

Chapter 5

The Swahili Language between Nation and Region

In November 1961, in his last public lecture, the Tanzanian poet Shaaban Robert spoke at Makerere University in Uganda of the power of Swahili as a unifying language for East Africa. He began by recognising the many languages spoken in East Africa, and the pride that all individuals feel in their own language. But to seek unity with others was also natural. He asked rhetorically whether this unity could follow from “the same religion or political aspiration”, and answered “No, my good friends; no, my good friends, no.” “It is”, he said, “a common language, to my way of thinking, that has the influence and potency of bringing races and people into unity. Have we got that sort of language in East Africa? Yes. That language is Swahili, if we must not isolate ourselves from one another and disappear as a nation or nations.”¹ While “foreign overlordship has always been busy to advocate, through schools, churches or official positions, English to be the *lingua franca* in East Africa”, Swahili was, Robert argued, “already the *lingua franca* and political weapon in East Africa. It is a proved fact”.²

At the moment when he gave this speech, Shaaban Robert had just been elected Chairman of the East African Swahili Committee (EASC). The Committee, which had long worried about a lack of funding, was celebrating the award of significant external support to allow it to employ a Research Fellow and move forward on a more stable footing.³ And news that Tanganyika – on the eve of political independence which would take place in December 1961 – was setting up an organisation of its own on the use of Swahili as a result of its “conviction of the unifying influence of Swahili in achieving independence and its desire to see

1 Shaaban Robert, “Swahili as a Unifying Language,” *Swahili: Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 33, no. 1 (1962–1963): 11. Morgan Robinson discusses Shaaban Robert’s essay “*Lugha ya watu wote Afrika Mashariki*” or “The Language of all East African people” in Morgan Robinson, *A Language for the World: The Standardization of Swahili* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2022), 180.

2 Robert, “Swahili as a Unifying Language”: 12.

3 “Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Annual General Meeting of the East African Swahili Committee held in University Hall, Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, on Tuesday, 14th and Wednesday, 15th November, 1961, beginning at 9am on Tuesday 14th November,” *Swahili: Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 33, no. 1 (1962–1963): 139.

Swahili increasingly used in official and semi-official business”, was greeted warmly by the Committee members.⁴

Shaaban Robert died not long after his election as Chairman of the East African Swahili Committee, and was replaced by the British former colonial official and Swahili scholar J.W.T. Allen, who had been Honorary Secretary of the Committee since 1958. But the sense of optimism persisted. In 1963, the Committee’s journal *Swahili* reported that Zanzibar, too, had established an organisation similar to that set up in Tanganyika and situated the growth of the language firmly in the context of political federation, writing: “[w]ith the advent of the Federation of East Africa later this year, the need for a common language becomes imperative. This is realized by all people and the accent is on education, but to get that education quickly there must be a common teaching medium and it has been proved that Swahili will and must be the language of the people.”⁵

Federation, which seemed so close in 1963, did not happen, and the language policies of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar increasingly diverged. As Lyndon Harries wrote in 1968, while at independence “it was widely believed that the East African countries Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda would form a political federation, in which case the value of a common language, Swahili, would be greatly enhanced”, since then “the prospect of federation has receded further and further” with implications for Swahili’s role as a regional language.⁶ While in 1961 the Committee had celebrated the election of Shaaban Robert as Chairman, when Tanzania’s community of Swahili scholars and advocates for the language looked back from the vantage point of 1970, they were struck by the limited extent to which the Committee and its successor, the Institute for Swahili Research, had freed itself from its colonial origins. That same year saw Kenya’s *Daily Nation* newspaper celebrating what its 18 April 1970 editorial column described as “a national language fever” which was “catching on fast all over East Africa”, with KANU having “recently started a four-year campaign to popularise Kiswahili” and signs that “Uganda seems to be thinking seriously about its potential.” But, the editorial continued, Kenya and Uganda had a long way to go, with a generation of

4 “Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Annual General Meeting,” 140.

5 J. Knappert, “Editorial,” *Swahili* 33, no. 2 (1963): 1.

6 Lyndon Harries, “Swahili in Modern East Africa,” in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, eds. Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson and Jyotirindra Das Gupta (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), 421–422. Harries continued: “It seems unlikely that Uganda will ever take official action to make Swahili the national language. With federation, this might possibly have happened, but Uganda is no doubt the chief opponent of federation. In Kenya, the matter is in abeyance, for although the use of Swahili is encouraged, English is becoming more deeply entrenched in education and government.” Harries, “Swahili in Modern East Africa,” 422.

young people who had not learnt Swahili at school. “The result of this blunder is now seen in the fact that we have many young intellectuals who cannot express themselves in Kiswahili and whose natural tendency is to favour English.”⁷

Yet, as the editorial suggests, the ideas expressed by Shaaban Robert in his 1961 speech, that Swahili should assert its place as a global language and as a lingua franca for East Africa remained important as an intellectual project. As Morgan Robinson notes in the final chapter of her recent history of the development of Standard Swahili, *A Language for the World*, the early 1960s saw Swahili, and particularly “Standard Swahili”, increasingly tied to a Tanzanian national project, embodied in the move of the institution which had once been concerned with standardisation across the East African region to Dar es Salaam. Nevertheless, “the *idea* of Swahili as a regional, Pan-African, and/or diasporic lingua franca remained seductive into the postcolonial period.”⁸

We began this book by exploring East Africa’s 1960s intellectual culture through the lens of the magazine *Transition*, published in English, though with its pages playing host to vigorous debates about the question of language.⁹ In many ways, the 1960s marked an exceptional flourishing of intellectual culture in Swahili, with new opportunities to publish in the language, both in newspapers and in book form. But there was also a fragility to this flourishing. Arguments that had continued over many years about different conceptions of Swahili as a language of the coast or the interior, tensions between advocacy for “Standard Swahili” and those who argued that this was a destructive European colonial imposition, and the question of whether East Africa’s countries would or should adopt Swahili as a national language, persisted through the 1960s and beyond. But these older arguments were inflected by new debates: did East Africa need a shared – global – language in order to assert its place in the world and build an African modernity, and should that language be Swahili? Was there a tension between that aim and the goal of building national languages? Or should English be a lingua franca and a global language for East Africa?

7 Wilfred Whiteley papers, Editorial, “Learning Kiswahili,” *Daily Nation*, 18 April 1970, no page. The editorial set out some of the concrete ways in which it was contributing to the development of Swahili in Kenya, for example by printing “popular lessons” of the “well-known Kiswahili radio instructor, Mr Walter Mbotela”, each Monday, and offering a page in English and Swahili in the Friday edition of its sister paper, *Taifa Leo*, the work of a “joint effort by our newspaper group, Unesco and the Adult Literacy Department of the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services.”

8 Robinson, *A Language for the World*, 173.

9 Obiajunwa Wali, “The Dead End of African Literature,” *Transition*, 10 (1963): 330–335; Peter Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1986), 133–139.

This chapter explores the East African dimensions of this intellectual project and its limits, through the figures of some of East Africa's leading proponents of the development of Swahili, which included, prominently, Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere, translator into Swahili of the Shakespeare plays *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. But there was a much wider cast of characters who were also devoted to this project, including Shaaban Robert, Sheikh Amri Abedi, Mathias Mnyampala, and Shihabuddin Chiraghadin, individuals who worked with or alongside the institution of the East African Swahili Committee and its postcolonial successors, as well as its journal (which in this period was initially the *Bulletin* of the Committee, then *Swahili*, later *Kiswahili*).¹⁰ The chapter begins by exploring the ways in which Swahili language work and the project of Swahili as a lingua franca for East Africa both *was* and *was not* a decolonizing project in the early 1960s, exploring the late colonial institutional structure of the East African Swahili Committee in the context of a dynamic field of language work beyond those structures. The second part explores what happened after independence, interrogating the narrative that Swahili language and research work increasingly became part of a national Tanzanian story by thinking about the ways in which nation and region-making intersected. Finally, we explore the persistence of the idea of Swahili as a language for East Africa, against powerful forces set against it, and the way in which this was in part a result of the wide range of people and projects to whom the idea held an appeal.

Colonialism, Regionalism and The East African Swahili Committee

The question of language played a central role in arguments about what decolonization could and should mean in early 1960s East Africa. For some, adopting Swahili as a national language for individual countries and as a lingua franca for the region was seen as a powerful tool in the aim of liberation from colonialism. It could be understood as reclaiming a language from colonial states, and in doing so reclaiming too as a democratizing project, a means of including people in the production and sharing of knowledge who would have been excluded by the use

¹⁰ On the commercial success of Nyerere's translations see Saida Yahya-Othman, *The Making of a Philosopher Ruler*, volume 1 of *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2020), 195.

of English. For Julius Nyerere, the leader of mainland Tanzania's nationalist movement, and first President of Tanzania, this meant in particular, as Saidha Yahya-Othman emphasises, that it had to be a form of Swahili which was accessible to ordinary people.¹¹

Others were deeply sceptical of what they perceived as a colonial project to create and impose a standardised and reduced version of the language, and argued instead for English as a lingua franca, or a renewed focus on vernacular languages. We saw the powerful arguments which the question of language provoked in the pages of *Transition* in Chapter one of this book.

To understand the different forces at work, we start by returning to Shaaban Robert and the East African Swahili Committee. Shaaban Robert was born in Tanga district in Tanzania, then German East Africa, in 1909.¹² He worked for the colonial government in Tanganyika, but he was also one of a group of poets and intellectuals who regularly contributed to the colonial government periodical *Mambo Leo*, carefully navigating the limits of what it was and was not possible to publish in the context of a colonial public sphere.¹³ In this way, Shaaban Robert played an important part in the story of the development of Standard Swahili as a shared language of East Africa as it has recently been told by Morgan Robinson. As Robinson argues, this was not simply a top-down story of colonial language-making, but “[s]tandardization was a shared goal and an acknowledged impossibility, driving the actions of real people across more than a century of East Africa's history, all of whom sought, and achieved, linguistic commensurability.”¹⁴

Shaaban Robert joined the Inter-Territorial Language Committee (ILC), predecessor of the EASC, as an “Assistant Reader” in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The Committee itself had started life in 1930, concerned with language policy in general but specifically in relation to Swahili, with a mission to produce a standardized spelling and grammar for Swahili-language publishing.¹⁵ The dynamics of the ILC reflected disagreements among East Africa's colonial

11 Yahya-Othman, *The Making of a Philosopher Ruler*, 187.

12 John Mugane, *The Story of Swahili* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2015), 172; M. M. Mulokozi ed., *Barua za Shaaban Robert 1931–1958, zilikusanywa na kuhifadhiwa na Yusuf Ulenge* (Dar es Salaam: Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili, Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam, 2002); Robinson, *A Language for the World*.

13 Mulokozi, *Barua za Shaaban Robert*; Fabian Krautwald, “The Bearers of News: Print and Power in German East Africa,” *Journal of African History* 62, no. 1 (2021): 5–28.

14 Robinson, *A Language for the World*, 222.

15 Robinson, *A Language for the World*; Derek Peterson, “Language Work and Colonial Politics in Eastern Africa: The Making of Standard Swahili and ‘School Kikuyu,’” in *The Study of Language and the Politics of Community in Global Context*, ed. D. Hoyt and K. Oslund, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 185–214.

governments on the topic of language. The initial question of which version of Swahili to privilege had itself been controversial, with stark divides between those advocating for the Mombasa Kimvita Swahili and those arguing for the Zanzibar Kiunguja Swahili, which ultimately won out.¹⁶ But there were differences too over whether Swahili should have any reach beyond Tanganyika, Zanzibar and Kenya's coast. There were some in Kenya, such as the colonial official Oscar Watkins, who advocated strongly for Swahili. As we saw in Chapter two, Watkins put huge efforts in the early 1920s into the periodical *Habari*, published in both English and Swahili, though lack of support from the Kenya Government made its failure almost predetermined, and it disappeared for good in the early 1930s. In Uganda, meanwhile, colonial officials offered very little support for Swahili.

Nevertheless, in his role as Chairman of the Languages Board for Kenya Colony, Watkins could still confidently proclaim in his foreword to Rev. B.J. Ratcliffe and Sir Howard Elphinstone's *Modern Swahili* that "[i]t is probable that to posterity the moment at which we stand may appear as that epoch in the history of the East African peoples in which their literature was born. We have had in the past books and translations and collections of stories and proverbs in the various dialects of Swahili, but now at last a serious attempt is to be made to develop that lingua franca into a great educational medium for the spread of knowledge and civilisation throughout the four colonies."¹⁷

The Inter-Territorial Language Committee saw itself as part of that project. In the interwar years, it was dominated by European men like Ratcliffe. But like other institutions explored in this book, the end of the Second World War was accompanied by a shift in perspective and a sense that the previous make-up of the Committee could not continue into the post-war years. The Committee stopped meeting during the Second World War, and its 1946 meeting was its first in-person since 1939. The ILC's journal *Bulletin* recorded a drastic changeover in membership, with only two of those who had served on the Committee from its origins in 1927 now present: "Each Director of Education – ex-officio members of the committee – was new in his territory and so attended for the first time." But, more importantly, the *Bulletin* also reported that "Assistant readers took their place for the first time in the meeting and so from the territories represented on

16 Peterson, "Language Work". In Zanzibar, the periodical *Mazungumzo ya Waalimu* celebrated the fact that it was the Zanzibar version of Swahili which had been chosen to be the version for all East Africa. "Barua ya Mwezi," *Mazungumzo ya Waalimu*, February 1938.

17 O.F. Watkins, "Foreword" in Rev. B.J. Ratcliffe and Sir Howard Elphinstone, *Modern Swahili* (London, 1932), vii.

the committee Africans for the first time were taking their part in dealing with the problems of their mother tongue as submitted to the meeting.”¹⁸

Although it had started life within the framework of the East African Governors structure and then the East Africa High Commission, in 1952 the ILC moved to Makerere University and was attached to the East African Institute for Social Research (not to be confused with the EAISCA introduced in earlier chapters).¹⁹ For members of the Committee, the 1950s saw the question of language increasingly tied to broader questions about independence, nationalist politics, and the search for funding to continue research into the Swahili language and its development. The Committee itself remained deeply embedded in colonial structures, but it was also becoming a hub in a network of knowledge production and associational culture which extended beyond those structures.

We can see traces of those networks in the pages of the Committee’s *Bulletin*, the journal which would later be renamed the *Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* (1954), *Swahili* (1959) and then *Kiswahili*.²⁰ In the 1950s, the Committee remained dominated by European Swahili scholars. The driving force behind the Committee for much of the 1950s was the British scholar Wilfred H. Whiteley. Whiteley had studied anthropology before going to Tanganyika, initially as Government Anthropologist, where he became increasingly interested in linguistic research. When the Committee moved to Makerere in 1952 he became its Secretary.²¹ With the ILC’s base at Makerere, it was increasingly focused on research rather than language policy, and the *Bulletin* provided a home for the publication of some of this research.

But the *Bulletin*’s pages also began, tentatively, to provide a space which reflected some of the wider dynamics of East African language debates around Swahili. In 1954, the Kenya Legislative Council decided in favour of English as the primary language for Kenya. This prompted a strong response from advocates for Swahili, including a long letter published in the *Bulletin* from the Makerere-based Tanzanian scholar Oswald Bernard Kopoka setting out the case for Swahili rather than English to be “the lingua franca of East Africa – including Kenya”.²² The following year, the *Bulletin* printed a submission to the 1954 UN Visiting Mission

18 “Editorial”, *Bulletin No. 20, Inter-Territorial Language (Swahili) Committee*, July 1947, 1.

19 Wilfred Whiteley, *Swahili: The Rise of a National Language* (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993) [first published London: Methuen, 1969], 79–90; Shihabuddin Chiraghadin together with Mathias E. Mnyampala, *Historia ya Kiswahili* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1977), 61.

20 Whiteley, *Rise of a National Language*, 92.

21 John Kelly, “Introduction” in Whiteley, *Swahili: The Rise of a National Language*, no page.

22 Letter from O.B. Kopoka, “English as a Lingua Franca in Kenya,” *Bulletin No. 24 of the East African Swahili Committee*, June 1954: 76–81, 78.

to Tanganyika from the *Jumuia ya Taaluma ya Kiswahili Tanganyika* (the Association for the Study of Kiswahili in Tanganyika).²³ In its submission, the Association argued for Swahili as the only language which could bring all East Africa's communities together. "East Africa", they wrote "cannot develop without Swahili."²⁴ They expressed regret at moves in Kenya to shift away from the language, though they emphasised that English should also be taught alongside Swahili, given its importance in terms of accessing higher education. From Makerere, Michael Sanga, a Tanzanian student who was active in nationalist student politics at the College, shared news of the establishment of the Makerere College Swahili Language Propagation Society.²⁵ In a letter to the *Bulletin*, Sanga explained that the Society had been founded in 1954

at a time when there was a heated argument as to whether Swahili or English should be the national language of Kenya. The triumph for the latter language caused a great alarm amongst the members of the Society and they at once decided to found the Society which would not only prevent this unfortunate step from being taken elsewhere in E. Africa, but also explore the possibility of making the Kenya people reverse their policy.²⁶

In the same letter Sanga welcomed the existence of the *Jumuia ya Taaluma ya Kiswahili* and wrote that "[i]t is indeed gratifying to find out that there are, among the E. Africans, people, who are already aware of the need of fighting for the cause of Swahili even at that level – for what else can be done when there are forces within E. Africa fighting for legislations to the contrary!"²⁷

The ILC's successor organisation, the East African Swahili Committee, also increasingly supported historical work to recover and preserve Swahili manuscripts, through its new History Sub-Committee, established in 1958.²⁸ While Secretary Wilfred Whiteley framed the drive to undertake work in this area and seek funding from overseas foundations as being about making the many "historical documents in Swahili, both published and unpublished" available to both

23 "Aridhilihali ya Jumuiya ya Taaluma ya Kiswahili Tanganyika kwa Ujumbe wa Mataifa ya Umoja Uliotembelea Tanganyika Mwezi Septemba, 1954," *Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* No. 25, June 1955: 40–43.

24 "Afrika Mashairiki haiwezi kuendelea bila Kiswahili," *Ibid*, 42.

25 Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising world*, 43.

26 Letter from Michael M. Sanga, *Bulletin No. 26 of the East African Swahili Committee*, June 1956: 88–91

27 Letter from Michael M. Sanga, *Bulletin No. 26 of the East African Swahili Committee*, June 1956: 88–91.

28 Mss.Afr.s.1705, ff. 8–11, "Minutes of the 22nd Annual General Meeting of the East African Swahili Committee held in Mombasa, September 9th–11th, 1958," 4.

“the professional historian and the interested layman”, for others this was a work of recovery of coastal history and identity.

For a new generation of East African scholars active in the EASC and its History Committee, the scholar Shihabuddin Chiraghdin explained at the Peking Scientific Symposium in 1964:

It is accepted that Swahili is the lingua franca of East Africa and has played an important part in bringing about the national consciousness of these areas. Swahili is indigenous to East Africa, although it owes a lot from outside sources in Asia. But the Europeans have set out to show that it is foreign. This belief may have come from the idea held by the colonialists that ‘Africa had no history of its own’. But contemporary evidence shows otherwise. Swahili is an old language with no less than fifteen dialects.

But colonial administrators had stifled the language. And for Chiraghdin, “[t]hat is why the accusation of inadequacy of thought, vocabulary, and idiom could be levelled against Swahili. In fact, there was a certain amount of opposition to it being the lingua franca of East Africa.”²⁹

As these examples suggest, there were many groups and individuals committed to furthering the goal Shaaban Robert described in the speech we started the chapter with. Not all agreed with each other politically, and the communities they belonged to ranged widely. Some were members of old Swahili families of the coast, for whom the Swahili language was intimately tied to the history of their community. Others, like Mathias Mnyampala, had adopted Swahili as a second language, and actively defended their claim to it against those who sought to limit true ownership of the language to the people of the Swahili coast.³⁰

One individual who was a passionate advocate and scholar of the Swahili language was Sheikh Amri Abedi. Born in 1924 in Ujiji, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, his language work was bound up with his commitments to Islam and to anti-colonial nationalism in Tanganyika and in East Africa more broadly.³¹ Sheikh Amri Abedi’s career represented the ways in which language was, for many Tanzanians far beyond intellectual circles, fundamental to anti-colonial politics. Already from 1955, TANU was calling for Swahili to be used in the Legislative Council.³² One indicator of the power of TANU’s language policies among a wide public can be found in B.R. Omori’s popular column in *Baraza* “Panapo Moshi . . .”

²⁹ Chiraghdin, *Life Journey*, 103.

³⁰ Gregory Maddox, “Introduction: the Ironies of *Historia*, *Mila na Desturi za Wagogo*” in Mathias Mnyampala, *Historia, Mila na Desturi za Wagogo*, translated, introduced and ed. Gregory Maddox (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 3.

³¹ See Obituary in *Swahili*, March 1965, for more details.

³² Yahya-Othman, *Philosopher Ruler*, 188.

in September 1956. Omori reported the rumour that the schools which TANU was planning to establish would use Swahili, and that TANU representatives would seek to raise the standing of Swahili by addressing meetings in the language when they visited Europe or America.³³

As might be expected in a Swahili-language newspaper read across borders, the letters pages of the newspaper *Baraza* regularly included letters from correspondents calling for more East Africans to embrace Swahili. Such letters called attention both to the potential for Swahili as a unifying force in the region, and the extent to which hesitancy about Swahili in Uganda limited this potential. A certain J.P. Mwafwalo in Dar es Salaam, for instance, complained in a letter in January 1964 that Swahili broadcasts had not yet begun in Uganda, despite the fact that many people spoke the language there. Mwafwalo offered to help the Ugandan authorities if the problem was a lack of announcers, as, he explained, making sure that everyone in East Africa could speak and understand Swahili would make uniting the region much easier than if it were divided by language.³⁴ *Baraza's* editor, Francis Khamisi, was himself an active promoter of Swahili, as we saw in Chapter two. This extended beyond his work as a newspaper editor: in the early 1960s he presented a radio programme called “Ubingwa wa Lugha”, described in the *Daily Nation* radio listings as a quiz programme “aimed at promoting Swahili vocabulary fluency and African culture in general”.³⁵

As independence approached, some external observers predicted a future for Swahili as a regional language, and as in earlier periods, they saw its potential as a means of pursuing their own political agendas. Officials in London thinking about anti-communist activities in the region suggested that more should be published in Swahili as a rising regional language, including the idea of a Swahili-language anti-communist newspaper, as we saw in Chapter two.³⁶ For the Swahili scholar Lyndon Harries, the development of “broadcast programs in Swahili from Washington, London, Moscow, Peking, and New Delhi [was] evidence of the East African presence in world affairs.”³⁷

33 B.R. Omori, “Panapo Moshi,” *Baraza*, 15 September 1956, 4.

34 Letter from J.P. Mwafwalo, DSM, “Kiswahili katika Radio Uganda,” *Baraza*, 16 January 1964, 4.

35 Radio Listings, *Daily Nation*, 8 December 1964, 15.

36 FCO 168/615, no f, “Memorandum: Counter-Subversion in Zanzibar,” 12 May 1962, 3.

37 Harries, “Swahili in East Africa,” 416. In her study of Britain’s assertion of cultural power in East Africa after independence, Caroline Ritter traces the ways in which the BBC Swahili service was developed and reached growing audiences across East Africa. Based in London, the Swahili service offered training for young East African journalists but in turn deprived East Africa’s radio stations of personnel, often for long periods. Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire*, (Berkeley CA: University of California Press) 2021, 123.

However, the pages of the *Bulletin* only hint at this wider context, and it remained largely limited to a European readership. In volume 29, the then editor, Wilfred Whiteley, expressed concern that the journal, now called *Swahili*, reached so few East African readers.³⁸ The 1961 volume, now under the editorship of Jan Knappert, addressed this issue head on, under the heading “A change of wind requires a change of tack”. Knappert informed his readers that “[i]n view of the changing circumstances both inside and outside the Committee, a thorough revision of our work is indispensable”.³⁹

Issues published the following year better reflected the dynamic environment outside the Committee. While the loss of Shaaban Robert was felt deeply, there was nevertheless much to celebrate, in particular, funding from the Portuguese Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, built on the wealth of an oil magnate, to appoint Jan Knappert as Research Fellow. Knappert’s report of his activities during his first year of appointment spoke both to the excitement of the moment, and to diverging paths. Knappert celebrated the fact that “[t]hree of the Governments of East Africa have expressed views in favour of making Swahili the national language, and all are emphatic that it must be spoken well”. But at the same time, Tanganyika was pressing ahead with its own national structures. On his visit to Dar es Salaam, Knappert met Sheikh Amri Abedi, then mayor of Dar es Salaam and also incoming chair of the Tanganyika Swahili Committee.⁴⁰

The changing power dynamics at work were clearly expressed at the Committee’s annual meeting in 1963 in an opening address by Abedi, who now also served as Minister of Justice in Tanganyika. This was, he began by saying, “a particularly important meeting as you have come here from Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar, to discuss with those who represent this country, not only your annual estimates for the year 1963/64, but also to examine the future plans and functions of the East African Swahili Committee during the next five years.” In a lengthy speech he praised the proud history of the Committee, and the work of its members. He went on to address explicitly the question which, he was sure, all those present were asking themselves: “Where do we go from here?” What would be the EASC’s relationship with the new Department of Languages and Linguistics at the University College in Dar es Salaam, and with the new Swahili Academy in the process of being set up? Abedi set out a vision of the future for the Committee as a “research body, with an interest throughout East Africa, responsible for the collection and correlation of research work in all East African countries, and in

³⁸ W.H. Whiteley, “Editorial,” *Swahili* 29, no. 1 (1959): 5.

³⁹ Editorial, *Swahili* 32, no. 1 (1961): no page.

⁴⁰ J.K. Knappert, “Report of the Senior Research Fellow,” *Swahili* 33, no. 2 (1963): 3.

other countries where Swahili is spoken and is spreading.” The tone of the speech made clear how much has changed. As a government minister of an independent country, Abedi expressed thanks to the Committee on behalf of “the people of East Africa” for “all that it has done to help develop the rapid growth and use of the Swahili language, which in itself has provide of inestimable assistance in bringing into being not only the nation of Tanganyika but the other nations of East Africa and elsewhere”. He praised the “Committee’s work and the work of others”, through which the “people of Tanganyika have become conscious during the last decade, through study of their own language, of so much of their national heritage, which was previously known only to a few.” But this gratitude for past work went alongside a clear expectation that the primary role in taking forward the development of the language would now sit with national governments.⁴¹

The Many Roles of Swahili in a Decolonising World

At a 1971 UNESCO meeting of experts for the promotion of African Languages in Eastern and Central Africa, George A. Mhina of the University of Dar es Salaam described “a period of ‘Renaissance’” on the continent. “The African people”, he continued, “are recovering from the great humiliation inflicted to their culture by those who colonized them for years.” But cultural renaissance, Mhina continued, had to recognise “that culture goes with languages”. For Mhina, Swahili was “an African language that has exploded,” and which should be supported to “play its appropriate role as an effective tool for educational cultural and economic developments in East Africa.”⁴²

When in 1961 Shaaban Robert had insisted that no one could doubt Swahili’s position as East Africa’s lingua franca, he drew on a long tradition of making precisely this argument, an argument which, as we have seen, had been made by European language experts as well as by East African advocates of Swahili. But the reality was that already in 1961, before independence, very different national language policies were developing across the region.

⁴¹ Draft minutes annual meeting 1963, Appendix A, “Speech by the Hon Sheikh Amri Abedi, M.P., Minister for Justice to the Republic of Tanganyika, to the East African Language Committee on the Occasion of its Annual Meeting held on 30th September, 1963, at Dar es Salaam,” *Swahili: Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 34, no. 1 (1964): 5–8.

⁴² George A. Mhina, “Problems being faced in the process of developing African languages with special reference to Kiswahili,” UNESCO Meeting of Experts for the promotion of African Languages in Eastern and Central Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 15–21 December 1971, 4.

Within the Kenyan colonial government, Oscar Watkins's pro-Swahili advocacy had always been at the margins. Writing in 1956, Wilfred Whiteley referred to Swahili's declining position in both Uganda and Kenya, and predicted that "[o]nly in Tanganyika and Zanzibar does it seem likely to retain its importance for some years, and in the urban areas throughout East Africa some form of Swahili will probably persist."⁴³

The shift towards English which Whiteley identified can be seen in developing Colonial Office thinking in the early 1950s. In 1951 a Study Group travelled to East and Central Africa on behalf of the Colonial Office. The resulting report firmly rejected Swahili in favour of a combination of the vernaculars and English. The report's authors wrote: "Historically it had its origins as a means of communication between Arab slavers and African enslaved. Some African tribes therefore are unwilling, even when they know Swahili, to speak it and most unhappy when it is taught to their children", though they did admit that "it has inspired a little good poetry and some original stories."⁴⁴ The preference of the report's authors for English, rather than Swahili, was, they argued, threefold: "as a *lingua franca*; as a road to the technical knowledge of modern inventions; and a means of contact with world thought." The technical language of English was presented as the solution to poverty, drought and famine, and enhanced trade. In cultural terms, for the report's authors, "knowledge of English introduces the reader to the vast storehouse of English literature, for more foreign books have been translated into English than any other language. Now broadcasting and films penetrate into the remotest parts and can only be fully enjoyed by those who understand English." English was presented as no less than the route to a new morality. With missionary zeal, the report argued that "[t]he African needs English today in the same sense and to the same degree as the Renaissance European needed Greek or Greek thought in Latin form. English thought could come to Africa with all the liberating power of Greek thought to Europe. Language carries with it the spiritual values on which it is based." In this way, they argued, "[a] better, wider, and deeper knowledge of English would mean a better understanding of European thought, and some steps would be taken towards that synthesis of African and European ideas which must be the basis of a firm moral and social order."⁴⁵

⁴³ W.H. Whiteley, "The Changing Position of Swahili in East Africa," *Africa* 26, no. 4 (1956): 352.

⁴⁴ "Report of the East and Central Africa Study Group" In Nuffield Foundation and Colonial Office, *African Education: A Study of Educational Policy and Practice in British Tropical Africa* (Oxford: University Press, 1953), 81.

⁴⁵ "Report of the East and Central Africa Study Group" In Nuffield Foundation and Colonial Office, *African Education: A Study of Educational Policy and Practice in British Tropical Africa* (Oxford: University Press, 1953), 82.

In May 1952, a circular sent to the East African Governors from London expressed the view that English should become the lingua franca for East Africa. The letter recognised that “there are many, including probably some administrative officers, who may not share this view.” Yet, it continued,

in spite of certain obvious political difficulties which it may create it does seem to us that in the long run it is most desirable in East Africa, as we believe it has proved useful in India, that English should be the common language. It seems to us that this is so not only from the point of view of strengthening the British connection but also that it is clearly to the advantage of the Africans themselves that their common language should be one that is in world-wide use rather than one which is confined to East Africa and also by no means suitable as an instrument for use in connection with modern economic developments.⁴⁶

The language question, however, looked very different from Dar es Salaam. Accepting the aim of developing English as a lingua franca, Bruce Hutt, Tanganyika’s Chief Secretary from 1951 to 1954, emphasised that even if English were to develop as a lingua franca, this was unlikely to make Swahili less important. At a recent meeting of Tanganyika’s Provincial Commissioners, Hutt reported back to the Colonial Office in London, the question of language had been discussed, and the Provincial Commissioners had “recommended that Government policy should be to concentrate on Swahili and through Swahili to English.” This was not, he wrote, a consequence of their “prejudice in favour of Swahili”, but rather “they were recognising that at the present time Swahili is the natural lingua franca of the territory.”⁴⁷

And so as independence approached, East Africa’s leaders adopted a range of positions on the question of language. In Kenya, Swahili had played an important role in anti-colonial activism, notably in the trade union movement.⁴⁸ But as Kenya’s new leaders moved into government, they combined warm words for the importance of Swahili with, in practice, a continued commitment to English which per-

46 UKNA CO 822/679, f. 3, “Letter to all Governors,” 4 April 1952.

47 UKNA CO 822/679, f. 10, Letter from Bruce Hutt to P. Rogers, 10 July 1952: 1.

48 George Ileri Mbaabu, “The Impact of Language Policy on the Development of Kiswahili in Kenya, 1930–1990”, (PhD thesis, Howard University, 1991), 72; Chege Githiora, “Kenya: Language and the Search for a Coherent National Identity,” in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241. As an example, Makhan Singh’s memorandum to the Mombasa Labour Inquiry, which followed the Mombasa African workers’ general strike of 1939, was translated into Swahili by Francis Khamisi and “widely circulated among workers by the union after copies were cyclostyled in English and Swahili”. Makhan Singh, *History of Kenya’s Trade Union Movement to 1952* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), 93.

sisted through the 1960s. The 1964 Ominde Commission on Education for instance recommended the teaching of English from the first day of primary school.⁴⁹ There were a number of moments when the Kenyan government evinced stronger support for Swahili, notably in 1970 when Robert Matano, Acting Secretary General of KANU, Kenya's ruling party, set out ambitious plans for the development of Swahili, prompting the *Daily Nation* editorial discussed earlier.⁵⁰ But there were strong voices against Swahili too, famously the Attorney General Charles Njonjo who spoke forcefully against Swahili both publicly and in correspondence within Government.⁵¹

Beyond the voices of individuals, the example of the *East African Standard's* short-lived effort to publish provincial news in Swahili in 1970 gestures to the ways in which everyday political culture in Kenya worked against efforts to support the use of Swahili. As the *Standard* explained, this measure had been introduced "as a genuine attempt to encourage the use of Swahili in line with the policy explained by Mr. Matano, for the Kanu Governing Council." But it had not worked. Complaints were many and varied. Some asked why if there was news in Swahili there could not also be news in Duluo or Kikuyu, while others criticised the translation. There were also complaints "by politicians and others who failed to find their own items in the paper". Although they were told the item was there, in the Swahili pages, "very often they replied 'but we don't want them there – we want them in English so that everybody can read them'."⁵²

In Tanganyika, and, from 1964, in the United Republic of Tanzania, in contrast, Swahili was swiftly embraced as the national language. Already before independence, plans were underway for Swahili to be taught in all schools from January 1962, and for Swahili to increasingly be used in Government business.⁵³ The Institute for Swahili Research moved to the University of Dar es Salaam in 1964. It was attached to the University College, with a new name,

49 On the Ominde Commission, George Ireri Mbaabu, "The impact of language policy on the development of Kiswahili in Kenya, 1930–1990" (PhD thesis, Howard University, 1991), 87–93; On Kenya's approach more broadly, Henry Chakava, *Books and Reading in Kenya* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982), 2.

50 PP MS. Whiteley Box 4, SL55, Kenya High Commission, London, Kenya Digest, "Drive to introduce Swahili as Official Language," Number 128, 30 April 1970.

51 PP MS. Whiteley Box 4, SL55, "Using Swahili 'would stagnate progress,'" *East African Standard*, 26 July 1969.

52 PP MS. Whiteley Box 4, SL55, No author, "The news in Swahili," *East African Standard*, 11. 7.70.

53 E.g. "Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Annual General Meeting of the East African Swahili Committee held in University Hall, Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, on Tuesday, 14th and Wednesday, 15th November, 1961, beginning at 9am on Tuesday 14th November," 140.

the *Chuo cha uchunguzi katika lugha ya Kiswahili* or Institute of Kiswahili Research.⁵⁴

The Swahili scholar Ireri Mbaabu concluded, that, following its move to Dar es Salaam, the Institute increasingly “operated its affairs as a national rather than an East African institute”, and this is the point at which Morgan Robinson ends her story of the development of “Standard Swahili”.⁵⁵ But the story of the Institute for Swahili Research after its move to the University of Dar es Salaam also captures some of the ways in which nation and region interacted in the area of Swahili language research and knowledge production.

The East African dimension remained important to the way the Institute thought about its work. Its 1965 constitution described its aim as being to “contribute to the education and well-being of the people of Eastern Africa by providing opportunities for the study of the Swahili language in all its aspects”.⁵⁶ As was the case with other institutions we have explored in this book, the Institute benefited both from government funding from East Africa’s newly independent states and from the opportunities for external funding offered by international foundations. In September 1965, Wilfred Whiteley described the sources of funding which supported the Institute, which had come into being since his last editorial. Kenya and Tanzania each provided £800 a year, and there was a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the UK Ministry of Overseas Development for 1964–1967. The Zanzibar Ministry of Education had seconded J.A. Tejani for two and a half years to work on the Swahili dictionary, while Rockefeller Foundation funding paid for J. W. T. Allen to serve as Honorary Research Associate engaged in collecting Swahili literature.⁵⁷

Whiteley’s editorial outlined a direction for the Institute which would see it rooted in East Africa but also embedded in transnational circuits of knowledge exchange. He expected, he wrote, “to hand over to an East African” when his contract ended. And he expressed the Institute’s hopes for “close and fruitful cooperation between all persons, Institutions and Governments concerned with the use of Swahili.” It was, he continued “a joy to note that the contributors to the

54 Robinson, *A Language for the World*, 208.

55 Cited in Robinson, *A Language for the World*, 208.

56 TNA 622/SS/8, f. 17, Muhsin M.R. Alidina, Acting Director of the Institute of Swahili Research, “The Institute of Swahili Research: Its Composition, Activities and Collaboration with Kenya and Uganda,” Appendix to Minutes of the Thirteenth meeting of the board of the Institute of Kiswahili Research held on Saturday 24th August, 1974,” 5.

57 W.H. Whiteley, “Editorial,” *Swahili* 35 no. 2 (1965): 1.

present issue write from such diverse places as India, the Soviet Union, the United States, England and Germany, as well as East Africa.”⁵⁸

But over the course of the 1960s financial and institutional developments as well as dynamics internal to the country conspired to shift the Institute’s centre of gravity towards Tanzania. At the point at which the Institute moved to Dar es Salaam in 1964, contributions to its annual budget still came from across the region, with Kenya contributing 17,560 Shs, Tanganyika 16,000 Shs, Uganda 15,800 Shs and Zanzibar 3,125 Shs. But funds were nevertheless in short supply. Committee minutes record the limitations of staff and budgets, and few subscribers to the Committee’s journal regularly paid their subscriptions.⁵⁹

Despite all the good news for the Institute in 1964, this year also brought the blow of the news that, from then on, Uganda would no longer contribute to the work of the Committee or its successor, and that Kenya would not increase its commitment beyond existing levels.⁶⁰ In 1967/8 when Kenya was asked to match a substantial increase in funding from Tanzania and Zanzibar (up to 14,000 Shs from Zanzibar and 63,000 Shs from Tanzania), Kenya declined.⁶¹

The Institute was reconstituted in 1970 following the University of Dar es Salaam Act of that year, and it had an increasingly national element to it, with representation from the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s Ministry of Education and other Tanzanian bodies, including the recently established BAKITA or *Baraza la Taifa ya Lugha ya Kiswahili*, Tanzania’s National Swahili Council. Its inauguration and opening day celebration in June 1970, preserved in a pamphlet in Swahili and English, captured this sense of national mission. Tanzanians were encouraged to “play your part” in establishing and developing our National Language”.⁶² The reference to a wider East African mission was still there, with the constitution stating that “[t]he Institute of Swahili Research shall be concerned with the study and furtherance of the Swahili language in all its aspects, with spe-

58 W.H. Whiteley, “Editorial,” *Swahili* 35 no. 2 (1965): 1.

59 In his 1965 news-letter, the Committee’s secretary Wilfred Whiteley lamented the lack of subscriptions to the Committee’s Journal. He wrote, “a breakdown of our current subscribers shows that only 35 individuals paid their 1964 subscriptions.”

60 Rhodes House Library [hereafter RHO] Mss.Afr.s.1705, f. 39, East African Swahili Committee, University College, *News-Letter Number Two*, 24 February 1965.

61 TNA 622/S5/8, f. 17, “The Institute of Swahili Research: Its Composition, Activities and Collaboration with Kenya and Uganda,” Appendix to Minutes of the Thirteenth meeting of the board of the Institute of Kiswahili Research held on Saturday 24 August 1974, 2.

62 Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam, “Mzinduo na Siku ya Kufungua Jumamosi 19 Agosti 1970 Chuo cha Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili.” The Swahili part of the pamphlet, though not the English part, included a section emphasizing that the Swahili to be promoted was ‘Standard Swahili’, which was a language shared by all.

cial reference to the support of current and long term development plans in the United Republic of Tanzania, in East Africa and elsewhere, and in the university of Dar es Salaam.”⁶³ But at this point the shift in terms of the balance of financial support was reflected in the representation from the other East African governments. After the Institute was reconstituted in 1970, the Kenya government sent an initial representative, but they sent apologies rather than send a representative to the third meeting and subsequent meetings. When Kenya was asked to nominate a new representative in 1973/74 they declined to do so.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the foundation of BAKITA had institutionalised Tanzania’s focus on Swahili as a national language. The decision to establish the Council was taken in 1967, the same year that Tanzania’s government determined that henceforth Swahili would be the medium of instruction in primary schools and for government communication. Tanzania’s long-term goal was for it to be the medium of instruction in secondary schools and universities too, a position maintained – if not fully achieved – until 1983.

The National Swahili Council was created in a context in which new voices were building on the earlier advocacy and promotion of Swahili that we traced in the late 1950s. In 1963, when the civil society organisation the *Jumuiya ya kustawisha Kiswahili* (Association for the Advancement of Swahili) was established, its aims included work on grammar, orthography and usage, as well as to “translate and write books”.⁶⁵ Its members used the pages of Tanzania’s Swahili-language newspapers to advocate for the language, to develop it, and to instruct in its usage, as did members of the *Chama cha Usanifu wa Kiswahili na Ushairi* (Society for the Enhancement of the Swahili Language and Verse), founded in 1964 by the poet Mathias Mnyampala.⁶⁶ The Catholic newspaper *Kiongozi*, for example, had a

63 TNA 622/SS/8, f. 17, “The Institute of Swahili Research: Its Composition, Activities and Collaboration with Kenya and Uganda,” Appendix to “Minutes of the Thirteenth meeting of the board of the Institute of Kiswahili Research held on Saturday 24th August, 1974,” 5.

64 TNA 622/SS/8, f. 17, “The Institute of Swahili Research,” 2.

65 Whiteley, *Rise of a National Language*, 110.

66 Whiteley, *Rise of a National Language*, 111. In February 1965 the newspaper *Ngurumo* reported that the two associations were joining forces. “Vyama vyaungana kustawisha Kiswahili,” *Ngurumo* 9 February 1965, 2. This followed an expansion of the activities which the Chama cha Usanifu wa Kiswahili na Ushairi was planning to take to set up a special committee to correct what it deemed to be bad Swahili in the pages of newspapers and on the radio, which would not only include poets but also individuals such as Stephen Mhando, Juma Ali of the East African Literature Bureau and Mohamed Azaz of University College Dar es Salaam and the East African Swahili Committee. See “Kamati ya Kusahihisha Swahili,” *Ngurumo*, 7 January 1965, 4.

long running series of articles focusing on the Swahili language by Mamala.⁶⁷ There were heated newspaper arguments about the Swahili language which reformulated and recast long-running debates over whether Swahili's origins were as an Arabic or Bantu language and which languages, if at all, new vocabulary should be borrowed from.⁶⁸ Such newspaper debates appeared not only in *Kiongozi* but also, for example, in *Ngurumo*, an independent newspaper widely read by urban Tanzanians, and the TANU party newspaper *Uhuru*.⁶⁹

Nyerere himself contributed to the poetry pages of Tanzania's Swahili newspapers in the 1960s, but it was his translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which particularly captured the sense of possibility of the time.⁷⁰ Nyerere's biographer Saida Yahya-Othman describes queues outside bookshops when the first edition was published.⁷¹ Beyond his own translation work, Nyerere promoted the development of the language through the support he offered to new Swahili publications, by, for instance, providing a foreword. His introduction to the economics textbook *Uchumi Bora* published in 1966 (re-published in English in 1969 as *From Poverty to Prosperity: an introduction to economics*) is an example of this in practice, and shows the importance Nyerere attached to the use of Swahili to bring key concepts and ideas to a wider public than might be reached through English.⁷²

67 For example, PP MS. Whiteley Box 4, SL55M.E. Mnyampala, "Taaluma ya Kiswahili," *Kiongozi*, 1 May 1966, 3.

68 In his recent social history of the Swahili language, John Mugane distinguishes between what he terms "Swahili purists" and "Afrocentric purifiers", with the former suggesting that no borrowing was appropriate, and the latter a "lingual hierarchy" whereby, in the words of Chiragh-din and Mnyampala in Mugane's translation, words could be borrowed from "Bantu and other African languages followed by Arabic and English". Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*, 223–224.

69 Whiteley, *Rise of a National Language*, 111. There was for example, a long running debate in the letters pages of the Tanzanian newspaper *Ngurumo* in early 1965.

70 An interview which Geoffrey Reeves conducted with the Tanzanian publisher Walter Bgoya in 1973 provides a sense of the importance of the poetry pages in Tanzania's Swahili newspapers. Bgoya told Reeves that the poetry pages in the newspaper *Ngurumo* and *Uhuru* made it less essential than it would otherwise have been for the Tanzania Publishing House to publish stand-alone books of poetry in the Swahili language. Reeves, "The East African Intellectual Community," 214.

71 Yahya-Othman, *Philosopher Ruler*, 185.

72 Julius Nyerere, "Introduction" in Peter Temu, *Uchumi Bora* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press East Africa Branch, 1966). See also, though without Nyerere's introduction, Peter Temu, *From Poverty to Prosperity: an introduction to economics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Saida Yahya-Othman describes the many requests which authors of both English and Swahili books made for Nyerere's endorsement, and the careful choices he made in deciding which books he would endorse. Yahya-Othman, *Philosopher Ruler*, 191.

As this wider context suggests, the ambitions of the National Swahili Council were very different from the ambitions which had led to the creation of the Inter-Territorial Language Committee back in the 1930s. In a 1970 speech, the Honourable C. Y. Mgonja, Minister for National Education, the department responsible for the Council at that time, recalled the forces which had led to BAKITA's foundation. He described its aim as being to remove one of the shameful legacies of colonialism, the idea that "every good thing comes from outside of Africa, and in particular Europe. They tried to make us believe that even the greatest scholars of the language of Kiswahili, whose home is in Tanzania and East Africa in general, were Europeans or those who were educated by Europeans."⁷³

The Council's aims were very similar to those of the organisations which preceded it. First and foremost, it was to "promote the development and usage of the Swahili language throughout the United Republic".⁷⁴ Initially, it was housed within the Ministry for Regional Administration and Rural Development, before moving to National Education in 1969.⁷⁵ That original location indicates the focus on the integration of Tanzania's regions as a part of a Tanzanian nation, with Swahili as a central part of this nation-building project.

A sense of national mission pervades the archival record for the Council's early years. In his first report as Chair in 1969, future Tanzanian president Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who had replaced the first chair Stephen Mhando, expressed the Council's thanks to the government for its initial support and asserted the huge importance of the language work that they would undertake.⁷⁶ Building the national language was a project of nation-making, for having a national language was a way for people to know one another and to come together as one.⁷⁷ BAKITA started small, in an office with just one room and just three members of staff, which Mwinyi emphasised was far from sufficient for a National Council. Its first secretary was S.M. Kombo, who in March 1969 was replaced by Clement Nkunga,

73 "Kujitegemea katika Lugha ya Kiswahili. Hotuba Iliyotolewa na Mhe. C.Y. Mgonja, Waziri wa Elimu ya Taifa, akifunga Semina ya Kiswahili, Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam, Tarehe 9/6/70," in *Taarifa ya Semina ya Kiswahili*, ed. Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, 90.

74 Whiteley, *National language*, 112.

75 Andrea S. Dunn, "Swahili Policy Implementation in Tanzania: The role of the national Swahili council (BAKITA)," *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 15, no. 1 (1985): 34.

76 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 45, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, "Taarifa ya Shughuli za Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mwaka 1968/1969," December 1969. Mwinyi went on to serve as Tanzania's second President, from 1985–1995. On Mwinyi's time as Chairman of BAKITA see Ali Hassan Mwinyi, *Mzee Rukhsa: safari ya Maisha yangu* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2020), 92.

77 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 45, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, "Taarifa ya Shughuli za Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mwaka 1968/1969," December 1969.

previously editor of the Council's journal *Lugha Yetu* (Our Language).⁷⁸ The Council's report did not explicitly refer to Swahili as a regional language, instead emphasising that the work they were doing to develop Swahili would not only help Tanzanians, but also others "in Africa who use Swahili", and indeed the whole world because "it is said that Swahili is now the seventh largest language in the world."⁷⁹

BAKITA's leadership went out into Tanzania's regions to talk to teachers and students about the Council's work, but also to take questions, and it is clear that they took seriously the feedback they received. In April 1972, Clement Nkundu visited Shinyanga and Tabora, and one of the requests he received was for a radio programme about the Swahili language to be started.⁸⁰ Just five months later, Nkundu was able to announce that the Council would be launching a radio programme called "Lugha ya Taifa – Kiswahili", to discuss aspects of the development and correct usage of Swahili.⁸¹

Representatives were often pressed on what they were doing to ensure that the Council was connected to the regions. On the visit to Shinyanga and Tabora, for example, the Council was encouraged to establish branches in the regions and hold meetings and seminars.⁸² On the same visit, Nkundu was told that a new history of the language was urgently needed to correct the idea, which foreigners had brought, that Swahili was a foreign import. Reflecting on this visit, Nkundu was struck by the greater presence of street signs in Swahili, as opposed to English, compared with what he was used to in Dar es Salaam. As he saw it, the "colonial mindset" which led some to hold Swahili in contempt was much reduced in the countryside, even if it had not fully disappeared.⁸³

But questions were also raised about the implications of Tanzania's language policies on relations with its neighbours. During a visit to the Coast region in 1970

78 One of the Council's priorities had been setting up the journal *Lugha Yetu*, as a way of promoting the use of correct Swahili, but also to develop pride in the language.

79 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 45, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, "Taarifa ya Shughuli za Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mwaka 1968/1969," December 1969, 6.

80 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 86, Attachment "Taarifa ya Ziara ya Ujumbe wa Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mikoa ya Shinyanga na Tabora Tokea Tarehe 15–28 Aprili, 1972".

81 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 90, C.M.N. Nkundu, "Taarifa: Kipindi cha Kiswahili katika Redio Tanzania," 4 October 1972.

82 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, "Taarifa ya Ziara ya Ujumbe wa Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mikoa ya Shinyanga na Tabora Tokea Tarehe 15–28 Aprili, 1972."

83 TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 86, Attachment "Taarifa ya Ziara ya Ujumbe wa Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili katika Mikoa ya Shinyanga na Tabora Tokea Tarehe 15–28 Aprili, 1972".

Nkungu was asked how Tanzania would work with Kenya and Uganda to “ensure that Kiswahili is accepted and used in all the countries of East Africa”. He was also asked what the implications would be for East African examinations if “we Tanzanians use Swahili and Ugandans and Kenyans use a different language.”⁸⁴ Local language officers conducted research into regional languages, both as a way to enrich Swahili and as a means of national integration within Tanzania. For Tanzanian politicians and leaders of BAKITA, this national mission was a key part of Council’s work. Language was indeed understood as a way of bringing Tanzanians together, but leaders also drew on theories of nationalism which linked language and culture as a way of articulating differences between nations.⁸⁵

In theory, BAKITA and the Institute for Swahili Research simply had different remits. But the collected papers from a seminar held at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1970 also hint at tensions and the ways in which their different histories shaped how they understood themselves and each other. In the seminar papers, the colonial baggage of the East Africa Swahili Committee’s successor, the Institute for Swahili Research, looms large.⁸⁶ Speakers were critical of the role of European experts in its early years, and the limited extent to which this changed after 1945. There were passionate pleas to return archives such as that of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) which had been taken from East Africa and were now only available in foreign repositories.

If the 1970 Seminar revealed some of the tensions between the Institute and BAKITA, while also clearly setting out the Tanzanian Government’s vision for Swahili as a decolonizing and democratizing force, it also shows the extent to which arguments for Swahili as national language would also support connections across the region, a positive effect that was emphasized by a much wider range of actors than a focus on political leaders or institutions might suggest, and it is to this theme that we turn next.

People, Networks, and a Language for East Africa

In this final section, we briefly explore the ways in which the idea that Swahili could and should be a lingua franca for East Africa persisted in part because of the individuals and networks for whom, for different reasons, this idea was pow-

⁸⁴ TNA 622/UT/C4/2, f. 27, “Visit to Mkoa wa Pwani.”

⁸⁵ Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, *Taarifa ya Semina ya Kiswahili Iliyofanywa Tarehe 5–9 Juni, 1970, Chuo Kikuu, Dar es Salaam*, Baraza la Taifa la Lugha ya Kiswahili: Dar es Salaam, 1970.

⁸⁶ Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, *Taarifa ya Semina ya Kiswahili*.

erful. The community of intellectuals and scholars who engaged with the question of Swahili language research and advocated for it as a language of literature and intellectual life in East Africa extended beyond national governments, and often included individuals who were themselves at the margins of national politics. The power of regional circuits of movement, both in terms of attending meetings and longer-term assignments, comes through clearly in the biographies of two Kenyan Swahili language experts, Shihabuddin Chiraghdin and Abdullahi Nassir.

In her biography of her father, Shihabuddin Chiraghdin, Latifa S. Chiraghdin evokes how this community functioned in practice. She describes her father returning from the Peking Scientific Symposium of August 1964, which he had attended as a representative of the East African Academy as a delegate for Swahili and East African History, and immediately travelling to Dar es Salaam for a meeting of the East African Swahili Committee.⁸⁷ Chiraghdin was a founding member of the Kenya Swahili Academy and would become chairman of the Swahili panel of the Kenya Institute of Education, but he also continued to play an active part in broader East African networks. He travelled regularly between Mombasa and Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala, serving variously as external examiner for the University of Dar es Salaam and senior examiner for the East African Examinations Council.⁸⁸ When the Tanzanian poet and Swahili scholar Mathias Mnyampala died in 1969, before being able to complete his *Historia ya Kiswahili*, it was Chiraghdin who took over the project and brought it to publication, though Chiraghdin in turn died before the book could be published. The obituary for Chiraghdin published in the journal *Kiswahili* showed both the importance of his role as a “proud and patriotic member” of the Swahili community and how this drove his scholarship, and the way in which his activities inspired “devotion in his former pupils and others all over East Africa with whom he came into contact.”⁸⁹

For his part, the Kenyan former politician and member of the Legislative Council, Abdullahi Nassir, who became Oxford University Press’s first Swahili editor in 1967, played a key role in developing OUP’s Swahili publishing in Tanzania

⁸⁷ Latifa S. Chiraghdin, *Life journey of a Swahili scholar*, Asian African Heritage Trust, 2018, 102, 106. The paper which Chiraghdin presented at the Symposium was entitled “The Place of Swahili in the National Consciousness, Unity and Culture of the East African States”. In it, as we have seen, he attacked the stifling effect which colonial administrators had had on the language and the view put forward by Europeans that it was a foreign import. Chiraghdin, *Life Journey*, 103.

⁸⁸ Chiraghdin, *Life Journey*, 144.

⁸⁹ Caroline Agola, “Shihabuddin Chiraghdin: An Appreciation,” *Kiswahili*, Volume 46/2 September 1976, 1–2. Mnyampala died in June 1969, shortly before Tom Mboya was assassinated. The poems page in the 24 July 1969 issue of *Baraza* carried poems written in tribute to both men. “Marehemu Mboya na Mnyampala”, *Baraza*, 24 July 1969, 3.

from its Dar es Salaam office.⁹⁰ When the Kenya Government declined to send a representative to Board meetings, the Kenyan Swahili scholar Professor Abdula-ziz, present by invitation, expressed surprise and insisted “that the Kenya Government and the people of Kenya fully supported the furtherance of Swahili language in all its aspects.”⁹¹

Newspapers which crossed national boundaries also reflected and produced these regional connections. Kelly Askew has described the way in which poets produced a “transnewspaper East African collective of *washairi* (poets).”⁹² And as in other areas of intellectual and cultural life that we explore in this book, regional comparisons drove institutional innovation. Recalling the foundation of the Kenya Swahili Academy from the vantage point of 1967, its President Sheikh Hyder El Kindy “recalled that the Academy was formed by a few people who were anxious to see that Swahili was developed, maintained and made progress at the Coast.” Referring, perhaps, to the establishment of the *Jumuiya ya kustawisha Kiswahili* (Association for the Advancement of Swahili), which was established in Tanzania in 1963, he added: “The idea was to follow the example of our neighbouring country, Tanzania, which had started an organisation to promote Swahili.”⁹³ While the focus on the future of Swahili in coastal Kenya is unsurprising at a time, in 1963, when fears of the region’s political marginalisation ran high, it is also not surprising that the Academy was careful to frame its ambitions both national and regional terms.⁹⁴ At the time of the Academy’s founding, the *Daily Nation* reported Sheikh Hyder El-Kindy as saying that it would “have

90 Dawn D’arcy Nell, “Africa,” in *History of Oxford University Press*, Volume 3, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 747. See Yahya-Othman, *Philosopher Ruler*, 217 on his relationship with Nyerere and OUP’s role in the publication of Julius Nyerere’s translations of Julius Caesar and *The Merchant of Venice* into Swahili. In 1967 Abdullahi Nassir was elected to the Kenya Swahili Academy’s executive. No author, “Swahili Academy Officials Returned,” *Daily Nation*, 1 June 1967, 14.

91 TNA 622/S5/8, f. 34, “Minutes of the 15th meeting of the board of the Institute of Swahili Research held on Tuesday 21st January, 1975,” 5.

92 Kelly Askew, “Everyday poetry from Tanzania: Microcosm of the Newspaper Genre,” in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Derek R. Peterson et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 207.

93 No author, “Swahili academy officials returned,” *Daily Nation*, 1 June 1967, 14. On the *Jumuiya ya Kustawisha Kiswahili* see Wilfred Whiteley, *Swahili: The Rise of a National Language*, 110 and Hashim I. Mbita, “Jumuiya ya Kustawisha Kiswahili,” *Kiongozi* 1 October 1964, p. 4 in PP MS. Whiteley Box 4, SL55.

94 James R. Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 4 (2008): 831–861.

branches throughout Kenya” and that the “promotion of Swahili learning in East Africa is one of its objects”.⁹⁵

The journal which had started life as the *Bulletin of the Inter-Territorial Language Committee* itself continued to seek to speak to an East African, Swahili-phone regional public. Its one-time Editor Wilfred Whiteley had set as an objective the creation of “a Journal which will appeal not only to the educational world, nor solely to the academic world, but reach out to many sections of the East African reading public”. While this ambition may not have been realised, nevertheless the journal continued to provide a forum of exchange, both within the region and with Swahili scholars around the world. In an interview in 2023 conducted by Zamda Geuza, the Tanzanian Swahili scholar and publisher Professor M. M. Mulokozi described *Kiswahili*, with its long history dating back to 1930, as “probably the oldest academic journal in Tanzania and possibly East Africa.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

At the Institute of Swahili Research Board meeting in 1973, a point was raised concerning a “[m]ove to place the Institute under the Inter-University Council/East African Community” which had apparently been reported in the *Daily News*, Tanzania’s government-owned national English-language newspaper.⁹⁷ This report serves as a reminder of the Institute’s origins and its own sense of its mission in the 1960s and early 1970s – a regional mission. This aspect can be lost when we focus on the ways in which Swahili became a Tanzanian national project in the years after independence. The use of Swahili as an instrument of nation-making was always accompanied by its use as an instrument of region-making. But as we have seen, this story also reaches beyond politics and institutions, through the individuals whose political and intellectual projects we have explored here.

From George A. Mhina to Shihabuddin Chiraghdin, thinkers introduced in this chapter recognised and insisted that language was central to claims about culture and history. It would be Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o who articulated most clearly and most famously the case for using African languages, rather than English, as a medium for cultural and intellectual production, but many of his contemporaries

95 No author, “The accent is on Swahili,” *Daily Nation*, 19 October 1963.

96 Zamda Geuza, “Interview with Professor M.M. Mulokozi: Writing and Publishing in Post-Independence Tanzania,” in *Print, Press and Publishing in Tanzania*, eds. Zamda R. Geuza, George Roberts and Emma Hunter, forthcoming.

97 TNA C9/5, f. 6, “Minutes of the Tenth meeting of the board of the institute of Swahili research held in the Council Chamber on 1st September 1973,” 6.

across East Africa were grappling with similar questions.⁹⁸ For those advocating for the growth of Swahili as a regional lingua franca, language was never merely a neutral pragmatic medium of communication or education. The promotion of Swahili was never a straight-forwardly anti-colonial project, however. As this chapter has explained, the colonial foundations of the Institute of Swahili Research were one reason why its legitimacy across the region waned as the 1960s progressed.

In a book concerned with how ideas and practices of regionalism were expressed on the page, the project of a regional language is clearly central. And yet, many of the regional publications introduced in other chapters used English, either in whole or in part, with several important exceptions. As well as telling the story of Swahili in its own right, this chapter gives one perspective on why this was the case. There was certainly recognition of the potential for Swahili as a powerful, regional lingua franca. But the language project – like other initiatives and institutions we explore – needed funding and broad political backing. Contributions from national governments for regional projects were increasingly difficult to secure as the political project of East African federation became unattainable. This was especially true in the case of Swahili, given the strength of opposition coming from some political contingents of Kenya and Uganda in particular. Again, this meant the search for external funds, which carried with them the connotations of precisely the image that the Institute of Swahili Research was trying to shake of: that of a colonial institution out of step with the politics of independence.

98 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).