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HOW ASTERIX LEARNT SWAHILI

THE TANZANIAN APPROPRIATION OF A FRENCH COMIC

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Introduction

As a comic figure *Asterix* has crossed many borders. His adventures made him roam as far as America and India, not bad for a globetrotter living in the year 45 BC. The commercial success of *Asterix* exceeds even his travels. This “French trivial epic” (Stoll 1974: passim) has been translated into more than one hundred languages and dialects worldwide (Selles 2002). Yet *Asterix*’ impact on the African continent is minimal although he visited Egypt and Libya. For African readers, *Asterix* is only accessible through the colonial languages Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Afrikaans but not through any African language. However in the year 2000 the Gaul warrior entered Tanzania. He did it informal, without papers and without a license, but with an awareness of the host culture, which he had never shown before. *Asterix* has been adopted by the Tanzanian comic artist Chris Katembo, who taught him Swahili and Tanzanian culture, making it easy for *Asterix* to disguise himself as an African cartoon. Katembo created the adventure comic *Komredi Kipepe na Kisa cha Bi Arafu* (Comrade Kipepe and the episode of Ms. Arafu). In this story the well known Swahili comic figures *Kipepe* and *Madenge* rescue a kidnapped *mganga*, a traditional healer, called *Bi Arafu*. It has striking parallels to *Asterix* and *Obelix* saving *Getafix* out of the wraths of the Goths. By comparing both narratives, particularly in their language and artistic realisation, this article aims to demonstrate how Katembo appropriates Goscinny’s and Uderzo’s classic comic volume *Asterix and the Goths* into an East African setting. Comics have been studied in the field of popular culture for several years now, but most of these studies have been limited to Western society. Those few publications that consider other parts of the world, tend to ignore Africa. Also scientists, who deal with African societies, do not seem to care much about comics. They may analyse, e.g. a new Swahili novel in detail, which is only read by a few literature scholars. However, for a scientific reputation it does not seem adequate to do research on comics, which are apparently read by millions of people of

all walks of life. Nearly every Tanzanian knows the *SANI* comic magazine, but only a few East Africans could tell who the celebrated novelists are, about whose works several dissertations have been written on. Nevertheless comics offer a vast source, not only for scholars of literature and art, but also for social scientists. Being a form of popular culture, they are part of the articulation, negotiation and consolidation of identities and can be used as an “analytic lens to understand socio-historical processes” (Mankekar 2002: 11733). Therefore the study of African comics can shed some light on discourses and developments in African societies. This paper focuses on the appropriation of aspects of Western popular culture by a Tanzanian artist.

Comics in East Africa

Following Scott McCloud’s definition of comics as sequential art and his elaborations about signs and pictures which lead him to early rock paintings (McCloud 1994: 13, 149), one can conclude that not only the cradle of mankind, but also the cot of comic art, is to be found in East Africa. The rock paintings of Kolo in Central Tanzania are 3000 years old sequences displaying hunting scenes (Masao 1982: 46). Though there have been various works published about rock painting, little has been written about recent East African comics¹. Knigge, who wrote a history of world comics, traces the beginnings of African comics back to the 1940s, where the strip *Mbumbulu* appeared in a colonial newspaper (Knigge 1996: 238). In East Africa there are also hints about Swahili comics which were published in *Askari*, *Heshima*, and *Jambo* British journals for African soldiers in the second world war.² However, these comics were created by Europeans. The first known comics by East African artists were published in the 1970s. One of the earliest Swahili strips is E. Githau’s *Juha Kalulu* (Idiot Kalulu), which was first published in the Kenyan newspaper *Taifa Leo* in July 1973 (Gikonyo 1986: 190). In Tanzania, David Kyungu is the pioneer of Swahili comics. Inspired by *Andy Capp*, he created the character of *Kalikenye* and started publishing his own works from 1976 onwards in papers like *Kiongozi*, *Lengo*, *Nchi Yetu* and *Daily News* (Kyungu 1993: no page numbers and personal comment in October 2002). The interest in these Swahili comic strips was so huge, that by 1980 a whole magazine dedicated to comics was founded. It is called *SANI* and still appears today. The fact that it survived all economic and political problems which hit Tanzania over the last 20 years, demonstrates how dedicated its readers are. *Mageuzi* (changes, reforms), the Tanzanian version of Gorbachev’s perestroika,

¹ Only a few articles were published by Beck (1999), Beez (2003a, 2004), Beez and Kolbusa (2003), Gikonyo (1986) and Graebner (1995).

² I am grateful to Katrin Bromber for this information.

liberalized also the media sector and gave it a big push. More than thirty different Swahili comic magazines started appearing on the dusty streets of Dar es Salaam, the biggest Tanzanian city, where their colourful covers try to attract buyers for the price of currently 500 or 600 Tanzanian Shillings (around 0,5 to 0,6 €) which is equivalent to the price of a bottle of beer.

Although Beck states that “the influence of European, American, or Japanese comics other than daily newspaper strips seems to be rather small” (Beck 1999: 70) there are clear Western influences found in some publications. For instance, *Tintin’s* adventures and Hergé’s style can be found in Anthony Mwangi’s book *Safari ya Anga ya juu* (journey to space) (Mwangi 1997). The *TITANIC* comic by Joshua Amandus Mtani is another example. He has drawn the story of the famous Hollywood movie into a comic, changing all the characters into Africans (Mtani 2000). Following this brief overview, the article will now turn to a story published in *SANI*, which was influenced by Goscinny’s and Uderzo’s *Asterix*.

The SANI Magazine

The *SANI* magazine is said to be one of the oldest African comic magazines dating back to 1980. Over 70 issues have been published so far, which sold up to 60,000 copies per issue. *SANI’s* content comprises mainly of comic strips, often series, which are continued over several issues. But there are novels to be found as well as poems and riddles. Another regular feature found in the magazine are the pages dedicated to readers to greet each other and also to look for pen pals.

Each comic magazine has certain cartoon characters which are drawn over the years by different artists. The characters of *Madenge* and *Komredi Kipepe* who are the heroes of the story that I am going to introduce are drawn by Chris Katembo³ since 1992. But he says these characters have been with *SANI* since the early issues in the 1980s. Chris Katembo was born in 1970. After finishing his primary education he visited several art schools and worked as an art teacher before joining *SANI*. His love for comics dates back to his childhood days. Of course Katembo knows *Tintin* and *Asterix*, classic European comic heroes. But he says he only read four to five *Asterix* books, as they are rarely sold in Tanzanian bookshops and very expensive for Tanzanian standards. One of Katembo’s favourites is *Asterix and the Goths*, which he used as a blueprint for the story *Komredi Kipepe na kisa cha Bi Arafu*. However, Katembo had no idea that the Gauls represent the French and the Goths the Germans.

³ I am very grateful to Chris Katembo for the valuable information he gave me during a talk and via email.

***Asterix*' attraction to an East African audience**

Asterix and the Goths started as a series in the French magazine PILOTE as *Astérix chez les Goths* on 18.5.1961 and was published as *Asterix* album No. 3 in 1963 (Uderzo 1986: 266). In *Asterix and the Goths*, the Gauls *Asterix* and *Obelix* accompany *Getafix* their village druid to his annual druid meeting at the holy forest of the Carnutes. There, *Getafix* is kidnapped by the Goths who want to use his secrets to rule the world. *Asterix* and *Obelix* follow the druid and free him by using his powers to cause civil war.

In the European cultural context the adventures of *Asterix* refer to real history, the Roman Empire and its rule over wide parts of the continent. Anybody who studied Roman history at school gets lots of fun out of Goscinny's and Uderzo's stories. The story about the Goths gets its juice from the way the authors make fun out of the warlike Goths whose descendents started two world wars in the last century.⁴ But what makes this story interesting for an East African audience, forty years after its first publication in France? The answer lies in the fact that there are many similarities between *Asterix*' world and East African cultures, which makes it easy to appropriate it.

First of all *Asterix* is a warrior who is frequently hunting with his friend *Obelix*. Warriors and hunters are honoured professions also in East Africa. Even *Asterix*' favourite prey, wild pigs, is commonly hunted and eaten by East Africans. Another protagonist, the druid *Getafix*, is a familiar character to Swahili speaking communities, who have *waganga* and *wachawi*, traditional healers and witches. *Getafix* wears a white gown, which resembles a *kanzu*, a traditional Muslim dress at the Swahili coast. Many famous *waganga* are known to wear this type of clothing, e.g. Kinjikitile, the prophet of the maji maji war (Beez 2003b: 108).

Kinjikitile claimed to have a powerful war medicine, turning bullets into water. Thus *Getafix*' magic potion, which makes *Asterix* invincible, fits well into the East African concept of war medicines, *dawa ya vita*. Another Gaul druid in the *Asterix* adventure possesses rainmaking powers just as many of their African counterparts. The fact that Gaul magicians meet in holy forests that must not be entered by strangers has similarities in East African concepts. The *kaya*-forests in Kenya or the *mshitu* and *mpungi*-forests of the Pare in Tanzania can be mentioned as examples (Sheridan 2000: 6).

Asterix' armoury contains spears, swords, shields and fists, the same weapons which are traditionally used all over Africa. That the Goths crush each other's head with a club is more exotic to the European audience than to an East African reader, who is used to see Maasai and also policemen with their *rungu* (club). The blowing of horns as a signal in *Asterix* might be

⁴ Some of the Gothic Characters resemble the German President Hindenburg and Adolf Hitler (Stoll 1974: 152).

fascinating for an European reader but *kupiga pembe* (blowing the horn) is common in East African rural areas, when announcements are made. Even the cooking styles in both cases are similar. *Getafix* prepares his magic portions on an open fire just like many East African women do their cooking today. Finally the open air banquets in the end of each *Asterix*' adventure have striking similarities to *nyama choma* (BBQ) events: meat is roasted and served with local brew. Like most East Africans, *Asterix* lives in a rural setting. His country Gaul is occupied by the Romans who have an urban culture. This situation reminds the reader of the colonial days in East Africa, whereby rural societies were colonized by industrialized societies. However the funniest thing about *Asterix* is that the good boys beat up the bad boys. And this is well appreciated worldwide.

The Swahili Characters

According to the title, *Komredi Kipepe* and *Bi Arafa* are the main characters of Katembo's story. As mentioned earlier, *Komredi Kipepe* as a cartoon is a veteran in Swahili comic history, having appeared for the first time in the 1980s. His title "*Komredi*" is a humorous reference to the good old socialist days of Tanzanian Ujamaa. According to Katembo "*Kipepe*" is the name for loincloth in many southern Tanzanian languages. This cartoon is a cunning hunter running after the animals in amazing speed and swinging his characteristic club. Although *Kipepe* is brave and courageous he is often outwitted by the animals thus the readers of his stories have a laugh.

Bi Arafa is a new figure which was created by Chris Katembo specifically for this story. *Arafa* is a common female name along the East African coast. Katembo states that *Bi Arafa* is also a frequent name for female witches, *wachawi*. Its Arabic root means "the one who knows"⁵ making it a perfect name for a wise healer. *Bi Arafa* is tall and thin, especially in the last picture of the episode, where she resembles the first Tanzanian President with her grey hair. Her statement against tribalism and fundamentalism reminds the reader of Nyerere's legacy. *Kipepe* and *Bi Arafa* are accompanied by *Madenge*. Although *Madenge* is a school boy, wearing his characteristic black shirt and white shorts with suspenders, he is – historically speaking – as old as *Kipepe*, having been introduced to the Tanzanian readers in the 1980s. His name refers to his hairstyle. In his episodes, *Madenge* appears as a clever boy driving his parents and teachers nuts with his wit.

Kipepe, *Arafa* and *Madenge* belong to an ethnic group called Wabushi, which supposedly refers to the people from the bush. The Wabushi appear regularly in *SANI* for many years

⁵ I thank Farouk Topan for this valuable information.

now. They consist of all rural characters appearing in the *SANI* magazine. But Katembo is using the Wabushi for the first time as an ethnic group. The Wabushi are the good guys and the heroes of our story, representing the Gauls in Goscinny and Uderzo's story.

In the story of *Komredi Kipepe na kisa cha Bi Arafa*, *Kipepe* and *Madenge* escort *Bi Arafa* to a magicians competition in the forest of Gambush. Gambush is said to be the name of a real village in Mwanza region whose whole population consists of witches - *wachawi*. Thus Katembo takes a contemporary East African name as a translation for the antique name of the Gaul forest of Carnutes. *Bi Arafa* clearly takes over the part of the Gaul druid *Getafix*. Like him she is tall and slender. In the first pictures of the story she even wears the same dress: a white *kanzu* and a cape. Later she changes to a grey dress. Even her secret of a medicine that makes someone strong enough to uproot trees is the same as *Getafix*' secret. But contrary to *Getafix* *Bi Arafa* is a woman. Here Katembo shows gender consciousness, as most comics are dominated by male characters.

At first glance, *Kipepe* seems to play the role of *Obelix* and *Madenge* the role of *Asterix*. At least a comparison of Uderzo's and Katembo's drawings seems to suggest this as *Kipepe* often takes *Obelix*' position in a picture and *Madenge* poses like *Asterix*. Though they may take over poses in pictures, they still retain their own unique character which they developed over 20 years. For example *Kipepe* is more responsible. It is his idea to accompany *Bi Arafa* and protect her, while in the French comic this is *Asterix*' role. *Madenge* on the other hand seems to play *Asterix*' role. He is short and it is his smart idea which rescues the heroes. Nevertheless his childishness resembles *Obelix*' naivety more than *Asterix*' sober reasoning. An example of similarities between a drawing by Katembo and Uderzo can be demonstrated in pictures 1 and 2. The tree on the left can also be found in Uderzo's picture. For details Katembo adds flying birds which can be seen in many other pictures whereas these are not part of Uderzo's inventory for details. *Madenge*, just like *Asterix*, warns his comrade about approaching people. Even *Madenge*'s arm position and the direction of his look resemble *Asterix*.



Picture 1: SANI 69: 29



Picture 2: Uderzo/Goscinny 1971: 25

As *Getafix* is kidnapped by the Goths, *Bi Arafu* is also taken as a hostage by another ethnic group: the Wabarukuna. Katembo says the Wabarukuna is the nickname (*jina la utani*) for the Makonde, who live in Southern Tanzania. However, his Wabarukuna cartoons have their own character and are not meant to be a caricature of the Makonde. Like the Goths, the Wabarukuna are bold headed and dress in furs.

Material Culture

Besides using Swahili characters for his story Katembo also appropriates features from the material culture of *Asterix*, translating them into a Swahili context. Goscinny and Uderzo used a Gothic helmet resembling German helmets from the first world war, as a symbol for a savage and war thirsty nation. This helmet was lost by a Goth during the capture of *Getafix* thus giving *Asterix* a hint of the kidnappers. But a helmet does not fit into an East African context. Thus Katembo created a special kind of spear, a very short one, as a symbol for the Wabarukuna. When this spear is found in the forest of Gambush, *Madenge* knows, that the Wabarukuna captured *Bi Arafa*. In Barukunaland a strange feature for East Africa appears in the form of thick stone walls. The Barukuna ruler lives in a stone palace. Although stonewalls are known in the coastal urban Swahili culture they surprise in the rural setting of the story. Also the V shaped doors, which resemble the Gothic palace in the French story, appear to be exotic to a Tanzanian context. As *Madenge* and *Kipepe* enter Barukunaland to follow *Bi Arafa* it is striking that the environment of Barukunaland resembles the way Uderzo portrays the Goths. Also the gag of an owl arguing with a woodpecker (*SANI* 66: 21; Goscinny; Uderzo 1971: 9), which is a running gag in many *Asterix* adventures, appears in Katembo's story. This is astonishing as an owl is a symbol for witchcraft and evil for many East Africans to the extent that they try to avoid it. In *SANI* No. 69 Katembo uses a light bulb as a symbol of a bright idea of *Madenge*. This is quite a modernisation of the *Asterix* theme. During *Asterix* times there were no light bulbs. If someone has an idea, Uderzo indicates it by an oil-lamp. But as Katembo's story is not playing in the past, he can use the symbol of a light bulb. Another form of appropriation of symbols is the trophy for the winner of the druid or *wachawi* contest. *Getafix* is awarded a small golden menhir for his craft. Menhirs are unknown in East Africa thus Katembo lets *Bi Arafa* be presented with a *tunguli*⁶ *ya mpingo*, a gourd for local medicine made of ebony (Goscinny; Uderzo 1971: 13, *SANI* 67). Ebony seems to be the appropriate symbol for honour in a Swahili context, whereas in French culture it is gold.

Serialization of the story

As mentioned earlier Katembo published his story as a series over seven issues. Thus he returns to the origins of *Asterix* as the adventure of *Asterix and the Goths* was first published as a series in the comic magazine *PILOTE* in 1961 and only later in 1963 as an album.

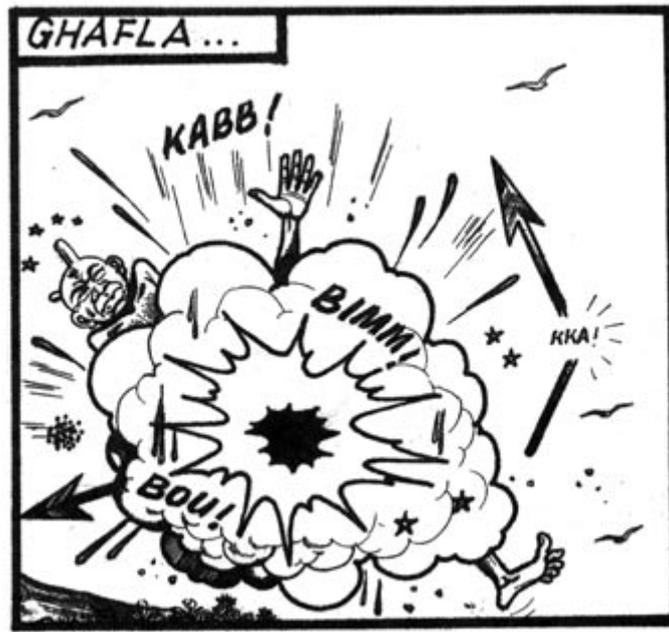
⁶ Katembo uses the form *tunguli*. In the dictionaries the form *tunguri* is used (Johnson 1939: 480; TUKI 2001: 328). Katembo as many other Swahili speakers often interchanges /l/ and /t/. Another example will be discussed later.

But Katembo has not as much space as Goscinny and Uderzo had, because *PILOTE* was published more frequently than *SANI*. Therefore Katembo has to squeeze a comic of 48 pages into nine pages. As a result much of the story telling cannot be done in pictures but has to be written in special frames and boxes. There is also the need for text frames because of the serialisation of the story. Katembo has to keep the tension high at the end of each issue in order to keep the reader eagerly waiting for the next issue, whereby at the beginning of each new issue he explains what has been happening so far. Besides texts Katembo also uses pictures at the beginning of a new episode to get the reader back into the story. In *SANI* No. 70 the story ends with a Barukuna guard blowing a horn. The same horn blower is shown in the first panel of the story in *SANI* No. 71 together with an explanation of what happened last. Additional to narrating the story in text frames, Katembo also shortens the episode by drawing various sequences in one panel. For example in *SANI* No. 70 the beating up of the Wabarukuna is combined in one picture with the stealing of their clothes as a disguise for *Madenge* and *Kipepe*. *Asterix* and *Obelix* need a full page for this (Goscinny; Uderzo 1971: 25f).

Action Scenes

Although the Swahili comic has developed its own code for fighting scenes⁷ Katembo is close to the original in the first violent scene of his episode as a comparison of picture 3 and 4 indicates: a spear is cracking on the right side of the panel. Both drawings are dominated by a cloud of dust out of which a foot and hands appear. *Obelix*' strong fist has been changed into a severely damaged Barukuna head. Whereas Uderzo only uses lines to indicate violent action Katembo adds splashing blood to illustrate that scene (*SANI* 70: 30; Goscinnny and Uderzo 1974: 25). The signs of violence are more drastic in Swahili than in the original *Asterix*. Uderzo and Goscinnny indicate the results of violence by stars, broken weapons, torn clothes, black eyes and a tongue hanging out of the mouth. Katembo uses the more drastic Swahili code for violence, especially in the last fighting scenes. His victims fart in despair, they run around with missing limbs and axes, arrows and knives sticking out of their bodies. Their heads get chopped off and fly through the picture while their blood is dripping all over the scene as can be seen in picture 5. Also the soundwords of the fight have been changed. Only BIMM! was used as by Goscinnny. BOUM! have become BOU!. The sound PAFF! Has been translated into the Swahili sound of KARB! Finally a new sound has been added. The breaking of the spear is silent in the original but Katembo added a KHA!. Another soundword change can be noted in the blowing of the signal horn. The sound of the horn changed from a BOOOOO BOOOO and BAAAoooo BOOOAAA into a POOOOOM. The Swahili horn sound seems to be more melodic to the listener as Katembo adds musical notes and a clef which are missing in the Gothic sound. The rest of the picture have close similarities. The horn blower stands on top of a stone wall holding the horn in his right hand and the body turned slightly to the left. (*SANI* 70: 31, 71: 28; Goscinnny Uderzo 1974: 28).

⁷ Instead of a soundword a noun describing trouble and violence is often written in the middle of a dust cloud, like *kasheshe*. Popular are also metaphors of violence like *Kosovo*, which became a synonym for trouble.



Picture 3: SANI 70: 30



Picture 4: Goscinny and Uderzo 1974: 25



Picture 5: SANI 71: 29

Body-language

The sequence of an interpreter interrogating *Bi Arafa* in the service of the Barukuna king seems to be taken from the *Asterix* album one by one. Two comparisons of this sequence can be found in pictures 6 to 9. In the pictures the positions of the figures and the way they hold their arms and heads do rarely vary from the original. But a closer look reveals striking differences. It is interesting that the body language of the interpreter is different as he translates the lie that *Bi Arafa* will give out her medicine. Uderzo stressed that lie with a heavy nodding and folded hands. This seems to have no Swahili equivalent as Katembo's interpreter stresses this positive statement by moving his hands downwards. Moreover the Barukuna interpreter is shaking all over the sequence, indicated by fine trembling lines, whereas the Gothic interpreter is not. Shivering seems to be the correct translation of body language for fear by Katembo. The translation in the speech balloons is more or less the same. The chief wants to know whether the magician is willing to share his or her knowledge. In the case of refusal he threatens to kill the interpreter as well. A threat which makes the interpreter not to translate the words of the magicians but to tell the chief what he wants to hear.

Interesting is the translation of *Getafix*' strict "never" into "si, rahisi". That shows that even in a very pressed situation a Tanzanian would be so polite to avoid a strict "hata" or "hapana" ("no") but prefers to give a vague "it is not easy".

Katembo adds thought balloons to the interpreter (*SANI* 70: 31) which are not used by Uderzo and Goscinny. These thought balloons are filled with Swahili exclamations "leo" (today, meaning, what a day), "duh" (expression of surprise) and "lo" (expression of bad surprise). Uderzo was able to express the stress and fear of the interpreter by changing his face colour into green and yellow. Further more Uderzo's interpreter's physiognomy was more detailed which allowed him to express fear with the eyes and uncertainty with the nose. Maybe fear is not expressed in green and yellow in African faces. Besides that *SANI* is published in black and white and its printing quality is rougher which might have hindered Katembo to work more on his interpreter's face.

Of course *Bi Arafa* does not give her secret to the Wabarukuna. *Madenge* has the idea of brewing a medicine to cause civil war in Barukunaland and escape while the Wabarukuna are busy killing themselves. This is a slight variation on the original theme, where the Goths started a civil war as they received the original magic portion due to their natural greed and thirst for war.



Picture 6: SANI 71: 28



Picture 7: Goscinny and Uderzo 1971: 26



Picture 8: SANI 71: 28



Picture 9: Goscinny and Uderzo 1971: 26

Speech-balloons

Katambo's speech-balloons have different styles. Sometimes they have the classic balloon shape as in the final drawing. There they are round, the lines of the text follow the oval of the balloon (SANI 71: 29). In other cases as in the first picture of the episode in SANI No. 70 the balloon follows the text and its paragraphs, having a straight line at the top and the bottom and slightly rounded lines on the sides. A third balloon variety appears on page 31 of SANI

No. 70. There, the balloons have a rectangular shape. There is no difference in the content of these three types of balloons evident. But there is a fourth balloon type with a zigzag-frame (SANI 70: 30 and 71: 28). The zigzag-frame indicates that the speaker is talking in a loud harsh voice to his audience.

One device of indicating different languages through lettering is taken from the *Asterix* volume. There the Goth talk is represented by Germanic fracture font, whereas the Gaul language is written in Latin script. In No. SANI 70 it is obvious that the Wabushi and the Wabarukuna do not understand each other and they need a translator. Katembo indicates the different languages by the size of the letters. The Wabarukuna only talk in small letters whereas the Wabushi talk in capital letters. But as the difference is not clearly visible many readers do not understand this means of lettering. By drawing pictures in the balloons Katembo indicates the thoughts of their protagonists. In issue No. 69 *Madenge* has an idea indicated by a light bulb. In the following picture in issue 70 *Madenge* thinks of a cloud of dust, definitely indicating a fight.

Spoken Language

The characters in *Asterix* stories are famous for their play on words, which are, as it is said, up to 80% untranslatable out of the French language and cultural context. Goscinny is parodying various accents, playing around with words, mixing modern and ancient forms. Therefore in all *Asterix* translations much of the verbal humour gets lost. But it can be said, that he and his comrades talk the standardized form of any languages avoiding swearwords, curses and slang. Thus making it readable for children without the danger of interference of any forms of censorship.

But *Madenge* and *Kipepe* use slang (*kihuni*), and street language (*kiswahili cha mitaani*), . For example in SANI 66 *Madenge* says to *Kipepe* after they fell behind *Arafa* and her friend: “*Anko tukazane bwana, ona vigagu vinatuacha*” (uncle lets exert man, look the oldtimers leave us behind). *Anko*, with the meaning of “uncle”, is the colloquial form of *mjomba* derived from English. *Kigagu* is slang for an old person.

In SANI No. 70 *Madenge* says “*Tulianzisha la kigetogeto ... tuyapangilie madili yetu*” (Let’s start the ghetto-thing ... let’s plan our deals). This talk would definitely be criticized and banned if bodies like BAKITA (Baraza ya Kiswahili ya Tanzania, the Tanzanian Swahili Council) had a say in comic production.⁸ The “ghetto thing” and “deals” as slang for a wild beating are a quite recent development of Swahili language in an urban underground culture

⁸ There is also a comic guarding the purity of Kiswahili: Mzee kifimbo cheza (Graebner 1995: 264). This Mzee is guarding the Swahili language to be clean of the dirty influence of uncivilized talk.

context. If a Swahili comic uses latest slang it is well received by the readers. Another example of colloquial Swahili, which would not make it into a serious public announcement, is the untranslatable language of the fighting Wabarukuna in the last part of the episode:

Umenipata mume mwenza kuna lingine sema basi – kutembea na mke wangu isiwe nongwa yaani mimi mume mwenza wako? (You got me the co-husband, but there is another, what do you say to that? - To walk with my wife do not be disagreeable... this means I am your co-husband?).

This rude language of sexual hints and admitted adultery would hardly fit into the clean world of the asexual figures of *Asterix* nor would it be heard on official Swahili occasions. But of course it would give someone credit in street quarrels. This indicates that Swahili comics do not represent polished talk of officials as it is read and heard in newspapers, radio or television. But they use the language of the ordinary man, which is spoken in the streets. This is a remarkable difference to Goscinny's and Uderzo's story.

The last example of sexual language is an unwilling slip of Katembo's pen in the process of lettering. In the last picture of the episode *Madenge* justifies the civil war in Barukunaland by saying *kiranga haliliwi* (sexual mania is not being eaten). To the reader it appears as if the greed and brutality of the Wabarukuna is classified by *Madenge* as *kiranga*, which means "sexual mania" (TUKI 2001: 148). But according to Katembo it is not that rude. *Madenge* wanted to say *kilanga haliliwi*, naughtiness is not being eaten, which indicates that he is not tolerating the mean behaviour of the Wabarukuna. It is obvious that *Madenge* interchanges /l/ and /r/ as many East African Bantu speakers do.

The Moral Ending

Finally the moral of Katembo's story, which is shown in picture 10, is a different one compared to *Asterix*. Uderzo and Goscinny were just making fun out of their war thirsty and power gambling neighbours, the Germans, whose desire to rule the world could be traced back to the times of *Asterix*. The Gauls just started a civil war in the country of the Goths so that the Goths may be busy slaughtering themselves instead of disturbing the peaceful Gauls. But for Katembo it is also a lesson to stop tribalism and religious fundamentalism in order to avoid civil war. This is what *Bi Arafa* explains to *Madenge* and *Kipepe*: *Unasikia Madenge mjukuu wangu. Ukabila na udini ni sumu kali sana! Penye ukabila na udini hali kama hii ni rahisi ya kutokea. Nyie ndiyo taifa la kesho hivyo msikubali vitu hivyo viwili vikawasambaratisha kama hawa Wabarukuna.* (You listen *Madenge*, my grandchild. Tribalism and religious fundamentalism is a very strong poison. Where there is tribalism and

religious fundamentalism a state like this is very likely to happen. You are really the nation of tomorrow. Therefore do not agree to these two things, they will divide you as it has happened to these Barukuna.)

Obviously many countries surrounding Tanzania suffer or have suffered from civil war, which is often explained by tribalism. What religious fundamentalism can cause is reported in the news from Ireland, Israel, Sudan, to name a few. *Bi Arafat* has similarities with the Father of the Tanzanian Nation Mwalimu Nyerere. She is slim and tall and has grey short hair. She is very wise and full of knowledge and obviously very respected, as the first Tanzanian president was. Nyerere's legacy is the fight for a peaceful and free nation. He always warned against tribalism and religious fundamentalism which could destroy the peace Tanzania is enjoying.



Picture 10: SANI 71: 29

Conclusion

Katimbo was inspired by a French comic episode, appropriating it in parts so closely, that the line to copyright violation is not always clear. But at the same time he translates it into a different cultural context and adds a moral notion, which was never implied in the original. Uderzo and Goscinny have always stressed that their characters are created just for entertainment⁹. But Tanzanian artists rarely do *l'art pour l'art* or make fun just for the sake of laughing. They feel obliged to educate the society. The artist Ka-Batembo “dedicates his efforts to making comics for social change”(worldcomics 2001a). Especially as people are

⁹ „Wir haben einzig und allein ein Ziel: selbst Spaß zu haben und anderen Spaß zu machen. Das ist unser bescheidener Beitrag während unseres kurzen Aufenthaltes auf diesem Planeten.“ (Our one and only aim is to have fun for ourselves and to entertain others. This is our humble contribution during our short stay on this planet) (Uderzo 1986: 128).

more interested in the cartoon characters of *Karikenye*, *Polo-Chakubanga* or *Bogi Benda*, than in politics. As David Kyungu states (Kyungu 1991: 9), the Tanzanian artists feel obliged to use them not only for entertainment but also for education. The popular Tanzanian cartoonist Kipanya says “*Watu wanazijua na wanaziheshimu katuni kwenye magazeti kama Kipanya, Bi Mkora (Majira) au Zero (Mtanzania) na tunaweza kuzitumia kuwaelimisha watu*” (Kipanya 2001: 6) (The people know and respect the cartoons in the newspapers like *Kipanya*, *Bi Mkora* or *Zero* and we can use them to educate the people.) Katembo follows this attitude by reviving Nyerere’s appeal for unity and peace. By taking something foreign or global and making use of it in his own local society he is appropriating *Asterix* for the Tanzanian audience. Local appropriation has been defined as a “translation into the vocabulary and syntax of the appropriating environment” (Beck 2001: 67). This is exactly what Katembo does with *Asterix*. He translates not only the words of the comic hero, but tailors the whole story to fit into an East African cultural context. Moreover he develops a moral ending for the story, which can be interpreted as “further invention as part of appropriation” (Beck 2001: 77). He uses the story of *Asterix* and puts it in a familiar surrounding. With the new moral ending he explains global problems of civil war in a local way. It is obvious that the civil war of the Wabarukuna is caused by *Bi Arafa*’s medicine. In the same way it can be explained that the ongoing civil wars are caused by medicine as well. An explanation which is within the world of thought of many East Africans as many leaders are said to possess strong spiritual powers or work together with ritual experts to sustain their rule. But this might be an over-interpretation as Katembo himself had only the conflict in Morogoro region in mind when he drew his story. There, pastoralists and farmers were in fierce battle over land issues and Katembo wanted to give a warning of what internal quarrels can lead to. Katembo’s story has a *mafunzo* for the reader, a lesson to be learned. Such lessons are appreciated by the Swahili audience as can be seen from their traditional *hadithi* (narrations), whether they are oral or written or in this case drawn.

Rose Marie Beck wrote an article about “Swahili Comic or Comic in Swahili?”. Here she queries if the Swahili culture has developed special forms of comic or if comics in East Africa are just ordinary western comics. Concerning *Kipepe*, it can be asked in a similar way: “*Asterix* in Swahili or a Swahili *Asterix*?” The answer is that Katembo has not simply translated *Asterix* into Swahili but has made a real *mshahili* out of him, a true East African.

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