Mwea Irrigation Scheme in Kenya: Did the Religious Institutions Abandon their Members During and Before the Mwea Rice Farmers’ Revolt of 1998?

Joseph Mwangi Munyua, PhD
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2551-9194
Adjunct Lecturer, St. Paul’s University (Kenya)

Abstract

History embraces the story of the Supreme Being, humanity, and the Universe. Human history is a silent realm that encompasses creation, fall, concupiscence, and the need for the prophetic voice towards human redemption. This article seeks to examine the Mwea Irrigation Scheme and explore the oppressive situation that was experienced by its rice farmers; and eventually assess the need for prophetic voice as the critical pillar and/or the key tool that ought to have stood as the weapon of addressing the vice. To this end, this article will methodologically draw from the history of Mwea Irrigation Scheme, unfold the origin and growth, the oppression of the rice farmers, and the need for the prophetic voice as the aforesaid tool of empowerment, as it seeks to build on a Kenyan version of liberation and/or political theology. Strictly therefore, the problem that this article wrestles with is the unearthing of the above-mentioned oppression of the Mwea rice farmers and the need for redemptive prophetic voice that is geared towards the ultimate goal, the liberation of the socio-economically oppressed rice farmers. Arguably, working out a liberation theology that addresses the Mwea case compares well with the Asian theologies such as the Burakumin theology for the marginalised and minority peoples of Asia whose reflection from the prophetic role of religion gives solace to their plight. It also compares with the Waterbuffalo theology, as propounded by Kosuko Koyama. In Waterbuffalo theology, a Japanese theologian, Kosuko Koyama, attempts to translate the Christian faith into the Asian tradition in Thailand, a phenomenon where farmers spend substantial amount of time in their respective rice fields without any substantial and/or decent returns. Apart from a theo-historical design, the methodology in this presentation includes: interview schedules, literature review of relevant and existing literature, and the reliance on the modus operandi that is well captured by the biblical Prophet Amos.

Keywords: Mwea Irrigation Scheme, Rice Farmers, Oppression, Prophetic Voice, Kenyan liberation theology.
Introduction

Mwea Irrigation Scheme was officially established in 1956 by the colonial government. The main crop in the scheme is rice, especially the basmati rice, a rice variety of long, slender-grained aromatic rice which is largely seen as originating from the Indian subcontinent. While India exports over 60% of the overseas basmati rice, Pakistan follows suit. In Kenya, Mwea Scheme, which is about 100 Kilometres North East of Nairobi, leads in these shores. In the twenty-first century, this scheme is one of the seven public schemes in Kenya that are managed by the National Irrigation Authority. Mwea Irrigation Scheme has a gazetted region of 30,350 acres, wherein 26,000 acres are irrigated, 20,000 acres are in the main scheme, and 6,000 acres are utilized by the out-growers. Regarding its locality, the said scheme is around 100 Km North East of Nairobi, Kenya. The two main rivers that grow rice, poverty is characterised by the vicious cycle of poverty. “We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?”

The colonial government handed over Mwea Irrigation Scheme to the Kenyan government in 1963 following the attainment of independence. Following the establishment of the scheme, each rice tenant initially received at least 4 rice paddies. As the situation which is characterised by the swelling population and poverty stands today, most of the holdings have been sub-divided among family members and in other cases “sold” (transferred) to new farmers. Note that, in most cases, the said “selling” takes place because of poverty. Conversely, the “selling” further impoverishes the affected rice farmers. In that vein, some of those who “sell” their rice paddies turn themselves into casual workers in the scheme.

Strictly speaking, however, the so-called “selling” of the rice paddies is considered as a transfer of rice paddies because the rice farmers are still rice tenants, whilst their rice paddies are mere holdings. Since the colonial era, there has been a string of empty promise of giving title deeds to the rice farmers. Instead of receiving the said title deeds, farmers have been facing tyrannical leadership from the managers of the lucrative scheme. In short, rice farmers do not legally own their rice paddies; a situation that ensures that they cannot legally sell them or benefit from a bank loan through depositing title deeds. The situation remains even if there is giving of money and exchange of signed forms when transfers of the rice paddies from the so-called “sellers” to the receiving tenants, are taking place. There is also receiving of other kinds of handouts behind the scenes, as the “selling” of rice paddies are taking place.

During the above-mentioned sub-division of the rice paddies among family members, poverty is further accelerated rather than eradicated altogether. One can imagine what would be sub-divided in the distant future by the unborn generations. It is worth noting that our religious institutions are silent at a time like this when the Mwea poor masses are in need of their prophetic voices that can liberate them from their vicious cycle of poverty. Prophetic sermons that discourage acceleration of poverty in the Mwea Scheme is certainly the way to go as Kenya’s theology of liberation takes shape in Mwea Settlement Scheme. As implied in Julius Gathogo (2020:6), this silence reminds us of the famous quote by the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Junior when he noted that, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Further, as noted in Gathogo (2020:6), Steve Biko once said that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” Furthermore, as Martin Luther King once said: “We will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends” (Klein, 2018:1). Failure to offer prophetic voices in oppressive situation will eventually drive us to confess, one day, as the German Evangelist, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (quoted in Gathogo 2020:6) confessed during the Nazi brutal regime of 1930s under Adolf Hitler, thus:

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the art of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?
It is from the above context that this article endeavours to investigate a short history of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme in order to bring out the following things: the oppression of the rice farmers and the need for the prophetic voice as a key tool of their holistic liberation. It is in view of this fundamental undertaking that we now turn to the history of the scheme.

Historicizing Mwea Irrigation Scheme

In their attempt to expand their irrigated agriculture, the British engineers in Kenya embarked on planning a large-scale irrigation project for the Mwea plain. The Mwea plain was a 62,000 hectare region that was (and still is) surrounded by the Tana and Thiba rivers. By 1930, before the entry of the above-mentioned engineers in the Mwea plain, the said swampy plain had been inhabited by several people from Kamba, Mbeere, Gichugu, and Ndia. Furthermore, the people from Murang’ a used a section of the said plain for grazing their livestock (Diemer, 1990).

At this point, it is important to note that in its decision to introduce new agricultural systems in the Mwea plain, the colonial government did not consult the above-mentioned groups of people. In their bigoted anthropological philosophy, the colonialists knew the needs of the colonized people and intended to ‘develop and civilize’ them. This lopsided and blinkered philosophy in governance led the colonizers to treat the colonized people as dry absorbent sponges that only needed to unquestionably absorb and accept the European’s agricultural initiatives in total disregard to the indigenous methods that were the norm since time immemorial.

Besides, as it will be mentioned later, the colonizers acted as if the Mwea plain was almost empty; this meant that it had very few people who were not of any importance. In this context, in 1933, the Nyeri Provincial Agricultural Office claimed that what the ‘empty’ Mwea plain required was the construction and irrigation of rice farms (Diemer, 1990). Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated in this article, this position triggered a debate about how the said plain would be used profitably.2

Colonial Debates

Generally, during the period before and immediately after the Second World War (1939-1945), many colonies were dealing with the debates about the primary goals of colonialism, the link between the colonized people and their respective colonizers, and their policies. In the Mwea plain, for example, some supported the idea of expanding the coffee estates of the European settlers, whilst the other part of the said debaters supported the establishment of a large-scale irrigation system for cotton and rice farming.

Nonetheless, what carried the day in the Mwea plains, is the latter position, which meant that what was really required in the Scheme was the establishment of a large-scale irrigation system for cotton and rice farming. To that end, the 22-mile Mwea furrow was completed in 1950 and it

---

1 Note that, as noted earlier, the main rivers that are used to irrigate the Mwea Irrigation Scheme are Thiba and Nyamindi rivers.

2 It is important to note that this debate did not involve the so-called few people who were living in the Mwea plain. Perhaps, the colonizers saw them as non-thinking beings who needed to depend on them for their civilization. It is worth knowing that the missionaries uttered no prophet voice to defend the human rights of the so-called few people who lived in the aforesaid plain before the initiation of the rice farming project. Definitely, the silence of the said missionaries can be interpreted to mean an act of approving the egoistic decisions of the colonizers. Certainly, the missionaries used the Sacred Scripture to brainwash the Africans into forgiving the white people for taking their land and freedom and focusing on the “spiritual land,” namely, heaven. So, the missionaries did not use the prophetic voice to defend the human rights of the Africans. Surely, there was a thin line between the missionaries and the colonizers.
was decided that rice was to be cultivated on the parts of the plain that had clay soil. Along these lines, by 1967, there was irrigated rice farming in around 5,000 acres (Manig, 1973).

However, the happiness of the colonizers was short-lived. This is because the so-called few people, who lived in the Mwea plain before the initiation of the rice farming project, arose to fight for their land that had been taken by the colonizers. Considering that the locals were not involved in the aforesaid project, they could not understand its importance. Thus, fighting for their land was the only option left. Note however that the European missionaries did not offer a prophetic voice that would have fought for the human rights of the affected locals, probably because they were in support of the colonizers. Julius Gathogo (2014:21 & 2017:3) appears to clarify the position of the missionaries, thus:

...the Mau-Mau war of Kenya’s independence was not just a protest against colonial injustices, but also the marriage of convenience between the church and the colonial government. Hence, a common saying had emerged that there is no marked difference between the European missionaries (and church leadership in general) and the European settler-farmers who were equally racist and brutal...

In the realm of community development, the resultant protests attest to the evidence that no one can develop people without their participation in a given project. In practice, thus, sustainable community development can only take place if the proposed change agents empower the targeted beneficiaries to develop themselves. In that vein, in their pastoral ministry, the missionaries would have prophetically advocated for a participatory rice farming project. At this juncture, let us briefly explain the aforesaid anti-colonial protests.

**Anti-colonial Protests**

It is worth mentioning that the commencement and expansion of the rice farming project in the Mwea plain was surrounded by anti-colonial protests, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The said protests reached their climax when the Mau Mau Movement erupted in 1952. Many Mwea locals deliberately joined the said movement in order to stop the land grabbing that was going on. Note that one of the primary issues of the Mau Mau movement was land ownership.

Hence, Mwea was one of the hotspots of the Mau Mau Revolt because the people who lived in these plains before the introduction of the rice farming project chose to join the revolt so as to fiercely fight for their land. Certainly, most people who occupy Mwealand today were in living in the upper parts of Kirinyaga County (Ndia and Gichugu). According to the 1960s research on the Mwea plains, which was carried out by a rural sociologist, fear and conflict permeated any further surveys on the said plain land in 1951 because the locals felt that the colonizers were taking their land (Moris, 1973).

Eventually, many Kikuyu people were detained under the Mau Mau Emergency Regulations of 1950s (Diemer, 1990). Then, in the context of what the colonizers called discipline and rehabilitation, the imprisoned men were made to work on the construction of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme (Interview, Mwaniki, 21-09-2020). Further, the landless Kikuyu people were given small residential plots so as to enable them to see the necessity of the rice farming project and distance themselves from one main issue in the Mau Mau Movement, namely, the land ownership. It is noteworthy that, the colonial government hoped that the completed irrigation system could

---

3 In this case, technically speaking, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was like a prison in which the former Mau Mau fighters were to be rehabilitated and disciplined before their release by the colonial government.
provide settlement opportunities for the landless Kikuyu detainees; which eventually happened (Chambers, 1973).4

After the Mau Mau Revolt, the colonial government was urgently searching for a place in which it would put the large number of the Kikuyu detainees. Nevertheless, in order to make the Mwea plains a settlement scheme, the colonial government had to create a propaganda that everyone was intended to embrace: that the Mwea plains was empty. According to this propaganda, there were no locals in Mwea area (Ertsen, 2006). As evidenced hereinbefore, this was a lie because the said area had already been purposefully occupied by some people from Mbere, Ndia, Gichugu, and Muranga, and a few members of the Kamba nationality would cross over from the present day Machakos County to put up Beehives so as to harvest honey (Gathogo and Nthukah, 2019).

In support of the aforesaid propaganda, the manager of the Mwea project (1962-1966) pointed out that the development of the Mwea area was simplified by the following situation:

…the almost total lack of population, which meant that there were few families to be evicted and they were offered places as tenants (Veen, 1973:116).

Note that, although the colonial government knew the truth, it lied in order to avoid the financial compensation of the locals (Moris, 1973). Certainly, those locals have never been compensated. Moreover, according to the above words of the manager of the Mwea project, the affected few families were treated as objects that did not matter. In fact, the said manager observes that, after their eviction from their own lands, the said families were offered treated as tenants. What this means is that the locals, who lived securely before the introduction of the rice farming project, were forced by foreigners to become tenants in their own homeland. To make the matter worse, the then religious institutions offered no prophetic voice towards defending the rights of the so-called ‘few people’ who did not matter. These points lead us to the discussion about the harsh management of the newly established Mwea Irrigation Scheme.

Despotic Management of the Scheme

As noted earlier, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was born in the 1950s. Along these lines, it is important to note that when the State of Emergency was put to an end, (1952-60), many ex-freedom fighters argued that they had no land to occupy (Interview, Wakuthii, 21-09-2020). Besides this, the colonial government decided that the said ex-freedom fighters should not go back to the villages; as it insisted that the ex-freedom fighters would incite the innocent locals. As a result, the government planned to settle them in the Mwea Irrigation Scheme (Kanyinga, 1999).5

Following the establishment of the required scheme in the 1950s, the colonial administrators forced the rice tenants to submit to their harsh management of the said scheme. For example, rice farmers were banned from altering their official pattern of rice production because the said alteration would interfere with the set irrigation schedule. In order to ensure that farming discipline was

4 Note that according to the colonizers, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was intended to be a holding ground for the landless, the Mau Mau detainees, and the unemployed people who posed a threat to the colonial government. Thus, to a great extent, the scheme was meant to stop any further anti-colonial revolts. In practice, the principal economic beneficiaries of this project was the colonial government. Strictly, therefore, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was primarily meant to serve the interests of the colonial government at the expense of the colonized poor masses.

5 It is in the above context that seven camps were built in order to accommodate the repatriated Kikuyu people and the Mau Mau detainees. The said camps were as follows: the Mwea camp, the Tebere camp, the Kandongu camp, the Thiba camp, the Wamumu camp, the Karaba camp, and the Gathigiriri camp. Ultimately, the Gathigiriri camp was turned into the Gathigiriri prison, whilst the Wamumu camp became an approved school. It was from these seven camps that the today’s five sections in the Mwea Irrigation Scheme were born; the said sections are as follows: Tebere, Mwea, Thiba, Wamumu, and Karaba sections (Chambers, 1969).
adhered to, the colonial government ensured that the field assistant from the management and the head cultivator (leader of the tenants in his block) were strict key law enforcers in the rice farming and scheme (De Wilde 1967b:236-237). Indeed, it was almost impossible to see a smile on the faces of these fierce men during their enforcement of the rice farming discipline. Definitely, the rice farmers were treated as boys and girls or children who required strict supervision in order to be efficient in their rice farming activities. Again, it is noteworthy that religious institutions failed to utter any prophetic voice against that kind of degrading treatment of the rice farmers.

In the same context, from 1960 onwards, the rice tenants were made to embrace some harsh regulations, namely, the Trust Land (Irrigation) Rules. Each tenant was made to append a signature or put a thumbprint on the eight-page document that contained the said strict rules. These cruel rules included the legislation for crop and water discipline, disposal of the crop, absenteeism, and so forth. The said rules also empowered the management to severely discipline any rice farmer who failed to adhere to any of the stipulated rules (Veen, 1973).

Surely, through these despotic rules, the rice tenants were treated as farming slaves. In the end, the military-like management of the entire scheme strove to ensure that there was a strict control over all rice tenants. Remember that it was believed that a close tyrannical supervision would protect the rice tenants from any failure and, therein, bring about a successful rice farming project (Veen, 1973:127). Therefore, in order avoid trouble, rice tenants had to be treated like objects or children whose opinions and contributions were not required for either the initiation of the rice farming project or in the running of the same.

At long last, however, the British government handed over the Mwea Irrigation Scheme to the government of Kenya in 1963 when Kenya got its independence. However, the harsh management of the rice farming project and the scheme as a whole continued. For example, the rice farmers remained tenants who worked at the mercy of the National Irrigation Board that had the power to evict any rice farmer out of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme if the involved rice farmer performed less well than expected. Generally, because of the despotic management of the scheme the rice farmers felt backed into a tight corner. They felt as if they were a cornered rattlesnake that would defend itself with a desperation attack. This point ushers in a discussion about the ensuing 1998 protest of the rice farmers and its achievements to which we now turn.

The 1998 Protest and Its Achievements

It is important to note that since 1963, until 1998, Mwea Irrigation Scheme has been under the management of the National Irrigation Board, as mandated by the Irrigation Act Cap 347. During the said epoch, the National Irrigation Board used to carry out all the production and marketing activities. However, just as in times of the colonial government, the National Irrigation Board used to pay its rice tenants peanuts after marketing and selling the delivered crops. Sadly, it was the sole decider of what the rice farmers would be paid. Just like the colonizers, the governing board ensured that its rice tenants faced a harsh management, as a measure of instilling the so-called farming discipline into them. Along these lines, just as it was the case during the colonial era, the rice farmers were ill-treated and impoverished. In response to this anomaly, the rice farmers developed a deep-seated animosity towards the Mwea Irrigation Board and eagerly waited for any redemptive voice.

---

6 Note that the colonial management of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was under the African Land Development Organization. However, after the attainment of independence in 1963, the management of the said scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, which, later in 1966, via an Act of Parliament, transferred the management of all the national irrigation schemes to the National Irrigation Board.
The rice farmers’ poverty and oppression created a time bomb, which partly erupted in 1998, when the aforesaid redemptive voice came. This was the political voice of the then Member of Parliament of the Mwea Constituency, Hon. Alfred Nderitu, and his hard-hearted pressure groups. During these fierce battles and/or demos for the liberation of Mwea rice farmers in late 1990s, Church's prophetic voice, both at the local and national levels, was not loud enough or not there at all. Certainly, a prophetic voice was not aired out in order to offer some words of hope. One would have expected some liberative words of hope to come thus: “enough is enough...let my people go” or “reconcile, reconcile…together we can do it...” In practice, the religious institutions remained mere spectators, as the 1998 protests by the rice farmers’ became the order of the day. Or did the Church misunderstand the Mwea rice crisis? Weren’t some of the oppressors playing the role of lay leaders of the local Churches and camouflaging as genuine dealers in the whole saga?

Due to the resultant revolt that was mainly lead by the aforesaid political leader(s), in 1998, the rice farmers refused to forward their crops to the National Irrigation Board. The said farmers argued that their constant oppression and poverty should come to an end. Towards that end, the rice farmers demanded that they should be allowed to sell their own crops (Ariemba, 2018).

Unfortunately, during the rice revolt of 1998, a few people died, whilst others were physically and psychologically impaired. For instance, the houses of some farmers who supported the National Irrigation Board were set ablaze. Generally, the rice farmers who seemed to support the National Irrigation Board were ridiculed and threatened by those who supported the revolt. Precisely, the rice farmers whose houses were set ablaze include: Cecily Wangui Munyua and James Nyaga Wanjai.

The rice farmers who supported the National Irrigation Board also had a position in this matter. Certainly, the said farmers could also see the importance of some positive change in the way the National Irrigation Board managed the rice farming. Nevertheless, these rice farmers wanted an initiation of a constructive dialogue between the National Irrigation Board and the rice farmers towards improving the management of the rice farming. In practice, they never wanted the National Irrigation Board to be treated as the rice farmers’ arch-enemy because it had also changed the lives of the rice farmers positively, especially in matters to do with the education of their children. Nonetheless, the supporters of the National Irrigation Board were misunderstood and severely persecuted (Interview, Wanjai, 19-09-2020).

Note that the local and national religious institutions did not support or condemn the revolt of the rice farmers prophetically. Silently, however, the poor rice farmers and the National Irrigation Board expected the prophetic voice as a divine intervention towards solving the problem (Interview, Gatungo, 25-09-2020). Unfortunately, this did not happen, a recollection that drives us to think of the church that failed to honour one of its key functions. Other functions of religion to society includes the promotion of: social cohesion, social control, explaining the unexplained, providing answers to ultimate questions, psychological support, and by inspiring positive social change. In this case, religious institutions failed to not only inspire positive social change but also to rebuke the corrupt who had camouflaged as lay church leaders. Equally, religious dysfunctions such as conflicts between religious groups, persecution of non-religious people, and apathy towards economic inequality can emerge (Gathogo, 2013).

Suddenly, the management of the scheme was unofficially taken over by the Mwea Rice Farmers Cooperative Society, hence the peasant ‘revolution’ Obviously, the Mwea rice farmers did not have the capacity to carry out the said management successfully without the support of the government. Definitely, the rice farmers lacked the skilled workers, money, and machinery that were necessary for the management of the rice farming project and the maintenance of the scheme. In order to avoid a total downfall of the said project and scheme, the aforesaid society approached
the government for some help in the management of the rice farming project and the much-needed maintenance of the scheme.

In its motherly response, via a constructive dialogue, the National Irrigation Board agreed to co-operate with the rice farmers towards improving the management of the rice farming project and raising the rice farmer’s standards of living. However, the said board had to restructure itself and embrace some particulars roles in the said farming project. At the moment, thus, the running of the said project is participatory (Interview, Gatungo, 25-09-2020). Herein, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme is managed via an approach that is known as the Participatory Irrigation Management.

In the context of the above participatory approach to the rice-farming project, the harmonious working between the government of Kenya (National Irrigation Authority)\(^7\) and the rice farmers partner in the management of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme is visible. In this partnership, the rice farmers participate in the said management by means of their organizations, namely, Irrigation Water Users Association,\(^8\) Mwea Rice Growers Multipurpose, and Lainisha Sacco. All the above-mentioned farmers’ organizations have precise roles in the aforesaid Participatory Irrigation Management. Additionally, the above-mentioned National Irrigation Authority has its own specific roles in the said Participatory Irrigation Management.\(^9\)

But, does the above-mentioned Participatory Irrigation Management of the scheme indicate that all the problems of the rice farmers have been solved? The answer is no! In short, the Mwea rice farmers still require the title deeds, reliable supply of irrigation water, good prices for their crops, tarmacked roads, good sanitation, and so on.\(^10\) Today, the Participatory Irrigation Management requires the assistance of the local and national religious institutions in order to solve some the said problems in the rice farming. Basically, the said religious institutions should offer a prophetic sense of direction towards stopping any future protest of the rice farmers. So, as illustrated by the prophetic voice of Amos, the prophetic voice of religious institutions and persons is one of the required solutions to some of the problems that the Mwea rice farmers are facing. This point ushers in a call for the religious institutions and persons to willingly embrace the prophetic voice of Amos.

### Embracing the Prophetic Voice of Amos

Generally, some of the problems that people face enable them to develop their intellectuality towards enhancing their living standards. Maybe, life without a few problems would be somewhat unworthy to live, yet human beings should not be subjected to an enslaving life of problems. It is

---

\(^7\) On 29th July 2019, President Uhuru Kenyatta assented the Irrigation Bill 2019 into an Act. In this case, the Irrigation Act 2019, which was gazetted on 2nd August 2019 and commenced on 16th August 2019, is aimed at supporting sustainable food production by offering a clear outline of the functions of national and county governments in facilitating irrigation activities in Kenya. Precisely, because of the said presidential assent to the Irrigation Bill 2019, the National Irrigation Board transitioned to the National Irrigation Authority. This transition of the National Irrigation Board to the National Irrigation Authority brought about the description and expansion of its mandate and roles such as supplying water to all the irrigable acres in Kenya (Chabari and Rajwayi, 2019:3rd Issue).

\(^8\) The Irrigation Act 2019 permits community-based irrigation projects in Kenya to form its Irrigation Water Users Association for purposes of the development and management of the involved scheme (Nzonzo, 2020:4th Issue).

\(^9\) The National Irrigation Authority’s main responsibilities in the management of the scheme include the operation and maintenance of the primary and secondary infrastructure, land administration, capacity building, irrigation expansion, and rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructure. In essence, the National Irrigation Authority strives to ensure that Kenya achieves food and nutrition security. Towards that end, it seeks to maintain and rehabilitate existing irrigation infrastructure in diverse projects and schemes such as the Mwea Irrigation Scheme. Besides, towards the same end, it develops irrigation infrastructure across the country as part of its essential mandates (Nzonzo, 2020:3rd Issue).

\(^10\) However, to some extent, the National Irrigation Authority has been able to improve the irrigation infrastructure in order to facilitate the rice farming activities. Today, what is really urgent is the tarmacking of the roads and lining the water canals with a cement-like protective covering in order to minimize water loss via seepage into the ground.
immoral to dehumanize humanity in the name of civilizing it. In this context, religious institutions and persons are obliged by the Divine Truth to embrace the prophetic voice and, therein, condemn anything that dehumanizes humanity in order to liberate the poor masses from their oppression. To this end, the prophetic voice of Amos illustrates that the prophetic voice of religious institutions and individuals is one of the needed solutions to some of the problems that the Mwea rice farmers are facing. In that vein, in the fifth chapter of the book of Amos, the prophet Amos wears a cloth of socio-religious concern and, therein, condemns social injustice and idol worship.

In his prophetic voice, therefore, Amos (1-3) condemned the social injustice and religious hypocrisy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In that vein, he prophetically gave a warning of the impending judgement and the consequences if the Northerners refused to repent and obey God. Ultimately, the Northerners’ refusal to repent and obey God brought forth the 722 BCE Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the resultant Assyrian exile. Similarly, the local and national religious institutions and persons should willingly embrace the prophetic voice of Amos so as to prophetically participate in the process of solving some of the problems of the Mwea rice farmers.

The Mwea revolution that ushered in a more liberal policy on rice farming in Kenya compares with the case in Thailand rice farmers. In this case of Asian theologies, the Burakumin liberation theology of Japan comes out relevantly to the Mwea case. In Japan, the Burakumin minority have been oppressed for more than 400 years (Gathogo, 2011). They are discriminated against in areas of marriage, housing, and employment among others. Such forms of discriminations in certain regions are also common in Africa as the Mwea historiography has demonstrated. Another Asian theology that compares with the case of Mwea Rice Farmers is Waterbuffalo theology. In this, a Japanese theologian Kosuko Koyama attempts to translate the Christian faith into Asian tradition in Thailand. His concept is based on 1 Cor 9:22, “To the weak, I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” Koyama’s missiological position is that in order to reach people, the Gospel must be shared with them on their own level of thinking (use of contextualization method). He targets Thai farmers who spend their days in the rice fields, and argues that if the Gospel is presented in our common theological terms, they will never comprehend it. It will remain a foreign story. He addresses this by relating theology to the Thai rice farmers in their own language. Considering that most Asians are Buddhists, Koyama has incorporated Buddhism into his Christian theology (Gathogo, 2011).

Conclusion

The Mwea Irrigation Scheme was born in the 1950s. Firstly, the rice farmers faced the colonial management of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme that was led by the African Land Development Organization. Then, in 1963, the management of the said scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture that, later in 1966, via an Act of Parliament, transferred the management of all the national irrigation schemes to the National Irrigation Board. Later on, the National Irrigation Board transitioned to the National Irrigation Authority, which is deemed to be participatory and receptive.

All in all, the article has unearthed the oppressive elements in the Mwea rice scheme and navigated the need for the redemptive prophetic voice that will usher in full liberation and authentic prosperity in the Mwea context. This article has attained its goal through offering a historical recollection of Mwea Irrigation Scheme. Regarding its methodology, this article has utilised the relevant interviews, reviewed existing relevant literature, and the modus operandi of Prophet Amos. In a nutshell, the article has established that since the era of colonialism there has been a perpetual oppression of the Mwea rice farmers. It has also established that the Christian missions and the post-
colonial religious institutions have been unable or unwilling to air their respective prophetic voices against the oppression of the said rice farmers or in support of their liberating activities.

All in all, a critical examination of a short history of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme evidences that the poor masses who fight for the bread of social justice and freedom are either ignored or told to wait till later by those in power, which almost always means never. In this context, the writer of this article observes that the local religious institutions should be able to offer their prophetic voice towards enhancing the quality of human life in the above-mentioned scheme. In this case, prophetic voice focus at ensuring that the present participatory management of the Mwea Irrigation Scheme will soon or later do the following things: provide the title deeds to the rice farmers, tarmac the impassable roads, cement the vital water canals, give reliable supply of irrigation water, offer good prices for their crops, and facilitate the rice farmers to have a good sanitation. Certainly, the Participatory Irrigation Management and Amos’ prophetic voice to religious institutions will ultimately make the Mwea Irrigation Scheme a little heaven in Kenya, as Mwea rice farmers experience the foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

References
https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6155

Certainly, history shows that the power of the prophetic voice is unstoppable. For example, one of the factors that dismantled the apartheid system in South Africa was the prophetic voice of many religious leaders who fought the said system by speaking fearlessly against it.


Interviews
Gatungo, Stanley, interview on Mwea Scheme on 25 September 2020.
Mwaniki, Stanley, interview on Mwea Scheme on 21 September 2020
Wanjai, James Nyaga, interview on Mwea Scheme on 19 September 2020
Wakuthii, Jane, interview on Mwea Scheme, 21 September 2020