



The Position of Kiswahili Poetry Crisis in the Development and Expansion of Literature and Its Theories

GerephaceMwangosi
CatholicUniversity of Mbeya

Rose Sekile
CatholicUniversity of Mbeya

Date of Submission: 04-12-2024

Date of Acceptance: 16-12-2024

Abstract

This article has examined the role of the crisis of Kiswahili poetry in the development and expansion of literature and its theories. The two things targeted in this article are the factors that caused the crisis of poetry as well as its role in the development of literature and its theories. The basic data was found in the library by referring to library methods, including careful reading. A review of the documents used to verify the primary data was obtained through electronic and library methods. The discussion of data was guided by the theory of New Historicism. One of its foundations is to explore literature and focus on the historical context and understand its culture and history through literary works. Therefore, literary works was viewed and interpreted within the context of the history of the author and the history of the reviewer. The results of the research have shown the linguistic, historical, academic, and political reasons that led to the emergence of the crisis of Kiswahili poetry in the 1960s and 1970s. It has also shown how the crisis launched poets' thoughts about their art and provided an opportunity for some of them to explain how they see their art. New fields and seas of Kiswahili poetry had a chance to emerge and flourish, including the flow and Bongo flavor. The publication and teaching of independent compositions began to be accepted and become part of school curricula. This article suggests that more research should be done on the reception of contemporary poetry, its growth and development, and its challenges in the academic, artistic, social, and temporal contexts.

Key Words: Position, Kiswahili Poetry, Poetry Crisis, Development and New Historicism Theory.

I. Introduction

This article has examined the role of the crisis of Kiswahili poetry in the development of literature and the expansion of its theories. What was investigated in this article were the factors that caused the poetry crisis, as well as its contribution to the development of Kiswahili literature. Historically and academically, the crisis of poetry cannot be isolated in the teaching of Kiswahili poetry (Mwangosi, 2024). The conflict has existed since the 1960s, and its foundations were related to the ambiguity of the meaning of the poem and Kiswahili poetry. This conflict occurred when new styles began to be tested and new philosophies emerged from new historical, intellectual, and time a few years after independence. The crisis can be linked to the changes that hit the world in the 1960s and 1970s. This period had great economic, political, and cultural changes throughout the world. The concept of freedom in this period affected many Africans. A few scholars who were engaged in Kiswahili poetry were also affected by the changes that hit the world during that period (Mulokozi, 2017). Some of them wished to leave the chains that bound them in the composition of Kiswahili poetry.

The traditional rules seemed to deny freedom to the modernists. The lack of that freedom made the modernists start making statements claiming that a Kiswahili poem does not have to have a balance of rhyme and meters (Mayoka, 1986). Thus, they began to compose Kiswahili poems without following the rules that ruled and were worshipped by the traditionalists. Also, they emphasised that it is a good thing to know where we came from, but it is a mistake to rely on solving current problems by using the axe left by the elders without looking for new methods. This crisis indicated the signs of the growth of literature and the expansion of its theories. The crisis officially began in 1968 when Ebrahim Hussein,



Euphrase Kezilahabi and Jared Angira composed poems regardless of the principles of rhyme and meter emphasised by traditionalists as the heart or backbone of Kiswahili poetry. Later, they were supported by other poets, including C. Haule, M. M. Mulokozi and K. K. Kahigi. Modernists claimed that Kiswahili poetry does not have to be constrained by those rules and laws. They began to compose compositions that did not have rhyme or meter and called them modern poetry.

Some saw the crisis as a step forward and others as a step back artistically. What the modernists emphasised is that everything and every being in the world is always in the process of change. The field of Kiswahili poetry would also not stand in the circle of the law forever (Kahigi and Mulokozi, 1982). The field of Kiswahili poetry had to accept the changes in the fields used by poets to express content in a new style. When the modernists started this crisis, they had studied higher education and saw the literature of other nations of the world as having a meter and not the principles followed by all the poets in the world. Also, they opposed the norms of traditional Kiswahili poetry due to being brought up in a mixed culture and modern life. Shariff (1988) explains that this conflict arose when modernists demanded three things. Firstly, the methods of composing Kiswahili poetry were very few. Second, composing by following the structure of Kiswahili verses deprived them of the freedom to compose. Third, the structure of their unconventional compositions is indigenous. Originally and historically, Kiswahili poetry had no meter or rhyme because it was linked to the poetry of many Bantu nations that were sung in the dance, funeral, initiation, and traditional ceremonies, including the coronation of a chief or queen.

On the part of the traditionalists, they were represented by A. Abdalla, H. M. Mbega, I. N. Sharrif, S. Kando, J. Mayoka, and A. S. Nabhany. In a way, the traditionalists had grown up in an environment of rhythm and meter that made Kiswahili poetry known. They emphasised that rhyme and meter are essential elements in Kiswahili poetry. For them, poetry is the one whose rules and laws are accompanied by poetry (Mulokozi, 1996). Thus, they emphasised that it is not easy to abandon the rules and laws that accompany the poem, and yet the composition was called a poem. Rhyme and meter are the backbone of Kiswahili poetry. Traditionalists agree that Kiswahili poetry has its own rules that must be followed. Poetry is a branch of real Swahili art. Inside those sentences there are

Swahili words. Rejecting the rules and laws related to poetry is to kill the desire to study the use of Kiswahili vocabulary. Similarly, they emphasised that Kiswahili poetry has its own special form.

The debate about the crisis reached its peak in a conference held at the University of Dar es Salaam where three things emerged. First, all Kiswahili poets compose at various levels of poetry theory. Here, there is a need to know the methods used by the poets of the past, now, and the future. Second, when traditionalists talk about poetry, they fall into a narrow sense and a broad sense for modernists. This argument is based on the fact that many Kiswahili poets have not had a strong relationship with the poetry of other countries. Fortunately, most of our poets are not people who received much inspiration from outside (Njogu and Chimera, 1999). Therefore, their effort has been to promote the art of poetry and develop it based on the philosophy of life as it is in these countries. Third, the perspective of traditionalists is local. Their thoughts end at the edge of Swahili because they have failed to go beyond that.

As the situation is now, the language and Kiswahili literature, including Kiswahili poetry and all its branches, have crossed the circle and borders of nationality and reached the level of international status. Artistically, the philosophy of traditionalists is wrong to think that the form of Kiswahili poetry is unique worldwide (Samwel, 2013). In other words, rhyme and meter are general features found in Kiswahili, Arabic, Hausa, English, Latin, French, and other countries of the world. Alone, these elements do not make a poem in Kiswahili, but there are important things that make a poem called Kiswahili. Organising Kiswahili poetry in a canon is to show the artistic world that Kiswahili poetry has reached its limit, which is not correct. Therefore, this article has investigated the factors that caused the poetry crisis, as well as its contribution to the development of Kiswahili literature.

II. Theory and Research Methods

This article has examined the factors that caused the poetry crisis, as well as its contribution to the development of Kiswahili literature. The primary data used in this article was obtained from the library by the method of careful reading. A review of the documents used to define or verify the primary data was obtained through electronic and library methods. The results of the study are presented in a descriptive manner. The analysis and review of the data presented in this article was



guided by the theory of New History founded by Stephen Jan Greenblatt in the early 1980s. Greenblatt (1990) showed some shortcomings after reviewing History by referring to the definitions given in the dictionary called 'The American Heritage Dictionary'. In the dictionary, historicism is defined as a theory that believes that humans have a very small contribution in the various processes of historical change that are emerging. Correspondingly, it explained that Historicism is a theory that emphasises historical influence as a criterion for appreciating the reality of the current situation.

The theory of Historicism through its definitions above, sees that historical changes occur by themselves and humans have little contribution to causing those changes. Also, you see that historians need to develop an important curiosity in their past skills and current culture. This argument means that there should be no connection between the past and the present. These shortcomings are what led to the emergence of the theory of New Historicism. The theory of New Historicism recognises the great and important role taken by the historical context in the reading and criticism of literary works (Vesser, 1994). The basic principle in this theory is to explore literature and focus on the historical context and understand its culture and history through literary works. Also, it states that no creative or documentary expression can point to an immutable truth or point to an unchangeable human condition. This theory explains that literary works should be viewed and interpreted within the context of the history of the author and the history of the reviewer.

Literary work is related to the environment affected by history (Wamitila, 2002). A literary work is the result of a complex interaction-material relationship and not works that result from the writer's creativity alone. The existing interaction is found by looking at society and culture, and it is not necessary to limit oneself to language alone. Literary works are not only the product of history but can produce history as well. In this environment, it is a mistake and a critical deficiency to separate the literary text from the social context because the interaction between the context and the work is important in giving shape and life to the work in question. Selden and his colleagues (2005) explain that the New Historicists believe that any change is caused by agents that can be humans, various creatures, or natural events. As a result, the presence of certain events in society during a certain period can lead to the birth of a certain event. This theory

sheds light on the historical forces that govern certain situations, as well as the changing environment (Thomas, 1991). Community historicism is a product of a specific culture by taking historical events and making them part of literary work. Investigation in this environment is built on the basis of the culture and context of society, and the reviewer has to illuminate this issue carefully in his/her review.

Wamitila explains that there are several basic concepts in this theory of New Historicism. These concepts are used in analysing works of art. Among those concepts is the concept of spinning used to refer to the state of taking historical events and making them part of the weave of literary work in an obscure fashion (Abrams, 1996). Similarly, he has shown some artistic works that have woven important historical events, *NyongoMkaliaInni*, which depicts political murders, the strikes of university students in the seventies, and the *Mau Mau* war in Kenya, and that of the Dumb Patriotic Projects, which depicts the history of Tanzania economic from independence to the overthrow of Julius K. Nyerere, who was the first president of the government of the United Republic of Tanzania.

The second concept that emerges is '*Muundogeu*' in relation to the statements made by critics in the history of the text and the text of history. The theory states that events cause each other, such that one event can cause another event to occur. The combination of certain events can result in one whole thing. Therefore, when we examine the crisis of Kiswahili poetry, we should not judge it in isolation, because to a large extent, the development of its growth and maturity is built on its foundations derived from other poetry, as described by the effects of Arabic and European literature in Kiswahili poetry.

Another important concept is '*Mzunguko*', used to refer to evolution or events. For example, ideological meanings or cultural artefacts that go from one place to another through exchange. This concept allows the researcher to look at literature in parallel with certain cultural events. Theorists of this approach believe that literary works interact cyclically (Ryan, 1996). Therefore, the cultural effects and Arabic and Islamic literature show the existence of a long history of language and culture interaction between the visitors from Persia and Arabia and the inhabitants of the East African Coast. This theory sheds light on the historical and cultural forces that govern a certain situation, as well as



illuminating the way Kiswahili poetry changed after receiving some exemplary and thematic elements.

The discussion and review of this article have highlighted the factors that caused the crisis of Kiswahili poetry by referring to the theory of New Historicism. In the analysis and discussion of the data, we have considered the development of the society historically and geographically, the context, and the relationships that occurred in the society. Poetry is a genre of literature that, through its profession, shows the relationships of changes that occur in its structure and form. Kiswahili poetry was examined in detail about its origin and its changes in terms of example and content, as well as its relationship with the literature of other nations of the world. The reasons that caused the crisis have been made clear and accepted through the structures and forms of traditional and modern poetry that have been directly examined without the need to make a detailed review. The selected theory was based on the historical and cultural forces that govern certain situations, as well as illuminating the changing environment and its place in literature. Investigations about the crisis of Kiswahili poetry are built on the basis of culture and the context of society, and the reviewer has to illuminate this matter carefully in his review.

III. Influences That Caused the Crisis in Kiswahili Poetry

Many scholars agree that there are various reasons that caused the crisis in Kiswahili poetry. Some of those reasons are related to the existence of the concept of foreignness, architecture and dialect, return, and idiom of Kiswahili poetry as explained in the next section.

3.1 Concept of Foreignness

Traditionalists and modernists agree on the presence of foreignness in Kiswahili poetry. Also, they believe that modern poetry has a double voice, original and received. Traditionalists claim that the modern style has been established by teachers and university students influenced by European literature. The arrival of the colonists and their education is the cause of the destruction of Kiswahili poetry. Poems that do not follow the meter of weight and meter are a negative effect of Western literature in Kiswahili literature. Emphasising this matter, Chiraghdin and Mnyampala (1980) explain that modernists compose other things and claim it is a new type of poetry. Chiraghdini calls to protect Kiswahili poetry. However, the modernists defended themselves that

the field of poetry does not begin or end in scales and scales. The basis of that argument justifies their position that their duty is to move forward, to do research and study the compositions of other nations, and to use their knowledge and talents to develop the art of poetry.

The modernists accused the traditionalists of the same mistake of alienation that the Swahili culture has been influenced by Arabic and its terminology. This is due to the fact that everything of Arabic origin was the measure of civilisation when they started to translate Arabic hymns into Kiswahili by associating rhyme and meter. Therefore, the concept of foreignness in poetry that follows form can be opposed with two arguments (Njogu and Chimelah, 1999). First, Arabism in Kiswahili events reveals the reality of historical events, and the long-term interaction of Swahili communities and Arabism is manifested in Kiswahili poetry. Second, those who composed the poems that follow form are ordinary people, and their poems were about the lives of the people around them. For example, some of the content of their work encouraged working in unity and solidarity, protection and security, education, and indigenous training based on the context of their composition and singing.

3.2 Standard Swahili and Dialects

Many traditionalists preferred different dialects of Kiswahili to be used in Kiswahili poetry. They felt that using standard Kiswahili is like desecrating poetry due to the existence of a great deficiency in terms of vocabulary and some other language methods that promote good poetry (Mayoka, 1986). Unlike the traditionalists, the modernists insisted that standard Kiswahili be used for reasons of nationalism. Correspondingly, they opposed the argument that emphasised that poetry was the property of the people of the Coast; they considered it political. However, they supported that in the past, the poet was an inhabitant of the Coast of East Africa, and their work was tied to their culture. Later, poets and writers of the continent began to promote the field with their writings and poems.

3.3 The Form of Poetry

Regarding the composition of poetry, traditionalists maintain that a Kiswahili poem must have a form with a special structure that is accompanied by the use of meter and meter. A form with a specific structure is what gives expression to the genre of art (Ruo, 1988). This argument follows



an effective approach that assumes that ancient poetry was the most powerful and was different from modern poetry. Modernists explain that the structure and style of literature are determined by its content. The change in the form of any literature in society and nations of the world is linked to the context of the development of science and technology. Therefore, the change of Kiswahili poetry is not something foreign. This situation made Mulokozi and Kahigi (1972) emphasise that new structures in Kiswahili poetry are not followed to replace the old ones but to be an addition to the existing ones. Therefore, the style that does not follow scales and scales is traditional in Kiswahili and Bantu literature, especially if you examine the development and scope of traditional social songs. Based on that, the style of rhyme and meter has come and started to strengthen in Kiswahili poetry after the arrival of the Arabs.

3.4 Poetic Expression

Traditionalists and modernists gave conflicting opinions about the concept of poetry. Traditionalists emphasised rhyme and meter when they explained the concept of poetry, while the modernists focused on the criterion of content and not its structure (Senkoro, 1987). The result of the poetry crisis prompted the opposing groups to start holding debates that raised and matured the theories of Kiswahili poetry. New fields and seas of Kiswahili poetry had a chance to emerge and flourish, including Bongo flavour and flow. The basic thing to consider about the definition of poetry is that the concept of Kiswahili poetry should not be separated in the definition of the nations of the world. Definitions take into account the wide scope of literature and poetry theories based on universal principles. Concise language helps to convey a broad concept in few words, which is an important characteristic of poetry. As indicated earlier, poetry is the source of songs that have no rhyme or reason. Singing is not a primary feature in poetry.

IV. The Role of the Crisis of Kiswahili Poetry in Developing Literature and Its Theories

The debate of the 1970s and 1980s about poetry launched poets' thoughts about their art and gave an opening for some of them to explain the way they see their art. Although most of them did not give a complete, comprehensive theory of Kiswahili poetry, when their ideas were combined together and combined with those of their predecessors from the 1920s - 1970s, they tried to explain the structure of the traditional theory of

Kiswahili poetry, as well as the characteristics of the form and thematically, its historical development and its presentation (Shariff, 1988). Similarly, it makes a great contribution in defining and building this field and content theory by showing the relationship and meter between the two elements. The relationship between the ideas of the poem and the way they are said, that is, the methods used. This point is considered in the popular saying that the composer's ideas create ideas, not ideas create ideas. The thing to consider is that the shorthand about the principle and philosophy of the relationship between the field and the content of poetry is that the field should come from ideas, and the content should rule the field. In other words, the poem finds its own form.

The discussion shows the existence of a relationship between narration and poetry and confirms that the composition of spontaneous poetry is a common thing of poetry. This matter is explained that those who compose without parties and papers, first, before composing, they have a specific reason and content that causes them to compose, and these are often caused by specific results linked to people's lives. Although they compose using the same scales and scales, what is important there is what they say (Njogu and Chimerah, 1999). As well, the discussion helped to make a suggestion about separating the terms poem and composition. Here, there was a suggestion that the concept of traditional poetry should not be confused with the concept of other compositions whose form is not poetry. However, this solution still leaves a certain gap, since the general concept of poetry still considers all the compositions. Another important thing noted in the discussion is about flow poetry as the traditionalists describe it in scolding and give it the name mapingiti. The issue emphasised here is that a Kiswahili poem has a specific form that distinguishes it from other types of compositions or texts.

Another contribution is about the existence of the classification of different currents about poetry and showing the theoretical link between traditionalists and modernists and showing where they clash and where they meet. Also, due to their experience and research, they show the ways of composition used in different seas to give birth to poems with various structures and art. On the other hand, the discussion shows that Kiswahili poets have been composing poems since ancient times following a certain theory that was not written down, and that theory began to be explained in



pieces by experts between the years 1940 and 1970 (Shariff, 1988). However, the analysis and explanation of the theory in a longer and broader way have been done after the outbreak of the poetry crisis starting in 1973.

The examination of this article has revealed three foundations of the traditional theory of Kiswahili poetry (Mulokozi, 1996). First, that a poem is a union and interaction of content and elements of the field, and that the relationship is guided by the principles of consistency and adequacy. Second, the content is the mother of the field, and it determines and governs the field, and it also affects and is affected by the content. Another thing is that the main role of poetry is to educate, entertain, and preserve the language. These theoretical foundations are traditional and are derived from the Swahili's own experiences in their artistic and living environment. This situation shows that theoretically, traditional and modern poets agree about the basics, but they differ about the position and importance of certain elements, especially tone and meter, within the broad pattern of poetry composition.

V. Conclusion

The results of the poetry crisis were positive because they motivated the traditionalists to begin to examine and reflect on the art of poetry professionally and more seriously, instead of just being composers, and thus, to develop or develop the theories of Kiswahili poetry. The crisis affected the profession of Kiswahili poetry, especially the definition of the concept of poetry, its scope, its seas, and its traditional methods. In addition, the modernists learnt a lot from the traditionalists, and the traditionalists likewise learnt new things from the modernists. Agreements and understandings were found because instead of conflicting one another there was mutual tolerance and educating one another. New fields and seas of Kiswahili poetry had a chance to emerge and flourish, including the flow and Bongo flavor. Various articles and books were written and published on the issue that helped to develop and mature poetry from these efforts. The publication and teaching of independent compositions began to be accepted and become part of school curricula.

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