

# Intertextuality of Themes in the Plays of *Kinjeketile* and *MAJIRA YA UTASA*

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**Abstract:** This study examines the intertextuality in the plays of *Kinjeketile* (1969) by Ibrahim Hussein and *Majira ya Utasa* (2015) by Timothy Arege. Although the two plays have a great difference in the historical periods of their writings, they depict similarity in the creation of themes and to a greater extent the echo of Hussein's work is seen in Arege's play. Hussein is a great East African play writer whose works have been read in Tanzania and East Africa at large. Most East African literature focus on protests against colonialism and neo-colonialism and advocate for education and how best they can fight vices such as tribalism and corruption. Intertextuality is the concept of interdependence of texts. The common themes in both plays are examined with a view to explaining the cultural, economic, historical and social factors that give rise to the situations inherent in both plays. Further, an attempt is made to explain the relevance of the contemporary themes in Arege's *Majira ya Utasa* to the historical environment that obtains in Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. All texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the pre-existing texts. According to Kristeva (1986) any work of art is an intertext which interacts with other texts, rewrites, transforms or parodies them. This article explores some of the themes in the two plays guided by the theory of intertextuality.

**Keywords:** co-operation, freedom, intertextuality, leadership, oppression

## 1. Introduction

The play is one of the genres of literature. According to Mlama (1983) the play is a composition which can be written or unwritten, which makes the action to be performed clearly, in front of the audience. Wamitila (2002) asserts that drama is a performed art of expression by words in front of an audience or literature written as dialogue to be read by people. In structure, a drama includes scenes and acts, and dialogue takes a major part in expressing the themes. *Kinjeketile* (1969) written by Ibrahim Hussein is among the pioneer plays to be written by an East African author. *Majira ya Utasa* (2015) written by Timothy Arege is among the plays written in the twenty-first century and it addresses contemporary issues that affect the common man. Most works of literature tell about people's history. This is because writers compose literature from their environments. What they see, experience or hear from their immediate surroundings form the themes for their focus. This study investigates and explains to what extent the themes addressed in *Kinjeketile* are echoed by *Majira ya Utasa*.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This work was guided by the theory of intertextuality. Intertextuality as a critical theory and an approach to texts was provided by formulations of such theorists as Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Ronald Barthes before the term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. Intertextuality is a way of interpreting texts which focuses on the idea of texts borrowing words and concepts from each other. Every writer, both before writing his/her text and during the writing process, is a reader of the texts written before his text. An author's work will always have echoes and traces of the other texts to which it refers directly or indirectly and either explicitly or implicitly. Tenets of intertextuality theory include:

- One text is creation of another text from former texts.
- Works of literature are produced from traditions of other cultures that were put together by initial texts. Thus the system, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture is crucial to the meaning of a work of literature.
- One text explains the reading of another text which are derived from the same canon, where one text seeks and answers another text.
- Literary texts fetches, quotes, changes, imitates in a way by referring to one text in one way or another.
- These are some of the tents that guided the writing of these paper.

### The short history of Kiswahili plays

According to Njogu and Chimera (1999) Kiswahili plays have two origins. First they are traditional drama and secondly they are the art of creativity. Graham Hyslop started acting in 1944 and he is the first foreigner to be associated with acting in the East African region. Later, East African writers among them Henry Kuria and Gerishon Ngugi started composing plays. In 1953, Kuria who was Hyslop's student composed the play titled *Nakupenda Lakini* which was first published in 1957. After independence, the African writers focused on themes such as oppression and colonization. The writers portrayed the awakening of Africans and how tired they had become under colonization and oppression. The end of colonization did not bear much fruits as the Africans who took over leadership continued to "colonize" their fellow Africans in what was regarded as neo-colonialism. The literary works that followed this period, especially in the 1980s portrayed how African leaders continued with vices perpetrated by the white colonizers and that is why that period is referred to as 'the darkest period' in Africa. The writers in the 1990s and the twenty-first century have touched on themes that portray hope that the vices such as oppression will come to an end. Despite evidence that other vices such as corruption and

tribalism are rampant today, there is hope for tomorrow's generation.

### A summary of the selected set books

The *Kinjeketile* play was written by the famous Kiswahili author Ibrahim Hussein in 1969. This play is among the first texts to be written after the exit of the colonial masters. In this play, the author explains about the battle between Africans from Tanaganyika (present-day mainland Tanzania) and the German colonizers. The Africans were fed up with the oppression against them in their own country. Therefore all tribes united against the colonizers for them to attain their independence. Their weapons were inferior and ineffective as compared to those of the Germans. Kinjeketile who is the main character and their leader, engages in some traditional machinations and convinces the tribesmen that they would use water as protection against the weapons of the colonizers. He also adds that their gods would protect them. Many tribes unite as a result, ready to fight the "Red Soil" (in reference to the white man's skin colour). They get into war but most of them lose their lives for blindly believing in the portent power of water. Kinjeketile is arrested, forced to denounce the power of witchcraft and finally imprisoned as a result.

*Majira ya Utasa* is a play authored by the renowned playwright Timothy Arege. It is among the contemporary plays of the twenty-first century. It was published in 2015. The themes addressed in this play are influenced by the contemporary society. In this play, there are two classes of people; the rich and the poor. The poor lack even basic commodities such as food, due to extended droughts. They have been forced to eat carcasses, wild fruits and roots. On the other hand, the rich are living in opulence. They are unaware of the sufferings of the poor since they have everything. The drought is as a result of grabbing forest lands and felling trees by a few leaders. The forest land is turned into a flower farm. Dangerous chemicals used in the farms have affected the environment. These include the ocean which had been a source of livelihood for the residents. Most workers who had been employed in the farms seem to be suffering from respiratory illnesses due to the chemicals used in the farms. The villagers unite to bring down Jumbe who is their leader in order to end their suffering. Led by Siwa, Dosho and Hori all the villagers destroy the flower farm and head towards Jumbe's house to reclaim the forest left by their forefathers.

### 3. Problem Statement

Analyzing themes as one of the elements of literature is common among literary scholars. Themes portray a society as it is. This study is a comparative analysis of the intertextuality of the themes in the two plays written by different authors at different times in history. Although *Kinjeketile* was written after independence, it depicts the colonial period while *Majira ya Utasa* portrays the contemporary society. There is need to understand the relationship between the East African literary works and how they impact the composition of other related works. This work aims at exposing vices such as poor leadership, oppression, greed, poverty, lack of co-operation and freedom as addressed in the two Kiswahili plays. Most works that

have researched on such themes have not fully exhausted the material in research thus this study aims at bridging the gap and adding new knowledge to the existing corpora.

### Data sources and methodology

This data was gathered from the library by reading two set books and other reference materials related to our theme of research. Specific themes were analyzed related to the research objectives. It entails identification and discussion of themes in the play *Kinjeketile* and comparison of similar themes in *Majira ya Utasa*. Intertextuality involves explanation of how one text impacts on another text by identifying common elements such as characters, themes, plots, settings and stylistic devices (Allen, 200). In this study, common themes and how they are echoed in both plays are identified and discussed.

### 4. Results and Discussion

There are several works which have been done on themes; our research tries to close the gaps on the themes that seem to have affected society in different historical periods as identified in both plays. Among these themes are:

#### Oppression

Oppression is where people are treated with cruelty and unfairness by denying them their right. In *Kinjeketile* play, Africans were oppressed by the German colonizers by taking away their land and forcing them to labour on the farms without pay. One such incident happens when the workers are in the farm:

**Kitunda:** What has happened?

**Bwana wa Kwanza:** Kitunda stood up to stretch his back, Mnyapala hit him with the cane. Kitunda did not like it, he held the cane. Three and then Jumbe came and ordered for his arrest and beating. (Act 1, Scene 1)

Another incident is seen when Mkichi complains thus:

**Mkichi:** It's better to die than continue being ruled like this. They make us cultivate like animals. Hunger, because we cannot cultivate ourselves. We cultivate for Bwana Kinoo only. It is better to die than to live like this. (Act 1, Scene 2)

In *Majira ya Utasa*, the theme of oppression is present as well. Jumbe together with other leaders destroy the forest and grab the land. This is an act of selfishness. This causes the drought and thus loss of lives.

**Bi Siwa:** Is the shortage of water as a result of felling down trees carelessly and the sources of water destroyed?

**Siwa:** Who is cause of that? Whatever you are saying has been said for quite some time. For sure it is no longer a secret. All these started when our selfish leaders shared a piece of land which was a taboo for anyone to own it. All other problems came after that. (Act 1, Scene 2)

#### Poor Leadership

Poor leadership is the kind of leadership that does not care about the welfare of its subjects. That kind of leadership

began during the era of colonial rule in Tanganyika as depicted in *Kinjeketile*. It has continued to the present times as depicted in *Majira ya Utasa*. Africans were mistreated by their rulers and endured a lot of suffering. The Africans who took over leadership continued to rule like the colonial masters. In the *Kinjekitele* play, we come across the poor leadership of German colonizers when they use Africans to lord it over fellow Africans to whom they are portrayed as villains. Among these Africans is Mnyapala who investigates and reports everything the Africans plan to do. When they organize a meeting at night, they are filled with fear and apprehension that Mnyapala might get them and that would lead to some kind of punishment.

**Ngulumbalyo:** Mnyapala is coming.

**Mngindo:** What shall we do now?

**Mkichi:** We cannot say anything now. We have to wait for another meeting.

**Kitunda:** I will bring you the message later. Very fast, they are coming. (Act 1, Scene 2)

In another scene we witness the poor leadership of the Germans when they arrest Kinjeketile and force him to confess to all people that the water was a lie. They force him to confess so that they can continue to rule without opposition.

**Police:** He has refused.

**German Official:** Wake him up. Tomorrow you will say it, you will tell people that the water was a lie.

**Official:** If you tell them that, all these people - children and women, will be released. (Act 4, Scene 1)

In *Majira ya Utasa*, poor leadership is portrayed when Jumbe uses dangerous chemicals that affect the health of the workers at his farm. These chemicals have also destroyed the ocean which is a source of livelihood for fishermen; almost all fish are dead.

**Mebo:** We have had tests done on us. Those of us with this disease have been told by the doctors that it is a result of the chemicals from the tents of flower farms. The caution which is supposed to be taken by our employer is ignored.

**Siwa:** I think what Mebo is saying is true. I have heard of that at the ocean. The disease that finished the fish at the ocean is the same that flower farm workers are suffering from. (Act 3, Scene 1)

Jumbe also rules with corruption without considering the people he is leading but himself. When donations are given to those experiencing drought, he instructs Dekka his assistant to get him sixty bags of beans and a hundred bags of maize flour. At the same time he urges him not to forget to pick some for himself.

**Jumbe:** Okay, that's good. (*silence*) There is that load.

**Deka:** There are many loads! Exactly which one are you referring to?

**Jumbe:** The one of wheat. How many bags of maize flour did you order the boys to get for me?

**Deka:** One hundred.

**Jumbe:** Good. And the beans?

**Deka:** Sixty bags.

**Jumbe:** This is nobody's property. A person eat where he worked. We are the first to enjoy these donations because we work here. If you behave like a "fool" you will die poor.

**Deka:** I see.

**Jumbe:** Okay, it's upon you. Miss anything at your own risk.

**Deka:** I won't miss. I will try my best. (Act 2, Scene 1)

### Co-operation and freedom

After grabbing the land and denial of their freedom, the Africans got tired of oppression. They came together to find a solution. There are those who volunteered for better or for worse to save the society.

In *Kinjeketile*, we see the efforts of Africans who were tired of being oppressed by the Germans in their own country. That is why leaders like Kinjeketile, Kitunda, Ngulumbalyo and others volunteered to save the republic from the hands of colonizers. First they understand they must be united. That is why they make efforts to unite all tribes together so that they can fight the war as a united army. Kinjeketile uses magic water to unite all the tribes.

**Kinjeketile:** After being one, after being one body we shall be people of Seyyid Said. The red soil (white man) will be fought and taken out of our country. Then we shall be people of Seyyid Said.

**Crowd:** Water! Water!

**Kinjeketile:** Unity!

**Crowd:** Unity! (Act 2, Scene 1)

After taking this step of togetherness and oneness, the citizens move towards acquiring their freedom.

**Ngulumbalyo:** What have you taken?

**Crowd:** Bamboos (a sign of our guns)

**Ngulumbalyo:** Bamboo!

**Crowd:** Bamboo!

**Ngulumbalyo:** What for?

**Crowd:** To Kill!

**Ngulumbalyo:** Kill! (Act 3, Scene 3)

Although majority of the people lost their lives, colonizers were no longer too harsh. The laws of the Germans were changed and were a little lenient until when Tanganyika was put under the British rule after the First World War.

In *Majira ya Utasa* play, we see efforts of the villagers when they unite to get rid of the leadership of Jumbe. Several meetings were held led by Kato their leader to find solutions to their problems. They have even tried sending several representatives to Jumbe to listen to their pleas but to no avail.

**Kato:** My fellow villagers, we meet here today because of the difficult times our people are going through.

**Dosho:** Very true.

**Mebo:** In deed these are difficult times.

**Kato:** I know that people have tried. But still nothing has been done. Neither can we say that we are defeated. Saying that will mean we have lost our hopes. We cannot do that. (Act 3, Scene 1)

**Deka:** People are so many. When your security men saw them, they disappeared while the workers joined the protest, singing songs of freedom.

**Jumbe:** Freedom?

**Deka:** Yes. They say it is freedom of their land. Today they have destroyed all the flower tents. (Act 4, scene 3).

Their efforts to unite and get rid of the oppressors finally bear fruit as they overrun the farm and Jumbe is forced to flee.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has analyzed some of the common themes present in both plays of *Kinjeketile* (1969) and *Majira ya Utasa* (2015). These plays were written by different writers at different historical times, but they depict similarity in several elements of literature such as characters, themes, plots, settings and stylistic devices. This study aimed at comparing themes and their intertextuality in the two works so as to understand some basics that have not changed even in the twenty-first century. This work will help the leaders in our society, writers and scholars to be awakened for the betterment of the future of tomorrow's generation. The youth who are scholars have a chance of making their future better. The works also give us hope to acquire freedom in the challenges of today's life.

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