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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PORTRAYAL OF THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POLITICIAN IN SWAHILI POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This study was, in a broader sense, intended to identify the many political, social and economic changes that the continent of Africa has undergone since independence. Among the significant changes witnessed are those of its political leaders. This study analyzed the various traits and actions of Africa's contemporary political leaders as portrayed by Kiswahili poets. The objective of this study was to evaluate the changes that the contemporary African politician has undergone since the attainment of multiparty democracy according to Swahili poets. The study was guided by Post-colonial Theory which is associated with the works of Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. Data was collected from selected anthologies of Kiswahili poems using purposive sampling method. Qualitative analysis of the selected poems was done guided by the research objective. The findings of the study revealed that although the African continent has made remarkable steps in enhancing democracy, a good number of its political leaders, whom were credited for championing multiparty democracy, have turned out to be tormentors of the very people they had sworn to protect.

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INTRODUCTION

This study was based on the premise that Kiswahili poetry has the ability to construct characters creatively and make them to reflect the traits of real people and their interactions in real life. Despite the fact that previous studies have been done in Kiswahili poetry and its relationship with politics in Africa, there was need to carry out a study that would evaluate the performance of the contemporary African politician since the attainment of multiparty democracy. Our study sought to reveal the special relationship that exists between African politics and Kiswahili poetry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various authors and researchers on governance in Africa have made an in-depth discussion on political changes that have taken place in the continent over years. This is based on the fact that political leadership affects many sectors, not only in Africa but worldwide. It is political leadership that controls and distributes power and resources in most sectors. According to Kipsang and Chepkuto (2011) politicians need to

prepare themselves adequately for leadership roles, to dedicate themselves fully for public service and to serve as role models to the people under them. This study however, found out that some contemporary African politicians have not acted responsibly in their roles as leaders as evidenced by poems analyzed from Kithakawa Mberia's *Msimuwa Tisa* (2007).

According to Asingo (2003), citizens of the continent had been disillusioned by political despots during the single-party dictatorship. They highly hoped that better governance would be in place during the multiparty period. However, equitable distribution of the national cake, as promised by politicians during the struggle for multiparty democracy, turned out to be a pipe dream. Politicians who took over the helms of leadership immediately after the fall of single-party dictatorship amassed the available wealth, caring less about the citizens whom they represented. They also used their political parties to gain political patronage and to suppress and sideline those opposed to their despotic rule.

The political leaders, whom the electorate looked into for solutions to their long suffering, were accused of land grabbing, among other acts of greed. Miguna (2012) explains how senior politicians encroached the Mau forest in Kenya and curved thousands of hectares of land for their own use. This act of greed affected water flow to the adjacent areas since the

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water catchment areas were interfered with, leading to serious water shortages.

Some politicians have been associated with unethical practices such as polarization of their countries based on political parties. Gachukia (2005) questions the character of politicians who incite their tribesmen against other tribes in order to gain control of some regions. The author claims that some African politicians cause chaos in some regions where they wish to gain supremacy, making members of some communities who could be opposed to their leadership to flee for safety, a few days to elections.

Hamisi (2011) also accuses the contemporary African leaders of indecent acts such as immorality. He cites a case where immorality was rampant in the offices of some members of parliament in one East African state. In the said case, used condoms were found in the offices as well as drainage channels. This is a clear indication that some African leaders don't mind failing the integrity test. That is why in some poems analyzed in this study they have referred to as hyenas and desert locusts due to their greed. The contemporary African politicians have also been accused of clinging to power long after they lose popularity.

Kanyinga, Long and Ndi (2008) posit that such leaders would refuse to leave office even after losing in democratically contested elections. Others would only complain of election rigging when they lose in elections and not vice versa. This is a clear indicator that most of these leaders are not concerned by the welfare of the people that elect them. Instead, they are led by selfish political and economic ambitions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a library-based study that employed purposive sampling method in analyzing poetic texts depicting the contemporary African politician as a poetic character. It involved descriptive analysis of selected poetic texts from the following anthologies of Kiswahili poems: *Diwaniya Karne Mpya* (Ken Walibora, Ed. 2007) and *Msimuwa Tisa* (Kithakawa Mberia, 2007) The study was conducted in various university libraries in Kenya namely; Chuka University, Kenya Methodist University, Egerton University, Kenyatta University and University of Nairobi. Literature review concentrate don works related to those found in the selected anthologies. These were found in books, research reports and theses, electronic and print journals, magazines and newspapers. The researchers analyzed poems that highlighted on the portrayal of the contemporary African politician. These poems revealed how the politician in question digressed on the promises made to the masses during the struggle for multiparty democracy and became a neo-colonialist who tormented his fellow Africans, who had assumed that full democracy would be realized after years of single party dictatorship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were presented in a descriptive manner. The researchers analyzed the selected poems, commenting on the creative construction of the contemporary African politician, his traits and actions. It was evident from

this study that the contemporary African politician was not any better than the predecessors. Poems analyzed from *Diwaniya Karne Mpya* and *Msimuwa Tisa* reveal that the contemporary African politician maintains some of the traits that were witnessed during the single-party era. Some of the politicians have been described as traitors, hypocritical liars and tricksters. They have also been accused of greed, as evidenced by grabbing of land set aside for public utility. In his poem titled 'Usingizini' (pg. 3), which means 'in the sleep', Mberia (2007) complains that some influential political leaders own large chunks of land, leaving the poor with no place to farm or settle. However, the poet flatly accuses the politicians without attempting to explain how they acquire this land from the poor citizens.

The contemporary African politician has also been accused of laxity and lacking commitment in as far as serving the citizens is concerned. In his poems titled 'Msimuwa Tisa' (pg. 9), that is 'the ninth season' and 'Msimu Mwinginewa Wasaliti' (pg. 12), meaning 'another traitors' season' Mberia discusses how the politicians have extended their laxity to parliament. He cites cases where the politicians sleep and snore in parliament instead of passing important laws that affect their countries. Cases of politicians being bribed by their colleagues in order to derail justice through passing bills that are oppressive to the poor have also been cited in the poems.

The study also showed how contemporary African leaders have acted with impunity, resisting any opposition to their oppressive practices. This is evidenced by the unstoppable urge to shelf important parliamentary business in order to pass bills aimed at increasing their salaries and allowances despite public outcry. In the anthology titled *Diwaniya Karne Mpya* (Ken Walibora, Ed. 2007), Muchai bin Chuicastigates these politicians for amassing wealth through setting high perks for themselves. In his poem titled 'Tujengentiwanati' (pg. 30), which means 'citizens, let us build the nation' the poet urges the citizens to ignore non-performing leaders and concentrate on nation-building activities. These sentiments are supported by Mberia (2007) in his poem, 'Wahalifu Huru' (pg. 30), which means 'free criminals'. The duo depicts the contemporary African politicians as selfish individuals who plunder the economies of their countries, caring less about the plight of the electorate.

In summary, this study revealed that the transition from single-party dictatorship to multiparty politics did not at all lead to good governance in Africa. Some of the politicians who posed as champions of multi-party democracy derailed the democratic train which was expected to deliver goodies to the citizens of this continent.

Conclusion

This study attempted to evaluate the performance of the contemporary African politician according to Swahili poets. Although most of the poets have depicted the same as an unreliable leader, the African continent has in the past boasted of having a few exemplary leaders. An analysis of selected poems from *Msimuwa Tisa* reveal that the founding father of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere was a patriotic Pan-African leader worth of emulation. Mberia (2007) describes Nyerere as

a builder who committed himself to maintaining peace, equity and democracy in his country. This leader has been deservingly put in the same category with other legendary Pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sekou Toure (Guinea), Samora Machel (Mozambique) and Nelson Mandela (South Africa). It is also worth noting that the continent of Africa has some good and performing political leaders who have contributed greatly towards the development of their countries to an extent of gaining regional and world recognition.

Recommendations for Further Research

- This study focused on works published between 1988 and 2007. Further research can be done on works published later in order to evaluate changes that have taken following emergence of new and emerging issues of governance such as the devolved government in Kenya and its implication on development.
- Studies can be carried out on translated works other than those originally written in Kiswahili.

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