

**THE CHARACTER OF KIMENDEERI IN
“DEVIL ON THE CROSS”:
A REPLICA OF MODERN AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERS.**

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Abstract: *This paper concerns itself with how the character of Kimendeeri in Ngugi’s “Devil on the Cross” depicts the modern African Politicians. A cursory look at Kimendeeri’s character portrayal reveals an exact replica of typical behaviour of current African political leaders. Ngugi creates character names and character types as devices through which the social reality is encapsulated and analyzed, and comprise a fresh way of understanding his novels. Kimendeeri, therefore, is one character who stands out to reflect the social reality obtaining currently in Africa as a whole. Kimendeeri refers to “the one who smashes or grinds.” Ngugi provides the key to Kimendeeri’s character when he tells us that Kimebdeeri was given the name during the emergency in colonial times “because of the way he used grind workers and peasants to death” (P.187). As District Officer, we are told, ‘he used to make men and women lie flat on the ground in a row, and then he would drive his land Rover over their bodies’ (P.187). In the neo-colonial set-up, Kimendeeri, like African political leaders, is an active and brutal enforcer of the law. He changes from the physical “smasher or grinder” of emergency days to Psychological grinder. Like most African Political leaders who want to hold on to power even when support dwindles, he proposes that his class and its overlords should use the law, religion, education, and the mass media to stifle the workers’ consciousness and to effectively kill the possibility of their rising against the exploitative order. By working on the psychology of the exploited, like oppressive political regimes do on their citizens, and showing them that their exploitation is God-ordained and unchangeable. Kimendeeri effectively grinds or smashes the workers’ consciousness and dehumanizes them, therefore living up to his type and the meaning of his name. Similarly, the Modern African political leaders effectively mount psychological smashing or grinding of their citizens using the law and the media. Media reporting is intentionally and deliberately twisted for political perpetuation and expediency. Even the Republican constitutions have been amended for selfish aggrandizement. The police is used to cosmetically maintain law and order to perpetuate those holding the reins of power. Through psychological grinding of the citizens, those charged with the responsibility of stewardship of people’s resources have the guts to hide their ineptitude by attributing the free fall of their currencies to global trends. Indeed, Modern African political leaders have succeeded in smashing their citizens to an extent that the masses tend to believe that their predicament is God-ordained and cannot be changed.*

Keywords: African Leaders, Psychological, Kimendeeri, Character, Media, Oppressive.

I. Introduction

Ngugi Wa Thiongo has been widely and consistently acknowledged as an important (towering) voice in African letters. He has been called the voice of the Kenyan people by certain commentators, while others have lauded his novels as among the most underrated and highest quality to come from Africa. Ngugi's fiction such as *'Devil on the Cross'* has been noted for its overtly political agenda, its attempts to give a literary voice to the poor Kenya, and its consistent critique of colonialism and oppressive regimes. He has projected post-liberation African governments as corrupt. His essays and critical works have been acclaimed as powerful and insightful explorations of relevant political, social, and literary issues.

'Devil on the Cross' is one of the first modern novel written in Gikuyu (Kikuyu) that centres on the workers' revolutionary movement ignited by the exploitative tendencies by those charged with the responsibility of overseeing their wealth. The so-called bourgeoisie engage in a competition in 'Theft and Robbery.' The competitors all boast of the ways they have exploited the masses in the past and outline new plans for doing so in the future. One of the competitors at the Devil's Feast is named Kimendeeri. Ngugi creates a very stunning character in Kimendeeri, as he is a sum total of exploitative regimes in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Of late, Africa is one of the continents that have been in the limelight of leadership crisis politically. The website www.africanholocast.net/news-ah/africanleadership.html notes that Africa's biggest problem today lies with the leadership. Wikipedia looks at leadership as the practical skill that encompasses the ability of an individual or organization to lead or guide others. A good leader therefore, should be one who creates an inspiring vision of the future, and motivates and inspires people to engage with that vision.

The concern, however, today is whether the African political leaders are visionary. If they are, then, how do they treat their resources (the people they govern)? African leadership is tied to what happens in a particular country or government. Citizens of a country may live in unnecessary frustration, hopelessness and poverty, die of preventable diseases or run to other places to gain appreciation. Crisis in Africa may arise from selfish, backward type of non-progressive leaders planted in post-colonial empires where their characteristics are either naïve, visionless or totally compromised.

This paper, therefore, argues that political leaders are the primary holders, controllers and distributors of power and resources in a particular institution and /or territory. Most political leaders in Africa and elsewhere loath criticism so much that it becomes their perpetual nightmare. But what they do not conceptualise is that failure to critique leadership is far more than a lively fun opinion on a social platform. Hence without a sharp critical assessment of leadership and the duties of leadership, we will select entertainers; sweet faced teddy bears, orators who use the media to cover the mess, cool cats, as opposed to strong visionaries. It further argues that political leaders in Africa and elsewhere in the world have succeeded in oppressing their citizens economically and politically to the extent that the masses tend to believe that their predicament is God-ordained and cannot be changed.

It is from what has been indicated in the foregone paragraph that a reminder is set to all the citizens of the earth concerning the type of leadership citizens of the earth should have. It is our moral duty as citizens of this earth to hold leadership accountable. Let them be assessed so that their leadership duties are known. It is time African leaders realised what they have done to their people and probably to the continent as a whole. For Africa to be redeemed, every average person must actively participate. Leaders being the top most must be sincere and understand opportunities and foster innovation. In this regard, African leaders should have humility to know when they are wrong and should exercise patience and above all have patience to listen to subordinates if their voice (advice) is applicable.

II. Literature Review

Quite substantive research has been done towards leadership in general. Jo-Ansie van Wyk (2007) in his paper “Political Leaders in Africa: Presidents, Patrons or Profiteers” indicates that the perception is that African leaders rule failed states that have acquired tags such as “corruptocracies”, “chaosocracies” or “terrorocracies.” He adds that perspectives on political leadership in Africa vary from the “criminalization” of the state to political leadership as “dispensing patrimony”, the “recycling” of elites and the use of state power and resources to consolidate political and economic power.

The book of Matthew (in the Bible) also talks of corruption. Corruption is not only about stealing funds but also about putting people in prime positions. This form of corruption is crippling Africa’s development. Corruption might be worse than murder in that a lot of resources die in the process since people in positions may not hold the qualifications but are there as clan members (wako niwako in Zambia). And, the corrupt leadership unleashes its weight on whistle blowers like a ton of bricks;

grinds its citizenry to a point of accepting bribes as normal practice to gain favour. African leaders have learnt to do quite a number of wrong things in different ways and few things right. Grant & Keohane (2005)'s assessment of standards of legitimacy in world politics argues that world politics is characterized by sharp conflicts of interests and values, and by potential or real violent conflict in the absence of a common government.

What leaders should bear in mind is that no man was created to last. Therefore, they should not hold on to power as if they will not die or as if they were not chosen by their fellow human beings. Today, most political leaders particularly in Africa do lead their countries to a level of oppressing fellow country men and women. This is done through the introduction of a lot of taxes which seem not to have been well explained to the entire citizenry. Social order seems to slowly disintegrate. The grass roots are suffering the most probably because of ignorance, locality, status and many other aspects of life lacking in them.

III. Discussion

Kimendeeri's character flashes into the limelight the greatest crisis facing not only Africa today but the world at large, that is, a leadership crisis, in all areas of people's activity. The African Holocaust Society (2017) could be right in its argument that Africa is the world's richest continent yet the bulk of African people live as if they were citizens of desert. The failure to produce an African brand from the billions of tons of raw material Africa exports to the West is primarily due to the Faustian, myopic, selfish, backward type of non-progressive, ego-centric leaders who are planted as candidates in post-colonial empires. Top traits are either naïve, visionless, proxy implants, opportunistic/parasitic and totally compromised. And when such ills and inadequacies are exposed by their citizenry, they become defensive to a point of being oppressive by using state machinery.

Political leaders of today, in my view are not different from Kimendeeri in '*Devil on the Cross*' who could drive his land Rover on men and women who were lying on the ground (p. 187). In a similar manner, political leaders of today brutally enforce laws through torture of those accused by the state. In the process, mental castration crops in and psychological effect becomes obvious. One is left to wonder the kind of world we live in where the views of the oppressed are expressed at the convenience of their oppressors. In most countries around the world, citizens are made to live in fear of the governments they put for themselves. This entails that when people fear their government, there is tyranny: and

when the government fears the people, there is liberty. Alas! It is not the case in most countries that claim to be democratic, where people fear their governments because they have produced tyrannical regimes through glorifying their liberators from the manacles of colonialism. It is clear that if the governed do not stop oppression when it is a seed, it will be very hard to stop it when it is a tree.

Modern world political leaders, in their tyrannical and Kimendeeri style, effectively mount psychological smashing or grinding of their citizens using the law and the media. Media reporting is intentionally and deliberately twisted for political perpetuation and expediency. Even the Republican constitutions have been amended for selfish aggrandizement. The police are used to cosmetically maintain law and order to perpetuate those holding the reins of power. Through psychological grinding of the citizens, those charged with the responsibility of stewardship of people's resources have the guts to hide their ineptitude by attributing the free fall of their currencies to global trends. Indeed, Modern African political leaders have succeeded in smashing their citizens to an extent that the masses tend to believe that their predicament is God-ordained and cannot be changed.

It is sad to say that sometimes, poor choices of leaders can lead to suffering and even death of people. The prevalence of such a trend causes the African leaders to lose quite a good number of people. One wonders what goes on in leaders' minds when citizens die like that. Leaders must bear in mind that the acceptances of the burden of leadership means he/she is responsible for those he has power over. It is not what he has done as an individual. However, at some point, the people who he represents must look at that contribution and re-weight the outcome of those choices made.

On another aspect, an African political leader tends to be bending all the time for assistance in order to meet certain standards in his country. Such assistances are taken as monetary aid or mutual understanding of leaders involved. One might not be wrong to say that our leadership and actually our entire disposition as a people are articulated on degrees of dependency. Africans in their right minds do not expect their political leaders to be the source or cause of any friction in the country. That is why Martin Luther King Jr. expressed himself over leadership by saying that *human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifices, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals*. John Hayford similarly says that *Africa's biggest problem today lies with the leadership. Leaders are driven by self-interest, so excessive that their people's interests are forgotten.... hardly different from the colonial masters*. This

view seems to be in tandem with Ngugi's position in *Devil on the Cross* through the portrait making of the competition at the caves to choose the best seven thieves and robbers in which Kimendeeri is contestant.

Instead of portraying such ill vices outlined above, African leaders in my view should be pioneers of peace, freedom and justice. Inherited facilities should neither be corrupted nor completely destroyed. Mandela can be isolated for having been a defender of the masses. His gentle hand steadies the rage self-serving Eurocentric abstract ideals of non-violence and love. It can be said that at some point, the people he represented must look at his contributions and re-weigh the outcome of those choices made. In addition, the acceptances of the burden of leadership means he is responsible for those he had power over.

IV. Conclusion

For political leadership to stand a test of time in African states and elsewhere in the world, focus must be on loyalty and love rather than issues of constrained society. The paper has demonstrated that African leaders an exact replica of the character of Ngugi's Kimendeeri. The police are used to cosmetically maintain law and order to perpetuate those holding the reins of power. Through psychological grinding of the citizens, those charged with the responsibility of stewardship of people's resources have the guts to hide their ineptitude by attributing the free fall of their currencies to global trends. Indeed, Modern African political leaders have succeeded in smashing their citizens to an extent that the masses tend to believe that their predicament is God-ordained and cannot be changed.

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