

## From auto/biography to a historiography of post-colonial Tanzania in Swahili popular literature

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This article will present two Swahili popular works: the popular novel *Mpenzi I-II* ('Lover I-II', 1984; 1985) by Kajubi D. Mukajanga and the collection of short stories *Mpe Maneno Yake* ('Give him his words,' 2006) by Freddy Macha.

Mukajanga started writing the novel in 1982 but the first volume was published in 1984 by his own publishing house, Grand Arts Promotions. The environment he describes is that of J.K.T (*Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa*/National Service) of Makutupora where the writer describes daily life as he lived it and according to the law in force in 1977.

The second volume of *Mpenzi*, published in 1985, recounts historically verifiable events as the outbreak of the Second World War; the founding of T.A.N.U (Tanganyika African National Union) with the veiled description of Nyerere; the 1964 uprising that is narrated through the perspective of Mzee Potee's character, and the failure of the Ujamaa's policy. The episodes narrated were really lived by him or by people very close to him.

In Macha's *Mpe Maneno Yake* the autobiographical elements are prominent, and the short stories reflect the author's personal perspective and the narrated events are a representation of how they were experienced by the author.

Although the two works were written and published at different times, the first in the mid-1980s and the second in 2006, both authors utilise autobiographical elements and contribute to the biographical representation of post-colonial Tanzania.

**Keywords:** Swahili Fiction; Popular literature; Auto/biography; Historiography; Post-colonial Tanzania

### 1. Introducing Swahili popular literature: definitions and investigation method

The issue of defining the terminology 'popular literature' has challenged the conventional notion of literature. Indeed, popular literature was conceived as a phenomenon associated with the form of cultural model that has emerged in various contexts at different times as a consequence of a technological dimension. The critical corpus is extensive and comprises a multitude of terms that are indicative of this particular type of literary production. These terms vary according to the geographical and cultural context in which they are expressed, including popular literature, para-literature, mass

literature and *fasihi pendwa* ‘beloved literature’ (Kezilahabi 1975; Palmer 1978; Fielder 1979; Knight 1979; Ohly 1982; Lindfors 1991). Popular texts and their writers arouse the curiosity and interest of critics, yet when literary historiographies are compiled, they are marginalised and judged in the light of aesthetic parameters through which they are denied artistic authority. As Rollin (1975) argued, for the critic of popular literature, questions of aesthetic value are irrelevant and limited to the functions of description and interpretation because through hermeneutic investigation the popular text could reveal interaction between text and society.

Since the 1970s onwards, Swahili fiction in East Africa has been characterised by a number of literary genres (short story, romance novel, crime novel and noir) and the separation of popular and academic literature. The status of literary demarcation has been noted by many scholars who in highlighting it have used connotative terms such as *pendwa/dhati* ‘popular/serious, popular/standard’ (Ohly 1982; Madumulla 1991; Zúbková Bertoncini 2019). Gromov (1996) argues that academic writers not only have a high literary capacity that allows them to perfect narrative techniques in classic prose genres, but also to experiment with new literary forms such as, for example, the fantastic parable. Conversely, popular writers continue to conform to the typical patterns of popular production, without any trace of stylistic or genre innovation. Although popular fiction is characterised by the presence of repetitive motifs, it lacks linearity and rhythmicity of narrated events. The popular novel tends to expand in time and space, to diachronically postpone the solution of the intrigue through the introduction of parallel plots (Bordoni 1984). Every literary event—whether acknowledged as such or not—brings together writers (whose presence poses problems of psychological, moral, and philosophical interpretation), books (whose mediation induces problems of aesthetics, style, language, and technique), and readers (whose existence entails problems of a historical, political, social, and economic nature; Escarpit 1958).

In Tanzania, popular writers have redefined their writing to match the demand of the local audience.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning, the production of popular fiction appeared to critics as a form of subsistence within the informal economic sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the 1960s, a cohort of young writers and journalists in the Tanga area began serialising their work in local newspapers, which rapidly gained considerable popularity. Adopting a colloquial style, they depicted the contemporary style of rural and urban life in a manner that was accessible to the general public. The ideology of modernisation was a significant contributing factor to the flourishing of the book industry. In the period between 1960 and 1975, there were thirteen publishing houses present in Tanzania. Of these, five were multinationals, namely Longman, Heineman, Oxford University Press, and Nelson Evans Brothers. Two were East African joint agencies, namely the East African Literary Bureau and the East African Publishing House. The remaining five were Tanzanian, namely the Tanzania Publishing House, TUKI (*Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili*), Maarifa Publishers, Ndanda Mission, and Tanzania Mission Press. In addition to the

The majority of popular fiction genres are linked to the social conditions and contexts of their production and reception, and frequently represent covert forms of political protest and cultural autonomy against local and international bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether the entire popular production is to be considered as a unified entity or whether it is also subject to a kind of internal fragmentation. Despite the absence of a direct equivalent in Swahili for the English terms ‘popular literature’ or ‘popular novel,’ Madumulla (1991) asserts that the most prevalent term is *fasihi pendwa*, which can be translated as ‘beloved literature,’ as already mentioned above. However, there are other definitions that have emerged, including *fasihi maarufu* ‘well-known novel’ and *fasihi ya taharuki* ‘exciting novel.’ The term *fasihi ya mitaani* ‘street literature’ is appropriate when used in reference to the distribution channel of this type of production. However, it is not an accurate representation when used to describe something that is exclusively associated with the street.<sup>2</sup>

In examining popular literary productions, the fundamental challenge persists in identifying an appropriate methodology for investigating the underlying conflicts of perception that shape the message. It is therefore important to attempt to comprehend the messages within the local context through an inductive methodology, whereby generalisations are represented by observations based on selected criteria that permit a degree of comparison between different cases or examples of phenomena.<sup>3</sup> If we consider the novel to be, actually, a social chronicle, a biography and autobiography, it is important to maintain an understanding of it in the context in which it was created.

In recent years, auto/biographical narration has been the subject of study in various academic fields, including literature. The genre of the autobiography is often characterised by a focus on the author’s significant life experiences, encompassing a range of emotions, aspirations, traumatic events and resonances that an individual may encounter throughout the course of his/her lifetime.

Related to this topic, two Swahili popular works are presented in this article: the novel *Mpenzi* I-II by Kajubi D. Mukajanga and the collection of short stories *Mpe Maneno Yake* by Freddy Macha.

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aforementioned publishing houses, a number of private local publishing houses were established, including Black Star Agencies, Busara Publications, Jommsi Publications, Mcheshi Publications, Heko Publishers, and Grand Arts Promotions (Zúbková Bertoncini 1986: 526-527).

<sup>2</sup> It is not infrequent that the critical evaluation is based on the appearance of the publication, such as neglected graphics, unclear printing, and poor-quality paper.

<sup>3</sup> This approach was proposed by J. Fabian in his study on the cultural expressions of Zaire (Fabian 1978).

Although the two works were written and published at different times, the first in the mid-1980s and the second in 2006, both authors utilise autobiographical elements and contribute to the biographical representation of post-colonial Tanzania.

## 2. Kajubi Mukajanga: auto-biographical elements in *Mpenzi*

Kajubi Mukajanga was born in 1957 in Biharamulo, in the Kagera region. After completing his primary education in Singida and Musoma, northern Tanzania, he moved to the Morogoro region and graduated in 1976. Following his employment at the Aga Khan Secondary School in the Tanga region, he was recruited by Tanzanian Airlines, a position he held until 1981. At then, he made the decision to dedicate himself to writing in addition to journalism. He has been a reporter, editor, media critic, media trainer, and publisher. He is also a poet, novelist, and author of several biographies, the best known of which is *Bob Marley, sauti ya ghetto* ('Bob Marley, the voice of the ghetto,' 1983).

The 1980s were very productive for him in the field of fiction, with the publication of novels such as *Kitanda cha mauti* ('The Death Bed', 1982); *Twanze lini?* ('When do we start?,' 1983) and *Mpenzi I-II* ('Lover I-II,' 1984-1985). He is currently the executive secretary of the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT).

Kajubi Mukajanga started writing his novel *Mpenzi* in 1982, but it was not until 1984 that the first volume was published. According to Zúbková Bertoncini (1986), *Mpenzi* is an audacious and critical novel which encompasses a multitude of significant themes, illustrating the last forty years of Tanzanian history through the lives of Mzee Potee and his daughter Shangwe.

The author situates the events that form the basis of the narrative in Makutupora<sup>4</sup> military training camp known as JKT<sup>5</sup> (*Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa*, 'National Service'), a location not explicitly referenced in the text but significant in the context of the author's own military training experience as an enlistee in 1977, as he stated when I interviewed him in 1989 during my fieldwork on Swahili

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<sup>4</sup> Makutupora is an administrative ward in the Dodoma Urban district of the Dodoma Region of Tanzania.

<sup>5</sup> The genesis of the *Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa* 'National Service' can be traced back to 1958, when national leaders undertook a visit to Ghana to attend the country's first-year independence celebrations. Among them were Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere and the former Prime Minister Rashid Kawawa who was also known as *Simba wa Vita* 'Lion of the War.' Kawawa was very impressed by the information given by the former Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Golda Meir, regarding the manner in which the State of Israel had gathered and prepared young people militarily, and how they subsequently, performed national duties with courage, patience, cooperation and discipline. Although the idea of implementing the Israeli project had already attracted considerable interest among many Tanganyikan politicians, it was only with the enactment of the National Service Act of 1964 that its implementation became a concrete reality within the newly independent State of Tanzania

(<https://www.jkt.go.tz/pages/ns-historical-background>).

popular literature. The author's experience of the JKT is an important contextual factor in the events depicted in the novel.

The JKT was initially conceived as an association of young volunteers, comprising both male and female members, who were required to undergo a period of political, military, agricultural and aptitude training prior to embarking on a subsequent work placement in a 'nation-building' project (Ivaska 2005). Nevertheless, a considerable number of young people were reluctant to enrol in the programme. In 1965, Prime Minister Rashid Kawawa announced the introduction of a government plan to make National Service compulsory for all those who had completed primary and secondary education, as well as preparatory studies for university (United Republic of Tanzania 1973).

Mukajanga attempts to enlighten those who resided beyond the gate of the JKT regarding the actual events within the military camp. His descriptions are meticulous. He gives particular attention to the punishments that were inflicted by the non-commissioned officers on the recruits.

*[...] Kijana alipelekwa hadi kambini; akianguka anainuliwa kwa mateke mazito na bakora, akishindwa kukimbia tokana na kuchoka na kuumwa na mwiba uliokuwa mguuni mwake anasukumwa mbele kwa teke na bakora. Ungemwuliza baadae huyu mwananchi, angekwambia anajua nini maana ya polisi ya jeshi la wananchi.*

*MP [...] aliondoka na mateka wake kuelekea quarter-guard – kule kwenye lango kuu la kuingilia kambini ambako ndiko waliokaa MP, na ndiko mahabusu ilikokuwa. Huko alimwamuru mateka ashone vidole vya mikono yake kama mtu anayesali, kisha alimwamuru alale kifudi fudi, viganja vilivyoshikana chini, na akawa anampa amri za kujiinua juu na kushuka kwa kutumia mikono. "Utapiga push-up mpaka utapike ugali wote wa jeshi uliopata kuiba."*

(Mukajanga 1984: 20-21).

*[...] The boy was taken to the camp. If he falls, he is made to get up with kicks and sticks, if he cannot run due to tiredness and the thorn in his foot, he is pushed by the kick and the stick. If you had asked this citizen, he would have told you that he knew what People's Military Police meant.*

*MP [...] left with his hostage towards the quarter-guard, at the main gate of the camp where the MP stayed and where the prison was located. There, he ordered the captive to sew his fingers together like a person praying, then he commanded him to lie on his face with his palms pressed together on the ground, and to lift himself up and down using only his hands. "You will do push-ups until you vomit all the army porridge you stole."<sup>6</sup>*

It is within the military camp that Shangwe, the main female character undergoes a series of traumatic experiences including a rape by some camp officials. The traumatic experiences instil in her a deep hate towards men:

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Swahili into English are mine.

*Na huku usiku ukipita taratibu, Shangwe aliendelea kuogelea katika bahari ya chuki, hasira na uchungu. 'Mwanadamu, ugeuzwe kinyangarika, mwanasesere wa kuchezeza, chombo cha kumstarehesha mwanamme [...] Ah! Laiti Mungu asingeliumba wanaume. Viumbe wenye umbo la mwanadamu lakini wasiokuwa na utu wowote. Tulikosa nini sie? Kuwabeba matumboni mwetu miezi tisa, tukawatunza na kuwalea kwa mapenzi, tukihimili taabu zote kwa ajili yao, ndilo kosa? Kwa nini wanatudharau? Kwa kuwa hatuna maguvu kamayao? Lakini mbona atokeapo mwanamke kuwa na misuli na maguvu wao humcheka, na hata kuufanya muda daima uwe mgumu kwake?' (Mukajanga 1984: 30-31).*

And as the night passed slowly, Shangwe continued to fret in a sea of hate, anger and pain. 'Creature, be you transformed into an object, a doll to play with, a tool to entertain the male [...] Ah! If only God had not created men. They are creatures with a human shape but no humanity. Where did we go wrong? We carry them in our wombs for nine months, lovingly care for them and raise them, enduring every pain for them, Is this the mistake? Why do they despise us? Perhaps because we do not have their strength? But then why when a woman has strength and muscles, do they mock her, making life difficult for her?'

When Shangwe arrives at the camp, she is already pregnant as a result of a sexual assault that occurred while she was still a Secondary school student. As a consequence, she flees the camp with the intention of terminating the pregnancy.

As Mukajanga himself explained, the character of Shangwe was inspired by a cousin of his own age who, after becoming pregnant, was expelled from school and forced to have an abortion.

In the novel, the author often merges with fictional characters. As he himself declares:

*Kama mimi ni mwandishi wa riwaya, mimi ni mtazamaji na tena mshiriki katika utendaji wa riwaya. Kwa maoni yangu mimi, ni muhimu sana kuitilia riwaya uhai kwa ajili ya wasomaji wangu, kwa hivyo lazima niishi mimi mwenyewe matendo yaliyoelezwa katika riwaya... kwa kawaida, mwanzoni kazi zangu zote zinaonyesha maisha yangu, hisia zangu, hofu zangu, utu wangu. Baadae tu, kazi hizo zinaonyesha jinsi ambavyo ningependa ziwe au mambo fulani yasiyotokea kama ningalipenda yawe. Katika sehemu ya kwanza ya riwaya, mhusika wa Shangwe ni binamu yangu mimi [...] safari ya Shangwe toka Musoma mpaka Dar es Salaam, ni ileile kama vile nilivyoisafiri mimi mwenyewe. Ndiyo, katika sura hii ya riwaya mi nipo kabisa...Mimi ndimi yule anayeishi matukio yale nikitumia mhusika wa Shangwe.<sup>7</sup>*

As a novelist, I'm both a spectator and a participant in the action of the novel. It's important for me to bring it to life for my readers, so I need to experience it myself... generally, at the beginning, all my works represent my life, my feelings, my fears, my being. Only later do they represent the way I would like them to be or certain things to go that I have not experienced as I would have liked. In the first part of the novel Shangwe represents my cousin [...] I made Shangwe experience a trip I

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<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, August 1989.

made from Musoma to Dar es Salaam... Yes, in this chapter of the novel<sup>8</sup>. I am very much present....  
It is I who live the event in the guise of Shangwe...

Shangwe represents the generation of young people born in the aftermath of Independence, who are experiencing the uncertainties of the new politics, confusion, and generational conflict. This latter sociological aspect is explicated in the dialogue between Mama Ndomba and a student under whose guise Mukajanga himself is concealed. Mama Ndomba is a former teacher who began to work for the government. This dialogue gives rise to the inherent problems in Nyerere's politics, which extolled the preservation of traditional values by asserting a kind of self-determination, and the corrupt interpretation of the message itself. When Mama Ndomba expresses her disapproval of the younger generation's inclination towards innovation, particularly in the case of the female youth for their unconventional style of dress, the young man challenges her by highlighting her apparent disregard for the traditional cultural norms. He asserts that her disapproval extends to certain innovations originating from abroad, while she supports those that align with her interests and social status (Mukajanga 1984: 79-80).

### 2.1. From character to the historical biography of Tanzania

*Mpenzi* is a journey into the historical memory of a small community, depicted through the life of Mzee Potee's family and a few other characters. These family recollections are interwoven with the national memory, thereby offering insights into the collective experiences of Tanzania. The main themes of politics and everyday life are embodied by marginal social actors as represented by the characters in the novel.

In the author's own words, as he stated during the interview, his characters often mirror aspects of his own emotional experiences. This suggests that the author is engaged in a "process of reconciliation with oneself," as Ferrari terms it (Ferrari 2022: 49).

At other times, the characters serve as representations of people who have influenced his life. When viewed through this interpretative lens, the historical narration of this small African community can be seen as a metaphor for the challenges and achievement of Tanzania as a whole.

Mukajanga presents a historical biography of the former Tanganyika and Tanzania through the life stages of Mzee Potee who is a prominent male character throughout the novel.

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<sup>8</sup> See Mukajanga (1984, Chapter 4).



The character of Potee is treated in detail in the second volume of Mpenzi, beginning with his opposition to the colonialists' first abuse to his family when he was a young boy:

*[...] wakoloni wakatamalaki ardhi iliyokuwa ikitumiwa na baba yake Potee, ardhi nzuri yenye rutuba. Mkutuo huu ndio uliomaliza baba yake Potee, ukamwamshiria – kikatili – kuingia kaburini mwake, aiache familia yake bila kitu chochote cha kuhimili kimaisha. Aidha, kwa kuwa wakoloni waliweka ardhi yote chini ya madaraka yao, nayo ikawa ya kununua, ilimwia muhali Potee, katika uchochote na umri wake, kuweza kupata walau kijipande cha kulima chakula kwa ajili yake na mama yake, ambaye hivi sasa akisakarika na kuzeeka haraka.*

*Alipokuwa na umri wa miaka kumi na minne Potee alianza kazi katika shamba kubwa la mibuna la bepari wa Kigiriki, akilipwa shilingi kumi na mbili kwa mwezi, na akianza kazi saa kumi na mbili asubuhi na kumaliza machwea. Yalikuwa Maisha ya dhiki, kazi ikisimamiwa na wanyapara Waafrika wenzao wakiwa na mijeledi na mbwa ambao hawakusita kuwatumia kuwaadhibisha vibarua. Wanyapara hao daima wameghadhabika, wakichachawiza katika kiruu kali bila sababu ya kueleweka, wakiahiria na kunyaparia kwa mori wa kihayawani. Yalikuwa maisha ya udhalili na fedheha ambayo babu zao hawakupata kuyafahamu hapo kabla ya utawala wa Wazungu ... (Mukajanga 1985: 17).*

*[...] the colonialists took the land his father cultivated, a beautiful and fertile land. It was this last blow that knocked Potee's father down, and pushed him cruelly into the grave, and left his family with nothing to survive on. Moreover, as the colonists expropriated all the land and put it up for sale, it became impossible for Potee at his age with his limited earnings to obtain even a modest plot of land to cultivate for his own sustenance and that of his mother, who was now debilitated and prematurely aged.*

*When he was fourteen, he started working on a big coffee plantation owned by a rich Greek man, for twelve shillings per month. His working day was from six in the morning until sunset. It was a life of hardship. The work was managed by African overseers, who were provided with whips and dogs, which they used to punish the worker. Those henchmen were always angry, indulging in blind rage for no logical reason, and remaining vigilant and watchful with bestial fury. Their grandparents had non experienced such a miserable and infamous existence before the European colonisation ...*

From that time onward, the struggle against the invaders become his primary focus and driving force.

He participates in World War II:

*Mzungu kwa Mzungu walikuwa wakipigana. Lo, hawa Wazungu walikuwa wakichukiana sana. Kila mara, kila bwana mkubwa aliwahubiria vibarua jinsi Mzungu wa kabila la Jerumani alivyokuwa mbaya, katili, na akitaka ama kuitawala dunia nzima, ama kuiangamiza yote. Alikuwa akimpinga Mtukufu Mfalme George.*

*Jina la Hitler likajulikana kote kote. Ukisikika mvumo angani ni ndege ya hitler. Akisikika simba usiku katumwa na hitler. Kukitokea ugonjwa mkubwa hewa imetiwa sumu na Hitler. Na watoto wa vibarua wakafunzwa nyimbo nyingi za kumlaani mwehu aliyetaka kuitawala dunia nzima, mwehu aliyeshika watu wa umati, akawafungia vyumbani na kuwatia moto, mwehu aliyetaka kuwatia ukharithi wanaume wote wa kiafrika... Na waliimba nyimbo za kumtukuza mfalme na malkia wake. Mfalme aliyeleta barabara; mfalme aliyeleta hospitali; mfalme mwenye enzi ianzayo litokezeapo jua haadi lizamiapo, mfalme wa watu ambao*



*katu hawatopata kuwa watumwa... Na malkia. Malkia mwadilifu; malkia mpole; malkia mwenye huruma; malkia mpenda watoto...*

[...]

*Waliambiwa vita hiyo ilikuwa kubwa, kubwa sana – ilikuwa vita vya dunia kwa kuwa ilikuwa, nao ilibidi wakapigane. Hitler alitaka kuwateka wao vile vile, halafu angewafanya watumwa, na wanaume wote, kasoro walio mapande ya watu, wangehasiwa. Na hao mapande ya watu wangekusanywa pamoja na wanawake ambao wangechaguliwa kwa uangalifu na wangefungiwa pahala kama nguruwe, walale na kutengeneza watoto!!!*

*Basi Potee na shemeji yake [...] wakashikwa katika mkumbo wa vijana wa kiafrika waliochukuliwa kwenda kumpigania Mfalme. Kina Potee hawakulipenda wazo la kwenda kumpigania huyo mtu ambaye hawakumjua, lakini kila walipofikiria ubaya wa huyo Hitler, na nia yake ya kuwaangamiza, walijikuta wamechanganyikiwa hawajui lipi bora kati ya kumpigania mfalme na kutompigania. Walijua jambo moja kwa hakika. Kwamba hata wakishinda katika vita hiyo ushindi huo hautawaletea uhuru, bali tu utakuwa ushindi wa kuhakikisha kwamba wanaendelea kuwa chini ya Mwingereza na Jarumani (Mukajanga 1985: 20-21).*

European was fighting against European. Oh, Europeans hated each other. Every day, every boss told the workers that the German European was a cruel and bloodthirsty man who wants to rule the whole world or destroy everything. He was in conflict with the Estimated King George. Hitler's name became known everywhere. If you hear a rumble in the sky, it is Hitler's airplane. If you hear a lion at night, it was sent by Hitler. If an epidemic breaks out, Hitler's poison has been spread in the air. The workers' children learned many songs to curse the madman who wanted to rule the whole world, the madman who captured hundreds of human beings, locked them in their houses and burn them, the mad man who wanted to pervert all African males... They sang hymns in honour of the king and queen. The king who had built the roads, the king who founded hospitals, the king whose domain begins where the sun rises and extends to where it sets, the king of people who would never be slaves... And the queen. A fair queen, a compassionate queen, a queen who loves children...

[...]

They were told that this was a big war, very big war-it was the World War and the had to fight. Hitler wanted to subjugate them, then enslave them and castrate all males, except the most vigorous of them. The virile ones would be herded together with carefully selected females, and then locked in places like pigs, to lie and breed!!!

Potee and his brother-in-law [...] were among a group of young Africans who had been recruited to fight for the king. Potee's group did not like the idea of going to fight for someone they did not know. However, whenever they thought about Hitler's cruelty and his intention to annihilate them, they felt confused because they did not know whether it was better or not to fight for the king. They were sure of one thing. Even if they had won the war, the victory would not have signified independence for them. On the contrary, it would have represented a confirmation of their continuing subjugation to British rather than German rule.

During the fighting, one of his eyes was blinded. Despite this trauma, the damaged eye will be the only part of his body to react with its tearing, indicating his profound frustration at being forced to fight for someone who will continue to oppress him and his people:

*'... Ndilo jeshi nililolilia sana hili? Ndilo jeshi nililotaka kujiunga nalo (...) Faida gani basi? Tofauti gani iliyopo? Jeshi liko katika mikono ya wale wale tuliowafukuza ...'* (Mukajanga 1985: 36).

*'... Is this the army I longed for? Is this the army I wanted to join (...) What advantage then? What difference is there? The army is in the hands of those we chased away ...'*

Mukajanga's narrative maintains a focus on the character of Potee, through whose life the author describes Nyerere's<sup>9</sup> ascension to power:

*Huyo mtu alizungumziwa san ana kutukuzwa mno. Kijana [...] aliyesoma na katika kusoma kwake akadhihirisha kwamba Mtu Mweusi angeweza kuwa na akili na maarifa kuliko Mtu mweupe [...] Kijana aliyesoma akataalamika, akaimaliza elimu yote Tanganyika, akaenda Makerere, akaimaliza elimu yote huko, akaenda Ulaya, akasoma [...].*

*Aliongoza harakati ya Uhuru. Aliwakosoa wanazuoni wenzie, akaonyesha jinsi kelele zao zilivyokuwa na nia ya kuwanufaisha wao tu, na si kuwanufaisha Watanganyika wote kwa ujumla... Alikiiita chama chao chama cha anasa, chama cha starehe, chama cha watu wachoyo na walafi waliofikiria matumbo yao tu, bila kuyajali matumbo ya watu [...] waliotengeneza Tanganyika, watu ambao bila wao Tanganyika isingekuwa Tanganyika ...*

*[...] alikivunja chama hicho cha anasa na starehe na kuanzisha chama cha umma, chama cha siasa, chama cha harakati ya umma* (Mukajanga 1985: 25).

This man was much talked about and highly praised. A young man [...] who had studied, and in his studies, he had shown that the Black Man could have more intelligence and knowledge than the White Man [...]. An educated young man who completed his studies in Tanganyika; he went to Makerere where he also finished his studies, and then he proceeded to Europe, he studied [...].

He was the leader of the Liberation movement. He pointed out the faults of his intellectual colleagues showing how their shouting was solely designed to make prosper themselves and not the people of Tanganyika... He called their party as the party of luxury, the party of hedonism, and the party of those gluttons who thought only of their stomachs without concern for those of the people [...] who had created Tanganyika, people without whom Tanganyika would not have been Tanganyika ...

[...] he abolished the party of luxury and pleasures and established a mass party, a political party, the Party of the People's Revolution.

The historical memory of the nation is sustained through the sentiments evoked by Potee at the moment of independence and the representation of the collective enthusiasm for this moment in narrative form:

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<sup>9</sup> The information pertaining to the life and persona of Nyerere, as delineated in the novel, can be found in the biography edited by George A. Mhina entitled *Mwalimu Nyerere na Tanzania* ('Teacher Nyerere and Tanzania') published in 1980.

*“Nataka kurudia tena jeshi lakini jeshi tofauti safari hii. Safari hii si jeshi la Mfalme wa Uingereza. Safari hii jeshi la Tanganyika. Ni hilo tu litakalofuta makosa niliyofanya katika siku zangu za ujana”.[...]*

*“Ndio, nitarudi. Nitarudi jeshini. Sikuziona taabu hizo wakati nilipokimpigania mkoloni, kwa nini sasa nizione? [...] Nilikuwa tayari kupoteza jicho langu kwa ajili ya Mwingereza, sasa niko tayari kupoteza uhai wangu kwa ajili ya Matanganyika [...] Nitakwenda, na nitaonyesha kwamba bado naweza kuishika bunduki, tena sasa, kwa mori zaidi kwani sasa nitashika bunduki kuulinda uhuru wa nchi yangu ...*

*[...]*

*Siku moja bendera ya dhalimu ilishushwa, na bendera ya wananchi ikapandishwa. Saa sita usiku, mizinga ikilia, Watanganyika makoo yakiwakauka kwa vifijo na vigelegele, ikapepea katika upepo laini wa saa hiyo na katika gwerida kubwa la heshima [...] macho ya Mama Shafii [...] yaliliona tambo dogo lakini kakamavu la mwandaniwe aliyempenda na kumwenzi, Potee...*

*Nao Watanganyika walikitazama kitambaa kile kilichokuwa na maana kubwa cha njano, kijani na nyeusi [...] na waliona kimatangaza kufunguliwa kwa kipindi kipya ...” (Mukajanga 1985: 32-34).*

*“I want to return to the army, but this time it 'll be a different army. Now, this isn't the King of England's army. This time it's the army of Tanganyika. It will be this one that will erase the mistakes I made in my youth”. [...]*

*“Yes, I'll be back. I'm going back to the army. Did I suffer when I fought for the coloniser? Why should I feel it now? [...] I was ready to lose an eye for the Englishman, now I'm ready to lose my life for the Tanganyikan [...] I will go and show that I can still take up a rifle, and moreover, with greater fervour because I'm now taking up the rifle to safeguard the independence of my country ...*

*[...]*

*One day, the flag of the tyrant was lowered, and the flag of the citizens was raised. At midnight, while the cannons were firing and the throats of the people of Tanganyika became dry from the shouts and trills of joy, (that flag) flew in the gentle breeze of that hour.*

*In the parade of honour [...] Mama Shafii's eyes [...] glimpsed the small figure of Potee, her partner who she respected and loved... and they, the people of Tanganyika looked at that yellow, green and black banner ... they saw in it the proclamation of a new era ...”*

The new political and economic system offered a sense of hope and promise for Potee and his homeland. Indeed, Potee chose to name his last two children Tumaini (‘Hope’) and Shangwe (‘Joy’), thereby symbolizing the importance of hope and joy in the new era (Mukajanga 1985: 26).

Between 1971 and 1975, the working class mounted a massive and militant struggle against private and state enterprises accusing their bosses of high-handed behaviour and maltreatment of workers.

Starting from strikes, the movement quickly graduated to the occupation of factories. In their struggle, workers used the party documents like the Arusha Declaration (Nyerere 1968: 231-250) and

Mwongozo ('Guidelines,' TANU 1971) to make their grievances and demands legible to the party and the state. In particular, clause 15<sup>10</sup> of Mwongozo become their battle cry (Shivji 1976: 123 ff.):

*Kilitangazwa kitu ambacho kila mvuja jasho alikitazama kama mgeuzo mkubwa na wa ghafla katika mfumo wa maisha. Kitu hicho kilipokelewa kwa shangwe kubwa na kila mfanyakazi kilipokelewa kama baraka iliyohitajika sana katika kiza kinene kilichokuwa kikiwazuilia wafanyakazi kuiona njia, wakawa wakiwaya waya ovyo katika maisha yao bila kujua njia ipi maishani mwao waliyokuwa wakikanyaga, bila kuiona hata meta moja mbele maishani mwao.*

*Kila mahala palipokuwa na mkusanyiko wa wafanyakazi kitu hicho kulizungumza na kujadiliwa kwa shauku isiyotofautiana sana na shauku isiyotofautiana sana na shauku iliyopata kuwapo muda moja tu – wakati uhuru ulipokaribia.*

*Ibara ya kumi na tano*

*Ibara ya kumi na tano*

*Mwongozo adilifu wa Chama*

*Mwongozo wa kikweli, njia, maji ya baraka ya maisha (...)*

*Mwongozo! [...]*

*Naam, mwongozo ulikuwa umewaingia watu. Lakini mwongozo huu ulikuwa na ibara ya kumi na tano...*

*Kamati za wafanyakazi zilianzishwa kote kote.*

*Mfanyakazi lazima ashiriki katika uendeshaji wa kiwanda au shirika. Mfanyakazi lazima ahisi kwa shirika au kampuni ni mali yake, na kazi aifanyayo ni kwa ajili yake na taifa zima.*

*Kamati zilianza kazi.[...]*

*Mara, polisi hao! Wanaingia na kuwatisha wafanyakazi ...*

*[...]*

*Wafanyakazi mia mbili wanafukuzwa... (Mukajanga 1985: 108-109; 111-112).*

What every worker saw as the sudden and great transformation of the system was proclaimed; the proclamation was greeted by every labourer with joy, it was welcomed as a blessing, as a light in the deep darkness that had hindered the workers from seeing a glimmer, they were wavering confusedly in their system without knowing the purpose of their lives that was trampling them without them even seeing a metre in front of them.

Wherever there was a large group of workers, they talked about it and discussed it with passion not unlike the passion there had been once—at the time of independence.

Article 15

Article 15

The Guidelines

The party's right Guidelines

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<sup>10</sup> Mwapachu (1973: 383) states that workers argued that the causes of their protests were those connected with the contravention of Clause 15, which was calling for the adoption by industrial management officials of a democratic and participatory leadership style. Management of the affected enterprises contended that the workers' strikes were by and large caused by a lack of clear understanding of this clause.

The Guidelines of Truth, the Way, the Blessed Water of Life (...)

The Guidelines!

[...]

Yes, the Guidelines had made their impact on people. But the Guidelines have Article 15 ...

Workers' committees arose everywhere. the worker must participate in the running of the industry or company. The worker must recognise that the company or industry are his wealth, his work is for his own good and that of the whole nation.

The committees began their work [...]

Police now! They enter and terrorise the workers...

[...]

Two hundred workers are laid off...

For over three years Nyerere watched workers' battles at the barricade. Workers believed Nyerere was on their side. Parastatals were owned by the state and the state was that of workers and peasants, therefore, when the workers went on strike, they armed their own property. In 1974, in his May Day speech, Nyerere came out against workers. His argument was typical of the state bourgeoisie which had ridden on the back of the ideology of Ujamaa (Shivji, Yahya-Othman and Kamata 2020).

When Potee realises the weakness of the new policy, his hopes also fall completely, leaving him in a state of frustration and distress.

One might suggest that the character of Mzee Potee represents a repository of the country's 'episodic memory', which could be defined as the recollection of specific events, locations and temporal contexts (Tulving 2002; Wenger and Shing 2016).

This section of the novel could be described as 'historiographical,' as it highlights transitional phenomena, i.e. the interval between one political regime and another, through the historical biography represented by certain moments in Nyerere's political life. However, it is necessary to emphasize that only the reception of Nyerere's image and the reasons for his popularity can be deduced from the narrative description, rather than the political leader as well as the character in the novel.

### 3. Freddy Macha: a writer and musician

Freddy Macha was born in Old Moshi, Kilimanjaro district, on 14 February 1955. He spent his formative years in Bumbuli, Tanga District, where his father was employed as a doctor at the local hospital, and the village of Mori. He subsequently attended primary school in Old Moshi.

After completing his primary education, he was admitted to a Secondary School in Ilboru, Arusha District, in 1969. During formative years, two defining traits emerged that would significantly shape

the remainder of his life: an inclination for travel and a pronounced literary talent. Indeed, this period marked the beginning of his engagement with writing.

In March 2014, I conducted an online interview with the author in collaboration with a student of mine, with the aim of gaining insight into the author's work and experiences.

As Macha himself stated:

*Nilianza kuona kipaji changu nikiwa na miaka kumi na minne au kumi na mitano hivi. Kwanza, watu mbalimbali walikuwa wakisifia barua zangu. Wakisema “Freddy akikuandikia barua na kama kitabu... Kuna wakati nilikuwa nawasaidia wenzangu shuleni kuandika barua kwa marafiki zao wa kike (girlfriends) wanakopi kisha wananipa fedha. Kila barua nilipewa shilingi moja [...] Nikaanza kuona faida ya kuandika [...]. Nikagundua Kumbe unaweza kupata fedha kwa kuandika?”<sup>11</sup>*

I started recognising my talent when I was about 14 or 15. At first, lots of people liked my letters. They said, ‘For Freddy, writing letters is like writing a book.’ There was a time when I used to help my classmates write letters for their girlfriends. They would copy them and then give me money. For each letter I received a shilling [...]. I began to think about the advantages of writing [...]. I was amazed! Can you really earn money by writing?

Upon completion of his studies, Freddy Macha commenced his training period in the National Service:

*[...] nikajiunga na Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa au National Service, mwaka 1975. [...] Ulikuwa msimko mkubwa, kwani Tanzania ilikuwa katika mabadiliko makubwa .... Ya siasa ya Ujamaa na Kujitegemea .... na siku zote nilikuwanikiandika na kupiga gitaa langu.<sup>12</sup>*

[...] I joined the Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa or National Service in 1975. [...] It was a very eventful period because Tanzania was facing big changes ... for the politics of Socialism and Self-Reliance<sup>13</sup> ... and every day I was writing and playing my guitar.

The adolescent proclivity for music was instilled in him by his parents; his father, in addition to a practice as a physician, was an expert guitarist and composer of songs, as his maternal uncles were. Furthermore, his family and friends played a role in fostering his interest in literature:

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<sup>11</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

<sup>13</sup> The 1960s and 1970s were defined by the policies advocated and articulated in the 1967 Arusha Declaration and in Nyerere's political and pedagogical texts, including *Socialism and Rural Development* (Nyerere 1967a), and *Education for Self-Reliance* (Nyerere 1967b). The outcome of these publications was the formulation of a process for the collectivization of the national agricultural system. It was believed that a return to traditional pre-colonial ways of life would be the only means of achieving an ideal socialist state (Nyerere 1968). Nevertheless, the theoretical premises proved to be a mere utopia (Raikes 1975).

[...] Shangazi zangu [...] wote walinipa moyo wa kuandika [...]. Nimekutana na wasanii wengi walionipa moyo. Toka Afrika kusini, Brazil, Marekani, Jamaika na kadhalika. Mdogo wangu, Ndesanjo Macha, vile vile. Ndesanjo ndiye aliyeleta vuguvugu la Mablogi Tanzania miaka zaidi ya kumi iliyopita.<sup>14</sup>

[...] My aunts [...] all inspired me to write [...] I've met many other artists from South Africa, Brazil, the USA, Jamaica and beyond. They also inspired me as well as my younger brother, Ndesanjo Macha. Ndesanjo started the blogging movement in Tanzania over a decade ago.

In 1976, he assumed the role of journalist for the *Uhuru* and *Mzalendo* newspapers, a position that contributed to his intellectual maturation and enhanced his sensibility as a writer.

[...] Kazi ya mwanahabari imechangia sana kunoa kalamu na macho yangu. Maana ukiwa mwandishi wa habari unatakiwa umshike mkono msomaji. [...] Nguzo za habari ni kutimiza majibu na maswali: nini, wapi, namna gani, nani na kadhalika. Yote yanatakiwa yajibiwe katika aya za mwanzo. Ukichelewa, msomaji anatupa gazeti kando. Pili, kuijua jamii unayoiandika. Uandishi wa matukio husaidia kuboresha nidhamu na msimamo wa mtu. [...] Wewe ni mtu wa kwanza kujua jambo na aghalabu kuwafahamisha watu nini kimetokea; wasichokifahamu. Hilo ni jambo muafaka kwa mwandishi. Kuwa na msisimko na kuutoa msisimko huo, pamoja na elimu na hamasa, kwa wasomaji wako. Wajibu mkubwa kwa jamii. Inaboresha na kuendeleza sana nidhamu ya kuandika riwaya, hadithi, mashairi ...<sup>15</sup>

[...] The work as a journalist has contributed a lot to sharpening my pen and eyes. Because if you are a journalist, you have to hold the hand of the reader. [...] The fundamental principle of journalism is to provide answers to questions like what, where, how, who etc. All (these questions) need to be answered in the opening paragraph. If you delay, the reader puts the paper away. Secondly, to know the society you write about. Writing about events helps individuals improve their discipline and emotions. [...] You are the first person who knows what is happening and you have to make sure that people understand what is happening; what they do not understand. That is the important thing for a writer. To feel and share emotions with readers, teach and care for them. It is a great duty to society. It also helps with writing novels, stories, poems ....

As has been previously stated, one factor that had an impact on Freddy Macha's life was his experience of movement, which began with his family and continued throughout his adulthood. However, as he himself claims, these constant relocations were not experienced by him as a kind of uprooting, a departure from his culture of origin:

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<sup>14</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Online interview, March 2014.



[...] Nimekuwa daima mtu wa mizunguko ... na napenda hilo ... Watu wengine wanaweza kuishi ndani ya utamaduni yao, lakini wanaufanya nini? Si hoja. Miye nimesafiri kama msanii, yaani mwanamuziki na mwandishi. Popote pale nilipokuwa nimeimba na kuandika nyombo za kusifia uzuri wa kwetu ... Nakumbuka mwaka 1994, nilikuwa nikipiga muziki ndani ya klabu moja mjini Asuncion, Paraguay. Wengi pale hawakuwahi kumwona Mwafrika akiwa vile: akiimba lugha mbalimbali, akiongea Kispanyola, Kiingereza, Kireno, na kadhalika. Nilikuwa naulizwa kama bado tunakula wadudu, tunaishi na nyani, tunalala nje, tunakufa njaa Afrika na kadhalika. Nafasi yangu pale ni kuonyesha zuri la Afrika... Nini kilichonifanya niasafiri? Sababu ni nyingi sana. Kwanza kabisa kutaka kujua. Pili, sikupanga kwenda nilikokwenda. Tatu, ni sanaa za maonyesho. Nne, ni kutafuta ahueni ya maisha, mapenzi, starehe... lakini, kumbel! Dunia nzima ina matatizo na raha zile zile. Labda wajihi na harufu tu ndiyo tofauti ...Kuhusu utajiri ndani ya nafsi yangu ni kama nahau ya kidini au tafakari mambo kifalsafa. Muhimu kila jamii na nchi nilyoipitia - iwe Ugiriki, Kenya, Kanada, Brazil, Ujerumani - popote nilipotuliza miguu na kichwa, ni watu wa pale. Wanadamu. Kitu kigumu labda huwa utamaduni. Mathalan huona taabu sana kwamba Wazungu wanalala na mbwa, wanavuta sigara au wana ubinafsi wa kutoongea ongea sana hadharani na wenzao, tofauti na Afrika... ila kuna mambo ambayo ni mazuri kama kujali kazi, kuwa wakweli na kadhalika. Kila nchi ina ubaya na uzuri wake. Brazil, ilinikumbusha sana Afrika na Ulaya, watu wake ni wepesi sana... Wakyuba ni watu wazuri kuliko wanadamu wowote niliyowaona ulimwenguni: wana moyo wa kusaidia, urafiki... Wakanada ni waungwana na wapole, Wamarekani wanapenda kuona mbele badala ya kulalamikia matatizo, Wajerumani si wanafiki, wakweli sana na kadhalika. Kila nchi ina uzuri wake ...<sup>16</sup>

[...] I have always been a nomad ... and I like it. Some people may live within their own culture, but what do they do with it? It is not necessary. I have travelled a lot as an artist, that is, as a musician and writer. Wherever I went, I sang and wrote songs about the beauty of our places .... I remember back in 1994, I was playing in a club in Asuncion, Paraguay. Many people there had never seen an African singing in various languages and speaking Spanish, English, Portuguese, and so on. I was asked if we still eat insects, live with monkeys, sleep outside, and starve in Africa. It was my chance to make the beauty of Africa known there ... What motivated me to travel? There are many reasons. First, the desire to get to know the world. Two, I never planned to go where I went. Three, the performing arts. Four, seeking the best in life, love, comforts...but, heck! the whole world has equal problems and joys. Maybe tastes and smells are different ... Regarding my inner wealth ... it's like explaining religious topics or philosophical thoughts. What is important is that in every country I have visited - Greece, Kenya, Canada, Brazil, or Germany - wherever I have relaxed my legs and head, I have met people. Human beings. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges is cultural differences. For instance, I have always found it strange that Europeans are used to sleeping with their dogs, smoking a lot of cigarettes, and being cautious in conversation with their friends. However, they also have some good qualities like respect for work and being honest. Every country has both positive and negative aspects. Brazil reminds me of both Africa and Europe, its people are very vivacious ... Cubans are the most beautiful people I have ever met. They have a charitable soul, they are friendly ... The Canadians are quite and friendly, the Americans are more forward-thinking than they are complainers, the Germans are not hypocrites, they are very honest, and so on. Each country has its own beauty.

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<sup>16</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

The 1970s and 1980s represent a particularly fruitful period in Macha's career, both in terms of musical output and literary publications. In 1980, he co-founded “Sayari,” the Tanzanian music-poetry band.<sup>17</sup> In 1981 he won a BBC poetry competition. Two publications have appeared in 1984, namely *Twenzetu Ulaya* (‘Let’s Go to Europe’), a small collection of short stories that is characterised by Macha's idiosyncratic language, which reflects the Tanzanian urban slang of the 1980s—and *Mwanamuziki Remi* (‘The Musician Remi’), a biography of the celebrated musician Remmy Ongala.

### 3.1. Some auto/biographical elements in Mpe Maneno Yake (‘Give him his words,’ 2006)

*Mpe Maneno Yake* (‘Give him his words,’ 2006) is a collection of short stories. The text is divided into five chapters. Each chapter is preceded by quotations that are like a summary of the content itself. The collection comprises a series of short stories written between 1976, when the author was living in Tanzania, and 1994, when he was based in Brazil. It was during this period that he also produced the final story included in the collection. Each story is distinguished by a title, followed by the place and year in which it is set. This structure gives the impression of a diary, offering insight into the author's life and travels. The scenes described seem like photographs, a strategy for the preservation of memories by means of a sheet of cards and a pen:

[...] Wengi hutaka kujua wapi ni Maisha yangu na wapi sio. Ukweli msingi wa kueleza haya mambo ni kama kupiga picha au kuchora jamii. Siku hizi kila mtu huwa na simu inayotengeneza picha. Zamani nilitumia kalamu na vijitabu kuweka kumbukumbu [...]. Kazi ya mwandishi ni kuripoti, kubuni, kuweka kumbukumbu na kukumbusha. Kwa kifupi, basi, naweza kusema kwamba huu ni mesto wa yaliyonitokea, niliyobuni na niliyoyaona yanigusa...<sup>18</sup>

[...] A lot of people ask me where my life is and where it isn't. The way I see it is that it's a bit like taking photos or drawing. These days, most people have a phone that can take pictures. In the past, I used pens and diaries to record my memories [...]. The writer's job is to report, compose, preserve memories and make people remember. In other words, this is a collection of things that happened to me, that I invented, that I saw and that moved me...

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<sup>17</sup> In Brazil, he was the lead vocalist of the Os Galas band for a period of several years, as well as the Kitoto Band in London. He is currently engaged in collaboration with Berimbau Blues Band, an ensemble that fuses folk, blues, Afro-Latin, and experimental music, and Kitoto Trio for private events and festivals. Between 1998 to 2001 Freddy promoted World Music Nights in London where he is resident since 1996. He has been involved with Global Fusion Music and Arts, an organisation promoting unknown musicians, hosting events as well as interviewing and making films and videos.

(<https://www.reverbnation.com/freddymacha/song/14552002-kilimanjaro>)

<sup>18</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

Although each narrative represents a personal expression of the writer's creative vision, this analysis will focus on those tales that are rooted in experiences from Macha's own life.

In the acknowledgements page, the author states that the manuscript for the book was drafted several years before its official publication (Macha 2006: v).

The opening short story in the first chapter, entitled *Waswahili, Sir* ('Swahili People Here, Sir'), is *Chizi Balaa* ('Wretched Cheese') written in Burughuni, Dar es Salaam District, in 1976.

It portrays the plight of a young orphan who lives on the streets, surrounded by a multitude of other individuals facing similar adversity, and largely ignored by society.

[...] *Katikati barabara kasimama kiumbe huyu. Magari yanampisha yeye badala ya yeye kuyapisha. Anatazamwa na kutupiwa macho ya hasira na madereva wanaomfokea, wakimkutana, wakimlaani* (Macha 2006: 4).

[...] This creature was standing in the middle of the road. The cars overtook him, rather than let him pass. They looked at him with grim eyes and the drivers shouted at him, insulting and cursing him.

[...] *Kati yao wapo wasichana hawa wawili wenye umri sambamba na huyu mtoto. Wamesimama kando na kaka yao anayeanza kuota ndevu. Wanauliza bila kusita kwa sauti ya kitoto, "Kaka Juma, kwa nini yule mtoto yuko vile? Mbona hajavaa nguo?"*

*Kaka atajibu nini? Ana mfano wa jibu? Anajaribu kuutafuta ukweli uliopumzika juu ya kivuli cha mazoea yake. Kwamba hii ni hali ya kawaida mjini. Anajaribu kujibu, "Ah, basi tu."* (Macha 2006: 5)

[...] Among them were two girls the same age as that child. They stood next to their older brother whose beard was growing. They asked without hesitation, in their childish voice, 'Brother Juma, why is that child in that condition? Why isn't he wearing any clothes?

What will the brother answer? Does he have any kind of answer? He tries to seek the truth in the shadows of his everyday life. Cause this is the normal condition in cities. He attempts to answer, 'Ah, that's just the way it is'. But they were not satisfied, 'Brother, what kind of madness does that child have?' The brother has nothing to explain. Yes, he started growing a beard.

The author employs the innocence of the two girls as a device to create a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the girls are aware of a highly anomalous situation, an unnatural phenomenon. On the other, the older brother, unable to provide a satisfactory response to their queries, defaults to a convenient answer.

In this short story, Macha does not provide a direct narrative of his personal experience; instead, he offers a biographical sketch of his country, focusing on the lived experiences of street children.

As the author himself stated:

*Chizi Balaa ni mmoja wa Watoto niliowaona kweli. Ana kipaji ambacho kinapotelea barabarani. Angepewa nafasi angefanya mengi katika jamii. Lakini kwa kuwa jamii, jumuiya na serikali zimemkosea, anaishia kuwa “chizi” ... kifasihi hii ni kejeli kwetu sote tusiojaribu kubadili hali hizi mbaya duniani...*<sup>19</sup>

Chizi Balaa is one of the children I really saw. He's lost his talent on the road. If he was given a chance, he would make a lot in society. But, since society, community and government have wronged him he ends up being a “cheese” ... this literature is a mockery for all us who do not try to change these bad situations in the world ...

The processes of rapid urbanization and population growth have transformed the urban environment as well as the lives of millions of people, leading to a series of changes, as well as challenges, which are not always positive. One of the many social problems associated with change and poverty is the situation of a social class composed of minors known as *watoto wa mitaani* ‘street children.’

In contrast to other children who are living on the streets but residing in urban slums, the term *watoto wa mitaani* refers to those children who live on their own. They have no contact with their biological families, and lack any form of protection (Lugalla and Mwambo 1999). Many of these children have followed the migration of adults from rural areas to urban centres.

They are without fixed addresses and are forced to sleep on the streets, on pavements close to shops, cinemas or nightclubs, or spend the night in buses or railways stations. During the day, those who are lucky enough to find work in the informal sector are engaged in low-paid jobs. In many East African urban areas, the problem of street children persists (Kilbride *et al.* 2001; Shitindi *et al.* 2023), inspiring writers such as Emmanuel Mbogo who published the short story *Watoto wa Maman'tilie* (‘Maman'tilie's Children’) in 2002.

The decade between the 1970s and the 1980s was a period of great change and challenges for Tanzania. The country was forced to confront a reality marked by the implementation of new development strategies. The transition to independence gave rise to new tensions, with all efforts concentrated on the pursuit of sovereignty and the instruments necessary to achieve it.

In the short story *Barua ya Siri* (‘The Secret Letter’), written in Dar es Salaam in 1983, Macha recounts a day in the life of an important politician, Raimos Halmashauri, who receives a letter that he perceives to be beneficial. However, an excess of commitments and an unforeseen incident prevent him from reading it, and the contents of the letter remain undisclosed. Halmashauri is representative of the typical politician of the period, whose authority is exercised solely for personal gain.

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<sup>19</sup> Online interview, March 2014.

An interesting aspect that Macha addresses in this story is the relationship between power and information.

One particularly intriguing aspect of Macha's narrative is its exploration of the nexus between power and information. On the street, Halmashauri is approached by two journalists affiliated with a prominent local newspaper, renowned for its coverage of individuals who have transgressed the tenets set forth in the Arusha Declaration. His response to their inquiries and implications is characterized by a sense of indignation, anger, and fear.

*Gazeti hili lilikuwa limeanza kuogopwa na waheshimiwa wabunge na wakubwa wengine. [...] wananchi walilipigania na lilikuwa likiuzika kuliko magazeti yote mengine [...]. Yule Pangusa lazima anyang'anywe uhuru wake wa doria wa kuingilia viongozi wa nchi (Macha 2006: 69-70).*

That newspaper began to be fearful of the honourable parliamentarians and other notables [...] the citizens competed for it and it sold more copies than any other newspaper [...]. That Pangusa [the newspaper editor] had to be deprived of his freedom to investigate and spy on the leaders of the country

As Macha confirms, at the time, journalists feared the reactions of the men in power because they had to be careful about what they wrote in order to avoid bad consequences.

Nevertheless, the state of censorship has remained unaltered since the 1970s.

Since the ascendance of John Magufuli to the presidency of Tanzania in 2015, the government has significantly expanded its censorship apparatus. Subsequently, a series of controversial regulations have been enacted, including the 2015 Statistics Act, which criminalised the publication of economic statistics without government approval; the 2018 Electronic and Postal Communications Act, which subjects bloggers to onerous licensing fees; and the 2016 Media Services Act, which conferred upon government agencies extensive powers to censor the media by establishing rigorous accreditation standards for journalists (<https://tdcglobal.org/last>).

#### 4. Conclusions

The genre of the autobiography is often characterised by a focus on the author's significant life experiences, encompassing a range of emotions, aspirations, traumatic events and resonances that an individual may encounter throughout the course of her/his lifetime.

As it was highlighted by the examples drawn from the two selected works, the characters depicted reflect frequently the authors' inner motivations and their perspectives. In the novel *Mpenzi*, Mukajanga presents a historical account in narrative form, from the advent of World War II (*Mpenzi* II,

Chapter II) to the formation of the Tanganyika African National Union, the advent of socialism and its policy's decline as seen through the life stage of Mzee Potee.

Following the attainment of independence, Tanzania was confronted with the challenges of establishing a new government, implementing social change and addressing the emerging generational conflicts. The character of Shangwe represents the emerging generation of Tanzanians, characterised by a complex set of emotions and experiences, including fear, uncertainty and confusion; traits that are moulded by the experiences and expectations of the preceding generation.

In *Mpe Maneno Yake* by Macha, the autobiographical element is particularly prominent. The short stories that are organised according to location and time period, reflect the author's personal experiences and perspectives. In this case, the narrator plays an important role in shaping the narrative, which is not an objective account of the events themselves, but rather a representation of how they were experienced by the author. A reading of *Mpe Maneno Yake* reveals the vision of an individual who aspired to travel the world, immerse himself in diverse cultures, and remain true to his African identity. The author's pan-Africanist vision is made manifest in the introduction to the final chapter of the collection, entitled *Maisha Mapya* ('A New Life'), where he makes his own quotation from Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a Nigerian musician who died in 1997:

*Kitu gani ninatafuta katika maisha haya? Umuhimu! [...] Nataka nisimame sawia na watu wa mataifa mengine. Kwa vile unapotembea barabarani na watu wa nchi nyingine, hupewi chapa au muhuri... na ili uwe mtu mkubwa unahitaji taifa kubwa. Ndiyo maana huwa nasema Afrika sisemi Naijeria, Togo au Senegal...* (Macha 2006: 170).

What are you looking for in this life? All that is important! [...] I want to be in harmony with peoples from other nations. To be great, you need a great nation. This is why I say Africa, and I don't say Nigeria, Togo or Senegal...

As it has been often observed by critics, the relationship between reality, autobiography, and fiction is much more complex than it may appear. This complexity can be traced back to formalist, structuralist, and semiological literary theories (Shkolvsky 2004; Smithson 1975; Kalelioğlu 2017) that regarded authors' biographies as external to their works and reality and fiction as distinct and antithetical. Nevertheless, alternative critical approaches, such as those based on psychoanalysis, challenge this view and assert that these differences are not as straightforward as it may appear. As Barbieri (2008, 2) stated, it is commonly accepted that it is the thought that generates the representation, and this occurs in both imaginative and autobiographical narration. The latter, in particular, allows for the shaping of memories and histories in a truthful and realistic manner.

In their interviews, both Mukajanga and Macha claimed that their works are the result of a combination of autobiographical and fictional elements. Therefore, it is essential to examine how the autobiographical or even biographical elements are intertwined with the narrative. According to Shinde (2019, 141), the autobiographical truth or the truth expressed in the autobiography becomes a developing content in a complex process of self-discovery, self-portrayal and self-creation.

It can be hypothesised that both works of popular fiction considered in this article could be the result of a writing process defined by Barbieri (2018) as 'trans-autobiographical writing.' This process involves the author drawing on his or her own autobiographical experiences and transferring them into a fictional context. At certain points in the author's autobiography, the narrative transitions into a fantastical domain. This typology of writing allows the author to explore the inner self through a dualistic lens, employing both the auto-biographer's direct perspective and the novelist's indirect gaze.

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