

**LANGUAGE OF OPPRESSION AND QUEST FOR JUSTICE IN KITHAKA WA MBERIA'S
PLAYS**

ANNE WAITHERA KAMANGAH

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other university

Signature

Date

Anne.W. Kamangah

C50/79806/2015

This research project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors:

First Supervisor

Signature

Date

Dr Miriam Musonye

Department of Literature,

University of Nairobi

Second Supervisor

Signature

Date

Dr Judith Jefwa

Department of Literature,

University of Nairobi

DEDICATION

To God for giving me the strength to carry out this research, to the memory of my late parents Peter Kamangah and Miriam Nyambura for molding me into the person I am today. To my dear family Dominic, Jeddy, Rawnsley, Peter, and Shantel for their support, patience and encouragement in this endeavor. May God bless you.

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ABSTRACT

This study is on the language of oppression and quest for justice in Kithaka wa Mberia's plays. The plays are set in post-colonial Kenya, and oppression appears to be the dominant theme. The study identifies different language devices used in the plays and how they manifest in addressing oppression and quest for justice. A close reading of the plays shows a significant relationship between language and oppression. It also reveals language as a tool for protest against oppression. Deploying formalism, this study demonstrates that words and how they are used can enhance oppression or justice. Postcolonial theories are used to address the binary opposition between the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as to identify the subaltern groups in society. This theoretical perspective also establishes the voices that speak for the subaltern in the contemporary society.

1.0 CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Language is a powerful communication tool that human beings use to delineate their various realities. This is because a person's language choices can be used to structure the way reality is perceived. This structuring and usage of language can be either for good or bad intentions. Understandably, the concept of "good" and "bad" can of course vary based on the individual or community in question.

On reading Kithaka wa Mberia's plays *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, and *Natala*, I realised that language plays a significant role in understanding the theme of oppression which is dominant in the texts. Characters present the attitude of political and social intolerance towards their opponents by using language that comes out as oppressive.

Mberia has been teaching and doing research in the Department of Linguistics and Languages in the University of Nairobi since 1982. In addition, he has published five collections of poetry including *Mchezo wa Karata*, *Radio na Mwenzi*, *Msimu wa Tisa* and *Rangi ya Anga*. He has also authored the three plays studied in this project: *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun* and *Natala*. These are translations from their Kiswahili originals *Kifo Kisimani*, *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* and *Natala* respectively. His quest for justice and human dignity is captured in many of his creative writings. He therefore uses his works to provide the voice that is needed to talk on behalf of the oppressed in the society. Language is an important tool in this aspect since he utilises it to address issues in the society.

Several researches have been carried out on Mberia's plays. For instance, the role and the place of women as presented in *Natala* is one of the concerns addressed by such scholars as Ibrahim Kiter and Kanyua Murungi. Another researcher Vincent Oire has carried out a comparative study on pragmatic and lexical meaning in metaphors and hyperbole in *Death at the Well*. While appreciating what these scholars have done on Mberia's works, they have not carried an in depth analysis on the role of

language in enhancing oppression or as a tool for protest. This is the gap this study seeks to investigate.

As mentioned earlier, the role of language in communication cannot be understated. K.B.C Ashipu and James Okipiliya (2013) posit that “language has a great degree of power beyond any lexical meaning and therefore language is not mere strings of words” (26). Hence, words and how they are used can unite or disintegrate the society. This happens when one group assumes superiority over another by using language that can be termed oppressive. In Mberia’s plays, prejudicial language against different groups of people in society as well as imagery and figurative language which enhance class and gender oppression are presented. In many instances, the marginalised in the society are oppressed and denied justice as a result of lack of access to discourses that confer power and status, hence the need to equip them with language that counters oppression.

In itself, language is defined as “purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotion, and desires by means of voluntary produced symbols” (Edward Sapir, 3). This means that language which is emotive in nature and deliberate in evoking these emotions is associated with human beings. Language is not necessarily verbal since symbols are equally effective in communicating ideas. This is aligned with Benard Block and George Trager’s (1942) definition of language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates.” It is clear that language is an important tool for expressing human experiences as well as for socializing. In addition, language can transform our thinking and therefore define our identity, as language identifies a person with a particular group. Furthermore, language is said to be a product of society. Literary artists present characters that use language in diverse ways. For example, characters may use language as an oppressive tool or even as a tool for liberation. Generally, language serves many uses in society: it can be used to educate, commend, to pass information and to express thoughts. Language is a double-edged sword: it can function as a vehicle for socialization or as a tool for disintegrating society.

This study is based on the assumption that there is a relationship between language, oppression, and quest for justice. The argument gives an insight into the role of language not only as a tool for oppression but also a weapon in the search for justice.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Oppression and injustice are common phenomenon in contemporary African societies. Different literary artists have used their works to present the issue of oppression and injustice in society. While a significant amount of research has been done on the twin themes of oppression and injustice in Mberia's works, the research has not addressed how language is used to propagate oppression and deny people justice or on the other hand as a tool for liberation. This study therefore seeks to investigate how language relates to oppression and injustice and how the selected texts demonstrate language as a tool for protest against injustice in the society.

1.3. Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Analyse language as a tool for addressing socio-political and economic oppression in Kithaka wa Mberia's plays.
- ii. Examine how language is used in the quest for justice and as a tool for protest in the selected texts.

1.4. Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- i. The social construction of people as inferior or superior present characters who perceive themselves as 'superior' as using oppressive language against the 'inferior'.
- ii. The language of protest and justice emanates from the quest for freedom from oppression.

1.5. Justification

Language is an important tool in addressing issues in the society. How language is used can affect peace and stability in the contemporary society. Derogatory and oppressive language has been the cause of many wars and civil strife in many countries in Africa and the world, such as the anti-Semitic campaign by Adolf Hitler that caused the death of over six million Jews in Germany; the 1994 Rwandan genocide and Kenya's 2007 post-election violence. On the hand, if language is well used, it can bring political, social and economic growth in the society. Though scholars have carried out studies on Mberia's plays, they have not taken an in-depth study on language as a tool for socio-political and economic oppression in society and as a tool for protest. Moreover, oppression is a threat to peace and stability not only in Kenya but in Africa and the whole world. Therefore, an analysis on the role of language in socio-political and economic oppression is justified.

The relationship between language and oppression help in understanding and explaining civil strife in contemporary African societies. Therefore, this study adds knowledge to the existing debates on the role of language as a tool for creating peace and stability in the society. Moreover, political leaders misuse language by creating ethnic animosity among communities through hate speech. This happens when they attack other people on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, and even sexual orientation. This study is therefore important since it aims at providing an insight to the society on the need to exercise political and social tolerance by avoiding language that exalts negative ethnic stereotypes.

1.6. Scope and Limitation

The focus of this study is *Death at the Well*, *Natala* and *Flowers in the Morning Sun*. The study explores language as an aspect of form in the theme of oppression. I am limiting this study to the three plays because they all exhibit the theme of oppression in different forms through the use of language, an aspect that is the focus of my study. Secondary materials and critical works which are related to this study are from time to time referred to.

1.7. Literature Review

In this part, works on oppression and the language of oppression have been reviewed. Reviews on Mberia's plays *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun* and *Natala* form part of the reviews to establish what other scholars have said. The focus of this section is on what has been done on language of oppression and how effective the linguistic devices used are in expressing the message.

Criticism on Oppression

Paulo Freire(2000) argues that humanisation and dehumanisation are common in society. He says that although dehumanisation is practiced by people on each other, it is not a choice by the dehumanised to be in that situation. It is through acts such as injustice, exploitation, and violence that people become oppressed and therefore dehumanised. However, it is through struggling that the dehumanised can recover their lost humanity. Freire adds that as people dehumanise others, they also become dehumanised. The oppressed also become oppressors themselves. This can be seen in the relationship between characters that are oppressed but become oppressors themselves. As we appreciate Freire's views on the effect of oppression, this study builds on this argument and goes further to examine the role of language in oppression and how language can equally be used as a tool for protest against oppression.

Moreover, Franz Fanon (1969) believes Algerian mental diseases were a manifestation of colonial alienation. Fanon argues that the North African is "pre-judged into pre-existing framework" (4). This in reference to the negative stereotype the French medics use towards the North African patients. The patients are said to suffer from "North African Syndrome", (4) which according to the French medics is an imaginary ailment. In another case, apart from being a "pseudo-invalid" (4), the Arab is said to be a simulator, a liar, a malingerer, a sluggard, a thief and many more. Fanon says that the negative perception of the French towards the North African is the root cause of the mental illness suffered by the Algerian nationals in France. Fanon's argument on the relationship between language and mental illness is an important ingredient in understanding the role of language and the characters' behavior in Mberia's plays. This argument is similar to the one advanced by Hussein Bulhan (2004)who agrees

with Fanon's argument that isolation of the mentally ill patients is oppressive and that it creates stigmatisation and denies them freedom. Negative words such as 'abnormal' and 'mad' used to refer to mentally ill patients create "otherness" in society. According to Bulhan, Fanon associates mental illness with oppressive situations that people encounter in life. This is especially among those in the lowest social class. This argument is important to this study since it adds to the understanding of the relationship between language of oppression and the psychological effect it has on the characters.

In addition, Birch in (1991) posits that, language can be used as a tool for oppressing women and that language can be a source of power or oppression. For instance, men oppress women by using language that constructs them as sexual objects. He says that women's ability is rejected by men through the use of language. It is only by recognising the relationship between language and power that women can liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression. Birch's argument therefore examines the language of oppression on women. This study goes further to identify the language of oppression on women and other vulnerable groups. The study also investigates the language of power in the texts under study, therefore adding knowledge to the existing topic on the discourse of oppression.

Manfres Pfister (1991) compares dramatic and narrative texts by arguing that unlike narrative texts where verbal matrix cannot be perceived, characters in drama act the parts as in real life. As the characters speak, they actualise the issues in the dramatic texts thus giving them a human face. The audience identifies and relates to the issues being highlighted and therefore initiates the necessary reaction or change where it is needed. This is referred to as dramatic dialogue or spoken action. Building on Pfister's views, this study sets out to explore how verbal elements particularly language employed in the texts succeed in the fight for justice.

Criticism on Mberia's Works

Kiter Ibrahim (2013) argues that many people have used different ways to address the issues concerning women. Literature is one way literary writers use to liberate women from patriarchal dominance. He adds that the war on the rights of women in the society has erroneously been taken to be a feminist concern. He argues that the rights of women should be a whole societal concern if we

intend to build a strong and meaningful society. Kiter focuses on how a male writer has succeeded in uplifting the role and the place of the woman in society. By deconstructing the negative stereotype attributed to women, Kiter sees the main character, Natala, as a woman who is wise and responsible. My study builds on Kiter's argument on the treatment of women. However, the main focus is language and how it has been used as a tool for oppression not only in Natala but also in *Flowers in the Morning Sun* and *Death at the Well*.

Moreover, Kanyua Murungi (2013) examines how characterisation has been used to address the role and place of women in the society as brought out in *Natala*. Murungi notes that the playwright has divided the characters into two: the major and the minor. Natala as the lead character has been used to depict the tribulations that a widow goes through in typical African societies. The other characters, both male and female, have been portrayed as the agents of oppression for the widow. Murungi argues that Mberia has succeeded in uplifting the place of the woman in the society by subverting the negative stereotypes associated with her. In this dissertation Murungi has dealt with characterisation as a style and how it has succeeded in uplifting the place and the role of women in the contemporary African society. However, this study focuses on language and how it can be used as a tool for oppression and a tool for protest.

Vincent Oire (2014) focuses on the pragmatic and lexical meaning of words used in the texts. He argues that in a literary work, words have both superficial and deeper meanings. This is especially so in the use of metaphor and hyperbole which create a mental picture in the reader, making the meaning more relevant. In his comparative study of the two texts, Oire argues that some words have a literal and deeper meaning. It is important for the reader to understand the deeper meaning of such group of words whose meaning cannot be interpreted literally, as in discerning and interpreting metaphors and hyperbole. Oire's thesis is important to this study since imagery, hyperbole and understatement form part of the language under study to establish how they bring out the aspect of oppression.

Nduta Murugu (2012) focuses on the challenges of translating proverbs, puns and cultural terminology from Swahili plays into English. She argues that although proverbs are universal in many

cultures, cultural differences and their situational factors make it necessary to have an emergence of local categories. She adds that culturally bound terminologies give a work of art a specific identity and therefore a particular piece of work can be identified with a particular culture. As for puns, Murugu notes that in most cases they are not translatable and translators sometimes omit them hence losing the punning effect in the target text. In relation to this, this study identifies translated terminologies that depict oppression.

In addition, the dramatist Francis Imbuga addresses corruption, suppression of the intellectual and bad governance in his plays *Betrayal in the City* and *Aminata*. Imbuga presents the masses as having the capacity to liberate themselves from bad leadership. He demonstrates that, political oppression leads to other forms of oppression such as social and economic oppression. Political oppression addressed in *Betrayal in the City* leads to political apathy, disillusionment and dissatisfaction on how affairs are run in the state of Kafira. Boss, the head of state, uses oppressive characters represented by Mulili and Tumbo to dominate the masses. Their oppressive behaviour is presented in their speech as much as in their behaviour. Appreciating Imbuga's contribution to the theme of oppression, this study focuses on oppression in a wider perspective as the role of language in oppression is examined. In the plays *Man of Kafira* and *Successor*, Imbuga presents African leaders in the post-colonial society who act on their own without any legal institutions to assist them. He therefore shows how some leaders in post-colonial Africa have become dictators. The so-called advisors are not competent; they heap empty praises on leaders hence encouraging them in their bad governance. The similarity between Imbuga's and Mberia's plays is the subject matter—oppression. However, this study explores oppression from a different perspective which is language and how it is used to counter oppression and therefore acting as a tool for liberation.

From the above reviews, it is clear that to understand the theme of oppression, the role language plays is critical. In studying Mberia's plays, therefore, the language the characters are equipped with is key to understanding how major themes are constructed. By understanding how language and language devices have been employed to express the concerns in the play, the theme of oppression which is

prominent in the texts will be richly understood. This study therefore explores language devices employed in the texts and how they bring out the theme of oppression and quest for justice.

1.8. Theoretical Framework

For the objectives of this study to be realised, the study is guided by two theoretical approaches: Formalism and postcolonial literary theories.

Formalists believe in the autonomy of literature and dispute the assumption that a work of literature reflects the author's experience and worldview. Selden et al (2005) assert that, "human reality (content) does not possess any literary significance in itself, but merely provides a context for the functioning of literary devices" (29). This argument shows that form, which comprises literary devices, is very important in the interpretation of a literary text. This argument will assist me both in identifying and in explaining the role of such literary devices as diction, symbols, simile, metaphor, irony, and characterization.

The Russian formalists Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum and Victor Vinogradov assert that to study literature is to study poetics, which is an analysis of a work's constituent parts—its linguistic and structural features or its form" (51). This means studying the internal devices in a literary work in order to arrive at the content, implying that both form and content are very important in understanding a literary text. The content in Mberia's plays is clarified by studying form which in this case is the language used.

Following Shklovsky's argument, literature is a "special use of a language which achieves its distinctiveness by deviating from and distorting 'practical' language" (31). This study investigates how the texts use language to create what Shklovsky calls 'defamiliarisation'. This special use of language helps to create aesthetic effect and to bring forth thematic concerns. This helps me to interrogate the issues that are addressed in the texts.

Similarly, Simon Gikandi (1987) argues that the form of a literary text is as important as its content. It is from form that a reader gets the meaning from the internal constituent that recreates reality.

Language as a feature of form is very important in the interpretation of meaning in a text. This study benefits from this assertion because the analysis of language assists in drawing out the meaning from the texts. Moreover, how the playwright uses language as a feature of form to address the theme of oppression assists in the analysis of texts under study. This is further advanced by Warren and Wallek (1956) who argue that literary texts use words which is language to pass information and to create beauty in that particular language. This paradigm helps me to analyse how the playwright chooses the words to create aesthetic effect and to pass the message especially on oppression.

The second theoretical approach is Postcolonial Theories. Charles Bresler (2007) defines Postcolonial theory as “A set of theories in literary analysis that is concerned with literature written in English in countries that were colonised” (235). They investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one assumes superiority over the other. The whites believed they were biologically superior to the ‘others’—the Africans and Asians. Postcolonial critics believe that colonialism is the cause of present day oppression and suffering and therefore, they “articulate the social, political and economic conditions of various subaltern groups” (237).

On the other hand, Selden et al(1998) describe postcolonial theory as “a way of analysing a literary work from the postcolonial perspective where western traditions of thought and literature are guilty of repressive ethnocentrism” (218). Western literature has been accused of marginalising non-western traditions and forms of cultural expression. This theory therefore investigates the effect of imperialism on the colonised.

Bill Ashcroft (2003) looks at postcolonial approach as one that encourages binary opposition. He observes that colonialism affected the colonised countries in three major ways—politically, economically and culturally, and that the effect is still felt today. The binary opposition of the rich and the poor, men and women, government and subjects, oppressor and the oppressed and so on has resulted in the conflict of “Us” and “Other”. This study adopts Ashcroft’s strand of postcolonial theory to establish how Mberia, a postcolonial author, and uses language to present binary oppositions that express contemporary forms of domination. Particularly, the study seeks to establish how the

texts respond to the binary opposition between the oppressors versus the oppressed and the binary opposition between oppression and the quest for justice.

Unlike Ashcroft who looks at binary opposition, Homi Bhabha advances the terminologies such as hybridity, ambivalence and fixity. He says that when two cultures interact, for example that of the colonisers and the colonised, there is a possibility of an emergence of an in-between culture. This is what he refers to as hybridity. Bhabha (1983) argues that the solution does not lie in the binary opposition as argued by Said, but the shift should be on the process of domination which is made possible by language which he refers to as “stereotypical discourse” (133). He further says that, the dominant discourse is likely to estrange the basis of its authority. The result is that the less dominant culture ends up producing the mimic man. This study identifies the dominant discourse that is oppressive and the discourses that reflect empowerment and examine what the texts recommend as the middle discourse or hybridity where no discourse is superior to the other.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a leading post-colonial critic, focuses on the marginalised people. She argues that “deconstruction can only speak in the language of the thing it criticises” (223). In other words, the west cannot speak for Africa and Asia or the coloniser on behalf of the colonized and the colonised people cannot speak for themselves. She says that, there must be a third space that represents the subaltern, who is the marginalised person in the society. Spivak further argues that in the merger between the colonisers and the colonised, the marginalized are not represented. In addition, their lack of appropriate discourse showed them as people without conscience.

Among the subaltern groups are the women whom she refers to as the gendered subaltern because they suffer double marginalisation. They are dominated both by colonial and patriarchal systems. Spivak argues that if the subaltern cannot speak, then they need somebody to come up and speak for them. In a text, the critic identifies the subaltern groups and the characters that speak on behalf of the subaltern. Hence the role of the critic is to identify the voices that represent the subalterns and articulate their voices. This approach helps me to identify the subaltern groups in the texts, as well as the point of intervention and the characters that speak on behalf of the subaltern.

1.9. Methodology

To understand the relationship between language and oppression in Mberia's *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, and *Natala*, the texts are subjected to close textual reading and analysis. This is done with the aim of bringing out the relationship between language and oppression, in which language is seen as a tool for socio-political and economic oppression. In addition, secondary texts are used to enrich the study. Beside those that critically engage with the theme of oppression and language use, key secondary texts are those on Postcolonial and Formalists theories, the two perspectives that guide this study.

Postcolonial approaches are important because they speak to contemporary societies, often highlighting existing power struggles among different players in society. Through this approach, it is possible to identify the language of 'otherness', a feature of society, as reproduced in the texts under study. This in turn brings out the binary opposition between the oppressors and the oppressed, making it possible to understand the theme of oppression.

On the other hand, the Formalist approach is important in analysing form—the style of the plays. This makes it possible to understand how language has been employed to communicate meaning in the plays.

1.10. Definition of Terms

The following terms are frequently used in this work and I find it necessary to give their working definitions.

Ethnicity: a category of people who identifies with each other based on language, common ancestry, social or cultural tradition. In this study, ethnicity is seen as the basis of discriminating against people based on their ethnic origin.

Figurative language: language that uses words or expressions with meaning that is different from the literally interpretation. It can be inform of metaphor, simile, personification or hyperbole.

Derogatory language: language meant to hurt or to offend the addressee. In this context, this kind of language is associated with ethnic stereotypes that are offensive and which create conflict among different ethnic groups.

Oppression: to rule or treat somebody in a continually cruel or harsh way.

Prejudicial sentiments or situations that cause or are likely to cause harm to a person's rights and interests.

A **Quest:** the act of seeking something or a long search for something.

Sarcasm: a remark that implies the opposite of what it appears to mean with the intention of upsetting or mocking somebody.

Liberation is the action of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery or oppression. In this context liberation is used to express the need to acquire social, political and economic freedom by adopting the language of power.

Justice is related to the administration of fairness by being impartial in administering the rule of law.

It is observing equity in applying the systems of law. In this study the word justice is used in relation to fairness in the society regardless of the person's gender, age or ethnic background.

1.11. Synopses

1.11.1. Flowers in the Morning Sun

Flowers in the Morning Sun is a translation from *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*. It is a play about two warring communities the Ndiku and the Tange. Members of the Ndiku ethnic community have been displaced from their farms by the Tange ethnic community and are currently living in internally displaced person's camps (IDP) camps. The main conflict is the issue of land. The Tange community has been incited by the political leaders to believe that the Ndiku who are perceived as 'outsiders' want to dispossess the Tange of their land. On the other hand, the Ndiku who are under the leadership

of Kabitho decide to retaliate and repossess their land which they say they had bought with their “hard-earned money.” Kabitho recruits warriors and seeks military expertise from Tungai, a retired army officer from the community. On the other hand, The Tange also trains warriors under the leadership of Chebwe. They also take an oath of allegiance to ensure total commitment to the cause.

The media is spreading propaganda about the state of security which convinces the Ndiku to go back to their farms only to be met with more violence and destruction. Kabitho complains about the media which he believes is being controlled by their opponents. While all these accusations and counter accusations are going on, two graduates, Waito from the Ndiku community and Nali from the Tange community, are in love and plan to get married. They are against the violence and believe there are amicable ways of dealing with the conflict. Other characters such as Toiche and Neche, like Nali and Waito, believe the violence is not justified. Nali is kidnapped by the Ndiku militia and is about to be executed to pay for her father’s crime but she is rescued by Tungai who believes a noble war is not about killing innocent women and children. The play ends with Tungai’s vision of Nali and Waito’s marriage, a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the Ndiku and the Tange communities.

1.11.2. Death at the Well

Death at the Well is a translated play from the Kiswahili original *Kifo Kisimani*. It is set in an imaginary state of Butangi which is headed a dictator Chief Bokono. Mwelusi, the protagonist, is a young man who sets out to fight an oppressive regime, assisted his girlfriend Atega. Bad governance, corruption and misuse of public resources are among the oppressive practices that are perpetuated by the state and anyone that attempts to criticize the government is imprisoned or eliminated altogether. Meanwhile, Mwelusi is arrested on allegations of inciting the citizens of Butangi to boycott chief Bokono’s meeting. In prison he is subjected to brutal treatment by the prison guards (Askari I, Askari II and Askari III).

New regulations are passed by the state which, prohibiting people from drawing water from Mkomani well, the only one with clean water. News emerge that the new directive is meant to preserve the well for Chief Bokono and his friends. Disgruntled voices start to emerge against the government. Batu,

Bokono's chief advisor, and the council of elders advise the chief to eliminate Mwelusi in order to end the rebellion. Gege, Mwelusi's brother is recruited to kill him with false promise of material wealth as well as chief Bokono's daughter's hand in marriage. Gege manages to kill Mwelusi, but contrary to the expectation, the rebellion continues under the leadership of Atega. The citizens manage to overthrow the government through a bloodless revolution. Chief Bokono and his cronies are locked up in prison. However, his wife Nyalwe is spared for not taking part in the violence. Liberation and justice are finally achieved for the citizen of Butangi.

1.11.3. *Natala*

Natala is a social drama whose protagonist is a young woman, Natala. She is mourning her husband Tango Mwina who is presumed dead. Tango is a son to Mzee Balu and a brother to Wakene, an irresponsible drunk. Wakene is married to Tila, a woman who is always borrowing items from Natala. At one point Tila accuses Natala of being stingy for failing to give her enough salt. Natala, accompanied by her cousin Bala, goes to the mortuary to collect her husband's body. However, the mortuary attendant is not ready to release the body unless Natala gives him a bribe in form of cash or sex. When Natala refuses, she is made to wait the whole day for another assistant to help her. Finally, she is given her husband's body and the burial ceremony is set to take place. The chief attempts to stop the ceremony claiming that Natala has not acquired the burial permit. It turns out that he wanted a bribe from Natala and Mzee Balu. However, Natala does not conform.

The elders led by Mzee Pali Pali and Mama Lime want Natala to be inherited by her brother-in-law Wakene as tradition demands but Natala refuses saying that she is ready to bring up her children by herself. Wakene is interested in acquiring his brother's property and claims to be in love with Natala. When the elders fail to convince Natala to be inherited, Wakene breaks into her house and steals the title deed of Tango's land. On the other hand, the chief wants Natala to have a sexual relationship with him, and when she turns him down, he accuses her of disrespecting a government office. Natala decides to use her own initiative to get her deed back. Meanwhile, Tila accuses Natala of scheming with Mama Lime to steal her husband from her. She believes Natala is interested in Wakene. Hence,

when Natala attempts to explain that she is not interested in Wakene, Tila shuts her up and swears to fight for her husband. Natala succeeds in getting the deed from Wakene and promises to fight for her rights and that of her children. This infuriates Wakene so much that he threatens to dispossess Natala of everything including her children. She is given a two-week' notice to vacate her house; a decision supported by the elders who feel Natala's refusal to be inherited could spell doom to the community. When Natala succeeds in getting her title deed back, to take it back by force and a scuffle ensues. It is in the midst of this that Natala's husband suddenly appears and witnesses the struggle between Wakene and Natala. Later it emerges that all this time Tango was in prison and the body that had been buried belonged to the man who had stolen Tango's documents.

1.12. Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter provides the background to the study. It consists of introduction to the topic, statement of the problem, objectives, hypothesis, justification, scope and limitation, literature review, theoretical framework, research methodology, synopses of the plays and definition terms.

The second chapter analyses the language of oppression used by the characters. In relation to this, it looks at prejudicial language of "us" verses "them" based on prejudice against tribe, women, youth and the citizens. The chapter also deals with how imagery, hyperbole and understatement explain oppression.

The third chapter dwells on the analysis of sarcasm, figurative language and imagery as tools for protest to counter the language of oppression.

The last section summarizes and concludes the study, bringing out major findings.

2.0. CHAPTER II: USE OF LANGUAGE DEVICES IN HIGHLIGHTING OPPRESSION

2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on language use in Mberia's plays. The chapter dwells on ways in which socio-political and economic oppression is manifested through negative use of language. Three language techniques are analysed to demonstrate the relationship between language and oppression: prejudicial language of "us" versus "them", imagery to construct class and gender oppression, and hyperbole and understatement as framing socio-political and economic oppression. Through these techniques, the texts are understood as portraying oppression as manifested through physical violence, gender-based violence, bad governance, greed, and ethnicity. By close textual analysis, the study establishes how certain characters discriminate against vulnerable groups in society. The analysis is done with the assumption that the issues addressed in the texts cut across many post-colonial societies. The chapter concludes with the argument that for social justice and democracy to be realised, people have to identify their source of oppression and fight against it, for instance by adopting the language of protest.

2.2. The Prejudicial Language of "Us" versus "Them"

In this section, prejudicial language is analysed to demonstrate how characters in the texts use it to portray others negatively. It brings out the effect of prejudice in the society that creates "othering" based on "us" versus "them". The section focuses on prejudicial language against tribe, youth, women and citizens.

2.2.1. Prejudicial Language against Tribe

This part analyses prejudice against tribe. It focuses on how different communities treat each other, particularly in the language they use. Of the three plays under study, only *Flowers in the Morning Sun* exhibits communities conflicting with each other—the Tange and the Ndiku. These two are at war over land, with the Tange claiming total ownership of the land they believe is theirs by right, and no outsider should migrate in to it therefore. The Ndiku, on the other hand, lay claim on the same land,

arguing that they bought the piece and should therefore be free to settle in. The text presents opposing characters from the two communities using language that discriminates against the other.

The Tange accuse the Ndiku of grabbing their land, calling them “land grabbers”. The Ndiku had migrated from a different area, hence the Tange consider them outsiders. On the other hand, the Ndikus argue that they bought the land with their “hard earned” money. The words “land grabbers” are derogatory and therefore cause conflict between the Tange and the Ndiku ethnic communities. This scenario has been the cause of civil unrests in many post-colonial African states; where by communities try to assert their superiority over others by spreading ethnic prejudice. Kabitho, a Ndiku, would not mind the whole Tange community being wiped out. He tells Tungai that “when push comes to shove, ensure no Tange is left alive in the nearby villages...” (67). Kabitho argues that no Tange is worth keeping alive since they are ‘monkeys’. By calling them so, Kabitho lowers the Tange to a sub-human level. On the other hand, Kabitho could be implying that the Tange had acquired the land through dubious means and therefore he feels justified to be part of it. He also hopes to feel less guilty in the event that he kills a Tange, as to him he would not have killed a human being but an animal. Hence, using the animal imagery, Kabitho succeeds in spreading ethnic prejudice which results in political oppression.

Besides, ethnicity interferes with human socialisation. Toiche, one of Chebwe’s warriors, informs Chebwe that the Ndiku as a way of punishing him has taken hostage his daughter Nali. However, Chebwe brands Toiche a ‘traitor’ and doubts his loyalty. He accuses Toiche of collaborating with the ‘enemy’:

So the Ndikus capture my daughter at the time that your loyalty becomes questionable, huh?
Do you want anybody to believe that that’s a coincidence? You’re the one who has betrayed my daughter you shameless traitor (75).

It happened that Toiche, a Ndiku, had got the information from Atange friend. Chebwe fails to appreciate the kind gesture since the information had come from one who is considered an enemy. Chebwe directs his anger to a member of his own ethnic group for associating with the enemy. The

word 'traitor' demonstrates his displeasure and negative attitude towards the rival community. It is ironical that his daughter's safety is not his priority; he directs his energy on castigating his own man. Ethnic prejudice creates a rift between rival communities, in most cases resulting in violence. This is because it creates hatred by preventing people from acknowledging any positive attribute of the 'enemy' community.

Consequently, this negative attitude results in family disintegration in the case of a mixed marriage situation. For instance, Kabitho's hatred of the Tange community led to the breakup of his marriage to a Tange. He explains why he broke up with Cheptero: "Cheptero was as useless as the rest of her tribesmen and women" (15). Kabitho generalises an individual mistake. Tribal prejudice causes Kabitho to view the Tange community through what Said calls "homogenous anonymous mass" other than as individual. Kabitho fails to see his wife's mistake as her own, instead condemning the entire community. This creates the binary opposition of 'us' and 'others' resulting in social oppression.

Politically, leaders have taken advantage of the contention over land to demonise other communities by branding them land grabbers. Hence, Chebwe tells Nali and Neche that the Ndiku "come from hundreds of kilometers to this place to shamelessly settle on our land! Now, they want to rule us again so that they may grab even more land" (62). Chebwe is trying to convince his wife and daughter to support his clandestine activities, which they are bitterly opposed to. However he does not succeed. Chebwe's attitude demonstrates that ethnic prejudice makes ordinary men and women prey to politicians who stand to reap from ethnic animosity while the poor become poorer. Chabal Patrick in *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* notes that "ordinary men and women are often pawns of politicians in whose interest it is to exploit, or benefit from their poverty and ill health" (53). From the postcolonial perspective, the effect of colonialism can be discerned from Chebwe's words. In Kenya, the idea of 'us' and 'others' is a colonial ideology of divide and rule, that sadly persists to date. Hence, Chebwe uses derogatory language to 'other' the Ndiku community and to spread ethnic animosity. Just like the western cultures used ethnocentrism to discriminate against the Africans, Africans use gender, class and ethnic difference to oppress each other.

Furthermore, the text demonstrates how propaganda and prejudicial language are used to advance economic oppression in order to control available resources. The Tange and the Ndiku engage in negative economic competition that leads to violence. Kabitho tells Tungai, “No, it’s an internal conflict, at the beginning it was just war. **Our** businesses were forced to go bankrupt. **Our** banks were made to collapse. **Our** industries were shut down and loan facilities fizzled out.”(9) [emphases mine]. I have highlighted the word ‘our’ because Kabitho uses it to set aside those who are not of his ethnic descent. His purpose is to paint them as saboteurs of his people’s economic growth. This is a clear case of ethnic prejudice which the leaders exploit as an excuse to call for ethnic “cleansing”. By repeatedly using the possessive pronoun ‘our’, Kabitho creates a scenario of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ In a society where people are judged by the amount of wealth they have, it is possible to have negative economic competition. Kabitho’s explanation, though given as a protest, is not inclusive. It sets aside those who are not in ‘our’ group therefore discriminating against them. Ngugi wa Thiong’o(1981) argues that the leaders in post-colonial Africa are not interested in fulfilling the pledges they made during independence, but that their main interest is power. Therefore, these leaders ensure ethnic prejudice is maintained at all costs, hence Kabitho’s attempt to convince Tungai to train the militia.

From the analysis, it is clear that language plays a role in propagating ethnic prejudice. As presented in the play, language appears as one of the major causes of conflict in contemporary societies. How people represented by different characters in the text use language either creates cohesion or causes disintegration in the society.

2.2.2. Prejudicial Language against the Youth

As mentioned earlier, the texts also examine the language the society and especially the elders use to address the youths. Each group views the other with suspicion resulting in generational conflict. This part therefore analyses prejudicial language the society use against the youth to establish the language of domination and its effect on the youths in the society.

Hence, youths are put in opposition with the elders who use derogatory language to address them. This creates generational conflict which is seen in the tension between Waito, a young man, and

Kabitho, an elder. The older generation dismisses the youth as useless and having nothing to offer the society in terms of advice since they 'lack wisdom.' For instance, Kabitho sees no need of listening to Waito, "Get out of here...nobody has asked for your advice" (72). Waito is dismissed as irrational and his advice as lacking practicality.

Nevertheless, the elders are the first to incite the youth into violence. Kabitho is ready to recruit street children as child soldiers to fight in a selfish war. He does not see them as human beings who deserve dignity, but as tools to fight his war. He calls them "street urchins", a word that dehumanises them. Tungai tries to remind Kabitho that the war will have negative effects on the children, to which Kabitho responds "...the important thing is to have bold fighters whether that boldness is as a result of a person's nature or use of drugs is of little significance. What is important is that they achieve victory." (50) Tungai, despite his advocating for the rights and safety of the children, is dismissed by Kabitho whose only focus is a victory. This is despite the fact that lives of the children are being compromised. Although Tungai's voice is ignored by Kabitho, he acts as an advocate for the subaltern. It is also evident from this extract that politicians do not care about the welfare of the people. This is a demonstration of greed for power and control; politicians are ready to do anything to maintain control and power.

Similarly, Toiche is manipulated by chebwe to take an oath of allegiance which binds him to the militia group that is controlled by the politicians. When he decides to quit, he is branded a 'traitor of their cause' and is threatened with dire consequences. The word 'traitor' and 'betrayed' are meant to oppress and suppress Toiche to submission.

In addition, Mwelusi, a young man in *Death at the Well* goes to the meeting ground where chief Bokono is expected to address the meeting. He finds Kaloo an elderly woman, preparing the ground for the meeting and as they talk, Kaloo argues that a majority of the youth do not contribute much in the society. Her conclusion is based on assumption rather than facts. She says, "Most youngsters are only preoccupied with self-interests. Their flow of thought centers on the pleasures of the youth." (2) Using stereotypical language against the youth, Kaloo generalises a whole group other than looking at

individuals. Kaloo represents the perception of the elders towards the youth, thus denying them opportunities to prove themselves. When this happens, the youth are subjected to poverty due to unemployment which leads to economic oppression. Therefore, in a bid to achieve their ambitions they become easy pawns to politicians' power broking game.

Moreover, the elders and the youth treat each other with suspicion as each group views the other as a threat thus creating conflict. However, Mwelusi deconstructs the perception created by Kaloo by arguing that during the time of war, the youth play a significant role in securing safety for the society. He says, "What you are saying mama Kaloo is true but it's also true that in time of war the youth are at the forefront, fighting on behalf of the society" (2). The message is that the society should have a point of convergence: Bhabha uses the terminology of hybridity. This is where the old and the young find the middle ground and appreciate each other's contribution for the benefit of the society.

As has been illustrated in this part, the youth are treated with suspicion by the older generation who feel that the youth are not ready for leadership. This creates the language of dominance on the youth who in turn try to resist.

2.2.3. Prejudicial Language against Women

In the three plays under study, female characters are faced with discourses that point to their oppression in society. It appears that gender prejudice is a way of 'othering' women. This section examines how society and especially the patriarchal system use language to undermine women. Here, language devices that present discrimination against women in the societies imagined in the texts is analysed.

For instance, Chebwe in *Flowers in the Morning Sun* attempts to intimidate his wife, Neche, for accusing him of fueling ethnic animosity and engaging in violence. In response, Chebwe tells Neche that, "... this is not a topic for discussion between husband and wife" (29). In other words, being a woman puts her in an inferior position to her husband. She is not supposed to get involved in politics which is viewed as a man's domain. However, Neche refuses to be silenced and accuses the leaders of

what she calls “partisan politics which do not have people’s welfare at heart” (77). She sees herself as capable of shaping her country’s politics. Neche is a symbol of women’s empowerment and reinforces Jenifer Gassman’s argument that “It is a misconception to perceive men as superior to women and that, social inequality is not ordained by the laws of God or nature, but results from social conditions that can be changed.” (10)Gassman advocates for active participation of women in all spheres of life.

The discourse of master-servant relationship plays a big role in socio-economic oppression. Kaloo addresses Batu as “sir”, creating a sense of inequality and social stratification. Batu looks down on Kaloo, even though Kaloo works hard to impress him and views him as an authority hence superior. Asked about the chairs that were to be used in chief Bokono’s meeting, she exaggerates her ability to get only the best, “I wouldn’t dare bring chairs that aren’t good. I don’t deliver half-measure.” (3) Batu responds by saying he and Kaloo are the same not on the ‘equal’ sense of the word but in reference to ‘perfect work.’ Batu and Kaloo represent the relationship between the leaders and citizens in the post-colonial era.

The playwright explores prejudicial language in *Death at the Well* as a tool for oppressing the citizens. The prison guards insult Tanya for being the mother of the convicted prisoner. Her attempts to see her son are futile. By reminding the guards of their parents, she hopes to draw sympathy and understanding. However, the guards intimidate her by talking sarcastically and issuing threats. Tanya says, “Please my children! Have pity on me. I beg you to allow me to see him...try to understand the agony of carrying a pregnancy for nine months and the challenge of bringing up a child” (56). The prison guards (Askari I, Askari II and Askari III) respond by telling her that “we do not want a speech on procreation, we don’t need that kind of knowledge.” Using derogatory language, the guard attempts to intimidate Tanya into silence. Arrogance and insults are used to ‘other’ people who are regarded inferior in the society. In addition, the guards, being victims of oppression themselves, use oppressive language as a way of compensating for their own inability to liberate themselves. Paredes Raymond (1979) argues that “Oppression brutalises people and strips many of its victims of their humanity” (6). By being oppressive to their victims, the oppressed become the oppressors, resulting in social oppression. According to Ashipu, man has always exercised one form of power over another.

He says that this results into inhumanity which is “exercised through oppressive use of language.” In their bid to exercise their power over the weak, the guards end up oppressing the very people they are supposed to protect by using language that denotes prejudice. In addition, Askari III sees no difference between the prisoner and his friends. To him “the friends of the prisoner are as stupid as the prisoner himself” (59). His conclusion is based on assumptions rather than facts. Paradoxically, those branded stupid turn out to be cleverer than the prison guards. They manage to sneak a file into the cell thus securing Mwelusi’s freedom.

In the text a woman is portrayed as an object of sexual pleasure for the man. It is ironical that women such as Kaloo seem to accept this perception and draw pleasure from it: Kaloo believes the women of Butangi should “gyrate their groins for their chief” (4). This is in abide to impress the chief in order to gain favour from him. This reinforces Spivak’s argument that “women have always been forced to express themselves in the language of their oppressor.” The language of the oppressor represents power; hence women get an illusion of being powerful when they use the language of men.

Furthermore, the language used to address women’s issues shows subordination. Batu tells Kaloo that she will discover that “to be a woman is a great blessing.” Batu insinuates that Chief Bokono is sexually attracted to Kaloo, and she should feel privileged. This echoes what James Okipiliya(2005) says of language, that it “possesses a suggestive power beyond immediate lexical meaning” (78). Batu’s statement creates binary opposition between men and women. It ‘others’ the women on the basis of their physical attributes. Batu’s statement also portrays a woman as someone who depends on her ‘womanness’ other than intelligence to advance herself. This attitude explains the social prejudice that is subjected to women in many African societies. Ciarunji C. (1992) believes the African woman has been a victim of discrimination. It is therefore important for the society to change this perception and treat women with dignity.

Natala is a drama whose protagonist is Natala, a young woman who draws the wrath of society by refusing to be inherited after her husband’s death. The text addresses social issues that are brought forth by use of language that depicts oppression especially in relation to women. Using prejudicial

language, hyperbole and understatement, imagery and symbolism, the playwright addresses issues such as gender violence, poverty, economic oppression, and wife inheritance.

In *Natala*, prejudicial language is used as a tool for enhancing oppression against women. This is because the society in *Natala* is patriarchal. Tila, Wakene's wife, adopts the language of the patriarchy and fails to recognise Natala as an equal partner with Tango in property ownership. She tells Natala "... the man of the house hasn't forbidden us from coming to this house, this is, after all, my brother-in-law's house" (7). In other words, she believes Natala has no say over the husband's property. Tila was reacting to Natala's attempt to get rid of her after they had differed over Tila's borrowing behavior. Tila is unhappy with Natala's refusal to give her the amount of salt that she needed. When women ape and acquire the language of the patriarchy, they fail to realise they are oppressed. This confirms Spivak's argument that women are forced to express themselves with the language of their oppressors. Although Tila is oppressed, she does not recognise her own oppression, and instead, she adopts the language of the oppressor to enhance her own oppression and that of other women.

Moreover, poverty and lack of economic empowerment disadvantages women. Tila has accepted her inferior position and she expects Natala to do the same. She accuses Natala of assuming a superior position when she asks "Are you some sort of a god or what?" (5) Natala responds by telling Tila that she is just "a self-respecting Mortal" (5). The society has conditioned women against themselves, making them believe they are inferior. Natala's statement deconstructs the negative stereotype of women occupying a lower rank. She is liberated from inferiority complex. Tila on the other hand accepts second place, a factor which is enhanced by lack of economic empowerment. This state of affairs has reduced women to begging and some use tricks to get what they don't have. The fact that Tila is borrowing the most basic items shows that she is not economically empowered. The reader also learns that this is not the first time, she borrows all the time. Natala reminds Tila, "...it's only the other day that you came requesting for two cups of sugar..." (3), but Tila goes defensive. Being economically oppressed has contributed to the 'othering' of women who have to depend on men for financial support.

Negative stereotypes lead characters in *Natala* to oppress each other. This is shown by the relationship of dominance and subordination of different characters. Mama Lime accuses Natala of arrogance for not accepting to be inherited. She extends the derogatory language to Natala's family, hence her complaints to Mzee Balu: "How many times have I mentioned we married into the family of scornful snobs? Don't you notice the insolence in Natala?" (29) Mama Lime blames Natala for her family's failure to attend Tango's funeral. By portraying Natala and her Family negatively, Mama Lime sets the ground for Natala's oppression. This demonstrates how women use language to facilitate their own oppression.

Social practices like wife inheritance are used to oppress women. The widow's consent is not sought; the society decides for her. Mama Lime has no problem with wife inheritance. She acts as a spokesperson on behalf of the elders. She believes every misfortune that occurs in the society is as a result of Natala's refusal to be inherited. She says, "I have been sent by the elders to inform you that they expect the cord to be severed" (65). This statement shows finality, meaning Natala is not expected to question the elders' decision. The same sentiment is echoed in Mama Lime's words when she tells Natala "you have no say in the matter" (66). This means the woman's opinion is not considered. The society dictates a woman's life and decides her destiny. The elders blame Natala for the presumed misfortune in the clan. Thus, Mama Lime tells Natala "The elders of the clan will not accept your cancerous ulcer to continue pestering the clan" (67).

It is ironical that throughout the play, Mama Lime is presented as the biggest obstacle to women empowerment. She represents the struggle and challenges a woman has to go through to overcome the 'othering' in a patriarchal society. She enhances male chauvinism and patriarchal system and authority. In addition, Mama Lime supports and conforms to traditional practices that oppress women. She tells Natala "...our fore fathers were not fools when they opted to marry more than one wife, they knew that it would bring joy to the home" (41). Here, the word 'joy' is relative. To the elders who have adapted patriarchal authority, gratification of a man is more important than justice to a woman.

Widowhood is portrayed as an ulcer that eats up the woman. A part from being oppressed by men, a widow is also a victim of ridicule and suspicion from the married women. They use language that is discriminative in an attempt to put her down. A widow is associated with negative terms such as 'home-breaker' or a 'husband snatcher', words which enhance her vulnerability. Instead of women fighting collectively, they join men in fighting their fellow women. It is a case of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. Hence, Tila accuses Natala of scheming to steal her husband Wakene. She tells Natala, "... if you wish to get yourself a husband, you'll have to go look elsewhere" (71). Being a widow automatically puts Natala into another category of a potential husband 'thief'. We can therefore conclude that in the African setting widowhood is a tool that is used to oppress women both socially and economically.

Ruthven (1990) argues that women's challenges will go on for a long time if sexist language used by men to oppress women is not addressed. In *Natala*, the mortuary attendant believes women should give in to men's sexual advances. He believes 'a real man' does not require the consent of a woman to have sex with her. He tells Natala, "I have you cornered, you can't escape. You will know this day that I am a real man." (24) Natala counters this statement by telling him "And today you will know that I am a complete human being." The mortuary attendant expects Natala to pay him in kind if not in cash, showing his insensitivity and lack of empathy to Natala's misfortune. He represents male chauvinists who perceive women as sexual tools that can be taken by force. The statement "... I have you cornered, puts emphasis on physical (in) ability which portrays a woman as physically inferior to man.

Another instance of "othering" is presented as a flashback through a play within a play, where Natala and Balu act out the roles of Natala and the Mortuary attendant. Natala is expected to bribe him in order to have her husband's body. From the dialogue between Natala and the mortuary attendant, other negative stereotypes associated with women are brought forth. While addressing a corpse, the attendant insinuates that women are foolish. "Hey! You stop lying there foolishly like a woman!" (20) These words are meant to intimidate Natala and women in general. The simile the attendant uses creates a picture of inactivity and lack of motion, meaning that women are incapable of initiating any

kind of development. Jennifer Gassman says that women have the capacity to choose their own destinies other than those ordained for them by society or stereotype. Gassman's argument deconstructs the negative stereotype of women as the weaker sex.

Wakene believes he has the right to inherit his brother's wife and property. When he fails to achieve this objective, he arrogantly dismisses Natala as insignificant. He acts childishly and refuses to offer a chair to Natala claiming, "I didn't realise that you had come with someone." (56) This is to dismiss Natala in order to compel her to marry him. He further tells Natala that if she wants to live in "peace, dignity and harmony" (57) then, she should talk to Mama Lime and accept to be inherited. By laying down conditions and issuing threats, Wakene hopes to have his way and acquire his brother's property illegally. This study argues that the woman is discriminated against when it comes to property ownership. Wakene's argument downplays the role of the woman in the acquisition of family property, pointing to economic oppression.

Moreover, the woman is regarded as part of her husband's property; hence Wakene informs Natala that if she does not agree to be inherited, then she has no option but to move out of the house in two weeks' time. In addition, her children will be taken away from her, "I intend to move into this house in two weeks' time. (Empathetically) Needless to say, you are not taking the children with you." (79) By denying her the children, Wakene hopes to blackmail Natala into marrying him. The woman is dehumanised in most cases.

In the text, Wakene keeps referring to Natala as 'this woman'. For instance, when Mzee Balu decides to leave the decision of his son's burial to Natala, Wakene is infuriated and asks his father, "Why do you always support this woman?"(31) Wakene's reference to Natala as 'this woman' highlights negative gender stereotypes. Mama Lime, Wakene, and the elders represent people in the society who have embraced social stratification and patriarchal language. Those who have adopted the attitude of superiority expect a woman to play an inferior role and acquire silence as her perspective.

From the foregoing analysis of the three texts, women are presented as suffering double marginalization. First of all, they suffer under the patriarchy especially their husbands who expect total submission. They also suffer under societal constructions that treat them as inferior.

2.2.4. Prejudicial Language against the Citizens

The focus in this part is on how prejudicial language is used by the government to oppress people. Government officials who represent the system of power are presented as using language that delineates the common people. In turn, rifts between the government and the people appear.

In addition, class distinction is captured in the text by use of verbal and non-verbal language. Earlier on, the Askaris had subjected Mwelusi to verbal insults and torture. This scenario is replayed on the Askaris by Batu who uses insults and threats to ensure social stratification is maintained. When Askari II attempts to explain to Batu how Mwelusi had escaped from prison, his body language shows that he is scared. Askari II: (enters trembling) "...he is run away! "This declaration infuriates Batu who attempts to strike the Askari but misses. What follows is a stream of verbal abuses, "wildcat, useless monkey, where are your eyes useless creatures, what were you doing when he escaped?"(66)This demonstrates how language can be used as a form of oppression to intimidate people in a bid to maintain the status quo.

Hence, Batu and the other leaders in *Death at the Well* represent leaders in the society who use discourses of superiority to oppress those presumed 'inferior.' Each group uses oppressive language to intimidate and therefore control the one below. This creates a downward chain of oppression. Chief Bokono threatens Batu, his chief advisor, with possible execution if he fails to capture Mwelusi. He says "you must succeed by the fourth day, should you fail I too will chew human bones. And no doubt my teeth won't agree to chew the bones of the guards. They are not worth it." (72) Earlier on, Batu had used the same words on the soldiers, telling them "he will chew their bones" if they fail to capture Mwelusi. As threats and counter threats continue, the reader realises that no one is safe in the state of Butangi. As characters in their respective social level adopt the language of oppression, what comes

out is the struggle for power and domination in a bid to control the populace politically, socially and economically.

However, those who do not conform to the leadership are eliminated. Bokono says, “Those who show signs of non-compliance will have no choice but to be assisted to see the benefit of patriotism.” (72) This type of language creates constant fear in people’s lives. Physical fear transforms to psychological fear which in turn make the victims feel helpless. Franz Fanon argues that people should not fear physical death as this will only lead to other forms of death. He therefore advocates for assisting people to acquire the language of power which will lead to liberation. To him, “...one may remain physically alive only to serve the interest of the oppressor” (136). Fanon’s argument implies that the need for liberation should be more than the fear of physical death since the one who is oppressed is already ‘dead’ in other ways.

Lowering the value of human life, Kabitho in *Flowers in the Morning Sun* hopes to get away with crimes against humanity. This is the scenario in post-colonial Africa where leaders discriminate people based on ethnicity. For instance, Chebwe, in a monologue, struggles with his Good and Evil selves. His good self warns him against spilling innocent blood while the evil one argues that it is alright to spill the blood of immigrants since they will not vote for him. This argument lowers the value of human life especially the immigrant who is described as a snake. From the dialogue, the reader is drawn to the evil that is brought out by greed for power:

Good Self: It is improper to continue involving yourself in politics of bloodshed.
Evil Self: What is wrong with spilling blood?
Good Self: Blood is precious and spilling it is the height of evil.
Evil Self: You don’t understand politics, expel the migrants. They won’t vote for you
(32).

The question “What is wrong with spilling blood?” shows the indifference in leaders ‘attitude toward the electorate. They are not concerned with those who will not vote for them and they do not care how they ascend into power as long as they do.

In *Natala*, corruption and stereotypical language are presented through several characters. Natala presents the first instance of corruption through a flashback. She explains to Mzee Balu why Bala and she took a long time to bring her husband's body home. From this, the reader encounters police's involvement in corruption. She tells Mzee Balu that, "The police had set up several roadblocks along the route. And you know that when police spots a vehicle on the road, the computer in their heads clicks: oil my palm" (7). The idiom 'oil my palm' is a way of demanding for a bribe leading to economic oppression. The use of an idiom to ask for a bribe shows that corruption is deeply rooted in our society to the extent of acquiring its own language. The police do not care about the wellbeing of the people, as they deny Natala passage; they argue that "...the death of one person shouldn't be the cause of the ones left behind to starve to death!" (17). Language is used to enhance social ills such as corruption which hinders healthy economic growth.

The chief is another character whose language use signifies a government oppressing its people. When Natala seeks his assistance, he demands a bribe. He tells Natala that "a good turn calls for another." (47) Using the proverb, the chief authenticates his demand since a proverb is a linguistic device that is associated with wisdom. This proverb that alludes to bribery lays the ground for corruption, which results to economic oppression of the victims. Moreover, the chief assumes superiority over Natala and he expects nothing short of total obedience. The chief has acquired language and attitude of superiority an adoption from imperialism that has not changed over the years. This confirms Colin Lay's argument in *Underdevelopment in Kenya* who posits that 'post-colonial ideologies' were adopted from colonial ideology of superiority. In addition, the chief goes further to make sexual advances to Natala, who refuses. Her refusal leads her being accused of breaking the law. "...refusing to answer a question by the chief is tantamount to contempt of the government" (46). The chief's words are meant to subdue Natala. Equally, the words "by the chief" create superior status hence creating the binary opposition of superiority and inferiority. The institution represented by the chief serve as a symbol of oppression not only to women but also to anyone who cannot offer a bribe. Moreover, the chief uses figurative language to demand a bribe from Mzee Balu whom he accuses of holding a gathering without a permit for an assembly. He says, "... am prepared to bend the law a bit

so that you may proceed...” (34), which actually questions his obedience to the law. “The law requires any assembly to have the government’s approval” (34). [Sic] He further uses an idiom to enhance corruption; “Even machines need oiling occasionally.” (34) The statement demonstrates how people misuse language to oppress others and to suit themselves.

In this segment, the relationship between the government and the citizens as presented in the texts has been analysed. It is apparent that there exist tensions between the two. This is as a result of oppressive language the government agents’ use against the citizens.

2.3. Imagery and Figurative Language in the Context of Class and Gender Oppression

This section deals with imagery and figurative language and how they are used to capture socio-political and economic oppression as captured in the texts. Imageries are very important in presenting a work of art; they help clarify issues which would otherwise be complicated. This section explores imageries that are employed and how they bring out the aspect of oppression.

Imagery is introduced in form of a dream in *Flowers in the Morning Sun*. In the dream, Nyagachi describes the barking of a dog and “a shriek like that of someone breathing his last” (1). An explanation of what had triggered the dream then follows. There has been a conflict between two warring communities, the Ndikus and the Tanges. On the side of the Ndiku are the following characters, Kabitho, Tungai, Waito, Chengi, Walila, Gachono and Nyagachi. On the other hand, the Tange community is represented by Chebwe, Toiche, Nali, Neche and the recruits. The Tange see themselves as the ‘locals’ regarding the Ndiku as ‘visitors’. The dream therefore captures how violence manifests into psychological oppression on the victims. It is used as a symbol of pain and lack of peace. Nyagachi and Gachone are victims of ethnic violence and they have been evicted from their farms and are currently living in camps for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). By using women to introduce the theme of violence, the text demonstrates that it is the weak in the society that suffer most as a result of ethnic cleansing.

Apart from the psychological effect, physical and emotional effect of violence on women and children is highlighted. This is captured in the description of the situation by Nyagachi, that “mothers and children sleep in the biting floors that sting one’s lungs, children have died of pneumonia and the doors to the grave still remain open” (13). The use of metaphors individualises the pain, disillusionment and hopelessness of the victims. This perception is further enhanced by Nyagachi’s statement that “our lives will never be the same again...our lives and those of our children have been shattered beyond repair” (1-2). This is an example of how negative ethnicity affects people’s lives, particularly the marginalised groups. Furthermore, the emotional turmoil experienced by the victims of ethnic violence is captured in Nyagachi’s recollection of her husband’s murder which she describes using violent imagery. Nyagachi could hear “the gurgling air and blood in his throat” (39). The imagery of blood and the description captures the brutal treatment of the victims of tribal clashes which breeds disillusionment, hatred and vengeance. It further explains Nyagachi’s words to Gachone that their farms and properties were destroyed in the fire and they are now living in “hovels.” An indication of how ethnic violence affects people’s economic status.

In addition, crime against humanity has been addressed in the texts. Security agents are used to harass and intimidate people, forcing them to “live like animals” (40). The simile by Nyagachi shows that ordinary citizens have no control over what happens in their lives. The soldiers use guns to evict them from their farms and they are forced into trucks “like sheep headed for slaughterhouse” (41). The soldiers and the guns symbolise authority and superiority, creating a binary opposition where authority oppresses the masses. The simile “like sheep headed for slaughterhouse” demonstrates that the victims were not expected to ask questions, but to do as commanded. Their destiny is no longer in their hands, but in others’. Using violent imagery, *Flowers in the Morning Sun* captures political violence that is created by negative ethnicity.

Ironically, although Chebwe is oppressed; he does not mind using street children to fight his own selfish war. He is ready to exploit their unfortunate situation to benefit himself and his community. He fails to see them as children who need protection but as potential soldiers. He views them as subhuman and as mere tools to be used in a war that they do not understand. This ‘othering’ is further

demonstrated by the cops who are said to shoot the street children as many as five times even when they are not armed and are said to die like worthless rats further enhancing oppression of the vulnerable groups in the society. Tribal rivalry is given as an excuse to carry out acts of violence and to create social stratification. Nali recounts a massacre that happened in a country referred to as Ndarwa. She says:

The song began in the evening. One large drop hit the earth. The lightening tore the sky asunder. Next came thunder. Thunder and lightning! There came thunder, lightning and rain of blood! Loud thunder, blinding lighting and the red rain [Sic] There was a deluge of blood. No, Dad! Let's not sing that song. Let's not plant the seed for torrential rain of blood. I beg you Dad! (65)

The imageries capture the imagination of the reader and paint a picture of pain and destruction. The playwright is challenging political leaders who exploit ethnic animosity to remain in power. This also compares to the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya where political leaders incited people against each other. Moreover, Kabitho, a Ndiku elder, has no regards for the Tange. He uses negative imagery to discriminate against them. To him, it is an advantage to have a whole community wiped out so that he can give the “vultures and crows a feast on human flesh” (67). He has no compassion for anybody who is not from his community and he explains this by saying that “a snake begets a snake” (68). The images of vultures, crows and snake communicate violence and lack of peace and harmony. They also show dehumanisation which in turn breeds death. This scenario is captured in Nali and Waito's discussion on the violence he witnessed and the subsequent effect it had on the victims. From the dialogue, the reader perceives how violence affects the victims. Apart from the physical effect, it has long-term psychological effects. This is captured by Waito's description of the destruction he witnessed in a place called Lopindia. He says, “I saw a woman whose skin was grey, she was born with a black skin, just like us, but alas! The tongue of a bomb licked her out with hot saliva and left her grey!” (56) The magnitude of violence is compared to an animal which has a tongue and saliva to demonstrate what happens when one community assumes power over another. Waito further describes

a woman who is said to be 'a lunatic' after the bomb had exploded and "blasted her mind." These words bring out the psychological effect of violence as a result of political incitement.

Moreover, to maintain the status quo, political leaders administer oaths of allegiance. Those who take it are supposed to maintain blind loyalty to their 'leaders.' They are indoctrinated to believe that anyone who breaks the oath will face unspecified consequences. The oath therefore becomes a symbol of oppression since it ensures the 'victims' maintain silence to avoid being isolated. Moreover, leaders exploit fear to have total control over their followers. This culture of silence only benefits the leaders while the masses continue to suffer. This is shown in Chugu's reaction to Nali and Waito's questioning. Chugu is afraid of revealing the details of the oath for fear of the repercussions. Chugu says, "I've this fear that revealing the secret could spell doom for me" (57). Waito understands that the language of silence is equally oppressive and he tries to urge Chugu to conquer fear by talking about the oath in order to overcome psychological oppression.

Gachono describes her present predicament using a metaphor. She says that she has "stumps in place of hands" (71). She compares her lack of economic empowerment to disability. This is as a result of displacement from her farm and the destruction of everything she owned. Ethnic violence forces her children to drop out of school and to engage in immoral behavior, which has resulted in her son contracting HIV/AIDS which she fears will "dump him into the grave" (71). The daughter, on the other hand, has resorted to sexual immorality which has brought other challenges such as "diseases, pregnancies, and funerals" (71). Gachono's son and daughter represent young people in post-colonial Africa who are forced to express their frustration and disillusionment by engaging in immorality. Negative ethnicity prevents equal distribution of resources, therefore resulting to poverty. Hence, those who do not 'belong' are forced to devise their own means of survival. In many occasions the youths are the most affected.

The elders mislead the youths by inciting them to violence by using negative imagery against their opponents. Chebwe describes the Ndikus as 'useless' and thinks his own community is superior. By assuming a superior attitude, he manages to 'other' the Ndiku community and goes further to

challenge them into a war which he believes they can never win. He says that the Ndikus cannot dare to challenge the Tange community because they will get “fried in their own fat like pigs” (63). Using the idiom, Chebwe demonstrates his hatred for the Ndiku. When such negative perceptions and conceited attitude is adopted by leaders in society, they breed tension and conflict.

Nali on the other hand counters Chebwe’s argument by making a correction that the Ndikus and the Tanges will “clobber each other” (62). She says that in war, both sides stand to lose. Chebwe represents leaders in post-colonial states who capitalise on negative ethnicity to cause chaos. He wants Nali and Neche to support his argument that the Ndikus want to grab land from the Tanges. However, Nali demonstrates her knowledge of the situation by arguing that violence will never solve issues; it will only lead to more violence. Each generation will hear of the “catastrophe that befell the community ages ago. They will take up arms to seek vengeance and the river of blood will start to flow once again” (65).

Similarly, through imagery, *Death at the Well* captures socio-political oppression using several characters. For example, Andua, Mwelusi’s sister, takes some food to prison for her brother. AskariIII snatches the food and harasses her. When Andua attempts to defend herself, the guard tells her that she will be “visited with a slap... for treating me like your granny” (39). The message from the guard is that he can do as he wishes since he is better than her.

In an attempt to force Mwelusi to conform, Zigu, a state agent, threatens Mwelusi with dire consequences. This threat is delivered in form of an idiom: “Arrogance is like drunkenness; it could be that he does not quite comprehend his precarious present position” (64). Zigu uses language of superiority to intimidate those he presumes to be inferior to him. Ashcroft (2003) shows how language can be used to create social stratification. He says that “language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’ , ‘order’ and ‘reality’ become established” (36). According to Zigu, reality is chief Bokono and his kind of leadership and the truth is what come from the authority. Leaders in post-colonial Africa have formed their own truth contrary to the ‘truth’ as it is known by the masses.

This deconstructed 'truth' creates conflict between the leaders and the citizens. Paradoxically, the idiom Zigu uses describes the behaviour of the authority and its agents.

As Chief Bokono's cronies wonder how Mwelusi will be killed "escorted out," (65). The reader captures the conspiracies and extra-judicial killings that are carried out in contemporary societies. By killing Mwelusi, the state hopes to silence him, and to give a warning to those who may have similar thought of agitating for change. Mwelusi therefore represents political prisoners in post-colonial Africa who attempt to change the imperial ideology of superiority. He is a symbol of change and new ideology and his murder serves as a symbol of political intolerance in contemporary African society where death is used as a way of silencing 'enemies of the state.'

Using figurative language, suggestions are proposed as to how the prisoner could be eliminated. Zigu suggests that the prisoner could be 'escorted out' through an accident because as he says it is better to "strike the iron while still hot" (65). In ordinary circumstances, proverbs are seen as a sign of wisdom. However, in this context, proverb is used to authentic oppression through political violence. It is ironical that the government is planning to kill Mwelusi while at the same time trying to cultivate friendship with his mother Tanya. She uses the imagery of 'a dove' and 'a hawk' to explain why there can be no friendship between her and the state. She says:

How can a dove understand a hawk well: (she stops working and faces Batu). The dove and the hawk are two birds with different lifestyles. If both of us were doves or hawks then I'd have understood you well.... (8)

According to Tanya, there can be no genuine friendship between a dove and a hawk. Such a relationship will result in one group—'hawk', oppressing the other—'dove'. Edward Said uses the terminologies of the orient and the occident. According to Said, the orient has always been considered the 'other' by the occident. He argues that this kind of relationship breeds "fear, humiliation, hatred and violence. "Said's sentiment is captured in Tanya's words when she is informed that Mwelusi has escaped from prison. She tells Batu:

Has he escaped or is he just missing? To be in the grip of a python and later to go missing could mean that one has escaped. But it could also mean that the throat of the python has done its job. (82)

From this quote, it is evident that Tanya is worried that Mwelusi could have been eliminated. The imagery of a python emphasises oppression of the people by the government. Tanya is therefore a symbol of hope and liberation. By using figurative language and sarcasm she demonstrates that she is aware of the role the government has played in her predicament. She is not ready to believe political propaganda that her son is trying to “destabilise peace and development.” (83) She laments that her “chickens” are suffering and that one of them has been snatched by “honorable hawk”. Hence, animal imageries are used as a strategy to communicate the theme of political oppression in *Death at the Well*. In addition, the imageries help us to understand the effect of political oppression on individuals.

While symbolism and imagery are used to express class oppression in *Flowers in the Morning Sun* and *Death at the Well*, in *Natala* they are used to bring out gender oppression. Therefore, Mberia uses them to clarify the relationship between men and women and more so how the women in *Natala* are treated by the men and by their fellow women. From the beginning of the play, we encounter Tila, Wakene’s wife. We learn that she has the habit of borrowing items from Natala. She becomes aggressive and arrogant when Natala fails to give her the amount of salt she wanted. Tila is a symbol of economically and socially oppressed women in the society. Her husband, Wakene, who is supposed to provide for her, is a drunkard and very irresponsible. Therefore, Tila directs her frustration towards Natala. She goes on to threaten Natala and calls herself a leopard to demonstrate her superiority, upon which Natala informs her that “genuine leopards don’t advertise their claws.” (7) Natala is aware that Tila’s attitude is a way of covering for her own weakness. Tila is a symbol of the psychological and social effect of lack of economic empowerment on women.

Description of the weather on the day Tango is buried foregrounds Natala’s tribulation in the later part of the text:

It's sunset, a range of hills on the distant horizon frame the orange and gold sky. The dark and ominous clouds of an impending storm can be seen creeping in slowly. It is a scene that is neither visually appealing nor endearing to heart. (29)

The contrast between "orange gold sky" and "the dark ominous cloud" explains Natala's Life when Tango was alive and now that he 'is dead.' As a widow, Natala suffers mistreatment from the clan elders, Wakene, and even her fellow women. The weather is symbolically used to show what widows go through in a patriarchal society. The 'impeding storm' represents Natala's suffering in the hands of the patriarchy and society as a whole.

The psychological effect of death of a spouse is enhanced by Natala's action of kneeling before her husband's grave. This non-verbal gesture attracts the reader's attention to the widow's loneliness and isolation from the society. The words that follow the action help us to understand Natala's state of mind:

"If only I could utter word other than widow and orphans! These are heart-breaking words, words that fill my heart with pain and my eyes with tears. My poor orphaned children and their widowed mother! What a misfortune! What sorrow! What solitude!" (36)

The words communicate the message of pain and loss. Natala abhors the words widow and orphan, words that later form the genesis of her nightmares. Natala gives us an insight into the challenges that widows go through. The action and the words paint a picture of despair, disillusionment and hopelessness of a widow in a patriarchal society. In a way, this situation perpetuates the practice of wife inheritance.

Natala describes her relationship and that of her brother-in-law as that of a leopard and a hyena. As a hyena, Wakene is greedy and lazy; he hopes to forcefully dispossess Natala of her dead husband's property. On the other hand, she calls herself a leopard, meaning she is ready to fight for her rights and to defend her children. Unlike Tila, she is not afraid to face her adversary; she tells Gane that she

is ready to use her ‘teeth and claws’ (44). Natala demonstrates that in order to survive in a patriarchal society a woman should be brave and not allow herself to be put down. She calls Wakene “the devil incarnate” (45) when he stole the title deed from her house. However, instead of being discouraged, she swears to show Wakene that “there are humans who take on the devil in a wrestling contest” (45). By calling herself ‘human’ other than a ‘woman’, Natala sends a message that all human beings are equal regardless of their gender.

In the text, the chief is presented as a symbol of oppression and failure in systems of government. He exploits his position to oppress the masses and especially women whom he subjects to sexual harassment. When Natala attempts to seek assistance from the chief, he seizes the opportunity to ask for a bribe, which he thinks can be paid in the form of sex. He attempts to use words of endearment like “jewel before my eyes” to lure Natala (48). Using empty words to attract Natala, the chief disrespects her, seeing her as a sex object. On the other hand, Natala is presented as strong and assertive character. She tells the chief that “there are women who respect themselves and whose dignity is steadfast. Whether you coax that dignity with honey or knock it with a hammer.” (49) The text thus presents Natala as the ideal vision of a woman in post-colonial Africa, who is ready to stand up against any form of oppression. The chief ignores the rules and regulations that govern the “conducts of public servants.’ He calls Natala’s threats “Empty words that disturb ears like the din from an empty tin,” (50) Natala is not discouraged, and she threatens to report the chief to his superiors, the District Officer and District Commissioner. Natala becomes a symbol of women’s empowerment and liberation. Countering the language of oppression with the language of power, Natala succeeds in securing her own independence from the discourse of oppression.

Imagery and figurative language are successfully used to address issues that affect women in the society. As much as figurative language and imageries are used to demonstrate oppression, they are equally important in enhancing social justice and liberation. Hence women should stop expecting men to liberate them; instead they should strive to liberate themselves by adopting language that enhances social justice.

2.4. Hyperbole and Understatement as Manifestation of Oppression

This section focuses on hyperbole and understatement and how they are used as literary techniques to address the theme of oppression in the plays under study. These literary techniques serve to put emphasis or to create humour. This section investigates how hyperbole, in itself an act of exaggeration, is employed to address the theme of oppression and its different manifestation. On the other hand, understatement which is the act of making light of issues so that they appear less important than they really are is employed by the characters in the texts to trivialise the dehumanising effect of oppression in the society.

Therefore, these being postcolonial texts, they address issues that are pertinent to contemporary Kenyan society. Political oppression experienced in *Death at the Well* is captured in the use of hyperbole and understatement. The same applies to *Flowers in the Morning Sun* in relation to socio-economic oppression as a result of ethnic conflict. Finally hyperbole and understatement are applied in *Natala* to address gender discrimination which may lead to gender violence.

In *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, the writer employs hyperbole and understatement to address socio-political and economic oppression. For instance, Kabitho expresses his wish to have the Tange community wiped out regardless of age or gender. His argument that “a snake begets a snake” is an understatement that underrates the dehumanisation involved in the violence. He says that ‘one day even a baby snake will become a mature snake, hence the reason to wipe out the whole community. Kabitho trivialises the value of human life in a bid to oppress the Tange community. According to him people are guilty either by association or by birth.

He says:

Do you mean to say that the aged, children and women have no ethnic affiliation? A snake begets a snake. A snake’s parent is a snake. And no doubt the wife of a snake is not a worm or a millipede; she’s a snake! (68)

Kabitho also downplays the crime of killing indiscriminately and dismisses this atrocity with an idiom. This attitude demonstrates the monumental greed and self-centeredness of leaders in the society. They are ready to go to any length to remain in power. However, Tungai differs with Kabitho on how the war should be conducted. Although he agrees that the Ndiku community need to fight back, he does not agree with the killing of innocent people just because they belong to the “wrong tribe.” He tells Kabitho that if they are going to fight they should observe international humanitarian laws and avoid killing women and children. Kabitho on his part argues that since their enemies the Tanges did not abide by the law, the Ndikus are equally justified to ignore them since “International Humanitarian Laws are propagated by foreign nations and they do not apply to the Africans” (68). This statement underscores the importance of human life and the injustice of the leaders to the vulnerable groups in the society. In addition, Kabitho believes violence should be countered with violence and he authenticates this belief with a saying that “Tit for tat is a fair game” (9). To Kabitho, justice for the innocent is a sign of weakness and should not be entertained. He would like to ensure that “no human being, animal or bird are left alive,” as he says he would like to give “vultures and crows a real feast” (67). The imagery lowers the value of human life. It does not matter to him that these are human beings. In fact, he dismisses them with an insult by referring to the Tanges as ‘monkeys’ hence presenting them as insignificant thus lowering their dignity as human beings. This amounts to political and social oppression.

Raymond Feredes in *Oppression and American Ethnic Literature* posits that it is the right choice of words that creates the desired effect on the oppressed. By choosing words that exaggerate Tungai’s cruelty, the Ndikus succeed in spreading fear among the Tanges, thus acquiring a feeling of superiority. This creates ethnic tension between the Ndiku and the Tange. The exaggerated rumour turns out to be baseless when Tungai saves Nali from being executed by the Ndiku militia. Surprised, she tells Tungai that “the Tange believe that encountering you is like falling into a drum of oil”. The simile exaggerates Tungai’s character in an attempt to create fear among the Tange community. It is therefore clear that when words are well used, they can create harmony in the society but when they are misused, they can breed tension, disunity and social oppression.

In addition, Nali uses exaggerated imagery to describe leaders in post-colonial Africa. She says that bad governance “turns people into beasts, minus tails and ears!” The phrase helps to put emphasis on the effect of bad governance on the society. People lose their humanity and start treating each other like animals. She goes on to describe the effect of ethnic animosity and the violence that comes with it:

I saw corpses! Not one corpse, not two, not three, Waito I saw corpses! The ethnic cleansing at Ndarwa was cruel beyond belief. The massacre threw bodies into River Gera in large numbers as tree sheds dry leaves in a fierce wind (64).

This exaggerated description puts emphasis on violence that was experienced in a country referred to as Ndarwa. Using exaggeration or hyperbole as a literary technique, the playwright sends a message to post-colonial African States that what happened in Ndarwa could happen to any other country if negative ethnicity is not addressed. The contentious issue of land in post-colonial Africa could lead to ethnic violence if land laws are not implemented fully. Leaders exploit the question of land to manipulate the youths to engage in acts of violence with the promise of free land and other goodies. Chebwe incites the youths to violence by exaggerating the benefits of joining the warriors. He promises them land in the event that they agree to join and fight against the Ndiku militia. He says, “Listen, upon repossessing the land, the warriors will be the first to be given farms. We’ll be the owners of large and fertile farms. Should you want to own one of these, I will ensure that you get it.” (36)

Apart from using land to entice the youth, Chebwe capitalises on unemployment among them. In doing so, he hopes to build his own political image. The text also addresses the unfair distribution of resources where those who are “rightfully connected” become the beneficiaries while majority of ordinary citizens have nothing. Therefore, using exaggeration and understatement as linguistic devices, the text succeeds in addressing thematic concerns in post-colonial Africa.

In *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, the citizens oppress each other by using prejudicial language against their “enemies”. On the hand, in *Death at the Well*, hyperbole and understatement are presented

through sarcasm and exaggeration to address social political and economic oppression, especially the way the government oppresses its citizens. At the grassroots, we have the guards who implement decisions passed by the leaders. They also take advantage of their position to vent their frustrations by using language to intimidate and subdue their victims. Mwelusi, a political activist, finds himself in prison for “incitement and lack of patriotism” against Chief Bokono and the state of Butangi. The prison guards try to break his resistance by using sarcasm and ridicule. Two prison guards, Mweke and Talui, sarcastically address Mwelusi as Honourable Chief, a title that is exclusively reserved for Chief Bokono. This exaggerated title is supposed to make Mwelusi feel inadequate and guilty for supposedly betraying the leadership. Mweke and Talui follow orders blindly and they do not question their superiors. They torture Mwelusi hoping to get a confession that will prove him guilty of treason:

Mweke: How are you, O Honourable Chief of Butangi? (Mwelusi remains silent).

(Mweke addresses him again emphatically and with sarcasm) good morning, Honourable Chief is not talking. What did you do to him?

Talui: Could be he fell asleep with his eyes open.

Using exaggeration in form of sarcasm and ridicule, Mweke and Talui compensate for their own weaknesses. The guards, who are equally oppressed, fail to identify their source of oppression and therefore oppress one of their own. By using the language of the oppressors, they feel superior and hope to impress the political class. Furthermore, Mweke and Talui conduct a play within a play which captures the disillusionment in the state of Butangi. The citizens’ quest for good leadership is brought out in the dialogue although the dialogue is presented sarcastically to intimidate Mwelusi:

Mweke: Butangi needs a chief with a benevolent heart.

Talui: A far sighted chief?

Mweke: who doesn’t oppress a person, or family, or village?

Talui: Who doesn’t lose his temper randomly?

Mweke: Who has no envy?

Talui: One who has visions of building not demolishing (24).

From the guards' dialogue, the reader realizes that the people in Butangi are a disillusioned lot. Mweke and Talui sarcastically describe the qualities of a good leader in reference to Mwelusi. Paradoxically, these are the qualities that the leadership in Butangi lacks.

The guards assume the role of the jury in the cells; they interrogate, torture and implement judgment. The aim is to silence the citizens so that they do not question how affairs are conducted in Butangi. This is the state of affair in many African states. They have been turned into police states where security agents adopt the attitude and the language of the oppressor. This is further demonstrated by Zigu, Batu and Kame who heap empty praises on chief Bokono in abide to impress him. "You will rule Butangi for a hundred years! God personally installed you upon the seat!" (11) This is like a loyalty pledge and those who do not conform are branded traitors. Mwelusi, a political activist in Butangi, adamantly refuses to be brainwashed, and this earns him torture and abuse by the police. Torture and falsehood are among the tools used by government agents to force political prisoners to admit to real and imagined crimes. Talui tells Mwelusi:

That song of "I don't know" doesn't have a pleasing sound. It grates the ears and feelings and it is not pleasant to torture people; (in a voice displaying firm intention). I want you to tell us who the leader of Katakana is! (29).

The accusations leveled against Mwelusi are meant to make the citizens of Butangi turn against him as a traitor. The physical and psychological torture is meant to silence him. Though he is blind-folded and his hands and legs are tied with manacles, he still asserts that, "manacles will not kill our dream" (34). The government exaggerates security measures arguing that Mwelusi is a threat to security and therefore he should be incarcerated. Apart from propaganda, government agents use threats to oppress the citizens. Mwelusi is threatened with unspecified consequences for failing to beg for forgiveness. Batu tells Mwelusi that "trying to disturb the peace in Butangi is a dangerous offense. And refusing to beg for forgiveness for committing the crime is even more dangerous" (33). People are made to believe that an enemy of Bokono is an enemy of the state. This is the scenario in many post-colonial African states where there is no distinction between the state and its head. Spreading propaganda that

Mwelusi is a leader of a clandestine group is one way of ensuring the citizens remain loyal, since no one wants to be associated with a 'traitor'. By exaggerating Mwelusi's crimes, the leaders hope to turn the citizens against him. Mwelusi represents members of the society whose fight for democracy is suppressed by the state through exaggerated propaganda. In contemporary societies, political leaders exaggerate their ability and importance to ensure political survival. This results in political oppression of the masses by the leaders through the language of dominance.

This technique also allows this study to criticise the behavior of the prison guards as presented in the texts. Although they break prison regulations at will, the prison guards do not allow Tanya to see her son claiming that; "prison regulations do not allow you to see even his hair" (59). They exaggerate their concern for prison regulations to justify their treatment of the prisoners and those branded "enemies of the state," thereby delineating the ordinary citizen. This is a pointer to the decay in the security sector. The guards work for the interests of individuals rather than work for the good of the people. Tanya says that "Butangi has no guards. The guards that used to belong to Butangi are now the guards of Chief Bokono, his family and friends." (84) The message that this study passes is that in post-colonial African states, the police and other security agents are compromised to serve the interests of political leaders at the expense of the masses.

When the plan for Mwelusi's death is complete, the state agents led by Batu, Zigu and Kame decide to fake explanations that will be fed to the people. Zigu suggests that the prisoner should "die of heart attack in jail." On the other hand, Batu believes Mwelusi's death should be organised to create a sense of cause and effect. This way, the citizens of Butangi will not complain for long. As Batu says; "Their grumbles will be like a passing cloud. Here now, gone tomorrow" (65). This is an understatement to demonstrate the leaders' disregard for human life and lack of political goodwill. Finally, Batu's suggestion is adopted, he says, "We could announce to the public that the prisoner says he is having trouble with heart palpitations. Next we could tell them...the good doctor fails to save his life. He dies." (65)

By spreading lies, Batu hopes to protect his own interests and to silence anybody who may appear too inquisitive. In addition, Batu believes the people of Butangi will turn against Mwelusi once they learn he is “out to cause bloodshed” (66). This is constructed propaganda by the leaders to turn the citizens against each other. The leaders ensure they turn the society against the ‘traitor’. Language can therefore be used to divide and turn people against each other, enabling the authority to control and dominate them.

Interestingly, propaganda and threats are not limited to ordinary citizens alone; the leaders use them against each other in their greed for power. For instance, Kame attempts to warn Batu against spilling innocent blood. However, Batu reacts furiously and calls Kame a traitor and threatens to deal with him. Instead of being intimidated, Kame calls Batu a murderer and insinuates that he might decide to reveal a secret of a murder that Batu is supposed to have committed. “Don’t fool yourself; your dark secret will spill out one of these days” (66). The text, addresses some of the crimes the leaders commit against the citizens. This creates a binary opposition of an oppressive system on one side and the masses on the other. Through dramatic irony, prisons are presented as facilities for oppressing the masses other than for confining criminals. The law is implemented selectively to favour the leaders who exaggerate the crimes of the subject as a weapon for domination.

Hence, in an attempt to divert the people’s attention from the political class, Batu orders the soldiers to attack civilians. These attacks cause a lot of suffering due to the soldiers’ brutality. When Chief Bokono shows his dissatisfaction with the attacks, Batu uses an understatement to justify police brutality. According to him, the attacks are necessary since they are “political strategies and strategies of self-defense” (70). According to Batu, a few deaths are necessary to keep the people on check. Although Chief Bokono does not agree with his chief advisor, he does not take any action. Consequently, more crimes are committed. Accused of being evil, Batu says that “politics has no evil beyond comparison”, meaning that politics is lawless. This argument undermines the democratic space, creating dictators in the society. It also ignores the pain and destruction that come as a result of political violence, which leads to displacement of people.

Violence that is carried out by the leaders in an attempt to eliminate their opponents ‘shocks the reader. For instance, Batu’s philosophy that “if you don’t straighten your opponent, he’ll end up straightening you” (70) is part of the strategy to oppress people. Batu does not see any problem in glorifying violence; he calls it “strategies for silencing the ever discontented” (70). Batu’s argument underrates the effect of violence on the victims making it part of their culture. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* argues that “oppression is above all else the practice and institutionalisation of violence” (136). This implies that when violence becomes part of the culture of a people, then oppression becomes part of their existence.

On the other hand, using exaggerated slogans, the leaders in Butangi hope to control people’s way of thinking and perception. Slogans such as: “One Butangi! Bokono! Bokono forever” discourage political fairness. Citizens have been brainwashed to believe Chief Bokono “will rule forever.” He is neither challenged nor questioned as this is interpreted as lack of patriotism which automatically makes one an enemy of the state. It is interesting to note that patriotism in Butangi is measured in “degree.” Gege explains to Batu that he could not wait with the other youth to be summoned since “the degree of the love for the Chief varies from person to person” (7), to which Batu responds that “That’s high level of patriotism.” By exaggerating the importance of the leaders in the society, the citizens contribute to their own oppression. They fail to hold the leaders accountable for their actions, instead helping them to maintain the status quo.

In addition, exaggeration is used in form of religious language which functions as a tool for controlling people psychologically. Bokono believes he is chosen by God and his authority is ordained in heaven and therefore, he cannot be questioned. He says:

Leadership is a gift from God. My authority is from above. God enthroned me upon the seat of power of Butangi. He did that because of His love for Butangi. His purpose had me installed upon the chief’s seat (11).

This demonstrates how contemporary leaders believe their voice is the voice of God. Hence, any kind of questioning or contradiction is met with decisive brutality and threats. In an aside, the text

demonstrates how leaders justify their refusal to relinquish power to other people. Bokono proclaims that “I will continue to rule Butangi whether the inciters like it or not! Were it not for me, Butangi would have been in turmoil long time ago.” (11).

Bokono represents leaders who are conceited in their ability to lead without acknowledging other people. This attitude is further enhanced by citizens who exaggerate their devotion and obedience to the leaders. Zigu tells Bokono that you will lead Butangi for a hundred years (11). This kind of religious language elevates the leaders to the level of the untouchables. Ordinary citizens, on the other hand, are reduced to what Homi Bhaba (1983) refers to as “the mimic man” (133). The oppressed adopt the language of the oppressors and therefore fail to fight for their own liberation

This perspective is demonstrated by Batu, Zigu and Kame who use imagery to exaggerate Chief Bokono’s abilities in an effort to secure political positions. Zigu says: “you are the best worker in Butangi. Better than all the rest.”[Sic] Batu seizes the opportunity to add that “your work, excellent leader, is the lifeline of Butangi.” This shows how leaders in post-colonial Africa disregard ethics while awarding positions in government. Qualifications mean little or nothing as long as one is “politically correct.” In order to benefit politically and economically, citizens are expected to heap praises on the leaders whether they are genuine or not. However, those who fail to toe the line are disregarded regardless of their qualification. This amounts to political and economic oppression. Batu, Zigu and Kame try to outdo each other in their praises for Chief Bokono since empty rhetoric is the measure of qualification:

Batu: The rest of the people are behind you, honourable beloved.

Zigu: They are following you on firm feet.

Kame: They follow you diligently.

Batu: They follow you with all their hearts.

Zigu: And with all their blood (10).

In their attempt to impress the inflated ego of the head of state, the people lose their own identity and therefore the power to control their own destiny. Mweke convinces Gege to get rid of his brother

Mwelusi. By exaggerating the gains, Mweke succeeds in turning Gege against Mwelusi. Mweke plays on Gege's greed when he tells him that "I don't know whether you understand what it means to marry the daughter of the honourable Chief Bokono, your life will take a flight into the sky" (78). This exaggerated success and the possibility of gaining both wealth and fame convinces Gege to kill his own brother, thus causing family disintegration. This confirms Fanon's argument that in the quest for personal gain, people end up betraying collective dreams. Consequently, leaders use a language that promises people upward social mobility, and this leads to their manipulation.

In addition, Gege is awarded a title after killing Mwelusi—"Diamond Spear", in recognition of what the state terms as his "love for honourable chief" (105). This is a hyperbole to maintain the philosophy of divide and rule. It is also a symbol of bad governance which leads to socio-political oppression. Unlike Bokono, Nyalwe is presented as a symbol of an ideal leader who captures the vision of this study. She is the voice that speaks on behalf of the masses. She warns Bokono against "listening to false praises and to the songs of hypocrisy" (21). Nyalwe understands that the praises are not genuine but a strategy by political leaders to service their greed. By using a woman as the voice of reason and that which represents the oppressed, the writer deconstructs the negative stereotypes that are associated with women.

The playwright further uplifts the role of women by using another female character, Azena, to address the theme of corruption. She says that "some people value their stomachs more than their life" (87). By comparing corruption with death, Azena demonstrates the effect of corruption on the society. She presents a scenario where some people compromise the values of the society for their own personal interests. The hyperbole also emphasises the effect of corruption especially to the "many that have eyes that don't see" (87). Using Azena, the text echoes concerns on the disparities that happen as a result of corruption. The leaders are elevated and "placed intermediary between humans and God." Azena adds that the leader is perhaps closer to God than the people. The masses are left to design their own ways of survival.

Unlike the other two texts, in *Natala*, the author uses hyperbole and understatement as linguistic devices to capture economic oppression on the women. In Scene One, Tila's borrowing and arrogant attitude is exaggerated to address the theme of poverty and economic oppression in the society. She does not appreciate the kind gesture, an indication of how poverty and lack of economic empowerment dehumanises people. Natala says, "But Tila, it's only the other day that you came requesting for two cups of sugar, which I gave you. If you remember well, I also gave you Kerosene four days ago. Now you want salt." (3) It is not the first time Tila is borrowing things from Natala. Tila adopts unfriendly attitude, which is also exaggerated. Although Tila's financial problems are as a result of her husband's irresponsibility, she opts to attack Natala instead of looking for solutions. The playwright exaggerates Tila's borrowing habit in a bid to address poverty and its effect in the society. By using Natala, a woman to help Tila, the text is passing a message that women have the capacity to liberate themselves from economic oppression.

Needless to say, economic oppression is not limited to women alone; the mortuary attendant mistreats Natala in the hope of getting a bribe. He complains that the cost of living is very high. He uses figurative language to describe the situation created by financial instability. He says, "The cost of living is like nowadays, shooting to the moon... meanwhile salaries have stagnated... I've seven mouths to feed; I can't afford to dose off for a second." (23)

The hyperbole put emphasis on financial situation and it explains the man's hostile treatment of Natala. The fact that Natala is grieving is of no interest to him as he hopes to gain from her misery. He informs Natala "If you don't wish to dip your hands into your pockets, that is not a problem, there is still a way out, an easier way." (23) The mortuary attendant uses the economic situation as an excuse to exploit women sexually. By overstating his economic misfortune, he hopes to justify his demand for a bribe.

Moreover, the chief exaggerates his own superiority which he exploits to oppress people financially. He demands a bribe from Natala who refuses to comply arguing that she is "totally opposed to graft" (34) the chief changes his tactics and makes sexual demands. When Natala turns him down, she is

accused of breaking the law. “Refusing to answer a question by the chief is tantamount to contempt of the government.” (46) The chief rides on the exaggerated opinion of himself as being the government. He exploits his position to oppress people socially and economically. He represents failed government systems that are mandated to help people, but instead, oppress them.

On the other hand, Wakene uses understatement to oppress Natala economically. He is greedy and hopes to inherit Natala in order to acquire his late brother’s property. When Natala refuses to be inherited, Wakene dispossess her of everything including the children arguing that “You’ve decided to set yourself apart from our family; you can’t continue benefitting from the property.” (79) By underscoring Natala’s contribution in the acquisition of property, Wakene hopes to render Natala helpless and economically disadvantaged. He trivialises a woman’s role in economic development, thus forming the basis for denying them what is rightfully theirs. By underrating a woman’s economic contribution, men deny women economic empowerment and self-dependence, resulting in economic dependence on men. On the other hand, Natala represents women empowerment. She tells Wakene that he is “attempting to milk a bull” (80) to demonstrate how hard it is for Wakene to evict her from her own house. By countering understatement with a hyperbole, Natala succeeds in countering the language of oppression.

Hyperbole has been used as a language device that captures oppression in the three texts. Using hyperbole, political oppression, gender violence, and ethnic conflict are addressed. Political leaders have been presented as having an exaggerated opinion of themselves, hence downplaying the role of the other members of society. On the other hand, the texts capture the roles of male and female characters, with male characters minimizing the role of women represented by the female characters.

2.5. Conclusion

The analyses of *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, and *Natala* reveal that there is a relationship between language and oppression. By analysing what different characters say and do, it is evident that the playwright has succeeded in addressing serious issues such as corruption, ethnicity, bad governance, and gender violence. The focus has been on the characters and how they relate to

each other through what they say or do in a bid to capture any discourse that portrays oppressive treatment.

Three language devices have been analysed to demonstrate how they are used to capture oppression which is the main theme. The texts demonstrate that derogatory or prejudicial language is a tool that is used to oppress people in society. It could be based on age, gender, or ethnic background. Hyperbole and understatement is another language device that has been analysed to reveal the role it plays in socio-political and economic oppression. The characters exaggerate some issues to create tension and conflict in the society while others trivialise serious issues such as violence to enhance oppression. Other thematic concerns such as greed, corruption and extra-judicial killings have been addressed using symbolism and imagery and how they link to oppression. It is therefore right to say that language has different impacts on people's lives depending on how it is used. Language is therefore very important in interpreting meaning since it can be a source of power or oppression.

3.0. CHAPTER THREE: SARCASM, IRONY AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AS TOOLS OF PROTEST

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focuses on language devices used to capture oppression in the selected texts. The focus is prejudicial language as a way of ‘othering’, imagery and symbolism to explain class and gender oppression, as well as understatement and hyperbole in relation to oppression. However, there is a way in which the author has equipped characters with language that counters oppression. This chapter therefore focuses on how characters use language to protest against oppression by the systems of power in the selected texts. In particular, this chapter analyses three language devices employed by the playwright to communicate protest against oppressive discourses: sarcasm, irony, and figurative language. In different ways, they come across as tools for protest and quest for justice.

3.2. Sarcasm as a Tool for Protest

There is a way in which the playwright has equipped the victims of oppression with language that demonstrates their awareness of the failures and betrayals of the system in power. When language is well utilised, it can be a tool for liberation, especially if the oppressed do not fear to use it to counter oppressive discourses. Beria has equipped the characters who are oppressed with sarcasm as way of protesting against the systems of oppression. In the plays under study, sarcasm is used to protest against oppression in the society. James Okipiliya (2013) argues that “language possesses a suggestive power beyond immediate lexical meaning” (78). This means that language can have more than one interpretation depending on the context and the circumstance under which it is used. He further argues that “the suggestive power of language can be appreciated when we analyse the powerful effect of certain expressions from the speaker” (78). In other words, if the oppressed can learn the language of power, they can liberate themselves.

For instance, in *Flowers in the morning Sun*, sarcasm is widely used by the characters to demonstrate their awareness of the source of oppression. Kabitho, for example dismisses the news from the

national radio that security has been beefed up. He sarcastically informs the reader about the real security situation and faults the District Commissioner for misleading people and making them go back to their farms. He says: “There is a high degree of tranquility in this country. That’s the reason people have run away from their farms. They have run away to escape the arrows that comes forth from the bows of peace” (6). Using the words ‘peace’ and ‘bows’ the playwright has managed to deconstruct the meaning intended. The government intended the masses to believe there is peace and tranquility, but from Kabitho’s monologue, the reader realises that there is no peace and the situation is still volatile. In the above quote, sarcasm serves as a tool for protest to demonstrate that contrary to the government’s intension, Kabitho is not convinced and so he resorts to sarcasm as a tool to protest against the government’s insincerity. In the contemporary society, those presumed weak can use sarcastic language to protest against an oppressive system. This kind of language both ensures the message is communicated and saves the speaker from prosecution.

Nyagachi admonishes Kabitho for failing to organise the Ndiku men to protect his community against attacks from the Tange community.

Nyagachi: Oh, how I long for the past-those days when our wombs used to bring forth men.

Kabitho: you still do bear men. Nyagachi, look at me.

Nyagachi: Ah! Why should I look at you! You’re just a fellow woman (to Gachono) Gachono bring him a skirt and a petticoat so that he may be properly dressed in order to stop dressing as though he were a man (3).

Being a strong woman, Nyagachi understands her position and wishes she could change the whole situation. She also knows what should be done in regard to protecting her community, but she lacks the means to do so. This explains her attitude when she tells Gachono that men are no longer men but just women who are improperly dressed. In other words, although she knows what should be done, the society has defined different roles for women and men, but mostly inhibiting women’s social

participation. Hence, Jeniffer Gassman demonstrates the power of women when she argues that women have the capacity to perform as well as men. She sees the assumption of men being superior to women as a misconception that results from social conditions other than nature. Nyagachi uses sarcasm to portray the strength and power of women who are forced to operate within the traditional mould, yet they are clearly capable than society permit them to be. She employs sarcasm to protest against the society's treatment of women.

Similarly, Neche sarcastically puts off her husband, Chebwe, when he attempts to prevent her from going on a rescue mission for their daughter who had been taken hostage by the Tange militia. According to her, she is as capable as any human when it comes to dealing with tasks that are exclusively regarded as men's. She says.

Neche: You could only stop me if I was going to use your legs.

Chebwe: Madness does not only manifest itself by one walking naked in public.

Neche: Definitely not, otherwise you and your friends would be roaming naked collecting trash (77).

Neche presents her views and asserts her authority without jeopardizing her relationship with her husband. She criticises her husband and the Butangi leadership without causing conflict and this trait raises her social power and also helps her obtain liberation from oppression. Although Chebwe sees Neche's determination to break away from the norm as 'madness', she refuses to be contained in gender roles that only enhance inequality. Moreover, Neche uses sarcastic language to protest against Chebwe's involvement in clandestine activities which she calls 'activities of darkness' (31). Although Chebwe tries hard to hoodwink Neche, he does not succeed. She is aware that the presumed 'trip' to Arusha is cover-up for Chebwe's involvement in activities against the citizens of Butangi. He pretends to be ignorant of the fact that his face and the details of his activities were in the newspaper. Sarcastically, Neche points out that she is surprised because "thieves now steal clothes, bodies and even people's appearances" (29). In addition, they steal "someone's voice as well as their manner of walking". Sarcasm is meant to demonstrate Neche's intellectual capability and her power of

reasoning. It is therefore in order to argue that women are intellectually capable of making sound decisions if and when the society gives them a chance.

Across the three texts, it has emerged that female characters use sarcasm more than the male characters. This can form a gap for further research. In *Death at the Well*, Tanya is aware that Batu and by extension the government of chief Bokono hides under the guise of friendship to extract information from her. She knows the 'friendship' is a trap. Batu and Tanya had grown up together; they knew each other from childhood, a relationship Batu attempts to capitalise on. He tries to convince Tanya to trust him, but Tanya is wary. She is aware of his role in her son's imprisonment and therefore puts him off. She uses sarcasm to show him that she is aware of the plot to make her reveal her son's whereabouts. She says "so welcome then, friend since those delightful dances of our youth" (82). Although Tanya does not have the might to fight the government, she makes use of language to fight the injustice done on her son. Tanya demonstrates that those who are oppressed by dictatorial governments have the power to liberate themselves by exposing any scheme that could interfere with social justice. Using language without fear, she demonstrates the power and the role of language in communicating the intended message. Through sarcasm, she is able to counter propaganda and expose the evils in the society. For example, when Batu informs her that the government is committed to stumping out wickedness, Tanya sarcastically points out that Batu's explanation does not change the fact that people have suffered. She says, "And the dead shall be resurrected! And their property salvaged from the flames!" In other words, the government should have been proactive in protecting people from suffering instead of waiting for the damage to occur.

Similarly, Azena exposes the government's deceit by exposing the truth:

Batu: What a shame! Honorable chief Bokono constantly advises us to leave in love and peace. I am shocked to hear that there are citizens in Butangi who ignore his wise call. But not to worry... [Sic]

Azena: ...of course, we are not worried! Why should we worry? Some people have been injured, some have been killed. A lot of our properties have been destroyed. What humans would be worried when they are leading such a good life?

This is a call to post-colonial regimes not to take ordinary citizens for granted. As much as they may lack the means to fight injustices, they do not hesitate to use language to point out the evils in the society as well as to protest against oppressive governments. Both Tanya and Azena use sarcastic language to articulate their thoughts and feelings hence attaining freedom from oppression. They adopt what Gassman (2006) refers to as constructed knowledge perspective. This is where characters are involved in creating knowledge that helps them to view their situation and therefore initiate their liberation. This special use of language can be adopted by the subaltern groups in post-colonial Africa to deconstruct propaganda and therefore initiate change.

Sarcasm in *Death at the Well* and *Flowers in the Morning Sun* is used to protest against oppressive systems. However, in *Natala*, the protagonist, Natala, uses sarcastic language to counter accusations leveled against her. Natala is accused of planning to 'steal' Tila's husband with the help of Mama Lime. Wakene is irresponsible and a drunk, Natala therefore shows the irony of fighting over him as demonstrated in the following dialogue.

Tila: Let me tell you this; you won't succeed in what you're planning with Mama Lime.

Natala: Now I get it... Natala and mama Lime have a project....a project as valuable as gold. And what might the project be? To make sure that Natala shares a husband with Tila...This is fired by an insatiable desire in her bosom.... The dream of feeling the heart of Tila's husband beating on her chest; the dream of soaking in sweat of Tila's husband... (70).

Natala's sarcasm is motivated by her belief in herself as a human being. She believes in gender equity, "...and you'll know that I am a complete human being" (24), she had told the mortuary attendant earlier. Natala represents the strength of a woman; she uses sarcasm to protest against the assumption of men being better than women. On the other hand, Tila represents women who believe in the superiority of men and would go out of their way to impress them. She tells Natala that Wakene does

not need another woman since “he is in the hand of an expert in the art of massage.....and Tila gives him all that he needs” (70). In response, Natala sarcastically points out “maybe that’s why Wakene looks so forlorn. Perhaps those are the very reasons that have driven him to hit the bottle so hard. He has been pampered so much that now it hurts” (71). In other words, society should review its treatment of women and avoid gender discrimination. On the other hand, women are challenged to support one another rather than attack each other. Natala uses sarcasm to assert herself; she refuses to conform to patriarchal authority, making her a symbol of female empowerment and liberation. Unlike Tila and Mama Lime, Natala has acquired knowledge and the language of liberation. She reinforces an argument by Fredrick Peterson(2010) that “the one who is in control of knowledge is in control of power and subsequently controls what can be said and claimed” (9). Natala has access to the discourse of power and therefore controls her own life. Use of sarcasm in *Natala* creates aesthetic effect and also helps criticise the society indirectly for its treatment of women.

The analysis of the texts reveals characters widely using sarcasm as a form of protest. By glossing their language, the characters are able to challenge the leaders without creating open confrontations. Sarcasm thus allows the oppressed to detach themselves from the object of their sarcasm. Through this style, issues related to gender discrimination, ethnic prejudice, and political oppression are addressed in the texts. From this analysis, sarcasm is found to be an effective language device for countering oppression.

3.3. Irony and Figurative Language for Social and Political Protest

This section examines how irony and figurative language are employed by characters as forms of protest. As characters get oppressed, they devise ways of dealing with oppression. One language device employed in the text is irony, which enables the characters to criticize the oppressor without causing direct conflict. This way, the message is passed and objective achieved. Together with irony is figurative language which is used by the characters to protest against the agents of oppression. The words they use do not have direct relationship to their lexical meaning, preventing them from possible prosecution.

3.3.1. Irony as a Tool for Social-Political Protest

In the previous section, the use of sarcasm to protest against oppressive systems was discussed. However, in this section the study examines how characters use irony to protest against oppression and attempt to restore human dignity.

It is only when the oppressed learn the language of power that they can get liberated. For instance, Neche admonishes the minister for what she calls the ‘hypocrisy’ of political leaders. She brings out the irony of what the minister does against what is expected of him:

Instead of leading the people along the road to social and economic development as well as ensuring that peace and harmony prevail among our people, you and your ilk are engaged in plots and intrigues that are detrimental to the very people you claim to lead, all in the name of winning the forthcoming elections. You and your ilk are dangerous enemies of the state... (76).

Neche demonstrates a high level of political consciousness that sets her as the voice of the common citizens. She brings out the irony of the roles played by leaders in contemporary societies who oppress the same people who gave them power. She does not fear to speak her mind; she has acquired the ability to utilise language to comment on issues affecting the common citizens and even refers to the minister not as honorable but as an ‘awful hooligan’. Neche’s ability to point out the ills in the political class and her use of powerful language to offer solutions is a pointer that women are politically mature and the society should give them a chance to express themselves. In *Flowers in the Morning Sun* language is effectively used to give voice to the weak in the society. By powerful use of language, the characters have shown that language is an important tool in exposing and fighting the ills in the society. Therefore, as long as people do not fear to use language to counter oppression, then there is hope for a better future in post-colonial Africa.

Similarly, Toiche a young man and a member of the Tange Militia, decides to quit the militia although at a great risk to his life. He tells Chebwe:

Yes, I did take the oath. However, I took it on the basis of inaccurate information: you told us that Ndiku were forming parties in order to forcibly take leadership of the country after which they would dispossess us of our property... now the truth has dawned upon me. There is more to it than the need to repossess land (35).

Toiche points out the irony of his situation. He joined the militia thinking he was fighting for his benefit. It is later that he learns he is being used together with the other young men to advance the leaders' agenda. That is why he says "now the truth has dawned upon me." He realises that the war against the Ndiku is actually an excuse by the leaders to acquire power and control of the resources.

Toiche overcomes the fear of physical death and uses language that depicts freedom from manipulation to acquire his own freedom. He demonstrates this freedom by confronting Chebwe, the leader of the militia. Toiche's words show that he is capable of making informed decisions after acquiring the 'truth'. He counters propaganda with what he believes to be the truth. The expression "Now the truth has dawned on me" demonstrates absolution and non-conformity. If the in youth contemporary societies acquire knowledge and appropriate language, they can be free from manipulation by politicians. They should not fear to utilise language to counter constructed truths.

In addition, Mwelusi in *Death at the Well* uses language to bring into focus the problems that ails post-colonial Africa. He identifies different types of wars which he says are bred by oppression. He argues that for people to be liberated from oppression, they must identify not just physical war, but also the psychological and emotional wars and consequently fight them. Mwelusi's ability to focus on a wider perspective on the question of oppression means he has the potential to achieve justice and liberation for the victims of oppression.

This sentiment is echoed by Azena who addresses the use of the oppressed to propagate oppression. According to Azena the authority manipulates the guards who are victims of oppression themselves to oppress the citizens. She says that the guards need sympathy other than condemnation since they are ignorant of their own disadvantaged position. Azena's assessment is captured thus:

...that is the disadvantage of those who serve the rulers with their bodies while their minds remain a sleep. They tend to identify with the rulers, and tend to think that the enemies of their masters are their enemies as well. They forget that their position in life is totally different from that of their masters. They should be pitied (54).

According to her, it is ironical that the guards who are equally oppressed by the authority fail to identify their enemies. Instead, they oppress the masses, hence a clear indication that in human relationships there is constant reversal of power centers. The guards ape their masters and they end up oppressing the very people they are supposed to protect. Azena argues that these people follow the leaders blindly and hence fail to think critically of their action "...those who serve the rulers with their bodies while their mind remains asleep..." (54).

This sentiment is shared by Chief Bokono's wife Nyalwe, when she tries to warn her husband against his dependence on false praises and empty rhetoric from his advisers. She is aware of the fact that majority of the citizens are not happy with her husband's leadership. However, Bokono ignores her and choose to believe his cronies. She says, "You would rather listen to false praises and to the songs of hypocrites!"(21) Nyalwe's words point to the irony of the situation. Although she does not occupy any official position, she is more aware of the reality on the ground as compared to her husband, Chief Bokono, the head of state. In addition, she does not fear to confront her husband with the question of corruption in his government. She says, "When the regulations of Butangi are disobeyed to satisfy your friends, you are content to turn a blind eye so that you don't see what is going on". Nyalwe utilises language to capture the vision of an ideal leader. She is presented as the voice of reason in an otherwise disillusioned society.

Nyalwe's concerns are echoed by Mwelusi who explains the source of agitation in the state of Butangi. These concerns are presented in a monologue:

Mwelusi: Butangi needs real peace, Butangi needs peace that is built around freedom, justice, respect and progress for all people. Manacles will not kill our dream. Our hearts are weary. Bad governance! Poverty and hunger! Looting of public funds! Manacles! The use of force!

Shedding of blood! Torture and assassination of leaders who dares to fight for justice! Denial of the right to access the water well. [Sic] That's progress for the Butangi people! It has been that way since the rule of Chief Mlima (34).

Mwelusi is accused of trying to disturb the peace in Butangi by advocating for change. According to the leaders in there is peace and progress as long as Chief Bokono is in power. Anyone who has a contrary opinion is eliminated through assassination. Mwelusi therefore informs the reader what he thinks of such kind of progress. It is clear that there is neither peace nor progress in the state of Butangi. Mwelusi shows the irony of the situation by use of figurative language, "That's progress for Butangi people!"(34) He paints a picture of the real situation in Butangi where leaders use their positions to oppress ordinary citizens while claiming to have progress and democracy. He becomes the voice for the people of Butangi despite the risk to his own life. Being a post-colonial text, *Death at the Well* addresses issues that still affect present day African states. Human rights abuses and unequal distribution of resources are concerns that still affect the society to date.

Mwelusi represents the voice of the marginalised in the society like Kaloo and Azena who cannot speak for themselves. He posits that, no amount of intimidation will stop him from fighting for democracy. "... My senses are free. They are as free as the wind; manacles will not kill our dream" (34). The use of the simile 'as free as the wind' demonstrates freedom of choice and determination of the oppressed to liberate themselves. Mwelusi uses the simile to demonstrate that the authority in Butangi can only imprison the body but not the mind. This demonstrates the will of Butangi citizens to fight an oppressive regime. The analysis of *Death at the Well* shows that when citizens are empowered with the discourse of power, they can acquire freedom from oppression. In addition, collective freedom starts with individual freedom, as Mwelusi says "they set me free, but they aren't the ones who cut the shackles... they found that I had already cut the shackles "(88). These words show the need for individuals to be proactive on issues affecting them in order to free themselves from oppression.

Mwelusi further challenges his brother Gege to share his dreams. He explains that there should be a distinction between animals and human beings. Humans should recognise that there is more to life than the basic needs. He says, “If your life should be bound by the primary needs of eating, bearing off springs and sleeping, where would humanity be?”(46). He argues that human beings should use their intelligence to improve their lives and that it is not enough for humans to recognise the problems facing them, but that it is important to find solutions to them.

Gege takes this literally claiming that he had been called an animal. He fails to see the larger picture of Butangi. On the other hand, Mwelusi dissects every issue and gets actively involved in looking for solutions. His explanation shows a character who understands the challenges facing the society and is ready to find solutions. To put emphasis on the vision he has for his people, Mwelusi uses repetition in the following quote:

... **I dream** about a Butangi that has security for all its people. I would like a Butangi that has security for all its people. I would like to see a Butangi that ensures justice and dignity for all of its people. **I dream** of a Butangi that will consider all of its people to be equal, with no prejudice as to village or clan... **I dream** of justice, equality and development. I dream of the right of every person in Butangi to use water... **I dream** of equality for all Butangi citizens... (50) [emphasis mine].

I have highlighted the words “I dream” since Mwelusi uses them repetitively to demonstrate lack of democracy in the state of Butangi contrary to what Chief Bokono would like people to believe. Ironically these are the issues that are ailing the state and which the leaders ignore. In addition, repetition emphasizes the need to have a society that observes justice and human dignity. It is also used to create a picture of an ideal post-colonial African state. This is a challenge to contemporary leaders who oppress the citizens by failing to observe the issues outlined in the vision. They use society’s diversity as a tool for oppression other than as a source of strength. Mwelusi says “yes, there is a difference, some villages have valleys, and others have hills.... But this difference should not be the cause for the rulers to favour a section of citizens” (31). Mwelusi’s argument is based on belief

that citizens can liberate themselves if they disregard their ethnic differences and adopt language that unites them against leaders who preach ethnic division.

From this section, it is clear that by successfully using irony, the texts have brought forth one major concern: some oppressed characters adopt the role of the oppressors themselves. This greatly hinders justice. The oppressed, then, ought to be equipped with language that empowers them on all fronts.

3.3.2. Use of Figurative Language as a form of Protest

Figurative language is another language device employed in the texts under study, and whose contribution to the understanding of the theme of oppression cannot be ignored. It takes the form of metaphors and simile. As a form of protest, they are effective as their meaning is indirect, beyond the literal. Using metaphors and simile, the speakers avoid direct confrontation with their oppressors. In essence, figurative language assists the characters to make light of serious issues but still manage to pass intended meaning.

In *Death at the Well*, Azena is aware of social stratification. She argues that for one to acquire justice there is need to fight on. She says, "... the tougher the going, the harder we should fight. That's the principle of succeeding in life" (55). Azena is urging Tanya not to give up the fight to acquire justice for her son Mwelusi. This is a challenge to ordinary citizens, that, war on oppression cannot be won by fighting each other but by uniting against the common enemy. Azena's awareness of her position and what should be done gives her freedom and liberation. In addition, she recognises that dehumanisation is caused by "bad governance, which turns humans into beasts minus tails and long ears" (54). The use of the metaphor 'beast' and her explanation of how people become beasts is a sign of awareness and therefore freedom from political manipulation. Azena further uses figurative language to urge Tanya to keep fighting for her rights. She says, "little strokes fell great oaks! And the world has no place for defeatist" (55) "The great oak" represents Chief Bokono and his political friends. In other words, justice and democracy cannot be won through fear but through courage and persistence. Furthermore, she is aware that the fight for democracy and justice is not a one-time affair but a continuous process that requires patience, hence, the metaphor "little strokes fell great oaks"

(55). Azena does not fear to utilise language to assert her conviction. Society needs people who can speak on behalf of the oppressed without fearing persecution. Hence, Azena becomes the voice of the oppressed since she knows what she wants and how she can get it.

In addition, Mwelusi's sister Andua refuses to compromise and tells off a prison guard showing that she cannot be intimidated. She uses the imagery of air to demonstrate her freedom from any form of control. She equates freedom with life, meaning oppression and lack of freedom is a form of death. She says "suffering to 'us' Butangi citizens is like air we breathe....to fight for ones right is wise".

(98). Andua refuses to let gender defined roles interfere with her quest for justice and her determination to fight oppression. She uses an all-inclusive language, "suffering to 'us' Butangi citizens", meaning liberation is a basic need to all human beings regardless of gender. Andua sees herself as part and parcel of the solutions to the challenges affecting the society. She refuses to be 'othered' and confirms Julia Kristeva's (1984) argument that "language can be used to empower women, for if women can be taught the language then they can acquire power." Since problems in the society affect both men and women, women should also be empowered with the language of power in order to provide solutions to the challenges affecting the society.

Meanwhile Natala, the protagonist in *Natala*, proves her quest for justice and determination to protest against oppression by refusing to give in to patriarchal authority. When the mortuary attendant demands sexual favours from Natala, she decisively asserts her authority and defends herself. She uses the analogy of a building to show that she expects to be treated with dignity. She says, "Am not a public building doorway through which people randomly stream in and out" (24). She is reacting to sexual harassment by the mortuary attendant who expects her to have sex with him before he could release Tango's body. The metaphor encourages the oppressed to fight for justice and human dignity. Women face double marginalisation—from men and from the society. Natala faces oppression from the mortuary attendant who expects sexual favours and the society which expects her to be inherited by Wakene. She therefore uses figurative language as a form of protest and to demonstrate that women should not give in to men's whim against their own interest. Natala's sense of freedom is further demonstrated in her refusal to offer a bribe to the chief. She cautions her father-in-law Mzee

Balu against giving a bribe. Between Mzee Balu and Natala, Natala has the language of power that enables her to stand up against her adversaries. When Mzee Balu asks Natala if she has “something to give to the chief”, she refuses and tells him that she is personally against such practices, “my heart is totally opposed to graft” (34). Natala demonstrates that society can fight corruption when people make personal decisions not to engage in corrupt deals. She tells Mzee Balu not to “accept to fertilise the thorny bush of corruption” (35). Natala represents people in the society who are ready to confront graft without fear or favor. When she says “I am personally against graft”, it means engaging and fighting corruption is an individual decision and people should be encouraged to stand up in arms against corruption.

Natala’s personal determination is shown in her refusal to be inherited by her brother-in-law Wakene. She demonstrates to Mama Lime that she does not have to be like any other woman. She says “Natala will take the road less travelled” (40). This means that what she thinks is more important than what others dictate to her. She believes a woman should be given a chance to decide what she wants in life. She says “I am totally opposed to such male chauvinism, how comes they disregard the nature and needs of women?” (41). She faults tradition that oppresses women. Natala has acquired knowledge through the language of liberation, reinforcing Fredrick Petterson argument that ‘one’ who is in control of knowledge is in control of power and subsequently controls what can be said and claimed (9). Natala has access to the discourse of power and she can therefore control her own life. Her refusal to be inherited demonstrates that women are capable of controlling their own destinies. She represents the voice of women in patriarchal society who are subjected to negative cultural practices. Unlike these women, Natala refuses to adapt what Gassman (2006) refers to as the perspective of silence. I can arguably say that women should be given a chance to add their voice to the discussion of wife inheritance. Hence, Natala’s refusal to conform to patriarchal authority makes her a symbol of empowerment. Paulo Freire (1971) argues that it is only the oppressed that have the power to liberate themselves and can initiate change. Therefore, it is in order to argue that to have social justice; the society should be ready to promote gender justice by empowering women with the discourse of power. There can be no democracy and justice in a situation where one group is denied the voice to

express itself. Natala's struggle is a symbol of a woman's struggle against prejudice that hinders her socio-economic development. Natala's strong stand enhances the playwright's quest for justice, liberation and human dignity, making her the voice of the marginalised.

This section has successfully dealt with the notable utilisation of simile and metaphor by the characters in Mberia's plays. The two figures of speech are often used interchangeably. This section has presented how issues related to corruption and gender discrimination in the texts are addressed by the effective use of figurative language. It emerges that when characters are equipped with appropriate language, they can overcome oppressive language by countering it with language of protest.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that as much as language can be a tool for oppression, it can also be an important tool for protest and liberation. This is possible when the oppressed are equipped with such language as sarcasm, which can be a tool for protest and language that demonstrates power and knowledge. It is therefore necessary to equip all people regardless of gender or social standing with language that empowers them against social injustice.

4.0. CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Summary

This study has dealt with the language of oppression and how it expresses systems of domination and oppression in contemporary societies. It has particularly focused on language and language devices that are employed to enhance the theme of oppression in Mberia's *Death at the Well*, *Flowers in the Morning Sun* and *Natala*. Prejudicial language against different players in society like tribe, youth, women and citizens has been analysed in view of how it demonstrates oppression. Language devices like irony, sarcasm, and imagery have also been critically engaged with as tools of oppression. These devices have been viewed as means by which characters in the texts protest against oppressive discourses. Critically engaging with Mberia's plays, this study has captured the relationship between language and oppression and the challenges contemporary societies face as a result of ethnic, gender and class prejudice.

4.2. Conclusion

This study sought to interpret how language devices employed in Mberia's plays address the theme of oppression and quest for justice. A systematic study has been conducted of how, in the texts, language is exploited to turn people against each other. Most importantly, this study has demonstrated how the language of oppression captures power struggles in contemporary societies. The binary opposition of power struggles between different groups paints a picture of a divided society where each party tries to use language of dominance against the other. The analysis of the plays led to the conclusion that such language device as prejudicial language and how it discriminates different groups of people can be an impediment to peace and stability in contemporary societies.

Furthermore, engaging how characters are presented in the texts has led to the deduction that the social construction of people as superior or inferior results in the advantaged group using oppressive language against the 'inferior' group. This has led to disadvantaged groups being presented as oppressed politically, socially and economically. A case in point is the use of animal imageries as a way of 'othering', an aspect that has been illustrated as resulting in dehumanisation and denial of

justice to the oppressed. This has been supported by instances in the texts where characters identify their opponents with undesirable animal traits while reserving admirable animal names for themselves.

Also, owing to the fact that the plays studied are set in post-colonial Africa, it has been noted that these texts reflect the challenges currently faced by African societies. Yet, however bleak the future may be, there seems to be a resounding hope should these societies find solutions to the challenges they face. The solutions may be in the form of people's realisation of their class-consciousness as opposed to ethnic consciousness, an argument advocated by Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981).

Looking at different roles played by the characters in the texts, it is clear that the struggle for liberation and justice should be a responsibility of all members of the society regardless of age, class or gender. This is evident in the fact that in the texts studied, some of the female characters who are tasked with leadership responsibilities are able to deliver. A common feature of this kind of female characters is that they are women who have been equipped with the language of power. This means that they are able to resist oppression by countering it with such language of power as sarcasm. Likewise, characters like Tungai in *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, Mwelusi in *Death at the Well* and Natala in *Natala* act as the voice of the marginalised groups in the societies presented in the texts. They effectively use language to counter oppression. Moreover, the texts demonstrate how the oppressed groups utilise language devices such as figurative language to express frustration and disillusionment against political oppression. This is especially with regards to the lament over unequal distribution of resources. Using language indirectly, characters representing the oppressed groups in the texts are able to point out social injustices like poverty, immorality and diseases that ail contemporary societies. Special use of language assists the characters in "masking the truth transparently" (John Ruganda, 1992). In other words, the oppressed use language of protest against the oppressors without obviously appearing to do so.

The study also established that there are power shifts in the text in that characters who are initially oppressed use the language of oppression to oppress others too. This presents human relationships as those preoccupied with domination. This in turn means that anytime there is a power vacuum, a new

center emerges. The only remedy against this continued domination, then, appears to be the oppressed adopting the language of protest.

Furthermore, it is evident that the author assigns his characters names which bear no relationship to any ethnic community in Kenya where the plays are presumably set. By Mberia using names that do not “purport to deal with, or signify ethnic cleavages that are certifiably familiar” (Ruganda, 8), he speaks not only to diverse ethnic communities in Kenya, but also to different countries in the contemporary African society.

In conclusion, the study has demonstrated the role of language in enhancing oppression in Kithaka wa Mberia’s plays. Oppression is shown in the use of language that can be termed as derogatory and discriminative. The extent of oppression is captured in the choice of words which are presented in form of language devices. On the other hand, the study has demonstrated that language can be a unifying tool if and when it is well used. In a nutshell, there is a significant relationship between language and oppression. Using Mberia’s texts, this study has brought out this relationship between language and oppression as well as language and protest. Hence, language has been brought out as a medium through which socio-political and economic challenges experienced in contemporary societies are expressed.

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