A Counter Reading of Globalised Children's Literature in Mollel's Books

Mpale Yvonne Mwansasu Silkiluwasha
Department of Literature
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
mpale.silkiluwasha@udsm.ac.tz

Abstract
This article analyses the perceptions of an African audience of books written on Africa published but mostly sold in the West, based on the assumption that these books primarily target a Western audience. Drawing insights from postcolonial and children's literature scholars, the study sought to bring into the conversation the voice of the otherwise marginalised population—African (Tanzanian) audience—who are represented in these texts. Based on ethnographic studies conducted in Dar es Salaam amongst primary school students, students and staff from the University of Dar es Salaam, and some staff from the Children's Books Project (CBP) of Tanzania, the study focused on Mollel Tolowa's seven books with to gather perceptions of a Tanzanian audience. Even though both young and older readers alike highly spoke of the books' quality and for having a relatively fair representation of Tanzania, these participants observed incidents of the books either pandering to stereotypes and/or offering inaccurate information.

Keywords:
African children's literature, Mollel Tolowa, African audience
https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v10i1.4

Introduction

In my earlier research on African children's literature, I was drawn to an article by Linda D. Labbo and Sherry L. Field (1998) on South Africa's children's literature which examines how South African educators respond to children's books about South Africa published and read in the US. That study contends that some of the books unauthentically represent South Africa and/or focus on the exotic. As my research further delved into issues of globalisation and its relation to African children's literature, the gist of Labbo and Field's study could not be more apt. Implicitly, the consequences of global movements and interconnectedness of people and places through trade and technology do not exempt literary works as the books about South Africa illustrate. As

such, I concur with Augustine Okereke's (2003, p.499) assertion that so long as African literature and its bearers— be it African scholars, writers, or authors— move beyond the shores of their continent and reach out to the rest of the world, African literature is encapsulated into globalisation. In other words, these global interactions engender the globalisation of African literature.

Building on Okereke's (2003) cautious observation that globalisation involves both co-operation and competition, which further brings "*the diffusion* of culture and literature to heterogeneous communities, nations, and states in the global community" (Okereke 2003, p.499, emphasis added), I contend that children's literature about Africa written for a supposedly Western audience might be more influenced by the heterogeneous culture than the ones it represents. Thus, the globalisation of African children's literature risks diffusion into the hegemony, which in turn serves mainstream interests (Western culture/audience). Roderick McGillis (1999) traces such unbalanced representations to colonialist fiction characterised by often biased, stereotypical, or inauthentic representations such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* bent on advancing their superiority agenda. McGillis further ties children's literature to the exploitative nature of colonialism, arguing that such exploitative/oppressive tendencies become visible when minority cultures represented in children's books may be othered or depicted as somehow inferior to Western/ dominant ones. Similar cases are deliberate efforts aimed to assimilate minority culture into the mainstream ways of lives in these works (McGillis 1999, p. xxiv).

In the same line of thought, Viviane Yenika-Agbaw (2008) examined such complexities from a historical perspective emanating from the colonial era when Africa (and Africans) were stripped of agency, and ceased to produce and, instead, became a market for European goods. Yenika-Agbaw (2008) contends that regardless of efforts aimed to eradicate colonial mentalities in the postcolonial era, African culture continues to face marginalisation in literary works about Africa(ns) that are written to suit Western ideals and tastes, further contending that this disadvantageous position could persist unless Africans have a say on

what is written about them, which is a particular concern in this article. Yenika-Agbaw looks at the inclusion of African children and their experiences into the wide range of multicultural children's books available to a Western audience, contending that the good intentions of including this category notwithstanding, it remains problematical when those represented do not have an opportunity to comment, affirm or rectify their own stories because they have no access to those books:

> As concerned individuals try to rectify the situation by filling in gaps with stories of African childhood, they produce books whose cultural content may be questionable. However, because the majority of African children may not have access to these books, they are denied the opportunity to examine these cultural experiences and either agree with the depiction of their culture, or question/challenge inappropriate images of themselves that they may find (Yenika-Agbaw 2008, p. xvi).

Although not all the books carry African experiences and may end up being inaccurate or stereotypical, Agbaw's assumptions cannot be ignored for two reasons. One, this much-needed integration into the mainstream tends to be reliably quiet as the representation of these marginalised people since they ought to be as accurate as possible. Two, these works represent Africa(ns), and those represented should at least have an idea about how the rest of the world view them. Examining the impact of globalisation of African children's literature, I find it imperative to pay attention to those represented in these works, with children in Tanzania serving as an example of an African country. This article builds on findings from a study originally conducted with school children, teacher education students, and other educators in Tanzania, between June and July 2008.[1] The intention of that study was to get the perspective of Tanzania's audience (those represented) on Tololwa Mollel's children's books.

Mollel was born and raised in Tanzania where he did his bachelor's degree in literature and theatre before going to Canada where he pursued

[1] Although the study was conducted 15 years ago, the situation has not changed much as most of public schools still use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction with factors like reading culture as well as availability of books to children only becoming worse in these schools.

a master's in drama. He also worked as a lecturer and actor in Tanzania before relocating to Canada where he now lives with his family. Between 1990 and 2011 Mollel published 17 children's books: *Orphan Boy (1990)*, *Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Supper: a Maasai Tale (1991)*, *A Promise to the Sun: an African Story (1992)*, *The Princess who Lost her Hair: an Akamba Legend (1993)*, *The King and the Tortoise (1993)*, *The Flying Tortoise: an Igbo Tale (1994)*, *Big Boy (1995)*, *Kele's Secret (1997)*, *Ananse's Feast: an Ashanti Tale (1997)*, *Dume's Roar(1997) Kitoto the Mighty (1998)*, *Shadow Dance(1998)*, *Song Bird (1999)*, *My Rows and Piles of Coins (1999)*, *Subira Subira (2000)*, and *To Dinner for Dinner (2000), From the Lands of Night (2011)*. All these books in English were published in North America and since the price indicated in US and Canadian dollars one would assume that they are mostly sold in the same region. In their library classification or bookstores these books fall under multicultural literature, an appendage to mainstream literature, which further indicates that these books target a Western audience. In addition to the author's place of origin, the content in these books represent African and, in some cases, Tanzanian context, traditions, and ways of life; thus, Africa (Tanzanian) children constitute these texts' subject of representation.

Background and Children's Literature in Tanzania

Prior to the presentation and analysis of my study's findings, I will contextualise my study by providing background information on the publishing industry and the reading culture in Tanzania. In Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's (2003) explanations the book industry was not highly prioritised in newly independent African countries. In those burgeoning days, building the economy and political state of their nations took top spot in these countries. This situation resulted in the prioritisation of various sectors of economic development received priority, with writing not drawing much attention. However, such non-prioritisation amounted into a drawback since at that time public companies seemed to fare better than private ones. Zeleza (2003) further focusing on the situation in Tanzania asserts that "private, indigenous publishers" face challenges such as "shortage of both monetary and material capital; editorial, production, promotion, and marketing skills, and limited market" (p. 371). This could

be attributable to public-owned companies receiving subsidies from the government which placed them at an advantageous position. Observing similar grounds Michael D. Ambatchew (2011) concludes that governments' monopoly over local publishing companies discouraged individual publishing companies, which in the long run would hurt the entire publishing industry in the region. As Zeleza (2003) aptly argues, local publishing companies failed to compete with multinational companies, particularly because in most African countries, publishing companies were state-owned and government institutions had all the powers to determine the fate of publishing companies. These determinants would not necessarily be business-related.

Although within localities government publishing companies were better off than private ones, they would not match the power and expertise of multinational ones, which made them unable to compete and thrive internationally. Thus, in both private and state-owned publishing companies, challenges persisted. The challenges facing book industries in developing countries, as observed by Zeleza (2003, p. 431), include having weak publishing sectors, inadequate distribution mechanism, hence a severe shortage of quality indigenous reading materials and limited purchasing power. Particularly, Cecilia Daglgren (2007) analyses the situation of book publishing in Tanzania and reports that local writers are not only inexperienced, but also contend with lack of sufficient indigenous publishing facilities and, as a result, end up seeking publishers from outside the country to produce quality books. In addition, the printing costs have escalated so high that only a few people can afford to buy books authored and produced locally. In other words, publishing in Tanzania not only result in books of poor quality but may also be economically unviable due to high production costs for people with low purchasing power.

In the face of such challenges facing the book industry in Tanzania, authors such as Mollel opted to publish in the West. Doing so made it imperative that they also negotiate the complexities of publishing in the

West as addressed in Silkiluwasha's (2012) Alterity in Hybridity[2]. In my analysis of Mollel's works, the intention is not to study his works per se as an 'other'[3] but with an understanding of the challenges that the book industry faces in Tanzania to seek ways of bringing Tanzanian children and quality, affordable and relevant books together.

Research Process

This study specifically sought to analyse the perceptions of an African audience as it relates to African children's literature largely written for a non-African audience, particularly when an African writer writes in the West and for a Western audience. I used seven titles— *Shadow Dance* (1998), *Big Boy* (1995), *The Orphan Boy* (1990), *Subira Subira* (2000), *Kitoto the Mighty* (1998), *Kele's Secret* (1997), and *My Rows and Piles of Coins* (1999)—as representative of Mollel's books. My research involved child and adult subjects. The children were recruited from two primary schools in Dar es Salaam, and the adults came Tanzania's Children's Book Project (CBP) staff, University of Dar es Salaam children's literature students, and their teachers (lecturers at the University of Dar es Salaam). CBP is a non-governmental organisation promoting local children's books publishing and distribution to various schools. Although there are several organisations that work to promote reading among children in Tanzania, at the time of the study CBP was more co-ordinated as it worked with various public schools in Tanzania by helping the schools to set up libraries and provide them with locally published books. Since the staff at CBP worked with both writers and children not only did they serve as great adult subjects, but also helped me to recruit child subjects. The University of Dar es Salaam, on the other hand, was the only Tanzanian university that offered a course in children's literature during field research; thus, students and their teachers were also ideal adult subjects.

With assistance from the CBP, I recruited children from two Dar es Salaam-based public primary schools, Msimbazi and Uhuru Girls. Since

[2] See Alterity in Hybridity: Examining the Impact of Globalisation on African Children's Literature for further discussions.

[3] Since Mollel writes in and resides in the West, I see the risk of judging him as an 'other' in the sense that he chose the West over home, literarily and metaphorically. I, therefore, insist, as indicated in participants' information sheet that this study is not intended to implicate the writer in any way but is, rather, an academic exercise.

English is mostly used in private primary schools except for a few public schools in Tanzania, subjects from the two schools would not only represent most Tanzanian children but would also facilitate the examination of the complexities of language issues on globalisation and African children literature. In addition to the language issue, my objective was to determine differences—if any—that Mollel's books under study would have from the books these children were accustomed to.

During my visits to both primary schools, I first had to make appointments with head teachers who would later assign me to work with teachers responsible for reading programmes at respective schools. These teachers, who also taught English, recommended that only students from grade five, six and seven be involved in the study as their "advanced" language skills would enable them to read and understand Mollel's books which are written in English. Useful as the teachers' recommendations were in recruiting the 29 primary school students in the study, it proved to be quite challenging categorising the books under review with the suggested, appropriate age-groups. In terms of the suitability of books to respective age-groups in terms of proportionality of texts and illustrations, having a straightforward storyline and simple vocabulary might, the books could have been suitable for much younger children, aged 9- 10, who are in class three or lower. However, it is the oldest children in school, mostly in class six and seven some as old as 14 or 15 years old, who participated in the study.

On the agreed time and day, I met with the English teacher and the children at designated places. To achieve my objectives with these child subjects, I formulated five main questions to be answered as my subjects read Mollel's books:

1) What is the story about? Was it an easy story to read/understand?
2) What is the most attractive thing(s) in the book?
3) Are there any differences between this book and other books that you have read?
4) Tell me three things that are familiar in the story and three that are completely new to in the story?
5) Do you see yourself as a Tanzanian child in the story/relate to the character?

The first question aimed to determine the children's ability to understand the story, particularly because it is written in English, which is not the medium of instruction in most of Tanzania's public primary schools. The second and third questions aimed to determine the quality of these books working on the assumption that books published outside the country (particularly in developed countries) might prove to be of a better quality due to advanced technology and, thus, children could be more attracted to and/or even prefer to read imported than locally published books. And the fourth and fifth questions consider the issue of relevance: Since Mollel's books represent African children from Tanzania, the questions sought to determine whether Tanzanian children could identify themselves with these stories. Although the books might have been intended for Western audiences, they are primarily about Africa/Tanzania. As such, can Tanzanian children find the representation relevant to their ways of life? Such questions enabled my respondents to engage in critical reading and attain, what Carmen M. Martines (2000) refers to as "meaning discussions" as they "talk about books …beyond 'like-or-dislike' responses" and come up with "statements and interpretations that reveal children's insights and evaluative comments about the stories". (Martinez 2000, p.17) As there were concerns from the students' teachers that language might be an obstacle to these children, I assured them that I would be available to answer any questions from the children as they read the books. Indeed, some vocabulary proved to be daunting to them, and I would be called upon from time to time to explain the meaning of several words. Together with new vocabularies that these children were happy to learn, they also said that they had never heard of the author (Mollel) let alone his stories, so this was a new and very rewarding experience to them.

Adult subjects consisted of staff from CBP, the University of Dar es Salaam children's literature students, and lecturers from the University of Dar es Salaam because people from these places largely deal with children's books in Tanzania. I approached each group and asked for volunteers to take part in my study, and I finally had two subjects from CBP, three came from university teaching staff and 23 university students, hence a total of 28 adult subjects. As I analyse problems in relation to

globalisation of African children's literature, focus on adult subjects would be to, first, determine their familiarity to these texts and later see whether they find the books to be relevant, and acceptable to a Tanzanian audience.

As was the case with child respondents, I requested these adult subjects to respond to four guiding questions in writing and present those answers in our discussion. All the adult respondents took part in every aspect of the study, that is, the seven books and their respective questions as follows:

1) What age group do you think would be suitable for the book you are reading?
2) Looking at its form, what makes the book most interesting or unique?
3) Do you think the book is relevant to the Tanzanian situation?
4) Can you see any inaccuracies and or unauthentic information?

The first question aimed to address the complexities of language in the globalisation of children's literature in the sense that, when a book is written in a foreign language, as is the case with Mollel's books, categorisation of children vs. young adult literature gets complicated because what matters here is the ability of respective children to understand the story and not the suitability of the content/ book in accordance with the age-group. This question would also help address problems in assigning these books to Tanzanian children. The second question set out to determine whether Mollel's books might in any way stand out and, thus, prove to be more interesting to the children than local ones as is the case with other imported goods/culture that supposedly convey Western values and ways of life. Finally, questions three and four problematise the globalisation of African children's literature since books about Africa published in the West for the Western audience might either be irrelevant to African children or their authenticity of information might be compromised and, thus, offer an unfair or unbalanced representation of the continent to the rest of the world.

Research Findings

The following section presents children's and adults' perceptions of Mollel's seven books in the following order: *Shadow Dance, Big Boy, The*

Orphan Boy, Subira Subira, Kitoto the Mighty, Kele's Secret, and *My Rows and Piles of Coins*. This order does not have any significant meaning in relation the content presented; it is simply a convenient way to present my research finding and analysis based on the issues raised in questions stated earlier.

Children reading *Shadow Dance* were aged 11 - 13 years. The children found the story to be very good; they were drawn to the way a pigeon helped Salome, the main character, escape from a crocodile. They were also drawn to the story's moral that one needs to be smart to escape from different troubles. Despite their relatively older age these children were excited about the book's colourful illustrations, and showed how much they value such scarce commodities. Moreover, they found the book's hard cover to be a good thing because of its durability. It was also noted that the book did not only have fewer words but also a lot of illustrations about human beings, unlike other books they were familiar with which would have very few pictures, mostly about animals in the usual animal stories that children's books often carry. In fact, one subject, who had earlier indicated that *Little Red Riding Hood* was her favourite story even though she has never seen a wolf in her life, admitted that because of its relevance to Tanzanian way of life, with animals such as cows that take part in farming activities or crocodiles in the river rather than a wolf in some forest, *Shadow Dance* has become her number one. Of particular interest to some of the children was a girl playing with her shadow. Subjects who happened to be girls admitted to playing with their shadows too; thus, they could easily relate to Salome so much that they copied her song from the books with the intention of learning it by heart and singing it while playing with their own shadows. Adult subjects also generally found the book relevant because it uses Kiswahili words, songs, children's games, and names such as Salome, which is common in Tanzania, together with children's games that they use in their play. They also observed that the story line is familiar, although it may carry different animals/monsters, but the story has the pattern of a trapped animal or monster being rescued and later trying to trick its rescuers the same way that a crocodile in this story does to Salome.

Although most of the children generally managed to tell the story quite well, which might suggest that they could read and comprehend the story, my two youngest subjects (aged 11) both from class five confessed to me that some words were not easy to understand, and they had to guess with the help of pictures and the context. Interestingly, adult subjects recommended that this book would be suitable for children aged 5-7 years for native speakers and seven to eleven for non-native speakers because the simple language, short paragraphs, and clear sentences together with well-illustrated, colourful pages would "surely attract young readers." Contrary to the suggested recommendations, the oldest of the suggested age-group found it hard to understand this story based on the text- as observed in the study-with words which might seem to be easy to read, like "weariness," "harmless" and "ungrateful" seemingly so strange to children older than 11 who listed these words as the most unusual things in the story my attempts to explain their meanings notwithstanding. I would further argue that the issue of matching the target audience to intended books is one of the major complexities in the globalisation of Africa children's literature. Since the books under discussion specify age groups for respective texts, based on language and literacy development of the children in North America where the books are published and the author resides, children's literature about Africa— intentionally or not— seems to want to exclude, if not ignore, African children as an intended audience. As such, we need to rethink our general categorisation of children's books and considering the question of language competence that categorisation ought to be adjustable to accommodate readers whose native language is not English.

Another complexity that arose included issues of accuracy and authenticity. One observation concerned the cow and farming activities. The story mentions a cow that is sad because it is now used for farming activities instead of its usual chores of providing milk for children. This is also problematic because such farming activities are only done by castrated bulls but never by ordinary cows as portrayed in the story; thus, this combination of activities might have been effective to develop the story line, but children may end up with wrong information either about farming practices in general or about the people of Tanzania who appear to practise "different" farming methods. In addition, although both

children and adult subjects commended the positive portrayal of Tanzania's culture, almost all adult subjects had problems with Salome's dressing. The main argument was that whereas it is quite normal to find a Tanzanian child called Salome, it is very unlikely to see a child of that age dressed like Salome (with a fabric called *Kitenge*, tailor-made skirt and blouse, a head scarf, a necklace, and anklets), especially during play time. One subject remarked that Salome looks like a performer in some national festival rather that a normal child playing. Another participant argued that the girl's picture resembles an older woman rather than a young girl. Since the *kitenge* dressing, with a headscarf, are more common on older women than young girls as portrayed in the story, this respondent thought Salome looks older than her age because of her apparel. Similarly, South African educators in Labbo and Field in their study observed: "[T]eachers laughed at the notion of a little girl would routinely dress up in traditional clothing at the end of the school day…In their minds these details made the book entertaining but exotic" (Labbo & Field 1998, p. 468). Much as I respect and appreciate any writer's freedom to recreate artistic works, there might be a problem when such creation seems to misrepresent people's ways of life, as the respondents in this study observed.

In their encounter with *Big Boy*, child subjects aged 10, 13 and 14 described this story quite well and found it was easy to understand. It was encouraging to note that these adult subjects' observations that the story would be very interesting to children (aged between seven and ten) because it is full of humour and uses some Kiswahili words were reactions shared by the children. There was also an agreement on illustrations. Child subjects further pointed out that, unlike other books that they usually read, which have either few, poor pictures, or no picture at all, the story's setting and illustrations are very attractive and elaborative. The children also commended the book for its proportionality between illustrations and texts, which was said to be so perfect that reading this book was a very rewarding experience.

Big Boy was generally accepted as a Tanzanian story; in fact, one subject could completely relate to the story and even summarised its moral in a

Kiswahili proverb *Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika Guu* (One who is disobedient to adults ends up in trouble). As was the case with the previous story, it was generally observed that Tanzanian culture is well-represented in the story through, for example, food. Characters eat *ugali* (Tanzania's main staple maize meal) and children hunting for birds in nearby forests using sling shots. Similarly, names such as Oli were said to be common, especially, in Northern Tanzania Meanwhile, the house that is portrayed to be darkened at the ceiling by smoke from cooking fire was also said to be something common, especially in village huts, as it suggests the use of firewood. Tanzanian audiences managed to see the book's representation in multiple ways through this story. Even though Oli's sling shot, and hunting activities were described as typically representative of Tanzanian children, these children could not imagine a child being that close to wild animals. Again, what might have simply been Mollel's right to exercise artistic freedom seemed unimaginable among Tanzanian children while simultaneously conforming to stereotypical views about Africa in the West.

Another observation made by both child and adult respondents involved the relationship between Oli and his mother. The respondents reported that it was unusual for a child of Oli's age to be covered by his mother with a *khanga* as he slept, as that can be only done with younger children (much younger than five). One adult subject thought that was an effort to "Westernise" Africans children's literature because, she added, "that business of tucking children in bed is just not the practice in many African communities…children of Oli's age are usually told to go to bed, no one sings them lullabies." Again, both child and adult subjects were surprised because stories in *Big Boy* are told during lunch time (the way Oli's mother does). In African societies, stories were traditionally told during the evenings or at night after the day's work. It takes one's exposure to a different culture to associate such misrepresentations with cultural importations. These respondents from Tanzania might have been able to relate to a the hegemonized western culture whose power that makes it possible to a Tanzanian who has never been out of the country to know about bedtime stories and lullabies, possibly, by watching western movies or reading western books. Ironically, the very tools that would effectively bestow the same power among Africans, like the book under discussion,

seem to reinforce the same power relation by emphasizing the illusion of universality of Western civilisation and, consequently, the superiority of Western over African ways of life.

In their final remarks, adult subjects expressed major concerns over inaccuracies that were observed in this story. First, the depiction of a forest and the sea at the same time suggests that both features can be found in one place, and if we are to take Arusha city as the setting of this story has no sea although, perhaps, a lake would have been more acceptable. Another inaccuracy is in the dressings of the Maasai people and their way of life. Oli's mother has Maasai earrings, but the way she wears her *Khanga* (an originally coastal dressing) appears out of place regarding the culture depicted. Whereas coastal women wear their *khangas* above the breasts as with Oli's mother, Maasai women wrap that piece of cloth on their shoulders with a knot in front, while clad in traditional attire underneath. This might not mean much to those who do not belong among those represented, but for those of us who have seen how different people dress, it can be disturbing because this is a significant aspect of womanhood, and what seems appropriate in one region is inappropriate in other parts of the country. As for the house, it has a wooden floor and is and decorated with a Maasai gourd on the wall, two baskets of Wanyiramba (an entirely different ethnic group hailing from Singida in Central Tanzania), and contains a food cover called *Kawa*, which is mostly found along coastal regions. Adult respondents observed that the setting looks like a blend of several cultures, and one subject questioned why the author decided to "wander" all over Tanzania instead of sticking to one part of the country and explore it to paint a composite picture. As I think of the last comment, I get a sense of relief mixed with frustration among these respondents: Relief because they found someone who could give a taste of Tanzania to the rest of the world, and frustration because this representation does not give a balanced and accurate picture, one that might, finally, grant those represented their power.

For the third book *The Orphan Boy,* child subjects were aged between 11 and 12 years. This age group to a great extent conformed to the suggestion by adult subjects that children aged 11 and above would be able to read

and understand this story. However, in this story too, the children pointed out that the book had difficult words which made it hard for them to follow and understand the story; they appeared to come to grips with the story's general concepts largely based on the illustrations. The fact that the book has no page numbers, which was a concern to almost every participant, might have made it harder for the children to follow the story. I had to go back to the book and get to its main points, the problem and solution to the problem in the story, since the children had not grasped the story's important details. Indeed, they completely missed the main points of the story in their summaries. Despite the apparent language-related challenges, the children remained interested in the story; they still indicated a preference for English over Kiswahili stories because they thought stories like these would help them learn the English language better. As for the book's relevance, the children reported that they could relate to living conditions in the story like those obtaining in Tanzania. On the other hand, they expressed their concerns that they could not relate to daily life experiences of Kelekani, an orphaned young boy, living with an old man since they have always lived in the city. Contrary to stereotypical views of a monolithic Africa, these children pointed out that their peers in the villages, especially those keeping livestock could have made a better comparison. Significantly, the children demonstrated that they understood that one's circumstances can influence one's understanding and the interpretation of a text. Indeed, their conclusions demonstrated critical reading at work.

As for adult respondents, there was a general observation that the book is particularly interesting because the story is about human experiences as opposed to the usual animal stories in children's books. I was particularly interested in the observation of the respondents who seemed to appreciate the story's lesson "unnecessary curiosity can be harmful." I think this is a good indicator of a Tanzanian audience relating to the story such that it is read and appreciated like one of their own; a story with a lesson to be learned. One respondent expressed interest in the story because it focuses on an orphan child, particularly because the number of orphans is rapidly increasing in Tanzania because of the AIDS epidemic. The adults also expressed interests in the book's illustrations in terms of both good artistic skills and a balanced representation of characters. One adult subject spoke

highly of the books for its consistent and faithful portrayal of the Maasai environment, dress, and culture. Much as I would like to dwell on these positive observations, however, there is also another side of the coin that I must attend to.

In addition, adult subjects observed a couple of things. First, whereas tea is usually served in cups or mugs—and in cups made of steel in villages. In this story, tea is served in a bowl: "Waiting for him in his favourite bowl was steaming hot tea" (Mollel, 1990, n. p.). Bowls are usually used for soup and other traditional foods. This misrepresentation does not only mislead readers, but it is also a missed opportunity to represent the respective culture through its food eating habits. Second, most of the subjects commented on the story not showing any interaction between the boy and the old man besides planning for work, which creates an impression that their relationship is purely an exploitative business arrangement. In reading the story, they argued, one gets an impression that the young man had to work in exchange for shelter, thus also implying that orphans ought to impress their guardians with hard work if they are to get a place where to stay. In their opinion, the relevance of the story from an African perspective would be an orphan taken in for love, and his work would be only part of life (as it is with a child and his parents); the old man would adopt him without expecting any payment in return.

As for the children, they expressed valid concerns about what they called the sudden drought in the story because there is no preparation, like lack of rain for a long time, the drought in the story seems unmotivated. The children also observed that the situation could have been justifiable had the setting been that of a desert. Again, this might just be the author's way of developing the story, but the problem with this presentation is its perpetuating stereotypes of Africa of being only either dangerous jungle or an inhabited but poverty-stricken, dry, and starving continent.

Following *Orphan Boy* is the book *Subira Subira.* Adult subjects thought that this story would be suitable to children from seven to 11-year-olds and children aged 12 and 13 years read the story. Since these children described the story well in their summaries, implying that children aged

10 upwards might read and understand this book well. The children reported that the story was easy to understand, with a few difficult words not affecting from their understanding of the story. Particularly, a number of things seemed relevant, or in their words "normal," to both child and adult subjects, such as children being brought up by a single parent; siblings not getting along with each other; and children like Tatu, the main character, working at a tender age and taking care of her young brother, going to school, and getting advice from an adult, who is not necessarily one's parent.

Other features that interested the children were the texts and paper quality of the book being attractive and different from books that they usually read. In addition, they stated that the story was interesting and enjoyable because it is written in the English language but has a Kiswahili song. The song in this story proved to be a new, interesting, and enjoyable thing for these children. They generally thought the story is well told, with moral inspiring and interesting pictures. The song in this story, somehow, carries the story's message, hence having assisted the children to better understand the story. Thus, in using this song, not only has the writer enhanced a multicultural flavour in his text for his western audience, but he has also helped a Tanzanian audience to both identify with the story and understand it better.

Although the children could understand issues such as lending a helping hand to one's brother or one's change of attitude for the better, the way Tatu's brother accepts his sister's love made the children find it hard to imagine a child of her age going to the forest and/or consulting a spirit named *Mamzuka*. One adult subject was, in fact, disturbed by this portrayal: "[I]ssues like this have no business in children's books." Another said that that such stories tend to "teach" children superstitious beliefs. These responses arose because the spirit world has been and is still part of many Africans' lives, but the coupling of the spread of Christianity that condemns such practices with the tendency of those being "consulted" to take advantage of people and hurt them physically or economically, has made these practices lose popularity. Thus, consulting spirits which is usually a sacred and secretive event that mostly involves adults and not children, could not have been a pleasant encounter to a

Tanzanian audience when reading a book designed to be read by children, especially outside Tanzania.

In addition, some adult subjects reported that a girl of Tatu's age demonstrates unusual closeness to her father. They explained that African fathers did not get that close to their older daughters when they were older, yet the story portrays Tatu leaning on her father, even touching his back when showing him her injured hand. The behaviour of a father wishing his children a good night or a good day, as Tatu's father does every day, is unusual between Tanzanian children and their fathers. And, in the village situation it is unusual for a man (like Tatu's father) to wear shoes and socks for that does not match with work activities (mostly farming) in the village. Similarly, a white bandage on Tatu's arm implying her having received some first aid readily available when an old piece of cloth usually serves such purposes in the village. In this regard, Achebe laments the tendency to westernise African styles in what he calls attempts "to dilute Africanness" (Achebe 2000, p. 72). Achebe quotes from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*: "They work too hard, Giving away Not only themselves, but All of us—The price is high" (Achebe 2000, p. 94). The novel talks about Africans who go to Europe to better themselves. Whereas the Westernisation of African ways might be necessary for authors to survive outside of Africa, those represented in these works pay the price of being dispossessed and alienated from their roots and cultural beliefs.

Next in line is the book titled *Kitoto the Mighty*. Children aged 11, 12, and 15 years who were involved in the study, who all reported that the story was not-easy-to-read and understand because its vocabulary was very difficult. Their explanations and summaries were too general mainly as informed by the illustrations rather than the text. For example, they focused on the setting, stating that the environment and mountainous topography with wild animals seemed Tanzanian as they could identify such features from experiences. When talking about the book's unique features, for example, they described its pictures to be very nice; they liked them a lot and had never seen anything like that. They also indicated that the attractive and elaborative illustrations helped them to grasp the story.

Realising the challenges they encountered, I had to tell the story to these subjects to ensure that they at least get the gist of the story.

On the other hand, adult subjects, observed that the story's adventures matched the curiosity of children aged 10 - 12 years, arguing that children of that age would be particularly interested in Kitoto's adventures. They also opined that considering Tanzanian children's rather limited aptitude in the English language, only children aged 11 - 15 could understand the story. Nonetheless, neither suggestion was feasible as the children under discussion could not read and understand this story.

Another factor that might have contributed to these children's inability to understand the story is the issue of relevance. Describing the story's setting, the children indicated that features such as tunnels and archways described in the story seemed alien to them. These features might have appeared foreign because the children live in Dar es Salaam, which is quite a congested city. They could have grasped the concept by relating to the tunnels in archways found on hills particularly for rail transportation such as TAZARA (Tanzania-Zambia Railways) had they been living in the countryside. Another possibility could be that for the children who have experienced man-made tunnels or archways in modern infrastructures, it might be easier for them to relate to the natural features described in the story, even though they had never seen them. For these urban Tanzanian children, therefore, their inability to relate to these features might be attributable to their having not seen both the natural or man-made tunnels and archways, which explains why the features and the story appeared strange to them.

One adult subject observed that the story's relevance is not bound to anyone's culture since it mostly deals with animals and the environment, with a moral on the importance of friendship. As such, the story can resonate with different cultures. Similarly, games such as hide-and-seek, and catch are also common in both African and Western cultures. Implicitly, this story seemed to adult participants like a "perfect" blend of the two cultures. The final observation made me realise that, as I was setting research questions, my focus had been on the representation or misrepresentation of Africa culture, and I did not allow for the possibility of a fusion of cultures in these works. This research, therefore, serves as an

eye-opener, as I can now read globalised African children's literature as a carrier of both African and Western cultures, which can bring about parallel, learning opportunities for children in Africa and the West.

For *Kele's Secret*, the actual child subjects ranged from 10 – 14 years whereas the age group adult subjects recommended was seven to eleven years of age because they thought the story might be irrelevant or uninteresting to older children. In their reports, the child subjects said it was not a very easy book to read because some words seemed very difficult to them. As was the case with earlier books, I assisted the children with interpreting difficult words and, eventually, they managed to write comprehensive summaries of the story. In general, the children thought the story was interesting, and were particularly drawn to the idea of a hen hiding inside a tree to lay eggs, something that they thought was both funny and strange. I was intrigued by the way these children were drawn to Kele, the hen in the story. They just could not understand why the story should focus on one hen that just happened to start laying eggs while other hens have been doing so for a while. I am not sure if it is because of their collective cultural upbringing that celebrates collective rather than individual achievements, which made it hard for the children to understand why the story should focus on one hen, while ignoring others. Nevertheless, the children thought Kele's behaviour was unique and interesting, and the book's pictures had captivating colours. In addition, the child subjects observed that various activities such as keeping livestock and poultry seemed familiar and quite relevant to their own lives. Urban-based Tanzanians often engage in livestock or poultry activities to subsidise their incomes by selling milk, eggs, or chicken; thus, these children, might have experienced such scenarios in their own households or those of their neighbours or relatives.

As for adult subjects, they said the book was relevant at multiple levels. One aspect was how Yoane, the young boy in the story, was encouraged to work hard; in fact, one respondent remarked that the book is "very African" because it encourages male children to work hard through its main character. The second one was the practice of staying with one's grandparents. It was argued that, as the case with Yoane's grandparents, it

is not unusual for children to stay with their grandparents, or for people to rely on livestock or poultry products as the source of income. The book's setting was another aspect. The book is set among genuine Maasai culture with Maasai names such as Akwi coupled with coffee farms and bamboo trees all of which are well known in that area. However, there was more on the setting.

It was observed that, although it is in a Maasai village, having a Maasai coffee farm near a big market and a big stadium as portrayed in the story is unlikely since marketplaces are usually located at village centres away from people's houses whereas big stadiums are found in big towns rather than villages in Tanzania. An equally important observation was that the market seemed unrealistic because of items displayed such dates and fish, which are not likely to be found at a Maasai market. Dates are largely consumed by people from the coast because of the Arab culture influence and are usually found in supermarkets in Arusha town. Meanwhile, the Maasai treat fish as some kind of inedible snakes. Thus, a fish market in the Maasai land is unheard of. Similarly, Maasai households usually consist of the house for the Akwi and Koko (grandparents) at the centre surrounded by houses of all their children such that the extended family would be ever present at the household, and they would all work together. Having one grandchild, with no other house in sight as portrayed in this book was seen as an unlikely scenario. In addition, the house looked more like a European[4] farmhouse since it has wooden floors, a rug at the middle of the house, flowers on a bedside table with a chair, a calendar, clothes in hangers hung somewhere in the room, all of which are not typical features of a Maasai household. One respondent commented that even those "supposedly influenced" by western cultures would not go that far. I happened to have an adult subject who is also of Maasai origin, and she was particularly disturbed by what she saw as an attempt to "modify" the Maasai's ways of life. She further asked me at great length:

[4] Since Europeans were the first white people to set foot and dwell in Tanzania, all white people, known as *wazungu* in Kiswahili, were considered to have come from Europe. It is still common to refer to all Western countries as Europe; thus, the use of European above is meant as a generic term.

> If I see and like a man's jacket that is cut at the back and has three pockets, and I have mine tailored but with fewer pockets, sewn at the back and maybe with a different material, won't mine also be a jacket? So why can't the Maasai ways of life be accepted and respected as an equally complete lifestyle? Why should Koko's room be so westernized? Who is the book trying to impress or become acceptable?

These questions summarise my thoughts about the effects of Westernisation on Tanzanians. I too still ponder over those questions.

There was also a general concern that the illustrated black hen with white spots is a bit unusual, more like a guinea fowl than a hen, although the glossary clearly indicates that Kele looks like a fowl. For a Tanzanian audience where both hens and guinea fowls are common, readers would assume the story is about the latter only to discover later that it is the story about the former. It seemed the author assumed that the book would not reach a Tanzanian audience at all and that all he had in mind was "his [W]estern audience." These observations echo Yenika-Agbaw's (2008) notions of double marginalisation presented in my introductory pages. In this case, a Tanzanian audience challenged and questioned what seemed inappropriate, hence they did not remain side-lined.

Finally, for *My Rows and Piles of Coins* primary school students aged 13 - 14 years said the story was a relatively easy read and describe it well. Adult subjects also recommended the same age group as the suitable group for the story because the title might be a bit complicated for younger children to understand, hence suiting this age-group. These adults also argued that children belonging to that age-group can have dreams, ambitions, determination, and desires like Saruni (the story's main character). In this regard, one respondent reported that the children of this age-group can be drawn to Saruni's inspirational verse "I emptied the box, arranged all the coins in piles and the piles in rows…" that appears again and again. Such repetitions make the story interesting. In its general sense, adult subjects found the story interesting in addition to reflecting a Tanzanian way of life whereby both the child parents have some respective responsibilities

related to the other, or that bicycles are not necessarily for recreation but work horses.

The children also pointed out differences in the way illustrations, which are in painting form, seem "unique and very nice," unlike the "usual" pencil and colours pictures that they see in picture books. They were also drawn to morals of the story like the importance of perseverance. Combined with the book's comic effects, like someone falling from the bicycle, the morals made the reading an interesting book to read. Several children said that, although someone riding a bicycle, pushing a wheelbarrow, and even saving money seemed familiar to their daily lives, they thought it was unusual for a boy to help by handling so many household chores. Notably, the differences between urban and rural children since children of the same age may face different life experiences or realities; thus, my child subjects might have been unable to relate to experiences of other Tanzanian children who live in rural areas. In addition, these Tanzanian children, especially boys who read this story reported that Saruni's kindness, patience, and placing of others first seemed too good to be true. The children here challenged what seemed to be unbalanced representation of a character, which is an excellent critical analysis from children's point-of-view.

Conclusion

Examining the complexities of globalisation in African children's literature has allowed this article to address several issues. Since these books are written in English, which is the second, or in some cases the third language among Tanzanians, the language barrier was an issue. In some cases, children were unable to understand textual content because the words seemed rather too difficult. Whereas these picture books may appear relevant to a younger audience mostly 10 years and younger; children as old as 15 were involved, as focus had to be on children in higher classes who would be able to understand English words. In addition, adult research subjects envisaged problems in assigning some of these books to Tanzanian children fearing that the books might be inaccessible because of the English language in which they have been published. Since these are all picture books, the children were in more than one occasion able to follow the story based on the illustrations.

Similarly, a combination of Kiswahili words, names, ways of life, and in some cases songs, helped contextualise these stories in Tanzanian situations that allowed the children to grasp the story's main idea. Thus, illustrations and a combination of languages helped child subjects, in some cases but not all, to overcome the language barrier. Moreover, the children found these books to be of better quality than what they usually read by identifying features such as the books' durable-hard covers, attractive illustrations, and visible prints together with content-related issues like interesting story lines with few characters which made it easy to follow the narratives. I was impressed by these children's determination to utilise the opportunity to read these books by asking questions and taking notes, mainly recording new vocabularies for future use. More significantly, their critical reading skills were evident in their ability to ask questions, probe for more information and, in some cases, understanding and admission that a different audience, such as their fellow children in rural areas, might offer different interpretation.

Furthermore, my study's key issue was to determine the perception of the Tanzanian audience on Mollel's books. Both children and adult subjects were excited about finding their culture represented in these books in terms of names, children's plays, games, songs and/or words in Kiswahili language, and different representations of ways of life, like child/ adult relationship, economic activities, or the role of children in families. However, the study found that the globalisation of African children's literature is, indeed, done with some compromises. Much as these books represent Tanzania's ways of life; they are not free from stereotypical or exotic presentations. In what seemed to be attempts to Westernise traditional Tanzania's ways of life, as observed in family relations or housing styles, to focus on the exotic presentations of the safari like African portrayal rather than the usual daily experiences, participants involved in this research have revealed that a number of inaccuracies and/or unauthentic information exist in some of the books that either attempt to "Westernise" Tanzanians' ways of life or seem to conform to persisting stereotypes about Africa and its people. These observations notwithstanding, both adult and child subjects found Mollel's books intriguing for not only being of better quality than locally published books

but also for attempting to represent Tanzania in these internationally known children's books.

References

Achebe, C. 2001, *Home and exile*, Edinburgh, Canongate.

Ambatchew, D. M. 2011, International communities building places for youth reading. Wolf, S.A. Coats, K. Enciso, P and Jenkins, C.A. eds. *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, New York, Routledge.

Children's Book Project for Tanzania. <http// www. cbp.or.tz>

Labbo, D. L., Field, L. S. 1998, Visiting South Africa through children's literature: Is it worth the trip? South African educators provide the answer, *The Reading Teacher,* vol. 51, pp. 464-75.

McGillis, R. 1999, *Voices of the other: Children's literature and the postcolonial context*. New York, Garland Publishing Inc.

Martinez, M. C. 2000, Bilingual students' responses to multicultural children's literature on discrimination, *The Dragon Lode* vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 17-23.

Mollel, M. T. 1997, *Kele's secret.* illus. Catherine Stock, New York, Dutton.

Mollel, M. T. 1995, *Big boy*. illus. E. B. Lewis, New York, Claron.

Mollel, M. T. 1999, *My rows and piles of coins.* E. B. illus. Lewis, New York, Clarion.

Mollel, M.T. 1990, *The orphan boy*. illus. Paul Morin, New York, Clarion.

Mollel, M.T. 1998, *Shadow dance*. illus. Donna Perrone, New York, Clarion.

Mollel, M.T. 1998, Kitoto the mighty. illus. Kristi Frost, Toronto, Stoddart Kids.

Mollel, M.T. 2000, *Subira subira*. illus. Linda Saport, New York, Clarion.

Nathenson-Meija, S. 2003, Connecting with Latino children: Bridging cultural gaps with children's literature, *Bilingual Research Journal,* vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 101-116.

Okereke, A. 2003, The globalisation of African literature: Continuity, change, and adaptation, *Globalizing Africa*, Ed. Malanda, S. Smith. Trenton, NJ: Africa WP, pp. 499-510.

Patton, Q. M. 2002, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, 3rd ed, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Silkiluwasha, M. Y. M. 2012, Alterity in hybridity: Examining the impact of globalization on African children's literature through the works of Tololwa M. Mollel, *Sankofa: A Journal of African Children's and Young Adult Literature*, vol. 11, pp. 36-45.

Yenika-Agbaw, V. 2008, *Representing Africa in children's literature*, New York, Routledge.

Zeleza, P. T. 2003, *Rethinking globalization: The intellectual challenges*, Trenton, NJ, Africa WP.