

كيسواحل

Kiswahili¹

Mtungaji: Ustadh Mau (Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir), 2003

الرحيم الرحمن الله بسم
bismi llāhi arraḥmani arraḥimi
bismillahi arrahmani arrahimi

كُنَيْمًا نِ مَكْوَكْ ١ تَانِيَامَا حَتَ لِنِ

kunyamā ni mek'ūka tānyāmā ḥaṭa lini
kunyamaa nimechoka * t'anyamaa hata lini 1a/b

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

وَنَنْغُ هُنِيْپُوْكَ تَمَانِ نَ كُوَانِ

wanangu huniepūka kuwaona na ṭamāni
wanangu huniepuka * kuwaona natamani 1c/d

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

وَالْوَبَاكِ كُنِشِكَا سَوْنُغُ نِ وَ وَندَانِ

wālūbāki kunishika siwangu ni wa wendāni
walobaki kunishika * si wangu ni wa wendani 1e/f

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

مِمِ نِ مَوْتِنْدَانِ مَبُونِ هُنِيْجَ زِتَ

mimi ni mewatendāni mbūna hunipija zita
mimi nimewatendani * mbona hunipija zita 1g/h

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

وَنَانْغُ مِمِ وَ دَمُ ٢ وَانَ وَ أُسْوَا حِلِنِ

wanāngu mimi wa damu wāna wa uswāḥilini
wanangu mimi wa damu * wana wa Uswahilini 2a/b

My own flesh and blood, the children of Swahiland,

¹Adbulkadir, MA and P.J.L. Frankl (2013): 'Kiswahili': a poem by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir. *Swahili Forum*, 20.

أَصِلْ هَوْنَ هَامُ يَا كُنْيُو نِ نَانِ
 aṣili hawana hāmu yā kuniyuwa ni nāni
 asili hawana hamu * ya kuniyuwa ni nani 2c/d
 are uninterested in knowing who I am,

وَمَنْتِي قَوْمُ نَ وَنَ وَ مَجِرِنِ
 wamenatiya qaumu na wana wa majirani
 wamenatiya kaumu * na wana wa majirani 2e/f
 and have left me to other peoples, and to the children of neighbours.

كُوسَ لَنْغَ كُوسَ غَانِ مَبُونَ هُنِيجَ زِتَ
 kūsa langu kūsa gāni mbūna hunipija zita
 kosa langu kosa gani * mbona hunipija zita 2g/h
 What kind of fault is my fault? [O my children] why do you continue waging war on me?

مِم مَامُنْ سِتَاسَ وَلَ سِنَ پُنْغُونِ
 mimi māmenu sitāsa wala sina punguwani
 mimi mamenu sit'asa * wala sina punguwani 3a/b
 I am your mother and am not yet infertile, nor has my ability to reproduce diminished.

نِ مَزَا وَ مَمْبَاسَ نَ كُنْغِنَ زِسُونِ
 ni mezā wa mambāsa na kungine zisiwani
 nimezaa wa Mambasa * na kungine zisiwani 3c/d
 I have given birth to children in Mambasa, and in the other islands [of the Swahili],

نِزَ وَنَ سِيَّاسَ نَ زِيُونْغُوزِ وَدِنِ
 nize wana siyāsa na ziyūngūzi waḍini
 nizee wanasiyasa * na ziongozi wa dini 3e/f
 to politicians and to religious leaders,

مَافُنْدِ وَ كُلَ فَنِ نَ مَاشُجَا وَ زِتَ
 māfunḍi wa kula fani na māshujā wa zita
 mafundi wa kila fani * na mashujaa wa zita 3g/h
 to craftsmen in every field, and to war heroes.

٤ نَدِيمَ مَامَاكَ مُيَاكَ يِي مَوْنُغُ عَثْمَانِ
 ndimi māmāke muyāka piya mwengo 'athumāni
 ndimi mamake Muyaka² * pia Mwengo Athumani³ 4a/b
I am the mother of Bwana Muyaka, and of Mwengo Athmani also,

نَ زَهْدٍ كَذَلِكَ نَ وَنُغٍ وَآكَ وَنَدَانِ
 na zahidi kadhalika na wengi wāke wendāni
 na Zahidi⁴ kadhalika * na wengi wake wendani 4c/d
and of Zahidi too, and many of his contemporaries,

عَالِي كُوْتِ نَ مَتَاكَ وَتَ مَبَوَا مُوَيَ قَرِنِ
 'ālī kūti na matāka wote mbwā mūya qarini
 Ali Koti⁵ na Mataka⁶ * wote mbwa moyā karini 4e/f
Ali Koti and Mataka, all from just one century,

وَلِتُوكَ مَا تُؤْمِبُونَ وَ كَوَا كَمَ نِيُوتَ
 waliṭūka māṭūmbūni wa kawā kama nīūta
 walitoka matumboni * wakawaa kama nyota 4g/h
they emerged from my womb, and shone like stars.

٥ اِنْكِشَافِ نَغْلِي اُكْسُومَ نَ كِدَانِ
 inkishāfi ngaliya ukisōme na kidani
 Inkishafi⁷ angaliya * ukisome na kidani 5a/b
Look at Inkishafi. Read it attentively

نَدِپُو تَاكَأُيُو كُولِي نِ كَوَامْبِيَاوْ مَوْنَدَانِ
 ndipuu tākāpuu kweleya ni kwāmbiyao mwendāni
 ndipo takapo kweleya * nikwambiyao mwendani 5c/d
and then you will understand, my dear friend,

²Bwana Muyaka was the outstanding Swahili poet of 19th 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.

³Mwengo Athmani: this 18th century poet from Pate composed the *Utendi wa Tambuka* (*The Epic of Heraklios*).

⁴Zahidi: see El-Maawy (2008).

⁵Ali Koti of Pate: see Chiraghdin (1987: 31-7).

⁶Bwana 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.

⁷The *Inkishafi*, according to W.E. Taylor Stigand (1915: 96-105) 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 Swahililand), may remind some readers of Thomas Gray's *Elegy written in an English churchyard* (London 1751).

نَ هَزِفِ أَصْلَانِ
na hazifi aṣilāni

نِ تُونْغُ زِمَسَلِي
ni tūngo zimesaliya * na hazifi asilani 5e/f

what I am telling you. These verses are of enduring worth and will never die.

نِ وَنَانْغُ وَالْوَيْتِ
ni wanāngu wālūpita

وَالْوَزِتْنُغَ نِ نِيَانِ
wālūzitunga ni nyāni
walozitunga ni nyani * ni wanangu walopita 5g/h

Who were those who composed them? They were my children who have passed on.

نَ پِي كِرَاغُ دِنِ
na piya k'irāgu ḍini

نَ مَاْلَنْغَ وَ مَقِيتَ ٦
na mālena wa mvita
na Malenga⁸ wa Mvita * na pia Chiraghdini⁹ 6a/b

And the Bard of Mambasa, and Chiraghdin too,

هَاوَكُكِرِ أُدُنِ
hāwakukiri uḍuni

نِيَايُو وَلِزِفُوتَ
nyāyuu ūlizifuwata
nyayo ulizifuata * hawakukiri uduni 6c/d

they followed in my footsteps, they did not submit to lower standards.

لَكِنْ هُفَلِيَانِ
lakini hufaliyāni

نَابَهَانِ هُتَ ٦
nnābahāni huṭeta
Nabahani¹⁰ huteta * lakini hufaliyani 6e/f
al-Nabhany reproves, but to what effect?

إِنْغَا أَمِيكِتَ
ingā ameikiṭa

نَدِي يُوْكَ أُوْنْدَانِ
ndiye pweke uwandāni
ndiye pweke uwandani * ingawa ameikita 6g/h

He remains alone in the field, yet he stays strong.

⁸The Bard of Mambasa refers to Ustadh Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo, see Chiraghdin (1971).

⁹Shihabdin Chiraghdin (1934-1976). See the biography by his daughter Latifa Chiraghdin which came out in 2012.

¹⁰In an unpublished commendation from 12 June 1974 J.W.T. Allen writes about Ahmad Sheikh Nabhany: “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”. For a biography see Said (2012).

٧ بَادُ كُزَا نَ وَزَ
 siyākūma ukingūni bāḍo kuzā na weza
 bado kuzaa naweza * siyakoma ukingoni 7a/b
I am still able to give birth. I have not yet reached the limit,

لَكِنْ مُمْنِپُوَزَ مُمَيْتَوُ فُونُ
 lakini mumenipūza mumeitōwa fuwoni
 lakini mumenipuuza * mumeitoa fuoni 7c/d
but you have all despised me. You have left me high and dry,

وَنُغْنِ مَيْتُوكَزَ كُنِيَانُغِي كَانُونُ
 wangine meitūkeza kunipāngiya kānūni
 wangine meitokeza * kunipangia kanuni 7e/f
now others have come forward to regulate me,

مُسَمِيَاتِ كُبُونُ نِينِي مُلِپُونِوَاتِ
 musamiyāti kubūni nyinyi mulipūniwata
 musamiyati kubuni¹¹ * nyinyi muliponiwata 7g/h
compiling standardized dictionaries.

٨ هُلِي كِسِكِيَتِكَا كَنُغَلِي جَرَدَنِ
 huliya kisikitika k'angaliya jaridani
 huliya kisikitika * changaliya jaridani 8a/b
I weep and lament when I look at the learned journals,

وَنُغِ وَنَاءُ أَنْدِكَ سِوَنَانُغِ نِ وَغْنِ
 wengi wanau andika siwanāngu ni wageni
 wengi wanaoandika * si wanangu ni wageni 8c/d
for many of those who contribute are not my children, they are strangers [to me].

¹¹For almost a century the principal publisher of standardized Swahili dictionaries has been the Oxford University Press (OUP). Clearly OUP has to be profitable, and profitable is what, over the years, their dictionaries of standardized Swahili have been. However, if one considers excellence in research and scholarship not one of the OUP's standardized 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 *Dictionary swahili-français* (Paris, 1939), compiled by Charles Sacleux. Sacleux's chef d'oeuvre ('unprecedented in historical depth, dialectological detail and philological knowledge') can now be accessed electronically, courtesy of *Swahili Forum* (<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~afrika/swafo/index.php/sacleux>). Heartfelt thanks are due to Thilo Schadeberg and Ridder Samson.

وَيْكَ تُنْغُ نِ نْيَانِ

wapeka tūngo ni nyāni

idhaani kadhalika * wapeka t'ungo ni nyani 8e/f

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

إِذَاعَانِ كَذَلِكْ

idhā'āni kadhalika

لَيْكَ كُوْ مَبُو مَمْتِ

lik'a kuwa mbwā mvita

wengi hawatoki pwani * licha kuwa mbwa Mvita 8g/h

Many do not come from the coast, although they may have a Mambasa address.

وَنْغِ هَاوَتُوكِ پَوَانِ

wengi hāwatūk pwān

زِسُومَشَوَاءُ شُلَنِ

zisūmeshwao shuleni

angalia na zitabu * zisomeshwao shuleni 9a/b

Look at the textbooks which are studied at our schools.

۹ أَنْغَلِي نَ زِتَابُ

angaliya na zitābu

سِ سُوْدِ وَلَ سِ شَانِ

si sūdī wala si shāni

hazandikwi na Rajabu * si Sudi wala si Shani 9c/d

They are written neither by Rajabu, nor by Sudi nor by Shani.

هَازَانْدِكُوْ نَ رَجَبُ

hāzāndikwī na rajabu

أَشِشِيُوْ سُكَانِ

ashishiyeo sukāni

Njoroge¹² ndiye katibu * ashishiyeo sukani 9e/f

The author is Njoroge, he is the helmsman.

نَجُورُغِ نَدِي كَتِبُ

njūroge ndiye katibu

نَاءُ نِيَوْمَ هُفُوتَ

nao nyūma hufuwaṭa

Charo¹³ na wake wendani * nao nyuma hufuata 9g/h

Charo and his colleagues follow.

كَارَ نَ وَاكِ وَندَانِ

k'āro na wāke wendāni

كَتَدَ هُرْدِ نَدِيَانِ

k'enda hurudī ndiyāni

hualikwa kongamano * chenda hurudi ndiani 10a/b

When I am invited to conferences, I turn back before I arrive.

۱۰ هُوَلِكُوْا كُونْغَمَانُ

huwalikwā kūngamāno

¹²njoroge: a name representing those who have their origins in the East African interior (the bara).

¹³charo: a name representing those who have their origins in the coastal hinterland (the nyika).

كُو نِينِي سِوَانِ

kuwa nyinyi siwaoni

huona utungu mnuu * kuwa nyinyi siwaoni 10c/d

I feel exceedingly bitter that I do not see you all there.

لَكِنْ نَتْنَدُ نَنْ

lakini nitende nni

na huziuma zitani¹⁴ * lakini nitende nini 10e/f

I bite my fingers in frustration, but what can I do?

مَاْمِنْ مُمْنَوَتَ

māmenu mumeniwaṭa

wanāngu mumeikhini
wanangu mumeihini * mamenu mumeniwata 10g/h

My children, you have missed your opportunity. You have abandoned your own mother.

هُوْنِ أَتْشَعُ مَنُو

huwona utungu mnuu

نَ هُزَامَ زِتَانِ

na huziuma zitāni

وَنَانْغُ مُمَيْخِنْ

wanāngu mumeikhini

كَتَغَلِي مِتَحَانِ

kʰangaliya mitihāni

na huliya kwa matozi * changaliya mitihani 11a/b

And I shed tears when I look at the results of the school exams.

نَ وَ كِسُومُ زَوْنِ

na wa kisūmu ziwani

wanafundi wa Kibwezi * na wa Kisumu¹⁵ ziwani¹⁶ 11c/d

Students from Kibwezi, and from Kisumu by the lake,

وَلِيُوكُو كِلَلِنِ

waliyūkuu kileleni

ndiwo wanao barizi * waliyoko kileleni 11e/f

they are the ones who are ahead, who are at the top;

مُكُو تِنِ هُكُوكُوتَ

mukuu ṭini hukūkūṭa

mulūtūka kwetu pwani * muko tini hukokota¹⁷ 11g/h

and you, students from the coast, you lag far behind.

مُلُوتُوكَ كُوتَ پَوَانِ

mulūtūka kwetu pwāni

¹⁴These words echo the words of the *Inkishafi*: “wakauma zanda na kuiyuta”. Readers unfamiliar with this Swahili gesture of regret could consult Eastman and Omar (1985).

¹⁵Kibwezi and Kisumu are places in the East African interior.

¹⁶The lake is Lake Nyanza, also known as Lake Victoria.

¹⁷Over 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 marginalised children.

وَأَزْمِلْ كُنْ

wa uzamili k'uwoni

wafanyao utafiti * wa uzamili chuwoni 12a/b

Amongst those who are researching for degrees at the universities,

أَوْ هَوَاطِكَا

aw hawapātikāni

Waswahili ni katiti * au hawapatikani 12c/d

Swahili students are few or non-existent.

وَسَوَاهِلِ نِ كَاتِ

waswāhili ni kātiti

مُونِي مَاكُوسَ نِ نِيَانِ

mwenye mākūsa ni nyāni

ni nyani ni mlaiti * mwenye makosa ni nyani 12e/f

Who is to be blamed? Whose fault is it?

نِ نِيَانِ نِ مَلَيْتِ

ni nyāni ni mlaiti

مَعْنِ هَامُكُطَاتِ

mgine hāmukupāta

mimi hamunithamini * mgine hamukupata 12g/h

You esteem me not at all, yet you have not replaced me by another.

مِمِ هَامُنِثَمِنِ

mimi hāmunithamini

هُنَانُغُونِغَ مُيُونِ

huniongūnga mūyūni

kiwasikiya hunena * huniungonga moyoni 13a/b

When I hear those who are not mother-tongue speakers speaking, I feel sick at heart.

كِوَسِكِي هُنِينِ

kiwasikiya hunīna

نَحُوْ نِ تَتَمَانِ

naḥau na itamāni

sarufi hakuna tena * nahau naitamani 13c/d

Inflection is no longer employed, while grammatical [Swahili] is what I desire!

صَرْفَ هَكُنْ تَنْ

ṣarfa hakuna tena

كَمْ مَشَايُوْ كَانَوَانِ

kama mashāpuu kānwāni

na hata ladha hayana * kama mashapu kanwani 13e/f

Even [their speech] is wanting in flavour, like a plug of tobacco in one's mouth.

نَ حَتَ لَدَ هَيَانِ

na ḥaṭa ladha hayāna

هُئِمْبَ أَوْ هُتَتِ

huimba aw huteta

sielewi hunenani * huimba au huteta 13g/h

I do not understand what they are saying. Are they singing? Are they complaining?

سِيَلُوْ هُنَانِ

sielewi hunenāni

١٤ لَوْ مُيَاكَ تَارُدِ أَيُّ تَنْ دُنْيَانِ
law muyāka tārudi ay tena duniyāni

lau Muyaka tarudi * ae tena duniyani 14a/b
Were Bwana Muyaka to return, were he to come back to the world,

مَوَانَانْغُ إِتْمَبِدِ كُونَدَ مَحَكَمَانِ
mwānāngu itambidi kwenenda mahakamāni
mwanangu itambidi * kwenenda mahakamani 14c/d
it would be necessary, my child, for him to go to a court of law,

أَيْتَنْ مَشْهَدِ وَنِيُؤَا يَقِينِ
aete na mashahidi waniyuwao yaqīni
aete na mashahidi * waniyuwao yakini 14e/f
and he would need to call witnesses who know me well,

نِيُوتْ مُونَدِ غَرَزَنْ كُؤَا حَتِي كُؤَا پَاتِ
nyūte mwende gerezani kwā ḥaṭiya kuwapāṭa
nyote mwende gerezani * kwa hatiya kuwapata 14g/h
and all of you would go to prison for the offence which you have committed against me.

١٥ وَاللَّهِ هَمُنَ غَيْرِ وَلَ هَامُونِ إِمَانِ
wallāhi hamuna gēra wala hāmūna imāni
wallahi hamuna ghera * wala hamuna imani 15a/b
Truly you have neither zeal nor self-confidence.

هَمُنَ لَكُؤَا كَرِ كُؤَا هَمُنِثَمِنِ
hamuna la kuwa hamunithamini
hamuna lakuwakera * kuwa hamunithamini 15c/d
It irritates you not at all that you do not esteem me.

مِمِ نِ كَامَ مِپِيرِ هُتَزَوَ أُونَدَانِ
mimi ni kāma mpiwiri hutezewa uwandāni
mimi ni kama mpwira * hutezewa uwandani 15e/f
I am just like a ball in the play-ground,

هِيْجُؤَا تَكْنَدِيَانِ نَ كُلَ مُونِي كُپِتِ
hipijwā teke na kula mwenye kupiṭa
hipijwa tekendiani * na kila mwenye kupita 15g/h
I am given a kick by anyone who passes by in the street.

۱۶ حَتَّ كُونِي أَشْعِرِ وَاسُو وَنْعُ وَمُبُونِ

wāsuu wangu wamebūni ḥaṭa kwenye usha'iri
hata kwenye ushairi * waso wangu wamebuni 16a/b
Even in the field of Swahili prosody, those who are not mine have invented

زِلِزْ حُرُّ بَحَارِ كُؤَا كُؤَلَزْ وَغْنِ
zilizo ḥuru baḥāri kwā kuwoleza wageni
zilizo huru bahari * kwa kuoleza wageni 16c/d
free verse, imitating foreigners.

مِم هَائُو سِيَاكِرِ سِ مَاشَعِرِ كِفَنِ
mimi hāyuu siyākiri si māsha'iri kifani
mimi hayo siyakiri * si mashairi kifani 16e/f
For myself, I cannot accept that. That is not Swahili poetry.

هَائُو نُوتْ نِ كُؤَا نَنْ هُزْ نِ مَبْنُ زَا زَتْ
hāyuu yūt ni kwā nn hzo n mbnu zā zṭa
hayo yote ni kwa nini * hizo ni mbinu za zita 16g/h
What is the point of it all? These are preparations for war.

۱۷ هَمْبُو مُونِيُو سِنَ هِنِ نِ عَجَابُ غَانِ

hambiwa mwenyewe sina hini ni 'ajābu gāni
hambiwa mwenyewe sina * hini ni ajabu gani 17a/b
I am told that I belong to nobody in particular. How extraordinary!

هُوَاءِ كَاكُوسَ شِنَ كَاوْ نِ تَانْدُ يَانْغَانِ
huwae kākūsa shina kāwa na ṭāndu yāngāni
huwae kakosa shina * kawa na tandu yangani 17c/d
How can I be rootless below ground and yet have branches above?

نِيَانِ الْوَنِيْ نِ الْوَنَانْدِكِ نِ نِيَانِ
nyāni alūnīpa ina alūnāndika ni nyāni
nyani alonipa ina * alonandika ni nyani 17e/f
Who gave me my name? And who are they who wrote me down?

كِيُو سِ أُسْوَا حِلِنِ نِ وَپِ نَالِيُوپَاتِ
kiwa si uswāḥilini ni wapi nālīpūpāṭa
kiwa si Uswahilini * ni wapi nalipopata 17g/h
If I do not hail from Swahililand, then whence do I come?

سِدَلِيلِ أَصْلَانِ

si aṣilāni

كُو وَنَغِ هُنِنَنْ ١٨

kuwa wengi huninena

kuwa wengi huninena * sidalili asilani 18a/b

That many speak me, [Swahili], is not of itself proof of origins,

كِتَغَرَزَ هَامُونِ

kingereza hāmuwoni

يَاكُو مُونِيُو سِنَ

yākuwa mwenyewe sina

yakuwa mwenyewe sina * Kingereza hamuoni 18c/d

or that I have no owner. What of the English language?

پَمْبَ زَتِ دُنِيَانِ

pembe zote duniyāni

هُنِنَوَا نَ وَنَغِ سَانَ

hunenwā na wengi sāna

hunenwa na wengi sana * pembe zote duniani 18e/f

It is spoken by very many, in all corners of the world,

مِزِي هَايُكَاثَا

miziye haikukāṭa

كِنَ نَ كَوَاءِ سِنَانِ

kina na kwao sināni

kina na kwao shinani * miziye haikukata 18g/h

yet the language remains firmly established in its homeland, its roots have not been severed.