

Individual Alienation and Political Oppression in Kenya as Depicted in Wahome Mutahi's Novels

¹Muindu, Japheth Peter; ²Gladys Kinara; and ¹Anne Jose

¹Department of Social Sciences, School of Education and Social Sciences, Kabianga University College; P. O. Box 2030, Kericho, Kenya.

²Department of Kiswahili, Kenyatta University, P. O. Box 43844, Nairobi, Kenya.

Corresponding Author: Muindu, Japheth Peter

Abstract

The study was an attempt to analyze how Wahome Mutahi, in a selected three of his texts, engages the political concerns of his time in Kenya. Though there is no mention of Kenya, the events featured obtained in Kenya in the writer's time. Similarly, some characters in the fiction are patterned after historical characters in Kenya at the period mediated in the works. Primary data was obtained from a critical reading of Wahome Mutahi's selected novels, namely *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992) and *Doomsday* (1999). Other materials, especially Wahome Mutahi's 'Whispers' column in the *Sunday Nation*, formed the secondary sources, and relevant critical works were read and cited to support the study. The texts present a universe fragmented by political misrule, which induces alienation to individual characters. The worlds evoked in these works are characterized by political oppression and the major characters in the works are alienated. Chipota and Momodu in *Three Days on the Cross*, Albert Kweyu in *The Jail Bugs* and Ismail and Albert Lukulo in *Doomsday* are all alienated characters living in societies where political oppression obtains. The study is a useful addition to the corpus of emergent research into and knowledge about the significance of this previously neglected Kenyan writer, dramatist and journalist, Wahome Mutahi.

Keywords: individual alienation, political oppression, Kenya, depicted, wahome mutahi, novels.

INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial novel in Kenya has never ceased to concern itself with its origins and to take up political questions as a social initiative. It is loyal to its political context and unswerving in characterizing the post-colonial reality as a cause of misery. What there is of politics in a novel is seen in the way the writer derives his characters from their historicity. In most cases, the characters are used as agents for exploring the effects of inhuman politics on the life and psyche of the individual. The political novel grapples with the complexity of political discourse while capturing the struggle to create satisfactory politics. The post-colonial reality finds effective articulation through what Gikandi (1987) describes as 'the process of individualizing reality, presenting it in terms of perception and mediation through a mind that exists uneasily in the context (p. 111). This process is what gives rise to the modernist novel in which reality is 'limited to the perception of a character who lives on the periphery of a society he would like to negate in its entirety' (Gikandi, 1987, p. 111-112). This is the kind of a novel which, according to George Lukacs,

He tried to capture human life as a totality in spite of contemporary alienation, and grows out of the premise that art is an instrument to counter fragmentation by establishing the link between the inner world of men and the outer reality (cited in Gikandi, 1987, p. 113).

The modernist writer reveals the subtle and indigenized form in which oppressive power manifests while at the same time searching redemptive options. This search ranges from satirical critique of the oppressive system to radicalization of literary discourse. These concerns animate Wahome Mutahi's three novels selected for this paper. As a mirror of reality, art at once represents and reflects on the social-political realities that fuel it. It embodies, writes Thiong'o (1981), 'in words and images the tensions and contradictions at the heart of community's process of becoming' (p. 5). This idea that the writer must of necessity address the burning issues of the day for him to remain relevant is also picked up by Ruganda (1992) who opines that:

Any artist whose pulse throbs contemporaneously with his environment cannot help but see, feel and articulate the sores of his society, its indignities and inequalities, its madness and arbitrariness, its propensity to undo itself to suppress dissent (p. 97).

Wahome Mutahi's fiction demonstrates this contemporaneity and commitment in presenting the Kenyan political situation. His art is a painful fiction that articulates the turbulent politics of the period spanned by the selected texts. Though there is no

mention of Kenya, the events featured obtained in Kenya in the writer's time. Similarly, some characters in the fiction are patterned after historical characters in Kenya at the period mediated in the works. The texts present a universe fragmented by political misrule, which induces alienation to individual characters. That some characters exhibit a strong will in the face of state terror seems to be a statement on the author's vision. This paper is an attempt to analyze how the texts engage the political concerns of their time whilst prescribing future possibilities for the society, for besides responding to the burning issues of the day, the writer must remain the voice of vision for his society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The author identified two salient features in Mutahi's selected novels: the worlds evoked in these works are characterized by political oppression and the major characters in the works are alienated. Chipota and Momodu in *Three Days on the Cross* Albert Kweyu in *The Jail Bugs* and Ismail and Albert Lukulo in *Doomsday* are all alienated characters living in societies where political oppression obtains. As such, the author sought to find out the way in which political oppression leads to characters' alienation.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

Three of Wahome Mutahi's novels, *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992) and *Doomsday* (1999) constituted the primary texts of the study. The three were chosen because the two features addressed in the study; that is, political oppression and individual alienation, are distinct in them. Mutahi's last novel, *The Miracle Merchant*, though centred on political problems in East Africa, was left out because it is co-authored with Wahome Karengo and because individual alienation is not salient in it. Mutahi's Kikuyu plays are outside the ambit of this study because the focus is on his fiction and not drama.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Library research on relevant material formed the basis of the study. It involved a critical reading of Wahome Mutahi's fiction particularly the primary texts. These were subjected to literary analysis. The primary texts chosen for the study were: *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992) and *Doomsday* (1999). Other materials including theses and newspaper articles, especially Wahome Mutahi's 'Whispers' column in the *Sunday Nation*, formed the secondary sources of the study. 'Whispers' and 'Fr. Camisassius', a collection of 14 stories by Mutahi, was mostly referred to. Relevant critical works were read and cited to support the study. Other works by the writer *The Miracle Merchant* and *How to be a Kenyan* - were studied to broaden the author's understanding of the Mutahi's style and perspectives. The study also benefited from consultation with

experts on Kenyan fiction from the literature departments of Moi, Kenyatta universities and the University of Nairobi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Simon Gikandi has noted that 'the modernist novelist sees himself as the medium through which the alienated individual expresses his sense of fragmentation' (Gikandi, 1987, p. 74). This means that the writer is fully aware of the gap between his ideals and the realities in his society and cannot therefore be an effective social visionary. The characters in modernist fiction show an inability to activate their ideals and in most cases exist in an antagonistic relationship with their landscape. The central characters in this kind of fiction 'are artists or individual intellectuals who have detached themselves from the mainstream of a way of life which they see as corrupt and contaminating' (Gikandi, 1987, p. 73). Modernist literature such as Mutahi's depicts, in Freud's terms, 'selves that are never fully formed, never acquired a healthy relationship with the world' (Nye, 1981, p. 126) because of the threat of oppression. *Three Days on the Cross* falls squarely in Gikandi's formulation of modernist literature in its portrayal of Chipota and Momodu, the alienated duo around whose tribulations the narrative evolves.

Chipota appears to be the author's favoured character in the limited omniscient point of view adopted by *Three Days on the Cross*. Though Mutahi goes outside Chipota to recount the experiences and thoughts of other characters, he is the one who best articulates the writer's consciousness (and alienation). The author has placed himself at Chipota's elbow, so to speak, and confronts alienation nakedly from his perspective. Chipota and Momodu are in a pathetic situation when we first meet them. They are two blindfolded bodies at the back of a jeep being escorted to a deserted hideout for their execution, having spent three days in underground cellars 'at the base of an high rise city building' (1). Their three days ordeal has so brutalized them that Chipota yearns for death to escape this reality while Momodu hallucinates about the elusive freedom. They are described as looking as still as corpses and their blindfolds giving them the look of unfinished mummies.

The two are long-time friends since their university days; they have been so close to the point of estranging Mrs Momodu. That the two close friends should be held incommunicado for a period and only allowed a moment to see each other for the last time further accentuates their alienation. Here are two old time friends condemned to apologize for their innocence and who must suffer torture and death for crimes they have not committed. Their suffering invites the reader to see the collapse of values in an

oligarchy that is inimical to associations, even of closest friends. Their majestic suffering reverberates with the crucifixion of Jesus, a Biblical allusion which is introduced in the novel's title.

As a journalist and a mud-raker, Chipota lights upon the muck in the regime and is careful not to step on the sores of the influential politicians. Sometimes he is bound by duty to expose some scandals, like when powerful politicians conspire to hoard maize, causing a man-made famine. Though touched by the injustice in the society, which he does his best to expose, the despotism in the country has made him cynical of change. Chipota is depicted as an altruistic and introspective individual indisposed to the rot around him. He helped Anita Nke when she was in deep trouble, a gesture of good will that contrasts sharply with his uncle Bolugun's iciness. He later marries her, irrespective of circumstances, and helps her recast her life which was fast being swallowed up by the perversion in the city.

The fact of his arbitrary arrest and unlawful confinement itself constitutes alienation. His alienation is not so much because he is cut off from his family and from the rest of the society, but because the fact of incarceration is painfully depriving, we learn that:

The cell was the normal police affair. Walls with smudges, scarred floor a barred high window and a musty smell. . . There wasn't even a blanket rug on the floor and the peep hole stared at Chipota menacingly. The bulb dangling from the roof was on although enough light was coming from the window. The room had an eerie coldness about it (p. 20).

This fragment captures the attenuating bareness of the cell. There are moments of situational irony as Chipota thinks he is being freed when the officers are actually visiting his home to comb it for seditious material. Any hope of freedom is dashed by the reality of the random search. The ransacking of his house, even exposing Pat's soiled cot, negates any prospect of innocence. Chipota is once more accused of flimsy offences such as posing for a photo with his teacher and mentor, Prof Kigoi, simply because the professor is regarded as a dissident. He is also charged with possessing a text, *Revolution in Guinea*, a coursework requisite material, because 'no book about revolution is good' (p. 25).

In *Three Days on the Cross*, families do not give the expected warmth since the police use them to torture assumed dissidents psychologically. There is a moment of irony when Chipota imagines that he was being freed when he is driven to his premises in Diamond Estate only to discover that it was a police gimmick to let him have a sight of his expectant wife and this way arouse his longing for freedom. The

sight of his wife worsens his sense of isolation, especially as he is not allowed to talk to her. There is in the cells an application of anti-life forces that assault the victims of oppression. The images of physical torture, blisters, bruises and battered flesh are telling images of alienating tyranny, the crying anguish of a people robbed of their dignity by an authoritarian system.

In, *The Novel and Feelings*, D.H. Lawrence has said that:

If we can't hear the cries far down in our own forest and dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen-in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of the character as they wonder in the dark woods of their destiny (cited in Palmer, 1992, p. 180).

The dramatization of police brutality in *Three Days on the Cross* copes with Lawrence's view in that the cries of desperation of the suspects in the cells, likened to that of animals in anguish, highlight the vulnerability of victims of oppression where their fate is decided without their consultation. Chipota is appalled by the excruciating pain of water treatment and starvation. Naked and taunted about the small size of his penis, he sinks into a state of ennui, a life of meaninglessness in a nation-state that punishes even crimes of thought. The graphic presentation of the drama (of the absurd) in the cells soon becomes linked to the absurdities resorted to by the oligarchy in trying to stifle dissent; an horrifying scenario that makes Odera sum up the Moi regime as an 'unmitigated disaster in the exercise of government' (Odera, 2002, p. 154).

Momodu also experiences a sense of isolation in the cells where there is no privacy and suspects have to be watched while answering a call of nature. The affliction that follows is even more chilling; he is made to listen to the taped voice of his wife in an effort to break his psyche. His reminiscence of their university days heightens his present predicament since it brings sad memories of bloody confrontations with the police when students were cornered and made fugitives in their own halls of residence. He remembers the orgy of violence that is the delight of the police and is terrified by what lies in wait for him. The 'absurd' image of the naked man strapped to a chair and the subsequent burning of his fingers and his genitalia underscore Momodu's alienation, the burning of his phallus itself a symbolic emasculation of his manhood. Not being a dissident as has been alleged, his ordeal becomes a conflictless dilemma because he cannot confess falsities no matter the amount of torture. His majestic suffering urges an empathy with him and a condemnation of the absolutist state. In such a depriving scenario, Momodu can only hallucinate about freedom as a

way to bear his unfortunate circumstance. The exteriorization of power in the text by Ode and his ilk is a determined effort at amputating the individuality of the citizens.

In *Three Days on the Cross*, Fr. Kerekou exhibits this kind of internal conflict where the physical desire for Mrs Momodu clashes with his sense of morality. Corporal Wandie undergoes an internal conflict as he decides on a more rational path to take out of the institutionalized barbarism of the political police. His dilemma is captured in his aimless walks in the streets and is further dramatized in the supposed dialogue between his id and the superego. He has done so much inhumanity to fellow man as a blind-folder and feels the need to atone for it. He makes a bold step for his conscience and decides to expose the evils carried out in the torture chambers. His situation arises from a sense of betrayal and disenchantment with the special branch service, for contrary to what he expected, the pay is still meagre and the allowances are not anything to write home about. He has to augment his scanty earnings by consuming prisoners' food. His disillusionment reflects on the general discontent in the entire country. His rendezvous with P'Njuru, editor of the 'Daily Horn', is the 'Skin Diseases Clinic' at 'Peoples Road', skin diseases being an image of the sickening decrepitude in the entire social fabric. Wandie's noble decision, a slight suggestion of the writer's vision, is the only way he can give meaning to his empty existence.

The Illustrious One also suffers an isolation of a kind. Perched on his presidential sanctuary, he is cut off from the masses and his concern for them is a mere rhetoric made to fill up this hollowness. It is little wonder that he has become paranoid and apprehensive of dissidents for he lacks full grip of the masses. He has become so mistrustful that he keeps shuffling his cabinet and increasing his motorcade. He also shuns travelling out of the country lest he should be toppled.

Albert Kweyu, the protagonist in *The Jail Bugs* is an alienated figure. He renders his 17 days ordeal in Wakora Wengi Prison in a novel that presents the plight of convicts. The text adopts the first person perspective, a strategy that makes Kweyu's experience more authentic. The use of the 'I' narrator presupposes an imaginary 'you' and the personalized point of view at once strikes a rapport with a reader (the 'you') and seduces him into believing what the 'I' reveals. This narrative voice suits the novel's form as a diary which documents the character's daily experience in incarceration. Kweyu, a diary writer, is the eye-witness of the inhuman treatment of the prisoners in the society of novel.

The reason for his Kweyu's imprisonment is tactfully withheld by the writer up to nearly the end of the

story. This suspense creates an anticlimax because, as Wasike also argues, the 'kind of maltreatment he goes through befits a gangster robber and not a harmless driver who inadvertently runs over a young boy' (Wasike, 2001, p. 8). Both the deployment of an anticlimax and the use of the engaging personalized perspective articulate Kweyu's depression in the alien environment he has been hurled into.

His alienation first registers when he is stripped of his name, his identity, and acquires a tag instead. Henceforth he is to answer to number P/F/1270, a label that underscores his anonymity and his equal status with the rest of the convicts and a constant reminder of his listlessness. Wakora Wengi Maximum prison, the Kiswahili rendition of 'many criminals prison', is home to 600 prisoners and counting. Most of them are hard-core criminals whose individuality is amputated by the 'cellular prison with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration' (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 480). In such a prison, a re-creation of Kenya's Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, criminals have become so hardened by the harsh conditions that to them crime has become a virtue and camaraderie among the convicts is struck on the basis of the seriousness of the crime that brings one in. Kweyu's 'female' crime further estranges him from the other inmates; he is received with disdain and coldness, no one wants to identify with him and he has to stand transfixed for a long time in 'Block G' before Pepeto and Pancho can 'deflate' themselves to create space for him. He experiences this isolation when the four other criminals brought in with him easily mingle with the other inmates apparently because of their known criminal record.

Kweyu, a naïve and circumspect individual finds it hard to adjust to the Spartan prison surrounding. He is bare and unaccommodated, not having been given any bedding, soap or sandals, and dressed in prison garb that exposes his private parts. The physical brutalization he undergoes under the brutal Walrus Moustache as part of the prisoners' induction programme are in every inch debasing and leave him extremely horrified and resigned to his fate. He expresses this resignation by making fun of himself; for instance, he uses self-deprecating humour to capture his helplessness when they are ordered nude:

Those who dared look my side must have been horrified to see a tummy resembling a three-quarter way inflated rugby ball supported by spindly legs with coarse, sparsely scattered hairs standing on end (p. 7).

This self-directed humour depicts him as a vulnerable, frail and diminutive figure at the mercy of the imposing Walrus Moustache and effectively renders his pathetic circumstances. It urges sympathy with his desperate state and condemnation of the

villains. His new dwelling in 'Block G' impresses on him as a morgue with a pile of blanket-wrapped bodies scattered on the floor, 'rib to rib and all mute' (p. 21). The malodorous smell of unwashed bodies is repugnant enough to send the prison warden retreating. The image of the mortuary emphasizes the gloomy environment inhabited by the prisoners, a condition confirmed by the grime on the prisoners' blankets and attire. The surrounding is contrite with filth, especially in the 'public inconvenience', which overflows with human dung. Mutahi deploys the images of filth to present a chilling miasma of human sorrow or what Margeretta wa Gacheru calls the 'taste of hell' (*Daily Nation*, 1991, July 14).

Commenting on this filth in the prison, Wasike observes that 'throughout the storyline the narrator takes us through a kaleidoscope of filth, dirt, cacophony, murk and sometimes total confusion (Wasike, 2001, p. 76). The filth and grime underscore the depths of dehumanization in the prison where convicts have been reduced to a scum level, a sort of insect-life existence. This dirt nauseates Kweyu (the odd one out as the first offender) to the point that he cannot partake of the badly cooked prison meals. The dirt coalesces with the reification in the larger society, for the entire country; in Thiong'o's (1998) words, 'is one vast prison where people's movements are tightly controlled, where they can be dislocated from their familiar spaces into those easily patrolled' (p. 65). In *The Jail Bugs*, the outside of the prison is the inside of it since there is a lot of insecurity and political repression.

The writer describes the vermin in a humorous personified way; the lice are moving specks with 'their parents, relatives and clansmen' (p. 31), who have connived, so to speak, with the prison authorities to aggravate the prisoners' misery. They have the freedom of the jail and move with the prisoners whenever they wish. It is these 'soldiers' who together with the dirt, cause the shedding of Kweyu's skin, a metaphorical transition from freedom to imprisonment, if one concurs with Pancho's take on it. The prison routine is designed to depersonalize the inmates; in Wakora Wengi, a day starts with the 'arithmetic', the prisoners' term for head-count and ends with it. The day is punctuated by other hurting exercises like sporadic inspections, nude parades and ceaseless insults from the wardens. The routine, meant to break the convicts through torture and boredom approximates Thiong'o's (1981) view of the alienating prison life, a life which is:

dull, mundane, monotonous, repetitious, torturous in intended animal rhythm of eating; defecating, sleeping, eating, defecating, sleeping. . . a rhythm of animals waiting for slaughter or escape from slaughter at a date not of their own fixing (p. 116).

Such boredom consigns the prisoner into endless waiting evocative of the Beckettian universe. It is a dull and hopeless world in which characters engage in absurdities in a bid to lessen the pain of waiting. Kweyu's ordeal in his brief sojourn in the notorious prison is thus a testimony of the isolation in the cells, which summarize as a tomb of endless silence, gloom and nightmare. In the forgoing circumstances it is not surprising that Kweyu experiences a nightmare in which Uzi lies dead beside him.

In the solitude of imprisonment, Kweyu is assailed by an overwhelming fear of dying in incarceration and being buried without ceremony in the prison graveyard, a moment of despair brought about by the report of the death of a prisoner at the hands of another. His loneliness is made more unbearable by the longing for his wife and the tantalizing thoughts that his lawyer could be cuckolding him. He is also seized by depression arising from his awareness of injustice in the society. He feels for the wretched of the earth, the likes of Mnyonge who are oppressed by law and a materialistic culture that discriminates against the poor. He is burdened by a sense of guilt that 'the scales of justice seemed so unbalanced that the favours' (p. 123) awarded him were denied the less privileged. His desperation is exacerbated by the starvation, a heavy punishment meted out on all the prisoners following the escape of five of them. He is so worn out by hunger pangs that he salivates for the prison food he had at first found nauseating.

The inmates of the isolation block are so debased that life has become fiction to them. This debasement confirms Kweyu's belief in the immutability of their plight. He therefore contradicts Haki's illusions of a better tomorrow and in fact dislikes him for his revolutionary fantasies. Rather than hope against hope, Kweyu decides to face his alienation nakedly and it is only the opportune, though belated appearance of his lawyer that saves him from an inevitable derangement. Other characters in *The Jail Bugs* also exhibit a sense of alienation. Pepeto, for example, has wasted in prison and in crime. He is a vagabond who cannot live a life without crime. The more he explores noble alternatives of eking out a living, the more he sinks into despair. Thoughts of becoming a pseudo-evangelist are laughed off by the agnostic Fixer who voices their inescapability from their predicament. Fixer attributes their lot to fate and looks to crime as the only way to success. They are both reluctant to disentangle themselves from crime; instead they delight in making jokes about dreadful crimes like the chopping off of the hand of the man who could not let go of the cash box. The dehumanizing prison conditions have so alienated the two characters that they befuddle themselves with drugs to confront their inevitable despair.

The social-political decadence in the society, especially the mayoral rot delineated in *The Jail Bugs*, has seen Pepeto rendered homeless, uprooted from the only place he had known to be home. This is done during the callous flattening of the Kabwera slums by the city council *askaris* to create room for the construction of storied flats for the city's well-connected tycoons. His rootlessness, enhanced by the fact that he does not know the whereabouts of his mother, confirms Pepeto in his isolation. The ugly confrontations between the armed local government officers and the defenceless slum dwellers demonstrate the clash between the haves and the have-nots where the latter are always the losers because the law is not on their side. Consequently, Pepeto is carted off to jail on fabricated charges as a warning to those who so much as dare haul a stone at the government agents.

Uzi, the frail and insatiably hungry diabetic is a personification of alienation. He is reticent and withdrawn in his inability to come out of his predicament. Like the rest of the inmates, he has to sacrifice the much needed piece of meat, in spite of his insatiability, to buy cigarettes so as to make his trying moments a bit bearable. Escapism is preferred to the reality of prison. His insatiability underlines the prisoners' anxiety for freedom and is a metaphor for the citizens' insatiable yearning for liberty.

The government agents in *The Jail Bugs* also suffer a kind of alienation. Walrus Moustache, the brutal head warden is dislocated from his true nature by his soullessness seen in the way he brutalizes the inmates. He is caricatured as 'an insensitive brutal and vulgar buffoon' (Wasike, 2001, p. 62). The writer's humorous description of his moustache, which dances as he shouts orders at the prisoners, makes him a vehicle of satire of vanity arising from brutality. His vanity is best captured by his repetitive reference of the inmates as 'thieves, conmen, and rapists'. To the prisoners, he is synonymous with torture, a quality reinforced by his terrifying voice satirically referred to as 'concrete mixer'.

Similarly, going through the motion of diagnosing his 'patients' has made the prison doctor lethargic since the easiest way was to ask for bribes so as to recommend the prisoners for light duties. Corruption has got the better of him to the extent that he is averse to taking off from duty. The poor remuneration of the prison wardens has disillusioned them so much that they have to pocket prisoners' money received from visiting relatives besides asking for bribes. Warden Kivunja, for example, is prepared to blatantly flout his professional code if this will lead to a jackpot. He is not averse to taking 'bomb' to alleviate his disillusionment. The narrative in *Doomsday* invites the reader to see characters that are overwhelmed by their situations. The characters operate in volatile

social circumstances in which they have no control, a world referred by David Cate as a 'permanent, unchangeable entity' (cited in Gikandi, 1987, p. 27). Ismail, the protagonist in *Doomsday*, is caught up in an international power game dating way back before he was born. This is the Arab-Israelite conflict around which the cold war revolved, sparked off by the creation of the state of Israeli in 1948 through the assistance of the US. The settling of the Jews on Palestinian ancestral lands by the US-led UNO antagonized the Arabs who could not take it lying down.

In *Doomsday*, 'Operation Khat' is the hub of Ismail's alienation and loneliness. He is apprehensive that the plot might abort, and becomes even more insecure after the blast. His sense of victory after the successful heinous act is evanescent for he is soon gripped by devastating fright about his own security. He tries his best to wear a brave face after the doom but his fear and anxiety is clear in his antics when the Anyisa TV flashes his face captioned as a man being sought by the police. Thrown into utter turmoil, he is not sure of his movements in his house, so afraid is he that he has no appetite for his supper. The political morass in *Doomsday* is a result of the protracted misrule of the sitting President Johannes Mtwapa who has been in power for a record twenty-five years. The incumbent is an outright tyrant who cannot brook any criticism. His model of multi-party democracy is a mere sham and a travesty of democracy given that he is out to scuttle all form of dissent. In fact, his charismatic posturing is his attempt to deodorize his tyranny; otherwise, as Lukulo discovers much to his shock, he is ready to spend colossal amounts of money to sustain himself in power. The upshot of his hypocrisy is that the Wasimba insurgents against his rule have camouflaged into a religious sect and only go public once they acquire enough political muscle. The *nouvou riche* Lukulo courts his own alienation when he sets himself against the Leviathan that has become Mtwapa's presidency and he is vanquished in sham elections characterized by massive rigging and vote buying. He counters this disillusionment by immersing himself in gun-running, an illegal business venture that has him depersonalized, so much that he neglects his wife, Brenda. He regrets this squandered opportunity later when the doomsday reckons. His vain attempts at the presidency represents the disillusionment of many a mediocre politician who are deluded by their ill-gotten wealth that they can have a go at politics. Desperate to satisfy his political craving, he is led to consort with Ismail against president Mtwapa, again showing how such politicians are misused by aliens, for unknown to him, Ismail is only out to exploit his overwhelming ambition to achieve his grand scheme of humiliating America on Anyisan soil. The insincere relationship that exists between them in the pursuit of their

different delusions plunges Lukulo into complete desolation and fashions his tragic end.

He is a crafty man, the 'Rat' who knows how to simultaneously bite and sooth but whose shrewdness pales before the prudent wickedness of Ismail. The eagerness with which he cuts deals to get rich quickly, and his acceptance to be an accomplice in a series of odious crimes in *Doomsday*, all in a bid to build up wealth and power, shows of a rapacious person who has given in to Mammon and is consequently alienated from himself. The intimation is that the university in Anyisa functions to 'neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from it and will form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it' (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 482). This is so considering the conservative nature of the senate and especially because unlike the radicalized Haki in *The Jail Bugs*, Lukulo, though a lawyer like him, appears integrated into the Mammonist society of the text. This view is also given succour by the fact that quite apart from the hotbed of opposition politics it was in *Three Days on the Cross*, the university in Anyisa is, to put it in Foucault's term, 'a panoptic modality of power' (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 482). It is now an educational ideological state apparatus which produces malleable elites who are blind to social injustice.

His avarice and worship of Mammon causes him so much despondency that he is incapable of love; he is so immersed in his material pursuits that he denies Brenda, his wife, her conjugal rights, setting their marriage headed for the rocks. This losing of himself to materialism at the expense of human warmth alienates his individual humanity, a situation akin to what Anthony Chekov referred to as 'half-dead existence'. He is thus a living-dead whose spiritual part has ossified. There is also a further dramatization of his anguish at the moment of his death, captured in the tremor and convulsions he experiences on the sofa and in Brenda's desperate calls for help to save his life. Lukulo dies an unfulfilled man having not achieved his dream of becoming the president of Anyisa. His death, caused by slow poison administered through his pork by Ismail, is an irony of sorts, coming when he was smug in his safety as a bomb mastermind and concerned only with his wife's safety. Lukulo is thus the Sartrean model of the 'unreflective and condemned bourgeois' who is depicted as socially at home, and who dies unperpetuated and unfulfilled.

Another character who exhibits half-dead existence in *Doomsday* is Zik Mwanamboka, the proprietor of Multi Bytes Computer College. His determination to cut links with his humble past has immersed him in obsessive quest for estates and he will seize any opportunity that comes his way to satisfy his cravings, his clumsy portrait as a man with long and

narrow neck who looks lost in his collar at once casts him as a person alienated in the deep. The knot in his narrow tie, which is swallowed by the collar, calls up the image of a hangman's noose and matches with the choking greed that defines his character. Mwanamboka is an embodiment of the larger felonious society where morals have collapsed and only the cold hearted can survive. The pervasive rot in the city has deadened his inside to a point of degeneration and it is only the suffering he undergoes in the entombment following the bomb blast that refines him to humaneness.

His regeneration in 'purgation' leads him to regret his futile existence and in his remorse, he extends an olive hand to Pauline, who is also entrapped under the debris. The kind-hearted Pauline does forgive him and Mwanamboka slips to his death with a light heart having won rapprochement with a creature as fine as Pauline whom he had treated roughly in his lifetime. That the more integrated Pauline is allowed to cheat death is a subtle statement on humanism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has discussed the relationship between the phenomenon of alienation and political oppression in Mutahi's selected fiction. Comparative reading of the texts reveals that characters are up against a rock wall of political repression, symbolized and sustained by elaborate mechanisms of state torture in *Three Days on the Cross* and in *Doomsday*, and by prison in *The Jail Bugs*. These images of state terror are inimical to the aspirations of both Chipota and Momodu in *Three Days on the Cross*, the two serving as representative of the educated elite who are forever being sacrificed at the altar of political savagery. In *The Jail Bugs*, the characters are shifted to a prison enclosure which offers a life that is unfit for human beings, while in *Doomsday* Ismail and Albert Lukulo, severally, set themselves against this indomitable wall to their own destruction.

The insecurity and violence in the society drives individual characters to take refuge in themselves. They create their existential worlds in which, like Chipota, Momodu and Desmond Nakaru in *Three Days on the Cross*, they hallucinate for the elusive freedom. In *The Jail Bugs*, the effect of alienating political tyranny registers most clearly in the zombification of characters in the isolation block. In *Doomsday*, Lukulo seizes the opportunity to enrich himself through wicked ways precisely because evil can easily be passed as virtue in the corrupt body politic of the novel. We have observed how the obsession with materialism has alienated the individual humanity of both Lukulo and Zik and Mwanamboka.

It also clear that the oppressors in the selected fiction are not saved the alienation engendered by the

political repression they help to bolster. The Illustrious One in *Three Days on the Cross*, and Johannes Mtswapa in *Doomsday* live in perpetual fear of coups because they have failed to rally genuine support from the masses. Other state operatives like Walrus Moustache in *The Jail Bugs* have lost their human expression of joy, he is so dehumanized by the terror he visits on the convicts in Wakora Wengi prison that he can ill-afford a smile. One sees the same dehumanization in state operatives like Inspector Ode in *Three Days on the Cross* and Police Commissioner Njooi in *Doomsday*, whose brutality make them pathetically tragic in moments of crises and failure.

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