



Textualization of History in Poems from East Africa by Cook and Rubadiri

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ABSTRACT

Using new historicism, this paper examines textualization of history in selected poems from Cook and Rubadiri anthology, *Poems from East Africa* (1971). A textual analysis of poems with titles that encompass appellations of real humans, such as Martin Luther King and Yatuta Chisiza, and places, such as Vietnam and Angola, have been selected in order to compare how history and historicization has been undertaken in poetry. History and historicization are examined as twin elements that ambivalently help readers in understanding the context and inspiration of the poets in the selected poems for this study. The reading established that there is a one to one correlation between the messages contained in the texts (poems) and the historicities surrounding such creations. It also established that the personalities in the poems: Martin Luther King, Yatuta Chisiza, Major Christopher Okigbo, inter alia, fought for causes that, to this day, afflict humanity as a whole. The reading also found that wars such as was the war in Vietnam, Angola, Maji Maji Revolt, and many more, mirror the current wars in various parts of the world.

Keywords: *historization, maji maji revolt, new historicism, poetry*



1.0 Introduction

The relationship between Literature and reality has attracted profound and enduring interest from both literary theorists and literary critics. Being a product of the writer's vivid artistic imagination, literature captures, with point blank accuracy, the observations made by the creative writer, observations that blend the realities of everyday life with imagination. This blending of human experience with imagination is what gives rise to art, to poetry, to literature. The creative writer is both a recorder and a maker of history, but unlike historians (in the ordinary sense) who capture in their writings what has actually taken place, a creative writer relies more on their imagination to record what they think makes sense in the present time, besides what they conjecture could take place and make sense ad infinitum. To a creative writer therefore human experience is constructed to suit the needs of one's imagination. These happenings might be related to the society the creative writer hails from or just be a microcosm of what could happen anywhere in the cosmos. The creative writer thus transcends both temporal and spatial boundaries. It is thus this amalgam of human experience and art that a creative writer presents to the reader who then is supposed to appreciate the aesthetic impact the work might have upon them. The writer's immediate experiences are communicated in ways unique to the writer. The creative writer's style is as idiolectal as their thinking is idiosyncratic, the reason writers can present the same reality in diverse ways thus making literary/poetic reality as multifaceted as there are writers themselves. Thus reality in literature is always subjective.

The writer's work is to make an attempt at persuading the reader to view reality from a given standpoint, besides making the reader appreciate the fact that they do not even have to agree with the writer's way of looking at reality. This perhaps is the condition of life itself: it is not possible that one will always persuade another to embrace a certain perspective on life. This is informed by the fact that writers emerge from real social-historical and cultural backgrounds which in most instances are mirrored in their writings. Their knowledge of what happens in reality perhaps functions as a source of inspiration for their artistic expressions. Be that as it may, writers will always find readers/critics who will embrace their (the writers') perspectives and those who will not. Those who do disagree with writers' standpoints help generate further knowledge by introducing new trajectories to given phenomena thus making the field of creative writing rich in the generation of novel ideas.

This paper discusses the various poems in David Cook and David Rubadiri's edition of poetry anthology *Poems from East Africa* (1971). The poetry in the anthology was written in the late 1960s, 1970 and 1971. The study takes cognizance of the correlation between real life situation (what has been referred to as the world of reality in the preceding paragraphs) and poetry, the 'factual' and 'fictitious', in a bid

to unravel the import presented in the poetry in this anthology. This study has employed the neo-historical approach (New Historicism which is, by extension, known as 'Cultural poetics') whereby history is viewed as including all of the cultural, social, political, anthropological discourses at work in any given age, and these various 'texts' are inescapably part of a social construct.

2.0 New historicism

This approach was propounded by Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault through his intertextual methods focusing especially on issues of power and knowledge. New Historicism frequently addresses the critical theory based idea that the lowest common denominator for all human actions is power, so the New Historicist seeks to find examples of power and how it is dispersed within the text. Power is a means through which the marginalized are controlled, and the things that the marginalized (or other) seek to gain. This relates back to the idea that because literature is written by those who have the most power (read knowledge), there must be details in it that show the views of the common people. New Historicists seek to find "sites of struggle" to identify just who is the group or entity with the most power. The presentation and interpretation of events, which the writer appears to support or condemn, is in a way reflexive of the writer's culture as far as new historicists are concerned. At other times it can be seen to do both.

According to Barry (2002), New Historicism is a critical theory propounded by American critic Stephen Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from more to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its beginning. Barry further observes that tendencies similar to New Historicism can be identified in works by various critics published during the 1970s, a good example being J. W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State: A Study of Jacobean Drama* (published by Methuen in 1971, and reissued in 1987 with an introduction by Jonathan Dollimore). He explains that this brief and epoch-making book challenged conservative critical views about Jacobean theatre, and linked the plays much more closely with the political events of their era than previous critics had done. Barry writes that a simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. Almost all the poems analysed in this paper were written during the historical period the mentioned figures lived and/or were assassinated. Barry continues that new historicism refuses (at least ostensibly) to 'privilege' the literary text: instead of a literary 'foreground' and a historical 'background' it envisages and practises a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other. This paper has adopted this approach to criticism. He further writes that this 'equal weighting' is suggested in the definition of new historicism offered by the American critic Louis Montrose who defines it as a combined interest in 'the

textuality of history, the historicity of texts'. (Barry, 2002 pp.119-120).

Montrose's definition of New Historicism is what has been adopted through modification for the title of this chapter: Textualization of History in *Poems from East Africa* by Cook and Rubadiri. This interplay of literary and non-literary texts in New Historicism enables the critic to read meanings into works of art in comparison with the historical happenings of the period the literary works were constructed. Foucault's conception of power is neither reductive nor synonymous with domination. Rather he understands power (in modern times at least) as continually articulated on knowledge and knowledge on power. This theory also encompasses elements of Marxist Literary perspective. According to Derek (2001), Brizee and Tompkins have this to say about New Historicism:

This school, influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist theories, seeks to reconnect a work with the time period in which it was produced and identify it with the cultural and political movements of the time (Michel Foucault's concept of *épistème*). New Historicism assumes that every work is a product of the historic moment that created it. Specifically, New Criticism is "...a practice that has developed out of contemporary theory, particularly the structuralist realization that all human systems are symbolic and subject to the rules of language, and the deconstructive realization that there is no way of positioning oneself as an observer outside the closed circle of textuality" (Richter 1205).

Working to prise the information out of the symptomatic ailments to present the various alternatives signaled by objective historical events (recorded in time and space) will help us picture out the presumed causative agents of these events. This is what literature seeks, not mere historical prescriptions but descriptions of what could potentially be the underlying explanations to these events. History is seen as part of fiction from Foucault's explanation in 'History of Sexuality'. To reiterate the statement made earlier, history is subjective in New Historicism.

3.0 New Historicism and Foucault

Barry (2002) sees New Historicism as resolutely anti-establishment, always implicitly on the side of liberal ideals of personal freedom and accepting and celebrating all forms of difference and 'deviance'. He writes that at the same time, though, it seems simultaneously to despair of the survival of these in the face of the power of the repressive state, which it constantly reveals as able to penetrate and taint the most intimate areas of personal life. He further observes that this notion of the State as all-powerful and all-seeing stems from the post-structuralist cultural historian Michel Foucault whose pervasive image of the State is that of 'panoptic' (meaning 'all-seeing')

surveillance. He explains that the Panopticon was a design for a circular prison conceived by the eighteenth-century utilitarian Jeremy Bentham: the design consisted of tiered ranks of cells which could all be surveyed by a single warder positioned at the centre of the circle. Barry explains that the panoptic State, however, maintains its surveillance not by physical force and intimidation, but by the power of its 'discursive practices' (to use Foucault's terminology - 'discursive' is the adjective derived from the noun 'discourse') which circulates its ideology throughout the body politic.

Foucault sees discourse as not just a way of speaking or writing, but the whole 'mental set' and ideology which encloses the thinking of all members of a given society. Barry explains that for Foucault, discourse is not merely singular and monolithic - there is always a multiplicity of discourses - so that the operation of power structures is as significant a factor in (say) the family as in layers of government. He concludes that for Foucault, contesting the power structures may involve, for example, the struggle to change sexual politics just as much as party politics. The individual thus becomes the centre of (a possible sphere) of political action. To Barry, the influence exerted by the individual in the political scene might elicit the interest of a feminist critic. He concludes that by so doing, there might be seen grounds for political optimism. On the other hand, Barry asserts, "when political power operates in and suffuses so many spheres, the possibility of fundamental change and transformation may come to seem very remote" (p.122).

New Historicism is a reaction to Formalism, which, according to Encarta, is a text based method developed by Victor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp and other Russian critics in the 20th century, which involved a detailed inquiry into the plot structure, narrative perspective, symbolic imagery and other literary techniques. Formalists strictly stuck to the text as far as interpretation of meaning was concerned. This is what New Historicists sought to discount by ascribing meaning to what lay outside the text for the text alone could not possibly offer all the implications associated with given utterances. The text merely suggests what can be ascribed to it, the interpretation and presentation of history by the readers being purely subjective in New Historicism. It also pries into how the events' portrayal criticizes the leading political figures or movements of the day besides investigating how the work considers traditionally marginalized populations. So the New Historicists dug deeper to unearth the connotations, the suggestions that lay outside the text as a tool through which meanings could be read. These include finding crucial leads to meanings of texts by tracing the events surrounding the life of the writer at the time of writing. So the analysis has employed the New Historicist's approach to focus on the metaphorical implications of the poems to be discussed here. Historical facts in these poems have a symbolic significance thus the need to use Hayden White's term *metahistory*.

The hailing/appellation in some of the titles of the poems in this anthology

appears to invite us to read specific meanings into them, meanings closely associated with the said titles in actuality. When a poet hails, one could argue that what they hail is new and that is exactly what they are talking about: a new Vietnam, for instance unrelated to the real life Vietnam in Asia. However, it would be difficult to give credible argument supporting this postulation, thus a critic's resort to see the poet's "Vietnam" as being inextricably bound with the historical Vietnam. This paper shall thus limit itself to the poems whose titles have been crafted by the use of appellation. This appellation helps the reader to both locate the historical period behind the poet's decision to use a title. It shall also guide the interpretation of the subject matter of the poems insofar as this analysis is concerned.

This analysis has selected poems whose titles are an appellation or hailing of somebody or something for the purpose of this paper. This study chose appellation or hailing as its focal point in order to draw the readers' attention to the poets' attempt to expose the suffering borne by oppressed peoples of the world, a motif that cuts across the analysed poems. This appellation also informs the oppressed peoples of the world what gallant and selfless freedom fighters such as Martin Luther King (regardless of the danger of losing their own lives) are doing in order to guarantee their peoples' human dignity. Besides, this appellation takes the readers to various spots in the world where the locals' human rights have not been guaranteed by the ruling class with the hope of nudging the readers to take it upon themselves (by embracing the mantra 'thinking globally but acting locally') in order to realize what new historicists call change (Foucault's revolution).

4.0 Place appellation

The section identified Jonathan Kariara's "Vietnam" (pp.67-69), Joseph Kariuki's "Sleepless in Angola" (p.72), Ralph Bitamazire's "The Dog in Kivulu" (22), Amin Kassam's "Mombasa"(74), John Mbiti's "New York Skyscrapers" (95), Paul Mukasa-Ssali's "Katebo Port" (104), Rubadiri's "Death at Mulago" (137), and David Wangusa's "Kilembe Mines" (182). Kariara's "Vietnam" and Kariuki's "Sleepless in Angola" has been analysed in details while the remainder have been mentioned in passing. The first case of appellation is Jonathan Kariara, in 'Vietnam' (pp.67-69). This cry easily pulls the reader's attention to the war in Vietnam (1959-1975) at the point this poem was written. The period of the war in Vietnam paints a gloomy picture of the untold suffering of the Vietnamese children, men and women in this apparently senseless war whose cause is as perturbing as it is unconvincing. One cannot avoid associating this poem with that war. The American public (viewed from the angle of the anti-war campaigners) was brainwashed by President Johnson in the wake of the assassination of President JF Kennedy (late 1963) into believing that the Vietcong (Vietnamese communist guerrilla forces) were animated by communism and not by nationalism and a desire for self-determination. The United States started sending

troops and supplies there in 1964 and by the end of 1965; there were 80,000 American troops in Vietnam. The number had risen to a peak of 543, 000 by 1969.

So this war attained unmanageably galactic proportions. Millions of casualties, destruction of the rice fields of the then poorest Asian country, the bombing of a poor people's huts making them burst forth into flames; the devastating effects of the use of the highly toxic Orange Agent that destroyed the rice fields in order to deprive the NLF (Vietnam) of food supplies and jungle cover, and later use of Napalm on the Viet Minh (Vietcong) guerrillas. The allusion here to this important historical happening during this time (1959 - mid 1975) compares to what was then in most African countries during that time. The poet is indubitably condemning this war. Like the blind actions of Americans in Vietnam that divided the Vietnamese people into two groups, the North who were communist supporters, and the South which the US created to counter the North under Mr. Diem, a brutal dictator and segregationist. The feeling that they had what Foucault sees as a Panopticon (adopted from Bentham), and therefore able to see what was supposed to be happening in Vietnam was fallacious. Africans had similarly suffered the same blow: the blind embrace of the antagonistic politics of the cold-war era whereby in Kenya, the Kenyatta-Mboya axis leaned towards the West while the Odinga-Pinto group leaned towards the East. The effects of the Vietnamese war still haunt the Vietnamese people, just like the effects of the Cold War era still haunt the Kenyan people.

This war in Vietnam is a condemnation of American aggression abroad, something witnessed in the 21st century when America and her ally Britain started a senseless war in Iraq in March, 2003. America still has several hotspots in the world where it is possible for full-scale military conflicts to break out: Iran, North Korea, China, and even Russia. A possibility of a nuclear inferno cannot be ruled out should any of these hotspots degenerate into war, something the writer of this poem indirectly condemns for literature points to what would probably happen. In Uganda, Amin leaned towards the East and cast tirades at the Israelis denying that the Holocaust ever occurred and declaring himself a champion of the Palestinian cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the symbolic level, both systems have failed in Africa. Mengistu and Nyerere's embrace of communism was a fiasco while Kenya and Uganda too have failed to boast of any meaningful economic development under capitalism. The power struggles we see in New Historicist interpretation of texts (the textualization of history and the historicization of texts) continue nonetheless. The ruling elites are keen on retaining their grip on power while the masses continue to fight to gain their fundamental privileges. The writer, voicing such concerns, appears to be on the side of the struggling masses.

The use of refrain 'in blood' (L.37, 42, 63) is emphatic of the lives that were lost in that senseless war. The poet alludes to the lack of meaningful dossier to support the justification for that war:

This was never to be forgotten
For this was not war
As other wars are wars

The poet here clearly exposes the hypocrisy of the Washington establishment during that war for that was a strange war. The Nixon administration was under huge pressure back home to put an end to the war but still stayed on in Vietnam, notable an tire war voices coming from conscius objectors (Mohammad Ali) and civil rights leader (Martin Luther King Jr). The administration refused to hearken to the voice of reason: it lost that war and signed the Jan27, 1973 Paris Treaty with the North that saw the Americans withdraw from the South. Vietnam had lost over 3.2 million combatants, Cambodia and Laos (the other South Asian countries that had involved themselves in the conflict) also lost about two million combatants. The United States lost over 58,000 troops, a case of Pyrrhic victory. This can be compared to the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in the year 2003 only to discover that the Saddam Hussein establishment had no weapons of mass murder. The poet here, through his reference to the Vietnamese case could be sending a warning signal to African politicians, and by extension world leaders against their blind embrace of violence as a means of conflict resolution. The possibility of a repeat event is real for history has a nasty way of repeating itself.

In a rejoinder, Joseph Kariuki, now closer home, talks of Angola in, "Sleepless in Angola" (p.72) whereby president Edwardo Dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi (1934-2002) engaged in an endless war in the second part of the 20th Century. The title, an appellation, immediately draws the readers' attention to Angola. While Santos' MPLA leaned toward Moscow, Savimbi's UNITA leaned toward Washington: the same cold war antics between capitalism and communism on display once more, the power struggles that Foucault is concerned with. The poet presents the two sides, and by extension the two diametrically opposed political figures in a clash that appears aimed at liberating the Angolan people. The reader is left on their own to determine the side to support. The poet here wonders whether this war will ever end: 'will there be a tomorrow? /they no longer sleep'. The use of the rhetorical question expresses the poet's skepticism, perhaps echoing the anxieties among the Angolan people. The tone of finality in 'They can no longer sleep' confirms the poet's fear, which collocates with the title "Sleepless in Angola". The hailing here suggests that the readers (in the world of reality) train their focus on Angola. The reason for this war draws the readers to an important debate that could end in the conclusion that the struggle for self-determination is an altruistic struggle: 'So that by death their children may live/Once again as men-/has called them to resist.' This is ironic for 'They are not alone:/Their moans find echoes in the torn continent.' The poet

perhaps detests this war and other such wars in Africa for Africans are at war with themselves. The refrain 'They shall no longer sleep' is satirically used as a mockery of African warlords who engage in wanton plunder of human life and African wealth. Pundits believe that the war in Angola had 'crude oil' as the main bone contention. The writer is in a way presenting the events from a critical tone thus giving the reader leave to either condemn both the warring forces or side with one, for in new historicism, history is interpreted as a subjective reality.

The other equally interesting poems in the anthology where hailing/appellation has been employed include Ralph Bitamazire's "The Dog in Kivulu"(22) which paints the absurd but credible picture of the life of the people of Kivulu slums adjoining Makerere area of Kampala, Uganda; Amin Kassam's "Mombasa"(74) which reveals the serenity of the coastal town, which is still reverberated in the contemporary time; John's Mbiti's "New York Skyscrapers"(95) in which the poet relives his stay in New York City, and the apparent adulteration of the natural climate which is perhaps his way of attacking the contemporary industrial complexes all over the world that have directly had a negative impact on human health; Paul Mukasa-Ssali's "Katebo Port"(104) where he revisits his childhood adventures at Katebo on the shores of lake Victoria, near Entebbe, Uganda; David Rubadiri's "Death at Mulago"(137) which seems to be the poet's recollection of a patient's death at Mulago Hospital in Kampala, Uganda, and the pain suffered by the patient's friends and family who, sadly, cannot save the life of their beloved; and David Wangusa's "Kilembe Mines"(182) which suggests the huge human cost of mining copper at Kilembe near Kasese, Uganda, and the destruction caused to the adjoining environment, an indirect indictment of the contemporary capitalist world. The poems talk about the poets' experiences at the mentioned places, and/or the human conditions there, all of which attracted their attention. The use of specific names like Kivulu, Mombasa, New York, Katebo, Mulago, and Kilembe tend to specifically turn our attention to these places. The goodness with poetry though is that one does not fail to read the conditions/situations there and associate them with something else they have experienced. Reality in most cases fails to do this, but since poetry suggests/alludes meaning, one can easily correlate experiences from one place to another, and from time to time.

5.0 Human names appellation

This study identified Amin Kassam's "Martin Luther King" (p.73), David Rubadiri's "Two Epitaphs" (p.140), and Yusuf Kassam's "Maji Maji" (p.77) for this section. Amin Kassam's poem shifts the readers' attention from African politics to that of the USA. Aside from hailing (as a tribute) the Civil Rights Leader whose name is the title of the poem, the poem is a serious allusion to the war against oppression of Africans by racists world over, and, absurdly, this is more virulent in this century from Asia to

Europe to America as far-rightist nationalism voices engulf Europe (read Marine Le Pen's France to Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson post-Brexit Britain) and Trump's United States. Racism is 'the black man's burden and the white man's shame' as Martin Luther King, Jr himself once said in a speech delivered back in 1967, on November the 8th to be exact, entitled 'Transforming a Neighborhood into a Brotherhood' whereby he talks about racism, economic injustice (or poverty), and war (Vietnamese War). On the thematic level, the poem here contributes to African and world politics by calling upon all races (black and white; rich and poor; men and women) to work together as brothers and sisters 'where soil and clouds/Embraced and fused'. Also the use of 'From rocky desert/He curved a valley...' alludes to King's most famous speech 'I Have A Dream' delivered on August 28, 1963 when he led a peaceful march between the George Washington Monument and Abraham Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC while calling the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom 'the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history our nation'. The repetition of 'a dream' thrice in this poem echoes King's use of 'I Have A Dream' that is severally repeated throughout his speech. Even though King is a historical figure, he has so often been quoted in fields outside of history, one such field being literature. The connection between the two areas of life is glaring. The poet is invariably paying tribute to the freedom fighter who was hailed by the entire world, a man whose vision for a just and humane world made him pay the ultimate price. Does the world still have contemporary Martin Luther Kings?

Away from the USA, Rubadiri mourns his learned friends in "Two Epitaphs" (p.140) who died fighting that Africa might be free. Among the dictionary definitions of epitaph is that it is 'a short speech or piece of writing commemorating the life of a recently deceased person' (Encarta, 2007). Major Christopher Okigbo (1930-1967) was shot dead in Biafra, the 1967 civil war in Nigeria that ended on Jan 6, 1970 when Biafra State leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu fled to Ivory Coast. An estimated one-three million people died. Okigbo was a renowned writer. His two books *HEAVENSGATE* and *LIMITS* have been cited by the poet here. Rubadiri writes of Okigbo:

HEAVENSGATE
And LIMITS
Who can reach them?
Lead and barrels of heat
Do so easily.
Youth and love
Joy and faith
Have gone through them,
And now our Limits

Because the lights at Heavens Gate
Have departed (p.140)

The poet poses a serious question then gives an answer. The question mark at the end of the question is assertive of the writer's emotional intensity. The period that punctuates the writer's precise answer is also punctuated with the tone of finality. 'Lead and barrels of heat' point to the battle field, lead being the bullet while barrels denote the heavy guns prevalent in this war. The departure of '...the lights at Heavens Gate's signals hopelessness which is antithetical to the preceding hope indicated by the writer's use of 'Youth and love/Joy and faith'. The mood expressed here is indicative of dejection. The people of Biafra state, having been marginalized by the Lagos establishment in the wake of the dawn of independence had to fight for self-determination. This war realistically portrayed the human condition in Africa as barbarically as any war anywhere else in the world could. This poem could therefore be the writer's way of voicing his opposition to the use of war by oppressed peoples as a means to resolving conflicts for such a mechanism only results in an even more confounding loss. The loss of Okigbo to this war for instance is lamentable. The writer is admittedly bitter that Okigbo has passed on and at the same time appears sympathetic to Okigbo's cause.

Okigbo however lived to fulfill 'the philosophy of determined struggle'. This is the reason he strongly believed that taking up arms could truly liberate his people from military dictatorship. This was his way of fighting injustice and oppression in a society where the voice of reason had failed to open the ears and eyes of ruthless dictators, a case of a literary theorist becoming a practitioner. His thinking about justice (text) had thus been historicized by his direct participation in war. Okigbo is thus transformed from Brustein's (1991) metaphysical hero to a practical revolutionary. On the other hand, Yatuta Chisiza (1926-1967) was assassinated in Malawi. He was shot by a single bullet to the head after he led a gorilla uprising against the autocratic regime of Kamuzu Banda. Rubadiri is mourning his fellow compatriot in this poem. In the last stanza he says:

There is much to remember
and little to forget
When greatness
Dies a simple death
For souls of men. (p.140)

Chisiza had earlier worked as the Minister for Home Affairs in the Banda regime. As one of the fierce critics of the Banda oppression, he fled the country in 1964 and is alleged to have undergone further military training perhaps in China. However his

insurrection in 1967 was thwarted resulting in his death. Chisiza died 'a simple death/for souls of men.' The poet wonders how such a 'great' man could die as simply as that. Rubadiri however sees this death as being for a worthy cause. He regards him as a martyr for he died for what he believed. The subsequent repression of the Malawian people by Banda tells the readers what Rubadiri means here: that more Chisiza needed to emerge from among the population and launch an uprising against the despot who had declared himself president for life. The writer's usage of 'There's much to remember/and little to forget' implies the moral to be learned from the death of Yatuta is worth taking seriously. The challenge is to the masses (taking their cue from Chisiza) to revolt against the evil regime. The short lines on both epitaphs are connotative of the brevity of life and the antecedent urgency of the moment, Rubadiri could have written this piece shortly after the two deaths. The people have got to rise in rebellion against unjust regimes for the time is now. The reactions by these two subjects of Rubadiri's writing, Okigbo and Chisiza, are anti-discourses in Foucaultian terms whereby an oppressed people decide to stand up against their oppressors.

According to Bitek (1973), the problems afflicting our people are 'home-made'. He could not have been more eloquent:

I believe that most of our social ills are indigenous, that the primary sources of our problems are native. They are rooted in the social set-up. And the most effective solutions cannot be imported, but must be the result of deliberate re-organization of the resources available for tackling specific issues. (Bitek, 6-7)

And on the African regimes, he has this to say:

The most striking and frightening characteristic of independent Africa governments is this: that, without exception, all of them are dictatorships and practice ruthless discrimination such as makes South African Apartheid look tame. African socialism may be defined as government of the people by the educated for the educated. (ibid, 7)

The glaring historicity in Bitek's text is self-evident. Post-independent African regimes have done more to under-develop Africa such that the countries in South America, the Caribbean and Asia, which were on level terms with Africa in the 1960s, 70s and 80s took great strides forward in the area of economic and democratic development leaving Africa basking in the (in)glory of what the West call a basket case.

Yusuf Kassam's 'Maji Maji' (p.77) alludes to the Kinjeketile Ngware led Maji

Maji Uprising in German East Africa (now Tanzania) of 1905-1907. The cry 'Maji Maji' hails the war cymbal itself, the magic 'maji' Ngware gave his adherents as an instrument against the German forces. "Maji Maji" is generally a tribute to Kinjeketile himself. The cause of this revolt was a general resentment of harsh colonial policies which included forced labour and ruthless tax collection. The words uttered by the mzee in the poem assume a conversational tone:

'The Germans -' He shook his head and shuddered:
'Yes, they came – with guns, to be sure –
Many guns.'

The poem here presents the might of the German forces (read the German war machine) which confounded the old man whom the speaker of the poem is observing:

Placing both his hands on his head,
He looked down on the earth and pronounced,
'They fired bullets, not water, no, not water.'
He looked up, with a face crumpled with agony,
And with an unsteady swing of his arm, he said,
'Dead, we all lay dead.'

A.D. Amateshe had this to say about these lines

...there is also the use of Paradox in the last line to bring out the catastrophic nature of the Maji Maji Rebellion during the colonial days. On the surface level, the whole poem may be regarded as a piece of prose but on a deeper level it has a poetic form which is quite intense and appealing (Amateshe, 7-8).

The poem partly questions the authenticity of Kinjeketile's claim that the magic water given to the resisters in the rebellion would protect them. The speaker further observes mzee's bitterness and remorse: 'He looked up, with a face crumpled with agony.' This observation, coupled with the old man's words, 'Dead, we all lay dead!' is indicative of the fact that the resisters were hugely frustrated at their humiliation by the Germans while at the same time resenting their blind belief that the water could immunize them against German bullets. The dialogue here creates a keen sense of immediacy making the reader experience a personal touch of the events of that war. The events of this war, though based on superstition, are motivated by the desire by the natives to gain their freedom. It demonstrates their zeal and resolve to gain their freedom. Perhaps the urgency of the moment made them move hastily

before they could adequately prepare for a coordinated attack, resulting in their defeat. Though a fiasco, the war was a great demonstration, on the part of the involved tribes of the then German East Africa, of their resolve to stand up on their own two feet and refuse to be subjugated. This nudges oppressed peoples on the continent to rise up against oppression, perhaps the message the poem underscores.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis was anchored on the oppressed people's struggle to gain their dignity, a historical phenomenon as textualized in the poems under this analysis. The poems present a glaring picture of the people's struggle against subjugation from Vietnam to the United States; from German East Africa to Nigeria and Malawi. These historical situations expressed in the poems (textualization of history) have a clear connect to reality. This connect is accessible to the readers. The writers of the poems quoted in this discussion partially appear to have set out to immortalize their subjects in letters. They perhaps could have been very passionate about the subjects of their interest: Yusuf O. Kassam is Tanzanian which perhaps explains his obsession with "Maji Maji"; Amin Kassam began writing poetry in 1966, two years before the death of Dr. King which must have motivated him to write the poem "Martin Luther King" while David Rubadiri, besides immortalizing his compatriot Chisiza, mourns his comrade in letters Christopher Okigbo. The poems appear to motivate the populations in the various parts of the world grappling with oppression and exploitation by the avaricious vicious political class to revolt and create their own new historical realities: New "Maji Maji" revolts must be born on the continent; new "Martin Luther King" must rise up in Africa; new 'Yatuta Chisiza and Christopher Okigbo' must emerge for the oppressed peoples of the world in general and Africa in particular to regain their human dignity.

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