

Pawliková-Vilhanová, Viera (ed.) *Umenie slova: Jazyk, písmo, ľudová slovesnosť a zrod literatúr v krajinách subsaharskej Afriky [The Art of Word: language, letters, folk literature and the origin of literatures in Sub-Saharan Africa]*. Trnava: University of SS. Cyril and Methodius, 2008. 176 p. ISBN 978-80-8105-061-9. In Slovak.

In this monograph the author Viera Pawlikowa-Vilhanova a senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava) and University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava deals with African languages, systems of writing, folk literature as well as the indigenous and exogenous origins of African literature. The author indicates that all African authors are faced with a major dilemma of finding an appropriate language for their works. The language problem of African literatures is pretty complicated and it has not been resolved yet.

The monograph has been divided into five major parts, including: the language situation of Africa; Language, system of writing, spoken and written forms of language; African oral literature; written literature in African languages; African literatures written in European languages.

The first part, namely, language situation of Africa, outlines an indispensable language related background of the continent. The author sketches the fact that Africa is a huge continent with more than 50 states and varying languages. The African peoples speak more than 1500 languages. The most widespread language in this continent is Arabic, which is the mother tongue of as many as 120 million African citizens and the liturgical language of Islam. Fifty other languages have more than a million speakers. Several hundred African languages have been spoken only by a few thousand or hundred people, many of these languages have died out rapidly because they were not operative enough. Nearly 146 African languages have been operative across a number of groups. Linguists have designated them as languages of communication because they are being used by offices, charities and non-governmental organizations. 41 of these languages serve as lingua franca (language of communication) for interethnic, regional or international communication.

The most often used languages are Hausa, Oromo, and Kiswahili. The ones less frequently used include: Kikongo, Fulfulde, Yoruba, Mandingo, Somali and many others. Out of the 55 African states only a few are homogenous in terms of ethnicity and language. This refers to relatively small territories such as Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia. Otherwise, in most African countries several languages are spoken. For instance, in the most populated African country Nigeria there are 252 different languages in use. Even in some smaller states like Togo, people speak 54 languages. In Uganda 30 languages are spoken. After political independence the majority of African governments were forced to speak the language of their respective colonial metropolis English, French or Portuguese. African countries are still unable to come up with a unified African homogenous language which could replace the functioning European languages in the continent. Thus bilingualism and/or multilingualism have become typical for Africa.

Studies indicate that Kiswahili is the language of interethnic communication in East and Central Africa. Kiswahili is the second widespread African language next to Arabic and it is typical for Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 50 million people speak Kiswahili, we

can safely regard Kiswahili as one of the world's major languages. Kiswahili is also a language of developing and modern literature in Tanzania and Kenya. The third widespread language of Africa is Hausa, which is typical for Central and Western Africa extending up to Lake Chad. Hausa belongs to the Chad language group. The Hausa literature is apparently rich. It used the Arabic system of writing in the past but nowadays this has been replaced by the Latin alphabet.

Since language is one of the most important symbols of all nations, the African academy of languages is conducting experiments to find a workable option for Africa. As the author emphasizes, the major task of this institution has become searching for an African option that would officially substitute European languages in the continent. The linguist Kwesi Prah from the Republic of South Africa, for instance, has created a project whose goal is to harmonize African languages and African dialects into mutually understandable clusters. As a result citizens have started perceiving less difference between dialects.

In the second part of the monograph, the author explains the unique role of the mutual relations between language, system of writing, written and spoken forms of language and literature in the African context. The author goes on discussing how Sub-Saharan Africa was wrongly perceived as a continent without history and culture and argues that the reverse is true. Africa has contributed the most important system of writing, namely, the Egyptian writing, which was the bedrock for the development of the Semitic and Greek systems of writing. The Phoenician system of writing which was used by Phoenician migrants in North Africa became the foundation for the Greek and the Roman systems of writing. Later on, the Greek and Latin systems of writings returned to Africa and were used by the Egyptian Christians, the Copts between 2nd and 7th centuries. The Arabic system of writing which had evolved from the Northern Semitic part of the Aramaic system of writing spread together with Islam along the East African coasts in the vicinity of the Swahili language. The other centre was South Arabia; it was from here that the Sabian system of writing spread to North East Africa, Ge'ez the ancient Ethiopian language is an excellent example.

It is obvious that in the past Africa was using Egyptian, Ethiopian, Greek, Latin and Arabic systems of writing. It was Africans who also came up with hieroglyphs. Africa provides a number of rock paintings, engravings, inscriptions and symbols. Graphical symbolisms of Egyptian ideograms are typical for Africa and its history. Graphical symbolism fulfills many functions, including: magic, religionist, numeric, information and communicative functions. Each symbol, pictogram, and ideogram means something magical and mystical. Africans had many ways of recording information: combined pictograms, hieroglyphs or phonetic writing. Moreover, there is no widely agreed opinion between scientists about when to regard a graphic system as a form of writing. Linguist De Francis divided them into two groups. Inclusionists are those who suppose all graphic systems as writing. Exclusionists are those who refuse to recognize partial writing and they accept only full-fledged systems of writing.

Among the most known graphic systems of representation chronologically the oldest pictographic writing is that of the Vai community in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which was developed from graphic symbols. Vai writing was the best developed one; it was only explored in the middle of the 19th century. It was used not only for writing but also

recording poetry, myths, and traditions. The Bible and Koran were translated into the Vai system of writing. The Fulb and Yoruba writing known as arako are also well known. In the Democratic Republic of Congo *mandobe* is still partly used as system of writing.

Generally, according to the author, there are two major graphic systems in Africa: the Arabic system of writing with the Arabic language, and the Latin writing with the English, French, Portuguese and Spanish languages. Arabic writing and language came with the Islamic culture and civilization and the Latin system of writing came with Christian missions and colonial supremacy. Nowadays, various systems of writings are evident: Arabic, Latin and Ethiopian writing. As indicated above, the Hausa language, for example, uses two of them.

In the third part, the author analyses the behaviour of what has been known as African oral literature. The specific attribute of African folk literature is its uniformity with typical symbols and features. Africans have created an extremely rich folk literature, which consists of fairytales, fables, myths, legends, genealogies and superstitions. Typical for Africa is the art of words. African myths often deal with relations between human beings and God. Human beings never go to heaven but gods descend to Earth. Myths explain the origin of death, fire, water, plants, and animals. For instance, Rwanda has rich war poetry, the Zulus have mainly historical poems and the Yoruba have rich drama.

Fables and fairytales are widespread in Africa. They focus on shrewdness and slyness. Usually the primary actors are rabbits, antelopes, and jackals. In the African folklore, too, the biggest and strongest actors are not the most skillful ones either. Lions and elephants usually have a negative character. The positive actors include turtles, spiders and foxes. African motifs are based on friendship between animals and people. Kiswahili literature often uses Islamic religious motives and scenes with sultan's residences.

African folklore prose reflects the way of life, social organization, customs, unwritten laws and societal norms and values. The main aim of stories is to give advice and entertain audiences. Fairytales and fables had simple speaking forms. The composition of stories is based on the author's narration and dialogs. Presentations are accompanied most frequently by rich innuendoes and metaphors.

The author confirms the fact that written literature in the African languages was influenced by Islam and Arabic writing for the greater part of its existence. During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the Latin system of writing arrived in Africa and pushed out the well established Arabic system of writing. This phenomenon was typical for Kiswahili and Hausa. The Christian missions, colonial supremacy and policy of colonial governments have substantially affected the African literature and language. The Christian missionaries were authors of the first translated parts of the Bible, dictionaries, textbooks, reading books, newspapers, and magazines. They established the first schools. The first African writers and officers were produced under the influence of colonial culture and supremacy. The policy of colonial governments was responsible for the coexistence of important African languages with the English or French languages in Africa during the whole period of colonization and including the present time. The most significant African literatures appear in Kiswahili, Hausa, Fulb

and Yoruba. Literatures have also been evident in other West African languages, in Central and Eastern Africa, in South Africa including: the Xhosa, Sotho, Chwan and Zulu literatures.

The Kiswahili literature was the only written language in the whole of Bantu Africa before the arrival of the Europeans. The cradle of Kiswahili civilization is the narrow zone of Eastern Africa coast from South Somalia to Mozambique. The local Bantu language was enriched with words from the Arabic, Persian and Indian languages. Later on, words from German, English and Portuguese were added. Kiswahili is the second most widespread language in Africa. It is the national language of Kenya and Tanzania. The cradle of Kiswahili literature is the city of Pate. The most important part of Kiswahili literature is poetry. Traditional Kiswahili poetry is rhymed. The topics of poems usually cover Islam and Muhammad. Words like palms and flowers are metaphors for women. A well known writer is Liongo Fum. He composes dance songs which are very popular mainly at weddings. His famous poem is Wajiwaji. The oldest epic is the Epic about Heraclius and the favorite one is the Epic about Fatima. The first displays of prose were chronicles. The famous writer is Shaaban Robert. He created a bridge between classical and modern Kiswahili literature. Writers often use novels. An important contemporary writer is Euphrase Kezihalabi. He was the first to use free verse. The most important topic of Kiswahili literature is conflict between city and village which symbolizes problems of African, European and Western culture.

The Hausa literature emerged in the 17th century. Literature in Hausa language was written in the Arabic alphabet and it was known as ajams. The richest is Islamic poetry and the poorest is Hausa classical prose. A major part of Hausa literature is dedicated to religious poetry. There are no differences between lyrical poems and songs. They have the same title – Waka. Important writers of poems are Usman Dan Fodia, Muhammad Birnin Gwaro or Naibi S. Wali. Hausa literature is still rapidly developing.

The Fulb literature is typical for areas like the Sudan and Senegal. It has many common features with the Hausa literature. Literature in the Fulb language is written with Latin letters. Fulb literature is strongly influenced by Islam. Famous writers include Yimre Shehu Usmanu and Amadou Hamp'ate Ba. Fulb prose constitutes legends known as gisa.

The Yoruba literature is connected with Christian missionaries and Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther who created the Yoruba grammar and Yoruba dictionary. An important writer is Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa known for his 5 novels. The Yoruba literature presents a rich drama and theatre.

Concerning the literature in western African languages the Igbo language is typical of Nigeria and the writer Pit Nwana with his novel Omenuko. There are also other languages: Fanti and Ewe. The Ewe language is typical of Ghana. The important writer here is Pev. F. Kwasi Fiawoo and he is famous for the drama Fith lagune.

Literature in Central and Eastern Africa started to develop apparently later than in the other parts, only in the 1960s. Several languages have been used during the process, for example, Luganda, Nrugnoru, Acholo, Tumbuka, Bemba, Lozi, Shona, and Ndebele.

In South Africa the literature combines various languages, including: domestic languages, such as Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, and European languages like English. Different ethnic groups and racial discrimination situations were reflected in literature.

In the final part of the monograph, the author gives an overview of the African literatures written in European languages, including: English, French and Portuguese. In this part of the publication a number of authors and their works have been assessed.

I consider the protest literatures as the most interesting part of the South African literature written in the English language. Writers who belong to this group have focused on such heated issues as race hatred, race oppression, violence, segregation, apartheid and the like. A lot of them must have emigrated from Africa, some were imprisoned or they must have changed their critical views. One of the most popular protest writers was Peter Abrahams. He criticized racial prejudices under the title “The Path of Thunder”. Other protest writers with liberal ideas and social sentiment include: Alan Paton, William Plomer, and Dan Jacobson. One of the most famous black South African writers these days is Es’kia Mphahlele. He criticizes independent African states while pointing out associated moral and ethical problems.

Nigerian literature is variegated. It consists of folk literature, official form of English represented by Nigerian writers and literature written in African languages. The main themes are city environment in Nigeria, urbanization, moral values destruction, different life styles – traditional (village) and modern (city). One of the key Nigerian writers is Chinua Achebe. Critical and realistic views of the development of Nigerian society, the colonial system, Nigerian nationalism, independence, and moral and political crisis are typical of his works. One of the best writers not only of Nigeria but also of Africa was Wole Soyinka who was awarded the Nobel Prize. He focused on folk literature, mythology, religions, fanaticism, and corruption, ethical and moral problems of human beings during the time of reforms in society.

The literatures of Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Gambia were less developed than Nigerian literature. My attention was attracted by the consciousness of one representative of modern drama in Ghana – Efua Theodora Sutherland. According to her point of view literature must attract the masses. To see the realization of this notion she established her own drama school.

The Eastern and Central African literatures seem to have been less developed than the Western and Southern African literatures. The East African Literature and Publication Bureau which was established in Nairobi in 1948 reflect a positive impact on the development of East African literature. This institution supports young writers. Many of them studied at the Makerere University in Uganda. In fact, we have got to mention here the literature of Kenya; it has been designated as more developed than the literature of Uganda and Tanzania. The most popular Kenyan writer is Ngugi wa Thiong’o. His roman “Weep Not Child” was the first East Africa title written in the English language. He is the establisher of critical realism in East African literature. He was mainly interested in colonialism, corruption, bureaucracy, moral degeneration of the ruling class and the position of women in society. A comparison between the literatures of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe has placed the Malawian literature on the highest level.. The best known poetry in Malawi is that of David Rubadiri. A typical feature of his work is social sentiment. The struggle for political and national sovereignty is the theme of the title “No Easy Task” which was written by another Malawian Aubrey Kachingwe.

The African literature written in the French language shows unequal development. The outstanding representatives of this group are Senegal and Camerun literatures. On the other hand Guinea, Mali and Benin represent less developed literatures in the group. At the bottom of this group are literatures of Togo, Niger, Congo, Rwanda, and Chad.

Senegal was the oldest and the most popular French colony so there were better conditions for education than in the other countries of this group. The first African autobiography written in French was "Force-Beauté". It was written by Senegal writer Bakary Diallo. A unique position in Senegalese but also African literature belongs to what is termed "Négritude". It was a philosophical, cultural and literary movement established to strengthen African patriotism, revive African traditions and African culture. This movement was against colonialism and the French policy of cultural assimilation. The founder of the ideology of this movement was L. S. Senghor who was the most popular African writer in the French language. He also became the President of Senegal. Another popular writer and also director was Sembène Ousmane called the "father of African film". Social sentiment, realistic views of life and problems of people of Africa, the destiny and psychology of women are typical of his work.

Cameronian literature was developed mainly after the Second World War. Modern African literature is represented there particularly by Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono. The main themes of their works are critical realism and outcry against colonialism.

The literature of Ivory Coast is mainly represented by Bernard Binlin Dadié. His work is designated as folk literature. He collected legends, fables and fairy tales. In his work entitled "Hommes de tous les continents" he points out the moral challenge to respect human rights, cooperation between nations, patriotism and equality. He was also interested in the role of Black people in the world. He compares African societies with life in modern cities as presented, for example, in "Patron de New York" and "Un nègre a Paris". Moreover "Les voix dans le vent" and "Iles de la Tempete" belong to his drama titles.

The most popular Guinean writer is Camara Laye. His biggest success is connected with his autobiographical work, entitled "L'enfant noir".

The major representative of the literature of Benin is Paul Hazoumé. He belongs to the group of the first Africans to start writing in French. He was awarded the Prize of the French Academy.

Concerning the literature of Mali the typical attribute is that most of the writers were also politicians. Examples are Fily Dabo Sissoko, Mamadou Gologo, Seydou Badian.

Madagascar's literature which is written in French enjoys a unique position in African literature. The oldest works are represented by legends, fables, sayings and aphorisms while among the modern works poetry is more popular than prose. The three most popular poets in Madagascan literature are Jean Joseph Rabearivelo, Jacques Rabemananjara and Flavien Ranaivo. Jean Joseph Rabearivelo is one of the best African poets in the French language. His soul is devoted to Malagasian patriotism but he also considers the French culture admirable. The other author Jacques Rabemananjara is a poet, politician and drama writer. His first works were determined by romantics and symbolism ("L'éventail de reve"). Later on, he preferred national traditions and ideas of "Négritude". The central topic of his poetry is love of the homeland.

As for the African literature written in the Portuguese language, it precedes the development of literary activities in Anglophone and Francophone areas of Sub-Saharan Africa. The most developed one was the Angolan literature. A typical feature of Angolan society during the 1940s was the outcry against Portuguese cultural assimilation and the theory of Lusotropicalism which proposes that the Portuguese were better colonizers than other European nations, that they celebrate both actual and mythological elements of racial democracy and the civilizing mission of the Portuguese Empire with a pro-miscegenation attitude toward the colonies.

Nevertheless, the Angolans established a significant cultural movement against Portuguese colonization in Lisbon known as “Vamos descobrir Angola”. The movement was spearheaded by such theoreticians like Viriato da Cruz, Agostinho Neto who became the first president of independent Angola in 1975, and Antonio Jacinto. These days, the most popular writer in Angola is Luandino Vieira. He is interested in multiracial society, racism and also colonialism.

Mozambique is the other area where literary activities in Africa appear in Portuguese. Here, literary activities are mainly represented by authors like Rui de Noronha who is also called “master of the sonet”, Noémie De Sousa, José Craveirinha and Marcelino dos Santos. Their works usually have revolutionary, political, critical and anti-colonial features.

As for Island Africa, including: Cape Verde, Saint Thomas, and Guinea Bissau literary activities also appear in the Portuguese language here. The literature of the Cape Verde Islands is determined by the revue called “Claridade” and the literary group “Certeza” represented mainly by Aguiinaldo Fonseca and Gabriel Mariano. The first poet of Saint Thomas Island was Caetana da Costa Alegre. The most popular poet in the literary history of Guinea Bissau is Amilcar Cabral. He was also famous for leading the independence movement and as a founder of the political party – PAIGG.

Finally, the writer of this review highly appreciates the effort that the author has shown in taking the giant step of embarking on the literary history of Sub-Saharan Africa. The publication is an excellent contribution to fill a gap in the Slovak market. Even if the publication is designed primarily for the Slovak readers, it will also obviously attract the attention of readers in the Czech Republic. The manuscript is a representation of a truly unique work in Slovakia about the development of literary activities in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. This is because I think that for the majority of the Slovak population African culture and literature still remains largely unknown.

In my opinion, probably, one of the down sides of the publication is a structural problem. For example, the chapter covering African literatures written in European languages would have been much better for comprehension if it were divided into more paragraphs. In fact, the author has chosen one of the possible ways of structuring, but dividing the text into more paragraphs would have helped readers’ grasp easily complicated matters. Some parts of the chapter look like a list of names and titles. This type of arrangement may generate loss of readers’ attention.

Presumably, the book would have been more interesting if it had included at least some portraits of the African writers, more maps of Africa with the main characteristics of each described country and also some statistics or ratings which inform the readers

about preferences of themes. The books lack the author's critical opinions and arguments evaluating the writers. The attitudes of citizens of Africa regarding languages and the situation in their countries are also missing.

In spite of these criticisms, the book undoubtedly provides the most essential material to broaden and improve readers' knowledge about African culture in general and literature in particular

*Genet Tamene*