

Themes on Selected Kiswahili Texts on HIV and AIDS

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Abstract:-The HIV and AIDS scourge has been in our society for more than three decades and during that duration, more than 34 million people have been affected by the disease in the world. In addition, according to UNAIDS (2012) more than 18 million people have died. Initially the HIV and AIDS disease caused a lot of destruction in the history of mankind. This paper sought to assess how figures of speech and style have been used to present themes regarding HIV and AIDS in selected Kiswahili Literature works. The themes were generated from ten Kiswahili Literary works that cuts across three different genres that were used in this study namely; novels, plays and short stories. The selected works from the three genres gave the researcher appropriate data for this study. The study was carried in the library and employed content analysis as a method of data collection. This study has established that despite the differences in the genres and style, different artists have similar themes that are presented regarding HIV and AIDS.

Key words: Themes, literature, genres, community, scourge

I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of themes has been addressed by different scholars with an attempt to make it well understood. According to Masebo and Nyangwine (2008) a theme is a main idea that is espoused in works of literature. The two authors argue that the themes originate from the society. According to them, themes could be political, economic or cultural in nature. According to Wamitila (2002), the concept of themes is used to refer to the topic, content and a specific objective of a specific work of art. However, there are different approaches and dimensions of using themes in a special way to refer to a concept or an aspect that comes up and is developed by works of literature.

Themes refer to the total meaning that an author and readers discover in course of writing and reading respectively. We can get the meaning of a specific work of art by reading that work carefully and keenly by identifying the relationship between sections and how those sections relate to build a specific work of art. There are some critics who argue that the meaning of a particular work of art is not in the work itself but is generated by readers themselves.

Themes do not create answers but generate questions. In this particular perspective, we see that some of the accusations that are made on writers of literature that their works do not offer solutions are geared more to thesis writing than themes in literary works. Wamitila (2008) explains that a theme is a main idea that dominates a specific work of art from the start up to the end. This idea is normally developed in very clear

ways. One of this ways is by use of the title of a respective book.

The concept of themes can be examined by theories of analysis. On this background, the definition of themes will depend on the type of analysis that is employed. Even though Njogu and Chimera (1999) gives a different definition of themes, they tend to agree with a certain argument that themes are an aspect of the content. Wamitila (2008) argues that artists in literary works are people who collect ideas and issues that take place in their communities or society and present them creatively in novels, plays, short stories and poems. To create in writing doesn't mean to lie but to present themes by using stylistic devices that will motivate and attract the reader to examine the respective work and identify the themes that were intended by the author.

From the time HIV and AIDS was discovered in the 1980's in Kenya, the community has continued to be sensitized on how to deal with the scourge. A number of groups that have been involved in sensitizing the community include private organizations, non-governmental organizations, musicians, newsmen, political leaders, religious institutions and scholars.

A number of writers have tackled HIV and AIDS by use of different genres. Mutembei (2009) has written on poetry, a genre that has discussed HIV and AIDS very openly. Our study is broader than Mutembei's because it has examined the presentation of themes on HIV/AIDS on three genres of written literature which are; novels, plays and short stories.

Annensia, (2015) argues that the art of songs is among works of art that Banyankole community in Uganda has used in a very unique way to talk about HIV and AIDS. The Banyankole are not the only community that has used songs to talk about HIV and AIDS but there is evidence that very many artists in the world have talked about HIV and AIDS.

Mutembei (ibid) continues to argue that literature can be used as a weapon in the fight against HIV and AIDS. He continues to point out that in literature, the use of stylistic devices like metaphors, similes and even irony is enough motivation in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Our study focused on presentation of themes on HIV and AIDS in selected Kiswahili literature texts and analyzed the contribution of selected literary works in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

A number of works of literature in most cases dwell on economic, political and social issues that come up in society. Artists of such works present it for the purpose of teaching,

cautioning and giving direction to the community in the right perspective. Many writers of literature have dwelt on themes revolving around HIV and AIDS with the purpose of enlightening the society to take adequate measures of avoiding to be infected with HIV and AIDS.

Our study analyzed some of the selected works of Kiswahili literature with the purpose of bringing out different themes and assessing their contribution in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The theme that is grounded in the society is the one that is discussing HIV and AIDS. Songs, plays and poems started addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS in the 1980's according to Mutembei (2001 & 2002). Currently songs composed that discuss on signs of HIV, destruction of the disease and how one can avoid the disease are sung during many forums. Our study focused on how themes on HIV and AIDS have been presented in order to identify the uniqueness of writers in addition to assessing the contribution of those literary works in the fight against AIDS.

II. THEORY

The theory of stylistics that was started and used by Buffon (1930) guided this study. The theory is normally used to refer to the method of analysis of literature texts by analyzing style in a scientific way. Basically this theory puts emphasis on the role of aesthetics of language in the works of literature. Language and literature were seen to use aesthetics to present ideas in the works of art. Aesthetics was presented in the use of language artistically for the purpose of molding an idea and passing it on the audience in an impressive way other than by use of the ordinary way.

Guided by the tenets of this theory, the researcher analyzed works of Kiswahili literature from three genres namely; novels, plays and short stories that were selected purposefully to arrive at data that satisfied the requirements of the study.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study was guided by the following objective: to discuss various themes that are presented in selected Kiswahili literature works on HIV/AIDS.

3.1 Justification of the Study

The researcher was motivated by a number of reasons to examine the style of presentation of themes on selected genres of Kiswahili literature. One of the reasons is that HIV and AIDS is an emerging issue that has affected the entire universe and so it can't be left on medical experts alone but can also be handled by other experts of language and literature. The experts who are not medics are language experts that are addressing the HIV and AIDS agenda through their written works that are used to sensitize the readers on the dangers and effects of HIV and AIDS.

The second reason is that up to the moment no cure has been discovered to treat HIV and AIDS. In this regard, the only way that is left that can help is to stop the infections of this scourge. In connection with the foregoing statement, there is

need for professional exchange of ideas between artists and medics in the fight against AIDS. Literature can be used to sensitize the readers and the community and in addition propose best ways of handling sex, fighting stigmatization and giving hope to those that are infected and affected with HIV and AIDS. The researcher also chose to work on this study because HIV and AIDS issues are normally presented in different styles in respective genres of literature. There is need for different styles to be explained and simplified in order for the common readers to understand what is conveyed in respective works of art.

The other factor is that the work of analysis of works of art in society is to sensitize and generate new perspectives or divergent opinions of readers. The literary critics use their skills to understand the community of the author, the value, philosophy and to present the message on AIDS to the writer's audience. It is imperative therefore to analyze and assess aesthetics on AIDS as it comes out in genres of Kiswahili literature for it will help in further understanding issues surrounding HIV and AIDS and give the society a chance of meditating on this scourge that has the capability of clearing all the generations of mankind in our society.

The genres of Kiswahili literature namely; novels, plays, short stories and poems have continued to be an important aspect of literature lessons in primary schools, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning like colleges and universities. These genres play a very critical role of sensitizing, warning, teaching and expounding on the culture of a given community. In order to give these genres their respective role, this study purposes to show how the narrative on HIV and AIDS can be used to warn the community on behaviors that can endanger them from being affected by the scourge in addition to giving hope to those that are already infected by the disease.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design for this research was case study. Case study is a research design whereby the researcher has the freedom of choosing one specific item that he will analyze in detail and give it concrete conclusions according to Robson(2007) and Creswell (2009). In a case study design the writer identifies a specific area of study or specific item that will be handled to enable him arrive at the intended data. Good (1966) observes that a case study design is a good method of research because it is reliable since it enables the researcher to get important and accurate information by spending less time and money as compared to other methods. In addition, case study design enables the researcher to present the whole context of the issue under investigation and hence makes it easy for the researcher to make conclusions on the objectives of his research. Kothari (2009) argues that the case study design enables the researcher to answer the following question; what? Why? For which reason? How? Case study as a method of research was adequate during this study for it enabled the researcher to analyze in detail all the

works that were selected that discuss the HIV and AIDS scourge.

In this research, selected written literature texts on HIV and AIDS are the basis of the case study because those works are a section of many works of art that have been written. Creswell (2009) explains that case study is a good method since it enables the researcher to collect and get all the data required for his research.

This research was done in the library. The selection of the sample that was used in this study was purposeful and it involved the following novels; *Sitaki Iwe Siri* of Matundura, (2008), *Ua la Faraja* of Mkufya, (2005), *Pendo Katika Shari* of Momanyi, (2008) and *Kala Tufaha* of Omari, (2007). The selected plays were; *Giza* of Jilala (2004), *Kilio Chetu* of Medical Aid Foundation, (1995) and *Orodha* of Steve Reynolds (2006). Selected short stories were; *Likizo ya Mauti na Hadithi Nyingine* of Kobia and Kingei (2007) *Alidhani Kapata na Hadithi Nyingine* of Iribemwangi (2007) and *Kiti Cha Moyoni na Hadithi Nyingine* of Walibora and Mohamed (2007). The selected works from the three genres gave the researcher appropriate data for this study. Primary data was collected in the library from selected texts, newspapers, journals, thesis and from the internet. The study employed content analysis as a method of data collection. Data that was found was recorded and analyzed as guided by specific objectives, hypothesis together with the tenets of the stylistic theory. The presentation of data was in a descriptive form.

V. DATA FINDINGS AND PRESENTATIONS

There are a number of themes that this study identified in the works that were used. Among the themes that were identified included the following;

5.1 Decay of Societal Morals

Every society or community has customs, norms and morals that guide its daily activities. Those norms and morals are normally acceptable in any given society and therefore anyone who goes against them contravenes the societal norms. Different writers of the works that were used in this study have highlighted on the theme of decay of societal morals. The author of a novel called *Ua La Faraja* (2007) has highlighted this theme when discussing the habit of sexual immorality within the society. Sexual immorality is a habit that entails one being involved in careless sex with different people as this contravenes the societal morals. According to the writer of *Ua La Faraja* this habit contributes greatly to the infection of HIV and AIDS. The writer has given many examples of characters in his book that have been involved in sexual immorality that eventually caused them to be infected with HIV and AIDS. Characters like Queen, Ngoma and Asha are examples of people in society who engage in careless sex but eventually get infected with HIV and AIDS.

The theme of decay of societal morals has been greatly highlighted by the author of the play *Orodha*. The author

presents to us two characters, Mary and Furaha and narrates to us how they used disappear at night to go and engage in sexual activities with men. Furaha used to instil fear in Mary who was her young sister not reveal her secret of disappearing at night. The two characters are depicted to be obsessed with looking for rich men who were to buy them beer, give them money and engage with them in sex. The author of the play portrays how women were selling their bodies in exchange for money and other small goodies.

On the other hand, the author of *Kilio Chetu* portrays to us how nearly all the youths in school had boyfriends or girlfriends and how they used tuition time to engage in sexual activities. The author narrates to us how characters like Joti and Jumbe accused Mwarami of not having a girlfriend. They threatened to remove him from their peer company if he continued with his 'backward' behavior. They accused Mwarami of not having a girlfriend because he was a coward. Such thoughts and behaviors perpetuates decay of societal morals among the youths. In addition, this is a clear indication of decay of moral standards in our institutions of learning.

5.2 Stigmatization

Stigmatization can be defined to mean hatred, negative attitudes and mistreatment that is subjected to people who are suffering from HIV and AIDS. Some of the effects of stigmatization include; segregation by family members and peers, failure to be treated at health facilities, discrimination at school, denial of human rights among other forms of stigmatization. This greatly hinder the steps of treatment. Various writers have discussed this theme of stigmatization. In one of the texts that was used in this study, the writer of the play *Giza* (2004) presents the theme of stigmatization very vividly. By using her main character Suzi, the author portrays how the society was discriminating and mistreating people who were suffering from HIV and AIDS. This societal attitude and trend affected negatively people who were suffering from HIV and AIDS and this caused them not to live long.

The employer of Suzi and her sister is depicted by the author as one who perpetuates stigmatization. The employer of Suzi on realizing that she was suffering from HIV and AIDS decided to chase her away. The society that the writer targeted in her work has a very negative attitude to people who are infected with HIV and AIDS. It was believed that whoever was suffering from HIV and AIDS had involved himself or herself in immoral activities. This societal perspective made the disease to be seen as a disgrace to whoever was infected with it. Suzi's employer portrayed a very high level of mistreatment when she decided to throw away Suzi's personal belongings outside her house and even refused to pay her salary.

It is even more ironical that hospital attendants were also part of the people that perpetuated stigmatization and more specifically nurses and doctors. These are the professionals that the society depended upon to treat patients of HIV and

AIDS but it is disheartening to realize that they are the same people who perpetuate stigmatization. According to their profession, even if they knew that the patient was not going to survive, they were not expected to disclose the information to the patient but instead give them hope and encouragement.

When Suzi was at the hospital, she was not assisted as expected as any other patient simply because she was suffering from AIDS. It is quite unfortunate that some doctors in hospitals actively contribute to stigmatization among their patients. It is quite ironical that nurses and doctors in hospitals contribute greatly to stigmatization among their patients. Other writers like Steve Reynolds (2006), Matundura, (2008), and Omar (2007) among others have discussed in depth about stigmatization.

In another text, *Likizo ya Mauti*, a character called Wakesho was denied to sit for an examination in school after being suspected to have HIV and AIDS. Wakesho's family and friends avoided to interact or come close to her when they discovered that she was suffering from AIDS. The author of *Likizo ya Mauti* continues to present the theme of stigmatization when he gives a further example of how Wakesho was denied an opportunity of employment because of her HIV and AIDS status. The author depicts how some non- governmental organizations were denying people jobs when they discovered that they were suffering from AIDS. Such organizations play a great role in spreading AIDS because the affected people felt segregated and thought that they were not part of that society. This went against the basic human rights.

5.3 Mistreatment of Women

Mistreatment against women can be defined to mean oppression that women are normally subjected to especially by men. In most cases this mistreatment is pegged on male chauvinism where a woman is taken to be a tool that is just used by men in any given way. In the novel of *Kala Tufaha* by Omari (2007), the author depicts how a girl child is oppressed and denied the opportunity to continue with studies in a secondary school. A character called Kibibi performed very well in her standard eight examination and became the best in the division but her father Mzee Selemani refused totally to allow her continue with her secondary education simply because she was a girl. Mzee Selemani valued education for the boy child at the expense of the girl child. This was even done in circumstances where Selemani's son Imu had performed very poorly in examinations as compared to Kibibi. Imu was given an opportunity to continue with his secondary education despite having performed very poorly.

The author of *Kala Tufaha* vividly narrates how Mzee Selemani portrayed his oppression. After denying Kibibi an opportunity to further her studies, he was secretly planning to marry off Kibibi at her young age by force. Mzee Selemani was seeing Kibibi in monetary terms and wanted to covert her into an income generating project.

Mistreatment of women is clearly portrayed in Momanyi's novel, *Pendo Katika Shari*. In this text, the author narrates to us the behavior of one of the characters called Sulubu. Sulubu threw out of the house all the utensils and other items in addition to chasing his children away when diagnosis that was done revealed that his wife Pendo had been infected with HIV and AIDS (*Pendo Katika Shari*, pg. 25). The irony of the matter is that it was Sulubu who infected Pendo with HIV and AIDS because of his loose morals of engaging in sexual affairs with many other women. This is a sign of total disregard of women in any given society.

5.4 Breaking the Silence on HIV and AIDS

Different communities accepted HIV and AIDS from different perspectives. Some of the communities didn't want to discuss about HIV and AIDS openly. The author of the novel *Sitaki Iwe Siri* looks at the societal issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. For a very long time, the HIV and AIDS scourge was killing people but the society didn't want to discuss about this disease openly. HIV and AIDS was declared a National disaster by President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya in 1999. This emanated from the number of people that lost their lives leaving behind orphans and the high amount of money that the government was spending to treat people that were infected by HIV and AIDS. Initially, people used to discuss issues related to this disease in low tones but currently the disease is being discussed openly.

The author of *Sitaki Iwe Siri* portrays how HIV and AIDS was believed to have been brought about by witchcraft. This perspective was held by a section of people in society who didn't want to get the truth about HIV and AIDS. Because of the fact that some communities equated HIV and AIDS to witchcraft, many communities feared the disease and did not want to discuss it in public.

The author of *Sitaki Iwe Siri* portrays how one of the characters called Mwalonga tried to save the life of her son Yusufu Matano and his wife Honorata Matano unsuccessfully. She used a lot of money for treatment and at the end imagined that her children had been bewitched but even her efforts of going to the witchdoctors didn't bare any fruits. Mwalonga did all this with the belief that the cause of HIV and AIDS was witchcraft. The grandchildren of Mwalonga wanted to know the cause of death of their parents but Mwalonga didn't want to share with them the name of the disease that killed their parents.

In the initial years, the grandchildren accepted the explanation that Mwalonga gave but when they grew up, Mwalonga found it difficult to tell them the truth. Mwalonga got the difficulty of explaining the cause of the deaths. This emanated from the perspective that the society was having on the disease that killed the parents of her grandchildren. HIV and AIDS was considered to be a curse within society. Any person who was seen suffering from HIV and AIDS was feared like a patient of leprosy. The person who was infected was feared like death. The disease was taken as a rubber stamp to death to

whoever was infected. Emanating from this societal perspective, Mwalonga decided not to divulge the name of the disease to her grandchildren.

5.5 The Effect of HIV and AIDS

The HIV and AIDS scourge has affected the society in many ways. Different communities have been depicted to lose their loved ones causing them to be affected psychologically and economically. Some of the women are left behind as widows and children as orphans. The author of the play, *Giza* has traced the lives of a number of characters and has shown how HIV and AIDS has shattered dreams of their lives. The author has given us the picture of the society in which AIDS has caused loss of many lives. Through the character Kichaa, the author of *Giza* has shown how AIDS has ravaged the society by causing loss of very many lives. The author says the darkness has reigned meaning that AIDS has spread like bushfire and caused loss of many lives.

It is also evident that the members of the community that was being referred in the play never used protective ways when engaging in sexual activities. Careless sex that was done by members of the community that was targeted contributed greatly to the spread of AIDS that caused loss of many lives. In this context all people that engaged in sexual activities with Davina and Mona perished because of AIDS.

The author of the play *Giza* has shown how HIV and AIDS was not discriminating the rich, the poor or anyone who had a specific rank in society. He further explains that engaging in unethical activities and behaviors contributed greatly to the infection and spread of HIV and AIDS. The author further gives an example of professor Matongo who also died after being infected with HIV and AIDS. Efforts that were made by some rich people to drain blood that was infected with the HIV virus and replace it with fresh blood did not assist in saving their lives. The author portrays a picture where HIV and AIDS had ravaged the community by causing loss of very many lives irrespective of the position one held in society.

VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has established that even though authors have different historical, economic, political, social and cultural backgrounds, the AIDS scourge affected them in a similar way. This in essence means that societal perspectives on AIDS are the same despite the differences of their backgrounds mentioned early. Even though the authors of novels, plays and short stories had similarities in their presentation of themes on AIDS but they differed on some aspects of their content.

In this study, the theory of stylistics enabled us to see that language is the only tool that can be used by the writer to pass messages to the targeted audience. Through the analysis of figures of speech and style in selected literary works we have established that various forms of style of the language used enables the author to present themes and content in a unique

and appealing way. In addition, this study has established that different styles of language used in literary works affect the way the message is received and understood. This also affects how the reader of the text receives and understands the same message. This study has established that style is the backbone of explaining the author's message.

In this study, we have also been able to show that the way or method that enables the writer to pass across the message is more important. More important in this study is the fact that language is an aspect that will define style has broad branches that can be used to elicit many meanings. It is the responsibility of the author to use language in a very creative and artistic way to present the message the way it was intended.

In this study the researcher established that the genres of novels, plays and short stories had similar themes regarding HIV and AIDS. By employing their uniqueness in their writing different authors were able to present themes that were similar or related on matters of HIV and AIDS.

Other than the three genres that were used in this study, further research can be done on the style of presentation of poetry, novella and epics. A study can also be done to compare and contrast different styles that are used by the authors to espouse the HIV and AIDS themes in selected literary works. Apart from the theory of stylistics that was employed in this study, a study can be carried out using a different theory. Other than that, research can be carried out to establish why some figures of speech and styles are not frequently used by authors in writing their creative works.

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