

**W**ives of the Leopard' que je traduirais en français par 'Les Épouses du Léopard' est peut-être le dernier livre paru sur le Danxome quoiqu'il soit publié par les Presses de l'Université de Virginie depuis 1998.<sup>2</sup> En parler maintenant près de dix ans après sa parution relève quelque peu de l'anachronisme, étant donné la rapidité avec laquelle les idées se renouvellent dans le milieu universitaire. Cependant, je suppose que pour plusieurs parmi nous le livre reste d'actualité pour essentiellement deux raisons : s'il est déjà vieux aux yeux des universitaires anglophones il n'est pas sûr qu'il soit encore bien connu parmi leurs homologues francophones. Ensuite, pour les Béninois que nous sommes, le livre soulève des questions si vitales qu'elles paraissent s'inscrire par delà le temps et l'espace. C'est ce qui justifie une présentation critique du livre du Professeur Edna Bay.

A plus d'un titre la démarche intellectuelle du Professeur Bay est inédite. Certes avant elle d'autres (et pas des moindres) ont écrit sur les femmes du Danxome.<sup>3</sup> Mais alors que ceux qui l'ont précédée ont tendance à focaliser notre attention sur le rôle joué par les Amazones de manière subtile, elle nous rappelle à l'ordre en nous montrant que les Amazones ne sont que l'arbre qui cache la forêt. En effet, elle élargit considérablement notre horizon sur la vie publique des femmes au Danxome en replaçant ce corps de soldats bien connu dans son cadre naturel : la vie grouillante des palais d'Abomey peuplés comme des termitières de milliers de femmes préposées à diverses tâches.<sup>4</sup> Le Professeur Bay nous présente ces richesses humaines comme un monde à part, organisé selon des principes déterminés et visant un certain équilibre entre le roi et sa *kpojito* ou reine-mère, les deux pôles centraux de cette savante architecture. Cet équilibre est lui-même le reflet de l'équilibre du monde articulé autour de la dualité primordiale entre le principe mâle et le principe femelle. Le Palais est donc comme un microcosme du royaume, théâtre élargi de l'union des contraires : Alladaxonu/Anato ; Femme/Homme ; Côte/Abomey ; Kutomè/Gbétomè.<sup>5</sup>

Mais la démarche intellectuelle du Professeur Bay est inédite pour une deuxième raison. Cette démarche marque une rupture en matière de méthode de traitement des sources dans la mesure où elle combine savamment une exploration exhaustive des sources écrites sur le Danxome avec une exploitation judicieuse de la tradition orale. Jusque-là nous avons été habitués à un mouvement de balancier entre les deux sources qui prétendent s'ignorer royalement. Par exemple, Robin Law et John Reid déclarent sans ambages leur scepticisme à l'égard des sources orales et produisent des ouvrages volumineux sur

## 'Les Épouses du Léopard' : Vers une Approche-Genre de L'histoire du Danxome<sup>1</sup> ?

Anselme Guezo

**Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey**  
by Edna G. Bay  
University of Virginia Press, 1998, 350pp. ISBN 0-8139-1791-3 – ISBN 0-8139-1792-1

la base de commentaires de récits de voyage et de livres de compte de compagnies commerciales européennes.<sup>6</sup> De son côté, Maurice Ahanhanzo Glèlè érigea sa monumentale reconstruction de l'histoire du Danxome seulement sur la tradition de la famille royale.<sup>7</sup> Le Professeur Bay vient de mettre fin à ce dialogue de sourds en nous administrant la preuve qu'il est possible de mettre à contribution ces deux sources dans une reconstruction scientifique de l'histoire du Danxome sans porter atteinte à l'objectivité historique. Leurs renseignements, loin de se contredire peuvent se compléter et se recouper valablement. A première vue, il ne paraît pas évident qu'une historienne expatriée pourrait mener à bon port une enquête aussi délicate sur le terrain sans tomber dans l'écueil de la superficialité. Qu'elle ait tiré son épingle du jeu de manière aussi élégante témoigne d'une bonne dose d'empathie, une qualité devenue rare aujourd'hui dans le milieu des Africanistes. Mais de quoi s'agit-il dans le livre ?

L'argument principal de cet ouvrage limpide, facilement accessible aux lecteurs qui ne pratiquent pas l'anglais comme leur première langue, c'est que le petit groupe des envahisseurs Alladaxonu fut confronté à leur arrivée sur le plateau d'Abomey à un grave problème de légitimité politique. Il s'agissait pour cette minorité dirigeante dans sa tentative de domination politique d'asseoir un pouvoir qui fût acceptable à la fois culturellement et politiquement à la majorité de la population autochtone. Pour ce faire, ils agirent sur un double registre. Au plan culturel ils essayaient de se rattacher aux populations Fon par une sorte de rafistolage de la lignée dynastique aboutissant à l'inclusion de Dako comme premier roi et en se dotant d'une origine mythique à partir du léopard, un mythe suffisamment répandu sur le plateau.<sup>8</sup> Au plan politique, la stratégie des Alladaxonu consiste à nouer de multiples alliances avec les autres groupes ethniques du plateau en se servant des femmes de la lignée royale réputées pour leur loyauté et leur liberté sexuelle, qualités qui se révélèrent nécessaires dans l'accroissement numérique du groupe.<sup>9</sup> En effet de manière

exceptionnelle dans un milieu patrilinéaire, les enfants de princesses sont d'office inclus dans la famille royale. Mais de manière plus générale, le rôle tampon joué par la suite par les *kpojito* s'inscrit dans la tradition de double allégeance caractéristique des femmes vivant dans des concessions polygamiques : ces femmes sont à la fois attachées aux intérêts de la famille de leurs époux et à ceux de leurs familles propres.<sup>10</sup>

C'est dans cette optique qu'il faut comprendre le rôle joué par la *kpojito* Nan Hwanjilé dans la stabilisation du royaume sous Tégébssou et des autres *kpojito* dans le renouvellement périodique des coalitions dirigeantes qui se sont succédés au pouvoir à Abomey.<sup>11</sup> Hwanjilé, une femme d'origine servile venue du pays Adja que le Professeur Bay rattache à la fois à Nan Adonon, la mère d'Agaja et à la princesse Aligbonon, réussit le tour de force d'affirmer le trône de Tégébssou grâce à la hardiesse de ses réformes religieuses. Ces réformes furent parachevées par l'introduction du culte de la double divinité Mahu/Lissa présidant aux destinées de Kutomè, le monde des morts. Ainsi, cette réforme vient confirmer au plan idéologique l'équilibre binaire difficilement acquis dans le monde réel. A l'instar de Mahu/Lissa, le roi et son *kpojito* forment un couple régnant sur le monde visible dont ils assurent la prospérité par leur bonne entente. Hwanjilé représente donc l'idéal de la *kpojito* qu'essayeront d'émuler toutes les autres *kpojito* en organisant au profit de leur partenaire royal une coalition d'hommes et de femmes qui se sont signalés par leurs qualités et leur fidélité au souverain régnant.

Selon le Professeur Bay, *kpojito*, qui étymologiquement signifie la génitrice du léopard ne qualifie pas la mère naturelle du roi. C'est un titre donné à l'élément féminin du pair régnant. Cependant, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle le fonctionnement normal de cette institution, conçue comme la clé de voûte de la vie politique du royaume, commença par prendre du plomb dans l'aile. Cette nouvelle tendance est le résultat d'une évolution politique allant dans le sens d'un

renforcement de l'autorité patriarcale. Elle fut marquée par la montée de la lignée royale soutenue par les cultes nouveaux du Fa et des Nésuxwé.<sup>12</sup> Mais une lecture plus attentive de l'histoire du Danxome montrerait que ces transformations dans la sphère idéologique viennent couronner une série de réformes ayant vu le jour dans le domaine économique.

Les acteurs principaux de ces réformes économiques sont les Européens, les Afro-Brésiens et les esclaves Yorouba qui devinrent les vecteurs de la nouvelle mentalité patriarcale. Mais la régression politique de la femme dans la culture Fon, dont les attributs traditionnels d'épouse commencent par prendre le pas sur ses attributs de sœur, n'est que le signe annonciateur du déclin du Danxome désormais confronté aux visées impérialistes de la France.<sup>13</sup> Cette tragédie se joua sur un fond de crise économique engendrée par l'incapacité de la traite d'huile de palme à compenser la baisse de revenus causée par l'abandon de la traite négrière.

Cette interprétation de l'histoire du Danxome, si brillante et si convaincante qu'elle soit, soulève de nombreux problèmes que j'essaierai de regrouper autour de trois axes pour des raisons de commodité :

- L'institution de la *kpojito*
- La question de la prospérité du Danxome au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle
- L'hypothèse d'un déclin du Danxome au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle

La *kpojito*, en tant que partenaire femelle du pair régnant, ne semble pas être une institution dont se souviennent encore les différents groupes sociaux vivant à Abomey. S'il a jamais existé un dédoublement de la personne du roi, c'est peut-être celui observé par les visiteurs européens du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui semble avoir été dicté par un réajustement rendu nécessaire par la réforme agraire des années 1840. Comme on le sait, cette réforme elle-même fut liée au développement de la traite d'huile de palme.<sup>14</sup> Avant cette période la tradition orale ne confirme aucun partage du pouvoir royal avec la *kpojito*. Selon des informations reçues auprès de certains membres de la famille royale, la *kpojito* est un titre porté par toutes celles qui ont engendré un roi. Certes on peut penser qu'avec la victoire définitive de l'ordre patrilinéaire au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle le souvenir du statu quo ante se fût effacé de la mémoire collective. Mais si tel était le cas la mémoire pieusement entretenue à Abomey de Nayé Adonon et de Nan Hwanjilé en serait elle aussi victime. Aujourd'hui, la terminologie de *kpojito* s'est même élargie pour couvrir toutes les femmes ayant donné naissance à des princes. Autrefois, après le décès de la mère du roi, la coutume voulait que son

considered as part and parcel of the royal pedigree. Generally speaking, the buffer role later played by the *kpojito* is consistent with the double allegiance exhibited by women living within polygamous family setups: they are usually promoting the interests of their husband's families as well as their own.<sup>10</sup>

This is the way one should understand the role played by *kpojito* Nan Hwanjilé in stabilizing the kingdom under the reign of Tegbesu, and by other *kpojitos* in the periodic reorganisation of the leadership teams that successively seized power in Abomey.<sup>11</sup> Hwanjilé, a woman of humble origin from Adja whose kinship to both Nan Adonon, Agaja's mother, and to Princess Aligbonon has been demonstrated by Professor Bay, achieved the daunting task of consolidating the rule of Tegbesu through bold religious reforms. These reforms culminated in the introduction of the worship of two divinities, Mahu and Lissa, who determine the destiny of Kutomé, the kingdom of the dead. Thus, this reform confirms the ideological belief in the binary balance that is difficult to achieve in the real world. Like Mahu/Lissa, the king and his *kpojito* constitute a couple that rule over and promote the prosperity of the visible world by sustaining its harmonious existence. Hwanjilé therefore constitutes the ideal *kpojito* that all other *kpojitos* shall emulate by organising, on behalf of their royal partner, a coalition of men and women that stood out by their character and their loyalty to the reigning king.

According to Professor Bay, *kpojito*, which translates into 'mother of leopard', does not apply to the king's biological mother. It is a title bestowed on the female partner of the ruling couple. However, in the nineteenth century, the normal functioning of this institution, which is considered as the nerve centre of the political life of the kingdom, was becoming burdensome. A new trend was borne out of the strengthening of patriarchal authority. Its characteristic was the rise of the royal lineage thanks to the introduction of new supportive cults, namely Fa and Nésuxwé.<sup>12</sup> However, a close look at the history of Danxome would reveal that the changes in the ideology are the culmination of a series of reforms that pertain to the economic domain.

The main promoters of these economic reforms are Europeans, Afro-Brazilians and former Yoruba slaves who became the upholders of the new patriarchal order. The loss of women's political influence in Fon culture, which manifested itself in the traditional role of a spouse overriding that of a sister; was a harbinger of the political and economic decline of Danxome. In the meantime, the kingdom was under the threat of the imperialist designs of France.<sup>13</sup> That tragedy unfolded against the background of an economic crisis that was caused by the failure of the palm oil trade to offset the loss of income that resulted from the discontinuation of the slave trade.

Brilliant and convincing as this interpretation of the history of Danxome may sound, I shall, for the sake of convenience, attempt to consider the issues arising from it under three headings:

- the *kpojito* institution;
- the prosperity of Danxome in the eighteenth century;
- the hypothesis of the decline of Danxome in the nineteenth century.

The *kpojito*, as the female partner of the ruling king, does not seem to be an institution that is still alive in the memory of the different social groups in Abomey. If the king was ever given a dual personality, this could only be in the minds of the

nineteenth century visitors from Europe and must have been influenced by a readjustment that was required by the agrarian reform of the 1840s. As we know, the reform itself was linked to the growth of the palm oil trade.<sup>14</sup> Before that period, there was no oral record confirming the fact that the king was sharing his power with the *kpojito*. Based on the information garnered from members of the royal family, the *kpojito* title is given to women who have mothered a king. Of course, it could be assumed that the effective entrenchment of the patriarchal order in the nineteenth century had removed the status quo ante from collective memory. Were that to be the case, the carefully preserved memory of Nayé Adonon and Nan Hwanjilé should not have survived.

Nowadays, the meaning of the term *kpojito* has even expanded to cover all mothers of princes. In the past, tradition had it that, following the demise of the king's mother, her position was to be occupied by a member of her family. It was therefore not unusual to see the position of *kpojito* being occupied, these days, by male descendants.<sup>15</sup> The most telling example is that of Daah Aligbonon who was often seen in public donning women's apparels. Naturally, the surrogate *kpojito* was granted all the privileges accorded to the real female *kpojito* during official ceremonies. That did not mean that the female *kpojito* played a political role. The honour bestowed on the title bearer derives totally from the fact that she is the king's mother, or a surrogate king's mother.

Exceptionally and thanks to her religious clout, *Kpojito* Hwanjilé, biological mother of Tegbesu, played an important political part in the process of stabilizing the kingdom in the wake of the political crisis that shook it during the first half of the nineteenth century. Beside Hwanjilé and Nayé Adonon, who were highly revered in Abomey tradition, hardly had any other *kpojito* enjoyed the same political or cultural stature. One cannot therefore conclude that each and every *kpojito* ruled in partnership with her son. It could not have been otherwise, since succession to the Abomey throne is strictly patrilineal. In neighbouring patrilineal kingdoms, where, as in Danxome, there are matrilineal traditions that lay emphasis on the role of women, this role is purely symbolic and is limited to cultural events such as granting of names to the Wassangari princes by the Gnon Kogui.<sup>16</sup> It is only in matrilineal societies such as among the western neighbours, the Akan, where the queen-mother has the last word regarding the choice of the next king, that she plays a highly political role. One can recall that the function of the queen-mother among the Akan can be performed by the mother of the next king or by one of the aunts or sisters, based on their position in the order of succession.

In Danxome, the *kpojito* enjoys no visible role, either in the process of choosing the Vidaxo who is the heir apparent or in the crowning ceremony of the king.<sup>17</sup> This fascinating book leaves the reader with a universal perception of women that is consistent with the author's own understanding but has no bearing on the actual status of women in nineteenth century Danxome. Meanwhile, it is an established fact that the modern concept of women derived from the successful cross fertilisation of Roman law and Germanic customary law concepts that bestowed a privileged status on women. This special concept was transplanted to America, and was carefully sustained by the first batch of European migrants, made mainly of males for whom women had a

high value, given their scarcity. In the case of Danxome, where the circumstances of the slave trade imposed a different kind of scarcity, namely of men, it would not be perhaps judicious to look for the same interpretation regarding women.

The idea of a golden age of the Fon culture, during which women enjoyed great authority and which is limited to the eighteenth century only, also seemed to be drawn from mythology. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Alladaxonu enjoyed no respite from the fierce struggle for their survival. As stated in Werner Peukert's book, slave trade statistics revealed that Danxome had never reached the number of slaves recorded in the older kingdoms of Allada and Ouidah.<sup>18</sup> What is more, the political crisis that followed the conquest of the coastal area by Agaja and the Yoruba invasions continued until 1740, not to mention the Hweda's guerrilla attacks that lasted much longer.<sup>19</sup> A more cautious analysis would show that there were only fifty years left for the partnership between the king and his *kpojito*, suggested by Professor Bay, to be forged.

After the year 1740, Tegbesu, with the assistance of his mother, *Kpojito* Hwanjilé, made an attempt to usher stability into the kingdom. However the efforts deployed in the economic sector failed to produce positive results, given the fact that his rule coincided with the shifting of European powers from the Slaves Coast to the Gold Coast following their restructuring of the trans-atlantic trade.<sup>20</sup> The situation became more complicated in the twilight of his reign, forcing him to wage a desperate fight against the increasing diversion of trade to the Kingdom of Porto-Novo; even his successor Kpengla did not succeed in stemming this trend.<sup>21</sup> It is known that the crisis got acute under Kpengla and his successor Agonglo, nearly causing the fall of the entire kingdom. Where then is the prosperity that contrasted with the decline of resources of the 19th century? Besides the deceptive calm, signalling stormy days ahead following the religious reforms carried out by Nan Hwanjilé, all regimes after Tegbesu have faced palace coups. Except for Agonglo, whose rule was cut short by his assassination, all other successors to the throne in the eighteenth century were confronted with problems, unlike those in the nineteenth century, whose succession from father to son ran smoothly.<sup>22</sup>

It seems rather far-fetched to suggest that the fortunes of the Abomey kingdom declined in the nineteenth century, given the overall prevailing context of lean days. The assumption, bequeathed by the abolitionists, that slave trade is often associated with prosperity is traceable to a lack of understanding of the process of acquisition of slaves. If, as numerous studies attest, the king is a major supplier of slaves, the fact remains that he is not the only one. Furthermore, these slaves are not exclusively spoils of war that only the king could wage. If, therefore, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot be compared

in terms of prosperity and stability, it becomes hard to validate the argument that the decline of Danxome in the nineteenth century was a result of its breach of the *kpojito* system. The war waged by the people of Dahomey against the French and their loyalty to Béhanzin confirm beyond any doubt that the culture was very much alive, notwithstanding the emergence of fresh class contradictions following the introduction of the palm oil trade.<sup>23</sup>

Incidentally, the litmus test for the 'deconstructionists', or for the process of deconstruction, is their attitude regarding historical causality. Is the application of causality limited to ideology only or to all systems? Interestingly, one can now recall the example of Michel Foucault attempting to trace, in *Les Mots et les Choses*, the intellectual development of Europe over many centuries without the slightest reference to the economic system underpinning such development. In the absence of total causality, proponents of this analytical method quite often fall back on 'diffusionism' as a way of explaining history. Thus, to explain the decline of Danxome, Professor Bay refers to foreign agents who, in her view, were the bearers of the new patriarchal mentality. The Fon culture has always been a cosmopolitan one, thus it would be hard to prove that eighteenth century Danxome is less patriarchal than nineteenth century Danxome. The acceptance of new cults such as Nésuxwé and Fa could also be explained by the coming to light of contradictions underpinning the economic domain. However, Professor Bay did not volunteer much information on this. It is only in the penultimate page of her book (p. 320) that she partially lifted the veil covering the economic system of which Danxome is only a link, which she calls commercial capitalism.<sup>24</sup>

Probably out of the inhibition induced by political correctness, she remains vague on the real aspects of this commercial capitalism. What manner of capitalism is this that sells its children, and indulges in making human sacrifices without any qualms? Tackling these issues effectively would entail a complete change of perspective, that is, instead of looking at the structure through an institution, namely the *kpojito*, one should look at this institution as a component of a structure confronted with the problem of diachrony.

Clearly, these few comments do not, in any way, diminish the quality of Professor Bay's book; and I do recommend its adoption by institutions of learning. In spite of this reader's irritation in the face of inconsistent uses of the expressions 'palm oil' and 'oil palm', and of the insufficient references to buttress serious assertions, and what I consider to be a wrong definition of 'Galobas', and the slight discomfort of the Fon listener in hearing 'Badahu' in place of 'Bahadu', one can still endorse the conclusion reached by Professor Curtin that *Wives of Leopard* is by far the best book that has ever been written on Danxome.

## Notes

\* This English version of the French review has been included in this issue in view of the fact that the book was written by an Anglophone and published by an English language publisher. [Editor]

<sup>1</sup> The first version of this text was presented at the academic review day of the Department of History and Archaeology on 15 June 2003. I wish to express my gratitude to all the colleagues who contributed to the discussion generated by the presentation. Their inputs have contributed to the enrichment of the rather rough original text.

<sup>2</sup> G. Edna Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Preston Blier, 'The Path of the Leopard: Motherhood and Majesty in Early Danxome', *Journal of African History*, 36, no.3 (1995), 391-417; Hélène d'Almeida-

one supreme party, CCM, set the stage for the further dilution of the powers of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council and the House of Representatives, which had come into being under the new constitutional dispensation ushered in by Jumbe.

In the wake of voices of discontent in Zanzibar (the economy was weak, shortages were a common feature, Jumbe's profligacy in spending on things like a presidential jet was unpopular), many on the islands believed, rightly or wrongly, that Zanzibar was being exploited and fettered by the mainland, and that if Zanzibar had greater autonomy this would not be the case. When Jumbe, in an attempt to respond to this challenge, and perhaps to further consolidate and secure his hold on power, started consulting legal minds with a view to effecting greater autonomy by instituting a separate government for Zanzibar, he was 'tried' in a meeting of the National Executive Committee of CCM and forced to resign all his official positions: Vice President of the Union, Vice Chairman of the party; President of Zanzibar, and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

The effect of this event has come to spawn new dissensions among Zanzibari politicians and commentators of varying political persuasions. Particularly resented is the practice of CCM imposing on Zanzibar leaders 'made in Dodoma'. Matters were not helped by the repeat of the same when, in 2000, the party once again chose as candidate for the Zanzibar presidential election who had failed to get the endorsement of the Zanzibar caucus of CCM. It is easy to speculate that if this practice is not tempered, these dissensions may one day come to a head with dire consequences for the Union. Already, the removal of the president of Zanzibar as automatic vice president of the Union has created a lot of rancour among many Zanzibaris.

In the conclusion, Shivji returns to the origins of the Union and the role played by the imperial powers to bring it about; at the same time, he brings into sharp contrast the contending views held by Nkrumah and Nyerere. On matters internal to the Union, he recaps his presentation of the secrecy in which the negotiations for the Union were shrouded and the weakness of the consultative process undertaken, which informed the disgruntlement expressed during the constitutional debate of the early 1980s, which indirectly brought about Jumbe's downfall. Shivji insists, with reason, that for a union to have legitimacy, and therefore sustainability, it must be anchored on the consent of the people affected and involve the equitable distribution of power. Nyerere, according to Shivji, did not allow this to happen, and he punished Jumbe when he tried to raise the issue.

Worse, Nyerere's successors did not take any steps to rectify the situation; instead, they reversed even those progressive gains he had registered in furthering the aims of the Pan-African agenda, leading to the current state where the country has slid back into narrow nationalisms based on race, ethnicity, indigeness and culture, even as we are witnessing elsewhere a resurgence of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. He concludes, with a quote from Nyerere:

*Africa must unite. This was the title of one of Kwame Nkrumah's books. That call is more urgent today than ever before. Together, we the peoples of Africa will be incomparably stronger internationally than we are now with our multiplicity of unviable states. The needs of our separate countries can be, and are being, ignored by the rich and powerful. The result is that Africa is being marginalised.*

Issa Shivji has to be congratulated on this tremendous contribution to the debate on Pan-Africanism in general and the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar in particular. This work that must surely qualify as his *magnum opus* (for now, that is, as there is no telling what he might come out with in the future.) There can be little disagreement with what he posits as the overriding urgency of the unity of African states if the continent is to survive in the hostile world of imperialism, now under the guise of globalisation.

The position he takes on the great debate between Nkrumah and Nyerere (African Union Government now vs. a step by step approach) has been with us for quite some time now and the jury seems to be still out. Shivji's new role as the first Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Professor in Pan-African Studies will undoubtedly afford him ample space to guide us in further deliberation on this matter, as there is much to be said for both sides of the argument.

The calls for unity we hear from individuals like Muammar Gaddafi come across increasingly as quirky, quixotic and capricious, unable to inspire serious consideration. Yet the yearning for unity among our peoples, our common recognition across the African continent that we share a common history and a common destiny, the realisation that we must either unite or perish in this world of adversity, must impel us to make that unity a reality. Forms may be debated but the principle remains unassailable.

Concerning the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, politicians, researchers and those who want to know where we came from, where we are and where we might be heading to, will want to read this book. To be sure, this book will not be popular with our rulers, and I suspect it was not intended to be, because it raises too many issues that will make them uncomfortable.

Now CCM seems to have settled into the practice of picking Zanzibar's leaders in Dodoma, without regard for the views of the Zanzibaris themselves. Need we say that this does not augur well for the future of the Union? Did not someone say that doing the same thing, the same way, over and over again and expecting different outcomes, is a sign of insanity?

Will Shivji's book stir a political hornet's nest? Maybe, but the sting of the hornets thus disturbed may prove the medicine we need to cure an otherwise more painful ailment. Some readers may find his treatment of some leading characters in the narrative objectionable, and these objections may come from different sources, but maybe that is something we all should learn to live with.

Shivji's handling of the role played by Mwalimu may be found by some to be a trifle iconoclastic as he shows him to be a scheming Machiavelli with few scruples when pursuing his political ends. Lese-majesty? Let the reader be the judge. We have the misfortune of never having had the opportunity to read Nyerere himself on a number of issues discussed in this book, or even to have had Nyerere interviewed seriously by an African writer of Shivji's stature. Also, those who lived through those heady days and have a first-hand story to tell are getting old and may not be with us for long. But Shivji has given anyone who thinks they can add something to what we already know (or even dispute what Shivji is saying) a solid starting bloc.

This book is a masterpiece, a must read.

