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LITERATURAS AFRICANAS ENTRE TRADICIONES Y MODERNIDADES.

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### **African children's literature and the promotion of readership: Swahili books for children in Tanzania**

*Uno de los desafíos con los que se enfrentan los autores y los editores de la literatura africana contemporánea –escrita tanto en las lenguas occidentales como en las africanas– es el escaso aumento de los lectores locales.*

*Al principio de los años noventa en África hemos asistido a un creciente reconocimiento del valor de la literatura infantil, de hecho, ha aumentado la importancia que ésta ha adquirido en el sistema educativo, ya que es considerada fundamental para el desarrollo de las habilidades y más en general de la cultura de la lectura.*

*Este es también el caso de Tanzania – uno de los pocos países donde la Independencia ha favorecido el desarrollo de una política lingüística nacionalista y la producción de una literatura escrita en las lenguas africanas, además el Gobierno y los donantes internacionales están apoyando la publicación de obras literarias para niños. En mi ponencia voy a hablar de las características principales de la literatura infantil contemporánea escrita en Swahili, poniendo de manifiesto cómo la acción sinérgica entre literatura y sistema educativo puede promover la lectura en Tanzania.*

Children's literature, Swahili language, Readerships.

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## INTRODUCTION: BOOKS AND CHILDREN IN AFRICA

One of the many challenges faced by authors and publishers of contemporary African Literature is the poor development of local readerships, which can be related both to the critical state of education in many African countries, often resulting in high rates of illiteracy, and to the usually low average income of the people. This problem is even more acute in the case of writers working in African languages, who deliberately do not address international audiences and consequently have to rely on endogenous readerships. This occurs in a context where, generally speaking, language and instruction policies are still mostly orientated towards former colonial languages (Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009: 16), thus affecting people's literacy and reading competence in their own languages (Oed & Reuster-Jahn 2008: 19).

If literacy is the obvious premise to develop new readerships for African literature, the role of children's literature - which means children's reading for pleasure and not simply studying textbooks - in developing instrumental abilities and, more in general, a reading culture in Africa has not always been acknowledged. In the initial phase after independence, some African writers, especially in Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana, who were motivated by anti-colonial commitment<sup>1</sup>, began to write for children and youths, but encountered great difficulties with regard to the publishing and distribution of their books (Segun 1992: 37).

Since the end of the Eighties there has been an increasing recognition of the value of African children's books, not only from a cultural/ideological but also from a pragmatic, pedagogic point of view. These are perceived as a valid support to the development of first or second language and reading skills, which, especially in family contexts where adults are illiterate or do not have a reading habit, could only be provided by formal education (Machet & Olen 1998: 236).

Throughout Africa there has been an increasing number of events attended by academics, writers, publishers and educators to debate the issue of children's books (Osa 1995: xvii). Examples of these are the first South African national symposium on children's literature "Towards understanding... Children's books for all South Africa's Children" (1987), resulting in the creation of a Children's Book Forum; the "Children and Literature in Africa" conference held at the University of Calabar, Nigeria in 1991 ; the Zimbabwe International Book Fairs of 1987 and 1998 which were devoted to

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<sup>1</sup> In the Seventies, writers like Achebe or Ngugi wa Thiongo, after finding out that the educational system and the books read by children were still inherited from the colonial experience, recognised the challenge of writing children's stories which would be able to reverse cultural misconceptions, often through the redeployment of the folktale tradition as a valid form of instruction and entertainment (Emenyonu 2002: 585).

Children's literature in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Everywhere writers and publishers show their difficulties with regard to the reception, distribution and marketing of children's literature, highlighting such causes as the lack of infrastructure, poverty, poor state of public education, incoherent language policies, and they often demand policies on education which will encourage reading for pleasure. This would take place in tandem with the development of libraries and the promotion of the local publishing industry.

## THE PUBLISHING OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TANZANIA

Many African Government and International donors have responded to these solicitations, and have recently supported the publication and diffusion of children's literature. This is also the case in Tanzania, one of the few countries in which Independence has led to a nationalist language policy and to the development of a rich vein of Swahili literature, but where the local readership, although increasing over recent years, is still not numerous enough to guarantee the vitality for the publishing of creative literature (Bgoya 2008: 87).

This can be related to the low income of the average reader, to the critical situation of State schools, to the scarcity of school libraries and to an ambivalent policy of Language of Instruction (LOI) - Kiswahili in primary schools and English in secondary schools -, a situation that has resulted in the deterioration of both languages (Qorro 2009: 58), so that people often do not master either language sufficiently to enjoy reading literature.

Since the 1990s, the Tanzanian government has established interesting donor-funded projects in order to develop children's reading habits and to promote indigenous writers, illustrators, publishers, booksellers and printers of children's literature (Moshi, 1998: 128).

Before, the publishing of children's literature was very problematic in Tanzania. Despite the fact that, during the years of *Ujamaa*, writers were strongly encouraged to produce literary works in Swahili, thus leading to the flourishing of new literary genres, like poetry in free verse, short stories, novels and modern plays (Blommaert 1999: 143), written modern literature has remained substantially a product aimed at adults or skilled, secondary school students. Children's literature never really developed before the 90s and remained an occasional activity for Tanzanian writers.

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<sup>2</sup> As can also be seen in the bibliography to this paper, since the early Nineties there has also been increasing publication of critical studies devoted to African children's literature (Granquist & Martini 1997: xiii), a field which previously received very little attention, albeit the notable exception of Schmidt's *Children's Fiction about Africa in English*, 1981.

The government concentrated on publishing textbooks (*vitabu vya kiada*) for primary and post-primary education, and could not afford to fund books as further reading (*vitabu vya ziada*) for pre-school and primary school children (Moshi, 1998:127).

Therefore, before the 1990s, publishing of children's books was poorly developed, school libraries were few and far between, and, given that they did not have to buy textbooks, the rare bookshops were little visited either by pupils or their parents. Due to this underdeveloped reading habit among children, and to the lack of public funding, private publishers would not invest in children's literature either (Saiwaad 1998:66).

The first of the projects funded by the Tanzanian government and International donors was the Children's Book Project (*Mradi wa Vitabu vya Watoto*), which was supported initially by CODE (Canadian Organisation for Development through Education), later assisted by other institutions, like SIDA, British Council, Aga Khan Foundation, etc. (Madumulla 2001:176).

The CBP project, launched in 1991, immediately started to produce a considerable number of children's titles, but only a few schools in each of the 117 districts on the mainland and Zanzibar received copies of these books. For this reason the project had to develop a National Reading Campaign, which was launched in 1997 with the aim of stimulating the desire to read and the appreciation of the importance of children's literature other than textbooks (Madumulla 2001: 177). This project, supported by the International Reading Association, by the South African READ Association Trust and by other international donors, had three main objectives: to increase the number of school libraries, to involve primary school teachers in the programme, and to improve the quality of the books through workshops with writers, illustrators and publishers (Moshi, 1998: 127).

Tanzanian writers have also participated in other international projects, like the pan-African StAAf (Stories across Africa), based in South Africa and sponsored by the Academy of African Languages, which provides for the publishing of children's books written in African languages and translated into other languages of Africa.<sup>3</sup> All these projects have had some good results, producing a large number of children's books in Swahili (up to now, the CBP alone has printed 237 children's titles and distributed them to 3,642 primary schools across the country<sup>4</sup>), opening new school libraries, and promoting good quality publishing. However, there is still much work to do because the fruits of these efforts have only reached a very limited proportion of Tanzanian schools.

<sup>3</sup> Stories Across Africa (StAAf) is one of the core Pan African projects of the African Academy of Languages, the official language agency of the African Union, see <http://littlehands.book.co.za/>.

<sup>4</sup> See the official site of the project, <http://www.cbp.or.tz>.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN CONTEMPORARY TANZANIA

The following observations about Swahili children's literature are based on a corpus of children's books (almost 100 volumes gathered together in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar) and to their interpretation both from a literary and cultural point of view. The focus of the analysis, at this point, is, thus, what adult writers want to tell Tanzanian children and how they fulfil their task of writing for children. The issue of the dissemination and the reception of this literary production by Tanzanian children needs further research in order to be dealt with.

The recent abundant production of children's books, which are mainly disseminated through school libraries as further reading, has been made possible by the involvement of Tanzanian intellectuals, academics, writers and publishers, who have participated in International Projects aimed at encouraging a production of Swahili children's literature. This should be, at the same time, a didactic support to language acquisition and a stimulus for developing a reading habit amongst children (Madumulla 2001: 175).

These initiatives are among the efforts made by the Tanzanian government and international donors in order to improve the situation of State schools, where teacher's salaries are low, adequate textbooks and teaching materials are lacking, classrooms are overcrowded and corporal punishment is still in use. Public education had started to deteriorate in the mid-1980s<sup>5</sup>, when the education system was detrimentally affected by macro reform policies which permitted the emergence of private, high-cost schools, rapidly spreading to all major urban centres, characterised by child-centred pedagogy, the non-use of corporal punishment and emphasis on English as the teaching language (Lema, Mbilinyi, Rajani 2004: xv).

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<sup>5</sup> From the period of the nationalist struggle in Tanganyika, education was a central issue in the ideas of Nyerere, who considered the reform of the racial colonial schooling system a key element in liberation and democratisation. After Independence and the Union with Zanzibar in 1964, which formed Tanzania, the new Government spent almost 20 per cent of its revenue on providing education for its children, young people and adults. In 1967 Nyerere wrote a document titled "Elimu ya kujitegemea/Education for Self Reliance" where he claimed that such a high expenditure on education in a poor country had a proportionate relevance to the building of a new society based on African Socialism (Ujamaa). The efforts made by the Tanzanian State during the 1970s were very successful and, in 1980, the gross enrolment ratio reached a peak of 98 per cent, but, in the following decade, such high expenditure on education was no longer sustainable because of the dramatic economic crisis and, in the mid-1980s, the education system was detrimentally affected by macro reform policies. First of all school fees were imposed, which was one of the conditions for World Bank loans in the early structural adjustment days. The proportion of children enrolled in school immediately began to decrease, the gross enrolment ratio dropping to 71 per cent in 1988 before gradually rising again to 78 per cent in 1997 (Lema, Mbilinyi, Rajani 2004: xiv). The present status of basic education in Tanzania has improved considerably since 2001, with the launch of the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP). The Government's abolition of primary school fees led to an immediate leap in enrolment, and the Gross Enrolment Rates increased from 78 per cent in 2000 to 108 per cent in 2003, remaining stable afterwards. In spite of these achievements in expanding school enrolment, the majority of pupils do not have access to good quality education, especially in the rural areas, and this factor, along with the inability of many families to afford other costs of schooling, is causing an extremely high school drop-out rate. (Lema, Mbilinyi, Rajani 2004: xv).

What seems to be happening is a rethinking of the role of literature in the field of education after the phase of *Ujamaa*, when the priorities for primary education, i.e. the spreading of the use of Swahili, the extension of literacy, and the “decolonisation of the mind”, were basically fulfilled through the publication of new textbooks, and access to written artistic literature was meant only for mature readers (Blommaert 1999: 139).

The children’s literature which has been published since the 1990s has, in fact, been edited bearing in mind its use in school libraries or classrooms. At the end of the stories we often find a lexicon of difficult words and, in some cases, suggestions for the teacher regarding the elaboration of a didactic unit. Books are classified into different levels, according to age, and both the themes and language of the texts are considered appropriate to each level (Kahigi 1995).

In this context of “democratisation” of literature, the development of children’s fiction appears to be an interesting opportunity for those writers who experiment with the manipulation and contamination of modes, styles, narrative genres, implicitly re-evaluating juxtapositions, like orality/literacy, elite/popular literature and tradition/modernity, forged in colonial and post-colonial eras (Barber 1997: 1).

Contemporary Swahili children’s literature can be essentially divided into original works, namely picture books for smaller children and short stories and novels for young readers, and translations of foreign children’s literature, which are not numerous and will not be discussed here.<sup>6</sup>

### Picturebooks

Swahili fiction aimed at small children is generally published in the form of picture books which are captivating from an iconic, aesthetic point of view. Most of these books are strongly inspired by the oral arts (*fasihi simulizi*), especially by narratives - in the Swahili tradition classified as *ngano*, *hekaya*, *kisa*, *hadithi*, (Bertoncini 1989: 4) -, which were traditionally a didactic entertainment for children and young people, and often contained in, or were built around, songs, poems and/or proverbs (Ohly : 466).

The handling of oral themes in contemporary children’s books is heterogeneous. Animal stories are very frequent; often in the form of etiological narratives, or showing a clear moral message such as the condemnation of vanity and egotism (like *Majivuno yamuua Samaki* (The vanity which killed the fish) by Peter

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<sup>6</sup> In the production of Swahili children’s literature there is a small number of translations of written stories, sometimes resulting from the participation of writers in international projects, such as the translations/adaptations of South African children’s literature in English provided by M. Mulokozi (*Dar es Salaam kwa Baba*, Visiting daddy in Dar es Salaam), A. Lihamba (*Mama Mbeku*, Lady Mbeku) and E. Lema (*Nyamanza ndege wa Amani*, Nyamanza, the bird of peace). Other examples are *Hazina iliyozikwa* (The Buried Treasure) by the Nigerian A. Adimora-Ezeigbo, translated by Alli A. Batta, Cardoso’s *Popo*, *Ndege na Panya* (The Bat, the Bird and the Mouse), translated by Mzee Hamis Akida and Walter Bgoya), and Aesop’s fables translated by H. Adam under the title *Hasira hasara* (Anger has Consequences).

Dominic, *Malkia mroho (The greedy queen)*, by R. Mahmoud), the appreciation of cooperative behaviour (*Nyuki na vipepeo (The bees and the butterflies)* by Senator E. L. Matemu, *Mfalme chura (The king frog)* by A.K. Shaali), respect for adults (*Chui wadogo (The young leopards)* by D. P. Mganga).

We can also find some writers who have a more innovative approach to this oral genre, using animal characters to create an original story, such as W. Bgoya's *Kinyonga mdogo ambaye hakuweza kubadilika rangi yake (The chameleon who could not change his colour)*, centred on modern, "individualistic" themes, i.e. respect for "others" and the value of what may appear to be a handicap to "normal" people.

Another kind of experimentation was introduced by A.A. Mohamed and M.J. Ukki in the book *Utenzi wa Sungura (The poem of the hare)*, where the authors combined a theme from the oral prose with a genre of poetry typical of the Swahili written tradition, so mixing together distinct genres of high and popular literature. Here the hare, an animal typical of Bantu oral folk traditions, where he is a symbol of cleverness and cunning, is, in fact, the main character of an *utenzi*. This is the Swahili poetic genre which is most representative of the Great Tradition, i.e. the output (often written in Arabic characters) of the narrow privileged social strata in Swahili towns, including theologians, courtiers, scholars and men of letters from wealthy Muslim lineages (Ohly : 462).

We can find also a number of didactic stories which have a contemporary setting and are meant to teach good behaviour (like "*Paka*" *asiyependa maziwa (The "cat" who did not like milk)* by A. Mohamed, condemning laziness), using a typical oral form, the proverb. A good example is the story *Asiyesikia la mkuu* by M. Abdi, which is about the repentance of a boy who did not listen to his parents and became a drug-user and a thief. Here the direct moral message is also given through the title, which is the first part of a very common Swahili proverb, *Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika mguu*, he who does not listen to his elders will break his legs).

Some children's books draw materials from the oral Oriental tradition (like *Ali Baba na majangili arobaini (Ali Baba and the forty thieves)* and *Masimulizi ya Alfu Lela u Lela (Thousand and one nights)* by Hassan Adam). Oriental narratives were the only non-western stories published in colonial East Africa (Madumulla 2001: 173), probably because of their more "civilised" Arabic origins (Mazrui, Shariff 1994: 97).

Oriental stories are very well known along the Swahili coast, and they have often been re-elaborated and contaminated by African orality, such as the human character of Abunuwasi in Arabic literature, which has been the inspiration for a number of Swahili tales, sometimes being transformed into Kibunuwasi, no longer a

man but a hare, as explained by the Zanzibari poet Haji Gora Haji to Madumulla (2001: 173).

In socialist Tanzania, though, there has, for a long time, been a marginalisation of whatever was perceived as too “Arab” because it did not fit into the model of a modern, socialist, African nation. The ideology-based constructions of “Arab-ness” and “African-ness”, a reversal of the inter-relationship between the racial categories forged during colonial times (Topan 1994: 140), meant that, for a long time in Tanzania, there was a suspicion of coastal Swahili culture, associated with Arabic culture, slavery and conservatism (another example of this is *taarab* music, defined as a non-autochthonous music, see Askew 2002: 224).

The rediscovery of Oriental stories and Swahili verbal tradition in the production of children’s stories is, in my opinion, an effect of and a contribution to the post-*Ujamaa* demolition of a monolithic idea of the Nation, leading to the recognition of the heterogeneity of Tanzanian oral traditions. In the *Ujamaa* period, in fact, the approach to oral traditions was inherently ambiguous. On one hand, *Ujamaa* was said to be rooted in African tradition, and for this reason, ethnic traditions should be proudly revalued as part of National Culture, on the other hand, *Ujamaa* ideology was deeply unifying, de-tribalising and modernising, so that a more radical conception of National Culture would soon emerge among intellectuals, very selective with regards to those local rituals and oral traditions which did not fit into a modern, socialist, supra-ethnic way of thinking (Blommaert 1999: 135). The handling of orality in contemporary children’s fiction reflects this process of rethinking the dialectic between ethnic traditions and national culture, as manifested in the recovery and the visibility of the oral traditions of not only Waswahili but also Tanzania’s other ethnic groups (an example is *Hadithi ya Morile* (The story of Morile) by Freda Mariki, from the oral tradition of the *Wachagga*).

### **Stories and novels for young readers**

Looking at children’s fiction for young pupils, it is noticeable that the writers generally prefer to create an original story, and that they are particularly inspired by Swahili modern short stories and novels, two literary genres that have flourished in post-colonial Tanzania (Bertoncini 1989: 56).

We can roughly distinguish three main trends: didactic stories, investigative stories, and historical fiction, although the first two often overlap.

Didactic books for young people, differently from those for smaller children, do not have a blunt, direct moral message and show a different pedagogic approach, which indirectly discusses issues such as cultural and gender identity, alphabetisation or sexual education. Good examples are the works by Elieshi Lema, a Tanzanian



intellectual, writer and publisher, like *Ndoto ya Upendo* (The dream of Upendo), *Freshi na Maisha* (Freshi and Maisha), *Mkate mtamu* (Tasty bread), *Mwendo* (Motion).

In the novel *Mwendo*, for example, there is a very interesting and innovative handling of oral traditions and rituals. A child, Felisia, is not allowed to go to school when she begins to menstruate, and is kept at home by her parents who, in the tradition of the Makonde people, want to celebrate the ritual of transition to adulthood (*ngoma ya Unyago*) which lasts many weeks. The big problem is that the family does not give any explanation to Felisia's teacher, so that the child risks being expelled from school. Felisia, too, is scared because she has heard that many young girls die during this ritual. The solution to the problem is found by Felisia's aunt, Helena Margreta, who is also her *somo*, i.e. the person who traditionally supports the child during the ritual in the place of her mother. She explains to little Felisia, that, in the case of the Makonde, the ritual of passage does not involve excision, and that little girls should refuse and rebel against any form of violence. Helena Margreta very courageously also talks to the teacher and the director of the primary school and convinces them of the importance of this tradition, especially as nothing is done to help a female child in this delicate moment of passage in formal education. The important message in this short novel is that, although it is necessary to fight any form of violence against female children, it would be nonsense to try to cancel the traditions of Tanzania's ethnic groups in the name of a modernist conception of education. The writer is, thus, giving a new interpretation to the concept of National culture, saying that it should be considered to be much more than simply folklore mixed with nationalist rhetoric.

One of the key elements of national unity in Tanzania is the Swahili language (*kiswahili*), the most widely spoken indigenous language in the country, considered by Nyerere to be the natural means of building a new decolonised, non-ethnic, modern, egalitarian society, and, therefore, the necessary medium of instruction in the primary school curriculum and in the adult education programme (Blommaert 1999: 91). The reform of the educational system did not involve secondary schools and universities, where the LOI is still English, thus restricting access to quality education because many students and teachers are not sufficiently proficient in English (Qorro 2009: 57, 65).

The issue of the standardisation of the Swahili language, which began in colonial times and, after Independence, was further developed by the IKR/TUKI of the University of Dar es Salaam<sup>7</sup>, is of course very relevant for Tanzanian writers,

<sup>7</sup> In 1964, the East African Swahili Committee was incorporated into the Institute of Kiswahili Research/Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili of the University of Dar es Salaam (Whiteley 1969: 82). The dictionary of Standard Swahili (Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu) was first published in 1981 (second edition 2004).

especially those who write school readers. The Zanzibari writer, Said Ahmed Mohamed [Khamis], has, though, criticised some of his colleagues pointing out that literature should contribute to develop and broaden the language and not to restrict it.<sup>8</sup>

S.A. Mohamed's approach to the language issue, defending passionately the creativity of the writers and the richness of the Swahili language beyond its standardised form, also emerges very clearly in his first children's books, *Atamlilia nani?* (To cry for whom?) and *Vipawa vya hasina* (The talents of Hasina), both published in 2009 by the Kenyan branch of Oxford University Press. These two didactic stories, addressing respectively the issue of children's upbringing and the importance of school education to overcome social barriers, show a great variety of linguistic features, concentrating particularly on extending vocabulary. At the end of the two stories, just as in his novels, we find an extensive glossary which explains the less common words and expressions.

The other trend, namely detective or thriller stories for children, is also very popular. It is inspired by the genre which has become predominant in popular adult literature (*fasihi pendwa*) in Tanzania since the 1980s. Elieshi Lema, for example, has also written a very charming investigative novel, *Safari ya Prospa* (Prospa's journey), where Prospa, a child living in a village near Arusha, goes to Dar es Salaam in search of his sister's son who has been kidnapped, and, helped by a little girl called Sara and by some street children living in the big city, he finally succeeds in finding his nephew. The author spent years getting documented about the social groups and contexts she was dealing with before writing this work (the same for *Mwendo*), following the idea that the writer should try to get as close as possible to children's experience and world view (Hanak 2001: 58).

Among these children's detective books, I found an interesting work, *Kipofu mwenye miwani myeusi* (The blind man in sunglasses), written by Ben Mtobwa, one of the most beloved writers in popular literature (Zúbková Bertoncini 1989: 53). In this detective story, the main characters are two children who start to investigate a blind man, eventually discovering that he is a policeman and helping him in his investigation. Many children's books follow this trend, like *Laba msichana shujaa* (Laba, heroic girl), by Marcell Lotto, a story about a young girl who courageously defeats some armed criminals who want to steal her family's harvest. In another book, *Bibi mwenye macho*

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<sup>8</sup> "Unfortunately many users of the so called standard form, for one reason or another, are satisfied with certain features, words or expressions to be found in our standard dictionaries... But Swahili is not that much poor for such role, hence it is a pity that variation, flexibility and broadness of choice in style is lacking, not because the language in its totality does not provide the means, but because the users of the language will not utilise the linguistic means sufficiently." (Khamis 1984: 591) Said Ahmed Mohamed Khamis, Professor of Literatures in African Languages at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, writes his creative literature under the name Said Ahmed Mohamed.

*mekundu* (The lady with red eyes), we find a theme which has been very common in Swahili literature since *Ujamaa*, namely the condemnation of superstition and of the belief in witchcraft. Once again the main characters are two children, Tina and Musa, who save their grand-mother from being killed by a man who is convinced that she is a witch who has poisoned his daughter. The man is supported in this belief by some local medicine men, who also point out that the old lady has red eyes. In reality, though, the daughter died because she had not received appropriate vaccinations, and the poor old lady has red eyes because she has cooked over a wood fire all her life.

The writer of detective and thriller stories are, thus, manipulating this genre of popular literature in a very innovative way, creating works which combine the literary (standard) language and stylistic structures of "high" prose, their pedagogic stances, and the charm of investigative narratives. This attitude in Tanzanian writers represents another important shift towards a more heterogeneous conception of literature and culture, no longer stigmatising popular culture as a commercial form which is extraneous to that true art which should be committed to socio-political issues relevant to the masses (Blommaert 1999: 139).

There are not many historical books for young readers. There are those dealing with the colonial past, and those relating to contemporary African civil wars. The series of historical novels written by M. Mulokozi, *Ngoma ya Mianzi*, *Ngome ya Mianzi*, *Moto ya Mianzi*, is set during the years of *Wahehe* resistance to against German rule, 1891-1898. The need for national heroes is typical of Africa post-colonial literatures, but in this case there is no single tragic hero (like Hussein's *Kinjeketile* or Mulokozi's *Mkwawa*) in the narration, instead the accent is placed upon the role of the communities, including young people, who are in fact the main characters of these novels. Another interesting feature of Mulokozi's works is the use of cartoons combined with prose (precisely in *Ngome ya Mianzi*), another clear indication of the writer's use of literary experimentation with genres of elite and popular literature.

An example of works dealing with contemporary civil wars is the short novel by O. Mnyaka *Kimbia! Helena, kimbia!* (Run, Helena, run!), which is based on stories told by Hutu refugees in Congo and Tanzania. Although the writer tries to give a "politically correct" report of the dramatic events happening in the area of the Great Lakes, the handling of such sensitive memories, in work where fiction and factual reports are not neatly distinguished, seems to be a very risky operation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I wish to thank my colleague Jean De Dieu Karangwa (INALCO) for his stimulating comments.

## CONCLUSION

The important role of children's literature for developing a reading culture, for a long time under-estimated in Africa, has been increasingly recognised over recent years, and not only by literary critics.

This is also the case in Tanzania, where since, the 1990's, the Government and International donors have promoted projects which have supported writers and publishers in the production and the diffusion of Swahili children's literature. Swahili children's books are a new production which appears to provide writers with a chance to experiment with the manipulation and contamination of literacy and orality, elite and popular literature, implicitly giving voice to a more heterogeneous vision of National literature and culture.

The recent flourishing of quality children's literature is a positive novelty, which we hope will become available to as many Tanzanian children as possible in the coming years, but it should always be kept in mind that a synergy between literature and education in Africa can not be fruitful without further investments in the education sector and coherent, well planned language policies.

*(English revision by Martin Brimble)*

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