

Drops That Open Worlds

Image of Water in the Poetry of Euphrase Kezilahabi

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Tiivistelmä Referat – Abstract <p>Euphrase Kezilahabi on tansanialainen kirjailija, joka ensimmäisenä julkaisi swahilinkielisen vapaalla mitalla kirjoitetun runokokoelman. Perinteisessä swahilirunoudessa tiukat muotosäännöt ovat tärkeitä, ja teos synnytti kiivasta keskustelua. Runoteokset <i>Kichomi</i> ('Viilto', 'Kipu', 1974) ja <i>Karibu Ndani</i> ('Tervetuloa sisään', 1988) sekä Kezilahabin muu tuotanto voidaan nähdä uuden sukupolven taiteena. Kezilahabi on arvostettu runoilija, mutta hänen runojaan ei aiemmin ole käännetty englanniksi (yksittäisiä säkeitä lukuunottamatta), eikä juurikaan tutkittu yksityiskohtaisesti. Yleiskuvaan pyrkivissä lausunnoissa Kezilahabin runouden on hyvin usein määritelty olevan poliittista.</p> <p>Monet Kezilahabin runoista ottavatkin kantaa yhteiskunnallisiin kysymyksiin, mutta niiden pohdinta on kuitenkin runoissa vain yksi taso. Sen lisäksi Kezilahabin lyriikassa on paljon muuta ennen kartoittamatonta – tämä tutkimus keskittyy veden kuvaan (the image of water). Kezilahabi vietti lapsuutensa saarella Victoria-järven keskellä, ja hänen vesikuvastonsa on rikasta. Tutkimuskysymyksenä on, mitä veden kuva runoteoksissa <i>Kichomi</i> ja <i>Karibu Ndani</i> esittää. Runojen analysoinnissa ja tulkinnassa on tarkasteltu myös sitä, miten äänteellinen taso osallistuu kuvien luomiseen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen määritelmä kuvasta pohjautuu osittain Hugh Kennerin näkemykseen, jonka mukaan oleellista kuvassa on kirjaimellinen taso. Kennerin lähtökohtaan on yhdistetty John Shoptawin teoriaa, joka korostaa runon äänteellisen puolen tärkeyttä merkityksen muodostumisessa. Foneemien analyysissä vaikutteena on ollut Reuven Tsurin teoria. Analyysiosio osoittaa, että veden kuva edustaa ja käsittelee teoksissa lukuisia teemoja: elämää, kuolemaa, fyysistä vetovoimaa, runoutta, mielikuvitusta ja (ali)tajuntaa sekä moraalialia. Veden kuvan tutkimuksen pohjalta on nähtävissä, että Kezilahabin filosofia asettuu elävä/kuollut- ja elämä/kuolema -dikotomioiden ulkopuolelle.</p>			
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*Ecoute plus souvent
Les choses que les êtres,
La voix du feu s'entend
Entends la voix de l'eau.*

Listen more often
To things than to beings,
The voice of fire can be understood
Hear the voice of water.

Birago Diop, Senegal

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1 INTRODUCTION

Untouched Water

Iba Ndiaye Diadji, a Senegalese professor of aesthetics, sees water as intrinsic to African ontology. He also argues that water is the most important substance to inspire African artists. (Diadji 2003: 273-275.) The importance of water can be seen in the poetry of Tanzanian Euphrase Kezilahabi, which is my subject of research. The image of water is present even in Kezilahabi's non-fictional texts as a way of speaking about poetry. In the preface to his first poetry collection Kichomi ('Twinge', 'Pain', 1974), Kezilahabi (1974: xiv) describes *nilivyoanza kujitosa katika ushairi* 'how I started to immerse myself in poetry'.¹ Later he continues that, in order to understand the poems, *lazima apige mbizi* 'one needs to take a dive' (ibid. xv). Correspondingly, Kezilahabi's poems in Kichomi and Karibu Ndani ('Welcome Inside', 1988) are imbued with images of water, each more absorbing than the last.

Water runs through many other African works of literature, too. My interest in the topic started to grow four years ago when I read two novels by Zimbabwean writers: Zenzele: A Letter for my Daughter (Maraire 1996) and Nervous Conditions (Dangarembga 1989). In both novels the image of river has a special, important meaning, and represents childhood. Later I started to catch sight of water everywhere in African literature: in Somali and Swahili poetry, in Season of Migration to the North (Salih 1991), in Nehanda (Vera 1993), in Matigari (Ngugi 1989), in Things Fall Apart (Achebe 1994), and in fairy tales. The commonness of the image is understandable, given the continual physiological necessity of water and the presence of it in everyone's life, and the scarcity of water in many areas of Africa. Water is also a brilliant symbol for literature, for as Ivan Illich (1986: 24) observes, water "has a nearly unlimited ability to carry metaphors"; doing

¹ My translation. All the translations (of poems and other texts) from Swahili into English in this dissertation are mine, except for one marked passage of Kichwamaji, quoted on pages 16-17, that is Diegner's translation. The dictionary translation from Finnish and the poem translations from French into English are mine, too. In this dissertation the Swahili quotations are in italics, the English translations of them in single quotes, and other quotations in double quotes.

research on the image of water means exploring almost any theme the poems deal with, often down to the muddy bottom.

Water imagery is even more frequent in the literatures of countries drier than Tanzania, such as Somalia. In Somali poetry water is an extremely common image, and most often used for praising. This expresses the value and positive connotations of water in Somali culture. A researcher of Somali literature Mohamed Abdillahi Rirash (2001: 48) argues that everything Somali breeders respect in life is psychologically associated with sources of water; pastoralism is traditionally the most common source of livelihood in Somalia. The positive connotation of water is oftentimes employed in Somali love poems. Sometimes water is used as a metaphor for love itself, for example in the form of a rain cloud: “And love which is true / Is the rain cloud [with] lightning / The rain drops falling on it” (Johnson 1996: 205). Rain commonly depicts the beloved: “like the heavens dropping rain in a place where fresh grass [grows] [- -] are you” (ibid. 79).²

In Swahili love poems fruits and flowers are more common images than water, but it is notable that both are closely connected to water. The best-known Swahili poet Shaaban Robert also occasionally employs the image of water, for example to illustrate the significance of small steps in the poem *Kiswahili* (‘Swahili’): *Mto huanza kijito, / Tone habari na ziwa* ‘A river begins as a brook, / A drop is a notice of a river’ (Robert 1994: 104). Besides, Fumo Liyongo – both a presumed poet and a literary character, the mythical hero of Swahili poetry – is told to have made songs of bathing (Lodhi, forthcoming).

Kezilahabi was born on an island, and spent his childhood by Lake Victoria. Possibly this has contributed to the great amount of water in his poems, though the image does not occur as frequently as in Somali poetry. What makes researching the image of water in Kezilahabi’s poetry intriguing, is the variety of themes that water represents, and the

² Since the writer of this dissertation is not competent in the Somali or Arabic languages, reference is made to the translated works. The translators are mentioned in parentheses. The original Somali or Arabic verses are not quoted (and some of the collections do not even have them). An exception is, however, made with the references to Somali poems from the collection *Sagaal Dayrood – Nio höstregn – Yhdeksän syyssadetta* (Tiilikainen, Axmed & Lilius 2001), which does not have English translations but, besides the original versions, translations in Swedish (and Finnish, but those translations have been made from the Swedish ones). In this case I have made the English translations myself from the Swedish translations, and because this translating from a translation is more likely to bring about mistranslations, the Somali lines are quoted, as well.

attributes and connotations Kezilahabi attaches to it. In addition to that, the image of water is often not used directly, but in close examination countless subtle allusions to liquids can be found, making the research exciting. Furthermore, Kezilahabi is the poet who first published a collection of poems in free verse in Swahili. Swahili poetry is a vast and rich cultural entirety, with long history and a wide audience. Therefore Kezilahabi, as a conspicuous reformist of the tradition, is a significant and rewarding subject of research. In addition to the new form, his poetry has brought Swahili poetry new content, too. My topic – the image of water – connects both dimensions: image is a concept that covers both content and form.

Most academic disciplines deal with water in some way: there is a lot of research on water resource management, environmental issues, water legislation, and some on the ritual uses of water from the theological and anthropological points of view. Some anthropologists have argued that the importance and many meanings of water have been neglected by anthropology, because of the practical side: “Human activities which have an obvious utilitarian aspect often fall completely outside the interest of anthropologists occupied with systems of meaning” (Dahl & Megerssa 1990: 21), and it is true that much of the anthropological research on the meaning of water has been carried out after the argument of Dahl and Megerssa (e.g. Iser 1993; Ingold 2000; Tounouga 2003; Strang 2004).

However, at least nowadays the accusation would be more valid in the case of literature research, especially of African literature. To my knowledge, there is no research on the meaning (let alone more specific research of the image, symbol, or metaphor) of water in any African literature. The image of water is not widely researched in other literatures, either.³ The literary research made on Kezilahabi is not an exception, quite the opposite – the researchers do not even mention the image of water, yet in my view it is quite a central image in his works. Even though Kezilahabi’s poetry has very versatile imagery and deals with personal issues, too, it has so far been mostly researched from the social or political points of view, neglecting the aesthetic analysis, and therefore needs new research that

³ I was only able to find a few studies concentrated on water in literature. Kerstin Eksell (1997) has studied the image of water in Arabic *Jahiliya* poetry, in a formalistic way. Donald R. Dickson (1987) has examined water typology in the works of Herbert, Traherne and Vaughan. Yrjö Oinonen (1945) has researched water nature in the poetry of the early 20th century Finnish writers. The nature imagery in general has nevertheless been researched quite widely.

concentrates on the artistic side and interpretations that are not only social. The images are an especially fruitful and significant subject of research, for as literary researcher Hugh Kenner (1975: 28) puts it, “[a]ny image is by nature more vivid than any statement”.

Image as a subject of research has a feature that is of particular advantage when the original language of the poems is unfamiliar to the majority of the public, and the researcher has to translate the poems that are examined: “An image can even be transferred without essential damage into another language. An abstract term often can’t. [- -] Because an image introduces a thing rather than a concept, it resists this sort of deformation.” (Kenner 1975: 26.) This is the strength of the image of water, as well – water, H₂O, is the same everywhere in the world.

Notwithstanding, the word *maji* in Swahili means a bit more than ‘water’ in English. It is the word for ‘liquid’ (together the word *majimaji*, which is the reduplicated form of *maji*), and can in general stand for ‘fluid’, ‘moisture’, and ‘damp’. It is also used in the meaning of ‘juice’, for example for the juice of lemon flesh. Besides, *maji* and *majimaji* can be used as adjectives, meaning ‘wet’, ‘damp’. As Johnson in his A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary (1939) notes, the word *maji* is “[a]lso used in the sense of being absolutely tired or exhausted, e.g. in a liquid state, i.e. nothing solid left”. In addition to these senses which ‘water’ in English does not share, both *maji* and ‘water’ are used for the body secretions.

Moreover, there are the different environmental factors that for example make pure water a scarcer resource in Tanzania than in the UK. Then again, nuances of this kind are never translated. Translating as such is always bound to lose something; Derrida talks about idioms being untranslatable, but this can be applied to all language: “As always, the idiom remains irreducible. [- -] This idiom is untranslatable, ultimately, even if we translate it.” (Derrida 2000: 181.) Yet exploring the somehow universal images in different cultures – especially in their poetry, which is one of the straightest ways into another mind – can nevertheless illuminate the reality and inner worlds of the “imagist”⁴. In this way, despite

⁴ *Imagists* is a word that was used for a group of American poets in the early 20th century. Some of their aims seem to be shared by Kezilahabi, or at least are fulfilled in his poetry: to show an image, to choose any subject, to use exact words but in the language of common speech, to suggest without telling through complete statements.

its perpetual, inevitable imperfectness, translation can greatly further *translatitudo* understanding.

Aims and Steps of the Dive – The Research Question

This dissertation researches what the image of water represents in Kezilahabi's two poetry collections, Kichomi and Karibu Ndani. I will also analyse how water imagery is interwoven with the auditory aspect of the poems, paying some attention to the visual dimension, too. My research questions in regard to the water imagery are thus *what* and *how*, and that which Emmanuel Ngara (1990: 16, original emphasis) calls the “tension between content and form, between the *what* and the *how*”, even though I see it more as co-operation than as tension.

I seek to analyse and interpret the image of water in Kezilahabi's poems closely, and diverge from the tradition of seeing Kezilahabi's poetry as a foremostly political vehicle. I also find it important to discuss some remarks in earlier research on Kezilahabi, especially of Elena Bertoncini-Zúbková, a professor in the department of African and Arabic Studies, in Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples, who is one of the best known and most often cited researchers in Swahili literature.⁵

The subject of analysis is water images of all kind: the images of sea, river, and lake as well as dew, rain, drops, even tears. The images of body liquids consisting predominantly of water, such as sweat and blood, are also discussed, because on the one hand they exhibit some corresponding properties and are in some poems presented as similar to water, but on the other hand they are on certain occasions employed to exhibit the opposite of water. The image of tea is used in a very similar way as pure water in one poem, and is analysed, as well. Hence the subject of research is more accurately the image of *maji*, not water, in the

⁵ Bertoncini-Zúbková's works have been cited for example by Ann Biersteker (1996), Kyallo Wadi Wamitila (1998 & 2001), Lutz Diegner (2002 & 2005), and Alena Rettová (2004). Hence Bertoncini-Zúbková (also the examined article of hers, published in 1980) has been referred to even lately. Note: Since the end of the 80's, Bertoncini has used the name Bertoncini-Zúbková. I refer to her with the double name unless I specifically refer to the publications before 1989.

poetry, for as both Frederick Johnson's A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary (1939) and A.C. Madan's Swahili-English Dictionary (2000, 1st publ. 1903) summarise, *maji* covers 'water, or what resembles water'.

My definition of image is based mostly on Hugh Kenner's (1975) theory, which argues that the literal aspect of an image is also important, and my emphasis of the auditory aspect draws from another literary researcher's, John Shoptaw's (1994, 1995, 2000), theory that sees sound crucial in the producing of meaning. I want to diverge from the strong tradition of political and social interpretations of Swahili poetry, and approach the poems as poetry, significant as such.

With *political* I mean *dealing with the affairs of public policy, or the affairs of administration or state*; consequently, in political interpretations poetry is seen chiefly dealing with these political issues. My understanding of *social*, for its part, is: *relating to human society and its modes of organization, in contrast with personal issues*.⁶ Similarly, the social interpretations have stressed the social nature of the poetry, neglecting the other levels. Kezilahabi's poetry has several layers, and for me, the layer of rich images and the way Kezilahabi employs the imagery in discussing psychological and philosophical questions, is the most interesting – the unexplored treasury I want to shed light on.

In the second chapter, "Theoretical Perspective", the theoretical frame of reference is deliberated: Kenner's theory is presented in the subchapter "Image: Reaching to the Skies Feet on the Ground", and Shoptaw's theory in the subchapter "Listening to the Palpable", which briefly regards three other theorists, as well. The subchapter "Sensing Images and Imagining Senses" discusses the relationship of images and senses.

The third chapter, "Kezilahabi and Research – Questioning Earlier Views", begins with a brief examination of Kezilahabi's relation to Swahili literature and his audience (subchapter "Kezilahabi's Splash in Poetry"). It is followed by a critical overview of earlier research on Kezilahabi's poetry (subchapters "More than Political" and "Neglected Undercurrents").

⁶ These definitions are based on my combining different definitions in dictionaries.

In the beginning of the fourth chapter, “Different Poems and Waters”, the categorising of water is concisely discussed (subchapter “Dividing Waters”). The subchapter “Flowing Lines of Swahili” presents a brief introduction to Swahili as a language of poetry and to the poem collections researched. The third subchapter, “Water as Image of Literature”, begins the analysis of Kezilahabi’s poems: it examines how the image of water is used to present poetry itself.

The chapters from five to seven continue to analyse and interpret the image of water in the poems. The fifth chapter, “Wet Life”, discusses how the image of water is used to represent life. The sixth chapter, “Dreams in Water”, considers the images of water connected to dreams or hallucinations. The seventh chapter, “Liquid Ethics”, concentrates on the images that link water and other liquids with morals.

The concluding chapter, “Conclusions: Catch of the Submersion”, pulls the strings together, and discusses the findings of the splashdown. The fifteen most closely researched poems of Kezilahabi can be found in the appendix (originals along with my translations from Swahili into English), offering the reader a possibility to make his/her own interpretations and, after the dry run, experience the dive in the act.

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Image: Reaching to the Skies Feet on the Ground

I have chosen to use the term *image* instead of for example *metaphor*, which is more popular in the current literature studies. This is because the word image covers both symbolic and literal dimensions, and therefore takes better into consideration the many-sidedness of Kezilahabi's imagery, whereas metaphor, *symbol*, and suchlike terms only refer to the symbolic content. Literary researcher W.J.T. Mitchell (1993: 557) notes that image is "a term which designates both metaphor and description, both a purely linguistic relation between words and a referential relation to a nonlinguistic reality, both a rhetorical device and a psychological event". As noted before, the images also have the strength of making translating into another languages more possible.

When it comes to water in poetry, the literal and concrete dimension is essential, and sometimes water has probably been used just to create a setting – regarding it always as metaphor would lead to over-interpretation. Because of its symbolic power, water is easy to see acting as a metaphor. Metaphor "“gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name”, so that it ceases to be airy nothing" (Murry 1975: 8). Water is definitely material, and can dissolve abstract themes into it, making them visible. But as already mentioned, this metaphoric dimension is present in the term image, too. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2000, italics added) summarises these sides of image well in its definition of the term: "A *concrete representation*, as in art, literature, or music, *that is expressive or evocative of something else*".

The multisided nature of image that to my mind is the strength of the concept, is seen as weakness by some literary critics. The term has been criticised of being ambiguous, blurring the distinction that underlies a large tract of poetics, namely, the difference between literal and figurative language. Some have suggested that we drop the term altogether (Mitchell 1993: 556-557). It is true that the term is used in many different ways,

and it breaks down the boundary between literal and symbolic, but that can be seen as desirable. As Mitchell suggests, the ambiguous use of the term image simply demonstrates the untenability of the figurative versus literal language distinction (ibid. 557).

Metaphor is often seen deeper as image, but Hugh Kenner has an interesting outlook on the matter. He notes that when images are used in a phrase, the phrase is illuminated, and it “exhibits *more meaning, and more definite meaning*, than it did before” (Kenner 1975: 26, original italics). When considering terms such as metaphor, simile, or synecdoche, Kenner observes that all the other terms have a serious hindrance: they draw the attention away from the thing that should be the core of the examination – that what the poet actually wrote (ibid. 30). Kenner brings his viewpoint to a head: “Poetry is the only mode of written communication in which it is normal for all the words to mean what they say.” (ibid. 31.) This is a valuable remark. The reader should not restrict him/herself to the literal, surface meaning, but (s)he should never overlook it, either: the literal meaning often has many important connotations that are superseded if all the words are interpreted as metaphors.⁷

When doing research on Swahili literature, I find it important to pay attention to the theoretical literature in Swahili, as well (which has not been done by most Western scholars of Swahili literature, except Lutz Diegner, and Bertoncini-Zúbková 1989). On the other hand, the theoretical literature in Swahili, in the field of literature research, is still quite scarce, or hard to get hold of. I was able to find only one scholarly definition of image by Swahili literary researchers. Ruo Kimani Ruo (1989: 81) defines the term as follows: *picha – maumbo ya vitu dhahiri yanayojitokeza katika mawazo baada ya kusoma au kusikia neno fulani* ‘image – formation/appearance of clear things that takes place in the mind after reading or hearing certain words’. This definition concentrates more on the active role of the reader and is closer to reader response theories, but nevertheless is compatible with my understanding of the concept, because *vitu* refers in particular to material objectives, taking into consideration the literal aspect of image. To conclude, my

⁷ As Kenner notes, the literal reading is not as easy as metaphor-seeking: “You have cultivated *defences against the literal sense of the words*, which go into action at the moment you confront an expanse of print. To read poems you must acquire the habit of switching these defences off, and trusting that the words mean what they say.” (Kenner 1975: 30, original italics.)

definition of image is: *a word or larger figure that is a literal, concrete reference, but can at the same time also be a symbol or a vehicle for a metaphor.*

Listening to the Palpable

Sound is important in any poetry, but in Swahili poetry the auditory aspect has always been the most elaborated side of poetry (e.g. Kezilahabi 1977: 62), and it is inseparable of the meaning. However, the current literature research generally sees that the role of sound in poetic meaning is “strictly secondary” (Shoptaw 2000: 222). For example, literary researcher Martin Montgomery (1992: 89) argues that only after regarding the meanings and context, which should be given priority, it is good to consider how the sound might support the sense. John Shoptaw sets himself against this outlook. He argues that sound can do more than echo the meaning: it can actually precede it and participate in creating the meaning. (Shoptaw 2000: 221-223.)

Despite being underrated in literary research, the notability of sound in poetry is observed by some other fields of research, which Shoptaw does not acknowledge. Linguist Edward Stankiewicz (1960: 60) argued already in 1960 that figures and rhyme have “a decisive effect on the development of a theme”. Psychology researcher T. Len Holdstock (2000: 186) accents the connection of meaning and sound in many African languages: “Much meaning is conveyed through sounds, not only the lowering of consonants or the use of softer consonants, nasals and sibilants, but grunts and similar utterances, have significance and elicit appropriate emotional responses”. Shoptaw’s understanding of the whole potentiality of sound is nevertheless rare in literary research, and worthy of support. My analysis of the auditory side of Kezilahabi’s poems is partly based on Shoptaw’s idea of “productive reading”.

Productive reading is a term that has been used by many critics, for example the New Critics, but as Shoptaw argues, they have not systematically regarded the auditory aspect. Shoptaw’s (2000: 223) argument is that the reader should ask “not (only) what the poem (a word, line, passage, etc.) means but by what means it [i.e. the meaning] was produced”.

Productive reading is analogous to “close reading” in the way in which it pays attention to the smallest particles and enters the poem thoroughly. But unlike close reading which typically completely neglects the “inner and outer worlds” that interact in the production of the poems, Shoptaw’s productive reading sees a poem “as the product of multiple forces, some of them deriving from the poet (his or her psyche, biography, education, poetics, intention, etc.), others from his or her history, culture, and especially language” (ibid. 221). I find Shoptaw’s understanding of the complexity of factors comprehensive, and appreciate his particular notion of the importance of language.

However, Shoptaw’s idea of “cryptography” means that poems have “crypt words” that can be read as ordinary words. He suggests that by solving these crypt words the “superficial complexity” of a poem can be turned into “an underlying simplicity” (Shoptaw 2000: 239). Even if Shoptaw carefully stresses that he does not see cryptography as the “be-all and end-all” but as “a beginning that makes the sounds and literal makeups of words and phrases matter” (ibid.), he in fact does not appreciate the sounds and the literal words, but illustratively, sees the literal level as make-up. For example, Shoptaw reads John Ashbery’s expression “long piers of silence” as “long periods of silence” (ibid. 226). To my view, this idea is disparaging poetry – if the poet has written “piers”, he primarily means “piers”. Shoptaw’s reading is also completely opposite to Kenner’s approach. Kenner in particular states, as a counterblow against Shoptaw: “It is unwise, whenever you encounter an unusual expression, to suppose that it is merely a colourful way of saying something commonplace, and then translate it into a commonplace near equivalent. The poet writes down what he means.”(Kenner 1975: 31.) Shoptaw’s way of reading has been criticised by John Vincent (1998), too, who finds it informative, but restricted.

But as my word “primarily” implies, I agree that, as Shoptaw suggests, the words in poetry can refer to other words and bring in mind more common phrases with similar sounds, and that their entering into the reader’s mind can participate in the interpretation of the poem. It is noteworthy that Shoptaw makes a concession or a clarification: the actual word on the page is not altogether different from the “crypt word”. He notes the “partial presence” of the crypt words in their markers. (Shoptaw 2000: 237.) However, Shoptaw’s claim of the “superficial complexity” and the claim to be able to diminish it by the cryptography

reading is in itself superficial. Contrary to Shoptaw's assertion, the participating meanings and allusions in particular show the *complexity* of the poetry.

Shoptaw's and Kenner's theories clash strongly in their extreme forms, but I find it possible and useful to apply parts of both theories. Shoptaw's (2000) evolvment of cryptography as a simplifier of poems trivialises poetry, but his idea of listening carefully to the sonic flavour of poems, taking into consideration the associations they give birth to, and seeing sound as an important participant in the production of meaning, is unique in its assurance of the connection of meaning and sound. Kenner's definition of image denies the symbolic aspect of image, but his defense of the essentiality of literal meaning is rare and valuable. Therefore I use Shoptaw's ideas in listening to the auditory dimension, yet without taking the words as cryptographs, and consider also the literal interpretation of words in accordance with Kenner, yet paying also attention to the possible symbolic allusions.

Furthermore, as contradictory as the theorists appear, they have something in common. Both read poems very closely and consider the actual letters and words. Kenner grips the literal meaning, but Shoptaw, too, sticks to the words and even prepositions and articles, listening to them as such, tasting the "palpability of their sound in the oral reader's mouth" (Shoptaw 1995: 225). This "palpability" is the key word that connects Shoptaw to Kenner, who expressly advocates the palpable, literal reading. The savouring attitude, appreciating the characters of words, is something this dissertation seeks to share with both Shoptaw and Kenner.

In the analysis of the phonemes of the poems I have got inspiration from Reuven Tsur (1992). He has developed a theory of cognitive poetics, and closely examines the impressions of phonemes in poetry. Tsur sees for example /k/ as hard and aggressive, and sonorants /l, m/ not hard. Consequently, the percentage of phonemes demonstrates the atmosphere in the poem, for example a high percentage of aggressive phonemes correlates with aggressive nature of the poem.⁸ Tsur (1992: 187) notes the different potentialities of

⁸ An example: Tsur (1992: 186) examines that in Paul Verlaine's poetry, the phoneme /g/ constitutes 1.63% of the phonemes in the tender poems, whereas in the angry ones it constitutes only 1.07% of the phonemes.

the phonemes, and remarks that one “must grant the poets a considerable degree of free choice, *within the constraints* of the sounds’ combinational potentials” (original italics). Tsur’s research covers a variety of languages, and he argues that the impressions are not language dependent, but there is “a system of phonological universals” (ibid. 181). Tsur’s research is very detailed, and he opposes some literary critics’ way of writing about sounds as just “beautiful”, or for example phonemes having “something of the angular sharpness of ice itself”, without the support of any scientific arguments (ibid). Similarly to Shoptaw, Tsur sees sound crucial in the production of meaning, and argues that the phonemes in poetry, too, deserve close examination.

I also find English professor and poet Alberto Rios’ concepts of “sonic intensity” and “sonic distance” useful. “Sonic intensity” is a passage that uses sound in an intense way, and often makes the reader pay attention to the line(s); it “suggests a lateral, or sideways, movement, rather than simply straightforward movement” (Rios 2001: 34). “Sonic distance”, on the contrary, does not draw attention to the language. Actually that may even be avoided: Rios notes that “[i]n this case, sound in the mouth of the reader is exactly what the poet does not want” (ibid. 34). This division is illustrative, since some parts of poetry sonically stand out from the texture much more than others.

Moreover, philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s thoughts about the significance of symbols are essential also in the case of researching the image of water. Ricoeur (1976: 61) sees symbols (in contrast to e.g. metaphors) as presentations that are “bound to the cosmos”: sky, earth, air, and *water*, and therefore not as “a free invention of discourse”. This supports the view that the relationship of allusions is in a way universal in the case of water. Ricoeur also argues that a symbol brings a human being’s understanding something that is otherwise not possible to fully express through language (ibid. 62), resembling Kenner’s (1975: 28) notion of the image’s potentiality that is beyond the statements.

Sensing Images and Imagining Senses

One of the factors that make image a fascinating topic of research is the fact that it combines the auditory, visual, and mental aspects of poetry. Shoptaw concentrates on the auditory aspect, Kenner on the mental, since he demands the reader to create a concrete counterpart of the literal images in the poetry (Kenner 1975: 30). W.J.T. Mitchell (1993: 558) sees phonetic images such as rhyme and onomatopoeia as the primary type of images in poetry. He finds the other images secondary and imperfect, and only mentions “mental pictures”, towards which poetics in general has certain ambivalence. As Mitchell presents, mental images have often been seen as private and inaccessible, even random (ibid. 558).

However, as stated before, in the case of water the image that is formed in the mind has strong connection with the literal content of the word ‘water’. Despite the small differences in the senses of *maji* and ‘water’ (and the word in other languages), water is a substance that seems to have universal meaning due to it being a physiological necessity (Dahl & Megerssa 1990: 21). In effect, that may also be true with other images (to which degree, depends on the image): the timidity of talking about mental images seems often to be due to the limited understanding of the term image. When the literal aspect is taken into account as well, the mental images can be seen to have a strong common base for analysis – at least much stronger than when images are seen as pure symbols.

Another dimension of image that Mitchell overlooks is the visual aspect. Poetry plays with both aural and visual. As Derrida (2000: 182-183) puts it, it is “necessary to [- -] hear and to see them [poems] in their space”. Even if the auditory aspect is more important and usually more closely connected to the content, the visual aspect should not be forgotten. Poetry uses particular spacing, unusual layout, enjambement, and other first and foremost visual ways of emphasising the meaning. Even the rhyme, alliteration and rhythm – which are crucial in Swahili poetry – have their visual side; for example, the rhyming words also look like rhyming.

Water is an image that connects all the five basic senses: sight, sound, touch, and even taste and smell.⁹ The rest of the senses, the sense of temperature and the sense of balance, are also present. In poetry images can only be conveyed through auditory and visual senses, but through them and the content of the words, for example depicting touches and tastes, sensations of other senses can be created in mind. The main emphasis of senses in this dissertation is the auditory side of the water imagery, because it is the strongest sense used in Kezilahabi's poetry. Despite that, when examining the image of water in his poems, paying some attention to other senses, too, is accounted for, because Kezilahabi has stressed the need to regard, at least at the mental level, all the senses (even if he only mentions four of them).

In his essay on poetry Kezilahabi (1977: 62) argues that Swahili poets have put emphasis on auditory aspect, but lost regard of other senses. According to Kezilahabi, for example the famous traditional poet Abedi Amri has declared that [*s*]hairi au utenzi¹⁰ ni wimbo. Hivyo, kama shairi haliimbiki, halina maana '[p]oems are songs. Thus, if poems are not singable, they have no meaning.' (Kezilahabi 1976a: 122 and 1977: 68.)¹¹ Kezilahabi opposes this view, but does not denigrate the meaning of auditory aspect. He argues that poetry can use, and benefits from using, all the senses: *Mshairi anaweza kutuonyesha jambo analotaka kutwambia [sic] kupitia hisi zote: kuona, kunusa, kusikia na kugusa. Yote haya yamo mikononi mwake* 'The poet can show us the thing (s)he wants to tell by using all the senses: sight, smell, hearing, and tactile sense. All these are in his/her hands.' (Kezilahabi 1977: 62.)

Kezilahabi's poems are elaborated in the sonic aspect, but have visual attractiveness as well, and notions of other senses. However, it seems that Kezilahabi in his argument has mixed up the levels. The traditional poetry uses the auditory side at the concrete level, but

⁹ Though the ideal drinking water is thought to be tasteless and odourless (as well as colourless), especially the sea water has a distinctive smell and taste (and can be seen to be blue).

¹⁰ *Utenzi* is a traditional type of poetry, employed for writing epic, heroic or didactic poems. In *utenzi* the basic form is eight syllables in a line and four lines in a stanza. *Ushairi* (or *shairi*) means both poetry in general and a traditional type of poetry, in which there are sixteen syllables in a line and usually three lines in a stanza. Since these names of poetry types are impossible to translate and since Amri refers to poetry in general (because he uses the word *shairi* to cover also *utenzi*), they are here translated as just 'poems'.

¹¹ As Ally Saleh (1990: 87) notes, the accusation of modern free verse being unsingable is actually unfounded: *Na ni nani hasa anayeshikilia kuwa shairi huru haliimbiki?* 'And who is it precisely that insists that free verse is not possible to be sung?'

depicts the other senses, i.e. uses them at the level of mind, such as love poetry using the images of odorous fruit and flowers (e.g. Knappert 1972). As already remarked, poetry is capable of using directly only auditory and visual senses, so it is not possible for Kezilahabi, either, to use the smells or tactile sense directly. Then again, if he is arguing for the use of all the senses at the level of depiction (at the level of mind), firstly, to mention the singing of poetry is unessential and quite misleading – since the sung or otherwise auditorily highly polished poems can just as well depict other senses – and secondly, the accusation seems rather unfounded, since as mentioned, the other senses are also traditionally depicted. The call for using all the senses is valuable, but in this way the free verse is not as far from the traditional as Kezilahabi appears to assume.

Kezilahabi discusses also the importance of imagery. As in the above-quoted passage in which the senses were seen as a way to show things, Kezilahabi (e.g. 1977: 62) often argues that a good poet is that who is able to show us instead of telling us. Kezilahabi refers to images also explicitly by telling that he appreciates Shaaban Robert's way of *kulipa maisha shairi lake kwa kutuonyesha picha mbalimbali* 'putting life in his poetry by showing us different images' (Kezilahabi 1976a: 126).

In *Kichwamaji*, the novel that was published in the same year as *Kichomi*, Kezilahabi discusses the possibility of interpretation and the new possibilities of the complex images.¹² The passage deals with visual arts, but the notion is interesting in regard to the images of poetry, too:

Huu ndio uzuri wa uchoraji na upakaji rangi wa siku hizi. Picha moja inaweza kuwa na maelezo elfu au zaidi. Inaweza kuwa na wazo tofauti kwa kila mtazamaji. Ndio kusema picha ya siku hizi haiwezi kutoeleweka; lakini wakati huo huo, mmoja anaweza kuona zaidi ya mwingine.

¹² An interesting detail is that besides the same year of publication, the titles of the works share the first four letters. It is also noteworthy that *kichwamaji* includes the word *maji* "water"; *kichwa* means "a head". According to Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi, the word *kichwamaji* has two meanings: a) a mad, disturbed person b) a person who has been born with a brain injury – "water in head" (Lodhi, personal communication, February 2006). A personage called *Kichwamaji* also occurs in the poem *Karibu Ndani* 'Welcome Indide', the title poem of the collection (Kezilahabi 1988: 34-37, not included in the appendix).

This indeed is the beauty of modern drawing and painting. One work of art can have one thousand or more explanations. It can have a different idea for every observer. This indeed is to say that modern works of art cannot be not understood; but at the same time, one can see more [in it] than another.

(Kezilahabi 1974b: 208 [qtd. in & tr. by Diegner 2002: 65.]

Free verse can use visuality in a much deeper sense than bound verse; instead of a rigid form, the physical page is a way of framing the text in a specific way.¹³ However, Kezilahabi's arrangement of the lines is very traditional. His way of using visuality seems to partly lie in the appearance of the words, at the level of graphemes,¹⁴ and more at the level of creating visual images in the reader's mind. S.A.K. Mlacha has remarked the high frequency of the verbs related to seeing in Kezilahabi's prose. The verbs *-tazama*¹⁵ 'look' and *-ona* 'see' are repeated much more often than other verbs, for example those related to hearing (Mlacha 1987: 275). The conclusion that Mlacha draws from this finding is rather odd – “This frequency [of the verb *-ona*] suggests that there is a higher degree of seeing with the eyes than through the mind” (ibid. 276) – but the cognition indicates that, at the level of description (i.e. mind), Kezilahabi's prose employs a great deal of visual images.

¹³ Oral poetry, which in most cases is also bound verse, can only use visuality at the level of mind. The strong history of oral poetry in Swahili literature (since the poems, though written, were traditionally performed by singing or recitation) might be one reason for Kezilahabi's tendency to use visuality mostly at the level of mind.

¹⁴ See an example of *Chai ya Jioni* in the subchapter “Drinking the Finite Elixir”.

¹⁵ I use the form *-tazama* of verbs, where the hyphen stands for the missing prefix. I do not use the infinitive form *kutazama*, unless quoting infinitives in the poems, because when referring to the verbs in the poems, the adding of prefix *ku-* would change the sound impression of the poem. On the other hand, I do not use the mere root, either, for leaving out the suffixes would also change the sound, and moreover, make the identification of the words hard (since some verb roots constitute of only one letter).

3 KEZILAHABI AND RESEARCH – QUESTIONING EARLIER VIEWS

Kezilahabi's Splash in Poetry

Euphrase Kezilahabi is today an associate professor at the University of Botswana. He has also worked as a professor of African oral and written literature and creative writing at the University of Dar es Salaam. In addition to fiction, he has written research on literature, and some of his academic works are also referred to in this dissertation.¹⁶

Kezilahabi was born 1944 in a small village called Namagondo, in the Ukerewe Islands by Lake Victoria (Nyanza), Tanzania.¹⁷ He was first educated, at primary and secondary levels, in a mission school near lake Victoria. Consequently Kezilahabi spent much time in his juvenile years near lake Victoria. Kezilahabi got his MA degree from the University of Dar es Salaam, and another MA degree as well as a PhD degree from the University of Wisconsin, USA.

Apart from the two poetry collections examined, Kezilahabi has published many novels: Rosa Mistika ('Mysterious Rose'; also the full name of the main character, 1971), Kichwamaji ('Disturbed', 1974), Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo ('World, the Court of Chaos' 1975), Gamba la Nyoka ('Skin of Snake', 1979), Nagona (1990) and Mzingile ('Labyrinth', 1991). Furthermore, Kezilahabi has written several short stories, and a play Kaputula la Marx ('Short trousers of Marx', written in 1979, published in 1999). The third poetry collection of his, Dhifa ('Feast' / 'Generosity' / 'Guesthouse'), is forthcoming probably this year (Kezilahabi, personal communication, December 2, 2005).

¹⁶ I definitely do not see Kezilahabi's theoretical works as the key to his poetry, but since he has sometimes, for example, explicitly argued demands for poetry in his research and on the other hand probably tried to realise them in his own artistic production, it is interesting to examine the theoretical works, too. In any case, the poet and the researcher can be contradictory, but it is not possible to fully separate them, either.

¹⁷ Some sources give his year of birth as 1943.

Kezilahabi was the first person to publish a collection of modern free verse poetry in Swahili.¹⁸ The collection, *Kichomi* ('Twinge', 'Pain', 1974), and already the publication of Kezilahabi's poem *Vipanya* ('Mouses') in 1971, three years before the first poem collection of his, created a fiery debate of poetry: the fronts of traditionalists and modernists argued over whether modern poetry can be called Swahili poetry, what the core of poetry is, and who can write Swahili poetry. Kezilahabi and his fellow students at the University of Dar es Salaam, Ebrahim Hussein and Crispin Hauli, challenged the tradition not only in the form: their poems also dealt with individual questions, even taboos, such as suicide¹⁹. Kezilahabi's *Vipanya*, as well as other free-verse poems published in magazines after it, were called *mashairi guni* 'defective poems' – actually the most categorical ones did not allow even that term, since they did not regard the new type of poetry as *mashairi* 'poetry', at all. According to Mulokozi, they were also called *masivina* (1989: 143), meaning no-poetry as well (*si* 'is not', *vina* 'lines', *ma* is the prefix of noun class 6).

Swahili poetry is one of the oldest forms of written literature in East Africa, and it is an object of pride for the Swahili speaking people. The written Swahili poetry is believed to date from the 11th century (Mulokozi & Sengo 1995: 1),²⁰ and it still is a crucial part of many people's life; for example, the newspapers in Tanzania and Kenya publish lots of poems. Accordingly, Kezilahabi's and others' reform of poetry was (or is) against a strong combination: a much appreciated, very active way of writing with rigid forms that are determined in detail. The debate of free versus traditional verse brought about several views and comments, and went on for years. A few other Swahili poets, such as Kahigi and Mulokozi (Kahigi & Mulokozi 1976; Mulokozi & Kahigi 1979), have published collections of modern poetry after Kezilahabi. However, Ebrahim Hussein concentrated later on plays and never published a poem collection; neither did Crispin Hauli. The traditional way of writing is predominant still today (Lodhi 2000: 37).

¹⁸ In addition to the free verse poems in *Kichomi*, there is one that has been written in a regular *shairi* metre: *Dakika 15 za Uzalendo* 'Fifteen Minutes of Patriotism' (Kezilahabi 1974: 51-51, not included in the appendix). In *Karibu Ndani* there is one rhymed poem, *Moshi Ukizidi Pangoni* 'Smoke Increases in the Cave' (Kezilahabi 1988: 11, not included in the appendix).

¹⁹ Kezilahabi's poem *Kisu Mkononi* 'A Knife in Hand' depicts a person considering suicide (Kezilahabi 1974: 13, not included in the appendix).

²⁰ There are many different estimations of the "birth" of Swahili poetry, as well as the language. For example Lodhi, Faris & Lodhi date the first Swahili poems to as early as 10th century (Lodhi & Faris & Lodhi 1974: 1). The approximations vary a lot since a language and its literature does not emerge from nothing.

Kezilahabi sees that even his most postmodernist works, *Nagona* and *Mzingile*, are based on the folklore of Ukerewe, his area of birth, though he has mentioned Nietzsche and Heidegger as a source of inspiration (Wamitila 1998: 80-87), as well as Camus and Beckett (Bernander 1977: 49; Bertoncini-Zúbková 1989: 108-109). Kezilahabi has emphasised the self-sufficiency of Swahili poetry. He criticises the previous views that stress the Arabic influence, and declares: *Badala ya kutazama Uarabuni au Uajemi kuna nini, siku hizi tunatunga mashairi kufuatana na matatizo yetu hapa* ‘Instead of looking at what the Arabic world and Iran have, nowadays we compose poetry following our own entanglement here’ (Kezilahabi 1977: 69). The remark of Arabic world is due to the “Arab myth”: the (Western) researchers credited the rich culture of Swahili people to Arabians, still long after independence of the East-African countries (Allen 1982: 228; Lodhi 2000: 49). Whereas the traditional Swahili poetry has been claimed to be adopted from the Arabians, today many people, researchers and some Swahili readers, argue that free verse is a thoroughly Western way of writing which Kezilahabi and his likes have adopted from abroad.²¹

The question of influences in literature is in a way absurd, since all writers are influenced by several people, artistic works and other factors – it is impossible to trace them. But in this case, because Kezilahabi, and free Swahili verse in general, have so often been accused of taking foreign influence, and even completely adopting foreign styles, I find it important to note that free verse has been used in Swahili poetry long ago. As Mulokozi and Kahigi (1979: 12-14) show, free verse has appeared in Swahili poems (and literatures in other languages of the area) hundreds of years ago, for example in lullaby lyrics. Edgar C. Polomé (1967: 226) also remarks that the old *mavugo* wedding songs of Swahili culture do not have rhyme or measure of vocal syllables.

²¹ This accusation is common in regard to modern African literature in general. According to K.L. Goodwin, for example South African poet Mazisi Kunene sees neo-African literature as rooted more in European than African literature models (Goodwin 1982: ix). Some, such as Tanure Ojaide, have different, and in my opinion more correct outlook, according to which the new poetic trends have incorporated the old African poetry traditions (Ojaide 1995: 4). Ojaide notes that in the 1970’s there began a strong tendency to decolonise African poetry (ibid. 6-8).

Moreover, as Rainer Arnold (1973: 69) notes, Swahili is “no more the language of a limited community of coastal towns and villages” but a national language, and today also the lingua franca of the whole East Africa, spoken by more than one hundred million speakers. As the body of the speakers has dramatically changed, it is inevitable that the literature in the language will alter a lot, too. To boot, the traditional poetry is written in an upper-class language that is often not understood by ordinary people, and its form is connected to the old nobility (e.g. Saleh 1990), so free verse could be seen acting as a liberator in a deeper sense than just in freeing the rigid poetic form.

One of Kezilahabi’s aims, which he declares in his preface to *Kichomi*, is the use of ordinary language: *Jambo ninalotaka kuleta katika ushairi wa Kiswahili ni utumiaji wa lugha ya kawaida; lugha itumiwayo na watu katika mazungumzo yao ya kawaida ya kila siku*. ‘A thing that I want to bring into Swahili poetry is the use of ordinary language; the language that people use in their ordinary, everyday chitchats.’ (Kezilahabi 1974: xiii). Farouk Topan, a researcher of Swahili literature and a native Swahili speaker, agrees that Kezilahabi “consciously used ordinary words in Swahili, which was then easy for his readers (for whom Swahili was not a mother-tongue) to understand and appreciate” (Topan, personal communication, April 18, 2006).

Then again, unlike the majority of people in Swahili speaking countries, the writers of free verse are highly educated. According to Farouk Topan, Kezilahabi’s audience is certainly the educated elite and university students (ibid.). Topan notes that Kezilahabi’s remark of the ordinary language is probably connected to the difference between the mainland and the coast of Tanzania: for example, the classical poems from the coast have references to Qur’anic verses, and people on the mainland found them too Arabicised in other ways, too (ibid.). Hence Kezilahabi has probably not escaped delimiting his audience, either, but at least he offers alternatives for the traditional Islamic-based way of writing poetry, and catches an audience that might otherwise have resorted to foreign free verse poetry.

More than Political

The researchers have at all times stressed the political and social nature of Swahili poetry. Ibrahim Shariff (1988), Assibi A. Amidu (1993), Ann Biersteker (1996), and Alamin Mazrui and Ibrahim Shariff (1995) have examined the role of Swahili poetry in the shaping of national identities. Nathalie Arnold (2002) and Kimani Njogu (2001) have also concentrated on political interpretations, as have Marxist researchers, such as Emmanuel Ngara (1990). This is the case with African poetry in general: for example the renowned poet and critic Tanure Ojaide (1995) has underlined the politicality of poetry, and U.A.H. Turuka (1971) sees that African poetry is always given high demands for social contribution.

Not belittling the possibilities of social contribution through poetry, it is limited to look poetry only from one point of view. The one-sidedness of the outlook becomes striking with a poet such as Kezilahabi, whose poetry is full of versatile imagery and personal contemplation. Many of his poems (like most of his novels and the play) deal with social matters, but they do it in an original, richly coloured way, and connect the social situation to an individual angle. The political interpretations are worthy, but the poetry of Kezilahabi deserves to be analysed also from the artistic point of view.

Lars Bernander describes Kichomi as follows: “Political poems, poems about man’s aimless wandering, especially the man who bears all the colonial heritage on his shoulders, poems about the great expectations of the new Tanzania” (Bernander 1977: 48). Except for the notion of “man’s aimless wandering”, which can be also seen linking Kezilahabi with existentialism, the whole interpretation is political. Elena Bertoncini, one of the leading critics of Swahili poetry, mentions the symbols and metaphors, but adds that Kezilahabi has used them as an aid to “proclaim his ideology”. When describing the content of Kichomi and the early novels of Kezilahabi, the only themes Bertoncini mentions are political: “Kezilahabi reacts sensitively to the burning political and social problems of the day in Tanzania and the whole of present-day Africa.” (Bertoncini 1980: 88-89.)

Interestingly, Kezilahabi has not laid stress on the political or social nature of his poems, though he has not denied it, either. Kezilahabi has told in an interview that he uses poetry “to dissemble his most profound and significant ideas” (Bertoncini-Zúbková 1992: 45). In his article on the history of Swahili poetry Kezilahabi (1973: 62) expresses his opinion of “poetry being the best aspect that reveals the peoples’ deepest feelings”. Even though the “most profound” ideas and especially the “deepest feelings” for most people mean personal issues, for a very political person they could be equated with his/her political ideas. In another interview Kezilahabi was asked whether he does not mention any African authors as inspiration, and he replied “No, they mainly write about colonialism, which I find a bit obsolete by now” (Bernander 1977: 49). This remark can also be seen from different viewpoints, since it is possible to be political with no interest in colonialism. In any case, Kezilahabi’s poetry can often be seen as political, but it is certainly also much more than that.

Some critics of Kezilahabi have noted the distortment in research. Kyallo Wadi Wamitila (e.g. 1998: 80) argues that the philosophy of Kezilahabi’s work has not got enough attention.²² Rainer Arnold (1973: 68) notes that many scholars of Swahili literature have an “ethnological or even anthropological view” and treat Swahili literature in a totally different way from European literature. The difference of the treatment can be seen still today, even if it is not meant to be ranking: Swahili poetry is seen most interesting as a social vehicle, or discussing political issues, whereas Western literature is mostly studied from other points of view, seeing literature more as “art for art’s sake”. Political/social interpretations of today often also mention the artistic nature of the poems, and appreciate poetry as such, but nevertheless they continue the history of domination of political/social interpretations of Swahili poetry. As late as in 1970 and by acknowledged researcher Lyndon Harries, Swahili poetry was seen only as a political tool of religion: Harries (1970: 37) argued that “[t]he success or failure” of Swahili poems lie in the “fulfillment of a purpose to propagate and expound Islamic teachings and example”.²³

²² Wamitila himself has made research from a psychoanalytical view on the archetypal images in poetry of Fumo Liyongo.

²³ Harries has made other, completely scornful remarks of Swahili poetry in general, such as: “One would hesitate to use the word ‘great’ in reference to any Swahili poem” (Harries 1962: 87). Despite these kind of statements, for example Knappert (1990: 94) argues that “the rigorous & scientific study by Europeans of Swahili poetry” started in the 1850’s.

However, quite many researchers have *mentioned* the importance of the images of Kezilahabi. Graziella Acquaviva (2004: 69) argues that it is *sitiari na mafumbo* ‘the allegories and enigmas’, that make Kezilahabi’s poetry special. Shaaban Ali Kachenje Mlacha (1987: 187) sees that images are “of vital importance in his works in that they portray a style that plays a part in the structure of his novels”. Ally Saleh (1990: 89), too, notes that *picha* ‘images’ are important in Kezilahabi’s poems. Some of Kezilahabi’s images have attracted more interest: Mlacha (1987: 189) mentions birds and animals, and finds it “interesting to note Kezilahabi’s use of living things”. Likewise, Wamitila (1998: 83) brings up the image of bird in Kichwamaji, and argues that it symbolizes life.

Nonetheless, to my knowledge, no one has yet even mentioned – let alone researched – the image of water in Kezilahabi’s poetry, despite of its recurrence. Similarly, the auditory aspect and other ways in which the poetry produces the meaning, have not been adequately researched. For example the roles of repetition have not been studied, despite the frequency of repetition in both traditional and modern Swahili poetry (Wamitila 1999: 58).

Neglected Undercurrents

Albeit Kezilahabi’s production has not been researched in the same way as its Western counterpart possibly would have been, Kezilahabi has nevertheless been classified as been influenced by Europe, as already mentioned. For some researchers the European influence and the quality of Kezilahabi’s production seem to be virtually connected. Elena Bertoncini-Zúbková has several times emphasised the European influence on Kezilahabi (e.g. 1980: 86, 1989: 116, 1992: 45). In her article “Two Contemporary Swahili Writers: Muhammed Said Abdulla and Euphrase Kezilahabi” Bertoncini (1980: 86) notes that Kezilahabi and the other Tanzanian writer Abdulla have “succeeded in admirably fusing East-African [sic] literary tradition with Western influences and *thus* have produced *truly African, yet simultaneously modern and original* works” (italics added).

This sentence, presenting the two pairs – (East) African and Western; African and modern + original – that are linked with the word “thus” creating a reason-consequence relation, implies that the qualifiers “modern” and “original” are possible only due the Western influence. The definitions of modern vary; my own understanding of the term is: characteristic or expressive of the present or recent times; contemporary or up-to-date. Since Bertoncini notes that the modernity of the works is due to the “admirably fusing”, her understanding of modern appears to be very positive. The same applies to “original”. The sense of being not derived from something does not fit the context, but apparently Bertoncini sees “original” in some other positive way. Since the attribute “original” can also refer to creativeness, the remark might imply that the creative nature of Kezilahabi’s production owes thanks to the Western influence.

Furthermore, this analysis is repeated as a slightly more simplified version, nine years later in a book by Bertoncini-Zúbková (1989: 116, italics added): “Kezilahabi amalgamates these influences [from European literature] with local traditions, creating works which are *deeply rooted in the African environment* and yet which are at the same time *modern and original*”. To counterbalance Bertoncini-Zúbková’s many remarks of European influence on Kezilahabi, this notice of African roots is refreshing. But why “yet”? Is it somehow surprising, even intrinsically contradictory, that deeply African works of art can be modern and original?

Bertoncini’s article of 1980 has another passage that should not merely be passed by. When describing Kezilahabi’s style of using “metaphors and symbols so that the reader is forced to reflect and read also between the lines” in prose and poetry, Bertoncini (1980: 89, italics added) declares: “The tendency not to say things fully but simply imply them, *taken over from Europe* and characteristic to Kezilahabi, is unique in contemporary Swahili prose.”

This naming of the origin – here Bertoncini is not talking about Western influence, but a complete adoption – is made by a subordinate clause; it is carelessly mentioned as a self-evident fact that does not need explanation, not even a main clause. Could it really be possible that there was a literature which did not say things between lines? The claim is

also contrary to research. For example Hamza Mustafa Njozi (2003: 41) has studied old Swahili poets that used lots of “enigmas and ambiguities”, and explains that the great amount of them is *because* of “the long-standing Kiswahili poetic tradition demanding that a magnificent poem should be like a coconut: delicious but hard to crack” and adds that “[t]he art of verbal riddling is highly valued among the Waswahili [Swahili people]”.

Njozi talks about poetry, and Bertoncini’s sentence may be read to refer only to prose, which is mentioned at the end of the sentence, though she has in the previous sentences dealt with Kezilahabi’s whole production and mentioned poems, too. But neither in that case is the claim of purely European origins of implying things justified, since Kezilahabi as a researcher of Swahili literature is certainly familiar with the tradition of enigmas and metaphors in Swahili poetry. The tradition of poetry has very likely had influence on his prose, too. Furthermore, the questionability of these three expressions of Bertoncini is still strengthened by a fourth one: Bertoncini (1980: 89) finds that “the traditional deficiency [of the whole Swahili literature, not just prose] consists precisely in a weak psychological insight into the thinking processes of the personages”. This is a very strong argument, since literature in particular is thought to be unique in the way it can expose the thinking processes of human beings.

The importance of the deep psychological insight in literature is expressed also by native Swahili literary researchers. Nyambari Nyangwine, a Swahili writer and researcher at the University of Dar es Salaam, in his description of the meaning of literature, starts with *Kioo cha maisha. Kwa maana kwamba mtu anaweza akajitazama akaona taswira yake* [- -] ‘Mirror of life: that human being can look at himself seeing his figure [- -].’ (Nyangwine 2002: 1.) Another Swahili writer, Ruo Kimani Ruo, sees that *ushairi umejengwa kutokana na vitu viwili hasa-hekima* [sic] *katika maneno na sanaa iliyomo katika utungo; yaani lugha ya mkato, iliyo nzito* [- -] ‘poetry is founded upon two specific things – wisdom in words, and art that is in the poem; in other words, short language that has depth [- -]’ (Ruo 1989: 16). Kezilahabi’s own definition of poetry is compatible with Ruo’s view of poetry and Nyangwine’s view of literature in general:

Ushairi ni tukio, hali au wazo ambalo limeonyeshwa kwetu kutokana na upangaji mzuri wa maneno fasaha yenye mizani kwa kifupi ili kuonyesha ukweli fulani wa maisha.

Poetry is occurrence, condition or thoughts that are presented to us by the desirable order of right words in short lines, in order to show us some specific truth of life.

(Kezilahabi 1976a: 123, the definition originally in italics).

Bertoncini-Zúbková's recent research on Kezilahabi has a more insightful view (see Bertoncini-Zúbková 1992 & 2004). However, besides Bertoncini-Zúbková, some other researchers of Kezilahabi have expressed a limited view. For example, Tanzanian-born literary researcher and author Said A.M. Khamis equates the speaker of the poem *Chai ya Jioni* with the poet, without any arguments. Similarly to Bertoncini's subordinate clause, the mentioning of the congruity of the words is made in brackets: "The narrator is the husband (the poet himself) [- -]" (Khamis 1990: 81). This confusing of the speaker with the author is very problematic, especially when unaccounted for. Khamis' interpretation of Kezilahabi's poetry is superficial in other ways, too, as will be shown in the subchapter "Drinking the Finite Elixir". On the basis of these numerous inaccuracies, I argue that new research of Kezilahabi's production is greatly needed.

4 DIFFERENT POEMS AND WATERS

Dividing Waters

*Niseme maji ni maji, pengine utaelewa
Ya kunywa ya mfereji, na yanayoogelewa
Ya umande na theluji, ya mvua, mito, maziwa
Asili yake ni hewa, hayapitani umaji*

I could say that water is water, maybe you will understand
Drinking water, tap water and water for swimming
Water in a font and in snow, in rain, rivers, lakes
Its source is the air, one can't exceed others' wateriness

A stanza of Julius Nyerere's (1965: 2) poem
Usawa wa Binadamu 'Equality of Human Beings'

The molecular constitution of water is same everywhere, yet we find that there are very different kinds of water. Water has the ability to move “between oppositional extremes: it may be a roaring flood, or a still pool” (Strang 2004: 59). Kezilahabi has noted the twofold nature also explicitly in his novel *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo: Mmoja anapokimbia asipigwe na mvua mwingine analilia tone la maji* ‘While one runs in order not to be caught by rain, another cries for a drop of water’ (Kezilahabi 1975: 21). The same two-sidedness of water is presented in the poem *Sisi kwa sisi* ‘Together, Each Other’²⁴ (Kezilahabi 1988: 19, not included in the appendix): first there is too little water in the desert, then too much in the rainforest.

This sorting of water, into the indispensable source of life and the powerful, dangerous masses of water, can be seen as the basic division, in which to incorporate the subdivisions, such as the peaceful but soiling water getting categorised under the dangerous waters. However, water has very many roles and sides, and accordingly it has been classified in numerous ways, most of which leave some aspects out. According to French

²⁴ The title of the poem is very hard to translate, since the poem plays with the double meaning of the repeated line *Sisi kwa sisi tukilana* ‘When we are eating together/eating each other’.

anthropologist Camille Talkeu Tounouga (2003: 283), African traditions represent three kinds of water: a source of life, an instrument of purification, and a locus for regeneration. All these aspects can be seen as part of the source of life dimension, for in the holistic view references to spiritual are manifestations of life force. In a bit more closely defined view the purification property is part of the spiritual dimension, but the locus of regeneration can nevertheless be included into the source of life class.

Iba Ndiaye Diadji's classification incorporates also the purification facet into the source of life aspect. Diadji (2003: 274) divides water into "life-water" and "death-water": "It is life-water when it purifies, it is death-water when it soils". This capability of soiling is not remarked by other dividers, even though it can be essential in Africa, where about one third of people lack access to clean drinking water. Then again, Diadji's division does not note water's ability to destroy by its mass and movement.

There is lots of and many different kinds of water in the Bible, and since Kezilahabi is Christian and uses biblical narratives in his poems, the Bible seems to have had influence on Kezilahabi's way of writing on water.²⁵ There is probably also indirect influence, since Shaaban Robert, the poet whom Kezilahabi (1976b) has researched, uses Christian imagery.²⁶ An example of his religious descriptions connected to water is the expression that Lord *mito huitiririsha* 'makes the rivers run', and *kwayo hukoma kiuye* 'quenches your thirst' (Robert 1994: 141). Donald R. Dickson, a professor of English literature, describes the biblical typology of The Old Testament as containing the following categories: the fountain in Eden and the primitive water of the creation of the world (which are seen as connected), the destructive water of the flood and the destructive potential of the deep, the dew of grace, the sealed fountain of purity. Dickson also notes the idea of *dissolution* of the universe at the end of time. (Dickson 1987: 29-79.)

In The New Testament baptism becomes a very important use of water. Water is often connected to Jesus in other ways, too. For example Jesus is depicted to have said: "If any

²⁵ According to Lodhi, when Kezilahabi was at the university he seriously thought of studying to become a priest, but later became quite critical towards Christianity (Lodhi, personal communication, February 2006).

²⁶ Robert's influence does not apply to Kezilahabi alone, on the contrary; as Bertoncini notes, "[i]t would be next to impossible not to be influenced by a leading literary personality of the postwar 20th century" (Bertoncini 1980: 85).

man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. / He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7: 37-38).²⁷ Despite these many roles of water, the division into two rough categories can be found in the Genesis – God separated the waters into two parts: below and above the firmament (Gen. 1: 6-8). On the other hand, since the fountain of Eden (water as a source of life) is connected with the waters of the deep and the creation, i.e. the powerful water masses, the two categories are interconnected.

Flowing Lines of Swahili

I have translated from Swahili into English the poems of Kezilahabi’s two poetry collections that deal with water; the ones that are discussed more closely in this dissertation can be found in the appendix (original ones along with translations), in the same order as in the original collections. Despite the appreciation Kezilahabi’s production has been received with, none of it has yet been published in English. However, Kichomi has been translated into Italian, by Bertoncini-Zúbková.²⁸

I have made the translations quite literal, so as to serve those readers who have some understanding of Swahili, and on the other hand those interested in linguistics. If the translation is considerably adapted in order to transmit the meaning more fluently, the literal translation can also be found (within square brackets, usually in a footnote). However, the word order is in most cases changed into ordinary – Kezilahabi often uses inversion of word order – in order to make the otherwise quite cryptic lines easier to understand. Similarly, the punctuation and the use of conjunctions are generally changed to adapt the English system. The original Swahili verses are always cited in the dissertation along the translated lines, which enables the reader to examine the auditory dimension of the lines. The system of graphemes is close to the system of phonemes, so it is easy to get

²⁷ I have used The King James Version of the Bible. It was first published in 1611 and is still the most used English version of the Bible.

²⁸ Translation published in 1987 with the title Sofferenza. Napoli: Plural.

the idea of the meant rhythm and sound environment. The stress is on the penultimate syllable in all words (except for some loan words).

Listening to how the words sound is essential in Swahili even outside poetry: as linguist (and native Swahili speaker) Abdulaziz Lodhi notes, ideophones, i.e. words and phrases employing sound symbolism, are frequently used in Swahili. He also mentions that the use of onomatopoeia, i.e. words sounding like the things they represent, is common. (Lodhi 2004: 149.) Generally the auditory landscape is gentle, for words in Swahili almost always end with a vowel, creating a certain soft flavour. Yet the most important character of Swahili in regard to the flowingness of poetry is the noun class agreement. Because the noun class marker comes at the beginning of the word in most cases, the consecutive words often start with same or at least rhyming syllable, as for example in *watu wanakimbia* ‘people run’, creating alliteration. Sometimes the words rhyme not only in the beginning of the word, but also in other parts, such as in *hivyo ndivyo* ‘just like this’. Consequently, the rhyming frequency of Swahili is high, making it an excellent language for poetry. As Wamitila (1999: 60) notes, the freeness of word order is another great tool, giving Swahili poetry “a powerful aesthetic value”.

Swahili is a very sonorous and flowing language – just like water – and offers an exceptionally great possibility for the poet to use “auditory imagination”, a term that T.S. Eliot (1975: 119-119) explains as follows: “What I call the ‘auditory imagination’ is the feeling for a syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking in the most primitive and forgotten [- -]”. As Eliot describes the auditory side offers something that the pure semantic aspect cannot express. Eliot’s idea illustrates the weakness of Shoptaw’s theory: the sound has a much deeper significance than solving the semantic riddles into simpler language. Although participating in the production of meaning, auditory dimension also works at a completely different level that is not reducible to the semantic level.

There are connections of poetry and water at the level of language, too. The word *bahari* means primarily ‘sea’ or ‘ocean’, but is also used for a one-line refrain in poetry.²⁹

Furthermore, a type of rhymed Swahili poetry is called *mtiririko* ‘gliding’ or ‘trickling’. In this poem category the internal rhymes are similar in the whole text, as are the end rhymes. “The flowing nature of the rhyme is implied by the very name of the category.” (Wamitila 2001: 65.) As mentioned before, free Swahili verse, too, is sometimes called *ushairi wa mtiririko* ‘poetry of stream’ or ‘flowing poetry’ (Mulokozi & Kahigi 1979: 11). This fits Kezilahabi’s poems, which have both flowing rhythm and plenty of references to water.

However, there is a difference between the amount of water in Kichomi and Karibu Ndani: whereas 12 of the 42 poems (29%) in Kichomi have (important) references to water, in Karibu Ndani only 3 of the 22 poems (14%) have (important) allusions to water.

Furthermore, the water imagery falls into two clear sections even inside the first collection. Kichomi is divided into two parts, first of which is named *Mashairi ya Mwanzo* ‘First Poems’. It has 9 poems, 6 of which have important references to water. The last part, *Fungueni Mlango* ‘Open the Door’, has 33 poems, only 6 of which significantly use the image of water.

Some of the poems that are examined closely have only subtle references to water, such as *Chai ya Jioni* (‘Evening Tea’) in Karibu Ndani. These poems are included in the research because, even if they are scarce in the direct allusions, the image of water or a similar liquid is crucial in the poems. Sometimes there is no water, but there is a clear lack of water, and this image as the intrinsic opposite of water is important for the research.

Correspondingly, some poems of the collections are not included in the appendix even if they have a clear reference to water. In this case the reference is understandable as such and does not benefit from the adjacent lines or the whole poem, but creates a separate image. These images of water are discussed in the dissertation by quoting the lines referring to water, and the necessary lines close to them. In most cases the poems left out

²⁹ In addition to these senses, *bahari* is also used as a figure of what is of vast extent, what is very extensive, immeasurable. The sense of ‘a one-line refrain’ is not noted by most of the dictionaries – for example Johnson’s *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (1939), Madan’s *Swahili-English Dictionary* (2000, 1st publ. 1903) or Baba Malaika’s *Modern Swahili-Modern English* (1991) do not mention it at all. The sense of ‘refrain’ is noted in the *Swahili-Suomi-Swahili –sanakirja* (‘The Swahili-Finnish-Swahili Dictionary’, 2002), and generally used in the Swahili literary research.

from the appendix are very long, and the reference(s) to water constitute only a digression from the imagery.

Although the choice of the poems in the appendix may be somewhat subjective, the distinction between the two collections is clear. It looks as if the writer's environment, or memories of that environment, have dried between 1974 and 1988, but especially during the writing of Kichomi, probably around the year 1970. As the name of the first part suggests and as Kezilahabi in his preface to the collection states, *Mashairi ya Mwanzo* 'First Poems' really are chronologically first. This is quite compatible with Euphrase Kezilahabi's personal history: until 1970 he lived by Lake Victoria, and since Kezilahabi published his first poem in 1971, he might well have written some poems before 1970.

Even if he had not done that, while writing them in Dar es Salaam before 1974 he was still much closer to the childhood on the island than 14 years later; the years 1983-1985 Kezilahabi was studying at the the University of Wisconsin, USA, and once he returned, he continued lecturing in Dar es Salaam.³⁰ Although Dar es Salaam is situated by the sea and the University of Wisconsin by Lake Mendota, for Kezilahabi water seems to be foremostly connected with Lake Victoria. Interestingly, all the three poems that use the image of water in Karibu Ndani see water in (almost) only a positive light. The floods and soiled water have evidently faded out of mind as the poet has aged, but the idea of water as the liquid that keeps us alive has stayed strong.

Water as Image of Literature

The image of water in poetry is sometimes used as the image of poetry itself, turning the poems into meta-literature. This usage is quite common in Somali poetry. In the poem

³⁰ On the other hand, living far away from water could also have increased the amount of water images in Kezilahabi's poetry. Some emigrants such as Abdirahman Mirreh, a Somali poet living in Norway and writing in English, frequently refer to water in accordance with the tradition of water images in Somali poetry (e.g. Mirreh 1996: 24, 31, 34). Sometimes the everydayness even prevents the forming of the needed aesthetic distance. As Oinonen notes, this was the case of water imagery in Finland before 19th century, until which water was mostly just a necessary tool (Oinonen 1945: 38-41).

“Defeat of the Infidels”, by Sayyid Muhammad Abd Allah Hasan, the speaker of the poem describes his verses as follows: “they thunder like the roar of a beginning rain storm”, “they wind their way like rain water rushing over the ground”, “they are like a stream which forms its own pool”, “they are like the restless sea, the rumbling waves” (Afdub & Kapteijns 1999: 40). By illustrations of the power of water, the speaker expresses his view of the agency of poetry. In Maxamed Cabdille Xasan’s poem “A Terrible Journey” poetry is seen as liquid: “Listen to my words [- -] I shall pour them out for you!” (Andrzejewski & Andrzejewski 1993: 37).

Consequently, references to drying of poetry are quite common in Somali poetry. In “Defeat of the Infidels” the speaker of the poem explains that once he had turned away from poetry using the expression “I had neglected poetry and had let it dry up” (Afdub & Kapteijns 1999: 37). In the same poem water represents also thoughts, for which poetry gives form: the poet depicts his verses as a vessel with which he catches “the waterfall of my thoughts” (ibid. 39).

The image of water represents poetry already in Kezilahabi’s preface to *Kichomi*, as mentioned before. Similarly to Kezilahabi, Farouk Topan uses the image in his preface to the same poem collection. Topan (1974: xi, emphasis added) employs the image to present the new form: he writes that the new poets in free verse *si kuvumbua **mito mingine ya kishairi** tu bali pia kutufunulia mawazo ya aina fulani ya kisasa* ‘not only discover **other poetic rivers** but also reveal us certain kinds of modern/current ideas’.³¹ As Ferber (1999: 172) notes, the image of river is a common symbol for poetry in many literatures.

Whereas Topan speaks of the ways of writing poetry as different rivers, Kezilahabi (1988: 34-37) sees the traditional type of poetry as dried leaves in his poem *Karibu Ndani* ‘Welcome Inside’: *Na ushairi umehama, umerudi upeponi / Lakini majani makavu, sasa hayatingishiki* ‘Poetry has moved away, returned to heaven / The dry leaves do not move

³¹ Since the original (in most cases Swahili) quotations in this dissertation are already in italics, I use bold to emphasise the central words within the Swahili quotations, and the corresponding words in the English translations, in order to help the readers having some knowledge in Swahili to follow the original texts. Even though the poems otherwise do not use bold, the added emphasis is always noted.

now'³². Another watery illustration of poetry in the same poem is the depiction of traditional poetry as superficial: *Na mahadhi yagaagaa, juu ya bahari ya utenzi / Yameshindwa chini kuzama, kwenye kina cha urazini* 'Recitation [of the traditional poems] floats above the sea of poetry / It has failed to submerge in the depth of consciousness'.³³

In classical Greek and Latin literatures, fountains mean sources of poetic inspiration (Ferber 1999: 79). Similarly in the poem *Kisima* 'A Well' (Kezilahabi 1988: 25) *kisima* 'well'³⁴ is the place from which to get inspiration and the source of creativity. In the first stanza [*k*] *isima cha maji ya uzima ki wazi* '[t]he well of the water of vitality is open', and the giant, the hero, comes to it. The giant is depicted to have *sindano ya shaba kitovuni* 'the copper dagger in the navel', which refers to the legend of Fumo Liyongo ('King Liyongo'): the poetic hero Liyongo is attacked by his own son, who was bribed to kill Liyongo. The son uses a special copper dagger. Liyongo does not die immediately but follows the attacker armed with a bow and arrows, bows at a village well and lies in wait for his son for three days, until dies. (King'ei 2001: 79.)

In *Kisima* the character also has [*u*] *pinde na mishale mkononi* '[a] bow and arrows in hand' and he *likapiga*³⁵ *goti kisimani* 'kneels down at the well'. The character is clearly Fumo Liyongo, but the well in the poem turns into the image of creativity and poetry in general. Whereas the first stanza depicts the powerful Liyongo – [*t*] *ayari kumfuma akaribiaye* '[r]eady to pierce anyone approaching' – in the second stanza there are fears and powerlessness among the poets. The change of the position of poets is pictured by the image of water. In contrast to the open well of vital water in the first stanza, the second stanza starts with the statement: *Hatuwezi tena kuteka maji / Na kalamu zetu zimekauka*

³² [But the dry leaves, now they are not moved]

³³ Even though *Karibu Ndani* is not written in a traditional bound form, the *grammatical comma* is used throughout the poem: all the lines are separated into two half-lines by a comma. In *ushairi wa vina* 'strophic or stanzaic poetry' the grammatical comma is always used (Lodhi 1990: 114). Thus the poem, written in free verse but with content that deals with traditional poetry, combines the forms.

The word *utenzi* in 'the sea of poetry' seems to refer to (traditional) poetry in general here, but usually refers to a type of poetry (see footnote on page 15).

³⁴ The word can also be translated as 'water-hole' or 'water-pit'.

³⁵ The word *pandikizi la mtu* 'a giant' (or 'a strong man') refers to a living creature, and therefore the predicate should in standard Swahili be *akapiga*. The word *pandikizi la mtu* itself belongs to the noun class 5. By using that (wrong) noun class in the predicate, too, Kezilahabi might imply that he does not mean (only) Fumo Liyongo but poetry in general; the word *shairi* 'a poem' belongs to the noun class 5, as well.

wino. ‘We cannot scoop water anymore / And the ink in our pens has run dry.’ The image resembles the references to drying of poetry in Somali poetry.

The well in the poem, the source of water, is depicted as the significant centre that should be approached:

*Aliyeitia kitovuni kwa hofu
Ingawa tegemeo hakulipata
Alifungua mlango uelekeao
Katikati ya ujuzi na urazini mpya*

He who took his stand ³⁶ in the centre in fear
Even though support was not given
He opened the opposite door
Between wisdom and new consciousness

The word *kitovuni* is used also in the first stanza in the meaning ‘in the navel’ (the word *kitovu* means both ‘a navel’ and ‘a centre’). The use of the double senses connects the central position of the well with the navel, the “centre” of Fumo Liyongo.³⁷

The use of tenses in the poem is peculiar. Whereas the first stanza is in the present tense, the second uses present, past and future tenses, as well as the perfect aspect. The lines preceding the above-quoted passage are in the future tense, and predict a sad future for poetry: *Nani atamsukuma kwa kalamu / Aitwe shujaa wa uwongo!* ‘He who will push [somebody] forward by pen / Will be called the hero of lies!’ Next the narration leaps to the past tense, referring probably to Fumo Liyongo again – he is depicted as a real poet who had authority. In the very last line the image of water is equated, in addition to creativity, with the progress of life: the opening of the door brings forward *[m]wanzo wa kizazi tukionacho* ‘[t]he first offspring that we see’.

One line in the poem *Fungueni Mlango* ‘Open the Door’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 23) connects writing with the image of blood: *Damu kichwani itumikayo kama wino*. [Blood in the head

³⁶ The verb *-tia* is a basic verb that can be translated in various ways. In addition to the chosen translation ‘take one’s stand’, in this context the senses ‘put’, ‘place’ and ‘set’ are also relevant.

³⁷ The line *Aliyeitia kitovuni kwa hofu* could also be interpreted to refer to the son of Liyongo, in which case the translation would be: ‘He who puts [the dagger] in the navel in fear’. However, this reading is not well based, since the poem does not mention the son before, and above all since it would be incompatible with the content of the poem to see the killer as a hero.

that is used like ink.] ‘Blood that is used like ink in the head.’³⁸ The movement of blood illustrates the thinking process of the speaker; the ideas are “written” in the mind. In contrast to the positive view of the well as the source of creativity in *Kisima* ‘A Well’, the image of writing with blood is dark. The blood is everywhere, suffocating the speaker of the poem.

In *Fasihi* ‘Literature’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 14-15) ink depicts literally the way to bring literature out (from the mind). The speaker, literature itself, declares:

*Halafu wakati
Ujao utafika
Matunda nitatoa
[- -]
Wakati utafika watakapokuja wajuzi
Kwa jembe la wino kunipalia.*

Then the future time
Will come
I will deliver fruits
[- -]
The time will come, when the people who can
Use a hoe of ink will come and weed me out.³⁹

Ink writes the literature down, but the actual works of literature, the artistic words, are another liquid – water in the pumpkin. The liquid nature of the literature is expressed already in the first line of the poem (emphasis added): *Maneno yangu kumeza tena sasa siwezi*. ‘My words, I still cannot **swallow** them.’

Even if the speaker of the poem remarks *mimi ni kama boga* ‘I am like a pumpkin’, the other references stress the liquid nature of the speaker, and hence the speaker can be seen to identify him/herself especially with the water inside the pumpkin. The shape of the pumpkin resembles the human head, and can be interpreted to represent the human mind, within which literature is created. It is essential that the plant is connected to the water

³⁸ I have added the literal translation in order to show the original word order, which on the other hand is unclear in English, since the predicate ‘is used’ refers to ‘head’ instead of the meant ‘blood’, but which, however, expresses better the emphasis at the end, ‘like ink’. In Swahili the difference in noun classes reveals the subject of the relative clause.

³⁹ The literal translation of the last two lines: [The time will come, when will arrive those who can / With a hoe of ink weed me out.]

below the soil. The pumpkin ripens among all the weeds with the lifeline of the roots: *Wala mboga za majani watanichuma*. ‘The vegetables will not pluck me either.’⁴⁰ When the time is right, the material for the literature is offered to be written down, the unclear or bad ideas as well as the clear or good ones: *Utafika, wa maboga kuwa mikata. / Machafu na safi yatachotwa* ‘The time will come, for the pumpkins to have wounds.’⁴¹ / The dirty and clean ones will **be ladled**’ (emphasis added).

The ability of water to efficiently spread things (usually diseases, but also positive things such as nutrients) is employed in the image that illustrates the power of literature: *Na nitaingia mitungi ya kila mji-shamba*. ‘And I shall go into the water pots of every town field.’ Another liquid image in the poem utilises the double meaning of the verb *-chambua*: the main sense of it is ‘clean’, but it can also be used figuratively in the sense of ‘criticise’. Even though the word *msomaji* ‘reader’ emphasises the figurative sense, the image combines both senses, one referring to the literal level of pumpkin, one to the alluded level of literature:

*Hatari sina
Wajibu msomaji
Mjini na shamba
Vizuri kunichambua.*

I am not in danger
The right reader
In the town and in the field
Analyses [also: cleans] me well.

The mentioning of *shamba* ‘field’ supports the reference to the actual pumpkin in the ground. Since the word *shamba* does not have the locative clitic *-ni*, and the infinitive *kunichambua* (referring to ‘analyse(s) me’) does not reveal the amount of the actors, the lines can also be interpreted as ‘The right reader / In the town, and the field, / Analyse and clean me well.’ Seeing the field as a cleaner could present the way in which environment

⁴⁰ In standard Swahili the predicate should be in the negative form (*hawatanichuma*). Because of the context and the word *wala* ‘neither’ it is, however, clear that the sentence means ‘will not pluck’, not ‘will pluck’.

⁴¹ The literal translation of *Utafika, wa maboga kuwa mikata*: [(Time) will come, of (the) pumpkin(s) to have wounds.] The preposition *wa* ‘of’ is used in an unusual way, since the word *wakati* ‘time’ is not mentioned. However, since the noun class 11 of the word *wakati* is one of the compatible classes with the form *wa*, the subject of reference can be argued to be *wakati*. On the other hand, the omitted word could be ‘shell’ or ‘shells’, but this seems improbable because none of the relevant words for shell (*ganda, gamba, gome*) belong to a noun class that is compatible with the preposition *wa*.

influences the works of art, “washing” the ideas, i.e. contributing to the elaboration of them.

Even though water is presented valuable, the poem has an image that expresses the importance of appreciating dry, dead ancestors as well:

*Lakini wakisahau wahenga
Kata na mboga walitumia
Msingi wa wao utamaduni
Watakuwa wameutupa.*

But if they forget that ancestors⁴²
Used a calabash and vegetables⁴³
The origin of their culture
They will throw it away.

It is noteworthy that a calabash is made of a hollowed and dried pumpkin, illustrating the connection of the ones imbued with life and the ancestors.⁴⁴ The poem looks forward: the dominant tense is future, used as many as 17 times, whereas the present tense is used three times and the past tense only once (the perfect aspect is also used once). Despite the concentration on the progression and the creations of the future, the poem seems to imply that the preceding lives should be kept in mind: *Kumbukeni, kumbukeni, kumbukeni*. ‘Remember, remember, remember.’

⁴² Or: ‘But *when* they forget that ancestors’.

⁴³ Both words can be in either singular or plural, ‘a calabash’ or ‘calabashes’, ‘a vegetable’ or ‘vegetables’. Since the pumpkin is a central character in the poem, I find the calabash more significant, and translate it as singular.

⁴⁴ The word *kata* can mean other kind of ladles or scoops, too, but because of the important image of pumpkin in the poem, I interpret the word to refer in particular to ‘a calabash’.

5 WET LIFE

Turbulent, Lusting Life

In Kezilahabi's first novel, *Rosa Mistika*, the human life is compared to a tree: *Maisha ya binadamu ni kama mti. Mti unahitaji maji, hewa na mwanga*. 'Life of a human being is like a tree. The tree needs water, air and light.' (Kezilahabi 1971: 56.) The image of life is closely connected to water, which is the first of the essential conditions that Kezilahabi enumerates. Life is the main theme that water itself represents and illustrates in Kezilahabi's poetry. Sometimes the comparison is direct, as in the line *Ziwa, mto, bahari – maisha* 'Lake, river, sea – life' in *Mto Nili* 'The Nile' (Kezilahabi 1974: 7). Despite the fact that there is no word *kama* 'like', which is regarded as an essential part of a simile and the difference between a simile and a metaphor, I would call that line a simile: the dash seems to imply the meaning of 'is like', rather than just 'is' of a metaphor, and the line is clearly a comparison, without the complexity of allusion directions typical to metaphors.

The order of the words '[l]ake, river, sea' is significant. As Strang (2004: 63) notes, the image of river is often used to illustrate time and the image of river is seen as eternity in poetry; Ferber (1999: 172) also comments on the river being a symbol of life in literature. In *Mto Nili* lake represents the peaceful childhood; in the case of Kezilahabi, connected to his childhood by Lake Victoria, but in general creating an image of sheltered environment and home. The river illustrates the progress of one's life. Unlike during the "timeless" childhood, the time runs fast. The life flows quickly towards the irrevocable end: the death, the sea, perhaps the eternity.

The preceding lines bring content to the simile. In the first stanza the speaker of the poem refers to the time *dhambi zikielea mtoni* 'when sins were diverted into a river'. In the second stanza the speaker mentions *damu ya watu waliozama zamani ziwani* 'blood of the people who drowned in the lake in the past'. In these images water is portrayed as something that absorbs everything, implying perhaps that even the darker aspects and sad

incidents are part of life and can be found in the history of everyone.⁴⁵ The poem is based on allusions to slave trade, but at the same time it discusses life in general, most explicitly in the line ‘Lake, river, sea – life’. The question *kwa nini Afrika ya weusi na Afrika ya weupe?* – ‘why there is Africa of black people and Africa of white people?’ applies especially to the Nile, since the people of the lower and upper course have traditionally been enemies, but from another viewpoint it contemplates the racial segregation in Africa in general.

The river is depicted as a moving entity that washes the sins away, but the lake, too, is described as being able to bury or dilute things into it. The alliteration and the several internal rhymes in the words *waliozama zamani ziwani* link deeply together the verb *-zama* ‘drown’ with its homograph *zama* ‘the past’ as well as *zamani* ‘in the past’ with *ziwani* ‘in the lake’. The words are not etymologically related – the verb *-zama* is a bantu word whereas *zamani* is borrowed from Arabic – but that does not diminish the auditory and visual effects. The poem appears to imply that leaving the past behind is like letting time drown, and that it is illustrative to think of ‘in the past’ as ‘in the lake’. The assonance, i.e. the repetition of the vowel /a/ through every word of the line, creates a flowing atmosphere that emphasises the semantic content of the line.

Another comparison of water to life is presented in *Upepo wa Wakati* ‘Wind of Time’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 4). In the first stanza the speaker is looking at a lake one stormy day. He describes the scenery:

[- -] *mawimbi*
Yakipanda na kushuka. Yakivimba,
Yakiviringika, yakigongana na kutoa povu

[- -] waves
Raising and falling. Expanding,
Rotating (spinning), colliding with each other and bringing about foam

By situating the word *yakiviringika* right after the word *yakivimba* the speaker creates a feeling that the first word actually expands into the second – the first six letters are same

⁴⁵ The ethical questions *Mto Nili* deals with are discussed more closely in the subchapters “Spirits and Judges Within Water” and “Watering with Blood”.

in both words, but the second word continues four letters longer – which is effective since the visual and auditory alteration takes place simultaneously with the semantic content. The rhythm of the words also resembles the rhythm of waves. The verb *-viringika* ‘rotate’ itself seems to contain three “rounds”, since the first three syllables end with /i/: *vi-ri-ngi*, each /i/ completing a round.

In the next line the behavior of water is preliminarily compared with human life: *Kama fahari wehu katika bonde lisomajani* ‘Like pride, madness, in a valley with grass’. The main comparison, however, comes in the second stanza, which commences with the lines *Hivyo ndivyo ulimwengu ulivyo. / Na hivyo maisha ya binadamu.* ‘Just like that is the world. / And like that (is) the life of human being(s).’ *Hivyo ndivyo ulivyo* (‘just like this is’) is a standard phrase in Swahili, but nevertheless, here again the internal rhymes strengthen the claim – the similarity of the words *hivyo*, *ndivyo* and *ulivyo*, and furthermore the alliteration of *ulimwengu* and *ulivyo*, support the suggested equivalence of waves and life.

Moreover, the description of the first stanza is partly repeated in the second stanza. Because in Swahili the noun class of the syntactic subject can be seen in the predicate, the adaptation of the second stanza can be very delicate, but still the reader knows that now the speaker is talking about human beings, not waves: *Yakipanda na kuskuka – Wanapanda na kushuka* ‘They (waves) raise and fall – They (human beings) raise and fall’, *Yakisukumwa – Wakisukumwa* ‘They (waves) are being pushed/forced – They (human beings) are being pushed/forced’. The subtle change in the first syllables also strengthens the impression of rhyme, instead of pure repetition. The waves are compared with the lives of human beings, and the world is hence portrayed as a chaotic place, as in the title of the novel Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo (‘World, the Court of Chaos’, Kezilahabi 1975). The water cannot decide where to go, but it is pushed by the winds that happen to blow at the time.

Furthermore, life is portrayed as a constant struggle for power, and waves that splash high and clash in order to remain stronger than the others. An impressive simile is constructed in the lines *Tazama wanavyojinyakulia madaraka / Kama mzamaji, mguu wa rafikiye, shikavyo!* ‘Look how they [human beings] seize power of themselves / Like a drowning

person, how he grips the leg of his friend!'. The desperate situation of drowning brings out the selfish side of the human nature, or the side guided by the instinct of self-preservation.

The waves are described to circulate and collide like *fahari wehu* 'pride, madness', illustrating the crazy competition and clashing of people. There is even more complete disorder in the poem *Hadija* (Kezilahabi 1974: 22, not included in the appendix). It is expressed in several images, one of them using water: *Umeziba mto hasira / Nyumba yako sasa mafurikoni* 'You have plugged up the river with hatred/anger / Your house [is] now flooded'.⁴⁶ The expression notes the importance of free movement of water, and can be seen to represent problems and dams in emotions and communication. The strong streams and waves can be scary, but one cannot get rid of them by damming them up, on the contrary. The rapids are part of life.

In the poem *Mwamba Ziwani* 'A Rock in a Lake' (Kezilahabi 1974: 6), water represents life, as well, and physical desire, which is presented as an inevitable part of being alive. The speaker of the poem admires the rock in the water: it is strong, hard and not exposed to anything. Opposite to that, the speaker cannot get away from the sphere of influence of a girl even when he is alone: *Nikitetemeshwa na mapaja ya huyu msichana/ mbichi karibu nami*. 'I am being trembled by the thighs of that fresh girl near me.' The adjective *-bichi* means 'unripe', 'very young', '[sexually] immature', 'fresh' and 'moist', and the last two meanings are most significant in the poem due to the prevailing theme of water, but the first three senses are also present.

The image of water is herewith attached to femaleness, sexuality, and youth. The concept of water has an intriguing connection with womanhood even in the Swahili language: the word *ziwa* stands both for 'a lake' and 'a female breast'.⁴⁷ The connection is reinforced by the similar sentence structure of the consecutive lines *Nikisukumwa na mawimbi, /*

⁴⁶ The literal translation is [You have plugged the river hatred]. Therefore the line could also be interpreted as 'You have plugged the river of hatred'.

⁴⁷ Even though the word for breast has got its name from *maziwa* 'milk', and though *nyanza* is also used for 'a lake' and *titi* for 'a breast', the words are homographs; the implications of homography is often used in poetry. Thus, combined with the content of the poem, the word *ziwa* in *Mwamba Ziwani* can be seen referring to a female breast too, in addition to the primary object of a lake.

Nikitetemeshwa na mapaja na huyu msichana 'I am being pushed/forced by the waves, / I am being trembled by the thighs of that girl'.

This connection of water with the object of erotic desire is common in Somali poetry. When the object of love is represented as water, the lover naturally feels thirst, offering a direct image for lust: "The man who thirsts [can] not dispense with water" (Johnson 1996: 109). Water can also be out of reach, expressing feelings of rejection, for example when a poet depicts his thwarted feelings in "A Broken Betrothal": "I am a man who has seen a spring full of water / But whose thirst must stay unquenched forever" (Andrzejewski & Andrzejewski 1993: 9).

The connection of sexuality and water can also be found in Arabic poetry: for example the image of an untouched spring or a pool of crystal-clear water symbolises chastity, and there is an expression "to drink water from her" (Stetkevych 2002: 16). In Arabic poetry, the image of water has also been seen to allegorically represent sexuality (Eksell 1997: 26). Nevertheless, all the examples, as the images in Somali poetry and *Mwamba Ziwani*, connect water particularly with women, or men's desire for them. It seems that the image is not so much about sexuality as such, but a way of representing women as objects of desire.⁴⁸

The speaker of *Mwamba Ziwani* 'A Rock in a Lake' sees himself as *-ovu* 'bad/evil' because of his inability to control 'being shaken'. Not until the end of the poem does he realise that the rock is dead, and that [*w*]akati wote niishipo sitaweza, nao kufanana '[a]s long as I live, I cannot resemble it'. The negative attitude towards physicality (at least in the beginning of the poem) is implied also in the comparison of water, and therefore of physical desire, too, with a sword of a killer: *Mawimbi yananigusa na kuvunjika / Kama upanga wa muuaji ushindwavyo kwa roho*. 'The waves touch me [the rock] and broke / Like the sword of a killer is defeated by spirit.' Even if physicality in *Mwamba Ziwani* is identified with life, paradoxically it is also attached to death (through the purpose of the killer's sword), expressing perhaps the idea that although physicality is a life force, it can

⁴⁸Though the gender of the speaker is not specified (Swahili does not mark gender, and the speaker refers to him/herself as *mtu* 'a human being, a person'), since nothing alludes to the speaker being woman, either, regarding the poem as a description of a girl thinking of a girl seems like a far-fetched reading.

also destroy life or overwhelm it. Psychoanalytic theory sees Eros a life force that is at the same time inseparable from Thanatos, the destructive force of death instinct (Freud 1975).

The end of the poem is very repetitive (emphasis added):

[- -] *Lakini **ule mwamba**,*
***Ule mwamba** ulikuwa umekufa.*
Wakati wote niishipo sitaweza, nao kufanana.
*Nitapokufa kama **huo mwamba**,*
***Huo mwamba** nitaushabihi.*

[- -] But **the rock**,
The rock had passed away.
As long as I live I cannot resemble it.
When I will die like **that rock**,
I will be like **that rock**.

The word *mwamba* ‘a rock’ is used four times, while just once or twice would have sufficed. The repetition is emphasised with the demonstrative pronouns *ule* and *huo*.⁴⁹ Repetition occurs both in traditional and modern Swahili poetry (Wamitila 1999: 58), and can have many functions. The above-quoted lines are harping on the same string in a way that fits the English linguist Catherine Emmott’s idea of the meaning of repetition in poetry. She suggests that a poem’s repetitive style can simulate the speaker’s lack of concentration when (s)he is in deep thoughts, continually returning to the topic that troubles him/her (Emmott 2002: 94-95). In *Mwamba Ziwani* the rock is troubling the speaker who is driven to mention it so many times in the last lines, and to make it also the title. In contrast to that, in the beginning of the poem the word is not mentioned. It is first used as late as in the eleventh line, so the reader cannot be sure of the subject of the predicates before that. On the other hand, since the predicates reveal that the noun class of the referred speaker is the same as the class of the title (noun class 3), the subject can be anticipated. However, the notable change in the frequency of the word *mwamba* ‘a rock’ illustrates the freshness of the contemplation – how the rock starts to trouble the speaker while he is staring at it.

⁴⁹ *Ule* is the demonstrative of distance in the noun class 3, corresponding to ‘that’ in English. *Huo* is the demonstrative of reference, used to designate the thing or person that has already been spoken about, and can be translated with ‘this’, ‘that’ or ‘the’.

Drinking the Finite Elixir

In Karibu Ndani there are two poems that mention water as the source of *uzima* ‘vitality, life, health’⁵⁰, with almost identical expressions. The poem *Kisima* ‘A Well’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 25) talks about [*k*] *isima cha maji ya uzima* ‘[t]he well of the water of vitality’. *Hii Moja Hadithi* ‘This One Tale’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 45, not included in the appendix) mentions *kisima cha uzima* ‘the well of vitality’. The rhyming of the words *kisima* and *uzima* accentuates the close connection, even equation, of water and vitality.

In the poem *Kilio Kijijini* ‘Mourning in a Village’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 17) there is a deceased and much water, but the water is connected to life. The deceased *amelala kama jiwe / Lenye thamani mizanini* ‘sleeps like a heavy stone on the scales’, which reminds of the contrasting of the dead stone and living water in *Mwamba Ziwani* ‘A Rock in a Lake’. The trees outside *bado matone inadondosha, ya mvua* ‘are still throwing drops, of rain’ and *kuwahesabia miaka yao ya uhai* ‘[are] counting their [human beings], not of trees] years of life’. This image of water as a measure of time is corresponding to Shakespeare’s lines: “Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / so do our minutes hasten to their end” (Sonnet 60).

The regularity of the rhythm of water, whether waves or dripping trees, makes water an effective timer. The image of dripping trees resembles an hourglass, and like the waves in Shakespeare’s sonnet, dripping also has an end: *Mara matone yaonekana yanakoma / Na maisha yaonekana mafupi*. ‘Suddenly the drops seem to cease / And life seems short.’ The alliteration of the words *matone* ‘drops’ and *maisha* ‘life’ and the identity of the predicates (*yanaonekana* ‘seem’; they are identical because the subjects belong to the same noun class 6) accentuate the similarity of the limitedness. The lines fit Holdstock’s

⁵⁰ The word *uzima* is hard to translate, since it refers to holistic well-being and vitality. In addition to ‘life’, ‘vitality’ and ‘health’, it can mean ‘vigour, soundness’; ‘being full-grown’; ‘completeness, wholeness’, ‘totality, full dimensions’; ‘freedom from injury’. Because Kezilahabi’s word *maisha* is best translated as ‘life’, I choose to translate *uzima* as ‘vitality’.

(2000: 186) idea of poetry being music; for example Luke Eyoh (2001: 105-117) and Alberto Rios (2001: 34) have also stressed the thorough connection of poetry and music.

Shortness of life is illustrated in *Kilio Kijijini* also by the lines:

*Isipokuwa maji ya mvua
Yatiririkayo kasi kuelekea bondeni
Kutukumbusha njia ya kila binadamu*

Though the rain water
That flows quickly towards the valley
Reminds us of the way of every human being.

The verb *-tiririka* ‘glide, trickle, slide along’ seems to be onomatopoeic: the consecutive syllables *ti-ri-ri* resemble the sound of trickling water.⁵¹ As in the previous example, the analogy of the words *maji* ‘water’ and *njia* ‘a way’ (in this passage implying the idea: ‘the way of human being’) is underscored by the means of the word structure. The expression *maji ya mvua* (‘rainwater’) resembles the following *njia ya kila* (‘the way of every’) – even the number of letters is exactly the same in all the corresponding words. The structures are also situated quite correspondingly, after one long word that begins the line.

While water generally represents life in *Kilio Kijijini*, as in most of Kezilahabi’s poems, there is a contrary image, too. The raindrops that count the years, are also told to have *chini yameshachimba vishimo / Kuonyesha mfano kwa washika majembe* ‘already formed small hollows in the ground / Showing example for those holding hoes’. This connects the raindrops not only with the passing of time, but also directly with death. When dropping is equated with the digging of a grave, the image of water is far from being the elixir of life. Another negative consequence of rain is presented in the line *Nje panateleza, wendao haraka waanguka* ‘Outside it is slippery, those walking quickly fall down’.

A nephew in *Kilio Kijijini*, who has just arrived in the mourning house, is still very much alive, which is described with the lines *Umande umelowanisha ncha za suruali / Ya huyu*

⁵¹ As noted before, the word that has the same root – *mtiririko* ‘gliding’ or ‘trickling’ – is also used to name a type(s) of poetry. See page 32.

mjomba ‘Dew has moistened the legs of the trousers / Of the nephew’.⁵² The image resembles the use of dew in the Bible: it is special water, dew of grace, always welcome. It also seems to be linked to youth. The psalm line “thou hast the dew of thy youth” (Psalm 110: 3) suggests, according to the literary researcher Michael Ferber (1999: 57), that dew is “something young people have within them”. The connecting of youth and dew is a natural image, since dew appears mostly in the morning. The connection of moistness and youth is present in *Mwamba Ziwani* ‘A Rock in a Lake’, too. The linking of youth and moistness is natural in the light of physiological changes in aging: the older one gets, the less water is retained in body cells, resulting in wrinkles.

Unlike in traditional Greek and Latin poetry, where dew is often a metaphor for tears (Ferber 1999: 58), dew in *Kilio Kijijini* is connected with life. It moistens only the person who is moving (coming to the house of mourning), in contrast to the immobile deceased. The corpse gets wet merely due to tears. It is noteworthy that the deceased is told to be *[a]kidai aoshwe na mito / Ya machozi mashavuni yatirikayo* ‘[d]emanding to be washed by the rivers / Of tears that flow on the cheeks’. This describes how the deceased hopes that his close ones will grieve him, and refers to the purifying aspect of water, but to my mind it also implies that the deceased is waterless and thus lifeless, desperate to still get water that is the element of life, hoping he could absorb some life from the tears.

Tears are a positive image also in the poem *Mgomba* ‘The Banana Plant’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 8): *Machozi yenye matumaini [- -]* ‘The tears that have hope [- -]’. Water is closely connected to life in this poem, too, since the banana plant *umelala chini: hauna faida tena, / Baada ya kukatwa* ‘is lying on the ground: it is of no use / After being cut’. The connection of crop and the water underneath the ground has been cut by cutting off the stalk; similarly to the poem *Fasihi* ‘Literature’, the connection is essential. The act of mowing has been a big question, since it is mentioned twice that the workers of the garden were hesitating when doing it. Cutting off a tree is a very serious mistake also in *Hadija*: the addressed person, Hadija, is accused first of all with the line *Umekata mti mtima* ‘You have cut off the heart of the tree’.

⁵² The word *mjomba* ‘nephew’ can also refer to an uncle on the mother’s side, but because of the connection to dew, the translation ‘nephew’ has been chosen.

In the line *Wenye hila waliokizunguka kitanda na kulia* ‘Betrayers who go round and round the bed and cry’ the words *wenye hila* mean literally [those who have betrayal/deceit], and the construction could possibly be interpreted as ‘the betrayed’, too.⁵³ The reading ‘betrayers’ connects the referred people with the workers of the garden, who cut the stalk – later they regret it. On the other hand, ‘the betrayed’ could refer to the people who suffer from the cutting of the banana plant; they were betrayed because the plant was cut without their knowledge. *Kitanda* ‘the bed’ can be seen to allude to the stub of the plant, which resembles a deathbed that the mourners rotate.

The structure of the poem is absorbingly repetitive, circular: in addition to the passage of a plant being cut down with hesitation, the description *Bustanini hakuna kitu / Isipokuwa upepo fulani wenye huzuni* ‘There is nothing in the garden / Except for some sorrowful wind’ is repeated in a slightly modified version. It creates the impression that as ‘[t]he betrayers who wandered around the bed’ (*[w]enye hila waliokizunguka kitanda*), the speaker of the poem – and the reader as well – cannot proceed anywhere, but is forced to rotate around the dried stub. The repetition of the line *Bustanini hakuna kitu* ‘There is nothing in the garden’ creates a strong image of emptiness. If there is no water, there is nothing.

The circular rhythm of *Mgomba* ‘The Banana Plant’ applies W.B. Yeats’ view of the meaning of rhythm:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.

(Yeats 1975: 55.)

⁵³ The predicate *waliokizunguka* ‘those who went around’ is in the past tense, but that seems to have no particular meaning.

The repetitions of the poem that make the reader rotate around the emptiness, “the alluring monotony”, combined with the alteration of the lines, create a trance-like feeling, which makes the images stronger.

In addition to water, milk is portrayed as a vital liquid in the poem. The speaker grieves: *Ole! Milki ya ‘Lexanda imekwisha!* ‘Poor you! Alexandra’s milk has finished!’ Alexandra might refer to Egypt’s second largest city and main port Alexandria, by the Mediterranean and thence inseparable of water. Another possible allusion could be a character in Greek mythology, Alexandra (more often called Cassandra), who is used in literature as a symbol of tragedy. In any case the running dry of milk is part of the great tragedy in *Mgomba*. The only liquid that is present in the poem is the wound liquid in the evidently rotting cut, which [*s*]asa viko nje kufyonzwa na inzi wa kila aina / Na vinanuka vibaya ‘[n]ow are open in full view for every fly to suck / Stinking’.⁵⁴ The wound liquid of the rotting cut can be included in Diadji’s category of soiling death-water.

Another liquid that is not pure water but, like milk in *Mgomba*, closely connected to life, is introduced in *Chai ya Jioni* ‘Evening Tea’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 3). *Chai ya Jioni* is the first poem in Karibu Ndani, and its mature outlook reflects that, while Kezilahabi was 30 years old when Kichomi was published, he turned 44 during the year of Karibu Ndani’s publication. The poem depicts an elderly couple drinking their evening tea on the porch. The speaker and his/her companion hope to be able to accept (drink) and appreciate (smile at) every part of their life: *Tumalizie machicha ya chai yetu ya jioni / Bila kutematema na kwa tabasamu*. ‘We shall finish our evening tea with the tea grounds / Without spitting them out, smiling.’⁵⁵ They want to make the most out of life, and even suck *utamuu tamu / Uliobakia kwenye midomo yetu* ‘the sweet taste / That remains on our lips’.

⁵⁴ The literal translation is [Now are out to be sucked by any kind of fly / Stinking].

⁵⁵ The literal translation is [Let us finish the grounds of our evening tea / Without spitting around and smiling]. The subjunctive form is closer to the translation ‘let us’ than ‘we shall’, but it is used in a non-urging sense, too. In order to preserve the subtle, mature nature of the poem I have chosen to use the translation ‘We shall’ in this line and in the fourth line (the other possible translation is noted when that line is examined); in the last line I have used the form ‘Let us’, to retain balance.

The reduplicated form *kutematema* ‘spit around’ emphasises the continuation of the spitting.

Said A.M. Khamis (1990: 80) has argued that *chai* ‘tea’ stands for “all what [sic] is good in life”, but that view is quite restricted. Even if the taste that remains on the lips of the speaker is told to be sweet, that can represent the memories – like the aftertaste of tea, memories are often sweeter than the actual situations in which they are created. Because the speaker expressly notes that they swallow even the tea grounds, tea cannot present only all that is good. Rather it becomes an image of their whole life as it stands. The fact that they are drinking together illustrates the deep companionship, sharing their life, both the sugared warm tea and the bitter remains.

The poem ends with the lines of farewell:

*Lakini kabla hatujaondoka kimyakimya
Kukamilika nusu duara iliyobakia.
Tuhakikishe vikombe vyetu ni safi.*

But before we will leave just silently
To complete the half circle that remains
Let us make sure that our cups are clean.

Khamis claims that leaving the cups clean means “to do good deeds” (ibid. 81), but that interpretation seems incorrect. The image of cleaning one’s cup before going to sleep symbolises purification: settling up with all the close ones, balancing the accounts, contemplating the life and preparing to leave it. Tea in the cups has been the life that the speaker and his/her partner have been enjoying, and now it is time to finish the tea.

‘The half circle that remains’ is linked with the previous image of the poem, where the speaker memorises him/herself swinging *zaidi ya nusu duara* ‘further than a half circle’. The image of swinging high illustrates the lively times of their most active years. The shape of the poem is that of a half circle, and it is the predominant shape in the poem. Even the phonetic scenery supports the image strongly: transverse alliteration with the phoneme /u/ is used a lot, creating a soft atmosphere.⁵⁶ The vowel /u/ is used 83 times altogether (which makes 10% of the 837 phonemes in the poem), whereas for example in *Mto Nili* the vowel constitutes only 6% of the phonemes. The form of the grapheme <u> resembles

⁵⁶ The notation /u/ stands for the phoneme, i.e. the sound of the letter *u* in Swahili. The notation <u> stands for the grapheme, i.e. the appearance of the letter on the page.

a swing, strengthening the image also visually. The team play of content, auditory and visual sides makes the poem a very intense reading experience.

The phonetic atmosphere of the poem is altered along with the contentual changes in the lines. The frequency of the phoneme /u/ is high in the first four lines, which depict the peaceful sitting and enjoying of tea and the view of children playing:

*Wakati tunywapo chai hapa upenuni
Na kuwatazama watoto wetu
Wakicheza bembea kwa furaha
Tujue kamba ya bembea yetu*

While we drink tea here on the porch
And watch our children
Swinging cheerfully
We know: the rope of our swing⁵⁷

The use of the word *bembea* as a verb and a noun is interesting, because the more common word for swinging in Swahili is *pembea* (for both the verb and the noun; some dictionaries also mention *bembea* especially for the verb).⁵⁸ The choice of the first letter may be influenced by the popular *taarab*-song⁵⁹ *Bembeya mtoto* ‘A Baby Swing’ by Ali Mkali. The choice of the phoneme /b/ might also allude to *-bembeleza* ‘soothe, quieten’ (often used for babies by their mothers), supporting the peaceful atmosphere. Furthermore, the phoneme /b/ seems to be very common in Kikerewe, the mother tongue of Kezilahabi, though /p/ also occurs in the language (Odden 1996: 111-149).

The phoneme /b/ as such is soft and relaxing. It resembles the peaceful ripple of a lake, the softness of a warm bath, and the gentle movement of the warm tea in a cup. The frequency of /b/ is quite high for a consonant in the whole poem: 27 times (2.2% of the phonemes), whereas for example in *Nenda Ukanywe!* ‘Go to Drink!’ it is used only 12 times (1.7% of

⁵⁷ Another possible translation ‘Let us know that the rope of our swing’.

⁵⁸ According to Lodhi, *-bembea* is not Swahili at all (personal communication, February 2006). Johnson’s *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (1939) does not mention either a noun or a verb *bembea*, neither does Madan’s *Swahili-English Dictionary* (2000, 1st publ. 1903) in the sense of swing. Baba Malaika’s *Modern Swahili-Modern English* (1991) mentions both *bembea* and *pembea* for both the verb and the noun, and *Swahili-Suomi-Swahili –sanakirja* (‘The Swahili-Finnish-Swahili Dictionary’, 2002) mentions *-bembea* for the verb and *pembea* for the noun.

⁵⁹ *Taarab* is a Swahili music genre in which rhythmic poems are sung to melodies spiced with many different cultures, such as Arabic, Indian, and Egyptian. *Taarab* is extremely popular in Zanzibar, but has spread also as far as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, and Mozambique.

the phonemes). The soft impression is strengthened by the use of reduplication, for example in *tujilambelambe* ‘we suck the taste’ and in the subsequent word, *utamuuutamu* ‘sweetness or a good taste’. The reduplication of verbs is common, and is used to express many things.⁶⁰ However, the reduplication of *utamu*, which means sweetness as such, is rare, and Kezilahabi has probably used it just for the aesthetic quality: to further the leniency of the line *Baada ya hapo tujilambelambe utamuutamu* (‘When we have sucked the sweet taste’).

The auditory landscape returns to quite a gentle style later in the poem, but changes into a harder one after the quoted first four lines. “Harder” phonemes, such as /i/ and /d/, are prevalent in the next two lines. Yet most striking is the occurrence of the vowel /o/, which is used six times in the last four-word line (and once just at the end of the previous line): *Imeshalika na imenanza kuoza / Na bado kidogo tutaporomoka*. ‘[The rope] [h]as already worn through and started to rot / After a short while we will fall down.’ In Swahili the grapheme <o> always corresponds with the same phoneme /o/, making this line auditorily very repetitive. The chopping rhythm underscores the image of the dangerously worn out rope, imitating the fast heartbeats of a threatened, or a knife cutting the rope.

The wearing away of the rope is interestingly connected to water: the rope is told not only to be worn through, but also to have started to *-oza* ‘rot’. Rotting does not take place without moisture, and therefore water is not only a positive image in *Chai ya Jioni*. Then again, making the rope would not have been possible without water (that is needed in the first place to grow the local fiber plant, such as sisal). Besides, even though rotting speeds up the wear and tear process, the rope would be worn out anyway. There is a certain amount of tea for every drinker and certain amount of swings for every rope.

The repetition of the grapheme <o> is also a visual allusion: the grapheme is a circle, symbolising the completing of life. On the other hand, the roundness of /o/ is produced at the auditory level, too: when articulated, the mouth forms the shape of <o>. The young half circle of the swing becomes round like <o> and /o/, and the swinging is over. The

⁶⁰ It can define various phases of intensiveness: on one hand it can underscore the meaning contained in the word, on the other it can lessen the force of the word. It is also used to express continuation of the action, or the idea of distributiveness. (Lodhi 2004: 147-149.)

shape of a circle can be found also in the form of the teacups in the poem. The carrying of the images of circles and half-circles in *Chai ya Jioni* is brilliant. As the auditory changes, the alteration of the visual aspects goes hand in hand with the contentual transitions. In the second stanza – right after the harsh notion of the rope being worn out soon, but separated by the far-detaching stanza break – the speaker steeped him/herself in recollecting the time when the swing moved far and lightly, and the whole stanza uses the grapheme <u> quite a lot. Its use is most pronounced in the first line with seven <u> graphemes: *Kulikuwa na wakati ulinisukuma juu* ‘There was a time when it pushed me upwards’.

According to Wamitila (1998: 87), the image of a circle occurs frequently in *Nagona* and *Mzingile*, too. Kezilahabi has talked in an interview about the *mzunguko* ‘a circuit, round’ of searching the truth (Diegner 2005: 32). In *Chai ya Jioni* the circle represents after-life, contrasted to the inescapable incompleteness of life, which is illustrated by the half-circle. On the other hand, the search for the completeness of the circle – life – is close to the search for truth. The shape of a half-circle and the steady to-and-fro, up-and-down movement of the swing can also be seen referring to waves, which fits the wet image of living as drinking one’s tea. The image of a whole circle is also close to water: water cycle is a common metaphor in literature. The circulation of water has been used as a religious symbol of ascent of human beings, such as dew returning to its heavenly origin. (Dickson 1987: 1-10.) Similarly the whole circle as the image of completed life in *Chai ya Jioni*, together with the wet image of drinking tea as the image of life, can be seen to refer to a completed water-cycle.

Drying to Death

Like in *Mgomba*, in most of Kezilahabi’s poems the lack of water identifies the lack of life. In *Nenda Ukanywe!* ‘Go to Drink!’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 30), the furious energy of the first stanza shifts into the passive suffering and infirmity of the future in the second stanza where the speaker sees him/herself drying: *Nitakapokuwa nikikauka kwa wakati* ‘When I will be drying by the time’. The expression illustrates at the same time the physical drying out of the skin and body of old people, and the drying up of the mental strength. The

impression of drying is strengthened by the use of consonance, i.e. the repetition of the “dry” consonant /k/ in every word of the line, seven times in the four words.⁶¹

The prevailing consonant in the poem, however, is /n/: it occurs as many as 72 times, constituting 10% of all phonemes of the poem, which is a lot for a consonant. In comparison, in *Chai ya Jioni* the consonant /n/ is used less by a half: 43 times, 5% of the phonemes. Furthermore, the prevalence of the phoneme /ng/ catches the ear. The phoneme occurs 11 times (3%) in *Nenda Ukanywe!*, whereas in *Chai ya Jioni* it is used only four times (1%). The phoneme /n/ and in particular the phoneme /ng/ resemble the sound of groaning of children, or very tired people – when one is not capable of speaking. In *Nenda Ukanywe!* the phonemes create an image of terrible thirst, and suffering, as well as tiredness in the last stanzas. The auditory atmosphere is as inconsolable as the content. Unlike in an idiomatic use of the word *maji* ‘water’, when it represents being absolutely tired (as remarked on page 4), here the *lack* of water illustrates the overall exhaustion, being both physically dead tired and mentally clapped-out.

Interestingly, the passivity that is foreboding death, is not connected with complete absence of any moist, but with the lack of pure water: *Nitakapokuwa marashi, damu, vidonda* ‘When I will be perfume, blood, wounds’. The word *marashi* can refer either to perfume or a milder version of that, scented water, but both are degrees of the same phase – the water is getting turbid and scarce.

The four stanzas of the poem are not separated with line spaces, so it would be possible to speak about a single stanza. Nonetheless, the indented words divide the parts, and each part or stanza has a different tone and a different phase of life. The first is thus full of energy, fighting against the sickness or drying, which has perhaps already started: the worms in the

⁶¹ Tsur notes that the phoneme /k/ correlates positively with aggressive poems in a variety of languages (Tsur 1992: 9); he also finds the phoneme “hard” and strong” (ibid. 184). However, in Kezilahabi’s poems the phoneme /k/ seems to have the quality of dryness. The impression is strengthened by the fact that the most common words referring to dryness start with /k/: *-kavu* ‘dry’ (adjective), *-kauka* ‘dry’ (verb). The attributes attached to the phonemes are impossible to fully separate from the content and connotations of the words; as Shoptaw puts it, the words in poetry “come with their feelings and associations attached” (Shoptaw 1994: 174). On the other hand, *Nenda Ukanywe!* is also aggressive, and the aggression can be seen as connected with the dryness, supporting Tsur’s arguments.

brain have *wakati wa joto* ‘hot times’ and the heating refers to drying. The second stanza presents a passive phase, the submitting to the approaching death. The third phase depicts time after death. Now there is water only in *[m]achozzi juu ya kaburi langu* ‘[t]eardrops on my grave’. The message of the speaker is the same as in the title of the poem: *Nenda ukanywe!* ‘Go to drink!’ Even though the word *maji* ‘water’ is not even mentioned in the poem, all the references to water are most crucial in the poem. As the last three lines tell in allegories, the death is irrevocable. The speaker appears to suggest that one should not waste scarce water in the form of teardrops – they do not help anybody – but keep the water, the life, in him/herself instead, drink all the energy of life that is available.

In the poem *Ukucha wa Mbwa* ‘The Claw of a Dog’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 25, not included in the appendix), the absence of water is connected with misery and poverty. The poor woman is described by the line *Haoni mvua haoni chakula* ‘She does not see rain, she does not see food’. Withal, the woman is paradoxically believed to be connected with rain: *Wengi kijijini wakaamini / Kwamba aliangukwa na mvua / Kutoka juu angani / Ingawa walifahamu alizaliwa*. ‘Many people in the village believed / That she was dropped by rain / From the sky / Even though they understood that she was born.’

In *Tunatazamana* ‘We Look at Each Other’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 65-66), drying of the nature represents colonialism. The colonialists are depicted to be powerful enough to control even the sun, and to cause harm either because of lack of understanding, or lack of caring (emphasis added):

*Akayawasha majani **makavu**
Yakawaka kuwasha kuni **kavu**
Zilizokaushwa na ndimi za jua **kali**
Lililotundikwa hewani kwa **kejeli na wakoloni.***

He [the father] set the **dry** leaves on fire
They caught fire and set fire to the **dry** wood
Which was **dried** by the tongues of the **hard** sun
That was hung up in the air ironically by the colonisers.⁶²

⁶² *Kwa kejeli* could also be translated as ‘as mockery’ or ‘just to make fun of them’, for example: ‘That was hung up in the air as mockery by the colonizers.’ According to Lodhi, the translation ‘ironically’ nevertheless is the most appropriate (personal communication, February 2006).

The expression *jua kali* ‘hard sun’ is also used in Kenya for a small business that is operated “under the hard sun”, for example along the road, in order to survive. This connotation, though not Tanzanian, may be present in the poem: the hard economic situation in which the *jua kali* workers toil may be seen as influenced by the colonialism. However, the literal sense of the ‘hard sun’ is present, too. The adjective *-kavu* ‘dry’ is used twice, and the verb *-kausha* ‘dry’ once; besides, the word *-kali* ‘hard’ alliterates with them. Similarly to *Nenda Ukanywe!*, the consonant /k/ occurs frequently – 13 times in these four lines, 12% of the phonemes – and as in *Nenda Ukanywe!*, it is associated with the image of dryness.

The drought is used to represent colonialism in Somali poetry, too. The most important Somali poem about imperialism, *Jowhariyo Luula*, composed in 1955, uses the image several times. The first reference is paradoxical and thence emphasises that water is used in a symbolical meaning: “My throat is parched whilst heavy showers fall”. The second mention implies that the subdued still have power: “I [had to] chase hyenas away with hot water”. Third reference is, however, hopeless, linking the image of water to the geographical loss: “the ocean and shore are lost from me”. The fourth passage connects the concrete image of “eyes which once sparkled” but have now “all dried up” to the abstract state of having no prospect. (Johnson 1996: 97-100.) However, it is significant that *Tunatazamana* does not present drying as merely negative: when the leaves and wood are dry, they are easier to set on fire. On the other hand, the fire – especially *moto wa matumaini* ‘the fire of hope’ – is expressly a way to *get rid* of the dry leaves and dry wood; a way to get rid of the consequences of colonialism.

In the poem *Mto wa Haki* ‘The River of Justice’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 17-18), the absence of water is connected with death in a very original way: dying is presented as solidifying that takes place within water – the dying person turns suddenly into a solid stone in a river, like melted tin when poured into water. This otherwise highly metaphorical image bears in mind the physiological fact that human beings are for the most part (60-70%) made of water, and that this liquid nature of us is essential for staying alive.

5 DREAMS IN WATER

Power and Dangers

As Johnson's in A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary (1939) remarks, the expression - *nywa maji* 'drink water' is used also in the meaning 'go on strike, disobey, rebel'. The image of water is connected to rebellion also in the legend of Kinjeketile and the Maji Maji uprising in the beginning of the 20th century: it was believed that the special water protected the men from bullets – the bullets were believed to turn into water. This connotation of water is used in a poem of an anonymous Swahili writer, which encourages to *maji eneza!* 'spread the water!' (Biersteker 1996: 177). Equating the spreading of water with the spreading of rebellion illustrates the power of water: water can have great force and be frightening. The mere depth of water, especially oceans, can fill with awe, and tidal waves or floods can destroy lives. The might of water offers tools for highly symbolical images, which can be found for example in psalms: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come in deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (Psalm 69.)

The great force of water has often been used in Somali poetry to illustrate calamities. Tidal waves often symbolise the civil war and the political crisis in Somalia: *Dadkiinnii wakaa / sidoo daad la tegey / dalanbaabbigee* 'Look where is now your nation/ that wept by the tidal wave / wavers, totters', Amran Maxamed Axmed writes in her *hees* (a type of poetry that includes e.g. work songs and other lighter poems) named *Duco iyo Habaar* 'Blessing and Curse' (Tiilikainen, Axmed & Lilius 2001: 209-212). In a similar way, the power of water can illustrate personal grief, for instance in the classical poem "Poet's Lament on the Death of His Wife" by Raage Ugaas: "like a well which has broken its sides or a river which has overflowed its bank [- -] Yesterday my lamentations drove sleep from all the camp" (Andrzejewski & Lewis 1964: 64). In Arabic poetry, for its part, the dramatic, devastating power of rain is often present (Eksell 1997).

Similarly, water has power in Swahili poetry. In his poem *Vitarudia* ‘Things Will Return’ modern poet Alamin Mazrui illustrates how people will get their rights after all, with the lines:

*Mito kwa furaha ikimiminika
Maziwa yaliyokitwa yakakitika
Na bahari zipovukazo katika zake haraka*

When the rivers joyfully pour out
When the firm lakes splash up
And when the sea crosses itself quickly

(Mazrui 1988: 6)

Abdulaziz Lodhi’s (1986: 47) poem *Fikra kwa Tungo za Uwili* ‘Thoughts on the Paired Style’ creates an image of *safari baharini / hatari za majini* ‘travelling by the sea / dangers in the water’. Michael Ferber (1999: 179) argues that the sea has always been seen as alien and dangerous in literatures. According to Lodhi, in Tanzania this is more common among the writers living by the sea, such as in Zanzibar where he comes from. They have experienced storms and know the dangers of seawater.⁶³

Lake Victoria as the largest lake in Africa is not very far from a sea. Accordingly, Kezilahabi, too, uses images of forceful water, and the setting is often in particular a lake. The might of the water masses is illustrated impressively in *Upepo wa Wakati* ‘Wind of Time’, particularly in the raging lines *Yakipanda na kushuka. Yakivimba, / Yakiviringika, yakigongana na kutoa povu* ‘Raising and lowering. Expanding, / Rotating, colliding and bringing about foam’.

Rain, which is a positive image for example in *Kilio Kijijini* ‘Mourning in a Village’, is used ambiguously in some poems of Kezilahabi. As Ferber (1999: 164) notes, rain can act as a synecdoche for bad weather in general, and that makes it a symbol of hardships in literature. This fits the description of the poor, suffering woman in *Ukucha wa Mbwa* ‘The Claw of a Dog’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 25, not included in the appendix): she is believed to have been *aliangushwa na mvua / Kutoka juu angani* ‘dropped by rain / From the sky’. In

⁶³ In Lodhi’s own poetry water is not associated with life, with one exception – in the poem *Tuna Jukumu Kubwa Jamani!* ‘We Have a Big Responsibility, My Goodness!’ Lodhi writes *pawepo maji ya kuchota / kwa wajao wetu waladi* ‘let there be water to fetch / for the generations to come’ (Lodhi 1986: 24).

Kezilahabi's short story *Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi* 'Mayai – Minister of Illnesses' (2004: 63-77) rain is connected with a frightening atmosphere, bad weather in general, and the dead.⁶⁴

Notwithstanding, the most common danger related to water in Kezilahabi's poem is drowning. As observed in the subchapter "Turbulent, Lusting Life", in *Mto Nili* 'The Nile' the image of drowning represents (also) the passing of time, the creating of history, but in other poems the image is menacing, or directly violent. In *Upepo wa Wakati* 'The Wind of Time' drowning illustrates an extreme emergency: *Kama mzamaji, mguu wa rafikiye, ashikavyo!* 'Like a drowning person, how he grips the leg of his friend!' In *Uvuaji wa Samaki Victoria* 'Fishing in Lake Victoria' (Kezilahabi 1974: 9), drowning is also grieved. In *Mto wa Haki* 'The River of Justice' the main character is afraid of even entering water: *Alianza kuogopa asije akamtupa majini. / Alianza kumwomba atembe polepole.* 'He started to fear that he would be thrown into the water. / He started to ask the man to walk slowly.'

In *Jinamizi* 'Nightmare' (Kezilahabi 1974: 1-2), there is no drowning, but in the first stanza the water is a suppressing material. Even the fish feel suffocated, which is presented in the paradoxical lines *[s]amaki ambaye, kupata hewa, / Aliinua kichwa chake juu ya maji* '[F]ish which, in order to get air, / Raise its head from the water'. It appears that the fish is suppressed by the fishers in a canoe, who are controlling the fish: *macho yao wameyakazia majini* '[they are s]taring into the water'.⁶⁵

The image of *fuvu la kichwa* 'an empty shell of the head' is connected to politicians (by the references to government and *siasa kwa ujumla* 'politics in general'), illustrating them being mere tools in the hands of someone else, or being not knowledgeable. The first stanza can be seen depicting the neo-colonial situation: the original inhabitants, the fish, cannot breath freely, since even if they are on home ground – or rather, in home water – their situation is critical. The people above them are just *fishing* for benefits for themselves

⁶⁴ Mayai is the name of the main character, but the word also means 'eggs'. The short story was first published in a newspaper in 1978, and as Bertoncini-Zúbková notes, it was probably written in the same period as some of Kezilahabi's poems in *Karibu Ndani* (Bertoncini- Zúbková 2004: 39).

⁶⁵ Literal translation of *macho yao wameyakazia majini*: [their eyes they have riveted upon the water].

– the white colonialists are exploiting the original inhabitants, the fish. The fishers are both *weusi* ‘black’ and *weupe* ‘white’, which probably refers to the black servants or assistants of the colonialists.

The second stanza dramatically changes the static atmosphere of the first stanza. There is a great amount of action, and the choice of words, such as *mara* ‘suddenly’ and *-kimbilika kwa fujo* ‘invade fiercely’ accentuates the great speed of the incidents. Crocodiles invaded the canoe of the fishers, the canoe was split, and *wakatatuliwa / Vipande, vipande* ‘they were ripped / In pieces, pieces’. The passage is ambiguous: the predicate *wakatatuliwa* ‘(they) were ripped’ can refer either to the crocodiles or to the fishers, or perhaps both (however, not to the boat, which the reader might assume). In a way it is compatible with the dreamlike qualities and the high speed of the poem that it is not clear who is ripped.

The relationship between the fish and the crocodiles is complicated. The crocodiles come from the same water as the fish, and on one hand they invade and break the canoe, breaking the static domination by the people above. On the other hand, they are ripped themselves (if the predicate is interpreted to refer to the crocodiles), and it is only after that when the fish *waliinua / Vichwa vyao juu ya maji / Na pamoja wakaimba wimbo wa Uhuru* ‘raised their / Heads from the water / And sung together the song of Freedom’. Therefore the crocodiles might depict violent overtakers: overtaking the decayed rulers, but being decayed, just hungry for power, themselves. The overtakers are frightening, they have sharp teeth, but they help the fish to get freedom – being (possibly) destroyed themselves.

The canoe and the crocodiles are demolished, but the nightmare is not over. In the distance there are *majitu* ‘giants’, and in the water there are more crocodiles. Even though *kutoka bahari / La magharibi washairi walikuwa / Wameanza kuimba juu ya kifo cha wadhalimu* ‘in the western sea / The poets had started to / Sing of the death of the oppressors’, the speaker is afraid of both the crocodiles and the giants. The title of the poem, *Jinamizi* (‘Nightmare’), is not only metaphorical: the poem has several elements of a typical nightmare dream. There is the peculiarity of fish not able to breath in the water; the quick action; the obscure, baffling messages – the giants are depicted to laugh [*k*] *icheko*

kilichoonekana kutokuwa na maana ‘[a] laughter that seemed not to have a meaning’ and to shake their heads in a way that *haikueleweka maana* ‘was not understandable’.

The scary creatures – giants and crocodiles – are also a trademark of nightmares. The idea of beings particularly attached to water masses seems to be intrinsic in all the mythologies: anthropologist Veronica Strang (2004: 69) notes that “[i]t is hard to find any cultural body of mythology without lurking water creatures of one sort or another: serpents, kraken, devil fish, giant octopi and other leviathans – these ideas run deep”. Our minds are inseparable from myths: as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argues, “myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of it” (qtd. e.g. in Leitch 1983: 19).

While reading the poem aloud, the clearest single consonant that remains in the echo memory, and on the lips and in the throat alike, is /m/. It is most frequent in the first stanza (constituting 8% of the phonemes; 7% in the second and 6% in the third stanza). The phoneme, which resembles for example the sound of an engine starting, seems to imply pent-up power – which in the second stanza emerges in the form of the fierce crocodiles. The phoneme /m/, followed by /a/, also begins the three central words in the poem, the three dangers: *mafuvu* ‘empty shells’ *mamba* ‘crocodiles’, and *majitu* ‘giants’. In the second stanza the frequency of verbs is high – eleven predicates in just three sentences – imitating the swift movement of the water.

Water in *Jinamizi* is portrayed to involve great dangers, but on the other hand, it also has hope. The poets that *[w]ameanza kuimba juu ya kifo cha wadhalimu* ‘[s]tarted to sing of the death of the suppressors’, are situated in *bahari la magharibi* ‘the western sea’. Here again, the image is confusing: if one assumes that the actions are located in East Africa, there is no ‘western sea’ within reach. However, *bahari la magharibi* can refer to the Atlantic Ocean that is the western sea to Africa as a continent, or in general to the west. The image of the western poets singing about ‘the death of the suppressors’ while the people, for example the speaker of the poem, are still afraid and living in the middle of the crocodiles and giants, might allude to the neo-colonial situation. The state of affairs is not easy or simple (especially as early as in the beginning of the 1970’s, since Tanzania became independent only in 1961).

As the first poem in Kichomi, *Jinamizi* also in a way sets the pace, or gives a foretaste of, the whole collection. The image of water in the poem, too, kind of summarises the image of water in the collection. It presents many sides: on one hand there are the scary creatures, on the other the songs of freedom and of the death of suppressors come from the water, as well. In the end, water illustrates life or the world – with all the chaos and dangers, water is the only place in which fish can live.

Dreams and Dissolving

While in *Jinamizi* ‘Nightmare’ the whole poem is a dream, many other poems of Kezilahabi are dream-like, or include references to hallucination. Graziella Acquaviva remarks this in her article *Jazanda ya Njozi Katika Baadhi ya Mashairi ya Euphrase Kezilahabi* [‘Oneiric Images in Some of the Poems of Euphrase Kezilahabi’]: *Njozi za ulimwengu zinazojitokeza katika ushairi wa Kezilahabi zinafanana sana na zile za mtu anayeweweseka akiwa usingizini* ‘Dreams (/visions) of the world that take place in Kezilahabi’s poetry, resemble closely those which people have while they sleep’ (Acquaviva 2004: 69). Some of these dreams in the poems are connected to water.

The dreamlike qualities are common in Kezilahabi’s poetry, but they are also present in the latter prose works of his. The first four novels of Kezilahabi (from Rosa Mistika, 1971, to Gamba la Nyoka, 1979) are quite realistic and situated in Ukerewe, Kezilahabi’s home region. In contrast to that, the setting in the novels Nagona (1990) and Mzingile (1991) is “a description of symbolic landscapes beyond space and time” (Diegner 2002: 46). The short story *Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi* ‘Mayai – Minister of Illnesses’ uses three different levels: reality, unreality, and dream world. Interestingly, water in a way acts as the vehicle for transition to the dream world: as Bertoncini-Zúbková (2004: 40) notes, the “transition from reality to unreality is marked by darkness and the nasty weather”, and the nastiness of weather means mainly rain.

Likewise, in Arabic poetry the effect created by the movement of water – the glittering – can indicate “the transformation of reality into illusion” (Eksell 1997: 54). This corresponds with the fact that in Arabic poetry the optical effects are “all-important”: for example water is commonly depicted glittering like gold or diamonds (ibid. 1997: 22). In Kezilahabi’s poetry the other properties of water are more important than the optical side. In reality, too, it is particularly the immersion in water that has physiological effects in human beings, and that offers great possibilities for poetic symbolism. Immersing in water causes lowering of heart rate and changes in EEG (Strang 2004: 55). The experience of being in water is intense, but at the same time weakens the observation of other senses besides touch. Strang notes water’s potential to provide an impression of “oneness” with the element (ibid. 57). Considering this common experience, it is an interesting detail that according to botanist S.M. Haslam, the salt content of our body reflects the amount of salt in primeval oceans (Haslam 1991: 1).

In addition to the sensation of being one with water, Strang (2004: 73) notes the presence of water or other fluids in the “most powerful dissolving of boundaries and flowing together” between human beings: the prenatal symbiosis with amniotic fluid, the breast feeding with milk, and the sexual intimacy with semen. This conforms to the connection of water and sexual desires in *Mwamba Ziwani* ‘A Rock in a Lake’. The association of water with the prenatal state may contribute to the common connection of water and childhood, in literature and in people’s minds. In Kezilahabi’s poem *Namagondo* (1974: 67, not included in the appendix) a river named Nabili represents childhood. The speaker thinks back to his/her childhood and asks: *Uko wapi mto Nabili uliokuwa ukifurika* ‘Where is the river Nabili that flooded’ – without a question mark, for the question is rhetoric. Later (s)he continues recollecting: *kelele tukazipiga / Jasho likitutoka Nabili tulijiogea* ‘we were noisy / When the sweat came off in Nabili in which we swam (bathed)’.

Perhaps it is the connection between childhood and water, and water’s ability to soften or even block out most of the perception of outer world, that create the freeing sensation. Many a times it is attached to the feeling of timelessness. The combination is expressed in Kezilahabi’s poem *Karibu Ndani* ‘Welcome Inside’ in the image of everlasting happiness:

Tuna hamu ya kucheza, tupate kukoga karne ‘We have the desire to play, we can bathe for a century’.⁶⁶

The disembodiment sensation of immersion or floating can also be frightening. There is the danger of loss of self: “if control is removed, immersion becomes drowning: the ultimate overwhelming of identity” (Strang 2004: 72). This risk of water illustrates the depth of sleeping in Kezilahabi’s poem *Nondo* ‘Moth’ (1988: 13-15, not included in the appendix): *Ninapotea katika bahari ya ndoto* ‘I disappear inside the sea of dream’. Sometimes the disappearing is at the same time disembodiment, in the form of dissolving, like in *Karibu Ndani* ‘Welcome Inside’: *Sasa fumba yako macho, usione tunavyoyeyuka* ‘Now close your eyes so that you will not see how we are **dissolved**’ (emphasis added). In addition to ‘dissolve’, the verb *-yeyuka* means also ‘melt’ and ‘become fluid’. The word is generally used also metaphorically, such as in Shaaban Robert’s (1994: 28, emphasis added) line *Furaha mara huhama, nyepesi kwa kuyeyuka* ‘Happiness suddenly moves away, quickly by **melting** away’.

The scary water creatures in the dream of *Jinamizi* ‘Nightmare’ reveal the possible unconscious fears of the speaker of the poem. Psychoanalysis often illustrates the unconscious with water, and finds them similar. The Freudian theory of the unconscious is filled with hydraulic metaphors. (Strang 2004: 67.) The comparison of water and human mind can illustrate the movement of thoughts, as well as the depth of potentiality. Iba Ndiaye Diadji (2003: 276, italics added) also finds the human being and water alike: “being, *in its natural state, which is water*, is aesthetically as well as spiritually immeasurable”.

⁶⁶ Another possible, and more literal, translation: ‘We have the desire to play so that we can bathe for a century’.

Steamed into Hallucination

Besides the dreamlikeness, Kezilahabi's poems on occasion resemble and/or depict hallucination. The same seems to apply to some of the prose works, too: Diegner (2005: 26) describes the novel *Nagona* to be "written in a puzzling style between realism and hallucination". In most cases that is a literary means, but Kezilahabi, in his article "The Swahili Novel and the Common Man in East Africa", notes the commonness of the use of opium in reality, too: "The common man becomes frustrated. [- -] he starts smoking opium." (Kezilahabi 1980: 82.)

Intriguingly, most of the depictions of hallucinations in Kezilahabi's poems are associated with a liquid. Water and hallucination have a connection in reality, too: as Strang (2004: 55) notes, long immersions in water produce people visual and auditory hallucinations. On the other hand, hallucinations also occur in the case of dehydration, if 10% of body fluid is lost (ibid. 59). The poem *Nenda Ukanywe!* 'Go to Drink!' could be read bearing that in mind, especially the beginning:

*Mafunza wameniingia bongoni
Nao wakati wa joto wachezapo mchezo
Wao ndani ya nyumba hii ya mawazo
Hunifanya kama mwehu*

Worms have invaded into my brain
They have hot times while playing their game
In the house of thoughts
They make me insane

The hallucination-like atmosphere in the passage, in which the speaker experiences things that cannot be real, could be linked up with the consequences of dehydration, since the poem has references to drying (as observed in the subchapter "Drying to Death").

In *Kichwa na Mwili* 'Head and Body' (Kezilahabi 1974: 16) the speaker of the poem is not immersed, either – (s)he only dreams of that: *ningeoga damu na maji* 'I would bathe in blood and water'. The hallucination in the poem is nevertheless linked with a liquid, or the smell of that: the smell of blood. The hallucinatory experience is possibly even caused by the smell:

*Bunduki! Harufu ya damu kutoka kusini!
Polepole kichwa kinalegea, harufu kama moshi
Wa bangi inaingia kichwani – chuki kama chongo na moshi.*

A Rifle! The smell of blood from the south!
Slowly my head relapses, the smell like the smoke
Of marijuana enters my head – annoyance, like one-eyed in smoke.

The smell of blood is compared with the smell of marijuana, and the results are corresponding – the speaker starts to hallucinate, and thinks that (s)he is without head, but yet hears and sees things: *Bila kichwa ninasikia haki mwili mzima / Na ninaona haja ya kushika bunduki*. ‘Without head I hear the justice with the whole body / I see the need to catch a rifle.’ The hearing and especially the seeing in this case could be interpreted merely metaphorically, not referring to actual perception; similarly, the expression ‘without head’ could be possible to interpret just to symbolise non-rational, emotional thinking or confidence. These meanings are present in the poem, but in my view the literal level of the hallucination is illustrative, and makes the poem stronger.

The personality of the speaker seems to change during the third stanza, in which (s)he smells the blood. In the first stanza of the poem the content of the speech is crude, but the effect is softened by the use of conditional mood: *Ningekuwa askari [- -]* ‘If I were a soldier [- -]’. In the second stanza the speaker even notes reasons for avoiding blood to be shed: *Inasemekana, sadaka kukataliwa / Damu ya mwanadamu ilitetemesha mbingu*. ‘It is said that ritual sacrifice is refused / Blood of people made heaven shake.’ In contrast to that, in the third and especially in the fourth stanza the attitude is very sharp and commanding, including lines such as the first line: *Usiniambie zaidi! Usinisihi!* ‘Do not tell me more! Do not beg!’

The use of punctuation underlines the radical stand: the exclamation mark is used five times in the last stanza, and twice in the preceding (third) stanza. Since the last stanza only has eight sentences, five of eight of its sentences are exclamations. In comparison to that, the first two stanzas do not employ exclamation marks at all. Even the question *Nikifa je!* ‘What if I die!’ is ended with an exclamation mark, in the way that *je*, the word marking the sentence as question, seems to be added to intensify the remark, in defiance. Shoptaw

(1995: 221) notes that non-alphabetic characters, such as punctuation marks, influence the production of meaning, as well. Moreover, he argues that “[f]lowing and stopping also characterize modes of being and behaving: smooth and rough, elegant (graceful) and rude (awkward), romantic and realist, diffuse and concentrated [- -]” (ibid. 217). In *Kichwa na Mwili* ‘Head and Body’, especially in the last (or last two) lines, the “mode of being and behaving” is “rough”, “rude”, and “concentrated”; perhaps “realist” as well (at least in contrast to “romantic”), despite the hallucinatory references.

Whereas in *Kichwa na Mwili* Kezilahabi refers to *bangi* ‘marijuana or hemp’, in two other poems he writes about *kasumba* ‘opium’. Interestingly, the word *kasumba* does not mean only opium or other drugs. Kamusi ya Maana na Matumizi (‘Dictionary of Meaning and Use’, 1992) defines *kasumba* as follows: 1. *bangi, hashishi, afyuni*. 2. *mawazo na fikira za kibeberu na kikoloni* ‘1. hemp or marijuana, hashis, opium. 2. imperialistic and colonialistic ideas and thoughts.’⁶⁷ The latter sense resembles the Marxist idea of religion as the opium of the people. The word *kasumba* once again illustrates the depth of images: both the literal and the metaphorical meanings can be harnessed. The sense of restricting or cloaking the field of vision is strongly present in the poem *Moshi Ukizidi Pangoni* ‘When Smoke Increases in the Cave’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 11, not included in the appendix). The poem depicts the traditionalist poets as stubborn diehards who stay in a cave: *Kweli wali hawaioni, kasumba iliyowasuka* ‘Really they do not see it, opium that twines (/twists/plaits, braids) them’.

The poem *Tunatazamana* ‘We Look at Each Other’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 65-66) is a fascinating mixture of imaginative illusion and concrete everydayness. The first four lines of the second stanza ground the hallucinatory passage of the stanzas from second to fourth:

Polepole maji yalianza kuzunguka
Kufuata mwendo tukazungusha vichwa vyetu.
Mvuke wa kasumba ukaanza kutoka
Tukatoa vichwa vyetu ukapita [- -]

⁶⁷ Swahili-Suomi-Swahili –sanakirja (‘The Swahili-Finnish-Swahili Dictionary’, 2002) defines the word as follows: “*Kasumba*: 1. opium 2. the way of thinking that is against the traditional way, a consequence of colonialism, or trace of colonialist propaganda.” This definition remarks better the fact that colonialism has also left traces that are not conscious.

Slowly the water started to go round and round
Following the way we moved our heads round.
Steam of opium started to come out
It passed into our heads [- -]

Despite the line ‘steam of opium started to come out’ and the following hallucination, the daydream is purely imagined: *unga wa uganga* ‘the healing powder’ that the father is told to fetch and add into the water (and which the reader at first suggests to be some herbal narcotic), turns out to be corn flour – they are preparing *ugali* ‘maize porridge’!

Even the revelation of the everyday level is started with a mysterious way, divulging the concrete side of the image in the fifth line of the fifth stanza:

*Kitu kama muujiza kikaanza kutokea.
Baada ya mda mfupi akatoa
Kitu kimoja kiitwacho ugali.*

A miraculous thing started to appear.
After a short while he took out
The thing that is called *ugali* [maize porridge].

The action in the poem thus takes place merely in the imagination of the narrator. The speaker is apparently a child, since (s)he refers to *baba* ‘father’, and tells that (s)he has small mouth and small palms.

Though being imagined, the whole dream is connected with the water that is heated in the cauldron. It is noteworthy that the circulation of water in the poem is told to *follow* the movement of the heads – implying that the water represents the thoughts or imagination of the people. The water starts to bubble at the end of the first stanza, and in the beginning of the second stanza the water vapour is equated with the steam of opium. The succeeding visions are connected to the changes of the water that is being heated. The clouds in the beginning of the dream – *tukauona / Unapanda juu katika mawingu ya udanganyifu* ‘we saw you / You ride upon the clouds of deceitfulness’ – refer to the steam. Next the water is told *kufanya vilima* ‘to form hills’ and *kupasuka* ‘to burst out’, which describes the beginning of boiling. That is followed by the lines *Baada ya mda mfupi askari wakali / Walianza kucheza majini bila mpango* ‘Soon after that severe soldiers / Started to play in the water without order’, miming the movement of the water. The movement, and perhaps

voice, too, of the (soon) boiling water is illustrated by the line *Halafu askari wakawa wacheza ngoma* ‘The soldiers started to dance’.

The soldiers are described to be moving chaotically: *[w]akaruka juu hewani bila fahamu* ‘[they were j]umping in the air without sense’, *[w]akaruka hata nje ya sufuria, wakatuchoma* ‘even jumped out from the cauldron, burning us’. This image uses the motive power of the dangerous and uncontrollable side of water. The depiction of the scary dance in the cauldron – *mapinduzi!* ‘revolution!’ – conveys a story of either fear or experience of the speaker: the frightening soldiers who create chaos and (try to) harm the speaker and his/her family. Since the first line of the poem mentions that *Mama alikuwa ameuawa na wazungu* ‘Mum was killed by white people’, the speaker has probably experienced the disturbance depicted. The equation of the movement of the water and the memory may be a way to process the trauma. The addressing of the hallucinated character – *tukauona / Unapanda juu katika mawingu ya udanganyifu* ‘we saw you / Riding upon the clouds of deceitfulness’ – implies that the speaker or his/her family have been betrayed.⁶⁸

In *Tunatazamana* the powerful water is tamed by the corn flour, which the father sprinkles into the water. At first it escalates chaos: the soldiers *wakaanza kuruka / Kama wagonjwa waliopagawa waachapo na shetani* ‘started to jump / Like ill, possessed people when Satan leaves them’. With the help of more corn flour the soldiers finally calm down. Interestingly, in a line the flour is called *unga wa ujamaa* ‘the flour of *ujamaa*’. *Ujamaa* refers to the socialist politics of Julius Nyerere and is hard to translate, but can also mean ‘familyhood’ or ‘brotherhood’ in general. Even though this line sees the ‘*ujamaa* flour’ as the way to calm the situation, criticism towards the *ujamaa* politics is to follow.

In the last stanza the speaker brings up the problem of differences between people:

Lakini kitu kimoja niliogopa daima.

⁶⁸ Even though the the verb combination *tukauona unapanda* means we saw you riding, because the parts of the combination are positioned on different lines, the passage could also be interpreted as ‘We saw you / You are riding [- -]’ Except for the verb *unapanda* ‘you ride upon’ or ‘you ascend’, the whole poem is in the past tense, and therefore the word *unapanda* stands out. It might be interpreted that the speaker of the poem believes that the alluded person is still there ‘upon the clouds of deceitfulness’, but that it was only possible to see him/her during the hallucination.

*Kuna watu wenye viganja vikubwa zaidi.
Vile vile wapo wamezao upesi upesi.*

But one thing I was afraid of all the time.
There are people with very big palms.
Similarly, there are people who swallow very quickly.

The presented dilemma employs the image of eating *ugali*, but represents the implementation of *ujamaa* politics, too. The noble idea, sharing everything, can fail like the eating in a circle: some are quicker or more skilled than the others to exploit the system. Moreover, the adherents of the system behave in an alarming way when the speaker raises the question: *Hao hao walinitazama kwa hasira* ‘They looked at me in anger’. The poem seems to imply that the system of *ujamaa* might have helped something (calming of the water) but there are problems which it does not recognise.⁶⁹

The punctuation in the end of the poem is remarkable. Unlike in the beginning of the poem or in the other poems, the full stop is used a lot. Whereas the stanzas from first to fourth use it from three to four times, the second to last uses the full stop seven times, and the last as many as eight times. Sometimes the full stop is used against the ordinary way, particularly in the lines *Kwa kuwa mimi kinywa changu kizito / Na viganja vyangu vidogo. Mwishowe nilisema*. ‘Because my mouth is slow / And my palms small. I said at last.’ The peculiar punctuation seems to emphasise the confidence and calmness of the speaker, whose attitude and situation is summarised in the last three lines:

*[- -] bila hofu nikawatazama.
Tukatazamana.
Sungura na mbweha.*

[- -] I looked at them without fear.
We looked at each other.
A rabbit and a jackal.

The second to last line has been chosen to be the title, as well, emphasising its importance even more, stressing the prolonging of the gaze. Unlike the hallucinatory middle part of the

⁶⁹ Even though Bertocini sees Kezilahabi more critical towards the realisation of *Ujamaa* politics than the principles of it (Bertocini 1980: 89), the poem’s depiction of the fundamental problem of “eating from the same plate” can also be seen to refer to problems in the core of *Ujamaa* ideology.

poem, the end is lucid. The steam has dispersed, the chaotic water tamed by the flour, reason prevails again.

6 LIQUID ETHICS

Spirits and Judges within Water

In *Tunatazamana* ‘We Look at Each Other’ the father is compared with *mganga azungumzaye na mababu* ‘a medicine man talking with ancestors’ when [*a*]liyakazia maji *macho kwa fikira* ‘[h]is glance was fixed on the water, (deep) in thoughts’. The implication that the spirit of ancestors is connected to water reminds a passage in Birago Diop’s poem *Souffle* ‘Breath’:

Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis
[- -]
Ils sont dans l'eau qui coule,
Ils sont dans l'eau qui dort,
[- -]
Les morts ne sont pas morts.

Those who have passed away are never away
[- -]
They are in the flowing water,
They are in the sleeping water,
[- -]
The dead are not dead.

(Birago Diop 1961: 173)

As Holdstock (2000: 170) notes, in Africa ancestors are often referred to as living dead, indicating that the boundary between death and life is not definitive. The overlapping of life and death can also be seen in Kezilahabi’s novel *Nagona*, in which an old man says: *Nilianza kufa tangu siku niliyozaliwa* ‘I began to die the day I was born’ (Kezilahabi 1990: 21 [qtd. in Diegner 2005: 30]).

Diadji (2003: 274) remarks that water is “always and everywhere imbued with spirituality”. Water is often a religious image in Somali poetry, as for example in the poem “Wish”, where it is used as a simile of God: “You who are like the holy water which the pilgrims bring from Mecca [- -] Oh Lord, how I wish I could swallow you!” (Andrzejewski

& Lewis 1964: 144). Water is generally linked to Paradise, as well. A *heello* depicts Adam and Eve “swimming [peacefully] in Paradise” (Johnson 1996: 10), and another poem describing heaven, “At the Grave of Cilmi Bowndheri” by Maxamed Ibraahim “Hadraawi”, tells that in Paradise the speaker fills his water-pail “from a pool that is ever full” (Andrzejewski & Andrzejewski 1993: 93). The Day of Judgement is, logically, connected to thirsting, for example in the poem named *Alla Bari* ‘To the praise of God’ by Amran Maxamed Axmed: “On the Doomsday / when everyone thirsts”, and contrasted to heaven *webiyadu ordaayeen* “where rivers flow” (Tiilikainen, Axmed & Lilius 2001: 85).

In the spiritual symbolism water is often seen as purifying. In the Bible God is depicted promising Israel, his chosen people: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek. 36: 25). Water is seen as purifying in some of Kezilahabi’s poems, too. *Mto Nili* ‘The Nile’ connects the building of the pyramids with the time *[w]akristu wakioshwa na kutakaswa, na dhambi zikielea mtoni* ‘[w]hen the Christians were washed and **purified**, and the sins directed into the lake’ (emphasis added). Intriguingly, the purifying is dated to the same period in which *huyo nyoka wa uchawi [- -] / Amechomeka mkia wake ziwani* ‘the snake of witchcraft [- -] / With its tail pierced in the lake’. Though the expression ‘tail of the river’ is occasionally used in English, the Swahili equivalent *mkia wa mto* is not used. Thus the image of the river’s “tail” in the poem alludes to the word *nyoka* ‘snake’ in the previous line.

The verb *-chomeka* generally means ‘be burnt’ but can also stand for ‘be pierced’. According to Lodhi, in this line the word means that the tail of the river goes sharply into water (personal communication, February, 2005). Considering the mentioning of *nyoka* ‘a snake’, the connotation of piercing is nevertheless strongly present, since the lines resemble the descriptions of piercing snakes (or sometimes translated into English as ‘dragons’) in the Bible. For example, the “arm of the LORD” is presented to be powerful by asking it rhetorically “Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and *wounded the dragon?*” (Isa. 51: 9, italics added). Furthermore, the succeeding line connects the might of God to water: “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” (Isa. 51: 10).

Similarly to this Isaiah's presentation of God being able not only to pierce huge snakes but also to control the water, in *Mto Nili* the line of piercing is soon (after one line) followed by the line about water (*Wakristu wakioshwa na kutakaswa, na dhambi zikielea mtoni* 'When the Christians were washed and purified, and the sins directed into the lake'). The passive voice of the sentence can be seen alluding that the actor is God, who is thought, in essence, to perform the purifying process.

In *Mto wa Haki* 'The River of Justice' water is portrayed as to be able to purify, but also to judge and punish. The poem is opened with the mentioning of flood: *Mto ulikuwa umefurika, hauvukiki*. 'The river had flooded, was not crossable.' The flood can be seen as metaphorical: for example in the Ancient Egypt, as theologian Robert A. Wild (1981: 28) notes, the flood of the Nile symbolised the "renewal", or even the "rebirth" of the river. The main character in the poem is an immoral man who has subjugated other people. Somehow he senses the power of water and is afraid of it: *Alianza kuogopa asije akamtupa majini. / Alianza kumwomba atembe polepole*. 'He started to fear that he would be thrown into the water. / He started to ask the man to walk slowly.'

Soon the man forgets his fear, and *[p]olepole alianza kujiona mjinga kwa kuogopa / Maji yaliyokuwa yakimtakasa mwenzake* '[s]lowly he started to see himself as a dummy who was scared of / Water that was purifying his companion'. This is the only reference to the purifying ability of water: the companion of the immoral man, the one who is carrying him on his shoulders, is evidently a good man, pure in the heart, but the immoral main character cannot escape the judgement of the water. He is struck by a lightning, and it is only after that when he *[a]lisikia sauti ya haki na usawa wa binadamu: / Kwa mda wa dakika moja alielewa ukweli* 'heard the voice of justice and equality of human beings: / For one minute he understood the truth'. This realisation of the truth is in the next stanza referred to as *Alikuwa ameona kivuli chake majini* 'He had seen his shadow in the water', using the old symbolism of water as a reflecting material.

The congealing in the poem happens because of the rotten nature of the person. Thus the water serves as a judge that uncovers the real nature of the man who is being carried over

the river. The crossing of rivers is a significant act especially in the Bible, for example in the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land in Exodus.⁷⁰ The poem suggests that water has the power of making visible the badness. The evil person is told to have *[a]kageuka jiwe ili wajukuu wapate kuona* ‘turned into a stone for the grandchildren to see’. Similarly to the stone in *Mwamba Ziwani* ‘A Rock in a Lake’, the stone represents ultimate death. On the other hand, the rock in *Mwamba Ziwani* is implied to be highly moral: *Mawimbi yananigusa na kuvunjika / Kama upanga wa muuaji ushindwavyo kwa roho* ‘The waves touch me and break down / Like the sword of a **killer defeated by spirit**’ (emphasis added). In contrast to that, in *Mto wa Haki* ‘The River of Justice’ the stone is presented resembling rubbish: *Sasa alikuwa kama takataka*. ‘Now he was like dirt.’

Drowning in Greediness

In one poem by Kezilahabi the healing liquid is saliva. *Kumbe*⁷¹ (Kezilahabi 1974: 37, not included in the appendix) depicts the healing of a lion as follows:

*[- -] Simba aliyeumizwa,
Bila haya alijikokota kwa unyonge
Mpaka nyumbani, vidonda vikalambwa
Vikapona kwa mate ya nyumbani*

The lion that was wounded
Without shame dragged itself weakly
Home, [and] the wounds were licked
They were healed by the saliva of home

The saliva can heal, but it can also express hatred. In his article “The Swahili Novel and the Common Man in East Africa”, Kezilahabi (1980: 78) depicts the frustrated people and illustrates: “With anger they keep on spitting the poisonous saliva like rabid dogs”.

While the spittle of the frustrated is directed to anyone, or everyone, the saliva as an allegory of a brutal insult, is clearly addressed in the poem *Dakika 15 za Uzalendo* ‘Fifteen

⁷⁰ The other main events of the Exodus are also connected to water: the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of a desert with the help of the waters of the rock of Horeb.

⁷¹ The name means an expression of astonishment or surprise.

Minutes of Patriotism’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 51, not included in the appendix; emphasis added): *Walitupiga makonzi, tukatemewa nyusoni* ‘They [colonialists] hit us [Tanzanians], **we got spat in the face**’. These images of the use of ‘poisonous saliva’ resemble the image of spit and other body fluids as a manifestation of frustration and extremity of corruption and greed in Ayi Kwei Armah’s (1988) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Tanure Ojaide (1995: 8) notes the power of the use of abhorrent imagery in strengthening the judgment of the things criticised in literature.

In *Uvuaji wa Samaki Victoria* ‘Fishing in Lake Victoria’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 9) water is closely related to ethics, too. The speaker narrates (emphasis added):

*Jana asubuhi ufukoni niliona watu
Wenye nguvu, wasohuruma, na walafi wakiimba
Na kuvuta kitu kirefu kutoka majini.*

Yesterday morning I saw people on the shore
Strong, **merciless** and **greedy**, they were singing
And pulling a long object from the water.

The greediness of the people is illustrated for example by the remark *Niliweza kuhesabu meno yao* ‘I could count their teeth’. The fishing is presented as *mashindano ya kamba* ‘a tug of war’: against each other are *wenye damu ya joto na wa baridi* ‘warm-blooded and those who are cold’. The expression *wa baridi* ‘of cold’ seems to refer to cold-blooded organisms, i.e. fish. In the end it is the battle between human beings and nature. The strong assonance of /a/ in the lines *Sijaona mashindano makali ya kamba kama haya /Kati ya wenye damu ya joto na wa baridi* (‘I have never seen a harder tug of war than this / Between warm-blooded and those who are cold’; emphasis added) makes the word *joto* ‘warmth’ to stand out. The word *wenye* ‘that has’ or ‘with’ is discerned, too, but does not have any semantic importance (and moreover, shares /n/ and /y/ with some other words in the lines). Therefore *joto*, presenting humans, can be seen to stand out, representing how human beings do not fit in the nature.

At the end the humans win. The speaker explains that because *walikuwa na choyo kisomfano* ‘[the people] were selfish beyond comparison’, they are left without auspices: *Neptune aliacha mashindano* ‘Neptune left the competition’. The name Neptune is in

italics (i.e. already in the original) and attached with an asterisk, which has an explanation at the bottom of the page – *Neptune: Mungu wa bahari (Katika utamaduni wa Kirumi)* ‘Neptune: God of sea (In the Roman culture)’. Kezilahabi’s poems have explicit watery references to other European sources, too: in the poem *Ukweli* ‘Truth’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 31, not included in the appendix), the speaker mentions *mji wa Oran* ‘the Oran River’ and explains in the footnote that the Oran was the river in which plague was put in the story ‘La Peste’ (‘The Plague’) by Albert Camus.

The greedy fishers leave the fish to dry and die on the sand:

*[- -] mamia
Walikuwa sasa wamelala mchangani
Wakirukaruka huku na huko
Ili kuepa mionzi mikali ichomayo.*

[- -] there were hundreds [of fish]
Laying on the sand
Jumping here and there
In order to avoid the hard rays that were burning them.

The fish are in dire straits: they cannot escape anywhere, and moreover, they are accused of dirtying the drinking water – everything in the behavior of people really seems to be upside down in the poem. The fish are sentenced into the cooking pot. The speaker of the poem disapproves of the fishers’ greediness.

The poem accuses fishers of too much fishing, and according to statistics, the freshwater fish catch in Tanzania approximately doubled between 1973 and 1974 (World Resources Institute 2005) – the poetry collection was published in 1974.⁷² Whether this change of environment has actually been noted by Kezilahabi, is an open question, but undeniably his growing up by Lake Victoria has influenced his production quite much; some of his novels are situated even on Ukerewe, the island in Lake Victoria, on which Kezilahabi was born. Literary theorist Morse Peckham (1997: 106) underscores the need to go beyond words: “One cannot stop with words, or verbal behavior, because verbal behavior always takes

⁷² Later the lake really became overfished, so Kezilahabi’s accusation of greediness can be seen as fully justified.

place in some kind of situational context, and that context obviously plays a part in the act of interpretation”.

However, the impact of environment to the work of art is not at all straightforward. As R.N. Egudu (1978: 4) notes, all the material from reality that is transported into texts “turn into signs for something else”. This two-sidedness becomes even more complicated when the influences pouring from everywhere are considered. This contradiction is remarked by Said A.M. Khamis, who on one hand defines that Swahili poetry is “written in Kiswahili and utilises the local images and local ideas”, but on the other hand notes that “the various linguistic, literary and poetic devices which have been employed ever since are universal”. (Khamis 1990: 78.)

Lake Victoria is also one of the chief headwater reservoirs of the Nile, and the White Nile rises from the lake. The lake that the Nile was depicted to have pierced its tail in, in the poem *Mto Nili* ‘The Nile’, is Lake Victoria. Thus the poem of Lake Victoria, the largest lake of Africa, and the poem of The Nile, the longest river in the world, can be seen connected. On the other hand, all the poems of a poet can be seen inter-connected: “Any poem is an inter-poem, and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading” (Bloom 1997: 149).

The last lines of the poem are obscure. After deprecating the fishers, the speaker seems to shift to other people without further explanations:

*”Tunafanya hivi mara tatu nne kwa siku,” walisema.
Hapo peke yangu nilisimama, kwa hasira yenye huruma
Nikiomboleza na kuwalilia
Waombolezi wa wazamao
Na walimu wa uogeleaji.*

“We do this three-four times a day”, they [the fishers] said.
I stood there by myself, in anger mixed with pity
I grieved for them and cried for them
Mourners of the drowned
And the swimming teachers.

Since the ‘mourners of the drowned’ are mentioned only after the use of ‘them’, the speaker can be seen to grieve for the fishers, too. Who are the drowned? Abdulaziz Lodhi

presents that this might refer to a student picnic by Lake Victoria in 1968, in which some of the students were drowned (personal communication, February 2006).

Because this reading nevertheless leaves the last two lines disconnected with the beginning of the poem, I argue that the drowning presents the moral degradation of the fishers, their “drowning in greediness”. Interpreted in this way, the last lines are consistent: the speaker does not suddenly change his topic and it is not unclear whether the word ‘them’ in the next to last line refers to the fishers or the drowned or their mourners: the fishers *are* the drowned. This interpretation is also in accordance with the beginning of the poem, in which the issue of greediness is raised several times; the fishers are even called *Wadhalimu* ‘Despots’.

Similarly to the uncaring fishers in *Uvuaji wa Samaki Victoria* ‘Fishing in Lake Victoria’, the use of water illustrates the lack of morality of a group of people in Kezilahabi’s short story *Mayai – Waziri wa Maradhi* ‘Mayai – Minister of Illnesses’. In a dream of the main character – minister himself – there are ministers who first drink beer and then urinate in the same river, even at the same time as some stockbreeders are bathing and watering their herd. The ministers even mock the breeders. The division of the access to safe water is expressed in the poem *Dakika 15 za Uzalendo* (‘Fifteen Minutes of Patriotism’; Kezilahabi 1974: 51-58, not included in the appendix), too: while the ordinary people suffer the lack of rain water (*sisi hatuna mvua* ‘we have not rain’), not everyone lacks it: *kabaila kuwa maji* ‘the nobility/upper class has water’.

Watering with Blood

Perhaps as often as the image of water, there is blood in Kezilahabi’s poems. Because of the dramatic nature of the material, the expressions stand out. Besides, the word *damu* ‘blood’ is used directly more often than *maji* ‘water’. Often the blood is in some way connected to water. In the poem *Kujifunza Kuendesha* ‘Studying Controlling’ (Kezilahabi 1988: 29) the speaker dreams that *[b]ahari ikawa damu na damu ikawa bahari* ‘[t]he sea became(/was) blood and the blood became(/was) sea’. The connectedness of water and

blood can be found in the Bible, too: Jesus is described by the line “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood” (1 John 5:6). Resemblingly, during the crucifixion, both water and blood are depicted flowing from the Christ’s side.

In traditional Swahili love songs the ‘disease’, love, is described to take away blood: *kupenda [- -] kunimaliza damu* ‘love [- -] takes away (lit. finishes) all blood’ (Knappert 1972: 98), *Waninyonyo damu yangu* ‘You suck my blood’ (ibid. 88). In these expressions blood is used to represent life. According to Ferber (1999: 29), “blood as life” is one of the three main clusters of meaning attached to blood; the other two are “blood as family or ancestry” and “blood as sacrifice”. Not all images of blood in Kezilahabi’s works fit into this division, however. For example in *Nagona* there is no (clean) water in the town because “the evils of one century” have turned the water into blood (Khamis 2003: 85); thus blood represents death.

In the third stanza of *Kichwa na Mwili* ‘Head and Body’ blood represents (also) family ties and feelings close to pan-Africanism: *Uhusiano wa damu ndugu zangu mzito mno, / Na mapenzi ya Afrika nzima kama samaki na maji*. ‘Connection of the blood of my brothers is too heavy (or: extremely heavy), / The love for whole Africa like a fish and water.’⁷³ The use of blood as the image of kinship is not found in the Bible (in which the symbol is a seed), but is common for example in Latin and Greek literature (Ferber 1999: 30). In the quoted lines of *Kichwa na Mwili* the images of blood and water occur close to each other. Both symbolise the vital importance of the issues; as inner as blood is for everyone, as essential as water is to the fish. As in the quoted lines of *Kichwa na Mwili*, blood is connected to the national spirit in the poem *Mkwawa* (Kezilahabi 1974: 59, not included in the appendix): *Tone lako moja la damu lilitosha / Kuandika vitabu vingi vya uzalendo* ‘One drop of your blood was enough / To write many books of patriotism’.

⁷³ In *Kichwa na Mwili* the image of blood is primarily a symbol for violence and warlikeness, but the examination is restricted on the dimensions that are relevant to the topic of the dissertation.

In *Fungueni Mlango* ‘Open the Door’ (Kezilahabi 1974: 23) the image of blood represents the opposite to water as the image of life: being smothered. The only liquids present in the poem are sweat and blood. Everyone has left the speaker:

Hewa kunikosa
Na jasho kunitoka ndani ya chumba
Kwa upweke

[Air fails to find me
And sweat leaves me inside the room
Of solitude]

I am without air
Sweating inside the room
Of solitude

The choice of words illustrates the complete loneliness. The leaving of water and air is combined with the lack of other people. Similarly to *Nenda Ukanywe!* ‘Go to Drink!’, the poem is very dry. The lack of water is emphasised by the lines *Kwa kichwa kama cha mbuni / Mchangani, tena ninaugonga* ‘With my head like that of an ostrich / **In the sand**, again I bang the door’ (emphasis added). The image of sand, dust, is as far from water as possible.

The word *damu* ‘blood’ is mentioned four times, all in three lines:

Damu
Damu puani, damu mdomoni,
Damu kichwani [- -]

Blood
Blood in the nose, blood in the mouth,
Blood in the head [- -]

The indentation of the first word *damu* and the setting of it as the only word in the line accentuate the significance of the repetition. The initial repetition is combined with syntactic parallelism (repetition of the syntactic structure). Moreover, the dry atmosphere is contributed by the strong transverse alliteration. As in *Nenda Ukanywe!*, the prevailing phoneme is the dry /n/, whose frequency is as high as 13% of the phonemes (compared with 10% in “dry” *Nenda Ukanywe!* and 5% in “moist” *Chai ya Jioni* ‘Evening Tea’). The occurrence of the phoneme /ng/ is very high, too, again similar to but stronger than in

Nenda Ukanywe! – it is used 19 times, constituting 8% of the phonemes (5% in *Nenda Ukanywe!* and just 1% in *Chai ya Jioni*). Hence the great amount of blood does not make the image any wetter, on the contrary: the hiss of blood in the ears (the speaker feels *kizunguzungu* ‘dizzy’ – note the double /ng/) illustrates the drying and being smothered.

In *Mto Nili* ‘The Nile’ the speaker depicts the construction of the civilisation by the Nile as being built with the help of the death of others: *Ninawaona wakimwagilia mashamba yao kwa damu*. ‘I see them irrigating their fields with blood.’ The poem denies that it accuses anyone, but it does not have to – the image of drinking other people’s blood creates a strong impression of brutality:

*Maelfu walifanywa watumwa, na maelfu
Waliuawa kwa sababu zisojulikana!
Halikuwa kosa lenu. Damu yetu
Iliwalewisha mlipotenda hivyo.*

Thousands of people were turned into slaves, and thousands
Were killed for reasons that are not known!
It was not your fault. Our blood
Had made you drunk when you did that.

The idea of the Nile turning into blood resembles that presented in the Bible:

Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. / And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river.

(Exd. 7: 17-18.)

The turning of the water into blood in Exodus illustrates the power of God, and his curse upon people. In *Mto Nili* the image is not as strong, since not all of the water is turned into blood; the blood comes from the drowned people, not through a curse.

Nevertheless, the impression of reason-consequence relation is present. Because of the use of slave trade people seem to have been punished by the scarcity of water. Besides the image of blood in the river, the end of the poem supports this interpretation:

Moyo wangu unatulia nitazamapo ramani.

*Ni adhabu ya kutosha kupashwa kuishi
Juu ya sahani yenye joto kali, ya kukaangia.*

My heart calms down when I look at the map.
There is enough punishment in being set to live
On an overheated frying pan.⁷⁴

The heat causes perspiration, taking the essential water out of the body. The images of heat and sweat (though liquid itself, but in wrong place) present drying in the poems *Fungueni Mlango* 'Open the Door', *Nenda Ukanywe!* 'Go to Drink!' and *Mto Nili* 'The Nile'.

In all the three poems the image of drying is connected to the image of blood. Whereas *Mto Nili* sees the drying as the punishment for shedding blood, *Nenda Ukanywe!* and *Fungueni Mlango* present the blood as a liquid that dominates when the vital liquid, water, has finished. In *Nenda Ukanywe!* the link is expressed by equating the sentences of similar syntax: *Nitakapokuwa marashi, damu, vidonda* 'When I will be perfume, blood, wounds' is reflected in *Nitakapokuwa nikikauka kwa wakati* 'When I will be drying of time'. Blood is essential to the body, too, but without pure water, one cannot live.

⁷⁴ The literal translation: [On a pan with hard heat, of frying]. The line plays with the word *sahani ya kukaangia* 'frying pan': mere *sahani* means 'a plate', and when the parts of the structure are separated, the line can be read in two ways, either referring directly to a frying pan or to a fiercely heated plate. The anastrophe or hyperbaton, i.e. the departure from ordinary word order, as such creates a literary effect.

7 CONCLUSIONS: CATCH OF THE SUBMERSION

Euphrase Kezilahabi's view of water is certainly different from that of a woman living in rural Tanzania and fetching water on foot from day to day – a task that often takes hours. As a highly educated person and as a man Kezilahabi does not represent any general “African” or “Tanzanian” point of view, and the image of water in his poetry is often in particular employed to deal with very personal issues. Kezilahabi might be far away from the association that is uppermost to the majority of his country(wo)men, but as his poetry shows, the perpetual image of a woman carrying an earthen jug on her head is not the only or primary association of water for all Tanzanian people, either.

Water in the poems of Kichomi and Karibu Ndani indeed grows into an illustration of a rich variety of issues. The image is employed to represent creativity and literature itself, as well as the human mind. Water demonstrates life in many ways: it illustrates the lifespan and the struggles and collisions of life, while on the other hand it is portrayed as the ultimate source of life. Consequently, the images of drying and being solid are connected with dying and death. Intrinsic to the image of water as life, water depicts the physical desire. The movement of water acts as an effective timer, whether as drops counting the years of life, or as the water within the body escaping as the speaker of a poem grows old. On the other hand, water is presented as the symbol of timelessness. Powerful water masses stand for the dangers and fears in life. Drowning and the capability of water to wash, to reveal the real nature of things, are employed to discuss ethical questions.

The image of water in the poems can be seen as “bound to the cosmos” (Ricoeur 1976: 61), and to the microcosmos of Kezilahabi's worldview. Compared with the water imagery in traditional Somali poetry or Shaaban Robert's production, Kezilahabi's way of using the image – and images in general – is more individualistic. Even though based on the material properties and connotation of water, the image is manipulated and presented behaving in surrealistic ways, too: it can make a person congeal, be a setting for dreams, or make peo-

ple hallucinate. Unlike Shaaban Robert and traditional Somali poets, Kezilahabi does not use the image for praising God, or anyone else, either. Neither does he make poems about the everyday use of water, such as the songs of watering herd common in Somali poetry. Kezilahabi's poems are elaborated in the auditory dimension, but they are modern songs of the waters that flow through the mind, rather than of the waters in a trough.

The auditory dimension of the poems participates in the constructing of the image of water, too. Some phonemes turn out to be related with either wetness or dryness. The phonemes /n/, /ng/ and /k/ are strongly attached to drying. In contrast to that, the phonemes illustrating water itself are not as distinguishable. However, occasionally the transverse alliteration with the phonemes /u/ or /b/ creates an impression of peaceful flowing. The growl of the consonant /m/, for its part, illustrates the powerful, even dangerous side of water.

In addition to the single phonemes, the image of water is created by rhymes, alliteration and repetition. Moreover, the use of punctuation guides the flow of the water images, for example emphasising the speed and power of water with exclamation marks, or setting a steady rhythm with evenly placed commas. Some of the poems employ visual means as well. Often the visual and auditory dimensions are inseparable: for example the vowel /u/ sounds like peaceful water, but also visually resembles a wave. Accordingly, the phoneme /o/ and the grapheme <o> both allude to the completeness of life.

The observation that the illustrativeness of the "dry" phonemes is stronger than the connection of specific phonemes and water itself, corresponds with the nature of water. The image of dryness can be captured in specific phonemes, but the freeness of water escapes fixed attributes. The sound of water depends on the amount and the environment. The dryness is always similar, but water has innumerable faces. The image of water runs away from the solid impressions in a way as slippery as water running from the clutch of hands.

The circle found in /o/ and <o> is an image that repeatedly occurs in relation to water in the poems: the movement of water is often described with verbs such as *-viringika* 'rotate' and *-kuzunguka* 'go round and round'. The recurrence of rotating is tied in with the importance of movement. In most of the poems in which water is full of life, the water is moving

– waving, dropping, or flowing. The opposite of moving forward in some of the poems seems not to be immobility, but being stuck with one, repeated movement: going around a dead banana plant, banging a door or an iron wall over and over again. The lack of water and the lack of moving forward are also connected to the image of emptiness.

The lack of water is depicted as similar to being smothered, but on the other hand water, too, can suffocate: the danger of drowning is present in many of Kezilahabi's poems. It represents the risk of disappearing, getting lost 'inside the sea of dream' (Kezilahabi 1988: 15). The connection of water and dreams is strong. In many of the poems water demonstrates consciousness, and the chaos of it. In the novel *Mzingile* ('Labyrinth') the narrator notes *umuhimu wa vurumai katika fikra*, 'the importance of pandemonium in thought(s)' (Kezilahabi 1991: 52). In the poems this pandemonium is often demonstrated by the image of water. The relation of chaos and water is present in the Bible, too: there is the primitive water of the creation of the world, and especially in Noah's Flood the earth is allegorically returned "to its primitive, chaotic state" (Dickson 1987: 51). Similarly to the Bible, in which the chaos of water is attached to creation, in Kezilahabi's poems the chaos of water is connected to creativity and creations, at the level of the human mind.

In his poem *Karibu Ndani* 'Welcome Inside' Kezilahabi argues that the traditional poetry 'has failed to submerge in the depth of consciousness'. His aim seems to be to dive into the bottom of *urazini* 'consciousness', and the image of water offers a way to depict the process. Consciousness is something that is hard to understand or discuss through ordinary language, and there the power of images stands out. The close examination of the imagery exposes different layers in the poems. Even in the poems in which the image of water is used to deal with social and ethical questions, the dimension of political or social issues is merely one level of the poems. Water may be argued over or used in an unethical way, but the same water can be a place to rest, the source of inspiration and a whirlpool of the (sub)consciousness.

The many-sidedness of the ever-same water is an intriguing combination. Water "may be life-giving, providing warm amniotic support and essential hydration, or it may burn, freeze or drown. Each of these states [- -] [is] always there in potential." (Strang 2004: 59.)

This potentiality of the other states is actualised in Kezilahabi's poems: the waters in the poems do not keep within bounds. The dew of grace is also the source of life, the destructive potential of the deep is connected to life itself, and the water as life is again compared with the sword of a killer. Kezilahabi's waters flow out from the pigeonholes.

As in all these examples, the image of water in the poems in general dissolves the binary oppositions of life/death and living/dead. The very same drops that are essential for life dig our graves – the drying, dying, starts early in every life. The process of dying is intrinsic in life, and rather than death, the opposite of life is *non-living*. The embodiment of non-living in the poems is the stone: *mwamba* 'a rock' in *Mwamba Ziwani* 'A Rock in a Lake', *jiwe* 'a stone, a rock' in *Mto wa Haki* 'The River of Justice'. It is noteworthy that a rock is not something that has lived and died, but it has always been non-living. Correspondingly, dying does not make one dead. Drying illustrates dying and the rock as the image of death is extremely dry, but it has not dried. An interesting elaboration of the idea is the image of an immoral person turning into a stone in *Mto wa Haki*: the person does not dry, but solidifies. The poem seems to imply that the person had never even lived – he had never appreciated the lives of other people, and therefore could not be seen as living.

If something has lived and been wet once, it can never be dead. A concrete representation of the difference between those who have died and the non-living in the poems is the difference between a calabash and a stone. Unlike the non-living stone, *kata* 'a calabash' has been a living pumpkin. The calabash represents ancestors, and turns into the image of *msingi wa utamaduni* 'the origin of culture' in the poem *Fasihi* 'Literature', illustrating the philosophy of life in Kezilahabi's poems. The system of conceptual oppositions, including life/death, is the core of Arabic poetry (Eksell 1997: 25-26), and similarly inherent in Western thought – something that Derrida and deconstruction in general seek to uncover and dismantle. In this way Kezilahabi's poetry can be seen to discern from the claimed sources of adoption. Moreover, it can participate in the dismantling of other binary categories, such as black/white: 'Then why there is Africa of black people and Africa of white people?' (Kezilahabi 1974: 7).

All the themes the image of water represents seem to be intertwined with the issue of life; water and the lack of it turn into the question of life and death. In addition to the poems representing water directly as life, there are connections underneath the water surface. In the dreams and hallucinations water is the setting for life, and the poems that attach ethical evaluation to water can be seen to comprise an idea of the ultimate ethics being incorporated in life itself; an inevitable justice bound to the core of life. The idea of literature as water also elaborates the connection of literature and a living mind. Unlike often in Western thought, literature is not seen as the ink on paper (or characters at screen) – ‘a hoe of ink’ is just a hoe, a way to get the literature out. Literature itself is the flowing “water” in the mind, consciousness, imagination. At the same time literature is life at another, imagined level. The re-estimation of the hierarchy of blood, attached to one’s own family, and water, attached to life itself – any life – can also be found in Kezilahabi’s poetry: *water is bigger than blood*.

The image of a water drop is round like a teacup, like the full circle of the swing, like the rotation of an eddy or a whirlpool, like the phoneme /o/ and the grapheme <o>, like the water cycle, like the cyclical conception of time, and like the cycle of life. At the same time the drop itself is part of the water cycle: even if it evaporates, it does not die, but just changes its location, condenses somewhere else again. In a conceptual dichotomy, contraries cannot be in harmony with each other, but the circular image of a water drop includes and welds all the dimensions. As a drop reflects new shades of the spectrum when looked at from a new point of view or when the drop itself moves, so does every drop in Euphrase Kezilahabi’s poetry open new worlds, and moreover, open itself into a world.

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APPENDIX: THE POEMS IN SWAHILI AND MY ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Poems that have images of water
in Euphrase Kezilahabi's Kichomi (1974)
and Karibu Ndani (1988)

Translated by Katriina Ranne

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KICHOMI

Jinamizi

Watu weusi na weupe
Mtumbwini walikuwa wamesimama, wametulia,
Na fimbo ndefu mikononi mwao,
Na macho yao wameyakazia majini.
Samaki ambaye, kupata hewa,
Aliinua kichwa chake juu ya maji
Utawala wa chuma ulimtoboa fuvu
La kichwa na kutupwa mtumbwini.
 Halafu nilifikiria Afrika
 Na siasa kwa ujumla
 – Mafuvu!

Lakini mara, mamba, kwa maelfu
Mtumbwi waliukimbilia kwa fujo,
Mtumbwi kupasuka wakatatuliwa
Vipande vipande.
Halafu samaki wote waliinua
Vichwa vyao juu ya maji
Na pamoja wakaimba wimbo wa Uhuru.
Lakini majitu, ambayo kwa mbali
Yalisimama yakitazama, yalionyesha
Kicheko kilichoonekana kutokuwa na maana,
Na kutingisha vichwa kwa njia ambayo
Haikueleweka maana.

 Kwa wakati huo, kutoka bahari
 La magharibi washairi walikuwa
 Wameanza kuimba juu ya kifo cha wadhalimu
 Na sauti zao zilisikika bara zima.

Lakini, niliogopa meno marefu ya mamba,
Zaidi ya hayo, majitu, ambayo
Kutoka mbali, yalisimama yakitazama,
Yakicheka na kutingisha vichwa vyao
Juu, chini, kushoto, kulia.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 1-2

Nightmare

(Jinamizi)

Black and white people
In a canoe, standing, resting,
Long sticks in their hands,
Staring into the water.
Fish which, in order to get air,
Raise their heads from the water
The government of iron drilled a hole in the empty shell
Of the head and it was thrust into the canoe.

I came to think about Africa
And politics in general
– Empty shells!

But suddenly thousands of crocodiles
Invaded the canoe fiercely,
The canoe split, they were ripped
In pieces, pieces.
At that time all the fish raised their
Heads from the water
And sung together the song of Freedom.
But the giants who were in the distance
Standing and watching, showed
A laughter that seemed not to have a meaning,
And shook their head in a way
That was not understandable.

During that time, in the western sea

The poets started to
Sing of the death of the oppressors
With a voice that was heard on the whole continent.

But I was afraid of the long teeth of the crocodiles
And the giants who were
Standing in the distance watching,
Laughing and shaking their heads
Up, down, Left, Right.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 1-2

Upepo wa Wakati

Juu ya mlima mdogo
Siku moja nilisimama.
Nikatazama chini ziwani, siku
Ya dhoruba. Halafu niliona mawimbi
Yakipanda na kushuka. Yakivimba,
Yakiviringika, yakigongana na kutoa povu
Kama fahari wehu katika bonde lisomajani.
Yalivyotengenezwa!
Yalivyofifia na kuanza tena!
Kamwe sikuona.
Lakini niliyaona yakishuka kwa nguvu
Na kupanda haraka, yakisukumwa
Na upepo wa Magharibi na Mashariki.

Hivyo ndivyo ulimwengu ulivyo.
Na hivyo maisha ya binadamu.
Wanapanda na kushuka
Wakisukumwa na upepo na wakati.
Tazama wanavyojinyakulia madaraka
Kama mzamaji, mguu wa rafikiye, ashikavyo!
Wanavyoshika pesa kama mtoto
Na picha ya bandia
Au asikari mwehu na bunduki yake
Na kutunyamazisha!

Watapanda na kushuka
Na wataanguka kweli!
Wakisukumwa na upepo wa wakati!

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 4

The Wind of Time

(Upepo wa Wakati)

One day I stood on a small hill.
I looked down at the lake, a stormy day.
At that point I saw the waves
Raising and lowering. Expanding,
Rotating, colliding and bringing about foam
Like pride, madness, in a valley with grass.
How did they get in order!
How did they weaken and start again!
Never seen before.
I saw them lowering intensely
And raising in a hurry, pushed by
The winds from the West and East.

Exactly like this is our world.
And the life of human beings.
They raise and lower
Pushed by the winds of time.
Look how they snatch power for themselves
Like a drowning man, how he grips the leg of his friend!
How they grip money like a child
Grips the picture of a doll
Or a soldier grips his rifle
And silences us!

They will raise and lower
And really fall!
Pushed by the wind of time.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 4

Mwamba Ziwani

Hautingishiki, hauzungumzi: umekufa;
Lakini ninaweza kuusikia ukizungumza:
“Kijana mimi sicheki, uwe hivyo na wewe.
Tazama jinsi ndege walivyokifanya kichwa changu
Cheupe kama mchwa na fuvu, mimi nimetulia,
Sina wasiwasi ingawa naonekana mjinga.
Mawimbi yananigusa na kuvunjika
Kama upanga wa muuaji ushindwavyo kwa roho.
Mimi ni imara na sihamishiki.
Na mtu mwovu siumiziki.”
Huo mwamba umekwenda. Siwezi tena kuuona.
Hapa ndipo nilipo, melini, mtu mwovu,
Na mwenye wasiwasi
Nikisukumwa na mawimbi,
Nikitetemeshwa na mapaja ya huyu msichana
Mbichi karibu nami. Lakini ule mwamba,
Ule mwamba ulikuwa umekufa.
Wakati wote niishipo sitaweza, nao kufanana.
Nitapokufa kama huo mwamba,
Huo mwamba nitaushabihi.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 6

A Rock in a Lake

(Mwamba Ziwani)

Does not shake, does not speak: is dead,
But I can hear it telling:
"Young man, I do not laugh, let it be like that with you, too.
Look how birds make my head
White like a termite and a skull, I have calmed down,
I do not have problems even though I seem ignorant.
The waves touch me and break down
Like the sword of a killer defeated by spirit.
I am firm/steady and shall not shift.
Even a bad person cannot hurt me."
The rock is gone, I cannot see it anymore.
Here I am, a bad person,
Worried
Being pushed by the waves
Being trembled by the thighs of that girl
Fresh/unripe/moist near me. But the rock,
The rock had passed away.
As long as I live I cannot resemble it.
When I will die like that rock,
I will be like that rock.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 6

Mto Nili

Ninamwona huyo nyoka wa uchawi juu ya ramani
Amechomeka mkia wake ziwani
Piramidi zikijengwa, na Warumi wakipiga mahema,
Wakristu wakioshwa na kutakaswa, na dhambi zikielea mtoni

Ninawaona wakimwagilia mashamba yao kwa damu.
Ile damu ya watu waliozama zamani ziwani
Kwa sababu ya *pepo za Julai*.^{*}
Ziwa, mto, bahari –maisha.

Kiini cha maisha yenu kimo katika kiini
Kitu gani kingetuunganisha zaidi ya hicho!
Sasa kwa nini Afrika ya weusi na Afrika ya weupe?
Lakini hapa nashikwa na bumbuazi.

Maelfu walifanywa watumwa, na maelfu
Waliuawa kwa sababu zisojulikana!
Halikuwa kosa lenu. Damu yetu
Iliwaleweshwa mlipotenda hivyo.

Moyo wangu unatulia nitazamapo ramani.
Ni adhabu ya kutosha kupashwa kuishi
Juu ya sahani yenye joto kali, ya kukaangia.
Na yaliyopita, yamepita.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 7

^{*} *Pepo za Julai*: Pepo zivumazo wakati wa kipupwe mwezi Juni na Julai. Pepo hizi husababisha watu kuzama ziwani, hasa wavuvi.

The Nile

(Mto Nili)

I see the snake of witchcraft on the map
With its tail pierced in the lake
When the pyramids were built and the Romans erected the tents,
When the Christians were washed and purified, and the sins directed into the lake.

I see them irrigating their fields with blood.
The blood of the people who drowned in the lake in the past
Because of *the wind of July*.
Lake, river, sea – life.

The core of your life is in the nucleus
What could connect us more than that!
Then why there is Africa of black people and Africa of white people?
I am puzzled.

Thousands of people were turned into slaves, and thousands
Were killed for reasons that are not known!
It was not your fault. Our blood
Had made you drunk when you did that.

My heart calms down when I look at the map.
There is enough punishment in being set to live
On an overheated frying pan.
What happened has happened.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 7

* *The wind of July*: The wind that blows during the cold months of June and July. This wind causes the drowning of a great amount of people, even fishermen.
[clarification: this footnote, too, is written by Kezilahabi]

Mgomba

Mgomba umelala chini: hauna faida tena,
Baada ya kukatwa na wafanya kazi
Wa bustani kwa kusita.
Watoto, kwa wasiwasi wanasubiri wakati wao
Bustanini hakuna kitu
Isipokuwa upepo fulani wenye huzuni,
Unaotikisa majani na kutoa sauti ya kilio.

Hivyo ndivyo ufalme wa mitara ulivyo.
Mti wa mji umelala chini: hauna faida tena,
Baada ya kukatwa na wafanya kazi
Wa bustani kwa kusita.
Chumbani hakuna kitu
Isipokuwa upepo fulani wenye huzuni utingishao
Wenye hila waliokizunguka kitanda na kulia.
Machozi yenye matumaini yapiga
Mbiu ya hatari ya magomvi nyumbani.
Magomvi
Kati ya wanawake
Magomvi
Kati ya watoto kwa ajili ya vitu na uongozi.
Ole! Milki ya 'Lexanda imekwisha!

Vidonda vya ukoma visofunikwa
Ambavyo kwa mda mrefu vilifichama
Sasa viko nje kufyonzwa na inzi wa kila aina
Na vinanuka vibaya.
Lakini inzi kila mara hufyonza wakifikiri
Nani watamwambukiza.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 8

The Banana Plant

(Mgomba)

The banana plant is lying on the ground: it is of no use,
After being cut by the workers
Of the garden, with hesitation.
Children, anxiously, wait until time is up
There is nothing in the garden
Except for some sorrowful wind
That makes the grass tremble and carries a cry.

This is exactly like a polygamous ruler.
The tree of the town is sleeping on the ground: it is of no use,
After being cut by the workers
Of the garden, with hesitation.
There is nothing in the garden
Expect for some sorrowful wind shaking
The betrayers who go round and round the bed and cry
The tears that have hope
Warn about the danger: eruption of quarrels at home.
 Quarrels
Between women
 Quarrels
Between children, about goods and leadership.
Poor you! Alexandra's milk has finished!

The wounds of leprosy are exposed
Wounds that had remained covered for so long
Now are open in full view for every fly to suck
Stinking.
With every suck the fly is thinking of
Whom to infect next.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 8

Uvuaji wa Samaki Victoria

Jana asubuhi ufukoni niliona watu
Wenye nguvu, wasohuruma, na walafi wakiimba
Na kuvuta kitu kirefu kutoka majini.
Uzitocho ulionekana kuwataka mashindano.
Hata hivyo walivuta tu.
Kwa nguvu zaidi sasa.
Niliweza kuhesabu meno yao.
Sijaona mashindano makali ya kamba kama haya
Kati ya wenye damu ya joto na wa baridi.
Mwishowe watoto wa Adamu walishinda,
Na *Neptune** aliacha mashindano,
Maana walikuwa na choyo kisomfano!
Baada ya kutolewa katika utawala wao, mamia
Walikuwa sasa wamelala mchangani
Wakirukaruka huku na huko
Ili kuepa mionzi mikali ichomayo.
Lakini wapi – walishitakiwa kwa kuchafua maji ya kunywa.
Na kwa kudanganywa na mmelemeto wa pesa,
Wadhalimu, waliwahukumu chunguni.
Niliondoka.
Saa kumi na moja nilikwenda tena kuogelea.
Wale watu walikuwapo bado, nusu uchi!
Walikuwa wakivuta tena!
”Tunafanya hivi mara tatu nne kwa siku,” walisema.
Hapo peke yangu nilisimama, kwa hasira yenye huruma
Nikiimboleza na kuwalilia
Waombolezi wa wazamao
Na walimu wa uogeleaji.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 9

* *Neptune*: Mungu wa bahari (Katika utamaduni wa Kirumi)

Fishing in Lake Victoria

(Uvuaji wa Samaki Victoria)

Yesterday morning I saw people on the shore
Strong, merciless and greedy, they were singing
And pulling a long object from the water.
So heavy that it seemed to challenge them.
Still, they kept on pulling.
Very hard.
I could count their teeth.
I have never seen a harder tug of war than this
Between warm-blooded and those who are cold.
In the end the children of Adam won,
And *Neptunus** left the competition,
For they were selfish beyond comparison!
After they had been given the control, there were hundreds
Laying on the sand
Jumping here and there
In order to avoid the hard rays that were burning them.
But where – they were accused of polluting the drinking water.
Deceived by the glitter of money,
Despots, they passed a sentence of putting them into the cooking pot.
I left.
At five I went again to swim.
Those people were still there, half naked!
Fishing again!
“We do this three-four times a day”, they said.
I stood there by myself, in anger mixed with pity
I grieved for them and cried for them
Mourners of the drowned
And the swimming teachers.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 9

* *Neptunus*: The god of the sea (in the Roman culture)
[clarification: this footnote, too, is written by Kezilahabi]

Fasihi

Maneno yangu kumeza tena sasa siwezi.
Lakini kuonyesha ukweli na kuutafuta
Nitaendelea: mimi ni kama boga.
Nimepandwa katikati, bustanini,
Na kama boga nitatambaa chini
Zote pande, kuikwea miti ya hekima
Na yote magugu koo kuyakaba.
Bila woga, bila nyuma kurudi nitashambulia
Ya binadamu matendo bado yakihema.

Halafu wakati
Ujao utafika
Matunda nitatoa
Makubwa madogo
Mazuri mabaya

Wakati utafika watakapokuja wajuzi
Kwa jembe la wino kunipalia.
Wala mboga za majani watanichuma.
Utafika, wa maboga kuwa mikata.
Machafu na safi yatachotwa
Na nitaingia mitungi ya kila mji-shamba.
Watoto mikononi mwao watanichezea.
Chini wataniangusha na kunipasua.
Lakini mbegu, mbegu zitabaki.

Mimi ninajua
Hatari sina
Wajibu msomaji
Mjini na shamba
Vizuri kunichambua.

Halafu utafika ule wakati
Watumia vikombe dhahabu na glasi
Pembeni kwa chuki kunitupa,
Na nitakuwa nyuma ya wakati
Lakini wakisahau wahenga
Kata na mboga walitumia
Msingi wa wao utamaduni
Watakuwa wameutupa.
Kumbukeni, kumbukeni, kumbukeni.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 14-15

Literature

(Fasihi)

My words, I still cannot swallow them.
I continue to show the truth and to search for it:
I am like a pumpkin.
I have been planted in the middle of the garden
Like a pumpkin I will creep on the ground
With both sides, and I will climb the trees of wisdom.
Strangle all the weeds.
Without fear, without history to go back to, I shall attack
The deeds of human beings that still are breathing
 Then the time
 Will come
 I will deliver fruits
 Big, small
 Good, bad
The time will come, when the people who can
Use the hoe of ink will come and weed me out.
The vegetables will not pluck me.
The time will come, for the pumpkins to have wounds.
The dirty and clean ones will be ladled
And I shall go into the water pots of every town field.
Children will play with me in their hands.
I will turn down and split open.
But the seeds, the seeds will stay.
 I know
 I am not in danger
 The right reader
 In the town and in the field
 Analyses [also: cleans] me well.

Then will come that time
When they use cups of gold and glass
To throw me in the corner,
And I will be beyond time
But when they forget that the ancestors
Used a calabash and vegetables
The origin of their culture
They will throw it away.
Remember, remember, remember.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 14-15

Kichwa na Mwili

Ningekuwa askari ningeoga damu na maji,
Ningepasua vichwa na kuchana matumbo,
Ningekanyaga kichwa cha msaliti au mhaini
Ili kuitwa mume wa wanaume.
Ningekuwa wa kwanza kutimiza malalamiko ya watu,
Wa kwanza kuona hatari ingawa wa mwisho kuiogopa
Ningekuwa askari wa haki, amani, na mapenzi Duniani.

Lakini kichwa changu kina kiburi mno na kigumu,
Na sitaogelea katika damu ya wasio hatia
Kwa manufaa ya umma na wajukuu.
Inasemekana, sadaka kukataliwa
Damu ya mwanadamu ilitetemeshwa mbingu.
Mkono wa haki ukaporomosha hukumu Duniani kwa mataifa,
Na sheria ikawa juu ya mwanadamu.

Bunduki! Harufu ya damu kutoka kusini!
Polepole kichwa kinalegea, harufu kama moshi
Wa bangi inaingia kichwani – chuki kama chongo na moshi.
Uhusiano wa damu ndugu zangu mzito mno,
Na mapenzi ya Afrika nzima kama samaki na maji.
Bila kichwa ninasikia haki mwili mzima
Na ninaona haja ya kushika bunduki.

Usiniambie zaidi! Usinisihi!
Mimi sitakunywa maziwa
Kama mtoto mchanga. Nitakunywa damu!
Sitakaa nyumbani kucheua majani
Kama mbuzi. Nitakula nyama mbichi!
Nikifa je! Mwanadamu hakuokolewa
Utumwani mwa shetani kwa damu?

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 16

Head and Body

(Kichwa na Mwili)

If I were a soldier I would bathe in blood and water,
I would split heads and tear up stomachs,
I would trample on the head of a traitor and betrayer
So that I would be called 'the husband of men' [the real man].
I would be the first to fulfill protests of people,
The first to see danger even though the last to be scared
I would be a soldier of justice, peace, and love in the world.

But my head has much painful pride,
I will not swim in the blood of those who are not guilty
For the benefit of people and new generations.
It is said that ritual sacrifice is refused
Blood of people made heaven shake.
The hand of justice rolled down the verdict for the nations of the world,
And the laws for the people to follow.

A Rifle! The smell of blood from the south!
Slowly my head relapses, the smell like the smoke
Of marijuana enters my head – annoyance, like one-eyed in smoke.
Connection of the blood of my brothers is too heavy,
The love for whole Africa like a fish and water.
Without head I hear the justice with the whole body
I see the need to catch a rifle.

Do not tell me more! Do not beg!
I will not drink from the breast
Like a baby. I will drink blood!
I will not sit at home chewing the cud
Like a goat. I will eat fresh meat!
What if I die! Is man not saved
From the slavery of Satan by blood?

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 16

Mto wa Haki

Alikuwa safarini kwenda arusini kwa furaha
Mto ulikuwa umefurika, hauvukiki.
Mara waogaji wawili kwake wakaenda.
Mmoja wao kumvusha kwa thumuni kajitolea.

Alimpanda. Mabegani kibwana alimkalia.
Lakini lo! Masikio madogo, pembe hana,
Mnyororo mdomoni hana: ni mwanadamu huru.
Alishika kichwa chake kidogo, mtoni wakaingia.

Alipepea hewani kama kidifu cha kabaila.
Alinepanepa kama kiboko cha Mjerumani.
Alipepea kama bendera ya Mwingereza:
Suti juu yake, elimu kichwani na pesa mfukoni.

Alianza kuogopa asije akamtupa majini.
Alianza kumwomba atembe polepole.
Polepole alianza kujiona mjinga kwa kuogopa
Maji yaliyokuwa yakimtakasa mwenzake.

Halafu alisikia kitu kama radi kutoka mbinguni
Na umeme ulipiga moyo wake.
Alisikia sauti ya haki na usawa wa binadamu:
Kwa mda wa dakika moja alielewa ukweli
Ambao vitabu vyote vilikuwa vimeshindwa kumweleza.

Alikuwa ameona kivuli chake majini.
Unafanya nini? Sauti iliuliza.
Hakuweza kujibu: mwili wake ulikuwa umeganda
Kama yule *mwanamke aliyetazama nyuma**
Akageuka jiwe ili wajukuu wapate kuona.

Ubaya wake ulikuwa umeota moyoni, ndani kabisa,
Na ulikuwa bado kufikiwa kwa maandashi na hotuba.
Sasa alikuwa kama takataka.
Alikuwa anakwenda kutupwa nchi nyingine:
Alikuwa hastahili kuishi na watu hawa.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 17-18

* *Mwanamke aliyetazama nyuma*: Mke wa Lot aliyetazama nyuma wakati miji ya Sodom na Gomorrah ilipounguzwa moto na Mungu. Aligeuka kuwa jiwe la chumvi.
(Biblia – Genesis 19:24)

The River of Justice

(Mto wa Haki)

He was on his way to a wedding in a good mood
The river had flooded, was not crossable.
Two people who had come to bathe were passing by.
One of them offered to help him cross the river for a small coin.

He climbed on his back. The oldest son of the house sat on the shoulders.
But strange! Small ears, no tusk,
No chain in the mouth: he was a free human being.
He gripped his head lightly, they walked into the river.

He was shaking in the air like the chin of a high-born.
He was flexible like the lash of a German.
He bent like the flag of an Englishman:
Suit on him, education in the head and money in the pocket.

He started to fear that he would be thrown into the water.
He started to ask the man to walk slowly.
Slowly he started to see himself as a dummy who was scared of
Water that was washing his companion.

Then he heard from the sky something like thunder
And a lightning struck in his heart.
He heard the voice of justice and equality of human beings:
For one minute he understood the truth
That all the books had failed to teach him.

He had seen his shadow in the water.
What do you do? The voice asked.
He could not answer: his body had congealed
Like of that woman who looked back from behind him*
And turned into a stone for the grandchildren to see.

The evil in him had grown in the heart, entirely inside,
And was yet to come to the writings and sermons.
Now he was like dirt.
He had been thrown into another country:
He was not allowed to live with his people.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 17-18

* *Woman who looked back from behind him*: The wife of Lot who looked back in the days of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when the fire of God was lit there. She turned into a pillar of salt. (The Bible – Genesis 19:24)

[clarification: this footnote, too, is written by Kezilahabi]

Fungueni Mlango

Hewa kunikosa
Na jasho kunitoka ndani ya chumba
Kwa upweke
Ninajiona nimefungiwa.
Sioni madirisha lakini
Mlango wa karatasi uko mbele yangu
Ninaugonga kwa mikono
Kichwa na mabega
Mlango unatoa mlio kilio,
Lakini mwanadamu hatanifungulia.

Damu

Damu puani, damu mdomoni,
Damu kichwani itumikayo kama wino.
Mikono, kichwa, mabega uchovu.
Kwa kichwa kama cha mbuni
Mchangani, tena ninaugonga
Lakini mwanadamu hatanifungulia.

Ninaona kizunguzungu
Ninapiga kelele kama
Ng'ombe machinjioni:
Fungueni mlango!
Mlango fungueni!
Lakini mwanadamu hatanifungulia.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 23

Open the Door

(Fungueni Mlango)

I am without air
Sweating inside the room
Of solitude
I see myself confined.
I cannot see windows but
A door of paper is in front of me
I bang it with my fists
Head and shoulders
The door cries, shouts,
But no one opens it for me.

Blood

Blood in the nose, blood in the mouth,
Blood that is used like ink in the head.
Hands, head, back, all tired.
With my head like that of an ostrich
In the sand, again I bang the door
But no one opens it for me.

I feel dizzy
I make noise like
A cow in the slaughterhouse:
Open the door!
The door, open it!
But no one opens if for me.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 23

Nenda Ukanywe!

Mafunza wameniingia bongoni
Nao wakati wa joto wachezapo mchezo
Wao ndani ya nyumba hii ya mawazo
Hunifanya kama mwehu
Nikimbie na kuwashambulia watu hao
Na kama nguruwe mwitu
Kugonga kuta hizo za chuma
Ziwafungano wanadamu

Lakini

Wakati wa baridi inzi watakapoiingia puani
Nitakapokuwa marashi, damu, vidonda
Kunusa siwezi au vizuri kupumua
Nitakapokuwa nikikauka kwa wakati
Basi nitaweka bunduki chini
Na kama askari aliyetaka na nguvu asizoon
Nitakaa nyumbani na mafua yangu
Wajukuu kunipanda, kichwa shinda kutikisa.

Ninasema

Wakati siafu watakaponinokoa
Macho na maskioni kuingia
Nitakapokuwa sioni, sisikii
Ngoma na vilio vya dunia
Kazi bure itakuwa kumwaga
Machozi juu ya karibu langu.
Ukilia shairi hili litakwambia
“Nenda ukanywe!”

Kwani

Nani alikula asile tena!
Nani aliruka hewani asitue?
Lakini nani alikufa akarudi?

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 30

Go to Drink!

(Nenda Ukanywe!)

Worms have invaded into my brain
They have hot times while playing their game
In the house of thoughts
They make me insane
I will run and attack those people
And like a wild boar
Bang the walls of iron
That close the people outside

But

During the cold months when a fly will invade my nose
When I will be perfume, blood, wounds
I cannot smell or breathe well
When I will be drying of time
Then I will lay my rifle down
And like a soldier who was robbed by forces he cannot see
I will stay home with my flu
Grandchildren will climb my back, shake the deficient head

I say

When the ants want to masticate
My eyes and invade my ears
When I will not see, not hear
The drum or cries of the world
There is no point in farewells
The tears on my grave
When you cry this poem will tell you
"Go to drink!"

For

Who ate does not eat anymore!
Who flew in the air will not come down?
But who passed away and came back?

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 30

Tunatazamana

Mama alikuwa ameuawa na wazungu.
Sufuria lilikuwa juu ya mafiga
Baba akaleta moto wa matumaini
Akayawasha majani makavu
Yakawaka kuwasha kuni kavu
Zilizokaushwa na ndimi za jua kali
Lililotundikwa hewani kwa kejeli na wakoloni.
Kuni zikawaka kulipa joto sufuria
Maji yapate kuchemka.

Polepole maji yalianza kuzunguka
Kufuata mwendo tukazungusha vichwa vyetu.
Mvuke wa kasumba ukaanza kutoka
Tukatoa vichwa vyetu ukapita, tukauona
Unapanda juu katika mawingu ya udanganyifu.
Halafu maji yalianza kufanya vilima
Vidogo vidogo vilivyovimba na kupasuka.
Sisi tuliokuwa tukitazama
Tukaanza kuwa na mashaka.

Baada ya mda mfupi askari wakali
Walianza kucheza majini bila mpango.
Hatukuamini macho yetu.
Halafu askari wakawa wacheza ngoma
Wakaruka juu hewani bila fahamu.
Mapinduzi! Tulianza kuogopa.
Lakini Baba aliyekuwa ametulia
Kama mganga azungumzaye na mababu
Aliyakazia maji macho kwa fikira

Halafu Baba akachukua unga wa uganga
Akaumimina kwa uangalifu majini
Askari wakawa wehu wakaanza kuruka
Kama wagonjwa waliopagawa waachwapo na shetani.
Wakaruka hata nje ya sufuria, wakatuchoma.
Baba akaongeza unga wa ujamaa
Pole pole askari wehu wakatulia
Kama wafungwa waliokatishwa tamaa
Na urefu wa ukuta wa mawe.

Akakoroga! Akakoroga! Tena na tena.
Dawa tuliyokuwa mda mrefu tukiisubiri.
Kitu kama muujiza kikaanza kutokea.
Baada ya mda mfupi akatoa
Kitu kimoja kiitwacho ugali.

Akaleta mboga tuliyolima sisi wenyewe.
Tukauzunguka kula pamoja.
Wote tulikuwa na njaa
Na mwanzoni hatukuzungumza.

Lakini kitu kimoja niliogopa daima.
Kuna watu wenye viganja vikubwa zaidi.
Vile vile wapo wamezao upesi upesi.
Kwa kuwa mimi kinywa changu kizito
Na viganja vyangu vidogo. Mwishowe nilisema.
Hao hao walinitazama kwa hasira
Nami bila hofu nikawatazama.
Tukatazamana.
Sungura na mbweha.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 65-66

We Look at Each Other

(Tunatazana)

Mum was killed by white people.
The cauldron was on the cooking stones
Dad brought the fire of hope
He set the dry leaves on fire
He lit the dry wood
Which was dried by the tongues of the hard sun
That was hung up in the air ironically by the colonisers.
Firewoods made the cauldron suffer from heat
That made the water bubble.

Slowly the water started to go round and round
Following the way we moved our heads round.
Steam of opium started to come out
It passed into our heads, we saw you
Riding upon the clouds of deceitfulness.
Water started to form hills
Little by little it expanded and burst out.
We who were looking at it
Started to worry.

Soon after that severe soldiers
Started to play in the water without order.
We did not believe our eyes.
The soldiers started to dance
Jumping in the air without sense.
Revolution! We started to fear.
But Dad was calm
Like a medicine man talking with ancestors
His glance was fixed on the water, deep in thoughts

Then Dad fetched the healing powder
He sprinkled the flour carefully into the water
The soldiers were mad and started to jump
Like ill, possessed people, when Satan leaves them.
They even jumped out from the cauldron, burning us.
Dad added more flour of familyhood
Gradually the mad soldiers calmed down
Like captured who lose their hope
Because of the thickness of the stonewall.

He stirred up! He stirred up! Again and again.
Medicine that we had been waiting for, for long.
A miraculous thing started to appear.
After a short while he took out

The thing that is called *ugali* [corn porridge].
He fetched vegetables that we had planted ourselves.
We made a circle and ate together.
Everybody ate for hunger
So at first we had no conversation.

But one thing I was afraid of all the time.
There are people with very big palms.
Similarly, there are people who swallow very quickly.
Because my mouth is slow
And my palms small. I said at last.
They looked at me in anger
While I looked at them without fear.
We looked at each other.
A rabbit and a jackal.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1974: 65-66

KARIBU NDANI

Chai ya Jioni

Wakati tunywapo chai hapa upenuni
Na kuwatazama watoto wetu
Wakicheza bembea kwa furaha
Tujue kamba ya bembea yetu
Imeshalika na imeanza kuoza
Na bado kidogo tutaporomoka.

Kulikuwa na wakati ulinisukuma juu
Nikaenda zaidi ya nusu duara;
Kulikuwa na wakati nilikudaka
Ulipo karibia kuanguka,
Na kulikuwa na wakati tulibebana kwa zamu
Mmoja wima akisukuma mwingine amekaa.
Wakati huo, japo tulipaa mbele na nyuma
Tulicheka kwa matumaini yaliyotiwa chumvi
Na kisha tukaongozana jikoni kupika chajio;
Ilikuwa adhuhuri yetu.

Sasa tukisubiri ndoto tusizoweza kutekeleza tena
Tumalizie machicha ya chai yetu ya jioni
Bila kutematema na kwa tabasamu.
Baada ya hapo tujilambelambe utamu utamu
Uliobakia kwenye midomo yetu,
Tukikumbuka siku ilee ya kwanza
Tulipokutana jioni chini ya mwembe
Tukitafuta tawi zuri gumu
La kufunga bembea yetu
Naye mbwa Simba akikusubiri.

Lakini kabla hatujaondoka kimyakimya
Kukamilika nusu duara iliyobakia.
Tuhakikishe vikombe vyetu ni safi.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 3

Evening Tea

(Chai ya Jioni)

While we drink tea here on the porch
And watch our children
Swinging cheerfully
We know: the rope of our swing
Has already worn through and started to rot
After a short while we will fall down.

There was a time when it pushed me upwards
I went further than a half circle,
There was a time when I caught you in the air
When you almost fell down,
There was a time when we took turns to carry each other
One standing and pushing, the other on the board.
During that time, even though the swing rose high when we swayed back and forth
We laughed at too high hopes
And went to the kitchen to prepare supper;
It was our early afternoon.

Now when we wait for dreams that we cannot carry out anymore
We shall finish our evening tea with the tea grounds
Without spitting them out, smiling.
When we have sucked the sweet taste
That remains on our lips,
We remember the first day
We met in the evening under the mango tree
Looking for a good, solid branch
To tie our swing to
Whilst your dog Simba waited for you.

But before we will leave just silently
To complete the half circle that remains
Let us make sure that our cups are clean.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 3

Kilio Kijijini

Baridi kali, upepo na dhoruba.
Vilio vya watu ndani ya nyumba.
Naye amelala kama jiwe
Lenye thamani mizanini,
Akidai aoshwe na mito
Ya machozi mashavuni yatiririkayo.
Nje shambani, mihindi imelaliana
Ikionyesha upepo ulikotoka, wa kifo.
Miti bado matone inadondosha, ya mvua
Ambayo chini yameshachimba vishimo
Kuonyesha mfano kwa washika majembe
Na kuwahesabia miaka yao ya uhai.
Mara matone yanakoma
Na maisha yaonekana mafupi.
Umande umelowanisha ncha za suruali
Ya huyu mjomba afikaye sasa kilioni.
Hakuna kijiaminicho,
Isipokuwa maji ya mvua
Yatiririkayo kasi kuelekea bondeni
Kutukumbusha njia ya kila binadamu.
Kimya! Kimya kijijini,
Kimya nje ya nyumba, ndani vilio.
Hapa tulipo tumeinama kama mihindi
Hatujakomaa, twasubiri tukiogopa mvunaji.
Nje panateleza, wendao haraka waanguka.
Ng'ombe na mbuzi kimya wamesimama,
Wakimtazama kila apitae kwa huzuni.
Kimya kijijini, kimya nje ya nyumba,
Ndani vilio vya mihindi iliyoinama:
Baba yenu mwisho ameshindwa!
Mungu Mkubwa! Waambiwa.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 17

Mourning in a Village

(Kilio Kijijini)

Harshly cold, windy and stormy.
People are grieving inside the house.
He sleeps like a heavy stone on the scales,
Demanding to be washed by the rivers
Of tears that flow on the cheeks.
Outside in the fields the corn heads lie flat
Revealing from whence the wind came, of death.
The trees are still throwing drops, of rain
That have already formed small hollows in the ground
Showing example for those holding hoes
Counting their years of life.
Suddenly the drops cease
And life seems short.
Dew has moistened the legs of the trousers
Of the nephew who just arrived.
No one trusts himself
Though the rain water
That flows quickly towards the valley
Reminds us of the way of every human being.
Silence! Silence in the village,
Silence outside the house, inside the mourning.
Here when we bow down like the corn heads
We are not yet ripe, fearful of the harvest.
Outside it is slippery, those walking quickly fall down.
A cow and a goat stand in silence,
Watching sorrowfully every passer-by.
Silence in the village
Silence outside the house
Inside the cry of the corn heads bowing:
Our Dad has finally been beaten!
God is Great! They were told so.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 17

Kisima

Kisima cha maji ya uzima ki wazi
Na vyura katika bonde la taaluma watuita
Tujongee kwa mahadhi yao
Yaongozayo pandikizi la mtu
Kwa hatua ndefu litembealo
Na sindano ya shaba kitovuni
Upinde na mishale mkononi
Kisha likapiga goti kisimani
Tayari kumfuma akaribiaye
Maana shujaa hafi miongoni mwa wezi
Bali kama simba mawindoni.

Hatuwezi tena kuteka maji
Na kalamu zetu zimekauka wino.
Nani atamsukuma kwa kalamu
Aitwe shujaa wa uwongo!
Aliyeitia kitovuni kwa hofu
Ingawa tegemeo hakulipata
Alifungua mlango uelekeao
Katikati ya ujuzi na urazini mpya
Mwanzo wa kizazi tukionacho.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 25

A Well

(Kisima)

The fountain of the water of health is open
The frogs in the valley of civilisation invite us
To come closer to their concert
That leads the giant
In long steps
With the copper dagger in the navel
A bow and arrows in hand
He kneels down at the well
Ready to pierce anyone approaching
For a hero does not die in the middle of robbers
But like a lion on prey.

We cannot scoop water anymore
And the ink in our pens has run dry.
He who will push [somebody] forward by pen
Will be called the hero of lies!
He who took his stand in the centre in fear
Even though support was not given
He opened the opposite door
Between wisdom and new understanding
The first offspring that we see.

Euphrase Kezilahabi 1988: 25