

Between Respect and Desire:
On being young, pious, and modern in an East African Muslim Town

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)
in the University of Michigan
2013

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Dedication

To my mother and my sister,
for reminding me of the beauty and the strength that lie in believing in yourself

Acknowledgements

The pages of this dissertation encompass far more than the culmination of years of study; they are also the result of relationships with many generous and inspiring people who have made this process possible and who assured I made it to the end. The list is long, and I undoubtedly have failed to include everyone who contributed to my success, but I deeply cherish every contribution to my development as a scholar, a teacher, and a person.

To the people of Lamu I owe a gratitude that cannot be expressed in words. The openness with which they welcomed me into their lives and homes was overwhelming and humbling. Their hospitality, generosity, warmth, and patience not only made this project feasible, but also added lasting friendship, joy, and beauty to my life. I owe my deepest gratitude to Ustadh Mahoud Abdulkadir who has been a guide and a mentor ever since the first day I stepped into his library in Lamu. His constant reminders that “*kua mvumilivu hula mbivu,*” motivated me to keep going, even in the final stages of the writing process. His understanding of Islam, interest in the history of Lamu, and passion for languages as well as his lasting dedication to learning continue to inspire me. I would like to thank Sheikh Ahmed Nabahany for generously sharing his in-depth knowledge of the dialects of Kiswahili and the history of the Lamu Archipelago. I offer a deep thank

you to Mwalim Hussein Soud for welcoming me into his home and sharing his extensive knowledge of Lamu and its people.

Many thanks are due to the employees of the National Museums of Kenya and the Research Institute of Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa (RISSEA). Their advice, guidance, support, and friendship made the difficult moments during fieldwork much easier to bear. The curator at the time, Mubarak Abdulqadir Abdallah, generously welcomed me and facilitated my research in different ways. A special thank you goes to Mohammed Karama for our endless discussions on Kiswahili and the patience with which he explained the intricacies of social interaction in Swahili towns. Fatma Bwana Ali welcomed me into her home and treated me as a daughter. Alawy Abzein provided valuable advice, insights, and help in expanding my social network, when organizing workshops, and during the interview process. Mohammed Mwenje was an intellectual partner in crime in many ways; I continue to be grateful for his insights, suggestions, and humor. I would also like to thank Athman Lali for offering valuable advice and much needed support.

Many people worked as informants and research assistants at some point during my fieldwork and to protect their anonymity I will not include all of them here. To four people I want to extend a special thank you. Mwalim Badi showed an in-depth understanding of, and passion for my research. His dedication to the (seemingly endless) interviewing and recording of elders and peers and his patience while analyzing and explaining these recordings shaped this dissertation in many ways. Omari Hasan was a friend more than a research assistant and his contributions to my research are invaluable. I fondly recall our hours of transcription and analysis and remain immensely grateful for

his commitment, patience and, most of all, his lasting friendship and support. Said displayed an admirable dedication to delivering fascinating recordings and interviews as well as detailed transcriptions, all of which contributed significantly to this dissertation. I would also like to thank Biti Fankupi for her help and patience with many hours of transcription.

Fieldwork can be challenging, being shaped by flashes of homesickness, despair, and frustration. Several individuals helped me overcome those moments through their friendship and support, and because of that they will always remain close to my heart. I would not have made it through the first half of my fieldwork without the friendship of Maryam Hussein who was my sounding board, advisee, confidant, friend, and guide. Zahra Aboud became a very close friend throughout the years I spent in Lamu and she remains someone who I admire for her commitment to her family, her community, and her religion. Amina Obo made me forget the frustrations of fieldwork with hugs, wonderful food, and sailing trips and I remain grateful for her friendship. I am extremely happy to have met Megan DaPisa and Naima Keppeler; their amazing personalities and friendship cheered up many difficult times in the field. Muneef Mohamed selflessly helped me at countless times during my research and remains a dear friend. A shared love for Lamu and its people created a beautiful friendship with Johanna Grueter, a bond that has grown stronger over the years. I profoundly thank Johanna for her support, concern, and words of wisdom that continuously motivated me throughout the research and writing period. I would also like to thank Rahima Hassan for the fun times in Lamu and for the prompt responses to my many questions about Lamu and the Swahili language during the writing process.

There are many more people who I would like to thank individually. The list is long and so I simply recognize my heartfelt indebtedness to Abbas, Abdalla Bargash, Abdullahi, Abdulgoro, Abouza, Abu, Adam, Ali Bunu, Ali Salim, Amina Kale, Amina Soud, Asya, Azraa, Dida, Eisha, Faiz, Fahad, Ghalib, Hababa Nour, Hadija, Hafswa, Hussein, Khadija, Kholo, Khudra, Majid, Nassim, Ngwamba, Nidal, Rahima, Rukia, Said, Shaeen, Swaleh, Tima, Twalib, Ummu, Ummi, Ustadh Idarus, Ustadh Omar, Yaba, Yasir, Zahra, Zuwana, and many more. A final, sincere thank you goes to the families of Mohamed Abdulqadir, Zahra Aboud, and Mohamed Lali who welcomed me into their homes as a sister and a daughter. They gave me a true home away from home. And lastly, I want to profoundly thank all the members of Promise/Ahadi who will always remain close to my heart; the support, friendship, and dedication they showed me continues to put a smile on my face. I remain grateful for the unforgettable memories they gave me. A final thank you goes to Eric Lafforgue and Jo Valvekens for letting me use their photographs of Lamu in this dissertation.

For support during research and writing in Kenya and the US, I owe thanks to several institutions. Primary research for this dissertation in 2007-2010 was made possible by a Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Grant No. 0714901 and the Wenner Gren Foundation. At the University of Michigan, I would like to thank the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, the African Studies Center, and the Department of Anthropology for additional research funds. Write-up was supported by a generous fellowship from the University of Michigan's Institute for the Humanities, by the Mary Malcomson Raphael Fellowship through the Center for the Education of Women, and by the Rackham School of Graduate

Studies. My studies at the University of Michigan would not have been possible without the support from the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF).

My interest in Africa and the study of the intricacies of language and social interaction began at Ghent University. Jan Blommaert's lectures on the sociolinguistics of Africa and his focus on different forms of language inequality quickly shifted my interest from African dance to African languages. I remain indebted to him for many of the unexpected twists and turns in my academic career. Without his confidence in my abilities and push in the back, I would have never embarked on this scholarly journey.

My committee at the University of Michigan provided direction, dedication, and invaluable advice and support throughout the PhD process. It with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the help, support, and guidance of Judy Irvine. She taught me the intricacies of studying language as social action and I will always be grateful for the wisdom she shared, the model of scholarship she offered, and the emphasis she placed on dedication and persistence. Webb Keane taught me the fascination and beauty that lies in reading and interpreting signs. His confidence in my scholarly abilities far surpassed my own and encouraged me to keep going at the most difficult times. Kelly Askew not only offered invaluable guidance throughout my graduate career but also taught me what it means to be a scholar of and for Africa. I can only aspire to achieve the example she sets. Derek Peterson provided extensive commentary on several chapter drafts. His insightful comments not only pushed me to improve my work, but also encouraged me to explore new areas of interest. This dissertation is infinitely better for it. Marlyse Baptista generously agreed to join my committee in the final stages. Her feedback on language contact and change challenged my thinking and is reflected throughout the dissertation.

This project also benefitted greatly from the mentorship of, and conversations with David Cohen, Mamadou Diouf, Gillian Feely-Harnik, Nancy Hunt, Michael Lempert, Bruce Mannheim, Barb Meek, and Butch Ware.

To Tam Perry I owe much more than I can say. Her friendship, endless support, and advice kept me on my feet during the last two years of the writing process. I remain enormously grateful for her and her family's generosity and hospitality. Dan Birchok's intellectual company and kindness have both improved this dissertation and preserved my sanity at the final stages of dissertation writing. Henrike Florusbosch and her family opened their doors for me during my very first visit to Ann Arbor and continue to offer a small piece of home in the United States. I owe a big thank you to Michael Prentice for his generous assistance with all kinds of technological and logistical questions, his intellectual input, and the jokes and laughter that made this whole process much more bearable.

At different stages, this research has benefitted from the advice and opinions of colleagues and friends at the University of Michigan. Grant proposals, research plans, and draft chapters improved through careful attention from Laura Brown, Jennifer Hall, Anneeth Hundle, Clapperton Mavhunga, Emily McKee, Jessica Robbins, and Mandy Terc. Draft chapters improved thanks to the generous feedback of the participants to the Winter 2012, Fall 2012, and Winter 2013 Linguistic Anthropology Laboratory at the University of Michigan. I was lucky enough to be part of the Winter 2012 Ethnolab at the University of Michigan, whose participants provided invaluable feedback on several chapters of this dissertation. I would also like to thank the participants to the Fall 2012

and Fall 2013 Sweetland Writing Groups for their insightful comments on several chapter drafts.

Throughout graduate school many people have entered and enriched my life and I thank everyone who allowed me to have a family away from home. My gratitude to Laurie Marx goes far beyond the words expressed here. Her advice, support, words of wisdom, and warm hugs made graduate school bearable at least, heartwarming and joyful at best. I remain grateful for her door that was never closed. I also thank Darlinda Flanigan and Debbie Fitch for the welcome breaks from writing and the continuing support they gave me. I remain grateful to have formed part of the wonderful cohort of 2004 at Michigan among whom I would especially like to thank Jess Robbins for being a constant source of support and inspiration. I also want to thank my classmates Anna Babel, Lizzy Falconi, Kate Graber, and Jennifer Hall for the many motivating and inspirational discussions throughout the years.

When far away from home, friends become family who laugh with you in time of joy and have your back in times of difficulty. I could not have asked for a better family of friends. Describing how they have enriched my life would take up at least a couple of pages, so I merely want to offer a very sincere thank you to Laura, Kimi, Khala Nariman, Hafsa, Hasan, Hadiya, Nama, Fatima, Ihsan, Rhola, Safia, Sarah, Zahraa, and Zahra. Their hugs, coffee chats, phone calls, meals, cup cakes, chocolate, and most of all, their sincere concern got me through the toughest years and their friendship warms my heart.

To my family, I owe far too much and no words will suffice to express my gratitude for their endless support, reassuring words and gestures, and trust in my abilities. I thank my father, Patrick Hillewaert, for the support and the numerous emails

that not only provided welcome breaks from writing but also offered words of encouragement. While not always expressed in words, my brother Maarten and his partner Tim's unshakable confidence in my ability and their trust in my own judgment was heartwarming and formed an important source of motivation. To David I am incredibly grateful for his understanding of, and unbelievable patience with endless Skype calls, unexpected visits, airport rides, and sisters-only dinners. I could not have asked for a more amazing brother-in-law. My little nieces, Flore and Kato, brightened up my darkest days and their smiles pulled me through the tough last few weeks. Watching them grow and explore the world reminds me of the beauty that lies in amazement of small things. My sister, Liesbet, is my best friend, confidant, support, and tough hand when I need it. She is my example of selflessness and positivity and a source of inspiration. Saying "thank you" does not even start to encompass my indebtedness to her. From my mother, Marleen Verhelst, I have learned the strength that lies in persistence, and that the most beautiful rewards come when taking the toughest paths. She taught me to walk the road less traveled, and for that, I thank her every day.

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Note on Transcription

Throughout the dissertation I use transcriptions of interviews as well as from daily interactions. If the transcript is a quote from an interview, it appears as quoted text in its original Kiswahili form first, followed by its translation. If the transcript derives from an interaction with multiple participants, the Kiswahili and English versions appear in columns next to each to facilitate the following along of turn-taking. The level of detail I include in these transcripts corresponds to the theoretical argument I make using that piece of data. I use the following conventions throughout my transcripts

.	indicates pauses
?	indicates rising intonation
!	indicates slight raise in volume
WORD	word or part of a word in all capital letters indicates loud volume
[Bracket in front of words indicates overlapping talk
=	an equal sign indicates latching or stuttering
[gesture]	information between brackets indicates extralinguistic information
wo::rd	Colon indicates lengthening of last sound – each colon is equivalent to about 0.1 seconds
[xxx]	x between brackets indicates problematic hearing or incomprehensible talk
(3.0)	prolonged pauses in speech are marked in parentheses with the number of seconds of silence
(...)	indicates leaps in transcription

In transcriptions and quotes I represent the Kiswahili language as the speaker uses it; this includes representing the dialects as they are spoken. Unless required for the argument made, I do not provide great phonetic specificity or phonetic transcriptions but rather represent the dialects using Roman orthography. Exactly because I endeavored to

represent dialect use as accurately as possible, the transcripts do not always follow Standard Swahili orthography. For transcriptions of dialect use I relied upon both linguistic descriptions (which can be found in Appendix A) and local writing conventions as provided to me by informants and research assistants.

Throughout the dissertation the unmarked language is the KiAmu dialect, unless stated differently. Switches to English are marked by **bold** letters, unless stated differently. All interactions described in this dissertation were digitally recorded, unless marked otherwise. All translations into English are my own.

Note on Terminology

Throughout the dissertation, I use Kiswahili lexical items for those words that do not have an exact translation in English. While I provide the English gloss as an approximation, these translations do not always capture the lexical nuances of Kiswahili. The differences between *mila* (traditions), *tabia* (manners, traditions), *utamaduni* (culture, civilization) are nuanced and do not necessarily correspond with the differences between the English lexemes. *Italics* mark the Kiswahili or KiAmu words that are retained and their translations appear between (parentheses).

When appearing as separate lexical items, Kiswahili terms are pluralized in the English manner, by adding “s,” rather than using the Kiswahili plural forms. For example, *baraza* (stone bench) appears as *barazas* (stone benches) instead of the Kiswahili *mabaraza*. Kiswahili nouns that refer to classes of people will retain their Kiswahili plural form and thus the use of the singular *m-* and plural *wa-* prefixes. For example, *mgeni* (one guest) will appear as *wageni* (several guests) in the plural form.

In this dissertation, I refer to the current inhabitants of Lamu as either “people from Lamu,” “Lamu inhabitants,” or “WaLamu.” These notions refer to all people indigenous to the Lamu Archipelago, including people from Shela, Matondoni, Kipungani, Siyu, Pate, and the Bajuni Islands who currently reside in Lamu Town. I opted not to use the well-known term “WaAmu” as this notion exclusively refers to

people who claim to be the original inhabitants of Lamu Town and does thus not incorporate recent immigrants from the surrounding islands.

Chapter 1 Introduction

muko hadir? nyini mnadhani mtaingia peponi sampuli hizi . mnavyoishi hiyau? kulala kwenye magodoro mkiamka mkipidjwa na mafeni, mkiketi barazani, mkipidja mastori, mkisagiwa, mkivuta bhangi? yani sampuli hizi ndo waIslamu wa kwenda peponi? ikiwa hesabu zenu ni hizo, futani . ikiwa hatutaki ku(athiriwa) hatutaki chochote, hakuna mandeleo . mwenyemungu atayazengeya kwa wengine la budha . na ndio hao waingilia sasa . tuko wapi sisi?

are you present? you think you will enter heaven this way . the way you are living now? sleeping on mattresses . waking up with the fans . as you sit on the barazas . as you are telling stories . as you are chewing khat . as you smoke weed? Is that how Muslims enter heaven? If that is your calculation forget it . if we don't want to be affected . if we don't want [to do] anything . there is no development . and God will give it [development] to others . and those are the ones who are arriving now . where are we?

~ Ustadh Taha

Muko hadir? Are you (pl.) present? The imposing voice of Ustadh Taha¹ resonates loudly through the prayer hall of the mosque. Amplified by loudspeakers, his question blares over the rooftops of nearby houses, reaching women who are hastily preparing food as the time for *maghrib* prayers is approaching quickly. It is Ramadhan 2008 and Ustadh Taha, a young but well-versed imam gives his daily lecture to the men gathered in the cool mosque. As he speaks, he quotes freely from the Quran and Prophetic hadith, effortlessly switching between the local KiAmu dialect and Classical Arabic. The seemingly evident connections he draws between quotes of the scripture and depictions of the local context, colored by interjections of colloquial expressions in English and

¹ pseudonym

Sheng, keep his audience engaged.²

Taha attracted a diverse, mostly young, crowd. Apart from the few elders relaxing in the corner, the mosque was filled with *madrassa* students, who had spent the day studying Quran, *beach boys* who had cut their dreadlocks as a symbolic gesture for the start of Ramadan, unemployed high school graduates, and a few young businessmen who had closed shop for the day.³ Escaping the afternoon heat and eager to pass the time until the breaking of the fast, these young men – Shia and Sunni alike – came to the mosque to hear the Imam speak. My friend Narmin’s voice recorder was placed visibly on the imam’s pulpit. Because Lamu women habitually do not go to the local mosques, these recordings enabled us – Narmin, a few of her friends and I – to listen to the sermon later that evening.

Ustadh Taha was highly respected among Lamu’s younger generation yet differed from the mix of youth gathered before him. Eloquent, provocative, politically engaged, and extremely well educated in religious scripture, the young imam was locally held – by young and old alike – to be one of the few figures that could inspire Lamu youth to bring positive change to the island. The Imam himself, through his verbal and non-verbal practices, reflected Lamu’s historical and contemporary exposure to a multiplicity of global influences: while his use of the KiAmu dialect was indicative of his belonging to Lamu’s upper social classes, his fluent Arabic reflected the religious education he received abroad, and the English words he inserted demonstrated his familiarity with urban discourses and youth lingo. His light skin color testified to his ancestors’ Hadrami

² Sheng is an urban youth slang mainly spoken in Kenya’s capital Nairobi but increasingly popular in other major cities like Mombasa and Kisumu.

³ *Beach boys* is a name used by Lamu residents to refer to young men working in Lamu’s tourism sector and who take tourists for sailing and fishing trips on the Indian Ocean. The young men themselves reject this name and prefer to be called *dhow operators*.

origin, while the black *kilemba* (turban) on his head was a symbol both of Omani influences and Taha's adherence to the *Shiite* sect of Islam (in a predominantly Sunni town). Yet, the young people in Taha's audience would not immediately describe their imam as cosmopolitan. On the contrary, his refusal to learn English, his insistence on speaking the KiAmu dialect and his persistence in wearing the white *kanzu* (or *thawb* in Arabic) differed from the eagerness with which many of his audience members incorporated *tabia ya kizungu* or "Western practices" – jeans, shorts, the occasional dreadlocks, and a frequent shifting between KiAmu, KiBajuni, Standard Swahili, and English. Although some of these young men chewed *khat*, occasionally smoked a joint, and had girlfriends waiting for them in Lamu's narrow alleys, they held Taha in high regard, a respect enforced by the Imam's adherence to both religious and traditional customs as well as the realistic view with which he approached young people's contemporary struggles.

Taha's *khutba* that day spoke directly to this struggle by asking, not only whether young people were physically present within the mosque, but also whether they were *morally* present and engaged in the processes of development that the community so desperately needed. Yet, the question that resounded most clearly among his young audience was *what* this moral presence, in fact, entailed.

This dissertation is about young people's attempts to navigate different, sometimes incompatible, orientations and loyalties to development, modernity, religion, heritage, and tradition. It explores the different strategies Lamu youth deploy to reposition themselves in a socially stratified, culturally diverse, and economically marginalized

Muslim community. The emphasis hereby lies on the creativity with which young people renegotiate moral personhood and agency in reference to local norms of propriety and respectability, and new sets of social and economic relationships. Specifically, it looks at how such shifts are tied to, reflected in, and negotiated through social interaction and language use, and how such processes are shaped by altering ideological understandings of languages' loading of social, political, and moral interests. Rather than leaving norms of propriety behind, I argue that Lamu youth are concerned with what it means to be a virtuous person in a rapidly changing society, and thus with negotiating social positions that accommodate societal expectations, respect for local norms and desire for change and development.

Taha's khutba

Muko *hadir*? Imam Taha repeats his question and in the silence that follows, the sound of neighing donkeys penetrates the mosque – an audible reminder of the spatial location where the *khutba* was given: Lamu Old Town on the Indian Ocean Island of Lamu, to be found in an Archipelago by the same name located at Kenya's northern edge, bordering Somalia (Figs. 1 and 2).⁴ Imam Taha's Ramadan lectures in 2008 focused on leadership in Islam – neatly tying into the violent Kenyan national elections that had taken place a few months earlier. Whereas the foregoing sermons had discussed *sharia* law and the responsibilities of political leaders, today's *khutba* focused on what Taha considered the third essential aspect of leadership: the *shahadatul ummah* or the testimony of the

⁴ A reminder for both Taha's audience in the mosque as well as for those audience members who later listened to the speech as it circulated on the Internet.

religious community, the essence of which he called *presence*. *Muko hadir?*⁵ The question formed the guiding thread throughout the hour-long sermon, repeated regularly, at rhetorically strategic points. Smoothly switching between citations of the Holy Quran, *hadith* that recount the exemplary life of the Prophet and anecdotal examples of life in Lamu, the Imam confronted his audience with the discrepancy between their current disengaged disposition and the demands imposed upon them by their religion. Required of them is *presence* – when streets are being paved, when houses are about to collapse, when electricity fails.

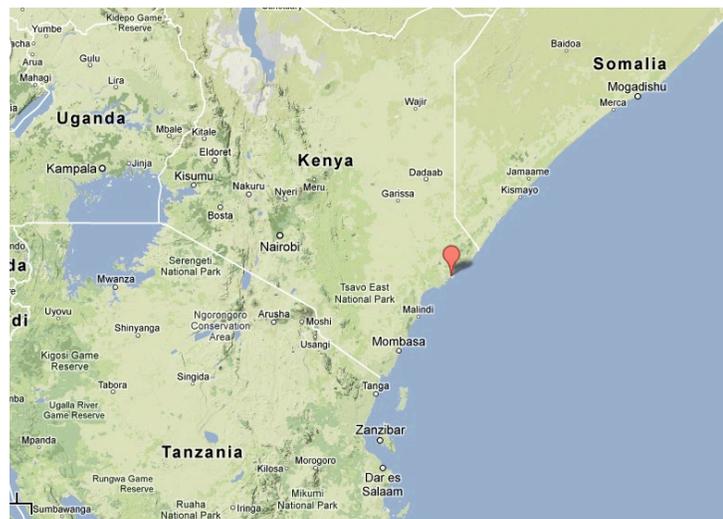


Figure 1. Map of Eastern Africa (Source: Google Maps)

⁵ The notion “hadir” is Arabic, and not Kiswahili. In Arabic the word “hadir” is generally translated as “present.” In Sufism, one of the ultimate goals is to have “hudoor” or presence with God. The underlying thought is that God is always present, we are simply veiled from him. This notion then strongly resembles the argument that Taha is making. In modern Arabic, people use “hadir” in response to the teacher when she takes attendance, like, “Mohammed?” and he responds, “hadir/present.” I would like to thank Mohammed Safi for bringing this to my attention.



Figure 2. The Lamu Archipelago (Source: Google Maps)

Taha argued that, contrary to their current disengagement, inhabitants of Lamu ought to strive towards such presence motivated by the knowledge that, one day, each of them will have to account for their actions before God, but especially by the awareness that they are never not “in front of God.”⁶ This physical presence then inextricably is also a moral presence.

sisi kwanzia mimi ninayenena na nyinyi mnaosikia na walioko mskitini na wasikuweko hapo mskitini . kila mmoya ana majukumu kuhusu kujibu maswali mbe ya mwenyezimungu . nnini maana ya mada hii? shahadat-ul ummah . ummah uwe HADIR (...) uko wapi ummah? iko wapi ayat la mwenyezi mungu?⁷ muko hadir? tuko hadir? hatuko hadir

we starting with me who is speaking and you who are listening those who are in the mosque and those who are not in the mosque . everyone has the responsibility to answer questions in front of God . what does that mean? *shahadat-ul ummah* . that the *ummah* is PRESENT (...) where is the *ummah*? where are the verses/signs of God? are you present? are we present? we are not present

⁶ This notion of constant surveillance – by God but also by WaLamu themselves – was true for all practices in the context of Lamu. The significance of respectful behavior (*heshima*) for social status and an awareness of people’s constant evaluation of one’s actions was an important factor in youth’s contemplations of conduct and negotiations of social positions. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 2 and forms an important thread throughout the dissertation.

⁷ In Arabic, “ayat” refers to a verse of the Quran and thus the word of God, but also means “a sign.” Taha thus not only asks where the word of God is in WaLamu’s daily life, but also where the *signs* of God are. This is important when linked to the understanding that Muslims ought to be the physical representation, the embodiment of the Quran. Individuals ought to be “walking Qurans.” By asking where the signs of God are, Taha questions whether WaLamu are living up to this requirement.

Taha called upon his diverse audience as an *ummah*, as a religious community that transcends the local social divides of social class, age, and gender. He hereby did not only place people from Lamu in relation to the global Muslim *ummah*, but localized them by explicitly appealing to *ummah wa Lamu* – the religious community of Lamu; a community that encompassed the young men gathered in front of him, the elders overhearing the *khutba* on the *barazas* located outside the mosque, the women cooking in the surrounding houses, my girlfriends who would listen to the recorded sermon, as well as those youth who had not bothered attending the lecture.⁸

The Imam argued that *maendeleo* (development) lies with this *ummah*'s active participation in the leadership of Lamu Town, but reminded his audience that such physical presence ought to be motivated, not by a desire for wealth or power, but by the ubiquitous awareness of believers' accountability before God. *Muko hadir?* Much more than an inquiry about their physical location, Taha challenged the audience's moral presence – in the immediate environment of the mosque as well as in the broader context of life on the island. Five times Taha asked his audience where they are, a seemingly rhetorical question to which he himself eventually provided the answer: *Hatuko hadir!* We are *not* present.⁹

This exchange, on which the Imam's hour-long sermon was based, was extremely sparse, yet intensely densely spatiotemporal. Through the question-answer structure Taha appeared to be locating himself and his audience in ordinary space-time, yet he expressed

⁸ *Barazas* are public stone benches popular in Swahili towns. Spread throughout town, these form popular gathering places for men after the morning and afternoon prayers. Historically, these *barazas* fulfilled an important political function as a forum where community problems were discussed and governing issues were decided upon. In contemporary Swahili societies, *barazas* have lost their political authority but still fulfill a function as a forum for discussions on political and other social issues. (see also Kresse 2007).

⁹ Ustadh Taha's inquiry then interestingly resembles the exchange between God and Abraham in the Hebrew Bible when Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. Three times God asks Abraham where he is and three times Abraham responds: *Hineni*, "Here I am."

a moral standpoint. Notably, Taha's argument suggested that a physical position is inescapably a moral stance; that these are inseparable. By pinpointing familiar locations in Lamu, the Imam took his audience on a spatiotemporal journey, at the end of which they would realize their moral position.¹⁰ Some of his listeners may think they are merely sitting on mattresses, standing in front of stoves or chewing *khat* occasionally, but in fact they are always and everywhere *in front of God*. It is only through this dialectic between the recognizable real-world space-time of familiar locations in Lamu and the moral space-time that the full significances of the exchange emerge.

The simplicity of meaning together with the bare structure of the Imam's question worked to amplify its ambiguity, its suspense, and forever-openness. Taha's answer – *hatuko hadir* – narrated something that seemed, at the end, as if it was over and done with. Yet the exchange actually posed a question that must be forever heard, an inquiry that did not stop reverberating at the end of the sermon and ought to form the moral guide for the daily conduct of this *ummah*.

According to the Imam, *maendeleo* was not to be found in electric fans or in wearing baggy pants and smoking weed. Rather it ought to be brought about by young people' religiously inspired, morally responsible participation in the development of Lamu town. To be a morally responsible person within a society faced with rapid transformation does then not demand an outward rejection of either change or tradition;

¹⁰ We will encounter the importance of such spatiotemporal journeys throughout this dissertation, as individuals continuously draw upon ideological understandings of particular places and times to make a statement about the moral disposition of Lamu youth.

rather it requires young people to negotiate new subject positions that are attuned to translocal discourses while remaining locally situated.¹¹

Central themes and arguments

Within recent years there has been an increasing interest in the study of “youth” and “youth culture” within anthropology, African studies as well as Islamic studies (see e.g. Austin and Willard 1998; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bucholtz 2002; Deeb 2006; Durham 2004; Furlong, et al. 2001; Herrera and Bayat 2010; Honwana 2012; Honwana and Boeck 2005; Maira and Soep 2005; Turner 2009). Few of these approaches document, however, the different ways in which young people negotiate, rather than reject, understandings of respectability and positionality. Scholarly accounts of youth in Africa, for example, have tended to focus on how young people respond to moments of rupture or social crises brought about by unemployment, genocide and war, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or the demographic crisis (Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Honwana and Boeck 2005). Using a problem-centered approach, these studies recognize and document African youth’s agency to react to social crises or to appropriate and localize global cultural flows. (Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Beckerleg 1995; Burgess 2002; Caplan and Topan 2004; Diouf 2003; Dlamini, et al. 2004; Durham 2000; Fuglesang 1994). These are, however, generally discussions *about* youth rather than considerations that approach young people on their own terms. What has been lacking within African (and Islamic) studies is a detailed analysis of young people’s day-to-day interactions and

¹¹ This then is similar to the kinds of social development projects Laura Deeb engages in when discussing the pursuit of deeply modern, cosmopolitan, yet pious practices among Muslims in Beirut, Lebanon (Deeb 2006).

their diverse considerations as they endeavor to reposition themselves within a rapidly changing society.

This dissertation proposes that a detailed analysis of young people's social interactions and language use is a means through which we can better understand youth's different deliberations as they adhere to local, urban, or global discourses within their daily lives. As I will argue, inhabitants of Lamu – both young and old – evaluate social interactions as primary indices of, and phenomenological experiences with social change and moral shifts. The subtle analysis of interactional practices and their ideological evaluation then presents a distinctive set of questions about the ways in which young people manage encounters, maintain relationships, and negotiate new social positions, but especially about the ideological processes that shape such deliberations. I suggest that youth never just reject or respond to local contexts; orienting toward a multitude of ideological discourses, young people create new social niches that reflect both respect for local norms and values and a desire for development and change.

This dissertation's main theoretical focus then is with the workings of ideologies; with an examination of the different ways in which linguistic and broader semiotic ideologies and young people's embeddedness within them not only shape interactional practices and their evaluations but also constitute the very capacity to, and means with which youth can negotiate their social position. This focus on situated moments of negotiation not only contributes to discussions on agency; it also provides insight into the ideological processes through which different semiotic forms come to signify and the intersubjective, situated, and ongoing nature of such meaning-making processes.

The title of this dissertation speaks to this focus on ideologies by locating youth

“*between respect and desire.*” It hints at young people’s ambiguous position between *respect* for local norms and values, and *desire* for opportunities. To this, the focus on ideologies adds young people’s awareness of societal *expectations* toward conduct, encounters, and social relations. Each of these considerations is socially situated and shaped by a multiplicity of discourses on culture preservation, religion, development, and modernity, to name but a few. The analysis of the different ways in which young people negotiate these different orientations then moves beyond the idea that youth are necessarily conflicted between an adherence to established identity categories (i.e. an identification with ethnic or national identities as well as notions such as “tradition” or “modernity”) and examines the ways in which new subject positions materialize.

By calling young people’s positionalities *ambiguous* I do not suggest that these are inherently problematic but rather that such positions of “inbetweenness” are not readily available for young people to step into. They are situated between established social types. To understand how young people express their identification with such new subject positions, I examine the ways in which (innovative) verbal and non-verbal practices can become enregistered; how they can become socially recognized as representing a particular social persona. This includes the important question of what happens in the meantime: when the social evaluation of new practices is not yet agreed upon.

Underlying these different theoretical considerations is the question of the moral – of what is considered morally appropriate conduct and how local understandings of the ethical can be (re)negotiated rather than rejected. My project then centers on an investigation of the intersection of morality and semiotic practice, or the language and

semiotic ideologies surrounding practices that reveal the social embedding of verbal and non-verbal communication, and the ways in which moral interests work to produce them. I attend to the ways in which metapragmatic frames, or discourses that guide interpretations of semiotic activities (Silverstein 2003), shape the definition of interactions and thus provide participants with a moral consciousness of opportunities and limits to (strategic) negotiation. This approach allows me to connect practices that constitute daily encounters such as details of talk, dress, and movement to different orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003), to other scales and domains of social life.

I approach these questions by chronicling the ways in which people talk about and evaluate social change, the ways in which shifting orientations are mediated within practice, and how the interpretations that regiment such altering practices are locally situated and simultaneously tied to broader societal levels and transformations. I hope to demonstrate that talk, gaze, dress, movement, and other associated forms of practice are critical to allowing youth to function within positions of ambiguity. While I thereby highlight creativity and agency, I also underline that possibilities to act are never unrestricted, but are always intersubjective, embedded within space-time, and guided by questions of morality, intentionality and responsibility.

As a whole the dissertation then presents a detailed analysis of the different ways in which youth in a context of social transformation navigate between expectations, respect, and desire and how this maneuvering is mediated by a multitude of social, economic, and political settings within which young people operate. By emphasizing these different orientations and loyalties, I endeavor to show that young people do not only react to particular situations such as poverty or political exclusion – they are also

shaping the terms of debate surrounding the issues that affect their lives, and they are creating and distributing messages to define themselves in an altered social reality. The innovative nature of this project then lies in its attempts to provide a detailed understanding of everyday practices, negotiations, and decisions at the micro-level, while remaining aware of the larger historical, political and economic tensions that shape African youth's social environment.

The following overview of the theoretical framework that informs my analysis first elaborates upon different approaches to the question of morality and moral personhood and its relation to conversations about agency. I situate this discussion within the context of Lamu to introduce the ethnographic background that motivated the theoretical approaches used. The second section of this theoretical introduction expounds upon the ways in which a language ideology approach provides insight in the interactional renegotiation of norms and values and their mediation within practice. I discuss the centrality of metadiscourses to social evaluation and how such assessments of language and practice impact the ways in which semiotic forms come to be enregistered, or how they become recognizable as representing a particular type of person. The discussion of spatiotemporal embeddness, chronotopes, and stance-taking speaks to the different ways in which processes of negotiation are shaped and restricted by their situatedness within space and time, and the ideological evaluations thereof. The final section of this theoretical introduction elaborates upon the third major focus of this dissertation, namely the different academic discussions about the study of "youth."

These different theoretical approaches interestingly come together in the *khutba* with which I started this introduction. In his sermon, Imam Taha clearly outlines local

ideologies of individual practice as situated and guided by moral responsibility. What is more, Taha's call for a *moral presence* offers a metapragmatic framework within which questions of morality, semiotic practice, and spatiotemporal embeddedness are tied together in a way that will help us understand youth's different considerations and restrictions as they negotiate orientations, affinities, and positionalities. For these reasons I use the religious sermon as a guiding thread in setting up the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Moral breakdown and agency in contexts of social transformation

In his *khutba*, Taha asked his audience to consciously reconsider their daily conduct and its moral implications. He called upon Lamu youth to make a calculated choice with regards to their actions, motivated by their belonging to a moral community, a religious *ummah*, not just the spatial territory that is Lamu. By taking his audience on a spatiotemporal journey constituted of recognizable locations and encounters, he made his audience aware of the choices they have, the consequences of their actions, and their moral responsibility as agentive-subjects. Within this situated discourse, Taha presented his audience's conduct as "an object of thought [for them] to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals" (Foucault and Rabinow 1984). Heidegger (1996) considered such a moment in which individuals are taken out of their unreflective state of being-in-the-world into a conscious-state-of-being as an instance of "moral breakdown," where individuals are caused to question the usefulness of their actions or the reasons behind their habits (Zigon 2007). Or, as Bourdieu would have it, such shift from an unreflective doxa to orthodoxy is a disruption of the habitus (Bourdieu 1984), and Taha's *khutba* appears to present a rather explicit formulation of such moment of moral uncertainty.

In this dissertation, I draw upon the theoretical frameworks of disruption and breakdown to address questions of agency and intentionality in what I consider youth's discursive and interactional (re)negotiation of new subject positions and social relations, and the notions of morality and respectability that constitute them. A disruption, or a shift to a conscious state of being-in-the-world brings with it an ethical demand; it requires an action, a decision, for one to return to an unreflective state or doxa (Keane 2010). Keane (2010) views this need for reflexivity and self-awareness of one's actions as a process of *objectification* – a discursive and ideological focus on material practices, much like what we saw with Taha above. I argue that these moments of objectification entail opportunities for the renegotiation of what it means to be a virtuous person in contemporary Lamu – what constitutes moral conduct and how it ought to be mediated within verbal and non-verbal practice.

I do not mean to suggest that this moment of disruption is unique to Lamu's history. On the contrary, Chapter 2 outlines at length how transformation and negotiation form an integral part of the town's history. The abolition of slavery, for example, was undoubtedly a moment of social and semiotic crisis during which both social status, and the material practices that meant to represent it were significantly reshuffled. Where I contribute to the theoretical discussions outlined above, is my analysis of Lamu inhabitants' (meta)discursive construction of the experienced shifts in moral authority as a moment of transformation and breakdown. It is the analysis of the metanarratives surrounding interactions and encounters, and how these shape the negotiation and remediation of norms and values within practice that contributes to an understanding of the link between objectification and agency.

Much of recent work in the anthropology of morality – on situated understandings of morality or ethics – has attended to the ways in which people work to shape themselves into moral persons (see, for example, Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). Ethnographic accounts, such as Saba Mahmood’s work on a women’s piety movement in Cairo, offer compelling analyses of people’s conscious considerations in working towards an appropriation and embodiment of morality and moral conduct, their striving towards becoming a pious person. I contribute to studies of ethics and morality through a direct examination of a situation in which, not only an individual’s ability to embody moral conduct is questioned, but the very understanding of morally appropriate behavior is renegotiated.

In contemporary Lamu, the uncertainty lies exactly with ethical practices – with which local habits or actions can be considered appropriate mediations of moral norms and how one, in such moments of ambiguity and ambivalence, can assess someone’s character and sincerity. The question for WaLamu is not *how* to become morally responsible but *what it means* to be a morally responsible person, as neither the *baraza*-sitting elder nor the *khat* chewing youth form a model of morality in contemporary society. As Taha’s *khutba* obviates, morality is not understood solely in terms of piety and a striving towards devoutness. Rather it entails considerations in relation to how youth ought to participate in change – it comprises decisions with regards to emancipation, development, modernity, and cosmopolitanism and, indeed, Muslim piety understood in relation to global Islam.

I am therefore interested in the role of what Webb Keane (2007) has called the “moral narrative of modernity” in shaping local ideologies of development and social

change. Across ethnographic contexts, “the idea of the modern is crucial to people’s historical self-understanding. It is part of both elite and popular discourses, imaginations and desires” (Keane 2007: 48). Webb Keane, in his study of Christian missionary encounters in the colonial Dutch East Indies, argues that such narratives of modernity have a particular moral character in that they are a call for humans to act upon their own history through exercising their own agency. When youth in Lamu maintain that adopting Western practices is not just about a yearning for the West, but also about one’s own capacity to positively contribute to, and change their community, they are making claims about agency that draw upon this moral narrative (see Chapter 5). In my account, I am particularly interested in analyzing the everyday life of the idea of being modern in Lamu and its ideological ties to historically (spatiotemporally) situated understandings of morality and respectability. I analyze what it means to *morally participate* in processes of change and how this is negotiated within discourse and practice.



Figure 3. Elders and young men on Lamu's main square
© Eric Lafforgue

Moral personhood in contemporary Lamu

As Taha's *khutba* outlined, Lamu inhabitants' reflexive consideration of practices and the discursive construction of moral transformation is not a situated moment brought about by a specific event (such as the abolition of slavery). Rather what caused this disruption is a set of broader sociopolitical processes that impacted, not only WaLamu's economic and (geo)political position but also their very perception of self-other relations; it altered their conception of what it means to be "from Lamu" in contemporary society.

As I will discuss at length in Chapter 2, Lamu inhabitants have historically distinguished themselves from the African mainland based on notions of cosmopolitanism and civilization (*uungwana* and *ustaarabu*), an essentialized ontological difference between the "savage" mainland and "civilized" coastal societies positioned into non-coeval chronotopes (Fabian 1983). The moment of decolonization and Lamu's incorporation into the Kenyan nation (1963) did not only entail the island's submission to a mainland (African) government, it also brought with it economic neo-liberalism and new discourses on development and modernity, processes that placed Lamu within the national and global periphery and increasingly challenged local understandings of urbanity and modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Hanson and Hentz 1999; Harrison 2010). The *khutba* that forms the guiding thread throughout this introduction clearly outlined how these changes are progressively phenomenologically present within the community and thus urge a reconsideration of what it means to be "cosmopolitan," "modern," or "civilized."

Taha gave his speech, not only against the backdrop of the Kenyan national elections and the discontents that it stirred up. He also spoke to more recent events in the

community – the rapidly increasing erection of churches in the predominantly Muslim town, and the recent collapse of an older building during the monsoon rains that had killed a playing child. Many considered these events strikingly representative of Lamu’s altered geopolitical position and the gloomy future that lies ahead. The churches, predominantly erected by mainland Kenyans from the Kikuyu ethnicity, formed a visible (and audible)¹² image of WaLamu’s increasing confrontation with their political, economic, and religious dispossession. The dilapidation of the town’s architecture, once the hallmark of Lamu’s cosmopolitan identity, and the physical danger it formed for the town’s inhabitants were strangely iconic of the broader decay of the town and the moral risk this formed for its younger generation.¹³



Figure 4. Church door with subtle “God loves you” inscription
© Eric Lafforgue

¹² The churches themselves were generally rather inconspicuous, located in houses or buildings without any recognizable outside signs of it being a church. When walking through town, particularly on Sundays, one could, however, hear hymns being sung or the sounds of “people speaking in tongues” coming from the local Pentecostal church.

¹³ I hereby suggest that the crumbling houses resemble the broader deterioration of economy, health, and moral standards in Lamu town and how this similarly threatens to “crush” the town’s younger generation.

This state of dilapidation and marginalization contrasts sharply with the lived memory of the town's cosmopolitan status as a center of trade and Islamic scholarship. The island of Lamu was, from its 14th century inception, one of the centers of the Swahili trade network that persisted up unto the 19th century. It was an international trade port that had long-standing connections with the Arabian Peninsula and Southeast Asia – a history evident in its culture, language, architecture, and social structure. The nature of this cosmopolitanism has been significantly redefined through Lamu's altered position within today's geopolitical order. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the island became increasingly peripheralized in relation to the formation of centers in Europe and mainland East Africa. Now at the margins of the Kenyan State (in physical, political, and economic terms) and the global economy, the archipelago's inhabitants question their access to, and participation in, not only the Kenyan nation, but also processes of development and globalization. In addition, the immediate confrontation with young people's altering behavior urges WaLamu to consider the consequences of participation in processes of change and makes the question of morally appropriate conduct all the more pressing.

While people worry about access to good education and health care, or about drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, there is also a true concern with what these changes mean in terms of altering moral dispositions, shifting understandings of propriety and piety, and norms of interaction. As Taha's opening quote suggested, WaLamu do not condemn the changes introduced in the name of development (*maendeleo*). On the contrary, the Imam proposed that the lack of much-needed development was caused by an absence of active engagement in and a moral commitment to processes of change.

For a town that for centuries distinguished itself from the African mainland as urban and cosmopolitan (*ustaarabu* vs. *ushenzi* or backwardness), but that is now poor and marginalized in relation to the Kenyan mainland, the question is not whether or not they desire development but rather what represents development and modernity within contemporary society. Until about fifty years ago, sitting on one of Lamu's local *barazas* while sipping Arabic coffee formed the epitome of urban flair. Now it is depicted either as an outdated practice by local youth or as a stereotypical example of Swahili "laziness" by mainland Kenyans who migrated to the island to take up employment. Those elders on the *barazas* watch young men – their sons, grandsons or nephews – walk by, sporting dreadlocks, and wearing T-shirts with slogans such as "*Spanish Sex Instructor*" – clothes brought to them as a gift by Western tourists or acquired when traveling abroad. Yet, these same young men provide for their extended families and pray next to their elders at Friday prayer.

In the recent past, women's seclusion was indicative of high social status and religious piety. Now sending one's daughters to college represents development and financial wealth. While this is viewed as a positive change, secular education and employment also enables young women to openly interact and possibly flirt with men. In such a context, what do urbanity, cosmopolitanism (*ustaarabu*), and modernity (*kisasa*, *dot com*) mean? And what does pride of cultural heritage (*utamaduni*, *tabia*, *desturi*) entail? Indeed, what does it mean to *morally* participate in change?

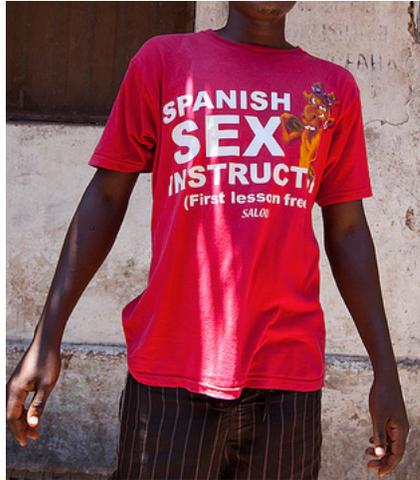


Figure 5. Slogan on T-Shirt
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Figure 6. Banner during annual Maulid celebrations
© Eric Lafforgue

Lamu then forms a unique site from which to examine the ways in which multiple kinds of subject positions, relations, and possibilities are produced, maintained, and negotiated within daily interaction. The examination of youth's verbal and material practices as they go about their daily life forms a particularly fruitful ground from which to study the production of social differences and places in contemporary Africa, and allows for an in-depth analysis of the day-to-day processes through which classifications

of behavior and those whose behaviors they are, are experienced, maintained, and modified (Agha 2007a).

As suggested above, these arguments introduce the important question of agency – a notion that seems to speak of a conscious agent, alluding to both the intended consequences and expected evaluations of one’s actions. In this dissertation, I build upon Webb Keane’s understanding of agency as a historical and cultural product, the understanding of which entails the examination of the historical (and situated) construction of the idea itself (Keane 1997). From Keane’s discussion I take the understanding, not only that the ability to act is socioculturally mediated (Ahearn 2001), but also that it is shaped and limited by situated semiotic ideologies and thus semiotic forms’ spatial and temporal embeddedness. I turn therefore to a discussion of the theoretical field of language and semiotic ideologies to outline how these approaches inform my analysis.

Language and semiotic ideologies

My discussion of social transformation and moral personhood argued that moments of breakdown confront the individual with the consequences of his or her own actions, a moment of objectification that demands intervention and thus implies a particular kind of agency. Although such moments of objectification can provide an individual with the tools to negotiate the meanings of his or her actions, such agency is never unrestricted and remains situated within, shaped, and evaluated by ideology. Ideologies do not only determine what forms of practice can be considered meaningful, but also how such semiotic forms are used and evaluated within interaction. This dissertation builds upon theories of language ideologies by taking as its focus the complex interaction and

interdependence of talk and material practice in order to better understand how semiotic forms (both verbal and non-verbal) function to challenge stereotypes, maintain relations, and negotiate new social positions.

Language ideologies and semiotic ideologies have often been discussed separately (although they never were suggested to be, in fact, separate). Webb Keane (1997, 2003b), however, defined semiotic ideology as “a guide to what words and things can or cannot do and to how they facilitate or impinge on the capacities of human [agents],” thereby focusing our attention on the conjunction of social, political, and other forces necessary for semiotic forms to carry signification (Keane 1997: 70). Emphasizing that the perceptible experience of languages’ material properties are organized by semiotic ideologies, Keane underlines language’s status as an inherently semiotic system and thus stresses the inseparability of the study of linguistic and material practices (see also Irvine and Gal 2000).

The study of language ideologies allowed for broader understandings of the interrelation between language structure, linguistic forms, people’s understandings of such forms, and political economy (Gal 2005; Irvine 1989; Irvine and Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, et al. 1998). Accessed both through metadiscourses or explicit statements about language and implicitly through speakers’ discursive strategies, the study of language (and semiotic) ideologies allows for insights in people’s own understandings of, and motivations for certain linguistic practices (Hill 1998; Hill and Mannheim 1992; Silverstein 1979, 1981). It helps us comprehend not only why and how not all forms of signification are recognized or accepted by all members of a society but also focuses our attention on subjects’ representational practices and the intersection

between ‘language’ and social personas (Agha 1998, 2005, 2007a, 2011; Coupland 2007; Goebel 2008; Irvine and Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, et al. 1998).

For my purpose in this dissertation, I find particularly useful Judith Irvine’s (1989) definition of language ideologies as the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests (Irvine 1989: 255). Not only does such an approach speak to the moral question pervasive in this dissertation, it also urges us to analyze how moral and political positions are reflected in, and through linguistic and broader semiotic practices. In my analysis of processes and events of negotiation, I also build upon Irvine and Gal’s (2000) work on semiotic processes of differentiation exactly because these reveal the cultural power of language ideologies to “locate, interpret and rationalize sociolinguistic complexity,” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 36) and thereby make divisions and distinctions appear utterly ‘natural’ (Eagleton 1994; Fairclough 1989, 1995; Irvine 2001). It is such an approach that permits an understanding of how speakers’ perception of the relationship between linguistic forms and social identities both draws on, and reproduces systems of social differentiation and affiliation (Irvine and Gal 2000).

As suggested above, one of the key features through which we can analyze and identify language ideologies is their articulation within metapragmatic discourses and their expression in individuals’ metapragmatic awareness. Jakobson first defined this “metapragmatic function” as the ability to make self-referential statements about linguistic practice and form (Jakobson, et al. 1990). In Lamu, daily encounters are abounding with such evaluative statements of others’ linguistic and material practices and the broad circulation of such discourses helps us understand individuals’ selection of one

linguistic variety over another, or one material practice over another. Yet, in contexts of transformation, such statements are shifting and emerging, rather than entirely explicit. I therefore consider it pertinent to examine how interpretations of actions and interactions within the lives of Lamu residents are governed by metapragmatic frames – as implicit and explicit classifications of contexts that govern signs and their meaning (Silverstein 2003).

The language ideology reasoning has then privileged a dialectical, cultural approach above the more stable analytic categorization that has sometimes dominated sociolinguistic research. Herein lies its openness to questions of history, and, most importantly for my purposes, the very experience of place, personhood, and temporality as produced through linguistic practice and ideas about language use. I add to the language ideology theoretical stance an emphasis on mediation and materiality, thereby providing contributions to discussions on enregisterment and agency.

Remediation and enregisterment through discourse and practice

Metadiscourses and metapragmatic framing enable observers to evaluate individuals' behavior within a particular interactional setting and assign interlocutors to a particular group of people. Within contexts of social transformation, however, new practices are introduced and new ideological discourses circulate, the appropriation of which reflects individuals' positioning within the social context. The assessment of such new practices and the people who use them is far from a given exactly because the ideological link between observed practice and social category belonging is in flux. Motivated by this understanding, I argue that the concepts of *remediation* and *enregisterment* are central to a discussion of agency and presentations of self in contexts of social transformation.

Within Lamu, young people's orientation to newly introduced discourses on modernity, emancipation, and development does not immediately entail youth's rejection of established moral values such as modesty, respectability, and piety. It, however, does necessitate a renegotiation of how these norms ought to be mediated within practice. I maintain that the concept of *remediation* is central to such processes of negotiation. The notion was introduced in an entirely different context, namely the discussion of the transformations practices and discourses undergo when they are introduced to new media – the transition from spoken to written to electronic forms of communication and the impact these shifts have on the practices themselves (Bolter and Grusin 1999).

I use the term *remediation* to discuss how ideologies or ideological understandings of norms and values can be re-mediated in different semiotic practices. I suggest that in contexts of change, where new ideological discourses are introduced and circulate, established semiotic forms can lose the signifying capacity in which they were used. Boundaries are redefined, ways of dressing shift, and forms of speaking become more or less widespread, while norms (ideas of respectful behavior or *heshima*) remain. In such contexts, ideologies can be *re*-mediated in different or new semiotic forms. I emphasize, however, that such remediations are not immediately or necessarily efficacious in any particular way, exactly because their uptake and evaluation depends on the (disintegrating) hegemony of established semiotic ideologies.

Keane (2003a) appears to allude to similar processes when he states that objectifications (as central to self-interpretation and thus agency) are “subject to recontextualization embedded in actions.” Central to such recontextualizations are metalanguages as causal links to material processes rather than arbitrary interpretations of

a world (Keane 2003a: 240). The metadiscursive interpretation and recognition of semiotic forms and their (remediated) meanings is thus necessary for them to function in presentations of self. That is, remediated forms need to become *enregistered* for them to be effective; they need to be recognizable for, and identified by observers as representing a particular type of person. I thus underscore the semiotic nature of signifying practices by emphasizing their mediation within verbal and non-verbal forms, but highlight the process of *enregisterment* such remediations need to undergo for them to be efficacious within interaction.

Asif Agha (2005, 2007a, 2011) introduced the notion “enregisterment” to refer to the ways in which particular ways of speaking can become identifiable as belonging to a particular group of people. Phrased differently, the notion hints at the social process through which Bakhtinian “voices” (Bakhtin 1981) come to be recognizable as belonging to a particular *register* of speaking. It is exactly this ongoing linking of practice and people, and the social evaluation it implies that makes “enregisterment” a useful notion in the study of Lamu youth’s novel practices. I argue, however, that this process is not only inherently intersubjective, but also that new forms of speech derive their full meaning only when assessed in relation to non-verbal semiotic practices. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic practices, I discuss a broader social process that also includes the gradual recognition of non-verbal semiotic forms as typifiable of social personas. With that I contend that Asif Agha’s notion of “enregisterment” is but a subsection of a broader semiotic process of what Alfred Schutz (1970) called “typification.”

Within linguistic anthropology a “register” has been defined as a socially recognizable way of speaking, whereby a “voice” is the individual occurrence of a

register in interaction (Agha 2005). Or, as Judith Irvine defined it, registers are “voices a speaker takes on in different social situations” (Irvine 1990: 153). By emphasizing the social enregistering of voices Agha locates register “in a continual process of production and reproduction” (Eckert 2008: 456). This processual and emerging nature is exactly what makes “enregisterment” useful for the study of social transformation; it emphasizes that shifts in macro-sociological typifications “can only be understood through attending to micro-level processes of register-use in interaction” (Agha 2005: 47). It is this attention to micro-level register effects that allows for an understanding of the different ways through which young people’s practices can negotiate new subject positions.

The notion of “voice” was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and refers to the ways in which utterances can index typifiable speaking personae – gender, class, caste, and profession – and includes both linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Even for Bakhtin, the signifying link between interactional practice and social categories of people went beyond identifiable ways of *speaking* and included non-verbal semiotic forms of practice. I agree with Agha, however, that using the already stretched notion of “voice” to refer to such instantiations of semiotic registers makes it “too thin to be usable” (Agha 2005: 39). In this dissertation, I therefore use “voice” to refer to individuals’ (strategic) selection of particular ways of speaking in self-positionings and the evaluative stance this can entail (see chapters 3 and 5). I use “semiotic styles” to refer to the conglomerate of verbal and non-verbal semiotic forms and their (strategic) use in interaction.

To fully understand the processes outlined above, my use of “style” needs some clarification. The notion “style” has been used in different ways in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and sociology (Alim 2004; Bell 1984, 2001; Blommaert

1990; Coupland 2007; Eckert 1989, 2000; Eckert and Rickford 2001; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Hebdige 1988; Kochman 1972, 1981; Milani and Jonsson 2012). Here I build upon Irvine's (2001) discussion of "style as distinctiveness" and particularly on her emphasis on "the evaluative schemes" that inform the social recognition of styles. Irvine defines "style" as principles of distinctiveness that may extend beyond the linguistic system to other aspects of comportment that are semiotically organized (Irvine 2001: 31-32). Expanding upon Bourdieu's discussion of distinction (Bourdieu 1984), she emphasizes that "style" – as a crosscut of communicative and other behavioral modalities – may characterize an individual, but "does so only within a social framework (of witnesses who pay attention); it thus depends upon social evaluation" (Irvine 2001: 21). Not only does a style only become meaningful in relation to other styles; its recognition also necessarily includes a particular value judgment: it can be assessed as, for example, respectful, modest, or improper (Irvine 2001).

Such an approach to "style" is meaningful for my discussion in two ways. Firstly, Irvine's emphasis on "style as distinction" hints at the fact that its habitual usage can cause it to become linked to a particular group of people; as a *lifestyle* it can become part of a particular *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984). This then suggests that young people's frequent use of particular semiotic styles can make them recognizable as a particular subset of Lamu's population. Secondly, because styles (and the relationship between them) are ideologically mediated, they are a way through which social relationships can be constructed (Irvine 2001: 24). Not only the use of semiotic styles as such, but also the different evaluative schemes or "interpretive regimes" that assess them reveal different subject positions within interaction (Chapter 7).

Such processes of stylization and enregisterment are, however, never unrestricted. While youth can use a range of strategies to reposition themselves within society, they are always acting from a particular subject position – from a particular ideological stance as well as from a situated moment in space and time. This spatiotemporal embeddedness that impedes upon individuals’ ability to act and strategically negotiate social positionalities comprises (1) the ideological conception and evaluation of the context in which interactions unfold, (2) the narrative representation of space and time, (3) and the stance speakers and observers take toward the ongoing interaction.

Exactly because space and time meaningfully impact both individuals’ discursive practices as well as others’ evaluation thereof, I consider space-time and its ideological understandings to be a semiotic resource (Blommaert 2005, 2010) in the creation, maintenance, and challenging of encounters, social relations and positionalities. The social meaning of space is continuously constructed, mediated, and contested by actions and behaviors rather than merely forming a context for their occurrence. I contribute to theoretical discussions of spatiotemporality by investigating how these processes operate, or how senses of place offer opportunities for stance-taking, and thus for negotiation and mediation.

Space-time embeddedness: Language as local practice

Space and time have always played a central role in WaLamu’s conceptions of self as well as their representations of others. Lamu Town, for example, was historically an urban milieu broadly structured by a series of ideological and material contrasts: “Arab”

and “Amu”¹⁴ versus “African,” stone structures versus mud huts, rich versus poor, free men versus slaves, representing both a spatial and social order (Bissell 2005).¹⁵

Architecture and specific geographies then form the topic of discourses and practices on longing and loss, shaped by where the speaker stands (both physically and ideologically) in the landscape of the present (Stewart 1988: 227). It is the space-time construction in the architecture and the very lay-out of the town – always changing, but organized around locations, buildings, and streets that are likely to be regarded as “still points in a turning world” (Eliot 1936 [1960])¹⁶ – that impact understandings of, and possibilities for negotiations of self-other relations. Even though they are not actually still, buildings, streets and squares form an invitation to imaginings and re-inventions, rather than merely a backdrop against which interactions unfold. In many ways, space *is* time in Lamu. Just as the donkeys outside of the mosque are an audible reminder of Lamu’s physical (and to some temporal) remoteness, so are the dilapidating buildings an ever-present reminder of both Lamu’s glorious past and its current marginalization. The churches are iconic of the increasing presence of mainland Kenyans, just as the graffiti on the walls of 14th century houses – often the logos of the soccer teams Arsenal and Manchester – are indexes of youth’s access to global consumerism (Prestholdt 2008).

This tension between the rapid changes and the simultaneous (imagined) unchanging nature of the town features significantly throughout this dissertation. The very spatiality and its ties to notions of temporality shape interactions, practices, and

¹⁴ Amu refers to the old denomination for the island town used by the original inhabitants of Lamu. The dialect spoken in the town is thus also KiAmu (instead of KiLamu). Lamu is the official denomination used by Kenyan administration (and increasingly by its current inhabitants).

¹⁵ While this is presented here as a dual divide, I explain later on that this is a much more complex set of oppositions and social relations, represented in both spatial and social organization.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Gillian Feeley-Harnik for making this connection and referring me to T.S. Eliot’s *The Four Quartets* (Eliot 1936 [1960]).

ideological discourses and importantly impact possibilities for, or ways of negotiating shifting social relations. How Lamu youth rely upon or are restricted by such complex constellations of language, non-verbal semiotic practice, and spatiotemporal location in negotiating alternative social positions forms a guiding question throughout this study.

In Lamu, I argue, spaces are produced by time; both in terms of their historical significance as well as the very real influence time has on the interpretation of an individual's actions. The time of day one encounters someone permits judgments about the appropriateness of their presence at that particular location, but also the rhythm or pace of the activity an individual engages in avails a set of evaluative judgments – the slowness of a young woman's pace, the length of her greetings, and the speed of her speech are all subject to appraisal. In addition, physical space itself – the location where an encounter takes place or the route a person walks – functions as a metapragmatic frame for an evaluation of these actions, and subjects' adherence to notions of respectability and honor. I examine implicit, explicit, and emerging expressions of metapragmatic awareness of actions' spatiotemporal embeddedness – of presence, dress, gaze, greeting, and speech – and how these understandings serve to mark individuals as belonging to a particular social category, and, more significantly, their moral disposition. I thus investigate the ways in which the meanings of spaces position these as resources within the life of Lamu youth, and how interactions' situatedness is implicated in the negotiation of new social niches and relations.

In a very immediate sense, Lamu then provides an ideal context to investigate Alastair Pennycook's (2010) call for a view of language as local practice that not only refers to practices' embeddedness in locality but also to the perspectives, ideologies, and

local ways of knowing through which language is viewed (Pennycook 2010: 128) (see also Blommaert 2010). By viewing practice, not merely as situated, but also as creating and negotiating the very locale in which it unfolds, this dissertation takes up Pennycook's challenge. I maintain that a view of language as local practice not only refers to the ways in which language use must always be related to place (must always be understood in terms of its situatedness) but also to the ways in which any understanding of the locality of language must encompass an appreciation of perspective – of the different ways in which language, locality, and practice are conceived in different contexts. Speakers' perception of what a locale entails, whether it is local, global, rural, or cosmopolitan is revealed through attention to chronotopic self-placements and alignments – through a focus on *stance-taking*.

I thus move beyond locality in purely analytical terms, and beyond a static understanding of place in an attempt to consider the convergence of different sociohistorical factors that impact different conceptions of a global-national-local nexus (Lempert 2012). While Lamu might be considered marginal from global development perspectives, locals reinvent and renegotiate, both in discourse and practice, the terms on which one can be considered developed or cosmopolitan (Prestholdt 2008). A focus on chronotopic placements and the spatiotemporal embeddedness of interaction does not only allow for an analysis of how the global is experienced locally; it also provides insight into how such scales emerge within interaction (rather than being an analytical given) and express subjects' own positionality and embeddedness (Lempert 2012).

Chronotopes and situatedness as semiotic opportunities

One means through which to access an individual's ideological assessment of her

positionality and interactional situatedness is through the analysis of narrative *chronotopes*. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of "chronotope" refers to particular representations of time (*chronos*) and space (*topos*) within literary tradition and how these reveal information about the speaker. Alluding to the senses of place and time that organize narrative, the concept has been particularly useful in analyzing ideological conceptions and representations of the interweaving of identity, voice, agency, and positioning. While Bakhtin focused on the occurrence of space-time constructs in the novel, Asif Agha's elaboration on these narrative chronotopes provides understandings of how semiotic representations of time and space within discursive events permit the creation, circulation, and maintenance of social categories and linguistic stereotypes (Agha 2007b: 321). Agha's *cultural chronotopes* essentially entail a presentation of self, to which other speakers orient for an understanding of both interaction and interlocutor.

In this dissertation I use this theoretical understanding of both narrative and cultural chronotopes to recognize and identify the deictic linking of space, time, and personhood within narratives and discourses. The identification of chronotopes within discourse not only allows us to see how such perceptions inform the social lives of those who perceive them; it also enables an investigation of how social stereotypes emerge and function, and how social transformation is evaluated through the use of chronotopes (such as nostalgic discourses). Particularly important for the focus of this dissertation is attention for the ways in which chronotopes are mobilized to implicitly challenge conventional and forge new indexical ties between space, time, and personhood. In other words, I examine how chronotopes operate in the metadiscursive and practical construction of change as moral transformation.

Bakhtin always emphasized that, while a chronotope represents a particular space-time construction within discourse and the novel, it is always experienced within a particular framework of interaction. That is, the act of construing a chronotopic representation itself has a chronotopic organization (Bakhtin 1981). Every utterance and interaction then projects an image of the possible world that may transform the very interactional framework in which it occurs (Bakhtin 1981: 321). I am particularly interested in the transformative impact chronotopes can have on participant frameworks (Chapter 5). Rather than referring to the spatiotemporal embeddedness of encounters as chronotopic, I retain the use of situatedness (or spatiotemporality) and context. I hereby want to preserve the distinction between individuals' narrative or discursive presentation of space-time constructs, and the metapragmatic frames that inform such constructions.

This approach enables me to build upon a growing body of literature that analyzes the temporal and spatial aspects of ideological regimentations through linguistic practice (Blommaert 2010; Kroskrity 2000) and allows me to investigate the different ways in which space-time features in, and impacts intersubjective negotiations of social relations. Individuals' narrative representation of space-time, their understanding of the spatiotemporal embeddedness of the interaction, and how this impacts their verbal and non-verbal semiotic practices will provide information about the stances subjects take toward the context of interaction, their alignment with interlocutors, and thus the different subject positions that can emerge within daily interaction.

Taha's *khutba*, for example, is a complex chronotopic event. Ustadh Taha presents his audience with a particular spatiotemporal representation of their own conduct: sitting on *barazas*, chewing *khat*, and smoking weed while houses collapse and

churches are being erected. The examples he uses and the pressing questions surrounding the Kenyan elections locate his speech in the spatiotemporal context of Lamu in 2008. The spatial environment of the mosque and the temporality of Ramadan, give Imam Taha's speech a particular moral authority. Linking space, time, and language use, Imam Taha constructs a moral chronotope that has an immediate effect on the spatiotemporal framework in which this lecture took place. It is through this constellation of space-time constructions, language, and positionality that Ustadh Taha can interpellate his audience as an *ummah*. The socially divided group, segregated by social background, age, and (dis)identification with processes of change is discursively united in its belonging to a moral community.

Taha's *khutba* not only illustrates how an awareness of discursive events' spatiotemporal embeddedness and the use of chronotopes function in establishing authority and appealing to an audience, it clearly demonstrates how these discursive tools allow for instances of explicit and implicit *stance-taking* and thus passing evaluative judgments about the context in which, and the interlocutors to whom one is speaking (Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009). Taha not only interpellates his audience as members of a very specific spatiotemporally grounded religious and social community, he himself takes a moral stance toward this *ummah*. It is by identifying such moments of *stance-taking* that we better understand how youth position themselves within the immediate context of interaction as well as the broader society.

Stance-taking

In every interaction, a speaker situates him or herself within time and space, through a choice of conduct and language motivated by a particular metapragmatic understanding

of the context in which he or she finds him or herself. Within linguistic anthropology, scholars speak of such chronotopic self-placements as an individual's *stance* – a three-part calculation in which utterances are interpreted through who said them, to whom they were said, and which utterances follow (Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009). Instances of stance-taking then not only express an assessment of the interactional context and interlocutors, they also comprise an alignment with observers. In addition, it evokes evaluative acts from, and thus a certain alignment by audience and overhearers, both intended and non-intended (Agha 2007a). Alexandra Jaffe (2009) underlines that, in this process, stance meaningfully links individual performance and social meaning, whereby taking up a stance becomes “associated with particular subject positions (social roles and identities, notions of personhood), and interpersonal and social relationships” (Jaffe 2009: 4).

In the context of Lamu, youth's conversational stance then refers to the complicated calculations young people make that take into account previous utterances in the conversation, the subject position of the interlocutor, and their own position within the interaction. Based on these considerations, Lamu youth can then select an appropriate style (comprising both language use and other material aspects of behavior), and take a stance that can function as a means to negotiate new social positions. By deploying stance correctly, youth can align themselves with elders and make claims to new social authority, positions or beliefs without facing censure or retributions (see, for example, Chapters 3 and 5; see also Terc 2011).

I find the notion of stance particularly useful to better comprehend situated moments of creation, negotiation, and maintenance of social relations and subject positions. Specifically, the concept provides insights in youth's selection of conduct from

a broadening repertoire of semiotic styles and the benefits or risks involved in behaving one way or another. Stance then provides significant information about subjects' metapragmatic awareness and their rejection of, or adherence to dominant ideologies, but hereby strongly relies on assumptions about individual knowledge, awareness, and intent (Jaffe 2007). While recognizing the usefulness of the concept, Irvine (2009) warns us, however, not to attribute too much explanatory power to this presumed individual agency in interaction as it appears to speak of a consciously acting agent (Irvine 2009: 54).

Stance is valuable for my analysis of youth practices because the notion recognizes that subject positions and relationships can be enacted through forms of talk, and does thus not approach social categories as essentialized (Jaffe 2009: 13). It allows for a view of semiotic repertoires as *resources* (Blommaert 2010) and hereby underlines the possible strategic nature of discursive events (Jaffe 2007: 13). At the same time, I acknowledge Irvine's concern for an overemphasis on individual agency. I therefore elaborately analyze moments of miscalculations; instances where the foreseen evaluation and uptake by a broader audience fails (see chapters 5, 6 and 7). I thus emphasize the intersubjective nature of successful stance-taking and discuss the spatiotemporal constraints to individual agency. I thereby complicate the discussion of *stance* by arguing for a consideration of the complex constellation of established ideologies, spatiotemporal embeddedness, and the incorporation of new semiotic practices. This encompassing approach illuminates young people's opportunities to create new tools to negotiate alternate positions in a transforming society as well as the restriction or limitations that occur. After all, negotiation far from guarantees phenomenological reality. *Stance-taking* shows, however, that youth do not merely manipulate pre-existing means nor are they

merely the object of attributions of identities; they also actively wield them toward themselves and others.¹⁷

Language ideologies, linguistic practice, and the study of youth

Discussions on youth's linguistic practices have often focused upon young people's desire to adhere to translocal discourses and practices. In their discussion of the global spread of Hip Hop and the linguistic practices tied to this music genre, Ibrahim et al. (2009), for example, argue that a desire for and orientation toward global cultural flows motivates youth to appropriate global languages, and particularly English, into their daily practices. Investigating language use in Hip Hop cultures across the globe, the authors suggest that we need to take young people's voices and their modes of self-fashioning seriously exactly because such accounts can illuminate youth's "constant struggles between an identification, rejection, and engagement with local cultural forms, and uses of language that not only localize but also transform what it means to be local" (Ibrahim, et al. 2009: 11-12). Such an approach then opens the discussion of youth practices up to an understanding of the relations between diverse language practices and the (trans)formation of local realities (Ibrahim, et al. 2009: 40).

While Ibrahim et al. importantly speak to the concerns of this dissertation, I move beyond their discussion in several ways. The authors' major concern is with processes of *glocalization* – with how global discourses and flows are localized, appropriated, and negotiated. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that such glocalizing tendencies and the desire that motivates them, while important, are far from youth's only concerns, particularly in an African context. As should be evident from this introduction thus far, I

¹⁷ Chapters 3 and 5 elaborate at length on the role of "voice" in processes of stance-taking and the moral implications this has.

argue that young people engage in complex processes of negotiation, whereby the indexical ties between broadened semiotic repertoires – including local dialects, global languages and a variety of semiotic practices – and social relations, categories, and positionalities are challenged and debated; a process shaped by more than desire alone. After all, global “flows” do not occur in “empty” spaces; they are movements that encounter scalar and spatial constrictions, both in a symbolic and material sense (Blommaert 2005, 2010). Ibrahim et al.’s (2009) discussion does, however, move beyond popular concerns within the linguistic anthropology of youth and particularly its focus on practices of “crossing,” “mixing,” and “switching.”

Linguistic anthropology has generally approached youth as social actors whose linguistic practices provide interesting case studies of how and why new linguistic varieties develop or how societal shifts impact boundaries between “speech communities” and “identities” (see e.g. Alim 2004; Alim 2006; Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003; Coupland 2010; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). Discussions of codeswitching, codemixing, or codecrossing, often examined among youth from different racial and social groupings, appear to re-produce a view of clearly delineated codes indexically and ideologically tied to particular social categories, such as race, gender, or social class, which individuals “cross” or “switch” between as they appropriate or temporarily adopt “others’ ” speech (Bucholtz 1999; Eckert 1989, 2000; Kiessling and Mous 2004; Lippi-Green 1997; Rampton 1995, 2006).

Such an approach to young people’s linguistic practices is then hinged on a view that, in multilingual settings, each language indexes a set of social meanings that are known to both those who deploy and those who receive such social messages (Gal 1987).

Individual speakers can then take advantage of their rich linguistic resources to accomplish an infinite number of linguistic and social tasks; they can situate themselves in the conversational context through a set of choices that distinguishes or aligns their speech with that of others. And there thus appears to exist a dialectical relationship between languages and identities, whereby speakers' language use simultaneously reproduces social structures and individual subjectivities (Ibrahim, et al. 2009).

In this dissertation, I suggest that, within contexts of rapid change, the social meaning of languages and thus the social categories they are ideologically tied to are not necessarily agreed upon. Rather, new ways of speaking are introduced and the registers of speech to which they ought to be linked are still being negotiated. Young people are then not necessarily trying to "cross" to the voice of an Other, but are rather negotiating new understandings of the social categories they are ascribed to. Such innovative linguistic practices are, however, never unrestricted but always subject to critical commentary, rejection, and censure.

Discussions on individuals' ability to present a particular kind of self through strategic language use have been influenced in important ways by Bourdieu's notion of the linguistic marketplace and questions of the political economy of language. Having a particular kind of value, linguistic styles and repertoires can carry significance and power in social and cultural realms of life (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991). Bourdieu thereby mainly focused on how institutions' imposition of official languages attributes prestige to particular linguistic forms and specifically paid attention to the role of the educational system in this process. While he recognized that individuals have the capacity to challenge the market, official institutions principally determined Bourdieu's linguistic

marketplace. Critiques of Bourdieu and further explorations of language's political economy maintained that prestige varieties, rather than established, are shifting notions that can only be fully understood when approached within context, taking account of their historicity and relationship with other social categories (Irvine 1989; Woolard 1985). Niloofar Haeri, for example, critiqued Bourdieu's conflation of elite varieties with the language of the state (Haeri 1997). And in her discussion of elite styles in Syria, Terc (2011) demonstrates that new linguistic practices are linked to new economic possibilities and global connections "in a complicated relationship that is neither unidirectional nor deterministic" (Terc 2011: 166).

In a context of social transformation, understandings of prestige or respectful forms are not necessarily shared and an analysis of shifting linguistic practices can highlight the strategies and risks involved in mobilizing new linguistic and semiotic practices. In Lamu, for example, there exists disagreement as to the value of Kiswahili dialects, Standard Swahili as well as English. Although Standard Swahili is the national language that is used within, and promoted by educational institutions, many locals consider it emblematic of historical processes of dispossession. Speaking the standard, while indexical of education, is thus far from valued in all contexts. Similarly, the use of local dialects is considered an index of authenticity and pride of one's heritage, but these varieties are equally linked to historical social inequality as well as lack of development. The island population does not equally share these differing opinions, and language varieties can be easily valued and devalued within two different, locally situated interactions or even within the context of the same interaction (see Chapters 4-5). The selection of language varieties thus not only requires a careful consideration of context

and audience; it also includes the risk for miscalculations of presumed evaluations. The detailed analysis of such processes enables an understanding of the ways in which speakers can simultaneously reproduce and resist dominant language ideologies and the stereotypes associated with them.

Youth in Africa: rebels, vandals, or innovators?

The “problem of youth” in Africa

Il faut cesser de travestir les realites de l’Afrique en melant ce qui serait souhaitable a ce qui existe...*le present n’a pas d’avenir sur le continent.* (Smith 2003: Avant propos)

This quote from the French author Stephen Smith opens Abbink and van Kessel’s edited volume on youth in Africa (Abbink and van Kessel 2005: 1). Indeed, Smith’s Afro-pessimism appears iconic of the popular attitude toward the overall situation of young people in Africa. As Abbink and van Kessel themselves state

“the exponential population increase and the fierce competition for resources within the contexts of malfunctioning or failing states have led to a relative decline in the well-being and social advancement of young people in Africa. They are growing up in conditions of mass unemployment and are facing exclusion, health problems, crisis within the family due to poverty and the AIDS pandemic, and a lack of education and skills. They are also marginalized in national state policies and have a weak legal position. African youths are over-represented in armed rebel or insurgent movements of various kinds as well as in criminal activities, to which they are so easily recruited.” (Abbink and van Kessel 2005: 1)

Indeed, anthropological descriptions of well-integrated African societies, where youth’s position was defined by age-grades and rites of passage – monographs on the Nuer, the Dinka or the Kikuyu – appear to portray another world (Abbink and van Kessel 2005: 2).

Public discourse on globalization and rapid social change has often depicted “youth” as “one of the great challenges of the twentieth century” (Honwana and Boeck 2005: ix). And across the globe young people’s practices have become “occasions for

moral panic” (Austin and Willard 1998: 1). Pronouncements such as the ones above, or generalizing statements like “the problems of youth today,” however, reify the notion of “youth,” and erase the larger social concerns that motivate such arguments. In the process “youth” itself became the problem and has been turned into “a metaphor for perceived social change and its projected consequences, and as such it is an enduring locus for displaced social anxieties” (Austin and Willard 1998: 1).

Nowhere is the perception of youth as a “lost generation” more acute than in Africa where young people are depicted either as perpetrators and victims of social and political conflict or as innovators and dupes in the globalization of culture (see e.g. Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Beckerleg 1995; Durham 2000; Honwana 2012; Honwana and Boeck 2005). Such pessimistic views are fueled by discussions of African youth’s desperate endeavors to confront the restructurings of global capital that render daily life ever more precarious (Honwana and Boeck 2005). From Angola to Lamu, there exists a profound sense of anxiety, an apparent crisis in the fundamental conditions of social production brought on by neoliberal policies and market orthodoxies (Bissell 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ferguson 2006; Hanson and Hentz 1999; Heller 2010; Hodgson 2011; Weiss 2004). Add to this the rising concerns surrounding poverty and hardship, violence, migration, AIDS, the breakdown of the family, violence and gangs and the negative image of youth in contemporary African societies is complete. Globalization and social change, while offering new (positive) opportunities to African youth, have generally been discussed in relation to these crisis-related issues: child soldiers (Honwana 2006), AIDS orphans (Dahl 2009; Dane and Levine 1994), child

trafficking (Dottridge 2002), female genital mutilation (Gosselin 2000) and sexual abuse of children and sex tourism (Richter, et al. 2004).

One then rightly wonders how to write about youth in Africa “without falling back on the bleak picture of crisis, crime and violence?” (Abbink and van Kessel 2005: 2). Abbink et al. ask how one can do justice to the positive resourcefulness of youth that has so often been erased within Africanist discourse. The response within the academic literature has been an approach that focuses on African youth as inventive and resilient subjects, whereby youth’s voices are taken seriously. This resulted in a range of studies that looked at the creativity with which youth appropriate and adapt global practices, making them inherently local. Eleen Moyer (2004, 2005), for example, discusses the popularity of the Rastafari movement in Dar Es Salaam to demonstrate how the uptake and use of global cultural flows is localized by different social forces. Moyer suggests that Rastafarianism, rather than a blind appropriation of global culture, was strategically used to maintain social harmony within a particular neighborhood of Tanzania’s capital. Mamadou Diouf (2003), in his study of the Setar movement in Dakar, looks at African youth and public space in the postcolonial context and demonstrates how young people can positively react against the political context within which their position is defined. He hereby speaks directly against the moral and civic panic that exists around youth in Africa today, without thereby romanticizing the social category.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, what has been lacking from studies of youth in Africa is, however, a consideration of young people’s everyday practices and particularly of their language use in daily encounters. Linguistic anthropological studies in African contexts have focused on the political economy of

language (Irvine 1989), processes of entextualization (Spitulnik 1996) or narratives surrounding social ills like HIV/AIDS (Black 2012). There are few detailed discussions of young people's linguistic and semiotic practices and how these relate to interactional management of social transformations. This dissertation then takes a first step toward filling this gap in both African studies and linguistic anthropology.

Defining youth

The notion of “youth” is a complex social category that until recently was under-studied and under-theorized in social sciences. The first half of the twentieth century focused on adolescence as a life stage, as part of the bio-sexual life span and the different cultural perceptions thereof (Evans-Pritchard 1947; Gennep 1960; Mead 1973). This emphasis on youth as “in between” childhood and adulthood, a preparation for integration into the adult community, often obscured young people's own cultural agency or framed it solely in relation to adults' concerns (Bucholtz 2002). The most salient, and troublesome, implication of such approaches was the portrayal of youth as inadequately formed adults, as “subjects lacking in the presumably desired qualities of adulthood, rather than as subjects in their own right” (Maira and Soep 2005: xxii).

In recent years, academic discussions have increasingly approached “youth” as a historically situated and mutable social category. The focus hereby shifted to young people as social actors and allowed for a view of “youth” as a “social achievement” (Maira and Soep 2005: xviii) – a social position structured by the powers of consumption, creativity, schooling, citizenship, surveillance, and social category membership. This brought the attention back to the constructed nature of youth as a social category and opened up space for discussions on youth's agency to navigate through the complex

realities of their lives; it allowed researchers to take seriously youth's voices, imaginations and desires (see e.g. Austin and Willard 1998; Herrera and Bayat 2010; Maira and Soep 2005; Roth-Gordon and Woronov 2009). Abbink and van Kessel (2005), however, rightly argue that such agency-approach is useful "only when the interaction with structural elements is taken seriously" (Abbink and van Kessel 2005: 10).

In this dissertation, I approach the category of "youth" as a discursive formation (Foucault 1976); as a social category shaped by unequal relations of power, authority, and respectability within the traditional society. In a society faced with transformations in moral authority, Foucault's "points of contestation" within such discursive formations become increasingly evident. In this ethnography, I then analyze the different ways in which young people in Lamu can contest this belonging to discursively constructed categories: how they challenge social stereotypes and the ways in which they redefine what "youth" can or cannot do. I hereby provide empirical concreteness for Foucault's phenomena of "contestation" and build upon discussions of linguistic stereotyping (Agha 1998, 2005, 2007a) and semiotic processes of differentiation (Irvine and Gal 2000) in doing so. This view of "youth" as a discursive formation then allows for an analysis of the agency of youth, their semiotic practices, and the ways in which they deal with the social and political forces that determine the conditions by which they are identified.

When writing, I used the term "youth" to refer to the social category of people defined as such by locals – *kijana* (pl. *vijana*) as distinguished from *mtoto* (or child). This notion broadly refers to a group of people between the ages of 18 and 35 (see also Abbink and van Kessel 2005). Locals' demarcation of this category of young people, or their conceptions of the age grade to which "youth" belong, is determined partly by the

legal understandings of youth (imposed by the Kenyan government, i.e. the legal age at which young people are allowed to obtain an Identity Card) and partly by shifting conceptions of social responsibilities. I was told that *zamani* (in the past, or before) youth stopped being “*kijana*” when they were married, when they were able to take up the responsibilities of husband and wife. Yet with changes in marital practices and because of a deteriorating economy, the category of youth has shifted as well. Even if they marry young, many young people are unable to provide for their own family and reside with in-laws. Socially they are therefore still considered *vijana*. This shifting social understanding of the age-brackets of “youth” is far from restricted to Lamu, and is a phenomenon that is occurring throughout the African continent (see e.g. Abbink and van Kessel 2005)

Many locals, however, pointed out that the notion *kijana* was not as straightforward as a simple bracketing of the ages 18-35. Within Lamu (and possibly the broader Swahili coast and other African societies), everyone is considered *kijana* in relation to his or her elder. My informant who was around 55 years old was referred to as *kijana* by the 70-year old man he interviewed. Such shifting or flexible conceptions of *youth* importantly hint at the local, context-bounded understandings of authority and status which will feature prominently in this dissertation’s discussion of changing social relations.

In my research, I divided my interviewees and informants into three categories: youth (18-35), middle-aged (35-60) and elder (60+). I want to underline that the strict demarcation of these categories was merely to facilitate my research and is an analytical division rather than a representation of recognized, rigid social categories.

Conducting research in Lamu

Methodology and data collection

Field research for this dissertation was conducted in two research periods, in July-August 2006 and from November 2007 until June 2010, totaling 32 months. During the majority of the research period I was based in Lamu, where I lived in private houses rented from local families. I lived at three different locations, two of which were situated in the *Mkomani* neighborhood, and one a bit farther out in the area popularly known as *Tundani*. I opted to live by myself to facilitate my research. While a home-stay would certainly have had certain benefits (such as the close observations of daily routines), it would also significantly have limited my freedom of movement.

Living on my own gave me more (but not unrestricted) freedom to interact with whom I wanted, at my convenience. Because I lived alone, I was able to interact with my male research assistants easily; they could come to my house to drop off the voice-recorder or could spend several hours doing transcriptions and analysis. My independence also enabled me to work with different youth organizations and allowed me to attend their late-night meetings. I built, however, close ties with several families and grew particularly fond of a few of them. I would spend days at their houses, help prepare food, share meals, celebrate religious holidays, and share intimate moments with them (such as the birth of children or the passing of family members). For these families I became like a daughter and there was the implicit understanding that my behavior would reflect my belonging to these different households. Interestingly enough, members of these families would explicitly rationalize (and hereby approve of) some of my less-traditional behavior (such as my late-night meetings or my choice to live alone) – I

occupied a liminal position, belonging to but not entirely absorbed by the local community.¹⁸

I conducted the majority of my research in Lamu, but also traveled to the surrounding islands and visited the towns of Pate, Siyu, and Faza where I conducted interviews with locals. I also traveled to Mombasa on a regular basis – joining friends on visits to family or on shopping trips, meeting people from Lamu who had moved to the city or interviewing residents of Mombasa about their perceptions of people from the Lamu Archipelago.

Throughout my research I relied on the seminal techniques of ethnography: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. My experiences of participant observation were as varied as the different social groups I was able to socialize with and ranged from organizing workshops with *beach boys* to joining women in funeral prayers. Much of my time was spent in offices, organizing events and awareness campaigns with young people, or at home with women, chatting, cooking or watching movies. It is during “my life” in Lamu, during the moments where I put recorders and notepads aside, that I learned the most about young people’s true concerns and difficulties. It was when I participated in the planning of awareness campaigns or in peer education workshops that I observed the openness with which young people were able to discuss the difficulty of, for example, spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS while remaining respectful to local traditions. Only when cooking with elder women during Ramadhan or when sitting with them for hours or days after a relative had passed were stories told, about how Lamu had changed, about their concerns for their children and grandchildren.

¹⁸ Later on in this introduction, I refer to these households or their members as my “foster” families.

Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili by myself as well as by research assistants of different ages and genders. While I conducted many interviews myself, I often felt that people held back while talking to me or were inclined to present a more positive picture of their community. In addition, some elder men and women refused to speak to a Western researcher, or some elder men were difficult for me to approach for religious reasons. I employed many young men and women as research assistants and informants, but I heavily relied on five individuals to conduct interviews. These included one older man, from the Bajuni ethnicity (*kabila*) but highly respected in the local community, who was able to interview many middle-aged to older men, from a wide range of social backgrounds, and who wasn't shy to ask more sensitive questions. I also relied on two older women (between the ages of 45-55) to conduct interviews with women from different social classes. Two young men (23-26) conducted interviews with their peers. I myself conducted the majority of interviews with younger women.

I generally framed these interviews in terms of social change. I asked elder interviewees how life in Lamu differed from the life they knew while growing up and how they felt about these changes. As the interview unfolded, I would ask more specific questions about language change and what they felt was getting lost with shifts in dialect use. When interviewing younger people (up to around the age of 35), I would ask whether they still felt proud of their Lamu or Bajuni identity, whether they still identified with its cultural traditions and language, and whether they still spoke the dialect. I generally let the interviews unfold naturally, rather than sticking to a strict set of questions.

I trained my research assistants by first conducting an interview with them

myself, in order for them to better understand what the nature of the interview was, what type of questions I asked, and how I wanted the interview to unfold, i.e. natural rather than formal. I also discussed the research with them at length and provided them with printed sets of guidelines. The majority of them quickly picked up on the idea, left the set of guidelines at home, and elaborated on those topics about which the interviewee appeared to be most talkative. Research assistants were also instructed to always clearly explain what the research was about and to ask interviewees explicitly for permission to be recorded. While the interviews conducted by research assistants proved very useful and informative, the downside was my inability to observe interviewees' behavior during the interview or the incapability of taking notes about the context in which the interview was conducted. Although I would discuss the different recordings with my research assistants, their descriptions of setting, participants, and overhearers were often limited.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in the Swahili language. When I was interviewing, people often switched back and forth between Standard Swahili and English – more as a display of their own linguistic competence rather than a necessity for communication. When informants conducted interviews, there was a much higher usage of local dialects, especially when Bajuni speakers were questioned. All quotes from these interviews are transcribed from the digital recordings. Translations of the interviews are my own. The interviews collected add up to 60. Recordings of daily interaction (of different length and different sound quality) provide a data set of about 70 recordings. Analysis sessions were not recorded, but an average of 4 sessions per week were organized with different research assistants.

Lamu is a very small town. People knew and know me very well and know whom

I socialized with. It is therefore difficult to maintain the anonymity of people. All the names of individuals are changed, unless noted differently, and information that would automatically reveal anyone's identity is either omitted or altered. At times, I slightly change biographical information to further conceal a person's identity; this can include details about family structure or location of employment. I began every interview with an explanation of how I would preserve the interviewee's privacy by eliminating proper names and some identifying details. In addition, I stressed he or she could refuse to answer any of the questions I posed, if they so desired. The people I interviewed had no hesitancy about answering any of the questions I asked, although some objected to being recorded. Especially elder women did not want their voice to be taped. In the majority of these cases, this was not caused by distrust but rather motivated by religious convictions, as it is believed that women's voices are not to be heard by strangers or are not to be heard at a loud volume. When women refused to be recorded, I took extensive fieldnotes as they spoke.

In addition to observation and interviews, I documented and analyzed the written, material, and linguistic practices that occurred in different settings in Lamu. To be able to document language use in natural settings, I gave several research assistants a recorder to carry around with them as they went about their daily chores. They were given the instruction to record interactions whenever they felt comfortable doing so. I thereby clearly instructed them that recordings could only happen in public places and that the device was not to be used to record private conversations, unless the participants were informed of the recording. These recordings often resulted in the most interesting data, as they provided information about the reality of language use in daily interactions rather

than the ideological conceptions expressed in interviews. In addition, it was especially interesting to analyze the shifts in language use by the assistants themselves as they were contributing to the different interactions. I subsequently listened to these recordings together with my research assistants, who would provide information about the setting in which the recording occurred, the people who were participating, and the topics discussed. Such playback sessions were extremely informative, as my assistants not only elaborated extensively on their friends' language use but also evaluated their own linguistic practices.

Other data derived from a wide array of social media: I purchased newspapers, photographed store signs, and election pamphlets. I analyzed websites, public *Facebook* pages, and news media. I attended community meetings, workshops, religious gatherings, and training session. Data from all these sources are integrated into the dissertation and contribute to my analysis. There is, however, much that I did not and could not do in my ethnography as well, and that is the issue to which I turn next.

Challenges and strategies

As I sat at the front of the *Tundani* mosque, wearing the most beautiful outfit I had in my closet, carefully selected and approved by my “foster” mother, I waited for women to arrive shortly after the afternoon prayers. While we had sent out many invitations for the *khafla* (celebration, party), I did not have high hopes for a big turnout as there were other events going on and I highly doubted I was a priority in the list of social obligations. Yet as time went by (and Lamu has a way of testing your patience), women slowly trickled in until the women's section of the mosque was almost entirely filled. I smiled at familiar faces and recognized many women even before they had removed their *ninja* (facial veil).

It was a couple of days before my scheduled departure from Lamu in June 2010 and I had organized a *dua* or prayer session in the neighborhood mosque to bid farewell to the women who had welcomed me into their homes, and to ask for their prayers as I traveled back home. When the prayer session came to an end, a young girl from the local *madrassa* recited a poem composed by *my mum* in my honor. And when she finished, another lady pressed a paper in her hand, and after her a third. As I listened to their beautiful praises, trying to hold back my tears, I looked around the mosque and saw many of those present wiping away their tears. And as I reflected back upon my three years in Lamu, I sincerely wondered why people from this island town had decided to open their doors for me.

Three years earlier, I had arrived in Lamu like any other Western tourist. Fascinated by the secrets that lie hidden within the town's labyrinth of alleys, I wanted to know what it was like to be young in a town like Lamu. Three years later, I looked at Lamu very differently: a town troubled by its economic and political marginalized position, a town wondering about the future of its younger generation, a town fighting against the increasing use of alcohol and drugs, against the rapidly rising HIV/AIDS rates among its youth, and against the increasing imposition of "outsiders" and land grabbers. At the same time, I came to know the stories attached to the alleys, walkways, and corners. I learned about smiles, gazes, and tones of voice. I learned about the subtle meaning of different times of day and of greetings, but also about the excitement of social events that stirred up life in Lamu, like the yearly *maulid* or *cultural festivals*. I came to understand both the opportunities and threats that locals saw in the changes that affected their town – in tourism, aid organizations, and the announcement of the impending construction of an international port.

I also came, however, to understand the importance of trust and the local ideologies surrounding the inappropriateness of revealing too much about oneself or one's family. I particularly struggled with this understanding as I was writing this dissertation and as I was trying to find an appropriate voice with which to describe change on the island. Susan Hirsch (1998), in her study of divorce cases in the kadhi's court of Mombasa, meaningfully speaks about this dilemma when she points to "the awkward fit between the Swahili ideology of concealing personal matters and the goal of obtaining and writing about "inside" knowledge" (Hirsch 1998: 14). Hirsch suggests that "to the extent that ethnographers expose the tensions underlying multiple relations of power in Swahili society, particularly by describing them ethnographically (...) we threaten to break community norms by narrating problems that – according to Swahili cultural ideals – are best left unremarked" (Hirsch 1998: 14). While writing, I became acutely aware of this and this dissertation itself is then a product of my own process of moral self-positioning; of trying to find an objective yet respectful voice with which to describe the issues at hand. I am, however, much aware that I still run the risk of having revealed issues that are considered best left unspoken, at least in public. At the same time, it was my understanding of this ideology that surrounds (and defines) personal relations that made me wonder, that last day in June 2010, what had convinced WaLamu to open up to me.

Conducting research in Lamu was difficult and at times extremely frustrating. While I arrived in Lamu with preconceived notions of a town set on its traditions – conservative and closed – I learned that inhabitants of Lamu struggle with change in many different ways. As a community that has always been integrative and open to the

incorporation of different cultural influences, they do not merely refuse to adopt new practices. Rather, locals explicitly reassess what can and cannot benefit their community. Yet their altered position within a geopolitical context often causes these changes to be out of their hands, like the arrival of mainland Kenyans, changes to economic policies, the introduction of new media technology, cutbacks on education and healthcare. And despite these struggles, life goes on: young people continue to court each other, people get married, give birth, graduate or move abroad. More than in interviews, I learned about these day-to-day negotiations in relation to larger scale changes through my daily life: by watching movies with friends, by shopping for *Eid* clothes, by taking evening strolls. But as I suggested previously, this participation in daily life in Lamu did not come easy, nor did everyone always tolerate my presence.

Before leaving for Lamu, I had been warned about the difficulties of conducting research in the island town. Due to two rather negative experiences with anthropologists conducting research in Lamu in the 1960s and '80s, locals had presumably become rather skeptical of researchers. In addition, Kenyan security forces and the CIA's recent investigations into terrorist activity in the area had made people from Lamu even more suspicious of outsiders asking one too many questions. Throughout my stay, people related their encounters with anthropologists who had previously conducted research in the area and who were said to have violated WaLamu's trust by having stolen valuable documents and having revealed confidential information. These stories were often followed by a series of questions: about my background, my family, my reasons for conducting research, etc. The fact that my study did not have one clear-cut question, but rather focused on a series of processes made individuals only more suspicious. People

understood that I conducted research on language change, but then openly asked why I attended meetings on, for example, drug abuse in Lamu. This distrust resulted in me being less comfortable taking fieldnotes in public (I generally waited until I came home to write lengthy reports), and in my being reluctant to take pictures throughout town. I relied on a research assistant to take photos of those sites that were of interest to me, and I later asked permission of professional photographers to use their snapshots of the town throughout my dissertation. My inability to take pictures, or the distrust it aroused, was also related to another obstacle to my research.

After the 1998 bombing of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam, and especially after the 2002 bombing of an Israeli hotel in Mombasa, the Lamu Archipelago had become a target of investigations by international security forces. This reached a climax when investigators discovered that Fazul Mohammed, the brain behind both the 1998 and the 2002 bombings, had lived and married in the community of Siyu, one of the towns located in the Lamu Archipelago (see also Prestholdt 2011). Following this discovery, investigations in the Lamu area intensified and several locals (from the surrounding islands and people who resided in Malindi) were arrested and questioned (Prestholdt 2009, 2011). The United States responded to these events by training Kenyan Maritime Police in a training facility in the Lamu Archipelago through the State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance program and by installing a Maritime Security and Safety Information System along the Kenyan coast through the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (Prestholdt 2011: 11).

Such military activity was counterbalanced with development and humanitarian assistance programs in the area (such as USAID). While the aid was much needed (and

welcomed) in Lamu, it also caused inhabitants to be suspicious of all foreigners who resided in their town. It then came as no surprise to hear, halfway through my research, that I was suspected of being an undercover CIA or FBI agent. Some locals were more explicit about their suspicions than others and blatantly asked me whether I was a spy. At one point I was summoned by the head of CIPK (Council of Imams and Preaches in Kenya) and elected MP, Sheikh Dor, who politely questioned me about my reasons for being in Lamu. At several instances, friends of mine who worked at the Department of Immigration in Nairobi warned me that “my file” was under investigation and suggested this was the reason why I was never granted an extension to my research permit.

Yet my research was also constrained in less “dramatic” ways, including issues related to status, gender, and age. When I arrived in Lamu to conduct fieldresearch, I had only visited the island twice before: once as a tourist together with my family and once during preliminary fieldwork. Both times, my encounters with locals had remained restricted to interactions with the young men who worked at Lamu’s seafront. Making a living in the tourism industry, these youth appeared to be “cultural brokers” – the intimate, friendly connection between the Western tourist and the “exotic” culture of Lamu. With their broken English, dreadlocks and drums, singing well-known songs (such as Rod Stewart’s “I am sailing” or Jon Denver’s “Country Road”) inventively adjusted to the local context, these young men provided tourists with the exotic, yet familiar, experience they were looking for. When I first arrived in Lamu, I mistakenly presumed these young men would be able to assist me: introduce me to family, sisters, and wives. I quickly learned, not only that they were unwilling to do so, but also that my habit of

spending time with these young men in the hopes of improving my research was counterproductive.

While Lamu has adjusted to tourism, and while locals were always polite and friendly, there remains quite a strict separation between WaLamu and tourists. More importantly, the seafront, the area of town bordering the Indian Ocean, was a strip predominantly occupied by men and largely avoided by respectable women. Young men working in the tourism industry were tolerated exactly because they entertained foreigners, yet their conduct was often looked down upon (see Chapters 6 and 7). Open interactions with young girls, dreadlocks, shorts, smoking – all these aspects of their behavior were heavily criticized. I quickly realized that, if I were to spend my time with these young men, I would be viewed as just another *mzungu* who fell into the trap of the *beach boys*' charms.

A couple of months into my research, I started to avoid the seafront and increasingly engaged myself with local NGOs. These local aid organizations worked closely with local youth and thus provided excellent opportunities to interview young people, observe their practices, and organize group discussions. Some of the young women who were active in these organizations were similar to me in age and my friendship with them enabled me to broaden my social network.

This engagement with NGOs, however, also meant I encountered a very particular section of Lamu youth and that my interactions with the elder generation were limited. The few attempts I made at interviewing elders resulted in refusals. In addition, elder women – especially from the higher social classes – remained inside their houses, only leaving their home for special occasions such as weddings. When friends of mine asked

whether they would be willing to be interviewed, these women refused time and time again. My access to lower class women – or women who were not original Lamu inhabitants – was easier as many of them worked, and they were often eager to talk about life in Lamu.

In addition, the incentive to remove myself from the seafront – to establish a good reputation in the community – proved to have its own downsides. Many of the young men initially responded negatively to my change of conduct as they took personal offense. At the same time, I realized that by cutting myself off from this group, I ignored a very important section of Lamu's youth. Through my involvement with the local NGOs I was eventually able to circumvent this issue. While aid organizations focused many of their activities on awareness campaigns surrounding drugs abuse and HIV/AIDS, they had neglected to work with the young men at the seafront. I volunteered to take this task upon myself and this initiative gave me the opportunity to work closely with Lamu's *beach boys*, without thereby ruining my reputation in the community.

I elaborate at length on the different considerations I had to make while conducting research in Lamu because it importantly highlights the complexity of social relations and rules of social conduct in this close-knit community. Everyone knows that no behavior in Lamu remains un-observed – a rule that increasingly applied to me just as much as to local youth. It was therefore extremely important to always be aware of where I was seen, with whom I was seen, and what I was doing. It is especially this experience that drew my attention to the details of social interaction and the important role these play in the renegotiation of social positions and relations.

Organization of chapters

The dissertation starts with an Interlude, a vignette that sets the ethnographic scene and walks the reader through contemporary Lamu Town. Descriptions of streets, houses, and people provide a detailed, visual image of Lamu's current condition and the striking remnants of the town's glorious past. This graphic depiction of contemporary Lamu is followed by (and contrasted with) a chapter that traces a selective history of the development of Lamu and its social composition. Chapter two endeavors to paint an accurate picture of the historical events that have shaped Lamu town but equally reveals the ways in which history can be misrecognized, as a justification of the present. The focus of this chapter is to show that, while people from Lamu now often paint a picture of a harmonious past, the island town has dealt with social, political, and economic transformations throughout its history. In this discussion, I pay particular attention to the role of local conceptions of respectability and honor in maintaining shifting social relations, and how these were mediated in both practice and spatial organization. I argue that this ambiguous moral hegemony (as accepted but contested) was central to the incorporation of newcomers into Lamu society. I also suggest, however, that it is the loss of this perceived hegemony that results in the current assessment of change as moral transformation.

Chapter three examines the ways in which Lamu inhabitants themselves differently evaluate current processes of change. Through an in-depth analysis of a range of discourses about change – in interactions, interviews, and on social network sites – I demonstrate how contemporary moral transformations are metadiscursively evaluated as moral decline, ambivalence, or opportunity. I thereby pay particular attention to the

interdiscursive nature of these discourses. More specifically, I discuss how ideological processes of erasure and fractal recursivity enable a selective kind of interdiscursivity that allows interlocutors to paint a particular kind of picture of contemporary Lamu. I demonstrate that, in doing so, they take a (moral) stance toward the current social condition. The first section focuses on how Lamu's relation to the Kenyan mainland is assessed, while the second part of the chapter focuses on metapragmatic evaluations of Lamu's youth. A guiding thread throughout this discussion is locals' differential understanding of *heshima* (respect) and its appropriate mediation in practice. Whereas chapter two discussed how *heshima* came to be ideologically tied to the town's spatial structure – its different neighborhoods and streets – this chapter looks at how locals rely on such spatiotemporal grounding to assess shifts in conduct.

Chapter four gives the reader insight in Lamu's complex linguistic landscape through a description of the different language varieties spoken within Lamu Town, but particularly by discussing the political and social processes that shaped Lamu's sociolinguistic environment. While providing historical information, the emphasis in this discussion lies on locals' language attitudes and how they differently assess the languages that make up young people's repertoires. I start with a succinct overview of the six different Swahili dialects spoken in the area and particularly focus on the social and historical distinctions between the different groups that speak them. The chapter subsequently provides an in-depth discussion of the standardization of Kiswahili under colonial rule, its imposition within an independent Kenya, and its implications for current administrative and educational policies. My emphasis here lies on local evaluations of the standard language and how such assessments reflect Lamu inhabitants' orientation to

mainland Kenya. A third part of the chapter looks at the position of English within Lamu as a language of instruction in schools as well as a global language introduced through tourism and new media technologies. By emphasizing these different means of acquisition I highlight the existence of different *Englishes* and the situated value of distinct linguistic competencies. In the conclusion, I take a critical look at Lamu youth's complex linguistic repertoires and discuss how the social and political processes described in this chapter impact both young people's acquisition and use of these different language varieties.

Chapter five is the first of three chapters that investigates the different ways in which young people negotiate new subject positions and social relations within practice. The focus of this chapter is on young people's verbal performances (Briggs 1988) in the interactional setting of a "meeting." Elaborating upon Goffmanian "frames" and Bakhtinian "voices," I suggest that the strategic use of broadened linguistic repertoires enables young people to redefine situated participant roles within the meetings, and thereby also defy broader societal expectations tied to social category membership. To do this, I analyze the contributions of a young girl named Ayah to two different "meetings"- a youth gathering and a community meeting. I suggest that the ambiguity of the interactional frame at hand (i.e. a meeting) enables Ayah to negotiate new subject positions within the immediate interaction, which also allows her to take a moral stance toward the broader social context. The different valuing and devaluing of Ayah's language use will show, not only how metapragmatic awareness can shape verbal performance, but also how evaluations of such performances are situated and never fully under the control of the individual. This chapter then meaningfully ties the foregoing

discussions on spatiotemporal embeddedness, language ideologies, and metapragmatic awareness together in an understanding of young people's situated language use.

Chapter six elaborates on the topic of negotiation and specifically focuses upon the enregisterment of Lamu youth's novel practices and its link to young people's ambivalent position. I build upon the argument that the practices of youth in contexts of social change have often been defined as ambivalent, reflecting young people's undecided position between conservation and change (Messing 2009). This chapter argues that ambivalent practices, rather than being problematic, in fact reflect young people's attempts to establish new social positions that incorporate an adherence to both the local and the global. Through the analysis of a *Facebook* interaction, linguistic stereotypes and youth's use of French accents, I demonstrate that close attention to details of talk, and their innovative linking to other semiotic forms, such as dress and technological gadgets, reveals the different ways in which young people negotiate new understandings of an altered social reality on a day-to day basis. I thereby concentrate on the materiality of language, the potentialities of signification this entails and the implications this has for discussions of ambivalence and renegotiation. While my argument exposes the agency young people can exert in contexts of social change, the analysis of the uptake and evaluation of their talk and other semiotic forms by their peers and elders also shows the intersubjective and interdiscursive nature of such processes of negotiation.

Chapter seven focuses on theoretical questions of semiotic mediation and remediation in both language and material practice. The chapter is comprised of three case studies that differently illustrate both the opportunities for and restrictions to

negotiation comprised in verbal and non-verbal semiotic practice. It follows two young girls – one urban and educated, the other pious and professional – as they endeavor to negotiate these new subject positions. An in-depth description of their daily practices not only reveals the different considerations that influence their conduct, but also the spatiotemporal embeddedness of semiotic forms that limits their ability to do so. A third case study follows one of Lamu's *beach boys* as he negotiates a position within local politics and the changes he makes in his behavior. This chapter then not only highlights the spatiotemporal restrictions to agency, but also introduces an important gender aspect to the discussion.

Chapter eight is a concluding epilogue that endeavors to tie together the different theoretical and ethnographic arguments made, but that also places the question of negotiation within the broader sociopolitical context. Through a short discussion of recent events and outsiders' perspectives of Lamu, I ask how meaningful local negotiations are in relation to global perceptions of Islam, development, and emancipation. This epilogue then alludes to the micro and macro effects of political and economic marginalization on small-scale African (Muslim) communities. It formulates questions for further research: inquiries about understandings of citizenship, development, geopolitics and global Islam, asking how identities are defined and negotiated, redefined and renegotiated in relation to real and perceived processes of political and economic marginalization within the postcolonial state.

Interlude

A stroll through Lamu

To reach the island of Lamu, travelers can choose between two means of transportation: bus or plane. Daily bus services run from Mombasa or Malindi to Lamu. Depending on road conditions the trip takes between 6 to 8 hours and takes travelers over a pothole-filled dust road, notorious for attacks by Somali bandits. To guarantee passengers' safety, armed guards are taken on board for the most dangerous parts of the journey. From the mainland jetty of *Mokowe*, a slow and overcrowded ferry takes passengers to Lamu in about half an hour, making the entire trip a trying 9-hour journey, if the bus does not break down. The second option is a twenty-minute flight that runs between Malindi and the Lamu airstrip on Manda Island, from where speedboats bring passengers to Lamu or Shela¹⁹ in about five minutes. This second choice brings travelers to Lamu in less than two hours. Easily eight times the price of a bus ticket, it is, however, not an alternative for the majority of *WaLamu* and the long bus-journey on a deteriorating road is an increasing source of frustration for many. The state of this important route along which at least 25 busses and several trucks pass daily is only one of the many indicators of Lamu's position in the national and global periphery.

¹⁹ Shela is a small town located on Lamu Island, about 2 km from Lamu town.



Figure 7. Two modes of transportation
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The expensive flights are, however, increasingly popular. For the few affluent inhabitants of Lamu flying is not only convenient, it is also an important and very visible sign of their social status. But the daily flights are especially used by Western tourists and particularly by the wealthy expatriates who made Lamu their second home. The majority of these Western tourists reside in the affluent town of Shela and some have purchased and restored homes in Lamu Town. The growing (permanent) presence of Westerners, and especially the increasing influence they enjoy within both towns, is indicative of the rapid transformations the island has been undergoing. The town of Shela, for example, was in ruins only two decades ago but now looks like a resort city where the Prince of Monaco, Hollywood film producers, and other elites own holiday mansions (Fig. 8). While their presence gave Shela an economic boost and enabled its overall revival, these new residents increasingly impose on local custom and inhibit, for example, religious practices. Only a few years back, disturbed Western residents demanded the prohibition of the early morning *adhaan* (call to prayer). Having purchased a home next to the town's main mosque, these expatriates awoke every morning at 5.30 to the "noise" of the *muadhin*. Exactly because they contributed significantly to the town's development and

economic revival, these new inhabitants of Shela felt entitled to demand the cessation of this religious practice. The temporary cancellation of the morning *adhaan* caused unrest in Lamu exactly because this concession to newcomers' demands reflected these *wageni*'s (visitors) increasing (moral) authority. Although Lamu inhabitants often criticize Shela for easily granting its elites' petitions, the impacts of tourism and uncontrolled immigration are equally visible in Lamu Town.

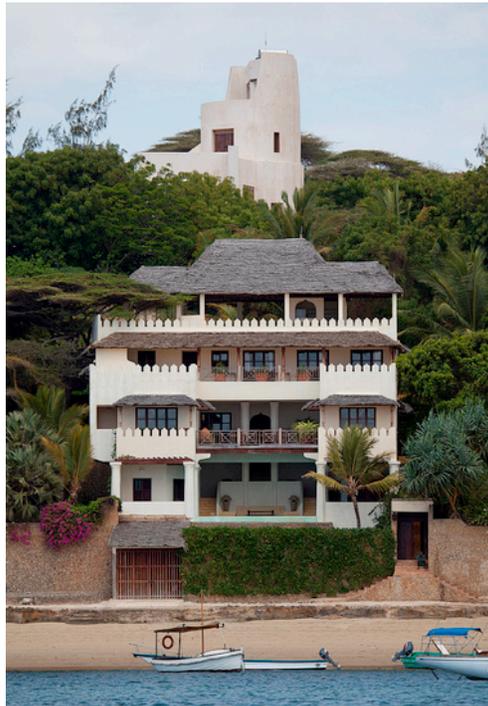


Figure 8. House in Shela
© Eric Lafforgue

High-reaching piles of mangrove poles awaiting transportation to the Arabian Peninsula characterized Lamu's seafront up until the 1980s. Now, idle young men crowd the town's jetty, eagerly anticipating the arrival of new tourists to guide them to one of Lamu's many hotels and receive a meager commission for a "job" well done. Rather than international trade, Lamu's economic survival is now largely dependent on international and domestic tourism. The volatility of this sector, however, causes much financial

instability for the majority of Lamu's population and support from the Kenyan government is, mildly put, limited. Rather than promoting tourism in the area, official investigations on terrorist activity and international warnings concerning the threatening presence of Somali pirates in the Lamu Archipelago has caused tourism to reach an all-time low.

From its 14th Century inception Lamu has attracted traders and explorers and this appeal continues to attract visitors today, albeit for entirely different reasons. Rather than its status as a center for trade and Islamic scholarship, it is now Lamu's isolation and the combination of historical urbanity and simplicity of life that appeals to Western tourists. With alleys too narrow for two people to pass by each other, Lamu knows no motorized transportation, except for one car, an ambulance, and a couple of motorcycles. All other transport happens on foot, by donkey or boat. While speedboats were introduced several years ago, local fishermen continue to rely on the traditional *dhow*s and these same boats form a popular tourist excursion. *Dhow*s sailing across the ocean, women donning black veils, men wearing white *kanzus*, and the *muadhin* calling believers to prayer from one of Lamu's forty two mosques; it all plays to the tourist's imagination of the exotic and the oriental.

Travel guides describe this UNESCO World Heritage Site as "an area frozen in time," where "people live as they did hundreds of years ago," yet Lamu Town has experienced significant transformations throughout its history, including shifts in political power as well as the abolition of its slave-based economy. What is more, throughout its history Lamu has continuously incorporated new waves of immigrants from both the Arabian Peninsula and Southeast Asia, seemingly effortlessly integrating these

newcomers into its (stratified) society. Far from stable or “frozen,” Lamu (like other Swahili city-states) has dealt with change and adaptation throughout its history; social relations, notions of respectability, and the material practices that reflect these were continuously redefined and readjusted to altered social contexts. Part of the Indian Ocean world, WaLamu were global consumers who proud themselves in obtaining and displaying paraphernalia from across the globe. One of the functions of the *vidaka* in the Swahili mansions was exactly the display of this global interconnectivity: Dutch bowls, Chinese porcelain, and other treasures signaled transoceanic relations (Fig. 9). Different fashion styles similarly were used to represent genealogical descent as well as familiarity with new trends from across the Indian Ocean (Beckwith, et al. 2009; Ho 2006; Prestholdt 2008).

This capacity to incorporate newcomers, appropriate global trends, and accommodate moments of social rupture shaped the town’s culture, language, and architecture and allowed its century-long survival. Since Kenyan Independence, and particularly over the last decade, Lamu appears, however, to have reached the limits to its malleability and compliance. Economic, political, and social transformations increasingly impact life in this island town and cause concern among its inhabitants. Tourists walking through Lamu’s narrow alleys might smile at the English graffiti on walls of Lamu mansions, yet such seemingly minor disconnects are indicative of shifts on a deeper societal level. While the arrival of immigrants is far from new to the local context, and while the displays of broadened linguistic repertoires could be viewed as another form of global consumerism, the inhabitants of Lamu experience the current transformations as unique and different.



Figure 9. *Vidaka* in Lamu house
© Eric Lafforgue



Figure 10. Dhow sailing in the lagoon



Figure 11. View of Lamu's seafront



Figure 12. Lamu's ambulance

A line of white limestone merchant houses, with balconies overlooking the lagoon and lush, green mangrove forests; I always found the first view of Lamu Town, sailing into its harbor, imposing to say the least (Figs. 10 and 11). Erected by Indian merchants shortly before British colonialism, these buildings form a first testimony to the island's rich cosmopolitan, maritime history. Once disembarked at the jetty, I initially loved, and later dreaded, the hustle and bustle on Lamu's seafront with porters unloading recently arrived *dhow*s, fishermen coming back home after a day at sea, *beach boys* entertaining newly arrived visitors, and elder men sipping Arabic coffee at one of the streets' many *barazas* or stone benches. Although the ocean breeze is refreshing and while the view is astonishing, very few women walk alongside the seafront. They prefer Lamu's main street or its quiet backstreets to the male dominated waterfront and the inquisitive looks of men. Young girls increasingly form an exception to this unspoken rule and men's flirtatious remarks can often be heard as these young women walk by. Aware of the inappropriateness of the experience, they would walk faster or enjoy the attention – depending on their intentions.

This seemingly authentic charm allows tourists to believe it has always been this way; that in Lamu time actually stood still – as many travel guides suggest. The young

man sporting dreadlocks, wearing a Bob Marley T-shirt, and speaking English with a remarkable American accent merely forms an interesting, amusing curiosity in an otherwise authentic experience. For many tourists, this young man acts as a cultural broker; he is the approachable connection to the unfamiliar and their access to a distant world of the tales of one thousand and one Arabian nights.

Lamu's seafront, as travelers' first encounter with the Muslim town, is indeed open and accessible with restaurants, hotels, and even a few bars located alongside it – a comfortable blend of the exotic and the familiar. Moving toward the town's interior and understanding its intricate system of streets and back-alleys iconically represents increasing familiarity with the town's culture and its people. Many tourists suggest they feel shy or uncomfortable walking towards the “inside” of the town, a discomfort not in the least caused by the contrast between their scanty dresses and Lamu women's complete veiling (with backstreets being a more feminine or female dominated space).

In between the seafront and the tiny alleys lies Lamu's main street or *usita wa mui*,²⁰ as a barrier between the openness of the seafront and the intimacy of the town's interior. Lined with former merchants houses and somewhat broader than the labyrinth of alleys, this is the local shopping street with neighborhood shops, clothing stores, and curio shops located alongside it. Only one row of houses removed from, and running parallel to the seafront, *usita wa mui* connects the outer northern neighborhood of *Mkomani* to the southern part of town, *Langoni*. While equally busy, even uninformed visitors notice the difference between these two areas of town. In the northern *Mkomani*, *usita wa mui* retains a sense of serenity despite being crowded and busy. No shouting can be heard, nor do people gather around to make conversation. Locals' demeanor tends to

²⁰ KiAmu for “the street of the town”

be restrained and respectful and greetings are kept short and polite. Rather than loud music, *Quran* recitation can be heard coming from several of the shops.

Walking southwards, one reaches *Mkunguni* or the town's main square where men gather on *barazas* surrounding two large trees that provide shelter from the hot African sun (Fig. 13). At the backdrop of this large open space stands Lamu's monumental fort. Built by *Zahidi Ngumi* in 1813 as a protection against possible attacks from rival city-states Mombasa and Pate, it is a major icon of Lamu's glorious past. A prison from 1910 until 1984, the fort now hosts the offices of the National Museums of Kenya and is a venue for many community events, including town meetings, workshops, and especially wedding celebrations.

Having crossed *Mkunguni*, one can mistakenly presume to have arrived in an entirely different town. In *Langoni*, the main street is bustling with activity, crowded with men and women rushing to its different stores, vendors selling their goods and children playing. Extensive greetings are exchanged and groups assemble on the side of the narrow road to catch up on the latest news. Men gather inside and in front of different *mikahawa* or local restaurants and shout their orders to its owners. Others crave the snacks sold alongside the street and form small groups around the food stalls selling meat kebabs, omelets, and fries. Men greet women openly and, in some cases, family news is exchanged. While there is no motorized transportation, there often occur "traffic jams" as handcarts and donkeys try to make their way through the crowd. As we walked through town, my girlfriends and I often sighed upon reaching the invisible boundary to *Langoni*. "Tayari? Ready?" They smilingly ask me, as we lowered our gaze and increased our pace, getting ready to face the *Langoni* crowd. When I was looking for housing, people

told me life in *Langoni* is “24/7” and suggested I find a residence in the more quiet *Mkomani* area of town. Not only would *Langoni*’s noise keep me up at night, the predominance of *wageni* (guests or nonlocals) in this area of town would imperil my safety.

The true “mystery” of Lamu, however, lies in its labyrinth of quiet backstreets and many tourists can be found gazing longingly at the tiny alleys, not daring to explore from fear of getting lost.²¹ Lamu’s alleys form an escape from its busy main street and people can easily walk from the northern to the southern end of town without being noticed. Often glimpses of women, veiled in their black *buibuis*, can be seen as they quietly walk in and out of different passages. Newly arrived in Lamu, I often wondered how they knew where they were going, as one alley looked exactly like the other. Once I figured out the town’s roadmap, I was grateful for the anonymity these alleys provided and only then did I feel as if I “belonged.” Using the backstreets had two important advantages. Firstly, nobody addressed me (except for a mumbled *Asalaam Aleykum*), which generally allowed me to reach my destination much faster. Secondly, cooled by a natural ventilation system provided by an ingenious ancient architectural layout of the oldest *mitaa*, these alleys provide shade and a gentle breeze in otherwise extremely hot weather (see Ghaidan 1975).

The above description, however, mostly pertains to the *Mkomani* side of town. The oldest part of Lamu, owned mainly by the town’s first inhabitants or patrician clans

²¹ This is where the cultural broker enters. Young men would form the perfect tour guides through these alleys and often formed the ideal connection to familiarize oneself with “the Other.”

(see also el Zein 1974),²² is made up of large, multiple story stone houses with beautifully carved doors and *barazas* in front of their entry. *Mkomani* is serene and quiet and the clean, paved streets tend to be empty except for a rare man relaxing on the quarter's *baraza*. Walking through these *mitaa* (quarters), one often wonders whether the ancient houses are inhabited and what life exists behind their high, bare walls (Fig. 16). On a rare occasion, passers-by can catch a glimpse of these houses' interior, only to be amazed by the sight of a lush inside garden and beautiful courtyard. The majority of these majestic houses are now owned and restored by Western tourists who only visit their holiday residence once a year. Financial worries often force locals to sell houses their families have owned for centuries, and if they are reluctant to do so, they are unable to upkeep the beautiful architecture. The sharp contrast between the dilapidating houses and the empty, restored Swahili mansions is strangely iconic of the shifts within geopolitics and the impact it has had on life in Lamu Town.



Figure 13. Mkomuni, Lamu's main square

²² Scholars discussing life in East African Swahili towns generally refer to the “original” inhabitants of Lamu (*wenyeji*, *waungwana*), the Afro-Arab merchants who formed the high social class as *patricians*. They were considered the “owners” of the town and had political, religious, and social responsibilities.



Figure 14. Mkomani's narrow alleys
© Eric Lafforgue

Langoni is an entirely different story. While stone houses have now replaced mud huts, many alleys remain dusty and unpaved. Built gradually as the community expanded, neighborhoods lack structure and houses seem to have been erected rather randomly. Lacking the aforementioned natural ventilation system, *Langoni* tends to be hot and humid. As you walk through its different *mitaa*, you can hear Tanzanian, Indian or Arabic music blasting from little neighborhood shops and house windows. Children run around unsupervised, playing with self-made toys. Shops selling the accepted and highly popular drug *miraa*²³ form a meeting point for the neighborhood's young men. While in *Mkomani* women remain unseen, unless fully covered, women in *Langoni* often gather on the doorstep of their houses, covering their hair with a scarf but without the traditional *abaya*, to chat with neighbors and friends. Watching people walk by, they greet familiar faces, joke around with acquaintances, and snack on sweets purchased from one of the roadside stores.

²³ Also known as *khat*.

On this side of town, the outside walls of houses and stores are decorated with brightly colored images and slogans. These wall paintings display unexpectedly broad linguistic repertoires and a familiarity with global cultural flows. One painting shows a large leaf of weed with lyrics from a Bob Marley song or self-written poetry written across, others display the logos of Manchester United and Liverpool, while others still are seemingly random English proverbs and slogans. “*We fix broken hearts,*” “*Your best friend can be your worst enemy.*” For visitors and tourists, these paintings are amusing curiosities that, in a seemingly unproblematic way, contrast with the authentic Swahili culture they came to experience. Such semiotic displays of a redefined cosmopolitanism are, however, indexical of broader social shifts and renegotiations (Figs. 15 and 16).

This redefined global orientation is also reflected in neighborhood names. New residential areas, formed by the increasing number of immigrants coming from surrounding islands and the Kenyan mainland, are called *Kashmiri*, *Kandahar*, and *Pakistan*. One of *Langoni*'s quarters carries the name *Bosnia* (Fig. 17). While such naming practices intrigued me, locals found it rather evident. When I asked why these neighborhoods carried such strange names, people would argue that it articulated their support for conflict stricken areas of the Muslim world as they identified with the problems the people face. As new immigrants, they felt marginalized both locally (within the Lamu community) and nationally (within Kenya), and such naming practices are then indicative of broader renegotiations of local, national, and global identities.

Although Lamu was allotted the title of UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001 and while tourist guides laude the town for its unspoiled nature and “authentic culture,”

the Lamu described above differs significantly from the thriving, wealthy merchant town it once was.



Figure 15. Painting on Langoni wall

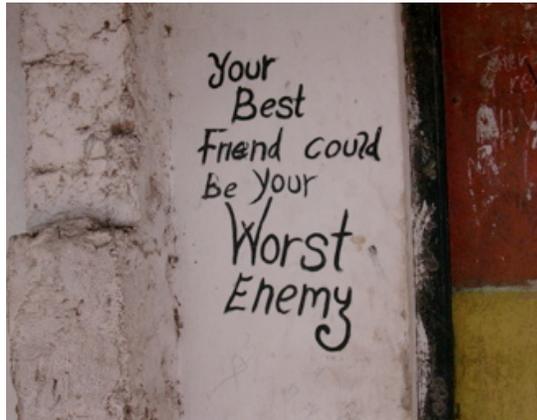


Figure 16. Proverb on Langoni wall



Figure 17. Restaurant in Bosnia neighborhood

Chapter 2

Lamu and its history as a cosmopolitan town

Locating Lamu

Lamu Old Town forms the urban epicenter of the Lamu Archipelago, an island group comprised of seven islands, the most known of which are Faza, Kiwayu, Lamu, Manda, and Pate Island (Fig. 18). Each of these islands is home to several villages most of which were historically important city-states and trade centers. Towns like Takwa (now in ruins), Shanga, Pate, and Siyu are believed to be among the earliest Muslim settlements in the area with remains dating back to the 8th Century (Chittick 1974; Horton and Middleton 2000). Currently inhabited towns include Lamu, Shela, Matondoni and Kipungani on Lamu Island; Pate, Siyu, Shanga, and Rasini on Pate Island; and Kiwayu village on Kiwayu Island. With its population of approximately 20,000 people, Lamu is the largest and most densely populated region of the archipelago and is its administrative center.²⁴

²⁴ The entire Lamu County (comprising both the districts of Lamu West and Lamu East) has a population of about 101 000 people according to the 2009 census.



Figure 18. Map of Lamu Archipelago (Source: Google Maps)

Many inhabitants of the surrounding islands migrate to Lamu Town in search of employment or to join family members who moved to Lamu during British rule and after Kenyan Independence.²⁵ Although the archipelago comprises a rather small geographical area and while many people now live in Lamu, (former) residents of these different towns continue to distinguish themselves from each other based on genealogical, cultural, and linguistic differences, claiming distinct ancestral ties, and speaking six different dialects (KiAmu, KiShela, KiMatondoni, KiPate, KiSiyu and KiBajuni). The population of Lamu Town also comprises people from Omani and Yemeni descent who migrated at the beginning of the 20th Century and who continue to be locally known as “Arabs.” The Indian population, numerous in the past, has reduced since the town’s economic decline and only a few families remain. In recent years, migration to the island mostly consists of mainland Kenyans from the Kikuyu, Meru, and Masaai ethnicities who come to Lamu in search of employment. Kikuyus generally work in administrative positions for the

²⁵ People moved to Lamu throughout the 19th and 20th Century, especially after the abolition of slavery. The majority moved to Lamu to participate in its international trade, especially the trade in mangrove, or to contribute to the local economy as fishermen.

Kenyan government or sell their produce in Lamu's market. Merus have flocked to the island as suppliers of the popular drug *miraa*, which they cultivate and sell at a large profit. And Masaai are increasingly present in Lamu Town because of their popularity among tourists and their likelihood of being hired as watchmen at hotels and private houses. As mentioned previously, a last section of Lamu's population is the rapidly growing group of expatriates who permanently live in Lamu and Shela. Contrary to other coastal towns such as Malindi and Watamu, these Western elites are not predominantly from one European country such as Italy or Germany. A wide variety of nationalities can be found in Lamu, including Belgians, Germans, Swedish, Norwegians, British, and Americans.

Although Lamu has incorporated immigrants throughout its history, its current social composition and especially the town's hierarchy differ from the past. Mainland Kenyans and Westerners are not only increasingly visible within the town but also have a growing authority in areas such as administration, economy, and politics. These shifts in social and authority structures have important implications, not just for WaLamu's political and economic power, but also for norms of social interaction and day-to-day life. Chapter 3 analyzes how people from Lamu themselves evaluate these shifts, and why these are perceived as a particular moral transformation that meaningfully differs from the past. To better understand locals' assessments of change, and to comprehend the terms on which the current transformation is discursively constructed as unique this chapter provides a succinct overview of Lamu's complex social and political history.

In this chapter, I aim to give the reader a sense of the historical and social complexity of Lamu society – of the different social groups of which the community is

composed and of the historical events that shaped social relations. Through this discussion I also demonstrate that transformation has always formed an integral part of Lamu society. While the past is currently often represented as stable and harmonious, I discuss the different ways in which, and means through which the town's seemingly rigid social hierarchy has been renegotiated throughout Lamu's history. I thereby endeavor to show that the current historical imaginings (of harmonious social co-existence and unambiguous signs) are, in part, misconceptions. In addition, this chapter provides the reader with the vocabulary with which WaLamu currently assess demographic, cultural, and social change.

I first provide an overview of Lamu's factual history: when it was founded, who ruled the town during its glory period, and what caused its decline. I subsequently look at the town's social composition, the different groups of which it was comprised, and what structured its social hierarchy. I pay close attention to the town's history of slavery and the different waves of migration that reshuffled its social order. I subsequently elaborate at length on the role notions of ideal behavior played in the incorporation of both newcomers and slaves within Lamu's social hierarchy, and how transformation caused a renegotiation of norms and values and their proper mediation within practice. The last section of the chapter looks at Lamu's position in contemporary Kenya and suggests why Lamu's residents could perceive the current transformations as different from the past.

Lamu's history as a cosmopolitan town

Throughout the centuries, merchants and travelers including Arabians, Iranians, Indians, Turks, Indonesians, Portuguese, and Chinese arrived and settled in Lamu and other towns along the Swahili coast. These settlements created an important network of city-states

that stretched the length of the East African coast – from Mogadishu in the north to Mozambique in the south. This “Swahili trade network” included ports like Lamu, Pate, Malindi, Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Kilwa, each of which became important gateways for the export of slaves, ivory, tortoiseshell, animal hides, ambergris, and other precious commodities to Arabia, Europe, and across the Indian Ocean (Horton and Middleton 2000).

When exactly the town of Lamu was founded is unclear. The *Khabar al-Lamu* or the “Lamu Chronicle” (Hichens 1938) claims that Lamu originated as early as the 7th century. The town’s oldest mosque, the *Pumwani Mosque*, however only dates from 1370 (Beckwith, et al. 2009). Historical documents first mention Lamu in 1441, when the Arab writer/traveler Abu-al-Mahasini relates his encounter with a *Qadi* (Muslim Judge) from Lamu in Mecca. Portuguese records make note of a Portuguese warship that arrived at the island in 1505 to claim tribute from its rulers. And Portuguese dominance of Lamu continued for 180 years, threatened only briefly by a Turkish fleet (Horton and Middleton 2000; Middleton 1992, 2004; Romero 1997).

Lamu’s ‘Golden Age’ began at the end of the 17th century. The Omani Arabs had ousted the Portuguese and Lamu prospered for the next 150 years. Because the *Yumbe* council of elders ruled the town as a republic, the Omanis only loosely controlled Lamu. And after having defeated rival city-states Pate and Mombasa, Lamu became the dominant port on the East African coast and a center of religious education, poetry, politics, arts, and crafts. It was during this period of prosperity that wealthier inhabitants built most of Lamu’s magnificent stone mansions and townhouses (Beckwith, et al. 2009; Romero 1997; Ylvisaker 1979).

While prosperous and dominant, Lamu faced fierce competition and threats from rival city-states Pate, Manda, and Mombasa who competed directly with Lamu for control over the region's international trade. Although Lamu was successful, it lived in the shadow of Pate Town until the 18th century, the latter at one time controlling the coast southwards to Kilifi near Mombasa and even Pemba Island. In 1812 a force lead by the Nabahany clan from Pate and the Mazrui Arabs from Mombasa attacked Lamu and a ferocious battle followed in the dunes of Shela – now known as the *Battle of Shela*. While Lamu was victorious, the *yumbe* feared reprisals and sought protection from the Sultan of Oman, Sayyid Said. Under his command, Lamu's fortress was built (Biersteker 1991; Pouwels 1991, 1997).

While the intervention of Sayyid Said prevented further attacks by the Pate-Mombasa alliance, the battle formed an important turning point in Lamu's history. Although the conflict was indicative of Lamu's economic strength during the 18th and early 19th centuries,²⁶ its aftermath introduced Omani rule to the Lamu Archipelago, making the island group part of the Zanzibar commercial network. This entailed active participation in the international slave trade, Lamu itself becoming a chief exporter of slaves (Glassman 2004; Pouwels 1991). From their Sultanate in Zanzibar, the Omanis proceeded to dominate the entire East African coast, thereby removing Lamu's economic domination over the area. With the subsequent abolition of the slave trade and the growing dominance of Mombasa and Zanzibar, Lamu went into a steep decline at the end of the 19th century (Romero 1997).

²⁶ After its victory Lamu continued to prosper economically, giving the town a second period of glory.

When the British arrived at the East African coast in the late 19th century, Lamu was still a rather successful port-city, thriving on the slave trade and answering to the Sultan of Zanzibar. The rule of Bargash bin Said (the son of Sultan Sayyid Said) allowed the coastal strip to retain an element of independence throughout the colonial period, enjoying the status of “protectorate” rather than “colony.” But like other coastal towns, Lamu experienced increasing British pressure to reduce its active participation in the East African slave trade. The growing suppression of slavery left Lamu landowners without the labor supply needed to maintain their field plantations and they suffered irremediable economic setbacks. The town’s economy gradually weakened with the building of the Uganda Railroad and the transfer of the colonial capital from Mombasa to Nairobi after the completion of the Railroad in 1901. When legal emancipation was imposed in 1907 Lamu’s economy was already in decline and the merchant class of old Afro-Arabs was poised on the brink of poverty – a condition that persisted almost without interruption until after WW II (Cooper 1980, 1990; Glassman 1991; Romero 1997; Ylvisaker 1979).

The coast’s status as protectorate under British colonialism had important implications in the debates leading up to Kenya’s independence in 1963. Having always distinguished themselves from the African hinterland, coastal inhabitants were not willing to subject themselves to the rule of an African government based in Nairobi. As the negotiations about an independent Kenya developed, so did the calls for coastal autonomy and even independence. Arab leaders and Swahili who feared political domination by mainland Africans set up the *Mwambao* or “coastline movement;” an organization that demanded coastal autonomy. Divisions within the movement, however, never gave *Mwambao* the political strength to push for autonomy or independence. When

Zanzibar withdrew its support, and with the British eager to rid themselves of an increasingly problematic colony, the coastal strip saw itself integrated into a newly independent Kenya, with the maintenance of a limited amount of privileges (such as the use of Kadhi's court) (Brennan 2008).

The *Mwambao* movement (and its later political revival in the Islamic Party of Kenya) revealed the deep cleavages between the coastal strip and “upcountry” Kenya. During the struggle for independence and *Mwambao*'s demands for autonomy, religion and genealogy were played out as unresolvable differences between these two parts of what was a new nation. Whereas Afro-Arabs living along the coast suggested their Islamic lifestyle made it impossible for them to be ruled by a Christian government, coastal Africans used immigrant history to argue that “Arabs” had no claim to land or political participation. These complaints and objections did not disappear after 1963 and many of the Afro-Arab's fears have proven to be grounded. In the conclusion to his discussion of the *Mwambao* movement, James Brennan states the following:

The subsequent domination of Kenya's government by upcountry Christian politicians of KANU has displaced coastal Muslims not only from local political offices ... but also from huge tracts of valuable rural land and urban property... Political patronage has increasingly determined land access since the 1980s, deepening the coast's squatter problem and raising broader tensions between coastal squatters and upcountry immigrants. ... Feeling is widespread that the upcountry has, since independence, lived parasitically off of the coast. Given this sharp sense of coastal dispossession, memories of *mwambao* will likely continue to shape future claims and debates. (Brennan 2008: 858-859)

Brennan's prediction could not have been more accurate. As a new constitution was negotiated in 2010, the position of Kenya's Coast Province and the role of Kadhi's court became a heavily debated topic once again. More importantly, the new constitution resulted in a revival of the *mwambao* sentiment along the coast and the Mombasa Republican Party (MRP) now gives voice to new demands for autonomy (Fig. 19).



Figure 19. Promotion of MRP

Life in Lamu during the “Golden Age”

It is unclear who exactly were the first inhabitants of Lamu Town. While the founding stories of most Swahili city-states claim a dual ancestry, linking the rulers of the town both to African and to Arab lineages, Lamu’s origin myth clearly distinguishes the town’s first inhabitants from the African mainland (el Zein 1974). While the first settlements most likely developed from intermarriages between Arab traders and local population groups, chronicles like the *Khabar al-Lamu* (Hichens 1938) only speak of two Arab settlements, one of which was composed of traders from Damascus in Syria. The (presumed) presence of indigenous population groups such as the Orma is thereby conspicuously erased.²⁷

The Chronicle suggests that these first settlers initially lived on separate sides of the island (*Hidabu* on the southern edge, and *Vuyoni* on the northern edge) and were

²⁷ Nowadays, people from Lamu, and particularly those who enjoyed education, will admit to the intermarriages between Arab traders and local population groups. In the past these relationships with the African mainland were erased. It is this erasure that now forms the topic of critique formulated against the former ruling classes (by groups like the Bajuni, see later on in this chapter).

unaware of each other's existence.²⁸ Following their first encounter, a battle unfolded between these two primary settlements. The eventual division between victors and defeated laid the basis for the town's social hierarchy, with these first residents being divided into two different groups living in separate wards – *Zena* and *Suudi* – and imposing endogamy. This division is claimed to form the basis for subsequent civil and military organization as the leaders of these two moieties rotated in taking up civic office, and the army was divided into two regiments (Middleton 2004; Ranger 1975).

All groups that arrived following the settlement of these Syrian and Arabian traders – be it Omani traders, Yemeni settlers or immigrants from the surrounding islands – were then incorporated in a strict social hierarchy in which these founding families or *wenyeji* (or the patrician clans) remained clearly distinct from *wageni* (guests or non-locals). Whereas newcomers' genealogy, religious education, and economic wealth contributed to a family's prestige and assigned them a higher position in the social hierarchy, *wageni* were never considered *wenyeji* nor were they ever viewed as true *waungwana* (Allen 1993; el Zein 1974; Romero 1997).

It is important to note that the *Khabar al-Lamu*, like many other Chronicles, was written long after these historical events took place and thus forms a retrospective justification for social hierarchy structures. This particular chronicle was written in 1897 by Shaibu Faraji bin Hamid al-Bakariy al-Lamuy at the request of the *wali* of Lamu, Abdallah bin Hamid. This historical time frame, at a moment of important shifts in the town's economic and political structures, suggests the need for a historical grounding of

²⁸ This origin myth is recounted in practically all accounts of Lamu. The locations where the first settlers presumably lived are still known (and identifiable) places in Lamu today. El Zein (1974) suggests this origin myth endeavors to incorporate the island's history within the history of Islam (El Zein 1974: 19). El Zein treats these histories as "a social fact" as he believes them to shape Lamu inhabitants' social relations and worldview (El Zein 1974: 19).

authority structures. The truth-value of these accounts can thus be questioned and the lacunae in the text (with substantial leaps between the 8th C and the 18th C) suggest as much (Rollins 1983). Important, however, is that these narrations form part of Lamu's discursive history and are re-told up until today as an explanation for the town's topography as well as its social structure (el Zein 1974). Chronicles like the *Khabar al-Lamu* enable founding families or *wenyeji* to claim a historical distinction with mainland Africans (and later immigrants) on grounds of Arab genealogy and an early adherence to Islam (as being part of the Muslim world).

Archaeological evidence, however, shows that all of the Swahili city-states were complicated, culturally variegated spaces (Allen and Wilson 1979; Chittick 1974; Rotberg and Chittick 1975).²⁹ Arab descent, economic wealth, and an adherence to Islam did, however, meaningfully contribute to the establishment of an urban and civilized lifestyle on the basis of which these Afro-Arab merchants claimed supremacy; they were *waungwana* as opposed to mainland *washenzi*.³⁰ *Uungwana*, which translates as “decency” or “civilization” was based on having the qualities of, among others, *ustaarabu* and *utamaduni*. *Ustaarabu*, while often believed to derive from “Arabness” and thus suggesting a significance of genealogy, literally stands for “long-standing and wise tradition” (Middleton 2004). *Utamaduni*, often translated as culture, derives from the Arabic word *madina* or city and refers to the urban lifestyle in Swahili settlements. Belonging to the *uungwana* social class then entailed being wise and urban, displaying “purity, honor, trustworthiness, and courtesy, as well as knowledge of the world that comes only from belief in God” (Middleton 2004: 4). *Ushenzi*, on the other hand, refers

²⁹ I would like to thank Derek Peterson for reminding me of this.

³⁰ Islam is believed to have arrived on the Swahili coast around the 9th century, based on coins with Muslim names imprinted on them that were dated between 1050-1080 (Horton in Romero).

to backwardness and barbarianism and *washenzi* literally stands for “stupid, ignorant ones.” The notion not only suggests ignorance and ill manners but especially a lack of religious education (see also Bromber 2006).

Jonathon Glassman underlines the importance of an adherence to Islam in the shaping of this worldview as it provided the Afro-Arab merchants with the notion that they were “connected more with their trade partners and coreligionists overseas than with their cultural cousins of the near interior” (Glassman 2011: 24). Transoceanic trade-relations and a shared adherence to Islam then fostered a worldview that “assigned prestige to all things connected to the distant Islamic heartland,” (Glassman 2011: 24) and thus resulted in distinct material practices (including ways of dressing, the use of Arab clan names, etc. See Fig. 20).



Figure 20. Zanzibar Arab wearing kilemba, joho, and jambia
Reprinted from Pearce, Zanzibar 1920 (Fair 1998: 72)

This distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi* meaningfully shaped the relationship between the Afro-Arab merchants and their slaves. Although Lamu was not actively engaged in the slave trade until the early 19th century, its early settlers did own

slaves who either resided with them in their houses or worked on their *shamba* (or farm). These slaves were mainly indigenous African population groups, some of whom came from Tanzania (el Zein 1974) as well as from local population groups such as the Boni, the Orma, and Mijikenda from coastline villages. In its early stages, slavery in East Africa was a variant of clientship rather than an outright exploitative condition. While considered “barbarians” of non-Swahili origin (*washenzi*) these clients were not considered private property (Eastman 1988; Glassman 1995, 2011; Pouwels 1991). The implementation of more extractive forms of servitude and property relations as well as Lamu’s active engagement in the international slave trade only occurred after the imposition of Omani rule.

House slaves often resided in the downstairs galleries of the Swahili mansions, while the majority of slaves working in the fields lived in mud huts on Lamu’s outer edge, an area that came to be known as *Langoni*. Located at the outskirts of town, this was a part of Lamu where traders temporarily resided as they awaited the monsoon winds to sail back across the Indian Ocean. As traders settled more permanently and as the slave population grew, *Langoni* became more clearly opposed to *Mkomani*, which comprised both *Zena* and *Suudi*, its population being mutually distinct from newcomers and slaves. The temporary mud huts in *Langoni* differed sharply from *Mkomani*’s stone mansions and movement between the two sides of town consisted only of slaves who went to their masters or returned home for the night (Eastman 1988; el Zein 1974; Romero 1986, 1997).

Slaves formed an important part of Lamu society and there often existed rather close relationships between the slave master and, especially, house slaves. Among the

women, for example, slaves were companions and conspirators who enabled women to remain in touch with family and friends through messages and gifts, who exchanged news about possible marriage partners, and on whom women depended to leave the house (Romero 1986).

As Lamu's population grew, with traders from Oman and Yemen settling permanently in the port-city, the upper social classes saw their economic power challenged and increasingly relied on honor and respectability to justify their claims to supremacy (see below). While upper-class women remained matriarchs in their own home, their respectability increasingly depended on visible displays of piety and seclusion or *purdah*. Toward the end of the 19th C, *waungwana* women increasingly depended on their slave girls to leave the house. These girls (who remained uncovered), held up a *shiraa*, a tent-like construction that completely covered the lady, and wore bells around their feet to warn men on the street of the arrival of a lady. Upon hearing the ringing noise, men would turn their faces toward house walls until the woman had passed and disappeared out of sight. Although they were considered Muslims, slave girls themselves did not cover, as their religious knowledge was deemed inadequate.

While Frederick Cooper (1977) considered the distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi* or *watwana* insurmountable, Jonathon Glassman meaningfully argues that the line between "free" and "slave" was far from fundamental and was so only in the minds of the dominant members of society (Glassman 1991: 285). As I will discuss below, slaves tried to straddle this boundary in different ways and with different means, and the distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi* was therefore much more of an ambiguous continuum than sometimes presumed. In the subsequent discussion, I do echo

Glassman's argument that in this challenging of their ascribed social positions, slaves endeavored to be accepted as "personal clients who shared with their patrons a devotion to Islam, commerce, and the other values of urban life," and thus retained an adherence to a variant of the hegemonic ideology (Glassman 1991: 292). In the case of slave women, for example, covering became an important means through which they endeavored to integrate themselves within Lamu society after the abolition of slavery. The appropriation of their previous masters' practices enabled a display of honor and respectability deemed necessary for integration within society as free women (Fair 1998, 2001).

In Lamu an evident challenge to the distinction between *waugwana* and *watwana* came with the arrival of Habib Saleh (Al Jahadmy) in the 1880s, a Sayyid from the Comores who defied the lack of religious education for local slaves (el Zein 1974). Habib Saleh had ties to the first wave of Yemeni immigrants from Hadramaut and belonged to the Al Jahadmy Shariffs, a famous and well-respected clan who traced their ancestry to the Prophet Mohammed. Upon his arrival in Lamu, Habib Saleh opted to reside in *Langoni's* slave quarters rather than living on the *Mkomani* side of town, where he had been offered a residence. From his small mud hut, he started teaching local slaves their religion and introduced them to honoring and remembering the Prophet through Maulid celebrations. While causing controversy at first, Habib Saleh soon received open support from leading Hadrami immigrant families and was offered a piece of land to build a mosque. The *Riyadha* mosque soon became a center of religious education, attracting students from across Africa and the world. Lamu's annual, international renowned *maulid* celebrations continue to commemorate Habib Saleh up until today.

Incorporating change: gradual shifts in Lamu's social structure

The events surrounding Habib Saleh's arrival were indicative of deeper shifts within Lamu's social hierarchy. While the *waungwana* were still very much in control, different waves of immigration increasingly challenged both their religious authority and their economic supremacy. The earliest group of immigrants came from Hadramaut in Yemen (12-15th C) and included important *Shariffu* clans.³¹ While not belonging to the town's original inhabitants, this group's religious position commanded high respect, even from Lamu's ruling families. Contrary to other traders and immigrants, the Hadrami Shariffs were allowed to reside on the *Mkomani* side of town and although they continued to be *wageni* (visitors) they were integrated within the higher echelons of society (el Zein 1974; Romero 1997).

The second wave of immigrants that challenged Lamu's social order consisted of Omani Arabs who arrived due to the increasing influence of the Sultan of Zanzibar and the Busaiydi clan (mid 18-20thC). And a third migration wave came once again from Hadramaut in Yemen (late 19th and 20thC). Horton and Middleton (2000) suggest that this last wave of renewed immigration from Arabia gravely affected the position of the high class Afro-Arabs, or *wenyeji*. Coming from rather poor areas of southwestern Arabia, these new immigrants engaged in whatever business was available to them (mainly retail and consumer goods). Due to the success of their businesses these Hadrami quickly replaced the patricians as wealthy retailers. During the 20th century, *wenyeji* then became increasingly impoverished and politically weak, whereas immigrants of Omani and Hadrami ancestry became both politically and economically powerful. While considered

³¹ Clans that trace their ancestry back to Prophet Mohamed

wageni, or outsiders, these immigrants gradually managed to incorporate themselves into Lamu's social structure and increasingly came to be considered as *waungwana*.³²

When the British arrived in Lamu they found a wealthy, highly stratified society with the old patrician clans still in the highest positions of respect and government, but with their religious authority overshadowed by Hadrami Shariffs and their economic power challenged by both Omani and Yemeni immigrants. They also encountered a large slave population mostly from indigenous population groups but also including Bajunis from the surrounding islands. While the abolition of slavery must have meant a significant reconfiguration of social structure, it did not have a detrimental effect on Swahili societies. Former slaves were able to incorporate themselves into Lamu society in the span of about 50-60 years.³³ As I will subsequently discuss, this integration did not remain uncontested and went hand in hand with the renegotiation of the signifying capacity of material practices and notions of belonging. This discussion will illustrate that (material or linguistic) signs were never unambiguous and that the contemporary idea that they once were is in itself ideological; or that it is a metapragmatic dimension of a historical consciousness.

While having incorporated many different population groups throughout its history, adapting to, and absorbing new cultural and linguistic practices, Lamu inhabitants suggest that their social organization always retained a sense of rigidity.

³² There is an important difference between *wenyeji* and *waungwana*. While the former notion refers to the original inhabitants of Lamu, the latter signifies qualities such as urbanity and decency. All *wenyeji* were *waungwana*, because of their urban flair, their religion and their respectability. Immigrants from Arabia, while not *wenyeji*, could become *waungwana* if they embodied norms of respectability and honor.

³³ It is important to note that many former slaves left the Lamu Archipelago, traveling to cities like Mombasa in search of employment in areas where people were unaware of their slave history. Other slaves traveled less far and settled in villages like Witu, on the Kenyan mainland, closer to Lamu. Witu historically was a village where runaway slaves settled, and grew significantly after the abolishment of slavery (Romero 1986).

Imposing endogamy, residing in different neighborhoods, and emphasizing the cultural and linguistic differences between its social groups, the town's population claimed strict separation until about 20 years ago. In today's Lamu, the distinction between Mkomani and Langoni remains, with different stereotypes about the neighborhoods' inhabitants infiltrating daily interactions. Political organizations, youth groups, and football teams continue to divide themselves along these geographical and social lines and even seating arrangements at weddings reflect the divide that continues to exist between Mkomani's *wenyeji* and the *wageni* residing in Langoni. While up until a few years ago, marriages across the divide were controversial and exceptional, nowadays young people appear to cross the partition more often. Elders blame secular education for the increased interaction between the different social groups and changing cultural habits are considered indicative of altering conceptions of social identity.

Heshima as the basis of Lamu's social hierarchy

Previous studies of life in Swahili towns suggest that claims to honorable and respectful behavior, more so than notions of an ethnicized identity, permitted the ruling *waungwana* to continuously distinguish themselves from both *wageni* and *washenzi*. However, a self-cultivation as civilized, religious, and urban and thus an individual's ability to embody and display respectful behavior did enable incorporation into the town's social structure. It is important to point out that this was not an absolute ideological domination. Although slaves (and newcomers) appropriated practices that facilitated their integration in Lamu society, and thus utilized the cultural ideas of their masters, they challenged these same forms in doing so. The adherence to notions of ideal behavior was then, what Glassman calls, an "ambiguous ideological hegemony" (Glassman 1991: 311). Phrased differently,

the *waungwana*'s hegemony was a "moving equilibrium" within which the terms on which social status and respectability could be attributed were continuously renegotiated.³⁴ Far from rigid, it was the ability to reconceptualize expectations towards displays of social status, honor, and respectability in relation to altered social realities that permitted the retention of a sense of order during times of rapid change.

Certain elements of the patricians' hegemonic ideology were more available for appropriation than others. Respectability and its reflection in material practice was one of the means through which newcomers, and former slaves in particular, endeavored to integrate themselves into Lamu society. This respectable conduct believed to be essential to an identification as *muungwana* can be summarized in the ideological concept of *heshima*, considered to be an all-encompassing term describing a Swahili moral code. (Iliffe 2005; Kresse 2009; McMahan 2006; Saleh 2004). Loosely defined *heshima* means having dignity, honor, and respect. It entails knowing how to properly extend courtesy and esteem to others and therefore suggests a conception of appropriate social interaction (McMahan 2006). Iliffe (2005) proposes that both following Islam and having *ustaarabu* are characteristics of someone with *heshima*. While the notion appears abstract, it acquires a particular meaning in Swahili contexts and continues to constitute the basis of day-to-day life (Saleh 2004).

Understanding heshima: defining honor and respect

When speaking of honor-based societies, we often tend to think either of gentlemen dueling for the love of a lady or of conservative communities where honor killings take place. The notion of "honor" is elusive and requires a clear definition in order to

³⁴ Derek Peterson, personal communication.

understand its significance for, and role in shaping social relations. Both Iliffe (2005) and Appiah (2010) wrote extensively about the role of honor in (African) societies and from their extensive discussions I found most useful Appiah's understanding of honor as related to people's concern with status and respect, and thus social identities and recognition.³⁵ Having a sense of honor then implies having an ideological conception of which behavior one ought to adhere to in order to be respected. Although different social identities can imply different demands as to respectful behavior, "people who respect a shared code belong to a shared world, whether or not they share an identity" (Appiah 2010: 176). This suggests that honor codes have a hegemonic nature whereby a dominant group can determine the criteria for honor and respect. I suggest that *heshima* played (and continues to play) a central role in shaping social relations within Lamu.³⁶

It is important to re-emphasize that Lamu's social equilibrium had not always focused on respectful conduct, but shifted from an emphasis on racialized belonging, to economic wealth, to the display of *heshima*. These shifts went hand in hand with transformations in the town's socio-economic composition and with new immigrants' growing political and economic influence. Both Iliffe and Appiah underline that the majority of honor-based societies experienced a shift from a nobility of rank to a nobility of character, whereby honor's primary criterion was not what a person *did*, but what a person *was*, emphasizing virtue and religiosity (Iliffe 2005: 5). As they ever more lost prestige based on genealogy and political and economic power, Lamu's *waungwana* increasingly emphasized *heshima* as a distinguishing factor of honor and respect. The

³⁵ Appiah suggests we ought to consider honor a question of morality and ethics, but stresses that honor and morality do not necessarily align. What is considered honorable might not always be moral.

³⁶ Of course, one's ability to adhere to the honor code is restricted and often dependent on wealth, genealogical ties etc. Controlling the conditions of respectful behavior, upper social classes regulated who could claim respect and honor, and to what extent they could do so.

emphasis on noble character provided *wenyeji* with a means to retain their social position within the town.

This shift to nobility of character had important implications for life in Lamu. While viewed as an inner quality of the individual, the family as a whole owned *heshima*. Their reputation and social standing rested with all family members and with the female members of a household in particular as sexual purity and *haya* (modesty) were considered essential elements of a woman's *heshima*. This change then had two important consequences. Firstly, women's covering and seclusion increasingly became a matter of social prestige as it reflected the family's ability to free women of outdoor labor through the acquisition of slaves (Salm and Falola 1996). The separation between men and women in communities like Lamu is then a recent phenomenon, introduced at the beginning of the previous century, rather than an established religious practice as it is often portrayed to be (Askew 1999).³⁷ Secondly, an individual's behavior became subject to public scrutiny and control, and the monitoring of public conduct thus brought with it repercussions for social interaction and movement through town.

Vocabulary of honor and respectability

An important means through which to study the importance of honor in a particular society is the analysis of its literary tradition and particularly of the vocabulary with which it describes and prescribes honor.³⁸ While there were no written codes of honor,

³⁷ Askew (1999) argues that up until the beginning of the 20th Century women played an important social, political, and economic role. And even after *purdah* was introduced, women in Lamu remained matriarchs, as they owned their own houses and generally controlled what happened in the household. The current discursive construction of a time where women lived segregated and protected their virtue is therefore a reflection upon a recent past, and is far from an accurate depiction of "historical times."

³⁸ The importance of literature to understanding honor then ties back to honor codes' hegemonic nature and intellectuals' crucial role in shaping the cultural and moral norms that ratify the structure of society (Gramsci 1992).

Lamu was famous for its literary tradition with a poetic tradition dating back as far as the 17th century (Mazrui 2007; Shariff 1991). Not only do these literary works provide a wide range of vocabulary items describing honorable conduct, they also give insight in the gradual shift from rank (*cheo*) to moral character (*heshima*) and the different implications this transfer had. The *Song of Fumo Liyongo*, for example, is a historical epic that describes the nobility of its main character in terms of *cheo* (rank) and *jaha* (dignity).³⁹ While both imply honor and respectability, it is respect attributed based on rank rather than character (Miehe and Abdalla 2004).

About a century later, literary works contain a much stronger emphasis on noble dispositions, underlining the importance of *heshima* and respectful conduct. In the famous *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona*, for example, a dying mother, Mwana Kupona, advises her young daughter, who is interestingly enough named Mwana Heshima, on how to be a good wife to her husband. She underscores the virtues of *adabu* (good manners), *sadiki* (trustworthiness), *haya* (modesty) as well as proper language use. In her analysis of this poem, Ann Biersteker (1991) underlines the author's emphasis on speech behavior and its meaningful link to notions of proper conduct. What is more, she argues that the poem embodies "the ideology of Swahili society" as well as Swahili Islamic ideology (Biersteker 1991: 74). While discussing virtuous behavior in daily life, the poem equally emphasizes the importance of conduct for the afterlife, much as Taha did in the *khutba* I analyzed in the introduction to this dissertation. Another example of the emphasis on respectful and virtuous conduct in Swahili literature is the famous *Al-Inkishafi* (1810-20); an epic, religious poem that warns its readers against the deceptions of worldly wealth

³⁹ Comparable in importance to the *Siegfried* legend in the Germanic tradition.

and power, and encourages a life shaped by *dini* (Islamic virtue), *haya* (modesty), and *taqwa* (piety) (Partington 1999).⁴⁰

The importance of *heshima* and what this notion entails for daily interaction is equally evident in local idioms and proverbs, which might better reflect the social reality of WaLamu who weren't necessarily literate. When looking at popular proverbs, we find a similar emphasis on values tied to knowledge, wisdom, and respect, including *ustaarabu* (wise tradition), *utamaduni* (civilization, culture), *hekima* (wisdom) and *busara* (wisdom, prudence); all of which appear closely linked to moral concepts of human solidarity (Kresse 2007). What is more, the transfer from *waungwana*'s economic and political domination to a superiority based on moral dispositions appears to be reflected in, and justified through Swahili proverbs. The saying "*Hekima heri kuliko lulu*," for example, underlines the value of wisdom and knowledge (Knappert and Mieder 1997). Translated as "*wisdom brings more luck than pearls*," it equates knowledge with greater success and happiness than wealth and material possessions. The proverb "*Saburi na heshima, nusu ya hekima*" (Knappert and Mieder 1997) reminds people that "patience and respect are half of wisdom." Such proverbs not only illustrate the social importance of honorable conduct; they also demonstrate local understandings of the ways in which such notions ought to be mediated within daily behavior.

The social significance of moral dispositions is equally evident in Kiswahili vocabulary where a range of notions hints at different elements of respectful conduct. The observable expression of *heshima* in daily interaction comprises expectations toward, among others, *adabu*, *haya*, and *tabia*. *Adabu* can be translated as "manners" or

⁴⁰ *Al-Inkishafi* is believed to have been written by Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nasir, a poet from Pate Island. It has been translated by Stephen Derwent Partington; its title having been translated as *Animation of the Soul*.

“courtesy,” and refers to notions of politeness and respectful composure. It concerns correct behavior toward elders and recognition of someone’s superior position in one’s general conduct as well as in interaction (including greeting styles) (Mtoro bin Mwinyi and Allen 1981). *Haya* signifies “modesty” and pertains to women and young girls as well as to men. Someone who is described as having “*haya*” is considerate of the rights and sensibilities of others, displays restraints, and does not impose on others (McMahon 2006). *Tabia* refers to a range of (cultural) habits that constitute respectful behavior. Mohamed Saleh (2004) adds *uaminifu* (honesty), *uadilifu* (ethics) and *ari* (honor) as attributes of moral conduct.⁴¹

According to John Middleton (1992), *heshima* was “all-encompassing in people’s lives,” and he further describes it as follows:

Heshima is the essential quality of a “true patrician” (*mungwana wa haki*), not merely of a member of a patrician lineage (...). It is not a quality of an isolated individual, but an aspect of relations of communications and exchange. By behaving with courtesy, sensitivity and goodness toward someone else, a person both acquires *heshima* and bestows it on the person addressed, who by responding seemingly and graciously in turn affirms his own *heshima* and emphasizes its possession by the original giver. (Middleton 1992: 194)

While *waungwana*’s social status was initially based on a nobility of rank (and thus comprising genealogy and economic wealth), the increasing emphasis on *heshima* (and thus nobility of character and an embodiment or a display of inherent moral dispositions) coincided with important moments of rupture and change in Lamu society. And as I will illustrate in Chapter 3, it is exactly around the above-described notions that the current sense of moral transformation is constructed.

⁴¹ Many of these notions are Arabic loans and are derived from religious discourse on notions of correct Islamic behavior. Yet, these terms acquired a specific cultural significance within the local context.

***Heshima* and social hierarchy during times of social transformation**

Many scholars of the Swahili coast have emphasized the importance of *heshima* for the maintenance of stability during moments of rupture, the most documented of which was the abolition of slavery (e.g. Fair 2001; Glassman 2011; Iliffe 2005; Kresse 2007; McMahon 2006; Saleh 2004). Iliffe (2005) argues that *ustaarabu* and *heshima*, with Islam at their core, provided a model to which slaves sought to acculturate themselves in order to claim a degree of honor and thus gradually incorporate themselves into Swahili towns' social hierarchy. Rather than ascribed, social status could be gained through lineage or economic wealth but especially through visible displays of piety, the latter being increasingly available to all members of society (Fair 2001; Glassman 1991, 2011; McMahon 2006; Pouwels 1991). Such displays of *heshima* – the cultivation of the virtuous self through observable practices – enabled former slaves to incorporate themselves into Lamu society as free individuals. Laura Fair (2001) analyzes how consumer habits of former slaves (e.g. clothing and recreational activities) allowed them to become valued members of post-emancipation Zanzibar based on creative fashioning of social and cultural materials rather than on genealogy or race (Fair 2001: 43).

It is, however, essential to underline that such cultivation of self included the renegotiation of exactly what practices constituted *heshima*. As Fair suggests, former slaves “strove to reform a variety of cultural and religious practices in ways that made pious living a more important evaluative criterion of a “good” Muslim than scholarly achievement” (Fair 2001: 18). As I argued previously, this effort to obtain honor and respect did not, however, entail slaves' rejection of their former masters' ideology. Rather, they struggled to be accepted as individuals who shared norms and values with

their former patrons (Glassman 1991). According to Iliffe (2005), the very fact that slaves learned so much – that they took up coastal forms of dress and spread Islam among themselves – reflects “the extent to which the slaveholders’ culture had in fact become hegemonic” (Iliffe 2005: 296).

Former slaves’ self-cultivation and the renegotiation of practices did not, however, remain uncontested. McMahon’s (2006) study of court cases in post-emancipation Pemba, for example, not only illustrates the importance of *heshima* for former slaves’ acceptance into mainstream society; it also shows how claims to *heshima* and social standing could be challenged. McMahon provides the example of the former slave, Zuhura, who lost an inheritance case exactly because she laid claim to an elite status. As the widow of a Shirazi, upper-class man Zuhura demanded her inheritance but lost the court case because her recognition as a legitimate wife would have given her membership to Pemba’s Shirazi elite (McMahon 2006). McMahon maintains that Zuhura was unsuccessful precisely because she petitioned for elite membership during the post-abolition period, when the elites felt increasingly threatened by emancipation exactly because former *washenzi* could become *waungwana*.

One of my older informants, Haifa, who we will encounter again in Chapter 3, told me a story about her grandmother’s response to the abolition of slavery and to her former slave’s appropriation of new material practices in particular. While Haifa lived in a small, cramped room on the Langoni side of town, she was originally from the town of Siyu on Pate Island. There, her family had belonged to the *waungwana* upper-class and had owned many slaves. She told me her grandmother had become rather “famous” shortly after the end of slavery because she had left the house without proper covering.

Haifa suggested that her grandmother had seen one of her former slave girls walk around town covered like an upper-class free woman. As a response, and out of protest, her grandmother decided to leave the house *without* any covering (as a redefined form of distinction), causing much uproar throughout the town. Haifa chuckled as she told the story and subsequently sighed that things had, indeed, changed a lot.

Visible displays of moral conduct provided newcomers and former slaves with a tool for social integration, but such appropriations were far from always uncontested and did not allow for an “unproblematic” integration into society as free men. By appropriating the practices of the *waungwana*, former slaves nevertheless “inadvertently absorbed some of the ideas of the dominant class” (Glassman 1991: 321). While there was a renegotiation of social structure and social relations, the very behaviors that displayed *heshima* and *ustaarabu* were appropriated and reproduced in often only slightly different variants. While ultimately able to challenge the upper-classes’ exclusiveness and while it was far from perfectly coherent, the ambiguous ideological hegemony was nevertheless reproduced (Glassman 1991). Exactly because *heshima* was the one criterion of social status accorded by the upper-classes, *wenyeji* retained a sense of control, despite rapid social change (el Zein 1974: 62).

McMahon’s (2006) work (and the story of Haifa’s grandmother), however, do illustrate the existence of anxiety among the Swahili upper classes. The different court cases reveal a concern among the elites about the difficulty of dealing with *wageni* and newcomers who did not ‘fit’ and might disrupt local social mores. It is in this time period that the previously discussed literary works such as *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona* and *Al-*

Inkishafi gained social importance. Their emphasis on *heshima* and its different components point to an elite struggling with new social constructions (Fair 2001).

***Heshima* in daily interaction: Social control and individual responsibility**

The foregoing discussion of *heshima* and how it historically informed social status provided an understanding of Lamu's integrative, though seemingly rigid social hierarchy. However, it gave little insight into what this growing emphasis on ideal conduct entailed for daily interaction: how an ideology of *heshima* shaped social relations, but also how the increasing importance of respectful behavior required both social control and a monitoring of individual behavior. The following discussion of ideological conceptions surrounding more open (*wazi*) and more intimate spaces (*ndani*), and the behavior expected within them, provides insight into how the very lay-out of Lamu Town and the structure of Swahili houses both imposed a hegemonic notion of *heshima* and facilitated social control of the adherence to behavioral norms.

As suggested previously, the shift from a nobility of rank to a nobility of character had important social implications, not the least of which being a growing need for the social monitoring of individuals' behavior. Exactly because individual conduct was now a measure for an entire family's honor and respectability (and thus their social status), new forms of social supervision were needed. I previously hinted at the implications this had for women, as a woman's segregation and her ability to avoid the "public eye," i.e. not being seen by men she was not related to, became an important index of her *haya*, her respectability, and thus her social status. As a result, high-class women (*wenyeji* but also women from the rich merchant classes and *Shariffu* clans) increasingly avoided public or open spaces, such as streets and markets, and remained inside the house (observing

pardah). Avoidance of contact with men did not, however, entail that women did not have a social life. Women made use of *wikio* (closed walkways above the streets) or walked across rooftops to visit family and friends, allowing them to avoid contact with men yet leading an active social life. If women did leave the house using the street, they only did so after the sunset prayers (*maghrib*) while covered by the *shiraa* and accompanied by slave girls. After the abolition of slavery, women carried their own *shiraa* and young children or family members accompanied them when leaving the house (Figs. 21 and 22).⁴²



Figure 21. Illustration of Shiraa.
Courtesy of the National Museums of Kenya



Figure 22. Demonstration of Shiraa.
Courtesy of Okoko Ashikoye

⁴² As I mentioned previously, this change in women's behavior only happened around the turn of the previous century and was fully in place by 1930 (Askew 1999).

This emphasis on proper conduct was far from restricted to women. Men were equally expected to display respectful behavior and were just as much subject to social evaluation. Notions of proper conduct comprised, for example, appropriate greeting styles and language use, respecting norms of hospitality, proper dress, and not eating in public. Such conceptions of ideal behavior were meaningfully linked to different locations within town, conduct along the seafront being clearly distinct from behavior in Lamu's backstreets. Such ideological understandings of different neighborhoods or streets, and the boundaries between them, allowed for the social monitoring of public conduct. Spatial divisions at different levels of Lamu society – ideological boundaries between different areas within the town and even segregations within the Swahili house – facilitated the regulation of behavior, the presentation of self, and the evaluation of others.

Residential areas and wards had always reflected important distinctions in terms of descent and economic wealth. The distinction between *Zena* and *Suudi* or the division between *Mkomani* and *Langoni* served to maintain a social hierarchy based on genealogy and wealth. The redefined understandings of social status as based on character, however, attributed a new or reconceptualized meaning to these different spaces. Movement through town and route taken, behavior within different areas, and the ability to respect segregations within the Swahili house provided the broader community (interlocutors and observers) with new means to assess an individual's character and thus the social status of his family.

While the abolition of slavery altered the social order, the social equilibrium shaped by notions of respectful conduct assured that former slaves appropriated material

practices that fit this ambiguous moral hegemony – respecting the moral and social implications of crossing normative and spatial boundaries. Within contemporary society, the rise in secular education and the subsequent employment of both men and women have significantly challenged both the spatial boundaries within town and the ideological understanding of the embodiment of *heshima*. With this came the increasing imposition of new immigrants who no longer had a vested interest in adhering to, and integrating themselves within Lamu’s social hierarchy.⁴³ For locals, the very notion of *heshima*, nevertheless, remains pertinent to social relations and positionality. The renegotiation of what respectful behavior entails, the ways in which it ought to be embodied, and how previous physical boundaries to interaction can be remediated within practice continues to rely on ideological understandings of separation, and notions of intimacy and openness, all of which were meaningfully reflected within geographical space.

Degrees of separation and intimacy: spatial boundaries as social control

Discussing the politics of conversion in colonial East Africa, Derek Peterson (2012) describes the importance of space and spatial boundaries as a source of moral knowledge in a range of communities throughout Eastern Africa. He argues that spatial divisions historically formed a guide to respectful behavior and were co-constitutive of social relations. Privacy, honor, and architecture were meaningfully linked in communities like the Luo, the Kikuyu, the Masaai, and the Swahili, whereby reputation-building was “a

⁴³ I do not suggest that previous waves of immigrants immediately adhered to norms of respectful behavior, but I do argue that the social, political and economic order was such that they integrated themselves within Lamu society – through a shared adherence to Islam, and notions of respectful conduct. For the current immigrants, like mainland Kikuyu, there is no need to appropriate local behaviors as their economic or political position will in no way be affected by their disregard for local custom.

cooperative discipline,” requiring people to monitor their appearances and to conduct themselves with reserve (Peterson 2012: 18).

The central, regulating role of spatial boundaries within WaLamu’s social life similarly did not go unnoticed and several historical studies of Lamu view physical separation as a central organizing principle throughout the town’s history (Allen and Wilson 1979; Fuglesang 1994; Prins 1971). In his elaborate study of the spatial structure of Lamu, Prins (1971) for example, suggests that the geographical division between the two residential areas *Mkomani* and *Langoni*, rather than being a mere result of historical settlement patterns, reflects a dual principle central to the town’s social hierarchy and political management. Other descriptions of Lamu focus on the gendered nature of spatial separation and underline the distinction between male open, public spaces and female closed, domestic spaces (Allen and Wilson 1979; Fuglesang 1994). Studies of Swahili architecture emphasize the importance of spatial partitions within the traditional Lamu houses for the maintenance of privacy and the regulation of social interaction (see e.g. Allen and Wilson 1979; Ghaidan 1975). While these different discussions register the importance of space and spatial separation, none of them make the explicit link to a hegemonic notion of *heshima* and the moral maintenance of social stratification within daily interaction.

In *Didemic Lamu*, Prins (1971) argues that a binary principle is apparent on different levels of Lamu society. For example, a binary division in lineages and social structure is iconically represented within the residential areas *Mkomani* and *Langoni* (as was discussed earlier on in this chapter). According to Prins, this dual principle was historically pervasive in regulating spatial and social relations within the town and this

duality ought thus to be considered an overtly present and visible phenomenon of social division and harmony (Prins 1971: 3). Prins was not the only one to note the importance of this dual principle. Discussions of the competition between Lamu's soccer teams, music bands, and dance groups whereby each team represents one of the two dominant neighborhoods within Lamu have been discussed along the lines of this dual principle (see e.g. Ranger 1975). In addition, we find a similar dual divide in other towns within the Lamu Archipelago. In towns like Pate and Siyu, this dual regulating principle is visible and pervasive up until today.

The geographical boundary between *Mkomani* and *Langoni* was indeed central to Lamu's social organization and it continues to fulfill a similar function in contemporary society. The *Mkomani/Langoni* divide derived its importance, not only from its link to historical settlement patterns and divisions between lineages with distinctive political, economic, and social power; the divide's ideological significance also constrained social interaction between the social groups occupying these different areas of town.⁴⁴ The physical, spatial representation of a historical and ideological distinction not only discouraged physical movement across this boundary; it also heightened the threshold for communication. It limited the circulation of both people and discourses, and thus facilitated the maintenance of privacy and intimacy at the broadest level (between two residential areas). I consider the division between *Mkomani* and *Langoni* a first level of separation that regulated interaction (and intimacy) between Lamu's different social groups, and thus enabled the evaluation and attribution of *heshima* based on the ability to uphold this boundary.

⁴⁴ This is a distinction in terms of *uungwana* and thus civilization, more so than lineage (this is evident in the fact that Shariffs and later Omanis could reside in Mkomani).

Spatial organization as a technique for controlling the limits to, and expectations towards social interaction and behavior was not restricted to the dual divide between *Mkomani* and *Langoni*. The layout of the different neighborhoods as well as the architecture of Lamu houses similarly reflects different degrees of intimacy, imposing comparable, albeit more detailed, expectations toward behavior and interaction – a fractal recursion of oppositions existing at a higher social level (Gal 2005; Irvine and Gal 2000). There is a separation between three parallel running areas within Lamu Town: the seafront, the main street, and the labyrinth of quiet back alleys, each enforcing different expectations toward behavior. This division has become especially important since women became a visible presence on Lamu's streets once again, because they rely upon these divisions to display or denounce respectability and honor. Exactly because the walls of their houses no longer physically separate women, their choice of different roads permits the recreation of different degrees of openness or intimacy. Route and behavior when walking these different paths have thus become crucial means to maintain respectability or display openness to flirtation.

The seafront or *pwani* is an area where tradesmen, porters, young men, and, more recently, scantily dressed Western tourists can be found. It is an open, male dominated space where shouting and crude language govern. Parallel to *pwani* runs *usita wa mui*; a hectic pathway along which men, and now also women, rush to work or visit local shops. This busy main street contrasts sharply with the quiet and empty backstreets that provide shade and privacy, subtly imposing respectful demeanor (Fig. 23). As the *Interlude* preceding this chapter already illustrated, these different areas of town impose distinctive norms of interaction: while hardly seen along Lamu's seafront, where loud language use

governs, women now often use the main street. Although greetings are exchanged, they are kept polite and short. More conservative women who prefer to remain unseen mostly use the labyrinth of alleys where encounters are rare and occasional interactions are kept to a minimum. I consider this division between these three parallel running areas a second separation that represents different degrees of intimacy, social control, and limits to interaction.⁴⁵

A third form of spatial separation can be found in Swahili architecture. Swahili houses' seemingly plain and unaccommodating partition into different narrow galleries has been the topic of many scholarly discussions (see e.g. Allen and Wilson 1979; Donley 1987; Ghaidan 1975; Horton and Middleton 2000). I suggest that Swahili houses exemplify degrees of separation that regulate interaction at the most intimate level; they form an iconic-like representation of the embodiment of *heshima*. Facades of traditional Swahili houses are generally windowless, shielding wealth, women, and private lives from the eye of the passerby. This lack of windows and the thickness of walls prevent any sound from inside the house to be heard outside on the streets. These blank, high walls are interrupted only by house entrance porches, flanked by stone benches or *barazas*, opening into the house through a monumental doorway – the door, its richly carved frame and the size of its lock being the only outside index of the family's wealth (Fig. 24). This door generally opens up to a wall or a staircase that prevents outsiders from seeing the inside, family life. The outside stone benches fulfill an important social function, as these allow the men of the house to entertain casual visitors without having

⁴⁵ It is important to underline that a similar distinction did exist in the past, even before women's visible re-appearance on Lamu's streets. Men's ability to adhere to the different norms of interaction that govern these different areas were just as much indicative of their social status as was their women's ability to avoid these spaces.

to invite them inside the house, thereby accommodating the importance of social involvement as well as the need for privacy (and limits to visibility).

The structure of the house itself generally consists of an open courtyard and three or four parallel spaces or galleries. The first space functions as a sitting area where intimate, family guests are entertained. The second space is the children's sleeping area, while the third forms the parents' private quarters. The fourth, most back area (*ndani*) is a space kept for either giving birth or for accommodating someone's last hours. The doors to these different galleries are often, though not always, strategically misaligned to prevent visibility from one section into the other, blocking visitors' view of the parents' quarters or more intimate spaces (Fig 25) (see also Allen and Wilson 1979; Beckwith, et al. 2009; Donley 1987; Ghaidan 1975; Prins 1971).



Figure 23. Narrow backstreet in Lamu



Figure 24. Lamu door

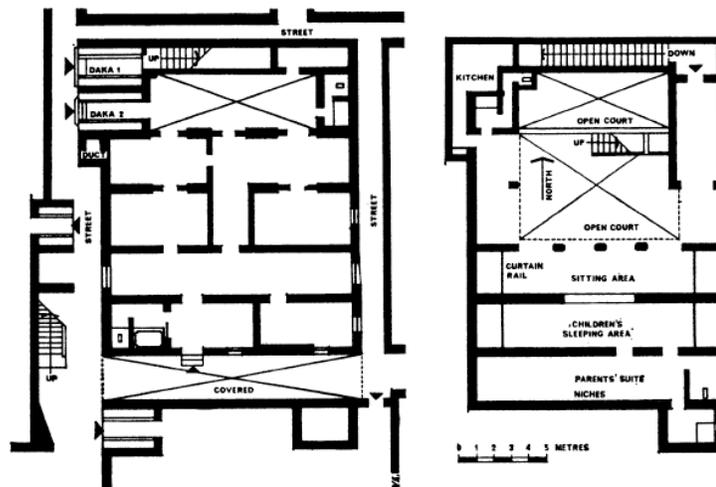


Figure 25. Layout Lamu house.
Source: Ghaidan 1975

I suggest that these different spatial divisions at distinct levels of society form a semiotic expression, a physicalization, of the ideological link between *heshima*, *privacy* or *intimacy*, and expectations toward behavior. At different levels of Lamu society these ideological conceptions of spatial boundaries limit the circulation of people, things, and discourses and they represent increasing degrees of intimacy in terms of (1) relatedness (2) norms of interaction, and (3) control of the senses – sight, hearing, and smell. It is exactly an individual's knowledge of, and ability to adhere to these different distinctions

that reflect his or her *heshima* and thus social status. They form part of what Bourdieu (1984) called a bodily hexis – a complex of words, gestures, postures, and movement charged with social meaning and value and indicative of one’s position on the local social ladder.

Firstly, the areas discussed range from a boundary between the most distant members of a community (Langoni’s *wageni* vs. Mkomani’s *wenyeji*) to divisions between living spaces occupied by members of the same family, to the most intimate space of birth and death. Secondly, these degrees of separations set expectations for interaction – what language use is appropriate, which interactions can take place, but also what kind of information can be shared. And thirdly, these ideological boundaries regulate the expected control over the senses. Ranging from the open, male dominated seafront to the intimate space of the house, there is an increasing encounter with a play of the senses related to female sensitivity. Not only are glimpses of women more likely in neighborhood backstreets, the intimate space of the house where the smell of incense (*udi*) and women’s voices dominate make a man more vulnerable to his own temptations.

These separations between different degrees of intimacy thus represent a leveled transition from an open, distant, and controlled male dominated space (*wazi – nde*) to an inside, intimate, and sensitive female governed space (*ndani*).⁴⁶ In the past, it was exactly an individual’s ability to understand, maintain, and respect those boundaries and thus to display behavior that adhered to these divisions that reflected a person’s *heshima* and thus his or her social status. A man who controls his emotions and limits the sharing of

⁴⁶ I refrain from using the distinction between public and private, as women’s interactions - across rooftops and through walkways - were common and cannot necessarily be considered private speech. Yet women were known to gossip - one of their weak spots. Personal information that was shared behind the walls of the family houses, that was not supposed to circulate across the boundaries of those *mitaa*, to the main street or to Langoni for that matter.

information while at the seafront, but has the courtesy to welcome a visitor at the *baraza* in front of his house, and knows to relax and enjoy the smell of incense in the inner quarters displays his noble character. Linda Donley, in her study of the spatial organization of Lamu Town, mentions that a male interviewee of 96 years old reported that “he went out every day because it is ‘unmanly’ to spend time at home” (Donley 1987: 186).

Similarly, a woman’s ability to display *haya* and avoid less intimate spaces (like the main street) largely determined the *heshima* people would attribute to her. A girl was considered to have *haya* when she was able to maintain the boundaries of intimacy – to refrain from playing with a man’s senses through gaze, smell, or voice. An individual’s moral qualities were then not merely inherent personality traits, but were assigned by community members upon witnessing an individual’s ability to observe and adhere to the ideological expectations that governed these different areas of Lamu town.

Thus far, I have refrained from describing these spatial divisions in terms of the oft-used public/private dichotomy, in particular because activities within these different areas of Lamu Town cannot be fully grasped when relying on an opposition between more “public” or less “private” spaces. Areas of town are distinct, not necessarily because of the kind of audience one engages with, but especially due to the control one is expected to assert over one’s behavior. Women can engage in very open interactions with family and friends in the inner space of the house but do not control the sound of their voice, their use of perfume, or their outer appearance when in such intimate spaces.

When in the outer space of the town, women's appearance is covered, the sound of their voice is lowered and the use of perfume is limited to non-existent.⁴⁷

While this presents a somewhat different approach to the oft-discussed public/private divide, the foregoing description of spatial boundaries and the differing expectations toward behavior that govern these spaces does importantly resemble the public/private dichotomy as discussed by Susan Gal (2005). Especially important is Gal's attention to the language and semiotic ideologies that inform both the divisions between such spaces and the behavior that is deemed appropriate within them. Rather than being inherently public or private (or intimate or open for that matter), the spaces as well as the practices within them are interpreted through an ideology that labels both as characteristic or emblematic of either the private (or intimate) or the public (or accessible) (Gal 2005).⁴⁸ Gal (2005) argues that spatial dichotomies or divisions are then never just shaped by an ideology of spatial distinctions; it rather concerns an ideological division of spaces, morality, types of people, actions, and linguistic practices. Ideological conceptions of spatial divisions are then always also ideologies about language use and material practices.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ I do not view this separation as a submission to male patriarchy (as has been suggested in other studies). Women in Lamu remained owners of houses and matriarchs within their houses. I do agree with Kelly Askew (1999) that the altered value of houses (in relation to the value of *shambas* that are generally owned by Lamu men) has decreased significantly over the last decades, and with it the power of women also diminished.

⁴⁸ It is also important to highlight the fractal recursive nature of the spatial divisions just discussed. In her discussion of the public and the private in North America and Eastern Europe, Susan Gal underlines that this opposition reoccurs through the ideological process of fractal recursivity. That is, a distinction that exists at one level reoccurs at another level; within the private, one is bound to find an opposition between more public and more private conduct or spaces. Similarly, the divisions within Lamu Town appear to be a fractal recursive reoccurrence of higher-level divisions, each informed by an ideology of intimacy and openness.

⁴⁹ This then speaks to Hirsch's (1998) discussion of women's language use in Mombasa courts, where their sharing of stories was deemed inappropriate. Hirsch meaningfully ties this to language ideologies and the type of stories that can be shared. I would add to this the influence of broader semiotic ideologies of spatiotemporal embeddedness as I just outlined.

I elaborate at length on the ideological link between *heshima* and the layout of Lamu town because it provides crucial insights into how every aspect of interaction and practice was historically influenced by notions of respectability and honor. More importantly, it paints a visual picture of how spatial boundaries enforced proper conduct and enabled the maintenance of both social relations and divisions. Grasping the importance of *heshima* and its translation in daily interaction is essential to an understanding of young people's current endeavors to renegotiate their position within contemporary Lamu, but especially to fully grasp the moral challenges WaLamu are dealing with.

The changes Lamu community currently faces not only entail a shift within the town's economic and political structures; they also undermine WaLamu's ability to uphold and maintain different boundaries and limits to interaction and practice – to impose a notion of virtuous or respectful behavior. While this chapter demonstrated that such challenges are far from new, and while it showed that renegotiations formed an integral part of Lamu's history, the current transformation is experienced as a consequence of an outside imposition by newcomers who maintain separate standards of sociality. Jonathon Glassman argued that the postcolonial political economy did not only destroy the material bases of *waungwana* supremacy; it also took away the ideological one (Glassman 2011: 22). What is more, the importance of *heshima*, with Islam at its core, is now being challenged. While *heshima*'s mediation in practice might have been contested and renegotiated in the past, its current insignificance for newcomers is experienced as a form of moral dispossession.

The arrival of mainland immigrants who disregard local boundaries to interaction and the expectations towards norms that govern them, as well as the growing circulation of discourses on modernity and development increasingly cause ideological and spatial boundaries to become obsolete. This increasing flow of people and discourses not only challenges a social hierarchy based on respectability and honor, but also enforces a renegotiation of what ideal behavior entails – of what it means to be a virtuous person in contemporary Lamu.

Lamu in contemporary Kenya

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Lamu's incorporation within an independent Kenya in 1963 brought with it many changes, including severe challenges to the town's social, political, and economic status. Returning to this important moment in Lamu's history and linking it to *waungwana*'s altering ability to insist on particular understandings of *heshima* will form an essential background to understand the metapragmatic discourses, language ideologies, and miscommunications that will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

Lamu after Kenyan Independence

The incorporation of the coastal strip in the Kenyan nation had important implications for Lamu District and the Lamu Archipelago. Not only did the assignment of government positions to the Kikuyu ethnicity introduce a new group of (this time, Christian) immigrants to the area, president Jomo Kenyatta artificially migrated a community of Kikuyus to the area around Lake Kenyatta, on the mainland close to Lamu, to commence labor on a new cotton plantation. The new settlement carried the name *Mpeketoni* and

soon developed into a big, successful town, thriving on agriculture. Mpeketoni currently is a large settlement with a population twice the size of Lamu Town (estimated between 25000-30000) and healthcare and educational facilities far better than those found in the archipelago. The presence of the (Christian) Kikuyu community in Mpeketoni is a sensitive issue in Lamu because Kikuyus increasingly immigrate to the town and because churches are rapidly being built in Lamu's different neighborhoods. More importantly, inhabitants of Mpeketoni were given title deeds to their land when they migrated to the area in 1964, whereas inhabitants of Lamu continue to face a difficult struggle when trying to obtain title deeds to the land they have resided on for centuries.

While immigration is not new to Lamu (as this chapter has clearly demonstrated), it is hard to ignore the impact the arrival of the Kikuyu ethnic group has had within the town. Contrary to previous newcomers, Kikuyus are self-conscious about their separate status and reflect this within different kinds of infrastructure and material practices. Not only do Kikuyus occupy the majority of administrative positions within the town (assigned by the Kenyan government), they also dominate the local market and form an increasingly visible (and audible) presence within Lamu. These new immigrants are uninterested in local norms of respectability and the majority of them make no concerted effort to integrate within Lamu society. Dress, movement, and social interaction clearly distinguish them from Lamu inhabitants and the introduction of bars, alcohol, and discos openly challenges locals' Islamic life style. The majority of these newcomers rents or buys houses in different areas of town, unaware of the historical social distinction between the different neighborhoods. Loud music, open interaction between men and women, the consumption of alcohol, and movement across spatial boundaries contrasts

with local behavioral norms.⁵⁰

In similar vein, the growing arrival of Western expatriates undermines the maintenance of spatial boundaries and their social significance. Dire economic circumstances increasingly force previously high-class families to sell their family homes to wealthy Western tourists, after which the families move either to other areas within Lamu (hereby crossing separations between different social groups, such as the boundary between Mkomani and Langoni) or to Mombasa in search of employment. While these Western tourists restore the houses to their former glory, their lack of interest in local norms of respectability challenges notions of *heshima* and honorable conduct. In addition, dire economic circumstances prevent WaLamu themselves from upholding boundaries between intimate and open spaces, and thus maintaining limits to interaction and visibility. Inside Swahili houses, walls are erected to divide the narrow galleries and create extra sleeping areas – to accommodate large families or to rent rooms out. Other houses are build following a Western model, lacking the old strategic divisions between different sections of the house. Now guests are welcomed inside, rather than on the outside *baraza*, and women are often unable to segregate themselves.⁵¹

Because the above-described changes are perceived as being linked to Lamu's incorporation within an independent Kenya, and because they are viewed as resulting from the government's increasing imposition, WaLamu discursively construct the current transformation as unprecedented and even question their rightful incorporation within the

⁵⁰ People from Lamu often told me they did not object to the presence of Kikuyus as such, exactly because Lamu had always had a welcoming attitude to foreigners. It was, however, exactly Kikuyus blatant disregard for local notions of respectability that bothered many (as we will see in Chapter 3).

⁵¹ It is important to point out that the “newer” layouts of houses also partly derive from an orientation to the West and a desire to display familiarity with the global. Wealthier WaLamu no longer build the traditional Swahili mansions, but often build houses with different, separate rooms.

Kenyan nation. While change and negotiation have always been part of Swahili society, it is exactly the current loss of the ideological basis of supremacy that concerns the former upper-classes. What is more, this altered position within the local and national context enables previously lower-class groups to challenge, not only Lamu's social order, but also the understanding of the norms and values that inform it.

Identifying with Kenya: Swahili, Arab, or Bajuni?

As I suggested in the beginning of this chapter, the origin myths of the different social groups currently living in Lamu all claim (in different ways and to different extents) a historical distinction from the African mainland, mainly based on references to an Arab descent of some sort. This retrospective distancing from the Kenyan mainland had, however, important implications after Kenyan Independence. The Lamu Archipelago's integration within an independent Kenya not only entailed a shift in Lamu's socioeconomic position; it also brought with it an ascription to one of Kenya's forty-three officially recognized ethnic groups. Today, people from Lamu have to identify as either "Arab" or "Bajuni" in order to be acknowledged as Kenyan citizens, and thus to lay claim to civil rights and to participate within Kenyan politics. This choice is far from evident and has deeper implications than one might initially think.

Within Lamu District, the officially recognized ethnic groups are limited to two: Bajuni or Kenyan Arab. There is no official recognition of a Swahili ethnic group, nor are identifications as Lamu or Pate acknowledged. In addition, identification as Arab requires the exhibition of birth certificates of three generations. Absence of official documentation and thus an inability to prove rightful citizenship reduces many of the Afro-Arabs to second-class citizens. This lack of official recognition leads many Lamu residents to

question, not only the authority of the administrators residing on the island (often of the Kikuyu ethnicity), but also the government's right to interfere in local politics and economy.

What is more, the official recognition of Bajunis as an ethnic group instigated a change in discourses pertaining to the historical development of Lamu town, with Bajunis more explicitly challenging *waungwana*'s rightful claim to being the original residents of the area. This overt defiance of previous upper-classes' supremacy also enabled new or redefined discourses on conceptions of proper conduct. While previously the social order was challenged by an appropriation of practices that were believed to exclusively belong to the *waungwana*, now the proper mediation of norms and values is being challenged.

Consider the following interaction between young men from mixed Bajuni backgrounds (some were from Rasini, others came from Kiwayu or Ndau). These young men, all of whom were between the ages of 21 and 25, grew up in Lamu town but strongly identified as Bajuni and often spoke KiBajuni amongst themselves. When asked about their relation to Lamu's *waungwana* and whether they would consider marrying a *muungwana* girl, an agitated conversation followed. The young men admitted that interactions with, and friendships across the social divide were much more common nowadays, but underlined that the distinction remained significant. They suggested that, in the past, marrying a girl from Lamu's upper social classes would have been impossible but that *waungwana* now could no longer afford to be selective as to who could marry their daughters. They added that, while their social position had shifted significantly, *waungwana* continued to insist on practices that were said to reflect their respectability

and honor. One of the practices discussed was, for example, the lasting emphasis on women's segregation.

A. sikia ukienda kule zizere zao huwaoni . kwa sababu gani? wako tofauti sana wao huwasita wale . mila ya pokomo wapokomo safi . umeona siyo? weusi! hata utashangaa ukiambiwa huyo bibi yake ni huyu.	A. listen when you go there you do not see their elder women . do you know why? they are very different = they hide them . traditions of the Pokomo pure Pokomo ⁵² . you understand right? black! you would even be amazed if you are told that she's his grandmother
B. kama rafiki yako ni kijoho ukiende naye kwenye nyumba . we usingie ndani!	B. when your friend is <i>kijoho</i> ⁵³ and you go to his house . you do not go inside!
C. Usiingie ndani, kabisa huingii	C. do not go inside . you won't get in
D. Kendra kwao atafanya kivovote afanye harakati yoyote ili akupate pale pale mlangoni	D. if you go to their place they will do no matter what to make sure they catch you at the door
B. Mbajuni amwambia chwende zechu ingia ndani msela.	B. the Bajuni say lets go home you're welcome inside friend
C. Nyumbani hapa wakati wowote nzee karibu	C. consider this your home, you are welcome anytime.

The young men who participated in the above interaction did not only defy the former upper social classes claim to Arab descent; they also challenged the practices that are believed to represent respectability. Whereas the *waungwana* families still place a high value on separation and displays of *haya*, the reasons for women's segregation is explained along entirely different lines in the conversation above. According to the young men, elder women's preference to remain unseen has nothing to do with *heshima* or *haya*, but rather derives from the fact that their dark skin color gives away their African descent and that they therefore need to remain hidden to uphold *waungwana*'s claims to an Arab descent line. This same argument is used to explain why upper-class families do not

⁵² The Pokomo are one of the indigenous ethnic groups of the Lamu Archipelago.

⁵³ *Kijoho* is a denigrating nickname used to refer to Lamu's *waungwana* families.

invite guests inside their houses. Rather than referring to notions of *heshima* and an upholding of the boundaries to interaction (as I discussed earlier), this is now explained as being impolite and resulting from a need to hide family secrets. Bajunis, on the other hand, are welcoming and generous, always inviting people inside their houses.

This short example illustrates that the current transformations do not merely bring about a challenge to the social order, but cause an explicit renegotiation of social relations and the norms and values that shape them. At stake are not merely claims to social supremacy, but the very understanding of what it means to be a virtuous person in today's society. Whereas these changes reveal social tensions and result in discussions as the ones above, the pertinent question for all different social groups remains how to present a respectable self in this rapidly changing society.

On a broader social scale, the tensions and historical resentment that are increasingly voiced prevent active participation within the postcolonial state. WaLamu's lack of a unified identity causes fraud politics with Kikuyus eventually determining the majority vote in the election of, for example, the area MP. Local politicians and religious leaders increasingly come to realize that, to be able to participate in processes of development and national politics, Lamu inhabitants will have to "identify" themselves. To be able to make claim to national resources, to defend their property rights, to find political representation, or to obtain international support, they will have to represent themselves as one people, be it as people from Lamu, coastal inhabitants, or Muslims – a local, national, or global unified identity.⁵⁴ This discussion then explains the increasing

⁵⁴ Derek Peterson rightfully pointed out that WaLamu, or coastal Swahilis for that matter, are far from the only ones who are working to define themselves as an ethnicity, worthy therefore of attention and entitlement from the Kenyan state.

emphasis on a reconceptualization of what it means to be Lamuan – an issue that surfaced in interviews, metapragmatic evaluations of change as well as within daily interaction.

Conclusion

From its inception Lamu Town has continuously dealt with the arrival of immigrants and challenges to its dominant position within the Swahili trade network – an ongoing process of negotiation and incorporation. Yet, Chapter 1 of this dissertation suggested that Lamu inhabitants now, more than before, are confronted with a moment of rupture: a challenge to its social hierarchy, a renegotiation of its social relations, and the undermining of the moral norms that shape understandings of respectability, piety, and social status. Chapter 2 endeavored to outline why different sections of Lamu's population can perceive the current condition as one of moral transformation that differs from previous moments of change. While I endeavored to demonstrate that shifts and negotiations are far from new to the local context, I also hinted at different reasons why WaLamu, and particularly the higher social classes, can construct the current transformation as unique to the town's history.

The overview of Lamu's historical development as a trade city and its social composition provided insight into the complexity of life in this island town and gave a sense of the different social groups residing in Lamu. This discussion simultaneously shed light on the different ways in which Lamu's social hierarchy was maintained and challenged throughout its history. I subsequently suggested that, while the social structure was contested previously, newcomers in the past had a vested interest in participating in, and thus incorporating themselves within a social order shaped partly by descent, partly by economic wealth, and partly by displays of virtue and respectability. Contemporary

immigrants are disinterested in integration in Lamu's social hierarchy and bring with them a range of practices that conflict with local understandings of proper conduct. The current transformation then far from only brings with it another reshuffling of the social hierarchy; it challenges norms of behavior that structure day-to-day interactions.

WaLamu from all different social groups are confronted with political, economic, and moral dispossession, whereby norms and values are increasingly determined and shaped by new immigrants as well as new kinds of global cultural flows. This brings with it an increasing emphasis on a social status determined by, among others, education, wealth, and notions of modernity. Whereas *heshima* itself has not become obsolete, its mediation within practice is being redefined. With Islam at its core, this renegotiation of *heshima* (and its proper mediation) not only entails questions of social status; it also concerns perceptions of religious identity and Islamic virtue. The current arrival of, for example, mainland Christians is therefore not only viewed as a challenge to the local social structure but also as a threat to an Islamic lifestyle. Exactly for these reasons the current transformation can be discursively constructed as either one of moral decline or opportunity, depending on who is doing the evaluating, what changes are focused upon, and which ones are being erased.

Young people navigate between these different discourses and evaluations as they endeavor to negotiate their own position in an altered society and as they negotiate what it means to be a virtuous person in contemporary society. At the same time, these renegotiations are importantly shaped by other discourses: on political marginalization, economic deterioration and global Islam, making this process significantly different from a mere generational shift. In Chapter 3, I turn to people's own articulation of these

transformations, and to their conception of the relationship between moral shifts and broader networks of political and economic power.

Chapter 3

Change as moral transformation: the interdiscursive construction of breakdown, ambivalence, and opportunity

Ama “hiyo ndio Amu atakao nae”? Or “this is Amu, where one will remain”?

haikwambiwa kwa hayo! waliambiwa ndooni hapa mwangalia utamaduni wa kiAmu . atakao nae . kwa kandu na makofi . hatukuwa na uchafu . sasa ni zijembe wapidja wale . Amu imekuwa hiyau . nyani mwenye kuya tena sasa? Mwenye haya? mwenye dini yake? kuya kuona ... wamesokota nye humtambui ni binadamu . je ilikuwa Amu katika miyaka khamsini? ilikuwa hunuka asmini Amu bwana.

it was never said in those terms! they were told come all here experience the culture of Lamu . remain with that . with the *kanzu* and the *kofias*⁵⁵ . we didn't have dirt . now they are beating the drums . this is what Lamu has become . who comes nowadays? with *haya* (modesty)? with *dini* (religion)? who comes and experiences ... they plait their hair you don't even recognize that it is a human being . was Lamu like this in the fifties? it smelled like jasmine in Lamu.
- Mzee Amr at a public *baraza*.

Mzee Amr's⁵⁶ voice sounded agitated, insulted almost. A silence fell over the group of men sitting on one of Lamu's many seafront *barazas*. The sharp response was directed at a younger man who had quietly uttered the old proverb that forms the title to this introduction. After the afternoon prayers, a group of men had customarily gathered on one of the many stone benches located throughout Lamu Town to sip Arabic coffee and discuss local politics. Today, this particular bench at the seafront was exceptionally

⁵⁵ The traditional Islamic dress style: the white robe (*kanzu*) and the hat (*kofia*) men often wear in Muslim communities.

⁵⁶ pseudonym

crowded, as a former resident of Lamu, who now resides in Mombasa, had joined in.⁵⁷ A mixed group of younger and elder men from different social backgrounds had gathered but it was Mzee Amr, a respected elder from Lamu's upper social classes, who dominated the discussion. Reflecting upon changing life in Lamu, the *mzee*,⁵⁸ who was about 60 at the time, uttered sharp critiques towards the increasing visible presence of mainland immigrants from Kenya's dominant Kikuyu ethnicity. After having patiently listened to the elder's complaints, not only about Kikuyus' presence but also about younger Lamu inhabitants' passive acceptance of their political and economic marginalization as well as their growing appropriation of newcomers' practices, the young man quietly interjected the famous proverb. He thereby appeared to suggest that the uninterrupted arrival of newcomers was merely the continuation of a historical trend that had always shaped life in, and the culture of the island town.

"Hiyo nidyo Amu atakao nae;" it is an expression that WaLamu often use to explain the island's historical appeal to *wageni* – to guests or foreigners. The proverb then underlines Lamu inhabitants' welcoming disposition and their warm hospitality to newcomers. Yet, Mzee Amr's sharp response, cited at the beginning of this introduction, proposes an alternative interpretation of the oft-quoted saying. Permanent residence on the island had never been unconditional, so he claimed. Rather, the integration of *wageni* into Lamu society had been dependent on their adherence to, and acceptance of local norms and values of *haya* (modesty), *dini* (religiosity) and *heshima* (respect). Although the arrival of newcomers worried the elder resident of the Swahili town, what particularly

⁵⁷ The presence of the guest – who, as a former resident of Lamu, was both local and non-local – is significant as it demanded (and allowed for) explanations that otherwise would have seemed superfluous and unnecessary.

⁵⁸ Kiswahili word used to refer to elders in a respectful way.

infuriated him was Kikuyus' and, less explicitly, Westerners' disregard for the behavioral expectations tied to *heshima* (respect).⁵⁹ These immigrants, who had no vested interest in adhering to local norms, defiled Lamu town both in a physical and moral sense.

A silence fell over the group of men as if each reflected upon the significance of the *mzee*'s altered interpretation of the proverb that was supposed to represent WaLamu's incorporating and cosmopolitan orientation. Just as the island's geopolitical position had shifted, so had the moral condition of its inhabitants.

This chapter analyzes the discursive construction of change as moral transformation. The mutations Lamu is currently undergoing are brought about by the archipelago's significantly altered geopolitical position (and thus the economic and political changes that accompany it) and by new introductions of discourses on modernity and development. This chapter examines how Lamu inhabitants experience and conceptualize these broader processes of change in *moral* terms, and how this perceived moral shift impacts evaluations of practices and those whose practices they are. The analysis of the (ideologically motivated) articulations of links between broader networks of political and economic power and perceived changes in moral dispositions provides a framework essential to an understanding of the analysis of daily interaction and practice in subsequent chapters. To comprehend the relation between young people's semiotic practices and the negotiation of new social positions in an altered social context, it is necessary to have a sense of the (evaluative) discourses that circulate within and surrounding these youth's social environment.

⁵⁹ While the majority of mainland immigrants are, in fact, Kikuyus, not all newcomers on the island are from the Kikuyu ethnicity. Mzee Amr's statement then already includes erasure and simplification of the social field.

As Chapter 2 underlined, the moment of rupture focused upon in this dissertation is not unique in Lamu's history. Previous moments of social transformation, such as the abolition of slavery, seriously challenged Lamu's social equilibrium. Yet, Lamu residents appear to experience the current changes as different and distinctive, and discursively construct them as such. The quote with which I opened this chapter already partly illustrated this: Mzee Amr's resentment does not result merely from a loss of political and economic power; it derives from a deeply-felt sense of moral dispossession – a loss of control over who arrives, how the newcomers comport themselves, and how they interact with others. It is not only economic wealth and political power that is lost; newcomers (and youth, as we will see) also lost respect for respect (*heshima*). The social hierarchy based on an honor code, monitored through ideological conceptions of space, social interaction, and bodily practices, is challenged and redefined.

The assessment of this moral transformation is, however, not the same across the board; it is differently evaluated as breakdown, ambivalence, or opportunity depending on the person speaking, the practices focused on, and the broader discourses drawn upon. Contrary to Mzee Amr, for example, some Lamu youth's metapragmatic discourses demonstrate an explicit orientation toward both established notions of respectability and new practices introduced through global cultural flows. Others explicitly view this moral transformation as opening up opportunities for youth to renegotiate their position in society and expand their horizons. By drawing upon different discourses, the selection of which is motivated by broader ideologies, speakers can differently assess, and thus take an evaluative stance toward the transformations Lamu is undergoing.

I use two theoretical frameworks to better understand this metadiscursive construction of moral transformation: interdiscursivity (Irvine 2005; Silverstein 2005; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Wilce 2005) and semiotic processes of differentiation (iconicity, erasure and fractal recursivity) (Irvine and Gal 2000). Formulated differently, I examine the interdiscursive nature of metapragmatic discourses to better understand how the same process of change can be evaluated differently.⁶⁰ And I suggest that the kinds of discourses used or oriented towards in these evaluative statements are motivated or shaped by processes of erasure, iconicity, and fractal recursivity (Irvine and Gal 2000). By bringing these two theoretical approaches together, I aim to demonstrate that metapragmatic statements anchor (Gal 2005) or stabilize the interpretation of practices through interdiscursivity, and thus through the ideologically motivated selection and erasure of discourses and conversations.

In her discussion of interdiscursivity, Judith Irvine (2005) suggests that statements, comments, or discourses are always informed by a larger set of conversations – spoken, written, or electronic – and are thus but part of a series of interactions. Irvine urges us to investigate exactly this “knotty nature” of interdiscursive complexity; she asks how interdiscursive effects are created and what consequences such effects might have (Irvine 2005: 72). In this chapter I take up this challenge. I investigate how the iconicity and erasure of discourses, or their fractal recursive application shapes metapragmatic statements about change and how this enables the representation of a certain kind of social world. I thereby aim to comprehend how interdiscursivity aids speakers in taking

⁶⁰ As outlined in Chapter 1, metapragmatic discourses refer to the metanarratives surrounding interactions, encounters, and language use – discourses that take as their focus the details of semiotic practice (Silverstein 2003).

an evaluative (and moral) stance towards an altered social reality and what implications this has for the evaluation of others.

Interdiscursivity itself can consist of iconic-like relationships. Chunks of discourse are seen as “like” other discourses (Irvine 2005: 76); they resemble other discursive practices (Silverstein 2005), or are shaped by discourses from the past (Wilce 2005). But Irvine rightfully points out that such “like-ness” effects bring with them the question of “unlike-ness;” that is, “whenever discourse chunks are picked out as ‘like,’ there must be a residue of ‘unlike’ chunks that are copresent in the analytical field of view” (Irvine 2005: 76). Interdiscursivity thus consists just as much of what is *not* being said; statements are equally informed by discourses that are conspicuously absent (Irvine 2005: 78). It is exactly this ideologically motivated construction of interdiscursivity that I focus upon in this chapter. Particularly, I analyze how it allows inhabitants of Lamu to articulate change in terms of a shift in the moral system (rather than an economic or political transformation) and how they construct this transformation as different from significant shifts in the past.

Irvine and Gal (2000) long emphasized that people make sense of linguistic differences by mapping languages onto people in a way that is meaningful to them. Similarly, I suggest that observers evaluate changes by mapping practices onto people in a way that is meaningful to them. Inhabitants of Lamu evaluate the current transformations by identifying discourses and practices that are alike, erasing those that do not confirm to their understanding of change, and recursively applying evaluative discourses upon different levels of society. It is through these processes that speakers make sense of the transformations the community is undergoing. It is essential, however,

to point out that, in doing so, speakers take an evaluative stance toward the altered social reality. Not only do they assess practices and those whose practices they are; they also position themselves toward those changes, and thereby re-evaluate self-other relations.

Linguistic anthropology has always approached social relations and identities as forever emergent within interaction, rather than rigid and established. In similar vein, discourse is viewed as a momentary, “concrete expression of the language-culture-society relationship” (Sherzer 1987: 296). It is discourse’s nature as a concrete, historically and socially situated performance that allows it to play a crucial role in the reproduction of the social imaginary (Hill and Mannheim 1992) (see also Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hill and Irvine 1993; Urban 1991). Taking metadiscursive evaluations of social change as its focus, this chapter then also demonstrates how renegotiations of social relations hinge on such ideological presentations of the social world. The analysis of metapragmatic statements and the stance-taking they imply then provide insight into the situated negotiations of social relations and positionality.

The first section of this chapter examines how moral transformation is constructed in relation to other circulating discourses (on, for example, political, economic, and religious dispossession), and how the production of such meta-discourses entails a self-situating toward the broader social and political context. Through the analysis of different reinterpretations of the proverb that historically represented the essence of Lamu’s hospitality, I discuss how an evaluation of moral transformation as breakdown or decline brings with it a reassessment of self-other relations and a reconceptualization of what it means to be “from Lamu.” I argue that through interdiscursivity historical discourses of similarity and difference are reinterpreted, allowing locals to not merely critique change

but also to redefine their belonging to the Kenyan nation.

The second section analyzes metadiscursive evaluations of local youth's changing practices. Here, I identify three different assessments: moral transformation as decline, as ambivalence, and as opportunity. Firstly, I suggest that an evaluation of youth's practices as indicative of moral decay is a fractal recursion of the evaluations of newcomers, discussed in the first section of the chapter. Through an identification of the tropes used to describe youth's altered conduct, I demonstrate that the distinction between *ustaarabu* and *ushenzi* – the display or lack of respectful behavior respectively – is recursively applied to Lamu's youth.

Secondly, I analyze a set of metapragmatic statements that display an evaluation of moral transformation as both decline *and* opportunity. I thereby show that interdiscursivity, or the ways in which discourses can build and draw upon multiple discourses, anchors the evaluation of practices, even if this displays ambivalence. I suggest that youth draw upon discourses that are both globally salient and culturally specific to navigate different expectations and positionalities within a rapidly changing social context. They embrace both local and transnational discourses to respond to economic dispossession, negotiate their subjectivities, and protest their exclusion from the nation-state (Forman 2005; Maira and Soep 2005; Roth-Gordon 2009; Roth-Gordon and Woronov 2009; Sansone 2003).

And thirdly, I discuss how moral transformation can be evaluated as opportunity through an analysis of the interdiscursive creation of the “*dot com*” generation. Through the identification of particular practices as being alike, and by positively linking these to discourses on development and modernity, speakers identify a new category of people

who positively can participate in change. I thus investigate how discourses, through the construction of like-ness, can create register effects (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011).

I start my discussion of the discursive construction of moral transformation by returning to Mzee Amr and his monologue-like speech on the seafront *baraza*.

Moral transformation and the redefinition of self-other relations

Mzee Amr's discursive construction of "the Other"

It was a seemingly innocent remark from Mzee Amr's guest that had provoked the lively discussion on the *baraza* that afternoon. Several years ago, this former Lamu resident had moved to Mombasa in search of employment. He had now come back to the island to visit family and to participate in the yearly *Maulid* celebrations that would take place later that week. One of my informants had joined the *baraza* and had informally questioned its members about what they considered to be the most significant changes to life in Lamu. The conversation had started off with a discussion on young people's altering behaviors due to the arrival of Westerners, satellite TV, and the use of mobile telephones. Observing the *dhow*s arriving in the local harbor while listening to the conversation, the guest from Mombasa quietly proposed another change he had observed: the majority of boat captains nowadays were from the Kikuyu ethnicity. His comment that "*Kamau's* and *Karanja's*"⁶¹ now appeared to control Lamu's job market did not go unnoticed and emotions at the *baraza* quickly ran high.

The remark touched upon an increasingly sensitive issue in the community: the rapidly rising presence of mainland Kenyans on the island, their claim to local

⁶¹ The most common, and stereotypical, last names in the Kikuyu ethnic group.

employment, and their escalating acquisition of land in the Lamu Archipelago. It was Mzee Amr who eagerly responded to the man's remark.

Ah basi ni HAYO ni hayo hiyau ninayo hawana uaminifu, ni miwizi . nimewaambia ni miwizi mijambazi hao . hawa kuingia maboti makachero wa bhangi . hao macaptaini walioko waKikuyu . hoko kokokoko nKikuyu . wamewekwa na serikali . mwengine akafanya kazi ya hoteli mwengine akafanya (mtumishi) . wakaona Amu imetaliwa automatic! (3.0) Bwana me:ngi ya kukueleza bwana tutanena mpaka saa sita za mtana hapa . hakuna KITENDO . hawana khera . hawana khera hawa watu

Ah well it is exactly THAT that is the issue I have . they are not trustworthy (*uaminifu*), they are *miwizi* (thieves) . I am telling you they are *miwizi* (thieves) *majambazi* (crooks) . those who enter the boats are drug dealers those Kikuyu captains . there there there a Kikuyu . the government has placed them there . another one works in a hotel . another one is a house help . and they think Lamu will be governed automatically like that (3.0) There is mu::ch to explain to you . we can talk until noon tomorrow . there is no more *KITENDO* (proper conduct) . there is no *khera* (zeal) those people don't have *khera* (discipline)

The elder *baraza* member's statement had racist-like undertones and evoked uncomfortable laughter among his audience. Although they subsequently agreed with the social issues the elder raised, and thus with the changes this increasingly powerful ethnic group brought about, these younger men appeared to be embarrassed at the explicitness with which Mzee Amr depicted these newcomers' moral qualities.⁶² It is exactly Mzee Amr's frankness about these recent immigrants' moral dispositions, and thus the way in which he conceptualizes the problem of Kikuyu presence, that is remarkable. Mzee Amr does not decry the arrival of these immigrants on explicit grounds of political domination or economic dispossession. Rather, these newcomers are judged (and condemned) on moral terms; they are untrustworthy, insincere, and undisciplined.⁶³

⁶² This laughter itself is indicative of change in Lamu. The *baraza*, as a local forum, is increasingly losing authority, and the *mzee* no longer commands respect despite the fact that he belongs to Lamu's upper social classes. This shift in authority structures and norms of respectability is discussed at length in studies of the *baraza* as a political and social institution (see also Kresse 2007; Kresse 2009).

⁶³ Derek Peterson pointed out that Mzee Amr's comments about Kikuyus must have also been made by Swahili slave-holders in reference to their slaves, who likewise were thought incapable of honoring the values of Swahili culture and civility. This is evident in Emily Ruete's (1989) memoir that is full of

As if challenged by his audience's uncomfortable laughter and the remarks from overhearers on surrounding *barazas*, Mzee Amr continued his monologue-like speech by providing examples of the detrimental effect immigrants' presence has had in Lamu. He did not draw upon discourses of economic deterioration, nor did he provide examples of immoral business practices. Rather he linked newcomers' moral dispositions to the rising occurrence of illness on the island, and thus likened their moral character to their physical condition. He further drew upon discourses of presumed government conspiracy and strengthened his argument by sharply contrasting Lamu's current condition to a nostalgic sketch of life under colonial rule.

anda tundani mpaka spitali . kisa we nenda spitali ndani uzundre .. Mohamadi ni mmoya Kamau Karanja karibu ni **ten** . ugonja wote umetusudia na spitali wanao . akitibiwa huu Ali kitwa kimezikwa tayari na wale wakiingia wacheza wakitoka! spitali hii si kwetu sisi tena .. mimi wakati elfu tisia mia wa khamisa beit sabaa=ni mdogo . spitali hini kila mwezi hutangawanywa dawa mara mbili . nkitembea zitandra hakuna HATA mmoya . na dee cee= British bendera KiUngwaya kipepea hapo akienda akimwuliza daktari . **Yes dee cee no no** hakuna ugonjwa

start in Tundani and walk to the hospital . and then go inside and walk around .. there is one Mohamed and almost **ten** are Kamau and Karanja . all the illness was planned for us and the hospital is theirs . when Ali is treated his head is buried already (i.e. he'll die) and when they go in they dance when they leave! this hospital is no longer ours . in 1957 = when I was young . this hospital distributed medicine twice per month . and when I walked around there was not EVEN one bed occupied . and the dee cee⁶⁴ = a Brit the flag of Zanzibar waved here he went and asked the doctor . **yes dee cee no no** there is no illness.

Mzee Amr invited his audience to observe living conditions in Lamu town from its outer southern end, *Tundani*, until its eastern end, *the King Fahd Hospital*. In doing so, he laid out a geographical area locally understood as the historical outer edges of Lamu territory. It is within those spatial boundaries that Kikuyu presence ought to be noted.⁶⁵

depictions of slaves as children, uncultured, immature who need the guiding hand that she and other aristocrats can offer.

⁶⁴ District Commissioner or DC

⁶⁵ I want to underline the importance of understandings of space and spatial boundaries, as will become evident in discourses analyzed subsequently. It is important to note that non-locals are highly unlikely to know the names of different neighborhoods in Lamu, like Tundani.

The hospital, while empty under colonial rule, was now filled with mainland immigrants and only a couple of locals occupied beds. While the former left the hospital healthy, the latter were bound to die.

This narrative is inherently interdiscursive as it draws upon broader discourses on issues impacting the community, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic as well as the rising occurrence of cholera outbreaks. It is remarkable, however, that Mzee Amr did not draw upon humanitarian aid organizations' discourses on hygiene and sanitation when he reminded his audience of the health issues faced by the Lamu community. Rather, he explicitly and implicitly suggested that Kikuyus were the cause of rising sickness on the island. He hereby did not only judge their moral condition and personal hygiene, but also drew upon popular conspiracy theories that accused the Kenyan government of purposefully undermining the health of indigenous people from Lamu to disempower the town's original population.

Mzee Amr's subsequent opposition of Lamu's current condition to the town's colonial past strengthened these accusations. WaLamu were not only healthy in the past; political leaders were also involved and generous, even if they were colonial administrators. This nostalgic discourse not only situates these issues within time and space (a deteriorated "now" in relation to a glorious "then"), the erasure of other possible interpretations anchors the evaluation of these newcomers' conduct. The interdiscursive nature of the *mzee's* statement precludes an understanding of change in terms of Lamu's altered geopolitical position, nor is illness explained along the lines of a need for better

sanitation; it is the moral state of newcomers and their unwillingness to adhere to local notions of ideal behavior that cause the current decay.⁶⁶

Mzee Amr's speech did not end there; the elder continued his extensive critique of the Kenyan government, providing lengthy examples of local administrators' ineptness, tribalism, and laziness, thereby establishing an iconic-like relation between their outward practices and their inward moral condition, identifying both as a cause for the current disarray. As his lively critique came to an end, Mzee Amr pondered why all Kenyans felt the need to come to Lamu. Lamu did surely belong to Kenya, but did Kenya not have thirty-eight provinces? Did he have an equal right to move to Kisumu? In response to exactly this question the younger *baraza* member uttered the proverb that forms the title to the introduction of the chapter: *Ama "hiyo ndio Amu atakao nae?"* Or "this is Lamu, where one is bound to remain?"

By contributing this age-old proverb, the young audience member enabled Mzee Amr to further strengthen his interdiscursive construction of change as moral decline. The proverb called upon the values on which Lamu's social hierarchy historically was based and thus permitted Mzee Amr to draw upon the tropes used to describe respectful conduct. Rather than the result of geopolitical transformations, it was newcomers' unwillingness to adhere to local norms of behavior that brought about the current condition. This reluctance on the part of new immigrants forced people from Lamu to reassess the meaning of this proverb and the values it represented. WaLamu themselves

⁶⁶ This discourse then meaningfully echoes the arguments of the *Mwambao* movement that strove for autonomy of the Kenyan coastline around Kenyan Independence (see Chapter 2). It is important to note that, around the time of this discussion, *mwambao* sentiments were running high along the Kenyan Coast. Mzee Amr's contribution then has a very political character and does not elaborate on the influences other *wageni*, such as Western tourists, have had on life in Lamu.

now needed to draw stricter boundaries around their own territory and set limits to the incorporation of newcomers – this in itself being a moral change.

Mzee Amr’s metapragmatic statement far from just portrayed the current context; it presented a clear evaluative stance toward change and those who were believed to cause it. He did not merely describe others’ practices and placed himself in relation to them; rather he redefined the “self-other” relationship. This redefinition is evident in the reinterpretation of the iconic proverb. While Lamu was incorporating and welcoming in the past, Mzee Amr now put conditions to this hospitality and thereby drew clear lines around what it means to be an inhabitant of Lamu. The moral transformation then concerned not only newcomers who had no vested interest in social integration, but also involved a transformation of Lamu people themselves.

Mzee Amr’s reinterpretation of the old proverb then appears to contradict prevalent depictions of Swahili towns as “plural societies,”⁶⁷ a portrayal that recognizes the diversity of East Africa’s coastal culture but that underlines the tranquil coexistence of different social sections within it. Historians were often baffled by the fluid and indeterminate identification of coastal populations (Caplan and Topan 2004; Fair 2001; Glassman 2004; LaViolette 2008; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Middleton 1992; Salim 1985). Indeed, in the 1960s A.H.J. Prins (1961) wrote that inhabitants of Lamu rarely thought of themselves as belonging exclusively to any one racial or ethnic category (a person was never Swahili and nothing else), and observed that individuals constantly crossed and straddled boundaries. This notion of ethnic fluidity was partly motivated by Swahili towns’ continuous incorporation of different groups of newcomers – from Oman, Yemen, Shiraz, India, and Portugal. But as I discussed in Chapter 2, this incorporation

⁶⁷ Furnivall in Brennan 2012

within Lamu's social hierarchy has always depended on the adherence to local expectations toward respectful behavior. Only through the embodiment of *heshima* and the display of *ustaarabu* (civilization) could newcomers and former slaves rid themselves from evaluations as *washenzi* (barbarians). This opposition provided a framework through which social relations were constructed and evaluated.

Mzee Amr's discourse, presenting a rather polarized conception of clearly delineated identities, then exhibits a continuation, a reinterpretation, of these ideological discourses on similarity and difference. By reinterpreting the iconic proverb, he merely reminded his audience of the grounds on which "others" could be incorporated within Lamu society. While thus drawing upon the historical opposition between *ustaarabu* and *ushenzi*, the depiction of these "others" is importantly informed by discourses on ethnicity and the ideological link between territory, culture, and language.⁶⁸ Mzee Amr not only focused on one particular ethnic group (the Kikuyu) whom he opposed to WaLamu, but meaningfully tied this opposition to claims to territory, imposition of culture, and (later) language differences.⁶⁹ By explicitly linking his critique of Lamu's current condition to the national context and the ethnic categories recognized by the Kenyan state, Mzee Amr's metapragmatic statement took on an ethnic character and clearly suggested a reevaluation of what it means to be "WaLamu" in a Kenyan context.

The interdiscursive nature of his discourse is then evident in the similarities between his depiction of Kikuyus, the historical descriptions of *washenzi*, and the political discourses that argued for coastal autonomy around Kenyan independence. And while he drew upon broader discourses of change when discussing WaLamu's health

⁶⁸ Again, this meaningfully echoes the arguments of the *Mwambao* movement.

⁶⁹ Throughout his commentary, Mzee Amr spoke KiAmu, only briefly shifting to English when he recounted the interactions with British colonial officials.

condition, he erased alternative explanations for these illnesses such as sanitation problems due to overpopulation and the lack of medical equipment. The discourse he drew upon was one of government conspiracy that strengthened his negative evaluation of immigrants' moral condition. The nostalgic discourse then only served to reinforce his overall argument: WaLamu are not the cause of this change, disrespectful newcomers are. According to the *mzee*, the current moral disarray is then not a consequence of broader processes of globalization, but ensues from the increasing imposition of uncultured mainlanders, *washenzi*, who ignore Lamu residents' moral standards. The arrival of newcomers is not rejected; it is their lack of moral character, of *heshima*, that forms the biggest objection against these new *wageni*. Through interdiscursivity and the ideologically motivated selection of discourses to draw upon, Mzee Amr constructed a view of change as a shift in a moral system: a sense of moral dispossession that feeds moral decay.⁷⁰

Placing Mzee Amr's grievances in the broader sociopolitical context

While Mzee Amr's nostalgic depiction of the Lamu hospital can be brushed off as incorrect and exaggerated, newcomers' indifference to local norms of proper conduct is indeed a reality and thus shapes local understandings of social differences that are increasingly phrased in ethnic and racial terms (drawing upon available discourses within the national context, through which people from Lamu themselves are equally defined).

⁷⁰ This meta-discursive evaluation of current immigration confirms my argument in Chapter 2 about the distinct nature of this immigration pattern. While immigration (and cultural conflict) are by no means new to Lamu, Kikuyus have no need to integrate themselves within Lamu's social hierarchy. Their explicit adherence to Christianity, their disregard for dresscodes, greeting styles, interaction between genders etc. reflects a different moral code; they demonstrate respectability according to different criteria that are not recognized within the local context. It is this explicit disregard of local moral values of *honor* that differs from the past.

While ideologically constructed as a moral transformation, sociopolitical shifts on the national and international level can explain this change in local power structures.

Despite its persistence in local ideological understandings of social status and limits to interaction, Lamu's hierarchical social structure (founded on communal attributions of *heshima*) became increasingly hard to uphold under colonialism and particularly within an independent Kenya. When Lamu became integrated into the Kenyan nation, the island not only lost the semi-independent status it held under British Colonialism, its population became increasingly marginalized in political terms and the community's economic vein was cut off through a ban on mangrove trade. The subsequent arrival of government officials (from the Kikuyu ethnicity) and the artificial migration of an enclave of Kikuyu laborers to Lamu District further undermined the power of local authorities. As I discuss at length in Chapter 2, for Kikuyus (and for other immigrants for that matter) there is no more need for, and benefit in compliance to WaLamu's moral code of respectability and honor.

This lack of vested interest in adhering to local norms is evident in newcomers' linguistic and material practices. Not only do immigrants (both Kenyan and tourists) no longer respect local understandings of modesty in dress and comportment, they also disregard norms of social interaction and are increasingly visibly present within the town through the erection of churches, bars and hotels as well as altered residence patterns. Within the historically high-class *Mkomani* neighborhood one now finds houses owned or rented by both Kikuyus and Westerners, whereas previously high-class families moved to cheaper neighborhoods on the outskirts of town. Social and spatial boundaries between *wenyeji* (indigenous people) and *wageni* (guests) are increasingly crossed, making the

normative imposition of *heshima* on Lamu's younger generation increasingly difficult. As physical and normative boundaries become porous, the segregations' normative functions are challenged and the grounds on which *heshima* can be attributed become unclear. Individuals are then left with few, ambiguous indexes of others' respectability and trustworthiness. It is this challenge to, and negotiation of values that historically structured life in Lamu and determined terms of incorporation that creates a sense of moral breakdown, clearly voiced in meta-discourses on social change.

Not only nostalgic elders voiced these perceptions of sociopolitical marginalization within the Kenyan nation and the down spiraling effect of newly arrived social groups on locals' moral condition. On the contrary, these sentiments circulate widely within the local context and increasingly impact understandings of similarity and difference.

Redefining proverbs: the circulation and reinterpretation of narratives in the understanding self-other relations

My friieeend! Hutosha! Wamezie kuya, mui umeyawa. Kumekua kuteleeee, mpaka sisi tumekua ni wageni. Sasa ni "HINI NDIO AMU FANYENI MWENDEZENU"

My friend! Enough already! They already came and the town has been filled. There are too many, up to the point where we ourselves have become the *wageni* (guests). Now it is "THIS IS AMU NOW HURRY UP AND GO HOME"

The above response to an informant's *Facebook* status struck me. It was 2009, right before Lamu's annual Cultural Festival and my informant had posted the proverb, *Hiyo ndio Amu atakao nae*, to mark the start of the yearly celebrations. The festival had become increasingly popular over its 8-year existence and attracted many national and international visitors. Over the years, the proverb had been printed on banners, flyers, and T-shirts as an iconic index of the wide range of activities representing Lamu's rich

cultural tradition that would be performed for the many international guests attending the festival (Fig. 26). A major source of income for many, the Cultural Festival had become an economic highlight for the islanders (next to the yearly *maulid* celebrations).



Figure 26. Banner *Hiyo ndio Amu*

The explicit, capitalized reformulation of the famous proverb stood out to me, not because of its temporal link to the annual Cultural Festival, but because of who expressed it and where the statement was made. Not an elder, but a young man of about 23 responded to my informant's *Facebook* status, where it would be read and evaluated by a broad audience – much broader than Mzee Amr's interlocutors and overhearers at the seafront *baraza*. Whereas Mzee Amr had merely stipulated (and delimited) the conditions of the proverb's applicability, the young man above straightforwardly rejects its continued relevance. While he explicitly discards Lamu's iconic values of hospitality and inclusion, he simultaneously lays claim to an authentic Amu identity through his exaggerated use of the KiAmu dialect. Words such as *wamezie*, *mui* and *hini* as well as phonetic features like /y/ (*umeyawa*) clearly identify the responder as *MwAmu*, as belonging to the indigenous inhabitants of Lamu Town.⁷¹ The knowledge that few young people use KiAmu to this extent in daily life makes this statement all the more

⁷¹ See Appendix A, *Note on Kiswahili and dialectal variation*. This use of the dialect also suggests an important locational aspect: the physical location of being in Lamu

conspicuous. This young man, rather than rejecting a “traditional” Amu identity, then appears to challenge what it *means* to be *MwAmu* in contemporary Kenya. Not WaLamu’s cultural or linguistic practices, but their values of hospitality ought to be reevaluated. Rather than open and welcoming, it is time for Lamu inhabitants to put limits to their generosity.

This young man’s rejection of an integrative, open attitude appears to contradict popular images of youth as globally oriented, eagerly adhering to, and incorporating global and transnational practices.⁷² It particularly appears to contradict depictions of Lamu youth as actively engaging with Western tourists. However, the young man responding to my informant’s *Facebook* status is far from exclusively locally oriented. His access to, and active use of the social network site itself demonstrates as much. As I will argue in Chapter 6, the use of *Facebook* is significant exactly because it suggests a global orientation and the need to communicate with friends in far-away places. What is more, making a statement on *Facebook* is exactly an act of, what I later describe as “doing being modern.” This young man is then not reacting against discourses of development or modernity; these discourses are actually conspicuously absent (as they were in Mzee Amr’s statements). Rather, the reformulated proverb responds to a particular kind of change and a particular *kind of presence* on the island.

I elaborate on these different reinterpretations of this proverb because they underline the interdiscursive nature of discourses on change and the anchoring of evaluations this entails. These evaluative discourses do not stand on their own; they inform each other and draw upon similar translocal discourses while erasing others. They

⁷² See below (section 2) for a discussion of ambivalence in discourses, and see Chapters 5, 6, 7 for a discussion of ambivalence in linguistic and material practices.

thereby do not only illustrate the discursive construction of moral transformation, but also signal altering conceptions of self-other relations in the postcolonial context. This is particularly evident in the example I discuss next.

I encountered the following exchange, once again, on *Facebook* as I was writing this chapter. While quite lengthy already, the responses below are merely a selection of what became a long list of reactions to a middle-aged lady's status update: *Hiyo ndio Amu atakao nae*. The Lamu-born woman, now living in the UK, wanted to express her longing for her hometown.⁷³ The responses to her *Facebook* status all came from men currently living in Lamu, between the ages of 22 and 50.⁷⁴

Razi	Siku hizi watu husema “hii ndio amu ina wenyewe.” Msemo umepitwa na wakati
Ihab	Iwapi Amu ya zamani, kunukia asimini na zilua pia? Sasa imekuwa taabani.
Gallal	Sahi si amu wala lamu ni ramu
Ihab	Zamani tukizungusha ngombe, kisha kutindwa kwa bwana hassani si supu kwa bofulo. Tukiambiwa musende buntwa ya ngombe kuna ngoloko na musipita maziarani ntana kuna wazuka. Sasa wazuka hukimbia watu maziarani na kwa bwana hassani hupitwa ntana na usiku. Buntwa ya ngombe kaupee kwa mtanga. Kumeenea majumba wiyoni imeyaa watu.
Saif	majini na mizuka ni katika culture ya Amu, lakini hawako tena! Iwapi Amu yetu? Hata KiAmu hupotea watu hunena kimombasa.
Nama	Hakuyulikani mwaka ungiapo wala utokapo ni zikuyu kwa wameru hakutambu wani
Razi	kwa lugha fasaha ya kiamu mambo yafika hadi hiyo hunenwa, “kumekuwa mavi kwa mikoyo.”
Razi	These days people say “this is Amu, it has its own people.” The proverb has been passed by time.
Ihab	Where is the Amu from before that smelled like jasmine and sweets? Now it is in dire straits
Gallal	Now it is not Amu or Lamu but Ramu
Ihab	Before when we took the cow around, slaughtered it at Bwana Hassan and had soup with bread. When we were told not to pass by the bridge/port of cows because there are spirits and do not pass by the graveyards at noon because there are ghosts. Now ghosts run from people at the graveyard and near bwana Hassan, people pass day and night. The bridge of cows is now white of sand and at Wiyoni houses are rising, it is filled with people.

⁷³ There is something to say about this woman's supposed longing for a place that “no longer exists.” At least, that is what the responses appear to suggest. As with Mzee Amr, the reformulation forms a response to people who are no longer part of the local context.

⁷⁴ All names are pseudonyms.

Saif	Ghosts and spirits are part of Amu culture , but they are no longer here! Where is our Amu? Even KiAmu is getting lost, people speak kiMombasa.
Nama	It is no longer known when the year comes in and when it leaves, it is Kikuyus and Merus, it's not being recognized
Razi	In the correct kiAmu dialect, when things reach this state, it is said: it has become dung and urine.

The responses start with a third reformulation of the proverb that has been the focus of this chapter thus far: “*Hiyo ndio Amu, ina wenyewe.*” Or, “Lamu has its own people.”⁷⁵ In this third reformulation, there is no questioning of norms of hospitality and integration, only a very explicit claim to ownership. While not stated explicitly, this statement is informed by broader discourses on dispossession that equally shaped the previously analyzed reinterpretations. The subsequent responses suggest how to understand this sense of dispossession: not in economic or political terms, but in terms of a deeply felt cultural and moral loss.

Razi explicitly states what remained implicit with Mzee Amr and the young man discussed above: the proverb is outdated, or literally “passed by time.” Whereas it might have been central to WaLamu’s sense of self in the past, it now no longer applies. The very use of the expression “*imepitwa na wakati*” is significant, particularly when considered in relation to the responses that follow it. Frequently used in discourses on development and modernity (and thus interdiscursive in its own right), this expression generally refers to the obsolescence of traditional or cultural practices that are perceived to stand in the way of progress. Saleh (2004), for example, suggests that young Zanzibaris use this phrase to justify an altered attitude toward their community and the values it upholds. In the case discussed here, it is not Lamu’s cultural practices that are

⁷⁵ For the transcription, I retained the structure as it appeared on Facebook. As this is a written text (and thus has no overlaps or interruptions), I did not separate it into separate columns as I do with subsequent transcriptions of verbal interactions. The translation is mine.

considered outdated. Rather its inhabitants' integrative, welcoming nature no longer fits the current (national) context.

Different nostalgic discourses follow upon Razi's initial response; reactions that provide detailed descriptions of cultural traditions that are no longer practiced within Lamu today. Whereas these traditions are depicted as *kupitwa na wakati* in discourses on modernity and development, respondents now present them as iconic of a deeply felt sense of loss. It was not WaLamu's adherence to development and modernity that ousted these traditions, the imposition of newcomers did.⁷⁶ While these responses are thus importantly informed by other discourses – other reinterpretations of the proverb, nostalgic discourses, and discourses on dispossession, modernity, and development – the ideologically motivated selection of which discourses to incorporate and which ones to erase anchors the evaluation of change in Lamu. What is more, the responses themselves delimit a redefined understanding of a Lamu identity: the depiction of long-forgotten traditions and the use of the Amu dialect when describing them makes these responses almost unintelligible to the outsiders or *wageni* reading this *Facebook* status, hereby excluding them from the conversation.

Ihab introduces the first nostalgic discourse in response to Razi's posting of the redefined proverb. His question "*iwapi Amu yetu?*" or "where has our Amu gone?" immediately introduces a sense of dispossession. What is lost is not the territory of Lamu itself, but the cultural traditions, and the notions of purity and honor. The fading of the smell of jasmine – a sensory depiction tied to female sensuality and purity that was equally referred to by Mzee Amr – functions as an iconic index of this loss. (This

⁷⁶ It is important to point out that these discussions do not focus on the arrival of Kikuyus in particular, but suggest an overall disregard of local norms and values by newcomers – mainland immigrants and tourists alike.

contrasts sharply with Razi's final depiction of Lamu's current condition as one of "dung and urine," not only referring to the actual dirtiness of the town but also indexing the loss of moral purity).

Ihab further elaborates on this trope of bereavement through a nostalgic discourse depicting local traditions that were previously viewed as indices of the "backwardness" or "outdated nature" of the Lamu community.⁷⁷ He does not refer to Lamu's rich maritime history, the wealth of its residents nor to the town's position as a center of Islamic scholarship. Rather he paints a picture of forgotten traditional practices tied to particular spatial locations within Lamu Town. Outsiders would not only fail to understand the old KiAmu dialect he uses, the full significance of the description would escape them due to their inability to identify the places Ihab refers to. It is exactly newcomers' ignorance of the value and meaning of spaces that enables them to defile it in the way he subsequently describes, building houses and chasing ghosts at noon.

Ihab speaks to WaLamu's shared memory both in historical and spatial terms. Through the identification of geographical points within the town and by using the local dialect he explicates the kind of ownership of Lamu that was claimed in Razi's reformulation of the proverb. Embedded in space are stories, local histories, and knowledge that are increasingly getting lost. Yet the awareness of which locations are meaningful remains significant exactly because it attributes authority to the interlocutors and clearly demarcates the boundary between "us" and "them." Discourses on the outdated nature of the traditional practices, or on the need for new sanitation systems in Lamu are conspicuously absent. The nostalgic discourse then not only paints a selective image of the past, it also situates WaLamu within space and time, reclaiming ownership

⁷⁷ El Zein's (1974) *Sacred Meadows* describes these practices at length.

over spatial locations through the knowledge and understanding of cultural values and practices.

While the younger participants to this discussion are highly unlikely to have ever experienced the cultural practices described, they actively participate in the construction of this shared sense of loss. Saif, for example, is only 22 years old yet he confirms Ihab's recounting of the days when spirits formed part of life in Lamu. He even reiterates Ihab's initial question: *Iwapi Amu yetu?* Where has *our* Amu gone? The use of the inclusive possessive pronoun then suggests a shared historical experience. There is a similar participation in the discursive construction of loss in Gallal's contribution to the discussion. Gallal suggests that the island is no longer called *Amu*, the historical name of the island used by most of its original inhabitants. Nor is it called *Lamu*, the name of the island used under colonial rule and its official name since Kenyan independence. Nowadays, Gallal proposes, the name of the island ought to be *Ramu*. The phonetic alteration of the letter /l/ to the letter /r/ in Ramu hints at Kikuyu's frequent inability to correctly pronounce the /l/ (which they pronounce as /r/). This jocular renaming of Lamu insinuates that the ethnic group's presence has reached a level where one might as well alter the name of the town. Gallal's emphasis on the shift from *Amu* to *Lamu* to *Ramu*, however, also lays out an important historical trajectory, whereby the hospitality of WaLamu led to their own downfall: from the historically prosperous *Amu*, to the colonially ruled *Lamu*, to the mainland-dominated *Ramu*.

Through the nostalgic recounting of historical events these occurrences are reinscribed as part of the shared, personal experiences of a particular set of people – indigenous WaLamu. In this discursive transformation of “historical memories” to

remembered memories these responses then interestingly resemble the function of ethnonationalist historical narratives as discussed by Glassman (2011: 20-22). The interdiscursive nature of these meta-discourses, and the ideologies that shaped them, not only permit the evaluation of change in terms of moral transformation; it also allows for a redefinition of self-other relations. This reconceptualization of social identities and the values that underlie them are inherently interdiscursive, neither wholly inherited nor wholly invented. The altered way of thinking about a new collective self (superseding local social divisions) is being refashioned in part from old discursive materials, in part from translocal discourses, in part from newly imagined narratives (Glassman 2011: 22). In this process, other voices and discourses are strategically erased.

The discussions on Lamu's seafront *baraza* and on *Facebook* are strikingly similar, despite the very different spatiotemporal locations and participatory frameworks of the interactions. Their interdiscursive nature is evident: familiarity with the original proverb and its local meaning is a necessity to fully understand the different reinterpretations' significance. The narratives themselves are importantly shaped by local and translocal discourses on dispossession, citizenship rights, and the postcolonial state as well as by the erasure of discourses on development and modernity, and the voices of the social groups whose presence the interlocutors are reacting against.

While these discourses might endeavor to (re)produce a particular social imaginary, this redefined image of a new social world is motivated by a sense of moral transformation and breakdown. Susan Gal remarks that "the strongest form of power may well be the ability to define social reality, to impose visions of the world" (Gal 1995:

178). The above-discussed discourses highlight how subjects endeavor to discursively reconstruct a social imaginary that fits the altered social context, re-assigning moral authority to themselves. Their *lived* social reality, however, confronts them with the consequences of a loss of moral authority; thus the overall discursive construction of change as a shift in a moral system. As I will subsequently discuss, within this lived social reality of daily interaction youth readily become “a metaphor for perceived social change and its projected consequences” (Austin and Willard 1998: 1).

In the second section of this chapter, I demonstrate that the tropes used to define the distinction between “*waungwana*” and “*wageni*,” (the self-other relationship in both historical and contemporary contexts) are recursively re-applied to youth who participate in change. I also demonstrate, however, that this is but one of several different ideological discourses on change that circulate within youth’s social environment. By doing so, I provide the linguistic and semiotic vocabulary with which youth’s behavior is evaluated and assessed in contemporary Lamu, and I illustrate the discursive regimes within which youth negotiate altered social positions and relations (see Chapters 5, 6, 7).

Moral transformation in daily interaction: Interdiscursive evaluations of youth’s participation in change

Tukisema ukweli utwana wa wakati hunu wa kwetu... Twaweza kusema kwamba uko utwana.

To say the truth, slavery in our time... We can say that slavery exists.

- Omari

I must have looked quite perplexed because Omari laughed loudly when he noticed the expression on my face following his statement above. We were sitting in one of Lamu’s seafront cafes, sipping a cold, fresh juice while enjoying the view of the lagoon. It was late afternoon and the seafront was rather busy. Porters were unloading shipments that

had arrived with the latest bus coming from Mombasa (including towering red crates of Coca Cola). Tourists were wandering around, enjoying the view of the sunset while critically inspecting the different cafes for an appealing evening meal. Two young men, sitting on one of the old canons placed along the seashore, called out to a couple of young Western women who were gallivanting by, dressed in tank tops and short skirts. Encouraged by the girls' smiles, the guys quickly jumped up and approached their potential customers, eventually joining them in the restaurant next-door. Two veiled young girls wandered by, one of them clicking disapprovingly as she observed the young men flirt with the *wazungus* (or Westerners).⁷⁸ The, to us unintelligible, response from the young men caused the veiled girls to chuckle audibly as they continued their walk along the seafront, tightly pulling their black *abayas* to their slender bodies.

Omari smiled as he observed the exchange unfold, and seemed to reflect upon how to clarify his foregoing statement. Omari was one of my few diligent research assistants. He had conducted many interviews with both peers and elders, and started to really grasp the focus of my research. Later, toward the end of my stay in Lamu, he explained that my work had sparked his interest in Lamu culture and the causes underlying its rapid change. Omari was a young man of 27, born and raised in Lamu but from Bajuni background. Although he had finished secondary education, he now worked as a "tour guide;" an unstable job that consists of taking tourists to hotels and striking up the commission.⁷⁹ If things went well, tourists would later call upon these *guides* to show them around town, identify good restaurants and "protect" them from *beach boys*. With

⁷⁸ Clicking sound locally used to express disagreement with, or rejection of a statement or observed practice.

⁷⁹ Not to confuse with the "beach boys," who take tourists on boat trips through the archipelago. The young men themselves insist on this distinction and the two groups of youth do not always get along very well.

tourist attraction being on the decline, Omari had gladly taken on the position of research assistant and had been doing a remarkable job.

That afternoon, he returned my recorder after having conducted a set of interviews, and I invited him to sit down and have a drink as we discussed his work. Rather than going over the different recordings, our conversation quickly diverted. I often used these times to ask clarifying questions about events I had observed, or interactions I had engaged in. As I watched the *mahamali* (porters) unload boats, carrying heavy bags of sand and cement up the street, I carefully asked whether Lamu youth were still aware of the town's slave history, and whether it continued to impact social relations. Much to my surprise Omari had been quick to respond.⁸⁰ His answer was, however, not quite what I had expected.

Following his reflective pause, Omari pointed to the young girls walking along the seafront, as if their appearance explained the statement that slavery still existed within Lamu. Noticing my continued confusion, he elaborated:

- O kuna msemu ambao kwamba husema *muata mila ni mtumwa...muata mila ni?*
S ni mtumwa
O ni mtumwa . sawa siyo? kwa hivyo huko upande wa kwetu naweza kusema
utumwa pia uko . kwa sababu gani? kwa sababu watu wingi wameata mila yao .
kama mfano . nguo ambazo kwamba mabinti zetu wanazovaa . siyo nguo ambazo
kwamba wakati wa nyuma walikuwa wazee = mabanati wa wazee wetu
walikuwa wakivaa . saa hii wamekuwa wasichana wetu wameata mila yao ya
kuvaa nguo vizuri kama inavyotakikana . jambo kama hili waweza kusema mtu
ni mtumwa kwa sababu ameata mila yake . umeona siyo?
- O there is a proverb that says *the one who leaves his mila (traditions) is a slave...*
The one who leaves his *mila* (traditions) is?
S is a slave
O is a slave . ok no? thus here with us I can say that slavery is also here . why?
because many people have left their *mila* (traditions) . for example . the clothes
our sisters wear . these are not the clothes that our elders used to wear . now our
girls have left their tradition of wearing clothes properly in the way that is

⁸⁰ People, especially elders, generally conspicuously avoided any question related to slavery.

expected/desired . in a case like that you can say that the person is a slave because she has left her *mila* (traditions) . you understand no?

It was the first time I encountered this proverb in the context of a discussion on change in Lamu, but the saying would continue to pop up in interviews that addressed this topic. I initially struggled to understand the supposed self-explanatory association between altered conduct and Lamu's history of slavery. It was not until I started writing this chapter that I began to fully comprehend the ideologies underlying this striking comparison.

Like the proverb I discussed previously, this saying was not new. One of my elder informants explained that it had been used since “the olden days,” and implies that, if you mix with others, you are bound to adhere to their cultural practices. Viewed in light of the overview of Lamu's history in Chapter 2, I suggest that the proverb derives from the historical context in which slaves adhered to the practices of the upper-classes in order to integrate themselves within Lamu society. The appropriation of others' practices then suggests an acknowledgement of the desirability of their social and/or economic position. The proverbial likening of youth to slaves then suggests that young people are increasingly subjected to the desire to adhere to, and appropriate others' practices. By doing so, they seemingly acknowledge these non-locals' (moral) superiority.

The second section of this chapter continues with the examination of the discursive construction of change as moral transformation but focuses on the metadiscursive evaluations of young Lamu inhabitants' behavior. I demonstrate that, while still focused on a moral shift rather than on political or economic processes, evaluative stances differently depict youth's condition as one of moral decline,

ambivalence or opportunity, depending on which discourses are drawn upon, and which ones are erased.⁸¹

“Mwata mila ni mtumwa.” The fractal recursion of change as moral decline

Within Lamu’s history, slaves (*watumwa* or *watwana*) were considered *washenzi* (barbarians or disbelievers) that were clearly distinct from the Lamu *waungwana*, an opposition in material and moral terms that supposedly distinguished coastal inhabitants from their inland neighbors (see also Glassman 2011: 34). In contemporary Lamu, the lasting use of tropes that describe newly arrived immigrants from Kenya’s mainland as *washenzi* continues to exclude them almost automatically from any moral community built on the values of *uungwana* and *ustaarabu* (Glassman 2011: 91).

In the first section of this chapter, I suggested that Mzee Amr’s depiction of Kikuyus as lacking *heshima* and as failing to display respectful conduct draws upon this historical distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi*. What has changed in contemporary Lamu, according to the *mzee*, is mainlanders’ reluctance to adhere to, or respect local norms of proper behavior. Mzee Amr’s reliance on these historical discourses on morality and respectability permitted him to depict current changes within Lamu as a moral shift, rather than the mere effects of broader political and economic

⁸¹ Later on in this chapter, and in subsequent chapters, I refer to the different public forums in which efforts are made to “redirect” young WaLamu’s behavior – orient, chastise, and instruct them. It is, however, worth underlining that these efforts were not just made by conservative elders: young people participated in community meetings on e.g. drug abuse or participated in awareness raising programs. Other public projects include religious *khubas*, magazines published by a local mosque, and increasingly popular Islamic radio stations such as *Radio Rahma* or *Radio Salaam*. While I was in Lamu, there was one explicit effort to physically enforce “proper” conduct. An organization similar to Saudi Arabia’s religious police was set up following a community meeting. This “community watch” consisted of young men, who were provided uniforms, and who patrolled neighborhoods after *maghrib* prayer. Upon noticing improper conduct (e.g. smoking of weed) or upon seeing a young, unsupervised woman walking down the street, these young men had the local authority to reprimand them. This organization was dissolved after people complained about physical force being used and unjust targeting of young women rather than young men.

transformations. It is in relation to this moral shift that the proverbial depiction of young people as slaves becomes significant. The use of tropes of slavery and respectability similarly enables the depiction of Lamu youth's altering practices as moral decay; it illustrates the fractal recursive application of the historical and contemporary opposition between *waungwana* and *washenzi*, and WaLamu and mainland Kenyans respectively in the metadiscursive creation of moral transformation.

Elders hardly ever explicitly called young people *washenzi* or *watumwa*.⁸² The ways in which they described young WaLamu's conduct, however, shows clear parallels to the depictions of mainland immigrants I discussed previously. Through the use of the same vocabulary – references to a lack of *heshima*, *adabu*, *haya* or *dini* – interviewees implicitly likened the behavior of contemporary youth to the disrespectful conduct of immigrants (and slaves when viewed in historical context). They hereby appear to interdiscursively recreate the opposition between *waungwana* and *washenzi*, or WaLamu and mainland Kenyans.

I encountered such discourses most frequently among Lamu's elder population – a group of Lamu residents with an age of 55 and older, from different social background.⁸³ Once they had agreed to be interviewed, discussions with Lamu's elders, conducted by myself and by my research assistants, went remarkably smoothly.⁸⁴ The

⁸² I most frequently encountered the use of the proverb among young people themselves.

⁸³ I want to underline that these meta-pragmatic statements were not exclusively found among Lamu's elder population, and I want to refrain from formulating this as a generational distinction. The nostalgic discourses I discuss here were, of course, most frequently encountered among the elder residents of Lamu. In what follows I will complicate this discussion by providing examples in which youth adhere to both a depiction of change as moral decay and as opportunity. In addition, I end this chapter by providing examples of elders who do depict change in Lamu as introducing new opportunities to the island's younger generation.

⁸⁴ As I mentioned in the introduction, plenty of locals were suspicious and reluctant to be interviewed. Those who were willing to answer questions talked openly once they understood what the focus of the research was.

opening question – whether life in Lamu nowadays (*hivi sasa*) differed from the life they knew before (*hapo zamani*) – generally opened up the door for a long, narrative response filled with nostalgic reflections upon the past. My focus here is not on these nostalgic discourses per se. Rather I look at how such depictions of the past are used as examples of behavior that contrasts sharply with contemporary youth’s conduct. More importantly, I want to draw attention to the vocabulary with which these behaviors are described.

Although we interviewed people from a range of different social backgrounds, elders’ responses to our initial question were surprisingly similar. Generally, interviewees identified a lack of *heshima* – an embodied understanding of respect – as the distinguishing difference between their childhood and the conduct of young people from Lamu. Such preoccupation with young people’s lack of respect in contexts of rapid change has been analyzed at length in different studies (in East Africa, see e.g. Saleh 2004; Turner 2009), including in linguistic anthropology (most specific Hill 1998). I, however, consider this emphasis on respect to be central to this chapter’s focus on the discursive construction of moral transformation.

Interviewees’ descriptions of their encounters with changing conduct in daily interactions – in greeting styles, language use, ways of dressing, and movement – always were related to, and phrased in terms of the all-encompassing notion of *heshima* and its ideological mediation in practice. While I have a range of data that illustrates this, I limit my discussion of such depictions to the comparison of two examples.

The first extract is derived from an interview with Haifa,⁸⁵ a lady of 57 years old who lived in the *Langoni* area of town. While she was originally from Siyu, Haifa had moved to Lamu as a little girl and had lived in the town ever since. After our initial

⁸⁵ pseudonym

encounter for the purpose of an informal interview, I visited Haifa's small house quite regularly and grew accustomed to the cramped room that served as living room, kitchen, and guest bedroom at the same time. The afternoon of our first meeting, I timidly found myself a seat on the traditional woven bed and leaned against the wall as I watched Haifa pour us some steaming hot *chai*. Serving me the *bhajia* and *samosa* that her grandson had unexpectedly dropped off, she eagerly waited for me to finish my obligatory IRB explanation for oral consent. I barely finished asking my initial question – whether life in Lamu had changed a lot since her childhood – when Haifa blurted out: “*Hapo zamani na sasa ntafauti!* Before and now is different!” I smiled at the eagerness with which she responded, immediately felt much more at ease, and asked her why she thought so; a question that resulted in a two-hour conversation. In our subsequent encounters, Haifa would use every opportunity to further elaborate on the topic of my research. Young girls passing by, the shouting of young men in the alley outside her door, or even the material of a cloth; these all evoked reflections upon the altered social context. Her initial response to my request for elaboration in our first interaction was, however, the following:

zamani kulikuwa na heshima .. mila imepunguwa . mila ya zamani na sasa ntafauti . tafauti yake ni matamshi ya kuzungumza . wakizungumza wazungumza maneno machafu . watu wa zamani walikuwa wakizungumza maneno ya heshima lakini sasa watu wazungumza maneno machafu

before there was *heshima* (respect) .. *mila* (traditions) have decreased . the *mila* (traditions) from before and now are different . the difference is the way of speaking . when they talk they speak dirty/disrespectful words . people from before they used to speak *ya heshima* (respectfully) but now people speak dirty words

Although Haifa subsequently elaborated at length on particular practices and encounters (as she did in our future meetings), she phrased her initial conceptualization of

change in terms of (a lack of) *heshima*, and the opposition of purity and impurity this implies.

Now compare this to the response of one of Lamu's upper-class women. Afrah⁸⁶ was a rather affluent lady of about 55 years old who lived on the Mkomani side of town. As we sipped hot *chai* and enjoyed the cool breeze from the ceiling fan while sitting on comfortable couches, Afrah listened attentively to the explanation of my research interests. As Haifa, she appeared eager to express her opinion on this topic and her initial proclamation echoed Haifa's: "*Watu wa sasa hawana heshima!*" or "People nowadays have no respect!" After a short, contemplative pause she elaborated:

hishma hawana tena = vijana walikuwa na adabu zake vijana walikuwa hawatusi mtu mzima . lakini sasa hakuna dasturi . sasa mtoto aweza kumtusi mtu mzima . ukizungumza naye kwako akakupotoleya . kwa hivo dasturi ya zamani na sasa ntafauti.

they no longer have *heshima* (respect) = youth used to have *adabu* (good manners) youth did not scold an older person . but now there is no more *desturi* (tradition) . now a child can scold an older person . when you speak with him he can confuse you . therefore *desturi* (tradition) from before and now are different.

My interview with Afrah went on for over an hour and would have continued, if the time for *maghrib* prayer hadn't come in. Our discussion covered lengthy examples of how life in Lamu had changed, mostly covering different kinds of behaviors that lacked a display of respect. Afrah appeared to be particularly fixated upon young women's altered conduct.

Haifa and Afrah's responses are almost identical, and are iconic of the majority of initial reactions I received to the opening question of interviews. Both women discursively oppose a nostalgic *hapo zamani* (past) to a distorted *hivi sasa* (now), the former referring to a society based on honor, respect, and purity, whereas the latter

⁸⁶ pseudonym

indexes a social context typified by disrespect, ill-manners, and impurity. These elder inhabitants then primarily experience current changes in Lamu as an absolving of *heshima* – an umbrella term that represents a set of practices that index an individual’s moral disposition. The argument that *vijana hawana tena heshima* then refers to a set of semiotic practices (both verbal and nonverbal) that represents a disregard for local norms and values, comprised under notions as *mila* (tradition, custom), *desturi* (tradition), and *adabu* (proper conduct). The women’s primary concern is not the rise in drug abuse, nor is it the staggering numbers of HIV/AIDS infections in the area; it is not the lack of employment, or their grandchildren’s failing school grades. Their direct encounter with social (and moral) change consists of shifted norms of interaction, considered indexical of, and essential to a person’s honor, trustworthiness, and social status. It is experienced, and discursively represented as a moral decline.

The vocabulary Haifa and Afrah use to describe these altering behaviors and norms of interaction (a lack of *adabu*, *mila*, *desturi* and the introduction of *uchafu*) significantly resembles Mzee Amr’s depiction of immigrants discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Mzee described these newcomers as individuals who lack *adabu* (manners) and *dini* (religion), and introduce *uchafu* (dirt, uncleanness) to Lamu. These tropes were used to underline the historical distinction between WaLamu and mainland Kenyans, a reproduction of the historical distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi*. The parallel between these depictions of change at different levels of society is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the central importance of *heshima* in conceptualizing social change and grasping altering social relations. As Hill (1998) advocated in her discussion of respect among Mexicano speakers in Central Mexico, I

suggest *heshima* ought to be considered a “multiplex sign” (Briggs 1988). It is an ideological notion that not merely refers to, but indexically calls upon a whole social system – an entire social order associated with the past (Hill 1998: 266). Talking about a loss of *heshima* then not only refers to impolite language use among Lamu’s younger generation; it calls upon complex sets of social roles, semiotic practices, and sociopolitical perspectives that are being redefined.

Secondly, the parallels between discursive depictions of new immigrants and the behavior of Lamu’s younger population importantly illustrate the interdiscursive nature of these meta-discourses. It suggests the fractal recursive application of a distinction that exists at a higher level of society (a historical and contemporary opposition between locals and non-locals). It is exactly the use of a vocabulary of *heshima*, and the social order this notion is associated with, that enables the fractal recursion of social distinctions, and thus the discursive evaluation of youth’s altering practices as moral breakdown or loss.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how *heshima* functioned as an ideology that justified and structured the social hierarchy. Notably, I argued it ought to be considered central to a bodily hexis (Bourdieu 1984), forming an embodied social structure that translates itself into daily practice – a complex of words, gestures, postures, and movement charged with social meaning and value and indicative of one’s position on the local social ladder. Historically, *heshima* could be acquired and negotiated. An individual’s increased embodied display of respectability and honor and the communal recognition thereof could then result in a shift from *ushenzi* to *ustaarabu*. In contemporary Lamu, the opposite is now occurring. The lack of a recognizable embodiment of *heshima* more and

more results in the intersubjective evaluation of individuals as *washenzi* (barbarians) or even *watumwa* (slaves), lacking culture, tradition, and religion – much like the descriptions we noted above.⁸⁷

Some sections of Lamu society appear more susceptible to such assessments than others. Women, for example, are particularly vulnerable to these evaluative judgments as they increasingly participate in public life. Just as women were the focus of the shift from a nobility of rank to a nobility of character, they are now at the heart of the anxiety surrounding the perceived obsolescence of, or indifference to *heshima* (see also Inoue 2004, 2006).⁸⁸ The changes in young women's bodily hexis – in their movements, postures, gestures and practices – are considered indexical of a lack of *haya* (modesty) and of a disregard for their responsibility to uphold a family's honor.⁸⁹ It is here that the interdiscursive link with other evaluations is most obvious. Assessments of young women's behavior are based on the presumed iconic resemblance between their conduct and that of mainland immigrants, or historically, that of slaves.

Consider the following statement recorded on a public *baraza* on *Mkunguni*, Lamu's main square. My research assistant Tariq⁹⁰ had joined the men at this popular gathering place right after the afternoon prayers. One of the busiest times of day, the men observed the hectic traffic of men, women, donkeys, and handcarts on the square. A

⁸⁷ This does not contradict my previous argument that the distinction between WaLamu and mainland Kenyans is increasingly represented as an ethnic-like, inherent disposition. The redefinitions or reinterpretations of the proverb discussed in the first section of this chapter illustrate the need for an altered conception of self-other relations. It does not denounce the possibility of an embodiment of *heshima*.

⁸⁸ *Heshima* as a value does not become obsolete. As I argue subsequently, as well as in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, young people renegotiate exactly the remediation of *heshima* in daily practice. Basing their evaluations on established ideological links between *heshima* and observable conduct, elders, however, often assess young people's conduct negatively. It is this disagreement on how *heshima* ought to be mediated in practice that results in difficulties for youth to renegotiate their (respectful) positions in society.

⁸⁹ See chapter 7 for a discussion of how young women negotiate a respectful status through semiotic practices.

⁹⁰ pseudonym

group of young women had just bought roasted *muhogo* (cassava) from a vendor nearby and continued their walk through the town as they consumed their fresh snacks while chatting and laughing. As the girls passed the *baraza*, one of the men made the following remark:

zamani huwezi kuzunguka barabani wamwona mwanamke kibajuni au kiislamu anayekula barabarani wala kuna time fulani ikifika kwamba huwezi kuona wanawake KABISA . sasa hiyau mpaka masaa sita za usiku unawaona wanawake barabani . sasa kujivunia ana mila gani? wanawake wetu wanatembea uchi = mambo ambayo si mila wala si katika dini yetu

in the past you could not walk on the street and see a Bajuni girl or a Muslim girl eating on the street and there was a certain time when you could not see women AT ALL . now you can see women on the street until twelve o'clock at night . now what *mila* (traditions) can she be proud of? our women are walking around naked = things that are not part of our *mila* (traditions) or of our *dini* (religion)

The man's remark, evoked by the girls' conduct, was responded to with much agreement from his fellow *baraza* members and resulted in a long discussion on young people's altering behaviors. What interests me here is *how* these young women are depicted: the notions used to describe their public conduct. Although the girls were fully covered, the men observing their behavior considered their very presence on the main square and their act of "eating in public" as indexes of their lack of dignity and honor, pride of their religious and ethnic identity, and respect for cultural practices. What is more, these young women's presence at this particular place and time appeared to avail other sets of evaluations: of other conduct, in other contexts (such as midnight walks). Their spatiotemporal location and the activities they engage in enable their ascription to a particular subset of "Lamu women," who do not only walk the streets at midnight but also do so "naked."⁹¹

⁹¹ In later chapters I make an explicit comparison to Miyako Inoue's (2004, 2006) work on "women's language" in Japan. There she argues that women's very public appearance becomes a sign of transgression.

While the Kiswahili word “uchi” literally means “naked,” it also refers to being uncovered, exposed, and unprotected. The nostalgic discourse that follows immediately after depicts women’s ideal spatiotemporal location and contrasts sharply with the girls’ visible (and audible) presence. This notion of “nakedness” or “openness” is then opposed to the segregation of women in Lamu’s recent past, and draws iconic-like connections to the historical behavior of slave girls as well as mainland immigrants and Western tourists in contemporary Lamu. This depiction of Lamu women’s contemporary “nakedness” then avails an assessment of their practices as lacking dignity and honor.

This evaluative stance is interdiscursive, not only through the fractal recursive and iconic-like connection to the behavior of slave girls or mainland immigrants, but also through the conspicuous absence of other possible evaluations. These young girls’ behavior could have been explained by drawing upon discourses of modernity and development, attributing their practices to their possible schooling in Mombasa or Nairobi (and thus their familiarity with urban practices). By selecting nakedness and disrespect, the speaker not only evaluates these women as a particular type of social persona; he also positions himself toward the current context.⁹² Once again, change is not evaluated in terms of political and economic processes, but as a moral decline.

A sense of moral breakdown is then discursively created through the selective depiction of change as a process of moral degeneration into a state of disbelief and uncivilized conduct. Exactly because speakers draw upon a certain set of discourses, practices are read in a particular way. In the accounts analyzed thus far the voices of

⁹² In light of the discussion of spatial boundaries in Lamu (Chapter 2), the evaluation of these young women can be explained by their crossing of such boundaries. It is the girls’ spatio-temporal locatedness as well as the man’s own location on a *baraza* (a historical authoritative position) that enables him to make this statement. In Chapter 7 I elaborate at length on the semiotic significance of roads and routes in young people’s (and particularly young women’s) negotiation of new social positions.

youth, women and immigrants were conspicuously absent, as were discourses on development, modernity, and emancipation. We thus ought to ask what other evaluations circulate; which discourses are erased and why.

Clashing voices? The interdiscursive construction of inbetweenness⁹³

While elders extensively drew upon the tropes of *heshima* and the lack thereof in their descriptions of young people's conduct, they never explicitly called Lamu youth "slaves." The comparison remains implicit. Interestingly enough, I most frequently encountered the explicit likening of young people's conduct to being in a state of slavery among young people themselves. Previously, I discussed how Omari used the old proverb "*mwata mila ni mtumwa*" to depict Lamu youth's behavior. At first sight, such occurrences suggest that young people echo the locally dominant discourses on moral breakdown to explain altering practices among their peers. Placing the use of this proverb in context, and analyzing the different discourses young people drawn upon, however, reveals a more complicated ideological orientation toward change and moral shifts. I suggest that youth's discursive depiction of change as moral transformation does not entail a rejection of change; rather it illustrates young people's awareness of the "risks" underlying their own adherence to translocal discourses and the incorporation of "others'" practices. Rather than an outright rejection of change or tradition, the

⁹³ I here draw upon Jane Hill's (1995) use of the notion "clash of voices" when discussing Don Gabriel's narrative. I explain my reference to this idea in the subsequent section. I want to underline that I far from suggest that young people's complex positioning in this changing social world is limited to languages. As the dissertation as a whole outlines young people's language use, attire, greeting styles, and other unconscious signifying practices testify to how they endeavor to navigate this complex social environment. Here I explicitly refer to the different moral positions that can be expressed by selecting particular, seemingly conflicting discourses to draw upon in meta-discursive statements about change.

interdiscursive nature of young people's meta-discourses reflects a position of "inbetweenness."

This position of ambivalence is particularly evident in the case of Ayah,⁹⁴ a Bajuni girl of about 22 who was studying at the University of Nairobi at the time of my research. Ayah will appear frequently throughout this dissertation. Her willingness to participate in my research provided me with rich data both on her opinions on life in contemporary Lamu, and on her daily (linguistic and material) practices. But most importantly, Ayah's position as a young girl from a respected social background who was a first generation college student, made her an interesting case-study of the challenges young people in Lamu face; how they negotiate change in daily practice.

While she had a Bajuni background, Ayah was born and raised in Lamu. Her family was well known and respected within the town, and Ayah was quite explicit about her pride of both her Bajuni identity and her Lamu residence. She always wore the black *abaya* and frequently used a facial veil or *ninja*. She had a very out-going personality, and while quiet when walking along the streets, she often dominated discussions when among her peers. When I first met Ayah, she was about to commence her college studies. But after having graduated from high school, she had joined a local youth organization and actively participated in many of the group's activities. In Chapter five, I extensively discuss Ayah's language use in different contexts. Here, I want to analyze her opinion on Lamu youth's altering behavior. I myself did not conduct the interview with Ayah, which I cite here. One of my young research assistants, Zubad,⁹⁵ had asked her for an interview. They both were members of the aforementioned youth organization, and because Ayah

⁹⁴ pseudonym

⁹⁵ pseudonym

was rather popular among her peers, it did not surprise me that Zubad had selected her for an interview.⁹⁶

Zubad had started the interview by asking Ayah whether she thought Lamu was changing. Ayah's affirmative answer was followed by a lengthy description of altering practices among youth, in terms of language use, dress, and general comportment. When Zubad asked her how she personally felt about these changes, Ayah responded with the following:⁹⁷

kulingana na ule msemu kwamba mwata mila ni mtumwa = sisi tumekuwa watumwa . kwa sababu sisi tuna asili yetu = tuna mila zetu = tuna akhlaq zetu tulivofundishwa . lakini kwa sababu sisi twataka kuwa wabora = twataka kuwaigiza ili twaona kama sisi ni wabora imebidi sisi kwa kiwango fulani tubadilishe mila zetu na kwa hivo tumekuwa sisi ndo watumwa

in relation to the proverb that the one who leaves his *mila* (traditions) is a slave = we have become slaves . because we have our *asili* (origin) = we have our *mila* (traditions) = we have our *akhlaq*⁹⁸ (morality) the way we were taught . but because we want to be better = we want to copy others such that we consider ourselves better it was necessary for us to a certain extent to change our culture and thus we have become slaves

Whereas Omari previously ascribed the status of slavery to others – to girls, sisters – hereby excluding himself from the discussion, Ayah explicitly applies the proverb to herself and her peers, identifying “us” – Zubad, herself, and her peers – as “slaves.” Just as slaves in the past had adhered to upper-social classes' behavior to be incorporated into Lamu society, so do youth now follow Westerners' practices in the hope of being identified or recognized as being “like” them. In appropriating the proverb, Ayah not only displays an awareness of elders' concerns with social and moral change, she explicates the ideological connection that was implicitly present in elders' discourses. This familiarity with, and adherence to the previously discussed evaluative discourses is

⁹⁶ One could suggest that, by agreeing to be interviewed by a male peer, Ayah was already taking a “modern” stance.

⁹⁷ Zubad did not provide the proverb. Ayah herself introduced the saying to the discussion.

⁹⁸ Arabic term for “virtue” or “morality,” particularly in relation to Islamic theology.

equally evident in the vocabulary Ayah uses to explain her use of the proverb: she refers to a loss of respect for *asili* (origin), *mila* (traditions) and *akhlaq* (morality).⁹⁹

The statement that follows this initial response, however, demonstrates that Ayah's use of the proverb and the vocabulary of altered moral conditions does not erase other discourses on change. On the contrary, she interdiscursively links the use of the proverb to broader, translocal discourses and hereby takes an alternative evaluative stance toward moral transformation. Rather than attributing moral decay to the imposition of outsiders, Ayah places the responsibility with young people themselves. Although considered problematic, she equally suggests that change is necessary and understandable.

mimi ndo kama kioo cha jamii . mimi ndio kama **carrier** nitabeba hii **information** nipeleke **next** . mimi ndio nitarelay hii **information** kwengine lakini ikiwa mimi sasa nimeisahau **information** hii ama mimi siitilii manaa = ama siioni kama ina faidha yoyote **information** kama hii siwezi kipeleka mbee . ijapokuwa kuna zile mila ambazo lazima tuziate sabu kulingana na wakati kama huu ama kulingana na maadili ya kibinadamu mila nyingine lazima ziatwe

I am the mirror of the community. I am the **carrier** I will carry this **information** I will take it **next** . I am the one who will **relay** this **information** elsewhere . but if I have forgotten this **information** or I don't attribute meaning to it = or I don't see information like that has *faidha* (value) I cannot take it forward . although there are some *mila* (traditions) that we ought to leave behind considering the time we are in or considering the *maadili* (values) of humanity certain *mila* (traditions) have to be left behind

At first glance Ayah's contribution appears inherently contradictory. She explicitly portrays herself as someone who could forget the value of local practices, while simultaneously promoting conservation. As she advocates culture preservation and laments young people's desire to mimic the behavior of others, she extensively incorporates English vocabulary and thereby displays familiarity with translocal

⁹⁹ It is interesting though that Ayah uses the Arabic notion rather than Swahili terms such as *heshima* or *haya*. One might assume that her use of the Arabic term suggests a familiarity with broader, global discourses on Islam and thus a global orientation.

discourses. Exactly this position of ambivalence is interesting: while not denying the threats of change, Ayah also does not reject discourses on development and modernity.

Interviews with Lamu youth were replete with similar examples of what could be viewed as a “clash of voices,” (Keane 2011: 167) seemingly inconsistent and self-contradicting practices: they explicitly voiced concern with change but simultaneously displayed the very practices they were critiquing.¹⁰⁰ In the case of Ayah, I suggest it is exactly through the mobilization of these different “voices” (Bakhtin 1981) – both in terms of vocabulary and the discourses drawn upon – that she can negotiate young people’s position of inbetweenness. While Ayah self-identifies with circulating meta-narratives of moral decay and the proverbial comparison to slavery, her reliance upon alternative and international discourses reveals the ambivalence of her position.

Young people’s meta-narratives on social change are interdiscursively complex and draw upon a wide range of discourses. It is in these self-reflective, evaluative narratives that their ambivalent position is most clear – both in what is said explicitly and how they formulate their argument. I maintain that the interdiscursivity of, and stylistic variation within these meta-narratives reveal young people’s different “voices” (Bakhtin 1981; Hill 1995; Keane 2011) and thus their different moral orientations toward the transformations their community is undergoing.¹⁰¹ Hill, in her discussion of conflicting voices in the narrative of Don Gabriel, suggests that the presence of multiple voices can index an internal struggle for dominance among these and the moral positions they index

¹⁰⁰ See Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for a discussion of seemingly contradictory practices and how these function in the negotiation of new social positions, or the emergence of new social categories.

¹⁰¹ In her discussion, Hill focuses on switches between dialects and hesitations with discourse, I add interdiscursivity to this list, as I believe that attention for the vocabulary used, discourses drawn upon and conspicuously absent discourses (or voices) importantly contributes to the identification of the different “voices” present in a narrative.

(Hill 1995). I suggest that this need not be a struggle for the individual. Such multivocal discourses – here in terms of the discourses drawn upon – allow youth to take an evaluative stance that reflects their ambivalent position within Lamu. How young people negotiate such positions of inbetweenness within daily interaction forms the topic of subsequent chapters. Here I want to underline that youth, while discursively recognizing change as moral shift, express a stance that values respect while challenging how it ought to be mediated within practice. They are able to do so exactly by drawing upon different voices (and discourses), and thus interdiscursively constructing a position of ambivalence.

Many interviews with Lamu youth provide examples of this uncertainty as to what can be considered respectful behavior, or rather, how qualities such as *haya* (modesty) and *adabu* (good manners) ought to be mediated within practice. These metapragmatic statements clearly reflect an awareness of societal expectations (and the widely circulating discourses on moral decay), a deeply felt respect for religious and cultural norms, as well as a desire to adhere to global cultural flows. In what follows, I elaborate on an extract from a lengthy interview with Badrul,¹⁰² a young man of about 26 who also formed part of the youth group Ayah was a member of. Badrul was very active within the local community and was particularly engaged with organizing awareness raising campaigns on topics like HIV/AIDS and drug and substance abuse. He was extremely ambitious and always applied for leadership positions in local organizations or workshops. His lack of education – he had only finished primary education – and limited knowledge of English, however, made it hard for him to obtain or maintain local management positions.

¹⁰² pseudonym

Very opinionated and always willing to talk, it did not surprise me to hear that Badrul had volunteered to be interviewed by Zubad. As with Ayah, Zubad had started the interview by asking Badrul how he thought Lamu was changing. The answer that followed was a lengthy, monologue-like narration, sparsely interspersed with remarks from Zubad who merely had to ask some clarifying questions at different moments throughout the interview. The examples Badrul gave and the way he narrated them provide rich data on young people's metadiscursive construction of moral transformation and their ambivalent orientation toward this process of change. Consider, for example, Badrul's opinion on altering marriage practices and relationships among Lamu's youth:

sasa utakuta hizi ndroa zetu . zinakwendra . zinasambaratika . Maanake kwa sababu ya utamaduni uliepukika . utamaduni wa kizamani ulikuwa umefungana na dini kukwambia la ukweli . na utamaduni ulikuwa na mila . kama vile watu wa zamani wanavovaa wanawake shuga utaona ni kibandra kiyao [laughs]

[Zubad and Badrul continue to laugh (4.0)]

utaona ni kibandra kiyao [laughs] kumbe ni mtu yuwaja! humuoni chochote! ULE NI UTAMADUNI lakini umeambatana na dini . LAKINI SISI HUKU, TUMEACHA ULE UTAMADUNI . imekuwa sasa utamaduni kuuwacha . mpaka dini pia imeachika . sasa hiyo ndrio tatizo kubwa

now you will find that our marriages . they go . they fall apart . I mean because *utamaduni* (culture) had disappeared . *utamaduni* (culture) from the past was tied to *dini* (religion) to say the truth . and *utamaduni* (culture) used to have *mila* (traditions) . like people in the past the way women wore their *abaya* you would think it is a tent that is coming [laughs]

[Zubad and Badrul continue to laugh (4.0)]

you will think it is a tent that is coming [laughs] behold it is a person that is coming! you do not see anything of her . THAT IS *UTAMADUNI* (CULTURE) but it is tied to *dini* (religion) . BUT WE HERE WE HAVE LEFT THAT *UTAMADUNI* (CULTURE) . *utamaduni* (culture) has been left to such an extent that even *dini* (religion) has been left behind . now that is a big problem

At first sight, the overall argument of Badrul's statement appears the same as that of the discourses that I have analyzed thus far: the loss of *utamaduni* (culture), *dini* (religion), and *mila* (traditions) results in the moral decay of Lamu youth. Badrul's focus on the loss of respect for culture and religion (and the vocabulary he uses) thus echoes the discourses voiced by Mzee Amr, Haifa, and Afrah – to name but a few. The way in which

Badrul delivers his commentary, however, permits him to display a particular, at times seemingly contradictory, stance toward the moral shift he describes. This is most evident in Badrul's depiction of cultural practices that historically protected Lamu society from social ills such as divorce. Like the men on Lamu's main square, Badrul's example focuses on women and their "naked" appearance in public. His description of the traditional *shiraa* that covered women entirely, however, provokes uncontrollable laughter from both him and Zubad. To these young men, the image of women's tent-like construction appears humorous rather than admirable and desirable. While Badrul thus explicitly recognizes, and even emphasizes the moral and social significance of values like *haya* (modesty), how these ought to be mediated within practice is far from evident.

It is not just the young men's laughter that signals their inbetweenness; the interdiscursivity of Badrul's statements equally indexes an ambivalent evaluative stance. Contrary to Mzee Amr, Badrul does not focus his evaluation of the moral shift on who has caused it, nor does he paint a picture of the resulting impoliteness and disrespect, as did Haifa and Afrah. He concentrates on the detrimental effect this transformation has had on Lamu youth by emphasizing the rapidly increasing divorce and HIV/AIDS rates within the community. He explicitly argues that cultural and religious practices – like the *shiraa*, but also proper dress for men – historically protected youth from these social ills.

lazima sisi tufikiriye . kwa sababu kama saa hii baada ya kukosa utamaduni kuna na maradhi makubwa ambayo yamekuja . HIV yanazidi kutumaliza .. kwa sababu utamaduni ilikuwa = ukivaa kanzu na kofia si rahisi mwanamke malaya kukuegemea kwa sababu ile itakuwa ni kama kinga . **instead** ya kuvaa **condom** uvae kanzu na kofia . na kushika msahafu .. kwa hivyo hiyo ni **step** nyingine ambayo waweza kujikinga

we have to think . because now after losing *utamaduni* (culture) big illnesses have come . HIV is increasingly finishing us .. because *utamaduni* (culture) it was = if you wear a *kanzu* and a *kofia* it is not easy for a whore to approach you because that will be like a protection . **instead** of wearing a **condom** you wear a *kanzu* and a *kofia* . and you hold a Quran .. thus this is another **step** through which you can protect yourself

The reliance on a (international) discourse on the HIV/AIDS epidemic permits Badrul to orient to local discourses on cultural preservation while displaying familiarity with, and access to globally circulating discourses. He is not only aware of the broader social ills affecting the community; he also can advise his peers on how to better protect themselves from these new threats. Badrul thereby preempts a self-placement as conservative and “backward,” while adhering to elders’ concerns. Although he still constructs change as a moral decline (through the tropes used), Badrul’s stance towards this shift (and thus people who display such altered practices) differs from elders like Mzee Amr.

These different instances of seemingly “clashing voices” (Keane 2011) interestingly reveal young people’s ambivalent position within Lamu society. It is at these moments that youth’s irresolute position, as situated between respect for tradition and a longing for change, is most clearly displayed. The identification of different “voices” – discourses drawn upon, stylistic variations and hesitations in discourse – is significant to understand how youth negotiate these ambivalent positions into new social niches. As Keane (2011) argued in his discussion of Jane Hill’s work, “it may be that objectification of moral possibilities, through such means as staging different voices, plays a critical role in the development of self-knowledge” (Keane 2011: 172). Keane suggests that such ambivalent positions may “constitute a discovery process by which the speaker comes to realize which moral figures he will become committed to” (Keane 2011: 172).¹⁰³ In subsequent chapters, I analyze both how young people negotiate this dialectal process of taking voice within daily interaction and practice, and how

¹⁰³ I elaborate on this argument and its applicability to young people’s language use in daily interactions within Lamu in Chapter 5.

(momentary) emergent resolutions can be reached. I maintain that, through the combination of these seemingly conflicting voices, youth endeavor to negotiate *new* social positions (rather than committing to the social types linked to established voices); positions that combine societal expectations, respect for local norms and values, and a desire for change and development. In the last section of this chapter, I analyze meta-discourses that hint at ways in which such resolutions could be achieved.

The “dot com” generation: the interdiscursive construction of moral shift as opportunity

The foregoing analysis of both elders and youth’s self-placement within discussions on political, social, and cultural mutations did not merely demonstrate how meta-discourses can present a particular image of the social world; it also highlighted how interdiscursivity enables such instances of stance-taking. In addition, it underlined how ideological processes of differentiation importantly shape the interdiscursive nature of such evaluative statements: we noted iconicity in the likening of different practices, and fractal recursivity in the reproduction of distinctions at different levels of Lamu society. The focus on interdiscursivity, however, also revealed the significance of erasure, of the meaning derived from voices and texts that were absent from the discussion. Erasure enabled, for example, representations and misreadings that reinforced established indexical ties between observed practices and social categories of people (in Mzee Amr’s case). It is on these conspicuously absent discourses that I want to focus in the final section of this chapter.

Lacking from the analysis thus far are evaluations of change as part of “modernity” or interdiscursive constructions that permit a positive approach to social and

cultural transformation. As the discussion of both Ayah and Badrul's statements already revealed, local and translocal discourses on development, modernity, and emancipation are equally present in Lamu community and can be drawn upon to assess altering practices among Lamu's youth. More importantly, it is the access to such discourses that can enforce new ideological connections between observed practices and social personae – a process central to the negotiation of new social positions. Such innovative evaluations do not need to be positive; they can merely recognize the development of a new category of people who adhere to, and appropriate newly introduced discourses. In Lamu, this alternative to the discourse of disarray and decay can be found in the interdiscursive construction of the notion "*dot com*."

I encountered the term "*dot com*" about halfway through my research and observed that it was used to refer to a set of practices unfamiliar or incomprehensible to the speaker. Whereas previously analyzed discourses described "youth" as an undistinguished group of individuals that, to different degrees, disregarded local norms and values, the denotation "*dot com*" appeared to refer to a subset of individuals who had incorporated new practices without therefore having entirely abandoned local norms and values. I would even suggest that the same youth described by Afrah and Haifa could be depicted as *dot com*, merely through a difference in the discourses drawn upon and thus the interdiscursive nature of the evaluation.

From the wide range of data I have on the use of this term, I will present a few, short examples. In one of the many streets of Langoni, among its many roadside stores, there was a middle-aged lady who sold *bhajia* and *viazi* on a daily basis. As she sat on her doorstep, she would greet familiar faces and strike up conversations with customers.

Many times she would wave down some of the children playing on the street and fill their tiny hands with the savory snacks. She did not make a living of this afternoon occupation; it merely was a nice way to keep herself busy and interact with people, so she told me. I often bought some of her crispy *bhajias* and sometimes I would join her on her doorstep and observe the hectic “traffic” on the street in front of her house. On one of those occasions, shortly after I first met her, I explained to her my reasons for being in Lamu. When she understood that I conducted research on change in the town, and particularly on Lamu youth’s altered practices, she responded with the following:

tunaita ni **dot com** ushaona? kuwa mtu ako na **free** . mtu anaweza kujichagulia mtu aweza kufanya lolote hata kama ni maskini

we call it **dot com** you see? that a person has **freedom** . someone can choose for himself he can do whatever even if it’s a poor person

To this lady from a poor Bajuni background, the transformations introduced to Lamu, through new media, education, and shifting social relations did not entail moral disarray, but rather offered youth a broad set of opportunities, chances that had been inaccessible to herself. While this orientation to new prospects and avenues did not necessarily bring with it disrespect, it did suggest a shift in social relations. This lady who observed many different interactions on a daily basis did not focus on impoliteness and disrespect, although she undoubtedly saw plenty of such exchanges when sitting on her doorstep. Rather, by drawing upon discourses of emancipation (through an emphasis on freedom and choice), she discursively constructed change in Lamu as a range of new opportunities for its younger population.

The expression “*dot com*” was also used in some of the interviews Zubad conducted on my behalf. In such instances, the practices described interestingly resemble those depicted by interviewees like Haifa and Afrah. Whereas the latter considered

altered linguistic practices and new greeting styles indicative of impoliteness and disrespect, the lady quoted below considered it part of “*dot com*.” Sumaiya¹⁰⁴ was a woman of about 45 years old who lived in a neighborhood of Lamu called *Bosnia*. Zubad had asked her whether she thought language use in Lamu was changing and whether she approved of such changes. After having replied in the affirmative, she stated the following:

jamaa zetu wakionana wao kwa wao mara nyingi utaona huwa hawana ile ya kumwambia *Salaam Waleykum* na *habari gani* ama *huyambo* . huwa lugha yao ni ile ya **kidotkomu** . maanake mtu atakwambia *vipi niaje* na wao huyatukuliya kuwa ni salamu

our young men when they see each other you will often see they do not have the habit of saying *Salaam Aleykum* or *habari gani* or *huyambo*¹⁰⁵. their language is that of **ki-dot com**¹⁰⁶ . I mean someone will say *vipi, niaje* (what’sup)¹⁰⁷ and they view that as a greeting

Whereas Afrah and Haifa would most likely evaluate the greeting styles described as “impolite” and “disrespectful,” Sumaiya makes the important observation that the speakers she describes use the greeting styles “wao kwa wao” or *amongst themselves*. She recognizes that language use is changing and does not necessarily evaluate these shifts as positive, but considers these practices specific to a particular subset of people who use these greeting styles among themselves without thereby necessarily disrespecting others.

I encountered similar uses of *dot com* when people explained altering ways of dressing among the younger generation. Hadiyah,¹⁰⁸ a mother of four who was about 40 years old at the time of this interview, made the following observation

¹⁰⁴ pseudonym

¹⁰⁵ Often-used, respectable greetings. These can be translated as *How are you?*

¹⁰⁶ In Kiswahili, the ki-prefix is added to a noun to indicate that it is a language. The Swahili people thus speak ki-Swahili, whereas the Germans speak ki-Gerumani. The “dot com” people in this case therefore speak “kidotkom,” suggesting that a particular set of practices is identifiably linked to a particular subset of people. Or rather, it suggests that there is a particular set of practices, including language use, which is distinguishable as being “dot com.”

¹⁰⁷ These greeting styles are part of *Sheng*, a popular urban youth slang.

ni **dotkom** sasa . we msichana utamwona mtu anavaa suruali=pengine mtu amevaa kitu imemkaa vizuri . sasa na we utatamani si ndrio? mbinadamu . waona katika tv waona **generation** imebadilika . aah nguo mzuri! nimeiona katika tv! wafuwata **new generation** mpya

it is **dot com** now . you as a girl you will see someone who is wearing pants = maybe someone is wearing something that fits nicely . now you will desire it as well no? that's human . you see it on tv you see the **generation** has changed . oh beautiful clothes! I saw it on tv! you follow the **new generation**

According to Hadiyah, shifts in dress-styles do not result from young girls' disregard for local norms of respectability nor are they indicative of a degenerated moral state. The observed appropriations of new styles and practices are the natural result from, and human response to an access to novel practices. As the woman I cited above, Hadiyah draws on discourses of development and modernity, not on negative depictions of moral decline. While she does not necessarily approve of these changes, and while she might not appropriate new styles of dress herself, she identifies justifiable reasons for why such shifts in practices might occur. What is interesting, and different, in the quote above is Hadiyah's use of *generation*. The use of this English word not only reflects her adherence to, and familiarity with translocal discourses; this identification of a new generation also signals her own distance from (and possible lack of control over) the changing practices of a new group of (younger) people.

A last example I want to share derives from a short discussion I had with one of the older, respectable men who I came to know very well during my stay in Lamu. While I never formally interviewed him, he would often explain to me how the changes in Lamu frustrated him. These frustrations did not concern the practices of young people; rather his complaints about the increasing presence of *wageni* echoed Mzee Amr's grievances. One evening, his youngest son came home with a pair of jeans so baggy that the entire

¹⁰⁸ pseudonym

household burst out laughing. Later that same night, I asked the older man how he felt about his son's changing habits. The otherwise talkative old man smiled, shrugged and simply stated:

sisi tunawaita **dotkom** sasa . wana baba mama na grandfool

we call them **dot com** now . they have a father a mother and a grandfool

This is one of the few instances in which I encountered a use of *dot com* that implicitly hinted at a lack of respect among Lamu's younger generation. The grandfather, who was viewed as a source of wisdom and authority in the past, has now become a *grandfool*. This play on words does not only suggest a lack of respect on the side of Lamu youth; it also importantly hints at elders' lack of understanding of the current transformations. Within the present-day context, elders' wisdom has turned into foolishness. As in the previous examples, the use of *dot com* then refers to an increasing lack of control over youth; it recognizes the possibility of a different orientation among young people that causes them not to adhere to, and incorporate the practices of the older generation.

I find the introduction and use of "*dot com*" fascinating for several reasons, not the least of which being the alternative it forms to discourses on change as moral disarray. It is intriguing, however, that this notion refers to a rather vague group of youth not specifically defined by an age grade or social background. The evaluation of someone or something as "*dot com*" appears to be based on a broad set of verbal and non-verbal semiotic practices ideologically linked to a particular understanding of "modernity." It is this iconic linking of "like practices" within discourse that Agha (2005, 2007a, 2011) has called "register effects." In her discussion of Agha's work, Irvine (2005) suggests that register-effects illustrate how "a social world is indexed – even created – through ... sets

of iconically linked discourses, when one interprets an utterance as ‘speaking just like *that*’ – or just like what one might expect from ‘*those people*.’” (Irvine 2005: 72, emphasis in original). As evaluative stances informed by semiotic and linguistic ideologies, such interdiscursive linkages occurred throughout this chapter, and I argued that these processes indeed permit the discursive creation of a particular social imaginary. The discourse on “*dot com*,” however, clearly illustrates the discursive construction of register effects and thus demonstrates how new indexical links between observed practices and social personae are negotiated; or how a process of *enregisterment* can unfold.

The conception of *dot com* as a distinguishable set of practices goes along with the ideological creation of a register: a set of practices that is indexically tied to a particular subset of individuals. The denomination used to refer to this new social type is itself iconic of what it stands for: the access to, and understanding of verbal and non-verbal semiotic practices introduced through new media technologies. A specific kind of social group has then become distinguishable exactly by its ability to use particular commodities. In their capacity to index social roles and relationships, these technological commodities (and the ways of writing and speaking that are related to it) have become social indexicals (Agha 2011).

The interdiscursive creation of *dot com* then avails a particular “voice” with which subjects can speak about social change and take an evaluative stance that does not necessarily condemn newly introduced practices. It remains, however, a discourse in flux whereby the link between practices and social personas is still negotiated, and the social evaluation of which is not yet agreed upon. Take for example the quotes provided above.

The way in which the *bhajia*-selling lady uses the category is clearly distinct from how my old male friend used it. Whereas for the former the notion *dot com* represents a range of new prospects and social relations inaccessible to herself, the latter perceives it to refer to a generation of youth that no longer has a vested interest in adhering to elders' norms and values. Whereas the former understands *dot com* in terms of opportunities, the latter sees it as loss.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

After having provided an overview of Lamu's history and the town's current condition in Chapter 2, this chapter asked how WaLamu themselves perceive the present-day changes their community is undergoing. The analysis of the different ways in which Lamu inhabitants conceive of the shifts they are confronted with, and how such evaluative stances are expressed in meta-discourses, revealed an important relationship of discourses on morality to political and economic domination. Rather than an articulation of changes in terms of economic or political transformation, WaLamu's focus lies with a significant shift in the moral system and how it translates into altered norms of social interaction.

The ways in which this moral transformation is evaluated, however, depends on the person speaking and the discourses drawn upon. All speakers recognized the increasing decline of a social hierarchy based on an honor code, monitored through ideological conceptions of space, social interaction, and bodily practices. Few of the evaluative stances analyzed, however, suggested that these transformations result in an

¹⁰⁹ I do not mean to suggest such changes are unique or new. Technological innovations and generational differences are undoubtedly part of all kinds of social transformations. We can presume that the appropriation of new habits (such as the wearing of the "modern" *abayas* instead of the traditional *buibui*) resulted in similar discourses.

outright rejection of the moral system. Lamu's younger generation's evaluations, for example, demonstrated that *heshima* has not entirely lost its significance. Aware of its value and its relation to religion, young people do not reject the value of respectful behavior; rather they endeavor to renegotiate the understanding of how such norms and values ought to be mediated within practice.

This elaborate discussion of the complexity and multiplicity of meta-discourses, of the range of evaluations and value judgments linked to age, social class, gender, and individual disposition then importantly demonstrated the discursive creation of (a particular) social imaginary – a social world in which different groups are identified and compartmentalized based on the iconic relation between discourses and semiotic practices (Irvine 2005). This multiplicity of evaluative stances is also indicative, however, of an ambivalence that results from the challenging of established authority structures and the introduction of new voices. The social world against which acts are evaluated is no longer agreed upon, and the iconic links that tie practices to social personas are questioned and challenged. *Those* people are no longer necessarily high class, while speaking like *that* is no longer necessarily disrespectful. As the authority of elders, *barazas*, and other local social institutions is being renegotiated, so are the iconic links they make.

We can then ask how shared understandings of similarities and differences are renegotiated within practice. Which implications does a process of negotiation have for the social world created by meta-discourses and how does it impact the social relations within it? Does the discursive construction of practices as belonging to a new register – the interdiscursive creation of social difference – necessarily include an ideological

rupture with the past? Based on what was argued in this chapter, discourses of nostalgia and modernity far from always assume a radical break, be it in terms of loss or progress. We ought to then further investigate the negotiation, mediation, and construction of continuity within daily interaction and practice. It is exactly these processes, and their articulation within the formation of social relations and positions, on which the rest of this dissertation focuses.

To fully comprehend processes of negotiation, and the mediation of norms and values within verbal and non-verbal material practice, we need a better understanding of the ways in which language use is assessed. While this chapter provided a detailed analysis of metadiscursive evaluations of change, it spent little time on locals' assessment of different language varieties nor did it elaborate on how precisely language use has been affected by the changes Lamu is experiencing. Interviewees' references to (improper) language use did hint at the significance of linguistic practices in young people's negotiation of altered subject positions. How young people's language has changed and what different ideologies impact their (shifting) linguistic practices remained vague. It is to this discussion we turn next. Chapter four provides insight in the complexity of young WaLamu's linguistic repertoire and provides a detailed discussion of the different social, political, and historical processes that have shaped language attitudes in the Lamu Archipelago.

Chapter 4

Lamu's linguistic landscape: dialects, languages, and transformations

In Lamu Town, not one variety of Kiswahili is spoken; rather six different dialects are used next to Standard Swahili. In addition, KiMombasa (also known as KiMvita, the dialect of Mombasa), English, and Arabic can be heard (and seen) to different extents throughout the town. Nowadays, the introduction of other foreign languages such as Spanish, French, and a range of different varieties of English (such as North American, British, or Australian English) further complicate this already intricate linguistic landscape. Young people in Lamu encounter and use these different language varieties in different ways and to different extents within their day-to-day lives. And while language contact is far from new to the Lamu Archipelago (on the contrary, the Swahili language is itself a testimony to longstanding language contact and borrowing along the East African Coast and across the Indian Ocean), locals experience the current context as one of language shift and change. Throughout my fieldwork, people (and especially elders) lamented a loss of dialect diversity among the younger generation. Young people, while recognizing the historical significance of the local dialects, admitted to frequent dialect shifting and their lack of an in-depth understanding of the local varieties of Kiswahili.

It was fascinating that these discourses surrounding language change in many ways resembled the evaluations of (moral) transformation analyzed in the foregoing chapter. While language contact has formed an integral part of life along the Swahili

coast, people (both young and old) spoke about the past as a time where language varieties were clearly distinct. When assessing elders' language use the emphasis lay on the older generation's sense of pride and their ability to uphold their dialect use (and dialect boundaries), despite living in a town where language contact is rife. Young people's language use was subsequently negatively evaluated as increasingly influenced by Standard Swahili, KiMombasa, and English, and predictions about the imminent loss of local dialects were voiced regularly – to me, but also within local magazines or during conferences on Swahili culture, for example. What is more, these assessments were not tied to a discourse of global interconnectivity (as exchanges in the past were phrased), but rather were considered the consequence of processes of dispossession started in the recent (colonial) past and continuing into the future. Discussions about language change were then never just about processes of increasing language contact; rather, different histories and political processes meaningfully informed these debates. Opinions about language shift then always also involved attitudes towards religion, race and ethnicity, and politics.

In essence, this is a chapter about language attitudes and language ideologies. While it aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the complexity of young people's linguistic repertoires, the chapter's detailed analysis of the historical and sociopolitical processes that introduced the different language varieties to the area sheds light on the value-laden nature of language use (and choice) in the archipelago. While I discuss historical facts, the focus is on how people from Lamu currently assess these historical events and how such evaluations translate into notions about (correct) language use. By discussing the multiple (historical, official, local) conceptions of the language varieties that make up Lamu's linguistic landscape, I hope to provide some clarity as to

the different, sometimes conflicting valuations of language use within the area. This then forms the essential background to an understanding of the various considerations young people make in language performances and strategic presentations of self (Chapter 5-6).

The chapter starts with an overview of the different Swahili dialects spoken in the Lamu Archipelago, their historical significance, and their lasting function as social indexicals (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011). I subsequently consider the historical process through which Standard Swahili was enforced, the implications this imposition has had within Lamu, and I elaborate at length on locals' attitudes toward the standard language. A third section of this chapter briefly discusses the introduction and significance of English in the local context. In the conclusion, I examine to what extent these different social, historical, and political developments have impacted language use among Lamu youth. In my discussion, I use scholarly analyses and assessments of these different language varieties both to substantiate and challenge claims made by local informants. The focus nevertheless remains on WaLamu's own assessment of processes of language change (or supposed lack thereof), and on the continuing social significance of the local dialects of Swahili. The theoretical contribution of this chapter is with its emphasis on the situatedness of linguistic value and language competencies. By explicating the wide range of evaluations of Swahili dialects, Standard Swahili, and English I challenge notions of the "monoglot standard" (Silverstein 1996) and complicate views of a language hierarchy that places prestige varieties (like English) on top (Blommaert 2005, 2010).

I start this chapter with an anecdotal narration of my own encounters with the differing assessments of "speaking Kiswahili" in Lamu and in the context of Kenya more

broadly. I do so to give the reader a sense, not just of the complexity of Lamu youth's linguistic repertoires, but especially of the importance of linguistic detail within the local context and the range of valuations people encounter when speaking Kiswahili. By underlining the situatedness of the valuing and devaluing of different language varieties, I frame the subsequent, lengthy discussion of historical and sociopolitical processes of language change, and I introduce the significance of linguistic value's locatedness.

Proficient or incompetent? The situatedness of linguistic value

When I first arrived in Lamu, I had little understanding of the linguistic diversity outlined above. My friends in Nairobi had warned me several times that coastal people spoke “difficult” Kiswahili and that interacting with people from Lamu would undoubtedly “distort” my knowledge of *Sheng*, the urban youth language spoken in Nairobi (and other major cities of Kenya). My previous research on *Sheng* had enabled me to speak the youth language quite fluently, although my friends had jokingly pointed out that my vocabulary had become rather dated.¹¹⁰ I was nevertheless aware that my knowledge of “proper” or Standard Swahili was rather poor.

During my first weeks in Lamu, I then frequently apologized for my broken language use to the young men I interacted most often with. Friendly and approachable, I had acquainted myself with the young men who spent their time on Lamu's seafront, as they seemed my most obvious link and access to the Lamu community. I often

¹¹⁰ I conducted research on *Sheng* for a total of 7 months in 2002 and 2003 (with a short return visit in 2005). When I visited friends in Nairobi before leaving for Lamu in 2007, my friends remarked that my absence from Nairobi had caused me to not pick up the changes within *Sheng*. Like many other urban youth languages, *Sheng* changes rather quickly, incorporating new words on almost a daily basis. The language itself is a mix of Kiswahili, English, and other ethnic languages such as Kikuyu and Dholuo. The base structure of the language, however, remains Kiswahili with few grammatical features introduced by e.g. Dholuo (Hillewaert 2003).

inadvertently greeted them using *Sheng* or incorporated English verbs in Kiswahili grammar (saying *nitacome*, instead of *nitakuja*, when I told someone I would join him later, for example). Much to my surprise, these young men refuted my claims to a lack of Kiswahili proficiency. On the contrary, they praised my language use. When they noticed my confusion, they clarified that the Kiswahili they spoke was far from correct language use. They claimed to speak different (outdated or incorrect) dialects of Kiswahili and to only have a limited knowledge of the standard language, let alone *Sheng*.¹¹¹ They ought to learn from me, they suggested laughingly. And while they appeared to be joking, I somehow became these young men's reference for translations and correct usages of new words or songs that were introduced through media and travels to Mombasa. I struggled, however, to understand the Kiswahili spoken on the island. Not only did people speak incredibly fast, the dialects they used were practically unintelligible to me.

About a year into my research, during the annual Maulid festival, an employee of the National Museums of Kenya introduced me to a reporter from the national TV-channel KTN – the Kenyan Television Network. He presented me as a researcher who was investigating the shifts in local language use, and particularly the gradual loss of Swahili dialects in the area. “But listen to the way she speaks Kiswahili,” he said with an amused tone of voice. I was not sure what he insinuated and kept my interaction with the reporter rather short.¹¹² When the latter asked me whether he could interview me about my research, however, I did not refuse. The 15-minute interview was aired in prime-time a couple of weeks later, right after the Kiswahili evening news. I was in Mombasa at the

¹¹¹ In Appendix A (*Note to Kiswahili and dialectal variation*), I explain how these varieties of Kiswahili differ from each other in terms of phonology, morphology, and lexicology.

¹¹² While my Kiswahili had become fluent during my time in the field, I was unaware of the fact I had acquired the local dialect, KiAmu, not just in terms of vocabulary (which I could intentionally leave out), but also in terms of intonation.

time and unaware of the interview's broadcasting. The next day, people recognized and addressed me on the streets and openly complemented my fluency in Kiswahili. This continued for several weeks. The interview was aired several times again and a YouTube video was posted on the Internet. What stood out to me was that, even on the Internet site, people praised my knowledge of, not just Kiswahili, but also the KiAmu dialect.

I start this chapter on Lamu's linguistic landscape with these two anecdotes, not to substantiate my own familiarity with the different varieties of Kiswahili, but rather to illustrate the social significance of language and dialectal differences in the Lamu Archipelago – the local awareness of, and value attributed to what are often considered inadequate deviations from the (Kiswahili) “monoglot standard” (Silverstein 1996).

These introductory examples importantly hint at the situatedness of both linguistic competencies and the social evaluations thereof. What it means to *speak* a language is far from a given; it depends on who is doing the speaking, on who is doing the evaluating, and on the spatiotemporal embeddedness of the interaction. While we – the beach boys, the people watching KTN evening news, users of the Internet, and I – all spoke Kiswahili, the value attributed to the *kinds* of Kiswahili we spoke heavily depended on the context, or the space in which the evaluations occurred. My friends in Nairobi had considered my knowledge of *Sheng* inadequate. Yet the young men at Lamu's seafront evaluated my use of *Sheng* positively and even appropriated some of the vocabulary I used. My use of *Sheng* to greet elders when walking via Lamu's backstreets, only a couple of streets removed from the seafront, was, however, considered far from admirable or valuable.

Residents of Mombasa evaluated my use of KiAmu positively, both because of the rarity of the occurrence (Western tourists and even expatriates hardly speak Standard Swahili, let alone coastal dialects) and because of its airing on national TV. Overhearing a young man from Lamu speak his local dialect when in Mombasa would, however, undoubtedly have led them to poke fun at his use of a “backward” dialect (see Chapter 6). What is more, his use of KiAmu (or KiBajuni) on national television would most likely have been evaluated as indicative of a lack of education and underdevelopment. And although urban residents considered my Kiswahili proficiency admirable, it was not valued as such within Lamu where it was evaluated as too closely resembling Standard Swahili. Both my use of *Sheng* and KiAmu would have been considered deficient forms of Kiswahili within official contexts, in a classroom, or when submitting a piece of writing to *Taiifa Leo*, a Kiswahili newspaper.

This short discussion hints at the multiple ideologies that circulate in young people’s linguistic environment and that impact their competence assessments within local as well as translocal contexts. It underlines the different ways in which languages can be valued *and* devalued within different, situated interactions (Blommaert 2010). The anecdotes described above meaningfully speak to the long accepted understanding within linguistic anthropology that languages do not simply exist “out there,” but rather are ideological objects, invested with social, political, and cultural interests (Blommaert, et al. 2005; Gal and Woolard 2001; Haviland 2003; Irvine 1989; Irvine and Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, et al. 1998; Silverstein 1979). This subsequent in-depth discussion of Lamu’s linguistic landscape will further demonstrate that the sociolinguistic system (Hymes 1974) cannot in any way be “equated to some supposedly internationally

valid system in which English is always empowering or disempowering” (Blommaert 2010: 189), nor can such oversimplification be applied to the standard language.

By discussing the different processes that impact patterns of appropriation and deployment of (transnational, national or local) linguistic resources, I aim to provide an understanding of the relocated values of Standard Swahili, English, and the Swahili dialects within the context of the Lamu Archipelago. Linking this discussion to Lamu’s history and to contemporary conceptions of the island’s relation to the Kenyan mainland (Chapter 2 and 3) underlines the remarkable semiotic potential language varieties and linguistic detail have within Lamu. This in-depth discussion of Lamu’s linguistic landscape is then essential to an understanding of the central role language use plays in the negotiation of new or redefined social positions and self-other relations.

The dialects of the Lamu Archipelago

Few Swahili textbooks make note of the dialectal diversity that exists within Kiswahili, yet these varieties were spoken along the East African coast as early as the 10th Century. Up until the standardization of Kiswahili under colonial rule, the language only existed in its dialectal variants. What is more, these different varieties of Kiswahili were only defined as “dialects” in relation to this artificially designed Standard Swahili (see also Irvine 2008). Before then Kiswahili language varieties, such as KiAmu or KiBajuni, were well-known, distinct forms of speech, meaningfully tied to different city-states along the East African coast (Bakari 1985; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Nurse, et al. 1993; Nurse and Spear 1985; Stigand 1915; Whiteley 1969). Today, these Swahili “dialects” continue to fulfill an important social function within local contexts, despite the fact that they are not recognized as distinct varieties (and thus mother tongues) within the national context.

Within the Lamu Archipelago six different “dialects” continue to be spoken: KiAmu, KiShela, KiMatondoni, KiPate, KiSiyu and KiBajuni (Fig. 27).¹¹³ Jointly these dialects are known as the Northern Swahili Dialects (Nurse, et al. 1993; Nurse and Spear 1985) . While these were historically spoken in the different towns located throughout the archipelago, they can now all be heard within Lamu Town as a result of increased migration to the urban center of the area.



Figure 27. The Northern Swahili Dialects

One evident consequence of these changing residence patterns is the resulting language contact, as different dialects are spoken within the same town. Notably this has not resulted in a communal shift to the use of KiAmu and the majority of Lamu residents proclaim to maintain their dialect-use. While this claim to dialect maintenance is remarkable (and questionable from a language contact viewpoint), several factors do contribute to such dialect maintenance. One of these is the topography of Lamu as

¹¹³ The dialects are mutually intelligible and differ in terms of phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and intonation patterns. For an in-depth discussion of the linguistic differences between these dialects, see Appendix A.

discussed in the foregoing chapters. In Chapter 2, I explained that newcomers to Lamu customarily settled in the *Langoni* area of town, whereas the *wenyeji* or original inhabitants predominantly lived in the neighborhoods of *Mkomani*. The geographical boundary between Mkomani and Langoni then increasingly entailed a dialect boundary. KiBajuni, KiPate, and KiSiyu were predominantly spoken in Langoni, whereas KiAmu was mostly heard in Mkomani. Among Lamu's younger generation, this boundary is becoming ever more porous. Due to the current rise in secular education, Lamu youth now go to the same schools and make friends across the social divides. They adopt each other's habits and practices, including different speaking styles. While still aware of the differences between, and social meanings attached to the different dialects, Lamu youth are familiar with, and use a range of different dialect features. As I will discuss in later chapters, many (although not all) young people increasingly retain only the most salient (phonological) features of these language varieties. Rather than switching to the dialects as such, they frequently incorporate such "accents" into their language use.

Locals,' and especially elders,' claim to dialect maintenance can be meaningfully explained through a discussion of the history of these dialects and the social groups that speak them. Many of the villages within the Lamu Archipelago were prosperous city-states at one point in history, and the rivalry between them is well documented.¹¹⁴ The shared memory of these different pasts ensures the lasting importance of the dialects and the different social identities they are tied to. The subsequent discussion then provides an understanding of the reasons for the dialectal diversity's lasting significance and the

¹¹⁴ Chapter 2 discussed the *Battle of Shela*, a battle between Lamu and the city-states of Pate and Mombasa.

importance linguistic detail – pronunciations, intonation patterns, or switching – continues to have within daily interaction.

The dialects of Lamu Island: KiAmu, KiShela and KiMatondoni

Of all the Northern Dialects, KiAmu is undoubtedly the most renowned. While Lamu's economic and political power indisputably aided the dialect's fame, it was its status as a literary language that resulted in its recognition along the East African coast. KiAmu has long been used in epic poems and was lauded for the richness of its vocabulary and the beauty of its rhyme. The dialect's written tradition dates back to the late 17th Century, with poems such as *Hamziya* written in Arabic script (Knappert 1999; Mazrui 2007; Zhukov 2004).¹¹⁵ Up until today, Lamu is celebrated for its skilled poets, the majority of whom continue to write their poetry in KiAmu rather than Standard Swahili. Some poets even continue to use Arabic script, suggesting that Roman letters are incapable of correctly representing the KiAmu dialect (and the Swahili language for that matter).¹¹⁶

KiAmu's dialectal difference with KiShela (spoken in Shela) and KiMatondoni (spoken in the village of Matondoni) is minimal, and linguists differ in opinion on the dialect status of both varieties. Nurse et al (1993) recognize the existence of KiMatondoni but only make cursory note of the local significance of KiShela. Bakari (1985) refutes the dialect status of KiMatondoni (and KiPate), and Stigand (1915) similarly only makes note of KiShela. Whitely (1969), in his discussion of the development of Standard

¹¹⁵ In his discussion of Kiswahili writing practices, Knappert proposes that “for such a perfect convention to develop and be established” there must have been a tradition of writing epics in Arabic script, perhaps for a century before the writing of *Hamziya* (Knappert 1999: v).

¹¹⁶ This will be discussed at length later on in this chapter, see *Standardization of Swahili*

Swahili, lists KiAmu and KiShela (next to KiPate, KiSiyu and KiBajuni), but does not mention KiMatondoni.¹¹⁷

While there are thus conflicting scholarly opinions on the linguistic distinctions between these language varieties, local “folk dialectology” insists on the dialects and bases this assessment on perceived distinctions in intonation patterns. The towns’ histories provide a possible explanation for this emphasis on dialect boundaries. While Lamu and Shela are only about two kilometers removed from each other, a historically tense relationship between the two towns could explain the continued insistence on linguistic (and cultural) differences (Nurse, et al. 1993; Stigand 1915).

I remember clearly how a family I visited quite regularly elaborated at length on the distinction between KiAmu and KiShela. The family was originally from Shela and had moved to Lamu because of the father’s employment. As the mother complained that her children no longer spoke KiShela, the children started mimicking the Shela dialect, intermittently being corrected by their father. The entire family found the whole exercise quite humorous and the daughters’ hilarity increased when they endeavored to explain to me *how* both dialects differed (which resulted in exaggerated pronunciations and enactments). People from Shela, so they explained, have a somewhat “harsher” pronunciation, which often entails an emphasis on the Arabic sounds in the Swahili language.¹¹⁸

The distinction between the dialects of Lamu and Shela, as slight as it might be, is not entirely implausible, and the towns’ historiography goes a long way in explaining the

¹¹⁷ Whiteley even suggests speakers of the dialects to be unintelligible to one another and to members of other dialect clusters (Whiteley 1969: 3).

¹¹⁸ As far as I recall, none of my informants gave me a real reason as to why people from Shela were perceived as having a more “Arab-sounding” pronunciation.

(ideological) maintenance of this linguistic and social distinction. At several occasions I was told that the town of Shela was home to the former residents of Takwa and Manda villages on Manda Island (now in ruins).¹¹⁹ Stigand (1915) confirms this story and uses this history to explain his description of KiShela as being linguistically situated between KiAmu and KiPate. Because Manda Island is geographically located between Lamu Island and Pate Island, Stigand suggests that the dialect equally took such an inbetween position (Stigand 1915: 62). Inhabitants of both Shela and Lamu attribute the abandonment of Manda Island to the turning of local sweet water resources into salt water.¹²⁰ Nurse et al. (1993) propose that the villages of Manda and Takwa were forsaken after the historical disputes between Lamu and Pate.

Whatever the case might be, WaLamu maintain that they donated the grounds of Shela to the homeless people of Manda; a generous gesture that enabled the latter to start a new settlement. In the past, so WaLamu argued, Shela people would take off their shoes upon entering Lamu town, as a visible sign of their gratitude.¹²¹ Interviewees from Shela would counter this story and suggest that they customarily do not wear shoes in Shela as the town's cleanliness permits them to do so. When going to Lamu nowadays, they are obliged to take their shoes with them as the town's dirtiness makes it impossible for them to walk barefoot. Such narrations are illustrative of the historically existing social (and physical) boundary between these two groups. As Shela becomes ever more prosperous,

¹¹⁹ Nurse et al. (1993) argue that the Manda dialect, like that of Pate and Siyu, was clearly distinct from the dialect of Lamu.

¹²⁰ This is a natural process that occurs quite often and results in the necessary abandonment of settlements, in search of sweet water.

¹²¹ Laura Fair (1998) discusses how, in Zanzibar, the absence of shoes was an immediately visible sign that identified a man or a woman as a slave. She suggests that slaves were forbidden from wearing shoes in the presence of the freeborn (Fair 1998: 69). The current inhabitants of Shela are not descendants of slaves, which would explain their objections to WaLamu's historical narration regarding the shoes. Yet the latter's recounting of such practice does hint at the discursive attribution of a lower social position to Shela people.

and as Lamu is increasingly faced with poverty, this historical distinction is only insisted upon more: through claimed distinctions in dress, food, dances, and language use.¹²²

The distinction between KiAmu and KiMatondoni is somewhat more evident and was recognized by Nurse et al (1993), but not by Stigand (1915), Polome (1967), or Bakari (1985). When asked to describe the difference between KiAmu and KiMatondoni, locals would suggest that people from Matondoni shortened their vowels, or “cut their words.” The existence of a systematic dialectal difference is not entirely implausible given the distance between the two towns, with Matondoni being located on the opposite side of Lamu Island. In addition, local historiography provides both a historical and ideological reason for the dialect boundary. According to historical records, the boat making village of Matondoni became home to the former residents of Pate Town, who migrated after the demise of the previously successful city-state. The current presence of the Nabahany clan – the previous rulers of Pate Town – seems to support this narration. This not only explains the dialectal difference, as KiMatondoni would be a derivative of the Pate dialect; the historical disputes between Lamu and Pate also validate the maintenance of a linguistic and social distinction between Lamu and Matondoni.

KiPate and KiSiyu: the dialects of former city-states

Both KiSiyu and KiPate occupy a unique position in this dialect cluster. Spoken in villages located on the same island, and only miles removed from areas where KiBajuni is spoken, the distinct status of both dialects is quite evident (Nurse, et al. 1993; Nurse and Spear 1985; Polome 1967; Stigand 1915). Bakari (1985) appears to be the only one

¹²² Certain dishes or dances are described as typically Shela or Amu. It is even said that men from Shela wear their *kofia* (Islamic hat) in a distinct way. All this illustrates the significance of local social identities and the semiotic potential of both linguistic and material detail.

who disputes the dialect status of KiPate (and argues it is not significantly distinct from KiSiyu). In terms of phonological and morphological distinctions, these language varieties share dialect features with both KiAmu and KiBajuni, and occupy an intermediate position between these dialects (Nurse, et al. 1993; Stigand 1915). When describing KiPate and KiSiyu to me, locals would emphasize vowel length and intonation as the most identifiable features of these dialects.

Because my focus in this chapter is on language attitudes and on the social value of linguistic difference, more than on the actual linguistic evidence for dialectal distinctions, it is important to point out that original inhabitants of Lamu (Lamu's *wenyeji*) often referred to people from Pate and Siyu as "Bajuni," thereby grouping the inhabitants of all other islands in the archipelago together. Inhabitants of both Pate and Siyu strongly rejected such denomination, insisting on their linguistic, cultural, and historical distinction from the Bajuni. This continued emphasis on a separate social status can be attributed to Pate and Siyu's historical position as successful city-states and their battles with Lamu town. Not only do inhabitants of these towns often recall their successful history, they also do not fail to underline the significant role the city-states played in the formation of the Swahili culture and language.



Figure 28. Siyu Fort
© Eric Lafforgue

KiBajuni, KiGunya, or KiTikuu

Within Lamu, the Bajuni continue to occupy a distinct position. Since Kenyan independence, many Bajuni migrated to Lamu in search of employment (mostly as fishermen, but also as traders in mangrove, as boat captains, etc.). There, the (formerly) wealthy Afro-Arab merchants distanced themselves from these fishermen and upheld a clear boundary based on linguistic, cultural, and even racial differences. A derogatory term used to refer to the Bajuni people is *WaGunya*. Nurse suggests the notion *Gunya* was used by Bajuni themselves to refer to those among them who were originally slaves (Nurse 2011: 1). It is for this reason that the appropriation of this term to refer to all Bajunis is considered insulting. The Bajuni themselves often use the term *KiTikuu* to refer to their dialect. Translating the notion as “the large land,” Bajuni explain its etymology as coming from *ti* meaning *land* and *kuu* meaning *large* or *big*. This denomination is then believed to represent their historical influence along the East African coast. Nurse (2011) suggests the term *Tikuu* was historically used by people from Pate and Siyu to refer to those Bajuni living on the African mainland (rather than on the islands). Rather than “large land,” the notion would thus have referred to the “main land” (Nurse 2011; Polome 1967; Spear 1978; Stigand 1915).

The status of KiBajuni as a distinct dialect is undisputed, however, and linguists have gone as far as to suggest that the Bajuni ought to be considered a separate “ethnolinguistic unit.”¹²³ With its 20.000 speakers, KiBajuni is undoubtedly the widest

¹²³ In his recent studies of the Bajuni, Derek Nurse (2011) suggests that KiBajuni is not merely a dialect of Kiswahili, but is distinct from it. He argues that up until twenty years ago, “the islands were almost 100% monolingual Bajuni speakers, although male traders and fishermen who traveled to Kismayu and Kenya would have had some exposure to Swahili” (Nurse, 2011: 37). He subsequently argues that Bajuni youth currently “speak poor Bajuni and lots of Swahili...[or]... a Bajuni-colored Swahili, Swahili with some Bajuni, mainly vocabulary and common phonetic features added” (Nurse, 2011: 37).

spoken dialect of the Northern Dialects and there is no question as to Bajunis' historically strong position along the Kenyan and Somali coast. Nurse (2011) contends that Bajuni settlements were powerful in the past and historical documents (partly) advance such claims. Reports from the Portuguese, for example, mention a request from the city-state of Pate to build walls around the town as a protection against Bajuni attacks (Nurse 2011). In the 16th Century raids by surrounding powerful African tribes, such as the Orma and the Boni, increasingly undermined Bajuni's prominent position. In the early 20th Century attacks by Somali tribes once again forced the Bajuni to flee from Somalia across the border into Kenya and to the islands of the Lamu Archipelago. The implosion of Somalia in 1991 caused a third wave of Bajuni migration. Villagers residing alongside the border with Somalia were forced to flee their homes and sought shelter in Lamu. These Bajuni refugees continue to live in Lamu as internally displaced people as they wait for their land to be reassigned to them.

Their distinct variant of Kiswahili, together with a politically and economically marginalized position in both Kenya and Somalia have resulted in an increasing sense of ethnic or tribal identity among Bajuni people. This is evident in the upsurge of organizations such the *Shungwaya Welfare Association*,¹²⁴ or the creation of websites like *bajuni.com*.¹²⁵ Whereas in the past, Bajunis occupied a lower position on Lamu's social ladder, they now actively argue for acknowledgement within the local and national context. Their recognition as an official ethnicity within the Kenyan nation (as opposed to

¹²⁴ Shungwaya is the acclaimed homeland of the Bajuni and the mythical area where Kiswahili supposedly was first spoken.

¹²⁵ www.bajuni.com Websites such as these form an interesting example of the meta-discursive exercise through which separate ethnolinguistic identities are created. The website contains different links such as "history," "culture," "language," and "religion," hereby meta-discursively outlining and thus objectifying different categories of "belonging."

Swahili or even Arabs) only strengthens their case, and they increasingly occupy an important position within local (Lamu) politics.

All of the above-described dialects can be heard within Lamu Town. And as suggested previously, some dialects are more prominent in particular areas of town than in others. In specific wards of Mkomani, such as *Mtaamwini* or *Utukuni*, only KiAmu can be heard. Within Langoni, KiSiyu, KiPate, and KiBajuni are most frequently spoken. What is more, the majority of older inhabitants I spoke to, insisted on the maintenance of these dialect boundaries. During interviews with elder residents from Pate, Siyu or Rasini, for example, interviewees would proudly proclaim to still speak their dialect despite having lived in Lamu for decades. I certainly do not suggest that the effects of extensive language contact are not there. On the contrary, I am convinced that a detailed analysis of my interviews and recordings of interactions would reveal quite a lot of switching, borrowing, and dialect leveling. What is more, young people's language use most clearly shows the effects of frequent interaction across dialect boundaries, with young Bajunis more frequently speaking KiAmu and with youth in general having a less in-depth knowledge of the dialects described above.

Here, I merely want to underline that dialect difference remains an important social fact for local residents. It is a social indexical that continues to be meaningfully tied to social background, manners, norms of interaction, area of residence, and social status. What is more, annual celebrations of the archipelago's "cultural diversity" bolster these differences. During the annual *Lamu Cultural Festival*, for example, men perform

the social groups' different dances, while women cook different "traditional" dishes and exhibit the social groups' dress styles during the festival's fashion show.

Complicating Lamu's linguistic map: urban dialects, standardization and English

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Northern Dialects are far from the only language varieties that make up Lamu's linguistic landscape. Influences from education, travel, media, and tourism increasingly introduce new varieties to the area. It is particularly Lamu's younger generation that adheres to, and incorporates these new linguistic influences. Exactly because the introduction of language varieties like KiMombasa or Standard Swahili is tied to broader historical and political processes, this appropriation equally hints at shifting (ideological) orientations among Lamu's youth. Evaluations of such repertoire shifts are then far from equal cross the board. By outlining the different sociopolitical processes that introduced these different varieties, I underline that altering linguistic practices are far from just a generational shift, nor are they merely the result of language contact. While both phenomena undoubtedly contribute to language change, language attitudes meaningfully inform dialect maintenance or shift. In what follows, I discuss the introduction and local evaluation of KiMombasa, Standard Swahili, and English.

KiMombasa: historical competition and contemporary appeal

Thus far I have provided an overview of the different Swahili dialects originally spoken within the Lamu Archipelago. One dialect of Swahili has not yet been introduced: KiMombasa or KiMvita, the dialect from Kenya's second largest city, Mombasa. Located

along the coast, about 350 km removed from Lamu, Mombasa is an important port-city that contributes significantly to Kenya's economy. As a successful city-state in the past, Mombasa also played a significant role in the history of the Swahili coast and has had a long-standing rivalry with Lamu. Mombasa's current economic success contrasts sharply with Lamu's deteriorated condition, and Lamu inhabitants' resentment over this "victory" is evident in the rather tense relationship between inhabitants of both towns.¹²⁶ People from Mombasa do not fail to poke fun at WaLamu and their supposed "lack" of development. What is more, they do not distinguish between people from Lamu, Pate, Siyu, and the Bajuni Islands and refer to all inhabitants of the archipelago as either *Bajuni* or *WaGunya*. Based on the foregoing discussion, it should be obvious that this is experienced as quite insulting by the Lamu *waungwana*, as well as by people from Pate and Siyu. Similarly, Bajuni increasingly reject a joint identification with WaLamu, emphasizing their distinct history and culture.

Like KiAmu, KiMombasa was renowned in the past and was mostly known under the name "KiMvita."¹²⁷ It is the dialect in which famous poems like *Muyaka* (Abdulaziz 1979) were written and the dialect was long considered a possible candidate for the standardization of Kiswahili. As I will subsequently discuss, the eventual selection of KiUnguja (the dialect of Zanzibar) was cause for resentment along the Kenyan coast.

Early descriptions of the Swahili dialects considered KiMvita to be evidently distinct (Krapf 1882; Stigand 1915) and the separate status of the dialect was equally recognized in later linguistic studies (Nurse and Spear 1985). In her analysis of the

¹²⁶ While this historical rivalry is mostly expressed through jocular discussions between people from Lamu and Mombasa, resentment was sometimes expressed quite frankly in (political) discussions.

¹²⁷ While the historical name of Mombasa was Kongwea, it obtained the name "Mvita" during a time of historical battles and shifts of ownership over the town. *Vita* is the Kiswahili word for *war*.

Mombasa dialect, Driever (1976) describes the dialect as having “ a pronunciation which is clearly different from other dialects of Swahili, its own intonation and some lexical items which are particular to Kimvita” (Driever 1976: 4). Nowadays, the dialect from Mombasa is most clearly discrete in terms of its intonation; its phonology and morphology, while still distinct, have appropriated much of Standard Swahili. People who speak KiMombasa are recognizable by their “singing” or melodious intonation. And although WaLamu explicitly distance themselves from people from Mombasa, young people increasingly use this urban dialect. As I will discuss at length in chapter six, this shift is motivated by a fear of mockery as well as by a desire to be viewed as urban and developed. Because of the historically stiff relationship between the two towns, elders often suggested they prefer their children to speak Standard Swahili, rather than KiMombasa. Some young people echoed this remark and suggested they spoke Standard Swahili when traveling to Mombasa. The increasingly significant (but rather contradictory) role of KiMombasa in young people’s linguistic repertoire will prove important in my subsequent analyses of linguistic practices and the negotiation of altered social positions within daily interaction.

Standard Swahili, a lasting dispute

Leonard Bloomfield (1933) once suggested that language standardization ought to be considered a natural process, the achievement of which is indicative of a society’s level of civilization. The standard, he argued, was best exemplified in its written form: the literary language (Bloomfield 1933: 393). One might then wonder what motivated the standardization of Kiswahili under colonial rule. Did the East African coast not have an established literary tradition when the British colonizers arrived?

On the Swahili coast, contrary to the African interior, written traditions had long replaced oral ones and books and manuscripts had been an integral part of Swahili culture for centuries. The epic poems or *tendi*, for example, are typologically comparable to Western epics and sagas; they are didactic poems based on the Quran and the Prophetic Hadith and form rich material for studying the moral values of the Waswahili (Zhukov 2004: 7). Epic poems, like the *Hamziya* (1652) and *Al-Inkishafi* (1749), were written in the KiAmu dialect, using Arabic orthography (Fig. 29). With its stable written form and established poetic conventions, KiAmu was a famous literary language that was in use as early as the 15th C (Harrow 1991; Knappert 1979; Mazrui 2007; Zhukov 2004). Did KiAmu then not answer to Leonard Bloomfield’s description of a standard language? If not an established orthography and literary tradition, what then was standardization to achieve?

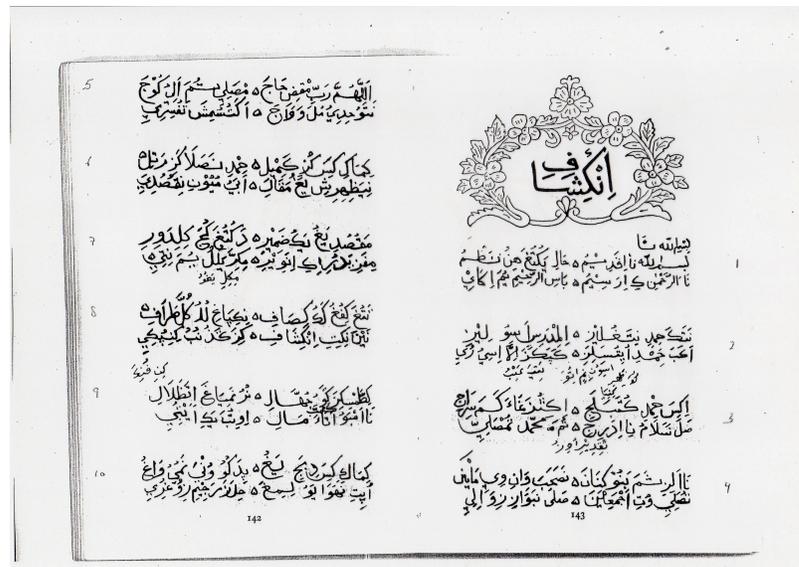


Figure 29. Al-Inkishafi in Arabic orthography
Courtesy of Prof. Abdulaziz Lodhi

Standardization of Swahili: a colonial project

Although British missionaries and colonizers encountered a language that answered to the technical demands of a standard literary language when they arrived at the East African coast, Kiswahili equally defied their expectations. Firstly, there did not exist one single Swahili language in precolonial East Africa (Peterson 2006); a range of dialectal varieties was spoken which contradicted Western Herderian expectations.¹²⁸ Secondly, this literary tradition, combined with white coral houses and centers of trade and Islamic scholarship strongly challenged explorers' overall conceptions of the African continent. The written tradition, with its Arabic orthography and focus on Islamic virtue, was consequently considered foreign to the local context (see Irvine 2008 for a similar discussion on, for example, Wolof and Sereer). Conversion to Christianity and the purging of all foreign elements was then a necessity to restore the "natural condition," and to subsequently allow Africans to become truly civilized, colonial subjects (Broomfield 1930, 1931; Roehl 1930). This purification process entailed a switch from Arabic to Latin orthography, the replacement of Arabic vocabulary with "African" concepts, and the establishment of one standard language in which the Bible could be translated (Irvine 2008).

A concern for missionaries, standardization was equally important to the British colonial project. Colonizers were in need of an effective means to communicate with their colonial subjects and the established lingua franca, Kiswahili, formed an ideal candidate. The language's Arabic orthography and its dialectal variation, however, alienated colonizers and prevented the much-needed (linguistic) control over

¹²⁸ The Herderian notions of the "Volk" and "volksgeist" heavily influenced European nationalist thinking; it was believed that one nation ought to speak one language, and multilingualism was considered dangerously divisive.

administration and education – elements vital to creating and maintaining symbolic power (Fabian 1986). With no unified language at hand, standardization of Kiswahili became a matter of both “political and practical urgency” (Peterson 2006: 8).

As Irvine (2008) and Peterson (2006) have argued, the writing and reworking of vernaculars allowed missionaries, linguists, and entrepreneurs to envision their particular imagined communities. Scholars have even gone as far as to say that the very usage of the notion “Swahili” coincided with British colonizers’ eagerness to classify indigenous inhabitants into a system of socio-cultural compartments (Southall 1970). Contrary to what Leonard Bloomfield (1933) suggested, standardization in the colonial project was far from a natural process. Standard Swahili had to be designed, constructed, and purified – a task assigned to East Africa’s Interterritorial Language Committee in 1930. This group of Western linguists and missionaries determined, not only the dialect on which the standard was to be based, but also the language’s correct phonemic structure and its spelling and grammar rules.

The standardization process itself was largely driven by the United Mission to Africa, headquartered in Zanzibar, and spearheaded by Gerald Broomfield (Broomfield 1930, 1931) and Edward Steere (1919 [1999]). Both had written grammars on the Swahili language, were proponents of the language’s re-Bantuization, and proposed the Zanzibari dialect to form the basis for a standardized Kiswahili.¹²⁹ Within the Interterritorial Language Committee they were opposed, however, by the Church Missionary Society, headquartered in Mombasa and supported by Ludwig Krapf (1882) who championed the use of KiMvita. Whiteley (1969) recounts the historical struggle

¹²⁹ A rather heated, and published debate between Broomfield (Broomfield 1930, 1931) and Roehl (1930) unfolded concerning the notion of re-Bantuization.

between these two camps and suggests it was Zanzibar's prominence as a political and economic center (and thus practical rather than linguistic reasons) that eventually formed the determining factor in the Committee's decision (see also Chimera 1998).

As Derek Peterson has emphasized, there was nothing inevitable or intrinsic to the Committee's decisions regarding the spelling system or vocabulary of what was to become Standard Swahili (Peterson 2006: 11). Rather, through standardization missionaries and upcountry African converts, who wished to purge Arabic from the Swahili language, were able to represent their own interests. Minutes from the Committee's meetings stated, for example, that "the unnecessary introduction of Arabic words and expressions, where equally good and expressive Bantu words existed, would create difficulty and confusion to the simpler minded peoples of the hinterland."¹³⁰ Ignorant about the functionality of distinctive aspirations, implosives, and consonant clusters, thinking them to be imports from Arabic, the committee eliminated these features in the new spelling system. The standard language thereby became a vehicle by which a class of Christian upcountry writers could express themselves, including Ngugi wa Thiongo, or indeed Julius Nyerere.¹³¹

For these reasons, the committee members are often said to have designed a new language – a language spoken by none. Or as one of the missionaries stated in his evaluation of the new standard language:

"We are in the somewhat ludicrous position of teaching Swahilis their own language through the medium of books... whose language has but little resemblance to the spoken tongue ... We have standardized Swahili... and in the process Swahili seems to have become a new language... something which is at its best lifeless, though intelligible, at its worst both lifeless and unintelligible"
(Missionary report cited in Khalid 1977: 156)

¹³⁰ Derek Peterson provided me with this quote from the Interterritorial Language Committee's minutes.

¹³¹ Derek Peterson, personal communication

Because of the debates within the Language Committee itself and the controversies surrounding some of its decisions, the eventual implementation of the standardization program was received with mixed feelings and accusations of destruction of the language were made as soon as the committee published its first works (Mkude 1984: 25). Despite the missionary reports and academic reviews that underlined the Interterritorial Language Committee's decisions as faulty and inadequate (mostly voiced from proponents of KiMvita), Standard Swahili was implemented with little alteration in official circles and in education. When independence reached Eastern Africa, Standard Swahili became the national and official language in Tanzania, and a national language (next to English) in Kenya, where it only became an official language in 2010.

The standardization of Kiswahili could be considered a success when viewed in terms of a colonial project that endeavored to design a language that facilitated communication across different ethnic groups, or as a postcolonial project needing a national language that was not tied to any one particular ethnicity (Chimera 1998; Polome 1967). At the same time, it is important to underline that Kiswahili had always been a lingua franca and that the language far from instilled a sense of national unity among Kenyan citizens (Chimera 1998; Whiteley 1969). In addition, mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili would certainly not acknowledge the successful standardization of the language. On the contrary, the majority continues to reject the standard language hegemony up until today.¹³²

¹³² In many ways, Kiswahili then defies established understandings of notions such as “language,” “dialect,” or “mother tongue.” The Swahili language refers to a set of linguistic practices that are recognizable as belonging to the same “unit,” yet the elaborate diversity within it simultaneously is indicative of complex, social identities on different levels of society. It hereby defies conceptions of

Standard Swahili in contemporary Kenya: contested encounters within education and administration

The establishment of Standard Swahili as one of Kenya's national languages within the postcolonial context indexed not only the "success" of the standardization process; it reflected a significant shift in the source of economic and social prestige. Already within the British protectorate, but more so in independent Kenya, the imposition of Standard Swahili entailed altered access to central forms of new political power for mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili. The standardization project went, purposefully, not hand in hand with the creation of a distinct Swahili ethnolinguistic identity and actually endeavored to counter such tendencies. Kiswahili speakers were then left with little linguistic capital: dialects, as their mother tongue, were negatively evaluated as a distorted, inadequate deviant of the standard language, and their lack of a unified "ethnic identity" constrained representation at the national level. Judged as "incorrect" language use, the varieties that were now viewed as "dialects" quickly came to stand for lack of education and development.

In the context of Lamu this is no different and the consequences of this lack of linguistic capital are increasingly evident in daily life. Two cases in point are Lamu inhabitants' encounters with administration and the educational failure of Lamu youth. Local administrators – in Lamu's county council, in the registrar's office, etc. – are generally from mainland ethnic groups, such as the Kikuyu or Meru. These individuals commonly speak Kiswahili as their second or third language. When submitting official documents or when reporting to local offices, WaLamu are often criticized, however, for their incorrect language use and particularly for "mistakes" in writing practices. If not

"ethnolinguistic units" in more than one way. This is, of course, the case in many descriptions of African languages (see Irvine 2008).

resorting to English, these officials themselves speak Kiswahili with an evident accent and use a variety of Kiswahili locally referred to as *Kibara*, or *the language of the mainland* (Wald 1985). While not grammatically deficient to the extent of historical variants as *Kisettla*, spoken by colonial officials (see e.g. Chimera 1998; Whiteley 1969), *Kibara* refers to the “harsher” pronunciation typical of “upcountry” Kenyans and to the mistakes many of them make, including repetition of verbal prefixes or the inability to pronounce the /l/. Much to the frustration of WaLamu, and coastal inhabitants in general, this variant of Kiswahili is becoming increasingly common, especially since Kenyan MP’s are often incapable of speaking “proper” Kiswahili (Wald 1985).¹³³

In Kenyan schools, Standard Swahili is the language of instruction in primary education.¹³⁴ English becomes the language of instruction in secondary education, where Kiswahili becomes a compulsory subject (Chimera 1998). School-going youth within coastal areas, like the Lamu Archipelago, are administratively considered mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili. Despite this recognition as mother tongue speakers, youth often obtain failing grades for this school subject. Exactly because dialectal variations are misrecognized or ignored in postcolonial language policies, local students struggle to speak and write Standard Swahili. They are either unfamiliar with the standard language, or are unaware of the differences in writing conventions. The subtle but significant distinctions between the local dialects and Standard Swahili then not only results in failing grades, they also lead to negative attitudes toward the local dialects, which are

¹³³ What is considered “proper” Kiswahili is, of course, dependent on the speaker. As I will subsequently discuss, many inhabitants of Lamu do not even consider Standard Swahili to be proper language use.

¹³⁴ This is the case in areas that are considered “urban” areas, where different ethnicities can be found. In more rural settings, the mother tongue is the language of instruction in primary education. Lamu is considered an urban area, so no adjustments are made for mother tongue education, which results in failing grades for many of the youth (as I outline in the main text).

viewed as a cause for educational failure. Parents and young people alike then increasingly steer away from dialect use in the hope of improving educational success.

Exactly because education on the Kenyan mainland is more attuned to second language acquisition, and because the overall quality of education is much higher, qualified teachers most often come from the Kikuyu, Meru or Luo ethnicities. As Lamu schools face a shortage of qualified local teachers, and because the numbers of school going youth increase yearly, school administrators are forced to employ teachers from Kenya's mainland. Much to the resentment of local elders, these instructors are increasingly viewed as experts in the Swahili language, despite the fact that many of them are locally considered to speak the aforementioned "Kibara."¹³⁵

Consider the following statement made by an interviewee from Pate. Suheil,¹³⁶ who was about 55 at the time of the interview, laments the gradual loss of KiPate and attributes this to the increasing imposition of mainland Kenyans (and implicitly the Kenyan government) in local schools. Tariq, my elder research assistant (who we encountered earlier in Chapter 3), conducted the interview. Suheil speaks KiPate throughout.

S Suheil
T Tariq

S. ile shule ile kuna somo la Kiswahili lakini Kiswahili kenyewe si cha Kipate . si Kipate . ndrio sasa hapo alipokuwa mwanangu husoma akawa hufeli Kiswahili . chukaankuliwa na walimu hadi masta kulee . kwa nini hawa ni waswahili wakafeli Kiswahili? nkamwambiya: naam ni lazima wafeli Kiswahili (...) sasa atakuya hapa mwalimu atakayemsomesha mwanangu Kiswahili atoka Meru .. Mmeru atoka Meru = au ni Njaluwo wa kutoka Taita . hoko waye

¹³⁵ This is both a combination of ideological perceptions and actual fact. Primary and secondary teachers generally have a degree in Kiswahili or had extensive training in the subject. This educational background, however, does not erase their accent nor does it always enable them to correctly pronounce /l/ or /r/ for example. The interviewee quoted expresses exactly this frustration: while the Kiswahili spoken by teachers is not considered correct Kiswahili within the local context, it (and the person teaching it) derives its authority from being the variant used in school books.

¹³⁶ pseudonym

hawaisi namna ya Kiswahili wawe wamekiona kitabuni tu (...) Kama alipachikana mwalimu wa kutoka nyumbani hafeli Kiswahili . kosa lilikuwa ni kwa sababu mwalimu atakuya ni kutoka bara bwana . *tukula* bwana TUKULA ati CHULE . sasa *kukula* nnini? [laughs]

T. si Kiswahili

S. sasa itachiziye asifeli na imeandikwa kwenye kichabu, ndo ashafeli . kwa heri bwana! [laughs]

S. that school over there there is a Kiswahili class but the Kiswahili itself is not KiPate . it is not KiPate . so now when my child went to study he failed Kiswahili . so the headmaster called us . why do they fail for Kiswahili and they are WaSwahili? I told him yes of course they fail for Kiswahili (...) now a teacher comes who will teach my child Kiswahili but he himself comes from Meru .. a Meru from Meru=or a Jaluo from Taita¹³⁷ . they come here but they do not know the ways of Kiswahili . they just saw it in books (...) if there had been a teacher from home he would not fail Kiswahili . the problem is that the teacher is from the mainland . *tukula* my friend . TUKULA . meaning let's eat (*tule*) what is *kukula*? [laughs]

T. it is not Kiswahili.

S. now how can it be that he wouldn't fail and it is written in books . that is why he has failed already! It's over my friend! [laughs]

According to Suheil, his son failed for Kiswahili, not because he was incapable of speaking or writing the language, but because the teacher had a different (and, according to Suheil a false) conception of what *correct* Kiswahili is supposed to look like. This sense of dispossession, of misrecognition of local knowledge and expertise, is considered indicative of broader sociopolitical processes and the imposition of the Kenyan State. In such a context, speaking the standard language is no longer just indicative of education but also of an adherence to the postcolonial state.

In what follows, I will elaborate on local attitudes toward Standard Swahili, both to complicate our understanding of the standardization project and to provide insight into the language ideologies surrounding standard language use. As will become obvious from the discussions, local assessments of Standard Swahili are often just as much about race,

¹³⁷ The Jaluo ethnicity does not come from Taita but lives in Western Kenya, around Lake Victoria. In many of my interview extracts, elders would refer to ethnic groups from Kenya's mainland without knowing exactly where they live or who they were. The very fact that they came from mainland Kenya was often enough to evaluate them negatively and group them together with other mainland Kenyans.

religion and politics, and thus about WaLamu's orientation to the Kenyan nation, as they are about language use.

Standard Swahili or KiAmu? Evaluations of standardization

In 1986, Ngugi wa Thiong'o published *Decolonising the Mind*, a compelling argument against the usage of the former colonial languages in African writings. Twenty years after Kenyan Independence, Ngugi (1986) lamented the lasting and persistent colonization of African minds, the primary expression of which he found in Kenya's reliance on its former colonial language, English. Ngugi argued for a revaluation of vernacular languages, for mother tongue education, and for dispensing with English in order to restore a truly African way of thinking.¹³⁸ Yet Ngugi was not the first to critique Kenya's postcolonial language policies. About 10 years earlier, Abdallah Khalid (1977) voiced similar concerns in his much less influential book, *The liberation of Swahili from European appropriation*. Khalid's argument differs from Ngugi's in that he does not see the continued colonization of the African (Kenyan) mind in Kenyans' dependence on English but rather in the status of Standard Swahili as a national language.¹³⁹ The standard language, so Khalid argued, is a colonial construct rather than a true representation of the richness of the Swahili language. And he subsequently suggested that true decolonization remained impossible as long as Kenyans continue to use Standard Swahili.¹⁴⁰ Negative assessments of colonial standardization projects are not restricted to deprived mother tongue speakers. Scholars in African linguistics, history,

¹³⁸ Ironically this is very similar to the arguments voiced by missionaries and colonizers when they set out to standardize Kiswahili – viewing the usage of an “African” language preferable over English as it would allow subjects to express their “African soul” (see e.g. Roehl 1930).

¹³⁹ He wrote the book in English.

¹⁴⁰ Adhering to academia's endeavors to conceive of “a Swahili people,” Khalid frames his arguments in terms of a European-style conception of an ethnolinguistic identity. While advancing a liberation of European influences, he ironically remains fixated upon a colonial ideology.

and linguistic anthropology have problematized the methods with which languages, like Kiswahili, were standardized (see e.g. Blommaert 2008; Fabian 1986; Irvine 2008; Makoni 2003; Peel 2003; Peterson 2006).

Written over 30 years ago, Khalid’s discontents still resemble Lamu inhabitants’ current objections to the standard language. Although they recognize Standard Swahili’s official status, and thus its linguistic capital (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991), its imposition within administration and education (to name but a few) is considered indicative of increasing, government-induced dispossession. Like Khalid, many WaLamu view Standard Swahili as a distorted, impoverished variant of true or “original” Kiswahili – KiAmu, KiPate, or one of the other dialects, depending on the speaker. Consider, for example, the following extract from a poem written by the Lamu poet, Ustadh Mahmoud Abdulkadir

Kunyamaa nimechoka ¹⁴¹	tanyamaa hata lini
Wanangu huniepuka	kuwaona natamani
Walobaki kunishika	siwangu niwawendani
Mimi nimewatendani	mbona mwanipija zita
Wanangu mimi wadamu	wana uswahilini
Asili hawana hamu	yakuniyuwa ninyani
Wame natiya kaumu	na wana wa majirani
Kosa langu kosa gani	mbona hunipija zita
<i>I am tired of keeping quiet</i>	<i>How much longer should I remain silent</i>
<i>My children are avoiding me</i>	<i>I long to see them</i>
<i>Those who hold on to me</i>	<i>They are not mine, they are strangers</i>
<i>How have I wronged you?</i>	<i>Why are you raging a war against me?</i>
<i>My children by blood</i>	<i>Children of Swahili Culture</i>
<i>They don’t long for their origins</i>	<i>Who is to understand me?</i>
<i>They placed me in the masses</i>	<i>Together with the children of our neighbors</i>
<i>What is my mistake?</i>	<i>Why are you raging a war against me?</i>

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, this first verse resembles a verse from a poem by Bwana Zahidi Ngumi, Lamu’s renowned poet and leader of Lamu, who wrote the poem before the “Battle of Shela.” The verse goes: “kunyamaa nimechoka, mwatupa shauri gani?” or “I am tired of keeping quiet, what advice will you give us?” (Abdulaziz 1979: 118).

These are the opening stanzas of a poem, written in KiAmu, entitled “*Swahili*,” composed by the Lamu poet and Imam, Ustadh Mahmoud Abdulkadir. Written in the voice of the Swahili language, he asks his audience why they have lost respect for their mother tongue, allowing others to gain control over it. The poem articulates, not just a feeling of loss, but also a broader sense of dispossession. The original poem is about three pages long and its in-depth analysis would undoubtedly provide fascinating material for a full-length article. Here, I merely want to highlight some of the different orders of indexicality comprised in a few of its stanzas. The title of the poem, for example, is “*Swahili*” yet the poet laments the loss of KiAmu, a dialect that is not officially recognized as “the Swahili language.” In addition, Ustadh Mahmoud calls upon *wana uswahilini* or “children of Swahili culture.”¹⁴² He hereby not only assumes the existence a referent of a unified “Swahili people,” a group of people that share an inherent quality of “*Swahiliness*,” but by using KiAmu when calling upon this group, Ustadh Mahmoud also implicitly questions Standard Swahili’s authority as the shared language of *wana uswahilini*.

Ustadh Mahmoud’s sense of dispossession, and its link to broader sociopolitical processes, is most evident in some of the later stanzas.

Angalia na zitabu	zisomeshwao shuleni
Haziandikwi na Rajabu	si Sudi wala si Shani
Njoroge ndiyo katibu	ashisheyeo sukani
Charo nawake wendani	nao nyuma hufuata
<i>Look at the books</i>	<i>that are being read in schools</i>
<i>They are not written by Rajabu</i>	<i>not by Sudi or Shani</i>
<i>Njoroge is the editor</i>	<i>he holds the steering today</i>
<i>Charo and his friends</i>	<i>they follow right behind</i>

¹⁴² The word “*uswahilini*” could be translated as a “*Swahiliness*” or a quality of being Swahili; just as “*ustaarabu*” refers to civilization or having civilized qualities.

As I suggested earlier on in this chapter, authors of schoolbooks are, indeed, seldom mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili. One might assume that the poet considers this phenomenon to result from mother tongue speakers' lack of interest in the language. Close attention to Ustadh Mahmoud's word choice, however, shows that he sees the community's economic and political dispossession as the true reason for language loss. Ustadh Mahmoud did not arbitrarily choose the names listed in the second line of the cited stanza. *Rajabu*, *Sudi*, and *Shani* are not random Muslim names; their phonological structure places them within the KiAmu dialect and thus ties them directly to the Lamu Archipelago.¹⁴³ More importantly, they stand in sharp contrast with the names in the third line. *Njoroge* is unquestionably a Kikuyu name, Kenya's largest ethnic groups and the ethnicity of both Kenya's first and current presidents, Jomo Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki respectively. *Charo* on the other hand is a name clearly recognizable as Luo, the second largest ethnicity of Kenya to which the country's prime minister belongs.

In reality, not only scholars from the Kikuyu or Luo ethnicity write Kiswahili textbooks. On the contrary, many schoolbooks come from Tanzania where Kiswahili is the national and official language and where they have been much more successful in implementing Kiswahili language policies. By choosing Kikuyu and Luo names (rather than a Tanzanian one), Ustadh Mahmoud meaningfully ties his critique of language change to the Kenyan political and economic context, and indeed, to the racialized history of the process of language standardization.

¹⁴³ The Arabic pronunciation would be e.g. Rajab or Sud rather than *Rajabu* and *Soudi*. Because there are alternatives - names that are not directly linkable to a certain dialect such as *Ali* - these names fulfill an indexical function and contribute to the implied argument of the poem when opposed to *Njoroge* and *Charo* in the next verses.

The word *katibu* (verse 3) could be translated in different ways. It means *writer* or *editor* but also (*executive*) *secretary* and it is therefore far from exclusively tied to contexts of book publications; *katiba*, for example, is the Kiswahili word for *constitution*. The new Kenyan constitution and its approval were heavily debated at the time this poem was written in 2010. The depiction of *Njoroge* as *katibu* could therefore reference his (someone from the Kikuyu ethnicity) position as the editor or writer of schoolbooks, or alternatively, refer to his being in charge of the constitution. This political implication becomes more evident when taking the next line into consideration. *Njoroge* currently holding the *steering* is difficult to interpret in terms of book publications. Within a political context, it implies, however, that the Kikuyu ethnic group presently controls political (and economic) decisions – on a local and national level. We can take this analysis even further. *Sukani* is not just any steering; it refers to the steering of the traditional Lamu dhows that sailed across the Indian Ocean for centuries. These dhows not only helped built Lamu's economy, they represent a central part of its cultural identity. Stating that a Kikuyu holds the steering, the author implies that not Lamu people, not even sailors, are in control of Lamu's economy, politics, or culture. People from the mainland, strangers, now decide the direction of Lamu's future developments.

For inhabitants of Lamu the increasing imposition of Standard Swahili signifies much more than merely the loss of local dialects. The standard language and its colonial origins are ideologically linked to broader historical and sociopolitical processes that have negatively affected life in Lamu and are meaningfully associated with the process of moral transformation discussed in Chapter 3. Tying historical processes to notions of

self-other relations, WaLamu's perceptions and evaluations are not so much about linguistic quality as they are about racial and political ideologies. To substantiate this argument, I analyze three objections to the standard language that WaLamu often voiced: (1) the dialect chosen for the standardization project, (2) the use of Latin script, (3) and Standard Swahili's impoverished vocabulary.

(1) KiUnguja's selection as the basis of Standard Swahili

As suggested previously, the Interterritorial Language Committee's choice of KiUnguja as the a basis for what was to become East Africa's standardized lingua franca went far from uncontested, even at the moment of standardization itself. In his retrospective commentary, Khalid (1977) rehashes objections made by the Church Missionary Society, but meaningfully adds to these previous protests by arguing that *KiUnguja*, rather than an authentic variant of Kiswahili, was a pidgin spoken by Arab migrants (Khalid 1977: 138). Based on this argument, he concludes that the Interterritorial Language Committee therefore did not standardize the Swahili language; rather they created an entirely new language based on "gibberish" spoken by missionaries and foreigners.¹⁴⁴

It is interesting to point out here that discussions about Kiswahili's status as a "pidgin" were, indeed, rife in the past. These debates, however, generally targeted the many Arabic loanwords that had been incorporated in the Swahili language and suggested that, rather than a Bantu language, Kiswahili was a pidgin that developed from the interactions between Arab traders and indigenous African population groups (Chimera 1998: 27-34). Such notions have since long been denounced and Kiswahili's

¹⁴⁴ Khalid himself was a resident of Mombasa and thus heavily inclined to promote either the Mombasa or Lamu dialects. His commentary merely forms an interesting reflection of many of the dominant perceptions on Standard Swahili on the Kenyan coast.

status as a Bantu language (that nevertheless borrowed extensively from Arabic, but also from English, Portuguese, Persian, and Indian languages) is now uncontested (Chimera 1998; Nurse and Spear 1985; Polome 1967; Spear 1978). Khalid's adoption of this well-known controversy and his use of similar arguments to contest the validity of Standard Swahili are interesting, in the least.

(2) Standard Swahili's orthography

Ustadh Mahmoud wrote the original version of his poem using the Arabic script. He was one of the few people I knew in Lamu who insisted on using Arabic orthography, particularly when he wrote his poems. While perfectly capable of writing in Latin script, he used Arabic orthography when taking notes in books, writing messages to his children, and even when sending letters to some of his former students. Ustadh Mahmoud also only spoke and wrote KiAmu, his poems more than once lamenting the gradual disappearance of the dialect. When he heard I conducted research on young people's altering language use, he was more than willing to help. During my fieldwork, I spent many hours in his small, cramped library, discussing the origins, changes, and future of the Swahili dialects.

When asked about his insistence on writing in Arabic script, Ustadh Mahmoud proposed that Latin orthography had significantly impoverished the Swahili language. Its limited number of letters prevented the correct representation of important and functional phonemes that could be represented using Arabic script. The inability to correctly write the language then inevitably resulted in an impoverished variant. The Kiswahili word for *news* is derived from the Arabic خبر and its transliteration, although but an

approximation, thus ought to be *khabar*. Its written form in Standard Swahili, however, is *habari*. The *ḫ* sound is hereby erased, as is the word's Arabic origin. Ustadh Mahmoud suggested that such alterations not only created confusion in daily interaction; they also erased the true origin of the Swahili language and thus the important historical connection with the Arabian Peninsula and Islam.

Khalid (1977) equally critiques this “purification” of Kiswahili from Arab influences, discussing the lexical confusion this process has caused:

“The Swahili word for ‘river’ and that for ‘pillow’ are both rendered as ‘*mtu*’ in the European transcription, but the Swahili laughs when he hears the European, or his African pupil, or even a mother-tongue speaker of the Zanzibari lingua franca, assert that he rested his head on a river, or else that he went swimming in a pillow.”

(Khalid 1977: 168)

This inability to represent distinctive aspiration or fricatives, for example, not only results in confusion but also leads to the gradual loss of such phonetic distinctions, even in the dialects.

These arguments (and writing practices) obtain a deeper meaning when tied to the foregoing historical discussion of the standardization of Kiswahili and the different political and racial interests that motivated it. The decision to eliminate the “*kh*” sound from Kiswahili, rather than a mistake, was the Interterritorial Language Committee's conscious choice and formed part of the ideological project of “re-Bantuization.” In addition, the supposed inadequacy of writing systems had equally been missionaries' incentive to alter the script. Suggesting that Arabic orthography did not “supply the symbols to denote a series of vowel and consonant phonemes” within the Bantu language, they argued that the script caused ambiguity and was “scarcely suitable for practical purposes” (Polome 1967: 200-201).

In their insistence on using Arabic script, or in their dismissal of the standard language orthography when using Roman script, WaLamu reject much more than merely a particular orthography; they equally object to the racial, religious, and political ideologies that shaped the standardization project. The increasing appropriation of standard language orthography causes distress, not only due to the linguistic changes it implies, but also because of its association to broader processes of social, political, religious, and economic dispossession. Ustadh Mahmoud's choice to use Arabic orthography is then not merely a nostalgic effort; it is an important political statement.

Alexandra Jaffe (2000) argues that orthographic choices and their interpretation should be read "as meta-linguistic, socially conditioned phenomena which shed light on people's attitudes toward both specific language varieties and social identities and on the relationship between linguistic form and social world in general" (Jaffe 2000: 498-499). Exactly because non-standard varieties continue to be evaluated in relation to the official language, their non-standard orthographic representations become political statements (see also Schieffelin and Doucet 1994).

We can then argue that Ustadh Mahmoud's explicit usage of the KiAmu dialect and Arabic orthography is a meta-linguistic statement that challenges the authority as well as the effectiveness of the standard language.¹⁴⁵ While usage of KiAmu within daily practice is not necessarily political, its mobilization within poetry lamenting the disappearance of the Swahili language obtains a political character. What is more, the choice to write KiAmu as a recognizable, distinct variety on walls, T-Shirts, or social network sites like *Facebook* equally obtains an important political meaning (see Chapter

¹⁴⁵ It is important to note that few people are able to read "Arabic Swahili," and Ustadh Mahmoud thus needs to "translate" his poems when they are published in local magazines, or when they are to be read at public gatherings.

3). In light of this argument, previously (and subsequently) analyzed *Facebook* statuses acquire an added value. Such non-standard orthographies can challenge established linguistic hierarchies exactly because they make non-standard voices visible in a medium that “habitually does not recognize them” (Jaffe 2000: 499). Precisely because these non-standard orthographies continue to be evaluated in relation to the official, standard language, they become political statements.

(3) Standard Swahili’s impoverished vocabulary

We have to refrain from using the term “*Swahili Sanifu*” to refer to Standard Swahili. *Sanifu* in Swahili means ‘the best’ or ‘the most beautiful.’ The standard language is far from the best variant of our Swahili language and this term should not be used to talk about this impoverished language.

*Mwalim Hussein Soud at 2010 RISSEA Conference*¹⁴⁶

It was November 2010 and I had just presented an earlier draft of this chapter at the inaugural conference of RISSEA – the Research Institute for Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa – in Mombasa. I had focused my discussion on the influence of Standard Swahili on educational achievements of school-going youth in Lamu, and a rather agitated discussion (in Kiswahili) unfolded quite quickly after I ended my presentation. Among the audience were elders from both Lamu and Mombasa, many of whom were respected poets and teachers. But the majority of audience members consisted of university professors, authors, and other educators from Kenya’s mainland and from Tanzania, many of whom spoke Kiswahili as a second language.

Audience members expressed different opinions as to whether Kiswahili dialects ought to be incorporated in school curricula, and what then the status of *Swahili Sanifu* –

¹⁴⁶ Mwalim Hussein Soud is a senior resident of Lamu and the chairman of the Lamu Council of Elders. He made this statement when commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter that was presented at the Inaugural Conference of the Research Institute for Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa (RISSEA).

the Kiswahili term for Standard Swahili – ought to be. Upon hearing the frequent use of the notion *Swahili Sanifu*, Mwalim Hussein, a prominent resident of Lamu and a retired teacher, demanded the microphone. Visibly agitated, he reprimanded attendees (including me) for using the term *Swahili Sanifu*. While he recognized the status and importance of Standard Swahili in contemporary Kenya (and in Eastern Africa), he vigilantly objected to anyone calling it *sanifu*. Standard Swahili was, after all, far from the best form of Kiswahili, so he claimed. According to Mwalim Hussein, Standard Swahili was merely functional and far from beautiful. Well aware that many of the audience members only spoke Standard Swahili, and that some of them were renowned authors of “Swahili literature,” Mwalim Hussein took a clear, and rather risky stance.¹⁴⁷

Mwalim Hussein did not stand alone with his opinion and I encountered similar attitudes among residents of Lamu as well as Mombasa (see also Wald 1985). When discussing his poetry, Ustadh Mahmoud, for example, often emphasized the need to write his poems in KiAmu exactly because the dialect’s rich vocabulary allowed him to express semantic nuances absent from Standard Swahili. But not only local intellectuals or poets regretted the increasing hegemony of Standard Swahili; many of my interviewees equally elaborated at length on the (semantic and grammatical) richness of the KiAmu dialect.

Suleyman¹⁴⁸ was an elderly man belonging to Lamu’s *waungwana* or Afro-Arab merchant clans. He was a highly respected elder who was a member of Lamu’s *baraza la wazee* (Council of Elders) and an active member of many local aid organizations. I interviewed Suleyman quite early on in my research and had been rather surprised at his

¹⁴⁷ The debate at the conference continued for quite some time and got quite heated. One focus of the discussion was what ought to be considered “Swahili literature.” Could non-mother tongue speakers produce Swahili literature?

¹⁴⁸ pseudonym

willingness to be interviewed. I had presumed the upper-social classes, and men in particular, would be reluctant to speak to me given their previous (negative) encounters with anthropologists. And although Suleyman had immediately agreed to an interview, I assumed he would keep our conversation formal and concise.

Much to my surprise, the interview with Suleyman lasted a good two hours. He had arrived quite punctually after *assr* prayers at a small coffee-place – public but out of sight of passers-by, as was deemed respectful.¹⁴⁹ Like many elder men (particularly from Lamu’s upper-classes), Suleyman wore his impeccably white *kanzu* and beautifully embroidered *kofia*, the Yemeni design signaling his claim to Arab descent. He also used a beautifully carved *bakora* (walking stick), not so much to support him as to index his seniority and thus authority.

Suleyman initially appeared apprehensive about my research, but the realization that I focused on language use and on KiAmu in particular appeared to please him and his attitude seemed to instantly change. As he sipped his hot tea, Suleyman listened attentively to the explanation of my research and to some of my initial questions. He subsequently started talking and did not stop until he had to leave for *maghrib* prayers. His long narrative covered issues ranging from the imposition of mainland Kenyans, to children’s failure in school, to the use of Latin script. The argumentative thread that ran through his narration, however, focused on KiAmu’s status as a distinct language with a grammar and vocabulary that was much richer than other Swahili dialects and Standard

¹⁴⁹ Finding locations for interviews was often difficult, especially when interviewing elder men. Men from the upper classes would not invite me at their home, but being seen in local restaurants or *mikahawa* was equally out of the question. This coffee-place formed part of a locally owned, respectful hotel, where we could not be seen from the street, but that was public enough to not be considered inappropriate.

Swahili in particular. This conception of KiAmu as a language (*lugha*) rather than a dialect (*lahaja*) is evident in, for example, the following statement:

lugha ya Amu iko na maneno mengi kuliko lugha nyingine yoyote . bado haijatiwa akilini ama kuthaminiwa . ina maneno me::ngi . mimi nasema lugha ya Amu ina kama nahwu . kama **grammar**.

the language of Amu has many more words than any other language . but this has not yet been realized or valued . it has ma::ny words . I say that the language of Amu has (its own) grammar (*Ar. nahw*) . like **grammar**.

Suleyman substantiated his argument with a wide range of examples, describing different grammatical structures and vocabulary differences. He thereby proposed that this richness allows for subtle semantic distinctions, absent from Standard Swahili (an argument that echoed Ustadh Mahmoud's opinions). This deficiency in the standard language not only caused confusion, but made the communication process unnecessarily lengthy:

sina haja ya kutumia meneno marefu . unaweza kutumia neno moja tu . kama hapa tuko **balcony** . aweza kuya mtu akaniita . Omari yuko chini! sasa ni lazima nitazame . a::h mwambia aningojee . mtu wa Amu aweza kuya kuniamba Omari yuko *TINI* . *tini* ni ile chini . watu wa Mombasa wanatuteka wao . lakini aweza kuya mwengine mtu wa Amu anaweza kusema Omari uko *TIATI* **mean on the floor** . mimi moya kwa moya nitayua ameANGUKA . hana haja ya kuniambia ameanguka = pengine alisikia kisunzi . sasa tukisema *tiati* wao watateka . sisi *tini* na *tiati* ni tofauti

I don't need to use long words . you can just use one word . for example we are here on the **balcony** . someone can call me . Omari is *chini* (down)! Now I have to look . a::h tell him to wait for me . someone from Amu can come and tell me Omari is *TINI* (downstairs) . *tini* is the same as that *chini* (down) . people from Mombasa laugh at us . but someone else from Amu can come and tell me Omari is *TIATI* (down) . **means on the floor** . at once I will know he fell . he does not need to tell me he has fallen down = maybe he was feeling dizzy . when we say *tiati* they laugh at us . but for us *tini* and *tiati* are different

Suleyman's contribution hints at local perceptions of linguistic value, as well as at broader evaluations of dialect use (by people from Mombasa, for example). Both his view of KiAmu as a clearly distinct language, and his conception of outsiders' unjustified

mockery are meaningful. According to Suleyman, Mombasa inhabitants' laughter derives from their ignorance about the richness and usefulness of the KiAmu dialect, rather than from warranted contempt. An understanding of the reasons for, and broader implications of assessments as the ones Suleyman made are important to better comprehend local evaluations and uses of KiAmu, particularly among Lamu youth, as we will see in the subsequent chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). While young people's language use is meaningfully influenced by the increasing imposition of both Standard Swahili and KiMombasa, the pervasiveness of ideological evaluations of local dialects motivates the strategic usage of the different language varieties that make up young people's repertoire. While successful evaluation is not guaranteed, the use of such ideologically laden varieties enables youth to take a particular stance toward the local context.

The discussion of the different evaluations of Standard Swahili demonstrates that standardization is never a naturally occurring or an all-encompassing process. While the creation of Standard Swahili erased dialectal differentiation in official knowledge production, linguistic diversity on the ground continues to shape social interaction and relations. The linguistic hierarchy – the linguistic regime of value – it was able to put in place, however, created a negative evaluation of linguistic diversity in relation to the standard: divergence from the imposed linguistic norm then becomes iconic of speakers' lack of education or marginality (from the view of the center).

While not effectively erasing the existing linguistic diversity, the political recognition of a standard language as well as its functions and significance in official contexts defines other languages or dialects in direct relation to it. Bourdieu (1997, 1984,

1991) therefore viewed linguistic diversity as inextricably linked to the production and reproduction of social inequality. Languages and linguistic varieties ultimately are social and economic capital, differentially distributed among the population of stratified societies. Standard languages, often used to invoke or appeal to a national identity in postcolonial contexts, then simultaneously create a state-endorsed inequality (Kroskrity, 2000: 28). Artificial as standard language projects may be, their political impacts are real and significantly influence linguistic practices and language attitudes of individuals and communities.

The foregoing discussion, however, underlined that this standard language hegemony (Silverstein 1996) and the inequality it imposes are far from complete. On the contrary, local objections to such domination can be quite explicit and politically meaningful. Language use, the evaluation thereof, and the relation to negotiations of social positionalities are then meaningfully tied to speaker, person spoken to, and context of interaction – it brings our attention back to the situatedness of both language use and ideologies.

English: imperial or global language?

When walking through Lamu, one can notice snippets of English everywhere: stores advertising their products in English (next to Kiswahili), slogans on walls, or announcement of the newest movies in the local theatre (Fig. 30-32). Locals, both men and women, are devout fans of soccer teams like Manchester United, Arsenal, or Manchester City and these teams' logos and slogans can be found throughout town. Upon entering the local school, a clearly visible sign reminds visitors that they “are now entering an English speaking zone.”

While few WaLamu speak English fluently, the language undoubtedly forms part of their linguistic repertoire, and both young and old regularly encounter English in their daily lives, to different extents and in different ways. When analyzing these semiotic expressions of a familiarity with English, it is not entirely clear, however, whether these linguistic practices are references to a colonial past, or whether these are new expressions of an orientation toward a global culture. The British colonial history and the renewed access to global forms of language use are interestingly intertwined – both form an index of global consumerism that has always formed part of Swahili cultural practices (Prestholdt 2008). Either way, conceptions of English appear to stand apart from evaluations of Standard Swahili. While the latter represents the Kenyan government, the former can be either indexical of a nostalgic past or of a renewed global orientation. But the use of English is not always positively evaluated; the language’s interpretation depends on context of use as well as the other material practices it is tied to.¹⁵⁰

WaLamu speak English with different degrees of fluency, the access to the language being restricted to secular education, new forms of technology (including satellite TV, Internet and cellular phones), or frequent interaction with Western tourists. Exactly these different means of language acquisition create diverging ideological conceptions of varieties of English; it creates “register effects” whereby speaking “like that” increasingly becomes indicative of “that kind” of people (Agha 2005; Irvine 2005). These different kinds of *Englishes* (Pennycook 2010) then acquire particular value within the local context of use (Blommaert 2005, 2010).

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 6 for an elaborate discussion of how this plays into negotiations of new social relations and positions.

Processes of appropriation and mobilization of English have been studied at length in linguistic anthropology (see e.g. Blommaert 2010; Heller 2003; Ibrahim, et al. 2009; Pennycook 1994, 1998, 2007, 2010). While I underline that English acquires its particular value within local contexts of use, I also suggest that the language retains an air of prestige because of Kenya's colonial and postcolonial language policies and the different ways in which it can be acquired. I stress, however, that exactly the distinct orientations toward the Kenyan nation and the different means of acquisition result in differing assessments of linguistic practices, depending on the situatedness of the interaction (see also Chapter 5).



Figure 30. English hairdresser advertisement, Langoni
©Eric Lafforgue

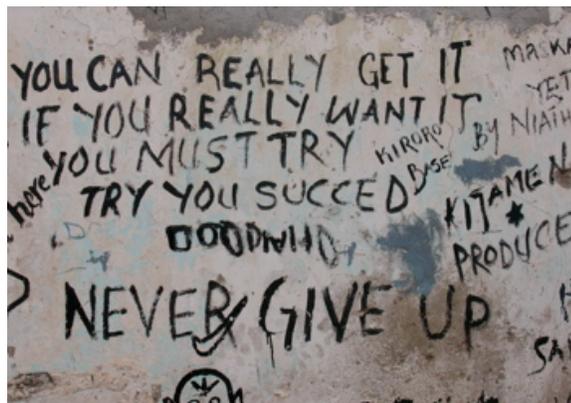


Figure 31. English graffiti, Langoni



Figure 32. Local shop: Kiswahili, English, and Arabic
 © Eric Lafforgue

In colonial East Africa, access to English (as the language of the colonizer) was strategically constrained by regulating (limited) access to education and by encouraging the use of vernaculars (like Kiswahili) in official communication. Restricted to the higher echelons of colonial society, English became the language of political, social, and economic progress. When reaching independence in 1963, Kenya appropriated colonial language policies, further promoting the status of English as the language of upward mobility, power, and prestige. (Contrary to Tanzania, where English was shunned and Swahili was installed as the only national language.) Within education, English remained the medium of instruction and Kiswahili only became a compulsory school subject in 1981 (Chimera 1998; Ogechi 2003; Whiteley 1969). In contemporary Kenya, the British Council continues to promote the English language in Kenyan education through the support of educational institutions committed to teaching English, developing teaching

materials, and training teachers of English (Githinji 2005). The status of English as a prestige language is further reinforced through its usage in government, judiciary, and basically all official contexts.

In Lamu, children hardly use English within daily interaction (unless they actively engage with Western tourists). The only context where they are expected to display active knowledge of English is within school walls (Fig. 33). Although school-going youth use the language on a daily basis, their ability to communicate in English is remarkably limited. Their language use is stiff and unnatural, and their vocabulary is unusually restricted considering this is the language of instruction. This contrasts sharply with the English of young WaLamu whose families sent them to secondary schools in Mombasa or Nairobi and who often continue their studies at the college level. This discrepancy in the ability to acquire English only reinforces the language's prestige status.



Figure 33. School in Lamu, English vocabulary
© Eric Lafforgue

As I suggested previously, a walk through Lamu clearly shows, however, that encounters with English are not entirely restricted to the school environment. Access to media technology, but particularly interaction with Western tourists enables even school dropouts to familiarize themselves with the language. This process of differential acquisition importantly creates *register-effects* and contributes to the establishment of different “Englishes” – the “kind” of English young people speak becomes indicative of their educational, and often their social background.

While Lamu has been a popular tourist destination since the 1960s, a growing number of young boys seek employment in Lamu’s tourism sector. In many of these cases, parents were unable to further pay for school fees and the tourism industry provided these young boys with “easy money.” Working as crewmembers on the traditional *dhow*s, they earned enough for meals while spending their days at sea. The frequent interaction with Western tourists, though limited, enabled these young men to pick up English rather quickly. Contrary to some of the school-going youth, these young boys were often able to have basic, but fluent conversations with foreigners. Based on this experience, they would suggest that their knowledge of English far surpassed the English spoken by their peers who spent their days at school. While this was partly accurate when compared to their peers in primary and secondary education, the argument did not hold up for those students who were able to continue their education at the college level. In addition, the kind of English these *beach boys* spoke – the vocabulary and sentences they were familiar with and used often – distinguished them from school-going youth. Most importantly, many of these young men were (partly) illiterate. While

speaking English rather fluently, they were often unable to read or write much more than their own name.

Lastly, satellite TV, Internet access as well as cellular telephones increasingly introduce WaLamu to (a particular kind of) English. These new media not only allow inhabitants of Lamu to stay up to date with events across the globe, the emergent access to translocal discourses enables a particular display of cosmopolitanism in which language plays a central role. The incorporation of key phrases in daily interaction, the familiarity with particular proverbs or songs, or knowledge of the names of international pop artists and soccer players then forms a new register that is increasingly linked to a particular kind of social persona.¹⁵¹ As I will discuss at length in Chapter 6, this process of *enregisterment* (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011) is still ongoing, and is far from straightforward. I will suggest that, rather than exclusively focus on linguistic practices, we ought to take into consideration how language use is tied to other semiotic practices, and thus how enregisterment is but part of a set of semiotic processes through which social categories emerge. To be able to fully engage with that discussion, I need to provide more insight into Lamu youth's language use.



Figure 34. *Arsenal*, the name of a local dhow
© Eric Lafforgue

¹⁵¹ It is, for example, such language use that would result in an identification as belonging to the “dot com” generation (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Conclusion: Lamu youth's linguistic repertoire

In different ways and to differing extents, young people in Lamu have access to the broad range of dialects and languages that were discussed throughout this chapter. Youth switch between and mix these different varieties quite regularly, but such practices are far from unrestricted and are importantly shaped by questions of availability and accessibility, as well as by the social, political, and ideological processes discussed in this chapter.

Lamu's *beach boys*, for example, are undoubtedly the group of youth that most clearly answers to scholarly depictions of young people's altering linguistic practices in context of language contact and environments of rapid change. These young men easily mix the KiBajuni and KiAmu dialects with Standard Swahili and different forms of English, including an increasing emphasis on the use of "foreign" accents (see chapter 6). While this way of speaking is locally referred to as "*lugha ya pwani*," or "language of the seafront" it is far from a clearly distinct code; this label merely refers to both the frequent switching between dialect forms, as well as the occurrence of inappropriate language use along Lamu's seafront. It does suggest, however, that particular ways of speaking can increasingly be linked to a particular group of people.

I do not mean to propose that Lamu youth do not switch or mix languages. On the contrary, they quite frequently do. I merely want to underline that these code-switches or mixed uses are not (yet) established codes in their own right. In different ways, and to different extents, young people use accents, words, or code-switches as important indices of their familiarity with particular social environments. What is more, the use and evaluation of such broadened linguistic practices is importantly informed by the context in which youth find themselves and thus a meta-linguistic or metapragmatic

understanding of the different ideologies that circulate in a particular environment (see Chapter 5).

For example, the use of, and familiarity with English is displayed quite frequently throughout Lamu (as I mentioned several times already). Slogans on boats, or proverbs and lyrics on walls form visible expressions of broadened linguistic repertoires. Similarly the common incorporation of *buzzwords* in daily interaction signals familiarity with new technology, social media, or translocal discourses from, for example, international aid organizations (Chapter 5 and 6). I previously suggested that such usages could be explained through the common understanding of English as a prestige variety, a status only strengthened through postcolonial language policies. Slogans and advertisements are then important indexicals of locals' global orientation and suggest an adherence to the global linguistic hierarchy, in which English is placed on top. Based on such assessments, the small mistakes in writing practices or within daily interaction could be evaluated as deviants from the monoglot standard (Silverstein 1996) (Figs. 35 and 36). They attest to failing language policies, the lasting prestige of English, and confirm the postcolonial, unequal access to standard varieties (Blommaert 2005).



Figure 35. Slogan on wall, spelling mistake
© Jo Valvekens

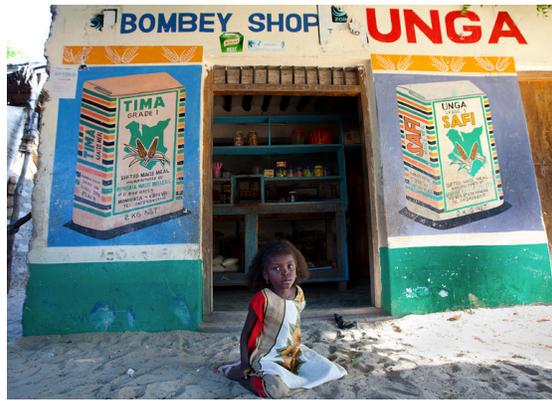


Figure 36. Shop in Lamu's Bombay neighborhood
© Eric Lafforgue

This chapter endeavored to challenge such conceptions. While mistakes in writing practices, or the inability to write English at all is indicative of inequality when evaluated in relation to the monoglot standard, the indexicalities of these practices are meaningfully renegotiated within the local context. In Lamu, these linguistic displays retain their function as indexes of entrepreneurship, mobility, or luxury (Blommaert 2005). In a similar vein, the act of writing KiAmu can be negatively evaluated in relation to the standard language hegemony – as many school-going youth experience. Outside of school walls, however, the use of KiAmu is valued and praised. A view of linguistic varieties as resources is then importantly shaped by questions of availability and accessibility, but historical, political, and social processes also importantly impact how linguistic practices are valued and devalued within the local context. This chapter also showed that such different valuations are not restricted to center-periphery distinctions (global-local or Kenya-Lamu); different sociopolitical processes equally impact valuations of varieties within the local context.

The foregoing discussion of the different *Englishes* used among Lamu youth importantly illustrated that the value of a language variety is meaningfully situated

locally. While a *beach boy's* English is considered valuable along the seafront, that same young man would be incapacitated within a classroom of the local secondary school. Similarly, the top student of that same classroom would hardly receive praise for his use of English along the seafront. The English spoken by both these young men would be considered inadequate when encountering their college-going friend in the office of a local aid organization (see also Blommaert 2005, 2010).

Space then importantly organizes regimes of language, on different scales. While the use of KiAmu can be considered deficient in relation to the monoglot standard (of Kiswahili), it is highly valued within the context of Lamu. Yet even within Lamu, spatial boundaries impact the way in which language use and conduct is assessed. Space itself then ought to be considered in semiotic terms exactly because the distinctions between different areas impact what activities are considered valid and valuable there (Chapter 5 and 6). It is here that the different spatial boundaries, emphasized in different ways throughout this dissertation, become significant: these geographical and ideological borders meaningfully impact the ways in which linguistic resources are mobilized and evaluated. The next chapter will illustrate both this importance of space as a semiotic resource and the local regimentation of linguistic repertoires in the interactional renegotiation of social category belonging and the presentation of self.

In this chapter, I endeavored to offer a critical approach to language diversity and multilingualism. I did so not only by providing an overview of the different historical, political, and social processes that shape Lamu inhabitants' linguistic repertoire, but also by demonstrating how insight into such processes can complicate the discussion of

frequently used notions like “standard language,” “prestige varieties,” and “dialects.” I underlined that regimes of language are not singular or straightforward, but are meaningfully shaped by historical, political, social, and scalar processes. This chapter then provided insight into the historical, political, and spatial situatedness of both language use and linguistic competencies, in order to fully comprehend the situated processes through which youth can renegotiate their positions in society.

Chapter 5 will examine different examples of such situated negotiations. I show that, through strategic language use, young people are able to challenge local conceptions of the social category of “youth,” as well as the (interactional) expectations tied to such category belonging. I thereby illustrate not only the local valuing and devaluing of language varieties, but also the importance of metapragmatic awareness in situated moments of negotiation. The language use of Ayah (the young girl we encountered in Chapter 3) – where and why she uses English, Standard Swahili, or KiAmu – becomes understandable in light of the different arguments made in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Ambiguous frames and shifting alignments: language use in the renegotiation of situated roles and social positions

Although it was only ten in the morning, it was blazing hot as I made my way through Lamu's tiny alleys. It was one of those last, unbearably humid days before the coming of the monsoon rains and I was rushing to the office of a local NGO where I wanted to attend the weekly meeting of the organization's volunteers. The NGO relied on a particularly active group of young volunteers to organize awareness campaigns throughout Lamu Town: public drama performances about HIV/AIDS, information sessions about drug and substance abuse, or house-to-house visits to raise awareness about the importance of hygiene and cleanliness (to prevent e.g. cholera outbreaks). This group of volunteers was comprised of young men and women who came from a variety of social backgrounds: youth from Siyu, Pate, and the Bajuni islands who either grew up in Lamu or who had migrated to the island to attend school, youth who identified as *WaAmu* or original inhabitants of the island town, as well as a few young people from the Kikuyu ethnicity. The majority of the organization's members was between the ages of 18 and 26, and had joined the group to either bridge the year between secondary school and college or merely to (usefully) occupy themselves and benefit from the education opportunities the NGO offered.

The ability to observe and interact with this interestingly mixed group of youth was one of the main reasons why I had become a regular at the NGO's office. The organization, and the activities it planned offered a rather unique opportunity for Lamu youth – both male and female – to openly interact with each other. While youth encountered one another on the streets of Lamu and while schools sometimes organized joint activities, these encounters were limited and highly policed. This organization, and the opportunities it offered, enabled young people to interact quite closely: they participated in training workshops, practiced for drama performances, went on team building trips, and had weekly meetings to organize their activities. So while young people joined the NGO to benefit from the training- and educational opportunities it offered, many of them were motivated by the chance to openly and easily interact with the opposite sex.

I had joined these youth to participate in their activities and to observe how this new, distinctive setting was negotiated. I wanted to document how young people interacted with each other and how altered social relations were negotiated, but also how these activities and interactions were presented to, and evaluated by outsiders – by community members who far from always approved of the volunteers' behavior. The organization and the youth who participated in its activities occupied a rather ambiguous position within Lamu. The NGO answered to a major need for humanitarian aid in the region and members of Lamu's elites managed the local branch. As such it was a highly respected and valued organization within the community. But because it was based upon an international model and as it advocated translocal discourses on development and emancipation, the organization was not always able to conform to local norms of

interaction and respectful behavior. Conscious efforts were indeed made to adjust development programs to the local context; local imams, for example, re-wrote and approved the HIV/AIDS awareness manual. But the management and the NGO's employees saw other, "new" activities as part of positive change and development, including the NGO's youth program.

While I had participated in many volunteer activities and while I had interviewed several of the volunteers individually, I found their weekly meetings particularly interesting. The dynamic between youth from a range of social backgrounds, with different levels of education, and differing perceptions of the socially and religiously acceptable provided new insights into how altered social positions were negotiated, even among young WaLamu themselves. In addition, the very event of a "meeting" was rather unique. Although *mikutano* (meetings) and councils have always been part of life in Lamu – the town was after all ruled as a republic throughout its history – such assemblies were historically restricted to male elites. What is more, seniority had always determined authority and contribution. As in many African societies, youth seldom participated in such gatherings and had no voice in decisions. Humanitarian aid organizations and discourses on democratization introduced a new kind of *mkutano* (meeting): community gatherings in which both men and women from different social classes could participate. Young people's participation in these meetings, however, remained rather limited and was subordinate to elders' authority. This organization then not only offered a unique context of interaction, it also established "youth" as a social category that could meaningfully contribute to the local community. The weekly meetings formed an important forum not only to debate what those contributions would be, but also to

negotiate who had authority within this newly established group and thus to redefine social relations among young people themselves.¹⁵²

As I arrived at the NGO's tiny office, I wiped the sweat of my forehead and thanked Narmin¹⁵³ – the young woman working in the office – for offering me a steaming cup of *chai*. I sat down, sipped my tea, and sighed that I still had not adjusted to Lamu timing as I was clearly too early for the meeting – I had not seen any of the volunteers. Narmin laughed and said that I had adapted to Lamu timing much better than I had to the heat, as she watched me break another sweat while drinking her tea. She suggested I drink quickly and hurry upstairs, as the meeting had started at 10 am sharp. Because meetings in Lamu generally commenced at least half an hour late (if things went well), I reacted rather surprised. Upon noticing my amazement, Narmin reminded me that these meetings differed from local community meetings; punctuality and efficiency were important so I had better hasten and join the youth. After all, it would be rather funny if the *mzungu* could not keep *mzungu* time, she remarked jokingly.¹⁵⁴

As I entered the upstairs room where the meeting was held, a lively discussion was going on. I mumbled a quick *Asalaam Aleykum*, found myself a spot on the floor, and looked around the room. As many times before, I was fascinated by the dynamics of these gatherings and especially by how they differed from community meetings, not just in terms of punctuality, but also in matters of seating arrangements and general interaction. Whereas community gatherings kept a strict separation between the seating

¹⁵² These meetings were referred to either as “mikutano” or as “meetingi,” the latter being used most frequently. I suggest later in this chapter that membership to the NGO availed youth with a new set of vocabulary items tied to development discourses. I suggest the use of “meetingi” instead of “mikutano” is tied to such register-effects.

¹⁵³ pseudonym

¹⁵⁴ Western or white person. When a meeting was meant to start on time, young people would remind each other that they were to keep “mzungu” timing, i.e. adhere to Western notions of punctuality and efficiency.

areas for men and women, no such division was to be noticed in this room. Although some of the girls had gathered in a corner to separate themselves from the male attendees, the majority of young men and women comfortably sat next to each other on the floor. Young girls wearing *niqab* quickly removed the facial veil as they entered the room, complaining about the unbearable heat. Other girls slightly pulled up their *abaya* as they sat on the floor, revealing jeans and fashionable shoes otherwise hidden underneath the black cloak. Upon entering the room, volunteers greeted each other, shook hands, and sometimes even exchanged hugs. These interactions differed sharply from encounters on the street, where a nodding of the head or a quick glance sufficed as a greeting.

What fascinated me most, however, was the dynamic of the meeting itself. The gatherings followed a clearly determined structure: the meeting opened with a prayer and someone was selected to take meeting minutes. The latter was often a rather obvious choice as few youth were sufficiently literate to write quickly enough and to know what minutes “were supposed to look like.” Subsequently the points on the agenda were announced, after which a lengthy, often rather chaotic discussion unfolded. While no one was specifically appointed to monitor this debate, a few individuals were quick to present themselves as leaders or authoritative voices on the matters discussed. Such positions of claimed authority did not always go uncontested and implicit as well as explicit contestations of leadership often took place. It is in these instances that youth’s different backgrounds surfaced and that different linguistic repertoires were displayed and exploited.

While it was an unspoken rule that discussions were to be held in Kiswahili (either Standard Swahili or one of the dialects), some youth displayed their education and

understanding of humanitarian aid discourses through an overreliance on English. In such instances, the need for Kiswahili was sometimes explicated or quietly commented upon. Young people who had a limited to non-existent grasp of English, however, often used vocabulary that displayed their experience within the NGO. This did not entail a switch to English but merely the interjection of “buzzwords” that were indexically tied to discourses on development and empowerment, and thus hinted at their belonging to a particular group of people – youth engaged with aid organizations. These register-effects (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011; Irvine 2005), combined with local dialects, enabled them to claim authority while simultaneously reflecting authenticity and respect for their non-educated peers. This chapter will demonstrate, however, that such value creating acts and strategic presentations of self are far from straightforward. Building upon the concluding statements of Chapter 4 and elaborating on the importance of interactions’ spatiotemporal embeddedness, I discuss how language varieties can be valued and devalued depending on the situatedness of the interaction.

Interaction frames and verbal performances

The establishment of (international) development agencies within Lamu introduced translocal discourses on modernity, development, and emancipation to the local context, including new understandings of social responsibilities and community involvement in which “youth empowerment” was a catchword. What this notion entailed within the local context, however, and how such new roles were to be negotiated was far from evident. The lengthy discussions dominating the volunteer meetings were then about much more than organizing awareness campaigns. Participation in these meetings (and in other community meetings, as this chapter will show) allowed for a negotiation of acceptable

behavior, presentations of self, and shifting social relations within a newly established or redefined category of youth.

Ideologies about language include assumptions and expectations about particular *kinds* of speech, such as gendered (Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Hirsch 1998), young (Bucholtz 2002), or virtuous (Mahmood 2005) ways of talking. In her study of women's participation in, and narrative performance during court cases in Mombasa's Islamic courts, Susan Hirsch (1998) argued that a person can be challenged or accused because her speech is considered inappropriate to her age, gender, or social status. She thereby relies on Charles Briggs' (1988) analysis of verbal performances as displays of linguistic and social competence. Briggs argued that Mexicano speakers, and elders in particular, can solidify authoritative social positions by producing "competent" speech. Hirsch reminds us that "a performed genre... then not only indexes and reconstitutes the social position of the person producing it but also engages social relations beyond the immediate speech context" (Hirsch 1998: 26-27).

This chapter analyzes young people's verbal performances in different interactional settings to understand how participation in situated interactions enables them to negotiate alternate conceptions of social category belonging, rather than solidify their social position. Through a close examination of the language use of Ayah (whom we encountered in Chapter 3), I demonstrate how conceptions of what "youth" and "women" can or cannot do can be renegotiated through situated performances in a way that engages social relations beyond the immediate interactional frame. I argue that she is able to do so exactly because the ideological understanding of the interactional frame in which she is participating is itself being renegotiated.

I examine young people's participation in "meetings" and compare their contributions to such assemblies in two different contexts: the youth gathering discussed above and a large community meeting. Based on this analysis, I argue that young people's partaking in this redefined, clearly delineated, situated interaction allows them to renegotiate alignments within the interaction, challenge behavioral expectations tied to social category belonging, and take a moral stance toward the immediate and wider social context. Because legitimized participation in interactions like "meetings" is being reassessed, calculated contributions allow young people to renegotiate what subjects (such as "youth" or "women") can or cannot do. More importantly, the "meeting" – as an interactional frame shaped by both macro-sociological and micro-sociological processes – provides a clearly delineated context in which a recognition of interlocutors' expectations, respect for local norms of interaction, and desire for global practices can be conveyed. I argue that an awareness of the situated value of language varieties is essential to such negotiations and moments of stance-taking.

I thus pay close attention to young participants' language use rather than to the broad set of material practices they otherwise engage in.¹⁵⁵ I analyze how an awareness of expectations tied to different interactional frames is channeled through a display of (linguistic) repertoires, and how such consciousness enables a particular presentation of self. By examining how repertoires are differently displayed and assessed in the youth gathering and the community meeting, I demonstrate that space – at the most local level – regiments linguistic repertoires (Blommaert 2010; Blommaert, et al. 2005). Phrased differently, I suggest that social evaluation is based upon the individual's (linguistic and

¹⁵⁵ I opted to do so exactly because these are instances of verbal performances (Briggs 1988). Within these clearly delineated settings there is little room for a "play of the senses" or negotiations through an important combination of sight and sounds, as I will discuss in the following chapters.

semiotic) potential and participants' expectations, but also on the demands of the particular environment the individual finds herself in. Specific contexts can differently value or devalue the language varieties of which a linguistic repertoire is comprised. This discussion will then illustrate how the situatedness of interactions impacts the ways in which participant roles and social positions are renegotiated.

The underlying argument of this chapter is one of moral stance-taking (Hill 1995; Jaffe 2009; Keane 2011). I contend that, through (strategic) language use, young people make statements about who they are in the current social environment; by appropriating particular discourses and vocabularies, while ignoring others, they express an opinion on what it means to be young in contemporary Lamu. In his discussion of Jane Hill's (1995) work Webb Keane's (2011) suggests that social interaction can itself become a process of moral self-discovery exactly because it requires the selection of one "voice" among many (see also Chapter 3). Young people's language use within clearly delineated interactions like "meetings" then forms part of such process of moral self-formation in an altered social reality. I underline, however, that these presumed calculated instances of self-presentation are importantly shaped by both awareness *and* unawareness: they comprise conscious, planned, and creative activity as well as the (unintentional) reproduction of meanings and structures (Blommaert, et al. 2005: 174).

In my discussion, I importantly draw upon the theoretical frameworks of Erving Goffman (1974, 1981 (1979), 1997 (1983)), Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1991), and Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). I use a critical approach to Goffmanian frames and endeavor to complicate his notion by introducing questions of multilingualism, heterogeneity, and scale (Blommaert, et al. 2005; Keane 2011). From Bourdieu (1984), I take the view of

social evaluation as “competence assessment,” but complicate the matter by investigating how such assessments shift in ambiguous interactional contexts where (societal) expectations are not necessarily self-evident. Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “voice” informs my discussion on young people’s broadened repertoire. Drawing upon elaborations on the term by both Jane Hill (1995) and Webb Keane (2011), I argue that young people’s selection of certain “voices” over others in situated interactions entails a moral stance toward the broader social context.

As mentioned previously, I compare two settings: the volunteer gathering discussed above and a large community meeting. In those two situated interactions I focus on the contributions of Ayah. In the first section of the chapter, I examine how she relates to her peers in the context of the youth assembly. I analyze the role of language use in framing practices and the establishment of a particular footing. By doing so, I demonstrate that young people negotiate what it means to partake in an official “meeting,” and hereby challenge behavioral expectations tied to social categories such as “youth” or “women.” Through a focus on the dynamic between two participants, Ayah and Badrul, I suggest that young people even negotiate social relations among themselves and reassess the value of age, gender, and education.

I discuss three different sections of the same meeting. The first section looks at the discursive creation of “youth” as a redefined, objectively recognizable category. The second section examines the dynamic between Ayah and Badrul and their negotiation over authority within the interaction at hand, as well as within this particular group of youth. The third section analyzes Ayah’s presentation of self and the (linguistic) strategies she relies upon to voice a critique of her own peers.

The last portion of the chapter discusses Ayah's conduct in an entirely different setting: that of a community meeting headed by elders. Noting the contrast between Ayah's overreliance on English among her peers and her emphasis on KiAmu in the community gathering, I discuss the valuing and devaluing of linguistic repertoires in situated contexts of interaction. I suggest that the selection of particular "voices" in these different settings enables moral stance-taking and the negotiation of new social positions.

Young people's redefined responsibility: meetings, workshops, and elections

What's a meeting anyway? Socializing or debating in a youth gathering

As I observed interactions during the youth meeting unfold, it struck me once again how well attended these meetings were. That day at least 30 members had already gathered and young people kept trickling in as agenda points were announced: participants for a peer education workshop had to be selected and the upcoming board elections needed to be discussed. The selected note-taker for the day (who had been given the only chair in the room) diligently noted down what was announced and a sheet of paper to register attendance was passed around.

When I first joined these gatherings I was not sure what to make of young people's insistence on these different administrative policies. The meetings themselves were often rather chaotic: while some young people actively engaged in the discussions, others were evidently there to socialize with their peers and were quite unaware of what the meeting was about. Those youth who participated in the discussion often interrupted others, went off on tangents, or made fun of what was being said.

I often smiled at the irony of the contradiction between the efficiency and organization that the display of administrative practices appeared to suggest, and the disorganized nature of the meetings themselves. Seemingly repetitive, attendees would stand up, express their opinion on the issue at hand, after which someone else would get up and say more or less the same thing. At the end of the three-hour long meetings, it often happened that no resolution had been found. Although I initially wondered what these meetings actually achieved, I quickly realized that youth's lengthy discussions were about much more than, for example, explaining the upcoming board elections. Through their contributions youth performed identity work: their linguistic and discursive practices provided interlocutors with information on who they were, and how they positioned themselves within the immediate context as well as within the broader community. The negotiation of roles and responsibilities within the situated interaction reflected changing conceptions of social relations and categories on a broader societal level. The success or failure of individuals to claim authority within the interaction not only reflected youth's altering orientations to translocal and transnational discourses, it also illustrated the very situated nature of competencies (Blommaert, et al. 2005).

Through their partaking in NGO activities, youth had learned what "a meeting" was supposed to look like: it had a beginning and an end, signaled by prayer. Agenda points had to be announced, attendance had to be taken, and minutes needed to be recorded. Although considered essential to the meeting, these practices' function or purpose was not always clear. Attendance lists were often thrown out afterwards and the meeting minutes, written on loose-leaf paper, often disappeared before they could be filed. But nevertheless, the meeting could not take place without them. These practices,

informed by translocal discourses on how proper (Western) meetings ought to be conducted, created a particular frame of interaction. Yet the behavioral expectations within that interaction frame and the participant roles that structured it were far from established.

Erving Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of “frame” as a spatial metaphor that connects the space¹⁵⁶ where activities take place to the people who occupy it. It refers to interlocutors’ shared orientation to the context of, and the participants to an interaction. How these interactants are positioned within this frame, and how they monitor this positioning is captured under the notion of *footing* (1981 (1979)). This latter concept suggests that the mutual identification of a frame allows interlocutors to place themselves in a particular relation to those around them and establish the behavioral rules that govern the interaction at hand. Interaction frames, as contexts determined by sets of norms and expectations about communicative behavior, then permit an examination of linguistic repertoires as conditioned resources and interactionally framed practices (Blommaert, et al. 2005); frames allow for an understanding of the situated valuing and devaluing of language varieties and competencies. The analysis of how such norms and expectations can be challenged in new or redefined frames of interaction permits a focus on the renegotiation of structured determinations and the interactional emergence of different positionalities. It is exactly such renegotiations we observe among the young people participating in the NGO meeting.

While the bureaucratic practices of taking attendance and noting down minutes enabled the shared recognition of the interaction frame at hand as a “meeting,” the

¹⁵⁶ Note this is not a physical space but rather a kind of context; an understanding of what type of activity is going on.

behavioral norms and *footing* within this frame of interaction was much less obvious. The conduct that was expected from participants, the manner in which they ought to relate to each other, and thus the different participant roles they occupied were not agreed upon. The two participants who were vigilantly debating about the agenda topics clearly had a different conception of “Western style meetings” than the young men and women had who were chitchatting among themselves.

I suggest it is exactly this ambiguity of participant roles and behavioral norms that enabled participants to renegotiate social relations and category belonging. Although these young people participated in a newly introduced, non-local frame, local notions of social identities and the behavioral expectations tied to them – the structured determinations, if you will – came to bear on the interaction. Phrased differently, “the meeting” is a redefined interaction frame that is shaped by translocal discourses but that nevertheless remains locally situated. Within it linguistic practices are differently valued and devalued and societal expectations are renegotiated. In the subsequent analysis of the youth gathering I analyze the above-described processes and particularly underline the central role language use plays therein.

Chaotic meetings and claims to authority. Introducing Ayah and Badrul

During the meeting on that hot, humid day in 2008, two young volunteers dominated the discussion: Ayah and Badrul, young people we encountered earlier on in this dissertation (Chapter 3). Ayah was the young girl of 22 from a rather affluent Bajuni family who was attending the University of Nairobi. Contrary to the majority of her peers she had also attended secondary school in Mombasa and was not shy to talk about her experiences in both cities. Overall, she was known to be a bright, passionate young woman who had

many friends. Her peers, however, did not always appreciate Ayah's emphasis on her experiences outside of Lamu.

Badrul was the young man of 26 years old who, in Chapter 3, expressed his opinion on Lamu's current transformations by suggesting young people ought to hold tight to their religious practices in order to protect themselves against diseases like HIV/AIDS. As I mentioned previously, Badrul had little to no educational background and was practically illiterate. His inability to find a job provided him with ample time to be actively engaged with different organizations in the area. His participation in different NGO activities had enabled him to partake in many educational workshops and he considered himself quite experienced in issues pertaining to community development.

In previous discussions I presented Ayah and Badrul as socially engaged, opinionated youth who expressed concerns about the changes Lamu was undergoing. Both of these individuals, however, displayed a rather ambiguous position: while they recognized the (moral) issues at hand, they equally noted the need for change. I stressed that these positions of inbetweenness were interestingly reflected in their language use, where shifts to KiAmu, Kiswahili, or English suggested familiarity with both local and translocal discourses. In what follows, I analyze Ayah and Badrul's language use and interactional practices as they engage with each other and their peers in the clearly delineated context of a "meeting."

Ayah and Badrul discursively construct a redefined understanding of "youth" as a social category, and negotiate who has authority within the interactional frame at hand as well as within this new category of youth. Ayah presents herself as the educated, experienced young woman who is concerned about the local context, whereas Badrul,

who seems to assume an authoritative position based on gender and seniority, challenges Ayah's implicit claims to authority. When his position is not validated, Badrul draws upon a broadened linguistic repertoire to demonstrate his experience within the NGO. I identify this as a negotiation of what participants to the interaction can or cannot do – micro-sociological negotiations informed by, and tied to shifts on a macro-sociological level. In what follows, I first examine how Ayah and Badrul discursively construct a recognizable social category to which the young volunteers belong.

“Us youth, we have our rights.” The discursive appeal to a new category of youth

While not necessarily on the same footing, Ayah and Badrul shared an opinion on the meeting's first agenda topic. This discussion had been much anticipated and members expected a spirited debate. The management of the organization had demanded the selection of twenty volunteers who would partake in an upcoming education workshop. Given that the group counted at least forty members, this had become a very sensitive issue. Youth who hadn't finished secondary education suggested they had more right to participate, as they needed the trainings more than others. Others suggested that educated members, like Ayah, would participate in the workshop and subsequently would leave for Mombasa or Nairobi, without contributing to community development. Others still argued that non-educated members would not be able to fully participate and benefit from the workshop, thereby defeating its purpose. Some other voices suggested that young people who were related to the management would be assigned the positions, so there was really no point in debating the issue.

When Ayah took it upon herself to explain the matter at hand, emotions already ran high and Badrul quickly stepped in to calm attendees down. While no one had appointed them as monitors, Ayah and Badrul subsequently lead the discussion and proposed a rather drastic measurement: none of the volunteers were to participate in the workshop unless the management could accommodate all forty of them. It is through this proposal that both Ayah and Badrul discursively created a social category of youth that overcame the different social divides revealed by the discussion at hand.

Regular script	Standard Swahili
<u>Underlined</u>	KiAma
Bold	English
A	Ayah
B	Badrul
X	Unknown participant

<p>A sisi ambao tuliko hapa tudedecide kama ni sawa sawa ili ye akija iwe yani haina kazi ya kuanza mpya itakuwa sisi tumededecide kitu fulani na hicho twachotaka kumwambia</p>	<p>A. we who are here . we decide what is good such that when she comes we don't have to start afresh it will be us who decide a certain thing and that is what we will tell her¹⁵⁷</p>
<p>B [nataka kuwafahamisha jambo moja . sisi youth . tusijipeke nyuma . sisi ndio tumewaandika watu ofisini kazi . sisi ndo tumemweka kila mtu hapa . sisi leo tukiamua hatuendi skuli hatuendi popote . nafikiri hakuna karatasi itaandikwa hata moya</p>	<p>B [I want to make you understand one thing . we youth . <u>we should not put ourselves back</u> . we are the ones who gave people in the office work . <u>we placed every person here</u> . today if we agree <u>we are not going to the school we are not going anywhere</u> . <u>I don't think there will be even one paper written</u></p>
<p>X [kama hakuna karatasi na senti haziyi [laughs]</p>	<p>X [<u>if there is no paper . there is no money</u> [laughs]</p>
<p>B [skiza nitawaelezea hakuna yoyote itakayofanywa . kwa hivyo hiyo training hiyo training ambayo itakuja kufanywa ni sisi . sisi pia tumefundishwa tuna right vile tunavotaka sisi . ni sisi tupange tumweleze sisi twataka hivi waweza sawa . huwezi cancel . umefahamu</p>	<p>B [<u>listen</u> . I will explain it to you . there is nothing that will be done thus this training . this training will be done for us . we too . we were taught that we have a right to do what we like (...) we we plan we explain we want this . can you do it ok . you cannot do it cancel . do you understand</p>

¹⁵⁷ Ayah was referring to the coordinator of youth activities in the NGO

The above transcript presents the opening statements of an extensive debate promoting a joint refusal to partake in the workshop. The discussion went on for quite some time and was mostly coordinated by Ayah and Badrul. What stands out in their opening arguments is the explicitness with which both participants appeal to a shared group-identity: they metadiscursively construct a category of youth, their rights, and their responsibilities within the context of the organization, and thus implicitly their position within the broader context of Lamu. They present an image of what “youth” can or cannot do: they are a group of agentive young people who can make independent decisions, who are in control of their actions (and life,) and who are aware of their rights.¹⁵⁸ They are therefore in a position to make demands of the NGO’s management, especially since the organization supposedly cannot function without the volunteers.

Both through explicit statements and through discursive strategies, Ayah and Badrul interpellated the young people present as a particular category of youth, locally situated but importantly informed by translocal discourses on development, emancipation, and empowerment. As Keane (2007) argued, to claim membership in a certain social category the criteria for belonging need to be available for objectification; certain identifiable aspects of behavior need to be known. Ayah and Badrul not only refer to the volunteers as “we as a group” or “we youth,” they also outline the characteristics of this category and how it ought to be perceived from the outside: empowered, responsible, educated, unified, and striving for development.

This discursive reference to, and establishment of “youth” as a clearly delineated, existing entity is particularly evident in Ayah and Badrul’s emphatic use of the personal pronoun “we” (Wortham 1996). In Kiswahili the independent pronoun “sisi” serves as an

¹⁵⁸ This “rights” discourse in particular had been introduced through (international) aid organizations.

emphatic marker, as person is automatically marked within the conjugated verb. The repetitive referral to “we” as a recognizable category of youth is strengthened by the use of “NGO jargon.” Through the incorporation of lexical items related to participation in NGO’s or other development organizations, young people like Ayah and Badrul become identifiable as a separate group that speaks “like that;” they create register-effects (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011; Irvine 2005). Words such as “meeting,” “training,” “workshop,” “rights,” and “youth” all have rather evident translations in Kiswahili; the use of the English lexemes distinguishes the volunteers as a particular group of youth that is familiar with discourses on development and emancipation.¹⁵⁹

Ayah and Badrul did not merely start the discussion on workshop participation, however, nor did they simply instill a sense of groupness among the volunteers; they also aligned themselves with their peers in a particular way. The strategic use of personal deictics not only creates a referent, it also establishes the footing between participants within the interactional framework. As Wortham (1996) suggested, the use of personal deictics entails a positioning of the self, and the use of “we” establishes the speaker as a central or defining member of the group. Ayah and Badrul established a particular conception of the social category of “youth,” but also claimed authority within that discursively created group. The way in which they did so differs significantly, however, and reflects different understandings of the grounds on which authority can be attributed in the framework of a “meeting.” These differences are apparent in the use of deictic reference (and thus their footing within the meeting) but also in their language use.

¹⁵⁹ This was particularly striking for the use of the term “youth.” Instead of using the Kiswahili lexeme “vijana,” volunteers would always use “youth” even when speaking only Kiswahili. I suggest that the use of “youth” represents a particular understanding of what it means to be young in contemporary Lamu. The Kiswahili “vijana” would then refer to a more localized understanding of being young and have particular behavioral expectations tied to it.

While fluent in English, Ayah did not use this competence to claim authority in her opening statement. On the contrary, her use of English was kept to a minimum and she mainly spoke Standard Swahili. The few lexemes she did use were easily understood and functioned as reminders or “signposts” of her educational background and urban experience.¹⁶⁰ Ayah explicitly aligned herself with her audience through the use of the first person plural “we,” and rather than making a demand or insisting on a certain solution, Ayah proposed a group decision. While she did not explicitly claim authority, the reference to a shared group identity (that overcomes inner social divides) and her strategic insertion of English indexed her leadership capacities.

Badrul used a rather different strategy. He interrupted Ayah quite abruptly and announced that he could clarify the issue for his peers. In doing so, Badrul not only challenged Ayah’s position (and her right to start or lead the discussion), he also immediately placed himself in an authoritative position: I (as the elder, experienced, male member of the group) can make you (the unified group of peers) understand. While he adopted Ayah’s reference to a shared group identity, his claims were much more explicit (“we youth”) and undoubtedly exaggerated. The suggestion that the volunteers are responsible for the employment of their elders caused some of the audience members to chuckle in disbelief. And Badrul’s subsequent, rather drastic proposal to simply not participate in any of the organization’s activities was challenged by one of the younger, female participants. By jokingly questioning the truth-value of his argument, the girl disputed Badrul’s entitlement to authoritative statements within the interactional setting.

¹⁶⁰ “Tudecide” could be labeled as *Sheng*, the urban youth slang, because it places the English verb in Kiswahili grammar. This is done more frequently nowadays and is not limited to Sheng speakers. The practice does retain a reference to familiarity with an urban context.

When responding to this challenge, Badrul made two interesting adjustments. Although he maintained his footing – separating himself from his peers when he suggested that he “will explain to them” and asking whether “they understand” – his appeal to joint group membership became much more explicit: he used “*sisi*” (we) no less than five times in this short statement. The most interesting shift, however, is in Badrul’s language use. In his first statement he overtly relied on KiAmu, with the majority of his statement being in the local dialect. After the younger girl challenged his authority, Badrul switched to Standard Swahili and incorporated some of the “register-effects” I discussed earlier. While having a very limited knowledge of English, the use of words like “training” and “rights” displayed Badrul’s experience within the NGO. The proposal that the workshop ought to be canceled if not all members could participate subsequently remained uncontested.

I suggest here, and will continue to argue subsequently, that Badrul miscalculated. In a more traditional setting (such as community gatherings), authority would have been assigned based on participants’ age (the older, the more authority) and gender (male), and Badrul would therefore have occupied the most authoritative position within the youth meeting. But the meeting itself – with its mixed attendance and lack of elder supervision – already defied societal expectations. In addition, the members clearly distinguished themselves as a unique or new group of youth within the context of Lamu. Badrul made the mistake of thinking that local norms of interaction and behavioral expectations would still apply. As the eldest, male participant, he assumed his authority would remain uncontested. He presumed Ayah, as a young girl (she was about 4 years younger than Badrul), would not be able to take an authoritative stance. Yet as the participant roles and

behavioral norms within the ambiguous frame of the NGO's "meeting" were renegotiated, Badrul's seniority and gender had little influence. On the contrary, Ayah's alignment with her audience as well as her use of Standard Swahili and limited English were valued within the context of interaction – they displayed education and experience but also a familiarity with, and concern for the local context. Badrul's initial reliance on KiAmu, however, was *devalued* and it jeopardized his authoritative position.¹⁶¹ Only through incorporating register-effects that were indicative of his experience, did he maintain his position. Ayah's authority and Badrul's desire for acknowledgement only became more evident as the meeting proceeded.

Shifting languages, shifting alignments

Ayah and Badrul's initial suggestion to refuse participation in the organization's upcoming workshop resulted in a lengthy debate over the benefits and risks attached to such a decision, but nobody explicitly challenged their reasoning. The atmosphere, however, became rather tense as Ayah became visibly irritated at Badrul's frequent disruptions – few of her statements remained uninterrupted. Upon noticing that the majority of youth audibly agreed with her contributions (and thus acknowledged her authority), she remained quiet for a while. But as the group was about to move on to the next agenda point, Ayah made one last statement. While she had previously contributed to the discursive creation of a shared sense of groupness, she now shifted alignment and voiced a rather sharp critique of her peers. In doing so, she evidently challenged Badrul's authority and her extensive use of English placed the latter in a difficult position to contest.

¹⁶¹ This will prove to be important in the second half of this chapter, where I will demonstrate that KiAmu is highly valued in other contexts of interaction, including the community gatherings.

Regular script
Underlined
Bold

Standard Swahili
KiAmu
English

- A. Ayah
B. Badrul

<p>A. nataka kuemphasize kitu kimoja . just a minute . nataka kuemphasize kitu kimoja . wajua hapa . sisi we are a group . siyo? . tumedecide kitu (xxx)</p>	<p>A. I want to emphasize one thing . just a minute . I want to emphasize one thing . you know here . we we are a group . is it not? . we have decided something (xxxx)</p>
<p>B [xxx aeleza kitu kimoja . ngoja ngoja meetingi lazima tuwe na mikakati ili tuelewane . mtu akizungumza inue mkono . mtu akitaka kuzungumza . inue mkono na mwenzake atoe maona . <u>amwate</u> . <u>sikiliza</u> . kisha anaweza kujibu</p>	<p>B [(xxx) let her explain something . wait wait in a meeting it is necessary to have rules such that we understand each other . when a person is speaking put your hand in the air . if someone wants to speak . raise your hand and his friend expresses his views . <u>he lets him</u> . <u>listen</u> . then he can respond</p>
<p>A okay . sasa . sisi hapa tuko as a group . sisi tuseme wao waliyoko hapa . ndio youth ya the branch of lamu NGO . siyo? sasa sisi tukedecide kitu we are supposed to move as one . among the principles of [NGO] najua kuna unity siyo? . we don't exercise that kwa sabu sisi tukedecide kitu hapa . tuseme kama haiwezekani kwenda sote tubakie nyuma . I am sure katika sisi tulioko hapa kuna wale ambao watakwenda wao not thinking about wale wengine . kwa hivo naomba . tafadhalini . tuwe kitu kimoja kwa sababu that's the only way ambao sisi tutafanya mambo yaelekea sawasawa kwa sababu so far we have decided on doing so many things lakini hatufanyi hata kitu kimoja kwa sababu hatuna umoja . we should like = tushaamua this is our goal we should all . be going forward for that</p>	<p>A okay . now . we here . we are here as a group . we we say those who are here . this is the youth of the Lamu branch [NGO] . is it not? now when we decide something we are supposed to move as one . among the principles of [NGO] I know there is unity . is it not? . we don't exercise that because we if we decide something here . lets say when it is not possible for us all to go we all remain behind . I am sure among us there are those who will go not thinking about those others . thus I beg you . please . lets agree on one thing because that is the only way we will make things go right because so far we have decided on doing many things but we don't even do one thing because we have no unity . we should like = we have agreed we should all . be moving forward for that</p>

The dynamics of the meeting clearly shifted. Ayah took control over the discussion and when Badrul endeavored to interfere, she acknowledged his statement with a simple “okay,” but did not further ratify his contribution. Ayah brought up an issue

that I had frequently noted, but that was hardly ever openly discussed. While the volunteers planned many activities and often agreed on a certain course of action, these decisions hardly ever materialized. Ayah's warning that the decision to not partake in the workshop could be taken advantage of by less sympathetic members who were out to benefit was therefore quite justified. This was a risky move, as it required Ayah to voice an explicit critique of her peers. The very fact that she took this risk, however, shows how confident Ayah was in her position of authority – an assertiveness that got challenged subsequently (as I will discuss below).

Ayah used several discursive techniques to successfully judge her peers' behavior. Firstly, she shifted alignments. Rather than using the inclusive "we," she commenced her statement by separating herself from the group: "*I* want to emphasize something." While she retained the reference to joint group membership, she positioned herself in a place of authority in relation to that group – as Badrul had previously done. Secondly, she increased her use of English, especially in the second part of her statement. Rather than merely using a few lexemes, Ayah now used entire chunks of English. This display of language proficiency inhibited Badrul from further interrupting. Thirdly, Ayah demonstrated her knowledge of, and acquaintance with the principles and functioning of the NGO as well as with the problems the local organization was facing. Her authoritative position as well as the critique she voiced remained uncontested. Some of the attendees even applauded Ayah for voicing these concerns. Before moving on to discuss how Ayah became too self-confident and undermined her own position, I want to point to the interesting way in which Badrul endeavored to retain control over the interaction.

Exactly because Badrul had a very limited proficiency in English, it was difficult for him to interrupt Ayah or to suggest that he could “explain it better” as he did previously. He therefore resorted to giving his peers clear instructions as to how a proper “meeting” ought to be conducted. What is more, he implicitly suggested he was “allowing” Ayah to speak (by monitoring the discussion: “let her speak”). In doing so, he claimed knowledge of the behavioral norms that ought to structure this new or redefined frame and endeavored to retain his footing within the interaction. As I suggested previously, Ayah acknowledged Badrul’s contribution but in a manner that merely brushed it off. Her subsequent emphasis on English only distanced Badrul even more.

Ayah’s successful claim to authority and her ability to effectively appraise her peers is indexical, not only of shifting relations within the situated context of the interaction, but also of ideological shifts on a macro-sociological level. Lamu youth increasingly orient to translocal discourses and redefine local norms and values in relation to them. Ayah’s ability to remain acquainted with the local context, while displaying an embodied familiarity with both professional and urban contexts then answered to young people’s desire for change and development. Although Badrul was not entirely discarded, he (and his use of KiAmu) were an easy target of mockery and his remarks were far from always taken seriously, despite the fact that he was the eldest member of the group. The increasing understanding of oft-heard words as “empowerment” and “emancipation” introduced new grounds on which authority could be attributed and thus encouraged a redefinition of social relations beyond the situated interaction, even among youth themselves.

Although education and language proficiency were highly valued among youth, and particularly within the “official” context of NGO’s and other aid organizations, these did not immediately guarantee respect from peers. It remained important to display adherence to the local context and to recognize the social differences (such as in education) that continued to exist within Lamu (despite the fact that these youth appealed to a shared identity). Disrespect for elders, for example, or an overreliance on English or KiMombasa would often lead to accusations of arrogance or inauthenticity (as we will see in Chapter 6 as well). In the meeting under discussion, Ayah made exactly these mistakes, which resulted in her authority being openly challenged.

In contexts of change, newly acquired social positions, within the immediate context of interaction or on a broader social scale, are unstable and can easily be contested. I contend that overemphasis on a newly acquired status can undermine a speaker’s authority and can ultimately distance the subject from his or her interlocutors.¹⁶² While languages like English can initially be highly valued, exaggerated use or overreliance on this linguistic capital can result in a devaluing of the language variety. In Ayah’s case, the ambiguity of the interactional frame and the instability of participant roles required her to monitor her linguistic practices as the audience’s evaluation and interpretation was neither guaranteed nor predictable. This became particularly evident when Ayah continued her criticism of the local context. This time she did not evaluate her peers, but rather expressed her opinion on the management of the organization.

¹⁶² As I will argue in Chapter 6 and 7, this is exactly because these new social positions are still “in flux,” their meaning and the social expectations tied to them are still being negotiated.

Translocal experiences, local criticisms

Shortly before the gathering, members had been informed that the organization's management committee would be reelected during the upcoming annual meeting. As active members, youth volunteers had the right to cast a vote and thus help determine the management structure of the organization. This was cause for much excitement among the attendees. The majority, if not all, of them had never been able to vote – not in the national elections or in any other matter. In addition, the current committee consisted of prominent members of the Lamu community: middle-aged and older men from well-respected families whose authority went unchallenged. Volunteers' right to help determine the structure of the NGO and thus assess their elders' capability to manage the organization assigned a new responsibility to these young people. The upcoming elections were therefore taken very seriously, but also required much explanation. Many of the volunteers had no grasp of the organizational structure of the NGO, nor did they know what voting entailed or who was, in fact, allowed to vote. The topic of "elections" therefore provided Ayah with another opportunity to reconfirm her authoritative position.

Ayah started by answering questions regarding the organizational structure of the committee, outlining which positions were up for election and who occupied them now. She exclusively used English terminology, including "chairman," "vice-chairman," or "secretary," without providing a translation or explaining what these positions entailed – and her generous act of "explaining" was thus merely a performance of both her experience and her linguistic repertoire. When she failed to identify one of the committee members, some of her peers openly challenged her authority and suggested Ayah "did not

know what she was talking about.” They criticized her lack of engagement with the local context, rather than her knowledge of the management structure.

Ayah’s eagerness to display her grasp of the NGO’s structure as well as her linguistic competence was not unmotivated. She re-emphasized her (situated) authority and her knowledge of the topic under discussion in order to successfully express a stance toward the local community – to voice a critique concerning the lack of progress she had observed. Whereas she previously condemned her peers for the absence of unity (a prerequisite for progress), she now criticized the management for their lack of engagement and the resulting absence of positive development.

Regular script	Standard Swahili
<u>Underlined</u>	KiAmu
Bold	English

- A. Ayah
- B. Badrul
- X. Unknown girl 1
- Y. Unknown girl 2

<p>A. I mean . the whole idea kuwa na elections ni kuwa si tuangalie what they have done ile miaka iliyopita . sasa tuangalia sisi whether we want to change it or not . kwa sababu so far . mimi I know the branch management is there lakini honestly speaking si kwa ubaya lakini I’ve seen nothing going on</p>	<p>A. I mean . the whole idea to have elections is that we look what they have done . those years that have passed . and now we look whether we want to change it or not because so far . me I know the branch = this bee em cee¹⁶³ is there but honestly speaking I don’t mean it badly but I have seen nothing going on</p>
<p>X WOW</p>	<p>X WOW</p>
<p>A kwa hivo . yani that’s my opinion . sawa . kwa hivo sisi ndo twafaa tudecide whether</p>	<p>A I mean . that is my opinion . ok . thus we have the right to decide whether we</p>
<p>B [Ayah</p>	<p>B [Ayah</p>
<p>we change them au tuwaweke pale pale . if we still want to become dormant kwa sababu . sisi we are a branch of the [NGO] . kwa hivo twataka na sisi pia tuwe kama zile branch nyingine there is no=hakuna .</p>	<p>change them or we place them right there . if we still want to become dormant because . we we are a branch of the [NGO] . thus we also want to be like those other branches . there is no = there is no .</p>

¹⁶³ BMC is the acronym for Branch Management Committee

<p>kule piya kuna youth . kuna people working in the office . kuna management I think . lakini sasa ukiangalia branch nyingine ziko more advanced compared to sisi . ushaona . sasa sisi pia twataka kufika hapo . na kufika hapo we have to . change those on top</p>	<p>there as well there are youth . there are people working in the office . there is management I think . but now if you look at other branches they are more advanced compared to us . do you see . now we also want to arrive there . and to arrive there we have to . change those on top</p>
<p>Y. [claps]</p>	<p>Y. [claps]</p>

The room became rather quiet after Ayah’s statement, except for a few young people who had not been following the conversation and who continued socializing among themselves. No one seemed to really know how to respond to Ayah’s accusations and the one girl who clapped in response to Ayah’s remark stopped quickly when she noticed nobody joined her. The inappropriateness of Ayah’s commentary was signaled right from the beginning when one of the volunteers expressed her amazement at the frankness with which Ayah criticized her elders. Badrul subsequently called her out, but surprisingly did not further interrupt (contrary to what he had done before). Ayah’s response to these minor disruptions was interesting. Rather than refraining from elaboration, she underlined that this was *her* opinion and thus distanced herself from the group she had previously identified with. She subsequently substantiated her comments by comparing the state of Lamu’s NGO to other NGO’s on the Kenyan mainland.¹⁶⁴ Ayah thereby did not only remind her peers of her experience in development organizations outside of Lamu, but called upon *their* longing for development and progress.

¹⁶⁴ This contrasts sharply with the meta-discourses I analyzed in Chapter 3, where speakers explicitly distanced themselves from the mainland and suggested non-locals to be to source of moral decay on the island.

Although Ayah initially overtly expressed this judgment as a personal opinion, she followed this with an explicit alignment with her audience: this critique of her elders and their leadership was formulated only in her peers' own interest and spoke to their desire for development. She thereby reincorporated herself in the discursively created category of youth that strove toward development and emancipation. She importantly supported these claims to authoritative judgment with significant changes in her language use.

Ayah's language use had shifted since the beginning of the meeting. Whereas she initially spoke Standard Swahili, with the insertion of a few English words, she now predominantly spoke English. When she endeavored to switch back to Standard Swahili, she appeared to have difficulty, stuttering as she tried to formulate her thoughts in her mother tongue and eventually ending the sentence with a switch back to English. Keeping in mind that many of the attendees were far from fluent in English, Ayah's insistence on speaking the language is remarkable.

Looking at Ayah's explicit statement, her language use, and her footing within the context of interaction, I suggest that she no longer merely claimed authority within the immediate framework of the meeting; rather she cultivated a position from which she could criticize the elder generation. She did not just renegotiate her relation to her peers, but also took a *moral stance* toward the broader social context. She did so by selecting a particular "voice" with which to speak. As Jane Hill (1995) argued in her analysis of the voices of Don Gabriel, selecting a language variety (or particular vocabulary) from a linguistic repertoire requires a moral choice from the speaker exactly because "it concerns a selection among the terministic and linguistic possibilities available to him"

(Hill 1995: 97). Webb Keane (2011) elaborated on Hill's argument and underlined that "linguistic choices are distinctively moral" because they are "choices among options" which subsequently call upon the social figures they are tied to (Keane 2011: 171).

Ayah's moral stance – her judgment of both her peers and her elders – was voiced in English, a language Ayah presented as a "naturalized" form of speech. Her difficulty to discuss matters of development and youth empowerment in Kiswahili reflected her familiarity and comfort-level with translocal discourses in contexts beyond the situated interaction. Rather than having English as a resource she could tactically draw upon, Ayah's linguistic practices toward the end of the meeting suggested these registers were part of her *linguistic habitus*. However, at the beginning of the meeting she was more than able to speak Kiswahili, and this was equally evident in the interview extract I analyzed in Chapter 3. That her act of speaking English was a choice rather than an incorporated way of speaking will become even more obvious when I subsequently analyze Ayah's language use in the community meeting.

Such claims to translocal experiences did not only disable authoritative objections from her peers (after all they did not have the same experience as Ayah did); it also attributed particular value to her language use. While English is considered a language of prestige within the context of Lamu, its usage within daily interaction was generally very limited and often considered inappropriate (as it excluded people from the interaction). In the context of an (international) NGO, and within the newly established frame of a "meeting," the use of this particular register of English was valued, exactly because it reflected expertise. Ayah's claim to the embodiment of these linguistic practices,

however, also distanced her from her peers in the interactional frame as well as from the broader local context.

When I later asked volunteers about Ayah's contributions to the discussion, many would express their ignorance about the topics discussed and would remind me that Ayah was very knowledgeable. When pressed, however, they added that, while they appreciated Ayah's insistence on the need for improvement, her statements made them feel rather incompetent and ignorant. Some of the girls I spoke to said that, while they loved Ayah as a friend, they found her attitude in meetings increasingly obnoxious. They emphasized that they did not envy Ayah, but merely disliked her performance of an altered condition ("*kuwa hali yake imebadilika*"). They recognized that Ayah was a good force to have within the group, but they expected her to be more considerate of her peers who did not have the same opportunities and who definitely did not possess the same language skills as she did.

In one of the meetings following the one analyzed here, Ayah's language use was overtly challenged. Yusuf, a young man of Ayah's age, stood up while she was making a statement and politely reminded her that not all members present spoke English. He subsequently requested for the rest of the interaction to be conducted in Kiswahili, and preferably in KiAmu as they were, after all, in Lamu. Yusuf had not finished primary education and had no knowledge of English, but was far from ashamed to admit this. On the contrary, he often underlined that he was proud to speak only KiAmu and that he had no need to learn English, as he was not planning on leaving the island. Ayah's response to Yusuf's request was fascinating: she endeavored to "translate" her argument into Kiswahili, but struggled to do so and frequently had to stop herself as she "inadvertently"

switched back to English. At several instances she sighed that “it was so hard,” and asked her peers for assistance because she needed help translating some of the English words.

This was one of the few moments during my fieldwork in which people were publicly criticized for using English. While young people quite frequently objected to their peer’s use of Kimombasa and while they sometimes mocked someone for speaking one of the dialects, the use of English was hardly ever reprimanded, let alone in the context of an NGO meeting. It was exactly Ayah’s claim to an incorporated practice and an inability to use both Kiswahili and the local dialect that separated her from her peers and, most importantly, suggested an altered moral condition.

Frames, voices, and stances: a theoretical interlude

The foregoing detailed analysis of language use during the volunteer meeting reconfirms a lot of things that have become common knowledge within linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. After all, William Labov (1972) demonstrated long ago that people’s language use is influenced by the context in which they find themselves. In addition, Erving Goffman’s (1974, 1981 (1979)) concepts of “frame” and “footing” underlined interlocutors’ orientation to both the situation in which they find themselves, as well to the presence of others in the interactional context – participants as well as ratified overhearers. Goffman’s notion of “frame” has been used and elaborated upon in an array of ways. For example, it has been complicated by questions of multilingualism and scalar processes, and their influence on framing practices. Blommaert et al (2005) noted that “Goffman’s original frame analysis presupposed homogeneity of an intra-group perspective (...) with little attention paid to conflicts over and policing of framed/farmable spaces” (Blommaert, et al. 2005: 208). The question of scale equally

surfaced in discussions about the relation between “frames” and notions of stance (Jaffe 2009) or voice (Bakhtin 1981; Hill 1995; Keane 2011). Indeed, how do macro-sociological processes (including shifting conceptions of social category belonging) come to bear on the micro-sociological interactional frame?

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984; 1991) discussion of distinction and habitus argued for a recognition that shared understandings of how to act, and how to evaluate others’ actions (in terms of social class or category belonging) can equally apply to discursive events. Blommaert et al (2005) remind us that Bourdieu suggested that, for a discursive event to be successful, there has to be a mutual recognition of the legitimate participants to the interaction, the roles they occupy, and the legitimacy of the speech they produce (Blommaert et al. refer to Bourdieu 1986). Linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists alike have thus long agreed that interactional frames are characterized by sets of norms and expectations about communicative behavior that legitimize certain forms of conduct while disqualifying others (see also my earlier discussion of Charles Briggs and Susan Hirsch’s work). In doing so, different contexts of interaction determine the value and function of linguistic repertoires and delimit possibilities for presentations of self and evaluations of others.¹⁶⁵

This chapter endeavors to complicate the understanding of framing practices, alignment, and stance-taking by taking into consideration both broadened linguistic repertoires as well as the ways in which scalar processes can impact the mutual recognition of frames and the rules that govern them. My discussion thus far illustrated that in contexts of social change, new frames are introduced that are translocally shaped

¹⁶⁵ That this is equally the case for non-verbal semiotic practices (and thus broader semiotic repertoires) will be discussed at length in Chapters 6 and 7.

but locally situated. I repeatedly underlined the ambiguity of such interactional frames as well as the lack of mutual recognition concerning the behavioral norms that govern them. I suggested that the (linguistic) negotiation of these situated roles and responsibilities equally challenged understandings of social categories such as “youth.” The analysis of both Ayah and Badrul’s practices, however, demonstrated that such negotiations are far from unrestricted and that not all acts are equally valued. While placed in an ambiguous frame that is informed by translocal discourses, speech acts continue to be situated locally and their valuations are thus conditioned by their spatiotemporal embeddedness.

This analysis then importantly speaks to questions concerning scalar processes and the dialectic between situated moments of stance-taking and the emergence of new or redefined social categories. As I outlined above, exactly because language use in multilingual settings implies a choice from a repertoire, situated stance-taking has broader moral implications. Although interlocutors focus on the immediate interaction and thus “the need to successfully project one’s own face, to have it accepted by others, and preserve theirs in turn,” (Keane 2011: 167) their choice of behavior is importantly informed by “moral rules.” In his discussion of moral stance-taking, Keane (2011) quotes Goffman at length, and I find it valuable to incorporate the same quote here:

“By acquiring [universal human nature], the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without. These rules, when followed, determine the evaluation he will make of himself and of his fellow-participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings, and the kinds of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory kind of ritual equilibrium. The general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transform him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters (Goffman 1967 (1955): 45)

Goffman's perspective on the moral implications of social encounters meaningfully contributes to the focus of this chapter. The moral rules Goffman refers to do not merely structure the interaction itself, but also appeal to broader social categories and even appear to suggest the emergence of social roles from the interaction. Situated speech acts can thus have broader social implications, or can be "subject to evaluations that may have moral entailments" (Keane 2011: 169).

I insert this theoretical discussion because it meaningfully adds to the subsequent analysis of Ayah's language use in the community gathering. While I clearly stated that Ayah's language use in the volunteer meeting was a choice that entailed a rather conscious presentation of self, this calculated act becomes evident when noting her presentation of self in front of a different audience. I do underline that such supposedly conscious and calculated acts go hand in hand with *unawareness* on both the side of the audience and the speaker herself. In the community gathering, Ayah is able to successfully present herself as a respectful, virtuous young woman striving for development exactly because the elders to whom she directs her comments are unaware that her language is a calculated choice instead of a naturalized way of speaking. In addition, while Ayah might have rather consciously selected the language with which to address her elders, in doing she is inadvertently reproduced the very ideologies she endeavors to negotiate.

Taking a stance toward elders: negotiating positions by respecting expectations

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, community gatherings differed significantly from youth meetings: from seating arrangements, to the structure of the

meeting itself, to the order of contributions made. Although women and youth attended and while community meetings had thus become much more “democratic” (under influence of discourses on emancipation and development), former authority structures importantly continued to inform behavioral expectations within the interactional frame.

I mentioned previously that town meetings have always played a central role in Lamu’s political and social organization. Throughout the town’s history a *Baraza la Wazee* or *Council of Elders* decided upon the town’s political, economic, and social policies. The committee was comprised of elder male *waungwana* – members of Lamu’s most prominent families, and participation of women and youth in council meetings was unheard of. After Independence, the *Council of Elders* was dissolved and a “democratically” elected County Council took its place. A few years back, some of Lamu’s prominent elders unanimously agreed to reinstall the *Council of Elders*. Without any effective political power, this council is a symbolic institution that plays an advisory, but highly valued and influential role.¹⁶⁶

While participation in, and the focus of community gatherings had altered significantly, their organization clearly reflected the lasting importance of both historical authority structures and local notions of respectful conduct. Meetings were generally held in the fort on Lamu’s main square. The location in the airy hallways of the monument differed sharply from the small, damp room where youth meetings were held. Attendees sat on neatly arranged chairs, facing a centrally placed table (where community leaders

¹⁶⁶ Recently, the “wageni” or nonlocals living in Langoni decided to set up their own *Council of Elders*, as only prominent *waungwana* families sat on the reinstalled council. By setting up their own council people originally from Siyu, Pate or the Bajuni islands clearly expressed their claim to a voice in matters concerning the management of Lamu Town. Both Councils are invited to community gatherings and each is given the chance to contribute to discussions. The Council of Elders of Mkomani strongly objects to this partition and often overtly suggests that it never refused people from Langoni to be part of the council.

sat), and seating areas in different hallways clearly separated the men from the women. In addition, separate entranceways assured attendees could take their seat without having to draw attention from, or interact with the opposite sex. A Master of Ceremony (MC) generally monitored community gatherings, and the use of a sound system assured that everyone could hear the contributions made. The meetings generally followed a clear order of address: first, community members sitting at the high table would speak to the audience, after which questions and comments were solicited from the male side of the gathering, and subsequently the women were asked to make contributions.¹⁶⁷ Women could either request the microphone or write down their question on a piece of paper that would subsequently be passed on to the MC, who would read the question out loud.

While these gatherings were therefore very organized in terms of their structure, they were far from punctual. Meetings would generally start at least an hour late and people more or less arrived as they pleased. A meeting scheduled to start at 9 am would often not commence until 11 am, but when the *muaddhin* called for prayer only an hour into the meeting, male attendees would promptly stand up and make their way to the mosque. The meeting would subsequently be adjourned until after lunch, when the same scenario would unfold.

The community gathering I discuss here resembled the picture I just painted, although attendance was higher than usual. The meeting took place in December 2008, shortly after Lamu had been faced with another case of land grabbing on Manda Island. After a piece of land had been sold to a Western tourist, local police forces had forcefully removed people living on the land because they had no title deeds that proved their rightful residence. These people subsequently came to Lamu and camped out in front of

¹⁶⁷ During some gatherings questions were solicited from both men and women at the same time.

the District Commissioner's office. Because this was far from the first incident of land grabbing, the event had stirred up quite some emotions in the otherwise quiet Lamu: rowdy demonstrations were held and government security forces were brought in to control the situation and "bring back" the peace.

The meeting analyzed here took place a couple of weeks after the demonstrations and aimed to address some of the issues underlying the increasingly frequent occurrence of land grabbing: the political and economic dispossession of WaLamu in a national context. The town crier, who went around town announcing the meeting using a megaphone, had formulated the topic of the community gathering as a question: how could WaLamu improve the local economy and strengthen their political position?¹⁶⁸ He emphasized that prominent elders from Mombasa would be present at the meeting and that attendance by all WaLamu was encouraged. In what follows, I analyze Ayah's contribution to this important community meeting. This time she did not just address fellow volunteers but spoke to a broad audience of community elders, women, and peers. I argue that Ayah successfully pronounced a critique of the local community, and particularly of the enduring influence of the old social hierarchy, by carefully monitoring her language use and by displaying an awareness of the behavioral expectations tied to the particular frame in which she was participating.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Lamu still works with a town crier: whoever wants to make an announcement (meetings, burials, etc.) pays the crier a small amount of money, after which he walks through the different neighborhoods of Lamu, passing along the message using a megaphone.

¹⁶⁹ She hereby defied views of youth (and their language use) as "disrespectful" or lacking *heshima* as was often voiced by community elders (see Chapter 3).

Ayah's opinion on Lamu's challenges

As expected, the meeting was very well attended and there was a buzz of excitement as people were waiting for the chairman of the *Council of Elders* to open the assembly with a word of prayer. At the high table several prominent community members had taken their place: the chairman of Lamu's Council of Imams, representatives of both Councils of Elders, and several prominent elders from Mombasa. I was told several university professors – former residents of Lamu who had moved to Mombasa and Nairobi – had flown in to attend the meeting. While often less busy, even the women's side was crowded that day. Many of the female attendees carefully covered their faces as they peeked at the high table and the male side of the gathering to identify who the prominent attendees were.

Once the meeting had started, women's excited whispering and mumbling quieted down, although, throughout the meeting, some women would express their agreement with statements made by shouting words of approval (such as *ndio!* "yes," or *kweli!* "true") or by ululating.¹⁷⁰ The gathering followed the usual structure: the MC announced the different agenda topics, each of which was subsequently addressed by one of the people sitting at the high table. These prominent elders gave rather long speeches and concluded their contribution with proposals as to how WaLamu could improve the town's economy or its political situation. Following these speeches, men (elders followed by younger attendees) elaborated at length on the different topics addressed and provided their own suggestions as to how WaLamu's situation could be improved. The MC subsequently directed his attention to the female section of the audience where responses

¹⁷⁰ Women would sometimes be reprimanded for making such unsolicited contributions, and men would often suggest that women's responses during meetings illustrated why they did historically not participate in meetings: they could not control their emotions.

were few. After some well-respected elder women had contributed to the gathering, Ayah raised her hand after which the microphone was passed on to her.

Up to that point, discussions had focused on the injustices that locals believed Lamu to have suffered, starting from Kenyan Independence until the present day. In matters of economy, the focus had been on the unjustified assigning of employment opportunities to non-locals and how this practice of tribalism could be prevented. Other speakers had focused on Lamu's lack of political representation and the problems it had caused. Several attendees suggested WaLamu ought to form alliances with people from Mombasa and other coastal communities in order to defend their rights on a national level. Ayah directed her comments particularly at this suggestion of translocal unity.

Regular script	Standard Swahili
<u>Underlined</u>	KiAmu
Bold	English
A	Ayah
X	Audience response

A salaam aleykum	A salaam aleykum
X waleykum salaam	X. waleykum salaam
A tumezungumza kila mtu kwa sababu karibu kila mtu amekuja hapa kuchangia amezungumza kuwa watu wengine wapewa nafasi zetu . watu wa nje ama tuseme watu wa bara (...) . lakini tufikirie kiislamu peke yake kwa sababu tuangalie katika Uislamu peke yake ikiwa waislamu sisi wenyewe tumegawanyika . na mi nitatoa mfano wangu mimi mwenyewe . mimi nimekwenda kufanya interview mahali . <u>swali la kwanda mimi nililoulizwa . babako wewe nshariffu gani mimi kabla siyafanya chochote hapo imekuwa nishayua mimi sipati</u>	A. every person has spoken because almost every person came here to contribute . he said that other people were given our opportunities . people from outside or lets say people from the mainland (...) but lets think Islamically alone because we need to look in Islam only . if we Muslims are divided ourselves . and I will give you an example of myself . I went to do an interview somewhere . <u>the first question I was asked . you your father which Shariff is he . before I had done anything I already knew that I was not getting that job</u>

Ayah’s recounting of her personal experience with discrimination in the local context, an exclusion based on her Bajuni background, caused uproar during the otherwise reasonably ordered meeting. Several people verbally expressed their agreement with Ayah’s example, while others discussed the matter among themselves. The MC eventually intervened, requesting order in the meeting, and Ayah subsequently continued her statement, following up with a second story of unjust treatment. She recounted how a local chief had not publicized employment opportunities that had been announced to him; rather he had proposed his own family members as candidates for the jobs. Audience members once again verbally responded to the story. And after having patiently waited for people to settle down, Ayah concluded her contribution with the following.

Regular script	Standard Swahili
<u>Underlined</u>	KiAmu
Bold	English
A	Ayah
X	Unknown male
Y	Audience response

<p>A. (...) <u>kila alilonena ni shida alitaya ya binafsi yake mwenyewe . na ikiwa sisi = mimi sitaki jirani yangu aendeleo hatutaendelea . kwa sababu nikikumbuka mimi ule mwana jirani yangu akiharibikiwa yeo akiwa mwizi atajepa kwangu kwanda . hajepi kwa mwengine . sasa mimi . maombi yangu . ni kuwa hata kama iko discrimination kule yuu siku zote sisi hudiscriminatiwa</u></p>	<p>A. (...) everyone who spoke mentioned his own personal problems . and if we = me I do not want my neighbor to progress we will not progress . because if I remember that when the child from my neighbor gets ruined today if he becomes a thief he will steal from my home first . he will not steal somewhere else . now me . my request is that even if there is discrimination up there . we are being discriminated against every day</p>
<p>[applause]</p>	<p>[applause]</p>
<p>A. (...) sasa mimi ningeomba kama waIslamtuongane kwa sababu ikiwa tutaongana kwa sisi hapa hapa na <u>huko mbe tutaendekewa</u> . ahsante</p>	<p>A. (...) now me I would beg as Muslims we stick together because if we work together here <u>then we will make progress</u> . thank you</p>
<p>[applause]</p>	<p>[applause]</p>

X. Takbeer	X. Takbeer ¹⁷¹
Y. Allahu Akbar	Y. Allahu Akbar

Several elders were clearly agitated and spiritedly responded to Ayah’s statement. One of the prominent community elders demanded to know the name of the Chief who had failed to publicize the employment opportunities. The women, who had loudly responded to the call for *Takbeer*, were excitedly talking among themselves. The MC was not immediately able to appease the audience and subsequently decided to announce a short break.

Ayah’s contribution to the crowded community meeting is interesting for many different reasons, particularly when compared to her participation in the youth gathering discussed previously. It was quite audacious of Ayah to pronounce such a sharp critique of the local community, especially given the context she was speaking in. I suggest she was able to pull it off and evoke supportive exclamations from the audience both due to the structure of her argument and because of her language use.

Ayah’s objections to the suggested collaboration with other coastal communities, and her rejection of the usefulness of accusations of tribalism on the side of the government interestingly resembled her critique of her peers. In both contexts, she argued that the cause for Lamu’s underdevelopment and lack of progress was to be found with divisions within the Lamu community itself. Among her peers, Ayah had based her argument on claims to translocal experiences, education, and familiarity with translocal discourses, and she had done so from an authoritative position within the meeting. In front of her elders at the community meeting, Ayah did not claim a position of authority

¹⁷¹ This could be translated as a command to “exclaim God is greater!”

from the onset. On the contrary, she held back from contributing until the very end of the meeting, thus recognizing her subservient position as a young female. When she eventually did make a statement, she commenced by politely greeting the assembly using the Islamic greeting *Asalaam Aleykum*. She subsequently recognized the value of other people's contributions but then carefully reminded them of the Islamic values they all lived by.

From the onset Ayah presented herself, not as an educated young woman eager for development and progress (as she had done among her peers), but as a respectful Muslimah who was well aware of the moral norms the religion expects her to live by. She did not rely on arguments of development, modernity, or emancipation, but suggested that a re-installment of religious values was essential to political and economic prosperity. Her final emphasis on caring for one's neighbor, for example, echoed an important Islamic value that she suggested had been lost in contemporary Lamu.

Ayah started by decrying the disunity and discrimination within the Muslim community – note, not the Lamu community – and immediately followed her accusation with the narration of two personal experiences. While her opening contribution was formulated in Standard Swahili, her individual experiences were recounted in fluent KiAmu. Whereas among her peers, Ayah had difficulty finishing a sentence in the Kiswahili, she now did not even hesitate when speaking the local dialect and throughout her statement did not even insert one English word, except when she referred to the professional “interview.” The personal narratives and the use of KiAmu granted Ayah authority within the situated interaction: not only are personal experiences difficult to

contest, her use of the local dialect (rather than English or Standard Swahili) also undeniably tied her to the local context.

Her last statement, equally formulated in KiAmu, sharply addressed the moral condition of many WaLamu today. Ayah suggested that, rather than being generous and selfless (as an adherence to Islam demands), people are increasingly preoccupied with their own well-being and thus stand in the way of their own development – an argument that mirrored the criticism she gave her peers. Rather than plainly accusing community members of selfish actions, she herself identified with the local social context by using the 1st person singular pronoun. In her peer environment, Ayah had relied on her personal experiences *outside* of the local context to make authoritative statements. Now she explicitly identified with the local environment through language use, deictic reference, and personal narrative. It was exactly this combination of personal understanding and linguistic practices that permitted Ayah to authoritatively and successfully pronounce a sharp critique of her community, and thus her elders.¹⁷²

Only through careful consideration of context, audience, and positioning of self was Ayah able to tackle the sensitive topic of enduring social distinctions and family politics. The response of the audience illustrated Ayah's success in addressing the matter. This effective voicing of a social critique is, however, also illustrative of young people's capacity to challenge, not only traditional participant structures within a certain interactional frame, but also the behavioral expectations and moral rules ideologically tied to particular social categories.

¹⁷² It would be valuable to further analyze Ayah's use of English words like "discrimination" as such an analysis could echo Jane Hill's (1995) argument that, through the selection of English vocabulary, Ayah morally distances herself from the practices she is describing. Comparing Ayah's contribution here to the youth gathering would, however, further complicate Hill's argument and underline the situatedness of linguistic value.

Although she voiced essentially the same critique in both the youth meeting and the community gathering – identifying selfishness and a lack of unity as the main causes for Lamu’s deteriorating condition – Ayah constructed her argument entirely differently. Her language use, the structure of the argument, and even the discourses she drew upon differed in both contexts.¹⁷³ I suggest that an awareness of the distinctive behavioral expectations, both those tied to the immediate context of interaction as well as the expectations linked to broader social categories (or Goffman’s moral rules), enabled Ayah to take a moral stance. In both cases, she expressed a judgment of her audience as well as of the macro-sociological context in which the interactions took place. And by doing so, she successfully challenged her (ascribed) role within the situated interaction and meaningfully renegotiated societal expectations tied to social categories such as “youth” and “women.”

Conclusion

Through the detailed analysis of young people’s contributions within two different “meetings,” this chapter set out to examine how participation in ambiguous interactional frames permits the situated negotiation of roles and responsibilities – both within the immediate context of interaction (participant roles) and on a broader sociological level (moral rules tied to social categories). In doing so, I endeavored to formulate three important arguments.

Firstly, I hope to have demonstrated that the regimentation of linguistic repertoires is (spatiotemporally) situated. The *value* of language varieties is not solely

¹⁷³ I have no video footage of these meetings, and did not take extensive notes on Ayah’s body language in the different contexts, but I would suggest that even Ayah’s bodily comportment differed significantly in both contexts.

determined by an orientation to the standard language hegemony, or to English as a prestige language (an argument that elaborates upon statements made in Chapter 4). On the contrary, linguistic value can meaningfully shift between interactional contexts and even within the same setting. Ayah's use of English might have been considered flawed within Nairobi, and a use of English within the community meeting would have been evaluated negatively (as disrespectful, inauthentic, or alienating). But it was highly valued within the context of the youth meeting: it indexed her education, experience, and authority. Ayah's overreliance on the prestige variety, however, resulted in a devaluing of her language use as it became indicative of her alienation from the local context. In addition, while Badrul's use of KiAmu in the youth meeting did not grant him authority, Ayah's reliance on the local dialect within the community meeting was highly valued. Her knowledge of the language variety showed her to be attuned to the local context and to be respectful of her elders.

Secondly, I demonstrated that participation in shifting interactional frames enabled young people to challenge behavioral expectations tied to the social category of "youth" itself. Not only did Ayah and Badrul metadiscursively construct a redefined notion of young people's agency in contemporary Lamu, Ayah's contribution to the community meeting demonstrated that young people can challenge the position historically ascribed to them. Exactly because Ayah acknowledged the expectations that governed the context of interaction, and expressed respect for moral norms and values, she could express her desire for change – she could claim a different agentive position within the local community.

In this creative act, however, individuals also partly reconfirm the ideological framework in which they are operating. During the community meeting, Ayah's self-positioning within the participant framework, her deference to elders, and her use of KiAmu in many ways reconfirmed young women's position in the local context. Also, Ayah's use of English among her peers reconfirmed young people's conception of the language as a prestige variety, tied to translocal discourses and desirable to non-educated youth. This does not contradict previous arguments that linguistic value is situated and spatiotemporally shaped; after all, the value of Ayah's English use shifted within the interaction itself.

Thirdly, I endeavored to show that young people take a moral stance toward the immediate context of interaction and the broader community by making (calculated) decisions about their conduct. The argument that Ayah's choice of language morally positions herself toward a changing society resembles Jane Hill's (1995) analysis of Don Gabriel's narrative. Ayah, however, differs from Don Gabriel because she uses different "voices," not to distance herself from the ideologies they are tied to, but to align herself in different ways with her audience and thereby negotiate a new social position for herself. Her strategic choice between the different voices available to her granted Ayah the authority to express critique and present herself in front of different audiences that hold divergent ideological positions. Ayah's linguistic practices displayed *a moral consciousness* of the ideological boundaries she can or cannot cross in order to achieve her immediate interactional goal, and to make claims on a broader societal level. Mobilizing different voices is then a process of moral self-discovery (Keane 2011): an

attempt to balance the different expectations of a changing society and redefine one's position therein.

The moral anxiety the Lamu community experiences partly stems from the ambiguity of frames and social types – conceptions of gender, social class, and age are being redefined under influence of translocal discourses on, among others, emancipation, empowerment, and development. Within a transforming society, “moral rules” governing situated interactions as well as conceptions of social category belonging are no longer necessarily shared. This lack of mutual recognition can result in miscalculations, but simultaneously opens up ways to renegotiate and redefine what these individuals' roles and responsibilities ought to be in an altered social context. While Badrul unsuccessfully claimed authority based on moral rules that structured interactions and meetings not too long ago (age and gender), Ayah took advantage of the uncertainty of appropriate conduct and was able to claim authority in two different contexts.

I suggest that Ayah's linguistic practices illustrate young people's position within Lamu: within different interactions, and in different ways, Ayah voiced her desire for change and development by being critical of her own community. Yet she simultaneously expressed her respect for the moral norms and values that ought to structure life in an Islamic community. And she did this in a manner that recognized the behavioral expectations that govern certain contexts.

In the following chapters, I demonstrate that the boundaries between contexts and thus the distinction between moral rules that govern different interactional frames are far from obvious, particularly in a community dealing with rapid transformation. In addition,

I show that calculated presentations of self are far from evident: multiple ideologies circulate, behavioral expectations can differ, boundaries can be misrecognized, and unrati ed overhearers can negatively assess individuals' conduct. In Chapter 6, I focus on the challenge young people face when drawing upon the broadened linguistic repertoire discussed in Chapter 4 and analyzed in this chapter. While young people like Ayah can exploit different linguistic resources within clearly delineated interactional settings, a positive evaluation is far from guaranteed exactly because multiple ideological evaluations circulate in their social environment. I suggest that the inventive linking of speech to material practice increasingly allows young people to challenge linguistic stereotypes and established ideological evaluations. What is more, I argue that the usage of such broadened semiotic repertoires enables processes of enregisterment and typification, whereby particular practices are increasingly linked to particular social personae. I emphasize, however, that the negotiation of new evaluations is inherently intersubjective and interdiscursive and that recognition (and valuation) of intended meanings is thus far from guaranteed.

Chapter 6

Qualities of sounds as qualities of personhood: negotiating ambivalence through sounds (and sights)

Lamu's complex linguistic landscape has always put linguistic detail – accents, features of speech, intonation, switching, etc. – at the center of social evaluations. Chapters 4 and 5 outlined the ways in which the island's altered geopolitical position presented a range of new language varieties to the local context. This broadening of linguistic repertoires entailed shifts in linguistic value and introduced multiple, sometimes conflicting evaluations of language use to the local context. As was clear from the discussion in Chapter 5, inhabitants of the Lamu Archipelago, both young and old, still place a high value on dialect use. The inability or reluctance to speak the dialects is then often evaluated as signaling a sense of shame (as we will see subsequently).

Because of the state-imposed standard language hegemony, young people, however, obtain failing grades in school when they do speak the dialects. The growing use of Standard Swahili might then suggest a rising level of education among the younger generation, but it is also considered indicative of the Kenyan government's increasing imposition and Lamu's position in the national periphery (see Chapter 4). In addition, the dialects' definition as *dialects* in relation to Standard Swahili together with Lamu's altered economic and political position brought about a range of linguistic stereotypes about these language varieties and their speakers. These negative or mocking depictions are pervasive, not only in cities like Mombasa, but also in social media such as on the

radio, in newspapers, and even on *Facebook* where the dialects are overtly linked to notions of backwardness and underdevelopment.

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the broadened linguistic repertoire forms an important resource for Lamu youth – for strategic presentations of self or for the (linguistic) negotiation of new social relations within daily interaction. Yet the chapter equally demonstrated that these young people struggle with the multiple ideological understandings of the language varieties that make up this repertoire and with their own varying orientations to several of these. Both Ayah and Badrul miscalculated at different instances and in different ways during the interactions analyzed, as they over- or underestimated the situated value of particular language varieties. When looking at Ayah and Badrul’s language use (both in Chapter 3 and 5), we could suggest that it displays an adherence to a variety of, sometimes conflicting, ideologies and thus resembles practices that have previously been described as indicative of “ambivalence.” (Hill and Hill 1986; Hill and Irvine 1993; Messing 2007, 2009)

Young people’s knowledge of the Swahili dialects is diminishing, a shift importantly shaped by educational policies but also by linguistic stereotypes. While young people value the dialects, and while they recognize elders’ emphasis on their retention, they switch or mix languages when encountering non-locals or when traveling to Mombasa, and increasingly do so within the local context to suggest familiarity with urban or global milieus (as we clearly saw with Ayah). This then often leads to seemingly contradictory practices, whereby youth criticize their peers for abandoning respectful, valuable language use, while they themselves display the very practices they are critiquing. We already noted such positions of apparent ambivalence with Ayah and

Badrul in Chapter 3; their critique of Lamu's moral transformation and its translation in youth's shifting day-to-day conduct was mirrored in the very way in which they expressed their opinion. In Chapter 5, I mentioned how Lamu youth were sometimes explicitly critical of their peers who shifted or mixed language use. Young people did so, not only because they didn't understand the language used (as was the case with Ayah in Chapter 5), but also because such avoidance practice were viewed as reflecting shame or a fear of being ridiculed by people from Mombasa. Yet many of them displayed exactly the avoidance practices they were critiquing. This is clearly illustrated in an interaction I encountered on the *Facebook* page of an informant.

The excerpt below displays the *Facebook* status of Asef,¹⁷⁴ a young man of about twenty-five who lives in Shela, the wealthy town neighboring Lamu where the Prince of Monaco, Hollywood film producers, and other high-class individuals own houses. Asef is well acquainted with these elites and often invites them for lavish Swahili dinners. He always wears either the traditional *kikoi* or Islamic *kanzu* and often walks around barefoot. Because of his interactions with European and American elites, Asef speaks rather fluent English; he is able to have short interactions in French and knows quite a few words in other European languages such as Spanish, Swedish, and Dutch. Other participants to the interaction are friends of Asef who reside in Lamu.

The *Facebook* exchange is interesting exactly because of the apparent irony of the contradiction between what is overtly stated and the interlocutors' own linguistic practices. All participants explicitly distance themselves from Lamu youth's avoidance of the local dialects and their tendency to appropriate urban dialects such as KiMombasa.

¹⁷⁴ pseudonym

They hereby tie the use of such urban varieties to young people’s denouncing of their cultural background. Yet they themselves seem to display the very practices they are critiquing.¹⁷⁵

Regular	Standard Swahili
<u>Underlined</u>	KiAmu
Bold	English
A	Asef
N	Nadir
J	Jafar

Asef



- A. Why do people from Lamu OR wagunya or wabajuni like to pretend to be from Mombasa? **What is good about it?**
- N. **I don’t understand it either.** A person lives in Mombasa for one year, when he comes back he doesn’t know kiamu anymore and pretends as if he has developed. Even the people from Shela act as if they are from Mombasa. **Really is something I hate**
- N. When do we say someone (M2) is developed? When he lives in Mombasa! **My God**
- J. It is not (C) all, **just some of us...**
- A. Nadir, a Shela person wherever he goes, he is **proud** of being from Shela! **But** people from Lamu I do not understand at all, I mean, they pretend to be from Mombasa **and nothing special about it.**

¹⁷⁵ All names used are pseudonyms.

Participants in this interaction overtly critique their peers who appropriate the practices of Mombasa youth, the most evident of which being their language use (as the most apparent distinction between inhabitants of Mombasa and the Lamu Archipelago). Looking closely at the exchange, we note, however, that Asef does not write KiShela. Rather, he uses Standard Swahili and English and even interjects the urban youth slang when using “*ajiproud*.” His friend Nadir is the only one who uses KiAmu. But he does so only at one instance: when he actually mentions KiAmu. Nadir does then not entirely shift to the dialect but merely mobilizes a distinguishing feature often used in stereotypical depictions of WaLamu – the use of /y/ instead of /j/ in *hayui*.¹⁷⁶ A shift to KiAmu would, for example, have meant also writing *moya* instead of *moja*, which Nadir uses. The remainder of Nadir’s contribution is in Standard Swahili, English and, interestingly, in text lingo – he uses M2 instead of the Kiswahili *mtu*. This is repeated in the response of Jafar, who uses *C* instead of the Kiswahili *si*. In both instances, the abbreviated form is not significantly shorter than the original Kiswahili word, but rather indexes expertise in the writing conventions of new means of communication.¹⁷⁷

Such apparently inconsistent narratives of youth in contexts of rapid change, where what young people say seemingly contradicts how they say it, have been identified as ambivalent – as indicative of youth’s interpersonal conflict about authenticity (Messing 2009: 356). Caught up in multiple ideologies of development and modernity as well as conservation and religious piety, the position of youth is viewed as confusing and conflicting – to the youth themselves. With its negative connotations of doubt, hesitation,

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix A, *Note on Kiswahili and its dialects*.

¹⁷⁷ Compare this interaction with the Facebook exchange in Chapter 3, and the difference is apparent because there the interactants used KiAmu the majority of the time.

and uncertainty, defining youth's narratives and practices as *ambivalent* then considers them inherently problematic.

Looking back at the *Facebook* interaction above and analyzing the seemingly inconsistent narrative, we could conclude that young people in Lamu equally find themselves in an undecided, conflicted position. The participants' use of English – as a commodity with great symbolic value – and their avoidance of local dialects then presumably shows their desire to be identified as “citizens of a transnational world” (Messing 2009: 256) despite what they might state explicitly. This chapter moves away from such perspective of ambivalence as problematic and suggests that young people's practices are indicative of ongoing (re)negotiations of loyalties, ideological orientations, and social positions. I contend that seemingly contradictory practices do not need to reflect the speaker's conflicted position, but can rather be indicative of the formation and negotiation of new subject positions that accommodate youth's “inbetweenness.” I propose that the innovative linking of talk and practice forms an essential part of the processes through which such new positions can emerge.

As this dissertation has argued from the onset: young people in Lamu negotiate new or alternative social positions within a rapidly transforming society; positions that enable a recognition of local expectations, respect for norms and values, and desire to appropriate global cultural flows. Chapter 5 already meaningfully illustrated how language use and metapragmatic awareness play a central role in the expression of respectful behavior and in the renegotiation of what it means to be a virtuous, respectful person in this context of change. This chapter builds upon this discussion and argues that the inventive linking of speech to other material practices, within particular contexts, is

essential to the challenging of established evaluations of language use and thus the emergence of new social categories.

While in the interaction above, Asef's overt claim to pride of his cultural background might appear to be contradicted by his mixed language use and his other material practices, he himself might consider his behavior as characteristically Swahili, or rather as a redefined understanding of what it means to be Swahili in contemporary society. Wealth, class, and a global orientation have always been, and continue to be constitutive of Swahili cultural traditions (Loimeier and Seesemann 2006; Prestholdt 2008). Asef's use of an iPhone, his switches to English, or his use of Sheng is then not an inauthentic adoption of an Other's voice, nor is his wearing of a *kanzu* and *kikoi* outdated; rather such practices display a redefined understanding of Swahili cosmopolitanism. The uptake and evaluation of these redefined practices, however, is far from guaranteed and depends on the relation of linguistic forms to other signifiers and the context in which they occur. It is through the innovative linking of linguistic and material forms that Asef can negotiate his position as a respectful, cosmopolitan Swahili rather than as a confused young man caught between respect for the local context and a longing for the urban.

This chapter examines exactly such processes of negotiation and the central role that language plays therein. Here, I focus on *details* of talk – on switches between languages, but particularly on features of speech such as the use of accents, distinctive features, and intonations – and analyze how these work together with other material forms in order to comprehend how shifting positionalities are negotiated in daily interaction. I suggest that the innovative linking of talk to gaze, dress, movement, and

other forms of practice are critical to allowing youth to function within positions of ambivalence.

Such close analysis of young people's verbal and material practices allows for an understanding of the day-to-day processes through which classifications of behavior, and those whose behaviors they are, are experienced, maintained, and modified. This chapter then provides insight in the semiotic processes that contribute to the negotiation, stabilization, and crystallization of recognizable social types – of how forms of practice can become socially recognized as indexical of a particular kind of speaker. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Asif Agha (2005, 2007a, 2011) calls this process “enregisterment” – or the process through which particular features of speech become meaningfully linked to particular categories of speakers. In Chapter 5, I suggested such process of enregisterment was noticeable among the volunteers of the NGO, who increasingly used a particular vocabulary to reflect their belonging to a new category of youth. In this chapter, I propose that enregisterment is but part of a larger process of typification. I hereby contend that the emergence of new social categories is not only tied to the introduction of recognizable linguistic practices, but that these also need to be correlated to dress, body language, and relative age in ways that are identifiable by observers. While I hereby highlight youth's resourcefulness, I also underline that possibilities to act are never unrestricted, but are always intersubjective and guided by questions of intentionality, responsibility, and morality.

The first section of the chapter takes a closer look at some of the linguistic stereotypes that circulate in Lamu youth's linguistic environment and reviews some of the theoretical frameworks that have provided insight in the different processes through

which stereotypes (Agha 1998) and language ideologies (Irvine and Gal 2000) materialize. The second section builds upon these theoretical approaches and discusses how the materiality of language permits a view of accents or features of speech as *qualisigns* – as qualities capable of signifying. How such an approach enables a better understanding of the negotiation or enregisterment of ambivalence, and the intersubjective and interdiscursive nature of such process form the focus of the subsequent sections. I end the chapter by underlining that, because indexical links between features of speech and social categories of people are still in flux, linguistic practices derive their full meaning only from their relation to other forms of material practice and from the situatedness of the interaction in which they occur.

Switching, mixing, and linguistic stereotypes

Negative stereotypes about the Northern Swahili dialects are abound. While locals might attribute social and linguistic value to these different variants, their usage is negatively evaluated along the broader Swahili coast, as well as in official, administrative, and educational contexts. It is exactly such negative evaluations of Lamu dialects that adversely impact dialect use among Lamu's younger generation, despite their awareness of its important ties to authenticity and respectability. This position is particularly evident in Asef's *Facebook* extract above: while critiquing avoidance practices among their peers, the young participants themselves display the practices they are critiquing. If stereotypes are so pervasive, how do young people challenge such negative evaluations? And how can new linguistic practices be incorporated without being evaluated as disrespectful, inauthentic, or contradictory? Phrased differently, in which way can young

people negotiate evaluations of talk and practice that reflect their adherence to discourses on development and change, as well as authenticity and respectability?

Linguistic stereotypes and language attitudes have been studied at length in linguistic anthropology (e.g. Agha 1998, 2007a; Bucholtz 2005; Cavanaugh 2003, 2005; Gumperz 1982; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Hill and Irvine 1993; Irvine and Gal 2000; Messing 2009). Here, I particularly draw upon two theoretical approaches to these phenomena. Asif Agha's (1998, 2005, 2007a, 2011) work on linguistic stereotypes and processes of enregisterment provides a theoretical framework from which to understand subjects' representational practices and the intersection between 'language' and social personas. And Judith Irvine and Sue Gal's (2000) seminal piece on semiotic processes of differentiation provides insight into how linguistic stereotypes materialize. It particularly calls our attention to the ways in which people conceive of links between linguistic forms and social phenomena. The processes of iconization, erasure, and fractal recursivity illustrate the different ways in which individuals understand linguistic differences by mapping languages onto people in a way that is meaningful to them.

Chapter 3 discussed different examples of how fractal recursivity and erasure operate in the context of Lamu. In the stereotyping of the Northern Swahili dialects, the processes of *iconization* and *erasure* are particularly evident. Consider, for example, the sentence people from Mombasa shout when overhearing someone speak, what they perceive to be, one of the Swahili dialects: *Ambacha ukucha punda uyao*. This jocular sentence is generally pronounced with a strong KiBajuni accent and can be translated as "stand/press against the wall, because there is a donkey coming."

The utterance of the sentence – urging someone to press themselves against the wall to let a donkey pass by – is particularly out of place in Mombasa as an urban center with broad streets and avenues, hectic motorized transportation, and the complete absence of donkeys. It is exactly this discrepancy between the sentence uttered and the reality of the context in which it circulates that emphasizes the distinction between the two rival cities, underscoring Lamu’s marginal position and Mombasa’s (economic) success.

In both Standard Swahili and KiMombasa the sentence would be written (and pronounced) as “*ambata ukuta punda **anakuja**.*” And the sentence thus focuses upon two particular distinguishing features – *ch* and *uyao* – to call upon a social category of people: the inhabitants of the Lamu Archipelago. The use of the feature “ch,” however, is typical only of the KiBajuni dialect, not of KiAmu.¹⁷⁸ By shouting this sentence at any speaker who is identified as coming from the Archipelago, people from Mombasa thus erase the archipelago’s important linguistic and social complexity. What is more, they iconically tie these phonological features and those who presumably use them to the narrow streets and predominance of donkey transportation in Lamu, viewing all as outdated and undeveloped.

¹⁷⁸ See Appendix A for a detailed description of the linguistic differences between different dialects.



Figure 37. Donkeys in Lamu's narrow streets
© Eric Lafforgue

The prevalence of such linguistic stereotypes – depictions of the Northern Swahili dialects as backward and undeveloped – importantly influences young people’s language use. Youth in Lamu often switch to KiMombasa when traveling to the mainland, or when encountering people from Mombasa. Young men in particular informed me that they often use KiMombasa when attempting to seduce a girl. The urban dialect, so they suggested, made them appear more developed, cosmopolitan, and thus more attractive. The commentary voiced by Asef and his friends in the *Facebook* status above, however, illustrates that even young people themselves often deem such sense of shame of one’s background inappropriate.

In this chapter, I do not so much focus on how such pervasive stereotypes impact language use among youth, but rather on the ways in which such linguistic stereotypes (and the indexical meaning of languages more broadly) can be renegotiated in daily interaction. Studies of language use in multilingual settings have often assumed that each language or code indexes a set of social meanings, known to both the speaker and his or her audience (Gal 1987). Chapter 5, however, demonstrated, not only that evaluations are not necessarily shared, but also that multiple language ideologies can circulate within the same linguistic environment. In contexts of social transformation, the social meaning of

language use can then become ambiguous, as language varieties' social indexicality is no longer straightforward. As Miyako Inoue (2004) proposes: social crisis often entails indexical crisis (2004: 49). I suggest that such moments of indexical ambiguity provide opportunities for the negotiation of new links between forms of practice and social personas.

Linguistic anthropology has at its core the (linguistic and semiotic) analysis of actors' own evaluations, interpretations, and representations of language and language use (Bauman 2003; Hill and Irvine 1993; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, et al. 1998; Silverstein 1979, 1981). And the field of language ideologies is build upon the recognition that multiple subject positions result in various representations and interpretations of language, as well as contestations over such arrangements (Inoue 2004: 43). Linguistic anthropologists have thus long agreed that (semiotic) relations and registers are always emerging (see e.g. Agha 2005, 2007a; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Hill and Irvine 1993; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Tedlock and Mannheim 1995); the question is how new meanings are negotiated and what happens in the meantime – when established indexical links between semiotic practice and social categories are challenged and become ambiguous.

The theoretical approaches referred to previously – Agha's discussion of linguistic stereotypes and processes of enregisterment, and Irvine and Gal's processes of linguistic differentiation – emphasize exactly the emergent qualities of linguistic and social evaluations. A linguistic stereotype, Agha argues, formulates signs of social identity by linking arbitrary features of utterance-form with social types of persons. Such ideological depiction of distinguishing features as stereotypical of a particular category of

people helps reify (social and linguistic) variability into consciously graspable categories (Agha 1998: 152). Similarly, Irvine and Gal's processes of differentiation underline that people select qualities supposedly shared by the social image and the linguistic image and bind them together in a linkage that appears from the perspective of the ideology to be intrinsic and particularly fitting (Gal 1995; Irvine 2001; Irvine and Gal 2000).

I want to call attention to Irvine and Gal's emphasis on *qualities of speech* rather than on entire languages or registers. People select *qualities* of "the linguistic image" and tie them to *qualities* of "the social image" (Irvine 2001; Irvine and Gal 2000). The slowness of speech, for example, is believed to represent the slowness of people. It is this emphasis on the qualities of languages that underlies the emphasis on *semiotic* ideologies of differentiation. Applications of this theoretical notion, however, have generally focused on how such qualities of speech come to stand for an entire language that is indexically tied to a social category of speakers. To better understand how stereotypes can be challenged, and how new ideological understandings of language use can be negotiated I want to bring our attention back to the ideological depiction and function of these *qualities* of speech.

Consider the linguistic stereotype I introduced above. When discussing such stereotypes with me, Lamu youth would complain that people from Mombasa were not familiar with the Northern Swahili dialects – their knowledge was limited to the distinguishing qualities "ch" and "uyao." Not only were they incapable of speaking the dialects, people from Mombasa were oblivious to the Lamu Archipelago's dialectal variation, and thus to the phonological and lexical complexity of these different varieties of Kiswahili. Yet, the mobilization of distinctive qualities of speech rather than entire

languages was not restricted to linguistic stereotypes. Reconsider the *Facebook* exchange that I analyzed in the introduction to this chapter. In that interaction, Nadir equally only mobilized the distinguishing feature “y” to index his identification with, and sense of pride of a Lamu identity. There is no evident shift to KiAmu, but merely the use of a distinctive *quality* of speech that calls upon a *quality* of personhood – in this case authenticity or cultural pride. Similarly, rather than using extensive text lingo, both Nadir and Jafar use a few short forms that signal familiarity with new technology and thus calls upon a quality of modernity. In both these examples – in linguistic depictions of others and in the presentation of self – a recognizable or distinguishing *quality* of speech is used to call upon a *quality* of personhood.

I suggest that it is exactly this use of distinguishing features – pronunciations, writing practices, or accents – that enables youth to negotiate alternate social positionalities. Rather than calling upon social categories, the use of features of speech allows them to call upon qualities of personhood. The innovative linking of such linguistic practices to other material forms then enables the negotiation of new subject positions – or the establishment of new indexical links between forms of practice and social personas.¹⁷⁹

Materiality of speech and potentiality for signification

Inhabitants of Mombasa did not just poke fun at young people who spoke the Northern Swahili dialects; they were quick to provide reasons or motivations for their dislike of the

¹⁷⁹ I do not mean to suggest that this very process is new to the context of the Swahili coast; on the contrary, such processes undoubtedly formed part of coastal history. In his discussion of global consumerism in the history of the East African coast, Prestholdt (2008) discusses at length how for inhabitants of Mutsamudu “things English, be they words or objects, were signs that reproduced for those who adopted them some of the qualities of what they signified: English “civility”” (Prestholdt 2008:17).

dialects. One of these oft-encountered depictions of KiAmu (and thus of its speakers) interestingly illustrates how material qualities of speech can be identified as iconic of particular qualities of personhood. The in-depth analysis of these iconic relationships, however, clearly illustrates that iconicity is far from inherent as the same quality of speech can be identified as representing entirely different qualities of personhood, depending on who is doing the evaluating.

When interviewed about their aversion towards KiAmu, many young men from Mombasa were quick to describe the dialect and its speakers as “too feminine,” even when spoken by men. And young men’s avoidance practices both when traveling to Mombasa and when encountering inhabitants of the city within Lamu, becomes more understandable in light of such descriptions. People who described KiAmu to me, and who tried to explain its difference from other Northern Swahili dialects often suggested that “*lafdhi yake ni laini*” – that the dialect’s pronunciation was *soft*. When depicting the dialect as such, they would gently rub their thumb, index, and middle fingers together as if touching soft material. When doing so, they did not identify any one particular distinguishing feature (like the “ch” or “uyao” we noted in the above examples); rather they referred to the material quality of sounds and the manner in which people spoke as soft, smooth, or gentle.

This perceived smoothness of KiAmu was said to give the dialect a feminine quality. Young, male interviewees often used exactly this description to explain their avoidance of the dialect. While they recognized the value of KiAmu and underscored the importance of retaining it, they would simultaneously suggest that the dialect sounded too feminine. It was therefore more suited for women than for men. The depiction of KiAmu

as soft, gentle, and feminine recalls our description of ideological conceptions of spatial divisions and ideal behavior in Chapter 2. There, I suggested that Lamu's seafront and the behavior that governed there were considered more open and masculine than the inner areas of the town and the Swahili houses, the latter two being shaped by notions of female sensitivity and sensuality. While at the male dominated seafront rough language use could be heard, the intimacy of Lamu's back alleys imposed a sense of modesty, respectability, and sensitivity. KiAmu then did not only call upon a feminine quality, but equally suggested a sense of respectability and honor tied to ideological notions of behavior.

These different metadiscursive evaluations are reminiscent of Miyako Inoue's (2004) analysis of the Japanese cultural categories of "woman's language" and "schoolgirls' speech" and their indexical link to the shifting social conditions (and gender relations) under Japan's modernization (Inoue 2004: 46). Inoue considers the notion of "woman's language," and the regretted loss thereof within contemporary Japan to be the outcome of inverted indexicality; of a process through which metapragmatic discourses retroactively constitute and naturalize indexicality (Inoue 2004: 44-46). Metapragmatic discourses on Japan's "women's language," like the foregoing depiction of KiAmu, describe the language variety as "feminine" and rationalize women's use of soft features of speech as the natural outcome of women's intrinsic nature as soft and gentle. I argue that, as in Japan, the explicit inscription of femininity into KiAmu as sensual and soft is tied to Lamu women's altered social position and their visible and audible appearance in Lamu's "public." They have become a visible sign of change. By "naturalizing" women's usage of KiAmu and normalizing their inscription into space (intimate spaces being the

“natural” context for women), metapragmatic commentaries facilitate the evaluation of young girls’ altered semiotic and linguistic practices as indexical of their moral corruption (Inoue 2004, 2006).¹⁸⁰

Many young men said they considered a girl who spoke KiAmu attractive, exactly because her language use was indicative of her moral condition as pure, sensitive, and conservative. A girl who spoke KiMombasa had an urban orientation, but was also presumed to have lost a quality of shyness, sensitivity, and gentleness. While a girl from Mombasa was fun to flirt with, Lamu girls were preferred marriage partners. This does not mean that young men’s shifting language use was not evaluated negatively. The previously analyzed *Facebook* interaction demonstrated as much. The above discussion merely shows how metapragmatic discourses can construct women as the sign of moral decline, and underlines the central role the materiality of language can play in this process.

Young men’s appropriation of urban language varieties was equally considered indicative of an altered attitude toward respectability, norms of interaction, and physical relations. Yet such shifts were often considered a rather evident result of young men’s interaction with non-locals through employment or travels to the mainland.¹⁸¹ In different ways, this example then again illustrates young people’s ambivalent position. While speaking the local dialect often results in negative evaluations by outsiders, and thus

¹⁸⁰ Chapter 3 elaborated on metapragmatic evaluations of young women’s behavior. While Chapter 5 focused on Ayah’s situated negotiation of new social positions, Chapter 7 will analyze young women’s attempts to negotiate new social positions as they move through daily life, as clearly visible signs of change.

¹⁸¹ It was particularly the supposed inability to “shift back” to KiAmu upon returning from trips to Mombasa that was negatively evaluated.

depictions as backward, using urban varieties such as KiMombasa suggests an altered moral state.

Lamu youth's ambivalence especially came to the fore in interviews where the feminine quality of KiAmu was given as an explanation for the interviewees' aversion towards the dialect. One of my research assistants, Farhan,¹⁸² provided an interesting example of such an interview. Farhan was a 22 year-old young man who had recently returned to Lamu after having lived in Nairobi for a few years. There, he had endeavored to complete his college studies but had dropped out when his family no longer could afford the tuition fees. He subsequently remained in Nairobi for a while, looked for employment, and eventually returned to Lamu. Unemployed, he was more than willing to assist me in my research. Farhan was an interesting young man. Although he never complained about having returned to Lamu, he seemed to have a rather difficult time settling back in. This was not only evident from his style of dressing – he generally wore wide jeans, sneakers, and neat shirts – but also from his language use. When speaking to me, Farhan would hardly ever use KiAmu or even Standard Swahili. Rather, he regularly interspersed his language use with Nairobi's *Sheng* language and often incorporated English in his speech. With his family, Farhan almost always used KiAmu. And while he had not lived in Mombasa, at least not recently, he generally switched between KiAmu and KiMombasa when talking to his peers.

Farhan conducted many interviews on my behalf, several of which were with his acquaintances from Mombasa or with young men whose parents were originally from Lamu but who now resided in Mombasa. The explicitness with which these young men expressed their aversion toward KiAmu resulted in rather interesting interactions. The

¹⁸² pseudonym

extract discussed here is derived from an interview with Adeel,¹⁸³ a young man who was 23 at the time. Adeel's parents were originally from Lamu and belonged to one of the prestigious Afro-Arab merchant clans. Due to Lamu's increasing economic deterioration, they had moved to Mombasa when Adeel was a child. They had lived in the city ever since but came to Lamu quite regularly to visit family and friends. When in Lamu, Adeel did not hesitate to openly express his aversion to these trips. He would complain about the lack of activities, the absence of motorized transportation, the noise (and dung) of donkeys, and the slowness of people. He frequently expressed a desire to return to the excitement of the city, suggesting that time in Lamu went by too slowly for someone from Mombasa. The following exchange unfolded after one of those statements. Only just having woken up when Farhan arrived at noon, Adeel grumbled that sleeping was the best use of his time in Lamu. Farhan used this opportunity to question Adeel about his sense of pride of his Lamu heritage.

F Farhan
A Adeel

Regular Standard Swahili/KiMombasa
Underlined KiAmu
Bold English
Italic Exaggerated KiMombasa

F. ukija kama hapa Lamu . je waongea Kilamu ama hapana?	F. when you come here to Lamu . do you speak Kilamu or not?
A. = siwezi kuongea Kilamu!	A. = I cannot speak Kilamu!
F. kwa nini usiongei Kilamu na uko Lamu?	F. why shouldn't you speak Kilamu and you are in Lamu?
A. sipendi kwa sababu lafdhi yake	A. I don't like it because of its pronunciation.

¹⁸³ pseudonym

F. kivipi hupendi? Ni aibu ama ni ya nini?	F. how do you not like it? Is it shameful?
A. ni aibu alafu enyewe ikakaa ka ya kisenge senge	A. it is shameful and it itself is like gay-ish
F. kivipi yani?	F. like how?
A. kihanithi yani	A. gay sounding I mean.
F. <i>huipendi hiyo luga kabisa?</i>	F. <i>you don't like this language at all?</i>
A. = Siipendi! kama wewe ni wa Lamu lakini mbona huongei Kilamu?	A. = I don't like it! like you are from Lamu but why don't you speak Kilamu?
F. okay .. mi ni Mlamu siongei Kilamu?	F. okay .. I am from Lamu but I do not speak Kilamu?
A. yes	A. yes
F. okay .. mimi . ni wa Lamu na naongea Kilamu, na saa hii naongea Kilamu	F. okay .. me . I am from Lamu and I speak Kilamu and now I am speaking Kilamu
A. huongei Kilamu	A. you are not speaking Kilamu.
F. <u>hiyau hiyau</u>	F. <u>hiyau hiyau</u>
A. uwongo! si sana kuongea Kilamu!	A. lies! you don't speak Kilamu often!
F. euh na je wewe unaheshimu dini yako?	F. euh and do you respect your religion?
A. naheshimu sana	A. I respect it very much.
F. lakini mbona mavazi yako unayovaa mara nyingi si ya kiIslamu	F. but why are the clothes you wear generally not Islamic
A. natoka kulala	A. I just woke up.

One of the limitations of transcriptions is the inability to indicate the signifying capacity of intonation. The above transcript suffers from this caveat exactly because one of the most fascinating elements of the exchange above is the explicit, and sometimes exaggerated use of Kimombasa – a dialect most clearly distinguished from Standard

Swahili through its melodious intonation.¹⁸⁴ In this interview the emphasis on such intonation, and thus the use of Kimombasa, is particularly evident at one instance: Farhan's response to Adeel's description of KiAmu as too feminine to be spoken by men.

Let's look at the interaction more closely. When Farhan questions Adeel about his ability to speak KiAmu, the latter sharply expresses his unwillingness to use the dialect. He does not refer to the oft-used stereotypical depiction of the Northern Dialects as backward, but rather suggests that the dialect – and thus its speakers have a gay-like quality. Although Farhan had not been speaking KiAmu when asking Adeel the initial question, his shift to an exaggerated use of KiMombasa following Adeel's depiction of the KiAmu dialect is remarkable. This does also not pass Adeel by, who subsequently calls Farhan out on the contradiction between the interviewer's line of questioning and his own linguistic practices. Here, Farhan is faced with a conflict. His interlocutor just described his mother tongue, KiAmu, as gay-sounding and the subsequent usage of the dialect would avail an evaluation of his sexual orientation. Refuting the use of KiAmu, however, would suggest a rejection of his cultural identity, which his own questions implicitly accused Adeel of. Farhan then resorts to the insertion of *hiyau*, a demonstrative that can be translated as "like this." A stereotypical word often used in jocular depictions of WaLamu – people from Mombasa often compare its pronunciation to the sound a cat makes – it neither proves nor denies Farhan's knowledge and (regular) usage of the dialect.

When Adeel does not accept this strategic recovery, Farhan quite suddenly switches the topic of conversation from pride of language to pride of religion. Adeel's

¹⁸⁴ I found the easiest way to explain the melodious intonation from people of Mombasa to be a comparison to the way Italians speak Italian.

negative attitude towards KiAmu then appears to justify or evoke an inquiry about the young man's religiosity and adherence to Islam. This abrupt change of topic is accepted and thus seems to suggest an indexical link between dialect use and the moral condition of the speaker. When Farhan subsequently focuses his attention on Adeel's way of dressing, he meaningfully connects language use and non-verbal material practice to the moral condition of his interviewee. The reasons for Adeel's dislike of KiAmu are linked to his way of dressing and his orientation to Islam: it is his moral disposition that results in an aversion toward his heritage. Speaking KiAmu does then not say anything about the speaker's sexual orientation, but rather hints at his moral condition as religious, conservative, and respectful.

The example interestingly contributes to our understanding of young people's ambivalent position in contemporary Lamu, and particularly to how such inbetweenness is reflected in young WaLamu's shifting, mixing, and seemingly contradictory language use. In addition, it meaningfully illustrates how evaluations of language use are tied to conceptions of moral transformation within the local community. But most importantly, this stereotype and its voicing in interviews interestingly shows how *qualities* of speech are tied to *qualities* of personhood. According to Adeel, the feminine quality he identified in KiAmu was iconic of the feminine disposition of its speakers, which subsequently justified an evaluation of their sexual orientation. The softness of speech is linked to the softness of people, a quality considered indicative of male speakers' disposition – a process illustrative of Irvine and Gal's *iconization*.

Lamu youth who admitted to shifting away from the dialect recognized the soft quality of their mother tongue, and they did not object to an identification of this

smoothness as “feminine.” Yet to them, the depiction of the material qualities of KiAmu as feminine ideologically called upon, or was iconic of a *moral* quality of personhood: kindness and religiosity. While in both instances the material quality of the dialect was identified as meaningful, what it was considered iconic of depended on who was doing the evaluating. The particular signifying relationship is then only evident for a particular person (or a particular social group). While KiAmu, or speech recognized as KiAmu, still identified the speaker as coming from the Lamu Archipelago (thus retaining its reference to a particular locality), it was the materiality of speech that permitted the attribution of a quality of personhood, of an attribution of meaning beyond the geographical location.

Up till now, the chapter discussed interesting examples of linguistic stereotypes that influence language use within the Lamu Archipelago. It also provided an understanding of the ideological processes of differentiation that shape such stereotypes, and that meaningfully inform evaluations of languages and their speakers. Most important, however, is my emphasis on the material qualities of speech. This focus on distinctive material qualities endeavored to substantiate an approach to features of speech as *qualisigns*; as qualities that *can* function as signs. I suggest that it is exactly the *potentiality* for signification implied in a view of distinguishing features as *qualisigns* that enables the renegotiation of indexical links between forms of speech and categories of people.

Potentiality of signification: features of speech as qualisigns

Jillian Cavanaugh (2005), in her discussion of the use of the Bergamasco dialect of Northern Italy, expressed a need for a study of the “semiotic ideologies of accents.”

Cavanaugh takes the concept of semiotic ideologies from Webb Keane, who defines the notion as “basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world” (Keane 2003b: 149) – a study of the processes through which material practices (both verbal and non-verbal) come to be considered signs of something else. By urging for a study of the “semiotic ideologies of accents,” Cavanaugh underlines that accents function on a number of levels; they can simultaneously index speaking subjects and concrete places but also iconically represent qualities associated with its speakers and locales in situations that have nothing to do with locality per se (Cavanaugh 2005). Observing how the Bergamasco dialect was used in local media, not to promote the area of Bergamo, but rather to call upon the stereotypical depictions of its inhabitants, she argues that such “interindexical redeployment of accents” allows them to be utilized “to index certain properties of characters in situations that have nothing to do with locality per se” (Cavanaugh 2005: 140). Based on this observation she argues that accents carry within themselves an infinite array of indexical *qualisigns*.

While Cavanaugh is correct in insisting that language’s material properties carry the potential to fulfill a signifying role that moves beyond denotational phonology, her argument merely illustrates the functioning of linguistic stereotypes as described by Asif Agha (1998), and the commodification this enables (Agha 2011; Heller 2010). Here, I build upon what I consider the most valuable contribution of Cavanaugh’s argument: the *potentiality* for signification implied in a view of accents as *qualisigns*. I hereby do not just focus on the signifying potential of accents, but extend the argument to *distinguishing features* – accents, intonations, and other distinctive qualities of both spoken and written practice. Such an approach is particularly valuable in a context of

rapid change and inequality, where access to, and availability of different languages vary and where conceptions of what it means to “speak” a dialect can differ across generations.

The term *qualisign* derives from Peircean semiotics and is considered a Peircean First; that is, a qualisign merely carries the potential for indicating or indexing something, the actual realization thereof being an icon. An icon is thus always mediated through semiotic ideologies; a sign always signifies something *for someone*. The material qualities of KiAmu, by their very nature as distinguishing, carry the potential to signify, what they stand for, however, is not a given. Both inhabitants from Mombasa and Lamu recognize the material quality of the dialect – both identify its softness, for example. What this softness represents, or rather what the iconic relationship of this quality of speech is to the KiAmu speakers’ quality of personhood is far from agreed upon. Similarly, the distinguishing features of the Northern Dialects – for example the “ch,” “hiyau,” or “uyao” – are recognized by people from both Lamu and Mombasa. How these features and the speakers who use them are perceived – what it says about these speakers’ personhood or moral condition – is not a given and depends on the people doing the evaluating and on the situatedness of the evaluated act.

Distinctive features, by their very nature *as* distinguishing, then form an invitation for iconicity yet “assert nothing” by themselves (beyond phonological denotation). Mediation is a prerequisite for qualisigns to function as icons or indexes – only when material qualities of speech are ideologically imbued with meaning, when they are identified as “cosmopolitan,” “feminine,” or “authentic” by observers, do they become iconic. This argument is interesting from a phenomenological viewpoint as it suggests the

presence of unrealized potential – that individuals can possibly find meaning in all aspects of behavior. This potentiality for signification, however, also entails a perpetual threat to destabilize existing semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003b). It is exactly this ambiguity of social existence – the potentiality for mediation and possible destabilizing of established ideologies – that creates opportunities for stigma’s to be revalorized, for social positions to be renegotiated, and for values to be (re)mediated. Such processes are inherently intersubjective: a sign becomes a sign only if what the sender uses, is recognized as such by the receiver (Goebel 2008; Irvine 2001).

Qualisigns and enregisterment: the negotiation of ambivalence

This emphasis on the material qualities of speech and the potentiality of signification this brings with it suggests that speakers can mobilize an isolated quality of speech to evoke a particular quality of personhood. By innovatively linking such features to other material practices stereotypes can be challenged and new social evaluations can be negotiated. It is through such novel language use that “register effects” are created (Agha 2005, 2007a, 2011): people come to be identified as “speaking like that” or speech acts are recognized as typical of “those kind of people” (Irvine 2005). This then underlines two important aspects of processes of negotiation: Language use only meaningfully contributes to the negotiation of new social positions as part of a broader set of semiotic practices – as part of a semiotic constellation, if you will. And the meaning-creating act only succeeds if what the speaker does, is recognized and evaluated as such by the observer. Keane (2003b) defined such “dynamic interconnections between different modes of signification” as a “representational economy.” He hereby referred to the ways in which

semiotic ideologies mediate the interpretation and use of both material goods and language within a particular historical and social context (Keane 2003b: 410).

My focus here is on the situated meaningful interconnection between different semiotic modalities. Exactly because social transformation brought with it an indexical crisis (Inoue 2004), practices' position or evaluation within the representational economy, and thus the indexical value of an act, is no longer a given. Innovative practices then derive their meaning only from their relation to other forms of practice. Phrased differently, I merely propose that the correct interpretation of (new) features of speech depends on their meaningful correlation to other forms of semiotic practice, such as dress, movement, and general comportment. The enregisterment of new linguistic practices is then but part of a broader process of typification. Another example from my fieldwork illustrates my argument.

As I hinted at throughout this dissertation, some of my informants were young men locally referred to as “beach boys.” One of them was Zishaan,¹⁸⁵ a young man of about 27 years old who had worked with tourists since the age of 14. As many of Lamu's *beach boys*, he had found himself a Western girlfriend, married her, and moved to her home in France for several years. When the marriage failed, Zishaan returned to Lamu where he resumed his job as *beach boy*. I had asked Zishaan to carry around my recorder for a couple of days and document his language use when interacting with peers, tourists, and elders, which he did. I subsequently analyzed the resulting recordings with my research assistant, Omari, who we encountered in Chapter 3. When we came to an interaction where Zishaan switched to English to address two female tourists Omari laughed loudly. “*Umesikia?* Did you hear that?,” he asked. We played the same extract

¹⁸⁵ pseudonym

several times again and when I failed to hear what was so amusing, Omari pointed out that Zishaan infused his broken English with, what he referred to as, a French accent. When I asked why Zishaan would do so, Omari clarified that *they*, i.e. the *beach boys*, use different English accents in an attempt to convince tourists to join them on boat trips as it signified familiarity with the tourists' country of origin. Omari subsequently argued that French, American, or British accents (just like the flags on the boats, slogans on walls, or T-Shirts) were increasingly used among young people to reflect cosmopolitanism and familiarity with Western culture.



Figure 38. Italian flag on boat
© Eric Lafforgue

Young people's use of foreign accents does then not merely function to appeal to tourists; it is not the mere adoption of an Other's voice. It also serves to instill respect and awe among peers as this quality of speech suggests familiarity with the global; it implies an embodied quality of sophistication. In Zishaan's case, his French accent – a part of his linguistic repertoire as a former resident of France – formed a testimony to his cosmopolitanism, to his personal experience with global culture. Yet I did not identify the accent *as* French, even though French is my second language. I merely considered it to be

part of Zishaan's broken English. Nor did Zishaan's language use appeal to the female tourists, as they did not join him on his boat trip.¹⁸⁶

More so than foreigners' recognition of Zishaan's pronunciation, it was its valuation within local "regimes of value" (Appadurai 1986) that was essential for it to function as an icon of the speaker's sophisticated personality. Important was then not *what* Zishaan spoke – whether his accent was in fact French – but *how* he sounded; the locally perceived quality of his accent *as* "French." Foreign accents only signal someone's cosmopolitan characteristics when interlocutors and observers recognize them as such. While Zishaan's accent, by its very nature as distinguishing, carries the potential to signify, what it stands for is not a given.

The same accounts for the previous examples discussed. Recall the *Facebook* interaction I analyzed in the introduction to this chapter. Both inhabitants from Mombasa and Lamu would recognize the "y" in Nadir's contribution. For inhabitants of Mombasa, however, this distinguishing feature could be considered an expression of Nadir's inherent "underdevelopment," its occurrence then being a slippage or a trace. WaLamu, on the other hand, could view it as signaling authenticity. Nadir's intention to signify succeeds only if interlocutors and observers recognize the feature's signifying capacity, and if the intended meaning is shared. Such sharedness of meaning is enabled exactly through talk's position within a "semiotic constellation."

¹⁸⁶ These use of accents, and my analysis of it, resembles Blommaert's (2010) discussion of businessmen's appropriation of American accents. He hereby suggests that "the object of globalized commodification is accent and not language" (Blommaert 2010: 54). These young men differ from Blommaert's businessmen in that the acquisition of the language does not precede the acquisition of the accent. Whereas businessmen who endeavor to "sound like an American" acquire a set of linguistic, pragmatic, and metapragmatic skills, these young men do not "buy the whole indexical package" (Blommaert 2010: 54). As I will argue, the acquisition of accents concerns the appropriation of a quality of cosmopolitanism, much more than the actual indexical value it could have. It is for this reason that the value of such accents is situated and can easily be devalued by observers or when taken out of its situated usage. As I suggest elsewhere, this practice is, in essence, not new to the Swahili Coast (Pretholdt 2008).

Nadir's simultaneous orientation toward authenticity and modernity, and language use's indexing of such subject position is only successful through the linking of features of speech to material practice. The distinguishing feature derives its full meaning only through its connection to other aspects of semiotic behavior: Nadir's use of a smart phone, his access to Internet, and his explicit adherence to a Lamu identity. It is through such innovative linking of talk and material practice that Nadir can challenge dominant linguistic stereotypes. Taken out of context, Nadir's use of a recognizable feature of KiAmu could very easily have been evaluated as indexical of his inherent "backwardness." It is through the feature's situatedness within a particular context of use that the value-creating act succeeds.

A more explicit example of how the innovative use of distinguishing features can challenge the qualities of personhood they are stereotypically tied to is the circulation of the previously analyzed linguistic stereotype, the "donkey example," on young people's *Facebook* pages (see Fig. 39). Rather than explicitly refuting stereotypical depictions of WaLamu as backward, young people appropriated the jocular slogan and overtly claimed it by adding the sentence "*Lamu Kwechu*," or "Lamu is our home." The inventive pasting of the slogan on a picture (using Photoshop) and its subsequent wide circulation on *Facebook*, however, challenges exactly the qualities of underdevelopment the stereotype is supposed to represent. Young WaLamu have access to Internet and know how to use modern technology. What is more, this access to technological innovations (and thus notions of modernity) did not remove their pride of their Lamu heritage. Young people are able to make such claim and thus challenge established stereotypes exactly by

creatively linking qualities of speech to other material practices, hereby proposing alternate evaluations of their language use.

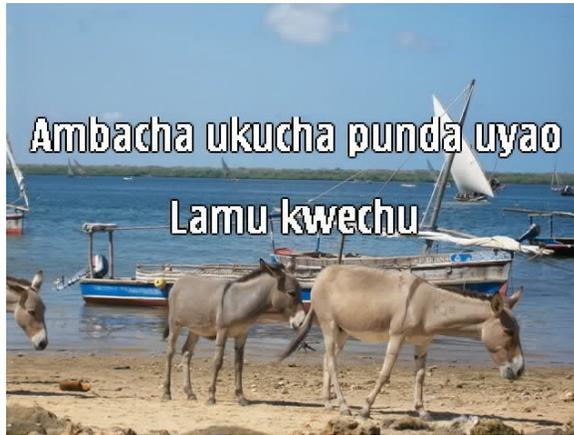


Figure 39. Appropriating linguistic stereotypes

All of the examples discussed thus far then demonstrated that distinctive features, such as the “ch” or a “French accent,” by their very nature *as* distinguishing, form an invitation for signification yet they “assert nothing” by themselves. Only through others’ recognition and by the linking of these features to other aspects of behavior can they become functional signs of “cosmopolitanism,” “backwardness,” or “authenticity.” This argument then importantly highlights the intersubjective nature of processes of negotiation.

Intersubjectivity and interdiscursivity in processes of negotiation

Zishaan’s case clearly demonstrates that potentiality for signification and intended mediation do not guarantee uptake and valuation. His use of a French accent appeared, after all, rather unsuccessful. Not only did he not convince the tourists to join him on a boat trip; I did not recognize his accent, and his peer, Omari, found his usage rather amusing. Evaluations of foreign accents (be it derived from French, British, or North

American English) are not guaranteed nor are they the same across the board. Locals' perception of Zishaan, as a *beach boy*, differed significantly from Asef's redefined Swahili cosmopolitanism (which I discussed in the introduction), nor was Zishaan viewed in the same light as Rashid – a young man who regularly used an Australian accent – despite the fact that both young men worked along the seafront.

Foreign accents then only signal someone's cosmopolitan characteristics when interlocutors and observers recognize them as such. While a qualisign capable of signifying cosmopolitanism, a French accent does not immediately characterize its user *as* cosmopolitan. Zishaan's accent retained its cosmopolitan flair for locals, but did not depict its user *as* sophisticated. Rather, combined with his raggedy clothes, hoarse voice, and drugged eyes the accent turned Zishaan into an icon of young people's moral decay, for both elders and his peers. To Omari, Zishaan's accent retained its international quality but the semiotic practices it was tied to merely made it representative of the negative outcome the desire for the West has had on young people from Lamu.

These observations then underscore the intersubjective nature of negotiation. If an accent or code is not recognized as meaningful, if its meaning is not shared or if it is differently linked to other aspects of behavior then the value creating act did not succeed and the intend to signify failed. After all, a sign becomes a sign only if what the sender uses, is recognized by the receiver. To complicate the meaning-making process even more, one can subsequently ask what enables such intersubjective or shared evaluation of practice. What assurance do young WaLamu have that practices can, and will be evaluated in a particular way? Looking back at the *Facebook* interaction once again, there is no guarantee that inhabitants from Mombasa would evaluate Nadir as developed *and*

proud of his heritage. As I suggested previously, they could easily evaluate his use of the distinctive feature “y” as a “trace” of Nadir’s inherent underdevelopment and thus his failed attempts at appropriating Standard Swahili.¹⁸⁷ My analysis and evaluation of the interaction are undoubtedly shaped by my familiarity with Lamu youth’s linguistic practices and my many encounters with Nadir.

This observation then also underscores the interdiscursive construction of meaning: evaluations are always linked to previous encounters with similar features of speech and, with the individuals who use them. Exactly this interdiscursive nature of signification explains young people’s difficulty to negotiate new social positions. Their acts are evaluated against established social types and observers’ familiarity with “like” and “unlike” practices. Not yet part of established registers, these new linguistic practices are undergoing a process of crystallization, whereby their link to social personas is still negotiated. Such ongoing negotiation of distinctive features as icons of new social positions depends on their link to other aspects of behavior and their ideological recognition by others; it is but part of a larger set of semiotic processes through which new social categories can emerge.

Features of speech as Strategically Deployable Shifters

Focusing on features of speech provides insight into the resources speakers employ as they orient toward, and against particular (ascribed) identities and as they respond to changing social and economic circumstances. The above examples’ emphasis on the isolatable and strategic use of features of speech provides insight into how stereotypes

¹⁸⁷ It could be negatively evaluated in relation to the monoglot standard, which would thus be a misrecognition of value creating acts within the local context – see conclusion of Chapter 4.

can be undermined, categories renegotiated, and values remediated through a challenging of the semiotic ideologies that link practice to categories of personhood.

A focus on the semiotic ideology of distinctive features – an understanding of accents and dialect features as signs and how they function in the world – helps us comprehend how linguistic features are intertwined with, and only become meaningful in relation to other aspects of semiotic behavior. Distinctive features are then part of a semiotic constellation and derive their full meaning only from their place within context and their relation to other semiotic forms. Because these links are still negotiated and in flux, I argue that we can consider them, what Bonnie Urciuoli has called, *strategically deployable shifters* (SDS) (Urciuoli 2003). Urciuoli uses this term to refer to words and expressions the full meaning of which shifts with the situatedness of the interaction because their interpretation depends the user's relation to audience and context. Like deictic words, SDSs can orient both the producer and recipient of such words to their location in an ideological world and thus index a speaker's relationship to context and ideology (Urciuoli 2003). Similarly, accents and dialect features, and even switches to other languages carry a denotational meaning separate from the context in which they appear – they are recognizable as “French,” “KiAmu” or “English” – but their full meaning and function only becomes evident in the particular realization in which they occur. Identifying functional qualisigns (rather than focusing on registers and codes) then allows us to trace them across multiple contexts of use and identify the different mediations they undergo – how actors link different aspects of behavior in diverse contexts and how this permits a destabilizing of linguistic stereotypes and categorical identities, and thus the negotiation of new indexical links.

Conclusion: the value creating act and the situatedness of negotiation

This chapter provided an important ethnographic elaboration on this dissertation's main argument. It demonstrated exactly that youth's ambivalent position does not have to be problematic but rather forms a fruitful ground from which to investigate the language and semiotic ideologies surrounding discursive practices, how these reveal the social embedding of verbal and non-verbal communication, and the ways in which moral interests work to produce them. As the second chapter that examined the different practices through which young people negotiate new social positions within daily interaction, it focused on the signifying potential of *details* of talk. The close analysis of the situated use of accents, intonations, and features of speech and their important relationship to other signifiers such as dress, comportment, and reputation demonstrated that young people's practices are not necessarily contradictory; the innovative linking of verbal and non-verbal practices reflects an ongoing process of negotiation and hints at the emergence of new social categories.

The *Facebook* exchange with which I started this chapter was an evident example. Asef's use of English and Sheng is not necessarily a crossing to Others' voices but can be understood as a redefined notion of Swahili cosmopolitanism when linked to his wearing of the *kanzu* and *kikoi*, his welcoming attitude to foreigners, his use of technological innovations like the iPhone – and thus a reproduction of wealth and class that has always been part of Swahili culture. The use of accents and dialects in new contexts, rather than problematic, permits the challenging of established indexical ties and thus the enregisterment of new styles and social categories, such as the respectful cosmopolitan.

As I conclude this chapter, one evident question remains: How, if ever do such negotiations end? Are young people ever successful in negotiating these altered social positions? The example of Ayah in Chapter 5 showed that negotiations in clearly defined settings are possible, but it equally demonstrated that successful evaluations are not guaranteed, even if the audience is known. In this chapter, Asef's position as "the respectful cosmopolitan" remained rather uncontested. But then he possessed one element that has historically contributed to notions of respectability and social status within Swahili societies: financial wealth. His innovative practices then entail a reproduction of wealth and class that has always been part of Swahili culture. As this dissertation has argued in different ways, and as the subsequent chapter will clearly show once again, such negotiation is not equally available to everybody: not everyone has the same rights, privileges, or simple power to have their presentations accepted. This explains why Asef can be viewed as cosmopolitan whereas Zishaan is socially undesirable.

In addition, Asef's self-presentation analyzed in this chapter was in a particular, controlled setting: that of a *Facebook* interaction. The assessments of Asef and Nadir's language use differed from Zishaan's use of a French accent partly because of the location where statements were made. There is a particular value attached to making statements on a social network site like *Facebook* rather than along the seafront; it is in itself a value-creating act. *Facebook* status updates, and responses to them, not only require having access to Internet and being computer literate. It also suggests that one has friendships abroad and translocal relations to upkeep. The increasing use of *Facebook* and other social media then more and more becomes an act of "doing being modern." It is

an active claim to, and participation in discourses on modernity. At the same time, the partaking in such acts enables the use of local forms of speech as their appearance on the Internet preempt evaluations as “backward” or “underdeveloped.” What is more, the very act of writing the local varieties of Swahili – this orthographic practice – has political and social meaning as it is a conscious deviant from the standard language hegemony in a framework that moves beyond local contexts of use (see Chapter 4).

While this chapter thus underlined the importance of intersubjectivity, interdiscursivity, and spatiotemporal embeddedness for the negotiation of new social relations and positionalities, this dissertation has not yet looked at what this entails for daily encounters. What do the above arguments mean for the ways in which young people manage their behavior as they move about their daily lives: as they walk through Lamu’s streets, engage in interactions, and go about their daily routines – when audience members and observers include both ratified and unratified overhearers?

Chapter 5 already demonstrated that the situatedness of language use meaningfully contributes to the value attributed to linguistic practices. The (un)awareness of the meaning of spatiotemporal embeddedness and how it contributes to presentations of self and evaluations by others then plays a central role in the negotiation of new social positions within the context of Lamu. To this argument, this chapter added an emphasis on details of talk and their meaningful relation to non-linguistic semiotic forms; it suggested that successful negotiation is hinged on the novel linking of verbal and non-verbal practice and observers’ recognition of this link.

The next chapter discusses what this means for daily interaction, for moments where the presentation of self is less conscious and even less under the control of the

individual. This is important in different ways. Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that, in Lamu, space itself is a semiotic resource, not just as an interactional frame, but also as the physical space through which people move. In addition, I suggested that opportunities for verbal interaction are not equal everywhere nor are they equally available to everyone. Addressing someone at the seafront or in Lamu's back alleys carries different semiotic meanings and this significance differs whether a man or a woman initiates the interaction.

So while the previous chapters underlined both the opportunities and limitations to the negotiation of new social relations and positions, the next chapter looks at what these arguments entail for day-to-day interactions, as young men and women go about their daily lives. I hereby look at how young people straddle ideological boundaries in the negotiation of new subject positions, how they miscalculate, and what this entails for the emergence of new social categories. While I analyze their language use (or lack thereof), I pay particularly attention to the importance of non-verbal communication, its intersubjective and interdiscursive nature, and to what extent it compliments (or contradicts) linguistic presentations of self. By looking at these daily interactions, and by analyzing assessments of both intended and unintended audience, I eventually endeavor to answer the question whether young people are in fact negotiating new social categories and whether such negotiations ever end.

Chapter 7

Reading the signs: renegotiation through remediation

ukipita huyu atakuita . we utafanya nini? yule mtu hukuangalia ile **reaction** yako haswa huku barabarani . ikiwa utago in . ile siku ya pili atakuvuta .. siku ya kwanda atakuita Swabra! utazunguka . ukimtekea siku ya pili atakwambia vipi? ya tatu atakushika mkono ya nne atakuweka mkono
- Narmin

if you pass by that guy will call you . what will you do? that person watches your **reaction** especially on the street . if you respond . the second day he will pull you in . the first day he will call you Swabra! you turn around . if you smile at him the second day he will tell you “what’s up?” the third day he will take your hand the fourth he will place his hand on you.
- Narmin

Narmin, the young employee of the NGO I introduced in Chapter 5, addressed a group of young female volunteers after rumors of inappropriate interactions with the branch’s young men had spread throughout Lamu.¹⁸⁸ Strongly reprimanding the young girls for their behavior, she emphasized their moral responsibility to protect not only their own reputation but also the social standing of their families: young women needed to be conscious of their conduct and the effects it might have. She did not hold the young men accountable. Rather she depicted the way young women behaved on Lamu’s streets – their greeting styles, clothing, gaze, and route taken – as conscious decisions in a presentation of self. Her explicit appeal to the girls’ moral consciousness underlines

¹⁸⁸ Recall my description of greeting practices among the NGO’s volunteers in Chapter 5. The broader community – elders, parents and some groups of youth who were not part of the volunteer group – did not appreciate the introduction of “hugs.”

WaLamu's current hypersensitivity to indexical possibilities in conduct. Within Lamu all aspects of behavior have become possibly meaningful, even the slightest smile.¹⁸⁹

Narmin's statement above highlights the importance of semiotic forms in young women's endeavors to negotiate a new social position within Lamu. As Chapter 2 outlined, high-class *waungwana* women were hardly seen on the town's streets up until about 20 years ago.¹⁹⁰ They remained *ndani* or inside, inside the house, shielded from men's eyes. The ability to remain unseen largely constituted a young girl's *heshima* or respect. The contemporary rise in secular education and women's subsequent employment, however, brought them back outside onto the streets, as they now move openly through town. Currently, many women work, shop, or visit friends in different parts of Lamu. Women's visible presence is precarious; exactly because unrelated men can observe their behavior it becomes subject to social scrutiny. The nature of surveillance has shifted and thereby introduces questions of social control and responsibility. Phrased differently, the kind of public (in a Goffmanian sense) has changed, yet the social assessment of women lingers. Women are thus expected to be aware of the consequences their actions and visible presence might have.

As a successful young professional woman who was focused on her career but proud of her religious and cultural background, Narmin was well-aware of the challenges young women faced when trying to carve out a new niche in Lamu society. Her meta-discourse on self-regulation reminded the female volunteers to be conscious of the unintended effects their (self-perceived) harmless behavior could have. She hereby

¹⁸⁹ Recall the meta-discourses analyzed in Chapter 3, whereby men assessed young women's visible presence on the main square as indicative of their moral disposition.

¹⁹⁰ Also recall that this has not always been the case. As I discussed in Chapter 2, women's seclusion only became indicative of piety and high social status around the turn of the 20th C.

meaningfully tied conduct to social evaluation and to women's responsibility in upholding the honor of their social network. While being held individually responsible for controlling their behavior, the impacts of misconduct reached far beyond the individual.

tumeona sisi wanawake wa kutoka kwa jamii yetu ya kiAmu . tuko na **unique culture** . na kitu ambacho hapa kwetu kiko **sensitive** hakuna kitu kingine kuliko ni **culture** . ukiharibu umekitengeza kazi yako umetengeza tabia yako na umetengeza na dini yako piya . na ukiharibu . umeharibu na kazi yako na wale wanaofanya kazi na wewe na majirani yako na yoyote ambaye atakuwa amefuatana na wewe . ni kweli ni urongo?

we have seen we women from our community of Lamu . we have a **unique culture** . and something that is **sensitive** here there is nothing more sensitive than **culture** . if you spoil it you impact your work you impact your *tabia* (habits) and you impact your *dini* (religion) as well . and if you spoil it you spoil your work and those who work with you and your neighbors and all those who follow you (=are your friends.) . true or false?

Narmin's argument once more illustrates young people's ambivalent position in contexts of social transformation, an ambivalence that has run through this dissertation as a guiding thread. A moral narrative of modernity (Keane 2007) urges Lamu youth to pursue education, employment, and overall development as these are believed to produce a certain kind of "modern" self. This accounts for young men, but particularly for young women as the latter are targeted by humanitarian aid organizations and translocal discourses on emancipation.¹⁹¹ What this working toward a "modern" self entails for individuals' moral condition, however, is not agreed upon. Especially in a context like Lamu, where inhabitants have always considered themselves modern and cosmopolitan, the *moral* in these contemporary narratives of modernity is not viewed so much as progress, rather than decline (see Chapter 3). Young people therefore struggle to convey what it means to be a "virtuous" person in contemporary Lamu; they struggle to show

¹⁹¹ There is a strong, and indeed much needed, emphasis on the education of the "girl child."

that participation in contemporary changes does not necessarily entail a forsaking of respectability or of the Islamic values of virtue and modesty.

As I have suggested earlier on in this dissertation, this particularly pertains (but is not exclusive) to young women. While an index of progress and modernity, women's participation in public life is simultaneously a sign of the transgression of social, spatial, and moral boundaries. In Lamu, women's publicness potentially blurs the social boundary between them as respectable (middle or high class) women and "commercial" women. And their presence equally distorts previous spatial boundaries to interactions and moral boundaries to visibility, audibility, and smell (as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3). They are, what Miyako Inoue calls, an "ambivalent sign" (Inoue 2004: 47).

In an attempt to negotiate respectful social positions – combining, for example, professionalism and piety – Lamu women's conduct thus becomes a careful consideration of different semiotic forms that index orientation towards interlocutors, immediate interaction, and the broader social context: it becomes a selfhood self-consciously mediated by others. This is not only the case in specific interactional settings (as we saw in Chapter 5), but particularly pertains to day-to-day activities, as Narmin's statement above suggests. A smile, a gaze, or taking a particular route to work – the individuals' choice as an agentive subject carries direct consequences for the presentation of self and others' evaluations of the self. This chapter will show, however, that such "managing" of linguistic and material practice is never complete or automatically efficacious. What is more, a process of "negotiation" does not just entail having one's proposed presentation of self accepted or rejected. The emergent nature of interaction lies in the fact that

negotiation alters the individual as she goes along and thus entails the mutual transformation of the various parties involved.

Throughout this dissertation I have suggested that strategic manipulation of verbal and non-verbal semiotic forms enables young people to differently orient themselves to societal expectations, respected traditions, and desires for change. As the foregoing chapters have argued, and as Narmin's statements above show, such a balancing act is far from straightforward. There are social dynamics at play that are not reducible to the individual. This chapter investigates what this means for "negotiation" and whether we can truly speak of the emergence of new social categories. While young people (both men and women) can make use of broadened semiotic repertoires, this far from guarantees the crystallization of new social types. Through a detailed analysis of young people's routine interactions and evaluations thereof, this chapter demonstrates that we, in fact, can see new subject positions materialize. Through the use of novel practices and the selection of a particular genre to evaluate this new behavior (cat-calling, gossiping, or support), young WaLamu and their observers take a particular stance toward the altered social reality. It is exactly within these differing orientations and interpretive regimes that we see new subject positions emerge.

Chapter 5 illustrated that young people can rely on a broadened linguistic repertoire to present a particular kind of self. Chapter 6 showed that such language use will be evaluated in relation to other semiotic practices and that negotiation is inherently interdiscursive and intersubjective. This chapter analyzes what that entails for daily interactions in Lamu, where not all contexts equally avail themselves for verbal

communication and displays of linguistic repertoires. While young women, like Narmin and Ayah, can take a particular stance toward the current context through language use – both through what they say explicitly and how they say it – we will see that such presentation of self can be misinterpreted when linked to other material practices within daily encounters. While the first part of the chapter focuses on the practices of young women, the second part shows that this is far from a gendered issue and that young men equally struggle to negotiate alternate positions in Lamu.

The three case studies analyzed in this chapter illustrate different aspects of this process of (re)negotiation. They exemplify how young WaLamu can (re)mediate different discourses – on piety, emancipation, urbanity, and professionalism – through material practices, but also why such attempts can either fail or succeed. We follow the stories of Nazneen – a young girl returning to Lamu after her studies in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi – and of Saniya – a professional and pious young woman. The case of Ayden, a *beach boy* turned politician, illustrates that this “semiotic struggle” is far from limited to young women alone.¹⁹²

The chapter starts with a discussion of the different ways in which young women endeavor to *remediate* previous (physical) boundaries to visibility and interaction within their daily practices, while simultaneously reflecting an adherence to translocal discourses. While not discarding the dominant ideological conceptions of ideal personhood – norms strongly tied to Islamic virtue – they challenge *what* practices can embody *heshima* (respect) and *haya* (modesty); they renegotiate the signifying capacity of the “signs” themselves. This discussion shows how the meaningfulness of the smallest aspects of behavior avails a semiotic repertoire – a range of different linguistic and non-

¹⁹² All names used are pseudonyms.

linguistic material practices from which young women strategically pick and choose, but the correct interpretation of which is not guaranteed. The indexical ambiguity brought about by such negotiations and thus the presence of conflicting semiotic ideologies can result in miscalculations, misconstruals, and breakdowns of communication.

The story of Nazneen demonstrates how the metapragmatic awareness of remediated forms' appropriate mobilization permit the individual to advance a certain self, depending on context and audience. Her account, however, also illustrates the risks such reliance on semiotic forms entails. The case of Saniya will complicate the theoretical notion of semiotic remediation and focuses our attention on the intersubjective nature of (re)negotiation. The story of Ayden further obfuscates the theoretical concept of semiotic repertoires and their strategic manipulation by adding a gender aspect to the discussion, and by elaborating upon the inherently intersubjective and interdiscursive nature of (re)mediation.

Strategically deploying veils, handshakes, and routes

As the foregoing introduction suggested, current evaluations of women's visible presence on Lamu's streets are shaped by two, seemingly conflicting discourses: (1) the understanding that a woman's avoidance of the public eye is indexical of her *heshima* and her social status (and its discursive projection into the past) and (2) a narrative of modernity that emphasizes the importance of education and employment as indexes of development and emancipation. Working-women often talked about their friends who did not leave the house as being ignorant and old-fashioned. These same women were equally aware, however, that their employment in public office, movement through town, and interactions with men formed a challenge to their *heshima*.

Narmin's explicit warning of her female volunteers illustrates the metapragmatic awareness that guides behavior, but how do young women effectively use semiotic forms to express their differing orientations to the discourses that circulate in their social environment? While individuals can strategically manipulate semiotic forms to express a stance within interaction, how do they circumvent the indexical ambiguity brought about by conflicting semiotic ideologies? In my analysis of Nazneen and Saniya's daily practices, I focus on three aspects of behavior that have become significant within the local context: (1) the route women choose to walk (2) the clothing they wear (3) and the greeting practices they use.

Which route to take?

While Lamu women currently leave their houses, not all areas of town are equally accessible to them nor is their presence always accepted. More importantly, women appear to rely on a fractal recursive (Irvine and Gal 2000) re-creation of the previous limits to visibility through the use of the geographical divisions within the town. Women's physical location and the routes they take therefore have become indexical of their piety and *heshima*. Exploiting the shared ideological evaluations of the division between Mkomani and Langoni, as well as the divisions between the seafront, the mainstreet, and the quiet labyrinth of backstreets, they strategically choose which route to use. Earlier on in this dissertation, I described that the use of Lamu's narrow alleys provides anonymity and limits encounters with other women and definitely with men. Walking along the seafront, however, entails passing in front of public *barazas* (stone benches) where men gather, sip coffee, and watch people walk by. To take the

backstreets therefore has become indexical of a woman's piety, while walking along the seafront shows a woman to be seeking attention.

The ideological implications of the historical divisions in Lamu's physical space are then being renegotiated. While fifty years ago an unaccompanied upper-class woman would have violated the norms of appropriate conduct by walking via the backstreets by herself, her walking via these narrow alleys currently indexes her piety and conscious attempts to maintain her social status. The fractal recursivity of this renegotiation of spatial boundaries lies in both the gradual shifts of existing boundaries of appropriateness as well as in the recreation of degrees of separation between men and women (such as the separations within Swahili houses) within Lamu's streets.

Saniya – a young, professional woman whose story I will discuss later on in this chapter – for example, prohibited her younger niece to walk along the seafront. She appeared, however, to consider herself excused from this local conception of spatial divisions as she sometimes suggested we catch the sea breeze on the way home from her office. Walking passed the crowded *barazas*, she would whisper: “Just imagine they are flowerpots,” showing me she was well aware of the staring gazes of men. Saniya might have presumed that her professional demeanor would exempt her from local moral evaluations, but I later demonstrate that such attempted renegotiation of semiotic practices was not univocally successful.

Clothing as displays of piety

Outsiders often see the black *abaya* as a cloth shielding women's bodies from the public eye. Yet the *abaya* has become a sophisticated semiotic form in local contexts. Different designs (e.g. the old Swahili *buibui* vs. the more modern *abaya*, the latter being either

open or closed) as well as small adjustments to the garment are indexical of a young woman's orientation to local norms – whether she is conservative, urban, or even flirtatious. The *abaya* – itself an iconic and fractal recursive recreation of the spatial separation between men and women and limits to interaction – has thus become a means through which different ideological discourses are being (re)mediated.

The traditional Swahili *buibui* is a piece of cloth, complicated to wear, that can conceal the whole body effectively. Its clumsiness – one needs to use both hands to hold it up – however, motivates the majority of young women to refrain from using it. They often objected that it prevented them from carrying bags or purses and that it was therefore not suited for working or studying women. The introduction of new designs – the *abaya* from Saudi Arabia for example – increasingly caused the Swahili *buibui* to be seen as too traditional and outdated. Wearing this garment then became indexical of a woman's conservative demeanor. The *abaya* itself – concealing the body completely while leaving one's hands free – became the topic of much controversy. The competition to wear the newest designs not only urged women to spend ridiculous amounts of money, the designs were often considered inappropriate or disrespectful. While imported from other Muslim countries, the *open* design *abaya* was considered highly inapt as it revealed a woman's clothing. The controversy reached its climax when some young women were spotted wearing short skirts underneath this previously respectful garment.

An alternative option for young women who were not allowed to wear an open design *abaya* was to tailor the garment to their size. During my time in Lamu young women increasingly brought their new *abayas* to the tailor before showing them to their parents. The tailor would then take the *abaya* in on the sides. Elders strongly disapproved

of such practices, as the altering of the *abaya*'s loose-fitting form revealed a woman's bodily shapes – defeating the garment's purpose. Elders often objected that the *abaya* had become a dress rather than a pious cover-up. A young girl who did not adjust the garment was therefore praised. This same girl could hold the *abaya* to the side, however, thereby achieving the same effect as altering it. Selecting the areas where to do so, she could, nevertheless, prevent unintended negative evaluations.

The *abaya* is therefore far from just a cloth that covers a woman's clothing. Rather it has an important indexical function within the local context. By wearing the newest design, a young woman can signal her social status as well as her global orientation (with *abayas* being imported directly from Dubai, for example, or the woman having traveled there herself). Choosing for an *open* design, opting to adjust it, or leaving it unaltered can simultaneously index her piety and modesty. Rather than simply remediating degrees of separation, the garment thus permits the mediation of urban, global, and even religious discourses. As the above discussion shows, such (re)mediations are far from agreed upon and the indexical function of the *abaya* continues to be negotiated within daily interaction – as the subsequent case studies will demonstrate.

The facial veil fulfills a similar role. Shielding their face from the public eye, constraining their visibility, women wearing the facial veil (or *ninja*) were initially seen as pious, conservative, and not to be interacted with. The *ninja*'s meaning has significantly shifted, however, as the anonymity it provides facilitated “alternative” uses (see also Fair 1998). Young women on their way to meet their boyfriend, for example, wear a *ninja* to prevent anybody from recognizing them. The *ninja*'s possible concealing

of impropriety thus poses a challenge for pious women as well as for men, as its indexical meaning is no longer straightforward.¹⁹³ It is here that route, bodily posture, gaze, and greeting styles become significant – the *ninja* as an indexical sign no longer stands on its own but is linked to other aspects of observable behavior.

Saniya did take her *abayas* to the local tailor to adjust them. In addition, she owned a couple of *open abayas* that allowed her to show glimpses of the clothing she bought on work trips to Nairobi. Owning several *abayas*, Saniya could choose between different designs when going to work, going out with friends, or visiting family. Her sense of fashion often evoked admiring remarks from friends, but was just as much a cause for envy. Her *abayas* portrayed Saniya as a successful, professional woman with a somewhat urban orientation – something not always positively evaluated within the local context (as I will subsequently discuss). But Saniya was not unaware of the local sensitivity to *abaya* designs. Giving her old *abayas* to her cousins, the open designs did not make it into their closets until they had taken them to the tailor – this time not to fit them, but rather to close them up.



Figure 40. Young girls wearing a *ninja*
©Eric Lafforgue

¹⁹³ I should note here that Laura Fair (1998, 2001) mentions similar practices in Zanzibar when the *abaya* was newly introduced. While much less frequently done, and while women would appear on the streets much less often, the meaning of the facial veil has thus been ambiguous from the onset.



Figure 41. Lamu woman wearing traditional *buibui*
© Eric Lafforgue



Figure 42. Women wearing different *abaya* designs
© Eric Lafforgue

Greetings as controversies

While men and women encounter each other on Lamu's streets, public interactions continue to be highly discouraged. Young men and women are even expected to refrain from exchanging verbal greetings. After all, a greeting either indexes an existing social connection or could establish one – both being unacceptable outside of family ties. The absence of verbal greetings does not mean, however, that young people do not acknowledge each other. Through gaze, subtle hand signals, and ways of wearing a

headscarf young women flirt and even arrange dates. A girl could, for example, signal her boyfriend to follow her or to meet her a few streets down.

More recently, the discussions on greetings got a new dimension with the introduction of handshakes and hugs. While these practices had been around, they never occurred between opposite genders. Introduced through satellite TV and by returning migrants, young people like Saniya viewed handshakes as a Western practice, indexical of modernity and professionalism. Extending their hand when greeting me, for example, they would state that they “know how *wazungu* greet each other.” Students returning to Lamu after studies in Nairobi would often insist on using handshakes, arguing that “they were used to it now.” It is this claim to an incorporated bodily practice (a *habitus*) that allowed them to portray themselves as urban youth.

Elders strongly objected to any form of interaction between young people and especially the use of handshakes was criticized. The physical touching – an intimate connection – violated local standards of interaction and was considered flirtation rather than an expression of an urban or professional attitude.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates, not only how women’s visibility instigated a discourse on self-regulation, but also how indexical meanings can be indeterminate or ambiguous. People are not sure how to read women’s signs: as pious, promiscuous, or professional.¹⁹⁴ How are men to view a woman who wears the *ninja*? Why did Saniya think she could walk along the seafront, but her niece could not? The social and spatial embeddedness and historical depth of semiotic forms impact the

¹⁹⁴ I do not argue that signs were ever unambiguous, even in the past. Rather the idea that they once were is itself ideological or a metapragmatic dimension of a historical consciousness. I do not intend to contrast past and present as unambiguous vs. ambiguous.

successful renegotiation of their meanings, their transformation to other material practices, or their combination with other semiotic forms. It is exactly this semiotic confusion that urged Narmin to remind her female volunteers of the sensitivity of their behavior and the impact it could have – even if unintended.

Different moral evaluations do not result exclusively from the divergent ideological conceptions of what practices entail. Rather, the understanding of semiotic forms as symbolic rather than indexical plays a central role in the moral evaluation of their exploitation. Whereas languages and accents, and the linguistic stereotypes that accompany them, often motivate observers to perceive them as reflecting an inherent quality of speakers (see chapter 6), the “denaturalizing” of non-linguistic semiotic forms’ indexical meaning permits both observers and unintended evaluators to question the sincerity of their mobilization – something that will be clearly illustrated in the subsequent discussion of Saniya’s story.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, changes within Lamu confronted locals with the meaningfulness of their own practices. The presence of non-locals who cross (ideological) boundaries and the introduction of translocal discourses that introduce individuals to alternative practices challenge people’s *habitus* and present their actions as *choices* rather than embodied practices.¹⁹⁵ It is this objectification of boundaries and categories such as “religion,” “culture” or “development” that impose expectations toward their symbolic representation within practice (Keane 2007, 2011). A way to act

¹⁹⁵ Again, this is not new. Recall my discussion of the abolishment of slavery and the contestation of former slaves’ appropriation of their masters’ practices. Haifa’s recounting of her grandmother’s response to the covering of her former slave equally shows a confrontation with actions as choices rather than embodied practices. Her grandmother could now choose to leave the house uncovered.

has become a choice that is indicative of a person's moral disposition: you choose which route to walk, which language to speak, or which greeting to use.

These processes avail a metapragmatic awareness of practice as well as the function of material forms to express an individual stance. The mindfulness of material forms' functions permits a denaturalizing of their indexical link – they come to be symbols of “culture” or “religion” that individuals can deploy whenever necessary (Keane 2007). This then entails that the sincere and authoritative mobilization of semiotic forms can be questioned, exactly because they are presumed to be consciously mobilized, rather than automatically indexical. In addition, the realization that individuals can express an orientation toward interlocutors, local context, and broader social world through mobilizing semiotic forms, suggests that a stance not only entails a personal orientation but also a value judgment about others and the broader social context.

Because individuals rely on non-linguistic, material forms to express orientations to different ideological discourses their meaning is no longer straightforward or univocal. The traditional *buibui* or the open *abaya* have become symbols of different categories – the former of tradition, the latter of urbanity. The *abaya* as such is then no longer uniquely indexical of a state of *haya* or modesty. It also indexes a conservative or urban demeanor. As we will see in Saniya's case, this need not be confusing for individuals themselves as they intend their actions to be viewed as an expression of an internal state. Saniya anticipates her wearing of the *ninja* to be seen as indexical of her pious disposition; just as her use of handshakes is an inevitable result of a professional attitude. Similarly, a pious girl wearing a *ninja*, but hanging its headcovering to the side presumes it to be read as indexical of her piety *and* awareness of urban fashion (see Fig 40). This

orientation toward two different ideological discourses need not be contradictory, but it does complicate the reading of the signs for the observers. How do young women then manage their behavior and its evaluation? The following account of Nazneen illustrates how awareness of multiple circulating discourses allows women to be agentive subjects who mobilize different semiotic forms in the strategic presentation of self, but also outlines the different limits to such intentional meaning-making practices.

Nazneen and Nejat

Nazneen was a young girl of 19 who I first met during an activity of a local youth group. Being the only girls living in the more affluent neighborhood of *Mkomani*, we decided to walk home together after the event. By the time we reached her house, I knew all about Nazneen's studies in Nairobi, her family, and her future plans – an openness that contrasted sharply with other *Mkomani* girls I had previously met. Contrary to her more reserved peers, she immediately introduced me to her family and subsequently invited me to their house as often as possible.

While her family was well respected and conservative, they never objected to my presence and often encouraged me to visit more often. Having a sparkling personality Nazneen never really knew when to keep quiet, expressing her opinion on everybody and everything. Her mother often commented on her talkativeness, reminding her that respectful Lamu girls knew when to keep their opinions to themselves. In addition, her family often made passing remarks about Nazneen's language use. While not being reprimanded as such, her mother as well as her older sister would poke fun at Nazneen's use of, what they suggested was, "*Kibara*" or the Kiswahili spoken on Kenya's mainland (see Chapter 4). Following such remarks, Nazneen would make a conscious effort to

speak KiAmu with her family, interjecting her speech with words as “*niyao*,” “*hiyao*,” and the use of “y” instead of “j” (see Chapter 5 and 6).¹⁹⁶ When I informed about these jocular discussions, Nazneen would tell me that she far from spoke *Kibara*, but that her use of Standard Swahili rather than KiAmu was not much appreciated by her family.

Having only just returned to the island after completing high school in Nairobi, both Nazneen’s candidness and her language use were indicative of her struggle to readjust to life in Lamu. And while her older sister, Nejat, was content staying at home with their mother, Nazneen was eager to leave the house. Because her sister needed to exercise, Nazneen suggested they go for daily walks on the beach. These afternoon strolls did not only function as a workout, but also allowed Nazneen’s older sister to “be seen” around town. Her mother was keen on finding Nejat a husband as she had far-surpassed the marriageable age for uneducated girls. And since the ideal candidate was not just going to walk through the door, “walks” had become permissible and even encouraged.¹⁹⁷ Nazneen merely took advantage of the situation.

As I joined the sisters on their daily outings, I became intrigued by the differences between Nazneen and Nejat’s behavior. I was particularly fascinated by the changes Nazneen’s conduct underwent as we moved through town exactly because she seemed aware of both the “inappropriateness” of some of her actions and the spatial boundaries she was crossing. In addition, I was fully aware that she took advantage of “being seen” with me, as certain choices could later be explained by blaming them on the “*mzungu*.”

¹⁹⁶ She herself would mention to me how she tried to incorporate as much KiAmu as she could, as it would show her family that Nairobi had not changed her too much.

¹⁹⁷ The decision of Nazneen’s parents importantly hints at different reconsiderations on their part as well. There is, if you will, a coordination of different aspects of Nejat’s and her parents’ modernity.

How Nazneen altered her behavior as she moved through town interestingly illustrates the argument of semiotic (re)mediation.

The two sisters never just left the house. Extensive combing of the hair (that would be covered by the *hijab*) and application of very subtle make-up (a process that lasted for over an hour) always preceded walks. The day recounted here was no different, but because Nejat was unexpectedly required to cook, she eventually could not join Nazneen and me. After we had left the house located in the quiet backstreets of *Mkomani*, Nazneen immediately walked down towards *usita wa mui*, Lamu's mainstreet. Despite opting for the busy main road, Nazneen's behavior remained very timid and composed. Not only did she keep her voice down when talking to me, she kept her greetings with female friends short which permitted her to keep walking (rather than chatting in the middle of the road). She carefully avoided greeting men. Shunning eye contact and keeping a straight gaze, male acquaintances were subtly ignored. One thing differed from the other *Mkomani* girls: the way she walked. While very subtle, her pace was somewhat faster and less graceful than other Lamu women; a cunning difference that nevertheless evoked comments from female acquaintances who jokingly asked us "*Una haraka gani? What's the hurry?*" Nazneen's way of walking showed her to be someone who had left Lamu – someone who had lived in an urban area, where the pace of life was faster. (Also recall Adeel's remarks regarding life in Lamu in Chapter 6.)

Reaching Lamu's main square – an open area separating the neighborhoods of *Langoni* and *Mkomani* – Nazneen changed our route. Rather than continuing on the mainstreet, she suggested we take the broad access road to the seafront – thereby leading us right in front of a crowded *baraza*. This stone bench, located in front of a mosque, was

a popular gathering place for men after the afternoon prayers. They discussed politics and sipped Arabic coffee while watching people walk by. Their staring gazes always made me feel uncomfortable and I recalled Saniya's suggestion, thinking to myself: "Just flowerpots, just flowerpots." But Nazneen did not seem to notice or was not bothered by the men's attention. Having reached the seafront on the more progressive *Langoni* side of town, Nazneen's behavior shifted. Not only did she raise the volume of her voice (often interjecting her Kiswahili with English when speaking to me), she also accompanied her talking with uninhibited hand gestures and laughter. While walking, she grabbed her wide, closed *abaya* and pulled it somewhat to the side, revealing her slender shape (concealed by the wide garment). When asked why she did so, she explained that the sea breeze would play with it too much. Whereas on the *Mkomani* side of town Nazneen had carefully avoided the looks of other pedestrians, she now boldly looked some of them in the eyes and let her gaze wander freely. When she encountered friends, she exchanged longer greetings, asked about their family and studies, and did not hesitate to switch between KiAmu, Sheng and English.

Upon reaching Lamu's only ice cream shop, Nazneen suggested we treat ourselves. Because I knew women are not supposed to eat in public, I carefully declined. Nazneen, however, bought herself an ice cream and ate it while strolling further along the seafront. When it was time to return home, she suggested we use the mainstreet on the *Langoni* side because she wanted to buy some other snacks. Eating the meat kebabs she just purchased, Nazneen ignored people's disapproving gaze. But when we arrived at Lamu's main square she nervously pushed the remaining pieces in my hand. "I am so full," she apologized. Although I objected strongly, reminding her I was vegetarian, she

refused to accept the little bag I tried to shove in her hand. Nazneen now let go of her *abaya* and lowered her voice. Gazing the level of the sun, she looked somewhat distressed. “It’s almost *maghrib*,” she said, “we really need to be getting home now.”

While I had noticed the shifts in Nazneen’s behavior, I became intrigued by these subtle differences when Nejat joined us a couple of days later. Although Nazneen’s overall behavior was fairly similar, it was the contrast with Nejat’s demeanor that made me realize the significance of Nazneen’s shifts. More importantly, Nejat’s mumbled, displeased comments confirmed my suspicion that her younger sister’s behavior was not entirely appropriate. Several moments during our walk revealed the indexical meaning – or rather the ideological implications – of Nazneen’s semiotic practices. Firstly, while reluctantly having agreed to take the mainstreet, Nejat plainly refused to take the mainsquare-road leading to the seafront. Instead, she suggested we walk further along the mainstreet to later use a narrow alley that lead us to the seafront. We thereby avoided passing by the crowded *baraza*. Secondly, Nejat continuously criticized her sister’s grabbing of the *abaya*, sometimes even hitting her hand such that she would let it go. Thirdly, when buying ice cream Nejat asked the shopkeeper to wrap hers so she could eat it at home. Nazneen, on the other hand, chose to eat it right there, much to the disapproval of her sister who continued to mumble objections on our way home. While Nazneen seemed amused, her behavior clearly made Nejat uncomfortable. When we reached the main square, Nazneen had – once again – not finished her snack. Looking anxious, she ultimately hid the ice cream under her *abaya* – ruining the garment as well as the ice cream. Nejat, now chuckling, insisted her sister did not show anybody she had

been eating. Taking the backstreets of *Mkomani*, Nazneen had the chance to quickly finish the ice cream before arriving home.

I elaborate at length on these two events because they exemplify some of the arguments made in this chapter. Nazneen and Nejat's story is significant in several ways. As a young woman who studied in Nairobi, Nazneen sought to distinguish herself from other local girls, but had to simultaneously assure that her peers did not consider her too removed from the local context and guarantee she was not talked about negatively. Because opportunities for verbal interaction, and thus displays of a broadened linguistic repertoire were limited, Nazneen had to exploit non-verbal material practices that could subtly convey her respectful, yet urban demeanor.

Aware that her family was well-known in *Mkomani*, she used her movement through this side of town to demonstrate that, while she was somewhat urban, she still adhered to local norms of respectful behavior. Not only did her choice of the mainstreet index that she did not shun the public eye, her pace reflected her adjustment to an urban lifestyle. She balanced these risky choices by lowering her voice and maintaining a straight gaze, a demeanor that showed her male friends she was not to be interacted with. Exactly the refusal of verbal interaction was an important index of Nazneen's disposition. On the *Langoni* side of town, Nazneen differently displayed her urban manners, as the chances of encountering familiar faces were much smaller. Pulling her *abaya* to the side and talking freely, Nazneen portrayed herself as a somewhat open-minded, progressive young girl. Her audible switching between KiAmu, English, and Sheng and her eating in public depicted Nazneen as urban and helped frame her other practices. It indexed that her overall behavior was not to be seen as flirtatious, but that it was the outcome of

having lived in Nairobi. Nazneen's nervous reactions every time we reached the main square stemmed from her entering a more intimate space where people could not only recognize her but also report her behavior to her parents.

Nejat's story, on the other hand, illustrates how the remediation of semiotic forms can be strategically exploited in other ways. Before her sister returned from Nairobi, Nejat had adhered to the more traditional norms of respectful behavior by remaining inside the home and avoiding the public eye. In the past, such behavior would have made Nejat a highly desirable marriage partner. The currently shifting ideological framework, however, evaluates her conduct as conservative and close-minded. To obtain the interest of local men, she therefore had to change her behavior, strategically deploying new semiotic forms that could index both her *haya* (modesty) and her openness to marriage. The walks with her sister offered exactly that opportunity. Nazneen's behavior, however, challenged Nejat's balance of visibility and *haya*. While Nazneen counted on her "eating in public" to be evaluated as "urban," Nejat realized that such conduct could negatively affect her. Having never left Lamu, she risked being seen as disrespectful and inappropriate.

When Nejat still had not found a husband after Nazneen had left for college, she took a drastic measure. She joined an adult study program in an attempt to finish her primary education. This adherence to new discourses on modernity and emancipation had its effects. Within a year, Nejat was engaged to be married. Her being visible on Lamu's streets – in a respectful manner, for the right intentions – as well as her choosing to complete a degree, had shown her to be progressive, yet respectful and modest. The stories of these sisters then exemplify how semiotic forms are strategically manipulated

to portray the self. In addition, they demonstrate how challenges to the dominant ideological framework force even the most conservative families to adopt new semiotic practices; it hints at a coordination of different aspects of Nejat's and her parents' modernity.

Problematizing negotiation through semiotic remediation

Nazneen's story illustrates how the metapragmatic awareness of bodily practices' sensitivity – of the semiotic remediation norms had undergone – availed them for strategic mobilization. While the foregoing discussion provided insight in the expression of individual orientations through semiotic practice, it did not elaborate on crucial questions of reception and evaluation. An individual's intention does not automatically align with the audience's evaluation nor are assessments undivided (see Chapter 5 and 6). Remediation, rather than a given, needs to be negotiated within interaction. While Nazneen's behavior might have been very calculated, it did not guaranteed a positive evaluation across the board. In what follows I discuss who observed Nazneen's behavior and whether or not her intention to portray herself as urban yet respectful was indeed successful.

Goffman's (1974, 1981 (1979), 1997 (1983)) theory of participant frameworks and footing argued that the immediate interlocutor is far from the only member of an audience – he is not the only one who can express an evaluation. More importantly, participant frameworks and who is authorized to express a value judgment is just as much ideologically constituted as the semiotic practices that are evaluated (see Chapter 5). It is here that Nazneen made a mistake. She miscalculated the ideological boundaries that set limits to the circulation of discourses and the expression of value judgments.

The question that guides my analysis of the subsequent cases is who the participants and stakeholders are in different evaluative discourses and what stance they take in the calculus of modernity, development, religion, and tradition. Discussing the success or failure of the negotiation of semiotic remediation requires the examination of processes of reception, response, uptake, consensus, and contestation. This approach will demonstrate that the overall negotiation of new categories does not happen through a simple incorporation of new practices and semiotic forms, but that remediation is a crucial part of this process. In addition, it will highlight the dialogic and intersubjective nature of this process. After all, the performer does not create a performance alone. The voices – and in this case, the material forms – deployed by and through the performer are witnessed, taken up, and responded to by different audiences.

Nazneen's unintended admirer: expanding the participant framework

Young men along the seafront did not call out to Nazneen nor had her behavior become the topic of gossip among local women, yet her balancing act was not univocally successful. One afternoon Nazneen arrived at my house, appearing somewhat disturbed and even ashamed. I urged her to tell me what bothered her. After some hesitation, she told me that a young man – who turned out to be Aman, my neighbor's son¹⁹⁸ – had approached her on the street. Not only had he openly greeted her, he had suggested he'd walk her home. The son of one of *Mkomani's* families, Aman was a well-known young man. While he openly spoke to me, I myself was shocked that he had considered it acceptable to address Nazneen. Publicly greeting a girl was one thing, but suggesting

¹⁹⁸ pseudonym

they walk together implied much more than a casual social connection and would unquestionably undermine Nazneen's respectability. If I was aware of that, so was Aman.

Aman's behavior didn't bother Nazneen. Rather she wondered what *she* had done to evoke such response. Exactly because her conduct differed from other young girls, she had drawn attention to herself, challenging local conceptions of *haya* (modesty) and its expected mediation within practice. Nazneen did not think of herself as flirtatious and definitely viewed herself as pious. She did, however, want to express her urban attitude. By strategically choosing where to do so, Nazneen had thought she would be able to control the audience of her behavior. But while she had hoped to be seen as urban, others had evaluated her behavior as flirtatious. Applying this incident to a discussion of participant frameworks, I suggest that Aman was an unintended overhearer of Nazneen's practices, although he was possibly on the lookout for opportunities to overhear.

Nazneen presumed that the "overhearers" of her challenging behavior would remain limited to the audience of *Langoni* – the accidental observers who were not her immediate interlocutors but whom she nevertheless targeted with her behavior. She assumed that the ideological boundary between *Langoni* and *Mkomani* would prevent the circulation of evaluative discourses. The changes the community currently is undergoing, however, caused this boundary to become porous and Nazneen's overhearers became truly unintended, as even the young men from her own neighborhood were aware of her unusual conduct. It is exactly this expansion of participant frameworks that motivated Aman to address Nazneen on the street. Considering himself to be an *intended* overhearer of her behavior, he considered her as having availed herself to such approaches.

This expansion of Goffman's participant framework then illustrates how unintended audiences complicate the negotiation of semiotic remediation. While Nazneen intended to appear urban, Aman continued to evaluate her behavior within the historically dominant ideological framework. Talking on the street and eating in public did not exclusively portray her as urban. Rather, to Aman it suggested that Nazneen did not uphold the values of piety and boundaries to social interaction. Addressing her openly on *Mkomani's* backstreets – a very intimate space – was then merely a consequence of her own behavior.

While Nazneen's metapragmatic awareness of boundaries and practices had provoked her to strategically use semiotic forms, her conscious attempts to renegotiate meanings caused her trouble. Not only did she miscalculate the participant framework, she did not expect her signs to be read the way they were. A singular event, Aman's approach did not immediately challenge Nazneen's social position. The subsequent discussion of Saniya's story will show that, not only expanded participant frameworks, but also indexical ambiguity forms a challenge for young women in Lamu.

Saniya's ascribed impropriety: questions of sincerity and semiotic confusion

Saniya was a young professional woman of 25 years old who worked in a local office. Coming from a respected local family living in the *Mkomani* area of Lamu town, Saniya was very religious and proud of her cultural background. She was, however, also focused on her career. Having finished secondary education, she was completing a college degree and combined her studies with her job to provide for her family. She herself did not see a conflict between her respect for local norms of propriety and religious piety and her desire to be an educated, successful professional. The broader community, however, did

not always recognize this position. What interests me here is not the many discussions we had on these matters, but rather how Saniya managed different requirements within her daily interactions. One of many examples is her daily route from her house to her office.

About four years ago, Saniya would leave for work wearing a colored headscarf and a black *abaya*, the sides of which had been fitted by a tailor. She walked via the backstreets of Lamu, only crossing to the mainstreet as close to her office as possible. Upon reaching the mainstreet, she put on her *ninja* until she reached the office. There, she removed the facial veil, greeted everybody, and interacted freely with men entering the office. When officials or visitors from the Kenyan capital Nairobi entered she would shake their hand and engage in professional discussions.

Saniya's behavior was the topic of gossip around town. I was shocked to hear that she was immodest, had boyfriends, and had loose morals. Not her colleagues, but Saniya's female cousins (young women who didn't go to school and hardly left the house) and a few community elders were among those spreading the rumors. Talking to my female friends, they explained that Saniya's position in a public office, where interaction with men was common, had inevitably caused people to start gossiping. *She should have known better*. While Saniya knew about the gossip and was affected by it, she used to shrug and tell me that these were the habits of *wanawake wa ndani* or *women from inside*, who don't leave the house: They had nothing better to do, did not understand what a working life was like, and clearly did not have good religious knowledge, as gossiping was prohibited in Islam. These negative evaluations nevertheless concerned Saniya. She was well-aware that local norms of piety and propriety expected her to limit her interactions with men, yet she argued that not shaking hands with male officials

would cause her to appear unprofessional. She suggested that her female cousins could not understand. But Saniya did worry: How was she to convey her position as both pious and professional?

Saniya defended her practices through a reliance on translocal discourses on development as well as global Islam. As an educated, working woman she was obliged to engage in “professional” interactions, a context within which handshakes were “proper” greetings rather than inappropriate physical contact. Her familiarity with global Islam (discourses introduced through satellite TV channels such as Peace TV) permitted judgments on the validity of others’ (moral) critique. Saniya argued that she had not acted incorrectly. Rather, through their criticism, those gossiping women displayed their old-fashioned mentality as well as their ignorance of Islamic jurisprudence. As mentioned previously, Saniya made such assumptions on several other occasions. She appeared to believe that, as a working-woman, she had acquired liberties that were not subjected to local moral evaluations; or rather she believed they would be evaluated in a framework of professionalism and urbanity.

Saniya did not see a conflict in being both pious and professional. On the contrary, she often explicitly argued that her professional development had not caused her to disregard local expectations towards respectability and piety. What is more, Saniya’s own language use appeared to suggest that her simultaneous adherence to both local and translocal discourses was not problematic for her. This was clear from a group discussion we had with other local young women about changing habits in the community. Discussing young women’s trips to cities like Mombasa or Nairobi for schooling or professional workshops, Saniya argued the following:

I have been there (...) kila pahala ambapo mmekwendra **I have gone to all of them** .. siyisifu lakini **experience** yangu . **it is more than anybody from here** . na siyo kwamba hayo mambo hayatendreki . **it happened** lakini **it doesn't happen to our society** . hapa kwetu **it doesn't happen and it doesn't apply**

I have been there (...) I every place where you have gone **I have gone to all of them** .. I am not bragging but my **experience** . **it is more than anybody from here** . and it is not that those things did not happen . **it happened** but **it doesn't happen to our society** . here with us **it doesn't happen and it doesn't apply**.

Not only does Saniya explicitly state that, despite her professional experience, she always remained aware of societal expectations, her language use reflects exactly this disposition as she switches between KiAmu and English. Addressing a group of young girls, she hereby shows that her professionalism did not cause her to lose respect for local custom and local ways of speaking, nor did her adherence to local norms of interaction prevent her from acquiring translocal experiences. Contrary to Ayah who distanced herself from her peers as a supposed consequence from her studies (Chapter 5), Saniya's language use reflects her identification with her peers, her adherence to the local context, and her professional attitude. This is particularly evident when looking at the sections of her contributions that came right before and right after the statement I just quoted. When discussing the importance of having respect for local norms of piety, Saniya spoke fluent KiAmu, and only shifted to English when making a final authoritative judgment about young people's changing practices.

Ya kwanda ilikuwa kuvaa buibui ya wazi na kuvaa masuruali ya kutubana . tulikuwa namna hiyau na tumekuwa yamefunguka Alhamdulillah . siku hizi kunena ukweli . imepungua na siyamwona mtu kwenda ile wazi wazi . tumeieka heshma lakini sasa tumetoka kwenye mavazi tumeingia kwenye kufanya vitendro ambavyo **they are not acceptable**.

First it was wearing open *abayas* and tight pants . we were like that and that has been closed Alhamdulillah . these days to say the truth . it has reduced and I haven't seen someone walking around open like that . we placed *heshima* (respect) in it [our clothing] . but now we have left clothing and we entered into habits **they are not acceptable**.

When Saniya subsequently speaks from her professional position, expressing her opinion on the rumors concerning young people's behavior when participating in workshops, trainings, or other events organized by local organizations, she switches to practically fluent English.

nikizungumzia **on behalf of the administration of [organization] . whatever happens . action will be taken . my friend action will be taken . nonsense I can tell you will never be tolerated**
when I speak **on behalf of the administration of [organization] . whatever happens . action will be taken . my friend action will be taken . nonsense I can tell you will never be tolerated**

Similar to Ayah, Saniya was able to display her different orientations in the clearly delineated context of a meeting: through what she said explicitly, and by how she said it she demonstrated both her respect for local norms and her adherence to a professional attitude. She oriented to, and embodied both. The mediation of such ambivalent positions within daily encounters, where audiences and thus evaluations were much less under her control, however, was not as straightforward. While such redefined positions might have been evident for young people like Saniya, their uptake and evaluation were not assured. Even though Saniya explicitly expressed her adherence to local norms of piety, her practices were still evaluated negatively. The social recognition of the innovative linking of talk and practice, or of the (re)mediation of redefined values in material forms and the social category they were intended to be tied to was thus not guaranteed.

Talking about her behavior in her office, Saniya would argue that her job required a professional attitude. She maintained that refusing to shake hands with male officials would result in her being seen as unprofessional, impolite, and even backward – *like those girls who never leave the house*. Yet, it was exactly the contrast between her

behavior in the ambiguous space of the office and Saniya's attempts to perform piety on her way to work that resulted in locals' negative evaluations. Rather than being seen as pious, observers interpreted her behavior as secretive. Saniya's cousins tied her interactions with men at the office to her wearing of the *ninja*, viewing the facial fail as an attempt to remain anonymous and thus conceal inappropriate conduct. Similarly, they considered Saniya's choice of the shadowy backstreets over the busy mainstreet as an effort to hide from the public eye rather than her upholding a respectful status. Unlike Saniya, these (unintended) observers did not make a clear distinction between the more shielded space of a professional office and the public, observable streets and thus evaluated all her "public" behavior in a framework of the visible and observable.¹⁹⁹

So Saniya miscalculated. She expected her behavior to be assessed within two different frameworks and failed to recognize the embeddedness of established semiotic ideologies. Being part of a specific historical context, the evaluation of the semiotic forms she relied upon was not under her control. Although reputation and demeanor are never completely in one's own hands, Saniya's metapragmatic awareness – her presumptions on how certain acts would be evaluated within a specific context – mistakenly assumed the boundary of the office to be an accepted framework boundary. But locals considered the separate professional space of the office just as open and visible as the streets. In addition, the circulation of various semiotic ideologies multiplied signs' available interpretations. Individuals' strategic use or manipulations of previously indexical symbols now permitted a questioning of their sincerity. Whereas before, Saniya's wearing of the *ninja* would have been seen as an index of her piety, locals now

¹⁹⁹ That Saniya makes this distinction is also evident from her language use, where she reserved English for her professional evaluation of what had happened, and KiAmu for an assessment in local terms.

based their interpretation on connections with other aspects of her behavior – e.g. her interactions with men – allowing them to doubt the sincerity of her *performance* of piety. Rather than a natural expression of an inherently pious demeanor, wearing the *ninja* is viewed as the individual's deliberate choice – a performance, if you will – the correct evaluation of which can only happen in accordance with her broader set of practices, previous meetings with that individual, and prior encounters with similar material forms. This observation recalls the emphasis on both the intersubjective and interdiscursive construction of meaning discussed in Chapter 6, and explains young people's difficulty with negotiating new social positions.

I suggest that Saniya's mistake lied in the fact that she presumed that her profession, her education, and her authoritative position in the office had exempted her from certain local norms – that they were sufficient to establish a new frame, an alternative context that would stabilize indexical reference. She assumed that these contexts would explain her behavior rather than make it the topic of gossip. Her walking along the seafront, for example, was undoubtedly a risky move. Yet she presumed that my presence and her professional attitude would “explain” those locally inappropriate actions. She remained, however, part of the local context.

Four years later, Saniya appears to have found somewhat of a balance; something she achieved through subtle shifts in her behavior. Nowadays, she no longer wears the *ninja*, generally uses the mainstreet to reach her office, and avoids the seafront. In the office, she no longer shakes hands with men and a centrally displayed sign announces that: “*According to Islamic law, shaking hands between men and women is prohibited.*”

Signed by *The Management*, the responsibility for its implementation does not lie with Saniya, but rather with an official, professional institution. While still interacting with men, the sign allows Saniya to refuse handshakes while retaining her professional attitude. Much like the signs we encounter at airports (Fig. 43), the authoritative announcement regiments possible evaluations and leaves no doubt as to how to evaluate Saniya's behavior. Her refusal to shake hands is not "outdated," "conservative" or "unprofessional;" it is office policy.



Figure 43. Airport Sign

Saniya's case is then one example that illustrates how young people's negotiations can crystallize in recognizable subject positions. Or is it? After all, this regimentation of evaluations needed a rather explicit, authoritative intervention. We might then wonder how successful renegotiations of semiotic forms in fact are. How, if ever do such negotiations end? The above-mentioned sign might have regimented evaluations for Saniya; it far from guaranteed positive evaluations of other handshakes in other contexts and an established recognition of a social position such as the "pious, professional woman" is far from assured.

Comparing Nazneen and Saniya

The accounts of Nazneen and Saniya are fascinating in several respects. Not only does the foregoing analysis exemplify how minor shifts in conduct are meaningful, it clearly shows how women are held responsible for their behavioral choices. While they are encouraged to work, they are pressed to take into account the fact that they are held answerable for the reactions their behavior evokes. Young women cultivate high levels of metapragmatic awareness of how their behavior could be interpreted in different settings, especially because of the sometimes-contradictory implications an act can have. Young women like Saniya may become acutely aware that interpretations of their behavior are quite open-ended and not, in fact, much under their control, even though they will be judged based on a strongly personalist theory of intention, grounded in notions of sincerity. Does the *niqab* a woman wears represent her sincere piety or her insincere attempts to avoid censure for immodest intentions? Who can know her intentions for sure? And so each action is judged in context, including what other behaviors have been observed, and where. From the perspective of young women, seeking to manage their reputations, the locations they move through become semiotically meaningful, as if they were the most tangible experiences of the dangers of semiotic misconstrual. It is this sensitivity, this charged metapragmatic awareness that simultaneously permits women to exploit semiotic forms in an endeavor to remediate meanings and ultimately renegotiate social positions.

Comparing the stories of Nazneen and Saniya urges us to ask several questions. Not only do we need to consider how Nazneen and Saniya differently exploit semiotic forms in their attempts to create a balance between their adherences to seemingly

conflicting discourses; we also need to ask what (structural) constraints there are to such presumed remediation. Not only do local conceptions of social responsibility imply broadened participant frameworks, we saw how enduring historical embeddedness can limit the possibilities for negotiating the meaning of semiotic forms and their strategic mobilization. When, then, do we find successful remediation and how does it permit negotiating social relations? After all, the above examples illustrate uptake but no balance.

Dreadlocks or kanzu's, does it really matter? Interpretive regimes and moral evaluations

The above-discussed cases might present the discussion of semiotic remediation as a gender-based challenge. While arguably most observable, young women are far from the only ones relying on new semiotic forms to balance the requirements of contrasting ideological discourses. This was already evident in the foregoing chapters, where young men like Badrul (Chapter 5) and Zishaan (Chapter 6) struggled to have their presentation of self acknowledged. I also discussed how Asef (Chapter 6) used both verbal and non-verbal semiotic forms to express a redefined position of the respectful cosmopolitan. While this suggests that successful negotiation is possible, I also underlined that Asef's financial wealth made him the exception rather than the rule in Lamu.

What is more, evaluating young men's semiotic practices was not necessarily easier for observers than assessing a young woman's intentions. Narmin made this very clear when she advised her female volunteers to monitor their behavior. She suggested that young women had to be cautious of their conduct, even when encountering someone

wearing a *kanzu* and a *kofia*. After all, she argued, one cannot know a young man's intentions, not matter how he's dressed:

kwa sababu gani? wamekuliya kwenye **same environment** ule rasta na ule **non** rasta wote wamekuliya kwenye **environment** moya **the difference?** ule ameweka rasta aende zake pwani na ule hakuweka rasta na yuko kwake mtaani . lakini twabia ni hizo hizo . atakuita akutezee

why? they grew up in the **same environment** that rasta and that **non** rasta they all grew up in one **environment the difference?** that one put rastas and went to the seafront and that one did not put rastas and he is in his neighborhood . but the *tabia* (*habits*) are the same . he will call you he will play you

Just as the wearing of the *ninja* is not immediately indexical of a young woman's piety, so is a *kanzu* not an immediate a sign of a young man's devoutness. While young men's movement through town might not in itself be a transgression, their practices can be just as ambiguous as young women's behavior. In this last section of this chapter therefore, I look at a group of young men that most evidently seemed to struggle with finding a balance between their recognition of societal expectations, their respect for local norms, and their own desires for development and change.

The subsequent example discusses the story of Ayden, a *beach boy* turned politician, and his group of friends who work along the seafront. I will discuss how a shift in their (mostly non-verbal) material practices (partially) enabled them to challenge stereotypes, appeal to different audiences, and balance the requirements of distinct social contexts. Their story, however, also demonstrates that regimenting evaluations, or finding that new social position between established social types not only depends on onlookers' assessments, but also on individuals' ability to determine that position – to find that balance.

Problematic inbetweenness?

Ayden's story is one that unfolded over the span of about 3 years. When I met him, Ayden was a young man of 25 years old. Born in Rasini on Pate Island, he came to Lamu at a young age and only seldom returned to his hometown. Living in *Langoni*, he considered himself to be from Lamu, but was simultaneously very proud of his Bajuni heritage. While Ayden had gone to secondary school until he was 16 years old, he had traded his studies for a life at the seafront.

As with many young men, working with tourists had appealed to Ayden. During the high season such work assured an income. In addition, going sailing was not really "work" for these young men. Rather, they loved the ocean and enjoyed spending time on the water while entertaining tourists. But working at the seafront had its downsides. When the rainy season came, few tourists visited Lamu and these young men struggled to get by. These were not the only challenges they faced. To attract customers, and thus to assure a good income, many young men appropriated practices that appealed to Western tourists; they endeavored to be that comfortable blend between the exotic and the familiar (see Interlude). Hippies that resided in Lamu during the sixties had introduced (and left behind) a love for the Rastafari culture – an adoration of Bob Marley and the relaxed way of life his music advocated. While the majority of the young men knew nothing about the Rastafari ideology, they realized that claiming adherence to this way of life charmed tourists much more than conservative Islam. Young men wore their hair in dreadlocks, made green-yellow-red wristbands, and obtained t-shirts and flags portraying Bob Marley. When sailing with tourists, they beat their self-made drums singing *Redemption Song*, *No woman no cry* and other Bob Marley classics.

Their attempts to please tourists were not limited to adjusting clothing and hairstyles. Some of these young men smoked marihuana and drank alcohol – practices strongly prohibited within Islam. As I discussed in my description of Zishaan, many of these young men also made a conscious effort to change their language use. Speaking a tourist’s language, or rather being able to utter a greeting in their mother tongue generally sparked an interest and could guarantee a job. And as I suggested in Chapter 4, many of these young men spoke some form of English, despite having dropped out of school at a young age. While their grammar and writing skills were limited, their vocabulary was generally rather extensive. And as I discussed in Chapter 6, many of them were able to exploit a range of different accents – mimicking British, North American, and Australian ways of speaking.

This conglomerate of practices, this semiotic repertoire, caused the *beach boys* to have a negative reputation within Lamu Town. They were the icon of how Western culture had negatively affected local youth and how Islamic values were in danger of being shunned. Make no mistake; all these young men strongly identified as Muslim. Some of them even suggested that, if the tourism business continued to stagger, they would pack their bags and join *Al-Shabaab*, the Muslim extremist organization in Somalia. When I discussed their controversial practices with some of the *beach boys*, the majority argued that these were just “techniques” to attract tourists and earn money; that they remained very proud of their cultural and religious heritage. These young men’s eagerness to attract tourists then far from entailed a rejection of Islam, disrespect for local custom, or misrecognition of societal expectations. On the contrary, for many of them respect from their family, elders, and peers was a true concern.

Although these young men claimed to strategically manipulate the semiotic forms of Western culture solely to make a living, they appeared to be unable to keep that balance. This is true in two respects. Firstly, the local community negatively evaluated their practices. Similar to the story of Saniya, the broader community (elders, but also school going peers, or the volunteers from the NGO for example) did not see these young men as “professionals” but rather evaluated their behavior as a reflection of their moral disposition. Their hairstyle, shorts, and jewelry were then indexical of an altered attitude and moral decline. Secondly, these young men themselves could, in fact, not always maintain a balance. Although I never doubted their love for Lamu, their desire to adhere to Western culture often got the upper hand. As some of their friends married Western girlfriends and left for *Ulaya* (Europe, or “the West”), some of the young men who remained behind increasingly used alcohol and drugs. While they initially used the excuse of tourist pressure, some became hooked and ended up as addicts. Some young men could not resist the temptation of *brown sugar* or heroin – a drug introduced within the last two decades and making an increasing number of victims along the Kenyan coast (Beckerleg 1995; Prestholdt 2004).

A few years before I met Ayden, he neatly fit this image of the local *beach boy*. He had long dreadlocks, wore chains and rings, and spent his days luring tourists along the seafront. When we first met, however, Ayden had intended to alter his lifestyle. I clearly remember our first encounter. I was looking for an older informant of mine and had been told I could find him along the seafront. Walking passed the *baraza* to which I had been directed, I noticed a young man sitting with a group of somewhat older men. Being more comfortable addressing someone my age, I hesitantly asked Ayden whether

he had seen my informant. Our subsequent fruitless search for the latter ended up with a fresh fruit juice at a local juice bar, a popular joint looking out over the ocean. Sipping his avocado juice, Ayden stared at his former friends, who were catcalling the young female tourists strolling along the seafront, and he subsequently told me how he intended to change his life. Not only had he cut his dreadlocks, he attended the five daily prayers in the mosque, and refrained from using any kind of drugs, including alcohol.

While Ayden still spent time on the seafront, he took his distance from the *beach boys*, because he was anxious that they would re-introduce him to the behaviors he had left behind. His attitude did not, however, make him very popular as his former friends blamed him for thinking he was “too good.” They talked about him as having become a *sheikh*, a Muslim scholar. As with Saniya, the rumors about Ayden’s behavior were a strong exaggeration as he was far from a Muslim scholar, just as Saniya was far from a slut. Talking to him while drinking our juice, it seemed, however, that there was no balance for these young men. Seeing one of his former friends enter a bar, Ayden told me:

You cannot belong to both worlds simultaneously. Either you are at the seafront or you are in the *mitaa*. Belonging to both just doesn’t work²⁰⁰

A couple of months after our first encounter, Ayden was back at the seafront fulltime. When I saw him, he strongly stressed that he was not using anything, except for the occasional *miraa*. When asked about his prayer habits, he smiled and mumbled: “you know how it goes.”

²⁰⁰ From fieldnotes

New frames, new interpretations

In November 2010, Ayden was elected to be a member of the Lamu county council as a city councillor. He thereby became the youngest council member ever. In little less than three years, his conflicting position appeared to have changed significantly. He was the Chairman of *Vijana* (not its real name) – a youth organization that represented the young men working at the seafront – and was planning on running for MP in Kenya’s 2013 elections (which he did). What happened during those three years? How did Ayden manage to appeal to his seafront “brothers” as well as to the broader community who was so skeptical of this particular group of youth? Why did his “beach boy”-image not prevent him from being elected by the Lamu community? I suggest it was exactly Ayden’s position as the chairman of *Vijana* that facilitated this new social position – not just because he had proved his excellent leadership skills, but also because the organization and his position therein provided an ideological framework within which he could find the previously non-existing balance.

Vijana was an organization that aimed to professionalize the tourism activities of the young men working along the seafront, but also to alter their negative reputation within Lamu. They exchanged the insulting name “beach boys” for “dhow operators,” or operators of the traditional Swahili boats. Their weekly meetings opened and ended with prayer, charity was given to local mosques, and town clean-up activities were organized. After an impromptu speech during one of the organization’s initial meetings, Ayden was voted to be the organization’s chairman. Under his leadership, *Vijana* made history and became Lamu’s biggest, most successful youth organization. Having obtained financial aid, the young men acquired an office, printed flyers and price lists, and all members

were given a uniform and a badge – rightly claiming to be a professional “dhow operators organization.”

More so than receiving training (in first aid, professionalization, or management), these young men highly insisted on acquiring *visible signs*. Their determination to obtain badges and uniforms could be explained in light of their employment; it would make them recognizable for tourists and give them professional credibility. But these recognizable signs of professionalization were just as important within the local community. The majority of the organization’s members wore their uniforms when walking through town, when visiting family, or when attending community meetings. Rather than being “beach boys,” they now had an occupation as “dhow operators” and their comportment could therefore be attributed to their profession rather than to mere catcalling. While this far from alleviated all negative evaluations, it did alter *beach boys’* position within the Lamu community.

As a professional organization working toward youth empowerment, *Vijana* provided the framework through which these young men could prove that their semiotic practices (and thus the material forms they used) were, in fact, strategically manipulated symbols rather than indexes. They could argue that their dreadlocks did not signal laziness, addiction, and disrespect; rather they were tools used as part of their professional occupation. As *dhow operators* they were young men who worked and helped sustain the tourist economy on which Lamu so highly depended. More importantly, the organization and its activities (beach cleanups, education programs, etc.) showed these young men to be concerned about their own future, that of their younger brothers, and the Lamu community in general.

The effect of this organizational structure became evident during *Vijana*'s official launch – a community meeting at the town's main square that officially introduced the organization to the broader Lamu community. While they had invited several officials (such as the head of the council of elders, representatives of WWF, Kenya Wildlife Service, the National Museums of Kenya, and some local politicians), the young men did not expect these speakers to attend, as “they would not speak during an event of ours.” Against all odds, the Lamu notables were present and they openly expressed their support for the young men who until recently had been considered undesirable. I suggest this shift in moral evaluation was facilitated by the indeterminacy of signs that I discussed earlier: people could not depend on the outward appearance of individuals to gauge their inner disposition. Just like the *kanzu* was not necessarily indexical of piety, so could dreadlocks, or a location at the seafront not be presumed to be indexical of disrespect for local norms. The success of *Vijana* proved exactly that.²⁰¹

What about Ayden? While the success of *Vijana* under his leadership had put him on the community radar, his election as councilor was far from an organic consequence. It is only through a careful balancing of his semiotic (and linguistic) practices that Ayden could present himself as a desirable councilor. Just like Saniya, Ayden subtly shifted some aspects of his behavior, permitting him to find a balance between the different discourses to which he oriented. While Ayden had been married for a while, this had been a public secret as it was presumed that being married would make him less popular among female tourists. Now, Ayden often took his young daughter for a walk through town – not just along the seafront but through the backstreets of Lamu as well. In

²⁰¹ I suggest these young people are more successful than Saniya in getting their signs accepted both because women's publicness as such is viewed as a sign of transgression, and because men's (historical) presence at the seafront has always entailed more frequent renegotiations of signs and their meaning.

addition, the *kofia* became part of his regular attire as well as a *bakora* (walking stick). He tried to attend the five daily prayers and always wore a *kanzu* on Fridays. Practices like these would previously have made him the laughing stock of the seafront. Now, young men addressed him as ‘councilor.’ Talking to his wife, she did say that Ayden continued to spend time at the seafront, entertained tourists, and often did not come home until late at night.

One could shrug and suggest that the above changes in attitude are just an example of local political practices. The event of Ayden’s election itself was unique, however, exactly because he was able to appeal to a community that was previously so opposed to young men from the seafront. More importantly, he remained popular among his peers while running for councilor. The success of *Vijana* had provided an ideological framework through which practices could be justified and explained – through which the meaning of semiotic forms could be renegotiated.

The explicit discourse of professionalization had allowed for a perception of semiotic forms as strategically manipulated signs – from both sides: from the community as well as from the *beach boys*. So Ayden’s friends viewed his use of the *bakora* as a symbol of his leadership and possible future councillorship while the local community read it as an adherence to, and respect for cultural traditions. Similarly, his presence at the seafront was no longer viewed as indexical of improper conduct. Rather Ayden’s behavior was interpreted within the framework of professional leadership. For Ayden’s friends it signified that he was still part of their group of youth. He was not accused of being obnoxious, an allegation he had heard after he tried to change his behavior (to a much a lesser extent) earlier. So “professionalism” and “leadership” provided an

ideological discourse for Ayden just as much as for the local public who could justify their shift in moral evaluations by phrasing it in terms of development and youth empowerment – a framework *Vijana* provided.

Successful negotiation, a gendered question?

So how are we to understand this example when comparing it to both Nazneen and Saniya's accounts? Can we explain Ayden's success in gender terms, arguing that the young women were structurally limited in renegotiating their social position? Is this, then, a question of gendered agency? While women's conduct is undoubtedly more sensitive (Inoue 2004, 2006), I refrain from relying completely on such a gendered explanation. After all, Nazneen and Saniya's attempts were not entirely unsuccessful. Nazneen did leave for Mombasa to complete her studies (and was not reprimanded for her altered behavior as her mother had threatened) and Saniya currently fulfills a role model function for young girls. I argue that we need to complicate our understanding of semiotic remediation by looking at the kinds of moral evaluations these different individuals received. We need to place these acts of self-representation and the responses they evoked within different *interpretive regimes*.²⁰²

I previously discussed the ideological construction of audiences and how participant frameworks can unintentionally be wider than expected. Here I build upon that argument and suggest that we also need to consider who these different publics are. The distinct moral evaluations discussed – self-regulation, gossip, catcalling, and public support – are very different kinds of metapragmatic acts. They are commentaries that themselves express differing stances toward people, context, and social world. Taking

²⁰² I would like to thank Christina Wirtz for suggesting this notion to me.

unintended overhearers into consideration does then not suffice. We need to consider both the different social groups and the *kinds* of evaluation they express to tease out how moral assessments differ from each other and on what grounds – in terms of interactional stances and frames as well as the consequences for those involved. In addition, we need to consider the value (or authority) of their judgments within the changing local context. It is exactly the analysis of such interpretive regimes that might give us insight into why there is such “confusion” about the meaning of everyday acts and choices.

Looking back at the data discussed, not one moral evaluation was voiced. Rather the range of evaluative responses is striking for how various subject positions seem to be constituted or reinforced through participation in particular genres of evaluation. For example, Narmin’s admonitions to other young girls, quoted throughout this chapter, refer to men watching women on the street, and their tests of a passing woman’s openness to flirtation. A more coercive evaluative genre is that of rumor and gossip to which Saniya became subject. These differences in moral evaluations – participating in calling to women on the street versus in gossiping about them – constitute very different subject positionings, especially with regard to gender and respectability. Similarly, notables’ public support for *Vijana* differs significantly from the disrespecting remarks of school-going youth about the *beach boy*’s use of English. This then implies audiences with different kinds of subject positions and stakes in the evaluation of these young women and men. Through these different genres of moral evaluation, they not only situate the people about whom they are making these statements, but they position themselves as a particular kind of subject, impacted differently by the ideological changes the community is undergoing.

The meta-commentaries on behavior – the reprimanding, gossiping, catcalling or support – are themselves different evaluations of the moral transformation Lamu is experiencing. By gossiping about Saniya’s behavior, young women express a stance on what women’s behavior should be like and thus critically evaluate newly introduced discourses on emancipation. By approaching Nazneen on the street, the young neighbor does not only position her as an open-minded, non-conservative girl; he also positions himself as someone who adheres to changing conceptions of appropriate interactions. By publicly supporting *Vijana*, local dignitaries position themselves as being progressive while simultaneously demanding respect for local norms.

It is exactly these interpretive regimes, and the different conditions under which they develop, that highlight the emergence of different social groups, distinct from the historical social stratification. The developing differentiation among young women according to whether they are *wanawake wa ndani* (women from inside) or modern, educated, working women, with each commenting on the limits of the other (and taking the opposite stance by doing so) is constituted on differing interpretations of local norms and values and their correct mediation within practice. Similarly, schoolboys’ remarks on beach boys’ language use and the possibilities for a future failure of their organization, is reflective of their interpretation of a moral narrative of modernity – what it entails and how it should be remediated within (linguistic and non-linguistic) semiotic practices.

Conclusion

We then need to ask whether the moral transformation analyzed in this dissertation, and the semiotic confusion it causes, indeed allows a new social order to develop. Are these in fact new social groups within a changing social context or are they more porous,

contextual kind of positionings youth can move between, as Ayah, Narmin, Nazneen, and Saniya seem to? If anything, this dissertation has revealed the necessity of approaching the semiotic system and semiotic practices as a whole rather than looking at the different forms that are mobilized within practice.

If we want to understand what semiotic forms do in interaction, and what role they play in creating new subject positions, renegotiating social relations, and remediating semiotic forms, we need to include questions concerning ideological conceptions of participant frameworks, uptake, and evaluation. Rather than focusing on the expression of stance through (linguistic and non-linguistic) semiotic practice, we also need to ask who the audiences are, how practices are evaluated, and what it teaches us about (changing) ideologies of personhood and social relations. It is exactly the historical embeddedness of semiotic forms, the metapragmatic awareness of their indexical functions as well as the different interpretive frames imposed on behaviors that help us understand the possibilities for (and restrictions on) a successful or shared understanding of moment-to-moment renegotiations of norms and values and thus the possible emergence of a redefined social order.

Chapter 8 Epilogue

watutezea sisi watutezea . kisha twaekezwa zidole sisi (...) leo imekuwa wewe ukivaa kanzu na kofia ni balaya . leo imekuwa we ukiweka ndevu na ile miswaada wanaopanga kuupitisha mabunge wataipitisha .. na kupambana na ugaidi na ugaidia walilewea ni waAmerika .. ndugu zangu waIslam tukifuata mfumo huu mauwaji yale ni kwa **interest** ya nani? (...) ni kutuletea zita sisi hapa pwani . ikiwa yeo mimi kama mpwani niko na makabila tafauti ya mijikenda na wako baadi yao waKristo tangu jadi na jadi . **why** mimi nainuka nachoma makanisa ya mgiriama ama ya nani kesho sisi tutakaa vipi pamoya kupidja niya mwambao(...) mimi siko kwenye kwamba watu wasi**react** lakini jua utapidja wapi (...)

they are playing with us . and the fingers are pointed at us (...) today if you wear a *kanzu* and a *kofia* you are trouble . today if you have a beard those funds the ministers are planning to pass they will grant them .. to fight terrorism and terrorism was brought by the Americans .. my brothers in Islam if we follow the system of those murders . in whose **interest** were they? (...) it was to bring war here at the coast because . if today I as a coastal resident work together with different *Mijikenda* tribes and some of them have traditionally been Christians . **why** do I get up to burn the churches of the Giriama or of someone else? how will we sit together tomorrow to plan *mwambao*? (...) I am not among those who say that people should not **react** but know where you will hit (...)

It was early September 2012 and Ustadh Taha's spirited *khutba* addressed the rising tensions on Lamu Island. In Mombasa, riots had been disrupting the city for a couple days now. Churches were being burned, cars demolished, and shop windows were broken. On August 27th, Sheikh Aboud Rogo had been shot dead on the streets of Mombasa, supposedly by thugs who had endeavored to rob the imam of his money. Sheikh Rogo had been well-known, not just as a leading imam in Mombasa, but also for the extremist discourse he promoted in his lectures. More than once he had urged young Kenyan Muslims to fight the "unbelievers" in the name of their religion. Over the years, the imam had become increasingly popular among coastal youth and his murder had

caused much turmoil along the entire Kenyan coast (as well as in Nairobi). Believing Kenyan or American security forces had killed Sheikh Rogo as part of a “war against terror,” young people directed their anger against everything that – in their mind – was linked to the Christian Kenyan government. While he had never preached in Lamu, Sheikh Aboud Rogo was originally from Pate Island, and his death equally disturbed the peace in Lamu.

In his *khutba*, Imam Taha endeavored to calm people’s tempers as he reminded them of what was truly at stake. He suggested that the death of Aboud Rogo, rather than the act of coastal Christians whom had traditionally been Muslims’ neighbors, had been the orchestrated act of national and international government forces. The turmoil the incident had caused then played into the hands of these conspirators. After all, with disunity along the coast, political endeavors to form a coastal party in the upcoming national elections would fail. What was more, this violent response (said to be fueled by Al Shabaab) provided a justification for Kenya’s military invasion of Somalia in an internationally supported “war against terror.”

Ustadh Taha reminded his audience of previous events that had stirred up the peace in the region and suggested that these equally fitted this image of impending terrorist threats along the coast. He recalled the improbable kidnapping and killing of a French tourist from her holiday home in the Lamu Archipelago in October 2011. This too, he suggested, had been nothing more than a government-orchestrated incident that enabled an outside assessment of Islam extremism in the coastal region, and the Lamu Archipelago in particular. He called upon his audience not to focus upon the minor differences between them – whether genealogy, social background, or authenticity of

religious practice – as these distinctions were erased in outsiders’ assessments of Lamu residents. To “them” *kanzus*, *kofias*, and beards only had one signification; one that answered to foreign conceptions of Muslim extremism and that fueled a discourse of much needed government intervention.

Taha’s *khutba* differed significantly from the sermon with which I started this dissertation. Five years earlier, Taha had called upon Lamu youth to take stock of their current condition and take up moral responsibility: they ought to stand up against the increasing local imposition of Christians, react against the building of churches, and the loss of land. The moral position they ought to take was spatiotemporally situated within Lamu. Now he called upon his audience, not as WaLamu, but as coastal residents who had *tangu jadi na jadi* (traditionally), shared their land with Christians. He hereby explicitly called for an erasure of local social, historical, and religious differences.

ndugu zangu . ni lazima sisi WaIslam kw kwa sauti moya tuungane baadhi na ikhtilafi zetu na hapo ndipo kila siku nanena . tukomeni fikra za kuten(gana) tukomeni fikra za kukafirishana kisha tutamalizwa sute (...) tuzitakue hatua za busara . sisi hatuna wazita na wakristo ambao tumeishi nao kwa miyaka huku pwani . kuna ndugu zetu wapokomo ni wakristo kuna wagiriama ni wakristo na tumeishi pamoya

my brothers . as Muslims we have to unite with one voice even with our disagreements and this is what I say every day . lets stop the mindset of separation lets stop the mindset of calling each other disbelievers after which we will all be finished (...) lets take wise steps . we don’t have issues with the Christians with whom we have been living for years here along the coast . our siblings the Pokomo are Christians and there are Giriama who are Christians and we have lived together

Taha’s appeal to a joint identification with the Pokomo and Giriama differs from some of the ideological discourses surrounding self-other relations I analyzed in this dissertation – discourses in which Lamu’s upper-social classes distanced themselves from mainland African tribes (see e.g. Chapter 2). Taha even urges his audience to overlook local social differences – between Shia and Sunni, between Sufi and Salafi tendencies. To

the extent that he underlined government conspiracy theories and their targeting of the Swahili coast, Taha's *khutba* echoed arguments I had heard him make many times before, including his frequent reference to Lamu as "the black Palestine." The *khutba* discussed here resembles these previous discourses in one particular aspect: just as the comparison of Lamu to Palestine discursively erased a complex sociopolitical history, so did the insistence on a unified coastal identity erase the intricate local histories I recounted throughout this ethnography. It is in this shifting emphasis on different notions of identity that Taha's *khutbas* meaningfully illustrate some of the main arguments this dissertation has made.

By returning to one of Taha's sermons in this conclusion, I attempt to bring this dissertation full circle. My foregoing description situates the *khutba* within the context of contemporary Lamu, and the Kenyan coast more broadly, and hints at how much has changed since I left the field in 2010. In the span of less than three years, Kenyan military forces have invaded Somalia to engage in a "war on terror," supported by American forces, while Al-Shabaab continues to cause unrest within Kenya. As I write this conclusion, Kenyans find themselves, once again, at the eve of the national elections. And within Lamu, speculations about the construction Africa's biggest international port have materialized.

Assessing the impending construction of the port, WaLamu weigh the prospects of development and modernity against the pitfalls of rapid change, heightened migration, and the imposition of outsiders. Images of what Lamu ought to look like after the port has been built, paint a – to the project's opponents – frightening image of a resort city with bike paths, fancy cars, and high rise buildings (Fig. 44). Within the local context, these

images are accompanied by politicians' predictions about Lamu's future status as "the Dubai of Africa;" a compelling discourse that is welcomed by many (though not all) WaLamu. Likening Lamu to Dubai, Qatar, or other successful Gulf states speaks to, and enables the reimagination of historical ties with the Arab and Islam world. It revives nostalgic discourses of prosperity, global interconnectivity, and an Islamic lifestyle; discourses that have importantly surfaced throughout this dissertation.

Conceptual Design of Convention Centre in Lamu



Figure 44. Conceptual design of convention center in Lamu

At the same time, the course of events outlined above and my description of Taha's *khutba* hint at the social reality within which young people find themselves, and with which they are all too often confronted. The lack of local consultation about the construction of the port, the land grabbing that accompanies it, and the uncertainty surrounding future employment opportunities in this billion-dollar project confront WaLamu, young and old, with the fact that none of these changes are of their own doing. They are the result of outside imposition and, in fact, reflect broader processes of dispossession. Locals' awareness of these unequal processes of "development" comes to the fore when they identify with Kashmir, Pakistan or Palestine, when young people vent their rage on the streets of Mombasa, or when others voice the desire to cross the border

with Somalia and join an elusive Islamic organization. The awareness that, contrary to the past, the materialization or the positive reinvigoration of transoceanic trade relations is not under their control confronts locals with their own situatedness within the national and global periphery.

While they might strive to be recognized as cosmopolitan (like Asef) or professional (like Saniya) or while their actions can be assessed as undesirable within the context of Lamu (like Zishaan), these locally meaningful distinctions are erased within a translocal context. Within national and international discourses, and thus in debates surrounding development projects like an international port, little distinction is made between the *beach boy* and the *madrassa* student, or between someone from the Bajuni islands and an Omani-Arab. Events like the killing of Sheikh Rogo and the subsequent discourses on counter-terrorism confront young people from Lamu with the fact that within a national context they are all “just” Muslims.

In this sense, young people along the Kenyan coast have been confronted with the fact that their practices, as diverse and harmless as they may be, are being read and evaluated in a particular way. As Taha outlines above, whether one wears a *kofia* and a *kanzu* and the way in which these are worn, no longer matters. Translocal discourses regiment outside interpretations of local signs. What is more, international discourses on anti-terrorism provide a means through which Swahili people, who have always considered themselves civilized and developed, can now be portrayed as uncivilized and barbaric – they provide a justification for certain types of acts and define how people ought to be read (Asad 2007).

In a way the *khutba* above then speaks to a question I was often asked when I explained to people what the focus of my research was and to which I hope this ethnography was a long-winded answer. When I told people I was writing my dissertation about change along the Swahili coast, and particularly about young people's negotiation of what it means to be a virtuous person in contemporary Lamu, the majority of my interlocutors would rightfully respond with one of two questions: Had change and negotiation not always been constitutive of Swahili culture? Or, alternatively, was the change I was describing not merely part of a generational rift, as so many societies across the globe experience continuously? In other words, while interesting, was my project in fact unique?

Taha's *khutbas* demonstrate that, truly, the processes analyzed in this dissertation – processes of transformation, negotiation, and incorporation – form an integral part of Swahili societies, both historical and contemporary. The contrast between the *khutba* that introduced this dissertation and the one with which I conclude demonstrates that conceptions of identity are both multiple and situated. Whereas Taha previously argued for taking a stance against the imposition of Christians, and whereas he underlined the importance of a Lamu identity, he now urged for WaLamu's identification as coastal residents who have shared land and life with the *Mijikenda* for centuries. Now, as in the past, conceptions of relations and identities shift with context and situation, without therefore being contradictory (see e.g. Fair 2001; Glassman 1995). At the same time, both *khutbas* showed, once again, that discourses and their representation are selective. In addition, they demonstrated that what speakers leave out and how they interpret what

they select is often more interesting than the mere selection itself (see Chapter 3) (Asad 2007; Irvine 2005).

What Taha's *khutba*, however, also illustrates is that the contemporary representation of such shifting identities, the reading of the signs, is not under Lamu inhabitants' control. Just as young women within the context of Lamu are much aware that their material practices are the subject of evaluation and misconstrual (Chapter 7), so are inhabitants of Lamu (and of the Swahili coast for that matter) increasingly confronted with the semiotic misconstrual they can fall victim to. As I argued in this dissertation, transformation enables a suspicion surrounding the "real" meaning of the verbal and behavioral signs displayed by people, which allows for diverging symbolic interpretation and misconceptions (Chapters 5-7). This conclusion endeavors to underline that such observations are equally relevant to the translocal and transnational context wherein "official hermeneutics has flourished" (Asad 2007: 31). Particularly, I want to highlight how such discourses and evaluations come to bear on the local context.

While translocal discourses on "terrorism" and "radical Islam" might not have caused the ambiguity of signs, they did offer a possible regimentation of interpretation (Chapter 7); it provided governments like Kenya's with a discourse to justify particular actions and measurements. In the name of national (and international) security an American Navy base is now situated in the Lamu Archipelago (see Chapter 1); there have been several (unfounded) arrests of inhabitants of Lamu, Malindi, and Mombasa; and Kenyan troops invaded Somalia. This course of events illustrates Talal Asad's statement that "fear, uncertainty, and the ambiguity of signs are part of the space of violence... they are its precondition, for they allow state power to penetrate the density of ordinary life"

(Asad 2007: 31). Yet, as Taha's *khutba* showed, this "penetration of ordinary life" equally constitutes WaLamu's increased difficulty to "read the signs" – who were the real culprits behind the recent events that stirred up the coast? Is a cross, painted on a burnt mosque's wall, a sign of Christians' revenge, or is it indicative of government conspiracies? Who can truly know the actors and their motivations?²⁰³ In addition, young people along the Kenyan coast are increasingly confronted with misreadings of their own practices; as diverse and harmless as they may be, their actions are being read and evaluated in a particular way.

Taha's *khutba* (and my analysis of it) then illustrate the different ways in which the micro-level of interaction on which this dissertation focused is meaningfully configured through multiple, (trans)local discourses (on development, modernity, global Islam, and indeed terrorism), each of which encodes a particular approach to notions of identity and social positionality. In this process of (moral) stance-taking, people can erase complex sociopolitical histories and spatiotemporal frames in order to situate themselves within contemporary society – as Taha did. The erasure of local meaning-making processes in *outsiders'* assessments of WaLamu, however, increasingly results in locals' recognition of these translocal discourses and their incorporation within practice – resulting in active identifications with, for example, Somalia, Kashmir, or Palestine. Just as these discourses define "WaLamu" to outsiders, so do they increasingly offer locals an understanding of their own condition.

²⁰³ The imam provides the example of a cross, painted on the wall of a burnt mosque. While the cross itself conventionally indexes Christianity, its indexicality can no longer be taken for granted but ought to be questioned: Who truly painted the cross and what were their motivations? This question then interestingly resembles arguments made in Chapter 7, about semiotic confusion in the local context.

Concluding thoughts

This ethnography has provided a close analysis of how the above-described processes have impacted day-to-day life within Lamu, for local youth in particular. It thereby endeavored to trace the minutiae of everyday interaction while remaining mindful of the larger processes that constituted them. I argued that, in their day-to-day activities, young WaLamu deliberate a range of, sometimes conflicting, discourses on modernity, development, and emancipation, but also on religious virtue, conservation, and respectability. This situated negotiation of meanings and evaluations, and the resulting emergence of redefined subject positions were at the heart of this dissertation.

I analyzed these interactional negotiations and metadiscursive evaluations against a clearly outlined historical and sociopolitical background. This provided insights in the different ways in which changing perspectives on norms, values, and social relations are informed by translocal discourses and individuals' differing orientations to the Kenyan nation and the broader (Islamic) world. In Chapter 3, Mzee Amr attributed Lamu's moral transformation to the national political context and hereby drew upon discourses on citizenship rights. Similarly, young people's redefined understanding of the values on which Lamu's social hierarchy is based was informed by translocal discourses on, for example, ethnicity or emancipation. I thus continuously underlined that renegotiations of situated meanings do not happen in a vacuum, but are inherently interdiscursive and meaningfully tied to the broader sociopolitical context.

By analyzing both discourse and practice, I sought to understand the dialectic between metadiscursive evaluations of change as moral transformation, and the situated semiotic processes of remediation and negotiation. I hereby endeavored to comprehend

how this dialectic impacted the different ways in which young people deliberate altered affinities for societal expectations, established norms and values, and desires for change and development. In a way, I analyzed how different conceptions of a moral narrative of modernity (Keane 2007) shape understandings of social change, proper conduct, and self-other relations in a local as well as translocal context.

I thereby hope to have contributed meaningful ethnographic data to an understanding of the complexity of social processes and situated interpretations of change. In particular, I hope to have shed a different light on young people's linguistic and material practices in contexts of change and to have offered alternative perspectives on the position of youth in Africa. The depictions of Ayah, Nazneen, and Saniya or of Asef and Zishaan differ from popular portrayals of African youth as gradually rejecting "traditional" practices in favor of an appropriation of global culture. I have argued that Lamu youth, rather than leaving norms of propriety behind, are concerned with what it means to be a virtuous person in a rapidly changing society, and thus with negotiating social positions that accommodate societal *expectations*, *respect* for local norms and *desire* for change and development.

Throughout the dissertation, I reminded the reader that such processes of negotiation – of multiple identities, of material practices, or of qualities of personhood – are not new to the Swahili coast. While I endeavored not to silence Lamu inhabitants' historical cosmopolitanism, I did intend to reveal the changing patterns of such global connectivity. While Lamu's current position continues to invite multiple and redefined cross-cultural performances of similarity (Prestholdt 2008), the ways in which such translocal sensibilities are read and evaluated has shifted significantly. Although the

young veiled woman using the latest smartphone and the old man fashioning a fancy pair of sunglasses consider their cosmopolitan styles to be a mere continuation of Swahili societies' global interconnectivity, Western tourists now grab their cameras to capture this "historical paradox" (Fig. 45-46) (Caplan and Topan 2004; Loimeier and Seesemann 2006; Prestholdt 2008).

This observation brings me back to the ambiguity of verbal and non-verbal signs. I have argued that (linguistic or material) displays of cosmopolitanism and other qualities of personhood are far from, and indeed never were, unambiguous even within the local context. The idea that they once were is itself an ideological or a metapragmatic dimension of a historical consciousness. The discursive contrasting of past and present as unambiguous versus ambiguous, however, enables an evaluation of contemporary changes as indexical of deeper lying, moral transformations (Chapter 3). I suggested that this local perception of transformation and, indeed, of breakdown created a hypersensitivity to indexicality, and enabled a detailed analysis of the intersubjective, interdiscursive, and situated negotiation of semiotic meaningfulness.

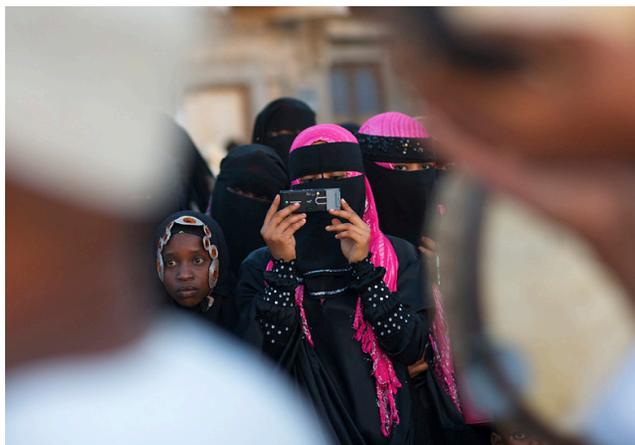


Figure 45. Veiled girl with smartphone
© Eric Lafforgue



Figure 46. Elder man with sunglasses
© Eric Lafforgue

This ethnography can be added to a list of linguistic anthropological studies that analyze the emergent nature of social relations and notions of identity within interaction; it equally supplements works that discuss the shifting or situated value of language and material practices in a globalized world. My emphasis on an approach that considers both spoken and unspoken aspects of interaction and practice, however, meaningfully adds to these discussions and innovatively brings different perspectives together.

This dissertation showed that taking the whole semiotic system into consideration – investigating when something becomes a sign, who mobilizes it and how it is evaluated – not only reveals how signs relate to social identities, but especially how these are continuously renegotiated. It demonstrates that there is, in fact, no singular or unitary semiotic form, but that different interpretive frames avail different meanings at different moments. It is, indeed, the analysis of strategic mobilizations of these signs and the different interpretive regimes through which they are assessed that provide an understanding of how new subject positions and social orders emerge.

In these concluding remarks, I therefore want to propose that examinations of social relations and social category belonging ought to start, not from the categories as

such, but from a question of semiotic distinction; we need to ask what factors contribute to (verbal and non-verbal) semiotic forms' nature of difference – of the forms used, but also of their different evaluations and the authority of those evaluations. I argue that such attention to the entire semiotic system avails new perspectives on the interactional negotiation of personhood, social relations, and social groups. This dissertation then did far more than examine the renegotiation of social relations through verbal and non-verbal semiotic practices. It uncovered epistemologies of certainty and uncertainty in contexts of rapid change. It exemplified how practices and remediations mobilize identifications and disidentifications at various intersections of age, gender, profession, religion, nation, and language.

Future research

A topic that ran through this dissertation, but that remained implicit is the one of Islam. Rather than making the anthropology of Islam an explicit focus of this dissertation, I opted to demonstrate how situated understandings of morality, virtue, and modesty translate into metadiscursive statements about change as well as into daily interactions through which social positions and relations are negotiated. While Islam forms a central part of WaLamu's understanding of self and greatly shapes their conception of self-other relations, what this notion entails and which practices can or cannot be considered "Islamic" meaningfully shift depending on context and interlocutors (Asad 1986). These different mediations of notions of virtue and morality within daily practice have formed an important thread throughout this dissertation.

As the *khutba* discussed at the beginning of this conclusion illustrated, however, such situated understandings and (mis)representation are frequently erased in outsiders'

readings of “Islam.” As important and meaningful as they are in a local context, semiotic details are just as quickly erased in translocal contexts. WaLamu increasingly adopt the discourse this erasure produces in their conception of self-other relations and in their response to the perceived moral transformation their community is undergoing.

Ideological processes of erasure and fractal recursivity (Irvine and Gal 2000) then meaningfully operate in the creation of desired and undesired (historical and spatial) contiguity in both perceptions of self and others’ evaluations of the self. It is here that I see trajectories for future research.

These concluding remarks have importantly underlined how the analysis of situated interaction can contribute to an understanding of developments on a broader sociopolitical scale. The riots on Mombasa’s streets were far from only about Sheikh Aboud Rogo’s death but importantly revealed the many frustrations that are otherwise mediated within linguistic and material practices. There is a need to analyze this dialectic further and to better comprehend how the increasing access to translocal discourses feeds such sentiments. This dissertation already hinted at the significance of understanding the broader sociopolitical context that shapes the use and reading of the signs that constitute and transform moral communities. Important avenues for future research then consist of further examining how an altered access to translocal discourses can change notions of moral communities and conceptions of belonging.

It is important to investigate how notions of religious identity and historical conceptions of global interconnectivity along the Swahili coast shift in tandem with emerging geopolitical positions and technological innovations. This becomes particularly interesting in light of the Kenyan government’s selection of Lamu as the site for the

construction of Africa's biggest international port – including an oil pipeline from South Sudan, an international airport, and high-speed railway. This development places Lamu in a historical trajectory from a pre-colonial port city, to a marginal tourist destination, to a critical transit and exit point for oil to China and the US. This transformation offers unique opportunities to investigate how this energy-security matrix, just like other technological innovations, redefines what it means to be Lamuan as well as what it means to be Muslim in this region of the world. How do WaLamu redefine both their national and religious identity in relation to these recent changes? And how do technological innovations, like Internet, enable them to transcend their own locatedness in the national and global periphery? This dissertation has already shown how access to Internet and satellite TV has enabled the re-imagining of historical connections to the Arab and Islamic world, thereby challenging the belonging to, and authority of the Kenyan State. To investigate how technologies become enmeshed within a particular cultural context, and how these are actively mobilized and discursively historicized to define a global and postcolonial Muslim identity, would then form a very valuable research project.

Such a study would address questions of citizenship, development, and geopolitics, asking how identities are defined and negotiated, redefined and renegotiated in relation to real and perceived processes of political and economic marginalization within the postcolonial state. It would thereby meaningfully connect Africa and the Arab and Islamic world, in an area that is increasingly critical to global geopolitics, especially in terms of the US-China competition as well as radical Islam and global security.

Appendices

Appendix A. Note on Kiswahili and dialectal variation

Throughout the dissertation I refer to the use of the Swahili language, both in its standardized form and its dialectal varieties, but there I do not provide an overview of the extent to which the language is used in East and Central Africa, nor do I elaborate at length on the linguistic differences between the standard and dialectal varieties of the language. Understanding how these different varieties of Kiswahili differ from each other and to what extent they are spoken within East and Central Africa will help the reader in following the different discussions of linguistic stereotyping, language mixing and switching, and language change in this dissertation.

Kiswahili, or the Swahili language, is a Bantu language spoken as a mother tongue by approximately 5 million people along the east coast of Africa, and about 60 million people in that same region use it as a lingua franca. Kiswahili is a national language of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Comoros, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A lack of historical records prevents the exact dating of the Swahili language's origins, but it is certain that the language was spoken along the East African coast since before 1100 (Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Nurse 1982a; Nurse, et al. 1993; Nurse and Spear 1985). It developed as a language of trade and commerce used between indigenous population groups living along the east coast of Africa and traders from the Arabian Peninsula, Southeast Asia and Persia. A wide range of loanwords from Arabic, Persian,

Indian languages as well as Portuguese and German testify to these historical trade relations (see e.g. Chimera 1998; Mbaabu 1978; Nurse 1985; Whiteley 1969).

Kiswahili refers to the Swahili language, *ki-* being a nominal prefix referring to the noun class that includes languages. The word *swahili* itself derives from the Arabic *sawahil*, which is the plural of *sahil*, meaning coast. *Waswahili* thus stands for “coastal people,” while *Kiswahili* signifies the “coastal language” (see e.g. Polome 1967).

The vowel system in Kiswahili consists of five vowels /a/, /ɛ/, /i/, /ɔ/, and /u/.

There are no diphthongs. When vowel combinations do occur, the letters are pronounced separately. For example, the word for *leopard* is *chui*, and is pronounced as [tʃu i].

Consonants in Swahili generally have the same values as in English. There are, however, a few exceptions (Myachina 1981; Polome 1967; Thompson and Schleicher 2001).

- *b, d, g* These voiced stops are implosives. Many of those who speak Kiswahili as their second language do, however, not retain this quality.
- *m, n* These nasal stops are pronounced as separate syllables when occurring before other consonants. For example, *mtoto* (child), or *ndege* (bird)
- *θ, ð, χ, γ* These fricatives are derived from Arabic. Many Swahili speakers, especially those not living along the Swahili coast no longer pronounce these as such. They use *h* for [χ], *z* for [ð], or *g* for [γ].

The Northern Swahili Dialects

The standard variety of Kiswahili, spoken today in countries like Tanzania and Kenya, was only introduced in the beginning of the 20th Century, as part of the British colonial (and missionary) project. Before that time, Kiswahili was only found in what are now

considered its different dialectal forms. Swahili coastal dialects continue to be spoken in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and a few communities in Mozambique and can be divided into three dialect clusters. Those spoken from Somalia to just south of Mombasa (comprising the dialects spoken within the Lamu Archipelago) are referred to as the Northern Dialects (ND). The Central Dialect group includes KiMvita, the dialect spoken on Mombasa Island (also known as KiMombasa). The southern cluster comprises KiUnguja (the dialect of Zanzibar) as well as KiVumba (Githiora 2002; Nurse 1982b; Nurse, et al. 1993).

Inhabitants of the Lamu Archipelago, where this research was conducted, claim to speak six different dialects (belonging to the Northern Dialect cluster): KiAmu, KiMatondoni, KiShela, KiPate, KiSiyu and KiBajuni. Derek Nurse (1982b; 1993; 1980; 1985) only contests the dialect status of KiShela (which he considers part of the KiAmu dialect), but agrees that the phonological, morphological and lexical differences between these variants of Kiswahili are quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient to consider them separate dialects. Bakari (1985) only recognizes four dialects, denying the dialect status of KiMatondoni and KiPate, whereas Stigand (1915) identifies five dialects, making no note of KiMatondoni. While these dialects do then not necessarily correspond to those identified by professional linguists, they do represent a dominant ‘folk dialectology.’ (Strand 2012: 24).

The island of Lamu is home to three of these dialects: KiAmu, KiShela and KiMatondoni. KiAmu is the mother tongue of about 8000 speakers, the majority of whom live in Lamu town and Kipungani village (Nurse, et al. 1993). KiShela is spoken in Shela, a town about 2 km removed from Lamu. KiMatondoni can be found in Matondoni

village, located on the opposite side of Lamu Island (see Fig. 2). Nurse (1982) and Nurse et al. (1993) made cursory notice of the (locally perceived) existence of KiShela and confirmed the distinct status of KiMatondoni. Bakari (1985) and Stigand (1915) do not mention KiMatondoni.

KiSiyu is spoken by roughly 6000 speakers in and around Siyu village on eastern Pate Island. As Nurse et al. (1993) suggest, Siyu numbers might have been higher in the past when the town was a successful city-state (with a fort as a testimony to that history). KiPate has about 2500 speakers, living in and around Pate village on southern Pate Island (see Figs. 1-2).

KiBajuni is a dialect spoken by approximately 15-20.000 people on the coastal mainland, on the remaining islands of the Archipelago, and across the border with Somalia. On the African mainland, KiBajuni (or KiTikuu) is spoken from Kismayu in southern Somalia down to the villages just below Lamu in northern Kenya. The Bajuni islands reach from the Somali islands just south of Kismayu to the Kenya islands of Ndao and Kiwayu and the northern side of Pate Island. On Pate Island it is spoken in the villages of Faza, Chundwa, Kizingitini and Mbwajumali (see Fig 2). The Bajuni themselves refer to this stretch of land as *Bajunini* or “in the land of the Bajuni.” (Nurse 1982b; Nurse, et al. 1993).

In what follows, I provide an overview of the most significant phonological, morphological, verbal and lexical differences between these different dialects. I hereby draw upon the works of Nurse (1982b), Nurse et al. (1993), and Stigand (1915) as well as upon personal data collection. I use the following abbreviations: Northern Dialects (ND),

Standard Swahili (S.Sw.), KiAmu (A), KiShela (Sh.), KiMatondoni (M), KiSiyu (S), KiPate (P), and KiBajuni (B).

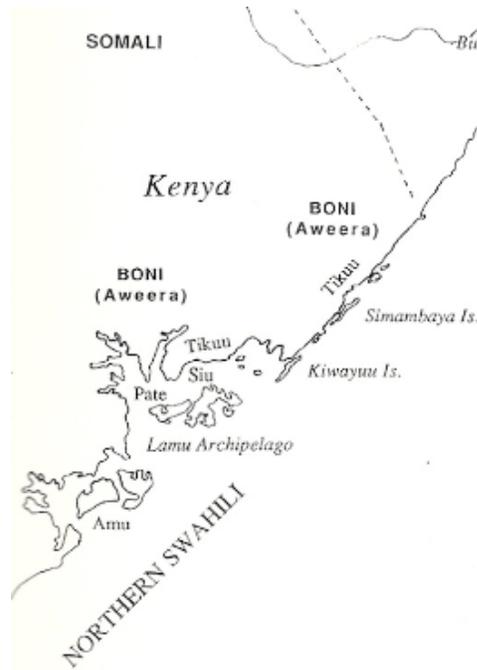


Figure 47. The Northern Swahili Dialects
Source Nurse et al. (1993)

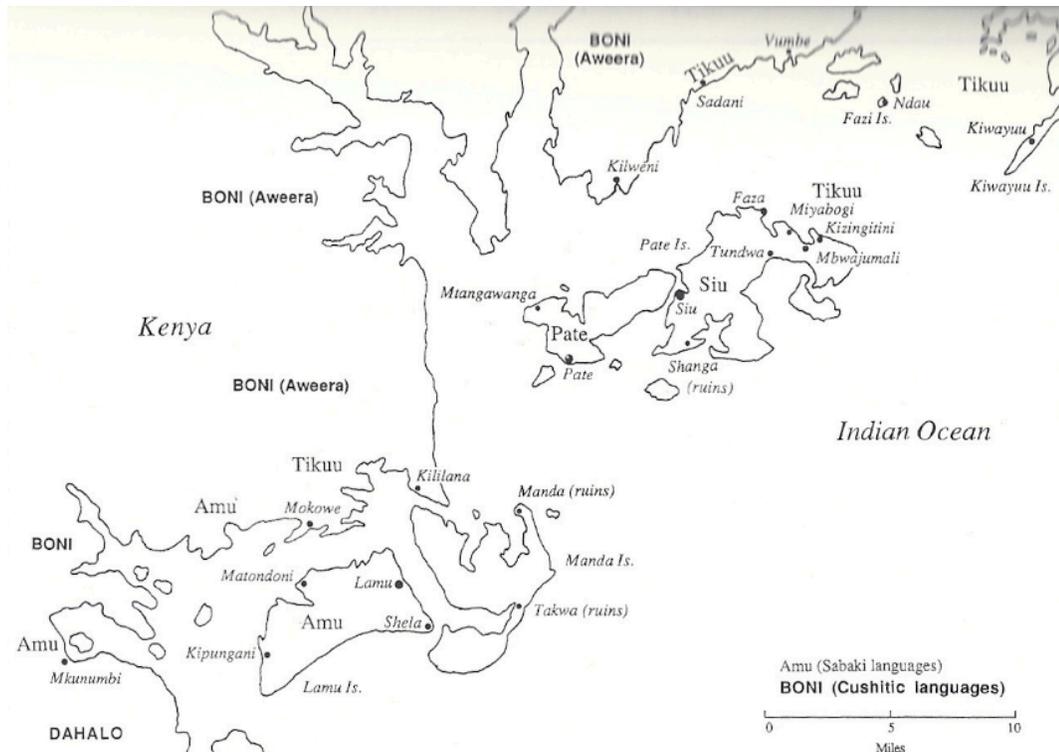


Figure 48. The Northern Swahili Dialects - Detailed
Source Nurse et al (1993)

Phonological differences

(1) Consonants

- /v/ in Standard Swahili is /z/ or [ð] in ND

The use /z/ instead of /v/ is consistent in the Amu and Shela dialects, whereas /dh/ is consistent in KiBajuni, KiPate and KiSiyu. In the smaller villages of Matondoni there tends to be a mixture of /z/ and /dh/. For example *vitu* (things) becomes *zitu* (KiAmu) or *dhichu* (KiBajuni).

- /z/ in Standard Swahili is [ð] in KiBajuni, KiPate and KiSiyu.

For example, the demonstrative *zile* (those) becomes *dhile*. KiAmu, KiMantdoni and KiShela retain /z/.

- /t/ in Standard Swahili is /t̥/ or [tʃ] in ND

The /t̥/ in KiAmu, KiMatondoni and KiShela is alveolar or post-alveolar, with some retroflex, making it clearly distinguishable from Standard Swahili. In KiBajuni, KiPate and KiSiyu [tʃ] is used instead of /t̥/. For example, the Standard Swahili *kupata* (to get) is pronounced *kupata* in KiAmu, KiMatondoni, and KiShela, or as *kupacha* in KiBajuni, KiSiyu and KiPate.

It is important to note that most loanwords from Arabic have /t̥/ in all dialects. Hence, all ND have *-tamu* (sweet), *-sita* (six) or *hatari* (dangerous). Recent loanwords, of non-Arabic origin retain /t/, such as *gazeti* (newspaper) or *boti* (boat).

- /tʃ/ in Standard Swahili is /t/ in all ND

For example, the Standard Swahili *kucheka* becomes *kuteka* in all ND.

- /nd/ in Standard Swahili is /ndr/ in all ND

For example, the Standard Swahili *ndoo* (bucket) becomes *ndroo* in all ND. The degree of rhotacisation, however, varies among the different ND. The strongest rhotacisation is found in KiBajuni, the least is found in KiAmu. In this overview d is used to represent a slightly retroflexed and post-alveolar pronunciation of /d/.

- /j/ in Standard Swahili is /y/ or ∅

In all ND, the consonant /j/ is pronounced as /y/ when occurring before the vowels /u/, /o/ and /a/. The Standard Swahili *jua* (sun) is then *yua*, or *moja* (one) becomes *moya*. In all

ND, except KiBajuni, /y/ becomes /∅/ before front vowels. For example, the Standard Swahili *jina* (name) becomes *ina*. In KiBajuni, a class marker *i-* is retained (*y-* in front of a vowel) resulting in *yina*. Other examples that derive from this rule are *mui* (city) and *muyi* (in Bajuni) instead of *mji* (in Standard Swahili), whereby the *m-* is a locative classmarker.

- Loss of /l/ before /e/ in all ND

The Standard Swahili *mbele* (in front of) becomes *mbee* in all ND. The imperative *Leta!* (Bring!) becomes *Eta!*. In KiAmu this l-loss leaves /y/ before /e/ in some cases. For example, *leo* (today) becomes *yeo*, or *-lea* (to raise) becomes *-yea*.

- Distinctive Aspiration

Contrary to Standard Swahili, ND have a contrast between aspirated and non-aspirated voiceless stops. For example, *paa* (roof) but *p'aa* (gazelle), or *kaa* (sit) but *k'aa* (crab). It is suggested that Standard Swahili used to have distinctive aspiration, but that the majority of Swahili speakers have lost this feature, a change possibly to be attributed to Standard Swahili being a second language for many speakers (whose mother tongue does not have distinctive aspiration) and due to the difficulty of representing aspiration in written language.

(2) Consonant and vowel assimilation

- m(u) + consonant

This assimilation occurs most frequently with the nominal prefixes for Classes 1 and 3. Although the basic form of this prefix is [m], [mu] is heard frequently in the ND. When the vowel does drop, assimilation of [m] to the following (stem) consonant occurs automatically.

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.SW</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<u>n</u> before dental:	<u>nt</u> anga	mchanga	sand
n before alveolar:	nlango	mlango	door
ng before velar:	ngeni [ŋgeni]	mgeni	guest

- /mi + V/ > ny

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/mi-aka/	nyaka	miaka	years
/mi-ezi/	nyezi/nyedhi	miezi	months

- n(i) + possessive

When the copular *ni* (“is”) is followed by a possessive, it assimilates to the first consonant of the possessive form. It is important to note that the assimilated nasal remains syllabic.

<i>ND</i>	<i>S.SW</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Numba hii <u>ndangu</u> .	Nyumba hii <u>ni yangu</u>	<i>This house is mine.</i>
Pundra hoo <u>ndecheu</u>	Punda huyu ni yetu	<i>This donkey is ours.</i>

- V1 + V2 > V2

Whereas Standard Swahili tends to retain vowels, vowel assimilation or deletion frequently occurs in the Northern Dialects and generally follows the pattern V1+V2 > V2

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/si-end-i/	sendri	siendi	I am not going
/a-si-o-chez-i/	asochezi	asiochezi	he who does not play

Vowel assimilation or deletion does, however, not occur across the board and vowels are retained at various points in the word. Nurse (1982, 2011) does not elaborate extensively on these occurrences. He suggests that vowels fail to assimilate in at least two occasions:

- When a consonant is lost. He thereby refers to the deletion of consonants in Standard Swahili forms, such as the loss of /l-/ discussed previously.
- When the relative occurs in final position

<i>Verb</i>	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.SW</i>	<i>Translation</i>
-leta	Usiniete	Usinilete	Do not bring me
-sema	Wasemao nnyani?	Wasemao nnani?	Who is speaking? ²⁰⁴

- CuCo > CoCo

Vowel assimilation also occurs in the second demonstrative, clearly distinguishing the ND from Standard Swahili. This assimilation follows the pattern CuCo > CoCo

²⁰⁴ Direct translation: Those who are speaking, who is it?

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Cl 1	hoyo (A) hoo (B)	huyo	that one
Cl 17	hoko	huko	over there

Morphology

(1) Demonstrative pronouns

It was mentioned previously that vowel assimilation occurs in the second demonstrative form. The demonstratives in the ND differ from Standard Swahili in one another aspect: the demonstrative stem -n-. While in Pate, Siyu and Bajuni dialects /-nu/ only occurs in locative forms, -n- can freely replace demonstratives of all classes in the other ND.

<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw.</i>	<i>Translation</i>
mtu hunu	mtu huyu	this person
meza hini	meza hii	this table
hukunu kwechu	huku kwetu	here at our place

(2) Verbal conjugation

- 3rd Person Singular (y)u-/w-

Whereas in Standard Swahili, the verbal prefix for the 3rd person singular is /a-/, the northern dialects use (y)u- in the present indefinite tense. It is important to note that ND prefer to use the present indefinite tense (-a-) over the present continuous (-na-), the former being the exception in Standard Swahili.

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/yu-a-m-pend-a/	ywampenda	anampenda	he loves her
/yu-end-a-o/	ywendrao	anaenda	he is going

Interestingly, in the negation of the verb “to be,” ND drop the use of /yu-/ whereas Standard Swahili incorporates it (in accordance with the use of negative verbal prefixes). So whereas Standard Swahili uses *hayuko* (he is not (here)), one hears *hako* in KiAmu.

- Suffixal /-o/ in “to come” and “to go”

In all ND, a suffix “-o” is used to express a continuing action. This suffix only occurs with two verbs: to come and to go. Recognized as a distinguishing feature of the ND, it is often used in stereotypical depictions of ND speakers.

	<i>ND</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/ni-a-end-a-o/	nendrao	ninaenda	I am going
/ni-y-a-o/	niyao	naja	I am coming

- Use of *-ndo-*

The formative /ndo/ (nda can be heard in kiBajuni) is used to express an action which took place in the recent past of which the consequences are still relevant to the present. It is particularly used to emphasize *the action* that recently took place. The form can be used either separately or can be incorporate into the verb.

Saa hii ndo tumefika. *We have arrived just now.*

Vandokwisa kuingia. (KiBajuni) *They have already gone inside.*

Features particular to the Bajuni Dialect

Some phonological, morphological and lexical features are specific to the Bajuni dialect, some of which are shared with the dialects from Pate and Siyu. It is worthwhile listing the most striking distinctions as these are frequently used in either linguistic stereotypes or when speakers want to emphasize their Bajuni background.

- Palatalisation /ch/ > /sh/

<i>B</i>	<i>S.SW</i>	<i>Translation</i>
shai	chai	tea
i-shungwa	chungwa	orange

- Dental /n/ where other ND have /ny/

<i>B</i>	<i>ND</i>	<i>Translation</i>
nama	nyama	meat
numba	nyumba	house

- Use of nominal prefix for CI 5, basic shape /i-/

Whereas the majority of the CI 5 nouns start with a Consonant (and thus have a zero-prefix) in Standard Swahili and the other ND, they take a prefix /i-/ in the Bajuni dialect.

This same feature occurs in KiSiyu.

<i>B/S</i>	<i>S.SW</i>	<i>Translation</i>
iguu	guu	foot
ichunda	tunda	fruit

- Personal Pronouns

The Bajuni dialect and the dialects of Pate and Siyu have distinct personal pronouns.

<i>B</i>	<i>P/S</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>Translation</i>
imi	mmi	mimi	I
uwe	uwe	wewe	you
iyē	iyē	yeye	he/she
isi	isi	sisi	we
ini	inyi	nyinyi	you
ivo	iwo	wao	they

Lexical differences

The ND distinguish themselves from Standard Swahili through a range of lexical differences. In what follows, I merely list a few of examples, including some distinctions that occur within the ND.

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>S.Sw</i>	<i>A, Sh, M</i>	<i>Pate</i>	<i>Siyu</i>	<i>Bajuni</i>
Call	-ita	-amkua	-ankua	-ankua	-ankua
Finger	kidole	chanda	chanda/kinwe	kinwe	chanda
Sell	-uza	-zanya	-dhanya	-dhanya	-dhanya
Salt	chumvi	munyu	munyu	munyu	munu
Bird	ndege	nyuni	nuni	nuni	<u>noni</u>

Intonation Contours

None of the linguistic descriptions available elaborate on the importance of intonation contours. Speaker of the ND, however, always identified intonation as one of the most distinctive characteristic of the individual dialects, next to the features listed above. These intonation patterns are particularly important, however, to distinguish between closely related dialects such as KiAmu, KiMatondoni and KiShela. Speakers would describe KiAmu as having a more feminine quality, and its speakers using a more melodious intonation pattern. People from Matondoni were said to stretch or lengthen their vowels, and KiShela was said to have a harsher quality and an exaggerated use of Arabic pronunciation. While these are folk explanations, they play an important role in local social contexts, as they function as important social indexicals.

Appendix B. Glossary

Kiswahili

English

adabu	manners
adhaan	call for prayer
ari	honor
asili	origin
baraza	stone bench
buibui	black cloak
busara	wisdom, reason
cheo	rank
dini	religion
haya	modesty
hekima	wisdom, knowledge
hivi sasa	nowadays
jaha	dignity
kabila	tribe
kanzu	white robe
khera	discipline, zeal
khutba	sermon
kijana/vijana	young person/youth
kitendo	manners

Langoni	southern neighborhood of lamu
maendeleo	development
maghrib	the early evening prayer
mila	traditions
miraa	khat
mitaa	neighborhoods
mji	city, town
Mkomani	western neighborhood of Lamu
Mkunguni	Lamu's main square
muadhin	person who calls for prayer
muungwana	original inhabitant of Lamu, Afro-Arab merchant
mwambao	coast
mzungu	Western person
ndani	inside
nde	outside
ninja	facial veil
niqab	facial veil
sadiki	trust
shiraa	traditional, tent-like covering
tabia	habits
taqwa	obedience, submission to god
uadilifu	morality, honesty
uaminifu	trustworthiness

ukoo	clan
Ulaya	Europe/the West
ustaarabu	being civilized
utamaduni	culture, urbanity
vitendo	habits, manners
wageni	guests
washenzi	barbarians
watumwa	slaves
watwana	slaves
wazi	open
wazungu	Western people
wenyeji	original inhabitants of Lamu
zamani	before, in the past

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