

**‘KISWAHILI’: A POEM**  
**BY MAHMOUD AHMAD ABDULKADIR**  
**TO WHICH IS APPENDED A LIST OF THE POET’S COMPOSITIONS IN VERSE**

MAHMOUD AHMAD ABDULKADIR & P. J. L. FRANKL

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‘Ustadh Mau’ ni jina la hirimu la Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir. Ni muAmu halisi: ni mzaliwa wa Amu, alikuwa mwanafunzi kule, na leo ni miongoni mwa viongozi wa dini wa Amu. Pia ni mfadhili wa miradi mingi. Umaarufu wake umeeneya kwa sababu ya vipaji vyake vya ushairi. Utungaji wa *Kiswahili* ni mfano mmoja katika vipaji hivi. Mashairi haya, alioandika kwa herufi za kiArabu, yanatafautisha hali ya kiSwahili ilivyokuwa zamani na ilivyo sasa. Ustadh Mau analalamika kukhusu hali ya lugha hii, hasa katika sehemu za uSwahili wa kaskazini. Katika wakati ujao kiSwahili kitakuwa hali gani?

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## 1 Introduction [by P. J. L. Frankl, in consultation with Ustadh Mau]

### 1.1 The Poet

Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir, poet, preacher and teacher<sup>1</sup>, was born in Lamu<sup>2</sup>, Kenya Protectorate, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1952<sup>3</sup> (13 mfuno nane 1371 in the Swahili-Islamic calendar). He was the first of six children of Ahmad Abdulkadir Abdulatif (1915-1970)<sup>4</sup>, marine engineer, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Timammy (2007: 303): “Little is known about (Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir) apart from being an Islamic scholar from Lamu”.

<sup>2</sup> Hoyle (2001: 304) describes Lamu as follows: “The historic port-cities of East Africa’s Indian Ocean coast belong to two worlds, modern independent Africa and the Muslim polities of the Indian Ocean”. Hoyle’s statement was valid for Lamu in 2001 (when the town became a world heritage site), and remains valid in 2014. However, as the poet put it: ‘look thy last on all things lovely every hour’. A major new port, with an extensive infrastructure and an immense workforce from the interior, is emerging nearby. Lamu Island, where Ustadh Mau was born and bred, will be submerged in the years to come although not, like the proverbial Ungama, ‘eaten’ by the sea. Yet, with similar finality, the community and culture and dialect (the kiAmu of Mau’s poem), will slowly cease to flourish – Lamu’s destiny having been determined by strangers in distant places.

<sup>3</sup> Mahmoud’s father, in a statement written in Swahili-Arabic script, attests that his son was born on ‘*siku ya jumaa-tatu, 13 mfuno nane, AH 1317*’ (Monday, 20 February 1952). Mahmud’s birth was not registered until 1967 - the date entered in his certificate being ‘1950’.

<sup>4</sup> Salvadori (1983: 148): “Another pioneer was Abdul Kadir Abdul Latif [Mahmoud’s paternal grandfather] from the village of Mohammed-neger, near Poona, who became incorporated into the Surati community, such as it was, by his marriage to a Surati girl from Mombasa. He settled in Lamu, where he became known as Abdul Kadir Engineer because he was employed to look after the District Commissioner’s boat” (see also Salvadori 1996, vol. I: 34. For a photograph of Ustadh Mau in his library, see vol. III, p. 221).

his wife Barka Aboud Mbarak (about 1938-2002). Both his parents were poets.<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud was educated at the al-Najah<sup>6</sup> *chuo* (Islamic primary school) and at the al-Najah *madrasa* (Islamic secondary school), behind Lamu's *gereza* (a fort, a prison and, since 1984, a museum). In due course Mahmoud became a teacher at the schools where he had been a pupil. When young he was attracted to Mao Zedong's brand of Chinese communism, and so friends called him 'Mao'. By 1966 it became clear that the government in Nairobi had rejected communism in favour of capitalism, so Mahmoud altered the spelling of his nickname (*jina la hirimu*) from 'Mao' to 'Mau' – suggesting to some, perhaps, that the youth had sympathized with the Mau Mau struggle. After his father's death Mahmoud spent two years, from 1971 to 1973, as a shopkeeper in Dar es Salaam, after which he returned to Lamu.

Already when in his twenties Mahmoud had revealed his gifts as a poet. In 1974 he wrote *Wasiya ya Mabanati* ('Advice to Young Girls').<sup>7</sup> In 1975 his *Kimondo* was circulated widely.<sup>8</sup> Other poems have followed (for a list of which see the Appendix); many are available on cassette, or compact disk, or on the internet. One advantage of recording Mau's poems (as opposed to having them printed) is that they can be listened to by a group. After all, poetry like music is composed to be heard.<sup>9</sup>

In 1975 Ustadh Mau married Aisha Ali Waleedi of Lamu and Siyu, with whom he has had eight children (3 sons and 5 daughters). In 1985 he married Sauda Kasim Bwanamaka of Faza, with whom he has had three children (1 son and 2 daughters). Also in 1985 Mahmoud was appointed imam of Lamu's oldest surviving mosque, the Pwani mosque.<sup>10</sup> An important duty attached to this post was, and continues to be, preaching the Friday sermon (*khuṭba ya ijumaa*), and at these times the mosque is almost always full to overflowing. Early on he took the daring step, at that time a step opposed by many, to preach the Friday sermon in Swahili rather than in Arabic, the Pwani mosque being the first mosque in Lamu where this was done. Currently all the Friday mosques in Lamu have the Friday sermon delivered in Swahili. In addition to his duties at the Pwani mosque,

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<sup>5</sup> When Mahmoud was born his father Ahmad composed a poem of paternal advice. Similarly, when Aboudi wa Mahmoud was born his father composed '*Haki za Watoto*' (see Appendix).

<sup>6</sup> 'al-Najah' is pronounced 'an-Najah'; likewise in stanza 6, 'al-Nabhany' is pronounced 'an-Nabhany'.

<sup>7</sup> Kresse (2007: 110) finds: "The cassette recording of the unpublished *Utendi wa mabanati* was extremely popular among Swahili people", '*Wasiya wa Mabanati*': The first ten verses of this poem (there are 143 stanzas in all) were published in *Wasafiri* (see Abdulkadir 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The '*Kimondo*' verses were directed at the candidates vying for the parliamentary seat of Lamu East in the 1975 general election (see Amidu 1990, 1993, 2004, Njogu 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Ustadh Mau not only makes recordings of his poetry, he also gives public readings. For example, the Goethe-Institut and the Alliance Française in Nairobi organized *Jukwaani*, an annual festival for performing literature, and in 2009 Ustadh Mau was among five distinguished poets from Swahililand who performed at the festival.

<sup>10</sup> The Pwani mosque is the oldest surviving mosque on the island (in the *mtaa* known as *Nyuma ya Gereza*), dating from 772 AH / AD 1370 (Allen 1974: 25-6).

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Ustadh Mau holds *darasa* (classes) every Ramadhan in the Ras Kopo mosque.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, he holds *darasa* daily (except for Fridays and Ramadhan), before mid-day prayers, in the Bandani mosque, also known as the BaWazir mosque.<sup>12</sup>

Ustadh Mau has travelled widely, particularly within the world of Islam, and every month receives periodicals from Cairo. As chairman of Lamu Muslim Youth, he has thrice performed *umra* (the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca). He has broadcast frequently in Swahili on Africa TV (Khartoum), and on Radio Salaam (Mombasa).

A poet who has not inherited wealth cannot normally expect to become wealthy, nor is the salary of an imam princely, so Ustadh Mau was fortunate to have inherited the Asilia Bakery (now managed by two sons, and currently the only bakery in the town). He has thus been assured of his daily bread.<sup>13</sup> As a servant of the community he agreed to chair the Lamu West constituency AIDS committee.<sup>14</sup> In addition, he is a member of the Lamu district education board, a member of the Lamu district children’s advisory committee, and a member of the Mkomani Girls’ Primary School committee, Lamu. In 2004 Ustadh Mau was appointed to be a member of the panel of elders on the Land Disputes Tribunal.<sup>15</sup> Also in 2004, in the Jamhuri Day Honours, he was awarded the Head of State’s Commendation “despite lack of formal education”.<sup>16</sup> Recently, and with great humility, Ustadh Mau sat for and passed the national examination for the certificate of primary education – a remarkable achievement for one in his sixties. As well as all this, the imam swims enthusiastically in the early morning at Uyoni beach.

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<sup>11</sup> The Ras Kopo mosque, near the market, dates from 1212 AH / AD 1797/8 (see note 10 above).

<sup>12</sup> The Bandani mosque: the original name is no longer known with certainty – it may have been called the Nyebai mosque.

<sup>13</sup> See Amidu (2009: 7, note 6): “[...] in Lamu, Mahmoud Ahmed Abdul-Kadir, alias Mau, has baked bread for most of his life for Lamu’s people in addition to writing poetry in his spare time. He is one of the small-scale bakers who has improved his economic condition through his profession, fed many, and has also become a modest celebrity as a topical political poet in Lamu”.

<sup>14</sup> See the poet’s *Tahadhari na UKIMWI!* (‘Beware of AIDS!’) (Abdulkadir 2006).

<sup>15</sup> See the list published in the Kenya Gazette CVI, No 44, GN 3674, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004.

<sup>16</sup> In a booklet issued for the investiture at State House, Nairobi, on Jamhuri Day, Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2004 one reads on page vii: “Mr. Abdulkadir [...] is a renowned Kiswahili poet [...] despite lack of formal education. He is a social philanthropist who has single handedly mobilized resources for communal projects within Lamu District, including a school for the mentally handicapped. He is currently actively involved in spearheading advocacy and publicity on HIV/AIDS in Lamu District. He is awarded the Head of State’s Commendation for his immense contribution towards national development.” “A renowned Kiswahili poet [...] despite lack of formal education” is an interesting observation. The perception seems to be that those who have acquired ‘formal education’ have acquired a form of that education which was first introduced to east Africa by European-Christians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If so, it would follow, for example, that the author of the 18<sup>th</sup> century poem *Inkishafi* composed his masterpiece ‘despite lack of formal education’ (see note 25 below). The truth is that since the coming of Islam to the east African coast the Swahili have received their formal education in the *chuo* and the *madrasa* (see also note 35). At the start of the twenty-first century, however, in changed circumstances, too many Swahili have acquired too little formal education beyond the *chuo* and the *madrasa*. The consequences for the economic and political future of the Swahili-speaking peoples are dire indeed.

Ustadh Mau belongs to what is, arguably, an endangered species – the Swahili gentleman. Those who know him as poet, preacher or teacher esteem a Lamu worthy, and value a Swahili treasure.

## 1. 2 The Poem

Ustadh Mau composed '*Kiswahili*' in 2003, in *kiAmu* (the Swahili speech of Lamu). The verses are beautifully written in Swahili-Arabic script on five pages of lined paper.<sup>17</sup> An audio version was recorded in Lamu in 2005 by Mathieu Roy. The Swahili text in roman characters appeared in the introduction to Roy's doctoral dissertation (2013), together with a French translation and with notes giving the standardized Swahili for 'difficult' *kiAmu* words and phrases (Roy 2013: 46-51).

What the narrator of '*Kiswahili*' says about his mother tongue in the first decade of the twenty-first century requires little or no explanation for readers who live in, or who have lived in, northern and central Swahililand. Largely due to the language policies of Julius Nyerere who led Tanganyika, and subsequently Tanzania, from 1961 to 1985 - the state of the language in southern Swahililand now differs significantly from that prevailing to the north.

The narrator of the poem, Mother Swahili, laments the state of Swahili in, for example, Lamu, and Mombasa at the start of the twenty-first century (the fifteenth century in the Islamic calendar).<sup>18</sup> The poet thoughts have been expressed quite freely, pessimistic though they may be. But let this paragraph end on an optimistic note – a note, as it were, for a potential additional stanza. The year 2012 witnessed an exceedingly important Swahili publication in Dar es Salaam: '*Kale ya Washairi wa Pemba: Kamange na Sarahani*' ('The Past of Pemba Poets: Kamange and Sarahani') by Abdurrahman Saggaf Alawy and Ali A. El-Maawy, edited by Abdilatif Abdalla. All is not yet lost – not yet.

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<sup>17</sup> In former times Swahili was written in Arabic or Swahili-Arabic script. However in the second half of the mid-nineteenth century two European-Christian missionaries, Johann Ludwig Krapf in Mombasa and Edward Steere in Zanzibar, pioneered printing Swahili in roman characters. Within a remarkably short time Swahili in roman script became widespread. Today many mother-tongue speakers of Swahili are unable to write Swahili meaningfully in their own script. The manuscript of Ustadh Mau's poem exemplifies what was once the norm for every Swahili poet. Some 'Islamic' languages continue to employ Arabic script, notably Arabic and Farsi; others do not. Swahili (that is to say the language of the Swahili-speaking people), like Turkish and Malay, has lost the battle of the two scripts.

<sup>18</sup> Mother Swahili may remind Irish readers of the literary figure of Kathleen Ni Houlihan, a mythical symbol and emblem of Irish nationalism. Ustadh Mau in Swahililand, like some leaders in twentieth century Ireland, is concerned with raising questions about identity and cultural difference.

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### 2 ‘Kiswahili’

#### 2.1 The Swahili Text in Roman Script [by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir]<sup>19</sup>

1	Kunyamaa nimechoka wanangu huniepuka walobaki kunishika Mimi nimewatendani	t’anyamaa haṭa lini kuwaona naṭamani si wangu ni wa wendani mbona mwanipija zita
2	Wanangu mimi wa ḍamu asili hawana hamu wamenatīya kaumu kosa langu kosa gani	wana wa Uswahilini ya kuniyuwa ni nani na wana wa majirani mbona hunipija zita
3	Mimi mamenu siṭ’asa nimezaa wa Mambasa nizee wanasiyasa mafundi wa kula fani	wala sina punguwani na kungine zisiwani na ziyongozi wa ḍini na mashujaa wa zita
4	Ndimi mamake Muyaka na Zahidi kadhalika Ali Koti na Mataka waliṭoka mtumboni	piya Mwengo Athumani na wengi wake wendani woṭ’e mbwa moya karini wa kawaa kama nyota
5	Inkishafi ngaliya ndipo ṭakapo kweleya ni t’ungo zimesaliya walozitunga ni nyani	ukisome na kidani nikwambiyao mwendani na hazifi asilani ni wanangu walopita

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<sup>19</sup> For a commentary on dialectal forms in the poem and equivalents in Standard Swahili, see Roy 2013.

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|----|--|--|
| 6  | Na Malenga wa Mvita<br>nyayo walizifuwata<br>n-Nabahani huteta<br>ndiye pweke uwandani       | na piya Chiraghudini<br>hawakukiri uduni<br>lakini hufaliyani<br>inga(w)a ameikita             |
| 7  | Bado kuzaa naweza<br>lakini mumenipuuzza<br>wengine meitokeza<br>musamiyati kubuni           | siyakoma ukingoni<br>mumeitowa fuwoni<br>kunipangiya kanuni<br>nyinyi muliponiwata             |
| 8  | Huliya kisikiti<br>wengi wanaoandika<br>idhaani kadhalika<br>wengi hawatoiki p'wani          | Changaliya jaridani<br>si wanangu ni wageni<br>wapeka t'ungo ni nyani<br>licha kuwa mbwa Mvita |
| 9  | Angaliya na zitabu<br>hazandikwi na Rajabu<br>Njoroge ndiyo katibu<br>Charo na wake wendani  | zisomeshwao shuleni<br>si Sudi wala si Shani<br>ashishiyeo sukani<br>nao nyuma hufuwata        |
| 10 | Hualikwa kongamano<br>huona utungu mno<br>na huziuma zitano<br>Wanangu mumeikhini            | Chenda hurudi ndiyani<br>kuwa nyinyi siwaoni<br>Lakini nitende nini<br>mamenu mumeniwata       |
| 11 | Na huliya kwa matenzi<br>wanafundi wa Kibwezi<br>ndiwo wanao barizi<br>mulotoka kwetu p'wani | changaliya mitihani<br>na wa Kisumu ziwani<br>waliyoko kileleni<br>muko t'ini hukokota         |

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|-----|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 12  | Wafanyao u <u>t</u> afiti             | wa uzamili zuwoni                     |
|     | Waswahili ni ka <u>t</u> i <u>t</u> i | au hawapatikani                       |
|     | ni nyani niml <u>a</u> i <u>t</u> i   | mwenye makosa ni nyani                |
|     | mimi hamuni tha <u>m</u> i <u>n</u> i | mngine hamukupata                     |
| 13  | Kiwasikiya hunena                     | huniungonga moyoni                    |
|     | sarufi hakuna <u>t</u> ena            | nahau nai <u>t</u> amani              |
|     | na ha <u>t</u> a ladha hayana         | kama mashapu kanwani                  |
|     | sielewi hunenani                      | huimba au huteta                      |
| 14  | Lau Muyaka <u>t</u> arud <u>i</u>     | ae <u>t</u> ena <u>d</u> uniyani      |
|     | mwanangu i <u>t</u> ambidi            | kwenenda mahakamani                   |
|     | aete na mashahid <u>i</u>             | waniyuwao yakini                      |
|     | nyut’e mwenda gerezani                | kwa ha <u>t</u> iya kuwapata          |
| 15. | Wallahi hamuna ghera                  | wala hamuna imani                     |
|     | hamuna la kuwakera                    | kuwa hamuni tha <u>m</u> i <u>n</u> i |
|     | mimi ni kama mpwira                   | hutezewa uwand <u>a</u> ni            |
|     | hupijwa teke nd <u>i</u> yani         | na kula anaepita                      |
| 16  | Ha <u>t</u> a kwenye ushairi          | waso wangu wamebuni                   |
|     | zilizo huru bahari                    | kwa kuoleza wageni                    |
|     | mimi hayo siyakiri                    | si mashairi kifani                    |
|     | hayo yot’e nikwa nini                 | hizo ni mbinu za zita                 |
| 17  | Hambiwa mwenyewe sina                 | hini ni ajabu gani                    |
|     | huwae kakosa shina                    | kawa na <u>t</u> andu yangani         |
|     | nyani alonipa ina                     | alonand <u>i</u> ka ni nyani          |
|     | kiwa si Uswahilini                    | ni wapi nilipopata                    |

18	Kuwa wengi huninena	si <u>dalili</u> aswilani
	yakuwa wenyewe sina	Kingereza hamuoni
	hunenwa na wengi sana	p'embe zot'e <u>duniyani</u>
	kina na kwao shinani	miziye haikuk'ata

## 2.2 A Free English Translation [by P. J. L. Frankl, in consultation with Ustadh Mau]

- 1 I am weary of staying silent. For how much longer am I to remain dumb? My own children avoid me, though I long to see them. And those who remain to embrace me are not my own, but are the offspring of others. What have I done to you? Why do you wage war on me?
- 2 My own flesh and blood, the children of Swahililand, are uninterested in knowing who I am, and have left me to other peoples, and to the children of neighbours. What kind of fault is my fault? [O my children] why do you continue waging war on me?
- 3 I am your mother and am not yet infertile, nor has my ability to reproduce diminished. I have given birth to children in Mambasa and in the other islands [of the Swahili], to politicians and to religious leaders, to craftsmen in every field, and to war heroes.
- 4 I am the mother of Bwana Muyaka,<sup>20</sup> and of Mwengo Athmani,<sup>21</sup> also, and of Zahidi<sup>22</sup> too, and many of his contemporaries, Ali Koti<sup>23</sup> and Mataka,<sup>24</sup> all from just one century, they emerged from my womb, and shone like stars.
- 5 Look at Inkishafi.<sup>25</sup> Read it attentively and then, my dear friend, you will understand what I am telling you. These verses are of enduring worth and will never die. Who were those who composed them? They were my children who have passed on.

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<sup>20</sup> Bwana Muyaka was the outstanding Swahili poet of 19th century Mombasa. After his death many of his verses were recalled by Mu'allim Sikujua Abdallah al-Batawi (died 1890) and transcribed with annotations by W.E. Taylor (1856-1927). After Taylor's death his papers were acquired by the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

<sup>21</sup> Mwengo Athmani: this 18th century poet from Pate composed the *Utendi wa Tambuka* ('The Epic of Heraklios').

<sup>22</sup> Zahidi: see El-Maawy (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Ali Koti of Pate: see Chiraghdin (1987: 31-7).

<sup>24</sup> Bwana Mataka's full name is Muhammad bin Shee Mataka al-Famau (1825-1868). He was ruler of Siyu, as was his father. His mother was Mwana Kupona, famous for the poem of advice written to her daughter. Bwana Mataka, died in Mombasa's fort while imprisoned by the Busa'idi.

<sup>25</sup> The *Inkishafi*, according to W.E. Taylor Stigand (1915: 96-105) is "a great, if not the greatest, religious classic of [the Swahili-speaking peoples]". The poem, concerned with the decay of Pate (formerly a flourishing town in northern Swahililand), may remind some readers of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy written in an English churchyard' (London 1751).



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- 6 And the Bard of Mambasa,<sup>26</sup> and Chiraghadin too,<sup>27</sup> they followed in my footsteps, they did not submit to lower standards. al-Nabhany<sup>28</sup> reproves, but to what effect? He remains alone in the field, yet he stays strong.
- 7 I am still able to give birth. I have not yet reached the limit, but you have all despised me. You have left me high and dry, now others have come forward to regulate me, compiling standardized dictionaries.<sup>29</sup>
- 8 I weep and lament when I look at the learned journals, for many of those who contribute are not my children, they are strangers [to me]. It is much the same with the media. Who are the ones who send in their compositions? Although they may have a Mambasa address, many do not come from the coast.
- 9 Look at the text books which are studied at our schools. They are written neither by Rajabu, nor by Sudi nor by Shani. The author is Njoroge,<sup>30</sup> he is the helmsman. Charo<sup>31</sup> and his colleagues follow.
- 10 When I am invited to conferences, I turn back before I arrive. I feel exceedingly bitter that I do not see you all there. I bite my fingers in frustration,<sup>32</sup> but what can I do? My children, you have missed your opportunity. You have abandoned your own mother.

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<sup>26</sup> The Bard of Mambasa refers to Ustadh Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo, see Chiraghadin (1971).

<sup>27</sup> Shihabdin Chiraghadin (1934-1976). See the biography by his daughter Latifa Chiraghadin which came out in 2012.

<sup>28</sup> In an unpublished commendation from 12th June 1974 J.W.T. Allen and M.A. Oxon. write about Ahmad Sheikh Nabhany: “[...] I am privileged to have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances among Swahili scholars of Swahili. I have some knowledge of their rating of themselves and I can name perhaps half a dozen (still living) who are always referred to as the most learned. To me they are walking dictionaries and mines of information and Ahmed is unquestionably one of them. He comes of a family of scholars whose discipline is as tough as any degree course in the world. They have no time for false scholarship or dilettantism. That this profound learning is almost wholly disregarded by those who have been highly educated in the western tradition affects almost everything written today in or about Swahili. When I want to know some word or something about Swahili, I do not go to professors, but to one of the *bingwa* known to me. One of these could give a much greater detail of assessment, but of course his opinion would not carry the weight of one who can put some totally irrelevant letters after his name”. (See also the second paragraph of note 16 above). For a biography see Said (2012).

<sup>29</sup> For almost a century the principal publisher of standardized Swahili dictionaries has been the Oxford University Press (OUP). Clearly OUP has to be profitable, and profitable is what, over the years, their dictionaries of standardized Swahili have been. However if one considers excellence in research and scholarship not one of the OUP’s standardized Swahili lexicons can begin to compare with the *Oxford English Dictionary* (‘more than 600,000 words over a thousand years’). Fortunately for Swahili and for Swahili studies there exists the monumental *Dictionnaire swahili-français* (Paris 1939), compiled by Charles Sacleux. Sacleux’s *chef d’œuvre* (‘unprecedented in historical depth, dialectological detail and philological knowledge’) can now be accessed electronically, by courtesy of *Swahili Forum*. Heartfelt thanks are due to Thilo Schadeberg and Ridder Samson.

<sup>30</sup> Njoroge: a name representing those who have their origins in the east African interior (the *bara*).

<sup>31</sup> Charo: a name representing those who have their origins in the coastal hinterland (the *nyika*).

<sup>32</sup> *nahuziuma zitano*: these words echo the words of the *Inkishafi* “*wakauma zanda na kuiyuta*”. Readers unfamiliar with this Swahili gesture of regret could consult Eastman & Omar (1985).

- 11 And I shed tears when I look at the results of the school exams. Students from Kibwezi, and from Kisumu<sup>33</sup> by the lake,<sup>34</sup> they are the ones who are ahead, who are at the top; and you, students from the coast, you lag far behind.<sup>35</sup>
- 12 Amongst those who are researching for degrees at the universities, Swahili students are few - or non-existent. Who is to be blamed? Whose fault is it? You esteem me not at all, yet you have not replaced me by another.
- 13 When I hear those who are not mother-tongue speakers speaking, I feel sick at heart. Inflection is no longer employed, while grammatical [Swahili] is what I desire! Even [their speech] is wanting in flavour, like a plug of tobacco in one's mouth. I do not understand what they are saying. Are they singing? Are they complaining?
- 14 Were Bwana Muyaka to return, were he to come back to the world, it would be necessary, my child, for him to go to a court of law, and he would need to call witnesses who know me well, and all of you would go to prison for the offence which you have committed against me.
- 15 Truly you have neither zeal nor self-confidence. It irritates you not at all that you do not esteem me. I am just like a ball in the play-ground, whoever passes me by in the street gives me a kick.
- 16 Even in the field of Swahili prosody, those who are not mine have invented free verse, imitating foreigners. For myself, I cannot accept that. That is not Swahili poetry. What is the point of it all? These are preparations for war.
- 17 I am told that I belong to nobody in particular. How extraordinary! How can I be rootless below ground and yet have branches above? Who gave me my name? And who are they who wrote me down? If I do not hail from Swahililand, then whence do I come?
- 18 That many speak me, [Swahili], is not of itself proof of origins, or of ownership. What of the English language? It is spoken by very many, in all corners of the world, yet the language remains firmly established in its homeland, its roots have not been severed.

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<sup>33</sup> Kibwezi and Kisumu: places in the east African interior.

<sup>34</sup> The lake is Lake Nyanza, also known as Lake Victoria.

<sup>35</sup> *muko t'ini hukokota*: over the years young people on Lamu Island (and indeed elsewhere in northern Swahililand) have received a raw deal in their primary and secondary education. They have 'lagged far behind' their counterparts from the interior, and so Mother Swahili grieves for her marginalised children (see also the second paragraph of note 16).

‘KISWAHILI’: A POEM BY MAHMOUD AHMAD ABDULKADIR

2.3 The Swahili Text in Swahili-Arabic Script [by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 كَسُوا حِلَّ  
 كُنِيَمَانِ مَحْشُوكِ تَانِيَا مَا حَتَّ لِنِ  
 وَنَسَخَ هَنْبِيُوكِ كَوَانَنَ تَمَانِ  
 وَالْوَبَاكِ كُنْشَكِ سَوْنَعُ وَوَنْدَانِ  
 مِمَّنْ مَوْتِنْدَانِ — مَبُونَ هَنْبِيَجِ زَتِ  
 وَمَانَعُ مِمَّ وَدَمُ وَأَنَ وَأَسْوَا حِلِينِ  
 أَصْلَ هَوْنَهَامُ يَا كَنْيُونِ نَانِ  
 وَمَنْتَبِ قَوْمُ نَوْنِ وَ مَجْرِنِ  
 كَوَسَ لَنَعُ كَوَسَمَانِ — مَبُونَ هَنْبِيَجِ زَتِ  
 مِمَّ مَا مَنَ سَتَامَ وَلَ سَنَ يُشْعُونِ  
 نِ مَنَا وَمَمْبَامَ نَ كَنْخِنَ زِ سَوْنِ  
 نِ زَوْنِ سِيَّاسَ نِ زِ يُوْنُخُورِ وَدِنِ  
 مَا فُنْدِ وَكَلَّ فَنِ — نَ مَا شَجَا وَ زَتِ  
 نَدِمَ مَا مَاكِ مِيَاكِ بِي مَوْنَعُ عَحْمَانِ  
 نَ زَهْدِ كَذَلِكِ نَ وَنَعُ وََاكِ وَنْدَانِ  
 عَلَى كَوْتِ نَ مَنَّاكِ تَوْتِ مَبُوا مُوَيَ قَرِنِ  
 وَلِتُوكِ مَا تَوْمَبُونِ وَ كَمُوا كَمَ نِيُوتِ

١ اِنْخَشَا فِ نَخْلِيْ      اَكْسُوْمِ نَ كِدِ نِ  
 نَدِرِيُو تَا كَا يُو كُو لِيْ      نِ كُوَا مِيَا ءِ مَوْنَدَانِ  
 نِ تُوْنَحْ رِ مَسْلِيْ      نِ هَزِفِ اَصْلَانِ  
 وَالْوَرِ تَنْعَ نِ نِيَانِ      نِ وَ تَانَعُ وَالْوَرِ تِ  
 نِ مَا لِنَعْ وَ مَقِتَ      نِ يِيْ خِرَاغِ رِ نِ  
 نِيَا يُو وَلِزْقُوْتِ      هَا وَ كُجِرِ اُ دِ نِ  
 نِنَا بَعَا نِ هَشْتِ      لِكِنِ صُقْلِيَا نِ  
 نَدِرِيْ يُو كِ اُوْنَدَانِ      اِنْخَا اِ مِيْحَتِ  
 بَادُ كَزَا نِ مَرِ      سِيَا كُوْمِ اِ كَنْقُوْرِ  
 لِكِنِ مَمْنِيُوْرِ      مُمْنِيُوْ قُوْ نِ  
 وَ نَعْنِ مِيْشُوَا كَزِ      كِنِيَا نَحْيِ كَانُوْ نِ  
 مَسْمِيَا تِ كَبُوْ نِ      نِيْسِيْ مِلِيُوْ نِ وَ تِ  
 هَلِيْ كِسْحَتِكَ      خَنْخَلِيْ جَرِدِ نِ  
 مَرِنَحْ وَ نَاءِ اُنْدَكِ      سَوَا نَعْ نِ وَ غِنِ  
 اِذَا مَانِ كَذَلِكَ      وَ يَكِ تَنْعَ نِ نِيَانِ  
 وَ نَعْ هَا وَ تُوْكَ يُوَانِ      لِيْ كُوْ مِيَا مَقِتِ



أَنْغَلِي نَ زَنَابُ      زَسُو مَشُوا أَ شَلِي  
 هَا زَا نِدْ كُونِ رَجَبُ      بِسْ سُوْدِ وَكَسْ شَانِ  
 نَجْوَرُ شَخْ نِدِي كَيْبُ      أَ شَشِيوُ سَكَانِ  
 خَارُ نَ وَالْ وَنْدَانِ      نَاءُ نِيُوْمَ هَفُوْتِ  
 هُوَ لِيْ كُوْنُ نَعْمَانِ      خَنْدَ هَرْدِ نِدِيَانِ  
 هُوَنَ أَ تُنْعَ هُنُو      كُوْ نِيْنِي سَوَانِ  
 نَ هَزَامَ زَنَانِ      لَكِيْنِ نَ تَنْدِ شَنِ  
 وَنَانْعَ مُمِيْخِيْنِ      مَا مِنْ مُمِيْرَتِ  
 نَ هَلِيْ كُوَامَاتُوْنِ      خَنْغَلِي مِيْكَانِ  
 وَنَ غَنْدِ وَكَبِيْرِيْ      نَ وَ كِسُوْمَ زَوْنِ  
 نِدْ وَ وَ نَاءُ بَارِيْ      وَ لِيُوْكُوْ كَلَلِنِ  
 مَلُوْ تُوْكَ كُوْتُ پِيَوَانِ      مُكُوْرَتِيْنِ هُكُوْ كُوْتِ  
 وَكَأَيَاءُ أَ تَفِيْتِ      وَ أُوْ زَ مِلْ خُوْنِ  
 وَ شَوَاهِلِ نِ كَاتِيْتِ      أُوْ هُوَ پَا رِيْكَانِ  
 نَ نِيَانِ نِ مَلِيْتِ      مُوْنِيْ مَا كُوْرَسَ نِ نِيَانِ  
 مِمْ هَا مَنِيْشَمِيْنِ      مَغِيْنِ هَا مُكِيَاتِ

كَوَسِيحِي هُنَيْنَ      هِنَا نَعْرُ نَعْمُ مَوِيُونِ  
 صَرْفَ هَكْنِ تِنَ      نَحْوُ نَ رِثْمَانِ  
 نَ حَتَّى لَذَ هَيَانِ      كَمَ مَشَايُفُ كَانُوَانِ  
 سِئَلُو هِنَانِ —      هُتَّعِبَ أَوْ هُتَّعِبَ  
 لَو مِيَاكَ تَارِدِ      آيِ تِنَ رُفِيَا نِ  
 مَوَانَا نَعْمُ رَا تَمِيدِ      كَرِ نَبْدَ مَكْكَيَا نِ  
 أَتُتَ نَ مَشْهَدِ      وَ فَيُوَا رَ يَقِينِ  
 نَبُوتِ مَوْنِدِ غَرَزِ —      كَوَا ~~هَ~~ حَتِّي كَوِيَا تِ  
 وَ اللّٰهُ هَمَنْ غَيْرِ      وَ لَ هَامُونِ رَامَانِ  
 هَمَنْ لَكُو عَرِ      كَوَ هَمَنْ شَمِينِ  
 مِمَّ نِ كَامَ مَيُورِ      هَتَزُو أَوْ تَدَانِ  
 هِيَجُو نَجْمِدِيَا نَ —      نَ كُلَّ مَوْنِي كِيَتِ  
 حَتَّى كَوْنِي أَسْعِرِ      وَ اسْوَوْنَعُ وَ مَبُورِ  
 رِلَزِ حُرِّ بَحَارِ      كَوَا كَوَالِزِ وَ غِنِ  
 مِمَّ هَايُو سِيَا عِرِ      سِ مَا شَعِرِ كَفْنِ  
 هَانُوتِ رَا كَالْتِ      هَتِ نَ مَسْجِدِ زَاوَدِ



هَمِيوْ مَوْنِيوْ سَيَّ هِي نِ عَجَابُ ثَغَانِ  
 هَوَاءِ كَا كَوَسِي شَنِّ كَاوَنَ تَائِدُ يَا نَغَانِ  
 نِيَانِ اَلْوَنِي نِيَانِ اَلْوَنَانْدَكْ رِيَانِ  
 كَوَسِي اَسْوَا حِلْنِ نِ وِ نَا لِيُوِيَا  
 كَوْنِيغْ هِنِنِ سِدْ لَلِ اَصْلَانِ  
 يَا كَوْ مَوْنِيوْ سَيَّ كَنَغَرَزْ هَا مَوْنِ  
 هِنُوَا نِ وِنِيغْ سَانِ يَمِبْ رِيَتْ دُرِيَانِ  
 كَنِ نِ كَوَا نِ سَانِ مِرِي هَرِيكَاتِ

30/7/03

**APPENDIX: Poetry by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir (Ustadh Mau)**

<b>Tendi</b>	<b>Year of Composition</b>
<i>Wasiya wa mabanati</i>	1974
<i>Kimondo (1, 2, 3)</i>	1975
<i>UKIMWI nzimwi</i>	1990
<i>Haki za watoto</i>	2000
<i>Uzunduzi</i>	2001
<i>Mwangaza</i>	2002
<i>Mukhadarati</i>	2004
<i>Ramani ya maisha ya ndowa (mume)</i>	2006
<i>Ramani ya maisha ya ndowa (mke)</i>	2006
<i>Kikuba</i>	2010

**Shorter Poems**

<i>Tunda</i>	1976
<i>Kipande cha ini</i>	1989
<i>Msichana wa kiIslamumu</i>	1990
<i>Kitabu</i>	2000
<i>Jahazi</i>	2002
<i>kiSwahili</i>	2003
<i>Mlango t'auhindika</i>	2005
<i>Ufisadi</i>	2005
<i>Aso chake!</i>	2006
<i>Tahadhari na UKIMWI!</i>	2006
<i>Mama musimlaumu</i>	2006
<i>Bandari</i>	2009
<i>Yatima</i>	2009



## ‘KISWAHILI’: A POEM BY MAHMOUD AHMAD ABDULKADIR

<i>Tupijeni makamama</i>	2010
<i>Tulindeni kiSwahili</i>	2010
<i>Bandari ina mawimbi</i>	2010

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