

Thesis Screenplay Summary for *Vuta N'Kuvute (A Tug of War)* Amil Issa Shivji - MFA Film

A Tug of War, based on Adam Shafi's award-winning Swahili novel, is a coming-of-age love story. Denge, a rebellious and idealistic young man meets Yasmin, a young Indian-Zanzibari runaway bride. Politically charged Zanzibar in its final years of British colonial rule provides a vivid and dramatic setting for their forbidden romance to unfold.

Yasmin escapes her oppressive marriage to a much older man and faces rejection from her family. Mwajuma, a feisty and talented singer takes her in to her home in the Swahili quarters of the island exposing her to a whole new effervescent world. Together they evade curfews and find freedom in dance and music.

Yasmin meets Denge who is deeply committed to the fight against British rule and devotes his days to acts of defiance. Their attraction to each other is palpable but she remains cautious of his revolutionary ideas. Denge and his friends are taking inordinate risk to translate and distribute Soviet propaganda and transport secret documents to mainland Tanganyika to further their cause.

There is an intricate underground network that falls under the surveillance of Inspector Wright, a British officer of the old school, who tracks their every move. Denge is passionate about setting his country free but he is sometimes betrayed by his youthful impulses and enjoyment of a few too many drinks! One evening he convinces his friends to wreak violent havoc at the local social club, an affluent spot for the island's wealthy residents. In doing this he puts his friends in serious danger and further provokes the ire of Inspector Wright.

Denge heads to the capital Dar es Salaam where the party leadership takes him to task for his ill-disciplined behaviour. Back on the island Yasmin is left unaware of what transpired that night. She is subjected to police interrogation as the authorities become hell-bent on getting Denge arrested. Her reluctant betrayal of the man she loves puts Denge behind bars.

She is distraught but spurred to action, putting herself at huge risk journeying to Dar to meet with the leadership. She ducks underwater to hide from the rain of bullets that claim the life of her travelling companion; her life has changed immeasurably. It is a tug of war. As the young revolutionaries pull harder, so too do the British authorities. In parallel, Yasmin and Denge are caught in a tug of war between fighting for their love and freedom.

Denge is incarcerated in intolerable conditions. Starved and beaten, he remains defiant. Yasmin and his friends resolve to try and get him out of prison. A dramatic plan is hatched with the help of a corrupt officer. Denge, now physically broken, is given a signal when doing forced labour in the fields. He just manages to escape the wardens and swim out against the tide of the Indian Ocean. As he fights to stay afloat his comrades lift him into a canoe and row him to Yasmin who is waiting on a dhow. They fall into each other's arms acknowledging their love is right but the times are not ready. They know they will be reunited when history allows.