

## **A friend in need is a friend indeed: Ken Walibora's novel *Kufa Kuzikana***

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### **Abstract**

After being for a long time in the shadow of its Tanzanian counterpart, Kenyan fiction has recently come into the foreground with writers such as Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, Rocha Chimera, Mwenda Mbatiah and Ken Walibora. The latter, Ken Walibora, is of Luhya origin. His real name is Kennedy Waliaula (cf. Waititu 2005) and he coined his pen name by replacing the last part of his surname aula – “good” or “better” in Luhya (as well as in Kiswahili) – with its more common Swahili syno-nym bora, hence Walibora. He was born in January 1965 and grew up in Western Kenya, in Kitale, a little farming town in the North Rift Valley. After finishing secondary school, he worked for eight years as a probation officer (i.e. a social worker attached to the Prison Department) and it was during this period that he wrote his first novel *Siku Njema*. His dream, however, was to become a broadcaster. Since the time he was a student at the Kenya Institute of Administration, he had tried his hand at reporting sport events, but it was only in 1999 that he got a chance to read and anchor news, becoming a well-known Kenya Television anchor man. In the meantime he graduated from the University of Nairobi with a first class honours degree in Literature and Kiswahili and in 2004 he won the prestigious University Fellowship Award at Ohio State University where he is currently studying African literature. Walibora is considered one of the best Kiswahili writers and broadcasters in Kenya (cf. *ibid.*). Thanks to his command of the language, he was instrumental in building Kenya TV Kiswahili broadcast and in leading the Kiswahili team in the translation of news from English. He is the one who coined the Kenyan Swahili term for constituency, *eneo bunge* (cf. *ibid.*). Walibora has published two novels so far: *Siku Njema* (“A good day”, 1996) and *Kufa Kuzikana* (“Friends for life”<sup>2</sup>, 2003), besides a secondary school textbook of Kiswahili and three books for children. One of them, *Ndoto ya Amerika*, won the 2003 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature (in the children category) and is about to appear in English as *The American Dream*, translated by the author. While staying in the United States, Walibora decided to try his hand at an English novel, *Guilty but Innocent*, which has not been published yet. It is a story, narrated by a young woman, of her ordeal of rape.