

Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie
(The Swahili between Africa and Arabia)

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Translation of cover blurb

Who are the Muslims of this geographical space situated at the confluence of Africa and Arabia? How do the communities function, dispersed as they are over the whole of the East African littoral from Somalia to Mozambique, and encompassing Kenya, Tanzania and the Comoros?

It is to these questions that we have sought to provide an answer, while respecting the ethnic diversity which give to the Swahili their particular configuration and which give value to the ancient social and cultural networks which structure the area.

These open networks - fluid, unstable, without precise limits - are in effect at the heart of the Swahili reality, since it is above all thanks to them that the majority of exchanges between different groups are established. But the originality of these networks lies also in their double dimension. This allows the groups the possibility of being at one and the same time close to their ethnic and social origins, and yet able to distance themselves from them in favour of wider relations, such as exogamous marriages and commercial or religious activities covering a broad geographical area.

The studies brought together here thus invite a dynamic knowledge of Swahili groups, a knowledge which, thanks to the bringing together of separate information, progresses towards a better understanding of these complex communities, which are always in the process of growing, unmaking and transforming themselves.

Addendum

The first Anglo-French Swahili Workshop (Table Ronde Swahili) took place in Paris in 1989, and its theme was 'Social Stratification in Swahili Society' (Parkin and Constantin 1989). Two years later, a conference was held on 'Networks and Exchanges in the Coastal Societies of East Africa' (Le Guennec-Coppens and Caplan, 1991), which resulted in the present volume.

References

Parkin, David and François Constantin (eds.), 1989 *Social Stratification in Swahili Society* special edition of *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 59. 2.