

TANZANIAN ANGLOPHONE FICTION: A SURVEY

John Wakota¹

Abstract

Tanzanian Anglophone fiction is extant and bustling. The invisibility of Tanzanian fiction in English is not due to the country's inability to produce good-quality Anglophone novels but is related to the challenge in accessing the texts both within and outside Tanzania. Studies about East African fiction tend to ignore the contribution of Tanzanian Anglophone writers in the region. In Tanzania people know more about other canonical African novelists than their very own Anglophone writers. This article explores the emergence and development of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction, paying particular attention to the emergence of Tanzanian Anglophone literary canons and how these canons have inspired and continue to inspire the production of Tanzanian fiction. Starting with the novels produced by the inaugural Tanzanian Anglophone writers in the sixties, and continuing with the most recent works, the paper examines the interface between Swahili and English, translation and self-translation, diasporic writers, universities' and researchers' contributions to the definition of the canon and to the visibility of the fiction in general.

Key words: bilingual writers, literary canon, Diasporan African writers, hyper-canonization, selective canons, Swahili literature, Tanzanian Anglophone fiction

Introduction

Taban Lo Liyong's piece "East Africa, O East Africa, I Lament thy Literary Barrenness" constitutes an important launch pad for the discussion of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction. In this ode, Liyong decries the 'literary bareness' of East Africa and wonders when the region will produce "a Dickens? Or a Conrad? Or a Mark Twain? Or a Joyce Cary?" (1975: 43). Proud of the region's literary icon Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he appeals that "We need Ngugis in plural" (1975: 43) and prays that the region catches up with the zeal demonstrated by West African writers in producing literary works. Liyong's piece also sparked debates about literary productivity of each of the East African nations. In that debate, contradictions abound: whereas Chris Wanjala cautioned that "Tanzania

¹ Department of Literature, University of Dar es Salaam

must be careful; she has no authors to boast of at the moment” (1975: 24), Arnold wondered why Tanzania was considered to be the “driest patch in an East African literary desert” (Arnold, 1980: 156) despite having a “modest though persistent production in English” (1986: 949). Arnold also wonders why, in his widely influential survey of East African fiction, the well-known editor and commentator Bernth Lindfors “mentions Tanzania only twice,” objecting that Lindfors’ seminal paper was more about Kenya and Uganda than the region as a whole (1980: 156-57). Arnold suggested that in order to have a more meaningful analysis of the literary productivity of the region, we need to focus on the cultural and historical specificities of each of the nations, and that in the context of Tanzania “Swahili literature especially needs to be a frequent reference point” (1986: 949).

In addition to Arnold (1980, 1986), two other exceptions, Ismael Mbise (1986) and Eliah Mwaifuge (2009) ought to be mentioned. Mbise is one of the first Tanzanian literary critics and authors to comment on the status of Tanzanian literature in English. In “Writing in English from Tanzania”, he recognizes the emergence of a breed of Tanzanian writers in the English language, mentioning among others, Gabriel Ruhumbika, Peter Palangyo, William Mkufya, Ebrahim Hussein, Hamza Sokko, and himself.

By writing in the sixties and seventies, these six authors are considered to be the progenitors of Tanzanian fiction in English. In the article, Mbise complains of both the slowness of developing a Tanzanian fiction canon in the English language and the lack of sufficient English texts by local authors. He appeals to Tanzanians to write more. Mwaifuge’s unpublished “Ideology and the Creative: A Study of Tanzanian Prose Fiction in English” can be counted as a landmark study in Tanzanian Anglophone fiction. It examines how Tanzania’s shifts in political and economic ideologies have influenced Tanzanian Anglophone literature. Mwaifuge notes both the limited pace in the development of fiction and the limited interest by literary critics addressing Tanzanian prose narrative in English. He attributes this state of affair to the nation’s ideology of *Ujamaa* and government’s efforts to promote writing in Swahili.

This argument is consistent with Gabriel Ruhumbika’s claim that writing in “Swahili was to be part of the *Ujamaa* revolution” (2015: 256). Ruhumbika started his writing career by writing in English before shifting to Swahili as a support for the *Ujamaa* course. Through *Ujamaa*, the government took deliberate efforts to make Swahili a dominant language culturally and politically. This way Swahili “relegated English and with it Anglophone Tanzanian literature to a secondary role . . . Kiswahili literature became the

de facto national literature” (2009: 9). The second factor that Mwaifuge discusses is the role of Tanzania’s publishing industry and the government in promoting Swahili writing. The government monopoly of a publishing industry in the sixties and seventies through the Tanzania Publishing House (TPH) meant that “literary works in English were the most adversely affected because they were written in a language with colonial implications” (10).² Furthermore Mwaifuge associates the sidelining of Tanzanian literature in English with the slighting by literary scholars. For example, he notes that critics like Albert Gerard (1981), Rajmund Ohly (1990), and Msiska and Hyland (1997) among others, claim that in Tanzania, “there is limited presence of what is considered “serious” literature in English” (7).

This is a huge claim and must be put into context. First, the question of what counts as ‘serious’ is difficult in that it is not easy to draw a line between serious and non-serious literature. Secondly, as Terry Eagleton has claimed, literary criticism itself is not an “innocent discipline and never has been” (1976: 17). Another factor is readership. Since Tanzania is predominantly a Kiswahili state, the majority of Tanzanians do not have access to the fiction written in English. This has negative impact on the markets for the texts in English. As a result, authors, publishers (such as the TPH) and the publishing industry in general “favoured the Kiswahili literary works because they were easily sold to Kiswahili speakers.” (Mwaifuge 2009: 11). This preference explains why Arnold notes that in the context of the seventies, “it had become much easier to get published in Swahili than in English” and that “English had lost its prestige” (Arnold 1986: 958-59).

Combined, the factors analysed by Mwaifuge, Arnold, and Mbise have worked against the development and growth of Anglophone fiction. Indeed, writing in English has been like “speaking only to a tiny elite, some of whom have no desire to listen” (Lindfors 1997: 125). Yet, despite these challenges, the fiction in both Anglophone and Swahili have continued to co-exist even though the latter has tended to be more dominant. Such then is a brief context and background of the status of fiction in Anglophone with respect to that in Swahili.

² Though sporadic, the government’s support for writing in English continued such that *Blood on our Land* (1974) by Ismael Mbise became (the first English novel to be) published by the government-owned Tanzania Publishing House (TPH), a publisher whose major output was in Swahili language.

Therefore, the problem of developing this genre is multidimensional. Firstly, although the presence of Tanzanian fiction in English in Tanzania and its quality is not to be doubted, there is a paucity of research on recent developments about this fiction. Secondly, although there have been a number of studies addressing this fiction, many of them have been thematic and do not offer a sustained review of the works' overall quality. One finds that the criticism has largely been sporadic in that individual scholars have written papers on a specific text or author by focusing on themes or other textual features. Furthermore, no one seems to be interested in the question of the emergence of a literary canon in this fiction.

I argue that since the quality of the fiction in question is unassailable, we should begin to talk about the emergence of a Tanzanian Anglophone canon. Since this canon is defined by both value and quality which are required in characterizing the formation of a literary canon in Tanzania, there is need to theorize 'canonization' as a process of inclusion and exclusion. I discuss both these processes of inclusion and exclusion; this approach allows me to provide a brief survey of Tanzanian popular fiction in English. First I will offer a definition of Tanzanian fiction and explore how the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), the universities, and the literary critics, have all helped to define the emergence of such a canon. I conclude by offering some suggestions for improving the output and the visibility of this fiction.

As a survey, this paper started with the discussion of the progenitors of Tanzanian Anglophone writers who wrote in the sixties and seventies. I will next discuss the significance of the co-existence of Swahili and English fiction and argue that, through translation, the interface has been used by writers to promote the growth and visibility of Tanzanian fiction in English. I borrow insights from both Gabriel Ruhumbika (2015) and Mikhail Gromov (2015) who have both theorised about how translation in the context of Tanzania accounts for a recent increase in visibility of Tanzanian fiction in both languages.

Using the concept 'Tanzanian fiction in English' is not without risks: already, Gromov (2015) has warned against the dangers attendant to defining Tanzanian literature in relation to language. He claims that due to linguistic complexity in Tanzania, the concept of national literature as defined by language is hardly applicable. In his earlier study, Gromov (2011) notes that what complicates the situation further is that even within Tanzania, some writers are already crossing the language border by

becoming bilingual writers. In defining a nation's literature Lindfors (1997) advises that a text should meet the standard national criteria which are "language, subject matter, style, ideas, audience, quantity, and quality of output" (1997:121). Wellek and Warren (1993) identify "national consciousness of the authors," "national subject-matter," "national local colour" and "national literary style" (1993: 41). Lindfors, Wellek and Warren complicate our task of defining Tanzanian literature because the aspects they highlight are not easy to define. Furthermore our attempt to define what constitutes a national literature is complicated by the ambiguity that characterizes the concept of a nation itself.

Here Benedict Anderson's claim that a nation is only an "imagined political community" (1983: 6) is useful. But I find Chinua Achebe's view that "a nation's literature presupposes a national experience which is unique and distinguishable from national experiences elsewhere" (2000: 127) to be even more useful since it emphasizes the representation of the uniqueness of a nation's experience in defining its literature. In the context of Tanzania, this definition is inclusive enough to bring together Tanzania's varied linguistic, socio-political, and literary values. In this study, I define Tanzanian Anglophone fiction on the basis of the richness of Tanzania's socio-economic life that is presented in such prose. A Tanzanian author is defined by his or her nationality. There will be exceptions to this definition, especially when some authors, in the course of their writing career, change their nationality for one reason or another.

Tanzanian Anglophone fiction: the canon and its trends

The idea of a canon means that the fiction we actually read and appreciate is just a small open sample — open in that new works and authors are usually admitted into it. Made of privileged works, this sample is what we call the canon. In this regard, I ask, is there a Tanzanian Anglophone canon? And what factors have determined the formation of this canon? I provide a brief discussion and the samples to demonstrate that there is indeed an interesting body of the Anglophone fiction and that some works and authors are able to stand out as the hallmark of quality and value.

The concept of a literary canon means that certain texts are privileged over others; some texts are established as aesthetically superior over others; and some texts have endured the test of time in that they retain great popularity despite being written several decades ago. The idea of a national existing canon means that there are texts that have a special place in both the literary and political history of the nation. These texts are generally defined by their 'necessity' in the educational and political contexts of the nation.

Therefore, a literary canon, “implies a collection of works enjoying an exclusive completeness” and that its formation usually proceeds to a selection of classics, a list of authors, and canons of taste” (Fowler 1979: 98). By theorising the canon in this way, we may ask: who are the prominent Tanzanian English authors? How important are these writers in the Tanzanian Anglophone literary landscape?

Advocates of the importance of literary canons argue that canons should be defined by their “aesthetic excellence” (Ping 2015: 60). However, this begs the question of what constitutes artistic ‘excellence’ and if there can be any criteria that is universal. If not, what determines a nation’s aesthetic excellence? In order to answer this question, canonization presupposes the distinction between standard or elite literature and popular or non-elite literature. This means that canonicity is reserved for serious which may be, but is not necessarily, elite literature. Serious literature, according to Ohly (1983) is complex, critical, and challenges the mind. In the context of Tanzania, this distinction complicates the statuses of Tanzanian fiction in Swahili and that in English. This is because Swahili fiction has been deemed to be “comprehensive-to-all” as well as “too simple;” while fiction written in English has generally been taken to be “serious” and “elitist” (Gromov 2015: 11). Thus we need to look for a more meaningful way of defining Tanzanian canons. Here, Ping (2015) offers a way forward. He claims that in addition to aesthetic sophistication, canons are also determined by ideologies and by the interests of elite classes. This perspective is useful in the discussion of the formation of a Tanzanian literary canon regarding the Anglophone novel.

Despite the fact some of the works by the first cohort of Tanzanian writers in English (Gabriel Ruhumbika, Peter Palangyo, Hamza Sokko, Ismael Mbise, William Mkufya and Ebrahim Hussein) were written almost four decades ago, they continue to be relevant to readers today. They remain useful primarily because they are pioneering as works that interrogate issues and landmark moments in the history of Tanzania. For example, the novel *Village in Uhuru* by Gabriel Ruhumbika (1969) is one of the first full-scale novels in English by a Tanzanian author. The story focuses on the relationship between villagization and modernization. Alongside *Village in Uhuru*, Peter Palangyo’s *Dying in the Sun* (1968) and Hamza Sokko’s *The Gathering Storm* (1977) are among the earliest Tanzanian novels to appear in prestigious international literary guides such as *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English since 1945* (Gikandi and Mwandu 2007). Indeed, any discussion or overview of the history of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction must begin with these authors, for they set

the stage for subsequent authors. Consider again the landmark discussion of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction as a corpus, by Mwaifuge (2009) in which he critiques sixteen novels. Although Mwaifuge's focus is on the prose fiction written from 1974 to 2004, he uses the 'classics' just mentioned, *Village in Uhuru* and *Dying in the Sun*, for illustrative purposes" which underscores their status as canonical works (Mwaifuge 2009: 27).

All the six fiction writers named above are taught as part of Tanzanian Literature in English, a course which was introduced at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2002. Among its objectives, the course is designed to acquaint students with the ethos, history and reception of Tanzanian writing in English. For these writers, English was an experimental medium; they were caught up in a political and cultural controversy which informed their desire to assert and explore their identity as Tanzanians facing the complexities of the day, yet to still use English as their means of expression (Mbise 1984: 57). For some of these writers, writing in English in this period was prestigious. One of the inaugural writers, Ruhumbika, boasted of himself that "[a]s an alumnus of Makerere College of the University of London at that time, with a BA Honours in English to boot, I simply could not imagine myself writing in Swahili!" (2014: 7).

Gromov (2015) has argued that this mentality was one of the factors that gave birth to modern Tanzanian English fiction. Still other writers at that time attributed their decision to write in English to the technical and semantic deficiencies of the Swahili language, citing as a problem the "lack of good and complete dictionaries capable of serving the needs of the language at its current level of development, as well as good grammar books" (Ruhumbika 2014: 15). Caught in this dilemma, the inaugural writers tried to express themselves as 'Tanzanians' by creating Tanzanian sensibility throughout their works using local idioms. To cater for the needs of a Tanzanian reader, some of these writers provided explanatory prefaces to defend their use of Swahili words in an English text.³ In other works, a glossary was included to make the reading easier.

Through these expository devices, these authors managed to 'domesticate' English while using it to write about Tanzania and about the world through Tanzanian perspectives. This approach is akin to literary acculturation – the deliberate blending of African and European literary techniques – used by pioneer African English writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa

³See the prefaces of *Village in Uhuru* (1969) and *The Gathering Storm* (1977).

Thiong'o. As pioneers, the authors discussed here are important for having been the first to attempt writing in English – for their unique style of writing, and for the fact that they set a standard in their own style; for these reasons they attract admiration and authority as comprising the beginning of a canon as classics of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction.

The making of a canon – through the schools and the publishers

In discussing classics of fiction in any national or cultural tradition, again it is useful to distinguish between official and unofficial canons. According to Fowler (1979), official canon is usually “institutionalized through education” (1979: 98). Despite having the classics reviewed above, the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) until recently had never included any Tanzanian Anglophone fiction writers among its required set texts. This is significant since TIE is the body responsible for developing school curricula nation-wide, and for setting texts for literature and reading programmes in all government schools as well as private institutions concerned with maintaining national accreditation. It is remarkable to discover that while the works of fiction just mentioned had made their way into prestigious international literary guides, they were yet to be included in any national syllabus.

The irony is that for decades, the privileged list of the Tanzania Institute of Education was replete with authors from outside Tanzania. Only recently, through the TIE, texts such as Severine Ndunguru's titles *Spared* (2004), *A Wreath for Fr. Mayer of Masasi* (1997), and *Divine Providence* (1999), as well as Bernard Mapalala's *Passed like a Shadow* (2006) have been included in secondary school literature programmes. This is a major step forward in acknowledging the literary value and quality of Tanzanian Anglophone fiction. These authors are now studied alongside other canonical African writers on a par with Okot p'Bitek and Wole Soyinka. These texts are now appearing with increasing frequency in the lists of required texts for literature courses in Tanzanian universities as well. They are also receiving a fair amount of critical attention from university scholars in general.

Dean Kolbas (2001) is another commentator who stresses the central role of university lecturers in the formation of a literary canon. Firstly, the Tanzania Institute of Education invites local literary scholars to evaluate the texts for recommendations to be used in secondary schools. Secondly, the introduction of a “Tanzanian Literature in English” course in Tanzanian universities has at last marked a canonical high point to date for

Tanzanian Anglophone fiction; for this development serves as definitive evidence of a body of fiction worthy of serious scrutiny and informed, theoretical analysis at the tertiary level of comparative literary criticism. Thirdly, in selecting certain authors repeatedly for their classes and examinations, university lecturers add to the rising recognition and greater visibility of certain texts over others. This way, the lecture platform is crucial in defining an historically and regionally specific literary canon.

This accounts for why texts such as Elieshi Lema's *Parched Earth* (2001) and P.B Mayega's *The Peoples' Schoolmaster* (2004), among others, are currently being used everywhere as literary standards appearing in course syllabi. Having entered the Tanzanian university staple courses they have in consequence attracted literary attention in critical and comparative literary scholarship produced all over the world. In this way, the canonization of some of the texts has come about via Tanzania's national universities through the sheer statistical frequency of their use in pedagogical contexts.

Further, while the course "Tanzanian Literature in English" offered at the University of Dar es Salaam defines its enrolled students of literature as 'consumers' of ready-made works, another course called "Introduction to Creative Writing" defines them as potential producers of English texts themselves. So in addition to being introduced to the art of writing, students in this course are also expected to write short literary pieces. Experimental though it is, through this course the UDSM Department of Literature has managed to produce a volume of short stories and poems titled *Tell Me Friends the Riddle of the Ages* (2004). The second volume in this series titled *Tell me, Friends: The Tales of Tanzania* (2005) records twenty stories collected by students of the University of Dar es Salaam. The third edition in the series is *Tell me Friends: Contemporary Stories and Plays of Tanzania* (2009). Through this course, the goal is to see students becoming writers themselves. Although these three writing projects have mostly involved writing short stories and not novels, the aim is to encourage students to try their hands at writing novels. The volume has since then been used for teaching first year introductory literary courses. In short, for this fiction to be more visible, the university, through the department of Literature should be a place where Tanzanian literature in English is not only consumed or taught but also produced.

The Tanzanian publishing industry has played an important role in strengthening the canon through reprints of these novels in successive editions. As canonical literature, defined by their ability to remain in

continual use and focus, the demand for these novels has increased. One such novel is Hamza Sokko's *The Gathering Storm* first published in 1977. The novel was recently reprinted by Mkuki na Nyota Publishers and this has added to its reputation of belonging to Tanzanians as part of their literary heritage that should be preserved. Also in 2012 Mkuki na Nyota reprinted William Mkufya *The Wicked Walk*, also first published in 1977. The decision by Mkuki na Nyota to publish these two texts indicates that they are essential components of an existing canon and that they should continue to be available to the readers.

Diasporans in the formation of a national literary canon

In defining the canon formation, it is important to problematise the concept of the 'Tanzanian-ness' of the authors. Whereas many of the canonical Tanzanian Anglophone writers reviewed above wrote while living in Tanzania, others have had to write from the Diaspora. By writing from the Diaspora they have written about Tanzania with a detached stance. According to Steiner (2009), writing from a distanced position is an example of cultural translation because "through content and language, they aim to express the multiple worlds the characters have come to occupy" (2009: 3). Against the backdrop of this theorization we can appreciate the contribution of Diasporic Tanzanian writers to the growth of Tanzanian fiction in English and their relationship to that canon. The key figures in this category of writers include Moyez Vassanji Moyez and Abdularzark Gurnah. Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania and he is now a Canadian. Gurnah was born in Zanzibar and he now resides in Britain. In her discussion of Gurnah and Vassanji, Steiner characterises them as 'translated writers' who are "situated at the crossroads of culture" (2009: 21). Vassanji is the author of several novels and short stories. His first novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989) is about the East African experience of South Asia Indians in general. In the novel he presents the history of four generations of Asians who settled in Tanzania. *No New Land* (1991) portrays a group of Indians from Tanzania (minority immigrants) trying to adapt to life in a new land. Another novel, *The Book of Secrets* (1994), is about disclosures found in the diary of a British administrator in East Africa, Alfred Corbin. *Uhuru Street* (1994), another work by the same author, is set in Dar es Salaam's central business district. Currently based in the United Kingdom, Gurnah is another important Diasporic writer. His first three novels *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990), focus on the experience of immigrants in Britain. His other novel, *Paradise* (1994) is set in colonial East Africa; while *Admiring Silence* (1996) documents the experience of a

young-man who migrates from Zanzibar to the UK and becomes a teacher. His other novels include *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005), and *The Last Gift* (2011).

The importance of Diasporic writers is that, being in foreign lands as migrants, they produce what Steiner calls “cross cultural” Tanzanian fiction which is defined as an “avenue to opening up cracks of light” between people who would otherwise “not come into contact with each other” (2009: 12). These works continue to enjoy canonical status both inside and outside Tanzania as part of a national, regional and indeed a continental canon.

The role of translation in canon formation

Many Tanzanian Anglophone writers are bilingual who transit freely from English in one text to Swahili in another text, and sometimes vice versa. Their motivation is to remain Tanzanian and at the same time to avoid the label of either a “Swahili writer [or] Tanzanian English writer” (Gromov 2011: 289). Yet, there are bilinguals who have decided to stick to one language only. For example, Severine Ndunguru has authored three works, all of them in the English language. These novels include *A Wreath for Father Mayer of Masasi* (1997), *Divine Providence* (1999) and *The Lion of Yola* (2004). Another writer is Prince Kagwema who has been consistent by authoring all his five fiction in English. The novels include, *Veneer of Love* (1975), *Married Love is a Plant* (1983), *Chausiku’s Dozen* (1983), *Society in the Dock* (1984), and *Storm in a Teacup* (1988). Regarding their relationship to canon formation, Tanzanian bilingual writers are affected by the process of canon formation in different ways. For example, while Gabriel Ruhumbika’s Swahili title *Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo* (1991) was part of a ‘selective canon’ insofar as the secondary school Swahili literature was concerned, its English translation *The Invisible Enterprises of the Compatriots* (2009) has never been attracted the attention of the TIE as a set text for English literature syllabus for Tanzanian schools.

By belonging to two cultural and literary traditions, that of Swahili and of English, bilingual writers have the option of borrowing and combining elements from both literary traditions. By combining the two, they have followed the footsteps of classical African writers in ‘domesticating’ the English language. Still others have decided to ‘shuttle’ between the two worlds by writing in both English and Swahili separately. Others turned to translation as a way of ensuring that they have access to a wider audience. For example, for Penina Mlama, the most important audience is the

Swahili audience. “If other people outside Tanzania or East Africa feel they want to know about that material, perhaps the best solution is to translate” (Mlama 1981: 140). Her argument is that it is important for authors to identify themselves with the language of the people for whom they write. She asserts that in the context of Tanzania, a translation of a work by a Tanzanian must always be from Swahili to another language. In other words, a Tanzanian writer must first write in Swahili before writing in English.

Mlama’s insight is useful in understanding the role of translation in the development and visibility of both the fiction in English and that in Swahili and this must be put into context. One of the trends has been self-translation—a translation of a work into another language by the author himself or herself. William Mkufya wrote *Wicked Walk* (1977) in English and later translated it into Swahili under the title *Kizazi Hiki* (1980); Aldin Mutembei’s *Kisiki Kikavu* (2005) was later translated into *Dry Stump* (2009); and Paschally Mayega wrote *Mwalimu Mkuu wa Watu* (2003) and later translated it into *The People’s Schoolmaster* (2004). On his part, Ruhumbika translated *Miradi Bubu ya Wazalendo* (1991) into *The Silent Empowerments of the Compatriots* (2009).

In these few examples, we see that the translation goes in both directions; this promotes the corpus of fiction in both languages. These examples also show that self-translation is a common practice in Tanzania, a practice that requires more research in its own right. Another practice features professional translators who translate other writers’ works. For example, Ruhumbika is a writer and professional translator who has translated, with introduction and notes, a voluminous Swahili epic novel by Aniceti Kitereza originally called *Bwana Myombekere na Bibi Bugonoka na Ntulanalwona na Bulihwali* (1982) into English under the lengthy title, *Mr. Myombekere and his Wife Bugonoka, Their Son Ntulanwalo and Daughter Bulihwali: The Story of Ancient African Community* (2002). Another example is Felicitas Becker’s translation of Ben Mtobwa’s *Dar es Salaam Usiku* into *Dar es Salaam by Night*.

In general, translation has improved the visibility of both Swahili and English fiction. These examples show that there is a close link between translation and canon formation. One possible aspect of this close relationship is that translation contributes to making a text canonical. Through the process of translation, a text may be canonical in one language and yet fail to be canonical when translated into another language. A good example of this is Mayega’s translation of his own

novel, *Mwalimu Mkuu wa Watu* into *The Peoples' Schoolmaster*. Unlike the Swahili version, the English version has attracted a lot of scholarship from university literary critics. In general, for Tanzanian authors, translation is still one of the best available options for increasing the visibility of their works both locally and internationally.

Sponsoring social relevance and the making of a national literary canon

In defining a text as canonical, the relevance of the text to the society is usually of paramount importance. In addressing the question of relevant fiction in Tanzania, the BURT⁴ award for African Literature has introduced a literature writing project. The project promotes contemporary themes and encourages Tanzanians to write original and thought-provoking English manuscripts – literary works that reflect social challenges that are faced by young people in Tanzania today. In order to ensure culturally-relevant books are produced and distributed, the project supports both the writing and the publication process. The initiative is important especially when considered against the background of a nation where it is culturally and economically more viable to write in Swahili than in English. Through this initiative, the last few years have witnessed the emergence of mostly young writers in the English language. Some of the names and titles to come out of this project include *Living in the Shade: Aiming for the Summit* (2011), *Lesslie: The City Maasai* (2012), and *The Detectives of Shangani: The Mystery of Lost Rubies* (2014) by Nahida Esmail. Other titles include *A Hero's Magic* (2010) by Ambani Guyi; *Close Calls* (2012) by Tune Salim; *Face under the Sea* (2011) by William Mkufya; *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* (2011) by Elieshi Lema, *Run Free* (2013) by Richard Mabala, *The Best is yet to Come* (2010) by Asungushe Kayombo, *Tears from a Lovely Heart* (2013) by Israel Yohana, *The Choice* (2012) and *The Wish* (2014) by Mamgirani Mwakimati, *The Birthday Party* (2013), and *Treeland: The Land of Laughter* (2009) both by Mkama Mwijarubi, and *The Temporary Orphan* (2014) by Hussein Tuwa. This initiative has considerably altered the Tanzanian Anglophone fiction landscape by introducing young and female writers thereby challenging the dominance of male and other writers in the canon.

An analysis of the coexistence between Tanzanian fiction in Swahili and that in English reveals that there remains a significant gap to be filled. Whereas Swahili fiction has been deemed to be “comprehensive-to-all,”

⁴More information about the project can be accessed at www.burtaward.org/tanzania

stories in English have been considered “serious” and “elitist” (Gromov2015:11). According to Gromov, this gap is a factor for the emergence of popular Tanzanian fiction in both languages. The common staple for these popular novels has been social issues: sex and love, crime, violence, money, and urban life. The Tanzanian Anglophone popular fiction began as a short story, consistently about protagonists facing these social challenges. Among the titles of popular Anglophone prose extant in Tanzania, those by Agoro Anduru must rank among the earliest. Some of the titles include *Temptation and Other Stories* (1981), *This is Living and other Stories*, *The Fugitive* (1983), and *A Bed of Roses and other Stories* (1983). All the four texts were published in a span of two years – a rush worth investigating in its own right.

Similarly, another surfeit of publications typical of many popular texts at the time occurred in Kenya, especially by the father of the East African popular novel, David Mailu. Considered morally inferior, Mailu’s works were banned by the government of Tanzania in 1976. In contrast to Mailu’s erotic fiction in Tanzania there was a special kind of popular didactic fiction. Utilizing the same themes of love and sex but in a mild and moralistic way, was the Tanzanian writer Prince Kagwema with novels *Veneer of Love* (1975), *Married Love is a Plant* (1983), *Chausiku’s Dozen* (1983), *Society in the Dock* (1984), and *Storm in a Teacup* (1988). Whereas sex and love function as an apparent invitation for readers to enjoy reading Kagwema’s novels with abandon, these seemingly salacious topics are interrogated in a way that is quite didactic. Kagwema’s novels have depth and constructive ideas. We can call these ‘popular-serious fiction’.

Although the Swahili detective novelists dominated the literary scene in the eighties, there were serious developments in English as well. Ben Mtobwa’s *Zero Hour* (1988) is one of the most fascinating popular Anglophone detective novels to come from Tanzania. First published in 1987 in Swahili with the title *Tutarudi na Roho Zetu* (1987) and then translated into English with the title *Zero Hour* (1988), the novel relates a series of murders and mysterious fires committed against frontline states that opposed the South African apartheid regime. Richard Henry Msechu is another writer whose thriller novel *The Pretorian Agenda* (1999) deals with politics, race, and crimes involving the frontline states and the South African apartheid government. In terms of topical content of lasting relevance, these are detective stories still ripe and ready for social and political criticism.

Popular themes such as witchcraft emerged as interesting staples in the region's English fiction. This is especially the case in Hokororo's *Salma's Spirit* (1997) and Alois Mmasi's *Satanic Tortures* (1998). In the two novels, the meaning of disease, life and death are interrogated against a background of a society that believes in superstition and witchcraft. In these stories, the world of the dead and that of the living are connected.

Another interesting development in Tanzanian Anglophone popular writing has been the emergence of work by Eric James Shigongo. Shigongo is one of the most prolific contemporary Tanzanian writers of the popular novel. Compared with other writers, he is known for writing lengthy plots as demonstrated in *The Last Days of my Life (Siku za Mwisho wa Uhai Wangu)* (2002), *The President Loves my Wife (Rais anampenda Mke wangu)* (2003) and *Tears and Blood (Machozi na Damu)*. Appealing to the tastes of the large numbers of ordinary readers, and in order to make sure that the stories are 'served while still hot' he has decided to set up his own publishing company – The Global Publishers. A second strategy employed by Shigongo in order to 'serve' his stories while 'still hot' is the serialization of his works – the publication of a story in regular installments in order to hook readers and to keep their appetites wet. In order to reach as many readers as possible, Shigongo ensures that the novels are available in both Swahili and English. This indicates that Tanzanian popular fiction in English has grown alongside that in Swahili.

Another version of popular fiction is cheeky fiction. Cheeky novels are simple texts and their subject is usually joking or humorous. Whereas the main elements of cheeky fictions are humor, laughter, and disrespect, some of their main devices are irony, sarcasm, subversion, hyperbole and understatement. Like all popular fiction, this genre is simple, easy to read, and digestible. This would explain why such works are not usually prioritized as required reading within the educational institutions. One of the writers in this subgenre is Wilson Kaigalura. His works include *Mini Devils* (2006), *Poisoned Love* (1986), and *The Old idiot* (2006). In all his works, he uses humour as a central narrative technique. Kaigalura attributes his love of humour to the primary influence of the Kenyan writer of humour, Wahome Mutahi. In *Mini Devils* the humorous content is proudly announced in the blurb on the cover of the book: "This is a humorous story of boys pocking fun at adult male society." Whereas readers enjoy reading humour in cheeky fictions, analysing humour and jokes changes them from being trivial matters to serious matters. In *Mini Devils*, one notices that laughter and seriousness are two sides of the same coin. The point is we need to study popular and cheeky fictions alongside

the canons—the serious. If we analyze cheeky fictions and humour as authors' conscious choice to represent the serious through the non-serious and the characters' strategy to come to terms with the serious in a laughable way.

What constitutes a canon varies from age to age; at least in part this is because contemporary Anglophone writers have to deal with somewhat different issues from their progenitors. Contemporary social and political concerns are the foci of new writers. *Passed like a Shadow* by Bernard Mapalala and *Dry Stump* by Aldin Mutembei, both interrogate the AIDS scourge and its effects on the very foundation of our existence – the family. As such one is not surprised to note that *Passed like a Shadow* is one of the prescribed texts by the Tanzania Institute of Education for secondary school literature. Environmental politics is another topic handled well in *The People's Schoolmaster* (2004) by Pascally Mayega. For him, contemporary environmental challenges are a result of corruption and not due to foreign domination. *Waters of the Vulture* (1991) by Marti Tololwa examines the effects of free market policies on the economy of the nation. The recent killing of Albinos for their body parts has been taken up by the Tanzanian English fiction writers such as Asungushe Kayombo's (2010) *The Best is Yet to Come*. Nahida Esmail's *Living in the Shade: Aiming for the Summit* (2011) focuses on an interesting topic of football and football politics in Tanzania. Fascinating about this is that it is about the quest of girls' football team to show that they are capable of achieving what their counterparts, boys can. The girls in this team have albinism and the point is that girls, let alone girls with albinism, can do it even better. In general, Tanzanian Anglophone fiction is on a par with contemporary issues.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the trends in Tanzanian Anglophone fiction and attempted to define its canon. Owing to the slipperiness of the concept of canon itself, it is necessary to make preliminary general observations about the notion of a 'canon' in its relationship to other aspects of literature, literary artists, language, society and cross cultural literary practice.

This involved defining an Anglophone canon in a broad sense that embraces the entirety of novels written in English by Tanzanian authors. This inclusive definition falls under what Alistair Fowler calls a "potential canon" (1979: 98). In the context of Tanzania, a potential canon would include the entire, consolidated list of fiction in English. This approximates

what Amatoritsero Ede refers to as a “retrieval canon” which “exists when literary value is reduced to the lowest common denominator, the better to indiscriminately consider all written material as ‘literary’ (2013:175). The Tanzanian version of this list would involve creating a literary guide, like an anthology, for Tanzanian Anglophone fiction. The challenge this poses is that much of the work to be included in a ‘potential canon’ list for Tanzania is simply not accessible. Some of these works are already out of print; other of such works can only be acquired second hand. For these works in the Tanzanian potential canon, a serious library culture needs to be developed.

A second less inclusive category of canon includes only ‘accessible’ Tanzanian Anglophone fiction. These works have been the subject of this paper. The discussion has included only samples of works which, through research, could be accessed to date. Hence this review is not exhaustive.

The third relevant sense of canonization that has been employed here is what Fowler has called “the selective canons;” this category includes accessible fiction deemed to be of the highest artistic standard. In this sense, the canon is a privileged collection countenanced by the elite and supported by academic institutions in various ways, including its formation as central to formal curricula in the teaching of literature at all levels. In the context of Tanzanian Anglophone literature, there are relatively few examples of canon in this sense, despite the recent inclusion of some previously mentioned Tanzanian Anglophone novels in the national curriculum.

The fourth element of this development that was noted is hyper-canonization. Some of the texts in the reviewed list seem to be so privileged that they appear repeatedly and internationally. They are part of the list when Tanzanian literature is mentioned; when East African literature guide is discussed; and when African literature is mentioned. These are very few.

We can make the following general observations about the Tanzanian Anglophone canon. Firstly, the list is predominantly male and this is due to the nation’s multiple legacies which have excluded women from educational opportunities since the colonial period. Of those reviewed, only one female author, Elieshi Lema seems to enjoy the same canonical status as male authors. Secondly, the canons, as we have seen, are defined by both artistic qualities and conformity to the sociocultural values of Tanzania. This is the main criterion that is used by institutions such as the

Tanzania Institute of Education. The role of publishers and critics is also important for the formation of the canons. In general, the recent inclusion of Tanzanian Anglophone authors in secondary school English programmes is a testament to the fact that we do have a canon in this body of writing.

In order to properly understand the position and contribution of Tanzanian fiction in English, we need to focus on the history of Tanzania and to pay particular attention to the politics of language in use. Investing in literary criticism and research, especially by local scholars, will help to improve the visibility of this genre outside the nation. Similarly, accessibility of the texts should be improved if the fiction is to be known outside Tanzania. One way to achieve greater accessibility would be to take advantage of improvements in communication and internet technologies to publish and promote our books.

The most interesting development has been the emergence of online Tanzanian novels in English. An interesting case here is Dunlop Ochieng's *Our Useless Kin* (2015) which interrogates migration and kinship bonds. It remains to be seen how viable this strategy will be. If the problem is accessibility of what is produced locally, then online publishing is more promising than the traditional print method. The Ministry of Education's decision to include some of the texts we have discussed in the national English syllabus, and the introduction of special tertiary level courses ("Tanzanian Literature in English" and "Introduction to Creative Writing") at the University of Dar es Salaam are some of the promising developments that will improve the visibility of the fiction. The University should be a place where the fiction is not only consumed through research and criticism, but also produced through special creative projects. Rather than blaming the dominance of Swahili literature over work produced in English, we should take advantage of the coexistence of the two languages, to improve Tanzanian fiction in English through translation. If both canonical and popular texts were to be digitalized routinely, this could lead to a useful online archive of the Anglophone novel.

References

- Achebe, C. 2000. *Home and Exile*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

- Arnold, S. 1986. Tanzania. In: *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (ed.) Albert Gerard. Budapest: Akademia Kiado, pp. 949-960.
- Arnold, S. 1980. Popular Literature in Tanzania: Its Background and Relation to East African Literature. *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle Série 115 (3e Trimestre), pp. 156-177.
- Eagleton, T. 1976. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: Verso.
- Ede, A. 2013. The Global Literary Canon and Minor African Literatures. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Carleton.
- Fowler, A. 1979. Genre and the Literary Canon. *Literary History* 11(1) Autumn: 97-119.
- Gerard, A. 1981. *Comparative Literature and African Literature*. Pretoria: Via Africa Limited.
- Gikandi, S. 1984. The Growth of the East African Novel. In: *The Writing of East & Central Africa*, (ed.) G.D. Killam. London: Heinemann, pp. 231-246.
- Gikandi, S and Mwangi, E. 2007. *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English since 1945*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gromov, M. 2015. Bilingual Literature of Tanzania as a Specific Inter-literary Community. *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa* 6(1): 1-15.
- Gromov, M. 2011. Across the Language Border: The Case of Bilingual Writers in Tanzania. In: *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, (eds.) J. Wawrzinek and Justus Makokha. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 283-287.
- Gromov, M. 2008. Swahili Popular Literature in Recent Years. *Swahili Forum* 15: 5-13.
- Kolbus, D.E. 2001. *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Lindfors, B. 1997. *African Textualities: Texts, Pre-texts and Contexts of African Literature*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Lindfors, B. 1979. East African Popular Literature in English. *Journal of Popular Culture* 13: 106-115.

- Liyong, T. 1993. On Translating the “untranslated”: Chapter 14 of “Wer Pa Lawino” by Okot p’Bitek. *Research in African Literatures* 24(3): 87-92.
- Liyong, T. 1975. East Africa, O East Africa, I Lament thy Literary Barrenness. *Transition* 50: 43.
- Liyong, T. 1965. Can we Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa? *East Africa Journal* 2(8): 5-13.
- Mazrui, A. 1971. *Cultural Engineering and Nation-Building in East Africa*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Mbise I. 1984. Writing in English from Tanzania. In: *The Writing of East and Central Africa*, (ed.) G.D. Killam. London: Heinemann, pp. 55-69.
- Mwaifuge, E.S. 2009. Ideology and the Creative: A Study of Tanzanian Prose Fiction in English. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Dar es Salaam.
- Nichols, L. 1981. *Conversation with African Writers: Interviews with Twenty-Six African Authors*. Washington: Voice of America.
- Ohly, R. 1990. *The Zanzibar Challenge: Swahili Prose in the Years 1975-1981*. Windhoek: African Studies of the Academy of Namibia.
- Ping, D. 2015. Canon Formation in Literary Field: A Sociological Perspective. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences* 3(8): 60-65.
- Ruhumbika, G. 1992. The African-Language Policy of Development: African National Languages. *Research in African Literatures* 23(1): 73-82.
- Senkoro, F.E.M.K. 1982. *The Prostitute in African Literature*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press.
- Steiner, T. 2009. *Translated People, Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Literature*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.