

Full length Research Paper

The vision of social justice in the novels of Wahome Mutahi

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This paper is based on a critical study of Wahome Mutahi's three novels, namely: *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992) and *Doomsday* (1999). It is augmented by other materials, especially Wahome Mutahi's 'Whispers' column in the *Sunday Nation*, and other relevant critical works. Data was analyzed through interpretation of textual content and stylistic analysis and findings presented through a discussion of each text. The authors in this paper identify two salient features in Mutahi's selected art: the worlds evoked in these works are characterized by political oppression and the major characters in the works are alienated. The works however show the writer's attempt to transcend this alienation and seem to gesture towards a more egalitarian order. Mutahi does not stop at lining up the rot in the society but goes a step further to suggest, albeit subtly, the way out of the political stasis. This he does by investing compassion and a strong will in some characters, which shields them from mental breakdown. He also presents characters that articulate his revolutionary sentiments. Arising from the study, Mutahi's fiction seems to have, in a small way contributed to the fostering of a more egalitarian politics in Kenya so far as it envisages bloom at the end of the pervasive gloom in the society. The study is a useful addition to the corpus of emergent research into the significance of this previously neglected writer, dramatist and journalist.

Keywords: Vision of Social Justice, Kenya's Politics, Novels, Wahome Mutahi

INTRODUCTION

The social-political tensions and the human condition depicted in Mutahi's selected texts is 'a silence that screams' out against oppression and in this way it can be said to contain the Munchean aspect of art that aims at political deconstruction. It is in the light of these suppositions that this paper attempts to read the author's vision embodied in the three texts under study. It does this by analyzing what is humanistic, revolutionary and positive in his fiction. Midega (1997) looks at vision as the poet's projection into the future seen in the general understanding of how the future will be. Vision therefore refers to the writer's conception of the future possibilities of the society, especially the gesture of the direction society should take. As used in this paper, the term also

includes the way the writer extends horizons of perfection in his society and his faith in the possibility of the birth of a new order out of the womb of the old. For Mutahi, as it is attested to by the three texts under discussion, the present holds up for the future of the society and he questions the present order of things in order to project a better future. Taken as a whole, Mutahi's fiction demonstrates a relentless resistance to domination even as they depict individual alienation of characters.

Though the reality of oppression, no doubt, undercuts the writer's vision, his art manifests a potency of an awakening consciousness as he summons his readers to full awareness of the political morass in the society. At times his art is overtly revolutionary and rebellious as the disenchanting writer tries to use his craft to counteract the void in his life and in the process, redeem and purify the society. He envisages a bright vision that enables him to see beauty in a world sickened by oppressive ugliness.

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Scope and Limitation

Three of Wahome Mutahi's novels, *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992) and *Doomsday* (1999) will constitute the primary texts of the study. The three are 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 centered on political problems in East Africa, is 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 this paper. It involved a critical reading of Wahome Mutahi's *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 our grasp of Mutahi's style and perspectives. The study also benefited from consultation with experts on Kenyan fiction from the literature departments of Moi University, Kenyatta University and the University of Nairobi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consciousness, Humanism and the Vision of Social Justice

Mutahi's works depict a universe fragmented by political tyranny where morality has been eroded by brutality and the culture of materialism. The works, however, show the writer's attempt to transcend this ugliness and seem (to be) propelled by an impulse towards resolution. Mutahi does not stop at lining up the rot in the society but goes a step further to suggest, albeit subtly, the way out of the political stasis. This he does by investing compassion and a strong will in some characters, which shield them from mental breakdown. He also presents characters that articulate his revolutionary sentiments. His works approximate Glicksberg's (1992, p. 1) view that:

the writer as artist struggles to preserve his integrity, he must satisfy himself first in his work and in revealing his deepest powers of imagination create what is of urgent importance to himself, only then does he discover

that by probing his own obsessions and embodying his private vision, however singular in expression or rebellious in content, he has spoken for others as well.

Three Days on the Cross is a fictional rendition of the writer's experience under police custody for sedition related charges, a fact that accounts for the outrageous tone in a text that condemns the oppressive system that jailed him. He employs absurdity as a trope to deal with neo-colonial tyranny and, through his castigation of the bankrupt Kenyan politics, manages to move the reader towards indignation and beyond it towards the possibility of a new human spirit. In this text as in others, Mutahi probes his own alienation as a conscious member of the society and in so doing is able to put across the vision he envisages for his society. *Three Days on the Cross* recreates the July 10th Movement and Mwakenya dissidence of 1986, which waged clandestine opposition against the government. The movement comprised mainly university lecturers and students and fought through the press and through circulating seditious publications that disclaimed against repression and corruption in high places. If one can extrapolate from the newspapers, Maina wa Kinyatti, a university don and one of the founder members of the February 10 Movement, testifies that:

Mwakenya was meant to instil national anti-imperialistic consciousness and demanded the recovery of national sovereignty and integrity, the building of an independent, integrated national economy and the establishment of a genuine democracy and social justice for all classes and nationalities (*Daily Nation*, July 18, 2003, p.12).

In *Three Days on the Cross*, the July 10th Movement administers oaths to bind its members to the liberation cause. In the text, the Mwakenya members are said to be fire-breathing revolutionaries who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the realization of a better future. So rife is the opposition fervour that Warn Warn bar has become the rendezvous for the agitated citizens where seditious literature is circulated and like-minded intellectuals discuss the sorry state of affairs in the country under the guise of beer-taking. The revolutionary ferment seems to spread fast as government clamp down on dissidents intensifies, so that one is drawn to agree with Ngugi wa Thiong'o that 'no force on earth, not even nuclear weapon can put down the organized power of an awakened people' (Thiong'o, 1981, p. 19). In the text, university graduates and trade unionists are the vanguards of change having imbibed ideas from radical intellectuals like Professor Kigoi, a darling of many a student including Chipota. It is worth noting that dissidence begun in the university during his time, a period that witnessed incessant university closures as the students challenged the reactionary senate.

The shaken state over-did itself in scuttling dissent and rounded up university students and their lecturers most of whom ended up in detention, some like the

fictional Ndimu Nduru of *Three Days on the Cross*, ended in death. Others fled to exile to dodge the inevitable annihilation by a regime that regarded its intellectuals as enemies. The forced exodus of lecturers in *Three Days on the Cross* is echoed by the flight of Prof. Kigoi, regarded as the unanimous leader of the clandestine dissident movement. Before his forced exile, the professor was vocal in condemning the parasitic politicians for behaving like pirates in high seas in their plunder and high-handedness. In the safety of his exile; he would continue his fight against the comprador bourgeois so as to pave way for a more humane order.

Chipota and Momodu and the scores of others jailed for political crimes see themselves as martyrs being sacrificed at the altar of political savagery. Their majestic suffering induces in them strength of spirit that steels them against the anti-life forces that threaten to annihilate them. Chipota addresses his jailors with an undefeatable resilient voice and reminds them that evil of the magnitude they were perpetrating could not last for long. Like Elias Tekwane in Alex La Guma's (1972) *In the Fog of the Season's End*, Chipota cautions them that they will one day 'pay for the suffering they are causing innocent people' (p. 100) since no situation is permanent. This protest can be read as Chipota's intellectual insurrection against torture and a refusal to budge even in the face of torture.

Earlier on he had ranted to his captors that their days were numbered and at one time he laughs at their ignorance when they cannot differentiate Mao Tse Tug's picture from that of Karl Marx. The author satirizes their stupidity, pokes fun at their myopia and lampoons the mistaken sense of their invincibility. The captives' faith in the triumph of the spirit in the face of torture is a symbolic extension of the determination of a people to liberate themselves from the shackles of tyranny and in *Three Days on the Cross* constitutes images that speak less of despair than a long relentless struggle. Thus though the state operatives in the text believe in history and its worthless course as unutterable, the idea is contested throughout the text by the presence of these dissident narratives.

The restiveness the country over has made the Illustrious One paranoid and distrustful of his cabinet ministers. He is given to firing then at will and has increased the number of his bodyguards who can now form a whole village. He no longer makes trips abroad lest he should be toppled, a pathetic case of a dictator whose sleep has been marred by the unstoppable clamour for democratization. The novel persuades us that it is only a matter of time before the regime collapses if one factors in the incumbent's excessive reaction to dissidence.

The incumbent's effort to gag the local press is undermined by the presence of journalists like Chipota and his boss P'Njuru, who are committed to truth and will not hesitate to expose social injustice. With such

uncompromising men of the press it is possible to anticipate that the web of lies on which the evil system thrives will finally be exposed. There are nuances of fellow feeling in *Three Days on the Cross* which register in the hospitality extended to Anita Nke by Chipota and Jane Diop when she (Anita) was procuring an abortion. This hospitality is highlighted by its sharp contrast with Balogun's and Joab Karim's urban individualism. Even Fr. Kerekou, his lust for Mrs Momodu notwithstanding, has a pricking conscience after betraying Momodu to the political police and he has to call up the CID director to revoke the earlier report. Chipota's kind gesture of saving Momodu from drowning as they fled from the riot police has bonded their friendship several years after their university days. These humane gestures are a ray of beauty in a society sickened by calculated brutality.

But perhaps the single most compassionate act in *Three Days on the Cross* is the one made by Corporal Chris Wandie, the blindfolder attached to the notorious torture chambers. Of his own volition and out of his introspection, he resolves to atone for all the savagery he has done to fellow man by exposing the atrocities that take place in the underground cellars. He is compelled by a new surge of altruism to do this because 'it is good for us and the country that the information be known' (p. 159) and he is prepared to suffer death should he be discovered. This way, the text evinces the individual's capacity to transform, offered here as a prerequisite for creating a just society. P'Njuru, the opinionated editor of the 'Daily Horn' to whom the explosive disclosure is made, flashes the bombshell in the local daily at a journalistic piece that enhances the realism of the text. All the hidden evil committed in the pleasure of the Illustrious One is let out, triggering an acrimonious exchange among the security agents who are knocked cold by the disclosure. Their predicament as they panic and trade blame on one another is celebrated as most appropriate. Mutahi is perhaps making a broader commentary that humanism is the only redeeming virtue in such pervasive tyranny and that any meaningful future calls upon individual citizens to embrace the noble feelings within them, for as Randall (1992) puts it, love provides 'a way out of the depredations of force and hatred, the integrity of individual relationships compensating for a wider social disintegration' (p. 211). Wandie's betrayal of the police force was also a subtle assertion that rocking the system from within is the only sure way to steal its sails for it is this act that dealt a big blow to the forces that hinder the birth of a new epoch.

The deflated Inspector Ode makes a desperate attempt to cover this screaming truth by ordering the elimination of both Chipota and Momodu, but this again proves to be a pyrrhic victory because Chipota miraculously survives to tell it all to the whole world. This disclosure and the numerous references in the text to corrupt deals like the man-made hunger and 'Operation Coffins' encourage the thought that terrible things do in

some sense come to an end. The retrieval of Momodu's body by P'Njuru saves it from ending up in the bowels of wild animals, he will receive a decent send-off where he will be eulogized and engraved as an innocent victim of political savagery. His death and that of Desmond Nakarus in the society will not therefore be in vain.

The novel closes with Wandie nursing the injured Chipota, which can be read as Mutahi's conception of a possible rapprochement between the oppressor and the oppressed in the new political order to be born from the womb of the present. This idea is strengthened by Chipota's recuperation, which is suggestive of the possibility of the nation healing from political misrule.

The writer presents a blurred vision in *The Jail Bugs*, published in 1992 when political repression was still at its peak in Kenya. In the text Mutahi shows the greatest sensitivity to and awareness of the plight of the inmates of Kenyan prison witnessed by Albert Kweyu, a participant narrator whose agonies are felt by Mutahi himself. It has already been pointed out that the novel is a fictional rendering of the writer's experience in Industrial Area prison and this reality, no doubt, colours his vision of life.

Stripped of his personal freedom by the reality of prison, Kweyu has retreated into self, a retreat which is a gesture of his rejection of the horrendous circumstances of imprisonment. He is a reflective character who shows an awareness of the perverted justice in the society, an awareness that forces him to go through life as if he was not part of the society. In *The Jail Bugs* Mutahi seems to view life from the point of view of the withdrawn and the alienated, a viewpoint that is not defeatist but rebellious in character.

The writer adopts a cross and cynical tone to register his condemnation of the inhuman politics of his society and his revolt against the criminal system that imprisoned him. His self-alienation from society is his refusal to accept the utopian aspirations of revolutionaries like Haki and his rejection of the beguiling rhetoric of the corrupt leadership who cast the autocratic state as democratic.

In his stint in prison, Kweyu comes face to face with alienating tyranny where the life offered befits that of an insect and not of a human being. The experience is all the more painful for him as a first offender, a pigeon among hawks, who is so pricked by his awareness of injustice that he feels strongly for the less privileged like Mnyonge who have no chance of being heard fairly before the law courts. He yearns for a time when there will be equity in the society for the vulnerable members of society to be protected from parasitic individuals like the extorting chief. In his remonstrance, he also pillories the magistrate who jailed him as a robotic judicial functionalist who has lost all his humanity to routine. The magistrate did not bother to weigh the matter before passing his verdict. This is a satirical indictment of farcical and perverted justice and it is easy to understand when the same

Judicial system throws the hapless Mnyonge in for protecting what is rightfully his. There is an upsurge of optimism in an otherwise disempowering text when Kweyu is released pending his appeal, and though he is apprehensive that the appeal may not go through, the text intimates that his lawyer has the potential to bribe his client's way to freedom and as the novel closes, Kweyu's release from the dislocating reality of the prison is almost assured.

Though the prose is heavy with anguish and defeat, we witness in some characters a stoicism that cushions them from the annihilating prison forces. If Kweyu's retreat to self is his subtle rejection of oppression, other inmates react to it by displaying a bravado and resilience that mocks the brutality of their jailors. For instance, within the restricting prison walls the prisoners have created social and mental spaces for themselves that enable them to accept their suffering as normal and in this acceptance they make their prison terms bearable. There has evolved a camaraderie among the inmates that is evident in the mingling that goes on during the 'food market' on 'flesh' days. They also narrate stories of heroic fantasies and make macabre jokes to laugh away their depression. They have coined prison register like 'net', cockroaches, 'who wants to kill me', 'eating a female cassava' and so forth in their attempts to come to terms with reality. The informal code is a sign of rebellion against the inflated officialdom of the warders and the boredom of the prison routine. The text endorses Mikhael Bakhtin's idea of the 'carnavalesque' which he equates with subversion (cited in Krieger, 1987, p. 82), for in the inmates' jokes and camaraderie can be seen their attempt to rebel against the monolithic prison structure that functions to suppress them. In addition to this, the inmate's instinct to survive vis-à-vis the harsh conditions enables them to stealthily sneak in cash and other contraband and no amount of frisking can expose the hidden items. Some convicts like Pepeto and Fixer have come to regard prison as their home as they have no fixed abode outside the prison. Jailing such prison mongers is a total mockery of the repressive regime, for going back to jail is what they desire most and their ready acceptance of their condition gives them strength of spirit that sees them through their lean days.

In the isolation block, prisoners act out an aesthetics of resistance to oppression through bodily and/or mental gestures that include Wakanyugi's antics, Umeme's zombification, and the homosexuality practised here. A prisoner takes valium to stupefy himself, drawing one to argue that insanity is preferred to the reality of imprisonment. This is presumably because there are no interdictions and taboos in insanity, in madness for instance, Wakanyugi manages to disarm the stern faces of the warders who can't help laughing at his frolics. One finds that in *The Jail Bugs*, insanity whether real or feigned, is to be preferred to the Bible which is rejected because it offers abstract and utopian solutions far

removed from the agonies of the prison. The religious tract finds better use as a toilet paper as the inmates defy the intended passivity and crave for a more practical solution to tyranny. These aberrations, to argue with Randall (1992), defuse, at least in imagination, this real tension by 'providing gratifying or utopian consolations that might in the end function as distractions from actual history and society' (p. 2 19). Their absurd reaction to tyranny is an attempt to erect an alternative social order and they seem to have acquired what Theweleit calls 'body amours' (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 126) that guard them against personal dissolution.

Quite apart from the expected docility, the less privileged exploit the slightest opportunity to get back at their oppressors. The demolition of the Kabwera slums sparked a bloody confrontation between the slum dwellers and the city council *askaris* and though the slum dwellers lost the battle, they did not lose the war. We get a picture of a gallant citizenry that will not take exploitation lying down and the fact that their cries as they haul stones at the authorities drown the rumbling of the bulldozers is anticipatory of the peasantry over their *moneyocratic* oppressors. Earlier on Pancho as a street urchin had struck a blow for all when he bit the hand of a policeman and made him scream his lungs out, while in the provinces Mnyonge refuses to surrender his cock to the parasitic chief. These fearless acts tally to point to the empowerment of the oppressed that are poised to end oppression albeit in an indefinite future.

The heavy punishment given to Sgt Pilippi for abusing his office to win sexual favours from the prisoner's wife is also celebrated as an empowerment of the marginalized people. For once the aggrieved woman is given redress when the sergeant is frog-matched to the commandant's office where he is given a thorough dressing down. He is described as looking 'like a chicken that had just been bombarded by a storm' (p. 108), an image which shows a forlorn man deflated of all his affectations of greatness. This, together with the caricatured portrait of Walrus Moustache, shows the writer's use of satire to belittle their assumed paramountcy and this way, he affirms their temporariness.

The expected visit to Wakora Wengi Prison by the Minister for Prisons and Borstol institutions is replenishing in the sense that it slightly improves the conditions and gives a modicum of humanity to the soulless wardens. The text applauds this as a sign of a possible compromise between the convicts and the jailors, between the masses and the oppressors, posited in *The Jail Bugs* as possible if individuals shed off their pretensions to class and power and discover their infinite selves. Earlier in the text, the man-to-man relationship between Corporal Kivunja and Fixer when the corporal connives to escort Fixer out of prison further attests to possibility of a humane relationship between the prison agents and the inmates as does the avuncular though short-lived relationship between Kweyu and the warden

named only as father of Peter. The text intimates that when such a rapprochement is achieved, prisons will then revert to their roles of rehabilitating convicts rather than hardening them. The writer also envisages the reversibility of circumstances when the exploiters will do the bidding of the exploited suggested in *The Jail Bugs* by the absurdly humorous event where the prison warders unknowingly carry an escaping prisoner in the wardrobe on their backs. Though this escape does not materialize, the text persuades us that the complicity of the wardens in aiding such escape is bound to undermine the establishment, a view strengthened by the hint in the text that the escape snuff might as well have been an inside game.

Haki cries for the much desired justice and is sustained in jail by the stoic philosophy that the oppressed shall one day overcome the tyranny in their midst since no situation is permanent. His long stay in the madhouse has not eroded his humaneness and he shares his food with Kweyu, refusing to touch it until Kweyu had tasted a morsel. He speaks for himself and for all when he admonishes that 'the kind of system that subjects its citizens to this kind of ill treatment cannot survive' (p. 183). Once more he prophesies the collapse of the regime. A lawyer put in for alleged subversion, Haki is relentless in making strong socialist articulations and is firm in his vision of the triumph of the dauntless effort of the revolutionaries, for culture is dynamic and history does not move in circles. His conviction appears premised on Abraham Lincoln's assertion that 'those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it' (as cited in Best, 1991, p. 81). He envisions the success of pen-points against gun-points when the local media seize the unstoppable revolutionary fervour in the country; he resolves to use his pen to fight through the press and through pamphlets to the bitter end.

Though Haki begs for mercy once hit by the warders, this is only a tactical withdrawal, he will carry on fighting and if need be, report the atrocities of the regime to the Amnesty International. He remains a strong voice against coercion and will not let the man in him die by keeping silent in the face of tyranny. Though his liberation discourse is at present confined within prison enclosures, he is steadfast in phrasing revolution as an imperative to liberate the country from its monstrous yoke. His clarion call for a revolt is thus a herald of the social redemption that the society of *The Jail Bugs* is hankering for. The revolutionary consciousness in the novel is affirmed by Haki's statements, which should be read as the author's, that:

These concentration camps will end with the eminent collapse of the criminal political system which has imposed itself on the people. History does not move in circles though that is what the ruling class thinks . . . they will only succeed in hardening my resolve to work with those sworn to see a democratic government come into

power (p. 184-185).

The clandestine groupings against the establishment in *Three Days on the Cross* and the revolution foreseen by Haki in *The Jail Bugs* have become more forceful and widespread in *Doomsday*. Though the tenor of discourse seems to negate the whole idea of revolution, it is significant that the collective consciousness in *Doomsday* coalesces around the Wasimba sect, which, though certainly visionless, keeps the government on its toes. The sect is a fictional recreation of the Mungiki sect, a mercenary-like militia that has featured prominently in Kenya's post-colonial politics.

In *Doomsday*, multi-party elections clamoured for in *Three Days on the Cross* and in *The Jail Bugs* have been allowed but upon the terms of the ruling class. The brand of multiparty politics fashioned out for the Anyisians is a travesty of democracy and an antithesis of the desired second liberation. Like the Illustrious One in *Three Days on the Cross*, the head of state is still a 'patriarch figure' who wears a charismatic garb to sanitize his dictatorship. He also luxuriates in praise names, the choirs call him the 'Foot of the Elephant' which, to repeat a point made earlier, is meant to promote personality cult.

Inhuman politics and corruption, petty and grand, are still the norm in Anyisa and the consequent discontent has precipitated the Wasimba insurgency. The sect's revolutionary gospel, in advocating a return to the lifestyles of yore, faults modernity and the Christian God for fostering capitalism in Africa. Their message, which sat well with the disillusioned Kiribiti unemployed, was critical of the first crop of leaders who have betrayed the masses. In terms of *Doomsday*, political agitation was in the air and the Wasimba clarion call was not only to fight the foreign God but also to battle the temporal powers that had betrayed the freedom struggle. The tendency is for Muthahi to blame the post-independence leadership in general for abandoning the liberation agenda in order to reap the benefits of neocolonialism. This clique of leaders is represented in *Doomsday* by the intra-bourgeois rivalry that informs Lukulo's ambition to become the president of Anyisa.

The general discontent with the comprador polity of Anyisa has made the capital city volatile as the oppressed agitate for change. The Wasimba sect has the capacity to cause disfavour with the government, if nothing else. Already, it has stealthily managed to establish their network cells in virtually all parts of the country and enjoys a bit of foreign support from countries like Zambuka. Its initial mission to restore 'the lost spiritual and political shrine' has no doubt been derailed by intra-class rivalry strong in the country, but nevertheless, it successfully organizes strikes and demonstrations against the state that cause mayhem in the capital city Kiribiti (Nairobi). Anti-government slogans rent the air in the streets as the masses cry out against political injustice. That the initially rag-tag and visionless militia owes such scores to Lukulo's leadership of it

tells of a system in the danger of being brought down by intra-bourgeois rivalries. Though at the end the expected Anyisa Liberation Army turns out to be a stillbirth, the Wasimba military wing, in a gesture of gallantry, has gunned down two policemen and raided two police stations.

The tenor of the discourse in *Doomsday* is of course against violence qua violence as a way out of the political quagmire in the text. But from these small feats by the Wasimba revolutionaries it can be argued that some kind of vicarious violence is gestured towards, if not entirely called for. These wildcat industrial actions, and the Wasimba insurgency, however disorganized, are an endorsement of the writer's optimism in the triumph of the nation's subjects against the oppressor. To spearhead insurrection and to commemorate fallen national heroes (a fallen politician is commemorated by university students) is to think that there may somehow be a better future for the society. The text appears arched towards amelioration, but the hooliganism that attends to such dissident activities undercuts the writer's vision. Fully aware of the obstacles on the way to better governance, the writer renders a blurred vision where he is incapable of stating when the new earth will be born and what it will look like. The writer however shows a clear awareness of the hurdles in the path of the revolution. Lukulo, the self-styled Wasimba sect leader's ambition to be president of Anyisa is driven by greed and not a call to improve the lot of mankind while the incumbent employs all kinds of political gimmicks to sustain himself in power. Neither the US ambassador to Anyisa nor his political counsellor appears committed towards democratization in Anyisa and they appear to have been hoodwinked by the official proclamation of multi-partysim to relent on their reform agenda in Anyisa.

Nevertheless, the text presents the social and political voices of its era and Ismail's victory in blowing the US embassy, heinous as it is, is a victory for the orients over real and perceived ideological control by the West. This ideological battle is rendered in religious terms, a contest between God and Satan where Satan (America) is singled out for blame for oppressing all and sundry, even selfishly bolstering up criminal regimes in Africa. The narrative anticipates the bombing by the Islamic extremists, of America's World Trade Centre in September 2001, who in *Doomsday* aver to take the battle to America after humiliating her in her outposts in Africa. It is manifestly clear, as argued earlier, that the writer is not sympathetic to the bombers but here again there seems to be a tendency to favour purificational violence as a step towards amelioration.

The twin aim of the plotters - to humiliate the US and to shake up tyrannical systems in Africa - are achieved as is seen in the panicky reaction to the shocking news by the then US president Bill Clinton and Anyisa's own His Excellency Johannas Mtwapa. Mtwapa's reaction is comically drawn: he is gripped by fear that it was a coup

de tat because he rules in fear. He is 'half sitting and half standing in the helicopter' as it approached the explosion scene. This comical portrait is effective in poking fun at his assumed might and invincibility. The reader is invited to see an elephantine dictator condemned to fright and absurdity, and the fact that he sheds tears over this tragedy draws attention to his indispensability by emphasizing the fact of his human nature. He is not after all the deity he has taken himself to be. In terms of liberation discourse, the suggestion is that these African 'tin-gods' represented by Mtwapa are apprehensive of change and are incapacitated when such reality beckons. His entire security and intelligence team is pilloried in equal manner and as if to question their intelligence since they believe the blast is the doing of the opposition politicians whom they make haste to check. They are on a wild goose chase while Ismail is about to flee the country after a mission accomplished. It is only through the intervention of Amina who inadvertently betrays him that they manage to intercept his flight, but even then he slips away from them by taking his life. This act mocks their show of might and emphasizes their helplessness. This dramatization of their panic is the writer's attempt to belittle their paramourcy and portray them as dispensable.

The Biblical allusion in the title to the moment when evil will be expunged from the world enables the author to posit an apocalyptic vision where earthly appetites will give way to the more infinite and noble values in man. The allusion anticipates the coming of a new era, a New Jerusalem, after doomsday and stimulates the optimism that the beautiful ones in the society can be conceived and be born. In an atmosphere of spiritual philistinism, the novel persuades, only a spiritual revolution can redeem man from fragmentation. This position is reinforced by the altruism of the rescue team who are united across tribe and race over the national calamity. The crowd applauds every life saved and it no longer matters whether it is that of the American ambassador or not. Dr Sussan Jibril's altruism is singular and a shining beauty of humanism that transcends the gruesome tragedy. It counters the gothic mood in the text and acts as a subtle ray of hope out of despair as does the humanness of Daudi Kamwesa, the crew leader of Close Films firm who offers the firm's lighting system to aid in the rescue effort. This light which bathes the city of Kiribiti is symbolic of the triumph of humanism in a society that denies it.

Zik Mwanamboka realizes the gratifying force of humanism as he suffers under the rumbles. His self-discovery under entombments recalls King Lear's regeneration in purgation while the Cordeliern fineness of Pauline is another highlight of the beauty of human values. Again in what echoes the reconciliation between King Lear and Cordelia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the fine-natured Pauline forgives her harassing boss. It is a compromise

that points to a possible rapprochement between the oppressor and the oppressed if individuals from the two divides summon their human passion and emotion against greed and pretensions of power. Once more, like in *Three Days on the Cross* there is a demonstration of the potential of love to conquer hate and the privileging of the integrity of individual relationship as a compensation for a wider social integration.

Conclusively, Mutahi envisages shifting and blurred vision in the three texts discussed in this thesis, investing a militant revolutionary favour in the early fiction and recapitulating with a call for a spiritual revolution in search of an ideal republic in *Doomsday*. The blurred vision is probably all he can offer presumably because there are no easy and clear solutions in real life, given that political repression is deeply entrenched in the society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has revealed that the texts are artistic responses to the political problems darkening the era they span. At times they go outside themselves to mention or to allude to historical realities that inspire their plots and characterization.

For instance, in *Three Days on the Cross*, there is mention of Mwakenya and The July 10 Movement, the notorious Nyayo Torture Chambers, the incarceration of dissident intellectuals and the police brutality on university students. In *The Jail Bugs*, the fictional Wakora Wengi Prison has close similarities with Kenya's Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, as Haki's confinement is an allusion to the detention without trial of political prisoners in the turbulent 1980s and early 1990s. The 1998 bombing of the American embassy in Kenya shapes the plot in *Doomsday*, set in the fictional country of Anyisa. This fidelity to history makes the writer's mediation of a repressive politics more credible.

In addition, we have observed that the alienating tyranny engenders despair and despondency to characters who feel hemmed in, and that this alienation is sometimes of a psychopathological sort. Our reading, however, reveals that the writer does not assimilate this despair. On the contrary, the authorial *attitudinizing* in the selected fiction reveals a sense of optimism, leading one to concur with Soyinka that 'the expressions of pessimism do not mean acceptance of that situation' and that they 'do not preclude change' (Ruganda, 1992, p. 188). This is so because, despite the pessimism in the three texts, Mutahi envisions a possibility of victory against adversity as this study has tried to argue in chapter three.

We also identify the texts' gesture towards amelioration. There is the presence of the 'little narratives', which, to borrow from Lyotard, have a 'critical oppositional function in relation to the capitalistic

metanarrative' (cited Krieger, 1987, p. 33). There is the resilience of characters whose strong will fortifies them against the forces of negation and there is an emerging genuine human relationship that has resisted the corroding evil in the society.

From the foregoing discussion, Mutahi's fiction seems to have, in a small way fulfilled this demand in so far as it envisages bloom at the end of the pervasive gloom in the society. Future researchers on the writer may find a study of his treatment of social issues interesting, such as the social perspectives in his art, including *The House of Doom*, published posthumously. One can also study the recurrence of Biblical allusions or the religious satire in his fiction.

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