



# The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya

*Edited by*  
Wanjala S. Nasong'o  
Maurice N. Amutabi  
Toyin Falola

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Wanjala S. Nasong'o  
Rhodes College  
Memphis, TN, USA

Maurice N. Amutabi  
Technical University of Kenya  
Nairobi, Kenya

Toyin Falola  
Department of History  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX, USA

ISBN 978-3-031-15853-7      ISBN 978-3-031-15854-4 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15854-4>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## PREFACE

In recent years, the Republic of Kenya has distinguished itself as one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite lacking the opportunities of booming populations of other sub-Saharan African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Nigeria, Kenya has nevertheless found itself a spot among the top economies in Africa. Aside from these, Kenya is a front-runner in the continent's financial technology sector, especially in the mobile money sub-sector. Despite Kenya's established status as one of the foremost economies and political giants in Africa, little has been written about the potential and opportunities in the country outside of the country's indigenous literature. This book attempts to showcase the country's importance beyond its national borders.

The volume comes out at a very opportune moment in the history of Kenya. In 2023 the country will be celebrating sixty years since independence in 1963 and yet the country has not developed a comprehensive text on all sectors of development. Many books on the market have not been comprehensive in representing marginalized parts of Kenya such as northern Kenya, as well as economic pursuits such as pastoralism and fishing. In the past, texts have been comprehensive in the analysis of themes such as gender, environment, and corruption, among others. The *Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya* is an advantaged and well-grounded work that goes beyond a chronology of events, providing a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of data which is contextualized in terms of place and role in the history of Kenya.

In the thirty-four chapters that comprise the *Handbook of Contemporary Kenya*, the authors explore different aspects of its society's national history, culture, economics, politics, and environment. Part I of the book comprising Chaps. 2 through 9 explores independence and the political economy of development. Part II of the book covering Chaps. 10–23 focuses on issues of environment, globalization, gender, and society. It assesses different aspects of post-colonial Kenya's socio-cultural, political, and economic histories, including the country's indigenous knowledge, sports, environmental policies, ethnicity, and security sector. The involvement of special groups such as women,

youth, and civil society is also examined. Part III of the book covering Chaps. 24–34 examines the external context, critically evaluating the impact of the external context on Kenya and Kenya’s contribution to the global political economy.

The discourse in this handbook is focused on the country’s present histories, including the country’s trajectories of development and future imaginations. The book’s themes, research methods, and styles of writing are diverse. Beyond merely narrating the trajectories of development in the country, the authors go further to analyze data, make scientific inquiries, and use existing data to make future predictions, using multiple multidisciplinary perspectives.

Prior to the publication of this handbook, no book had so comprehensively examined the state of contemporary Kenya. While a breadth of the previously existing literature has examined different aspects of the country’s history or its present political, economic, and cultural developments, there has never been such a book as this, with a bird’s eye view of different terrains and trajectories of the country’s development. Drawing from the proficient knowledge of humanities and social science scholars, this book is rich in diverse perspectives, imaginations, research methods, and styles of writing. The thirty-two scholars who are involved in writing and editing this book are drawn from multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, with decades of experience in the specific topics they have written about. Most of the scholars are of Kenyan nationality or with years of experience in the Kenyan tertiary education system. The few writers who are neither nationals nor scholars in its education system have acquired years of experience in African history or African studies, thus establishing their credibility and authority in participating in writing this book.

*The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya* is rich with information on Kenyan society. Its critical approach to the diverse ideas, themes, and discourses raised can open up opportunities for further debates and investigations in subsequent literature. The writers and editors of this book hope that historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, including students of any of these or related disciplines, plus policymakers and other interested readers find this book valuable in their exploration or research of contemporary Kenyan society.

Memphis, TN, USA  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Austin, TX, USA

Wanjala S. Nasong’o  
Maurice N. Amutabi  
Toyin Falola

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# Kiswahili in Kenya: Broken Language and Broken Promises

*Ken Walibora Waliaula*

## INTRODUCTION

Kenyan scholar Rocha Chimera's accurate assertion in his *Kiswahili: Past, Present and Future Horizons* (1997: 1) that "Kiswahili can claim to be the East and Central African region's foremost language of wider communication" has been borne out more than two decades after it was made. The status of Kiswahili in East and Central Africa, of which Kenya is a part, and indeed the language's attraction across Africa and beyond have continued to increase in leaps and bounds in the last two decades or so. The clamor for making Kiswahili the language of wider communication in the continent of Africa has been increasing exponentially. Wole Soyinka can be singled out as one of the earliest consistent and prominent proponents of Kiswahili as Africa's "continental language," a position he has tenaciously held on to since the 1970s. Lately, even Julius Malema, the fiery South African politician and leader of the Economic Freedom Party (EF), has joined the bandwagon of advocates for Kiswahili as the language of wider communication in Africa, going by his utterances in 2018. More than two decades since Chimera's claim, Kiswahili has made more significant strides than was ever envisaged. Kiswahili became a working language of the African Union in 2004 and the lingua franca of the revived East African Community (EAC) in 2015. South Africa has decided to start teaching Kiswahili in its schools from 2020. In East Africa, the cradle of Kiswahili, the

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K. W. Waliaula (✉)  
Riara University, Nairobi, Kenya

East African legislature went as far as recommending that Kiswahili be made one of the official languages of the community. The EAC launched the East African Kiswahili to “coordinate and promote the development and use of Kiswahili for regional and international interaction for political, economic, social, educational, scientific and technological development of the EAC Partner States” (EAKC, 2015: 1).

It is significant that Professor Kenneth Inyani Simala, the first person to clinch the position of executive secretary of the East African Kiswahili Commission, is Kenyan. The position was competitive and open to any qualified candidate from the EAC, but it was a Kenyan that emerged the stellar candidate. Headquartered in the semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar, the commission continues to render services to the entire EAC region and beyond. In July 2019, the commission teamed up with the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) under the auspices of the African Union to prepare the Dar es Salaam Frame of Action, upon whose basis all African leaders will hopefully work towards fulfilling Soyinka’s dream of seeing Kiswahili become the authentic continental language. It bears stating that in selecting a Kenyan for the inaugural position of executive secretary of the Kiswahili Commission, the EAC partner states, each self-interested, as all states are in the global world, were pitted in an inter-state contest whereby the nationalistic and inter-state politics and dynamics intertwined. And although the individual leadership skills, scholarship, initiative, and aptitude of the candidates on offer may have determined their performance, one cannot entirely rule out the magnitude of the role of their home states in contributing to Kiswahili in general, thereby providing the candidates with the experiential capital necessary for the promotion of the language. In this regard, the uneven actions and attitudes in the EAC partner states when it comes to promoting Kiswahili would place Kenya and Tanzania at the very top. It was, therefore, generally expected that the person at the helm of the Kiswahili Commission would inevitably come from Kenya or Tanzania.

Kenya and Tanzania have historically always been in the vanguard of the development and spread of Kiswahili. This chapter is dedicated to assessing the status of Kiswahili in Kenya in a number of domains. Yet it bears stating that Tanzania would be necessarily mentioned from time to time, albeit tangentially and for comparative purposes. For a start, it is worth comparing at the very outset the status of Kiswahili as an official language in Kenya and its neighboring states, Tanzania included. Chapter Two articles 7 (1) and (2) of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya states:

1. The national language of the Republic is Kiswahili.
2. The official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English.

The Kenyan Constitution thus unequivocally stipulates the role and status of Kiswahili vis-à-vis English, noting, for instance, that Kiswahili is the sole national language which English is not. The role and status of Kiswahili as the

national language means it is the principal trans-ethnic language of communication for more than 50 million Kenyans at home and abroad. It is *the* language of social interaction at weddings, funerals, get-togethers, dating, and public and private functions. Furthermore, Kiswahili enjoys pride of place with English as one of the two official languages. In contrast, the Tanzanian constitution is silent about the status of Kiswahili, even though in practice the language is the lingua franca, national language and official language of Kenya's southern neighbor (Mulokozi, 2011: 15). Kenya in this regard comes across as the first country ever to constitutionalize the dual role of Kiswahili as both the national and official language. But as I will soon demonstrate, the case of Kiswahili in Kenya is that of a broken language and broken promises.

### KISWAHILI ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Several theories have been advanced to account for the emergence of Kiswahili. David Massamba (2002) has outlined at least five possible explanations of what we may call the “academic myths of origin” of the Kiswahili language. Myths because no one can say with exactitude that this is when, how, and where Kiswahili started in this wild-goose chase of the shadows of origin. According to Massamba, these mostly implausible explanations include: (1) the hypothesis that Kiswahili is a pidgin language resulting from local Bantu and Arabic fusion, of which the Arabic component is the most dominant; (2) Kiswahili is the outcome of a fusion of Cushite languages and Arabic; (3) Kiswahili is an admixture of Cushitic languages; (4) Kiswahili is a Bantu fusion of a number of Bantu languages; and lastly, (5) that Kiswahili was always already there as a Bantu language. Shihabudin Chiraghdin (1977) and Ileri Mbaabu (1985) subscribe to this last school of thought, maintaining that Kiswahili has African roots among the Bantu people on the Kenyan coast.<sup>1</sup> Mbaabu asserts that the Kiswahili language was originally called Kingozi and its speakers Wangozi. Mbaabu explains:

The Swahilis were traditionally known as Wangozi. The name comes from Ngozi hide or skin which the old Swahili claim to have been their measure for a piece of land. After slaughtering a bull, they took the wet skin and cut it into a long strip which was used to measure the length and breadth of a piece of land. (Mbaabu, 1985: 2)

The nomenclature of Wangozi (the people) and Kiswahili (the language) is said to have changed to Waswahili and Kiswahili at the advent of Arab traders on the East African coast. Those who subscribe to this school of thought contend that the Arabs referred to the natives they found on the Kenyan coast as Suahel—“people of the coast” or “coastal dwellers.” Another explanation decouples the term “Swahili” from Arabic origin by claiming it is autochthonous, derived as it is from the expression “Siwa hili” meaning “this island” (Walibora, 2019: 305). However, despite the undeniably ubiquitous presence

of Kiswahili in Kenya and beyond, the identity of the Waswahili people has often generated heated debates over the last half a century, with some casting doubt on the existence of this ethnicity. This quandary of identity is best illustrated by a widely publicized incidence of official misinformation when the Kenyan ministry of tourism claimed in 1974 that there were absolutely no such people as the Waswahili in Kenya or anywhere for that matter (Walibora, 2019: 306). Thankfully, that anomaly has since been rectified with, for instance, the 2019 population census listing the Waswahili as one of the 44 ethnic groups in Kenya. Indeed, it has been proven that the settlement of the Bantu-speaking Waswahili at the coast preceded the arrival of the Arabs between the sixth and ninth centuries after Christ (Massamba, 2002: 92).

What is interesting is that because of historical exigencies and colonial arbitrariness, none of the so-called northern dialects of Kiswahili, such as Kiamu of Lamu, Kipate of Pate, Kisiu of Siu, Kivanga of Vanga, or Kimvita of Mombasa, would ascend to the status of Kenya's national and official language. The Kiunguja Kiswahili dialect of Zanzibar was selected to be the Standard Kiswahili much to the chagrin of speakers of Kenyan Kiswahili dialects, especially of Kimvita. How did this come about?

The choice of the Kiunguja dialect as the standard version of Kiswahili was an imposition of the colonial dispensation. In the precolonial era, the various dialects of Kiswahili grew organically as the Waswahili interacted with themselves and non-Waswahili because of spatial and temporal considerations in the coastal stretch of Swahiland from Mogadishu in Somalia to the North to Kilwa in Tanzania to the South as well as the Indian Ocean islands. Kiswahili spread to mainland Kenya, as in the rest of the East and Central Africa region, through Waswahili traders. The Waswahili and Arab traders from the coast entered the hinterland with their Kamba middlemen and inevitably used any number of northern Kiswahili dialects. On the other hand, the coastal traders who penetrated what is now the Tanzanian coast used, in the main, the southern Kiswahili dialects. The initial spread of Kiswahili in Kenya as elsewhere was therefore as a trans-ethnic language of trade. It would seem this trade impetus for the use and spread of the language had little to do with the variety used in a given situation so long as the variety served its purpose as a vehicle of business transactions.

Things would soon change dramatically at the advent of colonial rule in East Africa. The outcome of the partition of Africa in the Berlin conference of 1884–1885 was that Kenya was given to the British while what is now Tanzania was given to the Germans. The Germans used Kiswahili as the official language in Tanzania until the territory was handed over to the British following World War I. Language and education policies of the British and Germans before their departure, employed separately and collectively, did contribute significantly to the anatomy of Kiswahili as it is now in Kenya and Tanzania, the two foremost Kiswahili-speaking countries in the world, and indeed the state and status of modern Kiswahili in East Africa and beyond. Initially, the British had no qualms about allowing the use of Kiswahili as a language of instruction in

Kenyan schools. In fact, they encouraged Kiswahili as a medium of education at the basic education level, reserving English for themselves and selected African elites. Kiswahili was then the language of interaction with African laborers and riffraffs, while English remained the language of prestige and status. In other words, Kiswahili became the language of interaction with the masses of uneducated Kenyans, with the British forming their own version of Kiswahili called KiSettla. As Francis N. Njubi opines:

The colonial intervention in the structural development of Kiswahili in Kenya was contradictory, episodic and self-serving. Language policy was adjusted frequently according to circumstances. The use of Kiswahili as the language of instruction in schools was not motivated by a need for mass literacy, but by the administration's need for literate workers in district offices, police stations and the military. (Njubi, 2009: 117)

Despite the strides made over nearly 60 years of independence, including recognition of Kiswahili in the constitutional dispensation, some of these colonial attitudes, particularly the belief that English is a superior status symbol, persist, as we shall soon see.

The British promotion of Kiswahili soon waned when they realized its potential as a tool for political mass mobilization against them. In Kenya, as in Tanzania, Kiswahili became a unifying linguistic force of the multiethnic masses of indigenous peoples toiling under colonial rule. This realization was the impetus behind the British change of heart, prompting them to quickly switch tack, and embark on the use of English as a language of instruction in schools in Kenya. Of course, the intended diminution of the use and status of Kiswahili did not stem the tide of the anti-colonial struggle, which culminated in the Mau war of independence, which Caroline Elkins (2005) characterizes as one of the most atrocious and bloodiest wars of liberation in the colonial era.

When the British turned to Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in schools, they realized that there were far too many dialects on offer. This problem first came to the fore when the Christian Missionaries both in Kenya and in Tanzania found themselves at the crossroads as to which Kiswahili to use in their evangelizing mission. The Church Mission Society (CMS) headquartered at Rabai Mpya on the Kenyan coast and the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) stationed in Zanzibar both found Kiswahili a reliable and solid proselytizing tool because it was "a language already rich in religious lexicon and the settlers used it ... to keep Africans at a distance" (Njubi, 2009: 117). But the multiplicity of dialects was a challenge. The Christian missionaries and the colonial administration in East Africa, being Siamese twins of sorts, worked together to formulate a mechanism for selecting one universal Kiswahili variety. At the same time, the question of orthography needed to be addressed as early Kiswahili manuscripts were in the Arab script, which the European colonials did not comprehend or prefer. This led to the formation in 1930 of the

Inter-territorial Language Committee, a forerunner to the Simala-led East African Kiswahili Commission (EAKC) (Marshall, 2015).

It is this British colonial-sponsored Language Committee with no African representation that selected the Kiunguja dialect as Standard Kiswahili, relegating Kimvita of Mombasa and Kiamu of Lamu to relative oblivion, despite the two dialects' rich poetic histories and properties. This resulted in the diminution of the possibility of publishing mainstream literature and books in the Kiamu and Kimvita. Publications in these Kenyan dialects have generally been few and far between. One of the notable publications was a bilingual Swahili-English dictionary featuring the Kimvita dialect in 1882 by German Missionary Johannes Ludwig Krapf. This inaugural bilingual Swahili-English dictionary was revised and reissued by Rev. Cannon Binnes in 1925. Some newspaper articles in Kimvita by Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui in the early 1930s and one or two translations of the Q'uran in Kimvita gesture at feeble attempts to mainstream these neglected dialects (Mazrui, 2017). Up until now, poetry remains perhaps the only genre in which the northern Kiswahili dialects are preserved, with the verbal dexterity and felicity of the native speakers of these dialects waning by the day.

It is instructive that since Krapf's dictionary in 1882, little effort has been made to research the northern dialects, not least publish monolingual or bilingual dictionaries in them. This is in contrast to the autonomous island of Zanzibar whose recent national culturalist zeitgeist has energized it to publish monolingual dictionaries in Kipemba, Kimakunduchi, and Kitumbatu dialects. In a sense, the impetus to develop and promote other dialects dissipated and disappeared in Kenya as in mainland Tanzania (whose dialects include Kimgao, Kimtang'ata, and Kimrima), following the elevation of the Zanzibar variety of Kiswahili. The imposition of the Kiunguja dialect as the Standard Kiswahili may not have necessarily become a death knell to dialects of Kiswahili in Kenya, but it has certainly contributed to the diminution of their value and appeal. I have personally noticed over the decades how less and less Kimvita is spoken on the streets of Mombasa. Moreover, it would now seem evident that there are today no more speakers of Kijomvu at Jomvu Kuu or Changamwe, the traditional locus of the dialect, in the west of the island of Mombasa. Perhaps, it is for this fear of erasure that Kenyan opponents of Kiunguja such as Abdallah Khalid (1977) would write in defense of Kimvita with vitriol and venom.

Nonetheless, the journey Kiswahili has taken need not be read as mere gloom and doom, not even the European colonial imposition of Standard Kiswahili on the Waswahili on the Kenyan coast or non-native Kiswahili speakers living further in the hinterland. It really does not matter whether Kenyans would generally use *kichefufufu* for "nausea" as the Zanzibaris would, instead of *kitefufufu* as Kimvita speakers do. At any rate, in their informal day-to-day speech, Kenyans are known to routinely abandon the classroom Standard Kiswahili and turn to Sheng (Kiswahili slang) or broken Kiswahili (Wilfred H. Whiteley, 1974: 497). It is indeed a paradox that Standard Kiswahili is now, in the main, confined to Kiswahili classrooms and examination rooms and on

radio and television news bulletins. The bottom line is that today more than 90% of Kenyans are at least able to speak and understand some Kiswahili (Njubi, 2009: 118). This, as Njubi argues, is the same case with Tanzanians as well, thereby placing Kiswahili—of whatever variety—at the core of the two East African countries’ linguistic identity and heritage. In what follows, I will highlight the specific strides Kiswahili has taken in Kenya in a number of domains, including trade, politics, the creative industry, and education.

### THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ROLE OF KISWAHILI

The role of Kiswahili in Kenya as the language of the marketplace or trade since precolonial days persisted in the colonial era and beyond. Simply put, Kenyans generally buy and sell goods and services in Kiswahili. Kiswahili remains invariably the language of business interactions everywhere. Kiswahili is the language of public livestock auctions, hawking, begging, alms-giving, agricultural extension services, butcheries, fruit, grain and vegetable markets, second-hand and new clothes stalls, open and closed yards where vehicles are repaired, jua-kali sheds, shoeshine boys, salons, barbershops, matatus (Kiswahili for public commuter minibuses), sand harvesting, brick making, construction sites, fish markets on the riverbanks and lakeshores, selling soccer match tickets, spectating at stadia, and so on.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that most goods and services targeting the mass market are almost always advertised in Kiswahili on any number of media, whether it is radio, television, outdoor advertising or online because the providers are keenly aware that Kiswahili is the best language with which to reach this wider market in Kenya. Sportsman cigarettes bearing the marketing statement “*Sportsman ni sawa hasa*” in the 1970s and Shell BP’s marketing statement “*Mbele iko sawa*” as of this writing exemplify the centrality of Kiswahili as the language of marketing, indeed solidifying its presence in the marketplace.

Kiswahili reigns supreme in the Kenyan political arena. As Njubi cogently points out, no one desiring a national political office will succeed in Kenya without using Kiswahili as it is the language of political campaigns, name-calling, intrigue, arm-twisting, and maneuvering and sloganeering. In the era of Kenyan’s founding president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, his governing party KANU, although an English acronym, Kenya African National Union, was premised on the Kiswahili political slogan “KANU yajenga nchi” [KANU builds the nation]. It is significant to note that Kenyatta, who was said to have been more fluent in Kiswahili than English, decreed in 1974 that Kiswahili would be used in the Kenyan parliament, marking the first real milestone in the development of the language (Njubi, 2009: 118). This slogan was popularized through catchy Kiswahili songs played on national radio and television and were also performed at public rallies. In the mid-1980s, when KANU under Kenyatta’s successor, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi as the de facto one political party, imposed the controversial que-voting system as opposed to secret voting, Kiswahili songs came in handy again. The emergence of *taarab* musicians

extolling the virtues of the que-voting system is an index of how in Kenya, as in Tanzania, there are often musicians for hire during campaign periods and quite invariably, Kiswahili is their language of choice. I will be returning to this when discussing in some detail Kiswahili in the creative industry in Kenya.

The presence of Kiswahili in politics continues to be felt. Since Paul Muite and Richard Leakey (a Kiswahili-speaking Kenyan of white descent) formed the SAFINA Party in the 1997 general elections, other such parties with Kiswahili names have followed suit, including Isaac Ruto's Chama cha Mashinani (CCM), fashioned after the Tanzania governing party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), and NASA, the Kiswahili-sounding acronym for National Super Alliance, a coalition of opposition parties that battled against incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta's Jubilee Party in the 2017 general election and lost. Many times in their campaign trail, NASA politicians were at pains to swahilize the meaning of the acronym they had given their coalition by uttering slogans such as *tutawa-NASA* meaning "we will arrest or apprehend them," where "them" implied their Jubilee political archrivals. Jubilee, on the other hand, had *Tuko Pamoja*, ["We are together" as their campaign slogan], while one of the NASA affiliates, ODM, had ODM *kwanza* [ODM first] as its clarion call.

Kiswahili is not the only language of the media in Kenya, but it is the most dominant one, particularly on radio and television. The leading radio stations in Kenya all use Kiswahili as their medium of broadcasting, and they include Radio Maisha, Citizen Radio, and Redio Taifa. Despite being the official language since colonial times and now the joint official language with Kiswahili, radio stations using English have a tiny listener base. Certainly, accessibility and affordability enable even poor households in Kenya, who do not own TVs, to own radio sets. And on radio Kiswahili dominates. Not so with television.

Television stations in Kenya are largely multilingual in the sense that even vernacular stations like Kass TV, Inooru TV, and Kameme TV, invariably have English and Kiswahili segments. The cost of local production of programming is too high and, therefore, most stations are forced to buy cheaper programs from the United States, in which English is the medium. It is instructive that before it wound up in June 2016, Nation Media Group's Q TV purported to be an exclusive Kiswahili TV. Yet, in its heyday, it aired WWW wrestling or the German Bundesliga with English as the language of commentary, underscoring the multilingual reality of the Kenyan TV landscape. Having said that, it goes without saying that most successful TV stations have a heavy dose of Kiswahili programs, including news, comedies, and film series. Citizen TV is by far the most popular TV station and much of this popularity is based on prudent programming that caters to the sometimes uncanny tastes of the mass market for which Kiswahili is the language. The highly popular "*Papa Shirandula*," a simplistic program on Citizen TV involving lower brow characters such as watchmen and nannies, is a case in point.

The popularity of Kiswahili has led the South African-based cable TV service provider Multichoice to dedicate one channel, namely, ‘Movie Magic’, to Kiswahili movies which have a huge Kenyan fan base. English has the upper hand only when it comes to online and print media, whereas Kiswahili has only two major online newspapers, *Tuko* and *Taifa Leo*, with *Pambazuko* and *Taifa Leo* in the print sub-domain.<sup>3</sup> *Pambazuko*, launched by the Standard Media Group in April 2019, is the reincarnation of *Baraza*, which wound up in the 1980s. Interestingly, even English media have the habit of code-mixing and code-switching, creating an English that is heavily influenced by Kiswahili. For instance, NTV once posted a video clip on its website headlined: “Hamutamwona Ruto katika uongozi wa Kenya, Atwoli declares.” Moreover, there is now such a thing as Kenyan English in public and in the media with words such as *mwananchi*, *matatu*, *kamukunji*, *jua kali* and *baraza*, underpinning the pervasive influence of Kiswahili on English.

The Kenyan musical industry, as a component of the cultural and creative industries, has undergone tremendous transformation over the years, but what has remained constant is the popularity of music in Kiswahili. Save for the 1970s and 1980s, when Lingala music from the Democratic Republic of Congo reigned supreme with maestros such as Franco Luambo Makiadi and Tabu Ley ruling the airwaves, music in Kiswahili has always enjoyed remarkable popularity. The colonial days saw the rise of musicians such as Fadhili Williams, who is believed to have sung the global love anthem, “*Malaiika*” which was redone by a number of international stars such as members of Boney M and Miriam Makeba. Other Kenyan musicians singing in Kiswahili that rocked the music scene in the colonial and soon after independence include Daudi Kabaka, John Nzenze, George Mukabi, and David Amunga. These musicians mostly sang in Standard Kiswahili, a trend that remained until the late 1990s when singing in Sheng (Kiswahili slang) became more than just a passing fad. Today the biggest Kenyan names in the music industry, such as Juliani, Nazizi, and Nonini, use Sheng in their compositions. Their music resonates with the masses of youth who are taught Standard Kiswahili in schools but are permanently hooked to Sheng in their social interactions.

One could say that school remains the veritable haven of Standard Kiswahili. For years after independence, Kiswahili was taught as an optional and non-examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. It was not until 1985, when President Moi introduced the 8-4-4 system in which Kiswahili became compulsory and examinable, that the language was given the greatest impetus. Until then, Kiswahili course books and creative works were few and far between. Only a few Kenyan Kiswahili writers had their books in the school curriculum. Kenya had to rely heavily on Tanzanian authors for books in their curriculum. Today children’s books, novels, novellas, plays, short stories in Kiswahili by Kenyans are churned out every other day. Some of the readers of this rich corpus of works in Kiswahili are themselves becoming authors, teachers, academicians in Kiswahili studies, media personalities, comedians, and orators for

whom Kiswahili is the principal matrix of communication. It is instructive that since 2016, even schools following the international curriculum, such as the IGCSE in Kenya, are required to teach Kiswahili. All in all, Kenyan students are subjected to at least 12 years of mandatory learning of Standard Kiswahili before they graduate from high school, longer than it takes to train medical doctors. Then more often than not, they turn to the non-restrictive “comfort zone” of slang.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, Kiswahili has developed phenomenally in Kenya since independence, culminating in its constitutional recognition in 2010 as serving the dual role of national and joint official language with English. Kenya continues to mint experts in Kiswahili studies straddling global and regional academic institutions and media. It is now a known fact that Kenya produces more masters and doctoral degrees in Kiswahili than any other country in the world. Also, given that 90% of Kenyans now speak Kiswahili, there is no doubt that this indeed is the language of the masses. But in practice, English still enjoys the pride of status as the language of the elite and official language. English is still the medium of instruction in schools. There are still schools in Kenya with obnoxious notices reading: “This is an English-speaking zone,” and in which it is “illegal” to speak Kiswahili outside the Kiswahili lesson. Kiswahili is seldom used in parliament, and when used mainly for comic relief, legislators laugh at one another’s incompetence in the language. There is, hence, a glaring disconnect between the constitutional provisions and implementation as Kiswahili is only an official language in word, not in deed, underscoring the case of broken promises. Moreover, it remains to be seen how Kenya would move Standard Kiswahili from the classroom to the streets to punctuate how people live and die, a role now fully fulfilled by slang and broken Kiswahili. One wonders when those who strive to speak fluent Kiswahili will cease being branded non-Kenyan by a nation in whom slang, broken language, and broken promises are deeply embedded.

## NOTES

1. Mbaabu and Chiraghdin’s claims place the origin of Kiswahili in Kenya which runs counter to the claims of mainland Tanzanians, foremost among them Tigiti Sengo, who argue that Kiswahili sprung from mainland Tanzania while those from the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba separately claim the origin of the language. Ultimately, Kiswahili originated anywhere and nowhere in East Africa depending on the political and nationalistic whims and inclinations of the claimant(s).
2. *Jua kali* is a Kiswahili expression that means “hot sun” and refers to a thriving informal sector in Kenya in which artisans have the skills and audacity to tinker with metal by the roadside under the hot sun to make almost anything.
3. *Tuko* also uses English on its website.

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