

## Materialism and secularism in Swahili literature: The case of Topan's Aliyeonja Pepo

Roberto Gaudioso (University of Naples "L'Orientale"),  
Emiliano Minerba (University of Naples "L'Orientale", University of Bayreuth)

### Abstract

Concepts like materialism and secular thought have formed the basis of literary works of some of the most important authors of modern literature, such as Kezilahabi, Hussein, Mulokozi, and Topan. The value of such concepts has not always been admitted by critics: all these authors, in fact, have faced various difficulties related to their works, from open refusal (in Kezilahabi's case) to a reluctant acceptance that neglected their critical points (in Topan's and Hussein's cases). The aim of this paper is to show to what extent secularism, materialism, and laicism are fundamental to these writers by selecting one case study, that of Topan's comedy *Aliyeonja Pepo*, and exploring its critique of religion, both *independently* and in comparison with the other aforementioned authors. Recognizing the presence of these concepts, in fact, would allow for a deeper analysis of the internal structures of these texts and mark an advance in their critical studies.

### Zusammenfassung

Konzepte wie Materialismus und weltliches Denken sind die Grundlage literarischer Werke einiger der wichtigsten modernen Autoren wie Kezilahabi, Hussein, Mulokozi und Topan. Kritiker haben den Wert dieser Konzepte nicht anerkannt, und die genannten Autoren sahen sich deshalb in Bezug auf ihre Arbeiten mit verschiedenen Schwierigkeiten konfrontiert. Die reichen von unverhohlener Ablehnung (im Fall von Kezilahabi) bis zu widerwilliger Akzeptanz (im Falle von Topan und Hussein). In einer Fallstudie, Topans Komödie *Aliyeonja Pepo*, will dieser Artikel aufzeigen, in welchem Ausmaß Säkularismus, Materialismus und Laizismus für diese Autoren grundlegend sind. Dabei untersucht er Topans Religionskritik sowohl unabhängig als auch im Vergleich mit derjenigen der beiden anderen Autoren. Eine Anerkennung der genannten Konzepte würde eine tiefere Analyse der internen Strukturen der Texte zulassen und eine Bewertung als kritische Studien.

### Ikisiri

Dhana kama umaada [materialism] na fikra ya kutotegemea dini [secular thought] zilikuwa misingi ya kazi za kifasihi za baadhi ya waandishi bora wa fasihi ya kisasa, kama vile akina Kezilahabi, Hussein, Mulokozi na Topan. Thamani ya dhana hizo haijatambuliwa kwa ukamili na wachambuzi. Kwa hivyo, kazi za waandishi hao zilipata changamoto nyingi baada ya kuchapishwa: nyingine zikakataliwa na kulaumiwa (kwa mfano, zile za Kezilahabi), na nyingine zimekubaliwa ingawa vipengele vyao vyenye ukosoaji mkubwa zaidi vimepuuzwa na kunyamazishwa (kama ilivyotokea kwa Topan na Hussein). Lengo la makala hii ni kuonyesha kwamba dhana za umaada, kutotegemea dini na kujikomboa dini [laicism] ni ya msingi kabisa kwa waandishi husika, kwa kuteua kifani kimoja, ramsa ya Topan Aliyeonja Pepo, na kuzungumzia ukosoaji wake wa dini katika jamii ya leo, kwanza katika kazi yenyewe na tena kwa kuilinganisha na uwazo wa waandishi wengine waliotajwa. Kutambua kuwepo kwa dhana hizo kutatuwezesha kuchambua kwa kina zaidi miundo ya ndani ya matini hizo, na kufanya masomo ya uchambuzi wao kupiga hatua mbele.

## 1. Introduction

- <1> Despite its political contradictions, the *ujamaa* period has undoubtedly been a peculiar one compared with other periods of Swahili literature. Nyerere's political thought influenced many different spheres of Tanzanian social and cultural life: not only colonialism and its heritage, but also the issue of tribalism, the role of religion in society, etc. It is not surprising that such pervasive political activity also impacted the intellectual and artistic life of the Tanzanian educated class. Many authors of that period shared Nyerere's opinions, either in full or in part.
- <2> It would be overly simplistic, however, to assert that the literature of that time assimilated and spread Nyerere's views without any further elaboration. Topics and ideals like freedom, secularism, the importance and limits of politics, and the rejection of tribalism are common to Kezilahabi, Hussein, Topan, and others. However, each one of them has portrayed these elements from their own intellectual perspective, and each one's poetics has been influenced by them in different ways.
- <3> This state of affairs is an interesting departure point for a comparative analysis. It has an important consequence for the criticism of these authors, namely, that it is impossible—or at least extremely difficult—to investigate the aesthetics of their works without recognizing in them a reflection, and the urge for reflection, on these topics. Nor it is possible to deduce from a text the opinions of its author without looking at its aesthetic dimension. Indeed, Gaudioso<sup>1</sup> proposes considering literature as a holistic unity and investigating it by starting from the text (inductive method). Our studies up until now have guided us to follow precisely this strategy, because our analysis has shown us that an approach based solely on one dimension often fails to grasp the full sense of the work. Gaudioso<sup>2</sup> shows how neglected and misunderstood Kezilahabi's and Hussein's poetics have been due to a partial reading (often based solely on content) and/or a deductive reading (i.e. based on extra-textual views, like religion, culture, context, etc.). This point of view is shared by Minerba, who in his analysis of two important works of horror from these two authors (Hussein's *Mashetani* and Kezilahabi's *Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi*) has demonstrated the extent to which a critical perspective focusing on the context of the text's production—which therefore sees the *raison d'être* of the text and all its elements only as allegoric symbolizations of the author's environment—can be perplexing and misleading in its pretensions to objectivity.<sup>3</sup>
- <4> Topan's work, too, has been the object of allegorical criticism: in this case, the aesthetic dimension that has been neglected is not horror, but humorism. Minerba<sup>4</sup> has demonstrated that the allegorical reading of Topan's first comedy, *Mfalme Juha*, as a portrayal of colonial power neglects the humoristic dimension of that play, and is even contradicted by it. A reader open to experiencing the humour of *Mfalme Juha* would reckon that the comic and contradictory nature of the protagonist does not permit seeing him as evil, or as the symbol of evil, as other critics have suggested: Juha's flaw, in fact, is his mere stupidity, which, in preventing him from understanding the real needs and intentions of the people around him, turns him into a danger to his subjects and vice versa.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we propose a closer reading of the text that considers its elements as a holistic unity, because a mere descriptive analysis focused solely on one dimension can give rise to a misunderstanding of the artistic work, as our previous studies have demonstrated and as we will attempt to show in this article.

---

1 Gaudioso, Roberto. A Literary Approach to Avoiding Objectification of the Text: Reading Kezilahabi and Beyond.

2 Gaudioso, Roberto. Il corpo e la parola. La poetica di Ebrahim Hussein attraverso la traduzione di Ngoma na Vailini; Gaudioso, Roberto. Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein e Euphrase Kezilahabi; Gaudioso, Roberto. The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi's poetics.

3 Minerba, Emiliano. A frightening play: the element of horror in Hussein's *Mashetani*; Minerba, Emiliano. *Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi*, yaani kitisho kinachosimulia siasa.

4 Minerba, Emiliano. Humorism and sense: a Pirandellian reading of Topan's *Mfalme Juha* <66–67>.

5 Minerba, Emiliano. Humorism and sense: a Pirandellian reading of Topan's *Mfalme Juha* <67–68>.

<5> This paper, therefore, will take Topan's second comedy, *Aliyeonja Pepo*, as a case study: in its analysis, we will attempt to outline the author's views on the complex issue of the role of religion in society. In the first section, the plot of the play will be recounted and its critical history will be presented and discussed, showing that previous criticism has paid no attention at all to Topan's critical points about religion. In the second section, Topan's thoughts about religion and secularism will be presented, in juxtaposition with the views of other figures from this literary period (Kezilahabi, Hussein, Mulokozi). Lastly, in the third section, our analysis of the play will be presented, showing to what extent Topan's thought interrelates with the artistic and comic dimensions of his work.

## 2. Religion and modernity in Topan's oeuvre

### 2.1. *Aliyeonja Pepo* as a thesis play

<6> Although Topan's theatrical oeuvre is generally classified as comedy, a closer reading sheds light on several differences in the formal structures and aims of each play. This is especially true for *Aliyeonja Pepo* and the aforementioned *Mfalme Juha*. Topan's first play, in fact, is a comedy *stricto sensu*, in which humour and its devices, centred on the characterization of the protagonist, form the core of the play's aesthetics. On the contrary, *Aliyeonja Pepo*, in spite of certainly being full of comic sketches and situations, does not depend on these devices, but rather on the reflection on religion and its role in society that the author sustains throughout the plot: this is the reason why, without neglecting the role of its humorous elements, *Aliyeonja Pepo* should be seen as a thesis play rather than a humoristic comedy. The difference of intent on the part of the author is even evident from the prefaces of the two plays: in the introduction to *Mfalme Juha*<sup>6</sup>, Topan states that his aim in writing the comedy is not to deliver a message or teaching, but just to amuse people. The preface of *Aliyeonja Pepo*, on the other hand, is totally centred on Topan's secularist thought, and the play is explicitly declared to be an expression of this<sup>7</sup> (from here onwards, except when explicitly specified, all translations are ours):

The last question here is this: if religion by now is not the only instrument to secure man's development socially or nationally; if education and politics are two other important instruments for development in this century; if religion should now merely assist these two instruments, in the absence of the need to learn about heaven and hell; if religion has arrived at this point; then is religion really 'religion'?

If you abandoned the idea of heaven and hell, then what would Lucifer's<sup>8</sup> job be? He would no longer need to remain on earth. Would he make a deal with God to go to him in heaven? This play has tried to answer some of these questions.<sup>9</sup>

*Aliyeonja Pepo* thus specifically addresses the question of religion in modern times. The pre-dominance of this theme elicited strong criticism of the work even before its publication. As Topan<sup>10</sup> himself explains in the credits of the edition of the play, he asked several people to read his manuscript before publishing it: among them, the novelist and priest Felician Nkwera opposed Topan's views on the relationship between religion and modernity and proposed some

---

6 Topan, Farouk. *Mfalme Juha* <v>.

7 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <xii>.

8 We have decided to translate Ibilisi, the proper name of the devil in the Arabic and Islamic tradition, here with the corresponding name of the Christian and European one, namely Lucifer.

9 *Swali la mwisho hapa ni hili: ikiwa dini sasa si nyenzo pekee ya kutegemea maendeleo ya mwanadamu kijamii au kitaifa, ikiwa elimu na siasa ni nyenzo nyingine muhimu katika karne hii kwa ajili ya maendeleo; ikiwa dini iwe ikisaidia tu nyenzo mbili hizi bila ya kuwepo haja ya kusomesha habari za pepo na moto; ikiwa dini imefikia hali hii; basi dini kweli itakuwa 'dini'? Ukiyaondoa mawazo ya pepo na moto, basi kazi yake Ibilisi itakuwa nini? Atakuwa hana haja tena ya kubaki duniani. Atapatana na Mungu aende zake mbinguni? Mchezo huu umejaribu kutoa baadhi ya majibu ya maswali haya.*

10 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <vii>.

corrections of his work. In the published version of his play, Topan<sup>11</sup> thus attached a *Kifananisho* by Nkwera, in which his contrasting views and proposed corrections are laid out.

<7> Starting from these considerations, the analysis of *Aliyeonja Pepo* proposed here will focus on the way the question of religion is elaborated in this work and on its relationship with the characters, situations and comic elements of the play, in order to show the central importance of this theme to the work's interpretation. Points of comparison between Topan's work and the corrected version proposed by Nkwera will be outlined, shedding light on how deeply the novelist's difference of opinion affected not only the plot, but also the aesthetics and the general organization of the text.

## 2.2. *Aliyeonja Pepo* and its readings

<8> The plot of the play represents the author's questions about religion amid the setting of a paradise in which angels are depicted as office employees under the guidance of *Bwamkubwa*, 'the boss'. The representation of paradise derives from the Islamic tradition, but men of any religion are welcomed there. All of them enjoy their stay in heaven, giving in to all kinds of pleasure without minding the religious precepts they used to follow in life: even the angels, like Ziraili (Azrael), drink whisky, violating the Islamic prohibition of alcohol. At the request of *Bwamkubwa*, Ziraili and Sirafili (*Isrāfil*, the angel who will sound the trumpet on Judgement Day) check the register of people whose souls were brought to paradise by Ziraili's assistants (Munkari and Nakiri) the day before, noticing that a Swahili man from Bagamoyo, Juma Hamisi, has mistakenly been admitted instead of another man, John Houghton, a British bartender. Ziraili thus calls Juma, who in the meantime has already started enjoying life in paradise, and informs him of the mistake: in order to solve it, the angel must bring Juma back to life and take John Houghton's soul. Since Juma's corpse has already been buried, Ziraili proposes that Juma place his soul in Houghton's body immediately after making the bartender die so that he can live out the rest of his life, a period of one year, with Houghton's identity. Juma strongly resists the idea of leaving paradise and its pleasures to come back to earth. Finally, Sirafili comes to Ziraili's aid and asks Juma why he does not want to return to life. Juma tries to justify his desire to remain in heaven explaining that between him and the British bartender there are so many differences in religion, lifestyle and political and ideological background that it would be impossible for him to get used to living Houghton's life. Sirafili seems to agree with Juma, but not in the sense the Swahili man expected: the angel in fact decides to reincarnate him not in Scotland, but in the body of a cat at the fish market of Bagamoyo, Juma's home town. Juma tries to oppose this decision, but at this point he can do nothing but leave the scene with the angels, heading back to earth in the body of a cat.

After their exit, Lucifer enters the scene for a soliloquy. After making fun of Juma and his misadventure, he asks himself why God allows him so much time with and influence over his favourite creatures, human beings. Surely he does not do this out of fear, since he is almighty and superior to every creature, including the devil; thus, Lucifer concludes that God gives him so much power out of love (*mapenzi*): he, Lucifer, has been chosen to rule the world with God as a peer, due to being his favourite creature. Therefore, there is no hate between them, but reciprocal complementarity: together they constitute one single being, the prime mover of the universe.

<9> In spite of its importance and the emphasis the author himself places on it, the question of religion has not always occupied a central role in the critical history of *Aliyeonja Pepo*. Like Topan's other works, in fact, this play has received very little attention from critics: the only works on it are an article by Kruisheer<sup>12</sup> and the section on Swahili drama in the Tanzanian

---

11 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <26–27>.

12 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), *Dar es Salaam*, 1973 <45> (where he cites even a review by P. S. Kirumbi, published in *Mulika* in 1975).

mainland in the *Outline of Swahili Literature*,<sup>13</sup> which deals briefly with Topan's first two works. Kruisheers's article<sup>14</sup> proposes a political interpretation of *Aliyeonja Pepo* as a parody of *ujamaa*, arguing that the author's introduction, focusing on the question of religion, was actually meant to avoid censorship. Bertoncini,<sup>15</sup> on the contrary, accepts Topan's introduction and recognizes the importance of religion in the play. Her reading of the play, however, states that Topan's conclusion as presented in the development of the plot is that in modern times, religion can and must link together with science and politics without being neglected, precisely as Juma links them in preferring to be reincarnated as a cat in Bagamoyo rather than a man whose lifestyle is contrary to his religious and political principles. Bertoncini's<sup>16</sup> view thus implies the moral imperative of retaining religion and its values. This position is actually closer to that of Topan's opponent, Nkwera: "But it is bad when someone forgets to see the relationship between these three things [religion, science and education]. All three are his instruments, and thus a discovery that he makes in one field has to help develop the other two."<sup>17</sup> Instead, Topan's solution to the question of religion, as will be discussed here, does not convey the exigency of religion in modern times nor a moral imperative. The author looks at religion from a materialistic point of view, seeing in it nothing more than a historical phenomenon that had to develop by necessity in the past, but that now has no more reason to exist. This is not due to the birth of a new system of values, but on the contrary, to the possibility of overcoming the need for values and the concepts of good and evil, since education and politics now allow human beings to fully realize their potentialities and consciously, and no longer passively, find a way to live in prosperity.<sup>18</sup> The dispute over the need for morality is at the core of Topan and Nkwera's differences of opinion, as the analysis of the latter's corrections will show.

### 2.3. The Dar es Salaam textual tradition of that time

<10> It is important to note that secular thought did not just appear suddenly at a certain point in Swahili history. Among Swahili secular literature, we can also list the works of Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy (1776–1840). As Kai Kresse (2003: 304–305) points out, "Judging from readings and fieldwork experience, reflecting upon the Islamic reformism along the Swahili coast in terms of 'enlightenment' does make sense, if only to a certain point. Certainly, Islamic reformism does not exactly correspond to the particular secularism of the European Enlightenment. But in terms of the internal structural dynamics of both movements we can raise a parallel. In both cases, an emphatic insistence on reason, rationality and self-reliance turns into a (irrational) absolutism of a certain kind of rationality, a rationalism that has become dogmatic and unreasonable.' In 1931, the important poet Shaaban Robert, the father of Swahili language, demonstrated his secular approach to knowledge:

I lent you this book, *Information on the Body* [biology?]. [...] Read every page, every line, and almost every word. [...] Education comes from good science. You have to read this intensely rather than the *Hekaya za Abunuwasi*, because in this book there is education; in the *Hekaya za Abunuwasi*, mere stories.<sup>19</sup>

13 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. *Outline of Swahili Literature*.

14 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), *Dar es Salaam*, 1973 <46>.

15 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. *Outline of Swahili Literature* <223–225>.

16 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. *Outline of Swahili Literature* <226>.

17 *Ubaya lakini mtu anaposahau kuona uhusiano wa mambo hayo matatu [dini, sayansi na elimu]. Yote matatu ni zana zake, na hivi uvumbuzi ufanyao katika somo moja budi usaidie kukuza masomo mawili yanayobaki*. Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <27>.

18 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <xii–xiii>.

19 Amid his research for this volume of Shaaban Robert's unedited letters, Mulokozi discovered that the book that Robert refers to in the letter was written by Frederick Johnson and published by Sheldon Press in 1930. The original text: *Tena nimekuazima kitabu jina lake Habari za Mwili. Soma kila ukurasa, kila*

While it is true that the secularism demonstrated by Shaaban Robert here was influenced by the colonialism of the time, science does not pay heed to our nationality, origin, or identity. There is nothing to show that secularism was something alien to Swahili culture: in fact, according to Kresse, there had been a movement towards secularism that was not based on the European Enlightenment. However, even the European Enlightenment was culturally delimited and influenced by the different European cultures, so much so that we can recognize national or regional characteristics within it. Moreover, it is not a coincidence that during the European Enlightenment, cosmopolitanism developed together with secularism.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, no culture can be defined as secular in itself, so long as secularism is considered a praxis and a thought system. It is social, philosophical, legal, juridical, and institutional developments that can be secular. Nor can secularism be described as a cultural phenomenon, so long as culture is ontologically defined by its origin and identity. In this sense, culture would seek its own preservation rather than its development. On the contrary, it is the development of philosophical, legal, juridical, and institutional powers in that society that influences and changes its culture. The discourse around secularism is complex and demands more attention; we would like to suggest a comparative approach to this investigation.

<11> On the basis of these brief initial considerations, we may note that, in the Swahili world, secularism did not just emerge spontaneously or was imported wholesale. Secularism as a discrete political and social culture and a source of consistent intellectual output is a phenomenon of the '60s and '70s. For example, what happened in Dar es Salaam at that time, certainly prompted by Nyerere's activism of the '60s and independence, transformed the city into a critically important artistic and cultural laboratory (also with respect to political culture). This atmosphere was also full of contradictions, of course, as Nyerere followers were comprised of very different people.

Seeking leadership by using religion or using ethnic groups divides people. The purpose of leadership is to build a people so that it becomes one thing. The purpose of leadership cannot be to separate people. [...] If they start that kind of leadership and we accept it, we will be divided. [...] If these trends of stirring hate, be it related to ethnicity or to religion, emerge, and if we promote them, they get out of control. You will be surprised at how you will be preparing to slaughter each other, and when it reaches that point, there will be no one to shout, to say 'stop!'<sup>21</sup>

---

*mstari na karibu kila neno. [...] Elimu huja kwa taaluma nzuri. Lazima usome hiki sana kuliko Hekaya za Abunuwasi, sababu humu imo elimu na katika Hekaya za Abunuwasi zimo hadithi tupu.* In Mulokozi, Barua za Shaaban Robert <32>.

20 We are not suggesting that the Enlightenment was universal, but that it was a universalist movement. We know that it encompassed various racial (if not racist) positions, like the doctrine of the 'noble savage', which persists in European thought. This doctrine is a good example of how a paternalistic approach to the Other with a racial basis can only lead us to different forms of racism and prevarication. Patriotism, nationalism and any idea of compensation, without overcoming the underlying racial basis, as Soyinka Wole emphasizes in accusing the Negritude of accepting a racial paradigm (Soyinka, W. Mito e letteratura nell'orizzonte culturale africano <127–129>), becomes a 'fascist enterprise', as Kezilahabi argues (Kezilahabi, Euphrase. African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation. <357–358>): 'through the glorification of illusory traditional qualities of African society, our leaders create mythologies of a magnificent past and refuse to confront those very institutions which are by their nature retrogressive' (for more details on this point, see Gaudioso R., The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi's poetics <61–75>). However, it is important to point out that this doctrine did not originate within the Enlightenment (even if this was accepted at that time), and that the Enlightenment, with its secularism, scientism and cosmopolitanism, gave us the fundamental philosophical weapons to overcome these doctrines.

21 Speech by Nyerere at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=6TuNQOm4NFc>: *Kutafuta uongozi kwa kutumia dini au kutumia kabila inagawa watu. Kazi ya uongozi ni kujenga watu wawe kitu kimoja. Kazi ya uongozi hauwezi kuwa kutenga watu. [...] Wakianza uongozi wa namna hivyo na tuwakubalia tutagawanyika. Rwanda pale, mwaka jana, wameuwna sana. Watu wale msidhani ni makabila mawili*

These words express the importance of secularism in politics for peace and freedom, and the importance of language in order to unite people.

<12> Nyerere established the secular basis of the state without rejecting the social power of religion. However, some intellectuals went beyond this, achieving not only secularism but also atheistic sentiment. One example of this is the Swahili writer and scholar Mugyabuso Mlinzi Mulokozi, who expresses his atheism in the poem *Mimi ni Nani*<sup>22</sup>:

<i>Mimi ni kitu,</i>	I am a thing,
<i>Niko ardhini,</i>	I am in the land,
<i>Hakuna Mungu,</i>	There is no God,
<i>Hakuna mbingu,</i>	There is no heaven,
<i>Hakuna shetani,</i>	There is no Satan,
<i>Hakuna malaika,</i>	There is no angel,
<i>Hakuna mtawa,</i>	There is no monk,
<i>Hakuna mwovu.</i>	There is no evil creature.
<i>Roho yako,</i>	Your soul,
<i>Ndiyo Mungu wako;</i>	That is your God;
<i>Mawazo yako,</i>	Your thoughts,
<i>Ndiyo shetani wako;</i>	Are your devil
<i>Kaburi lako,</i>	Your grave
<i>Ndiyo mbigu yako;</i>	Is your heaven;
<i>Mateso yako duniani,</i>	Your struggles on the earth
<i>Ndiyo jahanam yako.</i>	Are your hell.

<13> Mulokozi's intention was not only to express his atheism, but much more than that, to affirm that everything can happen in this world; that means that men have the power to control their own lives. He uses this strategy to try to encourage people; obviously, Mulokozi recognizes this capacity as the power of individuals, but constrained within a political system. In his 1974 review of Hussein's drama *Kinjeketile* (1969), he writes:<sup>23</sup>

In this way, Ebrahim Hussein succeeds in accomplishing one of his aims that is very evident in this drama— that of showing the collision between science and superstition. [...] The great lesson that we can obtain here is that in the twentieth century, no nation can win a war basing itself on ideologies of superstition or religion. The principal tools of this century are politics and science.<sup>24</sup>

---

*mbalimbali. Wanaitwa wautu na watutsi: ni wanyaruwanda tu! Ni wanyaruwanda, hakuna makabila pale, kuna kabila moja tu la watu wanyaruwanda. [...] Wote ni wanyaruwanda lakini wako wautu, wako watutsi. Si makabila. Kabila lazima liwe na lugha yake. Hakuna lugha kinaitwa kitutsi au kiutu, hata kidogo, lugha yao ni ile ile Kinyaruwanda [...] Mambo haya ya kuchochea chuki ama za ukabila ama za udini yakianza na tukiyapa nafasi hayana simile. Mtashangaaa jinsi mnavyoandaa kuchinjiana na ikifika kiasi hicho hakuna mtu kukema, hakuna atakavyosema "acheni".*

22 Mulokozi, Mugyabuso Mlinzi. Mashairi ya Kisasa <32>. It is true that we cannot to identify directly the lyrical I with the author, but in a lyric poem, without irony, with only one voice, there would be no reason for the lyrical I to not express the author's thoughts. Moreover, Mulokozi rejected his Christian name of baptism and took a Haya name: Mugyabuso.

23 Mulokozi, Mugyabuso Mlinzi. *Kinjeketile* <47–48>.

24 *Kwa njia hii Ebrahim Hussein anafaulu kuitekeleza dhamira yake mojawapo ambayo inajitokeza sana katika mchezo huu – ile ya kuonyesha mgongano kati ya sayansi na ushirikina. [...] Fundisho kubwa tunalolipata hapa ni kwamba katika karne hii ya ishirini hakuna taifa linaloweza kushinda vita kwa kutegemea itikadi za ushirikina au dini. Nyenzo kuu ya karne hii ni siasa na sayansi.*

Science and politics are the tools of progress of a nation. It is important to notice that Topan<sup>25</sup> describes the question in a very similar way:

The last question here is this: if religion by now is not the only instrument to secure man's development socially or nationally; if education and politics are two other important instruments for development in this century; if religion should now merely assist these two instruments, in the absence of the need to learn about heaven and hell; if religion has arrived at this point; then is religion really 'religion'?

If you abandoned the idea of heaven and hell, then what would Lucifer's<sup>26</sup> job be? He would no longer need to remain on earth. Would he make a deal with God to go to him in heaven?

This play has tried to answer some of these questions. I think they are questions that must be answered if we want religion to help us with our development in modernity. If we don't do this, then religion will continue being a private affair, pursued only by the person who fears hell or seeks heaven; it will have neither utility nor meaning for the whole society or nation.<sup>27</sup>

Topan's position is clear enough: short of being a danger to society, religion can only be an individual and private affair nowadays. It is important to emphasize that the atheism of Mulo-kozi and Topan was neither militant nor a violent revolt against religion. They spoke out about something that was sharply silenced in traditional societies, and though their discourses marked a contribution to the role of religion in a secular state, they were not a political proposal to suppress it. That is why Topan adds this epigraph to *Aliyeonja Pepo: MAWAZO YA MWANADAMU HAYANA KIKOMO* ('Human ideas have no limit').

<14> Thus, Topan decides to consecrate his drama to free thinking. According to him, religion was a tool of emancipation that had now lost this function; on the contrary, it was now a conservative power that could influence only the less educated people. Indeed, the basis of emancipation, according to Topan,<sup>28</sup> is education:

The relation between one person and another used to have its basis in clan and tribe. Someone who was not from a certain clan or a certain tribe used to have no value for people of a different clan or tribe: he was not an asset of theirs, a life of theirs. Such a notion brought many conflicts. It led to fights, wars, and to people killing each other. The precepts of religion then tried to eliminate thoughts like these. And it was even successful to some extent, though afterwards the followers of different religions were those who were fighting and killing each other! But generally, in the past, religion was an expedient to setting the human being free from the fear of his own nature, and also to allowing him to expand the horizon of his love by admitting people from different clans and tribes, but [who shared] one religion. Everything has its own time. [...] Through his own research, the human being has started to discover certain things that made him capable of understanding nature well, and even controlling it as he wants. Therefore, he no longer feared it. Every schoolchild nowadays knows why there is rain, lightning, and rivers. Going on aeroplanes and crossing seas is something usual today. And not only crossing seas: mankind has even reached the moon. Things like these do not derive from

---

25 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <xii>.

26 We have decided to translate Ibilisi, the proper name of the devil in the Arabic and Islamic tradition, here with the corresponding name of the Christian and European one, namely Lucifer.

27 *Swali la mwisho hapa ni hili: ikiwa dini sasa si nyenzo pekee ya kutegemea maendeleo ya mwanadamu kijamii au kitaifa, ikiwa elimu na siasa ni nyenzo nyingine muhimu katika karne hii kwa ajili ya maendeleo; ikiwa dini iwe ikisaidia tu nyenzo mbili hizi bila ya kuweco haja ya kusomesha habari za pepo na moto; ikiwa dini imefikia hali hii; basi dini kweli itakuwa "dini"? Ukiyaondoa mawazo ya pepo na moto, basi kazi yake Ibilisi itakuwa nini? Atakuwa hana haja ya kubaki duniani. Atapatana na Mungu aende zake mbinguni? Mchezo huu umejaribu kutoa baadhi ya majibu ya maswali haya. Nafikiri ni maswali yanayopasa kujibiwa ikiwa tunaitaka dini itusaidie katika maendeleo yetu ya kisasa. Ikiwa hatutafanya hivyo, basi dini itabakia kuwa nyenzo ya kibinafsi tu inayofuatwa na mtu yule tu anayeogopa moto au anayeitaka pepo; haitakuwa na manufaa au maana kwa jamii nzima au taifa zima.*

28 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <ix>.

religion. Their modern basis is education. Education has become the modern instrument that makes human life progress.<sup>29</sup>

At that time, there were Topan and Mulokozi, on the one hand, who were questioning the utility of religion, the former with respect to society and the latter with respect to international power. Both of them conclude that humankind no longer needs religion. The accusation levied on these writers, namely, that they seek to confuse people with their confused works, often hid a refusal to accept such ideas in the critical reading of their works. On the other hand, but with the same tendency towards freedom of thought and secularism, there were Ebrahim Hussein and Euphrase Kezilahabi, who neither declared themselves atheists nor believed that religion had to be completely overcome.<sup>30</sup>

<15> However, Kezilahabi's position on religion and freedom is very clear, for example in the poem *Bikira Mwenye Huzuni*.<sup>31</sup>

*Miaka kumi ya uchovu  
Mapenzini na msichana  
Aliyeishi pangoni  
Ilikuwa imepita kwa huzuni.*

Ten years of tiredness  
Of love with a girl  
Who lived in a cave  
Had passed in sadness

*'Sababu, buibui alikuwa kwa uchawi  
Amekwisha fuma usiku  
Ule wavu wa ubikira  
Mlangoni.*

Because the spider, with magic,  
Had already woven, that night,  
That web of virginity  
At the door

*Halafu buibui, kanisa, alikuwa  
Amekwisha wasomea kitabu cha zamani  
Na kusema aliweza kumwoa; lakini  
Bila, kwa nguvu  
Za shetani, kwanza  
Kuvunja ule wavu wa uchawi.*

And then the spider, the church, had  
Already read to them the ancient book  
And said he could marry her, but  
without, by the power  
of the devil, first  
breaking that web of magic

*Vema. Lakini namna gani kwa nguvu  
Za Mungu, angeweza  
Kuingia hilo pango la upweke*

Well. But in which way by the power  
Of God would he be able to  
Enter that cave of solitude

---

29 *Uhusiano baina ya mtu na mtu ulikuwa na msingi wa ukoo na ukabila. Mtu aliyekuwa si wa ukoo fulani au si wa kabila fulani hakuthaminiwa kitu na wale wa ukoo au kabila jingine: si mali yake, si maisha yake. Wazo kama hili likaleta migogoro mingi. Likaleta mapigano, vita na watu kuuana. Mafunzo ya dini yakajaribu kuondosha fikira kama hizi. Nayo yakafuzu kidogo, ila, baadaye wafuasi wa dini mbali mbali wakawa ndio wanaopigana na kuuana! Lakini kwa jumla, hapo zamani, dini ilikuwa nyenzo haba ya kumkomboa mwanadamu kutoka katika woga wa maumbile yake, na kumfanya pia aupanue upeo wa mapenzi yake kwa kuwaingiza humo watu wa koo na makabila mengine mbali ya dini moja. Kila kitu kina siku zake. [...] Kwa utafiti wake mwenyewe, mwanadamu akaanza kuvumbua mambo fulani yaliyomwezesha kuelewa vema maumbile na hata kuweza kuyamudu atakavyo. Akawa sasa hayaogopi. Mtoto wa shule ye yote leo anajua sababu ya kuwepo mvua, radi na mito. Kupanda ndege na kuvuka bahari ni jambo la kawaida sasa. Na si kuvuka bahari tu, bali hata kwenye mwezi mwanadamu amefika. Mambo kama haya kisasa hayakusababishwa na dini. Msingi wake wa kisasa ni elimu. Elimu imekuwa nyenzo ya kisasa inayoendeleza mbele maisha ya mwanadamu.*

30 We will not engage in a discussion of Hussein's thought here; we are mostly in agreement with Mulokozi in the above-quoted passage on Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. On this topic and for a comparison between Hussein and Kezilahabi, see Gaudioso, Roberto. *Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein e Euphrase Kezilahabi*; Gaudioso, Roberto. *The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi's poetics <84–91, 201–208>*.

31 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. *Kichomi <3>*.

*Bila kwanza kuvunja  
Huo wavu wa uchawi?*

Without first breaking  
That web of magic?

*Ndoa ni jambo la kawaida  
Au ujuzi fulani usojulikana  
Ambao hausailiki  
Na akili za binadamu?*

Is marriage a normal thing  
Or an unknown knowledge  
That cannot be understood  
By the brains of human beings?

What emerges here is that for Kezilahabi, sex before marriage is not a matter of indifference, but something to fight for, because having intercourse with a partner also means making an effort to know one's partner physically. The poem *Bikira Mwenye Huzuni* fights the intellectualism and spiritualism of the church in favour of knowledge based on experience, including corporeal experience. For this reason, in the last stanza, the lyrical I asks if marriage is a normal thing or something that human beings cannot understand. This opposition is expressed by the image of the spider, i.e. the church, who reads a book (the Bible) to the people. The line "Because the spider, with magic,/Had already woven, that night,/That web of virginity" suggests that it is the church that created virginity and its myth. Moreover, the web that it weaves is magic (*uchawi*); thus, Kezilahabi sees this moral commandment of religion as not being far from esoteric initiation, or witchcraft; it is backward and far removed from reality.

<16> In his second novel, *Kichwamaji* ('The Dumb', 1974), he denounces the distance between the church and people's everyday lives.<sup>32</sup>

That evening, I went myself to meet the priest; I asked him to make the announcement for [the wedding] at the church because I didn't have many days to spend at home. After arguing with him for a long time, we made each other angry. 'The power that you priests were given by God, you have to use it properly!' I told him angrily. 'You may have studied politics and the other dirty things you intellectuals study there, but you have to follow the customs and laws of the church. I can't make your wedding different from the others. You haven't been tested and you haven't attended the marriage preparation classes.' When he finished saying this, he took his book and went into the church. I left angrily and went home.<sup>33</sup>

<17> This distance between moral good and reality is also the dilemma of the protagonist of *Rosa Mistika*. The unquestionability of morality and spiritualism creates a taboo, which thus leads to Rosa's ignorance. Her lack of knowledge, of education (in this case sexual education), was the cause of her fall. Kezilahabi speaks of education not only as the teaching of a curriculum at school, but generically, as a means of gaining freedom through direct experience. Kezilahabi refers to education and the freedom to gain experience in the novel when speaking about Rosa's father, Zakaria:

He [Zakaria] didn't understand that Rosa was in the bad 'age group' and that harshness would not help; he didn't understand that daughters need some freedom from their fathers; he didn't know that by beating his daughter he was intruding in a realm that wasn't his, and that when

---

32 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. *Kichwamaji* <138>.

33 *Jioni hiyo mimi mwenyewe nilikwenda kuonana na padri, nikamwomba aanze kutangaza kanisani kwani sikuwa na siku nyingi za kukaa nyumbani. Baada ya kuzozana naye kwa muda mrefu tulikasirishana. "Uwezo mliopewa na mungu lazima muutumie vizuri!" nilimwambia kwa hasira. "Unaweza kuwa umesomea siasa na takataka zingine msomazo huko lakini lazima ufuate kawaida na sharia za Kanisa. Siwezi kufanya arusi yako iwe tofauti na arusi za watu wengine! Hujapimwa na hujahudhuria mafundisho ya ndoa!" Alipomaliza kusema hivi alichukua kitabu chake na kwenda kanisani. Niliondoka kwa hasira nyumbani.*

it came to marriage, he was of very little help; he didn't understand that Rosa needed to understand boys.<sup>34</sup>

Kezilahabi is very explicit about the fact that he means sexual education:

The desire of the body, the fear of getting pregnant—both taken away completely; the happiness of the body; sexual positions; and pregnancy after pregnancy. If the priest had spoken of these things, perhaps he could have helped. But he started talking to her of being saved. [...] [Rosa:] 'Priest, my life has already been destroyed and I don't care. Why should you care more about my soul than about me as a whole?'<sup>35</sup>

<18> Similarly to Kezilahabi, Topan<sup>36</sup> argues that religion fails to understand and to accommodate the fundamental questions of our existence, to be a tool of emancipation, to treat people as a whole in terms of their identity and union of body and soul.

Everything has its own time. Ever since those days, century after century, human beings have been trusting religion and expecting it to be the main instrument for continuing his life. But, later on, things gradually changed. [...] We also see that the need that led to the precepts of religion today does not exist anymore. [...] Therefore, religion must not frighten anyone, nor instill fear to the extent that someone is no longer able to completely realize the exigencies of education and politics; for example, by having someone become a monk who isolates himself from his human peers and their efforts, so that he may do nothing but worship God all the time. Nor should religion weaken anyone to the point that he can no longer live in the world as a complete human being, possessing all the capabilities of being human. A religion that does such things has serious defects—because it transforms the human being into a sort of child, who is seduced by teachings that have nothing to do with today's environment.<sup>37</sup>

<19> These secular ideas were opposed by traditionalists. Indeed, in the 1974 issue of the journal *Zinduko*—thus, the year of publication of *Kichomi* and *Aliyeonja Pepo*, after *Rosa Mistika* and Hussein's *Kinjeketile* and *Mashetani*—traditionalist intellectuals harshly criticized Kezilahabi, Topan, and Hussein as well as Shaaban Robert. The article of Mattered synthesizes all the criticisms of these writers.<sup>38</sup>

I don't dare to read this book [*Rosa Mistika*] in front of people—maybe if I were with my mother I would read it. [...] I was told that there is a woman who was shocked to death by

---

34 [Zakaria] *Hakufahamu kwamba Rosa alikuwa katika rika baya na kwamba ukali ulikuwa haufai; hakufahamu kwamba mabinti wanahitaji uhuru fulani kutoka kwa baba zao; hakufahamu kwamba kwa kumpiga bintiye alikuwa akiingilia utawala usio wake na kwamba kuhusu maoni ya ndoa yeye alifaa kidogo sana; hakufahamu kwamba Rosa alihitaji kuwafahamu wavulana.* Kezilahabi, Euphrase. *Rosa Mistika* <14–15>.

35 *Tamaa ya mwili; hofu ya kupata mimba; inaondolewa kabisa; furaha ya mwili; staili; na mimba baada ya mimba. Kama Padri angalizungumza juu ya mambo haya labda angaliweza kumsaidia. Lakini yeye alianza kumzungumza juu ya wokovu. [...]* [Rosa:] "Padri maisha yangu yamekwisha haribika, na sijali! Kwa nini wewe ujali roho yangu kuliko mimi mwenyewe?". Kezilahabi, Euphrase. *Rosa Mistika* <58–59>.

36 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <ix, xi>.

37 *Kila kitu kina siku zake. Tokea siku hizo, karne hadi karne, mwanadamu amekuwa akiamini dini na kuitegemea kuwa nyenzo kuu ya kuendeshea maisha. Lakini, pole pole, baadaye mambo yakabadilika. [...]* *twaona pia kwamba ile haja iliyosababisha mafunzo ya dini sasa haipo tena. [...]* *Kwa hiyo, dini isimwogopeshe mtu wala isimtie hofu mtu hata akawa asiweze kutekeleza matakwa ya elimu na siasa kwa ukamilifu; kwa mfano, kumfanya mtu awe mtawa anayejitenga na wanadamu wenzake na jitihada zao ili aweze kumwabudu Mungu tu usiku na mchana. Wala dini isibatilishe mtu hata asiweze kuishi duniani kama mwanadamu kamili mwenye kila uwezo wa kibinadamu. Dini ifanyayo mambo kama haya ina makosa makubwa. Kwani inamegeza mtu kuwa mtoto wa bandia anayechezewa na mafunzo yasiyofanana na mazingira ya leo.*

38 Balisidya Mattered, May Lenna. *Uhuru wa Mwandishi* <26–30>.

seeing her daughter reading this book. The anger in this woman's voice can be understood after reading the book itself. [...] That is why *Rosa Mistika* is condemned: because of its clear depictions of acts that are usually secret, and for expressing open censure of the Minister of Education ... And *Kichomi* also seems to go against the structures that society has gotten used to. When I talk about forms of writing, I start to think that for books like *Mashetani* and *Aliyeonja Pepo*, it is impossible to understand what they say, their content, philosophy and the author's message; [and] books like *Kusadikika*, which had to be put in such a style so that its message and content might reach readers.<sup>39</sup>

Matteru's criticism of both content and form is based on morality. As for the content, it is clear that for Matteru, Kezilahabi's book is too explicit, even if there is not a single word of sexual description in the novel: thus, the problem is speaking about things that should be hidden. On the contrary, Hussein's, Topan's, and Robert's works are too cryptic for her; thus, if they are cryptic, they cannot be understood and they obviously cannot teach what should be taught as being morally acceptable by society. This position puts literature in a state of fundamental uselessness, because why should one teach something that is already accepted? Do not we already know what is accepted or what we consider acceptable and fitting in our society?

<20> Kezilahabi wages a very strong and consistent fight against this conception of literature. He finds that the arguments boil down to ideology (religious values, ethnic groups, etc.), which destroys any interest in finding the truth and analysing the text.<sup>40</sup>

Many of our famous poets like using the word 'wisdom'. This word has made many poets think of themselves as people whose wisdom is trustworthy as soon as they open their mouths, by the power of their pens. And this is what has made many Swahili poems elicit blame and censure.<sup>41</sup>

<21> Kezilahabi perceives the self-referentiality of conservative poetry as problematic. He notices that Swahili conservative poets often address themselves as the source of *hekima* ('wisdom'). Therefore, for Topan and Kezilahabi, moralism and self-referentiality are detrimental to the development of Swahili literature, the search for truth, and thought in general. Indeed, in the social, political, and religious situation of Tanzania in the '70s, Kezilahabi felt that freedom was at risk: *Hapa nilipo sina uhuru!*<sup>42</sup> He was afraid that ideology could deprive people of their freedom and humanity, that "the people have become things".

---

39 *Kitabu hiki [Rosa Mistika] sithubutu kukisoma mbele ya umati – huenda pengine ningekuwa na akina mama wenzangu ningekisoma. [...] Nimeambiwa kuna mama mmoja aliyeshitushwa nusura ya kufa baada ya kumkuta bintiye anakisoma kitabu hicho. Sauti ya ghadhabu ya mama huyo itaeleweka baada ya mtu kukisoma kitabu chenyewe. [...] Ndivo maana Rosa Mistika kinakataliwa kwa sababu ya zile picha za waziwazi ambazo zimeonyesha vitendo ambavyo huwa ni vya siri, au kusema mambo wazi wazi yanayoushitaki Wizara ya Elimu ... Na pia Kichomi kinasemekana kwamba kinaenda dhidi ya miundo ambayo inazoeleka katika jamii. Ninapozungumzia kuhusu mbinu za mwandishi nafirikia vitabu kama Mashetani na Aliyeonja Pepo ambavyo havieleweki vinasema nini, maudhui, falsafa na ujumbe wa mwandishi (yaani kiumbi) vinahusu; kitabu kama Kusadikika ambacho kilibidi kiwekwe katika mtindo ambao kiliwekwa ili ujumbe na yaliyomo viweze kuwafikia wasomaji.*

40 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 'Ushairi wa Mapokeo na Wakati Ujao' <129>.

41 *Wengi kati ya washairi wetu mashuhuri wanapenda sana kutumia neno hili hekima. Neno hili limefanya washairi wengi wajifikirie kama watu ambao mara tu wafunua vinywa vyao kwa uwezo wa kalamu, basi hekima inaaminika. Na hili ndilo jambo ambalo limefanya mashairi mengi ya Kiswahili yawe ni ya maoni na marudi.*

42 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. Kichomi <36>.

ASKARI:  
Hei Hei! nyinyi watu,  
njianini mwasemani?

Elezeni kila kitu, mlichu  
nacho kichwani,  
(Tajiri anainama)  
Wavitazama viatu, unacho  
nini moyoni?

Meno wauma kakatu, unayo  
hasira gani?  
TANU hunayo imani, watu  
wamekuwa vitu!

SOLDIER:  
Hey, hey, you people in the  
street! What do you say?

Explain everything you  
have in mind.  
(The rich man stoops)  
When you look at your  
shoes, what do you hold in  
your heart?  
grinding your teeth, what  
are you angry at?  
You don't trust TANU,  
people have become things!

This is not open criticism. Another interpretation is possible: that people are ‘things’ for the rich, for the capitalists. It is clear that Kezilahabi defends the poor<sup>43</sup> and that he is a socialist (as shown in his 1985 PhD thesis and confirmed in a 2015 interview in Gaborone). It is also true that, for Kezilahabi, freedom is fundamental to existence and unalienable from it,<sup>44</sup> and such a deep inspection (of mind and body) by a soldier can hardly be regarded positively by Kezilahabi. We have to look closely at this dialogic poem in order to see the criticism that is hidden between the lines. First, as shown above, the nature and content of the poem—which seems to be an exercise—entail irony. The comment “people have become things” is too far from Kezilahabi’s conception of existence and freedom. Kezilahabi is a socialist, but he seems not to be on the side of the soldiers.

<22> In his drama *Kinjeketile*, Hussein also speaks out about the lack of freedom of thought. Right after his own revelation, the eponymous protagonist, Kinjeketile, expresses some doubt about a prophecy that promises freedom but also a new lord.

Don't bring in the light. Get it out ... They said they would bring the light ... to get rid of the darkness. Now I know better; I know their light is far more dangerous. The darkness is far better. I prefer the enslavement of the body to that of the mind brought by light.<sup>45</sup>

In *Kinjeketile*, German colonization is related to slavery of the body, but it is not clear to what “slavery of thought” (*utumwa wa akili*, ‘slavery of mind’) refers. Kinjeketile doubts his own prophecy; although the drama is set in a time largely preceding the TANU’s (Tanganyika African National Union) liberation movement, it could be a criticism of Nyerere’s government. Specifically, the prophet Kinjeketile, instead of being a herald of freedom, becomes a prophet of the limits of the TANU government.

#### 2.4. Pleasure and morality in Topan’s heaven

<23> Freedom of thought and secularism also correspond to freedom of the body. This does not equate to a lack of morality; in secular thought, the difference between sin and crime is very important. For example, in his first novel, *Rosa Mistika*, Kezilahabi frames an important question in these terms: Rosa’s behavior is a sin, but it is not a crime, nor should it be stigmatized

---

43 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. Kichomi <62>.

44 Kezilahabi, Euphrase. African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation <67>.

45 *Usilete taa kalibu. Ondoa muangaza ... Walisema wataleta muangaza ... kutoa kiza ... Lakini nimetambua, nimetambua kuwa muangaza wao una hatali zaidi. Afazali kiza hiki. Afazali utumwa wa mwili kuliko utumwa wa akili unaoletwa na muangaza.* Hussein, *Kinjeketile* <226>.

by society, because Rosa was using her body to understand herself due to her lack of sexual education. The question of pleasure becomes very important in the '70s: Kezilahabi, Hussein<sup>46</sup> and Topan all incorporate this question into different works of theirs. Mulokozi,<sup>47</sup> too, while speaking about euthanasia, says that life is not only about being there in body, i.e. the body's presence (thus our own presence), but above all about our understanding of life and our happiness in living.

Helping an infirm and suffering person to say farewell to the world in dignity and peace is an act of pity and humanity. Personally, I don't think that doing this is a crime, especially if the infirm himself, or whoever takes care of him, asks for this help. Life is not just an anatomical existence; rather, it is the awareness of being alive and the happiness of living.<sup>48</sup>

<24> According to Topan,<sup>49</sup> pleasure and the good life are not only the basis of life but also that of politics; he thus recognizes the role of pleasure in planning our present and future.

How did mankind arrive on earth? Who created us? Such questions made him [the human being] doubtful, and it became necessary to answer them so that he might live happily. [...] The main fundament for the human environment of the twentieth century is politics. [...] The word 'politics', for us, has the meaning of a system that is followed by people of a certain society or country in order to provide a good life for themselves here on earth.<sup>50</sup>

<25> Topan expresses these thoughts in the introduction to his drama *Aliyeonja Pepo*. This aspect is totally lacking in previous studies on this work. Both the aforementioned Bertoncini<sup>51</sup> and Kruisheer<sup>52</sup> argue that the comic impact of the play owes much to the representation of the angels as normal office employees, completely human in their characterization. Kruisheer, furthermore, claims that this state of affairs, together with the angels' disposition to vices (recognizable in Azrael's habit of drinking alcohol) is a satire of the *ujamaa* system, in which bureaucratic employees are not loyal to the values they profess. A comic element is certainly to be found in this state of affairs, but it does not necessarily have to be read as satire, since the abandonment of morality is actually seen as a positive fact in *Aliyeonja Pepo*. In harmony with Topan's materialistic conception of religion and morality, the eternal beatitude of paradise does not derive from the practice of good behavior, but from the experience of pleasure. This emerges clearly in the first part of the conversation between Juma and Azrael, after Juma's experience at the Palace of Pleasure, in which he had sexual intercourse with several girls.<sup>53</sup>

---

46 For a detailed study of the epistemological questions related to the body in Kezilahabi and Hussein, see Gaudioso, Roberto. A Literary Approach to Avoiding Objectification of the Text: Reading Kezilahabi and Beyond'; Gaudioso, Roberto. Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein e Euphrase Kezilahabi.

47 Gaudioso, Roberto. Note per un federalismo libertario a partire dai laici federalisti tanzaniani <201>.

48 *Kumsaidia mgonjwa anayeteseka ili aage dunia kwa heshima na amani ni kitendo cha huruma na ubinadamu. Binafsi sioni kama ni kosa la jinai kufanya hivyo, hasa kama mgonjwa mwenyewe au wanaomtunza wanaomba msaada huo. Maisha siyo kuwapo tu kimwili, bali ni kutambua kuwa unaishi na kufurahia kuishi huko.*

49 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <ix-x>.

50 *Mwanadamu amekujaje duniani? Nani aliyetuumba? Maswali haya yakamtia mashakani, ikawa lazima yajibike ili aweze kuishi kwa raha. [...] Msingi mkuu wa mazingira ya mwanadamu katika karne hii ya ishirini unatokana na siasa. [...] Neno "siasa" kwetu sisi lina maana ya utaratibu unaofuatwa na wanadamu wa jamii au nchi fulani ili kujipatia maisha mema hapa duniani.*

51 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. Outline of Swahili Literature <224-226>.

52 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973 <48>.

53 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <12-13>.

- Juma Kila uvumbuzi upo hapa.
- Ziraili Kweli. Kina aina ya uvumbuzi uliopo duniani, ukiwa wa sayansi usiwe wa sayansi, sisi tunao hapa. Hata mambo yatakayovumbuliwa baadaye duniani, hapa tunayo hivi sasa. [...]
- Juma Ama mahali pazuri. Kila ukitakacho kipo hapo. Kila umtakaye tayari yupo. [...] Kila niliyemtaka nilimpata. Kule Bagamoyo, sana sana niliruhusiwa kuoa wake wanne. Lakini hapa naweza kuwa na wake...
- Ziraili Hawa si **wake**<sup>54</sup> wa mtu ye yote. Ni wanawake tu. Sisi hatuna wake peponi.
- Juma (*kwa kustaajabu*). Hamna wake?
- Ziraili Hatuna wake. Na hao wanawake uliokuwa nao jana si wake zako.
- Juma (*kwa kustaajabu*). Si wake zangu?
- Ziraili Si wake zako.
- Juma Basi si dhambi hiyo?
- Ziraili (*kwa hasira kidogo*). Ee, bwana, hiyo dhambi sasa imetoka wapi? Hapa peponi Bwana. Hatuna dhambi sisi. Wala wewe huna: wala hao wanawake hawana.
- Juma [...] Basi tuseme nini juu ya mwendo kama huo?
- Ziraili [...] Tuseme wanajistarehesha tu na wanaume kama wewe ulivyojistarehesha nao.
- Juma Basi tuseme wale wanawake niliokuwa nao mimi jana, hivi leo watakwenda na wanaume wengine.
- Ziraili Ndiyo. Kwa sababu wewe si **mume** wao. Tena hutawaonea wivu.
- Juma (*tena kwa kustaajabu*). Sitakuwa na wivu?
- Ziraili Hata chembe cha wivu hutaiona. Peponi mtu haoni wivu. Kwa sababu hutolewa nyongo. Hisi mbaya zote hizi hazimpatu. Ulipoingizwa peponi jana ulitolewa nyongo.
- Juma Basi nyinyi hapa hamna dhambi, hamna wivu [...].
- Ziraili Hatuna.
- Juma Ikiwa kwetu hamna mambo haya, basi kwa nini mkayaachia bado yawepo kwetu duniani? Yanatufungafunga sana katika mambo yetu.
- Juma There is every kind of discovery here.
- Azrael *That is true. Any kind of discovery that is found on earth, be it scientific or not, we have it here. We now have even the stuff that will be **discovered** in the future. [...]*
- Juma *Really a nice place. Whatever you want is here. Whomever you want is suddenly there. [...] Whomever I wanted, I found. There, in Bagamoyo, I was allowed to marry four wives at most. But now I can marry ...*
- Azrael *These are nobody's wives. They are just women. We have no **wives** in Heaven.*

---

54 Bold in the text.

- Juma (astonished). *You don't have wives?*
- Azrael *We do not. And those women with whom you were yesterday are not your wives.*
- Juma (astonished). *They are not my wives?*
- Azrael *They are not.*
- Juma *So, is this not a sin?*
- Azrael (a little upset). *Hey man, so where does this sin come from? It's paradise here, man. We have no sin. Neither do you; nor those women.*
- Juma *[...] So, what should we say about such behaviour?*
- Azrael *[...] We should say that they just have pleasure with men, just as you had pleasure with them.*
- Juma *So, let's say that those women whom I was with yesterday will go with other men today.*
- Azrael *Yes. Because you are not their **husband**. Furthermore, you will not be jealous of them.*
- Juma (astonished again). *I will not be jealous?*
- Azrael *Not even a little bit. In paradise, nobody is jealous. Because we have been drained of our black bile. We cannot have such bad feelings. When you were welcomed into paradise yesterday, your black bile was drained as well.*
- Juma *So here you have neither sin nor jealousy [...].*
- Azrael *We do not.*
- Juma *If at your place there are no such things, then why do you let them exist at ours on earth? They are real constrictions on our affairs.*

The presence of these women—likely recognizable as the *Hūr*, the girls who, in Islamic tradition, bring cheer to the blessed souls in paradise—in Topan's depiction of paradise has been often read as sign of his Islamic cultural context;<sup>55</sup> while the presence of the Islamic element is certainly true, the differences between Topan's paradise and that of Juma Hamisi are nevertheless undeniable. First of all, in Topan's paradise, eternal beatitude is not a gift from God, but a lifestyle that derives from human discoveries, be they scientific or not, as Juma notices and Azrael confirms. Together with human ingenuity, another fundamental element of beatitude in this paradise is freedom: it is the only rule that the blessed souls follow, to the point that they abandon their old religious values to enjoy it. In Juma and Azrael's conversation about the former's experience at the Palace of Pleasure, Juma shows himself still to be attached to his religious precepts, since he feels compelled to marry the women he had sexual intercourse with; Azrael replies by explaining to him that in paradise, such duties are not admissible. It is worth noting that, in depicting this scenario of total freedom, Topan breaks with the tradition that he apparently follows: the girls of the Palace of Pleasure are not *Hūr* at the service of blessed souls—as Kruisheer<sup>56</sup> supposes and cites as a reference to the Islamic cultural context—but are

---

55 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. Outline of Swahili Literature <223>; Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973 <47–48>.

56 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973 <48>.

themselves blessed souls, namely those of women who enjoy paradise and pleasure exactly as their counterparts do. Such a reading of the women in heaven as other blessed souls was proposed to Topan during the Baraza conference held in London on 27 November 2018; the author accepted it as plausible because of the absence of the concept of ‘sin’ in his paradise. Azrael, in fact, refers to them as *wanawake* (‘women’), and explicitly states that they are moved only by pleasure in their actions.

- <26> In other words, Topan’s paradise is not based on divine beatitude, but on the happiness that men can build. This last point is echoed by Bertoncini<sup>57</sup>; in her reading, however, she claims that in Topan’s opinion, religion should take part in this process, and she states that in *Aliyeonja Pepo*, the possibility for human beings to attain happiness becomes a moral imperative that constitutes the message of the play. In fact, as noted previously, Topan’s introduction does not state with any certainty that religion will have a role in the future of mankind, nor does he see human progress as a moral duty rather than a product of history. The theses contained in the introduction are expressed in the play by a paradise that, rather than being an expression of the importance of religion, represents its overcoming.
- <27> Paradise is seen as a reward in the imaginary of the Abrahamic religions: the blessed souls, in life, were men who renounced earthly pleasures in order to follow God’s precepts with patience and forbearance, so that they might enjoy eternal beatitude in heaven. This element is well depicted by Nietzsche in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*,<sup>58</sup> in which, quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, he shows that in the theologian’s opinion, the beatitude of pious souls will be increased by the sight of their ancient oppressors suffering in hell: Nietzsche states that the religious promise of beatitude is, both on the theoretical and on the social and historical levels, a compensation for the situations of subordination experienced in life, and not a message of general progress. Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Christian message is valid even for Islam, since in the Qur’an, paradise is often described as a reward. An example of this can be found in the sixty-ninth sura, *The Inevitable*, vv. 19–29:<sup>59</sup>

Then as for him who will be given his Record in his right hand will say: "Take, read my Record!  
 "Surely, I did believe that I shall meet my Account!"  
 So he shall be in a life, well-pleasing.  
 In a lofty Paradise,  
 The fruits in bunches whereof will be low and near at hand.  
 Eat and drink at ease for that which you have sent on before you in days past!  
 But as for him who will be given his Record in his left hand, will say: "I wish that I had not been given my Record!  
 "And that I had never known, how my Account is?  
 "I wish, would that it had been my end (death)!  
 "My wealth has not availed me,  
 "My power and arguments (to defend myself) have gone from me!"

- <28> Thus, if the character of Azrael were operating under the Islamic notion, he would have justified Juma’s experience of pleasure in paradise as a reward for his sacrifices in following God’s precepts in life, a reward that Juma has the right to enjoy; however, this does not happen at all in the play. Instead, Azrael explains that in paradise, people can give pleasure to each other without either committing sin or feeling jealous, because they have no more black bile. In humoral theory—which was so widespread in the Swahili world that it has affected the codifi-

57 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. Outline of Swahili Literature <225–226>.

58 Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogia della morale <38–39>.

59 <https://www.noblequran.com/translation/surah69.html>

cation of emotions in the Swahili language, as Tramutoli<sup>60</sup> points out—bile (*nyongo*) is associated with the feelings of hatred, resentment, bitterness, and jealousy, expressed by the derived term *kinyongo*.<sup>61</sup> Taking into consideration the value culturally attributed to bile, one may conclude that in the paradise of *Aliyeonja Pepo*, blessed souls like Juma neither commit sin nor feel jealousy, not because of seeing their partner as a deserved reward, but simply because they have lost the capability to be jealous. Thus, pleasure does not need to be justified (for example, as a reward by the Abrahamic religions) over sin: on the contrary, in harmony with Topan's<sup>62</sup> statements in his introduction, it can overcome and eliminate the cause of the sin itself, and thus be experienced without any need for justification. The fact that in the play, such freedom of pleasure is confined to paradise does not refute this assertion, but rather strengthens it, since in *Aliyeonja Pepo*, heaven is a symbol of the progress mankind can attain over history: therefore, as Topan<sup>63</sup> himself notes, freedom is a possibility afforded by progress.

<29> Nkwera's corrections<sup>64</sup> to this part of the play touch on these fundamental considerations, reversing all of them. Apparently, the differences between his and Topan's version are related to their different imaginaries of paradise: Nkwera, as a Christian, deletes all of Juma's references to sexual intercourse, and makes him say that he was overwhelmed with the pleasure of looking at the girls' smiling faces. Azrael, however, replies to Juma by telling him that this was only a test, since when a sincerely pure soul enters paradise, he aspires only to see God's face, the one truly infinite pleasure: Juma, thus, has demonstrated himself to need a period of purification (*tohara ya kiroho*). Juma not only accepts this state of affairs, but even finds that the nature of the girls' temptation is their lack of jealousy and inability to become pregnant. This rewriting goes conspicuously far beyond the writers' cultural differences, since in Nkwera's paradise, pleasure is not an expression of freedom, but one of God's gifts, and thus is not attainable by human capabilities. According to both Islamic and Christian traditions, eternal beatitude is directly related to the concept of good: 'Rather, a soul that does not have the completeness of love is still satisfied by these girls. Because he does not recognize the maximum good, that is, the Lord's face.'<sup>65</sup> Thus, pleasure, in Nkwera's view, does not correspond to the natural human faculty of enjoyment: instead, it goes against nature, since it must correspond to the maximum expression of good, namely the vision of God. While in Topan's view, the increasing number of possibilities offered to human beings by their own freedom should overcome the distinction between good and evil,<sup>66</sup> to Nkwera, exactly the opposite process that takes place, in the form of a moral imperative that the priest even employs to introduce his corrections: "Good is the true great purpose of the human being. Good starts here on earth and is completed in the world to come. Therefore, one *must* direct all his life and actions towards this purpose, good"<sup>67</sup> (italics mine). This is evident even in the way Nkwera has re-elaborated the role of jealousy in Topan's paradise: the girls, in fact, do not feel such a sentiment because they have the purpose of leading people into temptation, and not because they can fully enjoy their freedom.

<30> The second fundamental moment of the play is the confrontation between Juma and Isrāfīl (*Sirafili* in Swahili), who together with Azrael tries to convince Juma to come back to earth.

---

60 Tramutoli, Rosanna. The codification of emotions in Swahili. A cognitive linguistic analysis with a consideration of the socio-cultural context <171>.

61 Tramutoli, Rosanna. The codification of emotions in Swahili. A cognitive linguistic analysis with a consideration of the socio-cultural context <74>.

62 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <ix>.

63 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <ix-xi>.

64 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <29-30>.

65 *Bali roho isiyo na ukamili wa upendo bado huridhika na za hawa wanawake. Maana haitambui wazi heri zaidi, yaani uso wa Bwamkubwa.* Topan, *Aliyeonja Pepo* <29> (from Nkwera's corrections).

66 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <11-12>.

67 *Heri ni kipeo mahsusi cha mwanadamu. Heri hiyo yanzia hapa duniani na kukamilika katika ulimwengu ujao. Kwa hiyo mtu hupasa kuyaelekeza maisha na matendo yake yote kwenye kipeo hicho, heri.* Topan, *Aliyeonja Pepo* <26> (from Nkwera's commentary appendix).

Presenting himself as more sensitive and sympathetic than Azrael, Isrāfil asks Juma why it would be so hard for him to return to earth for just one year. Juma answers that his problem is not merely coming back to life, but taking the place of a British man with completely different habits from his own, both in religion as well as in culture and politics, since his socialist (*ya kiuujamaa*) style of life could never be exchanged for a capitalist one:<sup>68</sup>

Juma [...] Utamaduni wetu wa Bagamoyo ni tofauti na wao. Mimi Mwafrika, wao Wazungu. Mimi Mwislamu, wao si Waislamu. Huyu bwana anafuga mbwa; mbwa kwangu najisi. Anakula nguruwe; nguruwe kwangu haramu. Anauza mvinyo, huo pia kwangu haramu. Mimi nilikuwa mvuvi. Kila kitu changu ni tofauti na huyo bwana. Basi, bwana huoni kwamba nitakuwa katika jehanamu huko?

Sirafili Lakini naona utamaduni kama huo si muhimu. Muhimu ni utamaduni wa kitaifa.

Juma Lakini hata huo, bwana, twahitilafiana. Mimi Mtanzania, na sisi Watanzania tuna siasa yetu ambayo tofauti kabisa na hiyo yao. Sisi siasa yetu ni ya Ujamaa, wao siasa yao ni ya kikabaila na kibepari. Si tofauti hiyo? Sitaweza kuizoea hata kidogo. Vipi nitakwenda mahali na kuanza kuwanyonya binadamu wenzangu hali macho makavu? Haitawezekana bwana. Kila mtu na chake [...].

Juma [...] *Our culture in Bagamoyo is different from theirs. I am African, and they are white. I am Muslim, they are not. This guy has a dog; dogs are unclean to me. He eats pork; pork is prohibited for me. He sells wine, and this too is prohibited for me. I was a fisherman. Nothing of mine has anything to do with this person. So, sir, don't you see that it will be like hell for me there?*

Sirafili *But I do not think that this aspect of culture is important. National culture is important.*

Juma *But even in this, sir, we are different. I am a Tanzanian, and we in Tanzania have politics that are totally different from theirs. Our politics are ujamaa, and theirs are those of exploitation and capitalism. Is not this a difference? I will not be able to get used to it even a little bit. How could I exploit people like myself without pity? It will not be possible. To each his own [...].*

<31> This episode of the play appears in both of the previously quoted works about *Aliyeonja Pepo*: Bertoncini<sup>69</sup> states that Juma is truly sincere in justifying his reluctance to be reincarnated on socio-political grounds; Kruisheer<sup>70</sup> does not doubt Juma's sincerity either, even though he states, in accord with his socio-political reading, that this scene is meant to demonstrate that the angels in Topan's paradise are actually more interested in politics than religion: Isrāfil, in fact, does not seem to be impressed in the first part of the dialogue, in which Juma lists the differences between his Islamic moral code and the Christian one, but he is convinced in the second part, when the topic of discussion shifts to politics. Kruisheer even comments that Juma's defense of *ujamaa*, despite being useful in showing the importance of politics in the play, sounds too unrealistic and suspicious.<sup>71</sup> In the reading proposed here instead, this dialogue is seen as a

68 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <18–19>.

69 Bertoncini-Zúbková, E. & al. *Outline of Swahili Literature* <223-224>.

70 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973 <50>.

71 Kruisheer, Klazien. "Nani Alionja Nini?" Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973 <50>.

further expression of Topan's fundamental thesis about religion as discussed in the introduction. As we can see from the previous dialogue with Azrael about Juma's experience with the women at the Palace of Pleasure, Juma has not yet fully understood the true place of religion and morality in paradise: for him, they are still essential values even in heaven, and he naively expects that the angels also attribute the same importance to them. In any case, at the same time he has begun to appreciate the delights of paradise, and does not want to abandon a place in which everything can be done without the spectre of bad consequences such as jealousy or being in a state of sin. Thus, he cleverly tries to use religion and then politics as a way to avoid leaving paradise, not out of a sincere belief in their values, but for his own convenience. Faced with Juma's objections, and probably understanding that they are just a ruse, Isrāfil reacts even more cleverly, deciding on a definitive solution: reincarnating Juma within his own cultural context, but in the form of a cat.

<32> In his introduction, Topan notes that one of the most important points of the politics of *ujamaa* is the definitive overcoming of any kind of identity barrier between men: thus, under *ujamaa*, people have to reject their ancient tribal, ethnic, religious, and national affiliations, since a person who believes in *ujamaa* is requested to abandon even his national identity and to respect every other human being as member of a unique and universal community, namely mankind.<sup>72</sup> In his dialogue with Juma, Isrāfil seems to express this important statement, though in a comic and derisive way: since Juma claims to feel that he has nothing in common with a man of a different culture, religion, and political ideology, the angel, in a comic reversal of such objections, decides to grant Juma all that he needs except for the obvious point that the man from Bagamoyo had neglected: his human nature. Juma's hopes for sympathy on the basis of moral values (be they religious or political) are thus completely dashed, as shown by his initial reaction of refusal to be reincarnated in the body of a cat.

<33> The last important point in the play is Lucifer's soliloquy. After complaining about Azrael's incompetence in creating confusion between the human souls, the devil presents himself in a very human manner, without showing any sign of wickedness or menace, but only asking himself why God saw an enemy in him ("I was told to kneel in front of Adam and I refused. 'Should I?' I said. 'Should I kneel in front of this guy made of mud?' It just slipped out. And I was ordered to leave paradise;"<sup>73</sup>). Continuing his meditations, Lucifer wonders why God, despite his overwhelming power, grants him such great power over his favorite creatures, human beings. His explanation is that God actually has given him this position out of love:<sup>74</sup>

*Mapenzi. Hiyo ndiyo sababu. Mungu ananipenda. Ndiyo sababu ya kumwumba Adamu. Na Hawa. Na dunia hii. Ndiyo sababu ya kunipa dunia hii niimiliki. Ndiyo sababu ya kunipa wafuasi wangu. Nami kila nikiwapotosha yeye anazidi kuwaongoza. Kama baba anavyomdekeza mwanaye. (Anasita.) Sasa nimefahamu. Sasa nimeelewa. Dunia hii ni jengo la kuendeleza ayatakayo. Hivi viumbe ni watoto bandia. Hawana uwezo wowote. Kule yupo Mungu, huku nipo mimi. Na sote sisi ni kitu kimoja, kwa sababu tunapendana. Ndipo aliponiumba mimi mwanzo kabla ya kitu chochote. Nami ndiye nitakayebakia mwisho baada ya kila kiumbe kufariki dunia. Hapo nitarudi kwake mbinguni, ambapo pia ni pangu.*

Love. That's the reason. God loves me. That's the reason for creating Adam. And Eve. And this world. That's why he gave me this world to rule over. That's why he gives me my followers. And every time I bring them to perdition, he continues to increase their numbers. Like a father who pampers his child. (*He hesitates*). Now I understand. Now I have realized. This world is a building in which his will is sustained. These creatures are not his true sons. They don't have any kind of power. There, there is God; here, there's me. And we together are one thing, because we love each other. It's here that he created me at the beginning, before any

72 Topan, Farouk. Aliyeonja Pepo <x>.

73 Niliambiwa nimsujudie Adamu nikakataa. "Mimi!" nikasema, "mimi nimsujudie huyu aliyeumbwa kwa udongo," ndivyo ulimi ulivyoteleza. Nikaambiwa nitoke peponi. Topan, Aliyeonja Pepo <22>.

74 Topan, Farouk. Aliyeonja Pepo <23>.

other creature. And it's me who will remain at the end, after every creature leaves the world. Then I will come back to heaven; that is my place, too.

Lucifer thus realizes that human beings and their struggle between good and evil are just instruments for expressing his and God's reciprocal love.<sup>75</sup> It is from this contrast that human life attains dynamism and history can develop: "And that's what he wants me to do on earth, so that he and I make this world go on and give them this life. He pulls there, I pull here, and the world goes on."<sup>76</sup>

<34> Nkwera imposes several corrections on this soliloquy. His Lucifer does not deny that God loves him as one of his creatures (though they don't form one entity together, as in Topan's version), or that his love is the reason why he has a great influence over human beings; in this version, however, this feeling is not reciprocal, and must rather be interpreted as a sentiment of pity and temporary indulgence on God's part. Lucifer, in fact, has the power to tempt human beings, but he cannot force their will: his influence is thus just an instrument for God to test the goodness of his creatures. Furthermore, he will not return to paradise: at the end of history, with the permission of God, he will just kick the earth and throw it into the sun to burn. At the end of the play, Lucifer shows regret at having abandoned God's will and paradise; in any case, he rejects the idea of returning to him, and exits the scene with the purpose of bringing chaos to earth.<sup>77</sup>

<35> Thus, once again, Nkwera's corrections are understandable on the basis of his distance from Topan's thought. As previously noted, in Nkwera's opinion, good is an absolute value, and it cannot be eclipsed in any way by history or the development of human thought and society. This is expressed in the property of eternity that he affords to the opposition between God and the devil, which will last forever without any possibility of resolution. Topan's view, on the contrary, is dialectic and materialistic, since it sees good and evil not as absolute ideals, but as a stage in the history of mankind. In his version, Lucifer's soliloquy thus expresses his view of the contrast between these two concepts: on the one hand, they are nothing but a product of history, belonging to an age in which men did need absolute rules to live in peace and safety, and on the other, the dynamism they create in history itself can bring mankind to its next stage, in which they will be superseded and abandoned. Lucifer will thus be welcomed back to paradise; that is to say, there will be no need to label some aspects of life as wicked and exclude them from pleasure.

### 3. Conclusion

<36> *Aliyeonja Pepo* offers a deep insight not only into Topan's thought, but also into the overall development of materialistic and secular thought that took place in the Swahili world in the twentieth century, particularly in Tanzania in the '60s and '70s. It offers a view of religion as a mere tool for the development of mankind, one that was of great use in ancient times; the advent of modernity, however, has furnished mankind with new tools (science and politics), therefore allowing him to independently discover the direction for human and social development without trusting in absolute and *a priori* values for survival. This view has much in common with the other great authors of those decades, like Kezilahabi, Hussein and Mulokozi, and entails not only thought but style as well: the works of those authors were harshly criticized, as they revolutionized Swahili literature by introducing new styles and/or 'new' thought. These innovations prompted their detractors to react by invoking a Swahili or African identity on the basis of cultural or religious or moral values (like the question of 'Swahiliness' invoked against

---

75 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <25>.

76 *Na hivi ndivyo atakavyo nifanye duniani ili mimi na yeye tuiendeshe dunia hii tuipe uhai huu. Yeye anavuta kule, mimi navuta huku, na dunia inakwenda.* Topan, *Aliyeonja Pepo* <25>.

77 Topan, Farouk. *Aliyeonja Pepo* <31–32>.

Kezilahabi and free verse). As shown by Gaudioso in the cases of Hussein's<sup>78</sup> and Kezilahabi's<sup>79</sup> works, the prominence of the human body (and all the corporeal issues related to it) was underestimated (if not neglected) by critics and scholars. The destiny of Topan's *Aliyeonja Pepo* seems not dissimilar. The play conveys the image of an earthly paradise in which not only are good values not exalted, but even sin is a forgotten concept. The souls of Topan's paradise, in fact, enjoy all the pleasures that can be found in heaven: not only sex, as Juma discovers with astonishment, but also the comfort of all the technological inventions that humankind will discover, and above all, freedom. The nature of this paradise emerges even more clearly in Lucifer's final monologue, in which the devil, in understanding his fundamental unity with God, explains that good and evil are just two facets of humankind in development, and that their apparent contradiction will dissolve when men come to base their existence on their social and intellectual capabilities.

<37> Such an undoubtedly materialistic view, though not discussed explicitly by previous critics, nevertheless elicited an idealistic reaction from Topan's opponents, who claimed that religion, as well as the contradiction between good and evil, are absolute values that do not depend on historical change. Nkwera's corrections to *Aliyeonja Pepo* are the most evident example of this opposition.

It is worth noting that the emergence of 'new' styles and thought in Swahili literature, which should be a primary focus of interest in literary criticism, has been instead met with harsh criticism, misunderstanding, and general indifference. This paradox leads us to think that we need a different way to look at texts, which for us should entail a close reading of the text in a holistic and inductive way.

Topan's materialism and secular thought, in spite of the resistance it encountered, is a pre-eminent example of the great philosophical production that arose in Tanzania in the final period before independence: therefore, it certainly deserves further investigation, both *per se* and in comparison with the elaborations of other seminal figures of this period.

## References

Balisidya Matteredu, May Lenna. 1974.

'Uhuru wa Mwandishi'. In: *Zinduko – Kongamano la Kiswahili juu ya "Uhuru wa Mwandishi*, pp.23–31. Dar es Salaam: Chama cha Kiswahili Chuo Kikuu Dar es Salaam.

Bertoncini, Elena-Zúbková. 2009

'From the 1960s to the 1980s'. In: Bertoncini, Gromov, Khamis, Wamitila, *Outline of Swahili Literature*, pp.74–116. Leiden: Brill.

Gaudioso, Roberto. 2017.

'A Literary Approach to Avoiding Objectification of the Text: Reading Kezilahabi and Beyond'. *Annali Sezione Orientale* 77,1-2:3–32.

Gaudioso, Roberto. 2018a

'Il corpo e la parola. La poetica di Ebrahim Hussein attraverso la traduzione di Ngoma na Vailini'. *Smerilliana – civiltà poetiche*, 21:369–380.

Gaudioso, Roberto. 2018b.

'Note per un federalismo libertario a partire dai laici federalisti tanzaniani'. In: *Europa che fare? L'Unione Europea tra crisi, populismi e prospettive di rilancio federale*. Napoli: Guida, pp.191–205.

---

78 Gaudioso, Roberto. Il corpo e la parola. La poetica di Ebrahim Hussein attraverso la traduzione di Ngoma na Vailini; Gaudioso, Roberto. Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein and Euphrase Kezilahabi; Gaudioso, Roberto. The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi's poetics <87–91>.

79 Gaudioso, Roberto. Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein and Euphrase Kezilahabi; Gaudioso, Roberto. The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi's poetics.

- Gaudioso, Roberto. 2019a.  
 ‘Il genio della letteratura Swahili: Ebrahim Hussein and Euphrase Kezilahabi’. In: Aiello, F. & Gaudioso, R. (eds.) *Lugha na Fasihi. Essays in honour and memory of Elena Bertoncini Zúbková*, pp.195–222. Napoli: UniorPress.
- Gaudioso, Roberto. 2019b (in preparation).  
 The voice of the text and its body. The continuous reform of Kezilahabi’s poetics. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Hussein, Ebrahim. 1969.  
*Kinjeketile*. Oxford University Press. Dar es Salaam.
- Kahigi, Kulikoyela & Mulokozi, Mugyabuso Mlinzi. 1973.  
*Mashairi ya Kisasa*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1971.  
*Rosa Mistika*. Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau.
- Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1974.  
*Kichomi*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational.
- Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1974/2013.  
*Kichwamaji*. Nairobi: Vide~Muwa.
- Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1976.  
 ‘Ushairi wa Mapokeo na Wakati Ujao’. *Uandishi wa Tanzania*, pp.1-11. Nairobi/Kampala/Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau.
- Kezilahabi, Euphrase. 1985.  
 African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation University of Wisconsin – Madison (unpublished PhD thesis).
- Kruisheer, Klazien. 1999.  
 “Nani Alionja Nini?” Who Had a Taste of What? A Sociopolitical Interpretation of Farouk Topan's Play "Aliyeonja Pepo" ("A Taste of Heaven"), Dar es Salaam, 1973’. In *Research in African Literatures*, 30,1:44–57.
- Minerba, Emiliano. 2017.  
 ‘A frightening play: the element of horror in Hussein’s *Mashetani*’. *Swahili Forum*, 24:37–61.
- Minerba, Emiliano. 2018a.  
 ‘Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi, yaani kitisho kinachosimulia siasa’. *Studia Orientalia Electronica*, 6:1–17.
- Minerba, Emiliano. 2018b.  
 ‘Humorism and sense: a Pirandellian reading of Topan’s *Mfalme Juha*’. *Studia Orientalia Electronica*, 6:62–78.
- Mulokozi, Mugyabuso M. 1974.  
 ‘Kinjeketile’. *Kioo Cha Lugha*, 4,5:32–50.
- Mulokozi, Mugyabuso. 2006.  
*Barua za Shaaban Robert 1931 – 1958*. Dar es Salaam: TUKI.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2018.  
*Genealogia della morale*. Milan: Adelphi.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1995.  
*Mito e letteratura nell’orizzonte culturale africano*. Milano: Jaca Book.
- Topan, Farouk. 1971.  
*Mfalme Juha*. Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press.
- Topan, Farouk. 1974.  
*Aliyeonja Pepo*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House Limited.
- Tramutoli, Rosanna. 2018 (in preparation).  
 The codification of emotions in Swahili. A cognitive linguistic analysis with a consideration of the socio-cultural context. PhD dissertation (University of Naples “L’Orientale”).