

NEW RESPONSES TO OLD PROBLEMS: HOW THE GERMAN TRANSLATOR-PUBLISHER IS MAKING SWAHILI LITERATURE AVAILABLE IN A NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT MARKET

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This article shows how changing ideologies and evolving market forces have combined to lessen German publishers' enthusiasm for Swahili literature – and how, surprisingly, translators of Swahili are now taking the initiative to ensure that Swahili literature still gets published. After outlining preceding periods of translation and showing how they are determined by ideologies and market forces, I take a close and partially personal look at the development and role of the translator-publishers: how digital technology and new formats have enabled them to take over classical publishers' tasks. Still, even if translators manage to publish their translated works, they are confronted with the challenge of reaching an audience and creating a space for Swahili literature in German-speaking countries. These translators could possibly join forces to reach a critical mass for translations, thus paving the way for Swahili translated literature to be recognized and appreciated by German-speaking readers.

Introduction

Only a handful of modern Swahili literary works have been translated into German during the last fifty years. This article will take a look at these activities of translation from Swahili into German in their political and economic contexts. Its focus is on the translators, whose evolving role as a result of changing reception and markets will be explored. Since translated works only become relevant in the literature of receiving languages when they are noticed on the book market and acquire a readership, it is important to ask how translated Swahili literature has performed on the book market in Germany and how this in turn has affected translation activities. To fully understand how German translations of Swahili literature perform on the market, translation and publishing activities have to be examined in their respective historical, political and cultural contexts. This includes the relationship between Swahili literature and other African literature in German translation.

The interest in Swahili literature in Germany has been largely influenced by Germany's colonialist past, as one of the German empire's colonies in Africa was German East Africa (1885-1918). The first translation enterprises from Swahili into German date back to these colonial times. Unlike the British with their policy of "indirect rule", the German colonial administration did not favour indigenous languages but employed the existing lingua franca, Swahili, for administrative communication with its colonial subjects. Early administration

officers and language instructors made efforts to translate texts from Swahili into German (Büttner 1894, Seidel 1896, Brode 1905, Velten 1907). These texts were not primarily translated as works of literature, but rather as ethnographic and linguistic data. German colonial endeavours ended after the country's defeat in World War I. German East Africa was split into Rwanda, Burundi and Tanganyika, the latter being mandated to British administration by the League of Nations. After World War II, Tanganyika was transformed into a United Nations trust territory under British control. As a result, German interest in the country lessened.

This changed with Tanganyika's independence in 1961 and the formation of the United Republic of Tanzania through the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar.¹ Tanzania became one of the most important partners for economic cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa, both for socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) and capitalist West Germany. Partnerships were also established between church congregations, schools and towns. The people involved in such programmes have been an important target group for translated novels by renowned East African authors writing in English, in particular Meja Mwangi and Abdulrazak Gurnah. Also Ngugi wa Thiong'o's English-language novels have been translated into German or, in the case of his works written in Kikuyu, indirectly from their English translations. In contrast to works by these authors, only a handful Swahili works have been translated into German, the earliest being in the 1970s, when modern Swahili literature was still in its formative period. Nevertheless, it is the only afrophone literature with a relatively extensive body of German-language translation.² One must bear in mind, however, that these Swahili works in German translation must compete with works of African literature originally written in English, French or Portuguese, which thus from the start have a much wider circulation and recognition. Moreover, such works are often intended for both African and non-African audiences, immediately increasing potential readership.

As a study by Tomi Adeaga (2006) has shown, the market for German translations of even anglophone African literature is challenging. The publishers interviewed in Adeaga's survey all expressed their disappointment with sales. However, these publishers can hardly be blamed for not having made great efforts. Repeatedly, they launched special promotional campaigns. Already in the 1970s, the publishing houses Peter Hammer (Wuppertal, Germany) and Walter (Olten, Switzerland) started a book series called *Dialog Afrika* edited by Al Imfeld, Jochen R. Klicker and Gerd Meuer, all well-known promoters of African literature in German-speaking countries.³ In those early years, Swiss organisations and individuals played

¹ Tanganyika achieved independence in 1961, while the British Protectorate Zanzibar became independent in 1963. After the revolution in Zanzibar in early 1964, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed the United Republic of Tanzania in April 1964.

² Other languages are Zulu (Dhlomo 1994) and Sesotho (Mofolo 2000), both translated by Peter Sulzer. In addition, a trilingual volume (Shona, English, German) of poems by Chirikure Chirikure appeared in 2011, translated by Sylvia Geist.

³ In some cases, works that previously had been published in the GDR were re-published in this programme. The publisher Volk und Welt ('People and World') in the GDR specialised in translations of international works.

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a leading role in promoting African literature (Adeaga 2006: 206-208). In the 1980s, scholars Ulla Schild, Gerhard Grohs and Peter Schunck from Mainz University in Germany edited the series *Afrikanische Autoren* ('African Authors', twelve books) with the publisher Otto Lembeck in Frankfurt. In the 1990s, the publishing houses Marino (Ilija Trojanow) and Hammer (Hermann Schulz) launched a promotion campaign for African literature under the name *Afrikanissimo*. However, all these efforts did not significantly increase the sales of books by African authors in German translation (Adeaga 2006: 139). Authors from Africa are apparently not in demand by German-speaking readers. Even though recent publications by a few "afropolitan" writers (Selasie 2005) such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole and Taye Selasie have become global bestsellers, the market for African literature in German-speaking countries remains generally difficult.

The African continent is still often perceived as marginal and disadvantaged, and part of the audience consists of a "charity-oriented readership" (Asare in Adeaga 2006: 184-185). This orientation is also reflected in the fact that the influential Association for the Promotion of Literature from Africa, Asia and Latin America in Frankfurt is funded by the Protestant Church in Germany, aid and development agencies, the German government, and the Frankfurt Book Fair (Litprom 2019). This association has been instrumental in the publication of translations of books by authors from the Global South through distributing to publishers translation grants by the German Foreign Office and the Swiss foundation SüdKulturFonds.⁴ Grants supporting translations of African works have generally been given for books originally written in European languages (and more recently Arabic). In contrast, only two translations of Swahili works received translation grants. This figure, however, must be put into perspective, as one of the translations was done indirectly from French.

It is hard for Swahili literature to find an audience and a market outside East Africa. Most of Swahili literary works are written primarily for a domestic audience, even those by academics educated or working abroad who know that they will be read by international Swahili scholars and critics. The structure, style and even content of their works in many cases follow East African principles of oral story telling. Moreover, their works often do not adhere to the values of individualism, but those of community, even at the expense of individual freedom. Such cultural differences are challenging for translators of Swahili literature because they must continually decide whether to give background information or explain implicit meanings – thus potentially compromising the flow of their translation. However, for this article I decided not to put much emphasis on translation strategies and processes but on the challenges of publication and promotion of translated works. It will show that there have been different periods in the publication of Swahili works translated into

⁴ The translation programme started in 1984. It subsidises about 20 translations per year. To date, 721 books (novels, short stories and poetry) by African, Asian, Arab and Latin American authors have been sponsored (Litprom 2019).

German and that the position of translators and publishers has changed along the way. Their roles, approaches and publication strategies will be discussed. The focus will be on Germany.⁵

Translations in the German Democratic Republic

The first German literary translations from Swahili in the post-colonial era were carried out in the GDR. This is not surprising, as Tanzania and the GDR were friendly nations, both adhering to socialist ideologies. A number of Tanzanian literary scholars – who often were at the same time writers of prose, drama or poetry – did their PhD at the universities in Leipzig or Berlin, which had departments of African-language studies. There was a real exchange, as lecturers from the GDR also went to Dar es Salaam for research and teaching. One of them was Joachim Fiebach, a well-known scholar of drama and theatre studies, who worked at the Humboldt University of Berlin and was interested in African theatre. Between 1970 and 1973, he supervised the PhD project of the reputed Tanzanian dramatist Ebrahim Hussein (born 1943), titled *On the Development of Theatre in East Africa* (1975). Hussein stayed in Berlin until 1978, when he returned to Tanzania as a lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of Theatre, Arts, and Music. In his most well-known play *Kinjeketile* (1969), he deals with the *Maji Maji* war against German colonial oppression and exploitation. This war started in the Kilwa area in the south, Hussein's home area. The peasant *Kinjeketile* became possessed by a spirit and subsequently played a crucial role in the resistance movement. The *Maji Maji* war was the first time that different ethnic groups united and, although the resistance was brutally oppressed by the German colonial army, it has become part of the foundation narrative of the Tanzanian nation. Fiebach, who had learned Swahili, translated this politically progressive play for a volume of several African plays in German translation titled *Stücke Afrikas*, which he edited and published in 1974.⁶ The volume comprises plays by nine African playwrights from all African regions. Some of them were already well-known at the time, such as Wole Soyinka, Aimé Césaire and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o; others were largely unknown.

A second Swahili play translated by Fiebach into German is a work of such an unknown author. In fact, it was not published in Swahili in printed form, but was only performed on

⁵ In Austria, translation activities were going on at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Vienna, when Lourenço Noronha was the lecturer for Swahili (1974 – 2009). He translated parts of a number of novels for didactic purposes, setting each novel into context by an introduction including biographical information on its author. Noronha alternated between summaries of passages in German and original Swahili paragraphs, which had to be translated by the students. In this way, he has produced scripts for novels by Euphrase Kezilahabi (*Rosa Mistika*), Alex Banzi (*Zika mwenyewe*), Shafi Adam Shafi (*Kasri ya Mwinyi Fuad*) and Peter Ngare (*Kikulacho*), among others. In addition, he indirectly stimulated the translation of the play *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* (Mbogo 1988), which was translated by two graduates of theatre science from the university in Vienna, who had participated in Noronha's seminar on Swahili drama. The German translation was published as *Der Tanz des Ng'wanamalundi* ('Ng'wanamalundi's dance') in the journal of the institute (Mbogo 1992). However, translated works do not seem to have left the confines of the university, nor have there been any recent translation projects.

⁶ The title contains a wordplay, as *Stücke* means 'pieces' but also 'theatre plays'. Thus, it can be read as 'African pieces', 'Pieces of Africa' as well as 'African theatre plays'.

stage. The original Swahili title of this play by John Ramadhani is *Mgomo wa Masinde* ('The strike in Masinde'), and the German title is *Streik in Masinde*. As Fiebach writes in his short introduction, the play was commissioned by the federation of trade unions from mainland Tanzania to be performed in 1966 at the celebrations to commemorate the foundation of the ruling party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) (Fiebach 1974: 326). It is set in colonial times and shows how the workers on a British-owned farm in Tanganyika successfully strike for their rights after having joined the trade union. Quite different from Hussein's *Kinjeketile*, this play is characterised by a "striking representation of social-political fronts and developments, and flat character-types"⁷ reminiscent of agitprop theatre in Europe and Northern America (*Ibid.*: 677-678).⁸ It was Fiebach's intention to give visibility to such politically progressive lay theatre, which even in Africa often was ignored because it lacked the qualities of a "great work of art" (*Ibid.*: 679). The play's original Swahili version is not accessible, nor has its author published any further literary work.⁹ It seems that today in Germany both translations are better known to those interested in theatre than in African studies.

Testing the market: publications of translations in the 1990s

Translation of Aniceti Kitereza

In West Germany, translation of contemporary Swahili literature into German started two decades later than in the GDR, shortly before German reunification. The first work that attracted the interest of a publisher was Aniceti Kitereza's famous ethnographic family saga of more than 600 pages, *Bw. Myombekere na Bi. Bugonoka na Ntulanalwo na Bulihwali*, set in precolonial Ukerewe, the author's home area. Hermann Schulz, director of the Peter Hammer publishing house, whose vision was to give visibility to literature from the periphery, recognised the potential of this book to become a classic of world literature. Having lived in Tanzania, Schulz had a personal relationship with the country and thus took notice of the book soon after its publication in 1981.¹⁰ He asked Wilhelm J.G. Möhlig, a Bantuist and Swahili expert at the University of Cologne, if he could translate the work, and Möhlig agreed.

In personal communication (26 May 2018), Möhlig admitted that this translation was one of the most demanding projects of his career. Not only the length but also the language of the

⁷ The German original is: "Die plakative Zeichnung der sozialpolitischen Fronten und Entwicklungen und die flächenhafte Typisierung der Figuren."

⁸ In his afterword to the volume, Fiebach rejects the idea that this kind of theatre is an imitation of Western forms of revolutionary working-class theatre because it was unknown in Tanzania at the time (Fiebach 1974: 678).

⁹ According to Fiebach, Ramadhani studied at the University of Dar es Salaam and later worked with the ministry of education.

¹⁰ Although the publishing date is 1980, the book, which was printed in China, arrived in Tanzania only in 1981, just two weeks after its author had died.

published Swahili version, which was the basis for his translation, presented a number of problems primarily related to the history of the manuscript. The author Kitereza had initially written it in his mother tongue Kikerewe for a local readership in the early 1940s, with the aim of preserving for future generations knowledge about pre-colonial ways of living. A national publisher asked him to translate the manuscript into Swahili so that it would be accessible to a larger readership. Eventually, this Swahili manuscript was published in 1980 by Tanzania Publishing House.¹¹ In the epilogue to the first volume of the translation, Möhlig states that he did not have access to the Kikerewe version (Möhlig 1991: 321). Since the Swahili version addressed a wider readership than its Kikerewe predecessor, it contained explanations of many cultural peculiarities (*Ibid.*). While they made the text sometimes clumsy, these explanations relieved the translator of the necessity to add annotations or other forms of context information. Nevertheless, Möhlig would have liked to cross-check with the unpublished Kikerewe original (*Ibid.*). The Swahili text as such presented difficulties to the translator, as it is not in modern Standard Swahili (created after Kitereza had completed his education) but reflects an older usage of the Eastern African lingua franca. Kitereza had “obviously tried to close gaps in the lexicon of the lingua franca-Swahili with the help of dictionaries and experts”,¹² which not always yielded convincing results (*Ibid.*: 323). The author also created a number of recurrent “kerewe-isms”, as Möhlig calls them, with regard to “not only words but also metaphors and syntax”¹³ (*Ibid.*). In addition, Kitereza had retained a number of culture-specific Kikerewe terms for plants and animals, utensils of daily use, cultural institutions, proverbs and formulas used in communication. Although he had attached an extensive glossary to the Swahili version, it did not cover all those terms; hence they presented a nearly insurmountable difficulty for translation. In some cases, Möhlig had to deduce the meaning from the context (*Ibid.*). Like other translators of Swahili literature into European languages, Möhlig was not specifically trained, and therefore the translation process was characterised by a learning-by-doing approach. In the epilogue to the first volume, Möhlig explains some difficulties he faced and the principles he applied in his efforts to overcome them (*Ibid.*: 324-329). He perceived translation as an exercise in balancing faithfulness to the source against achieving meaning and style in the target language, and was well aware of the unavoidable subjectivity (*Ibid.*: 317-318).

Like the original Swahili version, the German translation was published in two equally long volumes of more than 300 pages each. The first volume appeared in 1991 under the title

¹¹ In fact, the history of the manuscript reads like an adventure story, and without Kitereza’s extraordinary determination and some help from others, it would never have been published (Hartwig & Hartwig 1972: 165-170, Möhlig 1991: 312-314, Ruhumbika 2002: viii-x).

¹² The German original is: “Kitereza hat augenscheinlich versucht, entsprechende Lücken im Wortschatz des Verkehrssprachen-Swahili mit Hilfe von Wörterbüchern und sprachkundigen Beratern zu schließen.”

¹³ The German original is: “Kitereza hat jedenfalls im Swahili eine Reihe von originellen ‚Kerewe-ismen‘ geschaffen, die sich nicht nur auf einzelnen Wörter, sondern auch auf die Metaphern und den Satzbau beziehen. Dadurch, dass die Lebenswelt, die Kitereza in seinem Roman beschreibt, in sich jedoch relativ geschlossen ist, konnten dieselben Sprachkreationen in den verschiedenen Kontexten von ihm immer wieder verwendet werden.”

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Die Kinder der Regenmacher. Herr Myombekere und Frau Bugonoka ('The rainmakers' children. Mr. Myombekere and Mrs. Bugonoka') and was followed in 1993 by the second, titled *Der Schlangentöter. Ntulanalwo und Bulihwali* ('The slayer of serpents. Ntulanalwo and Bulihwali'). The translation of the second volume was supported by a grant distributed through Litprom.¹⁴

Möhlig's text was the first complete translation of Kitereza's epic novel into a European language. It inspired the French translation of the two volumes published by L'Harmattan in Paris in 1996 and 1999, translated by Simon Baguma Mweze in collaboration with Olivier Barlet, who revised the French version using the German translation (Mweze & Barlet 1996: 14-15).¹⁵ An English translation followed in 2002, by Gabriel Ruhumbika, a professor of comparative literature at the University of Georgia in America, who is originally from Ukerewe.¹⁶ His translation is based on a copy of the original manuscript in Kikerewe, which had been retrieved at a mission archive in Canada (Ruhumbika 2002: xxx-xxxii). He writes that "I had to fill in a lot of the understood or implied references, occasionally even at the expense of the artistic quality of the passage" (*Ibid.*: xxvi-xxvii). Nevertheless, he felt that he could "read the author's aims and goals correctly" (*Ibid.*: xxv), something he feels that the German translator could not do (*Ibid.*: xxiv-xxv).

Kitereza's work in German translation stands out as a bestseller among African literature in German translation. A second edition appeared already in 1996, with a slight change of title: *Die Kinder der Regenmacher* was now used for the whole work, with the subtitles *Die Ehe* ('The marriage') for the first part, and *Die Familie* ('The family') for the second. A Swiss edition licensed to the Unionsverlag in Zürich appeared in 2001. In 2007, an audio book was released, read by well-known actress Eva Mattes.¹⁷ Finally, in 2016, on the occasion of the publishing house's 50th anniversary, Peter Hammer published a special paperback edition. This impressive record not only reflects the quality of the work – both the original and the translation – but also the publisher's successful promotion. An ethnographic family saga, this novel was advertised as an account of ancient Africa, thus complying with romantic perceptions of a harmonious African past. As such, it could not be taken as a test for the reception of modern Swahili novels in German translation, which often deal with social and individual failure.

¹⁴ <https://www.litprom.de/quellen/?country=&areas=&autor=Kitereza&title-or-tag=&release-start=&release-end=&language=&genre=&medium=&bestlist=&awards=&original-title=&translator=&verlag=&feminin=0&gefoerdert=0&gefoerdert=1&only-orderble=0&sort=author&start=0&search=Suchen+%2F+search> (last access 15-12-2018).

¹⁵ Kitereza 1996 and 1999.

¹⁶ Kitereza 2002.

¹⁷ *Steinbach Sprechende Bücher*, series *Afrika erzählt* ('Africa is telling stories').

Translation of Shafi Adam Shafi

The success of the family saga may have encouraged the publishing house Marino in Munich to try a translation of a modern Swahili novel. Marino had been founded in 1989 by the author and publicist Ilija Trojanow with the aim of promoting African literature in Germany. Trojanow published German translations of works by African authors, such as Yvonne Vera, Chenjerai Hove and Kojo Laing. Because the Zanzibari author Shafi Adam Shafi's Swahili novel *Kasri ya Mwinyi Fuad* ('Mwinyi Fuad's castle', 1978) had been published in French translation in 1986, Marino commissioned the translation into German from the French translation – a less complicatedly and costly endeavour than translating from the Swahili original. In his efforts, he was supported by a grant through Litprom. Karin Boden and Monique Lütgens, already known for their translations of francophone African authors, did the translation, including the epilogue by Jean-Pierre Richard.¹⁸ Entitled *Die Sklaverei der Gewürze* ('The slavery of spices'), the book was published in 1997.¹⁹ It was promoted through a nationwide reading tour with the author, where it received mixed reviews and encountered some criticism for its revolutionary romanticism (Grill 1998). Indeed, as the German title implies, the novel has a political thrust. Set in feudal Zanzibar on the eve of the revolution in 1964, it concentrates on the exploitation and deprivation of plantation workers, celebrating their eventual revolt as an act of liberation while not mentioning the killing and expulsion of thousands belonging to the wealthier part of the population. Despite his ambitions and literary vision, the publisher Trojanow closed down his publishing house shortly after publication of Shafi's novel. Looking back, he said "I thought I would bring African literature to Europe. I was sure that the bookshops would grab this fantastic literature out of my hands! But it wasn't so."²⁰

No further German translation of a literary work in Swahili has since been initiated by an established publishing house. This is not really surprising as there has never been a well-thought-out strategy for the translation of Swahili literature, and most publishers are not even aware that there is a vibrant body of Swahili literature. Clearly, German publishers have withdrawn from the idea of cultural engagement with Swahili literature through translation. This reflects the publishing policy that the translation historian and theorist Lawrence Venuti has described with regard to individual foreign authors: "If soon after publication the

¹⁸ Nowhere in the book is indicated that the translators did not translate from the Swahili original but from the French version. As they do not speak Swahili, they could not even consult the original novel.

¹⁹ The novel had been translated into French by the linguist and translator Jean-Pierre Richard and published by Karthala in Paris under the title *Les giroflières de Zanzibar*. It was Richard's only translation from Swahili. Usually he translates from English (<https://www.idref.fr/029001285>).

²⁰ Interview with Elisabeth Scharang, 1 May 2014 (<https://fm4v3.orf.at/stories/1737856/index.html> - last access 15-12-2018), translation from German by the author. The failure of Marino could be interpreted in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's study of concentration processes in the field of publishing in France, which led to the squeezing out of small, experimental publishers (Bourdieu 2008). Gisèle Sapiro (2008) and Pascale Casanova (2010) have pointed to similar processes in the field of literary translation. This discussion, however interesting and vital, is outside the scope of the present article.

translation suffers a substantial loss or fails to earn back its production cost or to realize a modest profit, then stop publishing translations of the author's books" (Venuti 2013a: 159). Swahili literature represents a minor culture and literature in the Global North, but Swahili is a major language in Africa. Interest in sub-Saharan African culture is generally low outside the continent. While recent internationally bestselling African authors mostly have a transnational background that is reflected in their novels, Swahili works are generally nationally oriented and deeply connected to East Africa. Most of the bestselling afropolitan novels are about urban middle-class families, university graduates and successful business people who struggle with relationship problems, all against the backdrop of migration and racism. In contrast, Swahili novels are concerned principally with poverty, corruption, disease, failure and despair, generally against a national backdrop. Nevertheless, they exhibit a certain charm, which lies in their depiction of social relations, especially in the family, their attitude of "despite everything", and their often irrepressible humour. The so-called popular novels in particular are also entertaining and often full of suspense. Still, they demand from the foreign reader curiosity and openness towards what is foreign and culturally unfamiliar.

Making Swahili literature available in German markets: translators as publishers

After the two publisher-driven projects of the 1990s, there was a gap of more than ten years until new, and very different, translation projects unfolded. In these new projects emerged a new type of translator, one who performed classic publishers' tasks in addition to translating. Indeed, starting from around 2010, enthusiastic translators have found creative ways to publish their translations, ranging from audio books and establishing their own publishing houses to print on demand. Digital technology has made this largely possible.

Muhammed Said Abdulla in audio format

The first of these new translators was Guido Korzonnek, a graduate of the Department of African and Ethiopian Language Studies at the University of Hamburg and professional study tour guide, hence by profession a mediator between cultures.²¹ On tour in Zanzibar the idea occurred to him to translate a book by Muhammed Said Abdulla (1918-1991), a Zanzibari author credited with having published in 1960 the first realistic novel in Swahili, *Mzimu wa watu wa kale* ('Graveyard of the ancestors'). This detective novel is the first in a series of six that feature the private detective Bwana Msa ('Mr. Msa'), modelled on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's world-famous character, Sherlock Holmes. Just like his template, Bwana Msa solves criminal cases by discovering clues and interpreting them in a range of surprising and even philosophical ways. Like Holmes, he smokes a pipe and is accompanied by a loyal assistant. However, the cases he investigates are deeply connected to social problems characteristic of Zanzibari culture and society. Korzonnek's idea was to introduce Bwana Msa to German readers and thus make authentic literature from Africa intended for a Tanzanian audience

²¹ Information on Korzonnek's project is taken from his website, personal communication via email, and a phone interview on 30 January 2019.

accessible to them. He started translating the book, improving his skills by participating in translation workshops. Eventually, he obtained translation rights from the family of the late author in 2007. However, Korzonnek was unsuccessful in his proposals to German publishers, who, he felt, merely brushed him off. Since he did not want to abandon his project, he founded his own publishing house, *Kalamu* ('Pen'). As is often the case with private initiatives, the direction of the fledgling company was partially determined by chance and encounter: A friend with a recording studio suggested that Korzonnek produce an audio book instead of a printed one. This seemed more than a good idea, and Korzonnek enthusiastically took it upon himself to read the translation. The first Bwana Msa novel appeared in 2009 as *Der Geisterwald der Ahnen* ('The grove of the ancestors') on three CDs in a cassette professionally designed by another friend of the author.



Figure 1: Homepage of *Kalamu* (<https://www.kalamu.de/>) with the menu bar and the covers of the first two audio books. “Welcome to Kalamu - Thrilling crime novels from Zanzibar! Discover the diversity of East African culture with private detective Bwana Msa!” (Courtesy of G. Korzonnek)

Korzonnek’s audio crime novel was well received as innovative and original. It received numerous reviews in the press, both local and regional. Korzonnek promoted his project and the author Muhammed Said Abdulla through an interview in a nationwide radio programme. Since he particularly targeted fans of crime novels, he was invited to crime fiction festivals and the like. He also used distribution channels in the tourism sector, such as references in

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tourist guides and direct contact with clients during tours. In addition, Korzonnek approached bookshops and organisations and was invited to a number of readings.²²

Korzonnek felt encouraged to release the second audio book in 2011, *Der Brunnen von Giningi*, a translation of Muhammed Said Abdulla's *Kisima cha Giningi* ('The well of Giningi', 1968). However, he soon realised that the first novel had not created a sufficient wave of success on which further books could ride. Korzonnek explains this partially by the decreasing popularity of the CD format. Thus, despite the translator's aim to publish more Bwana Msa novels, no further audio book has appeared to date. In the meantime, he is thinking of translating and publishing another author and is contemplating a printed book for his next translation project. In any case, with his two audio books, Korzonnek has certainly contributed to making Swahili literary works better known in Germany.

A publishing house for William E. Mkufya

A second private translation initiative was conducted around the same time by Barbara Schmid-Heidenhain, a lover of Swahili literature with longstanding private connections to Tanzania. In 2016, she published her translated version of William E. Mkufya's 2004 novel *Ua la faraja* ('Flower of consolation') into German. This was, however, not her first translation of Swahili literature into German. In 2008, she had translated a collection of Swahili folktales illustrated with colourful Tingatinga paintings (Kirknaes 1988, 2008). In fact, it was for this project that Schmid-Heidenhain, who prior to her retirement had worked in the publishing sector as an editorial manager, founded her own publishing house in 2008, which she named "Edition Pamoja", *pamoja* meaning 'together' in Swahili.²³



Figure 2: Website of Edition Pamoja (<http://www.editionpamoja.de/index.html>). "Edition Pamoja is committed to Africa, with works on literature, art and development policy." (Courtesy of B. Schmid-Heidenhain)

²² This information as well as the reviews and links to audio recordings of interviews are available on Kalamu's website.

²³ The information was obtained in personal communication on different occasions in 2016.

After this start, she looked for a novel to translate. As she lacked the expertise, she asked the Swahili lecturer at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin, Lutz Diegner, to select a suitable book, and he recommended *Ua la faraja*. Schmid-Heidenhain embarked on the ambitious project of translating Mkufya's novel, which comprises 423 pages. The novel is a literary response to the AIDS pandemic, which at the time the book was written posed a huge threat to the people in African countries. Infection, illness and death spread at a frightening speed and had an unsettling effect on Tanzanian society. People realised that they had to change their habits concerning sexual behaviour and relationships. *Ua la faraja* depicts a community of friends and neighbours in Dar es Salaam who through the AIDS threat start to reflect upon the meaning of their lives and their behaviour towards others. Thus, an intimate portrait of Dar es Salaam's inhabitants unfolds, which greatly contributes to the appeal of the novel, as it abounds with colloquial conversations, allusions, teasing, indirect communication and different speech registers. All this made translating the novel an immensely difficult task, which Schmid-Heidenhain tackled bravely and for the most part successfully. Certainly, dialogues and the use of register is a slippery terrain in translation, and even Swahili experts cannot claim a firm grasp of it. The translation took Schmid-Heidenhain about five years to complete. She was assisted by Vitale Kazimoto, a Swahili native speaker and language instructor at HU Berlin. In addition, she could turn to the author whenever specific clarification was needed. Eventually, Schmid-Heidenhain published her translation as *Blume des Trostes* ('Flower of consolation') in 2016.

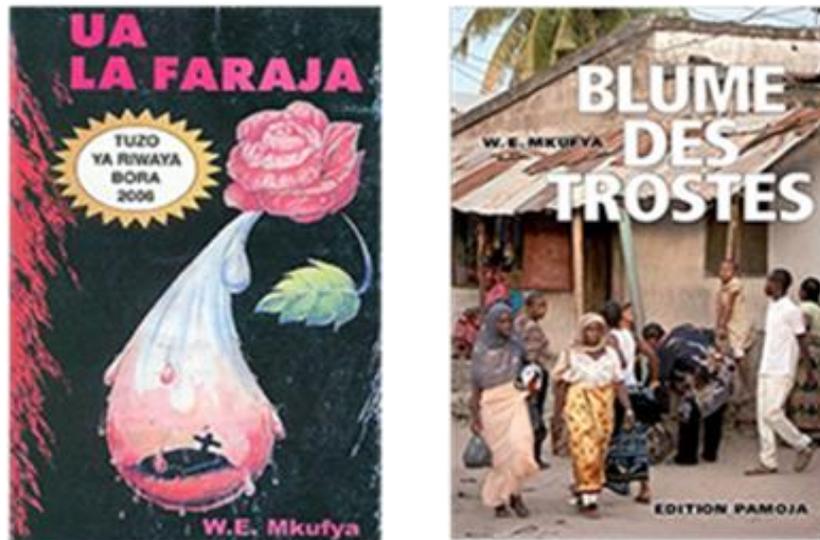


Figure 3. Left: Cover of *Ua la faraja* (2006 edition). Right: Cover of *Blume des Trostes* (2016).

However, the translation's reception did not meet the translator's expectations. Although Schmid-Heidenhain sent review copies to relevant newspapers, bloggers and critics and

presented the book at the Leipzig Book Fair in 2017, only two reviews appeared – both in magazines of development partnerships.²⁴ Also in 2017, she went on a reading tour with the author at relevant departments in German universities, where copies of the original as well as the translation could be purchased. However, the promotion did not reach much beyond the confines of academia. Even so, Schmid-Heidenhain is already working on a new project, this time the translation of a Swahili novel from Kenya.

Alex Banzi – on demand

Coincidentally, my own translation project was also completed in 2016, ten years after I had started it. Like Korzonnek and Schmid-Heidenhain, I too had worked in isolation, unaware that other translators were embracing the role of publisher in order to place their works on the German market. I had read Alex Banzi's *Titi la mkwe* ('The daughter-in-law's breast') with my Swahili teacher when I was living and working in the south of Tanzania in the 1980s. It was a striking reflection of the social environment of the rural town where I was living. The novel was my first encounter with Swahili literature, and ever since I read it I had been planning to translate it one day into German. The novel is an early classic with an interesting plot and style. The female protagonist, Ena, is married to the modern-oriented teacher Zenga, but is racked by doubt concerning his faithfulness. She feels inferior to educated women and, in addition, after giving birth to a sickly girl she has not been able to have any other children. While her husband is a modern man who rejects superstitious beliefs, she resorts to magic in order to gain control over her life. However, things work out differently and drive her into feelings of guilt and even more despair. In the end only a full confession to her husband and an open discussion with him can bring relief. The author refrains from overt didacticism, something that is rare in Swahili literature. Moreover, he "presents a convincing psychological analysis of his characters Ena and Zenga" (Bertoncini 2009: 83), and his "style oscillates between emotional involvement and detached irony" (*Ibid.*: 84). The end remains open, with a hint to a possible improvement of Ena's and Zenga's partnership.

When I embarked on the project my enthusiasm was great: I was still unaware that the biggest challenge would be to find a consistent literary style in the target language, German, which at the same time would not betray the Swahili original. I started with a first "raw", rather literal, translation, which I refined in a number of revisions. In the process I gained a lot from the feedback of "test readers" of different ages, including literary critics. Generally, they expressed a need for additional information on cultural background, which I decided to give in three forms: 1) general information in an introduction, 2) specific information in footnotes, and 3) some information on Swahili terms in subordinate clauses in the text. For example, the term *khanga*, denoting a wrap-cloth, I left in Swahili, but on its first occurrence I added this information in a subordinate clause. For the language style, I opted for a relatively "timeless"

²⁴ One review appeared in the magazine *Habari* (Lippert 2016), the other in the online magazine *Lo Nam* (Kößmann 2017).

style to capture the standard form of Swahili used in the original, and I took special care to give the language rhythm and sound through alliteration and assonance.²⁵

Since *Titi la mkwe* is situated and must be understood in a specific historical context, I give this background information in the foreword and introduction to the translation (Reuster-Jahn 2016). It starts with information on context: my own background as a translator and my relation to the text, as well as the historical context of the novel. Then I give a brief synopsis of the novel, followed by comments on the translation process and the decisions it entailed. For example, in Swahili there is no honorific plural as in German, while the observation of rules of respect is an important cultural feature. I decided to use the German honorifics in the dialogues between interlocutors whose relationship demands the use of signs of respect in Swahili. In addition, I adapted their use to German conventions of address, such as between interlocutors who are not acquainted with one another. In my translation, only friends, close relatives and marriage partners talk to each other using an informal address. I also decided to retain certain Swahili terms denoting objects and practices for which there is no equivalent in German, and to highlight them through italics. This concerns the domains of dress, food, and the use of titles in address, such as *mwelimu* ('teacher'), and *mzee* ('old man, elder', respectful address). The introduction concludes with a biographical section on the author, translated with his consent from our email exchange. It had been difficult to find the author, as Banzi had not published a work of literature since 1982. When I was finally able to contact him in 2015, we had warm and stimulating conversations about his career and experiences as an author in early independent Tanzania (Reuster-Jahn 2019). He was pleased with my translation project, so many years after the book's first publication, and he supported it whole-heartedly.²⁶

Although I had received a rejection by Peter Hammer publishing house in an early phase of the project, I still expected to find a publisher for the translation. However, no publisher in a German-speaking country reacted positively to the exposés I sent out to them. Founding my own publishing house was not an option for me, not only because of the legal and fiscal implications, but also because I wanted to avoid printing a certain print run of books, which I would have to manage. Therefore, I decided to try "self-publishing",²⁷ which at that time was still a relatively new format of publishing. This format enables authors to publish their work with little cost. The procedure comprises a contract with a service provider – nominally a publisher – who maintains a platform to which the camera-ready manuscript must be uploaded by the author or translator, where it is furnished with an ISBN and published without any quality assurance. Upon publication, the service provider manages the orders from conventional and online bookshops through a print-on-demand procedure. The service

²⁵ The Swahili syllable is open, with syllable structure of consonant-vowel and vowel, which gives the language a special sound. In contrast, the German language is characterised by consonant clusters.

²⁶ The translation rights had to be obtained from the original publisher's legal successor, Mkuki na Nyota publisher in Dar es Salaam.

²⁷ It should be noted that Carl Velten also self-published his translation of tales (1907).

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provider controls the sale, of which the author or translator receives a certain share. Apart from the printing, most of the tasks performed by a conventional publisher have to be done by the author or translator before and after printing. Before printing, the tasks include choice of work, legal procedures, editing, proof-reading, design and layout. After printing, promotion has to be done by the author or translator, whose capacity to reach a large number of readers is limited. Regarding copy-editing and layout, I was fortunate to get professional support by a friend, while for promotion I had to rely on myself. A renowned publisher would have given the book a better start through its own reputation and promotional networks. In Pierre Bourdieu's words, the publishing house would have consecrated the book, its author and its translator, through conferring to them value derived from its own symbolic, cultural and social capital, in short: from its name (Bourdieu 1980: 263-264). For my self-published book, I had to find and convince people endowed with such capital to recommend it. After publication, I sent review copies to literature bloggers, critics and magazines. The book was positively reviewed by two magazines specialised in development cooperation.²⁸ However, the biggest impact was achieved by a recommendation circulated by a well-known critic of African literature through her mailing list. Now, two years after its publication, 250 copies of the book have been sold. This is not a particularly encouraging result and it clearly shows the limits of self-publishing – even though, just like my colleagues, I already have a new translation project in the works.

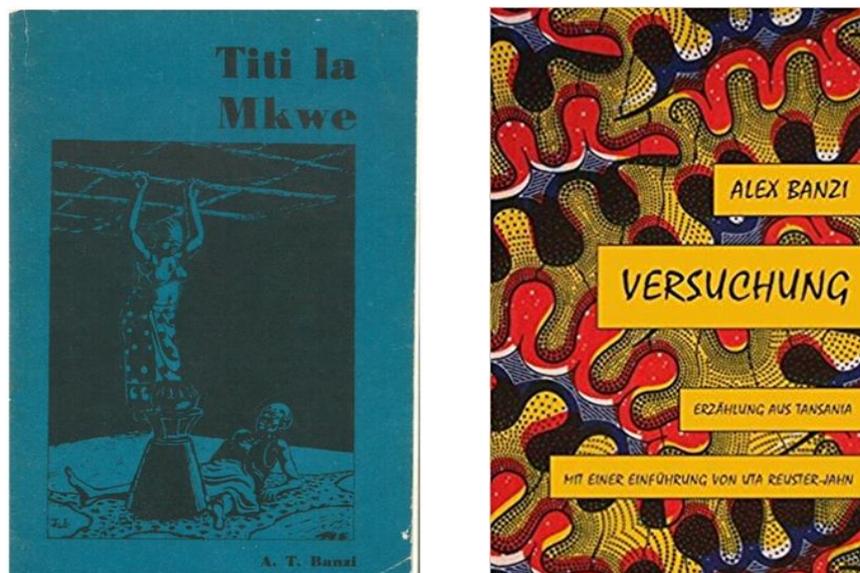


Figure 4. Left: Cover of *Titi la mkwe* (1972). Right: Cover of *Versuchung* (2016).

²⁸ One review appeared in the magazine *Habari* (Lippert 2017), and another in the magazine *Weltsichten* (Ruf 2017).

Conclusion

In the course of this article, a diverse picture of translation activities from Swahili into German has emerged. Germany has been shown to be a country with a relatively long history of translations of Swahili literature. However, this picture has also been shadowed by the withdrawal of specialised publishing houses by the late 1990s (after only two trials). Their waning interest has led to the emergence of individual translators as drivers of publications translated from Swahili. As it stands today, publication initiatives have completely shifted to private translators. Paradoxically, the difficult German market for African literature could well be a consequence of growing globalisation. People's curiosity for other cultures is satisfied through long-distance travel, television features and the internet. Moreover, there are afropolitan authors on the market who provide readers with less "foreign" novels. As a result, Swahili literature, which is characterised by a high degree of cultural difference, has become excluded from the established book market. Swahili writers are not "writing back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989), and their audience is mostly an East African one. This reduces their chances on the market because the European audience is not intended – a potentially unfortunate development since Swahili literature offers readers the opportunity to widen their concept of literature.

In a parallel development to the publisher's waning interest in Swahili literature, digital technology is empowering individual translators. They no longer have to depend on established publishers to get their translations published. However, these private publications are limited in their capacity to effectively reach a readership. Whether translators choose to establish their own publishing house or simply self-publish: the Achilles heel appears to be book promotion. As long as translators act in isolation, this situation will hardly change. However, if translators were to form networks, they could increase their visibility. As a collective, they could also approach Litprom. This would not only streamline the funding process but also, and more importantly, stimulate debate on Swahili literature as a minor foreign literature. The promotion of Swahili translation could be a significant contribution to an open and diverse translation culture as outlined by Venuti (2013b).

Nevertheless, forming a network is challenging due to the diverse backgrounds of the translators. Of the translation projects presented in this article, only few were carried out by academic Swahili language experts. In contrast, a surprising number of amateurs have engaged in translation, with equally surprising creativity regarding the form of publication. Highly idealistic, these amateurs use their own resources with little prospect of financial gain. In fact, the market is bleak. This, however, does not prevent the enthusiasts from embarking on new projects. By publishing their projects, however they do it, these translators of Swahili could make it possible for their translations to reach a critical mass, so that their product, Swahili translated literature, can ultimately entertain, move and enlighten larger segments of German-speaking readers.

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