

ALAIN RICARD: *EBRAHIM HUSSEIN. THÉÂTRE SWAHILI ET NATIONALISME TANZANIEN*. PARIS: ÉDITIONS KARTHALA, 1998. 186 PP., ILLUSTRATED.

Ricard's book contains a treatise on the Tanzanian playwright, theatre theoretician and teacher Ebrahim Hussein. Apparently it was designed as an introduction to Hussein's swahiliphone œuvre for a French (or francophone) intellectual public, but the specialist scholar of Swahili literature will also gain fresh insights. The book presents contextualizations of Hussein's literary production as well as overviews and interpretations of selected works composed by him between 1969 and 1995. The perspectives range from clarifying certain historical, political and conceptual backgrounds to relating the individual life conditions and artistic capacities of the playwright whom Ricard met in Dar es Salaam as rather retreated and isolated from the literary and political scene of the 1980-90s. Central points of Hussein's works are Tanzania's cultural and linguistic policy of the post-independence period (with its later burn-out syndrome), the theoretical influence of Bertolt Brecht whom Hussein had studied in former East Berlin and the indigenous bases of theatre playing and verbal spectacles. Here Ricard points out the performances of *taarab* with their witty interplays (*vichekesho*), poetic recitals, storytelling and the political and moralistic poetry of the *ngonjera*-type. Generally a strong case must be made for more systematic research of the procedures, genre conventions, themes and content matters of storytelling in East Africa (not to forget the art of puppeteering (*vikaragosi*), which appears totally neglected by researchers), so as to support such studies of modern literature. The 'Lectures historiques' and 'politiques' on the plays *Alikiona* (1969), *Kinjeketile* (1969) and *Wakati Ukuta* (1970), and Ricard's interpretations of the key concepts of secret, enigma and tabu in *Jogoo kijijini* (1976) read truly innovative. Interesting directions are also pointed out in discussing the postcolonial conditions of Swahili and East African identity as they are the theme of Hussein's little known play *Kwenye ukingo wa Thim* (1988). The brief poem on the fall of the political wall, *Ukuta wa Berlin* (1995), which was first published with a French translation in a regional literary journal in France, has not only a German or European, but also an East African or general dimension. Not to be missed in the study are analogies drawn to Wole Soyinka's theatre and the Nigerian nationalism, which Professor Ricard had previously worked on (1972). Eyebrows are raised by the idea that a *taarab* performance should correlate to a 'concert-party' in Togo (which Hussein himself had admitted to). The book which draws on rich references, illustrative text quotations and peripatetic encounters with Hussein in Kariakoo (Ricard's diary is quoted a few times), clearly adds to the more sophisticated and inspiring treatises on Swahili literature and theatre in particular. (As a correction one may add that Hussein's 'An Annotated Bibliography of Swahili Theatre' appeared in *Swahili* 39, 1969: 49-60.)

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