

TAFSIRI

**Siasa ya Kutafsiri na Kujikwamua
kutoka kwenye Ukoloni katika
Taaluma ya Kiswahili**
Politics of Translation and
Decolonisation in Swahili Studies

International Workshop

19/20 November 2021, Johannes Gutenberg-University
Mainz
hybrid (time zone: CET)

Warsha itafanyika kwa Kiingereza na Kiswahili.
The workshop will take place in English and Swahili.

Organisers:

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Please register here / Tafadhali jandikisheni hapa:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlsdOmtqTgqGdcpV9d34dkZ3q04TsZhD1U0>

Ijumaa Friday – 19 November 2021		Jumamosi Saturday – 20 November 2021	
13.00 - 14.00	Arrival and registration	10.00 - 11.00	Informal drop-in discussion space on TAFSIRI
14.00 - 14.15	Welcome note and introduction Irene Brunotti, Franziska Fay, Nathalie Koenings TAFSIRI: Politics of Translation and Decolonisation in Swahili Studies	11.00 - 11.30	Mohammed Ghassani Kufasili Methali za Kiswahili: Mgongano Baina ya Lugha na Mukstadha
14.15 - 14.30	Welcome note by ZIS representatives Matthias Krings (ifeas Mainz/ ZIS)	11.30 - 12.00	Zainab Alwi Baharoon Maana ya Tafsiri
14.30 - 15.15	Keynote Nanjala Nyabola Citizenship, Language and Digital Rights: The Status of African Languages as a Measure of the Health of Digital Rights	12.00 - 12.10	Discussion <i>(Comment by Ida Hadjivayanis and Meg Arenberg)</i>
15.15 - 15.20	BREAK	12.10 - 13.00	LUNCH BREAK
15.20 - 15.50	Ida Hadjivayanis Translating Paradise (1994) by Abdulrazak Gurnah into Swahili	13.00 - 13.30	Annachiara Raia Translating reading practices: first reflections on religious booklets as cultural objects
15.50 - 16.20	M. Yunus Rafiq Writing and Translating Ndege Wawili Tena by Mohamed Rafiq into Kiswahili	13.30 - 14.00	Clarissa Vierke Matini gani? Textual Variability and Translation of Swahili Oral Poetry
16.20 - 16.30	Discussion <i>(Comment by Mohammed Ghassani and Zainab Alwi Baharoon)</i>	14.00 - 14.10	Discussion <i>(Comment by Serena Talento and M. Yunus Rafiq)</i>
16.30 - 16.40	BREAK	14.10 - 14.20	BREAK
16.40 - 17.10	Meg Arenberg Swahili Translation in Community	14.20 - 14.30	Wrap-up and opening Irene Brunotti, Franziska Fay, Nathalie Koenings
17.10 - 17.40	Serena Talento Preliminary reflections on literary translation flows from Swahili into Italian, English and German: Niche exporting or glocal aspirations?	14.30 - 15.00	Plenary discussion and way forward
17.40 - 17.50	Discussion <i>(Comment by Annachiara Raia and Clarissa Vierke)</i>		
17.50 - 18.00	BREAK		
18.00 - 18.45	PERFORMING TRANSLATIONS		

Kwa njia gani sisi tulio wasomi wa Taaluma za Kiswahili tunaweza kujenga upya uhusiano baina ya 'lugha za tafsiri' zisizo na uwezo sawasawa, na kufikiria upya dhana ya tafsiri iwe "common language of languages" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2017)? Miradi gani idhaniwe ili kuanzisha na kutekeleza kazi hiyo?

Pamoja na kuwa "the most intimate act of reading" (Spivak 1993: 183) 'tafsiri' pia ni aina ya nadharia ambayo, ikichukuliwa kwa makini, inaweza kutuelezea mengi kuhusu siasa ya utafiti wa kitaaluma na sanaa. Dhana ya tafsiri - dhana ya Kiswahili yenye maana na matumizi mengi - ina asili yake katika elimu ya Kiislamu, istilahi ya 'tafsiri' ikihusiana haswa na Qur'an, na vilevile inatumika kuelezea sifa za "kushirikiana, kueneza, kukutanisha" zilizo za lugha, utamaduni, dhana, nadharia, fasihi, dini, pamoja na maana nyingi nyenginezo.

Tulipoanza kufikiria kuandaa warsha hii, tulikuwa tukijadiliana kuhusu kazi wasomi wa Taaluma za Kiswahili wanazofanya katika fani zao mbalimbali, tukichunguza namna 'siasa' (kwa maana mbalimbali) inavyoathiri kazi na utaratibu wa kutafsiri matini yoyote (andishi au simulizi, ya kifasihi au ya aina mbalimbali), pamoja na maana ya 'kutafsiri' maisha ya watu na vitendo vyao vya kijamii (kwenye fani ya ethnografia, falsafa, historia, nk). Kwa maana hiyo, tungependa kutafakari upya nafasi na uwezo wa kufasiri ili "kuuondoa, kuukana, kuuvua, kuupindua, kuuvunja, na kujikwamua kutoka kwenye, ukoloni" (*decolonization* - [Udadisi](#), Juni 2021). Vilevile tunahisi kuwa kutafakari juu ya uhusiano baina ya tafsiri, fasiri na fasili kunaweza/inaweza kuwa mchango mkubwa.

Tafsiri inategemea "ideological framings of comparison. And comparison (...) is always positioned, never politically neutral, never innocent" (Gal 2015: 236). Kutafakari upya juu ya *siasa ya kutafsiri* - iliyo na "simultaneous possibilities of closure and openness" (Kothari 2016: 44) – inadhahirisha umuhimu wa kuzitafakari upya Taaluma za Kiswahili, kwa vile: (1) tafsiri yoyote ndiyo kitendo cha kisiasa; (2) tafiti za kiethnografia zinategemea tafsiri; na (3) ethnografia yenyewe ni aina ya kutafsiri.

Achille Mbembe anavyohoji, msingi wa *Decolonization* ndio kwamba "social worlds are multiple, fractured, and contested." Kukubali na kukaribisha "multivocality and translation" inaweza kutusaidia "[to] avoid perpetuating the knowledge/power asymmetries that currently fracture global humanity", na kuunda nafasi kwa "a plurality of narratives from silenced voices and invisible places" (2021: 79). Sambamba na Mbembe, tunapendekeza kutafakari kuhusu njia ambazo wasomi wa Taaluma za Kiswahili wanazitumia wanavyoshughulikia na kukabiliana na sauti hizo tofauti tofauti (*multivocality*) na wanavyozitafsiri katika kazi zao. Vilevile tunajuliza kwa kiasi/kiwango gani tunaandika upya, kunena upya, au kusuluhisha na kufichua ukosefu wa usawa unaodumu baina ya ujuzi na uwezo katika kazi zetu za kitaaluma.

Lugha ya Kiswahili, historia yake, sura yake, wasemaji wake, sanaa yake, na siasa zake ni kiini cha Taaluma za Kiswahili. Lakini mpaka leo hii umuhimu wa tafsiri katika kazi za uchapishaji na uwasilishaji wa kitaaluma, pamoja na utafiti wa wasomi binafsi, hautambuliki sana. Tunaamini kwamba kukutana kwa ajili ya kuumba tafsiri upya na kutafakari tena kuhusu kazi za kutafsiri ni muhimu ili Taaluma za Kiswahili zijikwamue kutoka kwenye ukoloni.

Kubainisha siasa ya kutafsiri na kusisitiza umuhimu wa kujadiliana juu ya uwezo uliomo kwenye "passage between lived worlds" (Leavitt 2014: 193), warsha hii inakusudia kuzingatia nafasi, vitendo, siasa na maana mbalimbali za tafsiri kama "an array of [diverse] communicative practices" (Gal 2015: 226) na itatoa nafasi ya kushirikiana kiuweledi na kuhakiki njia mpya za utafiti, kujifunza namna ya kutafsiri ujuzi wa/maarifa ya Kiswahili, na kuunda mbinu mpya za kutekeleza tafiti pamoja na ushirikiano ulio na usawa na utakaojikwamua kutoka kwenye ukoloni..

Warsha italenga mazungumzo, majadiliano na ushirikiano baina ya watafsiri, matini, wasomi, na wasanii. Tunapendekeza kuwa na mawasilisho mafupi yatakayofuatiliwa na majadiliano ili tutafakari juu ya tafsiri kama: a) kitendo cha siasa, b) kitendo/kazi muhimu katika Taaluma za Kiswahili, na c) njia ya kujikwamua kutoka kwenye ukoloni.

Baadhi ya maswali ambayo tulianzia nayo tu, na yasiyotosha kwa vile yanahitaji kuongezeka na yale yenu, ni yafuatayo:

- Tafsiri ina maana gani katika kazi zako (kufanya utafiti, kuandika kazi ya kifasihi n.k.)?
- Ni nini unachotafsiri katika kazi zako?
- Kuna changamoto gani katika utaratibu wako wa kutafsiri? Unakuta "vitu" visivyotafsirika? Unakabiliana navyo kwa njia gani? Kwa nini?
- Je unatumia tafsiri kwa njia gani katika kazi zako? Ni nani walengwa haswa?
- Je unatafakari vipi juu ya nafasi yako kama mtafsiri?
- Ukitafsiri unamtegemea nani? Unategemea mitandao ipi na kwa nini?
- Vikwazo gani vinaathiri kazi zako au mahitaji yako katika utaratibu wako wa kutafsiri?
- Je unaona nafasi gani kwa tafsiri kuwa chombo cha kujikwamua kutoka kwenye ukoloni?

How can we as Swahili Studies scholars constructively deconstruct ongoing unequal power relationships between the languages of translation and reconfigure a concept of translation as a “common language of languages” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2017)? What kinds of projects could be imagined to implement and activate such an endeavour?

‘Translation’ is both “the most intimate act of reading” (Spivak 1993: 183) and an analytic category that, if taken seriously, can tell us much about the politics of scholarly research, art-making and engagement. *Tafsiri* - the multilayered Swahili concept for translation and its associated practices, stems from Qur’an exegesis and may describe the ‘carrying across’ of linguistic, cultural, conceptual, literary, religious and many other meanings. Intended as a practical intervention into contemporary Swahili Studies, we ask what Swahili Studies scholars do across different fields, and explore the political implications of the translation and re-telling of life worlds and social practices. We wish to rethink the productive and decolonial potential of *tafsiri* (translation) and its links to *fasiri* (interpretation) and *fasili* (explication/ elucidation/ resolution).

Translations “rely on ideological framings of comparison. And comparison (...) is always positioned, never politically neutral, never innocent” (Gal 2015: 236). A critical reappraisal of the politics of translation – its “simultaneous possibilities of closure and openness” (Kothari 2016: 44) – offers much potential in Swahili Studies, because: (1) all translation is political practice; (2) ethnographic practices rely on translations; and (3) ethnography itself is a kind of translation.

Decolonization, as Achille Mbembe recently argued, builds on the idea “that social worlds are multiple, fractured, and contested.” Embracing “multivocality and translation” can help us to “avoid perpetuating the knowledge/power asymmetries that currently fracture global humanity”, making room for “a plurality of narratives from silenced voices and invisible places” (2021: 79). Following Mbembe, we propose to think critically about how we as Swahili Studies scholars treat multivocality and translation in our work, and to what extent we reinscribe, articulate, or dismantle the perpetuation of knowledge/power imbalances in our research practices and products.

The Swahili language, its histories, forms, speakers, arts, and its politics are at the center of Swahili Studies. Yet the centrality of translation to academic practice and publishing, as well to individual research projects is rarely acknowledged. We believe that coming together to reconceive of translation and translation practice is essential to the project of decolonising Swahili Studies.

To tease out the politics of translation, or the active power negotiations involved in the “passage between lived worlds” (Leavitt 2014: 193), this workshop focuses on roles, practices, politics and meanings of translation as “an array of [diverse] communicative practices” (Gal 2015: 226) and as a critical engagement that opens up new research horizons, better represents how knowledge is actually produced, and can generate new approaches and reflexive, decolonial collaborations.

Mode: The workshop intends a dialogical and collaborative format with translators, with texts, scholars and artists. Going beyond the presentation of individual papers, it focuses on shorter interventions by participants, followed by discussions that aim to tease out and bring together broader insights on translation as: a) political b) a central practice in Swahili Studies, and c) offering decolonizing potential.

Some of the questions we imagine engaging collectively include:

- What does translation mean in the context of your work (research, teaching, creative writing, etc.)?
- What is it that you translate in your work?
- What do you find challenging or impossible to translate? Why is this so? How do you deal with such untranslatabilities, and why?
- How do you use translation in your own work? Whom does your work address?
- How do you reflect on your own role as a translator?
- Who are other actors you depend on when you translate? What networks do you rely on for translation, and why?
- What disciplinary or professional conventions affect your approach to or need for translation?
- What potential do you see in translation as a tool for research and social justice/decolonisation?

Keynote**Citizenship, Language and Digital Rights: The Status of African Languages as a Measure of the Health of Digital Rights**

Nanjala Nyabola

Abstracts**Translating Paradise (1994) by Abdulrazak Gurnah into Swahili**

Ida Hadjivayanis

"I speak to maps. And sometimes they say something back to me. This is not as strange as it sounds, nor is it an unheard of thing. Before maps, the world was limitless. It was maps that gave it shape and made it seem like territory, like something that could be possessed, not just laid waste and plundered. Maps made places on the edges of the imagination seem graspable and placable" (Gurnah, By the Sea).

Paradise (1994) blurb advances that the world Gurnah is presenting is 'beautiful strange...unknown place...compelling, pitiless, dazzling...' – it is a world that is made 'graspable' through his writing. Yet, we know that many in East Africa cannot access this work because English is alienating. This is why I have started translating Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise (1994). In this sense, translation will bring his work home.. or will it?

Paradise is a novel about Yusuf, the protagonist who is sold by his father as a form of repayment. Yusuf moves from the simple life of rural East Africa into a complex urban world – a world where Black Africans, Christian missionaries, Indians and Swahili Muslims coexist in this subtle social hierarchy. We are able to witness the war, trade and the coming of age of a young man. Then, when things seem to settle, Yusuf has to adjust to new realities – those of European colonialism. My presentation will look at the translation choices taken in translating the first chapter of Paradise.

Writing and Translating Ndege Wawili Tena by Mohamed Rafiq into Kiswahili

M. Yunus Rafiq

Jee nini nafasi ya nafsi kwa mwandishi ambaye ni mtunzi na mtafsiri katika mwili mmoja? Inaonekana kwamba jambo hili linadhaniwa kuwa ni rahisi kwa mwandishi anayefanya mambo haya mawili kwa mkupuo yaani kuandika na kutafsiri hio kazi kwa lugha ingine. Suala hapa linaonekana ni zaidi ya kutamalaki lugha kadhaa. Jee ni kweli kuna nafsi mbili tofauti kwa mwandishi ambaye kwa mwili mmoja yeye ni mtunzi na mtafsiri? Nitapenda kuchangia mawazo yangu kwenye jambo hili wakati nilipoandika kazi iitwayo Ndege Wawili Tena ambapo nilivaa kanzu mbili ya mwandishi na mtafsiri. Nitapenda kutoa hoja kwamba kuvaa nafsi hizo mbili, mtunzi na mtafsiri, ni jambo linaloleta mpasuko wa hisia na unagusa mambo zaidi ya uzoefu wa lugha kama msamiati, adabu, na sarufi.

Kufasili Methali za Kiswahili: Mgongano Baina ya Lugha na Mukadha

Mohammed Khelef Ghassani

Anasema Maria Khodorkovsky wa Taasisi ya ALTA Language inayojihusiha na tafsiri na ukalimani, kwamba "tafsiri ya sisizi haifanyi kazi kwenye misemo na methali." Sababu ni kwamba, mbali ya maneno yenyewe yanayounda, maana za tamathali hizi za semi zimo zaidi kwenye mukadha wa kitamaduni, falsafa, historia na mfumo wa maisha ya jamii husika.

Hapana shaka, kuna tafauti baina ya kufasiri na kufasili: cha kwanza ni kuhamisha maana kutoka matini ya lugha moja kwenda lugha nyengine na cha pili ni kufafanua maana ili kuweka wazi yaliyomo kwenye maana hiyo. Nomino ya kufasiri ni TAFSIRI na ya kufasili ni FASIL.

Licha ya kwamba warsha hii ni kuhusu TAFSIRI na sio FASIL, ninaomba kujielekeza kwenye hilo la KUFASIL kwani nitahoji kwamba ufafanuzi na uchambuzi wa methali na misemo una kazi kubwa zaidi kuliko ile ya kuhamisha maana kutoka lugha moja kwenda nyengine. Baadhi ya wanafunzi na hata watumiaji wa kawaida wa Kiswahili, methali na misemo zinaweza kuwa kama lugha ya kigeni, ambapo huyasikia na kuyatamka maneno yake, lakini wanapitwa maana zake.

Katika kuelezea fasili za misemo na methali nitajielekeza kwenye kuzungumza kama mzawa na mtumiaji wa kawaida tu wa lugha ya Kiswahili. Kwenye uwasilishaji wa mada hii, nitachaguwa methali ama misemo mitano ya Kiswahili na kwa kutumia mchanganyiko wa maandishi na picha/michoro kutoka mtandaoni, nitajaribu kufasili maana zake mbalimbali kwa mukadha unaozitifautisha. Sehemu kubwa ya methali hizo tayari zimo katika ukurasa wa Kiswahili Kina Wenyewe katika mtandao wangu wa mohammedghassani.online.

Maana ya Tafsiri

Zainab Baharoon

Mwandishi wa fasihi huipata tafsiri katika maisha kutokana na mazingira yaliyomzunguka. Akayahusisha katika mambo makuu mawili, ambayo ni mahusiano baina ya mtu na mtu pamoja na utendaji wake wa kazi. Utendaji wa mtu huangaliwa katika kufanikiwa au kutokufanikiwa katika masuala tofauti ya kimaisha. Na ili awe na ufanisi mzuri katika utendaji wake, mwanaadamu hutakiwa kuwa na elimu, ujuzi pamoja na uzoefu kwa kile anachokifanyia kazi. Hapo ndipo anaweza kuyafikia mafanikio yanayotarajiwa. Hivyo siku zote mwanaadamu hutakiwa kuwa ni mwenye kujituma na kujifunza.

Kwa upande wa pili, kuna mahusiano baina ya mtu na mtu. Katika Nyanja hii mwandishi ameigawa katika sehemu kuu tatu ambazo ni tabia njema, hisia kwa wengine - kujali kinachowapendeza na kujiepusha na kinachowachukiza. Na jambo la tatu ni kujitambua nafasi yako katika jamii na una wajibu gani kwayo. Kwa mambo hayo mwanaadamu ndipo ataweza kuishi vizuri na watu waliomzunguka.

Uhusiano wa watu pamoja na utendaji huwenda sambamba katika maisha ya kila mwanaadamu, kwani bila ya uhusiano mzuri kwa watu bila shaka utendaji nao hautakuwa mzuri, kwasababu hakuna utendaji wa mtu pekee. Hivyo kuwa na uhusiano mzuri na watu ni jambo la lazima ili utendaji ufanikiwe kwa kiwango kilichokusudiwa kufika.

Mfano mzuri tunauona kwenye riwaya ya Mungu Hakopeshwi, ambapo mwandishi ametuonesha jinsi gani Bw. Ahmed alivyopata anguko baada ya kuwa na uhusiano mbaya na familia yake yake. Hivi ndivyo mwandishi wa kazi za Fasihi alivyoipa tafsiri ya maisha kuwa mahusiano mazuri ya watu huwenda sambamba na utendaji mzuri na mafanikio katika maisha.

Swahili Translation in Community

Meg Arenberg

“It has to be possible to continue this work together... questioning and overturning each other’s decisions... doing this work in the name of continuance and variation.”

-Kate Briggs, *This Little Art*

Recognizing the collaborative and social aspects of all textual production, and the particularly inescapable relationality of translation--even as an ostensibly solitary practice--my intervention will offer a series of reflections on the practice of translation *in community*. I will speak to my own experience of translation collaboration and translation work from within collectives of translation practitioners, describing in particular a collaborative multilingual experiment carried out by the recently formed Swahili translators collective, Kilabu Gioa. From here I hope to open the discussion to invite the other participants to share their experiences of translation collaboration and to consider together the potential, both creative and strategic, offered by shared, synchronous, communal, and collective practices.

Preliminary reflections on literary translation flows from Swahili into Italian, English and German: Niche exporting or glocal aspirations?

Serena Talento

In my contribution, I would like to shortly outline a part of the project I am presently working on that involves the mapping of contemporary literary translations from Swahili into Italian, German and English, and that particularly focuses on the role of the network of agents of translation in the export of Swahili literature (a literary exchange subject to logics of (not solely) cultural power) and the constraints of the market on different kinds of translation practices.

While many differences can be found in the contexts under study, similar patterns seem to emerge. Firstly, the contemporary publishing markets of these contexts show only faint interest in literary translations from Swahili in contrast to Anglophone literatures from the East African region. Secondly, the constraints of the market do not similarly affect the academic fields, which play a major role in advancing the translation of Swahili literature and promoting its significance as a subject of research. Thirdly, translators, who are often committed to promoting the visibility of Swahili literature, have increasingly become multiple mediating figures. They not only conduct translations but also frequently promote translations, self-publish or found publishing houses to ensure literary transfers from the Swahili language. Since several expert translators will be present at the workshop, I would like to have the chance to ask the audience questions about their own practice: Which kind of negotiations between translators and editors/publisher further or hinder the work of translation? Where and how do individual initiatives and institutional agendas (project funding, academic goals) intersect? Where and how the literary practice intersects with activism?

Translating reading practices: first reflections on religious booklets as cultural objects

Annachiara Raia

At a time of sociocultural changes that started questioning established Islamic learning traditions (independence years, post-Cold War/book market liberalization), Swahili Muslim writers embraced vernacular booklets as a way to impart knowledge and moral guidance to the readers. In this paper I present some preliminary data on print-objects, such as booklets, as more than merely a container for religious discourse. Their materiality/design and literary affordances mean that these booklets have also participated in narrative history production: there is a link between the portability of the physical book (form) and the "worldview" (idea) translated in there. Drawing from C. Levine's concept of "affordances of form" (2017) -borrowed from design theory- this study seeks to capture the complex operations of social and literary forms in order to translate the potential uses and actions latent in materials and design. How patterns of dimension, price and layout, paratext, language and genre were tailored to appeal to an intended readership? How to describe and translate the actual habitat in which booklets were produced, received and consumed?

Matini gani? Textual Variability and Translation of Swahili Oral Poetry

Clarissa Vierke

With my contribution I want to critically reflect upon translation practices of oral poetry. I have been involved in several editorial projects of precolonial Swahili poems preserved in manuscripts but rooted in oral performance. One of the recurring challenges, which I find hardly any edition (including my one) does justice to, is the variability of texts: Most poems exist in several and often substantially different versions. Still, many translations suggest that there is one 'authentic' version of a poem and also, accordingly, one 'valid' translation. I will take examples from the early 19th century poetic duels attributed to Zahidi Mngumi from Lamu, Muyaka bin Haji from Mombasa and other master poets. I will show how much lines fluctuated and changed and only occurred in dynamic arrangements. Poems exist with various nuances, changing arguments and tone, offering various possibilities of text. I would like to suggest a discussion on how one can 'translate' this variability into book formats. How does one allow the reader various ways of reading the poems?