Exploring Haji Gora Haji's poetics in his collection *Shuwari*

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This article has its roots in a project carried out with Irene Brunotti (University of Leipzig), the result of which was the publication of a bilingual Swahili-English edition of the latest collection of poems by Haji Gora Haji, a well-known Swahili poet from Tumbatu, entitled *Shuwari* ("The calm;" Buluu Publishing, 2019). The aim of the paper is to analyse the poetry of Haji Gora Haji with a focus on this latest anthology, dwelling in particular on the great originality of his handling of the Swahili language, cultural repertoires and natural imagery, all essential elements of the poet's long-lasting dialogue with other Swahili poets and with the readers of/listeners to his poetry.

Keywords: poetry, Swahili, Tumbatu dialect, Zanzibar, Tanzania

1. Introduction

This analysis of the poetry of *Mzee*[1] Haji Gora Haji, an elderly, locally well-known poet from Tanzania, is based on work which was carried out in collaboration with Irene Brunotti, lecturer in Swahili language at the University of Leipzig, and resulted in the bilingual Swahili-English edition of Haji's *Shuwari* ("The calm"), his latest poetic anthology (*diwani*).[2] Along with the poems and their translation, carried out in collaboration with Nathalie Arnold Koenings,[3] the volume offers two prefaces by well-known scholars of Swahili language and literature (preface I is by Sauda Barwani and Ridder Samsom,

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[1] Old person, name of respect given to a man.

[3] Nathalie Arnold Koenings (Associate Professor, Zayed University, UAE) is an anthropologist, translator of Swahili literature, and novelist. We are also thankful to Bwana Ahmed Mgeni Ali, retired teacher of English in Zanzibar and Swahili writer of short stories, for having reviewed the first draft of our translation, adding some important suggestions.

while preface II is by Abdilatif Abdalla), some analytical insights by the editors into Haji Gora Haji's artistry and a link to videos of the poet himself performing nine of his poems.[4]

Haji Gora Haji, born in 1933 on Tumbatu, a tiny island in the Zanzibari archipelago, was sent at the age of four to live in Mkunazini, a neighbourhood of Stone Town (in Swahili Miji Mkongwe), the historic centre of the capital city on Zanzibar island (in Swahili Unguja). There he received his education at a Qu´ran school, but did not have the chance to attend a state school since he had to start working at a very young age. He has worked as a fisherman, a dhow sailor and a porter for most of his life. Since his childhood in Tumbatu, Haji Gora Haji has been involved in *ngoma*[5] contexts, which are characterised by competition features, not only in terms of the lyrical composition, but also of the performance itself. Since then, he has never ceased composing (Samsom 1999: 26). He has developed his career as a successful composer of poems and song lyrics (not only for *ngoma*, but also for *taarab*).[6] Since the 1950s, Haji has been cooperating with different *taarab* clubs ('Michenzani,' 'Malindi/Ikhwan Safaa,'[7] 'Culture' and 'Mlandege' among others) in Zanzibar, writing some very popular hits such as *Kimbunga* ("The hurricane"), performed by 'Malindi.' This latter lyric gave the title to his first collection of poems, edited by Tigiti S. Y. Sengo and published in 1994 by TUKI (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili), the Institute of Kiswahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam. For some time partly included in A-level school curriculum, the *Kimbunga* collection made Haji Gora Haji extremely famous in Tanzania and East Africa. In 2001, during the celebration of 'Kiswahili day' in Dar es Salaam, he was honoured by the National Swahili Council (BAKITA, Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa) for his literary work and contribution to the growth of Kiswahili. This was the last of a series of awards he received from BAKITA, which he was also a member of from 1980 to 1982. The poet was also member of BAKIZA (Baraza la Kiswahili Zanzibar, Zanzibar Swahili Council) between 2001 and 2003 (Aiello and Brunotti 2019: 138).

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[4] Playlist at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQn7q4TYUk8&list=PLSY1pFhtGnT3ot_Kn2TQIou1Nl2lfvLKH

[5] *Ngoma* (a Swahili word which literally means 'drum') are happenings during which music, dance and song act together to create performances relating to the most important rites in the cycle of social life – birth, female and male initiation, marriage, the celebration of female purity before weddings and death (Brunotti 2005).

[6] *Taarab* is a genre of Swahili sung poetry with an accompanying music marked by Arabo-islamic, African and Indian traditions. According to local accounts, *taarab* developed in Zanzibar at the end of the XIX century as a musical entertainment for the family and guests of Sultan Seyyid Barghash, and later, in 1905, the first *taarab* club, 'Ikhwan Safaa', was founded by a group of young men of Yemeni origins. In the 1920s and 1930s, this elite musical form started to be practiced in the Ng'ambo neighbourhoods, giving voice to the protests against the social injustices suffered by the lower classes and particularly by women, with the support of the colonial judiciary system, like in the songs (*nyimbo*) performed by the famous singer Siti binti Saad (Aiello 2006).

[7] After the revolution of 1964, the oldest taarab club in the islands 'Ikhwan Safaa' was renamed Malindi Branch because of the neighbourhood in which the closest ASP (Afro Shirazi Party) was located (Fair 2002: 64).

In spite of his age, Haji Gora Haji has continued to contribute to the contemporary cultural scene, to reflect on present society and to express himself creatively. Besides poetry, he has written one short novel, *Siri ya Ging'ingi* ("The secret of Ging'ingi," 2009), an unpublished autobiography entitled *Maisha Yangu. 1993-2001* ("My life. 1993-2001"), and some children's books which were published in Tanzania with the support of the Children's Book Project (in Swahili *Mradi wa Vitabu vya Watoto*), launched in 1991 and financed by a number of international donors such as CODE (*Canadian Organisation for Development through Education*), SIDA (*Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency*), British Council, etc. (Aiello Traore 2013: 50). Haji's children's works include, among others, *Nahodha Chui* ("Captain leopard;" Oxford University Press, 2004), *Ujanja wa Sungura* ("The cunning of the hare;" Oxford University Press, 2004), *Kunganyira* (E&D, 2004), *Jogoo na Kanga* ("The cock and the guinea fowl;" E&D, 2003).

Haji Gora Haji is also the author of a Tumbatu-Swahili lexicon (*Kamusi ya Kitumbatu,* Haji 2006) and collaborated with lexicographers on the publication of *Kamusi la Lahaja la Kitumbatu* ("Dictionary of the Kitumbatu dialect," 2012), published by *Baraza la Kiswahili la Zanzibar* (Zanzibar Swahili Council).

Irene Brunotti and I had already had the opportunity to meet the poet because of our previous doctoral research, respectively on ngoma and taarab performances, and therefore, when we heard about Haji Gora Haji's wish to publish his latest collection of poems entitled *Shuwari* ("The calm"), we decided to prepare the above-mentioned publishing project.

During the process of editing and translating Shuwari, the aspect that I found amazing and challenging in his poetry was the extreme originality of his handling of the Swahili language, cultural repertoires and natural imagery, all elements which are essential parts of his long-lasting dialogue with other Swahili poets and with the readers/listeners of the poems, as I will elaborate in the following pages.

2. Language use in *Shuwari*

In his compositions, Haji Gora Haji displays a distinctive combination of *Kiunguja* (Unguja dialect) and a number of vernacular features deriving prevalently from *Kitumbatu*, the dialect spoken on his native island of Tumbatu. Only one poem, *Ukulivu* (in standard Swahili *uvivu* "laziness"), is written entirely in *Kitumbatu*.

Kiunguja is a variety of Swahili, a Southern dialect with a Northern dialect overlay (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 12) that is spoken in Zanzibar town and in the surrounding area of Unguja,[8] the main island in the Zanzibari archipelago, which is formed of Unguja, Pemba, Tumbatu and some other small islets. During colonial times, it was chosen by the East African Swahili Committee as the basis for the development of a standard form of Swahili (*Kiswahili sanifu*; Whiteley 1969: 79-80).

Despite being the basis of Standard Swahili (SS in short), the Unguja dialect presents some specificities which are displayed in many poetry and prose works by Zanzibari authors. These include the insertion or deletion of the semi-vowels *y* and *w*, the frequent elision or contraction of vowels, the use of *–engine* (SS *–ingine* "another, other"), the generalisation of the relative particle *-o-*, the marker of the relative future *-ta-* (SS *-taka-*), the marker of the negative future *-to-* (SS *–ta-*), etc. (Bertoncini Zúbková 1987: 134-5). All these characteristics can be found in the *Shuwari* collection, starting with the insertion of the semi-vowel *y*, especially in the verbs ending with *-ia* and *-ea* in SS. For instance, in the poem *Mapishi 1* ("Cookery 1;" Haji 2019: 42), we find, among others, the forms *kutokeya* (SS *kutokea* "to appear"), *alofikiya* (SS *aliyefikia* "who arrived") and *zilotimiya* (SS *zilizotimia* "which are accomplished"). The addition of the semi-vowel *w* between two vowels (of which one is *u* or *o*) can also be noticed in many cases, for instance in the forms *rajuwa* (SS *rajua* "hope"), *asotambuwa* (SS *asiyetambua* "who doesn't recognize") and *kilopunguwa* (*kilichopungua* "which has decreased"), which appear in the poem *Afrika* ("Africa;" Haji 2019: 34). In some of the above-mentioned examples, two other characteristics of the Unguja dialect can be noted, in particular the use of the general relative particle *-o-* instead of the specific class agreements and the loss of the vowel preceding the relative. Additional instances of these co-occurring phenomena may be found throughout the poetic collection, for example, we find *niloziandika* (SS *nilizoziandika* "which I wrote") in the poem *Mwiba* ("Thorn;" Haji 2019: 76) and the forms *yasokuwa* (SS *yasiyokuwa* "which are not") and *yasoidadika* (SS *yasiyoidadika* "which are not numerable; innumerable") in *Bahari* ("Ocean;" Haji 2019: 90). The vowel *u* is frequently deleted, in forms like *kunifatafata* (SS *kunifuatafuata* "to follow me insistently") in the poem *Hunipati* ("You don't catch me;" Haji 2019: 53), *kifatilie* (SS *kifuatilie* "follow it") in the poem *Asili yako ni bora* ("Your heritage is best;" Haji 2019: 87), etc. The use of *–engine* (SS *-ingine*) can also be found in the *diwani*, in forms like *mwengine* ("another person"), for instance in *Kila Kunguru Moga* ("Every cautious crow;" Haji 2019: 48) and *Si*

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[8] The Unguja dialect was originally spoken in Zanzibar town and its environs. With the rise of Zanzibari political and economic power in the 18th and 19th centuries, it spread widely across central Zanzibar island, Pemba, southern Mafia, Kilwa and the adjoining mainland coast. Subsequently, it was carried much farther across the mainland to trading centres such as Tabora, Mwanza and Ujiji (currently in Tanzania), and into areas which are now a part of DR Congo (Kivu and Maniema; Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 12).

makofi na viboko ("Not slaps and whips;" Haji 2019: 85), or *kwengine* ("somewhere else") in *Hupendwa Baada ya Kufa* ("Loved after dying;" Haji 2019: 93).

The specificities of the future tense in the Unguja dialect are also present in the *Shuwari* collection, i.e. the marker of the relative future *-ta-* (instead of the SS *-taka-*), which appears in forms like *wataosimama* (SS *watakaosimama* "those who will stand") in the poem *Tuwasomeshe watoto* ("Let's educate the children;" Haji 2019: 37) and *ataokweleza* (SS *atakayepanda* "who will climb") in the poem *Siku ya kifo cha nyani* ("The day of the baboon's death;" Haji 2019: 78). Furthermore, the marker of the negative future *-to-* (instead of the SS *-ta-*), is recognisable in forms like *sitokataa* (SS *sitakataa* "I will not refuse"), which appears in the poem *Kwa kila kunguru moga* (Haji 2019: 48), and *hutonipata* (SS *hutanipata* "you will not catch me") in the poem *Hunipati* (Haji 2019: 53).

In his poems, Haji Gora Haji intermingles the use of *Kiunguja*, whose principal peculiar differences from Standard Swahili were presented above, with some elements of his mother tongue *Kitumbatu*, a Southern dialect of Swahili which is mainly spoken on Tumbatu island (off the north-west tip of Unguja/Zanzibar island) and on the adjoining parts of Zanzibar island around Mkokotoni bay (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 11). There are also Tumbatu speaking migrants in Zanzibar Town, on southern Pemba, on Mafia and on the mainland coast north of Tanga. Influences of the Tumbatu dialect can be found in the *Shuwari* collection at various linguistic levels. The most striking phonological characteristic of *Kitumbatu* which appears in the poetic collection is that the SS sounds *th, dh* and *gh* (/θ/, /ð/, /ɣ/), of Arabic origin, are pronounced respectively as *s, z* and *h* (Bakari 2015: 59). In the *Shuwari* anthology, many examples of this phenomenon can be discovered, like *mazara* (SS *madhara* "damage"), *-sibitisha* (SS *-thibitisha* "confirm"), *-zuru* (SS *-dhuru* "to hurt"), *hasiya* (SS *ghasia* "chaos").[9] Another example of this is the following stanza from the poem *Mwiba* ("Thorn;" Haji 2019: 72-73; English translation: 201-202), where we find forms in *Kitumbatu* such as *zihaka* (SS *dhihaka*) and *mzarau* (SS *mdharau*):

Mguu huota tende, si kwa kua ni zihaka	The leg gets badly swollen, and this is not a joke
Penye mwiba usitende, unyayo kuubandika	Where there is a thorn, do not set your foot
Utakuhasiri punde, ubaki kuyayatika	It will hurt you at once, leaving you writhing

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[9] Respectively in the poems *Sidumbe* ("Don't agree"), *Ukaliyona Bwaa Hono Bwe* ("If you see *bwa*, you won't see *bwe*"), *Kwa herini* ("Goodbye"), and *Mazimwi* ("Ogres;" Haji 2019: 65; 61; 64; 78).

Kila mzarau mwiba, mguu huota tende	Whoever ignores a thorn gets a badly swollen leg

Otherwise, the poet closely follows *Kiunguja* phonology and there are only traces of other typical traits of *Kitumbatu* in *Shuwari*, such as the palatalisation of *s* (*sh*)[10] in the word *shindano* (SS *sindano* "syringe") in the poem *Miujiza* ("Miracles;" Haji 2019: 92), or, at a morpho-phonological level, the loss of the class 5 prefix *ji-* (Bakari 2015: 66), for instance in the form *bwe* (SS *jiwe* "stone") in the poem *Ukaliyona Bwaa Hono Bwe* ("If you see *bwa,* you won't see *bwe*;" Haji 2019: 61).

With regard the verbal morphology, it is also possible to identify some typical forms of *Kitumbatu* which diverge from *Kiunguja*, such as *satumia* (SS *nitatumia*, "I will use"), which appears in the third stanza of the poem *Kwa kila kunguru moga* ("Every cautious crow") (Haji 2019: 48; English translation: 176):

Cheo changu satumia, kwa jamii kuifunza	My status I use, to instruct the community
Pawe na kuiteteya, na hilo nitafanyiza	It needs to be defended, and this I will do
Wengine wakikosea, katu sitawaneneza	If others err, never will I advise them
Kwa kila kunguru moga, hukimbiza ubawawe	Every cowardly crow, its wings would protect

The verbal marker for the future in Kitumbatu is *-cha-* (SS *-ta-*). For instance, the conjugation (1st, 2nd and 3rd person singular and plural) of the future tense *kuja* ("to come") is the following (Bakiza 2012: IV): *miye sakuja, weye uchakuja, veye kachakuja, suye tuchakuja, nyuye mchakuja, veo wachakuja* (SS *mimi nitakuja, wewe utakuja, yeye atakuja, sisi tutakuja, nyinyi mtakuja, wao watakuja*). It can also be seen that the subject prefix of the third person is *ka-*, a characteristic which it shares with other Southern dialects (including *Kipemba*) (Bertoncini Zúbková 2000: 53), and that the personal pronouns are different from Standard Swahili. The pronoun *veo* ("they," SS *wao*) appears once in the collection, in the poem *Hodi* ("May I come in?" – when entering a house; Haji 2019: 61).

Another phenomenon which differentiates *Kitumbatu* from *Kiunguja* is the first person singular in the narrative past, where the combination of the subject prefix *ni-* with the verbal marker *-ka-* generates *ha-*, as in the form *hasafiri* (SS *nikasafiri* "and I travelled"), in the poem *Hodi* (Haji 2919: 60) or

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[10] Much evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the dictionary of Kitumbatu (BAKIZA 2012), in entries such as *shikio* (SS *sikio* "ear"), *shirikali* (SS *serikali* "government"), etc.

hafika (SS *nikafika* "and I arrived"), which appears in the first stanza of the poem *Ukaliyona Bwaa Hono Bwe* ("If you see *bwa,* you won't see *bwe;*" Haji 2019: 61):

Niliifanya ziara, kisiwa Ndeme hafika	I made a visit, and arrived in Ndeme[11]
Nyazili Kidikobera, Gomani haizunguuka	I started in Kidikobera, and went round Gomani
Uvivini henda mara, nilipokwisha henda Chwaka	To Uvivini I went, and then to Chwaka
Kuonana na wakubwa, wakanambiya niseme	To meet the elders, who told me to speak

In the same poem, another dialectal feature of *Kitumbatu* (which is shared by some varieties of *Kipemba*; Bertoncini Zúbková 2000: 54) can be found, namely the construction of the negative conjugation of the present tense through vowel harmony, displayed in the verbal form *hono* (SS *huoni* "you don't see"), first person singular of the negative present tense of the verb *-ona* ("see").

Finally, at the level of the lexicon, we find numerous *Kitumbatu* words which are not present in Standard Swahili, such as *-firimba* (SS *-vuruga* "disarrange"), *-dumba* (SS *-kubali* "accept, agree"), *msururu* (SS *safu* "row"), *-danda* (SS *-choma* "pierce, burn"), *vukuto* (SS *joto* "heat"), *uyada* (SS *utamu* "good taste"), *-soza* (SS *-maliza* "finish"), *-yayatika* (SS *kulia sana kwa sababu ya maumivu* "to cry loudly because of pain").[12]

The above-mentioned vernacular features may even be difficult for many Swahili-speaking readers. Therefore, when editing the poetry collection, a glossary (*sherehe*) including both *Kitumbatu* and some non-standard *Kiunguja* forms as they appear in the collection *Shuwari*, was inserted after the poems.

Furthermore, it should be stressed here that the poet does not use *Kitumbatu* forms in a schematic, predictable way. Rather, they may be regarded as variations which are combined with *Kiunguja* forms for artistic purposes, in order to better fit the "soundscape" and/or the rhyme pattern of the poems, and sometimes to emphasise the local dimension of the discourse, something that will be elaborated upon in the following pages.

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[11] Old name of Tumbatu island (BAKIZA 2012: 90).

[12] Respectively in the poems *Shuwari*; *Afrika* and *Sidumbe*; *Honywa Honywa*; *Jua ladanda*; *Hapana*; *Yasoza Hayako Tena* (and others); *Sinda*; *Mwiba* (Haji 2019: 33; 34/65; 40; 44; 45; 47; 58; 72).

3. Language, poetry and cultural identity

The language variety presented in the previous section is a fundamental part of Haji Gora Haji's rich poetic language, which also includes other features of Swahili poetry, such as the deletion of the subject marker[13] (like *u-* in the second person of the subjunctive), the choice of rare/poetic terms such as *ja* ("like"), the contraction of nouns with possessives, like *sikuye* (*siku yake*), *maanaye* (*maana yake*), *neemaze* (*neema zake*)[14], and the use of the old *ile*-perfect deriving from the poetic tradition of Northern Swahili dialects. These traits were stylised and popularised in the 1950s by Kaluta Amri Abedi in his manual of poetic composition for a wider audience, *Sheria za kutunga mashairi na Diwani ya Amri* (1954: 16-43), which was written in response to the widespread publication of poetry in newspapers and books in order to instruct the would-be poets.

As Mohamed Hassan Abdulaziz (1979: 86) pointed out in his study on the verses of Muyaka bin Haji, the skilful exploitation of the language – including the use of archaisms, different varieties of Swahili and foreign words, as well as the flexibility of the syntactic order – can be regarded, to some degree, as a resource employed by Swahili poets in order to counterbalance the rigidity of meter and rhyme structures. Furthermore, the *mashairi* genre[15] invented by Muyaka, which constitutes the bulk of the *Shuwari* collection (and of modern Swahili poetry in general), a more secular form as opposed to the Swahili poetry prior to the nineteenth century, fully manifests the original, symbiotic relationship between orality and writing in Swahili poetry by incorporating many features of oral poetry, namely the use of colloquial and idiomatic language and the creation of euphony through various stylistic means such as lexical repetition, sound repetition, alliteration and rhyme (Khamis 1993: 724-726), as is shown henceforth through some examples from the compositions of Haji Gora Haji. For the poet, this playing with language represents not only a manifestation of the poet's virtuosity, but also, very importantly, his commitment to preserving the range of people's linguistic repertoires, since "your language is a richness" (*Lugha yako ni mali*; Interview with the poet, July 29, 2016). The use of the *mashairi* form in its most widespread typology, i.e. stanzas composed of four lines which are composed of two

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[13] For instance, *sije* instead of *usije* ("don't come") in the poem *Muhadhari* ("Be cautious of him"), and *sione* instead of *usione* ("don't see") in *Ukalyona Bwa Hono Bwe* (Haji 2019: 41; 59).

[14] In Standard Swahili this process happens almost exclusively with kinship terms (Bertoncini Zubkova 1987: 48).

[15] Following a definition which also takes into account possible variations, the *mashairi* are poems made of at least two stanzas, which are composed of an equal number of lines (usually four) divided into two parts, with the same internal and external rhymes (not forcefully central) in three first lines, and varying patterns of the last line. The number of syllables is commonly eight plus eight (with a caesura in the middle), but it can be slightly different, for instance six plus six or four plus eight (Shariff 1988: 49).This type of poetry is extremely popular: *mashairi* appear regularly in Swahili newspapers and radio programmes are devoted to them in Tanzania and Kenya (Topan 1974: 176).

eight-syllables hemistiches rhyming at the middle and at the end, with multiple variants concerning the last line (Amri Abedi 1954: 16-19), is not perceived by the poet as an artificial restriction of his artistry, but as an incentive for new verbal creations. According to him, "the responsibility of the poet implies some important things, first of all the language and the moulding of the words so that they lay well in rhyme and meter structures. That's how it is" (*Wajibu wa mshairi kuna vitu muhimu awe navyo: kwanza lugha, na ufinyanzi wa maneno yakae vizuri kwenye vina na mizani. Hiyo ndo hali*; interview with the poet, July 30, 2016).

With regard to the rhyming schemes, Haji Gora Haji mainly employs two patterns: the scheme AB/AB/AB/BX, where X frequently coincides with A in the first stanza, and the last line often constitutes a refrain (sometimes with slight word variations), such as in *Honywa Honywa*, *Muhadhari*, *Mapishi I/II*, *Jua ladanda*, *Ulimi*, *Sinda*, *Ndege mjanja*, *Hodi*, *Kwaherini*, *Binadamu*, etc.; and the scheme AB/AB/AB/CD, where rhyme B is the same in the whole poem, and the last line is repeated in every stanza (occasionally with slight variations), such as in *Shuwari*, *Afirika*, *Tuwasomeshe Watoto*, *Ukulivu*, *Kila kunguru mwoga*, *Hakuna mganga huyo*, *Kero la binadamu*, *Sidumbe*, etc. In two poems, *Kinoo cha akili* and *Nena*, the last line is made up of 8 syllables and the scheme is AB/AB/AB/X.

Indeed, language is a fundamental concern in Haji Gora Haji's poetics and a recurrent topic in his poems, amongst others *Ulimi* ("Tongue"), *Utamaduni hazina* ("Culture is treasure"), *Zambi za mdomo* ("The sins of the mouth"), *Nena* ("Speak;" Haji 2019: 46; 69; 96; 98). It is conceived of as both a means of communication to be handled with awareness and care ("Speak with care, sifting through words;" first line of the poem *Nena*), and as a vector of cultural identity, not merely conservative, but functional within the expression of the individual's multiple identities, here exemplified by his personal way of interweaving varieties of Swahili, since "standard [Swahili] and dialect are like nose and mouth;"[16] in other words, they are two things which are close to each other, diverse yet complementary. Haji Gora Haji has lived for many years in Zanzibar town, where he has been a witness to how the use of dialects tends to decline in an urban context, even amongst *Kitumbatu* speakers (BAKIZA 2012: iii), and especially amongst the younger generations (Bakari 2015: 52), to whom he addresses his warning in the poem *Ukaliyona bwa hono bwe* ("If you see *bwa* you won't see *bwe*;" here the sixth stanza*)*:

> *Kitumbatu nawe chako, kupokeya hukutaka*   Your own Kitumbatu, you did not want
>   to learn

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[16] "*Sanifu na lahaja pua na mdomo.*" Interview with the poet, 29 July 2016. It should be clarified here that when Haji Gora Haji speaks of Standard Swahili (*sanifu*), he is actually referring to *Kiunguja*, as he has made clear in many conversations.

Hukufikiya kiliko, kwako kilipeperuka	You did not get to where it is, it just fluttered by you
Utabaki pwekopweko, hili na lile kubaka	You'll stay lonely lonely, understanding only this and that
Ukalyona bwa hono bwe, naapa si paka shume	If you see bwa you won't see bwe,[17] I swear it's no male cat

His sense of responsibility with regard the preservation of language variety on the Islands has also been a prompt to Mzee Haji Gora Haji's keen interest in lexicography, as seen in the introduction, leading to the publication of his Tumbatu lexicon and his participation in the lexicographic work of BAKIZA (acknowledgment in BAKIZA 2012: vi).

Furthermore, his attitude to the language is also deployed in the frequent use of idioms and, especially, of sayings and proverbs from the Islands. These are quoted/evoked in the title and/or in the refrain of numerous poems, like *Kwa kila kunguru moga* ("Every cautious crow"), *Ndege mjanja* ("The cunning bird"), *Dua ya kuku* ("The chicken's prayer"), *Siku ya kifo cha nyani* ("The day of the baboon's death;" Haji 2019: 48; 60; 75; 78), etc., where they constitute the lyrical nucleus and are present in many others. The statements are often associated with the wisdom of the *wahenga* ("ancestors:" "The ancestors are the experts, in sayings that are wise" - *Wahenga ndio viranja, kwa semi zenye upevu*, first line of the poem *Ndege mjanja;* Haji 2019: 60) and, thus, with the kind of knowledge transmitted by the elders, which can be useful in orientating people's behaviour within the community. However, the didactic use of Swahili sayings and proverbs is never simplistic nor straightforward (Lodhi 1990: 113) since the elliptical and metaphorical shape of this verbal genre can be dynamically adapted to various situations and communicative functions. This is even more evident in literary forms such as poems,[18] where sayings and proverbs can be further moulded by the poet in the course the stanzas and enriched by different figurative expressions. For instance, in the poem *Ulimi* ("Tongue"), the poet starts by paraphrasing a well-known saying *Kheri kujikwaa kidole kuliko kujikwaa ulimi* "Better to stumble over your toe than to stumble over your tongue" (see BAKIZA 2010: 479), in order to advise people to use language cleverly and ethically, and then goes on by making use of two devices, i.e. a personification

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[17] *Bwa* is the Tumbatu word for SS *mbwa* ("dog"), *bwe* is in SS *jiwe* ("stone").

[18] According to Lodhi (in Kalugila and Lodhi 1980: 77-83), the ancient verbal art of Swahili proverbs (*methali/mithali*) has a deeply rooted interconnection with poetry, since most proverbs show a metric structure of 6, 8, 12 or 16 syllables (*mizani*), not uncommonly with a caesura (*kituo*) marked by internal and final rhyme, and have been used by poets within the Swahili tradition for a long time. This, the author exemplifies through many examples, from *Al Inkishafi* to poems from Ustaadh Bhalo, Mathias Mnyampala, D. P. Massamba, and A. Abdalla.

(as the tongue "has kicking and blows") and a sensorial metaphor ("if you give it a taste of aloe," if you let it be bitter, harsh), which reinforce his message by underlining the equivalence between words and (potentially dangerous) actions. The personification is continued in the last stanza ("when it slips") and other sensorial metaphors are added, this time including olfactory and tactile aspects ("it will cause you to stink;" "pushing you to lay down in the sand"):

Kukwaa wako ulimi, bora ukwae kidole	To stumble with your tongue, better stumble with your toe
Wahenga kwa zao semi, hukutungukiya ndwele	The ancestors through their sayings, would heal illness
Ukafikwa na mughumi, na kuliya kwa kelele	When you are caught up in confusion, and are sobbing out loud
Ulimi uuhofile, una mateke na ngumi	Be afraid of the tongue, it has kicking and blows
Kwa kalamu nakariri, ya ulimi niwambile	In pen I insist, on telling you about the tongue
Kutumia vizuri, hilo sheti utambule	To use it well, this you must know
Kiurambisha sibiri, utajutiya milele	If you give it a taste of aloe, you will regret it forever
Ulimi uuhofile, una mateke na ngumi	Be afraid of the tongue, it has kicking and blows
Ulimi hukupandisha, cheoni unyanyukile	The tongue can elevate you, enhancing your status
Unapoutelezesha, hukunukisha ukele	When it slips, it will cause you to stink
Punde hukuteremsha, penye mchanga ulale	Suddenly pushing you to lay down in the sand
Ulimi uuhofile, una mateke na ngumi	Be afraid of the tongue, it has kicking and fists

In this poem, we can also find some alliterations, such as "*kuliya kwa kelele*" ("sobbing out loud") and "*Kwa kalamu nakariri*" ("in pen I insist"). The perceptual, sensorial dimension which characterises the whole poem is amplified through the creation of phonic associations, for instance the noun *kelele* ("noise, din") is connected, through the repetition of the consonants *k* and *l* and of the vowel *e*, to *ukele* ("stink, nauseate"). In this way, the poet reinforces the relationship between two ideas, namely regret

after having talked badly and haphazardly and the unpleasant personal and social implications of this, and made them very physical by involving two sensorial abilities, i.e. the auditory and the olfactory. From this perspective, it can be seen that the lexical choices of Haji Gora Haji with regard to Swahili varieties, i.e. the use of *Kiunguja* or *Kitumbatu* forms (like *mughumi*, *ukele*, *sibiri* etc.), are not fortuitous, but respond to specific poetic exigencies in terms of phono-symbolic and aesthetic effects of the text. Vowel homophony also recurs through the poem and, in particular, can be noticed in the refrain "*Ulimi uuhofile, una mateke na ngumi,*" where the repetition of the sound *u* transmits to the reader the association between the language (*ulimi*), its fearfulness (*uuhofile*) and its potential violence (*ngumi*).

The repetition of sounds is also part of another typical poetic devise which is often employed by Haji Gora Haji, i.e. the duplication of words (for instance, opening and closing a stanza with the same word, like in Mapishi I, or repeating the last hemistich of one stanza at the beginning of the following one, like in *Kwa kila kunguru moga* and of lines (in the refrains). Moreover, as is visible in poems such as *Hodi*, *Sidumbe*, *Nena*, *Sinda* and *Zambi za mdomo*, the poet often makes use of a kind of poem with repetitions (*mashairi ya takariri*) which is very popular in Swahili poetry [19], i.e. poems based on anaphora, in other words the repetition of the first word of the poem (often in an emphatic position) in all the lines of the stanza (or of the whole poem; see Bertoncini Zúbková 2000b: 12), thus creating a repetitive, insistent rhythm like in the poem *Zambi za mdomo* (Haji 2019: 96; English translation: 222):

Mdomo mazambi yake, mtiririko mzima	The sins of the mouth flow and flow
Mdomo faraja yake, ni kule kusemasema	What makes the mouth happy, is to keep on talking
Mdomo ifahamike, ndilo dimbwi la nakama	Let it be known that the mouth is a source of devastation
Yateuwe ya kusema, una asari mdomo	Choose your words carefully, the mouth makes an impact
Mdomo hautambuwi, lipi ovu lipi jema	The mouth doesn't recognize what's evil, what's good
Mdomo hauteuwi, lipi la kuweka nyuma	The mouth doesn't choose what to hold back
Mdomo hausitawi, bila kutowa kalima	The mouth doesn't thrive without

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[19] Anaphora is also often used by the Swahili poets to illustrate the different meanings of homonym words (Bertoncini Zúbková 2000b: 12).

| | producing words |
| *Yateuwe ya kusema, una asari mdomo* | Choose your words carefully, the mouth makes an impact |

Mdomo hauzarau, ya masikiyo kugema	The mouth doesn't ignore what the ears glean
Mdomo hautambuu, kutenda zake huduma	The mouth doesn't recognize, how to serve its purpose
Mdomo ukinukuu, nao hutangaza hima	If you repeat what you've heard, another's mouth will publicize it fast
Yateuwe ya kusema, una asari mdomo	Choose your words carefully, the mouth makes an impact

Mdomo ujuwe nao, una uovu na wema	You should know that the mouth has its malice and goodness
Mdomo tambua nao, hukuchimbiya kisima	The mouth, know it too, digs a well you'll fall into
Mdomo waubezao, kwa ghafula wanazama	Those who scorn the mouth will suddenly drown
Yateuwe ya kusema, una asari mdomo	Choose your words carefully, the mouth makes an impact

Mdomo huliwafiki, lile ambalo lavuma	The mouth accepts the rumors that fly
Mdomo kwa marafiki, wengine huwa si wema	Use your mouth with friends, not with others who aren't kind
Mdomo hukuhiliki, hunusuriki daima	The mouth can destroy you, you will never be saved
Yateuwe ya kusema, una asari mdomo	Choose your words carefully, the mouth makes an impact

Moreover, the quite obsessive rhythm of the verses is emphasised by rhyme, by the presence of an identical refrain (Haji Gora Haji uses a refrain with variations in other poems), by word duplication (*kusemasema*; *lipi – lipi*) and sound repetition, such as the *l* alliteration in *lile ambalo lavuma*, the *u* homophony in *una uovu na wema* (the *w* of *wema* is pronounced [*u*]) and the vowel series in the refrain (alternance of "*a*" and "*u*"), where the poet condenses his didactic warning about the individual and social impact (*asari* in *Kitumbatu*, SS *athari*) of human verbal expression (and gossiping).

4. Relationality and dialogicity in H. Gora Haji's poems

The poet's self-perception as an educator, as observed in the previous pages, originates in his strong commitment "to piercingly reflect and debate on human behavior using a variety of images and imageries that address the audience, disturbing it as much as waking it up" (Brunotti 2019: 241). Thus, Haji Gora Haji's poems always have a strong relational dimension, since, in the words of Abdilatif Abdalla on poets' sense of belonging, "when he/she speaks about him/herself, the poet is at the same time addressing his/her community and would like what he/she says to be the breath of his/her community."[20]

Furthermore, Haji Gora Haji's poems are meant not only to be read/listened to and interpreted by the audience,[21] but often also to elicit poetic answers/reactions and to engage in a sort of discursive "duel" with other poets, a feature which characterises Swahili poetry and has been given different terms, such as *malumbano*, *kujibizana* or *mashindano* (see a.o. Shariff 1988; Bierstecker 1996; Samsom 1996). This form of challenging composition, which is shared with a number of poets from different places (Zanzibar, Kilwa, Dar es Salaam, etc.), is very explicit in those *mashairi* which raise a question, such as *Bata – swala* ("The duck – a question;" Haji 2019: 55), and also in those poems which propose a riddle or enigma,[22] a such as *Honywa Honywa*[23] (Haji 2019: 40) which was replied to by Amiri Sudi Andanenga, also known as *Sauti ya Kiza* ("The voice of darkness"). This latter poem was answered by a poet from Donge (in the northern region of Zanzibar Island; Haji Gora Haji no longer remembers this poet's name), and solicited a further comment from Haji Gora Haji: *Bata – jawabu* ("The duck – a reply") (Haji 2019: 57). A number of poems in this collection are essentially comments or replies to other poems. In some cases, the author openly cites the poet to whom he is addressing his poem, such as in *Hapana* ("There's none;" Haji 2019: 45), which is a response to Hashil's poem *Nani wa kuvishwa taji, shehe mume na jambazi* ("Who is worthy of the crown, the shehe, the husband or the robber;" Hashil 2009: 57), or in *Siirushie matope* ("Don't defame;" Haji 2019: 94), which answers the poem *Wapenda mishikaki*

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[20] "[...] *azungumzapo jambo la nafsi yake, mshairi huyo yataka wakati huo huo awe yuwazungumza na nafsi ya jamii yake, na ayasemayo yawe ni pumzi za jamii yake hiyo*" (Abdalla 2011: xxvii).

[21] Many of Haji Gora Haji's compositions were meant to be sung at *ngoma* or *taarab* performances; some of them also appear in this collection, such as *Ukulivu*, *Hunipati*, *Pendo la kulazimisha*, *Bahari*. It should also be remembered here that Haji Gora Haji, especially in his youth, was also a well-known author and performer of *ngoma* (Samsom 1999: 26).

[22] This is a very old tradition in Swahili poetry. *Mashairi* which present an enigma, "tying up an animal and untying it" (*kufunga na kufungua nyama*) have probably originated in Lamu, where they were recited during the *gungu* ceremonies (Abdulaziz 1979: 51).

[23] In *Kitumbatu* the word *honywahonywa* means "someone with a big, but weak body" (*mtu mwenye umbile kubwa lakini mwili wake mregevu*) (BAKIZA 2012: 40).

("Those who love shish kebabs") by Amri Haji. The poet can sometimes be quite sharp, like in *Kilikoliya king'ora* (whose refrain is: *Kwenye ramani ya tungo, Mwinyi akujua nani?* "In the world of poetry, who knows you Mwinyi;" Haji 2019: 77) or in *Si makofi na viboko* ("Not slaps and whips"), where he contradicts the very same poet, Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye from Dar es Salaam, who wrote the poem *Pigo la mke si vazi* ("The punishment for a wife is not a cloth"):

Ni makofi na viboko, pigo la mke si vazi	It's slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is not clothing
Kusudia nite nyoko, na kunitusi wazazi	She intends to insult me and offend my parents
Halafu nimpe heko, kwa doti mekuwa chizi	Should then I congratulate her, drive her crazy with a *kanga*?[24]
Pigo la mke si vazi, ni makofi na viboko	The right beating for a wife is not clothing, it's slaps and whips
[...]	
Mke hupigwa na fimbo, na makofi jozi jozi	A wife is beaten with a cane, and slap after slap
Tena akizidi mambo, nyoka achanike ngozi	If she exaggerates, let's cut the skin off the snake
Siyo kanga za mafumbo, bangili na podozi	Not with *kanga*, bracelets and cosmetics
Pigo la mke si vazi, ni makofi na viboko[25]	The right beating for a wife is not clothing, it's slaps and whips[26]

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[24] *Kangas* are sold as a pair called *doti.* "The kanga is a widely spread printed cloth, mainly used by women as a dress the cloth measures ca 110 cm in height and 150 in length. It is defined by a border *(pindo),* a central field *(mji)* and usually contains on the lower third a printed proverbial inscription *(jina).* We know that it was "invented" around the 1880s in Zanzibar and imported from Europe in this form, i. e. already imprinted with patterns and inscription. It played an important role in the emancipation of slaves and their integration into the Muslim Swahili community of the East African coast. [...] the kanga allows for the communication of the unspeakable, whereby the interactants cannot be held responsible for their interaction. [...] the kanga may be an expression of the difficulties of a society that feels threatened from within by the power of the powerless. [...] provocatively one may say that it is a specific feature of this society that it cannot resolve this threat, but rather "invents" a communicative genre that establishes and enacts the conflict between social power and powerlessness." (Beck 2001: 157, 166 and 167)

[25] First and third stanza of the poem. The text was provided by Haji Gora Haji (his handwritten copy).

[26] My translation.

Haji Gora Haji openly criticises Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye (Haji 2019: 84-85; English translation: 217-218):

Shehe Mwinyi Avumaye, siwafiki wazo lako	Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye, I disagree with your idea
Kwa kila aolewae, makofi silo tambiko	For every bride, slaps are not the proper offering
Pigo la mke avae, vizuri kila aliko	The right beating for a wife is being wonderfully dressed, wherever she is
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke kivazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Mke hupigwa kwa kanga, na kila yanayo heko	A wife is beaten with a gift of *kanga*, and everything delightful
Ni vizuri kumjenga, kwa mazuri matamko	It's good to treat her, with pleasant speech
Utapomuengaenga, hatamani kwa mwenzako	Once you pamper her, she won't desire anything from another man
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Hata kama hukutusi, muoneshe mema yako	Even if she offends you, show her your mercy
Matumizi na libasi, umpe kwa ongezeko	An allowance and garments, give her more and even more
Ukimueleza basi, yabaki manung'uniko	If you chide her, let it be with grumbling
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Pindi ukifumaniya, aucheza mdundiko	If you ever catch her dancing the *mdundiko*
Ujue kakusudiya, kuirusha roho yako	Know what she intends, to hurl your soul away
Usije mng'ang'aniya, mwache ende atakako	Don't go clinging to her, let her go where she will
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing

Makofi jozi kwa jozi, mbali ngumi na viboko	Slap after slap, not to mention fists and whips
Mwanamke kumuhizi, unaikiuka miko	By disgracing a woman, you break a taboo
Hata punda mchukuzi, hapewi hivyo vituko	Even a donkey carrying loads, isn't treated in this way
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Kwa zilivyo dasturi, ndani ya mtiririko	With customs as they are, in the flow of things
Haitokuwa fakhari, kumpiga mke wako	There will be no pride, in beating your wife
Na iwapo hakukiri, duniani wangaliko	And if she doesn't accept you, in the world there are still others
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Siwafundishe vijana, yasokuwa na mashiko	Don't teach young people, things with no sound basis
Katu sio uungwana, kuendeleza vituko	It is never decent, to go on with misdeeds
Akiwa ni wako mwana, huwaje moyoni mwako	How would you feel in your heart, if it were your own child
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing
Shehe watangaza vita, kuwachongea wenzako	Sheikh you are declaring war, endangering others
Waume wenye matata, kwa maelekezo yako	Troublesome-men, according to your instructions
Wake zao watajuta, kwa kupata masumbuko	Their wives will lament, for the misery they face
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing

Shehe unategemewa, mwambao na kwengineko	Sheikh, people rely on you, on the coast and elsewhere
Kila unalotongowa, kwa mwengine ilimiko	Everything you say, others take as knowledge
Jaribu kujikosowa, kwenye yako matamko	Try to identify the errors in the statements that you make
Si makofi na viboko, pigo la mke ni vazi	Not with slaps and whips, the right beating for a wife is clothing

In this case, Haji Gora Haji answers Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye very explicitly, naming the poet in the very first stanza. He uses a *shairi* with the same rhyming pattern employed by Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye, i.e. the scheme AB/AB/AB/BX,[27] and plays with the source text in order to attain an efficacious message. Indeed, the poet overturns the refrain by reversing its two hemistichs (*Pigo la mke si vazi* and *ni makofi na viboko)* within his composition and by switching *ni,* the affirmative, and *si,* the negative copulas. Furthermore, Haji Gora Haji makes many precise references to Avumaye's text in his quatrain, echoing his lexicon (words such as *heko*, *kanga*, *kusudiya*, *kutusi* etc.) and sometimes quoting the hemistichs literally, as in "*Makofi jozi kwa jozi*" ("Slap after slap"), or by modifying them, for instance "*Mke hupigwa kwa kanga*" ("A wife is beaten with a [gift of] kanga") instead of "*Mke hupigwa kwa fimbo*" ("A wife is beaten with a cane"). He replies to the aggressiveness of Avumaye's text, underlined by the use of crude language (the vulgar term *nyoko* "your mother") and violent imagery, like in *nyoka achanike ngozi* ("let's cut the skin off the snake"), by utilising a gentle, elegant language. In contrast to Avumaye, who sees the relationship with a wife in terms of rewarding (*Ama panapo furaha, doti nne kila mwezi*[28] "if there is joy, four *doti* every month") and punishing (*lakini penye karaha, kanga sio uamuzi* "but when there is disgust, a *kanga* is not the right decision;" *mke hupigwa kwa fimbo* "a wife is beaten with a cane," etc.), Haji Gora Haji uses soft paternalism and openly criticises the instigation of violence against women, particularly by a poet who should be aware of the impact of his words (*Siwafundishe vijana, yasokuwa na mashiko* "Don't teach young people, things with no sound basis") and remember that every mistreated wife could be his own child. Moreover, he states that treating a wife well can prevent her disaffection, but if she prefers someone else, *Usije mng'ang'aniya, mwache ende atakako (*"Don't go clinging

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[27] The last line of each stanza (BX) constitutes the refrain in both compositions. In the poem of Sheikh Mwinyi Avumaye X coincides with A in the first stanza.

[28] First line of the last stanza of Avumaye's poem (in Haji's manuscript), the following quotation is the third line.

to her, let her go where she will"). Here, the poet refers to betrayal via the metaphor of local *ngoma* dancing, *mdundiko.*

In other cases, as in *Mapishi ndani ya chungu* ("*Chungu*[29] cooking;" Haji 2019: 73), which answers the question raised by Hashil Seif Hashil in the poem *Mapishi yepi matamu, sufuria au chungu?* ("What makes tasty food, the metal or the clay pot?" Hashil 2009: 61), texts do not make any open reference to the poem which elicited the response or, alternatively, are just allusive, as in *Kila Kunguru moga*, where he refers in the fifth stanza to another poet/poetess who irritated him:

Kuna mwengine jueni, haraka alichomoza	Know that another suddenly appeared
Kama bwengo wa mavani, sauti akaipaza	Like a *bwengo wa mavani*,[30] and raised his voice
Anachokoza nini, nibaki kujiuliza	What does he aim to stir up, I keep asking myself
Kwa kila kunguru moga, hukimbiza ubawawe	Every cowardly crow guards its wings

As emerges from the above quotations, Haji Gora Haji's poems stir up readers' emotions and curiosity by combining plain and enigmatic language. In his compositions, Haji widely employs metaphors and allegories, mostly drawn from the rich local repository of proverbs and sayings, as seen above, and from the natural and cultural contexts of the Islands. Instances of this can be found in references to the environment of the Indian ocean in poems such as the *taarab* love lyrics *Bahari* ("Ocean;" Haji 2019: 90), *Sinda* (an edible sea creature which irritates the throat; Haji 2019: 58), *Ya meli si ya jahazi* ("What pertains to a ship is not for a dhow;" Haji 2019: 93), the cooking traditions of the Islands, as in *Mapishi 1* and *Mapishi 2*, *Mapishi ndani ya chungu*, the local *ngoma* varieties named in various poems, etc. As observed by Vierke (2012: 5-6), "poetic metaphors differ qualitatively from other metaphors, whose cognitive function of constructing analogies can be found in daily speech. These metaphors surprise because they have never or seldom been used before, and/or are placed in a collocation that is not expected, thus resulting in enigmatic imagery (*mafumbo*), which requires interpretation, but escapes easy understanding." In Swahili verbal culture, and particularly in poetry, it is the artistically veiled, indirect message, which is particularly appreciated, not only because it protects the respectability of its producer (and in some instances even his/her security) and of the recipient, but precisely because

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[29] *Chungu* is a clay pot, metal pots are called *sufuria.*

[30] Graveyard spirit.

of its allusiveness (Vierke 2012: 9), which allows it to tease and to stir people's feelings, thoughts and reactions.

Since the publication of the collection *Kimbunga* ("The hurricane," 1994), Haji Gora Haji has manifested in some of his poems a unique style of poetic imagery that is based on discordant elements (Samsom 1999: 28). This can be seen in *Kimbunga*, the homonym poem which opens the collection, where the hurricane uproots the baobabs yet leaves the palm trees, makes the big ships sink while saving the canoes and blows away the palaces, but leaves the huts in peace:

Kimbunga mji wa Siyu, kilichowahi kufika	A hurricane once arrived, in this town of Siu
Si kwa yule wala huyu, ilikuwa patashika	Not only for this person nor for that, it was chaos
Kimeing'owa mibuyu, minazi kunusurika	It uprooted the baobabs, but left the palm trees
Nyoyo zilifadhaika	The hearts were troubled[31]

The kind of discordance which is presented by the author is a very peculiar one, as the poetic image is built upon metaphors where the analogue is not found in the state of /relations between natural elements, as is usual in Swahili poetry, but rather in their subversion, in their defamiliarisation. This poetic procedure has been continued into his subsequent production. In *Shuwari*, the poem that gives the title to the present collection, the calm wind between the changing monsoons has a huge destructive force, to the point of flattening the mountains:

Shuwari ya maleleji, imeshangaza wahenga	The calm of the changing winds has stunned the ancestors
Kimya wake uvumaji, tafauti na kimbunga	Its subdued murmur differs from the hurricane's
Lakini popotowaji, kutokana zake kunga	But it brings destruction, given its hidden arts
Iporomosha milima, kugeuza tambarare	It devastates the mountains making them flat lands
Ilizuka aridhini, kuzagaa kwenye anga	It rose up from the earth, to spread

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[31] Translation by R. Stephens, in Haji (1999: 2).

	across the sky
Ushabihi wa tofani, kila kimoja kugonga	Like a typhoon that hits everything
Sinini wala sinini, hakuna kisichotinga	Neither this nor that, nothing was unswayed
Iporomosha milima, kugeuza tambarare	It devastates the mountains making them flat lands
Haipulizi vuvuvu, ja kusi na mwanashanga	It does not fiercely blow, like the south and the west winds
Bali chake kinyamavu, sio mzaha naronga	But its silence is no joke, I say
Kimeleta uokovu, na kupeperusha janga,	It has brought salvation and blown away disaster
Iporomosha milima, kugeuza tambarare	It devastates the mountains making them flat lands
Kwa kote ilifirimba, pwani na kwenye viunga	It wrought destruction everywhere, along the shores and on the outskirts
Ikavurugika myamba, na mawe yakawa unga	It crushed the boulders, reducing rocks to dust
Utahisi kama kwamba, kilobomowa mizinga	You'd think cannons had dismantled them
Iporomosha milima, kugeuza tambarare	It devastates the mountains making them flat lands

The poem very interestingly makes an intertextual allusion to the poem *Kimbunga* in the second line of the first stanza. Thus, the poet builds a sort of self-dialogue, since the poet enters into dialogue with his own composition and, at the same time, extends the discourse with his addressees by hinting that these two poems may be closely connected.[32] Indeed, partially thanks to the rhyme which connects the words *maleleji, uvumaji* and *popotowaji*, the calm between the changing winds is associated here with

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[32] It should be remembered here that the text of *Kimbunga* (which circulated as *taarab* sung poetry before the publication of the homonymous collection) was interpreted politically by many Zanzibari people. As R. Samsom and S. Barwani (2019: 147) recall: "There was a time when "Mzee Kimbunga," as some people used to call him, was interrogated by the Department of Culture of the Government of Zanzibar, which tried to make him agree that the poem *Kimbunga* is about the event of 1964 known as the "revolution." Yet, the poet himself intensely refused to agree with them, stating: 'This is how you read it and interpreted it, I personally didn't say that, I won't agree nor will I deny, all that I want to say is in my poems, I have nothing more to add.'"

what should naturally be its opposite, the hurricane, through its manifesting the same violence. The second stanza demonstrates this equivalence explicitly through a simile, *Ushabihi wa tofani, kila kimoja kugonga* ("like a typhoon that hits everything"), intensifying the destructive force of the typhoon through the rhythm created by the alliteration using *k* (and the repetition of the final vowel *a*) in the second hemistich. Moreover, this correspondence of destruction and immobility is beautifully condensed within the refrain *Iporomosha milima, kugeuza tambarare* ("It devastates the mountains, making them flat lands").[33]

Furthermore, the two poems have not only their textual reference and ambiguous relationship of antonymy/identity in common, but also the very essence of their imagery: in both cases, meteorological phenomena are presented in a completely denaturalised form which generates a sense of confusion ("The hearts were troubled") and astonishment ("[The calm] has stunned the ancestors"). We find the same kind of unfamiliarity in other poems in the *diwani*. In *Jua ladanda* ("The sun shines") (Haji 2019: 44; here the first stanza), although the sun has set, it continues to burn people's heads.

Ni magharibi jioni, mchana umeshakwenda	It's sunset now, and the afternoon has gone
Jua limezama chini, na kufikia mfunda	The sun has gone down, reaching the horizon
Japo halionekani, lakini kali ladanda	Though not visible, still shines bright
Kote kunako mawanda, latuunguza vichwani	Wherever wide plains are, it burns our heads

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[33] In local speeches, the poem is sometimes interpreted in reference to Amani Karume, President of Zanzibar from 2000 to 2010, for instance in the locally printed leaflet *12 Poems by Haji Gora Haji*, which presents Haji's selected poems in English translation, made by Said el Geithy and Judith Riddell (2014: 9). Since the transition to multipartyism in 1995, the Zanzibari elections, which take place every five years, have been characterised by aggressive confrontations, violent riots, political exclusion and suppression. The lack of good governance, together with the excessive use of force, lobbied for an accommodation through reconciliation agreements: from 1999 to 2007, three accords (*Muwafaka wa Kwanza, wa Pili, wa Tatu*) were signed by the two competing parties, but they have never been implemented. Thus, a new reconciliation process (beginning in 2009) was embraced on the basis of narratives of peace, stability and development, clearly addressed by the leaders, Amani Abeid Karume for the CCM, and Seif Sharif Hamad for the CUF, in their relationship with the citizens (Brunotti 2019: 280-281).This process of political reconciliation (*maridhiano ya kisiasa*) led to a Government of National Unity (ratified by a previous referendum), with Dr Ali Mohamed Shein, the winner, as President, and his opponent, the CUF leader Maalim Seif Sharif Hamad, as First Vice President.

In the *wimbo*[34] *Miujiza* ("Miracles"), other surprising events occur (Haji 2019: 99; first two stanzas):

Ulifika mwujiza, wake Ilahi Karima	A miracle happened, brought by the Most Bountiful
Mwituni kanaswa pweza, pwani kavuliwa kima	An octopus caught in the forest, a monkey fished at the coast
Lipi mnatueleza, enyi wetu maulama	Which do you explain, you our *maulama*[35]
Waso mbawa wanaruka, warukao kuwatama	Those without wings fly, those who fly sit down
Ukuti kuvunja shoka, nini kama si nakama	A coconut frond breaks an axe, what is it if not devastation
Dagaa kameza paka, kuna lipi la kusema	A whitebait has swallowed a cat, what is there to say?

The poem continues telling us that "A chick eats a hawk," "A chameleon outpaces a car," and so on and so forth. While the non-natural, fantastic events are textually related to God's intervention ("A miracle happened, brought by the Most Bountiful") in the poem *Miujiza*, no explanation, not even a supernatural one, is given in the other above-mentioned poems for such extra-ordinary facts. This lack of elucidation greatly enhances the sense of unfamiliarity and ambiguity, while simultaneously underlining the poem's fictionality. This technique of generating "irrealia" in Haji Gora Haji's poems is very striking and acts as an embodiment of the creative power of language, especially of poetry and literature as a whole, which has the capacity of dismantling conventional, "reassuring" representations, thus demanding the active interpretation of the readers/listeners.

The "voice" of the text is very important for Haji Gora Haji in the fruition of poetry.[36] During the revision of his diwani, he asked us (the editors, Brunotti and me) to read every single poem aloud, and sometimes, when not satisfied with the textual phonic substance, he decided to change a word or a

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[34] *Wimbo* is a type of poem whose stanzas are made up of three lines of various lengths, with a final rhyme and one or more caesuras (Shariff 1988: 45).

[35] *Ulemas* "The learned."

[36] The recitation or singing of Haji Gora Haji's compositions is linked not only to live performances, but also to forms of "secondary orality". He himself used to recite his poems for radio programmes (as witnessed by the poem *Redio Nuru*; Haji 2019: 192-193), and performances by different groups of his *taarab* songs have been recorded by Radio Zanzibar and various producers of CDs (Barwani and Samsom 2019: 149).

line. Moreover, Haji Gora Haji's poetic experience adapts to different receptive contexts, for instance during the shooting of the video of his reciting the poem Shuwari, he made some changes in the course of the live performance, i.e. he eliminated the third stanza, he alternated the initial refrain with a slight variation, *Ilivuruga milima, kugeuza tambarare* ("It destroyed the mountains making them flat lands"), which appears in the second and fourth stanza, and added a final stanza:

Hiki ni kitandawili, ambacho nasimulia	What I'm telling you is a riddle
Wateguzi mbalimbali, jawabu kunipatia	Riddle-solvers everywhere, give me an answer
Nimefunga kufuli, mfunguzi nangojea	I locked it well, I'm waiting for who can unlock it
Ilivuruga milima, kugeuza tambarare[37]	It destroyed the mountains making them flat lands

5. Conclusion

In this article, an investigation of Haji Gora Haji's poetics as manifested in his latest poetry collection, *Shuwari*, shows how the poet's original handling of two varieties of Swahili (*Kiunguja* and *Kitumbatu*) is an artistically complex process which involves the phonic substance and rhyming metres of poetry as well as cultural and identity issues of contemporary Zanzibar. Furthermore, the relational link to his readers/listeners, which includes a, sometimes sharp, dialogue with his fellow poets, has emerged as a fundamental element of Haji Gora Haji's poetry: a form of indirect or direct interaction with the audience he intends to stir, educate and challenge, often through enigmatic imagery, and an experience which is always open to new ideas.

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[37] https://vimeo.com/groups/476995/videos/199861998; the translation is from the English caption (of the editors).

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