

“Of madness and sagacity”

An intercultural dialogue between masks in Luigi Pirandello’s and Penina Muhando’s plays (Part Two)

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This paper stems from the challenge of translating Pirandello’s plays into Swahili and is aimed to open up a polylogue between Italian and Swahili literature. Therefore, in searching for connections between Luigi Pirandello’s and Penina Muhando’s plays, this paper will explore multiple masks engaged in a reciprocal dialogue among the following six selected plays: *Enrico IV* (‘Henry IV,’ Pirandello 1921); *Così è, Se vi pare* (‘It is so, if you think so!’ Pirandello 1917); *Il Berretto a Sonagli* (‘Cap and bells,’ Pirandello 1916); *Pambo* (‘Decoration,’ Muhando 1975); *Nguzo mama* (‘The Mother Pillar,’ Muhando 1982); and *Lina ubani* (‘An Antidote to Rot,’ Muhando 1984). In conclusion, this study will illustrate how different forms of sociohistorical alienation, which encircle the twentieth century, are stylistically represented in these plays through the characters who wear the masks of madness, or ‘sage-madness.’ To allow an in-depth analysis of the plays this study will be divided into two parts. Part one will examine *Enrico IV* (‘Henry IV,’ Pirandello 1921) and *Pambo* (‘Decoration,’ Muhando 1975). Part Two will examine *Così è, Se vi pare* (‘It is so, if you think so!’ Pirandello 1917); *Nguzo mama* (‘The Mother Pillar,’ Muhando 1982); *Il Berretto a Sonagli* (‘Cap and bells,’ Pirandello 1916); and *Lina ubani* (‘An Antidote to Rot,’ Muhando 1984).

Keywords: Swahili literature; theatre; comparative literature; comparative philosophy; translation Studies; Luigi Pirandello; Penina Muhando; alienation; masks; madness; sage-madness.

6. Madness as plural epistemologies¹

6.1. *Così è (Se vi pare)* (‘It Is So, (If You Think So),’ 1917)

Così è, Se vi pare, which I translated into Swahili as *Hivyo ndivyo mambo yalivyo, ukipenda hivyo*, is a comedy in three acts, which deals with the nonexistence of absolute truth or objective reality. Each person has their own truth that changes according to the observation point. The identity of a person is simply

¹ Part One of this article has been published in *Kervan* 27 (2023).

whatever they believe it to be, and there is no objective truth, as demonstrated by the character of Lamberto Laudisi, who represents the authorial voice and the philosopher of gnoseological relativism.

The plot of the play revolves around the investigations conducted by the inhabitants of a small Italian province, who are curious to discover the hidden secrets of the new residents, Mr and Mrs Ponza and her mother, Mrs Frola. Indeed, Mrs Frola is living separately from her relatives and seems to interact only with Mr Ponza, while she never meets with her own daughter, Mrs Ponza, whom no one could see either. Hence, Mrs Ponza’s real identity remains shrouded in mystery, and the explanations provided are multiple and relative: firstly, according to Mr Ponza, she is Giulia, his second wife, who is just pretending to be Mrs Frola’s daughter. In fact, Mrs Frola became mad after the death of her daughter Lina (Mr Ponza’s first wife). Secondly, according to Mrs Frola, Mr Ponza, who was extremely jealous of his wife Lina (Mrs Frola’s daughter): a “frenzy of love” (Pirandello 1995: 166), became mad after a period of separation from his spouse. In fact, Lina needed to be cured in a sanatorium and once she came back home, Mr Ponza refused to recognise his own wife; thus, Lina started pretending to be another woman, Giulia. Finally, according to Mrs Ponza, the truth is whatever you desire it to be.

The philosopher Laudisi leads the play by giving alienating laughs throughout the performance:

Original

Laudisi: [...] tutt’al più, farò tra me e me qualche risata; e se me ne scapperà qualcuna forte, mi scuserete. (Pirandello 1986: 446)

Translations²

Laudisi: [...] Pengine, nitacheka moyoni mwangu na nikitoo kicheko fulani kikubwa mtanisamehe.

Laudisi: [...] At the very most, I’ll have a laugh or two to myself, and if once in a while a loud laugh slips out, you will just have to forgive me! (Pirandello 1995: 149)

The other characters are chasing after a non-existent truth to unveil Mrs Ponza’s identity. However, no documents can help the citizens’ inquisitory research, for there exist no absolute truth.

² All the translations of Pirandello’s plays from Italian to Swahili in this paper are mine if not otherwise indicated. I acknowledge William Mkufya, a Swahili and English bilingual writer and translator, for proofreading my translations from Swahili to English of Muhando’s plays.

Ponza: *La signora Frola è pazza.*

Ponza: *Non pare, ma è pazza. E la sua pazzia consiste appunto nel credere che io non voglia farle vedere la figliola. [...]S'ostina a credere che non è vero che sua figlia sia morta, ma che io voglia tenermela tutta per me, senza fargliela più vedere.*

(Pirandello 1986: 458-459)

Ponza: *Bi. Frola ni mwendawazimu.*

Ponza: *Haonekani, lakini ni mwendawazimu kwa sababu anaamini kwamba mimi ninamzuia amwone mwanae. [...] Anaendelea kumfikiria mwanae bado yu hai [hajafa kweli], bali [anadhani] kwamba ndio mimi ninayetaka kumchukua mtoto wake kwa ajili yangu tu na nifanye asimwone tena*

Ponza: *Mrs Frola is insane, mad.*

Ponza: *She doesn't seem to be, but she is mad! And her madness consists precisely in believing that I do not want to let her see her daughter. [...] She insists on believing that it is not true her daughter is dead, but instead that I want to keep her daughter all to myself and never allow her to see her again. (Pirandello 1995: 159-160)*

Signora Frola: Non è, non è un pazzo! [...] Credette davvero che la moglie fosse morta [...]... E per fargliela riprendere, con l'aiuto degli amici, si dovette simulare un secondo matrimonio. (Pirandello 1986: 465)

Bi Frola: Hapana, sio kichaa! [...] Kwa kweli, alifikiri mke wake amefariki [...] ili amkaribishe tena, tumeigiza harusi nyingine, pamoja na rafiki waliotusaidia.

Mrs Frola: [...] He is not mad; he is not crazy. [...] He believed that his wife was truly dead. [...] And to get him to accept her again, with the help of friends we had to pretend to have a second wedding. (Pirandello 1995: 166)

Laudisi: Vi guardate tutti negli occhi? Eh! La verità? Scoppietà a ridere forte: Ah! Ah! Ah! (Pirandello 1986: 466)

Laudisi: Je, mnatazamana nyote machoni? Enhe! Ukweli uko wapi?

*Ataangua kicheko kikubwa: Ha! Ha!
Haa!*

Laudisi: So, there you are taking a good look at each other. Ah, ha! And the truth? [Bursts out laughing.] ha, ha , ha, ha!
(Pirandello 1995: 167)

There is no way to distinguish between true and false, because both are relative and contingent concepts.

Laudisi: [...] Ed eccovi dannati al meraviglioso supplizio d'aver davanti, accanto, qua il fantasma e qua la realtà, e di non poter distinguere l'uno dall'altra! (Pirandello 1986: 469)

Laudisi: [...] Na hapa mmelaaniwa kwa mateso ya ajabu ya kuwa mbele ya, kati ya mzimu (wigo) na ukweli, bila kuweza kutofautisha mmoja na mwingine!

Laudisi: [...] and so you are here, damned to the marvellous torment of finding here before your eyes on the one hand a world of fantasy and on the other a world of reality, and you are unable to distinguish one from the other. (Pirandello 1995: 170)

The identity of a person is fragmented, split among one, no one and one hundred thousand, leading to self-alienation or madness:

Laudisi: [...] (mentre parla con la sua immagine nello specchio) Eh caro! Chi è il pazzo di noi due? [...] -Il guajo è che, come ti vedo io, non ti vedono gli altri! E allora, caro mio, che diventi tu? [...] Un fantasma, caro, un fantasma! - Eppure, vedi questi pazzi? Senza badare al fantasma che portano con sé, in se stessi, vanno correndo, pieni di

Laudisi: : [...] (huku akiongea na sura yake kiooni) Mpenzi wangu! Mwendawazimu ni nani, mimi au wewe? [...] - Taabu ni kwamba, mi nakuona kwa jinsi ambavyo wengine hawakuoni! Kwa hiyo, rafiki'angu, wewe u nani? [...] Mzimu, rafiki, mzimu! - Lakini, unaona vichaa hawa? Bila kujali na mzimu ambaye wanambeba nao, ndani mwao,

curiosità, dietro il fantasma altrui!
(Pirandello 1986: 472-473)

*wenye udadisi wanafuatafuata
mzimu wa mtu mwingine!*

Laudisi: [...] (he looks at his image and start speaking to it)
[...] Tell me, old friend, which one of the two of us is crazy? [...] The trouble is that other people just do not see you the way I do! And so then, dear friend, what becomes of you? [...] A ghost, my friend, a ghostly image! And yet, you see all these crazy people? Paying no attention to that image they carry around with them, inside themselves, they run around full of curiosity, chasing after the ghostly image of others. (Pirandello 1995: 170)

Madness represents the union of body and soul; language and image re-joining the disjointed image in the mirror with the image seen by the naked eye. The language of madness speaks out loud the “truth of madness” (Foucault 2001: 95).

*Laudisi: (riderà al suo solito): Ah! Ah!
Ah!* (Pirandello 1986: 480)

*Laudisi: (atacheka kama kawaida
yake): Ha, ha, ha ...*

Laudisi: (with his usual laugh): Ha, ha, ha ... (Pirandello 1995: 180)

*Ponza: [...] che io le gridi così la verità,
come fosse una mia pazzia?*
(Pirandello 1986: 486)

*Ponza: [...] Hebu, nimwambie ukweli
kwa sauti kama ukiwa ni kichaa
changu?*

Ponza: [...] I have to shout out the truth that way, as if it were part of my madness? (Pirandello 1995: 184)

The actual truth is finally stated by Mrs Ponza: *mimi ni mtu yule ambaye wengine wananiamini niwe!* – “*Per me, io sono colei che mi si crede*” (‘I am the one you believe me to be’):

*Signora Ponza: - si; e per me
nessuna! Nessuna!*

*Signora Ponza: Nossignori. Per me,
io sono colei che mi si crede.
(Pirandello 1986: 509)*

*Bi Ponza: ndiyo; kwangu mimi
hakuna! Hakuna!*

*Bi Ponza: Hapana, mabwana. Kwa
maoni yangu, mimi ndimi mtu yule
wengine wananiamini niwe.*

Mrs Ponza: Yes. And for myself
no one! I am no one!

Mrs Ponza: No, ladies and
gentlemen, I am the one you
believe me to be. (Pirandello
1995: 206)

*Laudisi: Ed ecco, o signori, come
parla la verità! (scoppierà a ridere):
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! (Pirandello 1986:
509)*

*Laudisi: Hivyo ndivyo, jamani,
unavyoongea ukweli! (ataangua
kicheko): Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!*

Laudisi: There you have it, my
friends, that’s the voice of truth!
(Bursts out laughing) Ha! Ha! Ha!
Ha! (Pirandello 1995: 206)

6.2. *Nguzo Mama* (‘The Mother-Pillar,’ 1982)

Nguzo Mama is a play in four acts that deals with women’s liberation against patriarchy, and which expresses all Muhando’s creative genius, bridging traditional performative arts in a modern context. In fact, she decorates the play with storytelling, several types of *ngoma* ethnic dances and songs, as well as the dialogic style poetry of *majibizano* typical of the *ngonjera*, a poetic style which consists in a “dramatized poem-play” (Askew 2015), and which was created by Mathias Mnyampala³ (Mnyampala 1970; Roy 2013; Rettovà 2016).

³ Mnyampala invented the *ngonjera* in 1964, by merging a dramatized dialogical poetic style typical of his Gogo culture and other Tanzanian ethnicity with the *shairi* metre of Swahili poetry, but without music (Bertoncini 2002). During the Tanzanian socialist era, the *ngonjera* was a popular didactic instrument used to “teach the masses,” particularly in schools, on the principles of *ujamaa* contained in the Arusha Declaration through this ‘dispute’ like style (Blommaert 1997).

The play expresses “Tanzanian’s social sickness” (Sanga 2021): gender inequality and economic imbalances after the “economic disillusionment” produced by the failure of *ujamaa* politics and the implementation of neoliberal policies (1980s), which became a common motif in post-independence Swahili fiction. In particular, this disillusioned condition is connected to periods of great crisis, such as drought, famine, and the Tanzania-Uganda war from 1978 to 1984 (Wakota 2014). Especially women, who participated side by side with men in the labour of *ujamaa*, were not equally recompensated afterwards (Wakota 2014). Even though women’s liberation is the first step for the freedom of a nation, which cannot otherwise develop (Kruger 1998), women were enslaved by care of men, baby-sitting, and housekeeping duties.

The core symbol of this play is “the mother-pillar,” which is a wooden simulacrum⁴ representing woman’s power and potentialities as “Mother Earth” (Acquaviva p.c.). It symbolises unity, solidarity, and recognition of women’s roles as the foundation of the society, but it cannot stand because of the actual lack of unity and solidarity, as well as women discrimination. Indeed, the wooden simulacrum cannot be raised because of women’s fragmentation, and it will not stand until the female gender finds the strength of their unity. The characters in this play are eight unnamed women, who cover all women’s traditional roles in society: mothers, wives and prostitutes, whose oppressed and marginalized conditions are narrated.

The play open with a parodos song and it closes with the very same exodus song producing a choral structure (Mutembei 2012) that revolves around the metaphor of the “mother-pillar” of society that cannot be raised as well as the issue of how women’s liberation can finally be achieved:

Mkarara: Nguzo Mama, Nguzo Mama

*Tukupambaje maua*⁵

Tukupambaje maua

(Muhando 2010: 1; 75)

Refrain: Mother-pillar, Mother-pillar

Shall we decorate you with flowers

Shall we decorate you with flowers

[‘how can women’s liberation finally be?’]

⁴ Cf. the tradition of the Zaramo people carving *Mwanahiti*. *Mwanahiti* is a wood carved doll, which represents the female body and symbolises fertility. These statuettes are highly symbolic ritual objects used during female rites of passage to adulthood (Swantz 1986; Nicolini 2021).

⁵ The flowers as children of the Mother Earth are female symbols in Swahili classical poetry; for instance, the poetry *Ua* (‘Flower’) by Shaaban Robert quoted in Acquaviva (2016: 198) and in Khamis and Topan (2006).

*Ritornello: Pilastro-madre, pilastro-
madre*

Dovremmo forse decorarti con dei fiori

Dovremmo forse decorarti con dei fiori

*[‘Come può avvenire la liberazione
femminile?’]⁶*

The play is built around two narrative authorities: Bi Msimulizi, the female external narrator, alongside her alter ego Chizi (‘crazy’ in colloquial Swahili), the crazy woman. Bi Msimulizi is also a choral character, who links the acts of the play inside the frame of a traditional tale, explains the events as performed by the actors, and triggers spectators’ thoughts (Mutembei 2012). Chizi is a “superior narrative authority” (Kruger 1998: 63), a rational external observer, and a “choral-sage” (Nicolini 2022). The two narrative voices are playing the game of opposites between madness and rationality, as well as between the historical past of the fictional village of Patata and its present, where there is no more space for women, who are abused. Therefore, ‘women’s liberation’ continues to be like a pillar stuck in the mud that cannot be raised:

Bibi Msimulizi:

pesa zikapatikana

hizo hizo pombe zikanunua

na ile NGUZO MAMA

Udongoni ikabakia

(Muhando 2010: 20)

The female narrator:

the money was collected

And all types of alcoholic
beverages were purchased

while the mother-pillar

remained stuck into the mud

La Narratrice:

Il denaro fu raccolto

*È varie bevande alcoliche furono
comprate*

Mentre il pilastro-madre

Rimase nel fango

⁶The Italian version has been added to create a parallel between the two works of translation, i.e. in Pirandello’s case from Italian to Swahili and in Muhando’s case from Swahili into Italian.

Chizi is the artist who embodies rationality camouflaged behind the veiling mask of madness and who truly describes what is currently happening in the village of Patata. Chizi is a clever character not to be misjudged or undervalued.

Bi Msimulizi:

*[...] lakini alikuwepo mmoja hodari
msanii*

*Walizoea wapatata kumwita eti
Chizi*

*Si kama kweli chizi walimwengu
huwawezi*

*Walimpa hilo jina kwa vile bila
kujali*

*Mkubwa au kabwela, uwanjani au
ufichoni*

Ukweli alijisemea

Kwa kupiga lake rimba

*Maneno kuyapamba na ngoma
kujichezea*

Ukweli alitoboa

(Muhando 2010: 36)

The female narrator:

[...] however, there was a talented
artist

Whom the people of *Patata* usually
called the crazy woman

Not because she was really crazy

Yet, she obtained that funny name
because she was so courageous that
she would not be intimidated by
whomever was present

the powerful or powerless people, in
the open ground or hiding
somewhere

She would always state the truth

By playing her *rimba*

By adorning her words and by
performing with drums

She would always pierce the truth

La Narratrice:

[...] tuttavia c'era un artista talentuoso

*Che gli abitanti di Patata solevano
chiamare la pazza*

Non perchè fosse realmente pazza

*Quel nome le fu attribuito perchè non si
curava*

*Dei potenti o dei miserabili, apertamente
o in segreto*

Lei non poteva non dire la verità

Danzando la sua rimba

*Decorando le parole e danzando la
ngoma*

Perforava sempre la verità

Chizi is wearing the mask of ‘sage-madness:’

<i>CHIZI: chizi mie chizi mie</i>	The crazy: I am the crazy one; I am the crazy one
<i>[...]nimeishi siku nyingi</i>	I have lived for long
<i>Na mengi nimeyaona</i>	And I have seen many unsaid things
<i>[...] lakini haya ya Patata</i>	However, what is affecting <i>Patata</i>
<i>Sijui niite vita au niite ugonjwa</i>	I don’t know if it can be called a war or an epidemic
<i>Labda tuite njaa</i>	Maybe let’s call it famine
<i>[...] njaa ya kukosa umoja</i>	Famine for we have been deprived of our communal unity
<i>Kukosa ushirikiano</i>	and cooperation
(Muhando 2010: 37-39)	

La pazza: Sono pazza, sono pazza
[...] ho vissuto a lungo
E ne tante ne ho viste
[..] ma questa di Patata
Non so se chiamarla guerra o epidemia
Forse si potrebbe chiamare fame
[...] fame per esser stati privati dell’unità
E cooperazione sociale

Chizi uncovers and denounces all socio-political issues of the country as “the wise men or women capable of criticizing the current society, imposing their opinion, expressing the truth and teaching people, leading their society towards development” (Oruka 1990: 59):

<i>CHIZI: [...]Waoneni watu hawa</i>	The crazy: look at these people
<i>Hawapendi demokrasia</i>	They don’t like democracy
<i>Nikisema yote mie</i>	If I explain everything,
<i>Wananiita mie chizi</i>	they will call me crazy
<i>Chizi mie au nyie</i>	But who is the crazy one, am I or you?
<i>Ambao macho mwakodoa</i>	You who have your eyes fixedly stare?

[...] *nawaambia kuna woga*

[...] *ukweli wanaojua*

Kimya wajinyamazia

Au kama chizi hapa

Vicheko wajicheka

(Muhando 2010: 39-40)

I'm telling you that you are meek
and timid

Because you know the truth

Yet you remain silent

Or like the crazy fool I am

Laugh away [the untold truth]!

*La Pazza: [...] Ma guardate queste
persone*

Che non apprezzano la democrazia

Se dico tutto quel che so

Mi chiamano pazza

Ma la pazza sono io o voi

Che ve ne state a guardare

[...] *io vi dico che avete paura*

[...] *conoscete la verità*

Ma tacete

O come la folle pazza che sono io

Ridete fragorosamente la verità

CHIZI: Kazi yote anafanya Bi Pili

Matunda ale Bwana Sudi

Jasho lake Bi Pili

Laishia kilabuni

(Muhando 2010: 60)

The crazy: all the work is done by
Bi Pili

But the fruits of her hard work are
eaten by Mr Sudi

All earnings from Bi Pili's sweat

End at the beer club

*La Pazza: Tutto il lavoro lo fa la
signora Pili*

*Affinchè i frutti se li goda il signor
Sudi*

Il sudore della signora Pili

Finisce al bar

CHIZI: Jamani wacheni nicheke.

(Muhando 2010:61)

CHIZI: Binadamu wote sawa

The crazy: Please let me laugh.

All human beings are equal

*Lakini wengine ni sawa zaidi*⁷

CHIZI: [...] *mie chizi kila mtu anajua*

CHIZI: [...] *Wala simjui, wala sielewi kitu. Amueni wenyewe.*

(Muhando 2010: 66)

But some of them are more equal

I am crazy, everybody knows

Neither do I know, nor do I understand a thing. Please judge as you wish

La Pazza: Sissignori, Lasciate che io rida

La Pazza: Gli esseri umani sono tutti uguali

Ma alcuni di loro lo sono di più

La Pazza: [...] io sono pazza, tutti quanti lo sanno [...] né so, né capisco nulla.

Giudicate voi a vostro piacimento.

Particularly, Chizi is a partisan for women’s liberation against patriarchal legacies. Indeed, the performativity of songs shapes individual’s gendered behaviour according to historical and socio-cultural constructions (Sanga 2011: 351-352; Butler 1993) by both reproducing and challenging the accumulated gender norms of the society. Sometimes, by establishing gender norms and behaviour for a society, performative acts can produce an effect of “cultural tyranny” (Anzaldúa 1987; Sanga 2011: 353) to be contested:

Chizi: [...] *ingawa mwaniona mie chizi*

Machozzi yangu aghali

Kamwe sitayatoa kwa sababu ya hilo dume

(Muhando 2010: 67)

CHIZI: “*Sijui lolote mie, Najua kuzaa tu!*” [...]
ni wimbo wa unyagoni

(Muhando 2010: 69)

Even though I appear crazy to you

My tears are precious

And I will never shed them because of a lousy man

“I know nothing, all I know is to bear children!” This is what the *unyago*⁸ song says.

⁷ Cf. George Orwell’s *The Animal Farm* (1945): “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,” which was translated in Swahili by Fortunatus F. Kawagere as *Shamba la Wanyama* in 1967.

⁸ Female initiation rites. Cf. Kezilahabi’s *Wimbo wa Unyago* (‘The *Unyago* Song’) in his collection of poetry called *Dhifa* (‘the Banquet’ 2008). Kezilahabi composed a modern ‘maturity rites’ song that supports women’s emancipation: *Olewa msichana olewa. Olewa chaguo lako. Hiari ni haki asilia* (Kezilahabi 2008: 17-8) (‘Marry young maiden, marry. Marry your choice. The will is a natural right’).

*La Pazza: [...] sebbene mi
vediate come una pazza
Le mie lacrime sono preziose
Non le versero mai a causa di
questo maschio inutile
La Pazza: “Io non so nulla, so
solo partorire figli!” [...] questa
è quanto insegna la canzone
dell'unyago.*

Comparing the two plays, both Laudisi and Chizi are leaders of the plays and external observers, as well as philosophers, who represent the voice of rationality masked behind the crazy laugh of madness. Furthermore, both plays let the female voice be heard. Chizi is a character aimed to mobilise women to shake off the yoke. Chizi denounces the “epistemic marginalization of women” (Chimakonam 2018a) and challenges traditions such as unyago, the female initiation ritual, through her satirical sentence: ‘I know nothing, all I know is to bear children! This is what the unyago song says’ (Muhando 2010: 69). In fact, Muhando claims that women have authority as the keepers of knowledge. This will be illustrated through the character of the old lady Bibi in *Lina ubani* (Muhando 1984). Similarly, Mrs Ponza appears submissive to Mr Ponza, yet she ends up being the keeper of the mystery of truth: an objective reality universally shared doesn’t exist. Additionally, both plays are opposing traditional authorities either patriarchy or social conventions of the time. However, in Pirandello’s play, an objective reality does not exist, whereas, in Muhando’s play women’s oppression is objective, even though the majority of people refuse to witness this reality.

7. Madness as self-protection

7.1. *Il Berretto a Sonagli* (‘Caps and Bells,’ 1916)

Il Berretto a Sonagli, which I translated into Swahili as *Kofia yenye kengele*, is a comedy in two acts originally written in Sicilian dialect: ‘*A Birritta cu’l Ciancianeddi*, which anticipated the appearance of Pirandello’s key character: *Fantasia*, the inventive force, who was introduced later on in the preface of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), wearing a red cap with bells (Pirandello 2006).

This play is set in a small inland town in Sicily and narrates the story of Mrs Beatrice Fiorica, who, when she discovered the unfaithfulness of her husband, wanted a bombshell to explode by letting the extra-marital relationship of her husband become public. Subsequently, the adulterous couple, Mr

Fiorica and Mrs Nina Ciampa, were imprisoned, while the betrayed husband, Mr Ciampa, had the obligation to perform the murder of honour. However, Mr Ciampa had no intention of committing the crime, so he devised a successful escamotage, which involved letting Beatrice appear as a crazy woman who could not be trusted, as if she had just dreamt about the extramarital relationship of her husband. By acting as a madman, who wildly shouts out his own reality, Ciampa sacrificed Beatrice’s credibility so as to avoid committing a crime but saving his own honour as well.

Ciampa is also a philosophising character, who introduces interesting theories. Firstly, *le tre corde*, the theory of “the three watch springs” or *nadharia ya kamani (kamba za saa) tatu*:

Original

Ciampa: [...] Deve sapere che abbiamo tutti come tre corde d’orologio in testa. [...] la seria, la civile, la pazza. Soprattutto, dovendo vivere in società, ci serve la civile [...] la corda seria, per chiarire, rimettere le cose a posto [...] la corda pazza, perdo la vista degli occhi e non so più quello che faccio! (Pirandello 1986: 646).

Translations

Ciampa: [...] Ujue kwamba sisi sote tuna kamani tatu kichwani. [...] kamani nzito, kamani ya kistaarabu na kamani ya kichaa. Juu ya yote, kwa sababu inatubidi kuishi na wengine, tunahitaji ile kamani ya kistaarabu [...] ile nzito kwa kueleza na kurekebisha mambo [...] ile ya kichaa, napofuka na sijui ninachofanya!

Ciampa: [...] I must point out that we all possess three watch springs, as it were, in our heads. [...] one serious, one social, one insane. We need the social spring above all, as we are social animals – [...] the serious spring, then set about clearing matters up, give my reasons [...] then I give the insane spring a good turn...but then I lose my head... and God help us all! (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

Secondly, *i pupi*, the “theory of puppets” or *nadharia ya karagosi*:

Ciampa: [...] Perché ogni pupo, signora mia, vuole portato il suo

Ciampa: [...] kwa sababu kila kikaragosi, Bibi yangu we, anataka

rispetto, non tanto per quello che dentro di sé si crede, quanto per la parte che deve rappresentar fuori. A quatt'occhi, non è contento nessuno della sua parte: ognuno, ponendosi davanti il proprio pupo, gli tirerebbe magari uno sputo in faccia. Ma dagli altri, no; dagli altri lo vuole rispettato. (Pirandello 1986: 649)

kuheshimiwa sio kwa kile ambacho moyoni mwake anaamini; lakini kwa nafasi yake ambayo inabidi aonyeshe mbele ya wengine. Hakuna mtu ambaye, moyoni mwake, anayependa nafasi yake: kila mtu akiweka mbele yake kikaragosi chake angetema mate usoni mwake. Lakini kutoka wengine, hapana; anataka kuheshimiwa nao.

Ciampa: [...] Because you see, dear lady, every puppet demands respect, not so much for what he really believes himself to be, but for the part he plays in public. Let's be honest with ourselves: no one is happy with the role he plays. if each of us were faced with the image of the puppet he really is, he'd spit in its face. But from others...ah, from others he asks for, nay demands respect. (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

In the end, he teaches how madness is a self-protective mask and the key to solving all issues.

Ciampa: [...] sissignori ...si può aggiustare tutto... pacificamente! [...] le mie mani possono restar pulite...

Ciampa: [...] lo riconosciamo tutti: e dunque lei è pazza! Pazza, e se ne va al manicomio! [...] Sua sorella ha svergognato anche il signor cavaliere (Pirandello 1986: 680-681)

Ciampa: [...] Si dice: - è pazza! [...] Pazza, pazza da chiudere e da legare! -E solo così io non ho più niente da vendicare! (Pirandello 1986: 682)

Ciampa: [...] Ndio, mabwana ... kila kitu kinaweza kurekebishwa kwa amani! [...] mikono yangu itabaki safi

Ciampa: [...] sote tunatambua kwamba yeye ni mwenda wazimu! Kichaa ambao atafungwafungwa! [...] dadake ameaibisha hata mheshimiwa 'Cavaliere'

Ciampa: wanasema: yeye ni mwenda wazimu! [...] mwenda wazimu wa kufunga na kufunga! na ndo hivyo mie sina chochote cha kulipia kisasi!

Ciampa: [...] Yes, ladies and gentlemen! All can be solved peacefully! [...] I needn't soil my hands with crime...they can stay clean...

Ciampa: [...] we all agreed that you are mad. If we all say so it must be true. You're mad and you're off to the madhouse. [...] Can't see you sister has made her husband ridiculous.

Ciampa: [...] if we say: "She's insane!" - [...] "She's insane, let's lock her up and that's that." In this case I shall be fully vindicated. (Pirandello 2019: no page numbers)

Ciampa: Ma davanti a tutto il paese, lei, signora, non ha bollato con un marchio d'infamia tre persone? Uno, d'adultero; un'altra, di squaldrina; e me, di becco? (Pirandello 1986: 682)

Ciampa: Si ulikuwa wewe, Bibie, uliyewadhililisha watu watatu mbele ya kijiji kizima? Mtu wa kwanza, mzinzi; wa pili, malaya; na mimi, mume aliyechezewa na mkewe.

Ciampa: [...] it was you who branded three people with the mark of infamy before the whole town. The first as an adulterer, the second as a whore, the third as a cuckold. (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

Indeed, Ciampa also teaches Beatrice the proper way to wear the costume and mask of madness:

Ciampa: [...] Gliel'insegno io come si fa. Basta che lei si metta a gridare in faccia a tutti la verità. Nessuno ci crede e tutti la prendono per pazza! (Pirandello 1986: 682)

Ciampa: [...] Potessi farlo io, come piacerebbe a me! [...] cacciarmi fino

Ciampa: [...] Nitakufundisha mimi jinsi ya kufanya. Inatosha uanze kufoka ukweli mbele ya watu wote. Hakuna mtu anayeamini na wote watafikiri wewe ni mwenda wazimu!

agli orecchi il berretto a sonagli della pazzia e scendere in piazza a sputare in faccia alla gente la verità.

(Pirandello 1986: 683)

[...] si butta a sedere su una seggiola in mezzo alla scena, scoppiando in un'orribile risata, di rabbia, di selvaggio piacere e di disperazione a un tempo. (Pirandello 1986: 683)

Ciampa: [...] Laiti ningaliweza kufanya mimi, kama ninavyopenda mimi! [...] kuvaa kofia yenye kengele za kichaa na kujititia mpaka masikio yangu na kuingia uwanjani na kufoka ukweli mbele ya wote.

[...] anajitupa juu ya kiti kilicho katikati ya jukwaani, akiangua kicheko cha kutisha, cha hasira, cha raha na sononeko kwa wakati mmoja.

Ciampa: [...] I'll tell you how you set about it: tell everyone the truth. Nobody'll believe you. They'll all think you're insane. (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

Ciampa: [...] If only I could allow myself that luxury! [...] pull down over my ears the cap and bells of madness and parade myself in the town square, spitting out the truth at them all! (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

[...] Ciampa collapses on a chair, centre stage, and bursts into a heart-rending laugh, full of rancour, savage relish and despair, as ... (Pirandello 2019: no page number)

7.2. *Lina Ubani* ('An Antidote to Rot,' 1984)⁹

The title of this play, *Lina Ubani*,¹⁰ is a counter-proverb created from the traditional one: *La kuvunda halina ubani* ('the rot has no incense [to cover the smell]'), which has been transformed into *La kuvunda lina ubani* ('the rot does have incense'), or *Lina Ubani* ('there is a Panacea,' Omari 2016: 24).

Lina Ubani is a play in six acts, whose protagonist is Bibi, an old lady who goes insane after the death of Daudi, one of her two sons, killed on the battlefield during the Kagera war (conflict between Uganda and Tanzania) in 1978-1979. After Daudi's death Bibi, filled with woe, is sent away from the village and welcomed at the home of Huila, her second son, together with her daughter-in-law Sara and her granddaughter Mota. Mota is the only person with whom the old lady seems to communicate through her stories and her songs (Msokile 1991).

Bibi is inhabited by her sorrow and psychologically devastated by her grief, so she escapes from reality in her own allegorical tale. Bibi's insanity is a self-protective device (Vierke 2012: 279) which allows her to denounce loudly the fear and instability marking that time. The character of Bibi is the representation of both "a mother" devastated by the loss of her son, and the "motherland" devastated by war, famine, and drought (Acquaviva 2019). Since Bibi is also approaching death, she is free of inhibition, and accuses the powerful by shouting against *Dyamini*, 'Idi Amin.'¹¹ Lastly, Bibi is the internal narrator, who acts as the alter ego of the external narrative voice of Mtambaji. Both are choral-sages. The figure of Bibi involves both madness and rationality; she represents the historical memory that explains the current issues of the country with which the narrator deals (Acquaviva 2019). Indeed, African drama draws attention to the socio-historical roots of present cultural dilemmas and socio-political struggles (Jeyifo 1985: 85).

The play opens with a parodos song, Bibi's mourning lamentation full of woe, and closes with the same structure as exodus song; this parallel structure shapes a kind of chorus.

⁹ *Lina Ubani* literally means 'it has incense,' which has commonly been translated in English as "There is an Antidote for Rot," as shown in the *World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre: Africa* (Diakhate, Eyoh and Rubin 2001: 309).

¹⁰ This play was entirely translated into Italian with the title 'Eppur si ha Purificazione' by Graziella Acquaviva (unpublished). Moreover, sections from *Lina Ubani* were selected for the glottodrama applied to Swahili language "*Nirudi Kwangu - Ritorno a Me Stessa*" directed by Prof. G. Acquaviva at the University of Turin and performed by her students at Teatro Araldo in Turin in June 2013.

¹¹ Idi Amin Dada was the third president of Uganda, who ruled the country with brutality as a dictator between 1971 and 1979. In 1978 Idi Amin invaded Tanzania, starting the war known as the Kagera war, because the Kagera region, on the border with Uganda, was the location that suffered the most.

Bibi challenges the sky; she wants the sky to fall by means of her narration, while the external narrator/Mtambaji, who is a choral character (Mutembei 2012), completes Bibi's role by telling an allegorical story about animals who were hunted by a predator known as "Dyamini."

(Anazungumza na mtu asiyeonekana lakini anayemwona yeye. Mtu huyo yuko juu hewani.)

Bibi: Ndiyo... eeh... teremka basi unijibu... Si unasema eti wewe ndiye unayejua kila kitu. Eee.. eti... mkubwa kabisa, mwenye akili kupita wote... Basi njoo kama wewe mkubwa kweli... (Muhando 2011: 13)

(She speaks with an invisible person, whom she only can see. The person is hidden somewhere in the sky.)

Bibi: Yees. So...come down and answer my questions...haven't you said that you are the one who knows everything. You claim to be the almighty, the cleverest of all...so come down if you are really that almighty...

(Conversa con qualcuno che non si vede ma che soltanto lei può vedere. Questa persona è su nel cielo)

Bibi: Sì, bè, allora scendi e rispondimi...non sei tu che dici di conoscere ogni cosa? Eee, l'onnipotente, con una mente superiore, allora vieni se sei veramente così grande...

Bibi: Mwongo wee, ni mchana. Mawingu yataanguka. Lakini enhee! Wacha tupige hadithi mchana mawingu yaanguke yamteremsha yule pale. Kweli nitakuteremsha kwa hadithi zitakazotungua mawingu. Utaona. (Muhando 2011: 17)

Bibi: Liar, it's noon. The sky will fall. But still! Let's tell the story during the daylight, and make the sky fall down here together with that one who is over there. Truly, I will make you fall down by my stories that will knock down the sky. You will see.

Bibi: Bugiarda è giorno, le nuvole cadranno. Maaaa! Narriamo la storia di giorno e lasciamo che le nuvole cadano qui per terra e facciamo scendere quello là. In verità ti farò

*scendere io con il racconto che abbatte
le nuvole. Vedrai.*

Bibi, who is a choral-sage, denounces the powerful and criticises the situation of political instability and social insecurity which people are suffering.

Bibi: Wanasema eti wenye vyeo wote hawana kisomo (Muhando 2011: 41)

Bibi: Gossip claims that all those who hold important posts are not well educated.

[Bibi: Dicono che tutti coloro i quali posseggono alte cariche non sono istruiti]

*Bibi: Enhee! Sikiza! Mawingu hayo
yanaanguka! Ona! (kwa yule mtu
hewani.) Utaona cha mtema kuni!
Mota unaona? Mawingu yanaanguka!
(Muhando 2011: 49)*

Bibi: Eh hear! The sky is falling down! See! (Speaking to the person up in the sky). You will suffer the hardest experience (as the woodcutter did)! Mota don't you see? The sky is falling!

*Bibi: Enhee! Senti! Le nuvole stanno
cadendo! Vedi! (rivolgendosi alla
persona in cielo). Ne pagherai le
conseguenze così come fece il
taglialegna! Mota lo vedi! Le nuvole
cadono!*

*Bibi: aliyeya Daudi
kaua sabuni yangu
kaua mchele wangu
kaua sukari yangu
kaua sabuni yangu
Dyamini! Dyamini!
(Muhando 2011: 39-40)*

Bibi: Whoever killed Daudi
killed my soap
killed my rice
killed my sugar
killed my soap
Dyamini! Dyamini!

*Bibi: Chi uccise Daudi
Ha ucciso il mio sapone
Ha ucciso il mio riso
Ha ucciso il mio zucchero
Ha ucciso il mio sapone
Dyamini! Dyamini! (Idd Amin)*

Bibi is dying, so she shouts out loud without inhibition whatever she means:

*Bibi: Sitaki! Daudi! Dyamini
linanichukua! Daudi njoo! Nakufa!
Sitaki! Mawingu yananguka! Motaaa!
Hadithiii! Mawingu! Daudi! Motaa!
(Muhando 2011: 66)*

Bibi: I don't want! Daudi help!
Dyamini is capturing me! Daudi
please, come! I am dying! I don't
want! The sky is falling! Motaaa!
The stories! The sky! Daudi!
Motaa!

*Bibi: Non voglio! Daudi! Dyamini mi
prende! Daudi vieni! Sto morendo! Non
voglio! Le nuvole cadono! Motaaa! Il
racconto! Le nuvole! Daudi! Motaa!*

Another interesting choral character in this play is Mwanahego, who appears to be a foolish drunkard; instead, he denounces the rotten part of the society: the corrupt politicians who enrich themselves while people are starving. In this play, insanity is a fundamental self-protective device.

*Mwanahego: [...] hela za kigeni
...unazitaka wewe unayekula vya
kigeni. Mie nataka hela za hapa hapa
(Muhando 2011: 58)*

*Mwanahego: eti punguani mimi?
Punguani wewe mwenyewe. Unalala
na njaa unanyamaza (Muhando
2011: 59)*

Mwanahego: [...] you need foreign
money...you who eat the
strangers' food. I only want the
local currency.

Mwanahego: Is that really me the
imbecile? You are the imbecile,
who goes to sleep starving and
with your timid mouth shut.

*Mwanahego: [...] I soldi stranieri...sono
quello che vuoi tu che mangi cibo
straniero. Io voglio denaro che
provenga da qui*

*Mwanahego: L'imbecille sarei io?
Sarete voi gli imbecilli che vanno a
dormire con la fame restando in
silenzio*

As the Narrator comments:

Mtambaji: "Mlevi" "Siyo" "Mlevi!"

"Mlevi si mlevi

maneno yake ya kweli."

"Labda punguani?"

"Hata! Ana akili timamu kabisa."

(Muhando 2011: 60-61)

The Narrator: "Drunk" "he is not"
"Drunk"

"The drunk is not that drunk

His words are true"

"Perhaps, is he an imbecile?"

"Not at all! he has a rational mind"

Il Narratore: "Ubriaco" "No"

"Ubriaco!"

"L'ubriaco non è così ubriaco

Le sue parole sono veritiere"

"È forse un deficiente?"

"Non direi! Ha una mente ingegnosa"

In the end, Bibi dies without ending her story, but Mota performs her *ngonjera* at school, which unfolds Bibi's teachings:

Mota: madyamini kila mahali

Hakika kuna uvundo

Tena kuna ubani...

Mtambaji: [...] ngoma tutaicheza

Itakuwa

Uvundu katuondolea

la uvundo! lina ubani!

la uvundo! lina ubani!

(Muhando 2011: 71)

Mota: Different kinds of
Dyamini/predators are
everywhere

Certainly, there is something
rotten

But there is some incense as well...

Narrator: [...] let the dance begin

It will be the way

To get rid of the rotten stink

Wherever there is rot, there is
incense!

Wherever there is rot, there is
incense!

*Mota: I predatori come Idi Amin sono
ovunque*

Certamente c'è del marcio

Ma anche dell'incenso...

*Il Narratore: [...] lasciamo che le danze
abbiano inizio
Così che il marciame sia purificato
Dove c'è il marcio, c'è l'incenso
Dove c'è il marcio, c'è l'incenso*

Comparing the two plays, Ciampa makes Beatrice appear to be a fool so as to avoid the duel of honour or *mwuaji wa heshima*; in similar ways, Bibi and Mwanahago act without inhibition: she because she is approaching death devastated by grief and woe; and he because he is sunk in drunkenness. Thus, madness in both the plays is a self-protective device (*mbinu ya usalama*) to set oneself free by reducing socio-political repercussions. Indeed, “the fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool”—as Shakespeare describes the character of the Fool in his comedy *As You Like It* (Act 5 scene 1).

8. Comparing the six plays

In the end, this paper has illustrated how a multiplicity of self-alienation experiences are both disguised and debunked behind the mask of madness. In fact, on the one hand, the character of Pambo represents the delusion of the young intellectual in post-independence Tanzania; Chizi denounces discrimination against women; Bibi criticises the political and economic insecurity of a period characterised by historical crisis; and Mwanahago condemns political corruption. On the other hand, Enrico IV finds his subjective knowledge as an outcast pretending to be mad and avenges himself; Ciampa, however, avoids seeing the truth and hides himself behind the curtain of madness in order not to commit the murder of honour. Finally, Mrs Ponza, who is seen by the majority of people as a mad woman, embraces the nonexistence of a unique reality nor an objective truth.

Pirandello, who lived between two world wars, postulated a philosophy of gnoseological relativism, wherein there is no absolute truth or sole reality but multiple realities. Each individual can choose among one hundred thousand masks the one which fits him better, but, in the end, individuals are no one, and so madness appears to be the only social device to set oneself free from injustice, social conventions and rules. Conversely, Penina Muhando describes a period of great crisis after Tanzanian independence and the failure of the great dream of *ujamaa*: a period characterised by the delusion of educated people; women's oppression and marginalisation; and the corruption and misgovernance of politicians, who, after the imposition of a neoliberal economy, start taking personal advantage of foreign aid while people are suffering.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this study, I aimed firstly to build up a cross-cultural analysis of diverse literary and philosophical traditions, moving between cultural universals and particulars, by enacting a dialogue between Swahili and Italian dramatic works. These outstanding plays, which apparently have nothing to say to one another, in reality share using masks to stage splits in the human unconscious, in multiple personalities, though in completely different alienating sociohistorical situations.

The playwrights confront the lack of certitude and the nonexistence of a sole reality or truth. On the one hand, Pirandello claims the existence of multiple realities and supports a worldview capable of embracing cognitive relativism. On the other hand, Muhando encourages cultural pluralism and inclusion with the objective to give space to silenced, oppressed and marginalised voices. Different sociocultural environments but similar symbols appear through the narratives, such as characters who wear the mask that I call ‘sage-madness’ that disguises rationality and wisdom with madness. They aim not only to unveil alienating situations, but also to criticise the ruling classes and the narrowminded bourgeoisie. Thus, I joined the two authors’ plays in a dialogue, contextualising, decontextualising, recontextualising and developing an analysis of their similar and dissimilar uses of diverse masks e.g. the mask of foolishness and madness on the face of reason and rationality. The authors of these plays let their characters wear masks that have been chosen with awareness rather than imposed ones.

Furthermore, it can be noticed that a shared element among the two authors is an existential epistemology underlying the plays. Existentialism is the philosophical stream par excellence that provides people with support to cope with tragic life challenges and profound psychophysical suffering such as the devastation of war, the damage of colonialism, and severe/chronic illnesses. Existentialist epistemology struggles to find a meaning in meaningless life and in the nothing of existence that human persons are obliged to confront whenever they are steamrolled by tragic events. As an example, the two Tanzanian philosophers Euphrase Kezilahabi and William Mkufya (Rettovà 2007; Nicolini 2022). Mkufya, for instance, maintains that truth is a relative and contingent concept beyond human cognitive capacities and postulates an “epistemology of cognitive relativism, agnosticism and radical scepticism” (Rettovà 2021: 336) to criticise the positivist reduction of reality to a material and objectified form (Mkufya 1999; Rettovà 2007; 2021; Rodgers-John 2015). Indeed, Mkufya’s pen draws a demon manifesting itself in the form of a black bird who recites: “*kweli si kweli, kwelikweli; kweli hubadilika ukweli*” (“Truth is not truth, truly; the truth is that the truth changes the truth/the reality’ Mkufya 1999: 110).

Theatre is a hetero-inclusive paideia, and reading theatre is a universal artistic experience, pregnant with pedagogical and anthropological value as a means to teach and learn shared and embodied knowledge.

Furthermore, in search of cultural relativism as well as pluralist inclusion, not only both Italian and Swahili literature have their rightful and equal places in world literatures, but they are also engaged in the productive commingling of global philosophy (Connolly 2010). Particularly, I insist on the creation of a polyphonic polylogue through cross-cultural literary and philosophical topics. According to Jean-Godefroy Bidima (1997), *la palabre* is a model of active dialogue to open up spaces for living together (Masolo 2019); this is also a trend in development in contemporary African philosophical discourses. For instance, Chimakonam's "conversational thinking" is a method and theory of intercultural philosophy to engage in polylogue among different literary and philosophical traditions, which he describes as an "arumaristic process:" "reshuffling of thesis and antithesis by skipping synthesis" to create a "relationship between opposed variables" and to produce new meanings by alternative epistemologies (Chimakonam 2018b: 144-145). "Conversationalism" is a complementary reflection on the global community between universalism and particularism among different philosophical traditions (Chimakonam 2017a, b, c; 2018b; 2019; Chimakonam and Ofana 2022; Chimakonam and Egbai 2019), and which seems to be is an intercultural methodology particularly promising for facing contemporary challenges. Lastly, alienation as an epistemology demonstrates the possibility of an engaged dialogue aimed at inclusion of cultural relativism and coalescence of plural knowledge, as explained through the mouths of peculiar masks: crazies, *vichaa*, mad persons, *waendawazimu*, fools, *wachizi*, imbeciles, *punguani*...

In conclusion, I argue that a fundamental process and instrument to open up an inclusive polylogue in my study was the challenging work of translation. During my translation process, in which I did my best not to "betray"¹² the original content but to share its meaning, I made a mixture of foreignization of the source text to be faithful to Pirandello's concepts, but I also domesticated the content to the target language to render it understandable in Swahili (Venuti 2000; Kobus and Feinauer 2017; Mazrui 2016; Aiello 2018). A further aim of this paper is to make an introductory discussion to my work of translation, before completing the publication of the three Pirandello's plays translated into Swahili so as to make at least a small part of Pirandello's theatre available for the very first time in an East African language.

¹² As per the well-known Italian adage: *traduttore, traditore* 'translator, traitor;' see Umberto Eco's (2003) *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*.

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