

THEMATIC CONCERNS OF TANZANIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

Tanzanian poetry in English is yet to receive an interest from critics of poetry who rather concentrate on the more widely published Kiswahili poetry. This paper examines the thematic concerns of contemporary Tanzanian poetry in English. It focuses on collections of poems from Tanzania edited by Richard Mabala entitled *Summons*, Charles Mloka's *The Wonderful Surgeon and Other Poems*, Shilia Kaaya's *The Bleeding Heart and Other Poems*, and Neema Komba's *See through the Complicated*. The paper traces the development of Tanzanian poetry in English and showcases how Tanzania's socio-political realities in particular and global humanistic concerns in general are creatively explored in the Tanzanian poetry in English. The exploration of the thematic engagements of this poetic tradition confirms the emergence of an interesting trend in contemporary Tanzanian literature as a whole. The study appropriates postcolonial discursive insights in showcasing the new Tanzanian poetic genius in particular and instantiating the widely acclaimed enduring sociological character of African literature.

1. History and Mediating Society

It is difficult to overlook the history of Tanzania in a context of discourse of representation of Tanzanian socio-political realities through poetry. It could, therefore, be of interest to highlight the history of the country as it is depicted in contemporary Tanzanian poetry. Just as the colonial histories of some other African countries inform, Tanzania Mainland (Tanganyika in the pre-1964 Union period) was colonised by the Germans before it later was by the Britons. Tanzanian island of Zanzibar had been colonised by the Arabs. In both places, the people were not happy with the colonisers. They protested against colonialism in various forms. In light of Hulme's submission on postcolonialism, Tanzanian poetry demonstrates a particular process of disengaging from "colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and is probably

inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena” (1995: 120). Jwani Mwaikusa’s “Sunrise” (23) is such a poem that restages the drama of colonial incursion and seeks to inspire revolt against it.² It is a poem of longing and expression of determination for something lost. A creative endeavour propelled by romantic ideology of the Western literary tradition on which the first generation African poets were nurtured, it features allusions, metaphors and images in its thematisation of Tanzanian experience of colonialism. The lines “Behold!/The sun has risen” (23) are allusive of an expression associated with Kinjeketile, the central heroic character of Ebrahim Hussein’s play, *Kinjeketile*.³ The poem is an anaphoric representation of a clarion call to the colonised people of Tanzania to unite and fight the German imperialists. It is an imaginative recapturing of the eagerness and resolve of bygone days to oust the colonial regime.

On the surface, the poem, “Saluting Ujamaa” (59-61) by Kudi praises the ideology and presents it as a panacea to the socio-economic problems of post-independent Tanzania. Through the persona, it praises the ideology, alluding to the psychological views of its proponent, Nyerere. The reader encounters a persona whose wish is to see the ideology become part and parcel of whoever has the conviction that the ideology is better than the preceding ones propelled by bourgeois objectives. In consequence, the message of the piece is deeply interrogative of the ideology rather than a mere embrace of it as the poem makes use of images of elephants and buffalo to depict the strength of the ideology

The subsequent historic nationalisation of private property in Tanzania which was aimed at reorienting the capitalist elements in the society relates to a concern raised in the poem. As Peter notes, the poem is a series of questions relating to private property ownership, for during *Ujamaa* era which the poem tries to depict, people, especially leaders, were evaluated based on their record of integrity, and the leadership code forbade owning of property as it could “open the door for a few individuals to exploit their fellow human beings” (Peters 2011: 20-21). The worry over private property and the eagerness to embrace an ideology that undermines the security of private ownership of property constitute a central ironic situation depicted in the poem. The

²See Richard Mabala, (ed.) *Summons: Poems from Tanzania*. Dar es Salam: Tanzania Publishing Company, 1980, p.26.

³That play in its own creative right explores the popular *Maji Maji* war which took place between the people of Southern Tanganyikan and the Germans from 1905 to 1907. These words that Mwaikusa has injected into his poem were those of the legendary Kinjeketile whose historic personality and heroic exploits are creatively transposed into the play of Hussein, *Kinjeketile*.

following lines provide an exemplification of the contradictions that marred the implementation of the ideology:

I have a bar,
A hotel,
A butcher's shop,
All mine
And mine alone.
Tell me,
Ujamaa,
Perfect system,
What do I do...? (68-70).

The foregoing fragment showcases dissenting inclination and not acquiescence as expected by the proponents, promoters, and enthusiasts of the ideology. This is even more evident in the persona's consciousness that is divided between fancy for *Ujamaa* because of its very laudable promises on the one hand, and the irresistible allure of capitalism on the other hand. In spite of the persona's fascination for *Ujamaa* he cannot but recognise the inherent dangers it poses to him personally as a propertied man, a capitalist. The reader is confronted with a dilemmatic individual in the persona whose desire for increased material possession despite her/his proclaimed belief (admiration?) for *Ujamaa* is palpable.

What is not lost on the reader of "Saluting Ujamaa", however, is that it exposes the weaknesses inherent in the ideology. Could self-interest, egoism and disunity have been avoided by the people in spite of the official mandate of toeing the *Ujamaa* socialist line? Against the background of such factuality of human life, the poem simply presents *Ujamaa* as impracticable since at the heart of the people remains individualistic propensity upon which capitalism itself is based. The position canvassed here runs contrary to the popular view held by *Ujamaa*'s chief proponent, Nyerere. In his famous book, *Freedom and Unity*, Nyerere identifies the enemy of the socialist ideology as the capitalist system, urging the people to reject the capitalist attitude of mind which colonialism imposed on Africa. Nyerere insists that Tanzanians must not allow the growth of "parasites" in their country but should rather recognise that the socialist attitude of mind is the prerequisite for overcoming the temptation of personal gain (Nyerere 1966: 234). Nyerere strongly held the view that *Ujamaa* was the nemesis of capitalism. No wonder, in his speech, "The Challenge of Independence", he is as pungent as he is unequivocal:

Our whole existence has been controlled by people with the alien attitude to life, people with different customs and belief. They have determined the type of economic activity. They have shaped the future of the present generation of Tangayikans, more than any other influence (Nyerere 1966: 33).

Another poem that creatively interrogates the practicability of the popular socialist ideology is Mabala's "The Socialist" (44-46). Featuring three different persona, the poem equally interrogates the socialist principle called *Ujamaa*. The piece features a personality who is well versed in socialism in general and the precepts of *Ujamaa* as a kind of socialism in particular. Here is a fragment of the poem exemplifying the case in point:

"I am a socialist," he muted gently
Sinking softly into the sighing depths
Of the cushioned chairs
Of the Kilimanjaro
"Traditional
African Socialism
Work by all for the good of all.
"Socialism is an attitude of mind,"
He continued
Gazing lovingly at the golden whisky in his glass
"I am a peasant
And a worker
We must all sacrifice to build this great nation of ours"
(51-53).

Paradoxically, despite the proclamation of socialist ideology, the ideal is far from being achieved as demonstrated in the poem, "The Socialist". The expression, "the golden whisky in his glass," in reference to the persona's oppressive appearance contradicts her/his self-proclaimed socialist belief. What the appearance conveys is no more than a bourgeois presence in the life of a socialist. What a contradiction! Perhaps, this is a demonstration of Nyerere's claim that even a millionaire can be a socialist, since *Ujamaa* does not rule out being in possession of wealth. But is this not a contradictory thought since a propertied man can only be, at best, a reluctant socialist?

The first stanza of "The Socialist" provokes the reader's thought as to who constitutes a true socialist. "There is ironic expression of the character" – that is, the persona, in his pretence as a socialist (Peter 2011: 24), as Peter observes. Here is a case of clear-cut incongruence between the speaker's proclamation as well as posturing and the tenets of the *Ujamaa* ideology. The ideology requires that one works and co-operates with others. But the poem showcases a proclaimer of the ideology whose capitalist intent is not in doubt. Incidentally, the poetic piece indicates the type of *Ujamaa* that was meant to be institutionalised in Tanzania as conceived by Nyerere: one that would be African-based and anchored on the Western socialist philosophy (1968: vii); that is, a socialist Tanzania that would involve collective production and sharing of wealth (Nkemkia 1995: 51). The poem showcases yet another personality that equally pretends to be a socialist. This time, the speaker is a

Christian proselytiser who associates *Ujamaa* to the Christian faith. S/he compares the Christian values of love and togetherness with the virtues for which *Ujamaa* stands. The hypocrite is partly captured in the expression “I am a socialist [...] / Christian / Socialism /Of the Bible / [...] Love your neighbour as yourself / The Church and socialism are one” (44). The preacher is obviously a fraud because, in spite of her/his confession of Christianity, her/his exploitative inclination betrays her/his true self. Indeed, as Peter’s reading of the poem shows, socialism only aids her/his desire to exploit others (Peter 2011: 24). There is the third personality featured in the poem that has traits similar to those of the former. He classifies himself as a revolutionary-socialist, tracing the history and genesis of *Ujamaa* “alongside the wave of other theories”,⁴ and regarding *Ujamaa* as a revolutionary movement or a class struggle as advocated in Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Through consistency in the exemplification of hypocritical display of socialist belief, the multiplicity of the propensity in Tanzania is portrayed.

Richard Mabala’s poem, “Weeds” (65-67), is an ode to *Ujamaa*. The publication of the poem in 1980 coincided with the wake of the external pressure to foist capitalism on the nation. The poem embodies coded warnings against imminent threats to the socialist appeal of *Ujamaa*. Among the threats is the infiltration by foreign investors seeking to exploit the land, corrupt acts that are rampant among the populace, and the prevalence of acts of selfishness as opposed selflessness which the ideology strives to enthrone. The poem projects into the future of the nation as the neo-liberal policy of the capitalist West takes a stranglehold on the country. As an elegiac monologue, it is a political allegory that deploys the imagery of a garden in which weeds threaten to annihilate the existing beauty and displace its remarkable simplicity. The first stanza introduces two events associated with the 5th of February in Tanzania – the birth of the Arusha Declaration on 5th February, 1967 which gave birth to the *Ujamaa* ideology; and the birth of CCM⁵ on 5th February, 1977 when the mainland-based Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) went into an alliance with the Zanzibar-based Afro Shiraz Party (ASP).

The poem’s employment of agrarian imagery enhances the showcasing of CCM as a merger of two political parties. The poem is a representation of the people’s hope in the political merger, invariably implying that a single political party would forestall disunity among the people and galvanise the country towards unity and development. The tone of optimism running through the poem points to the perceived inevitable changes ahead, discernible through the merging of the political parties. The poem, however, embodies warning

⁴ (John Peter, “Representation of Tanzania’s”, p. 25.

⁵CCM stands for Chama cha Mapinduzi (the revolution party) the ruling party in Tanzania

over the enemies that threaten the survival of the “tender shoot,” the CCM and its *Ujamaa* ideology. Like “Saluting Ujamaa,” “Weeds” acknowledges that not all Tanzanians are supportive of *Ujamaa* despite being the nation’s adopted ideology. “Weeds” makes the assertion that the enemies of CCM and *Ujamaa* use endearing tricks through the use of the imagery of “beautiful flowers” in suggesting the idea of tricks used by those opposed to the ideology which could have undermined national efforts channelled towards development – a deep caution against all forms of dissenting ideological inclination marked by a violent option.

Despite the hope expressed in the last stanza of “Saluting Ujamaa”, Tanzania has witnessed the wilting and death of *Ujamaa* in the face of the scorching rays of the sun of capitalist ideology – “the weeds” – which have re-emerged as a force to reckon with. *Ujamaa* in contemporary Tanzania has become an empty slogan that has faded in the country’s constitution where it was once the cornerstone of social and political aspirations of the nation.

In the three long poems discussed thus far, “Saluting Ujamaa,” “Weeds” and “The Socialist”, one theme is recurrent: the realisation that *Ujamaa* is a difficult aim to achieve on account of insincerity and apathy shown towards it; that is, what Peter has indicated as low reception of it “as the ideal ideology for the development of the society” (2011: 31). Nevertheless, Yona traces the failure of the ideology to the sordid way people at the political helms of affairs in the country handled it (Yona 2008: 32). The cohesive method of implementing the villagisation programme of *Ujamaa* confronted the peasant unimpressively. As a result, many began to dislike *Ujamaa* and blamed the government and the President in particular for its failures. The situation was compounded by the economic doldrums in which Tanzania found herself in the latter years. This dynamics of the Tanzanian history is creatively notarised in Kundi Faraja’s “Development” (25-27).

It specifically sheds light on the economic condition of the country in its dramatic representation of President Nyerere as he responds to the emergent challenges of Tanzanians. His commitment as the leader remains unmistakable and the dreams of the beginning remains ever fresh in his memory as the poem affords an imaginative encounter with the legendary leader. Nevertheless, the dawning of reality which dispirits him and makes him confess his incompetence to confront the postcolonial challenges of developing independent Tanzania is not missed out in the poem.

On the one hand is the internal challenge of corruption in top places, egoistical, and exploitative attitudes of many Tanzanians; on the other hand is the more onerous burden of confronting the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank’s distaste for the *Ujamaa* ideology. The message drawn from the idea of documentation which the “files” “the man of the people” treats in “Development” is about the presence of poverty in the land. This theme of

poverty is also addressed in the poem “Live and Let Die” by Kundi Faraja, (27-29) “Prospering of Society” by Kajubi (41-44) and “The Dying Child” by Freeman Peter Lwamba (94). These poems describe the poverty in which the people live that reflects in the physical structure of the society. Tanzanian poets in English present the problem of corruption in different ways. For example, in the poem “The Bureaucrat” (46-48) by Richard Mabala, termites and other insects are used in showing the destructive nature of corruption (Peter 2011: 69). “A Village Song” (62-65) by Mabala also depicts the way corruption has spread its tentacles even to the rustic villages which had never experienced such before. What the poems manage to expose are the failings of *Ujamaa* policies of villagisation and collectivism as panacea to economic exploitation.

Truly, some implicitly or explicitly hail the radical break made by TANU in 1967 through the *Arusha Declaration*, the irresponsible acts of leadership and exploitation that undermined the goodwill that was supposed to be fostered under *Ujamaa* that preached self-reliance were known. *Ujamaa* was considered too idealistic and impracticable amidst the realities on the ground. In the words of Ibhawoh and Dibua, “Ujamaa policies unmitigated failures and that under Nyerere, Tanzania’s economic progress was distorted and resources wasted in the “slavish adherence to ideology” giving rise to a marginalised rural sector and a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy [...]” (2003: 70). Nyerere did step down in 1986 both as an acknowledgement of the failure of his policies and administration, and as sign of unwillingness to embrace Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) induced by the Breton Woods institutions, which he knew would undo practically everything *Ujamaa* strived to build.

1. Mediating Society: Liberal Romantic Paradigm

Summons, the first Tanzanian poetic collection in English, contains poems that are social critiques or satires in the unrestricted sense. Poems in this category include Isaac Mruma’s “Just Sit, Oppressor, Just Sit” (18-19) and “Belly Keeper”(34-36), Kundi Faraja’s “Live and Let Die” and Kajubi Mukajanga’s “Prospering of Society”. The first two poems by Isaac Mruma are critical reactions to the inequality which brazenly exists in societies. In the poem, “Just Sit, Oppressor, Just Sit”, oppression is personified by a rich individual before whom the poor mean little or nothing. The oppressor simply watches the masses as they fatally suffer because of poor socio-economic condition when, of course, he is very capable to assist in the situation. The oppressor’s criminal nonchalantness is vividly captured in the line “When you eat/as they die, just rest” (18), which is a powerful poetic line ironically indicting the oppressor. The same issue of oppression is treated in “Belly Keeper.” Two classes of people are identified in the poem: the rich and the poor. Riches are symbolised by the “Volvos” and “Limousines” owned by the rich. The rich neither care nor sympathise with the poor who perish because of hunger. Faraja’s “Live and Let

Die” also critically engages the two classes of the society. The first group enjoys what should have been the commonwealth of the society while the second group is left with nothing. In Mukajanga’s “Prospering of Society,” only a few people in the society are prospering while the majority wallows in poverty. Mukajanga juxtaposes the residences of the privileged and the underprivileged so as to draw attention to the wide gulf between the two segments of the society. The houses of the have-nots are dirty, stinking in addition to their leaking roofs; they are held in sharp contradistinction with the posh mansions of the haves. Taken together, the four poems criticise materialistic aspirations that societies pay for at the expense of the good of all and the needed human values. The four poems are opposed to a life of individualism that breeds and promotes egoistical and sadistic tendencies.

In her poems, “Sin” (92-93), “Some Friends” (43), and “Hypocrite” (38-39), Komba puts emphasis on friendship, trust and confession. She considers the virtues as the ideal means of upholding humanity. In the poem “Hypocrite”, those who pretend to love others wholeheartedly when evidently in their inhuman actions the reverse is the case are challenged. The poem arbitrates idealistically that contrary views should not be used in classifying enemies and friends so that life can continue in all its fullness. The poem, “Some Friend”, advises people to accept positive criticism when they are wrong rather than go angry and retaliatory: “Take the critic and change,/Take it in good faith intended” (43). It affirms that friendship is the sharing of both happiness and pain by people. In “Sin”, global harmony is a major preoccupation. It dwells on virtues that not only Christianity is well known for but that which Islam also preaches: confession of sin before God; personal acknowledgement as a sinner before God; and the consequent need for confession of sin as a way of atoning for the bad deeds done by individuals to facilitate heavenly clemency. The poem’s allusion to the Bible which stresses that the sin of a human being takes the form of judging goodness (and evil) for her/him confirms the Christian influence beneath the composition of the poem.

Kaaya’s poem, “The Lustful Heart” (87-88) also condemns human lustfulness and greed. The serious message conveyed through loaded metaphoric language is for human to desist from such inclinations as s/he was created to be perfect. The poem discourages acts of betrayal often necessitated by the pursuit of self-driven goals that often negates the wellbeing of others. In another poem of his, “The Beautiful Flower” (65-66), Kaaya provides a mirror for viewing humans’ destructive nature and their evil ideas which have led to the reduction in the standard of existence and negation of the real “essence of humanity” (65); hence, humans have derecognised the need for peaceful existence and put in its place brutality and villainy. The poem, in this sense, is a romantic longing for positive transformation of humanity so that there can be an end to bestiality.

Kaaya also underscores the need for people to help and support one another in times of trouble in “The Shame of Hunger” (95-96). Human beings are generally chastised for not assisting the needy in their agonising existence. Taking a swipe at the rich countries that have failed to support the poor ones, the persona questions the rich countries’ on their preference for spending their resources on expensive weapons rather than wholeheartedly rescuing the poor ones. The enlisting of God’s intervention for positive transformation of human beings by the persona evinces Biblical influence in the poem’s composition. This is also evident in Kaaya’s “Prayer for Sanity” (51-52) where, through the persona, God’s intervention is sought so that humanity can be redeemed and evil acts consequently brought to an end.

2. Contemporary Tanzanian Poetry and Neo-liberalism

Generally, the poems in *Summons* are largely devoted to events in Tanzania. Their themes focus on *Ujamaa* possibly because of the major impact the ideology had on the lives of Tanzanians and the direction in which the development path was steered. As they represent an earlier generation of Tanzanian poets in English, the later generation – Shilia Kaaya, Charles Mloka and Neema Komba – adjust the orientation and focus of their poems very much in line with the changing political and economic scene in Tanzania. Inevitably, Tanzanian poetry in English has been freed from the “shackles” of *Ujamaa*. These later poets do not focus on the *Ujamaa* ideology, perhaps because the ideology practically died in 1986. Their major concerns are with global issues as they relate to Tanzania as a matter of keen interest.

Neo-liberalism focuses on global economic and political practices (Harvey 2005: 2). First, economic liberalisation took root and, then, came political liberalisation, which radically transformed the political landscape of Africa. That was an appropriate moment for globalisation to also flourish. Neo-liberalism was embraced either willingly or reluctantly. Consequently, almost in the whole of the developing world, “policies associated with neo-liberalism” have been adopted (Shefner and Stewart 2011: 355). The idea behind neo-liberalism is that if a country follows and implements neo-liberal policies, then, economic development of the country would be attained (Martinez and Anoldo 2015: 1), although this does not always turn out to be the case. In fact, in Africa there have been complaints or grievances linked with widespread poverty and the ever widening gulf between the rich and poor despite many years of experimenting with neo-liberalism. Indeed, Lubriner notes that neo-liberalism, in many ways, has not brought development to the developing world and that neo-liberalism benefits only a few (2006: 1). Following the Breton Woods institutions’ intervention designed to be seen as blessings from the Western powers, neo-liberalisation started taking root in Tanzania. It is in this

light that contemporary Tanzanian poets in English attempt to air their view against neo-liberalism.

The Bleeding Heart and Other Poems by Shilia Kaaya focuses on globalisation and its impact on the people of Africa. He first situates the whole concept of globalisation as another form of colonialism through which Western countries loot African resources. The poem “On Globalisation” (46-47) gives a vivid picture on the history of colonialism in Africa and the invention of globalisation as a cover for neo-colonialism. From the first stanza to the fifth, the poem explores the history of colonialism in Africa. It touches on the conquests made by the Germans and the British following Vasco da Gama’s voyage of discovery. It tries to dismiss the claim that Africans were generally complicit in the conquest of their lands while affirming that Europeans use tricks to continue milking the rich African continent. It is at this stage that it becomes apparent that the poet views globalisation as just another form of colonialism.

Olutayo and Omobowale view globalisation as “entrenched in the garb of capitalism”. Their argument is that the Western world still wants to perpetuate their domination of the developing world. They explain that “This kind of reasoning informed colonialism and the process is repeating itself in what is now referred to as “globalisation” even when the “skin” and the “voice” are quite identical” (2007: 97-99). The poem, “On Globalisation”, explains globalisation using the Darwinian principle of existence; that is, that for one to survive in this hostile world, one has to compete and control others just as the capitalist system demands. The poem ends on a sad note with an explanation on how globalisation has not been a beneficial system even when it remains inescapable. To some extent, the poem, “Africa at the Crossroads”, by Kaaya also reveals the ugly side of globalisation. The ugliest scenarios of slavery and colonialism and the pain of apartheid are painted. So are the rule of dictatorship and its effects on the people. Africans are painted as having suffered slavery, colonialism, and apartheid and have to contend with globalisation – an unending experience of suffering and domination at the behest of the West.

The effect of globalisation is further highlighted in Kaaya’s poem titled “The Crawling of Africa” (71-72). In this poem, the poet in a sombre tone shows how Africa has remained downtrodden and exploited for centuries in both human and material senses. As in “Africa at Crossroads”(2), the poet laments over how the continent’s riches have been nakedly “squandered” under the pretext of globalisation which in Olutayo and Omobowale’s opinion is a “neo-colonial context” (2007: 103), which ensures that the global economic structure continue to favour the Western economies at the expense of weak African economies (Efanodor 2013: 12). In the poem, “The Fantasies of Capitalism” (77-78) a “vicious cycle” of poverty in which the African continent is trapped is indicated.

The issue being addressed in “On Globalisation” is thus further engaged in “The Fantasies of Capitalism.” The poem constructs a bleak future of Africa as there are no meaningful changes that globalisation would usher in apart from its turning the African situation into an even more intricate web of socio-economic and political challenges for Africans than its forerunners – colonialism and imperialism. Kaaya in his poems presents globalisation as capitalism or imperialism imposed by the West with the intent to exploit and ultimately deepen inequalities in and among African nations as Precious (2010: 1-2) notes. Precious’ observation is a subscription to Rugumamu’s claim that “the ongoing processes of globalization, regionalization, and liberalization present new sets of complex challenges to the particularly unstable, debt-ridden, aid dependent and technologically backward African national economies” (2001: 1).

These are depicted through images deployed by Kaaya to reveal the various masks of globalisation and the forces behind it. In the poem, “On Globalization”, the poet uses “trumpets” to portray ways in which Western countries through the IMF and the World Bank place the Hobson’s choice – the neo-liberal policies – before Africa. The same poem uses the image of cunning smiles of the West (46). The smiling images refer to the endless tricks the West employs to ensure that Africa accepts new liberal policies. In the poem, “The Crawling of Africa,” (71-72) “the vultures”⁶ is intended to aptly depict the cruelty of the Europeans to the black people. The West is cast in the image of a predatory vulture: “The birds so strong beak and claws with grip so hard and piercing”.

Neo-liberal policy encourages the promotion of human rights and democracy and takes them for pillars of development (Moyn 2015: 1). The policy is supposed to enhance democratic culture and the promotion of human rights which, in turn, are supposed to spur economic development (Pace 2015: 102). Neo-liberalism is also expected to focus on the right of individuals and enhance democratisation (Shefner and Steward 2011: 356). The IMF and the World Bank as midwives acting on behalf of the Western powers, were quick to impress upon developing countries the importance of the enumerated values. Yet, democratic culture remains poorly cultivated in many developing countries.

⁶ The likelihood that the Tanzania poet had read “The Vulture” by David Diop is suggested in the poem’s intertextual correspondence in the deployment of the image of the bird, “vulture: in capturing the voracious, rapacious and gripping effects of the Western influences on the African society. For a similar impression about the West, see Senanu, K. E and Vincent T., *A Selection of African Poetry*. Ikeja: Longman, 1976: 71.

Contemporary Tanzanian poets in English are acutely aware of the implications of the push for democracy and human rights, as revealed in their thematisation of them. For instance, the flouting of democratic principles in Africa is a prominent issue addressed in their poems. In the actual socio-political space of Africa, democratic principles tend to be either flagrantly disregarded or deliberately bent in such a way that speakers of the truth are intimidated, jailed and even, sometimes, killed. Ayanleye's comment captures the scenario appreciably in its affirmation that many elections in Africa "have been marred with extreme controversy and violence". In such elections, there are "corruption, massive rigging, ballot box snatching and political violence" which "impact negatively on the democratic process" (Ayanleye 2013: 1). This is how Neema Komba has endeavoured to creatively capture same in his poem, "My Democracy" (44-47).

The language and style of the poem are simple and straightforward; however, the poem embodies vital issues about contemporary Africa. The poem comments on unethical practices that characterise election processes in Africa such as corruption of different kinds and abuse of power. The poem therefore sounds a tone of lamentation because of unspeakable practices of politicians in ensuring election victory. The persona sees herself/himself in a sorry state for the reason that honest souls have been cheaply sold out, treated as non-existent. So, s/he asks pitifully: "When will I begin to matter?"(44). The same tone of melancholy permeates the poem's message of frustrated move made by Africa towards progress and quality human life. The poem's repeated allusion to the many unfulfilled promises of the leaders made while canvassing for votes is not dismissible. Such African leaders who would have raised the people's expectations before failing to deliver on their many promises are a matter of serious concern. The persona reflects on how, together with her family, promises of leaders made during electioneering were awaited in vain. While the poem is a lament over the plight of the disappointed, it is equally a revelation of the selfishness and shamelessness of the ever patronising election-seeking leaders. The unbecoming attitude of the leaders prompts the questioning of the very notion of democracy in relation to the African condition in the following line: "What is this thing we are calling democracy?" (46). After all, the Members of the Parliament who are supposed to be the people's representatives do not represent the people who gave them the mandate to power. The absence of democracy therefore endangers the present and the future as the poem philosophically analyses the political condition. Concluding on a note of protest borne out of disillusionment, the poem's advocacy of nihilism is evident.

Komba's expression of discontent with the philosophy of free enterprise under the guise of neo-liberalism is akin to Kaaya's concern in his poem on globalisation. The persona sees the prevalence of exploitation of the weak, the powerless, despite that democracy is supposed to guarantee their

liberty. Through the persona, the kinds of democratic culture practised in many African countries are such that exclude the people since they are not involved in the democratisation processes. Democracy, as Beethan explains, is a “mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control [...] (1993: 355). The kinds of democracy enunciated by Beethan are those over whose absence the persona laments.

While Komba’s “My Democracy” underscores the sheer absence of democracy in the African society depicted, Mloka’s poem, “Pillars of Good Leadership”, is for social pedagogy. The poem shows the way good leadership ensures democracy. Instead of leadership being detached from the led as regrettably depicted in Komba’s poem, Mloka paints an ideal picture in “Pillars of Good Leadership,” anchoring the essence of the poem’s pedagogical intent on the need for leaders to involve the people in the decision-making processes. As enunciated in the poem, under good leadership, opinions and ideas are shared mutually. The poem places democratic leadership in contradistinction to authoritarian leadership in the sense in which Bass defines democratic leadership:

an intention between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members in leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in a group (1990: 19-20).

What the poem presents are the essential features of a good leader which, when put into practice, can lead to good governance and, hence, democracy. Democracy, according to Arthur, Sithole, Chakunda and Matsika, “involves the procedural minimum of contestation for political office and policy choices, of popular participation in elections and other elements of political decision-making and the accountability of elected public official under rule of law” (2012: 68). It is associated with the rule of law for the reason that a democratic country would be able to foster justice, maintain ethical standards and ensure respect for the constitution, equal protection, political consensus and the likes.⁷ The poem, “My Democracy”, exposes a lack of these qualities in the country being depicted. This message is complemented by that of “Pillars of Good Leadership” which teaches that leadership should engender the kind of good governance that is linkable with “participatory development of human rights and democratization” in the holistic sense of it (Otoghile 2014: 180).

⁷See <http://www.naturalrightslibertarian.com/2012/03/democracy-versus-the-rule-of-law/> Accessed 12th February, 2015.

Whereas in the poem, “Pillars of Good Leadership” (37-38) by Charles Mloka, the teaching of democratic principles predominates, “Human Rights” (22-25), which is another poem by Mloka, interrogates the whole doctrine of human rights. In “Human Right”, the notion of human rights is questioned on account of the absence of the moral justification for the “white man” to champion its course and preach it to the “black man” after abandoning them all along. The poem is a questioning of the rationale for the black man to implement and enforce these rights as defined by the colonisers, who justifies and perpetuates apartheid and racism on the land of Africa. One strong contention of the poem so romantically framed is that Africa had her own rights which were better than the ones the white man would want Africa to embrace in spite of their being fraught with contradictions. The poem is also a romantic recapturing of the arrival of the colonialists with the attendant cruelty of that historic encounter.

“Human Rights,” attempts to provide a framework within which human rights are couched in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It presents the argument that human rights as presently practised globally and particularly in Africa are questionable since the interests of the white people seems to be the ultimate object of protection. The whole colonial enterprise is portrayed as a huge violation of human rights as the poem revisits the history of Africa’s colonial domination. At independence, African countries were mandated to include issues of human rights so that the European settlers’ safety would be guaranteed. Flashpoints on land arising from the white minority settlers’ ownership of the largest proportion of the fertile and arable land in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa among others lend credence to the claim made in the poem.

Mloka also treats globalisation as an abuse of human rights because the principle does not foster the development of African as it denies Africa’s self-determination, while it allows Western powers to reap from African economies. It could be argued based on the foregoing that the West had pounced on the economic doldrums of the 1980s firmly to make African countries toe the neo-liberal line after the collapse of the Cold War. Though Haque contends that neo-liberal policies were necessary to rescue the economic situation of Africa (1991: 198), the evidence on the ground indicates a staggering failure to bail out the poor African countries. Indeed, the resultant increase in market forces, the facilitation of open market competition, and the enhancement of mass production among others have not succeeded in improving the fortunes of most developing countries. For these reasons, “Human Rights” treats the whole idea of globalisation with sheer contempt as it considers it a gimmick for entrenching neo-colonisation. The poem is also an expose of the Europeans’ obsession with observing African elections to supposedly ensure they are free

and fair, while elections in European countries are not monitored by Africans in spite of the West's pretence over promotion of the ideal of equality. "Human Rights" boldly situates the principle of human rights within the context of the postcolonial circumstances that allows the powerful to decide over the fate of the weak.

1. War, Terrorism, and HIV/AIDS as Emergent Issues

Today's world is witness to wars and different terrorist activities. The conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria, the Al-Shabab in Somalia, the Israel-Palestine historical turmoil, the Ukraine-Russia territorial conflicts are few examples. These crises are no doubt endangering the survival of human beings. Wars and acts of terrorism are forms of violence which have "gradually encompassed a greater proportion of the civilian population", as Purwar, Dhabal and Chakravarty inform.⁸ Though many poets have written about these contemporary global issues, not many Tanzanian poets have focused on them and what they engender despite that the country was a victim of the terrorist bombing of its capital, Dar es Salaam. Presently, Kaaya is the only Tanzanian poet in English to have contended with how wars and terrorism created the saddest moment in the history of humanity and how it has led to the collapse of world civilization in contemporary period. In the poem, "The Inhuman Human" (83-84), the poet paints very ugly scenarios in the world, which have caused individuals to downplay the question of humanity in satisfying their whims. The poem mocks those who struggle over power without consideration for human worth. The second stanza of the poem is apt in this regard.

Using images of violence and destruction, the poem questions the rationale behind genocidal actions perpetrated in the name of liberation or condoning of collateral damage in the face of wanton destruction of lives. The poem incisively explores how war generates refugees and occasions the separation of families often because a few want power. It is equally a call for reason, directing the reader to the history of the present situation of existence. Its existentialist poser is crafted around the legendary Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein: "Saddam Hussein then the darling and partner/ But now the evil one and the pain to human kind" (84). Part of the global concern of the poem is the seemingly intractable territorial conflict between Palestine and Israel explored in "The Bleeding Palestine" (68-69). The poem is a clear statement of bias for the Palestinians in its indictment of the human race for remaining indifferent when the need to rescue the Palestinians is grave. Even when it enlists God's merciful intervention, the pain of the Palestinians which the poem projects as undeserving is accorded trans-national effect. Kaaya's "The Maniacs of War"

⁸See <http://www.astro.umd.edu>. Accessed 15th February, 2015.

(89-90) examines the impact of war and queries its causes as well as its anti-civilisation objectives. It mocks war-mongers who see war as a price of life and a valuable adornment as it generally historicises and philosophises about war. The poem digs into the history of war and the effects of it on human civilisation.

The third stanza of the poem features the effects of wars. Wars have brought about terrors and killings: “the wrecked and shaded blood/ [...] throwing the world into the darkest of times” (89). There is a tone of insistence in the poem that wars are not only senseless but can put an end to human civilization no matter how legitimate the concerns are. The need for peace to thrive as incessant wars can rob the world of its future predominates in Kaaya’s poem.

Terrorism is another traumatic experience that is threatening to hold the world captive. The world has been paralysed by terrorism because it has caused massive destruction and confusion. Macias reports that “the world has experienced 61% increase in terrorist attacks” and 17,918 people in the world were killed in these terrorist attacks in 2014. According to Macias, the main reasons behind terrorism are conflicts between different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, lack of inter-group cohesion and high levels of group grievances, presence of state sponsored violence and higher levels of other violence including deaths from organised conflicts [...]”.⁹ Countries most adversely affected by terrorism include Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Terrorism has brought insecurity, suffering, pain, poverty, fear, sorrow, shock and the likes to many countries. In Tanzania, which was also a scene of a terrorist attack in 1998, , Kaaya engages the issue of the September 11th 2001 terrorist attack on US. In his poem, “September 11th”, the poem depicts how the date was tainted with blood and how the world shed tears of concern. With a tone of anger, human beings are apprehended for such inhumane act that resulted in loss of lives of innocent people just because of selfishness and malice. The human race is blamed for abandoning civilisation for bestiality.

Terrorists are depicted as inhuman, defilers of humanity and morality. The images of pain which the poem carries reinforce the ideas that untimely deaths are not natural deaths. The image of the crumbling of the Twin Towers – the most symbolic buildings of wealth and power – marks the end of civilisation and the loss of innocence and humanity in the poem’s apprehension of the world condition in the circumstances of the September 11th event. The Twin Towers were a place where the world met and conducted business. The images of death are further deployed in Kaaya’s “The Ugly Face of Death” (102-103). The poem is marked by bitter lamentation over killings arising from

⁹<http://www.businessinsider.com>. Accessed 15th Jan., 2015.

terrorist attack on innocent lives. The graphic portrayal of the death arising from the activities of terrorists elicits emotion of shock as the dastardly acts of the perpetrators are revealed as totally condemnable. The poem invites the reader on an adventure through the streets of Libya. The reader is consequently made to recall the death of people and damage caused by terrorist attacks in the world, and in Libya in particular. Violence has become the people's way of life in Libya and the once rich country is crumbling, tending towards bankruptcy haven disintegrated into anarchy. Kaaya's singular engagement with the issue of war and terrorism is a major tendency in Tanzanian poetry that gives that poetic tradition global edge.

The seminal attempt by Kaaya is likely to live the history of Tanzanian poetry radically transformed since the waves of war and terrorism at the global level are yet to be stemmed. Tanzanian poets in English have also been preoccupied with issues relating to the HIV/AIDS scourge. So far, there are three poems on HIV/AIDS pandemic composed by Tanzanian poets in English. The poems are Mloka's "Mammoth AIDS" (1-5) and Kaaya's "The Misery of HIV/AIDS" (90-91) and "The War Front-HIV-AIDS" (106-107). Ever since the occurrence of the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s, communities and societies all over the world have been taking precaution as to how the deadly disease can be combated. In some countries, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns are conducted through TV drama, theatre performances, songs, cartoons among other effective means of disseminating information. The scourge has been identified as a social problem that threatens everyone's life. As Bujo has noted, the challenge posed by HIV/AIDS is not that of a single individual, community or society; rather, it is a crisis which the whole world needs to recognise with a view to combating it (1997: 187-188). Poets have not been left behind in the campaign against HIV/AIDS. Mloka's poem, "Mammoth AIDS", begins by first painting a picture of the symptoms of a person with AIDS without clearly indicating that the person has contracted it.

The picture of a lady who looks like a mosquito, a symbol of fragility or lightness, signifying the imminence of death is painted. Her very disturbing features are contrasted with those earlier enumerated in the poem: "This is a person, who looks strange today, than she was yesterday,/ When she was a woman, with all qualities" (2). The juxtaposition provides grounds for the pedagogical aim of the poem, a sort of enlightenment campaign succinctly captured in the repeated lines: "Keep away from AIDS! Be aware of AIDS" [...]. The persona recounts the story of the victim in a dramatic way that the reader is able to contrast the lady's former physical features with those of the present. Hence, the reader is effectively availed information about the fatality of the scourge. The poem evokes a feeling of pity by activating memory figuratively to how the victim fished with vigour at the lake, when she drove without "speed governors", when she stormed in the streets and when she went

boozing, only to find herself in this situation now (2-3). Not using “speed governors” implies that the girl had unsafe or unprotected sex as a result of not using condoms. The importance of having safe sex through the use of protectors is underscored and display of blind courage in sexual affair considered a suicidal act. On the whole, the poet calls on all to join hands so as to curb the spread of the killer disease and reduce the spread of the virus in the interest of the safety of all. Kaaya’s poem, “The Misery of HIV/AIDS”, is also a portrait of the destructive effect of the virus and disease. The way the world has panicked in the face of the scourge and the fruitless efforts made to find a vaccine and a permanent cure for it are painted. As in Mloka’s poem, “Mammoth AIDS,” Kaaya’s “The Misery of HIV/AIDS” paints how AIDS paralyses the immune system of the body of victim and drains the body’s vitality. It attempts to describe the process by which the flesh parts with the bones, making the whole body sag; and how an AIDS infected individual coughs in agony. The kind of poetic intent and pedagogical tone of Mloka’s poem on HIV/AIDS are equally present in Kaaya’s “The Misery of HIV/AIDS”. The poem is remarkable for its romantic portrayal of sexual experience and the regrettable condition of danger surrounding it because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that ironically serves as an equaliser, a leveller.

HIV/AIDS is a condition of health which has led to the “loss of parents and productive citizens” as Ashford puts on record.¹⁰ In another poem of his, “The War front-HIV and AIDS,” the persona reflects on the struggle against HIV/AIDS and depicts the world as a battlefield on which the disease is combated. Images of soldiers are deployed to indicate the enormity of the task at hand, as the disease threatens the very essence of living. Kaaya’s and Mloka’s poems attempt to vividly paint the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS scourge on individuals, families, communities, societies and the economic sector. The poems of Kaaya and Mloka establish that immediate actions need to be taken to save the world’s population from going into extinction. Indeed, the scourge of HIV/AIDS is a global issue to which Tanzanian poets in English have significantly added their voices no matter how little.

4. Conclusion

As it can be deciphered from the foregoing, colonialism is not seen as “a minor interruption” in the Tanzanian history; it, however, appears as a major one in “an extensive and intricately woven history”.¹¹The historical circumstances

¹⁰<http://www.prb/pdf06> Accessed 13th January, 2015.

¹¹A different position favoured by historians is made known by Vaughan. See M. Vaughan, “Madness and Colonialism, Colonialism as Madness”. *Paideuma*, 39, 1993: 47.

which made Kiswahili not only a national language but also a language of the common people that suits the political ideology of the 1960s as well as nationalistic discourse of that epoch are the reason for the firm establishment of Tanzanian poetry in Kiswahili. Nevertheless, as presently demonstrated, Tanzanian poets in English do exist and have varying degrees of issues relating to Tanzania and beyond at varying degrees. It can be argued that, the political transformations of the country in the 1990s inspired some of the poets to engage with issues of the contemporary Tanzanian society and the world at large. Unlike the writer of *Summons* who mostly focuses on Tanzania, the poets of the post-1980s cast their creative glances beyond the confines of Tanzania and, hence, are more transnational in outlook. Altogether, the poets demonstrate that Tanzanian poetry in English equally deserves critical approbation just like its Kiswahili counterparts on account of its scholarly worth and social relevance.

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