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Alcohol and drug abuse in fragmenting social identities among youths: Analysis of selected Kenyan fiction

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Abstract

This study examines the problems of excessive drug abuse and addiction among the Kenyan youths as represented in young adult fiction written by Kenyans. The study is motivated by works of a few popular fiction writers of 1970's who introduced topics such as drug abuse and addiction in their works. These topics had been considered taboo by the early African writers of the 1960s but it is only recently that the same topics have been accepted in youth fiction. This study therefore discusses these writings as pictures that reflect how life of drugs affect the identity formation of the Kenyan youth. In the process of its enquiry, the study employs postmodern literary theory because young adults show themselves as unstable figures. They embody many ambiguities and contradiction. Qualitative in nature, this study employs data obtained from close reading of the selected literary texts. It therefore comes to a conclusion that the life of addict is presented as a life on the margins of society. They are either ignored or pitied by their surroundings, with rare occurrences of helpers, while the institutions prove to be ineffective and powerless. The unfortunate endings in the novels that portray addicts as vulnerable serve as a warning to young people to avoid drugs. These novels include, Moraa Gitaa's *The Shark Attack* (2014), Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1974), Elizabeth Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* (2014).

Keywords: drugs abuse, fragmented identities, postmodernism, young adults



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Public Interest Statement

The issue of drug abuse and its centrality to identity formation among the youth has been depicted in works of literature by both iconic and contemporary writers. This implies that creative writers have identified this phenomenon as one of the negative shaping forces of socialization in the contemporary society. The study sets out to examine how these writers reveal characters whose social identities are affected by drugs and how problems of drug abuse can be eliminated.

Introduction

This study looks at how different writers portray characters who are navigating the question of drug abuse and how this phenomenon leads to the fragmentation of identities. The issue of drug abuse and its centrality to identity formation among the youth has been depicted in works of literature by both iconic and contemporary writers reflecting that creative writers have identified this phenomenon as one of the shaping force of socialization in the contemporary society. This is witnessed through the presentation of key characters and how these drugs and alcohol affect their lives. The study sets out to examine how the writers reveal characters whose social identities are affected by drugs.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009), drug abuse among adolescents continues to be a major problem worldwide, and in particular, Kenya. De Miranda and Jaffe (1998) argue that most teenagers begin to experiment with drugs at an early age. It has also been noted that most widely abused substances are alcohol, tobacco and cannabis because they are readily available (Alcohol and substance abuse information, n.d.; Madu & Matla, 2003).

The study applies postmodern theory in the analysis of the texts. The views of theorists of postmodernity such as Jameson (1991), Baudrillard (1994), Lyotard (1985), and Harvey (1989), have been found suitable because, they claim that technologies such as computers and media, new forms of knowledge, and changes in the socioeconomic system are producing a postmodern social formation. Baudrillard and Lyotard interpret these developments in terms of novel types of information, knowledge, and technologies, while neo-Marxist theorists like Jameson and Harvey interpret the postmodern in terms of development of a higher stage of capitalism marked by a greater degree of capital penetration and homogenization across the globe. These processes are also producing increased cultural fragmentation, changes in the experience of space and time, and new modes of experience, subjectivity, and culture. These conditions provide the socioeconomic and cultural basis for postmodern theory and their analysis provides the perspectives from which postmodern theory can claim to be on the cutting edge of contemporary developments (Kellner & Best, 1991). We therefore begin by looking at the implication of drugs and alcohol in Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*.

Drug and Alcohol abuse and its implications in Meja Mwangi's *Kill me Quick*

In *Kill Me Quick* (1974) Meja Mwangi devotes pages to vivid descriptions of smoking, drinking and drunkenness in crude slums in Nairobi in the early years of independence. The book depicts life of the jobless poor, youth who at any moment can find themselves cast into a rapidly growing underclass (a population that has increased dramatically since that time), eking out marginal existences as sex workers, petty criminals and distillers in disease-ridden shanty towns. Their poor economic status is what gives them multiple identities that are in a state of flux. We therefore look at how poor economic status can lead to disillusionment, to drug abuse and eventually to fragmentation of identities.

Various scholars and critics have looked at Mwangi's texts as those that focus mainly on the socio-economic and socio-political issues, while forgetting that drug abuse is a factor that is enhanced

by poor economic status. Rodger Kurtz (1994) looks at *Kill Me Quick* as a novel that focuses on problems of urban environment: the problems of street children, unemployment, cynicism, disillusionment and despair. While Phillip Etyang (2014) notes that urban poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The urban poor live with many daily deprivations such as limited access to employment opportunities and income, inadequate and insecure housing and services, violent and unhealthy environments, little or no social protection mechanisms, limited access to adequate health and education opportunities. Etyang further states that the Mwangian Man thrives in these harsh and challenging conditions and is quite at home in the slums. The urban slum is his natural habitat as he cannot afford decent living conditions in the city. Citing an example from Ben in *Going Down River Road* (1976, p. 135), Etyang quotes "Good old Karara Centre which was stuffy as hell yet warm as home." Urban poverty is not just a collection of characteristics but it is also a dynamic condition of vulnerability or susceptibility to risks (p.2).

Kill Me Quick is a reflection of the epoch of its production; it captures the problems of urban Kenya in the 1970s, a time when the gap between the rich and the poor was gradually widening. One of the major socio-economic problems that run through this study is lack of employment in the urban centres which lead to poverty and indulgence into drug abuse. Thus, the author states that,

Meja sat by the ditch swinging his legs this way and that. A few people passed by engrossed in their daily problems and none of them gave the lanky youth a thought. But the searching eyes of Meja missed nothing. They scrutinized the ragged beggars who floated ghostly past him as closely as they watched the smart pot-bellied executives wrinkling their noses at the foul stench of backyards. And between these two types of beings, Meja made comparison (Mwangi, 1974).

Mwangi's thematic focus centres on the portrayal of the terrifying, the painful, and a common insistence on poverty and disillusionment which leads to drug and alcohol abuse. He takes a panoramic view of the Kenyan society and fictionalises it by exposing the filth, decay, contradictions and conflicts with a view to presenting a true picture of the youth who are suffering. One of the areas that this paper seeks to address is the condition in which characters drown into drugs due to disillusionment and how this impacts on their character and identity formation. The effects of alcohol and drug abuse on the lives of the youth as portrayed in this fiction is pathetic.

Meja and Maina are two youths who travel to Nairobi from their countryside homes soon after finalizing their high school education. The two hope to find decent job with only their high school certificates. They soon realize they cannot secure jobs as they lack specialized training to fit in any work environment in the city. Maina says,

'Well, I tried to get a job,' he said and shrugged. "What qualifications?" they would ask me. "Second Division School Cert...." I would roar. Get out, we have no jobs." (Mwangi 1974, p.2).

The two youngsters become disillusioned and Meja even contemplates suicide. He tries desperately to secure a job, long after his friend Maina has lost all hope. They turn to delinquency in the back streets of Nairobi and this is when Maina meets his companion from their former primary school. His street name is Razor. Razor is a leader of a gang and Maina blindly joins the gang of seven. Mwangi gives a picaresque description of the communion of the gang and how Maina is introduced to the

world of drugs.

Crasher was thin and frail...and his claw-like fingers clutched at a thick cigar which produced a foul, dark cloud of smoke...The professor was also smoking a cigar like the others. He was roughly dressed and his ears stuck out of his head like a scarecrow's (p.61).

The author further narrates that,

The Sweeper found a thick cigar and offered it to Maina...They all sat and smoked bhang, warm, free and contented. They were one neatly bound gang, bound with love, rough living and lawlessness. Nothing mattered outside the circle. The fact that poverty and ignorance dwelt among them was insignificant (p.65)

The theme of drug abuse and moral decadence in the text thus becomes a metaphor for the history of neo-colonial Kenya, a country where young people are encumbered with dislocation, alienation, depression and deprivation of basic needs. It is a metaphor of intoxication with psychological problems which the government has failed to address. Resonating through the novel is an echo of the painful existence of the masses in the neo-colonial society, which creates a motley array of failure and ridiculous figures.

For instance, Razor as the leader of the gang suddenly becomes hot tempered. His temper rises from the moment Sara his girlfriend abandons him and his gang. His blade which he uses to intimidate and instil discipline on his gang members is now seen more frequently than ever before. The author says,

"Sara suddenly discovered that she was a woman not a gangster. She deserted the Razor and his temper became very bad. His blade appeared too often and he could no longer keep gang discipline." (p. 151).

This marks a change in the life of Razor. His leadership qualities are greatly challenged, as he now is unable to maintain discipline in his gang like he used to when Sara was still with him. The gang members stop fearing him and he then resorts to alcoholism to drown his sorrows. His health deteriorates fast from the heavy drinking and he eventually succumbs to alcohol poisoning. His body is found in a ditch one morning.

After the death of Razor, several gangsters take over the leadership of the criminal gang in turns including both Meja and Maina, but none is able to last long and hold the group together the way the Razor had done during the turbulent times.

In the novel, Mwangi gives a contemptuous indictment of the failure of the new government to provide job opportunities for its people including the youths. This leads to disillusionment and drowning into drugs. Razor metaphorically symbolizes African leaders who rose to power after independence. His death symbolizes failed leadership that cannot be redeemed. Alcohol denotes leader's drankness with power. At the same time in *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi takes up the fact that conflict is unavoidable in human society, and shows what happens when one engages in social conflict with one's society.

Arguably the novel takes as its thematic focus the foregrounding of drug addiction to express

the exploitation of the masses by the ruling class, betrayal of public confidence and socially stratified society that breeds and nurtures oppression of the less privileged in society. The text dwells on the suffering endured by innocent humanity, as a result of exploitation. For the case of Razor and Sarah we can conclude that social relationships are permanently tense in the novel, and are marked by continuous dissonance, frustration and incompatibility. As if natural calamity is not an albatross about the lives of Kenyans, there is also the problem of poverty. All these lead to unfulfilled hope hence resulting to drug abuse for escapism. It is this drugs that influence the formation of their characters hence their identities appear to be multiple in nature; of drunkenness, violence, immoral, drug addiction, delinquency, irrationality and hot-temperedness. This then leads us to look at drug abuse and identity crisis in *Was Nyakeeru My Father?*

Drug abuse and Identity Crisis in Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru My Father?*

According to policy brief No.55 published by the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) 2017, Alcohol and Drug Abuse (ADA) among young people in Kenya is becoming a major social and public health problem due to its far-reaching impacts on the individuals, families and communities. The brief states that a number of research studies that have been conducted locally and internationally have shown that alcohol and drug abuse is caused by a combination of many factors: Individual, environmental, biological and psychological factors. The main causes of ADA among young people include; poverty, peer pressure, easy access to drugs and alcohol and breakdown of traditional values - leading to dysfunctional families and high unemployment levels (NCPD, 2017). In Elizabeth Kabui's *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* One of the characters, Zack, is portrayed as a sulky young man completely submerged in a quagmire of identity crisis. This is due to desperation, hard economic times and lack of clear goals in life. He turns to drugs for consolation. When caught by Kirika smoking bhang, he panics and tries to hide it unsuccessfully. Kirika describes the situation as follows,

Zack tried to get the leaf out of view but the thick smoke betrayed its presence. "Nothing", he lied. "You are lying!" I said accusingly and skirted around him to get a better look. He turned, making sure I could not get a hold of the leaf in his hand ... soon it became like the game of shake-the game we used to play in school where one person tried to get past another without getting tapped. The 'game' however only lasted for a few seconds for soon Zach yelled and dropped the leaf, now flaming with the fire, on the ground. I jumped into action and with one foot stamped out the fire. (p.28).

Zach's action is a pointer to the sense of guilt associated with drug abuse and its effects in identity formation among the youth. Young people who are idle and have lost hope in life will many times turn to drugs leading to their destruction.

The first time we meet with him, Zach is caged in a bush smoking bhang. When startled out of his rendezvous by Kirika, he guiltily replies that he, "brought it... picking the now smoldering leaf... it is just that this leaf is overgrown ..." (p.29). Drug abuse as reflected in Zach's conversation with the protagonist is one of the contemporary issues that Kabui wants to inform her readers that it affects the lives of the youth in Kenya. It is a poignant sign of confusion. This then brings us to the novella's important role in highlighting the effects of drug menace and a possibility of their eradication. A further reading into the text indicates that Zach engages in drugs because of his status as a farm work

and as a young man who is lowly educated. The smoking of bhang is a form of escapism in which Zach hibernates to conceal his inferiority.

Apart from Zach there is also a character called Val. Val is a daughter to a single mother and the only other person she knows is her grandmother as revealed in the text. Her father is not known as it is later revealed. Val's mother engages in the business of smuggling drugs without her knowledge. The mother ensures that Val leads a flashy lifestyle. She therefore comes out as a snob and utterly spoilt. Her snobbish behaviour comes out from the way she insists on being called Val instead of Valarie (p.92), for she thinks this to be more trendy and fashionable and a depiction of her "higher" socio-economic class; for she pretends to be from a rich family. Her arrogance is further portrayed in the way she lies about her parents' occupation. It is through Kirika that we learn of Val's nature. He states that:

Val had made it known to everyone at school that her parents were wealthy – her father was a researcher in America and her mother was a stewardess with a reputable airline. She always talked loudly of exotic places she had been to over the school holidays and of gifts her mother bought her from faraway lands. To be honest, I did not think she had time for those of us who only visited our grandparents or were obvious not from wealthy backgrounds (pp.92 – 93).

The above description portrays Val's snobbishness that orchestrates a lot of tension among her classmates for the way she openly brags about her supposedly superior pedigree. Ironically this façade is shattered when her mother is arrested and charged with drug trafficking. This is reported via the TV news cast that "a woman had been arrested at the airport with a consignment of drugs. The woman would be taken to the law courts the following week" (p.95). The above episode is a turning point in Val's life. It marks the end of her bragging and chastisement. We look at Val as a young girl who is ready to lie to conceal her real identity. Her true identity is revealed as a daughter of a drug trafficker and not of a stewardess. This in essence gives us a picture of the conflict between her ego and her Id.

To understand Val's predicament, we apply Freudian (1949) argument that "Identity is not stable or rational, but an ever-conflicted tension between Id and Ego, conscious and unconscious". When the truth is revealed Val fears being labeled a criminal due to her association with the mother. That is the reason she says "Everyone now knows that my mother is a criminal. People probably think I am a criminal too!" (97). She continues to tell Kirika "Wait until the day your father commits a crime, you will know what embarrassment is!" (p.98). The last utterance is akin to placing a hot iron on a fresh wound. It shakes Kirika to the core for he is already suffering from identity crisis. The identity crisis that Val suffers compares favorably to that of Kirika. Like Kirika, Val is not sure of her paternal identity. This is revealed through Val's conversation with Kirika when she tells the latter:

My father is not in America... I do not have a father ...I once asked mother who my father is and she said I should never think of him. I think I assumed he must have been a terrible man and I hated him without even knowing him. In his place I created a loving father who longed to be with his only child but the pressure of important work could not allow him (p.105).

Indeed, Val's confession put her in the same shoes with Kirika. The two on an equal footing since both are not sure of their paternal parentage hence the identity crisis they suffer. Their only point of divergence lies in the fact that Kirika has a father figure in his life, although he is not sure whether he (Peterson Ngece) is his biological parent or not whereas Val does not know her father at all. More so, Kirika struggles to find out who his biological parent is whereas Val does not. More so, Kirika resolves his identity crisis when he realizes that his father has been taking care of a young man by the name Ngece for "for fifteen years" (p.137), after the death of the latter's father. He therefore realizes that he could have been mistaken. This is unlike Val's identity crisis which remains unresolved by the time the narrative comes to an end.

Here again we can still argue that Val's "identity" can be linked to two senses: the "social" and "personal" identities. In the former sense, an "identity" refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable (Fearon, 1999). At first Val wants the students to believe that she is a daughter of a rich father who lives in America and a well-to-do mother who works as an air hostess. This is what builds her personal identity as a proud girl who is snobbish but when things turn out that she is a liar she becomes apologetic. But her social identity is tainted by the discovery that her mother is a drug trafficker and she will be taken to court.

Val's predicament can be attributed to family breakdown. Family as a community is crucial for the development of an individual. According to Janković (1994, p. 42), the overall development of an individual is only possible if harmony is given in physical, psychological and social development. The parents therefore have a great responsibility for the development of their children and if they fail in their role as parents, the child will have difficulties adapting socially, manifesting a social or disruptive behaviour or even graver problems like complete separation from the environment or mental disorders. For Val, his father is not around to provide psychological counselling when her mother is arrested. Val and Zach come from different families and the author uses these two characters as vehicles of transmitting his thematic concern on drug abuse.

According to Culler (2001), there are different ways for literary characters to form their identity in literary works: from an identity formed at birth, the change of identity in line with the ups and downs in life, to an identity based on the qualities that are revealed when overcoming obstacles in life.

Family, therefore, whether extended or nuclear, whether modern or traditional is an important element in the novels that discuss the topics of drugs abuse and trafficking because the causes of the problems and the influence on an individual's identity formation are to be sought there. This paper considers Culler's starting points on identity formation of characters in which fiction traces the fates of the characters "while they are building their own self and in the way they are defined by different circumstances from their past, the choices they made and the social forces affecting them" (Culler, 2001, p. 129). The causes and reasons of drug abuse is not clear in the text but the characters of Val and Zach serve as a pointer to the confirmation that drug menace affects both families and individuals. And drugs can lead one to identity crisis. Val finally apologizes to her classmates and regrets after learning that her mother was a drug trafficker. Zach also shuns the company of his bhang-smoking friends, vows to abandon the life of drugs and pursues a health course such as rabbit keeping after being promised financial support by Uncle Ken.

Drug trafficking and abuse and how it distorts Youth identity in *The Shark Attack*

Gitaa's *The Shark Attack* (2014) is a moving account of drug abuse and trafficking. The story draws attention to how the habit is nurtured by corruption and greed. It is told in the realistic and relatable voice of a teenage victim.

The novel narrates the story of three teenagers: Kadzo, Kenga and Issa who are involved in drug use and peddling. They find the narcotic business to be fulfilling and enriching hence they play truancy from school. Gitaa uses the three key characters to articulate her concerns about effects of drugs. In this dangerous trade, the trio is working for the drug kingpin by the name Mustapha Jilo alias Bigman alias Mono-eye. Things go wrong when Mono - eye decides to eliminate the trio after they decline to continue with the trade. By a twist of fate they luckily escape when mono eye bombs mother-ship that he uses to ferry heroin, cocaine and mandrax. The explosion of 'mother ship' throws them into the deep sea in the Indian Ocean. Kadzo is attacked by the shark.

The author writes that,

she felt the shark head butt her twice and then a huge clamp close around her left leg. The pain was excruciating. She screamed. The shark yanked her below the water surface, swung and jerked her through the water like a piece of damp sea weed. (6)

Kadzo's agonizing experience leads to both fortune and misfortune. The attack leads to amputation of her leg at the knee causing her irreversible disability. Nevertheless the attack acts like a powerful jerk that bombards her consciousness hence her determination to fight the menace and redemption. She realizes that she has been using drugs for a long time hence her addiction.

The novel shows the hopelessness and forlornness of the addicts' world - once the addiction sets in, it is difficult to get out, even with effort. The institutions, even though they are mentioned, have no significant function because the addicts do not trust them. The author's depictions of the interiors where the addicts dwell, of the scenes of drug use and the attempts to quit are vivid and convincing. She obviously intends to emphasize the horror of such conditions and life, which constitutes the pedagogical tone in the novel.

This is a painful lesson to Kadzo who is affected by both physical suffering and the withdrawal syndromes during the recovery period. She experiences a lot of pain as a result of drugs - induced withdrawal syndrome that overshadows the pain from her wound. The author states that,

She had seen people suffer when denied cocaine or heroin but she had never imagined that she could also go through the same. She had seen them tremor, wade in mud in a bid to cool the body, undress and mutter incoherent speeches like people out of the world and somehow she never understood them. (9).

Kadzo's suffering mirrors the experience that the addicts undergo. Her identity has been subsumed by addiction and her real identity is on the back burner until she recovers fully from the addiction syndrome. Kadzo's suffering mirrors the experiences that that addicts undergo. This is a powerful indictment of drug abuse and a shocking reminder to young people entangled in this cruel web of drug abuse. Drugs interfere with youth identity and makes them become slaves of the same hence their fragmented identities, physical suffering and identity confusion.

Gitaa uses the episodes of drug trafficking and abuse to clarify how youths can fall victims of drug peddling. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2008), substance abuse is worsened by complex socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty and crime in general. These social ills are devastating to many families and communities. As evidenced in the text. Illegal drugs from all over the world currently flood Kenya. Drug peddlers are forcing young people into taking substances so that once they are hooked; they can manipulate their friends into taking substances (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). Too many youth seem to think of experimentation with substances as an acceptable part of transition into adulthood but very few take seriously the negative consequences of dependence on substances (Madu & Matla, 2003).

Kadzo's suffering is an embodiment of adolescence in trouble with no clear defined goals in life. The trio engage in drug abuse activities which they perceive as acceptable within their peer groups. Consequently, drug abuse have a major impact on the lives of adolescents (Berk, 2007; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Pressly & McCormick, 2007; Rice, 1992).

Gitaa further portrays drugs as a major factor to education disruption. Kadzo, Kenga and Issa are drug addicts who do not care much about their education. It is drugs that exposes them to dangers and identity confusion. Identity confusion occurs when adolescents are indecisive about themselves and their roles. They cannot integrate the various roles, and when they are confronted by contradictory value systems, they have neither the ability nor the self-confidence to make decisions. This confusion causes anxiety, as well as apathy or hostility towards roles or values (Erikson, 1977). The identity confusion can also result in an identity foreclosure or negative identity. Kadzo also suffers from Identity foreclosure. This means that she is trying to resolve her identity crisis by making a series of premature decisions about her identity while basing on her peer's expectations of trafficking drugs to get money. Identity confusion happens when external demands or role expectations pose a threat to adolescent's "identity development". In her confusion, Kadzo tends to fulfil roles simply to meet the expectations of her peers. In addition to that, she develops a negative identity. Negative identity means that she has formed an identity contrary to the cultural values and expectations of society, for example, she can be compared to adolescents who abuse drugs and juvenile delinquents (Burger, 2008; Donald et al., 2007; Louw et al, 1998; Sdorow & Rickabaugh, 2002; Visser & Routledge, 2007).

The fate of Kadzo, a poor girl, is in the centre of the narration. The narrator's interest is also directed to the depiction of certain parts of the social reality that threaten the contemporary youth. "By skilled storytelling, maintaining several narrative threads, bringing convincing characters (like juvenile employment) to the scene, the author intends to introduce young lost people who find themselves in deviant life circumstances due to different reasons such as poverty and lack of family upbringing" (Hranjec, 2004, p. 242).

Some adolescents consider smoking and drinking "safe" habits that make them look more adult like (Craig & Baucum, 2001). Other scholars have also given reasons for adolescent's drug abuse. The "abuse of substances include coping with stress, peer group pressure and following the example set by adults (Donald et al., 2007; Jaffe, 1998; Karen Lesly, 2008; Parrott et al., 2004). This period of adolescence fosters egocentrism and a sense of being vulnerable, encouraging adolescents to take risks (Williams, 2004, cited in Visser & Routledge, 2007). Being a female adolescent surrounded by societal stereotypes and pressures can contribute to psychological difficulties and risk-taking behaviour (Visser & Routledge, 2007). The fact that adolescents take drugs is a reflection of the element of sensation seeking prevalent in the years of adolescence (Baucum & Smith, 2004; Berk, 2007). Adolescents indulge in drug abuse as a way of trying to channel their heightened energy of

this developmental stage (Rikhotso,2002). Another reason for trying substances is to have fun or sensual pleasure. Users seek an exciting experience (De Miranda, 1987; Rice, 1992; Rice & Dolgin, 2008).Adolescents seem to experiment with substance even though they have heard what the effects of different substance are.

It is worth noting that adolescents also use drugs to prove their boldness and express their sense of adventure and partly because they do not believe that anything disastrous can happen to them (Conger, 1991). If adolescents are more attracted by the promises of drugs than repelled by its potential harm, they may be led to experimenting. Zack in *Was Nyakeeru my father?* began using bhang as a means to rebel, protest, and express his dissatisfaction with the economic system of the county. He is jobless and the only way to while the day is to take drugs.

The addicts' world is presented as insensible and callous; the addicts are unaware of their environment and rid of the ability to repay others with feelings. The only thing they are interested in is drugs. This novel also shows a hopeless world of drug addiction as it begins tragically, which is in congruence with the pedagogical function of the novel. It prepares the reader to the tragic effects of the drugs. After a dissipated lifestyle and many disappointments, Kadzo eventually leads her society to campaign against drugs.

The societal abhorrence of drugs in *The Shark Attack* is demonstrated when some benevolent residents of Mombasa organizes public demonstrations against this evil.

A day later, the streets of Mombasa were filled with the young and old. Kadzo and some community members had organized a peaceful demonstration against drug abuse and trafficking. They marched through the Old Town and ended up at the main police post where they addressed by the anti- narcotics police boss. (67).

The demonstrators in Mombasa are symbolic of societal consciousness against the menace of drugs. These are men and women of good conscience who have not been tainted by the menace.

Kadzo's essay entitled: THE KENYA I DO NOT WANT TO LIVE IN portrays Kenya as a country that its youth has been adversely affected by drugs. In order to curb this menace, Kadzo advises that,

Each school in the country should have a teacher trained in drug and substance abuse counselling. The Ministry of Education should put in place mechanisms to ensure that all schools are drug-free zones. This should be done by ensuring that the schools are fenced off, strangers are kept out and drug abuse education programmes are initiated. (p.136)

Through Kadzo, Moraa has outlined in *The Shark Attack* ways of addressing the impact of drug abuse in the society, and on what the government should do to end the problem of drug trafficking.

Kadzo's zeal and vigour for rehabilitating the youths to form a very strong and positive image in the face of drug trafficking gains impetus when she goes to the area chief and organizes a baraza. Kaya elders are also seen in full support of Kadzo's moves as they have realized that the youths have lost track in life and they "...wanted one thing in particular: to bring the youth back to social sanity that once existed before the current pollution" (104).

In the novel, the sea has been used metaphorically to mean the turbulent and the unstable lives of the youth. The hostility of the sea with sea breeze, coral reefs and dangerous sea animals

such as the snake and the sharks are a representative of ruthless adults who engage children in child labour, put their lives into risk and possibly kill them. *Shark Attack* uses the sea as its central symbol for the lives of the youths.

According to Whitehead (1927) the 'Sea' is used as a symbol in literature to represent life and its hardships. The sea, with its daunting width and depth, simply stands for life itself. It may be quite calm, but it becomes raging and even deadly in an instant, with the waves representing the sudden obstacles life throws away.

What we find to be the most important parallelism between the sea and life in general is the unpredictability of both. A sudden change in weather brings upon giant waves that make it impossible to swim forward, and the only solution is to go back to the shore, much like a sudden obstacle in life makes it impossible to move forward and the only solution is to go back a few steps.

The point of course is not to give up, but take a break and then keep going even if ultimately it doesn't give you what you struggled for so hard to attain. Kadzo, Kenga and Issa struggle so much to acquire money through drug trafficking but it turns out that they are putting their lives in danger. The best solution that Kadzo comes up with is to go back to school and also begin the process of eradicating drugs in the coastal strip.

The title of the book *The Shark Attack* has also been used metaphorically to imply the destructive forces in the lives of many youths in Kenya and especially the young people in the coastal region. The metaphor of the shark is apparently realized at the sea attack scene displayed by the writer how Kadzo's left leg is mutilated by the shark. A shark is a huge and the most dangerous of sea fishes. Mustafa Jilo, 'drug tycoon' in line with the government officials are denoted as the major sharks in the coastal 'sea' and attack the youths by introducing them to drug peddling and trafficking.

Just as shark is noted to be a powerful and destructive animal in the sea, Mustapha arises to be the most powerful tycoon who engages some government officials into this unlawful business. Some political figures and government officials also display the "shark hood" by pretending of not being aware of drug trafficking in their ministries. For instance defense forces, some cabinet secretaries and some members of parliament are listed by Kadzo in her essay to the president. In this essay she advises the president to fight against drug trafficking and drug abuse by wiping out any drug baron who might be in his government.

Moraa applies the metaphor to show that the problem of drug abuse in Kenya, particularly at the coast is no small matter and cannot be relegated to the fringes when issues that affect Kenyan youths are discussed.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at how Meja Mwangi, Elizabeth Kabui, and Moraa Gitaa raise the idea of alcohol, drug abuse and addiction among the youth. Through youth characters the hypocrisy of society in advancing drug abuse among the youth is revealed. The three authors satirize the human weaknesses with the intention of challenging the youth to abandon the loathsome weaknesses in use of drugs and encourage them to embrace positive virtues. Secondly, the study observes that the society plays a vital role in moulding of an adolescent. Adolescence stage is very critical during growth among the youth. It is a phase where an adolescent struggles with changes in his/her body, both physically and emotionally. At this stage they seem to adopt different identities at different times which sometimes give them a 'chameleon-like appearance'. They also engage in complex processes of identity work to locate themselves in social worlds that are predominantly defined by school, family and peers. It is clear, however, that this process is not just about the experience in

the sphere of everyday life, but also involves the interaction with the mass media and sometimes drugs. Fragmentation of identity is therefore realized through the attributes we associate the youth with. Again how they view themselves and their gender roles in the larger social environment have impacts on their social identity formation. We have argued that processes of social identity formation and sociocultural practices of identity performance mutually reinforce and shape each other. This helps to explain how fragmentation of identities comes about. Social identities can be experienced as real, unitary, and stable but when the youth decide to engage in drugs, their identities are constructed or reconstructed by especially the substance that they consume and eventually their identities are experienced as multiple, unstable and fluid (fragmented). The study concludes that the life of addict is presented as a life on the margins of society. They are either ignored or pitied by their surroundings, with rare occurrences of helpers, while the social institutions such as the schools, family and the church prove to be ineffective and powerless. The unfortunate endings in the novels that portray addicts as vulnerable serve as a warning to young people to avoid drugs.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The article has been authored by three scholars, Dr. Omutche, Dr. Yenjela and Vincent Odhiambo Oduor as the key author because of his input as a budding scholar who is undertaking a PhD course in literature.

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