The Case for Kiswahili as a Regional Broadcasting Language in East Africa

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Abstract

The peoples of East Africa have a long history of a rich and diverse regional heritage. Perhaps one of the most renowned aspects of this heritage is Kiswahili, the language widely spoken and understood across Eastern Africa. As the numbers of people who are proficient in the language continue to grow year after year, there have been numerous enriching perspectives on the anthropological, historical, literary and sociolinguistic aspects of Kiswahili. In this article, we offer a fresh perspective on how Kiswahili can be tapped as a resource for mobilizing popular support for the East African regional integration process across the five member-states of the current East African Community: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. Kiswahili should be elevated to the position of a regional broadcasting language for a proposed regional broadcasting network operating under the aegis of the East African Community in Arusha, Tanzania. This is the main argument of the article. The argument is grounded on three main points, namely, media studies indicate that ICT and FM radio stations have become very popular mass media across Africa in the past two decades; radios are ubiquitous media of communication, entertainment and education across East Africa, especially in the rural areas where the vast majority of the people still live; and a regional broadcasting service, using the popular FM mode, can be mooted by the EAC Secretariat in Arusha to promote the programs of the EAC and harness the popular support for its intentions. Kiswahili should be given priority as the chief broadcasting language, as it is a rich symbol of the shared regional heritage. The paper concludes with a proposed framework that offers a basis for further thought and action towards the realization of the foregoing.

General Background

The twenty-first century is undoubtedly the era of unprecedented integration and interaction of peoples of different localities and cultures across the globe. The need to nurture positive and sustainable intercultural dialogue between the communities of East Africa is as important as the ongoing dialogue between the region and the rest of the world. In the previous century, contact between Africa and Europe was significantly characterized by cultural conflicts that have been studied from the perspective of different disciplines within the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The twenty-first century, however, should be embraced as an era for enhancing cultural dialogue in the emergent Global Village. United, African countries can identify and take advantage of the positive features of global heritage such as the advanced information, communication and media technologies. Such technologies as well as legislations supporting their uses should be adopted urgently by African governments as they work towards establishing an enabling socio-political environment for increased transnational flows of human and monetary resources across the continent's economies.

According to the World Bank (1996, 1999a, 1996b, 2001), itself a chief agent of globalization, the twenty-first century is characterized by, *inter alia,* acceptance of regional economic blocs as crucial players in the multilateral trading system of the new international economic order. Participation in the global economy is currently considered more meaningful when negotiations are done between blocs rather than between single countries. In contemporary Africa, there is an emerging consensus that new regional economic blocs can enable African economies shield off rather than yield to the negative forces of globalization (Mazzeo, 1984; Asante, 1986; Jovanovic, 1992; EAC & GTZ, 2000; EAC, 2001; Kasonga, 2001). Trading blocs like East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the new inter-continental Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) can indeed help African countries evolve and pursue common and coordinated positions on various international trade issues and establish strong multilateral negotiating coalitions. Such coalitions can exert meaningful influence in negotiations with transnational corporations (TNCs) and the Bretton-Woods Institutions. As demonstrated by the OPEC bloc and the Cancun crisis, strong multilateral negotiating blocs offer one of the surest yet elusive ways forward in terms of addressing the serious inequalities that mar international trade between the Global South and the Global North (World Bank, 1999, 1999, 2001). Africa's own *avant-garde* developmental frameworks such as Network of Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and African Renaissance should be supported in their advocacy for regional integration as the *conditio sine qua non* for twenty-first century Africa's meaningful participation in the process of globalization.

Interdependence rather than independence is the new clarion call driving contemporary international relations in East Africa. Proponents of renewed regionalism in East Africa also note that regional integration is not a matter of choice rather one of necessity. In 2000, the then Deputy Secretary of the East African Community, Ambassador Fulgence Kazaura observed:

In this time of globalization, integration into world markets is needed, if the states [of East Africa] don't want to remain at the rear end of international development. It is true that some states e.g. India and China are integrating their economies in the world markets by national efforts only. However, it is also true, that most of the smaller states will not be able to pay the costs of globalization (EAC, 2001a: 12).

It appears the forces of globalization pervading the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century will continue to reduce the capacity of East African countries to effectively benefit from international trade unless a suitable strategy of coping is adopted. Regional integration is one such strategy as is evident from the view of those involved in the establishment of the East African Community in Arusha, Tanzania. This is evident not only from Kazaura's view above but even that of Kipyego Cheluget, Deputy Secretary General, EAC. While addressing the Meeting of the East African Manufacturers in Nairobi on 6 March 2002, Cheluget avered that:

Globalization offers both challenges and opportunities. However, those countries and regions that stand to take advantage of the opportunities, are those that are internationally competitive. Within this context, countries in different parts of the World are coming together as trading blocks, as a measure for enjoying economies of scale with a view to gaining competitiveness, in preparation of the unfolding global competition (EAC, 2002a: 12).

Reiterating the two observations, the retired Tanzanian President Benjamin William Mkapa summarized the importance of a new East African regional bloc thus, "The only key to our survival is to integrate our economies and markets. The Wakurya have a proverb that says: 'One person is thin porridge; two or three people are a lump of *ugali*.' And I say, Kenya on its own, Uganda on its own, or Tanzania on its own are like thin porridge. But if we unite, we can at least be a lump of *ugali*" (Mkapa, qtd. EAC, 2002a: 9).

On 30th November 1999, the three Heads of State of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, H. E. President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi (rtd), H. E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and H. E. President Benjamin William Mkapa (rtd) signed the Treaty of the establishment of the second East African Community in Arusha, Tanzania. The Treaty, which was the culmination of integration efforts revived in November 1993 by the three leaders, came into force on 7th July 2000. Since then, the long-serving Ugandan leader, President Museveni has worked with successive presidents of both Kenya and Tanzania, namely Presidents Emilio Mwai Kibaki, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete and Ali Hassan Mwinyi (rtd) in solidarity with the Heads of State of Rwanda and Burundi towards the formation of a socio-economic regional bloc that aspires to become a political federation by 2013.

The current East African Community (1999-?) thus comprises five contiguous nations of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda. At the moment, the population of East Africa is made up of 90% autochthonous Africans with significant minorities from Arabia, South Asia and Western Europe making the remaining 10%. The heritage of the region is therefore, the totality of the cultures and histories of all these peoples who inhabit the new EAC.

In the context of these turn-of-the-century developments, retrospective reflections on the impact of regional integration and globalization on the heritage of East Africa are imperative. This paper, therefore, attempts to highlight possible strategies of how the FM radio stations, often considered as vectors of Western cultural imperialism, can actually be used to revitalize our cultural heritage, especially the region's chief linguistic cultural heritage – Kiswahili.[i] It also examines the potential of using the media to inculcate regional consciousness that is indispensable for a sustainable, people-centered approach to East African regional integration. The paper ultimately ponders the following question: How can the idea of a "people's media", popularized by FM radio stations, be deployed in the renewed East Africa regional integration initiatives with the specific intention of enabling the peoples of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi to express their feelings as stakeholders in the process?

The Discourse of Neo-Regionalism in East Africa

The discourse and practice of regional integration is not new to East Africa. In fact, the first East African Community (1967-1977), which at its zenith was cited as a shining example for the rest of Africa, was built on the foundation of a regional framework that had been established by British colonial administration. Before 1960, the colonial administration in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania had created a number of service-delivery institutions to serve common needs of the three territories. Although the sense of "East Africanness" existed long before colonialism, it was institutionalized by the colonial government of British East Africa in 1917 with the establishment of a customs union between Kenya and Uganda (Kasonga, 2001). In East Africa, formal integration processes started with, among other things, the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway, 1897-1901, the establishment of the Customs Collection Centre, 1900, the East African Currency Board, 1905, the Postal Union, 1905, the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa, 1909, the Customs' Union in 1919 followed by the East African Governor's Conference of 1926. By 1930 a common income tax structure had been established besides a joint board to handle the collection of tax revenue (Thobhani, 1972).

During the Second World War, more intraregional institutions such as the East African Production and Supply Board, War Supplies Board and Industrial Management Board were established.[ii] The high level of intra-regional institutional networks operating under British colonial rule in East Africa led some of the leading lights of anti-colonial movement such as the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere to consider the idea of a political federation between Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya as soon as the three attained independence.

In 1961, Nyerere offered to postpone the independence of Tanganyika if a political federation could be achieved. Calls for a political federation were intensified in 1963 spearheaded by leaders of the three countries. Nyerere's dream of a single political entity called East Africa Federation never materialized. Nevertheless, it inspired the leaders of East African countries to work towards the establishment of a social and economic regional bloc. On 6th July 1967, the Treaty for East African Cooperation establishing the East African Community was signed in Kampala. It came into effect on 1st December 1967. This first East African Community lasted for a decade before collapsing in July 1977.[iii]

Recent work towards the establishment of the new East African Community should best be engaged in light of the afore-mentioned historical context. Neo-regionalism in East Africa does not exist in a historical vacuum. In fact, it emerges out of the enduring conviction that the people of East Africa may be different in the context of their present nationalities but do share a common past, memory and destiny as a geopolitical region of Africa. Acknowledgement of the role common colonial institutions played in preparing the foundation for the defunct EAC helps us understand the importance of setting up new regionalizing institutions to further develop our quest for a new sustainable regional bloc. As mentioned earlier on, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania together with Rwanda and Burundi have many historical commonalities evident in the various tangible and intangible aspects of the cultural heritage of their citizens. The observation of the Rwandan President Paul Kagame, in his speech after Rwanda formally joined the EAC, that the new membership marked "our formal entry into a family of nations with long historical and cultural ties" attests to this point (*New Vision*, 2007).

However, the five countries also have significant individual national memories and postcolonial experiences. East African pessimists always cite these idiosyncrasies as part of their rationale for rejecting regional integration.[iv] Without a media that enables the ventilation of popular opinion, such xenophobic attitudes, fuelled by opinionated individuals from the Member States, will not only forestall realization of the noble vision of integration started by the Founding Fathers of East Africa, but will also cultivate, rather than curtail, cultural and national idiosyncrasies across the region.

The Treaty establishing the new East African Community has guided the community since November 1999 through the recent inclusion of Rwanda and Burundi in July 2007. According to the Treaty, the objective of the new regional bloc is to achieve a private-sector-led, internationally competitive and sustainable development framework that will be both *people-centered* and exponent of a market oriented economic system (EAC, 2000). The five Member States in conjunction with organs of the East African Community based in Arusha, have come up with a comprehensive two-pronged methodology for operationalizing and realizing this objective. One operates at the institutional level, where efforts are being directed towards setting up the framework of integration.

The other operates at the political level, where respective leaders of the Partner States, Heads of State and Ministers in charge of East African Affairs are mobilizing support for the expanded EAC and the formation of the East African Federation (EAF), a political union of the five Member States.

At the institutional level, the creation of the EAC is being done programmatically across four phases: establishment of a Customs Union, establishment of a Common Market, establishment of a Monetary Union and establishment of a Political Federation. There are several organs of the EAC already operational such as the Head of States Summit, the Secretariat, the East African Court of Justice, the East African Council of Ministers and the East African Legislative Assembly. Together, these organs have developed regional cooperation development strategies such as the EAC Development Strategy (1997-2000) and the EAC Development Strategy (2001-2005), which identify over fifteen priority areas of co-operation. Most of these areas deal directly or indirectly with the private sector which is represented at the EAC by organs such as the East African Business Council. EABC is an organ of the business community within the region that is working towards the harmonization of business practices and the promotion of East African enterprise within the global environment. The successful implementation of the first three phases of integration identified above is expected to eventually harmonize trade practices and regulations in the five countries. Intraregional Stock exchange commerce, for example, will be mediated under the auspices of the East African Securities Regulatory Authority. Such economic integration is believed to be crucial in enhancing the welfare of the majority of East African peoples in the Global Village. Unlike the Cold War era in which the defunct EAC existed, the present moment identified by its neoliberalism and the pressures of globalization, has ensured that member-states of East Africa are pursuing similar economic policies on the principles of a free market (Sunny, Babikanyisa, Forcher & Akinboade, 2001).

Following the inauguration of the East African Customs Union, which became operational in January 2006, the region is now working towards a "fast-tracked" political federation, a common market, and later, monetary harmonization. The latter will entail removal of the current currencies of the member-states and work towards the existence of a single regional unit. Ideally, the political federation needs to be the final work in the phase-by-phase approach stipulated in the EAC Treaty. However, there are some strong voices advocating for the "fast-tracking" political integration. This school of thought argues that East Africans should fast seek the political kingdom and all else shall be added because politics controls all spheres of social life. It differs from the institutional phase-by-phase approach that recognizes the fact that sustainable regional integration is the result of a progressive process based on careful consultation. The school has received crucial support from the highest political office, the Heads of State Summit itself.[v] For example while ratifying the EAC Development Strategy Plan (2001-2005), Presidents Moi, Museveni and Mkapa, noted:

The Development Strategy recognizes the regional integration is a progressive process. However, it is appreciated that in the implementation of the different phases of integration, some elements belonging to future stages of integration may need to be brought forward in order to support the overall integration of the process (EAC, 2001b: v).

Politics plays a major role in determining the nature and direction of the renewed regional integration vision in East Africa. This is evident from the appendix attached at the end of the paper showing political actions that have led us to the current stage of the EAC, that is, the full membership of Rwanda and Burundi.

In November 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding on the ascension into the East African Community of Rwanda and Burundi was reached at the eighth East African Heads of State Summit in Arusha. On 18th June 2007, ascension treaties to join the EAC were finally signed paving way for Rwanda and Burundi to join the bloc. The two Francophone countries were required to make a series of domestic legislative changes that later culminated in their full membership in July 2007. Some of the conditions they were to meet to the satisfaction of the EAC include*, inter alia,* promoting Kiswahili and English in order to harmonize their socio-cultural national environments with those of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania; make equal contributions to the EAC Secretariat kitty; appoint representatives to all organs of the EAC; synchronize their fiscal years and budgetary patterns with those of the three traditional Partner States and participate in all affairs of the EAC (Ngare, 2007). African leaders from COMESA and the African Union witnessed the granting of full EAC membership to Rwanda and Burundi in a show of support to new regional integration initiatives across the continent.

With its new demography, Franco-Anglophone as well as Afrophone heritage, East Africa is now the home of over 100 million people living in the expansive two million square kilometers territory. The majority of this population is still ICT-illiterate and lives in far-flung rural areas that can only be accessed by poor transport networks and radio signals. Significant methods of ensuring the input of this majority in East Africa's neo-regionalism discourse need to be pursued if the new EAC is to stand the test of time. Today, pervasive communication networks being promoted by leading players in the privatized communication sector such as MTN, Vodacom, Safaricom and CELTEL challenge regional politicians to likewise come up with communicative networks that will link the people of the region as well as help them air their opinions. Already, ICT-literate citizens of the five Member States are performing their own kind of regionality online. Websites, blogs, listserves and other digital media typical of the heritage of the Global Village, host vibrant discussions on the pros and cons of political integration in East Africa. Websites such as www.jamboforums.com, www.habaritanzania.com and www.mashada.com, demonstrate East Africans' desire for a platform that will enable them engage their leaders in the development of a sustainable and people-centered Union.

Nevertheless, while commending the efforts of these virtual media spaces, it should be pointed out that majority of East Africans are still being locked out of the debate on integration because of the elitist nature of the Internet, which requires ICT-literacy and availability of ICT infrastructure for one to participate. It is in this light that we argue for a more ubiquitous media (and medium) capable of giving voice to the common man and woman. Such a media will enable *Wananchi* to actively participate in the otherwise elite-dominated discourse of regional integration. Radio stations, especially of the popular FM model and Kiswahili, the region's most popular medium, are indispensable instruments of integrating the majority of East African *Wananchi* in a genuine people-driven regional integration-from-below.

The Rise of FM Stations in East Africa

The origin of all forms of the mass media in East Africa lies in the various colonial states that later became Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Newspapers, radio and TV stations were owned and ran mostly by the colonial governments and powerful social interests in the colonial society. The print and electronic media were introduced to East African societies by colonial governments and their agents. This fact is evident in the name *gazeti*, newspaper in English which is a derivative from the word "gazette", a publication introduced by the colonial government to announce new policies and legislations (Mazrui, 1972). From its origins as the voice of the colonial administrations, in the early days of imperial rule in East Africa, print media later on became a crucial instrument for the mobilization of Africans against colonialism. Some of the founding fathers of East African nation-states such as Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and Mwalimu Nyerere actively employed print media to mobilize public opinion against colonial rule in their respective countries. Kenyatta published a Kikuyu newsletter of the Kenya African Union, *Mwiguithania*. By popularizing common grievances against the colonial administration, such anti-colonial printed media gave voice to the masses (Ainslie, 1966; Coltart, 1964; Condon, 1967; Healey, 1967; Nyamnjoh, 2005).

On the electronic media front, the pioneer national radio stations across East Africa were modeled along those of their colonial masters – the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This is true of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC). UBC has since changed to Radio Uganda. Radio Tanzania was created in 1951 as an arm of the BBC. At the time the country was still a United Nation territory under the trusteeship of Great Britain. The station relied heavily on foreign rather than local content. The coming of independence in the early 1960s, in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya respectively, saw the transfer of the colonial stations from the colonial administrations to the African national administrations of the three countries. Besides inheriting the radio stations, the new African governments inherited the bureaucracy and institutional function of the media as well. They maintained the role of the radio as the mouthpiece of the state. They also perpetuated state monopoly as well as control of the airwaves.

This state of affairs set the context for the growth of the radio as an industry and also as a media in the post-colonial era. Initially, the radio was viewed as an indispensable instrument in processes of national integration. In the young countries where gaps existed between disparate ethnic communities as well as between the illiterate and the literate in both rural and urban areas, the radio was seen as a vehicle for cultivating national consciousness. Moreover, using the state broadcasting stations, respective governments across East Africa were able to inform and educate their citizenry on various initiatives related to nation building and development. The example of Tanzania stands out prominently.

After the Arusha Declaration in 1967, the Tanzanian state radio shifted roles from an Anglophone instrument of entertainment and foreign ideology to a socialist platform for state political, economic, and social articulation. The broadcasting stations in mainland Tanzania and on the islands, utilized the radio in adult literacy programs and also to generate active party support. Radio programs followed by discussions based on radio topics were popularized by the government as a way of actively mobilizing the masses to support the vision of the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) (Wilcox, 1975:30). Besides the case of Tanzania, political developments in the 1960s through the 1980s did have far reaching implications for the media industry across the region. For example, in Kenya, during the one-party era under Kenyatta and later arap Moi, the national broadcaster, then called the Voice of Kenya (VOK) became a tool of marshalling state propaganda against voices calling for the re-introduction of multiparty democracy. From the foregoing sketch, we see that prior to the liberalization of the airwaves in the 1990s, the mass media had undergone four distinct phases: early colonialism, anti-colonialism, early post-colonialism and neo-colonialism under one-party rule. The radio, which had played a significant role in the mobilization of the masses against colonialism, became one of the tools through which single-party dictatorships hoodwinked the masses in the midst of the repression that characterized the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s, political and economic changes at both the international and local levels ushered in a new era for the media industry in East Africa. Pressure to embrace democracy, privatization of state institutions and liberalization of domestic markets defined by foreign forces such as the United States and the Bretton-Woods institutions led to the introduction of structural adjustment programs thereby giving a new context for the radio industry. These international pressures coupled with local developments in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania explain the rise of the private, commercial or community based radio stations broadcasting using the frequency modulations (FM) (Kawoya & Makokha, 2007). The new popular radio stations simply known as *FM stations* are symbols of the liberalization of the airwaves and deregulation of the media industry by the various states. They are monuments to the aftermath of economic recommendations popularized by powerful international financial institutions as prerequisites to African postcolonies' efforts to reverse their negative economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s.

Politics, both international and local, also made a huge contribution to the establishment of FM stations in East Africa. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of global capitalism after the triumph of the United States of America ushered in a new world order which saw governments such as that of Tanzania, which had initially pursued a Marxist-Socialist political and economic policies, change and embrace free-market policies (Hood, 1990). In April 1992, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, under President Ali Hassan Mwinyi (rtd), voted in favor of multiparty politics thus ending twenty seven years of single-party rule. This decision to open up the political space was in keeping with the ideological basis of free-market economics that underscores competition as an essential aspect of growth (Wangwe, 1987, 1991; Bagachwa & Mbelle, 1993). In Uganda, the coming to power of Yoweri Museveni with his No-Party democracy in 1986, and the subsequent restructuring of economic programs he embarked on, saw Uganda enable the establishment of private, commercial radio stations earlier than Kenya and Tanzania (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991; Maja Pearce, 1995).

At the dawn of the nineties, state monopoly of the airwaves was still a reality in Kenya. Calls for the reintroduction of multi-party politics based their quest on demands for the Bill of Rights and called for greater freedoms of expression and association. For example, denial of permits to set up radio stations was argued on the basis of contraventions of Section 79 of the Kenyan Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression. The challenges faced by the Kenyan media mogul, S. K. Macharia and his Royal Media Services Limited while attempting to register his FM radio and private television stations in Kenya between 1992 and 1997 are cases in point (Maja-Pearce, 1995:36-8). Nevertheless, in 1992, the Moi government capitulated under the Human Rights pressures coupled with sanctions by powerful foreign instructions. The government repealed the fundamental Section 2 (A) of the Kenya Constitution thus returning the country to a multiparty democracy for the first time since 1969. The extent to which the radio had become an instrument of neocolonialism in Kenya can be illustrated by the ways it was used to gain mileage for the government in the 1992 multiparty elections that followed the return of multiparty rule. According to Maja Pearce (1995), the national broadcaster in Kenya, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), had access to the electorate to the tune of 60% to 85% versus the Opposition's 40% to 15%. The state consciously manipulated the public to support the Kenya African National Union (KANU) by giving undue coverage and bias in favor of the ruling party through propaganda. Widespread disaffection with the state radio station and the government's misuse of its control of the airwaves in part strongly contributed to the rise of the FM stations in Kenya.[vi]

The rise of the FM stations in East Africa can thus be explained, *ceteris paribus*, in terms of political action such as the enactment of certain constitutional provisions in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in the past two decades. These amendments to the constitutions of the three countries, buttressed by technological developments in the fields of information and communication partly explain why the private radio stations did not emerge earlier, at least in this part of the continent. In Tanzania, the passing of the 1993 Broadcasting Act led to the rise of private and commercial television and radio stations. The ideology of the state as the sole custodian of radio broadcasting enshrined in the Arusha Declaration was challenged in this new liberal environment of the early 1990s. State-owned stations now had to share the airwaves with the new players. By 1995, Uganda had approved the licensing of seven private FM radio stations and two private TV stations (Hyden, Leslie & Ogundimu, 2002). By 1997, there were three commercial radio stations operating in Kampala. Currently, there are more than one hundred FM radio stations in Uganda that virtually cover the rich linguistic landscape of the country. Beside political and economic changes, there are also technological factors that contributed to the rise of FM stations in East Africa. Since the 1960s, there have been successive waves of technological revolutions sweeping the fields of information and communication heralding what is popularly called the Information Age *a la* Iron Age or Stone Age (World Bank, 2001).

Beside the econo-political changes, certain technological changes within the radio industry itself are worth noting. For instance, although FM stations emerged in East Africa in the early 1990s, it is acknowledged that this type of radio had already become popular in the Unites States and in the Far East as early as the 1960s. At this juncture, the nature of the FM stations and its idiosyncrasies deserve highlighting. There are two popular kinds of radio in the history of mass media in East Africa. These are: the AM [Amplitude Modulation] radio and the FM [Frequency Modulation]. Since the mid 1960s, new radio home receivers have been coming off the assembly lines routinely equipped with both AM and FM bands. The deregulation of the broadcasting sector in East Africa also initiated the decline in listenership to stations using AM stations, which in many cases were government-owned state stations. This move may be read by symbolic media theorists as a rejection of the hegemony of the state and its ideological apparati. The disapproval of AM stations as well as radios with AM bands, in favor of FM stations and the dual AM/FM band radio sets captured the changes in the political arena and economic discussed above. The modulation shift from AM to FM also led to changes in the consumer behavior of the radio audiences. With the emergence of private FM stations, more and more people started tuning in to stations that transmitted in their own vernacular languages and touching on matters affecting specific localities.

Today, FM stations, whether privately owned or state-sponsored, command large audiences with their customized programmes on news, entertainment, consumerism and especially political commentary. They have given voice to the masses in two ways. Firstly, in the spirit of free-market economic principle of demand and supply, the people have a greater say in the format, timing and even language of broadcasting. Failure to adhere to consumer tastes normally renders a radio station marginal and unpopular in the competitive field. Secondly, popular call-in interactive programmes such as the "People's Parliament" and the "*ebimeeza*" (interactive roundtable/call-in radio discussions) ensure greater civic engagement of the masses in topical and political issues affecting their localities and countries. It is in recognition of these facts that the media is now being challenged to participate in engendering a regional consciousness that is considered crucial to the success of the current East African Community. The Secretary-General of the EAC, Ambassador Juma Mwapachu in an opening address to the East African Media Summit, early this year underscored the role of the media in regional integration by noting that:

The Media represents a key public sphere for our citizen to express their opinions and to be listened to. It plays several roles: It is the medium in the sense of being a provider of information; it is a mediator because it promotes discourses, deliberations and activism; and it is a political actor through the features its professionals write. To this extent, the Media can and is able to influence the social interaction of our citizens by promoting an East African Agenda. Such role, when undertaken with depth of thought and passion, can help create societal integration, shared values as well as address the critical factors that underpin successful ... (Mwapachu, 2007:5).

With the benefit of such hindsight as that sampled in this section, it is clear that political developments, economic changes and technological advancement, then, are the three major factors that, in our view, explain the emergence and trajectory of FM stations in East Africa. These stations have become popular agents of change shaping the region's cultural heritage in terms of both globalization and localization. They integrate the region to global socio-cultural and economic networks through their programs. Yet, they also integrate their respective listeners to the fabric of their own cultures and histories as local (read traditional African) communities. Nevertheless, the contribution of FM stations to the cultural transformation, and as such, heritage of East Africa deserves deeper reflection; one we now shift to.

Kiswahili in the Context of FM Radio Stations and Neo-Regionalism

FM radio stations arguably reflect the interests and concerns of both their owners and their audiences. In East Africa, the stations can be classified on the basis of, *inter alia*, social, religious and linguistic criteria. All these interests reflect various aspects of our regional heritage. Some of the FM stations serve religious interests of groups such as the Catholic Church and Islam. Others serve particular social interests such as that of the cosmopolitan urban communities across the region. While others broadcast in local languages, thus catering for different language communities such as the Baganda, Agikuyu and Luo.

We have argued elsewhere that local languages have received a boost from FM radio stations (Kawooya and Makokha, 2007). Through FM stations, both non-government-sponsored and government-sponsored FM stations, in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi have offered our vernacular languages, vital vessels of African heritage, a new lease of life in the face of globalization and renewed cultural imperialism orchestrated by Western popular culture and mass media. Paradoxically, both East African governments and the private sector appear to have debunked the myth that only English can bring the international news to the *Wananchi.* It is in this context that we maintain that African languages continue to flourish even when the languages' speakers are dispersed from the traditional geography of their language communities by the pleasures and pressures of urbanization and other deculturalizing social dynamics.

What is the fate of Kiswahili in traditional Swahili strongholds such as Kenya when many today tune to either cosmopolitan Anglophone FM stations or vernacular FM stations? How will Kiswahili, as a broadcasting language, perform in an era when even Tanzania officially embraces her vernacular languages as part of her rich heritage?[vii] Kiswahili is viewed as the popular medium of reaching the majority of the non-Swahili-speaking people of Tanzania and Kenya. The present climate presents the *lingua franca* with both challenges and opportunities. One of the most important challenges is the issue of standardization. This may not exactly be an issue in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, considering that Kiswahili is rarely used as a broadcast language by the FM stations in these countries.

On the one hand, there is a worrying situation that can already be observed in Kenya. Although Kiswahili is used in most of the national FM stations such as Citizen FM and the state-sponsored Metro FM, usually it is not that of the classical Unguja dialect. It is a hybrid Kiswahili influenced by English and the popular Kenyan argot, Sheng'.[viii] In Kenya today, there are virtually no FM stations that broadcast in Kiswahili alone. Most do have programmes conducted in Kiswahili, English or a mixture of the two in the fashion of code-mixing and code-switching. Considering that media is one of the most powerful agents of cultural change, the hybrid Kiswahili used by many an FM stations spreads with ease across the country. Most of the broadcasters are considered local celebrities, especially among the youth and the latter almost always borrow heavily from the lifestyles and even speech patterns of the former. There is need for more sociolinguistic research on this phenomenon.

The popular songs played on the FM stations also use hybrid Kiswahili and Sheng' thus reinforcing the prevalence of a *laissez faire* approach to literary use of the lingua franca among the youth.[ix] In as much as most of the musicians of the New Generation (*Kizazi Kipya*) have a regional appeal and are actually some of the influential agents of regionalism among the East African youth, the cultural impact of their deconstructionist uses of Kiswahili in their art underscores the need to revisit the issue of standardization anew. Granted, the hybrid Kiswahili music of Jose Chameleone of Uganda, Nameless of Kenya and Profesa Jay of Tanzania is accepted as phenomenal across the region.

Nevertheless, we should seriously consider whether classical Kiswahili can also be popularized by these artists to achieve such success or not. As the region moves towards a political federation, a space where diversity will have to share the same social space, hybridity and ambivalence may be inevitable especially in informal communicative spaces where art and literature thrive.

Promoted by artists, media houses and even politicians, hybrid Kiswahili appears to pose a real threat to standardized Kiswahili. However, rather than dismiss the emergent forms of hybrid Kiswahili and their literary products as unworthy of serious intellectual rumination, we should begin by accepting both as symbolic forms of linguistic freedom that mirror the push for expressive freedoms that led to the rise of FM stations, the adoption of free-market economies, politics of pluralism and the emergence of popular youth subcultures as well as literary styles across the region.[x] From such a postmodernist theoretical stance, we may then be able to work towards viable ways of managing such ambivalence and hybridity, probably by disavowing either approaches to the matter and adopting an orientation that recognizes hybrid Kiswahilis in the informal communicative spaces and classical (standard Kiswahili) for formal and institutional communication.

On the other hand there is a real opportunity for Kiswahili in this neoliberal era of FM stations. On 27 April 2007, The East African Community Secretariat jointly with the East African Business Council (EABC) organized the East Africa Media Summit. A high-powered consortium of distinguished guests drawn from across the region met at the Grand Regency Hotel, Nairobi to discuss the role of the Media in the EAC integration and development process. In his speech to the audience, the EAC Secretary-General, Ambassador Mwapachu pointed out the crucial role that Kenya's Nation Group and Tanzania's IPP Media Group were playing in fostering regional consciousness across the five member countries. According to Mwapachu, the meeting was taking place "at an interesting moment when the Media in East Africa is slowly but steadfastly taking an East African shape and form [and] this emerging identity is inevitable, as economic players in our region respond to the logic of the market and become more regional-oriented" (Mwapachu, 2007: 2). IPP Media Group is preparing a regional weekly newspaper in Kiswahili to complement Nation Media Group's anglophone weekly, *The East African.*

A Swahiliphone newspaper such as the one IPP Media Group is working on will reach many who can read in Kiswahili just as *The East African* does for the Anglophone readership. Besides, such a newspaper will further underscore the regional character of the media in East Africa by using the region's most widely-spoken language. However there is also need for the East African Secretariat to seriously consider using the media in its pursuit of a people-centered approach to regional integration. By using the FM media with its capacity to reach more people more instantaneously, the EAC Secretariat will be furthering an intraregional agenda already underway courtesy of IPP Media's East African FM and East African TV (Channel 5). The latter has shown that East Africans are ready to share views on different regional concerns using popular call-in sessions.

Subsequently, the EAC Secretariat should pursue the idea of setting up radio services that will broadcast its policies, views and agenda across the region in Kiswahili. This will be a pathway towards devolving the decision-making responsibility from the current elitist approach and locating that mandate among the people in that interactive fashion popularized by FM Stations. The Secretariat should work on the idea of an East Africa Regional Broadcasting Service (EARBS). EARBS will work in the same capacity as other representational organs at the EAC such as the EABC, which represents the interests of the private corporate sector in the region. This service will be committed to media freedom and free expression in the tradition established by FM stations in East Africa since the turn-of-the-century. The EARBS would be the physical evidence to the Secretariat's genuine commitment to the principle of people-centeredness that is the central plank of the new calls for regional integration.

The proposed East African Regional Broadcasting Service (EARBS) can be pursued as an institution which bring together efforts and funds by the East Africa Media, East African governments, the EAC Secretariat and legitimized via the East Africa Legislative Assembly (EALA) in consultation with the various Attorney Generals of the Member States. In June, 2007, the Second EALA set down its legislative program for the fiscal year 2007/2008. The program includes the passing of the following bills introduced by the East African Community Council of Ministers for the establishment of the following institutions: the East African Kiswahili Commission; the East African Health Research Commission; the East African Science and Technology Commission; the East African Civil Aviation Safety and Oversight Agency.

Establishment of the EARBS should be done in tandem with the establishment of these four institutions. Furthermore, it should be treated as a bill complementing that of the establishment of the East African Kiswahili Commission. While the East African Kiswahili Commission will help attend to matters of standardization highlighted above, it may also help work out a programmatic agenda for the EARBS in consultation with other existing institutions such as the national Councils of Kiswahili in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, CHAKAMA and the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM).

We propose the following phases be used, with modification, to set off the process of establishing EARBS:

Phase One: establishment of the East African Broadcasting Commission (EABC) which will in turn create the East Africa Regional Broadcasting Service (EARBS). EABC will also be charged with *inter alia* the mandate to issue broadcasting policies/guidelines, supervise broadcasting activities and advise on matters of planning and distribution of frequency spectrum in consultation with the local broadcasting commissions of the various member-states.

Phase Two: The African Development Bank (ADB) has granted 5.5. Million U.S. dollars to the EAC to support the feasibility and design of the Arusha-Holili-Taveta-Voi road. The bank is also supporting investment preparations for the Tanga-Horohoro-Malinda road as well as civil engineering capacity-building for the project. In a similar fashion, ADB and other institutions should be approached again for support in terms of feasibility assessment, design as well as funding for the EARBS.

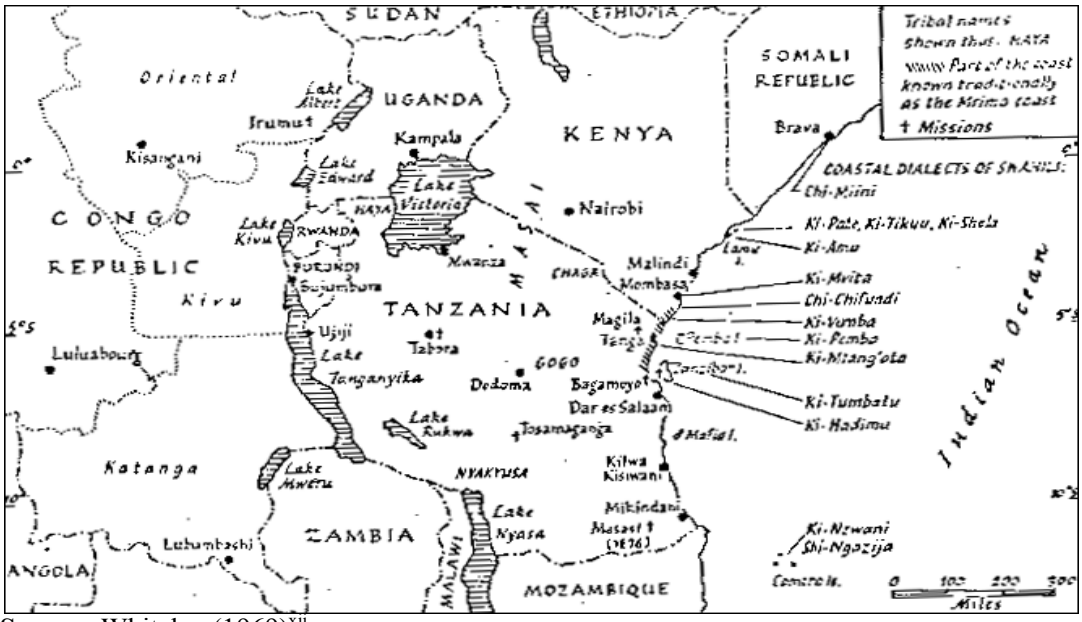
Phase Three: Establishment of an EAC-sponsored FM radio station in Arusha named *Redio Afrika Mashariki* (ARUSHA) or in short RAM FM (ARUSHA).

Phase Four: Establishment of affiliated FM stations in all the capital cities, that is: RAM FM (DAR), RAM FM (NAIROBI), RAM FM (KAMPALA), RAM FM (KIGALI) and RAM FM (BUJUMBURA). These satellite stations will help address the issues of broadcast range which are intrinsic to any FM radio; the frequency modulation service usually covers a limited broadcast range. It might not then enable the RAM FM ARUSHA cover the vast circumference of the expended EAC.

Such an EAC-sponsored Radio Afrika Mashariki FM, Arusha and its satellite stations in the five capital cities of the region will cover the expansive geographical space shown in Table 1.0.

Notice that the media operations of the proposed EARBS and its broadcast ranges will also cover peoples living in the Swahili-speaking Eastern Congo, northern Zambia, northern Malawi, northern Mozambique, southern Somalia and parts of Southern Sudan and southern Ethiopia where there exists populations that speak or understand Kiswahili. Political upheavals in the Horn of Africa that have driven away thousands of non-Kiswahili speaking people such as Southern Sudanese, Ethiopians and even Somalis have paradoxically ensured that a percentage of the affected people fleeing into Kenya acquire the language. The same sociolinguistic phenomenon has been observed among the Burundians and Rwandans who have lived in Tanzania over an extended period as political refugees. These unexpected factors and others such as the adoption of Kiswahili in Rwanda and Burundi besides the institutionalization of Kiswahili in Uganda as the second official language augur well for the future of Kiswahili in these postmodern times.[xi]

Table 1.0: Map of Eastern Africa Showing the Geographical Catchment Area for the Proposed EARBS Regional FM Swahiliphone Stations.



Source: Whiteley (1969)[xii]

It is not far-fetched to imagine how the establishment of a Swahiliphone regional broadcaster using FM techniques, methods and strategies will enable Kiswahili to deepen its roots further in the fertile cultural soils of East African societies. Scholars, such as Kiango (2002) posit:

Katika kutekeleza lengo la kukifikisha Kiswahili katika kila kona, kutakuwa na haja ya kuhimiza vyombo vyetu vya habari kukipa nafasi Kiswahili katika magazeti, redio na televisheni. Faida kubwa inayoweza kupatikana kutokana na mpango huu ni kwamba vyombo vya habari vitasaidia kukisambaza Kiswahili kwa haraka na kukuza uwezo wa lugha wa watumiaji wake. Faida ya pili, ni kwamba vyombo vya habari vitasaidia katika kufikisha habari kwa watu wengi ambao kwa namna moja au nyingine hawajui Kiingereza (Kiango, 2002:194-5).

With the services of the EARBS in place, more people will be able to directly participate through interactive media sessions in establishing a people's federation whose birth, model and future will be determined by the people themselves. The history of the FM radio stations in East Africa gives testimony to the right of popular participation in the economic and political decision-making within African nation-states in the twenty-first century. The right to speech is an integral aspect of each person's right to self-development and fulfillment.

In other words people cannot develop politically and even economically unless they are free to formulate their own political attitudes through discussion. With people's holistic development as the overriding impetus of renewed regional integration in East Africa, it is incumbent upon the region's leaders both in government and the corporate sector to ensure that the most ubiquitous mediums and media are used to integrate the people themselves in the march into the globalizing world.

New intraregional institutions need to be created and used as foundations for the construction of our shared ideals. Just like the institutions of the colonial administration were necessary in developing the vision for the first East African Community (1967-1977), so will new institutions be crucial in the pursuit of the East African Federation. Creation of the East Africa Kiswahili Council is a step in the right direction. But we must also support the creation of the East Africa Regional Broadcasting Service (EARBS) which will ensure our common right of access to public information. The fears and hopes of East Africans need to be aired rather than bottled up. Let the trend set by the growing number of ICT literate *Wananchi* debating matters of regional integration on virtual platforms such as www.jamboforums.com and www.habaritanzania.com, be strengthened by establishment of "a People's Regional Parliament" on the various FM stations that EAC should work towards establishing. Popular communicative spaces reminiscent of the *barazas* of yore, need to be urgently created to enable the peoples of East Africa articulate freely their opinions and help chart their own destiny. EARBS is an institution that should be urgently created to help in the creation of such spaces. Using Kiswahili, the most widely-spoken and understood medium across East Africa and the popular radio model of FM stations, EARBS will ensure regional integration in East Africa takes a popular rather than populist path towards establishment of the East African Political Federation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have invoked the discourse of globalization – zeitgeist of twenty-first century – in our efforts to understand changes within our cultural heritage being triggered by both local and global dynamics inherent in that discourse. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, intellectual efforts should be directed to the interpretation of the myriad influences on local cultures and societies occasioned by the incessant advances in information and communication technology and the increasing levels of literacy across East Africa. More information is reaching more people across Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi than ever before in the history of the region. This logically means that improved access to information is not just the result of technological advance but also the central plank in the construction of the people-centered administrative entities that will help negotiate the prosperity of majority of the Africans in the twenty-first century and beyond. The effects of technological transfers from the Global North to East African nations and the developing world coupled with instantaneous diffusion of information across the world will continue to have far reaching implications to our ideas of culture, society and heritage.

As African people pursue development into the twenty-first century, let it be understood that regional integration is indeed a kind of social development. However, as is the case with any sustainable development agenda, political integration should take the format of a popular process that respects the views of both the proponents and critics of the process who live in all the five Member States, and even their Diasporas. Certainly, more civic awareness campaigns and civic education can help the leaders of the integration agenda in the region achieve this end. When properly deployed, civic awareness campaigns and civic education have helped *Wananchi* reject populist developmental agenda. Regional integration, as a potential strategy of coping from developing countries in the era of globalization, is a crucial step in the process of constructing Africa's twenty-first century political polities. It is in such polities that the cultural differences of contemporary East Africa may be negotiated with minimal conflict. FM radio stations as cultural agents and popular modes of communication are one of the appropriate pathways to the creation of such education. Together with Kiswahili, the most widely-spoken and widely-understood medium in the region, EAC-sponsored FM radios are the road to cultivating a regional consciousness which will hopefully lead us to the East African Political Federation.

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[i] The term 'cultural heritage' is used advisedly following the definition of UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Cultural heritage therefore, can be separated into the intangible non-material aspects such as languages, customs, and religions as well as the tangible aspects such as sites, buildings and artifacts. We limit ourselves to one intangible aspect of African cultural heritage, the Kiswahili language. For varying descriptions of 'cultural heritage' with reference to Africa see. I. Serageldin & J. Taboroff, eds. (1994). *Culture and Development in Africa: Proceedings of an International Conference held at the World Bank, April 2 – 3 1992*. Washington: World Bank.

[ii] Other shared institutions in the colonial era included: the Secretariat of the High Commission, the East African Anti-Locust Directorate, the East African Industrial Council, the East African Directorate of Training, the East African Office in London, the East African Production Supply Council, the East African Refugee Administration, the Lake Victoria Fisheries Board, the Maritime Fisheries Organization, the East African Malaria Unit, the Virus Research Institute, the East African Leprosy Research Center, the East African Tse Tse Reclamation Department, the Directorate of Civil Aviation, the Customs and Excise Department, the Income Tax Department, the Research Services, the Statistical Department, The Regional Geographical Survey, the Meteorological Department, the Information Office, the Publicity Committee, the Post and Telecommunications Committee, the Inter-territorial Language Committee and the East African Radio Communications Service. The combined efforts of these institutions had a centralizing influence, which ensured, for example, that the East African High Commission, established in 1947/8 was transformed in 1961 into the East African Common Services Organization (EACSO) that in turn laid down the basis of the institutions of the initial East African Community (1967-1977).

[iii] See for example, Eken, S. (1979). 'Breakup of the East African Community'. *Finance & Development.* London.

[iv] See for example the opinions of those opposed to the establishment of both the EAC and the EAP at www.jamboforums.com and www.habaritanzania.com.

[v] Such calls have also come under close scrutiny by other regional politicians who have insisted on the need of approaching the issue of political union with caution. For example, the Zanzibar Attorney General Iddi Pandu and the Zanzibar Minister of State, President's Office (Finance and Economy), Dr. Mwinyihaji Makame posit that the Member States need to be given the time to prepare adequately for such an important eventuality http://www.ippmedia.com/ipp/guardian/2007/01/30/83360.html. Legal experts have also called for more consultative approaches to political federation that listens to the voices of more East African peoples than those who submitted their views to the various Presidential Committees mandated with seeking popular opinion on fast-racking integration of the Member States. See, for example, the views of the Executive Director of the Kampala-based, Kituo cha Katiba, Judy Kamanyi in her paper, "The East African Political Federation: Progress, Challenges, Prospects for Constitutional Development," presented at the 10th Annual Sir Udo Udoma Symposium organized by the Makerere Law Society in April, 2006.

[vi] It is this perception of a hard-earned media freedom that is now guiding the Media Owners Association (MOA), stakeholders in the Media industry and the Opposition in their fight against the government-sponsored Media Bill 2007 in Kenya. The contentious Bill, if passed to law, will see the Government exercise greater control of media practice.

[vii] In 1997, the Tanzanian Ministry of Education and Culture issued the Cultural Policy that was endorsed by Parliament. The Policy, for the first time, recognizes Tanzanian vernacular languages as part of the national heritage and proposes that they should be studied, researched and documented besides serving as a resource for enriching Kiswahili. See Mulokozi, (2007:3).

[viii] For further insights on the origins, development and the complex linguistic nature of Sheng' and the hybrid Kenyan Kiswahili consult: Samper, D. A., (2002). "Talking Sheng: The Role of a Hybrid Language in the Construction of Identity and Youth in Nairobi, Kenya," PhD. Diss. University of Pennsylvania. See also, Mazrui, A. M., (1995). "Slang and Code-Switching: The Case of Sheng in Kenya," *Africanistische Arbeitspapier*, 42: 168-179. There is an interesting website that dedicates its operations exclusively to the amoebic argot, www.sheng.co.ke

[ix] This "hybrid Kiswahili" borrows from multiple cultural sources both local and foreign in terms of syntax, semantics and even morphology. In a presentation at the Kiswahili and Globalization Conference organized by TUKI at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2005, Mariano Suriano offered illuminating insights into the literary uses of the hybridized Kiswahili in Tanzania. See "*Utajiju!* Bongo Flavour 'in da houze' The Music of a New Generation: Youth Culture and Globalization," in Sewangi, S. S., & Madmullah, J. S., eds. (2006). *Proceedings of the IKR Jubilee Symposium-2005.* Dar es Salaam: TUKI. Pp. 173-193. See also Casco, J. A. S., (2006). "The Language of the Young People: Rap, Urban Culture and Protest in Tanzania," *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* Vol. 41, No. 3: 229-48.

[x] See J. Nyairo, & J. Ogude, (2005). "Popular Music, Popular Politics: *Unbwogable* and the Idioms of Freedom in Kenyan Popular Music," *African Affairs*, 104/415: 225-49. For criticism on how various literary genres across the region have adapted to the era of FM stations consult, Ogude, & Nyairo, eds. (2007). *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

[xi] The development of the Google Search Engine (Kiswahili Version), a Computer Archives of Kiswahili language and folklore by Arvi Hurskainen in 1995 and the doctoral research of Seleman Sewangi of the IKR on computer-aided extraction of Kiswahili terms in specific domains attest to the fact that Kiswahili is adapting well to the era of digital ICT, see Mulokozi, (2007) Pp. 8-11. See Mwansoko, (2002) for perspectives on how Kiswahili can also be used to counter effects of political strife that lead to refugee crises. In 1992, the Government of Uganda launched the Government White Paper which laid down the official policy on languages in education. The policy clearly states that both Ugandan languages and Kiswahili are to be included in primary and secondary education. See Republic of Uganda, (2000). *Uganda Primary School Curriculum: Volume Tw*o. Kampala: National Curriculum Development Centre. Moreover, on 6 July 2005, the Parliament of Uganda passed an amendment in the 1995 Constitution making Kiswahili the second official language of Uganda, after English. These institutional actions are important in creating an enabling environment that may reinvigorate local stakeholders in Uganda to renew their efforts towards popularizing Kiswahili. For a refreshing assessment of the status of Kiswahili in Uganda today, consult: Mukuthuria, M. (2006). "Kiswahili and its Expanding Roles of Development in East African Cooperation: A Case of Uganda," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(2): 154-65.

[xii] This version obtained from http://www.inst.at/trans/11Nr/ogwana11.htm <Accessed 14 May 2007>.