

NEWSPAPER SERIALS IN TANZANIA: THE CASE OF ERIC JAMES SHIGONGO (WITH AN INTERVIEW)

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Newspaper serials

Newspaper serials have a long history in Tanzania. Since the privatisation of media in the 1990s, the number of newspapers and tabloids has multiplied, and serials have become abundant. I would dare to say that they are the most popular form of fiction at the moment in terms of quantity of readers. They are especially prevalent in the tabloids, where there often are more than three stories being serialised at a time. Some authors publish serials only occasionally, while there are also established serial writers such as Sultan Tamba, Faki A. Faki and Hamees M. Suba. Some are attached to a particular paper or publisher, like Faki A. Faki (*Wamasa Publications: Sani and Visa*), Zubagy Akilimia (*Global Publishers*), and Hamees Suba (*Kiu ya Jibu*). In a number of cases, these writers are directly employed by the publisher, story writing being only part of their job there. This is, for example, the case with Sultan Tamba who is dealing with graphic design at *Kiu ya Jibu*. Tamba's history as a writer is particularly long with a number of successive employments at different publishers, as well as attempts to set up his own magazine (*Shangwe* from 1994 to 1997, and from 1998 to 2000, *Lete Mambo* in 2006). Lastly, he serialised his novels in the tabloid *Sani* before turning to *Kiu ya Jibu* in 2006. However, the most prominent writer specialising in newspaper serials is Eric James Shigongo, who probably is also the most prolific author of popular literature of the last decade in Tanzania altogether. In his case, novel writing has reached a new quality as a well organised, apparently successful, self-owned business. His history as a writer is inextricably connected to his activity in the publishing sector, as he serialises his stories in his own newspapers. Eric James Shigongo is owner and chief executive officer of *Global Publishers & General Enterprises Ltd.*, located in Sinza, Dar es Salaam. Together with Abdallah Mrisho Salawi, he founded the company in 1998, and only then did he start publishing novels too. *Global Publishers* produce the weekly tabloids *Uwazi* (Transparency), *Ijumaa* (Friday), *Ijumaa Wikienda* (Friday Weekender), *Risasi* (Bullet), *Amani* (Peace) and *Championi* (Champion), which are all in Swahili. The bilingual (English and Swahili) newspaper *The Bongo Sun* ceased to be published in 2007, and so did the culture magazine *S&C*. According to the company's website, all papers are distributed in the whole of Tanzania and on the Islands. They aim at "men and women of all social classes, students and the young generation" and mix entertainment with social and political issues, as well as, in the case of *Championi*, Sports (Global Publishers n.d.). Having print-runs between 45 000 and 60 000

copies¹, they assumingly reach an average of 250 000 readers each, as it is estimated that in Tanzania one purchased newspaper is read by four to six persons (Bgoya 2008: 90). Except on Sunday, one of the papers appears on each day of the week. From the start, Shigongo's novels were part and parcel of *Global Publishers'* newspapers. In every issue he has a page out of twelve dedicated to one of his serials. This means that he publishes five different novels at a time, which, as is rather common for newspaper serials, all are long stories often reaching sixty sequels and more. This can only be achieved if writing is professionally exercised. In fact, Shigongo states that for him writing is a daily occupation (see interview below).

Topics, themes and features of E.J. Shigongo's serials

In August 2008 Shigongo was serialising the following novels:

- *The Blood Deal! (Kazi ya Damu)* in *Uwazi* (on Tuesday): Priscilla is a very rich but lonely young woman, who owns several big hotels. The story starts when she picks a handicapped beggar, Muddy, from the street in order to ask him to make love to her for the first time in her life. As she is very satisfied with his performance she decides to live with him. Soon Muddy discovers that she is a trader in human blood. Muddy also has a second life: he is a serial killer who kills women in order to cut off their genitals. He sells them to a medicine man in Zambia who makes them into a medicine for miners. From their encounter, the life histories of Priscilla and Muddy are unfolded in a flashback. Both had a difficult childhood. They lost their mothers as babies and were mistreated and abused by the persons who fostered them. At the time of writing this article, the story is still going on.²
- *She is Too Young to Die (Ni Mdogo Mno Kufa)* in *Ijumaa* (on Friday) and *Ijumaa Wikienda* (on Monday): Gilbert is married to Salome. During the course of the story their child Faith's life is repeatedly in danger and is only saved by intensive medical care. Salome also has problems with cerebral haemorrhage and goes through a long period of amnesia. In a parallel story Tecla, who is in love with Gilbert, crookedly claims that he is the father of her child. She herself had been cheated by the medicine man Toboatobo who had impregnated her while pretending to make a love charm for her. In the end, Tecla's ploy is revealed and she has to go to prison, where she dies. The happy ending consists in the setting up of a balanced family, as Gilbert and Salome raise Tecla's little boy together with their girl Faith.
- *The Sex Slave (Mtumwa wa Ngono)* in *Risasi* (on Wednesday and Saturday): Shortly after her mother has died, Dina is raped by an old man and kills him. She escapes to

¹ These figures are taken from *Global Publishers'* website (<http://www.globalpublisherstz.com/us/> last visited 05-12-2008).

² The 28th sequel appeared on 6th January 2009.

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Kenya where she falls in love with the street boy John. The two are lured to South Africa, where Dina is forced to work in a brothel as a sex slave, chained to the wall. When during xenophobic riots the brothel is burnt, Dina is rescued and brought to the UK, where she becomes a top model. Back in South Africa for work she is arrested for the murder she committed long ago in Tanzania and sentenced to death. John frees her and they flee to Kenya where they live in the bush, and after some time get twins. When John dies, they are brought back to Tanzania, where Dina has to go to jail, while the twins are raised in the UK. Eventually they unite in the UK, after Dina has been released from prison. The story then continues after a time gap with the adventures of the twins, who are now married. They go to America for holidays and are caught in the hurricane Katrina. At the time of writing this article, the story is still going on.³

- *From China with True Love (Kutoka China na Penzi la Kweli)* in *Amani* (on Thursday): The handsome Rei is of Rwandan origin, but was raised as a Masai in Tanzania. When forced to marry a Masai girl, he elopes with his European girlfriend to Hongkong. Their relationship ends and Rei falls in love with Aileen, a girl from the Philippines. Since they have no means to live in China any further, they go to Tanzania. Aileen is not accepted by the Masai community as Rei's future wife. She is given very hard work to do, and has to undergo circumcision. The circumcision is done deliberately badly, so that Aileen nearly dies. Only intensive hospital care saves her life and plastic surgery gives her back the mutilated parts of her genitals. After another attempt by her future in-laws to kill her, Aileen and Rei go to Arusha. In the meantime, Aileen's father, an immensely rich man, has died, and a detective is sent to find his heir, Aileen. She goes back to the Philippines with Rei and their child. However, as she misses Tanzania very much, the family eventually returns to Tanzania. From then they live in peace. Rei even finds out that he once came as a Rwandan refugee to Tanzania and that his parents were killed in the genocide. He visits the memorial site for the victims and brings his old nanny to his home in Arusha as his mother.⁴
- *The Assassination (Mauaji)* in *Championi* (on Friday and Monday): Since her childhood, Gift Aikarua has a dream: she wants to become the first female president of Tanzania. During a students' demonstration she is shot and her heart lethally injured. Her boyfriend Steven donates his heart for transplantation, and Gift survives. She completes her studies in America, where she meets Dr Godfrey whom she wants to marry. Back in Tanzania she becomes a minister in the government. On her wedding

³ The 63th sequel appeared on 7th January 2009.

⁴ The story has some resemblance to the best seller "The White Masai" by Corinne Hofmann (2005), originally published in German in 1998 as "Die weiße Massai".

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day Steven appears: it had not been his heart that was implanted into Gift's chest, but that of another man. Steven had been hidden in South Africa by his evil father. There he was found by the brave police inspector Suzan. Finding him was the last link in a chain which led her to discover evil scheming by Steven's father with a high rank police officer. At last Steven and Gift are united in marriage. Gift has to survive two other attempts to assassinate her, by Godfrey as well as jealous people from her own party. Eventually she becomes elected as president. This is when conjugal problems start, because of Steven's jealousy. Both partners find new lovers. While Gift's turns out to be her half brother, Steven's is a woman who wants to kill him in order to inherit his wealth. In the end, Gift and Steven are reunited.

Love and hate, fidelity and infidelity and the exploration of the value of social relationship compared to the value of money are prominent themes which deserve to be studied in detail, as does the representation of men and women in the stories, i.e. their gender aspects. True love on the one hand and the wish to subjugate the other is to be found in the stories. Abuse of power and corruption is depicted as something normal, and in this world of greed and vulgarity the protagonists are driven by their desire for individual happiness. There is a clear line drawn between good and bad characters, while bad ones can turn into good ones and vice versa. The main characters often find themselves in moral dilemmas, for example between the wish to revenge and kill, and the deeper insight, that this exceeds the right of the individual in society as well as before God. At one point they inevitably discover that their own resources do not countervail against the evil forces surrounding them, and this is when they invoke God's help. There is indeed an evangelical undercurrent in some of the stories, a personal relationship with God who is seen as directly intervening in one's life. Furthermore, the power of prayer is depicted as being able to change the tide of events. The main protagonists normally are Christians.

Shigongo's novels are populated by a universe of characters. Even so, they mostly centre on couples and their immediate relatives, friends and adversaries. The main characters are educated Tanzanians, members of the urban elite, who as a matter of course are very mobile. Not only do they have their own cars, they also travel with ease from one country to another. The protagonists' way of life is not in any way representative for most Tanzanians. Living in a sphere remote from the experience of the majority of Tanzanians, they are nonetheless plagued by the same basic problems connected to love and relationship. The stories thus provide for an escape from the daily grind while giving the reader food for thought on problems he or she is concerned with.

Countries like Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, South Africa, China, Australia, America, the UK and India are the stage for the plots. In an earlier novel, *The President Loves my Wife* (2003), part of the story is even set in an imagined African country, Sokomoni, though it resembles Tanzania. Changing settings as well as a high speed of action seem to be a device to keep readers interested in following the stories. However, the description of places is mostly

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superficial. This might reflect the fact that Shigongo is using the internet to search about the locations for his stories. However, if one recalls the vivid descriptions of foreign countries and landscapes by the German author Karl May (1842-1912), who had not visited those places but only read about them, it becomes clear that personal acquaintance is not an absolute precondition. The flatness probably has also to do with the speed of writing demanded for serial production. The stories' time dimension is also shallow, although the plots are frequently connected to historical or contemporary events, as for example the genocide in Rwanda, the Richmond corruption scandal in Tanzania, the hurricane Katrina in America and so on. Shigongo keeps his stories attractive by interesting locations and a quick taking up of topical themes like, for example, the current interest for China in his novel *From China with True Love (Kutoka China na Penzi la Kweli)*. However, whether the story is set in the past, the present or the future, whether in Iran or in Tanzania, this makes almost no difference with regard to technical, cultural or social conditions of the respective environment depicted. Time and space are in a way unspecific. I would therefore argue that Shigongo's novels represent a form of globalised literature in Tanzania, where, with few exceptions, anything can happen anywhere anytime. Even though the protagonists are recognisable as Africans, they are remote from traditional forms of culture, living in an urban westernised environment. This is especially evident in the dialogues.

A characteristic of Shigongo's stories is their extraordinary length. As is typical for serials, the protagonists often are torn apart shortly before the expected happy ending, and the next episode is set in motion with the appearance of some new characters. Cliffhangers are another feature of the novels, which, of course, are meant to keep readers interested in buying the newspapers. Apart from the long and changeful narratives provided by the protagonists' search for a happy solution of their problems against powerful adversaries, Shigongo's novels typically consist of multiple plot lines with their respective climaxes. This is connected to the technique of flashback, where the life histories of one or two characters are unfolded. Moreover, the time covered typically includes two or even three generations.

Regarding the topics, there are some recurrent elements to be observed. One is the already mentioned *being saved or born again* religious theme that is present in some of the stories. An even more general issue is gender roles in contemporary Tanzania, especially the question of male authority over women. Violence is depicted as a common means of solving problems, and the sometimes high degree of brutality and sadism may sometimes be felt as abhorrent by the reader. It is especially present in scenes of torture and sexual violence. Corruption and organised crime is another recurrent theme. It is worth noting that witchcraft plays no role in Shigongo's writing – something which adds to its international flavour. Even when in the novel *She Is too Young to Die* a medicine man appears, he is depicted as a charlatan who betrays his client. Instead, medical descriptions and hospital scenes are frequent. It seems as if Shigongo had a special interest or experience in medical problems and hospital routine.

Shigongo's history and literary genealogy

Considering that Shigongo is a public figure, his personal history remains remarkably unknown. When asked in the interview about his life history, he answered cageyly. In fact, it seemed as if he preferred to make himself enigmatic. Maybe his experience in the tabloid business has made him cautious. Therefore, from his professional career we only know that he started writing and publishing at one time, in 1998, and that before that date he was working in another sector.

Although being an innovative writer, Shigongo sees himself in the tradition of writers such as Elvis Musiba, Hammie Rajab and Faraji H. H. Katalambulla, whom he calls “*wazee wetu*” (our elders). However, Shigongo's writing is different from the bulk of Swahili literature, as it is urban and cosmopolite. It does not deny the influence of American thriller writers, like Sidney Sheldon and James Hadley Chase. Shigongo himself mentions the author of bestsellers par excellence, Sidney Sheldon, as a writer who has influenced him (see interview). Therefore, one can argue, he deliberately blends Swahili with American English thriller writing.

As has been observed by Mikhail Gromov (2008a: 11), Shigongo measures up with international thriller authors. As a skilled writer he knows how to create suspense. Even if some coincidences in the stories are very unlikely or impossible to happen in reality, his novels provide enjoyable reading and entertainment. They could indeed contribute to give Swahili literature a more modern image, as their “reader will start to learn that Swahili literature could be enjoyable and attractive” (Gromov 2008a: *ibid.*). Time will show whether this will happen, and to what extent Shigongo will become a model for other writers and influence Swahili fiction writing.

Literary bilingualism

The titles in English as well as in Swahili (in brackets) are a sort of Shigongo's trade mark. He follows the bilingual trait further in the dialogues of his novels, as such characters in his novels as the citizens of foreign countries as well as Tanzanian university students, medical doctors, or members of the elite with international connections speak English. As a rule, the Swahili translation of their utterances is given in brackets. Shigongo gives two reasons for the insertion of English into his essentially Swahili novels. Firstly, he thinks that English is more apt to render certain circumstances and to express feelings, and secondly he wants to give his readers the extra profit of learning or improving their English. I will not discuss the matter in detail here although this literary code-switching is an interesting phenomenon which should be further investigated by Swahili scholars, especially as it must be seen as an expression of the conflict between the two languages in the country.

The literary bilingualism has been adopted by other writers as well, and could therefore be called a phenomenon of the 2000s. One example is the novel *Mississippi Zanzibar* by Hamees

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M. Suba (2008). In that novel, American citizens speak in English, the translation being given in brackets. A similar phenomenon, being connected to the first, is the frequent use of English titles for films in Swahili. Even though this habit is widespread, it is rather criticised by the public, as is evident from chat forums. In an article on the website Swahili Remix from 25th August 2008, the writer concludes his criticism by telling writers and film makers “if you can not impress your audience using Kiswahili phrases pack your bags and leave the game [...]” (Swahili Remix staff writer 2008).

The writer’s mission

Beside love, resilience and determination are important topics in Shigongo’s writing. He does not only want to entertain, but, as he stressed in the interview, he also feels like having a mission. In fact, he aims at nothing less than changing the mindsets of his readers. As the author says, he wants to show that people are the agents of their life:

Naandika riwaya za kumtia nguvu mtu mweusi. Kumfanya – akisoma mpaka mwisho aamini kwamba kila mtu ana nafasi ya kufanikiwa. Bila kujali rangi yako, bila kujali dini yako, bila kujali kabila. Kila mtu anaweza, akiamua. Kwa hiyo hivi tunaandika riwaya ambazo ukizisoma, ukifika mwisho, utakuwa umejengwa, kwamba “yes, I can do it”.

I write novels to give the black person power. To make him or her believe – if he or she reads to the end – that everybody has the opportunity to be successful. Without regard to your colour, without regard to your religion, without regard to your tribe. Everybody can, if he or she decides. Therefore, we write novels that if you read them, when you reach the end, you will be conditioned to say “yes, I can do it”.

This statement echoes very much what Elvis Musiba has said on his aim in writing when interviewed by Mikhail Gromov (Gromov 2001: 37). It also reminds us of Barack Obama’s motto of his election campaign for the US presidency “Yes, we can!”, but this time in a more didactic version. Shigongo shares the didactic attitude with Reginald Mengi, the owner of IPP Media in Tanzania, who seems to have been a mentor for him (Nguvu 2007). When they both were invited speakers at a motivational talk with students of Dar es Salaam University in February 2007, Mengi reportedly explained what seems to be Shigongo’s credo too:

I have placed God ahead of me during the entire time of my activities. If you do that, you will not go astray in your plans. However, you should not just sit back and wait for God’s blessings. You must create confidence and believe in yourself that you can do something that will better your life. (Nguvu 2007)

The didactic stance is also present in the motivation for the insertion of English dialogues in the essentially Swahili novels, as mentioned above. The author says that by doing so he wants to educate his readership.

Shigongo has repeatedly stated his engagement in charity, thereby again following the example of Reginald Mengi (Nguvu 2007). On the cover of *The President Loves my Wife* he announced that he would donate five percent of the profit to help widows and another five

percent to assist families with hydrocephalic children. In the case of *Machosi na Damu* he announced to give ten percent of the profit to AIDS orphans. However, there is no information on whether that was just a marketing strategy or a serious commitment.

Writer-reader interaction

Shigongo's stories reach a large audience, which, as Shigongo himself is aware, is mainly comprised of women. This was confirmed by sellers of newspapers in the streets whom I asked. They told me that they have female customers who are especially interested in the stories, and buy the newspapers exactly out of this reason.

The author's serials are not only published in *Global Publishers'* printed newspapers, but also on their web-site, which was established in July 2007 (Salawi in Bongo Celebrity 08-07-2008). According to Salawi, the wish of readers to read sequels they might have missed was a major reason to set up the web-site, which within one year had almost two million visitors (Salawi in Bongo Celebrity 08-07-2008). Each sequel on the web-site is provided with a link to *maoni* (comments), where readers can and do react and comment on the developments of the stories. There they comment on the behaviour or fate of protagonists, but they also evaluate the story by saying whether they like it or not, and what they think of its author. As Shigongo said in the interview, the readers' comments sometimes can even change the dénouement of the stories. Moreover, according to Shigongo there is also a direct exchange between the writer and his readers, as he receives their emails and even meets them personally. According to information from several Tanzanian writers, this is something that generally marks popular writing in newspapers and fiction books sold in the streets, and it is almost a rule that writers provide their contact details like mobile phone number, or email address, in order to facilitate communication with their readers. It may happen that readers demand a certain story development or complain about a bad treatment of a certain character. This can even lead to a change in the writer's original plan, as the newspaper serials are often produced more or less simultaneously with publishing, on the basis of a pre-existing draft. This shows the directly interactive character of popular writing in Tanzania, which has to be taken into account in order to understand this writing. The active role of readers exceeds the "co-creation of textual meaning" in the reading process (Newell 2000: 156). The readers do not only influence the writing indirectly, as the writer anticipates their reception of his novel, but also in a much more direct way, as a kind of co-authors. A parallel can be drawn from this mode of writing to the cooperative style of story telling which is for example practiced among the Mwera in Southeast Tanzania in their traditional story telling sessions (Reuster-Jahn 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

Serials, books and films – the multiple commercialisation of writing

In Tanzania it is quite common that writers of newspaper serials re-use a story to produce a book. For example, this has been done by Sultan Tamba with *Mzee wa Busara* (The Sorcerer,

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2004), Hamees Suba with *Mississippi Zanzibar* (2008), Irene Mwamfupe Ndauka with *Uchawi wa Mchungaji Stephano* (The Sorcery of Pastor Stephano, 2004), Kessa Mwambeleko with *Chozi* (The Tear, 2008), among others. Even Ben R. Mtobwa, who is a renowned author of books, serialised his first *Joram Kiango* detective novel in a catholic newspaper (Gromov 2008b: 139) before publishing it in book form. As Shigongo put it in the interview, the book in these cases is “just another product” made from the story. Another way of re-selling the story is to make a film from it. This is also not new, as it has been done by Sultan Tamba (*Mzee wa Busara*), Ben R. Mtobwa (*Lazima Ufe Joram*) and others. However, while these writers operate with limited resources, Shigongo is doing the exercise on a larger scale, with more resources and wider coverage. As director of *Global Publishers* he can place advertisements in five different tabloids, and use the existing distribution channels.

Eric James Shigongo has hitherto turned three of his serials into books. The first was *The Last Days of my Life* (*Siku za Mwisho za Uhai Wangu*). This book is out of print and even Shigongo himself could not provide me with a copy. The second novel was *The President Loves my Wife* (*Rais Anampenda Mke Wangu*), published in 2003. This book of 496 pages tells the story of Derrick, a member of the elite in the country Sokomoni, who marries a beautiful village girl, Kabula, because he thinks that she will make a decent wife. However, on their wedding day the president falls in love with her and is immediately determined to make her his own wife. While he first uses force, after some time she becomes his accomplice in cheating on her legal husband. She even bears the president a child and takes part in a plot to kill Derrick. It takes a long time until order is restored and the corrupt president ousted. However, the novel does not end there, instead it continues with the story of Derricks granddaughter Caroline, who in the end becomes the wife of another president, this time in Tanzania.

Machizi na Damu (*Blood and Tears*) was published in 2005. The book has 483 pages and tells the story of Wilbert and Isabella. Isabella becomes the first African Miss World in a contest held in Australia, but almost immediately after the event she is nearly killed in a car accident, arranged by Imelda, who is madly in love with Wilbert to the extent that she stalks him. Although she successfully blackmails him to marry her, she betrays him only a few years later with another man, for whom she is even ready to kill her children. In the end, Isabella and Wilbert are united, when Isabella awakes from a long coma. They become *born again* Christians, and Wilbert starts his own church. The story continues with the adventures of his son Evarist, and ends eventually with Evarist’s happy marriage with a girl who has converted to Christianity from the Muslim faith.

Shigongo used the infrastructure of *Global Publishers* to produce and market his books. They were printed in India, as this is cheaper than in Tanzania, where a tax on paper has to be paid (see interview below). The books were then distributed using the sales representatives of *Global Publishers* in the country. Thus they reached every spot where *Global Publishers’* newspapers are sold. The importance to dispose of distribution channels cannot be

overestimated, as distribution is the weak point in the book chain in Tanzania. Many writers and publishers with whom I have talked pointed to distribution problems as the biggest obstacle for the book sector (see also Bgoya 2008: 90). Shigongo says in the interview that he has sold 120 000 copies of the two books – which is a huge figure for the Tanzanian book sector. In March 2006, even before the official publishing date, Shigongo put large advertisements in his tabloids to promote *Machizi na Damu (Tears and Blood)*. They showed the book cover and announced its official launch in newspapers and television (*Risasi* 22-28 March 2006: 5). He also advertised that he was looking for sales representatives for his book, promising that they could get rich because many people would buy it: *Tajirika na kitabu cha Shigongo!* ('Become rich with Shigongo's book!', *Ijumaa* 24-26 March 2006: 9).

The commercial success is probably also due to the appealing look of the books, which are in the format of American and UK popular books. This is an innovation on the Tanzanian book market, and it underlines Shigongo's claim to compete with international popular writing. The attractive design of the books, "impressive volume (several hundred pages), large gilded or silvery letters on the front cover and on the spine [...] attracts the reader immediately, telling him that this book is a bestseller, and therefore is worth buying" (Gromov 2008a: 10). This is of course quite different from the booklet format which is often used for Swahili books. Both volumes were sold at an affordable price of 4 000 Tanzanian Shillings (approximately 2,50 Euros).

As a professional writer, Shigongo had his books edited by others. *The President Loves my Wife* was edited by Saifu D. Kiango (Shigongo 2003: 5), *Machizi na Damu* by Sultan Tamba (personal communication August 2008).

Two films based on Shigongo's serial novels have so far been produced. The writer has started a special firm, *Ericom Limited*, for film production and promotion. Although already partially engaged in the production of the Swahili video film *Girlfriend* in 2002/03⁵, *Ericom* has hitherto produced only the two films based on novels by Shigongo.⁶ The first was *Fake Pastors*⁷ and the second *From China with Love* (November 2008). The latter came out shortly after the serial was finished in October 2008. Shigongo does not write the film scripts himself. In the case of *Fake Pastors* the script was written by Gervas Kasiga (Bongoland 2, 09-05-2007). Again *Global Publishers'* media are instrumental in marketing the products. Both films are advertised on the website of *Global Publishers*. Moreover, *Global Publishers'* tabloids had articles and reports on the film release and related issues.

⁵ Personal communication by Sultan Tamba, December 2008.

⁶ Personal communication by Claudia Boehme (11-01-2009).

⁷ According to Claudia Boehme, Mainz, *Fake Pastors* was released in 2007 (personal communication 11-01-2009).

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Readers' evaluation

Apart from readers' comments on individual sequels on *Global Publishers'* website, one can also find comments on Eric Shigongo as a writer on internet chat forums or individual blogs. The male blogger D. M. Mponji, for example, mentions as his favourite books Shigongo's *The President Loves my Wife* and *Last days of my Life* in one line with works of the reputed writers Okot p'Bitek, Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and James Hadley Chase (<http://www.blogger.com/profile/13471103105174710440>).

A participant in the Nigerian chat forum *Nairaland* contributed on 9th April 2006 to two ongoing discussions, one on the question "Some interesting books you have read" (Nairaland 1), the other on "Who do you think is the leading African writer?" (Nairaland 2). One participant with the name eslynera listed Shigongo's *Last Days of my Life* together with books by bestseller authors John Grisham, Agatha Christie, Frank Peretti, Christopher Pikes and R.L. Stine. The same participant praised Shigongo as an African writer ("men, he rocks") for his books which "just make u cry".

Although these are just individual opinions they show that Shigongo's novels are indeed placed by some in line with English language thrillers by international bestseller authors on the one hand, and with the works of reputed African authors on the other.

Conclusion

It can be said that newspaper serials are the most popular form of Swahili literature in Tanzania at the moment. This is all the more important for the assessment of reading culture in Tanzania, as book sales via the established channels of distribution using book stores are weak (Bgoya 2008), or even on decline, as in the case of Ndanda Mission Press' entertainment books (Reuster-Jahn 2008: 107 ff.). This decrease seems to be counterbalanced by an increase in fiction published in newspapers. In addition to being read in the papers, it must be noted that a number of serials appear in the form of books after the stories have reached their end in the paper, thus contributing to the book market in Tanzania. However, they tend to be overlooked by scholars because they do not turn up in book stores. Rather, they are sold on the streets using the distribution channels of the papers. Moreover, the editions are often sold out within a relatively short period. It seems that popular literature's "unique capacity to survive" (Gromov 2008a: 12) has led it to seek refuge in newspapers and tabloids. Maybe it will persevere there until another form will become more favourable for its development.

There is also much of an interrelationship between popular literature and film, which shows that the relationship between the two media is not fully grasped if solely their rivalry is considered. Not only are there a number of Swahili films made from books, but films also have an impact on written fiction. The intertextuality of the narratives as well as the intermediality between written and filmed story should be further investigated.

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Newspaper serials differ in some aspects from fiction in books, as they must make the reader want to buy the next issue of the respective paper. At the end of each sequel, the reader should want to know the further development of the plots, hoping that the protagonists will escape dangerous situations and find fulfilment of their dreams. This literature is not in the first instance meant to provoke deep philosophical thought, nor do literary sophistication and subtlety play an important role. The texts do not undergo a critical editorial process at a publishing house. Even so, the authors try to convey messages they deem important in contemporary Tanzanian society, and they do so in quite a direct way. In fact, the didactic attitude is still quite strong: the authors want to educate their readers. They take up themes the readership is interested in, especially relationship issues.

The targeted audience consists of people of the middle class and below. Newspaper serials are predominantly read by women. Readers' active role in the literary production has become stronger with the increased use of telecommunication. The interactive nature of popular storywriting and the role of readers as co-producers should be studied in more detail.

The writers of newspaper serials are numerous. There are veterans, but also young and emerging writers. Women are a minority, while writers of "high" literature seem to keep off the newspapers. The sheer number of serial writers gives evidence of this flourishing branch of popular literature in Tanzania. Eric James Shigongo, combining writing and publishing, can be considered an especially professional and successful serial author, in terms of variety of plots and ideas as well as in terms of output, readership and commercial success.

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The interview

The interview took place on 25th August 2008 in E. J. Shigongo's office at *Global Publishers'* in Sinza.

URJ: Kwanza, je, unaweza kunipatia historia yako kwa kifupi?

ESh: Mhm, historia yangu kimaisha? Okay, nimezaliwa hapa tu, nikasoma hapa Tanzania, baadaye nikafanya kazi Tanzania. Lakini nilikuwa na kipaji cha kuandika tangu mwanzo. Kwa hiyo hicho nimekitumia maisha yangu yote. Nilikuwa nafanya kitu tofauti zamani. Lakini nikawa kujisikia kuandika. Ilikuwemo ndani yangu. Kwa hiyo nikaanza kuandika. Tangu nimeanza kuandika mwaka tisini na nane mpaka leo naandika. Tukaanzisha kampuni hii, mimi na mwenzangu.⁸ Kwa hiyo tunaendelea kuandika. Nimeshaandika vitabu, siyo vingi, lakini nafikiri vitabu vitatu tu. Vingine katika magazeti naandika kila siku, hadithi tofauti tofauti.

URJ: Mhm. Ina maana kwamba umeanza kuandika wakati ungali bado mdogo, au ...

ESh: *No*, nimeanza kuandika mwaka 98, lakini huko nyuma nilikuwa naandikaandika tu lakini sifanyi chochote. Ninaandika tu, nampa mtu anasoma, basi.

URJ: Na mwaka 98 ulikuwa mwaka ulipotoa hadithi yako kwa mara ya kwanza, kuichapisha. Ilikuwa katika gazeti?

ESh: Ya, ilikuwa katika gazeti la *Uwazi*.

URJ : Ina maana kwamba kazi ya kutoa magazeti na kuandika riwaya ulizianza kwa pamoja ?

ESh : Ya.

URJ: Una lengo gani katika kuandika riwaya?

ESh: Lengo ni kuona kama tunaweza kuandika riwaya ambazo zikaweza kubadilisha maisha ya watu. Kusaidia watu waweze kugundua kitu ambacho kimo ndani yao. Siyo riwaya tu za kumfanya mtu asome, halafu afurahi tu, halafu basi. Ni riwaya ambazo zinaweza kubadilisha kabisa *thinking* ya mtu akaamini kwamba “naweza kutoka hapa nikaenda mbele”. Mtu ambaye amekata tamaa unampa matumaini tena, kwa kusoma. Na ajue kwamba, unaweza kutoka kwenye wakati mgumu kabisa, kwenye maisha, lakini ukaja kuishi kama mfalme – *possible*. *So*, ninachofanya ni kujaribu ku*impact* maisha ya watu.

URJ: Kivipi hasa?

ESh: Watu wengi kwetu katika ulimwengu wa tatu wamekata tamaa. Wanaona hawawezi kufika, kuwa kama wewe. Na wanapokutana na wewe wanajua tu wewe ni bora kuliko wao. Iko kwenye akili. *So*, mimi riwaya zangu, huwa naandika riwaya za kumtia nguvu mtu

⁸ Abdallah Mrisho Salawi, co-founder of *Global Publishers*.

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mweusi. Kumfanya – akisoma mpaka mwisho aamini kwamba kila mtu ana nafasi ya kufanikiwa. Bila kujali rangi yako, bila kujali dini yako, bila kujali kabila. Kila mtu anaweza, akiamua. Kwa hiyo hivi tunaandika riwaya ambazo ukizisoma, ukifika mwisho, utakuwa umejengwa, kwamba “*yes, I can do it*”.

URJ: Aha, ujumbe wako wa kwanza na muhimu ni kwamba watu wasikate tamaa?

ESh: Mhm, watu wabadilike. Watu wengi wanajua hawawezi. Mimi nataka watu waamke asubuhi na kusema wanaweza. Mimi kazi yangu ni kujenga kujiamini, kwenye moyo. Na ukishajiamini, *then*, uende mbele ufanye mambo. Badala ya kukaa na kusema *Germany* italetela hela, *England* italetela, mtu mweupe italetela. Wewe umekaa. Kila mtu ana nafasi ya kufanya kitu. Kwa sababu tunaandika riwaya, inaweza kuwa kwanza historia ya mapenzi, lakini mwisho inakuja kuonyesha kwamba ni kubadilisha *mind sets* za watu.

URJ: Nimesoma kitabu chako cha *Machizi na Damu* nikaona kwamba unaonyesha vile vile ubaya wa watu, kutaka kufanikisha lengo bila kujali labda anaumiza watu wengine.

ESh: Mwisho wa siku, *ending*, kwa mfano *Machizi na Damu*, ni habari ya mtu ambaye ana kitu anachokifuatilia. Ametendewa jambo, haki yake imepotea. Hasa ni *happy ending*. Shida nyingiiiiii, lakini mtu anavumilia tu, anaona anapita kwenye tabu tabu tabu, mfululizo tabu nyingi nyingi nyingi, anatakiwa aache, baada ya tabu nyingi, kusema “sitaki tena”. Lakini anasema “*it has to be done*”, yaani “inabidi ifanyike”. Yaani anapata tabu hii, anapata tabu hii, tabu tabu tabu, *analose family*, muda mrefu yuko kwenye *coma* au *something*. Lakini ni kwamba, *somebody believes in his dream*, anaamini kwamba “*I have to be there*”.

URJ: Sasa yule Imelda⁹ vile vile anaamini kwamba atatimiza lengo lake, ila yeye ni mtu mbaya.

ESh: Imelda aliletwa tu kwa sababu nilitaka kutengeza *coma*, kimsingi. *Because coma* isingehappen kama Imelda asingetokea. Imelda *was like Judas Iscariot* kwenye bible. Judas Iscariot ilikuwa lazima *ambetrays* Jesus ili watu waweze kuokolewa. Watu wa aina hiyo wapo dunaini, hatuwezi kuwaacha.

URJ: Mawazo kwa hadithi zako unayapata vipi na wapi?

ESh: Yanakuja tu nikiwa natembea. Nikiwa peke yangu nafikiria, nikiona kitu.

URJ: Ni maisha hasa au labda pia ni filamu, vitabu vingine, redio au nini.

ESh: Hapana. Maisha. Maisha tu. *Sometimes* ni vigumu kueleza. *Sometimes* nashindaga kujibu hilo swali. Ila tu unashangaa tunapata *idea*, inaenda tu, inaenda, inaenda ... Hilo swali ni gumu kweli kulieleza. Kwa mfano ukiniuliza ulijiandaaje kutunga hiyo siwezi hata kukumbuka. Siwezi. Kwanza *sometimes* inabidi hicho kitabu unisomee, yaani unisimulie ili nikumbuke. Siwezi kujua kila kitu. Ni vigumu kukumbuka. Lakini mara nyingi ni maisha.

⁹ Mhusika katika *Machizi na Damu*.

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Unapita mahali unaona kitu. Unaweza kuendesha gari ukaona mtoto anagongwa na gari, mtoto mdogo anagongwa. Halafu anakufa. Alikuwa anaenda shule. Sasa wewe unafikiri maskini wa mungu, wazazi wake wakisikia inakuwaje. Hapohapo, *suddenly*, kuna kitu kinadevelop vuuuuuu, *you know*.

URJ: Unasoma kazi za wenzako ambao nao wanatoa hadithi na riwaya katika magazeti?

ESh: Kwenye magazeti hapana. Siyo sana, kwa kweli. Niko *very busy*. Sina nafasi kabisa. Ila, mimi nasoma sana vitabu.

URJ: Unaweza kutaja vitabu ambavyo ulivisoma na ulivipenda hasa, viwe vya Kiswahili au vya Kiingereza au vya lugha nyingine?

ESh: Mimi nilikuwa nasoma, nimekuwa *influenced* na mtu mmoja, anaitwa Sidney Sheldon. Nilikuwa nasoma sana Sidney Sheldon zamani. Sana.

URJ: Ukiwa unasoma bado shule?

ESh: Nikiwa shule, ya.

URJ: Ulivipataje vitabu vile?

ESh: Nanunua kwenye maduka.

URJ: Na vingine labda vya Kiswahili?

ESh: Ya. Musiba, Elvis Musiba. Wazee wetu wale, Elvis Musiba, Hammie Rajabu, na Katalambulla. Wale wazee wetu wa zamani waliokuwa wanaandika zamani wakati sisi bado watoto. *Kufa na kupona*, vitabu kama hivyo, *Njama*.

URJ: Inabidi kutia mambo gani ili hadithi ivutie, yaani mambo kama mapenzi, ujambazi, labda na nguvu za giza?

ESh: Mimi nafikiri ni kueleza ukweli. Yaani ili uweze kuandika kitu ambacho kitaweza kumgusa mtu kwenye moyo, kwenye sehemu ambapo inakaa furaha, inakaa huzuni. Sasa uweze kuandika kitu ambacho kitafanya kukugusa pale, *emotions*, ni lazima uweze kuyajua maisha ya watu. Kwa hiyo unapoandika kitu ni lazima kiwe kina ukweli. Isiwe mno *fiction*. Yaani vitu ambavyo vinawezekana na watu hukutana navyo kila siku.

URJ: Una mawasiliano na wasomaji? Wewe huweki namba yako ya simu gazetini.

ESh: *Emails*. Ya, wanaandika. Nakutana nao.

URJ: Unakutana nao?

ESh: Nakutana nao, ndiyo. Nazunguka.

URJ: Mawasiliano hayo yanachangia katika kuandika hadithi au riwaya?

ESh: Ya. Watakuambia ukweli.

URJ: Wakati mwingine unaweza hata kupata lawama?

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ESh: Mhm. Sana. Sana, sana.

URJ: Unaweza hata kubadilisha mwelekeo wa hadithi yako kutokana na mawasiliano na wasomaji?

ESh: Kabisa.

URJ: Siyo kwamba wakati unapoanza kutoa riwaya moja katika gazeti tayari umeiandika toka mwanzo mpaka mwisho?

ESh: Siyo. Naandika kila siku.

URJ: Kila siku kwa toleo linalokuja?

ESh: Mhm. Lakini najua yote. Kwa sababu zote ziko kichwani. Kwa hiyo mimi nayaweka kwenye karatasi.

URJ: Lakini ukipata maoni ya wasomaji yanaweza kuzingatiwa?

ESh: Ya.

URJ: Na unalenga watu gani kama wasomaji wako?

ESh: Watu wote, lakini wasomaji wangu sana sana ni wanawake, na, *you know*, watu wa katikati na kushuka chini. Lakini wanawake zaidi ndiyo wanasoma. Na wanawake ndiyo wanafanya watu wengine wasome.

URJ: Wanawaambia marafiki zao “ah, kuna kitu lazima usome”?

ESh: Ya.

URJ: Sasa jambo maalumu katika riwaya zako ni kwamba unaingiza Kiingereza. Hiyo unafanya kwa makusudi gani?

ESh: Nina*enjoy*. Unajua Kiingereza kiko hivi, Kiingereza kiko Kiswahili nakipenda, lakini Kiswahili kina maneno mengi. Nikitaka kusema jambo, inakwenda na maneno mengi sana. Kwa mfano ukitaka kueleza hisia fulani hivi, hisia, nikiisema kwa Kiingereza inakuwa *very pointing*. Sijui nitie mfano gani. Nikisema kwa Kiswahili kwanza nitatumia maneno mengi sana. Nikisema kwa Kiingereza nitatumia maneno machache. *How can I put it?* Kwa mfano, mtu akisema ‘*I’ll always love you*’, nikisema Kiswahili “nitakupenda siku zote”. Ukijaribu kuangalia ile kwenye hisia, Kiingereza kitachoma zaidi kuliko Kiswahili, ninavyofikiria. La pili ni ninawafundisha watu Kiingereza, yaani ninapojaribu kumfundisha mtu Kiingereza, na Kiswahili chake nakiweka. Anaposoma inamsaidia kidogo kuelewa Kiingereza.

URJ: Umepata maoni ya wasomaji juu ya jambo hilo?

ESh: Hiyo iko. Watu wengine wanapenda, wengine hawapendi. Pengine kuna *some spelling mistakes, some grammatical errors*. Sisi tunaofanya hizi kazi kuna kitu ambacho tunafahamu, kwamba *we have so many pessimistic people*, ambao wanaangalia ubaya wa kitu. Watu wa-

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chache wanaangalia *critically*. Ukiwaambia watu watoe mawazo yao watakuambia ubaya tu. Wachache sana watakuambia uzuri na ubaya. Kwa hiyo unatakiwa upuuze wale wanaokuambia ubaya. Kwa hiyo *comments* zipo. Wako watu ambao wanasema hii inatusaidia kuelewa Kiingereza, watu wengine wanasema haifai, toa, watu wa Kiswahili wanasema hapana kabisa usiweke. Kwa hiyo, ni vigumu kuridhisha watu wote.

URJ: Riwaya zako unazitoa katika magazeti na baadhi yake unazifanya kuwa vitabu baadaye. Faida iko katika upande gani hasa, kibiashara?

ESh: Mimi naona kama vitabu vinaongezea, kwa sababu umeshafanya biashara halafu unakuwa unacompile, halafu unatengeneza kitabu, naona kama vile unazidi kutengeneza faida zaidi. Kwa sababu ushauza kwenye gazeti, sasa unacompile tena, unatengeneza kitabu, ni *product* nyingine tu.

URJ: Na kitabu kina faida vile vile?

ESh: Kibiashara ina faida, lakini matatizo yake pia ni mengi. Lakini pia mimi, faida nyingine ya vitabu siyo hela, faida nyingine ni hii (anashika kitabu *Machizi na Damu* kilichopo mezani). Hii unaweza kuitunza siku zote za maisha yako. Mjukuu wako anaweza kuja kusoma hii. Lakini gazeti haliwezi kudumu.

URJ: Unachapisha vitabu vyako huko India. Ni kwa sababu gani?

ESh: Sababu kubwa ni kupunguza *cost* ya kitabu. *Printing costs in India* ziko chini kidogo.

URJ: Pamoja na usafirishaji bado gharama ni nafuu kuliko kuchapisha humu nchini?

ESh: Ya. Kwa sababu ukileta karatasi hapa unalipa kodi kubwa, *tax*. Lakini ukileta vitabu haulipi kodi.

URJ: Umechapisha nakala ngapi kwa kila kitabu?

ESh: Watanzania hawasomi sana vitabu. Wanasoma kidogo. Kwa hiyo kwa vitabu vyote viwili nafikiri tuliua kama kopi laki moja na kumi au ishirini.

URJ: Bado vipo katika stoo?

ESh: Hapana, sasa hivi tunafikiria kuchapisha tena.

URJ: Katika suala la Kiingereza, vile vile nimeona kwamba vichwa vya riwaya zako ni vya Kiingereza, na nimeona kwamba mtindo huu umeingia katika upande wa filamu vile vile.

ESh: Ya, ndiyo.

URJ: Unaweza kueleza ni kwa nini?

ESh: Sababu ni ile tu niliyokuwa nimekuambia. Nafikiri ni sababu hiyohiyo. Kiswahili chetu kina maneno machache. Kiswahili kinahitaji mkikuze zaidi kiwe na maneno mengi. *Choice* ya maneno ya Kiswahili ni ndogo. Unaweza kutaka kupeleka ujumbe fulani hivi, kwa Kiswahili

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ni kazi ngumu kupeleka, lakini kwa Kiingereza ni rahisi, yaani maneno ya Kiingereza ni matamu. Yanakuwa ni matamu kidogo kuliko Kiswahili.

URJ: Au labda ni suala la fesheni vile vile?

ESh: *It's not fashion, I don't believe it's fashion.* Kwa mfano kitabu hiki “*Love in a torn land*” (anashika kitabu kilichopo mezani¹⁰), hapa ungetaka maneno ya Kiswahili ungeandika maneno mengi sana. Umeelewa? Yaani inatupa shida kutafuta *titles*.

URJ: Mhm. Sasa wewe una kazi nyingi. Wewe ni mkurugenzi wa *Global Publishers*, unaandika riwaya, na vilevile unaandika hadithi za filamu.

ESh: Mimi siandiki *scripts*. Mimi ni *story writer*, mimi naandika vitabu halafu watu wanaandika *script*, wanafanya sinema.

URJ: Unawauzia hadithi zako?

ESh: Tunayo kampuni ya kutengeneza sinema, sisi, inaitwa *Ericom Limited*, inafanyaga sinema.

URJ: Swali la mwisho. Una mipango gani kwa baadaye?

ESh: Kukua zaidi kibiashara. Nataka kwenda dunia nzima. Kwa sababu ninaamini kitu kimoja: naamini watu ni watu. *People are people: if I can cry, you can cry. If I can smile, you can smile. If I can make somebody like home*, hapa, akafurahia riwaya, ina maana kuna mtu Ujerumani akafurahia riwaya. *Provided* hiyo riwaya imeandikwa kwa Kijerumani, siyo, nitapata Mjerumani akasoma. Kama nimeweza watu wa hapa, ina maana naweza watu wengine. Kama ninaelewa *culture* yao.

URJ: Hapa ningependa kuongeza swali moja. Riwaya zako zinapitia nchi nyingi, dunia nzima. Uliwahi kuziona mwenyewe?

ESh: Natumia *internet* kusachi.

URJ: Nakushukuru sana kwa kuongea nami.

ESh: Nakushukuru sana kwa muda wako. *Hopefully* utanitafutia mtu wa kutafsiri kitabu changu kwa Kijerumani.

¹⁰ *Love in a Torn Land: Joanna of Kurdistan: the True Story of a Freedom Fighter's Escape from Iraqi Vengeance*, a book by Jean Sasson (2007).

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English translation

URJ: First of all, could you briefly tell me about your history?

ESh: Mhm, my life history? Okay, I was born here, then I got my education here in Tanzania, and then I worked in Tanzania. But from the beginning I had the talent to write. Therefore, I used that throughout my life. I did do other things before. But I felt like writing. It was inside me. That's why I started to write. From when I started to write in 1998 until today, I write. Thus we started this company, me and my companion. And so we continue to write. I have already written books, not many, I think only three books. Others are in the newspapers, I write every day, different stories.

URJ: Mhm. Does this mean that you started to write while you were still young, or ...

ESh: No, I started to write in 98, but before that I was writing just like that, nothing more. I wrote, I gave it to somebody, he read it, that was it.

URJ: And it was in the year 98 that you published your story for the first time. Which newspaper was it?

ESh: Yes, it was in the paper *Uwazi*.

URJ: This means that you started publishing and writing novels at one time?

ESh : Yes.

URJ: What aim do you have in writing novels?

ESh: The aim is to try to write novels that are able to change people's lives. To help people to discover what is inside them. Not just novels that give the reader pleasure and that's it. Novels which are able to change a person's thinking, so that he or she believes that "I can start from here and get on". A person who has resigned, you give him or her new hope, through reading. And he or she will know that you can come from a completely difficult time or life, but still you can live like a king – possible. So, what I do is to try to impact on people's life.

URJ: How, in particular?

ESh: Many people here in our Third World have resigned. They think that they cannot arrive at being like you. And if they meet you, they think that you are better than them. That's in their minds. So, I write novels to give the black person power. To make him or her believe – if he or she reads to the end – that everybody has the opportunity to be successful. Without regard to your colour, without regard to your religion, without regard to your tribe. Everybody can, if he or she decides. Therefore, we write novels that if you read them, when you reach the end, you will be conditioned to say "yes, I can do it".

URJ: Aha, your first and most important message is that people should not resign?

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ESh: Mhm, people should change. Many people think that they are incapable. And I want people to wake up in the morning saying that they are able. My task is to build self-confidence, in the heart. And if you are self-confident, then you can go ahead and do things. Instead of sitting back, saying Germany will bring us money, England will bring us money, the white man will bring it. While you are sitting back. Every person has the opportunity to do something. So we are writing novels – it can be a love story at first, but in the end it will become apparent that it changes the mindsets of people.

URJ: When I read your book *Machosi na Damu*, I realised that you show also the badness of people who want to achieve a goal without caring if they hurt other people.

ESh: At the end of the day, the ending, for example in *Machosi na Damu*, it is the story of a person who has something he is seeking. Something is done to him, he lost his right. But there is a happy ending. Although there is a lot of trouble the person perseveres, he goes through a lot of trouble, one after another, actually he should give up, after all those problems, saying “I don’t want anymore”. But he says “it has to be done”. He goes through much trouble, he loses his family, for a long time he is in a coma, or something. But he believes in his dream, he believes that “I have to be there”.

URJ: That Imelda¹¹ also believed in achieving her goal, but she is a bad character.

ESh: Imelda was brought in because I wanted to have a coma, basically. Because the coma would not have happened had Imelda not been there. Imelda was like Judas Iscariot in the Bible. Judas Iscariot had to betray Jesus in order that man could become saved. People of this kind are there in the world, we can’t leave them out.

URJ: Where and how do you get the ideas for your stories?

ESh: They just come when I’m walking around. When I’m alone thinking, or when I see something.

URJ: Is it especially life, or maybe also films, other books, radio, or something else?

ESh: No. Life. Just life. Sometimes it is difficult to explain. Sometimes I can’t answer this question. But it is astonishing, we get an idea, it develops, it develops, it develops This matter is really difficult to explain. If you ask me how I did prepare for writing that book I can’t even remember. I can’t. First of all, sometimes you would have to read the book to me, to recount it to me in order that I remember it. But often it’s life. You pass somewhere and you observe something. You can drive in your car and see a child being hit by a car, a small child is hit by a car. And then he dies. He had been on his way to school. Now, you imagine how it will be when the poor parents hear about that. On the spot, suddenly, there develops something, vuuuuuu, you know.

¹¹ A character in *Machosi na Damu*.

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URJ: Do you read the works of your fellow writers who publish their stories in newspapers?

ESh: Not in the newspapers. Not much, in fact. I'm very busy. I don't have the time at all. However, I do read books a lot.

URJ: Can you mention books you read, those which you especially liked, be they in Swahili or in English or in another language?

ESh: I was reading, I have been influenced by somebody called Sidney Sheldon. I was reading a lot of Sidney Sheldon in the past. A lot.

URJ: When you were still at school?

ESh: When I was at school, ya.

URJ: How did you get those books?

ESh: I bought them in the book stores.

URJ: And others, maybe in Swahili?

ESh: Ya. Musiba, Elvis Musiba. Our elders, Elvis Musiba, Hammie Rajabu, and Katalambulla. Our elders of former times, who were writing when we were still children. *Kufa na Kupona*, books like that, *Njama*.

URJ: What components should be there in order to get an attractive story, I mean things like love, crime, maybe black magic?

ESh: I think it's explaining the truth. In order to be able to write something that will touch a person at his heart, at the part where happiness resides, where sadness resides. Now, in order to be able to write something that touches there, at the emotions, you have to know the life of the people. Therefore, when you write something it must be true. It should not be too much fiction. I mean, things that are possible, that people encounter every day.

URJ: Do you communicate with the readers? You do not put your telephone number in the newspapers.

ESh: *Emails*. Ya, they write. I meet them.

URJ: You meet them?

ESh: I meet them, yes. I go around.

URJ: Does that communication contribute to your writing of stories and novels?

ESh: Ya. They will tell you the truth.

URJ: Do you sometimes also get complaints?

ESh: Mhm. A lot. A lot, a lot.

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URJ: May you even change the development of the story because of the communication with readers?

ESh: Very much so.

URJ: Isn't it that when you start publishing a novel in a newspaper, you have already written it from the start to the end?

ESh: No. I write every day.

URJ: Every day for the next issue?

ESh: Mhm. But I know everything. Because everything is in my head. I just put it on the paper.

URJ: But when you get the comments of the readers you may consider them?

ESh: Ya.

URJ: And you aim at what kind of people as your readers?

ESh: All people, but my readers are especially women, and, you know, people from the middle class and below. But it is especially women who read. And the women make other people read too.

URJ: They tell their friends "ah, there is something, you must read it"?

ESh: Ya.

URJ: A special feature of your novels is that you insert English. For what purpose are you doing that?

ESh: I enjoy it. You know, English is, English is I like Swahili, but Swahili has many words. If I want to say something, it goes with very many words. For example, if you want to express a feeling, if I say it in English, it will be very pointing. I don't know what example I could give. If I say it in Swahili, first of all I will have to use many words. If I say it in English, I will use few words. How can I put it? For example, if somebody says "I'll always love you", if I say it in Swahili "nitakupenda siku zote". With regard to feelings, English will be more pointing than Swahili, I think. Secondly, I do it in order to teach people English, so, when I try to teach them English, I put the Swahili translation. When the reader reads it, it helps him a bit to understand English.

URJ: Have you got comments of readers about this matter?

ESh: Yes. Some people like it, others don't. Sometimes there are some spelling mistakes, some grammatical errors. We who are doing this work are aware of one thing: that we have so many pessimistic people who look at the negative side of a thing. Few people look at it critically. If you ask people to give their opinion, they will tell you only the bad things. Very few will tell you the good things and the bad things. Therefore you must not care about those

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who tell you the bad things. So, comments are there. There are people who say “this helps us to understand English,”, and there are others who say “it’s not appropriate, leave it”, Swahili people say “no, you should absolutely not put it in”. Therefore, it is difficult to satisfy everybody.

URJ: You publish your novels in newspapers and you make some of them into books afterwards. On which side do you gain more?

ESh: I think that the books add, because you have already made the business, afterwards you compile and produce a book. I think that you are going to add some profit. Because, you have already sold it in the newspaper, and now you compile, you produce a book. It’s just another product.

URJ: The book has also a profit?

ESh: There is a profit, but there are also many problems. But for me, another profit of the book is not the money, it is this (he takes the book *Machizi na Damu* in his hands, which is on the desk). This you can preserve for your whole life. Your grandchild can read it. But the newspaper cannot persist.

URJ: You print your books in India. For what reason?

ESh: A big reason is that this reduces the costs of the book. Printing costs in India are a bit lower.

URJ: Together with the transport, the costs are still lower than if you print here in the country?

ESh: Ya. Because, when you import paper you pay a big tax. But if you import books, you don’t pay tax.

URJ: How many copies did you print of each book?

ESh: Tanzanians don’t read books that much. They read a little. Therefore, for both books together we have sold like 110 000 or 120 000 copies.

URJ: Are there still some in store?

ESh: No, at this moment we are thinking of a reprint.

URJ: Regarding the question of English, I have noticed that the titles of your novels are in English, and I have also noticed that this has become the case for films too.

ESh: Ya, yes.

URJ: Can you explain the reason?

ESh: The reason is the same that I have told you. I think it is the same. Our Swahili has few words. Swahili needs to get expanded, so that it gets more words. The choice of words in Swahili is little. You might wish to convey a certain message, which in Swahili is difficult to

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convey, while in English it is easy. That is, the English words are sweet. They are a bit sweeter than in Swahili.

URJ: Or maybe it is also a matter of fashion?

ESh: It's not fashion, I don't believe it's fashion. For example, this book *Love in a Torn Land* (he takes the book that is on the desk¹²), here, if you wanted it in Swahili, you would need a lot of words. Do you understand? That gives us problems to find titles.

URJ: Mhm. You have a lot of work. You are the director of *Global Publishers*, you write novels, and you also write film scripts.

ESh: I don't write film scripts. I am a story writer. I write the books, and other people then write scripts, they make films.

URJ: Do you sell them your stories?

ESh: We have a company to produce the films, it is called *Ericom Limited*, and it makes the films.

URJ: A last question: what projects do you have for the future?

ESh: To grow further as a business. I want to go to the whole world. Because I believe in one thing: I believe that people are people. People are people: if I can cry, you can cry. If I can smile, you can smile. If I can bring somebody to like a novel at home, here, that means that in Germany there is somebody who likes it too. Provided that the novel is written in German I will get a German to read it, isn't it? If I can succeed with people from here, I can succeed with other people as well. Provided that I understand their culture.

URJ: At this point I would like to add one more question. Your novels are set in many countries, the whole world. Have you been able to visit them yourself?

ESh: I use the internet to search.

URJ: Thank you very much for talking to me.

ESh: Thank you very much for your time. Hopefully you will find me somebody to translate my book into German.

¹² *Love in a Torn Land: Joanna of Kurdistan: the True Story of a Freedom Fighter's Escape from Iraqi Vengeance*, a book by Jean Sasson (2007).

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