

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN 'CONCEPTING' USWAHILI

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Dibaji – Provisional Notes on 'Critical Swahili Studies'...¹

Kai Kresse

It is difficult, and indeed problematic, to define a field of study as qualified simply by language and region – as it has been commonly done, for Swahili Studies, following established examples like German Studies, Italian Studies, and others. No study of a region, however, should be pre-determined as confined to itself, as that would indicate a provincial(ist) endeavour. This premise leads to the need for re-conceptualizing, or indeed re-configuring Swahili Studies, with a view to the wider field of African Studies. And this would also need to happen with a view to its relation to other, related, fields of research – like Indian Ocean Studies and Postcolonial Studies – and to the respective relevant disciplines, like Literature, History, and Anthropology.

As a starting point for us to think with, let me provide a pointer to what (here for us) the 'critical' in front of Swahili Studies may usefully be taken to mean. It is helpful to draw from the established understanding that the term 'critical' qualifies an approach that pays attention to the conditions of possibility of experience, and the processes of knowledge coming into being. 'Critical' thus can signify a certain intellectual engagement, with a view to the conditions for, and the dynamics of 'knowledge' in this field. This would mean that 'critical' marks a conscious sensitivity, a concern and particular attention of researchers to the processes that shape the conditions for, and the dynamics of, knowledge and experience in the Swahili region (Uswahilini) or in a Swahili sphere

¹ This is a written version of a talk that I, an anthropologist with philosophical interests, presented together with Abdilatif Abdalla, a Swahili poet, language specialist and political activist, at the online Swahili Kolloquium in May 2021. The text was subsequently edited by myself and Irene Brunotti. What follows are edited versions of passages that I presented back then, which were based on conversations Abdilatif and I had had in preparation for the talk. This text became the initial reference-point for a series of three online mazungumzo, which we had together with Mzee Farouk Topan and Irene Brunotti, held respectively on May 27th, 29th and June 2nd 2022. The title here has resonance with a title of an article by Achille Mbembe (1992) that most readers will be familiar with.

(Uswahili). These are processes they, as researchers, contribute to, in the very practices of ‘observing’ and ‘discussing’. In terms of contextual features, this includes being attentive to the environment, and the historical and social conditions that shape the kinds of knowledge and experience of social actors within the respective Swahili contexts that we seek to understand. I suggest that ‘Uswahili’ and ‘Uswahilini’ are relevant here as reference points – though where each of these terms begin and where they end will be discussed further in the following *mazungumzo*.

Perhaps our understanding of ‘critical’ here should also include a sense of self-positioning within a wider field of scholarship, current ongoing debates (and their histories), and a sense of the (potential, or envisaged) wider contribution that one is aiming at, within and beyond Swahili Studies. Aiming beyond local (and regional) knowledge, and toward a rich and contextualizing understanding of culture, society, and being human – based on well-grounded knowledge of regions and their histories, their language(s) and conceptual frameworks – is needed in the humanities and social sciences. This is true particularly with a view to African and other non-western regions that have thus far had too little input into building, re-thinking, and revising the theorizing of society and humanity – and have been neglected in global debates, by dominant Europhone discourse, and the dominant practices of science in the Western world. Yet, such kinds of input matter crucially, as they concern possible contributions to the pressing project of ‘re-writing the humanities and social sciences’ from Africa and the global South more generally (see de Sousa Santos 2014, Pollock 2017, Sarr 2019). Swahili Studies, widely conceived, may not only have relevant contributions to make to these bigger debates. Because of its long-standing engaged conversations (and collaborations) between researchers from East Africa and particularly the Swahili home-region and everywhere else in the world, it may also have more to offer than other sub-fields of regional and trans-regional studies. Yet what exactly it can contribute needs to be cautiously and patiently determined.

Going with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, we (Abdilatif Abdalla and I) take language – and the existential experience and expression of/by (native) speakers – as a foundational starting-point. Employing

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

one’s mother-tongue, one’s own² language, in art as well as in research, is necessarily liberating; it provides a centre for inquisitive inquiries and guidance for grounded explorations. We think that a Swahili conceptual lens should be (attempted to be) taken on and worked through, within the research process, as a valuable simple rule to be followed. In this way, we could say, researchers link themselves to one of the multiple centres that Ngũgĩ talks about (wa Thiong’o 1993). Pushing the point of language further as a starting-point, we can and should also ask further questions about usages and contextualizations of the Swahili context, and how it matters: in trans-regional terms; as a long-grown multi-lingual environment, as multi-ethnic social sphere, with diverse histories of connectivity, and with different kinds of ambivalence and complexity playing a role for the negotiation of difference in society. The Swahili region (Uswahilini) needs to be thought about as a multilingual environment in several ways. First of all, it is multi-lingual in itself, as many established dialects linked to the different (historically competing) port-towns reflect the different and plural ‘local’ identities of Kiswahili as inherently plural, “Viswahili”. The various dialects, Kiunguja, Kimvita, Kiamu, Kibajuni, Kimrima etc. constitute “Kiswahili” as unity in diversity. But also, beyond the scope of Swahili as being a local and transregional language at the same time, its interrelations with a host of various other languages (also documented in its vocabulary) represent multiple, plural ways of mutual interconnections and engagements, especially with Arabic, Gujarati, Kutchi, Hindi, as well as the Europhone former colonial languages English and German. As with all kinds of different regions-and-languages of the world, we should then perhaps approach Swahili Studies with questions in mind such as these: What kind of life-world is studied here? What makes the life-world to be studied distinct, and how should it thus be studied? Within what kind of wider world, and within which kind of wider current contexts are we, as researchers studying this life-world? And what are the conditions, interests, and limitations within (and with which) we conduct our studies?

As one concrete example to think with, for practical purposes of institutionalization and academic practice of teaching, I can draw from my own experience as having been involved in

² Own in the sense of ‘owning’ as well, as Mohammed Khelef Ghassani suggests in his *Kiswahili kina Wenyewe kienee lakini Kisitokomee* (2019).

establishing a sub-field of Swahili Studies as part of African studies at Columbia University, within the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies (MESAAS). MESAAS already pursued an innovative approach to the study of these three regions, driven by considerations of postcolonial critique of conventional Area Studies and a motivation to put regional (African, South Asian, Middle Eastern) agency of local actors and their perspectives at the centre of research and study engagements. This meant that a focus on language-learning, regional (and trans-regional) histories, and a shift in syllabi (according to authors from the regions of study) were central critical reference points. The existent long-term histories of interconnectivity between the regions were of particular interest, especially with a view to the pre-colonial era (as far as could be achieved, by reliable sources). Thus, Swahili Studies becomes embedded in a re-conceptualized and newly embedded kind of African Studies, with emphasis on the Swahili sphere that illustrates and exemplifies multiple long-term historical connectivities of Africa to South Asia and the Middle East – especially via the Indian Ocean. Thereby, a particular focus on Islam and its internal networks comes in – i.e., on Muslim communities, sub-groups, and their internal contestations – linking and separating people at the same time. And so does a focus on pre-colonial history, its documents (texts, etc.) and the kinds of connections and interactions that we know of, as well as a view to the different colonial and postcolonial experiences endured over time. Finally, also intellectual histories and the exchanges within such long-term histories of connectivity, movement, and exchange need to be considered. This means that in the end, postcolonial critique and theory need to be taken on board – as part of a fundamental critique of the history and practice of established (Western) scholarship – while working toward alternative constructive pathways, as part of a transformation, or ‘re-configuration’ (in terms of re-thinking) of African Studies from within, in relation to, and in overlap with, Middle Eastern Studies and South Asian Studies.³ These

³ See also Kresse and Sounaye 2022, especially the chapters on renewing African Studies by Osha and Badat. Practical questions and challenges arise when taking such an approach seriously. For teaching: how to adequately provide not only the relevant language training, but also expert training in disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, as much as possible (from an early stage onward) in relation to textual materials in regional languages? For a proper coverage of an interdisciplinary field, at least two adequately trained researchers-and/or-teachers with different disciplinary expertise need to complement each other. Yet such pairings as teaching conditions are hardly to be found anywhere in the world. For undergrad courses and seminars in which no language proficiency can yet be assumed, translations of

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

features characterize an approach to the study of the Swahili region (Uswahilini) as trans-regional and at the same time also interdisciplinary by nature. And here, a number of relevant disciplinary foci need to be involved: History, Literature and Textual Studies, Anthropology, and Religious Studies, next to Linguistics, which also facilitates serious language training.

Coming towards a conclusion, let us return to reflections upon what the ‘critical’, as an adjective qualifying an approach, should mean. For this, we could be thinking, along with Johannes Fabian, that ‘critical’ should be a quality of whatever we do (in our research and studies): and that “critique is not cumulative; it has to be thought and formulated again and again” (2001: vii). To reiterate, ‘Critical Swahili Studies’ cannot simply be the study of Swahili language and literature (only); nor the study of Swahili culture and society (only). It is to be qualified by a critical way of engagement, and a concern for the study of ‘human social life’, exploring different levels of meaningfulness for people on the Swahili coast, and within the wider Swahili context (Uswahilini), with a view to the parameters of its validity. It includes perspectives on ‘thinking society’ and ‘understanding life’ from within, how it is lived, grounded upon, and seen and expressed through the lens of Swahili language-and-beyond-language. Critical Swahili Studies, then, will be about sensitive and engaged research on issues that are at the heart of society in Swahili contexts (Uswahilini) and with a focus on human experience, through the lens of a Swahili conceptual framework.⁴ Critical Swahili

Swahili source texts need to be found and/or created, and made central to teaching, so that students take on perspectives from the region a central to their syllabi from the beginning of their studies. For graduate students all PhD students had to study (or already have studied) two languages from the regions for at least two years each. For Swahili studies, this presents the opportunity that the language could be studied in combination with another relevant (trans)regional language – for instance across the Indian Ocean, and so Arabic, Gujarati, Urdu – or other neighbouring languages based on the African mainland, reaching far inland – for instance, from the Mijikenda languages of the coastal hinterland or the nyika bushlands to Lingala or Makhuwa in further distance. These kinds of combinations of research languages from early on in the research training would promise rich and fruitful pathways of research for the future.

⁴ In preparation for this talk, I looked again at the book by marehemu Professor Alain Ricard on Ebrahim Hussein (2018), and it struck me that Ricard’s work could be seen as a perceptive and anticipatory sample of ‘Critical Swahili Studies’ (and we might think further back and be able to identify other and earlier ones as well). Ricard is engaging richly and critically with Hussein’s work which – and this is my point – is itself portrayed as an engaged critique of society by an insider, a critically engaged and aesthetically sensitive and creative thinker (for a similar focus, see Kresse 2007). Works along these lines would be part of a future ‘Critical Swahili Studies’ library – and hereby, translations should also, as much as possible, be provided and engaged with, for the wider world to learn from. This thought about the relevance of translation raises the idea that thinking about such a library, and which books, studies

Studies may be written up and published in multiple languages, including the dominant Europhone ones and particularly English – but Swahili language (paired with social knowledge and cultural sensitivity) should be its core resource, i.e. the key research language with the help of which research is conducted, like it has been called for by Ngũgĩ and practiced and pushed for by some East African Swahili scholars of different kinds (e.g. Shihabuddin Chiraghdin in the past, or currently academics like Aldin Mutembei or writers like Abdilatif Abdalla).

Contributors to this field, then, may be Swahili speakers of different kinds (mother-tongue speakers and others), from the Swahili coast, East Africa, and around the world. And mutual exchange in this field is being practiced each year again, “here” at the Swahili-Colloquium in Bayreuth (this year in virtual space), so promisingly. In Berlin, Mwalimu Luti Diegner and I have been trying to cultivate such a regular mutual exchange too, with our regular Swahili baraza meetings (between ZMO and Humboldt University), finding that online opportunities to “meet” and talk regularly across continents have been of immense benefit for shaping a joint Swahilophone discussion culture for a wider circle of participants spread across continents. In parallel, an awareness of and an active engagement with current Europhone research publications on relevant topical matters remain important, so that Swahili Studies – like other ‘critical regional studies’ – may be able to contribute to a foundational transformation of theorizing that is long overdue and we would like to see under way. Indeed, as it has been noted (from various perspectives; see also Mignolo & Walsh 2018), a renewed analytic vocabulary from language resources beyond the Europhone sphere need to be drawn in, taken on board, and used actively as additional key concepts for the humanities and social sciences to think with, for (re)thinking society and (re)conceptualizing upon what it means to be human.

All of the aspects and arguments focused upon here can be turned around and discussed much further – and, in a series of online discussions, we (Abdilatif Abdalla, Farouk Topan, Irene Brunotti, and I) decided to do so.

and volumes should constitute it (by authors like Hussein, in the first instance, and researchers like Ricard, in the second) would have been another fruitful starting-point for this talk.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

Mazungumzo – Conversation

Bwana Kai: Maybe we could start by asking some questions on the historical dimensions of Swahili Studies. Since you've been involved for so long, since the 60s, as a teacher, a professor, an active writer in all of these different dimensions and in different countries, maybe you could comment a little bit on what would you see as Swahili Studies, if it's concerned with the Swahili region and largely concerned also with Swahili language, either as a tool of expression or as a tool of research. Maybe you can say a few words on your assessment of progress, maendeleo, differences, topics from there to here.

Mzee Farouk: Well, my involvement with Swahili Studies has been threefold: there's first the language itself as my mother tongue, the language I've spoken at home. Secondly, there's the Swahili I studied it at SOAS, its perception, its grammar, its research, and so on as an academic subject. Thirdly, I would say that the trajectory for me has been of teaching and researching in East Africa and beyond. So, the way I see it is that Swahili Studies begins and operates in different spheres and for different reasons for individuals in terms of what they get from it and what they bring to it.

But how did Swahili Studies begin institutionally? In the West, I mean – I'll come to East Africa later. And also, I mean what we now consider in modern scholarship as 'Swahili Studies'. If I speak from the perspective of SOAS, as that's an institution I'm most familiar with, then we have to consider the colonial situation and its imperatives. SOAS came into existence mainly to serve colonial needs. That is, to train colonial administrators in the language and cultures of the ruled. So, it begins with that reason: it is established in order to train administrators. It would be fascinating to know how Swahili was taught at the time, and the attitudes and approach that went with it. And then, of course, the subject developed, perhaps very slowly, but it developed. I would like to think that the encounter with Swahili literature by those early scholars at SOAS of the 1930s, like Alice Werner, brought about a fresher way of thinking about the people and their literature.

When I went back to East Africa, to Dar es Salaam, in 1968 and I introduced the teaching of Swahili literature in Swahili, it was a different experience from the way I was taught at SOAS. There it was

taught in English, and we discussed the translation. Here in Dar, we were discussing the literature in Swahili. We struggled with terminologies in those early days, terminologies which would be meaningful to the context. And how conceptually meaningful was it to study Swahili literature in Swahili in a new nation in 1968? Just four years after Tanzania was established? Quite a few factors made the process so obvious and desirable – one of them was the enthusiasm of the young people around the seminar table, at a time when both the country and the University were places of dynamism and hope. It was very different from SOAS. There was a palpable sense of euphoria in Tanzania at that time. Ebrahim Hussein, then a student in that first class, even suggested we conduct our classes live on the radio, so the whole nation could participate in the process! We didn't, but we took the less dramatic approach of publishing the essays of that first class of students!⁵

Bw. Kai: I've found it very interesting listening to you and the contrast between teaching Swahili or Swahili related subjects at SOAS and Dar es Salaam, of course, a very huge contrast, in a way, at that historical time period, then from the colonial to the early post-colonial. But in Dar were you very consciously shaping the beginning of a field, of a subdiscipline? Was it like a joint conscious enterprise for you or how did you see it at the time?

Mzee Farouk: Well, at the time I think it was a thing that we had to do, an undertaking that arose from the context itself, the context of a new nation whose national language was Swahili. I do not think that we did so in opposition to SOAS, or to be consciously anti- or postcolonial, though we could contrast it with the SOAS approach. But we were conscious of starting something new, something dynamic and energizing in itself. In a sense, the literature course in 1968 started the process. For then in 1969, our department, the Department of Language and Linguistics, started a degree course in 'Swahili and Linguistics', in parallel with degrees in 'English and Linguistics' and 'French and Linguistics' which had preceded it. Mohamed Abdulaziz and I taught it. Mohamed had joined the University College in Dar es Salaam in 1967, a year earlier than me. He had then just completed his MA at SOAS on *Muyaka*; his thesis was later published as a book in 1977. We

⁵ *Uchambuzi wa Maandishi ya Kiswahili, Kitabu cha Kwanza*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971; the late Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, then the Swahili Editor of OUP Eastern Africa, guided it through its publication just as he had done with the first volume

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

had quite a forward-looking Head of Department at the time, John Woodhead (a phonetician from the University of Leeds) who welcomed and encouraged such developments.

But to return to the point about the teaching of Swahili at SOAS when I was a student. The one thing which I found very useful, and which I came to appreciate immensely, was the teaching of Swahili grammar. It didn’t matter that I spoke Swahili or that it was my mother-tongue. I had to take grammar courses, taught mainly through Ashton’s book (1944), and taught to me by a wonderful teacher, Margaret Bryan (a Bantu linguist). Fortunately, I had learned Latin at O-level before I had joined SOAS. That was very useful. I found it easier then to understand how language works, how Swahili language works. It was very good.

Bw. Kai: When were the years you conducted your own studies?

Mzee Farouk: I studied for my BA at SOAS from 1962 to 1965 in ‘African Studies’, comprising Swahili, Social Anthropology, and Linguistics. I then got on to the PhD programme from 1965 to 1968, but I did not complete it. Instead, I went to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam, till 1971. I returned to London in 1971 and completed my PhD later that year.

Bw. Kai: So, it was all early postcolonial period, not before.

Mzee Farouk: Yes. Then I went to the University of Nairobi in 1972 and I did the same thing again, that is, introduce the teaching of Swahili literature in Swahili.⁶

Bw. Kai: In Dar es Salaam you also overlapped with Abdilatif Abdalla?

Mzee Farouk: No, he came later. I left in 1971, and at that time he was still in prison in Kenya.

Bibi Irene: Can I ask a question out of what you’ve said just now? Ulizungumza kuhusu isimu and the way in which in 1969 you were invited to teach isimu ya Kiswahili. Ninavutiwa na uhusiano baina ya isimu na what we might call Swahili Studies, in a very decolonial sense. What do you think about this relationship?

⁶ The course at Nairobi resulted in the publication of the second volume of *Uchambuzi wa Maandishi ya Kiswahili. Kitabu cha Pili*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Mzee Farouk: I think, from a certain point of view it is a very healthy relationship, because one of my criticisms of SOAS, later on, when I was there, was that the students who speak Swahili were not required to take Swahili 1, the course which introduced them to Swahili grammar. In other words, they were exempted from learning grammar! Learning grammar, if I may say so from my own experience, provides one with real insight into language. I feel that if you really want to understand a language, then you need to learn its grammar. That is why, when I was teaching at SOAS, I found that students from Europe were far better equipped in learning Swahili than their classmates from England, because they all came with a certain knowledge of grammar, of analysis of structure. What is very interesting is that the Institute of Swahili Research in Dar es Salaam has produced very good grammar books in Swahili, and this was done right from the beginning, when the Institute moved to the University in the mid-1960s. Apart from their flagship publication in the early days, that is, the Dictionary, the Institute also produced Grammar books in Swahili. This meant coining or constructing grammar terminologies in Swahili. I know that that is a very technical part of Swahili Studies, but I think it matters.

But there is another relationship between grammar and Swahili Studies which is also worth noting, and that is related to those individuals who studied it in depth. I said earlier that, gradually, what we might today refer to as Swahili Studies was, in those early days, at least at SOAS, widened in scope. Some colonial administrators and missionaries became students and scholars of Swahili. I'm thinking here of the missionaries Edward Steere, Johann Krapf and their contribution to the study of Swahili, and administrators like Lambert and Snoxall. And Reverend Taylor in the 19th century. All these scholars had a very good knowledge of Swahili grammar. Bishop Steere, of course, produced the first written introduction to Swahili grammar. His mnemonic STROVE is unforgettable!⁷

Bw. Kai: It is interesting to think of these teachers and administrators and missionaries: How did you read them at the time? Were you from the beginning consciously combining three different

⁷ Steere alisema ni rahisi kukumbuka mpangilio wa sentensi ya kawaida ya Kiswahili kwa hili neno la Kiingereza: STROVE, yaani: Subject-Tense-Relative-Object-Verb-Ending.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

sets of literature in your mind, the way you thought of Swahili Studies, even if the name was maybe not used then? Were you reading them critically at the time? Or, how did you engage with them?

Mzee Farouk: It’s a very interesting question. I suppose I could think of it in two ways. As I said, I learnt Swahili grammar formally in England, not in Zanzibar where I acquired it as a mother tongue. So, I took it in as given. But, on the whole, I do not think I was critical as such. The exception was in literature, especially classical poetry, where much more was required of my teachers than simply understanding the language. Poetry requires an understanding of culture, sometimes nuances that are not so obvious. One of my teachers, Jan Knappert, was a prolific translator of Swahili poetry. He published several volumes on Swahili religious poetry. His collections are quite valuable as anthologies. But he had a habit of “correcting” the texts! When the meaning of a line sometimes eluded him, he would say the scribe got it wrong, perhaps a vowel was not in its rightful place in the Arabic script. He would then supply a variant meaning. But, still, I gained so much from my teachers – Jan Knappert, Lyndon Harries, Margaret Bryan, Ronald Snoxall. And, of course, my supervisor, Wilfred Whiteley. *Sijui kama nimelijibu swali lako Bi Irene.*

Bi. Irene: *Nahisi umejibu, lakini labda tuendelee kuzungumza.* Linguistics is the one thing that I believe enabled to conceptualize language the way we know it, and therefore what enabled as well English to get too much power. And this is when I wonder: can we do without it? Or can we have a different concept of language which is more comprehensive and not so strictly related to linguistics that has invented language in certain ways and just in those ways? Because what you were telling us is that it is your threefold experience with Swahili language that makes for you what Swahili Studies is: as your mother tongue, as the language of home, as the language you studied and researched. So, is there a way to think of all these ways in one conceptualization of language?

Mzee Farouk: *Lakini, kitu kimoja, I’ve just remembered your question about being critical. I became aware by studying grammar through Ashton that, perhaps, Swahili was being studied through Latin categories! Kwa hivyo unakivunja na kukigawa Kiswahili: hii inaingia hapa, na hiyo inaingia pale. A very simple example is ‘kwa sababu’. How do we categorise ‘kwa’? This brings*

up a broader point about theory or theories: does theory come from within Swahili Studies or is it imported from outside? Of course, I realise that theory is universal, but I'm speaking about theory specifically related to aspects of Swahili Studies. For instance, in literature. There is theory that is universally applicable to all literature but there are also particular forms and phenomena that give rise to their own dimensions of theoretical expression. The *utendi* form of Swahili poetry, for example, has received a scholarly in-depth analysis of its poetics by Clarissa Vierke through a critical exploration of a particular text (2009). In the process, she has brought to the fore elements or dimensions particular to the *utendi* form which, I believe, would now form an indispensable part of any theoretical discussion about a Swahili *utendi*. And possibly even contributing to discussion beyond *utendi* into poetics in general. But this has only been possible because there already existed, or rather exists, copious discussion about the *utendi* among Swahili and Western scholars. And also, collections of *tendi* manuscripts at some universities. Clarissa chose her text for analysis, and built upon and developed and advanced the discussion to the point of facilitating a meaningful theoretical formulation. There is no shortcut to theory. That is why I find it totally unhelpful to have so-called 'literary dictionaries' in Swahili, or dictionaries of literary terms, which simply translate terminologies, or should I say *try* to do that, from English into Swahili. As if every facet given in the 'translated' dictionary is present in current discourse. Sasa, je, nadharia itokane na jamii au itokee nje?

Bi. Irene: Samahani kidogo, lakini mtazamo huo una hatari yake vilevile, because we are defining an inside and an outside, which leads us to think of who belongs to the inside and who belongs to the outside...

Mzee Farouk: Yes, yes, lakini hakuna hatari. Hakuna ubaguzi. Wa ndani na wa nje washirikiane kutumia mbinu za elimu kujenga nadharia. Lakini iwe nadharia inayoeleweka 'ndani' pia, si 'nje' tu. Yaani, inayoeleweka kwa kimazingira ya fasihi au ya lugha 'ndani', si iliyopachikwa kutoka 'nje' kama katika mfano huo wa kamusi la msamiati wa fasihi. We need really kuunda nadharia kutoka kwa ndani. And this is something which would be a crucial part of what we think of as Critical Swahili Studies.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

Na hata ukitazama nadharia kutoka kwa ndani, tuseme fasihi ya Kiswahili, utaona ipo mikondo mingi. Na kila mkondo inataka tuutazame unatoka wapi na unakwenda wapi. Kuna mkondo wa Unguja, mkondo wa Pemba, tena mikondo ya waandishi binafsi, kama mkondo wa Shaaban Robert, halafu wa Euphrase Kezilahabi. Mikondo ya dhana zao, fikira zao, msimamo wao. Sasa, mikondo hii itakuwa tofauti lakini inafanana. Kwa hiyo ukichukua *Rosa Mistika* na ukichambua *Rosa Mistika* (Kezilahabi 1971) ukitumia nadharia kutoka kwa ndani, itakuwa kidogo ni tofauti. And we have read so much about *Rosa Mistika*. Lakini, we have not attempted this, hakuna mtu ambaye ametazama hivyo. Kai makes a point in his paper, kwamba there is so much studies out there we can use it, it’s true. Sasa, there is so much literary criticism of *Rosa Mistika*, there is so much of it, just as there is so much of *Utubora Mkulima* (Robert 1968).

While I think that you cannot be an alien to yourself, you’ve got to relate to other sources, so interdisciplinarity in Swahili Studies is fundamental. But that doesn’t mean that I am contradicting myself when I say that theory must come from within, no, the two go together.

Sasa, based on this, I have attempted a little diagram: na kati nimeandika USWAHILI, this is the core, halafu zipo hizi segments. Sasa unapozungumzia uswahili, some segments will be active, lakini some will be dormant. Huwezi kuwa na segments zote ziwe active ndo unapata Uswahili. Kwa hivo ukitazama uswahili Pemba, uswahili Unguja, uswahili Ukerewe, uswahili Iringa, uswahili Mtwara, is different, uswahili mbalimbali, si sawa, but similar. Lazima wawe na kitu common, a common stratum, ndiyo language, and how that language seems, then, inakuwa tofauti. Let me give you another example, how it sort of moves: siku hizi hakuna mtu anaetumia Ujamaa terminology in the everyday language, while in the Tanzania of the 1960s Ujamaa terminology was very prevalent. Kwa mfano: neno ‘mrija’ au ‘kupe’. Maneno yakitumika pia katika mashairi siku zile. Katika kitabu cha *Mashairi ya Azimio la Arusha* (Kamenju & Topan 1971). Today that’s sound almost redundant, hakuna mtu anayatumia, anayasoma yale. Sasa, ukianza wewe na nadharia wakati ule na mpaka sasa, itakuwa inaonyesha fluidity of categories. So, we are saying: this is Uswahili, in the middle, na hizi ni segments zake, and in 2050 these might change, isipokuwa for their common stratum. So, if we go into Critical Swahili Studies, what are the ingredients that make it ‘Critical’? Which ingredients are relevant now?

Bw. Kai: One reference point for us today is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o with his insistence on the use of African languages as empowering and I think we see the validity of that argument very much. Interestingly, it was historically parallel to when you started your job in Dar es Salaam. Were you consciously, if not in communication, aware of the struggle for the independence there, of that African literature department? I mean, did you observe, did you perceive that, and did you consciously position yourself vis-à-vis that? I refer to his struggle to implement the language as the anchor or even the heart, but you were already doing it, you said, you were using Kiswahili for the study of literature from the beginning, and there they were struggling to establish it. Were you looking at Kenya at the time, what was happening there, or was it not so much?

Mzee Farouk: I joined Ngũgĩ and the other colleagues at the Department of Literature in Nairobi in 1972, but I think you are talking about the earlier period when I was in Dar es Salaam in 1968. As I’ve said, we were then working within the environment, the aspirations and the euphoria prevalent in Tanzania itself at the time. There was a vibrant and dynamic sense of belonging, of being true to the nation’s goals. A sense of nationalism, if you like. And Nyerere used Kiswahili as a powerful tool in promoting unity and eliminating tribalism. The idea of ‘one people, one nation, one language’. So, while Ngũgĩ was talking about this in Kenya, the phenomenon was very much being practiced in Tanzania, arising out of its own need, its own necessity as Nyerere saw it. And he used the language very effectively indeed! There is an interesting article by Blommaert⁸ which analyses the five pillars of TANU (Tanganyika African National Union). A speech by Nyerere where he speaks of Ujamaa almost in religious terms – wanaTanu wawe na imani.

Bw. Kai: It’s also interesting that Nyerere would use the term *nguzo* expressing the five pillars of TANU, *amelitumia*?

Bi. Irene: Well, yes, *nguzo* is one of the words which travelled to the Kwanzaa also, in that Panafrican moment. Anyway, it seems to me that at the time, 1968/69, Swahili Studies was part of this Linguistics, Literature, Theatre and Art realm, or at least this is how I’ve understood you while

⁸ Says Blommaert in the introduction to the above-mentioned edited volume: „Both the generic studies as well as the linguistic and sociolinguistic ones should provide evidence for a dynamic picture of the language, in which historical change and social dynamics are closely connected to changes and evolutions in the domain of language” (*ibid*: 4).

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

identifying Swahili Studies. And you were also aware of the necessity of relating this ‘field’ to other fields. Do you feel it the same way right now? Or, what is Swahili Studies right now for you?

Mzee Farouk: Well, I think my approach to Swahili Studies has been influenced somewhat by Anthropology, Social Anthropology. Basically, Social Anthropology teaches you or requires you to study relationships and connections. In other words, Swahili Studies cannot just stand by itself. It has to be related to other studies, in more than an interdisciplinary way. Perhaps one could say in an interdisciplinary but integrated way to fields close to it. It’s difficult to explain, so let me give an example. Take Archaeology, for example. Mark Horton’s work on the coast and the islands has made a huge contribution by establishing the earliest period – the 8th Century – when Islam was introduced on the coast. This fact, then, becomes integral to the way we understand and perceive other historical events on the coast related to Islam and Muslims. Archaeology has provided us with a fundamental reference point.

Bi. Irene: Well, when she was starting the module in Swahili Studies here at the University of Leipzig, Rose Marie Beck was thinking exactly this way, of Swahili Studies like a non-field, more like an open field, open to these kinds of relationships, but with a core. Yet, it is this core that I am struggling to define all the time. Because it’s the language, but maybe it’s the Viswahili (i.e., Swahili languages), as you said, because there are different Viswahili spoken, used and experienced, which are all related to different practices. So maybe we can think of Swahili Studies as more than just a field, and more than just literature, language and linguistics.

Mzee Farouk: I will definitely agree with that, but I emphasize the core, the core is very important. Now the question in theorizing is the core, something that is dynamic, rather than just static.

Bi. Irene: In Italian to say core, we say cuore, which translates the heart as well; so, we know that the heart is an organ which is not fixed, rather changing, porous and entangled matter, right? So, also kwa Kiswahili, instead of using kiini to say core, we could use moyo...

Mzee Farouk: Beautiful analogy! Yes, moyo, and of course its emotions.

Bi. Irene: Yes, and it relates to the personal, the individual experience, the life experience that one brings in as a person, as a scholar, as an individual, and with-in a collectivity, a umma.

Bw. Kai: And I think one can relate it to the way in which the language is at the heart of the study of culture, society and literature, because it is what's provide the life blood also of the insights of the study, of the knowledge, if you like. And also, it relates to the way in which, for instance at Columbia University, we tried to conceive of a kind of Critical Swahili Studies, at MESAAS Department, when I was based there: it is quite useful and important that the language, that Kiswahili has been at the heart of the acquisition of knowledge and insight and experience of what is then brought out, or zoomed in, or focused on, reflected on. This seems to have some significance, an adequacy from the internal point of view of agency of Swahili speaker. In that sense I think zooming in on the moyo, language as moyo, is very nice to think with; and we can relate to this productively, also thinking of an interdisciplinarity, and having moyo as the core, language, which is always flexible, it can never be restrictive.

Mzee Farouk: Yes, yes, and then there is another thought related to language being moyo. That is language changes as you move through time, and therefore it has an impact on the moyo. So, if we take the example of the youth in Kenya today who have Sheng as their language, now it means that the way they are perceiving their environment, their surrounding is different, then it gives us some handle to how to study this.

Bi. Irene: I would add that it changes through time and space.

Bw. Kai: That would mean, as Irene has just said, that Critical Swahili Studies includes the consciousness about the way in which there is an embeddedness in historical dynamics and in contexts, be they geographical, or others, and this would be also what critical means: it's the consciousness of the coming into being of knowledge, or of the conditions of knowledge and experience. And it also directly connects to the Viswahili, to this internal pluralism, diversity that we see, and that is illustrated in many examples in Swahili contexts.

Mzee Farouk: This is a beautiful analogy, the production of knowledge is the heart, but then the perception of knowledge is the mind. Interesting, I'll give you an example: this morning (at the Swahili Colloquium), I listened to the paper by Michail Gromov (2022). A beautiful paper, because he makes his point very well through the categories, he brought up on Shaaban Robert, etc. Now

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’
USWAHILI

that is a very good example of production, or construction of a particular stand, or view, which he was putting forward. Except that, from my point of view, the problem was really in the conceptual understanding of the word ‘founder’: what do we mean by founder? I think to myself, Farouk: this is interesting now, because we are at the very threshold of how to conceptualize a particular individual like Shaaban Robert in history. So, in a sense, Gromov’s paper is part of this construction. Now, to conceptualize Shaaban Robert as the ‘founder’, I would like to have some more groundings, because other people at that time were also contributing to Kiswahili. This is a small example of how one little term begins to affect the production and perception of knowledge.

Bw. Kai: So, in a way, it can also distort, or it represents one out of many possible pictures in this kind of things that come with it, also the problems that may bring with it, no?

Mzee Farouk: Yes, but I like the moyo analogy!

Bi. Irene: So, juzijuzi tulizungumza kuhusu moyo wa uswahili, as essence, never the same and porous, and we spoke of the fluidity of categories and practices, as mikondo.

Mzee Farouk: Hili neno ‘uswahili’ linatokana na utamaduni. Tukitaka kulitumia basi tulipe uainisho wake, yaani, uswahili ni nini, na uswahilini ni nini? Tuyaangalie mazingira yake yote.

Mzee Abdilatif: Pengine...itabidi sasa tulifikirie upya, kuipanua maana yake. Tukilishikilia pale pale lilipokuwa zamani, kama ambavyo Mswahili maana yake, hatuwezi tena kuifunga tu pale tulikokuwapo zamani. Hata pale zamani ilikuwa haikufungika, maanake watu ambao walikuwa hawatokani na sehemu ile, walikubaliwa kwamba ni Waswahili, sio? Walikuja watu, wakaingiliana na wenyeji pale, walikubaliwa kwamba ni Waswahili. Ikiwa watu kutoka mabara mengine walikuja hapa wakikubalika kwamba ni Waswahili, kwa nini jamaa wa kibara ambao wanatokana na bara la Afrika na wameishi hapa kwa miaka na mikaka, kwa nini asikubalike huyo kwamba ni Mswahili? Maana kwao kwengine, pengine hata lugha ya wazazi wake haijui, unaona, anazungumza Kiswahili tu. Kwa hiyo lazima twanze kufikiria upya mambo haya: Mswahili ni mtu yeyote ambaye amezaliwa hapa, afuata mila za hapa, afuata dasturi za hapa, anakufanya hapa kwamba ndiko kwao, hana kwingine kwao. Kwa hiyo uswahili ni zile mila, dasturi na utamaduni

wa wale watu wenyewe Waswahili. Ule ndo uswahili: maanake kuishi maisha yako kwa mujibu wa mila na utamaduni na dasturi za Kiswahili. Pia unatokana na watu ambao wana asili ya Kiswahili, lakini maisha yao hawaishi tena kulingana na uswahili, tofauti kabisa.

Kwa hiyo mimi ninavyochukulia uswahili ni ule, mila, dasturi na utamaduni wa Waswahili, sasa. Huko unaendelea pengine kuuona huko huko katika baadhi ya mambo tu, pengine ikija katika mambo ya harusi labda, ndo utapata uswahili na hata huko kuna mchanganyiko wa mambo siku hizi, hakuna tena ule uswahili peke yake. Labda ukija katika mambo ya mazishi, kuzikana huko ndo utapata vile mila na mambo ya kuathiri, na kubaleghe na kadhalika, zile sherehe za Kiswahili. Lakini kwingine kote ni mchanganyiko sasa, kwa hivo sijui tutaitolea vipi maana ya uswahili ni nini. Maanake, maana ya Mswahili lazima ibadilike sasa: Mswahili ni nani? Tusitake kushikilikia maana iliyokuweco zamani, ambapo Waswahili walikuwa katika maeneo yao walikuwa wenyeji wao wenyewe, wengi kuliko watu wengine. Leo wao ni wachache, watu wasiokuwa Waswahili ni wengi zaidi kuliko wao. Kwa hivo ni jambo ambalo lazima twanze kulifikiria, kubadilisha maana ya Mswahili ni nani na uswahili ni nini.

Bw. Kai: Nakubali haswa kwa sababu zile mila na desturi za Waswahili, this has been dynamic tangu mwanzo, si ndiyo? So, nafikiri tukitafsiri uswahili kama swahiliness haitatusaidia sana. Labda it is more worth it to think of wanavyofanya wanaojiita Waswahili, but I think maybe then “uswahilini” might be more useful to think with, because it gives us a sense of contested sphere in which Swahili language is used in relevant meaningful ways, and that could be anywhere where speakers actively use language, project meaning and engage. Because, what I find problematic, and I think we probably agree, is the possible essentializing aspect of uswahili, and to get stuck in these old debates: part of the idea was to think of uswahilini as, maybe, a dynamic sphere that is changeable but constantly created and recreated by the speakers who use language and make meaning within their social context; and their origin does not matter so much, but what they do, that they use Viswahili in action, or that they are concerned with the meaning of Viswahili even.

Mzee Abdilatif: Nafikiri mwanzo, tujaribu kumalizana na uswahili mwanzo, halafu ndio tuingie uswahilini. Kwanza tujaribu kulijadili uswahili. Mimi navyoona uswahili ni vile mila, utamaduni na dasturi za Waswahili. Na kama nilivyosema, sio tena mila na desturi na utamaduni uliokuwa

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

ukijulikana zamani wakati Waswahili walikuwa ni wao wenyewe katika maeneo yao, au wao ndio wengi kuliko wengine. Sasa walikuwa mchanganyiko wa watu wengine ambao wanatoka nje ya maeneo tunayoita uswahili, lakini wale wanaishi hapo, wengine wafuata mila na desturi za pale kwa hivyo imepanuka sasa. Uswahili si yale wanayofanya wale watu waliokuwa wakijulikana ni Waswahili kwa asili tu.

Mzee Farouk: Kwa hivo hapa nafikiri labda tuseme kuna pande mbili: upande mmoja ni upande wa Waswahili ambao wanatumia hayo mambo matatu – mila, desturi na utamaduni – lakini pia wako Waswahili ambao wamekulia kuizungumza lugha hii kama lugha yao ya kwanza. Kama Tanzania. Tanzania kote kote sasa wako Waswahili namna hii. Wameoana watu wa makabila mawili na kwao sasa wanasema Kiswahili. Na ilitiliwa mkazo na Nyerere, vile kusema “nyie ni Waswahili” popote pale anapokwenda, ile kisiasa. Sasa navyoona mimi kuna hizi pande mbili hizi: upande wa uswahili ambao umeanza pale mwambao na ufukoni na kwenda ndani, na ikaja siasa ya Nyerere na kupanua Tanzania. Na upande wa Tanzania zinachanganyika, lakini upande wa Kenya vipengele vyake vyengine: Kiswahili kinazungumzwa, kama anavyosema Kai, kama dynamic sphere, is created na recreated, lakini ile intensity tofauti: tuseme tukichukua mtu bara azungumzae sana Kiingereza, sasa kufuata ile definition ile, iko tofauti kidogo baina ya pwani na ndani.

Bw. Kai: Lakini pia naona kwamba tofauti na intention labda inatusaidia intellectually kujaribu kuipata. If we have these spheres, we have no clear prerogative of an essentialist origin, but we have to focus rather on what kind of meanings are projected and what kind of contexts and how does this play out, how is language used, or how are histories of meanings invoked of Kiswahili or Viswahili, whether those are by speakers from whatever origin and actually wherever in the world, it could be among Swahili speakers in Europe and north America also. So uswahilini could be seen as a contested sphere where the projections and contestations about projections happen either through language only or in different kinds of contexts. Now this can be a little bit abstract, but I think it might be useful, or at least ... but now we are already again in uswahili.

Mzee Abdilatif: Najiuliza kwani ni lazima tuwe na maana moja tu ya uswahili, au Mswahili? Si lazima sio? Nafikiria tu maanake, sijui kama mmewahi kusoma makala ya zamani ya Marehemu

Shihabuddin Chiraghdin *Kiswahili na Wenyewe* (1974); yalichapishwa katika jarida la Mulika siku zile, Dar es Salaam alikuwa ndio mhariri wa Mulika. Siku zile ilikuwa imeshika kabisa habari ya Mswahili Tanzania. Wakamwalika akatoa lecture mbili pale, moja *Kiswahili na Wenyewe* (1974) na moja *Kiswahili tokea Ubuntu hadi Ki-standard Swahili* (1974), na zote zilichapishwa. Sasa kwa mfano katika *Kiswahili na Wenyewe*, alikuwa amejaribu kueleza kwamba inategemea kusema Mswahili ni nani, ni kabila, ni taifa, kwa hivyo akazidondoa zile na akazieleza zote, na akaonyesha kwamba zote zinaweza zikaingia. Ukihesabu Mswahili ni kabila, basi kuna nambari zao, na Mswahili pia ni taifa, maanake ni mkusanyiko wa watu mbalimbali waliofanya taifa na waswahili. Sasa, sio lazima tuwe na maana moja pekee ya Mswahili ni nani, na uswahili ni nini. Kama ambavyo, Mwafrika ni nani? Kwa mfano, ni yule mtu anaetokana amezaliwa Afrika au...hakuna maana moja. Sio lazima tuwe na maana moja.

Bw. Kai: Kidogo labda, I would like to try to insist. Nakubali kwamba the multiplicity of the potential meanings is there, but isn't it that speakers who make reference to uswahili have certain criteria in mind, an essential feature of what for them means? If that is so, isn't more useful to think of something that brings the multiplicity into view, rather than uswahili? Isn't it assuming that there is one thing that then the respective speakers make reference to, halafu they have different things in mind, but it is the view that there is something that is the determining feature of an essential Swahiliness. If we insist that there is something like an essential Swahiliness, it makes it more complicated to take in the picture the diversity of the unity.

Mzee Farouk: Navyofikiria mimi, ni kama ni continuum, na hii continuum inakuwa na ile intensity, or authenticity, ila ukiendelea ile inapungua, lakini haipungui kwa kupungua essence, ile essence inakuwa ipo lakini inakuwa complemented by something else, ambapo culture ya wale waliokuwepo wakati ule, vile anavyosema Abdilatif, leo Waswahili ambao wapo Uingereza, wanayo ile, the core is there, the essence is there, lakini ile essence, intensity yake, degree yake is complemented by the culture in England, maana is around them, kwa hiyo badala ya kwenda barazani, wanakwenda baa. Kwa hivyo yapo mambo ambayo ni human, and vile vitu take their place, kwa hivo zipo zile interactions, kwa hiyo bwana Kai ubadili dynamic sphere iwe dynamic spheres.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’
USWAHILI

Bw. Kai: Well, I think that with the *uswahilini* ... maybe I am wrong, and maybe it is also my own association with what is Germanness: I feel very uncomfortable if there is this reference point to ‘*ein Deutschtum*’ or ‘*ein Deutsch-sein*’ that is supposedly essential and that I should be part of just because I was born in Germany, or because German is my first language. Of course, we all know certain features of what we would agree on, but those features that makes sense are linked to a dynamic of meaning that is linked to a history of culture, of meaning making. So, I prefer an emphasis on these dynamics, rather than on a reference point to a core, because I find it, particularly in the German case, used in a problematic way. I am weary of these unifying, of this anything-ness that should define people, because there is a tendency to box-in also *maisha ya watu*. So, the plural helps us to keep in mind that there is always a different take.

Bi. Irene: I think that this problematic nature of Germanness and Italianness is very much related to the way in which we have invented the concept of ‘one nation-one language-one people’, which is not the case with *uswahili*. I agree with you that the translation of *uswahili* in English as Swahiliness could be problematic. So, we should not translate it, but elaborate on it: we need *uswahili* because of being a plurality, because of being multiple, because of being all that you have said, that is what I would say. And Mzee Farouk I am thinking also about *makala yako, From Coastal to Global: the Erosion of the Swahili “Paradox”* (2006): humo uliandika kuhusu sentiments, memory and Kiswahili. That could become Viswahili, sentiments and memory, and sentiment and memory are very crucial, they are of *mtu binafsi*, and this is also where the multiplicity comes in.

Bw. Kai: This wariness that Irene and I have with regard to Germanness and Italianness, maybe you do not have that for *uswahili*, maybe it is not the same thing for you, you do not have this association with something that fixes people. Maybe you could *kueleza zaidi* on this association?

Mzee Farouk: That analogy for us is different. It was open from the very beginning, it was accommodating. *Wanakuja watu*, so *ipo ile* process of accommodation *ambayo inaendelea* for centuries, *kwa hiyo essence ile imeleta uswahili, ile dasturi na utamaduni ni wazi, kwa hiyo hata upande wa damu, upo mchanganyiko ... lile neno la kilatini, lile ‘oikumene’*. *Kwa hivyo naona*

jambo lile ndio essence ya uswahili, kwa hivyo ile essence inakuja huku Uingereza, inakwenda kwengineko ambayo watu wanaichukua kwenye fikra zao, tabia zao, kwa hiyo Abdilatif, watoto wa Kiswahili huku, ikija kwa upande wa mambo fulanifulani, wanarudi kule kule uswahili. Juzijuzi nilialikwa harusini, mimi nilikuwa mmoja tu nimevaa suti, wote wamevaa kanzu, kilemba, na nini. Kwa bahati nzuri, nilichukua kofia yangu... Kwa hiyo that is sentiment. Katika yale makala yangu, sentiment ile inaleta chemchemu, lakini itaendelea mpaka lini chemchemu ile sijui, kwa sababu sijui vizazi na vizazi na vizazi ambao hawakuenda Unguja, hawakuenda popote kule, maanake to what extent that will be retained? On the other hand, ukitazama Omani, the situation is different. Omani ina uhusiano na Unguja, wale vizazi vyao, maanake imeshikamana zaidi kuliko na hapa Uingereza, ukitizama ile globally. Si nilisema katika makala yale, nilikuwa nimekaa kwenye ndege, ubavuni mwangu alikuwa kijana, tukaanza kuzungumza Kiswahili, Kiswahili chake kidogo, nilimwuliza, “wewe unakwenda wapi?” Kasema, “nakwenda Unguja kwa mara ya kwanza”, ndo hapo alikuwa nia miaka 28 hivi. Nikasema, “Kiswahili umejifunza wapi?” Akaniambia, “nimejifunza Muskat kwa baba na mama”. Kwa hiyo baba na mama toka alipokuwa mdogo wamemfundisha Kiswahili, nae alikuwa anatamani kwenda kutizama Unguja. Ndo ile ile essence itakuwa ni variable, inakwenda kwenye continuum, pale pale inapoanza inakuwa strong, halafu inachujika kidogo inapokwenda mbele, inapoingiliana. Ila, paradoxically, wale wenyewe wanakuwa Waswahili wa nchi nyingine, wanaingia katika tamaduni sisi tunazohamia, kwa hiyo ile nature ya accommodation inakuwa applied, lakini inakuwa applied katika culture nyingine, utamaduni mwengine. Inakuwa sasa ni wao Waswahili wanaoingizwa au wanaojiingiza katika tamaduni nyengine, mazingira mengine.

Mzee Abdilatif: Nilikuwa nafikiria, tumezungumza yote haya, sababu ya kuzungumza yote haya ni hilo neno, Critical Swahili Studies. Sasa, mmekusudia nini na hilo Critical Swahili Studies?

Mzee Farouk: Nataka kwenda kwenye paper yako, Bwana Kai. Wewe uliainisha mambo fulani, na vipengele hivi ndiyo viingize kwenye Swahili Studies. Kwanza umeandika nne, nizitaje: Swahili Studies haikai peke yake, ina uhusiano na masomo mengine – fields –, kwa hiyo ipo interdisciplinarity. Nami ntaongeza pia Translation Studies, hiyo pia iwepo. Pili, what we mean by knowledge production, na hiyo ukiichukua kwa upande wa Kiswahili, ina mikondo mbalimbali.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

Basi miye naona picha ya knowledge production iwe pia ya knowledge construction. Kwa hiyo, zipo tatu – construction, production, na transmission. What we mean by knowledge construction? Maanake vipengele vinaingiliana. Na tatu, umesema kuhusu self-positioning, na self-positioning ndo inaleta hivo Viswahili na mambo mengne. Na mwisho, yote hayo labda yaelekea towards an understanding of culture, society and being human. Sasa, hiyo culture and society, tumeitizama, lakini hii being human, yaani utu, nataka hii iwemo katika ujenzi huu, uchambuzi huu. Vitu hivo vinne ni muhimu ikiwa tunataka kutizama Swahili Studies, sio uswahili, lakini Swahili Studies. Kitu gani ambacho tunataka kiwemo. Halafu hivi vyote vinakuwa kama vina gurudumu lake, na gurudumu linakwenda kihistoria, linatoka huku, linakwenda huko, ndo ninavyofikiria mie.

Bi. Irene: Niongeze mawazo mawili matatu kuhusu translation. In response to Kai’s paper, I also felt the necessity to spend some thoughts on translation practices. Translation practices are a fundamental element in this process, as you say Kai, quoting Mzee Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o na ningeongeza kwa maoni ya wataalamu wengi, pamoja na Mzee Farouk Topan, Mzee Said Ahmed Mohamed, Mzee Abdilatif Abdalla, na wengi wengineo. Kuwezesha vitendo vya kutafisiri, kwa maana ya translation practices should be grounded in the acknowledgement that translation is not ‘just’ a language matter, as Nathalie Arnold Koenings and Meg Arenberg hawachoki kuisitiza (2021)⁹ wakiwaunga mkono wataalamu hao wote. A response-able¹⁰ translation is a collaborative practice that brings into conversation perspectives from across Africa and Europe, resulting in joint, reflexive processes of wor(l)d sensing and sense-making. Response-able translation does not just transfer meanings from one realm of signifiers to another, rather it is a radical re-turning, remembering (wa Thiong’o 1981, Barad 2019) of wor(l)ds – as for words and worlds – a practice of sensing and caring for wor(l)ds and for their relationality to the multiple onto-epistemologies – that are of translators, authors, possible future readers, performers, and their “pastfuturesresents”

⁹ Miongoni mwa michango yao, hapa ninarejea ile iliyotolewa kwenye warsha “Siasa ya Kutafisiri na Kujikwamua kutoka kwenye Ukoloni katika Taaluma ya Kiswahili”, tarehe 19-20 Novemba 2021, chuoni Johannes Gutenberg, mjini Mainz, Ujerumani.

¹⁰ To be response-able is “to address the past [...], to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that ‘we’ are, to acknowledge and be responsive to the noncontemporaneity of the present, to put oneself at risk, to risk oneself, to open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to come” (Barad 2014: 183). See also Haraway 2016.

(Barad 2019: 543) – which they are co-constituting. Translation, hence, seems to attend to the violence inherent to all forms of representation (which assumes the power of words to represent or describe pre-existing things); in so doing, it re-turns and diffracts wor(l)ds (Barad 2014), that is to say, it turns wor(l)ds over and over again, and cut them together-apart, in different multiple onto-epistemologies (as diffraction does with electrons). In this sense it matters to Critical Swahili Studies in the way you, Kai, define it, that is “the study of ‘human social life’, of different levels of meaningfulness within the Swahili context, [...] the study of ‘thinking society’ and ‘understanding life’, how it is lived, grounded upon, and seen through the lens of Swahili language (and-beyond-language) Swahili expressions, genres, discussion, and debates.”¹¹ Nikirejelea mawasilisho yaliyotolewa kwenye warsha ya kumwenzi Marehemu Euphrase Kezilahabi¹² na kazi zake, yaani urithi wake, basi we should never forget how mtu ni utu, and utu ni vitendo! There is a richness that we should address and share coming from and focusing on Swahili Studies, Taaluma za Uswahili (?).

Bw. Kai: Thank you, I was also thinking to consider the way in which we would find the studies of culture and society, and senses of being human, within the Swahili sphere, adequate. How would we like to see that proceed, conscious of problems, avoiding what kind of reduction and simplifications? How would you like researchers and students to proceed? How would you like people to be critical, yaani being aware of traps and pitfalls, and conscious and sensitive to historical sensitivity? How should writers, researchers proceed? Is there something one can generally say about that? How would we like that critical to be filled? What are our concerns, our demands and wishes? In what sense is decolonisation a theme here, an important issue? How can it be addressed? What aspects are there in which there is Swahili Studies, as our regional studies? Are there fundamental rules? What can be said that? There are certain things maybe that you would like to insist on, procedures that must be followed? According to you, how should Swahili Studies look like?

¹¹ Kai Kresse, dibaji ya mazungumzo haya.

¹² Baraza la Kiswahili la Berlin, Kumbukumbu ya Kumwenzi Marehemu Euphrase Kezilahabi - Eulogies in Memory of the late Euphrase Kezilahabi (1944-2020) – workshop, 11-01-2021.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

Mzee Abdilatif: Ndiyo hiyo ni lazima kuwepo na maelezo kuhusu tukisema Swahili Studies tuna maana gani, kwa mazingira ambayo tunayo hivi leo, tofauti na mazingira tuliyokuwa nayo zamani. Zamani naweza kusema Swahili Studies ni kitu gani, leo si rahisi hivyo. Sasa hapo nafikiri kitu cha kwanza ni ile tuliyozungumza sasa, ile ya uswahili, hilo ndilo jambo la kwanza. Tukipata kitu cha kushika vizuri kwenye hii uswahili, nafikiri hapo sasa ndiyo tutaweza kuweza kueleza Swahili Studies ni nini na kuandika. Lakini mwanzo ni lazima tuanze hapo kwenye uswahili, uswahili ni upi?

Bw. Kai: I think one could also reject with good reason the label Swahili Studies, because one could say that what you have done and written has nothing to do with Swahili Studies, rather it is a concern for human beings, it’s a concern for justice and injustice, it’s a concern for what it is that makes us human. Maybe one could refuse this to be under the title of Swahili Studies, because in a way it’s also a box that maybe is not applicable, but it would be a concern for expressing sensitivity or critique of what it means to be human from within the Swahilophone conceptual frame. This is how I understood your concern with Swahili Studies as a title.

Mzee Abdilatif: Exactly! Sawasawa, kabisa!

Bi. Irene: In the module, masomo ambayo yanaitwa Swahili Studies, in Leipzig, we added a subtitle, which reads “Swahili in the world, the world in Swahili”, which is also what we do in terms of African Studies. But I still do not know if what I do fits, sijui kama ninachokifundisha ndicho au vipi. Maanake yote yanavutia, na miye ndo vile navyopenda, wanafunzi wakiniuliza, “je vipi swala la mazingira? mabadiliko ya tabia nchi? ni ishuru, ni tatizo, linazungumziwa, wanasema vipi?”, nini na nini, of course, naanza kutafuta na naunda masomo na nafurahia. Tatizo kubwa nililo nalo, kutafuta na kukuta makala ya kiakademia, ya kitaaluma, juu ya mada hizo zote, ambazo zinakwenda kutoka tabianchi mpaka sijui, feminism, gender na kadhalika, it’s just haiwezekani! It is very difficult, ni vigumu sana, kwa hivyo nakubali kabisa na wewe Mzee Farouk: ni lazima kufikiria translation na vilevile access, it’s all of it. Wasomi wakiandika, wanaandika kwa Kiingereza, kwa sababu hiyo ndiyo lugha inakubalika kwenye uchapishaji ambao ndio lazima kusonga mbele kikazi. Kwa hiyo, tunasoma makala kwa Kiingereza halafu tunajaribu kuyajadili

kwa Kiswahili, sawa, within the whole process of translation and communication. But, is this Swahili Studies? Sina uhakika, sijui. Ni mtazamo, au ni vile Waswahili wanavyotazama na kuchunguza kutokana na uswahili wao, kwa vile tulivyosema? Mara tunafanyia kazi *Guidance – Uwongozi* (Kresse 2017), and that's beautiful, kuna mada chungu nzima ndani yake, zote muhimu, ambazo tunaweza kuzigusa, kuzichambua kwa undani fulani. Is this Swahili Studies? Mara tunasoma *Aliyeonja Pepo* (Topan 1973), au *Mfalme Juha* (Topan 1971), na wanafunzi wanasikiliza, mara tunasoma *Kinjeketile* (Hussein 1969), na kutizama michezo ya kuigiza ya kisasa iliyo na msingi Vita Vya Maji Maji: mara kuna fasihi, mara nyingine wanataka tuzungumzie siasa, dini, mabadiliko ya tabia nchi... Lakini sijui kama ndivyo mnavyotaka Swahili Studies iwe.

Mzee Farouk: Navyofikiria miye, tuanze na hii uswahili, halafu baada ya kuchambua hii uswahili, halafu ndo uswahilini inafumba nini? Inafumba fikira na jiografia na yote, itakuwa ni step yetu hii. Halafu tena ya tatu, kuna mambo haya uliyoleta saa hivi mambo ya mtazamo kutoka kwa upande wa utaalumu, sasa yaani tunatoka kwenye ile discussion yetu, lakini ndiyo mada ya practicalities. Lakini hiyo itategemea unavyodefine Mswahili na uswahili. Bora tuanzie hapo. Tukienda mbele tunaingia duniani, the world.

Bw. Kai: Ok, but actually I think, Bi Irene, maybe you do not need to be really worried about what is Swahili Studies, because what is important is the concern with the dynamics of meaning that are relevant for the people. But I think this module's title that you are using in Leipzig, is very evocative of something very important: thinking the world from the perspective of Swahili concepts, like *utu*, or others, how is the world thought and seen from, when we take as point of our orientation and our attention, the debates among the debates. For me this is very meaningful because, in the end, what matters most to me is that we can work on a contribution of how the world is thought in an original way that brings something more on the table from what is there if we only think through europhone languages. So, maybe Swahili Studies is not really an important term, but what is really important is that this is directly linked to what Dipesh Chakrabarty called the process of provincializing Europe (2000), that we are thinking the world – the social, the political – from a different framework of conceptualization that is based on another language. So, it is not a Eurocentric imposition on how the world should be thought, but here we are, learning

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

from another language, and, in so doing, another world. I think that is very relevant. Kwasi Wiredu, a Ghanaian philosopher who’s written this essay on conceptual decolonization (1996, 2002), says something like, “ok, as an anglophone African philosopher I’ve been entangled only in the anglophone meanings of these words, and I’ve learned to philosophize only in English”, and he tries kujikumbusha on the Akan meanings of terms, and how that brings in a different picture of the world which must be added. These are important aspects, and it has to do with what you have said.

Bi. Irene: I am not sure I agree entirely on the way you talk about language and concepts: it makes me feel as if concepts are detached from the vitendo, whereas I think that it is exactly the vitendo and the Viswahili in their relationality that make the uswahili, and in that sense I think it is important to unpack the uswahili. I’ve actually stopped thinking of concepts, rather using the verb concept-ing to underline the co-constitutive relationality of words and worlds (Barad & Gandorfer 2021). While, if we follow what you said, tunaishia kwenye lugha vile tulivyoelezea juzijuzi, the one concept of language, as if a lugha is just a lugha, while it is never ‘just’ a lugha, words are never ‘just’ words (Povinelli, Gandorfer & Ayub 2021: 310), so I think it is the uswahili that we need, you cannot escape it...

Bw. Kai: You are saying it is never the language alone, but always in relation with action that creates uswahili.

Bi. Irene: Well, I am saying that I cannot think of language and words as something floating in the air, but always in relationality, kwenye uhusiano, uhusiano ambao haujitokezi tu, bali Waswahili wapo, wanatenda, na wanazungumza, na uswahili unatokana na uhusiano baina ya vitendo, ambavyo ndivyo vya kusimulia vilevile, yaani vya kuzungumza. So, anyway. Kwa hivo hatuwezi kuepuka uswahili, maanake yale yote uliyonena yamo ndani yake.

Bw. Kai: So, if you have a vision of something you would call Swahili Studies, how should they look like, or what must not look like? What should they have on board, or what must be thrown out?

Mzee Abdilatif: Swahili Studies, swala hili ni la kulirudisha kwa wale waliokuja na fikra hii. Ilikuwa walikuja na fikra ya Swahili Studies, walikuwa wanakusudia nini? Nafikiri kuliita neno la Swahili Studies, mimi si noma, hata chuo kikuu cha Dar es Salaam ni Taaluma za Kiswahili, ndo Swahili Studies: utaona kwamba wanafanya mambo mengine ambayo hayahusiani kabisa na mambo ya Mswahili au uswahili. Baadhi ya utafiti wanaofanya pale unahusiana na wapare, unahusiana na wachaga, lakini upo katika Taasisi ya Taaluma za Kiswahili, unaona?

Mzee Farouk: Lakini ile ni kwa sababu DsM haikuwapo idara ya lugha nyingine. Tatizo hilo lilianza siku zetu zile, hapo kulikuwa kuna mbili: linguistics na Kiswahili. Na Taasisi. Sasa wakati ule hakutakikana kuwepo idara kama ile iliyokuwapo Nairobi wakati ule, yaani Idara ya Linguistics and African Languages. Toka mwanzo kulikuwa na Kiswahili tu, kwa sababu, nifikirivyo mimi, ya ile sera yake Nyerere ya kuondosha ukabila. Lakini utafiti wa lugha nyengine za Kiafrika zilifanyika katika department ya Kiswahili, kwa hiyo zote zinafanyika, lakini zilifanyika chini ya mwamvuli wa Kiswahili. Iianza kule upande wa kisiasa.

Mzee Abdilatif: Naam. Lakini pengine kuna haja kufikiria jina jingine, sio Swahili Studies.

Bw. Kai: I was thinking back about critical responses that you had about different presentations, and, whether they were historical, or contemporary, there is one principle on which you grounded your critique, as I can remember, that is: you rejected instances where there was an imposition from external, from non-first language speakers upon what language should mean, or what is. So, to insist that a Critical Swahili Studies, or an adequate way of dealing with language – if we call that Swahili Studies – would take the active perspective of the speakers as a central guidance, or something like that? I think that this is one thing showing very well how you are critical of such attempts to declare something about Kiswahili, or Viswahili that is not grounded on a perspective from within. So, I would link this to how you would insist that it should be guided by the speakers, the agents. It's just an observation that could be linked to a principle that one could try to formulate.

Mzee Abdilatif: Nilivozungumza siku ile, baina ya Mswahili, uswahili na uswahilini. Sasa Mswahili, kwa maana tuliyo nayo hivi sasa imekuwa na maana pana zaidi. Mtu yeyote anayetoka

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

anaejiita ni Mswahili, au pengine anayeishi katika sehemu za Waswahili. Lakini sasa unapokuja kwenye uswahili, na tulivyotaja ile habari ya uswahili, sasa ndo yanaingia na mambo ya mila na desturi na utamaduni. unaona? Sasa wale ambao wanajiita kwamba wao ni Waswahili, ikija kwenye uswahili utaona hawaingii katika baadhi ya mambo: kwa mfano mambo ya desturi zetu na mila zetu, tukija katika mambo ya kuoana, tukija katika mambo ya ngoma, tukija katika mambo ya jando, kupasha tohara, na kadhalika, na kadhalika, utaona kwamba tuna mila tofauti na desturi tofauti. Sasa hapo katika uswahili, uswahili nafikiri umefinyika kidogo, kuliko Mswahili.

Mzee Farouk: Naam, nimefahamu. Swala sasa hivi ni: je, katika hii tuna mtazamo wetu ambao tunaujenga hivi sasa? Tupanue ile uswahili ivuke mipaka ile iende huko kwengine?

Mzee Abdilatif: Sasa, hapo ni kutizama sasa: hata hawa wenyewe wanaotaka kujiita Waswahili ikifika katika mila na desturi, wao wenyewe wanaziita zile kwamba ni zao? Hilo ndilo swala la kujiuliza. Au wanasema, “ah-ah mimi mila yangu ni ya Kihaya”, wanasema, “hii ni ya kihaya sisi tunafanya hivi, hatufanyi hivi”, eh? au ya Kinyamwezi, au Kisukuma, “katika mila zetu tunafanya hivi, hatufanyi hivi, hivi wanafanya Waswahili, tofauti na sisi”. Sasa, hapo utaona kwamba tunatofautiana, unaona?

Bw. Kai: Nina swali kidogo. Si hii kama ni daraja ya ujuzi kuhusu uswahili na ungesema kwamba wao ambao ni wajuzi maalum ni Waswahili tu, wengine tusiwaite Waswahili tena? Ama tungeweza kukubali kwamba wao ni wataalamu, wajuzi maalum ambao wanakumbuka mambo haya, na wanakumbuka mambo haya, lakini wengine pia ni Waswahili, au hungependa kusema hivo? To me it seems a little bit as if, Abdilatif, you are saying that we have different levels of knowledge (and different life experiences) about being Waswahili, no?

Mzee Abdilatif: Ah-ah, ilikuwa si kutokana na ujuzi wao, ah-ah, si hivyo, tofauti. Maanake in practice sio kujua tu, bali yakifanya mambo yao yanalingana na mila na desturi na utamaduni wa Kiswahili au ni tofauti? Jawabu ni kwamba ni tofauti, kwa hiyo hawaingii katika huu uswahili. Wanaweza kuja kujiita Waswahili sawa, kama ambavyo baadhi ya Waswahili walijiita Waarabu, ijapo walikuwa sio Waarabu. Huwezi kumkataza mtu kujiita atakavyo, lakini sasa ...

Bw. Kai: Lakini mila na desturi pia zinakua na zinabadilika, ama siyo?

Mzee Abdilatif: Sawa, sawa, zinabadilika, lakini kwa mfano ukipata Muhaya ambaye anaishi amezaliwa Dar es Salaam, anaishi Dar es Salaam miaka yote hiyo, ikija katika mambo ya harusi au mambo mengine anayafanya kwa Kihaya si kwa Kiswahili, ijapokuwa amezaliwa pale, anaishi pale, watoto wake wamezaliwa hapo hapo. Sasa tukija katika Studies, hapo shida ipo hapo, kwamba vipi tunaweza kuziita kwamba hizo ni Swahili Studies? Ikija kama alivyosema bwana Farouk mwanzo kwamba ni mambo ya lugha tu na fasihi kwa mfano ambayo imeandikwa kwa Kiswahili, sawa, hiyo ni fasihi ya Kiswahili, haya. Na lugha ya Kiswahili, sawa. Lakini, tukija katika mambo ya utamaduni, tunafundisha mila na desturi, hapo itabidi tuwe na tofauti baina ya mila na desturi za Waswahili au za Kiswahili na mila na desturi zisizo za Kiswahili. Twaweza kucategorize hivyo: kwa upande wa lugha na fasihi sawa, zinaweza kuingia katika Swahili Studies: yote yaliyoandikwa kwa lugha ya Kiswahili, ikiwa pengine yaliyoandikwa na yanahusiana na mazingira ya uswahili au hayahusiani, maadabu ni kwa lugha ya Kiswahili inakubalika kwamba ni sehemu ya Swahili Studies. Lakini sasa ikija katika kusomesha mambo ya mila na desturi na utamaduni, hapo itabidi kuweka na tofauti, kwa maoni yangu, sijui nyinyi mnaonaje.

Bw. Kai: I think you're right: if we are interested in the complex realities of culture and societies, we need to make these differentiations deeper, right? And we have to be interested in what specifies Swahili culture and societies historically and so on. I think my only concern is that, if we talk about Critical Swahili Studies, it is a dynamic conception of it being also changing in history and relational in different contexts and situations; and the other points are dynamics and inclusiveness. I think it is maybe helpful to start with language, because it is language-related, or meaning-related interactions which have something to do with projection of meaning through language, because it is inclusive: the deeper we go, it does not exclude anything, it does not become exclusive as such. But I think we are still struggling a bit, so why Critical Swahili Studies? And I think the Critical stands in a positive way, in a way that helps us to think.

Mzee Abdilatif: Kwa nini kulikuwa na haja ya kuliita [*Kongamano*] Critical, kulikuwa na fikra gani kuliita Critical?

Bw. Kai: I could fill that in a little bit, although I was not part of the initiative, and what does also quite make sense to me, also linking to Bayreuth's research cluster initiative and its overall agenda

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

of reconfiguring African Studies. Basically, they are rethinking African Studies in a way that is appropriate and adequate in our current times, with a view to the project of decolonisation, to the practices of science, or to the practices of African Studies and of Swahili Studies that also went along with the colonial project. So, I think it is born out of the motivation to consciously think about what would be the criteria for us to practice in an adequate and good way that we would, as researchers and as mother tongue speakers and scholars, generally approve of. I do not have a good definition of Critical Swahili Studies at hand, but the idea is based, in the post-colonial era, on the critical consciousness about the way in which colonial history and Eurocentric perspective has impeded a good and rich research, or has presented its own perspective, and has distorted African perspectives. That should be readjusted. So, going along with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and others with the project of decolonising the mind (and the field, of African or Swahili Studies), I think this is what the Critical is standing for, to make us think about what critical capacities we should be involving in order to make the study and the research adequate for the complex ways of life that we are seeking to portray or engage with. Does that make sense?

Mzee Farouk: It does, it does. I think in that case we’ll have in a sense two segments: segment ya kwanza is ile decolonising yote upande huu. The second segment will be: ok we’ve done that, but that is to clean, so what are we replacing it with? This is the debate on Mswahili and uswahili. We have now to think of Swahili Studies from within, or from the core outward.

Bw. Kai: There have been in the history of Swahili Studies some works already trying to, first of all, ground themselves on an internal perspective, and trying to bring that in. So, there have been works of critical Swahili Studies already that provide good reference points of orientation, there has been an effort already put in to situate the reader and to raise the consciousness of the work in it. I think there is already a sort of existing tradition of Critical Swahili Studies. What is important is that one does not continue to follow sort of an external imposition, the uncritical Swahili Studies, or studies where the power of eurocentrism or of colonial history was imposed on scholarship. We all know examples of that as well; that cannot be the paradigm. But we also know that there is a continuing strand of African Studies, for instance those which do not take language seriously: the more you ignore the need to engage with language, and this is Irene’s point, if you neglect language,

than you cannot present your work as reasonable scholarship. That would be an uncritical scholarship; that would be unacceptable. So, one could also talk about negative or positive criteria of one regional studies to be, in this case, Swahili Studies.

Mzee Abdilatif: Naam. Nafikiri tumepata kitu cha kuanzia, sasa kuhusu Mswahili na uswahili, nafikiri sasa tumekubaliana hayo kuhusu Mswahili na uswahili, sio? Sasa si tutaweza kuingia kwenye uswahilini au bado? Sasa Uswahilini, navyolichukulia mimi hili neno ni geographical area, uswahilini ni zile sehemu ambazo kwa asili ndizo za Waswahili wa asili wanakotoka. Mpaka sasa uswahilini ndo vilevile, hilo haliwezi kubadilika, hata kama maana ya Mswahili imebadilika. Uswahilini bado ni sehemu zilezile za pwani Afrika Mashariki, tangu juu huko kaskazini Kisimayu mpaka Msumbiji. Sasa ule ndo uswahilini.

Bw. Kai: Sasa London si uswahilini? Kama wako Waswahili ambao ...

Mzee Abdilatif: London sihesabu kama ni uswahilini, ijapokuwa Waswahili wapo, lakini uswahilini, maana nachukua lile neno la asili, kwa maana ya kwanza, eneo la uswahilini ni hiyo. Sasa ikiwa sasa tena tunataka kuiexpand, mambo mengine hayo. Kwamba kila wanapokuwa Waswahili ni uswahilini, kidogo nina shida nayo. Maanake itakuwa tumepungua mno, kwa maoni yangu. Miye naona uswahilini kwanza ibaki kuwa geographical area ya sehemu za asili ambako ndiko walikotoka Waswahili.

Bi. Irene: Kwa hivo hatuwezi kufikiria uswahilini kama ‘in the practices of uswahili’ ulivyokuwa unavizungumzia hapo dakika chache zilizopita?

Mzee Farouk: In the practice of uswahili ni “kiuswahili”, au “kiuswahilini”.

Mzee Abdilatif: Ah-ah. Ninavyofahamu mimi ukinitajia neno la uswahilini...

Bi. Irene: ...It’s a place, it’s an area, it’s jiografia.

Mzee Abdilatif: Kabisa!

Bw. Kai: Naam, I think we were thinking that uswahilini might be appealing to think with. Accepting that this is the original meaning of the geographical region of origin, I think maybe we could say about uswahilini that is this sphere of meaning that is created through practices and

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

expressions of meaning in Swahili language and practices. But as a question, what does it give us? ... Maybe it doesn't lead us anywhere, but the idea was to think of Swahili keywords or key concepts that have something to offer to us to think with, like we had now Mswahili, and I think Viswahili we have also mentioned, the inherent plurality of Swahili language, and that within Swahili language we have also a means of expressing that other languages might not have in the same creative way. So, one could use *uswahilini* to think creatively about aspects of life and practices, and in research that might also be stimulating.

Mzee Abdilatif: Niongeze kidogo kuhusu hiyo *uswahilini*, bali na kuchukulia kwamba ni ule ukanda wote wa pwani there, kaskazini mpaka kusini, lakini katika miji vilevile, kwa mfano Dar es Salaam wanasema kuna *uswahilini*, yaani ile sehemu ya mji ambako Waswahili wengi wako kule. Halafu kulikuwa na uzunguni, akina Oysterbay na nini, ambako wazungu wengi waliishi pale. Lakini ikija kwenye Waswahili wengi wako na Waafrika wengi wako huko kunaitwa ni *uswahilini*.

Mzee Farouk: Labda kwa hivi sasa hii miji tuiache, kwa hivi sasa, *Uswahilini* ya miji, tuchukulie *uswahilini* kama ni ile geographical area. Lakini tusiiache kabisa, tuifanye kama ni chemchemu ambayo chemchemu ile watu wanachota mle, halafu wanachukua kwengine, sasa kule kwengine pia wao wanaanza tena maisha mapya ya Kiswahili. Tuseme sasa ukienda Barking (in London) nilivyokuambieni siku ile harusi na sio harusi tu, muhimu zaidi ni mazishi, lakini kwa vile wanavyofikiria vya Kiswahili au vya Kiislamu, kwa hivyo hata dini inachangia. Labda tuichukulie anavyosema Kai, kama meaning, maana. Sasa hiyo maana inampa mtu nini? Inampa mtu ridhia fulani, feelings na nini. Kwa hiyo turudi kwenye *uswahili*, twende tukaichambue ile *uswahili* zaidi, na halafu tena ile ‘-ni’ tutaweza kuileta baadaye. Tuanze kuchambua ile *Uswahili*, *uswahili* ina maana gani, Kai anaposema zote hizi nafikiri hizi zote zimo katika *uswahili*, sio Mswahili, lakini *uswahili*.

Mzee Abdilatif: Sawa.

Mzee Farouk: Na nimependa ile, ahsante Kai kwa kuzungumzia habari ya ile Bayreuth na reconfiguring, rethinking, na ile tuiache ile eurocentrism.

Bw. Kai: Na nafikiri bi Irene ana mawazo machache kuhusu maneno ambayo tunaweza kuyarudia.

Bi. Irene: Nilivyokuambia niliposoma karatasi yako ile, kwangu, ukisema uswahilini moja kwa moja kwangu nafikiria mji hasa, na vile ambavyo mwanachuoni Elísio Macamo anavyochukulia “African Studies as an intellectual agenda that is not exactly in pursuit of research results, but rather is a methodological enterprise concerned with the clarification of how we can make meaningful statements about Africa, or anything for that matter” (2020). Nae, kwa vile ni mwanasosholojia, anajenga hoja yake akifafanua umuhimu wa miji na urban practices, akidai kwamba kuchambua miji na uhai wao kunasaidia kuwa na mtazamo pana kuhusu mambo ya dunia, kuelewa ulimwengu yaani.

Bw. Kai: I think the reference to Elísio Macamo is very important: he is a sociologist based in Switzerland from Mozambique, and he gave this lecture on African Studies, a memorial lecture, where he makes a point on what we could probably call Critical African Studies.

Bi. Irene: Yes, and what he’s interested in is also kinchonivutia mimi, haswa kuhusu miji, na vilevile nilichofikiria niliposoma kuhusu mawazo yako Kai juu ya uswahilini. Uswahilini as conceptualization of Swahili Studies reminds me Macamo’s interest in the urban in Africa, while he claims that urban scholarship “describes a way of being in and dealing with the world” and “describes a research field constituted by elusive objects hiding away from our conceptual gazes and constantly resisting our grasp. In this respect, engaging with the urban is to constantly reflect on that makes it possible for us to know” (Macamo 2018: 7). To him, then, the urban is relevant because it is not just a field of studies, rather it allows to reflect on methodological challenges in the understanding of the world. Uswahilini has come to be used in the definition of specific urban neighbourhoods which do not respond to the normative sight of the state (Scott 1998) that is translated into physical and architectural processes of inclusion, and hence exclusion. Uswahilini is that place in the Swahili urban which does not belong to notions of modernity, order, good governance, and progress, among others. It is the result of the legal implementation of spatial il/legalization and criminalization (Roy 2019). It is the result of the practices of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) which are aiming at systematic “formal disappearance, civil death, social death, racialized rightlessness of the person(hood)” (Roy 2019). Therefore, following Macamo’s thinking, the choice of uswahilini as conceptualization of Swahili Studies becomes a powerful move that

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

aims to eventually see, listen to and feel what are the perspectives of uswahili on the urban, and hence of what are the Swahili perspectives on the world, beyond the academic normative order. Uswahilini speaks of and to the practices surrounding and focusing on Swahili.

Mzee Farouk: Bi Irene nataka nikuulize kitu. Hebu nikusomee uliyoandika, lakini nikabadilisha kidogo uone kama maana inabadilika: *“Therefore, following Macamo’s thinking, the choice of uswahili as conceptualization of Swahili Studies becomes a powerful move that aims to eventually see, listen to and feel what are the perspectives of uswahili on the urban, and hence of what are the Swahili perspectives on the world, beyond the academic normative order. Uswahili speaks of and to the practices surrounding and focusing on Swahili.”* Unaonaje? Conceptually ndivyo unavyofikiria?

Bi. Irene: Yes. I don't know, mtu akinisomea ninachoandika sifikirii tena kwamba nimeandika miye... Anyhow, I guess I will be “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2016), not being able to choose between the possibilities opened by uswahili as a way of concept-ing – getting in touch with human and non-human practices, as ubunifu wa fikra – that is adequately comprehensive of the Swahili wor(l)ds, and uswahilini. The way Kai suggested, and as urban situatedness, uswahilini makes me (us?) un/comfortable enough to push myself beyond “our” established and restrictive conceptual frames that do not help in grasping the invisible, elusive, unknowable and ever changing (urban) realities and practices. It in this sense that Macamo speaks of urban scholarship, as “a way of being and dealing with the world” (2018: 7), while insisting that “We don’t study the urban for the sake of the urban. We study it in order to know how to study it” (*ibid*: 8).

Bw. Kai: I think there is one additional thing to be said about this Macamo’s lecture, because this was the Lord Lugard memorial lecture of the African International Institute, and there was this debate whether the name should be changed, because he was a colonialist. And what was interesting is the way in which he took this on, as an African speaker, to say well, it is also my history, I am engaged in African Studies. I am not sure whether I would share that perspective, but I think it is quite remarkable that he made that, and he said, ok this is also my history, or part of my intellectual history, that I have to bear and deal with. This points us to the different constructive,

creative and critical ways to engage with a colonial history that not only rejection itself, but here he, who would have all the rights to reject and create a new space, he made the decision to take this on board as part of the history that he's also carrying. And in that sense this whole lecture is quite remarkable, I think. It's at least important to note.

Mzee Farouk: Yes, yes.

Bw. Kai: What we could also think more about, especially *nyinyi wazee*. Like with *utu*, that's one obvious example for all of us, how *utu* becomes a different key concept, so we don't have to go over that again, but I think that would be a good reference point, to think of what would be other..., because when we use *utu*, we think of humanity in a different way from the anglophone context. So, for me there is a lot in there to try to think of what other key concepts from Swahili can we use to bring in to a debate when we discuss with non-Swahili speakers, but we can explain to them then how there are other connotations and meanings, that are captured well in ways that English, German, Italian are not captured in. I think this is one productive path for critical Swahili studies.

Bi. Irene: Can I say something about these key concepts? I think that it is so helpful and meaningful to think through words and concepts than thinking through language. Words like *utu*, *nafasi* in their relationality, in the very situatedness in which they are used (hence, co-constituted), really have this power of looking and understanding in different ways. But the problem then is: how much this knowledge is acknowledged and accounted for at an academic level and beyond. When key concepts in European languages are explained, then they acquire a certain status, they become commonly used and referred to, and, vice versa, they also then contribute to the richness of that precise language, with all its consequences. When it comes to *utu*, instead, we feel the need to explain it to non-Swahili speakers, to claim the concept's rights, to argue for *utu* in order it to be recognized as a valid concept to be looked at when getting in touch with the world. But this happens not just because Swahili is not as widely understood as English, but because the overall Swahili concept-ing – concepts in their production, construction and transmission – are still easily dismissed as 'local, relative, emic' and alike, and therefore not accounted for like 'European/western' concepts. In European languages we do not need to argue because concepts hold power, and allegedly create universalities.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

So, the Critical, to me, would be to make a more radical move: when I write, I can explain *uswahili* or *uswahilini*, but then I use *uswahili*, and in the sharing, I make the readers uncomfortable, and this state has the potentiality to call for a pause, for the efforts from the readers to step outside the box, and get in touch with ... well, with *uswahili*. And that would be to me the Critical. Because, de facto, the issue has never been for the West ‘to give voice’ to ‘those who haven’t got it’, as voices have always been there, often screaming, ‘we’ should just start to hear ‘them’, to listen to them.

Bw. Kai: That is true, stimulating, and certainly laudable, but you also want to be sure that people get it, right? I think there is going to be a longer process necessary, until people get it, and this is a task, a good task that we can take on, to mediate, to bring to attention the meaningful aspects and associations next to humanity. Someone has to do that work of mediation. And for me this is part of the work of provincializing Europe, if you like. But yes, the goal should be as you say, but it is an important aspect of work that all of us can try to do. Nowadays one could say or use ‘Ubuntu’ and you can expect people to get it, because ubuntu has had so much publications and research. But this is an outcome of quite a long process. So, engaging in that kind of work to draw attention on other words that are particularly valuable to think with.

Irene: So, in Critical Swahili Studies, if Critical is entangled with the project of decolonization, than it should also be concerned with the disruption of academic normative order, which is still grounded on the power of certain language(s). Therefore, *Taaluma za Uswahili* (as including and indicative of language and languaging practices) might help in recalibrating that order and give space to the *sauti zilizopo na zisizosikika mpaka leo, sauti hizohizo ambazo Profesa Njogu na Profesa Mazrui walikuwa wanazizungumzia wakizingatia muktadha wa ufundiishaji wa Kiswahili nchini Marekani* (2021). And in the same spirit, then, *maarifa* should include a wider range of sources, to respond to wider range of publics which the *taaluma* should find a way to speak to. The conversations should not remain within *taaluma*, should not take place *miongoni mwa wataalamu tu, bali yahusishe hadhira za aina mbalimbali* (Kaya & Mutembei 2021). *Kwa kufikia lengo hili, basi taaluma za uswahili lazima zizingatie vitendo kwa kiwango sawa na falsafa, na nadharia*. In other words, a wider spectrum of practices should be considered practices of theorization, or, better,

concept-ing. Concepting should not pertain to elitist and normative realms, rather should include the variety of practices which are forms of theorizing. Ndiyo maana I like to think of Critical Swahili Studies the way the sociologist Elísio Macamo alivyohoji akifasili Taaluma za Kiafrika kama ajenda ya kitaaluma isiyo na nia ya kuhoji au kudhibitisha matokeo ya kitafiti, bali ni methodolojia inayojihusisha na kutoa kauli yenye maana kuhusu dunia nzima na kila swala, sio kuhusu Afrika tu, au maswala ya Kiafrika tu. And this links back to the controversial practice of translation (and publication), to the overall fear to sense different languages at once, and to the difficulties in access the baraza which should allow multiple languages, translanguaging, and more radically languaging (Krause 2022), to account for practices which try to undo the power relations between languages, and, eventually, the concept of language as conceived in western ways of theorizing.

Mzee Farouk: Bi Irene you mentioned utu, but you said there is also another word...

Bi. Irene: Oh, that is one of my favourite, it's nafasi. There is so much published in the humanities, there is the spatial turn, the time turn, and then scholars did not know how to address temporalities, instances of time which do not follow a chronological kind of Cartesian way to look at time, where there is jana, leo na kesho, but what I am doing right now, I am doing it because I am consciously or unconsciously already projected to the future, and while I am here right now I am carrying with me all my history. So, this kind of now, is not just this moment in time, like tukitizama saa. And then there is the debate on the differences between place and space, on the concept of spacetime, and alike... So, anyway, nafasi for me is interesting because it has the connotation of fursa, wakati na pahala kwa pamoja, depending on how and when it is used and of course on the practices which are co-constituted with and through it. And I think of the msemu "nafasi inategemea nafsi yako", very much related to the practices of the individual person, the self, creating a nafasi, being in the nafasi, especially related to urban studies. So, for me it is interesting.

Bw. Kai: So, thinking also with relationality and contextuality, basically, here.

CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’ USWAHILI

Mzee Farouk: Lakini navyoona mimi bi Irene ipo tofauti kifikira baina ya utu na nafasi. Maanake utu, the way we engage with it, kwa sababu utu is a very broad category, what is utu expressing in Swahili. Tukichukua nafasi tunaanza kuingia katika vipengele maalum.

Mzee Abdilatif: Ahaa, kabisa!

Mzee Farouk: So, then kuna nafasi, and then something else, and zote hizi you can relate them to utu. Nafasi ni moja tu, siwezi kufikiria kitu kingine, tuseme nini, nisaidie Abdilatif, heshima, murua, zote hizo, maanake heshima nini? Kwa upande wa uswahili, nini heshima. Namjua bwana mmoja alipokuwa Lamu alikwenda kuonana na Sheikh. Shekhe huyo alikuwa amevaa kanzu na kofia kama kawaida yake. Lakini bwana huyu alikuwa amevaa kaptula na fulana tu. Naye haikumjia kwamba kuvaa vile si kawaida ya pale.

Mzee Abdilatif: Sasa hapo Farouk umetoa mfano mzuri sana kuonesha kwamba hata kama ni Mswahili, kama alikuwa anatokana na uswahili asingevaa hivo.

Mzee Farouk: Na Mohamed Saleh, anataja vitu vile, alikuwa ametaja heshima, uaminifu, uadilifu na ari (2009). Labda hivi sasa, tuanze kufikiria, what are the concepts we think with, and how do we think them?

Bw. Kai: I just want to add a final point, because to me that’s another dimension of Critical Swahili Studies, or even a way in which makongamano, our Bayreuth meetings of the Swahili Colloquium indicate maybe, well, I don’t know, but the way in which the code-switching between English and Swahili, the kind of dynamic community of scholars who know each other, that this has also created a kind of tradition, a communication that has been cultivated in Swahili studies in some settings, also at BaLaKiBe (our Berlin-based baraza), a productive one, which one could try to think more about, or could point in relation to other fields of African studies more broadly, because what we have partly been practicing is sort of a collaborative endeavour, this mazungumzo; we have been cultivating a bit of a history of joint conversation and discussions where people are actively participating in their languages, mostly two of them (Swahili and English), and we have discussions in a way that I think in an academic context you rarely have or find anywhere in the world in a similar way; and for me (and I think many others) these have been very productive, because they

have been inclusive, quite open, and I think that this attitude of commonality of participants has been cultivated in these meetings, which is quite remarkable and something special. And I think all of us know what we mean when I say that, but I think we rarely see this at other conferences, and this is not much a critique of these other conferences, but I think it points to maybe the necessity of having a longer-term cultivation of collaboration among colleagues. These meetings show us that it is important to invest in those, to continue. Anyway, I hope it makes sense, but for me this is more of a practical dimension, of a practice of Critical Swahili Studies because they are inclusive. What matters is that these events have been going on, and in a unique way, because we are always able to discuss with each other, right? and maybe because this issue of decolonization is so loaded, and rightly so, so that potentially it can also be (or become) destructive, through this pathway of a cultivation of speaking with each other across north and south, east and west, that could also be a valuable constructive way of dealing with sensitive questions of decolonisation, where often we otherwise see a very aggressive approach, and here we have a community talking through difficult things, potentially, so maybe one should put on the plate some more...

Mzee Farouk: Yes, hasa, intellectual interactions conducted in a friendly atmosphere of camaraderie. Lakini pia there is also another aspect. Lipo neno la kiswahili, kukinaiana. Tumekuwa pamoja kwa miaka sasa, imekuwa tumekinaiana to a huge extent pale Bayreuth. Kwa hivo tunaweza kuzungumza mambo ambayo pengine ukienda kwenye formal conferences pengine huwezi, lakini pale tunaweza, na hata ‘kusutana’, if I may use that term!

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CRITICAL SWAHILI STUDIES: A COLLECTIVE EXERCISE IN ‘CONCEPTING’
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