

CHANCO

STUDY GUIDE

**TO
TIYAMBE ZELEZA'S**

SMOULDERING CHARCOAL

HARRY JAMES KAMWAZA AND DALE SY MTHATIWA

Chancellor College Publications

P O Box 280

Zomba

Malawi

Tel: (265) 524 222; 526 202

Fax: (265) 524 046

E-mail: publications @ chanco.unima.mw

© Harry James Kamwaza and Dale Sy Mthatiwa 2005 -

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means,, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the copyright owners.

ISBN: 99908-51-37-9

Printed in Malawi by University of Malawi Central Library Service Printing Press, P 0 Box 280, Zomba, Malawi,

Preface

Study Guide to Tiyambe Zeleza's Smouldering Charcoal is a response to numerous calls from both teachers and students for study notes to help in the understanding of Tiyambe Zeleza's novel, Smouldering Charcoal. Study Guide to Tiyambe Zeleza's Smouldering Charcoal is written in a way that facilitates meaningful learning and Understanding. Every chapter starts with a summary before going on to make analysis of it by picking out important areas in the chapter. **At the end of each chapter are questions to give chance to the reader to test himself or herself how much of the chapter he or she has understood.**

The other part of this work analyses important characters, themes, and the style Zeleza employed in narrating the story of Smouldering Charcoal. The last part of the guide contains questions (contextual questions and essay questions) to help equip those preparing to sit for Malawi School Certificate of Education Examinations in Literature or for an examination in African or Malawian Literature at tertiary level. These notes are by no means a substitute to the prescribed text, Smouldering Charcoal. Students are therefore encouraged to read the text several times and only use these notes (afterwards) as an aid for proper understanding of the novel.

Kingsley Jika

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Table of Contents

Introduction

Plot of Smouldering Charcoal4

Part One - Untamed Pests

Detailed Summaries and Analyses

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Part Two- Night Storms

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Part Three - Smouldering Charcoal

Chapter Nine ..

Chapter Ten ..

Chapter Eleven ..

Chapter Twelve ..

Epilogue ..

Characters ..

Major Themes ..

Minor Themes ..

Style ..

Activities ..

- Contextual Questions..

- Essay Questions ..

INTRODUCTION

(Paul) Tiyambe Zeleza was born to parents of Malawian stock on 25th May, 1955, in Salisbury, now Harare, Zimbabwe. His father comes from Ntchisi and his mother from Ntcheu. He studied for Bachelor of Arts at the University of Malawi, and for Master of Arts at London University. Besides, Zeleza has a Doctor. of Philosophy from Dalhousie University, Canada. For political reasons during the reign of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Zeleza, after his doctoral studies went on to work at the University of the West Indies rather than return to Malawi. Zeleza has been Professor of History at Trent University, Canada; Professor of History and African Studies, and Director, Centre for African Studies, University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign; and Professor of History and African Studies at Pennsylvania State University. He is still teaching in the United States.

Tiyambe Zeleza is a widely published and award-winning writer. His first collection of short stories, *Night of Darkness*, was published in 1976. In 1992 his first novel, *Smouldering Charcoal*, was published. In 1994, he published another collection of short stories, *The Joys of Exile*, and in the same year, he won a Noma Award for his book, *A Modern Economic History of Africa* (published in 1993).

Smouldering Charcoal was influenced by Marxism. Marxism may be defined as a school of thought or belief that focuses on the type of social and economic relationships that arise in every society as a result of material or wealth production and distribution. Those who are wedded to this opinion owe its origin to Karl Marx, a German philosopher who lived in the nineteenth century. Marx argued that at the centre of human history is the struggle (between two opposing classes in society) for private possession of property.

A good number of writers in Africa were influenced and more are still being influenced by Marxism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the famous Kenyan writer, is himself a self-confessed Marxist.

Marxism is a philosophy of protest, and it is believed that this desire to protest and liberate oneself from every form of oppression is embedded in every human being. Marxism also believes that every human being has in him or her a desire to realize his or her potentialities. It is also a protest against all forms of exploitative labour and systems that treat human beings as objects for the rich as a result of industrialism. Marx believed that for a human being to emancipate himself or herself, he or she has to understand the forces that lead to his or her miserable state. In other words, an individual should be conscious of his or her social class and should identify with it in his or her quest for total freedom from oppression. In his novel, *Smouldering Charcoal*, Zeleza offers the opinion to the reader through Chola, one of the main characters, who says: "The Movement is striving to bring together all the oppressed people and classes in our society in order to wage a common struggle against poverty, exploitation and oppression" (p. 148).

As a literary theory, that is to say, when used in literature, Marxism focuses on issues of class

conflict in society between the-rich (the 'haves') and the poor, (the 'have-nots'), the bourgeoisie (the class of people interested in accumulation of wealth and social positions) and the proletariat (the class of workers who own little or no property and have to work for wages). It seeks to improve the situation of the proletariat who are oppressed by the dominant class of the rich. It glorifies the role of revolution in the creation of a classless or equal society. It aims at eliminating all forms of inequality and injustice in society. In this novel, the Movement for National Transformation was formed on this principle: to bring together all the Oppressed people and classes to fight poverty, exploitation and oppression.

Marxist literary theorists argue that art or literature should be direct and confrontational or revolutionary and should radically oppose all traditional forms which perpetuate, the oppression of the masses. Consider how strong and direct the book Chola intends to write will be:

(It) would be about the raping of a dream, the subversion of the aspirations of Independence...it would show how those dreams and aspirations had been vested in the wrong people, and how the Dambos and Mcheres of this world offered a glimmer of hope not only to revitalize those dreams and aspirations, but also to realize them...it would be a book about himself, about Dambo, Mchere, their families, and about many other people, their inadequacies and frustrations, their lives and struggles to break out of the monstrous concentration camp that is independent Africa (p. 106).

Plot of Smouldering Charcoal

The novel, Smouldering Charcoal, opens with Mchere Ntolo (clan name Angozo), a poor worker for Nkate Bakery in Njala, a small village in the outskirts of a city or municipality. Mchere is awoken by a rat. He goes back to sleep but his wife Nambe reminds him that it is time to go to work at the bakery.

While Mchere is at work, his son Ntolo, the eldest of his six children, falls from a mango tree in the forest after being bitten by bees. Ntolo had gone to the forest with his friends to gather fruits. Nambe who is now heavy with a seventh pregnancy tries to find transport to take her son to hospital but is unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, the workers at Nkate Bakery organize a strike to demand salary increment and better working conditions. Chola, a journalist working for the Daily Dispatch, gets wind of it from a friend, Denga. This is the first major strike the country would witness since Independence. Chola decides to cover the event, a step which will bring him into contact with Mchere for the first time. On this particular day, the workers are mapping out the strategy for the strike the following day. Chola who is also a fiancé to Catherine, a university student, together with Dambo his close friend is critical of the government. But unlike Dambo, who takes a very hard line in his criticism, Chola plays a very low profile. Dambo is soon murdered by unknown people who are doubtlessly in the pay of the regime.

Dambo's death paves the way for a second meeting between Mchere and Chola. The two meet in hospital where Mchere has taken his son Ntolo for treatment and Chola is waiting for the doctor to

examine Alipo (Dambo's wife) who has collapsed with shock after identifying her husband's body in the hospital mortuary.

The strike at the bakery does not produce immediate expected results. The workers are rounded up and locked up in prison. Their wives back in Njala protest against their unjust incarceration. They boycott dance rehearsals in preparation for Independence Day celebrations. But their protest yields nothing. Instead, they are ordered to get out of Njala for disobeying party leaders in the area - Mrs. Gonthi and the Party Chairman.

The murder of Dambo badly affects Chola who resigns from his job in spite of his Editor's advice to reconsider his decision. Much to Catherine's displeasure, Chola suggests that they should get married and leave the country into exile. Unfortunately, before this happens, three strange men in dark suits invade his house and mount a bogus search for subversive material. In the end, Chola is arrested and thrown into prison where he meets Mchere and the other bakery workers, as well as Ndatero, a university lecturer and playwright. In prison Chola becomes the leader of the Movement for National Transformation (also simply called the Movement), a revolutionary movement geared towards toppling the oppressive dictatorial regime and establishing a humane democratic one.

Owing to the horrible conditions under which they are being kept, the prisoners organize a hunger strike. Chola is ..accused by the prison superintendent of masterminding the strike and of being leader of the Movement. Consequently, he is subjected to gruesome forms of torture before he is thrown in the cell of the murderous' Bonzo who later hangs him. Following Chola's arrest and subsequent death in prison, Catherine is expelled from the university ..barely a month before the end of her studies. The country's unsavory human rights record reaches far and wide and foreign banks and governments are compelled to react. The reactions by these governments and banks coupled with the fall from grace of the Party's Secretary General, bring about the release from prison of many innocent people including Mchere and Ndatero.

Upon arrival in Njala, Mchere is informed of the whereabouts of his wife, and back in his village Mchere is shocked to find her pregnant by his cousin Gwape, Leader of the Youth Militia in the village. Bitter and full of hatred for Gwape, Nambe sets his house on fire killing all the five people inside it including Gwape himself, before she and the rest of her family cross the border into exile in a neighboring country. Here they meet Mchere, who had fled Gwape's plot to deal with him, Ndatero and Catherine who are now married. Together with the other exiles they strengthen the structures of the Movement that is expected to bring revolutionary change to their home country.

PART ONE

Untamed Pests

This part has four chapters under the title Untamed Pests. There is a good reason for this title: forces that seem impossible to rout or tame are exposed in this part. These are the forces main characters are seen grappling with. These forces sprout from the abuse of power by the authorities signified by the death of the educated lawyer Dambo who tried to oppose the regime through the Movement. This struggle is first reflected in Mchere's belligerent actions against a rat (just as rats come about because of poor management in the home, the rats or poverty or evils in the regime

have come about because of poor management of the economy and abuse of power). Mchere blames his hopelessness and poverty on the rat. The act of venting anger on something else is also revealed to us through the death of Ntolo, who, when he is challenged by a fellow friend, Pota, climbs to the top of a tree to prove his being courageous. While in this tree, Ntolo is bitten by bees.

-These untamed pests are everywhere - in the houses (poverty, and traitors, for example, Chola's servant Smart who spies on him and his fiancée Catherine); at work (poor working conditions and intimidation); on the roads (the terrible members of the Youth Militia selling cards); and even in prison (the prison guards). The effort to struggle against these forces leads to more troubles (storms) - death of Ntolo Mchere (Mchere's son), the death of Dambo and the" suffering experienced by the striking force of Nkate Bakery, their wives and even their friends.

DETAILED SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

Chapter One

Summary

The chapter introduces the family of Mchere in Njala. His wife is simply called Nambe (and she is from a polygamous Muslim family). In this chapter, the family has five children (Ntolo, eight, named after Mchere's father who was murdered in prison in 1953; Uta, six; Mavuto and Titani, both four, and the mother is also breast-feeding though she is also heavy with another pregnancy) but they also stay with Mchere's mother who is simply called Grandmother. They live in a small rented house for whose weekly rental bills Mchere fails to settle, forcing the landlord to evict them from the house.

Mchere is woken up by a rat which has been causing a lot of trouble in the house. He tries to kill it but fails. His agitation surprises his pregnant wife Nambe who asks what the matter is but Mchere only points at the crack in the wall behind which the rat has disappeared,. Having come home late, as he was delayed by his prostitute girlfriend Lucy, and drunk, he relapses into sleep. But his wife wakes him up so that he should go to work at the bakery as the day is slowly Unfolding. But Mchere is reluctant to go to work today for two reasons. Firstly because of the hangover which has given him a splitting headache? Secondly because the bakery workers are organizing a strike to take places the following day to protest against their poor working conditions. Mchere is afraid of the consequences of the strike since striking is illegal in the regime. Besides, memories of the suffering of his father who later died in prison due to his participation in the violent protest against the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, are still fresh.

When Mchere finally leaves for his work place, the landlord comes to collect the money Mchere had promised him the day before. When he does not find any he threatens Nambe with eviction.

The landlord's anger against the family's dishonesty is intensified by Ntolo's revelation that he had seen his father that morning. Ntolo is the family's first-born son. Like many other children in Njala he is mischievous and does not go to school. The school teacher of Njala had been arrested allegedly because his wife had reported him to the party for failing to buy her a party uniform. Later, Ntolo and his friends go to the forest to collect mangoes to fill their chronically empty stomachs. In an effort to outdo Pota, his greatest rival who claims to have collected more mangoes than he has, Ntolo climbs another tree where he is badly bitten by bees. He falls from that tree and is badly hurt,

Analysis

Several issues, one of which poverty, are raised in this chapter. Mchere's family lives in a rat-infested hovel with cracked walls and a leaking roof. Notice that Mchere is woken up by a rat and on his way out of the house he knocks against a bucket that Nambe put on the floor to collect water from the leaking roof. Mchere's twin daughters, Mavuto and Titani, fight over an old blanket that has a hole in the middle. The family does not have decent and enough food and cannot afford to pay K1.50 rent a week. In an attempt to avoid facing the gloomy reality of his life, Mchere gets into drunkenness and prostitution. We are told that "(T)he prospect of another child was a source of deep gloom for him [as] it meant an extra mouth to feed, and an additional body to clothe and shelter" (p. 2).

Another important issue raised in this chapter is oppression. The school teacher of Njala is arrested for failing to buy a party uniform for his wife. As a result, the children of the p6or people of Nail are denied education. Mchere also abuses and oppresses his wife by beating her.

Exploitation is an, other important issue here. Mchere, like many other bakery workers, does not receive enough to support, his family. This is why they resort to a strike to try to force the authorities to consider their grievances. But the nation outlaws strikes thereby denying the workers the right to express themselves.-In this way the government perpetrates the exploitation of the workers.

Disillusionment and betrayal are other important issues in this chapter. Nambe is disillusioned to see.Mchere turn out to be a drunkard and the children rude. Mchere feels betrayed by the very government his father fought and died for. Like the colonial government before qt, the new government-oppresses and exploits the very people who brought it into power. Grandmother (one to help the reader compare better the pre-Independence era and the one after the nation attains Independence) is a credible witness when the author unveils her mind for the reader: "./. a lot of things had changed, little was deeply rooted, everything seemed to be in a state of flux. What was frightening Was to think that this was the world she would be leaving behind for her children" (P. 11).

Mchere, however, does not just sit and watch. He has his means of fighting off all this. His anger against the rat should be understood to mean his anger against the government. Like the rat "with a fat neck" which is „responsible for making holes in the family's clothes, for depleting and soiling

the food and for keeping them awake at night," (p. 3) the government and its supporters, the people with fat necks, oppress and impoverish the people.

Questions

1. Why is Mchere irritated by the rat in his house?
2. What two events in this chapter expose Mchere as an irresponsible husband?
3. Explain why Mchere feels uneasy to wake up on this particular morning.
4. Give two examples that show the regime's poor human rights record.
5. Why is Mchere afraid of the impending strike by Nkate Bakery workers?
6. Briefly explain how Ntolo gets injured.

Chapter Two

Summary

Chola parts with his fiancée Catherine, a university student with whom he cohabits, and drives off to his work place. He takes his favourite route to the office: a narrow, rugged road, with bumps and gullies, which was longer than the main road and passed through the poorest part of the city. Driving Slowly through the light rain, Chola is fascinated by all those he passes on the way. Captivated by the scenes of the road, he narrowly escapes an accident as a tanker sweeps past him. He is deeply shaken by the experience but later regains his calm and decides to drive faster. Thoughts of the injustices of the regime that has bred a lot of poverty, violence and misery fill his mind when he abruptly stops behind a long line of cars. The Party's Youth Militia, one of the party's weapons of oppression, are searching party cards. Woe to those without the mighty card! Chola avoids being roughed up by the Youth Militia by buying another card. But as was his practice, he would burn this card at night as a form of silent protest against the regime.

The encounter with the Party's Youth Militia reminds Chola of his fellow students of the 1960s, and six years ago in America. Together they had denounced Colonialism, Imperialism, Neo-colonialism and Dictatorship but now most of them have joined the very capitalists and dictators they denounced. The more he thinks about his fellow students' betrayal, the more his mind turns to Dambo, his closest friend. Three days have passed since Dambo, an activist and highly competent lawyer, was last seen. The thought that he had been "sent to 'high school'" (prison) frightens Chola. Such things occurred frequently in the country and given Dambo's activism, it would not be surprising.

When he gets to his work place, the Editor, who was once an influential member of the National Party Committee, reminds him that he is supposed to cover the opening of Chasu Brewery that day. He warns him against letting his emotions affect his manner of reporting: he should report the way those in power want to see things reported. Chola dislikes this kind of reporting, for all the readership gets are "sterile facts and hearty accolades" (p. 21) to those in power. Moreover, "the

papers were churned out day after day full of pictures of the Leader and bold headlines calling the nation's attention to his latest activities...coupled with repetitive reports of the latest development achievements" (p. 21).

From the Editor's office he goes to a restaurant for lunch. There he meets John, a former clerk at his office, who boasts about his journey to the United Kingdom, and an old friend, Denga. Chola and Denga disagree on who is responsible for the poverty in the country. While Denga blames expatriates only, Chola includes natives who have no consideration for the poor. In the course of the argument, Denga reveals to the journalist that there is to be a strike at Nkate Bakery the following day. This is the strike that scares Mchere in Chapter One, Chola decides to go to Nkate Bakery straight away as there had not been a strike in the country for a long time. On getting there, he finds that speeches meant to encourage the bakery workers to participate in the strike the following day, are under way. Speaker after speaker take the floor to accuse their employers of greed and prove the justification for the strike. Chola could not have been luckier to get across this hot piece of news. He decides to write two reports: one for his paper and another, a detailed one, for a newspaper abroad. Chola views the strike as a sign of the people's dissatisfaction not only with the ways of their employers but also those of the leaders.

Later, on his way to Chasu Brewery he encounters a group of workers killing a python at a hotel construction site. He cannot help sympathising with the poor workers who will never have access to the hotel they are constructing when it finally becomes operational. By the time he leaves the hotel construction site, it is too late for him to go to his office to collect a photographer who would cover the opening of 1 Chasu Brewery along with him. In fact, by the time he arrives at the opening ceremony, the managing director of the brewery has just finished delivering his speech. This does not worry him much because he knows that what the managing director had to say, like the rest of those who rose to speak after him, was "the same story retold in a thousand different ways to a thousand separate audiences, under thousand types of weather" (p. 30): the story of the development achievements of the Leader.

When the Editor finally receives Chola's report pictures he is furious and seeks to question Chola. But Chola has since left for his house to get ready for a play in which Catherine was taking part at the university later that evening. He is about to leave the house when an anonymous tells him that Dambo's body could be found in River.

Analysis

This chapter touches on disillusionment and betrayal. Chola is disillusioned by the regime that took over from the colonialists. Instead of addressing widespread poverty in the country, the emergent leaders were in a rat-race to amass wealth. He feels betrayed by his hypocritical schoolmates who had spoken passionately against dictators and Capitalism only to join them later and perpetrate the suffering of the poor. Some of these turned into sycophants like Mr Mbuzi who lied to the people about the level of development in the country. However, the lies are exposed by the events the same day at Nkate Bakery where the workers complain about their poor conditions of service.

Chola is, however, comforted by the fact that some educated people like Dambo, the lawyer (they had been together in school at university but he had also been to Britain for further studies) have decided to stand for the truth. Dambo joins an underground or secret freedom movement known as Movement for National Transformation or simply the Movement. He is later murdered by agents of the regime and his body thrown in Nkhona River.

We are also immediately aware that even the members of the Party's Youth Militia are victims of the system. They are made to graduate into a world of violence and an empty or meaningless existence. They are playing a game whose real beneficiaries are those in power. We learn this when we see the five young men approach Chola. We read that "(T)heir Supreme confidence betrayed the hollowness 'of their lives, a hollowness so deep that it could only be covered by darkness of its abyss" (p. 17).

In this chapter we are also aware of the lack of freedom expression in the country. Chola is advised by the Editor to follow a downtrodden path of reporting other than voice own views. He had to lie to please those in power and the possibility of death or detention. The meeting at bakery and the scene at the hotel construction site (where workers have managed' to overcome the python, a s dictatorship), however, point to the fact that unity is most effective weapon against an oppressive system. the workers (at this construction site) who unite to kill python that posed a threat to their lives, the bakery and all the oppressed have to be united to fight oppressive regime and a system of production that does serve their interests.

In this chapter, the reader is able to deduce that the fate befalling the uneducated (poor class) like Mchere is felt by the educated like Chola (a journalist working for Daily Despatch) and his fiancée Catherine (a history literature student at the university), and Dambo, the lawyer.

One is also able to note that Chola too is a radical simmering anger is vented on the party cards when he them whenever he is forced to buy one. This compares well with Mchere's actions of venting his frustrations on a rat.

Questions

1. What shows that Chola is a sympathetic character in this chapter?
2. Why is the campaign for party membership cards regarded as an abuse of the people's rights?
3. What instance in the chapter exposes Chola's radicalism?
4. In what way is Dambo an activist in this chapter?
5. In what way are the ethics of journalism flouted in this regime?
6. Why are Nkate Bakery workers on strike'?
7. Why is Chola more interested in the events at the Oakery than those at Chasu Brewery?
8. How does Chola learn about Dambos' death?

Chapter Three

Summary

After all her household chores, Nambe goes to draw water at the unreliable and only borehole in the whole of Njala. On finding a long queue, she decides to wait at Biti's house situated nearby. Biti is her cousin's wife and the only female tailor in Njala. She attracts a lot of female customers, who are the backbone of the tailoring trade, much to the annoyance of her male competitors. A lot of women are already gathered at Biti's house and are enjoying Mama Bob's story which prompts another woman's comment: "Men are liars; men are like dogs." Soon Nambe joins the group.

Mama Bob's story is about Ben, an unfaithful husband to Najele. Ben goes out with Estele, a newcomer in Njala who does not know that Ben is married. She hopes that Ben will marry her. Later Najele and Estele become friends and when they begin to talk about men in their lives, they discover that they are talking about the same man. Instead of fighting over him, they resolve to punish Ben. They agree that Estele should arrange to meet Ben at their usual meeting place, in a church. Instead of her going there, Najele should go and sleep with Ben pretending that she was Estele. Later, she should reveal her true identity to show him that he had been discovered. The trick works and Ben runs away in shame and embarrassment.

The women's excitement with Ben's story is broken by the arrival on the scene of Mrs Gonthi, Chairman of the local branch of the Women's Brigade, the women's section of the party, and her deputy Mrs Madimba. Mrs Gonthi enjoys displaying her power and authority while the friendlier Mrs Madimba derives considerable prestige from the fact that her brother-in-law was the Member of Parliament for Njala. The two have come to supervise. Biti's progress in her sewing of party uniforms. Although she has made a lot of progress in spite of the fact that she will not be paid as expected for the job, she still finds herself trader baseless accusations. Mrs Gonthi is displeased and thinks Biti could have done a lot more if she did not turn her place into a chattering house. Although offended, Biti dares not quarrel with her for fear of reprisals. Mrs. Madimba finally declares that since Independence Celebrations are approaching, dance rehearsals will have to take place twice a week, on Fridays and Sundays.

The atmosphere still remains tense with fear even,, after Mrs Gonthi and Mrs Madimba have left. No woman commented on what they had said for fear of being misunderstood and betrayed by those around. "The Party had eyes and ears everywhere. Safety lay in keeping one's eyes and ears open, but the mouth shut" (p. 41).

The December sky is becoming cloudy and the women are beginning to disperse when two men carrying the injured Ntolo arrive. The means of taking Ntolo to hospital had to be found and in the absence of Ntolo's father, the pregnant Nambe had to go and seek assistance from the only two citizens with cars in Njala, the priest and the Party Chairman. To her surprise, neither of them is willing to help. Meanwhile Mchere and Bota are on their way from the bakery. Mchere is clearly apprehensive about the prospect of a strike the following day. He is pessimistic about its success. Bota, one of the longest serving members at the bakery, on the other hand, believes that the strike

will be a success. After all, their strike of 1962 had been a success. But Mchere who is well aware of the ruthlessness of the present regime cannot afford to be hopeful. He hesitates to confide in Bota the source of his fear about the impending strike. Noticing this, Bota suggests that they pass through a bar for some beer (chibuku), which he believes will loosen Mchere's tongue.

Analysis

The chapter brings to light the extent of women's suffering during the regime. Apart from being abused by their husbands through violence, deception and infidelity, they are also forced to dance before the Leader. It also shows that men are not the only ones behind women's suffering. Women also perpetrate the suffering of fellow women. Mrs Gonthi is a good example here.

We also get a glimpse of the atmosphere of fear that hangs above the country like a dark cloud. People fear to speak their mind for fear of being reported to the Party by those closest to them. Everyone is a potential traitor.

Ufulu Estate through which Bota and Mchere pass on their way from the bakery represents the ufulu (freedom) which the people had hoped for after Independence. But the fact that after just a few years the estate developed all the characteristics of a neglected, run-down slum, shows how quickly the much-hoped-for freedom disappeared and in its place oppression, repression and exploitation reigned.

Hypocrisy is an important issue in this chapter. Contrary to his teachings of kindness to the needy and love to one's neighbours, the priest fails to assist Nambe in her greatest

hour of need. He tells her it is about to rain and the roads would be muddy and that he is expected to chair the meeting of church Elders that night. To crown it all, he tells her bees never kill anybody. His words are not matched with actions. In the case of his wife, instead of appreciating Nambe's poverty and doing something to assist her, she looks "disapprovingly at her tight dress and the unfavourable manner it exposed the contours of her body" (p. 42). The Party Chairman is another hypocrite. In spite of his words at the last meeting he had held in Njala that "people should feel free to come and see him about their problems" (p. 44) and the Leader's call for respect of women who are the backbone of society, he refuses to assist Nambe, allegedly because his van is full of fish. Both the priest and the Party Chairman are self-interested individuals who pretend that they are serving the society.

Ben's story serves as an illustration of the need for women's collaboration to fight all forms of abuse, oppression and exploitation.

Questions

1. Why are the male tailors of Njala jealous of Biti?
2. In what way does Ben's story, as mandated by Mama Bob, have a bearing on Nambe's family?
3. "Men are like dogs." What aspect of Mchere's life shows that he is a dog?
4. Why are the women excited with Mama Bob's

5. Why have Mrs Gonthi and Mrs Madimba come to see Biti?
 6. Why does Mrs Madimba enjoy a considerable prestige in Njala?
 7. Why doesn't Biti charge more on the party uniforms she is sewing?
 8. What is the objective for holding political party dance rehearsals for the Independence Celebration, twice a week?
 9. "The party had eyes and ears everywhere." does this statement mean in this chapter?
 10. Why do the women remain silent when Mrs and Mrs Madimba leaves them?
11. Give three reasons for Nambe's inability to Ntolo to hospital.
12. Why is Nambe so sure that both the priest and Party Chairman of Njala would assist her transport to take Ntolo to hospital?
13. What reasons does each give for not assisting with transport?
14. Give instances in this chapter which show that certain individuals in the regime abuse their political power for personal gains?
15. One of the themes in this chapter can be 'greed'. In "I what way has this been expounded in the chapter?
16. Show how the theme of 'selfishness' has exposed in this chapter.
17. why does Bota feel that the strike is justifiable
would therefore succeed?
18. Give reasons for Mchere's resentment over the strike.
19. In what way does this chapter show the regimes
human rights abuse?
20. What one solution does the chapter give to solve the problem of female oppression?

Chapter Four

Summary

Catherine and her classmates wait uneasily for the arrival of Dr Bakha, an unpopular, lanky and bespectacled Senior Lecturer and Chairman of the History Department. He is also Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Dr Bakha promised to return the students' essays today. He becomes unpopular among the students because of his habit of publicly criticising what he considers bad writing, much to the embarrassment of the students responsible, and his boastfulness about his academic achievements. Today Dr Bakha picks on Catherine. He attacks her for what he terms sloganeering, a favourite word of his. As far as he is concerned, Catherine is guilty of sloganeering in her essay. After quickly distributing the essays to the students, Dr Bakha asks Catherine to follow him to his office where he repeats the same points he had made in class about her essay. Incidentally, Dr

Bakha likes Catherine and wants to sleep with her.

Dr Bakha's criticism makes the rest of the afternoon miserable for Catherine. But for the fact that she was taking part in the Ndatero's play that was being staged that evening, she would have gone home straight away.

Later she goes to the porter's lodge accompanied by her friend Thoko to wait for Chola. He is supposed to take her home for supper and back to the university campus for the play. The waiting gets longer than expected and to make matters worse, it starts raining. The porters' good humour does not help make Catherine feel at ease. Catherine's gloom is deepened by the impudence of male students the presence of Diana and her friends who pass Catherine' and Thoko on their way to the library. Diana,

Doll because she wore too much make up, and her friends are an unpopular lot because of their arrogance, frivolity "carefree attitude towards everything, including money and love affairs...They were sons and daughters the 'big shots': retired diplomats; cabinet ministers, Leaders, company directors and the like" (p. 56) who selected to university not necessarily on merit befit through the powerful influence of their fathers,

Time for the play is fast approaching but Chola is to be seen. Catherine begins to suspect that Chola is trying to avoid watching the play because he does not The Ndatero's plays. Chola maintains that Ndatero was a good playwright. But it occurs to her that this cannot be the reason for his delay. She becomes apprehensive when she imagines that his hitherto missing friend Dambo could be the reason for Chola's delay. This later proves to be the.. real reason. Chola is seen running to the porter's lodge to announce to Catherine that Dambo is dead. An anonymous, caller had alerted both him and Alipo, Dambo's wife, that Dambo's body was found floating in Nkhona River "that morning. Consequently he would have to miss the play. The stupefied young ladies watch him disappear into the rain, now becoming stormier than ever.

Analysis

This chapter brings to light some of the regime' s weapons old oppression namely, detention and murder. Ndatero, author of the play in which Catherine takes part is detained Dambo who was openly critical of the regime,is

Murdered by people who are in all likely hood government pay.

We are also made aware of the corruption in the country. The university, which should have been a cradle of moral excellence, is infiltrated by corrupt people who use their political muscle and influence to secure places for their children in the university. The immorality of people, like the university lecturer, Dr Bakha, who should be role models for the young is also brought to light here. The strained relationships between men and women and between the rich and the poor in society are reflected by the relationships at the university campus between young men and women and between the majority poor and the likes of Diana and her friends'. The rain in this chapter foreshadows the deep emotional and physical suffering of the characters in the chapters that follow and is in keeping with the title of the second part of the book, Night Storms.

Questions

1. Why is Dr Bakha unpopular with his students?
2. What shows that Dr Bakha is an unpopular university lecturer? Give two examples.
3. From where does Dr Bakha derive his feeling of importance?
4. Give four reasons why students are eager to please the following groups of people at the university: guards, cooks and porters.
5. Why are relations between male and female students at the university where Catherine is doing studies strained?
6. Who are referred to as the "been-tos" at the university? 7. Why are they (been-tos) unpopular on the campus?
8. What shows that corruption also exists at the university?
9. "He had 'scored' with many other students." What does the phrase mean about Dr Bakha?
10. Explain briefly what delays Chola from collecting Catherine in time.

PART TWO

Night Storms

This part comes under this title because it brings to a climax the suffering which started in Part One. Although the death of Dambo happens in Part One, it is in this part that more about it is known. It is in this part that its spill-over effects are felt, such effects as the reaction of the regime following the pandemonium that takes place at the funeral of Dambo in his home village. Above all, Mchere himself undergoes the literal storms when he is escorting his son Ntolo to City Central Hospital.

Chapter Five Summary

Bota wants to know Mchere's reasons for not endorsing idea for them (workers at Nkate Bakery) to go on Aware of the fact that Mchere likes beer, Bota proposes stopover at Mchere's favourite Chibuku bar. Bota hopes that "a few drinks would surely help loosen Mchere's tongue" (p. 50).

After buying beer-with Bota's money, Mchere momentarily disappears and comes back proudly and possessively holding Lucy's waist and introduces her to Bota. Lucy, who is a prostitute at the bar, is Mchere's girlfriend. Bota envies1 Mchere. All the prostitutes that Bota knew when he used to frequent bars had since left. He feels lonely and out of place. This sense of loneliness increases when Mchere disappears again with Lucy. When he resurfaces he has given away Bota's K2 to Lucy. Infuriated by Mchere's irresponsibility, Bota leaves the bar for home but soon Mchere catches up with him. His tongue loosened by the fun he has had at the bar, Mchere begins to tell Bota the source of his fears about the strike.

Mchere says his fears erupt from the ordeal of his father during the struggle against the imposition of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. His father, Ntolo, was arrested'. beaten up and imprisoned by the colonial regime. He later died in prison. Mchere has a vivid picture of how his father was tortured by the colonial soldiers and fears the same might happen to him. And that is why in conclusion, he says: "I am worried about tomorrow. I have a feeling that it is going to be disastrous, and know the cost" (p. 67). Mchere is being visionary because his father's death had a negative impact on the family. He left school for there was no one to pay fees for him. There was poverty and misery in the family and Mchere had to find work to assist the family.

Although Mchere claims to have learnt a lesson from that event, he forgets that the askari got angrier with his father because he had slapped one of them for pushing back violently Mchere's mother. Mchere's father wanted to defend his wife, a characteristic absent in Mchere who beats his wife Nambe even when she is pregnant.

When Mchere gets home he is confronted by the cries of his starving children who cry even more on seeing his empty hands. They have not eaten anything since morning. His failure to make them stop crying only increases his fury. And when Nambe intervenes and tells him that another child is sick, she receives a savage beating. However, when he is shown Ntolo looking seriously ill after he was badly bitten by bees, Mchere regrets his actions.

His 'efforts to borrow money with which to hire a taxi to take Ntolo to hospital prove futile. He decides to walk, as tomorrow might be too late. As he walks through the heavy rain to hospital with Ntolo on his back he reflects on the enormity of his poverty. He remembers when he first took to regular drinking and how this has contributed to his poverty. He started the habit when he used to share a room with Bortzo. Bonzo is now arrested for violent robbery.

He had planned to stop drinking after getting married to Nambe but he soon discovered that marriage had its own trials. Nambe's efforts to brew and sell kachasu to eke the family budget were later frustrated by Mchere's folly when he started stealing some of it. The business was dealt a deathblow by the government which placed a ban on it discovering that the drink was unhealthy and could be fatal. With no kachasu in the house Mchere took to the bars where he also engaged in prostitution. He contracted a venereal disease which he passed on to Nambe.

Mchere feels relieved upon seeing the flickering neon lights spelling the words 'City Central Hospital' in the distance. His destination is now within reach.

Analysis

The chapter enables us to see the magnitude of the struggle against poverty and squalor by the inhabitants of Njala. Mchere's favourite bar is a nondescript, rat and cockroach- infested building with a fair share of prostitutes and stale and acrid smells. This is a haven for hardcore drunkards like 'The Throat' and poorly paid workers like Mchere who wish to drown their pain and misery in alcohol and sex. But life here too is competitive and tough. One should be careful to avoid

incurring the wrath of such violent characters as Maggie's boyfriend.

The poverty in Mchere's family is also put into sharper focus: Mchere has to walk in the rain to hospital with Ntolo on his back. He has used old curtains to tie Ntolo onto his back. They get drenched to the skin for the small broken umbrella cannot serve the purpose. Poverty is also bringing in hopelessness among the population. For instance, Bonzo who is now in prison came to town looking for employment to get money to pay for lobola. It took him a year to secure a poorly paying job. The long years he took to get money for Iobola forced his beloved to get married to another man. (Bonzo is like the evil spirit the regime has bred because of poor management of the economy, the evil that has forced Mchere to habitual drinking. It is this same evil that will deprive this nation of the freedom fighter - Chola, for it is Bonzo who kills Chola in prison:)

Violence against women and children is also exposed here. Mchere not only fails to provide for his children but also threatens to beat them for crying with hunger. He also savagely beats Nambe for no apparent reason but that she stops him from beating his innocent children. Moreover, Mchere frustrates Nambe's efforts for economic independence by stealing her kachasu and he even infects her with a venereal disease he contracted from a prostitute.

Despite this wide-spread violence against women and children, Biti comes in to offer solace and challenge to this

evil. She comes to Nambe's rescue when she brings food to Mchere's family when the children are crying with hunger. Even Mchere himself feels subdued by Biti's industriousness and generosity. Biti leads an independent life, for she does not dance to the tune of a man: she had divorced her first husband who was so stingy with food and money, besides his blaming her for their not having children in the family ,

The symbol of the rat re-emerges here.. it comes in moments when mchere feels helpless to taunt him. like the rat, the regime mocks the poor by its blatant insensitivity and oppression. his realisation that the rat is not indestructible also points to the fact that the regime which the rat represents, can also be destroyed through concerted effort.

through the suffering of mchere's father during the clashes of 1953, the author wishes to make the reader appreciate how much people suffered and died in the quest for freedom from colonial masters. however, mchere's fears about the strike show that not much has changed after independence. the new government is as ruthless and oppressive as the colonial one . those entrusted with power, party officials, abuse it for their(personal) gain. they stooped so low as to rape poor women who wish to bleed and sell kachasu to support their families. this leads to disillusionment and sense of betrayal among the oppressed.

1 why does Bota persuade mchere to have a drink with him at the chibuku bar?

2. how does mchere's squander botas' money and why is bota furious?

3 why was mchere's father arrested/?

4 In what way is mchere 's family affected by ntolo's arrested?

5.According to Mchere, what is connection between his father's arrest and impending strike
why does Mnchere beat Nambe when he comes home ?

7.In what way is Biti show as a friend indeed of Nambe in this chapter?

9 In what way has the chapter exposed Mchere responsible husband?

10.In this chapter, what shows that the regime oppresses the people?

Chapter Six

Summary

After leaving Catherine and Thoko at the university campus, Chola accompanies Alipo, Dambo's sister and her husband to the City Central Hospital's mortuary to identify Dambo's body. The face of the body bearing Dambo's name is mauled beyond recognition. But Alipo manages to identify it through a scar on the knee of his left leg.

The brutal fact that Dambo is now dead makes Chola feel guilty for not joining the Movement for National Transformation that was geared towards overthrowing the regime and introducing a popular government as Dambo had suggested the last time Chola had talked to him. On this occasion Chola warned Dambo against exposing himself too much to his enemies. But Dambo felt that too much caution would degenerate into cowardice. According to him, the time was ripe to tell the people that the system under which they were evil and served the interests of the rich. As such, they had to stand up and fight to destroy it so that a better one should replace it. Dambo persuaded Chola to join the Movement to match his words with action. Merely criticising the government without actively being involved in trying to change it was a waste of time for Dambo. But Chola was still hesitant. As he remembers all this, Dambo's words "I hope I won't be dead by the time you finally decide to join the Movement" (p. 77) keep ringing in Chola's ears.

Chola remembers Dambo's words that the Movement had now infiltrated enough: "We have infiltrated and we will continue to infiltrate and work with all the progressive

forces in our society: workers, peasants, students, patriotic elements, radical intellectuals" (p. 77). This explains why Dambo was assassinated only a few days before the strike. Perhaps the regime associated him with the strike at Nkate Bakery.

Chola is aroused to the present by a nurse who asks to know whether they would collect Dambo's body straight away. They agree that the body will be collected the following morning. Once out of the mortuary, Alipo faints from shock and is rushed into the Emergency Ward accompanied by Chola, Dambo's sister and her husband.

Meanwhile Mchere who has been thoroughly beaten by the heavy rain arrives at the hospital. Despite all this, he is happy that Ntolo's life will finally be saved at this place of hope (the hospital). He tries to find the Emergency Ward, leaving pools of dirty water and a trail of footsteps on the brightly lit corridors in the process. After several fruitless efforts, he meets two men pushing a dead body on a stretcher to the mortuary. These direct him to the ward he is looking for. Upon arrival at the admissions office, all eyes turn to him in bewilderment, as he was literally soaked in rainwater. The fact that he was wetting the carpet did not endear him to the State Registered Nurse (SRN) and a student nurse who unreasonably asks him to get dry first before entering the office. But Chola

who is in the same office gets annoyed by such insensitivity and surprises everybody when he admonishes the nurse and invites Mchere to come and sit next to him. When the two men recognise each other, having met at the bakery earlier that day, the tension between them eases and Mchere gets to know what brought Chola to the hospital.

It is way past midnight when Alipo's turn to be examined the doctor comes. The doctor advises that she would have remained under observation overnight. After Chola leave Mchere feels isolated as he waits for his turn to meet doctor. But when his turn does come after waiting for long, he is told that he is in the paying section. His that he would pay the money on Friday after being paid never accepted'." He has no choice but to go to the Section which was free.

Bitter and heart-broken, Chola drives home after Dambo's sister and her husband. Much as he wishes to the night's experience with Catherine, he is too tired proceed to the university campus. He ends up spending long night punctuated by remorseful thoughts nightmares alone.

At the university, Catherine, like Chola, spends a sleepless night. Shattered by Dambo's death and worried about might happen to Chola, Dambo's close friend, she celebrate the success of the play she has participated Although Ndatero had been detained for his writings, the censors allowed this play to be I because if was set in the remote past and had some dealing with tradition. The play was about a ruthless bloodthirsty King Kadzidzi who murders his (own) and sells others into slavery. Catherine plays the role Tafa, the youngest wife of the cruel King. The marriage. never consummated as the King has become impotent. hide his shame, the King engages the services of man who sleeps with her and she bears a son. But when joins the general outcry of the people against the Kin There was a storm and the dhow began sinking and there was great wailing and the young men jumped into the waters only to be devoured by crocodiles. Tafa clung to her child as the dhow sank. Then the child was wrenched from her by violent currents and drifted to the bottom of the Great Waters. And soon she, too, was engulfed in the bowels of the merciless waters (pp. 86- 7).

The chapter emphasises the ruthlessness of the regime which murders its (own) citizens in cold blood. Dambo has obviously been murdered because of his activities with the Movement. Ndatero's detention also shows the intolerance of the government which views anybody opposed to its ways as an enemy. Dambo's words to Chola, however, point to the fact that there was need to mobilise the people through the Movement to topple the government that only served the interests of the selected few and replace it with a humane one.

(Also see illustration on the front cover of Smouldering Charcoal.)

Analysis

cruelty and the famine that has struck the kingdom, the King who regards her as the living symbol of his failure as a man, sells her and her son into slavery. She, together with many others, dies on the high seas when a heavy storm strikes:

Mchere's experiences at the hospital emphasise the fact that there was no real change after Independence. His happiness Upon discovering that after Independence there were no longer European sections, Asian sections, and African sections in any of the country's hospitals and other

public places is short-lived. He soon realises that these have now been replaced by sections for the rich and those for the poor. As such, doctors in the section for the rich would rather attend to a constipated individual who can pay on the spot than a patient, like Ntolo, requiring immediate attention because payment was not guaranteed.

In the Ndatero's play is an allegorical commentary on what is happening in the country. (An allegory is a story in poetry or any type of continuous writing with two meanings, and therefore can mean one or two things.) The Leader, like the uncle to King Tatha, assumed power with the promise to introduce peace. But once he gets the power he turns upon his own people, killing and detaining those who opposed his oppressive ways. Dambo and Ndatero are some such victims. The Leader, like King Tatha, does not want to be associated with failure but success.

Questions

1. How does Alipo recognise Dambo's body at the mortuary?
2. In what way is Alipo affected by her husband's death in this chapter?
3. What shows that Dambo is a prominent freedom fighter?
4. "People must become aware that the system we have at present is evil" (p. 77). Give examples that support the statement above.
5. Why is Chola hesitant to join Dambo's Movement?
6. Why does Chola feel as if he is the one who betrayed Dambo?
7. Why is Mchere not familiar with the City Central Hospital?
8. What problems does Mchere face before Ntolo gets treatment?
9. In what ways are the nurses rude to Mchere?,
10. How does Chola assist Mchere at the Hospital?
11. What led to the detention of the university lecturer, Ndatero?
12. What instances in this chapter show that the regime has no respect for human rights?

Chapter Seven.

Summary

It never rains but pours for Mchere in this chapter. wasted time at the paying section, Mchere finds another queue at the General Casualty. The queue moves slowly until dawn and Mchere grooms over his and his fear for the impending strike,, and even over ordeal. He finds everything confusing. Mchere would to leave the queue, stand up and stretch his legs, but cannot. Temporarily leaving the queue would mean lose his place and starting all over again. He perseveres. health assistants arrive and start serving patients. An woman who had been coughing the whole night in queue, unattended, dies. Memories of his father advised his children to stand up and fight injustice come him but there is nothing he can do under th circumstances. The (dead) woman's body is taken aw Mchere has not eaten for two days now and feels hungry Ntolo too needs something to eat. His wish is that should come and take his place in the queue so that he go and look for food for himself and Ntolo and also children and Grandmother at home. It is at three when Mchere is just within reach of a health assistant Nambe appears. Mchere feels relieved at her sight. takes over the place of Mchere and he goes home to look food. Ntolo is admitted and Nambe vows to divorce soon after Ntolo's recovery.

The children's ward (Ward 4C) is crowded with two to three children share the same bed and sleep on the floor. Nambe compares it to a pigsty It all:, She admires: the young doctor who attends to and, envies :her status. She wishes to defend for herself so that Mchere should stop abusing her to see Bota at the bakery to ask: is also afraid that the other strikers :might harass picketing at the bakery as agreed. Having h being angry with him for having squandered his money on Lucy, he gives up and goes to see Bwana Patel an Indian trader: to whom he is a regular customer. Patel refuses him his request because he already owes him K20. Mchere leaves the shop, lost and confused. He contemplates pretending to be a street beggar but he realises that he Would only be risking arrest as the from the city in anticipation for the vast of a European reader in a fortnight's time. Having exhausted all possibilities, he decides to try Lucy at the bar. :Although her reception is far from warm she is kind enough to cook him a decent meal. He tells her about hi son's sickness and strike at the bakery. But when she latter says that somehow women would have to strike against for the abuse they receive from them, For him men are far more superior cannot afford something as serious as strike

this angers, Lucy who remembers the abuse that she had suffered at the hands of men. In particular she remembers MP: for Njala who had seduced her by, promising her school fees at one of the famous, boarding school for girls. when she became pregnant, he abandoned her: and her family with undisclosed punishment she, Would tell people that he was responsible. . responsible

suffered so much at the hands of men, she cannot help comparing them to dogs. However, after listening to Mchere's troubles, she is touched and she gives him a debt of K3.

After buying foodstuffs from the market, he decides to leave some of the food for the children and Grandmother at home before proceeding to the hospital. But his suffering for the day is worsened by his discovery that his family has been evicted from their house,

Analysis

The chapter touches on poverty and the poor health services in the country. In spite of the much-touted development in the country, health services are very poor. The sick spend ages in a queue to the extent that others die there before being attended by a doctor. There are not enough hospitals and no enough nurses and doctors to attend to the sick. Owing to the lack of enough hospitals, the wards of the available hospitals are crowded and unhygienic. The need for struggle against injustice is also hinted at here through the teachings of Mchere's father.

The hypocrisy and immorality of the leaders is also shown here. The leaders evict beggars from the city to create the impression to the visiting presidents that there is none poor in this country. Instead of providing for them, the government sends the beggars home to wallow in even more poverty. The hospital personnel too are concerned with trivial issues (like the cleanliness of the carpet) rather than with the lives and welfare of the patients. The M.P. for Njala fails to be a model for moral uprightness as he

seduced and made Lucy pregnant. Worse still, he abandoned the mother and the child, forcing Lucy into prostitution to support herself and her son (paying for his school fees). The people who should be champions of moral uprightness perpetrate moral degeneration in this society.

Mchere's views on women reveal the subjectivity of women in this society. Women are viewed as chattels. They are supposed to serve men who are their superiors. The folly in this line of thinking is proved when we notice that Mchere's fellow men fail to assist him. It is Lucy, the prostitute, who feels pity with him and gives him a loan of K3. The need for women empowerment through education is all too clear in Nambe's admiration of the female doctor who administers an injection on Ntolo.

Questions

1. Why is Mchere hesitant to leave the queue to stretch himself in the General Casualty Section?
2. Explain how Mchere suffers at the hospital.
3. Why is Mchere happy that Nambe has followed him at the hospital?
4. Why does Nambe wish she were educated when she witnesses a young female doctor attending to Ntolo?
5. Why is Mchere hesitant to see Bota for assistance?
6. Compared with Bwana Patel, in what way is Lucy a friend indeed to Mchere?
7. Why does Bwana Patel refuse to assist Mchere?
8. In what way is Mchere affected by Bwana Patel's refusal to lend him money?

Dambo's father had gone to the Boma to pay his taxes (to the same government that has assassinated his son) when Chola, Alipo, Catherine and Alipo's three children arrive with Dambo's body. The body is put in a house he (Dambo) had just completed for his parents. Dambo's father

was once a chief during the colonial era but was deposed some years after Independence for lack of his support to the Party. Some local Party's Youth Militias come to Dambo's funeral in the name of maintaining peace and order.

The chapter also introduces Smart, their house servant. Smart is not really smart in the sense of the word for he acts as the regime's eye to spy on Chola and Catherine.

Later, Chola tells Catherine of his wish to resign from his job and go into exile. Catherine is hesitant to agree to his proposal of following him into exile. She has a few months to finish her studies at the university. Besides, being first born in their family and the first in the family to go to university, her father expects a lot from her as far as assistance to the family is concerned. She never cherishes the whole idea of breaking away from her own people and facing an unknown future in exile. They quarrel because Chola does not see any sense in Catherine's arguments since their decision is between life and death.

On the eve of the burial, when late Dambo's relatives overhear the Youth Militia whispering to each other that Dambo was a subversive and that all subversives were bound to end like Dambo, they (the relatives) decide to evict them from the premises. A fight ensues between these Youth Militias and the united villagers.

During the burial, mourners at the cemetery are surrounded by reinforcements of the Youth Militia from the neighbouring villages. Members of the Police Mobile Unit have also been called all the way from the Boma. Later "a number of people from the village were taken to the Boma for questioning by Special Branch, including Alipo and Dambo's father" p. 113). In fact one of Dambo's uncles is detained because of the fight that erupted on the eve of Dambo's burial.

Two days after Dambo's body was recovered from Nkhona River, Chola and Catherine drive to late Dambo's house to collect Alipo and her three children to the mortuary. After collecting Dambo's body, they make for Dambo's village for burial. The driving is tedious and long due to the nature of the road and also the tension that grips their hearts.

At home, the idea of going into exile disturbs Catherine. If she goes with Chola to exile, that would mark the end of her education and the hopes of leading a normal life. At same time, if she chooses to stay, she would lose him probably be in trouble with the security agents for be fiancée to a subversive in exile. Meanwhile Chola is trailed by the Special Branch maybe because of his role in Dambo's funeral. Later, Catherine agrees that Chola go into exile for his own safety, but before that they agree have their marriage registered at the Registrar General Office. To do this they need two witnesses and choose Thoko to be her witness. The idea of becoming Catherine Chola Mbewe invigorates her.

The prospect of marrying also makes Chola happy. Six ago when he was in the United States, he got so close marrying an African American woman, The two failed agree on where they should stay

after their marriage. woman refused to come to Africa, and Chola too resolute not to live in the US.

At work, Chola hands in his resignation letter to the but do not disclose his intention to go into exile. foolish, Chola. What else can you do? Reconsider decision before you come to regret it" (p. 116). Editor's words foretell Chola's arrest in the chapter of Part Three when we see Chola in prison.)

Analysis

The brutality of the regime is emphasised and exposed the presence of the Youth Militia and the Police Mobile at the funeral of Dambo. After murdering Dambo regime cannot even leave his relatives to mourn him peace. Worse still, they trouble his widow and father questioning after clashes between the Youth Militia and villagers at the funeral. Dambo's uncles are even made to languish in prison. The fact that Dambo's kinsmen suspect that his death is a result of a conspiracy within the ranks of the party to eliminate him as he was a threat to a certain faction from the central region reveals that there is regionalism in the country.

Chola is trailed by Special Branch for no other reason than that he was a good friend of the militant Dambo. Here the regime is also shown as being ruthless as it persecutes innocent people related to those it considers subversives. Catherine feels that staying behind after Chola has gone into exile will not be a better choice, as she is likely to be persecuted for being a "fiancée of a man who had opted for exile" (p. 113).

Questions

1. Explain how Chola and Catherine are affected by Dambo' s death.
2. How did Dambo risk his (own) life?
3. Why does Catherine refuse to go to exile with Chola?
4. How do people of Dambo's village suffer at Dambo's funeral?
5. Why does the regime send the Youth Militia to Dambo's funeral?
6. What leads to the fight between the villagers and the Party's Youth Militias?
7. In this chapter, what shows that the regime is cruel, oppressive and lacks respect for human rights?
8. In what way does Chola endanger his life when he resigns from his job?
9. Why is the Editor a likely person to have betrayed Chola?

PART THREE

Smouldering Charcoal

Chola and the bakery workers are in prison. Chola is arrested at his house after being betrayed by Smart, his house servant. Smart had told the authorities that Chola was planning to go into exile. The bakery workers, on the other hand, are rounded up by police at the bakery and taken to prison after refusing to stop the strike. This brings fear and tension in Njala where the wives of the bakery workers boycott dance rehearsals called to prepare for Independence Day celebrations. In prison, Chola becomes leader of the Movement while Mchere, Chola's first convert amongst the bakery workers, becomes its general secretary. As a result of the poor conditions in prison, the prisoners go on a hunger strike. This invites a lot of torture, which also leads to Chola's death.

The other prisoners are later released following the fall from power of the Secretary General of the Party. Catherine, Ndatero and Chola's family go into exile in a neighbouring country where together with other exiles they strengthen the structures of the Movement to fight and depose the oppressive regime at home.

Chapter Nine

Summary

Chola is in prison. He wakes up very early after a night spent on a bare floor and a single blanket to be confronted by the smell of human waste from a bucket in a corner of the cell. He feels thirsty but when he picks up a cup of water to drink, he sees a dead fly in it. Shocked by the grim reality that awaits him in prison, he throws a cup to the ground. The noise caused by the cup wakes up the other prisoners who stare at him with curiosity.

Later, Chola discovers that the food in prison is awfully. The porridge that they are served with is lumpy and of fire smoke. To his amazement some of the prisoners eat heartily. After breakfast the prisoners are made to stand around a rock in the centre of the prison compound that apparently is supposed to be removed. While taking a break from the back-breaking work, Chola tells Mchere the other prisoners what had happened for him to be here. He says three men (in dark suits) from the section the police called the Special Branch searched his house snatched books from his shelf and later drove him to in a Peugeot 504. But the other prisoners do not know the crime he might have committed. In fact Chola does reveal that the three men had also asked him about intention to flee the country.

Mchere also tells him that on Friday, which happened to the second day of the strike, a track-load of policemen to Nkate Bakery where they rounded up all the workers, shooting to death two of the workers in the says Members of the Emergency Striking Committee like Bota, Tione and Nkuntho suffered the worst, for they were accused of economic subversion.

When time for lunch comes round, Chola finds the food revolting. The mgaiwa is badly cooked with a lot of lumps and is as hard as a stone. The relish is a hideous meshy fish which look like worms. To his surprise, some prisoners fight over such food. Mchere advises him to eat the food for his survival and Chola sees sense in this advice.

The prisoners are locked up at three o'clock and Chola finds the silence that reigns in the cell and the heat oppressive. At six o'clock prayers begin in the cell led by one of the bakery workers whom the others named Our Holy Brother. He was founder and leader of a church in prison called Freedom-in- Christ Church. He uses the Bible smuggled into prison by one of the prison guards who, according to Mchere, can be bribed by the hideous prison food. Our Holy Brother's sermon dwells on God's power to liberate his people from oppression. God would deliver the prisoners from their predicament as he did the Israelites from Pharaoh if they could only believe in him.

After the sermon Mchere furnishes Chola with information on what happened during the strike. He relates that the strike went on very well on the first day. The strikers carried placards proclaiming their demands .and they attracted a lot of attention. Efforts to make them stop striking and go back to work failed. On the second day, however, the workers Were confronted by locked gates. They immediately suspected that something was wrong but they continued with the strike. Negotiations between management and the strikers reached a deadlock. The striker's maintained stand to continue the strike until their demands was met. But circa four o'clock, a truckload of policemen arrived at the bakery, rounded up all the strikers and took them to prison. As he ends his story Mchere can no longer hide his bitterness against the regime that betrayed those who had laid down their lives in the fight for Independence.

Analysis

The regime's human rights abuses are further highlighted here. Strikers are arrested for protesting against low salaries and poor conditions of service. They are denied the right to speak up against injustice. Chola is also unjustly arrested for being a friend to murdered militant, Dambo, and planning to flee the country. Police brutality is also exposed in the chapter when Mchere is savagely beaten while trying to escape arrest and two bakery workers are murdered by the police.

In this chapter we also come in contact with the horrible prison conditions in the country. There is overcrowding in the prisons' filthy cells The food is horrible and the' prisoners are made to work in the sweltering heat of the sun.

What makes the punishment even more unjustified is that it is meted out to innocent people while the real criminals like Duli, the murderer, remain untouched, as the prison guards fear them.

The regime's betrayal of those who died in the fight for Independence is also emphasised in the chapter.

Questions

1. Mention the appalling prison conditions Chola and the Nkate Bakery workers are subjected to.

2. Why is Mchere hesitant to accept Chola in prison?
3. Explain the circumstances that lead to the arrest of the bakery workers.
4. Explain how Chola is arrested.
5. In what way does the chapter show abuse of power by the prison guards?
6. How do the prison guards also suffer in the regime?
7. What message does Our Holy Brother preach in the cells?
8. How does Our Holy Brother get the Bible in prison?
9. What is Mchere's greatest worry in prison?
10. In what way does he prison conditions harden the resolve of Mchere?

Chapter Ten

Summary

Nambe spends a sleepless night after Mchere leaves her the hospital with Ntolo to go and look for food. In morning Ntolo's condition slightly improves and manages to swallow a few morsels of food. Nambe waits Mchere in vain till evening comes.

Back in Njala, the women also wait in vain for husbands who had gone to the bakery to continue strike. The women grow more apprehensive when the who are sent to look for the men at the bakery report that men are not there. Later it turns out that they are not in bars either. Rumours that the bakery workers have arrested are later confirmed by a guard at the bakery and announcement on the radio.

Nambe learns about the men's arrest from Biti who pays a visit the following day. It is then that she gets to know Mchere too has been arrested. Later that day Nambe Ntolo home from hospital against Biti's suggestion Ntolo should remain in hospital for a while. surprisingly, Ntolo quietly dies in his sleep at night. He buried the following day, a Saturday, without a real ceremony after Nambe chases away the hypocritical who denied her a car to take Ntolo to hospital. The death Ntolo in the absence of his father infuriates a lot of women. To show their fury the wives of the arrested decide to boycott traditional dance rehearsals scheduled thee following day in preparation for celebrations. This decision has a great impact on the that demanded absolute obedience from its supporters. As punishment for their disobedience the women are denied access to all public services in Njala.

The punishment, however, does not stop*them from boycotting the rehearsals the following Sunday when they decided to visit their husbands at the prison. In solidarity with their fellow women, Lucy and Biti join the journey to the prison. But on arrival, there they are denied the opportunity to see their husbands who have been branded subversives. The same fate befalls Catherine and Thoko who come to see Chola. Nevertheless, the journey to the prison provides an opportunity for a meeting between the Njala women and the highly educated Catherine and Thoko who promise to visit Njala in future. The two university students are greatly impressed by the courage of these uneducated women to boycott dance rehearsals, something that even university students cannot think of doing.

When Catherine and Thoko later arrive at Chola's house, Thoko leaves Catherine alone to go and bu3) coffee at the shops. In her absence one of the men who came to search the house the day before, sneaks in and unsuccessfully attempts to rape Catherine. He runs away when Thoko arrives in the house. The experience of attempted rape and the thug's revelation that it was Smart, their house servant, who had betrayed Chola, leaves Catherine in a state of shock.

An equally bad experience awaits the women of Njala. Mrs Gonthi and the Party Chairman who had waited in vain for the women at the football grounds were determined to Punish them severely. And so when the women enter Njala they are met by the Youth Militia who take them straight t the

football grounds to meet the irate Party Chairman and the sour faced Mrs Gonthi.

Analysis

Smart's betrayal of his master, Chola, shows how insecure many citizens are in the country' as every individual is a potential traitor. This recalls the fear of the women at Biti's place to comment on what Mrs Gonthi had said for fear of betrayal. The human rights abuses in the country are shown here by the attempted rape. of Catherine by the man who arrested her husband the previous day. The denial of visits from loved ones to the prisoners together with the inhumane conditions under which the prisoners are kept also point to the same.

The description of the prison guards, and the fact that they can be bribed by the bad food in the previous chapter, shows that they too are victims of the oppressive system in the country. The regime's ruthlessness is highlighted by the fear that pervades Njala when the wives of the strikers boycott the dance rehearsals. The people are sure that certain oppressive measures await the women and wonder whether these measures will not affect them in one way or another.

Questions

1. What problems does Nambe face when Mchere is imprisoned?
2. How do the Njala women discover that their husbands have been detained?
3. How does Biti assist Nambe at Ntolo's funeral?
4. Why does Nambe chase the priest at her son's funeral?
5. Why do the Njala women boycott the dance rehearsals?
5. In what way are the women punished for this?
6. Why do the prison guards refuse the women the opportunity to see their husbands?
7. In what ways do the Njala women show solidarity in "times of trouble?
8. Why does Lucy take part in the procession of women who go to see their husbands in prison?
9. What problems does Catherine face following Chola's arrest?
10. How does Catherine discover that the regime has eyes and ears everywhere in this chapter?
11. Why is Nambe considered one of the ringleaders of the striking women?

Chapter Eleven

Summary

Chola and the bakery workers are moved to A Block of prison. Owing to the inhumane conditions under which they are kept, the prisoners led by Chola, organise a hunger strike to demand better food and improved living

Chola introduced the teachings of the Movement in prison and has won several prisoners such as Mchere

Bota. They do not touch food for four days. Although

they are adversely affected by hunger, the prisoners stick to their resolve. The prison guards' threats of punishment if they continue the strike and Our Holy Brother's death only proved the strike justifiable.

The strikers are denied the opportunity to pay their respects to Our Holy Brother's body. Instead they are all in one small leaking cell. Here Chola learns that the playwright whom he met in A Block and had with at length about the Movement and the proper role literature, taught Catherine at the university. confesses to him that she is his fiancé.

Regarding the aspirations of the Movement to replace government, Ndatero argues that the problem is deeper just replacing one government by another. There was possibility of the next government being as tyrannical as one before it. But Chola maintains that there was need to capture state power first to create a more democratic and humane society. While Ndatero is of the view that Movement should clearly spell out what it is going to do once in power, Chola feels that the Movement should power first and then strengthen the structures of democracy to eradicate poverty and greed.

While Ndatero and Chola are arguing about the role of the Movement, two guards appear in the cell to warn the strikers to stop the strike by the following day. Chola and Mchere, who is the organising secretary of the Movement in prison and one of the first bakery workers to join it and are seated on opposed ends of the cell, exchange glances on hearing the threat.

True to their warning, a group of guards come to the cell the next day. While they are surveying the cell Mchere sees a rat. He ignores the guards and chases and kills it. While looking at the dead rat, a strange expression of satisfaction spreads across his face. Later, Mchere, Chola, Bota, Tione and others are singled out as ringleaders of the strike and are led out of the cell. Outside the Cell Chola is separated from the rest who are taken for interrogation and various forms of torture. They are advised against following Chola and his Movement which Will be crushed by the regime. But the strikers refuse to give in. For four days they are ruthlessly tortured in various ways including being thrown (individually) in a dark room of icy water with a live snake in it. Mchere sticks to his resolve and is deeply hurt when, on being taken back to his cell, he discovers that a few of his colleagues including Bota had relented. They nevertheless draft a letter to be smuggled out of prison describing their plight. Meanwhile, after being separated from the others, Chola is taken to a cell in the Condemned Section of the prison." The superintendent, also known as 'hangman', comes to interrogate him, but threats and torture do not succeed in forcing Chola to admit that he was the one who organised the strike. He maintains that the organisation of the strike was a collective responsibility. To break him up, the prison superintendent strategically puts Chola in a cell together with Duli, wh'o is contemptuously called "Lizard the Tough" by the other prisoners. Duli beats and rapes Chola. But when he is later taken for yet another interrogation, he does not respond to the questions put forward to him. Afterwards, he is taken to a tiny stinking cell occupied by Bonzo. Chola is frightened by the silence of the seemingly mad man and his violent behaviour when food is brought into the cell. It later occurs to Chola that the man is not mad but is waiting for death by hanging.

On the morning of his last day of life, Bonzo murders Chola who the prison authorities deliberately and knowingly put in his company. Mchere is left to be haunted by the knowledge that it was his one time friend, Bonzo, who killed Chola, after Nangaine, a prison guard, confides in him.

Analysis

The regime's tarnished human rights record is further exposed by the atrocities that prisoners encounter in prison. The prisoners are ruthlessly tortured for going on a hunger strike to demand some humane treatment.

Prisons are used as a weapon to maintain a tyrannical hold on unquestionable power. The suppression of dissent is not only outside prison but also inside it. Everybody has to blindly obey whatever those in positions of power said. The degree of the torture the strikers are subjected to justifies the need to replace the regime for something better.

Ndatoro's reservations in this chapter regarding the Movement's ability to bring real change in the country hint ' at the need for revolutionary movements to map out what they would do when they assume power. Otherwise such movements end up being more oppressive than the ones they opposed. Here Chola also shows the need for unity to fight for a common cause.

1. Why are the strikers transferred to A Block of the prison?
2. What are the prisoners fighting for by staging a hunger strike?
3. Why does the death of Our Holy Brother shake the prisoners?
4. Why do Chola and Mchere feel it necessary that most prisoners enrol in the Movement?
5. What are the objectives of the Movement?
6. In what way are the strikers tortured for refusing to call off the strike?
7. Outline some of the dehumanising conditions Chola and Mnchere are subjected to by the prison superintendent.
8. Who is Nangaine? What role does he play in the struggle against the regime?
9. Why are the hunger strikers given blankets that were once used by prisoners who died from leprosy and tuberculosis?
10. How does Mchere learn about his son's death?
11. Give examples which show that the superintendent is a cruel man prison
12. Who are Duli and Bonzo? What role do they play in the prison?
13. What does Bonzo urge Chola to do before he dies?
14. Give instances of gross human rights abuse in chapter.

Summary

Catherine gets to hear about Chola's death a week after he was assassinated. She wishes she had had a child with him to sustain his memory. She attends his burial ceremony at his village after which she returns to the city.

One day Dr Bakha calls her to his office wherever tells her that the regime wanted her to discontinue her studies because of her relationship with Chola. A Senate meeting was to take place the following day to formalise her dismissal from the university. Dr Bakha plans to use this as an opportunity to sleep with Catherine. The plan is to take her to a motel where he would sleep with her after promising to fight for her right to continue with her studies.

Although she allows Dr Bakha to take her to the motel, Catherine runs away when he attempts to rape her. Two days later, she receives a letter of expulsion from the university. Her fellow students' attempted strike bears no fruits while Dr Bakha's attempts to defend her during the Senate meeting earn him a dismissal from his job.

After moving out of Chola's company house, Catherine goes to stay with an aunt instead of going to the village. Thoko brings her a letter from prison one day which she sends outside the country for publication. Since the letter also contains Mchere's message to Nambe she decides to go to Njala where she learns that Nambe no longer lives there. She meets Lucy instead, who has opened a hairdressing salon. It is from her that Catherine learns about the fate of the wives of the prisoners. Lucy tells her that on arrival in Njala from their unsuccessful prison visit, the women were led by the Youth Militia to the football ground where the irate Part), Chairman and Mrs Gonthi awaited them. There, the women are abused by the two party officials while their hoes' er6 being 't6oied.'Biti lost her" sewing machine m the process. In the end 'those suspected of being ring leaders were picked out and the rest were allowed to go home. Sacred of what might happen to her fellow women , Lucy led a delegation to the mp for the a read to seek his intervention . it is the mp 's intervention that enabled the women to escape with a comparativevely smaller punishment of banishment from Njala. Bit find s life out of njala very hard but she manages to find ways of survival. She manages to keep communication between her and Lucy and Nambe . this is how she gets mchere's and Lucy's letters through to Nambe and also how she gets to know about the birth of names 's child on the night of 29 th January.

The fall from grace of t he secretary general of the party leads the releaesee of hundreds of prisoner's including mchere and other bakery worker . on arrival in njala, the men are told about the fate of the women. Full o9f anticipation , mnchere goes to his village. But he finds Nambe pregnant by gwape, his cousin, Gwape who had the full support of the youth militia had threaten Nambe with eviction from the village claiming that mchere, her husband, had died in prison. She was also being constantly harassed by the youth militia who called her wife of a subversive. Gwape rapes her one night and she falls pregnant.

On hearing this, Mchere goes to Gwape's house to confront him but he does not find him. When Gwape learns about Mchere's plans, he calls a meeting with the Youth Militia where an agreement

to deal with Mchere is reached. But Mchere escapes just in time.

Bitter with Gwape's behaviour, Nambe torches his house killing all five people in it including Gwape himself. She too, like Mchere, crosses the boarder into a neighbouring country where the family gets reunited.

The release of the prisoners following the fall from grace of the Secretary General of the party rouses memories of Chola in Catherine. In the relaxed atmosphere following the Secretary General's fall, Catherine manages to get a job at the city national library. It is here where she meets Ndatero, her former lecturer. He had received a cool welcome from his materialistic wife and when he is later divorced, he proposes marriage to Catherine. Upon realising that they were not safe in the country, they go into exile in a neighbouring country. But exile too has its own challenges. The living conditions for refugees waiting for admission papers are appalling. Luckily enough for them, they meet Peter, Ndatero's old friend who offers them accommodation and assists them to get a job. They, however, do not forget the trouble at home. The Movement is as much alive here as it is at home. An extraordinary congress is convened to map out the Movement's (future) strategy and elect new leaders. Mchere and Nambe, like many other exiles attend and it is on this occasion that Mchere tells Catherine that he had. Chola's manuscripts which he got from Nangaine, a prison guard who came from the same village with him. He offers to clarify some issues in the manuscript for her.

Analysis

The fact that many prisoners are released from jail after the fall of the Secretary General from power is testimony to the fact that many innocent people were unjustly imprisoned by the regime. Many people were physically and psychologically maimed while others like Chola, and Our Holy Brother, lost their lives.

Furthermore, Chola's manuscript shows the need to preserve the memory of what the people went through during the oppressive system of government. Those who suffered like Chola should share their experiences with others to preserve this memory.

Those outside prison also suffered in various ways. Morally bankrupt people as Dr Bakha take advantage of such women as Catherine whose only crime is to be a fiancée of an imprisoned Chola. Dr Bakha wants to exploit her sexually. Catherine loses her place at the university and for a long time cannot find a job.

The wave of the bakery workers are abused by the Party Chairman Mrs Gonthi before being thrown out of Njala. Nambe is constantly abused by the Youth Militia who call her a wife. of a subversive. Worse still, Mchere's cousin Gwape raped her. This rape shows how one relative turned against her in this oppressive regime. Relationships were ruthlessly broken as the leaders struggled to cling to power. ;

When Nambe burns Gwape's house, we learn that the only way to deal with the oppression in the country is to stand up and fight. This also shows women's ability to fight against oppression. The need to struggle for change is emphasised by the exiles' continued involvement in the Movement which they hope will topple the oppressive regime and introduce a democratic society. The suffering that people go through in exile only strengthens their determination to fight and depose the oppressors back home.

Questions

1. Where does Catherine live after being expelled from the university?
2. Why does the Senate decide to expel her?
- 3.. In what way are Dr Bakha and the university Chaplain punished for defending Catherine?
4. Who else suffers for sympathising with Catherine?
5. Why is the Nkate Bakery Managing Director arrested?
6. Why does Catherine go to Njala?
7. Why are people in Njala reluctant to talk to Catherine when she inquires about Nambe, Biti and Lucy?
8. What business does Lucy embark on after her expulsion from Njala?
9. Explain the circumstances that lead to the release of Mchere and other political detainees.
10. Give evidence that shows that Gwape, Chairman of the Youth Militia in Mchere's village, abused his power.
11. Why is Mchere angry with Nambe when he arrives home after his release?
12. What role does Grandmother play in Mchere's family?
13. How does Nambe punish Gwape?

Epilogue

Catherine and Ndatero who are now blessed with a baby girl, Mtsogolo, and Mchere and his family are still in exile. Their living conditions have greatly improved over the years. Mchere is a guerrilla fighter. He is involved with the military wing of the Movement. Catherine who finished her B.A. at the local university and is registered for an M.A. is now principal of Jane's Secretarial College. It is at this college that Nambe works as a cleaner. As for Ndatero, apart from teaching at the local university, he also travels widely to publicise and raise funds for the cause.

The novel, Smouldering Charcoal, is actually Chola's manuscript with additions and clarifications from Mchere and Catherine.

Characters

Below are some of the important characters in this novel:

Mchere

When we first meet Mchere, he is a weak character, but he grows stronger as the plot progresses. We first meet Mchere as a poor bakery worker living in the poor neighbourhood of Njala. He is portrayed as an irresponsible and abusive husband. He lives in a dilapidated rat-infested house for which he fails to pay the K1.50 weekly rent. He beats his wife Nambe and fails to provide for his family. He is a drunkard and promiscuous. His failure to provide for his family is partly due to the fact that he spends his money on beer and prostitutes. In fact, he has a prostitute girlfriend, Lucy.

Nevertheless, Mchere is cautious and perceptive. When the bakery workers organise a strike he doubts its success, as he is aware that the government's hand is long and brutal. He fears that the events of 1953 will repeat themselves. True to his fears the bakery workers are rounded up and taken to prison. Two of them are shot dead while fleeing arrest. In prison, he does not take Chola immediately into his confidence fearing that he might be a member of the notorious Special Branch.

His eldest son's (Ntolo's) sickness provides a turning point in Mchere's life. He begins to reflect on his irresponsible life and vows to change for the better. We now begin to see him as a strong willed character. He does not waver from his determination to take his son Ntolo to hospital in spite of the heavy downpour and the pitch darkness. He walks through the rain to the City Central Hospital to have his son treated. In prison he shows his courage and protests against: oppression by becoming Chola's first convert to the Movement. Moreover, during a hunger strike, the prison guard's calculated revelation of the death of his son Ntolo does not break his resolve. This revelation proves how wicked this government is and proves to him that the strike' is justifiable.

Towards the end of the novel, Mchere is portrayed as understanding. When he gets out of prison and finds pregnant by another man, Gwape, he is
However, when his mother explains to him the
that forced Nambe to bow down to Gwape's demands, he decides to deal with Gwape, his cousin.

Nambe and Mchere next meet in exile, he forgives her reconciles with her as his wife. When Gwape's son dies Mchere mourns for him as if it is his own. His participation in the Movement is recognised by the members of the Movement in exile, including Ndatero and Catherine. In exile, Mchere is entrusted with the responsibility to lead group of guerrilla fighters to topple the oppressive regime back home. He is acting as some salt (Mchere) to savour and meaning to the struggle for freedom.

Nambe

Nambe, Mchere's wife is portrayed as a patient and woman. In spite of her suffering at the hands of her husband, she does not divorce him as Biti wanted her to. She is also resourceful as we see her brewing kachasu in attempt to eke the family's budget. But her efforts frustrated by the very husband she tries to assist supporting the family. Throughout the novel, she is known by her clan name Nambe (perhaps to reinforce the fact that positive contributions by women are often deliberately left unnoticed). She is also seen to be tolerant. Although she knows that Lucy is in a sexual affair with Mchere, Nambe does not fight with her when Lucy accompanies women from Njala village to visit their husbands in prison.

Nambe is also courageous. She, together with other Njala women, boycotts the dance rehearsals in preparation for the Independence celebrations although she is aware that the party would punish them for this. She is also vengeful. When Mchere runs away after getting wind of a conspiracy by the Youth Militia led by the rapist Gwape to deal with him, Nambe sets Gwape's house on fire killing all five people in it including Gwape himself before fleeing into exile.

Chola

He is a humble and compassionate character. He feels sorry and touched by the magnitude of poverty in the regime. When he nearly runs into a pedestrian with his car, he apologises to the man. He feels sorry for Mchere when they meet again in hospital and offers him a place next to him when everybody else is trying to avoid him because of his wet clothes. He believes that a society should be run on the principle of equality, As such the oppressive regime has to be replaced by a humane one. However, unlike the militant Dambo, Chola believes in silent and careful protests to avoid exposing oneself to gents of the/regime. This is why he quietly bums party cards at home. When he is sent to cover the opening function of Chasu Brewery, he covers a strike at the bakery and decides to write two reports, the damning one to be published abroad. This also shows that Chola is a smart and calculating revolutionary.

Chola is also resolute. After the murder of Dambo, he resolves to go into exile. Catherine's reservations and his Editor's suggestion to reconsider his decision to resign from his job, do not make him change his mind. When he is arrested, he becomes leader of the Movement in prison and no amount of torture makes him revoke his allegiance. He maintains his courage until he is murdered by Bonzo,

Chola's criticism of the regime is partly influenced by prejudice, idealism and monomania or a feeling that he knows better than others. He sees all literature as geared towards a protest against oppression and exploitation. This is why he unfairly criticises Ndatero's play.

Catherine

Catherine, a university student, is a fiancée to Chola. She is a good actor as she takes part in Ndatero's play, The Great Famine. At times, she seems to lack foresight and is a bit naive. She expects Chola to wait till she finishes her studies before fleeing the country. She does not realise that Chola's closeness to the murdered Dambo would have its effects on them. Her expulsion from university following Chola's arrest awakens her to reality.

She is humble. She interacts with the women of Njala freely and agrees to visit Njala.

Catherine is also strong-willed. She goes against all odds to visit Chola in prison although the women are denied the right to meet the prisoners. Besides, she does not just give in to Chola's suggestions for them to go into exile.

She however, shows a little weakness in that although she is not legally married to Chola, she is seen to be in close sexual intimacy with him. She however, stands her ground when Dr Bakha, the University lecturer, tries to rape her.

When the regime forces her to abandon her studies at the university, s/he falls in love with Ndatero.

She is later

married to him.

Lucy

She is a victim of deception. The Member of Parliament for Njala, Honourable Chide, takes advantage of her poverty and promises to pay her school fees at a girl's boarding school when all he wants is simply to sexually abuse her. He abandons her when she gets pregnant. She becomes a prostitute to find money with which to support her son.

Lucy is kind and sympathetic. She gives Mchere food and lends him K3 after he spends some time without food following his son's sickness and subsequent hospitalisation. She is a freedom fighter who protests against oppression and injustice. Although she has no husband, she joins the boycott of dance rehearsals by the wives of the imprisoned bakery workers and accompanies them to the prison to cheer them up. She believes in women's solidarity to defeat injustice.

Biti

She is the only woman tailor in Njala, thereby breaking male domination of the tailoring business and proving women's capability to do ably what others wrongly prescribe to men only. She is kind-hearted and friendly. Women who come to draw water at the nearby borehole gather at her veranda to chat. She provides food for the impoverished family of Mchere. She is a friend indeed for Nambe. Like Lucy, she also protests against injustice. She joins the boycott of the dance rehearsals and accompanies her fellow women to prison to see their imprisoned husbands. This costs her the sewing machine which gets stolen in the looting that ensues in Njala following the women's bold decision (to boycott the dance rehearsals).

Biti is also a fighter against abuse of women by their husbands. She divorces her first husband for ill-treating her and advises Nambe to leave the abusive Mchere. Her successes show that a woman

was not made to dance to a male tune - she can succeed in life without a husband.

Bota

He is a good friend of Mchere's. Unlike Mchere, he is a thoughtful man who quits drinking to manage his marital affairs properly. He protests against oppression and exploitation by supporting the strike at the bakery where he and Mchere work. He is a good public speaker as evidenced by his speech at the bakery when he was trying to prove the justification of the strike. Unlike Mchere and other prisoners, he exposes his weaknesses when he pulls out from the hunger strike to avert torture by the prison superintendent.

Major Themes

Oppression and Exploitation

This is the central theme in this novel. The people in the regime are oppressed by the tyrannical leadership and also by the rich in society; a case in point is Bwana Patel. There are gross human rights abuses in the country as those with power, be it political or economic, abuse it. Chola is nearly roughed up by Youth Militias selling party cards. Every citizen in the country is supposed to have one. Dambo is murdered by unidentified people because of his opposition to the regime. Dambo's friend Chola, is arrested for planning to flee the country following Dambo's death. Catherine is nearly raped by one of the people who arrested Chola when she returns from prison where she went with a hope to see Chola. Further, the bakery workers are arrested for demanding more pay. In prison they are tortured for demanding proper food and treatment. The prisoners are detained without charge or trial. Furthermore, the prisoners' wives are chased out of Njala for boycotting dance rehearsals. Biti loses her sewing machine in the looting that ensues following the boycott. Women are forced to dance at party functions and before the Leader, and the poor are made to believe that their condition has improved with Independence when in fact it has not.

There are several instances of exploitation in the novel. Lucy is exploited by the M.P. who made her pregnant and consequently abandoned her. The bakery workers are exploited by their bosses who give them peanuts for their back-breaking job. The health sector in the country is also exploitative to the poor. At the City Central Hospital, there are sections for paying patients and those for free. As a result poor citizens who have no money spend ages in a queue to meet a health assistant when the rich can afford to meet a doctor for such minor health problems as constipation. Biti is made to sew party uniforms for a token amount when she could have made a lot of money and improved her living condition if she sewed the clothes of other customers. We also, learn from the novel, that poor women wishing to do some business are systematically raped to get a pass to brew kachasu for sale. Dr Bakha, a university lecturer who should champion moral uprightness, takes advantage of Catherine's predicament to exploit her when she is about to be expelled from the diversity.

Betrayal and Disillusionment

Most people in the regime are frustrated (disillusioned). Because they feel betrayed by the government they themselves put into power through the struggle for Independence. Many citizens

amongst whom is Mchere's father, Ntolo, lost their lives in the struggle for freedom and - Independence. These had hoped that with Independence their living conditions or those of their children would improve and the oppression and exploitation that they experienced from the colonial masters would end. However, many years after Independence, the much-hoped-for change remains a far-fetched dream. The freedom fighters, dead or alive, and the rest of the citizens feel betrayed and disillusioned by the government. It is this disillusionment that forces the poor bakery workers at Nkate Bakery to stage a strike. This disillusionment is almost everywhere both among the educated, for instance Chola, and the uneducated, such as Mchere.

Chola feels betrayed by his fellow students with whom he denounced Dictatorship, Imperialism, Colonialism and Neo-colonialism during their school days. Most of these have since joined, the dictatorial government they used to. denounce fervently. Honourable Chide, M.P. for Njala, betrays Lucy. He promises to pay her school fees at a prestigious boarding secondary school for girls when in fact all he wanted was to sexually' exploit her. When he makes her pregnant, he abandons her and e baby to the trials and tribulations of life. Having no one to look up to for support, Lucy bows down to prostitution. In. essence, it is Honourable Chide who is a worse prostitute for forcing Lucy into it. Smart, Chola's house servant, betrays Chola and Catherine, his employers. Although they give him an attractive salary package, he thanks them by spying on them and reporting to the Party whatever information he manages to get hold of This leads to the arrest and subsequent death of Chola in prison after Smart reports to the Special Branch that Chola and Catherine are planning to go into exile.

This theme of betrayal is also seen alongside the element of infiltration. There is great, fear of the unknown in the regime since no-one knows who his or her enemy is or who will betray him or her.

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is clearly revealed by the behaviour of the priest in the novel. Although he preaches about love to his congregation, advising them to love one another, he utterly fails to practise all this when he refuses to assist Nambe at her greatest hour of need. He clings to his preparation for a sermon instead of practising what he teaches. Actually his whole family is hypocritical. When Nambe arrives at the priest's house and asks to-s¢ him to .ask for assistance in form of transport to hospital, his wife takes her time while .the desperate Nambe helplessly waits in the kitchen. The priest later leaves her with the assurance that bees do not kill and promises to pray for her" Son.

The M.P. for Njala is an0thex hypocrite in the novel. He advises his constituents, particularly women, to seek his assistance whenever they are in problems yet when Nambe goes to ask him to use his car to take her son to hospital, he declines claiming that his .van is full of fish. He would rather ,guard against destruction Of his fish than save human

The regime is also hypocritical in a way. It pretends to protect the interests of the citizens when in fact it is oppressing, persecuting and exploiting them. The leaders arc self-interested and abuse their power by killing, imprisoning and forcing those opposing, them into exile. When a European leader is about to visit the country the government rounds up all beggars from the city's streets and sends

them to their home districts. This is done to create the false impression in the visiting leader that there are no beggars in the country's streets.

78

Struggle for Freedom and Justice

In Smouldering Charcoal several individuals and groups of people are seen in a ceaseless struggle for freedom and justice. Dambo is murdered and thrown into Nkhona River all because he protests against the regime. The same fate befalls Chola who is assassinated in prison for leading a banned Movement that struggles for freedom. The bakery workers who end up in prison and the Njala women who are later banished from Njala are groups of people who are engaged in a struggle for freedom and justice.

Minor Themes

Hope

Although the leaders oppress many of the country's citizens in various ways, there is hope in the Movement for National Transformation that one day things shall change for the better. Many, like Dambo and Chola, might die along the way towards attainment of real freedom but Catherine, Ndatero, Mchere and the other exiles are hopeful that one day the powerful in their country shall find themselves powerless. They foresee an era when the Movement shall have captured state power, through violent means if need be, to establish a democratic society. However, the fact that the Movement is not very clear on the form of state it will establish after the revolution, as revealed in the conversation between Ndatero and Chola in prison, sheds some doubt on the ability of the Movement to establish the much-desired humane society.

Poverty

Poverty is another important sub-theme in Smouldering Charcoal. We encounter the poverty that is prevalent in the country right on the first page of the novel. Chola's family lives in a rat-infested nondescript leaking house for which he pays K1.50 weekly rent in a run-down neighbourhood of Njala. The family, like many other families in Njala cannot afford decent food, a development that sends the young boys to the forest to look for fruits to fill their hunger-abused stomachs. The poverty also drives other people such as Lucy into prostitution to get money while others numb their brains with beer to forget their misery.

We also learn that the other side of the city in which Chola likes to pass through on his way to his workplace, wallows in abject poverty. Here old men and women die in their sleep, others are stabbed to death, girls prematurely give birth to children in quick succession and young men graduate into the world of terror and violence. The people here live in shacks built of mud, grass, metal sheets, cardboard, and anything else that could provide temporary permanence.

Prostitution

Prostitution, which reveals the extent of moral degeneration in society, is also an important sub-theme (minor theme) in Smouldering Charcoal. Lucy is one of the many prostitutes at Mchere's favourite bar. Although Mchere is a married man, he chases prostitutes and contracts a venereal disease which he transmits to his innocent wife, Nambe. Honourable Chide, M.P. for Njala, who should lead his constituents and the rest of the country's citizens by example, also engages in prostitution. He makes Lucy pregnant and threatens her and her family with unspecified punishment should she reveal that he was responsible for the pregnancy.

We also learn in the novel that in the poor part of the city, girls prematurely give birth to children in quick succession and from time to time one heard stories of girls throwing unwanted babies into bushes, latrines and toilets. Yet the leaders who decried immorality were in some cases the ones who had thrown those babies into the virgin bodies of the girls. The story of Ben, Estele and Najere also testifies to the disintegration of the social fabric in the country.

Love/Compassion

Two characters are especially notable for their compassion or love, and these are Biti and Peter. Biti brings food to Mchere's family when Mchere has no food to feed the family. In another instance, when the landlord evicts Mchere's family from the house, Biti takes into her house the children and Nambe. She also looks after the children when Nambe is in hospital where Ntolo is admitted. She also pays her a visit to cheer her up.

In exile, Peter assists Catherine and Ndatero to acquire work permits when the two are stranded. Peter and his wife also assist Catherine and Ndatero to secure jobs in exile. They also demonstrate love when they accommodate Catherine and Ndatero in their house.

Women Liberation

Efforts among women to liberate themselves from oppressive forces are evident in the novel. Apart from fighting the oppressive regime itself, the women are also fighting problems created by their husbands. Nambe, for instance, is often beaten by her husband, Mchere, who also happens to have a secret love affair with Lucy. One would safely conclude that at times, some women frustrate the very spirit for women emancipation or liberation. Lucy for instance, is contributing to the misery in Nambe's life. Other women such as Mrs Gonthi are also in the forefront hindering women emancipation. Biti, however, is a good example of a woman who ventures into the man's world and engages and succeeds in a trade often associated with males. Biti divorced her first husband because she believes in herself. She does not want to see other women suffer at the hands of males, no wonder she keeps advising Nambe to divorce Mchere. She also wants women to live together happily. Her place is a good place for women to chat and discuss issues affecting them. She advises Nambe never to fight Lucy when women from Njala are going to visit Nkate Bakery workers in prison.

The Power of the Written Word

The written word is seen as a strong tool to pass on information to facilitate change. The Movement which Dambo started continues after his death through Chola and Mchere, among others. Chola and Mchere rely on the written documents explaining the objectives and goals of the Movement. Even after the death of Chola, Mchere is able to go on with the vision since it is written. Moreover, the spirit of the Movement is given even more fire when it is known that what Chola wrote while in prison is to be published into a book. In short, the written word is a tool for continuation of the will and determination in the struggle.

Style

'Style' refers to the way a story gets unravelled or told. There are several aspects of style in Smouldering Charcoal, but it is important to look at those areas which are central to the understanding of this novel.

Setting

The novel is set in Malawi during the one party era. In fact 'Malawi' is only mentioned once in the story. There is also mention of Nyasaland when we are told about the death of Mchere's father

during the State of Emergency of 1953. Be that as it may, the events described in the novel can take place anywhere in the world where tyrants have a grip on power.,

'Flashback' refers to the tendency of referring back to the events of the past when narrating a story. Tiyambe Zeleza employs flashback technique in telling his story of Smouldering Charcoal. While telling us the plight of Mchere's family, the narrator takes us back to the early days of Mchere and Nambe's marriage, even to the time before they got married. We hear that Nambe married Mchere through the influence of her parents, especially her father, who saw him as a good suitor for his daughter since he worked in the city and looked well-to-do.

Another instance of flashback is when we hear about the death of Mchere's father in prison during the colonial period. In trying to explain to Bota the reason why he is apprehensive about the prospect of a strike at the bakery, Mchere takes us back to 1953 during the imposition of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. We hear that Mchere's father emerged as one of the leaders of those who protested against the imposition of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in his district. As a result, he was ruthlessly beaten by the askari in front of his family one evening before taking him to prison where he died.

When Mchere remembers when he took to regular drinking, we also encounter another instance where flashback is employed in the novel. He remembers that he took up the habit of regular drinking when he was sharing a room with a heavy drinker called Bonzo with whom he became friends. Bonzo had come to the city to find money for lobola but as years passed, he still got nowhere close to realising his dream. He was later arrested and imprisoned for violent robbery. This use of flashback is very effective because when we later witness the fatal encounter between Chola and Bonzo in prison we never ask who Bonzo is. The relationship between Lucy and Honourable Chide, Assistant Minister for Health and M.P. for Njala, is also told in flashback. As beauty queen of Njala, Lucy is seduced by Honourable Chide with a promise to have her school fees paid at one of the famous boarding schools for girls. He abandons her when she becomes pregnant.

Symbolism

Another important stylistic feature in the novel is symbolism. A symbol is an object, image or any other thing that represents or refers to something else while symbolism is the use of symbols to represent things in a work of art. The novel, Smouldering Charcoal, is divided into three symbolic sections. The first section is called "The Untamed Pests." This refers to the party functionaries and other members of society who perpetrate the suffering of others. The Youth Militias harass and abuse other citizens in their perpetual sale of party cards; the Special Branch arrest imaginary enemies of the party and rape desperate women; party women's brigades are tools of torture for other women; prison guards and hardcore criminals like Duli are weapons used to maintain a smothering grip on power, while a number of informers infiltrate different sectors to act as the eyes and ears of the leaders. These untamed pests feature amongst all the three groups of people represented in the story, namely the poor Njala inhabitants who are represented by Mchere, Nambe

and Bota, among others; the intellectuals working as journalists, lawyers and academics represented by Chola, Dambo, Dr Bakha and Inde Ndatero; and the party functionaries.. These untamed pests are everywhere in the country, in prison, schools, households, and wield unquestionable power derived from the Leader himself.

The symbol of untamed pests is concretised in the rat that haunts Mchere. Like the party and its functionaries that oppress and exploit the poor, the rat depletes food in Mchere's house and makes holes in his clothes. It is fat like the exploitative bosses of the bakery workers who fatten on other people's sweat. Mchere's hatred for the rat is his hatred for the Party and, like the rat which he later discovers is destructible, he is sure that the Party shall some day be destroyed. Not surprisingly, he joins the Movement in prison and becomes its guerrilla fighter in exile.

The second part titled "Night Storms" is equally symbolic. Night storms bring pain and suffering to the people. The dictatorial regime, which causes suffering and even death to the country's citizens, is compared to a devastating night storm. Many events show the devastating nature of the tyrannical reign of the president who is only referred to as "the Leader". :For instance, Dambo is murdered in cold blood while Mchere .spends hours in a queue in hospital to have his son Ntolo treated. Chola is spied upon by his house servant, Smart, and is later arrested, imprisoned and killed while Dr Bakha is suspended from his lecturing job for defending: Catherine's right to continue her studies.

Associated with these night storms is water or rain. In this novel rain or water is a symbol of suffering. Mchere and his family live in a leaking house: Nambe has .to put a bucket at a strategic point to collect the rainwater. Nambe walks in vain in the rain to look for a car to take her injured son Ntolo to hospital. The ...rain simply exacerbates her suffering. Chola walks through the rain to the porter's lodge to report the death of Dambo to Catherine. When Mchere gets to know about Ntolo's sickness it is raining and he walks through the rain with Ntolo on his back to the City Central Hospital. Further, there is light rain when Chola is nearly involved in an accident while driving to the offices of the Daily Despatch where he works. It is also raining when Chola, Alipo, Alipo's sister and her husband arrive at the City Central Hospital mortuary to identify Dambo's body. This prevalence of rain in the novel is easy to understand since the events in chapters one to six happen within a day.

In prison we see the hunger strikers being put in cells with icy water in which live snakes are thrown. In all these instances the water intensifies the suffering of the people involved.

The last part, "Smouldering Charcoal," refers to dissent and protest that lives on like a smouldering charcoal against the party's efforts to kill all opposition. 'Smouldering Charcoal' here represents longevity particularly that of the movement. Although Dambo who quits the party and joins an underground movement is murdered and Chola who joins it after the murder of Dambo is also murdered in prison, the Movement, like a smouldering charcoal, refuses to die, it smoulders on. Its influence extends beyond the confines of the nation's boundaries and there is hope that one day this revolutionary movement will capture state power and introduce a humane democratic society. The smouldering charcoal shall one day start a fiery fire that the untamed pests and night storms will

fail to contain and the oppressive political structures established by the fat necked rats (the leaders) shall crumble to pave way for a new political culture. The Movement which is also smouldering charcoal in a way, is the people's hope for a brighter future.

Activities

Contextual Questions

1. She climbed the stairs slowly. When she came to the doorstep, she lingered for a moment. Had she made the right decision to come? She knocked on the door. It was the Party Chairman himself who opened it. His slanted eyes narrowed and his nose sniffed like t do smelling out a stranger. Nambe was uneasy.

- i. Why has Nambe come to see the Part Chairrnna
- ii. Who does Nambe see first before coming to the Party Chairman? (1) ' iii Why is Nambe hesitant, to seek help from the Party Chairman?

. Explain the Party Chairman's response to Nambe's request.

Give two examples which show that the Party Chairman is a ruthless person.

Mention three problems that Mchere encounters when carries Ntolo to hospital.

In what way does Chola assist Mchere at the hospital

How does Lucy assist Mchere when Ntolo is in hospital? Mention two ways.

What three problems does Nambe face when Mchere is arrested?

In what two ways are Njala women punished for not attending Party dance practices?

2. "I am not criticising you, you know. I am simply reminding you of the rules of the game. Remember it is those up there who 'read' the papers." The Editor's face suddenly lost its jollity and became grave. Chola was unsettled, for there was something strangely ominous about the way the Editor had just spoken".

Who are "those up there" that the Editor is talking about?

According to the Editor, what are "the rules of the game" that he reminds Chola about?

Who does Chola meet at the restaurant after his conversation with the Editor?

What information does the person above tell Chola?

Give two reasons why the workers at Nkate Bakery stage a strike.

Why is Mchere hesitant to support the strike?

what measures do the strikers at the bakery put in place to make sure that nobody works at the bakery?

Explain how the women of Njala learn about the arrest of their husbands.

What charges are levelled• against Nkate Bakery workers by the regime?

Mention two things that show that Mchere is a strong character in prison.

"You had better stop this nonsense of yours before you all die like that foolish friend of yours." The news chilled the prisoners. "Those ones are clever." The guard pointed to those who were not taking part in the strike. The two groups looked at each other with mutual contempt.

- i. What is "this nonsense" the guard is talking about? (2)
 - ii. Who is this friend who dies in prison? (1)
 - iii. Mention two things which show that the friend in (ii) was an exceptional prisoner. (4)
 - iv. What leads to the death of the friend mentioned in (ii) above? (2)
 - v. Mention two reasons that motivate Chola to support Dambo's movement in prison. (4)
 - vi. In what three ways does Chola prove that he is a friend indeed of Mchere? (3)
 - vii. Mention three things that show that the regime had no respect for prisoner's rights. (3)
 - viii. What role does Chola play for the Movement while in prison? (2)
 - ix. In what three ways does Catherine suffer after Chola's arrest? (3)
 - x. What strategies have the prison authorities employed to discourage the striking prisoners from continuing with the strike? (3)
4. "Look here Mchere, I know you, and you always say that, don't you? One time you came here and said that you couldn't pay your weekly instalment because your mother was very ill, forgetting that a fortnight ago before that you had told me that she had died. How many mothers do you have? I am not a fool, you know."
- i. Where is Mchere coming from when he visits Bwana Patel? (1)
 - ii. Why does Mchere come to see Bwana Patel? (2)

- iii. What two issues make Bwana Patel popular among the people of Njala? (2)
- iv. Why does Mchere forgo the idea of pretending to be a beggar in order to get money? (4)
- v. Explain how the bakery workers are arrested. (4)
- vi. In what ways do the women of Njala suffer because of the arrest of their husbands? (2)
- vii. How do the Njala women show solidarity after the arrest of the bakery workers?
Mention two ways.. (2)
- viii. What two things show that although Lucy is a prostitute, she is an understanding woman? (4)
- ix. In what way was Nangaine helpful to Chola and Mchere? (2)
- 5 "Listen, I know you are already missing him, who wouldn't? In fact, I am here to help you maintain contact with him." The words tumbled one on top of the other. He waited for an answer. Catherine wondered whether she had been too harsh with him. "So we can make an agreement," he continued as if nothing had disturbed him.
- Who is the speaker in the quotation above? (1)
 - What has the person in (i) come to do in Chola's house? (2)
 - What does he do to Catherine? (2)
 - Explain the circumstances that lead to Chola's arrest? (4)
 - How does Catherine discover that Smart, the house servant, had been spying on them? (3)
 - How does Thoko assist Catherine on this particular day? (2)
 - "Mrs. Gonthi flashed angry glances at her fellow women who had betrayed her and the Party." In what way do the women betray the Party and how are they punished for the betrayal? Mention two ways. (3)
 - What role does Lucy play in making the punishment imposed on the women lighter? (3)

6. After they had searched the whole house and taken all the subversive material, including my short-wave radio, they turned to me and the shortest of them said: "You have to come with us". It sounded as if he was speaking through his nose, probably in order to hide his rotten teeth. "Can I first go and have a bath and change?" I asked them.
- Name the people who search Chola's house.
 - What reply do the people in (i) give to Chola's request above? (2)
 - Name two people who could have been suspected to have betrayed Chola. (2)
 - Mention two incidents that show Chola's rebellion against the regime. (2)
 - How does Chola hide Dambo's manuscript from the prison guards during a search? (2)
 - What two measures do the prison authorities take to force Chola and the others to call off their hunger strike in prison?

Who was Peter?

In what two ways does Peter Catherine and Ndatero?

viii What sad event takes place in Mchere's family in exile? (1)

ix. Why does Catherine resist the idea of forming the women's wing of the Movement in exile? (1)

x. What position does Ndatero hold in the Movement in exile? (1)

vii. Name two concessions the prison authorities make later to address the objectives of the hunger strike. (2)

viii. What leads to the release of Mchere and the other political detainees

7...the gates of the detention centres were opened. Hundreds of political detainees emerged some of whom had been inside a decade or more. Among them was Mchere and the other bakery workers, as well as Ndatero, the playwright.

i. Why was Ndatero detained? (2)

ii. What two problems does Ndatero encounter after his release from prison? (4)

iii For how long does the bakery workers stay in prison? (1)

iv. What circumstances lead to the release of hundreds of political prisoners? (4)

v. How does Gwape, the Youth Militia, abuse his power? (4)

vi. In what way does Gwape's abuse of power affect Mchere? (2)

vii. How is Gwape punished? (2)

viii Where does Catherine work after her dismissal from the university? (1)

8 "It's up to you. You have to continue living. Chola is dead and won't come back. But frankly, if I were you, I would get myself a man with a job and a clean record." i. In what way is Ndatero's personal record tarnished? (2)

ii. What makes Ndatero divorce his first wife? (4)

iii. Why was the university unwilling to reemploy Ndatero after his release from detention? (2)

iv. Mention three problems that Catherine and Ndatero face in exile. (3)

v. Mention two instances that show that the authorities in exile manipulate the rights of

Essay Questions

1. The regime under which Chola and the other characters found themselves in Smouldering Charcoal exercises gross human rights abuse which leads to the suffering of many innocent people. With relevant examples from the novel, support the above statement. (25)
2. Although Mchere and Lucy start off as weak characters, they eventually grow into stronger ones. Support the above statement by showing the weaknesses and strengths of each one of them as the plot progresses. (25)
3. One of the themes in Smouldering Charcoal is 'abuse of power' by some selfish individuals. Show how the following people abuse power in the novel:
 - i. The prison guards.
 - ii. Dr Bakha, the university lecturer. (25)
4. The novel, Smouldering Charcoal, exposes an oppressive regime and individuals' struggle for survival. Show how the following characters are oppressed and also how they struggle against the regime:
 - i. The prisoners.
 - ii. Dr Bakha and the university students.(25)
5. 'Solidarity in times of trouble' could be one of the themes in Smouldering Charcoal. How is this theme shown in the following groups of people:(25)
9. Smouldering charcoal exposes the suffering of women and their resistance to oppression. Support this statement by showing how women suffer and stand up against oppression in the novel. (25)
10. Discuss the theme of betrayal in Smouldering Charcoal. (25)
11. Discuss rain or water and the rat as symbols in Smouldering Charcoal. (25)
12. Why does Tiyambe Zeleza give the novel the title 'Smouldering Charcoal'? (25)