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Healing and Spirituality in Tanzania:

The *mganga* figure between literature, myths and beliefs

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In many areas of Africa, illness, health and misfortune are considered human experiences influenced by spiritual entities, and therefore connected to local beliefs and religion. Consequently, the concept of *uganga* ("healing") reflects the total of knowledge, skills and practices based on theories, beliefs and experiences. The 'conceptual reality' can be transformed into imaginative and mnemonic reality through stories, narrations, representations and memories. In my paper, I will show the figures of three men who have been transformed into literary and/or media characters: the prophet-healer Kinjeketile, the witchdoctor Nguvumali, and the "dreamy healer" Ambilikile Mwasapile a retired Lutheran pastor who became a public figure for his self-referential ability to cure diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Though they were different in chronology, history and destinies, they are still linked to the topic of 'healing'.

1. Defining *Uganga* – An Introductory Note

The term *uganga* ('healing') denotes in Swahili the art and profession of medicine and healing. The word stems from the root *-ganga* meaning "to heal; cure; do magic". According to Kim, the English translation for *uganga* lends an image of medical treatment and physical or psychological cure, whereas *uganga* deals with human predicaments more comprehensively than just addressing medical prolems (Kim 2010: 75-76). *Uganga* is an institution that combines religion, sorcery, witchcraft,[1] health and interpersonal conflicts in one single form of cultural beliefs and practices (Erdtsieck 2003: 21). It is not only concerned with the integrity of the individual but also of social bodies, and is indeed known that before the colonial conquest – around 1880 – *waganga* (sing. *mganga*)[2] 'traditional healers'

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[1] Witchcraft is often associated to sorcery and evil magic. The Swahili of the East Coast use the term *uchawi* for witchcraft, *uramali* or *sihiri* for sorcery conceived as the performance of rituals, the uttering of spell and the manipulation of organic substances – bodily effluvia, carcasses of animals, roots, leaves and so on- with the conscious intent to causing harm (Kisurulia 2017: 365-366).

[2] The term *mganga* (pl. *waganga*) is used to describe a person who practices healing (Swantz 1990: 11). The *mganga* is also called in to exorcise the spirits that make people hill (Knappert 1971: 77). It is said that *waganga* obtain the power from their ancestors. It is common for traditional healers to come from the same lineage, since it is believed the ancestors themselves enable the powers (Oestigaard 2014: 162; Swantz 1990: 13). *Mganga* is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using methods based on the social, cultural and religious background, as well as on the knowledge, attributes and beliefs that are prevalent in the community (Ekeopara and Ugoha 2017). There are different kinds

and their allied political leaders had the control over the social conditions and health (Pels 2013: 239; Erdtsieck 2003: 29).

Pels points out that *uganga* is the practice of preventing or countering misfortune, practiced by means of both ritual and medicine, to cure and protect individuals as well as lineage healthy (communion or reconciliation with the ancestors and treatment with lineage medicine), to provide rain and to do war magic, to protect the community against witchcraft and to exorcize bad spirit (Pels 2013: 245-246).

The concept of *uganga* is therefore closely connected to that of traditional medicine and magic. Traditional medicine can be seen as the totality of practice, measures, ingredients and procedures of all kinds which enable people to guide against diseases. It is a method of healing founded on its own concept of health and disease which comprises unscientific knowledge systems that developed over generations within various societies before the era of western medicine (Antwi-Baffour 2014: 49), and involves collecting, conserving, utilizing and the application of medicinal plants for the cure, prevention and promotion of the physical and spiritual well-being of people (Omoleke 2013: 320-321). It embodies identity and cultural values and its position during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods has been largely discussed in literature (Cory 1949, 1954; Swantz 1990; Sindiga 1995; Abdullahi 2011; Langwick 2011; Omoleke 2013; Antwi-Baffour 2014; Mokgobi 2014). The principle of practice in traditional medicine is premised on the belief that human being is both a somatic and spiritual entity and that disease can be due to supernatural causes as well as to the invasion of the body by external objects. So, not only the symptoms of the disease are taken into account by traditional healers – many of them in Africa are people without education who have received knowledge of medicinal plants and their effects on the human body from their forebears – but also psychological and sociological factors (Antwi-Baffour 2014: 52-53). Traditional medicine – in the words of Knapp van Bogaert – sees the whole of the patient, and his/her place in the family and the community of the living and the dead, looking at the spiritual causes of the patient's illness, e.g. displeased ancestors and witchcraft (Knapp van Bogaert 2007: 36). According to Omoleke, it is possible to divide traditional medicine in two broad headings: explicable and inexplicable traditional medicine. The first one is a healing method which uses medicinal substances whose action and

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of *waganga*: *mganga wa jadi* is the traditional healer; *mganga wa jadi nchini* is the traditional healer inspired by divine forces, a prophet healer; *mganga wa mizimu ya ukoo*, is the healer inspired by lineage ancestors, an ancestral healer; *Mganga wa uchawi* is the healer inspired to counter-act witchcraft, a witchdoctor (Erdtsieck 2003: 21). In his/her equivalent witchdoctor, *mganga* figure is a very common character in Swahili literature (poetry, fiction and drama) and an important element in Tanzanian horror films (Böhme 2013: 342).

potency can be scientifically probed and proved. The second one cannot be investigated and includes extrasensory perception, psychic experiences, mysticism, supernatural indications, esoteric features, oracular consultation and witchcraft (Omoleke 2013: 321).[3] Larsen refers that *uganga* involves the performance of *dawa* ('medicine') obtained from specialists who possess particular kinds of knowledge, and applied in order to protect, to heal and to recreate harmony, but also to cause disharmony and imbalance in people's lives and ruptures in social relations. In her phenomenological description, she defines it as 'spectral':

> "…at times invisible yet sometimes visible or, rather, turned visible either in terms of its effect when applied onto somebody or something or when materialized through particular objects and devices…" (Larsen 2013: 74).

Describing the practices of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi tribal group, Cory observed that in a magical rite a medicine endowed with magical power is needed, and it consists of two classes of ingredients: specified roots or other parts of trees which symbolically represent the client/patient, and *shingila* or *shingira,* which typically symbolizes the character of the complaints and consists of medicinal ingredients from plants, animal and minerals known to influence the power of medicine in terms of protection, aggressiveness, vitality, and in love filter (Cory 1949: 20-21; Abrahams 1981: 22). Any *shingila* is used in very small portions and is traded amongst the healers. The trade is entirely based on good faith, but as a matter of fact, the healers pay other colleagues comparatively good prices for an item whose origin is never proved or recognizable. Although in many cases some medicines do not have therapeutic properties and by experience the Africans know that magic does not always give the desired effects, their belief in it is not weakened (Cory 1949: 28; Langwik 2011).

As can be seen from the above, the concept of *uganga* embodies the total of knowledge, skills and practices based on theories, beliefs and experiences. The "conceptual reality" can be transformed into "imaginative and mnemonic reality" through stories, narrations, representations and memories of personalities who, in some way, have marked the Tanzanian culture, history, and collective imagery. In the following paragraphs I will outline the story of three real characters who, although

[3] Knapp van Bogaert (2007: 35) observes that the 'unknown' is the major focus in many traditional medicine practices. Using the vehicle of traditional healers, spirits prescribe the particolar potion to be used. The Swahili people do not consider spirit possession abnormal, because it occurs frequently and it is used in healing rites. Walker (1972: 128) states that spirit possession is an expression of the culturally constituted reality, and Kim (2010: 71) claims that in the Swahili context the ritualistic spirit possession serves as a therapeutic vehicle that has been employed to cure physical, mental and relational problems; also the trance state of possession, or altered state of consciousness, is a cultural vehicle for the *uganga*.

different in chronology, history and destinies, are still linked to the topic of 'healing' and called with the title of *mganga*.

2. The prophet and the witchdoctor: Kinjeketile Ngwale and Nguvumali Mpangile

2.1. Kinjeketile Ngwale: *mganga* of 'sacred water' and prophet of Maji Maji War

There is no data on the childhood and upbringing of Kinjeketile, or Kinjikitile as called by Gwassa (1972). From the oral tales of the elders of Ngarambe, the village from which he came, it seems that his real name was Ali Abdallah "Kinjeketile"Ngwale, although Abdallah points out that "Kinjeketile" was probably an epithet or a nickname, and he does not deny the hypothesis that the real name was Kinjeketile Mbonde (Abdallah 2011: 69). Kinjeketile Ngwale is known for his personal involvement with the historical Maji Maji insurrection against the German colonial regime. More than a century after the occurrence of the historical events that made him famous, his myth continues to fascinate an international audience of scholars and readers. His popularity abroad is due to the fact of being the protagonist of Hussein's drama *Kinjeketile*, the author's first play to be published in a book edition both in Swahili language (1969) and in English version (1970) by the author himself (Bertoncini Zubkóvá et al. 2009: 198). Dealing with the period between 1890 and 1905, when the Germans occupied southern Tanganyika and forced the local tribes to cultivate cotton for them and also to pay taxes, the play focuses on Kinjeketile, the leader of the Maji Maji rebellion (Bertoncini Zubkóvá et al. 2009: 198, 351). Although Hussein is closer to his historical sources and substantial in his reference, in his introduction to the play he declines any ideological responsibility, stating that the character Kinjeketile:

> "[...] is not an historical evocation of the real man. Kinjeketile here is a creature of the imagination, and although the "two" men closely resemble one another in their action, they are not identical, I have had to mould my character to suit artistic needs, borrowing freely from the imagination when historical facts did not suit my purpose. History should not be used as the measuring stick for my purpose therefore, rather, its failures or successes should be gauged against rules determining a work of art" (Hussein 1970: v).

And continues saying:

> "[…] Firstly, I have tried to show how the Wamatumbi[4] felt about the cruel invasion by the Germans, especially to show the master-servant relationship then pertaining. Secondly, I have tried to show briefly the political climate of that period (1890-1904). Thirdly, I have touched on the theme of economic exploitation of the Africans by the Germans, when Tanzania was being de-prived of her produce and manpower, and yet her people were being made to pay taxes without being given any chance of earning an income "(Hussein 1970: vi-vii).

I will now depict the figure of *mganga* Kinjeketile, whose myth is expressed both in his historical dimension as a real man and in the artistic-imaginative space as a character re-created by Hussein.

Following the independence of Tanganyika (1961), some scholars and students based at University of Dar es Salaam (Department of History) under the guidance of John Iliffe began to develop a historical narrative of Maji Maji revolt that takes its name from the *maji* ('water') and refers to the war medicine[5] used by rebels as well as the messianic message carried by messengers of the Bokero[6] cult, who called themselves *hongos* and spread the word of the need for resistance originated with the prophet and *mganga wa kienyeji*/traditional healer Kinjeketile Ngwale (Gwassa and Iliffe 1974: 17; Greenstein 2010: 61, Schmidt 2010: 27, 41; Abdallah 2011:57). The revolt is one of the best known cases of mass-uprising in the history of former Tanganyika,[7] today Tanzania. It began in July 1905 in the Matumbi Hills in the central eastern part of German East Africa with the uprooting of cotton from communal fields. From there it spread in the country (north and northwest, south and southwest), and ended two years after, in 1907 (Giblin and Monson 2010: 5-10; Schmidt 2010: 41). Pike claimed that twenty years of foreign occupation – it began around 1880 – "made the ground fertile for revolt, but its immediate inspiration came in the person of Kinjeketile Ngwale" (Pike 1986: 226).

[4] The Wamatumbi are an etnic group of the Rufiji District, Southern Tanzania (Hoag 2013: 35).

[5] War medicine used by Maji Maji rebels consisted in water, castor oil and millet seeds. Castor oil plant (Sw. *Mbarika*) is known for its many therapeutic properties (antiulcer, antimicrobial, antifungal, bone regeneration and wound healing activities) and is used in traditional medicine (Bhakta and Das 2015). Rebels that took the *maji* agreed to respect a list of prescriptions and wore millet stalks on their head as identification (Greenstein 2010: 61). The word *maji* in Swahili means more than 'water' in English. It is the general word for 'liquid' and can stand for 'fluid, 'moisture', 'damp' and 'juice' (Ranne 2016: 3). The special water of Maji Maji was also called *maji ya uzima,*'water of health/salvation (Iliffe 1967: 510), and *dawa ya kinga* 'protecting medicine' (Sunseri 1997: 241).

[6] Bokero is the divinity at the Kibesa shrine who controlled the Rufiji region (Hoag 2013: 50).

[7] In 1956, Julius Nyerere declared that Maji Maji anticipated national unity and the nationalist struggle for independence (Wright 1995: 125).

It is said that Kinjeketile was possessed by the spirit Hongo,[8] emissary of the superior divinity Bokero, and enjoyed the prestige of *mganga* (Gwassa 1972: 209). Legend has it that a huge snake, having the head of a small black monkey and colored like a rainbow – one of the attributes of Hongo – and of a size never seen before, paid a visit to the house of one Mzee Machuya Nnundu of Lihenga near Ngarambe, in Rufiji district. The snake had large red glowing eyes and looked at people – who moved out in favour of the visitor – in a fearsome manner. On the third day the snake disappeared. Two women who had been harvesting sorghum that afternoon suddenly beheld a man dressed in a white *kanzu*[9] too white to look at in the afternoon sun. Suddenly, the man disappeared and he and the snake were never seen again. Subsequently, an examination by the villagers revealed that the trail of the snake disappeared at the point where the man in white kanzu was seen. Halimoja describes Kinjeketile as a tall, middle –aged man, bold and muscular, intelligent and communicative. A man of faith (a Muslim) who loved to wear a long and white *kanzu* (Halimoja 1981: 1). From there the trail led to the Ngarambe river into which the huge snake was believed to have vanished. The day after, Kinjeketile was taken by a spirit. His family saw him go on his belly, his hands stretched out before him – in an evident trance state (Gwassa 1972:2111). In his historical drama *Kinjeketile*, Ebrahim Hussein describes the surprise of the villagers in not seeing the body resurface:

> *Tumengojea siku nzima (...) Ntu gani anaweza kukaa ndani ya maji siku moja nzima? Toka jana saa kama hizi mpaka leo?* (Hussein 1969: 13).
>
> We waited for him a whole day (...). Which man can remain healthy in water for a whole day? Since yesterday at this time until today? (English translation is mine).

Then he disappeared in the pool of water and emerged the following morning unhurt and with his clothes dry, and began talking of prophetic matters: "All dead ancestors will come back"(Gwassa 1972: 211). Pronouncing this sentence, Kinjeketile announces his self-initiation into the world of spirits and ancestors: he has become a *mganga* because, as Mokgobi claims, to become a traditional healer a special calling from the ancestors is required (Mokgobi 2014: 29). Hussein's Kinjeketile returned from the river with two metaphysical gifts from the spirit: a flywhisk and *maji*. The first one denotes the spiritual connection between the prophet and the spirits imparting spiritual blessings on the people; the second one is a sacred symbol of union and invincibility against the German bullets (Solanke 2013:

[8] Oral histories collected by Gwassa reveal that Hongo was a huge snake that lived under deep waters (Gwassa 1969: 258).

[9] *Kanzu* is a typical Muslim robe made from light cotton. Many famous *waganga* and/or *waalimu* are known to wear this type of clothing (Swantz 1990: 24; Beez 2004: 102).

13). After his spiritual initiation, Kinjeketile started preparation by calling people to anticipate a war; next they were invited to make a pilgrimage to Ngarambe in order to receive the medicine; in that occasion they used to appear in groups, often organized as military units (Wright 1995: 131). In the play the rebellion is shown to begin with a struggle between the conflicting local clans, who are not able to unite to resist the German oppression. The unity of the people is achieved when Kinjeketile draws the rival clans together. According to Mwaifuge (2014:43) Kinjeketile uses belief in the supernatural to unite the once divided ethnic groups:

> **Kinjeketile**: Smoke, there was smoke. Fog, there was fog. But after the smoke will come light. After the fog will come the gentle glow of dawn. Smoke and fog were bred on our ignorance, our hatred. They sapped our unity and strength. This fog and smoke smothered our love for one another, the love between the Mmakonde, and the Mmatumbi, the Mpogoro and the Mmatumbi. Hatred is darkness. We were all our own masters, in disunity. The Mmatumbi felt superior to the Mngoni, the Mzaramo better than the Mkichi. This was darkness. We will march from darkness into light. I have been given this water. This water I have brought to you. This water will bind together the roots of love and affection. And the roots will grow, expand, and reach out and tie, tie us in the bond of brotherhood. We will be one people. Maji!
> [...]
> We will unite and we will be one body. And as in a human body. When a toe gets hurt, the whole body feels the pain. When a Mmatumbi gets whipped, it is the Mzaramo who will feel the pain (Hussein 1970: 14-16).

Kinjeketile applies the mixture to the warriors' forehead and uses the ancestors' whisk to pass an ancestral and spiritual protection and blessings. "This is the water given us. This is the water of life [...] he who partakes of this water [...] no bullet will penetrate his body[...]" (Hussein 1970: 16-17).

According to Bertoncini Zubkóvá et al. (2009: 198), Hongo made prophecy in a trance that if his people defeat the Germans they would become children (i.e., slaves) of the Sultan of Zanzibar's, Seyyid Said. Mwaifuge (2013: 44) notices how Hussein makes reference in his play to an evil spirit called Chunusi, a demon living in rivers or seas and inhabiting human bodies. Chunusi – as underlined by Mwaifuge – is used by Hussein in the scene in which Kinjeketile confesses to Kitunda to have been deceived:

> **Kitunda**: I was waiting for you.
> **Kinjeketile**: How did you know I would pass here?

Kitunda: I know you normally go to the river at a time like this.

Kinjeketile: How do you know?

Kitunda: One night, some time ago, I could not get a sleep; so I came out. It was too hot inside, and as I came out I saw you going towards the river. The following night I saw you doing the same. The third night too, I came out, and saw go towards the river.

Kinjeketile: What is troubling you?

Kitunda: I have been waiting here because I want to talk to you. I cannot get the chance otherwise.

[...].

Kitunda: When you came out of the river, your clothes were dry. I touched them. They were
quite dry.

Kinjeketile: So?

Kitunda: This thing has been troubling me in my heart.

Kinjeketile: You don't believe?...

Kitunda: You don't look like Kinjeketile anymore. You face is smooth, not dry. And even your stature-you have somehow shrunk...one more question...

[...]

Kitunda: Who is Seyyid Said?

Kinjeketile: He is the Sultan of Zanzibar. Zanzibar is a beautiful place.

Kitunda: That is the land of the Arabs.

Kinjeketile: There are many Arabs there...

Kitunda: You said we will be children of Seyyid said.

Kinjeketile: I said so? (He shakes Kitunda.) Tell me, please tell me. Tell me all that I said.

Kitunda: You said that we should unite. After we are united, then we can declare war. And
that we will win. You said that the ancestors at Bokelo give us their support. You also said that
after our victory, we will be the children of Seyyid Said.

Kinjeketile: After winning the war we will be under Seyyid Said? I said that?

Kitunda: Yes. Are you ill...Your face...where are you going?

Kinjeketile: I have been cheated! They have killed me—no, I have killed myself! It was a dream, yes, I was dreaming! No, no, no! I have been cheated! No! (Hussein 1970: 19-21).

Bertoncini Zubkóvá et al. (2009: 198) remark Kinjeketle's inner conflict when he realizes that his being is at the mercy of a power greater than himself, although of his own making:

> **Kinjeketile**: (*to himself*) A man gives birth to a word… the word grows bigger and bigger… and destroys the man who let it loose. A word born of man grows strong, and ends by enslaving him (Hussein 1970: 36).

Despite his doubts, in the final scene, after a battle turned into a massacre, the hero is tortured and close to death, but refuses to renounce the efficacy of the *maji* so that his people would not lose the last hope of not succumbing to the enemy:

> **Kinjeketile:** Do you know what they will say tomorrow? The officer will say that we were wrong. He will tell our children that we were wrong in fighting him (…) *That to fight for one's country is wrong!* And he wants me to help him by retracting all that I said. He wants me to say that the water was a lie (…) The moment I say that, people in the north, south, east and west will stop fighting. They will fall into hepelss despair – they will give up. I will not say that! Our children will tell their children about this word (…) One day the word will cease to be a dream, it will be a reality! (Hussein 1970: 53).

There are different hypotheses about the nature and power of the Maji Maji movement. Some scholars tend to attribute its strength to faith and beliefs (as stated by Gwassa and Iliffe 1974) that the movement had begun in answer to the religious message of a prophet and also that the *maji* power over European weapons depended on religious faith (Gwassa and Iliffe 1974: 17). Adas claimed that widespread belief in Kinjeketile's possession gave evidence that he has been linked with powerful deities who had long been revered as sources of fertility and a regulator of rainfall and riverine waters (Adas 1979:105); Akiri defined Maji Maji as a religious movement that used the power of religious beliefs as a vehicle for mobilization, transformation, and universalization (Akiri 2017: 205). According to Mwaifuge, the myth and mystery surrounding the Maji Maji war and the belief in the supernatural in order to overcome repression at the hands of the Germans was the basis for the Maji Maji rebellion (Mwaifuge 2014: 41). Although Kinjeketile was captured by the Germans on July 16th, 1905 and executed on July 24th 1905, the uprising continued and was carried out by another man of Kinjeketile's family, Njugumaina Ngwale Nyunguni (Abdallah 2011: 57).

2.2 Nguvumali Mpangile and the witch struggle

In the East African coastal area there are a number of itinerant witchdoctors. One of the most famous of them was Nguvumali Mpangile. According to Lienhardt, the name Nguvumali is created by joining together the Swahili words "nguvu" for "power" and "mali" for "wealth" while Wamitila translates it

as "Power is strength" (Wamitila 1999: 35). It seems that Nguvumali became rich by magically seeking out sorcerers (Lienhardt 1968: 201): he came from a village in the Kilwa region, though he often visited Dar es Salaam for his work and there he would be cheered by the crowd. He used plants or herbal magic, and his method was so successful that sometimes he was consulted by the police in order to solve murders (Vassanji 2015). His career started in the early 1950s when he first established his reputation in the Kilwa district as a person with unusual powers to detect witches, counter black magic and find people who had been hidden by witches (Larson, 1976:91). In 1954 Nguvumali came to prominence when the colonial administration had to yield to his methods of uncovering witches and cleansing people. His role as an anti-whichcraft agent in the colonial estabilishment is narrated in the poem *Swifa ya Nguvumali*, written in the spoken dialect of Kilwa and translated and edited by Lienhardt (1968). The poem's author/narrator is Hasani bin Ismail, who found inspiration to become a poet from a book inherited from his grandfather, as stated in the following stanzas:

387	387
Baadaya kutoka chuoni	When I left the Koran school
Mama akanita ndani	my mother called me inside, saying
'Kitabu (h)iki zamani	'This is the book which long ago
Babu alikuwekea	my father saved for you
388	388
Nikaona mwanzo wake	I looked at the beginning
Mpaka na mwisho wake	and read through to the end
Yote maneno yake	and every word of it
Moyoni yakaniingia	penetrated my heart
389	389
Hiyo ndio asili	That was the beginning
Hasani bin Ismaili	of Hasani bin Ismaili
Ikawa mtungaji wa kweli	who became a true poet
Bila moja kupotea.	and makes no mistakes.

[English translation by Lienhardt 1968:187]

According to Garnier (2013: 143), the poem contains all the elements of a detective novel: a criminal gang, the brutal murder of an innocent man, an official investigation run by authorities, and the

detective *mganga* Nguvumali engaged in a parallel and successful investigation. According to Larson (1976) the central theme of the poem concerns the actions and psychology of a coven of witches. The circumstance which led to Nguvumali's fame and recognition was the disappearance of a man in Rufiji district, known as a place where more qualified and powerful witches lived and engaged in macabre activities involving murders and various cannibalistic rituals especially in the occasion of the initiation of novices. The local councils of Rufiji district had requested the services of Nguvumali to cleanse the whole district of witchcraft. Permission was granted and between November and December 1954 Nguvumali launched a classical witchcraft eradication campaign throughout the district, applying his medicines and calling upon witches to surrender their articles of witchcraft. A total of 704 people surrendered various paraphernalia and certainly others destroyed theirs before taking Nguvumali's medicine (Larson 1976: 89-92).

In 1954, an old man had disappeared near the village of Mohoro, in Rufiji district. Suspicion narrowed on three women, who confessed the ritual murder of the missing man. They and four others implicated were taken into custody and investigation by local authorities went forward. Due to some probative inconsistencies, it was decided to take the case to the High Court of Tanganyika and the District Commissioner agreed that Nguvumali should be consulted. Indeed, the step was taken as an administrative measure in order to check the panic that was growing in the village. Nguvumali arrived in Mohoro to begin his operation, as narrated in the following stanza:

294	294
Wakarudi na Nguvumali	Returned with Nguvumali
Mganga wa kiasili	the authentic medicine-man
Hatta chini ya jibali	even from under a mountain
Uchawi anautoa.	he can bring sorcery to light.

[English translation by Lienhardt 1968: 163]

The witch detection phase was carried out:

304	304
Asubuhi kuamka	When the morning had come
Na wale wameshafika	and the suspects had arrived
Pale tena bila shaka	there he was, confident
Moyo umemturia.	calm in his heart

305	305
Ukali akausonga	He crushed his strong medicines
Anashamiri uganga	he assembled his charms
Na dawa zake za unga	and those powdered drugs of his
Ndizo anazotumia.	it was his custom to use.

[English translation by Lienhardt 1968:167]

According to Lienhardt, Nguvumali was an exponent of the "tree" medicine. He used the Uliro magic, which is said to be originally from Mozambique (Lienhardt 1968: 167, 51). Uliro is the name of a spirit, which "rises in people's head", both of the magic that the spirit makes possible, and of the man into whom the spirits comes (Lienhardt 1968: 71). The fame of Nguvumali brought people from afar, and both Swahili and Arabs came to witness his intervention in the investigation and the divergence between traditional "wild" and "Book" medicine is clarified in the following stanzas of the poem:

368	368
Bwana Shambi akasema	Then Bwana Shambi said,
'Sikiza yangu karima'	'Listen to my words'
[...]	[...]
[...]	[...]

369	369
'Kalima yangu: si kweli	'I say that are not true,
Maneno ya Nguvumali	those words of Nguvumali
Kama yeyeni hodari	if he is a true medicine-man
Leo alete mvua.	let him make it rain today.

370	370
'Mimi mganga wa ngoma	'I am a medicine-man for dances
Si mchawi ninasema	not a sorcerer I say
Na (h)uu ulimi ni alama	and this tongue is just the sign
Mbuzi niliyetumia.	that I have used a goat.

371	371
'Nalichinja mbuzi wangu	'I slaughtered my goat
Siku ile ya ngoma yangu	on the day of my dance

Ile wale wenzangu	those friends of mine
Waliyenishuhudia.	will bear witness.
[...]	[...]
[...]	[...]
374	374
'Kwa (h)apo nikifikiri	'And when I think about it
Naona uchungu kweli	I feel very bitter
Yule mshenzi kafiri	that an unbelieving savage
[...]	[...]

[English translation by Lienhardt 1968: 183]

The Swahili word *ngoma* has more meanings: dance, drum and ritual in general, as most rituals involve the use of both dance and drum. During the healing ritual, healers and patients meet to perform the so-called "dances for the spirits", or *ngoma ya majini/mashetani*. While some healers perform *ngoma*, Koranic or Book healers (*waganga wa kitabu*) use an ecstatic ritual performance called *dhikri* which includes the recital of prayers and the calling of spirits through songs. While *dhikri*, through its ceremonial style (*dhikri*-technique), instrumentation (none, or tambourine), language (Swahili with Zanzibari pronunciation, Arabic), and spirit types (*kiarabu*) represents the Islamic sphere of Swahili society, *ngoma*'s ceremonial style (African music and dance), instrumentation (drums, rattles), language (Swahili and many other non-Arabic languages) and spirit types (*bara*, *kipemba,* non-Muslim coastal) represent the African heritage of Swahili society (Mackenrodt 2016: 12-13). An example of ritual *ngoma* performed by Nguvumali is described in the following stanzas of the poem:

313	313
Nguvumali katamka	Then Nguvumali said,
'Wale watu nawataka	'I want those people,
Mganga wasiye shaka	those suspects I the medicine-man
Leo nimishawajia.	Have now caught up with.
[...]	[...]

[...]	[...]
316	316
Amewaweka tayali	He kept them at hand:
Pasiwe tena usiri	there was to be no more delay
Muda wake umejiri	His moment had come
Na makoja kavalia.	He had donned his necklaces.
317	317
Akavalia makoja	As he put on his necklaces
Na wanafunzi pamoja	so too did his apprentices,
Sasa anaanza viroja	now wonders were to start,
Amekwisha kuvalia.	He had finished donning his costume.
318	318
Akacheza ngoma zake	He danced his dances
Na wanachama wenzake	his students joining with him
Anatuma enzi yake	summoning his strength
Uhai anatumia.	Putting to work his vital energy.

[English translation by Lienhardt 1968: 183]

Nguvumali, like other successful witchdoctors, aspired to practice in Dar-es-Salaam and died in a motor car accident while on a visit to the city in 1957. When he died, a number of self-proclaimed witches celebrated his demise by ritually killing a man called Ali Saidi Mango in the Nyakanzu village of Rufiji district and feasting on his flesh. The victim was lured into a bush and his body was cut up. This episode was recorded by Lienhardt:

> [...] On the morning of Tuesday, 1 October 1957, Ali Said Mango, a married man of about 30, went from his home in the village of Nyakanzu in the Rufiji District to collect a muzzle-loading gum which his father-in-law had left to be repaired with a smith in a neighbouring village. He never returned.[...] On the evening of the second day of the general search for the lost man, the brother-in-law of Ali Saidi smelt something in the bush, and saw a white object lying in the grass. This proved to be a man's *kanzu* [...] He called the assistant headman and Ali Said's cousin [...] They found [...] a hat, a shirt, a muzzle-loading gun, and some bones. [...]The bones were lying about fifteen feet away from a tree in which there was tied a bark rope. One hand of the rope had blood on it [...] On 7 October, the assistant headman arrested [...] Leunzi son of Ngenje and two women

> [...] the three accused were at their home at the time of their arrest and the assistant headman stated that they all lived near to each other and cultivated and ate together [...] Leunzi said that he had been an apprentice sorcerer for more than three years and had eaten part of man's heart [...] he said also that he had often been present when the sorcerers had taken bodies from graves, but he had only eaten human flesh once [...] In court Leunzi stated what parts of the body had been taken by the various sorcerers [...] he and Nyakilanzi had taken none of the "meat", though Nyakilanzi had given the head to Z. Somo had received part of genitals [...] On 1 March 1958 [...] were convicted in the High Court of the murder of Ali Saidi Mango and sentenced to death" (Lienhardt 1968: 191-198).

Nguvumali's grave in the outskirts of Dar-es-Salaam soon became a place of pilgrimage, and Swantz reports that his grave has since become a *mzimu* (ancestral) shrine, attended to by Nguvumali's sister, who also practiced traditional medicine. After Nguvumali's death, another man Hemedi Saidi Matoroka, has taken his name and worked between December 1967 and January 1968 in Dar es Salaam area. The son of the true Nguvumali, Ali, continued his father's work as an itinerant medicine man, also using "Nguvumali" as his trade name (Swantz 1990: 54, 47). Some medicine men and women claiming to be his relatives have come forward to practice, but none has attained Nguvumali's legendary status.

3. Babu wa Loliondo: "the dreamy healer"

Tanzanian Ambilikile Mwasapile, a retired Evangelical Lutheran pastor, known to the great public under the pseudonym of "Babu[10] wa Loliondo", become a media personality and healer in Tanzania for half a year in 2011 (Fielder 2016: 19). Although the Lutherans had arrived in the northern parts of former Tanganyika – precisely in Loliondo area inhabited by the Sonjo tribe[11] – as early as 1947, the local traditional religion continued to be present. Usually, the missionaries spent about two years in the area and Rev. Mwasapile began to work among the Sonjo people as a volunteer. His ministry in Samunge village[12] began in 1989. There is not much information on Mwasapile's life, and even with regard to his name there are different versions: some authors call him 'Mwasapila' (Senzota 2012: 54;

[10] Babu is a Swahili word meaning "grandfather."

[11] A good description of the Sonjo area is made by Father Donovan – a Catholic priest who spent many years doing missionary work in Tanzania and Kenya- in his personal collection of letters in the form of a travel diary that he sent home. The letters have been preserved, chronologically aranged and published by Bowen (2011).

[12] Samunge is close to the protected areas of Loliondo Game Reserve, Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area (Senzota 2012: 54).

Vähäkangas 2015), for others his name is 'Mwasupile' or 'Mwaisupile' (Malebo and Mwambo 2011: 1, 2), and 'Mwasapile' (Mattes 2014: 169). Vähäkangas (2015; 2016a) tried to reconstruct part of his biography on the basis of interviews with him and on the systematic browsing of Tanzanian leading Swahili newspapers (*Nipashe*, *Majira*, *Rai*, *Mwanahalisi*, *Raia Mwema*) as well as occasional browsing of the *Daily News* and *The Guardian*, and Internet sources (Vähäkangas 2015: 6).

Mwasapile's date of birth remains uncertain. It seems that he was born between 1935 and 1936 (Fielder 2016: 19; Vähäkangas 2015: 8) in Southern Tanzania (Mbeya region). Orphaned, he migrated to northern Tanzania in search of work. After his studies, in 1965 he settled in Babati, a town in northern Tanzania to carry out his ministry as Lutheran pastor. Because of the low salary he was attracted to trade in precious stones (a mining area producing the blue tanzanite gem stones being located nearby). It was at this time of spiritual and economic crisis that he had a dream in which he and his friends were collecting gems that started to burn his hands. He interpreted the dream as a divine message in which God commanded him to stop the commerce of gem stones and remain faithful to his pastoral mission. In 1991 he received another dreamlike message: he dreamed of a woman unknown to him and the voice of God telling him to give her a medicine that would make her recover from AIDS. In 2002 he retired and remained in the Samunge village, where he received the third message from God telling him that he still had a good deal to do, and in 2009, in the Samunge church, he saw again the AIDS infected woman from his previous dream. The following night he dreamed of a person who gave him two roots and he understood that this was the key to a medicine and how to prepare it: the roots needed to be cooked in water. In the dream he was also instructed that the medicine should be delivered by him at the modest costs of 500 TSH (Tanzanian Shillings) per cup – the price of a regular cup of tea at that time. The sum of 300 TSH was offered as a sacrifice in the church and the remaining 200 TSH for paying helpers and other expenses related to the service (Mattes 2014: 172; Malebo and Mbwambo 2011: 5). He was able to produce the first batch of medicine and gave a cup of concoction containing water and roots of the shrubs *Carissa spinarum* (*Mugariga* tree, which was re-identified by the Maasai as *Engamuriaki* or *Olmuriaki* and by Sonjo people as *Engamuriaka*; Senzota 2012: 54; Malebo and Mbwambo 2011: 5) to the woman of the dream. When Vähäkangas interviewed the woman, named Mama Upendo ('Lady Love'), she said that the doctors were surprised to find no trace of the virus (Vähäkangas 2015: 8-10). The news of this first healing spread immediately and many people were taken out of the hospitals by their relatives in the belief that they would be better cared by Mwasapile. As the treatment attracted more and more people, the Tanzanian National Institute for Medical Research produced a report in which two researchers (doctors Malebo and Mwambo) described from an ethnobotanical point of view the plant used by

Mwasapile, studying its therapeutic properties and its use in traditional medicine among some tribes living in the area of Loliondo, in particular Maasai and Sonjo. According to Malebo and Mbwambo, the result showed that the *Mugariga* tree is safe, especially when taken orally, and the dose provided by Mwasapile (one cup – about 200 mls – out of three kilos of whole root materials boiled in 60 litres of water) fell within the safety window and no overdose or acute poisoning was expected (Malebo and Mbwambo 2011: 11). The dispensing of Babu's medicine was never officially stopped. A prayer was recited during the distribution of the medicine made with the cup known as *kikombe cha Babu* (Grandfather's cup):

> *Watu hawa wote Mungu wametoka mbali na kunifuata mimi. Wamekufuata wewe maana mahali hapa umeweka muujiza wako. Nakusihi sasa Mungu chukua magonjwa yao yote, watolee Bwana mzigo huu waende wakiwa wameanza maisha mapya... Hakuna magonjwa yatakayo kubabaisha Mungu.... Tena Mungu uliwaumba na mikono mitakatifu isiyokuwa na ugonjwa,magonjwa hayakutoka kwako yametoka kwa ibilisi na ushirikina na uchawi. Ninayakataa kwa mamlaka uliyonipa katika miili yao...Asante maana umesikia maombi yetu....Ninaomba nikiamini utayatimiza hayo,kwa jina la Bwana wetu Yesu Kristo. Amen.* [The Swahili text was recorded by Vähäkangas (2015: 35) during his interview with Babu].
>
> God, all these people have come to me from far away. They have come to you because you have placed your miracle here. I beg you now, God, to take away all their illnesses. Lord, take from them this burden so that they can return with new life...There is no sickness that can deceive God...Again, you, God created them with holy hands with no sickness—sicknesses do not come from you but they have come from Satan, witchcraft, and sorcery. I renounce them with the authority you gave me over their bodies...Thank you for hearing our prayers...I pray believing that you fulfil these requests in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. [The English translation of Babu's prayer is by Vähäkangas (2015: 12-13)].[13]

According to Vähäkangas (2016b: 23), the prayer does not contain any reference to the medicine, only to the effect hoped for healing. Mwasapile emphasized that the potency of the medicine – efficient only when administered by him - came from the presence of the word of God in it (Vähäkangas 2016b: 22). The idea that the power of a medicine depends on the person of the healer is widespread in Tanzanian traditional healing. As of March 2011 all major Tanzanian media started to report regularly about the developments of Babu. Babu's increasing popularity attracted threats from

[13] In his English version of the prayer "*magonjwa hayakutoka kwako yametoka kwa ibilisi na ushirikina na uchawi*/ sicknesses do not come from you but they have come from Satan, witchcraft, and sorcery[...]". Vähäkangas translates *ushirikina* as "witchcraft", and *uchawi* as "sorcery". The term *ushirikina* means in Swahili "superstition", while *uchawi* refers both to "witchcraft" and "sorcery" (TUKI 2001: 333, 349; Merlo Pick 1978: 420, 448; Kirkeby 2000: 876, 918).

competitors. Vähäkangas (2015: 15) claims that rumours circulated about attempts against the pastor's life and his miraculous protection by God, but he did not confirm any of these as true; he admitted that a patient once came with a snake in his pocket to kill him, that he saw it, probably thanks to divine intervention, and that the would-be assassin himself fell dead.

Behind Babu's success lie the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on Tanzania and the omnipresent fear of the disease. The 1990s and the beginning of the millennium saw a rapid expansion of the pandemic, especially among the urban working-age population, turning many providers for the family into burdens. The ARVs (anti-retroviral drugs) available from the mid-2000s have given a glimpse of hope and reduced AIDS-related deaths considerably. Furthermore, the number of HIV-infected people also decreased (UNAIDS 2012). In spite of the improving situation, Babu's medicine was perceived as a divine intervention to help his afflicted nation. The chairperson of Tanzania's HIV+ people travelled to Babu and reported afterwards that he had improved after the medication. However, he advised that no one should give up the ARVs until they tested negative for HIV three times (*Nipashe Jamii*, 5 April 2011). The medicine was considered a second chance for HIV-positive people but regarded as a one-off cure that would not function on a second occasion, and therefore patients should avoid promiscuous sexual relations after drinking from the cup (*Majira,* 15 March 2011).

The woman who spread the miracle cure was Wilia John. She narrated that one day she was summoned to the pastor's house by one of her children. The pastor said he wanted to see her over her health (about which he had no knownledge). She drank a cup of the concoction and left. However she continued using the ARVs (antiretroviral drugs) and did her scheduled checkups. Then came an astonishing discovery: in two or three of the checkups, the nurses detected that the viruses were diminishing (*Daily Nation,* November 24, 2012).

According to Mattes, while some traditional healers were scandalized because Mwasapile was not registered as per Tanzania's *Traditional and Alternative Medicine Act*, 2002 (which makes provisions for the promotion, control and regulation of traditional and alternative medicines practice and provides for related matters), Babu himself insisted that he was not a traditional healer but only an instrument of God on earth. Vähäkangas (2016a) argues that Mwasapile's theology of healing has evident Lutheran sacramental theological elements combined with views from African traditional medicine and Christian charismatic faith healing: he perceived himself as a prophet called by God to alleviate sufferings of humankind in a world Infested with illnesses sent by Satan and refused to have his medicine processed into pills – as an expert WHO delegation had recommended – arguing that God had not agreed to that (Mattes 2014: 173-174). However, regardless of what can be the reality of

Self as perceived by the Individual, often the collective imagery is marked by the indirect message that some words and rituals transmit and, in this case, his fame of healer become such that the word *Babu*, when used in the media, only referred to him, and likewise the word *kikombe* (cup) acquired a specific meaning because the healing practice was referred as *kikombe cha babu*.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have briefly discussed the theme of healing and spirituality through the stories of three personalities who, over a century, marked both the reality and imaginative contexts of Swahili society. The first of them in chronological order is Kenjeketile Ngwale, an ordinary man who gets in contact with the spirits and spends more than twenty-four hours under water with the spirit Hongo in order to receive mythical magical powers. While in the historical reality he is known for fomenting the Maji Maji rebellion against the Germans, by proclaiming himself prophet and healer, he stands in the spiritual gap between the people, the ancestors and the spirits and thus becomes a symbolic incarnation of the people's psychological, spiritual, and physical struggle. His figure has been a source of artistic inspiration for the creation of new myths, becoming an epitome of social and cultural memory in Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. The play uses realistic strategies to stage traumatic memories experienced by people during German colonial rule. Hussein's reconstruction of the Maji Maji rebellion in the play was more geared towards teaching the present and future generations than simply reproducing historical facts – hence the divergences from historical truth.

The second character I considered is Nguvumali Mpangile, an itinerant traditional healer who became famous for his work as witchdoctor and for collaborating in the nineteen-fifties with the colonial authorities in the witch hunt. Like Kinjeketile, also Nguvumali has left a mark in collective memory thanks to the work of Hasani Bin Ismail, *Swifa ya Nguvumali*.

With regard to the figure of Ambilikile Mwasapile, he is the modern human representation of a syncretism in which characteristic elements of traditional medicine and *uganga*, and elements of Christianity to which he adheres, converge. Although he has publicly refused the title of traditional healer, declaring himself a mere instrument of God in alleviating the pains of poor humanity, his initiatory path to become *mganga* shows many similarities with the experiences of those who have been recognized as traditional healers, e.g. the dream as a means of entering into direct or indirect contact with supernatural entities – God or spirits belonging to the local pantheon – and/or the use of plants known and used in ethnomedicine.

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