REVOLUTION AND REACTION IN SWAHILI POETRY*

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Swahili poetry is that poetry, written or oral, which has been or is being produced in the Swahili language by East Africans. Swahili poetry is therefore wide and varied, both in its formal as well as in its thematic aspects. Nevertheless, this diversity cannot be absolute, for in East African diversity there is also East African unity. To each work of poetry or art, to each book of fiction or play, one always identifies a common denominator which characterises that work as being East African. It is this common denominator which makes it possible to speak of "Swahili Literature" or "Swahili Poetry" without giving rise to confusing ambiguities.

Swahili poetry can be identified, not so much by its formal aspects, but rather by its historical determinants, the language medium, and the cultural and social values that it expresses. It is these, and not the "*vina*" and "*mizani*" which differentiate Swahili Poetry from other world poetries.

Unfortunately this fact has not been given its due weight in many of the studies that have so far been undertaken on Swahili Poetry. These studies were, of course, undertaken by Europeans (one may add, colonialist) scholars, for their own purposes. Such people came with distorted views about the African. They were not interested in studying Swahili poetry as a literature of a given people at a given time and place, a people with its own history, cultural values, feelings and emotions, but rather as one of the numerous jungle curiosities. Swahili poetry and African literature in general were for them strictly anthropological museum pieces to be utilised as a means of getting into the mind of the "savage". Naturally many of these scholars, confounded by the fact that Swahili poetry was so rich and even (their parochial minds could not believe it!) written, decided to spend all their lives trying to prove that Swahili poetry originated in Arabia and Persia. To prove this, they put forward the theory of the double-origin of the Swahili people and language. According to this theory, the Swahili people are not pure Africans (i.e. jungle savages) but hybrids of Africans and Asians, and consequently Swahili is not a Bantu language *per se* but a product of a certain mythical intermarriage between Arabic and Bantu. Even as late as 1967, we find Susan

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Fuller declaring: "The long association between the Bantus and the Arabs in Zanzibar produced Swahili".[1]

. It is therefore not surprising that in his book, *Traditional Swahili Poetry*, Jan Knappert argues that "Swahili culture is essentially Oriental, not African, in its material as well as in its spiritual aspects".[2] To prove this erroneous thesis, his survey includes only poems with Islamic-Arabic themes and historical origin. Similarly in his collection of tales which he miscalls *Myths and Legends of the Swahili*,[3] Knappert mostly includes tales of Eastern origin, which naturally reflect a feudalistic, Alfulela-Ulela mentality.

In view of these distortions, there is need, as R. Arnold suggests in his article, "Swahili Literature and Modern History: A Necessary Remark on Literary Criticism" to make "a new methodological approach" to the study and criticism of Swahili poetry, which would connect "clearly and scientifically the development of Swahili Literature with the very development of the East African society itself".[4]

Euphrase Kezilahabi has attempted to make such an appraisal. In his paper, "The Development of Swahili Poetry 18th-20th Century" Kezilahabi states that "The study of Swahili Literature is the study of the cultural and psychological effects brought about by the coming of the Portuguese and Arabs to East Africa, the dehumanization and humiliation caused by the German and British colonialists, and lastly the continued struggle for independence both politically and economically".[5]

This statement, though correct—to a point, should not be taken uncritically. It is, as Dr. Ohly says, too narrow.[6] Firstly, it ignores the existence of unwritten, pre-Arab poetry among the Swahili. This poetry does not show any influence of Arab or European colonisation. It includes most of the initiation songs, work songs, lullabies, marriage songs, etc. As an example, let us look at the following song, taken from Swahili oral literature: it is a marriage song:

Huyo mwanamume kamanya kula na kugona
Hadodo hamlemela
Oi! Hadolo hamlemela.

And the following two pieces are initiation songs for girls:

Ngurunguru katora
katora
atorire na mromo
Kifidua fidua mbele
Nyuma kwa wajinga

The following is a *mavugo* song:

Huyu yuwaya yuwaya mtelea nguu
Aya atukule pembe
Na pembe mwana nyema
Atukuzile akitua mzigo kitwani

These poems (or songs if you like) were intended to operate in certain traditional cultural contexts. All the words and references are Bantu. External influences—positive or negative—are entirely lacking. These are but a few examples, but there are many others.[7] Most of these songs belong to the realm of oral literature, and where they have not fallen into disuse, make up the bulk of East African (including Swahili) literature.

Our second objection to Kezilahabi's remark is that it ignores a great deal of the poetry written after the advent of the colonialists. It is not empirically true that all the literature, let alone poetry, produced by the Swahili in that period reflects the effects of colonialism. There is a great deal of poetry produced then which deals with "general" themes—such as love, hate, beauty, etc. Such poems existed before the Arabs and Europeans came, and they continued to exist even after. The following, written by Muyaka, is about love and marriage:

"Oa"

Oa kwamba u muozi, uzoelea kuoa
Oa mato maolezi na mboni ukikodowa
Oa maji maundazi, meupe kama maziwa
Oa sizi ndizi ndowa, aso kuowa ni yupi.
Oa ndiwe muolezi, uzoeleo kuowa
Oa sifunge maozi maninga uchiyavuwa
Oa uzaze kama ulivyozaliwa
Oa sizi ndizi ndowa aso kuowa ni yupi[8]

There were also a great deal of personal poems produced all over the Coast. For instance, Muyaka used to write personal poems in the form of letters or retorts to various people. One of his most popular personal poems was addressed to his slave, who had complained to Muyaka for "borrowing" his wife:

SLAVE:

Billahi wa bilhaki, niamuani ninende,
N'jile kuwashtaki, ninyengenyewe yangu konde,
Nywinywi m'na laki-laki, nimi ni chichi kipande!
Waungwana msitende wa watendao waseni!

MUYAKA:

Licha kifupa kifupi hata nundu na kiuno!
Haramu mtu hanipi pamoja na ovu neno.
Na kwamba sina sikopi?—kukopa ni matukano!
Haya mambo kwa mfano, ela si mimi na wewe?[9]

Poems of a similar type were written also during the German and British occupation. (See for instance the poems of love, *"nzige"*, etc., in Velten's collection.)[10] Most of these poems, of course reflect a feudal, male chauvinist mentality. Some could even be called "reactionary". But this is not necessarily a reflection of the psychological and cultural effects of alien rule, in as much as the rise of classes in East Africa had started taking place even before

Arab and European incursions.[11] Again, we are fully aware that such poetry may objectively be reflective of the colonial situation in that the poet may decide to write on themes of love, beauty, etc., as a means of psychological escape from the objective reality. In that case, such poetry plays the role of drugs, religion, or booze, i.e. providing momentary relief from consciousness of the oppressive environment. But this is not always the case, and I think it is necessary to take every poem within its social-historical context.

The advent of Easterners and Islam had a marked influence on Swahili poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (It is strange that Portuguese colonialism (fifteenth-eighteenth centuries) is not well reflected in the existing Swahili poetry of the period.) This influence was many-sided. It was economic, political and cultural. For the Arabs did not come to spread Islam; they came to rule and exploit. This exploitation was perpetuated through caravan and mercantile trade, plantation farming based on slave labour, and money-lending and usury. This was the basic factor in Arab imperialism—other factors such as religion, culture and political rule were either incidental or largely geared to the economic ends. Thus Seyyid Said decided to shift his capital to Zanzibar in 1832 in order to consolidate "his overseas territory" for commerce and plantation agriculture. It is no accident that clove and sugar-cane farming in Zanzibar and Arab slave trade in East Africa flourished only after 1832. According to Captain Hart, another imperialist who visited Zanzibar in 1834, Seyyid Said's annual revenue at that time was $250,000 ($150,000 from Zanzibar and $100,000 from Muscat); plus clove and cotton plantations and 20 merchant ships.[12]

Because of this Arab exploitation, it is natural that some of the Swahili poets of that time should have written nationalist resistance poetry. Kezilahabi negates and contradicts himself when he says that: "One would have expected a literature of protest in Swahili. But this has not been the case."[13] But further on, he quotes and appraises Muyaka as a nationalist poet who resisted Arab rule. This is paradoxical and reflects some confusion on the part of the author.

For it is true that Muyaka bin Haji (1776-1840), the "Father of Modern Swahili Poetry", used poetry as a tool of resistance against Arab attempts to subjugate Mombasa, his home town, between 1820 and 1840. In one of his poems, Muyaka exhorts the Mombasan people thus:

Jifungetoni masombo, mshike msu na ngao,
Zile ndizo zao sambo zijile zatoka kwao,
Na tuwakalie kombo, tuwapigie Hario!
Wakija tuteze nao, wayawiapo ngomani!
Na waje kwa ungi wao, tupate kuwapunguza,
Waloachia miji yao, ili kuja kujisoza!
Na hawano waiyao, wana wa Mwana Aziza,
Sijui watayaweza, au ni k'ongeza duni!
Wajile wajisumbua, hawa na wana wa Manga,

Kutaka lisilokuwa, ni maana ya ujinga,
Kulla siku twawaua, na kuwakata kwa panga!
Mwaka huu ukizinga, hawaji tena mwakani![14]

Dr. Ohly says of Muyaka: "Muyaka, striving against parasitism of his contemporaries acted on behalf of the Umma, but simultaneously he gave his backing to the feudal Mazruis, who were recognized, e.g. by the umma of Pate as "imperialists", identically as the Zanzibarians in relation to Mombasa. One's fight for freedom was tantamount to the subjugation of others."[15]

This appraisal of Muyaka is faulty. The confusion of course arises from Dr. Ohly's misinterpretation of the historical events that led to what he calls the Mazruis' "subjugation" of Mombasa. The Mazruis were resisting Seyyid Said's domination on the Coast—not only in Mombasa. Although they had successfully resisted his attempts to subjugate Mombasa, Seyyid Said's forces were still at large on other parts of the Coast, including Pate and Lamu. Thus in 1919, the Mazruis decided to invade these places. Since Seyyid Said still considered himself the ruler of all the Coast, this invasion can only be understood as an attempt by the rulers of Mombasa to dislodge the alient imperialist—an extension of the Mombasa versus Zanzibar conflict. It was not so much a war between Mombasa and the people of Pate and Lamu. This is further borne out by the fact that the success of the Mazrui campaign of 1919 against Pate and Lamu led to another invasion of these places by Seyyid Said in 1822, leading to the recapture of Pate and Lamu in 1823.[16]

It is of course possible that the Mazruis might have secretly entertained the idea of turning Pate and Lamu into their own vassal states. Muyaka himself suspected the possibility of such intentions. Hence he did not give the 1819 campaign his whole-hearted support. This is revealed in the poem he wrote about the campaign:

Waungwana Pate-Yunga hawaridhia pingu,
Msambe ndiswi wajinga mumututumao kizungu,
Kwa kibaba cha mpunga kisichotimia chungu.
Msikufuruni Mungu Mkangia kufuruni.[17]

It is true that there are not many poems of resistance to Arab rule still extant, but those few which still exist point to the possibility of there having been many such poems which are now extinct. One of the few available *tenzi* of resistance is the controversial *Utenzi wa Al-Okida,*[18] which narrates the story of the latter's resistance to Seyyid Said. Again the existence of resistance or at least suppressed antagonism to Arab rule becomes obvious when one examines the poetry written immediately after European colonisation of East Africa, and also the poetry succeeding the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964. Both these episodes characterised the downfall of Arab rule in some parts of East Africa. The indigenous people, realising that the Sultan of Zanzibar no longer had power over them, saw no more inhibitions to their articulating

their hatred against the Arabs. One poet, written in about 1900, has this to say about the Arabs:

Ujuba na takaburi, uli kwenu walikuwa
ya kufanyiza jeuri, ya kupiga na kuua
Leo hapana shauri, kuuza wala kununua
illa ni kufilisiwa, hadi ni kuza sahani.
Ati wale wakisema, Unguja tutanunua,
Kulla penyi numba njema, mwenyewe tutamtoa
Leo kanda la mtama, nyumbani lawasumbua
illa ni kufilisiwa, hadi ni kuza sahani.[19]

It is significant that this kind of poetry was not, at this time, written in Zanzibar. The reason is obvious. In Zanzibar, though the British were now effectively in control, the Sultan of Zanzibar and the land-owning Arabs still had a certain measure of internal control over the people. Hence fear of repercussions may have inhibited production of anti-Arab poetry. But as soon as the Arab ruling class was overthrown in 1964, anti-Arab poetry became the usual phenomenon in the radio, newspapers, books and oral songs.

Arab rule brought into existence a feudal mode of production. Judging from pre-Arab oral literature as well as other historical sources, it appears probable that feudalism had not yet evolved as the dominant mode of production by the time the first Arab settlers immigrated to the Coast, i.e. about A.D. 900. Even tales about the early indigenous leaders, such as Fumo Liyongo, give us a picture of a 'king' who was more of a leader than a tyrant. Fumo Liyongo was not alienated from his people in the same manner that the Arab sultans were. Unlike typical feudal rulers, Liyongo's power largely depended on his personal ability as leader and warrior. Thus when he died all the people bemoaned him:

Mwake Liyongo hakika
matanga aliyaweka
Kwa Liyongo kuifiya.
Liyongo swilaha yetu
kwa wote hasimu zetu
alikuwa ngao yetu.
Mui walisikitika
hakuna wa kutosheka
kwa Liyongo kutoweka
Imeanguka paziya.[20]

Under Arab rule, the feudal-slave exploitation of the indigenous people was rampant. Naturally, the ruling class, mainly Arabs, who held political power also controlled the dominant ideologies, culture, literature and other aspects of cultural and spiritual life. Africans aspired to become Muslims, for by so doing they automatically became "*Waungwana*"—at least theoretically. Many tried to immitate and ape Arab customs and manners, including language. It was probably at this period that many Arabic and Persian words invaded the language, in some cases replacing the Bantu words.

Swahili poetry was greatly affected by this imposition of Arabic culture. Many poets, particularly those who wrote *tenzi*, derived their themes from Arabic and Persian myths, including the Koranic ones, which, as Kezilahabi rightly says, were quite alien, not to say irrelevant, to the African. The African slave was trying to identify with the conqueror, to aspire to the ideal, which in this sense meant the Arab and his way of life.

Arnold and Ohly are of the opinion that the Islamic content in Swahili poetry of the nineteenth century has nothing to do with the Africanness of that poetry. Dr. Ohly goes further and asserts that the "statement that secular poems about Liyongo Fumo and Muyaka's compositions are closer to Tanzanian feelings than Swahili Islamic poetry, is founded on fideistic argumentation, because it negates the culture—creating function and also the historical role of East African "Black Islam"; it denies, thereby, the power of the African genious to transform world wide ideas. .".[21]

This would be true if one were dealing with a normal, that is basically internally generated historical situation where alien values and rule have been imposed on the indigenous people. This is a complex situation. The so-called world-wide ideas (on what criteria do they become 'world-wide', Dr. Ohly does not say) are to the colonised man merely the master's ideas, irrespective of their intrinsic goodness or badness. Cultural interaction is only possible and desirable among equals; but in a slave-master relationship there is only cultural imposition on the part of the master, and protest and resistance on the part of the slave. As Fanon argues, a national culture cannot precede national political liberation.

Again Islam, like all other religious, necessarily served the interests of the ruling class, in this case the Arab invaders. The fact that an African became a Muslim did not imply that he was now free, on the contrary, it meant that he was now more slave, since he was now enslaved body and 'soul' by the enemy. Such a slave would actually defend the master against his own brothers who were, as he was taught to believe, infidels. He could thus believe that bravery in the master's wars, as in *Ras al-Ghuli*, is an element of emancipation. But can there be emancipation without capture of political and economic power? Furthermore, one must differentiate between writing Arabic literature in Swahili and writing Swahili literature which reflects Koranic or Biblical ideas. It seems to us that writing *tenzi* based on old Arabic and Persian epics, e.g. *Seyidina Hussein bin Ali, Vita vya Uhud* or *Hamziya* is, for an African with his own history, ancestral heroes and cultural values, the height of absurdity. It reflects the extent to which that person has been "assimilated' by the coloniser.

This type of colonial mentality is, of course, reflected in the language. Some of the *tenzi* written at this time are so full of Arabic words and borrowings that it becomes impossible for one not conversant with Arabic to get their full meaning. This is how Said Abdalla b. Ali b. Nassir starts his poem, *Al-Inkishafi*:

Bismillahi naikadiumu
hali ya kunga nino nudhumu:
Na ar-Rahmani kiirasimu,
basi ar-Rahimi nyuma ikaye.
Nataka himdi nitangulize,
alo mdarisi asiulize,
Achamba, "Hindi uitusize,
kapakaza ila isiyo nduye.
Ikisa himdi kutabalaji,
ikituazagaa kama siraji,
Sala na salamu kiidariji.
Tumwa Muhammadi tumsaliye.[22]

It was probably during Arab rule that Arabic tales became dominant in oral prose among East African coastal towns, and the use of '*vina*' and '*mizani*' became widespread, particularly with the adoption and adaptation of Arabic script for writing Swahili.

Content-wise, the class nature of the poetry of this period was revealed by the fact that most poems stressed virtue and obedience—teachings which were directly derived from Koranic admonishments. People were taught to be obedient to Allah and the Sultan; or religion and the secular authority:

La kwanda kamata dini
faradhi ushiikhini
na sunna ikimkini
ni wajibu kuttia.
Tena mwanangu idhili
mbee za makabaili
uwaonapo mahali
angusa kuwenukia.[23]

They must care less about the things of this transitory world and think more about the world to come:

Suu ulimwengu bahari tesi,
una matumbawe na mangi maasi,
Aurakibuo juwa ni mwasi
Kwa kula kahasara ukhasiriye.
Ni kama kisima kisicho ombe,
chenye mta-paa mwana wa ng'ombe.
Endao kwegema humta pembe,
asipate katu kunwa maiye.
Dunia ni jifa siikaribu.
Haipendi mtu ila kilabu.
Ihali gani ewe labibu,
Kuwania na mbwa utukizwaye?
Hiki ewe moyo kievu changu,
hukengeukii nunuha yangu.
Huza akherayo kwa ulimwengu
ya kuliwa bangu ukhitariye.[24]

Such are the teachings that abound in many of the "great" *tenzi* of the period.

That there was a fairly big affluent class that lived on the sweat of others is revealed by the poems themselves: Said Abdalla has left us an astonishing picture of the idle and indulgent way of life these drones led:

Uwene wangapi watu wakwasi,
walo wakiwaa kama shamusi,
Wa muluku zana za adharusi,
dhahabu na fedha wakhiziniye.
Malimwengu yote yawatiile,
na dunia yote iwaokele;
Wachenenda zitwa zao zilele
mato mafumbuzi wayafumbiye.
Wakimia mbinu na zao shingo,
na nyuma na mbele ili miyongo;
Wakaapo pote ili zitengo,
asikari jamu wawatandiye.
Nyumba zao mbake zikinawiri,
kwa taa za kowa na za sufuri.
Masiku yakele kama nahari,
haiba na jaha iwazingiye.
Pindi walalapo kwa masindizi,
wali na wakandi na wapepezi,
Na wake wapambe watumbuizi,
wakitumbuiza wasinyamaye.[25]

Needless to say, most of the poets were from this ruling class, for it is they who had both the leisure and the means to indulge in such luxuries. Indeed many of them could even employ scribes to write down the poems as they recited. Thus arose the practice of starting Swahili poems with "*Niletee kalamu*" or "*Mtumwa leta kalamu na karatasi*" which persists even today, though the conditions which gave rise to it are no longer there.

Some of the poetry was obviously addressed to the ruling class. Thus Manakupona admonishes her daughter:

Sitangane na watumwa
illa mwida wa khuduma
watakuvutia tama
la buda nimekwambia.[26]

In another poem, the slave is considered to be the quintessence of evil:

Mtumwa usimwamini,
ujapokuwa pamoja,
huwa na lake moyoni,
vile akakuzoea,
huwa na nia ya kuhuni
mtumwa mwana hezaya
usowe hauna haya
adu vallahu rasuli.
Ajapo kwenenda Maka
kuhiji kafika Medina
wakati wa kurejea

hujivuna, kajona hamna;
mtumwa ni maleuna
adu wallahu rasuli.[27]

Another aspect of the feudal mentality is reflected in the attitude of poets to women: in feudal societies, the woman is not only subordinate to the man, she is a thing, a toy; a tool for the satisfaction of the man's desires. Mwanakupona (a woman) tells her daughter:

Keti naye mume kwa adabu
usimtie ghadhabu
akinena simjibu
itahidi kunyamaa
Kilala siikukuse
mwegeme umpapase
na upepo asikose
mtu wa kumpepea.
Enda naye kwa imani
atakalo simkhini
we naye sikindaneni
ukindani huumia
Chamka siimuhuli
mwandikie maakuli
na kumtunda muili
kumsinga na kumwoa...

Not only are these rules of behaviour proper, they are God-ordained! Any woman who does not fulfil them is already condemned to the fire of hell, for the authority of men is recognised even in heaven:

Na ufapo wewe mbee
radhi yake izengee
wende uitukuzie
ndipo upatopo ndia
Siku ufufuliwao
nadhari ni ya mumeo
taulizwa utakao
ndilo takalotendewa.
Kipenda wende peponi
utakwenda dalhini
kinena wende motoni
huna budi utatiwa.[28]

This of course reminds one of the Biblical and Koranic mythology regarding the so-called original sin, in which the woman supposedly played the most obnoxious role, and was therefore condemned to perpetual subordination to the man. Needless to say, such teachings are merely an ideological rationalisation of a social reality.

The invasion of East Africa by Europeans imposed Europe in the place of Arabia, and Christianity in the place of Islam or African religions, as points of reference. Kezilahabi divides the poets of the European colonial

period into two groups: the escorts and the boot-licking writers. According to him, the escorts were the educated but mentally castrated people from the Coast who accompanied European travellers inland. The boot-licking poets are those who were employed in the service of the German government, and wrote verse in praise of their masters.

This division is inadequate and incorrect. In the first place it is based on wrong criteria. You cannot classify literature on the basis of the occupations of the writers. For one's status in society and one's world outlook need not necessarily be congruent. From Kezilahabi's explanation, it seems that the main thing that differentiated these two groups is not the content of their poetry, but the fact that some happened to be escorts of tourists going inland while others were in the colonial administration. Kezilahabi, therefore, differentiates between colonialists and explorers. He forgets that these were one and the same thing—harbingers and servants of colonialism. Accordingly, the poets who served these two groups were serving the same end. They were all bootlickers. Hence Kezilahabi has merely identified one group (a very small one at that, as Ohly points out).[29] He has not identified the other, indeed major, groups. These include the protest poets and the escapist poets.

The earliest resistance against German rule took place in 1888-1889. It was led by Abushiri bin Salim, the then Liwali of Pangani. Hemedi Abdalla became the poet of the Abushiri struggle. In his epic poem, *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima,* written about the year 1895, he gives a vivid description of the motives of the war, its course and the various forces and personalities which were involved in the struggle. He says of the disrespect the German imperialists showed to the Africans and their customs:

Kilwa na Dari's Salama
Kuna wazungu nakama
Nti wamezizuwia.

On "Iddi" day, prayers could not be said in the mosque because:

Walikuja wakangia
Na majibwa yao pia
Liwali akakimbia
Asihimili kukaa.[30]

Hemedi Abdalla was aware that the Europeans did not come to Africa for philanthropic reasons; they wanted to avert a catastrophe which was threatening the whole of Europe at the turn of the last century; a time when capitalism had reached a critical point:

Jambo tunalokujia
vyuo tumeangalia
kungia vita ajaa
Twataka tukaikaye
tumuweke tutakaye
tumwondoe twondoaye
tutume tukitumia

Tumetafuta makamu
ya kwenda kustakimu
nti ya Sawahilia
Tukajenge na majumba
tukithiri kuyapamba
na kula mwinyi kasumba
tumtoe jeuria.[31]

Hemedi's resistance against German rule is covert, and can only be discovered by reading between the lines. It is, for instance, embodied in his description of the white invaders. He always refers to them as "*majahili*" (Stanza 48); "*Mzungu dhaifu*" (168): "*Mzungu kahati*"—abominable European (169), etc. On the other hand, his description of the local leaders, including Abushiri and the Sultan of Zanzibar, is very favourable. Thus he says about Abushiri:

Ni shujaa maarufu
Rohoye haina hofu
Mjapokuwa alufu
Hakhofu kuwangilia.[32]

Perhaps the Sultan of Zanzibar is praised because, at this point, the major contradiction was that between all the local people (including Arabs) and the new invaders. For once the internal differences had to be relegated to a secondary place while that between the coastal people and the invaders gained predominance. The same thing happened in Zanzibar during the resistance war against the British (1895). The poet of the war, Mustafa Hamadi, elevates the then Sultan of Zanzibar, Khalid bin Barghash, to the status of 'hero', while the British Commander, Colonel Hardinge, is delineated as the devil incarnate:

Akatoka Hardingu
Mfalme wa Kizungu
Aduwa ilahi wa Mungu
Kafiri wa asilia.[33]

The anti-colonial struggle did not end with the defeat of Abushiri. In virtually every part of East Africa there was some form of resistance against the invaders. This resistance reached its peak during the Maji Maji War, when the liberation movement in Tanzania acquired a national dimension under the leadership of Kinjeketile Ngwale, transcending all the ethnic and geographical differences which were hitherto predominant. Abdul Karim became the poet of that war with his *Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji.* In this poem, the poet manages to recapture the feelings and emotions of the oppressed people, as can be seen from the following verses:

Bwana wetu tumechoka
Kila siku kutumika
tufe, yatoke mashaka,
naam, tumethitari!

Mara kulima shamba,
jioni tuvune pamba,
tena tujenge majumba
na kodi tukidabiri.[34]

Of course not all the poetry written at this time contains overt or covert criticism or resistance. Some of the poems were clearly, as Kezilahabi says, reactionary. These were the ones written by the betrayers of the people; the bootlickers and the opportunists. Most of the panegyrics collected by Velten fall into this category. In some cases the poets accept their dehumanisation:

Sisi tu watu dhalili
Wala hatuna akili
sharti usitahimili
tutakayokufanyia.
Sote hatuelekevu
wala hatuna werevu
ndisi watu wapumbavu
jamii mirima pia.[35]

Even such poems, however, do sometimes reveal some enmity between the poets and their objects of adoration. Their respect for the coloniser is based on fear, not love:

Miji imepiga kimya
Hamna mwenye kusema
kila mtu atetema
ambapo akumbukia
Na mimi hivi handika
roho yanitetemeka
nna khofu kughzibika
bana, ukaja tukiwa.[36]

A third, perhaps the largest, group of colonial poets was that of the escapists. These were poets who, instead, wrote poems on love, religion, nature and natural phenomena. Because of lack of space, we shall quote only two brief examples. The first is a poem about love, written at the turn of the century:

'Shairi la Mauti'
Kabisa! ndiye anwali,
Kabisa! ukimwona,
hupotewa na akili;
kiumbe ukadangana
kwa haiba ya muwili
na uyungo kufanana,
mfano wake hakuna,
kabisa ulimwenguni.
Kabisa mambo! akenda
njiani ukimwona,
mwili huuvundavunda;
ashikamapo kitanda

mtu huamba zinduna;
mfano wake hakuna
kabisa ulimwenguni.[37]

Dua ya Mungu
Ya rabbi, mola keriuru
niafu mtuniwa wako,
wallahi, ndio rahimu,
afua yote ni kwako;
unifariji na hamu,
unondolee pujuliko,
unionyeshe kivuko
fauza lifaizi.
Ndiwe tibabu wa ndwele
nitibu nami nipole
nondoe masikitiko
ndiwe mpoza milele
nipoze huko uliko
unionyeshe kivuko.[38]

The suppression of the Maji Maji uprising concided with the beginning of a period of stagnation and apathy in Swahili poetry. Swahili poetry once more degenerated into a tool of religious dogma and superstition. The golden epoch in Swahili poetry thus came to an end, never to re-appear again in its full vigour until about 1950, when the increase in political activity created the need and the inspiration to write such poetry. The activities of the Tanganyika African Association, and later TANU, were instrumental to this change.

The switch from political apathy to resistance and propagation of the Uhuru struggle was not abrupt. Actually it was very gradual, and a new sense of direction could already be discerned in poems written between the end of World War II and the founding of TANU. Saadan Kandoro's poem, written in 1948, is a good example. In the poem, Kandoro suggested that Swahili be used in the proceedings of the Legislative Council, and that Africans be allowed to elect their own representatives:

Baraza la Tanganyika, ambalo la serikali
Ndilo tunalolitaka, litumike Kiswahili,
Tupate Waafrika, kuendesha serikali
Kitumike Kiswahili, Baraza la Tanganyika.
Tunataka madaraka, ya uchaguzi kamili
Wajumbe tunaotaka, isichague serikali,
Tuchague tunaotaka, ipokee serikali,
Kitumike Kiswahili, Baraza la Tanganyika.[39]

Viewed through modern spectacles these demands are mild enough, but at that time, when independence was not even considered to be a realisable possibility in the foreseeable future, such proposals were certainly radical. In any case, ten years later, with independence just around the corner, Kandoro could dare to be more critical and aggressive:

Raia tumekutana, mbele ya wakubwa wetu,
Raia tumeungana, kuunda taifa letu,
Na sisi tuwe mabwana, tutawale nchi yetu,
Ondoka nchini mwetu, mwishoni mwa mwaka huu.
Nchi tunayoinena, hii Tanganyika yetu,
Nchi yote kuungana, Afrika ni ya kwetu,
Afrika yakazana, tokeni, tokeni mwetu,
Ondoka nchini mwetu, mwishoni mwa mwaka huu.[40]

Perhaps the most significant poem that Kandoro wrote soon after the formation of TANU is the one entitled "*Siafu Wamekazana*". It was addressed to Amri Abedi, who was then studying theology in Pakistan. In this poem, Kandoro not only stressed the fact of unity and the inevitability of independence, but also had a vision regarding the future post-independence Tanganyikan society. We find it useful to quote this poem in full:

Nyoka amegutuka, ndani ya shimo kutuna,
Tena amekasirika, hasira zenye kununa,
Nyoka anababaika, shimoni kwa kujikuna,
Siafu wamekazana, nyoka amekasirika.
Shimoni ataondoka, hilo nataja kwa jina,
Nyoka anajua fika, siafu wakiungana,
Nguvu zinaongezeka, shimoni watagombana,
Siafu wameungana, nyoka amekasirika.
Siafu zikijishika, mshiko kushikamana,
Kwamba zinampeleka, sultani wao bwana,
Shimoni zinapofika, nyoka la kufanya hana,
Siafu wameungana, nyoka amekasirika.
Siafu wanapofika, na nyoka wakikutana,
Nyoka hawezi kufoka, huwa ametulizana,
Ndipo nyoka hundoka, na wana wakilizana,
Siafu wameungana, nyoka wamekasirika.
Kupo na kukanganyika, hilo na tujue sana,
Nyoka anapoondoka, siafu hulaliana,
Huuma hupumzika, hapo hakutafanana,
Siafu wameungana nyoka amekasirika.
Nyoka akisha ondoka, na siafu hujazana,
Shimo wakipeleka, vyakula kutiliana,
Ndilo walilolitaka, wale kwa kutulizana,
Siafu wameungana, nyoka amekasirika.[41]

Kandoro was of course not the only nationalist poet writing at this time. Even as early as 1946, Shaaban Robert was already urging his countrymen to unite under the banner of TAA to collectively fight for their rights:

Tabu zilizo kali, wajibu kuelezwa,
Ifahamu serikali, dola ya Kiingereza,
Waume wenye akili, na wake wanoweza,
Kazi hii halali, kimya kinaangamiza.
Tuungane kwa sauti, bila mtu kuiza,
Ifike kiliko kiti, Dola iwe yawaza,
Kuwa uko umati, mashaka yawaumiza

Kando mtu asiketi, mwendo unafuliza...
All come one, *kila mwenyeji aweza,*
Do his turn, *Tanganyika kuikuza*
Know each grain, *uzito inaongeza*
African Association *naam mwangaza.*[42]

Also related to the fight for human rights is Amri Abedi's poem on "*Uhuru*" written probably in 1952. We quote two stanzas:

Vya bure vyao vitabu, wao hawavitakasi,
Wamevipangia babu, kuupambaza unasi,
Na usawa umeghibu, hata ndani ya kanisi,
Uhuru jambo halisi, kuukosa ni taabu.

Iko siku kwa Wahabu, sisi tutakuwa sisi,
Hapo hatutawasibu, kwa dhiki na wasiwasi,
Japo wanatuharibu, hatutawapa tatasi,
Uhuru jambo halisi, kuukosa ni taabu.[43]

Another important factor that influenced the development of Swahili poetry at this period was the publication, in 1954, of Amri Abedi's *Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi na Diwani ya Amri.* For the first time the rules of Swahili prosody were published in a systematic way for the benefit of all would-be poets. Henceforth it was possible to teach poetry composition in schools; and the conventions of poetics, which had hitherto remained the cherished secret of a select few, became accessible to increasing numbers of young (including up-country) people. As a result, new blood was infused into Swahili poetry, raising it to new and unprecedented heights.

It was at this time that Swahili poetry became unmistakably nationalist, both in Tanganyika and Kenya. In Tanganyika, Shaaban Robert continued to produce poems and prose of a high standard, dealing with the burning social issues: oppression (see *Kusadikika, Kufikirika,* etc.), the rights of women, equality, freedom, etc. His poem on human dignity is among his most progressive pieces:

Kama heshima ni kosa mtu kuitaradhia,
Bora nife hivi sasa nitengane na dunia
Ama niwe nayo hisa katika kuheshimiwa.[44]

Another outstanding poem he wrote at this time is entitled '*Kufua Moyo*' and is about patriotism and sacrifice. In one of the stanzas he says:

Uvundo wa mashujaa
Ni sawa na manukato,
Marashi katika pua
Hauna harufu nzito...,
Ni urithi wenye hawa
Kama hazina ya vito
Dhali katika dunia
Kufa vitani ni ndoto.[45]

Shaaban Robert of course did write a number of reactionary or escapist poems as well, particularly in the forties. See, for example, his *Utenzi wa Vita vya Uhuru*, which was written during the war in praise of the Allied Forces fighting against Hitler. This *utenzi* could of course be considered progressive if viewed within the war context, when everything anti-Germany was progressive. However, in view of the fact that Shaaban Robert was a colonial subject, i.e. a slave, one wonders whether he should not have kept out of the struggle, which in any case was not intended to liberate him, but rather the masters were fighting to see which power should rule the world, including Tanganyika.

With the approach of Uhuru and old age, Shaaban Robert became more and more utopian. He tried to form a vision as to what type of society should be created after independence. This is reflected in his later novels, particularly *Utubora Mkulima* and *Siku ya Watenzi Wote*, as well as in his later *tenzi*. The most outstanding of his utopian *tenzi* is *Mapenzi Bora*, in which he suggests love as the solution to all the world's ills.

Writing about the freedom struggle in Kenya, the Mombasan poet, Ahmadi Nassir, urged his countrymen to fight for their rights:

Simama uitetee, asivikhofu vituko
Aliyo nayo mwendee, akupe kilicho chako
Akipinga mlemee, mwanadame kulaa endako
Uwatapo haki yako, utaingiya motoni...
Teteya kwa kulla hali, usiche msukosuko
Siche wingi wala mali, sabilisha roho yako
Unyonge usikubali, ukaonewa kwa chako
Uwatapo haki yako, utaingiya motoni.[46]

The post-independence period in East Africa was characterised by a new renaissance in literature and other cultural spheres. With their newly gained confidence, their hope in the future, their love for their land and almost hero-worship for their leaders, the East African Swahili poets (and to some extent even poets writing in English) confined themselves to uncritical idealisation of the prevailing situation. They praised the present with as equal vehemence as they condemned the colonial past. Ramadhan Mwaruka's *Utenzi wa Jamhuri ya Tanganyika* and Salum Kibao's *Utenzi wa Uhuru wa Kenya*,[47] are typical of much of the poetry of this period.

This hilarity was, however, shortlived, for some of the poets began to realize that Uhuru was not "*lelemama*". They realised, or were made to realise by such slogans as "*Uhuru na Kazi*" that freedom meant hard work, self-sacrifice and a readiness to build and defend the nation. Thus wrote Kandoro:

Ni mume si mwanamke, aliniambia fahamu,
Mtawaliwa mcheke, cheko la kumlaumu,
Na tena yapambazuke, kujitawala kugumu,
Kujitawala kugumu, tujikongoje tufike.[48]

This feeling is also discernible in East African poetry in English of the period. Hence the Ugandan poet Y. S. Chemba (H. Barlow) says in his poem, "My Newest Bride":

Oh that I could divorce you,
But God forbid! How could I, and say so!
Oh! Uhuru my love sweet,
You are my bane, my life
I love and hate you,
Uhuru my love, my Freedom.[49]

Another recurrent theme in the Swahili, and poetry in English of this period is that of cultural conflict and search for identity. Indeed this was not confined to East Africa, it was pan-African. This becomes obvious when one reads the West African or Southern African literature in English or French. In East Africa, people like Okot p'Bitek, Ebrahim Hussein, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Tigiti Sengo, John Mbiti, Felician Nkwera, Ngugi wa Thiongo to a greater or lesser extent belong to this school. These writers are all in their different ways, reacting to an imposed value-system.

Soon however, the nationalist stance began to take on a class character as the masses of the people realized that they had been betrayed, that Uhuru was not for their benefit, but for the *"Wabenzi"*—the nascent petty-bourgeois class. To quote Ahmad Lesso:

Wakubwa waliandama,
Kuwagandamiza Umma,
Wakanona waadhama,
Wanyonge wakafifia,
Nchi ikabadilika,
Zikawa mbili takaba,
Kwanza waliokunjuka,
Pili waliofifia.[50]

The maturation of these class contradictions in Tanzania led to the promulgation of the Arusha Declaration, in Uganda to the Common Man's Charter and Amin's coup, and in Kenya to the banning of all opposition parties and imprisonment of the opposition leaders, including Oginga Odinga.

With the introduction of the Arusha Declaration in 1967, Swahili poetry reached its heyday in revolutionary terms, at least in Tanzania. The Declaration injected a new life into Swahili poetry, as well as giving it a clear-cut ideological orientation. Tanzanian poets, both young and old, found themselves being drawn into the heated class struggle, irresistably becoming spokesmen of the working class (or the petty-bourgeoisie as the case may be). But they all, in one way or another, propounded the zeitgeist or 'spirit of the time'. Henceforth Mathias Mnyampala, the most eminent poet after Shaaban Robert till his death in 1969, devoted himself entirely to furthering the socialist cause. He revived the Ngonjera poetic form, in which he wrote propaganda poems intended to be performed in public. Two volumes of his

Ngonjera were subsequently published.[51] Many other poets wrote and continue to write about Declaration, and also the more recent *Mwongozo* and *Siasa ni Kilimo.* Many of the poems on the Arusha Declaration have fortunately been collected together and published in book form under the title *Mashairi ya Azimio la Arusha* (edited by G. Kamenju and F. Topan).[52] This collection has of course been silently suppressed by the petty-bourgeois, for how else does one explain the fact that it has not been entered into the school or university Swahili literature curricula?

In Kenya, as peripheral capitalism continued to tighten its stronghold upon the masses of the people, some of the poets began to react against the system. The most outstanding among the rebel poets is undoubtedly Abdilatif Abdalla, who was incidentally a member of the now banned KPU, and was, because of his political activities, imprisoned for three years. It was while serving the sentence that he wrote his first collection of poems, *Sauti ya Dhiki.* The themes of class struggle and betrayal of Uhuru by the present ruling elite in Africa run through the poems in this collection.

Pamoja tulipoluwa, vyetu tukivigawanya
Jambo moja hagunduwa, ulokuwa ukifanya
Hukuwa kinipa sawa, wakati wa kugawanya
Changu ukinipokonya
Mwerevu ulijidai, fungu kubwa ukitwaa
Wanayo wala miyao, na vyakula vya kufaa
Wala hata kukinai, kwa mitumbo kuwajaa
Na nguo njema wavaa
Hali kuwa wangu wana, wadhii mono kwa ndaa
Ndiyani ukiwaona, ni mtambara 'mevaa'
Ni kwa kuwa kutu sina, kuwapa nilowazaa
Kwa wewe changu kutwaa.[53]

Abdilatif believes that if things continue as they are in Kenya, a violent revolution is inevitable.

In any discussion of the development of Swahili poetry, one poet cannot be ignored. That poet is E. Kezilahabi. His collection of poems, *Kichomi,*[54] is, like Abdilatif's a critique of the present situation in Africa, in particular Tanzania. However, what is conspicuous about these poems is not so much the themes—which are not new—but the formal aspects.

For a long time it was believed, and European Scholars helped to propagate the belief, that one cannot conceive of a Swahili poem without '*vina*' and '*mizani*'. Thus Knappert declared: "The term poetry, the definition of which presents considerable difficulty in a literature like English, can be easily defined in Swahili, where all poetry has a fixed metrical form, and is composed with very rigid patterns of rhyme". This view is dangerous in that it views Swahili poetry as a static, non-dynamic art whose form is always the same irrespective of the changing circumstances and themes. This statement is again historically untrue, for Swahili poetry, like all poetries, has been changing in both form and content over time. The *gungu, mavugo* or *hamziya*

are as far removed from 'modern' poetic conventions as are the poems of Kezilahabi who has chosen to depart from the conventions as enumerated by Amri Abedi and his patron scholars from Europe. Kezilahabi's departure from rigid conventionality has of course led to a conflict with the old school of poets. The battle of words has been raging in the Swahili press, in lecture rooms and in Swahili academic symposiums held at the university of Dar es Salaam. Kezilahabi seems to be winning converts, particularly from the young generation. See for example, Senkoro's and Kahigi's poems in support of 'Free verse' in Uhuru newspaper.[56] Though it is still too early to predict the outcome of the controversy, one is led to believe—if history is anything to go by—that the forces of change will eventually prevail over the forces of conservatism. In any case, one can judge from this that the thematic and formal basis of the Swahili poetry of the future is presently being laid, in spite of the subjective objections of the conservatives. For it is obvious that fundamental social changes are beginning to take place in the social structures of our countries, and with the change in the basic economic structure that must ensue after the inevitable socialist revolutions, there are bound to be profound changes in the super-structures as well. And this will necessarily be reflected in the Swahili poetry of the future.

FOOTNOTES

1. Fuller, Susan, *Times Educational Supplement*, 24 February, 1967. Quoted by Wilfred Whiteley in *Swahili: The Rise of a National Language* (London: Methuen, 1969).
2. Knappert, Jan, *Traditional Swahili poetry* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) p. 9.
3. Knappert, Jan, *Myths and Legends of the Swahili* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1970). For a review of Knappert's books, see Ibrahim Noor Sharrif's essay in "Knappert's Tales" in *Kiswahili, Vol. 41/2*, (September 1971).
4. Arnold, R., "Swahili Literature and Modern History: A Necessary Remark on Literary Criticism", *Kiswahili, Vol. 42/2; 43/1*, (March 1973).
5. Kezilahabi, E., "The Development of Swahili Poetry 18th-20th Century", *Kiswahili, Vol. 42/2; 43/1*, (March 1973).
6. Ohly, R., "A Historical Approach to Swahili Literature as heretofore an open question", *Kiswahili, Vol. 43/2*, (September 1973).
7. See, for instance, C. Velten's collection, *Prosa und Poesie Suaheli* (Berlin, 1907).
8. Muyaka, poem quoted by Lyndon Herries in *Swahili Poetry* (London, 1966), p. 257.
9. Muyaka, katika *Diwani ya Muyaka* (ed. Hichens) (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1940), p. 50.
10. Velten, op. cit.
11. For a thorough discussion of this question, read Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Nkrumah, K., *Class Struggle in Africa* and Shivji, *The Silent Class Struggle* and *Class Struggle Continues*.
12. Quoted by John Gray in *History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 132.
13. Kezilahabi, op. cit.
14. Muyaka, op. cit., p. 10.

15. Ohly, op. cit.
16. See Harries, op. cit., pp. 214-15; Hichens, op. cit., Introduction.
17. Muyaka, op. cit., p. 8.
18. Quoted in Harries, op. cit.
19. Quoted in Velten, op. cit., "Shairi la Waarabu", p. 398.
20. Muhamadi Kijumwa, *Utenzi wa Fumo Liyongo*, Chuo cha Uchunguzi wa Lugha ya Kiswahili, p. 13, beti 222-226.
21. Ohly, op. cit.
22. Sayyid Abdallah A. Nasir, *Al-Inkishafi* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1972).
23. Mwana Kupona, *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona.* (Nairobi: Heinemann), beti 12 na 15.
24. Nasir, S. A. A., op. cit.
25. Ibid.
26. Mwana Kupona, op. cit., Ubeti 20.
27. Velten, op. cit., p. 401.
28. Mwana Kupona, op. cit.
29. Ohly, op. cit.
30. Hemedi Abdalla, *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima* (Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1960).
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Mustafa Hamadi, quoted in Velten, op. cit., "Utenzi wa Kala Saara".
34. Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini, *Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji*, Supplement to *Swahili, Vol. 27* (1957), p. 34.
35. Velten, op. cit., "Utenzi wa Bwana Ganava", p. 347. beti 64 na 69.
36. Velten, ibid.
37. Velten, ibid. "Dua ya Mauti", p. 406.
38. Velten, ibid. "Dua ya Mungu", p. 409.
39. Saadan Kandoro, *Mashairi ya Saadan* (Dar es Salaam: Mwananchi Publishing), p. 142.
40. Saadan Kandoro, ibid., p. 141.
41. Sadan Kandoro, ibid., p. 138.
42. Shaaban Robert, *Pambo la Lugha* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press).
43. Amri Abedi *Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi na Diwani ya Amri* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1954).
44. Shaaban Robert, *Kielelezo cha Fasili* (Dar es Salaam: Nelson).
45. Shaaban Robert, ibid.
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47. Ramadhan Mwaruka, *Utenzi wa Jamhuri ya Tanzania* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1968). Salum Kibao, *Utenzi wa Uhuru wa Kenya*, (Oxford).
48. Saadan Kandoro, op. cit.
49. Chemba, Y. S. "My Newest Bride" in *Drum Beat* (ed. L. Okola) (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967).
50. Zuberi A. Lesso, *Utenzi wa Zinduko la Ujamaa* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972).
51. Mathias Mnyampala, *Ngonjera za Ukuta*, No. I and II.
52. Kamenju, G. and Topan, F., (eds.) *Mashairi ya Azimio la Arusha* (Dar es Salaam: Longman, 1970).
53. Abdilatif Abdalla, *Sauti ya Dhiki* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 19-20.
54. Kezilahabi E., *Kichomi* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1974).
55. See *Uhuru*, 31 October, 1973.