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# The woman hidden in the *Diwani ya Mnyampala*

Writing in Kiswahili, Mathias E. Mnyampala (1917-1969) was an important poet, historian, essayist and judge from Tanzania. A famous poet, renowned for his mastery of classical techniques of poetic composition, he was the president of a national-scale association of poets (*Usanifu wa Kiswahili na Ushairi Tanzania – UKUTA*– Improvement of Kiswahili and Poetry in Tanzania) until 1966. In 1994 he received the Medal of the United Republic of Tanzania (MNYAMPALA, M., E. 2013 : 83) by presidential decree, for the totality of his patriotic work in service of the spread of Kiswahili, and in particular for his collections of classical poetry like *Diwani ya Mnyampala* (MNYAMPALA, M., E. 1963). The principle behind *Diwani* is that of a collection, created by the poet himself, of his own poems in order to give the public a lyric window on his best compositions, or his favorite compositions, as a sort of magnum opus. By definition, these works are not collectively-made. However, a woman, Mary Mangwela Mnyampala, the poet's wife, appears in contre-jour in some of her husband's poems in *Diwani*. Was this Mary Mangwela herself, because she is a poet herself, writing under the pen name "Wastara", or is it a sort of female alter-ego of the poet, writing under a pseudonym? Or perhaps these are poems written by Mnyampala for his wife? The answers to these questions are not immediately clear and we can ask ourselves about this ambiguous female presence in the *Diwani ya Mnyampala*.

During my stay in Tanzania, Charles M. Mnyampala, the second son of Mathias E. and Mary M. Mnyampala, who maintains his father's archives in Dodoma, pointed out that his mother's compositions appeared in his father's Diwani. He confided tapescripts of four poems signed by typewriter with the name of Mary Mangwela, which we have since been able to digitize in their original format in Paris (ROY, M., 2013: pp 522-525). If we but adhere to the typographical conventions of the tapescripts, it appears that Mary Mangwela (WASTARA) is without doubt the author of those works. We also noticed the presence of these works in the Diwani ya Mnyampala, with the exception of the flysheet mangwela4 (ROY, M., 2013: pp 525).

The poems which appear in the *Diwani ya Mnyampala* are:

- *PAMBO LA NDOA MAPENZI* "the ornament of marriage is love" (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963 : pp 45-46)
- *AJIDAIYE<sup>1</sup> UFUNDI* "he who pretends to master art" (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963 : 60)
- *LAZIMA ISO MAPENZI* "obligation is not love" (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963 : pp 73-74).

Charles M. Mnyampala also told us that composition 13 of *Diwani*, entitled *WASTARA HAZUMBUKI* "Wastara (the pen name of Mary Mangwela, which means

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<sup>1</sup> "AJIDAIYE" written in standard Kiswahili in the book *Diwani ya Mnyampala* corresponds to "ANOJIDAI" in the northern dialects of Kiswahili, the form in which classical poetry was written, and also of 5 syllables in the tapescript of Mary Mangwela.

‘reticence’ NDT) is discreet” (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963: 9) was written by his mother. A letter written by Mary Mangwela herself to the secretary of Tabora’s Catholic newspaper, Kiongozi (ROY, M. 2013 :526) on 17 May, 1958, shows clearly that the Shairi poem entitled *NJOZI YA MAWE MATATU* “the dream of three stones” (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963 : pp 33-34) was written by her. This poem has a political theme hidden in the enigma of three entities which bring Mary Mangwela out of the genre of love poetry which she might have addressed to her husband and which was not included in the *Diwani*. This is also the poem we can, with the most certainty, attribute to Mary Mangwela in terms of proof of her authorship. We can in fact base this statement on one of her letters, which presents her as the author of *NJOZI YA MAWE MATATU*, for in it she writes “*shairi langu*”, “*my poem*” regarding that work.

However, the word of Charles M. Mnyampala is also legitimate testimony and can be held as authoritative. At the very least we can reassess this information along with the elements we already possess. Under the oral tradition, which is still active in Tanzania, the words of a member of the Mnyampala family who is implicated in, well-informed about his father’s work, given to someone whom he perceives as a researcher whose work he perfectly understands, are considered to be a valid source of information. With Charles M. Mnyampala, we were able to find a copy of the newspaper *Uhuru* ‘freedom’, dated 13 June, 1969, at the Central Library (*Maktaba Kuu*) of Dar es Salaam. In this issue appeared the condolences and homages sent by poets on the decease of Mathias E. Mnyampala on the 8 June, 1969. The SHAIRI

poem which appears in the newspaper for this purpose, *PAMBO LA NDOA MAPENDO* “the ornament of marriage is love”<sup>2</sup> is signed Mary Mangwela, followed by her pen name, Wastara. The slight difference in titles aside, these are the exact same lines as the poem *PAMBO LA NDOA MAPENZI*, which appears in the collection *Diwani ya Mnyampala* (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963: pp 45-46). Mary Mangwela thus fixed her name to a work which had already appeared, but without authorial attribution, in the *Diwani*. The information given orally by Charles M. Mnyampala, thus found written confirmation. The oral tradition and our written tradition meet and thus converge. We know of at least five poems by Mary Mangwela which are collected in the *Diwani* of her husband. It has not been stated that there are not others.

The works of Mary Mangwela Mnyampala are not mentioned explicitly as if they had been written by here in the *Diwani ya Mnyampala*. There is no indication of the fact, either outright or following the poems themselves in the book. In the introduction, written in Mpanda in 1962, Mathias E. Mnyampala mentions his wife and her pen name, Wastara in a way that seems ambiguous:

“Mashairi yaliyomo kitabuni humu baadhi yake yalipewa jina la Bi Mary Mangwela (Wastara) ambaye ni mke wangu.” (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963: dibaji)

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The two Kiswahili nouns, ‘*mapendo*’ and ‘*mapenzi*’ have almost the same correspondances in English: ‘love’, or ‘affection’ (JOHNSON, F. *et al.* 1939 : 373). But ‘*mapendo*’ introduces the semantic feature of ‘act of loving’.

“Some of the poems in this book were given the name of Mrs. Mary Mangwela (Wastara), who is my wife.”

It is not clear if this is a dedication of some poems of *Diwani*, to Mary Mangwela (*Wastara*), or the name of the author of these poems. Mathias E. Mnyampala could have also taken his wife’s pen name in the case of certain works (MULOKOZI, M., M. *et al*, 1995: 71). The author of the poems mentioned is not given, either. It is the passive construction of the verb ‘*kupa*’ (to give) which creates the ambiguity: “*yalipezwa jina la Bi Mary Mangwela (Wastara)*”

“ [some poems NDT] were given the name Mary Mangwela (*Wastara*)”

This usage mediates the action of, for or under the name Mary Mangwela and situates her in the general framework of the anthology of the works of Mathias E. Mnyampala. The rest of the phrase, where the name of the poet’s wife appears brings greater precision for the suggestion that these are poems dedicated to one person:

“ [...] na wale marafiki niliowandikia mimi nimetaja majina yao penye mashairi yao niliwatungia. ». (MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963: dibaji)”

“ [...] and the friends for whom I wrote, I inscribed their names in the poems that I composed for them.”

Mary Mangwela’s name does not fulfill this last condition because it is not written for the five works that we have cited. They were therefore not written for her. In the absence of marks identifying the works she might have created, and an

acknowledgement of her as a co-author, Mary Mangwela appears in a fuzzy relation to certain poems of *Diwani*.

What exact relationship does this indicate, if it is not stated that some poems were given her name? Is she the author of those poems? Was her name borrowed by Mathias E. Mnyampala as a female pseudonym? Mary Mangwela is both there and not there at the same time, partly acknowledged and in a certain way hidden by representation that is made of her, just as none of her works in the *Diwani* bear her signature. What is the significance of this strange hidden-presence? What is this, which appears to us like the contradicted will of the poet to recognize the role of his wife in the *Diwani*, to the point of making invisible her authorship of some of these works?

The fact that the authorship of the works of Mary Mangwela is not recognized without ambiguity in the text of *Diwani* could be interpreted in many different ways. One first approach, under gender studies, seems appropriate to us, at least in a heuristic way, because it is actually the role of the poet's wife which is in fact disguised. We can ask ourselves if it is because of her gender that Mary Mangwela is not fully recognized in her husband's *Diwani*. We must restore the place of women in the world of Swahili poetry and in Tanzanian society in order to avoid any misinterpretations. We should first of all point out that the world of Swahili poetry is not exclusively masculine. The *Utenzi* of Mwana Kupona was written by a woman for her daughter and is one of the most famous poems of the genre (ALLEN, J. W. T. 1971: pp 58-75). Whatever the degree of sexual segregation or equilibrium of the

sexes that Swahili poetry might encounter in the diverse societies where it is still extant women write and are recognized as authors. It would also be an effect of “African Traditional Religion” that is revealed by Mulokozi by establishing a link between tolerance and the acceptance of difference and the greatest gender balance that would observe, at the same time in academic theory, the cosmology and the practice of this traditional religion (EWEL, M. *et al*, 2001 : pp 40-41). All the same, if women and men both wrote poetry, this doesn’t exclude the hypothesis regarding an absence of balance at the heart of a single work. We could imagine that there are masculine and feminine *Diwani*, regardless of whether the works of the two sexes could meet within the bosom of a single work. But, *a contrario*, male poets write and take women’s names and vice versa (MULOKOZI, M., M. *et al*, 1995: 71).

The situation, in terms of the sexual gender of Swahili poetry does not follow a clear line of demarcation between the masculine and feminine, and it is a complex task to work on the basis of this gender opposition in order to identify the authors. According to Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi (MULOKOZI, M., M. *et al*, 1995: 71), who quotes an interview dated 10 July 1993 with Mary Mangwela, Mathias E. Mnyampala might have used her pen name, Wastara, from time to time to compose some of his poems. Without doubt this fogs our certainty regarding Mary Mangwela’s authorship in *Diwani ya Mnyampala*, and brings a simple explanation of the strange presentation of certain poems in the book:

“... baadhi yake yalipeɽwa jina la Bi Mary Mangwela (Wastara)”

“... some [poems] were given the name of Mrs. Mary Mangwela (Wastara)”.



We should therefore find we have poems by Mathias E. Mnyampala that he wrote using the name of his wife, which were then collected with others of which he is all the author, in his *Diwani*.

It is a possibility, but it contradicts the words of Charles M. Mnyampala, whom we contacted in Dodoma in 2010. It is in contradiction with the presentation of the typescripts, where Mary Mangwela (*Wastara*) is shown to be an author. It is also a clear contradiction, at least for the composition of “*Njozi ya marwe matatu*”, (The Dream of Three Stones), along with the fact that Mary Mangwela notes she is the author of this work in the letter of 1958, which we have already cited. Unless this letter, too, was written by Mathias E. Mnyampala but signed with the name of his wife, it is probably that Mary Mangwela is the author of the poem.

Also, the four typed sheets bear a postal address, (P.O. BOX 44, Dodoma) for the name Mary Mangwela. Would Mathias E. Mnyampala have pushed the ruse to the point of inventing an address with his wife’s name? In typescripts which were not for public consumption? Besides, Mary Mangwela is a poet and she wrote poems under the pen name “*Wastara*” (reticence). The elements at our disposal favor the hypothesis that Mary Mangwela is indeed the author of some poems in *Diwani*, even if the hypothesis of the female pseudonym remains.

In this case, if Mary Mangwela is really the author of some of the poems, why would she be presented so cautiously in the *Diwani*’s introduction? We have seen that the conditions of production in terms of gender of Swahili poetry demonstrates a balance,

even a blending, of genders. If Mary Mangwela does not clearly appear in the *Diwani* it doesn't seem to us that it would be due to her being a woman. The reason must be found elsewhere. In the politics of the 1950s, women were not excluded. The ideology of TANU, and of nationalist militants, that Mathias E. Mnyampala shared even though a Catholic was founded on the ideal of equality (*usawa*) in order to justify the struggle against colonialism. This ideal had repercussions on the state of equality between the sexes. The struggle assumed a sense of unity among all Tanganyikans which ignored differences of all kinds, including those between the sexes. Also, women played an effective role of socio-political mobilization in the political battles of the 1950s. Susan Geiger demonstrates this with the example of militant nationalist Bibi Titi Mohamed and forms of propaganda linked to music, song and dance:

“Introduced and brought into the party through the mobilizing efforts of one of their own, Bibi Titi Mohamed [...] 5,000 women had joined TANU by October 1955, their importance to Tanganyikan nationalism was thereby established. Through their *ngoma*, *taarab* and *lelemama* (dance/musical groups), women both transmitted and created information about TANU and the independence movement.” GEIGER, S. “Engendering and gendering African nationalism” in (MADDOX, G., ed. sc. et al, 2005: pp 281-284).

While sharing Kiswahili with their comrades in this masculine struggle, women wrote songs with political content. All the same, there was nothing during this period from preventing Mary Mangwela from writing politically-oriented poems such as *Njozi ya*

*Marwe Matatu*. In her letter of 1958, which gives answers a question put to her by the regional director of the Catholic newspaper *Kiongozi* as to the meaning of the “three stones”, she gave three interpretations which are explicitly and technically political. The first is that of the “three votes” or “*kura tatu*” of the legislative council of Dar es Salaam. The second is that of the “three nations”, “*mataifa matatu*” and their feelings about the transitional government (*Serikali ya Mseto*) of Tanganyika. Finally, the third interpretation is that of the “three parties”, TANU, UTP and TFL, which recaptures the first interpretation in terms of the “three votes”. Mary Mangwela, whether she is a female poet herself, or the feminine pseudonym of Mathias E. Mnyampala could, as a woman- real or a mask worn by Mnyampala, compose a political poem.

### **The ambiguous transformation of the notion of the sole author of the anthology of poems.**

The reason for Mary Mangwela’s eviction- real author or pseudonym, does not seem to us to be due to the fact that she is a woman. We see in the silence on the matter a manifestation of the understood rule that there was only one author for *Diwani*. A *Diwani* is an anthology which is not a collective work in the traditional fashion. Mathias E. Mnyampala, by not explicitly representing a second author, whether it be a woman or his own double, was conforming to the traditions of poetry anthologies in Kiswahili. In addition, *Mashairi* poems were part of a dialog in verse among Kiswahili language poets whose works were excised from the *Diwani*. Mathias E. Mnyampala

might equally have brought forth an innovation by creating a dual *Diwani*, masculine and feminine, but he wouldn't have gone to the logical end of this two-author work by inscribing it as such in an unambiguous manner. In this we find elements of Tanzanian sculpture and "African Traditional Religion", where the fetishes and spirits to whom they were destined could bring feminine and masculine features (EWEL, M. *et al*, 2001 : 41). The feminine fragments at the heart of the *Diwani* of Mathias E. Mnyampala, where there are also voluntary indications of the existence of a second author, in the first place the pen name, seem to us to possibly reveal a game among intimates which was not destined for just any reader of the *Diwani*. The members of the tight circle of the Mnyampala know and don't need any more signs about the inclusion of Mary Mangwela Mnyampala in the *Diwani* of her husband than this passive-voiced signature "*mashairi [...] yalipewa jina la Bi Mary Mangwela Mnyampala (Wastara)*", "some poems [...] were given the name of Mrs. Mary Mangwela Mnyampala (*Wastara*) ..."

Whether it is the wife of the author or his feminine pseudonym, that which truly surprises us the most is the way in which Mathias E. Mnyampala succeeded in strictly conforming to the tradition of sole author in the presentation of the poems at the heart of his poetry anthology, while at the same time innovating and recognizing his innovation in a fairly indisputable way. As far as meter goes, the five poems attributed to Mary Mangwela adhere to the classical meter of *Shairi*. Without fail there are four lines per stanza/*ubeti*, and scansion lines in octosyllabic hemistiches.

The links of rhymes which organize the stanza/*ubeti* in this way also create classically oriented motifs.

It is the transformation of a guiding principle of the poetry collection or *Diwani* which brings novelty. The number of authors has changed; we have passed from one to two. This transformation of a quantifiable parameter which is linked to the principle of authorship which presides over the poetry anthology, once introduced, authorizes other variations in this number whose only limit is the imagination of the poets. In the case of the *Diwani ya Mnyampala*, it is concerned with a familial *Diwani* where a husband and his wife are reunited. It appears to us that this innovation finds *ex materia* echoes in African cultural elements belonging to art and to African Traditional Religion. The latter has the characteristic of being composed of different elements like a collage, which juxtaposes abnormal materials in a single, integrated space.

According to Mulokozi, this traditional religion maintains its unity by its eclectism: “African traditional religion is not exclusive; it accepts newcomers, new gods and new ideas so long as they are harmless and are immediately or potentially useful.”

(EWEL, M. *et al*, 2001: 39)

As for artistic creation, *ex materia* creation, recycling and respect for traditional forms would therefore be in harmony with the African religious substrate. This while various forms of academisms or of artistic dogma would recall crusade or jihad

methods left behind in history by the two other religions which Mulokozi takes into account for African art: Christianity and Islam.

The *Diwani ya Mnyampala*, in some ways, exemplifies an “Africanness” in creation in its capacity for composite creation. We know the influence the discovery of African art had on French artists of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and we find this Africanness in collage. For the case of a poetry anthology in Kiswahili, the *Diwani ya Mnyampala* integrates masculine and feminine elements which are revelatory of its two authors. It also integrates classic *Shairi* meter in strict conformity with Kiswahili poetry or, in a minority of compositions of the *Msisitizo* meter, on the basis of a transformation of the classic *Shairi* form. The *Diwani* could exist as such, in a composite way. Its uniqueness rises from the commune of texts residing at the heart of single object, or book. But Mnyampala does not take this project to a logical end, but chooses instead to homogenize the book's presentation: the poems are numbered and given with their titles. They are accompanied by contextual notes or dedications. They are never signed. The anomaly constituted by the name of a second author only comes to light in a sentence in the last paragraph in the book's introduction. We can wonder at what it is that makes an object composite. In the case of *Diwani*, it's the presentation of the book, in a way that conforms to the literary tradition, that makes sense. It's a demonstration of a kind of conformism in a *Diwani* project, which is classic but which, however, innovates.

If we hold to its general form, the *Diwani ya Mnyampala* is a classic, conformist work at the heart of Kiswahili poetry. The traditional poetry anthology project, or *diwani*, is respected. Know that in a *diwani* it is the best of works written on other occasions, which are collected by the author himself. The author, therefore, participates in the expression and the preservation of a norm. As for formal metric analysis, the majority of the compositions were structured according to the same classic *Shairi* meter, with a stanza/*ubeti* made up of four lines of equal scansion and octosyllabic hemistiches (SHARIFF, I. N. 1988: pp 49-51). Mathias E. Mnyampala, who was officially recognized as the president of Tanzanian poets in the UKUTA organization, as well as a national artist (*Msanii wa Taifa*) in 1987 (MNYAMPALA, M. E. 2013: 82) shows respect for his excellence in the manipulation of classic meter and in the traditional use of the poetry anthology which were defined between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by Swahili poets on the coast of the Indian Ocean. Mathias Mnyampala, who wrote within a geopolitical space which was upset by colonization and then the invention of a national swahilophone culture along the scale of Tanganyika then Tanzania, maintains this tradition, which is respected to the letter in most of his *Diwani*.

While respecting classical rules and the traditions of Swahili poetry, Mathias E. Mnyampala created his own style (*mtindo*), which led to the definition of a new type (*aina*) of composition at the heart of the *Shairi* meter. Mnyampala named and defined the style as *Mtiririko*, “flux” in one of the opening works of *Diwani* (MNYAMPALA, M. E. 1963: pp 5-6). The *Mtiririko*, which the author connects to the Ugogo (his

home region and its traditional oral literature), is explained by the addition of a rule to the classical rules. It is a powerful constraint on meter which demands isometricity in each stanza/*ubeti* with a single composition. That is to say that the chain of rhymes which structure and limit the structural elements of the stanza/*ubeti* must systematically receive the same parametric values. These have the same phonological value and describe exactly the same itinerary, and from that the same orientational motifs in the stanza/*ubeti*.

The *Diwani ya Mnyampala* distances itself from the tradition in two ways which are only visible in a minority of the poems. The first way is the creation of a new poetic form, the *Msisitizo* (insistence) on the basis of the transformation of the *Shairi* meter. This innovation is seen in composition of the *Diwani* which inaugurates the new *Msisitizo* form by defining its rules in a work which applies these same rules (MNYAMPALA, M. E 1963: pp 121-122) as was the case with the *Mtiririko* style.

The second way, which brings us back to our question of femininity in the *Diwani*, goes even further from the tradition of the poetry anthology in that it adds an author to what is normally the work of one individual. Some of these poems were in fact signed, before having been chosen for inclusion in the *Diwani*, by Mary Mangwela (*Wastara*), the wife of Mathias E. Mnyampala. Whether this name refers to the actual author of these poems, which is my hypothesis, or to a feminine pseudonym of Mathias E. Mnyampala, it introduces an authorial and gender duality which is missing from the *Diwani* tradition of classical Swahili poetry. This transformation of the principle of one author for the *Diwani* is in accord with other forms of African



art, like sculpture, and with a traditional African religion substrate, which favors eclecticism and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous objects in the production of a singularity, whether it be artistic or religious. This phenomenon is noted by Mnyampala in a single line of the introduction of the *Diwani*, but which is not presented in the ensuing text as was the case with the style (*mtindo*) *Mtiririko* and of the meter (*bahari*) *Msisitizo*, which are two more of the author's innovations. Mnyampala might not have been able to entitle his work "*Diwani*" if his violation of the single author principle had been seen without ambiguity. It is a transformation founded *ex materia*, as with the *Mtiririko* and *Msisitizo*, which are both derived from the classic meter *Shairi*. The polyphony in *Diwani* seems to us in fact to come from the cultural African substrate and in more particularly from the *Gogo* culture, but the results of the switch from one author to two is too different from the original *Diwani* project which Mnyampala strictly adheres to in the majority of his collection. A familial *Diwani* with two voices, that of the wife and her husband, or that of Mnyampala and his double and female pseudonym, might possibly have found another label. This isn't the main goal of Mnyampala, who wishes to create a classic work in a way which is both conformist, and understandable by the wider readership of Kiswahili poetry.

Also, the main goal of a *diwani* is to apply, maintain and magnify a classic Kiswahili poetry norm. The collection, within which the *Diwani* was published, after the demurs and changes of the East African Literature Bureau, is entitled "*Johari za Kihabili*" (Jewels of Kiswahili), which had the intention of valorizing and publicizing

classical works. African in spirit, the polyphony of *Diwani* is announced to a few initiates with a certain veil of secrecy, while for a general and conventional reading, the principle of a single author remains the only possibility. The poems of or under the name of Mary Mangwela (Mnyampala) are not identified in the *Diwani ya Mnyampala*. The poetry texts of other Kiswahili poets, like Snow-White Akilimali, which react to some of Mnyampala's poems and form a dialog with them, were deleted: "*Mshairi mmoja wa Kigoma aitwae Snow-White alipinga shairi hili lilipotoka, naye alisema hivi 'Kuzaa si kazi kubwa, kazi kubwa ni kulea'. Nami nilimjibu tena kwamba [...] TUTALEA MWANA GANI?*"

(MNYAMPALA, M., E., 1963: pp 17-18).

"A poet from Kigoma called Snow-White was against this poem. He said: 'It is no big job to procreate; the big job is in the raising'<sup>3</sup>. And me, I answered him [...] WHAT CHILD SHALL WE RAISE?"<sup>4</sup>

The existence of a dialog is announced while its content must conform to the *Diwani* goal of a single author. The Snow-White poem is absent. The poetry anthology or *Diwani* is an individualistic work, which comes from an arabo-persian cultural area different from that of the African societies of Tanganyika or Tanzania. It is however deeply rooted in the literary culture of the coastal Kiswahili speakers and from there

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<sup>3</sup>This is the title of the poem by Snow-White, which answered that of Mnyampala.

<sup>4</sup>This is also the title of a poem in answer which, being by Mnyampala, is collected in his *Diwani*.

has become African and Swahili in the ethnic meaning of the term. The colonial plan to universalize *Kiswahili* and its literary forms as a trans-ethnic vector, taken up by the national plan to tanzanize classic forms, followed the spread of the practice of the *Diwani*. Mathias E. Mnyampala went along with it, too. This effort is in harmony with the colonial project and then with the national and nationalist project when it required the most faithful replanting of the meter of classical Kiswahili poetry. At the heart of Kiswahili poetic expression, the practice of a conversation in verse between poets of the *Shairi* genre, like the *malumbano ya ushairi* “poetic chats” restitutes the collective poetic dimension and a certain amount of Africanity of the poetic composition- or even the negotiation, to some of them. In the *Diwani* of Mnyampala, it is the presence of the hidden woman which plays this role.

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