

CLASH OF  
EPISTEMES:  
Knowledge  
of HIV/AIDS  
in Swahili  
Literary Genres  
Cristina Nicolini



**ATrA**

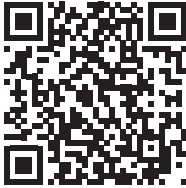
*Aree di transizione linguistiche e culturali in Africa*

**8**



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# Foreword

FAROUK TOPAN  
Professor Emeritus  
Aga Khan University

Three facets contribute to the originality of this study by Cristina Nicolini. The first, the main aim of the book, is to investigate the nature of epistemes as part of the panorama of Afrophone literatures and philosophies (building on the works of Alena Rettová and others in this field). It explores how, for instance, the articulation of knowledge through various media in society can be explored as meaningful philosophical discourse. Further, it asks whether such discourses are convergent or divergent in their conceptual bases, particularly in the way they interact with ‘new knowledge’ external to their culture.

Nicolini’s attempts at answering such questions take us to the second facet of the study, namely, the employment of Swahili literature as a conduit for philosophical discourse. She delves into two genres for the answers: novels and drama, providing a very useful historical narrative and critique of their writing vis-à-vis the third facet of the study: the affliction of HIV/AIDS which affected many African countries, including Tanzania, during the 1980s and beyond. She conducted in-depth research of the two facets during her six months of fieldwork in Tanzania, interviewing authors, University lecturers, officials and workers of NGOs, student actors of a theatre group, a healer, and, in the process, even co-producing a performance of a play (written in

1989, thus one of the earliest on HIV/AIDS). She thus had an excellent opportunity of engaging in discussions with the major participants and stakeholders of both Swahili literature and key educators about HIV/AIDS, among them Professor Aldin Mutembei, and the Swahili novelist, William Mkufya whose trilogy she discusses in the book alongside works by other authors, altogether six Swahili dramas and four novels. The study of drama and novels in correlation is a rare occurrence in Swahili literature: Nicolini is to be commended for bringing the two genres in a fruitful confluence.

The study also owes its richness to the inclusion of popular literature, represented here by theatre for development, and its engagement with popular notions about HIV/AIDS in what is termed “indigenous knowledge”, spanning both the empirical and the supernatural.

Cristina Nicolini’s book has revealed different avenues for discussion and further research.

London, 7 March 2022

# List of abbreviations and acronyms

ABC – Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condom use  
AMREF - African Medical Research Foundation  
ARV/ARTs - Anti-retroviral Drugs/Anti-retroviral Therapies  
BAKITA - *Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa*: National Council of Swahili Language  
BASATA - *Baraza la Sanaa la Taifa*: National Council of Arts  
BAYOICE - Bagamoyo Youth Centre  
CBT - Community Based Theatre  
COSTECH - Commission for Science and Technology  
COVID-19 - Corona Virus December 2019  
CVM/APA - Community of Volunteers around the World & African Partners for AIDS  
DSM - Dar es Salaam  
EN – External Narrator  
FASDO - *Faru Arts and Sports Development Organization Tanzania*  
FGDs - Focus Group Discussions  
FGM/C - Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting  
GBV - Gender Based Violence  
HIV/AIDS - Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

IKS - Institute of Kiswahili Studies  
IKSs - Indigenous Knowledge Systems  
IMF - International Monetary Fund  
IN – Internal Narrator  
INGOs - International Non-Governmental Organizations  
KARP - Kagera AIDS Research Project  
MAF - Medical Aid Foundation  
NACP - National AIDS Control Programme  
NIMR - National Institute of Medical Research  
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization  
P.C. - Personal Communication  
PLWHIV/AIDS - People Living with HIV/AIDS  
PO - Participant Observation  
SAPs - Structural Adjustment Programmes  
SOAS - School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London  
STD/Is - Sexually Transmitted Disease/Infections  
TACAIDS - Tanzanian Commission for AIDS  
TASUBA - *Taasisi ya Sanaa na Utamaduni Bagamoyo*: The Bagamoyo Arts and Cultural Institute  
Tfd - Theatre for Development  
THIS - Tanzania HIV Impact Survey  
TUKI – *Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili*: Department of Swahili Research  
UDSM - University of Dar es Salaam  
UNAIDS - United Nation Commission for AIDS  
UWAMABA – *Umoja wa Watu Wanaoishi na Matumaini*: The Union of People Living with Hope of Bagamoyo  
UVIKO-19 - *Umoja wa Virusi vya Korona* (the cluster of coronaviruses) 2019  
VVU/UKIMWI - *Virusi Vya UKIMWI/Ukosefu wa Kinga Mwilini* (the lack of body defences)  
WB - World Bank

**Book Titles:**

D - *The Dilemma*  
ED - *Embe Dodo*  
F - *Firauni*  
FUS - *Face Under the Sea*  
G - *Giza*  
KC - *Kilio Chetu*  
KJ - *Kilio cha Jeska*  
KH - *Kizazi Hiki*  
KK - *Kisiki Kikavu*  
KKM - *Kuwa Kwa Maua*

MR - *Mwalimu Rose*  
ULF - *Ua La Faraja*  
UM - *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa*  
O - *Orodha*  
PFH - *Pilgrims From Hell*  
WW - *The Wicked Walk*  
ZZ - *Ziraili na Zirani*



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study has been written during the challenging times of the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, in Swahili named *UVIKO-19* (*Umoja wa Virusi vya Korona* - the cluster of coronaviruses) (BAKITA 2020). In this I aim to explore epistemologies and philosophical thoughts arising from a stream of Swahili literature dealing with the well-known pandemic of HIV/AIDS, in Swahili *VVU/UKIMWI* (*Virusi Vya Ukimwi/Ukosefu wa Kinga Mwilini* - the lack of body defences) (BAKITA 2004), which has been threatening humanity since the 1980s.

I chose to explore two genres of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS, namely drama and novels, written by authors coming from mainland Tanzania, so as to conduct a thorough stylistic and thematic analysis of literature as a basis to investigate the potential of this body of literature to articulate philosophies. Therefore, grounded in anthropological scholarship, this study investigates literature to excavate philosophical thoughts and to explore themes embedded in philosophy.

The choice of investigating literature dealing with HIV/AIDS stems from my previous student fieldwork experiences in Tanzania, during my Bachelor's

degree (2011 - 2012) and Master's degree (2014 - 2015), during which Professor Aldin Mutembei illustrated the importance of carrying out research on the HIV/AIDS issue from a literary perspective and where, as a volunteer, I collaborated with HIV-positive women on an HIV/AIDS education project. Therefore, I embarked on this further challenge to connect stylistics and literature with philosophy.

The research methodology has been designed through a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and textual analysis. This research project has been conceptualised as a phenomenological and hermeneutical study which aims to, firstly, collect empirical data paying attention to subjective experiences of the research participants, and, secondly, to analyse and provide an interpretation of the literary materials collected.

Particularly, the research is focused on William Mkufya, a Tanzanian intellectual, with whom I worked closely during fieldwork research, and whose novels use HIV/AIDS as a trial for philosophical reflections on the meaning of life and death: "*the two pillars of all philosophical enquiries*" (Mkufya p.c.). Moreover, I investigated other texts and genres – theatre productions and plays, to better contextualise Mkufya's works and to enhance the epistemological investigation.

HIV/AIDS can be considered a peculiar *illness*<sup>1</sup> because of not only its mysterious origins or, better saying, rumours and myths that the virus triggered since its first appearance in both the North and the South of the globe. But also, for the impact that the incurable illness, which is strictly intertwined in both socio-cultural and political-economic nets, has always had on human bodies and lives. Therefore, HIV/AIDS results an interesting trial to be taken for investigation, as it is a topic deeply intermingled with biomedicine, socio-political, economical, and moral questions. Furthermore, by analysing literary productions on HIV/AIDS, contrasting epistemologies of healing as well as different ontologies as causes for the disease emerged. Even though discourses on HIV/AIDS education and prevention have been monopolized by a positivist epistemology of science, complementary epistemologies cooperate with science thus contributing to an assemblage of knowledge.

In conclusion, even though a literary and philosophical investigation of HIV/AIDS could be felt to be a "bourgeois luxury" (Dilger 2017b: 100), because people primarily need an actual cure, by expanding epistemological boundaries, education on the illness is not excluded. In fact, since epistemologies in practice are the foundation of education, a study on epistemologies

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<sup>1</sup> In this research, following from Kleinman's terminology (Kleinman 2006; Quaranta 2006c; Rödlach 2006), I mainly refer to HIV/AIDS as an *illness* which implies a wholistic condition of "being ill" including the physical *disease*, the socio-political relations to the condition of *sickness* and psychical subjective experience of *malaise*. It can also be defined as *malady* (*ugonjwa*), which refers to both a moral defect and a physical illness (Langwick 2011: 11).

can contribute to highlight alternative modes of HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND DATA ON HIV/AIDS

The first case of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania was reported in the North-Western part of the country, in the Kagera region, in 1983, where it was known as *Slim* (Iliffe 2006; Setel 1999a; Mutembei 2001; 2009a; Epstein 2007). Then the disease was given the Swahili scientific name of *VVU/UKIMWP*<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the main responses were, on the one hand, the foreign intervention of the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) (Bourgault 2003), which from 1993 to 1997 “scrambled to rescue” the country from HIV/AIDS (Mutembei 2001: 59), and, on the other hand, the appearance of a “culture of AIDS” (Barz & Cohen 2011). Thus, HIV/AIDS turns out to be one of the major themes in East African and Tanzanian contemporary literary productions in different genres in both Swahili and English (Mutembei 2009a; 2013; 2015).

In Tanzania, the *National AIDS Control Programme* (NACP) was launched within the Ministry of Health in 1988. In 2000, the *Tanzania Commission for AIDS* (TACAIDS) was established to coordinate all stakeholders involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Finally, anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) and the National HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign were launched between 2004 and in 2007 (Askew 2015: 260; Whiteside 2016).

In Tanzania nowadays, HIV/AIDS is no longer perceived as an emergency issue, because of the decrease in rates of HIV infection and mortality. For instance, taking as a parameter the HIV rate of infection among the adult population aged between 15 - 49, the rate dropped from 9.42% in 1997 (UNAIDS 1998), to 8.8% in 2003 (UNAIDS 2005), and then halved to 4.5% in 2017 (UNAIDS. TZ 2018<sup>3</sup>). The results of the *Tanzania HIV Impact Survey* (THIS)<sup>4</sup> indicate that the current prevalence of HIV among adults aged 15 - 49 years in the Pwani region is 5.5% and in Dar es Salaam 4.7%.

Furthermore, in the country there is widespread knowledge and awareness of the HIV virus amongst the population, who have been overwhelmed by over thirty years of HIV/AIDS education and prevention projects and campaigns<sup>5</sup>. For instance, knowledge about HIV prevention among young people aged 15 - 24 is reported at 43.08% of the total population (UNAIDS 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Another acronym for AIDS is MAHABUSI: *Matokeo ya Hali ya Burungiko la Silaha za mwili* (the result of the upsetting state of body defences; EMAU 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Country factsheets online UNAIDS Tanzania, last visited 20-01-2020.

<sup>4</sup> Final report 2017 obtained from TACAIDS-DSM visited on 9-10-2018.

<sup>5</sup> Reactions obtained from the majority of local participants who I interviewed during field research 2018/19.

However, it is fundamental not to underestimate the current scale of the mortal disease, the transmission of which is still ongoing. In fact, in Tanzania there are 1 500 000 People Living with HIV (PLWHIV) among adults and children and 32 000 deaths from AIDS per annum (UNAIDS 2017). Therefore, the goal of this research will be to contribute not only to the production of knowledge as such but also to cope with the HIV/AIDS issue in Tanzania.

### 1.3. MAIN ARGUMENT

I argue that Swahili literature, as an example of Afrophone literature, articulates local discourses and philosophical thoughts which are drawn from an “African epistemological locus” (Kresse 2005b). Thus, I am analysing different Swahili literary genres from Tanzania, particularly the local theorisation about HIV/AIDS provided by Mkufya’s novels, as an original contribution to not only unearth African epistemes (Kresse 2005b) developing local philosophical speculations, but also to fill the gap into the epistemological debate (Western vs African epistemes).

Swahili literature appears to be an arena where encounters between diverse epistemes are displayed and where Afrocentric knowledge (-s) and science clash and live together between challenge and negotiation. Thus, literature can be a middle ground, capable of filling the gap in the knowledge debate “moving the centre of knowledge” (Thiong’o 1993) towards a new balance.

### 1.4. RESEARCH RATIONALE

Even though scientific knowledge of HIV/AIDS is quite widespread amongst the sexually active groups of the Tanzanian population, this does not correspond to an actual change in behaviour because of the wide gap between scientific knowledge, which is mainly described by International Health Organisations and international NGOs, and local understanding and perceptions (Offe 2001; Dilger 2012). Therefore, Tanzanian authors and artists attempt to connect local knowledge and behaviour so as to prevent HIV/AIDS effectively, particularly by means of literature and performative arts.

Although non-scientific knowledge has been underestimated by the mainstream scientific knowledge, which informs HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns, “other epistemologies” emerge in literature. In fact, Tanzanian authors attempt to bridge the gap between scientific medicine and local knowledge by means of literary (stylistic, thematic and narratological) devices as strategic forms of communication for HIV/AIDS prevention. How exactly this is done is the topic of this study.

Therefore, I do believe that it is necessary to overcome the problematic discourses of “power and knowledge” (Foucault 1998) of “Otherness” (Mudimbe 1988) and of “epistemological ethnocentrism” (Mudimbe 1988: 28), by researching the African context. The aim is “counterpointing the epistemologies of the South with the dominant epistemologies of the global North” (Santos 2014: 13) and moving towards “Africa-centred Knowledges” “entangled, contextual and contingent” (Cooper & Morrell 2014: 3; Mbembe 2001), which are strategically located in an intermediate space between binaries, with the objective of combining “paradigmatic oppositions” (Mudimbe 1988: 4).

## 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How is the HIV/AIDS illness perceived and represented in literature?

How are Tanzanian authors committed to figuring out an original formula to communicate about HIV/AIDS, merging different ontologies and epistemologies in the same text?

How can scientific knowledge be connected to local knowledge to foster an actual change in people’s behaviour? How can cultural traditions be merged with scientific progress, and scientific epistemologies be combined with “other epistemologies” to prevent HIV/AIDS effectively?

## 1.6. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study, the originality of which lies in privileged access to original materials granted by William Mkufya, whom I gratefully acknowledge, are not only to highlight the philosophical potential of Swahili literature, which is a major contribution to the panorama of Afrophone literature and philosophy, but also to contribute to a *decolonization in praxis* by both unearthing African epistemes and detecting epistemologies other than positivism in literature.

I will explore plural epistemic interactions through diverse genres, drama and performance as well as different types of novels, according to their stylistic and narrative characteristics.

Therefore, other objectives will be to demonstrate how Swahili literature can be both an exemplary medium of inclusion, with the potentiality to harmonize the clash between discordant epistemes, and a textual platform, designed for being the narrative aspect of philosophy (Hountondji 1983), which engenders a self-critique aimed to enhance “African discourses” in “a language authentically African” (Mbembe 2002: 244).

## 1.7. ETHICS, METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

### *Positionality Statement*

While I am aware that my background as a white, Italian woman, who is HIV-negative can affect the research, I have benefited from my previous experience in the field. I lived in Tanzania for three long periods both as a student<sup>6</sup> and as a researcher, and I have advanced competency in speaking and understanding Swahili. Particularly, when I conducted my fieldwork research as a PhD candidate (2018 - 2019), I was inserted into a neutral, cooperative and friendly environment, both inside and outside the academic context, sharing knowledge and experience with many local participants such as academic staff, other researchers, authors and artists; thus, I will do my best to assume a position of being an *insider* rather than an *outsider* in my research. Nonetheless, I would like to avoid the illusion of the “zero-point epistemology” (Mignolo 2009: 160), given that my own knowledge is situated and limited (Kresse 2007). Thus, although I am researching from a Western academic environment, the objective is to highlight local epistemologies through the perspectives and interpretation provided by my research participants.

### *Methodology and Ethics*

This study consists of two kinds of datasets: from the literary perspective, a collection of Swahili texts will be analysed, and from the anthropological perspective, I analyse the responses of human participants’ feelings engendered by and perceptions of the illness, which are embedded in rhetoric and narrative. Furthermore, ethnographic research implies an “anthropology of philosophy” - by means of anthropological enquiries genuine local philosophical discourses and practices can be explored (Kresse 2007: 11 – 35; Barber 2007).

This research has been crafted drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, consisting of participant observation, targeted interviews and focus group discussions, with the aim to collect texts written in Swahili (interview transcripts, performance scripts, published novels and dramas) as primary sources upon which I perform a thorough textual analysis, not only inserted into the theoretical framework of epistemologies, but also interpreted with the support of local participants’ reactions, which I obtained through the privileged access to formal/informal interviews and other communication with them (Kvale 1996).

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<sup>6</sup> Scholarship for exchange student experiences awarded from “L’Orientale” University of Naples under the bilateral agreement between “L’Orientale” and the University of Dar es Salaam. I was awarded twice during my Bachelor’s (2011 - 2012) and Master’s (2014 - 2015) degrees.

The main working language utilized throughout all the fieldwork research, as the language of everyday communications, interviews, discussions and for written sources and documents, is the Tanzanian national language Swahili.

Before leaving for my field trip, I devoted the entire summer to fieldwork preparation. Firstly, I chose Professor Aldin Mutembei for local supervision<sup>7</sup>, as he is an expert in Swahili literature dealing with HIV/AIDS, and himself an author of a well-known novel (2005a) on HIV/AIDS.

Secondly, to conduct research ethically, according to local rules and legislation, I obtained all the required research permits: the *Ethical Clearance Certificate* issued by NIMR (*National Institute for Medical Research*), which is required to obtaining the compulsory *Research Clearance Certificate* issued by COSTECH (*Commission for Science and Technology*), propaedeutic to obtaining the *Resident Permit class C* for students and researchers issued by the Immigration Headquarter of DSM.

The research institutions in Tanzania not only have been indoctrinated by modern scientific principles, especially on HIV/AIDS, which is identified predominantly as a biomedical challenge investigated by health researchers, but they have also developed an ethical code related to HIV/AIDS (*Dakar Declaration* 1994 in Dilger 2017a; Dilger 2017b: 102). This was clearly shown in the process of obtaining research clearance, which previously required the ethical clearance approval from the Institute of Medical Research to conduct any study involving human participants. Since my research was conducted via a humanistic and not scientific approach, many points in the *NIMR application booklet for ethics approval* were answered as “not applicable”. Nevertheless, I stated clearly that I would not carry out research with PLWHIV/AIDS and that, in this case, I would keep the material as confidential. The interviews would have conducted with adult people, taking care neither to ask personal stories nor to ask about health conditions. Finally, I declared that I would not address the topic of the illness except through fictional works.

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out using Qualitative Research Methods (Mason 2002; Madden 2017) consisting of in-depth person-centred interviews, limited focus group discussions (FGDs), supplemented by substantial participant observation (PO) and extensive informal conversations (Kvale 1996).

I used the technique of participant observation not only to investigate the life of my principal research participants, as the most prominent author of literature related to HIV/AIDS, but also while attending live performances and theatrical outreach events, which were both video and tape recorded, and in

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<sup>7</sup> Prof A.K. Mutembei is a senior lecturer in Swahili Literature and the Director of Confucius Institute at the University of Dar es Salaam. He has a PhD (2001) on HIV/AIDS in Tanzanian oral arts, and he also cooperated as Luhaya native speaker interpreter for KARP (*Kagera AIDS Research Project*).

cooperation with chosen local NGOs involved in projects on HIV/AIDS, as examples of grassroots responses to the issue through arts and performance, especially young people's theatre groups.

Participant observation (PO), from an ontological perspective, shows interactions, actions, behaviours and the language of people, such as everyday conversations enriched with rhetoric, in a real-life setting. PO is an interactive technique that brings the researcher into a close relationship with research participants (De Laine 2000). "During PO the researcher, who is absorbed in the field setting context, goes through a novice experience as a rite of passage" (De Laine 2000: 88 - 101).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with directors and local artists members of youth theatre group dealing with HIV/AIDS. FGD is a technique to obtain common thoughts, perceptions and attitudes on a peculiar issue among a small and homogeneous group of people through a guided discussion, which lasts around 90 minutes (Songa 2015; Mutembei 2001).

Finally, the targeted interviews were conducted with local writers, playwrights and novelists, performers, and university professors. The interviews utilised the person-centred targeted interviewing technique, where the participant is treated as both informant providing general information about the cultural context and as respondent expressing individual experiences in relation to those cultural contexts and values (Halley 2012; Attree 2010a).

The qualitative research interview is, from a postmodern perspective, an arena where knowledge is produced by different means, such as knowledge as conversation, the narrative knowledge embodied in storytelling, knowledge generated by the language medium, and by the "inter-view" or exchange of views between two persons who converse about a shared theme (Kvale 1996: 44). The knowledge production is followed by the hermeneutical process of interpretation of the dialogue or conversation about a portion of human life transformed into a text. Then the phenomenological approach consists in consciousness and direct description of the life world experienced by people (Kvale 1996: 38 - 58). Thus, I conducted interviews with as many authors as possible, because before carrying out textual analysis of their works, I prefer visualising people's faces in front of those texts, talking with them in Swahili and being inserted into their environment.

The choice of the interviewed was focused on the authors of the selected primary sources and academic experts in relevant topics for my research. The participants were previously contacted, either by phone or in person, to book appointments for formal interviews, which were usually held at their home or workplaces. Contemporarily, I provided them with the research participant information sheet. Subsequently, before starting the interview and the recording I was always conscientious to have received written consent from the interviewees.

The in-depth interviews, which were conducted in Swahili, were based on a well-structured scheme of questions<sup>8</sup> divided into four main parts: interviewee's data sheet (optional); a first group of questions centred on arts and literature as a medium to deal with HIV/AIDS, drawn from my "MPhil core chapter" and research questions (Nicolini 2018); a special section on African theatre and performance dedicated to playwrights and performers, if applicable, and a final section entirely dedicated and moulded according to the participants' own creative work/s. The number of questions was variable according to the individual participant. The open questions could easily be adapted to suit each participant, leaving space for an interactive conversation which usually lasted about one hour. Conversely, FGDs were semi-structured questions more oriented to an open conversation among all participants.

All the interviews, FGDs, and live performances were both video and audio recorded, only after obtaining written consent from all participants. On rare occasions the informants gave permission to be only voice recorded but not filmed<sup>9</sup>. All the research participants read the *research participant information sheet*, a detailed information sheet about my project, which I prepared from the SOAS template, and that I made available in both English and Swahili. Then the participants agreed to and signed the *SOAS research participant consent form*, also available in both English and Swahili<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the authors of my core primary sources granted me copyright permission<sup>11</sup>.

According to ethical clearance principles<sup>12</sup> I declare that, with reference to the research participants, I obtained the informed consent from them to participate in the research, and that I shall respect the confidentiality of the information obtained. I guaranteed the participants the right to ask questions about the project, to withdraw from the study and to choose whether to be named or anonymized<sup>13</sup>. Beside this, I asked permission for translation/transcription of the interviews, as well as for both audio and/or video recording of their contributions. I also provided the interviewed with my business card to enable them to contact me at any time. Finally, I declared that I would be responsible for protecting the participants involved from any harm, and for respecting their personal dignity following the practice of the country with reference to international declarations and conventions (the *Nuremberg Code*

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendices: sample of interview questions in Swahili and English.

<sup>9</sup> I was equipped with both a voice recorder and a HD digital camera.

<sup>10</sup> See *SOAS Research Participant Information Sheet Template (2018)* and *SOAS Research Participant Consent Form Template (2018)* (<https://www.soas.ac.uk/dparesearch/file150711>).

<sup>11</sup> See *SOAS Copyright Permission Request Text*.

<sup>12</sup> I successfully completed the *Epigeum Research Integrity - Arts and Humanities* Course (December 2017).

<sup>13</sup> All the research participants referred to in this study expressed their written consent.

1947) and the basic ethical principles of the *Belmont Report*, such as respect for persons, beneficence towards participants, justice and approval consent. Lastly, all the material will be treated as confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that ethics cannot be standardized corresponding to scientific procedures, yet contextualized subjectively according to the epistemological shift (Dilger 2017b: 118).

#### *Fieldwork Research (Tanzania 2018 - 2019) – Data Collection*

My research project consists of six months of SOAS-approved field work research in the Pwani region in Tanzania, particularly in the urban context of the cities of Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, conducted from October 2018 to March 2019. The main activities undertaken during this period were directed at the following targets: data collection of primary sources, developing research skills such as communication skills for conducting interviews, as well as participant observation, and improvement of Swahili language proficiency, which was the only language used throughout the research period. In fact, having an MA and a BA in Swahili literature, I was able to communicate in Swahili all the time, and also to analyse primary sources written in Swahili.

The field trip was focused on texts and people, in other words, my aim was to communicate with authors and to collect their written and/or performed productions.

Once in the field, I renewed my Tanzanian driving licence, and after having rented a small Suzuki, which became popular among my research participants as “*kopo la nyanya – tomatoes can*”, I was able to roam through the over congested roads of Dar es Salaam. I planned to visit institutes and organizations dealing with HIV/AIDS, as well as with arts and literature, such as Colleges of Arts, the Departments of Performing Arts and the Institute of *Kiswahili* Studies (IKS) of Dar es Salaam, TASUBA – Institute of Arts and Culture of Bagamoyo, and small locally run NGOs.

The most fruitful experiences for the research outcome were the following: firstly, the experience of participant observation that I conducted with William Mkufya, a prominent author of novels dealing with HIV/AIDS through a philosophical prism. At first, I spent a period living at Mkufya’s place with his family, particularly his wife and their two daughters. Subsequently, we met regularly once a week, alternating formal interviews with extensive informal talks and *lectures* on his own works throughout the research period. I collected more than six hours of recordings while we were discussing and analysing together each one of his works, and he gave me permissions to translate the novel *Ua La Faraja* into Italian (30-11-2018), and copyright permission to use his trilogy on HIV/AIDS in my research. The experience with

Mkufya was a real initiation rite for me into a new mode of thinking. In fact, his ideas and reflections deeply influenced my viewpoint not only towards this research but also towards life.

The empirical experience in Mkufya's life and works, our interviews and personal communications have been my entry point into epistemological reflections. Mkufya became my "research guide", who shared his insights into his literary productions so that I would understand him better as both an individual and an author. Moreover, the encounter between our different background knowledge and worldviews emerged sometimes during discussions. For instance, he told me: "you wouldn't have asked me this question if the cultural understanding had been the same in Africa as in Europe". In fact, one of Mkufya's objectives as an author is to operate a "*strengthening of epistemes*"<sup>14</sup> that is a *positive and productive interaction between different epistemes*" (interview 30-10-2018), which can be accomplished through literature and experimentation.

Furthermore, after fieldwork we have continued our collaboration, exchanging personal communications, documents, and interviews by email (from April 2019 onwards).

Secondly, several times from November 2018 to February 2019, I met Chande Nabora, the representative of a local lead NGO, FASDO (*Faru Arts and Sports Development Organization Tanzania*), which is located in the neighbourhood of *Temeke Maghorofani* in Dar es Salaam (chapter 3). From our meetings two theatrical outreach projects on HIV/AIDS were produced, directed by Nabora and performed by the youth theatre group of the association. Finally, the first performance was used by FASDO's members to produce an original short film of about 30 minutes, called *Pima!* (Test for HIV!)<sup>15</sup>.

Additionally, I carried out not only a formal interview with Nabora, but I also conducted several informal conversations with all the FASDO members and one FGD with the actors of the two theatrical performances.

Likewise, I acted as participant observer in the performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa*<sup>16</sup> based on Ngozi's homonymous drama (1989), which was studied and performed by the bachelor's degree students at the College of Performing Arts – University of Dar es Salaam, during the examination period - February 2019. They used the performance to conduct their assessment, while I used it for my research project. In fact, during the official performance of the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2019 not only I was mentioned as the executive director, but I also performed dancing together with the actors in the final dance (chapter 3).

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<sup>14</sup> Epistemology: *elimu ya ufahamu* in Swahili.

<sup>15</sup> I acknowledge FASDO for the file video of the short film produced in December 2018.

<sup>16</sup> I video recorded the entire performance after obtaining written informed consent from all the actors.

Furthermore, during the period of research on the ground, I attended other live performances collecting a total of more than five hours of recorded materials<sup>17</sup>.

Initially, I attended the “37th Festival of Arts and Culture” held at TASUBA Bagamoyo College of Arts, during the week between 20 and 27 October 2018. The topic of the festival was patriotism and national unity, as expressed through either traditional ethnical *ngoma* or contemporary dance music performances.

In the same period, in Bagamoyo, I came into contact with another local NGO, BAYOICE (*Bagamoyo Youth Centre*), an association dedicated to youth empowerment through dramatic arts, and which works in partnership with the Bagamoyo branch of the Italian NGO, CVM/APA (*Community of Volunteers around the World* enterprise with *African Partners for AIDS*), committed to fight HIV/AIDS through gender empowerment. BAYOICE drama group, consists of young actors, both men and women. The three theatrical skits that I attended on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2018 were cross sections of everyday life in Tanzanian middle class, dealing with HIV/AIDS, gender discrimination, and domestic violence. The first skit was the story of Josephina who, exchanging favours with a peer, discovers herself to be HIV positive and pregnant. Consequently, she is chased away from school and from her family. The remaining two skits dealt with gender rights, illustrating examples of domestic violence and abused wives. The plays were a mix of semi prepared plots and performers’ improvisation, of which I collected 16 shots among rehearsals and actual skits. Additionally, the BAYOICE drama group was available to take part into a short FGD, which was held at CVM office.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, I bought a ticket for *Bahati - A Show to Inspire Changes*<sup>18</sup> performed at *The Little Theatre of Dar es Salaam*. It was a musical sponsored by the Embassy of Switzerland (Swiss Aid Agency), which focused on secondary school children’s education to avoid pregnancies among teenagers.

Finally, on the occasion of the 1<sup>st</sup> December World AIDS Day at the *Nafasi Art Space* of Dar es Salaam the stage performance of *Fear of What?*, an allegorical dance performed by *Camilla Ekelof Productions* in collaboration with *Dance Garage* and *DDI*, was presented. The dance reflected all the main threats to human life: AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, war, politics, poverty and stealing.

Conducting interviews was a central part of my research on the ground; therefore, I collected a wide sample of in-depth person-centred interviews<sup>19</sup>, consisting of more than twenty hours of recordings, lasting about one hour

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendices: List of Audio-Visual materials collected on the field. All video and/or audio materials quoted throughout the study (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6) are listed.

<sup>18</sup> <https://bahati.or.tz/>

<sup>19</sup> All the interviewees and actors/performers, who are mentioned throughout this study, whom I acknowledge, gave me written consent to take part in my research.

each. The nineteen interviews<sup>20</sup> were conducted with eleven writers, among them some authors of plays and novels analysed in this study and other writers who dealt with HIV/AIDS in either their novels or theatre works. Five among them were university lecturers and professors, two are representatives of locally run NGOs dealing with HIV/AIDS education and a traditional healer.

On February 4, 2019, Mkufya accompanied me to visit a *falaki*, an Islamic faith-healer and my conversation with the healer demonstrated the relevance and the local popularity of herbalists and diviners. These practitioners are both depositories and channels for a local epistemology of healing, which is an example of the “epistemic resistance” (Meneses 2007) of traditional medicine, which coexists with and works alongside modern hospitals in the country.

Beside this, I conducted two FGDs with the two youth theatre groups of BAYOICE and FASDO, where the young performers participated in sharing their experiences as sprouting actors and actresses, committed to communicating a sensitive message to their peers by means of theatrical outreach.

Lastly, I had the opportunity to conduct an interview with the representative of UWAMABA (*the Union of People Living with Hope of Bagamoyo*), and one FGD with a small group of female UWAMABA members, whose objective is “to delink the HIV transmission from sexual relationships” (22-10-2018). This NGO is a locally managed association of PLWHIV/AIDS which works in partnership with the CVM/APA in Bagamoyo. As the members of UWAMABA are people living with HIV/AIDS, the content of the interview and the FGD will be kept as confidential, although the participants gave me full consent to participate in this research project.

To sum up, the data collection outcome consisted of a good number of published narratives, yet few live performances and a significant collection of interviews and communication with human participants to be used in the second part of the study, which consists of a thorough textual analysis of literature. My close reading of the Swahili texts also includes authors’ voices to produce a polyphony between the authors and me as a methodological strategy to include different epistemologies and worldviews in my study.

## 1.8. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE REPRESENTATIONS OF HIV/AIDS

This section consists of a literature review, which draws on socio-anthropological and literary scholarship, to illustrate how HIV/AIDS is conceptualised and represented in Africa from socio-anthropological, biomedical, and artistic perspectives.

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendices: List of Interviews. All the interviews and FGDs mentioned throughout the study (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6) are listed.

### 1.8.1. SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The “socio-cultural syndrome” of HIV/AIDS, consists of different symptoms appearing at the same time and incorporating social, cultural and economic aspects, one inseparable from the other (Gong 1985; Trostle 2005).

HIV/AIDS has been described as “a plague of paradoxes” (Setel 1999a: 236), and each unveiled paradox corresponds to one of the main causes of the transmission of the virus, in close relation with the socio-cultural context. The main one corresponds to the equation where modernity is seen as equal to vulnerability. Modernity, which started during the colonial period, was accompanied by the consequent fading of the traditional forms of education. This caused new material and sexual desires as well as high-risk behaviours (*tabia* and *tamaa*) among younger people. Among the Haya and the Chagga in Tanzania, the epidemic is closely linked to “local patterns of productivity and reproductivity as well as sociality and sexuality” which have undergone changes (Setel 1999b: 142). The traditional rural pattern, based on the reproduction and perpetration of the clan, has been transformed into sexual enjoyment in the urban context. The determining vectors of the spread of the virus are the new desires, both material and sexual; the movement of people - “the migrant as a vector” (Setel 1999a,b,c; Mutembei 2001; Bourgault 2003; Iliffe 2006); the consequent separation of spouses over a prolonged period of time - “Acquired Spousal Deficiency Syndrome” (Setel 1999a: 75); and the resulting social reproduction crisis.

“AIDS doesn’t show its face” (Smith 2014: 18); In fact, the “Acquired Income Deficiency Syndrome” (Farmer 1992: 95) of AIDS is nothing but an “interplay between human agency and powerful forces: deepening poverty and political dislocation” (Farmer 1995: 6; Quaranta 2006c). Schoepf (1995) defines the concept better as the “incorporation of social inequality and social injustice”, above all “for women in patriarchal African society” (Schoepf 1995; Obbo 1995). Since the main cause of the spread of AIDS in Africa is unprotected heterosexual sex, the more vulnerable are adolescent women (Schoepf 1995; Obbo 1995) due to economic dependence and the impact missionary ideology had on how sexuality was reinvented in ways similar to other traditions in the colonial era (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Ranger & Kimambo 1976; Hasu 1999: 87ff; Falen 2008).

Epidemiology and sociology merge in defining “risk behaviour groups” very often condemning local practices and beliefs in the name of prevention, but under religious and moral influences shaped by categories of Western thinking (Farmer 1992; Schoepf 1995; Quaranta 2006a). Therefore, the spread of the virus has become seen as “accusation and blame” in the form of sorcery paradigms from inside or conspiracy theories from outside (Farmer 1992: 192; Rödlach 2006). The denial of AIDS in Africa and the development of alternative theories are manifestations of the resistance to Western inter-

pretations of the virus, and the symptoms are metonymies of incorporated social tensions (Quaranta 2006a,b).

Traditional customs such as life-cycle rituals have undergone changes with the occurrence of two determining historical events: colonization and Christianization first, and the appearance of AIDS afterwards, at the “end of the road” (Hasu 1999). Thus, the compromise between the pre-colonial customs of the past and the European customs of the present has led to the formation of a new local identity, which is traditional, but at the same time Christian and modern. Through colonization and the spread of a monetized economy, a new and excessive desire emerged for material goods; as a result, AIDS has been explained as an act of sorcery triggered by witches jealous of wealthy people (Rödlach 2006). The concept of *tamaa* refers also to sexual desires, especially among young people. Thus, the transmission of AIDS is attributed to alien spirits and *majini* (jinns), who have illicit sexual relations with their victims, infecting them (Hasu 1999: 410, 430).

The AIDS epidemic would therefore be caused by modern economic and moral crisis and incorporated in the bodies of young people (Hasu 1999; Quaranta 2006b); “She was bewitched and caught an illness similar to AIDS” (Mshana *et al.* 2006: 45). The legend of *Popobawa*<sup>21</sup> would fall into the group of supernatural legends and the AIDS conspiracy theories would serve to explain the transgression of the cultural norms and the illicit sexuality through the use of metaphors and riddles (Thompson 2017).

In African cultures, those who do not respect ritual prescriptions are castigated by means of “punitive theology” (Trinitapoli & Weinreb 2012: 5) which can be a specific curse called *Chira*, in the Luo culture, (Dilger 2008; 2009; Hussein 1988), or, *Bakuntumile* among the Haya (Mutembei 2009a), with symptoms similar to AIDS, and which causes the death of the entire bloodline of the guilty person.

Death from AIDS contaminates the entire kinship structure of the deceased. Consequently, in the metaphoric “ill modernity” (Dilger 2008: 209), the young HIV infected, and their relatives invent strategies to deal with and justify the disease in religious and moral terms (Dilger 2008). The interpretation of HIV/AIDS is embedded in local ritual practices such as burial ceremonies, a rite of passage through which the local population can restore the moral integrity of a relative who has died of AIDS. The performance of ritual burial not only averts the deceased’s revenge against relatives, who denied him/her support during illness, but also protects the family from further affliction coming from the “bad death” caused by the stigmatised disease (Dilger 2006: 117). In fact, the obligation to cure and assist the sick is embedded in “kinship obligations and household constellations” (Dilger 2010: 119).

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<sup>21</sup> A shapeshifter evil spirit of the Zanzibari tradition, who gifted with oversized genitalia sodomizes victims of both sexes (Thompson 2017).

In the case of terminally ill people the cure is entrusted to the family of the ill person, together with home care treatment offered by NGOs. However, on the one hand, the rules of the clan impose to offer support to the family of the ill person until death; on the other hand, the return of the AIDS sufferer to their home brings shame and stigma to families (Dilger 2010). AIDS is a “social death sentence” (Smith 2014: 18), a “disruptive force in the reproductive order of kinship and community” (Dilger 2010: 3).

The responses to tackle HIV/AIDS in Africa are interlinked through three different discourses: biomedical treatments (hospitals), religious faith-healing (Christian pastors or Islamic faith-healers), and traditional healing practices (herbalists and diviners) (Dilger *et al.* 2014; Wilkens 2009; Trinitapoli & Weinreb 2012; Burchardt 2014; Kiel 2015).

As an example, the Neo-Pentecostal Churches in the urban context of Dar es Salaam refer to syncretic healing rituals which are partly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and partly in the “typically African” traditional cosmologies of illness and healing, thus creating an “Africanisation of Western Christianity” (Dilger 2007: 76) which opposes the self-proclaimed superiority of Western medicine (Dilger 2001a,b; 2007). The affliction arising from spirit possession and satanic forces (*pepo*, *jini* or *shetani*) (Giles 1999; 1995) as well as the corpus of healing prayers created to counter them are entirely rooted in the understanding of the Islamic Swahili coast and East African values (Dilger 2007: 68; 2001a,b). However, traditional religious ideologies and practices clash with the public health institutions and their scientific language (Dilger *et al.* 2014; Wilkens 2009; Mattes 2014). Thus, reluctance to use modern therapies explains the turning to traditional healing practices to cure AIDS related opportunistic infections or “maladies” - a simultaneous weakness of both the body and the spirit (Langwick 2011).

Illnesses can not only be caused by natural sources, but also by the interventions of either human (ancestors, witches, sorcerers) or non-human actants (Gods, spirits, devils) (Langwick 2011: 21; Pavanello 2017). Thus, “maladies (*magonjwa*)” are classified as “maladies of God”, which are the natural diseases; “maladies of the person”, which result from witchcraft; and “maladies of *mashetani*” (demons), which result from run-ins with devilish non-human actors (Langwick 2011: 151 - 231). Likewise, HIV/AIDS can be caused by God (*UKIMWI wa Mungu*); by sexual relationships (*UKIMWI wa kawaida*); and by sorcery and witchcraft (*UKIMWI wa mazingira ya kichawi*) (Olsen & Sargent 2017: 5; Janzen 2017).

### 1.8.2. BIOMEDICAL CONCEPTUALISATION

Modern biomedicine is entrenched in the positivist epistemology of science. Scientific knowledge is disseminated through education projects and preven-

tion campaigns managed by NGOs, which are leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, particularly after the implementation of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes) by the IMF and the WB, after the country's economic collapse of the 1970's (Dilger 2012; Marsland 2007; Langwick 2008).

In the wake of neoliberal reforms in Tanzania, a "trans-nationalization and NGO-ization of the country health sector" took place (Dilger 2012: 61), with an ever-growing dependence on international and private funding. In fact, following the cuts in government spending, the consequent health sector decline, and the privatization of the healthcare system, the HIV/AIDS epidemic became the "epidemic of NGOs" (Smith 2014: 165). Therefore, public health interventions and prevention health strategies follow "bio power regulations" (Foucault 1998; Dilger 2012) aimed to keep under "social control, bodies and pleasure" (Halperin 2016: 216-7) through the exercise of state power on sexed bodies.

HIV/AIDS education campaigns in Tanzania are aimed at promoting the culture of condom use, safe sex (Plummer 2012; Plummer & Wight 2013), HIV testing before marriage (Mutembei 2011a), and ARV therapies (Dilger *et al.* 2014). However, the practice of preventive testing, prior to any symptoms, was not a habit of Tanzanian people before the advent of HIV/AIDS (Mutembei 2009a: 148-9). Likewise, ARVs, which were introduced in the early 2000's with the financial support from the United States President's fund for AIDS relief (Dilger *et al.* 2014: 11-2), re-designed "a life made up of pills" (Mutembei 2009a: 161-2).

ARV is not a real cure, it produces a lifelong dependency, or "lifelong contract - *mkataba wa maisha*" (Dilger 2012: 74) that transforms the life-threatening into a chronic condition. Moreover, ART, the treatment that prolongs life, has been perceived as a threat to the community, because "*marehemu mtarajiwa* - the living dead", with a healthy outer aspect, acts among the members of the community spreading the virus without being discovered (Dilger *et al.* 2014). Finally, the restricted access to ARVs and their unwelcome side effects induce people to integrate them with traditional "magic cups" made of herbal concoctions effective to treat opportunistic infections of HIV/AIDS (Zu Biesen 2014: 271-87).

In conclusion, Western inspired interventions, representing African crisis through Western understanding (Mudimbe quoted in Smith 2014: 12) "marginalizing other knowledge systems" (Ahlberg-Maina & Kulane 2011: 328), tend to obtain "iatrogenic effects" (Smith 2014: 12) leaving a gap between scientific knowledge and people's reflexive behaviours (Dilger 2003; 2009).

### 1.8.3. HIV/AIDS IN LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

In Africa, the "epidemic of signification" (Treichler 1987) engenders "the culture of AIDS" (Barz & Cohen 2011: 5; Treichler 1991) through: popular

culture and creative means to send effective messages against AIDS (Barber 2018; Fabian 1978).

In Tanzania, the first response to HIV/AIDS was in oral literature. Mutembei (2001; 2005b) analyses a corpus of oral literature in the Luhaya language (1985 - 1998) in relation to socio-behavioural aspects of AIDS, particularly sexuality and gender relations. The aim of the study, drawn from KARP (*Kagera AIDS Research Project*) findings (Lugalla *et al.* 2004; Mutembei *et al.* 2002), is to examine how the Haya perceive the pandemic and how they communicate regarding AIDS, using oral poetry, metaphors and metonymies. The metaphorical expressions shift from uncertainty about the “unknown disease” or “inescapable evil” to understanding and reaction (Mutembei *et al.* 2002: 10). Afterwards, by analysing the myths and metaphors in a corpus of Swahili poems (1982 - 2006), Mutembei (2009a) examines the history of AIDS and the changes in the perception of the poets, as the spokespeople of the community, on the pandemic in a path from denial, via comprehension, to reaction.

“Literary AIDS” represents the reality combating the construction of untruth and prejudices (Pastore 1993: 3; Barbour & Huby 1998; Perkins 2009).

During the early stages of the epidemic (1990 - 1995) popular songs, poetry, and theatre constituted the main data to highlight the epistemological misunderstandings between biomedical discourses on HIV/AIDS as forwarded by NGOs and public health officers, and local discourses grounded in social concerns (Askew 2015: 255).

Singing and playing “for life” (Barz 2006; Bourgault 2003) also constitute the artistic expression of the “*kizazi kipya* - new generation” (Perullo 2011) in the urban context of contemporary Tanzania, which produces popular music performances regarding the gravest health concerns and diseases such as HIV/AIDS education and prevention (Ndomondo 2010; Low 2011; Jilala 2011; Mnenuka 2011; Songa 2015). For instance, singers of Tanzanian Hip Hop *Bongo Flewa* are a “mirror of the society - *kioo cha jamii*” (Reuster-Jahn 2007; 2011; Suriano 2007; 2011a; Higgins 2013), which looks at and tackles current problems. Thus, since 2004, with the creation of the project *ISHI*, “singers and rappers have been taking part in AIDS awareness campaigns reaffirming and rejecting values from the past” (Suriano 2011a: 123).

Finally, after the open-door policy, Tanzania has been filled with billboards and posters along its main roads, its walls covered in murals and graffiti, as new artistic tools promoted by HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns (Mutembei *et al.* 2002; Mutembei 2014; Mutembei *Swahili Colloquium* 2015; Omari 2011), and the pictographic art known as “*Kiswahili* mobile literature” (Mutembei 2014: 3) decorates local means of transports such as *daladala*, motorbikes and *bajaji* with HIV/AIDS awareness slogans. However, the campaigns’ “approach of deterrence” (Dilger 2012: 66; Mutembei 2014) produces aggressive and intimidating messages with a low level of comprehension among the

local population. Therefore, the scientific construction of AIDS, imposed by Western neoliberal interventions, which reduces the pandemic to an “individual pattern of sexual behaviour” (O’Manique 2004: 18; Cloete 2007), tends to be rejected by African peoples (Beck 2006: 537; Higgins 2009; Higgins 2010).

Since the failure of the development strategies in Africa has been attributed to their top-down approach and the negation of the local culture, theatre has been seen as the best way to free people from political and colonial oppression (Mlama 1991a: 7 - 17). The first generation of HIV/AIDS intervention programmes lacked functional value in local cultures because the “colonial cum capitalist culture” (Mlama 1991a) has undermined local traditions by defining art and literature through Western theoretical lenses (Mckee *et al.* 2004; Singhal 2003; Singhal & Rogers 2003; Salhi 1998; Campbell 2003a,b). However, culture is the best form of resistance against exploitation and oppression, and the use of African native languages is the better means to decolonize minds (Thiong’o 1986). Thus, the “African Popular Theatre” created by local playwrights came into being, against the European theatre imposed in colonial times, in order to reintroduce a development approach from people’s way of life (Thiong’o 1986; Mlama 1991a; Lihamba 1986; Mda 1990; 1993; Kerr 1991; 1995; Desai 1990; 1991; Barber 1987; 1997; 2000; 2018; Breitinger 1994).

Theatre and performances are among the most widespread tools in HIV/AIDS education and prevention programmes, with the aim of fostering behavioural changes through a “community/participatory” approach, especially in the forms of “Theatre for Development” (TfD) (Frank 1995; Johansson 2011; Mahiri 2010; Salhi 1998; Byam 1999; Plastow 2014; Lange 1995; 1999; 2001; Ross 1984; Ross-Byram 1979; Eyoh 1987; Mumma 1995; Hatar 2001; Odhiambo 2008; Riccio 1991), and healing theatre (Lihamba 1986; Janzen 1992).

African theatre for development has been influenced by South American dramaturgic techniques such as the “pedagogy of the oppressed” and the “poetic of the oppressed” (Freire 2005; Boal 2008). These awareness-raising techniques induce the audience to “conscientization” to foster the growth of a collective conscience that urges change and frees them from oppression.

Theatre-based programmes such as “Magnet Theatre against HIV/AIDS” in Kenya (Mahiri 2010; 2011) and Community Based Theatre (CBT) in Tanzania (Johansson 2010; 2011; 2006) use behaviour change communication strategies not only as a tool against HIV/AIDS but also to overcome the disconnection between scientific knowledge and cultural knowledge created by the top-down Western approach in prevention programs (Mahiri 2011; Johansson 2010). The communication through theatrical performances is successful in mobilizing people into a participatory and non-judgmental community-based forum, proposing solutions more suitable to the local context (Mahiri 2010; 2011). “Theatre involves people and motivates them to action” (Frank 1995: 166). However, projects like CBT turn out to be a “deadly paradox” (Johansson

2010: 128). Despite being the most adaptable and widespread mode of HIV prevention in Africa, these projects lack a social, political and economic support structure that hinders a long-term effectiveness. Thus, CBT remains “a mediator in HIV prevention without a political mandate” (Johansson 2010: 73), because it is unwelcomed by both NGOs, bound by their agenda and budget, and local authorities. Therefore, Tfd has a double role between “community empowerment and dis-empowerment” (Thiong’o 2013).

“Neoliberalist reforms and NGOs are a form of neo-Imperialism under the guise of globalization and Tfd” (Shule 2011b: 191; 2011a; 2014; 2009; 2010), which pushed theatre to the fringes and by creating a donor dependence hinders theatre from becoming self-supporting, yet it becomes “Theatre for Donor Development or In Development” (Shule 2011b: 211).

Since Tanzanian socialist era, which introduced the mission of “Nation Building” (Edmondson 2002; 2007; Ranger 1975; Suriano 2011b; Suriano 2015) as “Performing the Nation” (Askew 2002), the relations of “conviviality” and “collaborative nationalism” have been illustrating a history of both resistance and co-optation between the state and theatrical campaigns (Edmondson 2007: 17; Kigombe 2014).

## 1.9. OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

**Chapter 1** introduces the research topic as a philosophical reading of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS from Tanzania. The main argument, research rationale, research questions, and objectives are clearly stated. Consequently, this chapter lays out the research methodology outlining in detail the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tanzania (2018 - 2019) in observance of the research ethics principles. Finally, the chapter includes a review of literature dealing with the different representations of HIV/AIDS through the lenses of social anthropology, biomedicine and literature.

**Chapter 2** outlines the theoretical framework of this study comprehensively. In this chapter, I discuss the philosophical debates on epistemologies, and I introduce the main concepts of “Epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2014) and “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morell 2014), leading towards a conceptualisation of Afrocentric epistemologies and a recognition of their plurality. This chapter connects the epistemological enquiry with the analysis of Swahili literature as the platform where Afrocentric knowledge can be generated and found. Thus, cultural traditions, ritual practices and life philosophies are described as a gateway to endogenous knowledge. Literary devices, modes of narration, various genres and styles are examined as epistemic tools to drive Afrocentric knowledge. This analytical structure is mirrored in the case studies, which consist of an in-depth textual analysis of the selected primary sources.

**Chapter 3** deals with the encounters between epistemes in drama and theatre performances. It investigates the play *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (The Testimony of the Bones, Ngozi 1990), contextualised within a group of six plays: *Kilio Chetu* (MAF 1996), *Giza* (Jilala 2004), *Kilio cha Jeska* (Mghanga 2004), *Orodha* (Reynolds 2006), *Mwalimu Rose* (Mghanga 2007), *Embe Dodo* (Makukula 2014) and two live performances collected during fieldwork research: the FASDO production *Pima!* (Test for HIV! 2018) and the performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (2019) staged at the College of Arts - UDSM.

**Chapter 4** deals with the encounters between epistemes in two novels: the historical evidence of *Kisiki Kikavu* (The Dry Stump, Mutembei 2005a), and the more contemporary adaptation of *Firauni* (the Debauchee, Mauya 2017).

**Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6** are entirely dedicated to a thorough analysis of the first two published volumes of the trilogy on HIV/AIDS *Diwani ya Maua* (The Poetry of Flowers), supported by both personal communications and documents exchanged with the author, William Mkufya. The trilogy consists of: *Ua La Faraja* (The Flower of Consolation, 2004) and *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (The Existence of Flowers, 2019). Chapter 5 focuses on *Ua La Faraja* while Chapter 6 explores *Kuwa Kwa Maua*.



# Chapter 2

## Epistemology & Literature

Epistemologies are the ways in which people conceptualise, represent, obtain, produce and expand knowledge. This chapter confronts a complex debate on knowledge and then adds an original contribution, which is drawn from Swahili literature dealing with HIV/AIDS. The field of non-Western epistemologies is characterized by a longstanding debate which stages a confrontation between two different knowledge/thought-systems: Western scientific epistemology, which stems from the Enlightenment, and what De Sousa Santos conceptualizes as “Epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2014), which are based on the recognition of non-scientific knowledge systems (Santos & Meneses 2020). The field of epistemologies today has indeed to do with the validation of knowledge and ways of knowing not recognised by Western centric modernity (Santos 2018: 3).

Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to bridge this philosophical debate with Afrophone literature, aiming not only to contribute to the “renaissance” of “the traditional thought system” (Rettovà 2002: 149) as “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014), but also to recognise the contribution of African languages, particularly Swahili, in the production of both African literature and philosophy. Thus, this section works as a bridge to bring an epistemological perspective on the analysis of literature. “Decolonization is the effort to challenge the Western epistemological

paradigm and to access non-Western approaches to knowledge-making” (*The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research* 11, 2018) as well as to decentre knowledge and to develop non-Western epistemologies.

This chapter consists of an introduction on the epistemological debate, between the Western hegemonic epistemology and the movement that I call the *rise of counter-epistemologies* (Nicolini Asixoxe 2021), which is the framework of “Epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2014; 2020), where “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014) are located. “Africa-centred Knowledges” aim to overcome both the Western representation of the East (Orientalism/Africanism, Saïd 1978; Mudimbe 1988), and African discourses based on the paradigm of the Western episteme (Mudimbe 1988; Kresse 2005b).

This chapter introduces the analysis of different genres of Swahili literature through the prism of an epistemological discourse. I examine what literature describes, including local cultural practices such as life-cycle rituals, and life philosophy, which are drawn from Afrocentric knowledge. I argue that literature conveys its messages by narrative and stylistic devices such as characters, dialogues, metaphors and other tropes, which drive “Africa-centred Knowledges”.

## 2.1. FROM EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE TO EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE SOUTH

“What we do not know is not an accidental gap in our knowledge, but has been actively produced and sustained for purposes of domination and exploitation” and described as “**epistemology of ignorance**” (Sullivan & Tuana 2007: 1; Alcoff 2007).

“Strategic ignorance” (Bailey 1997: 77) is a way of actively concealing portions of knowledge; it is produced through two forms of “**epistemic injustices**” (Fricker 2007: 5): “**hermeneutical**” - “a non-accidental gap in collective hermeneutical resources” (Fricker 2007: 6); and “**testimonial**”, where a speaker’s credibility is affected by the class, race and gender prejudices of the hearer (Fricker 2007: 4).

A counter process to knowledge suffocation has been developed, the “**epistemology of resistance**”, which “revolves around resistant experiences shared, compared and contrasted” (Medina 2013: 7) through positive epistemic friction: “interactions with significantly different epistemic others” (Medina 2013: 23).

The individuals responsible for fighting against epistemic injustice in the daily struggles of ordinary people are called “**epistemic heroes**” (Medina 2013: 25): extraordinary persons who, under conditions of epistemic oppression, act within societies to construct “networks of solidarity” between heterogeneous elements. These are achieved “not at the expense of difference

but rather through relations that preserve differences” (Medina 2013: 308), moving towards **epistemic justice**.

The “orthopaedic thinking” (Ortega y Gasset quoted in Santos 2009: 110), which has been generated from the epistemological hegemony of modern science imposed beyond science, reduces all problems to scientific challenges, refusing to acknowledge the existence of other forms of knowledge. “Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking, which divides social reality into “this side of the line”, and then “the other side of the line” is “produced as non-existent” (Santos 2007: 1). In fact, “**abyssal thinking**” grants to modern science the monopoly against “lay, indigenous, popular and peasant knowledge”, which is regarded as being on the other side of the line; here, there is “no real knowledge; there are beliefs, opinions, intuitions, subjective understanding and raw material for science inquiry” (Santos 2014: 120; 2007; Santos *et al.* 2007). This “**epistemological fascism**” results in “**epistemicide**” - the murder of knowledge and the destruction of socio-cultural practices of indigenous populations” (Santos 2016: 18; 2014: 154); “epistemicide conceals the other ways of knowing, declaring them non-existent in favour of a hierarchization of knowledge dominated by modern science” (Santos 2009: 116).

As a form of epistemic resistance, the notion of “**post-abyssal thinking**” has emerged, aiming to reflect on the epistemological perspective of the other side of the line: the non-imperial “**global South**” (Santos 2016: 18), and to learn from it through “**Epistemologies of the South**” (Santos 2014:134-5). The creation of “Epistemologies of the South” is the result of “decolonial epistemic de-linking” and “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009; 2011; 2013), tools which enable delinking from the illusion of a “zero point of epistemology”, moving towards a recognition of “situated knowledge” (Mignolo 2009: 160-1), and conceptualizing a “Non-Occidentalist West” (Santos 2009: 104-5).

“**Epistemologies of the South** are an engagement with ways of knowing from the perspectives of those who have systematically suffered injustices, dominations and oppressions caused by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy” (Santos 2016: 18; Santos & Meneses 2020). “Epistemologies of the South” are multiple epistemologies, born in struggle and anchored in the experience of resistance (Santos & Meneses 2020: xvii; Santos 2018); they engender a new process of production and validation of valuable knowledges, whether scientific or non-scientific, and new relations among them (Santos 2012: 51).

The construction of “Epistemologies of the South” is built on four pillars: *sociology of absences* (non-existence is produced), *sociology of emergences* (all the future possibilities inscribed in the present), *intercultural translation*, and *ecology of knowledge* (Santos 2012; 2014).

“**Intercultural translation**” is a procedure that enhances mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world (Santos 2012: 58), mediating and negotiating among different cultures without dissolving identities, and

acknowledging the diversity of knowledge, because all “knowledges” are incomplete (Santos 2014: 223; 2018: 32).

This counter-epistemology is founded on the idea that “knowledge is **inter-knowledge**” (Santos 2007: 27), which means to learn other knowledge without forgetting one’s own (Santos 2012: 57). Solidarity among people thus has an epistemological dimension, based on “the recognition of epistemological diversity bringing together heterogeneous knowledge: scientific knowledge together with popular vernacular knowledge and other non-scientific ways of knowing, which have dynamic interconnections between them without compromising their autonomy” (Santos 2016: 22). The objective is achieving an “**ecology of knowledge**”, a counter-epistemology, or a third way epistemology between modern science and other ways of knowing, aiming to give “equality of opportunity” to all different kinds of knowledge (Santos 2014: 190), treating them not as alternatives to one another, but as parts of the ecology, because “all knowledge is partial and situated” (Santos 2014: 192).

The “**learned ignorant**” (Santos 2014: 105; Kresse 2007: 2), *those who know that they don’t know*, recognise that epistemological diversity consists in an “infinite plurality of finite ways of knowing” (Santos 2009: 115), and that there is only “a general epistemology of the impossibility of a general epistemology” (Santos 2007: 28).

In the specific case of HIV/AIDS in Africa, the Western conceptualisation, represented by the positivist epistemology of modern science and medicine, was imposed as the only reliable source of knowledge and effective healing method. However, biomedicine and traditional African medicine are not alternatives. Once the context and the practices in which each form of knowledge operates have been identified, avoiding undiagnosed illnesses, equal opportunity should be granted to both these ways of healing. Recognising the value of non-scientific knowledge does not mean discrediting the value of the modern achievements of science.

“Deconstruction” is a strategic reversal of categories, order of priorities among categories, and of conceptual oppositions which make that order possible (Derrida quoted in Norris 1991: 31; Derrida 2016). It aims to challenge hierarchical orders and binary oppositions between plural thought systems.

The recognition of rationality as a “plural” concept (*rationalité plurielle*, Hountondji 2007; Eze 2007) is the prerequisite to achieve a “point of contact” (*rencontre des rationalités*, Memel-Foté 2007: 25) between African and Euro-American rationalities, which is the base to gain a “**kaleidoscopic consciousness**” (Medina 2013: 222) that welcomes the formation of a “**constellation of knowledges**” (Santos 2014: 157).

## 2.2. FROM AFRICAN DISCOURSES BASED ON A WESTERN EPISTEME TO AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

“African traditional system of thought” is “a dynamic process in which concrete experiences are theorised into a framework of cultural concepts and interpretations” (Mudimbe 1988: 9; Masolo 1994: 250). Nevertheless, for over a century discourse on Africa have been dominated either by non-Africans, or by Africans educated on Western epistemes, especially in the field of philosophy, leading to hermeneutical epistemic injustice so as to maintain the privilege of the scientific Western epistemological paradigm (Ramose 2005: 6).

“African philosophy has historically associated to Western discourse on Africa and African response to it”, revolving around a rationality debate between reason and emotion (Masolo 1994: 1). Therefore, Mudimbe suggests, “African gnosis”, as a system of knowledge, which aims to “Africanizing knowledge” against the construction of an African order of knowledge founded on the Western episteme (Mudimbe 1988: 10).

“Western discourses on Africa have conditioned the establishment of conceptual categories in which Africans today conceive and express their own identity” (Masolo 1994: 181). Thus, “Africanizing African philosophy” (Hountondji 1997; 2007) implies not only overcoming the Western image of Africa, represented by the invention of Africanism as a scientific discipline consisting in a body of knowledge on Africa (Mudimbe 1988: 10; Appiah 1992; 2018), but also destroying African ideologies of “otherness”, by self-criticism, self-expression, and raising “surreptitious speeches” (Mudimbe 1992).

“Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly ‘Afrocentric’ descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order” (Mudimbe 1988: x; Kresse 2005b: 103; Masolo 1994: 180-2).

Mudimbe’s famous statement aims to criticize Africanism as the “invention of Africa” (Mudimbe 1988) based on Western epistemological standard, produced not only by Western thinkers, but also by African themselves. Then he wishes to re-centre African discourses on African epistemes, contributing to the development of an “African epistemological locus” (Kresse 2005b: 104; Masolo 1994: 179).

After criticising “the Western centrism in all representations of Africa” (Kresse 2005a: 7), the “Idea of Africa” (Mudimbe 1994), even produced by insider Africans, the objective is a quest for African epistemological identities via local discourses and based on essential African systems of thoughts and an “usable past” (Masolo 1994: 179).

For instance, practice, performance and knowledge expressed in African languages through “sagacious reasoning” (Kresse & Graness 1997) by insider

“knowledge-specialists” (Kresse 2005b: 106) represent the real contribution to unearth an “African epistemological locus” “within the framework of their own rationality” (Mudimbe quoted in Kresse 2005b: 107) and thus not dominated by the Western episteme.

To illustrate the idea expressed as Mudimbe’s “regional epistemes” (1988) or Kresse’s *Swahiliness* (2005b: 108), I choose concrete examples written in Swahili by Tanzanian intellectuals “in search of identity” (Masolo 1994). My original case is William Mkufya’s novels which tackle universal human problems that are represented as perceived by Tanzanian people. The author, as insider intellectual, operates a *Swahilization of AIDS*: where Western science is moulded in and enriched with local cultural knowledge, and where science is not neglected nor African epistemes rejected, yet both cooperate holistically.

“Afrophone philosophies are the best discourse on local intellectual traditions” and “literature is the medium of reflection of those ideas” (Rettovà 2004: 47-8). “Narrative philosophy” (Bell 1989: 372) entails that Afrophone literature produced by African people can provide philosophical discourses with a written text (Hountonji 1983).

I argue that not only an *African epistemological locus* founded on real African experiences cannot be reduced to a Kantian *Noumenon*, yet it is *thinkable* (Robert 1967), but also Afrophone literatures have a high potential to describe philosophical thoughts based on African epistemes.

### 2.3. AFRICAN EPISTEMES

African epistemes or African knowledge systems challenge the idea of Africa as monolithic entity, yet it is a pluralistic articulation of experiences, identities, cultures and relations which shape plural and heterogenous “knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014), “sexualities” (Tamale 2011), “rationalities” (Hountondji 2007), epistemologies (Mudimbe 1988; Mbembe 2001) and philosophies (Rettovà 2016a). The “multiplicity” and “heterogeneity of African cultures” (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992; Gyekye 1995: 25) imply that each culture produces a different philosophy (Gyekye 1995: 109).

“Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, including the criteria by which a cognitive agent understands reality” (Ukpokolo 2017: 4); in other words, “people’s ways of knowing themselves and the realities around them according to their cultures and languages” (Nabudere 2011: 39 - 40).

African epistemologies are likely to conceive of the world matrix as an “interwoven and connected” system beyond dichotomous distinctions between epistemic subject and object as well as natural and supernatural or material and spiritual world (Jimoh & Thomas 2015: 61; Jimoh 2017).

Multiple African traditional belief systems are based on evidence that disembodied agents and invisible ontologies such as ancestors’ spirits and natu-

ral spirits interact with humans. Their world is ontologically both analogous and contiguous to that of the mortals, and they communicate through rituals (Coetzee & Roux 2005; Hamminga 2005; Appiah 2005; Ukpokolo 2017). Spiritual entities interfere in the physical world with causal efficacy, influencing human experience and perception in a multiplicity of ways (Jimoh & Thomas 2015: 54). For instance, certain types of knowledge are not produced but transmitted by the vital power of ancestors to the livings (Hamminga 2005: 57 - 67).

Therefore, the supernatural is recognised as an ontological category: “supernatural beings are not alien but quite human, sharing characteristics with the human counterpart” (Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 12). Thus, the supernatural is characterized by not only “ambivalence and ambiguity” because spiritual agents can be either good or evil, but also “reciprocity and contiguity” between the “other world” that depends on and negotiates with “this world” through the mutual dependency between ancestors and their progeny (Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 11).

Furthermore, witchcraft is as real as science (Evans-Pritchard 1976), and its efficacy can be explained as a “combination of categories of causes: teleological and mechanical” (Sogolo 2005: 228). For instance, African healers and diviners aim to protect a client from being afflicted by illnesses and *malaises*, which can be caused either by scientific causes or supernatural forces (Sogolo 2005); the two causes are related into an “integrated diagnostic process which blends the natural with the supernatural” (Sogolo 2005: 237). Thus, predestination differs from fatalism, because the first leaves room for human agency, although within the context of a general allotment of destiny. For example, illnesses can be prevented, and ill-fate is not unavoidable (Gbadegesin 2005: 220-1; 2004a,b).

Likewise, paranormal phenomena, extrasensory perceptions and data, which imply spirit mediumship, divination, witchcraft, telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition, are all component parts of epistemologies (Rettová 2021a; Gyekye 1995; Gyekye quoted in Mosley 2004: 149; Coetzee & Roux 2005; Ajei 2009) and modes of cognition or ways of knowing (Gyekye 1995: 202). Therefore, the epistemology of **extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition** is a third “source of knowledge” (Gyekye 1995: 201) between innate ideas and learned experiences, which recognises the universal wholeness as the coexistence of both supernatural and natural world (Gyekye quoted in Mosley 2004: 149; Gyekye 1995; Ajei 2009).

In addition to this, the interculturality of African social epistemologies can be described as the “C4 Factor”, that is, “the confluence of cultures in the continent” (Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2003: 225): African traditional cultures; modern Western culture and the cultural assimilation between these two, with advances in science and technology of the West being adapted into the magico-religious African cultures. Thus, the “**C4 cross-culturation**” (Wiredu

quoted in Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2003: 228), is where different cultures meet and mingle all together, and like all the “cross-cultural theories”, they must be approached not only by cognitive relativism (Hallen & Sodipo 1997; Hallen 2004; Hallen & Wiredu 2013).

I appreciate Hountondji’s terminology of “**endogenous knowledge**” (1997), or, “local knowledge system” (Hountondji 2004: 534), which implies dynamic and independent processes of knowledge production in African societies, thus avoiding the problematic label of “Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs)” (Masolo 2003; Munyaradzi 2011; 2014). “**Endogenous knowledge** can be identified as an internal product drawn from a given cultural background and as an integrated part of its heritage in contrast to exogenous knowledge, which is perceived as an element of another value system” (Hountondji 1997: 17-8).

A valid example of ancestral knowledge and know-how based on African epistemes is the traditional system of healing, which entails both medical and magical effects. The African aetiology of illness implies “aggression”, which can be linked to two main causes: either conflicts in interpersonal relationships with human beings, which correspond to a witchcraft assault, or, conflicts with ancestors, taboos, and traditions, which correspond to an aggression from spirits (Hountondji 1997: 27-8). The healers’ intervention, as a diagnostic system, is aimed firstly at identifying the aggressor, who can either be human, such as the practice of sorcery, or a superhuman agent.

Far from refusing the positive epistemology of science and “modern healing” (Langwick 2007: 3), the canons of knowledge should be opened up, recognizing epistemological diversity.

Over the last two decades, the struggle of knowledge from the “global South” (Santos 2014) has challenged the conception of “local, indigenous, traditional or lay knowledge” as irrationality and superstition opening up the possibility of a “complementary articulation of situated knowledge” (Santos *et al.* 2007: xxxix). An example of “**resistance of the subaltern**” (Spivak quoted in Meneses 2007: 315) is the case of medical practices in Africa; “the refusal to recognize traditional medicines is a form of *epistemicide* that give to the “other” culture the status of subject or non-knowledge” (Meneses 2007: 353). Nevertheless, the vitality of traditional healing challenges modern biomedicine, leading to a hybridization of therapeutic knowledge, which is applied in different spheres through a constant mixing and intersecting in forms of “inter-medicine” (Meneses 2007: 354), and which is capable of reinforcing not only the legitimacy, but also the performance of both (Meneses 2007: 372-3).

In conclusion, “**Africa-centred Knowledges**” (Cooper & Morrell 2014) are conceptualised as multiple, “entangled, contextual and contingent” (Cooper & Morrell 2014: 3), and they are situated in “an intermediate space” (Mudimbe 1988: 4) of “entanglement” (Mbembe 2001: 66), which is a space of collaboration and negotiation opposed to extremes and binary oppositions;

the “third Africa-centred” space is located between the “bad place” or meta-code of Eurocentrism (scientific universal wisdom) and the “immovable rock” or cultural code of Afrocentrism (local knowledge, traditions, beliefs, embodied knowledge) (Cooper & Morrell 2014: 2 - 6). Thus, “Africa-centred Knowledges” are flexible and open to take part in the “constellation of knowledges” (Santos 2014: 157) and its ecology.

“How we know determines what we know” (Ashcroft 2014: 11); for instance, there are forms of “endogenous knowledge” (Mbembe 2002: 254), or “local knowledge” (Geertz 1993), which welcome a “corpus of knowledge that we gain through the body, the unconscious and sensorial experiences that is not recognized by modern science as epistemology” (Ashcroft 2014: 68). “**Embodied knowledge**” (Green 2014: 48), which implies the relationships of care or enmity towards the body, never makes its way into scientific epistemology, because it is “classified as belief admitted through the gates of knowledge only via the tests of science”; otherwise, it remains “alongside superstition, charlatanism, snake-oil and hocus-pocus” (Cooper & Morrell 2014: 16). Nevertheless, this “knowledge accessible beyond meaning” (Ashcroft 2014: 68) has been rescued by literary texts and narratives in local languages, whose purpose is to accommodate two orders of reality, the spirit world and the modern world, aiming towards a “cross-cultural dialogue between belief systems” (Ashcroft 2014: 73).

### 2.3.1. THE TEMPORALITY OF AIDS

An example of clash between thought systems is the different representations of time in connection to HIV/AIDS.

On the one hand, the notion of prevention, introduced by Euro-American prevention campaigns against HIV/AIDS, refers to a “public health strategy which is aimed at avoiding illness or impairment in advance” (Offe 2001: 53-4). This logic of prevention pertains to the European Enlightenment ideas about time and future, and by maintaining that a future disease can be avoided by human actions in the present, it means that the future itself is “contingent yet controllable” (Offe 2001: 55-6).

On the other hand, Mbiti’s classical interpretation on African time maintains that the African cyclical time “has virtually no future” (Mbiti 2011: 17) and “people don’t plan for distant future” (Mbiti 2011: 23) which is “non-contingent, uncontrollable, and inalterable” (Offe 2001: 66-7).

Notwithstanding, both these opposite interpretations have been challenged. In fact, the traditional rites of passage, which mark the turning point in African people’s lives, follow a logical sequence that suggests a linear concept of time. “The Africans have a concept of time which is not cyclical but a continuum. They conceive of distant future events and live with the hope of

having these events fulfilled” (Beyaraza 2000: 97). People are aware of ritual events before they occur, and they therefore prepare for them suggesting the capability of projecting their minds into a distant future and plan for long term future projects (Parrinder quoted in Beyaraza 2000: 91).

Furthermore, the dynamic of divination that consists of: “reconsidering the past to assess the present and projecting the future” (Peek & Van Beek 2013: 19; Peek 1991) suggests that African people can look into the future through divination as a “review of reality” (Peek & Van Beek 2013: 2), where present actions can be altered so as to affect differently what is still to come. In fact, diviners reveal the destiny and thus people have the responsibility to intervene to at least mitigate a foretold bad destiny (Gbadegesin 2004a: 58). Even though the forecast can be negative, it does inform people’s behaviour so that they would be able to avert or prevent something from happening, which suggests an optimistic view of destiny (Gbadegesin 2004a: 59).

Therefore, I maintain that an Afrocentric logic of prevention can be conceptualised, opening the minds to “a sliding scale of time and fortune” (Swancutt 2012: 222).

In rendering AIDS as the result of either illicit sexual affairs with non-human evil creatures or a sorcery craft made by envious witches, which are all misfortunes that can be foretold in advance by diviners, HIV-transmission becomes predictable and in certain cases avoidable. Hence, the “logic of prevention” (Offe 2001: 53-5) is inserted into a “layered time” which “simultaneously accommodates two orders of reality” – physical and metaphysical (Ashcroft 2014: 71).

Through a closer examination of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS we see that, although the technique of flashback and forward is utilised, the time structure of the narrative appears overall linear, following the progressive evolution of not only the physical illness, but also the scientific medical interventions. Characters in fiction are, firstly, committed to fighting their bad destiny undertaking various treatments so as to prolong their lives. Subsequently, they suggest an existentialist view of life between resignation to death and consolatory hope, accepting their destiny with optimism and solace (Mkufya 2004).

Nevertheless, a local discourse about time is also articulated into characters’ minds, rendering a cyclical temporal perception through the nostalgia of a “significant meaningful past” (Kresse 2018: 4), which “enables a free recourse to the past and a transfer of the past into the present as repetition”, where “the win is the return to an idealized past of African tradition” (Rettovà 2016d: 396). This motion is characterized by a sense of “**past present continuous**” (Kresse 2018; Kresse *Swahili Colloquium* 2019), where people are “enveloped in loops of experience, feeling stuck as things are not changing despite an acute sense of the time that is passing” (Kresse 2018: 3), and entails an “**epistemology of return**” (Rettovà 2016d: 394).

Mkufya (2014; 2019), by representing the cycle of birth-death-rebirth and stressing the importance of childbearing in his novels, describes cyclical returns which renders a feeling of “eternal now” (Kezilahabi quoted in Lanfranchi 2012: 74) similar to Nietzsche’s “eternal return of the same”. The uncertainty of life in the face of impending death implies “writing the future and the possible” (Rettovà 2017: 170), where the future “is” equally real as the present is, because of the identity of “being” and “becoming” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2017: 172).

Therefore, by establishing literature as a framework that constructs the world, African literature contributes to the creation of an “Afro-modernity”, which is an alternative to the linear progression of time and modern development of science and technology (Ashcroft 2014: 76). Thus, the result is an entanglement of linear progression and cyclical returns.

#### 2.4. SWAHILI LITERATURE ON HIV/AIDS AS AN ARENA TO PERFORM AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

Tanzanian writers have made substantial contributions to situate Swahili literature in the broader panorama of African literatures (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Garnier 2013), and also have contributed to the production of contemporary Afrophone literatures and philosophies (Rettovà 2002; 2004; Rettovà *Swahili Colloquium* 2019). Literature in African languages is a medium to naturally express the plurality of African cultures as well as philosophical thoughts and reflections (Thiong’o 1986; Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a: 194; Rettovà 2010: 36).

Even though in Swahili literature there are references to both Western and African philosophy, those discussions of Western philosophy are an “appropriation of these traditions within another cultural context” (Rettovà 2007a: 171). Or, “incorporation of Western philosophical influences in his narratives, accommodating them within the Swahili language and its conceptual framework” (Rettovà 2007a: 171; 2010: 34).

“If you learn philosophy in a given language, that is the language in which you naturally philosophize” (Wiredu 1998: 17). In fact, the concern is that African people who studied philosophy in European languages tend to produce philosophical messages “conceptually westernized” (Wiredu 1998: 17; 2009).

Nevertheless, literature in African languages is the perfect instrument to urge a “decolonization of the mind” (Thiong’o 1986) opposing the principle of exclusion of local knowledge, which is usually depreciated as “local” or defective in comparison with hegemonic Western knowledge, which emerges as valid and unchallenged. Thus, literature in African languages is a form of resistance to imperial culture through local experiences and knowledge

(Kezilahabi 2015): “writing in foreign languages is writing about people, while writing in African languages is writing people” (Kezilahabi 2015: 41). The creative writings in African languages, such as Swahili literature, are “the key to harmonization in diversity” (Kezilahabi 2015: 45).

Therefore, the major endeavour of this research is to re-centre the focus on Afrophone literary texts – Swahili literature – conducting thorough textual analysis on them and “digging into the language” (Vierke 2017) to unearth their philosophical and epistemological meaning within an African locus.

The intercultural heritage of Swahili literature, which embraces pure elements of Bantu culture, Islamic legacy, and Western-Christian impact, is capable of reshaping, and reconfiguring the parameters of Swahili identity flowing beyond new boundaries (Mazrui 2007: 171). This renders Swahili literature a privileged platform for philosophical enquiries and a space where new epistemological perspectives can be detected.

I have chosen literature as the principal medium for exploring epistemologies of HIV/AIDS because “literature has always been a main tool for expressing doubts and questions” (Topan, lecture at SOAS March 2019). Thus, different fictional genres in Swahili have been among the first local responses which draw on Afrocentric knowledge to deal with the HIV/AIDS issue in the country (Mutembei 2013).

Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS appears to be a stage on which intermittent clashes between contrasting, yet complementary epistemologies and rationalities are performed. These clashes occur, particularly in relation to the aetiology of the illness that represents the real disease as well as a socio-political and economic sickness and the result of witchcraft and sorcery practices. Modern scientific medicine clashes with traditional divinatory and healing practices. Different temporal epistemologies related to prevention and treatment can be perceived. Unknown, supernatural and spiritual ontologies manifest themselves sporadically in the same text. The juxtaposition of these discordant codes between the real and the magical not only leads to an extra relativism effect and a conflicting critique of different ways of knowing, but can also be “*la rencontre de rationalités*” (a meeting point, Hountondji 2007) between plural rationalities.

Swahili literature can be explored as a “battlefield” where encounters between rationalities that are resistant to one other are prominent. For instance, the clash between science and “other” knowledge is emphasized; however, the intermitting bilateral critique of both systems aims to negotiate a “third space of engagement” which allows interconnection and interaction of thoughts (Nnaemeka 2003: 360), projected towards a holistic co-existence of plural realities and animated by alternative epistemologies and incompatible ontologies.

The uncontested role of science and scientific medicine is acknowledged in literary texts, even though some problematic aspects are loudly denounced. Nevertheless, science coexists with spiritual and mythological epistemologies

and ontologies. The “African worldview, where the natural world is animated by the spiritual world, showing the awareness of the elastic nature of knowledge as its one reality” (Soyinka 2005: 53), is made available to African people through their literature (Soyinka 2005: 142-3).

## 2.5. CULTURAL AND LITERARY ELEMENTS WHICH CHANNEL AFROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE (-S) IN SWAHILI LITERATURE ON HIV/AIDS

African traditional philosophical thoughts and wisdom are expressed in a wide range of fictional and non-fictional genres: proverbs and sayings (Wanjohi 1997; Gbadegesin 1996), ritual performances (Mbiti 2011; Finnegan 2012), life philosophies (Gyekye 1995), oral and written literature (Rettovà 2010). Common “Swahili knowledge” and “folk wisdom” (Kresse 2009: 157) are embedded in and articulated by proverbs and sayings as well as local traditions, poetry and prose (Rettovà 2010: 211-2; Wamitila 1991; 1997; 1998; 2002; Diegner 2005).

Swahili Literature on HIV/AIDS is an example of “building on the indigenous” (Nnaemeka 2003: 369), which means that the African worldview and thoughts are capable of providing the theoretical base-structure on which African literature can be sustained.

I argue that endogenous epistemologies are expressed and become clear through cultural practices described in fictional works. This part of the chapter is divided to address three levels: communal ritual practices, individual philosophies and narrative genres and styles.

This section describes, firstly, **cultural traditions** and **ritual practices** shared by the **community** that are drawn from African epistemes, and secondly, characteristic **personas**, who express their **individual perceptions** and **life philosophies**.

Subsequently, the next section illustrates **literary stylistic devices** and **narrative strategies**, which drive and channel Afrocentric knowledge, such as narrators, chorus, proverbs and figures of speech.

Literary texts in different genres describe cultural practices, traditions, personas and philosophies through narratology and stylistic techniques. Since the narrative aspect of philosophy ties culture inside a text (Bell 1989; Barber 2007), epistemologies based on Afrocentric knowledge (-s) are shown on the level of text, which turns out to be a strategy to unearth philosophical thoughts by engaging in stylistic analysis of narrative elements that dilute those epistemologies.

I argue that fictional works not only mirror the phenomenal world, but also epitomize and coincide with real practices and characters; literature and reality are entangled ontologies.

### 2.5.1. PRACTICES: LIFECYCLE RITUALS (INITIATION AND BURIAL CEREMONIES) AS A GATEWAY TO ENDOGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

I am examining the traditional rites of passage into adulthood, for girls, *unyago*, and for boys, *jando* (Mamuya 1973), as gatekeepers to endogenous knowledge. My argument is based on the examination of *unyago* as “living knowledge” (Swantz 2016) which I encountered in both literature on HIV/AIDS and during my personal fieldwork experience. According to the statements of the research participants that I interviewed in 2018 - 2019, *jando* and *unyago* are heterogenous cultural institutions respected by the vast majority of the Tanzanian population, today as in the past, although the practice has been fading year after year because of the process of modernization and globalization undergone by the country.

*Unyago* used to be the main source of education on sex and sexuality<sup>1</sup>. It is made up of symbols, metaphors and myths which correspond to a “symbolic view of life” (Swantz 1986: 375) and is imparted to the girls who have reached puberty (Swantz *et al.* 2014). Therefore, the female initiation rituals lend themselves to being interpreted as based on a traditional epistemology aimed at STIs education and prevention (Van Gennep 1960, Sanderson 1955; Brain 1978; Turner 1967; 1969; 1974; 1982; La Fontaine 1986; Ruel 1997; Brown 1963; Cohen 1964; Raum 1939; 1940; Halley 2012; Richards 1956; Beidemann 2001; Mulokozi 2011). These teachings, which were given in the proper time and space, and which were channelled through mature relatives of the same sex, articulate specific **epistemologies of gender and youth**.

Nevertheless, the loss of the rites of passage leaves room for silence and taboo as well as for wrong information obtained through unreliable means like peers and social media (Leshabari *et al.* 1997a,b; Roth Allen 2000; Bastien 2009). Thus, many girls remain entrapped in the difficult transition phase to adulthood, as they find themselves without a guide (Tumbo-Masabo & Liljestrom 1994; Liljestrom & Rwebangira 1998), because of the inadequacy of formal education in Tanzania, especially the gap in sexual and reproductive health education (Vavrus 2003).

Therefore, discussing *unyago* in literature on HIV/AIDS is a form of “incitement to discourse” (Foucault 1998) about sex and sexuality aiming to: disclose taboos, restate the validity of *unyago* sexual teachings in the current time, and to foster communication between parents and children. Particularly, I am arguing that rites of passage are used both as a screen to display and a trigger to drive local knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Considering the culturally specific diversity of *unyago* practices, it is important to clarify that the *unyago* traditions described in my case studies do not entail any kind of female genital mutilations, but they are focused on aspects of sexual education.

Furthermore, sexual practices taught in *unyago*, in between pleasure and communal responsibility, enhance the value of women's roles in knowledge production and fight against **“women's epistemic marginalization”**: “all measures spoken, written or gestured by men which seek to convey the impression that women are incapable of intellectual rigour or cognitive enterprises” (Chimakonam 2018: 11; Khatib 2014).

Initiation ceremonies are tutorial devices to pass down knowledge and values through the mouth of the *somo*, the initiation instructor, who is an elder “saviour woman” (Ntakula 1994: 98) or a “sage” (Oruka 1990). Sexuality in most African countries is connected to knowledge about one's body and bodily pleasures imparted by the *somo/kungwi* through a long education process (Swantz 1986; Swantz *et al.* 2014; Halley 2012), which includes undergoing isolation/liminality “betwixt and between” “in and out of both time and social structure” (Turner 1969: 95).

The plurality of African sexualities accomplishes multiple functions: social responsibility (reproduction), individual realisation (pleasure) and a sacred role connected to rituals (Tamale 2011). Furthermore, the historical encounter between Africa and the colonizers caused an additional inter-culturation of the local traditional cultural meanings of sexual relationships with other “sexual regimes” (Ahlberg-Maina 1994: 233): religious influences, both Islamic and Christian, Western administrative/legal rules, medical scientific practices (safe sex campaigns) and the secular version of romantic love (Ahlberg-Maina 1994; Tumbo-Masabo & Liljestrom 1994).

Therefore, on the one hand, the *Ars erotica* of the East is used to produce the truth on sex drawn from pleasure itself, understood as practice and accumulated as experience. On the other hand, The West tells the truth on sex by *Scientia sexualis*, a form of knowledge and power expressed by confession of the individual's hidden secrets (Foucault 1998: 58ff). The shift from *Ars erotica*, initiation, to *Scientia sexualis*, confession, implied a transformation of the education on sex from the truth of sex and pleasure to a distorted ideology of it (Foucault 1998: 62).

“The inner experience of eroticism demands from the subject sensitiveness to and the desire to infringe the taboo” (Bataille 2012: 39). Consequently, “disproportionate bodily appetites are connected to death” and prostitutes' bodies represent a “dead goddess” (Bataille quoted in Tchokothe 2012: 9). Thus, people die of AIDS transmitted by prostitutes and as punishment for loose manners in both “transgressive” (Tchokothe 2012) dramas and novels (Senkoro 1982).

However, Western eroticism (Bataille 2012: 29 - 30) has been countered by Nzegwu's concept of “*Osunality*”, “an Afrocentric representation of the erotic”, which explores female pleasure, agency and sexual knowledge (Nzegwu 2011: 257). Nzegwu's *Osunality*, stemming from *Osun* the Yoruba female goddess as source of sexual knowledge and pleasure, suggests that “the morality

of sexual pleasure and the erotic is a critique of emphasising fertility over pleasure in sexuality” (Nzegwu 2011: 258) An example of which is embodied in the character of Asha Kabeya in *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (Mkufya 2019).

Women are also trained as “(m)other” (Nnaemeka 1997: 1), mothering with pain and rewards in the “mother-centred logic of African societies regardless of their cultural differences” (Nzegwu 2011: 256). Thus, women in Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS are often portrayed as mothers, a critical role between agency and victimhood; the “paradoxical location of m(o)ther as both central and marginal” is related to the epistemological question of “construction, containment and dissemination of knowledge” (Nnaemeka 1997: 7). Mothers frame their “knowledge in wisdom” in “sphinx like enigma” (Nnaemeka 1997: 12) including useful clues and warnings. This “gendered knowledge”, transmitted by old women during initiation, is an example of “located knowledge” (Nnaemeka 1997: 8), which is often dismissed as “wom-anish wisdom” (Nnaemeka 1997: 12; Nnaemeka *et al.* 2016).

Therefore, women occupy an “intermediate space” (Mudimbe 1988) of observation and a “third space of engagement” (Nnaemeka 2003: 360), marginal and privileged, sitting “on the edge” (Nnaemeka 1994: 142). As an example, “Negofeminism is the feminism of negotiation, or, it stands for no ego feminism” (Nnaemeka 2003: 377), which is a “self-authentication within cultural boundaries” (Nnaemeka 1995: 106), for “the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance” (Nnaemeka 2003: 378). The ability to challenge through negotiations and compromise is usually learned at the crossroads (Nnaemeka 2003; 1995) and discussed in literature (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997).

...

In many African cultures **death** symbolizes the link between the natural and the spiritual world; death is the ontological departure from mankind and the beginning of spirithood. The living dead are those spirits who still live in the *sasa* period before becoming *mizimu* ancestors’ spirits (Mbiti 2011; 2010). In many African societies death is a welcome phenomenon for aged individuals, who have fulfilled their goals and can become ancestors, whereas death is a tragic event when it involves young people, unqualified for the ancestral home, because they have left no progeny. In “African existentialism” child-bearing and procreation qualify one to become an ancestor and thus these are prerequisites to a “good death” (Igbafen 2017).

Conversely, death from HIV/AIDS contaminates kinship networks because the “bad disease” causes premature “bad deaths” that endanger the continuity of the lineage that is no longer guaranteed (Setel 1999a; Mutembei 2001; Smith 2014). Specific concerns arise about the continuation of the bloodline, because unmarried and young people either have died in large numbers with-

out leaving any heirs, or they are unable to bear children because of HIV positivity. The decline in reproduction created by AIDS made people fear that “we are all going to die” because of the “apocalyptic illness” (Dilger 2008; 2010).

HIV/AIDS represents the moral decay of modern societies, being caused by negligent behaviour, the failure to respect moral prescriptions, from a family or an individual, or the practice of witchcraft. Therefore, proper **burial ceremonies** are recommended to restore the moral integrity of both the deceased and their family and to re-establish both social relations and spiritual control over living family members. Funerals are a “moral practice” to wipe away shame, stigma and curses afflicting entire kinships (Dilger 2008: 228; 2006).

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The cultural practice of *utani* or **joking relationships** can be described as “the relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence” (Radcliffe Brown 1940: 145). The Swahili root *utani* means kinship or familiar friendship and *mtani/watani* can be a member of either the same family, or the same clan/lineage within the same generation or an alternate generation, rarely within contiguous generations (Christensen 1963).

*Utani* is a traditional institution of social interaction or inter-ethnic relationships, which stems from ancient ethnic rivalries among different groups when former enemies integrated into one social group to get support during hard times caused by warfare or natural disasters. *Utani* gives emotional and practical support in hardships and bring peace between rivalries (Nombo 2007:102-3).

*Utani* is part and parcel of life-cycle rituals and communal events, which plays the role of conflict resolution for “social dramas” (Turner 1969), making use of aggressive language. The “anti-structure” of joking implies a symbolic language of satire, sexual and obscene games, world plays, and puns (Turner 1982: 85). Joking is characteristic especially in funerals to relieve mournful events and serious concerns. *Mtani* is a member of the deceased clan who prepares both the corpse and the ritual ceremony in a witty manner. Confiscations of food, garments or livestock by *watani* often occur in funerals as part of the rituals, but it is returned to the original owner after payment of a sum in cash or a ransom (Christensen 1963: 1317; Obadare 2010).

*Utani* also symbolises a juridical relationship that must be viewed in terms of duties and obligations, as well as rights and privileges in times of crisis, birth, death and quarrels, which aims to dissolve anger, appease dispute, and preserve peace among groups (Christensen 1963: 1326). This “intellectual tradition or knowledge-oriented practice” (Kresse 2018: 14; 2007) is an example of “untranslatability of culture” (Kezilahabi 2015: 40).

## 2.5.2. LIFE PHILOSOPHIES: COMMUNALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM: HOLISM AND EXISTENTIALISM

### 2.5.2.1. THE HOLISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

When the crisis of modern scientific epistemology, imposed as universal truth, began to manifest itself, **Afrikology**, an “all-inclusive epistemology rooted in the cradle of humankind” (Nabudere 2011: 1), suggests overcoming this crisis by returning to the source of African knowledge<sup>2</sup> (Nabudere 2011: 111). Afrikology is based on a **holistic epistemology** of experience and embodiment aiming to rehumanise the world (Nabudere 2011: 164) towards a “holistic integrated nature of reality and knowledge” which can “generate knowledge for a sustainable use” (Nabudere 2011: 39). An example of this is the practice of divination, a system of knowledge which works through sources that cannot be accessed by modern science, yet through vision, dreams and paranormal experiences (Gyekye 1995).

Knowledge is obtained through social communications among community members; in fact, the essence of being human is to share moral knowledge and communal virtues participating in communitarian ceremonies such as the rites of passage (Masolo 2004).

Therefore, Senghor (1964;1971) develops a theory of knowledge founded on emotions as the “black reason” (Mbembe 2017) that is “intuitive by participation” (Senghor quoted in Rettovà 2004: 56). By opposing himself to the objectifying European science, Senghor (1964) theorizes an embodied epistemology free of the split into subject and object, which is the theory of “dancing the other”, where dance means to know (Rettovà 2021a: 326). This knowing is via intuition, participation, emotion and Senghor’s “spiritual forces”: emotive intuitions that enter the sensory universe and that relate the spiritual world to the natural world (Bâ 1973). “Dancing the other” is underpinned by embodied knowledge of the knowing subject, which reaches full cognition of an object through sensory perception, emotion, intuition and sensibility (Udefi 2014).

Therefore, “Swahili writers “draw on indigenous ontologies” and their fictions challenge ontological and epistemological boundaries as a strategy for criticizing the Western hegemony” (Rettovà 2018: 439). Swahili writers aim to overcome Western hegemonic thinking represented by the “tragic epistemology of Western men”, which splits the totality of being into the “categories of Subject/Object” (man and thing: *mtu na kitu*), moving towards a holistic epistemology “based on **Being**” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 441; Rettovà 2007a; Rettovà 2017), obtained by the rejection of all the categorical distinctions (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 441).

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<sup>2</sup> See also Mutaawe-Kasozi’s “Ntu’ology” (2011).

The new relationship between humanity and “Being” in Swahili literature is *Kuwako*, which according to E. Kezilahabi’s interpretation means being in a locative sense: existence as “being-there” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018). Kezilahabi’s *Kuwako* reformulates Heidegger’s *Dasein* “existence in this world” with existential meaning (Rettovà 2018: 443); “*kuwapo* overcomes the concept of beings in favour of bare existence” (Rettovà 2018: 453). Likewise, in Mkufya’s conceptualization, *kuwa* being is the attribute of Gods and immaterial entities, without boundaries of time and space; whereas, *kuwako* is the attribute for humans and material beings, who exist in a well-defined time and space (Rettovà 2018: 452; 2007b).

Furthermore, “there is the belief that man is the centre of all nature and that everything is for his sake and at his disposal” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a: 174; Mkufya 2011). This kind of ecocriticism supported by Swahili writers is a contribution to a holistic epistemology or worldview, in search of a harmonious balance among human beings and the nature, which aims to preserve nature, rejecting any anthropocentrism: humans are neither superior nor separate from nature. It also empowers women (Graness 2018: 195).

A similar claim is expressed by Mkufya in *Face Under the Sea* (2011), the Burt-awarded<sup>3</sup> novel which can be analysed through the lenses of eco-criticism, linking the ideas to environmental justice and responsibility. Mkufya defends nature against humans’ pollution and their claims of superiority over all other living creatures, preaching instead mutual respect and harmony: “Nature always works to achieve a balance” (Mkufya 2011: 148) or a new **epistemology of Balance** learning from reciprocal compensation.

As a consequence, holistic philosophies are engendered such as the “philosophy of *utu*” (Rettovà 2020), which has its foundation in Senghor’s “dancing the other” (1971), and which not only implies co-being, being among and for the other, but can also be compared with the philosophy of “*buen vivir* – good life” (Medina 2011; Santos 2014; 2018) that implies a co-existence of epistemological and ontological diversity based on reciprocity and communality.

Finally, according to Kezilahabi’s “**onto-criticism**” (1985), literature itself is not *mimesis*-representation but ontology: “ontological aspect of metaphor, symbols and ritual” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 215). Through “onto-criticism” the project of destruction and re-construction not only dismantles inauthentic readings of African literature, but it also breaks with the Western epistemological tradition that splits subject and object (Kezilahabi 1985; Lanfranchi 2012: 72) and the “phenomenology of prostitution” - the use of foreign languages (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 450) in favour of expressing local discourses from an African epistemological locus in African languages. Kezilahabi’s project is of a “creative horizon of infinite possibilities” “that may stand in contradictory terms with one another” and that

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<sup>3</sup> [www.burtaward.org/wemkufya](http://www.burtaward.org/wemkufya).

represents “the possibility for contradictions and co-existence of opposites” (Lanfranchi 2012: 79). “The co-existence of opposites renders the African experience of “keeping together” worlds and worldviews” (Kezilahabi quoted in Lanfranchi 2012: 80).

#### 2.5.2.2. EXISTENTIALISM AND HUMANISM

**Existentialism** stands on the following core pillars: consciousness and fear of death, the search for the meaning of life, as well as alienation, absurdity and nausea of life. Existentialists examine the existence in this world, “Being-in-the-World” between the nonsense of life and the fearful awareness of death (Rettová 2007a; Csordas 1994), rejecting metaphysics according to Sartre’s statement that “existence precedes essence” (Sartre 2003; Rettová 2007a).

Existence refers to human beings’ life, who exist “thrown into the world” (Heidegger 1962), where each person has been endowed with the freedom to choose (Řehák 2007: 136). However, freedom leads to anxiety, because human beings cannot escape from making a choice and no choice is also a choice. Furthermore, everyday stereotypical activities bring the realization of the void and nothingness of life. In fact, to live free in a life without meaning causes the fall into the absurdity of existence, which together with the awareness of death, make suicide appear as the only way out (Řehák 2007; Sartre 2003; 2000).

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide” (Camus 2005: 1); “Judging whether life is or is not worth living is the most urgent of questions” (Camus 2005: 2). Committing suicide means to succumb to the absurdity of life: recognizing the human incapability of living own’s life such as it is (Camus 2005: 52-7). The *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) teaches us that recognising that life is worth living even though it is meaningless and absurd corresponds to the real revolt against the absurdity of life: “we have to imagine Sisyphus as a happy person” (Camus quoted in Řehák 2007: 138). Thus, “life will be lived all the better if it has no meaning” (Camus 2005: 51). Therefore, only the full consciousness and acceptance of both the human frailty and limits as well as the inevitability of death means to live happily and to die untroubled; whereas, fighting against an unavoidable faith means succumbing to the absurd ending with committing suicide.

Nevertheless, existentialism is also **humanism** (Sartre 2007): the meaning of life lies in the heroic help to other people and in the sacrifice of oneself for the others as an act of solidarity (Řehák 2007; Camus 2002; Sartre 2007). The “**African communalistic existentialism**” (Wiredu quoted in Řehák 2007: 148-9; Gyekye 1995: 208) considers existence to be the existence of the whole community and the individual as part of it; thus, in case of illness, and misfortunes these are extended to the whole clan and when one of the members of the community comes across an unchangeable bad destiny the

only way out is suicide in the form of self-sacrifice to save others. It is required to distinguish between “**individualistic existentialism**”: individual tragedy and collective revolt (*La Peste*, Camus 2002) and “**collective existentialism**”: collective tragedy and individual revolt culminating with the main characters’ suicide as a self-sacrifice for the community (*Kichwamaji*, Kezilahabi 2008) (Řehák 2007: 146-50). An individual existentialist commits suicide to save themselves from anxiety, whereas the communalist existentialist sacrifices themselves to free the community from oppression.

The Swahili concept of *utu*: humanity/humanism, which stems from the proverbs *mtu ni utu*: “a human being is humanity” or “being human through humanity”, refers to a transcendental source of moral values and community moral values (Rettová 2007b: 89). This transcendental element is excluded in existentialism. Yet, if you do not have transcendent goals, your life has no meaning, so you commit suicide.

African history is made of communalism not individualism: “humanity/*utu* in Swahili existential literature is referred to *kuwako* - existence in this world as being in the world as a society” (Rettová 2007b). In the novel *Ua La Faraja* (Mkufya 2004), for example, the character of Dr Hans Jumbe overcomes the boundaries of human life, between born and death, through childbirth (Rettová 2007b: 114). Thus, “African humanism” (Gordon quoted in Rettová 2020: 32), as a cultural concept, lies on the dependence of humanity on community; whereas, as a literary concept, “the philosophy of *utu* – being human” is grounded in a transcendental source of values and meaning (religion) (Rettová 2020: 33). In Swahili existential literature, the focus of which is the *conditio humana* of the human inhabitants of this world (*mlimwengu*), the value is immanent to human existence itself (Rettová 2020).

Conversely, *selfishness* is one of the unpleasant consequences of “*UKIMWI wa kijamii*” – “the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome/system of society” (Mkufya 2004: 357), in other words, a fragile society exposed to any external aggression in striking contrast to the radical integrity of the traditional concepts of humanity and identity (Mkufya email 1-08-2018). *UKIMWI wa kijamii* is a collective problem, not an individual one, because “African humanity - *utu wa mwafrika*”, has been forged by the collective African history of slavery, colonization, and neo-colonialism (Mkufya 2004: 361; Rettová 2007b: 116). As a consequence of the complicated history of African society, the contemporary humanity result being a “defective” one, “*utu-guni*” (Mkufya 2004: 361), which needs to be educated on how to return being “*utu wa kweli* - actual humanity” (Mkufya quoted in Rettová 2007b: 120).

Existentialism in Swahili literature was launched by Kezilahabi’s realist novels *Kichwamaji* (Hydrocephalus, 1974) and *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* (The World is an Arena of Chaos, 1975) and developed in his experimental phase (Rettová 2016b) with *Nagona* (proper name, 1990) and *Mzingile* (The Labyrinth, 1991).

To conclude, existentialist writing is the implementation of an ontological approach: the “text is the thing itself not the representation” (Rettovà 2007a: 196), and the ontological stand is the base of “quest for QUASSIA” - the African essence (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a: 196).

### 2.5.2.3. UDHAHIRI AND UYAKINIFU

In Mkufya’s first philosophical novel *Ziraili na Zirani*<sup>4</sup> (ZZ) (Azrael and Zirani, 1999), which represents through an allegorical situation “*the reality of the unreality preached to us about heaven*” (Mkufya 30-10-2018), new philosophical perspectives can be explored (Rettovà 2005; 2007a,b; 2016a,c; 2018; 2021a; De Giuli 2012) .

In this experimental novel, the souls of atheist and materialist (*yakinifu*) philosophers are settled in the “*kambi ya dhahara*” (the camp of what is evident/manifest, ZZ 68), a location in Hell, where the “*ideology of udhahiri*” - “*evidence or manifestness of things*” (Rettovà 2007a: 251; 2005: 17) is professed: “characteristics that can be recognised by human senses and their instruments not through characteristics of beliefs or ideas only” (Mkufya 1999: 68 quoted in Rettovà 2007a: 250; 2021a). *Udhahiri* is the “**true being**” consisting of both “**a cognitive and ontological aspect of reality**” (Rettovà 2007a: 252). In fact, it is an ontology which is **evident** and adequate to human cognitive capacities: the five senses and reason. Thus, it is a “**real and evident being**” (Rettovà 2007a: 252). **Evidence** is the cognitive quality of **reality**: “what is manifest is real, what is real is manifest” (Rettovà 2007a: 251), and “**true being** is a matter, a substance”: “what is **material is evident** and thus **real**” (Rettovà 2007a: 253).

Therefore, religious beliefs, ideas and any metaphysical claims behind/beyond the world of phenomena, not accessible through the sensory experiences, are excluded in favour of a reality of material nature (Rettovà 2007a: 251-3). Thus, *udhahiri* is the reduction of reality at measure of men, accessible through the senses and the minds of materialist and atheist’ thinkers, in connection with *uyakinifu* (Rettovà 2007a: 255), which I redefine as **cognitive materialism**.

Nevertheless, reality is constituted by multiple dimensions and multi-faceted versions which cannot be objectified and thus escape from the limited human cognitive capacities of senses and reason. The other dimensions of reality are accessible in the novel through the intervals of free-verse poetry and poems recited by demons and other creatures in Hell (Rettovà 2021a),

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<sup>4</sup> The novel, the first draft of which saw the light in 1980, was only accepted by a publisher in 1999. It has been translated into English by the author himself with the title *Pilgrims From Hell* (PFH). However, the English manuscript is still unpublished.

which develop a counter-epistemology through genre. Therefore, the novel articulates “**the epistemology of cognitive relativism, radical scepticism and agnosticism**” (Rettovà 2021a: 332-4) by which is characterized.

#### 2.5.2.4. CHARACTERS AND PERSONAS ARTICULATING AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

“Orukian sages” are carriers of “other” knowledge and alternative rationalities following on from the argument that plural rationalities exist, and that “reason” does not exclusively pertain to the domain of science (Hountondji 2007).

The concept of “philosophical sagacity” (Oruka 1990; Graness & Kresse 1997) “resides in a critical reflection on the world that has as its protagonists what Odera Oruka calls “sages,” be they poets, storytellers, musicians, traditional healers or other traditional authorities” (Santos 2014: 319).

Sagacity means: “expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community, those thoughts are a way of representing and explaining the world that fluctuates between **popular wisdom** and **didactic wisdom**” (Oruka 1990: 28).

According to Oruka, the masters of popular wisdom (conformist thoughts) are the **folk-sages**, while the **philosophic sages** are the experts in didactic wisdom, who at times are critical of the communal set-up as well as of popular wisdom (Oruka 1990: 28). Philosophic sages are representative of a particular culture, but they make independent critical assessments of what people take for granted, whereas folk sages recite and describe customs and beliefs. Thus, philosophical sagacity is “the thought of rigorous indigenous thinkers (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education, but they are nonetheless critical independent thinkers” (Oruka 1990: 234).

Female sages are often qualified as “folk sages” (Mosima 2018: 27). However, women are those who give “active interpretation of tradition” (Presbey quoted in Mosima 2018: 34).

“**Intellectually adventurous thinkers**” (Wiredu quoted in Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2003: 227) are the philosophic sages of the community, cognitive revisionists, who have the epistemic authority of a society, and people to whom others turn for knowledge and advice being depositories of wisdom and knowledge who engage in a critical reflection on tradition. In fact, “sagacity is a broader concept than knowledge because it is the ability to make good use of knowledge between common sense and reasoning” (Oruka 1990: 234).

On the one hand, the figure of the philosopher is a “specialist of the general” (Kresse 2009: 150) that means being capable of bridging together specialized knowledge with issues and questions concerning every member of the community. On the other hand, there are “*walimu wa jamii* - the teachers

of society” people acknowledged as wise who illustrate intellectual activity within social practice described by the Swahili idiomatic phrase: “*hekima na busara*”- the owner of wisdom and good common sense (Kresse 2009: 151).

Wisdom implies having the intellectual ability or good sense to put knowledge into action and practice, to apply socially relevant knowledge within a community, and to make people think (Kresse 2009: 164). “Wisdom in Swahili context is placed between, on the one hand, the non-conformity and originality of individual thinkers, going beyond previously established borders of knowledge, and, on the other hand, the adherence and reproduction of an existent body of knowledge” (Kresse 2009: 164).

Sages and intellectually adventurous thinkers are represented in literature, inspiring fictional protagonists between “modern actual creativity and cultural purity” (Kasanda, *Asixoxe* London 2018).

## 2.6. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF GENRE

I argue that philosophical thoughts and epistemologies can be conveyed through literary genres and stylistic aspects of the narrative. At this point of the study, a pivotal juncture to be considered is the way in which different literary genres, such as novels, theatre, and performances, communicate philosophical and social messages differently.

The literary genres, which immediately responded to the first occurrence of the HIV virus in Tanzania, were “African orature” (Mugo 1991) verbal arts, oral narratives, poetry (Mutembei 2001; 2005b; 2009a; 2002; 2015; 2016), songs (Barz 2006; Askew 2015) and performances (Askew 2002; Barber 2018; Edmondson 2007). Finally, the topic has spread through all literary genres among them complex novelistic productions in both English and Swahili (Mutembei 2013; 2015; Bertoncini *et al.* 2009).

African popular theatre and Theatre for Development (Mlama 1991a; Salhi 1998; Hatar 2001; Johansson 2011; Plastow 2014) projects have been founded and encouraged in Tanzania, becoming the most common tool to communicate HIV/AIDS education with all their advantages and disadvantages such as political interests and Western epistemological influences (Mlama 1991a; Shule 2011; 2014; Thiong’o 2013).

Furthermore, with the passing of time and the expansion of Western prevention campaigns, the media of communication discussing HIV/AIDS were developed and new more medium became popular. For example, murals, billboards, and advanced communication technologies (social media, blogs, websites etc) (Mutembei 2014; Beck 2006; Omari 2011). However, it is worth noting how billboard campaigns were largely a failure in Tanzania because of the misuse of Euro-American prevention campaigns notions as well as the use of English language (Mutembei 2014; Offe 2001).

As a result of my fieldwork observation, I can state that Tanzanian writers have recently chosen to write high quality novels to communicate about HIV/AIDS (Mkufya 6-10-2018). In fact, the HIV/AIDS issue is no longer a social crisis of public concern to be displayed through performance; conversely, it has become a personal topic to reflect on privately.

Therefore, I decided to investigate two different genres, drama and novels, with the objective of unearthing “the ontological aspect of metaphors, symbols and ritual” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 215), in other words, practices, personas, philosophies, as well as literary devices, which are extricated from “a body of knowledge that signifies” (Kezilahabi quoted in Lanfranchi 2012: 78) and which stem from an “African epistemological locus” (Kresse 2005b).

Traditional African theatre is a social activity embedded in ritual performances (Kerr 1995; Mlama 2003a,b; Lihamba 2004), showing the “eminent theatricality of African cultures” (Conteh-Morgan & Olaniyan 1994: 3). African theatre is not a self-contained genre because it implies “enactment” of stories and characters through an integrative use of various formats of performing arts as well as improvisation by means of the interactive communication of the chorus with the audience (Finnegan 2012; Conteh-Morgan & Olaniyan 1994).

Subsequently, “Gods self-sacrifice on the altar of literature” (Soyinka 2005: 1) and the traditional African performances (Finnegan 2012; Conteh-Morgan & Olaniyan 2004; Mlama 2003a,b) developed in the post-independence period into three categories: literary drama, African Popular Theatre and Theatre for Development (TfD) (Conteh-Morgan & Olaniyan 1999; Kerr 1995; Method 2013; Wafula 1999).

On the one hand, literary drama is the play script designed following dramatic conventions for stage representation (Mda 1990: 355), which is made up of an incorporation of different elements such as plot, actions/events, characters’ dialogues, narrators’ monologues, storytelling, chorus intervals, music and dances (Hussein 2003; Pickering 2005; Chimerah & Njogu 2011; Method 2013). In addition to this, the Swahili experimental phase also incorporates oral folk tales, “*hadithi*-like theatre” (Fiebach 1997; Hussein 1976), and poetry, “poetic theatre” (Ricard 2000; Bertoncini *et al.* 2009), into drama. On the other hand, theatre is a live performance, an open forum to negotiate and create meaning with active participation of the community members (Mda 1993: 45 - 51).

For instance, the “participatory popular theatre” (Kerr 1991) is characterized by the participation of not only intellectuals, who operate a “sanctification of linguistic and cultural vernacularism” through popular literature (Kerr 1991: 69; Thiong’o 1986), but also the community, who are actively engaged through dialogue. Therefore, African Popular theatre is used in community education as a mobilization tool for the marginalized groups of society, which

works through conscientization and interactive participatory communication (Eyoh 1987).

African “Popular theatre with development themes” (Byam 1999: 2) is a “pedagogical medium” (Desai 1990: 75) and a “normative discursive praxis” (Desai 1990: 68), which was built upon the theories of the Brazilian educators Freire (2005) and Boal (2008), as the expression of popular cultural resistance to oppression applied in postcolonial African societies and which relies on people to encourage community development (Mloma 1991b).

Firstly, Freirean “pedagogy of the oppressed” (2005) which consists in “problem-posing education” and “the philosophy of conscientization” has been transposed in Africa to subvert the culture of silence through open dialogues, which are a medium to develop critical thinking and gauge level of consciousness (Byam 1999: 15 - 28; Freire 2005). Subsequently, Boal illustrates how the Aristotelian’s *Poetics* is a “coercive system of intimidation” because the actors think in place of the spectators, who instead remain passive (Boal 2008: 31). Conversely, Brechtian epic theatre hinders the audience from identifying itself with the characters in the play through “the Alienation effect (1935)”, also applied in the “Africanised Epic theatre” (Fiebach 1997: 25; Hussein 1969), which is a feeling of estrangement that describes a surprising and strange event that transforms something familiar into something unexpected to make the spectators adopt a critical approach to the event (Brecht 1992: 91-9). Finally, Boal launches the “poetic of the oppressed” (2008), whose objectives are to tear down the wall between spectators and actors and to transform theatre into a revolutionary tool aimed to free the oppressed by giving to the spectators an active role in the creation of the performance (Boal 2008: 95 - 135). Thus, “forum theatre” is an open performance led by the “joker system”, where the joker’s explanations, delivered in forms of a fable or a lecture, bring it closer to the spectator than to the actors, and, in the meantime, the spectators become “spect-actors”, who assume protagonists’ roles in the spectacles.

TfD is a “theatre for Conscientization” (Mda 1990: 355), based on the use of a dramatic media “to communicate for development” by involving the community members at every stage of the process (Mloma 1991b: 43), through dialogical communication where actors are catalysts to social consciousness who halt the action at the crisis point. Thus, the audience become performers, who participate in an open forum discussion, researching solutions for community problems (Mda 1990: 352-8). Mda defines TfD as a “communicative act” where the performer-spectator bond is recognised as an “interpersonal channel of communication” (Mda 1993: 81-2). In TfD, the text, in which the participants interact to produce meaning, is a macro sign which breaks into smaller units of signs (Hall 2019). Through these signs the catalysts and the community interact producing and exchanging meaning. Therefore, dramatic performance is a set of signs and codes which must operate within a culture

and be shared by both catalysts and audience members to be successful. The change in attitude is achieved through effective involvement of the audience in “development communication” (Mda 1993: 45 - 51), which is possible only if all the participants share the same code (Mda 1993: 83-5; Hall 2006).

To sum up, theatre is an “interpersonal channel of communication for development” (Mda 1993: 85) which works through the following three essential elements for any change to be effective: firstly, “optimal heterophily”, between catalysts/source and spectators/receivers, enables “optimal intervention”, which is the best compromise between the opposing tendencies of catalysts’ intervention and community participation; secondly, when the balance is obtained, “optimal intervention” engenders the highest level of conscientization and the community members become catalysts themselves; finally, “optimal participation” becomes an instrument of liberation for the periphery which is able to produce and distribute its own message (Mda 1993: 173-4).

In conclusion, theatre is a key collective communication medium which addresses the community for development. Through choral devices, dialogic interactions, storytelling, songs and dances, it conveys specific messages as well as embodied knowledge and philosophies, which are approved through “optimal participation” (Mda 1993) of the “spect-actors” (Boal 2008) to raise consciousness and mobilize communities in open forum performances.

Conversely, novels are an individualistic media for self-reflection and meditation, which display stylistic intrusions of multiple genres that open up the canons of literary genres for experimentation, embedding into the narrative prose orality, dramatic style and performance. Novels are a promising genre through which to develop and communicate philosophical elaboration of alternative epistemologies, because the prose has the potential to intermingle multiple philosophical outlooks through the merging of plural and heterogenous genres, voices, and languages because of its **heteroglossia** (Bakhtin 1981), **intertextuality** (Kristeva 1986), “**entextualization**” (Barber 2007) and “**generic fracturing**” (Rettovà 2021b).

Novels are “a rather complex systems of styles and dialectics” (Bakhtin 1981: 25), as well as a system of different languages and heterogenous incorporated genres that can produce a “novelization of other genres” (Bakhtin 1981: 39). This “system of languages” (Bakhtin 1981: 262) -**heteroglossia**-reproduces all the types of multiform social speeches, the multiplicity of social languages, the variety of individual voices and their interrelationships (Bakhtin 1981: 264). Thus, the novel is “an artistic system of languages in dialogic interrelationships” (Bakhtin 1981: 416), where the social heteroglossia is “dialogized” into variform speeches from multiple voices in various languages (authorial speech, narrator speech, and characters’ dialogues), which defer meaning according to the context. Novels are both characterised by dialogism to situate philosophical problems within language and founded on

experience that makes them more prone to show epistemologies (Bakhtin 1981). “Dialogism or double-voiced discourse” expresses how every character have a unique personality, which reflects their worldview, belief system, mode of speech, and ideology expressed through the characters’ voices (Bakhtin 1981: 333). In a “polyphonic novel”, all characters and narrators are “ideologues” who possess their own discursive consciousness (Bakhtin quoted in Allen 2000: 22-3). Likewise, since each language embodies an ideology, an opinion, an interpretation and a worldview (Bakhtin quoted in Allen 2000: 25), heteroglossia reproduces a dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems (Bakhtin 1981: 314-5). For instance, novels, which express philosophical thoughts in African languages, mark “the renaissance of African culture” (Thiong’o quoted in Kresse 1999: 35) by illustrating the polylogue and multilingual world from whence African philosophy stems (Kresse 1999: 33).

Moreover, the “self-reflexive narrative” technique, which characterizes Swahili “new novel” (Khamis 2005; Mwangi 2009: 6-8), shows the “multifacetedness of the narrator character” by illustrating different voices and perspectives that can be isolated in a single character’s words (Khamis 2007c: 176-7).

Novels are characterized by multivocality, but they also feature quotes from other texts intermingled in the narration. **Intertextuality** means that: “each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read”; any text is the absorption and transformation of another text (Kristeva 1986: 37; Allen 2000). A text is reflexive of its society by intertextual linkages (Barber 2007: 3): “text is a field of local, popular, personal, domestic textual productivity” (Barber 2007: 222), which “tells us about society and cultural values through its specific textuality (its way of being a text)” (Barber 2007: 13). Intertextuality is quotation between genres or when a “genre incorporates chunks of other genres”, yet “the chunks of genres incorporated keep their genre markers intact” (Barber 2007: 78).

“**Entextualization**”, is “the process of rendering a given instance of discourse as text” (Barber 2007: 22). It fixes words and “all types of utterance” into texts (Barber 2007: 73). For instance, “text and performance are two sides of the same coin” (Barber 2007: 79): “text depends on performance and performance on text” (Barber 2005: 264). Since text (decontextualized discourse) and performance (the act of mobilizing discursive elements) are inseparably and mutually constitutive (Barber 2005: 274), the technique of “entextualization” makes possible a fluid and dynamic realization of the text in performance” (Barber 2005: 276) and vice versa.

The roots of Swahili modern creative writing reside in fables or folk-tales; however, oral literature, with the passing of time, evolved into the contemporary novelistic productions aimed at exploring not only the psychological insights of individual experiences, but also the meaning of human beings’ lives in a philosophical key (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Philipson 1992). The in-

roduction of novel as a genre in Africa made its first appearance during the colonial period (Gérard 1981; Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Garnier 2013; wa Ngũgĩ 2018), and thus, realism has been considered the style par excellence of the novelistic genre, which is considered an intellectual product of the European Enlightenment attached to the positivist epistemology of science (Watt 1987; Rettovà 2021b). Nevertheless, novels are neither endogenous to African traditions nor are they expropriated from the West, yet they are an acquired genre adopted and readjusted to the Swahili cultural context (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009: 33).

Novels are “empirical philosophy”, where being and material reality are embodied in narrative plot and characters (Rettovà 2016c: 123). Nonetheless, the artistic creativity overcame the mere representation of a bare reality favouring instead an “enchanted reality” (Rettovà 2016c: 118). Thus, “marvellous appearances (*ajabu*)” dissolve ontological and epistemological boundaries questioning the difference between existence and non-existence” (Rettovà 2016c: 114). Those alternative epistemologies and ontologies, which are the “signs” of the Swahili “new novels” (Khamis 2005; 2007c), challenge the ontology of Western reality and the epistemology of scientific rationality producing a “marvellous world” set on the basis and the rules of the real world, yet they are always ready to subvert and transgress it (Rettovà 2016c: 129). “It is only possible to challenge the Western episteme from within the Western episteme towards “regional rationalities” (Mudimbe quoted in Rettovà 2016c: 129).

Multiple epistemologies can be expressed via various literary genres, not only oral forms such as proverbs (Gyekye 1995; Wanjohi 1997), poetry (Rettovà 2010; 2016a), and other non-written medium like drama and performances (Rettovà 2010), but also written genres like novels (Wamitila 2002; Diegner 2005; 2018; Rettovà 2007a). Then each specific genre constructs philosophical reflections differently. Furthermore, pieces of oral literature can be integrated into written texts, particularly into novels.

This is exemplified by Mkufya’s novel *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999), which has been defined a “patchwork of genres” (Gromov quoted in Rettovà 2016a) and “a mosaic of citations” “rich in intertextuality” (Diegner 2005: 27), wherein contrasting ontologies and epistemologies articulate various philosophical thoughts through interferences of performance, poems and songs (Rettovà 2016a; Rettovà 2021b). The “**generic fracturing**” (Rettovà 2021b) applied in this novel, through the insertion of free-verse poetry into the prose, is a technique to surface a clash of different philosophies. The positivist epistemology of the materialist thinkers is challenged by the process of relativization, introduced by the evil ontologies of the demons and the black bird of Hell, which as a result develops “the epistemology of cognitive relativism, scepticism and agnosticism” (Rettovà 2021b: 12; 2021a) that characterizes the novel. In the end, both materialist thinkers and demons are challenged by the mystery of

Heaven. The novel stages two main trials against both physics and metaphysics. On the one hand, it challenges the ontological dimension, questioning the phenomenal world and the afterlife as Heaven and Hell, and, on the other hand, it challenges the epistemological dimension, questioning the nature of truth, knowledge and reality (Rettovà 2016a: 216). The reality as *udhahiri*, which we defined as manifest or accessible through human cognitive capacities, “senses and instruments”, (Mkufya 1999: 68) is challenged by another reality “behind and beyond the world of phenomena” (Rettovà 2016a: 216) and the human rational thinking, which is either concealed or revealed by the free verses performed by the counter-ontologies of the demons.

This technique has been defined as “generic fracturing” (Rettovà 2021b: 2) and conceptualised as the “interval of heterogenous genres (commonly poetry into the novelistic prose) which fracture the prose of the novel”, capable of challenging the hegemonic ideology of the novels informed by scientific positivism and realist aesthetic through the appearance of “alternative aesthetics, epistemologies and ontologies” (Rettovà 2021b: 3 - 4). Those cracks into the main genres let other genres explode, integrating the communication with multiple philosophies (Rettovà 2021b). Since human cognitive capacities are transitory and limited, the “generic fracturing” (Rettovà 2021b) is employed through poetry and songs to temporarily “reveal and hide the reality” (Rettovà 2016a: 218), “opening up the way to another concealed dimension of reality behind the phenomenal world and beyond human cognitive capacities” (Rettovà 2016a: 218; Mkufya 1999).

Furthermore, the use of oral genres in written texts such as poetry, proverbs, or metaphors is a technique to preserve historical heritage and folklore (Barber 2005; 2007). Proverbs and sayings are often introduced in prose by local expressions such as “*waswahili wanasema* - the Swahili say” by narrators or jokers, who are characters who act as depository of local knowledge. Pivotal characters can be introduced or introduce themselves by poetry, bringing in the narrative discourse’s alternative epistemologies, ontologies and philosophies. For instance, the core character of Asha Kabeya in Mkufya’s *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (2019) introduces herself by songs and lullabies sung in the language of her ethnic group of origin, the *Manyema*, passed on by her grandmother.

To conclude, localised knowledge and traditional structures of thinking are reflected in the modern narrative by means of a heterogenous styles of narration (Quayson 2009) made up of characters, narrators, dialogues in languages pertaining to different classes and social registers (Bakhtin 1981). Moreover, a “polysemy of oral discourses” (myths, proverbs and dramatic elements), intermingled in the narrative prose, represent a way to narrate endogenous knowledge and local systems of beliefs (Quayson 2009: 160). Thus, “flux and intertextuality can be the key for an African gnosis” (Quayson 1997: 149).

In the following sections, I analyse the main aspects of the epistemology of genre such as stylistics, narratology, characters, chorus and figures of speech.

## 2.6.1. STYLISTICS AND NARRATOLOGY

Narratology is the study of narrative discourse (Genette 1993: 54); the analysis of which investigates the succession of actions/events (narrative discourse), the medium which conveys the narrative (either oral or written), and the act of narrating itself (Genette 1980: 25). The narrative discourse in literature is a narrative text in which we analyse the relationship between events (plot, story), discourse (narrative), and the act of narrating (Genette 1980: 27).

The “mediacy” (Stanzel 1981: 5) can be the authorial voice, or the narrator and characters performing either monologue or dialogue. The **narrator** can speak either in the first or third person, it can be either an external omniscient voice or an internal voice with a limited point of view (Stanzel 1984).

In my case studies, novels usually present omniscient external narrators, whereas in plays there are internal narrators who are either omniscient or who hold a more limited view.

Moreover, other agents of transmission are the **teller-characters**, who narrate, tell by verbal communication and who must be distinguished from the **reflector-characters**, who show, reflect and mirror in their consciousness the external world and thus communicate through perceptions and thoughts (Stanzel 1981; 1984). The reflectors are more common in novels, while the tellers in drama, according to the case studies.

Finally, the **focalizer** expresses the point of view, the focus (Genette 1980; Bal 1997), by “envisioning” the readers with plural cultural visions (Bal 2019: 249).

In Mkufya’s trilogy, the authorial voice overlaps with the external omniscient narrator, and the main characters are both reflector-characters and focalizers.

To conclude, “the point of narratology” is to connect the fictional narrative text to reality, history, anthropology, ideology and philosophy (Bal 1990).

### 2.6.1.1. DRAMATIC CHORUS, NARRATORS AND CHARACTERS

The **dramatic chorus** not only is a stylistics element in drama and performance, but it is also a social cultural practise and a localised epistemology which channels communal knowledge (Mutembei 2012).

Originally, the chorus used to be a big group of people representing the community dialoguing with characters. With the passing of time we see the increase in the number of characters and the decrease in the chorus members, reduced even to one single element or “choral character” (Mutembei 2012: 5 - 25).

Mkufya (20-8-2019) detects an “individualisation of the chorus”, which changes from “the communal voice” of a group of chosen people who express collective opinions. The chorus splits into “a multitude of individuals”,

among whom we can identify the individual protagonist or tragic hero and the antagonist.

Moreover, the actual applicability of the chorus in all the Swahili literary genres (theatre, novels and poetry) (Mutembei 2012) is still an open debate. For instance, Mutembei's analysis (2012: 121-59) of the applicability of chorus in novels is opposed by Mkufya (Mkufya on Chorus e-mail 20-8-2019), who maintains that "*the choral style analysis is not suitable in novels, especially in the modern psychoanalytical novel representing a modern society it is hard to get a choral voice*" and the choral characters are flat characters, generally not well developed psychologically, who thus cannot cover a core function in complex novelistic situation.

The core function of the chorus is to convey and to circulate the morals and the leitmotif of the work; however, chorus in Swahili dramas is the representation of African traditions and customs with the aim to sort out social issues through community shared solutions (Mutembei 2012).

The seven types of choruses which appear in Swahili literature are as follows: a peculiar event which describes *traditional habits and customs* such as life cycle rituals and symbolizes the ethical pillars of the African society; *songs and music* performances expressed by the refrain or the repetition of core concepts; the *structure* that is commonly dialogic and the *style*, which is characterised by a story inside the story or multi-layered narrations usually rich in flashbacks; *choral characters* who give advice, opinions, raise questions and propose answers to those queries. They also unify the plot, lead both the audience and other characters and teach the reasons underpinning the purpose of the drama; the presence of *silence* in the form of understood actions, proverbs, metaphors or absence of voices; finally, the *purpose* itself of the play has a choral function (Mutembei 2012: 27 - 68).

Furthermore, choral songs, which are performed with a style and a language recalling the Greek Dionysian dithyramps, play an antagonistic and anti-chorus role, expressed by a "dithyrambic-exasperate" style of poetry. Hence, "*Ushairi wa ki-dithiramb-korofi*" (the impertinent dithyramb), which characterises the "*korasi ya ki-korofi*" (satirical arrogant chorus) is a non-conformist and revolutionary kind of anti-chorus that challenges the classical function of the Greek chorus (Mkufya unpublished<sup>5</sup>).

After the decrease of the choral elements only one representative of the traditional chorus remains, the leader of the play, or the **choral character** (Mutembei 2012), who performs both aesthetic and economic functions in the play. They are the author's spokespersons, or, the focalizers of the play (Genette 1980; Bal 1997), who lead the audience to a precise perspective, which would not be possible without their interventions and explanations, and they also construct the leitmotif of the play (Mutembei 2012). The choral

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<sup>5</sup> "*Ushairi wa Kikorofi*", Mkufya unpublished (April 2019).

characters overlap with both narrator-like characters and non-fictional traditional figures of the African society.

Thus the principal choral characters who I isolated in the case studies are the following key figures: *Mtambaji*: the narrator; *Mtani*: the joker; *Bi Msimulizi*: the female storyteller; *La Mgambo*: the bellman; *Manju*: the maestro or chorus master; *Chizi/kichaa*: the fool; *Sauti*: the off screen voice.

Finally, *Sauti*, the voice, can be either an off-screen narration or an internal voice heard in a character's head as thoughts and reflections. This is a further example of chorus reduced to a choral character, which sings to unveil secrets in the plot and to foster virtuous behaviour related to HIV/AIDS prevention.

Those personas are people who usually perform focal roles in African traditional societies and who consequently inspire main characters in literature. In the following paragraphs, I am describing in detail narrators, jokers and choral sages.

The narrative agent, **the narrator**, is “that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text”, and it differs from the author of the narrative (Bal 1997: 18). A text is a narration which is determined by the narrator and the focalizer. In the narration we have three layers which do not always overlap in the shape of a single person: narrator, focalizer and actors/characters. The narrator narrates and is the agent who tells the story. Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent who sees, and that which is seen. Thus, the focalizer expresses an aspect of the story, and is the “holder of the point of view, shaping vision and worldview” (Bal 1997: 21).

The narrator who never refers to itself as a character and does not act nor figures in the fabula is an external narrator (EN). The narrator who can be identified with a character in the fabula and perform actions in the story is a character-bound narrator (CN).

Finally, the distinction between round and flat characters is based on psychological criteria: the round characters are complex persons who undergo a change in the course of the story and remain capable of surprising the reader. Flat characters are stable, stereotyped and without anything surprising.

The traditional **joker** in literature not only reminds us of the important social role which he plays in African communities, but it can also develop according to the Boal's “joker system” style (Boal 2008). The “Joker system” satisfies the need to analyse the text and to reveal the secrets of the text to the audience, showing the point of view of the author and focusing the action according to a predetermined perspective (Boal 2008: 152). The joker resembles both the moderator function of the chorus, and the “raisonneur” of Ibsen's plays. In fact, the joker performs the role of the “magical, omniscient, polymorphous and ubiquitous” character, the master of ceremony, who “makes all the explanations verified in the structure of the performance and when necessary, he can be assisted by choral orchestra or coryphaeus” (Boal 2008: 159).

The joker is a complex stylistic device who plays a polyvalent role as chorus leader, of one of the characters, a protagonist but diametrically opposed to the protagonist, and the author's spokesperson (Boal 2008: 158-9).

Finally, in the HIV/AIDS literature I discovered and isolated peculiar figures, who not only embody all the characteristics of wise people and sages of the Swahili community, but they also perform narrative and stylistic functions as choral characters or storytellers. Those are complex characters who incorporate characteristics of choral characters (Mutembei 2012), and their thoughts can overlap with the "thoughts of wise men and women in any given community, between *popular wisdom* and *didactic wisdom*" (Oruka 1990: 28), who I baptize as "**choral sages**".

Thus, two sets of "choral sages" emerge. On the one hand, the traditional healers and diviners, who are the expression of traditional knowledge and local understanding of health, illness and treatment. They provide us with the culturally particular representation of sickness. In fact, healers are figures in between spaces, who combine the ontological divide between traditional and modern medicine into an "epistemic assemblage" interconnecting dissonant ontologies such as Islamic evils, traditional spirits, viruses and bacteria (Langwick 2011: 18), leading to a new lexicon of intersection from "enchanted parasites to biomedical devils" (Langwick 2011: 7). On the other hand, the narrators or traditional storytellers, animated by strong didactic purposes, evolved as the representatives of the positivist epistemology and science. They represent the critics of traditional knowledge, for they aim to provide people with general scientific HIV/AIDS education and prevention. Particularly, in HIV/AIDS plays, the "**narrator-sages**" seem to assume an antagonistic position towards the "**healer-sages**", for each faction is the representative of different worldviews and contrasting epistemologies, which can be either general scientific or culturally specific knowledge.

To sum up, typical characters and personas making their appearance in literature, both dramas and novels, are the following: first, there are Mutembei's (2012) choral characters, who can overlap with both the classical notion of tragic chorus and the narrators; second, there are the Orukian sages (1990); third, the Boalian jokers (2008); the African *watani*; and finally, what I called, as my original contribution, "choral sages", which can be split into "narrator-sages" and "healer-sages".

However, in the case studies it will be noticed that in the plays the characters cover well-structured functions or stereotypical roles. In the novels, on the other hand, characters are alive and independent. Especially Mkufya's novels depict round complex characters in development. Moreover, in plays, women are often epistemically marginalized not only as "folk sages" representative of traditional knowledge (Mosima 2018), but also as victims, whereas novels epitomize stronger female characters. Finally, traditional healers tend to be stereotyped as charlatans in dramas, whereas in novels, their practices are recognised.

## 2.6.2. METAPHORS AND OTHER TROPES AS EPISTEMIC DEVICES

As a form of epistemology of genre, the multi-generic texts are intermingled with elements characteristic of orality and verbal arts (Ong 1982) such as “master tropes” (Sapir 1977: 4), proverbs and myths articulating a plurality of local discourses.

“Metaphors we live by” (Lakoff & Johnson 1989) are part of a human being’s everyday life, as well as the “embodied metaphors” (Low 1994) that represent bodily experiences and sensations, which shape human cognition (Lakoff & Johnson 1989), convey socio-cultural meanings (Quinn 1991), and challenge the structure of the world (Fernandez & Durham 1991; Fernandez 1991).

In East Africa, fictional works communicate through metaphors (Mutembei 2015), and the figurative language shifts from the area of the known to the unknown; for instance, witches who send unseen lethal agents to kill people are common to the AIDS paradigm. Meaningful dialogues through metaphors are built up in literature, so as to communicate effectively with people not only about the illness, but also on the whole process of being ill, living with infected people, and death. “Illness as a figure or metaphor is the most truthful way of regarding illness and the healthiest way of being ill” (Sontag 1991: 3; Alcorn 1988).

The “epistemology of metaphors” (Burkhardt & Nerlich 2010) and other tropes is an evolutionary epistemology. Metaphors are the component parts of a knowledge process which determines the development of not only cultural and social environment in which human beings interact, but also the ways in which humans perceive the world (Mac Cormac 1985: 127). Rhetorical tropes are “contextually performative strategies” (Crocker 1977: 38; Fernandez 1977) and “way in” or “equipment for living” (Crocker 1977: 44; Seitel 1977: 75).

In the following section I describe the techniques that will be applied for textual analysis on rhetorical language.

The “**logic of riddles**” (Maranda quoted in Turner 1974) relates metaphors to both analogy and metonymy. “Analogy is a technique of reasoning, resting on two kinds of connectives between phenomena: similarity and contiguity, in other words, metaphor and metonymy” (Turner 1974: 193-4). In the analogy formula two members in the same structural position (A and C; B and D) constitute a metaphor. The members of one side of the equation mark are in metonymic relation to each other (A and B; C and D):  $A/B = C/D$ .

“**Metaphonymy**” (Goossens 1995) is a linguistic device which connects two distinct cognitive processes where metaphor and metonymy are intertwined. Metaphor involves similarity between two conceptual domains, while metonymy involves contiguity in the same conceptual domain. In other words, the same sign expresses both a metaphorical image and a concept that stands metonymically to the main conceptual domain.

**Social representations** (Moscovici 2000) shapes reality and thoughts produced through interaction and communication. The source of social representations is unfamiliarity, and the aim is to familiarize with the unfamiliar: “the source of all representations is to make something unfamiliar familiar” (Moscovici 2000: 37). Anchoring and objectification are the two processes that generate social representations. Anchoring is the process by which unfamiliar concepts are compared/interpreted with common sense shared values, norms and beliefs, setting them into a familiar context; then, the anchored product that is still something abstract becomes objectified into concrete content. The “social representations theory” is a process through which HIV/AIDS acquires meanings showing how things change in society. For example, AIDS can be compared to syphilis, and then explained as sorcery. For any new threatening phenomena, new representations emerge as the result of inter-individual communications in daily life to both understand the unknown and create new meanings (Moscovici quoted in Rödlach 2006: 10).

**UKIMWISHAJI / “AIDS-tization”** (Mutembei 2007) is the aesthetic process through which analyse AIDS in literature, rooted in people’s popular conversations and everyday speeches, where people are changing meaning, structure and use of traditional rhetorical figures, metaphors and proverbs because of AIDS. As in the following common examples (Mutembei 2007: 76 - 89): *kama hujui kufa chungulia kaburi* (if you don’t know what death is, look inside a grave), it developed into *kama hujui kufa angalia mwenye UKIMWI* (if you don’t know what death is, look at someone affected by AIDS).

The acronym AIDS developed into the following Swahilization of acrostics (Mutembei *et al.* 2002): *Angalia Isikupate Dawa Sina* (Be careful not to catch it, there is no cure), stemming from the proverb *Kinga ni bora kuliko tiba* (prevention is better than cure); *Acha Iniue Dogodogo Siachi* (Let it kill me, I can’t give up having sex with chicks) stemming from, *Moyo wa kupenda hana subira* (the heart of who is in love does not know what patience is), if you do not want to change sexual desires, you will die; *Adhabu Imetolewa Duniani Sikatai* (the punishment has be sent on earth, I cannot disagree) stemming from *Kazi ya Mungu hakuna makosa* (God’s work has no mistakes), something inevitable is caused by superior powers. In these acrostics the principal causes of HIV transmission are illicit sex and God’s punishment for promiscuity, particularly after the Christian influence in AIDS campaign.

HIV/AIDS is *ugonjwa mbaya* (the bad disease) or *adhabu ya Mungu* (God’s punishment), which are all metaphors for “the moral breakdown symptoms of the ill-modernity” (Dilger 2008: 209).

This metaphorization of proverbs contributes to the production of a multiplicity of new social meanings linked to the context of AIDS. For instance, oral literature such as proverbs, riddles, and jokes, which make use of a “community participatory approach” (Mutembei 2001: 74), are needed to update the past and project the present into the future with educational purposes.

Take control over the past, make it fit into the present with the purpose of preparing people for a less risk-ridden society of tomorrow. For example, preventing HIV transmission (Mutembei 2001: 87). Metaphorical phrases describe the day-to-day encounter with “the unknown disease” disclosing myths, beliefs, symptoms, and prevention as well as warning to restore good norms, and rectify attitudes towards life and people (Mutembei *et al.* 2002: 7 - 8). The metaphorical expressions are rooted either in “traditions” or “modernisation” because of the need for “translating abstract definitions of the disease presented by medical discourses” (Mutembei *et al.* 2002: 12). The main social representation of HIV/AIDS in northern Tanzania is *eyembe* (vampire or bloodsuckers) implying that the death of young people is unnatural and apocalyptic (Mutembei 2001).

Analysing illness<sup>6</sup> as metaphors we must distinguish between two levels of understanding: “direct” and “indirect” (Mutembei 2001: 117). “Direct” is the basic level of metaphor: when the association between the *comparant* and the *comparé* is immediately obvious. “Indirect” is the person’s perception stemming from both the objective clinical manifestations of a disease and the outwards pathological abnormalities of physical functions. For example, *Eiyembe/maembe* has a direct concrete meaning: the animal horns used by sorcerers as divinatory instruments (Reynolds-Whyte 1997). Indirectly, the horns contain a *jinn* that is a mythical supernatural capricious spirit, *eyembe* causes witch hunting and killings, and enmities among neighbours; *Juliana* is a trademark symbolised by an eagle which hints at both the American power and the origin of HIV/AIDS as caused by the practice of sorcery to curse illegal traders. *Juliana* refers also to the promiscuous traders *Abekikomela*, dealing over Tanzanian borders, who are perishing of AIDS (metonymy) (Mutembei 2001: 118-36).

Therefore, the origins of HIV/AIDS are organized on two levels: the mythological, supernatural origins and the “inside- outside” paradigm or “the Other are contaminated and Us are safe” (Mutembei 2001: 137); “Hell is other people” (Sartre 1989).

Metaphors and metonyms embody the “metonymic weapon” of resistance for “Indigenous Knowledge” (Cooper 2008: 14); metonymies do not contest the power yet work together with it into a “simultaneous multiplicity” between visible and invisible (Mbembe 2001: 145).

Proverbiality is a “specific communication strategy in which equivocation plays a major role” (Beck 2005: 131). Metaphorical strategic ambiguity and proverbial equivocation are techniques to reveal the forbidden and animate a polite rebellion. The “ambiguous nature” of the “veiled speech of *mafumbo*” (Vierke 2012: 278), or Swahili’s “inner language of *fumbo* (metaphors, irony

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<sup>6</sup> Illness and malady are both translations for the Swahili *ugonjwa*, a psychophysical and spiritual malaise; the physical disease is *maradhi* (Mutembei 2001: 109).

and riddles)” (Topan 2004: 218) are not only strategies of “self-protection and safeguarding of the equilibrium into one’s own community”, but also a “decorative tool and a cognitive instrument” (Vierke 2012: 278). Since local epistemologies are both revealed and hidden by means of artistic and cultural linguistic tools, as Mkufya says: “*It is unfair to ask an author to unveil his art*” (Mkufya p.c.).

**Proverbs** not only are stylistic figures of speech, but also are sources of African philosophy and wisdom (Wanjohi 1997) as well as a way of knowledge acquisition between theories and experiences (Hallen & Sodipo 1997). Thus, philosophy is established and delivered through oral and written literature as well as through oral interferences in prose.

Myths and proverbs, appearing in written literature, juxtapose the mythic reality with the phenomenological reality (Amuta 2017). **Myths** are explanatory historical tales which draw from past experiences to construct the present as well as revised traditions (Okpewho 1983). These oral tales, between facts and fiction, contain philosophy (Okpewho 1983), showing an **epistemology of myth** (*kisasili*), and re-channel orality and historical heritage in written literature in the form of intertextuality or “generic fracturing” (Rettovà 2021b).

### 2.6.3. A MODE OF NARRATING IK (INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE)

Encounters and clashes between both ontologies and epistemologies are displayed by means of narrative strategies or modes of narration like *lo real maravilloso* – the marvellous<sup>7</sup> real (Carpentier 1995: 131; 1949) or *el realismo maravilloso* - marvellous realism (Chiampis quoted in Warnes 2005a: 5). Magical realist texts draw upon cultural systems expressing the “indigenous” as non-Western practices (Faris & Zamora 1995; Carpentier 1995; Cooper 1998).

Through the mode of narration of magical realism the supernatural is accepted as normal, and both the natural and the supernatural appear as non-contradictory: “the denaturalisation of the real and naturalisation of the marvellous” (Chiampis quoted in Warnes 2005a: 5). Marvellous grows within the reality, symbolised by a combination of materialism and mystery, spiritualism, and non-scientific belief systems, which present the unverifiable as real, “never managing to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy” (Slemon quoted in Faris 2004: 48).

Clashes between cultural belief systems appear within the narrative and in between the material world and the “other worldly” or the supernatural: “seeing takes place only if you smuggle yourself in between worlds: the world of ordinary people and that of the witches” (Duerr quoted in Faris 2004: 21).

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<sup>7</sup> Extraordinary, strange as the real does not conform to daily reality (Carpentier 1995: 89 - 108).

Magical Realism in Africa encompasses “a world of omens, premonitions, curses and superstitions that is authentically ours” (Marquez quoted in Cooper 1998: 16) and involves “seeing with a third eye” (Cooper 1998), creating a holistic middle ground between dissonant epistemologies and ontologies.

The “authorial reticence” (Warnes 2005a: 1), which “naturalises the supernatural” (Warnes 2005a,b; 2009), and “authorial irony” illustrate the tensions between the scepticism of Western educated writers, who assume ironic distance from the lack of scientific understanding, and the celebration of the “authenticity of omen and superstition” (Cooper 1998: 34). Magical Realism is a “re-mystification of the narrative” and “re-enchantment of the Western reader”, which “ineffable in between” integrates the supernatural into the natural as a perfectly acceptable and understandable aspect of everyday life (Faris 2004: 46; Warnes 2005a: 10). It represents the response to the disenchanted logic of Enlightenment and the capacity to resolve the tension between two discursive systems usually thought of as mutually exclusive.

Magical realism can be expressed in between “faith and irreverence” (Warnes 2005b): “faith” exposes alternative epistemologies and ontologies based on indigenous thought systems and interprets the magic as a cultural anthropological representation of worldview or belief system. “Irreverence” is a form of epistemological scepticism, a mode of critique that points towards a possible re-enchantment of Western modernity. Irreverence undermines the cognitive approaches of the Western scientific rationality, opening up more cultural perspectives other than the hegemonic West (Warnes 2005b: 8 - 12; Warnes 2009: 14-7).

In faith-based magical realism the supernatural may stand synecdochally or metonymically for an alternative way of conceiving the reality usually derived from a non-Western belief system or worldview (Warnes 2009: 14). For example, Okri’s “animist realism” (Warnes 2009: 127), or “animist materialism” (Garuba quoted in Quayson 2009: 160), blurs the lines between natural and the supernatural with rituals, curses, natural medicine, animism (Warnes 2009: 148-9) and Soyinka’s “African worldview” describes the “authentic African worldview and the elastic nature of knowledge and its one reality” (2005: 53).

“Naturalize the supernatural into realistic narrative is a way not only to expand existing categories of the real, but also to challenge the system of thought and knowledge that falls under the label of rationality” with “epistemological irreverence” (Warnes 2009: 151-2) as a “weapon against epistemicide” (Warnes 2009: 152).

Magical realism is “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (Bhabha 1990: 2), which operates a “cultural re-inscription that moves back to the future” (Bhabha 1994) - “future anterior” (Syrotinski 2007: 167), and which creates a new hybridity among a plurality of worlds. Furthermore, Derrida’s “hauntology” haunts material ontology by spiritual otherworldly

presences, and renders consciousness of absence, silence, ghosts as well as awareness of otherness (Derrida quoted in Warnes 2009: 150; Syrotinsky 2007: 159). “*Faire ou laisser parler un esprit*” (Let a spirit to talk) entails not only awareness and openness towards the unheard “other”, “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive”, which intruded in our ontological world of being and presence (Derrida 1994; Davis 2005: 373), but also suggests the possibility of crossing epistemological and ontological boundaries.

Similarly, “since facts and beliefs are both fabricated, the fetishless world is populated by as many aliens as the world of the fetish” (Latour 2010: 11), made-up passwords like “*factisches*” (Latour 2010: 11), by combining scientific facts with beliefs and African fetishes, unravel the binary opposition between modernity and Africa (Cooper 2014: 84). Therefore, “light cross paths and African divinities are welcomed into the science laboratory” (Latour 2010: 66). “The name Africa plays the role of the mask in the drama of contemporary existence” and “through fetish and mystery, for the first time, myth and reality seems to coincide” (Mbembe 2017: 50-1).

In conclusion, it is indeed the idea of “fragmentation”, realized in literature through fictional devices and strategies, which makes “the uniqueness” of Swahili novels (Khamis 2003: 90). Magical realism is a device for “epistemological rupture” (Moudileno 2006: 29) and a narrative mode where “two diametrically opposed ontologies co-exist on equal terms” (Ericksson and Scarano quoted in Moudileno 2006: 30), suggesting an “**epistemology of complementary/inclusion or indeterminacy**” as the “*tercero incluido* – the included third” (Rettovà 2021a: 319-23; Medina 2011).

Even though the debate about the applicability of this literary technique in Swahili literature is still wide open and flourishing (Khamis 2003; 2005; 2007a,b,c,d; Garnier 2013; 2019; Gromov 2004; 2014; Rettovà 2016; 2021a; Walibora 2010), an epistemology for magical realism, capable of capturing the state of inclusion and/or “indeterminacy between scientific and “mythical” or “magical” epistemologies/ontologies” (Rettovà 2021a: 323), can be isolated in Swahili literature as well as in the literature analysed in the case studies.

## 2.7. TOWARDS THE CASE STUDIES: A STYLISTIC AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PLAYS AND NOVELS

Historically, strategic ignorance was produced, epistemic injustice perpetrated, and epistemic fascism imposed. This is exemplified by the invention of Africanism and the imposition of a hegemonic epistemological order on African discourses and philosophy. However, by examining Swahili literature by means of the devices and instruments described in this chapter, such as genre, narrative, stylistics, characters’ dialogues, I argue that literature is a

medium which illuminates cultural practices (ritual customs, medical traditions and religious cults) and life philosophies (from materialism to idealism, and in between positivism and mysticism), which articulate Afrocentric epistemologies of resistance.

“Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014) are localised culturally specific forms of “Epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2014; 2018; 2020), which recognise the multiplicity of knowledge sources. Coexistence and co-dependency, among various modes of cognition are explained in literature, which in turn is a harmonious medium of collaboration and negotiation.

Thus, the case studies are focused on two literary genres, namely Swahili drama and novels on HIV/AIDS from Tanzania<sup>8</sup> as a vernacular of local discourses. Theatre (chapter 3) will be examined through the drama *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (Ngozi 1990), contextualised among other six plays on HIV/AIDS. Novels will be investigated through analysing both Mutembei’s *Kisiki Kikavu* (2005a), and Mauya’s *Firauni* (2017) (chapter 4) as well as Mkufya’s two novels: *Ua La Faraja* (2004) (chapter 5) and *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (2019) (chapter 6).

The in-depth textual analysis will show how digging into the narrative discourse, local epistemologies can be excavated. Both the plays and the novels manifest encounters between heterogenous ways of knowing, dissonant epistemologies and opposing ontologies to show not only epistemological clashes, but also an environment of coexistence among complementary yet contrasting terms aiming to fill in the gap of the epistemological debate.

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<sup>8</sup> The selected titles have been chosen among the several works available, dealing with HIV/AIDS in either English or Swahili, according to the objective of this research. Cf. Appendices: “Fictional works on HIV/AIDS from Tanzania and Kenya”.



# Chapter 3

## Encounters Between Plural Epistemologies in Swahili Literature on HIV/AIDS: Drama and Performance

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION TO SWAHILI THEATRE AND DRAMA

Historically, theatre in East Africa has been, a force of colonial resistance via *Beni Ngoma* performances as mimicry of colonial armies (Ranger 1975). Later, it was a politically committed instrument of “nation building” (Askew 2002; Ricard 2000; Lihamba 2004; Edmondson 2007; Barber 2018; Lange 1995; 1999). Finally, theatre ends up in contemporary productions as “optimal participation” (Mda 1993) to communicate for development (Mlama 1991a), and as “individualism” to establish intellectuals’ autonomy over artistic creations (Ricard 2000).

The history of Tanzanian theatre can be divided into three periods: “traditional performing arts” including ritual artistic performances; “contemporary arts”, which developed in the colonial period and took over some influences of the European models; and “the experimental drama or new-traditional African drama” (*tamthilia za majaribio*), launched by academics from the Dar Arts college, who after independence produced pieces for theatre and stage performances so as to re-establish the independence of African theatre and performance (Mlama 2003a,b; Wafula 1999; Method 2013). The Theatre Arts Department of the University of Dar es Salaam was founded in the second half of the 1960s, when university-based theatre groups were established, and

dramatists and playwrights of international fame were forged. Those dramatists created the “modern African theatre” (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Lihamba 2004), in which three main categories of dramatic arts can be distinguished: literary drama, popular theatre and Theatre for Development (Kerr 1995; Mlama 1991a; Method 2013).

On the one hand, the “African Popular Theatre” approach emerged as a conscious effort to assert the culture of the dominated classes” (Mlama 1991a: 67) with the objective of “decolonising theatre with endogenous structures” (Kerr 1995: 105; Thiong’o 1986). Popular Theatre is the evolution of the “African Traveling Theatre” (Mda 1993; Odhiambo 2008; Kerr 1995), as the first East African university-based movement born in the 1960s.

Subsequently, in the 1970s, with the implementation of SAPs and the intrusion of NGOs, the experience of “African Theatre for Development” (Salhi 1998; Odhiambo 2008) was developed. Thus, following the leads of projects like the *Kamiriithu Community Theatre* or “Theatre of Popular Struggle” (Kerr 1995: 241), created in Kenya by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirĩ in Kenya (1977), Tanzanian artists like Chambulozoki, Mlama, Lihamba and Balisidya operated the project of *Malya Popular Theatre for Social Development* in 1982 - 1983 (Lihamba 2004; Mlama 1991a; Hatar 2001).

In the 1980s, many theatre projects against HIV/AIDS sprouted (Frank 1995; Mwita 2010; 2011; Odhiambo 2004) among them the Community Based Theatre (CBT) (Johanssen 2010), which became “a contemporary ritual of affliction in the age of AIDS” (Johanssen 2011: 77).

In contemporary Tanzania, theatre consists of both TfD and community theatre projects in relation to health and social issues, which are run by both local and international NGOs, as well as academic drama and performance, which are managed by local college of Arts such as UDSM, BASATA (*National Council of Arts*) and TASUBA (*Institute of Performing Arts Bagamoyo*) (Hatar 2001). However, the main challenge of TfD remains cultural globalization (Lihamba 2004: 246), foreign techniques imported to Africa (Salhi 1998; Bakari 1998) and donor dependence (Shule 2010; 2011b; 2014; Thiong’o 2013).

On the other hand, Swahili literary dramas flourished during British colonial times and thus they were influenced by Shakespearean theatre, which in turn introduced classical elements from the Greek theatre. Afterwards, *ujamaa* theatre productions included *Mwalimu Nyerere’s* translations of Shakespearean dramas, satirical playlets (*vichekesho*) and historical drama such as Mulokozi’s *Mukwava wa Uhehe* (1968) (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Mlama 2003a,b; Wafula 1999; Mutembei 2011b; Method 2013; Nicolini 2016). Subsequently, the objective of the academics of the Dar theatre college was written literary drama dismissing the Aristotelian canons and creating a new dramatic trend, the “experimental theatre”, capable of connecting the endogenous performing arts with the new Western influences (Mlama 2003a,b; Method 2013; Mutembei 2011b).

The “truly African theatre” (Fiebach 1997: 22) was inaugurated by Ebrahim Hussein (1969) and his experimentation gave birth to the “poetic theatre” (Ricard 2000), “*hadithi*-like theatre” (Fiebach 1997: 25), and ended up as the symbolist “theatre of intimacy” (Fiebach 1997: 28; Ricard 1998; 2000) dense with complex metaphors, intricate flashbacks and flashforwards to portray the ambivalence of modern African societies.

Literary dramas are characterized by “cultural syncretism” and “multi-culturalism” (Fiebach 1997: 20). Therefore, either the actual influence of Aristotelian dramatic conventions on Swahili dramas or the challenge they pose, constitute a controversial debate in academic environments (Mutembei 2011b).

“Writing a play by following the rules decreed by Aristotle is an interesting method, but not the only one” (Hussein 2003: 204; Fiebach 1997: 21). The Poetics of Aristotle has had a significant influence on Swahili contemporary plays (Mutembei 2011b: 257-8; Mulokozi 2017; Wamitila 2002) which attempt to connect the Aristotelian structure with elements of traditional African theatre (Mlama 2003a) creating a modern original formula to overcome the structure of the English theatre imposed during the colonial era (Nicolini 2016).

The same debate came up during the interviews which I conducted during my fieldwork research, where Prof. Mutembei (15-11-2018) maintains that the Swahili plays clearly show their independence from the European model, especially “Swahili plays on HIV/AIDS pose some challenge to the Aristotelian tragic structure” (Mutembei 2011b: 266) as well as Prof. Mlama (12-11-2018), who created “*tamthilia za majaribio* to demonstrate the existence of a real African art”, states that the Tanzanian theatre has not really been influenced by Aristotelian theatre, while Prof. Mulokozi (20-11-2018) and Prof. Mbogo (16-10-2018) confirm a strong influence of the Aristotelian structures which were introduced via English theatre.

Furthermore, theatre and drama were the first media to communicate on HIV/AIDS within local communities: Swahili plays and literary dramas on HIV/AIDS written in Tanzania obtained a firm place in the framework of world literature on the pandemic (Mutembei 2011a,b; Nicolini 2016), while theatre has been the perfect instrument to highlight epistemological misunderstandings between scientific discourses about the disease, as promoted by local and international health organizations, and local discourses (Askew 2015: 255).

Swahili HIV/AIDS plays constitute an example of both literary drama and Popular Theatre for Community Development. Therefore, in this chapter, which is divided in three sections (A: dramas; B: drama and performance; C: performance), I am presenting as my central case study *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (The Testimony of the Bones, Ngozi 1990), which is an interesting example of both academic drama and stage performance (as shown in section B).

Beforehand, this play is contextualised among other published plays on HIV/AIDS in which, through stylistic and analytical investigations, alternative (science and non-scientific) epistemologies can be isolated (as shown in section A). Afterwards, the stage performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa*, staged at Dar College of Arts (2019) will be linked to the live performances produced by the Tanzanian NGO called FASDO, whose educational message is to promote HIV testing and new biomedical therapies as good actions to be taken by the community to make a better life (as shown in section C).

## A. DRAMA: SIX SWAHILI PLAYS ON HIV/AIDS IN SEARCH OF AN EPISTEME<sup>1</sup>

The corpus which I am analysing as framework to *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (UM), has been drawn from the following six plays: *Kilio Chetu*<sup>2</sup> (KC) (Our Lament, MAF 1996), *Giza* (G) (Darkness, Jilala 2004), *Kilio cha Jeska* (KJ) (Jeska's Cry, Mghanga 2004), *Orodha*<sup>3</sup> (O) (The List, Reynolds 2006), *Mwalimu Rose* (MR) (The Teacher Rose, Mghanga 2007), and *Embe Dodo* (ED) (The Small Mango, Makukula 2015).

Additionally, during my fieldwork, I was able to meet and conduct interviews with the majority of authors: Hadija Jilala<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose Mghanga<sup>5</sup>, Dominicus Makukula<sup>6</sup> and Prof Aldin Mutembei<sup>7</sup>.

Mutembei told me that the play *Kilio Chetu* was composed in his office at UDSM, when he was working at the *Kagera AIDS Research Project*, along with Mgunza Mnyenyewa the director of *Parapanda Arts* in 1994<sup>8</sup>, and it was published as a project of the American NGO Medical Aid Foundation.

This play is focused on children's' rights to be educated on sexual health education so as to prevent teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and improving the communication between parents and children which breaks the silence on culturally sensitive issues.

Prof Mutembei (15-11-2018) explained that *Kilio Chetu* was a play which fought for children's rights, the right to speak and complain against injustice. Nowadays, children and teenagers do not receive proper education, particularly on health issues, thus they are the most vulnerable to unexpected pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. This play was inspired by a real event, when Mutembei, who was conducting research on the field, saw a little boy grab-

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the title of the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) by the Italian intellectual Luigi Pirandello.

<sup>2</sup> This play has been performed by the students of the Department of Performing Arts at UDSM and recorded by the university staff. The department granted me access to the one-hour video recording of this play and gave me permission to use it for the purpose of my study.

<sup>3</sup> Compare with footnote above.

<sup>4</sup> The interview, with Hadija Jilala, was held at the Open University of Tanzania of DSM (16-10-2018).

<sup>5</sup> The interview with Ambrose Mghanga was held in his office at BAKITA - the National Council for Swahili Language in Kijitonyama (19-10-2018).

<sup>6</sup> The interview with Dominicus Makukula was held at The School of Journalism and Mass Communication of UDSM (13-11-2018).

<sup>7</sup> The interviews with Prof. Aldin Mutembei were held at the *Kiswahili* Department of UDSM (15-11-2018), and at the Confucius Institute of UDSM (28-1-2019).

<sup>8</sup> This play was performed for the first time by Mutembei's students from the Swahili department at UDSM.

bing a used condom from a dump in Bukoba, and he started blowing into it as if it was a balloon, because he did not know what a condom was<sup>9</sup>.

*Giza* denounces political corruption, economic inequalities, the failure of the health care system as well as the culture of silence and deception which affects the youth. Particularly, it denounces “*Giza kuhusu UKIMWI*” – ‘Darkness in relation to HIV/AIDS’ that can be metaphorically described as darkness because of corruption, unfaithfulness, and secret sexual networking among teenagers (Jilala 16-10-2018). *Kilio cha Jeska* advocates for gender empowerment against stigma and patriarchal legacies. The last two plays were written by two university students at UDSM<sup>10</sup>, and published by the *Angaza Initiative Project*<sup>11</sup> (AMREF).

*Orodha*, composed by a dramatic arts teacher to be performed by the local artists’ group of *Dar es Salaam Young People Theatre*, reveals the exploitation of female teenagers by economically powerful male adults and urges them to break the silence on HIV/AIDS issues.

*Mwalimu Rose*, inspired by a real-life event (Mghanga 19-10-2018) and published in a series of *Educational Narrative on HIV/AIDS*, shows how family management and moral responsibilities weigh on young women’s shoulders.

*Embe Dodo* exposes illicit sexual networks which affect young adolescent girls. This play is set in the fishing village of Bagamoyo, where the playwright was a student at TASUBA. Life along the Swahili coast is structured by the seasons. Thus, the title “Small Mango” was inspired by the connection which exists between the seasons when “the smelly and tasty mangoes” are harvested and the seasons when *unyago* is celebrated. The metaphor implies that HIV/AIDS can be spread by hooligans raping unmarried maidens like an insect can attack the mango trees full of sweet fruits. The seriousness of the play is transformed into a comedy when *Manju*, the joker and the master of ceremony, adopts an *escamotage* to save himself by appearing as a mysterious angel, which is a strategic device to break the silence inside the society, denouncing unrighteous conducts and illicit sexual networks among characters<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, these plays represent a “manifestation of silence” (Mutembei 2011a: 432) in contrast with the “culture of silence and taboos” (Mutembei 2011a: 432).

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<sup>9</sup> The information in this paragraph is an extract from the interview with Prof. Aldin Mutembei held at the *Kiswahili* Department of UDSM (15-11-2018).

<sup>10</sup> It is common practice at the University of Dar es Salaam for the students of the Literature Department to be assessed writing their own fictional works. See also the plays in English: P. Nyoni’s “Judges on Trial” (2010) and A. Chikoti’s “The Monster” (2010) in *Tell Me, Friends*, edited by L. Osaki & M. B. Noudéhou, 57 – 73. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota. The plays *the Monster* (Chikoti 2010) and *Judges on Trial* (Nyoni 2010) are allegorical tales dealing with the “unknown Monster” of HIV/AIDS.

<sup>11</sup> A project sponsored by ACM Associated Colleges of Midwest and Global Partners East Africa task force.

<sup>12</sup> Information drawn from the interview with Makukula.

### 3.2.1. STYLISTIC FEATURES

#### 3.2.1.1. DRAMAS' OVERTURE AND STYLISTICS

These dramas are tragedies which deal with an incurable sickness, where the protagonist must meet their fatal destiny (Mutembei 2011b) and which end with either existentialist resignation to HIV/AIDS death or consolatory hope (Mkufya 2004).

The incipit of the plays follows the pattern of traditional folktales (*hadithi*), as a story inside a story, characterized by the typical dialogic structure and rich in oral formulaic expressions (Mlama 2003a; Finnegan 2012; Hussein 1976).

The parodos consists of a choral ode which opens the drama with lamentations, cries, and moaning, performed by children (KC), *vifani* (O), skeletons (UM), or by the typical dances of *unyago*, the maiden's initiation rite (ED).

The parodos is followed by the narrator's prologue which presents a parallel structure with the finale of the play, and which inserts a second level of narration as the disclosure of a play within a play (Mutembei 2012; Brecht 1992). The enclosed story is told in a dialogic manner between the narrator, the chorus master (*kiongozi*) and the communal choral voice (*watu/wote*), when African dances and drums are played in the background. These features observe the performative structures of traditional ritual ceremonies.

The traditional oral tale patterns of *hadithi* (*Paukwa – Pakawa; Hapo zamani za kale*) introduce the allegorical fairy tale, told by the chorus masters or narrators, as we can see in these two excerpts drawn from KC and UM respectively:

*Mtambaji: "Hapo zamani za kale paliondokea kisiwa kimoja kikubwa sana. [...] Dubwana likaleta balaa kisiwani."* (KC 1)

Narrator: "Once upon a time, there was a big island. [...] A **ghostly giant** suddenly brought **misfortune and calamity** to the island.<sup>13</sup>"

*Mtambaji: "Nitaanza mwanzo kabisa katika masimulizi yangu..."* (UM 3); *"Ikafika mwaka mmoja huo tukaona ghafla vifo vya ajabuajabu vingivingi vikaanza kutokea. [...] Nasema balaa kubwa!"* (UM 3 - 4)

Narrator: "I'll start my narration at the very beginning..."; "There came a year when we suddenly witnessed many **extraordinary deaths**. [...] I would say **calamity!**"

The "ghostly giant" and "marvellous deaths" are metaphors of AIDS. Both authors introduce HIV/AIDS as a supernatural creature or alien presence lead-

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<sup>13</sup> All the translations from the original Swahili texts into English are mine. All emphasis mine.

I acknowledge William Mkufya for the proofreading of my Swahili into English translations in this chapter.

ing to calamitous events “*balaa*”; however, in the first passage, the real cause of the disease, has been attributed to something pertaining to the phenomenal world, that is, the lack of sexual health education. Conversely, in the second passage, the metaphor of “Calamity” can be explained as a metaphysical Divine punishment (Mutembei *et al.* 2002).

By means of the prologue and the parodos, the playwrights aim to insert the readers into an African traditional setting or “African traditional mode of life and its spiritual framework” (Mudimbe 1988), which welcomes natural and spiritual ontologies.

Thus, the prologue to UM opens with the sound of traditional African dance (*milio ya ngoma*) which introduces the choral ode uttered by the living skeletons, risen from the dead to give their testimony through a mythological narration on the truth about HIV/AIDS. KC begins with an allegorical tale that tells us about the appearance of *Dubwana*, the ghostly giant of AIDS. O begins with the unknown, otherworldly appearances of *vifani*, the living dead, moaning with pain and sorrow caused by their condition as terminally ill people. The second scene of this play is set during the protagonist’s burial ceremony characterized by *mapigo ya ngoma za Kiafrika* (the drums of the African dances), which make the protagonist rise from her own grave and dance as the living dead. Likewise, both KJ and G are introduced by the funeral ceremony commented by either *Kichaa* (the fool, G) or *Mkuu wa Msafara* (the head of the funeral caravan, KJ). Similarly, the prologue of ED is set in the bushland during the traditional dance (*ngoma ya asili*) of the female rite of passage celebrated for the protagonist *Mwali* (initiated maiden) and led by *Manju/Mshereheshaji* the maestro of the celebration.

Therefore, the life-cycle rituals represent a liminal space where the instability of the boundary between the natural and the supernatural emerges (Warnes 2009: 140). People, skeletons and other ontologies come back to life as spirits, zombies and the living dead neutralized as natural elements in the stream of narration, and this suggests that the authors have blurred the boundaries between life and afterlife because the virus spreads without being visible among ordinary people. Thus, it can suddenly kill anybody. Consequently, Derrida’s concept of “hauntology” that haunts ontology by spiritual otherworldly presences demonstrates awareness of the plurality of “others” (Warnes 2009: 151).

The Swahili plays on HIV/AIDS are the representation of “social dramas” (Turner 1974: 33; 1982), a period of crisis in the everyday flow of social life, which needs to be redressed by means of rituals performed in a play (Turner 1974: 33).

The tragic structure is as follows: prologue, episode, finale, and choral odes (*parodos*, *interludes*, *exodus*). The narrative casts the audience backwards and forwards in time, which in the plays is not linear but seized by a multi-

layered structure of flashbacks and flashforwards (Hussein 2003; Mutembei 2012; 2016). This multi-layered time opens up the way to other dimensions, natural and spiritual, where flashbacks and forwards welcome different ontologies to enter the phenomenological world.

Speaking about characters<sup>14</sup>, the tragedy depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine. However, in HIV/AIDS plays, the tragic heroes are “shadow heroes” (Mutembei 2011b: 265): deviant and stereotyped characters portraying undesirable social traits like the protagonists of the renaissance *Commedia dell’Arte* (Conteh-Morgan & Olaniyan 1994; Mutembei 2011b). The heroines of these plays who succumb to the illness in the end are all young women, either teenagers, school-age girls, or mothers. They are neophytes challenging the system, set apart from (liminal to) a given social structure (Turner 1974: 233); however, these threshold protagonists cannot move beyond the liminal stage to re-enter society, because they must meet their fatal destiny (Dodgson-Katiyo & Wisker 2010).

Plays are naturally multimedia and multistylistic creations, where choral songs, dances and intervals of poetry intermingle into the dialogues, which illustrate heterogenous viewpoints through multiple voices.

Particularly, two plays, UM and KC, are characterized by incorporation of orality (Barber 2007) in the form of storytelling, choral songs intervals, ritual performances and proverbs. For instance, KC ends with the proverb: “*Asiyefundwa na mamake hufundwa na walimwengu!*” (who has not been taught by their mother will be taught by the world, KC 40), while, the live performance of the same play performed by the UDSM students changes the proverbs, but not the meaning, to “*mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo*” (a child grows up accordingly to how they was reared). Thus, the world is not a kind teacher, leading to disastrous consequences for the young generation doomed to fail the world test (Garnier 2013: 63). In fact, the education of younger generation is a serious and delicate contemporary issue.

In addition, the plays are quoting one another using the same metaphors such as: *peku peku* (sex without condoms in KC 19 and MR 53); *kupukutika kama mti wa kiangazi* (to fall off like summer leaves, in UM 1, KC 2 and G 47), *kukanyaga waya* (stepping on a live wire, it is common to all plays).

All plays are centred on characters’ dialogic interchanges. For instance, there are dialogues that articulate “womanish knowledge” (Nnaemeka 1997) by means of proverbs (Rettovà 2010; 2016a; Wanjohi 1997) like the dialogue between Mama Joti and Mama Suzi in KC (7 - 9): “*kifua simkingii, maana siwi naye*” (I cannot actually read inside his/her mind), “*wembamba wa reli, treni inapita*” (despite the narrowness of the rails, the train passes through), “*makapera kibao mume wangu wa nini?*” (among all these bachelors, who can become my husband?). The last proverb after the process of *UKIMWISHAJI*

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<sup>14</sup> See the Appendices: Table of the characters in the plays.

(Mutembei 2007) becomes “*mumeo ninaye makapera wana UKIMWI*” (I have my husband; the unmarried men have AIDS).

The dialogue comes to the concept of *UKIMWI wa kijamii* (Mkufya 2004: 357), the AIDS of society, which implies that African societies were weakened by the intrusion of external customs, pushing people to look backwards into an unpolluted past through the “epistemology of return” (Rettovà 2016d).

*Kwenda na wakati au kupotea na wakati! Shoga, watu tunachanganyikiwa. Tumbomoa ghala imara ya kuhifadha maadili yetu. Ghala tuliyojenga kwa miti yetu ya asili. Na sasa tunatukuza ghala iliyojengwa kwa miti dhafu ya kigeni. Sijui tunaelekea wapi!* (KC 8)

Moving with the times or getting lost into time! My friend, people are confused! We destroyed our strong arsenal which protected our ethical customs. Storehouses built from our ancestral trees. Now we glorify storehouses built from weak foreign trees. I don't know where we are heading!

A choral message is developed by means of the inter-textualized epistle written by Furaha, the protagonist of the play *Orodha*, who dies at 18 years old of HIV/AIDS, leaving to her mother a letter on the truth about what killed her to be read during her burial ceremonies. Furaha's letter creates an atmosphere of suspense that is held from the prologue to the very end of the play, when the nature of the list is finally revealed. By employing a multi-layered flashback style, the play reveals all the persons who had sexual contacts with Furaha, who panicked and tried to conceal their responsibilities in the contagion (Mutembei 2015; 2016).

Epistles in HIV/AIDS works are unidirectional messages without an answer (see Kawegere 2007). This can be interpreted as a metaphor for how HIV infects human bodies, remaining hidden and silent for a long time without any possibilities of defence; thus, the only effective message is prevention (Mutembei 2016).

### 3.2.1.2. NARRATION: DRAMATIC CHORUS AND CHARACTERS WHO PERFORM AS THE SPOKESPERSON OF AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

In HIV/AIDS plays all Mutembei's (2012: 27 - 68) “seven types of choruses” appear: ritual costumes, storytelling, dialogic interactions, choral characters, parallelism in the overture and closure of the play and dumb scenes.

Nonetheless, in these plays three central types of choruses can be distinguished: firstly, the **choral communal voices**, uttered by homogeneous groups, such as the skeletons in UM, the villagers in O and the teachers in MR. Moreover, the choral communal voices can also be expressed by inserted stanzas of poetry or singing intervals. For instance, in KC there are choral odes sung by the chorus led by the choirmaster (*kiongozi - watu wote*), chil-

dren's songs, and the mourning litanies performed by the community at funerals; secondly, the individual “**choral character**” (Mutembei 2012), which can overlap with internal characters in the play (Mjomba in KC, Manju in ED, and Mama Furaha in O); and, finally, a fundamental role is played by the irreverent voice of the “**anti-chorus or korasi ya kikorofi**” (Mkufya unpublished) performed by figures such as *Mtani*, the African joker (UM), *Sauti*, the off-screen voice (ED and G), and *Kichaa*, the fool (G).

Furthermore, as my own contribution to the stylistic analysis, I argue that a troupe of characters exist who are specifically designed to articulate Afrocentric knowledges, I baptise them as “**choral sages**”, being traditional African figures endowed with wisdom, who are connected to both the world of the ritual and the performance. These people, endowed with knowledge and common-sense, perform the role of “Orukian sages”- “the wise men or women capable of criticizing the current society, imposing their opinion, expressing the truth and teaching people, leading their society towards development” (Oruka 1990: 59). They also are the leaders of the ritual performances and choral characters. The group can be split into two typologies: “narrator-sages” and “healer-sages”.

The narrators<sup>15</sup> are the following key figures: *Mtambaji* the narrator (UM; KC), who can be external (EN) or internal (IN) (Stanzel 1984; Bal 1997); *Mtani* the African joker (UM); *Bi Msimulizi* the female storyteller (G); *La Mgambo* (ED) the bellman/village crier; *Manju/Mshehereshaji* (ED) the maestro or chorus master, *Mtangazaji* (MR) the announcer, *Sauti* (G) the external commentary voice.

On the other hand, the traditional practitioners are the following characters: *Ngariba* (UM) the circumciser who is also a *Somo* the chief instructor of initiation rites, the *Waganga wa jadi*, traditional healers, herbalists and diviners (*Mwaguzi*), or “magical healers” (Marquez 2014), and *Wachawi*, witchdoctors, witches and sorcerers.

In the plays, the “choral-sages” are not only traditional figures intrinsically connected to African ritual and performative traditions, but also are divided figures who demonstrate the encounter of different epistemes. In fact, the narrators' viewpoint, which supports modern medicine and embraces scientific progress translated into Swahili language and style, clashes with healers' views, which suggest other possible explanations and solutions.

The speeches and/or the actions of choral characters, narrators and choral sages perform stylistic, cognitive and cultural functions in the plays; in fact, their speeches and actions are the fulcrum around which the entire drama revolves and the core from which it has been developed.

Particularly, the plays analysed revolve around two core characters: the narrator (usually external) and *Mtani* who can also overlap with the focalizer of the play (Bal 1997).

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<sup>15</sup> For further details on characters in plays, see the table in the Appendices.

*Mtambaji: “Dubwana likaleta balaa kisiwani. Kila aliyeguswa na Dubwana alidhurika. Watu walitoka upele, wengine waliharisha, mara nywele kunyonyoka na vifo vikafuatia. Watu walipukutika, wakapukutika kama majani ya kiangazi” (KC 1)*

Narrator: “The **ghostly giant** spread calamity onto the island. Each person who was touched by the phantom was harmed. People started being affected by sours, diarrhoea, the hair falling off, and death followed. People were falling off, **falling off like summer leaves.**”

The external narrator of the example above (KC), endows dissonant epistemes. On the one hand, HIV/AIDS is the ghostly giant, *Dubwana*, from the realm of marvel. On the other hand, it is a physical disorder from the phenomenological world.

In plays, the narrators not only can be two of them, external and internal, but they can also perform functions of choral characters. Furthermore, the narrators' ideology is confronted by *Mtani*'s view, who acts as the anti-chorus. For instance, *Mtambaji* (EN/IN) interacts with *Mtani* (IN) in UM, *Manju* (IN) interacts with *Sauti* and *La Mgambo* (EN) in ED, and *Bi Msimulizi* (EN) performs together with *Kichaa* (the fool) and *Sauti* (the voice) in G, who in turn act as anti-chorus (external narrators):

*Bi Msimulizi: Tutazaa Watoto wenye UKIMWI mpaka lini?*

*Sauti: Waje waonje tamu na chungu ya maisha (G 22)*

Narrator: Until when shall we continue to give birth to children with HIV/AIDS?

Voice: Let them come into this world and test the sweet and sour of life.

*Sauti*, the voice, can also play the role of an impertinent chorus, singing an ominous song aimed at predicting the consequence of the illicit sexual affairs taking place among the characters:

*“Ibilisi wa chachu ndani ya embe dodo bivu lenye kunukia na hicho kitanda chako ndilo jeneza lako na hiyo shuka yako ndiyo sanda yako” (ED 18)*

Iblis is the bitterness inside a small ripened mango, which has a beautiful smell, and that bed of yours is your coffin as well as those sheets of yours are your shroud.

Claiming Islamic influences sex is portrayed as the devil responsible for HIV transmission.

### 3.2.2. PLAYS' CONTENT

#### 3.2.2.1. TRADITIONAL RITUALS AS A GATEWAY TO ENDOGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

##### 3.2.2.1.1. BREAK THE SILENCE ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS: INITIATION AND CONFESSION

In contemporary Tanzanian society, the traditional initiation rituals have lost their core function; whereas in traditional society, appropriate sexual behaviours used to be taught during initiation and discussed with paternal aunts (Mutembei 2011a: 426).

Swahili dramas are a form of “incitement to discourse” as a means to uncover discourses on sex and sexuality, which are concealed by silence and taboo (Foucault 1998: 17). After “the sexual revolution” of the colonial age, which collided with traditional initiation rituals, all free sexual relations are characterised as taboo because of the moral decay of the present.

“*Kuzaa siyo kazi bali kulea ndiyo kazi*” (to give birth is not the real work, but the real one is indeed to rear, ED 1); “*mzazi ndiye mwalimu wa kwanza*” (a relative is indeed the first teacher, KC 13). Therefore, breaking the silence and fostering the communication between parents and adolescents are the main objectives of these plays, which aim to restore essential sexual health education and lead the youth onto the right path (Tumbo-Masabo 1994; Ntakula 1994).

*Mtambaji: “Basi watoto wakaendelea kudhoofika kwa kukosa elimu ya jinsia; Dubwana lile likaendelea kuwadhuru”* (KC 1 - 3)

Narrator: “And thus, the children became weaker and weaker due to the **lack of sexual health education. That ghostly giant persisted in harming them**”

*Mtambaji: “Mbona historia inatueleza kuwa taasisi za jando na unyago kabla ya ukoloni, zilifundisha tendo la ndoa na maisha kwa ujumla wakati wa ndoa [...] **Mila zetu hazikukataza kutoa mafunzo ya elimu ya jinsia bali zilikuwa zikitolewa katika maeneo na nyakati maalumu.** [...] wakoloni walipiga vita jando na unyago wakidai eti ni ushenzi. [...] Sikieni sasa kilio chetu!”* (KC 16)

Narrator: “Why does history teach us that initiation rites used to teach sex and life after marriage just before colonization [...] **Our traditional customs don't forbid us to teach sexual education; instead, they used to teach it in the proper time and space.** [...] colonialists forbade initiation rites which were accused of being superstitious practices. [...] Listen now to our cry!”

KC blames parents for their ineptitude in rearing their offspring, which represents the main cause for young adults' misbehaviour. Without steady parental

guidance, sexually active boys and girls are more likely to take risks in order to satisfy their physiological necessities and pleasures such as having unprotected sexual affairs with many partners (Mutembei 2011a,b). The charge is on the silence surrounding sex and sexuality and the solution suggested by the voices of youth is to open up discussion about *magonjwa ya siri* (diseases of confidentiality; STDs), calling for the right to be educated (Mutembei 2011a).

*Suzi: “Mie kwanza sikujua mambo haya. Mama na mjomba walijua juu ya mambo haya ya mapenzi. [...] Mama hakuwa radhi kuachana na utamaduni wa kale wa kuweka ukuta baina ya wazazi na watoto katika kujadili mambo haya.... mimi na Joti tungepata bahati ya kuelimishwa, tusingetumbu... tui...” (KC 40)*

Suzi: “At first, I didn’t know all these things. My mother and my uncle did know about these **sexual issues**. [...] My mother wasn’t ready to break the old tradition of erecting a wall of silence between parents and children to discuss these issues... if Joti and I had the luck to be taught, we would not have fallen like this....”

This play highlights the difference between the behaviour of Suzi who didn’t receive a proper sexual education and falls as a victim, and Anna who was well educated and has knowledge and agency to defend herself. Teaching about sex to youth does not mean teaching them to lose manners, instead protect them from harm. Nevertheless, the sexual knowledge taught during initiation, should progress now to sexual health education informed by science.

*Mjomba: “Watoto waambiwe wazi juu ya mambo haya ya mapenzi na hatima yake [...] Elimu hii inalenga kwenye kuwaonyesha wenetu madhara ya kufanya ngono kabla ya wakati wake.” (KC 11) [...] “Mbona hizo taasisi (jando na unyago) zimekuwapo miaka yote lakini madhara yatokanayo na zinaa ndiyo kwanza yanaongezeka” (KC 14)*

Maternal uncle: “Children should be told openly about sexual matters and their end [...] This education aims to illustrate to our children all the risks of having sex before the right time.” [...] “Why those institutions (initiation rites) have always existed for years, yet the harmful effects of adultery have started to increase recently”

The allegorical tale sung by *Manju*, chorus master in ED, talks about “*dodo bivu mtini ni kishawishi kwa nzi na wadudu wengine*” (a ripened mango (metaphorically: young woman’s firm breasts) on a tree is a temptation for flies and other insects, ED 4). Therefore, it is necessary to give the girl sexual health education and protect her from harm, particularly *nyigu wakali* (sharp wasps, ED 3), which metaphorically means adult men, and synecdochally means penises, which can pierce the girl. Therefore, the girl risks getting an infection called *uchachu ndani ya utamu wa dodo* (sourness inside the sweetness of mango, ED 4) which in turn is a metaphor for HIV/AIDS that can be contracted having sexual intercourse.

Bi Kifarū is a m(o)ther who teaches her daughter through “sphinx like enigma” (Nnaemeka 1997), allegorical and metaphorical language of traditional

initiation rituals. However, she also teaches *Mwali* on condom use making tradition progress together with modern science. Thus, the woman falls under patriarchal accusation, because she displayed sexual matters, giving to *Mwali* a packet of condoms, during a public ceremony and thus breaking a taboo.

The main target for the playwrights is young people's HIV-risk related sexual behaviour and illicit or careless deeds (*wanajipelekapeleka ovyo*, MR 61) so as to encourage the discourse on the unspoken. The authors address those behaviours through the theme of confession of sins, or *Scientia sexualis*, as a way to say the truth, transmit knowledge and warn against certain behaviours, where there has been a lack of *Ars erotica* or initiation (Foucault 1998: 58). Confession (*maungamo*) is suggested as a device to unveil the truth and break the silence on repressed sex and lust (Foucault 1998: 59).

*Bw Makoma: "Nilizini na wake za watu [...] nilizini na wanafunzi [...] Niliwapa watoto wa shule mimba na kushiriki kutoa mimba. [...] Niliua kwa uchawi." (MR 69 - 70)*

Mr. Makoma: "I fornicated with the wives of others, I fornicated with students. I made schoolgirls pregnant and assisted them to have abortions. I killed by witchcraft".

For instance, in ED, the character of the guardian angel effectively triggers the confessions of the three unfaithful couples who create the network of illicit sexual relationships that correspond to the intrigue of this drama leading to the spread of the virus. The affairs between the young *Mwali* and a man who is the same age as her father is unveiled by the appearance of the guardian angel of the girl (*malaika mlinzi wa dodo bivu*, ED 31) which pops out into the last scene as *deus ex machina* and who acts as spokesmen of the ancestors, called by people who are seeking protection.

People in East Africa call sexual organs *sehemu za siri* (private parts); consequently, sexually transmitted disease like HIV/AIDS are called *magonjwa ya siri* (a secret illness to be kept as confidential). Therefore, veiling sex and sexuality under a conspiracy of silence denies to the youth the right to be educated on sexual and reproductive health. In the plays, cries (Suzi's cry, KC 39 - 40) and moaning (Jeska's moaning, KJ 31) are the appeal to break up with this conspiracy of confidentiality which suffocates knowledge, whereas, it authorizes gender-based violence (GBV) such as forced marriage and raping (Mutembei 2015: 196-8).

By means of flashback style all these plays (KC, KJ, O) demonstrate the grim and dark future in store for the new generation because of the lack of the required sexual health education. Hence, AIDS turns out to be the modern evil: *ugonjwa wa kisasa* (modern disease), a metaphor that puts the blame on the youth, who in turn, accuse the older generation of having endangered them (Mutembei 2015).

### 3.2.2.2. EPISTEMIC MARGINALIZATION OF GENDER AND EMBODIMENT IN HIV/AIDS DISCOURSES

In the plays women characters, both mothers and daughters, are portrayed as “epistemically marginalized” (Chimakonam & Du Toit 2018) victims by both male chauvinistic legacies and the harm of global economy; however, they try to “negotiate a space from the edge” (Nnaemeka 2003).

In literature, the characters whose bodies deliver HIV and whom AIDS is embodied (Csordas 1994; Pizza 2016) are *wahuni* (hooligans) and *malaya* (prostitutes) because of their lifestyle, but above all those are youth (Setel 1999a,b). “Embodiment” is a “psycho-physical experience of a self and societal suffering communicated through the embodied metaphors of sickness” (Csordas 1994: 269) and is the product of adverse socio-political, cultural and economic conditions (Low 1994). Incorporating the illness in people’s bodies corresponds to the concept of *personhood*, or, examining the things the body/*person does*, as actions generated by continuous negotiations between the context and other *persons* (Setel 1990a: 90; Pizza 2016: 29 - 30)

With the advent of modernity, “*tamaa* (desires) overcame the traditional personhood (*utu*)” (Setel 1999a: 90). In the context of HIV-risk related sexual behaviour, male-female relationships appear to be contingent actions stemming from desire and pushing contemporary sexuality outside the traditional reproductive pattern which used to be guaranteed by marriage bonds (Setel 1999a: 91), leading to “the pathology of *tamaa*” (Setel 1999a: 89).

Thus, “the experience of desire” is contaminated by the notion of AIDS as well as sex and love are contaminated by danger and illusion (Derrida 1993: 20; Attree 2010b: 87).

In drama male-female relationships are unhealthy and unequal because of prostitution and GBV, around which the intrigue of the play revolves, and which lead to virus transmission. “Poverty and lack of education remove control from women’s lives especially in relation to sex” (Attree 2010b: 79). Therefore, AIDS becomes a “women’s disease” (McFadden 1992: 159) as the incorporation of gender inequalities and economic imbalances (Obbo 1995; Schoepf 1995; Farmer 1995). Yet the embodiment of sickness in drama is the prostitute’s body “redefining female sexuality in guilt-ridden terms” (McFadden 1992: 181).

Narrators, passers-by or off-screen voices endow the young female protagonists with HIV/AIDS:

*Jirani*: “Fausta alikufa kwa *kukanyaga nyaya*”; *Mjomba*: “Marehemu Fausta alikufa kwa **UKIMWI**” (KC 11)

Neighbour: “Fausta died after **stepping on electric wires**”; Uncle: “Fausta died of **AIDS**”

*Mwanakijiji: “Katibu katika ofisi ya daktari kanambia ana huu ugonjwa wa AIDS! Wanauita slim kwa sababu ugonjwa wenyewe hukufanya ukondeane” (O 25)*

The villager: “The secretary at the doctor’s office told me that she is suffering from this **disease of AIDS!** It is also called *slim* because the disease makes you all skin and bones”

*Mtambaji: “Maskini Suzi! Umri wake, shule, ujauzito na lile gonjwa!” (KC 40)*

Narrator: “Poor Suzi! So young, still at school, now pregnant and **that illness!**”

Consequently, female bodies are depicted as “either diseased and vulnerable or seductive and dangerous” (Offe 2010: 274). This is particularly true for women whose strategy to survive turns out to be the “commodification of sexuality” (Quaranta 2010: 187). Hence, the perfect location for STDs are the bodies of prostitutes (Muriungi 2005). “STDs are a women’s disease” as the main carriers of sexual diseases are meant to be sex-workers, “easy women” and “sexually aggressive women” (McFadden 1992: 182-7;1993).

HIV/AIDS is seen as the natural outcome of prostitution: *malipo ya ufuska* (the payment for prostitution, G 8). The professional female sex worker is a *changudoa* (sea fish, G 32) or a bird who *kurukaruka ovyo* (flies here and there, G 31) traps many men in her nest (*kuwanasa*, G 5) or *ndoana* (fishes many sexual partners with hooks, G 52). The blame is also on carefree sex: *kufanya mapenzi/kutembea ovyo* (G 30) or *wajipelekapeleka ovyo* (MR 61) with “easy women”: *punda wa kijiji...mpe karoti na kila mtu anaweza kumpanda!* (the village donkey...give her a carrot and every man can ride her, O 18) and outside marriage (*atatoka nje*, MR 65). Core transmitters of the infection are both women engaged in commercial sex (*malaya*) like the characters Nuru (G 30-1) and their clients, usually married men (*dingi*, MR 62), who entertain themselves with much younger mistresses (*hawara* or *nyumba ndogo*) like Rose (MR 62-4).

The physical impact of the illness on the individuals is described through the female physical disintegration due to “the widespread belief that women are inherently sexually unclean, and that, therefore, STDs are caused by women”, “the prostitute is the most obvious scapegoat of such superstition” and for the virus transmission (McFadden 1992: 159-60).

Plays provide detailed descriptions of females’ rotten bodies affected by massive loss of weight, fallen hair and skin diseases (*utandu*, *matezi*, *ukurutu*, *aphthae*, swollen lymph nodes, eczema and skin rash, UM 13-4):

*Mtu 1: “Kutahamaki madonda! [...] Madonda mwili mzima.” (UM 14)*

Person 1: “Observe the sores! The entire body was full of ulcers!”

*Mama Furaha: “Malengelenge yalifumka sehemu zote za ngozi yake. Mitoki...na alianza kupungua uzito kwa kasi.” (O 21)*

Mama Furaha: “Blisters appeared everywhere on her skin. Inflammation of glands...and she started losing weight rapidly.”

*Suzi: Akafunua nguo kunionyesha sehemu zake za siri, alikuwa na vidonda. Ni nyama tu alioza. (G 13)*

Suzi: She uncovered her clothes to show me her genitals, she had soars. The flesh was septic.

Thus, “the body of the prostitute has long been the privileged location for the feminization of STDs and of a disgusted/fascinated medico-moral construct of diseased sexuality” (Wilton 1997: 68; Waldby 1996).

Both male adults (*Bwana Ecko, Bwana Juma, Padri James, Manju, Meneja-Dokoa, Joseph, Bwana Makoma*) and peers (*Kitunda, Joti, Steve*) easily cheat and exploit their female partners (*Furaha, Mwali, Makalikiti, Jeska, Suzi, Nuru, Rose*), who became prey of male desires under the illusion of love and romance. Thus, the romantic vision of love has been replaced by blaming, liars and unfaithful partners (Attree 2010b; 2007). The first sexual experience among young adults involves peers, schoolmates or friends of the opposite sex who usually meet in a recreational context. These relations in between love and friendship can be typified as *nipe-nikupe* (give me so that I give you) because of the exchange of sexual favours with financial and material support for the female partner, usually small gifts or tips (Setel 1999a: 109-11).

*Joti: “Mtoto hajapumua, kuku na chipsi; hajainua ulimi, mirinda; mtoto hoi. [...] Piga domo, piga domo nikashinda kwa maneno machache tu: “mara moja tu”; “hakuna mimba sisi watoto”. Kumtia nguvu nikafukua vidonge vya kuzuia mimba. [...] Hao mpaka gesti ya Msomali!” (KC 18-9)*

Joti: “Even before she relaxed, I ordered chicken and chips, before she had said anything, I ordered fruit soda, she was astounded! [...] I chattered and won her with only few words: “only once”; “no pregnancy among us children”. To give her courage I dug out the contraceptive pills. [...] Shortly later we were on our way to the Somali guesthouse!”

African women risk being targets for men, who believe in superstition and false myths, such as that having sex with a virgin, a disabled girl, or an elder is a means of “cleansing oneself” of AIDS (Fuller 2008: 6):

*Bw Juma: “Wanasema kwamba kufanya mapenzi na bikira ni tiba ya uhakika!” (O 27)*

Mr Juma: “They say that having sex with a **virgin** is an assured cure!”

Adolescent girls are prey for the phenomenon of transactional cross-generational sex with sugar daddies, wealthy older men, who offer gifts and money to schoolgirls:

*Mary: “Kuna mambo mengi ya kueleza kuhusu “shuga dadi!” Anafurahisha kuwa naye...na ana pesa nyingi.” (O 6)*

Mary: “There is much to say about “**sugar daddy**”! It’s fun to be with him...and he has a lot of money!”

*Bwana Makoma: (speaking English): “This is your money, don’t worry!” Lazima uinjoy bwana, uko na mzee.”* (MR 19) (you must enjoy my dear; you are with a capable man)

Rape narratives and incest occurred in the dramas. Many girls are victims of GBV in the family context: Suzi’s stepfather was raping her to get rid of his own HIV infection, thus condemning the girl: “*Kila siku alikuwa akinibaka*” (he was raping me every day, G 13). Patriarchy that allows GBV and arranged marriages is denounced, as victims of abduction are officially recognised as wives (Setel 1999a). For instance, during the rape scene Jeska’s body is depicted as a field to be ploughed by older men, or metaphorically as a field where the virus can be spread:

*Bibi: “Umefanikiwa kuvuna. Huyo ndio mke wako.”* (KJ 29)

Grandmother: “You have harvested well. She is indeed your wife.”

“Accusation as the assertion that human agency had a role in the aetiology of AIDS is the dominant leitmotif” (Farmer 1995: 92; Setel 1999a: 6).

The playwrights make use of stereotyped characters analogous to the “*maschere veneziane*” – of the Renaissance “*Commedia dell’Arte*” (1550). For example, women fight against testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007) by means of different strategies to negotiate more space reverting the situation. Techniques of stereotyping, joking and riddling, which draw on the cultural linguistic devices of *utani* (joking relationships in society) and *mafumbo* (the inner language of irony and riddles in literature) are a form of advocacy which tends to produce empowerment concealed behind a curtain of joking, satire and criticism. Swahili fictional works which are aimed to fulfil didactic purposes construct stereotypical models of women into a continuum from “saintly Mary” to “evil Eve” (Topan 2004: 214) or “Vamps and Victims” (Bertoncini 1996). Those female figures read through the “inner language of *fumbo*” (Topan 2004: 218) are obedient to established social rules and capable of deceiving and manipulating their men.

### 3.2.2.3. CONDOMS AND HIV-TESTING AS VEHICLES OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

In HIV/AIDS discourses, the bio-power represents “the social control on bodies and pleasure with normalizing form of self-surveillance disguised as HIV/AIDS prevention and public health” (Halperin 2016: 216-7). The target is unsafe sexual relationships which, even though these do not automatically

entail the transmission of the virus, are considered a form of lack of self-control, and so are labelled as unhealthy, risky and pathologized. Therefore, public health interventions such as NGO campaigns against unprotected sex and for antibody tests are aimed at “controlling the sexual epidemic through the exercise of state power on sexed bodies” (Halperin 2016: 207).

For instance, the chorus wearing condoms on their fingertips in UM urges people to: “*Tumia mipira, ni kinga bora!*” (Wear **condoms!** They are the best prevention you can get! UM 18). The mother character gives her daughter advice to use *mfuko wa kuhifadhia embe dodo* (the envelope to preserve the small mango, ED 8) as protection (*kinga*, ED 6). The issue of safe sex is addressed by stereotyping the behaviour of the young boys who have sex *pekupeku* (bare-foot, KC 19) and enjoy themselves “not eating the sweet in its wrapping” (*pipi na ganda lake*, KC 19); they rather prefer to have a full-contact experience “shaving their partners” (*mnyonyoe manyonya*, KC 24). Young boys complain about the effect of condoms during sexual activities (*kuna nazi* or grating a coconut, O 26): “*kondomu kunakulinda dhidhi ya slim [...] lakini Mabuti yamepoa MOTO!*” (condoms protect you from AIDS, but **boots** (condoms) cool down the fire of excitement!” O 26). *Kondomu* (O 25; MR 16) are called by the name of a trademark brand *Salama* (safety, MR 16) which in literature has become a metonymy for the effect of having safe sex with condoms.

The culture of testing for HIV-antibodies before marriage has become a significant element which intrudes into the life of Tanzanian people, as well as in the literature committed to preventing HIV/AIDS (Mutembei 2011a: 427). The character of *Afisa Maembe Dodo*, who is the officer of the young girls, is appointed by the state to check the girls’ health through a compulsory HIV test (*uchunguzi*, ED 31), and it is introduced in the play by the crier *Mgambo*. Church pastors impose *uchunguzi* as a condition before marriage (KJ 19) and griots discourage characters from seeking help from witchdoctors, encouraging them to have the HIV test done at the hospital: “*Nipimeni! Nipimeni!*” (UM 16) and to believe in laboratory tests: “*ni vema kwanza kuamini matokeo ya uchunguzi*” (the first thing is to believe in test results, KC 37), even though HIV tests are too often cheated by infected people (G; KJ). Alternatively, the call for testing is expressed by the stigmatizing slogan of NGO awareness campaigns focused on carefree sex: “*Unaringa? Umepima – Giza*” (Are you wandering around? Check your health – Darkness, G 18).

Conversely, the taking of contraceptive pills by adolescents is perceived as “*kisirani*” or “*uchuro*” (KC 9), a bad omen, or misfortune, and thus condemned as a way to “encourage loose manners among young girls”: “*Huko si ndiko kunifundishia mwanangu umalaya?*” (KC 11). These new habits, condoms, contraceptives, ARV therapies, and blood tests, are all perceived as foreign customs which spread in local people’s lives; thus, they are surrounded by perplexity and scepticism.

### 3.2.3. ANALYTICAL SECTIONS

#### 3.2.3.1. DIFFERENT WAYS OF TREATING ILLNESSES

In the HIV/AIDS related literary works, the clashes of discordant ontologies and epistemologies, science and magic, can be observed in relation to not only the aetiology of the illness, which can be either a curse made by jealous witches or a divine punishment for the sin of lust, but also in relation to its prevention and healing. Illness is conceived either as a biological or supernatural phenomenon. The authors assume shifting positions between western medicine (*udaktari*) and the healing practices (*uganga wa jadi*) of traditional healers and herbalists as well as between traditional ritual practices (*miviga*) and occult practices and superstitions (*ushirikina*) (Langwick 2011; Dilger 2001a,b; 2007).

The African medical tradition has been considered to endow at least three different types of rationalities: first, the cultural rationality which renders the cosmological and religious interpretations of health and illness; second, the botanic rationality which represents the knowledge of plants and herbs; and third, the therapeutic rationality which implies the knowledge of how to use herbal remedies to treat illnesses (Memel-Fotê 2007: 28). In addition to these, the superimposition of the modern scientific medicine took place.

The coexistence of not only incompatible ontologies such as parasites and devilish creatures as well as biomedical diseases and magic or witchcraft, but also of different epistemologies, both general scientific and local knowledge of medicine and treatment, leads to “the integration of those different realities into new hybrid practices” (Langwick 2011: 35).

The ambiguity assumed by the authors leads to *intermittent clashes* between different epistemes in their fictional works. On the one hand, the authors, committed to fighting against the disease, endorse the positivist epistemology of science (Rettovà 2021a) promoting scientific medicine for curing diseases, condom use and HIV antibodies testing; whereas, the traditional practices of healing as well as healers and diviners who are portrayed as stereotyped swindlers and cheaters are challenged.

*Mganga wa jadi*: “Njoo dawa njoo. Loo! Inakataa. Vua gauni, vua tu usiogope ni dawa” (MR 59)

The traditional healer: “Come cure, come here! Ay! It refuses. Get undressed, just get undressed, don’t worry, it’s part of the treatment!”

On the other hand, the authors reveal the failures of the health care system, particularly, after the privatization of the medical sector as part of the SAPs implemented in the country. The characters bribe doctors to lie about the results of HIV tests, and access to treatment is completely denied to terminally ill people who are economically constrained: *Hatukopeshi* (we don’t give

credit, G 27), which forces the population to turn to home-based care (Dilger 2010). Patients with HIV/AIDS are a burden for the new private hospital system (*hospitali za kisasa*: modern hospital, MR 65), for they seem to have rare probability to recover: “*wagonjwa hawa wanatusumbua sana, inapaswa wakae nyumbani tu*” (Those patients bother us, they should stay at home, G 36).

The philosophy of *utu*/humanity among people has been lost and this affects badly event health care sector as told by the narrator:

“*Madaktari ndio hao, hawana utu pesa ndio utu wa mtu*” (G 21).

“Such are the doctors; they have no human values, their values are based on money”

Therefore, people believing in different spiritual beings are more likely to turn to “other epistemologies”; thus, traditional healers seem to be particularly helpful for healing AIDS related opportunistic infections (Langwick 2011). This return to healing practices and spiritual culture can be read as a strategy to address the concerns of people about modernity, to suggest the “elasticity of African epistemologies: modernisation of the tradition and traditionalising of the modern” (Warnes 2009: 128), as well as an application of faith-based magical realism “naturalizing the supernatural” in fictional works (Warnes 2005b).

However, as the healers are not effective against AIDS complications:

*Bw. Makoma*: “*Mganga wangu karibu ametumia dawa zote, ameshindwa.*” (MR 65)

Mr. Makoma: “My healer has tried every treatment, yet he has failed!”

The characters turn to the hospitals, if already ill, or to prevention tools such as condoms and testing, although these are perceived as foreign customs which now intrude in African culture because of the state of emergency caused by the virus and the NGO-ization of the medical sector (Dilger 2012). Condoms are ironically named *female condoms za kizungu* (the **European** female condoms, MR18), so as to stress their European origins. The authors make often reference to NGOs’ projects:

*Mw. Rose*: “*Twende tukaangalie **Angaza**. Ni muhimu kujua afya zetu.*” (MR 66)

Rose: “Let’s go to **Angaza Project** (AMREF) for HIV testing. It is very important to know our health condition”.

Particularly ARV treatment, which is precluded to the vast majority of people who cannot afford the high price, is felt to be a device invented by foreign pharmaceutical companies to raise money:

“*Angepima angepata dawa za kuongeza siku*”

“*Acha uongo, maneno ya biashara tu! Watu wanataka kutajirika kwenye UKIMWI*” (G 26-7)

“If she had had the test done, she would have received the ARV treatments”  
“You are deceived! This is sheer business wit! People want to become rich through the AIDS problem”

Therefore, the therapeutic rationality of traditional herbal treatments (*miti shamba*, G 29) appears to be the most obvious solution. The clash of epistemes is neatly shown in KC when the characters try many herbal remedies such as “*mtoto kala mzizi ya aina yote*” (the boy has eaten roots of every kind, KC 35), and divination practices “*waganga wamemaliza makombe yao yote*” (the healers have finished all their medicine pots, KC 35) without succeeding. Eventually, they go to the hospital where the HIV infection was finally diagnosed “*huko hospitali wataalamu wamekuja na matokeo haya ya kutisha*” (there at the hospital the experts come out with that dreadful result, KC 34). The result is unpleasant; thus, people strive to find out some other possibilities: “*mafundi haweshi na kila mmoja na mkono wake*” (the experts are endless, and each one of them has his own skill, KC 36), “*huyu anajua dawa kwelikweli*” (he is a real expert in medicine, KC 36). Healers and herbalists have a cost and cannot solve the problem: “*mtani ushauza rasilimali zako kuuguza mtoto. Ushajitia umaskini kwa kuhangaika. Sasa leo daktari ameweka mambo wazi*” (you have already sold all your commodities to treat the boy. You condemned yourself to poverty and struggles. Now the medical doctor has clarified the situation, KC 37). In this drama the code of the real and the epistemology of science seem to prevail.

### 3.2.3.1.1. TIME AND HIV/AIDS IN LITERATURE

Prevention health strategies are made up of a Euro-American conceptualization of time as “contingent yet controllable future” by human actions (Offe 2001: 56). Local actors conversely are more likely, when motivated to consider a behavioural change, to recall past knowledge, as an “epistemological return” (Rettovà 2016d), creating a hybridization of customs “incorporating Western influences” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a: 171) into ancient teachings (Offe 2001).

The Swahili HIV/AIDS literature, especially dramas, show a linear concept of time, for the stream of events follows a logical sequence: people take risks and perform dangerous behaviour so that they contract the virus, fall ill and finally die. However, a projection into the distant future is foreseen, in both novels and dramas, because HIV/AIDS is a long-term illness that evolves from HIV positivity, via HIV disease, to full blown AIDS; thus, the sick person dies over a period of at least 10 years (Beyaraza 2000).

This linear conception of time in literature suggests the influence of the Euro-American logic of prevention imposed by health organizations, and

shows that HIV/AIDS epidemic, as a historical event, has contributed to change some patterns of the African societies (Hasu 1999). It also reveals that the dramatic genre tends to determine time relying on the Aristotelian unities of time, space and action. Notwithstanding, the time sequence is not always linear because of the use of flashbacks/forwards. In fact, people suffering from long-term illnesses renegotiate time, identity and space, particularly among their healthy past, a sick present and a hopeful future, leading to a complicated and bumpy perception of time.

### 3.2.3.2. DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS VS SCEPTICISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Clashes of different epistemes and incompatible ontologies are widespread across the dramas not only in between science and magic or religion, hospital treatments and traditional healing practices but also between Christianity and other spiritual beliefs as well as between different carriers of knowledge such as medical doctors, witchdoctors, healers, diviners, church pastors and revivalist Christians.

Traditional spiritual beliefs clash with Christianity, which has been imposed by the Lutheran church missionaries, leading to a hybridization of beliefs (Hasu 1999). Particularly, the Pentecostal churches proselytize referring to ontologies (*pepo, jini*) better understood by the population (Dilger 2001a). On the other hand, traditional spirituality as well as the power of omen, foreboding, foretelling and extra-sensorial experiences fight to gain their space and establish their credibility, particularly when religion fails and people die.

*Mw Rose: "Ukristu ni mchana, usiku kila mtu ana mambo yake."*

*Bw. Makoma: "Kweli dini ni mchana, usiku shetani" "Mimi nina mganga wangu special" (MR 56-7)*

Rose: "Christianity is at daytime, at night everybody minds their own business."

Mr Makoma: "That is the truth, during the day we are religious, during the night the devil rules" "I have my special healer".

Religion is debunked as an excuse to cover the truth and righteous teachings:

*"Mwiko kuzungumzia mambo haya kwa watoto" "Dini inakataza" "Mila Haziruhusu" "Waongo. Waongo wakubwa" (KC 2)*

"Speaking about these things (sex and sexuality) with children is a taboo."

"Religion prohibits it" "Cultural traditions forbid it" "Liars! Big liars!"

The criticism of "other epistemologies" seems to include even religion, therefore, exorcisms to get rid of AIDS are uncovered as a false superstition:

*Mchungaji: “Pepo hili ni pepo baya sana, pepo lenye nguvu.” (MR 71)  
“Nakuumuru toka wewe pepo mchafu! [...] Nasema toka, potea, shindwa kwa jina la Yesu!” (MR 74)*

The pastor: “This **demon** is a dangerous one, a really powerful demon”.  
“I order you bad spirit to get away from here! [...] I say get out, get lost, be defeated in the name of Jesus!”

Agnosticism and scepticism appear to be the only choice in the face of the collapse of all the structures either moderns or traditional, and the impending death:

*Nuru: Mama niambie Maisha ni nini? Mungu anapenda sisi tuteseke? Kuna maana gani ya kuhangaika na maisha ya dunia? (G 39 - 40)*

Nuru: Mother tell me what is life? Is God pleased by our suffering? What is the purpose of struggling for life in this world?

### 3.2.3.3. MAGIC, SUPERNATURAL, AND UNKNOWN ELEMENTS – MARVELLOUS REALISM

“Impossible things happen constantly and quite plausibly under the mid-day sun” (Marquez quoted in Warnes 2005a: 3), thus the supernatural filters through the real dimension and the code of the fantastic juxtaposes the code of nature around a “reality-esoteric axis” (Warnes 2009: 137).

In drama, authors use “a mode of narration that naturalizes or normalizes the supernatural. A supernatural event or presence may stand synecdochally or metonymically for an alternative way of conceiving reality derived from a non-Western belief system or worldview”. Thus, “faith-based magical realism is a culturally specific non-Western way of thinking relating to the world” (Warnes 2009: 15).

Unknown elements appear suddenly throughout the dramatic narration together with witchcraft, zombies and curses, which are lived as day-to-day reality. These supernatural elements are represented “judgemental-free” through “authorial reticence” (Chanady quoted in Rettová 2021a: 318).

*Mtu anawarudisha misukule nyumbani, atashindwa nini tena? (KC 36)*

[Speaking about a diviner]: a man sending zombies back home, what else can he failed to do?

Magical realism is an artistic style of writing which draws upon endogenous ways of thinking related to “inclusive” epistemologies.

Alternative epistemologies and surprising ontologies are merged together and naturalized in the narrative context, suggesting the coexistence of science and medicine with traditional spiritual beliefs, the supernatural which

appears in the form of zombies, curses, demons, spirits, ghosts, witches and sorcerers as well as unknown elements.

The transformation of human beings into zombies and ghosts occurs when they catch the HIV infection “*mtu si mtu, kizuka si kizuka*” (she was not a person anymore, nor a zombie KC 4), or, “*vifani*” phantoms suffering from physical pain which increases progressively (O 1).

Witchcraft is part of the normal stream of life: “*kuna mtu kamroga...pengine rafiki msichana mwenye wivu*” (there is someone who cursed him... perhaps a jealous female friend, O 25); “*wanasema kwamba amelogwa*” (they said that she has been bewitched, O 2); “*ukimjua mchawi na ukamkemea*” (if you know a witch, go and call her, MR 65); “*nasikia jamaa walimpiga juu*” (I heard that he has been cursed, MR 71) and is particularly related to the *aetiology* of HIV/AIDS.

“The illicit use of supernatural power to cause harm” (Darling quoted in Rödlach 2006: 51) can be divided into the two classical categories: first, “inborn witchcraft”, which implies either an entire family reared within the tradition of practicing magic, or evil super-human creatures born with super-human powers; and “learned sorcery”, which represents ordinary people who learn witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1976; Rödlach 2006: 52). However, in contemporary practices witchcraft (*uchawi* in Swahili) tends to incorporate sorcery (Abrahams 1994: 10, 23-4), and it comprises innate powers, spiritual interventions, and crafted sinister substances (Ashforth 2002: 126).

HIV/AIDS is interpreted within a sorcery paradigm to offer the hope of a cure, for scientific medicine cannot provide people with an actual cure. The only treatment which exists, the ARV, is extremely expensive, and is also not available in many countries. Hence, the illusion of sorcery seems to have the power to transform the incurable into a curable disease. Moreover, AIDS is believed to be an unnatural disease caused by non-human agents, because it persists over a long period of time and it does not respond to any currently tested treatment. Thus, the main causes of AIDS can be either the promiscuity of superhuman sexually active malicious creatures or witchcraft practices. In the first case, evil creatures have non-consensual sexual relationships with humans, transmitting HIV by their semen or, alternatively, by giving their seduced victims magical poisons (Rödlach 2006: 79 - 83).

Naturalizing the supernatural into a realistic narrative is a tool not only to expand the existing categories of the real (also associated with faith), but also to rupture with them through an attitude of “epistemological irreverence” (Warnes 2009: 151).

Magical realism in postcolonial production is an escape from violence, whether epistemic (“epistemicide”) or actual, which aims to challenge the system of thought and knowledge that falls under the label of rationality (Warnes 2009: 152). Suddenly, different sources of harm appear “included” (Rettová 2021a) as a combination of causes (Sogolo 2005):

“*Kila mtu akawa na lake: mara jini, wengine mzimu huo*” (KC 1)

“Everyone had their own interpretation: one time it is a jinn, others thought of an ancestral spirit.”

The unknown creatures, which appear as actual ontologies endowed by anthropomorphic features, can be treated by none of the medical, herbal or faith healing traditions, generating a state of “awe” (Rettová 2017):

“*Basi itabidi tuwaone walokole ili hili jini likakemewe [...] Jini lile lilikuwa linamwangusha. Alipelekwa kila hospitali, kila mganga, hakupona*” (MR 66)

“Then, we have to visit the *walokole* (Christian fundamentalists in Tanzania) so that this jinn can be expelled by rebuking it. [...] This jinn harmed her seriously. She went to all the hospitals, all the healers, yet could not recover”

#### 3.2.3.4. HIV/AIDS METAPHORS AND TROPES IN CONTEXT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

In the 1980s when an “unknown disease” was first identified, the Tanzanian population started to name it so that they could interpret and communicate the “new disease” (Mutembei *et al.* 2002). Likewise, “private affairs” circulating hidden in metaphors contribute to the erosion of the “culture of silence and taboo around sex and sexuality” in Africa (Mutembei 2011a: 426; 2001).

In dramas, mistresses are represented as spare tyres (*spea taya*, UM 8); thus, AIDS is a car accident (Hasu 1999). *Dodo Bivu* (the mature mango, ED 1) is a “metaphonymy” that in this example implies a synecdoche inside a simile: the immature mango usually means the hard breast of a young girl, for the girl is bodily shaped like a mango according to coastal people’s imaginary. *Uchachu ndani ya utamu wa dodo* (bitterness inside the sweetness of mango, ED 4) is another “metaphonymy” which stands for AIDS as the bitter unexpected consequence of sex. *Giza* (G 1) represents metaphonymically both the effect of HIV/AIDS: death, and its cause: ignorance about sexual health issues.

The “master tropes” (Sapir 1977) related to the aetiology of HIV/AIDS are drawn alternatively from either supernatural or biological ontologies, characterizing the plays as *epistemological miscellanea*.

HIV/AIDS can be rendered intermittently, on the one hand, as an ontology coming from the **realm of marvel**: a ghostly giant, a ghost or widow (*Dubwana*, KC 1 and *kizuka*, KC 4), an ogre (*zimwi*, Morgan 2010:1), an ancestral spirit (*mzimu*, KC 1), and *juju* (curse or voodoo practice, MR 76); *ugonjwa wa slim* (O 24): here the use of the English vocabulary “slim” connotes the disease with the unknown, for the only certitude is the effect not its causes; *kirusi cha kutisha* (the dreadful virus, O 43) renders both the malign cause and

the frightful effect of the illness on human bodies; and *Jini* is the Islamic evil spirit connected to adultery and fornication (Hasu 1999).

On the other hand, HIV/AIDS can be rendered as **natural ontologies**: *balaa* (natural calamity, MR 62), *ngoma* (traditional ritual dance or drums, MR 76), and *kuugua muda mrefu* (to be ill for a long time, MR 75) that can be either a metonymy referring to a consequence of the disease or a synecdoche for the characteristic of its action, slow but powerful.

Moreover, STIs are rendered by the image of a scorpion bite (*kuumwa nage*, UM 8), and HIV/AIDS can be represented, through the objectification process, as a flood (*gharika*, UM 19) referring to the power and the rapidity with which it kills thousands of people. People dying of AIDS are portrayed by the simile “they fall off like summer leaves from trees” (*kupukutika kama mti wa kiangazi*, UM 2; KC 1).

HIV/AIDS is represented in connection with elements pertaining to traditional life cycle rituals such as *ngoma* the drums traditionally played during burial ceremonies: *amewahi kwa ngoma* (start dancing early, G 8).

Accusation is on lifestyle in the following metaphors: *kaondoka kwa style hiyo* (died in such manner/style, G 48), *angeipata tamu ya chungu* (get the sweet and bitter of sex, G 47), and *kumuua kwa kunyonga* (to hang transmitting HIV to someone, give to somebody a death sentence, G 50) that represents metonymically the effect of the virus which kills slowly by consumption related to opportunistic diseases.

HIV/AIDS metaphors extend subjectivity beyond human species recognizing the role of non-human actors in ailing (Green 2014). Hence, HIV/AIDS turns to be a real “subject” embodied in **supernatural ontologies** and mythological marvellous creatures filling up the narration with alien presences and unknown elements which blur the boundaries of day-to-day life:

*UKIMWI, majitu yanaenda pekupeku tu hayajali!* (AIDS, a giant who walks barefoot - without wearing condoms - without caring, MR 53). This trope is a combination of metaphor and analogy: giant: HIV/AIDS = barefoot: unsafe sex (Maranda quoted in Turner 1974: 290-1).

*Dubwana lile likaendelea kuwadhuru!* (the ghostly giant of AIDS keeps hurting the children, who lack sexual health education, KC 3). This trope is a combination of metaphor and analogy: ghostly giant: HIV/AIDS = lack of sex education: unsafe sex (Maranda quoted in Turner 1974: 290-1).

The metaphorical image recalls the myth of genies who commit adultery with their victims causing illness such as *makanje* (growths which spread into the vagina, anus and nasal cavity) (Langwick 2011). Similarly, the Tanzanian legend of *Popo Bawa* is the mythological representation of illicit sexual activities as well as the transgression of cultural norms and taboos. Lately, it seems to reflect the local concerns about homosexuality and HIV transmission (Thompson 2017).

“*Kuna mtu hapa ofisini kanitupia pepo*” (there is someone here at the office who has cursed me, MR 65). This analogy can be analysed as follows: the

curse (demon/vampires) stands for the virus as the act of sorcery stands for transmission (Turner 1974). *Pepo* (demon) *la namna hii hula chakula cha mtu tumboni* (this kind of demon consumes the food inside the human's intestine, MR 65) refers to the mythical aetiology of the illness that is caused by vampires who suck vital lymph from human bodies making them losing weight until they die (MR 65).

Conversely, the process of objectification transforms abstract notions in concrete realities (Mutembei *et al.* 2002: 3; Moscovici 1981), thus, HIV/AIDS can be rendered as an ontology from the **realm of nature**.

For instance, *mdudu* (insect, MR 76) is a metonymy for the virus or the alien antibody that causes the disease ravaging human bodies, which by means of the anchoring process refers to a parasite that killed banana plants in North Tanzania threatening local people lives during the Eighties.

Similarly, the popular metaphor *kukanyaga waya/nyaya* (stepping on a live wire/electric wires, KC 4) which means to die of AIDS is a “metaphonymy”, that is, an inter-link between a metaphor and a metonymy (Goossens 1995; Mutembei 2001: 23-4). The wires are connected to the electricity (*umeme*) which is a metonymy referring to one of the symptoms of AIDS, that is, the skin burning (*mkanda wa jeshi*, G34) caused by herpes zoster (Mutembei 2001: 113). There is also a complex combination of external and internal metaphors: the metaphor compares skin damage provoked by the disease to the damage caused by electricity, while, the analogy means that AIDS kills as fast as an electro-shock does (Turner 1974: 290-1).

To sum up, not only do metaphors both describe everyday phenomena and engender the way of interpreting them, confirming the structure of thought of a given society (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), but they also articulate epistemologies. Therefore, a tripartite trend of metaphors can be isolated in plays pertaining respectively to the natural-biological realm, the spiritual-supernatural realm and the field of scientific medicine. These metaphorical trends intermingle into what I call the ***epistemological miscellanea*** of Swahili literature.

## B. FROM SCRIPT TO STAGE: *USHUHUDA WA MIFUPA* (THE TESTIMONY OF THE BONES) FROM DRAMA 1989 TO PERFORMANCE 2019

This section investigates the original play *Ushuhuda Wa Mifupa*, written in 1989, in connection with the live performance that I collected in 2019. I would like to clarify the differences between these two didactic works. The play of 1989 originated from the collaboration between the Tanzanian Ministries of Arts and Health; however, the author provides the audience with a detailed representation of local peoples' interpretations and a playscript rich in endogenous knowledge.

The performance of 2019 was created in the academic environment of UDSM, to teach students of literature how to become talented performers, and how to cope with social issues in modern globalized times<sup>16</sup>. The performance script was faithfully created from the original published drama of 1990 with small changes and simplifications. Particularly, language has been adapted on many occasions as contemporary "street Swahili" (Njewe 2018), although the main tropes have been preserved as original. The main changes occur in the final episode, where the play has now been readjusted and updated according to the scientific progress as well as to address the current times and problems.

### 3.3.1. THE PLAY: *USHUHUDA WA MIFUPA* (NGOZI 1990)

*Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (UM) (The Testimony of the Bones), is the very first play written in Swahili on HIV/AIDS, immediately after Merinyo's short story *Kifo cha AIDS* (Death from AIDS, 1988). It is a historical drama, which explains the origin and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania. It was composed by Ibrahim Ngozi<sup>17</sup> in 1989, six years after HIV first appeared in the Kagera region (1983), with strong didactic purposes for the competition announced by the *National AIDS Control Programme* (NACP) in collaboration with the *National Council of Arts* (BASATA)<sup>18</sup>, and held during the period from 21 May to 31 July 1989. It won the BASATA prize, chosen as the best out of 160 manuscripts submitted, and was published by the same institution in 1990.

This play deals with the different theories on HIV/AIDS's origins and causes, both mythological and scientific, and the main means by which the virus is transmitted: economic restrictions, political corruption, material and sexu-

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<sup>16</sup> I attended other related performances during my fieldwork: «BAHATI –A Show to Inspire Changes» *The Little Theatre*, Dar es Salaam (20-11-2018); «Fear of What? » *Nafasi Art Space*, Dar es Salaam (1-12-2018).

<sup>17</sup> According to my research participants, Ngozi died in Uganda some years ago.

<sup>18</sup> I visited BASATA during my fieldwork on February 11, 2019.

al desire, health sector problems in the country and HIV-risk related behaviours. It also deals with awareness campaigns for the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The play was immediately included in the compulsory syllabus of Swahili literature in secondary schools and universities in Tanzania until 1996, when it started being replaced with *Kilio Chetu*.

### 3.3.2. *USHUHUDA WA MIFUPA*: THE LIVE PERFORMANCE (DAR ES SALAAM 2019)

During my field research, on February 8, 2019, I attended as participant observer the 50-minutes live performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa*, performed by the students in Performing Arts at the theatre of the College of Arts at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Dr Delphine Njeweje was the producer of this performance, in which I actively participated and which I video recorded with the signed consent of all the actors<sup>19</sup>. Among the eleven bachelor's degree students who acted in the play, two female students were in their second year of a theatre degree, two young men were in the third year of a theatre and directing degree, and all the other young men were in the second year of a film degree. The play was performed during the examination period of the students as not only an assessment, but also for my research project. Moreover, I performed with the actors during the last dance.

The performance is made up of the following parts: the director's foreword; the prelude, consisting in the choral parodos dance; the narrator's prologue that introduces a story inside a story; the main body of the performance, which is divided in 12 episodes<sup>20</sup> plus 4 choral interludes<sup>21</sup>; and finally, the producer and director's afterword.

### 3.3.3. ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY AND THE PERFORMANCE

#### 3.3.3.1. STRUCTURE AND STYLE

The play consists of one long scene alternated with the narrator's interludes which introduce and comment on the episodes.

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<sup>19</sup> I also recorded the final rehearsal, held at the University theatre, on February 7, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Tanzanian traditional society; HIV origins; hospital treatments; the circumciser; prostitution, *Makalikiti's* death; *Menjeja-Dokoa*; HIV/AIDS; condoms company; new devices and prevention strategies; wear condoms!; the conclusive dialogue between the narrator and the joker.

<sup>21</sup> The skeleton dance (parodos), the party dance, the condom chorus song and dance, and the big final dance (exodos).

The protagonists are “shadow heroes” (Mutembei 2011b) either characters at fault, or their victims.

The chorus appears as choral songs, choral characters, and choral structures (Mutembei 2012). The traditional storytellers (*Mtambaji*, *Mtani*, *La Mgambo*) clearly play the role of chorus masters calling for the audience’s attention: “*La Mgambo likilia lina jambo*” (UM 1) (If the bellman calls something is happening).

The peculiar narration style used at the beginning of the performance (parodos) shows a parallelism with the narration at the end (exodus), and both of them have the function of the chorus, disclosing the moral of the tale through the use of a fairy-tale pattern or a dialogue between the narrator and the audience, which is a disclosure of a story inside a story (Mutembei 2012; Brecht 1992), and which casts the audience backwards and forwards in time by means of flashbacks (Hussein 2003).

Thus, the UM incipit opens with the sound of traditional African dance (*milio ya ngoma*) and tragic moaning and lamentations which introduce the choral ode uttered by the living skeletons risen from the dead to give their testimony on the truth about HIV/AIDS.

The parodos is followed by the mythological style narration of the narrator (prologue), which opens a second level of narration inside the main one. Afterwards, the skeletons become human beings again, at first, just called *Mtu*, a person with no name, then they evolve into real characters, and finally, they return to being skeletons.

The interactions among all these characters illustrates the social heteroglossia of that time dialogized (Bakhtin 1981). The core dialogues are the followings: the first is among four unnamed international researchers respectively from USA, Russia, Cuba and Africa; the second, among the hospital staff; the third, illustrates the dialogues between medical practitioners, both a medical doctor (*Korido-Dokta*) and a traditional healer, and their patients; the fourth dialogue is between a young girl who prostitutes herself (*Makalikiti*) and her “sugar daddy”, an old business man (*Meneja-Dokoa*); the fifth dialogue show the exchanges among the narrator, the joker, and *Meneja-Dokoa*; finally, the last dialogue is between narrator and joker.

### 3.3.3.2. NARRATION: CHORAL-SAGES AS THE SPOKESPERSONS OF AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

The most prominent figures in both the play and the performance are the choral characters (Mutembei 2012) of *Mtambaji* (Narrator) and *Mtani* (Joker). These storytellers are depositories of popular knowledge (Oruka 1990), and new discoveries from the biomedical field.

Different worldviews and ideologies are confronted in this play: on the one hand, the *Ngariba* (circumciser), is the expression of traditional knowledge of health, illness and treatment. On the other hand, the storytellers, *Mtambaji* and *Mtani*, who, represent positivist epistemology, aim to provide people with scientific knowledge about HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

*Mtambaji* is both an external and internal<sup>22</sup> narrator (Bal 1997; Stanzel 1984), which together with *Mtani*, who is also a focalizer, cover multiples functions: choral characters (Mutembei 2012), folk and didactic sages (Oruka 1990), but they also cover the function of “Boalian jokers” (Boal 2008), who “make all the explanations verified in the structure of the performance” (Boal 2008: 159). Narrator and joker’s performances involve audience participation, not only asking questions and making comments, but also acting, through body movements, gestures and dances, with the objective of transforming the audience into “spect-actors” (Freire 2005; Boal 2006; 2008). The complementary interplay between the narrator and the joker is the axis around which the entire play revolves and is built up. The narrator introduces, explains, teaches, and his role is completed by the joker, who provokes characters’ reactions and highlights the deeper insight of the work, smoothing even more raw or unpleasant realities with sweet and sour laughs. This analysis is articulated following the narrator’s interventions, which introduce or comment on each theme of the play, together with the provocative actions of his “stage complement”, the joker, who indeed completes and boosts the role of the narrator in a complementary way.

Apart from the choral characters, other forms of community chorus appear in the play: the *Mifupa*/skeletons’ chorus in the prologue (UM 1); the *kwaya*/refrain sung by the Doctors for emphasising condom use (UM 18); the apocalyptic epilogue “*tumekwisha*” (we are going to end), uttered by the whole community (*wote*), led by *Mtambaji* and *Mtani* (UM 21); and, finally, the presence of silence which covers dangerous actions, such as unsafe sexual intercourses and illicit medical treatments, performed in the darkness with the absence of voice (Mutembei 2012).

In the performances, the community chorus manifest itself through dances (at the dance floor, the condom dances) or in dumb scenes (at the hospital), where the characters express core messages through speechless body movements.

The choral song moaned by the *mifupa*/skeletons in the parodos of the play sounds like this:

*Viini...viini...VIINI! Virus – HIV VIRUS – Viini* (UM 1)

*Nuclei, nuclei, nuclei! Virus – HIV VIRUS – Nuclei* (Mutembei 2015: 189)

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<sup>22</sup> *Mtambaji* takes an active role as internal character in the play only in the last two dialogues.

*Kiini*, which Mutembei (2015) translates as *nucleus*, stands for what today in common Swahili is called *VVU-Virusi vya UKIMWI* (the virus of AIDS). The choice of shifting from a typical Swahili term to the English term implies going from the known into the unknown (Mutembei 2015: 189). Thus, the choral song interrupts the dramatic dialogue to introduce a dissonant local epistemology into the hegemonic science and to suggest the existence of a hidden reality just out there, inhabited by ghostly presences like the “*Zimwi (ogre) of UKIMWI/AIDS*”<sup>23</sup> (Morgan 2010).

The skeletons’ dialogue is replaced by the skeleton dance in the performance; then, both are followed by the narrator’s prologue in which oral tales praise the unpolluted African society of the precolonial past:

### Play

*Mtambaji: Nitaanza mwanzo kabisa katika masimulizi yangu ili tuone ilivyotokea.*  
(UM 3)

Narrator: I’ll start from the beginning of my story so as to illustrate clearly what happened.<sup>25</sup>

### Performance

*Mtambaji: Nitaanza mwanzo kabisa, mwanzo wa zamani zillleeeeeee, niweze kuwaeleza jinsi jamii yetu ilivyokuwa kabla ya kuwa mifupa.*

(To be compared with the video recorded performance 03:55 - 04:27”<sup>24</sup>)

Narrator: I’ll start from the beginning, a long time ago, so as to explain how our society used to be, before becoming a society of **skeletons**.

## 3.3.4. ANALYTICAL SECTIONS: DRIVERS FOR AFROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE (-S)

### 3.3.4.1. DIFFERENT MEDICAL TRADITIONS: MEDICAL DOCTORS AND TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS

Dealing with HIV/AIDS at that time meant dealing with the unknown. In fact, people could not understand properly neither the causes nor the consequences of HIV/AIDS. The only thing that was sure, at that time, was the stig-

<sup>23</sup> See the play: *The Beast* (Morgan 2005), and its Swahili translation: *Zimwi la UKIMWI* (Morgan 2010).

<sup>24</sup> The performance was video recorded by me, on February 8, 2019 in Dar es Salaam. The video clip selections and the translations from Swahili to English are mine. Time frame references are based on my own 50-minutes recorded video.

<sup>25</sup> All the translations from the original Swahili text into English are mine. All emphasis mine.

ma upon infected people and the fear of death. All the knowledge available was based on the Euro-American health organization projects. Meanwhile, the panic-striking population started questioning their own everyday traditional costumes and mores. The playwright indeed does not take a clear position in favour of scientific medicine or traditional healing practices; this ambiguity leads to *intermittent clashes* between contrasting epistemes. “Folk-practitioners” (Schoepf 2017) are stereotyped, criticised, and mainly described as witchdoctors or “magical healers” (Marquez 2014: 54), who can do more harms rather than curing as medicine men.

“*Waganga na waganguzi*<sup>26</sup>! Wapi! Mtoto anazidi kunyong’onyea tu” (UM 13)

“Healers and **their superiors!** Useless! The girl’s weakening is worsening”

*Mganga: “Mimi nimeepushwa na Shetani [...] nimepata uwezo wa kuponya wagonjwa [...] Nina uwezo! Nina nguvu!”* (UM 16)

The healer: “I have been spared by the Devil [...] I received the power to heal people [...] I have power! I have strength!”

Notwithstanding, the playwright also reveals the failures of the health care system, particularly after the privatization of the medical sector as part of the SAPs. Examples of this include the illicit and harmful services offered by the “Corridor-Doctor” (*Korido-Dokta*, UM 7), who, working inside and outside hospitals and receiving weighty tips from his patients, incorporates the corruption of the healthcare system (Dilger 2012). The SAPs include markets and media liberalization, government and bureaucracy’s rationalization resulting in a value-free economic with amoral results. Thus, this period provided fertile conditions for a rapid proliferation of occult practices and an occult economy (Sanders 2001: 162).

On the one hand, at the hospitals, not only doctors were unable to diagnose or to treat the virus properly, but they also lacked the proper instruments to intervene, because of cuts in government expenditure.

### Play

*Mtambaji: Pole maskini Daktari. Alidhani anaokoa maisha, kumbe anapoteza maisha. Damu ile ingepimwa kwanza, ingegunduliwa kuwa ina virusi vya UKIMWI.* (UM 7)

### Performance

*Mtambaji: [...] wasingemuongezea mgonjwa ile damu, damu ilikuwa imeathirika, ilikuwa na viini... (15:52 - 16:14”)*

<sup>26</sup> *Mganguzi* is a superior healer capable of tackling and overcoming the action of a *mganga* either maliciously or with good intention.

Narrator: Poor Doctor. He thought that he was saving lives, instead he was losing lives. If that blood had been tested before, it would have been discovered that it was HIV positive.

Narrator: if only they would not transfuse that blood to the patient, that blood was infected, there was the virus...

**At the Hospital:** this is a dumb scene where the doctor gives her patients injections by means of the same syringe used many times on several people, who are dying in the meantime. (13:49 – 14:15”)

On the other hand, *Ngariba* (UM 11), the men who practice circumcision, are the embodiment of disillusionment with and loss of faith in traditional healers and their treatments, because lack of hygiene makes them one of the main vectors of the infection, particularly during the early appearance of the virus.

### Play

*Mtambaji: Khe! Hata mimi sikujua kwamba Ngariba alikuwa pia mkata vineo. Salale! Haya tena, mwenye macho haambiwi ona. Ndiyo viini vilivyoenea hivyo.* (UM 10-1)

Narrator: Even I didn't know that the circumciser cuts the palatine uvula as well! Oh, my goodness! Those who have eyes, look at this! This is indeed the way by which the virus spreads all around.

### Performance

*Mtambaji: Lakini anatumia vifaa gani, lakini je vifaa vile vinachemshwa, kifaa kimoja watu kumi, sindano moja watu ishirini jamii yetu ndivyo ilivyoangamia.* (17:15 – 17:40”)

Narrator: However, what instruments does the circumciser use? Have those instruments been sterilized? The same instrument for 10 people, the same syringe for 20 people... our society is perishing this way...

During the early stages of the epidemic, traditional practitioners caused involuntary harm to patients. However, at the hospital, doctors struggled to cope with HIV/AIDS because of inadequate scientific knowledge:

*Mtambaji: Kumbe ana matetekuwanga! Kumbe ana kifua kikuu!* (UM 19)

Narrator: So, he is suffering from **chicken pox**! So, he is suffering from **tuberculosis**!

*Mtani: “Hospitalini [...] ugonjwa hawauoni. [...] Konfusheni tupu!”* (UM 19)

Joker: “At the hospital, doctors cannot diagnose the illness. This is total confusion!”

Thus, people prefer to go to traditional healers, but even they fail to heal their clients:

“Watu kama wanne hivi, nasikia wamehamia kwa Waganga!” [...] “Waganga wote nimemaliza – wapi sikupona!” (UM 16)

“About four people, I heard, that they shifted to the traditional healer [...] I have tried all the healers – I have not got any better!”

“Fedha zote zitaishia kwa waganga. [...] Ugonjwa huu hauna tiba hata ya kuombewa!” (UM 16)

“All our money will end with the healers. [...] This disease has no cure, not even by prayers!”

To sum up, there is a continuous re-balancing of the scales, now for, now against, hospital treatments or traditional healing practices. Finally, when even religious beliefs fail to give solace, people must accept the imminence of death with resignation:

“Kidini – feilia” (UM 19); “VAENI SANDA” (UM 21)

“Religious means failed”; “Put on shrouds.”

The shroud metonymically represents the deadly effect of AIDS in the form of Muslim burial traditions.

### 3.3.4.2. THE MAGICAL-SUPERNATURAL AND THE UNKNOWN: “EPISTEMOLOGIES OF MARVEL AND AWE”

Different epistemologies and marvellous ontologies appear suddenly and are naturalized in the narrative context, illustrating not only the clash of biomedicine and traditional healing practices, but also the coexistence of supernatural beliefs, magic and witchcraft, and unknown elements into an “epistemology of inclusion and indeterminacy” (Rettovà 2021a).

Witches and sorcerers (*Bwana jujumani*, UM 4; 20), as well as “strange events” and “mysterious deaths” (*ajabuajabu*, UM 4), populate the stories with an “epistemology of marvel” (Rettovà 2021a).

#### Play

*Mtambaji: lakini ikafika mwaka mmoja huo tukaona ghafla vifo vya ajabuajabu vingvingi vikaanza kutokea. Kadhalika tukaanza kusikia habari za ajabu ajabu* (UM 4)

#### Performance

*Mtambaji: tukaanza kusikia vifo vya ajabu ajabu, kila dakika, kesho msiba ukija mnazika, vilio, jamii ilijaa vilio kila siku ni kuzika. (22:55 - 23:20”)*

Narrator: however, suddenly many **mysterious deaths** happened within a particular year. We started hearing **news of strange things** happening!

Narrator: we started hearing about **mysterious deaths** at every minute, tomorrow there is a funeral and burial ceremony, cries, the society hears are plenty of cries, every day is burying.

Suddenly, the supernatural, in the form of witchcraft and non-human evil creatures, creeps from every corner, hunting human characters:

*“Huyu ana pepo mbaya”* (UM 16)

“She has a **bad spirit**”

Furthermore, a “third unknown possibility”, stemming from total confusion, starts becoming real when both modern medicine and traditional beliefs fail to give an answer to all the mysterious events that signify a state of “being in awe” (Rettovà 2017):

*“Tangu Makalikiti amekufa najionea vioja vinatokea! [...] Vituko haviishi!”* (UM 15); *“Hospitalini [...] ugonjwa hawauoni. [...] Konfusheni tupu! Hatujui lile wala hili”* (UM 19)

“Since Makalikiti’s death, **oddities are happening! Strange events are ceaseless!**”; “At the hospital, doctors fail to diagnose the illness. This is total confusion! We know neither this nor that”.

Conversely, in the modern adaptation the narrator tells us about opportunistic infections coming from a mysterious illness, the source of which is to be investigated (scientifically):

### Performance

*Mtambaji: [...] magonjwa sisi Waswahili tunaita nyemelezi yalikuwa yakiibuka [...] Kila upande watu walikuwa wanaugua magonjwa ambayo hatukuwahi kuyaona kwenye jamii yetu [...] Lakini chanzo ni nini? (7:42 - 08:28”)*

Narrator: [...] the diseases that we Swahili call **opportunistic infections** started popping out [...] Everywhere people were affected by **diseases that we had never seen before in our community** [...] What was the origin?

Finally, the continuous clashes of medical doctors with traditional healers, and magic with science, lead to a complex hybridization of beliefs and practices:

*Bwana Jujumani: “Jujuology imeonyesha kuwa ugonjwa huu umeanzia kwa wafungwa waliokuwa wanabashiana huko Marekani”* (UM 5)

Mister *Jujuman*: “Our investigation, carried out by means of **the science of witchcraft and superstition**, shows that this disease started in the American prisons, where inmates had the habit of sodomizing one another”.

The African researcher, a man of science, is stereotyped as “Mister *Jou Jou*”, or a sorcerer. The term *jujuology* (UM 5), which can be translated as witchcraft and superstition, combines two medical traditions; in fact, the word *jujuology* is made up of *juju*, which stems from the French *jou jou* or fetish, as the symbol of western African sorcery, and the Greek root -ology, which is used in English for scientific terminology (Mutembei 2013: 69; 2015). It is a *factish* term, made up of *facts* and *fetishes*, which welcomes “African divinities into the science laboratory” (Latour 2010: 66). The irreverence-based magic “stands in place of a set of ideas construct as reality” (Warnes 2009: 4) in this play.

*Mtani: Ugonjwa wa UKIMWI ulitoka hukoo Marekani* (11:47 - 12:05”)

Joker: The **disease of AIDS** came from the States

The performance illustrates the myth of “*umetoka kwenu si kwetu*” (the illness is coming from you not from us) (Mutembei 2009a).

### 3.3.4.3. GENDER RELATIONS: EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN

Healers and women are stereotyped as “prey” of the free-market economy that sells teenager’s bodies and the occult. Women are victims of male desires and are involved in sexual transactions for economic purposes. Mature women sell their bodies because of the lack of employment, while naïve teenagers perform cross generational sex with sugar daddies to receive extra cash to have fun.

#### Play

*Mtani: Eti mtoto wa shule, Makalikiti alikuwa na duka. [...] Duka la mwili wake.*  
*Mtambaji: Kwa nini tusijiepushe na mzizi wa tatizo – Uasherati?* (UM 17)

Joker: Imagine a school-age girl, Makalikiti had a business. [...] **The business of her own body.**  
Narrator: Why don’t we avoid the root of the problem? – **Promiscuity?**

#### Performance

*Mtani: Makalikiti alikuwa na duka anauza mwili wake mwenyewe. [...]Makalikiti ni duka linalotembea.*  
(00:33 - 01:03”)

Joker: Makalikiti had **the business of selling her own body.**  
[...] Makalikiti was an **itinerant store.**

Therefore, the consequence of promiscuity and prostitution is the HIV transmission:

*Meneja Doko:* “[*Makalikiti*] alikuwa akiumwa nini?”

*Mtambaji:* “[...] nimesikia watani wanapitapita hapa wanasema kuwa amekufa kwa *Slimufiti*...”

*Mtani:* “Alikuwa akiumwa *Acha Iniue Dawa Sina!* Ndiyo *Acha Iniue Dogodogo Siachi!* *Makalikiti* alikuwa anaumwa *Eidisi!* **VVU/UKIMWI!**” (UM 15)

Manager: “[The prostitute named *Makalikiti*] She was suffering from what?”

Narrator: “I’ve heard from people passing by that she was suffering from *Slim fit* (the disease which makes people thinner)”

Joker: “She was ill from “**Let it kill me, I have no cure**”, yes, “**Let it kill me, I can’t give up having sex with chicks**”. *Makalikiti* was suffering from *Eidisi* (Swahilization of AIDS)! **HIV/AIDS!**”

The term *slim fit* is a synecdoche for one symptom of AIDS which stems from the mythological belief that vampires, sent by jealous witches, suck blood from their victims and transform them into the walking dead (Mutembei 2001: 111). The two euphemistic acronyms (A-I-D-S) achieved by multilingual (English and Swahili) wordplay explain both the cause and the consequence (death) of the incurable disease, hinting at an internal cause for the HIV-transmission, the lack of control of one’s sexual desires. Then the two acronyms are followed by a Swahilization of AIDS-*Eidisi*, and finally, by the English scientific names of the disease.

In the performance, instead, AIDS is not incurable any longer provided that you are treated with ARV.

### Performance

*Mtani:* **Wacha nife dogodogo siachi.**

*Mtani:* *Makalikiti kafa ugonjwa unaitwa wacha nife dawa sinywi.*

*Mtani:* *Makalikiti kafa na AIDS, AIDS.*

*Doko:* **UKIMWI?? (27:47 - 28:35)**

Joker: “**Let me die, I can’t give up having sex with chicks!**”

Joker: *Makalikiti* died of a disease called “**Let me die, I shan’t take drugs**”

Joker: *Makalikiti* died of **AIDS** (English)...

*Doko:* **UKIMWI?! (Swahili scientific term corresponding to AIDS)**

The exchanges among *Mtambaji*, *Mtani* and *Meneja Doko*, illustrate well the typical “joking relationships” to correct certain behaviour with hot satire without giving offence, as shown in the passages below and above. Swahili metaphors are intentionally “allusive and elusive” (Askew 2015: 261), especially in relation to sex. Since promiscuous heterosexual relations are consid-

ered as the main source of virus transmission, unprotected sexual encounters with mistresses are denounced:

### Play

*Mtu: Dereva lazima uwe na **spea taya**  
Korido-Dokta: matokeo yake **kuumwa na nge!** (UM 8)*

A client: A long distance driver must be with **a spare tyre/a mistress along the road.**

Corridor-Doctor: But the result is to **be pricked by a scorpion - to get a sexually transmitted infection.**

### Performance

*Mtambaji: Enzi za **Sodoma na Gomora** jamii yetu sisi, lakini mwisho wake ni **kuenea kwa viini** vizidi kuenea kutoka upande mmoja kwenda upande mwingine. (22:31 - 22:55)" \_*

Narrator: Our own society is the legacy of **Sodom and Gomorra** and its end is **the virus transmission** from one corner to the other, everywhere.

On the other hand, men are blamed as promiscuous and simpler creatures, who believe in false myths, such as the cleansing effects of having sex with a virgin in order to be purified from sexual infections:

*Meneja-Dokoa: "Mimi ni mtu wa kampuni ya kondomu... mtu mkubwa kidogo... [...] Hivyo hupendelea **dogodogo za shule** kama wewe. [...] Unajua, lazima tahadhari kabla ya hatari, kuna viini siku hizi..." (UM 10)*

Meneja-Dokoa: "I am the manager of a condom company... I'm someone important...that's why I prefer **young schoolgirls** like you. You know, we need to be aware before taking risks, there is a virus nowadays..."

In performance, the sugar daddies' phenomenon is stressed:

### Performance

#### The dance of **Makaliki** and **Meneja**

**Dokoa:** on a floor dance, drunk old men are choosing their occasional partner to spend the night with looking at their physical attributes. (21:58 - 22:24")

*Meneja-Dokoa: Sitaki watu wazima, kuna vitoto vidogo vidogo ndio vizuri, vitamu.  
Mtani: Anhaaa kwahiyo we **mzee wa vidigidi?** (27:15 - 27:31)"\_*

**Meneja Dokoa:** I am not interested in adults, there are tender and sweet young damsels.

**Joker:** Anhaa! So, you are the old expert **womaniser of young damsels!**

Therefore, men-women relations are characterized by “epistemic injustice” (Fricker 2007). Young women are deceived, or obliged to accept unequal treatment and violence, because of a different exercise of “power and knowledge”, due to economic and educational imbalances.

Furthermore, techniques of *critique and stereotyping* describe a peculiar and subtle kind of critique. It is not a radical critique, but it is aimed at underlying negative elements, but also to highlight the positive, defending it from being discredited completely. It’s more likely to be a form of advocacy which tends toward improvement. This is what happens when in literature we come across stereotyped women characters or stereotyped traditional healers. Women and healers are not figures that literature would like to be condemned. However, the authors tend to draw a realistic portrait of them, made up of all the fragility and controversies that these figures present both in literature and in the current society.

#### 3.3.4.4. HIV/AIDS IN METAPHORS AND PROVERBS: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF METAPHORS

Philosophical knowledge, local wisdom and communal values are usually articulated through oral expressions and traditional proverbs (Rettovà 2010; 2016a; Wanjohi 1997; Beck 2005) as privileged aesthetic forms which channel and accommodate both old and new messages (Askew 2015):

##### Play

*Mtani: Nzi kufia kwenye kidonda si haramu.*

(UM 17)

Joker: **For a fly to die in a wound -that it is feeding on- is not illicit.**

*Mtambaji: Kweli kufa kufaana.* (UM 18)

Narrator: It is indeed true that **to die is a benefit!**

##### Performance

*Mtani: Bwannaaaa eeehhh nzi kufia kwenye kidonda sio haramu wewe*

(06:45 - 07:00”)

Joker: But “**after all you got what you wanted**” as a result of sexual indulgence (**for a fly is not illicit to die in a wound!**)

*Mtambaji: Aaa niambie “sijui”. Hamjui mbinu mpya, kwahiyo siwaambii bali mjionee wenyewe mbinu mpya, ama kweli kufa kufaana.* (02:45 - 02:46”)

Narrator: You’re telling me you don’t know **the new strategies and devices (condoms)**. So, I will let you find out on your own. Really it is true that “**to die is a benefit to the living!**”

This exchange says that “you have got what you deserve”, not only as a result of sexual indulgence and promiscuity, but also if you do not protect yourself using condoms. These two proverbs are commonly related to HIV/AIDS via the process known as *UKIMWISHAJI* (AIDS-tization) (Mutembei 2007) where the old proverbs are changed in their form and significance to convey AIDS-related messages.

From the metaphorical representation of a natural calamity (*gharika* – flood, UM 19), as AIDS could be read in the past, because of the rapidity of viral transmission and the power in killing people, nowadays it is described as *ajali kazini* (an accident at work) (08:16”). It is something that you catch as a consequence of your own actions, referring particularly to sexual behaviour. However, the latter metaphor, which used to be connected exclusively to sex workers, increasing stigma effect, nowadays tries to mitigate the stigma, shifting the focus on the cause of infection, caught by chance, as an everyday accidental happening (Mutembei 2009a: 39; 2001).

#### 3.3.4.5. SCIENTIFIC MEDICINE AND HIV-PREVENTION STRATEGIES: THE POSITIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY OF MODERN SCIENCE

Modern prevention strategies and devices to avoid STIs, are strongly promoted as vehicles of positivist-scientific knowledge.

The itinerant chorus, uttered by the medical doctors wearing condoms on their fingertips, urges people to:

“*Tumia mipira, ni kinga bora!*” “*Hii ni kinga bora ya UKIMWI! Vaeni hivi!*” (UM 18)

“Wear **condoms!** They are the best prevention you can get! They are the best prevention of AIDS! Wear them like this!”

The doctors’ “special song” is sung to the tune of “*mdundiko wetu wa AIDS*” (our Zaramo’s typical dance devised to spread awareness of AIDS, UM 18).

Condoms, also called *kondomu* (UM 12), started being advertised in 1990, and the symbol of acceptance for the new device is *soksi* - the Swahilization of socks a piece of everyday life equipment (*Mambo kwa Soksi*, Mutembei 2009a: 86; 2001).

The chorus discourages characters from seeking help from witchdoctors, encouraging them to have the HIV test done at the hospital: “*Nipimeni! Nipimeni!*” (UM 16).

In performance, the narrator talks about “*mbinu mpya*” – new devices and strategies to avoid HIV/AIDS.

## Performance

*Mtambaji: Mbinu mbalimbali zilibuniwa ili watu wafikiwe na kampeni hiyo ya UKIMWI, watu waweze kujikinga na UKIMWI, watu waweze kuepuka UKIMWI [...] Mbinu mpya zilibuniwa, mnajua mbinu mpya nyie?*

(02:24 - 02:46”)

Narrator: *[speaking to the spectators]*

**New strategies** have been devised by AIDS campaigns to enable people protecting themselves and avoiding AIDS [...] Do you know what the **new devices (condoms)** are?

The chorus intervenes through a refrain sung by the chorus master together with the audience as well as through “the condom dance”:

## Performance

*Mtambaji: Tumia mipiraaa, tumia mipiraaa ni kinga bora eeehhh*

*Hadhira: Tumia mipiraaaaaaa (03:41 - 04:15”)*

*Mtambaji: Ukitumia kondomu haupati mimba, haupati kisonono, haupati pangusa, haupati magonjwa ya zinaa na nzuri zaidi haupati mimba pasipo kutaka, tumia mipiraaa ni kinga bora*

*Hadhira: Tumia mipiraaa*

*Mtambaji: Yale unayoyakweaaa, shika kondomu tumiaaa, weka babaaa, shikaa kichwaa valishaaaa, vuta mpaka mwishooo, vaa moja mojaa chapa kaziii, haiondoi utamuu, ila inapunguza magonjwa mbali mbali, tumia mipira ni kinga boooraaaa*

(04:15 - 05:00”)

Narrator: **Wear condoms!** They are the best prevention you can get!

Audience: Wear condoms!

Narrator: If you use condoms, you don't risk being infected with gonorrhoea, syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, and more than this you avoid unplanned pregnancies. Wear condoms, the best prevention you can get!

Audience: Wear condoms!

Narrator: Take your condom, wear it, man, wear your condom, grab your glans and put the condom on, pull it until the end, change it every time, and do your job; it doesn't reduce the pleasure, but it reduces several diseases. Wear condoms! They are the best prevention you can get!

**The Condom dances:** didactic dances performed by the communal chorus to teach how to use and wear condoms. (05:25 - 05:35”)

In performance, during “the condom dance”, the performers mime how to open, to wear, and to use condoms during sex, while they are listing the several STDs, not only AIDS, which are commonly transmitted nowadays as well as the risk of unexpected pregnancies. The condom's chorus and dances are an example of *korasi ya kikorofi* “satirical impertinent choral ode” (Mkufya

unpublished). This arrogant chorus connects the traditional ritual and educational performances with scientific knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention strategies and instruments. The two epistemological realities are connected via this “*mdundiko wa AIDS*” (Zaramo’s traditional dance used in this occasion to spread information on AIDS, UM 18).

Nonetheless, when characters are looking for Tetracycline tablets, an antibiotic used for skin infections, these are described as odd double-colour pills: “*Nilikuwa nahitaji rangi-mbili!*” (UM 8).

*Mtani:* “*Kutumia kondomu ushamba, utakulaje pipi na maganda yake!*” (07:24 - 07:53)

*Joker:* “To use a condom is lousy, how can you eat a sweet in its wrap?”

New habits such as condoms, contraceptives, ARV therapies and blood tests, are all perceived as foreign customs which have entered local people’s lives; thus, they are surrounded by perplexity and doubts.

Both traditional healing practices and modern medicine are criticized as fallacious and vain, when the dialogues in the play deal with cure and treatments: *karuka maji* (he walked on the water, as a form of religious healing), *MM II* (a kind of new scientific treatment), *moro-kuna-mambo* (symbol of witchcraft or divination practices), *KEMRONI* (futuristic chemical experimentations), and “*na kumpa dripu lakini wapi!*” (he got **IV (intravenous feeding)**, but it was completely useless!), are all stereotyped (UM 20).

Indeed, the dialogue between the Narrator and the Joker in the original play reveals the state of general confusion of that time regarding the ways of transmission, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease, as well as the desperate and hopeless search for a cure.

Conversely, in the contemporary adaptation, scientific knowledge about the disease is demonstrated, and prevention tools such as blood testing and condoms are strongly encouraged.

Particularly, the new ARV therapies, which are the current evolution of chemical experimentations like *KEMRONI* (UM 20), are promoted, although they are surrounded by incertitude. In fact, ARVs, the treatment that prolongs life, has actually been perceived as a threat to the community, because the treated person with a healthy outer aspect, could circulate among the members of the community, spreading the virus without being discovered (Dilger *et al.* 2014).

Nonetheless, in the performance AIDS became a chronic illness that can be treated by ARV, provided that it is diagnosed in time via the blood test. Conversely, the play illustrates AIDS as a mortal disease, without any hope for a cure at that time: “*VAENI SANDA!*” “*Tumekwisha!*” (Wear your shrouds! We are done, UM 21).

## Performance

*Mtani: Hata leo hii nikiupata madawa kibao wazungu wamegundua mi'ARV mi'ARVVVV*

*Mtambaji: [...] kitu cha kwanza kila mmoja wetu anapaswa kupima na sikuhizi serikali imerahisisha, pale tu upimapo ukigundulika una maambukizi unaanza kupewa ARV hapo hapo, haina kusubiri wala CD4 inabidi zishuke. ARV inatakiwa kuimarisha tena mwili wako ili uweze kuwa tena imara uendelee na maisha yako kama kawaida, lakini shida ya Mtani najua unawasema wewe ARV zinakudanganya! (08:30 - 09:23)"\_*

Joker: Even if you catch the infection, today there are a lot of treatments available. The Europeans have discovered the **ARV therapy**.

Narrator: [...] the first thing is each of us to have the **blood test** done. In fact, today the government has made the thing easier. If you test and your result is HIV-positive, you start receiving the **ARV therapy** immediately; without waiting for the CD4 to drop. The ARV boosts your body so as to let you conduct your life as normal; but I understand your problem, Joker, you are outspoken: **ARVs deceive us making you overconfident!**

In conclusion, the essential theme of the play is to prevent something that cannot be defeated, according to the Swahili proverb “*kinga ni bora kuliko tiba*” (prevention is better than treatment).

*Mtambaji: “Lakini mji wetu unahitaji KINGA sio tiba!” (UM 21)*

Narrator: “Our city needs **PREVENTION** not a cure!”, which doesn't exist

In the end, the performance motto is: **Pimaaaa! (test for HIV!)** (10:14”)

*Mtambaji: “Njia moja tu ni kupima, usimuhukumu mtu wala usijiaminiche kwa mtu, pimaaa.” (10:06 - 10:14”\_*

Narrator: “The only way is to **test**. Don't just **judge** or **trust** someone neither yourself, but **test!!** Have the **test** done!”

On the one hand, the play emphasizes all the means of **prevention** such as careful sexual behaviour and condom use, because there was no cure. On the other hand, the performance stresses **blood test**, because once discovered HIV/AIDS can be treated.

In conclusion, the original play of 1989, written only six years after the HIV/AIDS discovery in the country, is full of perplexities, unanswered questions, and doubts. The author anchors and objectifies the unknown disease in local discourses. Despite the influences from health organizations, the play is rich in original tropes that are vessels of local epistemologies, showing a battle of epistemes, where in the end none could prevail. The main theme is general

**prevention**, controlling people's behaviour to avoid the incurable and mortal disease, as well as condom education and promotion, which in that time were new elements, recently introduced to Africa. Nonetheless, the final cry of the play shows hopelessness and despair: "*tumekwisha*" (we are done, UM 21).

In the 2019 performance, although the major metaphorical images of the original play are preserved, the main message relies more on the **positivist epistemology** of science that made AIDS a chronic but treatable disease by blood-testing and ARV therapies, and thus the fear of the unknown is replaced by optimism.

Furthermore, dances cover a pivotal function and demonstrate that sex and sexuality are not a taboo but a social discourse (Foucault 1998). Sexual activities are mimed during the didactic dance, which teaches the audience how to wear and use condoms, as per *unyago* traditional performance, which are aimed to teach the maidens how to perform sexual activities (Swantz 1986). Moreover, men are gazing at their female prey in public spaces and homosexuality is also shown. The performance, performed by young university students, shows on stage a mixture of traditional and globalized elements characterizing African contemporary societies.

Since HIV/AIDS has now become less threatening than in the past, and Tanzanian people have been overburdened by over thirty years of HIV/AIDS education and prevention campaigns<sup>27</sup>, the population is nowadays less sensitive to the issue. In fact, artistic and literary productions have decreased considerably. Thus, it is important to highlight *alternative ways* of communication that can more effectively attract people's attention. However, the quality of a *historical re-enacted* play like *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* is noteworthy - although it was written thirty years ago, it is still studied and performed. It still works effectively and can easily be adapted to current problems and necessities, demonstrating the impressive flexibility of the work.

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<sup>27</sup> Reaction obtained from the majority of local participants interviewed during my field research.

### C. PERFORMANCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF *PIMA!* (TEST!)

During my fieldwork research I came across the Tanzanian NGO called FASDO - *Faru Arts and Sports Development Organization* sited in *Temeke Maghorofani* a neighbourhood of Dar es Salaam.

This NGO attracted my attention because it is a self-run local organization managed by Chande Tedvan Nabora. In fact, FASDO office is a big room located inside a compound house, and their theatre is in the courtyard. This is FASDO's headquarter.

FASDO was established as an organization to sustain Tanzanian youth living in challenging conditions. The objectives are to recuperate and defend youth from family breakdown, homelessness, street children's phenomena, prostitution, drugs abuse, and HIV/AIDS transmission, encouraging youths' talents in arts and sports<sup>28</sup>.

The association was firstly developed around a soccer team and then they gained success through movie productions, written and directed by Nabora and his theatre troupe. The works produced are stimulating and appealing examples of contemporary media communication in many African countries (Dovey 2009; Shule 2013). It is broadcast through the free access granted by the internet through streaming television and You Tube channels, which is "the most popular internet site in Africa" (Dovey 2018: 99). In fact, the two long movies: *Dhuluma* (Injustice 2011), on orphans' rights, and *Zinduka*<sup>29</sup> (Awake! 2011) a story to spread awareness on HIV/AIDS transmission among teenagers, are available for free online on both the website of FASDO and You Tube<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, on December 5, 2018, I attended a first theatrical performance on HIV/AIDS created by FASDO's theatre-troupe<sup>31</sup> called *Pima!* (Test for HIV!). The 90 minutes performance, which I video recorded after written consent of all the participants, was performed at FASDO's theatre behind the association office.

The main scenes were the followings: the plot starts at the disco-pub, where the main character Kasuso, a teenager, hooks a poor girl who prostitutes her-

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<sup>28</sup> FASDO fact sheets received by the director on October 18, 2018.

See also website FASDO.org: <http://s243760778.onlinehome.us/fasdo/tag/temeke/>

<sup>29</sup> I received the original tracks of both the movies from FASDO on November 14, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.fasdo.org/theater-troupe>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEcFAMYRzjw>; <http://s243760778.onlinehome.us/fasdo/2011/09/zinduka-with-english-sub-titles/>

<sup>31</sup> FASDO's productions, produced and directed by Nabora, consist of two live theatrical performances, which I attended as participant observer in December 2018 and February 2019, and a short movie (*Pima!* 2018), which FASDO's members created from the first performance in December 2018 and shared for the purpose of this study.

self; the *bajaji*, where Kasuso persuades the prostitute (Hamida) of having sex with him for 20,000 TSH. Then, when the girl asks for a condom Kasuso refuses: “*mambo ya kizungu*”, because he do not trust “those European’s stuff for he is an African born with good and strong health”. Thus, the boy adds other 30,000 TSH to the price for not using condoms. She accepts. After six months, when Kasuso feels ill, we witness the argument between Kasuso’s parents.

The clash between traditional practitioners and hospital treatments is shown through the argument between Mama Kasuso, who negotiates between traditions and her son’s health, which was deteriorating rapidly, and her husband, who is strictly attached to traditional practices. In fact, the mother advocates for the hospital, while the father stands firmly for traditional healers, being sure that his son was ill due to a curse (*juju*) made because of jealousy (*chuki za binadamu*). After this, the family goes to a Maasai witchdoctor and then to a priest, so as to get rid of the bad spirit or the curse (*pepo, jini, mdudu*). Finally, they go to the hospital where the HIV infection was revealed through the blood test (*maambukizo ya virusi vya UKIMWI, HIV*).

The search for a cure for Kasuso is divided into two phases: the first phase, which is condemned, involves superstition/*ushirikina*, where fictitious traditional experts pretend to perform rituals to expel evil spirits, caused by a curse (*juju*), and religious healers (a church pastor) perform exorcisms to get rid of *mapepo* and the devil in the name of Jesus “*kwa jina la Yesu*”. The second phase is informed by science, at the hospital. The test reveals the HIV presence, and the boy immediately receives the ARV therapy. Thus, the final message is to have the test done, *Pima!* as the best strategy to either prevent or treat HIV/AIDS.

The final message is the same as the contemporary adaptation of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* performed at the Dar es Salaam College of Arts: the first thing is to have the test done to protect oneself and others. In case the test is positive people must not despair but must accept the new therapies available.

This performance reproduces both an authentic portrait of the actual Tanzanian lifestyle and a genuine picture of the Swahili culture through characters’/actors’ clothes, gestures and expressions as well as the environment: bars, houses, the market etc.

On December 8, 2018, Nabora gave me an introductory talk on the performance in which he clearly stated that the objective of his association is to educate people on the importance of having the HIV blood test done via artistic productions: “*Pima UKIMWI ili umlinda na mwenzako*” (Test for HIV/AIDS to protect the one you love!). In fact, HIV/AIDS became a chronic disease not life-threatening any longer, but only for those who receive the proper treatment. Conversely, for people who are not aware of the infection and who are not receiving any treatment, the risk of death from AIDS is still high.

Furthermore, on December 11, I received *Pima!* (Test!) a short movie of 26 minutes created by FASDO’s members from the theatrical performance. After

this first performance I kept in regular contact with the association and their activities during all the period of my field research.

Later, on February 1, 2019, the managing director released an interview to deliver his message related to the leitmotif of the production *Pima!*: Nabora (1-02-2019) stated that the association promotes condom use, testing and hospital care, and he was particularly concerned with the youth, who nowadays do not fear HIV/AIDS any longer, so they stop protecting themselves.

Afterwards, on February 1, 2019, I attended the second part of the story *Pima! II*, a 40-minutes performance that I recorded after actors' signed consent.

*Pima! II* is the reverse story of *Pima!*. The first performance was about Kasuso, a middle-class boy, who wanders around looking for pleasure in night clubs. Conversely, the second part is about Hamida, a poor girl living with her older sister, who prostitutes herself in pubs to buy alcohol and joints. Subsequently, she feels ill and goes first to a church, then to a witchdoctor to be treated. Although the elder sister suggests going to the hospital, Hamida refuses and dies. The lack of knowledge and opportunities, and particularly the marginalization of women characters, lets AIDS kill.

Different otherworldly ontologies pop out in the performance: *pepo* and *shetani* are chased away by the Christian priest; *mizimu* the traditional African ancestors the Islamic jinn, as well as curse and bewitchment (*juju*, *laana*, *pepo*) resulting from witchcraft practices are all treated by witchdoctors.

Furthermore, the young actors of the FASDO drama group were available for a FGD on the performances *Pima! I - II*, as well as about HIV/AIDS education through movies and the arts. The FGD<sup>32</sup> was audio and video recorded and lasted about 30 minutes (15-02-2019 Temeke). During the FGD, the artists highlighted, the importance of hospital care as the first option before seeking help from traditional healers and churches, which are also part of the healing system of the country. Secondly, they reminded the youth of the importance of being aware of the “*magojwa makubwa*” (serious illnesses) “*having the test done at the hospital to protect themselves and the other*” (FASDO 15-02-2019).

Those performances are local productions reproducing everyday life struggles of common people. Both *Pima! I* and *II* make use of stereotyping and jokes to wage war on epistemic injustice, advocating for common people's right to speak against testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007), aiming to let the “subaltern speak” (Spivak 1993). The performances reproduce a journey into the difficulties endured by the Dar es Salaam suburb-dwellers in their daily lives, showing how those people are cheated by “experts” who take them as

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<sup>32</sup> During the fieldwork, I had a similar experience with another Tanzanian NGO, BAYOICE (Bagamoyo Youth Centre). The BAYOICE youth drama group welcomed me to attending theatrical skits on HIV/AIDS and gender discrimination, and the young actors were available for FGD (Bagamoyo October 25, 2018).

simpler; for example, charlatans witchdoctors and fake religious healers who pretend to heal by prayers. The false religious healers represent a worrying phenomenon on the increase in Tanzania (Senkoro 28-1-2019), which should be distinguished from the genuine efforts of the Neo-Pentecostal church activities (Dilger 2001a; 2007; 2009). A recent issue correlated to AIDS is the belief that chronic diseases can be better treated by the curative powers of faith healers and prayers. Religion and faith healing have become a “shortcut” divergent from scientific answers and hospital treatments to cope with health and social problems. This makes fertile soil for false healers, who taking advantage of the situation, transform faith healing into a business (Senkoro 28-1-2019)<sup>33</sup>.

In conclusion, the *Pima!* experience matters in this study to illustrate other media, which differ from not only the written play, but also the live performance based on the published drama and performed in the academic context. In UM, although scientific prevention prevails, clashes between dissonant epistemes are shown. Conversely, *Pima!* as a form of Tfd project and informed by health awareness programmes, has as main target the straightforward communication of the message transmitted through the lenses of a positivist epistemology of science, intended to progress the health sector in the country. Although other ontologies appear, they are criticized.

Finally, the performance *Pima!* has become a short movie for forthcoming web distribution, which is “primarily an entertainment medium which allow the common exchange of information and sharing value” (Dovey 2018: 94), encouraging a new “particular kind of sociality” (Dovey 2018: 104).

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<sup>33</sup> The information in this paragraph is drawn from the interview with Prof. F.E.M.K. Senkoro on January 28, 2019, Dar es Salaam.

### 3.4. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE PLAYS

Tragic epistemology is the “knowledge or understanding which tragic art can yield to us” (Jeyifo 1985: 60). In the contemporary African drama where philosophical implications start raising, “the supernatural and metaphysical elements become the proof of *Africanness*” (Jeyifo 1985: 42).

By analysing the plays, it emerges clearly how each section is connected to alternative epistemological readings.

Firstly, the narrative agents, *Mtambaji* and *Mtani* together with the variety of choral devices, through their soliloquy or leading multivocal dialogic interactions, articulate contrasting worldviews and knowledge systems. The play-scripts incorporate enchanted oral tales which interrupt the material realism of characters’ dialogues. Moreover, ontologies pertaining to the realm of magic and the supernatural appear through artistic devices and this presence of “**marvel**” or “**awe**” - the unknown is naturalised in the plays through an epistemology of “**indeterminacy and complementary inclusion**” (Rettová 2021a; 2017).

The defence of traditional customs such as initiation rites, not only implies an epistemic resistance against colonial cultural intrusion, but also drives a **gender epistemology** which denounces epistemic marginalization of women and youth (Nnaemeka 2003; Chimakonam & Du Toit 2018) as well as **religious doctrines and mystical-spiritual beliefs** (Sogolo 2003) clash with **scepticism and agnosticism**.

Finally, traditional healing systems, which in HIV/AIDS discourses, clash with modern medicine, let prevention and treatment prevail as informed by the **positivist epistemology** of science.

Those epistemologies are intermingled in the dramatic dialogues by means of linguistic and cognitive devices, such as proverbs and metaphors, disclosing an **epistemological miscellanea** between biological-scientific and supernatural-spiritual realities.

Plays and performances display clashes between dissonant epistemes starting from an initial ambiguity and reticence (Ngozi 1990), and they eventually endorse scientific medicine to promote HIV testing and ARV therapies. Notwithstanding, local knowledge and worldviews, as interpreted by authors’ own styles, are displayed in the plays.

In conclusion, theatre, which is naturally made up of multimedia and heterogeneric interactions, introduces irreverent encounters among clashing epistemologies and ontologies: scientific knowledge is supported, and other epistemologies are intermittently valued or challenged in a continuous re-balancing of the scale, creating a clash-like effect between multiple existing realities that all have their roles to play. Thus juggling among clashing epistemologies, theatre acts into reality developing changes.

After the energetic action of performance (*Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* 2019; *Pima!* 2018), in the next chapter a contemplative type of novels, whose thorough descriptions of historical events, contemporary social issues and characters' stories are the basis for reflection, will be explored.



# Chapter 4

## Encounters Between Plural Epistemologies in Swahili Literature on HIV/AIDS: Novels

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION TO SWAHILI NOVELS

Swahili novels' history dates back to the late 1900's; the first productions consisted of ethnographic narratives, "reflecting Swahili customs and traditional tales" (Garnier 2013: 45) and historical accounts such as James Mbotela's *Uhuru wa Watumwa* (The Slaves' freedom, 1934) (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009).

A major topic of the ethnographic novel was the role traditional healers played in the fight against diseases, sterility and barrenness (Banzi 1972; Kitereza 1980) as well as the celebration of the healers' mystical knowledge, as the sign of a specific worldview, transmitted from one generation to the next (Garnier 2013). Conversely, the efficacy of traditional healers' services in fiction is questioned in Robert's *Kufikirika* (Thinkable, 1967), where modern medicine is promoted.

Shaaban Robert (1909 - 1962) has been recognised as the real father of the Swahili novel, whose "optimism" is reflected in his "homiletic and didactic novels" (Khamis 2005: 94), which are deeply rooted in traditional features, and are oriented towards modernity (Garnier 2013) characterized by the endorsement of positivist epistemology of science (Rettovà 2021a).

The mainstream literary current of the 1960s was political novels, dealing with the state ideology of socialism, Marxism and *ujamaa* philosophy,

also characterized by nostalgia for the unpolluted precolonial times (Khamis 2005; Garnier 2013; Mazrui 2007).

After the “romance era” (1950-60), Swahili novels were characterized by the “aggressive prose” of 1970-80’s (Ohly quoted in Tchokothe 2012: 44). Moreover, in the 1970s, the stream of crime novels (Ben Mtobwa 1958 - 2008) spread, accompanied by the “the real and its double” of Muhamed S. Muhamed (Garnier 2013: 126; Mazrui 2007). Swahili novels from the 1970s reproduce individual experiences, portraying insightful psychological depictions of characters through the lenses of “critical realism” and “bourgeois individualism” (Philipson 1992).

In the 1990s, a new trend was created by Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944 – 2020), the precursor of the philosophical strands in Swahili literature (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009), who, after his initially realist productions, which describe, through the lenses of existentialism, a world and a society as a “hydrocephalic” (*Kichwamaji*, 1974) “arena of chaos” (*Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*, 1975), detached from realism and paved the way to the “initiatory realism” (Garnier 2013: 78) of the “new novels” (Khamis 2005; Gromov 2019) or “experimental novels” (Rettová 2007a; 2016b) of the post-realist Swahili literature. In fact, positivism and realism clashed with local knowledge and beliefs until the “experimental phase” of the Swahili prose (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009; Garnier 2013; Gromov 2014; 2015).

After the 1990s, “transgression” in the Swahili novel implies the heterogeneity of narrative techniques and features applied to obtain a “Swahilization of the narrative forms” (Tchokothe 2012: 25). Thus, “postmodern novels” reproduce the “fragmentation of society and self-identity” (Khamis 2005: 98); “experimental novels” (Rettová 2007a; 2016b,e) are characterized by the narrative strategies of magical realism such as Said Ahmed Mohamed’s works (Garnier 2013; Rettová 2016c; Khamis 2005; 2003); “post-realist” novels are enriched by “metatextualities” contributing to the self-reflexivity of writing (Diegner 2017; Mwangi 2009); and, post-apocalyptic and dystopic realities are represented in William Mkufya’s *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999; Garnier 2013).

Therefore, the “experimental trend of Tanzanian postmodernist prose” (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009: 5) appears to be an artistic “collage or patchwork of styles” (Gromov 2004), which re-evaluates human beings’ existence. Modern Swahili novelists “at the crossroads” create a “fusion between the Occidental and the indigenous” (Khamis 2007c: 170) and merges “local-outside polarities” into “mixed tropes” (Khamis 2007c: 172). Finally, contemporary productions seem to have experienced a “swing” towards realism (Rettová 2016e) or “neorealism” (Diegner 2018).

Furthermore, Swahili literature has been classified as either “popular writing” or “élite/intellectual literature” since the 1970s (Bertoncini 2019). AIDS novels are educational stories classified as “stories of manners” (Bertoncini *et al.* 2009: 122), which are deeply committed to social issues and discuss key aspects of the country’s reality in a didactic manner.

In Tanzania, novels started dealing with HIV/AIDS issues when Clemence Merinyo wrote his short story *Kifo cha AIDS* (Death from AIDS, 1988)<sup>1</sup> and Yusuf Khalfani his *Kifo cha Huzuni* (Death from Sorrow, 1991). After the 2000's, the stream of *fasihi pendwa*, the term used for Swahili popular literature (Gromov 2008) or *littérature engagée* (Mutembei 2013; 2015; Diegner 2018) produced many novels<sup>2</sup> and novellas dedicated to young adults dealing with HIV/AIDS in relation to “gender, love, romance, sex and sexuality” (Muriungi 2005; Bulaya 2012; 2016). The *romance* pattern suggests that virtuous behaviour leads to a happy and healthy ending, while characters coping with a life of dire straits fall victims to HIV/AIDS (Maganga 2004; Machang'u 2004; Mngazija<sup>3</sup> 2004). Nevertheless, Mkufya's trilogy challenges the “élite/popular” distinction, crossing the boundaries between an educational romance and an intellectual novel with complex plots and round characters.

In this chapter, I examine two novels: Mutembei's *Kisiki Kikavu* (2005a) an historical novel based on empirical data from the author's field research in the Kagera region and set in the Tanzania-Uganda area in the post-war period (1978 - 1979), which illustrates local representations of HIV/AIDS during the first years of the virus discovery.

Mauya's *Firauni* (2017) is a more contemporary account of the HIV/AIDS issue, which denounces the moral corruption of neo-colonial society, after the implementation of neoliberal reforms in the 1980's.

#### 4.2. MUTEMBEI'S HISTORICAL FICTION: *KISIKI KIKAVU* (THE DRY STUMP)

Prof. Aldin Kazilege Mutembei has been “Mwalimu Nyerere Professor in Kiswahili Studies” since 2018, and current Tanzanian director of the Confucius Institute at UDSM since 2016. Mutembei has been conducting research not only on HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, since 1992, when he cooperated in the KARP (*Kagera AIDS Research Project*) as interpreter of Luhaya language<sup>4</sup>, but he has

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<sup>1</sup> Merinyo, interviewed on January 17, 2019, Dar es Salaam, told me that he also wrote a short story called *Waziri na Malaya* (The Minister and the Prostitute) published in 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendices: List of “Fictional Works on HIV/AIDS from Kenya and Tanzania”.

<sup>3</sup> Shabani Mngazija interviewed on January 29, 2019, Dar es Salaam.

<sup>4</sup> The KARP project with which Mutembei collaborated from 1992 to 2006 was composed of four teams: The *Muhimbili* hospital researchers in epidemiology, immunology and microbiology; the UDSM scholars in sociology and linguistics; the Bukoba government hospital medical doctors, and the Sweden team that consisted of the Karolinska of Stockholm and the *Umea* epidemiological department. The main sponsor of the project was the SIDA-SAREC. Information provided by Mutembei (21-11-2018) during one of our meetings at UDSM.

also been studying all genres of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS since his PhD dissertation (2001), and he wrote extensively, both academic publications (2002; 2004; 2005b; 2009a; 2011a,b; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016) and fictional works (*Kisiki Kikavu* 2005a) on the topic. Additionally, he was also my external supervisor, during my field research in Tanzania (2018 - 2019).

Mutembei's fictional works are entirely inspired by author's real experiences: *Kisiki Kikavu* was inspired by a neighbourhood family in Bukoba, Mutembei's native city, who were reliant on coffee trade, especially to educate their son. Unfortunately, when the son came back home from his studies with HIV/AIDS, the family lost everything and all their coffee trees dried to death<sup>5</sup>. *Kisiki Kikavu* deals with the social representations of HIV/AIDS through popular metaphors in the regional context of Northern Tanzania, with the objective of fighting against stigma and discrimination in communicating about HIV/AIDS. Mutembei states that in literature, although the best metaphors are the ones which do not judge or discriminate infected people, many AIDS related metaphors tend to stigmatize the illness. Furthermore, Mutembei explains that scientific progress and new findings on HIV/AIDS not only discharge cultural traditions, but they also enhance the results of biomedicine. He made an interesting example comparing how in the 1980s, due to the lack of actual knowledge about the new virus, both medical doctors and traditional practitioners contributed to the transmission of HIV: the former, by practising blood transfusions in hospitals, the latter, via circumcision and tonsure during traditional ceremonies.

Mutembei's novel *Kisiki Kikavu* (KK) (2005a), which has been translated in English as *The Dry Stump* (Mutembei 2009b), can be analysed in a contrastive and speculative way with Mkufya's trilogy.

On the one hand, in *Kisiki Kikavu*, despite the realist background and authorial reticence, the supernatural has taken its toll and unknown ontologies emerge from every corner of the narration without any attempt to hide or judge them. Although, sporadically, those beliefs are vaguely criticized as superstitious, a "re-enchantment of the reality" (Faris 2004) is supported by the "epistemology of indeterminacy" (Rettová 2021a).

On the other hand, *Ua La Faraja* (Mkufya 2004), by its realism, declares its complete trust in scientific knowledge and describes the triumph of humanity. However, at the same time, it defends other ways of knowing, and "other ontologies" pop out during the flow of narration surrounded by vagueness. The supernatural, in the form of spiritual presences, is described without judgement as part of traditional life.

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<sup>5</sup> Distillation from the formal interviews with Prof. Mutembei held at the *Kiswahili* Department of UDSM (15-11-2018) and at the Institute Confucius UDSM (8-1-2019).

#### 4.2.1. PLOT

KK is a historical novel, entirely based on documentary sources collected during the author's research on the ground conducted in the Kagera region (1992 - 2006), where HIV was first discovered. The focus is local people's perceptions and representations of HIV/AIDS. The fictional characters perform the reality and the chapters, which correspond to names and metaphors for HIV/AIDS, evolve as people's experience and understanding of the disease do.

Therefore, the metaphors evolve as follows: *Kikomela* (HIV/AIDS embodied in border traders), *Ihembe* (a mythological creature similar to a vampire), *Juliana* (HIV/AIDS embodied in young black marketers), *Silimu* (a "metaphoronymy", that is, metaphor of AIDS and metonymy of one of its symptoms, the massive loss of weight), *Ninja* (the American ninja, because AIDS is a killer as powerful as a super hero), *Kadi Nyekundu* (the red card when the game of life is over) and *Kisiki Kikavu* (not only a euphemism for prostitute, that is, one vector of transmission, but also a metonymy, hinting at the result of AIDS that dries human bodies like tree stumps).

The novel is focused on the life events of one male character, Kalabweli. Although the background of this work appears to be realistic, the supernatural and "the marvel" (Rettovà 2021a) typify the narration. "Medieval romance in postcolonial writing inverts the terms of Orientalist myth making, adopting a technique of re-mystification and re-enchantment" (Warnes 2009: 39).

The plot is linear; the narration starts in 1979, immediately after the end of the Uganda-Tanzania war, commonly known as the Kagera war, because this is the region at the border between the two countries, where the worst consequences were suffered. Kalabweli, who grew up in an ordinary family with economic constraints in Bukoba, became one of the wealthy black-market traders known as "*Abekikomela*" the borders traders, or, the "young of *Juliana*", catching people's enmity. Thus, Kalabweli started living a dissolute life, chasing after women and alcohol. After the marriage with Kadogo, he did not quit his numerous mistresses, and finally, he died from AIDS in Dar es Salaam. However, his corpse was returned in Bukoba to receive a proper funeral. The last temporal reference is in 1991, then Kalabweli dies. Thus, probably the whole story takes around 13 or 14 years.

The events are set between the two cities of Bukoba and Dar es Salaam. The urban contexts are portrayed as a corrupted place, disclosing nostalgia for the life in the locus *amenu*s of villages.

The author often uses sentences in Luhaya language, and this diglossia is also accompanied by *heteroglossic* speeches, which reproduce the multi-layered society made up of traders, the army, urban dwellers, and families coming from rural areas, etc.

It is evident how knowledge about HIV/AIDS in the temporal space of this novel was inadequate, resulting in fear, stigma and superstition. Although

Kalabweli dies with blame and stigma he was purified, and his family honour is restored through the funeral rite performed by his parents in the homeland. After, HIV/AIDS burial ceremonies restore deceased moral value, if properly performed by the family (Dilger 2008; 2006).

The historical background of this documentary novel mirrors the socio-economic collapse of that period, due to two historical factors: the context of the post Kagera war (1979) and the results of the SAP's implementation, started in Tanzania since 1974/75<sup>6</sup>, which led to the corruption of local customs and people's behaviour, which in turn caused the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.

The Luhaya song sings: "*ngono ekagenda yonka yahaba*" (the Kagera river *Ngono* didn't follow any advice and got lost, KK 3); "*Ngono amepotea*" (the river *Ngono*<sup>7</sup> is lost, KK 3), this is a metaphorical sentence drawn from a verse of a Luhaya poem, where the river represents people behaviour that is no longer under control. In fact, people conducted their secret affairs and illicit traffic in the former trenches of the Kagera war. Thus, illegitimate sexual affairs became something to be kept confidential.

*Ndani ya mahandaki kulifanyika mambo. Licha ya giza lake la kutisha, wakubwa kwa watoto waliendelea kufanyia shughuli za siri humo. (KK 4)*

Inside the trenches things were being done. Despite their fearful obscurity, adults and children continued doing their secret affairs inside there<sup>8</sup>.

The corruption of the moral customs is common among those people who made their fortune like Kalabweli, practicing black-markets activities, and "who changed women like a driver changes gear, while climbing a high peak" (KK 41).

#### 4.2.2. NARRATORS AND NARRATIVE STYLE AS VESSELS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGES

This story is narrated by an **external narrator**, who never appears as one of the characters in the novel; however, he tells the story in the first person as an insider who experiences the events happening in the fabula (Bal 1997) and acts as a choral character (Mutembei 2012).

Even the main characters, such as Kalabweli and his wife Kadogo, appear as flat, and they are not engaged in complex dialogues which illustrate their

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<sup>6</sup> Information provided by Mutembei (28-01-2019).

<sup>7</sup> *Ngono* in Luhaya is the native name of the river; however, to be noticed the allusion to the Swahili meaning of the word *ngono*, sex, highlighting the blame on illicit sexual behaviour.

<sup>8</sup> All the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. All emphasis mine.

I acknowledge Dr Ida Hadjivayanis and William Mkufya for the proofreading of my Swahili into English translations in this chapter.

psychological and emotional insight; however, both their actions and the underlying implied psychology are described in detail by the authorial voice of the omniscient narrator, who plays a major role in the narrative.

The **chorus** (Mutembei 2012) is represented by the off-screen voice of the invisible narrator, who is bewildered in the face of dissonant epistemologies that clash one against the other. The solution which appears closest to popular understanding is the one that must be allowed to prevail. The narrator here covers the function of epistemic hero (Medina 2013) giving to local interpretations the right to speak and be heard as valid source of knowledge.

*Mimi sikukubali kama walikuwa na ihembe, wala sikuweza kukataa hilo. Afadhali suala la ihembe lilileta mantiki kutokana na dhuluma. (KK 33)*

I did not agree with the vampire-spirit explanation, nor could I disagree completely. In fact, the **vampire-spirit theory** at least provided a logical explanation from the injustice.

Furthermore, from the examination of dissonant epistemes what emerges in more than one occasion is the concept of injustice (*dhuluma*) and how this “epistemic *dhuluma*” (epistemic injustice, Mutembei 2005a) is fought with the assistance of other ontologies coming from “marvellous world” like “*suala la ihembe*” (the vampire-spirit theory), which is a form of “epistemic friction” aimed to produce justice (Fricker 2007) or at least a state of tolerance towards the “others”.

Many unanswered questions remain, and the choral voice highlights the doubts and the vagueness between contrasting ways of knowledge, hinting at a quite unveiled accusation against Christianity:

*Lakini nilibaki najiuliza jambo moja: kama shetani ndiye analeta magonjwa, imekuwaje ugonjwa wa watu wa Juliana uwe ni adhabu toka kwa Mungu? Au labda tuseme siku hizi shetani anamsaidia Mungu katika kutoa adhabu? Kanisani hakuna kuuliza maswali. (KK 39)*

But I kept asking myself one thing: If it is the devil who brings diseases, how could the disease of Juliana’s people be God’s punishment? Unless we ought to say that these days the devil perhaps collaborates with God in dispensing punishment. At the Church there are no questions to be asked.

Opposite metaphysical ontologies confront God against the Devil. However, who is who?

There are two choral instances in the novel: the first questions the real origin of AIDS, between biomedicine and mythological malevolent ontologies (*mahembe*); the second one questions the “*kazi ya Mungu*” (the work of God) trying to go beyond questions left unanswered by the Church. However, there is not a real answer, because it is the dilemma common to all those who believe in the difference between God and Devil (Mutembei 2012).

Another formula to express local knowledges is the traditional character of **Mtani – the joker**, who commonly appears during traditional life-cycle rituals such as burial ceremonies.

The *Mtani*, who appears at Kalabweli's funeral, is portrayed as **the fool**: "*kichaa ambaye pia ni Mtani*" (a fool who is also a joker, KK 67) so as to allow him to break the silence and uncover the truth in public. His allegorical performance encloses the core theme of the novel: changing behaviour. Life, through the lenses of existentialism, is rendered as a stupid game like football. If you don't play safely, hinting particularly at promiscuity and condom use, you'll be chased away with the red card of AIDS, which kicks you out of life, and no metaphysical entity can interfere any longer to save humanity. Thus, the responsibilities lie on the back of human beings and their free-will.

*Maisha! Ni mchezo au ni ukweli? Ni mchezo mbaya? Watu huku wanasema ni kama mpira. Siku hizi wanasema cheza salama. Tabia? Kubadili tabia? Wote ni vichaa. Sheria za maisha unaonyeshwa kadi. Eti kadi nyekundu.* (KK 67)

Oh Life! Is it a game, or reality? Is this a bad game? People allege that it is like football. These days they say: "**Play Safely**" (slogan of a brand of condoms named *Salama/Safety*). Behaviour? Change behaviour? They are all insane. The rules of life give you a card. Indeed, a **red card**.

#### 4.2.3. ANALYTICAL ELEMENTS DRIVING DIFFERENT EPISTEMOLOGIES

##### 4.2.3.1. DIFFERENT MEDICAL TRADITIONS

The failure of hospitals in dealing with HIV/AIDS is well documented. The health system really was inadequate because of the post-Kagera war economic crisis, and it was also unaware of the new disease and totally unprepared to cope with it. The doctors were simply sending patients back home, being neither able to discover the cause of the illness, nor to cure it. Thus, people were just condemned to death, or they turned to traditional experts such as diviners and healers. In the novel, the healers are defended as people who act in good faith, with techniques close to people's understanding and beliefs, but who are doomed to fail because of the lack of proper instruments and knowledge to cope with HIV/AIDS. However, once they realized the surprising increase in the number of clients, even though incapable of providing them with actual treatment, they profited from the situation to cope with their own financial difficulties.

In fact, the limitation and inadequacy of the health system and the worsening economic conditions pushed people to enter the practice of traditional healers without any training as "self-styled traditional healers" (Xaba 2007: 340).

*Hospitalini hawakuona ugonjwa wowote. [...] Kumwambia arudi nyumbani. [...] Wakaona heri waende kwa waganga wa jadi kuuliza kulikoni. (KK 28)*

At the hospitals, doctors did not see any disease. Thus, they told him to go back home. They thought it was better to go to the traditional healers to ask what was going on.

*Alikuwa amepigwa na **ihembe**, jini analotupiwa mtu na watu wabaya. Alikuwa na **jini**. [...] Ihembe hilo ni la ughaibuni. Sio ihembe la kawaida. Na kuliondoa ihembe lililotoka nchi za ng'ambo siyo kitu cha mchezo. (KK 29)*

He was affected by a **vampire-spirit**, a kind of bloodsucking evil creature which is caused by a curse made by evil people. He had a **jinn**. This vampire-spirit is from foreign lands. Not a common one. To expel a vampire-spirit, which has come from abroad is not a joke.

The strange illness that leads to a strange death was better understood and rendered by traditional practitioners through the image of evil creatures. People demoralized by the discouraging answers of hospitals and medical doctors, rather prefer to trust the traditional healers. Obviously, the soil started being fertile for every kind of swindlers, who were aimed to fill their empty pockets, while the “strange illness” spreads “strange deaths” all around:

*Watu wakishaanza kuzungumzia **majini**. **Vifo vya ajabu** vilikuwa vinasimuliwa karibu kila kijiji. Mara utasikia kuwa fulani ugonjwa wake hausikii dawa. Mara, mwingine kafa kwa **ugonjwa wa ajabu**. Ni waganga wa kienyeji tu waliokuwa na ufahamu kuwa **mahembe** sasa yanawaingilia watu kuliko kawaida. Kila aliyekuwa na mgonjwa akanwondoa hospitalini na kumpeleka kwa mganga. Waganga wakatajirika. Mganga mmoja alisema kuwa ni lazima tuweke **zindiko**. [...] Huu si ugonjwa. Na hospitalini wameshidwa. [...] Baada ya muda kifo. **Kifo cha ajabu**. [...] Hiki ni **kisasi**. Ni lazima tufanye kafara. Twende tukamwage kahawa katika mto Kagera, tuvuke na kufika mpakani tukaombe radhi na kutoa sadaka. Waganga [...] Wakaahidi kuondoa laana. Wakachuma mali. [...] Vifo havikwisha. Wala wagonjwa hawakupungua. (KK 31)*

People started talking about **devilish spirits**. **Strange deaths** were told of in almost every village. One time, you hear about someone whose illness does not respond to any treatment. Another time you hear about someone who has died of a **strange illness**. Only the traditional healers were aware that **vampire-spirits** were assaulting people in an unusual manner. Each person who had an ill-relative took them from the hospital to the healers. The healers became rich. One diviner said that we must wear protective **charms**. [...] This is not a disease. The hospital has failed. [...] After a short time, death descended. A **strange death**. [...] This is revenge, **nemesis**, a kind of God's revenge (Mutembei 2009a: 27). We must give an offer or perform a sacrifice. Let's pour coffee into the Kagera river, cross it and get to the border where we can ask for forgiveness by offering a sacrifice. The cunning healers [...] they promised to remove the curse. They acquired a lot of wealth. Neither did the deaths end nor did the number of ill people decrease.

However, often healers did seem to succeed, because especially herbalists have the power to treat many opportunistic infections and symptoms of AIDS,

improving the general condition of their patients with traditional pharmacology obtained from indigenous plants, herbs, and roots. For instance, concoctions like *muarobaini* and other chopped leaves (*unga mweusi*, the black flour, 50) are very popular and have beneficial effects to relieve many physical disorders in seven days' time. Once the herbalist gave Kalabweli the leaves extracted from *muarobaini* trees, he came back home in good health (KK 50). This herbal medicine known as *muarobani* is believed to treat over forty different human illnesses.

The figure of *mganga wa tiba*, the traditional herbalist (Memel-Foté 2007), is recognised as valuable as well as their expertise: *mtaaluma wa mitishamba* (The expert in medicinal herbs and plants knowledge, KK 47). For example, herbalists and healers are experts in treating many different diseases from the simple *mafua*, the flu, also called *ugonjwa wa mapenzi*, the disease of lovers (KK 56), because it is caught by staying close to somebody, kissing somebody, to more complex illnesses such as *ugonjwa wa ukoo* (the kinship disease, KK 50), or, *endwala enkulu* (*enkulu* in Luhaya literally means old people), which are genetically transmitted disorders that are commonly treated, as other *chronic and genetic diseases* among the Haya people, by *mitishamba* (herbal mixtures)<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, those experts could not cure HIV/AIDS, despite their thorough knowledge of both traditional and common diseases as well as curses and bewitchments.

#### 4.2.3.2. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The Lutheran church in northern Tanzania preaches the eschatological theory of the existence of an afterlife and an almighty God, who distributes punishments or rewards (Setel 1999a; Hasu 1999). Thus, Christianity has its own view on the disease that must be the proper punishment for sinners, particularly if the sins are related to lust and sex:

*Vijana wa magendo, wanatenda dhambi. Na sasa Mungu Mwenyezi amewaletea pigo. Sasa Mungu ameleta ugonjwa.* (KK 39)

The young black marketers are all sinners. Now the Almighty God has brought them a **disaster**. Now God has hit them with **the illness**.

Contradictorily, God is indeed the only one that has the power to heal the same illness:

*Mungu atamwondolea ugonjwa* (KK 39)

God will cure him from the illness

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<sup>9</sup> Information provided by Mutembei (28-01-2019).

Religion clashes with “other beliefs”, and both do not match at all with science. The criticism of “other epistemologies” comprises even religion, that is accused of being superstition. The loss of faith and the mysterious state of unknown let to a stereotyped vision of the Christian God, while, people felt abandoned in the dark, while fighting between the evil and the good, as explained by the fool who is also a joker:

*“Sasa anayeonyesha kadi ni wewe Mungu au ni yeye Shetani?” Hello! Hello! Du imekatika” (KK 67) [...] “Kumbe hata kwa Mungu simu mbovu” (KK 68)*

“Now who is showing the red card is that you God or is he the Devil? Hello! Hello! Oh gosh the phone call has been cut off!” “Goodness, it seems even God’s telephone is not working<sup>10</sup>”

In the end, people who are bewildered and confused will tend to religious scepticism. Who is the cause of the illness? The Devil? God’s punishment? Do prayers save the believers or are those superstitions? Furthermore, religion contributes to the culture of blame (Mutembei 15-11-2018) as shown in the Church advertisement to avoid the contagion:

*Kuanzia jumapili ijayo hatutashiriki chakula cha bwana katika kikombe kimoja. Kila mtu atakuwa na kikombe chake (KK 39)*

Starting from next Sunday we will not share the blood of Christ in the same chalice. Each person will have their own chalice.

#### 4.2.3.3. WITCHES AS WOMEN

Women are accused of being witches who take their revenge on men by cursing them. Female sorcerers can be used as metonymies for immorality signified by women without resources (representation: women’s bodies), who become jealous and greedy. Sorcery is also a metaphor for illicit sexual behaviour (experience: violation of a taboo) embodied either in promiscuous women, victims of the political economic situation of the country, or in over-sexed supernatural creatures raping women. Witches are represented either as jealous women, who prepare love potions to control sexual behaviour of unfaithful husbands with the objective of preventing their extra-marital affairs or as poor women, who curse wealthy men (Rödlach 2006; Quaranta 2010). In conclusion, HIV/AIDS is an embodied cultural practice (Quaranta

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<sup>10</sup> During the 1980s, in Tanzania, to call someone you must call the Posta office beforehand to be connected to the person. *Hata kwa Mungu mawasilano mbaya*, means that in that period even with God it was difficult to communicate. Information provided by Mutembei (28-01-2019).

2010: 174) which symbolises the mutual relationship between experience (what the body does) and representation (what is done to the body) (Csordas 1994; Pizza 2016). Experience is endowed with the blame for the violation of sexual norms and taboos, while, representation corresponds to the bodies of jealous female witches. In conclusion, the symptoms of AIDS are metonymies of broader social processes (Quaranta 2010; 2006b).

Witches are described as common protagonists of everyday life, whose magical powers do not surprise. However, they are described as evil presences. Particularly, witches are marginalized women, who come from the lower classes of the society: the poor, widows, the old or prostitutes. Those are the reasons that justify the fury of the villagers against the old Bi Njunaki victim of witchcraft accusation:

*Ilisemekana kwamba kizee Njunaki alikuwa akiruka usiku na kwenda mahali pasipojulikana. Walisema alizungukazunguka **Kishenge makaburini**<sup>11</sup>. Na siku **Baniani** walipochoma moto maiti za wenzao, yeye ndiye aliyekuwa mstari wa mbele kuchochea kuni. Watu walisema aliruka kwa kutumia jani la mgomba. Wengine walisema aliruka kwa kutumia ungo. [...]. **Macho** yake ya kizee yalipenda kuangalia kitu kwa muda mrefu bila ya kupepesa, na kwa kuwa yalikuwa na kope za mvi na rangi **nyekundu** yaliongezea hali yake ya kutisha. [...]. Watu walisema ni sauti ya kichawi [...] kwani alikuwa hasikii vizuri. (KK 6)*

It was said that the old Njunaki flew during the night going to an unknown place. They said that she was hanging around in the **Kishenge cemetery**. When the **Hindu** people cremate the corpses, she was always in the first line to fetch the firewood. People said that she flew on banana leaves or using a basket. [...] Her eyes of an old person like to stare at things without blinking, and because her **eyes** were **red** with grey eyelashes, they increased her frightening aspect. [...] People said that it was the voice of a witch because she could not hear properly.

By describing the injustice perpetrated against Bi. Njunaki, Mutembei also challenges some classical interpretations of witchcraft, which is believed to be inherited through unilineal descent and characterized by physical traits like “red eyes” (Evans-Pritchard 1976). Witchcraft is a “cross-cultural theory” either sharing universal models or distinguishing relative interpretations (Hallen & Sodipo 1997: 122). Witches are portrayed either as “grave dancers” (Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 1) performing ecstatic dances to enact their magic, or as starving females consuming the victim’s body and spirit. Witches curse mortal men, and they represent either an AIDS omen or the embodiment of HIV/AIDS (Setel 1999a), appearing in dreams and visions:

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<sup>11</sup> *Kishenge* is a place of the Bukoba cemetery where are buried the *Baniani* Indian people followers of Brahma as per the Swahili proverb: *baniani mbaya, kiutu chake dawa*: An evil Indian, his shoe is a medicine (translation from <http://swahiliproverbs.afirst.illinois.edu/greed.html>); Indian businessmen are disliked by Swahili people, yet they purchase Indian made shoes for profit. Information provided by Mutembei (28-01-2019).

*Nikamwona ni mwanamke. Naye alionekana kukonda na kuchoka sana [...] ameanza kuwa mifupa, alijikokota na kutoweka. (KK 30)*

What I saw was a woman. She was **skinny** and exhausted [...] she became a **skeleton**, she dragged herself along and disappeared.

Female bodies are considered both endangered and dangerous, and their being diseased is associated with a moral deviance (Offe 2010). The commodification of sexuality is well expressed by the two protagonists: Kalabweli and his wife Kadogo. Those characters' behaviours are driven by desire ("*tabia* and *tamaa*", Setel 1999a) as the thirst for self-empowering their social status. Kalabweli is one of the "young of *Juliana*", a businessman in the black market who has enough money to buy women. In fact, he was entertaining himself with six mistresses contemporarily: prostitutes, students, men's wives and one primary school child (KK 59). Kadogo is an unfaithful wife, yet she is also a rebel fighting social injustice, while negotiating a "third space of engagement" (Nnaemeka 2003: 360):

*Ulimwengu wa kiafrika umekwishajua kuwa yeye ni mwanamke wa kuolewa na tayari ameolewa. Kadogo alitaka fedha, alitaka wanaume, alitaka starehe, atembe huko na kule; sio ndoa inayolazimisha kutulia mahali pamoja. Kalabweli, mume wake hakumwelewa, na kila mara alidhani kuwa elimu aliyokuwa nayo Kadogo ambayo kalabweli hakuwa nayo, ndiyo iliyomfanya awe na kiburi. (KK 58)*

For the African world she was a woman to be married and she was married indeed. She wanted money, men, entertainment, going everywhere, and not a marriage that would force her to remain still in one place only. Her husband Kalabweli could not understand her, and he thought that Kadogo's education, for which he had none, was the cause of his wife's arrogance.

However, she remained the flat and blamed character of a prostitute, who escorts sugar daddies as well as a minister, a priest, an Indian, and an Arab (Bulaya 2016).

The relationship between gender and AIDS can be explained through the concept of "blame and counter blame" (Mutembei 2001: 198). Men accuse women of being the vector of the virus and the source of sexually transmitted infection as they should be the custodian of the morality. Contrarily, women accuse men of being promiscuous, unfaithful, and particularly, to use their socio-economic power to deceive immature girls. Men take up leadership roles and are more educated than women, and by this unequal share of power and knowledge (Mbembe 2001) they exploit prostitution and cheat young girls.

In KK, female characters can be divided into two main categories: mothers and prostitutes.

On the one hand, the "mothers" such as Mama Kalabweli (KK 13), endure every kind of difficulties and violence to survive and sustain their families.

Women are categorized as the “(m)other” (Nnaemeka 1997: 1); the institution of motherhood in patriarchy is an oppressive construct of victimhood, which must be opposed to the actual experience of motherhood as perceived by women: “mothering with pain and rewards (Nnaemeka 1997: 12).

On the other hand, the younger girls who “prostitute” themselves as the only way out left to them and a sign of rebellion (McFadden 1992; 1993; Wilton 1997). Thus, victims can become agents, who opposes the oppressor/victim dichotomy.

The prostitutes are: Dogodogo, “*walimtegemea. Na kweli hawaangusha*” (her parents were relying on her, and she didn’t disappoint them, KK 20) and Kadogo, “*Binti huyu alitwa Kadogo, lakini umbo na matendo yake yalikuwa makubwa*” (the girl’s name was *Little thing*, yet both her physical appearance and her actions were mighty, KK 55).

Furthermore, young students are the unaware, innocent victims of older men. In fact, the sugar daddy phenomenon implies asymmetrical sexual encounters due to income and power differentials (Baylies *et al.* 1994; 2000): “*wanawake wakaona wajifunge mkanda mmoja, wa Kalabweli*” (women decided to have one purpose, Kalabweli’s one, KK 41). In this novel, women are portrayed as mother or prostitutes as well as witches or victims of social discrimination and gender-based violence.

#### 4.2.3.4. THE SYMBOLS OF “MARVEL”

In-born witchcraft (*wachawi*, KK 9) is an important element in this story; “an act of witchcraft is a psychic act” (Mosley 2004) that can be interpreted or rendered by forms of parapsychology, which are “sources of knowledge epistemically justified” (Bodunrin quoted in Mosley 2004: 138-9).

Witchcraft engages with ineffable, unknowable, unrepresentable beings/ontologies both “out there”, “in there” and “amongst us”. This metaphysical/transcended openness coexists with a sense of vulnerability and anxiety (Ashforth 2001: 219; Van Dijk 2001). Therefore, people’s reluctance and refusal to believe seem to be the only practical way to avoid these evil unseen powers, rendering them less effective through “epistemic anxiety” – the struggle against belief (Ashforth 2001: 219). If you do not believe in something, it cannot be real.

Contrarily, epistemic anxiety can be defeated by accepting uncertainty and instability through the access to unknown realities (*shingila*) (Stroeken 2012) or via the epistemology of “**indeterminacy and inclusion**” (Rettovà 2021a)

Afrocentric ontologies such as natural spirits and deceased human (Hamminga 2005), as well as metaphysical appearances, characterize this novel. The su-

pernatural, in the form of ghosts and spectres, lurks here and there, inhabiting the novel and haunting human characters:

*Ilisemekana wachawi huogopa msalaba, ukawa kama hirizi ya kumkinga na maovu katika ufu.* (KK 9)

It was said that **witches** fear the cross, which could be used as an **amulet** to protect a person against evil after death.

*Kila mara mifupa ya marehemu iliwakumbusha wanakijiji siku ile waliokumbwa na vita. Mizuka yao ilikuwa ikizungukazunguka ikiwasubiri ndugu wa kuizika kwa mujibu wa mila. Kila siku kulikuwa na mambo ya ajabu.* (KK 26)

Every time the **skeletons** reminded the villagers of the time the war overwhelmed them. Their **ghosts** wandered around, waiting for their relatives who were supposed to cremate them as per traditional custom. Every day there were “**marvellous/strange things**” happening.

“Hauntology” (Derrida quoted in Warnes 2009: 151) haunts ontology by spiritual otherworldly presences (*mahembe* 32; *majini* 33; *mizuka* 26) and demonstrates awareness of the plurality of “others” (Warnes 2009: 151). Ironically enough the choral voice of the narrator tries to interpret the mystery surrounding this illness by means of black magic, curses or superhuman creatures:

*Wote walikuwa ni wagonjwa wa ugonjwa usiofahamika, ugonjwa ambao vijijini waliuita mahembe au majini. Ilisemekana kuwa wafanyabiashara walidhulumu na sasa wanapata laana.* (KK 32-3)

All were ill with an unknown illness which in the villages was called **vampire-spirits** or **jinn**s. It was said that businessmen treated other people unjustly and now they are **cursed**.

The illness explanations are mainly connected to the local lore: a *jinn* is a mythological evil creature (*kiumbe chenye uovo*); *ihembe*, in the Luhaya language, is an evil spirit who sucks blood, similar to the *mumiani* blood sucker creatures of oral folk tales. The myth of vampires and bloodsuckers was also associated with blood donations made by the Red Cross during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, divination and witchcraft are recognised as “a mode of knowing” (Gyekye quoted in Mosley 2004: 149). Bad omens, oracular interpretations, premonitions, and foreboding are an important part of people’s beliefs and knowledge as “embodied epistemology” (Udefi 2014; Cooper & Morrell

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<sup>12</sup> Information provided by Mutembei (28-01-2019).

2014) and epistemology of extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition (Gyekye 1995):

*UPEPO! [...] Sauti za ajabuajabu zilianza kusikika. [...] Bundi hawakuonekana.* (KK 27)

**WIND! Mysterious voices** started being heard. **Owls** could not be seen.

*Ndoto nyingine ikanivamia. Waliongea lugha nisiyoielewa ingawa niliisikia. Wote hawakuwa na nguo. Miili yao ilitonekana wazi, ilikuwa imekondeana. Nikajua ni wachawi. Walilifukua kaburi lile kwa maneno yao yaliyofanana na maneno ya waganga wa kienyeji. Kaburi lilipofukuliwa lote nikaona mafuvu mengi ya watu.* (KK 30)

I was assaulted by another dream. There were spectres speaking in an incomprehensible language, although I could hear the words. All of them were naked. Their naked bodies were **skinny** and debilitated. I knew that they were **witches**. They exhumed that grave with their words that were similar to the incantations of traditional healers. When the grave was exhumated I saw many humans' skulls.

The complex dualistic symbol of the snake appears twice in this novel: firstly, as the symbol of death and a bad omen:

*Chatu mkubwa alikuwa akijitahidi kukimeza kichwa cha mtoto Keisho.* (KK 9)

A big boa was struggling to swallow the head of Keisho.

Secondly, as a healing symbol, snakes are used by diviners as oracular animals (KK 50).

That illness was so **“marvellous”** that it escaped out from any kind of explanation: traditional, mythological, and scientific:

*Haukuwa uchawi wala ihembe, ulikuwa ugonjwa ule wa ajabu.* (KK 47)

It wasn't witchcraft nor a vampire-spirit, yet it was that **strange illness**.

Thus, the state of “being in **awe**” (Rettovà 2017) surrounded the unknown disease:

*Silimu sasa ukawa ugonjwa, ugonjwa unaobadilisha majina kila kukicha; pasi kupatiwa dawa.* (KK 40)

Now the **Slim fit** became an illness, an illness which changes names every day, without finding any cure.

#### 4.2.3.5. SIGNS OF STIGMA AND UNEASINESS

Stigma and discrimination testify to the choice of an *absence of episteme*, caused by the lack of knowledge of HIV/AIDS. “Epistemic anxiety” (Ashfort 2001) leads to not recognizing nor accusing all the beings (physical and spiritual ontologies) that appear as “other” or unknown to us. The fear of “otherness” is the leitmotif that causes people to believe that everything that is unknown must be the belonging of “the other”. However, the bodily presence of other is indeed the first clash of consciousnesses which triggers the emergence of the “Being for-itself” (Sartre 2003).

*Ugonjwa si wa watu wote. Ni wa wale wa Juliana* (KK 33)

It's not a disease common to everybody. It affects only the Juliana people

*Kifo kinachotoka kwa Mwafrika “low caste” sudras* (KK 34)

The death which originates from an African, low caste, Indians...

The rhetoric of Us against the Other, “*umetoka kwao si kwetu*” - it comes from them not from us (Mutembei 2009a: 15), strengthens dialectic oppositions in HIV/AIDS discourses, particularly, the blame on certain groups: foreigners, Haya people who are the first ethnicity hit by the virus, black market dealers who brought the virus along the trade routes, urban dwellers, and prostitutes.

Firstly, HIV/AIDS is embodied in female bodies such as the dreadful appearance of the Benezeti girl, whose stinking and skeletal body covered up with sores is described in detail as in a visual documentary (KK 37-8).

The *heteroglossic* dialogues of this “polyphonic novel” mirror the social heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) of Northern Tanzania, emphasising class and gender discriminations:

For instance, when Mama Kalabweli was stopped and searched by the army, who warned her harshly, she humbly replied in a mixture of Luhaya and Swahili (KK 12).

The intertextuality (Kristeva 1986; Allen 2000) of the novel is shown by the intrusion of this allegorical song:

*Kapu la mchuuzi halichagui matunda*

*Yaliyooza – twende*

*Yalo mazima – twende* (KK 4)

The basket of the hawker does not choose its fruits

The rotten ones – let's go

The fresh ones – let's go

Females' wombs can be healthy or diseased with HIV; however, males going with prostitutes are not choosing carefully. Women who embody HIV/AIDS

are represented like *matunda yaliyooza* (rotten fruits, KK 4; Bulaya 2016) picked up from a fruit basket.

Especially, the Europeans, who imported second-hand clothes to Africa that was then marketed by “*Juliana* traders” and Indian businessmen are under accusation (Mutembei 2009a). Then, the “others” who are blamed are those who come from over the borders such as the “*Abekikomela*” black marketers trading in and out Tanzanian borders and new social groups like “the young of *Juliana*”.

The accusation against foreigners and urban dwellers implies nostalgia for the unpolluted past before colonization and urbanization, when people lived in villages (Mutembei 2009a: 18) and suggests an “epistemology of return” where “the win is the return to the past” (Rettová 2016d).

Literary myths in this novel are an example of intertextuality; these explanatory oral tales re-channel orality in written literature fracturing the mainstream genre of the prose (Okpewho 1983). The production of literary myths, which explain the origins of the unknown disease, is also a strategy to illustrate stigma.

“*Mzungu kafa Ulaya*”, the white man who died in Europe (Mutembei 2009a: 7ff) and infected the second-hand clothes with skin diseases. The clothes are then distributed by charities in Africa, infecting in turn, African peoples. Likewise, “*mitumba ndui*”, the second-hand clothes with the pox (Mutembei 2009a: 8) clarifies that the illness comes from abroad; however, the blame is on the black-market traders, who sell Euro-American second-hand clothes in Tanzania. Thus, the HIV virus comes from the “others”: Europe, traders from the cities, “*umetoka kwao si kwetu*” (Mutembei 2009a: 15ff). However, HIV/AIDS can be also the outcome of witchcraft as well as a well-deserved punishment from God for illicit traffic and immoral behaviour. Thus, AIDS is personified as the angel of death *Bakuntumile* among the Haya or as *Chira* among the Luo who punish the mankind for arrogance (Mutembei 2009a: 27; Hussein 1988; Masolo 1994: 97).

#### 4.2.3.6. THE SUPERNATURAL IN HIV/AIDS METAPHORS AND TROPES IN CONTEXT

*Kisiki Kikavu* (the Dry Stump of a coffee tree, KK 71) is a “metaphonymy”, because it is a metaphor for HIV/AIDS that is made up of *kisiki*, which in colloquial Swahili is a euphemism for prostitute, and therefore, it hints at the vector for HIV transmission, representing metonymically one of the causes for HIV/AIDS.

The “dry stump” stands also metonymically for the consequence of the disease that spoils human bodies, drying them like tree stumps. This image comes from a real experience of the author about a family of people close to

him who lost everything because of AIDS, even their coffee trees (Mutembei 15-11-2018). At the end of the novel, Kalabweli's parents came back to Bukoba and what they found in their farm were the dried-up stumps of what had been their coffee tree plantation (KK 71).

*Kisiki kikavu* is the dried tree roots, but it also means a person without hope (Mutembei 28-1-2019). The metaphor of the dry stump is also connected to the verb *kauka*, which literally means to dry up and is metonymically linked to HIV/AIDS, because it can be either its cause: the vital life dried up by bloodsuckers or its consequence: the body and skin dryness of a diseased person. Moreover, *KAUKA* corresponds to the acronym *KAmpuni ya Usafirishaji KABurini*, the undertaker's company, a metaphor for death and a metonymy of AIDS, because its consequence is dead (Mutembei 2009a: 51).

The novel engages with local representations of and peoples' popular beliefs about HIV/AIDS causation, such as God's will, natural biological agents, ancestral spirits and evil forces (Mshana *et al.* 2006; Mutembei *et al.* 2002; Lugalla *et al.* 2004).

Extraordinary "hauntological" presences, **spiritually disembodied ontologies**, inhabit the novel: *Ihembe-mahembe* (32), the vampire, or bloodsucker in Haya mythology, are jinns who survive on human or animal blood; *majini* (29) are over-sexed genies; *laana* (33) means curse or bewitchment; *majitu* (55) is an ogre; *silimu* (40, 45), which is the first name used in East Africa for HIV/AIDS (Iliffe 2006; Barz 2006), is a "metaphtonymy", that is, a metaphor of AIDS and a metonymy of one of its symptoms, the massive loss of weight. It is also associated with the mythological narration of the vampires that suck blood from human bodies until they are completely dried up in death. *Kinyamkera* is not only a kind of *kimbunga*, a typhoon bringing massive destruction, but also evil demons which live in baobab trees. Both are AIDS metaphors (Mutembei 2009a: 13, 41).

From the dark of "**awe - the unknown**" (Rettovà 2017), a third way, in between science and beliefs, has been excavated, rich in lurking alien and futuristic creatures which transmit the dreadful, marvellous, and totally unknown illness that leads to extraordinary deaths (*ugonjwa wa ajabu; kifo cha ajabu*, 31; *ugonjwa usiofahamika*, 32; *ugonjwa usiojulikana*, 44; *ugonjwa unaotisha*, 57). This includes creatures such as the *American ninjas* (55), a metaphor for AIDS, the terminator disease that kills as fast as a ninja's sword, as powerful as a super-hero.

Conversely, from the **natural world** and the **realm of science**, the virus is conceptualised as an insect (*mdudu*, 14) that is a metonymy for the HIV virus, which by means of the anchoring process, refers to a parasite that killed banana plants in Northern Tanzania during the 1980s. Haya people rely completely on banana plants and their entire life revolves around its cultivation and the goods they can produce from these trees. If cultivation is at risk the entire society is endangered. This is the explanation for the analogy of the banana plants

ravaged by parasite like human bodies can be infected with HIV (Mutembei 28-1-2019). The metaphor of the insect is quite common because insects and bacteria living in dirty environments like mosquitoes, bugs and louses are also associated to HIV transmission (Mutembei 2009a: 22). HIV/AIDS can also be a flooding river that swallows everything on its way as a dragnet, meaning also the magnitude and rate of spreading; *maji marefu*, deep waters, means to be careful of sexual behaviour: if you swim (coitus) in deep water as sex workers do, you can be infected with HIV (Mutembei 2001: 118-36).

According to Tanzanian popular discourses on HIV/AIDS, especially among the Haya people, the metaphor of “the disease/death of *Juliana*” comes from a well-known American textile, known as *Juliana*, sold on the black market, hinting at the foreign origins of the disease. The embodied metaphor (Low 1994) of *Juliana* means that HIV/AIDS was embodied in both clothes and young black marketeers, as well as in *Eagle (tai, 40)*, an American clothes brandmark, which is associated with the American origin of the virus imported to Africa from outside, and then transmitted by the black marketeers. Furthermore, *Juliana* is also a curse sent by envious witches against wealthy traders (Mutembei 2009a: 37) as well as *Abekikomela* are the contraband traders at the Uganda-Tanzania border, the target group for the disease, who are bewitched as a punishment for their dishonest business and bad behaviour (*ugonjwa wa Juliana, 33; ugonjwa wa kikomela, 47; kifo cha Juliana, 40*).

“The grave present” (*zawadi ya jenzeza, 61*) or the “four corner box” (*pembe nne, Askew 2015; Mutembei 2001*) is a Swahili popular image made up of a combination between metaphor and analogy: death itself is a metonymy for AIDS, while the analogy is as follows: misbehaviour is rewarded with a death sentence such as AIDS. Likewise, “the red card” (*kadi nyekundu, 67*) expresses a new conceptualization of life among youngsters. Life is a game like football, and it has its rules. If you misbehave you will be chased out of the game.

Finally, the scientific name - *UKIMWI/AIDS (57)* - appears only 5 total times in this novel.

To sum up, the metaphors are grouped into three trends: the natural-scientific world, the supernatural realm, and the space for the unknown all mixed into the narrative as an *epistemological miscellanea*, which work “across numerous genres” and reveal “the riddle-like provocative and challenging playfulness of textual obscurity in African genres” (Rodgers-John 2015: 71; Barber 2007).

In conclusion, *Kisiki Kikavu* is novel rich in endogenous knowledge: while science and religion are both under discussion, different epistemologies are highlighted with “epistemological irreverence” (Warnes 2009: 151).

### 4.3. SOCIO-POLITICAL DENUNCIATION AND DISSONANT EPISTEMES IN *FIRAUNI* (THE DEBAUCHEE)

Athumani Mauya's<sup>13</sup> novel *Firauni* (F) (The Debauchee, 2015 re-edited 2017) is a realist novel expressing a strong socio-political accusation against contemporary Tanzanian society, the process of neo-colonization started after the implementation of SAPs and the over expansion of INGOs (Bourgault 2003).

Particularly, the novel denounces all the evil and injustices in the society, narrating the fabula of a minister who was caught in a big scandal for having stolen public money, corruption, blackmailing, deception, witchcraft and sorcery practices, exploitation of prostitution, sexual abuse at the workplace, transmission of HIV/AIDS on purpose.

In this novel, HIV/AIDS is transmitted by heterosexual networks among adults. Particularly, the victims are married women because of the extra-marital affairs of their husbands with both official and occasional mistresses. In fact, in Tanzania 80% of wives are victims of HIV/AIDS because of their spouses' infidelity (Browning 2014).

The purpose of the novel is aimed toward the socio-political struggles in this world; however, a lot of space is preserved for other presences and dissonant ontologies appearing in people's daily lives. These chase after the less corrupted episteme into the confused and problematic contemporary society. For instance, black magic and the occult are intertwined in everyday realism, invoked to both solve complicated problems and achieve goals, via the intervention of diviners and Islamic faith healers, who perform ritual sacrifices and *dua* (see Mbogo 1996).

#### 4.3.1. PLOT AND NARRATIVE STYLE

The narrative of this novel shifts the chronology of the events through flashbacks and flashforwards folded one upon the other (Khamis 2007c). The first part of the story is told by the internal narrator of Bi Kunguru, the young widow of the debauched villain of the novel Buna. The story starts at the Islamic burial of Buna, jumping back to the hospital ward where Buna died of AIDS, then skips back again to the time when Buna cheated the HIV test done before marrying Kunguru as second wife, after the death of his first wife Mage from AIDS. Afterwards, the story flashes forward to the hereditary share discriminating against Kunguru. In chapters 5 to 8 Kunguru recalls her life with her departed husband, Buna, from their first meeting onwards. Conversely, from

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<sup>13</sup> Athumani Mauya, a retired secondary school teacher from Bagamoyo, whom I interviewed on January 31, 2019, Dar es Salaam.

chapter 9 to 25, the focalizer and narrator shift from the **internal narrator** Bi Kunguru to an **external narrator** telling Buna's life events in the third person, who in turn exchange their roles between narrator and focalizer (Bal 1997).

The multivocality (Bakhtin 1981) is shown by not only the intervention of the two narrators: the internal Bi Kunguru, who tells the story in the first person and the external omniscient one, but also displaying dialogues conducted from opposite perspectives: male-female and oppressed-oppressor.

The narration is overflowing with Swahili traditional proverbs, sayings, idioms (Mauya 2008), and it is characterized by generic fractures (Rettovà 2021b), which crack the narrative stream by the appearances of entire poetries, songs in the Zigua language translated into Swahili, epistles (Mutembei 2016), SMS texts (F 185), newspaper articles, advertisements and billboards (Mutembei 2014).

The "polyphonic" novel reproduces social heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981), by changing linguistic styles, from standard literary Swahili to everyday dialogues using hybrid forms of *Kiswenglish*, a Swahilization of English terms, and slang expressions in *Swahili ya mitaani* (street Swahili) (*denti*, young maiden, F 55; *dia*, dear, F 59).

The prose of this novel is rich in intertextuality (Allen 2000; Diegner 2005) and en-textualization (Barber 2005; 2007) of oral literature and performative elements inserted into the written narrative: oral poetry, traditional and ritual songs (*wimbo wa asili*, F 152-3), proverbs as well as epistles conveying riddles and *mafumbo* (Mazrui 2007; Vierke 2012) as "second order discourse" (Wanjohi 1997). Particularly, proverbs and sayings, often introduced by the formula of "the elders/saviours say", are doors to access local wisdom (Rettovà 2010; 2016a; Beck 2005).

Two long poems (F 40-1; 42-4) condemn those who spreads HIV on purpose and the epistemic marginalization of oppressed women, while the long letter (F 38-9) is a device to confess in confidentiality of being affected by HIV/AIDS (Mutembei 2015; 2016). Furthermore, the letter opens up the way to other ontologies and epistemologies from the supernatural world: the diviner (*mpiga ramli*, F 39) was consulted and he discovered that Buna's father was bewitched by a neighbour who hates him. Besides this, the diviner (*mganga wa ramli*, F 39) discovered that the family was cursed by their own ancestors' spirits (*mizimu ya mababu zetu*); thus, they must perform the ritual offer to praise those spirits (*tambiko*) to get rid of their curse. Finally, the letter discloses the failure of both scientific and traditional medical systems in coping with HIV/AIDS:

*Tulimpeleka hospitali ya wilaya kwa matibabu lakini hakupata nafuu hata kidogo. Madaktari walituambia hawakuona ugonjwa wowote ule. [...] tulimpeleka kwa Waganga wa kienyeji kumuagua<sup>14</sup> ilishindikana. (F 38-9)*

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<sup>14</sup> The verb *-agua* includes both scientific and traditional healing practices: treat medically; treat magically to remove a spell or witchcraft; predict, foretell, divine, interpret dreams (TUKI 2012).

We brought him to the district hospital for treatment, but he did not get any relief. The doctors told us that they could not diagnose any disease. [...] We brought him to the traditional healers to get their treatment, but it failed as well.

Spells, charms and divinatory songs (*nyimbo za uganga*, F 107-9) are utilised to perform traditional rituals, sacrifices, black magic practices and curses such as the *magic of juju*, opening up the way to the realm of marvel.

On the one hand, songs have the power to heal if sung by expert healers (Barz 2006). On the other hand, the devilish song (*wimbo wa kishetani*, F 108) uses black magic so as to succeed to the detriment of other people.

#### 4.3.2. ANALYTICAL SECTIONS

##### 4.3.2.1. SCIENTIFIC MEDICINE

The medical scientific language (*lugha ya kitabibu*) is vehiculated through Euro-American campaigns and television programmes and channels described in the novel (F 134-5). Slogans used in posters created by health organizations<sup>15</sup> are also quoted in the prose, such as the slogan which became popular in Tanzania since 2014: “*michepuko sio dili, mume wangu baki njia moja*” (diversions (mistresses) are not a deal, my husband remain on the main path! F 218).

HIV blood testing regularly done at the hospitals is a common practice in contemporary Tanzania (F 24-5; Mutembei 2011a) as the only way to ascertain if someone has been infected (F 15). However, corruption is the cause of fake blood test results as denounced both in the plays and in the novel. In fact, the ARV therapies, which are surrounded by suspicion, give infected people a healthy aspect and lifestyle, making the virus vectors not easily recognisable (F 4). HIV/AIDS is no longer a mortal disease to fear, yet it became a chronic illness that can be controlled with ARVs:

*Dawa za kupunguza makali ya VVU ili kurefusha Maisha yenu* (F 20)

Medications for suppressing the HIV virus strength and to prolong our lives.

Condoms are also promoted:

*Kondomu tu ndiyo kiboko ya UKIMWI* (F 161)

Condoms are the only “whip” against HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>15</sup> Population Services International (psi.or.tz).

#### 4.3.2.2. TRADITIONAL MEDICAL CULTURES

HIV/AIDS is familiarized as *kitigo* (F 4, 5); less familiar and dreadful realities are softened through the comparison with familiar and treatable illnesses such as syphilis or traditional hereditary curses coming from the break of sexual social norms, to offer people, at least, the hope of being treated, and give them solace (Mutembei 2009a; Rödlach 2006; Setel 1999b,c; Langwick 2007). *Kitigo* is a typical disease among the Zigua ethnicity from Bagamoyo and Handeni (Mauya 2016), which affects people who have incestuous sexual intercourses with close relatives, and it has the same symptoms of AIDS:

“*Ni vigumu kutofautisha UKIMWI na Kitigo*” (F 5)

“It’s difficult to distinguish between HIV/AIDS and *Kitigo*”.

Many typical diseases coming from an offence against social, and especially sexual, norms became the official interface of *UKIMWI* (Hountondji 2007; Langwick 2011; Hasu 1999):

“*Kitigo* kina dawa. Ukimpata mganga anayeyujulia ugonjwa huu unapona mara moja” (F 15)

“*Kitigo* is treatable. If you find a healer who knows it, you will recover immediately”.

Therefore, to treat those maladies (Langwick 2011) the novel introduces three types of traditional practitioners or folk-healers (Schoepf 2017): firstly, *waganga tabibu*: genuine healers and herbalists trusted and respected by people, who fail only because of the actual impossibility of HIV/AIDS of being treated; secondly, “*waganga wa kugangua*” (Mutembei 2009a: 24), “healer-swindlers” or the cheaters; thirdly, *wachawi*: the witchdoctors or sorcerers, who people entrust to ask for curses in order to obtain blessings, wealth, and social rank while harming other peoples.

Traditional medicine is a form of epistemic resistance (Meneses 2007) against the dangers that came with modernity, and it is not criticized, yet valued. Particularly, herbalists are praised for curing quickly typical diseases like *degedege* (jerks or convulsions provoked by malaria fever, F 46; Langwick 2011; 2007).

“*Je, mlijaribu kwenda kwa wataalamu, yaani Waganga wa jadi, kwa tiba mbadala? Maana magonjwa mengine si ya hospitali, yanafaa dawa za asili*”[...]

“*Hakuna tunakosifika kwa uchawi au tiba mbadala ambako hatukwenda [...] tumefika hadi kwenye Mizimu na kwenye makaburi ya Masharifu, lakini wapi! [...] tumemaliza waganga na waganguzi lakini wapi [...] hakuna nafuu ugonjwa hausikii dawa asilani [...] tukarudi tena hospitali, lakini nako wapi hakuna nafuu [...] tukarudi tena kwa waganga wa jadi na sasa tumerudi tena hospitali*” (F 13-4)

“Did you try going to the experts, traditional healers, for alternative medicine? Because some diseases cannot be treated at the hospital, but with natural medicine”. “There is no place popular for witchcraft or herbalism where we did not visit. We visited African ancestral worship places and Sharif graveyards<sup>16</sup>, without succeeding! We went to all the healers including the most respected, but they failed! There was no relief, this illness is stubbornly resistant to all the medication we have tried. Then, we came back to the hospital, yet there was no relief to the ailment! We went again to the traditional healers and now we are back to the hospital once again!”

However, the abilities of healers and “healer-swindlers” are either recognised or criticised through the practice of stereotyping and joking:

*Mzee Dunga ni gwiji la dawa za asili. Juju lake ni pana sana. [...] kufukuza majini na mashetani, kuweka watu misukule, kuwafanya ndondocho, kukopera, kuua kwa kutumia majini na mashetani, falaki, kupiga bao, kutabiri.* (F 101)

Mr Dunga is an expert in herbal treatments. His magic is wide in scope [...] exorcising spirits and devils, transforming people into zombies, creating living dead slaves, to steal crops from other people’s farms by witchcraft, Arabic faith healers, oracular consultations, and divining.

*“Gonjwa la UKIMWI nalitibu, siku zangu ni saba tu mgonjwa anapona”* (F 111)

“I can cure AIDS, within seven days the patient recovers”

Those practitioners can both heal and harm (healers or witches) people call them not only to be treated medically, but also to solve social injustices, or to perpetrate injustices to obtain personal benefits, for example to go up the ladder. The protagonist Buna went to the healer to become a minister, as it was a common practice to use magic to go up the ladder and to become appointed to high-ranking positions in the government:

*Viongozi wote serikalini hasa dunia ya tatu wanaishi kwa juju* (F 128)

All the government leaders of the Third World live depending on *juju* witchcraft.

Notwithstanding, when HIV/AIDS is concerned the result is the failure of both traditional healers and hospitals because of not only the viral resistance but also the modern evils of society, where both medical doctors and traditional experts do their own business. The detrimental effects of the SAPs which are intrinsically connected to the fast spread of AIDS in African countries as well as the denunciation of the inefficacy and corruption of the modern medical sector are common in fictional themes in literature on HIV/AIDS (Ngozi 1990; Jilala 2004; Mutembei 2005a). Therefore, the population is subjected

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<sup>16</sup> In the Pwani region many people believe in the cult of the saints (information provided by Mauya 31-1-2019).

to a “ping pong effect” between hospitals and local experts (*wataalamu*, F 13) as a result of the privatization of the health sector which offers a limited access to the services restricting the possibility of being treated to people able to pay expensive parcels to private doctors and clinics (Sanders 2001; Dilger 2010; Mutembei 2011a,b).

On the one hand, medical doctors are denounced for corruptly accepting extra money to cheat HIV tests, which became a new business:

*“Daktari alikuwa muuaji, asiyekuwa na maadili ya udaktari. Hakika ni **firauni**”* (F 19)

“The doctor was a murderer, without medical ethics, actually he was a **debauchee**”

On the other hand, witchcraft implies: “illegitimate actions directed towards evil ends either to cause harm or to accumulate wealth and power, engaging with invisible or extra-humans’ forces” (Ashforth 2001: 206). Therefore, being able to have control over unseen forces through occult medicine and concoctions – “good luck medicine”- made by witches and healers with human skins and body parts can generate wealth and political positions (Sanders 2001: 169). With the development of the free market, marketing the occult has become a business, because there are more witches interested in gaining power and wealth, but also the liberalization of the occult medicine for sale took place (Sanders 2001: 174), providing fertile conditions for a rapid proliferation of both occult practices and occult economies (Sanders 2001: 162).

The character Buna, firstly, asked the healer to become a minister with social powers and economic success. Then, when he started experiencing misfortunes, he turned to the diviner to be freed from the evil spirit which was haunting him:

*Kila mwaka lazima uchinja ng’ombe kwa ajili ya sadaka na chakula cha hili jini.* (F 113)

Every month you have to slaughter a cow for the ritual offer and to provide that evil jinn with food.

The “**epistemology of magic**” (Stroeker 2012) is based on the interlink between gift (do not work without sacrifice) and sacrifice (never be sure of a return), disclosing the non-linearity of events that science fails to regulate (Stroeken 2012: 6). Magic teaches us to “live with contingency” (Stroeker 2012: 26) accepting the fundamental instability with which life is imbued, trying to gain benefits from it. Offer and sacrifice are connected to the magic of *juju*, which is performed not only to obtain something, by harming or with detrimental effects on other people in favour of personal achievements, but also to exorcise *jinn*s, the evil spirits thrown by angered people (Stroeken 2017).

Notwithstanding, healers and diviners use magic not only for witchcraft purposes, but also to perform traditional rituals. For instance, the *tambiko* is the ritual offering for ancestral spirits of the dead of the clan, which is performed by *mganga wa ramli*, a soothsayer capable of interpreting oracles or the *sangoma* (healer or diviner in South Africa, F 228) by means of rites of affliction (Janzen 1992; Swantz 1990). After the divinatory consultation, the *falaki* healer write the *kombe*, the pot with the Islamic *dua*, prayer, gives the client herbal treatments to bathe, drink or rub on and prescribes particular rules to be followed on how to behave after the ritual performance (F 113-4; Langwick 2011).

Amulets, divinatory paraphernalia, witchcraft practices performed in cemeteries on Friday's nights, lists of commodities and ingredients (*vingira*, F 102) required for sacrifices, containing among the items albino's body parts (*mkono wa zeruzeru*, F 103) are described in detail in the novel (F 102-3).

Nevertheless, modernity affects traditional spiritual beliefs and new kinds of modern spirits<sup>17</sup> start being praised by *nyimbo mashuhuri za mizimu wa kisasa* (well-known songs for modern spirits, F 116).

The balancing of the scale is always sliding between contrasting epistemologies: "*Kama uchawi wa Kiswahili umeshindwa, tutajaribu uchawi wa Kizungu*" (F 239) - if Swahili witchcraft fails (*juju* and other witchcraft practices, black magic and fetishes), we will try with European witchcraft (corruption and blackmail).

#### 4.3.2.3. MAGIC, THE PARANORMAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

People in Africa strongly believe in witchcraft, curses, and mythological diseases, which can be used as strategies either to warn people or to discourage them from taking risks. If people fear the curse or the practice of sorcery, they will probably avoid taking risks. Thus, the occult can be considered as a good strategy to prevent AIDS, though superstition in society can be problematic. For instance, many people believe that they can succeed in life because of the sliding scale of fortune that can be controlled by magic. So if they want to achieve goals in life, such as happiness, richness, going up the ladder, they must make use of *juju magic*; thus, they can become slaves of their superstition as well as victims of fraudsters and blackmailers. Therefore, the novel is a stereotypical critique of current society after neoliberal reforms<sup>18</sup>.

The narrative discourse naturalises the supernatural and the realm of marvels entered into the everyday: characters believe in the power of bewitchments and omens such as the evil eye: "*jicho la husuda*" (the evil eye envy, F

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<sup>17</sup> Several new names have been coined for the numerous types of spirits praised by the numerous ethnic groups of Tanzania (information provided by Mauya 31-1-2019).

<sup>18</sup> The information provided in this paragraph is an extract from the interview with Athumani Mauya (Dar es Salaam, 30-1-2019).

4); *kama jicho linaua sisi tungekwishavalisahwa sanda* (if looks could kill, we would already be dressed in shrouds, F 4); *damu ya kunguni mwaya* (the blood of a bed bug is idle, a bad omen, F 4).

According to the “**epistemology of inclusion and complementarity**” (Rettovà 2021a), not only witchcraft and curses, but also spiritual disembodied entities such as the Islamic mythological genies, appear without judgement as part of people’s daily routine:

*Kila tulipokwenda tunaambiwa kuwa kakaliwa vibaya huko kwenye biashara zake, amerogwa, katupiwa jini makata, wengine wamesema jini subiani, wengine jini la msukule, wengine wamesema amekumba upepo, wengine wamesema kategewa tego kwa mke wa mtu, wengine wamesema kategewa usinga.* (F13)

Wherever we went, we were told that something went wrong at his business, he has been **bewitched**, a **jinn makata** (that kills by cutting down its victims) or a **jinn subiani** (that kills by sucking victims’ blood) has been thrown at him<sup>19</sup>. Other people said he was assaulted by a **living dead** instructed by a witch, or he has blown the wind, or he was affected by the curses of either **tego** (a disease coming from witchcraft. If an adulterous man has sex with a married woman, she will infect that man) or **usinga** (a witchcraft practice performed by betrayed married women against their unfaithful husbands or their extra-marital lovers) or **limbwata** (a type of food prepared by women to bewitch men so as to avoid men’s infidelity or to cast a love spell)<sup>20</sup>.

Dreams not only are the gateway to other worlds and other ontologies such as witches and “grave dancers” (Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 1), but they are also instruments to foreseen future events or reveal bad omens (*mkosi*, F 136) through an **epistemology of extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition** (Gyekye 1995):

*Ameona jini* (F 45)

She saw an evil creature.

*Aliota wanga wanacheza goma ya mahepe makaburini na watu wamebeba jeneza wanakwenda kuzika* (F 40)

She dreamed about **grave dancers’ witches**<sup>21</sup>, who were dancing **mahepe**, a witches’ night dance, at the cemetery and people who were about to bury a coffin.

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<sup>19</sup> The Islamic spirits jinns can be of different kinds. There are spirits from the coasts, from the sea, the forests, mountains, and rocks (Swantz 1990).

<sup>20</sup> All these detailed explanations were provided to me by the author during the interview (31-1-2019).

<sup>21</sup> Those witches are an illusion, and they appear dancing naked in cemeteries or flying on traditional plates or magic baskets. They are usually not dangerous, do not kill people but scare them only.

Magic appears as a fundamental part of everyday activities. For instance, in Buna's agenda:

*Likizo ya mwaka tarehe 20 January hadi 17 February [...] juju tarehe 25 January* (F 47)

Annual leave from 20<sup>th</sup> January to 17<sup>th</sup> February. The **juju** sorcery on 25<sup>th</sup> January

Or in daily discussions at the office:

*"Mkurugenzi ni mwingi wa habari kama amerogwa!"* (F 86)

"The director is full of information as though he were cursed!"

Suddenly and without warning someone can bump into creatures such as: *jini au mfu kutoka kaburini* (a jinn or a spirit of the dead risen from the grave, F 222) or can ask a witch or sorcerer to transform an enemy into *ndondocho*, *kizuu*, *kibwengo* (a zombie enslaved to a witch, a living dead soul working for a witch, an elf, or evil sea spirit, F 222).

The "realm of marvel" is linked to the material world, yet remains an unknown mystery for humans:

*Tumemuumba sisi wenyewe binadamu katika mawazo yetu kama tulivyowaumba majini, mashetani na viumbe vingine visivyonekana* (F 61)

We have created him ourselves in our human minds the same as we have created the images of jinns, devils and other invisible creatures

Cemeteries are inhabited by supernatural creatures such as the grave dancers and witches, the *wanga* (F 104), who are an optic illusion like *ignis fatuus* or will-o'-the-wisp, *ndondocho* (F 106), people who are believed to be dead have been bewitched by witches to become their slaves or *vizuu* (F 104), the evil spirits of dead people who are resurrected to be employed by witches to kill people. The symbol of "marvel *ajabu*" is the *tunguri*, the magical gourd (F 107-8). The power of magic is enclosed in marvellous object like the amulets: *hirizi hii ina maajabu kuliko yale maajabu saba ya dunia* (this amulet is more marvellous than the seven wonders of the world, F 112).

Finally, in life the most important criterion is to believe in the power of magic to either heal or harm: *juju linafanya kazi kwa wanaoamini* (a witchcraft performance works for those who believe in it, F 228), opening the gate to an **epistemology of magic and juju**.

#### 4.3.2.4. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

In this novel the Islamic credo of the author, a native of the Islamised Swahili coast, can be perceived clearly. HIV/AIDS is an illness which brings people

closer to reflections on the invincibility of death, the existence of God and an afterlife.

Even the Islamic mythological creatures of *Ziraili*, the angel of death, cannot escape from it. He is the link between this immanent world and the other metaphysical world, reserved to those who believe (*dunia ya pili*, F 6, 10).

Religion fails against HIV/AIDS; however, on the one hand, death is flavoured with the possibility of an afterlife:

*Ugonjwa huu hauna dawa, kinga, tiba wala dua. Ukikupata tu utavaa sare ya wafu, yaani sanda* (F 12)

This illness has no cure, nor prevention, it cannot be cured even by Islamic prayers. If you are infected with it, the shroud (typical dress for corpses along the Swahili Islamic coasts) will be your dress.

On the other hand, agnosticism confronts religious premises of an afterlife:

*“Nani kukudanganya kuna pepo na moto au maisha baada ya kufa?”* (F 84)

“Who deceived you about the existence of Heaven, Hell, or an afterlife?”

#### 4.3.2.5. STIGMA: EPISTEMIC MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN

A space in this novel is dedicated to debate the condition of women in postcolonial societies, who are dominated by male chauvinism and patriarchal legacies. For example, they are often excluded or disfavoured during hereditary devices (F 28), but they are also oppressed by neoliberal economies (Katrak 2006; Nnaemeka *et al.* 2016). Nevertheless, they negotiate “spaces from the edge” (Nnaemeka 1994; 2003) fighting for their right to speak and be heard (Fricker 2007; Chimakonam 2018). For example, the character of Hidaya in the novel (F 28 - 31) speaks in front of men, advocating for justice toward Bi Kunguru during her husband’s hereditary dispute, although she was insulted and outraged.

Epistemic injustice against women is challenged by both poems, which fracture the narrative of the novel (see the poem *Dhuluma kwa Wajane*, injustice against widows, F 36-7) as well as Euro-American slogans in English, that advocate for women rights are quoted: “*Stop dominating women*” (F 32).

Economic constraints and lack of education lead to less access to information on HIV/AIDS and, especially if this information is distributed in English and not in Swahili (Mutembei 2014), as in the episode of the two prostitutes at the bar:

*“Ukipimwa ukaonekana positive ina maana huna, lakini ukionekana negative basi unao.” “Hawajui maana ya positive na negative katika upimaji wa afya ukiwemo UKIMWI.”* (F 161-2)

“If you test and the result is **positive** it means you **don’t have** it, but if the result is **negative** it means you **have** got it.” “They do not know the meaning of positive and negative in a health test including that for AIDS.”

Mauya’s message aims to ensure and protect women’s access to knowledge and education, as Mngazija (29-01-2019), author of the novel *Njia Panda* (Crossroads 2004) states: “*kumsomesha mwanamke unasomesha ulimwengu*: educating women is like educating the whole universe”.

#### 4.3.2.6. THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF HIV/AIDS

*Firauni* the debauchee is the carrier of HIV/AIDS, and *Buna* is a hooligan, who embodies AIDS (Setel 1999a). HIV/AIDS, like witchcraft, is the outcome and the response to modernity and its complexities (Geshiere 1997; Abrahams 1994; Moore & Sanders 2001). In fact, it is just one among several modern diseases:

“*magonjwa mengi ya kisasa kumi na kushara*” (F 11).

“contemporary illnesses are **countless**.”

HIV/AIDS euphemisms are anchored to familiar concepts and objectified in concrete elements:

“*ugonjwa wa kisasa wenye jina ni UKIMWI ambao una majina kemkemu: ngoma, waya au miwaya, uneme<sup>22</sup>, Juliana na mdudu*” (F 12)

“the popular contemporary disease is HIV/AIDS which has several (metaphorical) names such as **drum, electric wires, electricity**, the clothes of *Juliana* sold at the black market, and an **insect**”.

According to Islamic discourses, HIV/AIDS is judged to be “the payment for fornication” (*malipo ya zinaa*, F 22).

To be HIV positive is like “*ana bastola* – holding a gun” (meaning that an HIV-positive person can spread HIV killing other people, F 88). Or, “*UKIMWI basi ni mtandao, tutaunganishwa wote kama treni inavyofungasha mabehewa*” (AIDS is a network (of illicit sexual relationships), to which we will be linked like a train that is followed with wagons from behind, F 5). HIV/AIDS has no cure and thus is known through metonymies (Mutembei 2009a) which signify either symptoms *mkanda wa jeshi* (herpes zoster, F 38) or consequences: to die and to be buried:

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<sup>22</sup> TANESCO the Tanzanian national electric company is also a popular metaphor for HIV/AIDS among the youth (Mngazija 2000, *Njia Panda*).

*dawa yake kamba tatu au pembe nne* (F 12)

its treatment is made up of either **three ropes** (used in Islamic burial to lay the corpse folded in a shroud underground) or a **four-cornered coffin** (as per Christian burial)

HIV/AIDS is explained in everyday conversations and popular communication through myths. For example, the myth of *mitumba* (F 23) the used clothes sent as aids for the Third World from Europe (Mutembei 2009a). The other popular myth is “us vs the other” which describes HIV/AIDS as the illness coming from abroad (Mutembei 2009a). “Hell is other people” (Sartre 1989), or *FANTA: Foolish Africans/Americans never take alcohol* (F 66).

The new modern and effective cure for HIV/AIDS steams from people’s cognitive reason (*dawa za akilini*, F 68) influenced by prevention campaigns slogans such as: *MM1-Mume mmoja, Mke mmoja* (one husband for one wife, 68); *ATN-Acha Tendo la Ndoa* (abstain from sex, 68); and *TK-Tumia Kondomu* (use a condom, 68), which encourages people to change their behaviour.

HIV/AIDS can also be an accident at work (*ajali kazini*, F 162) with a double interpretation: one aimed to decrease the stigma that means that HIV can be caught by accident at work by anybody; whereas, the other interpretation is connected to the result of risky jobs like prostitution and sex workers.

The phenomenon of *UKIMWISHAJI* is widely applied to proverbs and saying as follows: “*sukari imeingiwa na mchanga*” (the sugar was polluted by sand, AIDS, F 168); “*nzi kufia juu ya kidonda si haramu*” (for a fly to die in a wound is not illicit, F 185); “*ametulia tuli kama mtu anayesubiri majibu ya UKIMWI kutoka kwa Daktari*” (he froze steel like someone who is waiting for the HIV test result, F 189); “*nakuogopa kama UKIMWI*” (I fear you like AIDS, F 210); “*ukificha tatizo au matatizo huwezi kupata ufumbuzi*” (if you hide problems (HIV/AIDS), you cannot find a solution; if you do not test for HIV, you cannot receive a treatment like ARVs, F 232); and, “*Ipi bora ufe haraka kwa kukosa chakula au ufe polepole kwa UKIMWI?* (Which is better to die quickly of starvation or to die slowly of AIDS? F163).

#### 4.4. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE TWO NOVELS

“African images of evil clearly show the human image of anti-justice” in the form of bloodsuckers or zombies controlled by a witch (Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 17 - 20; Larsen 2015). *Kisiki Kikavu* illustrates how evil is both the explanation of and the reaction to misfortune and illness, or “the encounter with every day in search of justice” (Lambek quoted in Olsen & Van Beek 2015: 1). Witchcraft and the supernatural, such as *mahembe*, the bloodsucking vampire-spirits of the Haya mythology, explain the aetiology of illnesses like HIV/AIDS and epitomize the hope for a cure.

Extremely embedded in the Kagera region cultural context of the eighties, this historical and documentary novel recognises local epistemologies as valid cognitive explanations showing irreverence towards science. “Irreverence” undermines the cognitive approaches of scientific rationality, which was incapable of solving the crisis, opening up more culturally oriented perspectives (Warnes 2005b; 2009).

Driven by the stylistic devices of the narrative, the “code of the marvel” (Rettovà 2016c; 2021b) erupts every now and then into the code of realism that characterizes a documentary novel, based on historical sources, enriching the narrative with clashing epistemes and showing “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009).

Magic, witchcraft and divination are valued as sources of knowledge (Gyekye 1995) “epistemologically justified” (Mosley 2004) even without the test of science (Cooper & Morrel 2014). Omens, premonitions, and dreams imbued the novel with the **epistemology of extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition**. The supernatural and otherworldly ontologies operate a “re-mystification of the narrative” (Faris 2004) through the “**epistemology of indeterminacy or complementary inclusion**” (Rettovà 2021a) as well as the “**epistemology of marvel**” (Rettovà 2021a).

Christianity fails to answer questions and to save human bodies and souls. Thus, **the epistemology of religious beliefs** clashes with **epistemological scepticism** that renders people disillusioned in faith and leads to an existential resignation to a coming death. However, the state of unknown surrounding HIV/AIDS, giving a test to both science and local beliefs opens the way to an “**epistemology of awe**” (Rettovà 2017).

The novel fosters a communication aimed at abandoning stigma, dismantling the culture of silence and blame and fighting for justice from inside injustice.

*Firauni* illustrates Zigua traditional practices and customs with the aim of handing down a heritage of culturally oriented knowledge through contemporary literature with “faith” (Warnes 2005b; 2009). Faith exposes epistemologies and ontologies based on local thought systems, presents a “world of omens and curses typically African” (Cooper 2008), and interprets magic and the supernatural as a cultural anthropological representation of a worldview or belief system (Warnes 2009: 14).

Of relevance in the narration, **the epistemology of magic** is the mode of cognition by means of which witchcraft and divination work, accessing the unknown, the supernatural, and the paranormal to either exorcise evil or curse someone else by *juju* and black magic.

Furthermore, *juju* blessings or curses are “social diagnostics” of modern uncertainties, inequalities and individualism (Moore & Sanders 2001: 3; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993); popular superstitions and occult economy are

condemned as well as the contemporary moral decay of neoliberal societies, political misconduct and corruption. Even though several globalized institutions are criticized, the established scientific education on HIV/AIDS is promoted in this contemporary fiction.

The prose is rich in intertextuality, “heterogenous textuality” and “**generic fracturing**” (Rettovà 2021b: 2), which appear under multiple formats from orality: poems, ritual songs, myths, proverbs and sayings to modern communication media: letters, advertisement slogans and SMSs, which illustrate an **epistemology of genre** that articulates interchangeably the *epistemological plurality*.

*Kisiki Kikavu* and *Firauni* provide thought-provoking portraits that include independent ontologies and epistemologies. Indeed, I explain this type of novels as “descriptive-reflective”, for they both describe and reflect upon the varied and divided facets of reality. In the next chapter, Mkufya’s novels will be analysed as an example of philosophical reflections, action-oriented towards the achievement of a balance among heterogeneous rationalities, which is capable of overcoming marginalization and injustice by humanism and a holistic worldview.

# Chapter 5

## William Mkufya’s Trilogy: “*Diwani ya Maua* – The Poetry of Flowers”

### Part One

In this chapter I am introducing William Eliezer Mkufya (Lushoto 1953) as a thinker and an author of philosophical speculations in the shape of novels. Mkufya has been the main participant of my research and my “research guide”<sup>1</sup> from the summer of 2018, when I was preparing my field trip, onwards. In fact, the fundamental experience of my field work research (Dar es Salaam, October 2018 - March 2019) was acting as participant observer in William Mkufya’s life. I selected him as he is one of the most prominent authors of Swahili novels on HIV/AIDS in a philosophical key and the author of *Ua La Faraja* (The Flower of Consolation, 2004) and *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (The Existence of Flowers, 2019), which will be analysed in detail in the following chapters as the core case study of my project.

William Mkufya not only is a self-trained writer, novelist, and philosopher, but he also works as an editor and translator. He is currently editor

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<sup>1</sup> I want to express my heartfelt thanks to William Mkufya for his generosity, and for the trust he gave me, in granting me access to his personal materials and the unpublished manuscripts of the second part of the trilogy, *Uwa wa Maua*, which was subsequently published as *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (2019). In fact, he gave me the permission not only to read, analyse, and discuss the new and still unpublished versions of the manuscript with him since October 2018, but also to follow further developments in the crafting of this novel. Finally, I thank Mkufya for having accepted my comments on the novel.

in chief at the *Mangrove Publishing* house of Dar es Salaam and a translator for European Union projects as well as a major contributor to the Canadian project CODE, “The Children’s Book Project”, which aims to improve English literacy among African children.

Mkufya started writing in English; however, after having translated his first novel *The Wicked Walk* (1977) into *Kizazi Hiki* (This Generation 1980), he continued writing novels, children’s literature as well as poetry - mainly in Swahili. In fact, he was defined a primary example of bilingual Tanzanian writers<sup>2</sup> (Bertoncini 2005; Gromov 2011), who “introduced the trend of self-translation in Tanzania” (Gromov 2011: 286).

Furthermore, the author explained to me that he prefers to express himself through the genre of novel so as to gain more space for manoeuvre, merging prose and verses, experimenting and changing artistic style, depending on what he wants to express. “A writer is the creator of imagination, which is an exemplification of the reality from their own personal experiences proposed to the readers as a hypothetical, but possible situation lived by their characters” (Mkufya 3-10-2019<sup>3</sup>).

The anglophone novels *The Wicked Walk* (1977) and *The Dilemma* (1982) represent the author’s first phase of literary realism. These have been followed by the phase of experimentation of “new novels” (Gromov 2014; 2019; Khamis 2005), which generated the philosophical epic *Ziraili na Zirani* (Azrael and Zirani, 1999), before returning to “neo realism” (Rettovà 2016e) with the *Diwani ya Maua*.

The trilogy<sup>4</sup> *Diwani ya Maua* (The Poetry of Flowers) is a fictional work based on philosophical speculation and an intellectual quest regarding life, death, and faith in relation to HIV/AIDS.

The flowers (*maua*) are an insightful metaphor both for the fragile existence of human beings and the presence of good persons in this world. In fact, the human life cycle is similar to that of flowers: “the flower of humanity is the short period of time when they (human beings, like flowers) are alive and blossoming” (Mkufya 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> Another example is the female writer Elieshi Lema editor in chief of *E&D Vision Publishing* in Dar es Salaam. I met Lema personally during fieldwork research and I had both a formal interview with her on November 27, 2018 and informal conversations. She wrote the anglophone novel *Parched Earth* (2001) and many novels for children and young adults (*Mwendo* 1998).

<sup>3</sup> When the reference is “Mkufya” plus a date that means that I am referring to either data collected during formal oral interviews or the date of reception of written interviews/document exchanges received by email from William Mkufya.

<sup>4</sup> I am analysing the first and the second published novels; the third volume is still in process.

The titles in the trilogy are *Ua La Faraja* (ULF<sup>5</sup>) (The Flower of Consolation 2004) and *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (KKM) (The Existence of Flowers 2019)<sup>6</sup>. After the immediate success obtained with its first edition, ULF was published in Kenya in 2005; then, after winning both the TEPUSA (Technical Publication in Africa) Best Manuscript Award in 2001 and the prize for “Best Swahili Novel” as book of the year in 2006, it was reprinted in a revised edition for schools in 2007. Finally, the novel was translated into German as *Blume des Trostes* by Barbara Schmid-Heidenhain in 2016.

*Ua La Faraja* not only refers to the wreath of flower used during funerals, but also *ua* metaphorically represents the protagonist, Dr Hans, “*the flower of society*” (Mkufya p.c.<sup>7</sup>), who brings knowledge and reason, as well as hope and consolation. This is a realist novel which speaks about the conflicts and reactions generated by HIV/AIDS among the characters. ULF is a comedy which ends with the triumph of life, and where all the conflicts are resolved. Even though the tragic heroine dies, she dies in peace; the tragic villain repents, and Dr Hans succeeds in giving consolation/*faraja* to all who have suffered loss from HIV/AIDS. Conversely, *Kuwa Kwa Maua*, which refers to the existence of good and kind persons, who are flowers, is a philosophical dissertation and a “*pure tragedy*” (Mkufya p.c.), which ends with life shadowed by death, reminding us of the frailty of human existence. At the end of this novel all the tragic heroines commit suicide, either as a cathartic rebellion or because all of them succumb to the frustration of the absurdity of life (Camus 2005).

As Mkufya interprets the concepts (p.c.), *Kuwa* refers to the general state of being/existence, both becoming and ongoing, which expresses the uncertainty of (the location of) things, which, like a river, never stays, but *Panta Rei* – “everything flows” (Heraclitus’s theory). In addition, Mkufya compared the perception of *Kuwa* in relation to Sartre’s concept of the unconscious “Being – in – itself”; while, *Kuwapo*, the locative derivation from *Kuwa*, corresponds to Heidegger’s “Being-in-the-World” or Sartre’s consciousness of the “Being – for – itself” that is “conscious of what is not”. Therefore, through this awareness the “Being – in – itself” becomes what it really is: “nothingness or non-being” – or “*usifuri wa Maisha*” (Mkufya 2019), and thus, human beings must create themselves from nothing by acting in the world (*Being and Nothingness*, Sartre 2003).

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<sup>5</sup> Henceforth the acronyms of the titles of the novels (ULF; KKM) will be used throughout the dissertation instead of the titles in full.

<sup>6</sup> The names suggested for the two novels that are sequels to *Ua La Faraja* (2004), at the time when the first novel was published, were: *Maua Nyikani* and *Ua Limenyauka* (Mkufya 2005a; Bertoncini 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication. When the reference is “Mkufya”; “Mkufya’s p.c.” etc. it means that I am referring to expressions and sentences extrapolated by the author during our conversations or interviews (Dar es Salaam 2018/19). Mkufya’s communications are italicized.

Furthermore, human beings must acknowledge their own *utu*, that is, humanity or humanism, in relation to one another - the humanity of flowers (*utu wa maua*) (Mkufya 2019; *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre 2007). Mkufya merges multiple philosophies and introduces a constructive criticism of Western philosophy into his own cultural environment, rethinking it in Swahili words with creativity and style.

Mkufya chose the symbol of flowers for the trilogy because flowers are beautiful and attractive, yet they are fragile, and they have a brief existence. In ULF, the sunflower appears (*ua la alizeti*), symbolizing the beauty of life whereas in KKM, the hibiscus suggests the presence of distressful secrets in life.

The *Maua* trilogy, according to Mkufya, is an oeuvre which aims to explore the meaning of life, the fear of death, the existential absurdity of life, and religious attitudes towards both death and sexuality in connection with HIV/AIDS. For example, people live with the illusion that death is a remote reality; thus, they struggle to achieve several goals: material goods, power, and knowledge. On the other hand, the incurable disease of HIV/AIDS challenges us, and life starts becoming meaningless. This trilogy also attempts to portray and oppose a desperate attitude towards life so as to make it less difficult for HIV/AIDS sufferers. *Ua La Faraja* and *Kuwa Kwa Maua* not only debunk the existence of Heaven and Hell, but also oppose the absurdity of life. Thus, the aim of “Dr Hans, the universal hero of the *Maua* trilogy, is to declare that the salvation of human existence is in the moment of life itself and not in the after-life” (Mkufya unpublished<sup>8</sup>).

Furthermore, Mkufya wrote (email 8-4-2019) that dealing with an issue like HIV/AIDS in literature is difficult, because it is necessary to use modern science yet one must remember that science is one among all the other domains of knowledge. Finally, both science and literature must be *extricated* from politics.

From a closer observation of the stylistic structure, I realized that even though ULF and KKM are novels, they have been stylistically developed as if they were theatrical plays. In fact, the novels are divided into chapters and sections that can be considered as acts and scenes. Moreover, the main characters overlap with the choral orchestra, and their actions, behaviours and gestures express both theatricality and “performativity” (Butler 1993), by representing and moulding characters’ “style of Being” (Butler 1988: 521). Through thorough descriptions of the way his characters act and talk and through characters’ speech acts, Mkufya aims to produce actual social changes, communicating effective messages. Finally, there are detailed descriptions of both the environment (houses, bars, what the characters eat and drink), as in a playscript, and performative elements such as songs and traditional chil-

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<sup>8</sup> “A story in three novels about HIV/AIDS, fear of death and existential absurdity”, Mkufya unpublished (January 2019).

dren's games. Children express emotions and feelings by playing and singing. Therefore, poetry, prose, narrative, and drama are mixed together, as well as the elements of bodily gesture and interaction with the audience. "*African stories must be performed*" (Mkufya p.c.).

Mkufya, in his novels, reproduces the "theatricality of the African culture" (Fabian 2004) and describes "cultural performances" (Fiebach 2004), by performing theatrical phenomena beyond the performance formats into narrative texts.

The stylistic evolution from tragic dramas to tragic novels in African literatures implies that the tragic sensibility and dramatic form, transposed in modern African novels, illustrate the individualization of tragic events in postcolonial societies (Kortenaar 2006), and represent an aesthetic instrument to reproduce African worldviews in written narratives (Soyinka 2005; Achebe 2014).

According to Kezilahabi's "onto-criticism", literature is not *mimesis* (representation), but an ontology; an "ontological aspect of metaphor, symbols and ritual" (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018: 215) aimed at the erasure of the boundaries between *mtu*/subject and *kitu*/object as a kind of negotiation of ontological differences between humans and non-humans (things and nature) (Rettovà 2018: 452). Thus, Mkufya's novels are ontologies, whose narration not only is a story told by characters but also is life as it is lived and perceived by human beings, without any distinction between knowledge and understanding. Characters are alive: "*people who take their own lives and go anywhere they want*" (Mkufya's p.c.).

At the beginning of the first volume of the *Diwani*, the author lists the main characters, who are the protagonists of the entire trilogy, by name, surname and ethnic group in a list of participants, so as to familiarize the readers with them and clarify how they develop as personas. In addition to the core protagonists, all the other characters who act in each novel also cover a specific function and are listed as per Mkufya's characteristic style at the beginning of each book. The author describes his characters thoroughly: the way they move, behave and dress, as well as their personality and souls. Characters' ethnic groups are also explained to illustrate not only their cultural traditions but also their typical joking relations.

Dr Hans Jumbe is the real hero of the entire trilogy; he can strengthen vulnerable and victimized characters by relating to them, and they are then converted into fighters – like Tabu and Grace. Although Asha Kabeya has a strong personality, Dr Hans provides her with philosophical knowledge. However, Dr Hans becomes old over the course of the trilogy, and needs the support of Kristina, his wife, who becomes stronger.

Women are the most important and strongest characters. Mkufya told me that he was indeed inspired by his daughters in portraying female characters as he wished they would become cultivated, self-sufficient, resolute and free one day.

The story, in both the novels, is told in the third person by an unknown external narrator (EN) who is neither a character nor an actor in the fabula (Bal 1997). However, Mkufya (20-8-2019) identifies himself as the external narrative voice: “*However, is me who give to the characters freedom to speak differently, and sometimes they fight one another*”.

The main characters of ULF are James Omolo *Jaluo*; Ngoma and his wife Tabu with their children: Juma, Aisha, Nuru, Rahma and Abu; the two *Sambaa* sisters Tabu and Grace; Asha Kabeya *Manyema* a brilliant businesswoman owner of Hotel Victoria; Queen is the beautiful and successful lawyer; Dr Hans Jumbe *Sukuma*, is a fifty-five years old medical doctor, committed to research and assistance for HIV/AIDS, together with his wife Kristina, a teacher.

The chapters or acts evolve in parallel with the evolution of the characters’ feelings and emotions, such as *Hofu*/fear (embodied in Tabu and Ngoma), *Majuto*/regret (embodied in Ngoma), *Faraja*/consolation (embodied in Dr Hans and Tabu), *Buriani*/farewell (Tabu’s death), *Uzazi*/childbirth (Tumaini’s birth).

KKM is divided into six parts, subdivided into different scenes/acts: 1. *Uchuro* - bad omens: I – *Kijumba, Kijeba, Kibunzi* - the small house, the small goat and the goat’s game; II- *Wandava* - the bully girls; III- *Kudra* - destiny; 2. *Ma-isha* - life which is what is going to end; in this part Dr Hans’s theories on sex are explained (*nadharia* 192); 3. *Hofu* - fear (embodied in Hadija) and *Uhalifu* - assault (Zahoro Kabeya); 4. *Tanzia* - tragedy (the chain of deaths of Omolo, Asha, Tuma and Hadija); 5. *Maombolezo* - mourning in which can be discovered an opportunity or a ray of hope (*fursa*), and *Udhahiri* - evidence of human existence (Dr Hans and Haji’s dialogues) that questions the myth on sex (*kisasili* 426); 6. The epilogue: *Uzazi/Masumbuko* - childbirth/ agony (Masumbuko’s childbirth disturbed by Grace’s death).

The main characters are the following: James Omolo and his wife Grace with their daughter Tumaini (Tuma), Asha Kabeya and her brother Zahoro, Hadija and her son Haji, Dr Hans and his wife Kristina, and Aisha Ngoma and her brother Juma.

Speaking about the chronology of the trilogy, the *Diwani* starts with ULF that was written in only three months in 2002 and published in 2004. The second volume, KKM, took a longer time to be written from 2006 to 2019; in fact, the author started writing it in 2006, during his period as a guest writer at Bayreuth University. However, the project remained incomplete because of economical constraints. Then, the writing started again after the Bayreuth *Swahili Colloquium* in 2017, and the novel was completed at the author’s office “*kambini*”, in the camp, in Dar es Salaam; finally, the manuscript was published in October 2019. Mkufya has recently started writing the third part of the trilogy.

Narrated in the present time, the entire story takes place in the district of Tandika “*Mtaa wa Mbuyuni*”, in Dar es Salaam (Bertoncini 2005). ULF cov-

ers a period of seven years, starting immediately after the discovery of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, when Queen discovers that she is HIV infected, and ends with the childbirth of Omolo and Grace's daughter, Tumaini, who is the protagonist of the second novel (around 1987 according to Mkufya's document 10-10-2019<sup>9</sup>). The sequel starts 10 years after the events narrated at the end of ULF, and the plot covers a period of six years, from approximately 1997 to 2003, the year when the great tragedy happens (Mkufya 10-10-2019).

A linear conception of time can be perceived following the progressive evolution of events in the story, as per the novelistic genre style (Watt 1987). Contrary to the idea of a long past and present with almost no future (Mbiti 2011), the novel discloses a projection towards a long-distance future for HIV positive people through the undertaking of ARV therapies (Beyaraza 2000). Time for sick people can continue even after their death, provided that they have a progeny. Thus, linear time comes back to a circular alternation of life and death, dawn and dusk.

Therefore, in each novel the time of the events described in the narration are arranged into a linear sequence; however, the linearity is challenged when the novels are examined all together. Thus, time comes back to a circle similar to the cyclicity of human beings' life. In fact, ULF ends with both death (Tabu) and birth (Tumaini) and KKM ends with both deaths (Omolo, Asha, Tumaini, Hadija) and birth (Masumbuko, Tumaini's brother). The trilogy is a three units' circle, which is the allegory of the life cycle: life, death and rebirth, and each novel represents in turn a life cycle.

ULF and KKM are symmetrically opposed, like Life (ULF) and Death (KKM), and the trial of AIDS connects both. In fact, "*life and death are the pillars of philosophy*" (Mkufya 30-11-2018). ULF is a realist novel, which presents life as it is, portraying people's real lives and their struggles; while KKM is a philosophical speculation, which investigates life, trying to provide the reader with an interpretation of it, using AIDS as a vehicle. Reflecting on life and death, KKM is more engaged with mystery and symbolism. ULF is a comedy which ends in peace, consolation and a hopeful childbirth as the triumph of life, in contrast with KKM which is tragic all the way. In fact, the characters commit suicide full of regret and sorrow; the tragic villain is ignorance embodied in Hadija, an annoying character; and the final rebirth is violent and ominous. The *uchuro wa ukoo*, the catastrophic and tragic legacy, is passed on from Omolo to both his children. The novel depicts an apocalyptic situation, where all the main characters are destroyed, families collapse, and the project of Dr Hans and Asha to seek a cure for AIDS is threatened.

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<sup>9</sup> "Wendo wa matukio ya Trilojia ya Maua 1980 - 2014", Mkufya unpublished.

## 5.1. *UA LA FARAJA* – THE FLOWER OF CONSOLATION

I would like to introduce ULF personally, as the enchanting and complex novel. I have been analysing ULF since 2011 - 2012 when I was a Bachelor exchange student in Tanzania. Even though the plot seems easy and linear, every time I read it, I find new appealing elements. I remember the first time I read the novel while I was on a ferryboat on Lake Victoria, sailing towards Ukerewe island to visit the birthplace of the philosopher Euphrase Kezilahabi. Likewise, I remember Mkufya and I reading the original manuscript of ULF together in his office that he calls “*kambini*”, during my last fieldwork in Dar es Salaam (2018/19).

Although many literary critiques have already been written on this novel (Bertoncini 2005; Rettovà 2007a,b; 2021a; Kinara 2012; Kinara & Mwanzi 2015; Bulaya 2016), I would like to add my contribution based on knowledge and understanding acquired by being with the author for six months.

### 5.1.1. PLOT

ULF is the story of three families which intermingle together. Ngoma and Tabu are a married couple with four children, while Tabu’s sister works as a secretary for James Omolo *Jaluo*. The story starts when Queen, a successful lawyer, and one of Ngoma’s mistresses was discovered being infected with HIV. Therefore, all the characters connected to her panicked, among them the entire family of Ngoma, Omolo, who had had sexual intercourse with her, and Asha Kabeya *Manyema*, a businesswoman, widow of an Australian man, Hastings, and one of Ngoma’s mistresses. Tabu, infected by her husband was treated by Dr Hans Jumbe, who started providing her with a cure and assisted all the characters, among them Omolo who was unable to love and enjoy his life.

The main quarrels are related to Ngoma and his family: Ngoma infected his wife, and after discovering his illness he became *mcha-Mungu* (a God-fearing person, ULF 121), repudiated his wife because of her returning to Christianity, and broke with Juma, the elder son, who started hating him for having condemned his mother to death. However, in the end he found internal peace of mind, repented and made peace with Tabu, revoking the divorce, and his children. He left his inheritance to the children, “letting his brothers wrestle for it uselessly” (Bertoncini 2005: 5).

Asha started being treated and runs her managerial activities at the hotel and the foundation to support the orphans of AIDS. In the end, Queen killed herself, whereas, Ngoma and Tabu died of AIDS. However, Tabu and Ngoma’s children found solace, supported by both Omolo’s and Dr Hans’s families.

Omolo and Grace got married, Omolo accepted the challenge of being in love with someone, and Grace delivered a baby girl Tumaini, with hope.

### 5.1.2. CHARACTERS AND PERSONAS

The characters<sup>10</sup> incorporate either virtues or vices of humanity. **Ngoma** (dance, drums) is the embodiment of HIV/AIDS, as his name clearly shows being the drum as a metaphor through which AIDS is commonly objectified. AIDS is also embodied in **Queen**<sup>11</sup>, the well-educated and beautiful lawyer, as *mkanda wa jeshi* (herpes zoster, ULF 20, 39). The difference among the two vectoral characters spreading HIV/AIDS is that Ngoma was a drunkard and womanizer infecting his family, whereas, Queen is an economically and culturally independent woman making her own choices.

Mkufya aims to “deconstruct the gendering of AIDS” (Wilton 1997: 3), which is considered a “women’s disease” (Muriungi 2005) and is located into the bodies of “sexually aggressive women” (McFadden 1992: 181). In fact, “AIDS redefines female sexuality in even more rigid guilt-ridden terms” (McFadden 1992: 181-2) and obliges people to think of sex as “dangerous but inescapable” (Attree 2010b: 87) and as having two consequences: suicide or murder (Sontag 1991).

**Asha Kabeya** and **Dr Hans Jumbe** are example of what I define as “**choral sages**”.

Firstly, in Mkufya’s novels, an “individualisation of the chorus” (Mkufya 20-08-19) took place; in fact, the communal chorus was substituted with pivotal individual or choral characters (Mutembei 2012); however, they are not flat as the choral characters usually are. Indeed, Mkufya’s round characters engage in complex dialogues, which invite deeper reasoning and reveal their psychological and intellectual insight.

Moreover, Asha and Dr Hans can be interpreted as “*walimu wa jamii* - teachers of society” (Kresse 2009: 150) and “sages” (Oruka 1990), Asha is a folk-sage and Dr Hans a philosophic sage. Nonetheless, both of them are “intellectually adventurous thinkers” (Wiredu quoted in Kaphagawani & Malherbe 2003: 228) depositories and revisionists of tradition, capable of criticizing the negative aspects of traditional culture by means of independent critiques and scientific learning. Obviously, Dr Hans is a medical doctor, highly educated in scientific subjects, and a philosopher, while Asha has not had a proper formal education, thus she refers more to her traditional culture. However, Asha is not a conformist, nor does she accept all the traditions without personal

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendices: Table of Characters in the *Diwani ya Maua*.

<sup>11</sup> Swahili women on the coast used to occupy ruling positions and they were called *Mwana* “queen” (Topan 2004: 214).

thoughts. Moreover, she was taught scientifically and philosophically by Dr Hans, evolving into an even more round and mature character.

Furthermore, Dr Hans acts as an epistemic hero (Medina 2013), fighting together with marginalized people because of gender and HIV/AIDS and advocating for cultural traditions which have been covered by colonialism (hermeneutical injustice, Fricker 2007).

[...] “watu wamedanganywa na Wazungu mpaka wakasahau umuhimu wa historia na asili yao” (ULF 358)

[...] “people were deceived by the Europeans until they forgot the importance of their history and origins! <sup>12</sup>”

Neither Dr Hans nor Asha are narrators, but many times are the focalizer of the narration (Bal 1997), and reflector-characters (Stanzel 1981), conveying Mkufya’s ideas. Finally, they are also *watani* capable of using *utani* joking relations for resolving social problems and conflicts (Christensen 1963; Nombo 2007). Particularly, Mkufya embraces *utani*, which he defines as “*tonic ya Maisha - a life-boosting tonic*” (Mkufya 2005a; Mkufya 31-10-2018) to harmonize families and communities and to show humanity by offering consolation and support to the others.

The narrator is an external narrator (Bal 1997) who tells the story in the third person overlapping with an omniscient authorial voice. Characters’ speeches reproduce the social heteroglossia which shows different belief systems through dialogic tensions (Bakhtin 1981). However, different voices must be heard even from inside a single character, illustrating their self-reflections and psychological insights (Khamis 2007c), especially Dr Hans and Asha, who are gifted with the voice of wisdom.

The heterogenous and polyphonic speeches reproduced in this novel show all the social strata, from the most educated characters, medical doctors and lawyers to the humblest people, like the bar maids Pendo and Chiku. According to characters’ level of education and environment, the languages change colour, from the use of English words to Arabic loan words for the members of Islamic community.

I claim, looking at Mkufya’s characters, that he seems to be opposing the concept of cross-cultural “exchange” as a hybridization (Bhabha 1994). The characters, in fact, do not lose the purity of their culture, merging it with other cultures. They keep the practice of their traditional culture, on the one hand, and recognise the progress of modern science, on the other hand. More

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<sup>12</sup> All the translation from Swahili to English are mine unless otherwise indicated. All emphases mine. I acknowledge William Mkufya for the editing of my translations in this chapter (last editing May 2020). However, all the shortcomings are my responsibility.

than a hybrid they are aimed towards a third way of solidarity and cooperation without hierarchy.

Dr Hans is the link between Western philosophy and local epistemologies. Asha Kabeya bridges culture, common sense and modernity. She is deeply engrained in her traditional culture, she is a *Manyema* woman well instructed by her grandmother, she dresses, she moves as the representative of her ethnic group. In the meantime, she is a free woman, who conducts her own business as the owner of the Hotel Victoria all alone in a society led by men, and she enjoys the pleasure of life: alcohol, smoking, having sex with freedom. Therefore, she represents also an example of “no-ego feminism of negotiation” (Nnaemeka 2003) in between the African traditional legacy handed down by her grandmother and a modern Western woman, having received Western influences through her marriage with an Australian man.

She is also a humanist. In fact, she could not give birth to a child because of her HIV positivity, but she takes care of the community with a trust dedicated to support orphans. The strength of Asha can be compared with that of Queen and her modern lifestyle, and with the two pious and virtuous sisters: Tabu and Grace, although they behave moderately, this does not mean that they are not strong female characters. Tabu confronts her husband, takes care of her children and faces her disease with courage. African womanists accommodate men, since women are indispensable to male husbands and sons (Eboh 1998). Mkufya’s female characters are a good example of “self-authentication within cultural boundaries” yet “with negotiation, compromise and capability of effecting changes” (Nnaemeka 1995: 106-7).

The other core character is **James Omolo**, who not only is an existentialist thinker, *mwenye itikadi ya kidhanaishi* (Bertoncini 2005) – “*Udhanaishi* means *dhana ya Maisha*, or *intellectual vision of life*” (Mkufya 18-01-2019), who suffers the nausea of life, questioning its short-lived meaning, but also a materialist and agnostic, committed in the quest for an evident meaning of reality “directly accessible to human cognitive capacity” (Rettová 2007a; Mkufya 1999). He is deeply annoyed by the regular and repetitive organization of life, rejects any constraints such as marriage (*pingu za maisha*, the handcuffs of life, ULF 26), and he is horrified by the idea of having a child. “*He has a negative attitude towards life like me*” (Mkufya 30-10-2019) and, thus, reproduction as well as relationships only have the meaning of extra sorrow. What is the meaning of life? *Ndio nini sasa?* (What is that for? ULF 30); why am I struggling every single day to achieve nothing in the end? These are the main concerns of Omolo. Without metaphysics, the reality, which is looking for Omolo, the one which can be perceived by means of the five senses, results in being transient and vain.

*“Kuna manufaa gani au raha gani ya ajabu, iliyowafanya watu wayahangaikie maisha? Alishaangaa kwa nini hata yule mwenye maisha ya shida anapougua na kukaribia*

*kifo, hafurahii kwisha kwa shida zake akifa, bali huhangaika kujitibu ili apone halafu aendelee na shida zake!*" (ULF 30)

"Which is the advantage or what is the cause of the weird happiness/satisfaction which makes people struggle for life? He was surprised because people, even the ones with a life of struggles and troubles, when they fall ill approaching death, do not enjoy the end of all their troubles by dying, they struggle even more instead, to find a cure, to recover and to continue living and remain in the same troubles!"

Omolo could not accept the troublesome and crippling routine of life, why people have to suffer if they will not be rewarded anyway. If life is too painful, it is not worth living or struggling for. However, we must bear in mind that even Sisyphus (Camus 2005) is happy rolling his stone up and down the hill. In the end, Omolo's desperate vision is challenged by Dr Hans who resolves his struggles, finding the answers in local practices like the importance of traditional life-cycle rituals. Omolo, firstly, needed to fulfil the traditional *jando* initiation, which implies circumcision, to fully occupy a space in society as well as in the family, marrying Grace and having a child, contributing to the perpetuation of life. Not only did Dr Hans resolve the matter as a medical doctor, but he also covered the role of *mtani* a joker, teasing Omolo with the *Kama Sutra* (ULF 349).

### 5.1.3. TRADITIONAL RITUALS AND PRACTICES: RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Dr Hans is the link between modern medicine and local knowledge (Geertz 1993) that he uses to both address and solve the crisis. He combines two opposites *taasisi* (institutions): the local cultural and the international scientific knowledge; he, in fact, advocates for *jando* and *unyago*, but also refers to statistics and reports.

The first concern of Dr Hans is how "*Waafrika wauchukulie ugonjwa huo*" (how African people interpret HIV/AIDS and how they react to it, ULF 47). Dr Hans illustrates HIV/AIDS in Africa as a cultural question due to the epistemological clash that led the population to a crossroads (*njia panda kiutama-duni*, ULF 47). The social and economic vulnerability of African countries lets HIV/AIDS spread as:

*"Kama moto ulioshika kwenye msitu unapogundua chaka la majani makavu unavyopamba, ndivyo UKIMWI ulivyoivamia Afrika"* (ULF 38)

"HIV spreads like a fire in a forest of dried leaves, this is indeed the way AIDS assaulted Africa"

Nowadays, foreign customs (not only about sexuality), coming from the colonization by Europeans and Arabs, as well as from Islam and Christianity, af-

fect sexual ethics and traditional practices, contributing to the erosion of traditional societies (ULF 46 – 51); whereas, traditions are fading, for example, sexual behaviour and ethics used to be taught in traditional society through initiation rituals such as *jando* and *unyago*.

*Kama magonjwa mengine ya zinaa, kulikuwa na uhusiano mkubwa na tamaduni na maadili ya ngono katika jamii husika. Mwafrika wa asili alikuwa na majando na unyago yaliyohusu makuzi na elimu ya ngono, maadili na ufanisi wake. [...] Katika utamaduni na maadili ya Kiislamu na Kikristo [...] hakukuwa na maelekezo kamili kuhusu makuzi na elimu ya Watoto kuhusu ngono, ndoa na uzazi. [...] Utamaduni wa dini hizo ngeni uliifanya ngono ionekane kama kitu cha kuogopwa. (ULF 48)*

As other STDs, HIV/AIDS had big connections with cultural and sexual norms of the specific society. Originally, African people used to have initiation rites to foster sexual education, ethics and its efficiency. In Islamic and Christian culture and ethics, they do not have proper explanations to foster education among youth on sex, marriage and reproduction. The culture of these foreign religions renders sex as something to fear.

Dr Hans realized that many of his patients do not receive *jando* or *unyago* teachings and they speak about sex as a sin originated from the myth of Adam and Eve. Males have their circumcision done at the hospital, yet they lack the most important part of the rites: initiation is much more than circumcision, they are ethical and social teachings. Dr Hans defends *jando* and *unyago* as the bastion of epistemic resistance (Medina 2013; Santos 2007) against the loss of the cultural and historical heritage swallowed up by external cultural influences. However, he recognises the fragility of certain traditions and he does not defend ignorance “*usitetee uzembe*”, as Mkufya says, like FGM. Although some lessons from the initiation are debatable, because they make women inferior to men, those can be improved by contemporary forms of education (Mkufya 2004: 49).

Dr Hans fights against hermeneutical epistemic injustice, moving towards epistemic responsibility, which means seeking for knowledge that has been concealed or tamed. An example of this is cultural traditions in society:

Dr Hans: “*Eti mambo ya jadi siku hizi yamekuwa Sanaa ya kuwafurahisha wageni kwenye mahoteli ya kitalii! Watu wanajifanya wamekwenda jando kwa tohara, lakini jadi zao hawazijui!*” (ULF 413)

“Surprisingly, traditional performances nowadays have been reduced to arts for entertaining foreign guests in tourist hotels! People claim to have undergone their initiation having been circumcised, however they do not know or give value to their traditions.”

An example would be the taming of the typical erotic dances of Southern Tanzania - the *Sindimba* and the *Lizambe*- reinvented in the urban context subjecting the female agency of performances, that would now be reduced

to a stereotyped vision of women “swinging their hips smiling” for tourists (Edmondson 2007: 71). Thus, HIV/AIDS is the result of the destruction of traditional society and the development of a new world order:

*“Ugonjwa wa UKIMWI uliunyemelea ustawi huo na kuanza kula kutoka kwenye mizizi kuelekea kwenye shina na matawi yake” (ULF 51)*

“The illness of AIDS intruded into this prosperity and started eating and corroding from the roots upwards to the trunk until its branches.”

Dr Hans explains how “Western epistemological fascism” suffocated “the epistemology of the South” (Santos 2014), oppressed by Arab colonization and European imperialism first, and then, by Islamization and Christianisation. This cultural imperialism imposed foreign values, suffocating local ones, and the traditional social establishment has been replaced by a new social order which is not African. This process produced long stretches of “*time of destabilization*” (Mkufya 31-10-2018) making African society vulnerable because of “a clash between ethics and values” (ULF 47ff). “*Jamii imara imetengenezwa na watu imara*”- says Mkufya (31-10-2018) - “*a strong and stable society can only be produced by upright people*”. Conversely, African people became “*slaves of the strangers’ cultural imperialism*” (Mkufya 31-10-2018) which pushed their own cultural practices to the fringes and threw the population into confusion: “*Msahau kwao ni mtumwa*” (who forgets his/her origins is nothing but a slave, ULF 357).

*“Huu ugonjwa wa UKIMWI usababishwao na virusi umetukuta tayari tunaugua UKIMWI wa kijamii. Umekuta jamii yetu haina kinga ya lolote linalotuvamia iwe njaa, vita, ukame, madawa ya kulevywa au migogoro ya kisiasa. UKIMWI wa kijamii umeshakula utu wetu, uzalendo wetu, busara zetu na Imani zetu. Sasa tumebaki ndani ya mataifa tuliyoundiwa na Wazungu, kisha tukasadikishwa Imani zao, mila zao, na tafsiri yao ya utu na utaiifa” (ULF 357).*

“This illness of AIDS, caused by a virus, encountered us at a time when already we were suffering from **social AIDS**/the **AIDS of society**<sup>13</sup>. It found our society already affected by a **social immune deficiency syndrome** which rendered our society unable to protect itself from everything that could assault us such as famine, barrenness, drug abuse and political struggles. This **social AIDS** had already eaten our **human dignity**, our patriotism, our wisdom and our traditional beliefs. Now we find ourselves within national boundaries created by Europeans, and we accept as truthful their beliefs, their culture, and their interpretation of humanity and nationalism.”

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<sup>13</sup> **UKIMWI wa kijamii** (the societal/social AIDS), or **UKIMWI mwenyewe** (the actual syndrome of AIDS), is a metaphorical notion that explains how all historical traumas suffered by African societies made them vulnerable and unable to protect themselves from any catastrophic events. It also implies the social impact of AIDS. Mkufya, document on *Sexuality* 24 January 2019, Dar es Salaam.

Dr Hans alleges that:

“Wazungu waliuua **utu**<sup>14</sup> wao na kuunda **utu mpya wa Mwafrika. Utu usio Uzungu wala Uarabu wala Uafrika. Utu kama shairi guni – Utu-guni, usio na mwangwi wala lahani. Wakafanikiwa kuwatawala hao watu-guni.**” (ULF 361)

“The Europeans killed our traditional human identity (and values) and created a new African identity. An identity which is neither European, nor Arab, and not even African. A human identity that is like a defective-poem – a **defective human identity**, like music without melody nor echo. Then, they succeeded in ruling those **defective (flawed) people.**”

He stresses that:

“Tuache upuuzi wa kutaka usta-arabu au usta-ingereza. Tuwe **wasta-duni! Msta-duni ni mtu anayefuata utamaduni wake wa asili na anayeheshimu tamuduni za wengine bila kuzichukia au kuzidharau**” (ULF 363).

“We need to stop the absurdity of aspiring to imitate the Arab or the English civilizations. Let’s aspire to be “**culturally civilized**”! To be culturally civilized means to be contented and follow our own traditional culture and to respect habits and customs of the other without detesting nor ignoring them.”

It is important to criticize the weakness of one’s own customs with the intention to improve them, without rejecting one’s traditional culture completely:

“**Ustaduni**<sup>15</sup> wake unazifanya tofauti za uasili wao kuwaimarisha badala ya kuwahitilafisha” (ULF 363)

“This “**cultural civilization**” enables their diverse characteristics making both stronger and less defective.”

Furthermore, “*utu wa Mwafrika*”- African identity, used to be made of communalism not individualism: being in the world as a society. Consequently, contemporary African nations seem to have lost their authentic humanity; therefore, Dr Hans described contemporary African humanity as *utu guni* a defective (ruined or confused) humanity and the social AIDS (**UKIMWI wa kijamii**) as *conditio humana* in this contemporary world (Rettovà 2007b: 120). It became obvious that what is needed are knowledge of and education on actual humanity- “*utu wa kweli*” (Mkufya quoted in Rettovà 2007b: 120).

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<sup>14</sup> Mkufya translates the concept of *utu* as not only humanity but also human values, dignity and identity.

<sup>15</sup> Mkufya here is playing with terminology. Since both the terms civilization, *ustaarabu*, and culture, *utamaduni*, in Swahili are Arabic loan words, he suggests avoiding them. Instead, he coined *ustaduni*, from the merging of the terms *ustaarabu* and *utamaduni*, which means a cultural civilization, or a civilization grounded in one’s own cultural traditions.

The imitation of colonial manners is a mimicry, a mode of representation that mocks the power, represents it diminishing and menacing its authority. Therefore, the ambivalence of the colonial discourse which aims to create the “Other as a subject of a difference that is *almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 1984: 126), disrupts and disturbs instead the colonial authority itself. Mimicry rearticulates presences by the emergence of a “metonymy of presences” – “*almost the same but not quite*” (Bhabha 1984: 130), standing metonymically to the hegemonic presences and subverting them. The objective is to obtain “*utu wa kweli* – actual humanity” and “*ustaduni* – culturally specific civilization” (Mkufya 2004).

### 5.1.3.1. UTANI RELATIONSHIPS

Mkufya dedicates lot of space to traditional African practices: *utani* or joking relationships, which are a common expression of *Swahiliness* (Kresse 2005b), and which, for him, are a way to cope with ethnicity encouraging solidarity and peace among all human beings: “*wangoni ni watani wa wamakonde*” (the Ngoni people are *watani* of the Makonde, ULF 237).

This practice of joking and stereotyping are portals to endogenous knowledge systems (Hountondji 1997) and expressions of “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morell 2014). The custom of *utani* is utilised by people to solve social crises through proverbs, sayings, and pungent satire, typically connected to sexual matters. *Mshenga*, the matrimonial messenger (ULF 398), and *mtani*, the joker (ULF 377) are key figures in traditional life-cycle rituals such as marriages and funerals, where joking performances are needed to celebrate or give solace.

In ULF (377-80) *watani* appear at Tabu’s burial ceremony, bringing natural alcoholic distillations and beer to give solace to the family members of the departed person, and they conduct their jokes together with Dr Hans and Kristina who took the role of *watani* themselves. Dr Hans as a *mtani* told a joking tale; thus, the narrative becomes performance in the form of an oral folktale to channel a specific message (Barber 2005) according to its “specific textuality” (Barber 2007).

“*Hicho ndicho kilichomaliza Msambaa: pombe, wanawake na Waganga!*” (ULF 379)

“This is what ruined the **Sambaa** man: alcohol, women and wasting his money to pay healers!”

“*Leo au Kesho, nenda ukasimame kwenye barabara kuu uone msururu wa majeneza ya Wachaga waliokufa kwa UKIMWI yanayopelekwa Moshi. Nani anaendeleza uzinzi na pombe kama si Mchaga na Msukuma?*” *Kwenda kwa waganga na uchawi?*” (ULF 380)

“Today or tomorrow go to the main country route, you shall find a row of coffins of the **Chagga** people who died of AIDS which are being sent to Moshi for burial.

Who are coddling alcohol and fornication if not **Chagga** and **Sukuma** people?  
Who is the frequent visitor to healers or those who practice witchcraft?"

These joking dialogues give an example of jokes at funerals and testify to the importance of burial ceremonies. In Africa, there exists a historical "funeral culture" (Golomsky 2018) which implies a complex ritual aimed at purifying and dignifying the deceased. Dignity is a social, existential and moral value. Thus, a "dignified funeral" involves respect for the deceased as well as the responsibility for living parents and family. It is a public event which shows how the individual is part of the community, and finally, it should be well organized and well prepared, starting from the corpse cleansing, to singing and cooking (Golomsky 2018: 5 - 6).

### 5.1.3.2. SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL PRACTICES

In ULF, HIV/AIDS transmission is mainly connected to sex; conversely, in KKM the evolution lies in the fact that HIV is chiefly a blood infection. A major topic for discussion is the importance of sexual privacy on *sehemu za siri* (ULF 60) - the "secret body parts".

Mkufya explained that "*sex should be kept as confidential*", and Mutembei (interview 15-11-2018) told me that "*sex was not a confidentiality in traditional African society but nowadays people want it to be a secret*".

There are not, according to Mkufya, established sexual relationships in society. Sex is both a biological necessity and entertainment. However, the increase in the utilisation of sex for entertainment purposes, while the purpose of propagation of the species remains stable, leads to an abuse of sexual indulgence (*kiranga*, ULF 70). Sex is sacred, it is a stabilizer of families and society, which used to be mainly targeted to reproduction and clans' perpetuation (Mkufya 2004; Setel 1999a; Mutembei 2001). However, if abused and negligent, sex becomes harmful, also in connection with the HIV infection, thus, putting at risk the whole lineage of the infected person (Mkufya 2004; Setel 1999b; Mutembei 2001; Dilger 2008; 2006). Sex is sacred, but if abused it becomes "*kama zimwi au shetani linalowaandama watu*" (an ogre or the devil that haunts people, ULF 344). This is one of the main concerns of Dr Hans on which he reflects and debates more.

For example, Omolo complains that: "*chochote cha starehe, hatima ya hamasa yake ni ngono*" (anything luxurious, the end of its motivation is sex, ULF 317).

Omolo had a negative attitude towards sex and reproduction, which was corrected by Dr Hans's teachings:

*"Nadhani wewe unaiona ngono kama zimwi au shetani linalowaandama watu [...] Ngono sio jambo la kuogopwa na kuepukwa, ni jambo la kuheshimiwa [...] upotofu*

*wa ngono umesababishwa na wale wapuuzi walioiharamisha na kuiita dhambi”* (ULF 344-5)

“I think you consider sex to be something like an ogre or a devil that haunts people. [...] It is not something to be avoided or feared, but something that demands to be respected. [...] ignorance surrounding sexuality was caused by some fools, who declared it to be dirty and unlawful, calling it a sin.”

Sex is linguistically shaped according to gender and age. For example, among young people, sex is described as *mavituz* (ULF 18) “doing things” in secret. Among adults and married couples, on the other hand, sex is described by means of Arabic loan words connected to the erotic sphere of pleasure (Nzegwu 2011) such as *shauku* (sexual desire, ULF 17) *ashiki* (passionate love, ULF 62). In fact, sexuality is open and enjoyable provided that it respects social norms (Ahlberg-Maina 1994).

Asha expresses the knowledge handed down by her grandmother through the teachings of *unyago*, the female rite of passage, which drives sexual pleasures in the form of what Nzegwu (2011) calls *Osunality*, African eroticism. Thus, Asha was able to live her sexuality with pleasure while she was married with Hastings, her late husband. Men and women are complementary partners and Asha kindly cured Hastings from sexual weakness, using the traditional aphrodisiac *mkuyati* as a solicitous wife to help her weak and older husband Hastings to take part in sexual activities (ULF 100).

“*Mpumbaze apumbaye*”: “amuse him (with sexual pleasure) so he is amused” (*Mwana Kupona* 1858; Topan 2004: 219), and you can control him. Asha enjoyed her sexuality, pleasing her husband, and she will recall this time on many occasions in the second novel with nostalgia as her “temple of love” (*utawisho*).

#### 5.1.4. LIFE PHILOSOPHIES

##### 5.1.4.1. EXISTENTIALISM AND MATERIALISM

Mortal diseases like HIV/AIDS are what push us in front of the meaninglessness of life, becoming fully aware of its ultimate end: death (Camus 2005). The characters of Omolo and Queen question the meaning of existence and are annoyed by life’s routine.

Omolo: “*Ndio nini sasa?*”; “*faida ya maisha ni nini?*” (What for? What is the benefit of living? ULF 30); scepticism and agnosticism seem to have taken its toll on Omolo’s thoughts; without transcendental meaning life has no meaning:

“*Mtu huzaliwa, huishi na kisha hufa. Hakuona faida yoyote ya kuwemo katika mzunguko huo. Aliona kama mchezo wa kitoto usio na maana yoyote*” (ULF 113)

“Humans are born, live, and then they have to die. He didn’t see any advantage to being inside this compulsory circle. He perceived it as a children’s game that is completely meaningless.”

*Alihesabu kuzaliwa kama adhabu na sasa alikuwa amepewa adhabu kali zaidi: adhabu ya kufa kwa UKIMWI, tena UKIMWI wenyewe ulisababishwa na tendo la kipuuzi: ngono. (ULF 114)*

He regarded being born as a punishment, but now he has been given an even worse punishment: the punishment of dying of AIDS, as a consequence of an even more stupid action: having sex.

The concept of punishment for Omolo as an agnostic is different from the religious perspective of the characters who believe. For Omolo, it is a metaphorical sufferance to keep doing something that you know has no meaning at all, while he is pervaded by a feeling of nausea (Sartre 2000). The serious philosophical problem is whether to oppose the absurdity of life or to succumb to the absurd committing suicide (Camus 2005: 1).

Queen’s reaction to having AIDS was to accept the impending death completely, stopping suffering by the disease and killing herself: “*Si upuuzi tu! Mimi sioni tofauti yoyote kati ya kuwapo na kutokuwapo...*” (just a nonsense/absurdity! I don’t see any difference between being here or not being anywhere at all, ULF 159); “*nimeamua kuumaliza huu mchezo*” (I have decided to end this game, ULF 199); “*ndio nini sasa?*”; “*maana ya kuwa halafu kutokuwa ni nini?*” (what does it matter? What was the meaning of being here and then being nowhere? ULF 30).

Furthermore, Queen anticipates in ULF important arguments developed in KKM by Dr Hans: the difference between being and nothingness, and the existence or non-existence of an afterlife.

Queen was an agnostic, more likely to reject the existence of an afterlife, but she asked the questions: “*baada ya kufa kwake itakuwaje! Hivi kuna Maisha baada ya kifo?*” (what will happen after her death! Is there life after death? ULF 79).

Thus, being and nonbeing stand as equal terms because existence is doomed to nullify itself into nothingness, and human beings’ life is as fragile as the existence of flowers:

*Alikuwa kama ua la alizeti, lililochanua [...]Ua limenyauka laelekea kukauka (ULF 77)*

She was like a sunflower blossoming [...] The flower now has shriveled and is going to dry up.

Queen was not a believer, and this made her afraid of the darkness. Thus, she wishes she were able to believe in something as a source of consolation:

*“Aheri yule asemaye kuna pepo ambapo ataienda baada ya kufa. Hata kama ni uongo anakufa akiwa na matumaini” (ULF 79 - 80)*

“It sounds to be better for one who says that there is a heaven where he believes to go when he dies. Even though it is a lie, he, at least, dies with hope.”

This argument is opposed by Dr Hans, who instead states that religion is not a real source of consolation but a source of anxiety (see also the dialogue between Dr Hans and Masufuria, KKM 448-53).

Moreover, Queen, like Omolo, would not give birth to someone else condemning him or her to a “life that is nothing but a punishment” (ULF 78), and, like Omolo, she was more annoyed by the thought of how she got the infection than of the idea of dying itself by “*jambo lile lenye ulazima wa ajabu*” (that action which stems from an awkward/mysterious necessity, ULF 85).

Conversely to Omolo, Queen did enjoy sexual pleasures. In fact, Asha and Queen are “the expression of being in the World” because they do not regret any choices or actions, even though they led her to catch the virus. In life beautiful things are never priceless, so you must profit them: this is indeed the value of immanent pleasure like sexual activities (Rettovà 2007b: 115).

Omolo fears life more than death. As Dr Hans said, he refrains from loving like someone who is anticipating death itself:

*“Kufa ni kwetu sote. Lakini si vyema mtu kutanguliza kifo katika Maisha. Ishi halafu ufe”* (ULF 297)

“Death is part of all of us. However, it is not auspicious anticipating death in lifetime. Live then die”

Existentialist reflections question the value of life, which is vain, and whose vanity can be solved by a strong humanity handed down from generation to generation, and deal with the invincibility of death. Here comes into play the role of HIV/AIDS which brings death closer to human minds:

Dr Hans: *“UKIMWI ni ugonjwa uliofanikiwa kumdhihirishia binadamu ukweli kuhusu kutodumu kwake. Akasema, kiumbe chochote kifacho, kinapofumbukiwa na kujijua ukweli wa kutodumu kwake, kitaanza kupata mfadhaiko”* (ULF 418)

“AIDS is a disease which is able to make evident to humanity the fact of their being transient. He said, all the mortal creatures, once they acknowledge the truth and solve the puzzle about their being ephemeral, they start benefiting from that”

AIDS can be transformed into a chronic disease; however, we cannot win over old aging that has no cure as well.

Who is an existentialist character in the trilogy? Dr Hans Jumbe is a philosophical existentialist, similar to Dr Rieux (Camus’s *The Plague*) and Antoine Roquentin (Sartre’s *Nausea*); whereas, Omolo, Queen and Asha are materialists and “*human samples used by the author to represent an existentialist attitude*” (Mkufya 22-11-2019).

#### 5.1.4.2. HUMANISM AND IDEALISM

*Mtu ni utu* (a human being is humanity), thus being human in the Swahili context is strictly related to “morality and goodness” (Kresse 2007). In other words, a human is “a good flower/person” (Mkufya p.c.) who shows humanity towards others.

Although African humanity/identity as a consequence of its troublesome history can be perceived as “defective” and hardened, people demonstrate humanity by taking care of the others in a holistic manner and this is shown through the attention given to the future generations of orphans in the trilogy: Tabu cared for her children until her death, and after her death Omolo took care of them. Asha Kabeya, together with her sister-in-law Catherine Hastings, established a foundation for HIV/AIDS orphans (ULF 339-40). Ngoma repented because of Dr Hans’s role but particularly looking at his daughter, Aisha, revoking the divorce from Tabu (ULF 299).

ULF brings a message of solidarity and humanity against any kind of discrimination, teaching readers to offer comfort and assistance to suffering people. *Utu* as humanity refers to a transcendental source of community moral values, in contrast with existentialism, the anti-metaphysical philosophy focusing on the immanence of the human condition in the worlds, and which leads to the pessimistic vision of a meaningless life (Rettovà 2007b: 89).

Therefore, Dr Hans overcomes the boundaries of human life, between birth and death, through childbirth and reproduction (Rettovà 2007b: 114), opposing the pessimistic existential attitude with optimism, while finding a source of meaning in life. Through childbirth Dr Hans not only overcomes the fear of death; in fact, African existentialism asserts that childbearing and procreation qualify one to become an ancestor and, thus, these are prerequisites to a “good death” (Igbaden 2017):

*“Tusikubali kuwa mataifa ya misukule na ni lazima tuzae”* (ULF 415)

“We must not accept to be a nation of zombies; thus, we must give birth”.

Yet he also solves, at least partially, the question of an afterlife stating that the afterlife of human beings consists in giving life (ULF 379):

*“Anayekufa ni yule ambaye hakuzaa!”* (ULF 385)

“Who actually dies is the one who doesn’t give birth!”

Moreover, the clash between different beliefs is exemplified through the different reactions of the characters in front of HIV/AIDS.

On the one hand, there is the agnosticism of Omolo and Queen, who embody a “cognitive materialism” (Mkufya 29-10-2019) which makes both of

them hopeless regarding the afterlife: “*yeye hakuwa na Imani wala matumaini ya maisha baada ya kufa*” (she had not faith nor hope in a life after death, ULF 80).

On the other hand, Tabu was a good Christian and Ngoma, after being infected, became a fervent Muslim seeking for metaphysical consolation in front of death: “*akaona atafute faraja katika kumwabudu Mungu*” (he felt better looking for consolation in worshipping God, ULF 150). The marriage of Tabu, a Christian, and Ngoma, a Muslim, unveils Mkufya’s agnosticism. He illustrates how religion, in the form of different religious faiths, can be a cause of conflict inside a family.

The conflicts, between different faiths are however overcome in KKM, where we can discover how different worldviews and beliefs can coexist together, enriching one another as in the marriage of Dr Hans, an agnostic, and Kristina, a Christian, as well as the marriage of Omolo, an agnostic, and Grace, a Christian.

*Ua* is Dr Hans, the flower of humanity, a good-hearted person and *mtu mwenye hekima na busara* wisdom and common sense (Kresse 2009). *Faraja* refers to consolation as the one we can find showing humanity towards the other. This is part of Wiredu’s “African existential communalism” (Řehák 2007; Masolo 2004) and Senghor’s “dancing the other” (1964), which means knowledge by participation, merging with the other, as well as with the natural environment which surrounds us, towards a holistic epistemology, which connects all the *vi-hai*, the living and breathing creatures.

ULF is an alive and breathing portrait of authentic characters’ lives and their daily efforts. Dr Hans is the voice of consolation and hope, he teaches people not to fear death and he was capable of changing Omolo, Tabu and Ngoma’s minds completely.

Kristina in the first book covers the marginal role to support Dr Hans in his friendship with Tabu. Kristina never opposes and always agrees, and when Tabu died she gave comfort and solace to her children, particularly to Aisha. She brought the garland of flowers (*ua la faraja*) to put on Tabu’s grave.

Dr Hans: “*Namuomba mke wangu aje tuweke ua la pamoja, buriani kwa mwenzetu, ua la faraja kwa Watoto walioachwa*” (ULF 389)

“I ask to my wife to come and place a wreath together, a farewell flower to our friend, and a flower of consolation for the children she left”

Dr Hans maintains that people must respect and celebrate death (*kusherekea kifo*, ULF 415) as we celebrate birth because that is part of the circle of life, which continues through one’s progeny, and to whom we must pass through traditional and ethical teachings:

“*Utu wa mtu ni ukamilifu wa jadi yake. Mtu asiye na jadi ni ndondochoa...*” “*Au msukule!*” (ULF 415)

“The humanity of a person is the accomplishment of their own traditions. A man who does not have traditions is a Zombie or the un-dead”.

#### 5.1.4.3. OTHER ONTOLOGIES

Mkufya rejects any kind of superstition, because he claims that it comes from religious preaching and ignorance, looking instead to immanent and tangible explanations.

However, supernatural ontologies which escape from immanent observation can appear as “*shani, kioja*”, surprising and mysterious phenomena. The ontology of *shani*, mystery, is everything that falls beyond human cognitive materialism, admitting the existence of inexplicable and non-evident phenomena. For instance, there is the *shani* (unusual, curious but interesting) effect felt by Tabu at the bus stop:

*Safari ya Tabu kutoka hospitalini hadi nyumbani kwake ilikuwa shani* (ULF 219). [...] *Aliona weupe mbele yake, weupe wa kila kitu: nyasi nyeupe, watu weupe, magari na nyumba nyeupe. Kila kitu kilipauka halafu kikapeuka – pee!* (ULF 220) [...] *Alikuwa amemezwa na shani ile iliyokuwa inavuma, inang’ara mwako ulioacha kiwi kwenye hisia zake zote za nafsi* (ULF 220).

The trip of Tabu from the hospital to her place was **weird**. [...] She saw white in front of her, everything was white: the grass, the people, the cars and the houses. Everything faded, and then reappeared in dazzling whiteness. [...] She was swallowed up by that **mysterious** roaring and blazing whiteness which was spreading around. Its shine left a blindness from glare in all the senses of her soul.

HIV/AIDS is itself something that slips away from a complete human and scientific understanding: “*ugonjwa huu una mambo*” (this disease implies abnormal happenings, ULF 234). When humans fail to understand something, they tend to mystify the alien as the dreadful “perception of awe” - the unknown that eludes both scientific explanations and local beliefs (Rettová 2017). Even though the characters feel the awe, Mkufya immediately redeemed the unknown by explanations suitable to human cognitive capacity.

Seldom and quite unexpectedly, magic elements and spiritual ontologies as well as “hauntologies” (Derrida 1994) appear. For example, we see this in characters’ everyday dialogues, which make use of metaphors and aesthetic tools that draw from a local worldview: *Mtu aliyerogwa [...] akabaki mwili tu ambao unafanya kila anachoambiwa na mchawi wake* (A man who is under a spell who has lost his soul and remained just a body, which does whatever its witch orders to it, ULF 415). *Ndondocha* is a bewitched person, while the *msukule* is an un-dead who must work for his master, a sorcerer or a witch (Bertoncini 2005). *Misukule*, the zombies, are created by witchdoctors, who revive dead persons from the grave, just as bodies without mental function to

make them slaves. This is a powerful form of slavery created by supernatural powers controlling the minds of the enslaved. Those souls under the service of their master go around harming people (Mkufya p.c.).

Occasionally, women are “witches” who prepare love potions to involve their willingly or unwillingly male partners in sexual activities (Mkufya 2004). Magic love potions are prepared by female characters to arouse sexual desires in their partners and enable them to be involved in sexual intercourses: *Aphrodisiac- mkuyati* (ULF 100) and the *love juice* (ULF 60). *Mkuyati*, which has nothing to do with the occult sciences, is a naturally extracted drug that has a double function: both to arouse sexual desire and to cause someone to lose control of their own emotions and to be controlled by someone else (this is the case of Omolo, who is subdued by Queen), and to improve sexual performance (in the case of Hastings). Queen is portrayed as a “diseased and dangerous” (Offe 2010) woman, a sorcerer, trying to trap Omolo with her love potion “*juici*” (ULF 60-1; cf. *dawa ya mapenzi*, the love drug, Mbogo 1996: 43).

#### 5.1.5. SCIENTIFIC MEDICINE AND HIV/AIDS

People need to visualize things; therefore, Mkufya describes in detail the condition of diseased bodies, without avoiding the most disgusting phases of terminally ill people like bad odours, sweating, blood, sores, pimples, diarrhoea:

*Fizi zilikuwa nyekundu mno, zenye dalili za vidonda. Lile tabasamu la uzuri alilokuwa nalo zamani sasa lilikuwa limegeuka kuwa la kutisha. (ULF 158) [...] Unene wote uliomba umbile zuri ulikwishasinyaa, amekuwa mweusi, weusi usiovutia. Ilikuwa kama nuru ya mwili wake imeingiza giza. Sehemu zake za siri zilitoa harufu kali kutokana na vidonda vilivyoshambulia nje na ndani. (ULF 166)*

Gums were emaciated and red covered with sores, that smile which used to mark her beauty in the past, now was grim and frightening. [...] The body fat that rendered her to be so appealing had shrivelled, she looked black, unappealingly black. It looked as if darkness had entered into the liveliness of her body. Her genitals stunk because of the sores, which had spread inside and outside her body.

Scientific responses to the disease are unquestioned such as HIV testing to intervene and prolong one’s life. Dr Hans says:

“*Ukipima ukajua mapema kwamba una virusi*” (ULF 208)

“If you test, you’ll know whether you have the virus in time.”

“*Ni kweli kufa ni kufa tu, lakini kila mtu ana tarehe zake, na kama inawezekana kuziahirisha tarehe hizo ni vyema zaidi*” (ULF 209)

“This is true to die is to die, but each person has their own’s date, and if you are able to delay this date it is even better.”

Taking care of oneself is fundamental to postponing death; however, when death cannot be delayed, we do not have to fear. Death used to be a secret and people could not figure out the date of their end, instead with diseases like AIDS and cancer, people perceive death as being much closer.

Dr Hans: “*Hakuna sababu ya kukiogopa, maana huwezi kukiepuka. Mchezo wa kuzaliwa pia ni mchezo wa kujiandaa kufa*” (ULF 213)

“There is no reason to fear death because you cannot avoid it. The game of being born is also the game of preparing oneself to die.”

Euro-American prevention campaigns about condoms are a common feature in many HIV/AIDS novels in Swahili (see Habwe 2009), where volunteers are informing people about condom use in places considered at risk like pubs, bars, guest houses etc.

Promotion of condoms is stereotyped in the youth language as “*Mambo kwa Soksi*<sup>16</sup>!” (Things with Socks, ULF 18); “*walipowahi mavituz walitumia mipira?*” (before having sexual intercourse have you used condoms? ULF 18).

What I am interested in is the language used for promoting condoms, for the character Jose (ULF 18) disseminates information at the *Malaika* bar by reciting a sort of lullaby made up of proverbs and metaphors as a demonstration of how different intertextualized genres, in this case poetry and proverbs, are chosen to articulate specific messages (Rettovà 2021b; Wanjohi 1997).

The proverbs undergo the *UKIMWISHAJI* effect (Mutembei 2007), changing in shape and meaning to better communicate HIV/AIDS message. For example, traditional proverbs are inverted in Jose’s songs as follows: *maji uyavalie nguo ndipo uyakoge!* (ULF 18) You can take a bath only after wearing your clothes (condoms), which comes from *maji ukiyavulia nguo, huna budi kuyaoga*: If you take off your clothes for water, you must bathe. Finish the job you started<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, *ulapo ndizi usiimanye ila ivishe ganda* (ULF 18): when you want to eat a banana don’t peel it off, yet cover it with the peel (Sadok 2012). Finally, *jando la raha leo ni kuvishana magozi!* (ULF 18): the traditional male initiation today is safe and happy by wearing condoms!

In addition, condoms are anchored and objectified (Moscovici 2000; Mutembei 2001) to ordinary elements such as *soksi* (socks), *nguo* (clothes), *ganda* (banana peel), *magozi* (skins), and *mipira* (rubber is the common Swahili term coming from the materials of which condom are made).

However, condoms and safe sex are not the solution to all the problems if people do not control their behaviour by being faithful. For example, in the case of a married couple like Ngoma and Tabu, the husband infected his wife,

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<sup>16</sup> “*Siku hizi mambo sharti kwa soksi*” (Nowadays things must be done with socks, Mutembei et al. 2002: 7).

<sup>17</sup> <http://swahiliproverbs.afrst.illinois.edu/>.

for he neither used condoms, nor was he faithful to his wife (ULF 38-9). In fact, for married couple condoms can be a really annoying issue: “*ukuta wa mipira*” the rubber wall or “*mchezo wa Watoto*” a children’s game (ULF 31; Bulaya 2016).

#### 5.1.6. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL MISCELLANEA OF METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS

ULF is richer in tropes and metaphorical language in relation to HIV/AIDS than is KKM, for the following two reasons. First, it was the time when the novels were written, ULF was published in 2004, and set in the first years of the virus’s appearance in the country, when HIV/AIDS was still unknown to many Tanzanian people. KKM has been completed more recently in 2019, when HIV/AIDS is no longer feared as a mortal disease, but it has now become a chronic illness. Second, ULF is focused on the events lived by the characters, while KKM is focused on a philosophical speculation.

Different environments produce a different soil to feed the characters’ linguistic register (Bulaya 2016). On the one hand, hospital wards are places to confess one own’s sins and a place for repentance. Besides this, the office of Dr Hans is the place to acknowledge HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, bars, night clubs and guest houses “*guesti bubu*” (short time encounters, Bulaya 2016) are places to commit sins. In bars, is where information about HIV/AIDS and condoms circulates, but with a joking and satirical register like Jose, the condom advertiser, as well as the dialogues between the two young bar maids: Pendo and Chiku, at *Malaiika* bar. Sexual jokes and satire are common among the regular guests, namely, Ngoma, Pendo, Chiku, Asha and Omolo: *umeukwaa*: to stumble over HIV (ULF 71); *simba mwenda pole*: the lion goes slowly chasing “pray” to have secret sexual affairs with (72); and *kumuonja*: to taste or to have sex (74) (Bulaya 2016).

A group of tropes is connected to **religious interpretations** of the disease: *kudra* (114) is either the Islamic destiny or the Greek *parcae* and it is a metonymy for HIV/AIDS caused by ill destiny. Metonymies hinting at sexual indulgence, which must be condemned, are often used by Tabu and Grace the two virtuous sisters: *maradhi ya aibu* (shameful diseases, 106); *adhabu ya kifo* (death punishment, 107); *adhabu ya ngono* (punishment for sex, 114). Grace calls it also *doa* (spot, 170) and *gharama za pombe* (the price for alcoholism, 87-8).

“Metaphors can become punitive, giving a disease a moralistic meaning that sounds like a judgement” (Sontag 1991). According to Mkufya, Islam and Christianity, which were imported to Africa, spread the fear of death among human beings, by preaching that the afterlife has either a reward or a punishment. For example, HIV/AIDS is felt as *hukumu ya kifo* (a death sentence, 35)

by Tabu, who is influenced by Christian sermons on God's punishments, cries: *kifo cha aibu. Kiranga!* (a shameful death that is caused by sexual mania, 70).

Moreover, religion leads to a negative attitude towards sex, which is felt as a sin not only when it is outside marriage, but also when it is not for reproduction but for erotic amusement only. As an example, *Tende la aibu, chungu, lililojaa lawama* (A shameful, bitter, guilt-filled elephantiasis, 41). The swelling, which is metaphor for the scandalous consequences, is the punishment for Ngoma. The ancient wisdom adapts to carry AIDS epistemology, such as the proverb: *ukiudharau mwiba utaota tende* (if you ignore the thorn and step on it, your leg shall swell like one with elephantiasis). Literally it means that if you do not care about mosquito bites, you will become as swollen as someone who suffers from elephantiasis. In other words, if you ignore the cause, greater consequences will follow. If you do not protect yourself with good behaviour, you will get the virus of HIV (Mkufya 30-10-2018). Likewise, "*siri ya kitanda aijuaye kunguni*" (those who really know all the secrets of a bed (illicit sexual affairs) are the bed bugs (HIV virus transmission), 21).

The "new disease" *ugonjwa mpya* (153) has been anchored to natural and **traditional elements** such as: *ngoma* (dance or drum, 121, 234), *kidumbwe-dumbwe* (cyclone, confusion, 316), *mbegu* (seed, 234), *kimbunga* (typhoon, 234), and *janga* (50) can be either natural calamity, or generational curse as the result of witchcraft (Ruhumbika 2002). *Mdudu mbaya* (the evil insect, 154) is a metonymy for the HIV virus, which, by means of the anchoring process, refers to the dangerous parasites that ravage plants and crops vital for people's subsistence (Mutembei 2001).

The **scientific** acronym of the disease **UKIMWI** overfills the novel, in fact, the word appears at least 51 times throughout the narration together with other scientific references: *virusi* (149), *ugonjwa wa zinaa* (STI, 249), and metonymies referring to the main symptoms of AIDS such as "*shingles-heppes zoster*" (herpes zoster, 74) and *mkanda wa jeshi* (shingles, 20) which is a "metaphtonymy": metaphor for HIV/AIDS and metonymy for the symptoms, herpes zoster and skin burnings.

HIV/AIDS is also objectified through the analogy of the fast death and "metaphtonymy" (Goossens 1995; Mutembei 2001: 23-4) such as *mbegu za umeme* (electricity, lightning, 87), *kukanyaga waya za umeme* (stepping on a live wire, 175), *miwaya* (electric wires, 231), metaphors which mean to die of AIDS. The electric wires (*umeme*) are the metonymy referring to herpes zoster (Mutembei 2001: 113), while the analogy (Turner 1974: 290-1) inside the metaphor means that AIDS kills as fast as an electrical shock does. The analogy is also developed to indicate the inevitability of death "*umeme (HIV) umeshatoa ishara, tunangoja ngurumu yake (AIDS)*" – "when lightning flashes, we wait for its thunder" (ULF 87).

HIV/AIDS is often described from a scientific perspective as an untreatable illnesses: *ugonjwa usiotibika* (the incurable illness, 170), *ugonjwa usiopona*

(the illness that cannot be cured, 150), *ugonjwa hatari* (the dangerous illness, 178), *kuandamwa na magonjwa* (being pestered by succeeding illnesses, 231, 251), and *kuugua magonjwa mbalimbali* (being sick from multiple illnesses, opportunistic infections, 227), leading to apocalyptic visions: *UKIMWI utatumaliza* (AIDS will end all of us, 202, 234, 316), and *virusi vinanitafuna* (the virus is chewing me, 342).

Thus, the *epistemological miscellanea* reveal the three main cognitive fields of metaphorical representations: religious beliefs, the natural world and scientific medicine.

#### IN THE END...

Omolo remained mired in his existential doubts: “*kuzaliwa ni zawadi au adhabu?*” (to be born is a present or a punishment, ULF 421), regarding the meaning of life which is so ephemeral: “*wa kuja na kuondoka*” (coming and going away).

*Kiini cha yote, Omolo alikiona kama shani. Akabaki ameduwaa akiwaza kisa cha walimwengu kuitwa waja* (ULF 423)

To Omolo, the essence of all these things looked like a mystery. He remained shocked and dumbfounded, thinking about the fate of the human inhabitant of the world, who come into being in this immanent world.

When human beings come across mysterious events that fall out of the “manifestness” (Rettová 2007a) of our cognitive materialism, something that cannot be grasped by human cognitive capacities, we should leave some space to the *mysteriousness and vagueness* of life, which is what makes magic works, by accepting unpredictability as a central part of life (Stroeken 2012).

These last reflections link us to the philosophical dissertation of KKM, together with Asha Kabeya, who when still alive confronts the idea of AIDS as a “death sentence” in fiction (Treichler 2012).

#### 5.1.7. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS ON *UA LA FARAJA*

In ULF, the approach to HIV/AIDS relies on a **positivist epistemology** of modern medicine. However, it is not the only viewpoint explored. Mkufya introduces alternative epistemological perspectives stemming from human practices and interactions.

Traditional lifecycle rituals are ways of knowing, through training and experience and the manifestation of *ustaduni - cultural civilization* (Mkufya 2004: 363). Mkufya’s neologism, which stems from the linking of *ustaarabu*

(civilization) and *utamaduni* (culture) as national customs and habits, entails that each community is built upon a “culturally specific civilization” which cannot be denied:

*Tuache upuuzi wa kutaka usta-arabu au usta-ingereza. Tuwe wasta-duni! Msta-duni ni mtu anayefuata utamaduni wake wa asili na anayeheshimu tamuduni za wengine bila kuzichukia au kuzidharau* (ULF 363)

Just stopping the absurdity of willing the Arab or the English civilizations. Let us be “**culturally civilized**”! To be culturally civilized means to follow one’s own traditional culture and to respect habits and customs of the other without detesting nor ignoring them

The **epistemology of *ustaduni***, as the knowledge at the foundation of cultural civilization, depends on the resistance and resilience of local knowledge and practices according to the globalised progress of time.

Furthermore, two philosophical streams characterize the novel: on the one hand, the pessimistic attitude of **existentialism, scepticism, agnosticism and cognitive materialism**, which feels the anxiety of the meaninglessness of life in relation to the immanent existence in this world, and which rejects any metaphysical claims. On the other hand, there is the optimistic attitude of **idealism and humanism**, to be humans showing humanity, supporting and solacing the other, “being for the other” in relation to a transcendental spirituality and metaphysical beliefs (Rettovà 2007b; 2020).

In the midst of a **holistic epistemology**, based on harmony and communal well-being among all the creatures on earth, and a **relativist epistemology**, based on individual contingent existence, other ontologies intermingle in the phenomenal universe, both hiding and revealing the mysteries of life, such as the *shani*-effect. Thus, unpredictability and contingency in everyday lives can be endured by a touch of magic through an “**epistemology of indeterminacy and complementary inclusion**” (Rettovà 2021a).

Finally, the epistemology of genre demonstrates how the traditional oral heritage, in the form of proverbs and metaphors embedded in written texts (Barber 2007; Kristeva 1986), represents historical deposits which progress according to the current times. For instance, the ancient wisdom in the form of proverbs has been modified to channel a positivist epistemology informed by modern medicine.



# Chapter 6

## William Mkufya’s Trilogy: “*Diwani ya Maua* – The Poetry of Flowers”

### Part Two

#### 6.1. *KUWA KWA MAUA* – THE EXISTENCE OF FLOWERS

KKM<sup>1</sup> is the second blossom of the *Maua* trilogy, which begins where the story of ULF ends.

It is a realist novel, a philosophical dissertation and a “*pure tragedy*” (Mkufya p.c.), yet it is not characterized by “dry realism” (Khamis 2005). In fact, interferences from other realities make their appearance.

Firstly, let me offer an explanation of the title: *Kuwa* means existence, or being. *Maua* is a metaphor for human beings and good people who do not live long.

Mkufya (9-11-2019) explained that there are six interpretations for *Kuwa Kwa Maua*: “existence of flowers, or good persons” (metaphorically: transient

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<sup>1</sup> I followed the progress in the crafting of this novel for a period of one year, from October 2018, when I was in Tanzania for fieldwork research, to October 2019, when the novel was published. I thank William Mkufya for having given me this opportunity. Thus, in this chapter I am not only referring and referencing according to the book *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (2019), but also, where indicated, to the penultimate version of the manuscript received from the author on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2019, which before publication was entitled *Uwa wa Maua* (The Being/Essence of Flowers, UWM). Finally, I thank Mkufya for having acknowledged me in the published edition of the novel (KKM 5).

human beings taken up into a circular existence made up of birth-death-birth); “essence of flowers”, opening up the debate on the true essence of the “human flowers” between idealism, represented by the character of Kristina Jumbe, or materialism, represented by the character of Dr Hans Jumbe; “a flowery existence”, as per Asha Kabeya’s reflections on the perishability of the being (*ma-isha*); “the becoming and being of valuable human beings”, such as Dr Hans the compassionate flower in *Ua La Faraja*; “the manifestation of a conscious being in becoming” (*kudhihirika kwa maua*), as per Dr Hans’s argument about the rare and unique opportunity of being alive for a short while; and “the manifestation (*udhahiri*) of a tangible existence between being and nothingness” (*usifuri wa maisha*), or “a flowering flash of being between the two big eternal zeroes”: before birth and after death.

The style of the novel is a combination of genres: a novelistic narration (Parts I, II, III), which takes place over several years, intermingled with a tragic drama (Parts IV, V, *Epilogue*) The tragedy takes place in only one day and the mourning happens the following day (Mkufya 9-11-2019).

Moreover, there are multi-layered levels of narration: first, there is the plot and the actions performed by the characters, then the story narrated by an external narrator and which overlaps with the events of the plot. Finally, there is the philosophical dissertation, which is disclosed through, and conveyed by, characters’ dialogues.

The temporal space of the novel is defined as taking place over six years, as the characters of Tumaini and Haji grow respectively from 7 to 13 years old and from 10 to 16 years old. The author uses children as protagonists with the intention of describing a shocking tragedy.

Mkufya (20-08-2019) explained to me how in crafting a pure tragedy he was inspired by both classical Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, as shown by typical tragic elements appearing during the narration: *tanzia ya kale* (the ancient tragedy, KKM 315) is a sort of family curse or predestination to fall down as tragic hero. *Busu la uchuro* (the ominous or fatal kiss, KKM 317) is the theatrical scene during which Omolo, Grace and Tuma faint and fall down, lying one on top of the other.

Therefore, following up from ULF’s themes, Dr Hans’s reflections on human life, death and sexuality that are linked together by HIV/AIDS (*UKIMWI wa VVU*)<sup>2</sup>, contribute to developing his theory that the only existing possibility for humans to defeat death is reproduction, living through their progeny. Children are “gifted flowers” - “*zawadi ya ua lile*” (KKM 93). In Africa, childbearing is a core duty of members of the community, to secure the per-

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<sup>2</sup> Mkufya (p.c. 14-10-2021) distinguishes between *UKIMWI wa VVU*, the illness of AIDS, transmitted by the HIV virus, and its metaphorical correlation: *UKIMWI wa Kijamii* (the societal AIDS/the AIDS of society), a diseased identity, caused by the struggling African history.

petuation of their entire kinship. A meaningful or meaningless life, as well as a good or a bad death, depend on the presence of offspring. Therefore, HIV/AIDS is felt as an apocalyptic disease because people die young without children, and even children can die of AIDS, putting at risk the perpetuation of the entire lineage (Setel 1999a; Mutembei 2001; Dilger 2008; 2006).

Parenthood, especially motherhood, is a central theme in the novel: parents stop living for themselves, enjoying the happiness given to their children. Hadija is a single parent struggling for her only son Haji, “being her universe made up of two souls: Haji and herself” (KKM 12, 93). Children play an important role both in the family and in society – “*we live for our children*”, says Mkufya, and as the proverb states, “*ukitaka kumkamata mbuzi, kamata mtoto wake*” (if you want to catch the goat, catch her kid first) (Mkufya 14-11-2018). When the tragic hero is very young, the result is even more catastrophic, because there is no repair and no solution; for example, in Sophocles’s *Antigone*, the death of her brother was more catastrophic than the death of both her parents. We live to give birth, if hope of having a child dies, there is no longer meaning in life (Kezilahabi 2008: 180).

### 6.1.1. PLOT

The protagonists of this story are two children: Tumaini James Omolo (Tuma) and Haji Mzito. Tuma is Omolo and Grace’s daughter, and Haji is the illegitimate son of one of the maids working at Asha’s hotel, the poverty stricken Hadija. Tuma is strongly bound to Haji in a friendship relationship; while, Hadija has been welcomed under the protective wings of Asha Kabeya as a daughter.

Tuma is a rebel, and one day when fighting with an older girl at school, she was infected with HIV. In the meantime, Hadija discovers that her man Zito (Alfred Mzito), a wicked person and a criminal, infected her with HIV, and she, who had not had the blood test done, transmitted HIV to her son.

The three “sages” of the novel are as follows: Dr Hans Jumbe, his wife Kristina, and Asha Kabeya, the owner of the renamed Hotel *Nyanza*. In fact, the hotel was initially called Hotel *Victoria* (ULF) after Lake Victoria; however, when Asha’s Australian husband, Hastings, died, it was renamed with the precolonial Bantu name of the lake (KKM). Dr Hans and Asha establish a research laboratory to seek a cure for HIV/AIDS. However, Asha has violent quarrels about economic and religious matters with her brother Zahoro who vandalizes the *Kisarawe HIV Research Centre*.

Moreover, Tuma and Haji are suspected to have had sexual intercourse during their teenage years. Thus, when a letter from the boarding school informs Omolo of Tuma’s HIV positivity, the great tragedy happens. Omolo

dies from a heart attack, Asha kills herself with poison, Tuma commits suicide by plunging herself from the heights of the Hotel *Nyanza*, and Hadija after having tried to poison Haji, poisons herself. Grace, who is pregnant for the second time, becomes a madwoman until she delivers her son Masumbuko and then she dies in childbirth.

In the end, Haji inherits money from Asha's trust foundation, and Dr Hans looks after him with his wife Kristina. Other characters who appear are the neighbours, who perform the roles of the joker, Nyara, and Mzee Ibrahimu, the wise man. Hubiri Masufuria represents the anti-chorus opposing Dr Hans's last sermon, and the traditional sage authorities are Bibi Mtumwa Nyasimba Kabeya, the *ngariba*, instructor in traditional rituals, and the healers and diviners Bw Ngezi and Bw Mgaya.

### 6.1.2. CHARACTERS, CHORUS AND ANTI-CHORUS

Characters in KKM can be analysed in groups: the sages, who are people "*mwenye hekima na busara*" – gifted by wisdom and common sense (Oruka 1990; Kresse 2009), and personas who embody philosophies (Dr Hans, Asha and Kristina); traditional figures such as the healers and the traditional *watani* jokers; choral characters (Mutembei 2012) (Nyara, Mzee Ibrahimu and Hubiri Masufuria); and, the existentialists thinkers (Dr Hans, Asha and Omolo) "*mwenye itikadhi ya kidhanaishi*" (Mkufya 2004).

Asha and Dr Hans are sages, who incorporate both scientific and traditional knowledge: Dr Hans is more a man of science, while Asha sometimes lets common sense and traditional knowledge prevail.

Moreover, Dr Hans, Asha and Tuma are "epistemic heroes" (Medina 2013) fighting against both "hermeneutical and testimonial injustices" (Fricker 2007). In fact, Dr Hans and Asha, on the one hand, rediscover traditional African practices which have been suppressed during colonial times, for instance, the value of traditional initiation rites. On the other hand, Tuma and Asha, although they are of different ages, advocate for women's rights to be heard in society.

The *mtani* advocates and divulges traditional epistemologies in the forms of customs and mores through their satirical dialogues. Nyara and Asha conduct together core discussions making use of *utani* with the aim of peace building in the spirit of *utu* humanity as the proverb states: *mtu ni utu* - a person is made by its humanity towards the community (Rettovà 2007b; Kresse 2009).

Nyara and Mzee Ibrahimu, who are Omolo's neighbours, represent the chorus, the communal voice, which pops out during conflictual situations trying to explore community solutions to pacify conflicts (Mutembei 2012). Mkufya (20-08-2019) disagrees with the choral style literary analysis in com-

plex novelistic situations because what he observed is that the chorus as communal voice has split into individual characters. Mzee Ibrahimu is the old and wise man “*an angel of peace*” (Mkufya p.c.). Nyara is the typical joker *Mtani*, “*he is not an intellectual, but a layman*” (Mkufya 3-9-2020), who jokes without offending, although he teases people and makes use of a provocative and satirical language of *mafumbo*, rich in sexual allusions.

Furthermore, the main sermons delivered by a single hero are challenged by the choral voice of the community: “*In Africa today there is a choral reaction when you tamper with religious issues (either Islam or Christianity). Therefore, a choral assessment was required and the speech by Dr. Hans at Asha’s burial ceremony couldn’t go undiscussed because it touches people’s spiritual beliefs*” (Mkufya 20-08-2019) <sup>3</sup>.

The main reactions to Dr Hans’s final speech, as an anti-hero chorus, are raised by Hubiri Masufuria and a group of drunken scoundrels<sup>4</sup>.

Hubiri Masufuria is a friend of Asha, and a former catholic priest, who was chased away because of his homosexuality. The verbal confrontation between Dr Hans and Masufuria represents the clash between materialism/agnosticism and idealism/belief. Dr Hans maintains that life appears indeed meaningless in the face of the existence of an afterlife, which he defines as a story created to be a solace for children (*faraja la danganya toto* – a solace to deceive grown-up children, KKM 449). Instead, it is the fugacity of life that increases its value.

Conversely, Masufuria, performing the function of anti-chorus, asks: does someone who has been sentenced to death really enjoying the remaining time alive without having the hope of an afterlife? Seeing death in front of you, everything would become just a nonsense. He maintains that people do need consolation and hope that can be found in the possibility of the existence of an afterlife, because you cannot enjoy something when you know that it’s ending soon. Believing in an afterlife, deceitful as it might be, it does bring hope and makes sense of your life (KKM 448-53; see also Queen’s monologue ULF 80).

Here, Mkufya expresses his formulation of an anti-nihilist vision of life (Nietzsche 1968; 1974) through the ideological duel staged between Dr Hans and Masufuria. In this dialogue, Dr Hans states that reproduction, which is a strategy to defeat death, gives meaning to existence and that the presence of death increases the worth of life; conversely, religious doctrines, by preaching the existence of an afterlife, support a nihilist interpretation of a meaningless existence.

The second intervention in Dr Hans’s sermon is performed by a group of drunken scoundrels with metaphorical and stereotypical names. They support

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this chapter, I am often quoting Mkufya’s own words in italics, because I want to let him express himself, without paraphrasing his words and concepts as mine.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendices: Table of Characters in the *Diwani ya Maua*.

as a form of chorus Dr Hans's statement: there is not an afterlife nor death, and religion is an anthropological product of recent appearance: "*hakuna cha moto wala pepo*" (there is neither hell nor heaven, KKM 455). They state that each culture has its own God and worship. Hence, either there is none (God and worship) or there are many (KKM 453-8).

The drunkards' chorus is not really in agreement with Dr Hans by their words, but by their actions they express the consequences of supporting a nihilistic vision of life. However, the nihilist vision of life was not the argument stated by Dr Hans, but the key through which they interpreted Dr Hans's speech. They are an example of the theory of *korasi ya kikorofi* – a "satirical impertinent chorus" (Mkufya unpublished), another example of which are the free verse poetries of *Mashetani*, the devils dwelling in the hell of *Ziraili na Zirani* (Mkufya 1999). This kind of chorus is a "confrontative commentary" on the story, which establishes another level of dialogue in the novel by introducing counter-epistemologies (Rettovà 2016a: 221).

The narrator is the external omniscient voice of the author. However, Dr Hans and Asha are not only the main focalizers (Bal 1997) of the novel but also teller-characters, who internally narrate their ideology (Stanzel 1981). On the other hand, the vast majority of characters in the trilogy are reflector-characters such as Omolo, Queen, Tabu, Tuma, Hadija and Kristina, who express their ideology through actions.

In KKM, a wide gap is shown between the multitype dialogues, differing from the higher style of philosophical discussions and sermons to everyday speeches conducted in either humble language or the juvenile style of children's games. Finally, prayers, songs in regional languages and children's songs and lullabies are intertextualised, reproducing different voices according to age, gender, religious orientation and the level of education of the characters.

### 6.1.3. SYMBOLS OF AFRICA-CENTRED KNOWLEDGES

This section is dedicated to examining all those symbols pertaining to "endogenous knowledge" (Hountondji 1997) "beyond meaning" (Ashcroft 2014), which is not recognised as science, but considered "superstition and hocus pocus" (Cooper 2014).

The setting of the novel is Tandika district, and from the first page an important element of this narration, the *mbuyu* or the secular baobab tree, pops up. *Mbuyu wa Mkwezi* (the climber's baobab), which inspires religious devotion and awe from people, is not only intrinsically related to this first part of the novel called *uchuro* (bad omens), but it also embodies the prophecy of the entire trilogy. It is introduced by a weird jingle:

“Aliyebaki ni mkwezi peke yake. Lakini hata mkwezi alichoujia mti huo ni mabuyu, sio kisa na kiini cha **mahyuyu shani** iandamayo kuwa kwao” (KKM 9)

“And now the only one visiting the baobab tree is the climber, but what he comes for are the baobab fruits, not for the story, nor for the deep secrets/the essence of **mahyuyu**<sup>5</sup> (the fleeting mortals) which is the **mystery that haunts their existence**<sup>6</sup>”.

Mbuyu ukabaki ukiwahurumia kwali waliondoka pasi kujua ndwele iliyowawinga, ambayo pengine sio **mahyuyu**, bali **maajabu** yake (KKM 9)

The baobab was compassionate to them because they went ahead without knowing the ailment that was hunting them, which may not be the “**phenomenon of mahyuyu**” (being mortals) itself but by the **mystery** behind it (**mystery of mahyuyu**)<sup>7</sup>.

The baobab tree is a symbol deeply ingrained in the African culture. It is a place inhabited by superhuman presences typical in both the Bantu tradition and similar to the ancestors’ spirits (Langwick 2011; Hamminga 2005) and in Islamised Swahili culture, which can be either benevolent such as the jinns, *majini*, or malevolent, such as the pure devil, the tempting whisperer, *shetani* (Hussein 1971). The baobab tree is also connected to divination and fortune telling practices; it is a soothsayer’s symbol and a natural oracle. However, nowadays there exists another universe and the role of the baobab has been declared illicit, forbidden as superstition because showing awe for the baobab, being an animist cult, has been declared a sin according to the Christian influences (Mkufya p.c.).

The realistic narration is unexpectedly enchanted by the **complementary inclusion** (Rettovà 2021a) of dissonant ontologies such as spiritual and natural “Afrocentric ontologies” (natural spirits or deceased humans) (Hamminga 2005). A spiritual culture implies the presence of spiritual ontologies such as the demons of life and death (*Nzambi*), and the ancestral spirits (*Ndoki*) which are the bridge between breathing humans and spirits of the dead (*Nzambi*) (KKM 154).

“African metaphysics of life is characterized by a profound sense of spiritual otherworldliness that includes the ancestral influence of the “living dead”, insofar as the present generation is constantly in need of the accumulated wisdom of the past in order to negotiate the crises and challenges of the present” (Hountondji quoted in Cloete 2007: 397).

Premonitions, foreboding, foretelling, signs of clairvoyance, oracular interpretations, *uchuro* ominous presences are characteristic in a novel imbued with **extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition** (Gyekye 1995; Ajei 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> Literally this means what is going to die and which does not last for long.

<sup>6</sup> Mkufya’s translation 20-08-2019.

<sup>7</sup> Mkufya’s translation 31-12-2019.

In fact, the secrets of KKM are unfolded in the first part of the novel through omens (*uchuro*) and premonitions, which symbolize the prediction of a tragedy as perceived by the human subconscious (Mkufya p.c.).

Firstly, there is *mdudu*, the insect, which pollutes the beauty of the red hibiscus flower (KKM 15) offered by Haji to Tuma. The flower is polluted by a bug inside, and it becomes a bad omen. Its beauty has diminished, thus it cannot be a present that suits Haji's friend anymore<sup>8</sup>. *Mdudu* is also a metaphor for HIV/AIDS, and in this case represents analogically the dangerous intruder who ruins the shining beauty of a young flower (KKM 18).

The main *uchuro* (omens predicting the tragedy) around which the novel revolves are the following five: *kijumba*, the small playing house; the first cause of the tragedy is indeed the suspected sexual act performed by Tuma and Haji inside their *kijumba*; *kaburi la kijeba*, the grave of the dwarf goat (literally means dwarf, but it is a joking name given to a small pet goat due to be slaughtered), "*when a goat has been slaughtered a tragedy is coming*" (Mkufya p.c.); *kibunzi*, the kids' game; *ndava*, the nasty girl with whom Tuma fought contracting the virus; and finally, *kudra*, the unavoidable destiny.

Tuma and Haji had their first encounter with death quite early on, because they experienced the painful loss of their pet friend, the small goat called *Kijeba*. Traumatized from that event, they started building a grave to remember their departed friend in their games. Moreover, they were often playing *Kibunzi* (the kids' game; divination board, TUKI 2012), which is connected to the circle of life and death, and it is usually played dancing around the fake grave of a goat.

*Kibunzi! Kibunzi!*

*Chamee me, chamee me!*<sup>9</sup> (KKM 28)

The author reserves an important space in the novel for children's songs<sup>10</sup>, dances, and games as representations of African oral culture embedded in the novel. The highly symbolic children's game *Kibunzi* is featured. The game represents the goat's life, from youth to old age, which in turn is an allegory

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<sup>8</sup> "*Humans are flowers blossoming but with a bug inside. Life is a flowery moment; death is the bug in it. Tuma, rejecting the present, was unknowingly predicting her doom.*" (Mkufya 23-5-2020)

<sup>9</sup> Mkufya himself used Baringo (2005) as reference on Swahili children's games. I was enchanted by Mkufya rhyming this refrain to me in his office.

<sup>10</sup> Swahili songs for children can be divided into many different types. However, the first songs sung to a child by her mother is *utangulizi*, the introductory song. The *nyimbo za kubembeleza*, the cuddling songs, are a typology among the several types of existing lullabies. Then, growing up the child will listen to songs made for helping him in walking and speaking. *Kibunzi* teaches children to stand up and walk. Finally, there are the initiation songs upon entering adulthood as well as prayer songs (Knappert 1990).

of human beings' life. *Kibunzi*, which literally means a small goat, is a death omen as well as *Kijeba's* death, the small pet goat. *Kibunzi* the game speaks about life and death, and it starts with these two questions: “*Unatoka wapi? Unakwenda wapi?*” (Where do you come from? Where are you heading?) - “*kule na hapa*”, the answer means life and the afterlife. Where do you belong? If you are approaching death, the answer is to here and there. The game is inhabited by allegorical animals: it starts with *kijeba*, a small goat, then continues with *kuku*, an adult hen, and at the end with an old lion. At the end of the game, the children must run away from a *nyoka* snake, the symbol par excellence of death who chases after all of them.

“*Kila mchezo wa Kibunzi sharti kutengeneza kaburi? Mama yangu alisema kuabudu makaburi ni uchuro.*” Sadi alisema

Haji: “*Hatuwezi kucheza Kibunzi bila kaburi lake.*” (KKM 29)

“Must we build a grave every time we want to play *Kibunzi*? My mother says that worshipping graves is ominous.” Sadi said

Haji: “ We cannot play *Kibunzi* without the goat's grave”<sup>11</sup>

*Kijumba*, the small shelter, built by the two friends, is the symbol of where Tuma and Haji, following their juvenile curiosity, discovered their sexualities through an exchange of glancing and effleurance. This episode is a preliminary step required to build up the *peripeteia* of the tragedy which relies on the heroes' fatal error that will cause misunderstandings. Therefore, unsolved doubts about the event remain on hold during the entire story, leading to the final tragedy. When the news about Tuma being positive to HIV was acknowledged, every person remembered the accident between the two children and believed that she was infected by Haji during their sexual experience.

This event proceeded in parallel with Hadija who believed that destiny would have protected her. She did not have the HIV test done during pregnancy and delivered a baby who is HIV positive. The test was still not compulsory at the time when Hadija was pregnant and she avoided to have it done, believing that the destiny would be merciful! “*kudura itamnusuru*” (the destiny/God's will shall spare me, KKM 92).

Finally, an ominous family bond was established between Asha and Hadija and her son Haji:

“*kudura iliyomwingiza Hadija katikati ya uhusiano huu ilikuwa kama uchuro au mkosi uliofichama*” (KKM 66)

“the evil doom which inserted Hadija into this relationship was like a bad omen or a cursed thing hidden beneath”

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<sup>11</sup> All the translations from Swahili to English in this chapter are mine unless otherwise indicated. All emphasis mine. I acknowledge Mkufya for the editing (last editing 23-05-2020).

The tragic villain in KKM is Hadija's ignorance, or "the adverse fate – *kudra*". Each person's destiny predestines both what they will be in life and the outcomes of life itself. However, the traditional concept of destiny differs from the blind *kudra*, or, the religious conception of predestination. According to the African traditional theory of destiny, people not only are free to choose their own destiny, which is changeable, but they also have the responsibility to try changing their bad destiny, if revealed through divination, by performing the proper sacrifice (Gbadegesin 2004b: 314-16).

Dr Hans, as a doctor, a scientist, and a philosopher does not believe in destiny. Asha was taught about predestination by both traditional and Islamic beliefs of her parents, yet she too does not believe in destiny. Conversely, Hadija represents ignorance: "*ignorance is the worst disease*", says Mkufya (23-11-2018). Thus, she became a victim of religious beliefs and superstition contributing to the catastrophe in the plot.

#### 6.1.4. TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES

##### 6.1.4.1. INITIATION RITUALS

"*Children don't recognize gender differences and challenge them, as Tuma and Haji did, when they explored the genitals of each other driven by curiosity*", highlighted Mkufya (p.c.).

When Tuma and Haji discovered their sexes, other children caught them during the act and slandered the two, saying that Haji was raping Tuma. The African communal voice comes into play and the entire neighbourhood became involved in the argument, blaming the children's parents.

"*Munawafundisha watoto umalaya! Sasa wameanza kubaka watoto wetu!*" (KKM 42)

"You are teaching your sons loose manners (to sleep around) and now they are becoming the rapists of our daughters!"

To teach sex education is perceived by certain people like teaching vulgarity and bad mores. This case is similar to the play *Kilio Chetu* (MAF 1996) when Suzi's mother reproaches her brother who wanted to teach Suzi about adulthood.

The quarrel in the novel is solved when the two children's families met: Omolo, Grace, Hadija supported by Asha meet with the intervention of Nyara, the *mtani*, and Mzee Ibrahim, the old wise man.

This episode has a double meaning. On the one hand, it promotes traditional rituals and criticises some aspects of modernity. On the other hand, it is a necessary episode to develop the tragic plot. The *Kijumba* event implies

a critique of the modern age, where initiation teachings have been lost as well as parental guidance for teenagers; thus, the youth discover the world all alone, or through new media technologies, being exposed to dangerous consequences and the increase in taboos. The blame is not on the teenagers but on their parents, who are no longer capable of teaching their sons about how to behave properly (KKM 44).

It is fundamental to be aware of one's cultural tradition; however, people should also be able to produce independent thoughts and even to question their beliefs, recognising their weakness, for instance denouncing FGM (Nnaemeka 2005), as Mkufya always repeats: "*usitetee uzembe* - don't protect stupidity".

Likewise, the character of Asha states:

*"Unyago siyo ule wa wajinga wanaomenya utamu wauondoe!"* (KKM 62)

*"Unyago is not the faulty practice that aims to reduce female sexual pleasure by removing some sexual parts."*

The dialogue between Asha and Nyara (KKM 59 - 63<sup>12</sup>) is run in a joking manner to pacify any conflictual situation as per normal *utani*, "the tonic of life" (Mkufya 2005a).

Asha and Nyara advocate for the rites of passage which are: "*an example of traditional African epistemology*" (Mkufya p.c.) and the traditional initiation teachings handed down through initiation rituals, such as the female rites of passage of *unyago*<sup>13</sup>.

Then they comment satirically on the fact that there is no longer a formal opportunity for children to learn about sex; the youth must discover "*Mambo ya somsing*" - "*the something things*" (KKM 60) on their own: "*kujaribujaribu na kuonja-onja*" (testing and trying, KKM 60) like Haji.

Asha would like to open a school for the sexual education of adolescent boys and girls:

*"Mimi nitaanzisha shule na kuisajili kisheria. Kila jambo linahitaji shule. Zile za asili zilizalisha wanaume rijali na wanawake hodari." Asha alisema. [...] "Nitaiita Chuo cha Majando na Unyago." (KKM 60-2) [...] "Utaalamu upo na kama upo, kwa nini tuupoteze?" (KKM 62)*

"I intend to establish a school and I shall register it legally. For any successful thing you need to receive a proper training. The traditional schools generated perfect

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<sup>12</sup> To read more about this dialogue see Appendices: "Extracts from *Kuwa Kwa Maua*".

<sup>13</sup> During my fieldwork, I met Elieshi Lema, a writer, novelist, a specialist of children's literature, and a feminist. We discussed thoroughly the evolution of sexuality in African society, the transformation and the progressive loss of traditional sexual teachings taught during the female rites of passage of *unyago* and the issue of HIV/AIDS. We analysed also together her novel *Mwendo* (1998) on *unyago* traditions among the *Makonde* people (27-11-2018).

men proving their manhood and capable women”- Said Asha. [...] “I will call it the Institute for *Jando* and *Unyago*” [...] The expertise does exist and since it exists why should we let it to get lost?”

Mkufya, through Asha and Grace, explained how in traditional African societies *faragha* - sexual privacy (KKM 69) was related to age groups and there was a precise norm to speak about sexuality in the proper time and space. However, this custom has been lost with the destruction of traditional societies and rituals, and as a result the tendency of current African societies is to regard sex as a secret matter, particularly under religious influence.

Asha: “*Ni ngariba pekee unyagoni au jandoni aliye na uhodari na namna za kufunda vijana bila kigugumizi.*” (KKM 70)

“Only the *unyago* or *jando* instructor the *ngariba* has the ability and skill to teach the youth without stammering.”

Asha Kabeya shows how she has awareness and freedom of disposing of her own body, having been properly taught about sexual matters by her grandmothers. Furthermore, the character of Asha represents the embodiment of cultural traditions, a depository of local practices and “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morell 2014). She is the *unyago* instructor, *ngariba*, or “*the teacher of ethics*” (Mkufya p.c.):

*Alifanana na ngariba aliye tayari kumfunda mwali* (KKM 135)

She looked like the *unyago* instructor ready to train her initiand maiden.

Traditionally, the *Ngariba* is not only connected to circumcision, but he/she is chiefly the teacher of moral knowledge, learned through participation during initiation rites (Ntakula 1994).

Asha sings *unyago* songs to comfort her “daughter” Hadija:

“*Vitani, mwanamke ujifunge kibwebwe. [...] Wewe mwenyewe ndiye uwe muweza*” (KKM 134)

“In war, a worthy woman must fix tightly her waist clothes<sup>14</sup> and get down to work. [...] You ought to realize that the powers are in yourself!”

The novel is rich in cultural elements and “regional epistemologies” (Mudimbe 1988). For example, *nyumban'tobwa* (KKM 276-82) is the woman who delivers a baby on behalf of another who is a barren woman. In this case Grace is pregnant on behalf of Asha, who is HIV positive and cannot be a mother.

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<sup>14</sup> *Funga Kibwebwe*: It's like saying “tighten your belt and get ready”. Swahili women tighten a kanga cloth on their waist, as a source of strength, when they are doing a hard task (Mkufya 23-5-2020).

This strategy saves Asha from the oppression of barren women, who cannot become ancestors of their progeny if they have not delivered a child.

Therefore, I argue that the concept of sexuality introduced by Asha can be explained through Nzegwu's interpretation of *Osunality*, the African notion of sexuality and eroticism: "the morality of sexual pleasure and the erotic is a critique of emphasising fertility over pleasure" (Nzegwu 2011: 258). In fact, Asha is not a mother despite the "mother-centred logic of African civilization" (Nzegwu 2011: 256).

*Osunality* affirms that female sexuality is based on the paradigm of both erotic pleasure and fertility. Thus, sexual pleasure equally shared between both women and men is a prerequisite of fulfilment of not only the sexual intercourse but also of life. For instance, Asha often evokes her *utawisho*, which is either the temple or the season of love in traditional Swahili culture. Asha recalls the hours spent having sex with her beloved Hasting, who has died<sup>15</sup>.

Nonetheless, in the current time the concept is that of *faragha*, the required sexual privacy, which has evolved into a hidden language, and taboos (Mutembei 2011a). For instance, in Swahili everyday communications as well as in literature, the popular euphemism to refer to male/female genitals is *sehemu za siri* (secret/confidential body parts) (Mutembei 2011a; 2015). Thus, Tuma and Haji let flow their juvenile curiosity exploring their sexes as one among their games:

*Zinaitwa sehemu za siri [...] Hata kutaja majina ya sehemu hizo ni mwiko mkubwa ulioitwao matusi. [...] Hata yeye mwenyewe, Haji, angependa kuona siri ya Tuma. Lakini kulikuwa na hofu inamuandama kuhusu kusudi hilo la kuvunja mwiko [...] wakubwa wanaogopa kukaa uchi (KKM 35-6)*

They are called private parts [...] Even mentioning the names of such parts is a big taboo called swearing. [...] Even Haji himself would like to see Tuma's hidden parts. However, he was scared to death about the temptation to break the taboo [...] adults fear to be naked.

In investigating sexuality through this novel, whose primary focus is children, Mkufya highlights what he regards as the damages wrought by the loss of traditional ritual teachings and the negative attitude to sex fostered by imported religion to Africa, for instance, through the myths of Adam and Eve and the paradise lost.

*"Sexuality is natural. The culture developed around sex and sexuality is man-made, customs, initiations, laws, taboos are social or human modifications of the*

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<sup>15</sup> Mkufya describes in detail how characters behave bodily, particularly as expression of their sexuality (Queen and Omolo in ULF and Asha in both the novels), how they interact with others and the surrounding environment, knowing through their bodies, and bodily gestures which can articulate epistemologies. These are examples of "**embodied epistemologies**" (Merleau-Ponty 1962), which are the unique types of knowledge which are practically known by the body or through the body, and which knows how to act unconsciously.

*natural sex, often, the modifications are called morals. Before the social modifications, everything to the young is natural and innocent. The calf is not taught by the cow to go to the udder for milk. It naturally goes to suckle. A boy and a girl left in an island alone shall eventually discover their sexuality”* (Mkufya 20-08-2019).

#### 6.1.4.2. FUNERAL RITES

According to Mkufya, by Dr Hans’s mouth, we should celebrate life as we celebrate death. Asha’s funeral is a joking celebration with food, alcohol, and puns (KKM 350). A traditional ritual performance characterized by typical clothes, dances, songs in *kimanyema*<sup>16</sup> to celebrate “*mviga wa Asha Kabeya mtani wa kifo*” (the traditional ritual of Asha Kabeya who jokes with death; the joker of death, KKM 445).

Nyara performs the authentic *mtani* at Asha’s burial ceremony, which is also a joking celebration. According to her last will, it is an event where people can laugh in the face of death, enjoying every single instant of their being alive (KKM 438-48).

Asha decided to be cremated as per her ethnic traditions, but without any religious ceremony. However, HIV/AIDS interferes and destabilizes traditional customs (Golomsky 2018); for example, she advised people to wear gloves and be careful during the corpse washing ceremony because she had AIDS.

Asha’s traditional burial celebration is full of solace; conversely, the Lutheran Christian funerals of Omolo and Tuma are full of sorrow and grief. The speech is delivered by Kristina who compares human beings to a flower of God, being herself a fervid believer.

Furthermore, Kristina raises a good point in comparing different ways of confronting death. Firstly, in Africa, animists believed that dead persons become *mizimu* spirits to be worshipped by their progeny by means of ritual offers (Mbiti 2011; 2010). Afterwards, Christianity was brought and now people worship God and Paradise.

In conclusion, the message is that birth, life, and death are part of the cycle of life. Death is “*a pain that lasts just a second*” (Mkufya p.c.); what follows is no longer part of life. Thus, “*the fear of death ought not to exist*”; otherwise, “*if you don’t accept your own mortality, you will be condemned to fear all time*” (Mkufya 30-11-2018). The fear of death is mostly suffered in the novel by Hadija because of her religionism.

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<sup>16</sup> Mkufya is conducting research on traditional songs in regional languages, such as songs in *Kimanyema*, the ethnic group of Asha Kabeya. Mkufya, taught by an old *Manyema* lady, is learning both how to sing and how to translate these songs in Swahili.

### 6.1.4.3. *UTANI*

Life-cycle rituals, initiation and burials, as well as sensible discussions in the novel are solaced by a party with food and drinks organized by the traditional *watani*.

The following examples are puns showing up how to play and perform with language in a jocular style typical of the joker practice:

Omolo: “*Sharti leo Asha ulipe mahari yangu. Mjukuu wako kuchagua binti wa Kijaluo.*” (KKM 65)

“Asha, you must pay now the bride price, because your nephew chose a Luo maiden”.

“*Vyote viwili! Ningewakabaka. Nikishawakaba, nawabaka!*” Nyara alisema kwa *utani*” (KKM 60)

“Both of the two. I wanted to **robe-rape** you. After **robbing** you I would **rape** you” Said Nyara joking<sup>17</sup>.

The technique of “*mchanganyo ndimi* - the language of collage” (Khamis 2007d: 57), means the opposition of different realities not necessarily connected with one another to break the rules. This “intermingling of tongues” (Diegner 2017) is utilised in puns and jokes for the creation of new worlds, like tongue twisters, and intertextuality of genres leading to the craft of a patchwork language helpful to bring relief to even morbid and sorrowful events.

### 6.1.5. BIOMEDICINE AND HEALING TRADITIONS

KKM shows an evolution in the representation of HIV/AIDS in comparison with ULF. In fact, in the narrative there are fewer metaphors and more scientific terminology.

Moreover, people are less blamed about the transmission, because, in the first novel HIV is mainly described as an STI which is spread through sexual networks, multiple partners, and extramarital affairs among adult people of the same age (Queen, Ngoma, Asha and her lovers among them Msafiri and Omolo). In KKM, which focuses on children, HIV is a blood-transmitted infection or “blood borne infection” (Wilton 1997: 5), transmitted via mother to child vertical transmission and direct contact with infected blood.

Furthermore, the novel is up to date with the current state of HIV/AIDS knowledge, awareness about the illness has strongly increased, and people are less scared of it. The improvement achieved with ARV therapies has transformed HIV/AIDS from a mortal to a chronic disease, prolonging peo-

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<sup>17</sup> Mkufya’s translation 22-11-2019.

ple's lives for many years. Thus, “*kuokoa kiasi cha maji ambayo hayajamwagika*” (KKM 145), based on the traditional Swahili proverb that says: “water that has been poured cannot be recovered”, in this version means that “saving the water that has not been poured out yet” has become possible because of therapies. For example, Hadija and Tabu could live with the hope of raising their children before dying (KKM 117):

“*UKIMWI unakupa fursa ya kuishi, kujiandaa na kutimiza majukumu*” (KKM 99).

“AIDS gives you the time to live enough to prepare and accomplish our responsibilities.”

Blood testing and ARV therapies<sup>18</sup> are the pillars of the scientific approach to HIV/AIDS in the novel, as explained by Dr Hans to Hadija. In fact, if she had done the test during pregnancy there would have been methods to avoid the mother to foetus transmission of the HIV virus.

Mkufya, through the character of Dr Hans, the medical doctor, expert in virology, sexual and reproductive health, expresses his background expertise in biology and chemistry supporting a positivist epistemology of science.

Mkufya describes how Dr Hans is conducting his research on HIV/AIDS, negotiating between the government laboratory and his personal research. Dr Hans's research was focused on the “window period” of HIV when the virus is still dormant in human bodies' cells, and he was mixing chemical ARV drugs coming from the United States, Australia and Europe with *mimea ya asili* (KKM 189-90), natural herbal treatments from Africa.

Local medical practices in Africa are yielded and wielded as strong pillars of “resistance of the subaltern” (Meneses 2007), which resist despite the stratification of other imported medical cultures, creating a condition of “medical pluralism” (Olsen & Sargent 2017: 1) as a continuum between Western medicine and African healing. In Tanzania, traditional healing practices and herbal medicine, which have been formalized and institutionalized since 1970 so as to commodify the African manufacturing of herbal pharmaceuticals (Langwick 2017), either resist or accommodate the government claims, influenced by the Western medical system, into a status of “intentional hybridity” (Marsland 2007: 751). The new figure of “witchdoctors in white coats” (Nichols-Belo 2018: 723) are the outcome of the ongoing process of hybridization and negotiation between traditional healers and medical doctors at the hospital (Langwick 2008).

A case of this complex state of affairs is exemplified by the research laboratory created by Dr Hans, who, on the one hand, is the prototypical Western style medical doctor, and, on the other hand, is the advocate of traditional

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<sup>18</sup> The scientific names of the drugs are mentioned in length in the novels. For example, *KpC-XRETROV01 na KpC-XRETROV 02* (KKM 167); *Zidovudine, Nevirapine, Ritonavir* (KKM 118).

ritual and healing practices. Dr Hans challenges and destabilizes the boundaries between folk healing system and biotechnologies, mixing and matching African herbal knowledge and pharmacopoeia with modern science, looking for an effective treatment for HIV/AIDS. He initially started generating these experimental hybrid treatments in a secret laboratory at Hotel *Nyanza* supported by Asha, and later the two officially founded the *Asha Kabeya Kisarawe HIV Research Centre* (KKM 168).

The traditional “epistemology of healing” (Stroeken 2012) implies *tambiko* rituals (KKM 475), offers to propitiate the ancestors’ spirits, and *madogori* spirit possession cults (Swantz 1990), a ritual exorcism performed by playing *kigoma cha madogori* (the drum beaten for the exorcising dance, KKM 476), often practised in Tanzanian churches that mix and merge Christianity with “typically African” ontologies obtaining syncretic rites and treatments (Dilger 2007; Wilkins 2009). *Ngoma za madogori* (KKM 48-9) not only is an example of performance like the rituals of healing typical of the Swahili coasts called “ngoma (drums) cults of afflictions” (Janzen 1992), to chase away *kinyamkera* spirits (Swantz 1990; Lihamba 1986; Giles 1999), but it is also part of preventive treatments, “*dawa za kinga*” (Langwick 2011: 151ff) related to pregnancy and childbirth, which require the intervention of traditional midwives and diviners.

#### 6.1.6. GENDER AND YOUTH EPISTEMOLOGY

Mkufya’s representation of the epistemology of youth is an implicit challenge to traditional African gerontocracy. Sages are not only old and male, but also women and youth who equally contribute to knowledge production (Presbey 2004; 2012; Graness 2018; Mosima 2018). The “epistemic marginalization of women” (Chimakonam & Du Toit 2018) also expressed as “female body politics” (Katrak 2006: 203), means that the indigenous patriarchy collided with colonial patriarchy to dominate women and female bodies. Both patriarchy and gerontocracy must be transformed by challenge and negotiation (Nnaemeka 2003; Eboh 1998).

Mkufya contributes to deconstruct the rigid hierarchy of gender relations through his formidable female characters: Tumaini and Asha in contrast with Hadija.

Firstly, **Tumaini James** is a wonderful round and complex character. Mkufya (14-11-2018) explained that Tuma starts school late because of her arrogance as a spoilt child (*mtoto mkorofi*): “*in Tanzania problematic children are not allowed to join school until they calm down*”. The young girl is described by her own mother “*mtoto mwenye visirani vya kuzaliwa navyo*” (the girl with inborn misfortune KKM 32), because she often raises strong protests when

she feels oppressed by someone. Her irascible temperament and her rebel attitude, which cannot bear injustice, became ominous when at school she was badly beaten by a group of nasty girls (*wandava*, KKM 87) and she reacted by biting the finger of their leader Sifa, falling into the trap of HIV/AIDS. Tuma's anxiety (*kisirani*) lets misfortune in or is interpreted as a bad omen because she fights with all her strength against whoever denies her the right to liberty.

*“The accusation of being “mkorofi” by Kristina or other people is when they want to trespass Tuma’s rights or refuse her rights simply because she is young, and, thus, she violently opposes in order to defend her liberty. Tuma finds herself thrown into a world that has not patience to listen, to let her express herself, that does not to let her live and take part on equal terms with others, for example at school, and, a world that is cruel, particularly, after the death of her father and Asha, the people she trusted most. Throughout the novel the protest of Tuma was defensive not offensive”.* (Mkufya 20-8-2019).

However, Tuma is not only a rebel and arrogant, but also brave, because she fights for justice against oppressions, stemming from a clash of different epistemologies of youth (age) and gender. Particularly, she urges “testimonial justice” (Fricker 2007) as the right to speak and be heard, even though she is a young girl in a world of male adults, resisting gender oppression (Medina 2013). The old wise Ibrahim seems to be the only one who recognizes Tuma's reaction as a strength more than a weakness (KKM 57).

Secondly, the character of **Asha Kabeya** is the most complete and complex of this novel. Asha is a mature and wise woman, described as *Bibi kijana*, the ever-young old lady (KKM 160), who experienced a lot in her life, she loved, enjoyed many pleasures, had a career and economic success. Asha is a *mtu tosha* (complete and self-sustained person), and a complete woman, who does not need to be completed by a man.

Although she could not become a mother because of HIV/AIDS, she takes care of her fragile friend Hadija and her son Haji, she is also close to Omolo's family and to Grace, becoming her *Nyumba'ntobwa* (the one who bear a child in place of another woman). Furthermore, Asha founded a trust to support orphans and collaborates with Dr Hans in seeking a cure for HIV/AIDS.

Thus, the “*epistemology of experience, endowed by Asha is made up of both Dr Hans's lessons and traditional culture*” (Mkufya 30-11-2018). In fact, Asha grew up in a syncretic cultural environment made up of both African traditional religions (*dini za asili*, KKM 156) passed on by her grandmother, and her father's Islam. Additionally, she was taught by Dr Hans, developing also philosophical and scientific knowledge<sup>19</sup>.

Mkufya's “sages”, both men and women, complement each other and often women character are even stronger in defending their argument, criticizing the established traditions if necessary. In contrast to Asha, Dr Hans

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<sup>19</sup> Compare with the character of Fikirini Zirani in *Ziraili na Zirani* (Mkufya 1999).

started being old and weak, he is now 75 years old, and needs to be supported by his wife Kristina.

Even though children, women and youth are the most vulnerable groups in post-colonial society, Asha represents the exception, the “*perfect woman*” (Mkufya p.c.), whose knowledge and socio-economic power are equal to men. Conversely, **Hadija** is the example of victim of *UKIMWI wa kijamii* (AIDS of Society; Mkufya 2004), who is disadvantaged because of class, education, and gender imbalances.

Hadija embodies ignorance that is not only intended as a gap in formal education, but also as religionism and superstitious beliefs. Mkufya asserts that beliefs can become superstitious and dangerous in the hands of non-cultivated people, and above all, he strongly opposes the concept of destiny. This denies human agency and freedom to choose, as well as the promise given by religion of either a reward or punishment in the afterlife, which deceives people by misleading their choices and actions during the lifetime and making them afraid of death.

Hadija is the character who fears death the most; she has neither education nor economic power, thus she seeks shelter in faith, and hopes and believes in destiny. However, religion does not save people from AIDS, as it was for Ngoma, even Hadija was infected by HIV, which was transmitted to her son during childbirth: “Whores and mothers are vector and vessels” (Baileys 1994: 4).

### 6.1.7. PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

#### 6.1.7.1. THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSIONS (*HOJA*)

As a philosophical dissertation KKM revolves around the nuclear *hoja*, argumentative discussions, stated by the characters of Asha Kabeya, Dr Hans, and Kristina.

#### *Asha’s Existentialism*

Asha expresses her strong statement about life and death when she discovered that Hadija and Haji are both HIV positive. Asha expresses existentialist thinking stating that the presence of death makes life meaningless; however, you must take advantage of the short period of existence and the immanent pleasures in the world. Thus, she rejects the afterlife to really be in this world.

Asha laughs in front of death:

“*Dawa ya kutokiogopa kifo ni kukikubali kisha kukipuuza.*” (KKM 103)

“The only available treatment for not fearing death is accepting it and then ignoring it.”

The sour and crazy laughing of Asha and Hadija corresponds to the Brechtian “alienation effect” technique which dresses the environment as a theatrical scene (Mutembei 2012):

[...] *Lakini hata kicheko alichocheka hakikuwana utamu wa kicheko. Kilikuwa kama kicheko cha mwendawazimu. Kicheko kisicho na maana: upuuzi, mzaha, uhayawani.* (KKM 103-4)

[...] However, the laugh she was laughing had not the sweetness of a real laugh. It was a crazy one. Laughing without any reason: **absurdity**, nonsense, satire, shamelessness!

Life has no transcendent meaning, yet it is an immanent, tangible, and consuming pleasure that must be used, because it does not last for long; life is a joke that mocks human beings who in turn should mock it.

[...] *Maisha huitwa hiyo kwa kuwa yanaisha, hayadumu, ni ma-isha. [...] Kuishi maisha, huishia pale mwenyewe akisha-kwisha! Upuuzi mtupu! [...] Ni heri ucheke! [...] Utakapo-salimu amri ya afande kifo, inakuwa kama utani. [...] Kifo ni mtani wako, siyo mfalme wako!*” (KKM 106-7)

[...] Life is called like this **ma-isha** because it is made up of **things that are doomed to an end**<sup>20</sup>. [...] **Living life, means consuming it, it finishes itself, when it gets to its end! Complete nonsense, absurdity!** [...] You better laugh! [...] When the time comes to give your last salute, it will be like a joke! When the officer of death comes, give him the respectful salute! [...] Death is your joker and not your king!”

*“Ku-ishi ni kuishia. Maisha ni ma-isha. Ukisema “Ishi” umesema “isha” (to live is to finish. Life is a consuming thing. If you say “live” you mean “end”). “Life is a paradox even without using the Swahili word ma-isha. It is by living that we die and by dying we manifest the life we lived. Life is like a burning candle. Its size dwindles and dies out by its own flame. The flame that announces and glorifies it, at the same time consumes it. Asha says, laughter and utani is the best treat life deserves. But isn’t laughter, the highest expression of joy?!”* (Mkufya 31-12-2019).

Life is just a nonsense because of its perishability, living it means eating life to the end. Thus, people should take advantage of the immanent pleasures in this material world, like eating, drinking and having sex to satisfaction. Asha did enjoy each of these pleasures; particularly love as both romance and flash desires, and she savoured her sexual life boldly both inside and outside marriage (Rettovà 2016c). Thus, she does not regret anything and does not fear death. Life is only in human beings’ hands, not in God’s hands nor can it be predicted by destiny.

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<sup>20</sup> The Swahili noun *Maisha* stems from the verbal root *-isha* which means to live, but with the prepositional extension becomes *-ishia* to finish up.

Asha claims that what people fear most is their own freedom to choose (KKM 105 - 140), or, their bad faith (Sartre's *mauvaise foi*): recognising their responsibility and exercise autonomy in their life choices. She advocates instead for human responsibility and free will. Although it is a demanding task for human beings, they cannot escape from the responsibility of their freedom, leaving their destiny in anyone else's hands, even in God's hands (KKM 137-8). Asha states that there is neither good faith nor bad faith but that human beings are the makers of faith:

*“Dini ilipendekeza dhana ya kudura. Waumini wote huikiri dhana ya kudura. Asha Kabeya alipendekeza kuucheka ulimwengu na kuipuuza kudura”* (KKM 148).

“Religion suggests the idea of divine predestination. All believers accept the idea of divine predestination. Asha Kabeya suggested people should laugh at the immanent universe and ignore cosmic predestination (Mkufya 3-9-2020).”

However, in the end her strong unbeliever opinion was wavering, yet her scepticism seemed to prevail. When she was about to end her life, she unexpectedly doubts, but just for a second. Asha stands for sexual pleasure, **materialism, and scepticism** about both Christianity and Islam.

From an **existentialist and agnostic** perspective, Mkufya criticises the religious idea of supervision by a superior being and the promise of an afterlife. People have the freedom to decide the end of their lives, to be or not to be: *“The mamlaka of being, means that the only authority of being is yourself”*; *“You own yourself, not the state, nor the church, and only you have the right to choose if you want to live or die. There are no other authorities than your own on your life”* (Mkufya 6-12-2018).

#### 6.1.7.2. THE SEVEN ARGUMENTS OF DR HANS

Dr Hans is the novel's master and its sage, juggling between science, traditional beliefs and philosophy: *“a mixture of local and Western epistemologies”* (Mkufya p.c.). He is also the voice of Mkufya. Dr Hans asserts the non-existence of both God and of an afterlife.

Therefore, *the novel represents “a materialistic critique on idealist beliefs” in the presence of both a metaphysical reality (Heaven and Hell) and metaphysical ontologies (God and Devil), because overcoming the idealistic beliefs is the key to overcome the fears of death. However, this viewpoint is challenged by the idealism of Kristina's sermons and prayers* (Mkufya 22-11-2019).

I argue that each dialogue in the novel illuminates philosophical ideas, appearing in the form of sermons, and speculates on a mystery in life.

*The mysteries (shani) of humans' lives are something beyond human conception or conceptualization. These mysteries can be either a phenomenological*

mystery that may be resolved by the progress of science, or, a metaphysical one like the mystery of the Divinity or the universe that remains beyond human grasp (Mkufya 31-12-2019).

From this novel a “multiplicity of voices” (Bakhtin’s heteroglossia) rises such as the high languages of Dr Hans debating with Asha that is simplified when Dr Hans is in dialogue with the young Haji.

The seven main arguments advanced by Dr Hans in his philosophical sermons are as follows:

*The mystery of time and nothingness of life*

The first argument deals with Mkufya’s reinterpretation of **time** as existence in the world (Heidegger’s *Being and Time*) and **nothingness** of life (Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*) as “*usifuri wa Maisha*” (KKM 153).

In this dialogue between Dr Hans and Asha (KKM 151-4), Dr Hans argues that it does not matter for how long you live, for short or for long, because life is perishable and doomed to end *ma - isha* (*mambo ambayo yanaisha*); what matters instead is the quality of life, the way you spend your time alive. Life is a transitory phase of Being in the world for a short span, a point in time between two eternal zeros before and after it; then, life nullifies itself returning to zero.

The only thing that humans can count on is the short while of being in a certain time and space. However, time is a deceptive concept, an illusion. Time does not move nor change; people do are transient and affected by change. Time is described as *shani*, mysterious to human understanding; the ontology of *shani* reveals the existence of mysteries in the universe and that sometimes the presence of magic is necessary to accept the uncertainty of everyday life events (Stroeker 2012) (KKM 224).

In the end **being** is **zero** and **existence** is **nothingness**. This is indeed the only evidence that we have: the **mystery (*shani*) of life** that is “*usifuri wa Maisha*” (zero/nothingness of life, KKM 153).

This theory of Dr Hans had been anticipated in the prequel novel ULF by the character of Queen: there is no difference between being or not being because “being is just a blink”, and after the brief moment of life, existence goes back to zero (ULF 79 - 80).

[...] *Mko kwenye njozi ya kioja/ shani hiki kiitwacho muda au wakati.*” (KKM 151);  
“*Hicho ndicho kiini macho cha muda tunapoutumia kupima uwa-po wa mtu, yaani mtu kuwa mahali fulani katika muda fulani.*” (KKM 152) [...] “*Tofauti yake iko Dhahiri* [...] *Zote ni sifuri [...] Shani hii ya usifuri wa Maisha.*” (KKM 153) [...] “*Uhai hauna u-aina zaidi ya u-sifuri. [...] Maisha ni mzaha na kiini macho*<sup>21</sup>.” (KKM 154)

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<sup>21</sup> To read more, see Appendices: “Extracts from *Kuwa Kwa Maua*”.

“[...] You are into a **mysterious reverie** which is called **time as both space of time and point of time**”; “This is the illusion of time that we usually measure the **being of a person in a certain time and certain place.**” [...] “The difference is **evident.** [...] All are zero. [...] **The mystery of the nothingness of life.**” [...] “**Life** cannot be of any other kind except for zero. **Life** is just a joke and an illusion!”

*Sex as a biological mystery (nadharia)*

Dr Hans’s theory on sex (*nadharia*, KKM 192) relies on **positivist and social epistemologies**, expressing a holistic coexistence of multiple worldviews having always conducted research on HIV/AIDS from two perspectives: biomedical and socio-anthropological, the first one connected to the creature which brings the disease (the virus), the second connected to ***viumbe watu*** (human creatures, KKM 191).

Although HIV/AIDS is primarily a blood infection, one of the more common ways of transmission is sexual relations. This issue makes the ground fertile for theoretical speculations on sex and sexuality.

According to Dr Hans’s theory on sexuality (KKM 190-7), **sex is a biological mystery** (*ajabu ya kibayolojia*, KKM 192), a natural drive, experienced by the vast majority of living beings (*vi-hai*) finalized to both coupling and reproduction. However, sex is not only a biological necessity for the perpetuation of the species, but it is also source of joy in this world. A core objective in life is to find a partner and build a family; thus, sex is a source of happiness, satisfaction and realization in life.

*[...] kukamilisha ngono na hatimaye kuanzisha familia ambayo iliwapa furaha na ukamilifu kuwapo ulimwenguni* (KKM 191)

[...] performing sex and building a family is what gives happiness and completeness to human existence into the universe.

However, the origins of physical attraction and sexual appeal among human beings remain a mystery within the other mysteries of the universe. Even nature has secrets to hide that science has not yet resolved, and phenomena not accessible to human reason. “This creates the needed space of **indeterminacy** that enables and justifies alternative conceptualisations of reality, both within and beyond science” (Rettovà 2016c: 131). Thus, sexual pleasures, which slips out from both scientific and cultural rules, obeying the natural instincts of living creatures, suggest an “**epistemology of indeterminacy**” (Rettovà 2021a).

The only living beings who question sex and sexuality are humans, who started building socio-anthropological structures upon it such as theological (sacred, evil), biological (the process of *meiosis*), and secular (romantic) theo-

ries. Therefore, sexuality is not only a biological concept implying pleasure and continuity of humanity, but it is also a social construction (Tamale 2011).

*Sex as a religious myth (kisasili)*

Dr Hans criticizes particularly the biblical myth of the genesis – “the myth of Adam and Eve (*kisasili*)” - that rendered sex a sinful taboo, challenging both Christianity and Islam through narratives of the Old Testament that are the same in the Quran as in the Bible. **Sex** under religious influence was related to either the evil or the “original sin”, which is usually punished by **death**, particularly after the advent of **HIV/AIDS**.

Sexuality in Mkufya’s works is a *mafumbo*, an instrument of self-protection (Vierke 2012), to lead a veiled critique against the two imported religions into Africa. Afrocentricity resists hermeneutical epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) such as manufactured history, biblical invention of memory like the Genesis myth. Instead it recovers the past through Afro-centred historical reconstruction (Van Veen 2016: 82).

*“Kuondoa dhana za kufumbia [...] kuirejea nadharia hii ili kuzingatia uadhimu wa ngono kisayansi zaidi ya kiimani na athari hasi na chanya za mitazamo hiyo tofauti”* (KKM 193)

“Overcome the concept of covering [...] referring to this theory to observe the gloriousness of sex from a scientific perspective rather than from a religious one and consider the positive and negative effects of both these contradicting views”.

Opposite to scientific reason, religious beliefs and the myth of Adam and Eve (*kisasili*, KKM 426-8) cast blame on and construct an environment of shame around sex, concealing everything into confidentiality and taboos: This leads to catastrophic consequences like the event between Tuma and Haji, when juvenile curiosity pushes the youngest to discover sex on their own without parental guidance.

Religion spoils the pleasure of human beings in concrete and evident things, among them sexuality, promising instead illusions and unreality. Therefore, sexuality in literature can become a stylistic device to convey philosophical messages.

In fact, my argument is that Mkufya’s interlinking of **HIV/AIDS, sex, fear of death, and religious attitudes** towards both sex and death, is an intricate philosophical metaphor conveying a profound message towards humanity. Particularly, sex and sexuality are used as a cognitive, provocative and irreverent metaphor, which has the same function of the allegorical war, waged by the alliance between demons and *wanadhahara* - the residents of the *camp of manifestness*, against the Heaven throne in *Ziraili na Zirani* (Mkufya 1999). *“The wanadhahara embody the scientific and Marxist denial of religion, and the*

war is an allegory of the riotous relation between humanity and contrasting religious beliefs. Thus, the novel is a hypothetical representation of the religious promises and their unavoidable breakdown” (Mkufya 29-11-2019).

However, in the trilogy, Mkufya portrays material life and tangible human existence; thus, the metaphor is objectified, and it materializes into the immanent world, made up of human’ flesh and blood, with their sexual desires and carnal satisfaction. *Ngono*, sex, *sexual desires* and pleasures are symbols which represent the satisfaction of immanent, material desires and instant pleasures in contrast with religious preaching on the sacrifice of flesh pleasures with the promises of an eternal reward. Mkufya’s message is freeing humans’ freedom of thoughts from religious cognitive enslavement. The transcendental promises and the illusion of an endless reward preached by religion are converted into a celebration for immanent and material pleasures, a hymn to a concrete happiness usable in a short-term period.

Thus, I claim that sex in Mkufya’s reinterpretation symbolises an epistemological critique against all imported religions to Africa. If some authors choose one credo only, either Islam (Mauya 2017) or Christianity (Mutembei 2005a), Mkufya’s agnosticism (2004; 2019) questions both.

### *The mystery of being and not being*

The third argument is the expression of **scepticism, agnosticism, and materialism**, where the existence of God and of an afterlife are debunked. An **existential epistemology** is developed when Dr Hans argues for the nothingness of existence, rejecting metaphysics, and recognising only the phenomenal existence in this world made up of being and not being (*kuwapo-kutokuwapo*; existence and non-existence<sup>22</sup>).

Mkufya describes HIV/AIDS as “*UKIMWI mtihani mgumu*” (AIDS is a demanding exam) being an incurable disease. The only way to recover is to perish, it triggers thorough reflections on life, either its brevity and ephemerality, or its meaning and value, because humans have been gifted with “reflective (*kutafakari*) consciousness (*utambuzi*)” (Mkufya 2005a). Thus, they

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<sup>22</sup> *Kuwa*, *kuwapo*, *kutokuwapo* are existential verbs; *uwa*, *uwapo*, *utouwapo* are existential nouns; *Uwa* is a non-locative existence. It is abstract and describes being everywhere or anywhere into a non-specified time or location; *Uwa-po* is the locative existence, as the existence that locates you in a well-defined time and space (Mkufya’s explanations from the document of 20 August 2019).

Furthermore, Mkufya explains the difference between *Kuwa* (*Uwa* essence) as the being which can be an attribute of God, devils, and all the immaterial entities, whose essence is without boundaries of time and space; whereas, *KuwaKo* (*UwaPo*) is the attribute for living creatures, human beings and material beings (*binadamu na vihai*) who exist in time and space; *KutoKuwaPo* is the state of non-existence (Rettovà 2007b: 112; 2018: 452; Wiredu quoted in P’Bitek 2011: xviii).

do not accept dying without challenging and questioning it (KKM 191). Even though human beings question everything, their knowledge is not enough to acknowledge the mystery of the universe (*ufahamu wa mtu ni upuuzi*, human knowledge is a nonsense, KKM 202) because human beings are the most recent creation compared to other creatures' existence.

Dr Hans rejects every metaphysical explanation about the origin and meaning of life, which is "a circular dance of being and non-being" (*ngoma ya mduara wa kuwa na kutokuwa*, KKM 427ff), performed by "living beings". Moreover, Dr Hans suggests avoiding not only the term *wana wa Adamu*, the sons of Adam, which is connect to the myth of creation, but also the term *vi-umbe*, God's creatures, which refers to identities created by a superior Being. Thus, Dr Hans suggests using the Swahili term *vi-hai*, living beings or *walimwengu watu*, human inhabitants of the Universe<sup>23</sup>, or human world-dwellers.

In this first dialogue between Dr Hans and Haji (I) (KKM 247-57), Dr Hans endorses a **sceptical, agnostic and materialist** point of view. In one of his statements, which both recalls and challenges the Nietzschean "God is dead!" (1966; 1974), he maintains that there is no God, no destiny<sup>24</sup> and no afterlife with either punishments or rewards. If you do not believe in the afterlife, you will be free; otherwise, you will be a slave blackmailed under the idea of punishment<sup>25</sup>.

*"Ukiamini kwamba hakuna mpango wala mpangaji, unakuwa huru, huwi mtumwa na wala hutarajii adhabu wala zawadi."* (KKM 248)

"If you believe that **there is not a plan or a planner**, you will be free, you will not be a slave and you will not need to expect either a punishment or a reward".

*"Ni waongo! [...] Hakuna mbingu!"* (KKM 252) [...] *punde ya uhai wa mtu. Baada ya hapo ni uto-uwapo*". (KKM 253)

"Liars! [...] **Heaven does not exist!** [...] human life is a short while. After this, is not being".

The cognitive materialism and agnosticism of Dr Hans is shown when he debunks religion as superstition and expresses his mistrust towards faith healers; in fact, Hadija believing in God infected Haji, and the people who are praying looking for forgiveness usually die from AIDS.

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<sup>23</sup> Mkufya (23-11-2018) differentiates between *viumbe*, creatures, which implies the religious aspect of creation, and *vi-hai* which means the **living beings** that has not necessarily been created by a metaphysical superior entity. This is a neutral term. The author also avoids *wanadamu*, "the sons of Adam", because of the biblical connotation related to the Judaeo-Christian faith, rather preferring *walimwengu watu* (from the root of *utu/humanity*), **persons/human beings inhabiting the universe**.

<sup>24</sup> Mkufya explains (email 13-03-2022) that according to Dr Hans' view the idea of destiny is life which reveals itself as it is, thus this is also connected to the concept of *udhahiri*.

<sup>25</sup> Mkufya aims to free human world-dwellers' minds from any kind of inhibition and to render them fully responsible for their life and whatever choice they make.

*“Ingawa sijasikia hospitali, msikiti au kanisa lililofanikiwa kuponyesha watu wenye VVU kwa sala.”* (KKM 256)

“To tell the truth, I have never heard about any hospital, mosque or church that has been able to heal people affected by HIV/AIDS with prayers.”

HIV/AIDS challenges religion and unchains clashes between science and faith. Haji himself after Dr Hans’s teachings, rejects religion and undergoes a shift from Islam to agnosticism: *“maisha ni mchezo wa kufurahia”* (KKM 265), “life is a game to enjoy”, like a football match.

Human existence is a mystery **“the mystery of being and not being”** (*shani ya kuwapo na kutokuwapo*). Life is just a blink (*punde ndogo*<sup>26</sup>) of existence in the infinitude of nothingness. Thus, people must enjoy this short blink of existence which they have been gifted, because the only reality is the nothingness of existence.

Dr Hans explains to Haji the brevity of life through the lenses of existentialism playing with the Swahili verbs to be/being and its locative construction.

*“Maisha ya mtu ni punde ndogo tu, katikati ya udaima wa utouwapo. Katikati ya uto-uwapo, punde mtu huwa-po na punde hayupo, unarudia uto-uwapo wake. [...] Huo muda mfupi unaoitwa kuwa-po yaani kuwa duniani, mahali fulani na wakati fulani.”* (KKM 250-1) “[...] **Uwapo ni kama upuuzi, mzaha; uwapo ni kama ule mwako wa radi au wa cheche ya moto. [...] Hakika hakuna kuwapo. Zaidi sana ni kuto-kuwapo.**” (KKM 251)

“The life of a person lasts a **short while**, in between **eternity and non-existence**. During non-existence, suddenly a person is there, and suddenly again the same person is not there, coming back to non-existence. [...] This short period of time is the locative being in this world in a certain time and place”. “[...] **Existence is an absurdity, a joke** like the light of a flash or a spark of fire. [...] **To tell the truth there is not existence, the most is non-existence.**”

*“Ajabu hii ya kuwapo au kuto-kuwapo”* (KKM 254) is “the marvellous mystery of being here or not being here”. Existence implies different relative and contingent feelings, which differ according to every single personal experience, into an “endless deferral of meaning” (Derrida quoted in Rodgers-John 2015: 69). For instance, everything which cannot be grasped by the limited capacity of human reason and scientific rules is a stunning and magnificent unknown, the **“awe”** (Rettovà 2017) of existence. Otherwise, it remains an unsolvable enigma: *“Labda nipo. Pengine sipo. Tofauti gani?”* (Maybe I exist. Perhaps I do not exist. Which is the difference? Mohamed 2006: 1) The dissolution of ontological boundaries operated in Swahili novels, like between existence and non-existence, renders the *shani* the mysteriousness of life and

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<sup>26</sup> *Punde* is a short segment of time; *punde ya kuwapo* is the blink/point in time when human beings are in this world.

its being zero or nothingness. In the end, there are no absolute causes or reasons beyond an existence that is absolutely relative and non-fixed essence.

### *The mysterious meaning of life*

In the second dialogue between Dr Hans and Haji (II) (KKM 434-8), Dr Hans firmly rejects the existence of *kudra*, destiny, because humanity was gifted by reason and free will; thus, people are free to make their own choices and build their future.

Humans tend to question everything. However, Dr Hans suggests avoiding questioning life too much, because the result will be wasting the only opportunity that you have. Conversely, Dr Hans's message is accepting the mysteriousness of life, really enjoying it, without looking for a purpose. People should not waste time looking for the meaning of life because there is not a metaphysical purpose or reason to human life. The only meaning in life is your own purpose, which you give to it by just living and finding your own source of happiness in it.

Dr Hans professes a form of Epicurean hedonism, chasing after simple material pleasures, tranquillity and freedom from anxiety caused by spiritual and religious beliefs (Mkufya p.c.).

The meaning of life is a **relative** concept linked to a continuous deferral of meaning according to **contingent** situations. Dr Hans's **relativism** is revealed in his concluding explanation: "*sababu ya Maisha iwe kuyaishi*" (the only reason of life is life itself, KKM 435), because there are no metaphysical goals like religious Paradise, and the only purpose of life is to live and be as happy as possible.

"The search for the meaning of life is thus the heavy task of the human being on earth" and "an endless journey" (Rettovà 2016b: 112).

### *The mystery of death*

Dr Hans exposes his personal view about the vanity of life (*dhana za ubatili wa Maisha*, KKM 425) and death after having lost his friend Omolo.

Life is a circle which is destined to be closed by death. People, like flowers, must perish after having blossomed for a gifted period. The mystery of death is explained by Dr Hans as part of the biological circle of life. Even though human beings do not experience death, because the only real experience is life, they are psychologically annoyed by dying, because they want to speculate in an exaggerated manner on things beyond their grasp, instead of concentrating on the evidence of life.

*Mduara wa uhai ni kuzaliwa, kupata fursa adimu na adhimu ya kuwamo ukijifahamu; kuwamo duniani ukiufahamu ulimwengu; kuzaa, na kisha kufa. [...] Fikra za kuwa*

*na kuwapo wa mtu duniani, ubatili wa uchache wa kuwa, udhana wa kuwa na hofu ya kutokuwa; zote zimeelelea kwenye msisitizo wa kifo, kuliko fursa muhimu zaidi iitwayo maisha ambayo ndiyo dhahiri. Kuwa kwa watu hudhiririka kwenye Maisha pekee na si kabla yake au baada yake. Fikra zingeelelea kwenye udhahiri huu wa kuwa, kuitwako maisha, badala ya ndoto ya kuwa kabla ya Maisha au dhana ya mustakabali, baada ya Maisha, hofu ya kifo ingepotea. (KKM 425)*

The circle of life is to be born, to have **the rare but glorious opportunity of being in the world**, knowing the universe, to give birth and then to die. [...] The thoughts of **existence, of a human being in the phenomenal world, of the vanity of existence, of the concept of existence and fear of non-existence**, are all exasperated by death, instead of being focused on the most important opportunity called **life** which is the only **evident thing**. **The existence of human beings becomes evident in life neither before nor after it**. If these thoughts had been focused on the **manifestation of existence**, which is called **life**, instead of being concentrated on the dream of the existence before life and on the concept of a future existence after life, the fear of death would have disappeared.

Mkufya does not agree with those who believe that when the fall comes closer life loses meaning, nor does he agree with those who like *Masufuria* argue the value of one's life is transposed into an afterlife. Indeed, Dr Hans claims that when approaching death life acquires even more meaning and value because brief as it might be, it is the only actual chance which matters where every single choice is unique. Dr Hans in KKM give as an answer to catch the enjoyment from the fugacity of the moment, Horace's "carpe diem" and a form of epicurean hedonism, even though death is there waiting for you.

### *Udhahiri*

Finally, Asha's funeral or "celebration of death" is the occasion of Dr Hans's speech on the pillars upon which his theory stands: death, life and the dream of an afterlife (KKM 445-8).

Firstly, death does not exist provided that you give birth; secondly, people don't have reason for fearing death if there is none, and finally, live happily: *uhai ndilo ua*<sup>27</sup> *la kuwa kwetu!* (life is indeed the flower of our existence, KKM 448).

Therefore, Mkufya states by Dr Hans's mouth that human beings should live boldly during their short lives, enjoying life as it is, because there is no afterlife: "*Watu ni maua, wakiishi ndipo yamechanua*" (people are like flowers, they blossom while they are alive, 448). Thus, the only reason is to be happy like "*lile ua lake*" (448) that "flower enclosed in each person which is going to blossom" and which is "a meaning of life":

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<sup>27</sup> *Ua* is "Being" and a new-born life. *Ua* is the active, visible, consciousness of being, or "the revelation of being - *kudhihirika kwa UWA*" as the evidence of existence which might be represented as a child (Mkufya 20-08-2019).

*“Ninafarijika nikimtazama Grace na ujauzito wake. Ndani ya mwili wake, Ua limefunga, karibu kuchanua. Atachipukia Omolo mwingine, wa kike au wa kiume awe na sisi”* (KKM 448)

“I feel solaced looking at Grace and her pregnancy. In her stomach, a flower is enclosed, almost ready to bloom. Another Omolo will sprout, let she or he be among us again!”

The last part of the novel discloses the concept of *udhahiri* that is the evidence of the shortness of life and the non-existence of an afterlife that makes humanity afraid of dying. Death and afterlife do not exist. Death is an event that lasts just few seconds or is “an unexperienced event” (Mkufya p.c.) that is not part of human existence. Conversely, many people fearing death lose the meaning of life, becoming unable to enjoy their unique opportunity, which is just “a blink in time”.

*Udhahiri* is the evidence of existence, which corresponds to life itself that starts when you are born and ends when you die, and which is the unique opportunity to find happiness in it (KKM 446). *“More tautologically it means the reality which becomes evident to us through life (between birth and death). When we are born and start living, then our being becomes evident”* (Mkufya 20-08-2019). In other words, the relative and unique existence of individuals precedes the static essence.

### *Kristina’s Idealism*

Kristina, who in ULF stabilized Dr Hans in his friendship with Tabu, showing “actual humanity” (Mkufya quoted in Rettovà 2007b), in KKM has developed as a more self-reliant character, an independent thinker and a sage.

Kristina not only supports Dr Hans firmly, but she also challenges his points, and her arguments push him to reflect even more. Kristina inspires Dr Hans with constructive opinions and gives him comfort, when he succumbs to hopelessness and desperation in front of the invincibility of the illness (Camus 2002; 2005) and *“ubatili wa matibabu, mzaha, kichekesho cha matibabu”* (vanity of treatments, KKM 200).

Dr Hans and Kristina, as a married couple, enjoy a deep intimate bond, both romantic and sexual (KKM 193-4). *“They are lovers, friends, relatives supporting each other with responsibility, and they are also parents of four children”* (Mkufya 10-10-2019).

A holistic coexistence of different worldviews is demonstrated by the couple of Dr Hans and Kristina, *“pande mbili za sarafu”* (KKM 195) “the two faces of a coin”, who mutually respect each other. Kristina acts in complementarity with Dr Hans. For instance, she exposes an opposite viewpoint about religion: she is Christian while Dr Hans is an agnostic. Kristina represents **idealism** in

the face of Dr Hans's **materialism**, who provokes her: "*Sali wewe, mimi natafakari*" (You can pray, I reflect instead, KKM 202).

This statement opens up the clash between beliefs (which are innate, handed down, shared, and represent what we are) and reason (individual logic deduction).

On the one hand, we have the interpretation of the meaning of life from the viewpoint of those who believe, as Kristina. She claims that God endows human beings with free will and they can choose to either reject or to adore God (similar to the purpose of angels and demons' game in *Ziraili na Zirani* 221-5). If they choose to believe without coercion, they will be solaced. "It is indeed the finitude, the requirement and precondition of free will" (Rettovà 2005: 22).

On the other hand, we have the interpretation of the meaning of life from the viewpoint of the materialists like Dr Hans, who rejects the afterlife and the *Muumba*, Creator, because the afterlife makes people scared about death.

Kristina gives three important speeches: two prayers, one to support Dr Hans, the second after the great tragedy and a sermon at Omolo and Tuma's funeral.

Kristina's prayers (KKM 202-4) aimed to give solace to Dr Hans with "*African idealism*" (Mkufya p.c.), and they deal with the meaning of life which seems to be lost in its briefness. However, the real meaning of life in Kristina's view is loving and acknowledging God, fulfilling the life requirements that He gave to humans, who, in turn, obtain happiness and solace in finding Him and in the gift that human received of being capable of thinking and reflecting.

In her speech at Omolo and Tuma's funeral (KKM 461-4), Kristina claims that people have been endowed with reason and "reflective consciousness"; thus, they speculate on death excessively (Mkufya 2005a; KKM 462).

However, "humans are flowers of God" she said, particularly, they are "*ua litakalonitafakari*" (a flower that will reflect upon me (God), KKM 463); "*Kumpendeza Mungu kwa mwanadamu ni kwa kumtafakari*" (Being devoted to God as human beings means to reflect about Him, KKM 463). God as the symbol of His own power gives free will to humanity so that they are capable of using their free reasoning either to reject or to believe in God (Mkufya 1999): "*uzuri na ubora wa uwapo wa watu duniani ni ufanisi wao wa kujitafakari na kumtafakari Mungu*" (the beauty of being in this world for humanity and their success is to reflect and reflect upon God, KKM 464).

Furthermore, Kristina explores the history of death in Africa. Traditionally, before the advent of Christianity, people believed that deceased people become ancestral spirits, then, after Christianity, the promise of the afterlife appeared. In Africa, a stratification of religious customs took place from spiritual forces to theodicy. Omolo and Tuma's burial is a Christian ceremony, but from Kristina's discourse a kind of syncretism between *mizimu* ancestral spirits of traditional religion and Christianity emerges.

Kristina claims a communalism and syncretic vision of the Universe, where people holding different opinions can live peacefully all together, which resembles Medina's manifesto of "*vivir bien-live well*" (2011), which "is a holistic perspective of harmonious life on earth in complementarity and solidarity with nature" (Rettovà 2016c: 135). Kristina through her prayers suggests a holistic epistemology (Nabudere 2011) made up of harmony among both humans (humanity as *mtu ni utu*) and nature, rejecting anthropocentrism (Graness 2018). The theory of "emotion is the black reason" and embodied experiences as "dancing the other", meaning "intuition by participation" (Senghor quoted in Rettovà 2016c: 131-2), challenges the "tragic epistemology of Western men" (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a) that is rooted in scientific reason and splits subject and object.

*"The trilogy questions the idea that humans are at the centre of the universe, since they are temporary creatures, and questions the idea of an anthropomorphic God"* (Mkufya p.c. Nov.18).

### 6.1.7.3. EXISTENTIALISM, THE ABSURD AND SUICIDE

Suicide and absurdity in KKM are major topic developed through the three characters of Asha, Tuma and Hadija.

"Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. [...] It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end. Men who die by their own hand consequently follow to its conclusion their emotional inclination" (Camus 2005: 3 - 7)

Asha is the victim of both misjudgement that makes her feel responsible and "*emotional inclination*" (Mkufya 2-9-2019<sup>28</sup>).

*"If you believe in the afterlife and doomsday, as conceived by religions, you will fear death more. The simple reality of life and death has been complicated by religion"*, Mkufya argues (30-11-2018).

Notwithstanding, Queen and Asha staggered before killing themselves drinking poison.

Queen fears the unknown because she still doubts whether the afterlife exists or not:

*"Baada ya kufa kwake itakuwaje? Hivi kuna Maisha baada ya kifo?"* (ULF 79)

"What is the afterlife? Is there a life after death?"

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<sup>28</sup> "*Suicide and Absurdity in Uwa wa Maua*", Mkufya unpublished (2 September 2019).

Conversely, Asha is more confident because she has spent more time with Dr Hans, as Mkufya explained. Asha, before drinking the poison, was asking herself if she had really the right to deny the existence of God?

*“Je ni kweli inawezekana kumkana? Je ni kweli hayupo?”* (KKM 341)

“Is it truly possible to reject God? Is it a truth that He does not exist?”

In fact, maintaining the non-existence of God, when you are denying and rejecting him, who are you really denying? A non-existent being. Conversely, if God had actually existed, she would have sworn in front of Him. Finally, she chooses not to be a slave of beliefs (*mtumwa wa Imani*) (KKM 341-5).

*“Asha’s confusion at the end represents the doubts which characterize human rationality, but she didn’t change her mind towards religion that she denied throughout her whole life”* (Mkufya 2-9-2019).

**Tuma** threw herself down from the heights of Asha’s hotel not only because of inexperience and her young age, but also because of fear and mistrust in a world that wouldn’t listen to her. Tuma, having been deprived of both her father and Asha, is all alone in a deaf universe (*ulimwengu usiomskiliza* KKM 387). Tuma, a small child deprived of her future, symbolises the rejection of tolerance for injustice against innocent people. She rebels against fate and does not accept to live in a world which gave her HIV, while, it deprived her of her family; *“she does not embrace the passive submissiveness preached by religions; and she is not thankful for a life that gave her HIV”* (Mkufya 2-9-2019).

**Hadija**, oppressed by religious beliefs, remorse and guilt, succumbs to the absurdity of life. Mkufya (23-11-2018) describes Hadija as *“an annoying character who represents ignorance”* and existential selfishness (1-8-2019). In fact, she not only decided to kill herself, self-commiserating for being unable to bear her weaknesses and her guilt for Asha and Tuma’s deaths, but she was also planning to poison her son Haji to free him from stigma and blame of the community because of HIV/AIDS. In Hadija’s opinion everything has lost its meaning in front of the impending death, because if you know how the game is going to end, you will not enjoy the journey anymore.

*“The existentialist aspect of life crushes people in front of frustration. If the meaning of life is lost, life appears not worth living any longer”* Mkufya justifies (18-1-2019).

Human beings renounce often to their freedom pursuing objectives which pertain to the world of things. Thus, they fall into the absurd (Rettovà 2016b: 110-2). The loss of the meaning of life can also be caused by guilt and remorse as well as oppression and injustice that render the absurdity of life (Rettovà 2016b).

However, Mkufya, by the character of Dr Hans, tries to oppose the absurdist approach to life. *“Dr Hans tries to act as a super ego which tries to keep things*

and the Id characters under control; unfortunately, this attempt cannot be successful in a tragedy” – explained Mkufya (p.c.).

The tragic sensibility of drama in this novel shows the cruelty of existence (“Theatre of Cruelty”, 1938) that pushes humans’ actions to their limits, performing violence, determinism, and superhuman self-sacrifices (Artaud 2017: 60 - 72).

In ULF, Tabu dies from AIDS fully accepting her death. Conversely, In KKM the tragic heroines are riotous revolutionaries against the vanity of life; they reject the death sentence of AIDS and take their own lives. This attitude is already announced at the beginning of the novel, when Tuma rejects the hibiscus flower offered by Haji, because it is diseased, concealing the secret of HIV.

Therefore, suicide in the novel can be interpreted as individual selfishness which unveils the individual’s inability to live their life as it is. When the characters feel that life is too painful to be worth living, it means that they succumb to the absurd or **existential selfishness**. Conversely, when the characters come across an unchangeable destiny, commit a self-sacrifice as an action of solidarity towards the community, it is the expression of **existential humanism** or **African existential communalism**: *mtu ni utu*: showing humanity is to help their own community (Masolo 2004).

Suicide in existentialist Swahili novels is a symbol of an individual sacrifice for the wellbeing of the community. For example, Asha is the victim of misjudgement that makes her feel responsible for other people’s death and thus she self-sacrifices for the welfare of the community. Likewise, Kazimoto killed himself not to procreate a hydrocephalic generation (Kezilahabi 2008: 195).

Tuma’s self-sacrifice is for the community as well because she has been struggling for justice, representing all the oppressed and marginalized people who deserve to be heard. Tuma’s suicide differs clearly from Mersault’s suicide, who is an absurdist according to whom life has no meaning (Camus’s *The Outsider* quoted in Řehák 2007). Mersault is a stranger, an outsider of his own community without emotion, whereas Tuma is a rebel with strong feelings and emotions, she is part of her family and community for whom she is fighting.

Therefore, in European existentialism suicide is a means to liberate the individual from their suffering, whereas in African existentialism suicide is a means to liberate the community from a collective burden.

“Existentialism rejects metaphysics and the transcendent essence of humanity as part of a larger project, valuing, instead, the immanence of individual and being in this immanent world with subjective experiences and emotions” (Rettová 2016b: 111).

Dr Hans suggests a solution, opposing the material void with optimism through procreation, which gives a meaning to life beyond the single person. However, different answers are available according to individual relative per-

spectives. This is what I define the “*kuwa’s dilemma*” or the unsolvable “dilemma of (mortal beings’) **existence**”, which unlike the ideal and fixed **essence** (*uwa*), differs according to subjective experiences and individual emotions.

Therefore, “Swahili literature, through the lenses of existentialism, looks for authenticity and true humanity, based on existence (not static essence), while fighting against oppression” (Rettovà 2016b: 119-20; 2015).

#### 6.1.7.4. OTHER ONTOLOGIES AND EPISTEMOLOGIES

Characters’ reactions to death and HIV/AIDS differ individually. The effect produced by the **unknown**, which does not obey the rules of either material reality or spiritual beliefs, might be insanity, unless you accept the unpredictable element of “**awe**” (Rettovà 2017). When Hadija discovers she is HIV positive, becomes a madwoman feeling the “state of being in awe” (Rettovà 2017) because of the fear of death as the unknown:

*Hadija mwenyewe alijiona kama akilini kumeingiliwa na wadudu. Mwehu si mwehu; mwendawazimu si mwendawazimu* (KKM 121)

Hadija felt like her mind had been penetrated by an alien agent. She felt strange: neither crazy nor mad but something awkward in between.

“*Mimi ni mzimu! Mzimu hasa, ndiye mimi!*” (KKM 124)

“I’m a spirit! I am the real spirit, that is what I am!”

Conversely, the perception of **shani** recognises the existence of ontologies that escape from both human cognition and the phenomenal world, without scaring, yet opening human minds to other ways of knowing. As an example we see Asha’s reactions who, after the shock of Haji’s HIV diagnosis, feels the mysteriousness of life, experiences the marvellous **mysteries** of the universe “*ulimwengu wa ajabu*” (KKM 422) that cannot be entirely disclosed to humans’ limited minds and realizes the illusion of being and the nothingness of life, exactly like Tabu at the bus stop (ULF 220).

*Ghafa alijiona amefika kikomo cha safari yake ulimwenguni. Alipozitazama mbingu aliziona hazina upeo isipokuwa samawi [na shani] isiyo na ufumbuzi. [...] Kumba<sup>29</sup> ulimwengu unapoutafakari hugeuka kuwa kivuli!* (KKM 131)

Suddenly she (Asha) realized she had arrived at the end of her journey on earth. When she looked at the sky, she saw that it had no horizon except for a mysterious blue sky that could not be discerned. [...] Now I have learned that, when you start reflecting on the universe, it becomes shadow!

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<sup>29</sup> The word ‘*kumba*’ signifies a person admitting ignorance, and then realization (Mkufya 23-5-2020).

*Lakini ulimwengu siyo mtu. Hauonei ıla upo hivyo ulivyo, [shani itesayo au ifurahishayo (UWM 122)][...] Kichefichefu cha ujumla wa mambo yote, kiliingira nafsi yake (KKM 224)*

The universe is not a person. It doesn't victimize a person, yet it is as it is, a mystery that either teases you or makes you happy. [...] A nausea about the totality of everything started encircling her soul.

Unexpectedly enough for a realistic narration, supernatural ontologies from the code of the "marvel" (Rettovà 2021a) make their appearance, disclosing "black boxes and glass jars" (Cooper 2014), populated by "*factishes*" (facts and beliefs, Latour 2010: 11) capable of making someone do things that no one can control - "neither God nor Master" (Latour 2010: 65).

"In Africa, mystical and mundane have always coexisted" (Okorofar 2016: 209) via appearances of non-human and spiritual agents such as *mzimu* (dead person spirits or ancestral spirits), *pepo* (demons)<sup>30</sup>, *mashetani* (devils), *visirani* and *uchuro* (signs of misfortune) (KKM 127), as well as by the magic of *mganga wakupunga pepo* (the expert in exorcising demons, KKM 127) or witchcraft.

Female witches prepare *Limbwata* (KKM 159), a traditional food, which works as a love spell. Women give this food to their beloved who eat it while they whisper loving words and so remain bewitched by her, doing whatever she wants (see also Mauya 2017: 13).

Omens, oracular signs and "parapsychological phenomena" (dreams, hallucinations, premonitions and foreboding) (Rettovà 2016c: 131; Warnes 2009) are phenomena featuring **extra sensorial experiences and paranormal cognition** which characterize the novel.

Grace experienced many foreboding sensations predicting misfortune since she discovered she was pregnant with a second child: *hofu yake yeye ilikuwa kama hofu ya kisirani, tishio lisiloelezeka* (her fear was that kind of fear that cannot be explained, an ominous fear, KKM 181) as well as Asha's premonitions (KKM 270), when science and reason clash with the supernatural and the marvellous:

*"Mimi mwenyewe jana niliona ishara. Filimbi, ya kumaliza mchezo ilipigwa." Asha alisema.*

*"Ukimsikia bundi analia mjini, ujue ni uchuro: ama kuna maafa au kuna jambo baya litatokea." Asha alisema.*

*"Hiyo ni imani tu, siyo utabiri wa kweli. Bundi hawaonekani mijini kwa sababu hakuna pa kujenga viota." Omolo alisema. (KKM 270)*

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<sup>30</sup> Mulokozi (interview 21-11-2018, Dar es Salaam) explained to me the differences between the spiritual entities, which interfere with humans in both literature and life, such as *majini* (Islamic genies) and *shetani* (the Devil), which are not originally African, but have been introduced by Islamic and Christian faiths, *mazimwi* (ghosts and ghouls), *mzuka* (spirit ghosts), *mahoka* (delirium spirits), and *mapepo* (demons), which are part of African traditional folklore. In literature, these superhuman creatures usually represent the evil part of life that frightens and that the heroes must fight.

“Me myself yesterday I saw a premonitory sign. The last whistle pronouncing the end of the play has been blown”; “if you hear an owl crying in town, know that is a bad omen of a forthcoming death or misfortune” said Asha.

“This is only a superstitious belief not a real prediction. The owls are not common in town simply because they don’t have a good space to build their nests” said Omolo.

Nightmares are ominous signs of clairvoyance accompanied by foreboding sensations of jerking and sweating:

*Akapatwa na usingizi huo wa ajabu. Usingizi wenyewe ulikuwa ni wa majinamizi. Mara ajikute yuaanguka kwenye miamba yenye vimo virefu, mara ajikute anabebwa kwenda kwenye maporomoko ya mito iliyofurika. Kuna moja alijiota kuwa yeye ni ng’ombe machinjioni, anakwenda kusulubiwa (KKM 121)*

Her sleep was a weird sleep characterized by nightmares. One time she found herself falling down elevated cliffs, another time she was pushed towards a waterfall. She dreamed also of being a cow ready to be slaughtered in a slaughterhouse.

The presence of peculiar ontologies representative of the “marvellous world” and incompatible with the “real world” are links to access alternative epistemologies.

Particularly, “*Grace has undergone a cruel and bitter transformation; she is a pure victim of the tragedy which rendered her a “traumatic psychotic”, enduring the effects of shock, horror, heartbreak, and agony resulting from Omolo and Tuma’s deaths*” (Mkufya 1-8-2019).

Therefore, Grace is depicted as a fool singing and wandering around the *mbuyu wa radi* (lightning baobab, KKM 468) in search of her husband and daughter inside the baobab tree, which symbolizes the bridge between the material world of the living and the spiritual world of the death, and it, like the *calaveras*<sup>31</sup>, should remind people that they are not eternal (Okri 1991).

In the novel, two natural symbols as “the Included Third” (Medina 2011; Rettovà 2021a) represent the connections between the phenomenal and the supernatural world: **the owl (*bundi*)** and the **baobab** of lightning and thunder (*mbuyu wa radi*), which are keys to access “**epistemologies of marvel**” (Rettovà 2021a) and the wisdom of a parallel supernatural realm through extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition (KKM 288-9).

The owl in African culture is not only harbinger of evil, a bird of ill omen, and a messenger of forthcoming illness or death, but also the symbol of witchcraft, a witch’s messenger or the nocturnal form assumed by a witch (Cocker & Mikkola 2000; Mauya 2016).

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<sup>31</sup> Artistic replicas of human skulls handmaid for the Mexican celebrations of the “Day of the Dead”. According to Mexican cultural heritage earthly life is mirrored in the afterlife; thus, the art of *calaveras* reminds us that death is a part of life (Zamora 1995).

*Bundi* appears three times in the novel: in front of the window of Asha's house (KKM 270); it was heard by Omolo practicing witchcraft (*zuza ulozi*) on the branches of the old baobab tree just before the "great tempest" (KKM 288): "*Mbuyu ulimsikia bundi akiuchulia kwa ulozi, akizuza na kunuiza*" (the baobab could hear the owl's ominous recitation, chanting an evil spell<sup>32</sup>, KKM 290); and in Grace's nightmare when *korongo*, a mythological hybrid bird, between an owl and a crane/stork, appeared in the midst of the tempest to bring her the oracular prophecy (KKM 408).

During the great tempest (KKM 288-90), the chant of the owl predicts the forthcoming tragedy, but nobody can understand the oracular prophecy except for the old baobab, *mbuyu wa mkwezi*, the climber baobab (KKM 9), so called because only the *mkwezi* could climb it, which was now transformed into *mbuyu wa radi*, the lightning baobab (KKM 470), because it was stricken by lightning during the great ominous tempest. Finally, the owl dead after the typhon is not only an ominous premonition (*Bundi kafa kwa tufani/kimbunga*, KKM 288), but also represents the innocent's sacrifice for the mortal community.

Inside baobabs cavities, which are shelters for disembodied presences and traditional African ontologies, it is believed that mysterious things happen, and the longevity of these trees enables them to become oracles predicting bad things, or soothsayers interpreting divinatory signs. Therefore, Mkufya (22-11-2019) highlights how the three core symbols of doom in the story are connected to the baobab: the crown's carcass which was seen by the children while they were playing near the baobab; the owl landing on the baobab branches where the carcass of the crow had been buried; and the owl's prediction of doom during the tempest animated by lightning and thunderclaps:

"*Mzoga wa kunguru ulichotangua, watoto hawakukijua [...] anazuza mahyuyu*" (KKM 288).

"The children did not know what the carcass of the crown predicted [...] the owl is here chanting *mahyuyu* (making a fool of the mortals)"<sup>33</sup>.

The old baobab was the official guardian of *mahyuyu*, the mortal beings, or, human beings doomed to die; however, the secret prophecy of the *mahyuyu* has not been revealed yet in this novel, for it cannot be revealed until the forthcoming last part of the trilogy (Mkufya p.c.).

In the end, during *tufani*, "the great tempest" (KKM 288), and *kimbunga* (KKM 291), the typhoon, the baobab was completely destroyed by lightning and, *mizimu*, the spirits of the dead or ancestors, who inhabited the baobab, were forced to move from their home. Furthermore, since the spirits, who

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<sup>32</sup> Mkufya's translation 31-12-2019.

<sup>33</sup> Mkufya's translation 31-12-2019.

were waiting for a sacrifice (*dhabihu*) did not receive their *tambiko* (offering made to propitiate the spirits of the dead) from the living, they decided to keep with them the secret of *mahyuyu*, the ephemeral creatures who are going to die through a dark riddle:

“Ni nani ataifahamu mahyuyu, ingalau aipunguze kwa kuyarefusha ma-isha, hata asipoifikia au hata kuikaribia dawamu?” (KKM 292)

“Who will know the essence of *mahyuyu*? Even by lengthening their limited lifespan, they cannot reach nor even come close to immortality<sup>34</sup>”

Space for a magic epistemology is preserved and if the mortals are not offering anything, they cannot even hope to receive a gift from the spiritual realm. “Magical practices have uncertain outcomes, which imply interrelation between gift and sacrifice recognising the non-linearity of events that science fails to evoke” (Stroeken 2012: 6). Thus, if humans break the rule, they will be cursed.

For instance, Asha and Grace broke a taboo drawing upon themselves misfortune through the ominous celebration of Grace’s pregnancy. The Swahili say: “*usinunue mbeleko kabla ya mwana kuzaliwa*” (don’t buy a baby carrier until after the baby was born). In African culture it is believed that you cannot celebrate nor treat as already alive a pregnancy. The new born exists only after his or her delivery; otherwise you are breaking a taboo, preceding the creation, and showing arrogance towards the Creator (Mutembei 2001; KKM 281). To congratulate a pregnant woman is a sacrilege because it means that you are not respecting the rules of potential time; in fact, for the baby the time to be born has not been actualised and the event of birth has not taken place yet (Mutembei 2001: 100; Mbiti 2011).

Likewise, the hereditary kinship curse *kinda la mlapeke* (KKM 476) is similar to the Luo concept of *Chira* or *Bakuntumile*, in Haya culture, which is God’s revenge against humans’ arrogance inflicted as a result of the negligence of traditional sexual rules and taboos (Hussein 1988; Mutembei 2009a). *Kinda la mlapeke* literally means a baby bird who eats alone; this curse implies someone whose existence destroys the others’ existence. For instance, Omolo is an orphan, his daughter Tuma was considered to have a natural connection with spirits (*asili ya madogori*, KKM 476), and his son Masumbuko, whose name means agony, kills his mother in childbirth.

#### 6.1.8. EPISTEMOLOGY OF GENRE

Epistemologies apparently incompatible are included by means of generic fractures (Rettová 2021b) in this novel.

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<sup>34</sup> Mkufya’s translation 31-12-2019.

Afrocentric knowledge is conveyed by oral literary expressions such as songs in *Kimanyema*<sup>35</sup> sung by Asha Kabeya (KKM 140) and in *Kisambaa* uttered by Grace (KKM 282) as well as through original childrens' songs and lullabies.

The oral and performative genre inserted into the narrative stream of the prose is an example of intertextuality (Kristeva 1986), "heterogeneric textuality" and "generic fracturing" (Rettovà 2021b: 3), and each genre inserted drives different philosophies and epistemologies.

For example, Asha's lullabies, *lembeleye* (KKM 140), whispered in *Kimanyema*, and the song *Mukaya Mokalaga*, usually performed to celebrate the young maidens' send-off and sung during Asha's funeral (KKM 443), are expressions of historical heritage of the characters' ethnicity and cultural epistemology.

The prophetic baobab chants (KKM 288) and the diviners' ritual songs and spirit invocations (KKM 476) are means by which to access the supernatural, the unknown, to interpret paranormal phenomena, and to do magic and to heal. "This interference of heterogenous textualities and other genres in the prose subverts the literary realism and its scientific positivism" (Rettovà 2021b: 2 - 4).

Kristina's prayers (KKM 202), the quotes from the Bible (KKM 200) and the gospels sung at Christian church (KKM 459-64) are the expressions of religious beliefs and idealism. Furthermore, ancestral spirits invocations are combined with Christian faith prayers towards a holistic epistemology of "being for others" "dancing him/her" (Senghor quoted in Rettovà 2021a: 324); finally, children's songs, rhymes, and lullabies articulate an epistemology of youth.

A multiplicity of different voices (Bakhtin 1981) can be heard by the variety of characters' *heteroglossic* speeches, who are chosen among all ages, gender and social status.

Different genres communicate distinct messages to a different audience. Children's songs are a really important form of communication, says the author, "*every African child loves singing and dancing. You cannot tell a story about children without uttering their songs*" (Mkufya 3-10-2019).

Mkufya perfectly crafts the techniques of incorporation between "text and performance" distributing "two distinct and separately institutionalized genres"- one written and one oral- (Barber 2005: 271) according to their meaning and message as well as "entextualization" (Barber 2005: 276; Barber 2007) encoding both "cultural performances" (Fiebach 2004) and "social dramas" (Turner 1982) in the narrative text in a condition of perfectly balanced co-presence and creativity. Thus, Mkufya describes in detail the performance of traditional children's games and dances (*kibunzi, pakacha, mapela, ukuti*, KKM

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<sup>35</sup> Throughout the novel we can find excerpts of songs in original languages provided with Swahili translation in footnotes.

28; Baringo 2005) as well as ritual ceremonies.

Rituals and myths are the expression of “African worldviews” (Soyinka 2005) and spirituality in this novel, although the basic rules are realist, and positivist science is unquestioned, yet promoted.

By means of the techniques of intertextuality and “generic fracturing”, the song, whispered by the baobab branches, articulates an “**epistemology of inclusion and indeterminacy**” (Rettovà 2021a), linking the world of the living with the world of the spirits (Achebe 2014; Okri 1991; Warnes 2009):

*Mbuyu, ma-hyuyu, huna uhai!*  
*Mbuyu, ma-hyuyu, huna uhai!*  
*“Wanitabiria nini, kororo,*  
*Ewe ndege wa uchuro?*  
*Fukufuku za zama, za nini?*  
*Kunichimba hadi kiini?*  
*Mizoga ya kale, kaa la moto,*  
*Majeraha yake bado kero?*  
*Kwenda zako kuchakuro*  
*Wa makaburi ya nguchiro!”*  
(KKM 288-9)

Mortal baobab, you shall die  
Mortal baobab, you shall die  
What are you predicting for me, evil fowl?  
You, ominous bird?  
Why excavate a buried, evil past?  
You are maliciously digging to reveal my essence now,  
while old forgotten carcasses are still painful as hot coals,  
and their wounds still painfully annoying!  
Get lost evil ominous fowl  
digger of mongoose cemeteries<sup>36</sup>!

Healing and witchcraft are two faces of the same coin. Divination accesses the supernatural and the unknown. Since Grace was having a troublesome pregnancy, two diviners, Bibi Magaya na Magawa, were called to make an offer performing the ritual sacrifice to propitiate the spirits of the ancestors (*tambiko*). However, the diviners, after having read into the ominous signs, unveiled a hereditary curse “*kinda la mlapeke*” (the chick who eats alone, KKM 476) or the child who loves only himself; thus, the exorcising dance of *madogori* is performed by the two healers so as to ensure a safe delivery for Masumbuko the baby boy. However, Grace dies in childbirth.

The mysterious chant is an invocation to superior non-human powers:

*“Masubo na Nyasubo fungueni njia,*  
*Chaubaya Masumbuko apite*

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<sup>36</sup> Mkufya’s translation 22-11-2019.

*Atuachie mwali wetu-  
Salamaaa!*" (KKM 476)

"*Masubo na Nyasubo* (ancestral spirits evoked by the *waganga*) open the way,  
to let the evil (child) Masumbuko (agony) be born  
and leave our maiden  
safe!<sup>37</sup>"

The style of inserting epistles into the narration of fictional works is common form of intertextuality applicable in different genres of literature dealing with HIV/AIDS. In the plays, it expresses the psycho-social challenge of the crisis. These letters are usually used to break the silence on HIV/AIDS, challenging the environment of confidentiality that surrounds the topic and empowering communication. The letter diverges unexpectedly from the narrative pattern, creating an atmosphere of suspense usually held until the very end of the narration as a metaphor for the undiagnosed virus hidden in the victim's body (Mutembei 2016). The SIRI/CONFIDENTIAL (KKM 299) letter that the school master wrote to Omolo (KKM 314-5) explains the result of Tuma's HIV test and justifying her withdrawal from the boarding school is the nucleus around which the tragedy revolves. The letters created an atmosphere of mystery and suspense which lasted until Tuma herself found the letter and killed herself. The letter caused Omolo's heart attack, and Asha's suicide<sup>38</sup> because she thought it was Haji, her beloved acquired nephew, who infected Tuma. The only one who realized the truth about the origin of the infection was Tuma, yet she could not tell it to anybody.

In conclusion, the stylistic technique of combining heterogeneous genres, blending the mainstream prose with songs, poems, and dramatic elements reveals a philosophical reflection aimed at "keeping together" contradictory worldviews (Kezilahabi quoted in Lanfranchi 2012: 80).

On the one hand, the quest for a true being evident to human cognition, reason and senses (Mkufya 1999), implies the concept of *udhahiri*, accepting the evidence of existence which manifests itself in one's lifetime. On the other hand, since human reality is contingent and relative, as well as transitory and limited, the "**generic fracturing**" (Rettovà 2021b) is employed through poetry and songs to contemporarily "both reveal and hide the reality" (Rettovà 2016a: 218), opening up the way to "other" concealed dimensions of reality beyond phenomenal boundaries and outside human cognitive capacities (Rettovà 2016a: 218).

In the end, by means of an innovative aesthetics, which recognises the

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<sup>37</sup> Mkufya's translation 31-12-2019.

<sup>38</sup> Mkufya compares Asha's suicide with the Shakespearean character *Othello* misjudging his faithful wife Desdemona.

multiplicity of modes of cognition and philosophical thoughts, Mkufya demonstrates both the actual coexistence of incompatible epistemologies and the achievement of a balance among complementary knowledge (-s).

#### 6.1.8.1. METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HIV/AIDS

The metaphorical representations of HIV/AIDS are socially contextualised and can be organized in the following five groups.

The first group is related to people's **behaviour** that causes the HIV infection: *giza* (darkness, KKM 125), which "metaphorically" (Goossens 1995) refers to both the grim consequences of AIDS: illness and death, and its cause: ignorance, which sometimes is an "epistemology of ignorance" (Sullivan & Tuana 2007) voluntarily created by corruption and evil among people, who don't care to infect others cheating test or being promiscuous; "*Giza! Mbele giza, nyuma giza!* (Darkness! In front of me I see the darkness and behind me there is obscurity! KKM 125); *uzembe* (negligence, 146); *uovo* (bad, evil, 327); and *kudra* (destiny, 148) to believe in destiny can be fallacious and let people doing careless things such as Hadija who did not take the test delivering an infected child.

Being a story focused on children shows how those, who have not received an adequate level of education<sup>39</sup>, consider HIV/AIDS as a disease that concerns adult people only. Adults have different behaviour from children, for example they engage in sexual intercourses: *ugonjwa wa wakubwa wanaofanya ngono zembe* (the disease of adult people who have promiscuous/negligent sex, 357).

The second group of metaphors is connected to **stigma**, sadly attached to the illness: *aibu* (shame, 326); *adhabu* (punishment, 248); *ugonjwa wa siri* (secret disease, 123).

The stigma of the disease is often associated to target groups: "*ugonjwa wa zinaa unaowapata wavuta bangi na malaya*" "*ugonjwa wa walevi, wahuni na watu wabaya*" (the venereal disease that affects drug addicted and prostitutes; the illness of drunkards, hooligans and evil people, KKM 219). "Metaphors used for AIDS imply a moral judgment on society and a punishment for living unhealthy lives and arouse feelings of guilt and shame as well as liberation and consolation" (Sontag 1991).

Hence, Omolo's desperate reaction after discovering his daughter's HIV positivity: "*Mateso, AIBU, uonevu, adhabu, ugonjwa mwovu, zinaa, ngono... uchafu, zimwi linaloua washerati*" (Sorrow, shame, vexation, punishment, evil disease, adultery, sex, dirty, the ogre who kills promiscuous people, KKM 326).

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<sup>39</sup> During my fieldwork in Tanzania, in 2018/19, I also listen a university student (whose identity will not be revealed) claiming that HIV/AIDS is a disease endogenous only in Africa and not common in Europe like malaria.

Embodied metaphors represent bodily experiences and inner emotions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Thus, some metaphors engender **fear** of the disease and its calamitous consequences: *ugonjwa wa kutisha* (the dreadful illness, 422); *kidonda cha UKIMWI kisichopona* (the ulcers of AIDS which do not recover, 221); *uchuro wa janga la UKIMWI* (the omen of AIDS calamity, 179); *ugonjwa mbaya* (bad illness, 98); *neni lile baya na chungu, UKIMWI* (that bad and bitter word, 177); *neni hilo ovi na la kutisha, UKIMWI* (that evil and dreadful word, AIDS, 178); *ugonjwa mwovu* (evil illness, 326); and *pigo chungu la UKIMWI* (the bitter beating of AIDS, 332).

The role of non-humans in ailing is recognised (Green 2014). Hence, HIV/AIDS turns to be a “subject” embodied in **otherworldly ontologies**: *kizuu* (bewitched undead creature, 149); *zimwi* (ogre, 393); and *jitu linanikaba* (giant, ogre that hangs me, which embodies the fear of HIV/AIDS, 232).

HIV/AIDS can also be objectified (Moscovici 2000) in tangible and **familiar elements**: *mdondo* (a bird epidemic disease which kills without recover, 407); *ajali* (accident, 410; Mutembei 2009a); *chawa mwilini* (a louse inside the body, 347), an invisible intruder into a human body (HIV virus); and, *kimbunga* (KKM 291) the typhoon, which is a “metaphonymy”: metaphor for AIDS and metonymy of the fury with which destroys/kills (Mutembei 2009a).

When dealing with proverbs (Wanjohi 1997; Beck 2005), which are an example of oral heritage intermingled in prose, those which have undergone the effect of “AIDS-tization” (Mutembei 2007) have changed in meaning and structure to transmit HIV/AIDS related communication: *Ukikimbia nakupiga mshale, ukisimama nakupiga mkuki!* (KKM 136) “If you run away, you will be hit by an arrow; if you stay still, you will be hit by a spear.” No matter how, but if death is chasing after you, you will soon be caught. Thus, HIV/AIDS is nothing more than another arm at death disposal to the detriment of humanity. “*Mzee hapandi mwembe*” (KKM 293) an old person cannot climb a mango tree. This proverb with the UKIMWISHAJI effect refers not only to old people, but also to the endangered new generation exposed to HIV/AIDS.

Swahili novels sometimes seem to disclose an apocalyptic vision of the future of humanity exposed to catastrophes, calamities and ailments (see Kezilhabhi, Mkufya and Mohamed’s novels). Therefore, the only hope to save the human world is a common effort of solidarity in a dystopic reality, yet assistance from divine and magical powers can be an “other” way out (Gromov 2014).

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In conclusion, Mkufya “writing in the swing” (Rettovà 2016e: 29) changed his style from the “exuberant style” (Rettovà 2016e: 25) or “universalist epistemological critique” (Diegner 2018: 128) of *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999) to the “quiet existentialism” (Bertoncini 2005) of the *Maua* trilogy (2004; 2019) dealing with HIV/AIDS. Nevertheless, if Mkufya’s existentialism is reinterpreted through the African perspective in ULF, its pessimistic attitude is

challenged and criticized in KKM (Mkufya p.c.). The “neo realist” (Gromov quoted in Rettovà 2016e: 16) or “post-nation” (Diegner 2018: 137) stream of Swahili prose expresses the authors’ commitment to deal not only with socio-political issues inside the country, but also with universal humans’ concerns.

In both novels there are plenty of insightful and detailed description of places, people and events from a kaleidoscopic perspective that draws the readers into the story making them follow characters’ actions (Bertoncini 2005). This is an existentialist writing feature. According to “onto-criticism” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2007a; Lanfrachi 2012), Mkufya’s existential novels render the reality as it is perceived by human cognitive capacity with all its dilemmas, contradictions, contrasts, incongruencies through an epistemology “based on Being”, which corresponds to a literature which does not distinguish itself from reality (Rettovà 2017: 171). Novels are ontologies, not a mere representation of reality. Thus, both ULF and KKM manifest themselves as they are, not only as a critique of life that tries to analyse and solve issues and problems, but they are also part and parcel of reality. “A *novel is not a gospel; it is a critique*” Mkufya reminds us (18-1-2019).

The objective of the trilogy is to provide a psychological analysis of AIDS victims and their families. Although, as we have noticed, each novel is an independent story, the character of Dr Hans is the connector, who plays a demanding role to be capable of providing patients affected by HIV/AIDS with consolation. Mkufya defines this task as a big exam: “*UKIMWI mtihani mgumu*”, because HIV/AIDS obliges people to confront death as a much closer event, to cope with stigma that connects HIV transmission with sexual habits, and to reflect upon God’s existence and the afterlife. The position assumed by the characters are, on the one hand, to deny the existence of an afterlife and, on the other hand, they reject the absurdity of life assuming a positive attitude towards human existence (Mkufya 18-10-2019<sup>40</sup>).

The final message is to give hope and support to the ill people: *La msingi ni kujenga matumaini* (The base now is to build hope, KKM 145; Bertoncini 2005).

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<sup>40</sup> “Afterwords: *Kauli Ya Mwandishi Kuhusu Tungo Tatu Za Maua*”, Mkufya unpublished.

### 6.1.9. CONCLUSIONS: THE DILEMMA OF EXISTENCE IN *KUWA KWA MAUA*

To conclude, I argue that William Mkufya's novels are a privileged medium which contributes to unearth African epistemes from which his original philosophical thought *udhahiri* sprouts.

The theory of *udhahiri* is based on a well determined ontology: "*what is real to human beings is what is evident practically, materially, through their senses and experiences*" (Mkufya unpublished<sup>41</sup>).

Mkufya started theorizing this notion in the novel *Ziraili na Zirani* (ZZ) (1999), as the philosophy of *wanadhahara*, the revolutionaries, who profess the ideology of *manifestness of things* (Mkufya 1999: 68; Rettovà 2007a: 250) and where *udhahiri* is described as what is evident/manifest to human cognitive capacities through the five senses and reason.

This concept is linked to a form of *cognitive materialism* which recognises as real only "*the evident tangible ontologies and experiences pertaining to the phenomenal world, rejecting metaphysical beliefs and ideas*".

However, Mkufya in the trilogy reconceptualises the theory of *udhahiri* into a new positive key. In fact, *udhahiri* in ZZ was defeated, as it was proven to be a wrong philosophy, when materialists and atheist thinkers, by rejecting the Heaven, "buried themselves" (Mkufya 1999: 156; Rettovà 2021a: 334). Thus, Mkufya in KKM (2019) rejects the transcendental outlook of ZZ, where the author speculated by means of an allegorical tale, which portrayed human existence as imaginary, going into an immanent dimension of "being here and now" and as a "this worldly" conceptualization of the evidence/manifestation of human beings' existence. Mkufya in KKM describes everyday lives of common Tanzanian people; thus, *udhahiri* materialises as the evidence of human existence, which manifests itself after birth and before death, a relative concept of being/existence in time and space opposed to a static and idealistic essence.

**"*Udhahiri huu wa kuwa, kuitwako Maisha*"** (KKM 425)

**"The manifestation of existence which is called life - "the moment of life"**.

**"*Kinachomdhihirikia mtu kwenye utambuzi wake ni uhai, si uzazi wala kifo*"**  
(KKM 445-6)

**"What becomes evident to human cognitive capacity is life - "the living moment", neither procreation nor death."**

***Udhari* is the evident existence or the (cognitive) evidence of existence.**

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<sup>41</sup> "*Udhahiri ni Nini?*" Mkufya unpublished (29 November 2019). I gratefully acknowledge Mkufya for having shared with me this theory, which has been deeply inspiring for my project.

The *evident moment of human existence* refers to the human condition during their tangible existence, which corresponds to the “the living moment” that materialises after birth and before death (the brief extension called life), while humans are conscious of their own “**evident existence**” (Mkufya 2019).

The *cognitive evidence of human existence* is the point in time when human beings are conscious of their existence, in stark contrast with the void/nothingness that either precedes or follows. “*Beyond the tomb and the womb everything is blank to the subject*” – says Mkufya (29-11-2019).

*Ua*, the symbol of a flower, is “the revelation of Being” (*kudhihirika kwa kuwa*) (Mkufya 20-08-2019): a new-born (a baby), true/tangible, and conscious Being, revealing the evidence of existence that became manifest as a sprouting bud.

*“Watu ni maua, yakiishi ndipo yamechanua [...] Uhai, ndilo ua la kuwa kwetu! Sisi ni maua yake, tumedhihirika kwa kuchanua kwa kila rangi; tuna manukato ya kila aina; tuna maumbo yavutiayo kwa kila namna; na pia ulimwengu umetudhihirikia kwenye utambuzi wetu kwa kila rangi, manukato, ladha, hisia ufahamu na tafakuri. [...] Mmea wa waridi una namna moja tu ya furaha: lile ua lake!”* (KKM 448)

**“People are like flowers; they blossom while they are alive. [...] Life is indeed the flower of our existence/the revelation of our Being! We are the flowers of life, we become evident by blossoming in every colour, giving off every scent, and assuming the most attractive shapes; in turn, the universe becomes evident to our cognitive capacity through each of its colours, scents, flavours, senses, comprehensions and reflections. [...] Roses have just one reason for their happiness: their bud/blossom!”**<sup>42</sup>

The author started elaborating this concept in a highly symbolic and hypothetical manner in ZZ (1999), where *udhahiri* implies a form of *cognitive materialism* (*uyakinifu*), which recognises only the matter/substance as real in opposition to the ideal world of ideas, coming back to the phenomenal world in KKM (2019).

This **evident cognitive existence** of human beings engenders a positive attitude towards life; in fact, it opposes the pessimistic and alienating attitude of existentialism, unearthing a source of happiness and meaning in the brief moment of human life, which is the “*progressive reproduction*” of a stronger offspring.

*Udhahiri* is a pragmatic concept characterized by agnosticism (there is no God but there may be a creator or causal aspect of the phenomenal world), epicurean hedonism aimed at enjoying the material pleasures of ephemeral life and a holistic idea of solidarity and harmony among all the living creatures on the Earth (Mkufya 2011; 29-11-2019).

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<sup>42</sup> To read more quotes from the novel on the concept of *udhahiri* see the Appendices: “Extracts from *Kuwa Kwa Maua*”.

Mkufya projects something qualitatively different, looking forward to a better future, which is not “an eternal return of the same” (Rettovà 2016d), but a unique and valuable “blink in time” (*punde ya uhai*, KKM 253). *Udhahiri* is an “*alternative philosophical projection*” (Mkufya 29-11-2019) and a *third way epistemology* between materialism (existentialism, and Marxism expressed by Dr Hans’s theory) and idealism (Kristina’s Christian theology). *Udhahiri* is a new life philosophy, which corresponds to Mkufya’s final answer to his quest for an “epistemology based on Being” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2017), made up of individual experiences in the world.

The ontology of *udhahiri* engenders an opposite perspective to existential pessimism, which claims the meaninglessness and absurdity of life, which in turn results in alienation and suicide; if life is vain, it does not matter losing it. Conversely, Dr Hans gives a substantial meaning to life, not a metaphysical one, yet a phenomenal one: to give life, perpetuating human beings’ existence in this world.

KKM begins with displaying a strong existentialist approach, typified by materialism, scepticism, and agnosticism, to end up challenging completely this mainstream approach. In fact, the novel in its existentialist part raises what I defined “the dilemma of *kuwa*” – the dilemma of existence, torn between questioning or accepting our own life, either by enjoying the immanence of things, or falling into the absurd. Nevertheless, towards the end, Mkufya, suggests a solution which implies accepting the *mysteries of existence* as they are beyond questioning. In fact, in linking the two final sermons, delivered by Dr Hans and Kristina, the clash between belief/idealism and materialism/agnosticism is overcome, looking at the other side of the coin: the other “reality” which lies beneath the tangible material reality.

Even though Mkufya does not have a completely positive attitude towards life, his objective is to spread a positive message of optimism. Therefore, the optimistic solution proposed is valuing the immanent *evidence of being* (*udhahiri*) and *reproduction*. Childbirth implies a kind of “deferral” (Derrida 1978) of meaning from this generation of human beings to another “different” text: a new-born existence. Thus, children are the new protagonists of another story.

#### 6.1.9.1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS ON *KUWA KWA MAUA*

Mkufya succeeded in embedding philosophical debates in simple stories that everyone can read and enjoy, and from the philosophical potential of his stories interesting epistemological conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, KKM is the expression of “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014). Afrocentric customs and practices are described in the story, such as life-cycle rituals, healing and witchcraft performances: the *tam-*

*biko* sacrifice for ancestral spirits, the hereditary curse of *kinda la mlapeke* and the *madogori* exorcism. The novel is imbued with natural oracles, signs, omens, curses, prophecies and spiritual ontologies, which are acknowledged by means of a **mystical epistemology of spiritual beliefs** (Sogolo 2003). Therefore, the narrative is open to parallel ways of knowing and modes of cognition such as the **epistemologies of extrasensory perception, paranormal cognition**, para-psychological phenomena and spiritual communications, while magic and the supernatural are harbingers of “**epistemologies of marvel**” (Rettovà 2021a), which are all recognised as valuable sources of knowledge with epistemic “**inclusion and indeterminacy**” (Rettovà 2021a) within dissimilar knowledge systems.

Furthermore, the cluster of knowledge that consists in *ustaduni* - **cultural civilization** (Mkufya 2004); the practice of *utani* that is a strategy to cope with ethnicity and overcome ethnic conflicts; and the knowledge channelled through the rites of passage that foster **gender and youth epistemologies** to challenge male chauvinist and gerontocratic legacies, are all samples of “**epistemologies of resistance**” (Medina 2013) against both testimonial (gender, age) and hermeneutical (*ustaduni*) injustices (Fricker 2007).

The novel is characterized by two opposite philosophical streams: materialism and idealism; “*Kuwa Kwa Maua is a materialistic critique on idealist beliefs*” (Mkufya p.c.). For instance, the “**epistemologies of cognitive relativism, radical scepticism, agnosticism and materialism**” (Rettovà 2021a) embodied in characters like Dr Hans and Asha clash with **idealism** and **religious beliefs** and doctrines embodied in the character of Kristina.

Moreover, a hedonistic pursuit of immanent pleasures, like the satisfaction of sexual and fleshly desires, represents an irreverent and impertinent metaphor, which is aimed to criticise the idealistic promises of an afterlife as preached by the religions imported into Africa. Therefore, this analogy is a form of epistemic resistance which challenges cultural enslavement (both temporal and spiritual) (Mkufya p.c.).

In the end, what prevails is the humanism preached by Mkufya (2011) of *being human for the other* and *living well* in harmony with all the living beings coexisting in the world, which is based on the **holistic epistemology** that overcomes the separation between the knowing subject and acknowledged ontology (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018).

The philosophical discussions in the book revolve around the quest for an “**epistemology based on Being (*Kuwapo*)**” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2018) to which Mkufya’s final answer is the theory of *udhahiri* - **the evident existence or the evidence of existence**, which focus are human beings’ individual existence, subjective emotions and relative experiences.

However, the *manifestness* of human existence in the phenomenal world encounters the realm of magic, the marvellous, the supernatural and the paranormal, which adorn the universe with vagueness and mysteriousness. Thus

Mkufya, with the ontology of *shani*, accesses the *epistemology of the mysteries of the Universe* (time, life, death, being and nothingness) which embraces all the phenomena and events not yet explicable to human minds without fear. In fact, Mkufya avoids describing the unknown or not yet known as the horrific and dreadful “awe” (Rettovà 2017), like other novelists did (Mutembei 2005a; Mauya 2017), but he rather prefers to look for tangible explanations. Therefore, a **positivist epistemology** of science is promoted to investigate the field of modern medicine; for instance, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

The pivotal contribution of Mkufya’s philosophical dissertations in the shape of novels consists in the development of the theory of *udhahiri*. This has evolved from the negative evidence of cognitive materialism, which operates a reduction of reality and knowledge, as Mkufya introduced the concept in ZZ. Thus, Mkufya in KKM presents a holistic version of the evidence of existence which, rich in moral values (the philosophy of *utu*), acknowledges phenomenal and transcendental mysteries (*shani* effect).

The experimental techniques applied by Mkufya in his fictional works, from ZZ to KKM, consist of fragmentation (Khamis 2003; 2005) of the narrative discourse through stylistic devices, intertextuality (Allen 2000), “heterogeneric textuality” and especially “**generic fracturing**” (Rettovà 2021b: 3), holding together “words and worlds” in African writing (Arndt & Berndt 2007). Therefore, the **epistemology of genre** illustrates how oral and performative genres in the form of songs, proverbs, and dramatic elements, fracture the narrative prose, with the function of “confrontative commentaries” (Rettovà 2016a; 2021b), aiming to access another level of the discourse, which reveals other cognitive dimensions and parallel forms of reality, inserting other epistemologies and philosophies in the same text.

In conclusion, a dystopic reality is postulated relying on an **epistemology of balance, solidarity and mutual coexistence** in the same space of a cluster of multiple epistemologies, which is reflected into the narrative texture of the novels characterised by an original *hetero-epistemic textuality*.

#### 6.1.9.2. FINAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS ON MKUFYA’S NOVELS

Mkufya (3-10-2019<sup>43</sup>) explained to me that he expresses himself using novels as his favourite literary genre: “*How could I otherwise intermingle prose and poetry in Ziraili na Zirani? And how could I avoid the language of satire, sarcasm*

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<sup>43</sup> Unpublished document emailed to me by Mkufya, whom I acknowledge, on October 3, 2019.

and the impertinent idioms?” Similarly, in *Kuwa Kwa Maua* he creates interferences of children’s songs and Asha’s lullabies into the prose: “Any African children love singing and dancing. You cannot tell a story about children without mentioning their songs”. “The mode of artistic expression depends only on what the artist wants to express artistically” and he added that “literature grew through experimentation”.

Therefore, Mkufya conducts experiments to deconstruct the rigid terms of genre and to construct living characters and lived experiences. The style of “fracturing the genre” (Rettovà 2021b) or “heteroglossic textuality” (Bakhtin quoted in Rettovà 2021b: 3) subverts the ideology embedded in the mainstream textual genres, aiming to not only innovate genres, but also project new philosophies into readers’ minds. The writer, analysing human nature through the events narrated, is capable of communicating with them and of *making the readers dance* (Senghor 1964) through emotional participation and shared experiences among plural epistemologies and ontologies included in the novels.

For instance, the heterogeneric prose of KKM embeds both the reflective descriptions of historical and contemporary reality characterizing novels as well as the immediacy of knowledge transmission and action on community’s offstage life characterizing theatre. Mkufya’s philosophical novels not only speculate on, but they, as theatrical novels, also perform into the reality to postulate a co-existence of plural epistemes through intersected genres.

Furthermore, each of Mkufya’s works contains philosophical thoughts and introduces a new epistemological reading to be added to the positivist epistemology of science, from the raw realism of the first novels, to the post-apocalyptic and dystopic reality portrayed in *Ziraili na Zirani*.

In *Ziraili na Zirani* (1999) the author conceptualizes the epistemology of “**cognitive relativism, radical scepticism, and agnosticism**” (Rettovà 2007a; 2021a); in *Ua La Faraja* (2004) he suggests an **holistic epistemology**, founded on *utu* - humanity/humanism and surrounded by *shani* -mystery; and by passing through the *epistemology of balance* and solidarity of *Face Under the Sea* (2011), he ends up with an epistemology of **paranormal cognition and extrasensory perception** as well as an “**epistemology of marvel**” or “**epistemology of indeterminacy and complementary inclusion**” (Rettovà 2021a), which clash with the *cognitive evidence of existence (udhahiri)* in *Kuwa Kwa Maua* (2019).

Mkufya in his *Maua* trilogy aims to highlight the *dilemma of truthful existence (udhahiri)*. This search is reflected in the texts that show a *battle of epistemes* among, on the one hand, the anti-metaphysical perspectives of existentialism, cognitive materialism, scepticism, relativism and agnosticism, which, on the other hand, *co-exist* with transcendental experiences such as the “philosophy of *utu*” (Rettovà 2020), the mysteriousness of *shani*, which surrounds human beings life in this world, as well as paranormal and extra-

sensorial modes of cognition, which open up human minds to other parallel dimensions, paving the way to an unknown but possible future. Mkufya looks towards the future being aware of the past, pointing towards a search for a *conscious progress* through the *hetero-epistemic textuality* of his novels.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusions of This Study

### 7.1. CLASH BETWEEN EPISTEMES

Swahili novels and drama on HIV/AIDS are overall “neo-realist” (Rettovà 2016e) works set in a real dimension, characterized by the positivist epistemology of science. The code of the real prevails, and the authors, committed to fighting against a real disease, embrace biomedicine and “a strong presence of the phenomenal world” (Faris quoted in Grzęda 2013: 160) looking towards scientific and technological progress.

Nonetheless, when modern scientific epistemology seems able to neither explain nor solve its current crisis and the related maladies, the authors broaden the horizons of knowledge and their works become unexpectedly the stage on which “ontologically incongruent elements” (Rettovà 2021a: 319) play an important role. Space for the supernatural and faith is preserved, and neither local traditions nor “other epistemologies” are rejected. These elements are mixed and merged into a single text obeying the principles of both “inclusion” (“*El Tercer Incluido*”, Medina 2011) and “complementary coexistence” (Rettovà 2021a: 320-3).

HIV/AIDS literature in Swahili is characterized by *epistemological plurality* or *epistemological miscellanea*, bringing into the narration contrasting yet

complementary knowledge, while negotiating middle ground by a narrative strategy which allows “continuous dialectics” between “two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other” “into any kind of hierarchy” (Slemon quoted in Warnes 2005a: 7).

The clash-like effect among counter-epistemologies produces the conditions for “ecological thinking” that “recognizes the plurality of heterogeneous knowledge (-s) and highlights the dynamic interconnections that exist between them” (Santos 2007: 66).

The authors expand the limits of knowledge, introducing an understanding of the “holistic integrated nature of reality and knowledge” (Nabudere 2011: 39) which is able to overcome the divide between scientific and non-scientific epistemologies, by combining science and “artisanal knowledge” (Santos 2018: 32-4) as “ecology of knowledge” (Santos 2009: 116).

Therefore, Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS, fighting against “epistemicide” (Santos 2016: 149), allows the “Epistemologies of the South” to surface, highlighting an “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009: 159), and demonstrating “awareness of the elastic nature of knowledge” (Soyinka 2005: 53).

## 7.2. LITERATURE AND REALITY AS ENTANGLED ONTOLOGIES

Even though literature emerges from and reflects reality, both literature and reality fit into the categories of being, and they are interconnected yet independent ontologies.

Indeed, the genres of reality and fiction are interrelated, interwoven, and entangled systems, which reciprocally inter-act<sup>1</sup> (Nicolini 2021: 80). In fact, this research highlights how inter-active literary genres not only reflect on, but also have a challenging impact on reality “writing beyond representation” (Kezilahabi 2015: 46).

I have been investigating Swahili literature as an arena for philosophical enquiries, where cultural and literary elements intertwined. Communal cultural practices as well as individual beliefs and life philosophies, which are drawn from Afrocentric knowledge (-s), are described in Afrophone literatures by means of stylistic, thematic and narratological devices from which philosophy and epistemologies can be filtered. Different literary genres articulate incompatible epistemologies, highlighting the potential of literature to provide a textual basis for Afrophone philosophies. Thus, Swahili literature succeeds in building a bridge between literature and philosophical reflections related to human life on earth with style.

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<sup>1</sup> For this definition, I was also inspired by the new descriptions of quantum entanglement phenomena in physics. See Rozatkar, Gaurav (16 August 2018). “Demonstration of quantum entanglement.” OSF. <https://osf.io/g8bpj/>

In this study, I developed a comprehensive theoretical framework (chapter 2) which aims to connect philosophy and literature, as well as stylistics and epistemologies. Following Santos's concept of "Epistemologies of the South" (2014; 2018; 2020), I introduced the ongoing quest for "Africa-centred Knowledges" (Cooper & Morrel 2014) and African epistemes (Kresse 2005a,b). Then, applying the theories explained in the theoretical chapter into the case studies (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6), I analysed two genres of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS, namely drama and performance (chapter 3) as well as novels (chapters 4, 5, 6).

In the case studies, I explored the inter-actions, between clash and co-existence, of plural epistemes through literary genres, and from each case study, I have been able to draw different epistemological conclusions.

The first case study focuses on drama, which displays a rich *epistemological miscellanea* by showing clashes between discordant epistemes in the representation of HIV/AIDS.

The second case study analyses Mutembei's and Mauya's novels, whose narrative prose, which incorporates chunks of other genres and elements pertaining to orality, "en-textualises" and "inter-textualises" the *epistemological plurality*, establishing alternatives ways of inclusion and assimilation of clashing ontologies and epistemologies, yet with authorial reticence and ambiguity.

Finally, in my pivotal case study on the *Diwani ya Maua* I demonstrate that Mkufya composes philosophical dissertations folded into simple stories in which, by engaging in epistemological discussions and validating local knowledge, he creates a kaleidoscopic panorama of co-operating knowledge, by including a *miscellany of heterogeneous yet integrated ontologies*. Mkufya's novels dedicate substantial space to philosophical speculations aimed at overcoming not only the conflictual situations of stigma and discrimination through optimism and consolation, but also the clashes between different philosophies, dissonant ontological beings, and heterogenous forms of knowledge.

I argue that by digging into the multi-layered genre and multistylistic narration of the *Maua* trilogy, multiple philosophical outlooks emerge fashioning an original *hetero-epistemic textuality* that shows *the coexistence of plural epistemes*.

Furthermore, I have explored how the real-life event of HIV/AIDS penetrates arts and literature; thus, I argue that each genre reflects diversely on reality and articulates differently with the entanglements of plural epistemologies and philosophies of which reality is composed.

The departure point of my analysis has been the multimedia genre of theatre, including drama and performance, which performs reality and acts into it. Theatre transfers embodied knowledge and experiences through bodily ways of knowing: sensibility, sensory experience, perception, and intuition (Geurts 2002). In performances, knowledge flows through active participation and the cathartic effect of emotions engendered, which by developing

conscientization directly impacts on communities' behaviour. Drama performs clashing ontologies and epistemologies on a culturally aesthetic stage and acts to redress behaviour for community development, showing "contemporaneity and impermanence" (Okagbue & Kasule 2021) of texts, which are flexible and dynamic to fit the context.

Secondly, I analysed what I define as "descriptive-reflective" novels including Mutembei's historical-documentary novel based on authentic findings from the author's field research, and Mauya's novel *Firauni* a satirical depiction that mirrors social issues. These novels, by thoroughly describing the historical reality, reflect upon it creating their own fictional realities blended with culturally contextualised elements such as Haya mythology and Zigua traditions respectively. In these novels, description is the fundamental driver for developing readers' reflections on the messages conveyed, such as the vivid depictions of diseased bodies affected by HIV/AIDS for didactic purposes. Knowledge is embodied in characters' actions, behaviours, and experiences which are insightfully described by the narrators' voice, whose role is essential.

Lastly, Mkufya's philosophical novels are constructed upon philosophical arguments (*hoja*) conveyed as dialogues between the characters of Dr Hans, Asha and Kristina, which render HIV/AIDS as not only a medical condition but also a philosophical metaphor to reflect on the challenges of human existence: life, sex, faith and death. Furthermore, these novels are performative texts which incorporate dramatic style via: characters' discussions that work as speech acts (performative utterances, Austin 1962); minute descriptions of characters bodily movements and facial expressions (Asha's sensuality and Tuma's unruly frowning), as well as graphic descriptions of physical consumption, pain and psychological suffering caused by HIV/AIDS (Attree 2015), which represent a narrativization of embodied knowledge; and the cathartic effect of the emotions unleashed by the great tragedy performed in the second novel. The theatricality of these novels implies that reflections should be brought back to action influencing readers' behaviour.

Performances which are featured by "flow and transportation are able to exercise a power of transformation through participation" (Soyinka 2005: 38), and Mkufya's stories *make the readers dance* (Senghor 1964) through introspective meditation. In fact, by including both dramatic and novelistic aspects, the *Maua* trilogy aims to connect philosophical speculations with sensitive yet sensible actions beyond the text. Particularly, the emphasis is on youth; indeed, the plays make young peoples' "cries" be heard, and Mkufya encourages a deferral of the meaning of life on children. It is up to them to entangle philosophical reflections with life actions. Performers and characters, as Mkufya says, "*take their own lives*", share experiences and transmit knowledge (-s) so as to prevent both societal and medical HIV/AIDS effectively.

To sum up, theatre, "descriptive-reflective" novels, and philosophical novels not only reflect different approaches to life, which is symbolised as either

hopeless dried stumps or hopeful blossoming flowers, but also relate differently - yet interconnectedly, to reality in a circular path from action to description as the base for reflection and to philosophical speculations that are eventually brought back to action and performance.

In conclusion, the multi-generic Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS is capable of merging plural ontologies, epistemologies and philosophies in the same text, which inter-act and co-exist between clash and co-operation as well as challenge and negotiation, through narrative devices and original aesthetic and stylistic formulas. Drama, through dialogues and performances, stages embodied knowledge *in action* which transfers HIV/AIDS education and prevention, producing an effect of conscientization, but also performs through a clash-like effect the interplay of incompatible ontologies and alternative epistemologies as a strategy to demonstrate awareness of their presence.

Mutembei's and Mauya's novels describe the inclusion of epistemological plurality and its "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2009) through generic fractures, fragmentation and "metafictional devices" (Mwangi 2009): intertextuality, *heteroglossic* dialogues, and magical realist style, where the conjuring of spiritual ontologies, magic and the supernatural interfere in the phenomenal world, and where clashes between diverse ontologies and incompatible epistemologies are displayed.

Mkufya experiments further the generic fusion embedding "metareferences" (Diegner 2021) across genres: oral sermons, prophetic chants, children's games and lullabies, and dramatic actions, which blend the prose of his performative texts that postulate the coexistence of plural and complementary epistemologies in a cooperative environment.

Therefore, Swahili literature demonstrates how each genre "with its own style" reflects the multifaceted and kaleidoscopic aspects of reality, which are influenced by plural rationalities and knowledge (-s), articulating different plural epistemic interactions.

#### 7.2.1. COMMUNAL PRACTICES AND INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS STEMMING FROM AFRICAN EPISTEMES

Traditional communal practices such as lifecycle rituals, healing, divination and witchcraft as well as individual beliefs are sources for Afrocentric knowledge and channels through which to convey neotraditional (Appiah 1992: 107) cultural epistemologies.

The "**epistemology of return**" (Rettovà 2016d), renders a cyclical conceptualisation of time that enables a repetition or return to the idealized past of the African tradition (Rettovà 2016), implying full awareness of one's own origins and cultural traditions.

For instance, traditional lifecycle rituals are the bastions of *ustaduni* - **cultural civilization** (Mkufya 2004: 363): “To be culturally civilized means to be contented to follow our own traditional culture and to respect habits and customs of the other without detesting nor ignoring them” (ULF 363).

Thus, the **epistemology of *ustaduni***, the knowledge at the foundation of cultural civilization depends on the resistance and resilience of local knowledge and practices, even though it is also open to progress according to the globalised advancement of science and technology.

For instance, the knowledge channelled through the rites of passage, which is described by Mkufya as “*an example of local epistemology*” (Mkufya p.c.), fosters **epistemologies of gender and youth**, which challenge traditional African gerontocracy and patriarchy, aiming to negotiate equal rights against “epistemic marginalization” of women and youth (Chimakonam & Du Toit 2018). Likewise, **joking relations of *utani*** are a strategy to cope with conflicts related to ethnicity and to pacify any conflict inside the society.

In Africa, religious beliefs are characterized by, on the one hand, monotheistic credo imported to Africa, Islam and Christianity, which are defined by doctrines (Appiah 2005: 31), and, on the other hand, traditional cults and rituals, which are systems of beliefs.

The heterogenous African traditional religious thoughts are based on the evidence of not only the existence of a host of non-human powers, spirits and divinities, but also the interference and the relationships between people and spiritual forces and entities (Appiah 2005; Oladipo 2004; P’Bitek 2011). Thus, according to monotheistic religions, which stem from anthropocentric cultures, all the explanations are verified in God’s existence (Appiah 2005). Conversely, according to traditional beliefs, knowledge is transmitted by the spirits of the ancestors and other spiritual forces to living humans (Hamminga 2005: 66) by “**contingency**” (Hamminga 2005: 62).

Therefore, an **epistemology of religious beliefs** and doctrines (Pritchard 2018) encounters a **mystical epistemology of spiritual beliefs** (Sogolo 2003; Hamminga 2005; Appiah 2005; Hallen & Wiredu 2013) in literature.

Furthermore, both witchcraft and divination work through a “synesthetic epistemology of magic” (Stroeker 2012), which is a mode of cognition that evokes the non-linearity of events that science fails to recognise (Stroeken 2012: 6). For instance, Stroeker’s (2012: 26) “epistemology of *Shingila*” is the key to access the unknown, determining whether you are able or not to welcome the instability/insecurity/uncertainty which characterises life events.

Finally, **epistemologies of healing** are forms of entangled syncretism in the “quest for therapies” (Janzen 2017: 3) located into a “therapeutic continuum” (Olsen & Sargent 2017: 1) from traditional healing practices (diviners and herbalists), Christian or Islamic faith healing rituals and biomedical hospital treatments. They also represent an “ever shifting self” of the patience

among the complementary and additional practices available (Janzen 2017: 12; Feierman & Janzen 1992).

In conclusion, the cluster of epistemologies representing both collective traditional practices and individual beliefs are an example of “**epistemologies of resistance**” (Medina 2013) against “epistemicide” (Santos 2014; Santos & Meneses 2020).

### 7.2.2. EPISTEMOLOGIES ISOLATED IN SWAHILI LITERATURE ON HIV/AIDS

The **positivist-scientific epistemology** and modern medicine, as products of Western Enlightenment, which characterise “realist” literature (Watt 1987; Rettovà 2021a), are recognised but not undiscussed.

Nevertheless, the key achievement of this project has been to identify **neotraditional** (Appiah 1992: 120) and **complementary** epistemologies. Knowledge is not an immovable rock of local traditions, instead it is adaptable according to the progress of time. Likewise, other sources of knowledge are not alternatives to the positivist epistemology of science yet can be integrated (with science). These epistemologies make their appearance in Swahili literature as the expression of “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morell 2014), clashing and co-operating together in a “kaleidoscopic horizon of intercultural knowledge solidarity” (Santos 2014).

By investigating those epistemologies, which are explained in detail below, as a kind of *system*, I claim that each epistemology is based on a distinguished *X* as the variable feature capable of changing the balance among plural elements and relative perspectives, determining the lenses through which the world is contingently perceived and interpreted. Epistemologies are indeed the endogenous variables which work like a prism through which both reality and literature can be explored and interpreted.

The magical-supernatural epistemology of “**indeterminacy and inclusion/complementarity**” (Rettovà 2021a) that characterises the style of magical realist works, manifests itself when the antinomies between contrasting epistemologies and opposite ontologies are resolved (Chanady 2003) into a narrative style capable of looking with a “third eye” (Cooper 1998).

This epistemology is based on three postulates: “**indeterminacy**” between scientific and mythical or magical epistemologies/ontologies; “**inclusion**” of “dissonant epistemologies and incompatible ontologies” as equally real into a single text” (Rettovà 2021a); and “mutual **complementarity**” rendering the inclusion of “parallel worlds” with “simultaneous validity and complementary coexistence of both” (Rettovà 2021a: 319-23).

The foundation of this epistemology stems from the philosophy of “**Suma Qamaña**” or *buen vivir* (good life) (Medina 2011), which represents a “car-

tography of coexistence” and reciprocal respect in the same space, according to the principle of indeterminacy: “*el efecto/estado T<sup>2</sup>*”, where antagonistic strengths encounter one another, generating a third natural strength that is the synthesis of both, and which is not excluded, but included: “*el Tercer Incluido - the included third*” (Medina 2011; Rettovà 2021a)<sup>3</sup>.

The “**holistic epistemology**” (Rettovà 2018; 2021a: 323-32) is based on the concept of embodied knowledge, as Senghor’s conceptions of “*dancing the other*” and knowing through the body, emotions and intuitive reason by communitarianism and through participation (Senghor 1964; 1971; Udefi 2014). Holism is aimed at overcoming the split between subject and object, essence and existence, through the concept of “*onto-criticism*”, which has been postulated by the Tanzanian philosopher Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944 - 2020), so as to create an identity/unity of “*being*” (Rettovà 2007a; 2021a; Lanfranchi 2012). This holistic epistemology aims to connect knowing subjects with experienced knowledge into an “*integrated nature of knowledge*” or “*all-inclusive epistemology*” (Nabudere 2011). The goal is an **epistemology of balance**, a form of knowing that happens through a delicate equilibrium to *live well and let live* among humans, natural and spiritual beings as part of the same universe (Mkufya 2011).

The “**epistemology of cognitive relativism, scepticism, and agnosticism**”, suggested by Rettovà (2021a: 332-5), surges from the contrast with the “*ideology of manifestness of things*”, created by William Mkufya (*Ziraili na Zirani* 1999), searching for an “*objective reality ontologically conform to human cognitive capacity*” (Rettovà 2017; Rettovà 2021a). This epistemology rests upon four pillars: the critique of “**cognitive materialism**” that corresponds to “*those characteristics that can be recognized by human senses and their instruments, and not through characteristics of belief or ideas only*” (Mkufya 1999: 68; Rettovà 2007a; 2021a); “**radical scepticism and relativism**” that imply a “*critical reflection on epistemology*” (Diegner quoted in Rodgers-John 2015: 73), which expresses both the relativity of truth as an “*ideal*” product of the human mind (Mkufya 1999: 110); “**cultural pluralism**” as the existence of plural “*realities*” (Rettovà 2021a), which change depending on the circumstances with an “*endless deferral of meaning*” (Rodgers-John 2015: 69); and, “**agnosticism**” that stems from Mkufya’s *kuzikana* - the denial of Heavens, and the rejection of both God and an afterlife, but also of a sole reality (Mkufya quoted in Rettovà 2021a: 334).

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<sup>2</sup> The T-State refers to the “*antagonistic principle*” of Stephane Lupasco.

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, epistemologies such as “*the epistemology of indeterminacy and complementary/inclusion*” (Rettovà 2021a), embodied knowledge as Senghor’s “*dancing the other*” (1964; 1971) and the holistic epistemology (Rettovà 2018; 2021a; Nabudere 2011) share the principle that knowledge production is created by the interconnection of emotions, perceptions and reason with the “*epistemologies of corazonar*”: a “*feeling-thinking to being-with*” (Santos 2018: 101).

The **epistemology of extrasensory perception and paranormal cognition** originates from “*une rationalité implacable*” (implacable rationality, Huendako 2007: 206) which recognises sources of knowledge not acknowledged in Western science including intuition, precognition, foreboding, foretelling, dreams, spirit mediumship, oracular interpretation, clairvoyance, telepathy (Ajei 2009: 30; Mbogoni 2013). The “African multiple ways of knowing incorporates the reality that exists beyond the five senses expressed and understood through complex and multidimensional symbols” (Ikhane 2017: 142). Therefore, paranormal cognition and extra sensory experiences are “a mode of knowing” - an epistemology (Gyekye 1993: 203; Mosley 2004: 149) in between innate ideas and learned experiences (Gyekye quoted in Coetze & Roux 2005) and accessible through the exercise of local practices such as divination and witchcraft.

The “**epistemology of marvel**” (Rettovà 2021a), whose ontologies are *maajabu*/marvels (*Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*, Kezilahabi 2013), is the “epistemology of supernaturalism and superstition, which portrays a reality characterised by black magic, witchcraft, paranormal and extra sensorial appearances” (Rettovà 2021a: 314-9), where the antinomy between the code of the real and the supernatural is not resolved and thus represents something that sounds weird to human understanding. In fact, the ontology of *ajabu* and the “realm of marvel” (Rettovà 2016c) appear suddenly into a bare existentialist reality, allowing access to extraordinary happenings and strange events, which clash with cognitive materialism. The marvel - *ajabu* in Kezilahabi (2008: 110) is a marvel that frightens and includes death, black magic, and curses. Mkufya’s mystery - *shani* (Mkufya 2004; 2019), on the other hands has a positive interpretation, becoming a source of knowledge beyond material reality.

The “**epistemology of awe**”, whose ontology is “the unknown”, is an alternative reality incomprehensible to local beliefs, traditional myth, and native religious spirituality, as well as to positivist science (Rettovà 2017: 176-7). Awe is out of control and unpredictable, it transcends the limit of science and escapes all existing explanatory models. It represents the horrific unknown in front of which human beings lack completely the conceptual means to understand it. However, it can also be a new possible experimental reality, which appears in the midst of the traditional and the truth, conceptualized as the unknown and accessible through “the epistemology of *being in awe*”, which is “located in the space vacated by the receding explanatory models that fail in the face of the new reality” (Rettovà 2017: 176-7). The “epistemology of awe”, which transcends human’ understanding and slips out from both traditional beliefs and science, can also be conceptualised as an “**alien epistemology**” of other new possible worlds inhabiting Sci-Fi literature (Rettovà *Swahili Colloquium* 2019).

Both the marvel (*ajabu*) and the unknown (*awe*) are reconceptualised in a positive light in the form of *shani*, the mysteries of the universe by Mkufya

(2004). The supernatural does exist as the ontological reality inaccessible to human observation, and beyond limited human cognitive capacity. Mkufya (2004: 220) with the ontology of “*shani, kioja*” embraces all the phenomena and events that are not yet explicable to human cognitive capacity. Hence, the **feeling of *shani*** implies sensations and perceptions that fall beyond the explanation provided by the human mind’s rational categories. The mystery of *shani*, which apparently escapes humans’ understanding, gives humans access to a hidden reality behind the phenomenal world and beyond the evident existence. The tolerance for mysterious events, odd coincidences, weird happenings and strange ontologies is important in both life and in creative writings. Nonetheless, Mkufya does not describe the unknown or not yet known as the horrific, dreadful, and post humanist “awe” (Rettovà 2017). Instead, he encourages people not only to accept all the mysteries related to human existence in the universe (time, existence, life, death, being and nothingness) with optimism and peace of mind, but also to focus on what is evident as the only way to realize and comprehend *udhahiri* (the cognitive evidence of existence). The *shani* effect postulated by Mkufya (2004; 2019; interview 31-10-2018) can be interpreted as a life philosophy, a sort of existentialist attitude reconceptualised in an African key, which claims to accept all the mysteriousness of life as it is, because the mysteriousness of *shani* can become a gateway to access knowledge beyond the boundaries of human reason and behind cognitive materialism as the *epistemology of the mystery of the Universe*.

Mkufya’s final answer to his quest for an “**epistemology based on Being**” (Kezilahabi quoted in Rettovà 2017; 2018), which consists in individual relative experiences, characterising human beings’ existence in the world and not the ideal essence, is *udhahiri*: the **evident existence or the (cognitive) evidence of existence**.

“People are like flowers; they blossom while they live. [...] Life is indeed the flower of our existence/the revelation of our Being! [...] the universe becomes evident to our cognitive capacity through each of its colours, scents, flavours, senses, comprehensions and reflections.” (Mkufya 2019: 448; the translation is mine)

*Udhahiri* (Mkufya 1999; 2019), is a positive reconceptualization of the philosophy professed by atheists and materialists, who are defeated in the end by the “faith paradox” (Rettovà 2007a: 147). It is a real life philosophy or optimistic attitude towards life, based on an immanent ontology: the **evident cognitive existence** of “*walimwengu watu* – human world-dwellers”, which materialises during the “living moment” in the midst of the void of non-existence that precedes and follows. It is an “*alternative philosophical projection*” (Mkufya 29-11-2019) and a “*third way epistemology*” between materialism and idealism, which engenders a positive reading of the human condition on earth, revealing the source of happiness and meaning in the moment of life that is reproduction.

The ontology of *Maua* (flowers as human beings) metaphorically harmonizes humans (*walimwengu watu*) and nature, including all the other living entities (*vi-hai*), which engendered a feeling of “*vivir bien*-live well” (Medina 2011; Santos 2014; 2018) by an “**epistemology of balance**” (Mkufya 2011).

In the end, the “generic innovation” (Barber & Furniss 2006: 13) consists in the presence of elements pertaining to orality, dramatic style, and performance, intermingled into the narrative prose by means of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) intertextuality (Kristeva 1976) and “**generic fracturing**” (Rettovà 2021b) not only shows the epistemic potentiality of style, but it also demonstrates the applicability of an **epistemology of genre**. Thus, the interweaving of genres provides African philosophies with a textual canvas capable of articulating multiple philosophical readings and epistemological perspectives.

### 7.3. THE *HETERO-EPISTEMIC TEXTUALITY* OF SWAHILI LITERATURE

By previously “presenting” an individual author’s fiction with a concrete rootedness in a specific language and culture (Nicolini, *Asixoxe* 2020), through my case study on Mkufya’s *Diwani ya Maua*, I have demonstrated that literature in African languages is a privileged medium to develop philosophical thoughts based on an “African epistemological locus” (Kresse 2005b). Literature also provides African philosophies with a textual basis: “philosophy is critical reflection *par excellence* and cannot develop fully unless it “writes its memoirs” or “keeps a diary” (Hountondji 1983: 105); “philosophy is a set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves” (Hountondji 1983: 33; Bell 1989: 369; Wanjohi 1997: 77).

Swahili literature emerges as an exemplary arena from where African epistemes can be excavated, illustrating practices, thoughts and beliefs that are drawn from Afrocentric knowledge. Furthermore, the analysis of different literary genres highlights that each of them conveys intermingling of various ontologies, epistemologies and philosophies. Especially, Mkufya’s novels harmonize the clashes, demonstrating the coexistence of a “constellation of knowledge” (Santos 2014: 157). This balance is represented through style and narrative such as the technique of “generic fracturing” (Rettovà 2021b), which incorporates distinct genres in the novelistic prose and channels mismatching epistemologies into a “prism of knowledge” (Santos 2018: 140). The mutual *coexistence* of complementary epistemologies is thus reflected into the *hetero-epistemic textuality* of Swahili literature.

Furthermore, this study makes a small contribution to a broader ongoing project aimed at “re-centring” knowledge as the operation of “moving the centre” of knowledge (Thiong’o 1993; Fanon 2001; 2017; Mbembe 2001; 2017; Senghor 1971), “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2008; Kresse

2018), “de-centring” Western modernity, and shifting the new centre onto “border epistemology (thinking from the border)” (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2006: 208; Mignolo 2013; Santos 2009).

Therefore, the “Epistemological South” involves knowledge perspectives from the countries subjected to both historical colonialism and “epistemicide”, perpetrated by the hegemony of modern Western thinking (Santos 2018: 1; Santos & Meneses 2020: xvii), and engages in “South-South intercultural translation” (Santos 2018: 247ff), which is characteristic of literature valorising cultural diversity. For instance, Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” is the theoretical foundation of the post-independence African Popular Theatre for Development, and the artistic style of magical realism, popular in Latin America narratives, is a feature applicable to Swahili post-realist novels.

Hence, “Africa-centred Knowledges” (Cooper & Morrell 2014) can be “interculturally translated” as “epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2014), which participate in the current counter-epistemological effort to validate heterogeneous ways of knowing by the medium of multiple genres of literature in African languages such as Swahili literature.

To conclude, I argue that Swahili literature is a noteworthy contribution to the panorama of both literature in African languages and Afrophone philosophies, placing itself between an “internal dynamism – pluralism of system of belief of African cultures” (Hountondji quoted in Kresse 2007: 5) and an external pluralism of cultures and thoughts or what has been called a “philosophy of culture” (Haise quoted in Kresse 2007: 232). Particularly, Mkufya proposes an “African intellectual renaissance of thoughts” (Mkufya 18-02-2019) introducing an original “mode of self-writing” (Mbembe 2002: 239) in his own style. He is a “free thinker” (Kresse 2007: 238) who, between practical wisdom and intellectual endeavour, composes a unique contribution to “African philosophical discourses” (Kresse 2007: 31).

Since Mkufya trusts the “human flowers” and their ability to show humanity, he suggests healing the sickness of the human condition, “the AIDS of society” (*UKIMWI wa kijamii*) by the life philosophy of *udhahiri*, which is a hopeful and optimistic interpretation of the evidence of existence that lets life win over death through procreation. Even though his characters are facing universal problems, they always show their “Africanness” (Jeyifo 1985).

Through Mkufya’s case, I argue that Swahili literature overcomes the clash between epistemes, drawing a “cartography of coexistence” (Medina 2011), which engenders an “alternative thinking of alternatives” (Santos & Meneses 2020: 118) as a kind of supportive cooperation among “alternative ways of being in the world” (Santos & Meneses 2020: xx), by the original aesthetic and style of his texts. Therefore, Swahili literature, as exponent of Afrophone literature and philosophy, is a manifestation of Afrocentric discourses, and it contributes to filling the gap in the knowledge debate by practising a “harmonization in diversity” (Kezilahabi 2015: 45). This happens within a constel-

lation of kaleidoscopic knowledge, reflected in the *hetero-epistemic textuality* of the narrative.

By way of a conclusion, I state that the encounters between both alternative and complementary epistemologies and diverse ontologies in literature shift from a clash to a productive *coexistence*, rendering Swahili literature a fertile ground for further explorations into the field of knowledge production and philosophical enquiries, providing them with an original textual medium.



# Appendices



## APPENDIX 1. SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH AND SWAHILI)

### FORMAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PHD RESEARCH PROJECT<sup>1</sup>

#### INTERVIEWEE/S PERSONAL DATA

#### DATE, TIME AND LOCATION OF THE INTERVIEW

- How do you think **communication** for HIV/AIDS prevention has changed between the 1990s and today? I mean, how has communication evolved, and how have these changes affected people's awareness of the disease?
- What are the common reactions related to HIV/AIDS?
- How is HIV/AIDS perceived and represented in your community? In the society? In your work?
- Could you tell me which, in your opinion, are the images that best represent and render HIV/AIDS for the local population?
- Are there any particular **figure of speech and metaphors** for rendering HIV/AIDS that you have used in your work/s, and if so, what are they?
- How do you understand and what do you think about the relationship between **art and education**? Are they complementary or compatible?
- In your experience, is it possible to use literature and the art to connect scientific knowledge with local culture?
- What are the difficulties artists/writers have in negotiating between the scientific message and local understanding? What works, to attract people and convince them of the message?
- What role do **religion** and the churches play in HIV/AIDS prevention in your area? And in literature?
- Can you explain the role of **traditional ritual and customs** in HIV/AIDS transmission?
- Do initiation rites play any role in educating people on HIV/AIDS?
- Who is today's sexual guide? Who do people look to for guidance in sexual matters? How do the initiation rites influence people's sexual behaviour?

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<sup>1</sup> The project information sheet and consent form templates display the working title of this project that was in use during the time of my fieldwork research (i.e. *The Evolution of Communication For HIV/AIDS Prevention Through Performative Arts in Tanzania*).

- In your opinion, how changeable is **people’s sexual behaviour**?
- What do you think is the most effective kind of communication to convince people to change their sexual behaviour?
- Do you think that it is possible to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and local people’s behaviour?
- Can communication be more effective by rendering HIV/AIDS as something which pertains to **the supernatural** world?
- How does the literary genre of **magical realism** fit in the landscape of the literature aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention?
- How do you understand and explain the relation between the aesthetic level of art and literature (for example the use of magical realism and different ontologies) and its didactic as well as informative role?
- What is the role of **philosophy** in HIV/AIDS prevention literature? Which philosophy?
- How is the positivist **epistemology** connected with local epistemologies?
- What is the space for other ontologies and the supernatural in literature?
- Are there any elements pertaining to magic, superstition and witchcraft in your work?
- Which is the role of **traditional healers** for HIV/AIDS prevention, both in the society and in your work? What are the relations between them and the hospitals?
- Do you think that it is possible to combine alternative epistemologies and discordant ontologies in literature?
- What is the perception of **time** in your work?
- Could you explain the role of **women** in HIV/AIDS literature? Are they able to negotiate between their own agency and empowerment as well as local culture?
- Are you aware of examples of female characters negotiating the challenges that come not only from their socio-economic situation and their culture but also from HIV/AIDS transmission?
- How has sexuality been changing since HIV/AIDS?
- Could you describe and explain the language that you used to address sexual issues? Can this be considered a “hidden language”?
- Are there any particular metaphors for women in your work?
- How do **gender relations** have an impact on the transmission of HIV/AIDS?
- In which bodies is HIV/AIDS embodied?

- Why do you think HIV/AIDS has been defined as a “women’s disease”?
- What is the role of prostitution and sugar daddies in relation to HIV/AIDS?
- Could you describe and explain the main **tropes and figure of speech** that you used for **HIV/AIDS prevention** and **condoms** in your work?
- What do you think about the relations between HIV/AIDS and **drug abuse or alcoholism**?
- Do you think that **didactic theatre** can be both attractive and informative?
- In your experience, can theatre be a good tool to influence behaviour?
- Which is your experience as a playwright?
- What is the theatricality or performativity of your work?
- Could you describe the function of your main characters?
- Do you believe that your novels can be related to theatre and performance?
- Is there a tragic hero’s fall in your work?
- Could you tell me briefly the history of theatre in Tanzania?
- Which are the differences among African traditional theatre, Tanzanian Popular theatre, Theatre for Development (TfD) and Academic theatre?
- What is the relationship between local theatre and Theatre for Development? Participation or domestication?
- How would you describe the relations between Tanzanian Popular theatre and TfD?
- What do you mean by Tanzanian Popular theatre?
- What are the relationships between the theatre and the state or foreign actors (donors and funders)?
- How can theatrical groups, directors and actors as well as playwrights satisfy foreign funders and donors, who ask for a precise kind of communication, while also staying close to the local culture and popular perceptions?
- Could you explain if and how the Aristotelian theory on tragedy influences Swahili plays?
- Could you point out the Aristotelian elements in the plot and characters of your play/work?
- Do you think that the traditional storyteller can be described as “Orukian sages”?
- Where do you recognise a “traditional African setting” (Mudimbe 1988) in your work?

- Why did you start to commit **yourself** and your work to the fight against HIV/AIDS?
- Where do you get inspiration from? Does it come from your personal life experience?
- What is the main message that you wish to deliver through your work?

## USAILI NA MAHOJIANO PAMOJA NA WAANDISHI KWA AJILI YA MRADI WA UTAFITI WA SHAHADA YA UZAMIVU

### TAARIFA BINAFSI ZA MHOJIWA /WAHOJIWA

#### TAREHE, MUDA NA MAHALI ZA USAILI

- Je, unafikiri **mawasiliano** ya kudhibiti UKIMWI kati ya miaka 1990 na leo yamebadilika vipi? Ninamaanisha jinsi mawasiliano yalivyoendelea, na jinsi gani mabadiliko hayo yameathiri uelewa wa watu kuhusu ugonjwa huo?
- Kutokana na uzoefu wako, hisia za watu kuhusu VVU/UKIMWI na maambukizi yake ni zipi?
- VVU/UKIMWI unafikiriwa na kuelezwa kivipi katika jamii yako? Na pia katika kazi yako?
- Katika maoni yako taswira na sitiari zipi zinaeleza vema VVU/UKIMWI kwa watu wa kawaida?
- Kuna **tamathali za usemi/lugha ya picha** (sitiari na taswira) ambazo zinatumiwa hasa katika kazi za fasihi zihusuzo VVU/UKIMWI? Ni zipi? Tafadhali zitaje.
- Unaelewaje mahusiano baina ya **sanaa na elimu**? Unayafikiriaje? Je unaona sanaa na elimu zinaambatana na zinakamilishana?
- Unaonavyo wewe, je, inawezekana kutumia fasihi na sanaa za maonyesho ili kuunganisha ujuzi wa kisayansi na mila za kiasili? Umepata kuona matumizo hayo?
- Wasanii na waandishi wanapata matatizo yepi ili kujadili kati ya ujumbe wa kisayansi na ufahamu wa asili wa watu? Nini kinachoifanya kazi kuvutia watu zaidi na kuwashawishi kuhusu ujumbe huo?
- **Dini** ina nafasi gani katika kupambana dhidi ya UKIMWI majimboni? Na katika fasihi?
- Unadhani kwamba **miviga na matambiko** yana uhusiano na maambukizi ya UKIMWI?
- Miviga inachangia kuwaelimisha vijana juu ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- Ni watu gani ambao leo ni somo au kungwi? Miviga inaathiri vipi tabia za watu kuhusu mahusiano ya kijinsia na ujinsia?
- Unavyofikiri wewe, **hulka za jamii na tabia kuhusu mahusiano ya kijinsia** yanabadilishwaje?
- Kwa maoni yako, ni aina ipi kuu ya mawasiliano inayoweza kushawishi watu wabadilisha **tabia** zao?

- Unafikiri kwamba inawezekana kuunganisha tofauti kati ya ufahamu wa kisayansi na tabia za asili za wenyeji kuchochea mabadiliko ya tabia?
- Je, mawasiliano yana nguvu zaidi ikiwa VVU/UKIMWI unazungumzwa kama unatokana na ulimwengu wa **majini, mapepo, mazimwi na kadhalika** (supernatural)?
- Tanzu ya fasihi inayoitwa **uhalisia-mazingaombwe** inapatana vipi na fasihi inayolenga ukingaji wa VVU/UKIMWI?
- Unaelewaje na ufafanujie uhusiano baina ya kiwango cha ujumi (aesthetic) cha sanaa na fasihi (**uhalisia-mazingaombwe** na kuwepo kwa viumbe (ontologies) mbalimbali)? Unaelewaje na ufafanujie kiwango chake cha elimu (didactic) na uwezo wa kufikisha ujumbe?
- **Falsafa** ina nafasi gani katika fasihi inayohusu VVU/UKIMWI? Ni falsafa ipi?
- **Ufahamu** wa kisayansi (positivist epistemology) unaweza kulinganishwa kiviipi na ufahamu wa asili (local epistemology)?
- Kuwepo kwa viumbe tofauti (ontologies) na mizimu, mapepo, mashetani na majini (supernatural) kuna dhima gani katika fasihi?
- Katika kazi yako kuna vipengele vinavyohusu uchawi, ushirikina na mazingaombwe?
- **Waganga wa jadi**, wachawi na waaguzi wanachangia kwa namna gani katika kujikinga na kutibu VVU/UKIMWI kwenye jamii? Na kwenye fasihi? Je, Wao wana uhusiano upi na madaktari na matabibu wa hospitali?
- Unafikiri kwamba inawezekana kuunganisha ufahamu/epistemolojia tofauti na kuwapo kwa viumbe vinavyopingana ili kupata tafsiri kamili ya uhalisia, ufahamu na ugonjwa?
- Nieleze upangaji wa **wakati** katika kazi yako?
- Naomba nieleze nafasi ya **wanawake** katika kazi za fasihi zihusuzo VVU/UKIMWI?
- Je, wanawake wanaweza kujadili baina ya kujiweza (empowerment) na utamaduni wao wa asili?
- Unafahamu mifano ya wahusika wanawake wanaoweza kukabiliana na changamoto zote zinazojitokeza kutokana na: uchumi, jamii na maambukizi ya UKIMWI?
- Mtazamo wa ujinsia umebadilika kiviipi baada ya kufika kwa VVU/UKIMWI?
- Tafadhali nieleze lugha inayotumika kuelezea masuala ya ngono? Inaweza kuchukuliwa kama lugha ya siri?
- Kuna sitiari za kipekee zinazolenga wanawake katika kazi yako?

- **Mahusiano ya kijinsia** yanachangia vipi katika maambukizi ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- VVU/UKIMWI unaenezwa katika miili ya wahusika wa aina gani?
- Kwa nini VVU/UKIMWI unaelezwa kama “ugojwa wa wanawake”?
- Ukahaba, umalaya na mahusiano na mafataki (baba sukari) yanachangia vipi katika maambukizi ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- Unaweza tafadhali kueleza lugha ya picha inayotumika katika fasihi kuongea kuhusu **kondomu na kinga** nyingine dhidi ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- Kwa maoni yako, matumizi ya **madawa ya kulevya** na pombe yanachangia vipi katika maambukizi ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- Je, unafikiri kwamba **Sanaa kwa Maendeleo (SkM)/thieta** kwa kuwaelimisha watu zinaweza kuwa za kuvutia na kufikisha ujumbe pia?
- Katika uzoefu wako, thieta inaweza kuwa chombo kizuri kinachoathiri tabia za watu?
- Uzoefu wako kama mwandishi wa tamthilia ni upi?
- Kazi yako inaonyesha uigizaji na usanii kwa namna gani?
- Naomba nieleze jukumu la wahusika wakuu wa kazi yako/fasihi/tamthilia zihusuzo VVU/UKIMWI?
- Unadhani kwamba riwaya zako zinaweza kulinganishwa na maigizo?
- Anguko la shujaa wa kitanzia linajitokeza wapi katika kazi yako?
- Naomba unieleze kwa ufupi historia ya thieta nchini Tanzania?
- Nieleze tafadhali, tofauti zilizokuwapo baina ya sanaa za maonyesho ya jadi, Sanaa kwa Maendeleo (Theatre for Development), “Sanaa kwa Umma za kitanzania” (Tanzanian Popular theatre) na thieta ya KiAfrika iliyoigiza vyuoni (Academic African theatre)
- Upu uhusiano upi baina ya sanaa za maonyesho za kienyeji na Sanaa kwa Maendeleo? Ni wa kushiriki au kulazimishwa?
- Unaelezaje uhusiano baina ya “Sanaa/thieta kwa Umma za kitanzania” na Sanaa kwa Maendeleo?
- Unamaanisha nini kwa kusema “Sanaa kwa Umma”?
- Unaelezaje uhusiano baina ya Serikali, wafadhili na uhisani wa kigeni na thieta za kitanzania leo?
- Kwa vipi vikundi vya sanaa, waigizaji, waongozaji na waandishi/watunzi wanaweza kutosheleza wafadhili na wahisani wao wa kigeni ambao wanaongoza aina sahihi ya mawasiliano? Na pia inaeleweka na utamaduni wa asili na mihemko ya umma?
- Unajua kama na kwa namna gani nadharia ya ki-Aristotle kuhusu tanzia imeziathiri tamthilia za kiswahili?

- Unaweza kuonyesha vipengele vya ki-Aristotle katika msuko na wahusika wa tamthilia yako?
- Unafikiri kwamba watambaji na wasimulizi wanaweza kueleweka kama “Orukian sages”?
- Unatambua mazingira ya “utamaduni wa asili ya kiafrika” (Mudimbe 1988) wapi katika kazi yako?
- Kwa nini **umejikita** katika mapambano dhidi ya VVU/UKIMWI?
- Ulipata wapi ushawishi wako? Unatokea katika uzoefu wa maisha yako binafsi?
- Ujumbe upi mkuu unatamani kuufikisha kupitia kazi yako?

## APPENDIX 2.

### LIST OF AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS

1. BAYOICE theatrical outreach performance about HIV/AIDS and gender, October 25, 2018, Bagamoyo.
2. FASDO's performance *Pima!* (Test for HIV!), December 5, 2018, Temeke Maghorofani, Dar es Salaam.
3. FASDO's performance *Pima III!* (Test for HIV!), February 1, 2019, Temeke Maghorofani, Dar es Salaam.
4. Rehearsal of the performance *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* performed by the students at the College of Arts of Dar es Salaam, February 7, 2019, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
5. Official performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* performed by the students at the College of Arts of Dar es Salaam, February 8, 2019, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
6. *Pima!* Movie, 26 minutes MP4 FILE, December 10, 2018, provided by FASDO (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvup7jGY7bc> since 21 August 2020).
7. *KILIO CHETU* and *ORODHA* performed by the students at the College of Arts of Dar es Salaam and recorded by faculty members.
8. FASDO's *Dhuluma*, a Swahili film about orphan rights in Tanzania Africa, file video provided by FASDO (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX30Zoqo-mo>).
9. FASDO's *Zinduka*, a Swahili HIV/AIDS film with English Subtitles, HD file video provided by FASDO (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fToWR6amJiU>).

All the actors agreed to take part and, if applicable, to be video and audio recorded by written informed consent, by means of *SOAS Research Participant Information Sheet Template* and *SOAS Research Participant Consent Form Template*.

## APPENDIX 3.

### LIST OF INTERVIEWS

1. William Mkufya, October 6, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
2. Professor Emmanuel Mbogo, October 16, 2018, Open University of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam.
3. Hadija Jilala, October 16, 2018, Open University of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam.
4. Ambrose Mghanga, October 19, 2018, BAKITA, Dar es Salaam.
5. FGD with UWAMABA, October 22, 2018, UWAMABA, Bagamoyo.
6. FGD with the performers' troupe of BAYOICE drama group, October 25, 2018, Bagamoyo.
7. William Mkufya, October 30, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
8. William Mkufya, October 31, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
9. Professor Penina Mlama, November 12, 2018, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
10. Dominicus Makukula, November 13, 2018, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
11. William Mkufya, November 14, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
12. Professor Aldin Mutembei, November 15, 2018, Institute of Kiswahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
13. Professor Magabyuso Mulokozi, November 21, 2018, Institute of Kiswahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
14. Elieshi Lema, November 27, 2018, E & D Vision Ltd, Dar es Salaam.
15. William Mkufya, November 30, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
16. William Mkufya, December 6, 2018, Dar es Salaam.
17. Tedvan Chande Nabora, December 8, 2018, FASDO, Temeke Maghorofani, Dar es Salaam.
18. Clemence Merinyo, January 17, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
19. William Mkufya, January 18, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
20. William Mkufya, January 24, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
21. Professor Aldin Mutembei, January 28, 2019, Confucius Institute, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam.
22. Professor F. E. M. K Senkoro, January 28, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
23. Shabaani Mngazija, January 29, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
24. Athumani Mauya, January 31, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
25. Tedvan Chande Nabora, February 1, 2019, FASDO, Temeke Maghorofani, Dar es Salaam.

26. William Mkufya, February 4, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
27. William Mkufya, February 13, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
28. FGD with the performers' troupe of FASDO, February 15, 2019, Temeke Maghorofani, Dar es Salaam.
29. William Mkufya, February 18, 2019, Dar es Salaam.
30. William Mkufya, February 22, 2019, Dar es Salaam.

All the interviewees agreed to take part and be named in my research by written informed consent, by means of *SOAS Research Participant Information Sheet Template* and *SOAS Research Participant Consent Form Template*.

#### APPENDIX 4.

#### FICTIONAL WORKS ON HIV/AIDS FROM KENYA AND TANZANIA

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APPENDIX 5.

TABLE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS

	<i>Ushuhuda wa Mifupa (1990)</i>	<i>Kilio Chetu (1996)</i>	<i>Kilio cha Jeska (2004)</i>	<i>Giza (2004)</i>	<i>Orodha (2006)</i>	<i>Mwalimu Rose (2007)</i>	<i>Embe Dodo (2015)</i>
<b>Heroines/victims</b>	Makalikiti	Suzi; Anna	Jeska	Nuru; Suzi	Furaha	Rose	Mwali; Bi. Kifaru
<b>Anti-heroes/ shadow heroes</b>	Korido-Dokta; Meneja-Dokoa	Joti	Joseph	Steve; Daktari	Padri James; Bw. Ecko; Bw. Juma; Salim; Kitunda	Bw. Makoma	Manju; Bw. Kifaru
<b>Choral characters</b>	Mtambaj; Mtani	Mjomba; Baba Anna	Mkuu wa Msafara	Kichaa; Sauti	Mama Furaha		Manju; Afisa Maembe Dodo; Mgambo; Sauti
<b>Sages</b>	Mtani	Mjomba					
<b>Narrators –external</b>	Mtambaji	Mtambaji		Bi. Msimulizi		Mtangazaji	
<b>Narrators-internal</b>							Manju; Mgambo
<b>Chorus-choral songs</b>	Mifupa (1); Kwaya ya daktari (18); Wote (20)	Kiongozi-watu (1); Wote (2); Kiongozi -wote (39)			Vifani (1); Wanakijiji (18)	Walimu (76)	
<b>Anti-chorus/ Jokers</b>	Mtani			Kichaa; Sauti			Mgambo; Sauti
<b>Focalizers</b>	Mtani	Mjomba; Suzi	Jeska	Nuru			
<b>Healers</b>	Ngariba	Chongo; Mganga				Mlokole; Mchungaji; Mganga wa jadi	

APPENDIX 6.

TABLE OF THE CHARACTERS IN MKUFYA'S TRILOGY *DIWANI YA MAUA*

	<i>Ua La Faraja</i> (2004)	<i>Kuwa Kwa Maua</i> (2019)
<b>Heroes</b>	Dr Hans and Omolo	Dr Hans, Omolo and Haji
<b>Heroines</b>	Tabu, Grace, Asha and Queen	Asha, Tuma, Kristina and Grace
<b>Anti-heroes</b>	Ngoma	Hadija, Zahoro and Zito
<b>Choral-Sages</b>	Dr Hans	Dr Hans, Asha and Kristina
<b>Narrator external</b>	X	X
<b>Chorus/ Community or Mtani</b>	<i>Mshenga, Watani, Jose</i>	Mzee Ibrahimu, Nyara
<b>Anti-chorus</b>		Hubiri Masufuria; <i>Walevi</i> (the drunken scoundrels chorus): <i>Kadinari</i> the cardinal who drinks a harsh and powerful kind of local brewed alcohol, <i>Sketa</i> the alcohol scatter, <i>Siasa kali</i> or <i>Kalikali</i> an assassin, <i>Sinasheria</i> or <i>Sinashere</i> who drinks without choosing, <i>Mkomunisti</i> who drinks <i>komonist</i> an alcoholic drink popular during Nyerere's socialist period, <i>Silipi deni</i> who does not pay his debts, and <i>Msomi</i> a cultivated person who struggles for money as he is not paid enough by the government.
<b>Focalization</b>	Dr Hans and Omolo	Dr Hans and Asha
<b>Idealist-Believers</b>	Kristina, Tabu and Ngoma	Hadija and Grace
<b>Materialists-sceptics/ agnostics-existentialists</b>	Dr Hans, Asha, Queen and Omolo	Dr Hans, Asha and Omolo
<b>Healers</b>		Bw Mgezi and Bw Mgya, Bi Mtumwa Kabeya (initiation instructor)

## APPENDIX 7.

### EXTRACTS FROM *KUWA KWA MAUA* (CHAPTER 6)

*Translated by Cristina Nicolini and edited by William Mkufya*<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.1.3. THE BAOBAB PROPHECY

*“Aliyebaki ni mkwezi peke yake. Lakini hata mkwezi alichoujia mti huo ni mabuyu, sio kisa na kiini cha mahyuyu shani iandamayo kuwa kwao [...] Walikohamia, mbuyu haukutaka kujua, kwani walisambaratika kutafuta nusura na faraja ya mahyuyu. Mbuyu ukabaki ukiwahurumia kwali waliondoka pasi kujua ndwele iliyowawinga, ambayo pengine sio mahyuyu, bali maajabu yake”* (KKM 9)

“And now the only one visiting the baobab tree is the climber, but what he comes for are the baobab fruits, not for the story/cause, nor for the deep secrets/the essence of *mahyuyu*<sup>3</sup> (the fleeting mortals) the mystery that haunts their existence<sup>4</sup>” [...] “To where they converted, the baobab was not interested in, because they went here and there to find assistance and consolation for the phenomenon of *mahyuyu*. The baobab was compassionate to them because they went ahead without knowing the ailment that haunts them, which actually may not be the “**phenomenon of *mahyuyu*”** (being mortals) itself but **the mystery behind it** (the mystery of *mahyuyu*)”.

#### 6.1.4.1. INITIATION RITUALS

*“Sasa mjomba vipi? Ulikula vitu?” [...] Nyara akamkonyeza na kusema, “Hukuomba somsing?” Kisha akagusa sehemu ya suruali iliyoficha faragha yake. Alitaka kusema Kiingereza kuwa ‘Hukuomba something’. [...] “Wapi! Hakuna chuo! Da’ Asha! Mambo hayo siku hizi hayana shule. Tuliowahi majando tulikuwa sisi wa mwishomwisho. Siku hizi hata wanaume wanatahiriwa hospitali na dokta. Mambo ya somsing, watu hujua hivi hivi kwa kujaribujaribu na kuonja-onja kama mjomba Haji. Hakuna shule maalumu. Mnaanza kwa kuoneshana, kisha mnaombana.” [...] Nyara akacheka na kusema, “Mkiombana ukapewa, vitu vyenyewe vitajua uchochoro wa kupita.”*

*“Ndiyo sababu kuna upotofu. Kila uchochoro ukipitwa maana yote inapotea.” Asha alisema. “Hakuna maelekezo wala makatazo uchochoro upi ni halali na upi si halali. Kila panapowasha mtu yeyote aruhusiwe kupakuna hata kama ni*

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<sup>2</sup> Last editing 3-9-2020.

<sup>3</sup> Literally this means what is going to die and which does not last for long.

<sup>4</sup> Mkufya’s original translation 20-08-2019.

mwiko.” Nyara alisema [...]“ Siku hizi kuna mitandao Da’ Asha! Kukulana kusikostahili ndiyo dili mtandaoni! Msipokubali nchi haipewi mikopo.” Nyara alisema na kukenua pengo lake.

“Ngono ina uhalali na uharamu wake. Kisicho ngono kikiitwa ngono ni uchuro.” Asha alisema.

“ Kupotea kwa elimu ya majando na unyago kumezusha mambo mengi.” Hadija aliunga mkono.

“Mimi nitaanzisha shule na kuisajili kisheria. Kila jambo linahitaji shule. Zile za asili zililalisha wanaume rijali na wanawake hodari.” Asha alisema.

“Utaita shule ya nini?” Hadija aliuliza.

“Shule ya somsing.” Nyara alisema na kukenua pengo lake.[...]

“Hapana, nitaita Chuo cha Majando na Unyago.” Asha alisema. (KKM 60 - 62) [...]

Nyara alisema na kumkonyeza Asha akisema, “Nasikia kwenu hodari, au siyo Da’Asha?”

Asha akacheka na kusema, “Ndiyo! Bibi yangu Nyasimba Mtumwa alikuwa hodari. Wala si jambo la kuonewa haya. Utaalamu upo na kama upo, kwa nini tuipoteze?”

“Kweli, uhodari wa kitu chochote unahitaji mafunzo. Siku hizi ndoa zinafungwa, mwali hajui kukata kiuno.” Alisema Hadija.

Asha akasema, “Unyago siyo ule wa wajinga wanaomenya utamu wauondoe!”Nyara na Hadija wakacheka. Asha Alimaanisha makabila yayayotahiri wanawake kwa kukata sehemu nyeti ya uke wao.

[...] Watu wengine mafala kwelikweli. Sasa mwanmke ukimtoa nyege zake hata wewe mumewe utamfaijije?”Nyara alisema (KKM 62)

[...]Watoto wetu wanapataje majibu ya maswali wanayojiuliza kuhusu faragha zao?” [...]

Watoto wanaogofywa mno kuhusu ngono. Kuna dhana zinazosema ngono ni kama uchafu, laana, najisi, matusi, dhambi ambayo wahalifu wake wanastahili kupigwa mawe hadi wafe! [...](KKM 69)

Grace akavunja ukimya na kusema, “Lakini Da’ Asha kila jambo lina wakati wake na mipaka yake. Msichana akivunja ungo ndipo anapopewa mafunzo na mama yake. Hata wavulana wanapobalehe wana mafundisho yao. Hawa bado hawajafikia muda huo.”

“Umesema kweli kabisa Grace, mafundo ya jando na unyago yana muda wake. Lakini balehe na kuvunja ungo ni baada ya miaka kumi na nne ya utoto. Watoto huanza kudadisi mapema sana. [...]”.

[...] Ni ngariba pekee unyagoni au jandoni aliye na uhodari na namna za kufunda vijana bila kigugumizi.”(KKM 70)

Ni lini utaanza kumfundisha kuhusu uzuri wa jambo hilo, manufaa yake, miiko yake na raha zake? Mimi nilibahatika kuwa na bibi aliyenifunda. (KKM 71)

[...] Wote walikuzwa kwenye maadili ya kidini na maadili hayo, kwa namna nyingi, yaliharamisha ngono na kuitamka kama jambo ovu. (KKM 72)

“Now my uncle, did you eat something?” [...] Nyara winked and said: “Did you ask for *somsing*?” Then he touched the trousers at the level of his genitals. He meant in English: “Did you attempt for sex? Didn’t you?” [...] “There are no schools! My sister, Asha! For these matters there are no longer schools. We were the last generation to attend initiations. Nowadays men have the circumcision done at the hospital by a medical doctor. *Things about sex* are learned by children like this, by trial and error like our uncle Haji. There are no specific schools. You start by showing each other, then by touching each other....”

[...] Nyara smiled and said: “If you ask for sex and are lucky to get the tools themselves (sexual organs) will know which passage to go through.” “This is why the uncommon problem of gays has arisen.”

“That is why there is sexual perversity. If every opening on the body is penetrated the whole meaning of sex is lost.” Said Asha.

“There are no explanations or prohibitions about which body entrances are allowed and which forbidden. Nowadays every part of the body which arouses excitement when stimulated is allowed, even if it is wrong to do so.” Said Nyara.

[...] “Nowadays there is the problem of the internet, sister Asha! Video shows on perverted stimulations is the new fun found on the internet! If your country has censorship laws against pornography, it will suffer sanctions against getting foreign aid.” Said Nyara while grinning<sup>5</sup>.

“Sex has its licit and illicit rights and prohibitions. Actions that are not sexual but are named as such and made to seem sexual is a tendency that predicts evil social consequences.” Said Asha.

“The disappearance of education taught in traditional age initiation rites has caused much social decadence.” Hadija agreed.

“I want to establish a school and I shall register it legally. Everything needs to have a proper training. The traditional schools generated men with proper sexual roles and capable women.” Said Asha

“What will you call such a school?” Asked Hadija

“The *somsing* school!” said Nyara while grinning.

[...] “No, I will call it the institute of *jando* and *unyago*.” said Asha

[...] Then Nyara asked, while winking to Asha: “I heard that, where you come from, women are really talented, isn’t that true sister Asha?”

Asha answered laughing: “Sure! My grandmother, Mtumwa Binti Kabeya, she was an expert. This is not a thing to be embarrassed or to be modest

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<sup>5</sup> Nyara is not an intellectual but a layman, this is what he meant. There has been some public outcry in African countries being coerced by the West to allow the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) liberty movement that is becoming legal and common in America and Europe. Countries opposed to LGBT are accused of violations of human rights and are denied financial aid by Western donor nations like the US and European Union (Mkufya 3-9-2020).

about. The expertise does exist and since it exists why should we let it get lost?”

“It’s true. For any good skill to be acquired some training is needed. Nowadays people get married and the bride doesn’t even know how to swing her hips.” Said Hadija<sup>6</sup>.

Asha added: “Proper *Unyago* is not the mistaken type that aims at reducing female sexual pleasure.”

Asha and Nyara were laughing. Asha meant the ethnic groups which practice female genital mutilations.

[...] “Such people are real imbeciles. If you cut off the parts of a woman that gives her the sexual desire, what is the benefit for you? How shall she and her partner get pleasure out of their sexual act?” Nyara asked.

[...] “Where can our children obtain the answers to their curiosity on things concerning their private parts (sexual organs)?” (Asha asked Omolo)

[...] “Children are made to be scared about sex. There are beliefs stating that sex is dirty, blameful, impure, vulgar and sinful and the lawbreakers deserve to be lapidated to death!” [...]

Grace broke the silence and said: “However, Asha, everything has its proper time and place. When a girl reaches her puberty indeed, she receives the lesson from her mother. This is the same for the boys when they reach their puberty, they get age initiation rites education. Haji and Tuma, are still too young.”

“You are right, Grace, *jando* and *unyago* teachings have their rightful time. However, sexual maturity is reached when children are 14 years old. Children start being curious long before that time. [...]

Only the *unyago* or *jando* instructor, the *ngariba* has the ability and skill to teach the youth without stammering”.

[...] “When will parents start teaching the beauty of sex, its benefits and pleasures? I was lucky to have my grandmother’s teachings. [...] All the people who grew up with religious teachings and its ethical mores, because of many reasons start to think of sex as illicit and link it to evil, sin and impurity”.

#### 6.1.4.1. KIJUMBA

*Zinaitwa sehemu za siri. Kila mtu anaficha za kwake. Hata kutaja majina ya sehemu hizo ni mwiko mkubwa ulioitwao matusi. Lakini sasa Tuma anataka waoneshane. Hata yeye mwenyewe, Haji, angependa kuona siri ya Tuma. Lakini kuli kuwa na hofu inamuandama kuhusu kusudi hilo la kuvunja mwiko. [...] “Lakini*

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<sup>6</sup> Here Hadija means the skill of waist play during the sexual act.

*hawavui chupi. Kuvua chupi ndiyo matusi.” Haji alieleza. [...]Mtoto wa kike au wa kiume, alionywa vikali au hata kupigwa, akiondoa nguo zilizofunika sehemu ya mwili iliyoitwa ya siri. Ukikaa uchi utaitwa mtu mbaya, utakaripiwa, wakubwa wanaogopa kukaa uchi [...](KKM 35 - 36)*

They are called private parts. Everybody hides his own. Even mentioning the names of such parts is a big taboo called swearing. But now Tuma wants them to start exposing their parts to each other. Even Haji himself would like to see Tuma’s hidden parts. However, he was scared to death about the temptation to break the taboo. [...] “But we won’t take off their underwear. Taking off the underwear is the real taboo.” Haji explained. [...] Both male and female children are strictly warned or beaten if they take off clothes showing their secret body parts. If you are naked, you will be called a bad person and you will be admonished, adults fear to be naked.

#### 6.1.7.1 ASHA ON LIFE

*Asha: “Dawa ya kutokiogopa kifo ni kukikubali kisha kukipuuza. Puuza kila kitu, puuza maisha na kifo chenyeuwe.” [...] Lakini hata kicheko alichocheka hakikuwana utamu wa kicheko. Kilikuwa kama kicheko cha mwendawazimu. Kicheko kisicho na maana: **upuuzi**, mzaha, uhayawani. (KKM 103 - 104)*

The only available treatment for not fearing death is accepting it and then ignoring it. Ignore everything, ignore life and death! [...] However, the laugh she was laughing had not the sweetness of a real laugh. It was a crazy one. Laughing without any reason: **absurdity**, nonsense, satire, shamelessness!

*Hayo ndiyo maisha. Maisha ni utamu wa nyama, ulevi wa pombe; [...] Mawazo mengineyo ni upuuzi. Ukiyanyenyekea maisha aukuyaogopa, yanageuka kuwa mzigo, mateso. [...] “**Maisha** huitwa hiyo kwa kuwa yanaisha, hayadumu, ni **ma-isha**. Ukila nyama zinaisha. Ukinywa bia inaisha. [...]Watu wakihangaika, wakiteseka kutafuta maisha, ni upuuzi mtupu. [...] **Kuishi maisha, huishia pale mwenyewe akisha-kwisha! Upuuzi mtupu!**” [...] “Ni heri ucheke! Ma-isha usiyadekeze! [...] Yafaidi! [...] Utakapo-salimu amri ya afande kifo, inakuwa kama utani. Afande kifo akija, piga saluti! Yamekwisha! Kifo ni mtani wako, siyo mfalme wako!” (KKM 106 - 107)*

This is life indeed. Life is enjoying the taste of meat and the intoxication of alcohol. [...] The rest is nonsense. If you are too humble and respectful towards life, it will turn out to be only a burden and sorrow. [...] Life is called like this **ma-isha** because it is made up of **things that are doomed to an end**<sup>7</sup>. If you

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<sup>7</sup> The Swahili noun *Maisha* stems from the verbal root *-isha* which means to live, but with the prepositional extension becomes *-ishia* to finish up.

eat meat, it ends. If you drink beer, it ends. [...] People struggle looking for the meaning of life, it is just absurdity! [...] **Living life means consuming it, it finishes itself, when it gets to its end!/it ends when it's over! Complete nonsense, absurdity!** [...] You better laugh! Don't give life much attention! Be arrogant! [...] Make profit of it! [...] When the time comes to give your last salute, it will be like a joke! When the officer of death comes, give him the respectful salute! All is over! Death is your joker and not your king!

#### 6.1.7.2. THE MYSTERY OF TIME

*“Sikiliza Asha, wewe na watu wengi hamjioni kwamba mko kwenye njozi ya **kioja/shani** hiki kiitwacho **muda au wakati**. Kusema kweli maisha marefu na mafupi yote ni marefu na, hapohapo, yote ni mafupi! Sababu ni kwamba, hatimaye yote hufa na kupotea. Inategemea tu muda na pale ulipo na unchozungumzia. Ukiwa bado hai, maisha yana urefu na ufupi wake lakini ukitafakari zaidi, utaona mtu akishakufa maisha hayakuwa na urefu wala ufupi. (KKM 151) [...] “Hicho ndicho kiini macho cha muda tunapoutumia kupima uwa-po wa mtu, yaani mtu kuwa mahali fulani katika muda fulani. Lakini, kusema kweli, muda hautembezi wala haubadiliki. Kama kweli kuna kitu kama hicho tukiitacho muda, basi kuisha kwa muda au kuongezeka kwa muda ni kwa kile kitu kinachopimwa. (KKM 152) “Maisha ni hali ya nafsi kuwa kwenye uwa-po unaopungua hadi kufutika. Yaani kuwa hai kwenye kipindi fulani, (mahali fulani,) ukiwa unaona yanayotokea, ukishiriki katika yanayotokea kwa kufurahia au kuumizwa nayo, ukiwa mmoja wa waliokuwa-po wakati huo na hatimaye ukaisha, ukafa na kusahaulika. Lakini ukiuchunguza kuwa huku, kwanza unaona ni kuchache mno lakini pia ni kama kakukuwepo. Cha muhimu kuliko yote ni kwamba uliwahi kuwa muda na mahali fulani. Kuwe kuwa kufupi au kuwa kurefu, kote ni kuwa kufutikako. Na ni vyema uwe uwa uliokuwa wa furaha hata kwa uchache wake.” [...] Tofauti yake iko Dhahiri [...] Zote ni sifuri [...] Kwake yeye, uwapo wake ni sifuri kwa kuwa ulikuja hautambui utokako kisha ukaondoka hautambui ulikoishia. Shani hii ya usifuri wa maisha, ukiifikiria, huwezi kusema kuna maisha marefu na mafupi, mengi na machache, matamu au machungu. Usifuri wa maisha ni uleule. Hata utamu au uchungu wa maisha hatimaye ni usifuri. (KKM 153) Lakini usifuri wa maisha yenyewe ndio ulimpa changamoto zaidi kwamba: alimradi uhai hufutika, kwa yule afutikaye, uhai hauna u-aina zaidi ya u-sifuri. Akaona kwamba kumbe yote ni bure! Maisha ni mzaha na kiini macho.” (KKM 154)*

“You, Asha, like many other people don't know that you are in a **mysterious dream** which is called **time**, as both space of time and point of time. To tell the truth, there is no difference between a long life and a short life. However short or long, it makes no difference because eventually the end is dying and getting lost. Only during the period of time when you are alive, life seems

to be too long or short, but when you die life has no length any longer. [...] This is the illusion of time that we usually measure the being of a person in a certain time and certain place. However, to tell the truth, time does not move and does not change. If there is really something similar to what we call time, the increase or the decrease in time is just a reference to the thing that is being measured in time. Life actually is the condition of the soul (the self) that exists in a diminishing (space time) existence that recedes until it disappears. In other words, being alive in a specific period, and a specific place, witnessing whatever is happening at that time; taking part in the activities, enjoying or being hurt by the activities; being amongst the people who are alive at that time; then eventually you end up at death, and you will be forgotten. However, if you examine this existence, you see that it was so brief, but also it was as if it never happened. The most important thing is for the person himself to have had the particular opportunity of being at a place in a particular time. Being an existence that was short or long doesn't matter since all existences are erasable. It is good to be in an enjoyable existence although brief. [...] The difference is evident. [...] All existences are zero. [...] Your being in time and space is zero because you will not be capable of discerning how it started or from where it originated, neither can you discern the future when it is finished. The mystery of the nothingness of life, if you think of it, you cannot say there is long, or short life; or too much or too little: sweet or bitter life. The nothingness of life is the same. In the end it is the same zero. However, the nothingness of life is indeed what challenges you, that as long as life gets erased, it cannot be of any other kind except that zero aspect of it. Life is just a joke and an illusion!"

#### 6.1.7.2. THE MYSTERY OF BEING AND NOT-BEING

*“Maisha ya mtu ni **punde ndogo tu**, katikati ya **udaima wa utouwapo**. Katikati ya uto-uwapo, punde mtu huwa-po na punde hayupo, unarudia uto-uwapo wake. Ni kama mwako wa radi uliomulika kisha ghafla ukapotea [...] huo muda mfupi unaoitwa kuwa-po yaani kuwa duniani, mahali fulani na wakati fulani [...]Kila mtu huwapo punde.”* (KKM 250 - 251) *Wingi wa uhalisia ni utouwapo, ombwe. **Uwapo ni kama upuuzi, mzaha**; uwapo ni kama ule mwako wa radi au wa cheche ya moto. [...] **Hakika hakuna kuwapo. Zaidi sana ni kuto-kuwapo.**”* (KKM 251) [...] *Ni heri ufurahie tu ile punde ya kuwapo kwako. Ifurahie sana punde hiyo, ifaidi sana, hadi ipotee. Usipoifurahia na kuifaidi, wewe mjinga. Hata ukiisononekea, uwapo wake ni wa punde. [...] Ukiwa mjinga ukaiacha punde ikapita bila kuifaidi, ni ujinga wako. Ikishapita, imepita, hairudi tena na, hatimaye, ni kama haijawa.”* (KKM 252)

“The life of a person lasts a **short while**, in between **eternity and non-existence**. During non-existence, suddenly a person is there, and suddenly

again the same person is not there, coming back to non-existence. It's like a lightning flash which lights and suddenly disappears. [...] This short period of time is the locative being in this world in a certain time and place. [...] For every person the being in this world is a short while. Most of reality is non-existence, **existence is an absurdity, a joke** like the light of a lightning flash or a spark of fire. [...] **To tell the truth there is not existence, the most is non-existence.** [...] Better to enjoy your short being there, make profit of it and then let it go. If you are so stupid to leave your short while, it goes and never comes back, and it would be as if it had never been there.”

#### 6.1.7.2. THE MYSTERY OF DEATH

*“[...] Watu ni lazima wafe [...] Mduara wa uhai ni kuzaliwa, kupata fursa **adimu na adhimu ya kuwamo** ukijifahamu; **kuwamo duniani** ukiufahamu ulimwengu; kuzaa, na kisha kufa. [...] **Fikra za kuwa na kuwapo wa mtu duniani, ubatili wa uchache wa kuwa, udhana wa kuwa na hofu ya kutokuwa; zote zimeelemea kwenye msisitizo wa kifo, kuliko fursa muhimu zaidi iitwayo **maisha ambayo ndiyo dhahiri.** [...] **kuwa kwa watu hudhiririka kwenye Maisha pekee na si kabla yake au baada yake. Fikra zingeelemea kwenye **udhahiri huu wa kuwa, kuitwako maisha,**** badala ya ndoto ya kuwa kabla ya Maisha au dhana ya mustakabali, baada ya Maisha, hofu ya kifo ingepotea.”*** (KKM 425)

[...] Life is the short chance for human beings to exist, similar to a flower which blossoms and enjoys the glory of its beauty. A flower must die, after its opportunity to blossom.] “People have to die. [...] The circle of life is to be born, to have **the rare but glorious opportunity of being in the world** and knowing the universe, to give birth and then to die. [...] **The thoughts of existence, of a human being in the world, of the absurdity of existence, of the concept of existence and fear of non-existence,** are all exasperated by death. Instead of being focused on the opportunity, the more important thing, that is **life, the only evident thing.** [...] **The existence of people becomes evident in life** neither before nor after. If the thoughts were directed towards the **evidence of existence,** which is called **life,** instead of being concentrated on the dream of being before life and on the concept of a future afterlife, the fear of death would disappear.”

#### 6.1.7.4. DISEMBODIED ONTOLOGIES AS AILMENT CAUSES

*“Mimi ni mzimu! Mzimu hasa, ndiye mimi!”*

*“Una pepo? Umeanza kuingiliwa na mashetani kichwani?” Asha alifoka. [...] Alikuwa na dalili zote za kupagawa. (KKM 124)*

“I’m a spirit! I am the real spirit, that is what I am!”

“Have you a demon? Have you been run-in by devils?” Asha scolded her. Hadija had all signs of someone who had been possessed.

*“Kama una pepo au mashetani ya kwenu, si uende ukaaguliwe? Kwa nini unakuja na visirani vyako na kututangazia? Eti uneingiliwa na vikosi? Hapa kuna mganga wakupunga pepo? Eti Giza...mzimu!Mzimu gani? Niondolee uchuro!”* (KKM 127)

“If you are possessed by demons or devils of your ancestors, why don’t you go to get them to be treated (exorcised)? Why are you coming here with your misfortunes displaying them in public? How dare you boast that you have been invaded by troops of demons? Do you think that in here there is an expert to exorcise your demons? You dare say that you are seeing Darkness... spirits? Which kind of spirits? Oh! Save me from your evil omen!”

*Sauti ilisikika kama matamshi ya Muaguzi wa pungwa ya mashetani. Alitamka kwa kunuizia, kama anautuliza mzimu.* (KKM 137)

Her voice could be heard sounding like the recitation of a diviner exorcising devils. She talked, pronouncing her words like a prayer to obtain the spirit’s favour.

#### 6.1.7.4. SHANI

*Ghafla alijiona amefika kikomo cha safari yake ulimwenguni. Alipozitazama mbingu aliziona hazina upeo isipokuwa samawi [na shani] isiyo na ufumbuzi.* (KKM 131)

Suddenly she (Asha) realized she had arrived at the end of her journey on earth. When she looked at the sky, she saw that it had no horizon except for a mysterious blue sky that could not be discerned.

*“Kumbe<sup>8</sup> ulimwengu unapoutafakari hugeuka kuwa kivuli! Mazigazi! Mzaha! Masihara! Kumbe Hadija na Haji ni sehemu ya masihara hayo!”* (KKM 131)

“Now I have learned that, when you start reflecting on the universe, it becomes a shadow! An optical illusion, a mirage, a puzzle and a joke! Thus, I have realized that, even Hadija and Haji are part of this joke!”

*Lakini ulimwengu siyo mtu. Hauonei ila upo hivyo ulivyo, [shani itesayo au ifurahi-hishayo (UWM 122)][...] Kichefichefu cha ujumla wa mambo yote, kiliizingira nafsi yake* (KKM 224)

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<sup>8</sup> The word “kumbe” signifies a person admitting ignorance, and then, realization (Mkufya 23-5-2020).

The universe is not a person. It doesn't victimize a person, yet it is as it is, a mystery that either teases you or makes you happy. [...] A nausea about the totality of everything started encircling her soul.

#### 6.1.9. UDHAHIRI

*Fikra za kuwa na kuwapo wa mtu duniani, ubatili wa kuwa, udhana wa kuwa na hofu ya kutokuwa, zote zimeelemea kwenye msisitizo wa kifo, kuliko fursa muhimu zaidi iitwayo **maisha ambayo ndiyo dhahiri. Kuwa kwa watu hudhahirika kwenye maisha pekee na si kabla yake au baada yake.** Fikra zingeelemea kwenye **udhahiri huu wa kuwa, kuitwako maisha,** badala ya ndoto ya kuwa kabla ya maisha au dhana ya mustakabali, baada ya maisha, hofu ya kifo ingepotea. (KKM 425)*

The thoughts of the existence, the existence of a human being in the phenomenal world, the vanity of existence, the concept of being and the fear of not being, are all leaning upon the emphasis of death, instead of emphasising the most important opportunity called **“life” which is evident. The existence of human beings becomes evident during the “living moment” neither before nor after it.** If these thoughts had depended support on this **manifestation of existence called life moment** instead of looking for either the dream of an existence before life or the idea of a future existence after people die, the fear of death would have disappeared.

*Dkt Hans alipowatazama waombolezaji waliojawa na simanzi. Akazidi kuchukia **uzushi wa Wana wa Adamu,** chanzo cha upotoshaji huu ambao umeharibu furaha ya **udhahiri pekee uitwao uhai au maisha,** aupatao mtu au **ki-hai** chochote kiwamo ulimwenguni. (KKM 425)*

Dr Hans, whilst he was looking at the mourners who were full of sorrow and grief, felt even more hatred against the **heresy of the sons of Adam,** who were the source of that distorted vision which ruined the joy of the only **evident existence** which is called **life,** and the **consuming life moment** which is given to human beings and to all the **living beings inhabiting the universe.**

*Dkt Hans alianza kwa kuwashitua watu aliposema, “Kuna uhai tu. Hakuna kifo!” Akaendelea, “**Kinachomdhahirikia mtu kwenye utambuzi wake ni uhai, si uzazi wala kifo.** Hapo kale kuna mtu alisema hakuna kufa, sijui kwa nini hakuitwa nabii! Alisema kweli iliyo wazi na dhahiri! Kifo ni sekunde chache za mtu au kitu chenye uhai kupotewa na uhai na ufahamu. Hakuna akionaye. Hukioni kwa sababu kitokeapo huna fahamu za kukiona. Kikishatokea iliyopo ni maiti siyo wewe tena. Ni nani aliwahi kuona kifo? Aliye hai hakioni kifo. Mfu hana fahamu, hajui kilichotokea, hayupo. Hata kabla ya kuupata uhai, kabla ya kuzaliwa, hatukuwapo. **Udhahiri mtu aujuao ni uhai pekee!**” (KKM 445 - 446)*

Dr Hans started shocking people by asserting that “there exists only life! Death does not exist!” he went on saying that “**what becomes evident to human cognitive capacity is life, not procreation nor death.** Once upon a time, there was a man who said that death does not exist. I don’t know why he had not been called a prophet! He told a truth that is crystal clear! Death is an event that lasts just a few seconds and that happens when a living being is losing their life and consciousness. No one has ever seen it (death). You cannot see death because this event happens to a body that has lost its senses. When death happens, a person is already a corpse, not a conscious individual anymore. Could you tell me anyone who has ever seen death? The human beings who are still alive cannot see death. A dead person does not have consciousness to feel what has happened, he does not exist. Likewise, before being instilled with life, before being born, we do not exist. **The only evidence that a person can experience is life!**”

*“Watu ni maua, yakiishi ndipo yamechanua. Miaka mingi iliyopita, alipofariki rafiki yangu Tabu, nilimwambia binti yake Aisha Ngoma kwamba watu hawafi alimradi wanazaa. Mimi ninaishi kwa kuamini mambo matatu tu: Kwanza lile nililosema zamani kwa Aisha Ngoma; pili, kuondoa hofu ya kifo kwa kuwa hakipo na hakuna uwapo wowote baada yake; tatu, na muhimu kuliko yote, kuufurahia uhai kwa sababu **Uhai, ndilo ua la kuwa kwetu!** Sisi ni maua yake, tumedhihirika kwa kuchanua kwa kila rangi; tuna manukato ya kila aina; tuna maumbo yavutiayo kwa kila namna; na pia **ulimwengu umetudhihirikia kwenye utambuzi wetu kwa kila rangi, manukato, ladha, hisia ufahamu na tafakuri.** Kwa nini tusiringe na kuifurahia mbuga hii ya ulimwengu, kama pundamilia na mbega waisherehekeavyo porini? Mtu ndiye mnyama pekee **anayesaliti udhahiri wa uhai na kukumbatia kifo.** Anaishi kwa kukitarajia na kukitesekea kifo. Kwa kutokukitafakari vyema, **mlimwengu-mtu amekipa kifo wadhifa kisicholingana nao.** Kumbe kifo ni tukio la sekunde chache, baada ya fursa ndefu ya uhai; fursa yenye kila neema, furaha yenye kila aina ya vionjo. Mmea wa waridi una namna moja tu ya **furaha: lile ua lake!** Kwenye rutuba na mvua; mionzi ya jua na upepo mwanana, mmea wa waridi hauishi kulisherehekea ua lake kila linapochanua. Ninafarajika nikimtazama Grace na ujauzito wake. Ndani ya mwili wake, **Ua limefunga, karibu kuchanua.** Atachipukia Omolo mwingine, wa kike au wa kiume awe na sisi. Ahsanteni na furahieni hii sherehe ya pekee ya Asha Kabea kukitania kifo.” (KKM 448)*

“**People are like flowers; they blossom when they live.** Many years ago, when my friend Tabu died, I told her daughter Aisha Ngoma that people do not die as long as they procreate. I live believing in only three things: firstly, what I said to Aisha Ngoma; second, I believe in removing the fear of death because death does not exist nor does any existence after death; last but not least, I believe in enjoying life because **life is indeed the flower of our existence!** We are the flowers of life, we become evident by blossoming

in every colour, smelling in every scent, and assuming the most attractive shapes; in turn, **the universe becomes evident to our cognitive capacity through each of its colours, scents, flavours, senses, comprehensions and reflections.** Why don't we look forward to enjoying this vast field of the universe like the zebras who celebrate the grasslands? People are the only animals who betray the **manifestation/evidence of life** by embracing death instead. Human beings live waiting for death and they are perpetually persecuted by fear of death. The **human inhabitants of the universe** cannot comprehend death; thus, they attribute to death a status that does not pertain to it. Surprisingly, death is an event which lasts only a few seconds, after the long-lasting opportunity of life; the opportunity of experiencing every grace, and every taste of happiness. Roses have just one reason for their **happiness: their blossom!** With either fertile soil and rain, or sun rays and breeze, the roses do not stop celebrating their flower every time it is flourishing. I feel solaced looking at Grace and her pregnancy. In her stomach, a flower is enclosed, almost ready to bloom. Another Omolo will sprout, and she or he will live together with us again! Thanks to all of you and please relish this peculiar celebration of Asha Kabeya, the woman who shared a joke with death.”

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This research relates literary analysis to philosophical speculations focused on the quest for African epistemes. The study investigates the representations of HIV/AIDS by means of two ontological entities: real-life experiences, obtained through the contributions of research participants, and literature, so as to highlight African discourses on knowledge.

The empirical study was crafted through a combination of six months of ethnographic fieldwork research in Tanzania and a thorough textual analysis conducted on two selected genres of Swahili literature from Tanzania, namely drama and novels, that deal with the topic of HIV/AIDS. Firstly, I explore drama, both the playscript and the performance of *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (Ngozi 1990 - UDSM 2019), contextualized within a selection of other plays written between 1989 and 2014. Secondly, I analyse novelistic prose by looking at Mutembei's *Kisiki Kikavu* (2005) and Mauya's *Firauni* (2017). Finally, I focused on Mkufya's trilogy *Diwani ya Maua* (*Ua La Faraja* 2004; *Kuwa Kwa Maua* 2019).

The objectives of this study are to demonstrate the philosophical potential of Swahili literature, which is part of the panorama of Afrophone literatures and philosophies, and to isolate both incompatible and complementary epistemologies coexisting in Swahili literature, which are articulated through multi-genre and multi-style narrative texts.

**CRISTINA NICOLINI**, Ph.D. is a researcher interested in Swahili literature and culture as well as African philosophy. She obtained both a BA in "Oriental and African Languages and Cultures – Arabic and Swahili" *cum laude* and an MA in "Sciences of Languages, History and Cultures of Mediterranean and Islamic Countries" *cum laude* at the University of Naples "L'Orientale"; an MA in "Economics and Institutions of Islamic Countries" *cum laude* at LUISS Guido Carlo; and a PhD in "African Languages and Cultures" at SOAS, University of London. She has published articles in peer reviewed journals, and this is her first monograph.



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