

KENYAN LITERARY KISWAHILI¹

ELENA BERTONCINI-ZUBKOVA

Until the Eighties the regional character of Kenyan prose writing was far less marked than that of Zanzibari novels. Different was the situation in poetry; in fact, Kimvita and Kiamu have been used even in modern times (see, e.g., Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo, Abdilatif Abdalla and Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany; the last one is well-known for his endeavour in enriching and modernizing Swahili terminology, and a few of his proposed terms, e.g. *runinga* for „television“, have been accepted). Kenyan prose fiction, on the other hand, used to be much alike to the up-country Tanzanian literary production, written as it was in standard Swahili, sometimes with many colloquial features.

The first coastal novelist (though a Mijikenda, not mother-tongue Swahili) is **Katama Mkangi** (b. 1944 at Ribe), so far author of three novels: *Ukiwa* (1975) — a love story, and two political satires, *Mafuta* (1984) and *Walenisi* (1995). „*Mafuta* deals with class differences and satirizes African leadership exhorting mass liberation, . . . (but) it is so much steeped in allegory and symbolism that few readers are able to draw parallels between it and the political realities of post colonial Kenya.“² Mkangi's third novel *Walenisi* (The country of the *Wale ni Sisi* — They are Us) describes an ideal planet where all inhabitants live in peace and love, working hard, after having defeated the exploiters (Wachuna). The main character Dzombo, an inhabitant of the Earth who has landed by chance on this happy planet, only after several years manages to get rid of his egoistic habits.

Mkangi's language is particular, rich and difficult, with some words modified or invented by himself. Thus in *Mafuta* he writes *bwagu* instead of *pwagu*,³ and in *Walenisi* the number of „strange“ words increases considerably.⁴ For instance

-mamatia -shikilia bila ya kuacha, -gandama;
hawakukoma kuimamatia kufa na kupona [Walenisi 152]

girimiti kazi ya lazima, kazi ya shokoa;
sio kama girimiti - yaani kazi ya kulazimishwa [Walenisi 101]

Habusu is Mkangi's singular form of *mahabusu*:

¹ Paper presented at the 11th Swahili-Kolloquium, Bayreuth, 9-10 October 1998

² Cf. Wamitila 1997: 121.

³ I am grateful to Bw. Wamitila for this observation as well as for his help in understanding the Kenyan Kiswahili

⁴ Some of them have been explained to me by Mkangi's countryman Wamitila, but I have a long list of words that even he does not understand!

Haki hizi kwa hivyo, zinampa habusu nafasi ya kujirekebisha [Walenisi 4]

According to Wamitila, Mkangi himself admits that he has an insufficient knowledge of Kiswahili for a writer. In fact, in *Mafuta* there are some strange (or ungrammatical) forms like

chumba alichojikutamo „the room in which they met“ [Mafuta 14]
 „*Nimnunulieni chai?*“ „*Tutashukuru*“ [Mafuta 55]

where -M- should be the object infix of the 2nd person pl. (instead of -WA-). He employs also some unusual causative verbs, like *-rukisha*, *-choksha*, and even *-upyisha* „renew“:

ni mbinu zisizoisha za kuupyisha ubinadamu wetu [Walenisi 127]

Anyway, there is a striking difference between *Ukiwa* on one side and the other two novels on the other side, the former presenting powerful imagery and rich but less „difficult“ language.

A noteworthy Kenyan novelist of the Eighties is **Yusuf King'ala**, an up-country writer (born in Machakos in 1951), author of the Bildungsroman *Anasa* (1984) which illustrates the importance of a good education on the story of a pretty widow, her beautiful daughter and her neglected grandson who becomes a robber and a killer.

Another Kenyan title of the Eighties is *Miaka 52 jela* (1989) by **Michael Karanja Ngugi**, a Kikuyu born in 1919. His book is seemingly the autobiography of an incorrigible thief who passed almost all his life in prison. Being illiterate, Ngugi does not explain how he did produce his work. It is a pure narration enriched by proverbs and sayings illustrating the author's point, namely that *uhalifu haulipi* („crime does not pay“). For instance

Ama kwa hakika, tamaa ilimwua fisi. (p.8)
Wahenga wamesema, cha haramu hakidumu (p.17)

In 1995-6 five Kenyan novels appeared⁵, thus confirming that if Tanzanian literature is at present at a standstill, it is not the case with Kenya. According to Wamitila, several other titles are awaiting publication⁶

Besides Mkangi's third novel *Walenisi*, the most interesting of the five titles is *Nyongo mkalia ini* (1995) by **C.M. Rocha Chimera**, a Giriama (i.e. Mijikenda). His novel is situated in 1975 and treats the critical situation in Kenya, even if the author had to put it in an invented country. Rocha criticizes an illicit trade in ivory and in drugs, illustrated on the story of the narrator Juma Mumanyi and his friends, however the episodic plot has only minor importance. A large part of the book consists in discussions of the friends about such important topics as corruption,

⁵ They were discussed by Wamitila at the previous Swahili Kolloquium, cf. Wamitila 1997

⁶ Mkangi has a number of manuscripts that are likely to come out soon. Habwe has a forthcoming work *Maisha kitendawili* (Jomo Kenyatta Foundation); Wamitila's *Nguvu ya Sala* will be published soon by Longhorn. Another work likely to come out soon is Mwenda Mbatia's sociological *Upotevu* (Wamitila 1997: 118, note 2)

oppression, tribalism etc. which often result in lectures or sermons, so the text becomes heavy and confused. The story takes place in the town Gongwa (Gongwa or Kongowea is the name used in Muyaka's poetry for Mombasa) and the reader can identify a number of historical events mentioned in the novel, from the Mau Mau freedom struggle (*Majimaji*) to university riots (Wamitila 1997:121)

The strong point of Rocha's work is an impressive imagery and a creative language, very rich and idiomatic. His vocabulary is rather varied, it goes from modern coastal terms and words taken from Muyaka's poetry to urban slang.

John Habwe's novel *Maumbile si huja* (1995) is situated in Mombasa and narrates the story of an unfaithful wife, Amina, and her lover Saidi, a former servant of her husband Juma. While Juma dies poor and lonely, the couple lives happily and comfortably; the infidelity is not punished except the fact that their last child is born blind. And only then Saidi starts feeling remorse for what he did to his employer Juma.

Habwe's novel is noteworthy for a relatively high number of similes which are not stereotyped, but have various forms and some of them are quite original.

Ali Hassan Njama is also a Mijikenda (Digo), born probably at the end of the Sixties. His novelette *Haki haizami* (1995) features an evil teacher Baya who seduces, abandons and at last kills a girl - his student Mwanaidi. This (apparently) criminal story lacks (as often happens) a powerful narrative force; „an outright poetic justice is absent and one may be left thinking that the right (*haki*) hinted in the title as not getting lost actually does“ (Wamitila 1997:118). Njama's language reflects the Mombasa usage, but it is less interesting than the other discussed works.

The last novel of this group is *Siku njema* by **Ken Walibora**, published in 1996. The story, „with some autobiographical infusions“ (Wamitila 1997:120) is situated in Tanga, Mombasa, and in up-country Kenya, and narrates the adventures of a righteous orphan in search of his father. „This *Ich-Erzählung* novel ... reeks a lot of the moralistic tendencies and inclinations of Shaaban Robert, the writer's idol.“ (Wamitila 1997:118)

This work, clearly targeting a school audience, is presented in a very rich and highly idiomatic Kiswahili. Walibora's language seems to be a mixture of regional varieties: he uses such typically Kenyan words and expressions as *skuli* and *shule (!) ya upili* along with *shule ya sekondari*, typically Tanzanian-bara *hela* together with idioms and sayings used by Zanzibari writers, such as *sako kwa bako*, *hamnazo* or *hazimtoshi*. His vocabulary needs a glossary of 12 pages at the end of the novel.

Morphologically, too, Walibora blends Kenyan and Tanzanian features, e.g. the Kimvita present tense YUA- and the Tanzanian perfective tense KA-, or the typically Zanzibari usage of the imperfective -KI-:

Nikimjua tu ahlan wa sahalan (hivi hivi tu), simkumbuki vyema. [Walibora 20]

Style

A striking feature of this new Kenyan prose in general, which approaches it to Zanzibari writings, is its expressive, colourful and idiomatic language. In fact, the style in most of these books is more attractive than the matter.

Consider the following picturesque expression:

Binamu zangu walikuwa wakikaa tu raha mustar ehe wameandika nne kwa miguu yao, au wanabukua vitabu [Walibora 23]

"Writing the number four with one's legs" illustrates very well the sitting position.

Some expressions remind me of Said A. Mohamed and his countrymen, like *pumzi zamwenda mbili mbili, macho yakasharabu wekundu, machozi njia mbili mbili*. Consider also the following examples:

Mja yuawatazama tu, hatii neno wala mkono. [Rocha 41-2]
Pana ajabu gani? Kwani bahari mimi nimeitia chumvi? [Walibora 57]
Nimekuwa mumunye (a kind of gourd), ninaharibikia ukubwani. [Walibora 31]

Other expressions are more colloquial:

Nilitamani kumpa moja ya shingo hadi chini .! [Rocha 118] (kumpiga ngumi moja ya shingo hadi aanguke chini)
Polisi hawaitwi wakaja ghafla bin yuu [Rocha 95]
Ungedhani walishitadi kuponda raha maana karaha yaja [Walibora 35]
Niliona hohehahe sina sinani nikiulizwa siungami [Walibora 65]
Alikuwa kama mtu baki kabisa tusiyehusiana kwa damu wala kwa usaha [Walibora 18]

Characteristic for Mkangi's style are free repetitions as well as syntactic and lexical parallelisms:

Kwamba ujinga ndio uliokuwa ukimtawala mwake maishani, kulimchekesha sana 'Ajabu ni kwamba, nilizaliwa ujingani. Nimekulia ujingani. Ninaishi ujingani. Nala, nanywa, nafa ujingani. Yaonekana ujinga ni wepesi, ni raha, ni starehe na hausumbui Ujinga si matatizo bali ni starehe ya kujiona ni mimi tu na mimi tu basi,' Ti akawa akijiwazia [Mafuta 51-2]

Rocha, too, exploits the rhetoric figure of repetition with its effect of intensification:

Wakati wa kazi ulipokwisha nilitoka haraka haraka Esta akatoka haraka haraka Bwana Khalifa akatoka haraka haraka, sote tukakimbilia mlangoni, karibu kugongana. Esta akakimbia na Bwana Khalifa akakimbia na mimi nikakimbia. [Rocha 97]

A powerful stylistic device is enumeration — listening of two or more terms or phrases in the same syntactic position:

Walijipa sifa za kimiungu na kuanzisha tafrijia, nderemo (Mv. joy, happiness), tamaduni, mila na desturi zilizokuwa na lengo moja tu. [Walenisi 146]

*Mlango huo-huo mmoja ndio kila kitu kiliingia na kutoka. Si watu si mifugo Si mbu si moshi Si kuku si mainzi Si uvundo si marashi. Si watoto si watu wazima... [Mafuta 27]
*Habiba aliuliza kwa sauti iliyojaa woga, masikitiko na uchovu [King'ala 31]
 Badala yake alimwalia kwa macho makali yaliyojaa bezo, beuo na sodawi. [King'ala 31]**

The next example contains both the plain enumeration and the antithetic lexical parallelism:

Wachuna walikuwa na mavazi — nguo, viatu, shanga, vipuli, mikoba, manukato na kadhalika, ya kila namna na kwa kila hali. Ya kazi na ya starehe; ya kulala na ya kuamkia; ya kutembelea na ya gumzo; ya safari na ya nyumbani; ya usiku na ya mchana; ya baridi na ya joto; ya furaha na ya kuomboleza, ya kuogelea na ya kuzikiwa; ya kuchezea na ya kukimbilia, ya kupikia na ya kulia; ya kutafutia mimba na ya kubebea mimba. [Walenisi 154]

An antithesis brings together two units with opposed meaning:

*Tofali kubwa na zito lilikuwa ni lile lililomfanya mjinga kuonekana mwerevu na mwerevu kuonekana mjinga; mwehu kuonekana timamu, muuaji kuonekana mlinda usalama, msema ukweli kuwa mwenda wazimu, na busara kutoka kwa wasaliti [Walenisi 11]
 Namna ya kutembea Vipi kutembea kikazi na vipi kutembea kike Wapi kuviringisha na wapi kunepeza Wapi kulegeza na wapi kukaza Wapi kutikisa na wapi kuzuia. [Mafuta 29]*

In the previous sentences we have also seen another kind of repetition, i.e. syntactic parallelism - the repeating, in two or more sequences, of the same morphosyntactic pattern accompanied by rhythmical and phonic repetitions. Consider some more examples:

*[Tohara] ilikuwa har usi yao ambayo waliifikia kwa kisu kukata ngozi, damu kumwangika, (!) meno kusangika (!) na machozi kuyakausha [Mafuta 28]
Akajibeua (kujipuuzua) na kujibekua (kujipuuzua) na kujishaua (kujiringa) na kujikunakuna kinyani (kama nyani) kabla hajafikiria kutuhudumia [Rocha 31]*

Expressiveness of the style may be heightened by **ideophones**:

*Alipoutia mlango komeo na kuhakikisha ameufunga ndindindi, alitoa kile kibahasha. [King'ala 51]
 Walikwenda marshi marshi (haraka haraka) wakamfumana. [Walibora 22]*

After having discussed schemes, we now turn to the other category of rhetorical figures, namely tropes. The most frequent ones are similes and metaphors.

Similes are usually taken from African nature and traditional life.

*Daudi alianza kudungadunga chakula kama mtu aliye kwa wakwe zake [King'ala 27]
 Walikuwa ni kama kupe na mkia wa ng'ombe (inseparable) [King'ala 54]
 Alikuwa ameanza kupiga unyende kama mbuzi anayeng'olewa mwiba uliokwama kwenye kaakaa [King'ala 101]*

[*Nilikuwa na wazo lakini maneno yalinikimbia*] Ni kama mtu atakaye kupika ugali akakosa sufuria. [Walibora 38]

The following simile is taken from a Luo legend:

Alikuwa ameshikwa na hamu iliyomshika Tekayo alipoanza kula maini ya wajukuu wake
[King'ala 41]

The same author (King'ala) draws his parallels also from Western culture:

Tabasamu ilimtoka na kuonyesha macho yaliyomeremeta kama ya mpiga filimbi wa Hamelin [King'ala 29]

Other modern similes are, e.g.

Daudi alikuwa keshalainika kama siagi. [King'ala 3]
meno meupe pepepe kama theluji [Walibora 16]
Mkaza-mjomba alinitumbulia tu macho kama sinema [Walibora 26]

Besides conventional similes (*kama*), Kenyan novelists (especially Mkangi) use other constructions which express or imply similitude (*utadhani mithili ya* etc.):

kiwiliwili chake kilionekana tuli mithili ya maji mtungini [Walenisi 109]
Umati huu ulikuwa sawa na wa ule wa ng'ombe wanaosubiri kuchinjwa [Walenisi 2]
Sasa akawa macho wazi zaidi ya bundi! [Walenisi 20]

Metaphor is omnipresent in literary writings. Consider just a few examples:

Mama Mumbe, japo alifahamu Kiswahili barabara, neno „wiyathi“ ('uhuru' in Kikuyu) lilikuwa limejenga na kutamakani mdomoni mwake [Rocha 61]
Yeye pia vichwa vya ndovu (beer) avisukuma kama nini sijui [Rocha 9]

Here the allusion is to the caps of the beer Ndovu, i.e. he drinks a lot of beer.

"To push elephants' heads" is an idiomatic expression. In fact, most idioms and proverbs arise from metaphors.

Idiomatic expressions are - if you allow me this metaphor - like spices, without them the language would be tasteless. And the Kenyan novelists know how to use them, how to add taste to their writing.

Idiom is a morphosyntactic phenomenon. The lower structural boundary of idiomacity is considered the compound lexeme (*hazimtoshi, hamnazo, chambilecho*), while the upper structural limit is constituted by the sentence, e.g. *Ubwabwa wa shingo haujamtoka*.

Nilifumba macho na kujitia hamnazo [Walibora 58]
Maskini hazimtoshi, sijui kapagawa na pepo gani [Walibora 65]
Aliingilia ukahaba akiwa mdogo hata ubwabwa haujamtoka shingoni [Walibora 57]

Ilikuwa ndio kwanza mkoko ualike maua ⁷ [Walibora 7]

Semantic idioms force the reader to decode them in a metaphorical way; these expressions are seldom transparent, as in

Tulikuwa marafiki wa kufa kuzikana haswa " [Walibora 83]

Amekuwa mtu wa kiguu na njia [Rocha 2]

Nilichukua baiskeli nikamwaga vumbi (kukimbia sana) [Rocha 92]

Wanaenda kwao na midomo mirefu (maneno mengi) *kueneza uvumi usio na mwanzo wala mwisho*. [Rocha 80]

Usually they manifest a high degree of opacity, although they may not exhibit any structural peculiarity.

Watu nao hushukuru kuwa hakwenda magharibi (kulala nje na mwanamke si wake) [Rocha 2]

Kazi ya kuingiza maiti ile ndani ya jeneza ilikuwa kukata jongoo kwa meno hasa [Walibora 81]

*Umepania kabisa kutupa jongoo na mti wake sio?*⁸ [Walibora 79]

*Eti Said amegeuka kitatange: anamla tajiri yake kivuli*⁹ [Habwe 64]

Some idioms are widespread, used all over Swahili speaking territory, like *kuwa na mkono wa birika* or *kumpaka mtu kwa mgongo wa chupa*. Others are regional, yet others are part of colloquial speech or slang, like the following:

Alikuwa anautema Umombo (to speak English) *kama ambaye kazaliwa huko kwenyewe* [Walibora 56]

Idioms may exhibit parallelism, repetition and internal rhyme, like *(kupata) hija (k)wa haja* (to get two things at the same time), *dhahiri shahiri* (clearly, evidently), *sako kwa bako* (side by side) or *si hayati si mamati* (neither healthy nor sick: miserable). And besides,

Mtoto aliyetunukiwa uzuri wa sura na sira. [Rocha 16] (sira - life of the Prophet)

Nikaingiwa na woga usiojulikana asili wala fasili. [Rocha 92]

Idiom is a syntactic unit which manifests lexical integrity. Nothing can be added or changed in the idioms like *kufa na kupona* (matter of life and death), *si hayati si mamati*, *pua na mdomo* (close, nearby), or *si wa maji si wa chakula* (very sick).

⁷ The translation of Sacleux (p.562) is as follows: „C'est (aujourd'hui) le premier jour que le palétuvier commence à fleurir (que la passion s'est déclarée, que la chose a commencé)“

⁸ „To cut/bite a millipede with one's teeth“ means to deal with an unpleasant situation, while „to throw away a millipede with its stick“ means to change one's life

⁹ *Kitatange* (a sea porcupine) ni aina ya samaki ambaye huwaongoza wengine hadi demani (chombo cha kuvulia samaki) kisha akakwepa yeye. Hutumiwa kwa mtu wa aina hiyo. (A person who stirs up strife among others). *Kumla mtu kivuli* ni kumfanyia mtu mabaya aondokapo au asipokuwako (Wamitila)

Maweni (a village) *ni hapa hapa pua na mdomo* [Rocha 3]
Niliomtizama pale kitandani, yu taabani si wa maji si wa chakula, niliangema (-kata tamaa) [Walibora 12]

However, the lexical integrity of idioms is not always inviolate. Several idioms, especially those including a verb, can undergo a certain amount of transformations. Thus parts of idioms can be deleted or substituted, and an adjective or an adverb can be inserted into the structure of the idiom. It must be stressed that when an element of the idiom is changed, its original signification remains unchanged. Consider these three variations of the same idiom „to do not mind“:

Walikaa kiholela, hawajali hawabali [Walibora 52]
Mama mkichaa alikwenda zake, hajali wala habali [Walibora 73]
[Maapizo] yameambulua patupu. hakuyajali wala kuyabali [Rocha 14]

or the following two variations of the idiom „it is not at all your (his) concern“:

Niliona hapana haja ya kukwambia maanake hayakuhusu ndewe wala sikio. [Habwe 60]
mtu mdaku aliyejishengsha katika mambo yasiyomhusu ndewe wala sikio [Walibora 22]

From the football terminology is taken the idiom *kupiga/kupa chenga* (dribbling > avoiding)

Alimpa chenga huku mbavu zake zikiuma kwa mcheko [Habwe]
Nilimtulizia macho kitambo kizima, moyo ukinipiga chenga Mara wataka nimsemeze, mara waghairi [Rocha 1]

Like idioms, **proverbs** may be opaque and transparent. Opaque proverbs have two meanings - one literal and the other figurative. The proverbs chosen from the Kenyan texts are mostly opaque, but with varying degree of opacity.

Consider the following ones:

Alistahili sifa kwa upishi wake bora. Mgalla muue na haki umpe. [Walibora 35]
*Alijua wazi kuwa mtegemea nundu haachi kunona*¹⁰ [King'ala 30]
Kumbuka huu ndio mwanzo, na mwanzo wa ngoma ni lele (tralala)¹¹ [King'ala30]
*Lakini „radhi za mtoto zi matakoni mwa nina“ Habiba aliendelea kufikiria bintiye kila siku ichayo*¹² [King'ala 75]
*Bali walisema wavyele Mwenye kuushiriki moyo, asourudi mtima, hufa maji pondo-ima na kuondoka na kilema*¹³ [Rocha 42]

¹⁰ „A person who relies on the hump of a cow will not fail to grow fat. = If a person associates himself with the right people he cannot fail profiting from his relationship“ (Scheven 255)

¹¹ „Big things have small beginnings“ (Scheven 598)

¹² This proverb, in his more common form *Pendo za mwana zi matakoni mwa nina* (Scheven 1558), is translated by Sacleux „l'amour pour l'enfant est sur (n'a autre siège que) les genoux de sa mère“ (p.684), and is interpreted by Taylor as „Father's love for a child disappears when the mother dies“.

¹³ „He that gives full play to his desires and does not retrain his heart, will die by drowning in shallow water, and decease with disgrace.“ (Scheven 810) Cf. also Sacleux p. 612.

The most common way of introducing a proverb is to quote it entirely by the narrator or a character, often preceded by an introductory phrase such as *Waswahili wasema, wahenga wasema*. The proverb may be marked by quotation marks, italics or introduced by a colon, which emphasize its separation from the flow of the narration.

Hatimaye aliupiga moyo konde na kujiambia „Ukitaka kula nguruwe, chagua aliyenona“
[King'ala 29]

On the other hand, when the proverb, or a part of it, is introduced into the discourse more smoothly, the aesthetic pleasure increases

Walikaa kiholela hawajali hawabali, kana kwamba macho ya wapita njia yana pazia
[Walibora 52]

A great appeal is conveyed by the instances in which the proverbs are paraphrased, alluded to or further developed.

Kuinamako ndiko kuinukako ati. [Walibora 65]

is the reversal of the proverb „Kuinukako ndiko kuinamako “ Where there is standing up, there will be bending down. (Scheven n.373)

Of course, the appeal of a proverb does not depend only on the technique of incorporating it to the narrative text, but also on its literary function. The role of the proverb may be that of advancing an argument in favour of one's reasoning.

Lakini alikuwa mbali na sanda ya mbali haiziki [Walibora 18] (coined on „fimbo ya mbali haiui nyoka“)

Language

Among the morphosyntactic peculiarities of Kenyan literary Kiswahili we may mention the frequent occurrence of the marker SHA, alone or combined with ME, e.g. *hakuwa ameshaona* [Mafuta 53], *alikuwa ashajua* [Mafuta 53], *hukumu ishatolewa* [Rocha 115].

On the other hand, the so-called perfective marker KA- - *kaanza* [King'ala 19], *katwa* [Walibora 20], *alikuwa kenda* [Njama 51] or *alikuwa kaenda* [Walibora 24] - is far less frequent than in Tanzania; however, some authors use it, especially Walibora (remember that Walibora's language is a mixture of Kenyan and Tanzanian features).

Shati kaliacha nyuma. [Walibora 20]

The present tense marker -A- is preferred to -NA-, like in *kitanda chafaa kulaliwa, ...ukiwa wataka* (= ukitaka). *mwashangaa, wajifanya hukumbuki, aja sasa hivi.*

Siku hizi wanichukia sana na hata hutaki kuniona. [King'ala 25]

The 3rd person sing. form of the same prefix may be YUA- (*yuajisikia, yuakijua* [Rocha])

Wao hapa wapoteza wakati, mtu yuenda Kadude gari yuaipeleka mwendo wa ndege.
[Rocha 69]

Muradi nilikuwa na furaha kubwa kama kipofu anayetahamaki yuaona [Walibora 48]

Recurrent enough is the negative copula with its full conjugated forms, in Rocha often in the combination with the adverb *mbali*: *Kifo changu haki mbali* [Rocha 47], *mwisho wangu hau mbali* [Rocha 115], *kesho si mbali hai mbali* [Rocha 107]. And besides,

Lakini sasa nawe unakanusha hu Mungu hu Mwanawe na hu Rohoye [Walenisi 74]

Less usual are Rocha's poetic copulas *msi*, *msinacho* (both „he who does not have“) and *mlichacho* („he who has“).

Msi shukurani mwivi mkubwa wee! [Rocha 120]

Taabu wa msinacho nazielewa sana. [Rocha 12]

Wachelea kumwidhi mlichacho, lakini nina hakika matumbo yaumia. [Rocha 11]

Another common feature are suffixed interrogatives, mostly -pi for *wapi* (*fedha ulizipatapi, hayo yote yamefanyikapi* - Rocha), but also -ni for *nini* (*Afanyani hapa?* [Mafuta 34])

Like in „Kiunguja“, instead of relative morphemes of the different classes, only -O- may be used, with the elision of the preceding vowel, e.g. *alosema* instead of *aliyesema* or *wasokuwa* instead of *wasiokuwa*:

wewe ndiye ulouvunja (mkataba) [Rocha 121]

usiku ulokoleza weusi [Habwe 34]

binadamu aso na kazi [Walenisi 152]

The pluralizing suffix -NI is recurrent in the forms *soteni* and *nyoteni*

Asali ni yetu soteni [Rocha 6]

Mkangi introduces into his writings some peculiar dialectal features, like the passive verb followed by the preposition *ni* instead of *na*, to be found especially in *Mafuta*:

alikuwa akichunguzwa vikali ni mwenye mali. [Mafuta 4]

...he was observed attentively by the proprietary.

The demonstratives in -NO are used by Njama: *habari hino, jela hino, shule hino*.

The archaic suffix -ngwa „of another“, used by Rocha, is explained by Sacleux as „crase pour -a ngine „d'autrui...“:

Jipu lilipasuka msichanangwa (msichana wa watu, maskini msichana) akafa (Rocha 104)

Mhurumieni mwanamkengwa. [Rocha 2]

Rocha uses a Kimvita passive *-pawa* instead of *-pewa*.

Hata hiyo kazi ya ofisi alipawa na Amu Zaid [Rocha 111]

He also features occasionally the archaic perfect:

Mimi usingizi ulikuwa univeme (umenivamia). [Rocha 14]
Sote tulimtaama Warega. Naye halele (hakuwa amelala). [Rocha 28]

Most of Kenyan writers make use of augmentatives in *JI-* (*jilango, jibaba, jinyama*) with the plural *MIJI-* *mijisaha* (from *usaha*), *mijidamu* or *mijibunduki*, as well as diminutives in *KIJI-/VIJI-* (*kijilikizo, kijibiashara, vijisafari, vijisarafu*).

Nikatekwa na kijiusingizi cha urongo na kweli [Rocha 113]

Occasionally Kenyan texts also feature non-standard spelling like *urongo, -mwaika, mme* or *bengi*. Sometimes *W* is inserted between *U* and *A* as in *ataka kukuuwa* [Walibora 42] or *amenyakuwa* [Walibora 64]. Kimvita pronunciation is reflected in *ndoo = njoo* [Walibora 58], and *ndaa = njaa* [Walibora 66]

These Kenyan texts are very rich and colourful in **vocabulary**. Thus the semantic variety of Rocha's **verbs of speech** is remarkable. Besides the common verbs *-sema* or *-ambia* he uses, for instance, *-takalamu -kuli, -toa kalima* or *-toa kauli, -tokwa na kalima* or *-tokwa na kauli*, but also *-funua kanwa*, and for the opposite, i.e. not speaking, *-ponyokwa na uneni* and *-angukwa na mdomo*.

Nilikuli kwa sauti ya juu [Rocha 100]
Kibibi alikuwa hatoi tena kauli sasa [Rocha 115]
Ajabu ni kwamba sijafunua kanwa hata siku moja kumwambia nakusudia kwenda ng'ambo .. [Rocha 87]
Amu Zaidi alitokwa na kalima [Rocha 49]
Omar aliponyokwa na uneni [Rocha 12]
Mzee aliangukwa na mdomo hakuufungua mpaka alipoingia kitandani [Rocha 87]

Some novelists use archaic and poetic expressions (taken, maybe, from Muyaka' poems) like *kadamnasi [ya watu]* „in front of [the people]“, *kuti* „food“, *-lola (-ola)* „see“, *ози* and *ninga* „eye“, *-tongoa* „speak“, *ukwasi* „wealth“, or the adverb *ja* „like“; e.g. the latter, according to Sacleux, is „adverbe archaïque, sans emploi dans le langage de la conversation.

Amu haoni haya kuyafanya mambo haya kadamnasi ya watu hasa ikiwa ana chupa mbili tatu kichwani. [Rocha 10]
alitamani ageuke ninga aufuata huko [Habwe]
Nilikaribia mikononi mwake ja mwana mikononi mwa mamaye [Rocha 106]

Instead of the standard locative noun *mahali* (or besides it) Rocha uses *pahali* for a near place and *kwahali* for a far place:

Akawaomba wampe pahali akae. [Rocha 20]
Ametahadharishwa kuwa kwahali kwenyewe ni mbali mno. [Rocha 17]
Kuna watu fulani wanaokusanya pesa huku Uziwani na kuzipeleka kwahali kwingine
[Rocha 78]

A typically Kenyan word is *ndiposa* (ndipo sasa), used by almost all writers:

Ndiposa yule mwanamke muuzaji alipopiga mbio kasi na kumfuata [Walibora 72]

Other typically „Northern“ words are, e.g. *nina* „mother“, *-gura* -hama, *kinyangarika* „child“ (instead of the „Kamusi“’s definition: „kitu cha kudharaulika au kisicho na faida; kitu kisicho maana au kisichofaa.“) or *runinga* „television“ (coined by the poet Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany).

Haya ziliwatoka toka matumboni mwa nina zao. [Rocha 10]
wametumwa na Amina wagurishe vitu [Habwe]
Vinyangarika vilipasua vilio walipopigwa kumbo na watu wazima [King'ala 63]
huwa ni picha tu kama . . . kwenye runinga [Habwe]

Loans from Kikuyu and other Kenyan languages (Mijikenda, Kamba, occasionally Maasai) are quite frequent. Obviously the authors suppose that everybody understands such words as *irio*, *mbosho* or *githeri* (types of food), *wiyathi* ("uhuru") and so on.

Tukaanza kijibiashara chetu cha mbosho na githeri. [Rocha 19]

Only Ngugi explains less common Kikuyu terms in the text:

Nikakuta mlango wa kienyeji yaani riige umelala upande mmoja. [Ngugi 7]

and Mkangi uses a Mijikenda word, *dicho*, explaining it in a note: „Neno hili asilia yake ni Kimijikenda Nalo ni muungano wa maneno mawili: *Dii* - maana yake kufanya kitu mfululizo siku nzima. na *cho* ama *che* - mfululizo usiku wote Kwa hivyo, *dicho* ni sawa na kusema, „kila siku au kila wakati“ (p 34)

Yaonekana kuta tuzijengazo dicho ili kuwazuia watu kama hawa kuja kutuharibia starehe zetu si imara ama ndefu vya kutosha vya wao kushindwa kuziparaga [Mafuta 34]

While English borrowings are not particularly abundant, Arabic loans are plentiful and sometimes they are formally less adapted. Just two interesting examples are:

akhwati the broken plural of „sister“ (*ukht*):
Jambo Omar i analolichukia zaidi ni kuharibiwa akhwati zake [Rocha 25]

jufula Ar. terror, fright > morgue;
Maiti ilikiwa haijaletwa kutoka katika jufula hospitali ya mkoa [Rocha 114]

Many words used by Kenyan authors are absent from the extant Swahili dictionaries, like *darmadari* "around", *-deku* "observe", *marduru* "much", *mrahano* "discussion", *mtahi* "friend", *lekele* "without reason", *purufu namba* "poor, destitute people", *-tanzika* "have no option", *sini* "not at all", *suitafahum* "misunderstanding" or *horomo* "enough, stop". This last word comes from the children play "hide and seek".¹⁴

Hapa horomo ikipigwa hawa, kina dada watahitaji kupelekwa lojingi. [Rocha 9-10]
Khalifa si mtu wa kupingapinga jambo lekele. [Rocha 13]
Suitafahum baina yetu ilikuwa yapungua sasa. [Rocha 108]

Some of these words are listed only in the new Russian dictionary like *mkakati* "tactics" or *msena* "friend", others terms do occur in Kamusi, but as a different part of speech, e.g. *mtondoti* (W mtu ambaye ana tabia ya kutaka maelezo mengi au apendaye kusema sana): in Kamusi only the abstract noun *utondoti* is explained as *maelezo marefu kupita kiasi*

The Kenyan authors also make use of *lugha ya mitaani* or slang, e.g. the widespread *toto shoo* „beautiful young woman“, or some more specific local terms like *fwaa* (bure au bila ya kazi), *fogo* (tele, kwa wingi), *-foli* (fall in love), *-sare* (-toweka, -potea, au -acha), *-pangua* (-ondoka);

Peponi ni raha tupu na ni kukaa tu fwaa [Walenisi 83]
Pesa tunazo maji twapiga, wanawake fogo nini zaidi? [Rocha 10]
Kumbe hapa yuaniambia hivyo ilhali yeye mwenyewe amefoli kwa Kibibi! [Rocha 86]

Ngugi in his autobiography *Miaka 52 jela* presents even **thieves' argot**:

Namudekea pai ana kam saidi hii hebu tupangue. = Nimemwona askari akija upande huu. Hebu twendeni. [Ngugi 24]
Namudekea nongwe ana kam saidi hii na ana mnago fogo Nazidekea mimi = Namwona mjinga anakuja upande huu na ana pesa nyingi Nimeziona mimi [Ngugi 24]
Tulijichukulia ati sisi ndio werevu, tukajiita „mapanja“ na wale wengine tukawaita manongwe. [Ngugi 33]
Nilipodekea huku na huko niliona wale „manongwe“ wanakuja () Karanja alituomba tumuachi „achai huyo nongwe yaani amuibie huyo mjinga aliyekuwa anakaribia. () Karanja alipoangukia tu ile kibeti cha pesa yule „fara“ alimkamata [Ngugi 33]

Conclusion

I have presented only some features which are symptomatic for the style of Kenyan writers of the Nineties, but I hope to have proved that it exists indeed Kenyan literary language. It is no more anonymous, but has acquired its own characteristics. Or perhaps we may speak of *Kiswahili cha pwani (na Visiwani)* as opposed to *Kiswahili cha Bara*

¹⁴ Neno hili hutumiwa katika mchezo wa watoto wa *kibemasa* au *mwajificho* (hide and seek). Mtoto mmoja hujificha kisha wenzake wakasema *kibe'* naye akajibu *masa*. Mmojawao atakapo kupumzika kwa muda au kuukatiza kwa muda husema *horomo'* Huu ndio msingi wa *horomo* na mwanzo wa nahau *-piga horomo* - kuacha kwa muda. kutaka kupumzika kwa muda (Wamitila, a private letter)

References

- Chimerah, R. 1995. *Nyongo mkalia ini*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Habwe, J. 1995. *Maumbile si huja*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- King'ala, Y. 1984. *Anasa*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Mkangi, K. 1975. *Ukiwa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Mkangi, K. 1984. *Mafuta*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Mkangi, K. 1995. *Walenisi*. Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers.
- Ngugi, M.K. 1989. *Miaka 52 jela*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya.
- Njama, A.H. 1995. *Haki haizami*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- Scheven, A. 1981. *Swahili proverbs Nia zikiwa moja, kilicho mbali huja*. Washington: University Press of America.
- Walibora, K. 1996. *Siku njema*. Nairobi: Longhorn Kenya.
- Wamitila, K.W. 1997. "Reading the Kenyan Swahili prose works: A 'terra incognita' in Swahili literature." *Swahili Forum IV (=Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere 51)*: 117-125.
- Taylor, W.E. 1891. *African aphorisms or, saws from Swahili-Land*. London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. (Reprinted 1924. London: Sheldon Press).