

“An Alienated Intellectual”? Rereading E. Kezilahabi’s Novel *Kichwamaji*

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with Euphrase Kezilahabi’s second novel, *Kichwamaji*, which describes the life and death of a protagonist as well as a first-person narrator Kazimoto. Previous studies share a common perspective of Kazimoto’s image, that is, a suffering intellectual alienated from his native village. It is true that in his narration Kazimoto depicts the gap between him and his surroundings, and emphasizes his sense of alienation. However, at the same time, the novel has some aspects which make readers doubt the reliability of his narration. Therefore, this study points out the possibility that Kazimoto is an “unreliable narrator” and tries to revise his common image of previous studies. The aim of this study is to provide Kazimoto’s real image, which reveals the hidden theme of the novel.

Keywords: *Swahili novel, Euphrase Kezilahabi, unreliable narrator.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A prominent Tanzanian Swahili author, Euphrase Kezilahabi¹, has made two achievements in the world of Swahili literature: establishment of free verse in Swahili and publication of the first experimental Swahili novel. He is an author who challenges existing forms and promotes literary development in the field of Swahili literature.

This study deals with his second novel, entitled *Kichwamaji* (‘Swollen Head²’; 1974). According to Bertoncini (2009: 95), Kezilahabi has “reached full artistic maturity” in this novel. This is a first-person novel that tells a story of Kazimoto, who is protagonist as well as narrator. The story describes his daily

¹ For information about Kezilahabi’s biography and works, see Bertoncini (2009: 93-94).

² According to certain dictionaries, the word *kichwamaji* has two meanings: “idiot” and “hydrocephalus” (TUKI 2001, Mwita 2003). Therefore, in previous studies, there seem to be two positions regarding how to translate this title. One position focuses on the fact that Kazimoto is abused by this word in the novel, and translates it as “wrong-headed” (Dieger 2002), “empty-head” (Sakkos 2008), “misfit” (Bertoncini 2009) and “idiot” (Wamitila 1999). The other position takes notice of the appearance of a disease which causes head swelling, and translates the word as “hydrocephalus” (Řehák 2007). This study takes a third position and translates it as “swollen head,” which has both meanings, an abusive language and the disease condition. This word seems to match the protagonist of the novel, who is full of conceit.

life in villages and a city and his suicide because of being infected with a venereal disease.

Kazimoto is a university educated man, and his narration emphasizes the sense of alienation he feels in his home village. As a result, the previous studies about the novel have commonly regarded Kazimoto as a Westernized intellectual being alienated from village society.

This study will cast a doubt on this common image of Kazimoto presented in the previous studies. Some devices in the novel suggest that Kazimoto’s narration cannot be accepted as always true, and that Kazimoto can be regarded as an “unreliable narrator”. It is worth reexamining the image created by such a suspicious narrator. The aim of this study is to revise Kazimoto’s common image and to point out new meanings from the novel.

2. OUTLINE OF THE NOVEL

This chapter describes the outline of *Kichwamaji*. Kazimoto, a student at the University of Dar es Salaam, has a childhood friend called Manase, who became a director general. One day, they meet again by chance, but since Manase has impregnated Kazimoto’s younger sister Rukia, they part in anger. During the summer vacation, Kazimoto returns to his home village. There he has intercourse with his former lover Vumilia, knowing that she is engaged to Manase.

After Rukia loses her life because of a miscarriage and her mother kills herself out of despair, Kazimoto swears vengeance against Manase. First, he sets fire to Manase’s father’s (Kabenga) house and causes Kabenga’s wife Tuza to burn herself. Then, he seduces Manase’s sister Sabina with the intention of trifling with her and betraying her. However, he unexpectedly falls in love with her, and after Kazimoto’s graduation, they get married. Meanwhile, Kazimoto reconciles with Manase, and the couple starts their new life in Dar es Salaam while working as teachers.

Shortly afterward Sabina gets pregnant, but she miscarries because of unusual size of the child’s head. At around the same time, it is found that Manase has been infected with a venereal disease from a city woman called Pili. It infects his wife and newborn child too, resulting in the unusual swelling of the child’s head. Kazimoto also had intercourse with Pili before and after his marriage, and he realizes that the disease was the cause of Sabina’s miscarriage. Manase tells Kazimoto that there is no remedy for this disease. After knowing Kazimoto’s betrayal and sin, Sabina abuses him and leaves him. He has no words to answer back and kills himself using a pistol.

The first-person narrator Kazimoto narrates every event until his suicide. Then, an unknown narrator takes his place to talk about his death and about subsequent events. This narrator disappears after showing how the press

reported Kazimoto's suicide. At the very end of the novel, a short, mysterious poem is placed without any commentary.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES AND THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Several studies have dealt with this novel so far. Řehák (2007) analyzes the novel from the existentialistic perspective and compares Kazimoto with Meursault, a protagonist in *L'Étranger*. According to Řehák, both protagonists share the same characteristics: being indifferent towards society and concentrating on their personal issues. The difference is that while Meursault rejects the notion of adapting to society, Kazimoto wants to live in accordance with society. However, since Kazimoto is a university-educated man, he finds that he cannot live in "the traditional Christian-animist society of East African Mainland" (Řehák 2007: 146). Therefore, he tries to escape from his native village, although he cannot stop seeking the meaning of life and always finds no meaning. Řehák sees the difference in their ends; Kazimoto kills himself while Meursault waits for his execution. Řehák explains their difference using the dichotomy of "European individualism" and "African communalism" (Řehák 2007: 146).

In his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Nairobi, Swaleh (2011) traces the history of Swahili literature, and also refers to existentialist elements in Kezilahabi's novels. Regarding *Kichwamaji*, he mentions that the novel "furthers the motifs of despair and disillusionment amongst Tanzania's educated middle class. Particularly telling in *Kichwamaji* is Kezilahabi's view that young educated people are alienated by their Western education" (Swaleh 2011: 77).

Sakkos (2008) focuses on the female characters in the novel to see how the image of women in the novel is different from the stereotypical image of women in other works of Swahili literature. Notably, Sakkos also applies existentialism to the novel and sees Kazimoto as one of the "young Western-educated intellectuals being alienated to their culture of origin" (Sakkos 2008: 55).

Diegner (2002) analyzes allegories in Kezilahabi's first four novels, including *Kichwamaji*. Regarding *Kichwamaji*, he tries to read between the lines to find metaphors for Kazimoto's thought and mental condition. For example, the image of a lizard deprived of its tail represents "a modern man who suffers from alienation" and "survives without tradition" (Diegner 2002: 51).

These studies have a common perspective regarding the theme of the novel, that is, the distress and alienation of young African intellectuals who cannot appreciate the cultural values of their traditional home village because of having fully absorbed university education and Western culture (Diegner, 2002: 62; Řehák, 2007: 141–146; Sakkos, 2008: 55). *Outline of Swahili Literature* introduces many modern Swahili novels and also evaluates *Kichwamaji* by saying that Kezilahabi "succeeds in expressing the sense of alienation of young Africans who are absorbing Western culture to such an extent that they no

longer recognize their own traditional values” (Bertoncini 2009: 96). This was the common way of reading and understanding the novel and its narrator Kazimoto until now.

This study will cast a doubt on this common recognition of the novel as well as Kazimoto’s image. The final target of this study is to argue that the image of Kazimoto in the previous studies, that is, “an alienated intellectual”, is merely a virtual image created by his narration.

4. KAZIMOTO AS AN UNRELIABLE NARRATOR (WITH DEFINITION)

In this chapter, I will start from the definition of the concept of “unreliable narrator”, which will be the theoretical basis of this study. The term “unreliable narrator” was firstly coined by Wayne Booth in his book entitled *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth points out that there are variations of distance between the implied author³ and the narrator. The distance may be moral, intellectual, physical or temporal. For the purpose of expressing this kind of distance, Booth coins the terminology “unreliable narrator”. He defines the reliable and unreliable narrator as follows: “I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (Booth 1961: 158–159, *Italic and parentheses are in original*). Booth also argue that by creating the unreliable narrator, the author carries the reader with him in judging the narrator (Booth 1961: 158).

M. H. Abrams explains the definition more specifically in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as follows. “The fallible or unreliable narrator is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he narrates do not coincide with the implicit opinions and norms manifested by the author, and which the author expects the alert reader to share with him” (Abrams 1988: 168).

The main sources which make readers suspect the narrator’s reliability is, according to Rimmon-Kenan, the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his questionable morals (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 101). For examples, a young narrator would be a clear case of limited knowledge, as well as an idiot narrator. When a narrator is personally involved into the story he narrates, even an adult or mentally normal narrator can tell events or characters in a subjective way. Lastly, if a narrator’s moral values do not tally with those of

³ “Implied author” is Booth’s term which refers to “the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 87-88). In this study I do not distinguish the term “implied author” from “author”, since the distinction between the two does not relate directly to the discussion of this study.

the author, then his morals are considered questionable (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 102).

This study points out the possibility that Kazimoto is an unreliable narrator. There are two major reasons for considering him as an unreliable narrator. The first reason comes from the end of the novel, where a switch of narrators: from Kazimoto to an unknown narrator, occurs. The second reason is Kazimoto's anti-heroic aspects. Following part of this chapter will explain these two reasons in detail.

The first-person narrator Kazimoto relays events and describes other characters from his own point of view. There is no room for another person's viewpoint. Therefore, readers get limited information through Kazimoto's own eyes. However, this mode of storytelling collapses at the moment of Kazimoto's suicide in the last chapter.

Let us take a closer look at the end of the novel. Soon after it is revealed that Kazimoto has given a venereal disease to his wife and child because of his adultery, he is abused by his wife and stands around in a daze. At that moment, Kazimoto is called by "*kitu fulani kama sauti*" (something like a voice) and picks up something guided by "*nguvu fulani*" (some kind of force).

In the next paragraph, the narrator suddenly switches to third-person. The new narrator explains how his wife Sabina, who has heard a shot, finds Kazimoto fallen on the floor and his will, which is cited below:

Nimejiua. Siwezi kuendelea kuzaa kizazi kibaya. Pia sikuona tofauti kati yangu na mdudu au wanyama. Akili! Akili! Akili ni nini? Pia nikiwa duniani sikupata kukutana hata siku moja na mtu anayeamini kwamba kuna Mungu. Watu wanaoogopa kufa na kwenda motoni hao nimewaona, tena wengi sana. Mtu ye yote asilaumiwe kwa kifo changu. Mimi, kabla ya kufa, ninaungama mbele ya ulimwengu kwamba nilimwua mdogo wangu ingawa sikumgusa. (Kezilahabi 2008⁴: 195)

I killed myself. I do not want to produce another baby with a birth defect. In addition, I do not see any difference between me and insects or animals. Intelligence! Intelligence! What is intelligence? In my life I have never met anyone who believes that God exists. There are people who are afraid of death and falling into hell. I saw them many times. No one is to blame for my death. Before I die, I confess in front of the world that I killed my baby without a touch.⁵

This new narrator just describes events without giving own comments, except when he/she attracts readers' attention by saying "*ndugu zangu*" (my brothers) (Kezilahabi 2008: 195). This narrator states that Kazimoto's suicide has grabbed many people's attention and introduces some newspaper articles that feature his

⁴ The first edition of *Kichwamaji* was published in 1974.

⁵ All translations from Swahili to English are by the author.

death. They denounce him as an infidel westernophile who neglects the intellectual’s duty to contribute to his own nation and kills himself for suffering from personal matters. One paper gives a positive evaluation of him by regarding him as a philosophical thinker. (Kezilahabi 2008: 196).

After the newspaper articles, the novel finishes with the following poem:
*Upepo wa jioni ulivuma/ Msafiri akasikia karakacha/ Akatazama nyuma/
Hakuona kitu/ Akakaza mwendo/ Mbele kidogo akakuta maiti/
Akasimama.*⁶ (Kezilahabi 2008: 196)

Evening wind was blowing/ A traveler heard a strange noise/ He looked back/ He didn’t see anything/ He quickened his pace/ A little ahead he saw a corpse/ He stood still. (Kezilahabi 2008: 196)

The first-person narrator Kazimoto is guided by a “voice” to his death. Then, another narrator appears and shows the image of Kazimoto created by the press, that is, the image expressed by anonymous and plural narrations. Finally, a poem is narrated without any commentary. The disappearance of an authorized first-person narrator leads to a multiplicity of narration, and Kazimoto, who used to see and estimate others, suddenly becomes a target of others’ observations and estimations. This ending inevitably makes readers doubt the absoluteness of the narrator Kazimoto, and induces readers to reevaluate their reliance on his narration. Referring to Booth’s words, the switch of narrators at the ending can be regarded as one of the devices to carry readers with the author in judging Kazimoto. Therefore, this ending gives a logical reason for doubting his narration as unreliable.

The second reason for considering Kazimoto as an unreliable narrator is his immoral aspects. Some previous studies have already regarded Kazimoto as an anti-hero (Wamitila 1999: 39, Bertoncini 2009: 95). Although they do not reveal the basis for this perception, it is a reasonable one. In the following paragraph, I will give some examples which indicate his anti-heroic aspects.

Kazimoto commits several sins and hurts others, often without guilt feelings or regret. For example, after the miscarriage and death of his sister Rukia, who was impregnated by Manase, Kazimoto seeks revenge on him. First, he tries to kill Manase’s father Kabenga using a club and a stone when he finds Kabenga walking alone and badly drunk. After he fails to kill Kabenga because of his cowardice, he decides to set fire to Kabenga’s house. At that time, Kabenga’s wife Tuza is sleeping alone inside the house. Tuza burns her right hand, and the house is completely burnt down. Kazimoto is afraid of being caught, but he never feels guilty (Kezilahabi 2008: 88–89).

Kazimoto does not stop his plans for revenge there. His next target is Manase’s elder sister Sabina. She is a devout protestant who stays unmarried

⁶ This study only points out the experimental aspect of the arrangement of the mysterious poem at the end of the novel. The interpretation of this poem will be the topic of my future study.

until the age of twenty-six. Kazimoto decides to seduce her to take advantage of her impatience for marriage. He thinks as follows:

Kweli alionyesha hali ya uzee, nami niliuona wakati huu kuwa mzuri wa kujilipiza kisasi. Ng'ombe mzee akikanyaga matopeni haondoki mpaka achinjwe pale pale. Hapa sasa kulikuwa na ng'ombe akitapatapa roho ili kumaliza siku zake za mwisho. Manase alimtia mimba ndugu yangu, akafa. (...) nilikata shauri kutumia njia yo yote ili kumpata huyu msichana, siyo kumpata tu kwa siku moja, isipokuwa mpaka nihakikishe kwamba tumbo lake lilikuwa zito. (Kezilahabi 2008: 102)

Truly, she seemed to become old, and I thought this was a good chance to get revenge. An old cow stuck in mud does not get out until it is slaughtered at that place. Now a cow is here struggling desperately, waiting for her death. (...) I have decided to do whatever it takes to make this girl mine. Only having a one-night stand is not enough; she should become pregnant.

Having won Sabina's heart, he writes Manase the following letter to make him angry. Although his motive is revenge, his words humiliating Sabina make readers feel disgusted.

Siku hizi Sabina ni wangu. Mara fulani huwa analala kwangu. Si mbaya sana, isipokuwa mdomo wake unanuka kidogo, jambo ambalo inanifanya nimpe shuka yake. Lakini kwa jumla anafaa! (Kezilahabi 2008: 107)

These days Sabina is mine. Sometimes she sleeps in my place. She is not too bad, although her mouth smells a bit, which makes me separate my sheets and hers. Yet she is, overall, satisfactory!

Despite his evil intentions, Kazimoto falls in love with Sabina, and they get married. However, after it is revealed that he is infected with a venereal disease, he confesses that he had sexual relationship with a girl called Pili before and after the marriage. Having lost his child because of the disease, Kazimoto kills himself without apologizing to Sabina, leaving Sabina all alone.

Kazimoto can clearly be regarded as an anti-hero. Readers can see the distance between the author and the narrator Kazimoto, from his lack of morals and sympathy for others. In addition, in the novel, there are other aspects that indicate the distance.

Firstly, Kazimoto is a womanizer. He likes to boast of how he had sexual relations with four women - Pili, Vumilia, Nyambuso and Sabina - by utilizing his seduction techniques. From the beginning of the novel, his narration shows this lusty aspect. The novel begins at the moment when Kazimoto is sitting between two girls on a long board in front of a director general's office. Each time someone stands up, they shift their buttocks to fill the gap. Kazimoto finds this "play" "very nice" (Kezilahabi 2008: 1).

After getting out from the office, Kazimoto meets Salima, his former student, and recalls how precocious girls like her bothered him when he worked as a teacher. He says, “*Niliona haya kidogo kuona kwamba kwa muda wote ule nilikuwa nikijitahidi kugusa kiuno cha mwanafunzi wangu*” (Kezilahabi 2008: 5) (“I felt a little bit ashamed about those days when I always tried to touch my students’ hips”). These statements seen at the beginning of the novel create an impression on readers of his immoral aspects and make them be wary of his personality.

He is an immoral womanizer, and yet he is somehow loveable because he often disgraces himself, especially in front of women. After his former student Salima leaves, he notices that his zipper has been undone, which makes him badly depressed (Kezilahabi 2008: 6). When he invites a woman called Nyambuso to his bed, he gets drunk and falls into a sleep. The next day, he finds his trousers being taken away by Nyambuso, who tells everyone that he is not a man (Kezilahabi 2008: 55–56). His future wife Sabina also does not regard him as a man at first. After chatting together for the first time in a while, Sabina tells Kazimoto that “*Sikuamini kwamba nawe utaweza siku moja kuwa mtu mzima. Siku hizi hata wewe umeota ndevu!*” (Kezilahabi 2008: 104) (“I did not believe that one day you will be an adult. These days even your mustache is growing!”), and Kazimoto feels displeased.

There is a scene where Kazimoto, who is riding a bike, bumps against a herd of cattle, breaks his bike, and is laughed at by the cowhands (Kezilahabi 2008: 62–63). The reason this seemingly unnecessary scene exists is to show Kazimoto as a bungler. He is depicted as an immoral and conceited bungler who is often embarrassed in front of someone whom he wishes to display himself to. In summary, all these examples above indicate reasonable grounds to regard Kazimoto as an unreliable narrator.

5. REVISED IMAGE OF KAZIMOTO

The previous chapter showed the possibility that Kazimoto is an unreliable narrator. What is important for the technique of unreliable narrator, however, is the fact that a narrator whose narration is completely unreliable does not exist. If such a narrator existed, it would show readers the mere fact that a novel is fiction. The technique of the “unreliable narrator” is effective when there is “some possibility of discriminating between truth and falsehood within the imagined world of the novel” (Lodge 1992: 155). Therefore, if Kazimoto can be regarded as an unreliable narrator, the next task is to seek that possibility.

What does Kazimoto try to convey the most in his narration? The answer is his sense of alienation. This fact raises the issue of the similarity of the perspectives of Kazimoto’s image in previous studies: “a Westernized African intellectual being alienated by village society.” For example, Kazimoto suggests

in his narration that his home village is shut off from the academic world. When Kazimoto returns home, he is teased by women bathing in the river and says,

Niliona kwamba sasa wakati wa kusahau vitabu ulikuwa umeingia na kwamba nilikuwa nimeyafika maisha yanayoitwa “maisha.”

I realize that the time has come when I must forget about books and that I have arrived in this exact life. (Kezilahabi 2008: 23)

In addition, when his parents scold him for staying out of house without telling them anything, he thinks,

Kwa muda wa siku mbili kichwa changu kilikuwa kimepumzika huko nyumbani kwa Kamata. Sasa matata yalianza tena. Nami nilikuwa nimekuja nyumbani likizoni kupumzisha kichwa changu ambacho kilikuwa kimekwisha anza kuwanga kwa sababu ya kusoma. (Kezilahabi 2008: 67)

For two days, I could rest my head in Kamata's house. Now troubles have come again, though I returned home with the intention of resting my head, which has started to ache because of studying.

The following part emphasizes his sense of alienation from his village. Here, Kazimoto is sitting by a lake, watching fishermen working and chatting cheerfully.

Hapo ndipo nilipoanza kufikiri moyoni kwa nini nilisoma mpaka Chuo Kikuu. (...) Niliwaonea wivu wenzangu ambao tuliachana darasa la nne. Wao sasa walikuwa wakicheza zeze na kupiga vishindo kwa furaha. Niliona kwamba elimu ilikuwa sumu ya furaha yangu. Kila siku kusoma vitabu na magazeti nisiwe nyuma ya wakati. Sasa niliona tofauti kati ya maisha yangu na yao. Kwa wakati huu wazo la kuacha shule ili niishi kama wao liliinjia kichwani. Sikuona sababu ya kusumbuliwa na mawazo, kuwa na wajibu mkubwa zaidi, halafu kufa kama wao na labda kwenda motoni, wao mbinguni - faida gani? (Kezilahabi 2008: 43)

It was the first time for me to wonder why I have continued to study until I entered the university. (...) I envied my companions whom I left when we were in fourth grade. Now they are cheerfully playing *zeze*⁷ and fooling around. I felt that my education turns out to be a poison for my happiness. I read books and newspapers every day not to be out of date. Now I saw the difference between my life and theirs. At that moment, the idea of quitting my studies and living as they live came across my mind. I could not find any reason to be tired by thoughts, burdened with heavier

⁷ *Zeze* is a stringed instrument like guitar (TUKI 2001).

responsibility, and to die as they do, perhaps resulting in falling down to hell while they are in heaven - where is the profit?

Here, Kazimoto tries to differentiate himself - a university student being engaged with books and newspapers - from villagers enjoying their lives. He tries to present himself as a troubled intellectual who is alienated from his home village and watching villagers with a cold look. Judging from these examples, Kazimoto appears to be the same as indicated in previous studies.

These examples suggest that the image of an “alienated intellectual” is delivered by his introspective narration, which mentions his own feelings, opinions, and self-awareness. At the same time, as a narrator, he is responsible for advancing the story-line. Here, this type of narration is conveniently called “descriptive narration.” If his narration is divided into these two types, it is found that his and other characters’ actual behaviors delivered by his descriptive narration sometimes contradict his introspective narration. For example, Kazimoto tries to convey that his village is nothing to do with academic world; however, a villager’s behavior goes against his perception. At a feast of banana beer, an old man asks Kazimoto why their lives did not turn out to be better even after independence. This question reveals the fact that the villagers are not indifferent about political and economic issues and do not consider them irrelevant. Nevertheless, Kazimoto continues to differentiate them from the academic world:

Lilikuwa swali gumu la uchumi kueleza hasa kati ya wazee kama hawa. Uchumi nilikuwa sijui lakini ili kutunza heshima yangu ya elimu nilijitahidi kuwaeleza lakini hata hivyo walikuwa bado wakinitazama tu wakitegemea kuelezwa zaidi. (Kezilahabi 2008: 51)

It was a difficult economic question to explain, especially to these kinds of elders. I did not know much about economics; still I tried to explain to keep my dignity as an intellectual, though they just kept watching me and expecting more explanations about it.

Regarding this scene, Řehák is inclined toward Kazimoto’s intentions. In his study, he prompts readers to imagine the unusual scene where “a young university student discusses with a group of old uneducated men about life” (Řehák 2007: 143). In other words, the old men are not educated enough to understand Kazimoto’s words. As a result, “the young man must inevitably feel as a misfit in his native village” (Řehák 2007: 143). However, this article regards this scene as another example of Kazimoto’s bungling. He tries to show off in front of the villagers but fails. In this scene, a villager’s question discloses Kazimoto’s pseudo intellectual aspect.

By observing Kazimoto’s behaviors and other characters’ reactions, it becomes clear that he actively communicates with villagers rather than being

alienated from them. For example, when his house suffers a black magic attack, he wonders at his family believing in it and says,

Siamini kwamba kuna wachawi duniani. Lazima tu wawe watu wa kawaida. Na ni watu ambao wanaishi kijijini humu humu. Niliona kwamba watu wote wa nyumbani kwetu walikuwa wamekwisha nyang'anywa utu wao, hapakuwa na mtu tena pale nyumbani. Sikutaka kugeuzwa na hofu kama wao; wao walikwisha kuwa watu ambao hawawezi hata kuguna." (Kezilahabi 2008: 30)

I do not believe that a witch exists. They must be common people, living in this exact village. I felt that all of my family members were deprived of their reason. There were no reasonable persons in my home anymore. I did not want to be controlled by fear like them. Now they have become people who cannot even complain.

Nevertheless, he joins a family meeting and gives advice on how to counter black magic.

Hapo ndipo nilipowaambia maneno niliyoambiwa na padri mmoja. "Kuwashika wachawi ni jambo rahishi sana," nilianza. "Jambo moja kuhusu wachawi ni kwamba wana pua kali sana kama wanyama. Wanafahamu sana harufu ya mwanadamu, kwa sababu mtu ambaye huota moto ana harufu ya pekee. Wachawi wakitaka kwenda kutembea usiku, hawasogelei moto muda wa siku tatu nne; halafu wakitoka nje usiku huvaa nguo ambazo huwa zimetunzwa nje majanini ili kupoteza harufu kwa umande. Wengine huenda uchi. Kwa hiyo watembeapo ni vigumu kuwaona. Ukitaka kuwaona fanya kama wao." (Kezilahabi 2008: 39)

At that moment, I decided to tell them a story that I heard from a priest. "It is very easy to catch witches," I started. "Witches have a common feature - they have fine noses like animals. They know the smell of human beings very well, because human beings have a particular smell from warming themselves in front of a fire. When witches go out to walk at night, they keep away from fire for three or four days and go out at night wearing special clothes which have been laid in glasses outside to get rid of the human smell. Others go outside naked. So it is difficult to see them walking. If you want to see them, you have to do like them."

His words above must confuse readers, because a little while earlier, he had said he does not believe in black magic. Here, his narration clearly contradicts his behavior. After this meeting, Kazimoto is the one who confronts the witches by using the strategy he mentioned.

His relationship with women also suggests his intimacy with the villagers. He has sexual relations with some village women, and their parents curse him.

He is interested in love affairs and marriage rumors among villagers. He likes to estimate girls based on whether they deserve to be his future fiancée. Furthermore, he gossips about other's wife for nearly four pages (Kezilahabi 2008: 133–136).

Additionally, the villagers' behavior clearly shows that they do not perceive him as special. They rely on him at the time of harvest or when they face troubles like black magic and arson. Women prefer to advise him on his love affairs. Kazimoto is regarded as a member of his village and is even a target of villagers' love and hatred.

These facts suggest that Kazimoto is not the alienated intellectual of previous studies. The reality is that he is a comical and pitiable man who wishes to be treated as an intellectual but fails. Kazimoto's image presented in previous studies is exactly what he wants to show to readers. This virtual image is created by his introspective narration. Therefore, it can be said that his unreliability lies in his introspective narration.

What is the purpose of making the narrator of a novel an unreliable narrator? David Lodge, explains that “the point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter” (Lodge 1992: 155). In other words, the effect of an unreliable narrator is to create dramatic irony. According to Booth, irony is created when the author includes readers into secret collusion with him while excluding the narrator alone (Booth 1961: 304). In other words, the author and readers “belong to an in-group that shares values, judgements, and meanings from which the unreliable narrator is ousted” (Olson 2003: 94). Likewise, in *Kichwamaji*, readers share a suspicious eye with the author on Kazimoto's statements, while Kazimoto alone does not seem to be aware of his unreliability. The sense that others are excluded, according to Booth, brings readers pleasure (Booth 1961: 304).

In the novel, there is another device for making the ironical effect. Kazimoto's real name “Deusdedit Kazimoto” contains irony. “Deusdedit” is a saint's name, which means, “the God has given” in Latin; however, he has declared that he is an atheist (Kezilahabi 2008: 51, 123–124). Kazimoto means “tough and quick work” in Swahili (Wamitila 1999: 40), even though the character is described as a weak man who cannot face difficulties and easily chooses death. A Swahili literary critic, K. W. Wamitila, describes the effect produced by his name as “pathetic” (Wamitila 1999: 40), but considering Kazimoto's characteristics and literary roles, it is probably more ironic than pathetic.

Kazimoto's infection with a venereal disease and suicide seem to play the role of punishing him for his immorality. Therefore, in conclusion, the life and death of Kazimoto is ironically described with educational and instructional intentions. Regarding Kazimoto as an unreliable narrator enables us to revise his image as well as to find new messages in the novel.

6. CONCLUSION

This study tried to reevaluate the protagonist of *Kichwamaji*, Kazimoto. Previous studies share the same image of Kazimoto, a suffering African intellectual alienated from his native village. However, the novel has some aspects which make readers doubt the reliability of Kazimoto's narration. Therefore, this study pointed out the possibility of considering Kazimoto as an unreliable narrator, and casted a doubt on the image created by him.

Although an unreliable narrator distorts or conceals the reality, there must be some clues to distinguish the reality from the falsehood. This study analyzed Kazimoto's narration by dividing it into two types: his introspective narration and his descriptive narration. As a result, his introspective narration emphasizes that he is alienated from his surroundings. However, his actual behaviors and other characters' reactions, which are narrated by his descriptive narration, suggest that he is closely related to others, and the gap between appearance and reality is thus revealed.

Usually, the reality is revealed by this contradiction between the two types of narration. However, his real image is sometimes embedded in his descriptive narration as a hint. For example, when Kazimoto fails to answer villagers' academic question, he narrates that "*Hawakuona tofauti kubwa kati yangu na wao*" (They did not see a big difference between me and them) (Kezilahabi 2008: 51). Another hint is provided by his wife Sabina. After his disease is detected, Kazimoto says, "*Sijui kwa nini ninaishi*" ("I do not know why I live"). His emphasis on his image of a suffering intellectual is observed even in conversations with others. Hearing his words, Sabina says, "*Nimechoka na maswali yako ya kijinga. (...) Hakika sikufahamu kwamba wewe ni kichwamaji namna hii!*" ("I am tired of your stupid question. I really did not know that you were such an idiot!") (Kezilahabi 2008: 194–195). This scene where he is abused by others as "idiot" exposes the reality that Kazimoto is not a suffering intellectual. In addition, the word "kichwamaji", which is conveniently translated as "idiot" here, is put as a title of the novel. Therefore, the author seems to give her abuse a guarantee.

Kazimoto, who was trying to depict himself as an alienated intellectual and differentiate him from his surroundings, kills himself after being infected with a venereal disease by a woman at a bar. This ending reveals his deception by suggesting the intimacy between him and his surroundings. What lies behind the apparent theme of the alienation of an African intellectual, is the story of a young man who intimately associates with others while at the same time trying to differentiate himself from others, stumbles by this contradiction, and falls.

Finally, I would like to point out that the new interpretation of *Kichwamaji* presented in this study can contribute to broader research on the author Kezilahabi. Kezilahabi's two novels, *Nagona* and *Mzingile*, published at the

beginning of the 1990s, drew attention as the first experimental novels⁸ in the field of Swahili literature (Bertoncini 2009: 5). However, *Kichwamaji*'s ending focused in this study has the experimental structure, which clearly deviates from the methodology of realist novel. Although it is difficult to affirm that Kazimoto is the first unreliable narrator in Swahili literature, still it is safe to say that the use of unreliable narrator has been very rare. These points suggest that Kezilahabi became familiar with literary experimentation much earlier than 1990s, and show readers the necessity to read Kezilahabi's early works with more care.

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⁸ Historically, the term “experimental novel” refers to a novel written in the naturalist mode advocated by Émile Zola in his *Le Roman expérimental* in 1880. However, at the present day, the term generally refers to a novel which is written for the purpose of investigating new possibilities of the genre by extending boundaries of artistic practice, while rejecting hide-bound tradition, values and forms (Bray et al. 2012). The term is used here as the latter meaning.

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