

Literacy in a multi-cultural environment

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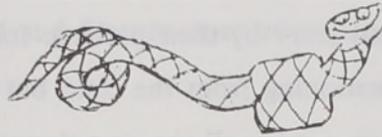
In this talk a particular aspect of literacy in a multicultural society will be discussed, namely the accessibility of Western literate stories to black children from an oral environment.

It is often assumed that a good story will cross any borders and a book judged to be good literature will be accessible to any child. However, it must be kept in mind that stories are reflections of social values, beliefs and goals that underlie and involve human interaction. Each culture will have its own stories with themes that are relevant to that particular social group. The underlying structures, as much as the stories, will reflect cultural norms and thought patterns (Stein 1988:282–283).

The African culture in South Africa is largely an oral one as indicated by the high levels of illiteracy (Wilson & Ramphela 1989:17) and research (Finnegan 1988; Ong 1982) indicates that oral and literate cultures differ radically. Thought and expression in oral cultures, even residually oral cultures, is often highly organized but this organisation differs from that of a literate culture. These differences are evident in narrative structures and affect understanding and response to literature. This factor could affect accessibility of text written within

a literate tradition to children living in an oral tradition. An oral culture, such as that of black South Africans, will look for different structures, characters and types of discourse in their literature. It cannot be assumed that those structures present in the Western literate story are accessible to the African child coming from an oral environment and that these children will relate to the same books as Westernised children. This may be true but it ought not to be accepted without investigation, especially taking into account variations in socialisation.

Story schema



Stories are a particular category of text which have a conventional structure. This structure or story schema helps the reader or listener comprehend and remember the text and can be represented in a story grammar. However, if the structure differs from that which the reader or listener is familiar, the reader or listener will be unable to identify the significant elements of the story or recognise the structure.

The story schema is important as it acts as a general framework within which detailed comprehension processes take place during encoding. This framework performs several functions. Firstly, it directs attention to certain aspects of the incoming material, for example the words “once upon a time” indicate to the listener or reader that the story will be a traditional fairy story. Secondly, the framework helps the listener or reader keep track of what has gone before and increases the predictability of what is coming. Finally, the framework indicates to the reader or listener when a section of the story is complete and can be stored, or is incomplete and must be held until further material is encoded (Mandler &

Johnson 1977:111–112). Adequate comprehension of a story requires familiarity with the particular underlying structure of the story.

Children do not automatically understand story structure. They are taught the particular structure used within their culture by parents or caregivers when they start to tell or read stories to a child.

In Western mainstream societies children are usually trained to listen for the essential elements of a Western story by their parents. Initially the parents encourage interaction and questioning from the child but gradually the parent will encourage the child to listen to a story all the way through and ask questions at the end. The parent will teach them what to listen for by asking directed questions, such as what do you think will happen now? Why did that happen?

Children coming from an oral environment will have been taught different structures and as a result listen and look for different elements (Heath 1982; 1983; 1984). Children are exposed to a stream of conversation rather than having elements of their experience isolated for them. Stories may be told by any member of the community and there is great competition to tell one's stories. Children from an early age may also act as storytellers. Stories seldom have a formal beginning or ending. The listeners often act as a chorus encouraging and responding to the storyteller. Children listen for as long as they are interested and then wander off. There is no interactive questioning in order to highlight important elements of the story.

In order to test African children's understanding of Western literate story as compared to traditional African stories two stories, a Western literate story and a

traditional story, were read to children in Standard 5. The children were between 11 and 15 years old. They were then asked to give a summary of the story. These summaries were then analysed according to a story grammar. In this research various differences in the story structure were found to influence their ability to access a Western literate story. I would like to briefly mention those particular differences (Machet 1993).

Differences between oral and literate story structure



Form of story

Oral story structure is usually cyclic whereas the literate Western story's structure is linear and connections are causal (Kaplan 1988). Research shows that the ideal form of story for Westerners is a goal based story with strong causal and temporal connections. An oral narrative does not have the controlled temporal and causal chain ordering conventions of literate narrative (Michaels 1986). Oral stories are episodic in structure and utilise a topic-associating style, which consists of a series of sections or episodes which are implicitly linked together by emphasising some person or theme. It has no plot in the way it is understood in literate societies, that is a climactic linear structure (Ong 1982). Oral stories are usually experiential in that the events happen to a person rather than the protagonist initiating and in some way controlling the action. In oral stories the protagonist is reactive rather than proactive whereas in Western stories the reverse is true.

In the research the respondents had a problem seeing logical and causal connections in a story. Whereas Western children will recall incidents which are

linked causally better than other aspects of the story this was not the case with these children (Applebee 1978:58–72; Stein 1988:290). Their recall of the stories was random. Many of the structural elements that Westerners take for granted were not understood or perceived by these children. They recalled the stories according to an episodic structure rather than the linear structure and as a result often missed the point of the story altogether.

In Glenn's (1978) research with Western children, she found that those elements of the story that form the causal centre around which the story is organised were better recalled than other types of information. The results from this study were in fact the opposite of those of Glenn. One must conclude that these children did not organise their story around a causal centre. Respondents also seldom indicated causal connections or motivation.

A large percentage of the respondents did not include a goal which is an essential element of a Western story. Research with American English-speaking respondents (Trabasso & Nickels 1992) and Hebrew-speaking respondents (Berman 1988) indicates that by the age of nine, the vast majority of respondents include goals.

Channel constraints

In both oral and written discourse there are channel constraints, that is conditions on communicative form which are the result of the nature of the medium.

However, if you consider what is involved in a speaker or writer estimating an audience's ability to make an inference, you can see the differences in spoken and written language. For example, in written language there is little information as to intonation, or gesture, or information conveyed through movement or expression

on the narrator's face. There is also no immediate feedback – no way of telling whether the audience agrees or disagrees, or has understood what is being said. One of the problems for a reader who comes from an oral background is the lack of familiarity with the conventions used in written discourse to convey emotions, or movement, to group together pieces of information so as to emphasise certain sections and to downplay others, to indicate a shift in theme or subject, and to establish and maintain perspective within a topic (Collins & Michaels 1986). These would be conveyed by an oral narrator by using facial expression, movement and intonation. Children from a predominantly oral culture may not have the background knowledge or schemata to understand or perceive the connections or structures in a piece of written text.

This in fact did prove to be the case. The children did not understand or perceive the shifts in the text indicating psychological shifts or changes in characters. For example, they were able to understand anger when it was displayed through physical aggression but not internal reactions or state of mind.

They were also unable to identify important sections of the text. They failed to centre on a single topic or series of closely related topics and there was little thematic development or lexical cohesion. Their summaries had few lexicalised markers other than “and” between topics which made them difficult to follow if one was expecting the summaries to focus on a single event or object.

Formulaic

Oral “literature” is made up of formulas or clichés which have accumulated meaning within the society (Bynum 1978; Foley 1981). Although an oral story teller will tell the story differently each time, the story will be composed of set

formulas which already exist in the culture. The individuality lies in the storyteller's ability to combine these formulaic elements effectively and dramatically rather than to display literary originality, as would be expected in a literate society (Opland 1983:52, 164). Redundancy is closely related to the use of formulas. The elements of oral thought and expression tend to be groups of similar or antithetical terms, phrases or clauses (Bowerman 1981). For example, in oral discourse the soldier will be the brave soldier; the princess will be the beautiful princess.

These factors are important when considering accessibility of text because in a culture with a high residue of orality it is possible that readers will relate better to works that display a formulaic character with familiar clichés which they can recognise. This in fact did prove to be the case in terms of clichés and structure. Fourteen children were interviewed in depth and all the children except one preferred traditional trickster tales or fairy tales to other forms of story books even though they were past the age that most children have stopped reading fairy stories. They also used redundant expressions in their own summaries, such as the wicked wolf.

Emphasis on action

In oral literature the emphasis is on actions and incidents – to tell the story – because of the relatively short attention span of the listening audience. Dialogue is also used extensively to advance the plot. The narrative style concentrates on presenting a clear visual picture of outward appearance and movement (Ho 1990). In literate stories the emphasis is often on inner growth and character development rather than action *per se*. This was substantiated in my own research (Machet 1993). The elements of the story that had a high level of activity were better remembered than descriptive elements.

Physical violence

Oral stories concentrate on physical behaviour rather than focusing on interior crises and often portray gross physical violence. To a certain extent the excessive amount of violence found in oral literature can be explained by the physical hardships of life in many oral societies. In a world where events, such as drought, floods, disease and other disasters, take place without any apparent cause, it is easier to blame the personal malevolence of another human being – a magician or witch (Ong 1982).

In the one book which was used in the testing there was a fight with some robbers. This incident was remembered very clearly by most respondents. The children all enjoyed violence, such as the wolf eating the grandmother in *Little Red Riding Hood*. But they did not enjoy violence that too clearly reflected their real situation, such as a story¹ which closely paralleled the situation in the townships at the time. This was surprising as one would have expected that stories which enable the children to work through their anxieties about the violence would have been popular. However, this was not the case and they all responded negatively to the story which had specifically been chosen because it seemed relevant to the conditions in South Africa. But the children's reaction was negative even though the book had a strong message of hope.

Characters

The characters in oral narrative are usually flat, heroic and stereotypical as these types of characters are easier to remember (Bowerman 1981:162). This differs from the more rounded character typically used in literate stories. In my research the respondents summaries showed the characters as one dimensional and no attempt was made at characterisation in any of the summaries.

Ending

In the Western framework no story would be considered complete without a final event that ties all the threads of a story together and indicates the relevance of the other events. However, this may not be an essential element of an oral story framework. Research indicates that although all stories in oral tradition have a dramatic structure (Fischer 1963:237) they do not necessarily include some form of resolution of conflict. Conflict may be created and deliberately not resolved (Finnegan 1967:30). A number of stories from oral tradition have “bad endings” from the point of view of a Western reader (Brewer 1985:183). This was very clear in the empirical research where a number of traditional African stories were given to Westerners to read. They all found the endings very unsatisfactory.

The respondents in the empirical research also failed to include a cogent resolution or to provide evaluative comments both of which have been identified as a common trait of Western narrators (Michaels 1986). The children did not see a final resolution as an essential part of a story. They failed to use devices that would have enabled them to evaluate, interpret and conclude the stories adequately by Western standards. The children did not attempt to make their summaries meaningful but simply listed those events they could remember. Many omitted the last event or failed to complete the sequence as they did not see its relevance. Because they did not understand the underlying meaning of the story they failed to recognise and remember which elements were important. The emphasis of the summaries was on action and there was no attempt at evaluation or interpretation.

In the second part of the research project children were interviewed in order to find out more about their likes and dislikes as related to an oral culture.

Communal orientation

Respondents preferred characters who were communally orientated and disliked characters that displayed individualism. The book liked least by the respondents was one that focused on a person's attempt to be different rather than conforming to the group. This is consistent with strong communal values which have been identified as being present in African communities as opposed to the value "individualism" which is an important value in Western communities (Machet 1989). This finding was consistent with other research (Wilson & Ramphela 1989) which has been carried out amongst African groups in South Africa, where the value "ubuntu" (caring for other people; humaneness) has been identified as a major African value.

The importance of this value was also reflected in the children's choice of favourite character in a number of books. The majority of children indicated that their reason for choosing a particular character as their favourite character was that the person was helpful. In particular, the children liked characters who were shown to be helpful to older people.

The strong respect for elders and for males (common in oral societies) also had an effect on the children's response. In one of the stories which was used the children move the father who is snoring outside because his snoring disturbed them. This was not acceptable to many of the children as it showed disrespect to an important authority figure. Westernised children on the other hand found the incident amusing.

An interesting aspect of this is that children especially from the rural areas were very chauvinistic and regarded males as superior. In one of the stories used in the

tests the younger sister saves an older brother by using karate. Children found this unacceptable and changed the story so that either the brother saved the sister or both were saved by the father.

Conclusion

Based on the above research it can be concluded that Western story structure is largely inaccessible to children from an oral environment. It must be stressed, however, that children who had the Western story structure mediated to them were then more able to access Western literate stories. However, without active mediation children from a predominantly oral environment will not be able to access many of the structures in Western literate stories. This is important as not only are stories structured this way but most forms of discourse reflect this structure. If one thinks of history one of the first things that is taught is the reasons for things happening and the result. The same applies to scientific discourse. In an experiment one is expected to identify the aim or goal, the method, the results. The understanding of a causal linear structure is essential in understanding most forms of Western discourse. The research indicated that active mediation in teaching children this structure was effective in helping children access a Western story.

Western thought structures are often perceived as superior to those of other cultures and it is therefore perceived as right to impose these structures on other cultures as an improvement (Havelock 1976). Western paradigms, however, should not simply be imposed on children from a predominantly oral culture. These children may have alternate cognitive structures which may be more creative than the linear Western models. In studies with children from an oral environment it was found that although these children did not have linear

cognitive structures they were able to see connections that teachers themselves were unable to see because they were limited by their linear thought processes. There is a growing disillusionment with linear cognitive processes in the West and an increased perception that lateral thinking skills can increase creativity and enable new and imaginative solutions to problems. The emphasis on lateral thinking rather than linear thinking is an indication of the shortcomings of Western linear thought structures.

The school curriculum should build on the children's strengths. By starting from where the children are teachers can increase their abilities. This does not mean that Western methodologies should not be taught to these children, as these methodologies are essential for many disciplines such as science and mathematics, but not at the expense of their indigenous thinking patterns. By teaching children additional thinking skills, their repertoire is broadened, by replacing one paradigm with another, their abilities are reduced.

An issue that must be kept in mind is that frequently in an attempt to simplify text for second language readers causal structures are taken out because these tend to lengthen sentences and make them, superficially at least, easier to understand. However, for many African readers these causal structures are not self-evident and need to be highlighted.

The multilingual situation in South Africa has meant that most books available to African children, besides school books, are in a second language. Children, especially young children who are not yet fluent readers, need books which are easily accessible as cultural inaccessibility may put them off reading permanently. Literacy must be culturally specific in order to be culturally meaningful (Fishman 1989:30).

The findings do show, however, that mediation whether in libraries through story hours or in schools can make a difference and help children to internalise this schema which is essential not only for Western story structure but also for other forms of Western discourse.

The way in which text is read and interpreted will depend on social and cultural factors and these factors will influence the way in which a text is understood. People from diverse backgrounds will not necessarily understand a text in the same way as they bring their background, expectations and values to the text and understand and interpret it in the light of that schema.

Note

1 The story used was *The Cherry tree* by D Ikeda (1991). This book was donated to READ by Soka Gakkai International to “promote peace, culture and education”.

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The Structural and social significance

of the journey in children's folktales from Zanzibar

femk senkoro

Introduction

There is an old literary truism which insists that the soul of every great work of literature is a journey. Indeed, the journey motif is as old as literature itself. With the acquisition of speech, man's journey towards the world of fantasy started, and with the ability to walk began man's spatial movement within time.

In this paper two major overlapping planes evident in the folktales from Zanzibar which utilise the journey motif are examined. The first is the External Journey. The second is the Internal Journey which does, at the same time, have some existential dimensions.

Although the external journey precedes the internal one, most of the time the two overlap a lot; and the fact that there is no clear dividing line between the two journeys in the children's fairy and folktales from Zanzibar, makes this motif a complex literary phenomenon in relation to the child and the world around him.

In this paper we first of all examine the nature of the motif by analysing its exemplification through the external journey. This is essentially a structuralist approach. After that we look at the use of the internal journey as a medium of instruction to the child on the process of growing up. This part uses psychoanalysis in its approach. The main thrust of the paper is to see the relevance of the journey motif to the Zanzibari child's growing-up process.



The external journey

The journey motif is a literary device through which we can discover in a fairy or folktale, a number of interconnected occurrence-patterns similar to *some* of those observed by structuralists such as Daniel Kunene and, before him, Joseph Campbell, Lord Raglan, and V Propp. Although in this paper we have utilised the ideas of Joseph Campbell and Lord Raglan, since these have not really dealt with the African folktale as such, our main point of reference is Daniel Kunene who has specifically looked at the theme in connection with African written literature in general and the African epic in particular in his two major articles.¹

Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a thousand faces* has divided his formula of the folktale hero's life into three parts: separation – initiation – return. As he himself puts it:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from the mysterious adventure with power to bestow boons on his fellow man.²

Lord Raglan, who in *The Hero* has divided the basic pattern of the journey of a hero into 22 incidents, supports Campbell when he regroups the 22 incidents into three major groups. He says:

The incidents fall definitely into three groups: those connected with the hero's birth, those connected with his accession to the throne, and those connected with his death. They, thus correspond to the three principal *rites de passage* – that is to say, the rites at birth, at initiation, and at death.³

Although the division made by Campbell and Lord Raglan does help in the elucidation of the journey motif in the Zanzibari folktale, some of the details which the two theorists give are not prominent in the tales from Zanzibar. For example, the details of the birth of the hero/es are treated very marginally in these tales. Indeed, most of the time such details are not dealt with at all. In most of these tales it is only when the hero has come of age, ready to go out into the world of adventure, that the tales begin. A typical formulaic beginning of a tale will just mention that there was a man and his wife, or a king/sultan and his wife, who either did not have a child for a long time, or had such and such a number of children. Thus, in the Zanzibari folktale, the detailed description of the birth of such children is inconsequential.⁴

Kunene's Loci theory

The external journey in folktales from Zanzibar shows the spatial movement of a tale's character from one point to another. Kunene calls these points *loci* which are joined by the journey's curves. Since Kunene has dealt at length with the physical journey, that is, the spatial movement, it is worth testing his theories of the different loci. Kunene has stated the summary of his theory thus:

It goes without saying that most of the action in a "journey story" takes place during the journey, and can be plotted systematically along the journey curve which comprises two arcs, the going away arc A.....B, and the coming-back arc, A.....>B, which describe a circle ... We see then that action can take place at four major points, namely, A, A > B, B, B < A.⁵

Our research into the use of the journey motif in the Zanzibari folktale has shown that the spatial movement of the heroes has complex patterns which do not always describe a full circle. The patterns fall mainly into four groups, which incidentally, Kunene also acknowledged in his earlier writing on this motif.⁶ These are: firstly, narratives whose heroes travel and come back victorious, or whose return is implied. This kind of return forms a major phase during which the hero or heroine has to consolidate the powers gained during the quest. This is mainly in loci B and BA. Secondly, tales whose heroes' return is thwarted. Thirdly, stories whose heroes have no intention of returning, and fourthly, pieces whose heroes have a false return.

It seems that in the Zanzibari folktales even the three major parts/loci mentioned by Kunene do not necessarily follow the pattern of *separation – initiation – return* from point A to B and then back to A again. Point A can be recreated and even combined with point B to form a new locus altogether. Here we can cite one Zanzibari tale as our example. In *Kisa cha Mtu na Wanawe Watatu* (The tale of a man and his three sons) we have the typical story of three sons who are called to the deathbed of their father. The father is not rich, and he tries to play a trick on the sons and their mother, so that they do not blame him for the meagre inheritance which he has reserved for them. He tells each one, separately, that he is dying, and that his money, to be inherited by the one he is presently talking to, must only be inherited *after* he has managed to inherit the wealth of the Sultan of Mauritius.⁷

While the dead father had instructed each of the sons not to tell the others about the inheritance, finally they all get to know the “secret” and decide in unison to go and do all they can to inherit the wealth of the Sultan of Mauritius. So, they set off on a journey which takes them through a number of trials and tribulations. On the way they encounter three riddle-like incidents and episodes which they manage to unravel, with the youngest of them untangling the most obscure aspects. Finally they are able to outwit the Sultan of Mauritius and they inherit his kingdom, after which they also inherit their father’s “wealth”.

The picture that one gets here is:

POINT A-1: Home: Sanctuary at First,
Then Source of Sibling Conflict and
Reasons for the Journey.

to

TRANSITION POINT AB: The Journey’s
Curve Full of Riddle-like Trials and
Tribulations.

to

POINT B-1: Kingdom of Mauritius:
Conflict, Confrontation and Final
Victory.

to

POINT BA-2: Double Inheritance,
Harmony, Living Happily Ever After



From the above illustrations, it is clear that in effect, the sons move from point A-1 and point B-1 to a new point A and B which we can call point BA-2. So, while Kunene talks about the return of the hero to locus A2, in this tale what Kunene would term locus A2 is a combination of new loci A and B. It combines two “kingdoms” where the sons achieve double inheritance. Unlike most tales, in this one not only the youngest, but all the sons, inherit the kingdom, and the initial sibling rivalry is smoothed out through compromise and understanding.

Key points of the journey in the Zanzibari folktale

By far, a single return journey is the most common type of the external journey. In this journey, a character travels away from home and then ultimately comes back home or to a replica of the old home (minus the initial conflicts), after lengthy trials and tribulations. However, almost all the types of journey have similar departure points, although the social forces in operation in those loci can differ from one tale to another.

Locus A: Departure point

Most of the time, the original point of departure is the home where the parents of the heroes or heroines live or lived; and so, by making a full circle through a return journey, the idea of the importance of the family unit is expressed.⁸ However, we must emphasise, and as mentioned earlier, in the Zanzibari folktales locus A treats the details of the birth of the hero/es, if at all, very marginally. Indeed, even the details of the death of a hero or heroine are not given. Death is usually mentioned at the beginning of a tale to show the passing away of one generation and the take-over by another, new generation.

Naturally *Locus A* prompts the question: Why does a character travel? The answers to this question vary depending on the nature of the journey. Although most of the heroes and heroines on journeys in the Zanzibari folktales do seem to just go out there for mere adventure; it is actually through the journey that the characters reveal themselves.

Kunene has broadly classified two major types of heroes' or heroines' departure from home. The first is voluntary or unforced, and the second one is involuntary or forced departure. Kunene states the following concerning the latter form of departure, which mostly suggests some form of exile:

Where the protagonist is still too young to know what is going on, those who are responsible for fleeing with him to a place of safety act on his behalf and their intent to bring him back fulfills the same role in the analysis as the protagonist's own declaration of such an intent ... In oral narratives such child heroes are found in many stories, notably the ones where a father declares that any male child born to him should be destroyed.⁹

In spite of the presence of the flight and exile motif in a number of world oral traditions that Kunene mentions, involving such figures like Jesus Christ, Chaka the Zulu, and Sundiata, it is noteworthy that such a motif is present in very rare cases in the Zanzibari folktales. In fact, it would be very strange indeed to find in Kiswahili oral literature, a father who declares that a male child born to him should be destroyed, for Swahili fathers are very proud of begetting sons.

Incidentally, in most of the few tales that have this motif it is the female characters who have to go into exile. This is the case, for example, in *Watoto Saba* and in *Ndugu Wawili*. In the first tale, a sick father calls his six sons and one daughter to his deathbed and asks each of them to choose between inheriting his wealth or his blessings. Only the youngest daughter chooses her father's

blessings. Later on, after the father is dead and the sons have inherited the wealth while the daughter inherits only the blessings, her two hands are cut off after she is caught “stealing” her brothers’ sugarcane. She is consequently thrown out by her brothers and is forced to go into exile as the story states:

Yule msichana masikini ya Mungu, mikono ikakatwa ikabakia mapigi matupu, na nyumba wakamfukuza. Yule msichana alifanya *safari ya kuhama* na alikwenda mbali ... (my emphasis)

(That poor girl, her hands were chopped off at the elbows, and only *mapigi*, the useless parts of the hand remained. On top of that she was chased away from home. That girl set on a journey into exile, and she travelled very, very far.)

In *Ndugu Wawili*, the travellers are a brother and his sister who finally part as the brother amputates all his sister’s limbs, leaving only her head and stomach under a Mbungo tree. More on this story later on when we look at the social significance of the journey motif in the Zanzibari folktale.¹⁰

The above departures aside, the majority of the other departures are voluntary and unforced on the part of the heroes and heroines. A few examples will help to illustrate this. The tale called *Mfalme na Wanawe Watatu* (The King and his three sons) clearly demonstrates this point: It begins thus:

Hapo kale alikuwepo mfalme na wanawe watatu wanaume ambao ni watu wazima. Wakakaa katika milki yao kwa muda mkubwa. Hata siku hiyo mfalme akapata maradhi makubwa akaona haponi, ndipo alipowakusanya wanawe wote akawaambia hivi, “Wanangu, miye naumwa sana, nanaona maradhi haya yatanichukua. Lakini nikifa mujue kuwa hapo chini ya kitanda changu pana pesa nyingi. Lakini musizirithi kwanza mpaka mukamrithi mfalme wa Misri.” Wale wanawe wote wakakubali. Siku ya pili mfalme akafa, na wanawe wakamzika ...

Sasa wakatoka kwenda Misri kama walivyousiwa na baba yao huku wakiwa na elimu nyingi vichwani mwao. Hapo walitoka kwenda safari yao.

(Long long ago, there was a king with his three grown-up sons. They stayed in their kingdom for a long time. Then, one day the king fell seriously sick, and he instantly realized that he was not going to survive. That's when he called all his sons to his deathbed and said to them, "My sons, I am very sick, and I think this illness will be the end of me. When I die, know that under my bed there is a lot of money. Do not inherit the wealth until you have conquered the kingdom of Egypt." All the sons agreed with their father's wish. The following day the king died and his sons buried him.

Then they left for Egypt as instructed by their father. These were learned travellers ...)

Although in this tale the three sons are "forced" to travel to Egypt before they can inherit what their father, who was a King, has left for them, this is not exactly an exile, but rather an adventure. Besides showing their respect to their father's wish, the sons also prove that they are worthy and capable of inheriting and ruling the kingdom.

A typical departure point in the Zanzibari folktale will involve the hero or heroine actually begging his or her parents to be allowed to travel. A departure of this type can have the sole aim of finding a bride as happens in one of the Makame wa Makame stories from Pemba island. A similar departure is that of the husband and the wife in *Kitambi cha Pembemeuli*. In this love tale, each of the two characters go on a parallel journey in search of something to prove his or her love to the spouse. The husband has to get "kitambi cha pembemeuli" for his wife. This is a dress made from a spider's web. The wife has to get "maji yasiyolia chura" for her husband. This is water fetched from a well in the bush, but there must be no frogs in the surroundings of the well. While it is impossible to get a dress made from a spider's web, and while in rural Zanzibar there will always be frogs near the wells, the love tale shows how these two characters undergo so much trouble, even to the extent of being involved in

nerve-wracking chases against trolls, to prove their love to each other. Of course, eventually they are able to get the impossible items.¹¹

Unlike this type of departure, most other departures will be motivated by a mere urge to go on an adventure as testified to in the following quotation taken from *Watoto wa Maajabu*:

Hapo zamani za kale paliondokea mtu na mkewe. Wakazaa watoto wao wawili, mmoja aliye mwanamke akiitwa Ramli, na yule mwanamume akiitwa Zarba. Wakakaa, wakakaa; hata siku moja wale watoto wakaaga kwa wazee wao kwenda kutembea sehemu za mbali. Wakatayarishiwa vyakula aina aina na mama yao wakaondoka kwenda safari yao.

(Long long ago there was a man and his wife. They were blessed with two children, one, a girl called Ramli, and the second one, a son called Zarba. They lived and lived, until one day those children bid their parents goodbye. They were headed for far off lands just to see what was happening out there. Various types of food were prepared for them by their mother, and then they went on their way.)

Kunene has subdivided Locus A into two major parts. The first part is Locus A1 in which there is the home as a sanctuary where happiness prevails. Life here is like that of paradise; but the story has not yet begun. The second part is Locus A2 which is the same home, but with an element of dissatisfaction introduced. According to Kunene, this is what prompts the character's departure. However, in most of the journey folktales from Zanzibar, such a subdivision does not really apply. It is not always the element of dissatisfaction that will prompt the character to travel since, as previously mentioned, the elements that prompt such departures will vary from mere desire for adventure to the urge to find out what is happening out there in the world.

Finally, still on the departure point, Kunene has drawn up a very interesting list of motivations for the departures of the heroes and heroines of the travel tale which we find equally quite relevant to our discussion on the Zanzibari folktale. He has listed six types of motivation, namely The Call for Adventure, Conflict in Familial Relationships, The Quest for Something of Value, In Search of Education, Cultural Alienation, and Involuntary Exile. Although Kunene has based his classification on written literature, it applies quite well to the Zanzibari oral tale. The call for adventure is the most common type of departure in which the hero or heroine, on his or her own volition asks for permission to travel and see what is happening out there in the world. The second type, conflict in familial relationships, appears also in several tales from Zanzibar. The two tales which were mentioned earlier, involving the female characters who have to travel away from home after quarelling with their brothers are typical examples of this type of departure. The departure which is prompted by a quest for something of value is sparingly present in the Zanzibari folktales. One very good example of such a tale is narrated in Jan Knappert's *Myths and legends of the Swahili*. The tale, titled "The Island of the snake and the land of gold,"¹² tells the story of a young girl whose "father" informs her on his deathbed that her family stems from a people who lived in a land where everything was gold, and that he is not her real father but ... And before he has completed the sentence he dies. After her "father's" death, the girl is "lucky" enough to catch the eye of the Sultan who marries her and she becomes queen. Now she is in a position to request anything that she wants. So, one day she requests permission to go and see that land. After many days of difficult travel, and finally with the help of a snake, she reaches the golden land. There she meets her real father who is, incidentally, a king. She stays for one year with her father and her husband who has joined her. After which they are given a golden ship as a present. They return to their home via the island of the snake where the girl had promised to sacrifice to the

snake whatever child she would have in exchange for the directions to the land of gold. The tale has a happy ending as the snake finally does not only hand the baby boy back to his mother, but also gives the mother many blessings so that “she had many more babies, as her husband was always good to her”.

As for the search for education, if education is taken in its broadest sense, then there are many Zanzibari tales with this kind of departure. Most of the tales dealing with pubertal initiation rites which are examined in the next section of this paper, would fall under this category. The heroes and heroines in these tales have to undergo an educational process which will help them graduate from childhood to adulthood.

The type of departure which is prompted by cultural alienation is, indeed, alien to the Zanzibari folktale although it is quite common in Swahili written literature.¹³ As we have already indicated, the last type of departure is also present in the Zanzibari folktale, although not very prominently.

Curve AB: Trials and tribulations

The journey's curve from Departure Point to point B in the Zanzibari folktale is full of trials and tribulations. It is very interesting that most of the tales will talk of the difficult journey in the forest, very much unlike what one would expect from islands surrounded by a great mass of water.¹⁴ Thus, in such tales like *Radhi Au Mali*, *Watoto wa Maajabu*, *Kitambi cha Pembemeuli*, and a host of other tales a statement like “Akenda msitu na nyika, msitu na nyika, msitu na nyika kwa siku sita ...” is a very common expression.

Besides travelling through thick forests, the character also has to face a number of tests in the AB Curve. One of the most common tests for young travelling characters is the request from very old, dirty women to lick the discharges from their dirty eyes. Narrators will sometimes describe such scenes in nauseating detail such as in the following part again taken from *Kitambi cha Pembemeuli*:

Hata siku ya sabaa akafikia pahala akakikuta kibibi kikongwe sana hata haoneshi kuwa yuwaona, kwa sababu aligubikwa na matongo mazito machoni mwake. Yule bwana akamshitua yule bibi kwa kumgusa, na kumwita. Kile kibibi kikaitika na kumuuliza yule bwana, “Weye n’nani uliyekuja huku na kwahala kwenyewe hakuji watu? Kila ajae yuwafa, kwa sababu hapa ni pahala wakaapo mazimwi, na wakija wakikukuta hapa watakula, na miye hapa ni mpishi wao. Lakini hebu nirambe tongo nikuone.”

Basi yule bwana akaziramba ramba tongo zote kavu na akakiuliza kile kibibi, “Jee, niziteme au nizimeze?”

Kibibi kikajibu, “Zimeze!” Akazimeza.

Hayaa! Kibibi kikamwambia, “Nirambe tena mwanangu, sijakuona.”

Yule bwana akawamo kuziramba. Mara hii akaramba zile mbichi mbichi, na akauliza tena, “Nimeze au niteme.”

Kibibi kikajibu, “Tema mwanangu. Uchungu wa mwana naujua weee!” Yule bwana akatema na tayari kibibi kikawa chaona.

(And then, lo and behold! On the seventh day he reached a place where he met a very, very old woman. It was clear that the woman was not able to see owing to piles and piles of dirty discharges from her eyes. The young man startled the old woman by touching and calling her. The old, old woman responded and asked him, “Who are you who has dared to come to this forbidden place? People are not allowed to come here, for, anyone who comes this way dies! This is the dwelling place of ogres, and should they come and find you here they will surely eat you up. I am their cook. However, please, can you lick these discharges from my eyes so I may see you?”

The young man started by licking the dry discharges and then asked the old, old woman, “Should I spit out the discharges or swallow them?”

The old, old woman answered, "Swallow them!"

The young man swallowed.

Well then, the old, old woman told him, Please my son, lick me again, I still cannot see you."

The young man started licking the old, old woman's eyes again, and this time he licked the watery discharges, and then asked the old, old woman, "Should I swallow them or spit them out?"

The old, old woman answered, "Spit them out my child. I know the pains of birth pangs, my son!"

The young man spat out the discharges, and already the old, old woman was able to see.)

The moment the young man passes this test the old woman gives him some very important clues which will help him overcome all the obstacles and achieve his goals. Such helpers can also be old men. In some stories Such as in *Ndugu Wawili* and in *Dege* the helpers are in the form of birds while in others the helpers can even be snakes, such as happens to the heroine in *The Island of the snake and the land of gold*.

The other common types of tests in the AB Curve which the heroes and heroines of the travel folktale have to face are riddle-like events and phenomena which they have to be able to interpret. The chases in *Kitambi cha Pembemeuli* and the tricks which the wife and the husband play to outwit the trolls are an example of the tests. In *Mfalme na Wanawe Watatu* we have typical riddle-like tests which the three sons have to pass before they can inherit the kingdoms of Egypt and that of their father. For example, they have to be able to tell so many facts from a mark left by someone who had sat somewhere along their way:

Hapo walitoka kwenda safari yao. Walipokuwa njiani waliona alama ya kikao cha mtu. Hapo wakasimama. Yule mkubwa wao akasema, “Huyu ntu ni mwanan’ke.” Wa pili akasema, “Tena ana ntoto.” Na wa tatu akamalizia, “Na huyo ntoto yu wenda.”

(They were then set for their journey. On their way they saw the marks of a person who had sat somewhere. They halted. The eldest said, “It is a woman who sat here.” The second said, “And the woman had a child.” And the third one added, “And the child is a toddler.”)

This equally riddle-like explanation of a mere sitting mark left by a traveller manipulates the audience’s feelings keeping them in suspense until finally when the three sons disentangle its web in front of the King of Egypt:

Yule mtu aliyepotelewa na mkewe akaanza, “Enhe! Nyie ndiye mulionichukulia mke wangu; kwa dalili mulizonipa.”

Wale watoto wakakataa. Wakaanza kusema hivi, akianza wa mwanzo, “Tunamjua sio kwa sababu tulimchukua mkeo; ila ni kwa sababu hizi: Kwanza mwanamke anapokaa pahali hukatakata vijiti.” Wa pili akaendelea, “Hivyo vijiti vilichakurwachakurwa.” Wa tatu akasema, “Tuliona alama za njuga.”

Ha! Yule mtu aliyeshitaki akawaza kimoyomoyo na kukubali kuwa ni kweli maneno yao.

(The man whose wife had disappeared said, “OK! You guys are the ones who stole my wife, judging from all the evidence that you have given.”)

The three brothers denied the charges. The eldest brother then responded saying, “We know her not because we stole her but for the following reasons: First, wherever a woman sits she is bound to cut little sticks of grass into tiny pieces.” Then the second one said, “The little pieces of sticks were scraped and scratched.” The third added, “We saw a mark of a small bell usually tied to the legs of a toddler.”

Well, well! That man who had accused the three young men thought to himself and even found their explanations to be true.)

By being able to prove to the King of Egypt that they are innocent and, of course, very intelligent gentlemen, the three sons prove that they are worthy of inheriting the Kingdom of Egypt.

Several qualities of the hero/heroine are, thus, put to task in this AB Arc. Intelligence and also humility are among the common qualities. For example, in trying to show one's humility, it is very common to have heroes or heroines giving the following answer when they encounter the helpers mentioned above, who ask them who they are, where they are coming from and where they are going: “*Sijui ninakotokea wala ninakokwendea. Lakini natumai nitapata msaada wako.*” (I do not know where I come from, nor where I am going. However, I hope I will get your help.) By pleading ignorance the heroes and heroines are easily accepted and assisted by the helpers.

Sometimes, as we have seen, the hero or heroine has to prove his or her physical prowess, willpower, and even wit and a sense of humour in order to be able to outwit the evil forces which are typically found in this outgoing curve of the journey.

Curiously enough, it is also in this outgoing AB Arc that the Zanzibari folktale has some of its heroes either falling into deep sleep, or being carried by huge birds to far off lands, just like in a dream. Sometimes instead of a hero or heroine falling asleep he or she is entombed in a hole or cave. The act of the sister being left alone under a Mbungo tree in *Ndugu Wawili* is one of the many such acts which involve the travelling character falling into a state of unconsciousness or deep sleep. Eventually the sister is saved by some little birds who, like doctors, give her back her limbs.¹⁵ She then lives happily ever after in a castle of her own, away from her original home.

It is thus in the AB Curve that the heroes or heroines are immersed in a world full of adventures and even dangerous encounters. It is mostly in this arc that these heroes and heroines have to prove their worth.

Locus B: Consolidation point

In some tales, Locus B is the place where the above events in Arc AB will take place, in which case the arc becomes just a pathway leading to Locus B where the real action will happen. Many of the ogre tales where young men have to single-handedly fight some ogre in order to release the villagers who had been gobbled up fall under this category. This point is not only a consolidation point for such heroes, but first the attainment point and then the place of consolidation. Indeed, in some tales this locus also turns out to be the permanent home for the hero who is invariably made the king of the village which he has freed. In this case then, such heroes do not return to their former points of departure. Such is the case, for example, in *Nunda Mla Watu* and *Ndugu Wawili* and *Watoto Saba*. One can add, therefore, that in the tales where the heroes or heroines do not return to their points of departure, this point is a kind of freedom locus.

Locus B is the middle point where the journey out more or less ends, and the journey back to the original point begins. Kunene refers to this point as the Place of Foreign Sojourn.¹⁶ After a long period of trials and initiation in which the traveller's courage and temperament are put to test, whatever was gained is consolidated in this locus. As we stated earlier, rather than just using this point for consolidation, some of the tales from Zanzibar have the heroes or heroines turn this "foreign sojourn" into their permanent homes. Perhaps that explains why most of the time this point is marked by a building/castle to show the qualities of a new home which it represents.

The BA return curve

The Return Curve from Locus B back to A is used by most of the heroes and heroines for further consolidation of their victories. Most of the time this is an uneventful journey back, although sometimes it includes major events which will affect the hero's or heroine's future as happens in *Kisa cha Hamadi na Babu Akili*. This is a good example of a story with multiple patterns. Hamadi, an orphan, decides to leave home for far off lands in search of a better life. He travels for six days without meeting anyone; and then on the proverbial seventh day he arrives in a town where he meets an old man who gives him some advice and a warning. Soon afterwards, however, Hamadi fails the test as he forgets the advice and the warning, and draws his knife in public thus catching the attention and envy of the King's son. The Prince orders Hamadi's arrest falsely accusing him of stealing his knife. Consequently he is arrested and sent before the King. Again it is Mzee Akili who teaches Hamadi the way to overcome his problems. This time Hamadi heeds the advice given to him by Mzee Akili and, as the story says, he is freed:

Hamadi alitulia tuli huku anaendelea na kula. Hata ilipofika siku ya kuhukumiwa, Hamadi alieleza yale yote yaliyotolewa na Mzee Akili kwa kumfundisha paka. Hivyo, baraza la Mfalme lilitowa hukumu kwamba mtoto wa Mfalme ndiye mhalifu, na sharia ilimlazi-misha anyongwe kwa tamaa ya kisu.

(Hamadi paid a lot of attention while eating. Then, when the day of judgement arrived, Hamadi explained all that Mzee Akili (lit. "The Old Brainy Man") had trained him to say through Mzee Akili's word to the cat. Thus, the King's court passed the verdict that the Prince was the culprit, and the laws of the land stipulated that he must be hanged for stealing the knife.)

Somehow, this story comes to a dead end as we are not told what happened to Hamadi, although we might assume that as a result of his innocence he probably lived happily ever after in the King's castle.

The pattern of this story does not take Hamadi back to his original place of departure. It is more of a multiple journey style which looks as follows:

HOME: Departure point

to

TOWN ONE: A – Encounter
with Mzee Akili

to

TOWN TWO: A – Hamadi is
arrested

to

BACK TO TOWN ONE:
Coaching by Mzee Akili

to

BACK TO TOWN TWO:
Successful defence and freedom
for Hamadi



The pattern of this tale: from A to B to C, then back to B, and then C again makes its return curve different from the others in that it retraces the departure curve, but does not retrace it right to where the departure began; for that point is not important to this story. The most important locus is the dwelling of Mzee Akili who is, in effect, Hamadi's saviour.

Locus A Again: Arrival and further consolidation

Most of the Zanzibari folktales do not give details of this locus. The victory won by the hero or heroine in the AB Arc and also in Locus B seem to be enough since it fulfills the aim of the journey. That is why most tales from Zanzibar will end at locus B. However, some tales treat this locus as the concluding part of the story, in which the hero or heroine will consolidate whatever was gained. It is in this locus where the ensuing results of the return will manifest themselves. Where the journey has been a form of pubertal rites, the arrival locus will show the characters reasserting their positions; in which case the locus will imply the casting aside of the old world of childhood and the establishment of the new world of maturity and of adult life. This is the locus of the coronation of kings and queens who will then live happily ever after.

The social significance of the journey

In all societies the passage from childhood to adulthood is a big challenge and may even be a problem for parents. Adolescents experience biological, physiological and hormonal changes and social obligations which means they experience different moods which are not always compatible with what parents and society at large expect. A crisis of this kind is dealt with in most African societies by means of initiation rites and ceremonies. This part of the paper analyses the way the journey motif dramatises in a symbolic manner the different phases of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Folktales show the child how he or she can relinquish his or her infantile dependence and attain a more independent existence. Talking about the same issue, Bruno Bettelheim has this to say:

Today, children no longer grow up in the security of an extended family, or of a well integrated community. Therefore, even more than at the times when fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, though originally ignorant of ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.¹⁷

Fairy and folktales carry a very strongly felt need by the child to find answers about life in general, and childhood experience in particular. At the same time the adventures narrated in the tales fulfil the child's wishes to be able to fly and do other suchlike wondrous feats. The narratives take the child through different stages of development, step by step, so that initiation into adult life is, most of the time, gradual and very rarely sudden. Talking about the same issue, Eliade writes:

It is impossible to deny that the ordeals and adventures of the heroes and heroines of fairy tales are almost always translated into initiatory terms. Now, this to me seems of the utmost importance: from the time – which is so difficult to determine – when fairy tales took shape as such, men have listened to them with a pleasure susceptible of indefinite repetition. This amounts to saying that initiatory scenarios – even camouflaged, as they are in fairy tales – are the expression of a psychodrama that answers a deep need in the human being. Every man wants to experience certain perilous situations, to confront exceptional ordeals, to make his way into the Other World – and he experiences all this, on the level of his imaginative life, by hearing or reading fairy tales.¹⁸

The “initiatory terms” of the Zanzibari folktales can be determined by looking at the role of their use of the journey motif as *puberty rites of passage*. In dealing with the subject, the fairy and folktale from Zanzibar has also incorporated different outlooks and philosophies of the people of Zanzibar regarding life in general, death in particular, and also about different roles played by different people in the community at different stages of their growing-up process. The

physical journey of a hero or heroine in the Zanzibari fairy and folktale represents an intellectual and emotional initiation to maturity. The traveller's goal is to achieve or acquire the knowledge and/or power that will allow him or her to rejoin the community and enjoy heightened status in it. Thus, it is clear that the journey motif in the Zanzibari folktale does, at the same time, represent the socialisation process which is very necessary for young members of the community to undergo. This socialisation process can be traced from Point A of the journey to the arrival point as summarily indicated below.

Departure Point: The deathbed as the beginning of new life

Most of the tales from Zanzibar begin with the deathbed scene of one or even both parents. The deathbed scene signifies the passing away of the older generation and the new duties and responsibilities that have to be shouldered by the new generation. Already it indicates to the child that the *rites de passage* it is about to embark on imply taking over the custodianship of the homestead which was, up till then, in the hands of the parents. The first step on the road to one's initiation into maturity is the death of an older generation which symbolises the necessity to relinquish one's dependency on one's parents.

Death then, in the Zanzibari fairy and folktales, is taken for granted as a fact of life which must be borne and even accepted by all from the very beginning.

Thus, in making most of the Zanzibari tales which utilise the journey motif start with the death of one or both parents, the child is, in this way, instructed that his or her life's journey must, from the start, be prepared for the inevitable to come: death.

Death in these tales, however, must be seen from an African cultural context. Although, in effect, the deathbed scene at the start of a tale implies the end of

an old life and the beginning of a new one, this new life, however, does not signify the cutting off of the umbilical cord that joins it to the old one. That accounts for the name-giving ceremonies in most of African societies. Quite often, the names given to children, are those of the forefathers. This indicates that the old and dead are still very much alive in the young ones. This is where the world of the unborn can even be older than that of the living, to borrow Soyinka's statement;¹⁹ and the cyclic reality of traditional African thought must be related to this outlook. Death, in this case, is actually the beginning of life.

Touching on the same issue of death in fairy tales, Bettelheim has stated as follows:

Fairy tales were derived from, or give symbolic expression to, initiation rites or other *rites de passage* – such as the metaphoric death of an old, inadequate self in order to be reborn on a higher plane of existence.²⁰

While Bettelheim is referring to the hero or heroine who emerges as a newborn at the end of the journey, it is interesting that the Zanzibari fairy and folktale begin with an actual *physical* death of the parents and only ends with the *metaphoric* death of those who have just completed the feats of dangerous journeys. The cyclic reality of traditional African thought here means that the physical death is the beginning of the metaphoric life, and the metaphoric death turns into the beginning of a new physical life. The beginning of a journey is, therefore, the start of the struggle for self-realisation. This is so because the journey in fairy and folktales can be both an adventure and also a search for self-identity and recognition by others around the one who is undertaking the journey. In the Zanzibari tales, the travellers set out on their adventurous and even dangerous journeys *willingly* though with uncertainty and anxiety. In fact, as we have mentioned already, in most of the tales the initiates beg their parents for permission to travel and see the world.

This urge and even request indicates the anxiety to leave childhood and grow up. The journey's circular nature is, essentially, a rite of passage which leads, via trials and purification, to a new life, and ends more or less where it began: at home.

In *Watoto Saba* which we mentioned above, it is very interesting to note that the sister's hands are cut off after she steals the sugarcane. While this punishment can be related to the Muslim system of retribution, in this case it is very likely that this was meant to be symbolic of a warning against not only relying too much on the warmth and comforts of the idyllic life of the homestead when one is already supposed to have shed his or her infantile dependencies; but also it signifies another equally important warning; it is an admonition against incestuous desire, an opposition against sibling incest.

Curve AB: Trials and tribulations in the wilderness

The stages of development of a young member of family are depicted very well in a short, but very interesting, folktale from Zanzibar known simply as *Umoja*. Here there is an old couple with two children: a son and a daughter. The father dies after a short illness: and soon, the ailing mother calls the children to her deathbed bidding them goodbye with these final words:

Siponi, ila ninachowaomba ni kuwa muwe pamoja kwa hali na mali. Musisikitike kwani kila chenye mwanzo hakikosi kuwa na mwisho.

("I do not hope to survive. However, one thing which I beg of you is to stick together in whatever circumstances. Do not feel sad, for whatever has a beginning must have an end.")

A few days after the passing away of their mother, the brother embarks on a journey in search of food. This is obviously the first test of adulthood: to be

able to fend for one's family. After a long journey through the forest, the young man comes across a very dirty, old woman:

Akamkuta bibi mmoja alie na hali mbaya. Yule bibi akamwambia, "Ewe mjukuu wangu, nirambe tongo nikuone."

Yule mtoto akafanya kama alivyoambiwa. Akamwuliza, "Sasa mjukuu wangu umekuja huku kufanya nini?"

Akamwambia, "Nimekuja kutafuta chakula ili nikale na ndugu yangu. Hivi sasa nimeona nyumba ile kubwa nakwenda kuomba."

Yule bibi akamwambia, "Ile ni nyumba ya zimwi. Mle ndani kimo chakula kingi sana, lakini ukenda tu atakuua."

(Then he met an old, old sickly woman.

That old woman said to him, "My dear grandson, please lick the discharges on my eyes so I may see you."

That child did as he was told. Then the old woman asked, "Now my grandson, what have you come to do here?"

The young man said, "I have come in search for food so that I go and eat it with my sister. Now, I can see that house over there. I am going to beg for food."

That old woman said to him, "that is a house of the ogre. In there there is plenty of food. However, the moment you attempt to go there you will be gobbled up!")

The helper in this tale, an old, dirty woman, is a typical character in most of the Zanzibari fairy and folktales which have utilised the journey motif. Although in this case the helper is actually a positive character, in some cases as will be seen later, the helpers themselves are meant to mislead the hero/heroine so that he or she may discover on his or her own, the trick that has been set up to test his or her maturity. In the case of *Umoja*, the trial of the hero begins with the request from the old, dirty woman. The moment the boy agrees to lick the mucus-like,

dirty discharge from the eyes of the old woman, his maturity is strengthened. The licking of this puss-like discharge from the eyes of the dirty old woman carries a moral which celebrates humility. By being able to lick the nauseating discharge he has shown the necessary respect for old age. His second trial is how to deal with the *troll* which inhabits the castle in which there is the food he needs so much for his own and his sister's survival. Luckily, even here his respect pays off:

Yule bibi akamwambia, "Sikiliza mjukuu wangu; nenda ikiwa saa kumi na mbili wakati zimwi huwa anakwenda kuchunga. Panda mpaka orofa ya juu, utapata hicho unachotaka".

(That old woman advised him, "listen my grandson. You should go there at six in the evening when the ogre usually goes to graze. You climb up to the top floor, you will get that which you want.")

After the *troll* has left, the boy goes to its house, eats all the cooked food and collects the rest for use at home. The *troll* comes back when the boy is still in the house, which forces the boy to quickly hide in the attic of the house. The *troll*, finding no food in the house, and foolishly suspecting that its fat tail is to blame on seeing a grain of rice on it, burns its own tail, and the fire spreads so that the whole *troll* is destroyed. The boy who has witnessed all this while hiding in the attic, dances happily and goes to collect his sister and also the old woman who had helped him. They live in that house happily and enjoy the wealth that had belonged to the *troll* for a very long time. After some time the old woman passes away.

There is quite a substantial number of fairy and folktales from Zanzibar in which there are trolls and giant snakes or dragons which swallow whole villages. These are finally defeated by, usually, young men who have to travel from other far off villages. These tales suggest a ritual of purification and the rebirth of a

community. This is, for example, very well-illustrated in a fairy tale known as *Tovu*. In this tale a very prosperous and fertile village which has prosperous farmers, is invaded by an ogre who keeps on claiming one of the villagers every year. Eventually the ogre has swallowed all the villagers who, incidentally, belonged to one and the same clan. The ogre inherits all the wealth that had belonged to the villagers and, for a time lives very happily. However, in another village, there are people who are of the same clan as the ones who have been swallowed. Among them is a boy child who insists to his parents that he wants to visit the scene of the fatal events. The parents are against the idea, for they are sure that if their son goes he too will be swallowed. The boy persists in his demands, and so, eventually the parents give their half-hearted consent. So he sets out on a journey. By doing this, the boy is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his kith and kin. This readiness is finally rewarded as he manages to outwit the ogre which, in the same manner as happens to the troll in *Umoja*, foolishly kills itself by burning its navel when it accidentally discovers a grain of rice on it and accuses its own navel of stealing the food. The self-sacrifice transferred from the young boys to the *zimwi* and *troll* is indicative of the maturity of the boys. The initiates must be able to conquer their animal lusts and become conscious of their other responsibilities in their societies. As is usual in fairy tales, the boy in *Tovu* cuts open the stomach of the ogre and releases all his clanmates. As a reward, he is crowned and made king of that community.

Concluding remarks

In trying to describe the journey in the Zanzibari folktale, this paper has shown how, in spite of a number of theories which would divide the folktale into even more than 30 "functions" as propounded by structuralists like Lord Raglan, Propp, and Levi Strauss, for our purposes, the most appropriate division of the Zanzibari travel tale is into four major parts whose terms have been borrowed

from Kunene, namely, Locus A, Curve AB, Locus B, and Curve BA. These loci and curves have helped us in decoding the journey in the Zanzibari folktale by deliberating on the reasons for a character's departure, the Arc AB trials and tribulations faced by such a character before reaching the foreign land contained in Locus B, the consolidation of power and victory by the hero or heroine in that locus and also in the returning Arc BA. The paper has indicated that most of the heroes and heroines in the tales do not return to their original points of departure. However, when they do so, these and those who remain in Locus B turn those loci into new homes as they start life afresh.

This paper has also shown that the journey motif in the fairy and folktale from Zanzibar is, essentially, ritualistic. The rites of passage in the motif are, at the same time, a codified idiom which, through creative excursions tend to reveal social processes which sustain and modify the conduct and behavior of individuals of a given community. This has been shown to be done through manipulation of various symbols. The paper has also indicated that the initiation rites represented by the journey undertaken by heroes and heroines are cosmogonic not only in structure but in their very nature. The journey then represents the birth of a new world with new hopes. It ends with the most reassuring manner to the child, similar to what Bettelheim has stated:

At the story's end the hero returns to reality – a happy reality, but one devoid of magic ... As we awake refreshed from our dreams, better able to meet the tasks of reality, so the fairy tale ends with the hero returning, or being returned, to the real world, much better able to master life.²²

The paper has, hopefully, proved that contrary to John M Whiting's contentions that initiation ceremonies are social instruments through which the older, especially male, generation dramatises its disciplinary power and control over the younger

generation or even their power to destroy any inclination of rebellion by those in the initiates group;²³ the Zanzibari case, both in the actual initiation rites and also as portrayed in fairy and folktales does *not* support this viewpoint.

Fatherhood and motherhood in Zanzibar, as in many other African societies, does not generate any feeling of insecurity or any excessive rebellion among children. Children do belong to more than the immediate, nuclear family.

This explains why the character who travels in the fairy and folktales from Zanzibar is not forced out of the homestead; and this is why the hero or heroine, ultimately returns to the family or starts a new family which replicates the old one. Initiation rites in the actual lives of the Zanzibaris, and as portrayed in the Zanzibari fairy and folktales are neither aggressive nor hostile in intent to the initiates as such. The method of disciplining the initiates, such as secluding them from the comforts of the homestead as represented by the journey into the wilderness does not indicate aggressiveness or hostility. Rather it symbolises the shared struggle to grow up and take responsibilities in one's community. Thus, the sister in *Watoto Saba*, the boy in *Dege*, and all others who undergo this struggle do not regret having undergone it. On the contrary, they are thankful that they passed through it and that it finally brought them to a happy ending.

This paper has indicated that to have heroes and heroines sent out to encounter the dangerous forces out there in the world is to mark the end of infancy. This is the initiation into another kind of life whose process the child has to begin in the long march towards adulthood. One can, thus, say that the journey motif as utilised in the fairy and folktale from Zanzibar is, at the same time, the story of manhood and womanhood achieved.

Notes

1 See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a thousand faces* (Princeton: Bolingen, 1973); Lord Raglan, *The Hero* (New York: Meridian, 1979); V. Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958); and Daniel Kunene, "Journey as metaphor in African literature", in Arnold, Stephen ed., *African literature studies: the present state/l'etat present* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1985) pp 188–215, and "Journey in the African epic", in *Research in African literature*, Vol. 22, no. 2 (Summer 1992), pp 205–224.

2 Joseph Campbell, op. cit., p 30.

3 Op. cit., p 186.

4 Curiously enough, unlike in the Zanzibari folktale, childhood is one of the recurrent themes in African written literature where African writers, like their counterparts in other continents, remember and re-create childhood in an attempt to recapture a lost world. In the Zanzibari folktale, the presence of that "lost" world is taken for granted and, thus, not described in detail. For an interesting paper of visions of childhood in African literature see Burness, Donald, "Three visions of childhood in African literature: Camara Laye, Luandino Vieira, Geraldo Bessa Victor", paper presented at the African Literature Association Meeting, University of Indiana, March 21–24, 1979. Available in ALA Archives, Department of Comparative Literature, University of Alberta, Canada.

5 Daniel P. Kunene, "Journey in the African epic", op. cit., p 206.

6 See his earlier article, "Journey as metaphor in African literature", as mentioned above.

7 I am told by my informants that the island of Mauritius is used just as a metaphor that indicates long distance. In fact, as we mention later in the paper, some other versions of the same story use Egypt and even Arabia instead of Mauritius.

8 Kunene has expressed a similar idea in his "Journey as metaphor in African literature", op. cit., p 188, as he says:

The wide prevalence of the travelling hero, or hero who ventures forth away from home must be seen in the light of [sic] African's attitude to home, family and communal cohesion. Out there is a jungle. The hero who turns his back on the courtyard and cattle-folds and grazing fields of his home is entering this jungle with all its beasts and monsters. If he comes back alive and unscathed he will have learned some lessons of life. If he comes back scarred in body and soul, he will have tasted the hazards of being away from home, and will appreciate all the more the advantages of maintaining his links with his family and his society.

9 In his "Journey as metaphor in African literature", op. cit., p 189.

- 10 At a glance this type of punishment might lead one to conclude that it is based on the Muslim system of sin and retribution where whoever is caught stealing have their hands cut off. However, its use in Ndugu Wawili where the sister agrees with her brother's demands that her hands be amputated in payment for loaves of bread does not exactly tally with the Muslim influence for there is no theft involved here. Although my informants tell me that this was just used to emphasise the cruelty of the brother, the coincidence of the hand-cutting incidents calls for more research for it might have some further symbolic significance.
- 11 This is one of the many tales from Zanzibar which uses the motif of the quest for the absurd which is widespread the world over, Stith Thomson (1946:341) mentions how the motif appears quite often in the tales from North Pacific coasts and even in Europe where, for example, the hero is told to look for berries in the midst of winter; which goes to show how folktales cut across different continents and cultures.
- 12 See Jan Knappert, *Myths and legends of the Swahili* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970) pp 104–106.
- 13 Most of the literature that tackles the question of the conflict between culture of the countryside life and that of the city does, invariably, deal with this theme.
- 14 Incidentally, in our current collection of more than 350 folktales only two utilise the journey motif through sailing, confirming the fact that most of the storytellers/narrators must have come from the Tanzanian mainland without having undergone the experience of being seafarers.
- 15 See Kunene's article, "Journey as metaphor ..." (p 193), which talks about Chaka who is in the wilderness after several days of wandering. Due to fatigue and hunger, Chaka succumbs to a deep sleep under a tree by a fountain. Waking up in the late afternoon, he finds a tall "doctor-man" standing near him. This "doctor-man" helps Chaka in the process of cleansing and strengthening himself, similar to the girl's strengthening which is done by the little birds.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p 190.
- 17 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairy tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p 11.
- 18 See Mircea Eliade, *Birth and rebirth* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958); and also his *Myth and reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). Here Eliade is quoted by Bettelheim (1977), p 35.
- 19 In trying to show how the African system of naming can make a child's father refer to him as "my father", and how the father's conduct towards the child might be so differential that he might never call him by his real name, Wole Soyinka adds the

following regarding this issue in his *Myth, literature and the African world* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p 10:

Thus, the world of the unborn is older than the world of the living, and the world of the living is older than the world of the ancestors, and the same is true if put the other way round.

20 See Bruno Bettelheim, op. cit., p 16.

21 Curiously, this parallels a lot with the role given to Kijana (Mtu) in E.N. Hussein's *Jogoo Kijijini* (Dar es Salaam; Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976) in which a young boy, trying to save a village from the dangerous *Joka*, a dragon which is threatening to devastate the whole village unless each year a virgin is sacrificed to it. This young boy is called by the author, "ng'ombe wa kafara", a sacrificial cow, as he states:

Kiitikio:

Masikini kijana masikini

Masikini lahaua masikini

Haya yote yanajia nini?

Hata ye kujifanya ng'ombe alia

Ng'ombe wa surat al-bakari

Ambae aso na dosari

Au wa Keats mshairi

Endae machinjoni huku alia

Maisha yake hivi hivi

Kuyapoteza

Ndivyo hivi?

Au tabu 'lizozipata

Mashaka yalomkuta

Dhiki zilizomkamata

Kuja kuwang'ombe wa kafara?

(p 28)

22 Op. cit., p 63.

23 See Whiting, John W.M., "Comment", in *American journal of sociology*, 67 (1962), pp 391-394.

