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**SWAHILI LITERATURE IN GLOBAL EXCHANGE:
TRANSLATIONS, TRANSLATORS AND TRENDS**

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Uta Reuster-Jahn & Serena Talento

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INTRODUCTION

UTA REUSTER-JAHN & SERENA TALENTO

Swahili translations from the perspective of directionality

When we sent out the call for papers for a panel on “Translation of Literature from and into Swahili” to be held at the 30th International Swahili Colloquium at the University of Bayreuth in May 2017, we were planning to take up the conference theme of “interconnectedness of Swahili and non-Swahili linguistic and literary worlds” with regard to practices of translation. Since we ourselves were involved with Swahili translation,¹ we were excited at the idea of examining how Swahili translation practices had evolved. We felt that it was time to look at developments in translation practices and projects in the 21st century that had not yet received scholarly attention. In the past two decades, various Swahili literary works have been translated into European languages: works by Shaaban Robert and Euphrase Kezilahabi can now be found in French,² works by Peter Kareithi, Kithaka wa Mberia and Ken Walibora in English,³ and some works by Said Ahmed Mohamed, Abilatif Abdalla and Euphrase Kezilahabi in both Italian and English.⁴ Most recently, German translations of William Mkufya’s *Ua la Faraja* and Alex Banzi’s *Titi la Mkwe* were published (2016).⁵ Simultaneously, there has been a resurgence in translation of classical works from other languages into Swahili. Recent translations of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Le petit prince*, Victor Hugo’s *Le roi s’amuse*, Vaclav Havel’s *Vernisáž* (‘Vernissage’) or the retranslation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* are just a few examples.⁶

¹ Uta Reuster-Jahn translated the Swahili novel *Titi la Mkwe* (‘The daughter-in-law’s breast’, 1972) by Alex Banzi into German (Banzi 2016) and, in cooperation with her student Sabine Körner, has subtitled the Film *Sanda nyeusi* (‘The black shroud’) by Sultan Tamba (2009). They also have developed classroom material for German learners of Swahili from the film (2017). Serena Talento’s major focus of research is the social history of literary translation in Swahili. She wrote her PhD thesis on “Framing texts/framing social spaces: the conceptualization of literary translation and its discourses in three centuries of Swahili literature”, University of Bayreuth (2018).

² Robert 2010; Kezilahabi 2010.

³ Kareithi 2017; Kithaka wa Mberia 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, Walibora 2019.

⁴ Mohamed 2005 & 2013; Aiello & Gaudio 2017; Kezilahabi 2015.

⁵ Mkufya 2016; Banzi 2016.

⁶ Saint-Exupéry 2011; Hugo & Lagarce. 2013; Havel 2005; Carroll 2015.

Swahili translation is a relatively new academic field,⁷ and recent publications show increasing interest in this area of research. Ida Hadjivayanis' doctoral thesis, *Norms of Swahili Translations in Tanzania: An Analysis of Selected Translated Prose* (2011), is a good example of comprehensive research adopting clear theoretical and methodological approaches from translation studies to explore translation phenomena in the Swahili context. Hadjivayanis' work, informed by Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and Gideon Toury's norm theory, focuses on the detection of Toury's operational norms – i.e. norms directing translators' decisions pertaining to formal textual elements (Toury 1995: 58) – in selected texts translated into Swahili. She also takes into consideration the impact of historical and political context on textual choices, such as patronage, state ideology and intended audiences (*Ibid.*: 128). Tracing the evolution of norms over time, Hadjivayanis shows how in different periods translation followed the aim of either domestication or foreignisation. Some texts intended for a school audience, for example, caused translators to opt for the sanitation of language or add abridgments.

The socio-political contextualisation of translation practices is the focus of *Cultural Politics of Translation: East Africa in a Global Context* (2016) by Alamin M. Mazrui. Here, Mazrui examines translations into Swahili undertaken in the last few decades – ranging from Bible translations to literary translations from Chinese, Russian, French and Italian and to legal translation – to portray the political implications of these translations in Kenya and Tanzania. Mazrui's aim is to explore how translation contributes to the “(post)colonial condition” (*Ibid.*: 11) and how it interconnects with issues of identity and tensions in global and local power relationships. In a recent publication, Evan Maina Mwangi engages with a wide range of foundational and postcolonial theories of translation. He examines the extent to which translation is an instrument of cosmopolitanism in postcolonial African literature. His *Translation in African contexts: Postcolonial texts, queer sexuality, and cosmopolitan fluency* (2017) examines textual intervention or domestication which functions as a political stand against the discrimination of foreigners and minorities, including sexual minorities. He scrutinizes a wide variety of works, including East African translations of Shakespeare, writings by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, and Amandina Lihamba's stage adaptation of Sembene Ousmane's *Le Mandat*. Mwangi's unique contribution is bringing queer theory to the study of Swahili translations.

With their cultural approaches (post-colonial and post post-colonial), the above works have helped conceptualise a field of research: translation practices in the Swahili context. Their

⁷ For instance, at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam, there are courses on translation theory and practice with a focus on Swahili at the BA, MA and PhD level. At the Centre for Translation and Interpretation at the University of Nairobi there are courses on translation practice with Swahili at the MA level. In Department of Kiswahili and Other African Languages at Moi University, Eldoret there are courses on the translation of literary texts in Swahili at the BA level.

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contributions are relevant for the field of general Translation Studies on the one hand and Swahili Studies on the other. In particular, they provide perspectives on translation theorisations and practices with regard to African language texts and on the impact of translations on the development of national literatures.

Since Swahili translation studies is a young field of inquiry, we opted for a broad approach in our panel call, inviting contributions on topics ranging from translation as method, process and experience to its political and historical relevance at the interface of transnational literary exchanges. We suggested exploring the visibility and impact of Swahili translations in the literary world, along with the related topic of translation's role in literatures and cultures affected by power relations between literary communities. We also wanted to draw attention to the role and situation of translators and the multiplicity of their transfer practices with regard to forms, genres and procedures, including self-translation. While we made no restrictions as to the direction of translation, we did propose the question of directionality itself as a topic for our panel. Interestingly, however, most of the papers at the panel were concerned with translation from Swahili into other languages, and the same applied to papers submitted after the conference. We welcomed this focus on translation from Swahili into other languages as this direction, in contrast to translation from other languages into Swahili, had not been given much attention before. Historically, translation of literary works from Swahili into other languages served a different interest and purpose than that in the other direction. In colonial times, literary works were a source of ethnographic knowledge. Today, the interest of the reader has shifted to foreign forms of aesthetics and literary content, often springing from a concern with unjust power relations. The post-colonial situation in the Swahili-speaking area is, however, different from that of other African regions with regard to language policy. Tanzania made Swahili a main pillar of its nation-building project. Tanzanian cultural politics emphasised the dignity of the African cultural tradition and African languages. In Kenya, where cultural politics were less centred on African traditions, Swahili still played a role as *lingua franca* and school subject. Swahili authors, therefore, do not primarily write back to the empire but address their fellow country people. This is reflected in their choices of topic, discourse, style and the way they engage with their readers. It is therefore necessary to do research on the translation, publishing and reception of translated Swahili literary works in the North and East; fortunately, a number of contributions in this volume pave the way.

The articles in this volume offer insights into translation from Swahili into other languages in Europe (Aiello, Garnier, Gaudio, Reuster-Jahn), the USA (Koenings), Russia (Gromov), China (Lei), and Egypt (Salah). They also consider translation practices in Kenya (Gromov) and Tanzania (Böhme, Gromov). Thus these papers bring together reflections on translation from and into Swahili from across four continents. They adopt a micro-perspective, discussing approaches to translation, strategies and experiences, but also offer a macro-perspective with systematic

overviews of translations from and into Swahili in various countries (Aiello, Gromov, Lei, Reuster-Jahn). The discussion of translation activities in certain countries in both directions (Lei: translations from and into Swahili in China; Salah: translations from and into Arabic in Egypt) offers an intriguing picture of cultural exchange through translation.

From *tendi* to commented movies: The political and literary aspects of translation

Translation from other languages into Swahili has traditionally received much more scholarly attention than the opposite direction. Such translations have a much longer history, starting from the early contact with the Arabs and Islam. Translations of poetry dealing with Muslim traditions and history were instrumental in bringing the new ideology and dogma of Islam to the East African coast (Shariff 1991: 39, Zukhov 2004: 7).⁸ Translations from Arabic sources played a crucial role in the formation of Swahili classical poetry (Abdulaziz 1996, Dammann 1940, Harries 1962, Knappert 1971, Shariff 1991) and also made an impact on Swahili oral literature (Geider 2007). In her contribution to this volume, Annachiara Raia discusses the linguistic, literary and cultural journey of the *Qisāṣ al-Anbiyā'* literature and the Qur'ān to the Swahili coast and their relation to three Swahili classical *tendi* on prophets dating from the 19th century. She applies Gérard Genette's concept of palimpsest and undertakes a close reading of the Arabic Muslim and Swahili literary works to reveal their textual relationship. In so doing, she not only fleshes out the palimpsestuous character of Swahili poetry but also points to *tafsiri*, 'translation', as a form of adaptation and expansion, through which Swahili poets appropriate these stories and forge them into a new narrative discourse. Raia's paper shows how translation is used for specific reasons – in this case to assert the nature of creativity in the Swahili poetic realm.

Aesthetic agendas and ideological underpinnings have historically invested translation practices in and from the Swahili context. In the colonial period, translations from English undertaken within the framework of the Inter-territorial Language Committee aimed to support the colonial project of modernisation and the shaping of a modern Swahili literature (Harries 1970, Ruhumbika 1983, Mazrui 2007: 123-157, Geider 2008, Hadjivayanis 2011). Significantly, they also reflected the uneven power relations between East Africa and foreign powers (see Mazrui 2016) and played a role in the intellectual construction of the colonial project (see Talento 2017). In the post-colonial period, East Africans took translation into their own hands and used it for ideological purposes in the context of national politics (cf. Aiello Traore 2013, Talento 2018). Most prominently, Tanzanian president Julius K. Nyerere, with his translations of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1963, revised 1969) and *The Merchant of Venice* (1969), made a strong effort to validate the Swahili language and contribute to the establishment of a national literary corpus in Swahili (Mazrui 1996,

⁸ For further insights on the role of *tendi* translation as a symbolic resource to obtain prestige, see Talento 2014.

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Talento 2014: 57-59). This was also a period in which translations into Swahili were done from Russian and especially from Chinese, reflecting the political ties between Tanzania and these communist countries (Gromova 2004, Mazrui 2016: 44-53). In nascent political spaces and authoritarian political contexts, translation has often been an instrument aimed at promoting the national culture (Sapiro 2014: 87). As Lawrence Venuti underscores: “Nationalist movements have frequently enlisted translation in the development of national languages and cultures, especially national literatures” (Venuti 2013: 117). The entrenchment of national agendas and translation practices is addressed in two contributions to this volume. Mikhail Gromov and Zhao Lei both show how translation activities can be affected by national cultural policies. For instance, the translation policies of Russia and China changed after the end of the Cold War to ones that emphasise cultural equality (Mazrui 2016: 44-53). In one of his contributions to our volume, Gromov gives an account of translation activities in the Soviet Union and later Russia. In the Soviet Union, cultural policy aimed at acquainting the reading public with the literature of post-colonial countries through translation into Russian. In the case of Tanzania, works by Shaaban Robert were chosen for this purpose, in addition to Swahili folktales. Following the end of communism in the 1990s, translation activities declined but were revived in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, interest is limited and only short translated texts appear occasionally in Russian scholarly journals.

Lei’s overview of translation in China shows for the first time to Western readers that there has been a great deal of translation from Swahili into Chinese. In China, translation in both directions was driven by the state. According to Lei, the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing launched its Swahili department in August 1964 and employed graduates of Swahili from China and Tanzanian experts to translate Chinese texts and books into Swahili; the aim here was to spread communist political content. However, after the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1976, funding decreased sharply and with it politically motivated translation activities (see figure 1 in Lei). In a contrasting development, translations from Swahili into Chinese commenced in the late 1970s, and China became a hotspot for the translation of Swahili works, including novels by Shaaban Robert, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Shafi Adam Shafi and William Mkufya, as well as popular fiction by Eddie Ganzel and Elvis Musiba. Twenty-six major works were translated and published by a handful of translators with high Swahili proficiency. Among those translators, Ge Gongshang and Cai Linxiang stand out as most prolific. However, as Lei points out, the situation in China changed after 1989 under the new market economy in the country and as a result of China’s acceding to the Berne Convention on intellectual property rights in 1992. In 1993 the Swahili department of the Foreign Languages Press, which had facilitated all the translations, was closed down by a government directive. Since then, no translations have been done, neither into nor from Swahili. Nevertheless, the translated books continue to serve as an important source of information for students of East African politics and culture. Lei’s article itself is a work of translation, as the

author writes in Swahili while his mother tongue is Chinese. A further contributor, Alaa Salah from Egypt, has also written his article in Swahili, which he studied and now teaches as a foreign language.

The above examples demonstrate that translations are affected by the social and political context into which they are injected. However, translations are not solely affected by ideological, historical and social constraints. Literary constraints, or the determination to conform to or rebel against the dominant poetics, also play a role in the selection of texts to be imported and the strategies to translate them (Lefevere 1992: 8). In this volume, Gromov makes an argument about the role of self-translation – an under-researched topic in the Swahili context – when discussing the translation of Kezilahabi’s poems from English into Swahili by the poet himself. Gromov perceives this action as a political act or deliberate stance to bring about a revolution in poetry (in a broader revolutionary framework outside the literary context). He also links it to the national rhetoric of “going down to the people” in a democratic effort. Kezilahabi’s literary agenda – taking a literary form deemed elitist to a popular level – is interwoven with his socialist political orientation. Gromov’s focus on self-translation is one example of how the articles in our volume add new aspects and topics to the existing literature on translation in Swahili. Claudia Böhme’s contribution points to an emerging and promising field of inquiry, namely, the role and practices of film translation. Her article zooms in on the translation strategies of a film commentator, or veejay, in his rendering of a science fiction film, an episode of *Star Wars*. In mediating the strange universe of that film, the veejay draws on various rhetorical resources when combining translation with storytelling and commentary. In identifying the commentator’s strategies, Böhme reveals the tension between delivering the peculiarities of an unfamiliar cultural universe and the strategies of mediation employed to make this universe closer to its recipient. In this effort, Böhme discusses the role of the film commentator as ethnodramaturg and brings translation issues to the lively field of popular culture and film industry.

Textualities, subjectivities and the visibility of translators and translation

Textual analysis is a recurring concern in the contributions to this volume. The contributions by Flavia Aiello, Xavier Garnier, Roberto Gaudio, Nathalie Arnold Koenings, and Uta Reuster-Jahn not only describe translation projects but also offer readers a glimpse into the complex and multilayered ruminations of translators. Although engaging in translation from Swahili into very different linguistic and literary contexts (Italian, French, German, American English), translators’ practices and approaches to texts have many connecting points. Aiello, Garnier and Gaudio conceptualise translation as an exercise in understanding, one which enables the translator to deeply grasp the essence, mystery and aesthetics of texts. This perception is at the core of Gaudio’s contribution; he proposes translation as a governing principle in knowing and analysing a text. His

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contribution is a detailed discussion of his translation of a poem by Euphrase Kezilahabi into Italian and a poem by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi into Swahili. In both cases he is privileging a sensualistic approach to text and translation. Gaudioso comes up with the notion of translation as a bodily and cognitive experience, where one deeply understands the text by perceiving it through one's flesh and consciousness. Gaudioso's contribution critically brings together thinkers from different intellectual contexts, epochs and languages, ranging from Euphrase Kezilahabi, Ebrahim Hussein, Wolfgang Kayser, Gabriele Frasca, Elemire Zolla, Roman Jakobson, and Friedrich Nietzsche. He unveils how these thinkers can speak to the Swahili context, but also the other way round, how the Swahili context can broaden the philosophical conceptualisations of these thinkers.

The challenges of the translation process, especially with regard to prosody and dialectical features, are at the core of Aiello's contribution. Her article discusses problems and choices in the translation of a selection of Abdilatif Abdalla's poems. She also frames translation as a vehicle to recognise the distinctive character of Abdalla's language and convey its local and universal dimensions. In addition to discussing specific problems of his experience of translating Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and *Mzingile* into French, Garnier describes the impact of the translator's subjectivity and the audience's expectations on translation process. Koenings' contribution on her translation projects of rendering a Swahili story by Mlenge Fanuel Mgende into American English and an English-language short story by Tope Folarin into Swahili also provides us with considerations of the translator's subjectivity and historicity. In her discussion of the linkages between language uses, class registers, and socio-political realities and understandings, Koenings highlights the translator's different position towards, and history with, each target language, as well as her aesthetic and political commitment towards each. She shows how these in turn determine the cross-cultural negotiation of the process of mediation and determine the host of opportunities in a translated text. Her detailed account of the genesis of her translations reveals that translators are historical subjects situated in a specific historical context and that translation is the result of the individual and social history of its agent(s). Moreover, she emphasises through her translation practice the importance of cooperation with native speakers, whose advice she seeks. The papers by Aiello, Garnier, Gaudioso, Koenings and Reuster-Jahn all have in common a preoccupation with the question of how to deal with cultural distance. Aware of the power imbalances among the languages and literatures they are working with in the system of world literary exchanges, they engage in a translation practice that places foreignisation at the forefront. In their translation choices, strategies to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the source texts serve to balance the "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values" (Venuti 1995: 20), which has characterised much of the translation of literature from the Global South (Spivak 1993, Venuti 1995).

These in-depth discussions on the negotiations, intersubjectivities and contextualisations of translation processes reveal the growing importance of translators as major agents for translations, who propose or select works for translation and who stimulate, conduct and sometimes publish translations, even in the face of discouragement. These translators are often committed to promoting the visibility of East African literatures and helping draw attention to neglected literatures in African languages in their recipient contexts. As Aiello (this volume) comments, one reason she decided to translate Abdalla's poem was the "desire to help Italian readers get a 'taste' of Swahili poetry". The current scant interest in literatures in African languages is a frequent complaint in the articles in this volume, emerging above all in the contributions by Aiello, Gromov, Koenings, Lei and Reuster-Jahn. From this perspective, the volume engages with current debates on the role of translation to promote the visibility of texts, languages and authors on the international market (Casanova 2002). For many authors from the African continent, translation is a gateway to be included, as Said Khamis pleaded, in "the world's literary map" (Khamis 2015: 62). The predominance of one direction of translation – from or into Swahili – over the other has changed over time and with it the quantity of translated works and the approaches of the involved agents, such as authors, translators and publishers. Nevertheless, the issue of visibility affects translations in both directions, relating not only to international audiences but also to local ones. Gromov's discussion of Kithaka wa Mberia's authorised translation from Swahili into English illustrates the power of translation to secure a broader audience and increase the readership of his poems. In accordance with our aim of increasing the visibility of Swahili works, this volume is enriched by a poem by Nassor Hilal Kharusi, a Zanzibari contemporary poet, along with an English translation by Koenings.

Translations in the context of markets, publishing houses and academia

In the literary exchanges from and into Swahili, it is important to recognise the dual character of literature, including translated literature, as a work of art and as a commodity that has to compete with other such commodities on a market (Bourdieu 1993). The success or failure of a translated book on the book market of the receiving language depends very much on its consecration by those who possess the cultural, symbolic and social capital. If those who have accumulated prestige in the form of "a name" in the field of literature deny a translated literature consecration, it will be very hard for it to find a space in the receiving literature. What emerges from contributions to this volume is that the neo-liberal condition has led to a withdrawal of relevant publishers from translated Swahili literature (Koenings, Reuster-Jahn). Garnier (this volume) also points to the fact that translations from African literatures in the post-colonial context "are not subject to concerted editorial strategies". This has contributed to the emergence of a new type of translator in Western

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countries, who, enabled by new digital publication strategies, have become their own publishers (Reuster-Jahn).

The article by Reuster-Jahn on the translation of novels and plays into German reveals how much they are affected by social, political and economic conditions. Translations of contemporary Swahili works into German have to be examined in the context of the broader market segment of African literature translated into German, which is marred by relatively little interest from potential readers. Reuster-Jahn outlines the history of the translation of contemporary Swahili literature into German, with a focus on the agents of translation, such as translators, publishers, critics, and promotional agencies. She shows that, due to publishers' recent lack of interest in Swahili literature, the role of translators has changed profoundly over the last ten years. Enabled by digital technology and new publishing formats, they have taken over classical publishers' tasks. Still, even if translators manage to publish their translated works, the problem of how to reach an audience and create a space for Swahili literature in German-speaking countries remains to be solved. The challenge of getting translations from Swahili published is also evident in Koenings' article on translation from Swahili into English in the United States.

Market constraints also affect the publication of translations from other languages into Swahili. The contemporary Swahili publishing context favours the publication of texts which promise an economic return, and this is still only the case for books that are part of the school syllabus. Nevertheless, important translation projects have been sponsored by foreign institutions for cultural relations. During the early 2000s, for instance, the Russian-Tanzanian Cultural Centre (Kituo cha Utamaduni cha Urusi na Tanzania) in Dar es Salaam organised literary translations of Russian classics and published them with the Catholic Ndanda Mission Press (Reuster-Jahn 2008: 111). The series, entitled *Maktaba ya fasihi ya Kirusi* ('Russian literature library'), comprises prose and poetry by the Russian writers Pushkin and Gogol, in addition to Russian folktales (Gromova 2004: 121-122). These literary exchanges played a role in maintaining Tanzanian-Russian relationships after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the weakening of Russian influence over Tanzania (Mazrui 2016: 49). Important translation projects could also be afforded by publishers with enough economic and symbolic capital. Recently Mkuki na Nyota published a notable number of works translated into Swahili. The translation of the novel *The Search* by Nobel prize winner Naguib Mahfouz was published in 2004, and Marita Conlon-Mckenna's *Under the Hawthorn Tree* in 2010. The first unabridged translation into Swahili of the *Arabian Nights* was published in nine volumes between 2004 and 2010. It was done by Hassan Adam, former Swahili lecturer at the Institute of African Languages at the University of Cologne in Germany, via the German and English versions of the text. Moreover, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le petit prince* was translated into Swahili by Philipp Kruse in cooperation with Walter Bgoya, Mkuki na Nyota's director. Entitled *Mwana*

mdogo wa mfalme, the translation was published in 2011 and made Swahili one of the more than 250 languages into which the world classic has to date been translated.

Of course, the constraints of the market do not similarly affect academic translation projects, which have been playing and will continue to play a major role in advancing the translation of Swahili literature, and its significance as a subject of research. The involvement of academia in translation practices has a long history. During the early colonial period, translations from other languages into Swahili were done primarily to obtain linguistic data and reading material for language instruction, along with ethnographic knowledge about the Waswahili of the coast (Brode 1905, Büttner 1894, Seidel 1896, Steere 1889, Velten 1907). From the second half of the 19th century, the collection, transcription and translation of African texts occupied a special place in the development and establishment of African Studies on the European continent. With their translations, W.E. Taylor, Alice Werner, William Hichens and Ernst Damman greatly contributed to bringing Swahili literature to the attention of Western academia. For a long time, translation remained a linguistic and literary exercise within the academic realm, and teaching often stimulated translations from Swahili. Elena Bertoncini Zubkovà, professor of Swahili Language and Literature at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, was an untiring promoter of translation from Swahili into Italian. Starting in the late 1970s, she translated many Swahili works into Italian as well as into Slovak, her mother tongue, and also inspired her students to translate such works in the context of their theses. Flavia Aiello, her student and later her successor at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” was among the first to start a scholarly discourse on the challenges of translation and the strategies to overcome them (Aiello Traore 2005). Most recently, Aiello and Gaudioso conducted a project to translate poetry by Euphrase Kezilahabi and Abdillatif Abdalla (Aiello & Gaudioso 2017). In one of her contributions to our volume, Aiello offers readers a list of Bertoncini’s translations and a list of the – regrettably – unpublished translated texts by students at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. In Russia, too, translation has been done and published in the context of Swahili Studies at universities. As Gromov’s overview of translations in Russia shows, it was an academic teacher, Professor Andrei Zhukov, who was the driving force behind those projects. His translation work and that of the students he inspired focused on Shaaban Robert, the founding father of Swahili literature, who straddled tradition and modernity. The picture is more diverse regarding France, with translators from in- and outside academia; the most recent translations, however, were done by scholars Xavier Garnier (Kezilahabi 2010) and Nathalie Carré.⁹

⁹ In 2014 Carré translated *Safari za Wasuaheli*, edited by Carl Velten and published in 1901, as *De la côte aux confins. Récits de voyageurs swahili*. Paris: éditions du CNRS.

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Salah's article on translations from and into Arabic in Egypt also shows the role of academia in Egypt's attempt to revive the old ties between the Arab world and the East African coast through the cultural exchange of translation. Accordingly, translation activities take place at the National Centre for Translation in Cairo, officially launched in 2006, and at the Translation Centre of the Islamic Al-Azhar University, established in 2016. The translators are mostly teachers from the Al-Azhar University. According to Salah, translation of Islamic texts is done from Arabic into Swahili, while the realm of literature sees both directions of translation. The years 2005 to 2015 saw the translation from Swahili into Arabic of five novels, one children's book and a history of Kiswahili.¹⁰

Concluding remarks

The contributions in our volume show an impressive array of new topics, approaches and perspectives on Swahili translation practices, and we hope that they will stimulate further discussion and contribute to the development of Swahili translation studies as a field of inquiry. Simultaneously, these contributions increase the visibility of translators: up to now there have been only a few accounts by translators from and into Swahili about their translation strategies and experiences, which they gave in prefaces to translated works. This volume reveals the multi-layered practices and particular passions of these translators – their efforts, struggles and negotiations in fulfilling their role as cultural mediators in a context coloured by uneven power relations. From the contributions in our volume emerges clearly the problem of outreach of translated works. In many cases, translations remain trapped in the confines of the academic institutions in which they were published. In other cases, market forces often filter out Swahili literature because of the unequal allocation of resources to carry out a translation project and publicise it effectively. One of the goals of translation activities described in this volume is to achieve literary exchanges free of power imbalances and historical preconceptions. Swahili is indeed an independent linguistic and cultural universe with a lot to offer to readers worldwide – and the translators in this volume are its unique and committed ambassadors.

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¹⁰ Shihabuddin Chiraghdin and Mathias E. Mnyampala's *Historia ya Kiswahili*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

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