

CONTEMPRAINITY OF THEMES IN KITHAKA WA MBERIA'S POETRY

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Abstract

*Kithaka wa Mberia is one of the key Swahili free verse authors in Kenya and East Africa. He has authored several anthologies of free verse poems such as **Mchezo wa Karata** (Games of Cards) (1997), **Bara Jingere** (Another Continent) (2001), **Redio na Mwezi** (Radio and the Moon) (2005), **Msimu wa Tisa** (The Ninth Season) (2007), and **Rangi ya Anga** (Colour of the Sky) (2014). The thematic issues he addresses in his poems touches and concerns the Kenyan people, Africa and the World in general. The poet does not address the issues in his anthologies in a vacuum but rather draws them from his immediate environment and surroundings where they occur. The environment and surroundings combined make the contexts of communication in his poetry. The poet raises his voice to educate people, sensitize people, condemn or satirize certain evils happening in the contemporary society with a view of enhancing a just, moral and decent society suitable for all. Therefore, this paper endeavours to explicate various thematic issues in Kithaka's poetry with a view of showing how they are relevant in the contemporary society. These issues will be interrogated by postcolonial theory, as expounded by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.*

Key words: Contemporinity, Hybridity, Otherness, Postcolonial

1.0 Introduction

Kithaka wa Mberia has authored several poetry anthologies. Each anthology has poems touching on various thematic issues. Although Kithaka analyses issues that have been articulated by other poets, he gives them a fresh look and uses a unique style of delivery. For instance, in the Anthology **Mchezo wa Karata** (1997) the following themes are evident: politics and governance, exploitation of workers and neocolonialism. In **Bara Jingere** (2001), we have themes such as bad leadership in African nations, prostitution, Hiv/Aids, drug abuse, destruction and conservation of the environment.

In **Redio na Mwezi** (2005) the poet touches on issues like unjust judicial system, Hiv/Aids, environmental destruction, education, adultery and drug abuse. In **Msimu wa Tisa** (2007), Kithaka looks at issues of politics, dictatorial leadership, environment, Hiv/Aids, terrorism,

problems of refugees and injustice in courts based on racial discrimination. In **Rangi ya Anga** (2014), the poet further talks about environmental destruction, outdated cultural practices, domestic violence against women, rape of young girls and women and issues of colonialism and neocolonialism among others. All these issues affect people directly in the current society hence they are contemporary in nature.

2.0 Literature Review

Researches that have been done regarding themes and styles in Kithaka's poetry indicate that the poet composes unique poems in shape and structure. For instance, Ndung'o and Mwai (1991) claim that there is no evidence at all that there existed picture-poetry in Swahili free verse poetry until this time they emerge in Kithaka's poetry. Likewise, Ngari (1998) analysed how Kithaka defends the rights of workers and the oppressed in **Mchezo wa Karata**. Moreover, he analysed the use of similes, repetition, rhetorical questions and picture-poetry to reflect on the problems of the oppressed people in society. Ngari's analysis is significant in explicating contemporaneity of themes in research. However, he collected and analysed his data from one anthology by using Marxist ideology to address the issues of the oppressed. Again, this research will not delve into the aspect of style employed by the poet. It shall reflect on thematic issues in five anthologies of Kithaka wa Mberia. Ngari's analysis does not dwell on the contemporaneity of themes analysed in **Mchezo wa Karata**.

Intertextuality between form and content is another scholarly debate tackled in Kithaka's poetry. This debate was done by Nzuki (2003) who analysed themes like politics, environment, culture and oppression in love affairs. However, the themes are so few and their contemporaneity has not been explicated. Nzuki (ibid) analysed how figurative language like similes, metaphors, irony and personification have been employed by the poet to communicate his ideas to the audience. Furthermore, he evaluated the effectiveness of picture-poetry in the poet's works. This research was done by collecting data from two anthologies: **Mchezo wa Karata** and **Bara Jingine**. Nzuki employed two theories to look at form and content: sociological theory and structural theory. Sociological theory was used to explicate on themes whereas structural theory was suitable in analysing aspects of form like language use and picture poems in some poems.

In as much as Kithaka wa Mberia composes many poems touching on different contemporary issues, no in-depth research has been done on contemporaneity of the themes in his poetry. Those ones who have already done research on Kithaka's poetry have dwelt on the issues in a superficial manner. This motivates this research to look at this debate on Kithaka's poetry from a different perspective; to analyse contemporaneity of themes in Kithaka's previous and later published anthologies. By so doing, this paper will answer some questions like: does Kithaka's poetry exhibit thematic patterns? What makes Kithaka's thematic issues contemporary? What motivates the poet to address thematic issues of that nature? How is history embedded in Kithaka's poetry? To address these issues effectively, this research will be guided by the postcolonial theory.

3.0 Theoretical Perspective

This paper will use postcolonial theory to analyse the issues in Kithaka's poems. Postcolonial theory emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. It focuses on political issues, culture and national identity, "otherness", ethnicity, imperialism and language during the colonial regime and after the regime. Baldick (2001) says that the pioneers of postcolonial theory are Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Postcolonial theory is a broad concept which keeps mutating to involve concepts of feminist criticism and Marxist criticism. Many postcolonial theorists, postcolonial critics and activists have applied Marxist ideas to support the emergence of national identity, social and cultural identity in postcolonial era. Likewise, women in countries that were colonized have looked at their situations differently from men, especially the cultures brought about by colonial pressures which when put together with traditional patriarchal systems oppress them even more. Feminist critics in third world countries like Gayatri Spivak (1987) have applied this theory to articulate their issues.

Postcolonial theory focuses on actions and important cultural issues that shows different colonial experiences. A critical approach to postcolonial works is two fold: Analysing texts written by authors from imperialist nations on certain cultural aspects of the colonized; and an analysis of texts written by the inhabitants of the colonized cultures themselves regarding the colonial experiences and its aftermath.

One thing regarding texts written by colonial writers that postcolonial critics want to reveal is how those texts portrayed the cultures of the colonized people as inferior as compared to their western counterparts. Edward Said, who is the pioneer of the postcolonial theory, in his crucial works like **Orientalism** (1978) and **Culture and Imperialism** (1993), show how colonial writings exhibits and perpetuates the politics and culture of the colonizers as well as portray the colonized to be inferior and different from them. This was the first phase of postcolonial criticism.

In the second part of the 20th century, inhabitants of the colonized countries started to reconstruct their own histories and cultures thwarted by the colonialists. Padley (2006) claims that in literature, this situation emerged from many postcolonial writings. This was the second phase of postcolonial criticism. These writers intended to search themselves with an aim of understanding themselves and their societies. According to Wafula and Njogu (2007), examples of such writers include Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Salman Rushdie, Alamin Mazrui and Said Mohamed.

Postcolonial theory has several tenets that makes it appropriate in analysing contemporaneity of themes in Kithaka's poetry. One of the tenets of postcolonial theory is the understanding of how black people are portrayed as evil and different from the white people. Ethnicity has been used to oppress. Hall (2001) reiterates that racial and ethnic segregation common in the world today because of differences in skin colour, language and culture have been used to designate that one group is superior than the other. There are those that are economically, politically and technologically powerful than others. This is seen in wars amongst influential nations and terrorist attacks evident worldwide. Kithaka's poetry focuses on themes that show how

developed nations use their influential power to oppress young nations especially in Africa. Due to that, cases of revenge through terrorism are being witnessed in many countries.

Another tenet of postcolonial theory asserts that economic expansion and greediness is reflected in the long history of imperialism and colonialism. Further, cultures with good values and traditional civilization were destroyed when religion, language and European values were forced on the colonized people. Based on this tenet, Kithaka's poetry shows how workers especially farmers who toil in their farms end up being exploited when their produce is exported to foreign countries but get low pay.

Inheritance of the oppressive rule and effects of colonial powers is yet another tenet of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory investigates the effects of political and cultural colonialism as well as evaluate the changes brought upon the colonized people. Kithaka who focuses more on sovereign nations after colonialism, exposes how African countries exhibit dictatorial leadership, uses colonial mentalities and constitutional mechanisms to rule. This is a clear manifestation of neocolonialism in our nations. African countries still rely on developed nations for foreign aid thereby raising the question of their political sovereignty and independence.

Cultural hybridity is also a fundamental pillar in postcolonial theory. Cultural hybridity is a concept that refers to the picking of some cultural aspects before colonialism, a small portion of the colonial culture and the culture that emanates from opposing colonialism (Wamitila, 2002). Kithaka's poetry shows that cultural assimilation can be good as well as oppressive.

An analysis of texts on ethnicity and customs can be a beginning of social revolution into the future is also a basic tenet in postcolonial theory. In as much as research on ethnicity, customs and postcoloniality investigates past events to get historical evidence, there is a firm believe that by analysing the issues of oppression; cultural and literacy critics can construct a new society in the future.

4.0 Discussion and Results

Kithaka has focused on a multiplicity of themes that are quite contemporary. These themes are; political issues, economic issues, environmental issues, culture and historical issues.

4.1 Political issues

The poet has written several poems on politics and governance. The manner in which countries and politicians conduct their politics is crucial in the lives of people. This is the main reason why the poet sensitizes citizens to be careful when electing leaders. In most of the poems in his anthologies, Kithaka condemns poor governance through the use of satire and metaphors. At the same time, he challenges the citizens to reform their politics and society through their constitutional right as electorates.

In **Mchezo wa Karata** (1997), a number of poems revolves around politics. For instance, *Mchezo wa Karata* (A Game of Cards) is a good metaphor which shows how a government runs its affairs to the citizens in a cunning manner. In a game of cards, there is a winner and a loser. The losers here are citizens. Likewise, the poet talks about the adverse effects of dictatorial

leadership in poems like *Sisimizi Nijulisheni* (Tell me Ant), *Swali kwa Konokono* (Question to the Snail) and *Swali kwa Yangeyange* (Question to the Heron). The poet questions why a leader especially a president ascends to power and oppresses citizens.

In **Bara Jingine** (2001), the poem *Machozi ya Damu* (Tears of Blood) talks about the cries and regrets of citizens due to electing leaders who oppress them in every aspect. People elect leaders who neglect their plight and do not fulfill the promises they give to the electorates during their campaigns. In the same anthology, the poet praises Obasanjo who was at one time the president of Nigeria in the poem *Obasanjo*. Kithaka feels that Obasanjo should be a role model for other presidents to emulate because he did not cling onto power when his term expired. This is a common practice in Africa where sitting presidents want to stay in power forever. Clinging to power angers the citizens who engage in protests and riots that leads to bloodshed and loss of human lives. Such scenarios have been witnessed in many African leading to dissent and uprisings. This shows how relevant Kithaka's themes are because they mirror what is happening in the current societies.

In **Msimu wa Tisa** (2009), the poem *Nahodha na Jahazi* (The Captain and the Dhow) is metaphorical as it refers to the president and the country he heads. The president assisted by the cabinet and members of parliament fail to provide good leadership. The leaders are full of greed which makes a country to lose focus in development. Likewise in the poem *Werevu* (The Clever), the poet shows how a president is misadvised by leaders with no vision to lead a country in the wrong direction especially in distribution of resources inequitably.

Elsewhere in *Msimu Mwingine wa Wasaliti* (Another Season of Betrayers) Kithaka metaphorically equates politicians to betrayers. When the political aspirants want political seats, they campaign strongly using convincing language and make numerous promises to the electorates. Once they are elected into office, they disappear and forget about the electorates and the promises they gave them. The poet explains:

*Vitimbakwira watarudi karibuni kutoka karamu haramu
Utaziona barakoa za tabasamu kwenye nyuso zao
Watakuja kutugawia peremende zenye sumu ya akili
Watalewesha watu kwa pombe kutoka vibuyu vya maneno
Wataahidi kesho yenye mapipa ya maziwa na mitungi ya asali (uk 12).*

Very soon political leaders will come back from their illicit ceremony
You will see masked smiles on their faces
They will come to give us sweets coated with poison to confuse our mind
They will intoxicate people with empty words from their barrels
They will promise tomorrow full of drums of milk and barrels of honey (pg. 12)

After failing to lead and serve the people as per their promises; when another season to elect new leaders comes, the same politicians come back to pester the electorates to elect them again for a poor job done. They use every tactic including bribing them with money, sweet and convincing

language as well as false promises again. The electorates guided by greed for money and forgetfulness, they re-elect them thus enabling another season of betrayal.

4.2 Economic Exploitation Issues

In the society, there exists classes of people based on their wealth, political power and education. The high class cadre which has capital, power and the means to produce wealth controls the economy. The high class group wants to remain at the top. The middle class also struggle to climb up the economic ladder. The low class people who comprise of the poor masses are employed in government institutions, private firms and companies or in the rich peoples' homesteads. In the struggle to meet their basic needs, the poor people get exploited by the high and middle class people. On the same note, developed nations exploit developing nations in matters of trade through exports and imports.

In **Mchezo wa Karata** (1997) *Wimbo wa Mkulima* (The Farmer's Song) is a good example of exploitation. The poet reveals the plight of farmers. They work hard in their farms to produce various products as well as rear livestock to get cash and contribute towards general economic prosperity of the country. However, the government, companies and middlemen buy their products at low prices. The poet says:

*Inakera sana moyo
Hii anga ambayo
Inawapa
Maziwa ya ng'ombe
Na mayai ya kuku
Wasiofuga
Ng'ombe
Na kuku
Na kutemea mate
Wafugaji! (uk. 9)*

The heart gets annoyed so much
This sky that
Gives
Cow's milk
And chicken eggs
Those who do not rear
Cows
And chicken
And spits on
The hearers (pg. 9)

The poet seems to represent the cry of the farmers not to be exploited but get equal pay for their hard work. The same theme of exploitation is reiterated in the poems *Nyuki, Ndege na Nyegere* (Bees, Birds and Honey-badger), *Kero* (Annoyance) and *Jembe, Surupwenye na Kalamu* (Hoe, Overall and a Pen).

When poor people in the low class fail to meet their basic needs, they use short cuts and unethical ways like robbery and prostitution to survive. This is evident in many young men, women and girls who take to wayward styles of existence. Once in the business, sex commercial workers face a lot challenges like lack of pay from arrogant clients, police harassment and the danger of contracting Hiv/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases. Besides the poet showing how economic disparity contribute to these evils, he further exposes how the prostitutes; both men and women exhibit moral decadence in the society. This is how Kithaka's themes are contemporary because they reflect what is happening in the society.

In *Bara Jigine* (2001) there are poems exposing the problems of prostitution and its effects such as *Mimi, Monika* (I, Monicah) and *Wanabiashara Barabarani* (Business People on the Streets). By using first person narration, in *Mimi, Monika*, the poet exposes the bitter life of sex commercial workers. He says:

*Kama mlango wa umma
Nimeguswa na viganja milioni
Kama jumba la mikutano
Nimetembelewa na halaiki ya watu
Kutoka kila pembe ya ulimwengu (uk. 37)*

Like a public door
I have been touched by a million hands
Like a conference hall
I have been visited by several people
From every corner of the world (pg. 37)

The poet exposes how these twilight women end up in people's homes, hotels and brothels. At times they end up in police cells or get harassed by clients who don't pay them after offering them services. They spend long and sleepless nights, enduring cold weather and mosquito bites just to serve the world with a bitter smile. They get a lot of fatigue and furthermore are at risk of contracting Hiv/Aids and related diseases.

4.3 Environmental Issues

Environment is a broad concept which encompass physical environment like water, air, land, trees, crops and animals in general. Some of Kithaka's poems focus on how human activities contribute to environmental degradation. On the other hand, there are those that touch on the need for environmental conservation.

Destruction of the environment threatens the existence of the human race and other creatures. Destruction of the environment occurs in the form of water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, indiscriminate cutting of trees, soil erosion among others. In **Bara Jingine** (2001) for instance the poet talks about the adverse effects of cutting down trees in the poem *Jinamizi* (The Monster). He says:

*Kaumu ya watu
Ikibeba shoka
Panga kali
Na misumeno inayonguruma
Ilikuwa kwa mawimbi
Na bila huruma
Ikachinja miti
Na kunyonga chemchemi
Ikiimba nyimbo
Za mashamba na mbao (uk. 55)*

A lot of people
Who were carrying axes
Sharp machetes
And scooters
Came with force
And without sympathy
They cut down trees
And destroyed water sources
While singing songs
In need of land and timber (pg. 55)

The poet says that a group of people with axes, machetes and power saws descended on a forest of trees and cut down trees for the purpose of getting land and timber. This act left the land bare. With time, there was soil erosion, lack of grass for livestock, death of animals and people due to the effects of drought and hunger.

Kithaka further condemns the gradual destruction of the Ozone layer through emission of gases into the atmosphere from factories and industries in the poem *Ngao* (The Shield). He says:

*Kemikali jeuri
Zinatafuna Ozoni
Kama majeshi ya mchwa
Yaliyovamia paa
La kombamoyo (uk. 59)*

Insolent chemicals

Are chewing Ozone layer
 Like armies of termites
 Which have invaded the roof
 Made of rafters (pg 59)

The Ozone layer is crucial in protecting human beings against dangerous rays from the sun which can affect the human skin. Destruction of the Ozone layer is contributing to climate change due to global warming which is a major concern worldwide. Elsewhere, in **Rangi ya Anga** (2014), Kithaka dwells in all human activities that contribute to environmental destruction and their effects in the subsection *Wanda* (Fields).

Apart from highlighting on environmental degradation, the poet urges and sensitizes people on the need to protect our environment for human posterity. He particularly praises the deliberate attempts made to rehabilitate the already destroyed environments. Kithaka further shows his love for beautiful and green sceneries appealing to the eyes, cool breezes and oxygen. Such poems in **Bara Jingine** (2001) which revolves around environmental conservation include: *Mkalitusi* (Eucalyptus Tree), *Nyeri*, *Mombasa Mibuyuni* (Mombasa Inside Baobab Trees), *Matone ya Mvua* (Rain Drops), *Mjakaranda* (Jacaranda Tree) and *Kambi Malindi* (Camping in Malindi). Likewise, in **Msimu wa Tisa** (2007), the poet talks about the numerous benefits from the natural environment in poems like *Johari Angani* (Jewel in the Sky), *Olkaria*, *Mwea* and *Ukarimu wa Ekweta* (The Generosity of the Equator). These poems elaborate how a well cared for environment benefits mankind and ensures his survival on this planet.

4.4 Cultural Hybridity

Cultural hybridity refers to a blending of several cultures from different groups of people in the process of human interaction. In a postcolonial perspective, cultural hybridity refers to the picking of some aspects of culture in the pre-colonial period, during the colonial period and postcolonial period. Cultural hybridity can be enriching as well as oppressive.

4.4.1 Outdated cultural practices

Kithaka in his poems shifts attention to customs and traditions in African communities upheld from the precolonial and colonial periods which oppress young girls and women too. In **Rangi ya Anga** (2014), the subsection of *Rangi ya Anga* (Colour of the Sky) has a series of poems which touches on the challenge facing girls and women in most African communities. For example, girls undergo genital mutilation, get married to rich old men so as to bail out their families from poverty at the expense of their education and in the process this leads to early pregnancies leading to school dropouts and working in towns as housemaids. On the other hand, women are denied the right to inheritance of ancestral land, domestic violence against women is practiced and women who don't bear male children are looked down upon. These actions upheld in the contemporary society deny women their fundamental rights and freedoms. The poet condemns all these practices that treat women and girls differently from men and boys. He suggests that it is time our societies reformed and outlawed this outdated practices.

4.4.2 Religious hypocrisy

Modern religion is one aspect of a new culture especially in Africa. Christianity was brought to Africa by the missionaries with a view to liberate Africans from their traditional religious practices and witchcraft. Modern Christianity is supposed to make people believe in God's powers, providence, and inculcate morals in people. However, on the contrary, the clergy and believers engage in activities that are ungodly. Some clergy commit adultery with girls and women in their places of worship, focus their mind on material wealth against the Biblical teachings whereas others engage in homosexual behaviours. For instance in **Redio na Mwezi** (2005), the poem *Mchungaji na Muumini* (Pastor and the Believer) show religious hypocrisy whereby the pastor engages in love affair with one of his believers in a dark place and the following day he stands in the alter to preach to the innocent congregation unaware of what the pastor did the previous day. A similar message is found in poems like *Muumini* (Believer) and *Mhubiri na Mjinga* (The Preacher and the Idiot). These acts show how adultery and fornication exists among the clergy and their flock. They are rampant inside and outside the places of worship.

4.4.3 Rape, prostitution and homosexuality

Prostitution, homosexuality and rape is on the rise in the current society. Kithaka shows how such evils contribute to the spread of Hiv/Aids, school dropout due to unwanted pregnancies and family breakages. For instance, the poet reveals how girls education get terminated when they are raped by their fellow school boys, teachers and old rich men in society. Poems like *Giza Mbele* (Darkness Ahead), *Pamela* and *Flora na Wenzake* (Florence and her colleagues) in **Bara Jingine** (2001) are perfect examples of the challenges facing the girl child education. In terms of prostitution, the poems *Mimi*, *Monika* (I, Monicah) and *Wanabiashara Barabarani* (Business People on the Streets) demonstrate how women engage in prostitution as a normal business to make ends meet. Nowadays prostitutes, homosexuals and lesbians hold protests seeking recognition and legalization of their business in the constitution. These are contemporary issues that hitherto could not be expected in the African society.

4.4.4 Drug use and drug abuse

In traditional African communities, beer and other alcoholic drinks were used by old men in ceremonies and special gatherings as a form of socialization and leisure. There were regulations guiding the consumption of alcohol. Women were not supposed to take alcohol. However, this is not the case in modern times. Consumption of alcohol even by people who are not supposed to consume is the order of the day. The youth including students consume alcohol and other substances. Drug use among the youth destroy their focus in life, education, engage in criminal activities and become drug addicts. To the married people, the use of drugs and alcohol leads to unfaithfulness, poverty, domestic violence or even death. In **Bara Jingine** (2001), Kithaka explores the side effects of drugs and alcohol to an individual, family members and the society at large in the poem, *Ni sumu kwa Watoto* (It is Poison for Children); *Tembo* (Alcohol) and *Rafiki Katili* (Brutal Visitor) in **Redio na Mwezi** (2005).

4.4.5 Race and status discrimination

Discrimination is a system of denying services to people based on skin colour, gender and tribe among others. Discrimination of whatever nature denies an individual certain rights and fuels corruption and bitterness among people. Discrimination perpetuates otherness whereby some people are seen as special from other people. The theme of racial discrimination is evident in **Msimu wa Tisa** (2007), in the poem *Muuaji Mwenye Furaha* (A Happy Murderer). In this poem, a white foreign soldier kills a black African woman at night near the ocean by using a bottle. While in court, he admits his offence before the judge. Instead of the judge administering justice to the culprit according to the law, he sets him free to go back to his country. This notion of judging people based on colour still exists in society. The poet says ironically:

*Kumbe! Sheria za taifa zina macho yasiyohitaji miwani
Zinaona na kutambua vyema ngozi za washtakiwa
Kwa nini mahakama ichanganywe weupe na weusi!! (uk. 22)*

Alas! National laws have eyes that do not require spectacles
They see and identify the skin colour of the prosecuted
Why should the court be mixed with white and black!! (pg. 22)

Elsewhere, Kithaka talks about how politicians incite citizens to turn against fellow citizens from another tribe by killing them, destroying their property and chasing them away by branding them foreigners. Women become widows and children end up being orphans. However, the politicians who are behind this tribal animosity are freely moving around doing their business in the poem *Wahalifu Huru* (Free Criminals). The poet says:

*Badala ya wahandisi wa jakamoyo kutetemeka mahakamani
Badala ya wenye damu viganjani kutupwa korokoroni
Wanaendesha mashangingi yenye bendera za mamlaka
Wanalipwa mishahara minono wakiitwa “Viongozi wa Taifa”! (uk. 30)*
Instead of the masterminds of this animosity trembling in court
Instead of people with blood on their hands thrown into jail
They are driving expensive cars bearing flags of authority
They are paid hefty salaries while being addressed “National Leaders”! (pg. 30)

Kithaka shows that laws are applied selectively as prominent people in the government commit crime and go unpunished. He says that instead of the perpetrators going to jail, they still move around freely in expensive cars as well as being paid hefty salaries while referred to as “national leaders”.

4.5 Historical Issues

Kithaka focuses on the relationship between the colonial masters and their colonies during the colonial and postcolonial period. In **Mchezo wa Karata** (1997) the poem *Mgunga shambani* (Acacia Tree in the Farm) shows how colonialism and neocolonialism in Kenya and Africa at large are embedded in our history. “Acacia” is a metaphor representing the Whiteman whereas “farm” represents Kenya or any other African country. The Whiteman oppressed Kenyans and Africans in all sorts of manner. The Africans fought hard to gain their freedom and independence.

However, the leaders who took power from the colonial regime perpetuate neocolonialism on their own people. The poet says:

*Pale tulipong’oa mgunga
Palistawi mti mwingine
Michomo ikatuliza machozi
Mithili zama za nyuma (uk. 21)*

Where we uprooted an acacia tree
Another tree flourished
The piercings made us cry
Like in the previous regime (pg. 21)

Mgunga (Acacia) is a metaphor referring to the white people who colonized Kenya. Kenyans fought for independence through MAU MAU movement. They succeeded in removing the colonial government from power which was oppressing them. However, the poet says that in the place of the acacia grew another tree (new leaders) with a burning irritation which made people cry like in the previous colonial regime. He implies that neocolonialism can be worse than old colonial regime.

In **Rangi ya Anga** (2014), Kithaka delves in historical injustice in the continent of Africa in the poem *Zimwi la Theluji* (A Ghost of Snow). He give a brief history of how the Arabs, missionaries and colonialists came to Africa with all sorts of tricks to settle and partition Africa for their own interests. The Arabs came in the East African coast to trade and made Africans slaves in the famous Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The missionaries followed closely with the aim of spreading Christianity to the Africans. Thereafter, the whiteman came to colonize and rule Africa. They took away the Africans fertile land and left Africans living as squatters. The poet says:

*Moyo wangu, tushirikiane
Tushike kijinga cha ushairi
Tumulike historia ya madhila
Tushtakie janga la ujanja
Katika hii mahakama azizi*

*Kwa kunyemelea
Lilikuja zimwi jeupe
Kwanza kwenye upwa... (uk 49)*

My heart, let's cooperate
We get hold of the firebrand of poetry
We address historical injustice
We accuse the calamity of craftiness
In this honourable court

By creeping
There came a white ghost
First at the coast... (pg. 49)

The coming of the Arabs, missionaries and the white people in Africa left so much impact economically, politically and culturally. Africa still feels the positive and negative effects of this history even now. This is how Kithaka demonstrates that history shapes our political, economic and cultural perspectives and orientations as a nation and continent.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has extensively analysed themes in Kithaka's poetry. It has been able to categorise the various themes into categories like politics, economic issues, environment, cultural issues and historical issues. A good literary artist ties his or her content in a given context. Kithaka wa Mberia has shown a direct relationship of the themes and the society. Literature is created by people for the people. All the issues raised by the poet affect people directly in the contemporary society. Kithaka's poetry is a true reflection of what is witnessed in society. It is this reality that makes his works meaningful because a reader discovers what is in the text and what takes place in society. The contextualization of theme with the society makes Kithaka's poetry contemporary.

It seems that the poet wants a democratic, just and decent society for all people. That's why he bitterly condemns the politics of hypocrisy and dictatorship. He wants to see a reformed society where there are no cases of exploitation of whatever nature. Further, the environment should be well utilized and preserved for the present and future generations to come. Destroying the environment is a threat to humanity, animals as well as vegetation. All forms of bad cultures should be done away with. All these issues motivates the poet to act as an activist of social transformation for a better living.

Kithaka's poetry shows how history shapes our destiny as a country and a continent. The coming of the Arabs in the East African coast, missionaries and colonialists affected greatly the lives of Kenyans and Africans in general. Even though Kenya and other African nations are independent,

there are cases of misrule that mirror colonial oppression, bad foreign cultural practices due to cultural hybridity brought about by the interaction between the visitors and the natives and social segregation. This is what confirms contemporaneity in Kithaka wa Mberia's poetry.

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