THE STATE SECURITY APPARATUS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *PETALS OF BLOOD* AND *DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Ngugi wa Thiong'o's perception and delineation of the state security apparatus in *Petals of blood* and *Devil on the cross*. It explores how the agents of state security, who are supposed to be neutral in the discharge of their legal duties, serve as tools used by members of the ruling class to silence political opposition in postcolonial Kenya, in order to maintain class domination. It maintains that the characters who represent the state security apparatus in independent Kenya are agents of the oppressors' class and thus serve as anti-revolutionary agents. The study, however, recommends that the agents of state security should be re-oriented to their real duties via periodic, organised seminars. In all, it concludes that the state security apparatuses in Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of blood* and *Devil on the cross* serve as instruments of political repression.

Keywords: exploitation; lawenforcement; Ngugi wa Thiong'o; repression; state security apparatus

INTRODUCTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya is one of the most prolific and acknowledged novelists in Africa. He has published seven powerful novels: *Weep not, child* (1964), *The river*

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between (1965), *A grain of wheat* (1967), *Petals of blood* (1977), *Devil on the cross* (1980), *Matigari* (1986) and *Wizard of the crow* (2006). Like every other work by Wa Thiong'o, *Petals of blood* (hereafter *Petals*) and *Devil on the cross* (hereafter *Devil*) have been commented on by numerous critics. While Eustace Palmer (1979, 153) views *Petals* as a novel which, among African novels, possibly delineates 'the most comprehensive analysis so far of the evil perpetrated in independent African society by black imperialists', Bayo Ogunjimi (1984, 68) considers *Devil* to be a novel written for the oppressed. In 'The many faces of neo-colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of blood* and *Devil on the cross*', G.E. Okereke (1989, 138) comments that in both novels coercion is perpetrated against African people by the new African leaders who now 'perfect themselves in the act of oppression and exploitation, an art [at] which the European colonizers were adept'. Okereke further points out that in spite of the evils done against the masses, 'the law enforcement agents – the army and the police –exist not to redress wrongs, and protect the people but rather to serve the ruling elite and their European mentors' (ibid, 139). Here, Okereke's comment – made in passing – is particularly significant because it has a direct bearing on the thrust of this study, which identifies the state security apparatus as the main vehicle of repression not only during the colonial era, but also the postcolonial dispensation. Even though critics have called attention to the aberrant roles of the state security apparatuses in Wa Thiong'o's writing, there is a dearth of detailed study of the state security apparatuses as instruments of political repression in *Petals* and *Devil*, hence the need for this article.

In reading Wa Thiong'o's *Petals* and *Devil*, the reader cannot fail to see the gap that exists between the rulers and the ruled, oppressors and the oppressed; with the rulers maintaining their hegemony over the ruled, the masses, by using state security apparatuses. In essence, Wa Thiong'o's *Petals* and *Devil* represent the state security apparatuses as negating their ideal constitutional functions.

Frantz Fanon (1963, 138), in *The wretched of the earth*, makes a significant point about state security apparatuses and the shirking of their duties when he avers that 'the strength of the police and the power of the army are proportionate to the stagnation in which the rest of the nation is sunk'. The meaning of Fanon's averment is that the police and the army exert their powers and stamina to pull the nation down, rather than advancing the nation. Their aim, according to W. Wesolowski (1990, 170) in 'Marx's theory of class domination', is to suppress 'those who do not observe laws, that is, who act against the existing social relations'. This implies that the gulf between the haves and the have nots is perpetuated through the state's law-enforcement agencies.

Thus, political repression involves discrimination against and the subjugation of an individual or a group for political motives, especially with the intention of pegging people down or inhibiting them from participating in the political life of a nation. Political repression shows itself through discriminatory or anti-people

policies such as human rights violations, terrorism by the army, police brutality and unlawful apprehensions or incarcerations, violent actions such as the murder, torture, kidnapping, summary execution and other extrajudicial maltreatment of political activists, members of the opposition or society at large. It is also important to point out that where political repression is endorsed and ordered by the state, it may amount to state intimidation or crimes against humanity. Fierce and bloodthirsty political repression is a classic quality of dictatorships, authoritarian and undemocratic nations and related governments. Acts of political repression are often discharged by the police, army, paramilitary agencies or death squads. This is where Wa Thiong'o comes into the picture. The purpose of this article is to examine his perception and delineation of the state security apparatuses in *Petals* and *Devil* as tools of political repression. Specifically, the focus will be on how state security agents allow themselves to be used by those in authority to unleash terror on the populace – especially their perceived political enemies.

SECURITY AGENTS AS TOOLS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION IN *PETALS*

As novels, *Petals* and *Devil* demonstrate the inhumane treatment of the people of Kenya by those whom they had elected to lead them after independence. Instead of leading the people to the promised land, where egalitarianism should have reigned, the new African leaders embark on the dictum and system of self-regard. In *Homecoming*, Wa Thiong'o states: 'The trouble, of course, is that many African middle classes helped to smother the revolutionary demands of the majority of peasants and workers and negotiated a treaty of mutual trust with the white colonial power structure' (1972, 12). To this end, African leaders propel themselves into the privileged positions vacated by the white colonial lords; hence they match them in acquiring the symbols of social distinction. They create a gulf between themselves and the people. The inhumane relations that exist between the rulers and the ruled make the rulers and the ruled to become conscious of their different class ideologies, so that any calls for revolutionary action are silenced by the agents of state security.

Looking at *Petals*, Wa Thiong'o's first novel on independent Kenya, the text concerns itself with the exploitation, repression and impoverishment of the Kenyan masses. Like *Devil*, the novel is set in the secluded community of Ilmorog which, in its heyday, sustained the nation with abundant human and natural resources. It is, however, subsequently deserted and disregarded in the postcolonial rush for earthly possessions. To ensure that the Kenyan masses do not reap what they sow, the new government uses the agents of state security. State security apparatuses which, by their nature are supposed to be neutral in exercising their duties, allow themselves to be manipulated by the ruling classes into suppressing the masses.

In *Petals* (1977) Wa Thiong'o traces the injuries the Ilmorog people suffer, at the hands of the colonial government and its law enforcement agents, in their struggle for independence. Their hope is that independence will bring renewal. During the colonial era, for example, Abdulla – who disagrees with every bad system – is sold out by Kimeria and considered a political enemy. To this effect he is mutilated by 'two plain-clothes men' (ibid, 223) who park a police van 'near a Keiapple hedge near the Indian-shops' (ibid.). Abdulla explains how it happened to him: 'Now they shot at me. I fell. I arose. They shot again. I fell and rose, over ditches and hillocks, through fields of grass, through Rongai market-place…' (ibid.). Nding'uri, the son of Mariamu, Abdulla's aunt, with whom Abdulla had moved out before the arrival of the policemen, is caught and 'a week later they hanged him at Githunguri' (ibid, 224). The repression by state security apparatuses did not end with colonialism. Post-independence a continuity of law enforcement repression has remained. Wa Thiong'o begins by showing us investigating police officers (IPOs) who are either inexperienced or judgemental in their efforts to find out who is committing the crimes of arson and murder in Ilmorog. Although the crimes have been committed by Munira because of his religious fanaticism, should those who did not participate in the offences be manhandled merely because the men – Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, who monopolise the resources of the nation – died? On the fourth page of the *Sunday Mouthpiece* newspaper which the police bring, the banner headline reads: 'Murder in Ilmorog. Foul play suspected. Political motivation?' (ibid, 193). From the received information the police feel that the death of the three African directors of Theng'eta breweries – whom the writer of *Daily Mouthpiece* ironically describes as 'three well-known nationalist fighters for political, educational, and above all, economic freedom for Africans' (ibid, 194) – is politically motivated. Accordingly, the IPOs start to torture Abdulla and Karega, who are arrested along with Munira as suspects. The IPOs fail to realise that a suspect is assumed blameless until found guilty in a court of law. Their aim is not to incriminate or condemn a suspect before taking him or her to a court of law, but to glean intelligence. According to Catling (cited in Clayton and Killingray [1989, 117–118]), laws should 'be used to ensure that wherever possible the innocent should not be harmed along with the guilty by swiping'. But in *Petals* the innocent are harmed along with the guilty, thanks to the law enforcement agents. The same Abdulla whose life should have been bettered after his country's independence, is slapped in the face by a policeman for trying to protest against the deception of the officer who only invited him to the station to record his statement, but later detains him. At the station, Abdulla is faced with routine questioning which lasts for nine days. He is squeezed into a corner and 'occasionally […] roughly handled' (ibid, 309). Again, Karega, who is arrested for a murder he knows nothing about, is abandoned (he is no longer questioned) yet he remains in police custody for three days. However, when the questioning begins, as in Abdulla's case, it lasts for more than eight days. On the basis of the fact that Karega refuses to confess any

knowledge of the arson and murder of Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, Inspector Godfrey becomes very angry. Therefore, 'with sudden rage' he strikes 'Karega on the face' and blood oozes 'between his teeth' (ibid, 309). As if that is not enough, on the orders of Inspector Godfrey, Karega is taken by a policeman 'to the red chamber' (ibid.) and interrogated and tortured relentlessly. The workers who go to the police station demanding his release are tyrannised by an officer and his lieutenants. The officers come with guns and chase the protesting workers right to the centre of Ilmorog. 'One or two workers sustained injuries and were taken to hospital' (ibid, 4). This is indeed a symbol of police brutality. Here, Wa Thiong'o depicts the unfriendly and crude investigation methods so characteristic of security agencies in postcolonial Kenya and other third-world countries in Africa.

Furthermore, in *Petals* the state security agents (who are now black Africans) are used to repress anyone who questions the present political administration: 'There was always the police, the army and the law courts to put down any resistance from below' (ibid, 186). Kenya, as Wa Thiong'o shows here, is a country of exploitation and oppression. The people are pitilessly betrayed by their new African leaders, the likes of Nderi wa Riera, Mzigo, Chui, Kimeria, Ezekieli Waweru, the Revered Jerrod Brown and their fellows who are identified as malignant and spiteful, hypocritical and exploitative public officers: 'They were all of one tribe: the Mercedes family: whether they came from the coast or Kisumu. One family. We were another tribe: another family' (ibid, 98).

In effect, they are presented in the novel as the bourgeois class, the exploiters and oppressors, while Karega, Abdulla, Munira, Nyakinyua and Wanja, on the other hand, are represented as the oppressed class which is made up of workers and peasants. Nderi wa Riera, who represents the Ilmorog community (along with representatives of other communities) in parliament in Nairobi, does not think about the problems of the people which include 'lack of water, lack of roads and lack of hospitals' (ibid, 85). Instead of deliberating on how to bring development to the various autonomous communities, Nderi and his brigade gather together under the umbrella of the KCO (Kiama Kamwene Cultural Organisation) to discuss issues that will enrich only their members economically and hamper the all-round development of the country. Of course, the 'KCO would serve the interest of the wealthy locals and their foreign partners to create similar economic giants' (ibid, 186). In the words of Ngara (1985, 79), KCO is 'an organization whose objective is to divide the people and support the ruling class'. However, in order for the KCO members to achieve their selfish goals, they employ the power of witchcraft and the state security apparatuses to keep their followers fearful and obedient. The KCO members deceive the people, luring them into taking an oath by inviting them for the mass tea drinking. There they plan to extort 12 shillings and 50 cents from each, all for the purpose of enrolling in the KCO. Unfortunately, the anonymous lawyer, an upright man who is sincere and stands up for the underprivileged, is hunted down at all costs. According to the narrator, a parliamentarian such as 'Nderi would surely have

the lawyer eliminated. He would ask his henchmen to open [a] "file" for the lawyer in their minds' (Wa Thiong'o 1977, 187). As in the old days of colonialism, people are arrested en masse as they express their disillusionment with self-government programmes and, perhaps, ask questions similar to those posed by the Leader in *The black hermit*:

> Where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools for our children? Who of our tribe is in the government? Who of our flesh and blood can be seen in long cars and houses built of stone? Our tribe waits for a government composed of other tribes. What has Uhuru brought us? (Wa Thiong'o 1968, 13)

Without doubt, *uhuru* has brought more hardship than prosperity. In *Petals*, for example, Wa Thiong'o nonetheless presents a character, Nderi wa Riera, as someone who is without integrity. He is the MP for Ilmorog constituency, but he forgets his people. He does not remember 'his old promise to bring piped water to the area' (1977, 84). While poverty and unemployment are the news of the day, the people resolve to do whatever odd jobs they find so as to earn a living. For instance, Abdulla is reduced to becoming a drunkard who specialises in selling sheepskins and oranges by the roadside, to landlords and motorists. Wanja, who has also fallen on hard times, is forced to open a brothel and states that 'you eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you' (ibid, 291). Nderi, as the people's MP, knows that unemployment is rife in the country, but does not propose a solution or a means to eradicate it, stating:

> I quite agree with you. Unemployment is an acute problem in this country. But it is the same all over the world. Even in England and America you read of millions laid off and begging for bread. It is the population explosion. (ibid, 178)

Nderi, like Chinua Achebe's chief, the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, who uses 'his position to enrich himself' (1966, 2), sees politics as a means to personal aggrandisement, while the members of his society are left deprived. The Ilmorog of old, as Wa Thiong'o would rightly demonstrate, is the home of red-blooded inhabitants who enjoy the fruits of nature. However, now they have fallen on hard times, and a menacing drought has ravaged the environment. The implication of this drought is symbolic of a society which is economically ruined. Nevertheless, the people remember that they have a representative in government, and they organise and sent their delegates to the city to acquaint him with their plight. On their way to the city, the delegation is denied shelter and even water by priests and princes alike. The worst is that their donkey is confiscated at the capital by state security agents who, by virtue of their work, should have provided them with adequate security. They are blamed for bringing an ass-drawn cart into the city since it obstructs traffic. The evidence of their bad experience at the hands of state security officials is highlighted thus:

> Karega and Munira found others in another crisis: Abdulla's donkey and cart had been detained by the police, for holding up the traffic and shitting in one of the streets and in Jee Vanjee Gardens…The police said they would hold the donkey until the group was ready to leave. (Wa Thiong'o 1977, 157–158)

When the delegates act against Nderi by throwing things at him for neglecting their complaints and needs, the next port of call for him is Central Police Station. In the words of the narrator: 'He suddenly took to his heels…he ran across Jee Vanjee Gardens towards the Central Police Station…' (ibid, 183). Subsequently, 'a riot squad and sirened police car came to the scene… Nderi sat beside the officer in the car and pointed at Munira, Abdulla and Karega' (ibid.). What follows is their immediate apprehension and detention 'at the City's Central Police Station for a night' (ibid, 184). The next day they are arraigned in court for sitting on the lawns and for unlawful assembly. Were it not for the anonymous lawyer's efforts to defend them and vindicate their cause, their ordeal would have been too terrible because their own MP had been determined to punish them, using the state security apparatus as his own personal instrument.

The implication of Nderi's position (and that of the police) is that the city capital, Nairobi, has been exclusively built and reserved for politicians, top industrialists and educationalists like Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo. The moment a character like Nderi wins an election he leaves his rural community for Nairobi, where he stays throughout his tenure in office and restricts his people from seeing him:

> They had heard of him during the last elections. He had visited the area to ask to be given votes. He had made several promises. He had even collected two shillings from each household in his constituency for a Haraambe water project, and ranching scheme. But they had hardly seen him since. (ibid, 78)

Another example of political repression by state security apparatuses is the act of compelling citizens to pay taxes to a government that is negligent and irresponsible. During the colonial period, one of the reasons why the Mau Mau insurgents resisted the colonial government was due to its ability to impose taxes on the people and its failure to use those taxes to develop communities. Having won independence, the people's hope was that they would never again pay taxes that would end up in the pockets of a few individuals: 'Now that we have an African Governor and African big chiefs, they will return some of the fats back to these parts' (ibid, 83). But do these African leaders fulfil the desires of the people? No. Ilmorog, for instance, is forsaken by its M.P. Nderi. Instead of seeing to the collective welfare of the Ilmorog people, Nderi busies himself with acquiring property and amassing wealth. Chidi Amuta (1986, 173), in *Towards a sociology of African literature*, argues that

> Nderi wa Riera, the M.P. for Ilmorog constituency personifies the new habitual betrayal of African rural masses by those whom they elect to represent their interest in government. While the people of Ilmorog starve and dehydrate from the devastating draught, he busies

> himself in the capital with endless profit making deals. Moreover, his party thrives on ethnic chauvinism thereby betraying the national solidarity which was at the core of the Mau Mau struggle for independence.

Despite the fact that the new independent government does not consider the development of a rural area like Ilmorog its primary task, agents of state power are sent to force people to pay taxes on yearly basis – something which Ilmorogians thought would not be practised in the Haraambe era:

> …at the beginning of each year, the chief, the tax gatherer and a policeman would come and they would terrorize them into paying their dues. Thus the money from the seasonal traders would end up in the hands of the tax gatherer. (Wa Thiong'o 1977, 19)

This is indeed a political way of exploiting the people economically. Here, politics is used as a means of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. It is also illustrated in *Petals* that prior to Munira's journey to Ruwa-ini to see Mzigo (the education minister) about the challenges facing his (Munira's) school, 'the tax officer in a government landrover accompanied by two gun-carrying Askaris' (ibid, 84) goes from house to house to collect taxes despite the fact that the wellbeing of the people is not important to government. The Ilmorog Full Primary School, of which Munira is the headmaster, is not well resourced, yet the government's interest is in robbing people who are struggling to make ends meet. In this regard, Nyakinyua, an old woman who played a significant role in the achievement of independence, asks: 'From what hole are we to dig up the money?' (ibid, 185). As a matter of fact the security agents, instead of helping to redress social wrongs, assist in holding the masses to ransom, so that they can be milked to the point of poverty or even death. In other words, the law enforcement officers help to ensure that people are exploited economically and kept separate from the ruling class through acts of terror. 'Before the officer could get out of the landrover, word of his arrival had gone round: all the men somehow managed to vanish into the plains' (ibid, 843). From the foregoing, no reader of *Petals* can fail to see that Wa Thiong'o deems the state security agents to be instrumental in making citizens' lives uncomfortable. This, of course, conforms with P.M. Sweezy's (1990, 234) comments:

> the extreme of exploitation to which they –Ilmorogians – are subjected deprived them of any interest in the existing social order, forces them to live in conditions in which morality is meaningless and family life impossible, and ends by totally alienating them from their work, their products, their society, and even themselves. (emphasis added)

Unquestionably, Wa Thiong'o's *Petals*, like *Devil*, lays bare the economic challenges facing the people of Kenya and the rest of Africa, beginning from the time of

colonialism through postcolonialism and neocolonialism. *Petals* and *Devil* are used to expose the fact that a privileged few form a minority class who, because of their favoured positions in society, repress the majority by depriving them of their means of livelihood, with the support of state security agents. Obviously, the imaginary world of the novels – the old colonial and new independence dispensations of Kenya – are disrupted by rapaciousness and barbarous cupidity. It is greed that sees a small number of leaders take an absolute hold of the nation's economy – leaders who are not perturbed at all by the collapse of the economy.

During and after colonialism, Ezekieli Waweru, Munira's father, hides under the canopy of the Presbyterian Church to deprive the people of their land. He employs labourers on his farm and short-changes them. Two of the labourers who have remained in his employment since Munira's boyhood still wear 'the same type of patched up trousers and Nginyira for shoes' (Wa Thiong'o 1977, 14). Workers who demand higher wages are dismissed. Those who try to organise themselves into a union are sacked and denounced in a church sermon. Whereto from here? The little portion of land which the people are left with, is over-used hence theirs is fruitless labour. The situation in which Kenyans find themselves, leads Muturi to complain:

> … in those days the land was not for buying. It was for use. It was also plenty, you need to have beaten one yard over and over again. The land was covered with forest. The trees called rain. They also cast a shadow on the land. But the forest was eaten by the railway. You remember they used to come for wood as far as here – to feed the iron thing. Aah, they only knew how to eat, how to take away everything. But then, those were Foreigners – white people. (ibid, 82)

The foreign settlers with whom Ezekieli collaborates indulge in land grabbing, economic repression and geographic marauding. However, when the likes of Dedan Kimathi resist this type of menace, the authorities come after him:

> Dedan had been caught, delivered to our enemies by our own brothers, lovers of their own stomachs, Wakamatimo… Plans and attempts to rescue him had failed. The hospital where he lay was heavily guarded, with armoured vehicles, troops on horses, soldiers on foot and on motor-cycles patrolling the streets and jet fighters circling in the sky… in every European settler's home that week was held a party in celebration of the Temporary victory of Colonialism over liberation struggle. (ibid, 142)

Indeed, *Petals* demonstrates how foreign and local business magnates politically manipulate and hijack the land from the original owners and compel them to work without much pay. When the workers protest for better wages they are subdued by the security agents. In the novel, Abdulla's experience illustrates the repressive role of the state security apparatuses: 'He was then a worker at a shoe-factory near his home, where strike after strike for higher wages and better housing has always been broken by helmeted policemen' (ibid, 136).

SECURITY AGENTS AS TOOLS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION IN *DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

The same picture of political repression by state security agencies manifests in *Devil on the Cross*. Here, Wa Thiong'o presents capitalism as the root cause of every repression suffered by the Kenyan masses at the hands of the authorities. The citizens of Kenya are let down: they believed that their new government would embrace the provision of good leadership, protect fundamental human rights, preserve and ensure the safety of lives and property, supply essential amenities and would allow everybody in Kenya to benefit from self-rule. The people who helped write the nation's history through their labour and efforts are cut off, oppressed and exploited. The very creations of their hands are used against them. In the words of the narrator (the *gicaandi* artist), 'the edifice of progress is erected on top of the corpses of human beings' (1987, 131). Government officials, who are supposed to ensure that the economy of the nation flourishes, work against it, simply in pursuit of personal gain. These officers 'have been taught the principle and system of self-interest and have been told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good. They have been taught new songs, new hymns that celebrate the acquisition of money' (ibid, 15).

> The Haraambe of money
>
> The Haraambe of money
>
> Is for the rich and their friend. (ibid, 39)

It can be deduced that these new songs portray the neocolonial government as that of the wealthy, by the wealthy, for the wealthy and their foreign imperialists. The irony is that for the masses, Haraambe signifies additional hardship and tribulation, while it affords the ruling class an opening to loot the public treasury and repress the masses.

Without doubt, in *Devil*, Wa Thiong'o depicts the government of Kenya as having the hide of an elephant when it comes to the plight of the people. There is great unemployment and poverty in society, but government pays no heed to the creation of jobs for men and women who are willing to work and are full of energy. The directors of companies consider it as business as usual to offer girls places and retain them only after sleeping with them. As long as these directors are involved, 'modern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs' (ibid, 19). Boss Kihara, for instance, dismisses Wariinga (the typist around whom the story revolves) because she turns down his request to sleep with her.

The high level of unemployment in Kenya teaches Wariinga, the protagonist, to become self-sufficient. Wariinga, having overcome huge shocks (eviction from her rented one-room apartment because of her inability to pay; rejection by her sweetheart,

John Kimwana; dropping out of school because of an unwanted pregnancy) – starts an engineering course at a polytechnic with the aid of her parents. She attaches significance to her studies and performs even better than her male colleagues. Unfortunately, the garage where she works after studying at the polytechnic is sold off by the Nairobi City Council (with no compensation) to Boss Kihara, who owns 'almost the whole of Nairobi' (ibid, 233). Consequently, Wariinga and other workers are stripped of their livelihood. This represents political repression.

Thus the idea of using political means to rob people of their possessions has existed since colonial times. In this novel, Wa Thiong'o pinpoints the fact that the purpose of the white man coming into the country with the Bible in his left hand and a gun in his right was to enable him to easily grab people's land and rob them of the labour of their hands (ibid, 102).

In *Devil*, Wa Thiong'o casts his mind back to past events that are connected to the present. Since the colonial era, the Kenyan masses have been cut off from their land, as illustrated through characters like Gitutu, Gatheeca, Mwireri, Nditika, Kimeendeeri, Mwaura and their class (acknowledged as Devil's Angels), whose intentions and narrative operations suggest that they are the main tools of dispossession. Gitutu's class aggrandises itself by subtly dispossessing the underprivileged of their property. As Gitutu states:

> …after Uhuru a few black people started buying the lands for which Mau Mau had fought … I had hardly a cent in my pocket. But having watched the way the country was moving since the flag had been hoisted high in the sky, I was confident that for as long as I lived I would surely be able to survive by looting other people's property. (ibid, 103)

This is Gitutu's testimony at the cave in Ilmorog, where the Devil's Angels plot political acts of repression against the populace. As far as Gitutu is concerned, the following horrendous calculation holds sway:

> Hunger x thirst = famine
>
> Famine among the masses = wealth for a man of cunning. (ibid, 104)

However, any attempt from the masses to resist economic exploitation is resisted. The police, who are supposed to be the watchdogs of the masses, only act in favour of the bourgeois class, arresting and torturing members of the working class whenever there is a crisis between the two classes. This is revealed in the conversation between Gaturia and Wariinga:

> 'The cave is in chaos;' Gaturia said gloomily. 'The police came.' 'And did they arrest the Gitutus and the Gatheecas'... 'No,' Gaturia replied in a low voice. 'They arrested Wangari' (ibid, 195).

This segment is evidence of police partisanship and injustice. In *Devil*, the character Kihaahu wa Gatheeca allows the reader to form an image of the new government, as

he is characterised negatively. This corrupt political leader who does not believe in democracy states:

> I don't believe in this democratic nonsense. In the morning the topic is democracy. In the evening the topic is democracy. Is democracy food and drink? If I could get hold of those kids at the university, together with their pygmy-sized teachers… I would load them to an aeroplane and request them to take their communist nonsense to China or the Soviet Union. (ibid, 117)

As chairman of the Iciciri County Council, Ruuawa-ini ward, and appointed chairman of Iciciri Council's Housing Committee, Gatheeca diverts almost all the money borrowed from the American-owned World Bank (for low-cost housing for the underprivileged) into his private purse, without fully embarking on the housing project. Instead, he states that

> we need only build houses the size of a bird's nest. The nests will be constructed in such a way they can be folded, the way tents are folded. Anyone who is desperate for a place to lay his head will be forced to buy a nest from us … (ibid, 188)

This is characteristic of irresponsible leadership, and it shows that the ruling class does not have the interests of the masses at heart. As a political leader, Gatheeca discovers that the greatest need amongst the masses is for shelter, thus he comes up with a plan based on theft and robbery centering on housing. For him, 'there is nothing on this earth that generates as much profit as people's hunger and thirst for shelter' (ibid, 118). To this end, he proposes to build houses the size of a bird's nest. What an evil plan against the people! He informs the members of his class: 'just imagine the money we would make building nests. One man, one nest! ... Every peasant inside a nest' (ibid.). Obviously, this statement reveals that the bourgeoisie derive pleasure from seeing someone like Wariinga living and suffocating in a one-room dwelling such as the one she rented in Ofafa, Jericho in Nairobi, which serves as 'kitchen, sitting room and bedroom combined' (ibid, 216). To know more about Wariinga's rented house, the narrator asks: 'A house or a bird's nest? The floor was pitted with holes, the walls gaped with cracks, the ceiling leaked' (ibid, 10).

Gatheeca's government is the type that keeps a whole local council in debt – a debt which the rural masses will eventually pay through government-imposed taxes. All work contracted by the Iciciri County Council is awarded to, and executed by,Gatheeca's own company, Ruuawa-ini Housing Development, as he builds a financial empire for himself. Like Robin Mwaura, he believes that 'independence is not tales about the past but the sound of money in one's pocket' (ibid, 37). Gatheeca allows himself to be used by foreign imperialists who make him a director of their companies so that he will help them thwart any efforts on the part of the proletariat to revolutionise society. This is illustrated in the following words he utters:

> It's the possibility that things may change that has prompted some foreigners to appoint me a director of their companies – to protect them from the wrath of masses of workers and peasants. I don't mind the assignment. It's fairly lucrative. (ibid, 117)

Gatheeca, to ensure that the bad policies of his government thrive, makes Haraambe donations everywhere so as to keep people's eyes off government's wrongdoing. In this type of dictatorial government, where bad and harmful policies are upheld, any form of resistance from the masses is crushed by state security agents. In the novel those who try to awaken the consciousness of the masses are 'shown the whip – detention or prison' (ibid.). The novel also reveals that those who oppose the malpractice of Gatheeca's government are either bribed or, where that is not possible, arrested by the police or assassinated. The novel's narrator states that 'two whole years since the Devil's feast at the thieves' and robbers' den gave birth to the sorrow of jail and death' (ibid, 215).

In *Devil* the parable of the Kingdom of Earthly Wiles presents a picture of state security apparatuses as instruments used to bruise and crush those who reject all forms of political slavery and misery. Cases in point are the manner in which the police handle a servant who spurns trading with the 100,000 shillings offered to him by his foreign lord, and the way Senior Superintendent Gakono and his men deal with Wangari, who represents the poor. The police are used to overawe the servant for daring to resist enslavement, while in Wangari's case, she is ruthlessly attacked by Gakono's officer for trying to assist the police in capturing the actual criminals – foreign and local statesmen – in Ilmorog. According to the narrator, 'they prodded at her and shoved her with clubs and batons and spat at her' (ibid, 198). Muturi's narrative about events at Champion Construction Company reveals the repression inflicted by Wa Thiong'o's law-enforcement agents. The hoi polloi of Kenya are overlooked by the state security forces, which show that the entire system is being used by government officials and their cohorts to coerce the proletariat. Such politically motivated sadism manifests itself when the workers at Champion call for a wage increase. The workers resolve to strike, but the employer implores them not to do so. He promises to review their grievances and to submit a memorandum to them a week later. On the day of the submission he approaches, escorted by policemen armed with guns, batons and shields, and irately announces that any strikes have been forbidden by a presidential decree (ibid, 72). The ringleaders are fired, while other workers are dispersed.

This is reminiscent of a similar incident in Sembene Ousmane's *God's bits of wood* (1962), which paints a picture of railway workers: although both races do the same work, the whites receive higher wages than their black Senegalese counterparts. When the Senegalese workers protest, the authorities unleash soldiers on them. Without hesitation the 'soldiers will come, and there will be shooting' (ibid, 5). Ousmane's work spells out that as the Senegalese workers arrange to embark on strike, 'with their weapons held ready, the soldiers spread out in a thin line, stationing

themselves between the fence and the crowd of workers' (ibid, 21) and at this, within the blink of an eye, 'two soldiers had driven Demba, the smelter, up against the fence and were raining blows of their rifles and bayonets on his head and abdomen' (ibid, 23).

Another example of political repression in *Devil* is delineated in Wangari's experience soon after her country's independence. Wangari, who played a significant role in the fight for Kenya's independence, is physically manhandled by policemen. She travels to Nairobi in search of employment, but any hopes of working in a hotel owned by a European is dashed as she is arrested by the police. She explains her encounter thus:

> I was about to leave when the man called me back. He asked me to sit down on a chair while he rang up a place that he knew was never short of jobs for people like us. My heart beat with joy. Independence had truly come to our land. I waited for my good fortune with the patience of a fisherman … before I could sneeze twice, I saw policemen enter the office. The black man gave me up to the police, who were black like me, and told them that I had been keeping a watch on the hotel. I was then pushed into a police vehicle and taken to a cell. (Wa Thiong'o 1989, 43)

This repression is not merely political but also socio-political, and it leaves a patriotic Kenyan like Wangari socially and politically alienated. A charge of theft is made by the European hotel proprietor and his African companion against the innocent, irreproachable job-hunting Wangari who is subsequently dragged off to court. Despite promising to assist the police in arresting the real thieves – those who loot the nation's wealth and brag about their lootings in the Ilmorog cave – she is compelled by the judiciary to pay a fine of 200 shillings for breaking the vagrancy laws of her country. Once again, the actions of African policemen in Wa Thiong'o's work reveals how the state security system solely functions as the law-enforcement agency of the ruling class.

Instances where officers side with 'very important persons' in African society also occur in Achebe's *A man of the people*. A prime example is where the driver of a political leader, Chief S.I. Koko, knocks over his master's political opponent, Max, and kills him 'on the spot' (1966, 142) using 'one of Chief Koko's Jeeps' (ibid.). Instead of doing their duty and arresting the culprit, the police report to Chief Koko who tells them 'not to worry; he would handle the matter himself' (ibid, 142–143). Had this problem concerned the Wangaris (underprivileged) and not the Kokos (privileged) of African society, the police would have pounced. It is against this background that Festus Iyayi (1979, 6) notes that they act 'on behalf of the government and not on behalf of the people'.

In Wangari's case, her promise to assist the authorities in arresting the political bigwigs who incite violence amongst the Ilmorog community, turns against her. Before that time, Wangari had believed the police would carry out their duty without fear or favour:

> If the police arrest pick-pockets, who snatch women's handbags in market places, and petty criminals who steal five shillings, and thieves who steal hens in villages, what do you think they will do to these men, who steal from the masses and rob the whole nation? (Wa Thiong'o 1989, 157)

Her innocence dies as she is rearrested instead. As if that is not enough, Muturi and the student leader are humiliated because of their objection to political repression. Why exactly is that? Remarkably, Muturi, as an agent of revolution, champions the cause of gathering workers to come and chase away those political henchmen, the 'Devils' Angels' who gather in a cave at Ilmorog. Muturi and the workers carry placards which state the following:

> WE REJECT THE SYSTEM OF THEFT AND ROBBERY; OUR POVERTY IS THEIR WEALTH; THE THIEF AND THE WITCH ARE TWINS – THEIR MOTHER IS EXPLOITATION; THE BEEHIVE IN WHICH WE WILL ROLL THIEVES AND ROBBERS DOWN THE SLOPES OF THE HILL OF DEATH HAS ALREADY BEEN BUILT BY THE WORKERS. (ibid, 203)

Charged with disturbing the public peace at Ilmorog golf course during a meeting of private businessmen, Wangari, Muturi and the student leader are handcuffed and detained by the police and the army. This confirms that the state security apparatuses, by their very nature, are malignant and untrustworthy. Wangari's arrest leads her to ask: 'Is it right that I should need a permit to enter Nairobi, just like in the day of the Emergency, when our European tormentors used to make us carry pass books?' (ibid, 44).

The implication of her question is that the undue political repression of Kenyans by the authorities, who use brute force to deny the people their freedom, has continued across various dispensations, be they colonial, postcolonial or neocolonial times. The authorities have failed in their duty to protect the lives and rights of citizens. Still, in *Devil* the narrator recalls that between 1954 and 1955, Wariinga's father and mother were detained at Manyani and Langata/Kamiti prisons respectively. The detentions were politically motivated, because her parents were thought to be members of the Mau Mau. The detentions not only oppressed Wariinga's parents and the masses they represent, but also Wariinga, who is forced to go and live with her aunt in Nakuru. Unfortunately, her 'uncle', as the archetypal Judas, betrays and forsakes Wariinga by handing her to his friend, the Rich Old Man from Ngorika, who impregnates her and puts an end to her schooling. However, when 'Wariinga's parents were released from detention in 1960 – three years before Uhuru' (ibid, 140) they discovered 'that their small piece of land at Kaamburu had been sold to the home guards by the colonial regime' (ibid, 140). Here, politics thus serves as a means of keeping people in compulsory servitude. It also serves as a channel for scattering and separating families, so that politicians and their brigades can claim and dispose of people's property. The act of buying up land intended for the masses, which Kenyan citizens

fought for, makes the home guards exploiters, oppressors and traitors. They exist solely to harm the people.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion it has been established that state security apparatuses side with only the few individuals in authority, and see the masses of independent Kenya as the enemy of national progress, peace and unity. Independent Kenyan leaders play the politics of self-interest, showing a disregard for the people who voted them into power. These self-centred and autocratic leaders use agents of state security as instruments for their evil designs who stifle or stigmatise any dissent against their harmful and inhumane policies. Through the use of weapons of war, the security forces intimidate, arrest and molest the underprivileged, and widen the chasm between the poor and the rich. Indeed, state security agents enforce slave-labour as well as land and house dispossessions. Their duties include safeguarding foreign and local imperialists as they steal the commonwealth of the nation.

In all, Wa Thiong'o, as a visionary writer, has brought to readers' notice the fact that political repression prevails in independent Kenya, as in other independent African countries because of law enforcement's inability to combat this travesty. Instead of being non-partisan in their fight against repression and enslavement, state security agents support those in authority and involve themselves fully in the act of political repression, which is a negation of their constitutional role. However, for an African nation to function effectively, state security agencies must be re-oriented to perform their actual duties. This can be done through trimerous seminars. Government should also provide security officers with sufficient housing, allowances and salaries, while for their part, officers should be non-partisan in discharging their duties. Indeed, a harmonious social order will be achieved when security agents and all members of society contribute to the security and prosperity of African nations.

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