



Daring To Be Destructive Euphrase Kezilahabi's Onto-criticism

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This paper analyses the philosophical concept of onto-criticism advanced by Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi in his PhD dissertation “African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation” (1985). Onto-criticism is presented as a critical approach to African literature defying “technical” analysis, which Kezilahabi sees as rooted in the Western tradition and which uncritically transposes Western philosophical concepts onto African literary productions, judging them on the basis of external paradigms.

I illustrate how Kezilahabi's daring propositions in the field of literary criticism touch on fundamental epistemological and ontological themes, thus making an important contribution to the field of African and world philosophy. I discuss Kezilahabi's emphasis on *language* as the projective ground of African literature, from which epistemological approaches and fundamental philosophical concepts such as “time”, “value” and “progress” are called into question, re-interpreted and re-invented.

Finally, I propose a political reading of this theory by analysing the profound connection that exists between “philosophical liberation” and self-determination, both in the individual and collective human dimension.

(This paper was written in light of the Bayreuth Swahili Colloquium as an in depth study of one aspect of the work of a known Swahili writer, touching on the themes of language and postcoloniality from this year's thematic focus.)