

Depiction of Class Conflicts and their Resolutions in Tanzanian Young Adult Novels

John Peter MADOSHI* 

Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined class conflicts as highlighted in selected Tanzanian young adult novels. Significantly, the study sought to generate some knowledge on class conflicts revealed in selected young adult novels in the Tanzanian society. The study has used Marxist social critical theory. We have examined qualitatively class conflicts as phenomena occurring in the novels. We argue that disability, as depicted in some literary works, is a social construct intensified by capitalism. We also observed that a lack of knowledge on albinism places people with skin conditions into a class that conflicts with society. We also found that as a class of young adults grows, they are in a race to run towards what they will be. Parents have the role of encouraging them to win the race. They are not supposed to be obstacles to their running. We further observed that the selected young adult novels show class conflicts that involve different perceptions on the issues of sex and love. Finally, we see that street children are a class of people in Tanzanian society, which reveals a conflict between young adults in well-to-do families and low-income families.

Keywords: Classes, conflicts, novels, Tanzania, young adult

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*Corresponding author's email: doshijope@yahoo.com

Introduction

Young adult novels in Tanzania have added a literary scrutiny. Despite the expansive opportunities, the novels have not been given full-fledged scholarly studies by researchers in Tanzanian novels. Recent studies in Tanzanian novels in English in general include that of Mwaifuge (2009). His study focuses on adult novels on how creative writing has participated in forming ideology for the nation. Ng'umbi (2011) and Wakota (2008) have examined only adult novels using single authors. Wakota (2014) did a study on gender relations combining two classic young adult novels, *Mabala the Farmer* and *Hawa The Bus Driver*.

The few cited studies on Tanzanian novels in English exclude young adult novels. When they have included them, they have studied them in combination with other novels which are not for young adults. Apart from that, the researchers have not examined young adult novels in order to see how young adult protagonists address social struggles in their society and how they endeavour to resolve different conflicts in society. Such limitation in examining creative writing in Tanzanian literary works in English diminishes the breadth of Tanzanian literature in English, which also covers a body of young adult novels.

This study aims to identify class conflicts as highlighted in the selected young adult novels. As researchers, we have asked: What class conflicts are highlighted in selected Tanzanian young adult novels? To answer this question, the study identified the class conflicts highlighted in five young adult novels: *Run Free* (2013) by Richard Mabala, Akide's *Maliyamungu's Escape* (2013); Esmail's *Living in the Shade* (2011), Mwamgwirani's *The Choice* (2015) and Lema's *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* (2011). In the discussion, selected texts from the works have been examined and discussed.

Theoretical Framework

This study has used Marxist social critical theory. The literary theory enabled the researcher to read and interpret the selected works. Literary works in Marxist social criticism reflect the social and political conditions of the time (Mutmainah et al., 2024). Thus, the theory allowed the researcher to examine the society as reflected in young adult novels. Reading the texts using this literary theory provided a fresh perspective to better understand the works, learn more about diverse social struggles (Suharjanto, 2024). Generally, the theory controlled the analysis of the selected works.

Marxism social critical theory stems from an economic and cultural theory propounded by the German Karl Marx (1818-83) and his counterpart, philosopher Friedrich Engels (1820-95). This study has used this literary criticism in which the texts were regarded as part of social endeavours where conflicts occur. Eagleton (1976) presents two ideas that are held by Marxist critics (p. 16). He argues that some Marxists see a work of art as nothing other than ideological in a particular artistic form. He further claims that they regard literature as the means of expressing the ideologies of their time. In this study, we have used the theory to test whether the two ideas apply in the selected young adult novels. Hunt (2023) argues that, within literature, one can see antagonistic social classes. He further shows that even within dominant classes, this antagonism is manifested. In this study, we have treated young adult novels as literature of the common in which an accurate picture of their struggle for their rights is shown.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative literary or text analysis of young adult novels. The intention of choosing Qualitative research was to comprehend a phenomenon and to examine patterns

(Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Qualitative research is the one whose information is descriptive (Amin, 2005). Thus, this study involved an analysis of selected texts of young adult novels. The texts selected have been used hand in hand with other sources. These sources were obtained from critical works such as textbooks, journal articles, internet resources, dissertations, theses and essays.

Analysis

Tanzanian Young adult novels reveal several class conflicts. *Maliyamungu's Escape* is a work that depicts some of these class conflicts. This young adult novel is set on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam at an unknown time. It portrays the conflict between outdated beliefs, which lead to an attempt to kill a child known as Maliyamungu, who is born with disability. Within the story, one can hear the voice of conflicts described by Maliyamungu, the major character, as he expresses himself:

My name is Maliyamungu, and I was born lame. This condition was noticed by the midwife, and my mother was informed immediately after I was born. When I left the hospital, two days after my birth, it was decided that I should die. Keeping a badly disabled child would not be so good for my parents' image in society. (*Maliyamungu's Escape 2*)

In the above text, Maliyamungu states that a badly disabled child is a sign of a 'bad image in society'. Maliyamungu is to be killed because his lameness could tarnish the image of society. Although the conflict in this story is on outdated beliefs, it is more connected to socio-economic conflict, in which the value of a person is measured in terms of material production.

Disability in a society whose income depends upon the working class might be considered a burden because a disabled person cannot offer maximum production. Moreover, a victim would demand human services such as clothing, shelter and regular medical services. All this would require much sacrifice from relatives who, worse still, are wage earners and lowly paid.

It is for these reasons that a poor society cannot tolerate living with a disabled person who could be a burden. Benelli et al (2023) argue that disability in many societies is a social construct intensified with capitalism. They see that, before capitalism, primitive societies could accommodate people with disability by providing them with requirements. Primitive societies covered all the needs of people with disability at the social level.

With the emergence of capitalism, people were divided into different classes: a class of people with disabilities and those without any disability. The class of people who had no disabilities was an advantage. It could survive through labour exchange. The class of 'people with disability' like Maliyamungu cannot fit into labour market. Thus, a capitalistic society could seek to either wipe out or exclude them from any paid work.

Maliyamungu's father shows a capitalistic phobia. He fears living with a child who could be a burden and obstacle to his survival. He lives in a society in which labour is more valued than humanity. In such a society, disabled persons are regarded as a social problem. *Maliyamungu's Escape* mirrors the reality in present-day Tanzanian society. The work shows that a class of disabled people is not well represented. This work of art shows a lamentation of a class of people which seeks to reveal the intensity of conflict between people with disability and people born without disability. From this work, we gather the truth that the two classes here

are in a clash. The class of the disabled is humiliated, and the class without disability humiliates the disabled people. However, as we have seen, these classes are created by the urge for economic survival.

Ismail's *Living in the Shade* is another young adult novel highlighting class conflicts in Tanzanian society. This novel depicts a young adult character called Tatu. The girl is brought up in a single-parent family. Tatu is the idol of her mother, in spite of her skin disability. Her mother protects her as the only child. She is described from the beginning as facing discrimination from the society in which skin impairment is disregarded and looked down upon.

From the beginning, Tatu is affected psychologically due to the stories she hears from different people on how society treats people with albinism. In the novel, we are told about Tatu's narrow escape from the kidnappers. The escape helps the girl reveal the secret of the kidnappers' network. Later, the kidnappers are brought to justice. Tatu manages to realise her dreams in her life. In the story, we see the social conflict that exists between Tatu and her classmate in school. The girl is discriminated against because of her skin colour, as the following text reveals:

No one wants to sit with me. They think I've got some sort of germs that can harm them. I don't know why they think that. If they knew me, they would realise I am just as human as they are. (*Living in the Shade 2*)

The above text reveals the social void of knowledge on albinism, which places people with such a skin condition into a class that conflicts with society. Tatu's schoolmates seem to lack understanding of albinism. They believe albinism is an infectious disease caused by specific germs that might harm every child who tries to sit near her. Within Tatu's voice, a reader can hear a tone of despair. Tatu knows that she is a human being. However, because of such discrimination, Tatu believes that her fellow pupils think that she is not a normal human being. Discrimination, as we can see, is rampant with its roots at the family level, as the following text reveals:

Father had not accepted me immediately as his daughter. However, his friend had told him that he knew of another man from a nearby village whose wife had also given birth to a 'white' baby. After that, he'd felt more relaxed and began to accept me. Father's family, on the other hand, has not accepted me. To this day, they believe a child with albinism is cursed and could bring bad luck to the family. When my father passed away a year after my birth, his family was convinced I was the cause. They broke off all contact with my mother and me...her family and community had cut off contact with her, fearing that the curse would affect them if they saw or touched the child with albinism. (*Living in the Shade*, p. 33)

The text above depicts albinism as a source of conflict and family division. Tatu, for instance, is rejected from the beginning by his father until his father is convinced by his friend that he was not the first to have a child with albinism. We saw, however, that even when Tatu's father dies a natural death, his death is associated with Tatu's albinism. Tatu's skin condition also affects her mother. This woman is discriminated against in her family and her community.

The discrimination seen from the text above shows the complexity of class conflict. Albinism becomes a dividing factor among the people. It divides them into different social classes. The killing of people who have skin impairment needs a quick intervention. Burke et al (2014) noted that the intervention to stop killing people with albinism could also induce violation of human rights if not handled carefully. Thus, the scholars suggest a humanitarian intervention that could not harm other people. As we have seen, Tatu conflicts with her classmates. Furthermore, albinism becomes a source of conflict between Tatu and her teachers.

In this story, the society neglects Tatu. In the class, the teachers consider her stubborn when she tries to report that she cannot see properly because she was usually made to sit behind the class. At the family level, as we have discussed, albinism induces a misunderstanding among the family members. A typical example is the misunderstanding between Tatu's parents and relatives. We see later that Tatu's mother becomes an object of rejection on both sides: her own family and the family of her in-laws. She becomes a source of fear in the family; they fear that she could be a source of death in the family. Killing of people with albinism is also described as a business, as the following text reveals:

People with albinism have been slaughtered in my own blessed country. Their limbs and organs are sold for thousands of dollars to witchdoctors who use them to make the so-called 'luck charms.' Bones, hair, skin, arms, legs, tongues and genitals are used by some witch doctors in rituals erroneously believed to bring wealth and luck...Fishermen have been known to weave hair of a person with albinism into their nets, hoping for a bigger catch...People with albinism have no supernatural powers. How can a witch doctor use an organ of a person with albinism in some concoction that can help miners get diamonds from the soil? (*Living in the Shade*, pp. 58-59)

The above text connects albinism with economic endeavours in which albinism becomes a commodity of substantial value. Some diction from the text above shows that almost every organ of a person with albinism is sold for many dollars. The text reveals that limbs are sold to be used as charms. Bones, hair and skin are sold to different dealers for different activities such as fishery and mining.

A quick generalisation might make a person think that selling limbs of albinism is a business that is caused by local and outdated beliefs. The text above reveals that the extermination of people with albinism is a systematic business. It involves a network of business people in the fishing industry, mining and politicians. Mbantha (2021) observes that this black market is prevalent in Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa (p. 37).

We hear from the text a sad tone. The narrator seems to blame society for shutting its eyes and ears while innocent people are shedding blood. The narrator says, "People with albinism have been slaughtered in my own blessed country" (p. 37). Note that in this statement, the narrator appears to question the essence of blessing in her country, where other citizens are subjected to butchery due to their skin conditions.

Mabala's *Run Free* is another young adult masterpiece which reveals several social conflicts. This novel tells a story of two young adult girls, Rehema and Clara. These characters are created to show class division between the rich and the poor. Clara is the character who

comes from a well-to-do family. This is the family of a resigned police officer living in a mansion in a suburb in Arusha called Olosivia.

As the title suggests, *Run Free* depicts a motif of running. Running occurs severally times from the beginning of the story to the end. This motif carries the conflicts in work. It has been used to show young adults' struggles in their lives. Although Clara and Rehema run, the text shows that running differs from one person to another. Thus, the work suggests that life is like an athletic competition in which every person is in the race.

The work shows that when young adults are growing, they are in a race to run towards what they are going to be. Parents, like spectators, have the role of encouraging them to win rather than being obstacles to their running. This novel shows Baba Clara discouraging his son Patrick from painting. Painting is regarded as a profession that could make Patrick's life miserable.

Reading different texts from this literary novel, we see several class conflicts emphasised through characterisation. Below is a text which shows class conflict between politicians and voters:

During her first years in school, there were no sports classes at all...When I was in school, we were always told that if your body is fit, your mind will be fit as well. So we had sports, and I am sure they were good for us. But then, along came someone who decided that sports prevented pupils from studying. So he gave the order 'no more sport!' and that was the end of sports in school. I suppose we are not prepared to disagree with the politician ministers. They can wake up and make any order they like, even if some decisions they make seem questionable. Maybe it is because when big politicians become ministers, they can make decisions without consultation, and no one dares to question them. (*Run Free*, pp. 6-7)

The statement above is provided by Baba Clara. The narrator reveals a class conflict that involves political decisions on vital issues. These issues require advice from an expert in a particular area of specialisation. The narrator above blames politicians in society because they make decisions without consulting the body of experts in the specific field.

Within this text there emerges two classes emerge. There is a class of rulers and that of the ruled. The narrator favours the class of the ruled. This class is represented by experts in a certain discipline and a group of ordinary people who are presented with the affected pupils who are denied the right to sports. The narrator again argues that in *Run Free's* society, when it comes to decision making, politicians decide without seeking advice from experts in that area.

Mwamgwirani's *The Choice* is another young adult novel depicting class conflict among the youth on the issue of love and sex. The setting of the novel is in an imaginary city of Vyemani. It is narrated by the main female character called Mria. Mria is a secondary school student. She falls in love with a university student called David. The two lovers find themselves in a difficult situation. They are tempted to engage in premarital sex. Despite her love with David, Mria resists the temptation firmly because she fears getting pregnant. This novel reveals

class conflict involving different perceptions of love and sex. Before we discuss this issue in length, let us first examine the following text:

“I do not understand you Mria.” He went on, “You say you love me. You tell your friends the same. But you just won’t have sex with me. Why Mria...I just cannot take this anymore. I just can’t! ...please talk to me Mria, I am going crazy. Do you... do...do you like someone else? David could not bring himself to entertain the thought, let alone say it. Mria shook her head vigorously in negation to it. (*The Choice*, p. 45)

In the text above, we see David attempting to convince Mria to engage in sex. David sees that sex is the vindication of love. The text reveals that Mria keeps saying she loves David. However, when it comes to sex, she refuses to engage in it. Mria and David represent two classes of males and females. The two classes are in a strong urge to explore sexuality as part of flesh drives that haunt their tender age. Nevertheless, we see in Mria the moral strength in preferring chastity to sexual immorality.

One can see that the perception of sex and the resistance to the vice are probably caused by religious background and peer pressure. Mria comes from an Islamic background. Like in any other Abrahamic religion, Sexual immorality is highly condemned. She understands that sexuality not only brings pleasure, as David thinks, but also comes with other results, such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and the guilt of conscience, as the following text reveals:

To her, sex meant pregnancy, and pregnancy meant the end of the world. How would she face her father? What about her mother? How will she explain to Mwanaabdallah, even as she was warning her about the vice that she was still practicing behind her? (*The Choice*, p. 49)

As discussed above, the text cements our discussion. Mria’s strength comes from the early prohibition and fear of her parents. She sees the shame that could be brought by the vice. She understands that her father could encounter this action with an angry reaction. She also sees that the discovery of her mischief could be taken as a betrayal of the teachings she received from her mother. With such fears in her mind, Mria is not ready to fall prey to sexual immorality. To David, however, sex, as we have said, meant the expression of manhood as it is perceived in most male young adults, as the following text reveals:

Mria...why won’t you have sex with me like how all my friends do with their girlfriends? What’s wrong with me? What should I do Mria...? He went on now and lost the little control that he initially seemed to possess. She said nothing in response. (*The Choice*, p. 45)

This text reveals that David is driven by more infatuation than true love. The desire to try sex in David can be associated with pressure from his age-mate friends. He complains that all of his friends have sex with their girlfriends. Mria’s refusal to make sex affects David. He thinks that he is not sexually normal. From David, we understand that the class of male young adults perceive love differently from female young adults. As we see in the example of Mria, love goes beyond sexual drives and emotions to something that involves duties to the lover.

Mria understands that sex comes with consequences. These consequences might be unprepared children. She sees that she is not prepared to receive children at such an early age. She also sees that she has her aspirations and dreams that should be fulfilled. She, therefore, understands that getting children at such an early age imposes duties, not only on herself but also on her father and mother. On the other hand, David forces Mria to engage in sex. He regards sex a sign of manhood and prestige to his fellow friends. The following text further reveals that peer pressure is an orientation of class division of young adults for better and for worse, as the following text reveals:

Yet school is a place where some learn vices like drugs and unprotected sexual activities that lead them to destruction. It is indeed a place that young people escape to, a way from the nagging and pestering of their adult parents. And school is also where the young find juvenile bliss, while others find an earthly hell waiting. (*The Choice* p. 58)

The above text shows that school creates classes in young adults that shape their personalities. The text reveals that since the school collects different people, most young adults have taught themselves different vices such as drug abuse, and different sexual behavior. This text is in agreement with the urge of David, as we have discussed above, David learns from his friends that real boys should show their boyhood in sexual orientation with girls. That is why, when Mria refuses to have sex, he doubts whether Mria is really in love with him. Michaela et al (2020) argue that educational institutions contribute to the impact of academic-related stress. This stress causes many things, such as poor educational performance, mental health complications, like nervousness and despair, as well as sleep disturbances. We see some of the traits mentioned in the behaviour of David towards Mria.

Lema's *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* is another young adult masterpiece that reveals several class conflicts. This novel depicts the life of young adults who are mostly fired with the spirit of adventure to come to the city of Dar-es Salaam. They travel to the city with different dreams of success. Usually, these young adults escape from rampant rural poverty and life drudgery.

The text below reveals the life of a social class of street children in the city of Dar es Salaam. Sara, the main character, joins with other street children in search of survival. The text explains that life in the streets of Dar es Salaam is characterised by unrestricted freedom but with relatively harsher conditions in which hunger is common, as the following text shows:

Life in the streets was new to Sara. It was life without Prospa. A life in the belly of Dar es Salaam in which she wandered endlessly. Its streets beckoned to offer her unrestrained freedom. But it was a life which demanded effort and struggle to survive. She was alone, although she had companions (*In the Belly of Dar es Salaam*, p. 16)

As it has been explained above, a group of street children is a class of people in society which reveals a conflict between young adults in wealthy families and low-income families. Although street children come to the city for different reasons, this literary work calls for the attention of any reader to examine the situation of this class in society. This society advocates equality and equal opportunity for all.

In this story, two young adult characters come to the city from different places in the nation. They have similar backgrounds and reasons. Kaleb Mbegu is the character who comes from Dar es Salaam from a rural area in the Mtwara region. His family earns their living from cashew nut growing. Kaleb observes that cashew nut farming does not pay well. The market is not good, and his father borrows heavily to buy pesticides and fungicides. Almost every harvest goes to repay debts. Thus, Kaleb comes to Dar es Salaam and chooses to be *Machinga*, selling wares for Chinese bosses.

One of the men read their hesitation and urged them to move on. “Go to Kariakoo and find the Makonde boys. They are called *Machinga*. They sell wares of all kinds on the streets for Chinese bosses. (In *The Belly of Dar es Salaam*, p. 37)

The text above reveals a class of street vendors commonly known as *Machingas*. According to the text, this class is controlled by a few Chinese bosses. These men dominate the business of wares in Kariakoo. The narrator has chosen special diction to express the two distinctions of the *Machinga*, as a class which is exploited heavily by a class of a few Chinese businessmen. As noted, Kaleb Mbegu becomes a *Machinga* due to regional poverty caused by little gains from the cashew crop farming.

The same experience is seen in the character known as Ali Shekilango. Like Kaleb Mbegu, Ali is the son of an orange farmer. His father has worked in an orange farm without getting enough income to cater for his family's needs. Ali is discontented with the peasantry living. He wishes to transform his life. He aspires to purchase a *boda boda* that would carry him wherever he wants to go. Ali Shekilango understands the gap between the rich and the poor. The rich, who mostly live in urban areas, come to rural areas as tourists and merchants. They pay the fruit farmers low prices, as the text below shows:

Ali knew that this talk about the beauty of the place was just tourist talk. That was how rich people talked. They did not have to hold a hoe in their life or pick fruits every season and then sell them for nothing, for fear they would rot. Merchants came with pick-ups and lorries to haul the fruits. (In *the Belly of Dar es Salaam*, p. 44)

The text above shows that merchants benefit from the class of farmers. Although fruit farming is done to earn income, the farmers are given a meagre return compared to their labour. Due to inadequate income, the peasants cannot afford to provide a good education to their children. Consequently, when children grow, they compare their lives and those of the urban dwellers. They covet the life of the town dwellers because it seems to be good.

Conclusion

This paper identified class conflicts as highlighted in young adult novels. It has presented the class conflicts highlighted in five young adult novels: *Run Free* (2013) by Richard Mabala, Akide's *Maliyamungu's Escape* (2013); Esmail's *Living in the Shade* (2011), Mwamgwirani's *The Choice* (2015) and Lema's *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* (2011). In the discussion, texts from the young adult novels have been examined to see how the texts reveal the class conflicts. It is important to note that most of the young adult novels explain several class struggles.

About the Author

The author of this article is a lecturer in the department of foreign languages and literature at the University of Dodoma. His area of research includes young adult literature, folklore and literature as well as Kiswahili literature. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8129-8782>

Declaration of AI Refined

This document has benefited from the application of AI-driven tools, including Grammarly and Scholar AI Chat, to refine its linguistic aspects. These tools were utilised to correct grammar and spelling and improve the overall writing style. It is acknowledged that the use of these technologies may introduce certain AI-generated linguistic patterns. However, the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented remain the sole work of the authors.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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