

**PROTESTS AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED ORDER IN *TIYAMBE ZELEZA'S*
*SMOULDERING CHARCOAL***

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Abstract: *Smouldering Charcoal* by Tiyaambe Zeleza can be considered as a proletarian novel wherein the author depicts the pitiable living conditions of the population fallen in the pitfalls of dearth under the reign of Hastings Banda. The bankrupt government of Banda that does not care about its population's well-being is responsible for this misery. Instead of accepting the fate of his characters, Zeleza engages them in waves of protests which aim at coming out of the quagmire of poverty. This paper x-rays these protests in a Marxist perspective.

Key words: protest, established order, strike, Feminism, Marxism, demands.

Résumé *Smouldering Charcoal* de Tiyaambe Zeleza peut être considéré comme un roman prolétaire dans lequel l'auteur dépeint les conditions de vie pitoyable de la population prise au piège de la pauvreté sous le règne de Hastings Banda. Le gouvernement défaillant de Banda qui ne se soucie guère du bien-être de sa population est comptable de cette situation de misère. Au lieu d'accepter le destin de ses personnages, Zeleza les engage dans des vagues de protestations visant à les sortir du borbier de la pauvreté. Cet article passe au scanner ces contestations dans une perspective marxiste.

Mots clés: protestation, ordre établi, grève, Féminisme, Marxisme, revendications.

INTRODUCTION

With a few exception, African literature has always been a protest literature which targets the established order, whether this order is colonial or neocolonial. Protests are often visible in the form of revolutions, public demonstrations, conflicts opposing different classes and interests, or socioeconomic or political mutations. Even when there is no open upheaval targeting the upper classes in African novels, there exists brooding ones which testify authors' goodwill to reshape society in order to give it a more humane face.

Tiyambe Zeleza's *Smouldering Charcoal* brings to the fore such a brooding clash which ultimately aims at bettering the living conditions of the downtrodden whose indigent life is the shocking illustration of the gap between the haves and the have-nots. In this novel, the middle class, the proletariat and the under-proletariat or lumpen-proletariat get united to loosen the grips of the exploiting class. Their movement eventually demands for an equitable distribution of the wealth of Malawi which serves as backcloth to Zeleza's fiction. Their demands lead straight to a clash opposing the oppressed on the one hand and the oppressor on the other one. What is the core of this clash? Differently put, what are the ins and outs of the protests against the established order? A fourfold answer seems to clearly stand out: bakers' strike, prisoners' hunger strike, women's protests and the exile and reorganization of the movement. This paper is based on Marxism and Feminist Marxism as theories which empower poor and weak people, including women for the birth of an equitable society.

I. BAKERS' STRIKE, A STERN 'NO' TO NEOCOLONIAL EXPLOITATION

The opening pages of *Smouldering Charcoal* present the reader with workers who are so poverty-stricken that they cannot afford eating bread and living in decent houses. And yet, they are the producing forces of society. Apart from smelling the baking bread, bakers for example have never tasted it because this is a luxury their meager wages cannot grant them. Their too-much contained discontent bursts out in the form of claims that lead to a strike which symbolizes their stern 'no' to neocolonial exploitation. What does the discontent consist of? What are the reasons and outcome of the strike?

The workers, namely bakers' interests and those of the well-off come to grips in the form of demands for a better life. Their attitude is seen as a subversive one, a harbinger of upcoming woes. Consequently, it has to be quickly smothered so as to doze the revolution burning in each worker. The behavior of the bakery managers pushes bakers to resort to a strike.

There are many reasons to the strike which has been brooding for decades. But the immediate reason is the firing of four workers who deem it their responsibility to demand for better working conditions and wages. The sacking is taken as a pretext to underscore the pitiable living conditions of the downtrodden. These conditions, by far dying conditions, are actually the remote reasons of the strike.

Most of Zeleza's characters are walking corpses in an unprecedented graveyard. These absent-minded people and highly alienated and reified by neocolonial capitalism are epitomized by Mchere in the opening pages. Indeed, the novel opens with Mchere's insomnia resulting from a series of unsolved problems. His dilapidated house is shared with a rat that continuously taunts him. Worse, the rat is responsible for 'making holes in the family's clothes, for depleting and soiling the food, and for keeping them awake at night' (Zeleza, 1992: 3). Mchere's troubles are not isolated ones. They are the common hardships of workers

whose lives and belongings have been holed by the suffocating system that makes endeavors to better exploit workers. Consequently, they spend sleepless nights. Being denied sleep is outrageously criminal because sleeping has been ordained by God. Owing to the suffocating system, many people cannot pay their weekly rent. As a result, they are constantly evicted with their families, and this daily frustrates their manhood. And yet, whatever the society, “Failure to provide adequate economic support for one’s family is considered the most humiliating failure a man can experience because it means that he has failed at what is considered his biological role as provider (Tyson, 2006: 87). Furthermore, poverty is so rampant in Njala that no pupil has gone ‘beyond a few years of rudimentary education’ (Zezeza, 1992: 9). Worse, poverty is the only food served to the workers and non-educated people. Even graduates are faced with unemployment and to survive they burn their utmost dreams and careers ‘on the stake of compromises for the sake of survival’ (Zezeza, 1992: 16). Below is an insight of the people’s dying conditions:

On both sides of the road there were shacks built of mud, grass, metal sheets, cardboard, and anything else that could provide temporary permanence. These rickety structures harboured disjointed human forms, not people, surrounded by mad dogs, rats, and inhuman stench. The old men and women died in their sleep, or were stabbed to death, thanks to a few coins they had hidden in the ground, young girls prematurely bore children in quick succession, children who would neither know their fathers nor the shape of blackboard...(Zezeza, 1992: 16)

Life in Njala is so sorrowful and mournful that it becomes useless and tasteless. As mentioned above, the system is so busy smacking would-be opponents that it does not care about guaranteeing basic education. Refusing basic education to the people is part of a well-thought and orchestrated strategy to have low-priced manpower and thus save the greatest amount of money, which is the main concern of capitalism, a highly suffocating and inhuman system. Once non-educated children are fully grown-up, they are offered two alternatives to give a meaning to their useless lives: either they become highway robbers or they are turned into the noxious party militia members who terrorize people “in the name of rooting out subversive elements (Zezeza, 1992: 17). Youths are thus in the pay of the upper class that shamelessly exploits and even turns them into bullies against workers. The basic characteristics of these youth is unmatched violence and destructiveness: Violence flowed in their veins like poisoned blood, draining them of meaning and purpose and leaving them with the spasm of death (Zezeza, 1992: 18). The youth, rather the militia is but the replica of leaders who have no social policy, no government program, no short or long term job creation policy. The only thing leaders excel in is how to set up strategies to hush up and kill those who dare to demand for better living conditions. Like the youth, the only power the government has is destructiveness. To better cling on power, leaders proceed to intoxication and brainwash that ultimately aim at making everybody swallow the idea that without the supreme leader the country will sink and disappear from the atlas. The leader is deified to such a pitch that everybody kowtows to him.

In addition to the preceding, the one-party state that has managed the country till the eve of multiparty system in the 1990s has so tightened its grips that any citizen who does not bear the party’s card is considered a subversive who deserves a fine or being bitten to death. This practice effectively existed in Malawi under the supervision of the Malawi Young Pioneers, a name Zezeza turns into Youth Militia for the sake of fiction. As a matter of fact, the Malawi

Young Pioneers (MYP) were the notorious paramilitary wing of the MCP that were used to bully and spy on the population in the name of Banda's party.

The aforementioned inhuman dictatorship is also at the roots of the general discontent observed in the country and which is epitomized by the bakers' strikes. As a matter of fact, when bakers engage their strike, "passers-by stopped to watch, while others, probably the unemployed, joined their ranks" (Zezeza, 1992: 127). This looks like the creation of a trade union. Thus, the strike gradually becomes that of all the wretched of the earth who are fed up with the poisonous government that only serves starvation within abundance, squalor, diseases, barbarity, poverty, exploitation, degradation, abuses and corruption to the people who just demand for the minimum to survive. The above-mentioned flaws are the daily food left to the people in the form of sugar-coated lies that turn blind. Meanwhile, ministers' "bellies are almost bursting with food" (Zezeza, 1992:31). The imagery is an outstanding one: ministers' protruded bellies testify their unprecedented greed and selfishness, just like President Banda himself whose personal richness was estimated to billions at his death. The particular oppression he has lorded on his people through an iron grid has so disadvantaged citizens that any protest is illegal and subversive.

In *Smouldering Charcoal*, arguing that the bakers' strike is an illegal one, the government proceeds to massive arrests through which some people die. The government behavior turns out to be a mistake. Indeed, it gives another impetus to the strike which is taken by workers as an avenue to write their part of History. The involvement of bakers in the march of History is but the first step of a long series of 'no' even though their path is paved with woes as everybody will discover in prison. Indeed, once in prison, bakers will realize that the country as a whole is a prison. The living conditions will trigger another strike, namely a hunger strike.

II. PRISONERS' HUNGER STRIKE, AN EXPRESSION OF A HUNGER FOR JUSTICE

Following the strike to demand for better wages and living conditions, the authorities whose basic vocabulary expels such notions as negotiations and compassion, proceed to a massive arrest of people who take part into the demonstrations. This tyrannical attitude spurs discontent. Sent to prison like high-way criminals, the only alternative people have to voice out their discontent is to initiate a hunger strike which gives to the township of Njala its full significance: Njala in local language means hunger. This hunger is an imagery for many non-satisfied needs. This section scrutinizes the reasons and consequences of this hunger strike that expresses a hunger for justice.

Prior to consequences, Zezeza spotlights the different forms of injustice the people suffers from. This is spotlighted via the inhuman living conditions in prison. It is a common villainy of the system to deny any right to prisoners. Prisoners are before all perceived as subversives who plot the downfall of the government. They are considered worse than true murderers and as a consequence, they are reduced to mere slaves whose lives are useful according to the whim of their masters. To show that prisoners are less than animals, they are left in cells which are but shitholes worse than pigsties: green flies trouble prisoners who can hardly breathe and sleep owing to the stench which suffocates them. The stench parallels the sleaze of the system whose most cherished perfume is corruption.

Living conditions in prison are much worse than in society even though the society as a whole has been turned into an underground prison where basic rights such as freedom of speech are tightly encapsulated. Illustrative of this is the fact that forty men are huddled together in cells initially built for ten prisoners at most. Actually, the prison cells are so stinking that the prison as a whole can be perceived as a pigsty wherein prisoners are stinking pigs. By extension, the country becomes a pigsty wherein dirtiness is part of the food of the population. The hunger strike is thus a way of rejecting this decay which symbolizes the rotten state. This dirtiness clogs the faculties of the leaders with congenital congested brains and moral decay. In addition to forced labor for no money, prisoners are continuously beaten by heartless guards. These are manifest signs that the system enslaves them. The food they are served in cells where they shit and urinate is all except food. Not only it is extremely bad but it is also insufficient. As a result, prisoners cannot feed properly and so they become sets of fleshless bones. By refusing the food served in prison, they somehow reject the whole system that has encapsulated their freedom. An incoercible hunger for justice therefore underpins prisoners' hunger strike.

In prison, information are extorted from prisoners even when they are inaccurate ones. One of the means the government has found to extort information is the one inflicted to Chola who has meanwhile become the firebrand leader of the movement in prison. After electrocuting him, he is left to an unscrupulous gay who rapes him. Despite that rape that "shatters Chola's life and values", he stands dumb and confesses nothing. Infuriated, prison authorities make him sit naked on a stove of burning charcoal. Then, a hot nail is taken from the stove and pierced through his penis before making him wear shoes full of nails that pierce his feet when he wants to walk. The retrograde barbarity of the prison managers convinces the reader that the country as a whole is but a concentration camp with "black Hitlers" who have coined new ways to exterminate "black Jews". To crown their barbarity, Chola is given to a hangman who murders him. With Chola's murder Zeleza leaves the field of fiction to deal with aspects of Hasting Banda's blind repression of his opponents who have been massively slaughtered under him. His government regularly tortured and murdered political opponents. Human rights groups estimate that at least 6,000 people were killed, tortured and jailed without trial. The strike thus aims at insightful social changes for the re-installation of justice.

Even though Chola is murdered in the prime of age, the movement he epitomizes in prison does not die. His death rather fuels the hunger strike and is construed as a Christ-like sacrifice for radical transformation. This transformation broods in every citizen and this is easily perceived in the enumeration of the types of prisoners: "there were school teachers, lawyers, civil servants, workers, peasants, and even a number of chiefs and former ministers. It was a microcosm of the potential a country laid to waste because of pervasive fear, ruthless greed, political repression and moral bankruptcy" (Zeleza, 1992: 149). Every prisoner has been betrayed by a close person: The Leader is well served by vigilant party women, youth leaguers, chairmen, and ministers, informers employed as house workers, university lecturers, newspaper editors, house wives and prostitutes (Review, 122). Former ministers, as regards true history, refer to three ministers – Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala, Aaron Gadama – who officially died in road accident in 1983 after challenging Banda by voicing support for multiparty practices. Zeleza veils history by just sending them to prison instead of revealing their murder by the Leader who has for a long decade made all endeavor to prevent the publication of *Smouldering Charcoal*. Zeleza's concern is clear enough: to use all the hushed-up forces to overthrow the government. No wonder to Ndatéro who asks "when will this madness end?" Chola answers: "until the thugs in power have been overthrown" (Zeleza,

1992:151). To this end, the movement proceeds to massive infiltration and instills in every single citizen the necessity to uproot the system whose parasitic members are but awful bloodsuckers.

We have infiltrated and will continue to infiltrate and work with all the progressive forces in our society: workers, peasants, students, patriotic elements, radical intellectuals. People must become aware that the system we have at present is evil. It serves the rich and the powerful at the expense of the mass. It is the creation of greedy men, and anything which men can make, men can also destroy and build something better in its place. Capitalism and all its bastards – colonialism, neocolonialism –, should be eradicated once and for all. (Zezeza, 1992:77).

As it can be seen, the hunger strike is taken as an opportunity to convince and recruit the most skeptical ones like Ndatéro. It ultimately expresses a hunger for social justice which requires a new form of organization. This foreshadows the organization of the movement in exile. In his attempt to revalorize intellectuals Zezeza brings them to the firing squad of the people struggle as it will be emphasized in the section dealing with the reorganization of the movement. Prior to any reorganization, the author engages his female characters in protests to voice out their plights.

III. THE WOMEN'S PROTESTS, AN OVERT BLOW TO PATRIARCHY

The bakers' strike results into arrest and killing that are hidden to the people. In the wake of such events women comb the whole Njala until they are informed that their husbands have been jailed for having demanded more money so as to live decently and make their offspring's lives tasteful. This arrest de facto turns women into widows who must feed alone their somewhat orphaned children. Taking advantage of their husbands' arrest, they voice out their discontent which is motivated by the shabby living conditions imposed them by patriarchy. Their protests are consequently an overt blow to patriarchy.

Being born a girl in Njala is somehow a venial sin. The patriarchal system willfully sets up strategies to impede success which must lead to female freedom and thus proceeds to the "feminization of poverty" as would say Bowens. For Bowens and al., the fact that women are victims of sexual and economic exploitation, thus making them the bulk of the poor and most affected by economic crises; is the "feminization of poverty." (Bowens and al. 2013: 28). Lucy for example is forced to prostitution because her education gets aborted mid-way. This is not the consequence of bad results; it is rather due to her poor background. As she is extraordinary beautiful, the local MP initiates a love-affair with her, promising to pay her school fees till the end of her studies. Yet, he proves to be a deceitful liar who sexually preys on poor girls. Indeed, in lieu of the promise, he abandons Lucy to her fate as soon as she gets pregnant. He even convinces her to never reveal the identity of her pregnancy's author if she wants to remain alive. Girls who are lucky enough to go to university are preyed on by rapacious politicians and sugar daddies. These fat-assed men or untamed pests inexorably drive female students straight to veiled prostitution. The predicament of these students is not different from that of Lucy. However, as a hopeful writer, Zezeza makes the system be caught in an orgy of self-destruction since young girls that irresponsible leaders make pregnant throw their unwanted babies into bushes and latrine pits. The predicament of women is to

exclusively depend on their husbands for money concerns. Sending their husbands to prison consequently equates cutting any means of survival.

In a nutshell, the system deliberately reduces women to wallflowers, or beasts of burden, or objects of pleasure, anything but full and equal human beings (Zezeza, 1992:164). As the author writes, “the act of being born a woman is a permanent seal on inferiority” (Zezeza, 1992:164). The system has willfully turned women into second-class citizens who can feed only when the system handlers are overfed. These are typical schemes of *patriarchy*, which Tyson defines as ‘any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles’ which ‘cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive’; and ‘women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions, paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job, and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering (Tyson, 2006 :85). And yet, the country disburses billion to celebrate the commemoration of independence which sounds like an empty shell for the women of Njala who cannot afford daily food. To show their too much contained frustration, they decide to boycott the dance rehearsal and rather march to the prison to demand for the unconditional release of their husbands. Their behavior is considered subversive and an avalanche of punishment is imposed to them. The subversive women “should be barred from using the market, the borehole and all public transport (Zezeza, 1992:135). Worse, they are isolated as firm recommendations to avoid fraternizing with them are made in the form of warning. Conditions of their death are thus gathered. And they would have died except female solidarity. The threat and sanctions rather trigger their determination to get their husbands free instead of discouraging them. Despites all the sanctions hovering over their heads, they purposely chose a dance rehearsal day to march to the prison. In words borrowed from Ogbiede, their action is a clear-cut demonstration of their rejection of the system that has long traded their dignity and well-being for crass tyranny (Ogbiede, 2014: 181). This uprising turns them into arrowheads of social protest. The procession comprises all categories of women: prostitutes, tailors, students, bachelors, married and even a non-native lady. Zezeza thus appeals to all African women, regardless of their profession and marital status to join in the boycott which is the starting point of their empowerment as women in movement. The second phase of the boycott begins with Nambe who rebukes the priest who is so heartless that he has coldly refused to take Nambe’s sick boy to hospital, pretending he is very busy and that his fish in the car will rot if he goes to the city. And yet, after the boy’s death, he saves time for the Christian ceremony of the funerals. Nambe is so shocked that she unceremoniously dismisses the priest. Following his departure some women suggest to conduct the religious ceremony by their own, arguing that female priests leading shrines existed in the past. The proposal is refused but for the first time in history, the myth surrounding the priest is broken. As a consequence, the religious order rooted in patriarchy is somehow removed.

Just after the burial, the women who are summoned for the traditional dance rehearsals “decided not to participate in the rehearsals until they knew what had happened to their husbands” (Zezeza, 1992:135). As usual, the local authorities consider they are staging a subversion which can easily degenerate because of the already rotten atmosphere prevailing in Njala which is taken as a microcosm of Malawi under the tyrannical Hastings Banda. This subversion needs to be smothered by the local authorities who consider any boycott as economic hooliganism which aims at preventing foreign investment and subsequently sapping the leader’s development efforts. To prevent future boycott, women are publicly abused and scolded. Driven by a punitive impetus, authorities resort to the Party’s Youth Militia who loot their houses. Biti for example loses her tailoring machine, some lose their place at the local

market where they use to sell and others are purely banished from the village. The ultimate aim of such an avalanche of punishment is to reduce women to naught and make them obedient. Instead of just accepting their fate, women bypass their local Party Chairman and “refer the matter to the MP for Njala himself (Zezeza, 1992:164). Despite the corroboration of the women’s account of their misfortune, he takes no responsibility and women are massively banished from the village. Nambe goes back to her native village where she is harassed till she is made pregnant by his cousin-in-law. As the advocate of women’s case, Zezeza organizes his work so that a political earthquake shakes the country and all the authorities who have turned women into objects of pleasure lose their positions. To tame the local pests, Nambe sets fire to the house of her cousin-in-law who made her pregnant. The fire consumes all its inhabitants. Nambe thus contributes to the writing of History and the eradication of the local pest. This is a symbolic way of dismantling the oppressive structures that keep citizens in nameless thrall.

In a word, the boycott creates more problems than it solves. The same is true of the different protests to demand for better living conditions. Yet, it has the merit of opening the minds of women who somehow blow the patriarchal noxious practices. The immediate offshoot of their action is their integration at the heart of the movement in exile.

IV. THE EXILE AND REORGANISATION OF THE MOVEMENT FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Furtherance to arrests and banishments, many people realize the impossibility of any change from within. They thus massively go to exile in order to enjoy their freedom. The decision leads them straight to a refugee camp in a neighboring country where they realize that the camp is but a mere replica of Africa and its lots of immoral practices. As for the movement of those who are fed up with the regime, it undergoes profound changes that empower women to better fuel protests on a genderless basis. Nevertheless, before dealing with this change, Zezeza decries the immorality and inhumanity surrounding refugee camps.

Dealing with refugees is the short path many who fail to take the official ways of robbery have found to get rich on the sweat and blood of the population. These people are so cynical that they provoke wars, convinced that wars always result in massive displacements and the creation of refugee camps. These camps are but mere replicas of African states which are characterized by administrative heaviness and government dysfunction which are part of the African vicious circle that may never be broken (review article, 121).

Like African states, the camps are highly flawed with corruption. For example, refugees only receive an infinitesimal fraction of the money that pours into the country in their name. The greatest part of that money is purloined by managers whose unmatched greed dictates their behavior. In addition to money, the food destined to refugees is diverted to furnish their groceries and shops created with the money of refugees. Refugees thus live once more the starvation they have fled in their home country.

The already precarious refugees’ living conditions are worsened once they leave the camp. As the money paid to each refugee by the UNHCR is seriously reduced by the white-collar robbers who manage the camp, they are obliged to debase themselves by resorting to prostitution or begging in their quest for a sweeter life.

In exile, Ndatéro and Cathy find out that the movement is a gangrene-ridden one: despair and the impossibility of any mass uprising at home can be read on the mournful faces of exiles.

Ndatero deems it his responsibility to remove this despair and write lines of hopeful life. To this end, he finds it necessary to reshuffle the movement in order to strengthen it and map out future strategies. Following the reorganization of the movement Ndatero is elected as publicity secretary through democratic vote. This election has been possible partly thanks to Cathy who convinces people on the necessity of voting on a genderless basis. Ndatero's election lays the foundations of democracy that better blossoms in a genderless society. Ndatero is consequently charged to instill in the community the principles that underlie the movement which comprises the middle class, the proletariat and the underclass. The struggle of the movement is therefore a class-struggle that bears the hallmarks of revolution. This revolution will be fuelled with the publishing of Chola's manuscript describing the inhumanity of their leaders who have turned the country as a whole into concentration camps. Furthermore, Ndatero's election is somehow an appeal to African intellectuals so they can show the right way to the people who daily strive to break off the yoke of faceless dictatorship, poverty and corruption. In a way, Zeleza advocates for intellectual militancy for the sake of society. Ndatero is now in charge of opening the mind of everybody on the necessity to collectively engage in the same struggle for collective salvation. He somehow resumes his teaching far from amphitheaters. His teaching is destined to the whole population for whom he has a promethean mission: he brings them the light from the sky in the form of knowledge. This knowledge in return opens their eyes on the necessity to fully associate women in the fight against the system. Zeleza thus joins Marxists who opine that intellectuals should fuel and see to it that the fight initiated by workers or peasants never fail. In other words, 'beyond mere portrayal, the novelist for example should suggest a way out of the socio-political lockjam that is Africa today' (Ogbeide, 2014: 81).

The most important decision of the reorganization of the movement is the creation of a women's wing. By so doing, Zeleza plots a path for Feminism. In Offen's terminology, 'Feminism makes claims for a rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic, and political power within a given society, on behalf of both sexes in the name of their common humanity, but with respect for their differences' (Offen, 1988 : 151). This serves as a platform wherein female specific issues are debated by women without men's intimidation and dictation. Interesting enough, the platform is an avenue to train women for leadership. This suppresses the ancient conception of life that confines women into household chores. Not only was women's biological capacity for childbirth and breastfeeding and their generally lesser physical strength seen as determining their social role in the home, occupying themselves with domestic chores and bringing up children, but it was also claimed that these biological differences made them unfit to participate in the public sphere. Women were judged to be less reasonable than men, more ruled by emotion, and thus incapable of political decision-making, for example (Freedman, 2001:12). The Feminist inclination of Zeleza is scarcely hidden. By proceeding to women's capacity building, he makes the blueprint for a genderless society that will neither sideline nor consider women as second-class citizens who blindly accept that decisions related to their rights and functions be made by men. This concern is echoed by the post-Banda government. Indeed, Englund informs that 'the new government seeks to transform economic relations between men and women by earmarking credit opportunities for women, it joins NGOs in demanding an end to cultural practices that appear to exploit girls and women' (Englund 2004: 157) and annihilate their endeavors to self-sufficiency. In Njala, female independent-mindedness so troubles men and triggers male jealousy that it pushes them to try their best to destroy women who compete with them. Nonetheless, in the author's wish to empower women, any attempt to destroy them rather strengthens them and they engage in movements which ultimately aim at freeing them and giving them back their place in the construction of their society at a national level as exemplified by Motta:

Women in movement are often organised around attempts to reclaim collective process in the provision, definition and organisation of health, education and housing. In addition, their coping strategies mean that by necessity they have often become organizers and thinkers in the struggle for day-to-day survival for themselves, their families and communities. Poor women in particular, who have faced the harshest forms of alienation, oppression and exploitation under neoliberalism, have engaged in a territorialised struggle to determine collectively how best to provide for social reproduction in a way that ensures the dignity and development of their community. These processes have extended the terrain of the political to the community and resulted in the growth of women's social power and autonomy (Motta et al. 2011: 22-23).

In addition to the creation of women's wing, the notion of democracy is brought to the fore in the movement's principles. Thus, to better promote the culture of democracy, "previous references to the movement as the sole representative of the people, and to its intention to form a one-party state were removed" (Zezeza, 1992: 178). Yet the very notion of democracy is evoked as a panacea because nobody knows its real signification. For this reason, the movement has created a military wing which soon turns into guerrilla. This is the basic weakness of Zezeza's novel. How can a so emeritus professor whose fame and renown have gone beyond the confines of Malawi and who is always travelling throughout the world to teach at glorious universities and deliver speeches at international conferences promote guerrilla at the eve of the 21st century? Zezeza's attitude foretells the hardships of democracy which will not be easy to come by (Review, 123) because *guerrilleros* nowhere have proved to be democrats.

CONCLUSION

Smouldering Charcoal is a true Marxist work that underscores the struggle of an oppressed people to get rid of the poisonous grip of the established order. More than a fictional work, it is the author's appeal to all the social layers to get united and bring about the downfall of a system that nurtures on the blood of its population. When the grip is too tightened on the national scale, the way out is to go to exile in order to reshape and give a new impetus to the struggle. Interestingly enough, the new configuration of the movement is the one wished by the population: a genderless society rid of its cancerous dispositions. By integrating and giving full responsibilities to women at the heart of the movement, Zezeza overtly joins Feminists for whom a society that turns its women into second-class citizens contains the seeds of its collapse. He therefore campaigns for 'a world free of male privilege and male hierarchy and authority over women' (Offen, 1988: 157). With the reorganization of the masses, Zezeza somehow dismembers the existing society and dreams of a palmy upcoming decade: "It will probably be a decade during which the weight of the past, the burden of the present, and the demands of posterity will explode into a period of tumultuous change: it will certainly be harder to mask the poverty and emptiness of our present lives (Zezeza 1992: 181). Comforted with the upcoming change, the author writes that "the future has begun" (Zezeza 1992: 182). This future can be a glorious one where the sun will shine for everybody and not just for the few white-collar hooligans who manage the country. With the loss of power by

Banda in 1993, one is prone to say that Zeleza is a real visionary writer who 'brings closer the day when all workers can cooperate in the struggle to tear down capitalist exploitation and oppression' (Bowens and al. 1974: 39).

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