



## Reaction against Subordination of Women Observed from the Struggle of Hawa in Mabala's *Hawa the Bus Driver*

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**Abstract:** This study examined Richard Mabala's young adult prose fiction: *Hawa the Bus Driver*. The study used Social Critical Theory as a tool of analysis. Examining the work thematically, the reading revealed a struggle of the major character Hawa in *Hawa the Bus Driver*. The character is portrayed to have: recognition of female potentiality and the urge of equality in male dominated society. The study shows that the author in this work has drawn the characters in such a way that at the exposition of the narrative, she encounters male chauvinism and the pain of gender stereotype. Nevertheless, she emerges as heroine at the resolution by acquiring recognition and acceptance in her society. A careful reading indicates that the author, through creative writing, intends to inculcate gender education in society and he chooses juvenile audience as the area of commencement.

**Keywords:** Gender issues; Young adult; literature; Patriarchy; *Hawa the Bus Driver*

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### Introduction

This study investigated how a young adult prose fiction is used to influence social changes in Tanzania through the Social Critical Theory. The paper examined how gender discrimination as one of social conflicts prevailed in *Hawa the Bus Driver*. The analysis is based on struggles manifested by protagonist in resolving gender social conflicts in her society. The examination considered gender discrimination as a theme that appeared in this literary work. The theme available was so examined as to reveal gender inequity intended to subordinate a woman in that society and how the character struggles to solve the conflict. Mabala's *Hawa the Bus Driver* reveals the struggle of the woman against gender stereotype, subjugation of women and male supremacy in a male dominated society. The reading portrays the patience and forbearance manifested by the woman whose deeds are depicted to speak louder than words. Her

struggle, as it is shown in the reading, becomes fruitful. Although she is despised at the beginning, Hawa fulfills her role and gains recognition and respect in her society.

The name of the author, Richard Mabala, is not new in the field of Tanzanian's literature and among students who went through Tanzania's secondary schools. Almost every adult who went to secondary school in Tanzania from 1980s remembers so well the titles of the two class readers: *Mabala the Farmer* and *Hawa the Bus Driver*. Richard Satterthwaite studied French and History at Oxford between 1961 and 1967, and then he undertook a post diploma in education. He came to Tanzania in 1973 as one of the five British volunteers through Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). As a volunteer, he started his life in Tanzania at Milambo Secondary School. Attracted by *Ujamaa* as the humanity political ideology, he applied for Tanzanian citizenship in 1979 and two years later he became a

citizen of Tanzania. He tutored at Mzumbe Secondary school, Chang'ombe Teachers' College, Marangu Teachers' College, Kibosho Girls Secondary School and the University of Dar es salaam between 1973-1993 (*The Citizen* June 25 2013, p. 51).

This paper examined the struggle of women in male dominated society as highlighted in Mabala's *Hawa the Bus Driver*. The work has been selected and discussed in detail because it portrays the struggle that has been examined. The general objective of this study was to discuss how this young adult prose fiction addresses gender issues in Hawa's society. The aim was to show how the protagonist endeavored to solve those conflicts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed social critical theory. Meehan (1995) explains that a social critical theory frames its research program and its conceptual frame work with an eye to the aim of oppositional movements. This statement implies that on relating something about subordination of women, the research should focus on describing the characters by showing how they oppose each other. However, description can be simplified by feminist stylistics which can be seen through the interaction between the text and the reader as Mills (2005) observes. Templeton (1992) shows that a 'literary work as an artificial construct' provides meaning that comes from the context of culture and history of a particular society and cannot be comprehended in social exclusiveness. This idea is shared by Scott (1978) who reveals that, it is difficult to assess any society without looking into the system that works within that society.

The use of this theory, through a close reading to feminist stylistics, allows a researcher to comprehend different sexist languages within the text(s). Braggin (1981) shows that by examining sexism through language, a researcher can make a sound inference on how language promotes or exploits the unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes. This study has paid attention to every language which is given by character(s) in promoting gender segregation and how once again the author employs counter sexist language in integrating gender awareness in his audience. By using this approach, it is possible to understand how social pressure in male dominated society has contributed to the failure of women to develop their rational faculties as O'Sullivan (2000) quotes Wollstonecraft (1995). It is important to note that the observation of O'Sullivan can also be traced in the text under discussion. Nevertheless, in the

narratives, the main character shows how women can address gender issues and how the society in the text at last recognizes the potentiality of either gender.

### **Methodology**

This is a library research based paper. The major objective was to analyze *Hawa the Bus Driver*. The researcher treated the text as a primary data and interpreted the text by using social critical theory to enhance the analysis.

Guerin and Michael (1985) see that a literary theory explains how power imbalance in a given culture is reflected and challenged in a literary text. Kurnia (2010) argues that a literary work can be used to explain how the author reflects the injustices experienced by people especially women which (the injustices) are caused by gender stereotype of society through his /her work. This paper endeavored to explain the struggle of women shown in the main character and how the text sought to implant gender education in the tender mind of juvenile audience.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Mabala's *Hawa the Bus Driver* portrays the struggle of women against gender discrimination, subordination and gender stereotype in a male dominated society. The character, Hawa is portrayed as a Swahili woman who manages her roles as wife, mother and bus driver. As a mother and a wife, she so fulfills all her roles and she is admired by her family and her neighbors. As a driver, however, she encounters obstacles from the society. Her career does not go without sharp criticism from opponents. Being zealous and courageous in her work, she gains popularity that sparks fire of jealous from some of men, including her husband. She does not react negatively to her husband; she tries to persuade him in a humble and polite manner to allow her continue with her job. Defeated by sense and logic, her husband allows her to continue with her job.

In patriarchy society, it is not women that are victim of the system but every member of a particular society. Adults as well as children have been conditioned to accept the system and they work as advocates thereof. We see in this book that, some children laugh at Hawa's children at school because she is a bus driver. Sometimes her children get angry and want to fight but Hawa tells them "don't get angry. Don't fight with a fool. Just smile and they will leave you" Mabala (1988). This statement shows

that Hawa is waging a struggle with a systematically organized patriarchal system. Kramarae (1992), Stacey (1993) and Aina (1998) explain the impact of such system that it is intended to uphold male supremacy and to subordinate women in every sphere of life: socially, politically and economically.

The text reveals that in patriarchal society, it is the deeds performed by a woman that bring a change of attitude towards gender stereotype. The narrator paints such deeds that bring Hawa into social acceptance and recognition. Hawa is not at the beginning accepted by male drivers who stop talking when he enters inside the office. However, the incidence at the Ubungo station, when she manages to stop the moving bus whose breaks were not working and whose male driver was too afraid to cross the road, manages Hawa to gain a good reputation among her fellow drivers and the society from that day, all drivers accepted and respected Hawa. "She was one of them "(Mabala, 1988).

Again, the ability of Hawa to stop the thieves who intended to hijack the bus in order to make robbery and the rescue of a pupil who was hit by a bus called, CHANGU NI CHANGU CHOTA CHAKO KWINGINE, adds to her popularity and acceptance among the whole society. Through the chorus which occasionally appears at the end of some chapters, we understand that, although Hawa is described to have *strong teeth like a lion...she has arms like baobabs but her heart is as sweet as a ripe mango* (Mabala, 1988).

The narrator shows that in her society, there are some roles which are considered to be acceptable in a certain gender. When these roles are performed by the opposite sex, they raise jealousy, bitterness and sharp criticism from the other sex. A close examination of this truth can be seen through the following sexist language recalled by Hawa (Mabala, 1988).

*Women can't drive, women can't drive  
Men are drivers, women stay at home  
Women stay at home, men are the masters.*

The narrator shows that such words are commonly uttered by men when they see Hawa driving. Within these words there are different things ascribed. Driving, by the time when the book was going in publication was considered to be one of male's roles. Women, as some words show, were supposed to stay at home and do other chores related to their sex. There is once again some truth revealed through some of words: men are considered to be

*masters. "A master is a man who has people working for him, often servants in his home" (Oxford, 2005, p. 913). The fact that men are masters, and women should stay at home implies that women are subordinates who should remain at home as servants. No wonder when Hawa is confronted by a drunkard, ordering her: "let me drive women can't drive a bus" Hawa at the beginning does not consider the seriousness of the issue until the drunkard comes close to her in attempt to attack her. Yet again even when she is laid flat by Hawa's kick, he groans while shouting "no, no. a woman can't drive. A woman can't fight a man. A woman ...a woman..." (Mabala, 1988).*

The climax of the story reveals the intensity of Hawa's struggle in which when the conflict is resolved, the narrator is considered to have fulfilled his role in inculcating gender awareness among the audience. From the beginning of the story, Hawa is waging a battle with foes without. Now she is compiled to wage a battle with foes within. This time, it is Selemani, her own husband, who places a difficult choice to Hawa.

At the begging, things are smooth. However, it appears that patriarchal system is infectious. Selemani is depicted to overcome by jealousy and he orders Hawa to quit the job. Wherever he moves in Manzese, he is greeted with joking words from people saying '*Hawa the Great!*' The fact that his name is fading and Hawa's overshadowing, brings internal conflict to Selemani in such a way as to think that "*why is my wife more famous than I am? If she becomes famous like this, she will stop being a good wife. She will think that she is better than I am. I must stop this* (Mabala, 1988).

Selemani's assumption on Hawa's fame is prompted with jealousy. Whereas he is supposed to talk with his wife on this issue, he consults his friends at work who, being within the circle of patriarchy offer a rather advice than, *it is very dangerous if a wife is more famous than her husband. You must stop her" (Mabala, 1988).*

Throughout the remaining portion of the story, Selemani decides to act as he is advised by his male friends. Blind to the consequences that might be brought by his decision, he keeps on insisting: "*listen woman, you think you can argue with me just because you are famous in Manzese! That is nothing. You are my wife and you must obey me. I am telling you to resign as a bus driver" (Mabala, 1988).*

The happy ending of the book reveals that dealing with gender issues especially in male dominated society requires patience and perseverance. Hawa as the protagonist is depicted to have such patience and perseverance that at last he manages to be accepted in her society. Whereas Selemani seeks advice from his friends, Hawa seizes an opportunity of the company of *men* who have recognized her potentiality. She describes to them the tense situation that now exists between her and her husband. Concerned by this issue, it is *men* (drivers) who decide to talk with the *man* (Selemani). Using sound arguments, Selemani as the last foe, is overcome: for "*Selemani soon saw that the drivers were telling the truth*" (Mabala, 1988).

We understand from the book that matters between the couple were settled because, "*after seeing off, Selemani came back, sat down and told his wife. "I am sorry."*" The apology rendered to Hawa by her husband is enough vindication that he is completely reformed from his former attitude because "*after that, he was never jealous again. He and Hawa continued to live happily together*" (Mabala, 1988)

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Although Hawa is the female character in a male dominated society, she struggles to gain recognition as a potential person. She stands firm as a wife, mother and driver. She also struggles with her husband intending him to understand that she works as a driver as a way of generating income for their family. In the beginning, Hawa is misunderstood by her fellow drivers, the whole society and her husband. However, Hawa is later accepted by everyone. The narrative shows that the author has succeeded to resolve gender issues in Swahili society and how a woman should address them. The work also reveals that human development depends solely upon total involvement of people of all sexes. Furthermore, the work shows that when it comes to success, it is not one's sex that matters but rather the talents one is given by divine providence.

This work suggests that gender equality is crucial for the attainment of civil liberties for all. A close look on the text implies that women should be given opportunities in different activities. This will help them to exercise their potentialities and become useful members of their society.

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