

Research

DEPLOYING MYTHS THROUGH FACTS AND FICTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR TANZANIANS' NATIONAL SOUL IN EBRAHIM N. HUSSEIN'S *KINJEKETILE*

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Abstract. Creating myths and mythologies out of facts and fictions has been known to man for a long time. The practice of using them for freedom struggle is something very recent, amongst the many situations they are intended for. This position, taken to a higher level, is predominant in Ebrahim N. Hussein's *Kinjeketile*: creating new myths from the old to fight a pressing national societal dilemma. The Tanzanians, in unbundling the shackles of the Germans in the late 19th century to the early 20th century, had to recreate and utilize the myths of unity and inner strength through a prophet-seer, *Kinjeketile*. He became a rallying point through his divinely given gifts of water and fly-whisk. For him and the freedom of the nation, the people went to war. This paper, therefore, sees the possibility of a conquered, separated and disunited people becoming a whole and unified nation in the face of an ene-

my: freedom is achievable with the remaking of the old myths to suit, serve and fight new social problems as they arise.

Keywords: myths, mythologies, national soul, Tanzania and *Kinjeketile*

Introduction

Kinjeketile (or *Hero's Name*) by Ebrahim N. Hussein, an epic dramaturgy, provides information on the Tanzanian culture that birthed it. It records Tanzania's freedom struggle from German shackles between late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Germans, welcomed by the friendly Tanzanians, overtime confiscated and appropriated the land making the latter serfs on their own land. They were subjected to depersonalizing and dehumanizing acts. Commenting on the text's realism, Hussein (1970) opines:

Firstly, I have tried to show how the Wamatumbi felt about the cruel invasion by the Germans, especially to show the master-servant relationship then pertaining. Secondly, I have tried to show briefly the political climate of that period (1890-1904). Thirdly, I have touched on the theme of economic exploitation of the Africans by the Germans, when Tanzania was being deprived of her produce and manpower, and yet her people were being made to pay taxes without being given any chance of earning an income. (p. vi-vii)

The people endure until the seer, *Kinjeketile*, arrives. The spirit, Hon-go, influences him, opening vistas of freedom. These visions are contradictory and bloody. In confusion, *Kinjeketile* encourages the people but found it impossible recanting when reality strikes. He nearly sold his people, putting his trust in a betraying spirit.

Portraying *Kinjeketile*, a mono-mythic hero, Hussein borrowed “freely from imagination when historical facts did not suit my purpose” (*Kinjeketile*, p. v). An historical Kinjeketile Ngwale existed: he lived at Ngarambe (in Southern Tanzania). His influence was from 1905 until he was executed in 1906. Hussein utilizes the faction philosophy: mixture of facts and fiction. The textual Kinjeketile “is a creature of the imagination and although the “two men” closely resemble one another in their actions, they are not identical” (*Kinjeketile*, p. v). Myths explain historical and non-historical communal events. Meanings and symbols encoded in the events predicate for the future.

This work, set among ordinary Tanzanians, looks at their sufferings and liberation struggle under German colonizers devoid of union or elitist interference or influence. Like all *hoi polloi* over the world, they accept the situation but bid their time while lacking unity. In Tanzania (Tanganyika as at then), there were many ethnic groups which believed in their individualities. Kinjeketile emerges, uniting them towards the war. He “taught the people the meaning of unity, and encouraged them to unite by symbolically using water as a medicine against divisive forces” (*Kinjeketile*, p. vi).

Textual approach

There are basically two main approaches to textual analysis: the content analysis and the interpretive analysis (Ogunyemi et al., 2013). This work has basically used the interpretive approach. Part of this includes rhetorical analysis, ideological analysis, psychoanalytic analysis and others. Within these analyses, a researcher seeks to derive meanings at two basic levels: surface (denotative meanings) and embedded (connotative meanings). These are employed on the specific text to derive meanings in relation to the author’s thematic foci and their sociological implications.

Mythic hero

The major mythic personality is realized through the character of Kinjeketile, the seer. He is an ordinary man who gets in contact with the spirit, Hongo, through the medium of “a pool in a tributary of the River Rufiji” (*Kinjeketile*, p. vi) near his home at Ngarambe. He is given water to make his warriors invincible, and a fly-whisk to invoke blessings on them. These endear him to the people who flock to his side. He unites and sends them to war under the control of Kitunda. Mythic characters are grounded in their humanness. Kinjeketile is no exception. He is faced and battered with doubts especially when told he had prophesied that the Arab, Seyyid Said (the Sultan of Zanzibar, another oppressor), would take over after the people’s victory (*Kinjeketile*, p. 21). He doubts more on seeing Hongo’s bloodied image of the future for the people. This shakes his faith in Hongo, the vision, the water and the essence of fighting. What upholds him is not his spirituality but his belief in the power of the people and their future. He refuses to recant when he is urged to by Askari and the German Officer. According to him, his defiance is founded on the following premises:

Do you know what they will say tomorrow? The officer will say that we were wrong. He will say to our children that we were wrong in fighting him. He will tell that to our children, Kitunda. That to fight him is wrong! That to fight for one’s country is wrong! And he wants me to help him by retracting all that I said.... The moment I say that, people in the north, south, east and west will stop fighting. They will fall into hopeless despair - they will give up. (*Kinjeketile*, p. 53)

The recanting of Kinjeketile and its would-be-effects on future Tanzanians is a concern of the text. The success of his not recanting made him a rogue in the eyes of the Germans but a mythic hero whose life and times are now celebrated in Tanzania. Okeama (2005) posits:

During colonialism, the resistance was called the Maji Maji Rebellion. After independence, it was renamed the Maji Maji Insurrection. And so it is that the chiefs hanged by the Germans as criminals are today honoured as heroes.

Becoming the myth

In the normal time-frame, the textual events encompass the period of the Maji Maji Insurrection. According to Okeama (2005):

On February 27, Tanzanians marked the 100th anniversary of the Maji Maji uprising. It was on February 27, 1906 that the German colonial authorities executed the leaders of the uprising. The Tanzanian people launched the resistance against German rule in 1905.

To become mythic and have the infusion of mythic powers, Kinjeketile spends more than twenty-four hours under water with the spirit, Hongo. During this period, it is assumed he undergoes self-initiation into the world of the spirits and ancestors. To keep this contact intact, he visits the river at different times on mythic sojourns, and gets possessed through trances by Hongo. In the initial trance, he is dragged, physically and spiritually, towards the river, and surreptitiously, to the world of the spirits where he is briefed by the ancestors. His initiation symbolizes his acceptance by the ancestors as their messenger.

Mythic representations

Maize flour, a major staple food of the people, represents the wholeness of the nation while the water from the ancestors represents their affirmativeness in the struggle. Kinjeketile applies the mixture to the warriors' foreheads and uses the ancestors' whisk to pass on ancestral and spiritual protection and blessings. The fighting personnel undergo its group and individual initiations into the world of ancestors' protection. This materializes through

their contact with the ancestors' water in "a small pot" (*Kinjeketile*, p. 15). According to *Kinjeketile* pp. 16-17:

This is the water given us / This is the water of life ...
He who partakes of this water / No harm will befall him
No bullet will penetrate his body ... / All this is possible
Because of the power of the water. / Maji!
(*Kinjeketile*, pp. 16-17)

The men drink from the water which is also sprinkled on their heads. They are made to believe in their invincibility. The water serves as a nullifier, disrobing them of tribal limitations that had debarred their joint struggle against the Germans. Now,

We will unite and we will be one body. And as it is in a
human body. When a toe gets hurt, the whole body feels
the pain. When a Mmatumbi gets whipped, it is the
Mzaramo who will feel the pain (*Kinjeketile*, p. 16).

The characters are mythically symbolic, psychologically engaging, sociologically resolute and relevant not only for the past but for all time. They are not ordinary individuals as they represent and symbolize the various aspects and shades of the struggles of the people.

The two women, Bibi Kitunda and Bibi Kinjeketile, are epitomes of womanist feminism (Oyewumi, 2004): [w]omen who believe in partnering with their husbands. While the men are concerned about social and political changes, they scrounge, fend and care for their children and husbands. Their love and thoughts for their families come across quite explicitly. Through them, problems of the homes are portrayed: children dying, onset of famine, absence of the men from home and its effects. Both women are affected by the struggle as their husbands are front-liners: Kitunda is the army general while Kinjeketile is the spiritual leader. They are pillars of support for their husbands: they do what they ought to do and let be what they do not understand.

Talking about her husband, Bibi Kinjeketile says: “I don’t go peering into his affairs too closely” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 2).

Representing the younger generation, Ngulumbalyo’s decisions and behaviour are rash and careless. He is extremely impatient; unmindful of the after-effects of his actions. He and Kibasila are the major cause of the loss of the war. He either forgets the war strategy or decides to forgo it. He leads his men, without any cover, into hails of bullets chanting: “Maji! Maji! Maji!” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 49).

Kitunda, a metamorphosis of a suffering and oppressed personality, becomes a war leader. He is portrayed as peaceful, truthful, detribalized and people oriented. Though made the leader based on the belief in the water, he has personal doubts. His war strategies are not based on the water therapy. He relies on unity and planning deferring the war until the equipment, and warriors are made ready. In the deciding battle, Ngulumbalyo and Kibasila scuttle his good plans. Though he feels and knows the inadequacies of Kinjeketile, he never betrays him. He stands by the seer, transporting the war from the spiritual to the physical. The loss of the war cannot be attributed to him but to the warriors’ very misplaced belief in the water and the poor implementation of the war strategy.

Kinjeketile, the main character, is the seer and prophet who stands in the spiritual gap between the people, the ancestors and the spirits. After his river initiation, he is reputed to have extra-ordinary powers. He becomes an epitome of the psycho-spiritual and physical struggle of the people. Personally, he gets to the level of doubting the message he terms “a dream”. His conviction later switches from the power of the spirits and the ancestors to the unity of the people. Refuting the power of the water, he postulates:

[w]e will be strong; but not by being strengthened by some dubious aid from the outside. We will be strong because this strength comes from us - our

own strength. With this we will fight and we will win (*Kinjeketile*, p. 29).

In him, the physical and spiritual are embodied. He paints the future for his people: a limited reliance on the spirit but more on their own power and efforts in escaping subjugation, suppression and oppression (from any source: either Seyyid Said or the Germans).

Symbolic representations

Symbols are characteristic of the archetype (Ngumoha, 1988) as the playwright utilizes many symbols to portray the universality of his message. The smoke, from *Kinjeketile*'s house, represents the worship and propitiation of the spirits. The plantation symbolizes the tool and medium of oppression of the people by the Germans. As an extension, 'plantation' on the psyche of Blacks was an oppressive place and avenue used in enslaving those exported from Africa during the slave trade era. The Mmatumbi become workers on the plantations set up by the Germans: without payments, and suffering various types of inhuman degradations. The Germans are referred to as "Red Earth". The 'earth' is a universal icon; from where all humans are assumed to emanate; the mother of all. 'Red' in the African cosmogony represents danger. The Germans are seen as humans but dangerous ones not only to themselves but to all humans. The use of the drum situates the text in the African world. It is a means of communication between places as used by Kitunda and exemplified when the message of the disappearance of *Kinjeketile* is sent from one village to another. *Kinjeketile* returns from the river with two metaphysical gifts from the spirits: a flywhisk and water. The flywhisk denotes the spiritual connection between the seer and the spirits imparting spiritual blessings on the people. The water unifies the various tribes and is assumed to be able to make the warriors invincible to the German guns. Though it fails as an invincibility agent, it succeeds in unifying the people. Nazareth (1978) orates:

Actually, *Kinjeketile* knows that the water as such does not have protective powers; he knows that the people are all-powerful once they are united and so, he is using the water to unite them. However, the people believe that the water will really protect them from German bullets.

Mytho-factual issues

Oppression, suppression, famine and their effects

The text establishes the oppression and suppression of Tanzanians by Germans through persecutions. The men, forced to work on German cotton fields, without payments, pay tax. This affects the people's lives in various ways. The women, like Bibi Kitunda and Bibi Kinjeketile, are left to fend for their homes. They could not find food. One of the fatal casualties of the famine is Bibi Bobati's son. The people are dehumanized. They are beaten as in the case of Kitunda. The women are not exempted: Bibi Kitunda stands in for her sick husband on the plantation. These connect with the universal sufferings of the oppressed. Historically, oppressors have ways and means of oppressing the conquered. To escape this situation, Tanzanians through the inspirations of Kinjeketile and Kitunda decide to fight. Mkichi posits angrily:

But it is better to die than to live like this. We are made to work like beasts in the cotton plantation. We are forced to pay tax. We die of hunger because we cannot work on our shambas. I say death is better than this life (*Kinjeketile*, p. 8).

Though the battle is lost, the war of freedom is started for other generations to carry on. Certain that the future is secured and freedom achievable Kinjeketile avows:

A word has been born. Our children will tell their children about this word. Our great grand-children will hear of it. One day the word will cease to be a dream, it will be a reality. (*Kinjeketile*, p. 53)

Betrayal, unity and war

Betrayal, prevalent in oppressed lands, is also here. It runs its allegations from the physical to the spiritual. Nearly all the major characters, tangible and abstract, physical and spiritual, are accused of one type of betrayal or the other: all having to do with oppression and the struggle for freedom. A fundamental reason for betrayal is depicted in the truism of Kitunda: “We are a hungry people, and hunger drives us to betray one another” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 5). To escape hunger, and allocation of working portions on the plantations, Mnyapala, the overseer, captures and takes “other people’s tender maidens, for the Askari to spoil” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 11). Chausiku, Kitunda’s daughter, is forcefully “stolen” to be “used” by the Askari. Mkichi and Mngindo accuse Kitunda of betrayal when he advocates patience and caution before the start of the uprising. He is encouraged to betray his daughter: to give her out to be “used” by the Askari! For this, he would be given two whole days off from work!

On the war, Kitunda accuses Kinjeketile of betraying the trust of the people: “You have cheated us. That stuff about being possessed by Hongo and the water was an act, a deception” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 28). Kinjeketile encourages the people to believe in the ‘magic water’. He wants to use it as a unifier. He accuses Hongo of betraying its people and worshippers doubting the giver and power of the ‘magic water’. His grouse with Hongo is the purported transfer of the people to another external power. Few of the questions that must have run through *Kinjeketile*’s mind might include the followings: why the transfer from one oppressor to another? If this will happen, why believe in and use the water? Why not embark on a war to ensure permanent individual and communal freedom? In the fight for freedom nobody, spiritual or physical, it appears, could be trusted. Hussein paints the spectre of a new form of intra-continental oppression lurking behind the political scene in Africa (Alain, 2000).

Unity is a recipe for fighting an enemy. The text exemplifies this with Kinjeketile. On the surface, it appears that he fails but on second reflection, “a word has been born ... One day the word will cease to be a dream, it will be a reality!” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 53). The belief is not mainly in the water for the war: it serves only as a mythic medium of unifying the people towards freedom. Disunity limits the people’s ability to oppose the Red Earth. Each tribe feels it could stand alone in all facets of communal life. This individualism contributes to their falling under German slavery and becoming dispirited. Old Man gives a panacea to this situation: “But to be able to go to war against the Red Earth we must be united. To go to war disunited, fighting one another, is impossible”(*Kinjeketile*, p. 7). Kinjeketile preaches unity after his mythical sojourn into the river deriving his unification ideology from the gifts of the gods and the ancestors: “Do not be afraid. Do not fear, for our ancestors support and are behind us” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 19). This disunity, caused by “clouds of smoke and fog” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 15), which he calls “darkness” and “cold”, hides the tribes, one from the other, creating hatred and separation. The healing balms are “the rays of the sun” which will “banish from your eyes” all limitations to unity and development. United, the tribes seek to defeat the Germans. According to Kitunda, “Day by day we are growing stronger. Yesterday, and the day before, and today, our brothers have come to join forces with us” (*Kinjeketile*, p. 23).

The people, reposing total trust in the mystical water, agree with Kinjeketile’s choice of Kitunda as the army general. The general vacillates between belief in the water and the power of the people. Militarily, he advocates for and gets the *Likida* war dance so that the warriors are well trained. In the end, the war is lost not for his lack of effective leadership but due to circumstances contiguous to the war. It is reported that the men break and violate the taboos set by Kinjeketile, therefore some die despite partaking in the water. For most mythic heroes, their falls are usually attributed to the failure of

their protective or defensive mythic instruments. Kinjeketile's failure lies in the loss of the water's efficacy. The success comes in the planting of the revolution seed that will be harvested by future generations.

Kinjeketile, the seer

The process of creating a mythical character encompasses the physical and spiritual modes. Usually, his or her physical actions and inactions become attributable to metaphysical supports and sources: the ancestors, spirits and gods (Ngumoha, 1988, Okeama, 2005). This process plays itself out in the creation of Kinjeketile, the seer. According to Hussein (1970), Kinjeketile, the man, had lived near Ngarambe before becoming known in 1904. This would have been when the spirit, Hongo, possessed him. From that moment, he became a demigod like Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, "who is half man and half spirit" (Duerden, 1975).

The first metaphysical inference to Kinjeketile comes from the discussion between Chausiku and her mother, Bibi Kitunda when he is symbolized with the snake that chases Chausiku from approaching his house. Ascribed bilocative abilities, he is simultaneously seen on the field and at home. His mythical characterization peaks after he spends about two days under the river and emerging dry. In his life, spiritual-like characteristics are exhibited: he speaks in tongue, "some strange Swahili – like Arabic" (*Kinjeketile*, p. 21); he controls wild animals; his physical appearance and expressions change. Confronted with all these, the people see no reason not to follow him: it is obeying their ancestors and gods.

His transmutation and change in focus occur when informed that he might unwittingly be selling his people into another world of slavery. He refuses to be possessed by the spirit, Hongo, again and decides to wait on God to highlight point the way out. He transfers his belief from the magic water to the inner strength and unity of the people. It is already too late: the people's

implicit belief in the water contributes to the immediate loss of the struggle. He becomes a permanent mythical hero in his refusal to recant and retract his avowed prophecies not only about the water but also on the freedom struggle. This is succinctly exemplified in Okeama's (2005) article title, "Maji Maji: Yesterday's Criminals, Today's Heroes." His position in the mytho-historical and political landscape of his people becomes assured. He develops into a mythical figure larger than life. His individuality of sacrifice, termed "political voluntarism" by Alain (2000), cements his mythic image and the future freedom of his people (Duerden 1975, Apter 1992). A fitting epitaph, though written in a general tone by Izevbaye (1979), can be ascribed to this hero:

Generally, it is the traditional epic which glorifies the collective achievement of a human group by embodying this in the actions of heroes...who best embody the group's most valued ideals... The epic hero...that man of uncommon abilities who combines in himself the most highly rated values of his race.

Demystifying the supernatural forces

Hussein establishes that though there can be spiritual help and assistance in any struggle, the people themselves must be the vanguard and arrowhead of the struggle - armed or not. The spiritual and ancestral gifts of the magic water and the flywhisk are only to assist and are not the main paraphernalia of the struggle.

The doubts that trouble Kinjeketile and which he passes on to Kitunda are meant to help the people focus on their struggle. The rhetorical question he faces is the same Ezeulu encounters in *Arrow of God* (Achebe, 1964): could a god lead his people into the thick of battle and desert them during or after a defeat (by handing them over to another oppressor)? Kinjeketile's inner thoughts flow in line with Ezeulu's:

Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and then unleash rain on him? Whoever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree? But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take flight and in one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry:

If the rat cannot flee fast enough

Let him make way for the tortoise!

From these limitations and doubts, Kinjeketile tries convincing, to an extent, Kitunda. His idea is that a god who would not stay by his worshippers should not be followed dogmatically. This elicits his change in policy direction culminating in the demystification of the powers of the ancestors, the gods, their gifts and influence in the affairs of men. The people's strength, valour and unity should come from within. Writing on the socio-political nature of nations, Osofisan (2005) posits:

Our nation is divided; but art can create the sense of a common identity by assembling and building upon our common cultural traits, our common practices and our common beliefs. And where the differences must exist, the artist can help smoothen the harshness out of our necessary encounters, by exploiting and explaining the uniqueness of these differences. For even if everybody is well-fed, we cannot live together in harmony, or make progress if we continue to suspect or misunderstand one another, if we insist on regarding the other citizen as the stranger or the enemy.

Conclusion

Hussein uses Kinjeketile, the character, and *Kinjeketile*, the text, as portrayals of the next level of socio-religious and political struggle. Help and assistance are not outside the man who wants to achieve but within him. He must achieve based on his capabilities and limitations. According to Okpewho (1983), the old mythology no longer:

[p]rovides sufficient answers for the problems of contemporary African society...Consequently, an energy, directed at creating a new mythology that would offer ... a firmer road to self-realization

This demystifies the old gods and reduces reliance on them; paving ways and means for new methods of fighting socio-political, religious and economic ills. Hussein effectively utilizes myth and mythography to explain what *Kinjeketile* and the Maji Maji revolution represent. He encodes mythographic icons, through facts and fiction, to narrate the Tanzanians' struggle, at least, from their point of view. Decoding helps generations to understand what the fighters fought and died for as prophesied in the words of Kinjeketile: "One day the word will cease to be a dream, it will be a reality" (*Kinjeketile*, p. 53).

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