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# The significance of the Swahili literary tradition and interpretation of early twentieth-century political poetry

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWAHILI LITERARY  
TRADITION AND INTERPRETATION OF EARLY  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
POLITICAL POETRY**

*By Ann Biersteker*

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWAHILI LITERARY TRADITION  
FOR THE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION  
OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY POLITICAL POETRY**

*By Ann Biersteker*

During the period 1890-1912 Swahili poets living in what had recently become German East Africa wrote poems depicting the German conquest and African resistance. Among the poets who praised the resistance movement and resistance leaders were Hemedi bin Abdallah bin Said bin Abdallah bin Masudi el Buhriy, author of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," and Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini,<sup>1</sup> author of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji." Other Swahili poets of the same period appear to have written poems that present a more positive view of the German conquerers and early rulers.<sup>2</sup> Both "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji" have been published in scholarly editions,<sup>3</sup> and translated by eminent researchers.<sup>4</sup>

Both poems are frequently cited in discussions of political and other Swahili poetry.<sup>5</sup> Yet the available translations and, more obviously, the available interpretations of these poems are weaker than they might otherwise be because they do not reflect adequate understanding of the Swahili literary and scholarly

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<sup>1</sup>These are the title page spellings of the authors' names. Ibrahim Noor Shariff has suggested that spellings closer to those actually in use would be: Hemed bin Abdallah bin Said bin Abdallah bin Mas'ud al Buhriy, Abdul Karim bin Jamalidin. I have retained the title page spellings, as these enable access to the editions discussed here. Another alternative might have been to have used the names as given in the poems: Hemedi bin Abdallah ^Buhriya /!Buhri; Abdul-Karimu Jaliddini.

<sup>2</sup>See the poems collected by Velten 1907 and 1918, and by Zache 1898. After his discussion of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," Whiteley states that "Similar poems sought to document, often from the German point of view, the punitive expeditions against the Hehe, under Mkwawa, the campaigns around Kondoa, and against Hasan bin Omari, between 1893 and 1897, but again there is no evidence at all as to the audience for whom they were composed. They were collected by the German scholar, C. Velten, published with a German translation, and have remained in libraries ever since" (Whiteley, 1969: 58-59).

The extent to which these poems actually praise the Germans or are written "from the German point of view" merits further investigation. As Abdilatif Abdalla notes, "from the very beginning of the twentieth century . . . there are many [poems] composed in enigmatic language such that the rulers and 'their lackey informants' did not discern the deeper meanings which are in these poems." ("Wajibu wa Mshairi wa Kiswahili," p. 34; my translation).

A number of the *tenzi* collected by Velten et al. deserve further study that considers the traditions of enigmas and irony in political poetry.

<sup>3</sup>See the editions listed under the names of the authors in the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup>J. W. T. Allen, who edited the manuscript sources and translated "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," is one of the most scholarly editors and translators who has ever studied Swahili poetry. While Wilfred H. Whiteley (who translated "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji") is better known for his linguistic work, his translations and editions are very respectable, if not as elegant and as precisely reliable as those of Allen. Whiteley worked from Lorenz's earlier edition, which like many of the texts based on written versions collected by early twentieth century German scholars, is quite reliable.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Mulokozi 1975:55-57, Knappert 1979:217-222, Harries 1962:129, and Whiteley 1969:57-59.

traditions of which the poems are a part. Consideration of the scholarly context of their creation, collection, and publication, and of the genre, language, metaphorical and symbolic conventions of the Swahili literary tradition provides a much richer understanding of these poems and of the perspective the poems offer on East African views of the colonial conquest.

### Context of Collection and Publication

There do not appear to exist manuscripts of poetry used in the actual struggles against the Germans, although Hemedi bin Abdalla bin Said el Buhriy in his poetic account of the resistance led by Abushiri bin Salim describes his own role in that resistance as an advisor, soothsayer, and spy. In his "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," the poet says that he was recommended to Abushiri bin Salim as a talented specialist in "astrology and poetry" (384, ii-iii).<sup>6</sup> The poem also claims that the poet buried a charm at the door of a German stronghold (468, iv) and entered without being detected to survey the German armaments and forces (467-479).

"Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji" are both interpretations of resistance movements written by members of the Swahili Islamic intellectual elite shortly after these movements were defeated. The authors were from prominent families in Tanga and Lindi respectively and were both religious scholars. Hemedi Abdalla bin Said el-Buhriy's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all poets, and his grandfather was the Mazrui governor of Mtangata.<sup>7</sup> After the poet's death his poetry was kept in a family collection and not published until the 1950s and 1960s when J.W.T. Allen collected manuscripts for the East African Swahili Committee and worked closely with the el-Buhriy family.<sup>8</sup> The only poem published earlier was his version of "Utendi wa Qiyama" (The Last Judgement), published in 1945 by Roland Allen, J. W. T. Allen's father.<sup>9</sup> Other of his published poems include:

*Utenzi wa Seyyidna Huseni bin Ali: The History of Prince Hussein Son of Ali,*

*with translation and notes by J. W. T. Allen (Dar es Salaam, 1965);*

*Utenzi wa Kutawafu Kwa Nabii*, trans. by Roland Allen, Supplement to *Journal of the East African Swahili Committee*, 26 (1956);

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<sup>6</sup> References are to verse numbers (Arabic numerals) and line numbers (Roman numerals) in Allen's edition. Translations are mine unless otherwise marked with quotation marks, in which case Allen's translation is quoted unless otherwise noted.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Tendi*, 270; and Knappert, *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse*, 211.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, *Tendi*, 270, 429.

<sup>9</sup> Allen says that the manuscript T (his label) of this poem is "by Hemedi Abdalla in the sense that it is a recension by him with additional material inserted by him and this is inclined to the Pemba dialect." (*Tendi*, 431). Ibrahim Noor Sharif, who collected a Lamu written version and an oral version and edited the Swahili editions of the poem, says that Fahamy Hinawy has informed him that Hemedi Abdalla bin Said el-Buhriy is the author (personal communication). This is quite possible in that the manuscripts examined by Allen were all versions of the poem collected during the period in which the author was most prolific, but only examination of all the manuscripts and comparison to other poems by the poet would prove this.

*Utenzi wa Abdirrahmani na Sufiyani*, edited by J.W.T. Allen, trans. by Roland Allen (Dar es Salaam, 1961).<sup>10</sup>

These poems presumably were recited and copied within the Swahili intellectual and religious community during the poet's lifetime, but this intellectual tradition has not been carefully studied. It is difficult to know how widely the poems might have been disseminated or how that dissemination might have taken place. Of the two poems considered here, "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" is by far the more straightforward in its praise for the resistance movement and its condemnation of the German conquerors. The poem may or may not have been widely disseminated within East Africa by means of Swahili traditions of dissemination (i.e. copied and/or recited). It was not published for a wider East African audience until 1955,<sup>11</sup> one year after the formation of TANU in Tanganyika.

Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini's much more ambiguous "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji" was first published much earlier. The circumstances of its collection and publication offer a very plausible explanation as to why the poem appears ambiguous in its praise of the resistance movement and its condemnation of the German invaders. The poem was collected by A. Lorenz in 1912.<sup>12</sup> According to Lorenz the poet's parents were from Lamu.<sup>13</sup> Martin says that the poet's father, Qadi 'Omari bin Ahmad was from Kilwa and came to Lindi as a Muslim teacher employed by the al-Barwani family.<sup>14</sup> Iliffe suggests that the poet's brother Sheikh Omari bin Jamaliddini had been involved in the Abushiri movement and then "rehabilitated himself" with the Germans.<sup>15</sup> Lorenz collected the poem from Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini while the latter was a prisoner accused by his brother, Sheikh Omari bin Jamaliddini (the *kadhi* or Islamic judge of Lindi) "of leading a movement to permit women to enter the mosques and officiating at a funeral at which dancing and singing women were present."<sup>16</sup>

According to Iliffe, "Abdul Karim was described by the district officer as a radical teacher implicated in the Mecca Letters affair and as an adherent of 'zikri."<sup>17</sup> Nimitz cites Richter who in his 1934 work refers to the poet as a "Qadiri

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<sup>10</sup> See verses 992-999 re. the relationship of this poem to the earlier poem by the poet's grandfather.

<sup>11</sup> This point is also made by Glinga 1987: 267.

<sup>12</sup> Lorenz 1933: 228.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Martin 1976, 230.

<sup>15</sup> Iliffe 1979: 208.

<sup>16</sup> Iliffe 1969: 195.

<sup>17</sup> Based on his examination of records in the Tanzania National Archives; Iliffe 1969: 195.

leader in Lindi,"<sup>18</sup> As also noted by Iliffe, the relationship between what the Germans called "zikri" and the Qadiriyya order remains "uncertain." Iliffe suggests:

Besides its potential or actual radicalism, "zikri" may have provided urban immigrants like the Manyema with opportunities for socialization and ritual life. In this aspect, the movement seems to have resembled the urban welfare associations which were being created in large numbers in the new towns of Africa during this period.<sup>19</sup>

Abdul Karim Jamaliddini died in prison,<sup>20</sup> and his family helped Lorenz translate the poem. The only other poem of Jamaliddini known to have been published is "Shairi la Dola Jermani."<sup>21</sup> This poem is described by Iliffe as a "eulogy of the Germans,"<sup>22</sup> but I believe closer examination of the poem will indicate it to be reasonably considered a eulogy in the sense of "praise of the dead" only if the "praise" is recognized to be for Islam and the "death" depicted is that of Christian ideology and German rule.

### Genre Conventions

"Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji-Maji" are both written in the *utenzi/utendi* genre.<sup>23</sup> The poems follow the *utenzi* convention of having verses of two lines each of sixteen syllables with the final syllables of half-lines 1-3 rhyming in each verse and the final syllables of fourth lines rhyming throughout the poem.<sup>24</sup> As is typical of this form, both are narrative poems which relate a series of events and provide comment and testimony. As noted by Shariff, one meaning of *utenzi* is, in fact, *maelezo marefu*, "a lengthy explanation."<sup>25</sup> Shariff also observes that *tenzi* are used "to explain stories or any issues which need to be explained at length and with clarity."<sup>26</sup> Like many other *tenzi*, both "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya

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<sup>18</sup>Nimtz (1980: 80) cites Richter, *Tanganyika and Its Future* (London: World Dominion Press, 1934, 80). Nimtz refers to the poet as "an Arab." The question of ethnicity is, of course, a problem in discussing East African coastal peoples. The poet may have been referred to by others as an Arab at times, and may have even referred to himself as such on certain occasions, but he wrote political poetry in Swahili. This would seem to suggest quite strongly that he identified himself politically as Mswahili.

<sup>19</sup>Iliffe 1969: 198.

<sup>20</sup>Iliffe 1979: 234.

<sup>21</sup>Velten 1918: 174-180.

<sup>22</sup>Iliffe 1969: 234.

<sup>23</sup>"Utendi" is the Northern Dialect form of the word "utenzi."

<sup>24</sup>Shariff 1988: 51.

<sup>25</sup>Shariff 1989: 94. Unless otherwise noted, translations from Shariff 1989 are mine.

<sup>26</sup>Shariff, 1988, 94.

Maji-Maji" provide moral lessons.<sup>27</sup> The *utenzi* genre and *shairi* genre are both used in political discourse,<sup>28</sup> but *shairi* as opposed to *utenzi* is "the genre which is used to explain issues which have been of significance or which are official."<sup>29</sup>

In each poem a number of verses contain content that is formulaic within the *utenzi* genre. For example, in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" the poet's call for a chair (2, i)<sup>30</sup> is typical of requests for requisite implements (also paper, pen, ink) which are found in initial verses of *tenzi*. In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," the poet mentions that he is using a pen and Syrian paper (13, i-ii). Whether Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini actually composed before an audience seated around him or Hemedi bin Abdalla used paper from Syria is unknown. The importance of such verses in *tenzi* would seem to be to demonstrate that the poet has at his access the appropriate implements for composition, the most important of which, presumably, is familiarity with the conventions of the genre.

As also is conventional in the genre, both poets define their audience. In these two instances the audience is specifically defined as "wenzangu"/"my friends" ("Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," 15, iv) and "wasomao"/those who read and "jamii ya bandari"/the community at the coast ("Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 4, iii, iv).

The poems also follow genre conventions in noting the author's name in one of the final verses (625 and 626 of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," and 334 of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji), and in including a self-deprecating remark about the author ("Nami ni mtu fakiri/sina wasaa dunia" /I am a destitute person/I have little in the world, 626, iii-iv of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "mjinga"/a fool, 333, iii of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji").

In addition to verses containing content formulaic in the genre, the poems also follow genre convention in posing oppositions within lines of verses and between lines of verses. It would seem as if the oppositions established within lines (especially final lines) are conventional to a large extent, while those established between final lines are specific to individual poems and central to the meaning of those poems. For example, in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" oppositions within lines include:

amani na harubu / "peace and devastation" (1, iii)  
 sifa dhaifu na njema / "reputations despicable and praiseworthy"  
 (6, iii; 329, ii)  
 bilayli wa nahari / "by night or (by) day" (2, iv; 57, i v; 91, iv)  
 watumwa na ihrari / "slaves and freemen" (46, iv)  
 twifli na akbari / "young and old" (38, iv)  
 akbari na vijana / "old and young" (45, ii)  
 akhuru na awladi / "adults and adolescents" (46, ii)

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Biersteker 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Shariff 1988: 95.

<sup>29</sup> Shariff 1988: 117.

<sup>30</sup> References to this poem are to verses (Arabic numerals) and line numbers (Roman numerals) in Whiteley's edition unless otherwise noted. Whiteley's translations are marked with quotations. My translations are noted to be such.



ihrari na vitwana / "freemen and slaves" (5, iii)  
 usubuhi na jioni / "morning and evening" (162, iii)

In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," oppositions within final lines and other lines include:

ardhi na samawati / "earth and heaven" (4, ii)  
 shamsi na kamari / "sun and moon" (5, ii)  
 awali na akhiri / "beginning and end" (16, iv)  
 jinni na insia / "spirits and men" (18, iv)  
 aftali na kubari / "young and old" (103, iv)  
 akhiri hata awali / "end to beginning" (328, iii)  
 ya uchungu na utamu / "of sweetness and bitterness" (331, ii)  
 watumwa kwa waungwana / "slaves and nobles" (535, ii)  
 asubuhi na jioni / "morning and evening" (628, iii)

"Vita vya Maji Maji" is a less obviously partisan poem overall than "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," yet its sympathies are also evident when the oppositions established between lines are considered. The fourth line rhyming syllable throughout the poem is "-ri."<sup>31</sup> The most frequently occurring fourth line rhyming word is "shauri" ("plan" / "advice" / "advise"). This term, which occurs twenty-four times as the rhyming word in the fourth line of verses, is nearly always used with reference to those involved in the Maji Maji resistance. The term is contrasted with another frequently occurring rhyming word "amri" / "order(s)" (eight occurrences), which is most often associated with the German conquerers. In one instance an unidentified African leader asks his associates for advice saying:

Ndugu zangu nieleza, nami nitawasikiza nipate kwenu <i>shauri</i> (94, ii-iv)	My colleagues, explain to me, and I will listen to you so as to secure from you <i>advice</i>
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In contrast an unidentified German leader orders his African subordinates, saying:

Ninawatuma nendani mkangie majumbani subuhi hata jioni fuwata yangu <i>amri!</i> (295)	I'm sending you, Go and search the houses morning until night follow my <i>orders!</i>
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By the establishment in this way of the opposition between "shauri" and "amri," the poem contrasts two styles of leadership and two styles of rule: German authoritarian rule and African consultational governance, and obviously indicates preference for the latter.

<sup>31</sup> This is the fourth line rhyming syllable of many poems of the period, a large number of which include the term "manuwari" / "manowari" (from Eng. "man of war"). This is so extensive that it could probably be argued this is the dominant symbol of the Germans in the poetry of the period. It is found at 18, iv of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji."

The second most frequently occurring fourth line rhyming word in the poem is "-khubiri" / "provide news or information" (twenty-one occurrences). This term is not associated with either group of combatants and is not obviously contrasted with any other term. It is used twice to mark two of the very few overt comments by the poet (1, iv; 90, iv).

Contrast is provided by the third most frequently occurring fourth line rhyming word, "askari" / "soldier(s)" (fifteen occurrences). This term is used consistently in the poem to refer to the forces under German command. "Askari" becomes in the poem the dominant symbol of the German conquest. This term is contrasted with "asighari / asghari / sighari," another frequently occurring term which is consistently used with reference to young fighters in the Maji Maji movement.

Similar oppositions within lines establish the line final contrasts in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" between "Taaa" / the Light and "baa" / evil, between "ndia" / the way and "udhia" / "confusion," and between "Jaliya" or "Mmoya" or "Mungu" / "God" and the "Nasariya"<sup>32</sup> or the "Mzungu."<sup>33</sup> "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" presents the struggle led by Abushiri bin Salim as a "Holy War"<sup>34</sup> between vile Christian Germans and virtuous East African Muslims and their allies. The invocation calls upon God:

Tunusuru waja wako	Protect us your people
vita vya adui zako	in the war against your enemies
wakataa dini yako	those who deny your religion
tusiabudu Taaa	[saying] we should not worship
(19)	The Most High.

Also invoked are the heroes of Islam who fought for the faith (32, iv) and defeated infidels (32, ii). The rule of Sultan Khalifa of Zanzibar is presented as divinely sanctioned. The sultan is described in the prayer at the end of the poem as "mja" / "person or servant of God" and the prayer asks:

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<sup>32</sup> Or "Nasari"/"Christian." This is the term most frequently used in the poem to refer to the Germans. Allen, surprisingly, often translates this as "European" and does so without explanation.

<sup>33</sup> Mulokozi (1975: 56) notes: "Hemedi's resistance against German rule is covert and can only be discovered by reading between the lines. It is, for instance, embodied in his description of the white invaders. He always refers to them as "majahili" (stanza 48); "Mzungu dhaifu" (168); "Mzungu Kahati" - abominable European (168, etc.).

Some of these terms are also found in other lines, for example: "jahili" (p. majahili) - (538, ii) - infidel. Other epithets include Juhaa (551, iv) or Juhali (552, i) - infidels, and Manasari (193, i) - disgusting Christians.

See also Allen's "Index of Proper Names" in his edition of the poem (p. 84). Allen's list includes a number of disparaging nicknames given to specific Germans. The list includes nicknames used in the poem. A more general list is found in Velten, C. "Die Spitznamen der Europäer bei den Suaheli."

<sup>34</sup> Knappert makes this point also (1979: 218).

<p>Mja wako mjalie aitulize eziye na adue mshindie ambaye amkamia (611)</p>	<p>Your servant, enable him to bring peace to his dominions and defeat any enemy who threatens him.</p>
<p>Mja wako mhifadhi kwa kula mwinyi gharadhi umzidie na hadhi kwa majumbe na raia (612)</p>	<p>Your servant, protect him from all with other objectives increase his honour among his councillors and people</p>
<p>Mja wako msitiri umpe na nyingi kheri pasiwe na mwinyi jeuri ambaye amfanyia (613)</p>	<p>Your servant, safeguard him give him great good fortune let there not be any brute who would harm him</p>
<p>Mjaalie baraka katika wake muluka na kula mwinyi shabuka uwashinde wote pia (614)</p>	<p>Make plentiful the blessings in his dominion and everyone troublesome defeat them all as well</p>

The poem, thus, is a call for divine intervention given the defeat of Abushiri. It argues that the Germans overthrew a divinely approved political order and installed in its place a brutally repressive and chaotic regime. "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" is a very "engaged" poem. As noted above, the poet indicates he himself was involved in the struggle. The Germans are referred to as "kafara" / "infidels" (440, ii), their drunkenness is described (193, ii) and their "majibwa" / "despicable dogs" (267), with which they enter a mosque (244), symbolize them.

While consultation symbolizes African governance as presented in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," in both poems political dialogue is extensively represented. The majority of verses in each poem consist of reported speech. Discussions and disputes within leadership groups are much more fully portrayed than battles, attacks, the effects of these or even descriptions of leading figures. In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" all parties are presented as involved in lengthy consultations. Even the kaiser calls in scholars (41-71) and merchants (72-146) for advice. In this poem, the kaiser, like the sultan of Zanzibar, is presented as above the struggle. In verse 155 of the poem the kaiser is reported to have said:

<p>... sinavyo vita moyoni kwenda jitia mjini bure pasipo khatia (155)</p>	<p>... I do not have war in my heart to involve myself in the city without reason or cause</p>
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It is the agents of the German East Africa Company who have disobeyed both the kaiser's and the sultan's commands who are blamed for the invasion. They are reported to have conspired saying:

Tukatakeni forodha  
Sayyidi tumpe fedha  
itakuwa kadi madha  
zamani eshapo twaa  
(173)

We will ask for the harbors  
We will give Sayyidi money  
it will be all over  
long ago having been seized

Tukisha katibiana  
mambo yetu yatafana  
hapatakuwa kuwana  
na nti tutaitwaa  
(174)

"When we have a written agreement  
all will go well with us"  
there will not be bloodshed  
and we will seize the country

The poems provide a wealth of historical detail including names and activities of participants, yet may reveal less about the actual struggles than about late nineteenth-century Swahili concepts of conflict resolution. These struggles are written about as if they were the struggles a century earlier between Lamu and the Mombasa/Pate alliance. While the framework of each poem is narrative, the bulk of the verses report dialogue speech and the positive figures who speak are portrayed as if they were rulers and poets like Fumo Liyongo, the legendary Swahili hero,<sup>35</sup> or Zahidi Mngumi the early nineteenth-century leader of Lamu<sup>36</sup> or poet emissaries and advisors like Muyaka bin Haji,<sup>37</sup> the early nineteenth-century Mombasa poet. The exchanges between positive leaders and between such leaders and advisors are patterned on the model of exchanges such as those which took place nearly a century earlier between Zahidi Mngumi and Muyaka and between Mngumi and his advisors.<sup>38</sup>

For example, in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" Abushiri first consults with Jahazi,<sup>39</sup> "rafikiye" / "his friend":

Pangani kuna kishindo  
ati amekuja Nyundo<sup>40</sup>  
yuwatenda vitendo  
visivyo kuwapasia (286)

Na mlingoti wa Bwana  
wameukata laana  
nao wamenyamazana  
hapo mwinyi kutongoa (287)

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<sup>35</sup>For further information on Fumo Liyongo see Mbele and Shariff (1988b).

<sup>36</sup>For background information on Zahidi Mngumi see Shariff (1988a) and Nabhany (1988).

<sup>37</sup>For additional information about Muyaka see Abdulaziz 1979 and Hichens 1940.

<sup>38</sup>An edition on these exchanges is being prepared by Biersteker, Shariff, and Nabhany. Previous works which include parts of the exchanges include Abdulaziz and Hichens.

<sup>39</sup>According to Iliffe (1979), Jahazi was a Comorian fortifications engineer and Abushiri's brother-in-law (p. 93).

<sup>40</sup>Allen, in his index, identifies "Nyundo"/"Hammer" as Hauptmann Emil von Zelewski Bezirkschef (1971: 84).

"Have you heard what has happened at Pangani? There is trouble at Pangani; Nyundo has come and is doing things that are not fitting. They have felled, curse them, the sultan's flagpole and the people are silent, there is none to speak" (Allen's translation).

When Jahazi replies that he has heard, Abushiri continues:

....  
ewe Jahazi sikia (288)

Mambo hayo yapitayo  
yamenichoma na moyo  
na tukinyamaza siyo  
bwana yatamtukiwa (289)

Natamani nende kuko  
hayole yaliyoko  
nimuonye na vituko  
Nyundo apate nijua (290)

"Jahazi, listen, these things have cut me to the heart, and if we are silent it will not please the sultan. I wish to go there and see what is happening, and to do something to warn Nyundo so that he will know me."

Jahazi then responds by saying:

....  
nami hayo nayataka  
kutezewa ni wazuka  
haifai kunyamaa (291)

"I am with you. It is cowardly to be mocked and to remain silent" (Whiteley's translation).

Abushiri then calls the "madiwani" (also referred to as "majumbe," "councillors") and asks them:

Majumbe kawauliza	Councillors, I ask you
sababu ya kunyamaza	the reason for silence
Nyundo anayofanyiza	[given] the problems Nyundo is causing
nanyi mkawangalia	and you are observing them
(295) [i.e. the Germans]?	

The structure of this exchange parallels that between Zahidi Mgumi and his Lamu councillors.<sup>41</sup> Both exchanges begin with the leader's poetic call for action and statement of his position. Also in both, this call is followed by similar calls and statements by councillors, not all of which are in total agreement.

Clearly by reporting speech, a poet can claim the role of a historian, as well as poetic license, and avoid possible accusation of having made a controversial

<sup>41</sup>See Biersteker, Shariff, and Nabhany.

political statement. In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima," the lengthy praises of Sultan Khalifa, his palace, his troops, and Zanzibar town are attributed to Mushti Kirofu,<sup>42</sup> a German merchant addressing the kaiser. The potential of reported speech is also evident in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji." The poem includes a verse insulting Omari Kinjala,<sup>43</sup> which is clearly a reported insult rather than an author insult (312), and a curse which may be an author comment or may be reported (330, i-ii). Whatever the author's attitude toward him, Kinjala is not presented as the key resistance leader in the poem. The figure who has this role in the poem is Hongo (or Hongo-Hongo),<sup>44</sup> who is presented in the poem as a most [word omitted?] leader who embodies very Swahili ideals of leadership. He inspires his followers, placates those within his ranks who oppose him, attracts new followers, and as he dies leaves a message of inspiration and instruction that is his legacy to the struggle. His deathbed "utenzi wa wasia" of forty-eight verses occurs within the larger "utenzi" of the entire Maji Maji movement. Hongo's "utenzi" begins:

.....  
 Mliobaki ziwya                      You who remain resist  
 na Mahongo sote miya              Hundreds embody and represent me  
 na sasa nami kwa heri! (200) Now I say farewell

Upesi mtawanyike,                      Quickly scatter yourselves  
 kila mahala mfike (201)              and reach every known place  
 [My translation]

---

<sup>42</sup> According to Allen in his "Index of Proper Names" at the end of his edition (1971), the reference here may be to Ludwig Krapf.

<sup>43</sup> According to Iliffe, Kinjala was "an Ngindo who had married Mkomani, a female 'nduna' of the Mshope chiefdom in Ungoni" (1979: 173). He led the Maji Maji movement in Ungoni, including a successful attack on a police detachment at Songea (1979: 185).

<sup>44</sup> The identification of this figure is unclear. Hongo was the spirit who possessed Kinjikitile (Iliffe 1979: 169). It is possible that this central figure in the poem represents Kinjikitile. This is plausible in that "Hongo" of the poem, like the actual Kinjikitile, is presented as an early inspirational leader who dies early in the movement, and is succeeded by Kinjala and others. There is no evidence I have been able to locate of other figures of this significance. However, Kinjikitile took the title of "Bokero" (Iliffe 1979: 170), and his assistants were referred to as "hongo" (Iliffe 1979: 170-171). In addition, Kinjikitile was hanged, while Hongo of the poem is presented as dying of battle wounds.

Margaret Bates in her introduction to the poem says, "A witch-doctor known only as Hongo appeared to take over the leadership of Uvidunda" (1957: 13). According to Iliffe: "the 'hongo' [was an] emissary who arrived at a village, summoned them to fight and administered maji. Many hongo, it appears were Ngindo, in whose hands the movement acquired millennial characteristics, claiming power to rid African societies of the two incalculable evils, European control and sorcery" (Iliffe 1969: 24-25).

In the poem the leader is referred to as "Muhiyongo" at 165, i; but the meaning of this is unclear and the line in which it occurs is suspect as it contains nine rather than the eight syllables used in every other line of the poem.

The term "hongo" in Swahili means a token of tribute.

Other advice to all who follow him includes:

Msibakishe mahala pakushinda, na kulala kwa taratibu na hila! muwaonye makadari!(206)	Don't leave a place to rest or to sleep with care and trickery show them [your] power!
Msipangane kitoto kama Bodo na Mkoto nendeni kimotomoto nawajuwa mashuhuri! (239)	Don't plan together childishly like Bodo and Mkoto <sup>45</sup> go fiercely I know you are brave!
Msiache vitongoji kupita mkitaraji asema: "kwenu siji" msimwache mkhasiri.(242)	Don't by-pass small villages when you pass [them], be confident anyone who says, "I'm not joining you" don't leave without destroying him.
Mahongo, maji eneza! yakipunguwa ongeza! si kama nawakataza Kinjara wenu kubari! (243)	Hongos, spread the water! If its depleted, replace it! It's not as if I were prohibiting you Kinjara is your leader!

As an "utenzi wa wasia," this poem very much resembles others of this genre such as "Utendi wa Mwana Kupona."<sup>46</sup> It is much more explicitly political, yet provides a remarkably similar mixture of practical, cultural and tactical advice. The two poems even use the same figures of speech in at least one instance. Mwana Kupona advises her daughter:

<i>Twaa nikupe hirizi</i> .... (8)	<i>Seize the amulet I give you</i>
....	
uvae katika <i>shingo</i> utaona manufaa (10)	wear it at the neck and you will see its value

Likewise, Hongo advises Mtambo:

Na <i>hirizi za shingoni</i> na ingine mkobani Mtambo, tupa mwituni wasipate askari (212)	And <i>the neck amulets</i> and the others in the bag Mtambo, throw them in the forest so the German forces don't get them.
--	--

<sup>45</sup>These two figures are not identified.

<sup>46</sup>See Allen's edition and Biersteker forthcoming.

Napenda wewe <i>utwae</i> killa siku utumie na miko usitumie subiri, somo, subiri <sup>47</sup> (213)	I want you to <i>seize</i> them every day use them but taboos refrain from them patience, my friend, patience
--	--

In both cases the amulet symbolizes the poem and its advice and the affectionately addressed daughter or friend is advised to seize both the artifact (amulet/poem) and the significance of both so as to survive the adversity s/he will confront.<sup>48</sup>

### Metaphorical Conventions

Consideration of genre conventions adds much to the interpretation of the poems. Consideration of metaphorical conventions is also essential to interpretation and translation. For example, terms that in other contexts might signify relationships and roles in a household unit have specialized meanings in Swahili poetry and political discourse generally, and especially in political poetry. Terms which in other contexts would be terms of address are particularly likely to have specialized meanings. Terms such as "bwana" / "husband," "bibi" / "wife," "watoto" or "wana" / "children," "watumwa" / "slaves," and "ndugu" / "sibling," often do not refer to a husband, a wife, children, slaves, or siblings in the context of political poetry. "Bwana" in the context of this poetry most often refers to "one who has political authority."<sup>49</sup> "Bibi" in political poetry often refers to a subordinate authority or ally who has agreed to accept the authority of another. The terms "watoto," "wana," and "vijana" typically refer to people who are not in positions of authority, the term "ndugu" refers to allies or to those having shared or equal authority within a political system, and a derogatory term for "slaves," "vitwana," often seems to refer to "traitors" or "compradors."

In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" there are two incidents in which the central figures are "kitwana" or "vitwana." In the first, "vitwana watatu" (55, iii-iv) approach a German leader and tell him:

Tumefika hatta kwao aliko mkuu wao na wote maneno yao watazitwaa bandari (58)	We reached their headquarters where their leader is and all of them said they will seize the harbors
Bwana, wengi kama taka! na silaha ni mashoka; na sisi tumetoroka, tume kuja kukhubiri. (59)	Bwana, they are numerous as chaff and their weapons are axes we have fled we've come to tell you

---

<sup>47</sup>This line occurs earlier in the poem at 174, iv; where Hongo addresses his forces and says, "Subiri, wana, subiri."

<sup>48</sup>For further discussion of this point see Biersteker, forthcoming.

<sup>49</sup>In religious contexts the term is used with reference to God.



It seems implausible that three young "slaves" would have this sort of access to both the Maji Maji leadership (being with the leader and hearing what was said) and to a German leader (they interrupt his discussions with the local populace in which grievances are being aired). Those who could have done this are more likely to have been comprador local residents. Yet if this were the only incident, the use of "vitwana" here might still seem ambiguous even though the intelligence report of the three is clearly what is emphasized in the description of this incident. Later in the poem another "kitwana" goes to the German stronghold:

Kitwana alipofika bomani akatamka "Wapi bwana? Namtaka! leo nina mashauri (283)	When the Kitwana arrived at the encampment he said "Where's the Bwana? I want him! today I have information
Kama yuko ghorofani ao kwake hafisini kwa upesi nionyani nije nayo khabari (284)	Whether he's on the roof or in his office quickly show me so I come with the news
Na hapa siwezi nena illa nimpate bwana kwani ya faragha sana aidha yana khatari (285)	Here I cannot speak except directly to the Bwana because of the great secrecy further, it's dangerous

Here a "young slave" (who happens to be in the employ of a "Swahili wife" whose "husband" has joined the resistance movement, see below) arrives at the German encampment, orders those working there to call the German in charge, insists he will speak only to the German commander, causes the commander to be awakened from his sleep, and promptly gives a report. Again, a "comprador" reading is more plausible than a literal reading of "kitwana" as "boy-slave."<sup>50</sup> The metaphorical use of terms which in other contexts would refer to slaves is elucidated in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" when the sultan of Zanzibar is explaining to the Germans his relationship to the peoples of the East African coast. He says:

Na jamii ya Mrima wao kwangu si watumwa ni watu walinandama wakakiri uraia (268)	But the people of the mainland are not my slaves; they have freely agreed to join me and to accept my sovereignty.
---	---

[Allen's translation].

Of course, neither the sultan nor the Germans he is addressing could have thought that the the people of the mainland were literally slaves of the sultan. The point attributed to the sultan here is that the relationship of these people to him is *not* like that of slaves to a master. That is, they have agreed to their association with him, and have agreed to accept his sovereignty.

<sup>50</sup>Whiteley's translation of "kitwana chake" (280, iii).

"Vitwana" and "watumwa" are not the only terms describing members of a household unit that are used metaphorically in the two poems. In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," when an unidentified African "shekhe" seeks to resolve a conflict, he addresses an unspecified group as "ndugu zangu," here, obviously "colleagues" rather than "siblings." He is specified as "shekhe wao" / "their leader" but he addresses them as his equals:

<p>Ndugu zangu nieleza, nami nitawasikiza nipate kwenu shauri (94, ii-iv)</p>	<p>My colleagues, explain to me, and I will listen to you so as to secure your advice</p>
---	---

They, in turn, are referred to as "watoto," in this context, those under his authority, and they respond to their leader referring to themselves as youths:

<p>Watoto wakamjibu "Vijana tumeharibu, things, sasa fanya taratibu tutafuwata amri!" (95, ii-iv)</p>	<p>Those under his command answered "We your troops have made a mess of  now you must come up with a plan and we" will follow your command!"</p>
---	--

By how they address him, as well as by explicit statement, they affirm their willingness to accept the leadership of their commander. Similarly in this poem, when Hongo in his deathbed statement says, "watoto wetu vijana / msikhalifu amri" (our young troops / don't disobey orders), he is not referring to children or young people, but to the junior level forces under his command.

Likewise, in the same poem, when Hassani bin Ismaili,<sup>51</sup> a Liwali who allies with Omari Kinjala, "akenda zake/nyumbani kwa bibi yake," "goes on his way/home to "bibi yake," "bibi yake" probably does not refer to his literal wife. If "the wife" is not actually a wife, but rather a subordinate authority, translation of the lines Whiteley describes as "difficult" becomes considerably easier. When Hassani bin Ismaili says:

Maji tulijaribu  
hapana ila kutubu,  
na mume ni wa dhahiri  
(271, ii-iv)

Whiteley translates this as "Let us try this bottle, after all, we need only repent, and your husband is here before you" (p. 63), and says in a footnote that this is the first of "two very difficult sentences." He gives as alternative translations of the final line:

"I your husband address you" OR  
"you should know no one but your legal husband" (p. 63)

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<sup>51</sup> I have not been able to identify this figure. Nintz states that "Muslim clerics, or walimu, played a role in spreading the movement's ideology by helping the lieutenants of Maji Maji administer their initiation rituals" (1980: 75). He cites a conversation with the late Dr. Gilbert Gwassa for this information.

But if Hassani bin Ismaili is here being portrayed as trying to convince a possibly unreliable subordinate authority to join Kinjala along with him, the verse is much less ambiguous. The subordinate authority / "wife" has already been told that anyone taking the water, i.e. joining the movement, "asitembee / kwa mume wa isirari" / "must not go with a lover" (Whiteley, v. 269) i.e. must not accept / another political authority secretly. The subordinate authority/"wife" then says:

.... "Bwana,  
yale yako ni kunena,  
uneleze kwa uzuri!"  
(p. 60, v.270, l.ii-iv)

"My husband, those words you said, explain them to me properly."  
[Whiteley's translation]

.... "Sir,  
your way of talking about this  
explain it to me well."  
[My translation]

By this analysis then when Hassani bin Ismaili says,

Maji tulijaribu  
hapana ila kutubu,  
na mume ni wa dhahiri  
(p. 62, v. 271, l. ii-iv),

he is explaining to a subordinate political authority what that figure will be able to say if the movement fails, and that person is called upon to explain involvement to the German or other authorities:

We tried the water,  
after all, you need only say you are sorry  
and the one under whose command you are is known  
(p. 62, v. 271, ii-iv)  
[My literal translation].

[Tell the truth] We tried the water,  
and say you're sorry  
and that you did this under orders from me  
[My alternative translation].

The use of the terms "bibi" and "bwana" in these verses makes complete sense when it is realized that Hassani bin Ismaili is presenting these as the terms which the subordinate figure will be able to use should it ever be necessary for him to exonerate himself. Whiteley's next "difficult" verse now also seems much clearer:

Wakatengana maneno  
ya kuwacha nyama nono  
wakatafuna mikono  
hiyo ni yao khiyari.  
(p.62, v.273)

They agreed to abstain from pleasures and swallowed their ill-feeling; this they did from choice [Whiteley's translation, p. 62].

And they disagreed over this question of illicit pleasure but eventually decided to abstain from it [Whiteley's alternative, p. 63].

They disagreed over this issue  
of abstaining from certain pleasures<sup>52</sup>  
but decided to do so<sup>53</sup>  
this was their choice  
[My translation].

Similarly:

Kawapiyana yamini  
bibi kuacha kuzini  
wakadhalika Hassani  
wala kutwaa majari  
(p. 62, v. 274).

They swore to each other a solemn oath; the wife to abstain from fornication, and the husband, likewise, to refrain from taking a second wife [Whiteley translation, p. 63].

They solemnly vowed to each other  
the subordinate would abandon secret involvements  
as would Hassani  
as well as the seizing of majari<sup>54</sup>

Certainly this interpretation explains more clearly why Hassani bin Ismaili would go immediately and announce this agreement to Kinjala (276). It also helps to explain verses 280-287. In these verses the "wife" / subordinate authority has regrets and calls her "male slave" / "traitor" or "comprador," who is told:

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<sup>52</sup>"Nyama nono" may be symbolic of "illicit pleasure," it could also, more likely, refer to a fee or payment of some sort. "Fatty meat" would be a literal translation, but this is clearly not workable in the context.

<sup>53</sup>The translation of this line is uncertain.

<sup>54</sup>"Majari" might be "second wife" or "wives" as Whiteley translates it. Another possibility is that it is "magari"/"vehicles" or "majaro"/caravans (Krapf 1882: 117).

Kitwana, usikimbie  
kila siku unijye  
lakini ila nahari!

"My dear, don't run off, come back to me every day, but not in the daytime"

This analysis of "wife" as "subordinate authority" and "slave" as "traitor" or "comprador" becomes even more plausible when one considers the events described in terms of Swahili cultural and poetic conventions concerning discussion of sexual topics. As Shariff notes, explicit literal discussions of issues involving sexuality "violate a cultural taboo."<sup>55</sup> Yet sexual imagery is used in political poetry (see his example, pp. 14-15). A description in which a Swahili husband and wife take a vow "to stop fornicating" and then the wife explicitly invites a young male slave to visit her secretly at night is quite implausible if read literally. If this series of events were being described, other imagery would be used to describe the events metaphorically. It is much more likely the case here that unacceptable sexual behavior is being used as a metaphor for disapproved political behavior.

In addition to the use of kinship terms as metaphors for political roles, both poems also use verbs that literally refer to non-political activities to symbolize political action. In both poems verbs of speech ("kusema," "kutamka," "kunena") are often used to represent "free speech," speaking symbolizes resistance, and the denial or loss of free speech symbolizes loss of political power. In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" the following examples of this symbolism are found:

Kilwa na Dari-'s Salama kuna Wazungu nakama mtu hapati kusema nti wamezizuia (238) <sup>56</sup>	In Kilwa and Dar es Salaam there is a "plague" of Europeans No one can speak/object they have stifled the countries
---	--

In the last two lines of this verse denial of free speech is the example given of all of the types of repression perpetuated by the Germans. In the next two examples silence symbolizes failure to resist and speaking symbolizes resistance:

Mji ukanyamaza pasiwe mtu kunena jamii ya waungwana pasi mwinyi kutongoa (274)	The city was silent There was no one to speak Among the gentry There was no one to speak
---	---

....  
....

Nao wamenyamazana Hapo mwinyi kutongoa (287)	They silence each other There is no one to speak
---	---

In the next example, a verb which can refer either to verbal or non-verbal offense, *kutezewa* / "to be mocked" or "to be toyed with," is used to symbolize Ger-

<sup>55</sup>"The Function of Dialogue Poetry," 21.

<sup>56</sup>This is a frequently cited verse. It is mentioned by Whiteley and Freeman-Grenville among others.

man abusive behavior. The final line of the verse again uses "silence" to symbolize "failure to resist" and says that given the abusiveness of the Germans, their rule must be fought:

....	....
....	....
kutezewa ni wazuka	if one is mocked by specters <sup>57</sup>
haifai kunyamaa (291)	one cannot not be silent

The same symbolism is found in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji." In the following verses, the local people who have resisted and have been ordered jailed and executed by the German ruler, tell him:

....	....
Asili kuwa harubu	The origin of the war
kama wataka sababu	if you want the reasons
Hatufichi takhubiri (24)	We will not conceal [things]
	we will speak
Bwana wetu, tumechoka	Our leader, we are tired
kila siku kutumika	of always being used
"tufe, yatoke mashaka!"	"Let us die rather than be hesitant"
naam, tumekhitari (25)	Yes, we have made our choice.

Freedom of speech and freedom of movement are also the choices of others as the movement spreads. In the next two verses, even though the participants have doubts about the Maji Maji leadership and purposes, they join the movement rather than living "in secrecy":

Boma natuipe nyongo!	Let us turn our backs on the
encampment	
tumwandame Hongo-Hongo	and follow Hongo-Hongo
ingawa yeye muwongo	even if he is an imposter
tutapata tukadawiri (100)	we will be able to move freely
Na twende zetu barani	Let us go inland
tukafune majani	and live off the land
tukadumu vilimani	and continue in the hills
upesi pasiwe usiri! (101)	Quickly, there should not be secrecy!

---

<sup>57</sup>I have used "specters" here with the assumption that the "ni" in this line is the "na" of Standard Swahili. Those who are "mocking" are thus the "wazuka," who could be ghosts, spirits, people who have recently "popped up." The reference, in this case, is to the Germans, and "specters" seems to be the best English term to convey this negative image of them.

Alternatively the line might read "kutezewa ni [kufanana] na wazuka"/"to be mocked/toyed with is to be like specters." In this case, "wazuka" would refer to those mocked, and the implication would be that to be "mocked/toyed with" and not respond, is to deny the reality of one's existence.

Allen translates the two lines, "It is cowardly to be mocked and to remain silent."

The same symbolism is used when the movement begins to falter and those involved confront their leader. The two examples of the German decimation are the many deaths and that there is no place where discussions can take place:

Hongo tupe maarifa	Hongo give us a plan
watu wengi wamekufa	Many have died
bara yote ina afa	The entire interior has been decimated
wapi kafanye shauri? (173)	Where can discussion take place?

At the end of the poem the impact of the German victory is represented in the following verse. Here the local people, who in the beginning of the poem objected to German rule, now can only agree to and repeat insults of themselves:

"Washenzi hawana akili fukara hana rijali!" wote wakamkubali kila alilo dhukuri (326).	"The locals are mindless a pauper isn't a man!" all agreed with him each repeated this.
---	--

### Language Conventions

There is no evidence in these poems that the poets had any familiarity with earlier extant political poetry from the Northern dialect regions. There are no references to known poets or poems from the areas where the Northern dialects are spoken. Yet Hemedi bin Abdalla el-Buhriy, from Tanga, and Abdul Karim bin Jamaliddini, from Lindi, composed their poems in similar language heavily influenced by Northern dialects. They also used the "shairi" and "utendi" conventions of Kiamu, Kipate and Kimvita and many of the same figures of speech found in much earlier poetry from the Northern dialect areas. How and when this tradition was transmitted is unclear. That it was transmitted seems indisputable. The literary traditions of the Lamu archipelago were most likely transmitted to Zanzibar, Pemba, and what are now coastal areas of Tanzania by scholars from Lamu, Pate, Barawa and Siyu.<sup>58</sup> Certainly these dialects were well known and highly regarded in Zanzibar well before the turn of the century. In the preface to his dictionary published in 1882, Ludwig Krapf states:

For the best and most original dialect of Kiswahili itself, the people of Patta, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, and Tanga claim pre-eminence over the inhabitants of Zanzibar and Pemba. And it must be admitted that the Kiswahili spoken at Zanzibar has a very large infusion of Arabic and other foreign words. The Mombassians, therefore, consider the dialect of Zanzibar as the

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<sup>58</sup>According to Whiteley, "From Mombasa the verse tradition spread to Pemba, where it flourished during the later part of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of this. All the poets seem to have lived in or around the main centres and the clove-plantations and to have enjoyed the patronage of wealthy Arab landowners. Here they acted as commentators of daily life, vying with one another in their efforts to record their feelings on such diverse topics as hunger, love, hardship, the spirits, politics, and notable people." (1969: 22-23). See also Allen 1971, Martin 1976, and Iliffe 1979.

"maneno ya Kijingajinga," i.e. the language of ignorant people, or of newly arrived slaves and other foreigners" (p. xi).

Presumably, the status of the Northern dialects was largely a reflection of their continued and, during the nineteenth century, expanding and spreading use in disseminating Islamic teaching and in written poetry.<sup>59</sup> Although prose texts by the same authors are not available, prose texts collected by Velten that were composed by other authors from Zanzibar and the Kimrima speaking coastal areas do not show the extensive Northern dialect influence evident in these poems.<sup>60</sup>

The language of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" would seem to represent a stage in the evolution of what later became a more standardized poetic dialect.<sup>61</sup> Characteristics of this poetic dialect evident in these poems include preservation of Northern dialect vowel and verbal subject prefix deletion rules, use of Northern dialect first person singular subject prefixes, use of certain Northern dialect verb forms, and use of some Northern dialect lexical items.

Northern dialect type vowel deletion where:  $V1 + V2 > V2$ <sup>62</sup> is found very often in the poems. Examples found in twenty verses from "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" are:

- 408 i. Akanambia (a + ka + ni + ambia)
- iii. Nenda (ni + enda) [= niende (ni + end + e) St.]
- 414 i. Tukenenda (tu + ka + enenda)
- 415 ii. Akamba (a + ka + amba)
- iv. Homa iloningia (i + li + yo + ni + ngia)
- 419 i. Tukenda (tu + ka + enda)
- 423 ii. Nambia (ni + ambia)
- 426 iv. Nambia (ni + ambia)

---

<sup>59</sup>Oral poetry collected during the same period seems to preserve older forms likely common to a number of dialects. However since this poetry was collected before the invention of tape recorders the available texts are less reliable than written texts collected during the same period. For examples of oral poetry of this period see Krapf 1882 and Velten 1907.

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, "Hadisi za Wasuaheli" in Velten 1907: 1-144.

<sup>61</sup>Much of the description of the poetic dialect as evidenced in these poems, and of the dialect generally, is very tentative. Why the particular characteristics listed below seem to hold in these poems is difficult to explain. Swahili was first written in Arabic script and all evidence suggests that the earliest poetic texts were written in Northern dialects. Standardization of the orthography, to the extent it did occur, came much later. Presumably some Northern forms became "frozen" in the written poetic dialect. In other cases, it is probable, given the importance of meter in Swahili poetry, that poets utilized alternative forms depending on which fit the meter better. In either case, what is important to bear in mind is that the written poem for the poet, the scribe, and the transliterator, was presumably basically a script for oral recitation. Lines which do not scan are suspect. Lines such as the following from "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" even if written in the poet's hand and transliterated exactly cannot reflect how the poem was and should be read:

79 iii. nawaambiani na mapema (na/wa/a/mbi/a/ni/ na ma/pe/ma) = 10 syllables

123 ii. ufikapo kawaambie (u/fi/ka/po ka/wa/a/mbi/e) = 9 syllables

<sup>62</sup>Nurse, "Swahili Dialects," 86.



Similarly, the following were found in twenty verses from "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji":

- 111 ii. Munandame (mu + ni + andame)
- 114 i. Mkanambia (m + ka + ni + ambia)
- 118 i. Msende (m + si + end + e)
- 69 ii. Neleza (ni + a + eleza) [Not from sample]

Deletion of subject prefixes, another characteristic of Northern dialects,<sup>63</sup> also occurs quite frequently. Examples from the twenty-line sample of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" are:

- 408 ii. Nami tangia ndani ([ni] + ta + ngia)
- 411 i. Saadani kiwasili ([tu/ni] + ki + wasili)
- 412 iii. Takhuni ([ni] + ta + khuni)
- 413 iv. Tarejea ([tu] + ta + rejea)
- 428 iii. Takaposhika ([ni] + taka + po + shika)

Only one example from the sample of "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" was found. Yet examples are amply evident in the poem:

- 118 ii. Dawa yangu taharibu ([i] + ta + haribu)
- 71 iv. tapeleka askari ([ni] + ta + peleka)
- 80 ii. tawakamata ([ni] + ta + wa + kamata)

Likewise, what seems to be an older Northern dialect form of the first person singular with "-ka" past consecutive verb forms<sup>64</sup> is found often, albeit not consistently, in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima." The following examples are found in three verses of the poem:<sup>65</sup>

- 400 i. Haisoma (Ha + i + soma) = (ni + ka + i + soma/St.)
- haijua (Ha + i + jua) = (ni + ka + i + jua/St.)
- 401 i. Haitazama (ha + i + tazama) = (ni + ka + i + tazama/St.)
- iii. haona (ha + ona) = (ni + ka + ona/St.)
- 402 i. hatazama (ha + tazama) = (ni + ka + tazama/St.)
- 403 i. Hasema (ha + sema) = (ni + ka + tazama/St.)

In "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" there is also at least one example of Northern dialect typical ni + w > mbw.<sup>66</sup> This occurs at 418, iii: "mbwene" (ni + wona; see also below).

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<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>64</sup>Nurse says, "the assimilation process n(i)kV > nk'V > k'V > hv is well attested" but does not give a Swahili example of the last stages (p. 99). Miche provides examples from older Northern Dialect poetry (1979: 233). Mazrui says the ka- > ha- /ki- > hi- process "only seldom appears in present day Kimvita" (p. 32) and says it is "fairly restricted to the older generation" (1981: 33).

<sup>65</sup>I have not found examples of this in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji."

<sup>66</sup>Nurse, 83.

Both poems also include some verb forms which seem more Northern than Southern. The following occur in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima":

- 252 ii: tuwene (tu + won + e)<sup>67</sup> = St. tumeona  
 418 iii: mbwene (ni + won +ie) = St. nimeona  
 425 i: nalingafanyiza (ni + a + li + nga + fany + iz + a) = St. nilikuwaninafanyiza  
 426 iii: nipa (ni + p+ e) = St. nipe

The following are found in "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji":

- 7 i: twalikaa (tu + a + li + kaa) = St. tulikaa  
 94 ii: nieleza (ni + elez + a) = St. nieleze  
 113 i: nalikuwa (n+ a + li + kuwa) = St. nilikuwa  
 162 ii: yawele (ya + w +ele)<sup>68</sup> = St. ilikuwa  
 290, iv: wawene (wa + won +ie)<sup>69</sup> = St. waliona  
 211, ii: mwalikuwa (mu + a + li + kuwa)= St. mlikuwa  
 329, iii: atakaye ni kusoma = St. atakaye aisome<sup>70</sup>

Both poems also use, although not consistently, Northern dialect forms of items shared by Northern and Southern dialects. For example:

- "mato" as opposed to "macho"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 187 i;  
 "ndia" as opposed to "njia"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 414 ii;  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 125 i.  
 "-ngi" as opposed to "-ingi"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 196 ii, 205 ii, 252 ii;  
 "-ngia" as opposed to "-ingia"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and  
 "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," very frequently in both poems.  
 "moya" as opposed to "moja"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 2 iv, 13 iv x 2, 421 iv  
 (but "mmoja mmoja" 44 ii).  
 "yuani" as opposed to "jueni"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 68 ii, 70 iv, 74 iii, 418 ii.

<sup>67</sup>See Nurse, on these forms historically and in Northern dialects (pp. 89, 103).

<sup>68</sup> See Nurse, 89. Whiteley has "(Makonde)" in brackets in the glossary to his translation, presumably implying that this form is borrowed from Makonde. It is much more plausible that this is a poetic usage of the Northern form or that this form was also the older form in Southern dialects.

<sup>69</sup>See Nurse, 89. Whiteley again has "(Makonde)" in brackets in the glossary to his translation. Again it is much more plausible that this is a poetic usage of the Northern form or that this form was also the older form in Southern dialects.

<sup>70</sup>Nurse gives as an example from Kiamu: "sisi ni kutenda" (we have to do it), 99.

- "nti" as opposed to "nchi"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 56 i, 259  
 ii; and  
 "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 125 i.  
 "-sikiza" as opposed to "-sikiliza"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 131 iv.  
 "-uzana" as opposed to "-ulizana"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 53, i.  
 "-enenda" as opposed to "-enda"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 263 iv, 411  
 iii, 421 ii, 414 i, 419 i;  
 "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 123 i.  
 "-ziwiya" as opposed to "zuia"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 200 ii.  
 "-ata" as opposed to "-acha"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 417 ii.  
 "nyoyo" as opposed to "mioyo"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji," 185 iii.  
 "nyongo" as opposed to "mgongo" "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji,"  
 100 i.

Both poems also include a few lexical items common in Northern dialects but not found or restricted in Southern dialects:

- "-pulika" rather than "-sikiliza"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 187 i;  
 "-amba" rather than "-sema"  
 –"Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" 187 i.

### Conclusion

This consideration of a limited number of genre conventions, two types of metaphorical convention, and a few features of poetic language illustrates only a few elements of the traditions of Swahili political poetry evident in two poems. Other aspects of these traditions obviously relevant to the translation and interpretation of these and other poems include irony, forms of praising and cursing, other symbols and types of symbolism, other types of metaphor, and the use of myth and legend. More comprehensive literary and linguistic analysis of these and other political poems, as well as other types of poetry, should be undertaken.

This analysis has demonstrated, first, that "Utenzi wa Vita wa Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima" and "Utenzi wa Vita vya Maji Maji" were composed within and contributed to the maintenance and perpetuation of a rich and well established literary tradition in which political poetry, and particularly resistance poetry, is of particular importance.

Second, while the two poems utilize many of the same elements of this tradition, each is a highly original and moving composition which provides considerable insight into the dynamics of intellectual and political thought and life of the period.

This study suggests that poetry was a highly significant mode of political discourse in East Africa at the time of the German conquest. It raises the question as to the role poetry may have had in the two resistance movements and in the

spread of Islam and of the Swahili language during this period. Further work should consider other poetry of the period, as well as political poetry from earlier and later periods, and, of course, political poetry from other areas of East Africa should be examined.

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