Identity and Memory in Swahili War Verses:
The Long Road to an East African *Self*

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The article aims at an analysis of memory and identity on the basis of literary evidence, and in particular Swahili war poetry. Identity requires a balance between self-assertion and respect for others, between difference and integration. Traditional theories have introduced a distinction between personal identities and social identities. It is not easy to determine the boundary line of where the self ends and where the non-self begins. Identity is a point of anchorage and it is for this reason that people appear to be committed to building and maintaining a feeling of themselves with all that is involved: a story, a wealth of emotions and values, individual and collective memories, a system of social roles capable of defining one's place in the world. Although identity can constitute an hindrance to the knowledge and understanding of others, it is also true that it represents a point of reference from which to take the steps towards self-determination. In their function of handing down messages through their verses, poets become tools through which the other – the reader or the listener – responds. The Swahili genre of *utenzi,* alias epic, seems to be suitable for examining the message each poet or author gives to his/her target readers. I consider two Islamic-based epics, namely *Chuo cha Herekali* and *Rasi 'l Ghuli*, two *tenzi* referring to European Colonial period, namely *Vita vya Maji Maji* and *Vita vya Wadachi*, and the epic *Vita vya Kagera* referring to the first war against an African enemy, namely Ugandan Idi Amin Dada.

1. Swahili poetry: main forms, structures and genres

The critics date the beginning of the literature written in Swahili to the 14th century on the basis of Ibn Battuta's (early 14th century) visit to the island of Kilwa, where he met local poets who wrote lyrical and epic poems in Swahili (Whiteley 1969: 35). Swahili versification is said to be due to Arab and Persian influence, in particular on the Arab *qaṣīda* (laudatory, elegiac or satiric poem of 60 to 100 lines, and maintaining a single end rhyme) and Persian *masnavī* (poem written in rhyming couplets). Still, the genius of the Swahili language and its system of accentuation, must have modified the imported metres (Werner 1918; 1927). Overtime, the classification of poetic genres has changed and it varies from one scholar to another. Hichens (1962-1963), for example, considers five main poetic genres taking into account both the strophic structure and the content. He tries to approach them with the genres of Western poetry: *shairi* (poem); *utendi* (epic poem); *takhmisa* (quintine composition

of a previous poem); *hamziya* (long poem in distichs/couplets dating back to around 1750 a. C.); *wimbo* (sonnet, ballad, lyric or hymn). In addition to the genres considered by Hichens (1962-1963), Chiraghdin, Nabhani, and Barwa (1975: 25-30) still distinguish two other poetic genres following the strophic structure: *tumbuizo* (lullaby) and *waji-waji*, an archaic term that refers to a joint work: an author composed two ot three lines of each verse and another added the rest preserving the original style and meaning (Harries 1950: 759). The classification of Shariff (1988) is much more complex: in the genres he examined, he considers the structure of the compositions, their function, the context of production and use. He identifies in particular: *Tiyani Fatiha* (from the name of an ancient poetess from Lamu known as Bibi Rukiya binti Fadhil al-Bakari), or *utungo* (composition): a religious composition that is characterized by rhymes and syllabic meter. The length of lines may vary (Wamitila 2003: 232); *wawe*: term used to denote a composition sung by peasants while working in the fields, and which can also only refer to their work (Wamitila 2003: 350); *kimai*, widely used for a composition referring to the work of fishermen and sailors, or to travel by sea (Wamitila 2003: 88); and *Zivindo*, a poetic genre whose purpose is teaching the language through the different meanings of one and the same word (Wamitila 2003: 355).

Swahili prosody is characterized by syllabicism and an ordered rhyming scheme. The line in a stanza of a poem (*m-stari/mi-; m-shororo/mi-*) is composed by a variable number of syllables, and can be divided by one or more caesuras (*ki-tuo/vi-*) in two or more hemistichs (*ki-pande/vi-*). The rhyme (*ki-na /vi-*) can be internal (*kina cha kati*) if it is inside the line before a caesura, or final (*kina cha mwisho*) if it is at the end of the line (Hichens 1962-63: 107-109; Kirkeby 2000: 120; Mbatiah 2001: 116, 119). The different poetic forms are distinguished by the number of syllables in the verse.[1] The oldest attested poetic compositions are in long-measure verse with a variable number of syllables – from 30 to 20. The strophe (*ubeti* or *baiti*) consists of a single line divided medially by a caesura into two equal hemistichs (Harries 1953:128). A typical example in long-measure verse is *Mashairi ya Liyongo* (Liyongo Songs) attributed to Fumo Liongo (Werner 1927; Mulokozi and Sengo 1995). Many are the poems in the meter of 20 syllables, and generally they are poems of praise dedicated to women. An example is *Utumbuizi wa Mwana wa Hejaz* (Serenade to the Hejazian Maid), by copyist Muhammad Abubakar bin Umar al-Bakari (known as Muhammad Kijuma; Harries 1962: 179). An unusual meter of 21 syllables is found in *Gungu la kukwaa* (The song of hesitation dance; Steere 1870; Harries 1952: 161) which is characterized by epizeuxis at the end of the first hemistich:

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[1] According to Harries (1962: 10), the rhyme, the caesura and the number of lines have little relevance.

Mama, nipekee, haoe kaoe	Mother, take me that I may see, may see
Urembo na shani Ungama	Beauty and ornaments at Ungama
Haoe mnara mpambe mpambe,	That I may see the tower adorned, adorned
Uzainyeo heshima.	And dressed up for honour.
(Steere 1870: 480).	(Steere 1870: 480).

The most popular Swahili verse is the *shairi* that is generally used for love and political poems. It consist of four lines, each of them containing sixteen syllables, can have two rhymes, and is separated by a caesura. The rhyme scheme is regular: the first hemistich of the last line rhymes with every second hemistich of the first three lines, while the rhyme that precedes the caesura can be repeated in the final hemistich of the strophe (Knappert 1971; Wamitila 2003: 191; Saavedra Casco 2007: 21). The *Mashairi ya takariri* (poems with repetitions) are noteworthy. They are the poems in which some lines, words or syllables are repeated in the same stanza, i.e. "**Lakutenda** situuze, situuze **lakutenda**" (Harries 1962: 254; Bierstecker and Shariff 1995: 158). The *ukawafi,* typical of religious poetry, derives from the long-measure verse. Each line is generally divided in three hemistichs (Wamitila 2003: 284). Each line contains fifteen syllables. A large part of *ukawafi* lines has no internal rhymes. It is only around the 19th century that the *ukawafi* verse becomes more sophisticated: in *Dua ya kuombea mvua* (Prayer for rain), a traditional Islamic Swahili poem composed by Muḥyī al-Dīibn Shaykh ibn Qahtān al-Wā'ilī, the author modifies the form of traditional *ukawafi* verse and introduces the internal rhyme (Knappert 1979: 201; Ranne 2010: 60-61). Alongside the *ukawafi,* also the *kisarambe* is used in religious poetry: it is characterized by a line with eleven syllables and the caesura after the sixth syllable (Wamitila 2003: 91). The first document in *kisarambe,* dating from the early 19th century, is *Al-Inkishafi* (Soul's Awakening; Hichens 1962/63; Harries 1962), a 79-stanzas poem believed to have been composed by Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali Nasir in four-line stanzas; each stanza has the first three lines rhyming and the rhyme changing from stanza to stanza (Mberia 2015: 92, 96):

Uwene wangapi watu wakwasi	How many rich men have you seen
Walo wakiwaaa kama shamasi	Who shone like the sun who had
Wamuluku zana za adharusi	control of the weapons of war
Dahabu na fedha wakhiziniye	and stored up silver and gold
(Hichens 1972: 69).	(English translation by Jahadhmi 1975: 68).

Most songs or *nyimbo* (pl.; sing.: *wimbo*) have a meter of eleven, twelve, thirteen or sixteen syllables even if in Swahili prosody, the term *wimbo* refers to the twelve-syllables line with caesura in the

middle or after the fourth and/or eight syllable. The stanza is formed by three lines and each line usually has two rhymes (Wamitila 2003: 351; Saavedra Casco 2007: 23).

Tenzi or *tendi* (sing. *utenzi; utendi*) are poems of four-line verses - or, in the opinionin of some, two with a caesura - with eight syllables to a line and an AAAB rhyming pattern. Its language is often simple, making little use of metaphorical discourse; because of its features, it has lent itself well to the versification of historical events and fictional narrative (Mazrui 2007: 17).

Every poem includes: the introduction (*dibaji),* a prayer for blessing beginning with the invocation to God and the Prophet, the main text and the epilogue. Before proceeding to the narration the author or the copyist often mentions the content of the poem, sometimes claiming to have found the story in an ancient Arabic book, as in *Utendi wa Ayubu* (The Epic of Job) by anonymous and written down by Muhammadi Kijuma (Steere 1870: xii; Werner 1921: 85):

Naandikie kikutubu	That I may write, inditing *[sic]*
Hadithi ya kiarabu	An Arabic *[sic]* story
Kwa khabari ya Ayubu	With the history of Job
Tumwa wa Mola Rasua	The messenger sent by the Lord
(Werner 1921: 89)	(Werner 1921: 101)

In the epilogue there is thanksgiving to Allah, the request to the reader to correct any errors, and sometimes the name of the author and the date of composition.

2. Epic poem as journey of the Self

The journey and evolution of the Self is closely linked to the concept of identity. Following traditional theories on this topic (Allen 1971; Tajfel 1978; Middleton and Edwards 1990; Serino 2001), it is not easy to determine the boundary line of where the Self ends and where the non-Self begins. Identity is a point of anchorage and it is for this reason that people appear to be committed to building and maintaining a feeling of themselves with all that is involved: a story, a wealth of emotions and values, autobiographical memories and collective memories, a system of social roles capable of defining one's place in the world. Although identity can constitute an hindrance to the knowledge and understanding of others, it also represents a reference point from which to take a step towards self-determination.

Many psychological studies have dealt with the way identity works in the specific contexts in which individuals are called to act (Tajfel 1978). According to Serino (2001: 19, 25-27), the sense of

identity implies a series of cognitive processes such as categorization and comparison, the perception of similarities and differences, the definition of the Self as a coherent unit that is endowed with a certain continuity. Belonging and uniqueness, similarity and difference, permanence and change are essential components of the feeling of identity. Another characteristic is the individual's need to perceive himself as having a certain coherence and continuity over time and this possibility is based on the memory of the Self. It is a historical feeling: the ability to place itself at the center of a temporal flow that includes past, present and future. Middleton and Edwards (1990) highlight that collective memory can be more or less consciously used to reinforce or diminish the bonds between individuals and groups, to reflect or challenge differences in status and power, thus memory is an essential element of what is defined as individual and collective identity. In their function of handing down messages through their verses, the poets become the tools through which the other – the reader or the listener – responds. When they did give rise to a certain response, they are part, and highly important elements, of the organization of the social act. To the human observer they are expressions of emotion, and that function of expressing emotion can legitimately become the line of work of an artist as the poet who expresses emotions through his/her poetry (Mead 1934: 44, 161). While it is true that poetry is made up of words, and not of ideas, the choice of words and of language and the use or not of symbolism create ideas, perceptions and visions of both the poetic and imaginary reality and the objective reality. According to Skafte Jensen (1990: 35), a sense of cultural identity is based on a group's feeling of having something in common and at the same time of being different from anybody else. Thus, epic seems a very important genre for maintaining cultural identity because it ties the present to the past and supplies the listeners with a feeling that they share their culture with former generations. In East Africa, the period between 1000 and 1500 saw the emergence of the coastal city-state polity, a mixed economy based on agriculture and maritime activities, and Islamization (Simala 2004: 19). Islam created an intellectual class that monopolized knowledge in each coastal town (Saavedra Casco 2007: 38), and the written tradition prevailed over the oral one as the main instrument of cultural and ideological influences on Swahili intellectuals and Muslim teachers, including *shehe* and *walimu* – although many old manuscripts of that time have been lost. Mazrui (2007: 16) claims that the beginnings of writing in Swahili literature can be traced to the Afro-Arab contact on the East African seaboard that goes back to antiquity, professional copysts and court poets became the keepers of cultural informations among the literate part of society. It is through the need to explain the dogmas and practices of Islam (which reached the East African coast starting from the 8th century) and describe the life of the Prophet that the monuments of Swahili literature were created and passed down (Zhukov 2004: 4-6). As reminded by Topan (2001: 107),

religious poetry has been preserved down the centuries for many reasons: reminding the believers of their duties and obligations, reasserting their identity, and reinforcing their values. In other words, it gives meaning to their practices. A majority of literate Swahili people had the religious and didactic literature in the traditional poetic form of *utendi* or *utenzi,* translated as "the poem" or "epic."[2] The measure for long poems are ten or eleven syllables with four stresses to the line, and eight syllables with two stresses; the stanza is of four lines, three rhyming together, and the fourth ending in the same rhyme throughout the poem (Werner 1927: 105). Kesteloot (1989: 204) explains that the two components of length – from two to twenty thousand lines or verses - and poetic narrative are essential to the definition of the true epic, although the long epic poem category includes also eulogistic poems of less than hundred lines which are described as short or brief epic poems. As Zhukov (2004: 6) suggests, it is important to note that the link of Swahili poetical works to the Arab sources does not mean a direct translation of them: in most cases it is an author's rearrangement of the plot of some work of the Muslim literature, since some of Arab sources do not exist in their full form. Most of this tipology of *utenzi* production can be dated to the 18th century. This is the case of the epic poem *Chuo cha Herekali* (Epic of Herakleios), also known as *Utenzi wa Tambuka* (Action at Tabook; Knappert 1979: 111) consisting of 1150 strophes of four lines each, by Bwana Mwengo bin Athumani (unknown birth and death dates, but certainly from the early 18th century, since the first manuscript of the poem dates back to 1728). At the end of his work, the author describes himself as "ignorant." The name Mwengo is of Bantu origin and clearly shows that he was a true Swahili and not a Swahilicized Arab – in addition to being a man of the people and a devout Muslim. The essence of epic verse is the presence of the Divine (Knappert 1979:109-112), and this *utenzi* is an exemplary story that illustrates how Allah helped pious Muslims to destroy the evil Christians, who are described as irascible and presumptuous, drunk and dishonest. Herakleios is pictured as an example of deception and godlessness in contrast to the prophet's great virtues and glory. Although the subject is Arab, in *Chuo cha Herekali* there are typical African elements such as similarities taken from the animal world,[3] such as when Ali, after a victorious fight, comparing himself to a proud lion, to an excellent predatory hunting bird, to an elephant that makes wives widows (Knappert 1967: 196-197). Knappert (1967: 182) suggests that, given its religious fervor, this tipology of *utenzi* seems to have been written to keep the Muslim community together, probably at the time of the Portuguese occupation, when the main

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2 According to Werner (1927: 105), the term *tenzi* (sing. *utenzi*) or *tendi* in the Northern dialect is probably connected with the Swahili verb *-tenda* (to do). She states that her native informants describe *tenzi* as concerned with matters of war and/or religion, and that they are usually narratives and sometimes gnomic or didactic in character.

3 Many similarities with the animal world are found in the poetry of Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassani (Abdulaziz 1979).

reason for the saga, namely the battles of the Prophet Muhammad against the hated Christians, acquired a new meaning (Knappert 1967: 182). Unlike the *Utenzi wa Rasi'l Ghuli,* whose origins lie in Arab history with the title of *Futuhu ' l Yamani* the Arabic model of *Chuo cha Herekali* has not been found. In the preface to the *Utenzi wa Rasi'l Ghuli* we read:

> "[...]Rasi'l Ghuli si tafsiri ya neno kwa neno ya hadithi ya Futuhu 'l Yamani, utenzi huu ni utungo wa pekee wa kiswahili, uliotumia Futuhu 'l Yamani kama kiini tu [...]" (Mgeni bin Faqihi 1979: v)

> "[...] *Rasi'l Ghuli* is not a literal translation of the story of *Futuhu 'l Yamani,* this *utenzi* is an original Swahili composition that used *Futuhu 'l Yamani* as a plot [...]"[4]

According to Saavedra Casco (2007: 46), religious literature on the origins of Islam and battle history as representation of Muslim identity, were transformed to vernacular versions using Swahili prosody as a distinctive characteristic of this genre, with an aim to communicate these stories to a wider audience in their own language, as author Mgeni bin Faqihi explains in the introductory stanzas of the *utenzi*:

25	25
Pana hadithi ajabu	There is an amazing story
yandikwa ndani kitabu	written in a book
kwa lugha ya waarabu	in the language of Arabs:
nayo hadithi khiyari	it is a good story.

26	26
Hadithi hiyo yuani	Know that story
ina maneno bayani	has a clear account
ya vita vya l'Yamani	of the battles for the Yemen
zamani zake Bashiri	during the time of the Prophet.

27	27
Haiona haisoma	I saw it, and I read it
Maana ni kufahama	and I understood its meaning.

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[4] English version mine.

[...]	[...]
28	28
Hufikiri nikiweza	I considered whether I could
haona kunipendeza	compose it as a poem
moyoni nikilekeza	my heart then led me
kutunga kwa ushairi	to a way that pleased me.
29	29
Hapenda kuibadili	I wanted to translate it
kwa lugha ya suwahili	into Swahili
kiarabu ni qalili	since only a few people
wajuao tafsiri	understand its Arabic content.
30	30
Nikawa kujikalifu	So I undertook the burden
kiarabu hawaqifu	of following its Arabic
maneno hayasanifu	and to make clear its words
kuwapa zote khabari	and to narrate it all you.
(Mgeni bin Faqihi 1979: 2)	(Topan 2001: 115).

Utenzi wa Rasi'l Ghuli, with its more than 4000 strophes, gives an account of the conquest of Yemen, ruled at the time by a cruel king known with the nickname of 'Head of Ghoul." This *utenzi* was composed in Bagamoyo between 1850 and 1855. Its author, Mgeni bin Faqihi, is said to have been born on the island of Tumbatu, where he was a teacher and later moved to the mainland to the Tanzanian coast to Mbweni, Bagamoyo, to teach Islam (Topan 2001: 114). Rasi'l Ghuli, alias, in Swahili, Mukhariqi bin Shahabu, was known for his cruelty, to the extent that his father locked him up. He managed to escape with the help of a friend of his, killed his father, and took his place. One day a woman whose children had been killed by him went to the Prophet, who was praying in the desert with his companions, and asked him to punish the culprit. The angel Jiburili (i.e., Gabriel) told the Prophet to declare war on Rasi'l Ghuli. In the poem there are many miracolous interventions by the Prophet to save the Muslims when they are in danger. The fighting continues until the Muslim victory and the conversion of even a few of the king's children.

In Swahili epic poetry of this period, East African topoi are less frequent than the Arab ones. The first poet who wrote about local themes was Abdallah bin Masud bin Salim al-Mazrui, who put in verses the rebellion of Mombasa citizens against al-Akida, the city commander appointed by the Sultan. In *Utenzi wa al-Akida,* of only 99 stanzas, the poet narrates the salient facts of the story in a simple style devoid of literary embellishment and lacking even the traditional introduction and ending of the *tenzi.*

3. The long road to Self-determination

European colonization of East Africa began in the late 1880s. The German presence began and ended in violence and was met by the continued resistance, much of it armed, of Africans. The resistance to the German coastal invasions involved many sectors of the Swahili society, which saw in the Europeans a threat quite different from the Arab rule they had learned to tolerate (Pike 1986: 201, 204). The bloody revolts against the Germans taking place in Tanganyika found a poetic expression in two important *tenzi,* namely *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima* (The Epic of German Rule of Mrima) by Hemedi Abdullah el-Buhri, and *Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji* (Poem of Maji Maji war, 1957) by Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini. As Saavedra Casco (2007: 1) observes, both are examples of a peculiar and indigenous written literature (Saavedra Casco 2007:1).

In his introduction to the *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima,* Allen[5] claims that it represents a great novelty in the *utenzi* genre because the author,[6] who composed and wrote in 1891 this poem upon the fight led by Abushir[7] in 1888 in Tanga, Pangani, and Bagamoyo, did not work on the basis of any earlier version (Hemedi 1960: 5). The poem begins with the traditional opening formula that is the entrusting to God of the work that is going to be composed and the aim of the composition:

1	1
Bismillahi Ghafari	In the name of God, the Forgiving
Al Wahidi 'lKahari	The One, the Dominant
Mwinyi kuhui shajari	The giver of life to plants

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[5] Allen states that he translated the poem freely, omitting much repetition in order to produce a readable version in prose (Hemedi 1960: 5).

[6] The *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi* is based on facts contemporary to the poet and witnessed by him (Saavedra Casco 2007: 152).

[7] For more information on Abushir see Abdallah (2011: 5-16).

Na jinni na insiya	to spirits and to mankind[8]

(Hemedi 1960: 10)

13	13
Sasa nashika kalamu	Now I take my pen
Na karatasi ya shamu	and Syrian paper
Ambalo nalifahamu	and what I learned
Nilandika moya moya	I write it directly[9]

(Hemedi 1960: 11)

After the invocations to God, the Prophet and different Islamic characters, in stanza no. 46 the reader is introduced to the heart of the matter:

46	46
Na mimi kusudi yangu	And my purpose
iliyo moyoni mwangu	that is in my heart
kisa cha hawa wazungu	the story of these Europeans
takacho wahadithia	I am going to tell you

(Hemedi 1960: 14).

The poet goes on to the long description of how the Germans agreed with the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Khalifa bin Said, the concession of the Mrima coast, and the atrocities committed by Europeans in Pangani, Bweni, Tanga and other coastal towns. Describing the ensuing war, Hemedi introduces the resistance leader Abushiri bin Salim. Abushiri and his men attack the German fortress in Bagamoyo on the coast, but they are defeated. It is at this point that Abushiri asks for an astrologer. According to Saavedra Casco (2007: 99, 154), Hemedi was a member of a famous family of healers and poets who settled in Pemba island at the beginning of the 19th century. He was poet, healer, expert for controlling Muslim and local spirits, *jinni* and *pepo*, and astrologer. For his own background Hemedi was reputed also a prophet becoming a popular hero. In times of war, the skills of the healers were highly valued, and the charms employed in wars were similar to those employed to protect from spirit possession. The Islamic world, its ritual and magic are present and evident in the fourth section of the poem, when Abushir retreats from the unsuccessfull siege of Bagamoyo, and

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8 English version of this stanza by Allen in Hemedi (1960). The rendering in poetry is mine.

9 The English version of this and the following stanza is mine.

he is advised to get the services of a magician and astrologer in order to defeat the enemies. In this section, offering his magical powers as a contribution to the struggle, the poet shows his self-determination as both a fighter and a defender of his land. He assumes the responsibility by appearing not as a simple observer or narrator, but as a character with his true physical and moral identity.

384	384
Jinale etwa Hemedi	His name is Hemedi
Huyo mganga kazidi	An expert healer
Falaki na mfuradi	Astrologer and poet
[...]	[...]
(Hemedi 1960: 52)	(Saavedra Casco 2007: 164)
489	489
Wazungu tawapumbaza	I will deceive the Europeans
Na mimi tangia kwanza	And I will enter first
Wala pasiwe kuwaza	And before they can think
Wauawe wote pia	All of them shall be killed.
(Hemedi 1960: 65)	(Saavedra Casco 2007: 165)

The poem continues with the description of the German occupation of Sadani, Pangani, and Tanga, and with the negotiations to surrender the towns to the Germans. After the prayers that the poet makes to God in order that Sultan Khalifa defeats his enemies, Hemedi mentions his own name, calling himself a poor man but devoted to God.

Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddin's *Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji* (Poem of Maji Maji War), written around 1912 is the first African account of the Maji Maji revolt that broke out in the South of Tanganyika (1905-1907).[10] The author was a Sufi scholar from Lindi, and wrote the poem a few years

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10 Maji Maji is the best researched war of the early colonial period in Africa. Following the independence of Tanganyika (1961), some scholars and students based at the Department of History, University of Dar es Salaam began to develop a historical narrative of the Maji Maji revolt. It takes its name from *maji* ('water') and refers to the war medicine used by the rebels. The revolt is one of the best known cases of mass-uprising in the history of former Tanganyika. It began in July 1905 in the Matumbi Hills in the central eastern part of German East Africa with the uprooting of cotton from communal fields. From there it spread in the country (north and northwest, south and southwest), and ended two years after, in 1907.

after the end of the conflict. The text represents an open condemnation of the violence and the terrible outcome wrought by the revolt. After a brief introduction, the poem mentions the outbreak of the rebellion and the German response to the hostilities. From the beginning, the poet openly declares his opposition to the Maji Maji revolt:

7	7
Twalikaa tukilala	We were resting
Na ndisha njema tukila	And eating well
Mara ikaja ghafula	When suddenly
Tukasikia habari	We heard the news

8	8
Ya washenzi wamekhuni	Of pagans rebelling
Ni hivi waja bomani	Approaching the fortress
Na silaha mkononi	With weapons in their hands
Na miji kuyihasiri	And destroying the villages

9	9
Na sote tukadharau	We scorned
Kwa habari ni kuu	These important news
Huwaje hata wao	How could they
Kufanya mno jeuri?	Act in such a violent way?
(Jamaliddini 1957: 32)	(Saavedra Casco 2007: 258)

A few rebels are captured and, when interrogated, they expose the grievances that made them rise in arms against the colonial regime:

25	25
Bwana wetu tumechoka	Our Sir, we are tired
Kila siku kutumika	Of being used every day
Tufe, yatoke mashaka!	Better to die, and be free from suffering!
Naam tumekhitari!	Yes, this is our choice[11].

Concerning Maji Maji war see: Iliffe 1967; Gwassa and Iliffe 1968; Pike 1986; Giblin and Monson 2010; Sunseri 2000; Becker 2004; Schmidt 2010; Greenstein 2010; Abdallah 2011.

[11] English version mine.

(Jamaliddini 1957: 36)

and continued with their resolution to fight till the very end:

27	27
Mazito! Tukayaona;	A heavy load! we can see
Tukaucha na kunena	We discussed the matter
Tukaizuwa fitina	We planned the revolt
La kufa tumekhitari	And we choose to die.
(Jamaliddini 1957: 37)	(Saavedra Casco 2007: 261)

The violence of the German soldiers and the corruption of their acolytes are an integral part of the poem.

The poet continues his narrative describing the actions of the rebels in the Lindi region. The fifth section of the poem depicts a dialogue between the rebels and *hongo*, the medicine man who distributes the magic water that was the ideological sustenance of the rebellion. The rebels complain about the lack of the protection of the magic water. The *hongo* replies that the medicine has failed due to the sinful behavior of the Maji Maji fighters. In the sixth section, the Germans attack the rebels and wound the *hongo.* According to Pike (1986: 226), Maji Maji belief offered Tanganyikans a solution to the problem of unity and morale:

Hivi sasa msijute!	Let's not feel remorse
Gogo na tulikokote!	But carry the yoke further,
Tukifa tufe sote!	If we die, let's die together
Nawapa langu shauri!	That's my advise
Na hivi twende vitani,	And now off to war
Tusijiweke mwituni	Let's not hide in the forest,
Kheri tufe utamboni!	It's better to die in battle!
Nasi sote ihrari!	We are all free people!
(Jamaliddin 1957: 233)	(Pike1986: 228)

The tribes of Ngoni and Ngindo join to plan an attack: Germans and the rebels clash again and finally the Germans completely defeat the Maji Maji fighters and the rebellion is suppressed (Saavedra Casco 2007: 258).

The post-independence period marks the spirit of the *wananchi* (new citizens). The concept of nation and nationalism pervades all sectors of the country and, in particular, influences the communicative dynamics. According to Saavedra Casco (2006: 236), intellectuals of the *Ujamaa* regime chose the narrative genre of utenzi to honour the ruling party CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi,* Party of the Revolution), the Tanzanian Army, and the government of Zanzibar. This genre was also used by Henry R. Muhanika for his *Utenzi wa Vita vya Kagera. Anguko la Idi Amin* (The Poem of Kagera War and the Fall of Idi Amin, 1987) to narrate the Kagera war between Tanzania and Uganda whose outcome was the end of Idi Amin Dada's dictatorial regime. The Uganda-Tanzania war of 1978-1979 was a landmark event in post-colonial East African history. In response to Idi Amin's annexation of the Kagera Salient in north-western Tanzania in 1978, in April 1979 Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere launched a counterattack that routed Amin's forces and swept him from power. According to Rettova (2010: 37), among the post-independence historiographic *tenzi,* Muhanika's poem is the most innovative. Already in the first stanza there is a tone of emotional independence from the traditional *utenzi* opening forms: instead of the act of entrustment to God of the poets of previous centuries, Muhanika draws the reader's attention, calling him *ndugu,* a Swahili term meaning kin, sibling, relative, and also comrade:

1	1
Ndugu yangu sikiliza	My comrade, listen
Kirefu kisa naleta	I bring a long story
Ingawa kilitendeka	though it was made
Kwa muda mfupi sana.	in a very short time.

2	2
Sianzi kuomba dua	I don 't start by praying
Kwa Mungu au Miungu	God or the gods
Kitu *ninategemea*	What I rely on
Hasa ni juhudi yangu.	It is my effort.

5	5
Siombi mtu kalamu	I don't ask anyone for a pen
Wino pia karatasi	Ink or paper
Vifaa nihitajivyo	What I need
Viko vyote mbele yangu.	Is here in front of me

Muhanika states that although he knows the metric of *utenzi,* he deliberately detaches himself from it, and this declaration of his may be seen as synonymous with an emerging individuation and the construction of a 'collective Self' within a socialist project aiming at stemming the role of religion as an ideological-political instrument. The poem continues by introducing the time in which the events that will be discussed occurred, and all the historical characters of the story, from Idi Amin to Gheddafi. The description of the early days of Idi Amin in his role as Ugandan dictator faithfully corresponds to what is reported in the film archives of that period.[12] Although the title of the poem refers to the Kagera war, it is actually an account of the entire Idi Amin's regime. The conflict had serious consequences, such as bitter exchanges at the OAU (Organization of African Unity), the failure of *Ujamaa* in Tanzania, and the end of eight years of dictatorship in Uganda (Roberts 2014: 692; Nayenga 1984: 69).

4. Final Remarks

Awareness of Self and memory can be used together to strengthen the sense of belonging to one's own cultural and social context. Starting from the times of the Islamic-based poetry, the epic poem, *utenzi*, has been a successful medium used by Swahili authors to express themselves as both the custodians of an acquired cultural memory and innovators of those previous literary works that inspired them in the composition of their epics. The poet himself becomes a means of communication for using his mother tongue to reformulate the story, so that the message written down in the epics can reach a wider audience: as Simala (2004: 17) underlines, just as many Africans converted to Islam but indigenous religious practices persisted through the modern era, Swahili, and not Arabic, remained the spoken language, and it is through Swahili that poetry spread. During the European colonization, Swahili compositions became the voice of the resistance spirit against the colonialists and a vehicle for externalizing cultural values antithetical to those of the *wazungu*. If at the beginning of Swahili epic production, poets tended to follow the Islamic literary tradition, it is with the advent of European colonization that they try to defend and preserve their self-determination and assertion. It is in the postcolonial period that Swahili *utenzi* becomes a witness to the new historical events in East Africa, and to the failure of many local and pan-African policies. Historical memories become a psychological substratum to strengthen one's own Self as well as to act like a support for emerging local policies. Examples of this type of narrative poetry are the political *tenzi.* Among the most

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[12] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ3lh_RGlrKecYSgbaXkbYw.

significative *tenzi* published between 1960s and 1980s one can remember the *Utenzi wa Jamhuri ya Tanzania* (Poem of the Republic of Tanzania, 1968), by Ramadhani Mwaruka, that covers the history of Tanganyika and Tanzania, the *Utenzi wa Zinduko la Ujamaa* (Poem of the Establishment of Ujamaa, 1972) by Zuberi Kamali Lesso, that describes the implementation of the economic socialist system in Tanzania, and the *Utenzi wa Jeshi la Wananchi Tanzania* (Poem of the Tanzanian Popular Army; 1987) by Minaeli Mdundo. This last poem deals with the development of weapons and military defensive strategies and depicts the battles against Europeans; at the end of its 3108 stanzas the author concludes with a eulogy to the army and also to its peacetime work. Becoming a representation and record of the historical events of East Africans' collective experience and the imagined reconstruction of local perceptions and consciousness induced by that experience, the Swahili *utenzi* poems become instrumental to the recognition and acknowledgement of the individual and collective identity.

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