

LUBUMBASHI AND MAYOTTE: TWO RECENT EDITIONS OF SWAHILI-WRITTEN CHRONICLES

JOHANNES FABIAN (ED.), *HISTORY FROM BELOW. THE "VOCABULARY OF ELISABETHVILLE" BY ANDRÉ YAV: TEXT, TRANSLATIONS, AND INTERPRETIVE ESSAY.* (Creole Language Library, Vol.7). Edited, translated and commented by Johannes Fabian with assistance from Kalundi Mango. With linguistic notes by W. Schicho. Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990. 236 pp. ISBN 90 272 5227 0. Hfl. 80.-, US \$ 42.00.

NOEL-JACQUES GUEUNIER (ED.), *LA CHRONIQUE SWAHILIE DU CADI UMARI DE MAYOTTE. EDITION CRITIQUE.* (Recherches et Documents, 2). Toliara (Madagascar): Etablissement d'Enseignement Supérieur des Lettres (CEDRATOM), 1989. Mimeograph A4, 84 pp. Price not stated.

The starting-point of Johannes Fabian's book is a Zairean mimeograph of some 35 pages, which he reproduces in facsimile, reduced in size. This document is written in the peculiar Shaba dialect of Swahili, which has become known to the academic world through the sociolinguistic, morphological and lexical studies of Edgar Polomé, Walter Schicho and Johannes Fabian himself. In its original spelling typed in spaced capitals the title of the document reads "VOCABULAIRE DEVILLE DE ELISABETHVILLE. PROVINCE DU KATANGA ORIENTAL " (sic)

On the remaining 214 pages Johannes Fabian reflects upon several problems relating to the document. Some of these pages are allotted to linguistic notes by Walter Schicho (pp. 9-54), which together with the document itself form Part I. Part II of the book consists of translations (pp. 55-158). On the left-hand pages we find a second version of the Swahili text, while on the right-hand pages there is an English translation. There follow 151 notes, which function as footnotes to the translation, whereby their typography is the same as that of the reference text. Part III, "Interpretations" (pp. 159-227), deals with "interpretive" (interpretative ?) and methodological issues. The book is introduced by eight pages of "Preface and Acknowledgement", which state the problems and reveal the network of persons involved in the acquisition, processing and study of the document. The adventures related, which Fabian sees as a function of the scholarship of the 1960-80s (pp. 1-8, 165-169), merit discussion in courses on textology in African languages. The book ends with bibliographical references to sources concerning the peculiar Zairean context and postmodernist studies on ethnographical and historiographical textuality (M. Bakhtin, J. Clifford & G. Marcus, B. Jewsiewicki, R.

Koselleck, P. Ricoeur, D. Tedlock, H. White) We are also given two helpful maps.

The reader cannot expect a conventional "vocabulaire" from this book. What is presented here is not a list of words but rather some kind of dossier of various genres of texts, among which we find:

- historical narrations and anecdotes, interspersed with proverbs;
- lists and enumerations of persons (European authorities), place names, street names, food producers, sports clubs, hotels, acronyms of companies;
- a parable entitled "Wisdom among soldiers" (pp 114-119)

These texts are spread over 33 chapters, whose headings contain narrative and/or deictic statements, as well as a considerable number of rhetorical questions, as in the following example:

X. KUFIKA KWA STRONG NI MWAKA WA 1928. FASI YAKE NI WAPI? NI PALE PEKO MAGASIN MUKUBWA YA B.C.K. BUREAU MUKUBWA YA JUU ETAGE.

(X. Strong arrived in the year 1928. Where was his place? It was where the big warehouse of the B.C.K. was, the big office building with many floors.)

The theme of the document is the history of Elisabethville, now Lubumbashi, seen from the perspective of former "houseboys": 1885 - the arrival of the Whites in Shaba; 1901 - the founding of Elisabethville; 1906 - the establishment of the mining companies; World War I; 1917 - the rising of Kienda-Biela; 1922 - Simon Kimbangu; 1924 - the missions; 1937 - the construction of a high chimney; World War II; 1965 - independence. A pervasive topic is the relationship between the Africans and the white colonialists, as reflected in personal reminiscences and in the parable mentioned above. Like the well-known historical texts of Pate, Lamu, Mombasa and other coastal towns, the "vocabulary", which also bears the genre designation *habari* (discussed by Fabian on p. 187), could be termed a chronicle. In this case, however, the text concerned is not the testimony of a ruling elite but that of a group of domestic servants, and Fabian terms it a "political manifesto" with the "main tenor (of telling) how Africans helped to build a colony in which Europeans prided themselves" (p. 223).

An embarrassing omission in the acquisition of the document in around 1966 left the author's identity unknown, as his name does not appear in the document itself. Parallel and later research revealed that his name was André Yav (with a long list of patronyms given on p. 176), who is known to have authored another historical text in his mother tongue Lunda, dated Musumba, 28 December 1940. Being a mimeograph of an orthographic design similar to the "Vocabulaire", it may help future researchers to discover about André Yav, but first, as Fabian

says, it must be translated (p 176) As hypothetical models for this text and hence the "Vocabulaire" Fabian points to two indigenous historiographies, which were published by Bonaventure Makonga and Antoine Mwenda Munongo in Luba and French in 1949 and 1967 (p. 158). But in my view it is equally important to consider similar accounts, which were published in the same period in Swahili, such as the series "*Masimulizi na Desturi ya Afrika ya Mashariki* - Custom and Tradition in East Africa", whose ten or so titles appeared in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, as did a number of little monographs without serialization. About the spread of these writings we know next to nothing, except that earlier texts must have served as models for those that followed. This type of auto-ethnographical writing was initiated by missionaries and colonial administrators in the 1890s and thereafter.¹

The entire edition surpasses those of similar text publications, as Fabian is explicit about his theory and methods in establishing, analyzing and interpreting the text. The following methodological procedures can be pointed out as particularly useful:

1. The difficult comprehension of the graphically diffuse source text, to which the peculiarities of Shaba-Swahili have to be added, was solved by Fabian by employing a mother tongue speaker of Shaba-Swahili, Mr. Kalundi Mango, who read the text aloud and was recorded on tape. This "re-oralization" proved most successful, as the speaker's intonation allowed the marking of proper syntactic segments and words (thus generating the second version of the Swahili text mentioned above). Before this was done, it had been impossible to rewrite the document, because Kalundi Mango had kept too close to the written original, which is full of "irregularities in spacing, erratic punctuation, seemingly incomprehensible strings of morphemes (and) typing errors together with corrections and repairs" (p. 3)²

2. The close examination of the text through screening the inherent terms and metaterms with the help of a word processor (p. 171) facilitated the recognition of certain key concepts within the discourse. Thus, for example, the term *jina* as "evidence for the practice of 'naming = assigning/recalling meaning'" could be counted more than twenty times (Fabian, p. 172). The listing of personal names should revive certain historical agents and remember their deeds and characters as these are known by tradition elsewhere in the society or rather in parts of it (otherwise a written composition would hardly be of any necessity). Other investigations are concerned with the lexical expressions of seeing (reading) and listening (oral transmission), which serve in assessing the status and functions

¹My forthcoming *Outline of Swahili-Written Literature* will help to remedy the lack of an "inventory or survey of such writing", which Fabian misses on pp. 161-162.

²A similar procedure, which resulted in getting further topical information from the reading informant, is mentioned by Eugeniusz Rzewuski, "Origins of the Tungi Sultanate (Northern Mozambique) in the Light of Local Traditions". In: St. Pilaszewicz & E. Rzewuski (eds.), *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past*, (Orientalia Varsovensia, Vol 2), Warsaw 1991, pp. 193-213 (here 196-197).

of the literary document.³

While admiring Fabian's well-organized and well-founded study of André Yav's 'thick description' of colonial life in Lubumbashi I must express reservations about one inconsistency: Fabian strongly advocates an anti-hegemonial exegesis and interpretation of the text, which convincingly appears to be fulfilled in his discourse and even in the typographical layout of the (foot-)notes - yet not in the title of his book. The heading "*History from Below*" in fact subjugates Yav's document to Fabian's scholarly hegemony, thus reducing it to source materials of an anthropological treatise. References, abridged as they usually appear in academic writings, will always limit themselves to "Fabian, *History from Below*", and not present the original author or title, as a philologist would probably have opted for.

This fascinating chronicle and the many methodological issues it raises will certainly mobilize a number of further researchers and scholars, and for this we can be grateful to Johannes Fabian. He has succeeded in extending the *Writing Culture* approach of post-modernist anthropologists in such a way as to encompass text materials written in the mother tongue of a non-academic African researcher. It is to be hoped that Fabian will publish the collection of "several notes and articles of varying length" which he has received from Bruce Fetter, John Higginson, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Kyaoni kya Mulundu and Walter Schicho (p 8). As contributions to the discussion of Fabian's edition we can already recognize a number of reviews.⁴

Without doubt the discussion must include Schicho's morphological sketch, in which the notion of a "dummy element" (p 40f.) can only be understood as a preliminary term for of a grammatical work in progress. With regard to the dictionaries consulted by Schicho (p. 33: Sacleux, Johnson; for Kiluba van Avermaet & Mbuya) one wonders why he did not consult Alphonse Lenselaer's *Dictionnaire Swahili - Français*, Paris 1983, which marks peculiarities of Zairean Swahili.

While Fabian has elevated an existing mimeograph into a hardcover book, Noel-Jacques Gueunier has transformed an existing manuscript into a mimeograph. Both editions thus aim at

³I found a closely related function of terms serving as aide-mémoires in Ahmed Sheikh Nabhan's didactic documentary poem *Umbuji wa Mnazi* (1985), which I worked on in the years 1986-89. I too searched for 'key terms' (cf. Th. Geider, "Die Schönheit der Kokospalme: Sheikh Nabhan's zweites Dokumentargedicht in einem Swahili-Schulbuch", *Afrika und Übersee* 75, 1992: 161-190). In similar terms Jan Knappert (*Myths and Legends of the Swahili*, Nairobi 1970, p. 27) writes: "The Swahili authors see language as a collection of names. Each name summarizes a set of definitions, so that knowing the name of the thing implies knowing its definitions."

⁴Reviews known to me have been written by Chet A. Creider (*American Anthropologist* 93, 1991: 741-742); Carol M. Eastman (*International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, 1991: 396-397); Kyoni kya Mulundu (*SLS/NN* 8, 1991: 41-42); Wilhelm J.G. Möhlig (*Anthropos* 86, 1991: 604-606); Helma Pasch (*Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 7, 1992: 149-154); J.D.Y. Peel (*Man* 27, 1992: 421-422). For a special comment on questions of epistemology and intertextuality see Jan Blommaert's contribution in *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 32, 1992: 85-95.

reaching a wider circulation of their respective documents. As in Fabian's case, Gueunier's chronicle originates from outside the classical Swahili region, namely from the Comoro Islands. "La chronique swahilie du Cadi 'Umari de Mayotte" was found by Gueunier in the Bibliothèque Universitaire d'Antananarivo, Madagascar, where it was among papers, which C. Poirier had acquired when he was Governor of the Comoro Islands in 1916-20. Gueunier argues that it was written shortly after 1841.

The "édition critique" contains the facsimile of the Swahili-written manuscript in Arabic script (11 pp.), its Roman transliteration and a French translation, which altogether make up the manuscript of reference. Here one regrets that the French sentences on the right-hand pages are unnumbered, while the Swahili sentences on the left are numbered, which makes bilingual reading somewhat strenuous. Footnotes complement passages from three additional manuscripts:

- 1 the "Manuscrit de Cheikh Mkadara", which was published in facsimile by Allibert (1984: 307-340);
- 2 a text file of 31 pages, dated 1965, photocopied from a manuscript in possession of Sheikh Adinani Mela of Tsingoni, partly published by Allibert, Ahmed Chamanga and Boulinier (1976);
- 3 a manuscript entitled "Ecrits de Cheik M'Kadara ben Mohamed, traduits par Said Ahmed Said Ali", presented in 1975 to the Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, Paris, by H. Cornu, who was Governor of Mayotte in 1931-32; this contains a French translation, whose Swahili original is lost. It is published in Allibert (1984: 277-290)

Gueunier's edition thus brings to light Swahili texts and French translations from unknown and partly published documents, in which French scholars have shown an increasing interest, e.g. in the little-known journal *Études Océan Indien*, published annually since No. 1/1982 by INALCO under the editorship of Pierre Verin. Surprisingly, a fourth text, which is a variant written in Arabic by the very same Kadhi Umari and edited by Rotter (1976), plays only a very minor role in Gueunier's edition⁵

The chronicle is a source for the history of Mayotte, one of the four main Comoro Islands. It presents four topics: 1) The Shirazi immigrants who founded a royal dynasty, their names being listed in chronological order; 2) alliances with people from Madagascar and the ensuing wars of c. 1830-40; 3) the French intervention after the signing of a treaty with "Sultan" Ndriantsoly of Madagascar; 4) an appendix with additional genealogies listing names in the

⁵The sources mentioned are: (1) Claude Allibert, Mohamed Ahmed Chamanga & Georges Boulinier, "Texte, traduction et interprétation du manuscrit de Chingoni (Mayotte)", *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* 7, 4, 1976: 25-62. (2) Claude Allibert, *Mayotte. Plaque tournante et microcosme de l'Océan Indien Occidental. Son Histoire avant 1841* Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1984. (3) Gernot Rotter (ed.), *Muslimische Inseln vor Ostafrika. Eine arabische Komoren-Chronik des 19. Jahrhunderts* Beirut - Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976.

form of a litany. Pp. 10-12 show a genealogical tree, which combines data from Gueunier's and Rotter's chronicle texts.

The author of the chronicle is Qadi 'Umar bin abi Bakr ash-Skirazi, about whose life and fate we learn less from Gueunier's edition than we do from Rotter's book (1976: 11-12). Born in about 1800, he was a member of the royal family of Mayotte. In a succession dispute in 1829 he failed to gain the sultanate, and he spent the years 1830-36 in exile in Nzwani. From there he returned to Mayotte as the representative of the Sultan of Nzwani, but soon lost this function to Ndriantsoly. His only remaining option was to stay on as the Kadhi of Mayotte. Gueunier assumes that Kadhi Umar's motive in writing this charter was to justify his former political activities and reaffirm the legitimacy of his sultanship (p. 8).

The edition has been produced on stiff yellow paper slightly fixed with staples, with some typical mimeograph blurs. Although it looks cheap and not very durable, scholars will be grateful that such a document has been made accessible. One hopes that further low-budget critical editions will follow. Indeed, Gueunier mentions another manuscript by Kadhi Umari, which he plans to publish (p. 4). Gueunier intends to present data from various manuscripts, which are described in Vol. 4 of his unpublished doctoral thesis on Malagasy folktales from Mayotte Island (Universite de Paris-VII, 1985). The chronicle under review is obtainable from CEDRATOM, B.P. 185, Toliara, Madagascar.

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