

SATIRE AND THE THEME OF VICTIMS AND CULPRITS IN *MIRADI BUBU YA WAZALENDO*

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Abstract

Gabriel Ruhumbika's Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo is one of the most significant Kiswahili novels to be published in the 1990s. It is an historical work which explores the lives of various classes of Tanzanians before and after uhuru. The author effectively uses satire to expose and attack the shortcomings of the socio-economic and political systems of both eras. Apart from showing that both the colonial regime and that of the new independent nation failed to uphold the rights of the poor, it pinpoints those who were responsible for the suffering of the downtrodden. This paper examines the use of satirical elements such as ridicule, sarcasm, hyperbole and irony as weapons for fighting various culprits. During colonial rule, the culprits were often the white masters while the victims were their African servants. After independence, the culprits were the powerful but corrupt government officials while the victims were the workers who served under them. In analyzing the novel we shall examine how members of these classes related.

1.0 Introduction

“Satire” is one of the oldest literary terms that has been used in various epochs to mean different things. Nowadays the term tends to be used mostly to refer to a literary technique that is used to criticize, diminish or disparage its subject in various ways. Satire can characterize an entire work to the extent that if it is a novel, for instance, it can be categorized as a “satirical novel.” Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (translated into Kiswahili as *Safari za Galiva*) is often referred to as one of the best examples of such a work. To paraphrase Hawthorn’s (2010:242) description of such works, their main goal is to attack their subject using a variety of means rather than to present settings, actions and characters that are believable. This means that such works are more romantic than realistic.

Satire can also be in the form of specific elements in a work that is not entirely satirical. For example, a realistic novel can have elements of satire within its characterization, description of setting or themes. This is the way satire is used in *Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo* which is a realistic novel.

Whether we are talking about satire as characterizing an entire work to the extent that it can be termed satirical or as incidental elements in a realistic work, the main goal of satire is always to fight and hence correct specific evils or failings. Abrams (2005:285) says: “Satire has been justified by those who use it as corrective of human folly...” It is a weapon for fighting personal or communal vices such as dishonesty, hypocrisy, incompetence, vanity, greed and corruption. Some of the devices that are commonly used in satire are ridicule, sarcasm, irony, hyperbole and understatement.

There is a need to provide definitions of these terms so that it is clear from the outset how we intend to use them. To ridicule is to use language that is intended to mock, deride or humiliate a subject. Such language often provokes laughter. In literary scholarship, there is consensus that sarcasm is a form of irony, which in the words of Leech (1969:172) “consists in saying the opposite of what is intended.” For example if you referred to a corrupt leader as “a paragon of virtue,” you would be saying the opposite of what you mean, hence drawing attention to the subject. This would be an effective way of disparaging the said leader. Cuddon (1976:431) summarizes the functions of irony in exposing human weaknesses as a corrective measure and concludes by saying: “It is not surprising, therefore, that irony is the most efficient weapon of the satirist.” In other words, irony is an indispensable tool of satire.

Other than sarcasm, which is alternatively referred to as “verbal irony,” there are other types of irony. For example, there is situational irony, which Gordon and Kuehner (1999:450) says that it “refers to an occurrence that is contrary to what is expected.” If for example, a respected leader who is a champion of human rights is found to own slaves, this would be situational irony in that it is contrary to expectations. We also have cosmic irony which is alternatively called “irony of fate.” In the words of Abrams (ibid. p.144), this is a type of irony where “a deity, or else fate, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate and mock them.”

Finally, satire also frequently uses hyperbole and its opposite, understatement. Hyperbole is simply deliberate exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. An alternative definition is given by Chapman (1978:78) who says that “hyperbole is conscious overstatement” It draws attention to its subject by using words that are too strong for the context. Understatement, on the other hand, uses words that are too weak for the context.

In *Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo*, Ruhumbika employs most of the devices associated with satire that we have discussed in this section. The reason we chose to investigate satire in relation to the themes of victims and culprits is that the novel presents a situation where the actions of some characters (culprits) result directly in the suffering or even death of others (victims). Satire is used to expose the evils of the culprits and to fight them. We begin the analysis with a summary of the novel under discussion so as to provide the context from which the examples selected for discussion are derived.

2.0 Synopsis

Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo is a historical novel which traces the evolution of modern Tanzania from colonial times to the attainment of uhuru to the end of J.K. Nyerere's rule. This is a forty-year period roughly between 1945 to 1985 – when Nyerere retired as president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Although the historical Nyerere plays an important role in the narrative – which is in keeping with a historical novel, the story revolves around two main characters: Ndugu Saidi and Ndugu Nzoka. They come from very different backgrounds but they are brought together by the liberation struggle in which they both play an important role. In the course of their political involvement, they meet Nyerere, work under him for long periods of time and become close friends.

After the Arusha Declaration of 1967, the vicissitudes of politics make Nzoka and Saidi – the former comrades in the liberation struggle – very different people. Nzoka becomes a rich and powerful member of the new ruling bourgeois class. Saidi, on the other hand, becomes a member of the exploited and poor working class. He retires a poor and dejected old man while Nzoka continues to amass more wealth and power.

The story begins with the horrible chain of tragedies that befall Mzee Jabiri – Saidi's father. Death wipes out his entire clan and family, leaving him with only his ten-year old son, Saidi. This is what prompts him to migrate from his ancestral home in Masasi to Tanga. Father and son end up becoming migrant labourers in the sisal plantation of a Greek settler farmer named Tumbo Tumbo. Their working conditions are extremely poor and the terms under which they work are tantamount to slavery. Harvesting sisal is a risky and very taxing job but Jabiri and his son are determined to continue working in the plantation. There is no alternative livelihood for them. Tragedy befalls young Saidi, when his father is fatally injured in the course of his work. All attempts to save his life prove to be futile mainly because there are no health facilities in the plantation.

After Mzee Jabiri's death, the foreman at Tumbo Tumbo's plantation helps Saidi to go to Dar es Salaam, where he is received by the foreman's relative. Saidi settles down to the lowly life of a houseboy in the house of an Indian shopkeeper. Because of Saidi's diligence, his employer decides to take him to work in the shop. In 1954 following the formation of TANU (Tanganyika African National Union), Saidi joins the party's Youth League. He shares his time between working in the Indian's shop and at the party headquarters. His hard work and commitment attracts the attention and admiration of the party leader – Mwalimu Nyerere – who directs that the young man be employed to work full time for the party. Despite the meager pay and taxing work, Saidi works tirelessly because of his patriotism and faith in his leader.

It is also during this period that Nyerere recruits Nzoka to work for TANU in fighting for independence. This happens when Nyerere visits Mwanza to address a public rally. Nzoka who heads a local workers' union steals the show when his group stages a Sukuma traditional dance. He later holds talks with the TANU leader who hires him to work for the party headquarters in Dar es Salaam. Like Saidi, Nzoka serves the party faithfully and contributes immensely to the liberation of his country. He recruits members, disseminates party policies and continues to learn politics from Nyerere. When uhuru comes eventually, Nyerere moves to State House from the party headquarters in Kariokor. He goes with both Nzoka and Saidi. The latter is employed as a messenger, while the former becomes one of the president's special advisers.

In 1967 following the Arusha Declaration, several state corporations are formed to run the private firms that had been nationalized. Nationalization was a key pillar of *ujamaa* (the brand of socialism introduced in Tanzania by Mwalimu Nyerere). Nzoka is appointed by the president to run the largest among the new corporations. Subsequently, Nzoka appoints his friend Saidi to be the head messenger of the corporation. From this point onwards, fate leads the two men along different paths. Saidi continues serving his country with utmost commitment amidst deteriorating remuneration for workers of his lot. Meanwhile, Nzoka is a rising star in social and political circles. He gets many opportunities to go for further studies and training abroad, and as a result, he is given more responsibilities by the government. He ends up becoming a cunning and unscrupulous official who uses his position for personal gain. Women are attracted to him because he flaunts his ill-gotten wealth, and consequently, he marries several of them. Nevertheless, he remains an insatiable womanizer.

In the state corporation that he heads, Nzoka tramples on the workers under him the same way colonial administrators trampled on their African juniors. He does not spare even his old friend – Saidi. Their friendship comes to an abrupt end when Saidi refuses to obey his obnoxious order to take home his (Nzoka's) girlfriend after sleeping with her, hence deflowering her in his office. The girl later becomes Nzoka's second wife. By 1985 Nzoka has five wives, numerous concubines and thirty-two children. This year marks the climax of his rise to power, great wealth and social prestige. In the meantime, the country's economy has completely collapsed due to corruption and mismanagement by the likes of Nzoka. The underdogs like Saidi suffer untold misery. Every attempt by the government to salvage the economy and mitigate the suffering of the poor ends in total failure.

Poor Saidi's final straw comes when he is forced to retire following the government's policy to retrench. This is one of the measures that the government

is forced to take to reduce the wage bill at a time of unprecedented economic hardships. Saidi is sent home empty-handed. His attempt to petition President Nyerere concerning his plight during the latter's farewell ceremony is thwarted by Nzoka. The story ends with Nyerere's farewell messages to the people and media reports of his praise for an exceptionally patriotic messenger. Thus Saidi's attempt to present his problems to his mentor and leader are misunderstood by the entire country, thanks to Nzoka's evil machinations.

3.0 Hyperbole and Ridicule

The two devices are used to satirize the greed and extremely voracious eating habits of one of the greatest culprits in the novel – Mr. Tumbo Tumbo. This is the Greek settler farmer in whose plantation Saidi and his father work. First of all, even his nickname (his real name is not revealed) literally means stomach. It is, therefore, an allegorical name that draws attention to his love for food. This is how his eating is described:

...hicho kifungua kinywa chake kwanza ilikuwa ni sahani ya matunda, halafu maji ya matunda, halafu anafuatisha bakuli la uji wa maziwa, kabla ya kuingilia kwanza sahani ya nyama ya nguruwe ya kukaanga, halafu mayai ya kuchemsha, halafu mayai ya kukaanga, yakiwa ni pamoja na figo na maini ya ng'ombe ya kukaanga yaliyopakuliwa pamoja na viazi-Ulaya vya kukaanga na maharagwe na kachumbari. Halafu anamalizia kwa kuongeza birika la kahawa ya maziwa la kusindikiza mikate iliyopakwa siagi na asali na jamu! Na huo ulikuwa mwanzo tu. Mchana meza kubwa ajabu ya kuweza kutumiwa na watu kumi na wawili ilikuwa inajaa chakula chake yeye mtu mmoja tu na anakula na kumaliza chote fyu! Na bado. Usiku ndio ulikuwa wakati wa karamu yake hasa! Kila siku! (p.13).

...that breakfast of his was firstly a plateful of fruits, then fruit juice, then follows a bowl of porridge with milk, before attacking firstly a plateful of fried pork, then boiled eggs, then fried eggs together with fried kidney with liver served with fried potatoes, beans and chutney. Then he finishes off with a kettle of white coffee to wash down bread spread with butter, honey and jam! And that was just the beginning. In daytime, an extremely large table that can fit twelve people would be filled with food solely for him and he would finish it off! And still he would not yet be done with it. At night it would be his time for a real party! Every day!

This massive description of food and eating is one of the longest, most detailed, colourful and outstanding passages in the entire novel. We note the piles of detail on the incredible variety and quantity of food. It creates the effect of intense loathing for the character in question. This is because Tumbo Tumbo's overeating is juxtaposed with the squalid conditions in which his overworked and exploited plantation workers live. We get a picture of a hateful person who wallows in luxury while his workers are stuck in grinding poverty. Tumbo Tumbo is the vile

culprit while the African plantation workers are the helpless victims. This is made possible by a colonial system where the white colonialists (including settler farmers like Tumbo Tumbo) are the masters and the African subjects are the servants.

Apart from Tumbo Tumbo's eating habits, his physique is also hyperbolically described, hence enriching the satirical portrayal of this character. The result of his excessive eating is deformity. We are told that he is so fat that his hands cannot reach his backside. Consequently, every time he visits the toilet, his servants have to wipe shit from his body because he cannot do it. His shapelessness is likened to that of a pig. Furthermore, his appearance is so distorted that from a distance, it is difficult to know which is the front or back of his body (p.14). All this is highly ridiculous and it further diminishes the character in question.

Tumbo Tumbo's behavior is also described in extremely contemptuous terms. For instance:

mshenzi mwenye tabia chafu anayewatendea binadamu wenzake mambo ambayo mtu hathubutu kumtendea hata mbwa wake (p.22).

uncouth person with dirty rotten habits who does to his fellow humans things that one would not dare do even to a dog.

On the whole, Tumbo Tumbo is so demonized that he becomes more of a caricature than a realistic character. The intention is to portray him as the epitome of inhumanity in order to emphasize his role as a culprit.

Although we have said that Tumbo Tumbo's victims are his workers collectively, it is still possible to identify an individual victim. The character in question is Mzee Jabiri who accidentally gets badly injured in the head while cutting sisal leaves in the plantation. Since there are no health facilities, he does not get any medical attention until almost two days later when Tumbo Tumbo returns from his merry-making spree in Tanga town. He is not concerned about saving the injured man's life, and only agrees to take him to hospital because of the foreman's insistence. The nearest hospital is fifteen miles away so he has to drive Mzee Jabiri all the way on a very bad road. With extreme callousness, he throws the incapacitated man at the back of his lorry and drives at high speed causing him more injuries. By the time he gets to the hospital, Jabiri is dead. It is made quite clear that Tumbo Tumbo's actions are the direct cause of his death. Jabiri's body is not buried but thrown into the plantation sewer.

Apart from white settler farmers like Tumbo Tumbo, the other category of culprits during the colonial era were the Indian businessmen (Banians) who exploited and

mistreated their African servants almost as much as the whites did. To illustrate this, Saidi's work as a shop attendant working for a Banian in Dar es Salaam is described in the following words:

Kazi hiyo ya kwa Baniani ya kufagia duka, kusafisha madirisha, kupangusa vumbi, kukaribisha wateja, kutumwa posta na benki, na hapa na pale na kila mahali tangu kufunguliwa kwa duka hadi kufungwa.... (p. 43)

That job at the Banian's shop of sweeping, cleaning windows, dusting, attending to customers, running errands to the post office and to the bank and here and there and everywhere from the time the shop is opened to the time it is closed....

The amount, variety and duration of Saidi's work at the Banian's shop is grossly exaggerated to drive home the point that he is exploited, mistreated and enslaved. Although the quotation refers to Saidi, who is the victim, it is actually directed at his Banian employer who is the culprit. It is the Banian who is being satirized because he is an oppressive and exploitative employer. Elsewhere in the novel, Banian employers are characterized as being disdainful of their African employees. When Nzoka becomes head of a large state corporation, we are told that he treats his juniors with "*dharau ya tajiri wa Kibaniani*" /disdain of a Banian employer (p.106). On the whole, the satire directed at the Banian community attacks them for being cunning business people who prosper by exploiting their African workers and collaborating with corrupt government officials.

4.0 Sarcasm and Contempt

After independence, a new class of rich and powerful Africans emerges to replace the European and Asian masters of the colonial era. Nzoka, who is one of the main characters in the novel, represents this class. In the novel, examples of satire directed at this class collectively or at individuals who belong to it abound. For instance, they are derisively described as "*Wazungu weusi*" /black Europeans (p. 107). This description signifies two important things. Firstly, this group whose mannerisms and lifestyle imitate the former European rulers constitute a neo-colonial class which is bent on perpetuating colonialism Secondly, these are the new culprits who create a situation where ordinary people continue to be victims. Thus Nzoka runs the state corporation with "*...ukoloni wa Bwana Tumbo Tumbo*" /the colonial manner of Mr. Tumbo Tumbo (p. 106).

When Nzoka is at the apex of his career, he engages in an ignominious act that is tantamount to rape. It is described as follows:

Nzoka Mwanakulanga, pamoja na cheo chake hicho chote, alikuwa bado ni mtoto wa wafugaji wa Kisukuma aliyekulia machungani ambako kupigana mweleka...kulihasabika mchezo wa kawaida kabisa kwa watoto huko machungani walikoshinda. Haikuwa kazi ngumu kumweka chini huyo binti kwenye hilo kochi-kitanda la ofisi ya kibepari (p.112).

Nzoka Mwanakulanga, with all his big post, was still a child of Sukuma herdsmen who grew up in the pasture where wrestling somebody to the ground... was regarded as quite an ordinary game for children in the pasture where they spent the whole day. It was not a difficult task to bring down that girl to the couch-bed of the bourgeois office.

First of all, the tone of the entire passage is highly sarcastic, and although it describes Nzoka's action and abilities approvingly, disapproval is the real intention. In fact for a senior government official and a person of high social status like him, having sex with the girl in question in the office is abhorrent. He wrestles with her and has sex with her apparently by force because she seems to be unwilling to sleep with him. Ordinarily, what Nzoka does amounts to rape. However, we know that the whole thing is the girl's scheme to get Nzoka deflower her so that he is forced to marry her. She has always yearned for a man with the kind of money and power that Nzoka has.

Secondly, we can also pick out specific elements of the extract that are particularly ironical. For example, Nzoka's heinous act is equated to a wrestling game among children who are grazing animals in a pasture. This is deliberately understating the seriousness of the matter. Another example is that of the couch-bed. This coinage signifies a couch which is a bed at the same time. Although this appears innocent, it is meant to draw attention to Nzoka's objectionable act of turning the office couch into a bed where he sleeps with women. Finally, we have the bourgeois office. This sounds approving of the office as a magnificent room. However, it is actually derogatory, especially because of Nzoka's desecration.

The question that arises here is about who the victim is. The immediate victim is Saidi, who is Nzoka's messenger. Reading on a few pages after the extract quoted above, Saidi's boss summons him to the office after winning the wrestling game. The office is in a mess with blood stains – from the girl's deflowering – all over the place. Her clothes are torn and stained with blood. Poor Saidi is instructed to take her home and come the following day (Sunday) to clean the office. Saidi defies this oppressive order and his boss vows to teach him a lesson. From this point onwards, Saidi's life becomes very difficult ending in forced retirement without any benefits. Thus Saidi pays dearly for "disobeying" his boss.

Ultimately, however, it is the entire public which Nzoka is supposed to serve that suffers from his actions. He not only uses public resources for his personal matters but also mismanages the public organization he heads by introducing nepotism and antagonizing his juniors.

Another example of verbal irony associated with Nzoka as the culprit is the description of how his child, Mayala Nzoka goes for further studies at Oxford

University. It is clearly explained that there is a rule that bars people from going abroad to study for courses that are locally available. Economics is one such course, which we are told is offered at the University of Dar es Salaam. Then Mayala Nzoka's case is described thus:

...lakini hata hivyo, ilionelewa kwamba ombi la mwanafunzi Ndugu Nzoka Mayala Mwanakulanga lilikuwa ni ombi tofauti na akaruhusiwa kwenda Oxford kwa kulipiwa na Serikali ya Tanzania (p. 155)!

but nevertheless, it was felt that the request by the student Ndugu Mayala Nzoka Mwanakulanga was a special request and he was allowed to go to Oxford with all the expenses being paid by the government of Tanzania!

The preferential treatment of Nzoka's child is presented here as if it is quite in order. However, it is evident that this is naked corruption. Nzoka uses his position to ensure that his child is not barred from going for studies out of the country by any of the existing rules. To make the matter worse, the child is paid for by the government.

The use of the honorific "Ndugu"/comrade is another element of irony in the extract. In the *ujamaa* ideology, the term signifies equality of all Tanzanians regardless of rank or social status. But the reality, as evidenced by the preferential treatment of Mayala Nzoka, is that there is no equality. The use of the term is, therefore, a mockery of equality. Elsewhere in the novel, it is stated more explicitly as follows:

Nchi nzima watu wote walikuwa wakiitana Ndugu...Lakini ukweli wa maisha ulikuwa ni kwamba huo usawa uliishia kwenye hilo jina la Ndugu tu (p. 61).

In the whole country, all the people were calling each other comrade...But the reality of life was that the presumed equality was nothing beyond the use of the term comrade.

Here, it is the entire political leadership that is being satirized for trying to hoodwink the public that *ujamaa* has brought equality. In the meantime, the leaders are using their positions to engage in nepotism as we have seen in the case of Nzoka.

5.0 Situational and Cosmic Irony

As the synopsis shows, a significant part of the narrative is about Saidi's lifelong career fighting for the independence of his country by working for TANU which spearheads the national liberation movement. Saidi is a humble, honest, hard-working person. His life is characterized by endless toil. Even his boss, leader and mentor – Mwalimu Nyerere – knows Saidi's enormous contribution to the liberation of the country and the building of *ujamaa*. With such a colourful history

and glittering credentials, what befalls Saidi in the end is totally unexpected and gross injustice. Saidi becomes a victim of the same system that he has spent his entire life toiling for, when he is forced into early retirement empty-handed. This is at a time when the national economy has collapsed and as a result the hardships that ordinary Tanzanians are going through have reached unprecedented levels. The government resorts to reducing the workforce in the public sector as a way of cutting costs, to revive the economy. But even if the government's decision is justifiable, it is still inconceivable that a prop of the system like Saidi could be discarded. It is hinted that Nzoka masterminds Saidi's removal as a punishment for the latter's refusal to be misused by him.

We can also talk of cosmic irony in relation to Saidi and his father, Mzee Jabiri. The latter is portrayed, from the very beginning, as an ill-fated character, whose endeavours to find refuge from calamity and misfortunes end in futility:

...Mwenyezi Mungu humwandikia kila mtu lake, na alimwandikia babake mzazi taabu na upweke duniani (p. 2).

Almighty God ordains what will happen to every person and he ordained for his father suffering and loneliness in this world.

The person being referred to here is Mzee Jabiri, Saidi's father. He migrates from Masasi to Tanga in an attempt to escape the tragedy that has claimed the lives of his family and clan. But as we have seen, tragedy follows him to Tanga where he dies following a freak accident in Tumbo Tumbo's sisal plantation.

Although Saidi's life and circumstances are in many ways different from those of his father, it is quite clear that as far as fate is concerned, there is a lot of similarity between the two. As we have seen, Saidi works extremely hard to earn a living and develop his country. But instead of his life and that of his family improving, it deteriorates. At one point, his life looks as if it is about to take a turn for the better when he is appointed by Nzoka head messenger in the state corporation. The salary is much better than what he was earning while holding the same post at State House. Secondly, there are now people under him to whom he can delegate some tasks so that he can have time to rest. But this promise of a better life turns out to be a mirage. Within a short time, Saidi's life is plunged into hardship and misery. It is as if there is a mysterious force controlling his life to ensure that all his efforts are doomed to failure.

6.0 Conclusion

Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo is not satirical to the degree of *Safari za Galiva*. This is because it is a historical and realistic novel which fictionalizes the history of Tanzania between 1945 and 1985. Nevertheless, it abounds in satire as a major

technique of developing its themes. Satirical elements such as ridicule, sarcasm, contempt, hyperbole, understatement, situational and cosmic irony are used as weapons for fighting various culprits. The culprits can be described in terms of the classes they belong to or the systems they represent. Hence, we have colonialists as the culprits while their African subjects are the victims. After independence, the situation changes and we have an African bourgeois class taking the place of the former colonial masters. This is the class of culprits whose victims are the workers and ordinary citizens. The culprits and victims can also be identified as individuals. During colonial rule we have the settler farmer, Tumbo Tumbo as the culprit while Mzee Jabiri and Saidi Jabiri are the victims. After independence, we have Nzoka as the culprit and Saidi as the victim. The elements of satire we have identified are used to provoke laughter, anger and hatred towards the culprits. At the same time, we sympathise with the victims because we know they are innocent and are unjustly treated.

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