

**THE KENYAN POPULAR THRILLER AND HISTORY: A READING OF
*BLACK GOLD OF CHEPKUBE AND THREE DAYS ON THE CROSS***

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Master of Arts in Literature of the Department of Literature, Theatre and Film
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DECLARATION

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

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In loving memory of my parents, Dads John Maina and Paulino Gichuri; and Mums Liz Waithera and Octavia Wanjiru. Your presence lives with me forever. And to Shelly, my rock.

ABSTRACT

Literary texts do not emerge from a vacuum. They are created in specific historical epochs which shape them and which they respond and speak to. To demonstrate that this point is true regardless of whether the literary text falls in the category of canonical, “serious” literature or popular fiction, this study examines how two Kenyan popular fiction novels, *Black Gold of Chepkube* by Wamugunda Geteria and *Three Days on the Cross* by Wahome Mutahi, engage with history. These two novels are premised on historical events with *Black Gold of Chepkube* taking as its context the black market trade in coffee across the Kenya-Uganda border in the 1970s, which led to the emergence of a new culture of corruption in Kenya, while *Three Days on the Cross*, which although set in an imaginary African country, is a fictional rendition of its author's experience under police custody for sedition-related charges. The objectives of the study are: to examine the elements of popular fiction present in Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*; to explore how Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history; and to discuss the significance of the engagement of Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*, as popular fiction texts, with history. The study employs New Historicism theory, as espoused by Stephen Greenblatt, which states that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. In terms of method, this is a qualitative research at the heart of which is the content analysis of Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*. The study critically analyses the two novels in its exploration of how they engage with history. With its demonstration that both Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* transmit knowledge about history and intervene in Kenya's political debates of the 1990s, the study concludes that the dismissal of popular fiction as “non-serious” on account of a perceived impulse to “escape” from social and political concerns has no basis in fact. This being the case, there is a need to reevaluate attitudes towards popular fiction which blind readers to the fact that these texts contribute to a writing of history from below, from the perspective of the masses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.1.1 Popular Fiction.....	2
1.1.2 African Popular Fiction.....	6
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	8
1.3 Research Objectives.....	8
1.4 Research Questions.....	9
1.5 Research Premises.....	9
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study.....	10
1.7.1 Scope.....	10
1.7.2 Limitations.....	12
1.8 Theoretical Framework.....	12
1.8.1 Introduction.....	12
1.8.2 The Tenets of New Historicism.....	14

1.8.3 Contextualizing New Historicism - Import to the Study.....	17
1.9 Review of Related Literature.....	19
1.9.1 Studies on Selected Novels and other Works by Geteria and Mutahi.....	19
1.9.2 Related Studies and Criticism.....	24
1.10 Methodology.....	29
1.11 Thesis Structure.....	30
CHAPTER TWO: BLACK GOLD OF CHEPKUBE AND THREE DAYS ON THE CROSS AS POPULAR FICTION.....	31
2.1 Introduction.....	31
2.2 About the Authors.....	31
2.2.1 Wamugunda Geteria.....	31
2.2.2 Wahome Mutahi.....	32
2.3 A Synopsis of <i>Black Gold of Chepkube</i>	32
2.4 A Synopsis of <i>Three Days on the Cross</i>	33
2.5 <i>Black Gold of Chepkube</i> as a Historical Thriller.....	34
2.6 <i>Three Days on the Cross</i> as a Political Thriller.....	41
2.7 Conclusion.....	53
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY AND WAMUGUNDA GETERIA'S BLACK GOLD OF CHEPKUBE.....	55
3.1 Introduction.....	55
3.2 History, <i>Black Gold of Chepkube</i> and the Present Past.....	55
3.3 Conclusion.....	75
CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORY, WAHOME MUTAHI'S THREE DAYS ON THE CROSS AND THE TRUTH OF FICTION.....	77

4.1 Introduction.....	77
4.2 History and Wahome Mutahi’s <i>Three Days on the Cross</i>	78
4.3 Conclusion.....	104
CHAPTER FIVE.....	107
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	107
5.1 Summary.....	107
5.2 Conclusions.....	110
REFERENCES.....	115

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DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

- Authoritarian:** Belonging to or believing in a political system in which obedience to the ruling person or group is strongly enforced.
- Historical thriller:** Novels whose spatial, story structure, plot and credibility aspects render themselves to be premised on history for context and background. Also, a literary piece of art whose content is a product of both imagination and facts, whose purpose is to educate and excite the reader.
- History:** A popular public narrative produced by a centre of power.
- Literary fiction:** Also referred to as canonical literature, means 'heavy' literature deemed to evoke thought
- Literary history:** An author's choice to re-create past realities in fiction using history as a backdrop.
- Political thriller:** Political novels that work like thermometers and calibrate the temperature of a given era's political symptoms.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Debate over the quality, content, and relevance of popular fiction has raged on in Kenya with scholars such as Chris Wanjala criticizing popular literature for being aesthetically wanting and incapable of ‘commitment’ requisite of ‘serious’ literature. Wanjala (1978, p. 136) refers to such work as “...a trashy and scabrous imitation of brothel and [low-life] especially yearned for [by] the [low-brow] reader in this country”.

According to Bourdeu (1983), the concept of ‘popular’ is always ambiguous because it comes to us inscribed with the history of political and cultural struggles. It is not only a site of contested evaluation but the term ‘popular’ has also been used pejoratively. ‘Popular’ has been used as synonymous with low-class; and low-class with (irrelevant) insignificant. The association of popular fiction with the “low-class” members of the society has led to the misconception that popular fiction has nothing “serious” to offer to the “elite readership”.

Popular fiction has thus been dogged by (mis)conceptions. These include the charges that popular fiction is: an antonym of canonical literature; formulaic; commercially-oriented; sensational; melodramatic; largely sentimental; and meant for a large audience which is supposed to have a less educated taste in literature. This is in great contrast to canonical literature which is deemed to have great artistic merit; is of higher cultural value; and is for the elite and the intellectual who have an educated taste in literature (Cuddon, 2013; Asong, 2012; Mwangi, 2010).

1.1.1 Popular Fiction

According to Joseph (2014), regardless of the lack of an exact definition of what literary fiction is, an in-depth scrutiny reveals a plethora of differences that distinguish literary fiction from popular fiction. He observes that:

Literary fiction can be said to come more from the writer than popular fiction, which comes directly from the desires of the general public to increase its sales. Unlike popular fiction, literary fiction is concerned with ideas and deep thought, and it is a manifestation of self-expression for the author as opposed to being driven by popularity in the market. Literary fiction tends to focus more on the characters, giving them considerable psychological depth, and on the universal issues of life and existence, whereas popular fiction is more concerned with keeping audiences interested through the plot and might sometimes have characters who lack depth ([www.http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-popular-fiction.htm](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-popular-fiction.htm)).

The debate between the popular and the literary fiction also seems to hinge on the ideas-emotions axis. This means that popular fiction is considered the fiction of emotions, while literary fiction is the fiction of ideas (Thacker, 2004). In the words of Gracie (2011), a historical romance author:

Popular fiction isn't simply fiction that aims to be popular - every writer wants that. Popular fiction includes ... the kind of books you see in airport bookshops, the books that make you laugh or cry, and take you away - and not just in a plane. The prime aim of popular fiction is to entertain readers and keep them turning pages far into the night because they can't put the book down (<http://annegracie.blogspot.com/2011/10/what-is-popular-fiction.html>.)

If we develop this argument along this line, it therefore follows that the purpose of literary fiction is to evoke thought as opposed to that of popular fiction whose aim is to entertain. Consequently, writers of literary fiction are immersed in self-expression and have little, if any, consideration of the reader. On the other hand, writers of popular fiction are only interested in entertaining the reader and thus in the few instances where self-expression rears its head, it is by sheer accident (Harold, 2011; Wood, 2008; Cohen, 1993; Umstead, 2011).

This thesis posits that despite the above mentioned differences that demarcate the line between the literary and the popular, the conception that the core purpose of popular fiction is simply to be popular and make great sales for all involved parties is misleading. Most popular fiction writers are in a quest to offer edutainment - a concept where material content is intended to both entertain and educate users. While seeking to write texts that engage the readership and entertain them, these writers also dig deep into affairs affecting the society. More often than not, these writers tend to actually address issues perceived to be mundane by the writers of literary fiction (Ngugi, 1986; Chapman, 1999; Gordon, 2013; Higginson, 2008).

Critics of popular fiction have also dismissed popular fiction as being escapist and formulaic. This thesis observes that contrary to the charges of escapism, popular fiction actually does deal with reality, but in a more optimistic manner. This is because the underlying philosophy behind most popular fiction novels is that despite the reality of the human condition being deplorable, the future is not all bleak and there is always room for change – for the better – as espoused by Maxwell & Lowell (2012), wit:

Popular fiction is a continuation of and an embroidery upon ancient myths and archetypes; popular fiction is good against evil, Prometheus against the uncaring gods, Persephone emerging from hell with the seeds of spring in her hands,

Adam discovering Eve ... In a word, popular fiction is heroic and transcendent at a time when heroism and transcendence are out of intellectual favour (<http://www.elizabethlowell.com/popfiction.html>).

On the charge of being formulaic, the following long quote suffices to capture what popular fiction is all about:

The concept of formula has an interesting history as first a literary device and then a literary putdown. The Greeks divided literature into tragedy and comedy. A tragedy had a political, masculine theme and ended in death. A comedy had a social, often feminine theme and ended in marriage, the union of male and female from which all life comes. We have kept the scope of tragedy, of death and despair, but we have reduced the concept of comedy to a pottymouthed nightclub act. Perhaps that is why critics of popular fiction reserve their most priapic scorn for the stories called romances. Romances follow the ancient Greek formula for comedy: they celebrate life rather than anticipate death. In addition to being almost exclusively female in their audience and authorship, romances address timeless female concerns of union and regeneration. The demand for romances is feminine, deep, and apparently universal. Harlequin/Silhouette has an enormously profitable romance publishing empire in which the majority of the money is earned outside of the American market, in more countries and languages than I can name. Even worse than their roots in ancient feminine concerns, romances irritate critics because they often have a subtext of mythic archetypes rather than modernist, smaller-than-life characters (www.elizabethlowell.com/popfiction.htm).

It therefore suffices to argue that popular fiction is not basically a field defined by literary escapism and formulaic dispositions (Neira, 2008). On the contrary, popular

fiction seeks to provide possibilities while creating an identity for itself. It would be virtually impossible to define and study popular fiction if there were no distinct characteristics that define it. This thesis observes that regardless of sub-genre, popular fiction seeks to show that no matter how mundane and (irrelevant) supposedly insignificant issues and classes of masses might be deemed, each is vital and deserves attention. To some extent, it is possible that the so-called "ordinary earthlings" might end up doing extra-ordinary things as opposed to the "high and mighty".

This thesis adopts Gelder's (2004, p.41) understanding of popular fiction as "a singular and distinct category" while at the same time acknowledging the diversity of popular fiction within each specific sub-genre.

Most Kenyan popular fiction writers concern themselves with a whole range of themes such as the vagaries of urbanisation, causes and effects of unemployment, prostitution, love, marriage, crime and violence, the neglect of the rural population by the ruling elite, moral, economic and political corruption, among others (Kurtz, 1998; Bardolph, 1998). With this in mind, this study posits that Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* fall under the genre of popular fiction not only because of the thematic concerns the two texts deal with but also because of the embellished ornaments (Watt, 1956) the two authors employ. Consequently, this thesis shows that these authors are fully aware of the confluence between politics, culture and the economic realities of independent Kenya, and that their novels engage with history to make social and political commentary.

1.1.2 African Popular Fiction

This thesis avers that African popular fiction works differently from the notions of what constitutes Western popular fiction. While acknowledging that African popular fiction has its genesis in the West, it is worth noting that African popular fiction has undergone adaptations to fit the continent. While discussing African popular fiction, Newell (2002, p.1) reveals some central features of popular literature consumption on the continent, wit:

First, cost is the most significant element governing a book's 'bestselling' status in Africa, for most people cannot afford to buy full-length new texts on a regular basis; Secondly, the relevance of a book to the reader's life is an important factor, for ... what a popular novel teaches is considered by many African readers to be of equal importance to its entertainment value; finally, the book-seller's marketing ability is a significant factor in the success of a particular text, for fiction throughout Africa often is published on local printing presses and distributed within the locality, a process sometimes paid for and overseen by the authors themselves.

It is also of import to debunk the notion that African popular fiction is homogenous. On the contrary, African popular fiction must be viewed "as more individualistic and heterogeneous than the mass-produced titles available in Europe and North America" (Newell, 2002, p.1). This is because Africa is a vast geographical space that has been defined by social, economic and political upheavals leading to economic and infrastructural breakdowns. This stratified nature of the continent has meant that works of art that fall under the category of popular fiction, more often than not, circulate within a relatively narrow and geographically limited space determined by the producer's marketing ability, finances, mobility and circle. It thus follows that compared

to the generic classifications applied to popular literature in the West, African popular fiction occupies a "tangential" position.

African popular fiction also approaches language differently. The heterogeneous nature of the vast African literary field means that varying geographical locales use language differently. It also goes without saying that language choice has a corresponding influence on thematic concerns, style of narration and perspective as observed by Larkin (1997). In this regard, therefore, one could argue for the attempt by Hausa authors to liberate popular fiction from the English language stronghold (Newell, 2002) by writing in Hausa, acknowledge the use of English by *Drum* writers in South Africa as a means of defiance against the language and educational policies of the Afrikaner state (Gready, 1990), the localization of universal cultural forms with indigenous meanings (Furniss, 1998) and see sense in Frederiksen's (1991) assertion that the characters in Hollywood movies are a source of material and influence from which authors of African popular fiction create "localized" heroes, experiences and worlds for their readers.

It is vital to make it clear that this thesis approaches Wamugunda's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* not from a Western conceptualization of popular fiction but from an African popular fiction point of view. African popular fiction therefore becomes what Newell (2002, p.4) refers to as a "field of African creativity which is non-elite, unofficial and urban" because as observed by Barber (1997), what distinguishes African popular art form is the absence of formal and stylistic regulations from outside.

In this respect, African popular fiction becomes a receptor of intertextuality (Bartian, in Newell, 2002) and transcends its own time of production to voice social concerns (Nwoga, 1965). This study, therefore, concurs with Líndfors' (1991, p.2) assertion that

"any work that seeks to communicate an African perspective to a large audience in a style that can be readily apprehended and appreciated could legitimately be called a piece of African popular literature" and Newell's (2002, p.5) observation that "popular fiction in Africa describes those types of narratives which never fail to generate debate among readers on moral and behavioural issues."

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Popular fiction has been dismissed as “non-serious” on account of a perceived impulse to “escape” from social and political concerns. However, this study argues that literary texts do not emerge from a vacuum but are created in specific historical epochs which shape them and which they respond and speak to. To demonstrate this point, this study examines how two Kenyan popular novels, Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*, engage with history; and explores the significance of that engagement. These two novels are premised on historical events. *Black Gold of Chepkube* takes for its context the black market trade in coffee across the Kenya-Uganda border, which in the 1970s led to the emergence of a new culture of corruption (Gikandi & Mwangi, 2007). *Three Days on the Cross* is set in an imaginary African country and is a fictional rendition of the author's experience under police custody for sedition-related charges at a time when his country, Kenya, was under the authoritarian rule of a dictator (Muindu, 2006). The study seeks to show that these texts contribute to a writing of history from below, from the perspective of the masses.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To examine elements of popular fiction in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*;
2. To explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* engages with history;
3. To explore how *Three Days on the Cross* engages with history; and
4. To discuss the significance of the engagement with history in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do elements of popular fiction manifest themselves in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*?
2. How does *Black Gold of Chepkube* engage with history?
3. How does *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history?
4. What is the significance of the engagement with history in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*?

1.5 Research Premises

This study was guided by the following premises:

1. *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are popular novels.
2. *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.
3. The engagement with history by *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* has aesthetic and thematic significance.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study's main objective is to explore how and with what results two Kenyan popular fiction writers engage with history. As such it is useful in providing a way towards understanding how writers of popular fiction capture the history which shapes their

work. Through its demonstration that *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history, this study furthers the growing study of Kenyan popular fiction.

As per the available literature, it is evident that a number of scholars (Karauri, 2008; Kariuki, 1996; Muindu et al., 2012a; Nyambeki, 2013) have undertaken studies on the works of Wahome Mutahi and his style of writing. A cursory glance, if any, has been given to how and with what results the author's works have engaged with history. This study fills this gap, and thereby also enriches our understanding of this writer's work. Furthermore, within the context of available literature, there exist no prior studies on Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* with history. By focusing on the engagement of these novels with history, this study fills this gap and continues the argument against Chris Wanjala's dismissal of popular fiction as being aesthetically wanting and incapable of 'commitment' requisite of 'serious' literature by instantiating these novels' contribution to important political and moral debates.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.7.1 Scope

This study is essentially a literary appreciation of two popular novels, *Black Gold of Chepkube* by Wamugunda Geteria and *Three Days on the Cross* by Wahome Mutahi. Literary criticism can take any of numerous approaches, each approach placing emphasis on specific elements and features of the text(s) under study. The focus of the present study is history – the interest being in the engagement of these novels with history.

The choice of the two novels is made on the basis that both writers use popular fiction as a genre which provides them with a platform to tackle issues to do with political

intrigues, economic lobbying, instant riches, moral degradation and the quest for wealth. Since no work of art is based on a vacuum, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are premised on historical events such as the climatic catastrophe that engulfed Latin America in the 1970s leading to scarcity of coffee, the dictatorial rule of Uganda's Idi Amin, the reign and death of Kenya's first president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, and the attempted 1982 coup on President Daniel arap Moi's government which led to the establishment of the (in)famous Nyayo Torture Chambers at Nyayo House, Nairobi, Kenya. The other factor is that the two represent the transition period between the change of regimes between Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and President Moi. It is thus arguable that though not exclusive, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* can be said to represent the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

Black Gold of Chepkube is one of two works by Wamugunda Geteria (Gikandi & Mwangi, 2007). His other work includes *Nice People* (1992) which deals with the HIV/AIDS menace and the challenges that come with controlling it. *Black Gold of Chepkube* was chosen because of its high dependency on historical actualities, more so the well documented illegal coffee trade that rocked the Kenya-Uganda border in the 1970s and the ripple effects that were both a cause and course of the events that defined this period (Bevan, et al., 1989; Branch, 2011; Wamanji, 2009; Kamau, 2013).

Three Days on the Cross is one among Wahome Mutahi's works. His other works include: *The Jail Bugs* (1992), *Doomsday* (1999), *The Miracle Merchant* (2003) [co-authored with Wahome Karengo], *How to be a Kenyan* (1996), *The House of Doom* (published posthumously and serialized by the Nation Media Group), and plays in Kikuyu, which include: *Mugathe Mugobothi*, *Mugathe Ndotono*, *Igoti ria Muingi* and *Makaririra Kioro* (Ogolla, 2004; Muindu, 2006). *Three Days on the Cross* was chosen because of its two-fold nature - it is a fictional rendition of the author's own experience

in the hands of a brutal despotic regime and it engages with history in a very deep manner thus satisfying the quest of this study. Despite being a popular fictional work of art, the text bears very close resemblance with historical texts that record the intrigues that defined the state-society tensions that were the Moi era.

1.7.2 Limitations

While taking cognizance of the existence of other angles from which works of fiction can be approached, this study limits itself to exploring how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*, as popular novels, engage with history. The study thus limits itself to exploring how elements of popular fiction manifest in the two novels, and how both *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

1.8.1 Introduction

This thesis anchors its arguments on selected tenets of New Historicism. New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. It has its roots in a reaction to the New Criticism of formal analysis of works of literature, which is seen as ignoring the greater social and political consequences of the production of literary texts (Murfin & Ray, 1998). New Historicism developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic Stephen Greenblatt, gaining widespread influence in the 1990s and beyond (<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/en...sm>). New Historicists acknowledge the importance of the literary text and analyze the text with an eye to history.

New Historicism seeks to understand literary texts historically and rejects the formalizing influence of previous literary studies, including New Criticism, Structuralism and Deconstruction, all of which in varying ways privilege the literary text and place only secondary emphasis on historical context. According to New Historicism, the circulation of literary and non-literary texts produces relations of social power within a culture (Brewton, 2002; <http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/2002>).

New historicism is not “new”; the majority of critics between 1920 and 1950 focused on a work’s historical content and based their interpretations on the interplay between the text and historical contexts (such as the author’s life or intentions in writing the work). New Historicist thought differs from traditional historicism in literary studies in several crucial ways. Rejecting traditional historicism’s premise of neutral inquiry, New Historicism accepts the necessity of making historical value judgments. According to New Historicism, we can only know the textual history of the past because it is “embedded,” a key term, in the textuality of the present and its concerns. Text and context are less clearly distinct in New Historicist practice. Traditional separations of literary and non-literary texts, “great” literature and popular literature, are also fundamentally challenged.

For the New Historicist, all acts of expression are embedded in the material conditions of a culture. Texts are examined with an eye to how they reveal the economic and social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion. Like much of the emergent European social history of the 1980s, New Historicism takes particular interest in representations of marginal/marginalized groups and non-normative behaviours - prostitution, crime, corruption, womanizing, peasant ‘revolts’, among others - as exemplary of the need for power to represent subversive alternatives, the Other, to legitimize itself (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary>).

Louis Montrose, an innovator and exponent of New Historicism, describes a fundamental axiom of the movement as an intellectual belief in “the textuality of history and the historicity of texts” (cited in Veenser, 1989, p.34). New Historicism draws on the work of Levi-Strauss, in particular his notion of culture as a “self-regulating system.” The Foucauldian premise that power is ubiquitous and cannot be equated with state or economic power and Gramsci’s conception of “hegemony,” i.e., that domination is often achieved through culturally-orchestrated consent rather than force, are critical underpinnings to the New Historicist perspective.

In its period of ascendancy during the 1980s, New Historicism drew criticism from the political left for its depiction of counter-cultural expression as always co-opted by the dominant discourses. Equally, New Historicism’s lack of emphasis on “literariness” and formal literary concerns brought disdain from traditional literary scholars. However, New Historicism continues to exercise a major influence in the humanities and in the extended conception of literary studies.

1.8.2 The Tenets of New Historicism

According to Myers (1988), New Historicism grounds itself upon four main pillars. First, *literature is historical*, which means, for this work, that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind’s attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Second, literature, then, *is not a distinct category of human activity*. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of history. Third, *like works of literature, man himself is a social construct*, the sloppy composition of social and political forces; there is no such thing as a human nature that transcends history; history is a series of “ruptures” between ages and men. Fourth, as a

consequence, *the historian/ critic is trapped in his own "historicity."* No one can rise above his own social formations, his own ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. Given this fact, the best a modern historicist approach to literature can hope to accomplish, according to Belsey (1980, p. 144), is "to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology" (<http://www-english.tamu.edu/.../historicism.html>).

Such an approach stands traditional historical scholarship on its head. The first principle of traditional scholarship - its generally agreed-upon point of departure - was that the recovery of the original meaning of a literary text is the whole aim of critical interpretation. However, New Historicism premises that recovery of meaning is impossible, and to attempt it naive. What practitioners of the new method are concerned with, by contrast, is the recovery of the original ideology which gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to disseminate throughout a culture (Ankermist, 2010).

This dimension of critical interpretation has been neglected by traditional scholars not merely because the required concept, the "enabling presumption" of ideology, was unavailable to them until recently; in the New Historicist view, it had never been widely attempted because literary texts themselves suppress the means by which they construct ideology. A traditional formalistic approach, treating the text as self-contained, can never locate these ideological operations, also known as "representations." Only a historicist approach, treating the text as one element in the ideology of an age, can hope to lay them bare (Bressler, 2007).

This study is, nevertheless, alive to the challenges that would emanate from the intentional fallacy vis-a-vis the interpretative project that seeks to utilize the New Historicism approach. Intentional fallacy dictates that an attempt to seek the author's

intention through the work, or reading a work of art with the author's intention in mind, is a subjective approach to literary appreciation. It therefore follows that the text should be the only source of meaning and any details of the author's desires and life are extraneous. It is, however, the view of this study that the creative inter-ubiquity that defines popular fiction employs historical, social and political material in the text's milieu and New Historicism provides the critic with tools of analysis that enable him to identify historical, social and political realities within the text itself and relate them to (past and present) experience, expertise with the art, and repertoire with the forms and traditions of popular fiction.

Although the movement represents itself, then, as being more faithful to the true, hitherto-neglected nature of literature, in reality its key assumptions are derived from the institutional milieu in which it arose. Its concepts and categories are simply those which have conditioned a large part of the literary thought within the academia. Thus, New Historicism is critical of the "enabling presumptions" of its more distant, but not of its more immediate, predecessors. For instance, the movement follows poststructuralism in its assurance that literary works mean any number of things to any number of readers (the doctrine of the plurality of meaning), freeing New Historicists to find the warrant for their interpretations not in the author's intentions for his work but in the ideology of his age.

Similarly, the New Historicist effort to assimilate the literary text to history is guaranteed by the poststructuralist doctrine of textuality, which states that the text is not aloof from the surrounding context, that there is a contiguity, an ebb and flow, between text and whatever might once have been seen as "outside" it. This study thus finds it of import to note that these ideas are obtained second-hand. They are not established by original inquiry or argument. They are simply the precipitate of an academic climate in

which a plurality of meanings is recognized as offering the greatest good for the greatest number of literary scholars, and in which the re-assimilation of text to context is the goal of practically everybody.

1.8.3 Contextualizing New Historicism - Import to the Study

Since New Historicism tries to explore, discover and concentrate on ignored parts of history and the marginalized people in society, this study appropriates New Historicism to enable it explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history. Because *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are popular novels, New Historicism was adopted due to the theory's preference to study a pulp fiction rather than an academic theory book; or to analyze a movie based on a book rather than the so-called high literature. It is arguable that analyzing a more popular issue brings about the chance of plurality in voices, which causes a more accurate understating of it. This is premised on the fact that New Historicism posits that power (which was once the only reliable source of narrating history) is never confined to a single person or a single level of society - it moves through the culture's social, political, ideological and economic interactions.

This study thus posits that for effective analysis, understanding and criticism of popular fiction, discussing an author's words, biography and acts in a particular time in history is not enough. In order to understand works produced during a particular period of history, one should analyze the culture in which the author and the work appeared. We shouldn't analyze the phenomenon in an isolated manner, but rather ask why the phenomenon happened, and how. This is because the popular (fiction) literary text is the passive voice of lower middle-class in society and seeks to not only highlight their attitudes and feelings towards changes in society, but it is the (only) source through which they can look and laugh at their lives, albeit as a mechanism to cope with their immediate life complexities. Consequently, a literary text, like any other phenomenon, is formed and structured by the particular conditions of a time and place, and should be discussed in its

own context, i.e. the social and cultural patterns of that era, and cannot be understood fully unless one considers these influences, too.

New Historicism states that history is narrated subjectively and should be interpreted (it is not a fact to be accepted). In search of a clue to interpret history, it finds literature as a way to reach the culture and society of the time, in which particular phenomenon has happened. In order to explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history, this study relied on the first function of literature, in New Historicism; to help interpret history more accurately. The next step was the usage of New Historicism in literature. In this case, the procedure was the same. The study tried to understand the cultural and social setting of the time, in which *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* were introduced, to understand the novels better. This was premised on the fact that New Historicism wants to know why a particular text was written in a particular time in a particular society. The study borrowed from New Historicism and discussed other works covering the same time as that captured in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*, and analyzed political, social and economic related issues in order to find more information regarding the time, place and situation that produced the works of fiction.

Furthermore, since New Historicism functions best by interpreting the culture of a time under study, the study was able to explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history by making reference to and discussing other material such as literary and non-literary works (any social, political, or popular documents, and even the written history) of the time obtained in the works of fiction.

While acknowledging that not all texts are necessarily conditioned by historical and social circumstances of their times, the above approach came in handy in the analysis of *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* which are premised on historical events. In other words, the issues tackled in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are influenced by social and cultural contexts. That's why the study chose not to analyze *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* as isolated creations because they are not only literary but cultural and social production of particular time(s).

Since *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* discuss more neglected subjects such as prostitution, crime, corruption, womanizing, peasant 'revolts', post-independence and post-colonial realities among others, New Historicism provided an avenue through which the interests of the middle-class could be analysed. From the foregoing, it thus suffices to conclude that New Historicism was the most suitable theoretical framework upon which this study could explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

1.9 Review of Related Literature

1.9.1 Studies on Selected Novels and other Works by Geteria and Mutahi

While studying *Three Days on the Cross*, Karauri (2008) argues that Mutahi's novel explores the manner in which the dictatorial post-independence African states oppress the populace, more so those perceived to be anti-establishment, through the state apparatus. In this case, the state uses the police. The novel thus becomes a platform through which the author depicts and interrogates the nature of power, the use and abuse of it, the ways to power, the impact of political systems upon various aspects of social life in African countries, and many others.

While concluding his study, Karauri (2008) observes that Kenyan novels serve the main purpose of increasing the awareness of the readers about the political processes going on in their society, revealing the anti-social nature of political power in Kenya, and on a larger scale, on the whole continent of Africa; and implicitly, giving the readers the notion of progressive and socially beneficial power structures.

Karauri's work was of use to the present study because not only did it provide an entry point into *Three Days on the Cross* but it also exhibited gaps that the present study sought to fill. For instance, the study seems to have overlooked the historical context (and co-text) of the work. It needs not to be gainsaid that the use of the police system to suppress dissent during the Moi regime was influenced by, among others, the circumstances in which President Moi came into power and the steps taken to maintain a stranglehold on the power, such as the response to the attempted 1982 coup (Kariuki, 1996). The present study thus goes a step further and locates *Three Days on the Cross* on the historical pedestal hence offering the reader/critic a wider base to understand the text.

In an article entitled "Individual Alienation and Political Oppression: Kenya as Depicted in Wahome Mutahi's Novels", Muindu, Kinara and Jose (2012a) analyze how Wahome Mutahi, in three of his works, engages the political concerns of his time in Kenya. The trio focuses on *Three Days on the Cross*, *The Jail Bugs* and *Doomsday* and argue that the author's decision not to mention Kenya notwithstanding, the events described in the works of fiction obtained in Kenya during the writer's time and that some of the characters in *Three Days on the Cross* are modelled after historical characters in Kenya at the period mediated in the text.

Muindu et al. (2012a) observe that the characters in *Three Days on the Cross*, especially Momodu and Chipota, are alienated individuals living in societies where political oppression is supreme. While the study by Muindu et al. (ibid.) focuses on alienation and political oppression, the present study adopted a different strand and explored how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history. This study, however, concurred with Muindu et al.'s (2012a) observation that though a work of fiction, *Three Days on the Cross* is patterned after historical actualities in Kenya and is an amalgam of fact and fiction.

While studying the vision of social justice in the novels of Wahome Mutahi, Muindu, Kinara and Jose (2012b) posit that *Three Days on the Cross* is an artistic response to the political problems darkening the era that the text spans. They argue that to achieve credibility and authenticity, the text at times goes outside itself to mention or allude to historical realities that inspire its plot(s) and characterization. This, they observe, is captured through the mention and/or allusion to *Mwakenya* and the *July 10 Movement*, the Nyayo Torture Chambers, the incarceration of dissident intellectuals and the police brutality on university students. The present study is parallel to Muindu et al.'s (2012b) but rather than focus on the author's vision for social justice, the study focused on how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

Working on the presumption that typical features of the Kenyan novel are exemplified in the works of Wahome Mutahi, *Three Days on the Cross*, *The Jail Bugs* and *Doomsday*, Nyambeki (2013) investigates the phenomenon of the political novel in Kenyan Anglophone literature. Nyambeki (2013) avers that although the author uses different methods in dealing with things political, the works of Wahome Mutahi can be assuredly classified as political novels. In particular, Nyambeki observes that the texts

reveal the mechanisms of oppression induced by a dictatorial regime in an African state through the insightful description of the state police system.

The present study borrows from Nyambeki's study and working from the standpoint that *Three Days on the Cross* is a popular fiction text, goes ahead and provides evidence that helps classify the text as a political thriller. This study goes a step further and explores how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

Ogolla (2004) has examined contemporary Kenyan popular fiction as a site of cultural production, where the contradictions of African modernity are played out. Ogolla (2004) focuses on *Whispers*, a column that featured on *The Sunday Nation* and written by Wahome Mutahi. Ogolla's study seeks to establish how the author uses the popular mode of representation to address perceived threats to masculinity as a product of social change. He also examines how the author resorts to popular fiction and uses humour, parody and satire to address pertinent issues affecting the society. The present study builds on this study and evaluates the elements that constitute popular fiction in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* and subjected these texts to a historical analysis which seeks to situate the texts in their immediate environment thus enabling the researcher access to empirical data which can be analyzed in a bid to explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

According to Ogolla (2004), popular fiction columns have become the most resilient and versatile of the newspaper sub-genres in Kenya. He thus undertakes a detailed discussion of Wahome Mutahi's column, *Whispers*, against the historical dynamics of post-independence Kenya and examines how *Whispers* became a public space where Kenya's postcolonial existence, in its many contradictory faces was constantly interrogated (<http://hdl.handle.net/10539/262>). Ogolla further argues that the column

provided its readers certain ‘moments of freedom’; it was a site where the limits of social and political taboos were boldly tested. In *Whispers*, people could heartily laugh at authority, and at themselves, but ultimately reflect on the reasons for their laughter. By providing such a space for self-reflection and for the critique of society, he argues that the Kenyan newspaper became an important site of cultural production especially in the 1980s through the 1990s.

Whereas Ogolla’s study mainly focuses on Wahome Mutahi’s newspaper column, *Whispers*, the present study looked at *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube*. It is worth mentioning that this study found Ogolla’s work pivotal because apart from offering a parallel viewpoint on the interplay between literature and history, it also offered a reference point on the works of Wahome Mutahi, more specifically, his use of the popular medium to address social, economic and political issues of the day. It is therefore arguable that the popular fiction in Kenya, read against its immediate historical context becomes what Ogolla (2004, p. 1-2) refers to as a “public space where Kenya’s postcolonial existence, in its many faces, was constantly interrogated”. In arguing for Wahome Mutahi’s position in social commentary while operating within an oppressive regime, Ogolla (ibid.) observes that:

In many ways, the column defined the ‘Kenya(n) becoming’, exploring his hopes and fears, his dreams and failures, his existential dilemmas as he grappled with the vagaries of African modernity and the ruthlessness of the postcolonial political order. But above all else, Mutahi highlighted the realm of the ‘popular’ as being capable of engaging with the complex contradictions and ambiguities of postcolonial Kenya.

From the foregoing, it is evident that though a lot of studies have been done on Wahome Mutahi and his style of writing, none has focused on how his works engage with

history. It is also evident, according to the available literature to the researcher at the time of the study, that there exist no prior studies on *Black Gold of Chepkube* and the novel's engagement with history. This study thus sought to fill this research gap by exploring how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

1.9.2 Related Studies and Criticism

The role of different fields in influencing society has been studied by various scholars. While defining the place of literature in the understanding of culture, Wanjala (1978, p.1) observes that:

Society is not defined only in its material attributes but also by its non-material characteristics. Social activities include politics, law, religion, philosophy, literature and art. These activities are shared by all members of a given society irrespective of religion, creed or class. At its best, literature influences the life of people, and reflects tensions within groups as well as within individuals....uses imagination and *verisimilitude* to make aspects of life clearer than other forms of discourse can (emphasis mine).

It is worth noting that Wanjala stresses on the need for literature to rely on verisimilitude to capture aspects of “reality”. The question that follows from this argument is whether literature can achieve this task in isolation. Arguing that reality is both past and present, this study sought to show that *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* rely on historical happenings which give them the impetus needed to achieve the sense of verisimilitude (Wanjala, 1978) that not only enable readers to extract meaning(s) from it, but also enables them identify with the literary history inherent in the text.

Mūsangi (2008, p.16) focuses on the use of the criminal figure to represent the urban space and its discourses and while focusing on John Kiriamiti's *My Life in Crime* and *My Life in Prison*, observes that:

With the passing on of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the commencement of Daniel Toroitich arap Moi's rule in 1978, the concept of law and order became a clear-cut for the rule of law, or what in Odhiambo's words may be termed as "Party of Order", to prevail (1987, p.190). With his Nyayo Philosophy of Peace, Love and Unity, President Moi was keen on 'silencing' any individuals who posed a threat to this philosophy and to order. Such dissidents were detained without trial in Kenyan prisons or at the (in)famous Nyayo Torture Chambers in the Nairobi's city centre in order for law and order to be maintained in the country. Such people included writers and politicians such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Maina wa Kinyatti, Wahome Mutahi, Raila Odinga among others. The state at this time became more concerned with maintenance of law and order more than it was about democracy for "he rules best, and lasts longest, who can ensure that law and order, in other words internal security, is paramount" (Odhiambo, 1987, p. 190).

The above study was relevant to the present study because it offered a guide to the understanding of the historical situations in which popular fiction writers situate their works. While Mūsangi (2008) focuses on John Kiriamiti's works, this study focused on texts by Wamugunda Geteria and Wahome Mutahi but walked an almost similar path – that of understanding society through the work of fiction. Consequently, the study explored how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

Odhiambo (2004) has explored the ways in which popular fiction writer David Maillu has used the canvas of popular fiction to make social commentary. Odhiambo (2004) demonstrates the extent to which different literary genres are exploited by writers of popular fiction to address imagined social needs. The study by Odhiambo focuses on how Mailu's *The Equatorial Assignment* and *Operation DXT* fall under the sub-genre of the romantic detective. This study focused on *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* and positioned these novels within the popular fiction genre. While borrowing from Odhiambo's (2004) study on the nature of popular fiction to address social needs, the study went a step further and subjected *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* to a historical analysis through which the way the authors engage with the history of the time of the texts' production was explored.

In a study on Postcolonial Africa, Kehinde (2005) has presented the manner in which social and economic realities in the real world of post-independence Kenya come to be presented in Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. In arguing for the position of *Going Down River Road*, Kehinde (ibid.) locates the text within its ideological and historical contexts. In addition, Kehinde's study positions the text as a highly utilitarian art that hugely dwells on the socio-economic realities of its enabling milieu, thus giving it an identity and relevance based on its immediate environment. The present study also focussed on independent Kenya but detoured by focusing on *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*. Kehinde's work was of import to the present study because Kehinde deals with a text that sets out to attack political, social and economic injustice. In a similar vein, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* can be argued to be on a journey to not only capture independent Kenya but also address the issues that the populace grapple with.

According to Líndfors (1997), the literature that emerged in Africa in the late twentieth century was profoundly influenced by political history. Líndfors (1997) argues that this literature was shaped by social forces. He further notes that writers of this form of literature served not only as advocates of social change but also were chroniclers of (political) history. The present study borrowed a leaf from this observation and explored how Wamugunda Geteria and Wahome Mutahi use popular fiction as a site for presenting history in their texts, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*, respectively. Arguing for the importance of situating texts within their historical locales, Líndfors (ibid, p.vii) posits that:

African literary texts can be approached in a variety of ways. They may be examined in isolation as verbal artefacts that have a unique integrity. They may be studied in relation to other texts that preceded or followed them. Or they may be seen against the backdrop of the times, traditions and circumstances that helped to shape them.

In a study on African culture, Ngara (1990) observes that African culture can be approached from two broad perspectives: serious and light hearted. Giving examples from Okot's *Song of Prisoner* and *Song of Malaya*, Ngara (ibid.) argues that the former has a serious tone as opposed to the latter which treats serious social concerns in a light manner. Ngara's study was important to this study because by focusing on characterization in texts deemed popular, the study provided the researcher with a basis upon which to interrogate the presentation of characters in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*.

In discussing how literary works contribute to the understanding of culture, Muriungi (2002) explores how a Kenyan novelist, Meja Mwangi, engages in dramatising how ideas of sex are embedded in complex systems of socio-economic and cultural beliefs,

values and ideals in his text, *The Last Plague*. Read against a background of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, this text becomes a vital source of how the given society reacts to the pandemic and more specifically, how and why the author manages to represent this reality in a work of fiction. The present study borrowed from Muriungi's study more so on how writers of works of fiction use the symbol of the human body to represent the possible way(s) in which the society can deteriorate when plunged in a history of political despondence, economic woes, moral degradation and religious hypocrisy. In addition, the present study sought to explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* interact with their immediate environment in a society undergoing political, economic and social crises.

Focusing on the romantic sub-genre of popular fiction, Muhomah (2002) presents an analysis of masculinity as espoused in Asenath Odaga's *Between the Years* (1987) and *Riana* (1991). Muhomah argues that these two texts offer insights into the expectations and hopes that the female protagonists in the texts have for men. By investigating how masculinity is constructed using monogamy, wealth and fatherhood as parameters, the author undertakes a study of cultural configurations, which was of paramount importance to the present study. The present study sought to establish the contribution of literature and history in the construction of culture. By situating *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* in their immediate historical context, this study explored how the authors engage with the events (history) upon which the texts are premised.

According to the literature available to the researcher and as evidenced in the literature reviewed above, little research has been done on Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* with a view of exploring how the authors engage with the times of the texts' production. In this regard, this study fills

this gap by not only situating the novels within the times of their production but also by subjecting the novels to an analysis so as to explore how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history.

1.10 Methodology

This was a qualitative research of popular fiction novels and was mainly engaged with content analysis. To engage with the literariness of the selected texts, the study employed content analysis, close reading and stylistic analysis. By visiting libraries, archives and the internet, the researcher was in a position to undertake an in-depth reading of not only *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* but also literary and journalistic material that focuses on literature at a general level, popular fiction at a particular level and the engagement between history and popular fiction at a specific level. *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* were the main texts from which primary data was sourced.

The researcher also visited various libraries such as the Margaret Thatcher Library of Moi University, The Kenya National Library in Eldoret, and Kenyatta University's online library. From these sources, the study was able to access and analyse secondary data from documented literary materials where the issues under investigation are discussed. These visits also enabled the researcher enrich secondary data and from various periodicals, journals and historical documents, the study was able to understand the historical conditioning of the period under study much better. It is also from these sources that a review of related literature was undertaken and the research gap identified.

The study then employed a critical and descriptive analysis in a bid to explore how the two popular novels engage with history. An analysis of language was done as a "means

of inquiring into latent meaning and patterns of interpretation" (Ernst, 2009, p. 253). Stylistic elements such as irony, juxtaposition, metaphor and description were also analysed to draw attention to the texts' implicit statements.

1.11 Thesis Structure

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter One is an introduction in which the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research objectives and questions guiding the study, the research premises, the significance of the study, justification of the study, the scope and limitations of the study, theoretical framework underpinning the study, literature relevant to the study, and the methodology employed in the study were discussed. Chapter Two presents a detailed analysis through which the researcher examined how elements of popular fiction manifest themselves in Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*. In Chapter Three, the study explored how Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* engages with history while Chapter Four explored how Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* engages with history. Chapter Five is a summary of the study and conclusions derived from the study. A list of works cited is provided immediately after Chapter Five.

The next chapter explores how elements of popular fiction manifest themselves in Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*.

CHAPTER TWO

BLACK GOLD OF CHEPKUBE AND THREE DAYS ON THE CROSS AS POPULAR FICTION

Few professors of English literature will ever admit it, but the truth is that popular writers have had just as great an effect on the people of this nation as Dickens, Poe, or Melville and their classic works

– James L. Collins

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the novels under study in this thesis - Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* (1985) and *Three Days on the Cross* (1991) by Wahome Mutahi. The chapter also provides some background information about the authors of the selected novels. It then goes ahead and demonstrates that the selected novels properly fall in the category of popular fiction. *Black Gold of Chepkube* is shown to be a historical thriller while *Three Days on the Cross* is shown to be a political thriller.

2.2 About the Authors

2.2.1 Wamugunda Geteria

Wamugunda Geteria was born in what is now Embu County, Kenya, in 1945. His works belong to the tradition of popular fiction in East Africa and often tackle topical issues. His first novel, *Black Gold of Chepkube* (1985), explores the black market trade in coffee across the Kenya-Uganda border, which in the 1970s led to the emergence of a new culture of corruption and illicit trade. His second novel, *Nice People* (1992), deals with Kenya's experience with the HIV/AIDS menace in the early years of the disease's appearance in the country. The novel particularly decries the high prices of the drugs that were needed to manage the disease at the time (Gikandi & Mwangi, 2007).

2.2.2 Wahome Mutahi

Wahome Mutahi (1954 – 2003) was born in what is now Nyeri County, Kenya. A graduate of the University of Nairobi, Wahome Mutahi was a journalist in Kenya, famous especially for his long-running humour column, *Whispers* (1982 – 2003). Wahome Mutahi's published works include the novels *Three Days on the Cross* (1991), *The Jail Bugs* (1992), *Doomsday* (1999), *The Miracle Merchant* (2003), co-authored with Wahome Karengo; *How to be a Kenyan* (1996), and *The House of Doom*, published posthumously and serialised by *Nation* newspapers; and plays written in his mother-tongue, Kikuyu, which include *Mugathe Mubogothi*, *Mugathe Ndotono*, *Igotiria Muingi*, *Ngoma Cia Aka*, *Ngoma Cia Arume* (co-authored with Wahome Karengo) and *Makariria Kioro* (co-authored with Ndungi Githuku).

2.3 A Synopsis of *Black Gold of Chepkube*

First published in 1985, *Black Gold of Chepkube* deals with the black market in coffee across the Kenya-Uganda border, which in the 1970s led to the emergence of a new culture of corruption and illicit life (Gikandi & Mwangi, 2007). It is an intriguing story about the effects of clandestine economic politics on the moral fabric of a society. *Black Gold of Chepkube* traces the historical path that several characters who get involved in the illegal coffee trade in the Kenya-Uganda border in the 1970s trudge on towards their inevitable destruction.

For Lucy Njoki, life at Ragati village becomes unbearable due to the high levels of poverty occasioned by the adverse effects of colonialism and once an opportunity to seek a better future in the city avails itself, she grabs it. While the city doesn't turn out as she expected and the vagaries of capitalism on urban spaces initiate her into prostitution to make ends meet, it is in the city that her life becomes intertwined with that of

characters - Gladys, Catherine, Kimaru, Nyamu and Gatembu, just to mention but a few – who instigate her involvement in the black market coffee trade.

Though events captured in the novel span a period that bears resemblance to happenings that obtained in colonial and post-colonial Kenya, *Black Gold of Chepkube* majorly focuses on what Karimi (2014) refers to as the "Chepkube boom era" (<http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/...into-millionaires?pageNo=3>). This refers to the period in which the once dormant village of Chepkube in what is now Bungoma County was turned into a goldmine for those involved in the illegal trade of smuggled Ugandan Coffee. *Black Gold of Chepkube* fictionalizes this phenomenon and shows the historical continuum of how a ring of politicians, administrators, businessmen and prostitutes took advantage of two major international events - the catastrophic climate disaster in Brazil in July 1975 and Idi Amin's destruction of the Ugandan economy during his dictatorial regime. Lucy, Catherine, Gladys, Kimaru, Gatongoria, Gatembu, Area Governor Maingi, Tom, Oluoch and Nyamu are some of the characters through whom the intrigues behind the clandestine economic politics are played out.

As stated in the blurb, this novel “is the first ever told story of a people gone mad over the black gold of Chepkube: told by an insider” (Geteria, 1985). From the rural village of Ragati to the emerging cities of Nairobi and Mombasa to as far as London, the author takes the reader through a journey in which political intrigues, moral decadence, corruption, instant riches (and instant poverty), inhumanity and death are explored.

2.4 A Synopsis of *Three Days on the Cross*

Published in 1991 and a recipient of the prestigious Jomo Kenyatta Award for Literature in 1992, *Three Days on the Cross* deals with life under a paranoid postcolonial African dictatorship.

For Albert Momodu, an attempt by a friend to introduce him to a secret organization in a bar turns out to be the beginning of his end. While at Wam Wam bar, the friend hands Momodu a note which Momodu pockets without reading. The author skilfully takes the reader through the events that lead to Momodu's murder. His wife, out of ignorance, grand naiveté and fear, comes across the crumpled note and seeks help from the only person she can trust, a religious leader – the Catholic Priest Fr. Kerekou. In total disregard of his role as a priest and in betrayal to both flock and religion, Fr. Kerekou succumbs to lust and uses the information he received in confidence as a means towards having Momodu arrested thus giving him a chance to pursue Mrs. Momodu. Fr. Kerekou informs the police of Momodu's (alleged) involvement in the activities of an insurrectionary group and what begins as a simple act of fear, confusion and lust develops into a “matter of national security” as Momodu and his equally innocent friend, Ogudipe Chipota, are tortured in a secret location in the bustling capital city by an overzealous special police force.

2.5 *Black Gold of Chepkube* as a Historical Thriller

Black Gold of Chepkube could be argued to be an amalgamation of various sub-genres of popular fiction. However, what comes out clearly is that the text clearly distinguishes itself as a(n) historical thriller. Johnson (2006, p.2) has defined the historical thriller in the following terms:

[T]he genre has unofficial rules that authors are expected to follow ... persuade the readers that the story could have happened ... should portray the time period as accurately as possible and avoid anachronisms. The fiction and the history should be well balanced, with neither one overwhelming the other.

In other words, texts that fall under this genre ought to be both credible and entertaining to the reader. The text should be able to present to the reader something familiar and distant at the same time (Lee, 2010). This means that while the reader is aware of the fact that the text is a product of the author's creativity and ability to create a fictional world, this new world must have authenticity and credibility. Authors of popular fiction employ their creative skills and knowledge of historical events to present to us a world we (probably) never lived in but one we can identify with.

The argument that *Black Gold of Chepkube* is a historical thriller is premised on a number of factors. First, the text falls within the spatial period requisite of historical thrillers (Mondor, 2005; Lee, 2010). Despite the apparent lack of consensus on the exact figure, most historical thrillers are considered so only if they are written between fifteen and thirty years after the occurrence of the events described. This study identifies *Black Gold of Chepkube* as a historical thriller based on the fact that although the novel came out in 1985 and the *magendo* (black market) business on which the novel majorly concerns itself with happened in the period 1976 - 1979, the spatial element is well catered for when the author traces Njoki's development from birth at Ragati, to a teenage young girl in colonial Kenya, and finally to a grown woman in independent Kenya, a period that even supersedes the 15-year period. This is also true of the historical events that obtain in the text more so when the text begins with Njoki's birth, the main protagonist, and ends with the Epilogue set at Limuru in 1981 (*Black Gold of Chepkube*, p. 137). Since *Black Gold of Chepkube* satisfies the spatial requirements of a historical thriller, this thesis identifies and classifies it as a historical thriller.

Black Gold of Chepkube is also a historical thriller due to its engagement with history (Dickstein, 2008). While focusing on individual characters, the author gives his characters the density requisite of a historical thriller, that of real people and how their

lives are affected by historical events. For instance, the evolution of Njoki from a naive village girl to a central character in the *magendo* business and a failing businesswoman in Limuru is well traced. This is achieved by paralleling her development with historical happenings and how these happenings affect her at an individual level. The fact that the author launches into his (main) focus of political intrigue, illegal coffee trade, corruption, among others when Njoki is already twenty years old (Geteria, 1985, p. 13) and an adult in the city is lent credence by Dickstein's (2008, p. 1) observation that the historical thriller:

Works best when [it] shows how history really affects the fate of individuals and when ... characters have the density, the contradictory fullness, of real people, instead of coming through as cardboard cutouts or historical ciphers. The writer can grasp the best perhaps twenty years or so after the fact, not when too much time has passed or when the events is still raw.

There is, then, history in *Black Gold of Chepkube*.

As observed by Robertson (2010), on a cold night in July 17 1975, Brazil's coffee growing region of Paraná was hit by an enormous frost that destroyed more than seventy percent of the coffee crop. This was an event whose ripple effects were felt all over the world. With Brazil being a major producer of coffee, this catastrophe led to a slump in production, the result being soaring coffee prices as a result of hoarding.

Across the world, Uganda, another major producer of coffee, was suffering under the caprices of its military dictator, Idi Amin. This situation, coupled with the imposition of a trade embargo on Uganda's coffee by US President Jimmy Carter in 1977 following the murder of Archbishop Janani Luwum in July 1977, meant that Ugandan coffee could only get an outlet through Kenya, and the number of interested individuals was vast.

This study avers that the climatic catastrophe that befell Brazil in 1975, the illegal coffee trade that rocked the Uganda-Kenya border between 1976 and 1979, the death of Kenya's first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, in August 1978 and the dictatorial rule of Idi Amin in Uganda between 1971 and 1979 are all historical events. They happened.

The question being answered by these events is 'what' and not 'how'. The author relies on the 'what' to give his work a feel of authenticity before venturing into his creative imagination to answer the 'how' question. In *Black Gold of Chepkube*, these historical events are used both as motivating circumstances that explain character action and as time-markers in the lives of the characters (Mboya, 1997). For instance, the intrigues that define the lives of Lucy, Catherine, Kimaru, Gatongoria, Gatembu, Area Governor Maingi, Tom, Oluoch and Nyamu, just to mention but a few, are the author's attempt at showing 'how' the ('what') events affected individuals.

Second, *Black Gold of Chepkube* has a unique story structure – another distinct feature of historical thrillers (Linda, 2005). In most historical thrillers, the reader is treated to a number of unexpected turns and twists. In effect, what a thriller ends up as could be different from how it started. In most instances, the reader has to refer to the blurb as much as two-thirds of a text to know what is at stake in the text. *Black Gold of Chepkube* conforms to and adapts itself to this feature. As the text starts, the reader is focused on the life of Lucy Njoki and the drudgery that defines her life in Ragati Village. The author convincingly creates a character who is so fed up with the hardships of village life that she will stop at nothing to turn the tables. Despite her initial experience with men who turn out to be on a quest to use and dump her (save for James), Lucy has no qualms accepting Maitha's offer to take her to the land of opportunities – the city. She sees him as her gateway to a better life. The reader is made to expect the text to focus on the trials and tribulations of a village girl and how she

(perhaps) manages to rise above male selfishness and becomes successful. Once in the city, Lucy once again becomes nothing more than an object of desire for men and a source of both entertainment and, at times, trouble for Maitha and other city men. By the time the author ventures into his central thematic concerns of political intrigue, illegal coffee trade, corruption, among others, the reader has covered a huge chunk of the text.

However, it is worth noting that this could be a deliberate attempt by the author to create credible characters with whom the reader can identify. The slow development and growth of Lucy could be an attempt to make the reader understand and sympathize with her situation and thus not condemn her for what could pass as either moral decadence or a survival strategy depending on what side of the moral fence one argues from.

It goes without saying that the sub-genre 'historical thriller' is a combination of both the 'historical' and the 'thrilling' elements (Dalton, 2006). With this in mind, this study defines a historical thriller as a literary piece of art whose content is a product of both imagination and facts, whose purpose is to educate and excite the reader. While focusing on the latter part of this definition, this study argues that *Black Gold of Chepkube* satisfies this requirement and thus earns the definition of a thriller – it thrills. The events in the text are both exciting and dangerous. As mentioned earlier, the reader is treated to a wide array of unexpected turns which leave him wondering what will happen next. One keeps wondering what will happen to Lucy. Will she manage to move to the city? Once in the city, can she survive without Maitha? Will the brawl in the bar escalate to something else? How will Kimaru, Gatembu, Grace and the others fare in the illegal coffee trade? Does fate really punish the wrong-doers in the text, or is it just coincidence? These and other questions initiate and maintain suspense and with each

unfolding event, the reader gets to understand that no single character in the text is sacred – they are all highly susceptible to being victims of their own follies.

Fourth, this study identifies *Black Gold of Chepkube* as a historical thriller on the premise that, as a unit of analysis, the plot of the text renders itself to this genre. Due to the fact that historical thrillers are characterized by big storylines, the plots upon which the narrative(s) rest end up being complex. This is because for the author to pull off a big storyline, the plot has to be strong enough to hold various narratives within it and yet find a way to weave the various strands into one organic whole.

Black Gold of Chepkube is dotted by multiple strands. The novel has several storylines that intersect at various points. For instance, the narrative about Mr. Harrison as a microcosm of colonial rule is complete on its own. The torturous and debasing atrocities meted on the Africans are clearly drawn out through Mr. Harrison. However, his narrative gains more value when his actions and the resulting effects help motivate Njoki's actions (character motivation) and act as markers in her life. The caning she receives on that fateful day when she and Esther are whipped, coupled with her father's woes under the dictatorial rule of Mr. Harrison, help to explain her loathing of village life and desire to live a better life, a dream she hopes of achieving through prostituting herself to the highest bidder.

While the events that define and characterize the life of Lucy Njoki could suffice to make social commentary on the vagaries of urbanization and the challenges of urban spaces, her story is cleverly weaved in to contribute to the organic whole of the text. Her encounter with John at the bar and later as a prostitute in the University Halls becomes a hallmark in her life. The author thus attempts to draw a web in which the concept of love and the inconveniences of moral decadence amidst clandestine economic activities

is redefined. When the two characters later meet in the illegal coffee trade, their varied stories merge to enable the author achieve his objectives(s).

By the end of the text where each character has received their fair share of poetic justice, each character's fate becomes a story in itself. From Idi Amin's attempt to commit chemical warfare to the ban of coffee transactions and the death of Catherine, each of the 'minor' narratives contribute to the whole. Of significance to this study, is the author's reliance and parallel use of historical facts and the use of creative imagination to paint the lives of individual characters who, though sufficient to sustain narrative on their own, have storylines that intersect at various points thus contributing to the grand narrative about the effects of clandestine political economics and how individual characters reacted to such occurrences - mega-narrative. It is this ability to bring out the nuances that define the historical continuum by concentrating on characters as individuals and part of a larger group that not only enables the author to tell the reader what the characters do in their struggle for survival, but goes a step further to show why and how.

Black Gold of Chepkube also thrives on credibility. As a historical thriller, the text must strive to strike a balance between the author's creative skills and historical facts that lend authenticity to the text. This becomes a challenging task more so when we consider the fact that at a general level, the text can be argued to fall under the sub-genre of historical fiction. However, this general definition generates a problem: how do both the author and reader differentiate between historical fiction and history? This, according to Dalton (2006), is because all history contains elements of fiction, albeit at interpolative and/or speculative levels.

This study observes that *Black Gold of Chepkube* conforms to the historical thriller sub-genre because the author manages to cut through the fog of perception and comes to the ‘truth’ as he understands it and wants to communicate it to his immediate audience. This happens when he succeeds in focusing on both events and characters. Wamugunda not only tells us about the illegal coffee trade and the death of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta – historical hallmarks – but goes ahead to show us how these events affected the lives of (almost) all characters in the text. We are told of not only how Idi Amin’s attempted chemical warfare was schemed, but also how the actors were affected. For instance, by use of character and characterization, the author manages to ask the reader to suspend belief and feel the tension and fear that gripped Professor Kiwanuka and Dr. Dada.

2.6 *Three Days on the Cross* as a Political Thriller

This study posits that Wahome Mutahi’s text is a popular novel by virtue of being a political thriller. This, the study shows, is premised on an intrinsic analysis of the text’s setting, thematic concerns, character and characterisations, narrative techniques and mode of narration. According to Dickstein (2008), the political thriller is, in its barest form, an “odd hybrid of fact and fiction”. It is therefore worth noting that the political thriller derives its existences from an interplay between (historical) facts and fiction.

Basing on facts, a writer of a political thriller is able to weave a narrative interpolated with his creative imagination. This study is, however, cognisant of the fact that all works of fiction are political and based on eventualities (McCarthy, 1984). This is because even those texts that avoid political nuances are in the very essence, as posited by Marxists, being political as their silence on the subject tends to “lend tacit support to the status quo”.

Nevertheless, since political awareness (or lack of it thereof) is not a standardized entity and may vary from one individual to the other, *Three Days on the Cross* is a political thriller due to the fact that it allows for an insight into the relationship between private and public life - a credo of political thrillers as advanced by Eliot (1866). For instance, for Momodu, his private life is thrust into the turmoil that defines the public life when he is jolted into the effects of paranoia that characterize the dictatorial regime. In a quest to stamp out dissidence, the government of the day outdoes itself and will stop at nothing to force confessions out of suspects. Momodu, an innocent victim, ends up having his private life affected by the public one.

One could also view Mrs. Momodu's attempt at saving her husband in this light. Out of concern for her husband, she ends up confiding in a priest who has already broken the vow of celibacy four times and who, although later acknowledges his folly and recants his statement, sets the police on Momodu. *Three Days on the Cross* thus speaks to this aspect of the political thriller. For Chipota, his woes are attributed to his work as a private citizen. Being a journalist, he is expected to keep the public in the know. However, the dictatorial government of the day finds him a threat when he exposes a scandal implicating top government officials. To divert attention, the government accuses Chipota of promoting disaffection towards the government (Mutonya, 2012), an atrocity he pays for dearly through torture and humiliation. It suffices to argue that the politics of the day find their way into Chipota's private life hence validating Eliot's (Quoted in Mrkovits, 2006, p. 207) assertion that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life."

While acknowledging the difficulty in delimiting the boundaries within which the political thriller can be defined, this study categorises *Three Days on the Cross* as a political thriller since the text focuses, albeit satirically, on the machinations of the

political elite who are at the helm of political power in their attempts to consolidate this power. Precisely, it focuses on the tyranny served by the ruling class in their quest to maintain power and stamp out any form of dissidence, whether real or imagined. Although there is no direct mention of Kenya, the text is set in a Nairobi-like city and, with the knowledge that Wahome Mutahi was once a victim of state harassment, this study posits that the text is an exposé of the rot and dictatorial nature of the Moi-led government. At the helm of political power is the Most Illustrious One who is depicted as the definition of paradox; he seems to give freedom and liberty lip service while in reality, he will go to any measures to ensure any other voice that seems to question him is silenced – literally (Branch, 2011).

This study approaches *Three Days on the Cross* as a political thriller since by marrying fact and fiction in an artistic way, the author makes an attempt at achieving credibility - a key element of political thrillers. The setting (an independent African state) coupled with characterization, more so Momodu and Chipota (the former a West African name and the latter a central African one) are but examples of the author's deliberate attempt to achieve credibility and authenticity.

The plot of *Three Days on the Cross* subscribes to the characteristic features of a political thriller. In most political thrillers, the plot revolves around the trials and tribulations of an ordinary citizen, like Momodu, who is plucked from his everyday life and thrust into a world of dangers and intrigues by circumstances and forces beyond their control (Derry, 2002; Palmer, 1978; Gromov, 2008; Davis, 2013). More often than not, this involves the "low-level" and ordinary individual who attracts the unwarranted attention of desperate but powerful individuals who will stop at nothing to consolidate their interests. It is also of import to note that once these forces decide to protect their

interests, it becomes a matter of life and death situation for the victims, who are faced with obstacles they barely overcome.

Three Days on the Cross has two main protagonists, Momodu and Chipota, who find themselves as the unwilling participants in a cruel cycle of dominance that leaves one dead and the other scarred, possibly, for life. For Momodu, his life is disrupted when Fr. Kerekou reports him to the police about his alleged involvement in the activities of a subservient underground movement out to destabilize the government. For three days, he is tortured and intimidated towards confessing for crimes he never committed. Once it emerges that he is an innocent victim of circumstances, the dictatorial regime decides to eliminate him so as ensure that the truth remains buried. For Chipota, his exposure of corruption scandals involving high ranking government officials sets him on a collision path with the powers-that-be. He is accused of being disloyal to the government and since he is a threat, he too has to be eliminated. It therefore suffices to conclude that by virtue of having a plot that renders itself to the characteristic elements of a political thriller, and as demonstrated from the novel, this study classifies *Three Days on the Cross* as a political thriller.

Published in 1991, *Three Days on the Cross* is set in the 1980s when the Moi regime in Kenya was in panic mode and subjected the populace to torture and injustice as it tried to do away with the underground movements that were agitating for a change in the mode of governance. As observed by Mburu (2000) in the *Sunday Nation*, between 1980 and 1983, writers Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Gakaara wa Wanjau, together with historian Maina wa Kinyatti formed an underground movement known as the December Twelve Movement.

The slow pace of the movement and the policies taken towards achieving its objectives saw the young members of the movement, who comprised the militant *Mwakenya* wing, break away from the December Twelve Movement and seek to oust the then sitting president, Daniel arap Moi (Mutonya, 2012). Though most ex-members have denied membership to the movement, recent media reports indicate that the movement was real as confessed by Kang'ethe Mungai (quoted by Mburu, 12 March 2000) that "Mwakenya was for real and not a creation of the government, as people tend to think. We were determined to overthrow the government because Moi had blocked all the avenues of democratic expression. We wanted to give the people a new government that would allow them all the democratic freedoms that had been denied by the regime".

This development, coupled with the conditions and environment within which President Moi got into power and the mechanisms set into place to safeguard this position against dissenting forces, led to the existence of a general feeling between state and society defined by a huge sense of mistrust (Kariuki, 1996). This was also a period when there was a clamour for multiparty democracy and the powers-that-be did not take this lightly. It is in this environment that Wahome Mutahi sets *Three Days on the Cross* and shows how private citizens get pulled into the violent wars that dominate public politics.

The two protagonists in the text, Momodu and Chipota, are depicted as two ordinary citizens in an independent African state. The two are middle-class citizens who hold jobs that define them thus – one works in a bank while the other is a journalist. The two, however, find themselves at the wrong place at the wrong time and become victims of happenstance. Through the machinations of a naive wife, a lustful priest and a lampooned buffoonery of a special police force, the two become the unfortunate victims of state tyranny and dictatorship.

It is noteworthy that in his lifetime, the author was a critic of the Kenyan government; a fact that led to his incarceration on sedition-related charges at Industrial Area prison in 1986. This study thus avers that *Three Days on the Cross* is an account of his suffering at the hands of the dictatorial government interpolated with his creative skills as a writer. As observed by Waliaula (2010, http://citation.allacademic.com..._index.html):

Wahome Mutahi states in the disclaimer that his is a work of fiction ... His refusal to admit that his fictional work represents his own sentient prison experience is, one could say, a tactical rhetorical device that enables him to tacitly narrativize his prison experience without appearing to be doing so ... this conclusion is not only simply premised on the theoretical assumption that all novels are autobiographies or autobiographical ... rather there are far too many concrete resemblances between the author Wahome Mutahi and Ongudipe Chipota, a key character in the novel and between the unnamed country and Mutahi's own native Kenya to escape any perspicuous reader's attention ... the tumultuous political climate in Kenya in the 1990s compelled Mutahi to utilize the novel genre and its diegetic properties to represent his own experience as a victim of the barbarous force of Daniel arap Moi's totalitarian regime.

Literature is but a product of fact and human imagination which employs language artistically. As Ngugi (1981, p.73) aptly puts it, “every writer is a writer in politics”. This is because writing popular fiction in Kenya is a reflecting of the reality; reflecting man’s relationship with his environment. Popular fiction thus becomes a mirror for mankind. It seeks to reflect issues and events through time, locations and characters. This type of reflection brings to mind the idea of resemblance – like that of a mirror. These reflections can be argued to be historically conditioned since they are images of objects and people included at certain times and location in the history of man. While

discussing the interplay between literature and politics, Nwagbara (2008, p. 245) opines thus:

... literature and politics are hardly separable; political development determines the trajectory of literature in certain times, and literary creations have equally influenced political developments. Thus, political novels are like thermometers. They calibrate the temperature of a given era's political symptoms. Literary history is awash with evidence of this.

For writers of popular fiction whose work contain a running thread of political undertones, the above mentioned nature and function of literature becomes of special import. As observed by Massie (2011), writers who write about politics and dare introduce the politicians they are criticising by their (real) names invite trouble for themselves. Ranging from libel action to threats to their lives, the dangers that linger on the heads of artists who make political statements are vast.

This study argues that Wahome Mutahi succeeds in making political commentary because his text is artistically carved to allow the presentation of real-life politicians through the eyes of fictional characters. This is of import to this study because it not only recreates the events for the reader but also the balance between fact and fiction generates the verisimilitude so needed to help the reader simultaneously identify with the text and yet be able to interact with it objectively. Perhaps this attempt to address issues deemed mundane but yet pertinent to the populace in a manner they will respond to is what Ruganda (1992, p. 97) is referring to when he says:

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

The above discussed craft becomes vital when we consider the environment within which *Three Days on the Cross* is set. The text is set within the late 1980s and early 1990s when Kenya was a one *party de jure* state. During this period, there were still remnant behaviours of the government's hard stance on any voice that seemed to question the role and position of neo-colonialism in an independent state. With the growing opposition, the powers-that-be saw it fit to curtail this freedom by arbitrarily arresting journalists, members of academia, politicians, the clergy and any other government critic – real or imagined (Branch, 2011). This environmental landscape within which the author has to work becomes sadder and (to an extent even comic) when Ngugi (1998, p. 16) observes that:

Between the year 1982 and 1986, many writers and intellectuals were sent to prison or else forced into exile. The year 1986 was particularly bad for the students and faculty. Even discussions in the university classrooms were often monitored by undercover police. It was in that climate that president Daniel Arap Moi ordered the immediate arrest of the main character of my novel after intelligence reports had reached him of a Matigari who was going about asking questions related to justice in a postcolonial state.

It is this kind of environment characterised by political intolerance that Wahome Mutahi writes about in his text. *Three Days on the Cross* thus becomes a political thriller when the author employs what Njabulo Ndebele (cited in Newell, 2002, p.5) refers to as “a sense of recognition, understanding, historical documentation and indictment”. This study argues that *Three Days on the Cross* is a combination of reality with creative episodes of the writer's own life experiences. Himself a journalist and a victim of the brutality that characterised the Moi regime, the author works hard to merge fact and

fiction into an interesting narrative which readers are able to engage with, digest and learn from.

The political thriller is, in most cases, characterised by the presence of innocence in an overwhelmingly corrupt world at political, social, economic and moral levels. The "victims" in these texts are, in many a times, innocent individuals going about their business or seekers of truth who stumble upon information deemed detrimental to the powers-that-be. *Three Days on the Cross* is a fictional rendition of individuals who find themselves in the crosshairs of a corrupt regime that will go to any lengths to protect itself against real and imagined adversaries.

Bardolph (1998, p. 123) describes *Three Days on the Cross* as “an angry account of the failure of democracy ... in an imaginary country where journalists are brutalised when they try to expose the truth about mismanagement and fraud in high places”. This study also seeks to concur with Muindu (2006) who, while commenting on the landscape that Wahome Mutahi transmits into fiction, wit:

He roots his characters firmly into this turbulent politics in order to expose its absurdities. He was himself a victim of state terror, having been tortured under police custody and imprisoned for sedition related charges in 1986. These experiences enable him to render an incisive surgical examination of Kenya’s inhuman politics and ... political oppression... (15).

From the foregoing, it is arguable that *Three Days on the Cross* could be categorised as a political thriller. However, this study finds it of import to acknowledge Jameson’s (1981) argument that such a genre has no “meaning since everything is in the last analysis political”. Jameson (1981) seems to suggest that seeking to delineate texts as either political or apolitical is a “symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and

privatization of contemporary life”. While acknowledging the validity of Jameson’s observations, this study argues that the observation opens another literary door that is of equal importance to the categorisation of *Three Days on the Cross* – that of the relation between private and public life (Dickstein, 2008).

This study seeks to concur with Eliot (1866) who observes that “there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life”. Wahome Mutahi’s text works best because it shows us how historical events (facts) affect the fate of individuals and how these individuals condition themselves to either accept change or fight back. *Three Days on the Cross* deals with how Momodu and Chipota’s lives (and the lives of those around them) are affected by the state/s quest to rid the country of dissidents. The special police force thus stops at nothing to prove to the Illustrious One that all dissidents – whether real or a creation of their fear-driven imagination – have been silenced. Through creative zeal (fiction), Wahome is able to paint the events of independent Kenya without coming out as a historic cipher. The text does not read as a journalistic articulation of the mistreatment of the populace by the dictatorial regime but goes further to show how individuals are affected.

This study argues that the author succeeds in showing the reader how individual private life is affected by a wider public one. The fear and paranoia that dictates the ruling elite’s actions end up affecting Momodu and those around him. The propaganda circulated by the government about an underground movement – July Movement – is what leads Mrs. Momodu to set the wheels that crash her husband in motion. This study thus reads *Three Days on the Cross* as evidence in which the author blends (political) historical facts and fiction and comes up with a political thriller that not only educates but enthrals.

The political thriller is also characterised by presence of betrayal and torment. *Three Days on the Cross*, this study argues, is a political thriller since it takes into cognisance political developments in Kenya in its aesthetization (Nwagbara, 2008). It thus becomes a work of art which condemns arbitrary governance in independent Kenya. This study also posits that as Nwagbara (2008, p240) observes, “history bears out the capacity of a political novel to shape human civilization and development”. While acknowledging that *Three Days on the Cross* is set in a fictional world, an unnamed African country, this study finds the setting bearing close resemblance to the events that obtained in Kenya in the 1980s. Commenting on the relationship between political conditions and literary creativity, Danysh (2001, p.40) observes that:

For a reader unaware of Kenya’s literary and political history, Wahome’s novel reads with a disappointing abstractness in that it is not grounded in any African location but in an impossibly conglomerate country with character names taken from the Yoruba, the Kikuyu and others. However, anyone familiar with Kenya and Nairobi will recognize the setting and those who have heard the stories of people accused of Mwakenya activities will recognize a detailed and very accurate description of the Nyayo House torture chamber experience.

Three Days on the Cross adumbrates the tyranny that characterised the Moi regime and the lengths those in power were willing to go to so as to hold the masses down. This is achieved by the use of character and characterisation. To effectively paint the high-handedness of those in power, the author creates a head of state who is all-assuming and all-powerful. The head of state is a subject of a personality cult tradition and heaps titles upon titles on himself. He refers to himself as “The Illustrious One”, “Star of the Continent” and “Father of All”; all of them praise names distinctively characteristic of leaders in charge of oppressive independent African states (Muindu, 2006, p. 23). In

reality, however, the head of state is a scared leader who practices the politics of fear. He knows that the masses are awakening to the truth and thus resorts to lies and torture to maintain his hold on power. Perceived dissidents are “dealt with” and he uses propaganda to camouflage his dictatorial leadership and malign those advocating for change.

In regard to the spatial setting of *Three Days on the Cross*, Kenya witnessed an increment in the clamour for multiparty democracy from the intellectuals, clergy and the civil society. The government of the time thought it wise to discredit those pushing for reforms as puppets of the West and whose sole purpose was to wreck havoc in the country. They were painted as agents of Communism intent on overthrowing the “people’s democratic government”. Wahome Mutahi mirrors this when he presents to the reader a head of state – The Illustrious One – who in his quest to perpetuate dictatorship, lies to the masses that Communism advocates for the sharing of wives! Such a blatant lie, in the face of African traditional values, is an attempt at maligning those calling for political reforms by ensuring that the masses distance themselves from them.

This study thus concurs with the Althusserian idea that the effect of ideology is the practical denial of the ideological character of ideology by ideology (as cited in Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 301). Wahome Mutahi manages to show how the ones in political power “utilize propaganda and misinformation to misrepresent and distract from real, factual issues of the day in order to maintain confusion and complicity” (Nwagbara, 2008, p. 246). This kind of control is vital for the dictatorial regime who realize that in addition to using torture to make the masses “toe the line”, they need to control what people think and no other avenue provides the desired results than the use of propaganda.

This study thus situates *Three Days on the Cross* in the tradition that defines post-independence novels that dotted the African literary scene in the 1980s (Kehinde, 2005). This is partly because through the use of characters in the text, the author is able to expose and discuss the most of complex issues affecting the masses at the given period. According to Muindu (2006, p. 4):

What there is of politics in a novel is seen in the way the writer derives his characters from their historicity. In most cases, the characters are used as agents for exploring the effects of inhuman politics on the life and psyche of the individual ... The political novel grapples with the complexity of political discourse while capturing the struggle to create satisfactory politics.

The characters in *Three Days on the Cross* are stock characters of most fictional texts. The two protagonists, Momodu and Chipota, are a microcosm of the minority that has chosen to go apolitical. They are fully aware of the oppression and misrule being perpetuated by the ruling elite, but out of fear, desperation or disinterestedness, they choose to accept things as they are. They thus represent the group of middle class citizens who choose to resign to the reality around them and, in a move that could easily be interpreted as capitalistic individualism, resign themselves to the status quo.

They are aware that attempts to destabilize the status quo could have dire consequences. Being ordinary citizens who enjoy the benefits of education and a steady job (one is a journalist while the other works in a bank), the two opt to “mind their own business” and find themselves a way to escape from the harsh realities of life – drinking at Wam Wam Bar. The two, this study argues, are presented as a duo who despite their attempt to be apolitical, are affected by the wider politics and become victims of state brutality, terror and murder as those in power perpetuate their politics of fear.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to introduce the novels under study in this thesis - Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* (1985) and *Three Days on the Cross* (1991) by Wahome Mutahi. The chapter has also provided some background information about the authors of the selected novels. The core of the chapter has been a demonstration that *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* belong to the category of popular fiction. The demonstration has given setting, thematic concerns, character and characterisation, and narrative techniques in the novels as evidence for their categorization. This chapter has thus shown how Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* is a political thriller, while Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* is a historical thriller – all sub-genres of popular fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY AND WAMUGUNDA GETERIA'S *BLACK GOLD OF CHEPKUBE*

The field of History and Literature is designed primarily for those men who have, shall we say, a philosophic turn of mind. At all events, they must be interested in cause and effect, they must have the capacity and background to see the inter-relation of events, and must be possessed of sufficient imagination to apply the lessons of the Past to the problems of the Future - Eli A. Whitney

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship that the novel *Black Gold of Chepkube* by Wamugunda Geteria has with history. The starting point is the assumption that literature is a historical phenomenon. The implication of this, therefore, is that the novel is a creative reflection of, and a reaction to, the political, economic and social environments in which it was produced. Literary elements such as setting, character and characterisation, and style and language, just to mention but a few, are examined for both their functionality and their referentiality. The framing argument is that Wamugunda uses fiction to explain a historical episode in humane terms, and uses history to give weight to a moral message that he transmits as a writer of popular fiction.

3.2 History, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and the Present Past

According to Muindu (2006, p. 18), the setting of a novelistic text is of paramount importance because it “brings out the historical actualities” of the text. Setting refers to the physical, historical and social, even psychological context in which the action(s) of the story occurs, its major elements being the time, the place and the social environment that frames the characters and themes.

Though not chronologically ordered due to flashbacks, *Black Gold of Chepkube* primarily focuses on the physical locales of the Karura Caves (in the outskirts of Nairobi), Ragati in Central Kenya, Nairobi, Chepkube and Chepkitale in Trans Nzoia, Kakamega in Western Kenya, Kampala and Entebbe in Uganda, Mombasa and London. These locales might at first glance appear disjointed but in essence, they mark important signposts through which the author drives the plot by tracking the characters' journey in their quest for fulfilment. It is in these settings that the intrigues that define the characters and their actions are set.

It is the position of this thesis that the author specifically selects these settings to advance both character development and thematic concerns. Moreover, there is a deliberate attempt to represent actual conditions. For instance, the positioning of Njoki at Ragati Village and the harsh realities of life could be a clue towards making the reader desire to identify with her tribulations and consequent choices. This thesis argues that since *Black Gold of Chepkube* is a highly mimetic novel that seeks to project a replica of actuality (Julien, 1983) through popular fiction, the setting chosen by the author provides the reader with a space to engage in a "study of the isolated mind, the story of how someone recognizably like ourselves is broken by a conflict between the inner and outer world, between imaginative reality and the sort of reality which is established by social consensus" as observed by Frye (1957, p. 39). Njoki is born in Ragati Forest Village, a place she views as "a dark place full of poverty, toil and dullness" (*Black Gold of Chepkube*, p. 4). This, coupled with the harsh weather conditions chosen by the author to paint a picture of gloom, works hand in hand with the ill-treatment meted out on the Africans by the colonial masters to create a girl ready to run to "greener pastures" once the chance presents itself.

Ragati Forest Village becomes a space within which the author interrogates the role of colonialism towards social development and its associated ills. At Ragati, the most dreaded and feared master, Mr. Harrison, becomes a microcosm of colonial masters who, in their quest to spread “civilization”, push the African towards self-loathing tendencies. This kind of conditioning ends up giving the reader a girl who despite being obedient, has desires for a brighter future and at an early age of fifteen, swears not to live in the village (ibid.). The conditions, as depicted, are so dire that the characters feel the need to better themselves through any means. Lucy's initiation into prostitution, and eventual involvement in the *magendo* business, is thus attributed to her immediate environment. This thesis thus argues that the road to Chepkube starts at Ragati village.

The sixty eight (68) years of colonial rule in Kenya were characterised by punitive economic, social and political policies. Most outstanding among these policies was racial discrimination. Huge fertile land was alienated for white settlement, and harsh labour laws were enacted to force the Africans to work at low wages on settler farms and public works (Kanogo, 1987; Ogot & Ochieng', 1995). Wamugunda, in his text, subverts the narrative that has sought to paint the village as pure compared to the city which is ravaged by the vagaries of urbanisation (Kelly, 2007; Guthrie, 2011; Ramazani, 2001; Okafor, 2001; Gikandi & Mwangi, 2007).

Black Gold of Chepkube uses Ragati Forest Village as a setting to discuss the decaying social fabric. The setting of the text in the village helps create characters who are conditioned by their immediate environment to wish for a better life and grab opportunities when and if they come by. The conditions within which Njoki grows up in seem, in a way, to be preparing her for the smuggling business at Chepkube. By setting the text to capture Njoki's childhood at Ragati, the novel provides for the reader a colonial master who is merciless and who, unwittingly, creates a rebel in the African. It

therefore follows that though it may appear disjointed, the effects of colonialism, as depicted in Njoki's early life, lay the ground for the author's main concern - the cause and course of the *magendo* business.

Through the use of flashback, the reader is given a glimpse at Kenya's historical experience with colonialism. Mr. Harrison becomes the enforcer of the draconian colonial rule and, at the onset of the novel, Lucy becomes the unlucky recipient of this unwarranted brutality. Being a forest village, it is the duty of the entire village to trudge through the cold and wet month of April planting seedlings in the forest. It is during one of these planting days that Lucy is introduced to the murk that defines colonialism. Having been woken up as early as 3.00 am, Lucy and her friend are unfortunate enough to be left behind the crowd and their encounter with Mr. Harrison ends with them being whipped and scampering for safety. Their punishment is not the end of the tribulations but just a beginning for the rest of the village:

That day, none of the two hundred villagers saw the sky. All of them had their eyes glued to the ground and the cypress seedlings the whole day, obeying the forest authority from which they earned twenty-five cents per day for planting tree seedlings (*ibid.*, p. 5).

This situation of maltreatment is recouped when Lucy's brother, Gichohi, is "criminal" enough to respond to the pangs of hunger. Gichohi and his friend decide to "reap where they never sowed" by picking oranges from Mr. Harrison's orchard. They are discovered and what follows is a horrifying rendition of colonial Kenya. Despite nursing injuries sustained from falling from the tree, Gichohi is almost mauled by the monstrous dog that guards Mr. Harrison's property and once held by the ears, dragged to the office for judgement. Of import is the way the fellow Africans feign ignorance of what is going on: Nobody moved to witness the scene. The workers near the office all

faced the ground cutting the grass. The clerks went on with their paper work as Mr. Harrison thunderously entered the office (Wamugunda, 1985, p. 6).

Black Gold of Chepkube uses the characters and their actions to go beyond colonialism and discuss the underlying effects of colonialism. Rather than provide a blanket overview of the effects of colonialism on the colonised, the author captures the effects such historical eventualities had on the family unit and on individuals. The African workers are depicted as a scared lot who have been psychologically conditioned to accept their inferior position in the social strata. The storyline that defines the tribulations faced by Njoki and her family thus works towards marrying facts and fiction - while colonialism was real in Kenya, the effects on individuals as depicted by the author are more personalised and a product of his creative imagination. This invites the reader to sympathise with the Mwais more so when the reader is told that:

It was an unfortunate day for the Mwai family. He himself had taken a French leave and was not on duty. The news that reached him, on seeing Munene, the forest guard was that his two [whole] month's pay was no more; his daughter and son had both received six strokes of the cane, and that he was wanted the following day at seven o'clock in Mr. Harrison's office. All these were hard blows, but the idea of standing before Mr. Harrison, was a thing Mwai, son of Irimu, dreaded most (ibid., p. 6).

It is noteworthy that while the actions of Gichohi and his friend are, from any perspective, an act of theft, the author seems to be simultaneously condoning and condemning it. While the author might be seen as blaming the theft on the effects of colonialism and its attendant consequences and laying ground for events that obtain later in the text, the act itself speaks to the larger novel in the sense that actions have consequences. The *magendo* business, on which the novel is largely based, is also theft.

Gichohi's act of theft is met with immediate punishment and the effects trickle down to the larger family. In the same vein, the effects of the illegal trade in Ugandan coffee not only affects those directly involved but ends up having ripple effects on the economy of the affected countries and near-diplomatic rows. This thesis thus reads these events as a continuous series of events that, gradually, blend into each other in a seamless manner such that the introduction of the *magendo* business and the theft mentality depicted through Gichohi, coupled with Njoki's conditioning of a person ready to do anything to escape the clutches of poverty, constitute a continuum weaved through merging facts and fiction.

Of import to this study is character motivation. This study posits that Wamugunda Geteria locates the motivation of his central character(s) in history. Against a background of extreme poverty, humiliation and mistreatment by the colonial powers, this study postulates that the author, writing in independent Kenya, could be aiming at laying ground to explain, rather than excuse, the actions undertaken by his main characters as the novel develops. This becomes clearer with the knowledge that as the text develops, the reader is treated to a situation where due to oppression, any slight chance of a change in fortunes, is grabbed at by the characters.

Black Gold of Chepkube makes a lot of reference to historical events that occurred during the period that obtains in the novel. The novel makes reference to the global inflation instigated by OPEC countries in 1973 and the evolution of Kenya into a capitalistic man-eat-man society. This situation, coupled with the looming elections slated for October 1974, meant that money was in high demand as a solution to the many problems that were afflicting the country. This anxiety is then heightened by the murder of J. M. Karikui (alluded to in p. 27-28) and the decapitation of the Ugandan economy by Idi Amin.

The novel goes deeper than just alluding to historical facts. The novel shows how individuals were affected by these occurrences. For instance, the shortage of coffee as occasioned by the frost in Brazil and the economic war waged by Idi Amin is used to portray family relations in Kenya. Wambui, Kimaru's mother, experiences the effects of these world happenings when her husband, a product of patriarchy, decides to cut off his coffee plantation owing to the poor prices it is fetching. The author uses historical realities to create fictional spaces in which he can interrogate gender relations and domestic violence. Wambui is only saved from further physical abuse when Kimaru emerges and Kimani stops beating her out of the fear and love he has for Kimaru (p. 30-31). This scenario is not an isolated one but helps in developing the plot towards the *magendo* business. Historical facts are used to explain the choices taken by the characters.

The actions of the characters also resonate with developments in the politics of Kenya. For instance, the author resorts to historical events to lay ground for the characters' actions. By means of vivid description, the reader is made to sympathise with Lucy when one considers the harsh climatic and political environment she is brought up in. This, coupled with her desire to disentangle herself from the tentacles of poverty, makes her see men as a source of redemption. While describing the sexual liaison between Lucy, an unmarried girl in the village, and Peter, the young Luo ranger, Lucy is said to have "accepted the rare treat with teenage athletics which she secretly believed was bridging the gap between her humble home and that of Mr. Harrison's ruling class" (Wamugunda, 1985, p.10). This becomes more evident when, perhaps in a moment of authorial intrusion, the author explains the reason(s) behind Lucy's decision to declare war "on what she took at an unfeeling species - men" (p.12).

Lucy's determination to consider men an unfeeling species is driven by Peter's action of deserting her in her time of need. Realizing the dire consequences of his sexual liaison with an unmarried girl, Peter makes plans to run away from Ragati, and his obligations, while all the time promising Lucy marriage. The author, however, manages to tone down Peter's seemingly questionable choices by insinuating that Peter's actions were an indirect result of the Affiliation Act (1969) which "had been enacted by the colonial government to ensure that putative fathers cared for their children" (Kabereri-Macharia, 1985, p.7).

Lucy's desire to break the yoke of poverty leads her to commit acts deemed inappropriate by the society. Her relationship with James is just but a material one and once more, the author finds it apt to equate the coldness of her heart towards James with that of a cold evening (p. 8). Through character and characterization, the author weaves in the entry of Peter who introduces a new channel for Lucy towards riches. Her desire for wealth and a better life blinds her and she has no qualms responding to James' marriage proposal thus: "James, I love you dearly. No woman ever lived who ever did for a man she loved the things I could have done for you. But I cannot live in this village under this poverty!" (p. 9).

This physical setting of *Black Gold of Chepkube* becomes of great import because it is at Ragati Forest Village and, albeit unknowingly, as an indirect effect of the Affiliation Act, that Lucy's life takes a turn. Her involvement with Peter leads to pregnancy and what she once regarded as a way of "bridging the gap between her humble home and that of Mr. Harrison's ruling class" becomes a mirage. When Peter betrays and abandons her, she reverts to James who takes her back and hopes that since her pride has now been wounded, she will stay with him.

By now Lucy is twenty years old and as is typical in independent Kenya, she is inclined to believe that the city holds more opportunities and a chance for a better life. The author thus intrudes and informs the reader that despite James' kindness, Lucy was "still determined to avoid this poverty and squalor to her last days of life" (p. 13) and that "she still aimed higher than Ragati Forest Village" (p. 13). Could Lucy be a product of her environment? Could she have turned out different if the circumstances were different? Or was Lucy destined by fate to be the cause of misery – her own, to her family and to others – at Ragati? These questions are not to be taken lightly since it is the postulation of this study that the author decides to use fiction to make social commentary by situating his text on a Kenya that, historically, bleeds from the effects of colonialism.

Another setting worth noting in *Black Gold of Chepkube* is the use of Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The author deliberately sets the text within the city for what this study considers two major purposes. One, the setting situates the text in independent Kenya which not only helps the reader identify with the events in the text but also lends credence to the text itself. Two, Nairobi serves as a microcosm of major urban centres in post-independence Kenya that were seen by many a young people as the "promised land". It is worth mentioning that though predicated on what happens within Nairobi, the city is not so much the author's focus but serves as the ground on which the author tackles what he considers major issues such as the vagaries of urbanisation.

Of interest is the creation of a fictitious space - Jericho 1007. The author makes use of Jericho as a setting within which he can make social commentary. He parallels his version of Jericho with an actual existing one in Nairobi. Jericho is a low cost estate within the Eastlands area of Nairobi characterized by prostitution, poor living conditions, high levels of unemployment and the resultant soaring levels of crime

(Mitullah, 2002). In *Black Gold of Chepkube*, Jericho becomes a “hovel devoted to prostitution” (Rodrigues-Torres, 2010, p.195) and this explains why, coupled with other factors, Lucy easily slides to prostitution. He utilises a locale that is saturated with harsh living conditions to explore how such an environment conditions an individual. Jericho, a product of historical actualities, provides fodder for the author’s creative realm. *Black Gold of Chepkube* could therefore be argued to be treading on the same path with White’s (1990) *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* since both seem to rely on historical happenings to undertake an analysis of the effects of urbanisation on the social fabric.

While trying to explore the entire concept of prostitution, the use of Jericho 1007 is also in fact, biblical allusion and refers to the story of Rahab the prostitute as captured in the Book of Joshua. As narrativized in the Bible, Jericho was a town in shambles. The living conditions were deplorable and class stratification was evident. Faced with an impending attack from the Israelites under Joshua, the city was on the verge of destruction. As such, the haves and the have-nots are separated by a wall in which case the rich move to the centre of the city protected by the inner wall while the poor are left to live between the inner and outer walls. This was an area prone to the ills of society and is inhabited by the derelicts, criminals and the sick – a fertile ground for Rahab’s brothel business to flourish. It is at this brothel that Rahab saves the lives of two Hebrew spies on condition that when they attack the city, they are to spare her life and that of her family. This she does since she believes that the Lord worshipped by the Israelites is worth the leap of faith. True to their word, when the Israelites attack Jericho, Rahab and her family are spared.

In *Black Gold of Chepkube*, and bearing in mind that Jericho is the lowest city in the world with an altitude of 250 metres below sea level, Jericho becomes a site where the

lowest of the low live. Jericho is dogged by conditions of squalor and morality is facing imminent destruction. It is at Jericho where those entrusted with upholding the values of the society (the clergy, civic leaders, the government) converge to engage in their illicit endeavours. The decaying moral fabric provides Catherine with all the ingredients requisite for a flourishing brothel business.

The novel thus utilises history to tackle moral dilemmas. Of note is that the novel revisits the place of the prostitute in the society. Questions are raised as to the role of the prostitute in the society. Regarded by many as the bane of society, the prostitute is depicted as one who is willing to take risks, sacrifice for the sake of others but also one who seeks individual gains. Catherine tells of how her prostitution activities were castigated by her family members yet the same proceeds have been used to uplift the living conditions of her kin. It is also at Jericho that the idea to invest in the risky illegal coffee trade is hatched and it is the prostitutes who are tasked with running the business. Catherine, Njoki and Gladys take a leap of faith hoping that the proceeds from the *magendo* business will uplift their lives. By use of symbolism and allusion, the novel utilizes history to call for a re-look in the moral debates concerning the place of the prostitute in the society.

In essence, the setting becomes very vital in developing the characters, driving the plot and tackling thematic issues. Through description and dialogue, the author helps paint the position Nairobi holds among the youth with phrases such as:

She had never visited Nairobi, but the tales she had heard of that place mingled with Maitha's words set her wondering if the city did not have things worth discovering. These thoughts made dreams of the place haunt her regularly in her sleep.

You get what you want, when you want, in Nairobi. ... you even pick money in the streets.

One evening as she brooded over all these tales, Lucy found the solution to her quandary of either rotting in the Forest station or seeking fortunes elsewhere (Nairobi) (p. 14).

The city/urban setting becomes a space associated with a downward degradation of the moral fabric. It is in the city that most of these characters are introduced to wayward behaviour that eventually lead to their ultimate destruction. Due to the prevalence of a harsh capitalistic economy, the characters are “forced” into self-destructive behaviour that see them “punished” at the end of the narrative. For Lucy, the “naive innocent” girl from up-country, the betrayal by Maitha leads her to “find a saviour” in Gladys who introduces her to the world of prostitution.

It is, however, of import to note that Wamugunda Geteria deviates from the “tradition” of contrasting the village vis-a-vis the city prevalent at the time of the text’s production. Unlike other writers who present the village as pure and clean; and the city as the centre of moral corruption, Wamugunda Geteria presents characters who, already influenced by a cash economy, are already materialistic and need just a little shove to cross into self-destruction. It therefore comes as no surprise when Lucy meets Gladys in the University hostels when already engaging in prostitution. Her first interaction with Kimaru also happens around this time and albeit unknowingly, their journey to Chepkube becomes enmeshed.

The city becomes, for this study, a space where class structures, socio-economic inequalities and depravity are discussed. As observed by Nelson (1996, p. 113):

There is in the representation of the city the germ of class analysis. Money, or the lack of it, is the major problem in the urban area. Everything in urban areas is based on money. As everywhere, these poor migrants entering the system ... will do anything to obtain the wherewithal to live.

The city thus becomes the ground within which the author can question the rustics that hold the social fabric together and which are threatening to tear. It is in the city that Lucy is introduced to prostitution and through her actions and those around her, issues of greed, sexuality and corruption are tackled. Of import here is the way the author questions the hypocrisy meted out on prostitutes who are products and shapers of the society that seeks to crucify them. This is more so through the introduction of Catherine, the female pimp who seems to be the one who glues the “who’s who” of the town together.

Newell (2002) argues that the economy of the East African region was hard hit by the global recession and the oil crises of the 1970s and 1980s. This, she observes, resulted in the need for popular literature to identify new ways of experiencing socio-economic realities. One of the avenues that emerged was through new sexual stereotypes as captured by Bardolph (1989, p.41) who argues that “the novelists who were not writing about the Emergency and ‘Mau Mau’ were all concerned with prostitutes”.

With regard to the above observation, the writer of this period has to deal with harsh economic realities and as an escape route, finds someone to blame – the morally loose urban woman. In a society marked by individualism, the author of the text develops characters who are individualistic, selfish and highly materialistic. These characters are thus spawned in a space that has little resources and they “naturally” resort to a man-eat-man situation where each has to compete with the other for access. In *Black Gold of*

Chepkube, the “silent” rivalry between Gladys and Lucy enunciates this competition. The two women, presented as urban prostitutes with an insatiable thirst for money, have to compete for clients and Gladys seems to be losing the battle due to her advanced age. Through characters, such as the prostitutes, the text manages to comment on the corruption of the post-colonial Kenyan state (Stratton, 1994) via the use of symbolism.

Since the procurement of sexual services at a fee seems to be the norm in the city, Catherine sees an opportunity and gradually establishes a brothel above Wakorino Lodge. This becomes the focal point where those in power come to “unwind”. It is at Catherine’s that Nyamu the Kikuyu Farmer’s Union Chief, Councillor Kinuthu, Rev. Gitau and MP Jerry Wahome meet to engage in orgies (p. 48), do drugs and hatch plans to fleece those who have put their trust in them and make money from the illegal coffee trade.

The symbolism of the brothel’s name ought not to be missed. Since colonial times, the Akorio, or Wakorino, have been regarded as a movement that while engaging in a non-violent opposition to policies deemed unjust, refuse to take their children to mission schools or hospitals, be counted during census and generally have an aversion to anything western (Waigwa, 2007). They are, however, considered among the most stringent African indigenous movements and practice their religious beliefs with fervour. This group, which likes to worship on the move and liberally mix scripture with the teachings of the Kikuyu tribe (Blomfield, 2005), is used in this novel as a representation of the church and its role in national politics. The author seems to question the hypocritical path chosen by the church in terms of leadership. Contrary to expectations, the church has become a brothel where greed and personal gratification precede the needs of the masses. *Black Gold of Chepkube* decries the defilement of the church with a covert disapproval of Rev. Gitau’s decision to use proceeds from the

church for his personal gratification and investment in the illegal coffee trade. Ideally, the church should be on the forefront in the fight against social ills but as evidenced in the novel, once the church and state officers who are morally corrupt collude to fleece the citizenry, the church loses its standing in the society.

Wanjala (1978) accuses popular fiction of corruptions of public morality and taste. This attack has been premised on the argument that the genre is characterised by novels that more often than not, glorify violence, sentimental pathos, romantic love and material wealth. The texts are also prone to stereotypical characters and melodramatic plots (Granqvist, 1993). While alive to the fact that texts in popular fiction offer the readers an escape from the harsh realities and monotonies of everyday life, this study avers that *Black Gold of Chepkube*, being a popular fiction text, goes beyond mere escapism and carries with it an entrenched overlay of moral didacticism. As Bjornson (2002, p. 71) puts it:

Even when they focus on violence, corruption and sexuality, they invariably establish a context of values according to which some moral lessons can be drawn from their depiction of undesirable behaviour. .. In any case, ... readers expect to extract a moral from such writing ... although the principal attraction of their work is its promise of a vicarious escape from everyday reality.

This study posits that Wamugunda Geteria sets out to paint a vivid picture of independent Nairobi and, in doing so, makes reference to the history that defines the narrative. The author goes ahead and raises questions that are difficult to tackle and those that the society would rather have remain under the carpet. Through a language that might be considered explicit and full of unequivocal candour, the text deals with major social issues that dogged post-independence urban spaces in East Africa (White,

1990). For instance, it is interesting to note how Catherine, once castigated for being a prostitute, is painted as the “saviour” of her people:

Who could imagine it. I came here hungry and poor like a church mouse ... You know what, Gladys, when I came here, my parents would have strangled me if they got hold of me. My brothers shunned me like a leper calling me a dirty harlot. Today, I am Queen of Sheba ... I built all those stone buildings you see at home ... I educate all my brothers’ children ... I bought the old man a car (*Black Gold of Chepkube*, p. 25).

Discussing the recurrent motif of the prostitute in African Popular fiction, Nwahunanya (2014) observes that:

Postcolonial African writers who deal with the prostitute portray African society as one that contradicts itself. The image of the prostitute is a male construct from a social structure based on gender relations in a patriarchal society. The prostitute becomes a figure for subtly examining post-colonial African societies with a view to assessing them in terms of their declared goals and overall achievements so far. Within the general new patronizing attitude to women encouraged by feminism, we have now in the prostitute another voice calling for compassion, sympathy and an appreciative consciousness willing to carve a niche for the prostitute as woman, realizing the real reasons for what could be called her aberrant behaviour, and seeing her relevance in contemporary society. The attitude would seem to be that whatever problems her profession has caused for society should be addressed, alongside the problems that have also brought about her own predicament.

Of import to this study is the realization that through fiction, the author makes an attempt at questioning the social inequalities in most post-independence African states.

While on the surface the text may appear to focus more on these characters as prostitutes, it pays to look deeper and realize that the text tackles political corruption as well. Set at a time in Kenya characterised by state oppression and censorship, the text epitomises Newell's (2002, p.6) conceptualization of the popular fiction text that resorts to such characterisation because:

... female morality is more manageable than political corruption in Africa, and narrators can criticise women's behaviour more readily [and safely] than that of the national political class. Having transposed their country's complex political and economic problems into a moral area in which women are the primary participants, authors can then set about creating plots that attempt to resolve the problems for which their heroines are responsible.

Between 1976 and 1979, Kenya witnessed an, albeit short-lived, unexpected return of economic growth. This development, referred to by Bevan *et al.* (1989, pp. 39-47) as a "prodigious economic growth" was not as a result of government policy but a ripple effect of events in the world. A sharp frost had hit the coffee-growing areas of Brazil during the southern winter of 1975. Consequently, the coffee there was destroyed and global prices for the commodity spiked in response to the consequent downturn in supply from the World's biggest producer (Branch, 2011).

However, the East African region was in no way experiencing these weather hardships but was, in contrast, experiencing favourable rainfall and thus stood a chance of reaping from the misfortunes of South America. It is on this historical event, among others, that Wamugunda moulds his work and, by creating fictitious characters, manages to tell the tale of Kenya's experience and interaction with the rest of the world during this period. The author skilfully uses popular fiction as a vehicle through which he can comment on a number of issues ranging from corruption (moral and political), economic sabotage,

social disintegration among others, just to mention but a few. The text thus lends credence to Becker's (as cited by Vaughn, 1985, p. 33) assertion that:

Left to themselves, the facts do not speak; left to themselves, they do not exist, not really, since for all practical purposes there is no fact until [someone] affirms it ... the form and substance of historical facts, having a negotiable existence only in literary discourse, vary with the words employed to convey them. Since history is not part of the external material world, but an imaginative reconstruction of vanished events, its form and substance are inseparable; in the realm of literary discourse substance, being an idea, in form; conveying the idea, is substance.

Of special interest to this study is the selected text's title, *Black Gold of Chepkube*. In what Brindle (2013, p.4) calls "new historicist fashion", the title is more of an anecdote which reveals a wealth of information and commentary about the issues besetting Kenya (and the rest of the world) in the 1970s. According to Wa-Mungai (2007, p. 343), whereas Kiambu and Nyeri districts in Kenya's central Province are known for coffee farming, the real story that intrigues is the one that refers to the 1970s *magendo* (smuggling) boom during which Kikuyu businessmen from Kiambu, with conniving highly-placed bureaucrats in the Kenyatta regime, made huge fortunes selling cheaply obtained Ugandan coffee, euphemistically called "the black gold of Chepkube", on the Kenyan market. It is also noteworthy that the 1970s saw a huge upsurge of Kikuyu-owned land buying companies that bought swathes of land in the Rift Valley.

This study therefore argues that *Black Gold of Chepkube* is an attempt at narrating Kenya's experiences in the 1970s and 1980s. We also posit that Wamugunda goes beyond recording the past and makes a conscious choice to (re)construct and represent this version of history. A majority of major characters in the novel come from the

Central Province and are deliberately chosen. It is by no coincidence that the reader is introduced to Nyamu, the Kikuyu Farmers Union Chief, whom this study regards as the microcosm of the Kiambu elite. Chepkube and the smuggling of coffee become of paramount import to this study since all events revolve around it. To capture the illegal trade, the reader is informed that:

Meanwhile, Brazilian coffee supply dwindled after a frost ravaged plantations. Ugandan Idi Amin went [amok] with his economic war, getting rid of every able manufacturer, trader, administrator, academician and the country went into disarray (p. 28).

It all began as a joke. The low priced coffee was selling at ten shillings a bag to be sold to the K.P.C.U. as Kenya coffee at triple the price. Then the profit margin rose to ten times and later twenty times! Coffee suddenly became *black gold* by October 1976 (p. 28) [emphasis mine].

All one needed, was a motorboat in Sio Port and the road to wealth was open ... Chepkube, on the Luakhakha river dividing Kenya and Uganda on the slopes of Mt. Elgon, overnight became a trading city (p. 29).

Commenting on the nature of historical fiction, Granqvist (1993, as cited in Newell, 2002, p.85) observes that:

To cater for a reading public that is present in the absolute sense of his word has always been a main impetus ... They are texts that respond to the immediate needs of their readers, they intimately reflect the broad taste of the today,... but they may also be caustic and openly critical of the very mechanism that generates them.

This study argues that *Black Gold of Chepkube*, being a product of its time, reacts to its time of production and through an “attractive” style of writing, makes social commentary. Catherine, Gladys and Lucy are presented as individuals, though conditioned by their immediate environment, who choose the path of easy access to financial stability through prostitution - a vice detested by and scorned by the society which, ironically, seems to benefit a lot from it. Kimaru, Nyamu, Rev. Gitau, Oluoch, Patel and others of their ilk as depicted in the novel, come to the reader as corrupt individuals who will stop at nothing to gain material wealth. The author systematically takes the reader through these characters’ lives and what influences their decisions – their insatiable quest for material wealth. Of fundamental significance here is the fact that through poetic justice, the novel illustrates the “perspective of the folly of obsessive preoccupation with wealth and sexual desires” (Bjornson, 2002, p.77), for such obsessions end up corrupting the individual.

By the end of *Black Gold of Chepkube*, all “evil” characters are “punished” – Catherine is murdered, Nyamu commits adultery and is shot, Kimaru is barely sane and survives on the making and sale of illegal brews, Patel is murdered, Maingi is fed to crocodiles in Uganda, just to mention but a few. The novel thus seems to condemn the materialistic individualism that was pervading most post-independence African states in its time of production through depiction of morally corrupt characters with the implied meaning that a reversal of these behaviours was perhaps the antidote to a society with a social fabric on the brinks of rupture.

Weighing on the above postulation, Ikiddeh (1969, p. 78) observes that “the moral remains the writer’s primary assignment” in popular fiction texts. It therefore follows that *Black Gold of Chepkube*’s blurb reads thus:

This is a story of the illegal coffee trade that rocked the border between Kenya and Uganda during the 70s. It is a story of political intrigue, expansive lobbying, instant riches, moral degradation and death. It is the first ever told story of a people gone mad over the black gold of Chepkube; told by an insider.

3.3 Conclusion

The starting point for this chapter was the assumption that literature is a historical phenomenon. The implication of this, therefore, is that the novel is a creative reflection of, and a reaction to, the political, economic and social environments in which it was produced. Literary elements such as setting, character and characterisation, and style and language were examined for both their functionality and their referentiality.

The chapter has shown that the author of this novel has imbued creativity with historical facts to describe to the reader the very minute details of the characters' lives to the extent that the reader is transported to a world of make-believe. Lucy Njoki, John Kimaru, Catherine, Ben Gatembu, Tom Kaminda, Oluoch, just to mention but a few, find themselves enmeshed in a never-ending quest to survive in a capitalistic world that sees them engage in prostitution, corruption and near-death theatrics in the search for the shilling. The novel, albeit in a light manner, premises the narrative(s) on historical actualities and makes social commentary on issues that affect society. As stated in the novel's blurb, "it is the first ever told story of a people gone mad over the black gold of Chepkube: told by an insider" (Wamugunda, 1985). The novel is thus the author's interpretation of the society as defined and influenced by historical events and happenings. Consequently, *Black Gold of Chepkube* engages with history to make commentary.

The novel, grounded against the background of historical events such as the climatic catastrophe of the 1970s in South America, the dictatorship of Idi Amin, the death of Kenya's first President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the associated effects of the vagaries of capitalism and emerging spaces, takes a deeper look at how societies react to dynamics in political, economic and social spheres. From those with little or no formal education to those with university degrees, the author employs characters and characterization in a bid to depict how events in reality are laden with episodes that demand individuals to make decisions whose consequences they must be ready to deal with.

Almost all the characters in the novel end up "paying for their sins" either by death or economic ruin. This work posits that the entire novel is a deliberate attempt by the author to give voice to issues considered mundane by the so-called "serious" literature. The author, aware of the wide berth given to "irrelevant" issues, makes a conscious decision to use the popular fiction genre as a medium through which he can make social commentary. He does this by giving serious concerns and issues a light touch and thus easier to deal with. In reference to the novel itself, the characters, themes, setting, and language, it suffices to conclude that this chapter has clearly illustrated that *Black Gold of Chepkube*, as a product of creative imagination and hence popular fiction, engages with history.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORY, WAHOME MUTAHI'S *THREE DAYS ON THE CROSS* AND THE TRUTH OF FICTION

As literary works are rooted, to a large extent, in a precise setting, at a given time, literary critics tend to take into consideration the space, the time, the political, cultural, social and economic background of any work of art to better interpret it – Djiby Diaw

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reads the political thriller *Three Days on the Cross* as a novel that sets out to recount the socio-political realities of 1980s' Kenya. Following Diaw (2005) who argues that an author's background should be brought in in the attempt to achieve a good understanding of the novel, data from Wahome Mutahi's life is deployed in the reading.

Information on the time of production of *Three Days on the Cross* is focused on not only to explore the interplay between literature and history in the novel, but also to decode what the author is saying to his immediate audience. Commenting on the necessity of such an approach, Diaw (2005, p. 17) observes that:

As literary works are rooted, to a large extent, in a precise setting, at a given time, literary critics tend to take into consideration the space, the time, the political, cultural, social and economic background of any work of art to better interpret it.

The argument pursued in the chapter is that in *Three Days on the Cross*, Mutahi documents and disseminates historical knowledge in a medium – popular fiction – that reaches greater populations than do regular history texts. Being literary, *Three Days on the Cross* also amplifies the humanity of those who live through history.

4.2 History and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*

The plot of *Three Days on the Cross* revolves around two main characters, Albert Momodu and Ogundice Chipota who are suspected to be members of an underground movement, The July 10 Movement, that is seeking to overthrow the government of an unnamed African country. The two are consequently arrested, detained and tortured. As the story unfolds, the swift operation of the government in cracking down on perceived dissidents is evident in the events that define the experiences of Chipota and Momodu in the brutal hands of state operatives.

Albeit unknowingly, Momodu begins his journey to the gallows of death when his wife approaches Fr. Kerekou for advice and the latter is unable to control his lust for Mrs Momodu. Later on as the events unfold, Momodu is approached by persons unknown to him and told that his work station, a bank, has been the latest victim of a crime, a robbery, and it is imperative that he records a statement with the police at the police station. Being the law abiding citizen he is, he readily agrees and is surprised when he gets to the station only to be blindfolded, taken to an underground cell and told that he is under arrest.

The story is almost similar for Chipota who is offered a lift by “well-wishers” who in real sense are agents of the special police in an endeavour to arrest him. His “capture” results in a dramatic adventure where in an attempt to conceal their involvement, the police keep moving him from one station to another, never recording his presence in the Occurrence Book as stipulated by law. He eventually ends up in an underground cell, blindfolded, and this marks the beginning of his torturous journey. The police embark on a quest to prove the two guilty and resort to all forms of tricks including searching the “suspect’s” houses for seditious materials, obtaining confessions under pretence and

using force to make the suspects confess. The paradoxical role of the media in highlighting evils in the society and also being perpetrators of the same when used as puppets of the regime are brought out in the novel and end up with the death of one of the protagonists and the miraculous survival of one.

Commenting on the political, social and economic landscape that characterized Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s, Ogolla (2004, p. 14) asserts that:

This period witnessed a wave of ruthless state oppression especially intensified after an attempted *coup* to topple the government of Daniel Moi in 1982. In the process of consolidating power, the Moi government reined in many writers, journalists, intellectuals and politicians perceived as dissidents. Some were forced into exile while others were incarcerated.

This study posits that the unnamed city in which *Three Days on the Cross* is set is Nairobi, and the actions that constitute the narrative reflect the happenings that defined post-independence Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s. Although unnamed, the city is Nairobi-like and characterized by high-rise storey buildings, underground cells, poor roads and mushrooming businesses. This is informed by the study's entry point concerning the author's experience in the torture chambers located in the basement of a high-rise building referred to by Brown (2009, p.1) as:

.. the basement of the faded yellow 26-storey office building ... where ... in the late 1980s and 1990s, dozens of political prisoners were tortured in a notorious prison below Nyayo House. Some died from their ordeal. The tortures took place under Daniel arap Moi, the former president who ruled with an increasingly heavy hand towards the end of his regime.

It is worth noting that in October 1986, Mutahi was arrested by the Moi-led government and charged with two counts - neglecting to report the existence of an anti-government organization; and publishing a seditious publication. After a horrendous torture experience at Nyayo House, Mutahi was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment (Imanyara, 1992). The torture experience was so terrifying that although the charges were trumped up, Mutahi pleaded guilty to avoid going back to Nyayo House because "a prison sentence looked a better prospect than a day longer in Nyayo House" (Mutahi, March 12, 2000). This thesis posits that Mutahi transforms his personal experience and history into a platform for addressing national/political issues thus, in a way, validating Jameson's (1986, p.69) much contested assertion that "all third-world texts are necessarily national allegories".

The fact that the city and country within which the novel is set are not named suggests several points. The first is that the author envisions his work not only as representative of a specific locale but a general commentary that could apply to virtually all places ruled by despotic politicians. As earlier observed by Waliaula (2009, p.313), Mutahi's "refusal to admit that his fictional work represents his own sentient prison experience is, one could say, a tactical rhetorical device that enables him to tacitly narrativize his prison experience without appearing to be doing so" and Mutonya's (2012) assertion that "though set in an unnamed country and despite the writer's disclaimer that his works are fictional, an uncanny resemblance to Kenya can be gleaned. *Three Days on the Cross* was in fact prophetic of Mutahi's own detention although he revised the manuscript for publication only after his release from jail". As observed by Njogu (in Maupeu & Mutahi, 2005), *Three Days on the Cross* "represent[s] a fictionalization of the fifteen-month ordeal [Mutahi] experienced during the government crackdown of Mwakenya movement of the 1980s".

Consequently, it is worth noting that despite the political space opening up in 1991 and the author's attempt to distance his novel from its parallel to Kenya, *Three Days on the Cross* is set within a period in which the Moi regime was on a massive crackdown on perceived dissidents. This was a time in which the civil society, the clergy and opposition politicians were on high gear in their clamour for multi-party democracy in Kenya. This was not a call well received by the powers-that-be of the time and it was met by arbitrary arrests, brutality and torture from state operatives and politicians with huge political clouts, politically-instigated assassinations and curtailed freedom of expression and association – all distinct characteristics of a political elite practising politics of fear.

This study thus draws parallels between the time the novel is set and the author's ability to capture this confluence. It focuses on how the author employs literary elements to capture this interplay. The quest thus becomes one of both "what" and "how". As earlier mentioned, the author of *Three Days on the Cross* sets his novel within a time in which Kenya was a one-party *de jure* state characterised by an insatiable desire to crack down on the growing opposition. To get a glimpse of the prevailing conditions of the time, this study finds it apt to quote Odinga (as cited in Cowell, 1982, p. 10) who observes that:

Sooner rather than later, these one-party systems become non-party systems. The presidents arrogate to themselves the role of lawmaker and lawgiver. They rule by undeclared decree. They set up cohorts of sycophants around themselves and run court cabals which are united only in one intention: the exploitation of the broad masses.

The US Interagency Intelligence Memorandum of November 1982 (as cited by CIA, 1982, p. 1), while commenting on President Moi's efforts to hold on to power, states

that “he will turn increasingly to repression to maintain his hold on power ... may buy time by intimidating his opponents”.

The present study also takes cognisance of the fact that though published in 1991, *Three Days on the Cross* echoes events that, mostly, occurred prior to the time of its production, and to some extent, in the 1980s. From the heavily foregrounded allusion of the Mwakenya Movement (referred to in the novel as the July Movement), the almost fanatical crackdown on the opposition to the events captured in *Three Days on the Cross*, the author seems to locate a great deal of his work in the 1980s. This is more so when the reader encounters the statement: “... following items were taken from Chipota’s house after a search on *October 24 1985*: one photo album, three books, press cuttings, one cup, a pair of boots and two diaries (p. 27) [emphasis mine].

The citation of the exact date is indicative of the historical location of *Three Days on the Cross*. Being a political thriller, the author makes an attempt at demystifying his extended metaphor and tries to relate the fictional aspects of the novel with the harsh realities of the day. 1985 was a year that saw heavy clampdown of perceived dissidents by the Moi regime and the author goes out of his way to ensure the reader goes beyond the novel's surface meaning.

In a study entitled *The Incarcerated Self: Narratives of Political Confinement in Kenya*, Waliaula (2009) argues for the engagement between popular fiction and historical realities by asserting that in *Three Days on the Cross*, “the truth of Mutahi's fiction is both fictional and actual ... the truth of fiction ... since it operates in the imaginative realm” (p. 331). In other words, fiction and history weave in and out of each other in *Three Days on the Cross*. This direct engagement with history is clearer when we consider the way the novel seems to differ and at the same time parallel history. For

instance, historical records have it that Mutahi's rough encounter with the Special Branch saw him imprisoned for 15 months on sedition-related charges. It is worth noting that before his incarceration, Mutahi, together with his brother, had been arrested on August 9, 1896, and detained without trial for 30 days (Citizens for Justice, 2003). While this ordeal has a large bearing on the novel, *Three Days on the Cross* has Momodu and Chipota experiencing torture under the fictionalized police state for three days only.

Another example is in the simultaneous similarities and differences between Chipota the journalist, a product of fiction, and Mutahi the author, a historical reality. This thesis reads a lot of resemblance between Mutahi and Chipota. Just like Mutahi, Chipota is also arrested and, tortured for being in possession of seditious material. Of import also is the fact that both Chipota and Mutahi are journalists, who in the end survive the brutality of an oppressive state and live to tell the tale. Of interest is also the fact that while Mutahi worked for the *Daily Nation*, Chipota in *Three Days on the Cross* works for the *Daily Horn*. The author thus seems to give his work a feel of authenticity by resorting to historical 'truths', in this case his personal experience. This thesis thus, argues that there is a direct engagement between *Three Days on the Cross* and history and concurs with Waliaula's observation that "things and people inhabiting the world of Mutahi's novel are true on their own terms" and that in *Three Days on the Cross*, "Mutahi's incarceration narrative is reflected, or at least, refracted in Chipota's narrative" (p. 331).

This study revisits its earlier stated postulation that *Three Days on the Cross* is set within a Nairobi-like city. It was also postulated that the observation rises from the mention of, among others, a proliferation of high-rise buildings. Of import to this study is the prominence of one specific building that seems to stick out like a sore thumb – the

one that houses the underground cells in which Momodu and Chipota become unfortunate victims of state torture and brutality. Writing on the state of politics in Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s, Branch (2011, p. 161) refers to Nyayo House as “a dirty-yellow skyscraper, which was quickly stained by the traffic fumes”.

The mentioned skyscraper housed the now infamous Nyayo House torture chambers and therefore ‘stained’ Kenya’s political history in terms of justice and rampant oppression. These torture chambers belonged to the Special Branch and were located in the basement of the building. Branch (2011, p. 162) goes ahead to assert that during Moi’s era of tyranny, “up to two thousand Kenyans underwent interrogation and torture in the fourteen cells”. It is in these same underground cells that Momodu and Chipota find themselves. They, this study argues, become unfortunate victims of what Ogot (1967, p. 121) calls “Kenya’s decade of extreme political oppression”. The author could thus be argued to situate his novel within an era rife with political oppression and misrule.

The above discussed setting informs the events of the novel in an environment in which critics and opponents of the powers-that-be are routinely arrested and subjected to torture and imprisonment. The setting is rife with what Branch (2011, p. 162) refers to as political repression characterized by:

... rather than simply being targeted at the radicals in Parliament, government and on university campuses, repression was used more widely throughout Kenyan society than it had previously. Without recourse to student politics, opposition parties or any other formal outlet for discontent [sic], opponents of the regime were pushed underground ... For the first time, ordinary citizens found themselves the target of state repression, and torture and imprisonment became part of the regular engagement between rulers and the ruled.

Closely related to the above is the psychological setting of *Three Days on the Cross*. As a product of both time and place, Mutahi successfully presents characters who are a product of this setting. With the political elite practising their politics of fear and subsequent oppression, it comes as no surprise when characters in *Three Days on the Cross* have to “play by the book” or face dire consequences such as “eternal silencing”. This could perhaps explain why in the opening pages of the novel, the author immediately confronts the reader with a frightened Fr. Kerekou who observes that “the political climate in the country does not allow for one to hear even a whisper about some people playing with the government” (*Three Days on the Cross*, p. 7). This kind of environment has wrought fear in the minds of the citizenry.

It need not be gainsaid that a climate as the one resulting from such an environment as the one mentioned above breeds both fear and contempt. The weak citizenry, failing to revolt against the stronger tyrannical government, have to conform to the wishes of the ruling elite. However, the same citizenry need to get an outlet for their frustrated disillusionment and, in most cases, turn to the seemingly weaker members of the same citizenry. It is this fear that could be argued to set the events captured in *Three Days on the Cross* in motion.

In *Three Days on the Cross*, the effects of politics of fear play out. In the case of Momodu, his wife switches to self preservation mode when she finds Momodu’s association with Chipota to be a threat to her. On the one hand, she feels threatened by the existence of another centre of attention. As any other spouse, she feels that Chipota has become Momodu’s close friend and confidant thus shifting the centre of attention. On the other hand, Chipota’s line of work poses a threat to her husband. Chipota is an investigative journalist and hence, more often than not, is at loggerheads with the government. The author utilises characterization to comment on the citizenry’s fear.

Fear leads to individual interests. As a result of fear, individuals are inclined to care less about public life and prefer to avoid trouble and quarrels. Mrs Momodu's attempt to save her husband could thus be argued to be an act of self-preservation and a result of politics of fear practiced by the ruling elite. She is trying to prise her husband away from Chipota, whom she sees as a corrupting influence.

For Mrs. Momodu, her naivety, coupled with fear, leads her to believe that her husband has joined a subservient movement, the July 10 Movement, whose core objective, according to the ruling regime, is to topple the government. Her quest for guidance from Fr. Kerekou thus becomes an act of both self-preservation and concern for her husband. His lust and betrayal of his religious flock aside, Fr. Kerokou's response to and influence by the information from Mrs. Momodu could also be argued to be influenced by fear and frustration. As a priest who has taken vows of celibacy, he cannot really keep these vows and his inability to question the authority above him provides him with an avenue for a sense of power. He wrongly believes that by eliminating Momodu, the threat of possible repercussions for adultery will be lessened.

As the author points out, already scores of people have been subjected to police torture and brutality as the regime reins in on perceived dissidents; both real and imagined. One would argue, therefore, that it would be expected that for a people already inculcated into a culture of perpetual fear, the actions of the two characters are part and parcel of the ebb and flow that defined Kenya under Moi's despotic rule. This is more so when we consider the alleged "serious" nature of the crime (knowingly withholding information from the authorities) vis-a-vis the author's own incarceration for allegedly having knowledge of the operations of the Mwakenya Movement and intentionally failing to notify the relevant authorities of the same (Muhomah, 2002; Maupeu & Mutahi, 2005; Waliaula, 2009).

This chapter also argues that this psychological setting coincides with the political climate of the time within which the novel is set. As earlier stated, this was a time marred by political misrule and fear. In 1985, there emerged in Kenya a group referring to itself as Mwakenya – a Swahili acronym for “Union of Nationalists to Liberate Kenya”. This was an outfit that sought to condemn “corruption, the inequity of land access, the slow encroachment of commercial ranching on pastoralist grazing areas, and the endemic problem of social inequality” (Branch, 2011, p. 163). Despite the group’s ineffective leadership (it was marred by consistent power and ideological wrangles) and potential insignificance against the backdrop of political management in Kenya, the group’s existence became the avenue within which the political elite sought to prove who was in power – itself an attempt at clinging to the same power.

Being a student of a personality cult, the president really outdid himself in his attempts to “deal with these dissidents”. The call for a change in the politics of the day was met with state repression. Using state machinery, the government portrayed itself as the true patriot and those calling for change as agents of destruction doing the bidding of the West. The president was cast as the saviour of the nation and his word was law and woe unto those who dared attract his wrath. The irony of this was that while the leaders in government claimed to champion the interests of the citizenry, their actions were pulling in the opposite direction and they used the power granted to them by the same citizens to intimidate, harass, torture and kill them.

From the foregoing, it was thus expected that all personnel answerable to the president would have to respond to his whims. Mutahi, in *Three Days on the Cross*, through a creative mesh of personal experience, history and literary wit, manages to present to the reader characters who are products of this political environment. The Special Police force is rife with characters who do not mind degrading themselves and losing their

dignity as long as their actions please the Illustrious One. The ordeals that befall Momodu and Chipota are nothing but the consequences of a police force intent on pleasing the Illustrious One. Having realized that the masses are awakening to his dictatorship and that he is not as popular as he thought, the Illustrious One becomes paranoid; he becomes what Kiraitu (2000, p. 10) refers to when he says that “Moi’s government had reached its highest level of paranoia. Critics of any government policy found themselves labelled ‘a member of Mwakenya, and a threat to state security’”.

The police force, while meting injustice to the citizenry, is in itself both a symbol of and a reaction to politics of fear. The police force both represents the Illustrious One’s paranoia and the fear of the citizenry towards the ruling elite. This scenario plays itself out more clearly when Mutahi takes the reader through the events that caricatures a raid on Chipota’s house. The police are sent to search Chipota’s house for incriminating evidence against him. The lack of intelligence among the police officers is exposed when they are portrayed as stupid and overzealous. When they come across a portrait of Chipota’s grandfather, they are overjoyed at having found the photo of Karl Marx; whom they have only heard of through the Illustrious One’s propaganda mechanism and can’t even spell – they refer to him as “er ... er ... Karl Max (*Three Days on the Cross*). Due to the apprehensive nature and paranoia during the regime’s politics, the police officers become nothing short of conduits through which the citizens are harassed. Their lack of intelligence aside, the officers outdo themselves when one is more than willing to soil himself as he rummages through Pat’s cot while the other one crawls into a dusty ceiling in search of any hidden ‘seditious’ material – all these to appease the paranoiac whims of the Illustrious One.

The psychological condition of an individual could be argued to be a major determining factor behind the said individual’s decision-making abilities. This study argues that none

knew how to perfect the art of dominance and subduing than the Moi regime. By attacking and weakening the resolve of the masses, the regime was almost successful in eliminating the opposition voices that were calling for a re-evaluation of politics in the country. This kind of mental torture influences how the characters in *Three Days on the Cross* produce and react to the situations and conditions they find themselves in. This could perhaps explain why after being arrested and taken to the underground cells, Chipota is presented as an ordinary citizen who is relatively aware of his rights. He actually manages to convince himself that his is a case of mistaken identity and once this anomaly is corrected, he will be free to go.

It thus comes as a shocker to Chipota when he meets an interrogation team bent on proving him guilty of concocted crimes. Despite his initial resilience, the torture he undergoes eventually leads him to be subdued and confess to crimes he knows nothing about. Not only is he denied communication with the outside world (especially to his wife), but he is also locked up in a dark cell that screams of despair and horror. The cell is painted red and is full of graffiti that speaks volumes about its history as a site of pain, more so through the graffiti and writings of its previous occupants. While these conditions are aimed at weakening Chipota's resolute spirit and finally see him break, none comes closer to achieving this than the torture team that not only forces him to undress, humiliate him by laughing at his "shy penis" (*Three Days on the Cross*), do press ups and rotate on one finger but they also beat him with metal bars in what Muindu (2006, p. 25) refers to as a "free for all spanking". By the end of this ordeal, Chipota is more than ready to 'co-operate' with the authorities. It is of import to note how the repressive state manages to convert the victim's own bodies into instruments of torture.

This study finds it apt to argue for the space of a parallel scenario as obtained from non-literary sources. While discussing the course of politics in Kenya, Branch (2011, p. 165) observes that “for many of the established [dissidents] or ordinary members of the public, arrest and detention were violent and traumatic experiences”. In a document entitled *Kenya: Torture, Political Detention and Unfair Trials*, Amnesty International (1987, pp. 11-12) describes the condition in Kenya in the period under discussion thus:

Booked in under false names to throw family members off the scent and moved around police stations in Nairobi, the Mwakenya suspects were then handed over to the Special Branch for interrogation at Nyayo House. John Gupta Ng’ang’a Thiong’o, a law student, was picked up by police officers outside the law school at lunchtime on 8 May 1986 ... and was taken to the police station in the Kileleshwa neighbourhood He was collected ... by plainclothes policemen ... blindfolded, put into a car and ordered to lie down so as not to be seen by passers-by. He was driven around Nairobi for hours until he reached Nyayo House, just a mile from where he had been arrested. For most of the next week, he underwent torture and interrogation before being ... formally charged. During the car journey to the court, police officers warned him that he would be tortured again unless he pleaded guilty. He did as he was told.

This quote not only parallels the ordeal that Momodu and Chipota go through, but also helps explain why both Thiong’o (a real-life character) and Chipota (a fictitious character) succumb to the powers-that-be and confess to crimes they haven’t committed. Their admission to being elements that advocate anti-government sentiments becomes understandable more so when we consider the effects of the physical and psychological torture they have undergone. Consequently, this study re-asserts its postulation that there is a strong interplay between history and literature as evidenced in *Three Days on the*

Cross. The experiences of Chipota mirror that of the author who, fearing a repeat of the painful (torture) experience in the torture chambers at Nyayo House, pleaded guilty to sedition-related charges in 1986. By use of setting, stylistics and thematic concerns, the author is able to make commentary on the political environment of the day. It is thus the observation of this study that works of popular fiction have the ability to capture minute details thus making it possible for the reader to appreciate the "unsaid" and "silences" of the time (Walsh, 1998). This is more so when we take cognisance of the fact that these works of art employ imagination to execute and reconstruct historical events in a creative way.

Throughout the novel, Mutahi is resilient on portraying the inhumanity perpetuated by the government of the time against its citizenry. He does this by focusing on the brutality of the regime that leads to extra-judicial killings of perceived dissidents. Due to the torture meted out on them, some of the victims succumb to their injuries and end up dead. However, the regime is so keen on maintaining its illegitimate hold on power such that to those holding public office, human dignity and the sanctity of human life are values so valueless they are easily thrown out of the window.

This observation is highly informed by the author's presentation of a character who is a victim of this sad state of affairs. Ndimu Nduru is a university Economics lecturer who after having been tortured and interrogated by the special police for over a month, succumbs to his injuries and dies. He is discovered dead in the cells and this is when the police take the concept of inhumanity a notch higher. His body is dumped on the roadside in an attempt to create an impression that he is a victim of 'normal' incidents of crime in the city. This study therefore argues that through a creative employment of characterization, style and thematic concerns, the author vividly conjures up images of political oppression and human injustice.

Through the use of foreshadowing and allusion as stylistic devices, the author actually alludes to the extra-judicial killings of innocent Kenyans by the ruling political elite (Kagwanja & Southall, 2010; Ruteere, 2008; Kenney & Schrag, 2009; Ludeki, Tuta & Akiyaga, 2005). Due to the effects of torture, Chipota cannot think clearly and starts forming gruesome images such as that of “his ailing mother, his dead father and of himself lying in a forest, his body full of holes” (Muindu, 2006, p. 22). This not only foreshadows Momodu’s death (as a product of extra-judicial killing) but also alludes to the rampant killings of perceived dissidents by the state. The killing of Momodu in a forest and leaving his remains to be disposed of by animals is an apparent allusion to the assassination of J. M. Kariuki by the Kenyatta government in 1975. According to history records, Kariuki's body was discovered by a Maasai herdsman in Ngong Hills, having been feasted on by hyenas (Wasuna, 2014; Musila in Primorac, 2013; Hornsby, 2012; Vassanji, 2009). This is alluded to in *Three Days on the Cross* when the editor of the *Daily Horn*, P’Njuru, is said to make plans to go and remove Momodu's body from the park "before it is eaten by animals" (Mutahi, 1991, p. 182). This thesis thus argues that *Three Days on the Cross* goes deeper than to report the 'what' and provides for the reader the 'how'. The traumatizing experience that Momodu undergoes before his execution is brought to the fore by merging fact with fiction.

This study thus observes that *Three Days on the Cross* engages with history especially when we consider the extra-judicial murders and assassinations perpetuated by successive regimes in Kenya. The study thus considers it worth of mention the assassination of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Robert Ouko. Dr. Ouko went missing for three days before his charred remains were discovered at Gol Alila near his home in the then Nyando District in February 15 1990 (Hempstone, 1997; Barasa & Mugonyi, 2004; Branch, 2011; Anguka, 1998). Although various versions abound on

how and why Dr. Ouko was assassinated by the Moi government, this study acknowledges that his assassination was a reaction to his quest for good governance in Kenya. While it is difficult to prove the reasons behind Dr. Ouko's murder, what is clear is that the assassination was a dark cloud in Kenya's history. This thesis thus finds in *Three Days on the Cross*, a deliberate attempt by the author to render this serious violation of the sanctity of human life through a language that tones the pain down, while making the subject approachable. *Three Days on the Cross* thus resorts to what Mutonya (2012) refers to as popular political maxims and clichés in Kenya and by alluding to the slow pace of bringing the perpetrators of such assassinations to account, satirizes the daily rhetoric adopted by the government of the day with statements such as "the police promised that investigations would be carried out and that all would be done to bring the murderers to book".

The experience of Momodu and Chipota in *Three Days on the Cross* are thus, for this study, a fictional rendition of what the author underwent in the hands of the Moi regime. Drawing parallels with what happened to Ouko, the author narrates his ordeal but unlike the Ouko incident, gives his readers a glimmer of hope that all is not lost. Despite all efforts by the regime to suppress democracy, the hope and resolution of the masses will prevail. Towards the end of the novel, one of the puppets of the regime, Corporal Wandie, realizes the folly of the regime and decides to atone for his atrocities. He leaks the secret of the torture chambers to P'Njuru who goes ahead to write about it in his paper. The same could be argued for Fr. Kerekou who, although doesn't achieve much, sees his folly and recants his statement to the police about Momodu's involvement in the activities of a subservient movement.

Cohen and Odhiambo (1992), perceived by Branch (2011, p. 192) as "authors of perhaps the most searing account of the political account of Moi's Kenya", observe that

it is almost impossible to “fix a final narrative of Robert Ouko’s demise” (Cohen & Odhiambo, 1992, p. 32). Nevertheless, this study finds it relevant to mention the close resemblance between the events that surround the torture of suspects (Momodu and Chipota in *Three Days on the Cross*) in underground cells and Hempstone’s (1997) account of Ouko’s murder. Hempstone (1997) argues that Dr. Ouko was most likely seized from his home in Koru, tortured at CID headquarters in Nairobi and then taken to State House in Nairobi. The events described hereafter closely resonate with what Mutahi presents in his novel, *Three Days on the Cross*.

Hempstone (1997, pp. 69-70) asserts that Moi personally beat Ouko because of the slights the president felt he had suffered during a recent trip to the US. According to this version, on one occasion:

Ouko was returned to State House and hurled to the floor in front of Moi ... Someone – most accounts say it was Biwott – then pulled a pistol from his pocket and shot Ouko twice in the head in front of Moi. The president, it is said, then ordered the body returned to Koru by CID helicopter and burned in an attempted [sic] to conceal the nature of his injuries.

These images bring to mind the ordeals Momodu and Chipota experience in the hands of the brutal police force. The interrogation team, comprising of Supt. Ode, Ummure and Corporal Wandie, is acting at the behest of orders from the Illustrious One. This study thus observes that Mutahi utilises his experience in the hands of the brutal force, historical happenings and his creative skills to present to the reader a political thriller that questions the state of affairs in Kenya during the time that obtains in the novel. Even when the state operatives realize that Momodu and Chipota are innocent, their fate is already sealed and attempts are made to make them disappear. They are taken to the forest and shot in a bid to make their deaths appear as part and parcel of crimes that

punctuate emerging urban spaces. Although Chipota miraculously survives, this rendition by the author lends, and is lent by, credence to Branch's (2011, p. 166) assertion that "unsurprisingly, there were deaths in custody".

Mutahi's rendition of the tyrannical relationship between a dictatorial government and the citizenry is replete with historical accounts of assassinations targeting perceived 'enemies of the state'. This study finds it of import to mention that these notions of political repression did not just begin with President Moi. His predecessor, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, is also accused of committing similar atrocities against those he deemed to be opposing his methods of political (mis)management. The National Assembly Report (1975) gives details on how Kenyatta's fierce critic, J. M. Kariuki, was assassinated (pp. 21-29):

Kariuki was involved with revelations about poaching and ivory smuggling ... His mandate and willingness to criticise the excesses of Kenyatta's government seemed greater than ever ... Unsurprisingly, therefore, rumours of an imminent assassination were widely circulated in political circles ... a decision was taken by senior police officers to interrogate him in person. He was never seen alive in public again. Later that night, he was taken to a remote spot in the Ngong Hills outside the city and shot. His body was left for the animals to dispose of, but in the event his remains were discovered the following morning.

Amnesty International (1987) and BBC (1987) give an account of how Peter Njenga Karanja, a rally driver and businessman from Nakuru, was arrested and killed by the Moi government. Arrested on June 2 1987 at his home in Nakuru on suspicions of being a member of Mwakenya, Karanja was taken from one police station to another before ending up at Nyayo House where he was tortured and when he was deemed too weak to survive, he was dumped at Kenyatta Hospital from where he died on February 28 1987.

His death, despite post-mortem reports that he died of “lacerations of the membrane supporting the small intestine, and wounds and bruises on the limbs” (Amnesty International, 1987, p. 23), was downplayed by the government and attributed to “pneumonia and blood clots in blood vessels in his intestines” (BBC, 1987, 25/3/1987). This helps re-affirm this study’s argument that *Three Days on the Cross* engages with history. The author, through the characters, not only relates to, but also reacts to the enabling (and/or limiting) environment of the novel’s setting. He thus manages to speak of and speak to his immediate audience.

Through characterisation and vivid description, Mutahi manages to bring out themes of inhumanity and torture in his novel. This he does via characters such as Supt. Ode, Chipota and Momodu. Chipota and Momodu thus become the faces of the victims of state brutality while Supt. Ode and his team become a microcosm of the perpetrators of injustice. As deduced from historical records, the most common form of torture at Nyayo House torture chambers was known as the ‘swimming pool’. Accounts relate that for up to a week, the cell within which a suspect was being held was flooded with two inches of water and the suspect sprayed at regular intervals. During these ordeals, the suspects were not allowed to leave the cells and, consequently, had to urinate and defecate in the water. In his High Court appeal in August 1986, Karige Kihoro vividly describes his ordeal, wit:

I was put in a waterlogged cell for periods of 60 hours and was constantly beaten and were dictated statements alleging that I knew that some people intended to form an illegal party. I was forced to sign them as a condition of being removed from the water and having no alternative and being in pain I signed them (Anguka, 1998, p.12).

The above goes on to show how the oppressive state was intent on curbing dissent. In his novel, Mutahi presents us with characters who despite being victims of circumstances, their ordeals produce and react to the time of the novel's setting. In the case of Chipota, despite his initial resistance and resilience, he becomes a site upon which the author can question state brutality, expose it and discuss its consequences. Chipota becomes both a product and a producer. In Supt. Ode's line of reasoning, interrogation as a process should be one way and when suspects appear defiant and 'unco-operative', his system of 'water-treatment' comes in handy. When he is taken back to the cells, Chipota is ordered to undress and:

... the muzzle of a fire extinguisher hosepipe appeared held by the blindfolder appeared, looking like a canon. The blindfolder gave out a loud whistle, signal to somebody else, and water started flowing from the pipe. It first came as a gentle jet and then burst into a powerful blast as the blindfolder aimed the blast at the naked Chipota standing in the cell (*Three Days on the Cross*, p. 122).

The above description paints a picture of an individual, who having been humiliated and beaten with metal bars, is now being subjected to Supt. Ode's infamous 'water-treatment'. All these are aimed at breaking his resolute spirit and confessing to the crimes he is being accused of. Chipota, while at the same time enabling the author depict a true picture of historical happenings, becomes a product of the same. This kind of torture is what has led many of his ilk to surrender and the mournful and subdued groans Chipota hears when being escorted to the toilets in the underground cells emanate from victims of 'water-treatment'. In a way, therefore, Chipota's decision to finally concede defeat and confess to crimes he knows nothing about is highly influenced by his mental state. He is psychologically manipulated to view confession as the only escape route. His decision thus becomes a product of the cumulative effect of

his environment which, as observed by Amnesty International (1987, p.22), “contributed to the prisoners’ general state of anxiety and tension”.

This study argues that Mutahi’s novel, like most other critical accounts of Sub-Saharan African countries after independence, is an attempt at providing a platform within which the crisis of the post-colonial state can be discussed. The novel tends to give voice to the ordinary citizens. It makes a breakaway from the so-called ‘serious’ literature by shifting its core focus. Arguably, elites have controlled the Kenyan state during the period under discussion and, consequently, their actions form the bulk of these works and are normally prioritised since, as observed by Bates (2008), they are the ones who have delegitimized the state in the eyes of the citizens. As Branch (2011, p. 21) argues, “rather than using their control of institutions like parliament, the presidency or the judiciary to protect Kenyans and their livelihoods, elites in power have tended to use their power to seize resources”.

However, contrary to the critical onslaught such as Binyavanga Wainaina’s quip towards contemporary Kenya journalism that “our media is obsessed with the soap opera of political characters; so Kenya is really just a theatre-screen where we watch few people play drama games on stage, and clap, or cry or laugh” (Binyavanga, 2008, p.17), Mutahi shifts focus from the elite to the ordinary citizenry. The reader is thus confronted with ordinary people suffering from the effects and consequences of the elite’s machinations. This could perhaps explain why in *Three Days on the Cross*, the narrative(s) focus more on the nitty-gritty details about the lives of Chipota, Momodu, university students and lectures, among others. Although ever lurking in the background, figures such as the Illustrious One are present by proxy and rather than encounter the elite, the reader has to make much interpretation from the effects of their actions.

During the repressive era of the Moi regime, suspected dissidents were taken through a mockery of justice. Once a confession was extracted (more often than not through torture and other related means) from them, the ‘lucky’ suspects were taken immediately to court without legal representation or relatives being informed. The ‘unlucky’ ones were sent straight to prison (Maina wa Kinyatti, 1997). The cases that got to the courts were rapid affairs with some lasting as short as thirty minutes in what Kiraitu (2000, p. 11) refers to when he says that “the High Court had become part and parcel of the state machinery of oppression”.

Through an effective employment of historical happenstance and creative interpellation, Mutahi also manages to comment on the state and role of the judiciary during the time of the novel’s production. As characteristic of dictatorial regimes, the separation of power between the three arms of government – executive, legislature and judiciary – has collapsed as presented in the novel. Consequently, all arms of government are at the beck and call of the Illustrious One and none dares defy him. Mutahi captures the interplay between history and fiction via the use of characters who play out this relationship. He gives the reader a judiciary that no longer serves the citizenry but the Executive. Commenting on the judicial breakdown in Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s as evidenced in Mutahi’s *Three Days on the Cross*, Muindu (2006, p.21) asserts that:

The trials are farcical and a total mockery of justice, since the judiciary has been stripped of its powers by the executive. The courts must toe the line of the executive. Magistrate Amin is one government lackey detailed to mete out heavy punishments to suspects framed over sedition. His name is aptly connotative in that it recalls Idi Amin Dada, Uganda’s dictator reputed for his transgression of human rights.

In a document entitled *Independent Kenya*, Anonymous (n.d. p, 117) argues that during the Moi era, institutions of higher education were a microcosm of the Kenyan society and that in respect to the ills affecting the society at the time, “the university offers a reflection of the looting and mismanagement taking place at all levels of society”. It therefore comes as no surprise when the author of *Three Days on the Cross* decides to use popular fiction as an avenue through which he can explore the relationship between the government of the day and the academia. Arguably, the academia is host to many open minded individuals and, consequently, is always regarded as a breeding ground for political agitation, guidance and policies by the citizenry. In many an instance, the citizenry looks up at the academia for a way forward, especially when confronted with dilemmas of a political, economic or social nature. It is the postulation of this study that *Three Days on the Cross* brings out the interplay between history and literature by focusing on the relationship between the government of the day and the students and, by extension, the relationship between the students and the university administration. It is thus a back glance at the way those in power respond to criticism and perceived dissidence.

From the above observation, it is arguable that universities were regarded as the grounds within which seeds of political discord and unrest were to be planted, germinate and the fruits exhibited. With an increasing call for change in Kenya emanating from the universities, it therefore came as no surprise when the then president, Daniel arap Moi, claimed that university lecturers were “preaching the politics of subversion and violence” (Weekly Review, 1982, p.7). Consequently, accused of plotting the downfall of the government and of distributing seditious literature, academicians were caught up in a wave of arbitrary arrests and intimidation. For instance, following the riots at the Kenyatta University College in May 1982, Dr. Al Amin Mazrui, Willy Mutunga and

Maina wa Kinyatti – all lectures at the institution – were arrested and the college closed (Branch, 2011). This study argues that Mutahi, having been himself a university student, combines historical experience with artistic wit to communicate with and to his immediate audience.

Mutahi resorts to the use of characterisation and narrative techniques to represent the above relationship. Through characters such as Professor Kigoi, Ndiru Nduru, Chipota and Momodu, the author demands of the reader to suspend belief and embark on a journey to the author's world of make-believe. The author presents the reader with Chipota's flashback of university life which was perpetually brutal; only punctuated by inhumanity and denial of basic human rights. The university administration, in itself a microcosm of the government of the day, is painted as one keen on having its way at any cost. Students who call for better learning conditions are met with open hostility and police brutality. It is noteworthy that this approach is likewise extended to the teaching fraternity. On their part, the police are more than willing to help stem the quest for democracy and they embark on such duties with unrivalled zeal leading to the death and incarceration of innocent individuals.

Although a creation of his imagination, the author presents a narrative in which uncomfortable with mass failure in the Commerce Department, students hold peaceful rallies to deliberate on possible solutions. The university management, and by extension the government, reads this as manifestation of the seeds of discord planted by radical lecturers and unleash the police on them and the resultant chaos and mayhem leads to the arrest and death of students as the innocent are beaten, bludgeoned and raped. The author thus, in effect, could be argued to not only explain the role and place of the academia in Kenyan politics, but also perhaps shows the reactions to the immediate environment that defined Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s.

Perhaps in an attempt to vindicate them from accusations of running away as a matter of self-preservation, the author paints a picture that explains why many academicians sought exile during this period. Many intellectuals, fearing arrests, detention and an ever-lurking danger of possible assassination, fled the country. The use of brutal force against the academia serves to expound on the reactionary nature of the government of the time and how all institutions were indoctrinated towards practicing politics of fear and oppression. This, according to Muindu (2006, p. 23), was aimed at silencing intellectuals who are the “gadflies of the society, so that the ruling elite continue to sit on easy chairs and belch power at the expense of the docile masses”.

The chapter also indentifies the Illustrious One as a microcosm of an archetypical Shadow State; one that is constructed behind the facade of laws and government institutions. The Shadow State is a form of personal rule; that is, an authority that is based upon the decisions and interests of an individual, not a set of written laws and procedures, even though these formal aspects of government may exist. The Shadow State is founded on the abilities of those in power to manipulate external actors' access to markets, both formal and clandestine, in such a way as to enhance their power. This alternative manner of rule permits rulers to undermine the formal institutions of government itself (Reno, 1995). Mutahi has given us a similar ruler who manipulates and weakens structures to remain in power. The most affected is the Judiciary where judges and magistrates are just but appendages of the Executive and have no qualms holding briefs for the Executive at night and sentencing innocent citizens on trumped up charges lest they fall out of favour with the government of the day.

While the lives of the characters in the novel depict the harsh reality that is the plight of the masses, the author is able to tone this down via the use of humor. For instance, the Shadow State, a microcosm of many African rulers, is lampooned through the use of

humorous tags - The Illustrious One. With this, the reader realizes the bitter truth that the existing crop of power wielders is misruling them; they are subjecting the masses to hunger and social degradation because of their ineptitude, corruption and selfishness. They consequently lead the nation into perennial underdevelopment and stagnation.

Commenting on the state of the African novel, Huma Ibrahim (1990, p. 85) observes that the novel reflects:

Social and political realities of the post-independence era in which the colonizer has been replaced by a political elite. African literature of the past [two decades] have transformed the theme of disillusionment. Where the colonizer was once the sole subject of criticism, now African technocrats, cadres and government officials are depicted exploiting the masses they had promised to uplift.

Amuta (1986, p.40) rightly declares the import of popular fiction thus: "the writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it. People may mould their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines." *Three Days on the Cross* gives expression to a profound reflection of African societies as they are constituted, especially in their state-society and human dimensions.

Mutahi also uses symbolism to question the role of religion, more so Christianity. He seems to question the role of religion in society and finds religion complicit in state oppression. He thus makes a mockery of the symbols that represent Christianity. Between 1972 and 1990, Benin was ruled by Mathieu Kérékou, a military ruler whose regime has been described by Seely (2009, p. 144) as "characterised by one-party dictatorship with a Marxist-Leninist veneer". By making reference to Benin's former military ruler who ruled the country for 18 years (Starace, 2011; Edozie, 2008), *Three*

Days on the Cross alludes to the dictatorship of the Moi regime and seems to posit that the church, in its perceived silence, was therefore as guilty as the state.

Fr. Kerekou, a corruption of Benin's Kérékou, is used to show the failure of religion in society. As observed by Mutonya (2012), the "pastor ... who is supposed to be a paragon of virtue" is presented as the exact opposite. The troubles that mar Momodu's life are a direct result of the priest's failure to live to the expectations of the society. Although his attempts to assuage his conscience are too late, Fr. Kerekou becomes the symbol within which Mutahi critiques the church. Ideally, religion, in this case the church, is vested with the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of individuals. In *Three Days on the Cross*, this role is reversed and the church, just like the state, oppresses the individual for its own good and to the detriment of the individual. *Three Days on the Cross* therefore engages with history as observed by Waliaula (2009, p. 332), that:

Mutahi ... found the religious faction of Kenyan society complicit in the suffering of others at the hands of secret police as shown by Father Kerekou's betrayal and lies ... Mutahi implicitly points an accusing finger at the Church because it was complicit in its silence while atrocities were continually orchestrated by a Christian president whose attendance at Sunday services and donations to churches was legendary.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that *Three Days on the Cross* is a fictional rendition of the writer's experience under police custody for sedition-related charges, a fact that accounts for the outraged tone in a novel that condemns the criminal regime that jailed him. He uses language to deal with neo-colonial tyranny and through his castigation of the bankrupt Kenyan politics, manages to move the reader towards indignation and

beyond it towards the possibility of a new human spirit. *Three Days on the Cross* recreates the July 10th Movement and dissidence of 1986 which waged clandestine opposition against the government. As observed by Maina wa Kinyatti:

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

The trials and tribulations that Momodu and Chipota undergo are the results of a scared head of state. The Illustrious One is so scared of losing power that he will stop at nothing to root out his enemies - both real and imagined. The existence of a group calling for multi-party democracy, coupled with the attempted *coup* of 1982, make the Illustrious One practice politics of paranoia where citizens are subjected to torture and blatant dictatorship. The state resorts to use of state apparatus (Althusser, 1970) to frustrate the citizenry into submission. The use of the Special Branch to arrest, torture and sometimes extra-judicially execute perceived "enemies of the state" without following due process comes as no surprise to the reader. It is a deliberate attempt by the author to vividly re-enact the political atmosphere in their times and condemn regimes that perpetuate such atrocities by merging facts with fiction.

Having shown that *Three Days on the Cross* is strongly historical, this chapter also concludes that Mutahi uses the thriller genre to convey history in a memorable way. This is more so when we consider the optimistic ending of the novel considering its time of production. The fact that Mutahi was actually a victim of state brutality gives the novel a feel of authenticity and firsthand experience. It is also noteworthy that Mutahi was among the first people to document the horrendous atrocities committed by

the Moi regime. However, *Three Days on the Cross* goes beyond mere recording and recounting of history. The novel engages the reader at the individual level and demonstrates the effects of oppression on ordinary citizens. Produced in 1991, a time when the political space was opening up and with the impending multiparty general elections slated for 1992, *Three Days on the Cross* goes beyond mere recording of history and intervenes on the political debates of the day. History is used in an attempt to shape the present and the future. Himself a journalist, Mutahi ensures the survival of Chipota. This is significant as it shows that the journalist has a huge role to lay in social and political transformation. It is the surviving journalist who is tasked with telling the story so that the readership can react to the political system and make informed decisions. *Three Days on the Cross* recounts the horrors of the incumbent regime with the hope of ensuring that were the general elections to be free and fair, the citizens will vote for a more democratic government.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary

This study set out to examine how two popular fiction novels, Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* and Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross*, engage with history; and explores the significance of that engagement. The argument was that the novels are premised on historical events with *Black Gold of Chepkube* taking its context as the black market trade in coffee across the Kenya-Uganda border, which in the 1970s led to the emergence of a new culture of corruption and *Three Days on the Cross* being set in an imaginary African country and is a fictional rendition of the author's experience under police custody for sedition-related charges at a time when his country, Kenya, was under the authoritarian rule of a dictator.

The study has explored how popular fiction writers engage with historical realities in their literary works. It has shown that literature forms a major platform on which the society is shaped since it carries within it the envisioned image of a given society, sometimes projected through the vision of the author or by the author satirizing the behaviour of the said society with the aim of enabling the society reflect upon its behaviour and effect necessary changes.

Premising its discourse on selected tenets of New Historicism, this study has demonstrated the elements of popular fiction that manifest in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*, examined how *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* engage with history and discussed the significance of this engagement.

This study has shown that the two novels are not mere documentation of historical events but are the authors' attempts at going beyond reporting a phenomenon. The

novels go beyond mere reportage of history as isolated incidents and through the popular fiction medium, explore the why and the how. *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* use history to interrogate the effects of events deemed general on specific individuals. While it would be easy to view the climate crisis that hit Paraná, Brazil, as a global event, *Black Gold of Chepkube* goes deeper and instead of simply recording the event, forays into the effects of the climate catastrophe on individual lives and the attendant results. Similarly, while one could attribute the clampdown on the opposition as espoused in *Three Days on the Cross* to politics and the scramble for power, especially after the failed coup, the novel premises its discourse on history and examines the effect of national narratives on the individual – the innocent common man.

The study also sought to demonstrate *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* as popular fiction. In light of this, *Black Gold of Chepkube* has been demonstrated to be a historical thriller since it: falls within the spatial period requisite of historical thrillers; has a unique story structure that characterizes historical thrillers; is a combination of both the “historical” and “thrilling” elements; thrives on credibility’ and has a plot that renders the novel to this genre - *Black Gold of Chepkube* is dotted by multiple strands which weave towards a complex plot with big and multiple storylines.

Through an intrinsic analysis of the text’s setting, thematic concerns, character and characterisations, narrative techniques and mode of narration, this study has demonstrated that Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* is a popular novel by virtue of being a political thriller. First, *Three Days on the Cross* is a political thriller due to the fact that it allows for a insight into the relationship between private and public life - a credo of political thrillers. Second, *Three Days on the Cross* is a political thriller since the text focuses, albeit satirically, on the machinations of the political elite who are at the helm of political power in their attempts to consolidate this power. Precisely, it

focuses on the tyranny served by the ruling class in their quest to maintain power and stamp out any form of dissidence, whether real or imagined. Third, the plot of *Three Days on the Cross* subscribes to the characteristic features of a political thriller in which the plot revolves around the trials and tribulations of ordinary citizens plucked from their everyday lives and thrust into a world of dangers and intrigues by circumstances and forces beyond their control. Fourth, *Three Days on the Cross* has been demonstrated to be a political thriller since it takes into cognisance political developments in Kenya in its aesthetization.

The study also sought to examine how two popular fiction novels, *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross*, engage with history; and explore the significance of that engagement. Consequently, for *Black Gold of Chepkube*, the assumption was that literature is a historical phenomenon and as such the novel is a creative reflection of, and a reaction to, the political, economic and social environments in which it was produced. Literary elements such as setting, character and characterisation, and style and language, just to mention but a few, have been examined for both their functionality and their referentiality. The study has show that Geteria uses fiction to explain a historical episode in humane terms, and uses history to give weight to a moral message that he transmits as a writer of popular fiction.

Three Days on the Cross has been read as a novel that sets out to recount the socio-political realities of 1980s Kenya. To achieve a good understanding of the novel, data from Wahome Mutahi's life has been deployed in the reading. Furthermore, information on the time of the novel's production has been used to examine the interplay between literature and history and to decode what the author is saying to his immediate audience. The study has shown that *Three Days on the Cross* documents and disseminates historical knowledge in a medium – popular fiction – that reaches greater populations

than do regular history texts. Being literary, *Three Days on the Cross* also amplifies the humanity of those who live through history.

5.2 Conclusions

While Chapter One was an introductory chapter to the study, Chapter Two of this thesis introduced the novels under study - Wamugunda Geteria's *Black Gold of Chepkube* (1985) and *Three Days on the Cross* (1991) by Wahome Mutahi. The chapter also provided some background information about the authors. The core of the chapter was been a demonstration that *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* belong to the category of popular fiction. The demonstration gave setting, thematic concerns, character and characterisation, and narrative techniques in the novels as evidence for their categorization. The chapter thus showed how *Three Days on the Cross* is a political thriller, while *Black Gold of Chepkube* is a historical thriller – all sub-genres of popular fiction.

Chapters Three showed that *Black Gold of Chepkube* has imbued creativity with historical facts to describe to the reader the very minute details of the characters' lives to the extent that the reader is transported to a world of make-believe. The novel, albeit in a light manner, premises the narrative(s) on historical actualities and seeks to make social commentary on issues that affect society. As stated in the novel's blurb, "it is the first ever told story of a people gone mad over the black gold of Chepkube: told by an insider" (Wamugunda Geteria, 1985). The novel is thus the author's interpretation of the society as defined and influenced by historical events and happenings. Consequently, *Black Gold of Chepkube* engages with history.

The novel, premised against the background of historical events such as the climatic catastrophe of the 1970s in South America, the dictatorship of Idi Amin, the death of

Kenya's first President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the associated effects of the vagaries of capitalism and emerging spaces, takes a deeper look at how societies react to dynamics in political, economic and social spheres. This thesis posits that the entire novel is a deliberate attempt by the author to give voice to issues considered mundane by the so-called "serious" literature. The author, aware of the wide berth given to "irrelevant" issues, makes a conscious decision to use the popular fiction genre as a medium through which he can make social commentary. This he does by giving serious concerns and issues a light touch and thus easier to deal with. In reference to the novel itself, the characters, themes, setting, and language, it suffices to conclude that *Black Gold of Chepkube*, as a product of creative imagination and hence popular fiction, engages with history.

Chapter Four demonstrated that *Three Days on the Cross* is a fictional rendition of the writer's experience under police custody for sedition-related charges, a fact that accounts for the outraged tone in a novel that condemns the criminal regime that jailed him. He uses language to deal with neo-colonial tyranny and through his castigation of the bankrupt Kenyan politics, manages to move the reader towards indignation and beyond it towards the possibility of a new human spirit. *Three Days on the Cross* recreates the July 10th Movement and dissidence of 1986 which waged clandestine opposition against the government. It is a deliberate attempt by the author to vividly re-enact the political atmosphere in their times and condemn regimes that perpetuate such atrocities by merging facts with fiction.

Black Gold of Chepkube and *Three Days on the Cross* are (social) situations that deal with a "present" public. The language, themes and other attributes of the texts are products of the society at a particular time in society. The novelistic world registers with extreme subtlety the tinniest shifts and oscillation of the social atmosphere by

registering it as a whole in all its aspects. Mutahi and Geteria have imbued creativity with historical facts to describe to the reader the minutest details to the extent that the reader is transported to a world of make-believe.

Black Gold of Chepkube and *Three Days on the Cross* are premised on historical events. With regard to the mode of writing, setting, context and language, the authors have resorted to popular fiction as a platform through which they get space to engage with the history of the production of these texts. The authors thus use popular fiction to make social commentary. *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are texts that engage with the history of post-independence Kenya while at the same time presenting issues that affect the populace at social, political and economic levels.

Through the characters in the novels, Mutahi and Wamugunda Geteria expose the complex problems confronting the Kenyan state, the suffering of the populace in the midst of plenty and the inability of the state to cater for its citizens. The ordeals of the destitute citizenry in *Black Gold of Chepkube* and *Three Days on the Cross* are similar to those portrayed by Iyayi (1982) in his *The Contract* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1980) in *Devil on the Cross*. The texts illustrate the post-colonial environment that defined most African states as characterized by continuing cant, corruption, degeneration and frustration (Kehinde, 2004).

Three Days on the Cross and *Black Gold of Chepkube* could be regarded as historical representations of their times of production. This is because *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* are an amalgamation of events, ideas, feelings and experiences prevalent at the time(s) of their production. This study has thus shown the literary representativeness of these imaginative works of literature. In this regard Kehinde's observation becomes very important especially when he reminds us that:

... novelists are creators of signs, while the critics of the novel are their interpreters. Therefore what is found in the [modern] novel are images, words, acts, objects, settings, characters and other semiotic properties that are signified/significant that represent a transition ... to the recognition of the ambiguities and possible irredeemable nature of [modern] man's moral condition. (2009, p. 1)

From the foregoing, this study postulates that the debate on the interplay between history and literature goes beyond the simplistic question of whether either is holistic and/or a perfect embodiment of collective and representative issues. It opines that this relationship goes deeper than investigating whether imaginative and creative works (*Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube*) embody representative environments that defined their times of production. On the contrary, the study went deeper to explore the ways in which *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* do so. It thus becomes no longer a question of "if" but one of "how".

As the study has shown, the starting point towards effective literary criticism and analysis is by rejecting the temptation to approach *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* literally. This is more so when we consider the fact that no literary element has a historic meaning only in itself. This means that literary elements such as setting, character and characterisation, and style and language, just to mention but a few, are not just merely representatives of people, events or places. In essence, actually, these elements only acquire complete relevance and significance when they are viewed in their figurative nature as a combination of both referentiality and functionality. For instance, the two main characters in say *Three Days on the Cross*, Momodu and Chipota, both are, and are not, representatives of the Kenyan middle class in the 1990s; and similarly, the setting of the novel in a Nairobi-like city (Muindu, 2006), both is, and

is not, representative of life in Kenya capital city (Nairobi) during the despotic rule of the Moi regime in Kenya. This confluence leads us to read that these are just but the author's deliberate constructions that aim at creating elements that play out against each other in a work of fiction where all (elements) mutually develop and qualify each other thus qualifying the mutual and symbiotic nature of the relationship between literature and history.

This study has also shown that for effective analysis of *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* into cultural statements and visions, both literary and historical elements must be analyzed. This way, it is thus possible to understand the interplay between literature and society, between the individual and the society, and between the subjective and the collective. Consequently, this study concurs with Skardal's (1984) postulation that "the general consciousness of an author moulds his interpretations, his attitudes, and his use of language". This is more so when we consider the fact that *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* do not only represent a reflection of, but also a reaction to, a specific period, and this reaction is imbedded in the very texture of these texts themselves. In a way, therefore, *Three Days on the Cross* and *Black Gold of Chepkube* not only reproduce but also produce historical underpinnings and understandings.

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