Volume 25 Issue 2
Originally issued as A1

Global Journal of Human-Social Science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 25 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2025
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Postcolonial Disillusionment: A Study of Selected Playscripts from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

By Smith Likongwe
University of Pretoria

Background to the Study- Liberation movements, which had begun after the partition of Africa and before the world wars, gained momentum in pursuing independence (Rotberg, 1965:124). The British government proposed federations as stable political entities to manage these pressures. This, among others, led to the UK Parliament's enactment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Act in 1953. This established a Governor General as the Queen's representative (Phiri, 2010:134) stationed in Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe). However, intense nationalist opposition led to its dissolution in 1963. These movements eventually forced Britain to shift its colonial policies, paving the way for southern African independence (Phiri, 2010:126; McCracken, 2013:388).

The connection among Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe dates back to the pre-colonial era, with ethnic intermarriage, cultural exchange, and trade routes. Under British rule, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) was self-governing, while Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) were British protectorates (Baxter, 2018; Phiri, 2010).

GJHSS-A Classification: LCC: PR9408.5



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

© 2025. Smith Likongwe. This research/review article is distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). You must give appropriate credit to authors and reference this article if parts of the article are reproduced in any manner. Applicable licensing terms are at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Postcolonial Disillusionment: A Study of Selected Playscripts from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Smith Likongwe

I. Background to the Study

Liberation movements, which had begun after the partition of Africa and before the world wars, gained momentum in pursuing independence (Rotberg, 1965:124). The British government proposed federations as stable political entities to manage these pressures. This, among others, led to the UK Parliament's enactment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Act in 1953. This established a Governor General as the Queen's representative (Phiri, 2010:134) stationed in Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe). However, intense nationalist opposition led to its dissolution in 1963. These movements eventually forced Britain to shift its colonial policies, paving the way for southern African independence (Phiri, 2010:126; McCracken, 2013:388).

The connection among Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe dates back to the pre-colonial era, with ethnic intermarriage, cultural exchange, and trade routes. Under British rule, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) was self-governing, while Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) were British protectorates (Baxter, 2018; Phiri, 2010).

Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland gained independence in 1964 as Zambia and Malawi, while Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980 (Baxter, 2018:623; Shillington, 1995:403; Zeleza & Eyoh, 2003:621). Though colonial administrations ended, the post-colonial era did not erase colonialism's lasting effects.

Upon attaining independence people in the three countries had hopes of reversing the economic and political marginalisation experienced under the federation. They had hoped for political dignity, cultural revival and social equity. Their aspirations were equally spelt out by their trusted leaders. Kaunda (1974: x) emphasises the need to harness the same collective power that ended foreign rule to create a new social order based on equality. He argues that this transformation requires shifting from a capitalist economy to a humanist one, prioritising the well-being of the common people. In his collected speeches, featured in *Our War of Liberation: Speeches, Articles, Interviews: 1976–1979*, Robert Mugabe underscores that the fundamental objective of the armed struggle was the attainment of full and genuine independence, enabling Zimbabweans to govern and develop their nation in the interests of the majority. He unequivocally rejects any form of compromise that would safeguard the privileges of a minority, asserting that such concessions would undermine both the integrity of independence and the sovereignty of the Zimbabwean people (Mugabe, 1983). In his 1967 address to the Malawi Congress Party convention, Kamuzu Banda emphasised that leaders should not abuse their power. He stressed that while citizens deserved freedom, it must be exercised responsibly. Banda highlighted that unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline were just as crucial in combating poverty, ignorance, and disease as they had been during the struggle against colonialism and the Federation (Department of Information, 1967).

While there has been scholarly discourse on postcolonial disillusionment in various literary works, none specifically for play scripts and in particular using a regional approach such as one for the former Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The presence of such literature emanating from this study would fill a critical gap, foregrounding region-specific literary drama as a powerful medium of social critique and cultural reflection, while complementing and enriching the discourse on postcolonial disillusionment with a fresh and critical edge.

The combination of the three countries is important because the cultural ties and the shared experience of this federation fostered common struggles for independence and, later, postcolonial governance challenges.

I chose these playwrights because of their prominence as playwrights in their home countries, the thematic commonality of post-independence disillusionment in the plays and the playwrights' signature styles of writing. Despite their prominence, the literature scrutinising the work of these playwrights is negligible and this research is envisaged to contribute to existing literature.

This article, therefore, seeks to examine the distinctive characteristics of postcolonial playwriting as articulated by various scholars and to identify shared elements of disillusionment in the dramatic literature of Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. At this juncture, it is pertinent to delineate postcolonial playwriting within the broader context of postcolonial theatre. Gilbert and

Author: University of Pretoria. e-mail: slikongwe@unima.ac.mw
ORCID: 0000-0002-5589-8925

© 2025 Global Journals

Tompkins (1996: 245-248) assert that a defining feature of postcolonial theatre is its critical engagement with colonial legacies, particularly the persistence of foreign dominance through surrogate leadership long after formal colonisation has ended. Similarly, Amkpa (2004: 9) underscores the role of theatre as a crucial instrument of decolonisation, noting that while anticolonial theatre functioned as a direct form of resistance against colonial rule, postcolonial theatre interrogates colonial epistemologies and cultural hegemonies. In this continuum, decolonial theatre emerges as an active reconstructive force, seeking to establish new systems of knowledge and authority grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the formerly colonised. This theoretical framework provides a valuable lens through which to explore the recurring themes of postcolonial disillusionment in the selected playscripts.

I examine the play scripts through script analysis as a tool. As a mode of textual analysis, script analysis, allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions, and omissions of a text (Fursich, 2009:41). Script analysis therefore can uncover thematic echoes and narrative patterns that suggest a broader Southern African postcolonial condition.

The Malawian Playwright - Dunduzu Chisiza Jr.

Dunduzu Chisiza Jr. (1963–1999) was a Malawian playwright, director, and actor known for his politically charged plays. He gained early recognition in 1983 when his play *The Deceased's Attack* won the national schools' drama festival. Chisiza earned an MA in Fine and Performing Arts from Philadelphia University in 1987 and founded Malawi's first professional theatre company, Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre. He wrote over seventy plays, using theatre as a platform for political activism, particularly against Kamuzu Banda's regime. Chisiza briefly served as Minister of Youth, Sports, and Culture in 1993 before returning to politics in 1998. He passed away in February 1999 before the elections (Magalasi, 2012).

II. Context of the Period in Which *Democracy Boulevard* (1993) was Written

Democracy Boulevard reflects the political turbulence of its time. As Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda's regime weakened, it cracked down on dissent, imprisoning critics and restricting freedoms (Phiri, 2010: 340-344). Written and performed during Malawi's transition (1992-1994), the play captures the unrest between the multi-party referendum and the 1994 General Elections, as demands for democratic reforms grew, leading to Banda's eventual downfall.

Under mounting protests, Banda declared a referendum on October 18, 1992, giving Malawians a choice between a one-party or multi-party system (Phiri, 2010:339-352). The June 14, 1993, vote overwhelmingly favoured multi-party democracy (Phiri, 2010:359), repealing the 1966 Parliamentary Act that entrenched the Malawi Congress Party and nullifying Banda's Life Presidency (Muluzi et al., 1999:90).

This period echoed Malawi's colonial past, with Banda's censorship and political policing reminiscent of the 1959-60 Nyasaland State of Emergency (Murphy, 2012:154-164). By the early 1990s, political disillusionment fueled strikes, riots, and student protests (Newell, 1995:243).

A pivotal moment was the Catholic Bishops' 1992 pastoral letter, *Living Our Faith*, read nationwide on March 8, 1992 (Phiri, 2010:340; Newell, 1995:248). This letter, condemning human rights violations and calling for reforms, was widely circulated, sparking broader resistance against the regime.

The pastoral letter called for economic justice, condemned corruption and nepotism, highlighted issues in education and healthcare, and criticised human rights abuses like imprisonment without trial (Phiri, 2010:340).

Under Banda, Malawi's political climate was oppressive, with women used as political informants while lacking real power (Semu, 2002). Public frustration grew, especially after the Mwanza murders, where four politicians were assassinated by police in 1983 and the crime was disguised as an accident. A 1994 inquiry and 1995 trial confirmed the killings were politically motivated (Phiri, 2010:335-336).

III. *Democracy Boulevard* Synopsis

The play *Democracy Boulevard* is a political play that caricatured the pitfalls of political messianism in Malawi. It was written in 1993 and first performed in August of the same year. This was after the country had just voted for the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Malawi in a referendum held on 14th June 1993 (Phiri, 2010:355). The play is set in post-independent Malawi just after a national democracy referendum vote had ushered in a multi-party system of government that had been outlawed through a 1971 Act of Parliament (Phiri, 2010:306; Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 1971).

It starts with a political party chairman mobilising people to attend a rally to be addressed by the Life President at 3 p.m. At as early as 8 a.m., the party chairman orders Fokasi, a barber to close shop forthwith. Out of the four pillars of unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline, the opening of the shop was against the pillar of 'obedience'. Noticing the barber's unwillingness to close the barber shop immediately, the party chairman gives examples of women female guardians of the sick at the hospital who understand the importance of attending Kamuzu's rallies by abandoning

© 2025 Global Journals

the patients to attend the rally. The party chairman goes away, leaving a threat to deal with Fokasi if he does not pitch up at the rally.

Then comes a scene where a man known as Woza reprimands his wife, Hilda, for coming back home late at around midnight, in addition to paying more attention to Kamuzu at the expense of their marriage. With Hilda's insistence on her innocence and her right to actively participate in party politics, an altercation ensues and goes in the direction of instant divorce, where Hilda vows to take away the children with her. The three children, who, according to stage instructions, are not seen in the play, are Albert, Dick and Fernia. The stage instructions in the script indicate that Hilda leaves the stage. It is assumed the children would be somewhere behind and following her.

Then, there is a scene that is written to depict party loyalists confessing their undivided loyalty to Kamuzu. In the next scene, according to the script, Hilda leaves and goes to the party chairman's place where she complains about the treatment from her husband and his disrespect for Kamuzu. Woza is brought to the party chairman's court with hands tied together at the back. He is questioned before being sent to the police for detention. There is a scene where four detainees complain of unfair detention on flimsy grounds such as being related to some of Kamuzu's declared 'enemies'. As if to emphasise on the ill-treatment of ordinary citizens and political 'adversaries', the script indicates a scene where four blindfolded men in the names of Gadama, Sangala, Matenje and Chiwanga are executed by the police. These real-life characters were top politicians assassinated in real-life where a road "accident" was staged in an attempt to conceal government's involvement in the deaths.

Then the better part of the play takes place at Fokasi's barber shop where Chanelo and Fokasi discuss various political issues and people's disillusionment with the state of affairs at the material time. There are various other scenes with barber shop serving as a discussion point whenever necessary. Some scenes take place right at the barber shop with various people coming to have a hair-cut and narrating their ordeals with the political system of the time. One of such is Woza Kapoza Jr whose father Woza Kapoza Snr was detained for allegedly "mistreating" Kamuzu's women when he had differences with his wife. Woza Kapoza Jr was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University. He was detained for five years without trial for writing and being found in possession of poems seemingly not in support of the government of the time. There are also several allusions to real-life events such as the release of the Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter of 1992 that added fuel to the underground disillusionment by bringing out issues in the open. Thereafter, Fokasi and Chanelo engage in a critical analysis of the points that pro-multiparty enthusiasts had been condemning the Malawi Congress Party for. The two advise against overzealousness in getting rid of everything in totality.

IV. Script Analysis for *Democracy Boulevard*

Themes

Democracy Boulevard engages with a range of interrelated themes, including the (mis)representation of democratic processes, the overzealousness of citizens in their condemnation of the past and their expectations for the future, the manipulation of gendered allegiance under Banda's rule, political persecution, and the pervasive disillusionment with leadership at the time of the play's writing. Each of these themes contributes to a broader critique of postcolonial governance, political transition, and the complexities of societal transformation.

One of the central themes of the play is the (mis)representation of democratic processes. This is explored through the character of Chanelo, who provides a metaphorical explanation of democracy within a multi-party system. He states, "...People have a lot to learn. Democracy's like natural vegetation, where all kinds of fruits come from—sweet, bitter, sour, deadly—which also need to be guarded from bush fires..."(Chisiza, 1998: 158).

This analogy underscores the unpredictability and challenges inherent in democratic governance, suggesting that democracy requires careful nurturing, regulation, and adaptation.

The theme of overzealous condemnation of the past and unrealistic expectations for the future emerges prominently in the conversations at Fokasi's barbershop. Fokasi and Chanelo critique past political practices such as the compulsory purchase of party cards, forced donations, mandatory attendance at political meetings, and coerced public displays of allegiance, including dancing for the State President.

However, the discussion presents a nuanced critique rather than a simplistic rejection of past practices. While forced political participation is deemed oppressive, the outright banning of party card sales is also questioned, as some individuals may wish to affiliate voluntarily with a political party. Similarly, while coercive donations are problematic, voluntary contributions remain essential for party sustainability and align with culturally embedded practices of communal giving. The discussion suggests that rejecting past injustices should not entail the wholesale dismantling of cultural traditions, such as dance, which holds deep social and historical significance. Instead, the play tempers the utopian aspirations of the citizens by advocating for a pragmatic approach that balances progress with cultural resilience and perseverance.

© 2025 Global Journals

The manipulation of gendered allegiance is evident in the character of Hilda, whose unwavering loyalty to Banda reflects a broader pattern of female political indoctrination. Women, as portrayed in the play, appear to have been conditioned into an unquestioning allegiance to Banda's regime. Hilda, speaking on behalf of other women, asserts, "Just know that if I am Kamuzu's *mbumba* and I belong to him, those children also belong to him…" (Chisiza, 1998: 125). She further reveals the psychological grip of Banda's authority, stating, "We miss him so much that when he doesn't have any mass rally or make some kind of public appearance… we feel insecure" (Chisiza, 1998: 122-123).

These statements illustrate the strategic mobilisation of women's loyalty as a tool for political reinforcement. Women's allegiance to Banda is framed not merely as political support but as an extension of familial and emotional bonds, thereby deepening their subjugation within the ideological framework of the regime.

The theme of political persecution is a stark reminder of the authoritarian mechanisms employed to silence dissent. This is vividly illustrated through the imprisonment and torture of Hilda's husband, a consequence of domestic tensions arising from Hilda's unwavering political engagement. The narratives of detainees in prison cells further expose the arbitrary detainment and extrajudicial punishment of political opponents, reflecting the broader landscape of state-sanctioned violence. Additionally, the play dramatises the torture of real-life political figures, including Matenje, Gadama, Sangala, and Chiwanga, further reinforcing the brutal realities of political suppression. Through these depictions, *Democracy Boulevard* critiques the erosion of civil liberties and the entrenchment of fear within the political landscape.

An overarching theme that emerges from these discussions is disillusionment with postcolonial leadership. While independence had been expected to usher in an era of freedom, justice, and prosperity, the reality presented in the play suggests otherwise. Citizens, though eager for change, are confronted with persistent inequalities, unfulfilled promises, and the continuation of authoritarian tendencies under new leadership.

Through its thematic exploration, *Democracy Boulevard* ultimately challenges power structures, deconstructs inherited colonial hierarchies, and advocates for a more inclusive and representative governance system. The play serves as a critical interrogation of postcolonial democracy, urging audiences to navigate political change with both optimism and a realistic understanding of the complexities involved in democratic transitions.

Insinuations and Connotations for Democracy Boulevard

As earlier foreshadowed, the play has several meanings directly related to the time it was written and beyond. The discussion below unearths the meanings.

The story of Woza Kapoza Jr in Scene 6 is one example. He goes for a haircut at Fokasi's barbershop. He explains that he has just come out of a five years' detention without trial. He was Senior Lecturer in the Department of English. Similar to this story, there is the real-life experience of Jack Mapanje who was the Head of the English Department at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. In 1981 he published his first book titled *Of Chameleons and Gods*. The Malawian government banned the book[1]. In September 1987, he was arrested and detained at Mikuyu Prison without trial.

The name Hilda in the play is likely an allusion to Hilda Manjamkhosi, the former Lilongwe Women's League Chairperson of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), widely recognised for her unwavering loyalty to President Banda. Both the fictional Hilda and Manjamkhosi exemplify political die-hards whose excessive devotion to the party leads to conflict.

A notable historical parallel is Manjamkhosi's reaction to the 1992 Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter, in which she publicly called for the death of the bishops responsible for authoring it during an emergency MCP convention (Phiri, 2010: 340–342). In a particularly inflammatory remark, she allegedly referred to Bishop Chimole of the Lilongwe Diocese as a "witch" and "useless dog," even suggesting the desecration of his body.

By naming the character Hilda, the playwright likely mocks Manjamkhosi, using her as a stock character to satirise overzealous women who idolised Kamuzu Banda, often at the expense of their personal and domestic lives.

Overall, the conduct of the local politicians, such as the Chairman and others in the play, is reminiscent of the behaviour displayed by party cadres of the time. Therefore, the play is a connotation of the political situation of the time and the resultant disillusionment among the people.

General discourse for Democracy Boulevard

The title seeks to directly indicate what the play is about. The term 'boulevard' refers to a wide city street with trees on each side. Therefore, the journey to democracy is being undertaken on this road that has so many other distractions for those fighting for it. The

[1] Mapanje's poems in *Chameleons and Gods* were seen as subversive and potentially destabilising, especially because of their critique of the authoritarian system and their ability to resonate with the public, who were living under oppressive conditions. The government may have felt that the book's messages—however veiled—posed a threat to their control, leading to Mapanje's arrest. His arrest was a clear example of the state's crackdown on dissent, especially against those who used their art to challenge the political establishment.

© 2025 Global Journals

many other distractions for those fighting for it. The opponents of the change continue to caution people against potential civil wars and tribalism if the change to multi-party politics was to be successful. Pro-democracy activists and their supporters were intimidated. Even during Chihana's sedition trial where, he was being tried for calling on people to call for a change of government, there were people who threw stones at his lawyer, Bazuka Mhango, on the premises of the court (Ihonvbere, 1997:250).

To recapture the struggles and sacrifices of Malawians towards multi-party democracy, Chisiza Jr makes use of names of politicians that are considered heroes as character names in *Democracy Boulevard*. He makes use of the names of Sangala, Matenje, Gadama and Chiwanga, former cabinet Ministers and a member of Parliament (MP) who were assassinated by government. Muluzi *et al*. (1999: 130 -132) record as follows:

> In 1983, the first open resistance to Kamuzu Banda's policies since 1964 occurred in Parliament. Again, it was ministers who spoke out. Due to old age and failing health, Kamuzu Banda wanted to go to Europe on a long holiday. So, he arranged for Tembo to take over as 'caretaker president'. Three ministers, Dick Matenje, Secretary General of the MCP, Aaron Gadama, Minister for the Central Region, and Twaibu Sangala, Minister of Health, and one Member of Parliament for Chikwawa, David Chiwanga, challenged the decision. That was a grievous mistake. The four men were arrested, detained briefly at the Mikuyu detention prison in Zomba and murdered by the police in the border district of Mwanza. Years later, some members of the police force admitted using hammers and other objects to kill the politicians, after which they loaded the corpses in a car and rolled it over a cliff to simulate a car accident.

It could be argued that Chisiza Jnr makes use of these character names as a direct reflection of the four murdered politicians and a catalyst to re-ignite the desire in Malawians to strive for a better future. Hilda, the character has children named Albert, Dick and Fernia. Albert would remind the audiences about Albert Muwalo Nqumayo. Dick would rekindle the memories of Dick Matenje while Fernia would represent Mrs. Fernie Sadyalunda[2], a former cabinet Minister who was detained without trial for associating with the 'rebel', Albert Muwalo Nqumayo. The children do not play any practical role in the play but their names enhance one objective of the play by reminding the audience about the politicians who fell out of favour with the ruling elite. They are generally overzealous people with an exaggerated sense of hope after colonialism as evidenced in the play. However, they become disillusioned with their leadership due to the trajectory the country is taking. In spite of independence, coloniality seems to be dictating their lifestyles.

Some of the scenes in the play deal with various connotations. One detainee says:

> They've taken everything else away from us but they haven't taken our brains to think…there are people out there who are not in prison but they have the worst handcuffs on them because they cannot speak what they believe, they cannot associate freely, they cannot write with ease. They have the worst prisons in their hearts, they are prisoners of the subconscious, detainees of the superimposed freedom… we are simply fulfilling the books of life… if we are wise enough, we can fill in the blank pages. If we choose to be stupid we will just flip through…(Chisiza, 1998: 135).

The playwright presents multiple layers of meaning, illustrating both literal and metaphorical constraints on freedom. While individuals outside prison are not physically handcuffed, they remain constrained by fear, unable to write or express themselves freely due to potential repercussions. This self-imposed restraint persisted even after the landmark referendum of June 14, 1993 (Phiri, 2010: 355), as uncertainty about political change lingered. Playwrights and citizens alike hesitated, metaphorically wearing "handcuffs." More broadly, the nation's passive acceptance of circumstances is depicted as a continued state of bondage—what the playwright terms "choosing to be stupid" (Chisiza, 1998: 135). The concept of "superimposed freedom" (Chisiza, 1998: 135). critiques the illusion of liberty outside the physical prison, suggesting that post-colonial Malawi remained constrained by neo-colonial structures. As Nayar (2015: 5) argues, true decolonisation requires active resistance against neo-colonial oppression and the rejection of Eurocentric rationality and its lingering coloniality of being.

The play frequently expresses skepticism regarding the government's commitment to real change. When Fokasi questions Chanelo about the state's response to the Catholic Bishops' letter, Chanelo replies, "I don't suppose government has changed. But since they are Bishops... the Lord will pull them out of the water, just as he pulled Moses out of water..." (Chisiza, 1998: 140). This passage reflects doubt in political transformation while also highlighting the tension between faith and action. Although many were eager to embrace new freedoms, the playwright cautions against unrealistic expectations. Chanelo's conclusion underscores the necessity of a measured approach, urging citizens to safeguard democracy without destabilising the nation. Furthermore, the play critiques the wholesale adoption of foreign democratic models, warning against the indiscriminate rejection of traditions. This rejection of Eurocentrism aligns with

[2] Fernie Sadyalunda is the woman that had served as a cabinet Minister in Kamuzu Banda's era. Because of her apparent closeness to Muwalo Nqumayo, she was asked to testify in court against him. She was coached to testify that Muwalo Nqumayo was indeed planning to overthrow Banda's government. When she refused to give the false testimony in court, she was detained without trial for six years (Mpaso, 2013).

© 2025 Global Journals

broader post-colonial discourse, resisting externally imposed ideological frameworks and advocating for a localised approach to governance and cultural expression.

The Zambian Playwright – Cheela Chilala

Cheela Chilala, born in 1965, is a Literature, Drama, and Theatre Lecturer at the University of Zambia, holds a PhD in Literature. He's an award-winning playwright and poet, with notable works like *Venom of an Angel* (2003), *Blood Ties* (2012), and *The Chosen One* (2019), all earning national recognition (Ngoma Awards). Chilala has taught in Finland and Tanzania, published widely, and writes *The Spider's Web* column in the *Zambia Daily Mail*. He also contributed to Zambia's first soap opera, *Kabanana* (Likongwe, 2021).

V. The Context in which Dead Roots (2005) was Written

Dead Roots was written in 2005, during a period of political tension and corruption in Zambia. After President Frederick Chiluba's two terms ended, Levy Mwanawasa of the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) won the contested 2001 election, marred by allegations of fraud and abuse of state resources (The Carter Center, 2002). Though the courts upheld the election results, the revelations of vote-buying and misuse of public funds damaged the government's credibility.

Mwanawasa's minority government, with only 29% of the vote and no parliamentary majority, faced strong public dissatisfaction. Instead of forming a coalition, Mwanawasa secured support by appointing opposition MPs to government positions, leading to accusations of corruption and betrayal.

Mwanawasa also pursued an anti-corruption campaign, stripping Chiluba of his immunity and prosecuting him and his allies for grand corruption, including theft of millions from state coffers (Mbao, 2011). Despite some successes, this period saw both genuine efforts to combat corruption and troubling instances of political manipulation, creating an atmosphere of public disillusionment—reflected in the themes of *Dead Roots*.

VI. Synopsis for *Dead Roots*

Dead Roots explores the manipulation of people and resources for personal and political gain. The play opens with Thulason and Chimpinde, a gardener and chauffeur to Minister Kavuluvulu, gossiping about his corruption and shift from criticising the government to joining the ruling elite. Now "eating," Kavuluvulu enjoys plundering public resources while ignoring the complaints of his constituents.

As the minister prepares for his Integrity Day speech, he tries to control his public image through journalist Rita, but she hints at the people's dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, Thulason's frustration manifests in imagined violence against Kavuluvulu, reflecting collective anger and political disillusionment.

Kavuluvulu's downfall begins when his wife leaves him over his extramarital affairs. In a desperate publicity stunt, he gives out large cheques to his staff, but Rita and his secretary secretly conspire to expose his corruption. During an interview, Rita confronts him with incriminating documents, including a letter threatening a lands official to secure a prime plot. Kavuluvulu, oblivious, believes the looming scandal will affect his critics, not himself.

On the day of Integrity Day, also his birthday, a damaging article about Kavuluvulu dominates the press. The State President, seeing the public backlash, swiftly fires him, cancelling the event in a face-saving move. While Rita embodies resistance and the people's disillusionment, the President's quick action highlights the system's tendency to scapegoat individuals rather than address systemic corruption. The play closes with Kavuluvulu's disgrace, underscoring the inevitable reckoning for leaders who betray their people.

VII. Script Analysis for *Dead Roots*

Themes

Dead Roots explores selfish leadership and the disillusionment of its subjects. The major themes are power play and corruption, both of which reveal the destructive nature of greed and authoritarianism.

Power play dominates the narrative, showing how legitimate and coercive power creates fear and submission. Thulason, the garden worker, exemplifies this when he trembles at the thought of his boss, reflecting how the powerful exploit the weak (Chilala, 2023:2). Thulason believes that life is about "the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor — finish!" (Chilala, 2023:3). Chimpinde, the chauffeur, tries to challenge this fatalism, insisting that people have power to speak against injustices, but Thulason's internalised inferiority highlights the psychological power that subjugates people (Foucault, 1982:781).

Kavuluvulu's coercive power paralyses his subjects. He asserts that electricity is not a human right and that citizens should be grateful simply to exist in the country (Chilala, 2023:9). His arrogance is stark when he claims he only answers to the President, not the people, reinforcing structural power imbalances (Chilala, 2023: 17). Kavuluvulu's belief in his untouchability feeds his desire for absolute control, corrupting not only political systems but also social relationships, as seen when he promises his secretary and the journalist generous rewards once he becomes president (Chilala, 2023:35).

© 2025 Global Journals

Corruption, another central theme, involves dishonest conduct for personal gain at the expense of public good (OECD, 2013). Kavuluvulu uses his ministerial position to demand government trucks for personal use and force the reallocation of an occupied plot (Chilala, 2023:12). He exploits institutional weaknesses, even declaring the national Integrity Day on his birthday for self-aggrandisement (Chilala, 2023: 15). This exemplifies grand corruption, where leaders with discretionary powers subvert political, legal, and economic systems (Dong, 2011:2).

The principal-agent theory of corruption applies here, with Kavuluvulu as the principal and the journalist as the agent. He tries to manipulate her into creating propaganda to rebuild his image after abandoning the people's aspirations upon joining the ruling party. When the journalist refuses, calling his office a "den of corruption" (Chilala, 2020:53), it reveals the limits of coercive and reward power when met with ethical resistance.

Ultimately, *Dead Roots* portrays how corrupt and self-serving leadership fosters disillusionment, as the governed realize their exploitation and, in some cases, find the courage to resist.

Insinuations and Connotations

In *Dead Roots*, Thulason punches his punching bag while muttering Kavuluvulu's name, symbolizing the fear and frustration of the marginalised who cannot confront their oppressors directly. He admits, "I can't touch him, can't fight him. But I feel better when I punch the bag because I imagine I am punching the devils out of him" (Chilala, 2023: 25). To heighten this symbolic act, he uses sand from the Minister's garden, places a worn-out pair of wrong-sized shoes donated by Kavuluvulu in the bag, and writes his name on it. The ill-fitting shoes suggest a patronising gesture, reflecting how the powerful disregard the true needs of the oppressed.

This frustration echoes the broader Zambian experience, where citizens felt voiceless against corruption, as illustrated by the Chiluba case (Mbao, 2011: 263-264). Dead Roots subtly critiques the political climate through Kavuluvulu's corrupt actions: using government trucks for personal gain (Chilala, 2023: 16-18), seizing land already allocated to others (Chilala, 2023: 16-18), and bribing a reporter (Chilala, 2023: 28-29). These instances mirror the political realities of the time, reinforcing the play's message of disillusionment and systemic injustice.

Critical Discourse for Dead Roots

The title 'Dead Roots' encapsulates hope-lessness. For a tree to thrive, its roots must be healthy; dead roots signify stagnation and decay. In Chilala's play, this metaphor reflects the aspirations of the Zambian people, grounded in a corrupt political system devoid of moral integrity. Kavuluvulu's actions, emblematic of systemic corruption, become a catalyst for disillusionment.

Interestingly, the dead roots metaphor applies not only to the oppressed but also to the oppressor. Kavuluvulu's reliance on a fragile network of trust — assuming the journalist Rita, his chauffeur Chimpinde, and others would protect him — reveals his own disillusionment. His foundation of trust, like the political roots of the nation, proves lifeless.

The play employs satirical aspirations to expose Kavuluvulu's hypocrisy. He professes a desire for a corruption-free, egalitarian society while embodying the very corruption he decries: "I believe in the attainability of a society free of poverty, hunger, corruption, ignorance and underdevelopment; an egalitarian society in which the lamb shall lie in peace beside the tiger" (Chilala, 2023:13-14). This irony underscores the ideological position that corruption in Zambia is so entrenched that genuine reform seems impossible.

This critique echoes Fanon's assertion that national consciousness without economic and intellectual grounding is "an empty shell" (Fanon, 1963: 148). Achebe similarly notes that underdevelopment manifests in a ruling elite's "world of make-believe and unrealistic expectations" (Achebe, 1983:9). Wa Thiong'o, in Something Torn and New, reflects on the moral and intellectual decay underpinning such failed aspirations (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:108). Through this lens, Dead Roots offers a sobering commentary on Zambia's political reality, where the foundation of hope is already lifeless, and aspirations cannot flourish from dead roots.

Dead Roots critiques the moral decay in public leadership and the resulting disillusionment of the oppressed. From a decolonial perspective, the play highlights the experiences of marginalised workers like Chimpinde, the chauffeur, who is exploited by his boss, Kavuluvulu. However, the disillusioned do not remain passive; they resist oppression by exposing injustice and inequality. Ultimately, they confront an oppressor within the system, striving for decoloniality and justice.

The Zimbabwean Playwright – Blessing Hungwe

Blessing Hungwe, born in 1980, is a prominent Zimbabwean playwright, television writer, and social activist. He holds a Diploma in Journalism and Creative Writing and a Bachelor of Social Science in Media and Society Studies from Midlands State University. Hungwe gained recognition through his work on the Zimbabwean soap *Studio 263* and later contributed to the international TV series *The Team Zimbabwe* and *Ghetto Fellas*.

His theatre career flourished after mentorship by Developing Artists, leading to his co-writing of *Burn Mukwerekwere, Burn* (2011), which won the Outstanding Theatrical Production award at the 2012 National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA). He also wrote *When Angels*

© 2025 Global Journals

Weep, which won NAMA's Most Outstanding Theatrical Production in 2013.

VIII. Context of the Period When Angels Weep (2013) was Written

When Angels Weep explores themes of human trafficking, family betrayal, and youth exploitation, set against the backdrop of Zimbabwe's socio-political climate in the early 2010s. Human trafficking, particularly the sexual exploitation of women and children, was a growing issue in Southern Africa. By 2012, 27% of trafficking victims in Zimbabwe were children, with women and girls making up 75% of victims (UNODC, 2012). The rise of child marriage, influenced by poverty and cultural practices, further compounded this problem, with some political and traditional leaders defending the practice as culturally acceptable (Newsday, 2011).

Economic instability and political unrest exacerbated the issue, with widespread poverty and migration leaving citizens vulnerable to trafficking. Zimbabwean women, especially, were trafficked abroad for work under exploitative conditions (IOM, 2016). While *When Angels Weep* does not directly address child marriage, its themes resonate with the emotional manipulation and exploitation of vulnerable children, highlighting the socio-cultural factors that facilitated human trafficking in Zimbabwe during this period.

IX. Synopsis for *When Angels Weep*

When Angels Weep portrays modern-day human trafficking, emphasising the exploitation of young girls in Zimbabwe. It critiques local leadership, which, under the guise of rescuing girls from early marriages, subjects them to sexual exploitation for the benefit of a few influential individuals. The play underscores society's helplessness, as the community is unable to intervene, bound by deference to authority and cultural norms.

The play's themes align with colonial exploitation, where indigenous people were subjugated to menial labour, mirroring post-colonial structural violence, as discussed by theorists like Galtung (1969) and Fanon (2004). The protagonist, Sarita, is sold into sexual slavery by her uncle, a member of Parliament, reflecting the betrayal by those in power. Sarita's split personalities—her 30-year-old self and her younger, innocent self—reveal the psychological trauma of exploitation. The play employs stylized storytelling, blending traditional and Greek theatrical elements, to show the village's denial and the community's helplessness in confronting the abuse. Ultimately, *When Angels Weep* critiques local governance and the betrayal of vulnerable individuals in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

X. Script Analysis for *When Angels Weep*

Themes

The main themes in *When Angels Weep* are human trafficking, betrayal, and lost childhood.

First, human trafficking is depicted through the character of Gupta, who purchases Gamu, a young girl, to sell her to clients for abuse. Uncle Tito, who sells the girls, plays a role in exploiting them for money. This modern-day slavery highlights coercive power, where the girls are powerless in the hands of men who use them for profit. The story reveals the community's disillusionment with its leadership due to such exploitation.

Betrayal is another key theme. Uncle Tito betrays the girls' trust by selling them under false pretenses of better opportunities. When Sarita recalls her experience, she reflects on how her dream was shattered when she ended up in sexual exploitation instead. Tito, in his justification, claims that the money from trafficking helped him secure political power, further betraying the village's trust and contributing to societal disillusionment.

The theme of lost childhood is significant, especially in Sarita's story. Taken from her home at age 13, she reminisces about her lost innocence and the potential she never fulfilled. Her longing to retrace her childhood represents the lost opportunities that come from being exploited, which can also symbolise the stunted growth of a nation due to exploitation and betrayal by its leaders.

These themes converge to express the disillusionment of individuals and societies that are betrayed by their leadership, both personally and politically.

Insinuations and Connotations

The invocation of pre-colonial spirit mediums, like Nehanda, in *When Angels Weep* suggests a longing for the value of indigenous traditions, contrasting the devaluation caused by modernity. The mbira player, which underscores both joyful and sorrowful moments, symbolises the strength and depth of indigenous culture and its role in expressing societal emotions.

As for insinuations, the portrayal of Uncle Tito, a political leader in a wheelchair after causing harm to his community, reflects the complex figure of President Robert Mugabe. Despite his old age and past wrongs, Tito remains popular with some, echoing Mugabe's continued influence despite widespread criticism. This subtle critique reflects how artists may veil their opposition to political leaders out of respect for tradition and fear of retaliation.

Critical Discourse for When Angels Weep

The title *When Angels Weep* holds dual significance, symbolizing both the presence of angels

© 2025 Global Journals

and their weeping. In many cultures, deceased ancestors are believed to influence the living, guiding or punishing them based on their moral actions. The weeping angels in the play thus reflect spiritual disappointment with societal moral decay.

Angels, traditionally seen as divine messengers, symbolise purity and virtue. Their weeping signifies a profound moral crisis—an injustice so severe it causes grief even among the virtuous. In the play, these angels may represent ancestral spirits, whose disappointment serves as a warning against corruption, especially in the character of Uncle Tito. His involvement in child trafficking, including his own niece, highlights the moral betrayal by leaders. The play critiques the abuse of power by political elites and the powerless position of ordinary citizens, who, like the angels, are rendered voiceless.

This theme connects to Zimbabwe's socio-political context, where fear and repression under Robert Mugabe's rule silenced opposition. Just as the community in the play is too afraid to act, so too are the people of Zimbabwe oppressed by a corrupt leadership. The play critiques the inability of citizens to fight back against human trafficking and other systemic injustices, despite recognising the moral failings of their leaders.

In essence, *When Angels Weep* portrays collective grief in a society where corruption and fear prevent meaningful change. The play exposes the devastating consequences of moral decay, where even the innocent are powerless to stop the injustice around them.

XI. Conclusion

The playwrights under examination—through their respective works—engage deeply with the disillusionment that followed the attainment of independence, illustrating the persistent inequalities and societal fractures that were expected to dissipate after colonial rule. A critical analysis of the themes across *Democracy Boulevard*, *Dead Roots*, and *When Angels Weep* reveals a consistent critique of citizen exploitation, manifesting in political persecution, human trafficking, and corruption. These themes underscore a recurring pattern where, much like during the colonial era, leadership continues to operate with impunity, remaining unaccountable to the people and perpetuating a form of coloniality of power. The playwrights, therefore, engage in a subtle yet potent critique of the colonial legacy—particularly the persistence of foreign dominance and the manipulation of power structures through surrogate leadership long after the formal end of colonisation.

In this context, *Democracy Boulevard* stands out for its direct and unapologetic confrontation with political realities, particularly through its candid depiction of political misrepresentation and exploitation. The characters' outspoken critiques and the play's portrayal of a disillusioned citizenry reflect a sharp, overt discontent with the political system, highlighting the sustained control of power by elites, even post-independence.

On the other hand, *Dead Roots* adopts a more nuanced approach, utilising figurative language and subtle analogies to critique the socio-political landscape. The play does not explicitly call out its targets but uses metaphor and allegory to unearth the same themes of betrayal, corruption, and power abuse. This subtlety is also seen in *When Angels Weep*, where spiritual and cultural symbols are employed to critique the moral decay within the political system. Both plays rely on indirect methods of engagement, inviting the audience to infer the connections between the socio-political realities and the allegorical frameworks at play.

Despite their differing approaches, all three plays converge on the promotion of cultural hegemony. *Democracy Boulevard* and *When Angels Weep* integrate traditional practices—such as dance—into their critique, utilizing cultural symbols to both reflect and critique societal and political values. These cultural expressions, while seemingly celebratory, serve to highlight the ways in which power structures manipulate cultural identity to control and subjugate the people. In contrast, *Dead Roots* engages with figurative language, using the vernacular and specific cultural references to subtly reinforce these same hegemonies. In this way, *Dead Roots* becomes a vehicle for the exploration of power dynamics through language and culture, rather than through overt visual or performative symbols.

In conclusion, the playwrights' works collectively underscore the persistence of colonial legacies, manifesting in political structures that continue to exploit and oppress citizens long after the end of formal colonisation. Through varied stylistic approaches, these plays offer critical insights into the enduring nature of coloniality of power, highlighting the complexities of postcolonial governance and the struggle for true independence. The interplay of cultural practices and political critique serves as a reminder of the multifaceted ways in which power continues to shape and define society, both in explicit and subtle forms.

References Références Referencias

1. Achebe, C. (1983) *The Trouble with Nigeria,* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
2. Amkpa, A. (2004) *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires,* London: Routledge.
3. Baxter, P. (2018) *Rhodesia: A Complete History - 1890-1980,* Portland: Peter Baxter History.
4. Chilala, C. (2023) *Dead Roots and Other Plays*, Lusaka: Zambia Educational Publishing House.
5. Chisiza Jr, D. (1998) *Democracy Boulevard and other plays*, Blantyre: Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre.

© 2025 Global Journals

6. Department of Information (1967) 'Opening Address by President of Malawi Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda', Zomba: Department of Information.
7. Dong, B. (2011) The Causes and Consequences of Corruption. PhD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology.
8. Fanon, F. (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth,* New York: Grove Press.
9. Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power' in *Critical Inquiry, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 777-795,* University of Chicago Press http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197
10. Fursich, E. (2009) 'In Defense of Textual Analysis' in *Journalism Studies, 10:2, 238-252, DOI: 10.1080/14616700802374050*
11. Galtung, J. (1969) 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191, Sage Publications Ltd.* http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690
12. Gilbert, H. & Tompkins, J. (1996) *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice and politics,* London: Routledge.
13. Ihonvbere, J.O. (1997) 'From Despotism to Democracy: The Rise of Multiparty Politics in Malawi' in *Third World Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Jun., 1997), pp. 225-247,* Taylor and Francis Ltd. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3993221.pdf
14. IOM (2016, August 5). Zimbabwe Launches Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action. *International Organization for Migration https://www.iom.int/news/zimbabwe-launches-trafficking-persons-national-plan-action*
15. Kaunda, K.D. (1974) *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to its Implementation- Part II*, Lusaka: Government Printer.
16. Likongwe, S. (ed.) (2021) *Southern African Plays II,* Lilongwe: Pan African Publishers.
17. Magalasi, M. (2012) *Stage Drama in Independent Malawi: 1980 to 2002,* Zomba: Chancellor College Publications.
18. Mbao, M.L.M. (2011) 'Prevention and combating of corruption in Zambia' in *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa , JULY 2011, Vol. 44, No. 2 (JULY 2011), pp. 255-274,* Institute of Foreign and Comparative Law. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23253099
19. OECD (2013), 'What are bribery and corruption?', in *Bribery and Corruption Awareness Handbook for Tax Examiners and Tax Auditors*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264205376-3-en
20. Phiri, D.D. (2010) *History of Malawi, Vol.2,* Blantyre: College Publishing Company.
21. Rotberg, R.I. (1965) *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia,* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
22. McCracken, J. A (2013) *History of Malawi: 1859-1966,* Woodbridge: James Currey.
23. Mpaso, P. (2013, November 13) 'Fernie Sadyalunda', *The Nation.* https://mwnation.com/fernie-sadyalunda/
24. Mugabe, R.G. (1983) *Our War of Liberation-Speeches, Articles, Interviews: 1976-1979*, Gweru: Mambo Press.
25. Muluzi et al. (1999) *Democracy with a Price: The History of Malawi since 1900,* Blantyre: Jhango Heinemann.
26. Murphy, P. (2012) 'A Police State? The Nyasaland Emergency and colonial intelligence' in Phiri et al(eds) (2012)Malawi in Crisis: The 1959/60 Nyasaland State of Emergency and its Legacy, Zomba: Kachere Series.
27. Nayar, P.K. (2015) *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
28. Newell, J. (1995) 'A Moment of Truth'? The Church and Political Change in Malawi, 1992, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies, Jun., 1995, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), pp. 243-262,* Cambridge University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/161455.pdf
29. NewsDay (2011, April 1). Chiefs defend girl-child marriages. *NewsDay* https://www.newsday.co.zw/news/article/277818/chiefs-defend-girl-child-marriages
30. Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 1971, https://old.malawilii.org/mw/legislation/act/1971/27
31. Semu, L. (2002) 'Kamuzu's Mbumba: Malawi Women's Embeddedness to Culture in the Face of International Political Pressure and Internal Legal Change' in *Africa Today, Summer, 2002, Vol. 49, No. 2, Women, Language, and Law in Africa 2 (Summer, 2002), pp. 77-99,* Indiana University Press https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4187499.pdf

© 2025 Global Journals