



Class politics in Mda's *Ways of dying*

M.T. Twalo
Department of English
University of Fort Hare
ALICE
E-mail: ttwalo@gmail.co

Abstract

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Zakes Mda's analysis and exposé of nationalist politics in "Ways of dying" reveal that the unitary vision that characterised the national liberation discourse suppressed some dissonances, contradictions and disunity around the question of class. Mda probes the ironies and contradictions of the liberation struggle and by so doing questions the meaning of freedom for the ordinary South Africans. He then scrutinises the role of the colonised and oppressed in delaying their own total liberation due to the camouflaged interests and motives of the nationalists that were not in the nation's interest. His analysis of the class silences in his critique of the liberation struggle brings to attention concerns of the masses that had been marginalised in the liberation struggle. To their disappointment, after sacrificing and fighting for national liberation, the masses now realise that the postapartheid state is far from being what they hoped for. Their plight is exacerbated by the fact that they are still as oppressed as they had been prior to independence but now the oppressors are also some of their former comrades in the struggle.

Opsomming

Klassepolitiek in Mda se *Ways of dying*

Zakes Mda se ontleding van nasionale politiek in "Ways of dying" toon dat die eenheidsvisie wat die nasionale vryheidsgesprek gekenmerk het, bepaalde dissonansies, teenstrydig-hede en onenigheid rondom die kwessie van klasseverskille verbloem het. Mda ondersoek die ironieë en weersprekings in die vryheidstryd en bevraagteken sodoende die betekenis van vryheid vir die gewone Suid-Afrikaner. Hy kyk indringend na die

rol van die gekoloniseerdes en onderdrukte in die vertraging van hulle eie totale bevryding weens die verskuilde belange en motiewe van die nasionaliste wat nie in volksbelang was nie. Sy ontleding van die klasseswye in sy kritiek op die vryheidstryd vestig die aandag op die meerderheid wat in die proses gemarginaliseer is. Hulle vind nou uit, tot hulle ontnugtering, dat nadat hulle geveg en opofferings vir nasionale vryheid gemaak het, die postapartheidstaat ver te kort skiet van dit waarop hulle gehoop het. Hulle lot word vererger deur die feit dat hulle steeds soos voor bevryding onderdruk word, maar die onderdrukkers sluit nou van hulle eertydse strydmakers in.

1. Introduction

The reality of the current state of affairs in South Africa challenges Kwame Nkrumah's conviction that once political power is in African hands all else would follow. To date, millions of South Africans live in abject poverty, without adequate shelter, security and food. If that is the case, Mda believes that something must have definitely gone wrong for freedom in poverty is not what South Africans had hoped and fought for. This article seeks to explore what Mda perceives to be the perpetuation of poverty in spite of the myriad of promises by the nationalists to end it. It explores the dynamics of the liberation struggle, and the double standards implicit in nationalist literature. The double standards often manifest themselves in the suppression of critical discussions on class dynamics and politics. Being conscious of this malpractice by the nationalists, Mda's *Ways of dying* (1995) reveals scepticism with regard to the assumption of political power by the African petit bourgeoisie. This is because the socio-economic framework in South Africa is essentially unaltered. Mda, accordingly, probes the consequences that this would have for the struggle of African peasants and workers for a better life and consequently "confront[s] the burdens of expectation" (Austen, 2005:85).

2. The primary causes of class politics: colonialism and land dispossession

Mda identifies colonialism, particularly land dispossession, as the primary cause for the suffering of the black people in South Africa. The double standards of the nationalists is revealed in their opposition to colonialism and apartheid theoretically for the liberation of all the oppressed but practically for the benefit of the elite.

Mda painfully acknowledges the continued presence of poverty and suffering in postapartheid South Africa. Toloki's assertion that "it is

not my fault that these people are poor” (Mda, 1995:6) points to the root causes of poverty among the masses of the people. Mda seeks to explore the exact problem that is responsible for the plight of the poor. He notes, for instance, that the people who dispossessed Africans of their land are indeed the culprits.

To remedy the situation, he suggests an efficacious and equitable land redistribution programme. He juxtaposes the black people’s village landscape with the Boers’ farms. Toloki’s journey from the village to the city expresses the unfair land distribution in South Africa, because “he walked through semi-arid lands that stretched for many miles, where the Boers farmed ostriches and prickly pears” (Mda, 1995:58). Conversely, Noria’s memory of the village is the “[p]ale herd boys, with mucus hanging from the nostrils, looking after cattle whose ribs you could count, on barren hills with sparse grass and shrubs” (Mda, 1995:23). The lean cattle and barren hills are partly a result of overgrazing, which is in turn due to shortage of land for black people.

Mda emphasises the need for land redistribution by pointing out that it is not only black people’s livestock that is running out of space; the people, too, are victims of this malice. As a result, many black people live in “squatter camps” (Mda, 1995:42). Toloki remembers that, “they do not like to be called squatters. How can we be squatters on our own land, in our own country? ... squatters are those who came from across the seas and stole our land” (Mda, 1995:42). Mandela also sounds bitter about the squatter status of the African people in their own land and he explains its genesis: “The white man was hungry and greedy for land, and the black man shared the land with him as they shared the air and water; land was not for a man to possess. But the white man took land as you might seize another man’s horse.” (Mandela, 1994:27.) He further adds, “a steady encroachment of white settlers systematically dispossessed the [Africans] of their land” (Mandela, 1994:27).

Meli (1988:74) wholeheartedly supports the redistribution of resources. However, he warns that this is quite a complex issue:

Destroying separation is relatively very easy. We take over and away with racial laws. But how do we destroy inequality? When people have been disadvantaged for 300 years, this must affect their culture, their economy, their interests, needs, aspirations and levels of development, education and skills – in fact everything. So, once we destroy apartheid, there is still inequality. It will not be easy for Whites to lose all their privileges but, if we

want real equality in daily practice, not only formally in law, this question will have to be addressed.

The land question is one of the most complex questions South Africa has had to address. It has economic, political, psychological, cultural and social ramifications. The dilemma the nationalists have with national identity is that, because in the past national identity was inscribed in the land, when colonialists usurped the land, they distorted that identity. The blacks now find it difficult to identify with their land as they no longer own it. Land gives people a sense of identity, security, as well as a platform for economic growth and social development. Mda believes land ownership is precisely the reason why economic growth and social development for whites is more advanced than that of blacks. He avers that as long as the national leaders suppress dissonances and opposing voices and camouflage their interests with nationalist rhetoric, Uhuru would only bring back the means of economic advancement to a small section of the African community, the few middle-class elite.

The consequences of land dispossession are evidently horrifying and myriad. An immediate example is the migrant labour system that Mda alludes to. The migrant labour system separates families and sometimes breaks them up. Children grow up without nurturing and meaningful relationship with both parents and they are deprived of role models. Moreover, the division of labour in the domestic sphere forces the socialisation of children to be only one parent's duty, that is, the mother. Mda depicts this practice as commonplace in apartheid South Africa. At home these children whose socialisation is only the province of their mothers would receive an unbalanced parental perspective and guidance, because one of the parents is hardly at home. As if that is not enough, young women whose husbands are migrant workers in the mines are sometimes overwhelmed by natural desires that have to be suppressed due to this forced separation. Some become unfaithful to their men leading to unwanted pregnancies that the likes of that Mountain Woman help to abort. Similarly, as *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004) shows, men also fail to suppress their desires as they stay and work far away from their families, hence they engage in extramarital relationships. This system is a fertile ground for the proliferation of diseases like HIV and AIDS which Mda omits in his text.

This omission is Rush's (2005) criticism of Mda's works. "Although he has praise for Mda's novels, calling *Ways of dying* (1991) and *The heart of redness* (2000) 'accomplished, vivid, skilfully made', he deems the books disappointments because of their 'omissions'"

(Rush, 2005). Mda on the other hand underscores the omissions of the nationalists on class dynamics in the liberation struggle as they portrayed it as unified with shared goals, vision and values. He points out that the silences in the liberation struggle benefit the elite at the expense of the betrayed masses. His silence about some of the critical issues in postapartheid South Africa is not intended to promote the interests of some at the expense of the others as the nationalists did, but for the purposes of focus on his message. Moreover, Ibinga (2006:3) notes Mda's subversion of nationalist politics in that in *Ways of dying*, for instance, there is a "sudden shift away from a traditional perspective on the political struggle" caused by Mda's commitment to expose the omissions of the nationalists on gender, ethnicity and class issues.

3. The manifestation of class politics in postapartheid South Africa

Taking into cognisance the assumption of political power by the African petit bourgeoisie, one would probably find Ngugi's xenophobia understandable:

Ngugi wa Thiongo's xenophobia is of a different sort. He is not afraid of people but of an economic system that oppresses Africans, making them subservient to Western interests. He places his faith not in politicians, landowners or other representatives of the overprivileged African elite but in the masses – the ordinary peasants and workers who, he hopes, will one day rise up and overthrow their oppressors, establishing a more equitable economic system in the process. He is not a misanthrope but a Marxist. (Lindfors, 1997:158.)

The question of class seems to be quite frustrating to the underclass in many postcolonial states in Africa. This is because this question has been suppressed in many liberation struggles in the African continent. Amuta (1989:62) attributes this suppression to the fact that "the colonial heritage of the African continent coupled with the near absolute absence of an industrial capitalist class in Africa by the late 1950s and early 1960s creates a context in which national liberation, ... takes precedence over the class question". Amuta's account of the suppression of class issues is one among others, and whatever else one may use to account for the silence, the crux of the matter is that the suppression of the class question is a frustration and disappointment to the peasants and workers.

The sidelining and betrayal of the interests and aspirations of the underclass is rather typical of the nationalists. For instance, Aronson (1990) argues that the equality and good life for all that the ANC claimed to be pursuing was only a camouflage to get state power for the benefit of the nationalists. He notes that the ANC does not

... aim at a radical social transformation beyond abolishing apartheid. As many of its critics within the liberation struggle point out, the ANC/UDF movement, which takes the Freedom Charter as its touchstone, is committed to a respectable, moderate, and universalist vision – a middle class vision of a non-racial South Africa governed by a broad coalition of social forces. (Aronson, 1990:128.)

Stratton's (1994) assessment of the liberation struggle is quite encouraging, for it shows the discrepancy between promises and fulfilment, theory and practice, of the liberation struggle as well as the perpetual suffering of the underclass even after independence.

Mda is also persuaded that within the national liberation struggle, there are elements of greed for state power and money. Hence, the perpetual poverty of the masses portrayed in *Ways of dying* does not take him by surprise. However, it comes as a disappointment to those who had cherished the dream that national liberation would mean the liberation of everybody. If national liberation proves to be the liberation of the few middle class elite, as portrayed in *We shall sing for the fatherland* (Mda, 1981), then how can the new nation be truly free to determine its own destiny? These are some of the questions that inform the writing of some of Mda's works like *We shall sing for the fatherland* and *Ways of dying*. These texts confront the dissonances, contradictions and omissions of nationalist literature by questioning the meaning of freedom when people are still landless, jobless, homeless and insecure while the opposite is true for the middle class minority.

We shall sing for the fatherland is a story of two men whose neglect and isolation in postapartheid South Africa has reduced them into hoboes. They participated in the liberation struggle and cherished its ideals. Prior to national liberation, they fought together with those who drive them to the periphery of the society in post-apartheid South Africa. Owing to their betrayal, they question the meaning of freedom as it has not met their expectations for social and financial relief. What makes matters worse is that they are now oppressed not by the whites but by the very blacks with whom they fought for liberation. For this reason, Mandela warns "we are sitting on a time

bomb ... their enemy is now you and me, people who drive a car and have a house ... and it's a very grave situation" (Jacobs & Calland, 2003:41).

Because of the perpetual suffering of the poor, Mda is at war with apartheid and its attendant social evils including its economic system. The fact that even in the new South Africa there are still millions of people suffering because of poverty and a select few who benefit from the new system makes Mda question the nature, trend and pace of transformation of apartheid policies. It could be argued that the nationalist leadership that took over power after the democratic elections never defined in advance how, when and what apartheid's social and economic policies would be replaced with. In fact, it is such uncertainties within the liberation struggle that Mda exposes as they tend to have deleterious effects on the poor.

In *Ways of dying*, it is poverty that drives Noria into prostitution. Interestingly, the oppression of black people that manifests itself through poverty leads the oppressed to use apartheid's ridiculous and oppressive laws to turn against it. Noria's involvement in prostitution serves a dual purpose. It alleviates her poverty and undermines the apartheid system. Now she affords some luxury that she could not afford before and she enjoys ridiculing the Colour Bar Act that forbade any form of sexual relationship between blacks and whites. For instance, "At the hotel, Noria learnt the art of entertaining white men" (p. 80).¹

Having ridiculed the apartheid laws, she turns against the church, which played a vital role in the colonisation of the African people as she is one of the prostitutes who work for the Bible Society. This is a clear mockery of the church's claim to moral integrity. It exposes the double moral standards applied by this institution. The diabolic Afrikaner government was based on the doctrines of the Christian church and Mda seems to have a problem in reconciling its claim to righteousness and holiness with the evil it does on the lives of black people. The church made way for apartheid capitalism which Janabari and Sergeant in *We shall sing for the fatherland* view as responsible for their misery.

1 References containing only a page number are to Mda (1995).

4. Colonial achievements and liberation impediments: dependency syndrome, individualism and "othering"

Fowler (1995:155) sadly notes that "[o]ne of the legacies of colonialism that stands in the way of Africa's liberation is the syndrome of dependence. Its most obvious symptom is economic dependence, but its deepest root is intellectual dependence". Mda seems to be aware of this for he portrays his characters refusing to be dependent. For instance, when Toloki is dog-tired, famished, penniless and virtually helpless, he refuses to be dependent for food on a passer-by who does not want to be paid back for the help he offers. He maintains that, he "would rather rummage for scraps of food in the rubbish bins. Or steal. To steal is better than to beg" (p. 52). He claims that he does not accept alms; he does not accept charity and insists on doing some job for the man in return. Although Toloki

sees himself in the light of the aghori sadhu, held in the awesome veneration for the devout Hindus show the votaries ... he shuns the collection of alms. Votary or no votary, he will not collect alms ... he is glad that even in his dreams he is strong enough not to take a cent he has not worked for. (p. 10-11.)

Similarly, when Toloki offers to foot the bill when they hire a car to collect building material for Noria's house, Noria refuses. She, too, does not want to accept something she has not worked for. Through these examples, Mda seems to caution the nation against the dependency syndrome. Perhaps he is persuaded that South Africans should not depend on foreign aid or foreign nations, for history has shown that this does more harm than good. It perpetuates exploitation and dominance and delays people-driven development and total liberation. It further makes the dependent structure their policies in accordance with the needs or will of the people or nations on which they depend. In view of the fact that Mda discourages the dependency syndrome and the world economy is so integrated, it is essential that South Africans should realise the difference between pity and solidarity with other countries. Pity disempowers and solidarity empowers; hence Toloki does not appreciate the pity of the man who gives him food.

While discouraging the dependency syndrome, Mda encourages the people not to sit back and simply assume that socio-economic liberation will descend like manna from heaven. He seems to suggest that delivery should come from below and from above, from both the rulers/leadership and the ruled/public. While Noria is committed to the kind of delivery, which comes from below, Janabari

and Sergeant, in *We shall sing for the fatherland*, are unhappy that there is no delivery from above; the rulers have neglected them. Noria tells Toloki that Madimbhaza's place "is where I do some work for the community" (p. 99). Sergeant complains that he is hungry and neglected by the government in the "land we liberated with our sweat and blood" (Mda, 1990:44). As we see later, things are made astringent by the fact that even black capitalists refuse to be socially responsible.

The failure to be socially responsible is also evident in *Ways of dying*. Nefolovhodwe is a rich urban carpenter who enjoys living a Western lifestyle. Jwara, on the other hand, is a rich rural farmer who enjoys living a traditional African lifestyle. On the basis of their affluence, both can be said to belong to the same economic class, the middle class. Nefolovhodwe is a classic example of the capitalists Mda disapproves of, because they neglect their social responsibilities and blindly embrace individualistic Western values. He then seems to advocate the Jwara type of capitalist. Although he is an affluent farmer, Jwara does not negate his African roots and identity; instead he upholds his African traditional beliefs. He identifies himself with the poor African masses and also takes care of his social responsibilities.

This clash of interests, attitudes and orientation is also evident in Nefolovhodwe's and Toloki's interaction. Even though Nefolovhodwe liked Toloki because he came to his rescue at school when children were making silly jokes about him and always drank with Toloki's father, now he does not even want to see him, because he is still poor. As the narrator observes, "Toloki knew immediately that wealth had had a very strange effect of erasing from Nefolovhodwe's once sharp mind everything he used to know about his old friends back in the village" (p. 120). Little did Toloki know that homeboys who did well in the city developed amnesia. In fact, the truth of the matter is that Nefolovhodwe has not forgotten the poor Toloki, but he just chooses not to remember him, because he does not want to be associated with the poor. The ostracism of the poor is another repressed issue by the nationalists which Mda exposes.

As disturbing as it may be, the notion of "othering" is not only applicable to Europeans versus Africans. During the colonial era, Europeans did not identify with Africans. They saw them as different from them, not part of them and as the others. There was then a clear distinction between "them" and "us". Their failure to appreciate the difference made them to objectify, humiliate and discriminate against "them", that is, the Africans. The clash between the funeral proces-

sion and wedding procession, at Noria's son's funeral, results in the exposition of "othering" among the Africans. One of the mourners avers that "We are a procession of beautiful people, and many posh cars and buses while *yours* is an old *skorokoro* of a van, and hundreds of ragged souls on foot" (p. 6; emphasis – MTT). Mda's point here is that discrimination is not just a racial issue, but it is underpinned by class interests as well. These are the people who are fighting against discrimination though they practise it, thus exposing the double standards displayed by the liberation struggle. In this way, the order of the liberation struggle turns against itself and undermines its progress.

Barnard (2007) notes that Mda illuminates the plight of the poor through the contrast she makes between formal and informal economy or first and second world. She argues that Toloki's discrimination and expulsion from the first world people's space at the mall "serves as a salutary reminder of the fact that landscapes of exclusion will not evaporate overnight" (p. 157). This discrimination and rejection frustrates the poor people because it takes them back to the divide and rule policy that was used by the apartheid government to oppress Africans. The fact that there were no-go areas for the poor Toloki is evocative of the Europeans only areas in apartheid South Africa. Toloki, for instance, knows that "[r]ich people did not want to see him at all, so he did not bother going to their funerals" (p. 125). Furthermore, a nurse who had first-hand experience of the discrimination of the poor is so appalled by their conduct as

[t]hey are all so rude, and were not keen to be of assistance to people – especially to those who looked poor. ... these are our own people. When they get these big jobs in government offices they think they are better than us. They treat us like dirt! (p. 14.)

This discrimination is also evident in various institutions like hospitals and schools. The social services provided to the rich and the poor respectively by the government differ markedly. The narrator states that, "[t]he municipality was going to introduce the water cistern for the well-to-do families, and pit-latrines for the poorer ones" (p. 96). Further, we learn that in one hospital the

... ward is overcrowded. There are twenty beds packed into a small room, which is really meant to take only ten or so beds. Some patients are sleeping on thin mattresses under the beds. ... The smell of infection and methylated spirits chokes them (p. 131).

This means that access to better social services in this society is influenced by economic status. The implication for the postapartheid South Africa then is that the quality of life for the poor will continue to deteriorate.

The more Mda exposes the world in which the poor people live, the more the reader sees that the poor's lot is not worth much. For instance, at the informal settlement, Toloki "walks through a quagmire of dirty water and human odour that runs through the streets" (p. 42). This is reminiscent of Mphahlele's (1989) story "Down the quiet street" in *The drum decade: stories from the 1950s*. In this story, Mphahlele questions the poor standards of living for blacks in the townships and, like Mda, he notes that there is dirty water running down the streets and the dirt is appalling. In view of the fact that Mphahlele's story portrays South Africa during the 1950s, one can reasonably assume that there has hardly been any development on the lives of the poor. Farred (2000:184) observes that in "this novel the anticipations of the democratic future coexist awkwardly with the memories of past injustices. The poverty of the apartheid era ... is sometimes indistinguishable from the current deprivations of the squatter camps". For instance, while Toloki's modes of transport are his feet as well as public transport (when he has the fare), Nefolovhodwe drives his "dozen or so German, British, and American Luxury cars" (p. 119). The gap between the rich and the poor seems to be institutionally and systematically sustained. For this reason, Mda writes back to the elite, and Farred (2000:185) refers to him as a "writer with a strong affinity for the voiceless and the disempowered, and cautions about a black elite he has dubbed the 'new gatekeeping class'".

The class differences that Mda explores in *Ways of Dying* are manifest in physical appearance and lifestyle. Throughout the novel, the rich are generally portrayed as big and fat and the poor are the opposite. For instance, the driver of the convertible car "is a huge fellow" (p. 6) and the driver of the skorokoro van is "slight" (p. 6). Nefolovhodwe has "ballooned to ten times the size he used to be back in the village" (p. 120) while there is no significant improvement in Toloki's physical appearance. Noria's gym dress "maintained its sharp pleats, and it was not patched" (p. 64) as her mother was a businesswoman. Toloki "on the other hand, wore a khaki shirt and khaki shorts that were patched all over with pieces of cloth from his mother's old dresses" (p. 64).

The jobs that most people do in the novel require no skills for they are manual chores such as cleaning offices, gardening, or being a

"malayisha"² or watchman. Consequently, the poor people's chances of improving their lives are rather slim. It is interesting to note that Toloki is persuaded by his friends "to keep the good job he has [as a malayisha]. Such good jobs were hard to come by" (p. 54). This clearly shows the standard of life the poor have if being a malayisha – one of the lowest paying jobs – is regarded as a good job.

Mda also draws our attention to the discrepancy in living conditions. Although the father of the young man who was burnt to death by his white colleague has a "good job", he lives in a shack with his family. Shadrack, who "is the wealthiest member of the settlement ... lives in a shipping container, instead of a makeshift shelter of newspapers, plastic, canvas and corrugated iron sheets, like the rest of the residents" (p. 45). Nefolovhodwe, on the other hand, lives in a double-storey mansion that is expensively furnished. "His house was surrounded by a tall security fence, which had warnings that it was electrified attached. There was a well-trimmed hedge inside the fence" (p. 119), as well as a beautiful lawn. The gate to the house was locked and there was a security guard with two big Alsatians.

This class asymmetrical state of affairs clearly echoes Jacobs and Calland's (2003:15) observation that:

... there are grave socio-economic problems in the country. All the indicators show that the inequalities under apartheid have survived, and have worsened in some respects. South Africa is ranked as the third unequal society in the world, surpassed only by Brazil and Guatemala. (COSATU, 2001.)

This then clearly shows that the liberation struggle had elements of perpetual pursuit of self-interests camouflaged as national interests. This is one of the reasons why Lazarus concurs with Fanon (quoted in Lazarus, 1990:108-109) in his argument that

... anticolonial nationalism was animated above all by frustration. All along, it was aimed not at national liberation but at securing for its constituencies (the national middle class) the political power that, under the colonial system, was unattainable. Its project was framed by the desire to 'inherit' the colonial state apparatus. Its goal was not, therefore, the *over-*

2 A malayisha is a person who loads and offloads goods from trucks. Toloki is a malayisha for bags of maize (p. 53).

throw of the colonial state, but on the contrary, its *capture* and *appropriation*.

Mda, like Fanon, posits that postapartheid is in many ways parallel to colonialism. The new elite seems to thrive on the backs of the masses whose vision has since atrophied. Lazarus (1990) maintains that, despite their rhetoric, it was not capitalism as such but only foreign domination that reformist nationalists in Africa were eager to contest. This is confirmed by Mandela's statement that the "Freedom Charter was not a blueprint for socialism but for African-style capitalism" (Mandela, 1994:642). One is yet to see the merits of the African-style capitalism for at the moment more than a decade after the "charterists" took control of government, the conditions of the poor seem to be deteriorating.

On the basis of this, Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987) cautions that not all national liberation struggles are liberation struggles. He argues that, "[A]s political independence alone is not the final result of the national liberation struggle, a nationalist movement may be struggling against foreign political domination or the purely political aspects of imperialism, but not for genuine national liberation" (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1987:35). Ndebele (1983) also critiques the nascent black middle class values that Mda discerns in the postapartheid era in South Africa. In Ndebele's "The test" in *Fools and other stories* (1983), Thoba rebels against his middle class status and isolation. He pledges solidarity with the underprivileged children in the township by yearning to have cracked feet like Nana, Vusi and Simangele who had no shoes. Similarly, in Mda's novel, Toloki also pledges solidarity with Noria in that he does not want to wear his shoes, because Noria does not have any to wear. Instead of this kind of solidarity between the middle and lower class, there is oppression, exploitation, victimisation, tensions and animosity. This is the manifestation of the class problems that the nationalists have suppressed for their strategic interests.

It could be argued that, in emphasising national liberation, the interests of the working class are submerged with respect to the fact that the broad liberation movement presents the national struggle as a classless unitary struggle. Wolpe (1988:56) envisages that "the struggle for national liberation is bound to result in a sacrifice of the interests of the black working class, which bears the major burden of that struggle". Consequently, like Nzongola-Ntalaja and Ngugi, Wolpe advocates the "two-stage theory". This theory suggests that the simultaneity of social, political, economic and national emancipation in the postapartheid era is nothing but an illusion. Propo-

nents of this theory argue that history has shown that national consciousness and national liberation do not equal class consciousness and class emancipation. Moreover, they draw attention to the fact that the liberation struggle is multidimensional. For social and economic liberation to take place, it was necessary that in South Africa it should be preceded by political liberation. Black people could not have been socially and economically liberated had apartheid and colonialism not been done away with. Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987) adds that, Cabral's second major contribution to the theory of the national liberation struggle resides in his demonstration that the struggle consists of two phases – the national and the social, with the latter being more crucial to its ultimate denouement.

Mbingi (2000) goes a step further than the two-stage theory and proposes a "three-stage theory". He subscribes to the view that the first phase of national liberation is civil liberation – the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of association and so on; the second one is political liberation – freedom to govern the country; and the last one is economic liberation – economic sovereignty. He argues that most African countries only reach phase two and become stagnant or regress. He is greatly disturbed that no African country has attained the economic phase of the struggle against poverty and his fear is that no political freedom can be sustained with empty stomachs.

The nationalists' failure to live up to their promises and meet the expectations of the poor leads to bitterness, disappointment and anger. This is expressed by Noria in *Ways of dying* and Sergeant and Janabari in *We shall sing for the fatherland*. It is also noticeable when Njooki, in *I will marry when I want* (Ngugi, 1980:39), expresses her disillusionment and disappointment about freedom as she sings: "When we fought for freedom I'd thought that we the poor would milk grade cows. In the past I used to eat wild spinach. Today I am eating the same".

In *Ways of dying* we learn that Noria's "petticoat has seen better days, and like [Toloki's] venerable costume, it is held together by pieces of wire and safety pins" (p. 142). Sergeant and Janabari wear old ragged military uniforms. The poor have not realised the material benefits they fought for; it is only the rich who have, as Mafutha is portrayed as "a well-dressed portly fellow" (Mda, 1990:34) and Nefolovhodwe is portrayed as "[a] fat man in a white suit" (p. 189). Undoubtedly, the black elite has gone wild in their opulence and ostentation, an element which stratifies the black society further.

Owing to their lack of material benefits, the recently achieved freedom in South Africa is meaningless to Janabari and Sergeant for it does not address their economic needs. They are disillusioned because freedom has not yielded tangible benefits. The leaders have betrayed the cause of the South African revolution as the outcome of the struggle “does not coincide with the expectations of the peasants” (Ogude, 1999:25).

5. Conclusion

Mda’s analysis of the problem of class in nationalist discourse gives us a compelling context to examine the dynamics of the national liberation struggle. His focus on class conflict and contradictions among the black majority reveals new possibilities of understanding the liberation struggle as complex and far from the unitary process many nationalist leaders tend to project. This exposure would help the people to understand and reject nationalist myths and false promises by exposing the camouflaged interests and motives of the nationalists.

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Key concepts:

class dynamics in the struggle context
class politics, causes of
liberation struggle, contradictions of
masses, concerns of the

Kernbegrippe:

klassedinamika in vryheidstrydverband
klassepolitiek, oorsake van
meerderheid, belange van die
vryheidstryd, teenstrydighede