

FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN SAID AHMED MOHAMED'S NOVELS

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Introduction

The depiction of family ties is one of the core elements of Swahili novels in Tanzania, especially in the post-Independence, socialist period, conveying all the contradictions of that social and cultural context. On one hand the representation of family relationships in terms of tense and aggressive behaviour (Mlacha 1987: 82) reflects the clashes of those years, between town and countryside, between genders and between different generations. On the other hand, the image of a new family - like for instance Chonya, Masika and her baby in Ndyanao Balisidya's novel *Shida* (1975) - stands as a commitment to an alternative society, a dream of a better life inspired by *Ujamaa* which marked the Swahili prose of the 1970's (Mbughuni 1980: 92).

This duplicity of representation, where family life is, at the same time, the object of artistic analysis and the means of a meta-discourse about society and politics, is also a component of the initial production of major Zanzibari novelists, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed, Said Ahmed Mohamed, and Adam Shafi. A good example is the novel *Nyota ya Rehema* ('Rehema's Destiny', 1976) by Mohamed S. Mohamed, where Rehema's new family, constituted by her husband, Sulubu, and their baby, has to be defended at any price from the abuses of her family, Arab landowners, who have rejected her because of her dark complexion and have always exploited her naivety.

In these Zanzibari works of the 1970s, a characteristic element can be found in the description of family life, which is the memory of social, ethnic, and cultural conflicts as the basis of an overall reflection of power, identity and politics. The history of the Islands has a central role in the commitment to a socialist utopia on the part of these young writers (Ohly 1990: 24).

Said A. Mohamed, after his first novels which dealt with the colonial and pre-revolutionary past, turned his attention to contemporary society, but has continued to develop the idea of the family as a symbolic space where relationships between the characters articulate the inequalities and the conflicts within Zanzibari society. His literary discourse, as will become clear in the following pages, brilliantly investigates the deep roots and the countless facets of authoritarianism in contemporary Zanzibari society, depicting a gallery of fathers - in a biological and in a metaphorical sense - who are despotic, immoral, hypocritical, and increasingly cynical.

Families and historical memories

The breakdown of a family is a central element in Said A. Mohamed's novels. In his historical novels, *Asali Chungu* ('Bitter Honey', 1978) and *Dunia Mti Mkavu* ('The World is a Dry Tree', 1980), both depicting Zanzibari reality before the 1964 Revolution, class conflicts and ethnic tensions are condensed into the image of family decay.

The first novel, *Asali Chungu*, portrays the society of the Islands on the eve of the Revolution. The apparently immutable life of Zuberi, an Arab landowner and colonial functionary, cruel and womanizing, is upset by the arrival of Dude, a poor orphan. Without suspecting that he is Zuberi's illegitimate son, Dude starts to flirt with his father's wife, then marries one of his daughters and seduces the other, who gives him a child. Like Sulubu in *Nyota ya Rehema*, the outbreak of Revolution will save him from these family troubles (Zúbková Bertoncini 1989: 70).

In this work, Said A. Mohamed handles a theme which he went on to elaborate in his later novels, that is the arrogance of power as shown by fathers in their familial context as well as in their official role. The beginning of the novel is in fact a description of Zuberi's office, the material symbol of the prestige of his social position as a colonial functionary:

Chumbani kwa Bwana DC. Akrabu za saa ya ukutani zinaonyesha saa nne na vichopo. Nje, bao refu linalotambaa na ukuta limesaki mabibi wa kila sura na aina... Wote hawa wamekuja kwa dhamiri moja tu - kuonana na Bwana! - ingawa kila mmoja wao ana ndwele yake iliyomsama moyoni. Naam ndwele, maana daka la roho si ndwele ndogo! Kuja kwao hapo kumechukua taklifu kubwa. Wengine wamefunga safari ndefu. Wengine wamevuka ng'ambo za mbali, wamepanda gari na kushuka kuja hapo kwa tama kuwa angalau "Bwana Mkubwa" atawatazama kwa jicho la rehema. (Mohamed 1978: 1)

In the room of Mr. District Commissioner the hands of the clock on the wall have gone past ten o'clock. Outside, on a long bench near the wall, women of every aspect and type are crowded... All of them have come with one intention - to see the Bwana! – though each one has her own sore which crushes her heart. Yes, a sore, because a spiritual wound is no small pain! Their arrival there has required great sacrifices. Some of them have made long journeys. They have covered great distances, taken a bus and arrived there with the hope that at least "the Great Bwana" will look upon them with a merciful eye.

The distance of individuals like Zuberi from real life - exemplified by the palace where he encloses himself and his family (Garnier 2006: 205) - can not protect them from the inevitable contact with the external world, represented in this case by young Dude's sexual relations with the women of the household.

The novel *Dunia Mti Mkavu* again articulates social dynamics through the tragic story of a family, that of Mzee Jaku and his wife Bi Pole, who have four sons. Owing to their poverty, they are able to bring up only one of them, Fumu, whilst the others are given away to be adopted by different families. The mother will later die of grief after abandoning her children. Every brother represents, consequently, a class in Zanzibari society under colonial

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domination: Fumu, the peasant, Bakari, the dockworker, Pandu, the thief, and Kibwana, alias Farouk Hilal, the police inspector adopted by a rich Arab family (Zúbková Bertoncini 1989: 73). Without recognising each other, they will all commit themselves to the first General Strike (in the case of Farouk against it) and die during the bloody repression before the eyes of their father.

Mzee Jaku sasa alikuwa keshafika chini ya wale maiti. Mughma umemvaa; kijasho kinamkatika, malaika yamemsimama, moyo unamwenda mbio. Alitazama maiti ya Pandu, tena ya Fumu, halafu ya Bakari na mwisho ya Kibwana au kama ulimwengu ulivyozowea kumwita, Farouk. Wale wote ni mwanawe. Kabisa hakuweza kupotewa na damu yake. Maiti ya Fumu ililala kichalichali ikitazama mbingu nyeusi na kukoga mvua iliyomwagika; ya Bakari imelala kifudifudi, kabisa imekataa kuipa uso dunia ilyomcheza toka kuzaliwa. Maiti ya Pandu imejipeta kwa unyonge kuilalamikia dunia ili ytomdhulumu, na Kibwana, maiti yake ili uma ardhi na kuiomba msamaha kwa vile alivyokuwa akiikanyaga kwa matakuro na dharau. (Mohamed 1980: 120)

Now Mzee Jaku approached those dead bodies. He felt dazed; he was in a cold sweat, the hairs of his body stood on end, his heart beat very fast. He looked at Pandu's body, then that of Fumu, then that of Bakari, and finally that of Kibwana, or as the people had got used to calling him, Farouk. All of them were his sons. Blood ties do not get lost. The dead body of Fumu was lying on its back, looking at the dark sky, soaked by the rain falling on him; that of Bakari was lying face downwards, refusing to turn its face to the world which had played with him since his birth. Pandu's body was miserably folded, complaining about this world that oppressed him, and Kibwana's corpse was biting the earth begging for forgiveness for the aggressive and disdainful way he had used to trample on it.

The world of rich predators is, in this work, depicted through the character of Fauz, the landowner who oppresses the peasant, Fumu Jaku, by not allowing him to cultivate anything for himself, and, then, by taking away his fiancée, Masika, who is forced by her family to marry Fauz because of his wealth.

Mohamed's female characters are often those who express the exacerbation of social tensions, dying or courageously challenging the rules, as in the case of Masika, who goes on to kill Fauz in his own home. Once again, a rich and solid palace can not protect the despotic man from the danger within his four walls, from the revenge of the oppressed (Garnier 2006: 211).

Families and the crisis of optimism

It is with the novel *Utengano* ('Separation', 1980) that the writer's creativity starts to deal with his contemporary society. The core of the plot is the breaking up of Bwana Makuudi's family. Makuudi is a tyrannical man at home, and a corrupt leader outside, ready to use his power to satisfy any material desire. Two women, Farashuu and Kazija, victims of his abuse, carry out a plan to destroy his family, in particular by leading his daughter, Maimuna, away from home, towards alcohol and prostitution. Lonely and abandoned, Makuudi is also defeated at the parliamentary elections and arrested by the incorruptible policeman, Fadhili.

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Through the figure of this despotic father, so tragically similar to the cynical Zuberi, this work represents a highly critical evaluation of post-independence politicians, not only because of their bad governance, but also because of their incoherent, superficial cultural identity which was, in theory, revolutionary, before they were corrupted by the power of their positions, unconsciously modelling their private and public lives around the authoritarian relations of the colonial past (Aiello 1999: 60).

Jana sio leo. Kweli Makuudi alikuwa mchochole na ni wazi kwamba anatokana na ukoo wa kifanyakazi na kikulima. Ni kweli kwamba hapo kale imani yake ilikuwa thabiti. Alikuwa mtetezi wa haki na kiongozi shupavu, mpaka dakika ya mwisho. Yeye ndiye aliyekuwa miongoni mwa waasisi wa Chama cha Mwafrika. Naye alijitolea kwa nia, mvua na jua, panda shuka, nenda rudi. Kifungo, vitisho na visasi vya watawala, vyote havikumshtua wala kumrejsha nyuma. Alitaka kuona kwamba anajigomboa, na wanyonge, wafanyakazina wakulima wanajitawala.

Na hivyo ndivyo ilivyokuwa. Kweli ilipodhihiri uwongo ulijitenga. Uhuru ukapatikana, mkoloni akatoweka. Lakini kumbe nia ya Makuudi ilikuwa nyingine kabisa... Makuudi aligombania uhuru wa nchi yake kwa tamaa kwamba wakitoka wale watu weupe, yeye atakuwa mmojawapo atakayekamata nafasi zao. (Mohamed 1980: 17).

Yesterday is not today. In fact, once Makuudi had been really poor, and had obviously come from a family of labourers and peasants. His ideals then had been truly solid. He had fought for what was right, had been a tenacious leader, until the end. He had been a member of the African Party. He had completely committed himself, rain or shine, up and down, backwards and forwards. Prison, threats and the governors' persecution had not frightened or discouraged him. He had wanted to see his country liberated and the oppressed, the workers and the peasants govern themselves.

This was how things were now. Once Independence had been gained, the colonialists had disappeared. But, in the mean time, Makuudi's intentions had changed... Makuudi had fought for his country's Independence in the hope that when all the whites had gone, he would have been among those to take their place.

The reversal of colonial social hierarchies and the implementation of ambitious popular reforms characterised, in fact, the presidency of Abeid Karume (from 1964 to 1972), but also the use of coercion and the drastic limitation of the citizen's freedom (Crozon 1998: 55), forms of violence which can be symbolically retraced in Makuudi's interpersonal relations, especially in the familiar sphere, contradicting the rhetoric of his political discourses.

Once again the image of the palace, where the father despotically controls the lives of his family members, symbolises the close world of the new oligarchs, arid, hypocritical, and apart from the life of common people.

Jumba la Bwana Makuudi tuliite "Kasri la Watawa". Ni kasri kwa kimo chake, heba na uzuri uliolistahili. Na ni la Watawa, kwa sababu ya kukimwa kwa waliomo humo, mbali ya mwenyewe Bwana Makuudi aliyejikea kutoka nje kwa kazi tu... (Mohamed 1980: 19).

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We could call Bwana Makuudi's villa the "Palace of Seclusion". It's a "Palace" because of its dimension and beauty. "Of Seclusion", because of the unpleasant living conditions of its inhabitants, other than for Bwana Makuudi who would only leave for his work...

The contamination from the exterior world, personified in this novel by the servants, is the starting point for the novel's dramatic action, involving, primarily, the daughter, Maimuna, and her tragic exploration of real life and freedom. The characterisation of Makuudi's wife, Bi Tamima, is also very interesting. She is subjugated by her husband, and then badly rejected. On Makuudi's pleading her to return, she has the force to refuse him, categorically writing "*sirudi*" (I'm not coming back) in a letter (Mohamed 1980: 108).

In *Utengano*, the utopia of a new society is fulfilled by the young generation, Makuudi's children Mussa and Maimuna, who, following the fall and the redemption of Makuudi, form new families, away from the conflicts generated by male aggressiveness (Aiello 1999: 61).

In *Kiza Katika Nuru* ('The Darkness within the Light', 1988), there is no space for regret.... In this novel the representation of the familial world involves much more anguish, it is darker and dominated by conflict between the father, Bwan Juba, a corrupt, egocentric, cynical officer, and the sons of his first wife, Bi Kudura. This woman is initially totally devoted to her husband, even though he openly prefers his second wife who, being a more socially refined woman, is more in harmony with his world of appearance. Bwan Juba's sons, Mvita and Mbishi, are very hostile towards their despotic father. Mvita hates him because of his way of manipulating power, his being extremely immoral, corrupt and cynical.

As with Zuberi in *Asali Chungu*, we encounter Bwan Juba behind the door of his office, where people – Mvita included – await him for hours and hours, unless, that is, they are rich and influential. The character of Bwan Juba typifies again the predation of economic power by some government officers, this time in the context of 'liberal' reforms, which, instead of meaning a substantial democratisation of the islands, have led to a progressive reduction in public expenditure, thus generating a strong sense of insecurity among Zanzibari lower classes (Crozon 1998: 55).

Mvita is a militant, an idealist, who has started union struggles against Bwan Juba, thus threatening his position of power. Bwan Juba, though, is not frightened, he is prepared to defend the position he got with such effort at any costs, without any consideration for family ties:

Mnaanza kuwa wanafiki na wachochezi. Mnakuwa dhidi yetu; lakini sharti utambue Mvita, mimi sikuipata nafsi hii hivihivi. Nilianza mbali. Nilifikwa na mengi. Mbali na kisomo changu nilichokipata kwa taabu. Nilipata matatizo mengi wakati wa Wazungu, na leo sitakuwa tayari kutiliwa mchanga kitumbua changu bure, tena na kitoto kidogo nilichokizaa mwenyewe. Usidhani nitakaa kimya na kutumbua macho, nawe uwe unanirushia mchanga wa macho – hata ukiwa mwana niliyekuzaa mwenyewe... (Mohamed 1988: 22)

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You have begun as impostors and provokers. You are against us; but you have to understand, Mvita, I didn't get this position easily. I began a long time ago. Lots of things happened to me. Besides my education, which I got with difficulty. I had lots of problems with the Europeans and today I'm not willing to have all this destroyed, especially by a young kid of my own creation. I don't intend to remain in wide-eyed silence, while you throw dust in my eyes – even though you are my own child...

Biological ties do not matter to Bwan Juba and he organises Mvita's murder, accusing his daughter-in-law, Salma, of this. He also sends away his other son, Mbishi, who has hated him profoundly since childhood, when he drew a picture on the wall, showing his father as an ogre, and his first wife, who, thanks to the advice of her friend, Biti Jabu, has started to criticise him without fear. It is, though, these two apparently weak characters who kill the tyrannical Bwan Juba and, metaphorically, his world of darkness.

The pregnancy of Salma, a new generation, “*kizazi kipya*” (Mohamed 1988: 263), is the possibility of light that ends this novel, which is much more pessimistic about the moral and cultural alienation of Zanzibari society and of its leaders, who get legitimacy to their power through the use of mystifying propaganda.

Uhuru una sura gani? Masafa ya uhuru na utumwa labda ni madogo mno, kiasi cha kwamba mtu akiteleza kidogo hurejea katika utumwa. Au wanaotoa uhuru wana uwezo wa kuwazuga wanaowapa uhuru au kuwawekea pazia la udanganyifu mbele yao na kuwaacha wacheze ngoma, waimbe nimbo, wafanye karamu, na kisha wajenge anasa wakidhani wamejigomboa, kumbe... (Mohamed 1988: 149-150).

The distance between Independence and slavery is perhaps too short, to the extent that, if a man slips, even a little, he will return to slavery. Those who offer liberty have the capacity to subjugate those to whom they give that liberty or place before them a veil of deception and let them dance, sing, party, and enjoy life as they believe themselves to be free, and yet...

Alienated families, alienated individuals

Mental slavery and radical materialism; this is also the world that surrounds the main character of *Tata za Asumini* ('Asumini's Turmoils', 1990), a desperate novel, which marks a change in perspective within Mohamed's novels. No more choral works, but images of isolated individuals.

This novel has the form of a psychological journey within the tormented and distressed soul of a girl, Asumini, who is obsessed by the idea of purity, which has been instilled into her by her parents since her childhood in the village, in such a way that she perceives any contact with her body as dirty.

Ulimwengu ulikuwa mchafu unanuka. Ule ulimwengu ambamo Asumini alikuwa akiishi ndani yake; ulimwengu aliokuwa akiishi kila mtu, lakini bado wazee wake wakang'ang'ania kumsuuzwa yeye tu. (Mohamed 1990: 20)

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The world was dirty, it stank. That world in which Asumini lived; the world in which every person lived, but her parents insisted on keeping her, and only her, clean.

Living in the context of a University, she also refuses the vanity, materialism, and culture of appearance which is so wide spread in the big town. Her search for the truth, which she can not share with anyone, inevitably directs her towards self destruction (Brunotti 1998: 43).

The traumatic family experience in this novel is no longer the centre of an elaborate plot, it is only evoked in Asumini's frequent monologues as one of the components of her anguish, her inability to love, to communicate, and to live in this world. This is shown at the end of the novel, when she writes a farewell letter to Sewa, the young man who is in love with her:

Waambie, tafadhali waambie Sewa, nimedhulumiwa. Nimedhulumiwa na baba, nimedhulumiwa na mama, nimedhulumiwa na mazingira yaliyonizunguka tokea utoto: nimedhulumiwa na kila mtu kwa hakika; hata mimi mwenyewe nimejidhulumu kwa namna fulani. Na wewe... na wewe nakuomba, niahidi: niahidi kama hutamdhulumu mtoto wako mwanamke utakayezaa na yeyote. Mimi sifai! Tafadhali mlee vyema mtoto wako wa kike; umfunulie ukweli wa maisha ya ulimwengu, umwoneshe mitigo na hatari itakayomzunguka, hatari za kweli, na wala si zile hatari za mwanamme nilizokaririwa tokea utotoni. Mwambie kwamba hii ni dunia ya vita kwa kila mtu; mume na mke sawia katika vita hivyo. Mpe uhuru autafiti ulimwengu augundue na aishi atakavyoamua...lakini zaidi mwambie apigane dhidi ya sumu ya saykolojia ambayo itamwangamiza kama iliyoniangamiza mimi na wengine na wengine... (Mohamed 1990: 171).

Please, Sewa, tell them, I've been oppressed. I've been oppressed by my father, I've been oppressed by my mother, I've been oppressed by my surroundings since childhood; I've been oppressed by everyone, in truth: even by my own self, in a sense. And you... you... please. Make me a promise: promise me you won't oppress your daughter no matter who the mother is. I'm not the right woman! Please, raise your daughter well; show her the truth about life and the world, show her the traps and dangers that surround her, the real dangers, not just those of men, which I've been bombarded with since I was little. Tell her that this is a world of struggle for everyone; husband and wife are together in this struggle. Give her the freedom to discover the world and to live in it as she likes... but, above all, tell her to fight against the psychological poison which will destroy her as it has destroyed me and many others...

Here again the author highlights the importance of children's upbringing because negative, aggressive behaviour creates frustration, violence and alienation which goes far beyond the family context. It is not, in my view, a sort of psychological determinism, but a consideration that the non-egalitarian nature of power in some social contexts is visible at first in non-respectful interpersonal and parental relations (Constantin 1998: 26).

In Said A. Mohamed's sixth novel, *Babu Alipofufuka* ('When Grandfather Resurrected', 2001), the family life of the main character, K., is no longer the centre of the narrative action, but is very important with regards to the definition of the protagonist's personality, because it emphasises his cynical individualism. Once again, K is a negative father who completely ignores his wife, Bi Kikuba, and his children, Bamkubwa and Kidawa. On the only occasion

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when Bi Kikuba is presented in the novel, before going mad, she cries but her husband does not even look at her. She dares to talk to him because she is worried about their young children who often disappear without saying a word, but the simple, angry answer from K on leaving the home is:

Kila mtu na lake dunia hii... (Mohamed 2001: 67)

Each to his own in this world...

K., once again, is the prototype for the corrupt and immoral African leader who lives a materialistic life with no moral inhibition and exploits the power of his social position. Just like Bwana Maksuudi in the novel *Utengano* - in the scene of his secret phone call to Mr. Smith (Mohamed 1980: 72) -, albeit more openly, K is allied with those local and foreign predators who were his former enemies.

Leo K akiwatazama wale aliokuwa akiwaita mazimwi jana, huona kumbe sura zao zinafanana na yake. Na hilo si leo tu kumbe, tokea zamani! Wao tu akina K walikataa kuwatazama vilivyo hao waliokuwa wakiwaita mazimwi. Sasa amemaizi kwamba macho ya mazimwi ni matafutizi kama yake. Vichwa vyao vijanjunzi kama chake. Nyuso zimechunika haya kama wake. Vifua havipumi wala kupumua huzuni na huruma kama chake. Damu zao nyekundu zimekunywa utashi uleule wa kuhozi na kupangatia pasi na kikomo! Midomo yao haisiti kusema na kuathiri vibayavibaya bongo za wengine...Aliwaona bure mazimwi watu hao zamani. La, hashia si mazimwi. Ni watu. Ni vyumbe vya kawaida vyenye kuitikia utashi na raghba za ndani za kibinadamu. Ule ubinafsi wao uliokuwa ukididimizwa zamani. Ndivyo anavyoona siku hizi K (Mohamed 2001: 12).

Today if K looked at those people he once called ogres, he would realize that they look like him. And this is not only now, but has been so for a long time! The people like K refused to see how those so-called ogres were really made. Now he has realized that the eyes of the ogres are greedy like his. Their heads are full of craftiness like his. Their faces are shameless like his. In their chests there is neither beating nor breathing of sadness and compassion, just like in his. Their red blood is imbued with the endless desire for possession and unscrupulous accumulation! Their mouths do not hesitate to speak and poison the minds of others... Once he considered these people to be ogres, but for no reason. No, they are not ogres at all. They are human beings. They are normal creatures showing the voracity and greed of the human heart. That individualism that once was hidden. This is how K sees things nowadays.

K is totally isolated from the rest of society as he lives in segregated, luxurious spaces such as his palace, his limousine, his office, his lover's house and the Neo-Casino where he meets his perverted companions, without any moral consideration or any real human contact, in a dimension of cultural and spiritual alienation. His individualism and isolation metaphorically represent the sometimes dramatic distance between the majority of Zanzibari population and their leaders, veiled by the liberal propaganda which especially since the 1990s has encouraged the private initiative to face the progressive retrieval from social obligations (Crozon 1998: 59).

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The disturbing element in this work is not represented by a human being, because all the characters in the novel are either totally cynical or lost and distressed, especially K's relatives. It is rather the spirit of K.'s grandfather, who warns him about his immoral, materialistic, inhuman way of life. A family character from the past, who shocks K., who lives from day to day thinking only about his personal gratification, by forcing him to look beyond his sunglasses and the dark windows of his limousine, and to remember where he comes from. The ghost takes K on a journey, visiting 'Kataa', the world of his childhood, characterised by the dominion of an Arab landowner, a horrible but also fascinating figure for the young K., and 'Amani', the present world, where common people are completely unaware of their material and spiritual misery (Zúbková Bertoncini 2002 : 29). It is a journey in search of memory and criticism at the end of which the main character discovers that he is inexorably rejected by his previous life, losing his job, his privileges, his family, his "friends" and his lover. Shortly after being taken to his native village by the only servant who remains faithful to him, he hangs himself in order to come back to life as a spirit and to warn his children, who live in a desperate social, economic, and cultural situation. Initially, when he materialises, they are upset by the despised image of their father, but do not believe in apparitions or spirits, and refuse any contact with him. When he tries to talk to them, his son shouts:

Bull shit! Wewe unafanana na baba yetu. Unazungumza lugha ileile yake ya mahubiri... tuondokee hapa kabla hatujaingia hasira za kumbukizi za baba yetu... ingawa twajua aliyekufa hafufuki. (Mohamed 2001: 167)

Bull shit! You look like our father. You talk in the same way, as if you were giving a lecture... better we leave before we feel anger over the memories of our father... although we know that someone who dies can not come back to life.

While in *Kiza Katika Nuru* the young generation (the sensitive Salma, the idealist Mvita, the angry Mbishi) is still capable of feeling rebellion and hope, in this novel, Bamkubwa and Kidawa, K.'s children, are totally exhausted, not willing to think about the past and incredulous about a better world: it will be very difficult for K to break this wall down.

Conclusion

The collapse of a family is a key element in Said A. Mohamed's novels. In all his production up until the 1980s, it was actually the core of the plot, whilst, in his later prose, the decay of family life is the context for alienated individuals.

Said A. Mohamed, in my reading of his narrative works, has constantly elaborated the image of the family as a symbolic medium in order to depict and to analyse Zanzibari society. The writer, in his novels, investigates family dynamics, using them to represent the clashes between classes, between genders and between different generations. Moreover, by presenting us with a series of despotic fathers who are often also leaders or public officers, the author symbolically criticises the dark side of power (colonial cultural heritage, domination, violence, control, predation of economy, propaganda), whose dismissal would accelerate the process of democratisation in the contemporary, 'liberal' Zanzibari society.

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