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The study of signs or symbols and how they produce meanings in social communication falls within the confine of Semiotics. Semiotics is a theory of signification which endeavours to investigate the possibility of meanings generation in all contexts including works of literature. This paper aims in purpose to examine and describe the actantial narrative schema of Mukoma Wa Thiong'o's *Nairobi Heat*, a crime or detective novel of the Whodunit genre. The actantial narrative schema was developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas, a Lithuanian semiotician as a tool for structural account of narratives. The actantial model has six actants divided into three binary oppositions each of which forms an axis of the actantial description and also the relationship among the actants.

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I. ABSTRACT

The study of signs or symbols and how they produce meanings in social communication falls within the confine of Semiotics. Semiotics is a theory of signification which endeavours to investigate the possibility of meanings generation in all contexts including works of literature. This paper aims in purpose to examine and describe the actantial narrative schema of Mukoma Wa Thiong'o's Nairobi Heat, a crime or detective novel of the Whodunit genre. The actantial narrative schema was developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas, a Lithuanian semiotician as a tool for structural account of narratives. The actantial model has six actants divided into three binary oppositions each of which forms an axis of the actantial description and also the relationship among the actants.

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II. INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of signs in the world has added greater force to the process of human perception of the world and its various institutions. The task therefore, is that of keen observation in the process of 'meaning-making' out of the numerous signs around us. According to Chandler (2007, p. 16), Hawkes (2003, p.73) Man is 'homo-significans' and 'homo-loquen'); man makes meaning out of signs and gladly communicates the meanings to the members of

his community. The implication of this postulation is that the deciphering of the meaning of a sign precedes its communication. Charles S. Peirce in his triadic sign model submits, 'sign is something that relates to something else for someone in some respect or capacity,' (qtd. in Merrell Floyd 2001,p. 28). Thus, signs contain meanings and meanings are direct products of signs interpreted. 'Sign as meaning meaning as sign' thus, emphasizes the fact that inherent in signs such as a bouquet, smoke, a text, a traffic lights etc., are meaningful significations and as such the meaningful significations come as a direct result of decoding signs culminating in a buildup of perception which in turn leads to communication through the semiotic process.

In the words of Chandler, (2007, p. 1) Semiotics is the study of signs. Semiotics principally investigates and explores the production and function of signs and sign systems as well as the methods of their signification. It is mainly concerned with how a sign signifies and precedes it at deeper level to result in the manifestation of its meaning, (Aghaei, 2014, p. 43). The field of semiotics cuts across so many disciplines; it is inter-subjective in scope as its theories are open to discussions and analyses of concepts in other fields of human endeavour. In this study we are concerned with literary semiotics.

Semiotic Literary Criticism or Literary Semiotics is the approach to literary criticism informed by the theory of signs or semiotics. Literary texts are regarded as sign systems. In relation to this, Aghaei (2014) maintains:

The literary text as a sign system serves as an artfully constructed fictional discourse that signifies only when a competent reader interprets its textual signs that are basically foregrounded by the application of different literary devices (43).

Literary semiotics thus, gives an explanation on how literary text components such as setting, theme, plot characters etc., assume their signification value within the given literary discourse. The distinctive concern of literary semiotics is to deal with both theory and analysis of aesthetic signs, codes and signifying practices involved in literary discourse. This implies that in literary discourse signs and codes whether icons, indexes or symbols are very important for a text's signification. Roland Barthes (1999, p. 69) reemphasizing the Saussurian concept of sign states, 'the sign is ... a compound of a signifier and a signified.' The literary text is a sign system and therefore, a signifier which contains signifieds by means of the various ideas, beliefs, themes and projections which one can derive by means of its deeper analysis. Consolidating this point further, Sebeok (1994, p. 7) states, 'a text constitutes, in effect, a specific 'weaving together' of signs in order to communicate something. The signs that go into the make-up of texts belong to specific codes. These can be defined as systems of signs that are held together by paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.' A novel as a text comprises signs that need to be interpreted to dig out the 'interpretant' or 'signification' for total communication. A text's linguistic, cultural, socio-political or literary value is thus made manifest in the ability of the critic or narratee to interpret its structural components.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Structural Narratology Theory: The Actantial Narrative Schema

The actantial narrative schema is a structural narratology theory developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas, a Lithuanian semiotician as a tool for structural account of narratives. The actantial model is a tool that can be theoretically be used to

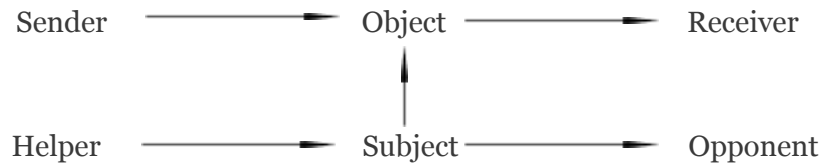
analyze any real or thematized action, but particularly those depicted in literary texts or images. Commenting on the work of A. J. Greimas, Hawkes maintains, 'in essence, his work attempts to describe narrative structure in terms of an established linguistic model derived from the Saussurean notion of an underlying **langue** or competence which generates a specific **parole** or performance, as well as from Saussure's and Jakobson's concept of the fundamental signifying role of binary opposition' (Hawkes, 1977, p. 69). The schema helps to give a clear account of the six narrative functions in works of literature and beyond works of literature to human relationship in the society as a whole. According to Martin and Ringham the actantial narrative schema, is 'a reformulation and simplification of Propp's 31 functions that were found to be common to all stories.' (qtd. in Aghaei, 2014, p. 47). Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* concentrated on a single genre; however, A. J. Greimas works at a universal 'grammar' of narrative; that is he replaces Propp's syntactic structure of narrative with a paradigmatic one. In the *Morphology of the Folktale* Vladimir Propp submitted seven 'spheres of action,' which are as follows:

1. Villain
2. Donor (provider)
3. Helper
4. Sought-for person and her father
5. Dispatcher
6. Hero
7. False hero

Greimas reduces these into three pairs of opposed 'actants.' He then presents not the individual items, but the structural relationship between them. In this schema, Greimas advances three pairs of binary oppositions which form the foundation of narratives and their structures. It is broken into six facets known as 'actants.' (Brown M. & Felicitas R., 2000, p. 18) agree that, 'an actant is someone or something who or which accomplishes or undergoes an act. It may be person, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic agent, a thing or an abstract entity, Actant is a

fundamental role at the level of narrative deep structure. According to Mieke Bal, (1999, p. 197) ‘an actant is a class of actors that shares a certain characteristics quality...an actant is...a class of actors whose members have an identical relationship to the aspect of the telos which

constitute the principle of the fabula.’ This definition fits perfectly into the work under review as the characters are identical in their relationship to one another. The schema is generally described as a diagram in the following representation:



(Culled from Louis Herbert, 50)

As could be seen from the diagram, the first relationship is that of desire between a subject and an object. The subject is what is directed towards the object. The relationship between the subject and the object is called a *junction*. This relationship is primarily dependent on whether the object is conjoined with the subject – that is whether the subject wants the object or disjoined that – is the subject does not want the object. It is then called a *conjunction* or a *disjunction*.

The next relationship is that between a helper and an opponent. The function of the helper is to assist the subject in achieving the desired junction between the subject and the object; the opponent does everything to prevent the subject from accomplishing his mission. The opponent could become anti-subject if he/she in course of the narrative pursues an object of value which implies that his aim of obstructing the subject is for him to achieve some personal goal.

The last relationship is that of transmission – the relationship between sender and receiver. The sender is the element requesting the set-up of the junction between subject and object. The receiver also called beneficiary receiver is that which benefits from achieving the junction between subject and object.

The actantial narrative schema is a useful tool in the analysis of stories as the various actions and happenings in the stories are well accounted for. Any action undertaken by the actors in the story is given full explication and analysis. This is due to

the fact that characters assume different roles in the course of a story. A helper may be an opponent, an opponent a helper or receiver and vice versa. Thus, with the actantial schema, characterization is not fixed or rigid as it shows functions and roles characters perform in a narrative at one point or the other.

2.2 *Nairobi Heat: A Synopsis*

The novel narrates the story of murder. There is a murder case of a young beautiful girl, Miss Macy Jane Amanzah whose parents was Catholic missionaries and got killed during the Rwandan genocide. Jane is aware of this fact and decides to expose the killer of her family, Joshua Hakizimana who is also the suspect of the murder. The African-American detective, Ishmael Fofona is sent to Nairobi to get information about the past in relation to the suspect. The novel is divided into segments with each carrying a particular caption.

The girl Miss Macy Jane Amanzah is found dead on the stairs of the house of an African professor of Genocide and Testimony, Joshua Hakizimana at 2010 Spaight Avenue, Mapple Bluff, Madison Wisconsin. It is to be noted that Joshua has been accused of genocide in the Rwandan genocide. Detective Ishmael gets to Africa and is joined by others like David Odhiambo and Muddy/Madaline in uncovering the mystery surrounding the murdered girl. They are met with strong oppositions arranged by Joshua Hakizimana. Characters like Lord Johnson, Samuel Alexander,

the young couple etc., fight to ensure that Ishmael fails in his quest for the truth about the suspect and everything he stands for.

The segment of the story captioned 'Where Dreams Come to Die' records the various experiences and encounters, the shootings and dead which the detective and his colleagues go through in unearthing the truth about the suspect Joshua Hakizimana and to get justice for Macy. The truth finally comes out at Butere, a village close to the Ugandan border as detective Fofona plans to return to the States. A church in the village which Ishmael Fofona leisurely walks into reveals the true identity of the dead girl as Miss Macy Jane Amanzah whose parents had died in a cross fire. The church symbolically becomes God who reveals deep secrets as the detective exclaims, 'I have found her' (94). He concludes after this discovery that there is a connection between the dead girl and Hakizimana - that he is the real murderer.

There is a smokescreen to conceal or distract the truth as Fofona makes known that Hakizimana is the murderer of Miss Macy Jane Amanzah. Mr. Chocbanc comes to the scene to claim responsibility for the murder of Macy. The case is settled with Hakizimana being set free and the body of Macy taken to Rwanda for burial.

But the words of Bill Quella BQ for short reverberate in Fofona's heart that, 'a person cannot be guilty of genocide and be innocent of murder...' (NH.109) with this new revelation the detective is convinced that the suspect actually commits the murder. At this moment, Joshua is preparing to leave the US to Africa. The detective employs the services of James Wellstone, a well-known notorious thug and finally Joshua is killed and the murder of Macy is avenged. The detective decides to move to Africa his ancestral home to start his life afresh as he thinks about great opportunities awaiting him in Africa.

2.3 The Actantial Narrative Schema in Nairobi Heat

In our analysis of *Nairobi Heat* using the actantial narrative schema, Ishmael Fofona is the subject in

quest of an object of value which in this context is truth and justice for the dead girl, Macy. As a result of this he is met with serious, deadly oppositions where his life and those working with him are threatened. But as the subject and hero he must press harder to ensure he succeeds in his quest to bring home good and victorious report because the course on which he has embarked deserves victory.

The above postulation suggests that anything that attempts to preclude him from achieving his victory has automatically put himself in the position of an opponent or even an anti-subject following our schema. In this connection, it means those characters such as Joshua Hazikimana, Samuel Alexander, Lord Johnson, the young couple, Andrew Chocbanc, the guitarist and the attackers who fire at the detective on his way to the airport have constituted themselves into an opponent or anti-subjects in course of the story. The young couple sends by Lord Johnson are to stop the detective and his colleagues from getting any information about the past that may incriminate Joshua. All these people are a network of Joshua and his foundation, The Never Again Foundation. They stand to ensure that the detective does not succeed in getting to the US with the information he has assembled. The men engage in serious gun battle and they are killed.

As for the actantial role of the sender the police Chief, Jackson Jordon fits accurately into this position. He sends the detective to Kenya to find out the truth surrounding the murder of the girl.

The role of the helpers as we have said are those who assist the subject in achieving his goal of value. In this group we have a mixture of opponent characters turn helpers. This is known as actantial syncretism. This is when a single actor contains several actants from different classes. Here we have David Odhiambo, Abu Jamal, Muddy/Madaline, the security guard, Lord Johnson, Bill Quella, James Wellstone, the fat man, the photographer, Mary Karilimbi of Kokomat Supermarket, Joshua Hazikimana etc. The case of actantial syncretism comes with Lord

Johnson and Joshua Hazikimana. Lord Johnson an opponent becomes a helper by providing the information that leads to The Never Again Foundation. Joshua Hazikimana an anti-subject and opponent by confessing to the murder of Macy also helps the subject, detective Ishmael to accomplish his mission of getting the truth and justice for the dead girl. The question and answer dialogue between Ishmael and Joshua Hazikimana reveals this:

‘Did you kill her?’ I asked.

...Yes, I kill the girl,’... ‘She come to me, so I take opportunity for myself and kill her....She look for justice for herself...’ (NH. 119)

Abu Jamal provides Ishmael with some documents which contain information about the Refugees’ Center and The Never Again Foundation (NH. 68-71). Madaline gives them information about the Kokomat Supermarket. At the Kokomat Supermarket, Mary Karilimbi and other five top ranking women who run the Kokomat Supermarket provide information about Joshua. (NH.77).

As for the actantial role of the beneficiary-receiver is that which benefits from achieving the junction between the object and the subject. Here, the sender elements are the same as receiver element. For the receivers we have detective Ishmael Fofona, Jackson Jordon and Miss Macy Jane Amanzah also benefits indirectly because she has been indirectly granted justice which she seeks for herself and her dead family. Every other person involve in the business of the Foundation are beneficiaries because with Joshua out of the way, they would have the business for themselves.

III. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have been able to use the actantial narrative schema, a structural narratology theory by A.J Greimas to semiotically analyze Mukoma Wa Thiong’o’s *Nairobi Heat*. We have seen that in using this schema characters are not stereotyped; their roles are subsumed as opponents or anti-subjects become helpers

assisting the subject in achieving his desired object of value which is truth and justice. The detective gets to the truth of the mystery and gets justice for the murdered girl Miss Macy Jane Amanzah who has void to avenge the killer of her family. The actantial narrative schema from our study of the work under review is an appropriate tool in the analysis of narratives as we have noted from the onset. This is perfect because it takes into account the various themes, roles, actions and even the characters in the narrative.

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