

EXTENSION OF KISWAHILI DURING THE GERMAN COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN CONTINENTAL TANZANIA (FORMER TANGANYIKA), 1885-1917

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When European explorers in the 19th century came to East Africa they found Kiswahili was already established as a lingua franca in the coastal region and along the trade routes from the coast to the interior. One of them, an Englishman, John Hanning Speke, embarked on his second journey, in 1860, from Bagamoyo and travelled inland. When he reached Karagwe on the west side of Lake Nyanza, he was welcomed by Mukama Rumanika, the ruler of Karagwe, who "spoke to Speke in Swahili" (Clerke 1960: 74). (On his previous journey to the same area, Speke gave the name of Victoria to Lake Nyanza, in honour of Queen Victoria of England) Kiswahili, then, was taken for granted as a language of communication as far inland as Karagwe. Other 19th century European travellers and explorers (Albrecht Roscher, Hermann von Wissmann, Richard Burton, David Livingstone and others) who reached trade centres inland, such as Njombe, Tabora and Ujiji, found Kiswahili was an important language of trade.

In the wake of these explorers there followed a wave of European missionaries and a rapid European colonisation of East Africa. Kiswahili was a useful tool to them, both for the consolidation of colonial administration and the spread of Christianity into the interior, as it had been instrumental earlier in the spread of Islam farther inland. However, Kiswahili then was mainly used as a lingua franca along narrow trade corridors running from the coastal towns of Pangani, Bagamoyo, Kilwa and later Dar es Salaam to the trade centres inland. Farther away from the trade corridors, Kiswahili was not the favoured language of communication, and in some places it was not well known until the coming of the European missionaries and the establishment of the German administration.

Although the German colonial rule in East Africa lasted for just thirty two years (1885 - 1917) yet it was a great influence for cultural, economic and political change in a vast region, which was called then by the Germans as *Deutsch-Ostafrika* (i.e. German East Africa). It comprised of Rwanda, Burundi and the area that later came to be called Tanganyika (by the British). In some parts of this region, and before the German rule, Catholic and Protestant missionaries were already establishing their missions and opening up schools in some of which, especially along the coastal area, Kiswahili was used for instruction or as one of the subjects of study, along side technical training with the aim of making missions and their schools as far as possible self-sufficient in many of their requirements.

In the 1890s Kiswahili was chosen by the German colonial authorities to support their administration in many parts of the colony. By doing so they increased the prestige of the language, and "gave (the) knowledge of Swahili a new importance outside the coastal area and trade centres ..." (Polomé & Hill 1980: 181). But their action of preferring Kiswahili, along

side German as the languages of administration, caused some initial opposition from a certain section of the Protestant Christian missionaries, who thought that Kiswahili was strongly associated with the spread of Islam from the coast into the interior. On the other hand, other missionaries, notably the Roman Catholic, were already using Kiswahili in their missionary work

However, when the colonial government began to encourage missionary schools by giving them financial assistance, the Protestant missionaries' opposition to the use of Kiswahili diminished. The government's decision of encouraging missionary schools was for the purpose of trying to get literate and skilled personnel for employment in the rapidly growing administration. It was attracted by the missionary policy of making their missions and schools self-reliant, a policy that was later to be followed by the colonial authorities in some of their schools and in other endeavours. At the beginning, the regime had also to rely on many coastal Swahili speaking people, most of whom had their education at the local Quran schools, and could read and write, using the Arabic script (Kaniki 1980: 201). They also had the advantage of being familiar with the customs of the people and knew the trade routes into the interior.

However, the colonial government could not rely entirely on the missionary and the Quran schools, to produce a sufficient number of employable persons for the administration and other government and private commercial ventures. Therefore early in the 1890s "(o)fficial participation in education began when the colonial regime perceived that more of the indigenous people would have to become proficient in arithmetic and Swahili (using the Latin script) if the new needs for clerks and craftsmen in administration, railways and plantations were to be met without recourse to expensive immigrant labour" (Polomé & Hill 1980: 201). Government schools were opened in various parts of the country. At one time it was even made compulsory to attend school in Tanga, where the first schools were opened by the regime. Kiswahili in Latin script was mostly used as the medium of instruction in the government primary schools. As more government schools were opened in various parts of the country so was Kiswahili being farther spread over other regions away from the trade routes, trade centres and from its traditional home along the coast. It was cheaper for the colonial regime to use Kiswahili rather than to try to spread the German language in every part of the colony, or to use the language of every community for official purpose. The aim was to centralise the administration for better control. Although other languages were not entirely neglected, but Kiswahili had an additional advantage because of the availability of some books, such as a grammar in Latin script by J. L. Krapf published in 1850, and his dictionary of the language, which was published in 1882 (Whiteley 1969: 13). There was also Edward Steere's *A Handbook of the Swahili Language, as spoken at Zanzibar* (1870).

Besides literary subjects, vocational education and technical training were encouraged in the government schools in order to obtain a supply of skilled workers, who were in great demand at the beginning of colonial development. The effect of vocational and technical training was to add a new secular dimension to Kiswahili, and was a step towards its secularisation from its Islamic oral and literary tradition; and therefore made it more acceptable to people of other faiths. The old traditional Swahili system of learning arts and crafts by apprenticeship at a local

mason, carpenter, smith, or tailor was being supplemented and later overtaken by a planned formal schooling.

Another factor which also helped to a certain extent the spread of Kiswahili from the coast into other areas, was the policy of appointing literate Swahili-speaking officers, known as *akida* and *jumbe*, to be in charge of administration centres in some districts inland. "The authority they wielded was considerable. They were responsible for law and order, they exercised certain magisterial powers and they collected the ... poll tax" (Ingham 1962: 203) on behalf of the government. They were also required to recruit manual workers for government work or private European plantations. Many of the first *akidas* were free to do their duties without much supervision. Some *akidas* were successful and got on well with the people in their district. But others exceeded their duties, and their reported "despotic and cruel behaviour" (Maxon 1986: 166) was the cause of serious hostility against them and the regime which they represented. An ambivalent attitude existed towards the *akidas*. Their position of power locally due to their literacy and knowledge of Kiswahili was, on the one hand, envied and perhaps might have caused a desire for learning Kiswahili in order to attain such a status; but on the other hand, their behaviour was hated for its manifestation of despotism. Nevertheless, however controversial their position might have been, the *akidas*' presence inland revealed to other people some of the advantages of possessing the knowledge of Kiswahili in the new regime.

The metropolitan government in Germany wanted the colony to be self-supporting and produce revenue. But this policy could not be implemented at the beginning of colonisation as the colonial regime encountered armed resistance at various times and in various parts of the region and reaching a peak in the Maji Maji war of July 1905 against the regime. However, John Iliffe points out in his study that the Maji Maji war, was followed by what is called by some historians as the period or age of improvement. That is that the Africans abandoned armed resistance, after their defeat in the Maji Maji war in 1907, and gradually came to accept the colonial rule on a simple expedience in that if you cannot beat them join them. And "... the characteristic man of the age of improvement was the literate priest, *akida* or *clek*, trader or teacher, the new intermediary between European and African" (Iliffe 1969: 166). Most of the new intermediaries were Swahili speaking. They were used extensively in the administration, and thereby were able to spread their influence and their language.

Besides the acquisition of the German language, Kiswahili was also seen as a language for self-improvement. Those who sought self-improvement in the colonial system by acquiescing in the continuation of the new regime reaped handsome rewards in employment, promotion to higher posts, better salaries and so on. They saw no contradiction in improving their condition at the expense of being ruled by a foreign power, because they believed "that the man who won advancement for himself thereby won a victory for his people" (Iliffe 1969: 166). But those who still believed in resisting the colonial rule thought otherwise. To them acquiescing in the entrenchment of the regime was tantamount to collaboration with the enemy. It was regarded that one way of self-improvement was through education. Therefore demand for school places increased. In some districts local people were willing to build their own schools if they could get teachers from the government. More students were also received by the

missionary schools. Some of their students were sent to Zanzibar for further training as teachers or clerics at St. Andrew's College of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (U.M.C.A.), where students of different ethnic background from the mainland spoke to each other in Kiswahili, as reported in a letter written by one of the students in January 1894 (Whiteley 1969: 57).

Nevertheless, the latent fear of renewed armed resistance caused a change of policy by the colonial administration as instructed by the government in Berlin. Comparatively more liberal policies were introduced in the colony after the Maji Maji war. Economic development was intensified. Cultivation of cash crops, coffee, cotton, sisal, rubber etc., was encouraged in order to occupy the indigenous people in economic activities and to produce supplies for the metropolitan factories in Germany, rather than to let them revert the activities of resistance. More schools were built by the government and the missionaries to cater for an increase in demand for acquiring formal education. Kiswahili was more widely taught in many districts. German colonial officers were also obliged to learn Kiswahili in Germany before they were sent to their posts in the colony.

Local administration was reorganised and government trained Africans were appointed and supervised. For better control of the colony and prevention of any renewed armed resistance, more administration centres and fortified *boma* were established inland at strategic places. Government-trained akidas and jumbes were employed at these centres, some of which grew into new trading settlements and towns, which attracted more Swahili-speaking traders and workers from the coast, thereby increasing interaction between the communities. Inland centres like Lushoto and Tukuyu were developed into towns with the names of *Neu-Langenburg* for the former and *Wilhelmstadt* for the latter (Clerke 1960: 101).

The construction of railways from Tanga and Dar es Salaam into the interior towns, and the introduction of steamboats on the inland lakes, made travel easier and quicker, compared to the old trade caravans. Much more people, and their goods, could travel from the coastal region to the inland towns and vice versa. Some of the inland towns were connected with other settlements or plantations by road. A network of communications was established. Interaction between people of various communities in a vast area increased, causing a need for a common language of communication. Kiswahili fulfilled the need. Many Swahili-speaking traders from the coast opened shops in many of these inland towns; and people from the towns went to look for better employment, or a better profit for their goods in larger coastal towns. Kiswahili was spreading as commercial activities increased. By the outbreak of the war in 1914 Kiswahili was well established in many parts of the colony.

Even during the war years (1914 to 1917), both sides, the Germans and the British, were obliged to use many Swahili-speaking soldiers, policemen, porters and stretcher bearers. The war did not cause too much destruction. When the British took over the colony in 1917 they replaced the German language by English as the new official language. Kiswahili continued to be used, though in somewhat reduced status, in the new peace time administration of Tanganyika. The English language became the new route to advancement for those who sought self-improvement in the colonial situation. Wilfred Whiteley contrasts the status of

Kiswahili during the former German rule and the British rule which followed it. He says that "(w)hereas in German times the acquisition of Swahili represented a first stage towards participation in Government through membership of the junior Civil Service, no further stage in this participation could be achieved through the language. The next stage involved the acquisition of English, and for this reason Swahili was seen increasingly by Tanganyikans as a 'second-class' language" (Whiteley 1969: 61) during the British regime. But the resilience of Kiswahili is remarkable. It did not take too long to recover from its reduced status. It eventually assumed an important stature as the language that helped to cement the unity of Tanganyikans for their struggle for independence, and the creation of a new nation of Tanzania with Kiswahili as their national language.

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