

Ilimu: The Importance of Education



FIGURE 15 Ustadh Mahmoud Mau visiting a school in the village of Barigoni on the mainland

1 *Mwalimu* (“Teacher”)

Ustadh Mau composed this *shairi* in 2005, when the Kenya National Union of Teachers, the national association of teachers, invited him to contribute a sermon (*khutba*) for their assembly. Instead of inviting him to deliver the sermon, they asked him for a written sermon. Ustadh Mau objected; he said that he preferred not to submit a written sermon, because a written sermon loses all its flavor: it is like *bario* “leftover food” (*ni kama bario yaani chakula kilicholala*). He proposed to write and send a *shairi* instead. The poem echoes Mahmoud’s own concern with education, which for him is an utmost priority. It is a precondition for the development not only of every individual, but also for society as a whole. In the poem, he highlights the importance of the teacher, who is “number one,” i.e. of utmost importance, doing the most important job in and for society. It is studying that makes an individual a productive member of society. He reminds teachers, who often lack respect in a society where value is increasingly measured by the amount of money one earns at their job, to esteem their work and take pride in it. He also encourages teachers to make the effort to con-

stantly increase their knowledge and not stop studying. Furthermore, for him, teaching does not just imply conveying knowledge, but being a moral guide and role model to the students. The poem has previously been translated by Mohamed Karama, whose translation we have revised here.

1. *Mabibi piya mabwana, mulioka hadhirani
Ni furaha nyingi sana, kuwa na nyinyi wendani
Mimi ninavowaona, nyinyi ndio namba wani*

Ladies and gentlemen at this gathering today,
I am very happy to be with you, my fellows.
The way I see you, you are number one.

2. *Ni namba wani nasema, popote ulimwenguni
Tokea zama za nyuma, na za sasa za angani
Mtu bila ya kusoma, ni nani hebu semeni*

I am telling you, you have been number one all over the world,
From the most ancient times until the current era.
Tell me, what is a human being without education?

3. *Mtu ende aendako, hata apae hewani
Ni chuoni hapo kwako, alipitia yakini
Ni tunda la kazi yako, basi nawe jithamini*

No matter where one goes, even if one flies through the air,
One must certainly have first passed through your school.
This is the fruit of your labor, so teacher, take pride in yourself.

4. *Jithamini jihishimu, siwe na shaka moyoni
Juwa wewe ni muhimu, ni kuu yako thamani
Bila ya wewe mwalimu, hakuna la kumkini*

Respect and value yourself; don't harbor doubt in your heart.
Know that you are important; you are of great value.
Without you, teacher, nothing is possible.

5. *Mwalimu bila ya wewe, unaeshinda shuleni
Nyumbani usipumuwe, ukakesha vitabuni
Hatupati uelewe, wakuishika sukani*

Oh teacher, without you who spends the day at school—
 At home, you don't rest, but pass the night buried in books—
 Understand, without you we wouldn't have someone to hold the steering wheel.

6. *Mwalimu wako uwezo, ni mkuu kwa yakini*
Siufanyiye matezo, usiuwone ni duni
Siketi kwenye pambizo, ngiya ndani wandani'

Teacher, you certainly have great abilities.
 Don't underestimate yourself; don't think you are worthless.
 Don't shy away, but get into full swing.

I wandani = uwandani (Std. uwanjani) "dance floor."

7. *Ndani uwandani ngiya, usiketi pambizoni*
Wazazi wamekweteya, zipande zao za ini
Musaidane kuleya, pamoja muwaudeni

Go for it—do not shy away.
 The parents have sent their precious children to you.
 Help each other; assist each other in bringing the child up together.

8. *Haitoshi kusomesha, kwa kwandika ubaoni*
Ni dharura kufundisha, kwa mwendo wa maishani
Sura njema kuonesha, wanafunzi igizani

It is not enough to teach by writing on the blackboard;
 It is important to teach them how to live in this world.
 The good example you provide, pupils will imitate it!

9. *Wewe kwao kiigizo, wakutizama makini*
Wawapa wengi mafunzo, hata kwa mwendo ndiyani
Hiyo kazi si mchezo, kufundisha fahamuni

You are a role model for the children to carefully observe.
 You teach them a lot, even how to behave in the streets.
 The job of teaching is not a joke—consider it.

10. *Bila ya uwaminifu, na ucha Mungu moyoni
Hatupati ufafanifu, si wa duniya si dini
Natupange zetu swafu, kwa kite tusomesheni*

Without being faithful and pious at heart,
We will never succeed, neither in secular nor in religious education.
Let us join hands; let us educate them with empathy.

11. *Twapokeya mshahara, twalipwa kwa kazi hini
Natufanye kazi bora, ili halali tuleni
Tufundisheni kwa ghera, wanafunzi tusikhini*

We receive a salary; we are paid for this job.
Let's do our best so that we achieve virtuous results.
Let's make an effort at teaching; let us not let the pupils down.

12. *Tusiwache watafiti, na wakubwa hafisini
Tumche kula wakati, Mola aliye mbinguni
Tufanye kazi kwa dhati, tungakosa shukurani*

Let us not be afraid of the inspectors and senior officers,
But let us always fear God, who is in heaven.
Let us work harder, even though people might not be grateful for it.

13. *Tufanye mbwetu wajibu, tumeitweka shingoni
Tutarajiye thawabu, kutoka kwake Mannani
Tatulipa kwa taabu, ni Mwelewa si khaini*

This is our responsibility; we have taken it on our shoulders.
Let us expect a heavenly reward from him, the Giver.
God will reward us for our efforts; He is the one who understands—He will not let us down.

14. *Na mwisho nawahimiza, nduzangu natusomeni
Tusomeni kwa kufuza, wala tusikhitimuni
Maarifa kuongeza, kula siku sichokeni*

I finally encourage you, my brothers: let us also study.
Let us study continuously and let it not come to an end.
Let us not tire of increasing our knowledge every day.

15. *Tusome tena tusome, dhihaka tuziwateni*
Wenzetu tuwatizame, walivojaa zuwoni
Nasi tufanye shime, kushindwa tusikirini

Let us study, really study; let us stop playing games.
 My fellow teachers, let us consider how many have joined the institutes,
 So let us also make an effort, and let us not accept defeat.

16. *Kauli yangu tammati, hapa ndipo kikomoni*
Wageni naryi wanati, nawaomba samahani
Kwa lolote nilohiti, niko kwenu maguuni

This is the end of my talk; this is where I will stop.
 Guests and hosts, I apologize
 For any mistake; I pay you obeisance.

2 *Kilia huliya mwenye* (“Change Begins at Home”)

The saying *Kulia huliya mwenye, na mtu mbali kalia*, “If the affected one cries out, another will join in from afar,” means that if you want to change something, you first have to do it yourself, so that others may then join in support.

Ustadh Mau wrote this poem in 2006 to inaugurate an international conference on popular culture in East Africa that had been organized in Mombasa by Andrew Eisenberg and Ann Biersteker. An international audience was present at the conference. This poem is reminiscent of his poem *Kiswahili*, in which he complains about the Swahili people deliberately abandoning their culture. In this poem, he laments the loss of values as well as pride in one’s own culture, but the addressee is rather the West, which he believes to impose its values on all other cultures. As he says, many people on Lamu generally agree with him that their culture is under threat and should be protected, but, as he also notes, many do nothing to protect it. He gives the example of the Lamu Museum, meant to protect the local culture, but where the museum staff wears jeans—which, for him, is a contradiction.

1. *Naanda kwa shukurani kwa wote walohusika*
Wazo waliolibuni ni muhiumu kwa hakika
Mbali mbali tamaduni hapa zimejumuika

I start by expressing my gratitude to all the organizers.
The idea they came up with is certainly important;
People of different cultures have gathered here.

2. *Wa hapa wa uzunguni wa Asia kadhalika
Walotoka zisiwani na bara la Afrika
Mafundi wa nyingi fani na wasomi wasifika*

People from here, from the West as well as from Asia,
Those who came from the islands and from the African mainland,
Experts in many fields and reputed scholars.

3. *Ni kubwa dalili hini ulimwengu mekutika'
Tumo katika sahani tukiiza tukitaka
Hakuna tena ugeni milango imefunguka*

This is a true sign that the world has shrunk:
We are in the same boat, whether we agree with it or not.
Foreignness is no more; the doors have opened.

1 -*kutika* "to shrink" (Std. -*kunjika*)

4. *Hata ngiya kipembeni hutoweza kutengeka
Funga mlango chumbani na madirisha shindika
Yatakuingilia ndani bila hodi kutamka*

Even retreating to the farthest corner, you will not be able to isolate yourself.
Close the door of your room and keep the windows shut;
Things from outside will still reach you without even knocking at the door.

5. *Yanayotoka tezini na omo kutiririka
Yadirikeni ngamani si kwa hiyari kumbuka
Ni hukumu ya kanuni ya mambo kubadilika*

The water that comes from the stern and flows from the bow,
Both reach the sinkhole; remember, there is no other option.
It is an inert principle that things change.

6. *Tusikirini wendani gozi letu kutwauka¹*
Kwenye yetu tubakini kwa mila tumetosheka
Tusitwae ya wageni ila tunapodhikika

My companions, let us not acquiesce to shedding our skin:
 Let us remain in our own, for our customs are rich enough.
 Let us not adopt foreign customs, except when we need them.

1 -*twauka* "to shed the skin."

7. *Masomo tutapieni² ilimu kuilimbika*
Tupije mbizi za ndani na lulu tupate zuka
Ilimu si ya fulani wala haina mipaka

Let us strive for better education and accumulate knowledge.
 Let us dive deeply, so that we may come back with pearls.
 Knowledge does not belong just to one people nor does it have limits.

1 -*tapia* Mau: "to be eager to do sth. or to find sth. quickly" (-*fuata harakaharaka*).

8. *Sindano na tutieni kinga ipate inuka*
Kwa yetu tutoshekeni ndipo tutasalimika
Majinzi na tuvueni turudi tulikotoka

Let us be vaccinated, so that we may build up resistance,
 And let us be satisfied with our culture; this is the way to thrive.
 Let us get rid of the jeans, and let us go back to where we come from.

9. *Hambaga tusileni tusiizowee koka*
Hatuwi na punguwani hizo tukiziepuka
Kwa zetu tutoshekeni ni mafundi wa kupika

Let us not eat hamburgers, and not get used to Coca-Cola;
 We won't miss anything if we avoid these things.
 Let us be satisfied with our culinary arts, as we ourselves are cooking experts.

10. *Tubaki Uswahilini na tusiweni mateka
Kwa dharura tuazimeni ikiwa yahitajika
Kama samli tuweni maini kutodeuka'*

1 -*deuka* "to melt" (Std. -yeyuka)

Let us remain in our Swahiliness, and not become prisoners.
Let us borrow only when necessary and when really needed.
Let us be like clarified butter, which does not dissolve in water.

11. *Kama ziwa tusiweni mayini likimwaika
Mara huwa hulioni mayi yamelifinika
Samli haiwi tini huwa yuu hutekeka*

Let us not be like milk that is poured into water,
Disappearing suddenly as it mingles with the water.
Clarified butter floats on the surface, and can be scooped from the
top.

12. *Harufu tuangalieni yaani hizi za kuandika
Zilioko nda latini nyingine humunaika'
Ziwapi za Kurani Mfano hono zunduka*

1 *munaika* "to get lost, to disappear" (Std. -potea)

Let us take a look at the letters, the ones used for writing:
The ones that are in use now are those of the Roman alphabet; others
are disappearing.
Where is the Arabic script? Reflect upon this example.

13. *Yetu na tuyathamini wangine watayataka
Kilio huliya nyani Na mgine kaitika'
Suali tulijibuni wasomi mulotukuka*

If we value our culture, others will aspire to it as well.
Who is the one who cries so that the other will join in?
Let us try to answer this question; would you, dignified scholars?

1 Literally, "If we do not cry out ourselves, who will be there to respond?" The phrase refers to the same proverb as the title, underlining the importance of taking one's own initiative.

14. *Hatuizi asilani tamaduni kuangika'
Zipo tu duniani toto na zilopanuka
Kwa pamoya tuishini kama zilopita nyaka*

We don't deny that there are numerous cultures.
There are many of them in the world, small ones and those that have spread.
Let us live together in mutual respect as we did before.

1 -*angika*. Am. (Std. -*hesabika*). See -*wanga* "to count, to find the total of sth."

15. *Wenye nguvu hishimuni nanyi mutahishimika
Mnyonge sidharauni mukatuona ni taka
Yetu nanyi yakirini bila ya kunung'unika*

You, the powerful ones, respect others and you will be respected.
Do not despise the weak and treat us like scum.
You should also respect our ways without complaint.

16. *Hatuneni andamani kwa lazima kuyashika
Nanyi nasi tuateni tuandame tuloridhika
Mashuga situvueni nanyi hatutowawika*

We don't demand that you follow us, nor do we force you,
And you should also allow us to live as we like.
Don't force us to take off the veil, and we will not impose it on you either.

17. *Shakespeare Landani na kwetu tuna Muyaka
Khayami Uwajemini Joji Thiri' Amerika
Kojiki ni Wajapani nao wote hutaika*

Shakespeare worked in London, and here we have Muyaka;
Khayami in Persia, and George Thoreau in America;
Kojiki is for the Japanese, and all of them are well known.

1 *Joji Thiri*—Ustadh Mau might have meant to write George Thoreau, possibly referring to Henry David Thoreau, but he himself no longer knows whom he wanted to refer to. In this stanza, the poet wanted to mention the literary giants of various nations. He asked the people around him for big names; someone mentioned the name Joji Thiri (George Thoreau), probably misremembering the first name.

18. *Twakiri mambo fulani' ni mamoya bila shaka
Yakiwa nda Uzunguni au Japani yatoka
Asili hayagongani na yale ya Afrika*

We share certain values, which mean the same to all of us, for sure:
No matter if they come from the West or from Japan,
They never contradict the ones from Africa.

I mambo fulani "certain things": according to Ustadh Mau, it was his intention to refer to shared moral values, like the rights of human beings, democracy, and the rights of workers.

19. *Hayo twataka suteni yawe yatandazika
Yasiwe kaskazini na kusini kutofika
Ni watu nasi jamani maisha bora twataka*

These are the values that we all want to spread;
They should not remain only in the north without reaching the south.
Oh people, we are also human beings striving for a better life.

20. *Hapa ndipo kikomoni nakhitimisha waraka
Nawaomba samahani ikiwa nimetamka
La kuwaudhi wendani maguuni napomoka*

This is the end; I am completing this composition.
I beg your forgiveness if I have uttered any word
That annoys you, my friends; I am falling at your feet.

21. *Nimezawa kisiwani wala nde sikutoka
Masomo ni ya chuoni ndiyo nilobahatika
Wala dufu siiyoni mbee ya wailimika*

I was born on the island; never have I left it.
My education is that of the Qur'ānic school; this is what I have been
blessed with.
I do not regard myself as worthless compared to those with a school
education.

22. *Hini ndiyo anuwani ina piya taliweka
Aruba wa khamsini ni jaluba langu nyaka
Amu ni kwetu nyumbani Mau ina hutumika*

Now I put my address, together with my name:
 “54” has been my postbox number for many years.
 Amu is my hometown; people call me Mau.

3 *Kiswahili* (“Swahili”)

Ustadh Mau composed this poem in 2003. A decade later, an edition of the poem, including its manuscript in Arabic script, was published by British Swahili scholar Peter Frankl, in cooperation with Ustadh Mau, in the journal *Swahili Forum*.¹ Peter Frankl, a lover of Swahili language and poetry who lived part of his life in Mombasa, passed away in 2020, but *Swahili Forum* kindly gave us permission to reprint the poem in this collection. A transliteration of the Arabic script also appeared in the introduction to Mathieu Roy’s unpublished doctoral dissertation, together with a French translation (2013).² It is worth mentioning that apart from Ustadh Mau, many Swahili poets, like, for instance, Shaaban Robert, have written poetry in praise of the language.

In the poem, it is the Kiswahili language itself that takes on the role of narrator, lamenting her deplorable state: the children of Mother Swahili no longer care about her. She is looking back on her glorious poetic past on the northern coast, where, for instance, Muyaka bin Haji, the famous poet from Mombasa, or Ali Koti from Pate wrote “verses of enduring worth.” Here, Ustadh Mau refers to examples of the written tradition of nineteenth-century classical poetry, as well as important scholars of Swahili from the twentieth century, namely Shihabdhin Chiraghdin and Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany, who put great effort into preserving Swahili manuscript traditions. At present, as Kiswahili laments, the grand intellectual tradition of the coast is no longer a source of pride for coastal inhabitants, who hardly cherish their respective dialects and take little interest in their own traditions and culture. Rather, as she cries, evoking the controversial dichotomy of the mainland and the coast, nowadays, Swahili is mastered by mainlanders, imposing a “dry,” standardized language “without any flavor” or a “free verse” poetry void of the prosodic rules, which Ustadh Mau so much cherishes. Here one finds an echo of

1 Peter, J.L. Frankl & Ahmad Abdulkadir Mahmoud. “Kiswahili: a poem by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir, to which is appended a list of the poet’s compositions in verse.” *Swahili Forum* 20 (2013): 1–18.

2 Mathieu Roy, “Mathias E. Mnyampala 1917–1969: Poésie d’expression swahilie et construction nationale tanzanienne” (PhD diss., Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 2013), <http://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00778667/>

Ustadh Mau's concern over the decline in education and his worries about increasing dropout rates on Lamu and the coast more generally, where a culture of learning and reading is missing. Both the translation and the notes are by Peter Frankl and Ustadh Mau. They differentiate between alveolar /t/ and /d/ and dental /t̪/ and /d̪/, which we have kept in this poem as well; in the other poems, we do not, since Kiamu speakers can hear this difference clearly but do not mark it in writing. We have also kept the bibliographical references given in footnotes as found in the previous article by Peter Frankl and Ustadh Mau.

1. *Kunyamaa nimechoka t'anyamaa hata lini*
wanangu huniepuka kuwaona natamani
walobaki kunishika si wangu ni wa wendani
Mimi nimewatendani mbona mwanipija zita

I am weary of staying silent. For how much longer am I to remain dumb?

My own children avoid me, though I long to see them.

And those who remain to embrace me are not my own, but the offspring of others.

What have I done to you? Why do you wage war on me?

2. *Wanangu mimi wa damu wana wa Uswahilini*
asili hawana hamu ya kuniyuwa ni nani
wamenatiya kaumu na wana wa majirani
kosa langu kosa gani mbona hunipija zita

My own flesh and blood, the children of Swahililand, origin(ally) are uninterested in knowing who I am, and have left me to other peoples, and to the children of neighbors.

What kind of fault is my fault? [O my children] why do you continue waging war on me?

3. *Mimi mamenu si t'asa wala sina punguwani*
nimezaawa Mambasa na kungine zisiwani
nizee wanasiyasa na ziyongozi wa dini
mafundi wa kula fani na mashujaa wa zita

I am your mother and am not yet infertile, nor has my ability to reproduce diminished.

I have given birth to children in Mombasa and on the other islands [of the Swahili],

to politicians as well as to religious leaders,
to craftsmen in every discipline (field), and to heroes of war.

4. *Ndimi mamake Muyaka piya Mwengo Athumani*
na Zahidi kadhalika na wengi wake wendani
Ali Koti na Mataka wot'e mbwa moya karini
walitoka mtumboni wa kawaa kama nyota

I am the mother of Bwana Muyaka,¹ and also of Mwengo Athmani,¹¹ also,
and of Zahidi¹¹¹ too, and many of his companions (contemporaries),
Ali Koti^{1v} and Mataka,^v all from just one the same century,
they emerged from my womb, and shone like stars.

¹ Bwana Muyaka was the most outstanding Swahili poet of nineteenth-century Mombasa. After his death, many of his verses were recalled by Mu'allim Sikujua Abdallah al-Batawi (died 1890) and transcribed with annotations by W.E. Taylor (1856–1927). After Taylor's death, his papers were acquired by the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. | ¹¹ Mwengo Athmani: this eighteenth-century poet from Pate composed the *Utendi wa Tambuka* ("The Epic of Heraklios"). | ¹¹¹ Zahidi³ | ^{1v} Ali Koti of Pate⁴ | ^{iv} Bwana Mataka's full name is Muhammad bin Shee Mataka al-Famau (1825–1868). He was ruler of Siyu, as was his father. His mother was Mwana Kupona, famous for the poem of advice written to her daughter. Bwana Mataka died in Mombasa's fort while imprisoned by the Busa'idi.

5. *Inkishafi ngaliya ukisome na kidani*
ndipo takapo kweleya nikwambiyao mwendani
ni t'ungo zimesaliya na hazifi asilani
walozitunga ni nyani ni wanangu walopita

Look at the *Al-Inkishafi*.¹ Read it attentively
and then, my dear friend, you will understand what I am telling you.

3 See Ali El-Maawy. *The Lamu Hero: The Story of Bwana Zahidi Mgumi* [1760–1832]. (Unpublished book manuscript, 2008 (1973).)

4 See Chiraghdin, Shihabdin. *Malenga wa Karne Moja*. Utangulizi na Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany. (Nairobi: Longman, 1987), 31–37

These verses are of enduring worth and will never die.
 Who were those who composed them? They were my children who
 have passed on.

1 The *Al-Inkishafi*, according to W.E. Taylor⁵ is “a great, if not the greatest, religious classic of [the Swahili-speaking peoples].” The poem, concerned with the decay of Pate (formerly a flourishing town in northern Swahiland), may remind some readers of Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in an English Churchyard”⁶

6. *Na Malenga wa Mvita* *na piya Chiraghdini*
nyayo walizifuwata *hawakukiri uduni*
n-Nabahani huteta *lakini hufaliyani*
nidiye pweke uwandani *inga(w)a ameikita*

And the Bard of Mambasa,¹ and Chiraghdin too,¹¹
 they followed the footsteps, they did not submit to lower standards.
 Al-Nabhany¹¹¹ reproves, but to what effect?
 He remains alone in the field, yet he stays strong.

1 The “Bard of Mambasa” refers to Ustadh Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo.⁷ | 11 Shihabdin Chiraghdin 1934–1976.⁸ | 111 In an unpublished commendation from June 12, 1974, J.W.T. Allen writes of Ahmad Sheikh Nabahany, “... I am privileged to have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances among Swahili scholars of Swahili. I have some knowledge of their rating of themselves and I can name perhaps half a dozen (still living) who are always referred to as the most learned. To me they are walking dictionaries and mines of information and Ahmed is unquestionably one of them. He comes of a family of scholars whose discipline is as tough as any degree course in the world. They have no time for false scholarship or dilettantism. That this profound learning is almost wholly disregarded by those who have been highly educated in the Western tradition affects almost everything written today in or about Swahili. When I want to know some word or something about Swahili, I do not go to professors, but to one of the *bingwa* known to me. One of these could give a much greater detail of assessment, but of course his opinion would not carry the weight of one who can put some totally irrelevant letters after his name.”⁹

5 Charles Stigand, *A Grammar of the Dialectic Changes in the Kiswahili Language: with an Introduction and a Recension and Poetical Translation of the Poem Inkishafi, A Swahili Speculum Mundi* by the Rev. W.E. Taylor, M.A. (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1915), 96–105.

6 Thomas Gray. *An Elegy Written at a Country Church Yard*. (London, Dodsley, 1751).

7 See Chiraghdin, Shihabdin. *Malenga wa Mvita: Diwani ya Ustadh Bhalo*. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971.)

8 See the biography by his daughter which came out in 2012. Latifa Chiraghdin, *Shihabuddin Chiraghdin. Life journey of a Swahili Scholar* (Mombasa: Jor’s Publishers, 2012).

9 For a biography, see Said, Amira Msellem. *Wasifu wa Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany*. (Mombasa: JC Press, 2012).

7. *Bado kuzaa naweza siyakoma ukingoni*
lakini mumenipuuza mumeitowa fuwoni
wangine meitokeza kunipangiya kanuni
musamiyati kubuni nyinyi muliponiwata

I am still able to give birth. I have not yet reached the limit,
 but you have all despised me. You have left me high and dry,
 now others have come forward to regulate me,
 compiling standardized dictionaries, while you have deserted
 me.¹

I For almost a century, Oxford University Press (OUP) has been the principal publisher of standardized Swahili dictionaries. Clearly OUP has to be profitable, and profitable is exactly what their Swahili dictionaries have been over the years. However, if one considers excellence in research and scholarship, not one of OUP's Swahili lexicons can begin to compare with the *Oxford English Dictionary* ("more than 600,000 words over a thousand years"). Fortunately for Swahili and for Swahili studies, there exists the monumental *Dictionnaire swahili-français* (Paris, 1939), compiled by Charles Sacleux—the greatest Swahili lexicographer. Sacleux's chef d'œuvre ("unprecedented in historical depth, dialectological detail and philological knowledge") can now be accessed electronically, courtesy of the *Swahili Forum*. Heartfelt thanks for this labor of love are due to Thilo Schadeberg and Ridder Samson.

8. *Huliya kisikitika Changaliya jaridani*
wengi wanaoandika si wanangu ni wageni
idhaani kadhalika wapeka t'ungo ni nyani
wengi hawatoki p'wani licha kuwa mbwa Mvita

I weep and lament when I look at the learned journals,
 for many of those who contribute are not my children, they are
 strangers [to me].

It is much the same with the media. Who are the ones who send in
 their compositions?

Although they may have a Mombasa address, many do not come from
 the coast.

9. *Angaliya na zitabu zisomeshwao shuleni*
hazandikwi na Rajabu si Sudi wala si Shani
Njoroge ndiyo katibu ashishiyeo sukani
Charo na wake wendani nao nyuma hufuwata

Look at the textbooks which are studied at our schools.
 They are written neither by Rajabu, nor by Sudi nor by Shani.
 The author is Njoroge^I, he is the helmsman.
 Charo^{II} and his colleagues follow.

I *Njoroge*: A [Gikuyu] name representing those who have their origins in the East African interior (the *bara*). | II *Charo*: A [Giriama] name representing those who have their origins in the coastal hinterland.

10. *Hualikwa kongamano* *Chenda hurudi ndiyani*
huona utungu mno *kuwa nyinyi siwaoni*
na huziuma zitano^I *Lakini nitende nini*
Wanangu mumeikhini *mamenu mumeniwata*

When I am invited to conferences, I turn back before I arrive.
 I feel exceedingly bitter that I do not see you all there.
 I bite my fingers in frustration, but what can I do?
 My children, you have missed your opportunity. You have abandoned
 your own mother.

I *Nahuziuma zitano*: these words echo the words of the *Inkishafi*, “*wakauma zanda na kuiyuta*.”¹⁰

11. *Na huliya kwa matozi* *changaliya mitihani*
wanafundi wa Kibwezi *na wa Kisumu ziwani*
ndiwo wanao barizi *waliyoko kileleni*
mulotoka kwetu p’wani *muko t’ini hukokota*

And I shed tears when I look at the results of the school exams.
 Students from Kibwezi^I, and from Kisumu by the lake,^{II}
 they are the ones who are ahead, who are at the top;
 and you, students from the coast, you lag far behind.^{III}

I *Kibwezi ... Kisumu*: places in the East African interior. | II The lake is Lake Nyanza, also known as Lake Victoria. | III *muko t’ini hukokota*: Over the years, young people on Lamu Island (and indeed elsewhere in northern Swahililand) have received a raw deal in their primary and secondary education. They have “lagged far behind” their counterparts from the interior, and so Mother Swahili grieves for her marginalized children.

10 On this Swahili gesture of regret, see Carol Eastman, & Yahya Ali Omar. “Swahili Gestures.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 2 (1985): 321–332.

12. *Wafanyao utafiti* *wa uzamili zuwoni*
Waswahili ni katiti *au hawapatikani*
ni nyani nimlaiti *mwenye makosa ni nyani*
mimi hamuni thamini *mngine hamukupata*

Among those who are researching for degrees at the universities,
 Swahili students are few—or non-existent.
 Who is to be blamed? Whose fault is it?
 You esteem me not at all, yet you have not replaced me by another.

13. *Kiwasikiya hunena* *huniungonga moyoni*
sarufi hakuna tena *nahau naitamani*
na hata ladha hayana *kama mashapu kanwani*
sielewi hunenani *huimba au huteta*

When I hear those who are not mother-tongue speakers speaking, I
 feel sick at heart.
 Inflection is no longer employed, while grammatical [Swahili] is what
 I desire!
 Even [their speech] is wanting in flavor, like a plug of tobacco in one's
 mouth.
 I do not understand what they are saying. Are they singing? Are they
 complaining?

14. *Lau Muyaka tarudi* *ae tena duniyani*
mwanangu itambidi *kwenenda mahakamani*
aete na mashahidi *waniyuwao yakini*
nyut'e mwenda gerezani *kwa hatiya kuwapata*

Were Bwana Muyaka to return, were he to come back to the world,
 it would be necessary, my child, for him to go to a court of law,
 and he would need to call witnesses who know me well,
 and all of you would go to prison for the offense that you have committed
 against me.

15. *Wallahi hamuna ghera* *wala hamuna imani*
hamuna la kuwakera *kuwa hamuni thamini*
mimi ni kama mpwira *hutezewa uwandani*
hupijwa teke ndiyani *na kula anaepita*

Truly you have neither zeal nor self-confidence.
It irritates you not at all that you do not esteem me.
I am just like a ball in the play-ground,
whoever passes me by in the street gives me a kick.

16. *Haṭa kwenye ushairi waso wangu wamebuni*
zilizo huru bahari kwa kuoleza wageni
mimi hayo siyakiri si mashairi kifani
hayo yoṭe ni kwa nini hizo ni mbinu za zita

Even in the field of Swahili prosody, those who are not mine have
invented
free verse, imitating foreigners.
For myself, I cannot accept that. That is not worthy poetry.
What is the point of it all? These are the methods of war.

17. *Hambiwa mwenyewe sina hini ni ajabu gani*
huwae kakosa shina kawa na tandu yangani
nyani alonipa ina alonandika ni nyani
kiwa si Uswahilini ni wapi nilipopata

I am told that I belong to nobody in particular. How extraordinary!
How can I be rootless below ground and yet have branches above?
Who gave me my name? And who are they who wrote me down?
If I do not hail from Swahiland, then whence did I come?

18. *Kuwa wengi huninena si dalili aswilani*
yakuwa wenyewe sina Kingereza hamuoni
hunenwa na wengi sana p'embe zoṭe ḍuniyani
kina na kwao shinani miziye haikuk'ata

That many speak me, [Swahili], is not of itself proof of origins,
or of ownership. What of the English language?
It is spoken by very many, in all corners of the world,
yet the language remains firmly established in its homeland, its roots
have not been severed.

4 *Za Washirazi athari* (“The Influence of the Persians”)

Ustadh Mau composed this poem on March 1, 2011, on the occasion of a conference commemorating the Persian (Shirazi) heritage of the coast. This is a short poem in *utendi* meter in which Ustadh Mau invites his audience to remember the ancient Shirazi influence on the Swahili coast. He mentions places such as Kilwa and Zanzibar that are renowned for their Shirazi influence. He refers to words of Shirazi origin in Swahili, like *barafu* (“ice”), *bandari* (“port”), and *achari* (“chutney”), and refers to forms of craftsmanship—like styles of door carving, cuisine, and masonry—of Persian origin. In a way, the poem urges the audience not to forget the coast’s history and its many cultural influences, which are also reflected in the language. The poet wants the audience to take pride in the history of the coast. Many visible traces still attest this history (*tarikhi hutwelezeza*, stz. 4). The poet urges the audience to keep watch for such evidence by looking up loanwords in the dictionary (*kamusini angaliya*, stz. 17) and studying patterns that are obvious to the careful observer (*kwa mato twashuhudiya*, stz. 14; *Mwenye mato huiyona/Katiti achangaliya*, stz. 11). The poem ends with the poet restraining himself from talking too much, so that those few reminders may be carefully considered by the audience. This poem was previously translated by Mohamed Karama.

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|----|---|---|
| 1. | <i>Bismillahi awwali</i> <i>Naanda hii kauli</i> <i>Kwenye kongamano hili</i> <i>Karibuni twawambiya</i> | In the name of Allah, I begin my message. To this conference We welcome you. |
| 2. | <i>Twawambiya karibuni</i> <i>Wenyeji piya wageni</i> <i>Katika warsha hini</i> <i>Shirazi kuhadithiya</i> | We bid you welcome, Hosts as well as guests Of this workshop, To talk about the Shirazi. |
| 3. | <i>Lengo lake kongamano</i> <i>Ni kuonesha mfano</i> <i>La shirazi tangamano</i> <i>Athari walotwatiya</i> | The objective of this conference Is to show examples Of past interactions with the Shirazi, And how they have affected us. |
| 4. | <i>Washirazi wa zamani</i> <i>Walikuya huku pwani</i> <i>Kabula nyingi karini</i> <i>Tarikhi hutwelezeza</i> | The ancient Shirazi Came to the coast Many centuries ago; That’s what history tells us. |

5. *Kilwa ndipo walokita
Unguja ikafwata
Na kungine walipata
Tatuko kutatukiya* Kilwa is where they settled;
Then Zanzibar followed,
And somewhere else
They found a place to live.
6. *Washirazi na Warabu
Waliambiwa karibu
Wakapata matulubu
Makao ya kushukiya* The Shirazi and the Arabs,
They were welcomed;
They got what they wanted—
A place to settle.
7. *Athari za Washirazi
Kuzikana hatuwezi
Kwani ziko wazi wazi
Kwa mwenye kuzangaliya* The influence of the Shirazi,
We cannot deny it,
Because the impact is clear
To anyone who looks at it.
8. *Za Washirazi athari
Huitokeza dhahiri
Katika kazi nzuri
Za mbao uwashi piya* The Shirazi influence
Is clearly visible
In fine works
Of wood and masonry.
9. *Athari kwenye uwashi
Mavazi piya upishi
Na milango ya nakishi
Zitele zimesaliya* One finds their influence in masonry,
Attire and cuisine,
And carved doors—
Many have remained.
10. *Na athari za ufundi
Ni moya katika kandi
Washirazi na Wahindi
Amabazo wametwatiya* And their influence on artisanship
Is one of the treasures
That the Shirazi and Indians
Have left to us.
11. *Wametwatiya hazina
Kuu mno ya maana
Mwenye mato huiyona
Katiti achangaliya* They have left a treasure,
A huge one, of great importance;
Anyone who has eyes can see it
If he or she looks around just a bit.
12. *Na zombo za usafiri
Yani hizi za bahari
Athari ni mashuhuri
Shirazi walozitiya* And vessels of transportation,
I mean those of the sea—
The influence is well known
That the Shirazi contributed.

13. *Twalina wetu uyuzi*
Kwenye za asili kazi
Wangine na Washirazi
Yao walitwengezeya We had our knowledge
In our traditional works;
The Shirazi and others,
They added theirs for us.
14. *Kuazima maarifa*
Hiiyo sisi ndetu sifa
Yetu kae haiyafa
Kwa mato twashuhudiya Borrowing techniques,
That is our habit,
An ancient one; it has not died.
We can witness it with our own eyes.
15. *Kwenye lugha kadhalika*
Athari ipo hakika
Kiswahili kupanuka
Shirazi walichangiya Also in the language,
There is an influence, for sure.
To expanding Kiswahili
The Shirazi contributed.
16. *Ni tumbindima zilima*
Waswahili huzisema
Aswili ukitazama
Ni lugha ya Farisiya There are many words
That the Swahili speak, and
When you consider their origin,
It is the Persian language.
17. *Neno barafu bandari*
Kadhalika achari
Ni Kiajemi dhwahiri
Kamusini angaliya The words *barafu*^I, *bandari*^{II},
And also *achari*^{III}
Are clearly Persian;
Take a look in the dictionary.
- I *barafu* “ice” | II *bandari* “port” | III *achari* “chutney.”
18. *Zilima za kiajemi*
Kwenye zetu sisi ndimi
Nikiziwanga sikomi
Ni mno zimeeneya The Persian words
In our tongue,
Were I to count them, I could not stop—
There are too many.
19. *Hapa tafunga shairi*
Zaidi sitokariri
Hutoshila niloashiri

Mifano niloashiriya Here I will end my poem;
I will not go on any further.
This is enough, what I have already
shown—
The examples I have given.

20. *Ni za kitambo alaka* It is an ancient relation
Kwa nguvu zimejengeka Built on a strong foundation;
Haziwezi kuondoka It cannot be destroyed,
Mitaimbo wangatiya Even if they use dynamite.

21. *Zalialaka imara* These are strong bonds
Za dini na biashara Of religion and trade;
Mno zalitiya fora' They flourished greatly
Mreno kabla kuya Before the Portuguese came.

I-tia fora "to prosper," "to flourish," "to be successful."

22. *Kauli yetu tammati* We cease our words
Kwa hizi chache baiti After these few verses,
Huwa ni tamu katiti Because short is sweet,
Na huchoki kusikiya And you don't tire of listening.