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## Chapter 1

### **Early 20th Century Published Swahili Prose Texts And The Europeanization of Swahili Prose Genres**

The Swahili prose that was being written by Swahili speakers at the very beginning of the 20th century, was, as one might suspect, very much like that found in the latter part of the 19th century. What assumed so prominent a role in the development of Swahili letters and what added a novel circumstance to its literary history during this early period, and indeed to the language itself, however, was the increasing European interest in both the language and the literature, an event, for the most part, manifestly not the result of any inherent aesthetic value Europeans found in either, but rather for more practical, utilitarian reasons. No clearer monument to this European interest in Swahili can be recorded than the existence of the many, however small, mission printing houses that sprang up throughout East Africa at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Thus at the outset, one must make a distinction between the prose these presses published and the prose that was still being written by Swahilis in the traditional manner ( by hand ), and then privately circulated. This corpus of prose remained largely unaffected by European influence for some time. It might very well be claimed, therefore, that there was at this time the very beginning of a bifurcation, a split between the traditional

Swahili prose, existing as it always had somewhat esoterically--to the European especially--and a new, highly visible one which was being subsidized, and in very many cases, even written by Europeans. It is this curious circumstance--two Swahili prose traditions existing side by side, each to affect the other, that may be seen as the signal feature of this early part of the literary history of Swahili prose in the 20th century. This in turn can be dealt with in two broad categories: nonfictional prose in both traditions and then developments in early prose fiction that brought to birth a broader based tradition by taking elements from both.

The Swahili prose that was produced by mission and then government presses during this period was certainly affected by a number of political circumstances. By 1900, it will be remembered, the British had declared Zanzibar, Kenya and Uganda protectorates. Sultan Barghash had died a broken man in Zanzibar in 1888; his nephew, Seyyid Hamud, now ruled; Sir Charles Eliot had only just arrived in Kenya in 1901 while only a year before Sir Harry Johnson had executed the famous Uganda agreement with the Kabaka of Buganda. In Tanganyika, Count Adolf von Gotzen, incensed at the brutality of the former administration, had begun to institute humanitarian reforms, but by July of 1905 fighting had broken out at Kilwa and the carefully planned Maji Maji uprising had begun. By 1919, after the war, Germany had lost of all what was German East Africa by a special mandate by the League of Nations, who, in turn, granted the greater part of the territory to the British.

Throughout these years, and indeed to the formation of the East African Swahili Committee, known first as the Inter-Territorial Language ( Swahili ) Committee in 1930, European missionaries had continued to refine their notions about Christianity in Africa, ideas developed in some cases from over fifty years' experience in East Africa. They had soon realized that no colonial government had, or would have for some time to come, the means to undertake any form of organized education. They, on the other hand, had recognized early in their work that the school was one of the most effective conduits of their evangelism; thus by 1900, it should not be surprising to note, there were burgeoning mission schools scattered throughout all of East Africa, often teaching children how to read and write using their own vernaculars as well as Swahili; however, it soon became apparent--given the linguistic diversity of these areas--that a lingua franca was needed as a " church language," one, as Professor M. H. Abdulaziz noted, that would " provide an intertribal integrative factor that would help to build the new community of Christians, just as it had done for Islam." And because large missions like the Universities Mission to Central Africa, begun after Livingstone's famous appeal in the Senate cHouse at Cambridge in 1857, had been in Zanzibar as early as 1864 and were already familiar with Swahili, having already translated and published religious tracts in the 19th century, following Krapf's Biblical translations with Ali bin Mohedin in 1844, Swahili became the natural choice.

Of the nonfictional prose published in Swahili by these mission presses at the beginning of the 20th century, it should

be mentioned, that these texts, all written or translated by Europeans, were either intended as school text books or as religious works whose manifest intent was evangelistic. By 1930 there were more than fifty translations of books of the Bible, no fewer than nineteen catechisms, twenty-seven hymn books and a significant number of other religious works, or semi-religious works such as histories of the church. Those written for school use included four latin grammars ( all published before 1925 ), two geography primers, seven arithmetic texts, one book on natural science, two on teaching, and two on hygiene, this list being illustrative rather than exhaustive for there were many others as well.

The colonial governments, too, began to realize the importance of a common language in East Africa, especially in regards to their political administration of these areas. By 1914 in Tanganyika the German akida and jumbe system of headmen was functioning through the medium of both spoken and written Swahili. But well before this, the Germans had established schools in Tanganyika especially to teach Swahili and Swahili customs to their junior foreign officers; in Berlin the well known Oriental Seminar, Seminar fur Orientalische Sprachen, was founded at the university and scholars like Velten, Buttner, and Seidel were gathering materials for the course. Somewhat later, the British produced translations of the War Office Manuals for use with the King's African Rifles, and various tracts on citizenship. What exists extant of these two traditions, the traditional Swahili and the European, from this early period,

shows certain illustrative stages of genre development which may also be seen on a more abstract level as a metaphor for these two cultures.

Of the Swahili prose subsidized by European interests, or actually written by Europeans, one may, with advantage, divide this rather remarkable corpus of literature into two broad categories: religious and secular, the former being the most prominent and having the most effect on subsequent Swahili genre development during the early years of the 20th century, although the extent to which European religious writing in Swahili affected the broader Swahili prose tradition has, for the most part, not been measured, nor even much considered by scholars of Swahili literature. It is nonetheless an historical circumstance of some moment that there was, at more than one point in Swahili literary history, more books in print written by Europeans in Swahili than there were written by indigenous Swahili speakers either privately circulated or commercially published.

The Christian milieu in East Africa at the turn of the century bears noting then for the missionary enterprise, from which a great deal of influential writing in Swahili egressed, is obviously an important one, too long unrecognized. In 1900, there were some 5000 professing Christians in Kenya out of a total population of 2,900,00. Of these Christians, 2700 were Catholics, 300 were Protestants, and 2000 were Anglicans; however, the tribal religionists numbered 2,779,700 which accounted for 95.8% of the population. The Muslims numbered some 100,00 and accounted for only 3.4% of the population. Thus one can see at the outset that Christianity was a very small

minority, .2% of the population, at the turn of the century. Out of Tanzania's 3,800,00 at the turn of the century, Christians accounted for 2.4% or 92,000 adherents. Of these Christians, 70,000 were Roman Catholics, 15,000 were Protestants and 7,000 were Anglicans; however once again one finds that out of the total population 3,439,900, or 90.5% were still tribal religionists. The Muslims accounted for 7% of the population, or 266,000 people. Thus one may see that in East Africa at this time the gains made by Christianity were modest. The 20th century, however, would show great gains for a number of reasons.

In Kenya by the early 1900s Christianity had already firmly established itself if not in numbers, in territory. Missionary priests were evident in Lamu as early as the 16th century and Augustinian friars in Mombasa; Anglican activity in Mombasa can be traced to the arrival of the Church Missionary Society's missionary, J. L. Krapf, in 1844; British Methodists appeared along with Scottish Presbyterians in the early 1890s and the African Inland Mission in 1895. Within a few years, the popularity of Christianity had increased remarkably. In many cases, missions reported doubling and even trebling their numbers of converts in one year.

To account for this sudden increase in popularity one might proffer many explanations. One of the most convincing arguments, offered by Roland Oliver in his The Missionary Factor in East Africa, is that this increase was due to "the pressure of a new social order which provided the conditions under which Christianity could expand." He explains that, as an illustration

of this idea, one may point to the Church Missionary Society work in Kikuyu in 1909: here one could find that many of the Kikuyu who sought knowledge of Christianity and of reading and writing, which were sometimes made obligatory for baptism, did so for economic gain, for with this knowledge and this professed belief, they could very often get high paying jobs on newly established European farms.

It was also true, of course, that the parochialism of tribal religions was accented by a comparison to Christianity, all of which further highlighted the fragility of many tribal traditional beliefs. Oliver concludes that:

Evidence concerning the nature of the Christian expansion shows rather that it was the parochialism of tribal religions which proved their undoing--the fact that basic monotheism had been so overlaid by the cult of tribal ancestors and the sanctification of tribal customs, that belief was shattered by the first impact of wider-than-tribal government. ( p.208)

The pagan East African very soon--after seeing his chief perhaps imprisoned, or European soldiers near his village, new taxes being levied, new medicines being dispensed--realized that there was underfoot a new social, economic and religious order that his traditional beliefs were unable to accomodate. There was a new system of thought, in short, that challenged his. And thus the lure of temporal gain was made all the more attractive for what the new " wisdom " offered was seemingly a complete package: a better world in this life and the next.

The Catholic plantation system offers a useful example of such a claim. From the original freed-slave settlements, came

this highly successful organization . The idea was a simple one: the mission would be planned around, or rather grow out of, a planation which would employ local families who, once solidly converted, would be replaced with others who, in turn, once they too had become good Christians and had a firm economic standing, would be sent out into the community as examples for others to follow. So a pattern was begun, encouraging an economic as well as a spiritual allegiance to the mission. Naturally only the best Christians, the most literate, the most useful, got the best jobs.

The colonial governments, as one might suppose, very much liked these mission enterprises since these missions not only established an economic base in these areas which could be taxed, and with more ease ,be governed, but also produced crops and a kind of infrastructure into which a European social order could be infused. The mission schools also created a class of trustworthy, intelligent, literate clerks and minor officals who would help administer their colonies.

Curiously enough, however, at the same time that Christianity was increasing in its popularity and the colonial governments were taking advantage the fruits of the various mission enterprises, one finds a corresponding expansion of Islam during the same period. One might argue that indirectly this Islamic expansion was the result of the very thing that made Christianity both popular and useful. The Europeans, European missionaries and government officials, gave to the Muslim Swahilis an unmistakable prestige by giving them the most sought after jobs. It was



apparent to even the most casual observer that the Europeans favored the Swahili. Indeed, Sir Arthur Hardinge, in his report on the East Africa Protectorate, claimed that Arabs and Swahilis were " the only element with any comprehension of politics, justice or government." One sees during this period , nearly at every level, Swahilis throughout the interior, as well as on the coast of course, who were skilled craftsmen, traders, minor officials, **akidas**, all usually trained at Dar es Salaam or Tanga. It seemed, and for good reason, that whenever one wanted something there was always a Swahili to go through. Again, to cite Oliver's conclusions: " The Swahili were the most visible instruments of the new authority which was shaking the foundations of his [ the African's ] world." It was the Muslim Swahili who sold Western goods, who acted as supervisors on the railway, who shared an Islamic brotherhood with other Africans, Arabs and orientals. By 1910, Islam had become an enormous threat to Christianity and prompted several conferences. Indeed it may be argued that this threat brought many missions into politics and caused a unification that otherwise probably would not have occurred, assuming, as the missions did, that a Muslim East Africa would be an anti-European East Africa. The famous Kikuyu conferences of 1913 and 1918 bear witness to these concerns.

In sum, the Edwardian missionary at the turn of the century in East Africa was a curious figure who was able to legislate custom, arbitrate law, control the economy of whole areas, run schools and medical centers; he controlled what people read--and perhaps unwittingly what they would read for years to come--how

they would pronounce and write Swahili and so on. Thus there can be little doubt that the history of many of these missionary figures, their affiliations and growth, as well as, of course, the prose they produced in Swahili, are more than relevant to any understanding of early 20th century Swahili prose developments.

While there was, during this period, what Oliver described as the "zenith" of missionary influence in East Africa ( up to the First World War ), with mission stations being founded and run by varying numbers of denominations such as Catholics, Anglicans, any number of protestant sects: Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostals of a variety of denominations and many others, it is beyond the scope of this modest volume to try to document all the missionary work, even in regards to translations of Christian texts in Swahili; however, as an illustration, which may serve as a suggestion of both the volume and quality of the prose produced by this unusual early 20th century population of writers of Swahili, it will be useful to examine the major missionary enterprises and representative Swahili works that emanated from these missions. These may be seen to be three: Catholic, Anglican and protestant, putting to one side the question of Islamic missionary activity for the moment. And of these three, certainly, in terms of the prose written in Swahili by them, the Catholics and the Anglicans seemed to have made the greatest effort, and subsequently the greatest impact, on the course of modern Swahili prose writing and it is to them and their Swahili prose that attention need now be turned.

The Christian faith in East Africa may be dated from Vasco da Gama in the 15th century, but a continuous, organized effort on the part of the Catholics did not begin until Bishop Amandus R. Maupoint, from St. Denis, Reunion, first, having taken an interest in the coast, planned a mission in Zanzibar in 1858. Two years later, on December 22, 1860, three priests, six sisters, some craftsmen and a French naval surgeon sailed into Zanzibar and approached Sultan Seyyid Majid. The latter readily agreed to support their work:

...to look after the sick, to nourish the poor and to teach their converts a useful trade...

By 1862, a roman Decree had raised the mission to the status of Apostolic Prefecture ( of Zanguebar ) to be supported by the only society with sufficient missionary experience to undertake this, La Congregation du Esprit, two of whom arrived at Zanzibar on June 16, 1863 ( Horner and Baur ). It will be remembered that the Holy Ghost Fathers " Campaign for Christianity " in Africa began in 1779 in Senegal and that they had also already had extensive experience in Gabon ( 1844 ) and in the Gambia ( 1849 ). Soon the stolid milieu on Zanzibar proved to be too confining for the mission, especially in regards to the increasing freed-slave population it was supporting; subsequently, it was decided that a " freedom village " was needed on the mainland to give these people " a suitable atmosphere to live a normal Christian life." Thus, having explored all the country which lay between Mzizima and Tanga, and already having rejected the Sultan's suggestion of settling in Dar es Salaam, Father Horner chose

Bagamoyo as the village site. From here the mission flourished in numbers, territory and responsibilities. Their goal, in creating a more "suitable atmosphere," was to build a truly Christian village (later called St. Joseph's Village) where their ex-slaves could lead "an agricultural life," and a settlement from which their Christian campaign could be supplied. The village was described by Stanley, who did the Fathers no favors elsewhere with his journalism, in what became a widely read text, Through the Dark Continent (1879), as a village that

...comprises at the moment 60 houses, all constructed on the same model...and the villagers earn their living as farmers, gardeners, carpenters, cabinet-makers, tailors, bricklayers and even as printers.

All were taught the principles of hard work, beginning with prayers at 5:45 a.m. and ending with night prayers in common at 8. It was Father Horner's conviction that

Je suis convaincu que le succes des missions africaines dependra en grande partie de l'amour et du respect pour le travail...le travail auquel on joint l'instruction elementaire et la connaissance du christianism...

It may give one pause to wonder at the strength of the moral foundation upon which a Christian society rested that was formed in the main by ransomed slaves. It will be remembered that it was the practice of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Zanzibar from the very beginning of their mission to visit, with some regularity, the slave market to purchase slaves. This was done naturally to gain their freedom rather than to engage their servitude;

nonetheless, the Fathers were, upon several occasions, accused of "slaving," a charge that understandably they took some offense to. It may also be noted in passing that the numbers of converts, who were counted as such by the mission, who were actually ransomed slaves, was not insignificant, Stanley citing some 170 in the village when he described it in 1879.

By 1883, "to give the Catholic Mission in East Africa the prestige it deserved..." the Prefecture was raised to the Vicariate of Zanguebar and the mission continued to prosper until the German East Africa Company, unhappy with the French Vicar Apostolic's ( de Courmont ) failure to side with them, struck an agreement with the Benedictines of St. Ottilien in Bavaria which resulted in the creation of a new Apostolic Prefecture of Zanguebar Meridional. This division, the line being drawn at the 7th parallel, effectively split the coast in half.

Mission records show that by 1904 the station had two fathers, six brothers and eight sisters. In the orphanage were 191 children and some 690 Catholics of various ages in six separate villages only two of which were close to the mission. Indeed there were now five branches in the interior with still others branching off of these. By 1907 the German sector of North Zanguebar had been elevated to an independent vicarate now called Central Zanguebar and had some thirty fathers, twenty brothers and 13,600 professing Christians.

During these early years the missions at both Zanzibar and Bagamoyo were graced by a handful of brilliant men serving in them, and none more so than Father Charles Sacleux, C. C. Sp., <sup>(1856-1943)</sup> a missionary apostolique whose linguistic expertise especially,

are, to this day, still regarded as monumental.