

## **BLOWING THE SUMMONING HORN: EUPHRASE KEZILAHABI, KITHAKA WA MBERIA AND SELF-TRANSLATION IN MODERN SWAHILI POETRY**

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This article compares two cases of poetic self-translation in two different periods in the development of modern Swahili literature – Euphrase Kezilahabi in Tanzania of the 1970s and Kithaka wa Mberia in Kenya of the 2000s. These writers represent two different literary situations and two different statuses that Swahili literature had achieved in the respective periods. The main argument in the article is that the two writers in their works seem to have a similar aim – to familiarise wider audiences on the national level with elitist poetic forms. The differences in both cases are determined by the specific socio-cultural context.

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### **Self-translation: a brief background**

Self-translation is a relatively well-researched subject in translation studies. Various scholars have pondered the question central to this article – “Why do some writers choose to repeat what they have already written in another language?”, that is, what are the reasons for self-translation? Rainer Grutman, for example, points to the particular relevance of asymmetrical language contact (Grutman 2009: 258), when, for instance, “self-translation may be encouraged by the elitarian character of a specific language” or “the cultural dominance of one language in a multilingual society [...] or in the international context” (Râbacov 2013: 68). In any case, “bilingual writers must deliberately decide which language to use in a given instance” (Beaujour 1989: 38), and “those writers should equally make a vigilant decision when they self-translate” (Râbacov 2013: 66).

Regarding self-translation, it is frequently stressed that “[s]ince the writer himself is the translator, he can allow himself bold shifts from the source text which, had it been done by another translator, probably would not have passed as an adequate translation” (Perry 1981:181). Jacqueline Risset, using the example of self-translations by James Joyce, states that while translations “in the usual sense of the word” attempt to be “hypothetical equivalents of the original text”, Joyce’s versions represent “a kind of extension, a new stage, a more daring variation on the text in process” (Risset 1984: 3, 6). Ghenadie Râbacov in his theoretical article on self-translation also states that “the self-translator, who is a bilingual and a bi-cultural author, is often free to do some changes in the process of his work’s translation” (Râbacov 2013: 66). After all, “the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator” (Fitch 1988: 125).

All these bold shifts and daring versions, however, appear to have the same final value as the original text:

A double writing process more than a two-stage reading-writing activity, they seem to give less precedence to the original, whose authority is no longer a matter of ‘status and standing’ but becomes ‘temporal in character’. The distinction between original and (self) translation therefore collapses, giving way to a more flexible terminology in which both texts can be referred to as ‘variants’ or ‘versions’ of comparable status. (Fitch 1988: 131-133, as quoted in Grutman 2009: 258)

As stated by Danby, “each version of the text is valid, and should be included in the reader’s appreciation and interpretation of the work, since they are both produced by the original author” (Danby as quoted in Râbacov 2013: 66).

In East African literature, self-translation has become an established practice since the 1960s, one of the first and most remarkable examples being that of *Song of Lawino* by Okot p’Bitek. Another notable self-translator is Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who initially gained his fame as a writer of English expression. However, in the 1980s he switched to his native language of Gikuyu, and later started to translate his Gikuyu novels into English. In an interview, Ngugi eloquently explained:

When I came out of prison with a novel, *Devil on the Cross*, two things happened: One, it meant here I had an original novel in an African language [that] could be read by people who understood Gikuyu. But the same novel was now available in English, so it reached the same audience I was reaching before. It was a revelation for me, in a practical sense, that you could write in an African language and still reach an audience beyond that language through the art of translation. Through the act of translation we break out of linguistic confinement and reach many other communities. (Ngugi 2008)

In Swahili literature, self-translation has played a more modest role than in East African writing in English. The cases of authors translating their own texts from Swahili into other languages and vice versa are not that numerous, the (arguably) earliest and most remarkable case being Aniceti Kitereza’s translation of his *magnum opus* from Kerewe into Swahili in the 1960s (see Bertoncini et al. 2009: 80).<sup>1</sup> Later notable cases include Ebrahim Hussein’s English translation of his play *Kinjeketile* in 1970 and William Mkufya’s Swahili translation of his novel *The Wicked Walk* (1977), published as *Kizazi hiki* (‘This Generation’) in 1980. In Kenya, earlier examples of self-translation are the English versions of the plays by Graham Hyslop (Bertoncini et al. 2009: 177).

In the following sections of this article, I will discuss two cases of poetic self-translation in two different periods in the development of modern Swahili literature – by Euphrase Kezilahabi in Tanzania of the 1970s, and by Kithaka wa Mberia in Kenya of the 2000s. The two East African poets also differ in the direction of their translations, Euphrase Kezilahabi translating from English into Swahili, and Kithaka wa Mberia from Swahili into English. I will consider

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<sup>1</sup> The Swahili version was published in 1980 by Tanzania Publishing House in Dar es Salaam.

only briefly the linguistic or stylistic features of these translations. Rather, these two cases will be viewed as markers of two different literary situations and two different statuses that Swahili literature achieved in the respective periods.

### **Euphrase Kezilahabi: a first example of self-translation**

Euphrase Kezilahabi,<sup>2</sup> renowned Tanzanian writer, scholar and philosopher and one of the major figures in modern Swahili writing, published his first poetic works in *DarLite*, the literary journal of Dar es Salaam University. His first poems, composed in English, saw the light of day in the late 1960s, when Kezilahabi was an undergraduate student of that university. Later these poems, translated by the author into Swahili, were published in his first poetic collection *Kichomi* ('A Burn', 1974), posing arguably the first example of self-translation in modern Swahili poetry. Below is a sample of this self-translation:

#### **ROCK IN LAKE**

It does not move, it does not speak: it is dead;  
But I can hear it speak.

“Young man be as serious as I am.

Look how birds

Have whitened my head as ants the  
skull,

Patient I am though foolish I seem

Waves touch me and break

as the murderer’s sword the soul.

I am firm and immovable

to the devilish man vulnerable”.

That rock is gone. I can no longer see it.

Here I am, in the boat, wicked little  
man,

weary-worried

Swayed by the waves.

Moved by the thighs of this young girl  
sitting by me

But that rock – that rock was dead.

As long as I live I can’t be like it;

When I’m dead like it, like it I will be.

*DarLite* 3,1 1969: 7

#### **MWAMBA ZIWANI**

*Hautingishiki, hauzungumzi: umekufa;*

*Lakini ninaweza kuusikia ukizungumza:*

*“Kijana mimi sicheki, uwe hivyo na wewe.*

*Tazama jinsi ndege walivyokifanya kichwa  
changu*

*Cheupe kama mchwa na fuvu, mimi nimetulia,*

*Sina wasiwasi ingawa naonekana mjinga.*

*Mawimbi yananigusa na kuvunjika*

*Kama upanga wa muuaji ushindwayo kwa roho.*

*Mimi ni imara na sihamishiki.*

*Na mtu mwovu siumiziki.”*

*Huo mwamba umekwenda. Siwezi tena kuuona.*

*Hapa ndipo nilipo, melini, mtu mwovu,*

*Na mwenye wasiwasi.*

*Nikisukumwa na mawimbi,*

*Nikitetemeshwa na mapaja ya huyu msichana*

*Mbichi karibu nami. Lakini ule mwamba,*

*Ule mwamba ulikuwa umekufa.*

*Wakati wote niishipo sitaweza, nao kufanana.*

*Nitakapokufa kama huo mwamba,*

*Huo mwamba nitaushabihi.*

*Kichomi* 1974: 6

<sup>2</sup> Euphrase Kezilahabi is a Tanzanian novelist and poet, born 13 April 1944 in Namagondo on Ukerewe Island (Lake Victoria). He completed secondary education at a Catholic seminary, then entered the University of Dar es Salaam, where he gained his BA and MA degrees in 1970 and 1976. He taught there in the Department of Kiswahili from 1974, except for a period of further studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he gained a doctorate in 1985. He is currently teaching at the University of Botswana. Kezilahabi is the author of the novels *Rosa Mistika* (1971), *Kichwamaji* (1974), *Dunia uwanja wa fujo* (1975), *Gamba la nyoka* (1979), *Nagona* (1990) and *Mzingile* (1991), of three collections of poems in free verse, *Kichomi* (1974), *Karibu ndani* (1988) and *Dhifa* (2008), of the play *Kaputula la Marx* (1996) and of some short stories. He has also written several articles and studies on Swahili literature.

Since even critics and scholars give authors and translators license for shifts and changes, the Swahili translation features certain modifications made by the author. For example, some occasional internal rhymes featured in the English original (such as “Patient I am though foolish I seem”) are lost in translation, although rhyming was somehow preserved in other cases: “sihamishiki – siumiziki” is rendered as “immovable – vulnerable”. The translation also preserves incremental repetition in the last four lines of the poem. At the same time, the poet presumably deliberately (or otherwise?) reverses the meaning of the lines about the soul and the sword of a murderer; it appears that in the English version the soul perishes under the murderer’s sword, whereas in the Swahili version the soul is spared.<sup>3</sup>

A few other English-language poems by Kezilahabi, published in this and the subsequent issue of *DarLite* (Vol. 3, No. 1), were self-translated into Swahili and published in *Kichomi: The Nile (Mto Nili)*, *The Bulls’ Fight (Mafahali wanapigana)*, and *The Wind of Time (Upepo wa wakati)*. Farouk Topan in his preface to *Kichomi* speaks of nine poems initially written by the poet in English:

*Kezilahabi aliutumia mtindo huu kwanza kuyatunga mashairi kwa Kiingereza. Mashairi tisa ya mwanzo katika diwani hii yaliandikwa hivyo. Baadaye akautumia mtindo huu kuuandikia mashairi ya Kiswahili. (Topan 1974: ix)*

Kezilahabi used this style first to compose poems in English. The first nine poems in this collection were written this way. Later he used this style to write poems in Swahili.<sup>4</sup>

The style that Topan speaks about is, of course, free verse, which was previously unknown in Swahili poetry. Kezilahabi in his introduction to the collection explains his motivation:

*Mimi nilikuwa na nia yangu nilipoyaandika. Jambo ninalotaka kuleta katika ushairi wa Kiswahili ni utumiaji wa lugha ya kawaida; lugha itumiwayo na watu katika mazungumzo yao ya kawaida ya kila siku... Mapinduzi haya ya kutotumia vina na kutumia lugha ya kawaida ya watu yametokea katika ushairi wa nchi mbalimbali. Nami, nimefanya hivyo, siyo kuwaiga, lakini kwa kuwa naamini kwamba mapinduzi ya aina hii ni hatua moja kubwa mbele katika ushairi wa Kiswahili. (Kezilahabi 1974: xiii-xiv)*

I had my aim when I was writing [the poems]. The thing that I want to bring to Swahili poetry is the use of common language; the language that people use in their everyday conversations... This revolution of not using rhymes and using the common language of the people has happened in the poetry of different countries. And me, I did the same not in order to imitate them, but because I believe that a revolution of this kind is a big step forward in Swahili poetry.

Kezilahabi also confirms the English origin of his poems:

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, by providing this brief analysis of the translation of the poetic texts quoted in this article, I did not try to assume the possibility of a direct correspondence between the English original text and the Swahili version of the same text (in the case of Kezilahabi) and vice versa (in the case of Kithaka wa Mberia). I am only illustrating the strategies and devices the poets were using for the purpose of “molding” their message in a different language.

<sup>4</sup> All the translations in this article, except the poems, are mine.

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*Kitabu hiki kimegawanyika katika sehemu mbili. Sehemu ya kwanza ni ya 'Mashairi ya Mwanzo'. Mashairi haya yaliandikwa kwanza katika lugha ya Kiingereza, lakini hapa nimeyatafsiri kwa ajili ya mtu atakayetaka kuona jinsi nilivyoanza kujitosa katika ushairi. Baadaye sikuona sababu ya kuendelea kutoa mawazo yangu kwa watu wasemao lugha ya Kiswahili, kwa kutumia lugha ya kigeni... niliona kwamba lugha ya Kiswahili iliweza kutoa mawazo yangu vizurizaidi. (Kezilahabi 1974: xiv)*

This book is divided into two parts. The first part is “Poems of the Beginning”. These poems were written first in the English language, but here I have translated them for the sake of somebody who will want to see the way I started to immerse myself in poetry. Later I did not see any reason to continue communicating my thoughts to people who speak Swahili in a foreign language... I saw that the Swahili language was better capable of communicating my thoughts.

Apart from the reasons mentioned by the author himself, my argument in this paper is that this act of self-translation was pursuing yet another aim. Talking about the revolution of form (free verse) and medium (common language) that he wanted to effectuate in Swahili poetry, Kezilahabi did not mention an additional aspect: the revolution in terms of the audience. In East Africa of the 1960s, free verse poetry in English was an elitarian, ‘high-breed’ art, incubated in literary journals by people who ‘by definition’ constituted the intellectual and social elite of East African societies due to their higher level of education – university dons and students, civil servants of higher rank, etc. Thus, by translating his works into Swahili, the poet intended more than just to transform the language of Swahili verse from the bombastic and complicated language of traditional poetry (which he referred to as “solving the riddle”- Kezilahabi 1974: xiv) into the everyday Swahili of his contemporaries. He meant to instigate yet another revolution: to replace the foreign language of high-breed modern East African poetry (mostly written in free verse) with the language of the people, thus giving a convincing and pioneering example of adapting a foreign and elitist form to the needs of common audience

The socio-cultural motivations behind Kezilahabi’s self-translation are also evident. His first poetic attempts were made in the period when Swahili was already playing an important role in the Tanzanian national (and nationalist) discourse. As expressed by Legère, “the country’s language policy emphasised Swahili as an authentic symbol of the Tanzanian nation” (Legère as quoted in Reuster-Jahn 2016: 202). At the same time, the role of English was diminished in many ways (see Gromov 2011: 284). Thus, the translation of literary works from English into Swahili was an act of bringing elitist texts to a wider audience, stressing the role of Swahili literature as ‘literature of the masses’. Another factor for Kezilahabi’s self-translation could have been his desire to popularise free verse poetry – again making an elitist poetic mode accessible to a wider reading public.

A different case can be found in Kenyan Swahili poetry several decades later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when a collection of poems by one of the leading authors, Kithaka wa Mberia, was also published in English translation. Below I will try to outline, after a brief analysis of one of the translated texts, some of the circumstances and motivations behind this translation, allowing us to put this project into a broader context.

### Kithaka wa Mberia: author as co-translator

Kenyan writer and scholar Kithaka wa Mberia<sup>5</sup> is considered to be not only the most prominent figure in modern Kenyan poetry in Swahili but also one of the pioneers of the country's free verse poetry in the language.<sup>6</sup> Of course, Kenyan Swahili poets who used free verse were drawing on the experience of their Tanzanian colleagues, who had started writing in this way two decades earlier. This time gap between the development of free verse Swahili poetry in two East African nations could be attributed to the fact that Swahili literature, and poetry in particular, have been largely overshadowed in Kenya by the country's rich English-language writing. In fact, it was not until the last two decades of the twentieth century that Swahili literature has gained more prominence in Kenya.

One of Kithaka wa Mberia's collections, *Bara Jingere*, published in 2001, was translated into English in cooperation with the author and published in 2011 under the title *Another Continent*. As an example of this translation, I quote below the very first poem of this collection:

<i>MACHOZI YA DAMU</i>	TEARS OF BLOOD
<i>Majuto ni mjukuu:</i>	Remorse, like a grandchild,
<i>Tulipocheza kinamo</i>	Arrives in due course:
<i>Katika karakana ya siasa</i>	In the arena of politics
<i>Hatukujua kwamba vinyago</i>	We played with a potter's clay
<i>Vingejibadilisha maumbile</i>	Knowing not that toys
<i>Na kujigeuza miungu-wajeuri</i>	Would change form
<i>Watulize machozi ya damu</i>	To become insolent gods
<i>Kwa kutuzamisha kucha</i>	And by sinking their nails
<i>Hadi mafundo ya neva!</i>	To our nerve ganglions
<i>Bara jingere 2001: 1</i>	Make us shed tears of blood!
	<i>Another Continent, 2011</i>

The English text features modifications similar to those found in the translation by Kezilahabi discussed above. One might notice the appearance of occasional rhymes, absent in the Swahili version – “remorse” and “course” and, less vividly, “politics” and “potter's” in the first four lines; note also a ‘nearly rhymed strophe’ in “toys-form-gods” (near rhyme being formed by o-sounds). The translation uses the inversion of lines. For instance, the line with the title words

<sup>5</sup> Kithaka wa Mberia is a Kenyan poet, linguist and playwright, born 8 August 1955 in the Tharaka district. He lectures in the Department of Linguistics and Languages at the University of Nairobi, where he obtained all his degrees in linguistics, having researched into his mother tongue, Kitharaka. He is author of the plays *Natala* (1997), *Kifo kisimani* (translated as *Death at the Well*, 2011, by Khalfan Kasu and Marami V. Marami) and *Maua kwenye jua la asubuhi* (2004, translated as *Flowers in the Morning Sun*, 2011, by the same translators). He is also author of several collections of poems: *Mchezo wa karata* (1997), *Bara jingere* (2001, translated as *Another Continent*, 2011, by Richard Wafula and Kithaka wa Mberia), *Redio na mwezi* (2005), *Msimu wa tisa* (2007), *Rangi ya anga* (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Alamin Mazrui published his collection of free verse poems *Chembe cha moyo* (‘Grain of the Heart’) nine years before Kithaka wa Mberia's first book appeared.

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“tears of blood”, which occupies the third-to-last line in the original, is made the last one in the English text – arguably for emphasis. For similar emphasis, and also maybe for explanation, the translator added the line “arrives in due course”: the Swahili saying “majuto ni mjukuu” does not have a direct analogue in English, thus an additional line was needed to expound on the meaning.

Here it should be noted that, unlike Kezilahabi’s poems, the collection of Kithaka wa Mberia was translated into English “by R. Wafula and the author” as indicated on the title page. Thus, in this case, we are obviously not dealing with a case of self-translation but with what could be called an authorised translation. One notable fact is the absence of a special article on authorised translation in major reference guides on translation, such as the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2011) and *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (1997). In most other sources, ‘authorised translation’ refers only to the terminology of law (such as translation during the court process authorised by the involved institutions) and theoretical studies about this remarkable phenomenon in creative writing appear to be, alas, rather scarce.

In view of this, the only information for any studies about the translation project of *Another Continent* – its reasons, author’s motivation, the process itself – could be obtained from the author himself, as the most reliable source. For that purpose, a short interview was conducted with Kithaka wa Mberia in September 2017. The text of the interview is given in the appendix to this article; below I will highlight several points made by the poet in the interview.

In the interview, the poet confessed that he decided to translate his second collection of poems from Swahili into English for a number of reasons. First, he was searching for a wider audience because, as he put it, “by the content of my poems I surely target the whole of Africa, thus in many of my poems I can use the picture of here and troubles of Kenya, but for the sake of addressing the whole of Africa about its problems and the ways of moving forward.” At the same time, he stressed that he was targeting a specific audience inside Kenya: “some Kenyans, because of their chauvinism or the problems of this or that type, have no wish to read in Swahili.” For these people English is definitely the language of a higher status, but the poet expressed his hope that although in Kenya “people do not want to speak Swahili, maybe they would not like to be seen carrying or reading a Swahili book, but if it is translated into English, now they will be able to maybe read it”.

At the same time, Kithaka wa Mberia considers the process of translation subordinate to that of writing, saying, “I am pressed by a lot by work. And if I use that short free time that I get for translation, I will lose a chance of writing another book [...] I mean my book can be translated by someone else, but my new book cannot be written by another person”. While wa Kithaka Mberia generously gives credit to the translator Richard Wafula, insisting that the bulk of the translation was done by him, he also acknowledges his own role in the process: “After getting those translations [by Wafula], I myself was marking those places where he, in my view, was slanted, with a red ink, that this in the end is what I would like to be amended [...] [I]f it says

‘translated by Wafula and...’, it is a way of admitting and being sincere that my name is there, because I have contributed to a certain extent, but the main translator is he. [...] I did not supervise all the things, there are some things that I gave a hand in working on, but the one who did the work itself was Wafula, and that is why we say ‘with’.”

In my opinion, this confession of the poet allows this *particular* case of the authorised translation (although I do not pretend to any wider theoretical generalisations) to be qualified as a sort of self-translation, since the author was not only the supervisor and the editor of the translations but also a contributor to the process itself. According to the above-quoted article by Râbacov, “The ideal cases of a successful translation are obviously... when the author who masters the target language cooperates with the translator and when the translator is the author himself” (Râbacov 2013: 67-68). Translations of wa Kithaka Mberia’s poems seem to be a sort of in-between case, when the author, who is thoroughly bilingual and may well have been able to translate his own work by himself, preferred to co-operate with the translator, mainly not to lose time for his teaching and writing activities.

In my interview with Kithaka wa Mberia (see appendix), he said that he was targeting those Kenyans who “would not like to be seen carrying or reading a Swahili book”. By this Kithaka wa Mberia not only meant that he would increase the readership of his poems. He also meant that he would acquaint his European-minded compatriots with the achievements of Swahili poetry, showing that these achievements are at the least comparable and at the most higher than those of local poetry in English. That this “reader with a lot of ‘Europeanness’” will read these poems in English cannot deny the fact that they are first and foremost poetry in the other national language. Thus, by “blowing the summoning horn” the poet was calling his European-minded audience to the meeting with Swahili poetry – and the English medium here played mainly the role of the instrument of familiarisation.

In comparison with Kezilahabi’s self-translations discussed above, Kithaka’s case and situation appear somehow reversed. In present-day Kenya, Swahili also plays an important role in the discourse of national consolidation, but on the level of literature the situation appears to be different. The majority of the country’s population speaks various simplified versions of Swahili as their everyday language – from *Sheng* and the pidginised Swahili of Nairobi and other large urban settlements to other regional and ethnic variations. However conversant a larger part of Kenyans could be with a standard version of the language, primarily through compulsory secondary education (where Swahili itself is a compulsory subject), their more or less close relationship with *Kiswahili sanifu* usually ends after school graduation. For many of them, the language of everyday communication is the local simplified variation of Swahili, whereas the “standard” version remains for them the language of both private and state-owned media and those works of Swahili literature that they were fed at school – and to which they hardly ever returned in their after-school life.

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The following section focuses on Kenyan literature, since in Tanzania the “rivalry” between English and Swahili writing has never been pronounced, mainly because of the even present-day scarcity of Tanzanian writing in English compared to the corpus of Swahili texts. In Kenya, as noted earlier, the situation was somewhat reversed, and the rapid growth of the country’s Swahili literature that has taken place since the 1990s did not change it drastically – rather, Swahili literature acquired a new status, as discussed in the next section.

### **Swahili and English literature in Kenya: a delicate balance?**

From the observations given in the previous section, one can assume that standard Swahili already appears as an elitist language in Kenya. As for its literary aspect, the fact that Swahili literature in Kenya is written almost exclusively in standard language appears to contribute greatly to the fact that the larger part of the reading public in the country indulges in English-language literature.

This assertion about the greater popularity of English-language writing in Kenya may be to a certain extent confirmed by figures. According to my records, after the year 2000 the number of active English-language authors in Kenya has totalled roughly one hundred, while the number of those writing in Swahili is barely half that. Correspondingly, novels in English published since 2000 amount to nearly 120, whereas novels in Swahili in the same period are half as many. The situation in poetry is even more striking: poetry collections in English by individual authors over the same period amount to almost 30, while Swahili poetry is mainly represented by five collections of Kithaka wa Mberia.<sup>7</sup>

There are various reasons for such apparent neglect towards literature in the national language. For many Kenyans, literary texts in Swahili are associated with the “boring” school curriculum, as well as with difficult, formal and thus “irrelevant” standard Swahili. Therefore, preference is given to more accessible English texts, which additionally for some people are associated with “modernity and civility”, as stated by Kithaka wa Mberia in the interview (see appendix). Thus English-language writing appears to have a wider audience in the country.

At the same time, it must be noted that the artistic level of Kenyan works in Swahili is frequently higher than that of the country’s English-language literature and that some forms used by Kenyan Swahili authors are hardly suitable for mass audiences. A good example is the “new” novel in Swahili, which employs elements of post-modernism and magical realism, uses complicated aspects of form, and has no analogies in Kenyan English-language writing. Even the conventional social-critical novels in Swahili by Kenyan writers are hardly qualified for mass audiences, some of them even by their volume – suffice it to recall *Kyallo Wadi*

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<sup>7</sup> The figures in this part of the article should be regarded as approximate since they are not taken from any official source but from my personal records on creative writing publishing in Kenya since the year 2000, as well as from what I saw in bookshops and publishers’ catalogues. Obtaining statistical data from the Kenya National Library Services or publishing houses can be problematic. Although I dare hold that these figures reflect the general situation, they still provide vivid illustrative material.

Wamitila's novel *Harufu ya mapera* ('The smell of guavas', 2012; about 700 pages)<sup>8</sup> or Rocha Chimerah's three-volume novel *Siri ya sirini* ('A secret within the secret', 2013-2014).<sup>9</sup> In the field of drama, Swahili writers increasingly incline towards complex parabolic forms, as found, for example, in *Safari* ('The journey') by Humphreys Omwaka (2005),<sup>10</sup> *Zilizala* ('Earthquake') by Kimani Njogu (2006)<sup>11</sup> and *Upotovu* ('Depravity') by Njiru Kimunyi (2000).<sup>12</sup> It must be mentioned that renowned Tanzanian writers, such as Said Ahmed Mohamed, who currently largely publish in Kenya and target predominantly Kenyan audience, are also inclining towards elaborate novelistic and dramatic forms. These are hardly appealing to the wider reading public. Thus, Swahili writing in Kenya falls into the status of literature not consumed by the reading majority of the country. This is also evidenced by the fact that the audience of this literature mainly consists of people who did not give up their connection to Swahili literature after completing formal schooling. And who may these people be? These days, most Kenyan universities (currently about 70) offer full-fledged major programmes (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral) in the Swahili language and related disciplines (education, communication, etc.). Students, graduates and teachers of these programmes appear to comprise the majority of Swahili literature readers.

The above speculations tempt us to assert that Swahili writing in Kenya is created by and for the audience of highly educated people, which may well be called the "elite". In view of this, we may state that we are faced with a rare case, where the niche of elite writing in an African country (Kenya) is occupied by African-language and not European literature. Thus, in Kenyan literature Swahili seems to have drastically flipped its status and is now the language of the elite literature.

## Conclusion

The two cases of self-translation discussed above represent, in my view, two instances of asymmetrical language contact, where self-translation was encouraged by the elitarian character of a specific language, as well as by the cultural dominance of one language in a multilingual society. In both cases, the purpose of self-translation was to expand the audience of the literature written in an elitist language. However, while Kezilahabi aimed through self-translation to popularise an elitist form (free verse) by transforming it from an elitist English into the culturally dominant Swahili, Kithaka wa Mberia's goal was to expand the audience of elitist modern poetry in Swahili by translating the poetry into English as a more accessible language of literature. Admittedly, in Kenyan society in general, the situation appears to be reversed:

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<sup>8</sup> Nairobi: Vide-Muwa.

<sup>9</sup> Nairobi: Sasa Sema.

<sup>10</sup> Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Nairobi: Longman.

<sup>12</sup> Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers.

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Swahili, in its multiple varieties, is much more widespread than English. I am speaking only about the elitarian character of standard Swahili, especially as the language of literature.

In both cases under discussion, a thesis posed by Râbacov is also applicable. According to him, “when rendering his/her experiences into both languages the self-translator becomes a cross-cultural mediator and establishes certain relationships between these cultures in the process of translation” (Râbacov 2013: 66). It appears that this mission of cross-cultural mediator was assumed by both writers, who in fact were mediating on different cultural levels. Kezilahabi was familiarising the local Swahili-reading audiences initially with a foreign culture product of free verse (in terms, first of all, of its applicability to Swahili poetry), building a bridge between his immediate public and modern poetic culture. Kithaka wa Mberia, on the international level, was trying to mediate between modern (Kenyan) Swahili poetry and wider audiences worldwide – but on the national level to build a bridge between Swahili poetry and the English-reading public of his own country. Thus, both Kezilahabi and Kithaka wa Mberia were pursuing similar aims, with the differences in both cases determined by the specific socio-cultural context.

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## Appendix

### **Mahojiano na Kithaka wa Mberia, Nairobi, 16 Septemba 2017**

*Nakumbuka Bara jingine imechapishwa kwa mara ya kwanza mwaka 2003, lakini tafsiri imetokea mnamo mwaka wa 2011. Na mimi ningetaka sana kuuliza: palikuwa na sababu gani ya kufanya tafsiri hiyo?*

Ingawaje naona fahari sana kuandika kwa Kiswahili – maanake naweza kuandika kwa Kiingereza, lakini naandika kwa Kiswahili kwa sababu ya kuwa na msimamo kwamba ningependa kuchangia katika ukuaji wa hiyo lugha na kwamba lugha za Kiafrika pia zina nafasi katika tamaduni za ulimwengu na utamaduni wetu na kwamba kuandika kwa lugha zetu ni njia mojawapo ya kujikomboa na kutetea katika dunia. Kwa hivyo naandika kwa Kiswahili si kwa sababu sina uwezo wa kuandika kwa Kiingereza lakini msimamo ambao nauchukua. Lakini baada ya kusema hivyo niseme hivi pia: kwamba Kiswahili ni muhimu, kwamba ni muhimu kukuza lugha zetu za kiafrika na kuwa Mwafrika na kuimarisha Uafrika wetu na utamaduni wetu, haimanishi kwamba hakuna umuhimu wa kutangamana na maeneo mengine ya dunia. Ni muhimu sana kuweza kuandika na kueleweka na watu ambao labda hawasomi kwa ile lugha ambayo naiandikia. Kwa hivyo maoni yangu ni kwamba ndio tunaweza kuandika kwa Kiswahili au labda kwa Hausa, ila tutambue ukweli: kuna watu wengi duniani ambao hawawezi kusoma Kiswahili, na hali hiyo haitabadilika. Hapo ndipo kunakuwa umuhimu sana wa kutafsiri.

Kwa hivyo ule wakati ambapo baada ya kuandika kitabu nikakaa kwa miaka hiyo yote kukisoma kwa Kiswahili, lakini sasa naelewa labda kitafsiriwe kwa lugha nyingine ikiwepo Kiingereza kwanza, ili watu ambao labda hawana uwezo wa kuandika na kusoma Kiswahili wasome. Maanake ingawaje mimi ni Mkenya na naandika hapa Kenya, ukiangalia maudhui yangu, kwa hakika kwa maudhui yangu nalilenga Afrika zima kwa mashairi yangu mengi, kwa hivyo kwa mashairi yangu mengi labda naweza kutimia picha ya hapa na zani za hapa Kenya, lakini kwa ajli ya kushughulika Afrika zima na matatizo yake na namna ya kusonga mbele... Nalenga hadhira ya Kenya na nje ya Kenya.

*Na kuhusu hadhira ya Kenya ambayo wewe unailenga na ile tafsiri: tafadhali maneno machache.*

Maanake kuna watu hapa Kenya ambao kwa namna moja au nyingine wana (*anacheka*) uzungu mwingi, na ambao wangeweza kujifunza Kiswahili kwa hakika, lakini hawataki... hawataki kuonekana kusoma Kiswahili, hawataki kufikiriwa kwamba wamesoma Kiswahili, maanake wanafikiria usasa na uungwana na nini ni kuzungumza lugha ya Kiingereza na kuvalia Kimagharibi na kadhalika. Sasa watu wale hawataki kuzungumza Kiswahili labda hawatapenda kuonekana wakibeba na kusoma kitabu cha Kiswahili, lakini kikitafsiriwa kwa Kiingereza, sasa wataweza labda kusoma kwa sababu sasa kitakuwa ni kitabu ambacho kimeandikwa kwa lugha ya kisasa, lugha ya fahari, lugha maarufu, kuliko lugha ya – kama wanavyofikiria baadhi ya

watu – lugha ya mama mboga, na ya matatu na kadhalika. Maanake wapo, na labda tungeona kuwa ni mambo mepesi, lakini mambo yale bado yapo mpaka sasa.

Watu wanauliza ‘kwa nini unaandika kwa Kiswahili?’ Swali lingekuwa ‘kwa nini unaandika kwa lugha nyingine isipokuwa Kiswahili, lugha ya taifa?’ Kwa hivyo nafikiria ulimwengu unazunguka Kiingereza. Ukiangalia bila shaka labda umaarufu na uzito wake katika jamii ya kimataifa inawezekana kusema kuwa Kiingereza ni lugha ya kwanza... Na nishawahi kuambia kuwa baadhi ya Wakenya, kutokana na taasubi zao au na matatizo ya namna moja au nyingine, hawana hiari. Sasa wakisoma mashairi kwa Kiswahili, na wengine, wale ambao hawangesoma kwa Kiswahili, watasoma kwa Kiingereza, bila shaka hadhira itakuwa imepanuka. Itakuwa ni kwa manufaa kwangu – na si manufaa kifedha, lakini kama mtu ambaye anapiga mbiu ya mgambo, ungependa watu wengi wasikie navyo wahidhurie mkutano. Kwa hivyo hadhira ya maandishi yangu ikiwa maradufu, mara nne, mara tano, mara kumi, mara mia moja – nitaishukuru mimi, maanake ujumbe wangu nitakuwa nimepitisha.

*Tena maswali mawili kuhusu tafsiri yenyewe. Kwa nini umependelea mashairi hayo yatafsiriwe siyo na wewe mwenyewe?*

Kwa sababu kadhaa. Sababu ya kwanza – nikakosa nafasi. Maanake wajua mimi ni mwalimu wa fasihi, kwa hivyo tatizo langu kubwa ni kwamba sasa nafundisha fasihi na isimu kama kazi yangu ya kila siku. Na pia mimi ni mpenzi sana wa kuandika, kwa hivyo inakuwa kwa siku nyingi mimi nimebanwa sana na kazi. Na muda mfupi ambao naupata nikiutumia kwa kutafsiri nitakosa nafasi ya kuandika kitabu kingine. Kwa hivyo nikichagua ule muda nilio nao kwa kufanya nini – afadhali nikautumie kwa kuandika kitabu kingine kuliko kutafsiri. Maanake kitabu changu kinaweza kutafsiriwa na mtu mwingine, lakini kitabu changu kipya hakiwezi kuandikwa na mtu mwingine.

*Tafsiri yenyewe ilikuwa inafanyaje: kwanza bwana Wafula alikuwa anakupatia zile tafsiri na wewe ulifanya uhariri fulani au vipi?*

Sasa nikipata zile tafsiri, mimi ndiye labda kule ambako naona anapotoka nitawekelea kwa wino mwekundu na nini, lakini hatimaye ndiyo nayopenda kurekebisha. Maanake naonyesha kule ambako kidogo naona ile tafsiri haikufaulu kabisa – imefaulu labda lakini siyo kwa kiwango ambacho ningependa, na kisha tunajadiliana. Si kama mimi nampuuza na kubadilishabadilisha mwenyewe. Kwa hivyo kwa hakika ndiyo unaona “translated by... with”, maanake hilo neno tumelitumia makusudi, maanake nafasi yangu mimi ni ndogo, na ikawa “with” maanake ndio kusema “translated by Wafula and...”, ni njia ya kukiri na kuwa mwaminifu kwamba jina langu liko hapa kwa maana nimechangia kwa kiwango fulani, ila mfasiri mkuu ni huyo.

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*Sasa wewe ulikuwa ni zaidi kama mhariri?*

Kama mhariri hapa na pale na kuchangia hapa na pale, ingawaje... maanake si mambo yote naangalia, kuna baadhi ya mambo ambayo... mimi nikamtilia kazi mkono, lakini anayefanya kazi mwenyewe ni Wafula, na ndivyo tunasema “with”.

### **Interview with Kithaka wa Mberia, Nairobi, September 16, 2017**

*I remember that Bara jingine was published for the first time in 2003, but the translation came out in 2011. And I would like to ask: what were the reasons for doing this translation?*

Although I feel very proud to write in Swahili – meaning that I can write in English, but I write in Swahili because of my convictions: I would like to contribute to the growth of this language. I feel that African languages also have their space in the cultures of the world and our culture, and I think that writing in our languages is one way of liberating and protecting ourselves in this world. Because of that I write in Swahili, not because I cannot write in English, but because of my convictions.

But that being said, I would also like to add this: that Swahili is important and that it is important to develop our African languages. But being an African and strengthening our Africanness and our culture does not mean that it is not important to mix with other areas of the world. It is very important to write and to be understood by the people who do not read in the language that you write in. Thus my opinion is that yes, we can write in Swahili or maybe Hausa, but let us recognise the truth: there are many people in the world who cannot read Swahili, and this condition will not change. Here exactly comes the importance of translating.

Because of that, all this time after writing the book, I spent all these years reading it in Swahili, but now I understand maybe it should be translated into other languages, with English the first among them, so that people who cannot write and read in Swahili may read it. I mean that although I am a Kenyan and write here in Kenya, if you look at my content, with the content of my poems I surely target the whole of Africa. Thus in many of my poems I can use the picture of here and troubles of Kenya, but for the sake of addressing the whole of Africa, its problems and the ways of moving forward... I target the audience in Kenya and outside Kenya.

*And about the audience that you target in Kenya: please, a few more words.*

I mean that there are people here in Kenya who in this or that way have (*laughs*) a lot of “Europeanness” and who would be able to learn Swahili, for sure, but they do not want to... they do not want to be seen reading Swahili, do not want to be thought of as having studied Swahili, they think that modernity and civility and all is speaking English and dressing up in Western style, and so on. Now those people do not want to speak Swahili, maybe they would not like to be seen carrying or reading a Swahili book, but if it is translated into English, now they will be able to maybe read it because now it will be a book which is written in the modern

language, the language of glory, the famous language, rather than in – as some of the people think – the language of vegetable sellers, *matatu* drivers, and so on. I mean that they are there, and while we may think it is a trifling matter, such things still exist.

People ask me, “Why do you write in Swahili?” The question should be, “Why do you write in any other language except Swahili, the language of the nation?” Thus I think that English has spread throughout the world. If you look at its popularity and importance in the international community, it is possible to say that English is the first language... And I already talked about those Kenyans who, because of their habits or problems of this or that type, have no wish [to read in Swahili]. Now if some read the poems in Swahili, and others, those who would read in Swahili, read in English, no doubt the audience will increase. This will be for my benefit – not in terms of money, but like a man who is blowing the summoning horn, he would like many people to hear it and join the meeting. Thus if the audience of my writings increases twice, four, five, ten, one hundred times – I will be grateful, because it means that I will have spread my message.

*Now two questions about the translation itself. Why did you prefer these poems to be translated not by yourself?*

For several reasons. The first reason – I did not have an opportunity. Meaning that, as you know, I am a teacher of literature, and because of that my big problem is that I teach literature and linguistics as my daily job. And also I am very fond of writing, but it appears that for many days I am pressed a lot by work. If I use the little [free] time that I get for doing translations, I will lose a chance to write another book. Because of that, I chose to use the time that I have to write another book rather than translating. I mean that my book can be translated by someone else, but my new book cannot be written by another person.

*How was the translation itself done? First Mr. Wafula gave you the translations and then you edited them, or what?*

After getting those translations, I marked the places in red ink where he, in my view, was slanted, indicating where I would like to see some changes. Meaning that I was showing where in my view the translation was not very successful – it was good, maybe, but not to the extent I wanted, and then we would discuss it. It was not as if I was ignoring him and making changes myself. Because of that surely you see [the words] “translated by... with”, meaning that we used this word on purpose, because my contribution is small, and if it says “translated by Wafula and...”, it is a way of admitting and being sincere that my name is there, because I have contributed to a certain extent, but that he is the main translator.

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*So you worked more as an editor?*

As an editor here and there, and I contributed here and there, although... I did not supervise everything, there are some things that I gave a hand in working on, but the one who did the work itself was Wafula, and that is why we say “with”.