

# **A SURVEY OF KISWAHILI LITERATURE: 1970-1988 <sup>(1)</sup>**

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**CURRENT RESEARCH INTEREST:** Kiswahili language and literature, writing and publishing \*

## **SUMMARY**

*A survey is given of the development of Kiswahili written literature during the past two decades. Particular attention is given to (a) the rise of the socially critical literature, (b) the emergence of experimental forms of literature, (c) the growing popularity of 'pop' fiction, (d) the continued development of the nationalistic-cum-cultural novel and (e) the quantitative and qualitative growth of Kiswahili translations. All this is placed against the background of East-African cultural and political developments since Independence.*

**KEY WORDS:** Tanzania, Swahili, literature (poetry, drama, fiction), East African historical and political development

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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Kiswahili is the most widely spoken African language. It is spoken by an estimated 70 million people in several Eastern and Central African states, viz. Burundi, the Comoro Islands, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia. Kiswahili is the national language of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and one of the national languages of the Comoro Islands and Zaire. The term 'Kiswahili literature' refers to the literature produced in Kiswahili in any of these countries. For the purpose of this paper, however, we shall concentrate on the literature produced in Kenya and Tanzania, since the Kiswahili literary output in the other countries was not accessible to us.

Before 1970, Kiswahili written literature was developing very slowly, with new publications appearing erratically if at all. Readers still thrived on the products of the classical literary age of the 17th to 19th century, and on the colonial-sponsored works of the 1930s to 1950s. The exceptions were the works of Tanzania's national poet, **Shaaban Robert** (1909-1962), the detective fiction of **Muhammad Said Abdalla**, and the works of a few other isolated writers based in Kenya and Tanzania.

All the Kiswahili-speaking countries got their independence in the early 1960s. The economies of these countries were fairly buoyant until the oil glut of 1973, after which they experienced a rapid decline, leading to mass misery, social upheavals and real or attempted coup d'états. These problems forced many thinkers and artists to reexamine some of the beliefs, principles and policies that had hitherto been taken for granted. The result was an emergence of a new generation of socially conscious authors and with them new forms, trends and preoccupations that shook the complacent foundations of the Kiswahili literary tradition.

This article surveys the development of Kiswahili literature in Kenya and Tanzania in the '70s and '80s, as it responded to the socio-economic pressures outlined above. It argues that there were five significant developments in the literary arena in the given period. The first one was the emergence of a critical, questioning literature that overturned many of the hitherto deeply held notions. The second significant development, which is related to the first, was the emergence of new, experimental forms of poetry, drama and fiction, and the attendant tensions within the East African literary circles. The third important development was the rise and flourishing of so-called popular fiction, the crime and romance potboiler. The fourth development was the expansion qualitatively and quantitatively, of the pre-existing literary currents, especially that of the cultural-cum-nationalistic

literature, and that of general literature focusing on popular concerns such as religion, family life, love and death. The fifth and final development was the intensification of translation activities which enabled Kiswahili readers to have access to many of the world classics in their own language.

## 2.0. BACKGROUND

Kiswahili literature is still primarily oral. Most verbal creativity still takes place as a social activity accompanying certain traditional practices or institutions, e.g. dances, work, weddings, initiation rites, celebrations, healing and worship. A discussion of such literature, which is certainly the most interesting and the most authentic product of the people's genius, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. Kiswahili written literature, though not as extensive as the oral literature, has a history of more than 500 years. Since writing (in Arabic script) was introduced along the coast in the tenth century, it is probable that written literature may have begun at that time. Nevertheless, documentary evidence is lacking, since the earliest surviving creative works in Kiswahili date from the 17th century (for example Siri l'Asirari - "the secretive secret"- by **Binti Bwana Lemba**, 1663).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Kiswahili literature, especially poetry, enjoyed unprecedented flourishing. Famous works of this period include Utendi wa Tambuka ("the epic of the Tabook Battle") by **Bwana Mwengo bin Athumani** (c. 1728), Utenzi wa Hamziyya ("the epic of Hamziyya") by **Said Aidarus** (c. 1749), Al-Inkishafi by **Said Abdallah bin Nasir** (c. 1800), Utenzi wa Ras 'l Ghuli ("the epic of Ras 'l Ghuli") by **Mgeni bin Faqini** (1855) and the poems of the great Kenyan nationalist poet **Muyaka bin Haji** (c. 1776-1840). Many of these works were inspired by Islam. Their content however, had broader implications and applications, since they related the Islamic forms and philosophy to the realities and struggles of East Africa, especially the struggle against the Portuguese, the British and the Germans.

The expansion of the Kiswahili language in East and Central Africa through trade in the 19th century, and as a result of government policy after 1900, ensured the gradual transformation of Kiswahili literature from an ethnic to a multi-ethnic literature. By the 1940s books and newspapers were being written, translated and published in Kiswahili all over East and Central Africa. Thus some of the outstanding writers of the '40s and '50s, such as **Amri Abedi** (d. 1965) and **Mathias Mnyampala** (d. 1969) were not ethnic Waswahili (2).

Kiswahili was standardized by the British in the 1930s, and thereafter many European and Eastern readers, including a few classics such as **Homer** and Alfu-lela-Ulela ("Thousand and one nights") were translated into standard Kiswahili. Nevertheless, indigenous publishing did not begin seriously until 1948, when the East Africa Literature Bureau was established. In any case, practically all the Kiswahili publications between 1920 and 1960 were school books.

The peasant struggles, the workers' movements and the nationalist struggles of the 1920s-1950s in Kenya and Tanzania adopted Kiswahili as their common, unifying language. After independence in the '60s, Kiswahili became the national language of Tanzania and Kenya, and one of the four national languages of Zaire. With this rise in the status of Kiswahili, the demand for the language and its literature increased. The Arusha Declaration of 1967, which officially steered Tanzania towards Socialism and led to an unprecedented expansion of adult literacy and primary education, also enhanced the demand for Kiswahili. There were even plans to replace English with Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in secondary and higher education in the 1970s. Thus, all in all, by 1970 the stage was already set for the expansion and relative flourishing of Kiswahili literature that characterized the 1970s.

### **3.0. SURVEY OF THE MAJOR TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS: 1970-1988**

#### **3.1. The literature of social criticism**

The literature of social criticism in Kiswahili did not begin in 1970. Already in the 19th century, poets such as **Muyaka bin Haji** were already voicing radical social criticism. During colonialism, writers such as **Amri Abedi**, **Saadani Kandoro** and **Shaaban Robert** wrote scathing satires on the colonial set-up, e.g. **S. Robert's** works Kusadikika ("the land of the unquestioning"), Kufikirika ("The land of reflection") and Adili na Nduguze ("Adili and his brothers"). **Shaaban Robert's** criticism, however, was usually and understandably veiled in parables and allegorical symbolism. It was only in the '70s that social criticism became more realistic and widespread.

The literature of social criticism in the '70s was largely a reaction or a response to the socialist ideals of the Arusha Declaration and their practical implementation. This literature began with the publication of **Ebrahim Hussein's** historical drama

Kinjeketile (3) in 1969. In that play, **Hussein** used a historical incident in Tanzania's anti-colonial struggle to probe, allegorically, the pros and cons of the ideas of Ujamaa as an African attempt to concretize the universal quest for freedom. Kinjeketile was followed by Mashetani ("Devils", Oxford University Press 1971), Ngao ya Jadi ("Ancestral shield") and Jogoo Kijijini ("the village cock"), both published by Oxford University Press in 1976. In these books, **Hussein** probed even more deeply the questions of freedom, violence, and the class tensions and psychological dilemmas arising out of the new post-Arusha situation. With these works, **Hussein** set standards for Kiswahili drama that have not been surpassed today. Hence he was awarded the Writers Union prize for drama in 1988.

Another outstanding author of similar stature is **Euphrase Kezilahabi**. His first novel, Rosa Mistika (EALB) (4) was published in 1970, and at once became a controversial bestseller. Since then, he has published in succession, Kichwamaji ("Pig-headed", EALB 1974), Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo ("The world is an arena of chaos", EALB 1975), a collection of poems under the title of Kichomi ("Sharp pain", Heinemann 1973), and two more novels, Gamba la Nyoka ("Scale of a reptile", EALP 1979) and Nagona (1987) (5).

**Kezilahabi** is a social critic who questions everything from the traditional social organisation and beliefs to Ujamaa, christianity, western-type education, political philosophies and practices. He is a thinker who approaches his themes from an individualistic, existentialist angle, and succeeds to lay bare the fears and the dilemmas of the Tanzanian petty bourgeois. **Kezilahabi's** preferred character - the anti-hero - is the unstable petty bourgeois intellectual or bureaucrat who is dangling between loyalty to self and loyalty to society, is confused by the apparent meaninglessness and aimlessness of the life around him/her, and eventually negates himself or herself through suicide.

Several other authors have addressed the post-Arusha problems facing the people of Tanzania. Of these the most prolific is **Penina Muhando** (or **Penina Mlama**), who has published or produced many plays depicting the problems and social contradictions of the '70s and '80s, in particular the betrayal of the people by the leaders who dance to the tune of the IMF and the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the cultural and moral conflicts in the old (traditional) and new (Ujamaa) villages, the alienation of the educated elite, and the contradiction between the egalitarian aims of Ujamaa and the egocentric, antidemocratic aims of those who claim to be spearheading the 'socialist' process. Among the most famous titles by Penina Muhando are Hatia ("Guilt", EAPH 1972), Tambueni haki zetu ("Acknowledge our rights", TPH 1973), Pambo ("Decoration", Foundation Books 1975), Nguzo Mama

("Mother pillar", DUP 1982), Lina Ubani ("There is a way out", DUP 1984) and Wizara ya Mitumba ("The Ministry of Second Hand Materials", forthcoming).

The sickness and hypocrisy of the bureaucratic strata wielding state power has further been diagnosed by several other writers, such as **C.S. Chachage**: Sudi ya Yohana ("John's star", DUP 1981) and Almasi za Bandia ("Fake diamonds") (6), **C. Mung'ong'o**: Ngozi iliyopotea ("The lost dream", TPH 1980), **E. Mbogo**: Giza limeingia ("Enters darkness", TPH 1980), **G. Ruhumbika**: Parapanda ("Trumpet call", EALB 1976) and Uwike usiwike kutakucha ("Whether the rooster crows or not dawn will come", EAPL 1978), **G. Liwenga**: Nyota za huzuni ("The star of sadness", TPH 1981), The **Paukwa Theatre Group**: Ayubu (Kampala Documentation Center 1984).

A few writers have addressed the agrarian question, revealing the contradictions and tensions afflicting the Ujamaa villages. Important works in this trend are: **C.S. Chachage**: Kivuli ("Shadow", BCI Publishers, n.d.), **N. Ngahyoma**: Kijiji Chetu ("Our village", TPH 1975), **E. Kezilahabi**: Gamba la Nyoka ("The scale of a reptile", EAPL 1979) and **K. Kahigi** and **A. Ngemera**: Mwanzo wa tufani ("The start of the storm", TPH 1976). Upon reading these works, one is forced to wonder whether Ujamaa villages were created to 'liberate' the peasants or rather to facilitate their collective exploitation by the kulaks and the international bourgeoisie.

In Kenya, apart from **Ngugi wa Thiong'o's** famous works (in English and Kiswahili translation), the agrarian problem does not feature seriously in the works of the Kiswahili writers, the possible exception being the drama by **A.S. Yahya** and **D. Mulwa** titled Ukame ("Drought", Longman 1984).

One interesting current of social criticism is that of books which criticize certain specific cultural aspects or beliefs found among the people. Among the most interesting ones are the plays criticizing religious teaching or practices, such as **Farouk Topan**: Aliyeonja Pepo ("A taste of Heaven", TPH 1973), **Muba**: Maalim ("Islamic teacher", TPH 1980) and **H. Muhanika**: Njia panda ("Crossroads", DUP 1981). There are also works criticizing certain character or cultural traits, e.g. **Ebrahim Hussein**: Wakati ukuta ("Time is a wall", EAPH 1969), **A. Banzi**: Zika mwenyewe ("Bury your dead alone") and numerous poems published in newspapers and anthologies. Under this group, one may mention also the growing literature against sexism, such as **I. Ngozi**: Machozi ya mwanamke ("The tears of a woman", TPH 1977), **E. Mbogo**: Tone la Mwisho ("The last drop", DUP 1981) and **Penina Muhando**: Nguzo Mama ("Mother pillar" (DUP 1982).

The most recent and most significant category in this trend is that of proletarian literature. The distinctive feature of the literature in this category is its uncompromising rejection of the existing socio-economic system, its working class perspective and heroes, and its futuristic, optimistic solution to the social tensions. The proletarian-oriented literature began with Abdilatif Abdalla: Sauti ya dhiki ("Voice of agony", OUP 1973) and Peter Ngare: Kikulacho ki nguoni mwako ("The pest that gnaws at you is in your clothes", EAPH 1975) - both Kenyan writers. These were followed by the works of Shafi Adam Shafi: Kasri ya Mwinyi Fuad ("Mwinyi Fuad's castle", TPH 1978) and Kuli ("Coolie", TPH 1979). The repertory was later enriched by the works of Said Ahmed Mohamed, especially Dunia mti mkavu ("The world is a dead trunk", Longman 1980), Sikate tamaa ("Don't lose hope", Longman 1981) and Kina cha maisha ("Life's depths", Longman 1984). (The latter two are collections of poetry). Mohamed's Dunia mti mkavu compares favourably with the classics of the proletarian genre, such as Gorki's "Mother". His latest novel, Kiza katika nuru ("Darkness in the light", OUP 1988) probes the same problematic in the context of the contemporary (i.e. post-revolutionary) period in Zanzibar (7). Both Kuli and Dunia mti mkavu focus on the Zanzibar peasants struggles and workers strikes of 1947-8 (8). Apart from these epoch-making works, various other works of socialist-oriented literature have also appeared in both Tanzania and Kenya, especially in poetry. Examples are G. Kamenju and F. Topan (eds.): Mashairi ya Azimio la Arusha ("Poems on the Arusha Declaration", Longman 1970), K. Kahigi and M. Mulokozi: Malenga wa Bara ("Bards from the Hinterland", EALB 1976) and Kunga za ushairi na diwani yetu ("Prosody and our Anthology", TPH 1982), and Al-Amin Mazrui Kilio cha haki ("A cry for justice", Longman 1981).

### 3.2. Innovation and experimentation

The '70s and '80s witnessed another phenomenon in the content and form of Kiswahili literary works: that of experimentation and innovation. Before 1970, non-conformist writing in Kiswahili literature was rare. Most authors were content to stick to the old time-tested ideas and forms of composition and delivery. This situation began to change, in Tanzania, in the late '60s, partly as a result of the impact of the Arusha Declaration, which led to popularization of socialist and liberation ideas throughout the country.

The first impact of the Arusha ideas on literature began to be noticed in 1968, when the poet Mathias Mnyampala popularized the dialogue verse form known as ngonjera, and turned it into a vehicle of the socialist ideology. Ngonjera, though based on traditional poetic forms, was new in content and in delivery of that

content to the audience; it was designed as a simple drama for oral performance, rather than as a poem to be read privately. Within a few years, Ngonjera was to spread to all parts of Tanzania and Kenya, and it became permanently established as a Kiswahili poetic-dramatic art form.

More innovations in drama were attempted by **Ebrahim Hussein**: Ngao ya jadi and Jogoo Kijijini, **Penina Muhando**: Lina ubani, **M. Mulokozi**: Mukwava wa Uhehe ("Mukwava wa Uhehe", DUP 1979), **The Paukwa Theatre Group**, and others with varying degrees of success. In most of these experiments, the dramatists were (like **Mnyampala**) attempting to transform traditional theatrical forms such as storytelling into modern, western dramatic art.

The most spectacular innovation in the theatre was, however, the use of the improvised, unscripted drama performed by semi-professional dance groups in bars and other public places. These dramas, blending traditional theatre arts with the rudiments of western drama, have become quite popular with the urban working people who otherwise have no forms of cheap entertainment to occupy their leisure hours. Already there are more than 500 troupes of this type in Tanzania alone, and the number is still growing. The plays performed by these groups usually address topical issues, such as AIDS and food shortages, and the day-to-day problems of the common people such as unemployment, family jealousies and squabbles, infidelity, economic straits, crime and punishment etc. A similar and related development in the mass media is the rise of improvised radio plays which by and large address similar problems in a similar vein. These plays seem to be very popular with the listeners in both Kenya and Tanzania (9).

In poetry, ripples of change began to be felt in 1969, when young university-trained poets such as **Jared Angira** (Kenya), **Ebrahim Hussein** and **Euphrase Kezilahabi** (both Tanzania), and others, began to write free verse, later to be known as masivina or mtiririko. They were soon followed by other authors, e.g. **K. Kahigi** and **M. Mulokozi**: Malenga wa Bara and Kunga za ushairi na diwani yetu, **Said A. Mohamed**: Sikate tamaa and Kina cha maisha, **T. Mvungi**: Chungu tamu ("Bitter sweet", TPH 1985), **P. Kija**: Wimbo wa kandambili ("Song of the sandals", Ndanda 1987) and **A. Saleh**: Changamka ("Delight", A. Khayria Press, Zanzibar 1988). These poets argued that the rigid traditional poetic conventions were too restrictive and could not adequately cater for all the needs of the modern poet. They suggested that form should be dictated by the content and purpose of the given poem. The debate unleashed by these attempts continued into the '80s. Its merit was that it forced the practising poets, for the first time, to think seriously and consciously about their craft. In the process, a more coherent theory of Kiswahili poetics evolved, thus contributing to the broadening and refining of our

knowledge of the theory and practice of poetry. Today, the debate has subsided, leaving in its wake a score of valuable works and anthologies.

In fiction, serious experimentation began with the novels of **Kezilahabi**, **Nagona** and **Mzingile**. In those novels (if they can be called novels at all), **Kezilahabi** employs a loose, cubistic story structure to portray universal philosophical problems about human life and existence. Apart from **Kezilahabi**, so far most Kiswahili novelists have tended to stick to the traditional story structure.

### 3.3. 'Pop' fiction

The Kiswahili 'popular' fiction, or more correctly, the fiction produced for mass consumption, is a product of the late '70s and early '80s. These are stories focusing on crime and romance, and usually involving formulaic stock characters, viz. the criminal who is often the villain, and his/her lover, the police inspector or detective who is sometimes the hero, and occasionally the spy in those stories that involve international conflicts or espionage.

The crime and detection fiction began in the '50s with the works of **Mohamed Said Abdalla** that featured his famous detective Bwana Msa, the Sherlock Holmes of Kiswahili fiction. Unlike the later writers of 'pop' fiction who emerged in the '70s, **M.S. Abdalla** is a serious writer of thrillers who grounds his fiction in the culture of his society and intends it to drive home a certain humanistic or didactic message. **M.S. Abdalla's** most recent works are **Mwana wa yungi hulewa** ("The offspring of a waterlily is always cared for", EAPH 1976) and **Kosa la Bwana Msa** ("Bwana Msa's mistake", Africana Publishers 1984).

The writers of thrillers who came after **M.S. Abdalla** provided a mixed recipe. Some of their works had some literary value, and some had only commercial value. It is the latter type of literature which we refer to as mass literature. The most famous and prolific authors of this type of literature include the following: **Eddie Ganzel**, **A. Musiba**, **Faraji Katalambula**, **John Simbabwe**, **Nicco ye Mbajo**, **Chande Kassim**, **K.M. Kassam**, **Sam Kitogo**, **Hammie Rajab** and **John Rutayisingwa**. All these have published at least three or more thrillers, some as many as ten. Many are self-published. Though the quality of their work differs, they all appear to be pandering to the readers' thirst for violence, sex and adventure.

A number of authors, such as **Mbunda Maokile** and **Leo Odela Omolo**, are attempting to create more serious literature using the techniques and motifs used

by the writers of thrillers. The literary success of these authors, as opposed to their commercial success, will be gauged by how long they succeed to retain a place and an audience in the Kiswahili literary world.

Tanzanian scholars and educators are still debating whether this type of literature has any value at all in society; whether banning it would not be the right thing to do. Many people, however, argue that this literature should be left alone as it meets a certain need in society, a need which no one else has been able to meet. They argue that it is better to have bad books to read than to have no books at all. While this debate goes on, the demand for these books continues to rise and their authors and publishers continue to make money.

### 3.4. Other literary categories

Before 1970 there was much literature dealing with general human concerns such as love, death, religion, human relations etc. Actually most of the existing literature, especially poetry, was of this type. Religion was the dominant preoccupation, followed by love (10). From the late '60s, more searching works were written around these old themes. For instance, the religious novel was given a boost by the publication of Z.N. Somba's *Alipanda upepo akavuna tufani* ("He sowed wind and harvested a tempest", Heinemann 1969). Long poems in the utendi meter inspired by religious writings were published by M. Mnyampala: *Utenzi wa Zaburi* ("The epic of Zaburi", Ndanda 1965) and *Utenzi wa Injili* ("The epic of Injili", Ndanda 1963); M. Mzenge: *Utenzi wa Nabii Issa* ("The epic of the prophet Jesus", Foundation Books 1977) and Abdillatif Abdalla: *Utenzi wa Nabii Adam na Hawaa* ("The epic of the prophets Adam and Eve" OUP 1971). The famous theme of love was searchingly treated in S.M. Komba's *Pete* ("The wedding ring", IKR 1978) and in the novels of M.S. Mohamed, especially *Kiu* ("Thirst" EAPH 1972). In that artistically outstanding novel, love is viewed from a philosophical angle as an aspect of the natural human acquisitive instinct or desire. Many more works around the themes of love and religion were published as poems or short stories in the newspapers and magazines.

There are also numerous titles of a general nature, treating petty, social problems. A good number of such books are published in Kenya, where more radical literature is viewed with disfavour by the establishment. The best representative of this type of literature is Jay Kitsao, who has published a number of entertaining but non-controversial plays.

Another literary current which was raised to new heights in the '70s and '80s is that of the liberation-cum-nationalist, including cultural, literature. In the novel, the liberation current was exemplified in the works of J.K. Kiimbila: Ubeberu utashindwa ("Imperialism will fail", IKR 1971); F. Senkoro: Mzalendo ("The patriot", Sungwaya Publishers 1978), P. Kareithi: Kaburi bila msalaba ("The unmarked grave", EAPH 1969) and O. Msewa: Kifo cha Ugegeni ("Death in a foreign country", TPH 1975), to name but a few. In drama, this theme was treated in the following works, among others: E. Hussein: Kinjeketile (OUP 1969), M. Mulokozi: Mukwava wa Uhehe (EAPH 1979), E. Mbogo: Tone la mwisho (DUP 1981) and P. Muhandu et al.: Harakati za ukombozi ("Liberation struggles", TPH 1982). These works depict the process of African liberation and attempt to understand its purpose and its meaning in the context of the post-Independence era.

The cultural novel began with the works of S. Farsy: Kurwa na Doto ("Kurwa and Doto", EALB 1960) and F. Nkwera: Mzishi wa baba ana radhi ("Parental blessing" EALB 1967). It reached its peak in 1982, when TPH published the late A. Kitereza's novel, Bwana Myombekere na Bibi Bugonoka na Ntulanalwo na Bulihwali ("Mr Myombekere and Mrs. Bugonoka and Ntulanalwo and Bulihwali"). This novel, the longest Kiswahili novel, was written in the Kikerebe language in the 1940s but could not be published until it was translated into Kiswahili. It immediately became a runner-up for the Noma Award. Today, this novel remains the most comprehensive and authentic literary portrayal of a pre-colonial African society in any language.

### 3.5. Translations

The repertory of translated works in Kiswahili enjoyed an unprecedented expansion in the '70s and '80s. In addition to the old colonial translations such as Stevenson's Kisiwa chenye hazina ("Treasure Island"), Haggard's Mashimo ya Mfalme Sulemani ("King Solomon's mines") and Eastern classics like Alfu-lela-Ulela, new works in greater variety were translated and published in Kiswahili. They include, from Africa, works by C. Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti, Ousmane Sembene, Wole Soyinka, Camara Laye, Peter Abrahams, Okot p'Bitek, Agostinho Neto, Peter Palangyo, Cyprian Ekwensi and others. From Western Europe and the US, Kiswahili now boasts of works by, inter alia, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere, Conrad, G. Orwell, Hemingway, Alex Haley and Swift. From the Soviet Union the following authors have been translated: Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Alexei Tolstoy, C. Aitmatov, M. Gorki, N. Ostrovski, N. Gogol, V.

**Suteev, Y. Ruthkeu** and several others. From Asia, **Omar Khayyam** and **K. Gibran** have appeared in Kiswahili translations. From China the Beijing Foreign Languages Press has issued more than 20 titles in the last ten years, ranging from the works of world famous writers such as **Lu Shun** to books by budding writers such as **Li Di**: Mwanamke aliyepiga hodi jioni ("The woman who knocked at the door in the evening").

Unfortunately, none of the major contemporary Indian, Persian and Latin American writers has been translated into Kiswahili. This, then, is an area which calls for urgent action on the part of the Kiswahili translators, for some of these authors, e.g. **Neruda** (Chile) and **Tagore** (India) have an urgent message for the Kiswahili-speaking world. Nevertheless, one can safely say that the development of translation in Kiswahili has been very rapid and exciting, so much so that it is now possible to teach world literature through Kiswahili translations.

#### **4.0. CONCLUSION**

This paper has surveyed the development of Kiswahili literature in Kenya and Tanzania in the 1970s and 1980s. It has outlined the major trends and the significant developments, and identified the highlights as being the emergence of the socially critical literature, especially the proletarian novel, the emergence of the experimental forms in fiction, drama and poetry, the rise of the 'pop', market literature, and the intensification of translation work.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the above survey. The first one is that the development of Kiswahili literature in the two decades under review has been fast and dramatic, in spite of the highly unfavourable economic and, sometimes, political environment. The second conclusion is that, judging from past performance, the future of Kiswahili literature is bound to be bright. The economic and political constraints will no doubt still be there, but the dedication and self-reliance of authors and publishers, that has enabled them to achieve this much to-date, will hopefully see them through the coming decades.

#### *NOTES*

1. Some of the titles mentioned in this paper have been published after this paper was written. Throughout the paper, Kiswahili titles will be translated, except for titles which indicate a character's name (e.g. Rosa Mistika).

2. The term 'Waswahili', plural of 'Mswahili', refers to the 'ethnic' Swahili community whose mother tongue was (and is) Kiswahili.
3. Published by Oxford University Press. Kinjeketile is the name of the hero in the book.
4. Abbreviations used here are:  
 DUP: Dar es Salaam University Press  
 EALB: East African Literature Bureau (Nairobi) - now defunct  
 EAPH: East African Publishing House (Nairobi)  
 EAPL: Eastern Africa Publications Ltd. (Arusha)  
 KLB: Kenya Literature Bureau (Nairobi)  
 Ndanda: Ndanda Mission Press (Peramiho)  
 OUP: Oxford University Press (Nairobi)  
 TPH: Tanzania Publishing House (Dar es Salaam).
5. Since 1988, Kezilahabi has published one more collection of poems, Karibu Ndan ("Welcome inside", DUP 1989), and the novel Mzingile (DUP 1991). The version of Nagona referred to here is the prepublication version. The book was published by DUP in 1990. Finally, a never published play, Kapitula la Marx ("Marx's baggy shorts") will appear in 1992.
6. Published in 1991.
7. Zanzibar was the scene of a violent, proletarian revolution in 1964, in which the ruling Arab elite was ousted and replaced by an African mass movement, the Afro-Shirazi Party led by Abeid Karume.
8. A similar strike in Senegal in 1947-8 inspired Ousmane Sembene's great novel, "Les bouts de bois de Dieu" ("God's bits of wood", Le Livre Contemporain 1960).
9. In fact, some of the characters of the Redio Tanzania feature play, such as 'Mzee Jangala and 'Mama Tomato', can be counted among the few real mass media stars of Tanzania.
10. Cf. H. Kuria: Nakupenda lakini... ("I love you, but...", EALB 1957) and G. Ngugi Nimelogwa nisiwe na mpenzi ("I have been bewitched, I cannot get a lover", EALB 1961).