

## Hope and Despair in Politics: An Analytical Approach to Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*

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### Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, a collection of poems by Jack Mapanje. It aims at demonstrating how new voices in politics are often compelled to silence. It explores the factors that make the hope of the masses dissipate to make room for a great despair in the heart of both the masses and the political opponents and activists who in our case here are writers. To conduct this work, we have based our analysis on new historicism and post-colonial criticism using the qualitative research method. The results of our findings reveal that some people get involved in politics either directly or indirectly with the hope of bringing about changes in the management of their country so as to put it on the path of sustainable development. Unfortunately, the powerholders resort to all the possible means to show resistance through all possible means to silence and discourage them. This state of affairs constitutes a hindrance to a true development and a good political leadership in Africa where powerholders do not tolerate opposition at all.

**Keywords:** Hope, despair, post-colonialism, political opponents, new historicism.

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### INTRODUCTION

Right from the eve of the African waves of independence, the African elites who fought to gain this so-called political freedom have ruled their respective countries. In Malawi which is the setting of the collection of poems under study, Hastings Banda who has been the first president of the country was one of those who have fought for independence. He has ruled the country for at least three decades, the period during which there were political imprisonments, exiles, mysterious disappearances and deaths of the activists and the political opponents. The same situation is still prevailing in many African countries today where people who yearn for building their nation and thus engage in politics are muzzled; which does not favour coexistence, peace and democracy in all its dimensions. To really build a country, political leaders sometimes refer to writers, activists and political opponents' criticisms so as to improve their ideas and strategies.

The topic is chosen considering the political events in Africa to make an analysis of how some people engage politics with a view to make things change for better and give hope to the masses. But, this hope soon turns into despair due to some animosities

settled to block these peoples' visions. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "Hope" is defined as "a belief that something you want will happen;" (A. S. Hornby, 1995, p.724) and "Despair" as "the feeling of having lost all hope." (A. S. Hornby, 1995, p.396). The same dictionary defines the concept of "Politics" as "the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society" (A. S. Hornby, 1995, p.1132). Indeed, politics includes the first two defined terms which on the contrary describe the reality in the domain. Engaging in politics has a motivational force which means that people engage in politics for a specific reason of their own. This specific reason constitutes the incentive force that leads them to take the path of politics.

Critically thinking about it, one can assert that things have not really changed in Africa. As a matter of fact, the same people who had fought the colonists or the white men can be said to manage things worse than their former masters. Not only do they rule their country but they reign with dictatorship and they lust for power as well. They do not hesitate to crush anybody who tries to make a comment on their

misdeeds. Considering Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* through which he mainly unveils his living conditions in prison with some political opponents, we have focussed this work on this topic to better make the analysis.

The elites, and most of the time, activists, political opponents, and writers express themselves and henceforth, they become the enemies of the powerholders. In this logic, the latter engage in politics with hope that things can still be changed so as to favour a well-being for Africans. These elites dream of a flawless Africa in which citizens will feel free to live a peaceful life. Unfortunately, some of their fellow citizens turn out to be the puppets recruited to serve the interests of the colonizers. As a consequence, the leaders react violently towards the activists and the opponents when they criticize their managements. They do not hesitate to resort to any violent means to crush whoever opposes them and constitute barriers that prevent people who engage in politics with hope to do well, from going further in their visions which leads the latter to despair and frustrations.

As a matter of fact, this study aims to demonstrate, through an analysis, how new voices in politics are often compelled to silence. Basing on Malawi as the setting of *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, the intention is also to show through Jack Mapanje's poems and his experience, the way people are treated when they engage in politics and do not share the same ideologies as the powerholders. The analysis is based on some of Jack Mapanje's poems in *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*.

While carrying out this research work, four main questions have cropped up our mind.

- Firstly, what is the common goal of people when engaging in politics?
- Secondly, what are the incentive forces leading to hope?
- Thirdly, are there some ambushes set up in the domain of politics to prevent people from achieving their goals?
- And what are the problems that could lead opponents and activists to despair?

Considering these questions, we assume that:

- When engaging in politics, people's common goal is to work towards the improvement of the well-being of the citizens at large.
- In adhering to politics, people would like to impact the powerholders by influencing their political perceptions, evaluating their leadership on the basis of the masses' satisfaction and disempowering them if need be.

- Paying a careful attention to the political situation in of Africa, one could assert that there are some ambushes set up in the domain of politics to prevent opposition from reaching their goals.
- The possible barriers set up to prevent people from reaching their goals in politics are: the phenomenon of colonialism, puppeteering of governments in Africa.

Using the qualitative research method, especially the phenomenological and documentary research approaches, the present work has been carried out on the basis of new historicism and post-colonial criticism. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describes the universal essence of a phenomenon. It explores what people have experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomenon.

New historicism: the word 'historicism' is defined according to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* 8<sup>th</sup> edition (A. S. Hornby, 1995, p.711) as "the theory that cultural and social events and situations can be explained by history." Considering the 'historicism' as the main one in the expression 'new historicism', one could assert that it interprets literature in the historical context. According to Ernst Troeltsch (1992) "all our thought about man, his culture, and his values is fundamentally historically-oriented" (E. Troeltsch, 1992, p. 102).

The post-colonial criticism investigates the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized in the post-colonial period. Considering the expressions "relationship" and "the post-colonization era", one wonders if the collaboration between the colonizers and the colonized is the one they should have in the period African countries are said to be free. Paying attention to the events related to the actions of the colonizers in African countries nowadays, it is obvious that these countries are still under the control of the colonizers.

## 1. Literature Review: Relevance of the Selected Works

*The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993) is a post-colonial collection of poems. The book is sequenced in four parts entitled respectively: Another Fools' Day Homes in; Out of Bounds; Chattering Wagtails; The Release and Other Curious Sights. Through his verses, the author denounces corruption, injustice towards the masses, and how the outspoken are muzzled through incarcerations, torture and exile. In his poem, *Smiller's Bar Revisited* (1983), he tells of how some elites are "accidentalize[d]", a word he defines as "to kill and pretend it was an accident when everybody knows it was not". Today, the masses who have been dreaming of a better living condition after independence are going through an ordeal, the

strenuous experience they have not imagined and this on the pretext of national development by African elites who are the new masters. This outspokenness has caused the poet to experience more than three years in Mikuyu Prison. This imprisonment of the author portrays many stories at the same time: incarceration, torture, murders, mysterious disappearance, and exile, of all those who rebel against despotism, corruption, injustice, funds embezzlement, neocolonialism, and especially puppeteering of governments in Africa.

*The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* is a metaphorical and satirical book. It is purely artistic. The book is tough-reading and cannot be understood after reading it once. To better understand the verses of Jack Mapanje, one needs to read this book many a time and carefully, because he has used more images and animals to convey his message just as any work of poetry. Let's address scholar's perceptions of Mapanje Poetry.

Colonialism, the crisis of governance and democratization in Africa have marked the literature of this continent. W. Adebayo (1996) mentions what African writers' fate has just been ruled by tyrants after the achievement of independences of African countries. As the first activists, though some of them have succeeded in escaping for exile, many of them have been incarcerated and others murdered. Sometimes, they face intimidation and torture. At the beginning, they have been faked by the political leaders throughout the whole continent and are made "the enemy number one of the public" (W. Adebayo, 1996, p.355). This is very important if one wants to figure out what African writers have gone through since the end of colonialism in the continent dominated by tyrants.

"Subverting Banda's Dictatorship in Malawi: Orality as Counter-Discourse in Jack Mapanje's *Of Chameleons and Gods*" (2007) is a paper by Reuben Makayiko Chirambo. Through this, the author deciphers, how through his poems, the poet Jack Mapanje has overthrown Banda's dictatorship. To maintain itself in power for a long time, the Malawi Congress Party has used censorship to control every document before the publication. The paper further describes how the Malawian Congress Party (MCP) through its leader has come to be popularized. Hastings Kamuzu Banda has used all the means to make the major part of the citizens adhere to the MCP. As regards his opponents, they were tortured, imprisoned without trial or forced to exile. Some of them were assassinated. According to the author of this article, Mapanje's poetry is subversive to the regime. Some of his poems in *Of Chameleons and Gods*, as most of them were written in the 1970s, "work to demystify Banda and threaten to undermine his legitimacy through interrogations of some beliefs and practices that anchored Banda's regime" (R. M. Chirambo, 2007, p.143). To get more insights into the Mapanje's

detention in Mikuyu Prison and how Banda ruled Malawi for thirty years, this article is recommended.

David M. Jefferess (2000) unveils, how on the one hand Mapanje through his poems and on the other hand Lucius Banda through his songs have resisted to the politics of anarchism in Malawi. A Censorship Board was established in 1968 to control everything before its publication while people needed to feel free and were thirsty of democracy. It is in this wake, according to D.M. Jefferess (2000), that Mapanje through *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* and Lucius Banda through some of his songs and stories in *Cease Fire*, "[protest] the corruption and economic mismanagement of the newly-democratic Malawi and [lament] the fragmentation of community and family" (D. M. Jefferess, 2000, p. 107). They have significantly contributed to the struggle which has led to the transition from autocracy to democracy in Malawi through their works of art. To have an idea of what has been "the role of culture" in the "resistance to oppression" in Malawi and in Africa at large and how it has contributed to end up autocracy in the aforementioned country, this article is very important and relevant.

Jegede Francis Olabisi in his article "Despotism, Corruption and Social Realism in Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prisons*" (2019), has selected some of the poems of the Malawian poet and their synopsis. Not only has he made the synopsis of these poems but he has also demonstrated how they are the artistic representation of the reality. He depicts despotism and corruption as the daily social phenomena that Mapanje recounts.

## 2. The Incentive Forces Leading to Hope

There are some important factors which encourage people to engage in politics. This subtly deals with some of those reasons that are specifically related to the fact of giving hope to the masses' expectation to influence political perceptions.

Colonialism can be seen as a phenomenon that has changed the political history of Africa. It "represents the single most disruptive factor in Africa's history" (W. Adebayo, 1996, p. 351). Talking about Africa's political system without starting from colonization is futile. Africa owes its modern political system to colonialism. It means that the basic problem that prevents Africa's development dates back to the colonial period. Basing on this, one wonders whether the Independence Day each African country celebrates each year is not useless. Undoubtedly, the answer to this question is "No", but that is not the point.

In fact, at certain level some elites engage in politics with a view to helping find a way out of the political crisis in Africa. Most of the time, they are activists, writers as in some contexts, politics goes with

literature or political opponents. This means they express themselves either orally or through writings. Since independence, African countries have known dictators and tyrants. Activists and the political opponents sometimes engage in politics with the expectation that they can influence these tyrannical political perceptions. The ambition is not always to get in a tug-of-war with the autocrats, but to manipulate their mindset.:

- ‘We’ve fought before, but this is more than rape!’
- In the semi-Sahara October haze, the raw jokes
- Of Balamanja women are remarkable. The vision
- We revel in has sent their husbands to the mines
- Of Jo’burg, to buy us large farms, she insists.
- But here, the wives survive by their wits & sweats:
- Shoving dead cassava stalks into rocks, catching
- Fish in tired *chitenje* cloths with kids, picking
- Baobab fruit & whoring. The bark from the baobab
- They strip into strings for their reed wattle,
- The fruit they crack, scoop out the white, mix with
- Goat milk, “That’s porridge for today, children!” (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 22)

In a society, the most vulnerable people are women and children. Indeed, the excerpt above, from the poem “Baobab Fruit Picking (or Development in Monkey Bay)” is a portrait of women and children daily life. Jack Mapanje, here, portrays the living conditions of women and children in order to draw the attention of the politicians in the simpler manner. By the way, it is noticeable that the poem is made up with stanzas of only two lines (couplets). In the first line of the present extract, he has used a literary device to foretell what people cope with basing on the past and the present. He says: “We’ve fought before, but this is more than rape!” To our mind, it is a simile made to show that what the women and their children are facing now is more violent than what they have dealt with in the past as struggle. Talking of rhyme, most of the lines do not have any rhyme scheme and that is a matter of preference. Rhyme is not the most important element of a poem. A poem should emphasize an emotion or an image, something one can feel or something related to the sensory organs (eye, ear, body/hand, nose or

tongue). Here, there is neither alliteration nor assonance, but some of the verses of Jack Mapanje end in words with voiceless consonant sounds. If one has to feel what is said in these verses, it is noticeable that the tone is serious, but not violent in mood. This shows that the level of the poet’s diction is simple. Basing on these elements, one could assert that Jack Mapanje does not want to get into a dispute with his country’s decision makers. As said above, he is just making a portrait of the situation of women and children, hoping to draw the authorities’ attention. If possible, these authorities could imagine the women and the children in such living conditions. This will probably make them notice that their political strategies are not impacting the masses’ living conditions positively. The political strategies are pointless and profiting only the powerholders.

Convincing politicians to change their political perceptions is not an easy task. When a doctor has a patient, who does respond quickly to a treatment, that doctor must try many ways of treating his patient. However, believing in the power of his poetry to change these people’s minds as far as politics is concerned, Jack Mapanje portrays through his poem “Kadango Village, Even Milimbo Lagoon Is Dry,” a village during the heat of October. This poem corroborates this fact:

- In the cracking heat of October, our village market.
- A queue of skeletal hands reaching out for the last
- Cowlac tin of loose grain, falters, against hope.
- In the drought, a frail dog sniffing his lover’s arse
- Goes berserk, barking at the wave of grey eddying
- Between the mountain boulders and the shrivelling lake.
- Scurvy children kicking the grit, scud beachwards,
- Their wobbly feet digging in for possible cassava
- Where even such tubers are now hushed in shoot.
- Rocky geckos, blue tongues hanging out, scuttle on
- The hot sand but bil-tong, belly-up, before the beach.
- Fish eagles suspended, swoop down for grasshoppers.
- Even Milimbo lagoon is dead; no oar dips in any more.
- Those fishermen who dreamt up better weather

- Once, no longer cast their nets here, and their
- Delightful bawdy songs to bait the droughts are
- Cloaked in the choking fumes of dawn, banned. But
- Our fat-necked custodians despatch another tale. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 6)

This poem is made up of six tercets. Though the lines do not have any rhyme scheme and contain no alliteration and assonance, the poem is full of images and what makes it interesting. Perhaps, Jack Mapanje feels that non-rhyming poetry can express feeling, emotions, and ideas as excellently as a rhyming one can. Di Yanni (2002) states that “An image is a concrete representation of a sense of impression, feeling or idea.” (2002, p.703) to show the importance of imagery not of rhyme. It is stated in *Introduction to Literature* that “probably a poet’s most powerful tool for creating tone is imagery” (K. Agyekum, 2013, p. 161). In fact, an image is used to emphasize a fact. Considering this slipstream, the images used in the above-mentioned poem are to emphasize the fact that the masses’ living conditions are very hard. To back up this idea, let us consider the expression “a queue of skeletal hands...” in the second line of the first stanza which is a literary device. One would say that it is an exaggeration or a metaphor. But, critically thinking about that expression we think that the poet wants to better portray people’s situation through a representation the readers could imagine. This poem is a deep report of the masses’ plight. It clearly depicts what the people in the poet’s native village go through during the heat of October. People face drought which causes them many problems such as starvation, diseases and ultimately death. This deep portrait of his native village and the problems people cope with there is to move the authorities to pity. During the month of October, everything seems doomed for Kadango village people and the authorities are implored to do something so as to change these ordinary people’s lives positively during the period. The poet writes:

- Those fishermen who dreamt up better weather
- Once, no longer cast their nets here, and their
- Delightful bawdy songs to bait the droughts are
- Cloaked in the choking fumes of dawn, banned. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 6)

This passage from the poem shows how the people yearn for better living conditions at the end of colonialism, but the independences have fallen short of their expectations.

The author’s intention through this passage is to remind the politicians of the promises of independence and that the strategies set up as projects to develop the country do not allow them to fulfil the promises, they have made to the masses prior to the independences.

In fact, the politicians of Jack Mapanje’s country are part of the author’s audience or readership and coming back to the poem itself, it is noticeable that he has used more long lines. Anyway, a good writing must consist of a combination of long and short sentences (lines). However, if the poet has used more long lines in his poem, this may be to arouse more interests in the audience or give more interest to the readers or the audience his targets are learned people, that is to say, the elites of his country. By doing so, he will for sure keep the attention of the politicians because they need to change their political perceptions. This will probably help change ordinary people’s lives positively.

- I was out of bounds, they insisted, outside
- The wards, where iron roofs crumble under
- Rotting *mlombwa* leaves, green paint rusts
- To two decades of dead dust, windows are
- Covered in shreds of matting (to stop our
- Scorpion pneumonia of June?). Inside, some
- Sixty inmates of spasming women top & tail
- On thirty beds; ninety others with infants
- Scramble over the cracked cold cement floor –
- A family under each bed, most in between.
- A fresh smelling babe in the corner grinds.
- Mother suckles him gnawing at her tatters.
- On a slab, a cramped enamel plate (with
- A piece of tripe she could not chew) labours. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 38)

The extract above clearly presents the calamity women face in maternity while giving birth. As one can notice, the poem is composed of couplets (two lines) which show that the poet’s intention here is to make sure what he says is simple and clear to the readership. But, his lines (sentences), though without any rhyming pattern, are not simple talking about syntax. The poet prefers enjambement technique to communicate. It is therefore not possible to understand a single line taken on its own. This “contribute to the sense of stifling boredom in the mental institutions” (K. Agyekum, 2013, p.161). In spite of its abnormality to the natural structure of a sentence, this technique is probably used

to show the bewilderment of the persona who finds the treatment of pregnant women as incomprehensible and abnormal. More importantly, by adopting enjambment, poets can effectively pull the reader from one line to the next and ultimately make the latter read the whole poem. So, probably, the poet intends to make the powerholder have the whole news about the ordeal of the masses at the prospect of making them feel their misfortune. To emphasise this fact, the poet has used lines such as: "Sixty inmates of spasming women top & tail/On thirty beds; ninety others with infants/Scramble over the cracked cold cement floor-/A family under each bed, most in between" (J. Mapanje, 1993, p.38). The first question here is to know why Mapanje has chosen to add the adjective "cold" to the noun phrase "cement floor". Potentially, he is trying to emphasize the tone of his poem which is perceived as pathetic; even very pathetic for babies – new born babies – to be in direct contact with a cement floor and what is more, a cold one as if there have been no preparations to welcome them. By experiencing such sickening situations, let us admit that the spirit of those children will learn that there is no softness in their new environment. Consequently, if they live their lives that way for long feeling that they mean nothing to the government, it would be tough that such children work for the welfare of their nation when grown-up.

Indeed, one could notice that there is an exaggeration. Even if it is an exaggeration, it aims to point out the huge number of women and their children comparing to the few available and relevant infrastructures and equipment. The conditions are favourable neither for the mothers nor the babies. The way the author unveils this is heart-touching and will probably influence their political leaders' mindset. As said above, this is the author's hope because he believes in the power of poetry to influence the political perceptions. This way of doing prevents the author from getting into a tug-of-war with the powerholders. Considering the process, one can assert that the author is somehow doing a psychological job to influence them. Thus, hope is the weapon to disempower the autocrats.

During the colonial era, voices rose. African elites formed movements to lead African countries to independences. Their struggle was against exploitation, slavery and the pillaging of African resources. However, colonialism has a political legacy in Africa. "Contemporary African states have adopted western models and their political institutions have also been inherited from the colonial states. As a result, the contemporary African leaders are authoritarian, rent seekers, corrupt and exclusionary to other opposition groups. This is why the democratization process in Africa remains difficult" (E. A. Bayeh, 2015, p. 92). The same people who fought for independence are now playing exactly the same role as the former masters.

Independence has not fulfilled people's expectation. In this respect Adebayo Williams (1996) asserts: Independence had brought not the solace and succor that it had promised but deepening misery and misfortune. In most African countries, internal colonialism had merely replaced external colonialism. Africans, in the words of some local wits, had only exchanged monkeys for baboons. What made the situation even more galling was the fact that in most cases, yesterday's freedom fighter had become today's remarkable tyrant. (W. Adebayo, 1996, p.353)

Up to today, African countries are still coping with the same problem. People come to power with good projects, but once in power, they turn to be authoritarians, autocrats and corrupt.

Basing on these events and the authorities' posture which create a revolt among the writers and the unemployed youth, the latter untie their tongues and denounce when they feel tired. In the present context, they hope to disempower the autocrats because the latter are selfish, arrogant and denuded of human sense. They must be demoralized so as to know they have to consider the citizens they are ruling. They must consider these citizens for they live in democracy and it is said that democracy is a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free and fair elections. In some of his poems, the Malawian poet and activist, Jack Mapanje, draws his inspirations from the actions of the politicians to dishearten them for they do not respect the people they govern. The following poem entitled "The Haggling Old Woman at Balaka" is an example:

- The old woman at Balaka never stops
- She haggles over every new event:
  
- 'I was fed on the breasts and goat milk,
- Not on your silly, dust-milk-tins!
- And you girls today are cocked up,
- You sell chicken eggs for cokes and fantas
- To suckle your babies, then you ask me
- Why your babies are rickets and ribs?
  
- Now you come to lend me money, you say,
- To buy fertilizers to improve my yield.
- How generous, how degrading! And I must
- Suppose your banks won't dry out! Can't
- You see I am too tired for these tricks?
  
- And from now on I will keep my crop to
- Myself – you have no shame building your
- Brick houses on the old women's dying energies
- Under the lie of national development!
- No, I've sung too many tattered praises,
- Spare me these spotted desires, children...

- Dear granny at Balaka fidgets too much,
- I fear what she'll brag about next. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 9)

This poem is an unrhymed one with a particular structure. It is composed of five stanzas respectively, two lines (couplet), six lines (sestet), five lines (cinquain), six lines (sestet) and two lines (couplet). As mentioned in the previous subtitle, rhyme is not the most important element in a poem and it is a matter of preference. There is no alliteration and assonance in this poem as for us, but what retains our attention is the expression “your banks won't dry out” the poet has used in the fourth line of the third stanza which is a representation of how full the politicians' bank accounts are while the large majority of people suffer. What is cruel is that reading the second stanza. This stanza which is absolutely metaphoric and an imagery. The speaker in stanza 2 of the poem is seemingly an adult citizen who can differentiate what used to be from what exists now. S/he remembers being fed on breast which is the most vital nutritious source for a baby, standing for the normal treatments of individuals which once dominated the societies. Nowadays girls who metaphorically represent the powerholders who are supposed to feed the masses put as babies in the stanza are using “dust-milk-tins” to feed the babies (masses).

First of all, dust-milk-tins are not African realities which is a connotation of the fact that African powerholders are using the colonists' strategies and ways to govern a completely different society. Africans cannot survive that way. The poet goes up to take the “girls” for cocked-up people. They sell chicken eggs which stands for our natural resources to buy cokes and *fantas* to feed their “babies”. Those powerholders liquidate what would be more beneficiary for and to the masses and give them what they do not really need. The poet successfully makes this stanza a metaphor and at the same time an imagery which is very much incredible.

We also have a sense of irony in the stanza. The persona of the poem wonders how the elites can use inappropriate materials and strategies to govern their nations and expect the citizens to be satisfied. This is quite ironical. and then this reveals the diction and the tone of the poem. Using concepts like “silly” and “crooked-up” combined with this irony in only stanza 2, it appears that the tone here is irritating and rebellious. That means the persona in the poem does not agree at all with the “girls”.

Moreover, we think that probably the money that does not run out in the bank account of the leaders is earned at the sale of the national properties. The poet says: “you sell chicken eggs” in stanza 2 which could be the sale of the national resources due to the imagery

and the metaphoric allure of the stanza. A deep and careful reading of the aforementioned poem shows that it is about corruption and injustice that people are victims of on the pretext of national development by the authorities and one can never cheat on somebody one respects and considers. In an online review published on January 18, 2011 by Image Nations, it is asserted that through the passage “You sell chicken eggs for cokes and *fantas*. /To suckle your babies, then you ask me/Why your babies are rickets and ribs?” (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 9), “Jack could possibly not be referring to the women but to the country's politburo, who are eagerly exchanging the resources of the country (chicken eggs) for postiches that would eventually cause the nation and its people to suffer (rickets and ribs)” (F. Agyeman, 2011 n.p). This way of addressing the authorities shows their weakness, incompetence and incapability to forge ideas and build their countries. What counts for them is their own interest. on the lie of national development, these leaders build their riches with the energies of others, especially old women (F. Agyeman, 2011 n.p). Through this denunciation, the writer hopes to dishearten these politicians who are blind by their greediness and do not even feel sorry for tricking old women to build their wealth. A woman is a vulnerable person in a society and portraying an old woman who suffers so that somebody still vigorous could make wealth on her “dying energies” (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 9) is a crucial point to demoralize the latter unless the person is heartless.

Actually, Jack Mapanje intends to dissuade and demoralize the politicians running national affairs. Indirectly, the poet wants his target group to understand that if he denounces its misdeeds, it is somehow poking the members of that group to realize that they are harming the masses through their governance.

Then, in his decision to psychologically disempower the powerholders, Mapanje did not stop only at this. The poet goes further and reduces these politicians to people who bamboozle their population. They forge no idea and through this, they cannot encourage their people to work for progress. In “For Another Village Politburo Projected,” he says:

- Hyenas with the gilt of our skulls behind will
- Tumble in chicken bones fattened by the meagre
- Women of this village; brusque bumble-  
bee gluttons
- Will woo their dung-beetles – who will not show up
- Here? We will all tune in to these levities, some
- Plodding on to the dais, others shrugging without
- Bitterness. And like yesterday, we will forge no new

- Vision, but nuzzling Adam and Queen Bee, we'll baa
- The same anthem: when did our swastika ever starve?
- (Unless some soldier-bee cracks in on us one day!) (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 11)

Still in his favourite writing style in all of these poems of which enjambment complicates the meaning of the message, Mapanje has spoken again. Let us admit that this preference of style is highly meaningful in this context. Actually, this style is one the best to show how politicians bamboozle the masses. Clearly, through this extract, Mapanje treats the leaders of his country as politicians who are not only incapable, incompetent, but who are also bamboozling their peoples. It appears that the poet's tone is serious, but playful. The poet's playfulness can be remarked in the mood and his seriousness can be seen through the rhythm of the poem. In his verses, he has used more words which produce a strong sound. Basing on this, one could say that he is maybe in rebellion with his target group. It is the playfulness noticed in the mood which shows that he is satirically telling the leaders of his country who they are and what they represent in the eyes of the youth. They are unwilling to progress and they "forge no new vision" (lines 7-8). As a result, everything seems doomed for the population. In fact, the whole poem whose passage is used here is a free verse sonnet. It is a sonnet because it is composed of fourteen lines and a free verse because it is rhymeless. As rhyme is not the most important element in a poem or not necessary in a poem, I have started thinking that perhaps this depends on the quality of literary work the poet wants to have. Perhaps, the rhymelessness of the poem is to create the emotion or feeling of pity and insurgence in the readers.

### 3. Political Opponents and Activists' Ordeal Leading to Despair

Colonization has left a lot of legacies in Africa. African leaders' governance is the fruit of colonization. The same people who have been jailed, tortured, and fought for the end of colonialism are now inflicting the same suffering on their compatriots when the latter complain about their management of the national affairs. They arrest and detain people (opponents and activists) for years without trial nor founded charges to incriminate them.

Regarding Malawi as the setting of the book under study, Jack Mapanje through some poems recounts the conditions in which he was detained with the people who were defending the general interests of the country. The passage goes thus:

- From the vault of Chingwe's Hole
- Come these chattering wagtails,
- Desperate voices of fractured souls

- Nesting on desert walls of prisons
- And exiles, afflicted or self-imposed,
- Counting stubborn beads, deprived
- Laughters and ceaseless tears shed
- In the chaos of invented autocracies
- Now darkly out of bounds beyond
- These tranquil walls of York. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 1)

This is the prologue of *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* which foretells about people's desperation in prisons and in exile. It expresses the nightmare that anyone who dares to challenge the powerholders goes through. To designate the prisoners with whom he stayed, the poet has used the expression "chattering wagtails" in the title of his book which one could consider a metaphor. He is taking them for wagtails, probably not for fun but as a result of a meticulous and judicious choice. Firstly, perhaps, Mapanje is in a logic of "selecting small and vulnerable species that are generally viewed as harmless, such as wagtails, and by extending a tender attitude towards birds that are normally reviled, such as the marabou stork" (S. Mthathiwa, 2009, p.20). Secondly, through the usage of this inoffensive bird Mapanje is maybe trying to point out that those who were persecuted during Banda's regime were harmless people who fell victim to the excesses of a despotic leader. Then, the bird imagery serves to expose the great physical and psychological anguish that captives in Banda's prisons such as Mikuyu faced (U. Kamanga, 1998, pp.44-45). Anyone, who reads this prologue, can easily figure out that innocent souls are fractured by any means for telling the truth. The truth seekers are arbitrary arrested and put in jail without any charge. What makes the situation worse is that they are tortured physically, morally and psychologically. They are made to clean some shits. In "Scrubbing the Furious Walls of Mikuyu," Jack Mapanje unveils this situation and how he has refused to be used as an ordinary criminal:

- Is this where they dump those rebels,
- These haggard cells stinking of bucket
- Shit and vomit and the acrid urine of
- Yesteryears? Who would have thought I
- Would be gazing at these dusty, cobweb
- Ceilings of Mikuyu Prison, scrubbing
- Briny walls and riddling out impetuous
- Scratches of another dung-beetle locked
- Up before me here? Violent human palms
- Wounded these blood-bloated mosquitoes
- And bugs (to survive), leaving these vicious
- Red marks. Monstrous flying cockroaches
- Crashed here. Up there the cobwebs trapped
- Dead bumblebees. Where did black wasps



- Get clay to build nests in this corner? (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 53)

Through this first stanza composed of fifteen lines, the persona who is also the poet is wondering whether somebody would have thought he could be put in prison one day. It is unbelievable to imagine himself dumped. The verb “dump” used in reference to a human being is an exaggeration. He would like readers to imagine how human beings are treated as trash. This poet, in his style of hyperbolic use has shown the living condition in the cells. He says that he can see the acrid urine of yesteryears. This is showing how dirty and unlivable those cells are. The worse is that he could not believe he is in jail and obliged to look at some shits, vomits and to inhale the gas of urine. The stanza is rhymeless, but in rhythm each of the verses ends up with a syllable producing a weak sound. To our mind, this shows the reason why the poet speaks calmly. Focusing on this, we think he is mourning or lamenting about how he is psychologically affected.

- But here, scratches, insolent scratches!
- I have marveled at the rock paintings
- Of Mphunzi Hills once but these grooves
- And notches on the walls of Mikuyu Prison,
- How furious, what barbarous squiggles!
- How long did this anger languish without
- Charge, without trial, without visit here, and
- What justice committed? This is the moment
- We dreaded: when we'd all descend into
- The pit, alone, without a wife or a child
- Without a story (just three Bibles for
- Ninety men), without charge without trial;
- This is the moment I never needed to see. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 53)

In the second strophe of the poem, Jack Mapanje still laments, but he seizes the opportunity to tell his readership he is victim of anger. Through these thirteen lines, he wonders how long his situation will last again. He is in prison without any charge and trial and what is sad is that he is not allowed any visit. Even his wife and children are not allowed to pay him a visit. That is what he mainly mourns in this second stanza:

- Shall I scrub these brave squiggles out
- Of human memory then or should I perhaps
- Superimpose my own, less caustic; dare I
- Overwrite this precious scrawl? Who'd
- Have known I'd find another prey without
- Charge, without trial (without bitterness)
- In these otherwise black walls of Mikuyu
- Prison? No, I will throw my water and mop
- Elsewhere. We have liquidated too many
- Brave names out of nation's memory
- I will not rub out or inscribe

- My own, more ignoble, to consummate this
- Moment of truth I have always feared! (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 54)

This preceding strophe of the poem about the poet's refusal to let himself be treated as some of the dissidents who have already been sacrificed “out of nation's memory” (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 54). The style in this last stanza is rhetorical questions. The persona just wonders repetitively throughout the stanza. Given that he is not expecting any answers, thence, he is probably trying to show the complexity and the bewilderment in the cases of those innocent prisoners of Banda's regime. The fact that this poem ends with an exclamatory mark is evidence of the bewilderment. In Mikuyu Prison, Jack Mapanje is not the only one incarcerated without trial. That is why he wonders: “Who'd/have known I'd find another prey without/charge, without trial (without bitterness)/in these otherwise black walls of Mikuyu/Prison?” (J. Mapanje, 1993, p. 54). That is the question which has led him to the conclusion that he should not let himself be sacrificed for they have already sacrificed too many dissidents in the country's name. This idea is expressed when he says: “we have liquidated too many brave names out of nation's memory,” which can be seen as a hyperbole. This hyperbole displays how human beings are sacrificed as if they are animals or unwanted things (wastes).

Considering the poem in a general view, it appears that only the first letter in the first verse of each strophe are capitalized, every following line starts with a lower case. The stanzas are written like paragraphs but with lines break up and in a rhythmic way to make it a poetic. This does not show that it is a bad poem. Rather, it is the choice of the poet to bring attention to the content and help the readers feel a certain way or get a picture in their minds. It is clear that the present poem is full of images. The poet has used these images to make the readers feel his situation in prison as these images bring sympathy. This poem clearly depicts how people who defend human rights are incarcerated without trial. Honesty requires that we admit that no country can be said to be taking the path of sustainable development with such a mindset. The best thing would be to let citizens put their right to freedom of speech into action. By doing so, they will definitely help the powerholders by pointing to their shortcomings so that the latter will have suggestions and opinions among which they can use as their springboard or steppingstone to be set off for a sustainable development. This experience of torture and trauma that powerholders hold in store for mostly the opposition is not helpful at all. “The experience of torture has been shown to have a severe impact on the survivors' mental health, particularly in terms of the diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder and major depression” (J. O. Halvorsen & A. Kagee, 2009, p. 990). In fact, torture

does not just have to do with the physical treatment. It also has to do with the trauma caused to somebody. Political detainees go through this strenuous experience and survive with severe effects on their mental health which cause despair. In order to avoid the impacts of these hard life conditions, activists, freedom fighters and politicians have no other option than go to exile.

Referring to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, exile is “the state of being sent to live in another country that is not your own, especially for political reasons or as a punishment” (A. S. Hornby, 1995, p.511). M. Sznajder and L. Roniger (2007) see exile as the removal of opponents in a state framework as a result of confrontational politics. The political theorist Judith Shklar in works published subsequently (1998a; 1998b) analyzed exile in terms of the severed political obligations of governments toward their citizens and the parallel ties of loyalty, fidelity, and allegiance that the exiles may maintain away from their home. Brian Loveman's analysis of *de facto* regimes, in which he shows how political exile is related to emergency legislation aimed at excluding the opposition from the political game throughout the continent (B. Loveman, 1993 n.p.).

From all these conceptions, one would say that the word exile is known as the fact of fleeing from his/her country so as to avoid a pending punishment. In addition, political exile can be seen as a self-imposed or imposed outland to escape trouble with a regime, most of the time, the one running the national affairs. At the end of the colonial period, seeing the way the rulers are governing, people have started writing to influence these politicians. As a consequence, this led them into trouble with the rulers:

Not unexpectedly, African rulers, without exception, reacted violently to this challenge to their authority and legitimacy. The writers were denounced as anarchists and communist saboteurs or paid agents of western powers bent on keeping Africa in slavery and colonial servitude. Many of the writers were thus imprisoned or forced into exile. In some cases, they were threatened with physical elimination. As a result, the 1970s marked the advent of African literary refugees wandering from country to country. On the entire continent, the writer suddenly became the most endangered species. The work of art became synonymous with subversive documents and no matter the complexion or coloration of the dictatorship, the literary artist was public enemy number one. (W. Adebayo, 1996, pp. 354-355)

This extract clearly shows the way writers as the first activists have been treated since the end of colonialism. In fact, at the very first time that politicians started lying, all one could do was writing. Writing to

denounce the politicians' lies. This clearly shows that at the beginning, literature and politics have always been incompatible. That is exactly what Adebayo Williams deplores in this quotation:

African writers have resisted oppression and injustice on the continent with great force and courage. Literature is fundamentally incompatible with tyranny. In its purest state, literature is subversive of authority and authoritarian writs. Its joyous and spontaneous celebration of life, its near anarchic contempt for regulation and regimentation makes it the most natural enemy of dictatorship. While the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation. It is thus inevitable that the two must come into potentially fatal collision... In their increasingly explosive confrontation with the rulers, many African writers have suffered great privation. These include torture, imprisonment, arbitrary arrests and detention, internal deportation, forced exile and the threats of physical liquidation... (W. Adebayo, 1996, p. 350)

The foregoing extracts clearly declare that literature and politics are not compatible. Both of them seek to defend contrary realities. Literature is an enemy of despotism, authoritarianism, and always seeks to liberate people. In this wake, after his release and on the eve of the publication of his prison memoirs, while talking to Rowenna Davis during an interview about freedom, timeless truth, at the question to know what he is politically passionate about, Jack Mpanje answered: “Truth and freedom. The thing I like to hear about is people's freedom” (R. Davis, 2011 n.p.) and that is exactly what literature incarnates while politics represents the total contrary of this. Therefore, as in vulnerable posture, activists (writers) and opponents are the ones sacrificed. They, ultimately, meet with “torture, imprisonment, arbitrary arrests and detention, internal deportation, forced exile and the threats of physical liquidation” (W. Adebayo, 1996, p. 350).

Forced exile is a current situation in Africa. It started since African countries gained their independence and it is still prevailing. Political opponents and activists are most of the time obliged to leave their homeland for political considerations because ever since the end of colonialism they do not hide their disagreement with governments when they do bad things. Considering for example Malawi, “almost immediately after the country gained independence six years later, Banda scattered into exile the very people who had organized the independence movement and had invited him to lead it” (R. M. Chirambo, 2001, p.145). In this slipstream, Reuben Makayiko Chirambo states:

Banda violently forced some of his colleagues into exile for disagreeing with him (Baker 104-

203). These people included Kanyama Chiume, Orton Chirwa, Masauko Chipembere, and several others. Yet strangely, these are the individuals who actually invited him back to Malawi and offered him the leadership of the independence movement, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC). (R. M. Chirambo, 2007, p. 145)

To honour these people and their memories, Jack Mapanje claims justice for them in his prologue and somehow dedicates the whole book to them when he says:

- From the vault of Chingwe's Hole
- Come these chattering wagtails,
  
- Desperate voices of fractured souls
- Nesting on desert walls of prisons
  
- And exiles, afflicted or self-imposed,
- Counting stubborn beads, deprived
  
- Laughters and ceaseless tears shed
- In the chaos of invented autocracies
  
- Now darkly out of bounds beyond
- These tranquil walls of York. (J. Mapanje, 1993, p.1)

Through his poem, "In Memoriam (For Orton Chirwa, 20 October 1992)," he recalls the case of Orton Chirwa who was forced to exile with his wife Vera Chirwa but later got kidnapped abroad, tried in Malawi on charges of treason and sentenced to death. But, "in October 1992, three months before his possible release, Orton Chirwa was found dead in his cell." His wife, Vera Chirwa got released in January 1993 from prison.

Considering himself as a victim of injustice as far as exile is concerned and now obliged to leave at York in the United Kingdom, the poet claims that justice be committed for them. Reading the prologue mentioned above, one can easily comprehend how far the poet has been driven to despair to be out of his homeland. Leaving out of one's homeland is not safe because one is called to meet with other challenges and the most known one is racism. Indeed, after being released in 1991, he was still unable to have a normal life. The police were still controlling him and his movement and what made the situation more complicated is that the authorities at the University of Malawi were reluctant to take him back, which means that his image as an ex-detainee pursues him. Being still controlled by the police, it means that he is not in security with his family. Ultimately, he was obliged to move to York, in the United Kingdom.

Moving to York is in the intention to find peace and live a normal life. In the last stanza of his

prologue, he said: "... Now darkly out of bounds beyond/These tranquil walls of York" (J. Mapanje, 1993, p.1). A careful attention is given to the word "tranquil" here which literally means peaceful. But some questions occur to us: did he find peace there? Is he living the peaceful life he desired while leaving his country? Are there not some challenges to face? It is commonly said that there is no good place for anybody than his/her homeland. If it is so, how can one admit that Jack Mapanje and his family have found a tranquil life in the United Kingdom? There is something to worry about.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, this research work is concerned with politics and the job has been to make an analytical assessment of hope and despair in politics based on *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, a collection of poems by the Malawian poet Jack Mapanje. The work revolves around three axes starting from a review of literature on the book under study to the factors leading to the despair of political opponents by going through the incentive forces leading to hope. We come to the conclusion that the independences have been just an allusion to cover puppeteering in Africa. Opponents and activists are still treated the same way as in the colonial era. We also find out that people decide to get involved in politics with the vision of taking an active part in the building of their nation as genuine patriots. But, once in the field, they discover a reality which unfortunately leads them to disappointment. The point is that when they adhere to politics and do not share the same ideologies as the current powerholders, they are reduced to silence through disappointing means including physical intimidations, torture, incarceration without fair crimes and murder or forcing to exile. The lust for power has turned some human beings into indescribable beings. Are Africans really longing for a sustainable development? Why is it so difficult for the leaders to take opponents' opinions in their leadership? These are some of the questions people ought to ask and find answers to so as to pave a real development.

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