

## Chapter 28

# The Portrayal of Masculinities in a Kiswahili Novel: The Case of *Nyota Ya Rehema*

**James Ogola Onyango**  
*Laikipia University, Kenya*

**Yasin S. Musa**  
*Islamic University in Uganda, Uganda*

### ABSTRACT

*Although the themes of fate and class struggle have been profoundly explored in the critical analyses that have been undertaken on *Nyota ya Rehema*, however, in Critical Discourse Analysis and Hegemonic Masculinity perspectives, the question of masculinities is no less vital. Therefore, this paper seeks to give a critical insight into varied shades of masculinity that are manifesting in *Nyota ya Rehema*. Focussing on relevant texts, we uncover the disproportional masculine ideological and power positions that are explicit in sexuality and socio-economic spheres such as marriage, prostitution, employment and property inheritance that depict the disadvantaged position of female characters. The exploration of masculinities in islands Kiswahili novel that has mainly focussed on class struggle may be a welcome departure.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Interrogating Masculinities

A number of analyses on the novels from the islands of East Africa have remarkably dwelt on the theme of the class struggle (for example Mazrui 1980, Njogu 1997 & Zaja 1988). The examples of novels that have been put in this category are: *Nyota ya Rehema* and *Dunia Mti Mkavu*. Evidently, these analyses were undertaken during the heyday of Marxist theory in social science scholarship in Africa. Under this rubric, Mazrui (1980) could assert that *Dunia Mti Mkavu* is the highest form of a Marxist treatise.

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### ***The Portrayal of Masculinities in a Kiswahili Novel***

The theme of fate has also been explored alongside the theme of class struggle in *Nyota ya Rehema*. In this context Rehema's suffering is seen as an act of fate in the fashion of a Kiswahili saying: *Lian-dikwalo ndilo liwalo, mja hana hiari* (a human being has no power in the wake of fate) (Mgeni 1987).

However, as the Marxist theoretical influence has withered in the last few decades one is persuaded to focus on the novels from the island in a new prism. It is a truism that for the last three decades, gender issues have received a remarkable focus in Sub-Saharan Africa. We can infer that on the front of creating gender awareness, some mileage has been gained. However, there is still a lot to be done because women still face a number of obstacles in the political, economic and social spheres when they are compared to their male counterparts. For instance, in the national parliament of Kenya, the number of female Members of Parliament women are still few. Although Tanzania has made remarkable strides in female representation but the percentage is still below that of men. On the economic side, the backbone of all the East African economies is land and yet many women face discrimination in areas of land ownership and inheritance too. On the social side, many of the East African communities are patriarchal thus many men are accorded a more favourable social status than women. The dominant status of men in the political, economic and social areas is also reflected in the psychological area. In patriarchal societies men are socialised to strive for position one in relation to women (Mohamed 1980:1), have propensity to protect the weak, be brave and so on (Uchendu 2005).

It is instructive to observe that the dominant position of men over women, in the hegemonic masculinity sense is rooted in the ideological and power structures of the patriarchal societies. Thus the dominant belief systems help in perpetuating the relations of difference between men and women.

Since masculinities, in the hegemonic sense, are informed by ideological and power structures of the society, it is inevitable that they are reflected in language. Wodak (2001) vividly captures the relationship between language and power below.

*Power is about relations in difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures. The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures. Very few linguistic forms have not at some stage been pressed into the service of the expression of power by a process of syntactic or textual metaphor. CDA takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text. (Wodak 2001:11)*

Language is definitely entwined with societal structures that embed unequal power relations such as sexuality and varied socio-economic areas that are manifest in a novel as *Nyota ya Rehema*. In this context a text from a novel can be critically analysed to uncover its disproportional ideological and power import. This is indeed what has made Critical Discourse Analysis a versatile theory for analysing language that has discriminatory import. More mileage in analysis is gained when the Discourse-Historical Approach that is committed to Critical Discourse Analysis is used because it uncovers the historical context of a text.

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