

## ABSTRACT

### **Mma-Tau: The Political Woman in Alex La Guma**

By

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Guided by the formalist perspective, this article presents an evaluation of Mma-Tau, the woman character in *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979), the last novel by the South African writer, Alex La Guma. It examines the political role that she plays as well as how she is depicted to play this role in *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979), such that there is harmony between her role and her characterization. Her positive description as a huge, energetic woman wearing a mixture of male and female clothing delineates as it enhances her courageous political stand as the attire suggests a union between male and female in the struggle against grinding poverty in the segregated city and against forced removal from her ancestral village. Accentuating her massive size, her bawling and booming voice announces her presence before she is seen. Her comparison to dark wood symbolises her unwavering unity with fellow villagers who the government wants to uproot from their ancestral land. As a result of her role as she leads the villagers in their resistance against relocation to a desolate strange land, Mma-Tau is the butcherbird of the title of the novel, which describes her as a ferocious woman whose ferocity is usually associated with the lioness, which, like the butcherbird, is a hunter. In her determination, focus and will to oppose the relocation of the villagers from their ancestral land to a bleak landscape lies a conviction that, being a human creation, a political order is changeable by human beings. In the process, she demonstrates La Guma's deftness in delineating character, her political role in sync with her aesthetic nature, her role showing her centrality in *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) even as she embodies an aesthetic ideal of a humane society that runs through his fictional world.

**Key Words:** Alex La Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird*, Mma-Tau, injustice, relocation, political role, aesthetic nature