

## KAZIMOTO AND MEURSAULT: “BROTHERS” IN DESPAIR AND LONELINESS. COMPARING KEZILAHABI’S *KICHWAMAJI* AND CAMUS’ *L’ETRANGER*

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Makala haya yanashughulikia maswali ya udhanaishi katika fasihi ya Kiswahili. Makala yanalinganisha riwaya mbili, *Mgeni* ya mwandishi wa Kifaransa anayeitwa Albert Camus na *Kichwamaji* ya mwandishi wa Kiswahili, Euphrase Kezilahabi, na kuonyesha jinsi riwaya hizo zinavyofanana na zinavyotofautiana. Kwa vile *Kichwamaji* inafanana na *Mgeni*, ni sahihi kumwita Kezilahabi mwandishi ya udhanaishi, lakini kuna tofauti nyingi pia baina ya riwaya hizo mbili. Tofauti moja ni kwamba Camus anamtazama mtu peke yake na hali yake iliyotengwa kabisa na watu wengine, na Kezilahabi, licha ya mtu peke yake, anaizingatia jamii nzima na hali yake vilevile. Tofauti hii ni tokeo la sifa za *communalism* katika mawazo ya Kiafrika ya kimapokeo yanayotilia mkazo jamaa na jamii, siyo mtu peke yake.

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### 1. Introduction

Existentialism is one of the most influential philosophical traditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the first time, Gabriel Marcel used this label in the early 1940’s for ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Later, it was widened to a number of Sartre’s contemporaries (Albert Camus, Marcel himself, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, occasionally Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) and to earlier philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and even Søren Kierkegaard or Friedrich Nietzsche.

But existentialism was not a strictly philosophical issue. Both Albert Camus and Gabriel Marcel had never been professional or academic philosophers. The question of human life and its meaning was reflected not only in philosophical tracts, but also in essays, plays, novellas, novels and in cinematography and art as well.

Due to this wide range, existentialism was so influential for more than a quarter of a century. At a glance it could seem that the influence of existentialism was limited to the Francophone and Germanophone world. But this would be a very simplified view because many other Western European, American and even Eastern European thinkers and artists may be seen as inspired by thoughts of existentialism, e.g. Spanish writers and philosophers such as José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno, the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun, absurdist theatre writers such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco (both French but their origin is Irish and Romanian respectively), Edward Albee or Harold Pinter, the Russian philosophers Nikolay Berdyaev and Lev Shestov, the Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman or the American abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky or Willem de Kooning.

What is very interesting and maybe surprising is that we can find some aspects of existentialist thought also in the very different cultural space of Eastern Africa - in Swahili literature. Actually it is not so surprising, because the basic existentialist themes like happiness,

solitude, emptiness, alienation or death and life are undoubtedly universal themes discussed all over the world.

For the purposes of my article I don't intend to ask the question whether Kezilahabi's early novel *Kichwamaji* (Hydrocephalus, 1974) is the only existentialist novel in Swahili literature (Bertoncini 2001: 245) or whether it was only the first pioneer of existentialism in Swahili (or African) literature which was later followed by several other existentialist or existentialism-inspired novels or novellas (Diegner 2005, Rettová 2006a). But I suppose that all of these three critics would agree with the statement that *Kichwamaji* was the first expression of existentialism in Swahili literature. Kezilahabi himself admitted the influence of the existentialist tradition in his novels; as a student he had read many works by authors such Samuel Beckett or Albert Camus (Bertoncini 1989: 108).

In my paper I would like to analyze the elements of existentialism in the novel *Kichwamaji* by comparing novels of Albert Camus and Euphrase Kezilahabi, or better to say, by comparing its main characters, Kazimoto and Meursault.

## 2. Existentialism

In the beginning we should briefly discuss some crucial points of existentialism, which is above all a critical reaction to the dominant philosophical tradition of metaphysics.

Metaphysics is thought which operates with a reference to a transcendent entity in its understanding of reality: to the essence, which determines what the existing being is like. The immanent, existing being is a *mere manifestation* of the essence and can be fully *reduced* to it. To this belief, Sartre opposes his famous dictum: *existence precedes essence*. Existentialism strives to re-evaluate the present, immanent being as it is, excluding references to a transcendent level. (Rettová 2006a)

Writers labelled as existentialists<sup>1</sup> deny this reduction of being to its essence and use the term *existence* to express the specificity of a human being's life.

Only in the case of human beings is the conduct of their life an "issue" for them; only they can "stand out" [...] from their lives and reflect upon them; and only they have the capacity freely to shape their lives. (Cooper 2002)

In Sartre's terms, while other entities exist in themselves (*être en soi*), human reality is also for itself (*être pour soi*). The human being simply exists ("thrown into the world" in Heidegger's words) and what it is is nothing else but the consequence of his/her own acts. Thus - using Sartre's famous phrase, *existence precedes essence* - each person has the freedom to make him-/herself on his/her own. But his/her attitude to this freedom of choice can be different. His/her acts, such as moral acts, are authentic if he/she acts in that way because it is his/her choice, because it is something to which he/she commits him-/herself. Conversely, his/her acts are inauthentic if he/she does something because moral people usually do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> We should keep in mind that many of the so-called existentialist writers rejected this label, including Albert Camus himself, especially after his philosophical and political breakup with Sartre in the 1950s.

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In both cases I have succeeded in being good, [but only in the former case have I] succeeded in being *myself*. [...] [Authenticity is the] recognition that I am a being who *can be* responsible for who I am. (Crowell 2004: 2.3)

Authenticity is a mark of my freedom of choice. Choice is an important aspect of existentialist, specifically Sartre's philosophy. There is no *a priori* human essence; I am continually defining myself through my acts. I'm acting in the manner in which I actually want to act and by these acts I'm defining myself not only for this moment, but also into the future. I'm creating my image through my choice and I'm responsible for it. Whatever my choice is I am responsible for its results. And it is not possible to avoid the choice because no choice is also a choice (Sartre 2001: 63). Thus, I'm condemned to live in freedom and this is one of the unavoidable facts of human existence (Janke 1994: 131).

I'm condemned, because I haven't created myself, but nevertheless I live in freedom, because being thrown into the world, I'm responsible for everything that I do.<sup>2</sup> (Sartre 2001: 39f)

This experience of living in freedom leads me to the state called anxiety (*Angst, angoisse*). Without any solid support that would lead me in my life, I realize my vulnerability. And because I feel vulnerable although there is no concrete reason for this vulnerability, this anxiety can also be called loneliness or isolation. Being deprived of natural societal relations I feel isolated from the milieu around me, I feel alienated. I realize the everyday stereotype activity that is wasting my time; I realize the void and nothingness of my life. I realize that I don't know the meaning of this world, I don't even know whether this world has any meaning that transcends me, but even if there were any meaning of the world, I realize I am incapable of identifying it (Monnier 1953: 71). My life thus seems to be without any meaning and my existence to be absurd. I start to be aware of the ultimate nothingness of my practical identity, to be aware of death.

Because my practical identity is constituted by the practices I engage in, when these collapse I "am" not anything. In a manner of speaking I am thus brought face-to-face with my own finitude, my "death" as the possibility in which I am no longer able to *be* anything. (Crowell 2004: 3.1)

As we will see, death is a recurring theme in both compared novels and also one of the crucial themes for most of the existentialist philosophers. Martin Heidegger's fundamental analysis of *Dasein* (human being's existence) points to temporality as its primordial meaning, i.e. human being is there to die. Therefore it is true that:

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of our topic we should note that Camus didn't wholly accept this assumption of Sartre's of *man being "thrown into the world" and projecting himself in his life without any predestination*. This is the reason why Camus is sometimes labelled as a philosopher of absurdity in contrast with Sartre as a philosopher of existence. But the main question of life and its meaning is the same for both authors. Eva Berankova in her epilogue to the Czech publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* assumes that Camus' absurdity is a feeling "not dissimilar" to Sartre's nausea (Camus 2006: 138).

A fundamental element of existentialist philosophy is the assumption that the inevitability of death is the human being's biggest intellectual and moral challenge. (Diegner 2005: 29)<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Existentialism in fiction

Now let us examine existentialist thought in fiction. I have already mentioned that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) can be seen as a predecessor of the French existentialist tradition in fiction but we had better call him a writer of existentialist humanism. He questions the meaning of life, but his way out is a little different than in the case of other existentialist writers. His humanistic position leads him to a heroic conception of life. The meaning of life lies in the heroic help to other people, one should sacrifice oneself for others or for some task that one took on oneself on behalf of mankind and human civilisation.

French existentialist tradition in fiction is represented mainly by two writers, both of them holders of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980; in fact, Sartre rejected the Nobel Prize) and Albert Camus (1913-1961) both concentrate on the state of anxiety and on people's reaction to this state. Although we live in freedom, we are bound in our existence (whether literally or metaphorically, e.g. by the closed gates of the town during the plague epidemics in *La Peste* for the former and the madness of *Caligula* for the latter, Monnier 1953: 74) in a world without any values.

What reigns is the absurdity presented as complete indifference. We are supposed to take the state of anxiety as a moral challenge (Monnier 1953: 72) to act, to make a choice and to take up responsibility for this choice. Contrary to this,

[the characters of Camus' novels or plays are] people indulging in some form or other of bad faith, [...] [for example] identifying too completely and mechanically with some fixed role that absolves them from having to face up to decisions, or surrendering to and then living up to images of themselves dictated by other people. (Cooper 2002)

Suicide seems to be the only logic way out of this state. But Camus strongly rejects this idea: to commit suicide is to succumb to the absurdity of my life, to confirm that I am incapable of living my life as it is. To support this idea he uses the analogy with Sisyphos: the stone we are rolling up to the mountain is falling down again and again; although we know it we are obliged not to stop rolling it. If we want to keep our dignity, we have to live our lives whatever they are like. The revolt against absurdity of life lies in its acceptance: we have to imagine Sisyphos as a happy person (see Camus 2006).

### 4. Albert Camus – *L'Etranger* and other works

One of Camus' characters is Meursault from his novel *L'Etranger* (The Stranger). He lives his everyday stereotypical life of an officer but one day everything dramatically changes. He,

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<sup>3</sup> For more details about existentialism cf. Ballestrem-Ottmann 1993, Janke 1994, Petříček 1997, Novozámská 1998.

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his girlfriend and his neighbour Raymond are invited to spend a weekday at the seaside where they meet two young Arab men. One of them is a brother of Raymond's former girlfriend. In a quarrel that starts between them he cuts Raymond in his face. Raymond pulls a revolver out of his pocket, but Meursault persuades him not to use it. Finally it is himself who has the revolver in hands. Few moments later he is also confronted with the Arab young man having a knife in his hand. Blinded by sharp sunshine he pulls the trigger and shoots his rival. Once, twice ... five times.

Meursault is arrested, accused of murdering the Arab young man and sentenced to death. He is sentenced to death because of being a murderer, but he is also sentenced to death due to his way of life. In the dichotomy natural vs. social he represents the former. And as he struggles to keep his identity, his personality comes in conflict with the norms of society, the society that he considers being intellectually empty and full of pretence. He seems to be unable to adapt to the surrounding society, but his problem is unwillingness to adapt rather than inability.

He is seen as not recognizing the common human values and as an indifferent person. It seems that his mother's death doesn't interest him at all: he did not know how old she was, he did not want to see her in the mortuary, he did not contemplate in the mortuary, he did not cry during the burial, he left the asylum where his mother lived just after the burial, he started a new relationship only one day after his mother's burial (Camus 1997a: 136).

As every absurd character he lives for the present and is unable to project himself into the future; he also denies the past and is unable to show even a single sign of remorse. This inevitably leads to the situation that all the people see him as a cold-blooded murderer. This is the image given to him by the society. His human characteristics such as veracity and rational conduct are neglected.

The figure of Meursault is highly ambivalent and we cannot see him in terms of the simple dichotomy of innocence and guilt. Drawn into other peoples' quarrel, he involuntarily shot dead a man. The capital punishment thus reflects the inescapable absurdity of life. Several days before execution, Meursault is sitting in his prison cell and thinking about this absurdity in which a human being's rationality is confronted with the world's anarchy, chaos and fortuitous character.

To sum up, the crucial question of existentialism is the question of death. The plot of *L'Etranger* turns around three moments: the mother's death, the murder of the young Arab man and the forthcoming execution of the main character.

*L'Etranger* was the first published novel by Camus<sup>4</sup> and set the pattern for several following works of this author. Two years later he published two of his plays, *Le Malentendu* (Misunderstanding) and *Caligula*. The main characters of the former are a mother and her daughter

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<sup>4</sup> His first novel, *La mort heureuse* (The happy death), was written in the middle of 1930's, but it was only published posthumously in 1971.

running a hotel in a small town somewhere in Bohemia. They long for a house at the seaside and their way to fulfil this wish is brutal: they kill the guests and throw their bodies into a river. The last victim is Jan, their son and brother respectively. He left the country almost twenty years ago and now he decides to return back and visit his mother and sister. He does not know what to say to his mother, so he rents a room in her hotel. Before he succeeds in finding the right words, he is killed. In the morning his identity is revealed and his mother throws herself into the river, followed by her daughter. In the latter play, the Roman emperor Caligula is confronted with the loss of values after his lover dies. He realizes the meaninglessness of his life and decides to exploit his position of emperor to change the political order of his empire, the moral order of the society and finally the world order in the name of absolute freedom. But he ceases to see the difference between the good and the bad and becomes a murdering tyrant. Eventually, he dies after people who do not share his visions conspire against him.

*Caligula* may be seen as a transition between the early period of “Camus the absurd” and the later period of “Camus the revolting”, represented mainly by his novel *La Peste* (The Plague) and his play *L’Etat de Siège* (The State of Siege). Both of these works deal with plague epidemics and present an atypical main character for Camus who rejects to submit to the reality of epidemics or even to take refuge from it. In the former Dr. Bernard Rieux fully concentrates on one aim that is to prepare an effective serum and stop the epidemics, while in the latter Diego lies down his life in a revolt against the reign of a metaphorical emperor called “Plague”.<sup>5</sup> The self-sacrifice of both characters is an act of interpersonal solidarity, which can be seen as an example of revolt against the absurdity of life.

In his final creative period (*La Chute*, The Fall, and *L’Exil et le Royaume*, The Exile and the Kingdom) Camus returns to the position of passively accepting the life as it is. The “exile” from the title of the latter work symbolizes the well-known feelings of isolation, alienation and deprivation of a person in the modern world, in other words the everyday reality of human life, while the “kingdom” refers to an ideal and final objective of unity between the human being and all around him/her of which he/she had been hitherto deprived.

## 5. Camus and Kezilahabi: Similarities

After a brief analysis of Camus’ literary works and existentialist thought in general we should discuss Kezilahabi’s famous novel called *Kichwamaji*<sup>6</sup> and compare it with Camus’ crucial novel *L’Etranger*. Kazimoto, the main character of this novel, is a university student of the teaching profession. He unsuccessfully seeks a temporary job at the bureau of a district officer so he decides to spend the holidays in his native village. But there is more sorrow than joy in

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<sup>5</sup> The radical humanist position in this “revolting” period is close to the position of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

<sup>6</sup> In my paper I analyze only *Kichwamaji* which is the first existentialist novel in Swahili literature. For analysis of other Kezilahabi’s novels and novellas, see Bertoncini 1989, Bertoncini 2001, Diegner 2005, Garnier 2006 or Rettová 2004.

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his parents' household. His sister Rukia is pregnant and she is not doing very well. Finally she dies, followed by her mother few days later, who was filled with sadness from losing her only daughter. Kazimoto wants to revenge his sister and mother. The origin of all the evil is known: it is Manase, his former colleague from school who raped Rukia. But he does not live in the village anymore, so Kazimoto decides to revenge on his family. Firstly he sets the hut of Manase's father on fire. Then he tries to seduce his sister Sabina. He succeeds, but in the process he falls in love with her and finally they get married. In a few months' time his wife is also pregnant, but their child is still-born. Later Kazimoto finds out that it was not only an accident: by sleeping with a prostitute he infected himself and his wife with Hydrocephalus, which causes children to have big heads.<sup>7</sup> Unable to bear his guilt, he commits suicide.

Early novels and novellas of Kezilahabi focus on Tanzanian society, which is a place of strong social tensions. In *Kichwamaji*, the key feature is a process of de-socialisation of the main character (Garnier 2006: 102). Kazimoto absorbed the "city culture" influenced by western culture during his university studies and becomes therefore more and more alienated from his family. He is bothered by his mother's care and by his father's advice, although they only do the same what their own parents did. The gap between the generations is widening and starts to be insurmountable.

*Mama aliingia mikono nyuma kama mtu aendaye kilioni.*

*"Ulikuwa wapi?" aniliuliza kwa upole.*

*Mimi nilinyamaza kwa sababu mara nyingi nilikuwa nimemwambia asiniulize swali kama hilo.*

*"Kazimoto, ulikuwa wapi kwa muda wa siku mbili zilizopita? Uliondoka bila kutuarifu na kurudi kwenyewe unarudi usiku wa manane. Umezaliwa, Kazimoto, na kuna watu wanaokujali."*

*"Unataka nini?" nilimwambia.*

*"Kazimoto, fahamu kwamba mimi ninakupenda sana, huwezi kuondoka bila kuni-pasha habari. Ungeuawa je – tungemshuku nani?"*

*"Mapenzi ya kitoto namna hiyo mimi siyapendi. Kila siku niondokapo nyumbani unaniuliza 'Unakwenda wapi?'. Mimi nimekwisha kuwa mtu mzima sasa, na sitaki wewe uwe unafahamu njia zangu zote."* (Kezilahabi 1974: 72f)

Mother entered to my room with hands behind her back, like someone coming to a mourning ceremony.

"Where were you?" she asked me politely.

I was silent. I had asked her many times not to pose me such questions.

"Kazimoto, where were you the last two days? You left the house without a word and you come back in the middle of the night. You don't live alone, Kazimoto, we were afraid!"

"What do you want?" I asked her.

"Kazimoto, you should understand that I love you very much. You can't leave the house without letting me know. If someone killed you, we wouldn't know who to blame!"

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<sup>7</sup> For a more profound and erudite explanation of Hydrocephalus see Rettová (2006a).

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“I don’t like this kind of motherly love. Every day when I leave the house, you ask me: ‘Where are you going?’ I’m not a child anymore and I don’t want you to know everywhere I go.”

The same alienation between the main character and his mother can be found in *L’Etranger*.

*Il a consulté un dossier et m’a dit : « Mme Meursault est entrée ici il y a trois ans. Vous étiez son seul soutien. » J’ai cru qu’il me reprochait quelque chose et j’ai commencé à lui expliquer. Mais il m’a interrompu : « Vous n’avez pas à vous justifier, mon cher enfant. J’ai lu le dossier de votre mère. Vous ne pouviez subvenir à son besoin. Il lui fallait une garde. Vos salaires sont modestes. Et tout compte fait, elle était plus heureuse ici. » J’ai dit : « Oui, monsieur le Directeur. » Il a ajouté : « [...] Vous êtes jeune et elle devait s’ennuyer avec vous. »*

*C’était vrai. Quand elle était à la maison, maman passait son temps à me suivre des yeux en silence. Dans les premiers jours où elle était à l’asile, elle pleurait souvent. Mais c’était à cause de l’habitude. Au bout de quelques mois, elle aurait pleuré si on l’avait retirée de l’asile. Toujours à cause de l’habitude. C’est un peu pour cela que dans la dernière année je n’y suis presque plus allé. Et aussi parce que cela me prenait mon dimanche. (Camus 1997a: 8)*

He looked into his papers and said: “Mrs. Meursault came here three years ago. You were her sole support.” I thought he wanted to blame me for something, so I started to explain my situation to him. He interrupted me: “You don’t have to justify yourself, my son. I have read your mother’s papers. It would be difficult for you to provide for all her needs with your poor salary. Your mother needed a nurse and I think that it was better for her to stay here in the asylum.” I said: “Yes, Sir. Director.” He added: “[...] you are still young and she would be bored with you.”

It was true. When she was still at home, she spent all her time by silently watching me. During the first days in the asylum she often cried. But it was a matter of habit. After several months she would cry if we took her from the asylum. Again: a matter of habit. Last year I visited my mum in the asylum very rarely and this might have been the reason. Another reason was that it would have taken me the whole Sunday to visit her.

Despite of the very different situation, there are some similarities in the behaviour of Kazimoto and Meursault. Without any doubt both of them love their mothers, but this love lies beyond the actually stronger feeling of misunderstanding between mother and son. Very probably this feeling comes from the lack of communication or failure in communication in the family (for the most evident case of this see Camus 2001). Unfortunately the family is not the only place of failure in communication and misunderstanding, the same can be said about the society as a whole. One of the clearest examples of this is a conversation between Kazimoto and a group of old men during a feast:

*“Kumbe wewe umesoma sana,” yule mzee aliniambia. “Sijui kama utaweza kunieleza jambo hili: uhuru tumekwisha kupata. Zamani mkoloni alikuwa akitengeza pesa kidogo kwa sababu alikuwa hataki tuendeleo [...] Susu uhuru tumepata. Kwa nini Serikali haiwezi kutengeneza pesa nyingi sana kila mtu awe tajiri?”*

*Lilikuwa swali gumu la uchumi [...] Uchumi nilikuwa sijui lakini ili kutunza heshima yangu ya elimu nilijitahidi kuwaeleza. [...] Niliona kwamba walikuwa hawaelewi. [...]*

*Mzee mwingine aliniuliza, “Swali la pesa tuliweke pembeni. Mimi nitafurahi sana kama utaweza kunieleza kwa nini mwezi unapoonekana ni mdogo na unapoota*



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*unakuwa mkubwa na mwekundu.*”

*Hapo nilipashwa kukiri kwamba nilikuwa sijui. Niliwaambia kwamba nilikuwa sijifunzi somo hilo na kwamba somo hilo liliitwa Jiografia. Niliposema hivyo tu wazee hawakuwa na shauku tena ya kuniuliza maswali. Hawakuona tofauti kubwa kati yangu na wao. (Kezilahabi 1974: 58-59)*

“You have studied a lot!” this old man said to me. “I don’t know if you will be able to explain this to me: we have reached independence. In the past, the colonist only produced little money because he didn’t want us to develop. Now we have reached independence. Why can’t the government produce a lot of money so that every citizen could be rich?”

This was a very difficult economic question. [...] I didn’t study economy, but I wanted to keep my dignity of an educated man so I tried to explain it to them. [...] I saw that they didn’t understand. [...]

Another old man asked me, “Let’s leave economic questions. I would appreciate if you explain to me this: why is it that when the Moon first appears, it is small, and when it waxes, it becomes big and red?”

I had to admit I didn’t know. I told them that I didn’t study these questions. This was the subject of geography. As I said this, the old men lost their interest to ask me any more questions. They didn’t see any difference between them and me.

Imagine the situation: a young university student discusses with a group of old uneducated men about life. They consider him to be omniscient and when this utopian image fails, they almost mock his “education”. The young man must inevitably feel as a misfit in his native village.<sup>8</sup> At this moment we return to the basic existentialist feeling of alienation and isolation. Inevitably, Kazimoto starts to contemplate about his family, his native village, and his life. The more he contemplates about these issues the deeper he falls into indifference towards common family and village problems and concentrates on his personal issues with girlfriend(s) and comrades. We can compare it with Meursault and his feeling of alienation and isolation.

*On lui a demandé [le directeur de l’ asile devant le court] si maman se plaignait de moi et il a dit que oui mais que c’était un peu la manie de ses pensionnaires de se plaindre de leur proches. Le président lui a fait préciser si elle me reprochait de l’avoir mise à l’asile et le directeur a dit encore oui. Mais cette fois, il n’a rien ajouté. [...]*

*Le concierge [...] a répondu aux questions qu’on lui posait. Il a dit que je n’avais pas voulu voir maman, que j’avais fumé, que j’avais dormi et que j’avais pris du café au lait. J’ai senti alors quelque chose qui soulevait toute la salle et, pour la première fois, j’ai compris que j’étais coupable. On a fait répéter au concierge l’histoire du café au lait et celle de la cigarette. [...] « Je sais bien que j’ai eu tort. Mais je n’ai pas osé refuser la cigarette que Monsieur m’a offerte. » [...]*

*[Le procureur a dit :] « Messieurs les jurés, le lendemain de la mort de sa mère, cet homme prenait des bains, commençait une liaison irrégulière, et allait rire devant un film comique. Je n’ai rien de plus à vous dire. » [...]*

*« Oui, [le procureur a écrit], j’accuse cet homme d’avoir enterré une mère avec*

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<sup>8</sup> Elena Bertocini (2001: 245) translates the title ‘Kichwamaji’ as “Misfit”, the title of the Italian translation of this novel is the same. Lutz Diegner (2002: 3) presents other possible translations of the title such as “Empty-head”, “Idiot” or “Wrong-headed (mind)”. These are metaphorical meanings of the title. I agree with Alena Rettová (2006a) who recommends sticking to the literal meaning (i.e., hydrocephalus) in translating the title.

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*un coeur de criminel.* » Cette déclaration a paru faire un effet considérable sur le public. (Camus 1997 a: 136, 138, 144, 148)

They asked him [the director of the asylum during the trial] whether my mum complained about me and he answered that it was so, but he added that it was almost a mania of his pensioners to complain about their relatives. The judge wanted him to state precisely whether my mum complained about me because I had put her in the asylum. The director agreed once again but this time he didn't add anything. [...]

The custodian answered all the questions he was asked. He said that I hadn't wanted to see my mum and that I had been smoking, sleeping and drinking coffee with milk. At this moment I noticed some unrest in the hall and for the first time I realized that I was guilty. They wanted the custodian to repeat the story of coffee and milk and cigarette once again. [...] "I know it was a mistake on my part. But I didn't dare to refuse the cigarette I was offered by Mr. Meursault." [...]

[The prosecutor said:] "Dear jurymen, one day after the death of his mother this man visited the bath, started a relationship with a girl and went to the cinema to watch a comedy. I have nothing more to say." [...]

"Yes, [the prosecutor raised his voice] I accuse this man that he buried his mom with the heart of a criminal." It seemed that this declaration had a very profound effect on the public.

It does not matter whether Meursault killed the young Arab involuntarily or whether he had planned it. What is more important for the prosecutor and subsequently for the jurymen and all the people is his behaviour during and after his mother's death. His mother was old and ill so he put her in the asylum, which was undoubtedly the best solution for both. Her death was a predictable event and Meursault takes it without emotions. He smokes a cigarette because he is a smoker, he offers a cigarette to the custodian because of his politeness and he drinks a cup of coffee because he is tired in such a hot day. Many others would do the same. But for the prosecutor this is a sign of Meursault's bad and "criminal" character. By his speech he succeeds to persuade not only the judge, the jury and the visitors, but even Meursault himself of his guilt. Meursault is unable to defend himself and passively accepts the image of an asocial cold-blooded murderer, which is given to him by others.

The gap between him and society is of another kind than in the case of Kazimoto, but the gap already exists and as neither side takes steps to reduce it, it is only deepening. Eventually, we can find Meursault in the same situation as Kazimoto: he is indifferent towards society and concentrates on his personal issues with his girlfriend and friends.

One of the main hypotheses of the existential philosophy of German philosopher Karl Jaspers is that the experience of "boundary (or limiting) situations" is an unavoidable condition of human existence. Experiencing and overcoming them in the right way provides a basic opportunity to realize the meaning of life. Death, suffering, struggling, or guilt – all of these situations are described by Jaspers as boundary situations.

Both characters find themselves in these situations, but they don't succeed to overcome them. Meursault is incapable to do so, because he resigns to deal with these situations openly. Kazimoto tries to do so, but he is greatly unsuccessful. Their inability to live or observe so-

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cietal mores and morals is also a kind of boundary situation for them with which they are confronted and which they try to overcome – of course unsuccessfully. They don't see any meaning of life – and we already know how their stories end...

### 6. Camus and Kezilahabi: Differences

In the previous chapter we have seen that the position of both characters in society and their perception of this position are very similar. There are many other similarities between Meursault and Kazimoto (for example their publicly declared rejection of God)<sup>9</sup>, but we can find also some differences in comparing these two characters. We have already mentioned that in the dichotomy natural vs. social Meursault represents the former. He prefers his personality and identity regardless of other people, which causes the above discussed conflict. Meursault lives for the present, denies the past and doesn't plan the future.

But the same cannot be said about Kazimoto. His favourite younger brother Kalia used to accompany him on his night trips to girlfriends and he was also a messenger between them. But his frustration from his inability to find a girlfriend, contrasting with several relationships of his brother, led him to become a rapist. When he is revealed, he is expelled from the village and later he is found dead. The death of his younger brother leads Kazimoto to reflect profoundly on the past and on his own and his brother's previous life. He realizes that Kalia took over the manners of his older brother, with the only, but important, exception that he didn't have a girlfriend.<sup>10</sup> Finally, such reflections make Kazimoto feel guilty of his brother's death.

*Huo ndio ulikuwa mwisho wa nunda mla watu. Mwisho wake uliendelea kunisumbua moyoni; kifo chake kilihusika sana na matendo yangu. Ilikuwa kama kwamba mimi mwenyewe nilimwua mdogo wangu. (Kezilahabi 1974: 127-128)*

So this was the end of the man-eating beast. His end continued to bother me; his death was connected with some of my actions. It was as if I had myself killed my younger brother.

Later, he is confronted with the death of his child and when he discovers the real cause of this death, he also feels guilty for this. Reflections on this event and remorse lead Kazimoto to commit suicide.

The same difference between both characters is in their attitudes toward the future. Meursault seems to be satisfied with his stereotypical life of a clerk (or maybe he is not satisfied, but he is firmly caught in this stereotype), to live day by day and to have resigned to plan his future. Kazimoto contrariwise plans his future in detail: to revenge his raped sister, to finish university, to have a job as a teacher, to marry, to have children... If we read the letter he had

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<sup>9</sup> Both Camus and Kezilahabi represent the atheistic branch of existentialism based on Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation of the "death of God". Theological existentialists such as Søren Kierkegaard or Gabriel Marcel conceive the fundamental existentialist question as man's relationship to God.

<sup>10</sup> Of course there is a second exception that Kazimoto was not a rapist, but in the case of Kalia it was a consequence of his inability to have a girlfriend.

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written before he shot himself, we will see another reflection on the future (concerning not only Kazimoto but the whole mankind).

*Siwezi kuendelea kuzaa kizazi kibaya.* (Kezilahabi 1974: 217)

I can't continue to breed such a damaged generation.

The question of planning the future is very closely connected with the question of adaptation to the society. While Meursault is unwilling to live according to some generally accepted norms contrasting with his ideas of life, Kazimoto wants to live in accordance with society but he doubts whether society wants to live in accordance with him. We would say that the dichotomy natural vs. social is in both novels inverse. Meursault is a natural man living among social people, while Kazimoto is a social man living among natural people – in the sense of dichotomy between the traditional Christian-animist society of East African mainland and a university educated man.

The gap between natural and social is in both cases the same and for both characters is in the same way insurmountable. Meursault realizes this very well – and he does not try to live “socially” and passively accepts his life as it is. Kazimoto also realizes this very well – and he tries to live “socially” (that is in the traditional way of life) but he comes to a conclusion that he is not able to live “socially” anymore. He becomes a teacher in a town – which may be seen as an escape from his native village. But very soon he comes to the fatal conclusion that such escape is not possible. Thus, he insistently seeks the meaning of life and often comes to the conclusion that it is a useless burden: the sooner we are rid of it the better (Bertoncini 1989: 116). So he decides to commit suicide – which is a substantially different position than Meursault's indifference prior to his execution (in *Kichwamaji*, it is rather Manase and his wife Salima who fall into this state of indifference, Kezilahabi 1974: 203-204).

### 7. European Individualism and African Communalism

Finally, I would like to discuss the main feature of existentialism in both novels - the main characters' reflections on life. Eva Berankova states in her epilogue to the Czech publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* that existentialism turns to concrete problems which are being solved by concrete people in a concrete situation and that it wants to describe the existence of a single being in its antagonism and internal contradiction (Camus 2006: 134). This is undoubtedly true for Meursault who cares above all for himself.

*Que m'importaient la mort des autres, l'amour d'une mère, que m'importaient son Dieu, les vies qu'on choisit, les destins qu'on élit.* (Camus 1997a: 186)

Why should I care for the death of others, for the love of a mother, why should I care for God, for the lives and destinies that people have chosen?

But we cannot say the same about Kazimoto.

*Juu ya jiwe niliona kibwawa kidogo cha maji. Ndani ya maji haya niliona nyuki ameanguka akiogelea. Nilijongea karibu. Mwanzoni nilifurahi kumwona huyu mdudu akipigania maisha. Lakini baada ya muda mfupi nyuki alikata tamaa. Nguvu zlimwishia. Alisambaza mbawa zake, miguu yake ilianza kupiga pole pole*

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*kama mtu anayekata roho. Huruma iliniingia moyoni. Niliona kwamba nilikuwa na uwezo wa kuokoa maisha yake kwa tendo moja dogo tu ambalo lilikuwa hali-hitaji hata tone moja la jasho. Nilijiona mungu mdogo. [...]*

*Nilichukua kijiti kidogo sana ambacho kwacho nilimtoa yule nyuki majini. Mbawa zake zilipokauka aliruka bila kusema asante. Aliruka bila hata kufahamu nani amemwokoa. Kwa huyu mdudu nilikuwa na nguvu ambazo haziwezi kufahamika. (Kezilahabi 1974: 88)*

I saw a small pool of water on the stone. In the water I saw a bee, which had fallen there and was swimming. I moved towards the pool. At first, I enjoyed seeing this insect to fight for life. But after a short time the bee was so weakened that it lost hope. It spread its wings and its legs moved slowly like a man who is dying. I started to feel compassion. I realized that I had the ability to save the life of this bee by one simple act, which didn't require even one drop of sweat. I felt like a little god. [...]

I took a small stick and pulled the bee up from the pool. When its wings dried up, the bee flew away without saying thank you. It flew away and it didn't even know by whom it had been saved. For this insect I had a power, which was not understandable.

Kazimoto reflects on the question of life in its full scope: he searches for the meaning of his life or the lives of other members of his family, he deals with questions about next generations and mankind in general, and, as Alena Rettová (2006a) observes, he also contemplates a slaughtered cow, a drowning bee (extract above) or a lizard's tail cut-off.

By comparing both novels we can state that Kezilahabi doesn't strictly concentrate on the existence of a single being in its antagonism and internal contradiction and focuses on the question of life and death in general, including cows, bees and lizards. Although *existence* is a term, which wants to express the specificity of a human being's life, this does not mean that we should reject the idea of Kezilahabi as an existentialist writer. Observation of the concrete actions is existentialistic when doubting self-evidence of the world, then it is a way of recognizing its absurdity.

Lutz Diegner (2002) in his essay analyzes allegories in the first four novels of Kezilahabi, including the story of the rescued bee. In this story, the bee stands for Kazimoto and every human being in general. Its fight for life is an allegory of human being's life, confronted with the surrounding world.

The bee at the mercy of fate may represent Man who in the course of his life again and again has to face events that he does not understand even if he uses all of his ratio. (Diegner 2002: 52)

The same can be said about the story of the lizard's tail cut-off. This is another allegory of a human being and his relation to the world, which can be interpreted as follows:

This observation of an animal might tell him [*Kazimoto*]: against the normally expected (i.e. death after losing such a big part of the body), modern Man who suffers from alienation survives without (the practice of) tradition. (ibid.: 51)

Such allegoric "animal" extracts in the novel serve the author as a way of emphasizing the main character's reflections on his own life (such as *nilijiona mungu mdogo...*) – but it is his

own life in the frame of the whole society around him. Thus we can say that Kazimoto is somehow less individualistic than Meursault.

This may be the result of the diametrically different nature of Western European and East African society. This difference lies for example in the approach to the basic unit of every society: family. The model of extended family is still common in African societies, while in western societies the model of the nuclear family has replaced this model.

Another feature of this different nature is the societal emphasis on the concept of family itself. Many Africans consider the family to represent the highest value, while Westerners seem to have a quite different scale of values: professional career and maybe money as the highest values. The consequence of this is for example an absolutely different level of birth rate in Europe and in Africa. While population in the latter is still growing, the former is slowly dying out.<sup>11</sup>

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu confirms Africans' emphasis on extended family and communalism.

One of the strongest points of our culture [...] [is] the great value it places on what we might call communal belonging (Wiredu 1980: 5).

The same, maybe even more clearly, can be found in the essays of the Tanzanian teacher, writer and politician Julius K. Nyerere, who considers society to be an extension of the basic family unit (Nyerere 1970: 12).

In our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community, and the community took care of us (ibid.: 6f).

One feature of this "traditional communalism" (ibid.: 87) is polygamy, which persists to these days in traditional societies.

We can very simply compare the number of main characters of both novels: Only a handful of people used by Camus on one side (Meursault himself, his friend Raymond and his girlfriend Marie, the prosecutor, the judge, the priest, the director and the custodian from the asylum, maybe the dead Arab young man) and some twenty characters with very complicated personal relationships on the other (Kazimoto himself, his wife Sabina and their still-born child, his former girlfriend Vumilia and her new husband, the father, the mother, his sister Rukia, his brother Kalia, his friend and former classmate Manase with his wife Salima and their child with a big head, Kabenga – the father of Manase – with his wife Tuza and his sec-

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<sup>11</sup> The rate of population growth in Africa is on the average 2.6% per annum, while in Europe it is only 0.1-0.2% per annum. In several countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary), the rate of population growth is negative (cf. Encyclopaedia Universum 2003). This difference is caused by absolutely different economic situation in both regions, and also by different conceptions of state in both regions. In Africa, the children are supposed to support their parents in their old age, while in Europe this role is taken up by the "welfare state". A second aspect of this problem is the very high rate of children mortality in Africa due to poor standards of medical care. A third aspect is cultural tradition, including such questions as women emancipation and others

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ond wife Tegemea, Kazimoto's other close friend Kamata with his wife, the prostitute Pili and other concubines...).

For historical reasons, communalism is deeply rooted in African societies and despite the hard effort of European missionaries nothing has dramatically changed during last century. This persisting communalism is very likely the cause of the above mentioned differences between "European" existentialism and "African" existentialism.

Alena Rettová in her works also deals with the question of existentialism in African literature and in her last essay she elaborates my preliminary remarks on African "communalistic" existentialism and corroborates my assumption by following:

*Mtazamo huu wa ukengeushi wa kiutamaduni uko katika maandishi yote ya udhanaishi katika fasihi ya Kiswahili. [...] Udhanaishi wa Magharibi unamtazama zaidi mtu peke yake na hali yake iliyotengwa kabisa na watu wengine. Watu wengine ni sehemu ya dunia ambayo anakabiliana naye na mara nyingi anashindwa kuielewa, wanaonekana kama wageni au hata maadui yake. [...] Udhanaishi wa Kiafrika, licha ya mtu peke yake, unaizingatia jamii nzima na hali yake. Jamii siyo sehemu ya dunia mtu anayokabiliana nayo huku akiuliza maswali kuhusu maana ya kuwapo kwake yeye, bali maswali haya yanaulizwa kuhusu jamii hiyo-hiyo, kwa jumla. (Rettova 2006b, chapter 3.2.3.4)*

This attitude of cultural alienation is present in all Swahili existentialist works. [...] Western existentialism focuses on a person him-/herself and on his/her state of isolation from other people who are part of the world with which he/she is confronted and very often fails to understand. They seem to be strangers or even enemies to him/her. [...] African existentialism observes not only the person him-/herself but the whole society and its situation. Society is not a part of the world with which a man is confronted while asking questions about the meaning of his/her own existence, but rather these questions are asked in respect of the whole society.

At the very end, let us quote Kwasi Wiredu once more, who can help us to answer another substantial question: why Kazimoto decides to commit suicide while Meursault indifferently waits for his execution. The answer may be the notion of fate and destiny, which is very deep in African traditional thought.

A successful man is likely to regard himself as being blessed with a good destiny. [...] On the other hand, adversity may lead a man to resignation. This happens everywhere and in all cultures. But in our culture the notions about destiny just mentioned are apt to facilitate the resignation of a despairing soul. (Wiredu 1980: 17)

Kazimoto was infected by an unknown venereal disease, which caused his child to be still-born. Although there is a rational reason for his personal misfortune, he may come to a conclusion that this misfortune is a consequence of his unchangeable destiny.<sup>12</sup> When he realizes that he would breed only children with big heads, he gives up his life and commits suicide.

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<sup>12</sup> As the notion of fate and destiny is important in African societies, we can imagine that Kazimoto at least partly believes in it, although he declares his rejection of idea of an omnipotent God publicly; it is likely that this notion is not necessarily connected with religion

Meursault does not believe in anything, so he has nothing to resign and only passively waits in his prison cell.

## 8. Conclusion

The comparison between *L'Etranger* and *Kichwamaji* confirms the statement that Kezilahabi was influenced by Western philosophical and particularly existentialist tradition. Kezilahabi takes up the main questions and problems posed by both Camus and Sartre, but he deals with these questions quite differently.

As I tried to show, his existentialism is less individualistic than the existentialism of Albert Camus. This may be a result of transferring existentialism from its original European setting into the very different culture of East African mainland with its deeply rooted communalism.<sup>13</sup> According to Monnier (1953: 99), in Camus' works tragedy is individual while revolt is collective. Kezilahabi seems to turn this scheme upside down: tragedy is collective and affects two families, while revolt presented by main character's suicide is individual.

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<sup>13</sup> This preliminary conclusion should be further discussed with regard to other works by Euphrase Kezilahabi, which I intend to do in other essay.

<sup>14</sup> When using translations from other languages into Czech, I added original titles in French and German respectively. When using original Czech monographs, I added English translations of their titles.



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