

*SWAHILI FORUM 24 (2017): i-iii*

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**JEAN DE DIEU KARANGWA**  
**28.10.1962-9.2.2017**



## FLAVIA AIELLO

The Swahilist community of scholars, teachers and students mourns the shocking death of Jean de Dieu Karangwa, an esteemed colleague, editor of *Swahili Forum* and, for many of us, a dear friend, who passed away prematurely on 9th February 2017. He was married to Consolata Murangwayire and was the father of two children.

Jean de Dieu Karangwa was born on 28th October 1962 in Kigali, Rwanda, in a large, open, welcoming family which encouraged his precocious intellectual curiosity: an anecdote tells of how, at the age of five, he insisted on going to school with his older siblings ... and was accepted. After completing his secondary education (Greek-Latin studies) in Nyanza, he took a degree in African Languages and Literatures (Kinyarwanda and Swahili) at the University of Kigali and started teaching Swahili there. In 1990, he was given a fellowship for his doctoral studies in Paris. He chose to write his Ph.D. thesis on the sociolinguistic situation of the Swahili language in the Great Lake Region, supervised by prof. Pierre Alexandre. From 1994, after Alexandre passed away, Jean de Dieu's work was directed by prof. Gérard Philippson (*Le Kiswahili dans l'Afrique des Grands Lacs: contribution sociolinguistique*, 1995, Paris). In the meantime, Rwanda had been ravaged by the civil war and Philippson advised him to prolong his stay in France, offering him a temporary collaborative role in charge of research and teaching. In 1996, he was associated to the CRIM (Centre de Recherche en Ingénierie Multilingue) at INALCO, directed at the time by prof. Monique Slodzian. However, Jean de Dieu had not lost hope of going back to Rwanda and was preparing for his return home when the Bantu section (Aziza Mohamed Aboubacar, Odile Racine and Gérard Philippson) asked him to help develop extra Swahili courses in the Department of African Languages, since INALCO was restructuring its programmes for the national LMD (Licence Master Doctorat) system and needed to increase the hours of language teaching. He then remained at Department of African Languages as a researcher and *mwalimu*, loved by colleagues and students alike. Between 2013 and 2016, he also served as director of the department. He was a member of various research centres, such as *Pluralité des Langues et des Identités: Didactique, Acquisition, Médiations* (PLIDAM - INALCO) and *Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale* (LACITO - CNRS). In parallel, Jean de Dieu taught at the university of Ghent as he had taken his family to live in Brussels, where his wife Consolata had found employment. He also gave Swahili courses at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the University *Sciences Po* in Paris.

Jean de Dieu Karangwa produced a number of publications on the sociolinguistic developments of Swahili in the Great Lake Region. Furthermore, he translated Cheikh Hamidou Kane's novel, *L'aventure ambiguë*, and a part of the *General History of Africa* (UNESCO) into Swahili. He had lately been working on a French-Swahili dictionary and for the publication of his Ph.D. thesis, under the supervision of prof. Marie-Françoise Rombi. His linguistic expertise also

## IN MEMORIAM JEAN DE DIEU KARANGWA

found application in extra-scientific fields, such as the media. He collaborated as a Kinyarwanda and Swahili language expert with a number of radio and television channels in France and was also responsible for the editing and English-Swahili translation of medical cartoons, written and illustrated by CHEPE and published by Chadu Editions, aimed at school pupils in East Africa (a UNICEF-OMS project). Moreover, with reference to the genocidary aspect of discourses and texts in Rwanda, Jean de Dieu was called in as expert sociolinguist (Kinyarwanda and Swahili), hermeneutist and translator by, amongst others, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Arusha) and the International Criminal Court (The Hague). In this regard, he also contributed observations and linguistic expertise to two academic publications, namely: G. Prunier, *The Rwanda crisis, 1959-1994: History of a Genocide* (1995), Hurst and Company, London, and *Rwanda: les médias du génocide* (1995), ed. by J. P. Chretien, Editions Karthala, Paris.

Jean de Dieu Karangwa was also a very early participant in the opening of INALCO's Department of African Languages to the exterior (he later served as International Relations Coordinator, 2001 – 2013). He was amongst the first lecturers to leave for Erasmus teaching periods, keeping long-lasting relations with partner institutions, such as the University of Helsinki, the University of Warsaw, the University of Leiden and, especially, the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Here he was always heartily welcomed by the Swahili team (prof. Elena Bertoncini, Maddalena Toscano, *marehemu* Abedi Tandika and the then doctoral fellows, Graziella Acquaviva and Ciro Marzio), by the colleagues in African Languages and Linguistics, such as Sergio Baldi and Giorgio Banti, and by the learners of Swahili, amongst whom were some future lecturers, such as Irene Brunotti, Maria Suriano and myself. From when I first met Jean de Dieu, twenty years ago, he (affectionately called *Kaka Mrefu*, "Tall Older brother") became a close friend of mine and of my husband, Moustapha Traore and proved himself to be loyal and supportive, in good and hard times.

This is the way he was, applying to his everyday life his Christian faith and his profound humanity, *utu*, with humbleness, simplicity, wisdom and a sense of humour, be it in the family, in the Rwandan community in Brussels, or with colleagues, students and friends.

*Sote tunakukosa sana Kaka Mrefu, Mola akulaze pema peponi.*