

The subversion of conventional masculinity and femininity in Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*

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Abstract

Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo is Euphrase Kezilahabi's novel that dramatises masculinity and femininity in relation to modern perspectives that contrast it with the traditional patriarchal definition of a man and a woman. The novel challenges and deconstructs the essentialists' perceptions and perspectives of a man's definition. This paper examines Kezilahabi's attempt to challenge and deconstruct the traditional patriarchal definition of men and woman in the novel. The paper argues that masculinity and femininity are unisex and are fluid, hence, subject to continual alterations. The paper uses Robert Connell's perspective of gender as a performed social construct and Judith Butler's idea of the performative aspect of gender as a theoretical framework to read and interpret characters' expression and performances in the novels. The analysis reveals that through his male and female characters, Kezilahabi explicitly demonstrates that the socially-constructed masculinity and femininity constitute positions that can be occupied by both males and females and, hence, can be subverted. Through this novel, Kezilahabi dramatises multiple levels of masculinities and femininities influenced by modernity, Western ideology, education and money. *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* reveals Kezilahabi's perception of gender as a contested taxonomy because of its mutable and ambivalent manifestations.

Theoretical framework

The reading and understanding of the subversion of conventional masculinity and femininity in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* is informed by Butler's (1990) and Connell's (1995) gender perspectives. According to Butler (1990), gender is a socially constructed through performance; it is manifested in ways through which individuals style their bodies and conduct themselves as well as ways through which they speak and move. She argues that gender is not only produced by and on particular bodies but is also located in particular activities, behaviours, and practices. It is through the "stylised repetition" of these gendered practices such as body gestures and mannerisms that masculinity is enacted through language (as a form of speech act), bodily (in terms of one's appearance), and through one's actions. Butler further asserts that these gendered practices are not fixed and vary depending on situations. She, thus, sees masculinity and femininity as unstable subjects and discourages the categorisation of women/men as fixed coherent identities against the opposite sex.

Like Butler, Connell (1995) contends that gender is not a natural state but is socially constructed through performances. Connell, who argues that masculinity exists in relation to femininity, insists that women can also possess and demonstrate masculinity features. She also points out that the concept of masculinity is always changing and in this changing process, there is a possibility of older forms of masculinity to be displaced by new ones because it is a dynamic 'configurations of gender practice' negotiated in time, ideology and culture (Connell, 2000, p. 28). It is a fluid subject.

Connell and Butler differ from essentialists who believe that the construction of the male gender requires one's moulding into a masculine role which presupposes autonomy, competition, and aggressiveness, and the domination of the innate human needs for connectedness, intimacy, and self-disclosure. A man is, therefore, expected to be active, tough, aggressive, a decision maker, a provider and his authority cannot be questioned by a woman whereas a woman is expected to be passive, submissive, silent, compassionate and caring. The essentialist patriarchal ideology rests on the idea that a man needs to prove his manhood because he has been socialised to believe that his masculinity is actually biological and not ascribed; thus, this state has to be continually maintained and enhanced through the externalisation of masculine behaviours. As opposed to the essentialists, Connell and Butler claim that gender is not natural without any necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender. Their notions of gender are, therefore, important in the discussion of this paper as they enable us to observe and interpret a character's expressions and performances in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* using a multilayered approach and affirm that masculinity and femininity are not fixed homogenous and innate constructs but are rather fluid, changing and circumstantial.

Subversion of Femininity and Masculinity

In *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*, the author seems anxious to challenge the conventional definition of masculinity and femininity through the portrayal of his female characters Vera, Fatuma and Hadija, who display masculine traits similar to those of men and male characters; Denis, John and Tumaini who demonstrate feminine features.

Kezilahabi uses Vera as an example of women who can transcend conventional gender boundaries. Through the portrayal of Vera (Mama Resi), he dramatises how a woman can perform masculinity and as such play roles traditionally and culturally assigned to men. Vera fights with a bus conductor when passengers are told to go out of the bus because it is stuck in the mud and needs to be pushed out. She refuses to alight and when the conductor forces her to do so, she yells at him saying she has paid her own bus fare and nobody should disturb her (56). Irritated by her arrogance, the bus conductor decides to return her money and forces Vera to take her luggage but she refuses, claiming that the agreement was to reach her destination. Angrily, the conductor pushes her down but she stands up and fights back. In this scene, Vera draws every passenger's attention and many passengers are surprised by what they perceive to be her 'arrogance' and aggression. In this regard, the narrator explains: "*Tumaini alishangaa kuona kulikuwa na wanawake wenye kiburi namna hii duniani*" [literal translation: Tumaini was surprised to see that there are such arrogant women in the world] (Kezilahabi, 1975:58).

Vera's confrontation with the bus conductor appears to challenge normalised definitions and performance of everyday rituals of masculinity and femininity. Vera's fight with men in public spheres deconstructs the conventional feminine traits of a traditional woman. The conventional patriarchal notion of a woman and the essentialists' perception of a woman treat women as weak and non-aggressive characters who in most cases appear to be inferior and timid in front of men (Connell, 1995). However, Vera challenges this notion as she acts against what is expected of a conventional traditional woman. She undermines masculinity when she adamantly refuses to get out of the bus and the conductor is forced to let her stay put, while the rest of the passengers are ordered out.

Vera's action is perceived as strange particularly by men who think that a woman must be submissive particularly to men. This kind of men's perception towards Vera is affirmed through Tumaini's comment:

"*Tumaini alishangaa kuona kulikuwa na wanawake wenye kiburi namna hii duniani*" (58). This comment captures a male's normalised categorisation and generalisation of women as submissive and docile. His thinking reflects the society's negative perception of women who try to cross traditional patriarchal boundaries by aggressively standing up and fighting for their rights. Such women are branded as stubborn and arrogant. Implicitly, Tumaini's attitude towards this type of women reveals fear and nervousness in the men's world; the fear that threatens men's masculinity because they do not expect to have a world whereby a woman can act like a man. In other words, this comment subscribes to the entrenched normalised constructed gender imbalances that consider femininity as always subservient to masculinity. Also implied in Tumaini's comment is the desire to entrench and perpetuate the patriarchal society's imbalances of masculine-feminine relationships.

However, Kezilahabi reveals that this status quo can be destabilised when conventional gender roles are challenged by men and women in the contemporary world. Through the portrayal of a married couple, Dennis and Vera, Kezilahabi subverts conventional feminine and masculine gender roles by depicting a wife who assumes masculine roles and orders her husband to perform what are normally coded as female gender roles in a 'conventional' patriarchal gendered socio-cultural set-up. The reader is confronted with this situation in the scene where Vera arrives from the village with visitors and instructs her husband to cook and serve them because she is tired. Dennis agrees and acts as duly ordered. He tells his visitors to read newspapers as he prepares a meal for them (59-60).

From a traditional patriarchal perception of a man, Dennis is feminised because his wife makes him perform feminine roles as his spouse takes a rest, which is against them norm in a patriarchal society. The reversed gendered roles of Dennis and Vera may be attributed to their acquiescence of Western ideology, modernity and education. Vera's argument about Western ideology's perception of equality between men and women in her conversation with

Tumaini makes this clear as she asserts:

Mimi na bwana wangu tunaamini katika jambo hili la usawa. Hata mimi ninaweza kutoa maoni yangu mbele ya bwana wangu. Dennis anafahamu sana kupika. Tunapeana zamu. Mara nyingi tunabishana mezani. Katika jamii ya kizungu utakuta mara nyingi mwanamke ana sauti kuliko mwanaume (Kezilahabi, 1975, p.71).

My husband and I believe in equality. I can give my views before my husband. Dennis is good at cooking. We take turns. Several times we argue at the table. In Western society you will find a woman is more powerful than a man.

This assertion confirms that the lifestyle of Vera and Dennis has been influenced by Western ideology.

Tumaini, who subscribes to African traditions and culture, differs with Vera in her notion of equality. For Tumaini, respect is the key factor in a marriage and not the issue of mutual agreement on family duties or discussing family issues together (72). He insists that their parents respected one another and that is why they maintained their marriages. Vera dismisses Tumaini's views as outdated and argues that African men no longer exploit and suppress women. Giving his views, Tumaini admits that there are evil things that have been practised in African traditional societies and are no longer useful. He further argues that, that should however not imply that all aspects of African culture are diabolic. He notes that there are good things that should be preserved with respect being one of them. Vera takes Tumaini's arguments as a challenge as she admits that she has never come across a man who is quite convincing like him (72). Tumaini is surprised by this comment and concludes that Vera is not an ordinary woman. He says: "*Hiyo haikuwa lugha ya wanawake wa kawaida*" [literary translation: That was not a language of ordinary women] (Kezilahabi, 1979, p.72).

The conversation between Vera and Tumaini reveals contradictory perceptions of the marriage institution. It also reveals how Western and African ideologies have varyingly influenced their thinking. Whereas Vera condemns African culture for suppressing women and praises Western world for giving freedom and space to woman, Tumaini rejects Vera's ideas by underscoring the place of respect in marital relationships. His insistence on respect in marriage suggests that in African patriarchal society, a wife should be obedient, subservient and respectful to her husband. In addition, Tumaini's facial expression

and response towards Vera's argument and comments suggest that a woman who does not abide by ethos of a traditional patriarchal marriage appears to be a misfit of society. As such Tumaini construes Vera as a strange woman who wants to subvert traditional patriarchal practices by living in accordance with Western culture.

Vera's embrace of Western culture influences her masculine performance in her relation with her husband. This is further revealed through her views on freedom, culture and ideology. Sitting in Dennis' sitting room, Tumaini and Vera argue about the notion of freedom and cultures in African and Western countries. This discussion is initiated by Vera who refers to Tumaini's article in the newspaper and her response to it. Tumaini believes that individual freedom is limited by his culture and considers those Africans who expose their nakedness in public spaces as similar to animals which are supposed to live in the forest as exposing naked bodies publicly is inappropriate in his society (74-5).

Contrary to Tumaini's views, Vera believes Western ideas are not that bad and argues that there is no country that only depends on its ideology; it has to be complemented by various cultures. She says that every culture is constituted by conflicting ideologies and intervention of various cultures from other countries. For Vera, a rigid culture entails an inability to relate to foreign countries, which is impossible in the contemporary world. In her views, Africans should allow for some integration of Western culture (76). Vera's argument and performances deflates the rigid standards of African patriarchal ideology and implies the transformation of gender perspectives. The integration of Western ideology is evident in her repetitive actions and her conversations with Tumaini and Dennis. This influence of Western culture on Vera's performance of masculinity affirms Althusser's (1998) views of ideology and masculinity construction. According to Althusser, ideology influences individuals' practices and these practices also serve to construct masculinity and femininity.

Apart from their differences in perspectives of African culture, what drives Vera to argue with Tumaini is her competitive spirit. She does this to demonstrate that he is less competent than her husband. Vera is not happy with Tumaini's progress and she hates seeing him out-winning her husband (76). She sees Tumaini as a man who wants to gain publicity by publishing articles in newspapers. To stop him from being more famous than her husband, she decides

to respond to his article by criticising him. This spirit of competing with men is what demonstrates that she embodies a masculine character. Her decision to compete with Tumaini on behalf of her husband, in fact, feminises her husband because her arguments and actions suggest that her husband is not strong enough to compete with another man and maintain his masculine identity.

Kezilahabi's portrayal of Vera affirms Butler's (1990) theory of performativity. Butler asserts that the construction of gender identity comprises the stylised repetition of acts, but not of an immutable and pre-discursive identity. Butler also alludes to the possibilities of gender transformation. These possibilities are usually found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repetition, and in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

Female Threatening Male's World

Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo challenges conventional masculine and feminine roles through the depiction of Vera who is aggressive and appears to go against the ethos of a traditional patriarchal marriage. Through this portrayal, Kezilahabi reveals how women's masculine performance can deconstruct men's masculinity. Vera rapes John, her husband's friend in her bedroom (72). She also invites John to stay in her house in her husband's absence. She does not even care about her daughter watching her performing sex with a lover. When John shows a sign of fear of nasty behaviour, Vera assures him that her husband cannot do anything because he is very polite and understanding: "*Vera alimhakikishia*

[John] asiogope na hata Dennis akijua hana matata masikini" [Vera assured John that he should not worry, even if Dennis knows about it, a poor man has no problem at all] (86). In this scene, Vera subverts conventional roles of women and men as she rapes a man and makes him a 'concubine' in her house. Vera, thus, takes a masculine role whereas John embodies a feminine character. Moreover, the way Vera describes her husband to her lover reveals how she undermines him. This description suggests that Vera controls her husband who is relegated to a feminine and subservient position in their marriage.

Vera and John's performances of gender in this context affirm Butler's view of gender performances. Butler (1999) contends that gender can be performed and re-enacted in a myriad of ways, including those that are against the heterosexual

framework of gender embodiment. Furthermore, in Salih (2002), Butler argues that the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied in the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylisation of masculine/feminine identities.

In the same scene, Kezilahabi depicts Vera as a woman who rejects her feminine roles of wife and mother. She is portrayed as a discourteous and irresponsible wife and mother who abuses her daughter by demonstrating a disgusting performance in her presence. Her sensual and immoral actions disqualify her from being a virtuous woman, according to traditional norms. In fact, Vera, therefore, performs negative and disruptive masculinity. Her portrayal inverts the conventional definition of a woman and the behaviour expected of her by the patriarchal society. Vera's rejection of conventional feminine roles reveals her as a woman who cannot take care of her domestic chores and keep her child clean:

"Vera hakuwajibika, alikuwa mvivu na mchafu. Hakusafisha vyombo wala nyumba. Hata mtoto wake alikuwa mchafu"
Vera was irresponsible. She neither washed the dishes nor cleaned the house. Her daughter was very dirty (Kezilahabi, 1975, p. 70).

Another factor that masculinises women and feminises men in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* is men's financial dependency. Vera used to send pocket money to Dennis when he was studying at Kivukoni College. She also pays dowry for him and prepares for a marriage (68). In addition, she takes good care of John, her lover and buys him expensive shirts and all necessary basic needs (87). Traditionally, a man has to pay dowry and provide for his woman in an African culture, particularly in Tanzania where the novel is set. As such, Vera has assumed a masculine position by turning Dennis and John into 'women'. This demonstrates that Vera has negated Dennis and John masculine status and relegates them into a humiliating effeminate position. Pierre Bourdieu (1998, p. 22) regards such a performance as the worst treatment for a man as he insists: "[the] worst humiliation for a man is to be turned into a woman." Vera's performance of masculine role highlights the subversion of normative gender roles. Furthermore, economic independence is an index of masculinity because it is economic power that gives Vera the means to alter her feminine role to a

masculine one. Money in this case enables Vera to subvert patriarchal gender relations and undermines traditional notions of femininity and masculinity that assumes men are providers and women are dependents. In addition, Kezilahabi's portrayal of Vera and John alludes to the idea of sugar mommy because John is younger than her and she is more financially comfortable.

Kezilahabi's subversion of conventional notions of masculinity and femininity is further laid bare through the act of decision-making in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*. Traditionally, a man makes decisions for himself and his family. In the novel, Vera inverts this role as she possesses power when she decides for herself and for her husband. Vera is portrayed as a key decision-maker in the family even on issues regarding employment. Dennis lacks this power. He tells Tumaini to wait for his wife to decide whether he should be offered a job or not. Vera's power in decision-making is further manifested when she offers Tumaini a job and decides what type of job he can do and his location (81). Moreover, Vera orders Dennis not to fire Tumaini from his job when Dennis realises that he has impregnated his sister and ran away. Also she displays this power when she stops Dennis from visiting Tumaini at the hospital where he is admitted (103). This act explains more about the masculine position that Vera possesses in the house and before other men and the feminine position that Dennis occupies.

Furthermore, Vera's spirit of competition with men and revenge display her masculinity, which affects men in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*. Vera offers Tumaini a security job in bar areas as a strategy to punish him. She wants to undermine and kill him. Her reasons include his interference in her relationship with John and, in consequence, seeks to destroy his public image (88). Vera uses bar owners to assist her in accomplishing her mission of killing Tumaini. She acts as a leader of gangsters that comprises a bar owner, a bar maid, and Makoroboi, the killer (91-92). She surreptitiously organises and co-ordinates the whole process of kidnapping and killing Tumaini. Everything goes as planned except that Makoroboi does not kill Tumaini. He just tortures him severely. He does not want to be jailed for murder (98). Tumaini ends up hospitalised and suffers for a while but eventually recovers.

Vera's spirit of competition with men leads her to become the most dangerous person in the gangster team. She viciously threatens Makoroboi and

other men for not accomplishing the task of killing Tumaini and gives them money and orders them to complete the job: "*Bwana Makoroboi chukua pesa hizo ukaniletee kichwa chake!*" [Mr Makoroboi, take this money and bring his head to me] (Kezilahabi, 1975, p. 98). Makoroboi refuses to do the job and condemns her for putting them into trouble, a situation that forces them to flee to another country for two years for their safety. Vera is annoyed by their refusal and swears to kill Tumaini herself: "*Basi nitamuua kwa mikono yangu mwenyewe*" [I will kill him with my own hands] (99).

The detailed description of the killing mission depicts Vera as an extraordinary woman in a conventional patriarchal society who threatens and kills men. In her quarrel with gangsters, Vera shows her clear-mindedness, unbending will and manlike prowess that not only humiliates men in the gangster team but also embarrasses them as she sees them as incompetent in their assigned job. She condemns them for putting the group at risk by not killing Tumaini because they are now wanted by the police. This portrayal presents Vera as a woman who performs masculine roles. In fact, she ends up appearing as a dictator, criminal and murderer. Vera, as a masculine woman, humiliates and threatens men, the gangsters and Tumaini, who are presented as effeminate men. This scenario affirms Butler's view of gender being 'unnatural'. According to Butler (1990), there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender. For her, gender is 'unnatural', implying that it is not necessary for a male body to display traits that are normally considered 'masculine'. In this case, one may be a 'masculine' female or a 'feminine' male as Vera's performances and the reaction of men she relates with demonstrate.

Vera's masculine performance is further evident in a scene where she attempts to kill Tumaini to accomplish her mission. She goes to Tumaini's house disguised in a *hijab* dress with a knife. Although Anastasia, Tumaini's wife recognises her, Vera does not hesitate to confront Tumaini. She accuses him of kicking her lover out of his house and threatens to kick him out of the town as well. She swears to tarnish his name (107). Vera's portrayal subverts the stereotype of an ideal woman as she demonstrates masculine traits to a greater extent.

However, Vera's description reveals the inconsistency and impermanence of conventional notions of masculinity and femininity as she fails

to totally escape from her true feminine traits. She appears to be an ambivalent character when she fails to kill Tumaini and decides to run quickly to her husband to inform him that Tumaini wanted to rape her. Her decision of running back to her husband indicates a subversive gender reversal that subverts her temporal masculine woman to a feminine one. Through Vera's characterisation and those of the male personae that she relates with, Kezilahabi appears to deconstruct the conception of conventional masculinity and femininity by creating female and male characters with non-specific and ambiguous gender identities in the novel. Furthermore, the characters' performances affirm that masculinity is not a fixed category and is, therefore, not solely located in male bodies as essentialists tend to believe. As such, masculinity can also be performed by female bodies. In addition, Kezilahabi's portrayal of Vera, Dennis and John is a dramatisation of masculinity and femininity as ephemeral conditions extant in gendered bodies.

The impermanence of masculinity and femininity in individuals' bodies is further evident in the portrayal of Dennis when he regains his conventional masculine traits and divorces Vera because of her adulterous behaviour (108). Dennis tells Tumaini and his wife what drives him to divorce Vera. He reveals that Vera's continued revolt and deceitful behaviour had become so bothersome that he had now become tired and sick of it. He expresses joy of divorcing his wife thusly: "... *Aliwaambia kwa furaha kuwa amemfukuza mbwa. Alieleza visa vingi vya Vera toka harusi hadi wakati huo*" [He happily told them that he has kicked a dog out of his house. He told them how Vera troubled him for a long time since they got married] (Kezilahabi, 1975:108).

Dennis' performance demonstrates what Butler describes as the inconsistency of gender. According to Butler, "what we take to be 'real,' what we invoke as the naturalised knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (Butler, 1999, p. xxiii). Dennis' divorce action shows that he eventually regains his masculinity that he has been repressing. In this instance, Dennis performs his masculinity as anticipated by the patriarchal society. His reaction to Vera obliterates his previous passive and submissive character as well as Vera's arrogance and aggressiveness. In this case, Vera's masculinity is confirmed as temporal and ephemeral as she can now no longer impose it on Dennis.

Furthermore, the use of metaphor "*mbwa*" [dog]

explains how Dennis is so fed up with his wife's behaviour that he equates her with an animal. His use of the word 'dog' metaphorically refers to a prostitute. It is a pejorative term that refers to a promiscuous conduct. Dennis' attitude towards his wife highlights how a discourteous wife can diminish a man's stature in a society, hence suggesting the significance of a man marrying a 'good and respectful' woman. This means that a man's masculinity is also judged by his wife's behaviour or actions. Moreover, it implies dependency and, therefore, challenges the essentialist notion of men's independence.

The subversion of masculinity and femininity is further evident in the portrayal of female characters who work as barmaids. Despite their striking differences with Vera in terms of respect to class, occupation, marital status and personality traits, these bar maids can also be categorised as modern women whose characters and personalities challenge conventional patriarchal perceptions and perspectives of masculinity and femininity.

The bar maids hold a meeting chaired by Fatuma in a bar to discuss Tumaini and John, the new men in town who seem to have money. In their discussion they realise that Tumaini's financial status is good but not John's as he has nothing. His life depends on Tumaini (73). They put in place a strategy to get hold of Tumaini's money and decide that any one of them can sleep with him to get money off him to build their house (74)—their project. In their meeting, they task Fatuma to continue having an affair with John and Hadija with Tumaini.

To accomplish their mission, Fatuma goes to live with John (76) but she decides to leave him immediately when she finds out that Tumaini's (John's benefactor) financial status has gone downhill. She takes John's properties with her and sells them to street vendors. When John and Tumaini follow her at African's Royal Bar, she threatens them for accusing her of being a thief. She scorns them: "*Mnanifahamu!*

Mnapoishiwa na pesa muwe mnakaa nyumbani!" [Do you know me! When you are bankrupt you should stay home!] (82). Tumaini and John feel embarrassed and to avoid more humiliation, they leave the place. After three days, they see John's clothes in the market but cannot take any measures to get them back.

Fatuma's boastfulness and her daring act of threatening men in public subvert conventional gender attitudes towards women and patriarchal

men by challenging gender stereotypes and conventional definition of masculinity and femininity that assumes women as submissive. Her pride, aggressiveness and self-confidence characterise her masculine performance that draws fear of embarrassment from Tumaini and John, who decide to leave her alone. Their decision to leave appears to be associated with the fear of being ashamed in public as Kristen Day *et al.* (2003, p. 320) point out: "For many men, public spaces and situations that challenge a masculinist identity may generate fear". In other words, men are afraid of being embarrassed and thus attempt to hide anything that diminishes their masculinity.

The bar maid's discussion on John's dependency (73) dramatises the fact that money is an indicator of success and power for one to be considered a man. On the other hand, lack of money has serious consequences for men's social value and affects their masculine pride. This is evident in Tumaini's decision to ask John to return to the village because he can no longer take care of him:

"Nafikiri kwamba lazima sasa ufanye kazi. Itakuwa vigumu kwangu kuendelea kuishi kutunza mlevi" [I think you should now start working. It will be difficult for me to keep on living with a drunkard] (Kezilahabi, 1975, p. 100). Tumaini's unwillingness to continue taking care of John is further evident

when he says: *"Amemlisha kama mtoto inatosha. Achukue pesa aende nyumbani kwao akafanye kazi huko"* [He has been feeding him like a child. It is enough. Let him take the money and go back home and work] (Kezilahabi, 1975, p. 105). This means that masculinity is inextricably linked to a man's economic status. It also stresses the role of money in shaping men's masculinity. John's case also validates the universally accepted effects of hegemonic masculinity which create pressure in men to achieve an ideal masculine status (Connell, 2000).

Weapons are the embodiment of violent models of masculinity, which, in turn, have broader societal ramifications. In this regard, Kezilahabi's novel illustrates how weapons enhance women's masculinity through the portrayal of Hadija. Hadija confronts Tumaini in the presence of his legal wife (85). She orders him to give her money for house rent and accuses him failing to spend nights with her. To threaten him, she tells him about how she poisoned and killed her ex-husbands and how she then grabbed everything and ran away. Tumaini gets

scared and is ready to give her money; however, before he does so, his wife intervenes and hits Hadija badly on her head with a piece of firewood. Tumaini and John try to assist her but before they do so, she gets up very fast and shoots Anastasia with a gun hidden under her gown. Being empowered by a gun, Hadija threatens to kill Tumaini and John. She forces them to surrender, takes the money by force and runs away, leaving them crying in pain.

In this confrontation, a woman challenges and dramatises the conventional expectations of a patriarchal society as she assumes aggressive and violent character in the novel. Fatuma acts as an armed robber, threatens and attempts to kill others. She is proud of robbing men of their properties, manipulating and even killing them. The gun that Hadija uses represents a phallic symbol of violence that enhances her masculinity. It terrifies men and makes them cry. Hadija in this case, assumes the role of a man in what would be a normalised patriarchal set-up because of her coercive and violent performance. Men in this case are feminised and made impotent as they are left poor, humiliated and scared. From this scenario Kezilahabi has again subverted the conventional definition of masculinity as he reverses the gender roles.

However, their individual behaviours represented by Hadija and Fatuma raise questions about this strategy as it exposes them as corrupt and disruptive to societal norms—robbing people of their property and even killing them. Kezilahabi condemns such masculine performance through female and male characters that run away after their evil deeds. Indeed, Hadija runs away after robbing and torturing Tumaini and his wife. Similarly, Makoroboi and his accomplices accuse Vera of putting them into trouble and deciding to flee from their community for two years after attempting to kill Tumaini. Kezilahabi in this case seems to affirm Butler's views on the issue of individuals' gender performances being controlled by the society's norms and ethos. Butler explains:

.....gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence (Butler, 1990, p. 33).

Conclusion

Kezilahabi's *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* deconstructs and subverts the conventional masculine and feminine definitions and perceptions. The male and female characters in the novel explicitly demonstrate that masculinity and femininity are positions that can be occupied by both males and females. Female characters such as Vera (Mama Resi) and the bar maids—Hadija and Fatuma, display masculine qualities such as aggression and arrogance. Conversely, this is also true of the depiction of male characters. Dennis, John and Tumaini are depicted as submissive and timid characters when they are before women. This portrayal enables the reader to understand Kezilahabi's perception of masculinity as a contested category because of its mutable and ambivalent manifestations. The mutability and ambivalence is revealed through the novel's male and female characters who exhibit both gender qualities: feminine and masculine. In addition to individuals' occupying dual gender traits, that is, masculinity and femininity in the novel, Kezilahabi condemns masculinity that is disruptive and suggests its elimination.

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