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**Knowledge and Agency:
The Social Relations of Islamic Expertise in Zanzibar Town**

by
Allyson Purpura

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York.

1997

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To my parents
Dominick and Penny Purpura

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Table of Contents

Copyright Page	ii
Approval Page	iii
Dedication Page	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Note on Translation	xvi

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction	1
I. Overview of the Project	4
a. Initial Questions	4
b. The Essentialists	6
II. The "Cultural Idea" of Islamic Knowledge	11
a. Why Knowledge? Text, Context, and Levels of Interpretation	11
b. Referential and Performative Modes in the Definition of Religious Knowledge: Islamic Discursive Practices in Zanzibar	26
III. Sorting Terms, Mapping Contingencies: Problems and Lessons in Naming and Meeting "Experts"	32
IV. Knowledge and Power; Ideology Making and Unmaking	41
V. Living in Zanzibar: Getting Connected	48
VI. Organization of the Dissertation	51

PART ONE: ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE IN ZANZIBAR:

<u>THE POLITICS OF HISTORY AND IDENTITY</u>	54

CHAPTER TWO

Reflections on the Past: Culture, Power, and Islam in the History of Zanzibar and the East African Coast	55
I. The Omanis, the Mwenyi Mkuu, and the Crown	56
II. Islam and the Early Settlement of the Coastal and Off-Shore Island Towns	62
III. Implicit Versions of Explicit Order: Clans, Swahili Oral Tradition, and the Incomplete Control Over Islamic Knowledge	68
IV. The Construction of Islamic Descent Identities: A Politics of Representation	73
V. The Ulama of the Zanzibar Sultanate in the Nineteenth Century	82
VI. "Counter Cultures" of Islamic Knowledge	90
a. Slaves, Identity, and Islam	91
b. Subversive Charisma: the Tarika Sheikhs	95

c. Power Plays: Sheikhs, Merchants, Colonialists, and the Sultan	103
d. Concluding Thoughts	110

CHAPTER THREE

Ambivalent Affinities: The Politics of Islamic Authority, Authenticity, and Descent in Zanzibar Town Today	115
I. Artifacts of a Ranked Prestige: "Stone Town", "Ng'ambo", and the Zanzibar Revolution	116
II. The "Paradox of Foreignness"	126
III. Essentialist Challenge, Sufi Response: Political Subtexts in Islamic Discourse on Authority	135
IV. Dialogue, Informality, and Intimacy in the "Authentication" of Islamic Learning and Authority	144

CHAPTER FOUR

A Political Economy of Images: Ethnicity, Islam, and the Colonial State	149
I. "Swahili" and the Contingencies of Identity Construction	150
II. A Political Economy of Images: Colonial Zanzibar	163
a. Legislating Distinctions: Communalism and the Nationalist Response	169
b. Degrees of Nativity: Constructions of "Foreign" and "Indigenous" in Late Colonial Political Discourse	177
III. Islam and the Politics of Language: Educational Reform and Muslim Identity	186
a. Qur'an Teaching in Government Schools: The Initial Plan	188
b. Local Protests, British "Concessions": Control over the Cultural Reproduction of Islam	191
c. Connections: Identity Politics and the Language Dispute	200

PART TWO

THE PERFORMANCE OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE:

<u>INSTRUCTION, PIETY, AND HEALING</u>	205

CHAPTER FIVE

Islamic Education and Discursive Practice: Women's Voices	209
I. Instructional Settings	209
a. Educating Youngsters	209
b. Children's Performance: The Maulidi	212
c. Continuing Education: Men and Women	217

II. Gender, Knowledge, and Agency	222
a. The Tarika	223
b. Tarika Women: Bi Rehema and Bi Lulu	226
c. Bi Mwanasha Suleiman and the Sunday Morning Darasa	241
d. Theoretical Considerations	250
 CHAPTER SIX	
The Social Construction of Piety: Portrait of Seyyid Silima	256
I. Seyyid Silima	257
II. Karama	262
III. Memory, Politics, and Identity	270
IV. Islamic Knowledge: A Virtue of Divine Blessing	276
 CHAPTER SEVEN	
The Work of Islamic Knowledge: Illness, Diagnosis, and the Practice of Healing	278
I. The Epistemology of Illness and Healing	278
a. Terms of the Trade: Knowledge, Curative Techniques, and Practitioners	278
b. Notions of Illness and Finding a Cure	289
c. Negotiating the "Parameters of the Permissible": Diagnosis, Intentionality, and Haram	293
d. Uganga and "Modernity"	303
II. Bwana Shaafi: mganga and sheikh	305
a. Belief and Qur'anic Expertise: Accessing the Power that Cures	306
b. Books from Arabia to Zanzibar: Political Implications in a Reversal of Fortune	309
c. Shaafi's Career: Acquiring Knowledge	314
III. Mzee Hasan: The Spirits' Interlocutor	320
a. Spirits in Zanzibar	320
b. Hasan's Career	328
c. Islamic Symbolism in Spirit Calling Sessions	333
d. Najma's Story	336
e. At the Fairgrounds: A Parody of Spirit Possession	341
IV. Concluding Thoughts	344
 CHAPTER EIGHT	
Critique and Counter-Critique in the Politicization of Islam	349
I. The Essentialists	351
a. Background and Context: Situating the Essentialists	351
b. Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, his Students, and Teachings	358
c. The Bi-Monthly Lectures for Women	371

d. Preserving Islam: Living Muhammad's Way	374
II. Politics and Islam: Dangerous Incursions	376
a. The 1988 Demonstration, and the "Bismilallah" Sticker Affair	377
b. The 1992 Demonstration	379
c. "If you want to enter politics, you must first remove your turban!"	382
III. The 1992 "International Conference on the History and Culture of Zanzibar": The Politics of Culture, Memory, and Self- Definition	385
IV. " <i>Ametia Kininja</i> ": Essentialism and the Renegade	390
a. From " <i>Kizorro</i> " to " <i>Kininja</i> ": A Short History of the Veil	393
b. " <i>Ametia Kininja!</i> ": Metaphor, Vantage Point, and an Irony of Images	398
GLOSSARY	403
REFERENCES CITED	414

Note on Translation

Most of my interviews with Zanzibari informants were conducted in Kiswahili; the English translations that appear in the text are my own.

Many Kiswahili terms are derived from Arabic, especially those with Islamic meanings and associations. Variations in the spelling of Arabic and Arabic-derived Kiswahili terms reflect variations in how respondents used and pronounced these terms (examples of such variation are *hijab/hijabu*, *ilm/elimu*, *tawasul/tawasali*).

Finally, Kiswahili and Arabic terms are italicized the first time they appear in the text. Thereafter, they remain unitalicized.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Zanzibar was once reputed as the center of Islamic culture and learning in East Africa. Indeed, in the accounts of early Arab geographers, European colonial officials and, most intimately, in the biographical collections written by the celebrated Islamic scholar-jurist of Zanzibar, Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy, we meet the many Muslim figures from places such as the Hadramawt (southern Yemen), Barawa (the Somali coast), the Comoro Islands, and Oman, who in earlier centuries came to settle and teach in Zanzibar.

The legacies of such figures are often invoked by Zanzibaris today as testimony to a tradition of Islamic learning that has "gone with Zanzibar's past." On the one hand, this sentiment is well-founded given how the gradual dismantling of the Omani Sultanate and the unfolding of colonial and post-colonial politics in Zanzibar led to the demise and dispersal of a once powerful and relatively select religious elite. However, this sentiment also belies the fact that Islamic expertise has continued to be culturally and politically significant in Zanzibar, and that networks of Islamic cultural expression today promote a range of possible forms and uses of knowledge that evade conformity to and control by any one group or cohort of "experts". In broadest terms, then, this study explores the

disconnections and continuities between Zanzibar's Islamic past and present, and how the instruction, performance, and uses of Islamic knowledge have been shaped by shifting configurations of power and ideas about prestige. It explores how Islamic discourses have been brought into -- and transformed through -- the daily exigencies of living in a culturally complex and subtly political, social world.

Zanzibar forms part of the Tanzanian nation state and is comprised of two islands, Pemba and Unguja, located 22 miles from the shores of the East African mainland. Unguja has a population of approximately 380,000,¹ is sixty miles long and twenty miles across at its widest point. Today, roughly one third of the island's population resides in Zanzibar Town, which includes the old port of Stone Town (or *Mji Mkongwe*, Old Town), and *Ng'ambo*, an expansive residential sector just east (or, literally, on "the other side") of Stone Town. I conducted my research in neighborhoods throughout Zanzibar Town, which has long been a cosmopolitan region with an ethnically and religiously diverse population.

While the vast majority of Zanzibar Town residents, indeed of Zanzibaris in general, are Muslim and speak Kiswahili as their first language, Muslims there do not comprise a single, undifferentiated community. Sunni

¹ As of the 1988 Tanzania Sensa, the population census "Preliminary Report" by the Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Economy, and Planning, Dar es Salaam.

(Shafi'i), Ibadhi, and Shi'a Islamic religious cultures are all practiced in Zanzibar. In addition to the ritual and doctrinal features that distinguish the Sunni and Shi'a congregations, the various Ithna Ashara and Ismaili (Shi'a) *jamats* (Shi'a sub-communities such as the Bohora, Khoja, and Kokni) are identified largely with the South Asian communities long-established on the island.² Sunni Muslims, a broadly defined, socially and ethnically heterogeneous group, constitute the majority population in Zanzibar. Included among them are the Islamic *tarika* or Sufi brotherhoods, the most popular being the *Qadiriyya*, followed by the *Shadhiliyya* and the *Alawiyya*.

Zanzibari society is not governed by the *sharia* (Islamic law), but there is a state-appointed *Kadhi Mkuu* (chief Islamic judge) having official, legal jurisdiction over Muslim domestic affairs such as Islamic inheritance, marriage and divorce. However, such institutionalized authority rarely extends beyond the kadhi's court. While the kadhi himself may be consulted at his home on a range of personal issues, so too are many other individuals who are recognized as experts in Islamic knowledge but who together do not constitute any overarching structure of religious authority.

² Not all Zanzibari South Asians, however, are Shi'a; there are also Sunni, Christian (Goan Catholics), and Hindu (Gujarati) Zanzibaris having South Asian descent.

This study, then, explores the social relations of Islamic expertise in Zanzibar Town. A central theme concerns how individuals come to be identified as Islamic knowledge experts -- or recognized as the bearers of Islamic expertise, however brief, enduring, or context-bound that recognition might be.

I. Overview of the Project

a. Initial questions

During the course of my fieldwork in Zanzibar, I came to understand that "exceptional" Islamic knowledge is distinguished from the routine and becomes significant in its recognition by others, and in the social consequences that such recognition can engender. If Islamic expertise is something which can be "demonstrated" and "recognized", this raises questions about its enactment or performance. For this reason I explore the social significance of performance -- especially Muslims' participation in contexts of Islamic discursive practice -- in creating impressions about the kinds of knowledge embodied in the performers, in the range of meanings their knowledge conveys to others, and in what that knowledge signals about its bearer.

This aspect of Islamic knowledge points to my main theoretical point which emerged out of and also helped to link the different facets of my research. That is, rather than naming experts by placing individuals into fixed

"religious" categories and agreed upon social roles, the identification of individuals as experts is actually the outcome of a collaborative dynamic in social relationships. As such, it can be shifting and imprecise, and is contingent upon wider social, political, and economic circumstances.

However, in "ideological situations", that is, where the reproduction of power structures is accomplished in part by controlling the definition of and access to Islamic knowledge, then categories that define the expert can become fixed, reified, and identified with specific sets of exclusionary qualifications (such as class, gender, or pedigree) which may have little to do with Islamic knowledge per se. One example of an "ideological situation" concerns the establishment of the Zanzibari ulama in the mid to late nineteenth century. A discussion of this historical conjuncture in chapter two helps bring to light some of the issues, explored in chapter three, concerning the (dis)connection between religious prestige and social privilege which are alluded to in Zanzibari commentaries on Islamic education and leadership there today.

Understanding these social and potentially political dimensions of Islamic knowledge also requires a consideration of how attributes or qualifications that denote Islamic expertise come to be identified (or "recognized") as such. How are these attributes shaped

historically or related to other cultural and ideological constructs of difference and identity in Zanzibar? This is an especially important issue in the Zanzibari context since local commentary concerning the various uses of Islamic knowledge and the condition of Islamic authority in Zanzibar today are discussed with reference to other-than religious factors. These include "traditional" culture, class position, ethnic identity, personal history, and ideas about Zanzibar's recent and distant past. All of these inform and shape the ways in which Islamic discourse is used in the mediation of social relations.

b. The essentialists

At one level, Zanzibar, like other Islamic societies today, has experienced the emergence of an essentialist Islamic discourse which has had noticeable, if only episodic, political ramifications over the past fifteen or so years. By "essentialist" I mean a discourse that defines Islam "in terms of founding essences invulnerable to historical change" (Prakash 1990:384).³ Indeed, the groups

³ The term "essentialist" was first introduced to me by Talal Asad who suggested that it described the discourse better than the term "purist", which I was using at the time (personal communication, 1992). As Prakash's article demonstrates, essentialism is an ideological assertion that monolithic essences exist and can define, once and for all, a religion, an ethnic group, or even an entire region of the world, as in the case of orientalism, the subject of his discussion in the article. See also Yahya Sadowski, 1993, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate" (Middle East Report, No. 183, vol. 23(4), July-August) for a discussion

contributing to the promotion of this discourse in Zanzibar are often referred to locally as the "*watu wa bida'a*" (the "*bida'a* people"). "*Bida'a*" refers to the group's critical disapproval of Islamic practices performed in Zanzibar which they consider to be "innovations" (*bida'a*) -- that is, devotional practices which were popularized after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and, as such, do not constitute authentic, allowable practices for Muslims. Thus the *bida'a* discourse is "essentializing" because it reduces Islam to what they regard as its single and original "essence".

While this study does not revolve around the essentialist groups in Zanzibar, it is instructive to introduce them here because the rather public, self-conscious character of their collective identity and discourse constituted a lively topic of discussion and debate among Zanzibaris generally, and brought a range of individual opinions and commentaries (mostly on Islam or being Muslim) to my attention.

While essentialist discourse in Zanzibar Town has been inspired, it is rumored, from "the outside" (via Iran, Khartoum, Nairobi), it has been disseminated and brought to life in the lectures of several Zanzibari Islamic teachers and their young cohorts. Their rhetoric has elicited responses from some of the older, "historical" Muslim

and critique of "neo-orientalist" thinking on the political relationship between "state" and "society" in the modern the Middle East.

figures (such as the Hadrami scholars and tarika [Sufi] leaders), some of whom have found it necessary to challenge the "bida'a" critique regarding the "problem" of Islamic knowledge and practice in Zanzibar today. But what struck me was that even though Islamic teachers and their students engaged the essentialist critique at various levels, it seems that the "problem" of Islam -- that is, its "vitiation" by "traditional culture" and by "lax" Islamic teachers -- is actually a creation of the essentialist vantage point itself. This is not to deny the fact that historically speaking, "higher" Islamic learning in Zanzibar declined significantly during the course of this century: indeed, most Muslims in Zanzibar today are aware of and at times make reference to the island's illustrious Islamic past, as I suggested earlier. Instead, the point I want to make here at the outset is that the essentialists' critique is ultimately about establishing their own self-definition, and this, significantly, hinges on their creating an image (or assessment) of Islam in Zanzibar against which they can situate and authenticate themselves. This had to be an image that was familiar enough so that Zanzibaris could relate to it, but one which also indicates that there is a need for reappraisal and reform. In this image, then, Islam in Zanzibar is portrayed as an imperfect product of human "innovation", a bricolage of paradoxical beliefs and choices

which "unenlightened" Muslims continue to make in the reproduction of their social worlds.

In a way, the position the essentialists rhetorically established for themselves in Zanzibar was analogous to my own position there as a fieldworker: while clearly our projects and intentions were very different, we both viewed ourselves to be "outside" of the cultural landscape that in fact defined our very projects. Even though we did not interpret our observations in the same way, nor could we have drawn the same conclusions, our interests were piqued in similar ways by what we saw and listened to in our encounters with others. My "others", however, necessarily included the essentialists themselves. At another level, then, the essentialists' vantage point is as much a product of the conditions and social relations of Islamic expertise in Zanzibar as it is a critique of them. The fact that they themselves were born and raised in Zanzibar gives them not only intimate knowledge of the various meanings associated with Islamic knowledge and practice there, but also helps to establish a familiarity which makes it possible, in an almost paternalistic way, for their discourse to be heard. Simultaneously positioned as insiders and outsiders, we can see with the "watu wa bida'a" how the question of vantage points becomes an important one to explore for examining the process of self characterization (Crapanzano 1990) and how

this relates to the construction and authentication of "expert" knowledge.

Finally, even though the essentialists do not constitute a single, homogeneous group, they can still be distinguished by the global, moralistic stance that their discourse ultimately creates. In this way, the essentialists -- not unlike other actors in Zanzibar's historical past, as we shall see -- are instructive for examining the process of ideology-making, that is, how aspects of Islamic knowledge and culture are commented on or appropriated in the wider construction and confrontation of power hierarchies of various kinds.

In the end, the essentialist critique should be understood as one among many views on Islamic knowledge and practice in Zanzibar which reflect a "variation" in local opinion that, in William Merrill's words, "testifies to the dynamism of culture and knowledge and directly reflects the social processes of which they are a part" (Merrill 1988:13). Indeed, this study considers a range of active, reflective stances on Islam in Zanzibar. By creatively defining and directing Islamic knowledge practices and the contexts in which they are performed, Muslims engage in and comment on the world, or their place in the world. This in turn has a significant impact on shaping the wider, sometimes paradoxical meanings that Islamic practices -- and responses to them -- might come to have, the contexts in

which they may or may not continue to be used, and the extent to which they can, in different ways, be directed towards the assertion of personal, collective, and in Zanzibar, sub-nationalist⁴ identities.

II. The "cultural idea" of Islamic knowledge⁵

a. Why knowledge? text, context, and levels of interpretation

In Islam, seeking "knowledge", above all, knowledge of God, is a Qur'anic injunction and as such is incumbent upon all Muslims (Tibawi 1972:24). Indeed, the source from which all knowledge flows and which mediates understanding of the created world is the Qur'an, the divine word as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, demonstrating exceptional devotion to the development of one's intellectual or spiritual grasp of God's word and Muhammad's way is, for Muslims, both personally elevating and socially commendable. In his description of the ideal connection between Islamic

⁴ That is, Zanzibar as separate from mainland Tanzania, or Unguja as distinct from Pemba.

⁵ Describing Islamic knowledge as a "cultural idea" is derived from Eickelman, 1978:489.

knowledge and action in "classical"⁶ Islam, Ira Lapidus writes:

"The acquisition of religious knowledge is both a means and an end...Knowledge directs judgement, points out error in feeling or behavior, controls the decision to act, and leads to the desire to put truth into action. Yet knowledge is also the goal in the sense that the training of the soul converts ordinary intellectual knowing into deeper forms of belief, faith, certainty, and vision of God. Knowing the good and ordering the soul in accord with knowledge deepens and changes the meaning of that knowledge...Religious knowledge, then, is the fundamental Muslim metaphor, the template on which a Muslim life is built" (Lapidus 1984:58).

While this statement presents a rather totalizing image of the significance of religious knowledge in Islam, as such, it also portrays well a sense of the idea of Islamic knowledge in constituting civil propriety, faith, and ultimately, the Muslim self. Writing from, in his words, an "Islamic perspective", mystical scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr discusses the connection between "intellect and intuition" - that is, the mutually constitutive relationship between knowledge and faith:

"Man must exercise his intelligence in order to understand God's revelation, but in order to understand God's revelation, the intellect must be already illuminated by the light of faith and

⁶ As F.E. Peters points out, the idea that Islam has a "medieval" and a "classical" period is derived from the western historical paradigm. Devout Muslim scholars themselves tend to periodize (at least the formative stages of) the intellectual history of Islam in terms of generations of thinkers, beginning with the time of the Prophet and his "Companions", the "Rightly Guided Ones" (the first four caliphs), the "Successors", and the "Successors to the Successors" (Peters, 1994).

touched by the grace issuing from revelation" (Nasr 1979:67). He continues: "...[T]he mind is a reflection of the heart, the center of the microcosm. The Islamic doctrine of Unity (*al-tawhid*) has been able to embrace all modes of knowing [sensual, imaginary, rational, intellectual] into complimentary and not contending states of a hierarchy leading to that supreme form of knowledge, that gnosis of the purified heart which is ultimately none other than the unitive and unifying knowledge of the One and the most profound realization of Unity (*al-tawhid*) which is the Alpha and Omega of the Islamic revelation" (ibid:74).

Thus "knowledge" in itself is a most complex Islamic cultural category that implies a range of intellectual-textual (*'ilm*), intuitive (*ma'arifa*), and mystical (*tasawwuf*) approaches to the world.

But what is especially interesting here is that this Islamic "reverence for knowledge" (Rosenthal 1970:18) rests simultaneously on the sublime immutability of religious knowledge as it is inscribed in the Qur'an and embodied in the collected *Hadith* (or *Sunna*, the authenticated accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions),⁷

⁷ An "authenticated" account means that a deed or saying that has been attributed to the Prophet Muhammad can be traced back to him through an actual chain of known individuals who, it is presumed, have preserved the integrity of the hadith. For example, a hadith reads in this way: "On the authority of Abu Hamza Anas ibn Malik, the servant of the Messenger of Allah, who said: None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself" (from Forty Hadith, compiled by the 13th century Syrian scholar An-Nawawi and translated by Ezzedim Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, 1976, pg. 56). As the translators of An-Nawawi's compilation explain, there are different degrees or "ranks" of authorized hadiths, the most authentic of which are called *musnad* hadiths, those "with a complete chain of authorities from the narrator to the Prophet himself" (ibid:106). A *mursal* hadith "is one where

as well as on the necessity of its interpretation. At least from the late eighth century A.D., the theses and commentaries of Islam's speculative theologians, theosophers, and jurists grew out of their attempts to develop methods for negotiating this tension in their interpretations of the foundational texts (the Qur'an and the Sunna) (Rosenthal 1970; Rahman 1982).⁸ On the one hand, their deliberations gave rise to the four main schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam -- the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i, and the Hanbali. More specifically, in the Shafi'i school, a set of hermeneutical techniques was established

the chain of authorities ends with the Follower [a Muslim who knew a Companion] and does not give the name of the Companion who lies, in the chain, between the Follower and the Prophet himself" (*ibid*).

⁸ Each of these schools constituted a variation or different "method" for interpreting and applying the knowledge that flowed from the Qur'an and Sunna as a social, moral, and legal paradigm for Islamic living. But exploring the concept of knowledge in Islamic hermeneutical thought would pull us into an intellectual history of Islam that is well beyond scope of this dissertation. See instead: A. Allamah ("The History of the Qur'an" in Tawhid [in 4 parts] vol 4(3), vol 5, nos. 1,2,3 1987); Ibn Khaldun (The Muqaddima, 1967); Muhammad Abdul Quasem (The Jewels of the Qur'an: The Theory of al-Ghazzali, 1977); F.E. Peters (A Reader in Classical Islam, 1994); Fazlur Rahman (Islam and Modernity: The Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition, 1982, and Islam, 1966); Andrew Rippen, (Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an, 1988); Muhammad Martyr, ("Thematic Approach to Qur'anic Exegesis" in Tawhid 6(3), 1989). J.Schacht (The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence, 1950), N.J.Coulson (A History of Islamic Law, 1964).

which, although firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith,⁹ hinged ultimately on the discerning mind of a qualified interpreter, (as in the act of *ijtihad*, "independent judgement"), or interpreters, (as in the act of *ijma*, arriving at a "consensus" among the community).¹⁰ Thus Eickelman and Piscatori point out that "the significance of the texts [the Qur'an and Sunna] derives not from their inherent centrality but from the contingent political, social, and economic circumstances of those interpreting them" (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990:14). However, even though the interpretive process is both subjective and contingent on a range of wider circumstances, this does not distract from the "inherent centrality" of the texts; rather, this centrality is expected to take on (different) meaning(s) through interpretation.

In a pivotal critique of essentialist thinking about Islam, Talal Asad argued that the *contested nature* of

⁹ Shafi'i jurisprudence accords special status to the Hadith. The founder of the Shafi'i school, jurist Muhammad al-Shafi'i (d. 820) argued that "when the Qur'an said 'We have sent down to you the Book and the Wisdom' (Surat Al Imran, 113), it meant by the second term *al-Hikma* [wisdom], the Hadith; thus Hadith was given a semi-divine inspiration as a source of guidance for mankind, especially as al-Shafi'i further laid special emphasis on the primacy of traditions emanating from the Prophet himself" (Maulanna Muhamad Ali, 1988: vi).

¹⁰ This ideal of the consensus of the community usually translates as consensus among those qualified bearers of Islamic expertise. Significantly, then, the key questions become how, in any one society, are those qualifications determined and authorized, and who comes to possess them? This is addressed below in section IV of the Introduction.

interpretation is itself a constitutive part of any Islamic "tradition" (Asad 1986). Perhaps it is this capacity for argument and debate that led to the development in Islam of what John Bowen has called "knowledge genealogies" (Bowen 1993a:186), that is, methods or traditions used by Muslims to establish the authenticity of, and thereby authorize, Qur'anic recitational styles, stories about the Prophet, or Sufi teachings and practices. These methods are referred to as "genealogies" because they identify lineages or lines of descent that link each of these discourses in a direct chain, in time and space, to their foundational, "authentic" past. In this way, "these knowledge genealogies make possible Islam's nonlocalization: they stretch over national and regional boundaries, creating a web of discursive, history-based authority" (ibid).

Thus an historically mediated, dynamic tension exists between the "transcendence" (divine immutability, timelessness) and "presence" (the worldliness of interpretation) of Islamic knowledge, an *acknowledged* tension that makes it possible for Muslims to engage the revelation not only in its own terms, but in terms of the lives of believers. I think the orientalist tendency to conceptualize Islam in terms of so many sets of dichotomous pairs -- universal/local, official/popular, doctrine/ritual, knowledge/belief, central/peripheral Islamic lands -- is in part the result of an attempt to control the production of

knowledge about Islam. It does so by categorizing, and thereby reifying the historical, cultural, and translocal dynamics of explicitly Muslim ways of producing knowledge about Islam that this creative tension has historically engendered.

The question of interpretation becomes critical for understanding the social construction of Islamic knowledge as it relates to the identification of Islamic knowledge "experts" at two levels. The first, as already noted, concerns assumptions (both "emic" and "etic") about the nature of Islamic knowledge as a scripturally based epistemology. As Dale Eickelman argues, "historians and sociologists have tended to take at face value the ideological claim in Islam of the fixed nature of religious knowledge" (1978:490). Thus in his study of the madrasa tradition of advanced Islamic learning in Morocco, Eickelman observed that "...an intellectual tradition which emphasizes fixity and memory as characteristic of many traditions of religious knowledge can still be capable of considerable flexibility" (*ibid*). Here, Brinkley Messick's work on the interpretation and application of Islamic legal knowledge in Ibb, Yemen makes a most significant contribution (Messick 1986).

In this work Messick calls attention to the methods and institutions of interpretation that indigenous people

explicitly define and use themselves."¹¹ He does this by exploring the social and hermeneutical role of the mufti, a scholar-jurist who "projected his knowledge beyond the confines of the madrasa [religious school] to address the affairs of the community", and who "in ideal terms, was an intermediate figure retaining the purity of the madrasa while approaching the rough and tumble of the mahkama [law court]" (110). Briefly, Messick's findings point to the dynamism and inventiveness of the fatwa -- a non-binding opinion or judgement that muftis are authorized (by scripture as "those who know") to issue upon the request of "lay questioners" (108).¹² Fatwas are usually derived by exercising independent judgement (*ijtihad*), a method which is anchored in analogical reasoning (*qiya*), whereby "new facts are interpreted with reference to existing text, and, conversely, new text [commentaries and documents] with reference to existing fact" (112). Thus the fatwa, although rooted in textually-based knowledge, is derived through a dialectical process that correlates text and context: that is, admitting the "mundane, earth-hugging realities" of

¹¹ He calls these "second or third order constructions" as opposed to "native interpretations embedded in everyday life that are not noticed as interpretations" *per se*. In this way Messick likens systems of "native hermeneutics" to anthropological interpretations of "'native' common sense" (1986: 103; 117).

¹² Messick describes the method of issuing fatwa historically and in counterdistinction to the binding or enforceable pronouncement of an Islamic judge in the court of law (pp. 106-116).

ordinary petitioners into the realm of religious scholarly consideration required that "analogical extensions of the body of textual theory" be made (117). Thus scripture does not dominate the social context in which it is invoked; instead it becomes a dynamic part of it, and as such its meaning is contingent, not monolithic (cf Fischer and Abedi 1990:93-149). Overall, as Messick writes, "the interrelated systems of the madrasa, the muftiship, and the court serve to bring knowledge into the world, and the world into knowledge" (104).

A final point I'd like to draw from Messick's work is that it is largely the mufti's interpretive style -- the way he demonstrates and applies his scholarship -- that identifies him as an expert who cannot be located exclusively within the confines of the court, the madrasa, or among the community of believers.¹³ Even though Messick's case is specific to the town of Ibb, it exemplifies the shifting and negotiable boundaries of even the more formal roles attributed to Islamic knowledge experts. Not only can the mufti negotiate the present through the transcendent (and vice versa); his expertise enables him to mediate exchanges between very real spheres

¹³ Messick links the role and images of the modern state to his case by remarking on the court. The court is the "quintessential public forum, a locus for the coercive forces of state power, represented by the judges' soldier-retainers and now the police and prosecutors" (110). Thus the mufti "distances himself from the court" since it is susceptible to "corruption, coercion, and "error" (103).

of daily experience, while remaining removed from and unscathed by them. Curiously, it seems, as "one who knows", he is liable to no one.

The second level at which interpretation is critical for understanding how the social construction of Islamic knowledge is linked to the identification of Islamic "experts" also concerns the relationship between text and context, but not in terms of Islamic legal discourse and methods. Instead, this "level" is located in the dialectic between, on the one hand, the use of Qur'anic references in the curative routines of Zanzibari medicinal practitioners (waganga), and, on the other, local commentary about these uses. In more general terms, this act of interpretation can be understood as the process by which "exceptional" or "expert" Islamic knowledge comes to be assessed and differentiated from "common knowledge" of Islam. Now what is particularly interesting about this process is that the "outcome", as it were, is subject not only to individual variation, but also to wider social, political, and material conditions that shape the lives and experiences of those individuals -- sometimes as a familial, ethnic, class, or even sub-national collectivity, and other times, far more idiosyncratically.¹⁴ While there is much more to say about

¹⁴ That is, not all Zanzibaris will necessarily distinguish common from expert Islamic knowledge in the same way; nor will they assess the authenticity, legitimacy, or efficacy of particular definitions or uses of "expert" knowledge in the same way.

these issues, for now I want to ground this process in an example that brings to light some of the factors at play.

The following case shows how the identification of Islamic "expertise" is contingent upon local ideas held about the "external" and "internal" knowledge of the Qur'an. I should note at the outset that these notions of "external" (*nje*) and "internal" (*ndani*) Qur'anic knowledge are not parochialized versions of textual and mystical Islamic knowledge respectively, but rather are constructs that emerged out of local explanations about ways of knowing the Qur'an that effectively bring it into the world to "work" on behalf of others.

The Qur'an itself makes reference to the depth of its message, encouraging and cautioning (almost daring) the individual believer to delve beneath its literal surface and grasp the poetic subtlety of its hidden or inner meanings (cf Fischer and Abedi 1990).¹⁵ The depths of meaning which

¹⁵ Al-Ghazzali's poetic commentary calls attention to the non-discursive quality of apprehending the depth of Qur'anic meaning: "In short, know that everything which you are likely to understand is presented to you by the Qur'an in such a way that if in sleep you were studying the Protected Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*) with your soul, it would be related to you through a suitable symbol which needs interpretation. Know that interpretation of the Qur'an (*ta'wil*) occupies the place of interpretation of dreams (*ta'wir*). This is why we have said that a commentator of the Qur'an (*al-mufasssir*) is concerned with its *rind*, since the commentator who translates the outward meaning of the ring, genitals, and mouths is not like him who understands that the real meaning is calling out to prayer before dawn" (from a translation and annotation of al-Ghazali's Kitab Jawahir al-Qur'an by M.A. Quasem, 1977:52).

are suggested by this sort of self-referentiality in the Qur'an have important social consequences. For instance, being recognized as an Islamic knowledge "expert" depends in part on one's ability to evidence his/her apprehension of these "hidden" or "internal" meanings. This is illustrated by discussions I had with two devout and enthusiastically analytical friends of mine, Mzee Ngara Hamad and Bwana Khalil Aziz.

While Mzee Ngara explained to me the nature of the "external" and "inner" meanings of the Qur'an,¹⁶ Bwana Khalil described a particular *mganga* (medicinal practitioner) and his expertise as an example of how these levels of Qur'anic meaning involve different levels of Islamic knowledge. According to Bwana Khalil, himself fluent in the Arabic language, Bwana Omari was a highly reputed *mganga*, who did not, however, know Arabic and could not understand a literal reading of the Qur'an -- its "*maana ya nje*", or "external meaning", in Mzee Ngara's words. However, Bwana Omari did possess knowledge of the *ayas* "*za mapoza*", that is, how to identify and use *ayas* from the Qur'an that had special curative powers when used, combined, and prepared in the proper ways.¹⁷ This knowledge reflected his grasp of the "*maana ya ndani*", the "inner meanings" of

¹⁶ From interview with Mzee Ngara,

¹⁷ Indeed, this would have been possible without any kind of literacy since this *mganga*, like many others, learned his craft by apprenticing with his elders.

the ayas, that is, knowing the reason behind their revelation (the story they tell) as well as the context and purpose of their having been sent to the Prophet (their "*sababu ya kuiteremka*").

Knowledge of the "inner meanings" of the Qur'an is considered valid or authentic because of the manner in which particular ayas are believed to act on the world, namely through the power of analogy. This interpretive technique likens the causes or conditions of a patient's troubling experience or circumstance to various events in the days of the Prophet. Thus the *Islamic* expertise that Bwana Omari is thought to have possessed -- in this example, knowledge of the inner meanings of the ayas and thus their curative powers -- was evidenced in his stylized method of analogically applying Islamic references to the lives of his patients. This makes sense and is consistent with Islamic methods of interpretation which, as we saw above, use *qiya* (analogical reasoning) in the exercise of *ijtihad* by jurists.

The case of Bwana Omari is especially interesting for showing us how the technique of analogy promotes the use of the Qur'an in curative practices -- regardless of whether the practices themselves are considered efficacious or even allowable in one's Islamic paradigm for living. It could even be argued that the value that is placed on knowing the "hidden" or "internal" meanings of the Qur'an deflected

attention away from this mganga's inability to read (and comprehend) the "external" text. But why should that matter? Indeed, whether or not he could actually interpret or translate the text of the Qur'an was, in this context, irrelevant. From this we can begin to see how local interpretations of what constitutes Islamic "expertise" are closely linked to social context and to *ways of knowing*, that is, how knowledge is demonstrated or performed -- a point to which I will return below. As a final note, analogical "talent", in a word, makes it possible to give Islamic valences to both collective and idiosyncratic concerns, issues, and conditions of life as it is lived by community members in the moment, thereby keeping the process of defining Islamic expertise dynamic and germane in a range of social circumstances that are not necessarily understood or defined as "religious".

In a similar vein, John Bowen comments on the usefulness of Talal Asad's distinction "between 'theological discourse' (discourse about religion) and 'liturgical utterances' (ways of speaking employed in praying, sacrificing, or preaching)" (Bowen 1993b:10). In his own research on Islamic knowledge and practice among the agrarian Gayo in highland Sumatra, Bowen observed that "Gayo [Islamic] discourses are *dispersive* in that they cannot be resolved into a single set of symbols or ideas" (*italics original*) (ibid). Rather than locating the production of

Islamic knowledge -- and local commentaries on it -- exclusively in the madrasa, Bowen is concerned with illuminating the social reproduction of knowledge through analyses of Islam-imbued speech events (ranging from everyday discourse, to ritual practice, to scholarly exegeses), the social relations that underlie them, and the symbolic constructions that mediate them. These events are shaped by wider historical and political conditions, such as the development of reformist Muslim discourse which Bowen examines in articulation with local practices and knowledge(s) about Islam among the Gayo.

Although Bowen is not so concerned with the process by which individuals come to be identified as Islamic knowledge "experts", his work is particularly relevant to this study in that he manages, among other things, to break down categorical boundaries that have "traditionally" (that is, both in academic theory and for indigenous practitioners themselves) structured arenas of Islamic discourse. In doing so, ideas about what constitutes Islamic knowledge and practice -- however grounded they may be in the authoritative texts -- can be captured and understood in the very contexts, places, and socio-historical conjunctures of their production.

b. Referential and performative modes in the definition of religious knowledge: Islamic discursive practices in Zanzibar

"Asking is the means. Knowing how to ask is the first knowledge. And language, to be exact, is the most ancient method of action." Alain, 1934, pg. 35

"The poetic word, like the tone, is absolute presence."

McClain, 1981, pg.115

The explicitly oral manner in which the Qur'anic revelations were transmitted to the Prophet constitutes a primary feature in the identification of Islamic knowledge. As William Graham points out in a discussion on *tajwid* (the rules governing the precise accent, phonetics, rhythm and temper in Qur'anic recitation [Surty 1988:15]), "chanting the Qur'an is a reenactment of the revelatory act itself, and how the Qur'an is vocally rendered not only matters, but matters ultimately" (Graham 1987:101).¹⁸ A hadith of the Prophet, cited by Graham, conveys the meaning of this belief most aptly: "Knowledge shall not perish so long as the Qur'an is recited" (*ibid*: 106). As a visiting Sudanese missionary in Zanzibar explained it to me, the Qur'an itself

¹⁸ In his book called A Course in Reciting the Qur'an (London, 1988: The Muslim Foundation), Muhammad Ibrahim Surty defines *tajwid* as a "science governed by deep-rooted static rules derived from the oral recitation of the Qur'an by the Prophet Muhammad (s.w.a.s.) after hearing the revelation from the Angel Gabriel. This science preserves the meaning of the revealed words of Allah in sound and expression, protects it from any alteration and retains the unique method of recitation." Thus, as Kristina Nelson writes, "the sound itself has a divine source and significance, and according to Muslim tradition, is significant to meaning" (1985:14).

is the miracle of Islam: it challenged and defeated the Arabs in their own style of expertise -- their poetry and the language which gave it life. In a discussion of the historical events that led to the compilation of the Qur'anic revelations into a written text (called the "Uthmanic Cannon"), Labib as-Said reminds us that the knowledge embodied therein had originally come into being as oral tradition (as-Said 1975:53-60). Thus for believers, Qur'anic meaning is, at one level, constituted as an aesthetic, aural experience. Indeed, while mention is consistently and necessarily made by researchers of the centrality of recitation in Islamic traditions, it is equally important, as McClain (1981) points out, to call attention to the impressions or "tonal images" that such recitations create in the listener (cf Nelson 1985).¹⁹

Thus while Islamic knowledge refers to and derives its content and instructive authority ultimately from the Qur'an and Hadith²⁰, it is also defined performatively (cf Fischer and Abedi 1990). Reciting *salat*, *dua* (obligatory and supplicatory prayer, respectively), *zikiri* (remembrance of God by repeating his names), or *tawasali* (intercession), constitute Islamic knowledge practices -- discursive

¹⁹ See also Oleg Grabar (1976 and 1978) for a discussion of the themes and ideas conveyed in Islamic visual art, and the impressions that geometric, floral, and arabesque images might create upon the viewer/believer.

²⁰ This would also include legal and theosophical commentaries on the Qur'an and Hadith.

practices -- which, in their performance, create for and signal to Muslims some quality of apprehension and relationship to God.

For example, dua are an especially popular form of discursive practice since it is through prayer that individuals communicate with and make entreaties to God. As my colleague Bwana Khalil explained, having your dua received by God is contingent, in a sense, on two creative components -- composition and performance. However, many individuals feel that they lack the knowledge and skill required to spontaneously compose and recite a quality dua. This problem is resolved by reading already prepared dua from booklets (written in Arabic with Kiswahili translations) that are available at shops in town. As Bwana Khalil put it:

You can use your own words to recite dua, but we Muslims think we don't know the best words with which to communicate our problems to God. There are ways of addressing Him that are more effective than others, and these ways have been written down by learned sheikhs in books. Thousands of dua have been collected in this way. The dua is complete with blanks that you fill in with names. This all emerges from the phenomenon of Islam: all dua are taken from the Qur'an, the events and teachings of all the prophets. These prophets encountered difficulties of all kinds, for which they prayed to God for help; because God answered their prayers, these particular dua are the foundation of those we now use.

Tawasali, meaning literally "to pass through", is a particular form of dua in which an event from the Prophetic past, such as the Battle of Badr, is invoked as a medium to

influence or bless the present. The intention is to make an appeal to God by praying through (not to, Khalil emphasized) the *baraka* or grace of, in this case, the Companions of Muhammad who fought this exalted battle. Moreover *tawasali* is a particularly significant form of discursive practice because of the social relationship it implies. The prayers of particular individuals are often solicited as the "medium" through which appeals to God are made, individuals who are attributed, in the here and now, with having been blessed by God, or of being in God's favor.²¹ Khalil laughs,

When I recite dua, I must read from a prepared text. I have to read because when I raise my hands in supplication, no words will come out! And yet the prepared text is neither my own personal request, nor my own words....

This is why, he explains, sometimes it is better (than reading dua himself) to have someone special pray on his behalf, someone who knows how to appeal to God properly, someone who prays beautifully.

As I explore below, the manner or contexts in which an individual or group performs Islamic knowledge practices may constitute a feature or personal attribute that distinguishes them from others. *Mswalihina*, for instance, refers to a person who demonstrates conspicuous dedication

²¹ While such individuals are sometimes called *mwombezi* (one who prays on behalf of another, an intercessor), this use of the term has potentially blasphemous connotations, and tends to be reserved instead for reference to the Prophet Muhammad.

to the devotional practices prescribed in Islam, including, of course, the act of prayer, as the term itself implies (from *kuswali*, to pray). Also, the *makhalifa* or leaders of the *tarika* (Sufi brotherhoods) in Zanzibar are, together with their followers, more commonly referred to as the "*watu wa zikiri*" (the "zikiri people"), that is, they are identified in terms of the style of their devotional practice, the *zikiri*: the collective remembrance of God through repeated invocation of his names. This is not to say that all Muslims who perform *zikiri* are necessarily affiliated with the *tarika*. Indeed, *zikiri* is even performed at spirit calling sessions, since some spirits, such as the *ruhani*, a Muslim spirit, are especially attracted to Islamic devotional recitations. In a sense, the *ruhani* makes its identity known to humans by its preference for this style of being summoned.

Performance, then, is not a purely conservative force. While it does reiterate the constitutive symbols of Islam, and maintains continuity with and orients practitioners as Muslims to an authentic, Islamic past and future (Asad 1986:14-15), performance also establishes the contexts in which Islamic references are used in the mediation of social relations, and in the recognition of a range of individuals as the bearers of Islamic expertise. As a product, then, of both referential and performative modes of definition, Islamic knowledge derives its social significance not only

in what it instructs people to do, but also in the piety it implies, the virtue it bestows, the power its invocation engenders, and in the authority, however contested, it confers upon the "exceptional".

Islamic knowledge comprises intellectual and devotional qualities which are expressed in a range of performative styles. In Zanzibar, Islamic instruction, recitation (of the Qur'an or extemporaneous prayer, especially when recited on the behalf of others), and the use of Islamic knowledge in local therapeutic routines are genres of discursive practice that convey different impressions of Islamic knowledge to participants. Its social significance is thus renewed and asserted but in a range of forms: knowledge that informs and reaffirms one's identity as a Muslim; knowledge as embodied in a person by virtue of their exceptional piety; or knowledge as a reified (materialized) symbol with the power, if manipulated properly, to act on the world. This does not mean, however, that all Muslims in Zanzibar concede that these practices and the social relations they create and represent are equally permissible within their Islamic paradigm for living. As I discussed earlier, Zanzibar has essentialist groups whose constituents have aspired to pinpoint and correct what they view to be the lax or transgressive practices of their Muslim brethren. It is interesting, however, that a reconciliation of differences, or a striving towards consensus regarding the

"correct" form and meaning of the practices that embody and express Islamic knowledge does not dominate or censor the ongoing exchanges of cultural information and commentary that Islamic media make possible. Instead, these social exchanges, which express a range of experiences from personal affliction to social protest, are facilitated by this heterogeneity (or, better, tolerant disinterest in homogeneity) and, especially, the social relationships it helps to create. Thus (as I discuss in chapters five, six, and seven) the contexts and discursive practices which constitute these exchanges -- a spirit calling session, a prayer recited on behalf of another, an allegorical reference to a hadith -- are features of a wider Islamic culture in Zanzibar where knowledges about spiritual, bodily, and social well being, distress, or empowerment do not conform to or require an exclusive interpretation or public declaration of what "Islam" is or necessarily ought to be.

III. Sorting Terms, Mapping Contingencies: problems and lessons in naming and meeting "experts"

Different ways of conceptualizing and demonstrating Islamic expertise will generate different pictures of the contours of its social distribution. As I described in an earlier example, a *mganga* was thought to demonstrate a particular style of Islamic expertise because of the conceptualizations of Islamic knowledge that the

commentators themselves brought to their interpretation of the *mganga's* practices. This man was not identified as an Islamic expert per se, but rather as a *mganga* who possessed a particular kind of Islamic expertise -- one, moreover, who was known for his specialization in the field of spirits.

This is not to say, however, that distinct categories of "Islamic expert" do not exist in Zanzibar. Indeed, the first time I inquired about meeting "Islamic religious specialists" or "sheikhs" I was taken straight away to the (then) Chief Kadhi Ameir Tadjo²² and his assistant Sheikh Mussa Makungu, the latter of whom hosted a radio show every Friday where he addressed and gave advice on theological issues and all sorts of personal problems sent in to him by his listeners. I was also whisked off by a Zanzibari colleague to meet the Hadrami sheikh Abdallah Bakathiri as "the" sheikh to meet if anyone was going to do research on Islam in Zanzibar; his madrasa, after all, was the most well known, best subsidized, and produced the best maulidi performers around -- not to mention the prestige and distinction his eminent father and grandfather, both buried there, continue to bestow on the compound. Islamic subjects including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis),

²² Meeting the Chief Kadhi was also a necessary part of my fieldwork. Conducting research on Islam in Zanzibar required that I begin by introducing myself to the proper "authorities", the most senior of which was the government appointed Chief Kadhi. Sheikh Ameir Tadjo passed away soon after I left the field, leaving Sheikh Mussa Makungu to take his place.

tawhid (the doctrine of Oneness of God), and the Hadith -- all branches of Islamic religious knowledge -- were taught at his madrasa. But Islamic knowledge is not confined, as it were, within the walls of the madrasa; how it gets carried into and redefined through a range of other social contexts is much of what this study is about. Thus I began to see that the ways in which I asked questions about meeting "experts", and the assumptions I made about this category ran the risk of preempting a view of the contingencies and points of overlap between "categories", that is, of the shifting, "dispersive" nature not only of Islamic discourse, but also of the very process through which individuals come to be identified as the bearers of Islamic expertise. In this way I learned that it was the *social relations of Islamic expertise* that I was after, not (at least at first) the naming of "experts" themselves.

In his study of Islamic experts in a village in Mayotte, the Comoro Islands (1990a and 1990b), anthropologist Michael Lambeck is intrigued by a very similar set of issues. "When we examine 'culture' in Mayotte," Lambeck writes, "we see a complex layering of multiple forms of knowledge" (1990a:35). More specifically, Lambeck found that "knowledge is organized into three main explicitly distinguished disciplines" which he translates as sacred Islamic, astrology or cosmology, and spirit possession (1990a), with distinct categories of expert in each. By focussing on the

practices of Qur'anic experts in one particular village, Lambeck's overarching aim is to understand how such heterogeneous forms of knowledge articulate, both conceptually and socially, and how their articulation might constrain or promote the personal authority and autonomy of the expert. He argues that the experts' knowledge becomes accessible and meaningful to others in the village through dialogue, that is, through practice -- their recitation, interpretation, and commentaries on the Qur'an and its application to the social world of the community. Indeed, it is through these discursive practices, and the social relations upon which they are based, that experts negotiate the ever-present tension between scriptural and personal authority in the village (1990b):

The more fundis [Qur'anic experts] know, the greater their authority. Yet the more scholarship they conduct, the more likely they are to discover challenges to current assumptions. Hence they encounter the paradox that they can only afford to be so critical of current mores before their attitude is turned against them as an attribute not fitting the practice of a fundi, whose responsibility lies precisely in upholding the mores of the community (1990a:22-23).

Lambeck's findings seem to indicate that the social relations of knowledge constitute a rather conservative social force in the village, since the expert can, so to speak, go just so far. This contrasts somewhat with my understanding of the consequences of the practices of "fundis" in the Zanzibari setting, where the performative dimension of knowledge has potentially creative, even

political implications for the social order, and for the identification of individuals as "experts". But I think this contrast is due in part to differences in the scale, setting, and history of the places under study -- indeed, possessing Islamic expertise in a small village will have different social consequences than in a heterogeneous, cosmopolitan town like Zanzibar, particularly where access to Islamic knowledge is, comparatively speaking, less restricted.²³ Moreover, as I described above, my approach is to focus on the social contexts and relations of expertise, and to examine how these in turn impact on the definition or categorization of individuals as experts -- be they Qur'anic scholars, astrologers, spirit experts, medicinal practitioners, or various combinations of these.

In an important discussion on "religious networks among the Swahili", Farouk Topan constructs a kind of topology depicting three networks of authority on the East African coast: the ulama (scholar-jurists), the sufi tarika (mystical, charismatic leaders), and finally, the waganga, practitioners of "traditional" (African) cosmology "influenced by Muslim beliefs and practices" (Topan n.d.). In this work Topan discusses these networks in their social and historical dimensions and concludes with a point that is especially pertinent:

²³ Unfortunately, further comparison between the village in Mayotte and Zanzibar Town goes beyond the topic at hand.

An overlap of personnel is another feature one notes in the operation of the networks. The pattern of overlap seems to be [that] a member of the 'ulama may belong to the tarika and a tarika leader may be a mganga. An overlap between the ['ulama and the waganga networks] is rare, but it does exist, i.e., a mwalimu [Islamic teacher] who is also a mganga. This is an area that requires further research... [also] at the level of the "clients" who could well belong to all the three networks" (pg. 19).

Although Topan was examining Islamic authority and not Islamic expertise per se, his observations speak to my own findings in Zanzibar, even the "rare" case of a mwalimu who is a mganga (as is described in a forthcoming portrait of Bwana Shaafi). But I'd like to extend Topan's inquiry by trying to understand the wider meanings, circumstances, or reasons for these distinctions, especially since, at least in Zanzibar, there is "overlap" in the practices, knowledges, and social relations through which these types are reproduced. I think the identification, or better the personification of "experts", is a process that can illuminate other, often contested, unresolved issues in Zanzibar having to do with notions of prestige, difference, qualification, belief, power, and authenticity -- issues I think are at play in the construction of Islamic expertise. Finally, Topan raises a key point about "clients". In my own research, those would be individuals who consult with or call upon Islamic knowledge experts (however they are identified) for a variety of reasons. Who specifically do clients seek out, and what are they looking for? Is this

the point where distinctions get made, pulled apart, even ignored? These questions are explored in the portraits of individuals presented throughout the dissertation, and in chapters five, six, and seven, which discuss the various forms, contexts, and social relations through which Islamic expertise is brought into the social world.

Generally speaking, then, individuals with expert knowledge of Islam in Zanzibar are not limited to, or cannot be described collectively as religious scholars or specialists per se. Indeed, the term "religious specialist", which I used at the beginning of my research in Zanzibar, was too limited a social category to encompass the various individuals who are considered to have Islamic expertise. Described locally in broad terms as *watu wenye ujuzi saana wa dini ya kiislamu*, (people with exceptional knowledge of Islam), these individuals were called to my attention by friends and informants who had either heard of or consulted with them, and who regarded them as exceptional in the ways in which they demonstrated or used their knowledge of Islam. Thus the term "Islamic knowledge expert" (or "bearer of Islamic expertise") better describes the Zanzibari scene because it is both a more inclusive and relative term: that is, while "Islamic knowledge expert" does set apart individuals who somehow demonstrate to others exceptional knowledge of Islam, the meaning it conveys, and the authority it implies, is open to a range of often

conflicting individual interpretations. For instance, there are individuals known for their ability (or, better, "gift") to recite dua upon the request of others by spontaneously drawing upon Qur'anic references and analogies infused with the grace of the Prophetic past, or others who demonstrate proficiency (and "success") in the application of Islamic knowledge for curative or prophylactic purposes, controversial though they may be. These persons are routinely consulted by people who regard such Islamic knowledge practices as necessary to their well-being. Thus the social roles defined by terms such as *kadhi* (judge), *imamu* or *hatibu* (leader in congregational prayer, religious orator/preacher), *khalifa* (tarika leader), *maalim* or *ustaadhi* (madrasa instructors) do not exhaust the ways in which Islamic expertise can contribute to the social construction of a person, nor do they necessarily convey a single, undisputed impression of what such individuals actually (or putatively) "know" or "do" with their knowledge; thus such categorical terms of reference alone cannot adequately represent the range of cultural meanings (e.g., "gift", "success") or social expectations that Islamic expertise can imply for Muslims.

In an article entitled "Ritual Specialists, Ambiguity and Power in Tuareg Society", Susan Rasumssen develops a compelling and complex argument that the social roles, knowledges, and images of the smith and the marabout (a

Muslim figure) "do not conform to a rigid, structural dichotomy between 'magician' and 'saint', but are alternately competing, aligned, opposed, complementary, and overlapping" (1992:106). She argues that "these shifts have to do with the ways in which mystic powers are defined according to their effects in different contexts and from different perspectives: effects that are unintended as well as intended, and in reference to outside researcher as well as local residents" (ibid). Indeed, the shifting social roles and powers of the marabout and smith are mutually constitutive and context dependent, a process which is shaped by and reflects "not only the growing fluidity and ambiguity of wealth, power, and descent in Tuareg society, but also the active reconstruction and transformation by the ritual specialists themselves of each other's powers, as well as of cultural representations of them" (ibid:107). A fuller discussion of Rasmussen's research would take us beyond the topic at hand. What I find especially relevant here is her point that even the boundaries between saint and smith -- seemingly defined by notions of purity and impurity, high and low status, virtuous and immoral mystical powers and intentions -- are in reality shifting and ambiguous; the meanings of these categories are in fact arbitrated and mediated by the representations that significant others confer upon them.

As the following chapters attempt to show, the identification of individuals as Islamic knowledge experts is not moored in social categories but rather is contingent upon social relationships -- relationships formed through the demonstration and recognition of Islamic expertise, and shaped by the personal and political circumstances that underlie them.

IV. Knowledge and power; ideology making and unmaking

As we have seen, Islamic knowledge constitutes an historical domain of argument and debate. As such, Islamic knowledge practices comprise a range of possible discourses that bring together meaning and agency, and as such, express experience. Islamic knowledge is creative symbolically in that, if properly understood and manipulated, it can be used to affect the world. It is also creative socially, since ideas about Islamic knowledge shape the relationships through which individuals come to be recognized as knowledge-bearers, or through which their identities as experts get realized. And it is creative as a discursive practice since its recitation and performance establish -- or enable people to claim -- social spaces, statuses, and connections. Thus Islamic knowledge is not restricted to the function of indexing information or ordering thought; we can say that it also has the potential to constitute domains and relations of power. As Juan Corradi writes, following Foucault:

"...power is not [only] located in a privileged site, like the state, but is produced in diverse settings... power does not simply impede, repress, pretend, but it also solicits, promotes, and sets in motion...power and knowledge are not alien to each other but intertwined in circuits whose diagrams must be drawn." (Corradi 1984:303; cf Foucault 1980:119).

Indeed, when efforts are made to control the sources, definitions, and dissemination of (or access to) Islamic knowledge, this constitutes an act of power that can have ramifications well beyond the more immediate, formative relation of control itself. In other words, control over Islamic knowledge is an important step in the process of ideology-making. By this I mean the process through which ideas about social difference get transformed into reified distinctions, lifting them out of the historical, reflexive moment of their construction; in this process, a totalizing, fixed set of attributes comes to be associated with a particular group, so that relations of social and economic control (power) come to be understood in terms of a particular set of (in this case, religious) qualifications.

The question, then, becomes, under what sorts of historical, political, and economic conditions do particular forms or interpretations of Islamic knowledge -- and the emblems or qualifications associated with them -- come to be authorized and promoted over others (Asad 1983; 1986)? What are the social consequences of this sort of privileging? These questions regarding the knowledge-power-

ideology nexus are addressed in the dissertation in two cases, both of which have already been introduced.

The first approaches the question of ideology-making in a historical context -- the late nineteenth century. In chapter two I examine the process under which the ulama of Zanzibar became authorized under the sultanate; I also examine the political-economic conditions and personalities -- namely, the leaders of the tarika, the Islamic mystical brotherhoods in East Africa -- responsible for the gradual weakening of the ulama's legitimacy. During this period, forms of Islamic religious knowledge were used locally to express changing realities on the coast. These realities were rooted in tensions between the indigenous coast and island dwellers and immigrant Arabs, between notions of ascribed and achieved statuses, and between, in Frederick Cooper's words, "relations of antagonism and affiliation" that shaped ties between ex- slaves and their masters (Cooper 1980:171). Islamic religious knowledge constituted an important "cultural resource" which was used to inform initiatives and negotiate and contest relations of power that affected groups differentially in the structure of domination on the coast during this time.

The second case focuses on the "essentialist" groups described earlier. These groups are mentioned throughout the dissertation largely because as a *self-conscious* group, their critique (discourse), social organization, even their

clothing in some instances, helped point out to me or throw into relief the broader, integrative issues with which I was grappling myself -- the politics of Islamic representation, the construction of authority, the often shifting or syncretic (thus, in their view, transgressive) nature of the practices and identities of Islamic "experts". In chapter eight, I discuss the essentialist groups as "ideology-makers" because their effort to establish a means of controlling religious orientation and practice in Zanzibar has the effect of reifying and elevating "Islam" as something above and separate from the vast majority of "tradition-bound" Zanzibari Muslims. Their discourse constitutes a critique of Zanzibari Islamic culture in which Zanzibari identity is itself reproved for being something other than "Muslim".

The emergence of these sheikhs in Zanzibar, the appeal they have (mostly among un- and underemployed young adults), and the various ways Zanzibaris in general have responded to them have to be situated within other wider political, economic, and social issues in Zanzibar which can, among other things, inform or influence the kinds of references that are invoked in such declarations of religious correctness and authority. Briefly, these would include: the effort to decentralize state control of the Zanzibari economy (started in the mid-nineteen eighties) and to encourage private enterprise and capital investment there in

ventures such as tourism, agro-industry, construction, and commerce; an escalation in the purchase and development of private properties (again largely with foreign capital) raising issues about citizenship and rights to land and housing; and, in the political sphere, the re-introduction of multiparty elections, the rhetoric of which has played on ethnic, class, and island-specific (that is, Pemba *versus* Unguja) interests and well as the older rifts between the island (Pemba and Unguja) and mainland (formally Tanganyika) "sub-nationalities" that have together constituted the troubled "Union" of Tanzania since 1964.

Together, these and other issues -- broad and overarching as they may be -- are not just remote "forces" shaping Zanzibari society, but are, in various ways, a part of day to day living there, and as such, are not necessarily discussed in distinctly "political", "religious", or "economic" terms. Thus the essentialist groups attempt to isolate or protect Islam from, on the one hand, local, "Swahili" cultural influences, and, on the other, from the corrupting trends introduced by the west via, for example, the tourist trade. In their view, "Islam" is being defined against two forces -- one the result of a passive, almost naive sort of cultural assimilation, the other, the result of the aggressive cultural impiety of western capital. I emphasize "cultural" here because, as the leader of one essentialist group explained to me, they are not resistant

to the *technological* innovations introduced by the west, nor are they, more broadly speaking, "anti-modern". Thus, the Islamic references they wield, the messages they convey, even the responses they elicit from people are not necessarily felt or expressed in exclusively religious terms. These and other issues raised by the essentialist cases are elaborated in chapters seven and eight.

A final issue concerning the control of Islamic knowledge involves a challenge to the usefulness of the notion of "Islamic institutions" which, as described by Carol Eastman (1984) in her study of Muslim identity and sexual segregation in Mombasa, lie exclusively within the purview and control of men. But what precisely are the parameters of "Islamic institutions"? Indeed, as Topan pointed out in his study of religious authority in coastal towns such as Mombasa, structures of authority in (Sunni) Islam are multiple, largely decentralized and socially embedded -- one reason why he speaks, I believe, in terms of networks rather than institutions.

Within the context of Islamic knowledge and instruction, we can talk about spaces, locations, roles, indeed, *traditions* (Asad 1986) that become authorized and get reproduced over time in meaningful and recognizable ways -- the madrasa, the kadhi's court, the mufti's fatwa. Moreover, we can talk about various forms of control over (or appropriation of) such spaces or traditions by, for

example, state officials, the elite, or simply men (as Eastman argues in her study), who then control the definition and dissemination of knowledge. But to assume that Islamic knowledge is defined specifically through "institutions" and the groups who control them precludes an understanding of the ways in which Islamic knowledge enters into -- or better, *is actively brought into* -- a range of social contexts which are not controlled by or defined in terms of a dominant group or structure.

These issues are approached in a presentation of the Islamic knowledge practices of Muslim women in Zanzibar in chapter five. Included here are portraits of several women who are recognized by both men and women as the bearers of Islamic expertise. I discuss these women in terms of their personal histories, their networks of learning, and the various practices in which they are involved. Examining a combination of factors such as class, descent, and piety, will, I hope, throw light on how Islamic knowledge is used in the negotiation of an eternal, but by no means absolute, sexually segregated Islamic paradigm of living.

V. Living in Zanzibar: Getting Connected

When I first arrived in Zanzibar, I spent most of my days at the East African Center for Research on Oral Traditions and African National Languages (EACROTANAL), the Research center with which I had affiliated and which

assisted me in obtaining my research clearance. Members of the staff also helped me adjust to Zanzibar living -- Bi Aziza taught me to cook²⁴, Talib Ramadhani Juma introduced me to Mwalimu Farouk, my Kiswahili tutor, who showed me around the market in town and neighborhoods in Ng'ambo. In particular, Bwana Khatib Makame Omar and Didier Rapanoel put me in touch with a number of key individuals discussed in this work. As such, they were instrumental in helping me to launch my research.

For instance, Khatib introduced me to the Chief Kadhi at the time, Sheikh Ameir Tadjjo, the assistant Chief Kadhi, Sheikh Mussa Makungu, and to Maalim Bakathiri, who appears in chapter three. Khatib also introduced me to Mzee Chuma, one of the several local healers (*mganga*) with whom I worked. Khatib and I spent hours discussing my interviews and findings, and his feedback and commentary played a critical role in working out my own analyses. Didier Rapanoel, the Language Officer at EACROTANAL introduced me to the Sufi Seyyid Silima (who appears in chapter six); and it was my acquaintance with Seyyid Silima that began my involvement with the Sufi brotherhoods in Zanzibar.

²⁴Bi Aziza Ali was the secretary of EACROTANAL at the time. Thanks to her I learned early on how to prepare a number of the standard Zanzibari dishes, such as *ndizi mbichi* (unripe bananas) with fish, *ndizi mbivu* (sweet, ripe bananas), and *wali wa nazi* (rice with coconut milk), as well as how to eat with others properly. Later, I would watch other friends prepare staples such as *muhogo* (cassava), and the special holiday rice dish, *pilau*. When available, cardamon is added to virtually every dish.

Meanwhile, after learning about my research on Islam, my Kiswahili tutor introduced me to one of his neighbors, Bi Mwanakhamisi, a woman who had an especially keen interest in studying the Qur'an and was quite active in attending religious lectures of various kinds. Indeed, Bi Mwanakhamisi took me to my first lecture in a series which I later learned was being sponsored by the "essentialist" sheikhs. It is through my contacts with her that I was able to learn more about the activities that orbited around one of the most popular and charismatic sheikhs of this religiously ardent cohort.

Another key person whom I met early on is a man named Mzee Abbasi Ali Hamadi, who lived in Jang'ombe, a neighborhood in Ng'ambo. We were introduced through a mutual acquaintance, an Italian doctor who was working with Unicef. A husband and father of eight, Mzee Abbasi worked at several jobs; he was grounds keeper at the orphanage just outside of town, a night watchman at BIZANJE (the import/export parastatal in Stone Town which has since been dismantled), and a Qur'an school teacher, also at the orphanage. I believe that the early interest he took in my project and the particular individuals he introduced me to shaped the kinds of questions I would ask later as my research developed. When I began the project I had imagined that most of my research on Islamic knowledge would be conducted within Stone Town itself; but it was largely

through my early friendship with Mzee Abbasi that this initial image of my "research site" would be swiftly abandoned.

During the first several months of my stay in Zanzibar I lived in the EACROTANAL Guest House, located on the main southbound road about a half mile from the Center in town. I shared the upstairs apartment with Dawn Morgan, who was also a research affiliate of EACROTANAL at the time. When Dawn returned to Canada, I moved to a small apartment on the top floor of an old building in Vuga, a neighborhood on the south side of Stone Town. With this move, another network of relations opened up through my neighbors, in particular Khadija Miraji, my downstairs neighbor, and Yenu Shabaan, who lived around the corner from us.

These individuals comprised my "first tier" of social relationships, so to speak, from which other contacts stemmed. My point in mentioning them here is to show that methodologically, my research was not conducted in select neighborhoods or within a particular ethnic, religious, or geographically defined "community", but rather through social networks which brought me to areas throughout the town area²⁵ and into contact with men and women of all ages and backgrounds.²⁶ Through these networks, a landscape of

²⁵ That is, spanning Stone Town and Ng'ambo.

²⁶ As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, I worked primarily with Sunni (Shafi'i, and some Ibadhi) Muslims, who comprised the vast majority of the population. As such,

Islamic cultural expression emerged which was as varied as the social relations that shaped it.

VI. Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into two parts. **Part One** (chapters two, three and four) addresses the enduring issues of history, politics, and power in Zanzibar, especially as they relate to constructions of Islamic knowledge, prestige, authority, and Muslim identity. **Chapter Two** locates Zanzibar within the wider political economic context of the East African coast, with an eye to the events of the late 19th century. Drawing on issues and concepts introduced in chapter two, **Chapter Three** examines contemporary discourse about the politics of Islamic authority and prestige in Zanzibar, and how figures and events of the past are used to both promote and contest the authenticity of personal authority today. **Chapter Four** moves into Zanzibar's colonial past, and focuses on the identity and party politics of the period. I examine how these politics dovetailed with an ongoing but little publicized controversy -- largely between Arabs of means and colonial officials -- over the use of Arabic in government schools. The controversy throws light on how Arabic, as the religious

this designation does not define a single "community" (except perhaps ideologically, as in the "*Umma*", or community of Muslims, which technically should not exclude Muslims of other schools of thought).

language of Muslims, became symbolically important to the colonial state in its struggle to create an autonomous but politically malleable civil society.

Part Two (chapters five, six, and seven) examines the various contexts and performances through which Islamic knowledge is "brought into" the social world. **Chapter Five** presents a brief overview of Islamic religious instruction in Zanzibar, from a child's lessons in Qur'an school and the basic knowledge and skills they are taught as Muslims, to the more in-depth study groups based on student-mentor relationships. The majority of the chapter is devoted to discussion of a women's prayer and study group and the scholars around whom it revolves. **Chapters Six and Seven** examine the various forms and meanings given to Islamic knowledge in contexts outside those of religious education and practice per se. While **Chapter Six** examines how Islamic expertise is constituted through the social relations of piety, **Chapter Seven** explores the uses of Islamic expertise in a variety of curative practices.

Chapter Eight is the concluding piece, which takes a broader look at the current politics of Islamic knowledge and representation in Zanzibar. After a brief discussion of Islam and Zanzibari politics in the 1970s and 1980s, the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the "essentialists" -- their discourse, their social organization, and the various ways in which Zanzibaris generally have engaged or commented

on them. I argue that the bida'a ideology is not in fact a new phenomenon, and that while these cohorts' discourse is indeed essentializing, it also ebbs and flows; that is, it is not necessarily an entrenched or inward-looking reaction to political and social change. In this concluding discussion, a number of themes that were raised in earlier chapters of the dissertation converge, including the power of personal authority; the coexistence of heterogeneous forms of expertise and explanations of "correct" practice; the cultural uses of parody; and the relationship between social categories and the individuals they fail to describe.

PART ONE

**ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE IN ZANZIBAR:
THE POLITICS OF HISTORY AND IDENTITY**

CHAPTER TWO
Reflections on the Past:
Culture, Power, and Islam in the History of Zanzibar and the
East African Coast

The purpose of this chapter is to locate Zanzibar in the wider context of East African coastal culture and political economic history. This is important for several reasons. First, the social relations of Islamic knowledge and practice in Zanzibar have, of course, changed over time and cannot be understood in isolation from the actors, places, and events outside of Zanzibar that were to shape them. Second, the historical periods and events discussed in this chapter were chosen because they illustrate well the protean character of Islamic knowledge and culture as it developed on the coast and off-shore island groups. In this way, several themes concerning the contemporary social relations of Islamic knowledge are generated from history: how its definition, forms, and uses are shaped by shifting configurations of power and ideas about prestige; and how Islamic meanings have been brought into -- and transformed through -- the construction of complex coastal identities.

I begin by introducing the Omanis, whose presence in Zanzibar had a profound impact on shaping Zanzibar's political economic trajectory in the nineteenth century. Relying on the work of historians, archaeologists, and historical linguists, I then examine the settlement and social organization of the coastal towns, the place of

Islamic knowledge in coastal epistemology, and the construction of "Islamic descent identities" associated with the sharifs and Islamic scholars who migrated to the East African coast from the Hadramawt. This sets up the second and main portion of the chapter which explores the establishment of the ulama, an elite coterie of Islamic scholars in 19th century Zanzibar, as well as the personalities and events which ultimately weakened the bases of their authority.

I. The Omanis, the Mwenyi Mkuu, and the Crown

The Omanis became actively involved in the East African political scene largely as a consequence of their success in ousting the Portuguese from the Gulf of Hormuz in 1622, and in 1650, from Muscat itself.²⁷ When news of Portugal's loss to the Yorubi dynasts of Oman reached the "ruling families of the east African coast", the Africans turned to the Yorubis for assistance in ending their own subjugation by

²⁷ It should be noted that the Omanis have also been credited with being among the first Arabs to settle on the East African coast: when the fifth caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, 'Abd al-Malik was expanding his empire from Damascus to the east, "his efforts were stoutly withstood by two [Muslim] chiefs of Oman, two brothers named Suleiman and Said...who were probably the grandsons of a former Chieftain Abdel Julanda, who ruled over Oman in the time of the Prophet..." (Ingrams 1967:73). Succumbing eventually to defeat in around 695, the brothers "emigrated to the land of the Zinj [the land of the "Blacks"], taking their families and a number of their tribes with them" (ibid). For this "piece of history" Ingrams cites the *Futuh-el-Buldan*, a history written by Ahmed bin Yahya el Baladzory (no date provided).

the Portuguese, whose rule of the coast dated back to 1510 (Middleton and Campbell 1965:3; Ayany 1970:9). The Yorubi campaigns on the coast were successful, and "by 1729, the Portuguese had lost all of their East African possessions north of Mozambique..." (Middleton and Campbell 1965:3). One consequence of this success, however, was that the coast now came under nominal suzerainty of Oman; indeed, in the early 18th century, the Omanis built a fort on the western coast of Unguja, at Zanzibar Town. In 1745, the Busaidi dynasty supplanted the Yorubis in Muscat -- a changeover that was resisted by the powerful Mazrui (Yorubi) clans of Zanzibar's Pemba Island. But in 1822, local Zanzibari rulers appealed to the first Busaidi sultan of Oman, Seyyid Said bin Sultan to end Mazrui overrule in Pemba. This signalled the beginning of a politically and economically significant Busaidi presence in Zanzibar: ten years later, in 1832, Seyyid Said bin Sultan transferred the capital of his mercantile operations from Muscat to Zanzibar; it was a move which ushered in a period of East African history characterized by the florescence of merchant capitalism, and the rise of Busaidi hegemony on the coast.²⁸

²⁸ Indeed, Said encouraged foreign merchants -- namely, the Americans, the British, and the French -- to trade at Zanzibar, and even to open consulates in Zanzibar Town, which they did. In 1833 Said made a commercial treaty with the United States, in 1839 with Great Britain, and in 1844 with France (Hollingsworth 1975:6).

Said's decision to relocate from Muscat to Zanzibar was the result of a combination of factors that had been weakening the success of Oman's commercial activities in the Persian Gulf region; these included piracy, struggles over the terms of trade, and a decline in the repatriation of customs revenues to Oman (Allen 1982:121-123). Once in Zanzibar, Said developed extensive clove plantations, expanded up-country trade especially in slaves and ivory, and successfully encouraged Indian merchant-creditors to settle in Zanzibar and finance commercial operations there as they had done in Oman (Janmohammed, 1978; Sheriff, 1987).²⁹

As historian Abdul Sheriff has shown, Zanzibar's wealth in the pre-protectorate period of the 19th century -- based as it was on "two definable sectors, agricultural production on the off-shore islands themselves and the transit trade" -- was highly concentrated predominantly in the hands of the Busaidi ruling family and several Indian merchant firms (Sheriff 1987:116). However, Sheriff goes on to say that agricultural production became "increasingly subordinated" to the commercial sector since, among other factors, the subsequent fall in the price of cloves on the world market led many of the plantation owners to mortgage off their properties and become indebted to Indian financiers, many of

²⁹ In 1856, the (Omani) sultanate of Zanzibar became politically autonomous from Oman.

whom had become economically powerful through their near monopoly over customs farming.³⁰

On an earlier reconnaissance visit to Zanzibar in 1828, Said had met with the Mwinyi Mkuu, the recognized sovereign of the indigenous Wahadimu peoples who occupied the central and southern half of Unguja (Gray 1977:139). At this time, Zanzibar (Unguja Island) constituted a semi-centralized, loosely hierarchical polity with the Mwenyi Mkuu "presiding over a number of regional administrators or *masheha*" (Clayton 1981:3). In the villages, authority was vested in a council of elders (*wazee*) who hailed from the four principle families of the village, with the senior member acting as headman (Gray 1977:143-44). According to Sir John Milner Gray, the former Chief Justice of Zanzibar from 1943 to 1952, these councils selected an executive officer who collected and stored millet as a customary tithe, the "*ubani wa mji*", from each plot owner at the time of harvest, and who functioned as a liaison between the *wazee* and the *masheha*.³¹ Indeed, such a polity lent itself well to a system of indirect rule which Sultan Said managed through

³⁰ See Abdul Sheriff's Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873 (1987, London:James Currey) for an analysis of the social and political-economic configurations of merchant capital in East Africa.

³¹ It is interesting to note that the preferred staple among Zanzibaris has long since been switched to rice -- a preference that may reflect in part the assimilation of one of the symbols of prestige associated with Omani hegemony in the late nineteenth century.

his arrangements with the Mwenyi Mkuu -- a system which expedited the Sultan's expropriation of land for clove, sugar cane, and coconut plantations, and which ensured him a constant supply of corvee labor for harvesting and for the construction of various public works projects. This meant that indigenous farmers were moved off their land in the fertile western and central parts of the island and forced to settle in and cultivate the stony shores in the south and east. However, Gray also reported that masheha occasionally profited from selling plots of communal, inalienable land to Arab buyers (Gray 1977:145).

Meanwhile, tensions were evolving between the Mwenyi Mkuu and the Sultan, so that in 1860, Gray writes, the Mwenyi Mkuu "withdrew" from his home in Zanzibar Town and "took up his permanent residence at Dunga", eleven miles inland (1977:139). By 1873, the position of the Mwenyi Mkuu was without a male heir (ibid:145); by this time, however, the point was already moot. For one thing, an increase in the supply of slaves from the mainland meant that the system of corvee -- and the Mwenyi Mkuu who organized and maintained it -- had become expendable. Moreover, Sultan Said, and his son and successor, Majid had both adopted a policy of relative non-interference regarding the social and political life of the villages: so long as the poll tax was collected (now in cash) and remitted to the Sultan, the masheha and wazee were left to govern locally as they saw

fit (ibid). But as we shall see below, this arrangement was to change significantly during the reign of Sultan Barghash (1870-1888), who decidedly took more direct control over local affairs than his father, and who set the political stage for the British to make their most significant strides towards becoming the dominant power in the region.³² The new "dual monarchy", as Gray called it -- which once described the co-rule of the Mwenyi Mkuu and the Sultan of Zanzibar -- now became a kind of concession, on the part of Sultan Barghash, between himself and the British Crown (Hollingsworth, 1975). As we shall see, one significant consequence of the political and economic consolidation of Omani rule at Zanzibar during this time concerns how the authorization of a particular set of attributes denoting Islamic expertise came to distinguish an elite coterie of

³² The initially cooperative association between Barghash and the British was due largely to Barghash's close relationship with Sir John Kirk, who was appointed the Consul-General at Zanzibar and "was taken into the confidence of Sultan Barghash" as advisor on a range of significant political and economic issues -- including especially that of slavery and its abolition (Hollingsworth, 1975:13). The abolition of slavery as an institution on the islands was a gradual process of coercion and compromise between the British, who succeeded in establishing a Protectorate relationship with Zanzibar in 1890, and the Sultan(s) of Zanzibar, culminating in two final abolition decrees in 1897 and 1909 (ibid:157). The economic and social consequences of abolition, and, more specifically, the changing labor relations among ex-slaves (squatters), their former masters, and the British colonial state are sensitively described and analyzed in Frederick Cooper's exceptional study From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925 (1980).

ulama which played a key legislative role in the Omani ruling oligarchy. This was until 1890, when Zanzibar and the Sultan's dominions were declared a British Protectorate. By the mid nineteenth century, literacy in Arabic and proficiency in a range of Islamic scholarly texts, together with descent -- defined by blood, such as the *masharifu* (or sharifs), the putative descendants of the prophet Muhammad, or by one's position in a transgenerational chain of learning from renowned Islamic scholars would constitute the emblems of Islamic erudition and piety.

II. Islam and the Early Settlement of the Coastal and Off-Shore Island Towns

But well before the establishment of the Omani Sultanate at Zanzibar, Islam had already featured significantly in the coalescence of ideas that were shaping the development of a distinctive "Swahili" (from the Arabic *suahil*, meaning coast) culture and society. According to historical linguist Thomas Spear, by at least the ninth century, Muslims from the legendary region known as "Shungwaya", located on the Benaadir Coast (of Somalia) had become fully ensconced within an international, interdependent trade network linking the East African coast and its hinterland with Arabia and regions of the Persian Gulf (Spear, 1984). These Muslims -- who themselves claimed to be the descendants of Persian immigrants from Shiraz -- migrated southward and established tributary and affinal

relations with local agricultural and fishing peoples along the East African littoral and off-shore island groups, including Zanzibar.³³ Indeed, the dynasty of the Mwenyi Mkuu described above was putatively of Shirazi descent. One "Shirazi origins" story recounted to me in Zanzibar asserts that these eponymous ancestors sailed to Zanzibar directly from Persia and tells the story of the first encounter between the "wanyezi" (natives) of a town called "Kizimkazi" at the southern tip of Unguja, and the Shirazis who came to settle there:

"It is believed that long ago, people from Shiraz travelled to the East African coast in search of trade. Sailing down the coast, the Shirazi arrived at the southern tip of Zanzibar where they settled down. There they intermarried with the villagers, and learned the work of fishing and cultivating in the stones along the shore. After some time, back in Persia, there sprang up the news that a group of Shirazis had fled their homeland. The question was, where did they go? So one man, a leader named El-Hassa, together with his seven brothers

³³ Ingrams notes that since Shiraz was Shia in 952, "the coastal Muslims must have become followers of the Shafii school somewhere between 813 and 975" (1967:77). Using information gleaned from the 16th century Portuguese geographer historian Joao de Barros, Ingrams proposes that even though Muslims of a branch called the Zaidiyya (a Shiite sect) did migrate to "Shangaya" (Shungwaya) via Yemen in the eighth century, Shafii Islam was most likely brought to the coastal peoples by "the seven brothers from El Hassa who were driven out [of their homeland] by the oppression of a neighboring sheikh. In three vessels they are said to have crossed over to the African coast, and in about 908 founded Mogadisho and Brava, which became capitals of important states" (ibid:75). As Ingrams carefully observes, while it is not clear whether "El-Hassa was in the Persian Gulf or Central Arabia, Muhammad bin Idris Es-Shafi, the founder of the Shafii school (767-822), preached both in the Hijaz and in Baghdad" (ibid:77). It is possible, then, that Spear's Shirazis were also Shafii.

set out to find their Shirazi compatriots. They reached many places, and Zanzibar was among them. When they arrived at the southern tip, they asked the villagers if they had met a visitor like themselves named Mzee Kizi. Indeed they had. Now Mzee Kizi had long been a pious man; and after having shared in the lives of the villagers, he built a mosque of stone. In this way knowledge of Islam was introduced to the villagers and made strong. Mzee Kizi was also given a farm where he planted millet, maize, and other crops. When El-Hassa and his brothers came looking for Mzee Kizi, the villagers took them to his farm; there he was found, hoeing his crops. "We have come to take you home", said the Shirazi visitors, and Mzee Kizi conceded. But Mzee Kizi was a God-fearing man, and asked to stop along the way so he might perform his ablutions and pray two rakas. With this El-Hassa exclaimed, "Why Mzee Kizi, you've become so familiar with this place, such a member of the community you are!" [mkazi refers to a settler or regular inhabitant of a place]. Indeed, Mzee Kizi lived as the villagers did and was loved by all. Now we can see why the town today is called "Kizi-mkazi". It is also said that while El-Hassa and the others were waiting for Mzee Kizi to finish praying, Mzee Kizi turned to stone. Until today, when you travel to Kizimkazi, you can see the stone is still there; and until today also, the stone mosque that Mzee Kizi built in cooperation with the villagers still stands, and inside there is even an inscription that is written in Kishirazi".³⁴

Part legend and part fact, this particular story is a kind of amalgam that combines aspects from several accounts of the Shirazi's arrival in Zanzibar.³⁵ I should note here too

³⁴ (translated from the Kiswahili) This story was recounted to me by Mwalimu Farouk Tahir Fatawi of Makunduchi, August 1, 1989.

³⁵ There are numerous accounts of the Persian voyage to Zanzibar. That this narrator described the departure of the first wave of Shirazi migrants as a "flight" from Persia without any explanation suggests that other versions were subsumed in the telling: the above mentioned (footnote #21) history by de Barros had Muslims "fleeing" oppression in their homeland, while a version recounted by Ayany (1977)

that this story was told to me in special reference to the historic mosque of Kizimkazi, claiming it, in effect, as the renowned emblem that testifies to Zanzibar's Shirazi origins. Indeed, this mosque, located at the southern tip of Zanzibar's Unguja Island, has long drawn the attention of archaeologists; its Kufic inscription dates the structure there to around 1107 A.D. (Chittick 1966:109). Moreover, this story also establishes the themes of Islamic piety, tolerance, and cooperation as present-day cultural virtues that were born of the Shirazis' earliest experience in Zanzibar.

Historians and archaeologists speculate that the peninsula which later become the cite of the Omani Fort and Zanzibar's Stone Town had first been settled as a fishing village in the 12th century; the settlement continued to develop as it became increasingly involved in craft production and maritime trade (Sheriff 1993a:8). In approximately 1700, Hasan, the son of the Mwenyi Mkuu Mwana Mwema, inherited the "throne" from his mother and "started to build the present city of Zanzibar, leaving the fisher-

has al-Hasan ibn Ali Sultan fleeing the religious upheavals in his native Shiraz in A.D. 950: "...with his six sons and their seven ships, Ali Sultan made his historic voyage to *Zenji-bar*, and thus marked the beginning of what became known as the Zenj Empire" (Ayany 1970:7). Arab geographers and historians who wrote about the East African littoral include: Masudi (of Baghdad, 956), Idris (of Ceuta, 1154), Yakut bin Abdullah (1179-1229), Ibn Said (sometime in 13th century), and the most famous, ibn Battuta (b. 1304 in Tangier) (Ingrams 1967 [1931]:75-85).

folk to settle at Shangani [a neighborhood in Stone Town], the present European quarter" (Ingrams 1967:149; Ingrams was writing in the late 1920's). Among the earliest immigrants to the peninsular settlement were the Shatiri and Mafazi Arabs from the Hadramawt in southern Yemen, who migrated to Zanzibar in the sixteenth century (Issa 1993:72; Sheriff 1993b:49). The strategic integration of the Hadramis into Zanzibar society is evidenced by the affinal alliances they seem to have established with the Shirazi elite: Mwana Mwema, the "queen" (Mwenyi Mkuu) of Zanzibar during the mid-1600's is "said to have married an Arab of Yemen"; and Fatuma, Mwana Mwema's niece who inherited the "northern portion of the kingdom which then included the town of Zanzibar" married "an Arab belonging to the Alawi clan from the Hadramawt" (Gray 1977:138-140). Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, the Hadrami Arabs, many of whom claimed to be sharifs (the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and who had migrated to the Benaadir coast (Somalia) in a period spanning the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, played a significant role in promoting the Shafi school of Islam in Zanzibar as well as throughout the coast.

Thus the development of coastal society in general involved a "dialectical interplay between the opposed forces of absorption and differentiation", as the accumulation of wealth and the interconnecting links of reciprocities and patron-client ties between landowners, local and immigrant

merchants, artisans, slaves, and other dependents encouraged the growth of towns on the coast and off-shore island groups such as Lamu, Pate, Kilwa, Malindi, Zanzibar, Mombasa, and Sofala (Spear, 1984; Berg, 1968). From the fourteenth century especially, these towns competed for control over international commercial networks, enriching those townspeople who could, for a time, successfully establish themselves as the economic and cultural center of cosmopolitanism and prestige on the coast. The towns themselves were stratified in terms of wealth, political power, and the prestige into which material wealth could be converted -- that is, the management of a range of dependency or *utani* relations which in turn created the image of benevolence and piety befitting the honorable patrician families of the towns.

On the northern coast, best characterized by towns such as Lamu or Mogadishu, the elite were referred to generally as the *(wa)ungwana*, those who comprised the "oldest, wealthiest, and most respected families of the town", and who are described as "urbane, respected, creditworthy, dressed in the Swahili manner, well-spoken in Kiswahili and adept at Swahili verse, and learned in Islamic knowledge" (Spear 1984:294; cf el Zein 1974). As we saw above, in Zanzibar, and along the *mrima* coast generally (that is, coastal Tanganyika and northern Mozambique), patrician culture and its emblems of prestige shared these

characteristics but were associated with, as de Vere Allen puts it, a "Shirazi mode of dominance" rather than an "Arab-Waungwana mode" (de Vere Allen 1993).

III. Implicit Versions of Explicit Order: Clans, Swahili Oral Tradition, and the Incomplete Control Over Islamic Knowledge

In his research on the pre-nineteenth century history of Islam and Islamic leadership on the East African coast, Randall Pouwels reconstructs the social, cultural, and political processes and events that shaped the development of Islam and Muslim identity in the region (Pouwels, 1987, 1984, 1978). I draw on his work here in order to develop a theoretical point about the relationship between forms of Islamic knowledge and the predominantly oral mode of expressing and transmitting knowledge on the coast before the nineteenth century. I will argue that the predominantly oral means of expressing and transmitting Islamic knowledge made it less possible for the content and meaning of that knowledge to be controlled, so that it could be used to express or create competing models of prestige and social hierarchy.

In his work, Pouwels points out that it was largely through the idiom of descent or "clan" membership that utani or dependency relations -- and the distribution of wealth and resources that flowed through them -- were identified (Pouwels 1987:78-80; cf Janet Bujra 1968; Patricia Caplan

1975). Clans also came to demarcate residential neighborhoods in the towns, and were associated with specialized vocations such as shipbuilding, carpentry, silversmithing, and farming (ibid:86-87).

Significantly, even "esoteric knowledge", as Pouwels describes it, such as "advanced" knowledge of Islam, poetry, and medicinal or therapeutic knowledge and practices were for the most part vocationalized and constituted the patrimony of particular clans. Pouwels suggests, however, that while conceptual distinctions were made between "elimu" (knowledge of local narrative traditions and of Islamic doctrine and texts, at this time limited to the Qur'an) and "uganga" (curative practices associated with the "interior" [bara] as opposed to the town), these categories of knowledge are best considered as parts of a single epistemological system which gave meaning to and helped order the social, psychic, physical, and even spacial dimensions of town living on the coast before the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, the definition of learning during this time was a broad one; a person who was regarded as a "religious" expert could be called many things -- *mzee* (an elder), *mwaliimu* (teacher), *mwanavyuoni* (Qur'anic or Islamic scholar) (Pouwels, 1987).

What I think is particularly interesting here is that the social distinctions that were created and managed by the clan system, together with the function of patrimony,

allowed townspeople to make rightful claims to define and control certain forms of knowledge and the emblems that represented them. This created the potential for the "privatization" of Islamic knowledge, in that knowledge could have been used -- or politicized -- in the competition for access to and control over resources and prestige, be it in the form of dependents, regalia, or property. Pouwels' findings regarding the issue of literacy and texts³⁶ on the coast before the mid-nineteenth century I think reflect this potential. In this regard he learned that Islamic texts besides the Qur'an were "rare possessions on the coast, as was the level of Arabic literacy needed to read them"; when they did exist, both the books and the expertise were "retained by an exclusive minority within specific clans" (Pouwels 1987:87-88). In a similar vein, *elimu* (textual knowledge) could also be called "book magic". Because, as in all Muslim societies, the Qur'an itself is understood as the actual embodiment of God's word, esoteric knowledge of the text, or of Arabic, God's language, was considered a most valuable resource. For these reasons *elimu* likely conferred more prestige upon the bearer. Moreover, when knowledge (let alone the word of God and the *baraka* therein) is embodied in a text, it is easier to treat

³⁶ Regarding these books, however, Pouwels remarks that for the pre-nineteenth century past, there is relatively little information available on when particular texts were initially introduced to the coast, and which texts these actually included (1987:87).

as "symbolic capital" or, as Pouwels puts it, to trade on it as a "commodity".

Significantly, however, while literacy in the Islamic sphere may have been viewed by the townspeople as a valuable resource, it was actually peripheral to the poetry, legends, and local histories which together constituted a highly cultivated, oral literary tradition that was expressed in Kiswahili, not in Arabic.³⁷ While some specialization, written or not, did exist in Islamic expertise (Qur'anic memorization, exegesis, and knowledge of shafi'i jurisprudence learned in private study groups or the madrasa [Pouwels, 1981]), Islamic knowledge and values in the coastal towns during this time were also incorporated into, and conveyed through, these kinds of creative discourses; and as Spear (1984) points out, being "well-spoken in Kiswahili and adept at Swahili verse" were attributes that denoted refinement and prestige. Thus the expressive arena in which knowledge and prestige were constructed, conveyed, and competitively pursued was a predominantly oral one, where social commentary -- that is, the modification and elaboration of oral "texts" (that expressed ideas not only

³⁷ Swahili coast scholar James de Vere Allen argues that it was not until 1700 that Swahili poetry began to be written down (1993:243). To this day Kiswahili poetry, both oral and written, is a highly valued art form on the coast; exceptionally talented poets are often sought out to correspond on the behalf of others. See also Ibrahim Noor Shariff, Tungo Zetu (19...), and Farouk Topan, "Muslim Perceptions in a Swahili Oral Genre" (in Harrow, ed., 1996).

about Islam but also about local history, world views and social arrangements, as Pouwels points out) -- was as much a part of the discursive tradition as was the reiteration of stories or genealogies that were intended to conserve the structure of power relations that existed in a town at any one time. This also makes sense because historically, the power hierarchies of the coastal towns were inherently unstable, with usually more than one prominent family at any one time competing for control over resources and political prestige. Thus while knowledge and training (often preserved within certain clans, as we saw above) was needed for participation in this kind of social discourse, "unclaimed" domains of knowledge (such as interpretations of history or Islamic references) could also be newly introduced or created through it.

For these reasons -- namely, the existence of a broad-ranging epistemological system and a tradition of oral narrative in which performance was as important as the content of the traditions, and where the content could be modified over time -- even the ranking of "esoteric" knowledge within the coastal epistemological system (while socially organized in this way by the clan system), could not be completely fixed or "privatized". Only certain very broad definitions of knowledge (e.g., Islamic or not) was controlled by, or associated with, the ruling elite. In other words, the cultural conceptualization of knowledge on

the coast during this time had the effect of keeping ideas about power³⁸ and prestige "circulating", that is taking on different forms, registers, or meanings, and changing or being associated anew with particular groups or families. Such was the case with the assimilation of the sharifs and Islamic scholars from the Hadramawt: the idea of being a descendant of the Prophet, or of being linked in a great chain of Islamic learning, became an integral part of the Swahili Islamic discourse that gave expression to the drive for cultural prestige and political power in the coastal towns in which they settled.

IV. The Construction of Islamic Descent Identities: A Politics of Representation

As we have seen, clan membership (and by extension, descent) emerged as an organizing paradigm for the creation of competitive familial, economic, and political alliances and social distinctions in the coastal towns. Both a part and a product of this process was the construction of Islamic descent identities, that is, the idea that a group of individuals could themselves embody, by virtue of their descent from the Prophet, the grace of God and the knowledge

³⁸ By "ideas of power" I mean the cultural ideas people hold and assumptions they make about how the effects of power can be accomplished. On the coast, these would include magic, baraka (such as that associated with the coastal sharifs), astrological knowledge, having strategic familial and political connections, and, ultimately, controlling access to key productive resources.

and piety that signal its presence. While descent from the Prophet is an acknowledged category of identity in Islamic societies cross-culturally and throughout history, the ways in which it is recognized by others, and the meanings it comes to have in a society are contingent on a range of social, cultural and historical factors. On the Swahili coast, individuals claiming descent from the prophet were associated predominantly with immigrants from the Hadramawt in southern Yemen who travelled to the coast from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century;³⁹ for among the petty traders, craftsmen, and merchants of "humbler origin" who weathered this trip were the "noble" Hadrami sharifs and sheikhs -- those descendants of the Prophet and of the great "intellectuals and theologians from Tarim whose celebrated religious prestige made it possible for them to integrate into the privileged ranks of the already stratified and predominantly Muslim coastal towns" (Le Guennec-Coppens, 1989).

While it is generally accepted in the historiography of the region that the promotion of Shafi'i Islam on the East

³⁹ Historians discuss at least two significant waves of Hadrami migration: from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries (Le Guennec-Coppans, 1989:185). Most historians agree that while the earlier migrants are largely responsible for the early promotion of Shafii Islam on the coast, the Hadrami sheikhs and sharifs of the 19th-20th century migration had the most significant impact on contemporary Islamic culture, knowledge and practice on the coast.

African coast can be attributed to the early presence of hadrami sharifs and sheikhs, historians have argued over the significance -- or, better, construction -- of "foreign" versus "local" contributions in the development of coastal society, a disagreement that at bottom reflects long standing political (or politicized) issues regarding the nature of Swahili culture and its origins.

For instance, James de Vere Allen writes that the paradigm of the international commercial system in which immigration and the intra-coastal movement of peoples has come to be understood has given the East African coast a "frontier image" that has led many scholars to erroneously assume a foreign (that is, "Arab") origin or to stress the foreign elements of Swahili coastal society (de Vere Allen, 1981). Countering this image, the above-mentioned Shungwaya origin thesis promoted by Spear (1984) and Nurse and Spear (1984) emphasizes the significance of indigenous demographic, economic, and cultural factors in the historical formation of Swahili society, arguing that "foreign" religious and linguistic influences (from immigrant Arab merchants and theologians), while important, did not dominate or define the cultural discourse or terms of social interaction that were developing on the coast.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For Spear, historical analyses of the Shirazi oral traditions of origin point to the importance of looking to marriage and the Swahili idiom of cognatic descent for understanding Swahili coastal origins. In the traditions, "Shirazi males [traders from the northern coast at Somalia]

To this de Vere Allen adds that evidence from the pre-17th century Portuguese and Arab records indicate neither a mass migration nor an overwhelming presence of Hadrami sharifs or sheikhs on the coast before 1700. In other words, rather than having "imposed the culture of their homeland" onto the coastal peoples, the early Hadrami religious figures who did settle on the coast "won acceptance and prominence by adopting Swahili ways and by intermarrying with local patricians" (de Vere Allen 1993:243; cf el Zein 1974).⁴¹ The sharifs, he continues, "accepted gifts of regalia items to cement political alliances, established utani-relations with mainland clans, acquired magical expertise where this was expected of rulers, and generally behaved in a wholly Swahili fashion" (ibid:244). De Vere Allen does concede that among the migrants who dispersed southward along the coast from Shungwaya (the Benaadir coast) in the 14th century were several clans who were sharifs of hadrami origin (1993:153). But his point here, again, is to stress

married indigenous females; their sons inherited the right to people and land through their mothers and the right to rule through their fathers...The Shirazi became a part of coastal society, but that society changed and became less homogeneous and less egalitarian...Numerous sub-groups developed and acquired different statuses within the whole...The Shirazi were thus less a people than a historical phenomenon as peoples along the coast traded, settled, and interacted" (Spear 1984:299) (emphasis mine).

⁴¹ De Vere Allen argues that "the number of female immigrants from Arabia was negligible throughout most of the history...We have almost no evidence that Swahili sharifs ever returned to the Hadramawt to find brides, or had them shipped out to East Africa" (1993:242).

that these sharifs were and should be characterized as being indigenous to the East African coast, not as "foreigners", or "Arabs" per se.

On the one hand this argument is useful because it helps establish that the historical development of the east African coast gave rise to a distinctively African Swahili society with complex sub-regional variations throughout its range. In this way, it supports a valuable trend in post-colonial Africanist scholarship that has critiqued the interpretive gaze of both ancient and modern "Observers" of Africa as the projection of their own imaginings of Self and Other defined by the relations of power -- those geographers, historians, and other social scientists whose participation in the "invention of Africa" preempted and disenfranchised the "indigenous" African intellectual and cultural discourses which indexed local and regional histories and identities (Miller, 1985; Mudimbe, 1988; al-Amin and Shariff, 1993).

On the other hand, debate over the status and contributions of (once) immigrant groups such as the sharifs and religious scholars as being "indigenous/African" as opposed to "foreign/Arab" is unproductive because it simply does not reflect the social reality of identity construction on the coast. This is because any cultural traits, behaviors, or identities that come to signal "foreign" or "indigenous" at any one time (and the rights and privilege

they may confer) have to be understood as the outcome of an historically mediated politics of representation in which the categories distinguishing "indigenous" and "foreign" are continuously being redefined. In the coastal towns, as we saw, descent and family membership was the key organizing paradigm for social action; de Vere Allen, Le Guennec-Coppens, and el Zein have all shown that the Hadrami sharifs and scholars ultimately did intermarry with local patrician families. Prestige was derived in part by being able to claim that one hailed from, or was on par with, the "original", founding families of the town; it also came from being, or claiming, descent from the sharifs and scholars of Tarim. Significantly, it is just this sort of dual claim that is typical, if anything is, of "Swahili" cultural discourses⁴² about issues of power and identity. As we shall see in chapter four, "foreign" elements can endure in much of what is promoted emphatically by Zanzibaris as "indigenous"; boundaries are often shifting and almost always shaped by vantage point and political circumstance. The questions to ask, then, become why and under what conditions does pedigree make a difference? How are sharifs recognized or distinguished from others? What are the

⁴² These would include discourses such as formal oratory and poetry, creating colloquialisms and riddles (*vitendawili*), ironic humor, Islamic discursive practices, popular music, and theatrical performance.

attributes that announce one's identity as a sharif?⁴³ How does an idiom of descent become an ideology of stratification?

"Their immanent holiness", writes Le Guennec-Coppens of the sharifs, "assured them consideration and respect on the part of the upper classes and veneration on the part of the deprived" (1989:186-188). While it is difficult to reconstruct, for the distant past, the ways in which this "immanent holiness" was portrayed and identified by others,⁴⁴ we do know of the socio-political consequences of such impressions. These individuals, or the "pedigree" of their piety and expertise, commanded deference and inspired faith -- personal feelings that, when expressed by a ruling elite, translated into the conferral of material and, as we shall see below, political and judicial powers. In the accounts of his fourteenth century travels to the East

⁴³ Even though de Vere Allen writes, "...it is not easy to lay false claim to sharifian descent because records are preserved in the Hadramawt" (1993:153), I do not think that pedigree papers alone (especially if their still in the Hadramawt) could have clinched their status. They do not today. As one Zanzibari sharif put it, "In spiritual matters, a certificate means nothing...Give a certificate to a rogue, what does it mean?"

⁴⁴ While *baraka* is something which another person can "participate" in, so to speak, or "benefit" from, by virtue of one's association with a sheikh or sharif, *buruhani*, *kaburi*, *kipaji*, *nur*, and *karama* are all personal attributes with a range of implications regarding Islamic piety and erudition. The social and cultural construction of these attributes, and the individuals with whom they may or may not be associated are critical issues that are discussed in a later chapter.

African coast, "Ibn Battuta observed that the [Shirazi] Sultan of Kilwa...put away a fifth of his revenues in order to entertain his holy visitors and to offer them gifts...Sharifs could benefit from tangible privileges such as tax exemptions or fiscal reductions while receiving pious donations from non-Sharifs and from the poor" (ibid:188). And while Pouwels does not indicate specifically whether or not the "exclusive minorities" that maintained control over access to Islamic texts in the coastal and off-shore island towns included the Hadrami sharifs and sheikhs, we learn from B.G. Martin that since before the 19th century, Hadrami "clans and family names of the Al abu Bakr b. Salim, Jamal al-Layl, the Saqqaf, the Aydarus, the Ba Kathir al Kindi, the Sumayt of Tarim and many others keep appearing and reappearing in the ranks of the 'learned'" (Martin 1971:530).

But the flow of such material and political benefits was also mediated by the social relations of representation. For the sharifs and the prior residents of the coastal towns in which they settled, this was a creative and ultimately political process of image making which spoke to and was mediated by coastal cultural ideas about the power connected to the Prophet Muhammad, the word and knowledge of God, and the concept of baraka. I think that Islamic descent identities (and the stories and symbols that supported them) created a compelling, indeed persuasive image because they

derived their power, if not their meaning, from the paradox that the putative descendants seemed to represent in the coastal towns. Although they were "distant" or "foreign" in both space (it was significant they came from the Hadramawt) and time (in a sense they embodied the original identity of the Prophet), the local appeal of this distance lay in the sharifs' and sheikhs' moral responsibility to transcend it - that is, to convey or bring home to the new community of believers the magical baraka and divine favor they were reputed to embody themselves. As Muslims, the sharifs and sheikhs had a necessary affinity with the local communities in which they settled. But while this affinity was mediated by their status as sacred beings, reproducing this sacred image was largely contingent upon the maintenance of a social distance which was accomplished by linking attributes of "exceptional" knowledge and piety -- that is, non-local sources of Islamic erudition and proofs of authenticity -- to descent. This is an ideological process which "primordialized" Islamic knowledge and piety in these cosmopolitan towns where high social rank was associated with Islamic erudition or piety, but did not constitute the necessary preconditions for it. In other words, as attributes of descent, knowledge and piety could be construed as "naturally" divine endowments.⁴⁵ In this way

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the universal egalitarian ethic in Islam -- the assumption that the only distinction permissible for Muslims to recognize among

Islamic descent identities presented an unambiguous way to distinguish "exceptional" knowledge and piety from the routine, and organized a more explicit connection between Islamic knowledge and the person. This is a connection that became politically authorized under the rulership of the Busaidi dynasts, and that is evidenced by the definition and promotion of a distinct coterie of Islamic scholars during the late 19th century, the apex of Omani power.

V. The Ulama of the Zanzibar Sultanate in the Nineteenth Century

B.G. Martin writes that in Zanzibar in the mid to late nineteenth century, even though the Omani rulers were themselves Ibadi Muslims and the Hadrami masharifu and scholars were Shafi'i, such sectarian distinctions were of little consequence; it seems that opportunities to participate in discussion groups, learning circles, and intellectual exchanges among the ulama -- the "learned

themselves comes down to differences in their knowledge of Islam and in the expression of their faith -- is both promoted and contradicted by the privilege descent conferred. On the one hand, the sharifs and sheikhs usually did demonstrate "exceptional" qualities regarding their piety and knowledge of Islam. The distinction they enjoyed thus "made sense" within the egalitarian paradigm. On the other hand, however, knowledge, theoretically, is open to all, not a select few; it is not ascribed or inherited. Thus while erudition may be associated with elites who are born into their class, their knowledge, like anyone's, is acquired; indeed, the opportunities for its acquisition and mastery is made possible by virtue of their class position, not their "blood". It was largely on these grounds that the tarika sheikhs introduced below were successful in building their followings at the end of the 19th century.

class" -- had more to do with being Omani or, especially, Hadrami, than it did with being Ibadhi or Shafi'i. Martin writes: "The East African ulama class was...closely knit. Whether Shafi'i or Ibadhi, they knew each other personally, and many posts were reserved for recruits from within their own groups. Because of the hereditary factor -- descent from the prophet -- nepotism could hardly be excluded. Hence the best qualification for becoming a learned man was to be the son of another learned man. For the person who wished to reach the higher ranks of the Shafi'i ulama, one of the better prerequisites was to be of Hadrami descent..."

(Martin 1971:530). This is especially revealing since, as Pouwels aptly cautions us in the introduction to his translation of Farsy's Imam Shafi and the History of the East African Ulama, the identification of an individual as an 'alim is in Islamic societies a most subjective call (Pouwels 1989:ii). Pouwels continues, "It is...evident from his text that Farsy [himself] consider[ed] a fairly high standard of literacy and at least a putatively Arab pedigree to be essential to claims of Islamic erudition" (ibid). Still, Martin does go on to say that it was possible for men from outside of these exclusive cliques to be recognized and lauded for their talent and expertise alone, and be incorporated into these learning circles as well. Indeed, considering the (proverbial) absence of an explicit, institutionally-based hierarchy of clerical authority in

Sunni Islam, Martin's reference to reaching the "higher ranks of the ulama" indicates that something further was taking place -- the relationship between these Islamic scholars and the Busaidi ruling elite mutually reinforced the privileges of each.

Indeed, while Martin uses the term "class" to describe the ulama, it seems they resembled more an occupationally specialized group or coterie that served and was supported by the Omani oligarchy. Some of the Hadrami ulama were also involved in trade or came from trading families and were wealthy in their own right; but others, like the Hadrami sheikh Abdallah Bakathir (whose grandson is introduced below), came from "poor" (ibid:538) families having no significant properties or commercial contacts of their own. Many positions in the governing and legislative machinery of the state were filled by the religious scholars who were selected, appointed, and subsidized by the Sultan (ibid).⁴⁶ These positions included kadhis (Islamic judges), wazirs (minister-advisors), *liwalis* (governors), *imams* (leaders of

⁴⁶ Martin reminds us that in addition to the Islamic religious scholars from the Hadramawt, there were also "...Hindus, Ismailis, Gujaratis, Sindis, Baluchis of the Hanafi school, Somalis, and Comorians" (ibid:526), all of whom occupied various, often competing positions in the political economy of the Busaidi Sultanate. The point here, however, is that a certain set of attributes came to distinguish an "official" ulama coterie which played a key legislative role among the ruling Omani oligarchy, especially before Zanzibar's declaration as a British Protectorate in 1890 (Hollingsworth 1953).

congregational prayer and religious consultants) and *khatibs* (lecturers).

This was especially characteristic of the Zanzibar Sultanate under the rulership of Seyyid Barghash b. Said, who reigned from 1870 to 1888 and was the son of Seyyid Said b. Sultan al-Busaidi. Indeed, Barghash made a much greater effort than his father to reach down and directly control the organization of political and religious affairs in Zanzibar at the local level; and making such appointments was one sure way of accomplishing this goal. As Pouwels (1987) and Hollingsworth (1975) recount, the strategy really took root after 1873, when the British signed a treaty with Barghash marking the beginning of a succession of restrictions on the slave trade. Although this agreement threatened the economic base of many local Swahili and Arab traders and plantation landholders, who depended to a great extent on the labor of slaves to cultivate their expanding export crop of cloves, it placed Barghash and his Sultanate under British protection and, for a while, strengthened his political power throughout the coast.

Unlike his father, Said, who had maintained a policy of relative non-intervention in local level religious and judicial matters of the coastal towns, Barghash appointed his own *liwalis* and *kadhis* who privileged their own knowledge and interpretation of Islam based on a legalistic,

textual tradition over which they maintained exclusive control.

Before, when Barghash's father Seyyid Said ruled, such appointments had to be approved by local town elders (Pouwels 1987:106). This significantly undermined the political and religious authority of the town wazee and walimu whose predominantly oral, locally-informed tradition of Islamic knowledge and beliefs was, according to Pouwels, "denounced" by the authorized elite. It was also during this time that a shift in the terms of address for Islamic experts emerged, reflecting the ideological trend that was taking shape: Kiswahili terms such as wazee (elders), walimu (teachers), and wanavyuoni (a general Kiswahili word for Islamic scholars) which had been used in reference to local authority figures, were losing ground to *maalim* and *ulama*, Arabic terms denoting expertise in a universal, literate Islamic tradition of scholarship (Pouwels, 1987; de Vere Allen, 1993). But even though Barghash was also far less "tolerant" of sectarian differences (Ibadi/Shafi'i) than his father, he continued to appoint Hadrami scholars as kadhis in his court, and, in one case at least, attempted to imprison a sheikh who had contested his reappointment.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Such was the case with the Hadhrami scholar Ahmad bin Sumayt, who, in 1885, refused Barghash's order to extend his appointed term as Qadi of Zanzibar. In order to avoid imprisonment, Sumayt fled to the Middle East and settled in Istanbul; he returned to Zanzibar in 1888, after the death of Barghash (Martin 1971:542-542).

Thus the tradition of learning or scholarship which distinguished this elite coterie of ulama from the local walimu and wazee was very much a literate one, where Arabic was favored over Kiswahili as the language of instruction. The books they used included both printed and hand-copied manuscripts of, and commentaries on, classic texts used in the madrasas and learning circles of Cairo, the Hadramawt, Mecca, and Medina, and covered a range of subjects including Arabic grammar, syntax, and poetry, and, of course, a wide repertoire of Islamic investigations such as tawhid (doctrine of the Oneness of God), tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence, predominantly of the Shafi'i school), the study of the hadith (authenticated compilations of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad), and tajwid, Qur'anic recitation (Elmasri, 1987; Martin, 1971; Becker, 1968). As birthplace and residence to many figures reputed both locally and abroad for their erudition and piety, Zanzibar Town came to be recognized as an intellectual center in its own right, attracting itinerant scholars and novices alike "from all over east Africa, even from Java and parts of west India, and always from the Hadramawt and Oman" (Martin 1971: 540).

One objective measure of such an alim's learning was denoted by the written authorizations (*ijaza*) he obtained which certified that he had successfully completed the reading of a particular text under the tutelage of a mentor

or colleague. Oftentimes these ijaza were obtained during the course of a sheikh's travels, since "master seeking", as Martin describes it, usually required protracted study visits to places like southern Yemen (the Hadramawt), Cairo (the famed al-Azhar madrasa), Lebanon, and Istanbul, which only enhanced the celebrity of a scholar upon his return; after all, hadiths attributed to the Prophet Muhammad encouraged the curious and devout to overcome long distances in the search for knowledge, *talab al- 'ilm*, as the following hadith describes: "Anas b. Malik reported that the Prophet said: Those who go out in search of religious knowledge will be in the path of God until they return" (Gellens 1990:50). Indeed, this overseas movement of Islamic knowledge through such social networks of mentoring and apprenticeship contributed not only to the prestige of the scholars themselves but also to the *idea of Islamic knowledge itself* as something wonderful and rare, with a real beginning but without an end, something to be sought out and experienced, but which also remained a sublime mystery. Finally, the understanding, or possibility, at least, that a kind of primeval virtue was embodied in and conveyed by Hadrami descendants of the Prophet and by those sheikhs linked or "descended" through a chain of revered scholarship lent both prestige and, if necessary by this point, legitimacy, to the Omani project of rule.

I think that the changes which unfolded with the relocation of the sultanate to Zanzibar reflect the ideological, rather than the cultural hegemony, as Cooper has written (1981) of the Busaidi state during this time. In other words, it is important to make a distinction here between Islamic culture and ideology: for Muslims, the elevated significance of Islamic knowledge -- as a symbol of piety and faith, and as the actual repertoire of ideas and practices that constitute Islamic traditions -- is an integral feature of Islamic culture. In the process of "ideology-making", Islamic knowledge comes to be defined and controlled by an exclusive coterie (the ulama) which is supported by those who rule: the ulama were supported socially, through the promotion of exclusivist definitions and emblems of prestige which limited their access to others; and they were supported materially, through subsidies. These conditions make it possible, in a Muslim society, for elite definitions of Islamic culture and knowledge to be promoted as the model of religious and civil propriety for all -- and forever. As Jean Lacroix writes in his discussion on "ideology",

"Because ideology expresses or valorizes a society or group in a given time and place, it has a definite historical character. But it is antihistorical in that it idealizes a regime, a situation, and wishes to freeze the phenomenon it expresses and interprets for all eternity. All ideology is reifying: it aims at the prolongation

of a given state of affairs; in this sense, it is anti-historical."⁴⁸

This calls up Talal Asad's conceptualization of "orthodoxy" as "not a mere body of opinion, but a distinctive relationship -- a relationship of power. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is a domain of orthodoxy" (Asad 1986:15). The conditions which were created especially under Barghash's rule made it possible for a "domain of orthodoxy" to emerge.

VI. "Counter cultures" of Islamic Knowledge⁴⁹

However, this process of ideology-making did not eclipse the possibility for other creative interpretations and uses of Islamic knowledge; in effect, it provided the context, perhaps impetus, for its development. This is illustrated by two related phenomena that occurred in Zanzibar and elsewhere on the coast toward the close of the nineteenth century. One concerns the conversion and manumission of slaves by their slaveholders, and the initiatives slaves took to define for themselves what was

⁴⁸ Jean Lacroix, Le personnalisme comme anti-ideologie, 1972:21, cited by Joseph Gabel in Stehr and Meja, Society and Knowledge: Contemporary Perspectives on Society and Knowledge, 1984:32).

⁴⁹ The idea of "counter cultures" of knowledge is derived from Randall Pouwels (personal communication, 1988).

required and what it meant to become Muslim. The other, related phenomenon concerns the emotional appeal and political impact of the Sufi or Islamic tarika sheikhs from (predominantly) the Comoro Islands and Barawa, whose controversial proselytizing activities on the coast challenged the exclusivist parameters of the Zanzibar ulama.

a. Slaves, Identity, and Islam

The conversion and freeing of slaves was viewed by Muslim slaveholders as a "pious and virtuous act" (Cooper, 1981) which ensured their salvation before God and created the image of benevolence and paternalism essential to their patrician ethos. According to Cooper, converting a slave brought him or her "out of 'heathenism' and into the world of Islam". However, with little or no social and economic resources of their own, ex-slaves remained largely dependent upon their former masters who, under Islamic law, were responsible for looking after their welfare: assisting in the financing and arrangement of marriages, providing food (if not small plots of land for the cultivation of subsistence crops), and shelter. Indeed, with the increased restrictions on the slave trade, manumission to a large extent secured the slaveholders' access to a dependent labor force, and helped prevent the crystallization of a self-conscious slave class (Cooper 1980:22-23).

However, from Jonathon Glassman's historical research on slave resistance in Pangani, a town on the *mrima* (Tanganyikan) coast, we learn that in any event, slaves did not constitute a single, distinct social category that fixed them in a position of absolute marginality. Instead, slave identity constituted a range of possible positions and statuses that were understood and ranked largely in terms of "the universally defined values of Swahili culture" (Glassman 1991:297). That is, in addition to the gender and rural-urban distinctions that shaped the definition of slaves' roles and work, the lexicon of slave categories included: *mshenzi*, the "newly incorporated, unacculturated" or "ignorant" slave; the *mzaliwa*, the slave born into coastal culture and religion; the *vibarua*, "those who were hired out for a daily wage which they were expected to share with their master"; and the *fundi*, the craftsman or trading slave which included caravan leaders, artisans, fishermen, and even sea captains (ibid:289-292).⁵⁰ These categories are ranked on a continuum from the most marginal and despised of slaves (the *washenzi*) to the *fundi*, the most acculturated and relatively autonomous among the non-

⁵⁰ These Kiswahili terms also have meanings that are not associated with slaves or slave identity: *-shenzi* connotes barbarism, being uncivilized; *mzaliwa* is a common term for any person born in the place where s/he resides, a "native" of a place (from the verb *kuzaa*, to give birth); *kibarua* is a term also used for documented (usually migrant) workers (from *barua*, letter or document); *fundi* does mean craftsman, one skilled in a trade (even *waganga* [curers] are sometimes referred to as *fundi*).

freeborn class. Moreover, Glassman describes how the manipulation of the rather ambiguous boundaries (or boundary markers?) that distinguished these categories reflected the slaves' attempts to resist the demoralizing link of exclusion and dependence and to strive instead for autonomy and prestige -- even though this resistance often involved the slaves' emulation of those very features that distinguished and promoted the domination of the freeborn class.

Still, the potential negotiability or shifting nature of these slave identities meant that manumission was not necessary for slaves to become Muslim or to strive toward cultural parity with their masters. Indeed, as Glassman indicates, given the range of economic niches that were opening up to especially the *vibarua* and *fundi* in the late nineteenth century, together with the slaveowners' increasing vulnerability to *their* need of the slaves they wished to control, "the slave's movement along this continuum was often opposed by his master each step of the way" (Glassman 1991:297; Cooper 1980:22). Perhaps, then, conversion and manumission was one way for the slaveowner to "oppose" slave autonomy without appearing to do so. There is one last point I'd like to make regarding Glassman's findings. While Glassman argues that "this continuum [of slave statuses] was not predetermined by the nature of Swahili cultural concepts but was the outcome of the

struggle of ambitious slaves" (pg. 217), it is also worth noting that the themes around which coastal notions of prestige have been shaped historically, are all reiterated in these slave categories. These include: notions of origins and placehood (local/foreign); a tension between ambiguity and definition in the process of self-characterization and in negotiating between the self and various others; the desired condition of having dependents, not being dependent; and finally, notions of urbanity and worldliness which made the universality of Islamic knowledge one of its appealing, indeed prestigious aspects.

In the end, both Cooper and Glassman recognize that, in Cooper's words, "the slaves' acquisition of religious knowledge and familiarity undermined the basis of their inferiority" (Cooper 1981:291), and enabled them to contest the ideology of the slaveholders on their own terms (Cooper 1980). Cooper describes two trends which are strong in the traditions of contemporary descendants of ex-slaves. First, "conversion and mastery of Islam made the slaves the religious equals to their masters within the terms of coastal culture, and second, these terms were not the only valid ones, for hinterland culture and identity were also worth preserving" (Cooper 1981:291-292). Thus we see again that the self-image of slaves (and ex-slaves) was crafted through a process that involved the creative incorporation of both Islamic knowledge and expressive identity-conferring

practices of hinterland origin, including initiation ceremonies -- especially strong among women (Strobel, 1979) -- and other song and dance associations.

b. Subversive Charisma: the Tarika Sheikhs

A critical conjuncture in the development of such "counter-cultures of Islamic knowledge" on the East African coast and Tanganyika occurred from the 1870's with the influx of the Sufi brotherhood or tarika sheikhs predominantly from Barawa (Somalia) and the Comoro Islands.⁵¹ While the tarika sheikhs are Sunni, their approach to God is a predominantly mystical one. Moreover, the tarika have a somewhat hierarchical structure organized

⁵¹ It should be noted that proselytization by tarika sheikhs was not the first contact hinterland peoples of Tanganyika had with Islam or the experience of conversion. Contact had long since been made with Muslim traders from the coast who traversed their territories with their caravans en route to the Congo. As Iliffe points out, in many instances Islam came to be associated with "modernity" and material wealth, incentives which encouraged at least nominal conversion to Islam. But these encounters, together with the conversion of peoples such as the Yao of the southeast, "who had visited the coast for 300 years before they accepted Islam", can be explained as a consequence of an "enlargement of scale" which placed "a new emphasis on the 'macrocosm'", an orientation which Islam, with its "universal history", spoke to quite convincingly (Iliffe, 1979:214-215). "Enlargement of scale" refers to the conditions that encouraged the emergence of powerful chieftainships such as the Yao, the consequences of military conquest, the movement of long distance traders and migrant workers, and, later, the overall integration of decentralized, smaller scale farmers into the wider political economy of the nascent colonial state (see Edward Alpers, 1972, "Towards a History of the Expansion of Islam in East Africa: The Matrilineal Peoples of the Southern Interior").

around the last living leader (khalifa) of their *silsilah*, that is, the chain of knowledge passed on from the *tarika*'s founding sheikh. Women, like men, can become leaders in their own right and preside over the religious, social, and performance activities of the *tarika*'s women members.

In 1880, Sheikh Husein bin Abdallah brought one branch of the Qadiriyya to Zanzibar, and in 1883-84, Sheikh Uways bin Muhammad al-Barawi from Barawa started his own branch -- the Uwaysiyya -- of the Qadiriyya, also in Zanzibar (Iliffe 1979:112; Martin 1969). The Shadhiliyya was introduced from the Comoro Islands in around 1900 by Muhammad Ma'ruf. The popularity of the *tarika* -- especially the Qadiriyya, the largest and most active *tarika* in East Africa today -- marked a "loosening up" of the ascribed qualifications that, with the *ulama*, had come to be associated with Islamic erudition and even piety. Meaning mystical "way" or "path", the *tarika* were regarded as controversial since the socially egalitarian activities and agenda of the sheikhs -- many descendants of hadrami sharifs themselves -- effectively critiqued the elitism of the *ulama* by making knowledge of Islam available to people well outside of the elite circles of learning.

Women, the illiterate majorities of the coastal towns' laboring poor, "the lonely and the deprived",⁵² were taught

⁵² These are Francois Constantin's words (1988) which well reflect the demoralization that many of the sheikhs' ready converts had experienced due to slavery, evictions,

the rudiments of the written tradition, including Qur'anic exegesis and fiqh; the sheikhs translated didactic works into Kiswahili (Nimtz, 1980), taught about the life and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (the hadith), and conducted collective zikiri ("remembrance" of God) performances in which participants enthusiastically swayed and intoned the names of God in an effort to experience profound communion with Him. Indeed, the *tasawwuf* (or mysticism, inner dimension of Islam) upon which the tarika sheikhs based their apprehension and communication of Muslim spirituality was readily accessible to a broad spectrum of non-literate converts since knowing God could be achieved through meditations (such as the zikiri) authenticated by the simplicity and indisputability of their intention. The tarika also offered a supportive and wide ranging social network that brought both material and spiritual support as well as a translocal collective identity as mouridis, or new members of the order. Glassman notes also that "public competitions in the recital of maulids (poems celebrating the birth of the Prophet)" were also associated with the tarika "sodalities" and "soon became the norm throughout Swahili Islam" (Glassman 1991:295). "[D]espite their initial distaste", writes Glassman, "the local artistocrats were not

and an uneven transition to proletarianization. Constantin was especially interested in the importance of the emotional appeal these sheikhs had for such followers, that is, the role of emotion in the construction of charisma and its connection to political power.

above sponsoring competitive *maulid* groups as acts of public patronage" (ibid).

While many of these sheikhs (or makhalifa, the tarika leaders) had the requisite pedigree -- both in terms of "blood" and their position in a recognized transgenerational chain of learning -- to be admitted into the elite circles of learning, they typically renounced such distinctions and initiated instead their own teaching groups with an interest in attracting more new mouridis or converts to Islam. Glassman notes that other tarika sheikhs had less lofty backgrounds, "low status newcomers from Yemen and Comoro" who "encouraged slaves and other low status outsiders in their penchant for integrating upcountry dance into their devotions, a practice which had been frowned upon by the Shirazi artistocrats" (1991:294).

Historian August Nimtz writes of the famous Sheikh Rumiyya who was himself a slave to a liwali in Bagamoyo (on the mrima coast). Upon his manumission, Rumiyya engaged in commercial activities which ultimately enabled him to devote time to religious study on his own. He later opened up a school in Bagamoyo which catered to the poor and unattached, housed itinerant Muslim preachers, and permitted and prepared women to gain entry into positions of Islamic religious authority (Nimtz, 1980). Another sheikh, Sayyid Adur Rahman as-Saqqaf was, in Mombasa, nicknamed the "professional poor man" as he used his government salary to

subsidize and teach the poor and illiterate. El-Zein (1974), Lienhardt (1959), and Strobel (1979) discuss how Habib Saliah Alawi Jamal al-Layl, a Comorian sheikh, was rejected by the religious elite of Lamu for teaching Qur'anic exegesis to the poor. Habib Saleh "gathered around him a faction of slaves, Hadrami merchants, and other strangers" to "socially, economically, and religiously challenge the upper-class freeborn leaders of Lamu" (Strobel 1979:77). Strobel continues, "...whereas the freeborn group stressed the importance of maintaining purity through descent and marriages between people of equal status, this Riyadhha faction argued that religious purity could be attained through the Prophet's love, which was open to all, not just the favored few" (ibid).

To their followers, then, these sheikhs were themselves the sources and symbols of Islamic piety and learning. Indeed, as the case of Sheikh Habib Saleh well illustrates, these sheikhs -- their teachings, their practices, their very way of being, as Francois Constantin writes -- became a formidable threat to the legitimacy of the official ulama and to their control over the qualifications and emblems of Islamic learning. Largely through the endeavors of the tarika sheikhs, the social relations of Islamic expertise and piety were becoming separated from their ideological engagement with descent, class, and even gender. Thus while it was from within

Islamic culture that ideologies were "made" to naturalize inequalities, it was also from within Islamic culture that such ideologies could be "unmade".

In a poignant article entitled, "Charisma and the Crisis of Power in East Africa" (1988), Francois Constantin locates the construction of Muslim sainthood within the wider context of political and economic transformation and uncertainty which characterized life on the coast towards the end of the nineteenth century. With the transition to a free labor system, the influx of European Christian missionaries, the installment of an official British colonial administration at the coast, and the German annexation of a large territory of the Tanganyika hinterland (previously under Barghash's sovereignty), the power base of the Busaidi Sultanate was severely compromised. Indeed, in 1886, a treaty was signed between Germany and Great Britain in which the East African territories were partitioned between the two. The partitioning of the region into two such "spheres of influence", as they were called, massively reduced Sultan Barghash's sovereign territory to the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia, and Lamu, and to a coastal strip (10 miles in depth) that extended from the northern (present-day) Kenyan coast (and included several towns to the north, including Barawa, Mogadishu, and Merka), to the River Ruvuma in southern Tanganyika. Although he protested the agreement and telegraphed London and Berlin "requesting

six months to consider the treaty", in the end, Barghash was forced to sign this "Delimitation Treaty" (Hollingsworth 1975 [1953]:18-21).

Finally, as we have seen, the proselytizing efforts of the tarika sheikhs -- while claiming great numbers of new converts to Islam -- "did not strengthen Arab hegemony" but rather "eroded it from its base" (Constantin 1988:86). In other words, while "becoming Muslim" or acquiring Islamic knowledge in itself may have done little to overcome the reality of the class and elitist status distinctions that had existed on the coast and between the coast and the hinterland, it also did not require "new" Muslims to consent to those terms of distinction as defined by the ulama. Moreover, the tarika contributed to the weakening of Arab hegemony not simply because the agendas of its sheikhs and the ulama were so different -- one to protect the exclusivity of Islamic learning and the prestige it conferred, the other to break down that very exclusivity; this explains the appeal of the sheikhs, but not the way in which they actually accomplished their goal. In this regard, Constantin attributes the sheikhs' cumulative impact on the ulama to their "latently seditious devoutness" because they worked "quietly, and with due respect to the established order" (ibid:68, 71).

Meanwhile, the ulama -- who clearly controlled access to their own authorized domains and methods of Islamic

learning -- "did not think they needed to strengthen their ideological supremacy" (ibid:69). The fact was, however, that the ulama could not control the social relations through which the sheikhs' charisma (and the new ideas about Islamic knowledge and authenticity it conveyed) was being constructed. Herein lies Constantin's special contribution: from such a vantage point, the ulama's "quasi-hegemony", as he calls it, was perilously incomplete. This illustrates well Raymond Williams' point that "the hegemonic" does not merely exist in the totalizing set of beliefs that aid in the domination of one class over another. Instead, like Asad's approach to orthodoxy, hegemony

"is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities...It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, altered, and challenged by processes not all its own". Thus "any hegemonic process must be equally alert and responsive to the alternatives and oppositions which question its dominance [which the ulama were not]. The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony" (Williams: 112-113).

Paradoxically, then, in order to reproduce the status quo, hegemonic ideas and relations contain the source of their own undoing. In this sense, establishing hegemony is about taking risks; it has to be incomplete.

c. Power Plays: Sheikhs, Merchants, Colonialists, and the Sultan

The charisma or emotional (and ultimately, political) appeal of the sheikhs was as much a product of the conditions affecting the lives of the estranged and disenfranchised segments of the coastal population and the relationships they entered into with the sheikhs, as it was an extension of the sheikhs' self-characterization as dedicated and God-fearing men. Like the elite ulama, many of the tarika sheikhs were well-travelled in their pursuit of Islam studies, were fluent in Arabic, adept in coastal magical practices, and were thought to have *karama*, a quality describing the condition of being in God's favor. Besides the exemplary piety and generosity they consistently demonstrated in their relations with others, the fact that the sheikhs renounced the privilege and prestige that their pedigree and qualifications entitled them to was regarded, in such a status conscious society, as a most impressive act of self sacrifice and grace. This is not to say that the sheikhs were destitute. But their often quite significant earnings accrued through entrepreneurial activities, salaried positions, or from their own family inheritances were "reinvested to finance pilgrimages and religious studies for their disciples and to provide for them spiritual and material support" (Constantin 1988:78). Indeed, "the system of clientalism that [came to] center on the sheikhs demanded that they had the means to guarantee

their followers protection" (ibid) -- in the form of shelter and physical up-keep, as well as "against dangers beyond the control of ordinary mortals, whether related to the struggle over the temporal power of the 'great' or to rather more mysterious problems" (ibid:87). In this latter context, the sheikhs' magical expertise and the other-worldly power associated with their baraka and grace were considered a valuable resource.

This clientalism and network of support that the tarika offered was a key feature of the sheikhs' social profile, especially in the eyes of the colonial administrations -- that is, the British in Kenya and the Germans in Tanganyika: the sheikhs were "not mystic utopians who encouraged their followers to retreat from the world, nor naive revolutionaries who think [their] faithful fanatics can take on the ruling power" (ibid:88). Instead, the sheikhs helped their followers to live in the world, as it was, to be a part of it -- but with the dignity, identity, and resources that spiritual guidance along the Right Path would bring them. Indeed, while the ulama dismissed the sheikhs as renegade proselytizers, the British officials recognized their potential power and understood that by "treating them carefully," these sheikhs -- with their followings among the not yet fully proletarianized, not quite landed,

predominantly African population⁵³ -- could be incorporated into the colonial project of indirect rule as "multipurpose mediators" (ibid:89) through whom the grievances and activities of the increasingly restive coastal population could be monitored and controlled. At the same time, however, when considering the geographically and politically wide-ranging territory into which the tarika -- especially the Qadiriyya -- expanded from the 1880's to about 1910 (from Zanzibar and the coast to upcountry Tanganyika and the "fringes of the Congo" [Martin 1969:486]), one learns that the extra-religious consequences of their activities were far from uniform. Being neither static nor dogmatic in their organization or style, the agenda and image of the tarika were shaped not only by the spiritual and material needs of their converts, but also by the role the tarika were said to have played in helping to foment "anti-foreign" sentiments -- in particular, against the Germans, who established an Imperial Protectorate over Tanganyika in 1891 (Martin, 1969; Iliffe, 1979; Nimtz, 1980).

While it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to delve into this issue in great detail, it is important to note that the popularity of the Qadiriyya -- the membership it attracted -- did cut across class lines. This is not to say that the interests of both rich and poor members, or the

⁵³ At the coast, these "Africans" were mostly ex-slaves, up-country migrants, as well as natives of the coastal strip.

conditions which shaped their attraction to the orders, were the same; the tarika were not necessarily a forum through which differences in class position (and all the cultural baggage attached to that) were levelled in unification against a colonizing power. But what it does mean is that the tarika simultaneously created new niches or possibilities for a range of actors -- the Sultans of Zanzibar, wealthy merchants, as well as the disenfranchised and displaced peoples of upcountry Tanganyika⁵⁴ -- to articulate rights, construct legitimacy, and to maneuver

⁵⁴ Such "displacement" and "disenfranchisement" was brought on largely by forced labor and subjugation to German authority. In southeastern Tanganyika, in 1905, these conditions triggered a wide spread, multi-ethnic rebellion (initiated when cotton, the crop that symbolized German control, was yanked from its roots by African laborers in a declaration of war) known as the Maji uprising. For an excellent analysis of its social and cultural underpinnings, and of the role of this (revitalization) movement's prophet, Kinjikitile, see G.C k. Gwassa, "Kinjikitile and the Ideology of Maji" (1972). In this article, Gwassa points to the importance of local cultural and eschatological ideas in contributing to the formation of a sustained and inter-ethnic belief system of resistance. Finally, see also Jonathon Glassman's recent Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888 (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995) for an extraordinary analysis on what is known as the "Arab Revolt" at Pangani (northern Tanganyika coast) in 1888. Glassman points out that this pivotal (that is, successful) uprising at the coast was fought by "a broad but brittle alliance of Shirazi patricians, lower-class townspeople, peasants and slaves from the surrounding countryside, and warriors from many parts of the interior" (1995:6). However, the Germans had found it "politically expedient to characterize this movement against them as an "Arab revolt", engineered by Omanis and other Arabs in an effort to preserve their position as the region's premier slave traders, planters, and power-brokers" (ibid). But as Glassman points out, the revolt was "directed against Arab rule as much as it was directed against the Germans".

both within and against (that is, in resistance to) the emergence of the colonial state. Indeed, the tarika's egalitarian message, the wide-ranging and integrative potential of their socio-religious organizations, and the visible success the sheikhs had in accelerating the spread of Islam in the Protectorate, posed a significant threat to the Germans' administrative and missionary endeavors to pacify and enlighten the colonized. Thus it is in this context, argues B.G. Martin,⁵⁵ that Sultan Barghash, religiously sectarian and orthodox though he was, would come to join the Uwaysiyya branch of the Qadiriyya: based as he was in Zanzibar, Barghash's affiliation with the order made it possible for him to "rally support" against the advances the Germans had been making in their occupation of the Tanganyikan interior, advances which had already thwarted the expansion of his dominions there (Martin 1969:475-476; 480).

In 1884 the Germans had successfully managed to annex a large territory of the Tanganyikan hinterland, including Usagara, Uzigua, Ukami, and Nguru which in 1886 was turned over to the German East Africa Company (Hollingsworth 1975:17). They did so by "signing" treaties with a number of local "chiefs" who purportedly surrendered the sovereignty of their territories. As Hollingsworth reports,

⁵⁵ Martin's position is informed by Rolland Oliver's The Missionary Factor in East Africa, 1884-1894 (1952).

being left out of this negotiation severely agitated Barghash since he claimed that his sovereignty had extended well into those very territories that the "chiefs" had surrendered.

Similarly, the German presence "damaged the political and commercial interests" of a wealthy, rather predatory coterie of slave and ivory merchants who were based in Zanzibar but who also commanded far-reaching political ties that extended as far as the Congo State (Martin 1969:482). This coterie centered on the family of one Muhammad b. Khalfan b. Khamis al-Barwani, well known in East African historiography as Rumaliza, who was also a member of the Qadiriyya. Of relevance to our discussion here is that Rumaliza is reputed, among other things, to have been the primary instigator of the "Mecca Letter Affair" (1905-1908), an incident designed ultimately to arouse Muslim self-consciousness as a political foil against the Germans.

In this incident, a letter -- written in Arabic and purportedly from Mecca -- was read aloud and circulated by a number of Qadiriyya tarika leaders, all colleagues of Rumaliza, namely, Abu Bakr b. Taha al-Jabri al Barawi at Bagamoyo (central Tanganyikan coast); Zahir b. Muhammad al-Jabri al Barawi at Tabora (central Tanganyika); and Isa b. Ahmad al-Ngaziiji at Lindi (southern Tanganyikan coast). In the letter, Muslims were warned of God's displeasure with their "backsliding" and "indulgences", and that if they did

not pass the letter on they would face the Prophet himself "as their opponent" on the impending Day of Judgement (ibid:477). Several variations of the letter came into being and were even embellished, as was the case with Zahir in Tabora, with "prophecies and millennial rumors" that portended the "end of European rule" and the rise of Muslim power (ibid:478). Indeed, convinced that the "spread of the [tarika's] ecstatic zikiri dance", together with public discussion of the letter and the teachings of the likes of Zahir would give rise to a "fanatical anti-European Islam", the Governor of the Tanganyikan Protectorate Albrecht von Rechenberg sent out a dispatch directing his officers to "drive a wedge between the genuinely pious Muslims and the Muslim agitators who were only waiting for trouble to break out⁵⁶ so they could take advantage of it" (ibid:479).

Since such distinctions were by no means mutually exclusive, however, one may well wonder how the Germans distinguished Muslims as "friend or foe". First, as Martin points out, the Germans knew that Rumaliza was behind the letter and that his motives were far from spiritual; thus, any one of his associates would be suspect. Secondly, the German attitude towards the tarika, together with the decentralized and heterogeneous nature of Islam and Islamic leadership in their Protectorate in general, led to the

⁵⁶ As Iliffe points out, the Maji revolt had made the Germans extra sensitive to the signs of potential uprisings.

Germans' choice to recognize the more conservative ulama as the only legitimate local authority on Islamic affairs (Iliffe, 1979). In turn, such recognition helped bolster the ulama's waning legitimacy, a decline hastened by the outreach efforts of the tarika sheikhs. Thus in 1890, Zahir was expelled from Tabora, and Isa fled from Lindi; both wound up in Zanzibar, where Isa became a reader in a mosque and a leader of Qadiriyya zikiri recitation in Ng'ambo, the residential sector of Zanzibar Town's laboring poor. Meanwhile, at Bagamoyo, Abu Bakr was forced to make a public disavowal of the letter (Martin 1969:484-485).

In the end, while these actions were successful in quelling the Mecca Letter affair, the Qadiriyya had become far too "unwieldy" -- in both the number and diversity of its membership -- to be contained. Constantin suggests that the rise of nationalism and the formation of political parties (and, I would add, of trade unions) in the mid-twentieth century put an end to the tarika sheikhs' "historical mission", even though, as I discuss in a later chapter, they continue to be active in Zanzibar today.

d. Concluding Thoughts

Turning back, now, to the emergence of "counter cultures of Islamic knowledge", we can begin to see how the popularization of Islamic erudition through the activities of the tarika sheikhs, together with the appropriation and

gradual transformation of a "patrician Islam" by ex-slaves as they crafted and enhanced their identities as Muslims and as freepeople, gave rise to new ideas about Islamic knowledge and authenticity.⁵⁷ In a sense, these developments constituted a transgression against the domain of knowledge cultivated and protected by the ulama. These constituted a transgression not only because they challenged the ideological basis of the ulama's legitimacy (in that pedigree, class, or gender were no longer prerequisites for access to Islamic knowledge), but also because the very existence of alternative ways of knowing Islam, of defining a practice as Islamic, or of constituting a Muslim identity meant that other-than-religious factors were at work in bringing meaning to how Muslims would understand and express their "submission" to God. These were social, political-economic, and cultural factors that shaped a range of human predicaments and perspectives over which the ulama had little control, and which existed well outside the authority upon which their privileges, prestige, and propriety as the "knowledge elite" had rested.

But it was not simply that the tarika sheikhs were egalitarian and proselytizing, and the ulama elitist and

⁵⁷ Similarly, Jonathon Glassman argues that because slaves were excluded from participating in "the precise rituals by which a [freeborn] man established his legitimacy" [as an honorable, powerful, and erudite man], they created their own "alternative versions of coastal ritual...[which] very often came to redefine Swahili culture generally" (Glassman 1991:294).

protectionist; this would unduly reify these groups as fixed, homogeneous and opposed categories which they were not: there were tarika sheikhs who read with the ulama, and ulama who participated in tarika activities; there were ulama sheikhs whose popularity among local communities made them veritable local heroes (in Zanzibar, Sheikhs Sumayt, Bakathir, and later, Farsy are good examples); even the tarika orders and branches themselves were not particularly unified since, among other things, competition for mouridis often turned them into rivals. Moreover, it is possible that like today, many of these Islamic figures were involved simultaneously in multiple sets of relationships with students, supplicants, mentors, clients, peers, and dependents, relationships which kept them moving in and out of various social roles, activities, and characterizations which may or may not have had to do with their having "expert" knowledge of Islam. But what we do learn from this "critical historical conjuncture" in East Africa's past (as Marcia Wright calls it), is that the definition and use of Islamic knowledge could not be controlled by any one class, and that Islamic knowledge was used, in its various forms, and in diverse settings, to inform initiatives and to authorize or contest the construction of cultural and class identifications that expressed the changing realities of coastal life during this time. Islamic knowledge was understood not only as a particular body of historical

traditions and prescriptions for living as Muslims; it was also an emblem in itself, potentially political (be it conservative or transgressive) in its expression, that could signify or represent aspects of the identity, status, and convictions of its bearers to the world.

The next chapter carries these themes into the present. In Zanzibar today, we find a secular state currently in the throes of constitutional reform, no single institution or body of arbiters is vested with the final authority to determine the credentials of authenticity or require uniformity in the traditions of learning. This does not mean, however, that there are no "ulama", but rather that they do not constitute a distinctive, homogeneous group, despite the authorization (or better, creation, through state recognition) of one such group by an elite oligarchy of earlier times. While literacy in Arabic, Islamic erudition, and descent do continue to be significant factors in the negotiation of authority within the emerging Islamic political culture in Zanzibar today, they are significant not because they define the agreed upon qualifications for laying claims to Islamic authenticity, but because the very meaning, value, and social implications of these emblems are being contested, defended, and redefined. Chapter three develops this topic by moving from the general to the specific, beginning with a description of how aspects of political history are reflected in the physical and spacial

orientation of Zanzibar Town. These aspects I relate to changing cultural ideas about the connections between Islamic descent identities, social privilege, religious prestige, and knowledge. This is followed by an analysis of how these ideas have entered into personalized arguments concerning the nature of Islamic authenticity and, implicitly, hierarchy, among Muslim figures in Zanzibar Town. The voices represented in those arguments include a leader of the Qadiriyya tarika, a Hadrami sheikh, and the leader of one of the "essentialist" (or "bida'a") factions in Zanzibar Town.

CHAPTER THREE
Ambivalent Affinities: The Politics of
Islamic Authority, Authenticity, and Descent
in Zanzibar Town Today

This chapter explores how cultural ideas associated with "Islamic descent identities" introduced in chapter two have endured through significant political changes in Zanzibar, changes which at times have found it ideologically untenable to recognize or valorize the social privileges that descent from the Prophet Muhammad or from celebrated Islamic scholars from the Hadramawt conferred upon such individuals in Zanzibar's past. I begin with a brief description of Stone Town and Ng'ambo and how the socio-cultural images of these places relate to each other and have been historically and politically shaped. In this discussion I introduce the compound (called Ukutani) of an historically renowned family of Hadrami Islamic scholars located in Mkunazini, a neighborhood in Stone Town. Here I argue that individuals in Zanzibar who are still distinguished by Islamic descent identities are often regarded by others with ambivalence because of their presumed affinity with a once exclusive and privileged religious elite. However, even while the bases of their legitimacy have been challenged by subsequent cohorts of Islamic teachers, these descendants continue to be pulled into, and in various ways are recreated through, the social relations of Islamic knowledge and practice. Finally, at

another, related level, I examine how descent has been invoked to both promote and contest ideas about "authenticity", hierarchy, and intimacy which together underlie a wider politics of Islamic representation in Zanzibar today -- a theme which I return to in chapter eight.

I. Artifacts of a Ranked Prestige: "Stone Town", "Ng'ambo", and the Zanzibar Revolution

Stone Town (or *Mji Mkongwe*, Old Town) was built at the water's edge. It is situated on a small peninsula on the western coast of the island. Approximately three quarters of a mile in perimeter, it is flanked on two sides by the Zanzibar Harbor, along which the main road curves. The eastern "margin" of Stone Town was once demarcated by a creek which was later filled in by the British during their colonial occupation of the island; this created a major thoroughfare, Creek Road, today the location of Zanzibar Town's bustling central marketplace. Fish, meat, and a wide array of fresh produce transported daily from peoples' *shambas* (cultivated plots or farms) in the rural areas by bicycle or large wooden passenger trucks is unloaded here and sold. While this is also where many of the larger and more expensive retail stores are located, smaller retailers, dry goods stores, and a myriad of workshops such as carpenters, tailors, gold and silver smiths, electricians, and cobblers are found all along the winding streets of the

town, interspersed with residential and administrative buildings, schools, mosques, Qur'an schools, eateries, guest houses, and, most recently, several larger hotels catering mostly to tourists. While vehicles drive along the main roads that shape the perimeter of Stone Town, getting around the narrow streets of its interior is best accomplished on foot, by motorscooter, or by bicycle, the most common form of transportation in the town. Here, the air is filled with the familiar scuffle of sandaled footfalls on gravelly paths, the shouts of young children playing games in the street or intoning Arabic phrases from their mats in the Qur'an schools, and the rattle of men's old black Raleigh bicycles typically encumbered by a load of recent purchases or by a woman passenger deftly balanced on a makeshift seat in the back. Clusters of people chat in the doorways of houses and shops that open up onto the street.

Just across Creek Road walking east is Darajani Street, another major retail sector (mostly imported clothing, fabric, housewares, and electronic goods are sold here), and the "dala dala" (taxi) stand, full of commotion, where pick-up trucks converted into passenger vehicles provide the means for commuting throughout Ng'ambo, the expansive residential areas where the majority of Zanzibar Town residents live. These neighborhoods are self-sufficient in that shops of all kinds provide residents with basic services and necessities, but quantities of staple

foodstuffs such as fish, rice, sweet potatoes, bananas, or cassava are usually obtained from the central marketplace, or from one's own shamba outside of town. Primary schools, mosques, and Qur'an schools are also located throughout these neighborhoods. While there are thoroughfares that link and cross-sect these neighborhoods, like Stone Town, walking or bicycling along the interior paths provides the best access to houses located farthest from the main roads. However, in contrast to the two to four story houses constructed of white-washed stone and coral rag in Stone Town -- most of which were built after Sultan Seyyid Said of Oman moved the capitol of his commercial empire there in 1832 -- houses in Ng'ambo, historically the residential sector of the laboring poor, were built with earth, wood, thatch or tin. Now, however, when finances permit, they are being constructed out of cement and corrugated iron. The Michanzani flats are also a part of the landscape just east of Stone Town, where, during the reign of Abeid Karume (1964-1972), a section of Ng'ambo housing was levelled and several 5-story concrete block apartment buildings were constructed in their place.

The everyday networks of social life in Zanzibar Town are symbolically and materially complex and can be far-reaching in both time and space. For instance, many town residents actively maintain familial ties to the rural areas which provide access to land, social alliances, and impart a

sense of communal belonging and place of origin. This is largely a consequence of the population shifts which occurred immediately after the revolution in 1964 discussed below. Similarly, but on a larger scale, Zanzibaris may cultivate new or pre-existing contacts with relatives or associates living abroad, particularly in Oman, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi.⁵⁸ Finally, a high rate of divorce, multiple remarriage, and the placing of children in the long term care of various relatives⁵⁹ all reflect the dynamic nature of the social relations through which individuals define and negotiate household parameters and responsibilities. Surely this kind of social flux is a feature of town life in most post-colonial settings, especially where, as in Zanzibar, cost of living increases, devaluation of the local currency, and un- and under- employment, all exacerbated by the recent

⁵⁸ As described in the text below, one significant consequence of the revolution was the expulsion of many elite Zanzibari families of Arab descent, creating, in time, an educated ex-patriot population in, among other places, Abu-Dhabi, Dubai, and Oman. Thus contacts among long separated family members have kept these countries entangled in Zanzibari affairs. However, the recent renewal of more formal, official relations with Oman and other wealthy Arab Emirates has been in large part a consequence of the economic liberalization campaign beginning in the 1980s and Zanzibar's solicitation of support from its wealthy "Muslim brethren" to the north.

⁵⁹ It is common, for instance, for people to distinguish *mzazi* (birth-parent) from *mlezi* (one who raised you) when referring to a "mother", or to describe one's relationship to a sibling as "*mama mmoja baba mmoja*" "[we share the] same birth-mother and father", or "*mama moja baba mbali*", "...same mother, but a different father".

campaign to privatize the local economy,⁶⁰ have made living in or depending on the town alone especially difficult for the majority of residents there. But this movement of people is also culturally significant -- particularly regarding the assumptions made about cultural prestige in the past -- since people's living arrangements and social relationships with family, peers, Islamic teachers, curers, clients, or spiritual mentors are not defined or limited by the location of their residence in either Stone Town or Ng'ambo, but rather extend beyond.

Indeed, the conceptualization of the outlying residential neighborhoods as "Ng'ambo", the "other side" of Stone Town, is best understood as a symbolic artifact of the social organization of space in the past, when the populations of these areas, despite their internal ethnic diversity, were distinguished largely in terms of class background and elite constructs of cultural prestige, with mostly workers, artisans, and migrant laborers (African mainlanders and ex-slaves, and indigenous Zanzibaris) living in Ng'ambo, and wealthier merchant-financiers and the

⁶⁰ A World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Program was implemented in Tanzania in 1986, but not in Zanzibar. Instead, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, the then president of Zanzibar (and current president of Tanzania) styled his own Economic Recovery Program for the islands which was designed to "permit market forces a larger role" in the otherwise government controlled economy (Throup, 1988:189; Biermann and Wagao, 1986:90; Juma, 1986). Import liberalization and the encouragement of foreign, private investment were, and have continued to be, the primary features of this economic reform.

landowning elite, Zanzibaris mostly of Asian and Arab descent, occupying houses in Stone Town. However, until recently, scholarly emphasis on the dichotomy between these two residential sectors, based though it was on very real differences in the economic status and power of the residents, has obscured a view of the social diversity that existed in each, and of the fact that wider political and economic conditions changed the social composition of Ng'ambo and Stone Town over time, as well as the relations within and between them. Historically, for example, Abdul Sheriff comments on the presence of Arab-built stone houses in Ng'ambo and, especially, wattle and daub houses in Stone Town, his point being that "the so-called 'native quarter' [what Ng'ambo was to become] existed on the peninsula on which Stone Town itself was located. It was not exiled across the creek until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and the so-called '*cordon sanitaire*' between Stone Town and Ng'ambo that the creek was to become developed largely during the colonial period." (Sheriff 1995:22-23). Moreover, by exploring the history of Ng'ambo on its own terms rather than as the amorphous, chaotic, sordid "other side" of Stone Town it was rumored to be, Garth Myers reveals that this residential sector was in fact well-organized into neighborhoods and districts. Myers also calls attention to the cultural and social diversity of Ng'ambo, and to the existence of active community-based

interest groups which played significant roles in the development of Ng'ambo's changing social, political, and economic life throughout the colonial period (Myers 1995:30-45).

Today, especially, it is not possible to draw such neat categorical distinctions between the residents of Stone Town and Ng'ambo. In 1964, a revolution took place in Zanzibar town -- a pivotal episode in Zanzibar's history which led to the dislocation and subsequent relocation of peoples who would come to live in town. Thereafter, the "boundaries" of prestige that had once distinguished Stone Town so conspicuously from its "other side" were, in effect, divested of their meaning, or, better, their relevance: with the dispossession of the elite, Stone Town, it was thought, would no longer constitute an enclave of privilege.

The Zanzibar revolution was staged in town on January 12 just after Zanzibar achieved its constitutional independence from Great Britain in December of 1963. Briefly, the 1963 elections on Unguja and Pemba established the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) as the first ruling party of a sovereign Zanzibar. However, several months after this election, members of the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) and the communist Umma Party overthrew the ZNP incumbents on the grounds that they had won the election unfairly (the ZNP were accused of gerrymandering [Cooper 1980:286]), and that a ZNP government -- a regime dominated by Zanzibari Arab

"intellectuals" (read: elites) -- would do nothing to transform the economic inequalities and structure of privilege which planters and merchant-financiers had enjoyed under British and Omani rule. Several months after the revolution, Zanzibar, or, rather Abeid Karume, President of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council, established a political union with Julius Nyerere, the then President of Tanganyika, forming the nation state of Tanzania. Presently, in addition to the Parliament of the Union Government, Zanzibar has its own House of Representatives and its own Constitution. The Union Government has continued to the present but has long been a source of political tension between the islands and the mainland, especially since Zanzibar has firmly stood its ground and protected its right to control its foreign exchange reserve earned mostly through the sale of its cloves. This tension became more serious after the governing parties of Zanzibar and the mainland (the ASP and TANU, respectively) merged in 1977 to form a single ruling party, the Chama Cha Mapinduzi, the Party of the Revolution.⁶¹

Among the aims of the revolution relevant to our discussion here was to rid Zanzibar of all vestiges of foreign rule (including the Omani Sultanate) and to end elite ownership and control of wealth and property on the

⁶¹ In the current wave of multipartyism, however, the domination of the CCM is being seriously challenged.

islands, especially plantations but also stone houses. Consequently, most Zanzibaris of Arab and Asian descent who comprised -- or who were associated with, by virtue of their ethnicity⁶² -- the merchant and large landowning, planter classes of Zanzibar, were forcibly exiled from the island, leaving their shops and Stone Town houses vacant. Anthony Clayton describes how plantations were nationalized and later redistributed to "individual peasant producers" (Clayton 1981:137), while stone houses in town were confiscated and became the property of the revolutionary government. Several of these houses were occupied by the new political elite (the Afro-Shirazi Party executives), while "others remained empty and deteriorated" (ibid:145).

Some Stone Town houses also came to be occupied by Zanzibaris who had been living as smallholders or squatters in the rural areas, some coming from as far as Pemba in search of wages. When a portion of Ng'ambo housing was razed for construction of the above-mentioned housing project Michanzani Flats, many residents were left (temporarily, it was hoped), without homes. Those who

⁶² As will be discussed in the following chapter, the struggle to end the economic structure of privilege in Zanzibar later came to be understood largely in racial terms, rendering "Arab" as a monolithic, undifferentiated ethnic category inextricably linked with the former oligarchy (which in reality was predominantly Omani). Thus Zanzibaris of Arab descent (from places such as the Hadramawt or Barawa as well as Oman) who were small-scale shopkeepers, petty traders, workers, or peasants in the countryside also suffered violent attacks and lootings.

ultimately could not get housing in these new apartment blocks took up residence as either squatters or tenants in Stone Town; indeed, many such individuals -- or their relatives -- have remained in these flats until today.

More recently, some Stone Town houses are being repurchased by formerly exiled owners (or their families) now living abroad but planning to return to Zanzibar, while others have been designated as historical landmarks and are being restored under supervision of the government, which still has authority over most of the buildings there.⁶³ This sort of gentrification is in part a consequence of the combined push to decentralize state control of the Zanzibari economy and to encourage private enterprise and capital investment there in ventures such as tourism, construction, trade, and agro-industry.⁶⁴ Indeed, it is largely in an effort to increase tourism that the Zanzibari government has invited several European NGO's to help finance the restoration of historic stone buildings in the town area.

⁶³ This trend in which former (and long exiled) Zanzibaris are returning to the island to buy back their former properties from the government has meant that many such squatter-tenants are coming under threat of eviction.

⁶⁴ With the closing down of Zanzibari parastatals that controlled the islands importing and exporting of commodities, a capitalist track is being laid through privatization, free market trade, and entrepreneurial initiatives. see also Omar Ali Juma, (1988?) Zanzibar in Perspective: A Collection of Speeches and Statements (a Zanzibar Government publication. Omar Ali Juma was Chief Minister of Zanzibar at the time of this particular publication).

The weathered, deteriorated condition of these once ornate houses caused by vacancy, neglect, or lack of resources for up-keep gives them a look of faded opulence, a shadow of the prestige that once distinguished Stone Town, and the source of what restoration teams today are working to bring back -- this time, it is hoped, to generate revenue.

II. The "Paradox of Foreignness"

Thus the deliberate expulsion of the majority of Arab and South Asian Zanzibaris and the eventual "re-peopling" of Stone Town was a most palpable signal to islanders that class distinctions -- identified, in the end, less in class than in racial terms⁶⁵ --and elite notions of privilege that linked prestige with material well-being epitomized by private ownership of stone houses, were to be a thing of Zanzibar's past; the idea was that, in the end, Zanzibar had been reclaimed for "Africa". And yet what has endured, despite the reified identification of the former ruling elite with Arabs, or, better, with "foreignness", has been the notion of descent -- an ideological construct that, as

⁶⁵ In their work, Abdulrahman Babu (1991), the founder of Zanzibar's Umma Party, and Amrit Wilson (1989) have endeavored to tease out the laudable socialist intentions of the revolution from the racism, anti-intellectualism, corruption, and mismanagement that ensued during the Karume years. In particular, Wilson's analysis locates the Union established between Zanzibar and Tanganyika within the context of Cold War politics that were being played out in East Africa during this time (featured especially in her work is the exposure of the strong but clandestine American presence in the negotiations between Nyerere and Karume).

we have seen, can serve to privilege or set certain people apart from others. As I discussed earlier, Islamic glosses on descent from the Prophet (*masharifu*) or from Hadrami Islamic scholars necessarily imply "foreign" origins, and yet it is in this very foreignness -- in the *baraka* (divine grace) implied by such putative genealogical connections -- that the physical and spiritual well-being of the community of believers is brought home. Consequently, individuals, or, better, the construction of individuals⁶⁶ who are still distinguished by descent identities rendered in Islamic religious terms -- whether through lineal ancestry or position in a transgenerational chain of learning (*silsilah*) -- are considered with some ambivalence⁶⁷ in Zanzibar. This is because they bear the weight of constituting a fallen elite that nevertheless continues to be pulled into and, in various ways, recreated through, the social relations of Islamic knowledge and practice.

⁶⁶ I make this distinction because a person's Islamic descent identity, if somehow distinguished by, say, one's name or clothing, may be recognized by others, even if it is not meaningful to the individual her/himself. This is in part the point of the "burden" of descent discussed below: after all, if one has something to offer as a descendant of a Hadrami scholar or of the Prophet himself (knowledge, grace), then he is obliged (by God) to do so.

⁶⁷ This is not to say that they are treated differently in face to face social intercourse; what I mean here is that an ambivalence is expressed or inferred in discussions about social status, the past, and Islamic authenticity and authority.

A window into this sort of cultural ambivalence regarding the shades of meaning associated with Islamic descent identities today -- specifically in comparison to the rather unambiguous spacial boundaries these meanings represented in the past -- can be found in the crumbled remains of a wall that once surrounded a *kiambo* (compound) in a *mtaa* (neighborhood) called Mkunazini. This area was known as Ukutani, so-named for its demarcation with a wall that had once enclosed -- indeed, protected -- the home and tombs of the famed Hadrami sheikhs of, among others, the Bakathiri family.

Ukutani was settled, probably in the late 18th century, by the sharifian clan of Abubakar bin Salim from Tarim in the Hadramawt. In approximately 1900, these sharifs invited Sheikh Abdallah Muhammad Bakathir (1864-1925) -- himself born and raised in Lamu, on the northern Kenyan coast -- to come to live and teach in Zanzibar. By that time, the Bakathir clan had already distinguished themselves among the Muslim scholarly elite in Lamu; indeed, their compound, Ryadha, like Ukutani in Zanzibar, was described to me as a "*chumbuko la ilm*", a fount of Islamic knowledge. Thus, as the story unfolds, Habib Saleh Jamal-Layl, another among the distinguished masharifu in Zanzibar, escorted Sheikh Abdallah Bakathir from Lamu to Ukutani, encouraging him to join in their effort to build lasting and harmonious relations among the various Muslim groups in Zanzibar.

Among Sheikh Bakathir's distinguished students in Zanzibar were the aforementioned Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy, and Sayyid Omar bin Sumayt. Sumayt's father, the Comorian sheikh Ahmad bin Sumayt (1861-1925) was a friend of Abdallah Bakathir and a most famous scholar in his own right who also hailed from a Hadrami sharifian family from Tarim and who was involved in the promotion of the Alawiyya tarika, one of the Sufi brotherhoods still active in Zanzibar today.

Thus building a wall (*ukuta*) around the sharifs' compound defined it as a kind of sanctuary.⁶⁸ In the words of one *ustaadh* (madrasa teacher), the wall "kept out the drunken and depraved", and "inspired fear of the great sheikhs (*mashekhe makubwa*) within."⁶⁹ "Today, Bakathir is exalted even as far as South Africa," recalls one of the tarika leaders in Zanzibar. "In 1907 Sheikhs Abdallah Bakathir, Muhammad bin Omar, and Said Dahman were sent by the then Kadhi Mkuu of Zanzibar Ahmed bin Sumayt to settle a crisis of leadership between two large Islamic factions in Durban. The delegation was successful in the peace-making mission and, in return, the Durban Muslims offered them a sum of money as a show of gratitude. Of course the

⁶⁸ In the Hadramawt, sharifs could "own territorial sanctuaries...[which] were considered by the townsmen and tribesmen of Hadramawt as sacred enclaves, centers of religious and political influence and inviolable in the case of hostilities." (Martin 1971:530).

⁶⁹ Interview with Utsaadh Abdulrahman, Mukunazini, Zanzibar Town, February 24, 1990.

delegation did not accept the gift, and suggested instead that such funds be used to build a new madrasa there. And that is how, in South Africa, the 'Masjid Bakathir' was built, commemorating the efforts of the great sheikhs of Zanzibar.⁷⁰

Abdallah Bakathir's grandson, "Maalim", now in his late fifties, continues to live at Ukutani and has expanded the compound's *madrasa* (mosque school) considerably. However, the wall that once surrounded the compound has fallen away, "...since before the revolution", explained the *ustaadh* at the madrasa. "It was never rebuilt, perhaps out of neglect, perhaps because the new government would not have permitted it." The tombs however are still intact, and for many Zanzibaris they continue to be a source and symbol of the piety and learning for which the elder Bakathirs were known, and are believed to bring baraka to those who visit and invoke their eminence in supplicatory prayer.

But while the madrasa today is a thriving institution run by Maalim Bakathiri and a cohort of former students, the burden of descent falls upon Maalim Bakathiri alone. The last in a line of men of knowledge and grace, it is a trial to remain exemplary in word and deed, particularly when one is unsure of one's audience or of what people seek from

⁷⁰ Interview with Sheikh Muhammad Latif at his mother's home in Kisimamnjogoo, Zanzibar Town, January 2, 1993.

one's past. After all, the old ruling elite in Zanzibar⁷¹ promoted itself largely through an enlightened paternalism fashioned in the image of the learned and the devout. Religious prestige, associated with sharifian or Islamic scholarly descent identities (like the Bakathirs who hailed from the Hadramawt),⁷² was manifested in the conferral of social privileges and expectations of deferential treatment. Some Zanzibaris remember how even the "local" Qur'an teachers -- the implication being that these native elders were less informed than the great scholars, since, after all, they had no pedigree, could not speak Arabic, and only knew parts of the Qur'an by rote -- affected airs of distinction: "We never questioned our sheikhs," recalls one of my acquaintances, Bwana Omar, about his childhood. "...We accepted everything they said as true and right...we used to kiss their hands...even in the street they would hold their hand out to passing children for them to kiss. But you don't see that today. [Now] the youth ask their sheikhs things, they question their teachings: what aya?⁷³ where

⁷¹ That is, the Omani ruling oligarchy of the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. See Abdul Sheriff (1987) on the actual governing role and power of the Omani Sultanate oligarchy during British overrule.

⁷² It is important to note that not all Zanzibaris of Hadrami descent were from scholarly families. In fact, the majority of Hadramis were small shopkeepers and watercarriers by vocation.

⁷³ An aya is a numbered passage in a chapter (sura) of the Qur'an.

does it say that? they challenge them, they want to know more."⁷⁴ In Bwana Omar's view, many of the older teachers were threatened by men like himself -- their former Qur'an school students -- who were awarded scholarships to study Islam, among other subjects, abroad (Khartoum, Ridhya) and who thus came to hold university degrees that represented not only a new vogue of learning dramatized by distance (study "abroad"), but also one in which a universally recognized, secular credential (a diploma) was accepted for authorization of a universally Islamic tradition of knowledge.

However, today, inasmuch as Maalim Bakathiri is sought out, praised, or prayed for -- he is, in fact, a conspicuous figure -- Maalim's expertise is recognized not by his command of Islamic scholarly texts, but rather by the sound of his voice; that is, his talent in the realm of performance: *Tajiwidi*, (Qur'anic recitation), reciting and composing *dua* and *kasida*, and performing *maulidi* are the heart of Maalim's expertise.⁷⁵ *Tajiwidi* is the art of correctly pronouncing, not just reciting, the Qur'an, and *maulidi* and *kasida* are Islamic devotional works composed and recited in poetic form; *dua* are prayers of supplication which are, in their most impressive form, composed and

⁷⁴ Discussion with Bwana Omar, in Queens, New York, June 13, 1992.

⁷⁵ Interview with Maalim Bakathir, Ukutani compound in Mkunazini, Zanzibar Town, May 11, 1989.

recited spontaneously on behalf of a supplicant.⁷⁶ Indeed, Islamic knowledge is defined in part through these very performances. As such, its significance -- and the social identity it confers upon the performer -- is not necessarily understood in connection with other, typically converging social constructs such as descent (in this case, being a Bakathiri), gender (being male), or status (being elite). This throws light on how the meanings and acts that Muslims may continue to associate with the bearers of Islamic descent identities -- namely, the effects of baraka and knowledge as it is communicated and experienced through the bearer's recitation and performance -- can endure, even when the social privilege or distinction that descent once conferred becomes politically unfashionable.⁷⁷

In part, Maalim's slight of his own domain of expertise (it does not constitute "scholarship") should be taken not so much as an admission that his status as a man of learning is questionable, but rather as a deferential nod to his forebears whose erudition, after all, far surpassed his own. For Maalim Bakathiri, performance has become his way of realizing, or living through, the bonds (and bounds)

⁷⁶ The students at Maalim's madrasa are also well known for their training in maulidi performances and are in high demand to recite at peoples' homes for weddings and other occasions.

⁷⁷ It is not unusual that cultural beliefs persist through changes in political regimes. But what is important and relevant here is that such cultural beliefs keep fragments of past power hierarchies alive.

of patrimony that he all but rejected in his youth. Maalim describes his younger days as a time of excess and indulgence; but later he came to understand and accept, as he recalls -- through self exploration and, of course, through prayer -- not only the outer decorum of being a Bakathiri but also the ongoing struggle for inner propriety that life as custodian of Ukutani requires.

Thus for Maalim, being his father's son formally obliged him to "the community of believers" or, better, to the task of maintaining the prestige of Ukutani. But the meaning of this prestige remains ambiguous since its wider significance is pulled between, on the one hand, the evidence it represents of the continuity of an "authentic", or "original",⁷⁸ Islamic past in the present (especially conveyed in the notion of descent), and, on the other, the elitism it represents of a once distinctive, entitled social group.

III. Essentialist Challenge, Sufi Response: Political Subtexts in Islamic Discourse on Authority

Adding to this sort of tension among the implied meanings conveyed by Islamic descent identities is a more explicit critique currently being articulated by a newer

⁷⁸ As Muhammad Latif explained (interview 1/2/93), knowledge of Islam was at its greatest during the time of Muhammad and his Companions. In succeeding generations, that is, the farther one is removed in time from the Prophet, the farther one is removed from the original, "authentic" knowledge, and the harder one must work to apprehend its meaning.

wave of "essentialist" or literalist madrasa instructors in Zanzibar. By stressing, among other things, the basic Islamic precept that the quality of a Muslim's piety and knowledge are not contingent upon pedigree, but rather upon his or her "*nia*", one's intention, resolve, innermost conscience, these sheikhs are establishing a context in which the stature or hegemony of Islamic descent identities can be truly disputed.⁷⁹ While this general point about intention (that is, the conceptual framework that structures the argument) is not contested, the essentialists are nevertheless repudiated by the Bakathiri cohort -- as well as by some of the *tarika* or Sufi brotherhood leaders in town -- for being self-promoting upstarts who never apprenticed themselves to "the great sheikhs" and who therefore lack authenticity. This may explain one reason why, in Maalim's words, these sheikhs "do not use" their descent ("*hawaitumii asili yao*") as they position themselves as the new teachers and guardians of Islam in Zanzibar.⁸⁰

No doubt part of the appeal of these Zanzibari sheikhs, particularly among the young and un/underemployed, may be that they do not rely on or invoke the exclusivity of descent, either by blood or *silsilah*, as a pretense for authority. Indeed much of this rhetorically self-conscious

⁷⁹ Like the 19th and early 20th century *tarika* described earlier.

⁸⁰ Interview with Sheikh Bakathiri at Ukutani, Mkunazini, Zanzibar Town, June 13, 1990.

argument over the "condition" of Islam in Zanzibar Town and the integrity, responsibility, and qualifications of Islamic leadership there today is informed by a more implicit, open-ended discourse about authenticity. This is a discourse that is mediated by cultural, even personal definitions and uses of Islamic knowledge, expressions of piety, and constructions of descent -- a point which I return to below.

One aspect of Zanzibar's Islamic legacy remains largely undisputed, even if it is interpreted in different ways. As Sheikh Muhammad Latif, a leader of the Qadiriyya tarika in Zanzibar explained, a casualty of the 1964 revolution was that Zanzibar lost "the last of the great men of Islamic learning, the men who should have become the mentors of today." Many of the ulama fled, including Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy -- who, as Sheikh Latif explained, ran from the destructive wake of the revolution, not from its politics. His point here is to stress that even as an elite of Omani descent, Farsy sympathized ardently with the cause to end inequality in Zanzibar. Even those scholars who remained in Zanzibar "mysteriously died before their time" (that is, in their forties or fifties), such as Sheikh Suleiman Al-Alawy, Seyyid Ahmed Hamid Mansab, and Sheikh Juma Abdul-Wadad. "We should be counting on these men today," bemoans Latif, "but Allah took them back." The implication here is that the great chain of learning had been broken.

Another tarika member and teacher of tasawwuf (mystical knowledge) explained that many of these great sheikhs (he names sixteen)⁸¹ are buried or entombed in mosques in the countryside and in Stone Town (such as the Ijumaa mosque, Gibriil mosque, and the Mnara mosque, among others). These were great men of learning, he said, religious questions were sent to them from as far as Arabia. "But the political period of the 1960s is a lost period, and it is difficult to go back." In building up the town, he said, "they even cleared away some of their graves...Sheikh Seyyid Abdul Fetah is buried by the Immigration Office, underneath the football field; and Sheikh Mwinyi Makimba is buried in front of the hospital, now a great mango tree grows there. But their blessings remain -- everything material is spiritual."⁸²

The loss of these scholars "tells us something is seriously wrong," Latif continues. "A sign of the apocalypse is that knowledge will be removed and ignorance will prevail, and the ignorant will take to leading the others.

⁸¹ Shk. Seyyid Ahmadi Sumayt, Shk. Seyyid Ahmadi Hussein, Shk. Seyyid Abdul Hussein bin Ahmad, Shk. Mustafa bin Jaffar, Shk. Said Dahman, Shk. Abdulaziz Awawi, Shk. Shauri (in countryside), Shk. Suleiman el Alawi (in countryside), Shk. Abdallah Bakathir, Shk. Abdul Bakr bin Abdallah, Shk. Said Ahmad Hamad Mansur, Shk. Seyyid Muhammad Jamal Layl, Shk. Mwinyi Makimba, Shk. Seyyid Abdul Fetah, Shk. Burhan bin Muhammad Mkelle, Shk. Hassan bin Ameir (buried in Makinduchi), and Shk. Said Ahmad bin Zein.

⁸² Interview with Sheikh Abdulwahab Alawi, October 18, 1990.

They have gone astray and will lead others astray, says the Prophet Muhammad...Allah will remove knowledge not by taking it from the minds of those who have it but by calling them back⁸³... And now they [the instigators of the Zanzibar revolution] realize they made a tremendous mistake".⁸⁴

Sheikh latif's account says several things. First, when he tells us "something is seriously wrong" he is alluding to the perceived decline or demise of formal Islamic learning in Zanzibar. While this process actually began with British colonial rule, that is, long before the transformations initiated by the revolution, it was especially after the revolution that the freedom to actually perform certain identity-conferring Islamic practices was dealt a severe blow.

In an effort to control any possible incitement of anti-government political unrest through religious gatherings, collective zikiri recitations and ziara excursions performed predominantly by the tarika were forbidden by President Karume. A zikiri recitation is recollection of God through repeated invocation of his names so as to attain spiritual oneness with him. A ziara excursion is a pilgrimage or visit to a Muslim saint's or

⁸³ Latif explains that "calling them back" is a euphemism for the untimely death of the sheikhs.

⁸⁴ All Sheikh Muhammad Latif's quotes are from an interview with him at his mother's home in Kisimamanjogoo, Zanzibar Town, January 2, 1993.

sheikh's tomb; zikiri recitations are often performed at the site of such tombs. Several tarika leaders of Comorian descent were detained by the government because of their actual or suspected affiliation with the ousted Zanzibar Nationalist Party. The fact was that most Comorians generally were in support of the ZNP. The Comorians constituted a group of long-established immigrants who were regarded as "minority aliens" at the time of the revolution which put the Afro-Shirazi party in power. Being predominantly middle class and well educated, most Comorians were threatened by the racial rhetoric of the ASP's campaign to level the unequal distribution of wealth in Zanzibar. Thus most Comorians allied themselves with the ZNP, whose vision of an independent, "multi-racial" Zanzibar united by the Islamic faith appealed to their interest to protect their positions and to secure their Zanzibari citizenship in the future (Lofchie 1965).⁸⁵

Furthermore, I was told that during the early years of Karume's rule (1964-1972), rumors circulated that the revolution had been won with the assistance of uchawi -- malevolent magic. At the same time, however, Karume himself was intent on eradicating the activities of wachawi (sorcerers), wapungaji (spirit practitioners), and local

⁸⁵ However, the extent to which the religious activities organized by Muslims of Comorian descent actually constituted arenas of self-conscious political subversion remains unclear.

healers generally.⁸⁶ With this goal in mind, Karume ordered all books of *waganga* (healers) and *walimu* (Islamic teachers) accused of practicing *uchawi* to be confiscated and burned. While these were mostly hand-copied manuscripts (typically Kiswahili texts written in Arabic script) on *uganga* (Qur'anic and other methods of curing, astrology, numerology, and general dealings with the spirit world),⁸⁷ many manuscripts on Islamic religious subjects were also confiscated and destroyed. This was because, as one elderly *mganga* recalled, "The intruders [Karume's soldiers] didn't know what they were looking for, so they just took the biggest books they could find, and most of these were on [Islamic] religion! In this way, many books were lost, on both religion and *uganga*."⁸⁸ Finally, in the years after the revolution, "Arabic gradually disappeared from the government school syllabuses...[and the] Muslim Academy which trained teachers in Arabic, Swahili, and *Diana*

⁸⁶ From interviews with Bwana Mkazo, Zanzibar Town, November 1, 1989, and with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1990, and Mzee Hasan, June 20, 1990. As Mzee Hasan, a spirit *mganga* described, "Karume had three men search out the sorcerers. One was a very great *mganga* himself...Yes, the government used *ufundi* [expertise in healing and magic] to find the sorcerers. However, those sorcerers pulled together, they united against [Karume's men] and killed them [lit: they buried their eyes]." I heard the same story -- that the sorcerers' magic was more powerful than that of Karume's search team, whom they killed with their incantations -- from several other sources.

⁸⁷ See chapter seven.

⁸⁸ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1990.

[religion] was closed down..." (Lodhi 1984-1986:257). It was not until the early 1970s, with the presidency of Aboud Jumbe CCM] that Islamic learning would again gain some official recognition as an important but neglected part of Zanzibari culture and identity.⁸⁹

However, recollections about the condition of Islamic learning and practice during this period are rarely expressed in explicitly political terms. While the conviction that Islam and politics "are different" and "should be kept separate" was a common refrain when discussing, for instance, the question of whether or not an Islamic political party should be organized in Zanzibar, I was also told that Islam recognizes no distinction between religion and politics. Both these positions indicate that Zanzibaris are aware that Islam, or "being Muslim", has the potential for becoming "politicized". Some Zanzibaris say disapprovingly that Islam is being "used" for political purposes,⁹⁰ while others say it *must*, by its very definition, *constitute* politics. In other words, there are varying shades of consciousness about being Muslim, or about Islam that are, in various circumstances and contexts, more or less "political". In the end, by dwelling on the consequences of such political transformations for Islam rather than on the causes of the transformations themselves,

⁸⁹ See chapter eight.

⁹⁰ See chapter eight.

a certain degree of detachment from specific history is achieved, and deliberations about Islamic learning and practice in Zanzibar get reworked instead in terms of Islam's ultimate symbols, however subject to interpretation they may be -- the Qur'an, and the words and deeds of the Prophet. But it is the very openness or versatility of these discourses, such as the rhetorical convention of wielding Qur'anic analogies to explain the past, present, and future that, in effect, establishes a discursive domain in which all issues affecting Muslims, past and present, can, and should, be addressed.⁹¹

When Latif talks about the "ignorance" that is leading others astray, he is implicating in part those "self-promoting" sheikhs who argue that some of the most significant, identity-conferring Islamic practices performed regularly by Zanzibaris (and especially by the *tarika*) such as *zikiri*, *ziara*, *maulidi*, and *khitima*,⁹² are actually nothing more than post-Muhammadan cultural innovations -- *bida'a* -- which, they assert, should be forbidden for any Muslim to practice. Latif argues that such charges of

⁹¹ Thus I am not implying that this "discursive domain" is ahistorical or that it does not address worldly concerns.

⁹² *Khitima* is recitation of the Qur'an, ideally in its entirety, (by passing it around from guest to guest) at funerals. The Qur'an is recited on behalf of the dead as a plea to God to have mercy on the soul of the departed. It is this latter aspect of the *khitima* -- its intention, really -- to which the "*bida'a* sheikhs" object.

bida'a are foolish because a Muslim is one who believes in and follows what the Prophet Muhammad was sent to do.

"Surely Muhammad came with the whole house," Latif insists. "It's just that he stayed in only one room!" -- and it is "our" task as Muslims to explore the entire house of Islam.

Still, to Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, one of the most popular and compelling instructors in the "bida'a" circle, such defensive responses to their critique are interpreted as evidence that an important prophesy of Muhammad's has indeed come to pass: "This religion came to us a stranger", Sheikh Khamisi quotes Muhammad, "an outsider among people; then it spread the world round, only to return to us, again, a foreigner/stranger. 'I [the Prophet] therefore proclaim that good things will come to those who strive to rescue this religion from its loss in foreignness.'" Here, foreignness is equated with loss of knowledge of Islam. In Sheikh Khamisi's view, then, Zanzibaris (indeed, Muslims the world over, he says) have stopped knowing Islam, and therefore cannot recognize the signs of vitiation; it has thus become his task to rediscover and promote its Truth.⁹³

⁹³ Interview with Sheikh Khamisi Jafar at his home in Michanzani Flats, Zanzibar Town, March 27, 1990.

IV. Dialogue, Informality, and Intimacy in the "Authentication" of Islamic Learning and Authority

One of the reasons Khamisi Jafar gives for the demise of Islam in Zanzibar is the insidious effect that "Swahili" culture (*mila*, as opposed to religion, *dini*)⁹⁴ has had on Islam. Sheikh Khamisi describes this vitiation as a consequence of tradition, in that what is familiar is accepted as true and right and thus gets passed on from one generation to the next. In this way the teachings of the "traditional" but well-intentioned walimu who, unbeknownst to them, were remiss in their knowledge, their command of Arabic, and the allowances they made for a range of practices rendered as "Islamic", remained unchallenged. Who were these "*walimu wa kimila*" (traditional, "cultural" teachers) but those Qur'an teachers who practiced their craft outside of the elite ulama circles of the past. Surely Khamisi's critique is not aimed at the likes of Abdallah Farsy and his peers; to Nassoro, too, Farsy was a most inspirational figure and continued to write him letters after Farsy's self-imposed exile to Mombasa.⁹⁵Khamisi's

⁹⁴ *Dini* is religion, or one's relationship with God. One can also speak of *mila ya kiislamu*, that is, Islamic cultural practices or traditions, which is distinguished from an unqualified *mila*.

⁹⁵ Sheikh Khamisi would never dismiss Farsy simply because of his elite background. The point is that while these may be attributes that can confer elite status, what complicates matters is that emblems or criteria of knowledge and piety can be defined and controlled by the elite (the wealthy and powerful).

grandfather, though, did study directly with Farsy, and Sheikh Khamisi, with his grandfather. By invoking the renowned Farsy to me in this way, Khamisi personalizes his connection with him, a connection which resembles a certain kind of *intimacy* that is typically built through relations of *silsilah* -- an intimacy which, I argue, is a constitutive element in the construction "authenticity".

But despite this invocation (and recollection of an uncle on his mother's side who did become a "great Islamic scholar" in Donge, a rural town in Zanzibar), Nassoro also explains that he does not come from a family of Islamic scholars; it was not patrimony, then, but rather his "love of dini" (manifested in his talent for memorizing and grasping the Qur'an), and especially, of course, encouragement from his various teachers, that led him to create his role as educator and to establish his own madrasas. While Khamisi studied briefly and most recently with visiting Sudanese and Egyptian missionaries in Zanzibar, he recalls that his most "eye-opening" teacher was a Zanzibari sheikh named Ali Rashaad, also a student of the late Abdalla Farsy. It is rumored, however, that Sheikh Ali never received *radhi* or blessing⁹⁶ from his teacher; *radhi*

⁹⁶ This is not to be confused with "divine blessing or rewards" (*baraka*) as discussed above. *Radhi* or "blessing" in this context implies acceptance or approval of, as in the following example taken from Johnson's Swahili-English Dictionary: "a father [or sheikh] is contented with his son's [student's] life and conduct." When used in the context of the transmission of Islamic knowledge, the term

is an informal but deeply meaningful acknowledgement that a sheikh is proud of and close to his student, and wishes his name to be associated with him (or her), particularly after he dies. Here we can begin to see one aspect of the connection between intimacy and authenticity which I introduced above: as personal affirmation of a long established relationship between a sheikh and his student, radhi symbolizes more than the transmission of Islamic knowledge; it also calls attention to, indeed elevates, the very manner in which knowledge is realized and conveyed -- that is, socially, inter-personally, through example, dialogue, and debate. "You must have a sheikh to show you things and to guide you", Latif exclaims.

A hadith from the Prophet cited by William Graham places the sentiment most aptly: "It is a grievous mistake to take the written word as your sheikh" (Graham 1987:104). Thus the rumor that Sheikh Ali Rashaad did not receive radhi from his teacher is an awful and reverberating condemnation, for it taints not just his own stature but also, as it was conveyed deliberately to me, the reputation of a devoted student. It also implies a break in the silsilah, the chain of learning. True or not, what we learn from this rumor is that radhi does seem to matter, at least to Latif and those others for whom it constitutes a conferral of authority; and operating as it does on a more intimate, non-ritualized

has larger implications.

level of communication, one cannot dismiss the acceptance and approval it signals as mere formality.⁹⁷ It seems, then, that "authenticity" in this instance is being understood in terms of the participation of individuals in a social, highly personalized style of communicating knowledge which, in the end, and by virtue of the relationships it creates, constitutes the basis of an informal and therefore significant deference hierarchy -- where the recognition or conferral of authority is shaped not so much by a "timeless" tradition of learning (or the nostalgia that surrounds it), as by the cultural and social commentary that various participants may bring to it at any one time.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ This is not to say that other, more ritualized styles of conferring authority carry less weight. For instance, among the tarika receiving ijaza from one's sheikh is a kind of initiation or bestowal of status which the sheikh and initiate enact together and which usually involves recitation, burning incense, and drinking rosewater. But in essence the meaning of this ritual is much the same as radhi, that is, it symbolizes recognition by and attachment to your sheikh, which, for the hierarchical tarika, is a vital part of communal organization and identity.

⁹⁸ For an interesting, largely Weberian analysis of the construction of personal authority and charismatic leadership in early Islam, see Hamid Dabashi (1993), Authority in Islam From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Ummayyads. New Brunswick: Transaction Books. For comparisons of personal authority and charismatic leadership in other contemporary Islamic societies, see Patric Gaffney (1987), "Authority and the Mosque in Upper Egypt: The Islamic Preacher as Image and Actor" in William Roff, ed., Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning, Berkeley: University of California Press; Khalid M. Masud (1984), "Adab al-Mufti: The Muslim Understanding of Values, Characteristics and Role of a Mufti" in B Metcalf, ed., Moral Conduct and Authority in South Asian Islam Berkeley: University of California Press; and R. Dekmejian R. and M. Wyszomirski (1972) "Charismatic Leadership in Islam: The

In this chapter I examined how Muslim views on prestige, descent, "foreignness", authority, authenticity, and learning are mediated by different constructions of the political past, so that ideas about Islamic knowledge have to be understood as both emergent and constitutive properties of the Zanzibari social, cultural, and political landscape.

The processes through which individuals come to be identified as the bearers of Islamic expertise can be better understood by taking into consideration the shifting and contingent nature of identity construction in Zanzibar more generally. Thus the following chapter turns back to the colonial period to examine the broader conditions and circumstances under which notions of social difference and identity were constructed in Zanzibar during that time.

Mahdi of the Sudan" in Comparative Studies in Society and History, 14(2).

CHAPTER FOUR
A Political Economy of Images:
Ethnicity, Islam, and the Colonial State

Late one morning I was returning home from a funeral I had attended with two women neighbors of mine, one a Zanzibari originally from Pemba, the other a Zanzibari of Omani descent. A breeze kicked up, and the kangas we all had worn for the occasion flapped around our dresses as we crossed through an open lot just behind the Michanzani Flats. As we approached the apartment buildings a boy about ten years old skipped out in front of us and shouted, "Mswahili! Mzungu! Mwarabu!" -- "Swahili! European! Arab!" -- then darted off, chasing after his companions.

This chapter explores the politics of difference and identity in colonial Zanzibar. The apparent simplicity of the boy's observation in the anecdote above -- the way he announced the differences he saw among us to the world -- actually belies the complexity of the historical and political issues which have shaped how ethnicity in Zanzibar has been constructed, contested, or otherwise given meaning. In fact, ethnic identity and nomenclature in Zanzibar must be understood in terms of the islands' past, especially the late colonial period (1957-1964) known locally as the "*zama za siasa*", the era of politics, when issues of ethnic origin (or "race", as British colonial officials glossed it) became highly politicized and divisive. In colonial Zanzibar, the terms and trajectory of identity discourse were shaped largely by policies legislated early on by the British colonial state. These policies, especially the institution of "communal representation", focussed attention on ethnicity, thereby reifying it as the primary marker of

social prestige and economic position in Zanzibari society, and as the prime mover in the partisan contest for control over the independent Zanzibari state.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the fluidity and contingencies of ethnic identity construction in Zanzibar, using examples from both the past and present. From here I explore the politicization of ethnicity under colonial rule and argue that during this time, notions of being "foreign" and "native" became polarized and emerged as narratives through which local groups authenticated their political claims to state power and resources. Finally, I examine how Islamic education and ideas about Muslim identity were used or in various ways affected by the politics of this period.

I. "Swahili" and the Contingencies of Identity Construction

In previous chapters, descent was discussed as an ideological concept important for understanding the construction of social distinctions and power hierarchies on the East African coast. As Glassman noted regarding the social mobility strategies of the non-freeborn class, descent was "a set of ideals to be manipulated and rules to be broken" (Glassman 1991:296n). More specifically in the Islamic context, the tarika sheikhs of the 19th century (like the tarika and essentialist leaders introduced in chapter three) denounced the privileges and exclusivity that

descent once legitimated, especially regarding control over the definitions of and access to knowledge. I also explored how the prestige and range of meanings associated with Islamic descent identities (individuals identified as sharifs or as sheikhs linked or "descended" through an intergenerational chain of learning from the Hadramawt) were contingent upon the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shaped how these individuals represented themselves to others -- and how they were understood and represented by others to the world. These wider conditions often define the very terms of identity discourse at any one time.

Thus issues around the contingent, dynamic process of identity construction -- drawing on placehood, descent, language, religion, knowledge, cultural notions of propriety, authority, and power -- have been prevalent in Zanzibari and coastal history for generations. This makes it necessary to pay close attention to the contexts and specifics of when and why individuals identify themselves with the groups that they do, especially since the terms of self-identification can change in time and space. In this vein, it is interesting to examine why "Swahili", the category most widely used to describe "the" people and culture of the East African coast and off-shore islands, is also the most equivocal in meaning for coastal people

themselves -- and, in particular, the least used by Zanzibaris for self-identification.

On the one hand, "Waswahili"⁹⁹ could be used to describe the majority population of Zanzibar. As an inclusive term for Kiswahili-speaking Muslims born on the coast or off-shore islands, Swahili implies multiple possibilities of identity construction. That is, it encompasses a range of more specific designations that Zanzibaris might use to describe themselves. On the other hand, the term is so broad that its non-specificity may connote a "lack" of identity or placehood. Thus in an article entitled "The Elusive 'Mswahili': Reflections on His Identity and Culture" written largely as a response to James de Vere Allen's¹⁰⁰ "historiography on the Swahili", Kenyan coast scholar Ahmed Idha Salim writes:

"Swahili, to my mind, is not a tribe but a generic or umbrella term covering a wide spectrum of identifiable groups that are not linked in any common descent or lineage -- the ukoo [ancestry, kinship] which the 'Swahili hasa' [the true Swahili, according to Allen himself]...were very proud of and guarded jealously, and which showed how long they had resided in their respective towns. In my view, group names that denote ukoo such as Bajuni, Wafaza, Waamu,... Wamvita, etc, would reflect more effectively the origins and therefore the indigenous nature of these Swahili groups than the generic and elastic term 'Swahili' inserted in the blank space next to the word

⁹⁹ (M)swahili denotes the singular (a Swahili person) and (Wa)swahili, the plural. (Ki)swahili, in noun form, refers to the Swahili language.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter two.

'tribe' in application forms" (Salim 1985:220; cf Salim 1976).

Salim covers a lot of ground in this brief passage, first by arguing that placehood and descent are important factors in identity construction for coastal populations. Second, in his last few words, he evokes with some sarcasm one legacy of the British colonial project in Kenya (and Zanzibar): in an effort to monitor the coastal populations, colonial officials administered social surveys requiring individuals to identify themselves in terms of the "racial" categories provided by the British --an important step in the reification of ethnic difference on the coast.

In a similar vein, Frederick Cooper has pointed out that "Swahili is not originally a local term, except for the language (properly, Kiswahili); it appears in foreign accounts as a catchall for a Swahili speaking Muslim who identifies himself with coastal culture and society but not with a specific ethnic group" (Cooper 1980:159). Perhaps this may help to explain the sometimes derogatory use of the term among Zanzibaris when reprimanding a person for insolent or unsociable behavior: "*Ala! Umefanya kama Mswahili, we!*" -- "Hey! You're acting like a Swahili!" Kiswahili readily employs irony, humor, and allegory as popular if often complex rhetorical devices in all kinds of discourse (a point I develop in chapter eight). Thus the disdainful nuance of the term as it is used in this example can be interpreted as a commentary on the pretensions of

self-identification and the importance of vantage point. In effect, regardless of what you fancy yourself to be, in the end, you are no different from anyone else (that is, Swahili).

Significantly, this notion of "sameness" is also given a positive gloss. One Zanzibari colleague who has been living abroad for many years explained to me that all Kiswahili-speaking Muslims of the East African coast and off-shore islands can and should be referred to as Waswahili, regardless of their nationality, descent, phenotype, and the like. For him it was a matter of political necessity: given the centralization of power in the governments of both Kenya and Tanzania, the inclusiveness of Swahili should evoke the affirmation of a collective identity which would unify coastal Muslims in the protection of their historic rights to land and citizenship as the Africans that they are.¹⁰¹ Thus he concluded by declaring that the derisive use of "Swahili" in Zanzibar was politically naive.

¹⁰¹ The implication here, that coastal peoples are challenged rather than represented by the central governments of Kenya and Tanzania, is a political theme explored in A.I. Salim, 1970, "The Movement for Mwambao or Coast Autonomy in Kenya, 1956-1963." However, it is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine the contemporary configurations of these political issues. For an analysis of identity politics on the Swahili coast which draws on these sentiments, see Alamin Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff, The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc (1994).

Nevertheless, like Salim's observation for the Kenya coast, most Kiswahili speakers born in Zanzibar do not self-identify singularly as Swahili. Nor do they often use the colonial construction "tribe" (in Kiswahili, *kabila*) to invoke collective or familial identity. Instead, the identity lexicon includes a range of terms which for the most part were descriptive of putative descent or places of family origin within or outside of Zanzibar, in recent or distant generations. At the broadest level are terms such as "Mzanzibari"¹⁰², emphasizing a national identity, or "Mwarabu", implying that one's father (at least) is of "Arab" descent, which in turn can be described with greater specificity by mentioning clan and place of origin, such as Oman or the Hadramawt. Individuals also use more specific terms, including, among others, "Mpemba" (implying one is from Pemba Island in contrast to Unguja); "Mtumbatu" (that one is from Tumbatu, an islet off the north shore of Unguja); "Mshirazi" (one who claims descent from the early Shirazi settlers); or "Mgazija" (one who traces descent from the Comoro Islands). Few of these terms are actually mutually exclusive. Indeed, in the event that a person needs to explicitly self-identity in ethnic terms (and in my experience, without a prompt of some kind, people rarely do)

¹⁰² "Zanzibari" is a term first introduced by the Arab Association as nationalist sentiments stirred in the early 1950s (Lofchie, 1965:151). This topic is pursued below.

Zanzibaris generally do not rely on singular terms, as it were, but tell stories instead -- of their families, their land, their past, their political views. It is when such terms are put into action, that is, into narratives of various kinds, that they take on specific meanings.

One afternoon, for instance, I was telling my friend Bwana Ngara about Thomas Spear's description of the Shirazi as "less a people than a historical phenomenon as people along the coast traded, settled and interacted".¹⁰³ Responding personally (and politically, as it turned out), Bwana Ngara was frustrated and dismayed by the way this scholar had effectively fictionalized and depersonalized his own identity. Bwana Ngara, who identifies as an Mpemba, described his impression of this bit of historiography as especially insulting since, as he put it, "the [Tanzanian] mainlanders' claims to their various tribal affiliations have always been regarded as real, historical, and legitimate by anthropologists and historians, why not my own identity as a Shirazi?" This was the first time I had heard my friend evoke this dimension of his identity to me. He even spoke of the Shirazi as a "tribe" -- the only time I heard Shirazi explicitly described as such. As the narrative conveys, this evocation of Shirazi was prompted by the apparent acceptance, in the world, of mainland "tribes",

¹⁰³ From Spear, 1984:299. See chapter two.

but not of those in Zanzibar; thus his was a kind of political commentary regarding the legitimacy of mainland versus island identities. These identity terms, then, take on special meanings when used in relation to other terms and in particular contexts.

In "What is 'a Spanish'?: Ambiguity and 'Mixed' Ethnicity in Trinidad" (1993)¹⁰⁴ anthropologist Aisha Khan analyzes the "importance of ambiguity [in 'mixed' categories of ethnic identity] for defining, sustaining, or resisting hierarchy in systems of social stratification" (pp.181-182). Significantly, Khan argues that "'mixed' ethnicities are fluid in the sense of consisting of a *dialectic* between boundary and content rather than as shifting boundaries that encompass interchangeable attributes" (p.182, italics original). What is interesting here is that despite the infrequent use of explicitly 'mixed' ethnic categories in Zanzibar,¹⁰⁵ Khan's "dialectic between boundary and content"

¹⁰⁴ In K. Yelvington, ed., Trinidad Ethnicity (London: Macmillian Pub. Ltd, 1993).

¹⁰⁵ There are few terms in Zanzibar that explicitly imply that a person is of "mixed" descent. One would be "*khumbaro*", describing the progeny of Arab and Indian parentage (a term I never heard in Zanzibar myself but which was told to me by a Zanzibari of Indian descent). Others, such as "*chotara*", "*haficasti*" (a likely bequest from the British), and "*mchanganyiko*" (literally "mixed person") are all terms which were explained to me as "a person whose parents are each a different color, like white and black". No single term exists to describe the progeny of an Arab and an African -- which is what one might expect the term Swahili to imply. But when I suggested this to a group of Zanzibari colleagues at a party here in the United States,

describes well the contingent nature of identity construction and its links to stratification processes. As the following historical examples will show, the ambiguity of Swahili was used in contrasting ways by people as they identified and de-identified as such. True to Khan's basic point, the examples pivot around the politics of social inequality, and illustrate a process Fred Cooper has described as "the dialectics of ethnicity and economy" (1980): as relations of economic and political power take on new configurations, so do the terms in which social identities get constructed.

Focusing on the first three decades of colonial rule, Cooper's own work in Zanzibar (1980) examines the dynamics of changing labor relations among ex-slaves (squatters), Omani planters, and a British colonial state with a keen interest in maintaining a viable plantation economy with free labor. "Because of its vagueness", Cooper writes, "Swahili fit ex-slaves in a changing society, reflecting both their assimilation to coastal culture and their exclusion from equal status in coastal society" (1980:159). Here it appears that Swahili identity could mediate, in a sense, the space between freeborn and slave -- a space which comprised, as Jonathon Glassman discussed (see chapter two), a complex gradation of negotiable statuses.

they looked at me blankly, indeed uncomfortably. It seems that the Swahili, at least to this crowd of expatriates, could not be -- are not -- described as "mixed".

Swahili also became a category to vacate in the interest of enhancing one's status during the early colonial period. In his political analysis of colonial Zanzibar, Michael Lofchie observes that according to censuses taken in Zanzibar between 1924 and 1931, "the Swahili people, who had numbered 33,944 in 1924...had virtually ceased to exist as such by 1931 when only 2,066 persons identified themselves as Swahili" (Lofchie 1965:74-75). Curiously, this change was accompanied by a surge in the number of individuals claiming to be Arab (an increase of 17,000), indicating that "large numbers of former non-Arabs changed their minds, as it were, about the ethnic category most suited to their own descent and decided to 'join' the Arab community...By far the overwhelming majority of the Arab converts came from the community known as the Swahili" (ibid). Lofchie (who draws also on the work of ethnographer A.H.J. Prins [1961]) suggests that people stopped identifying as "Swahili" because it implied, at best, an indistinguishable admixture of Arab and African descent, and at worst, the possibility of slave descent. This might also help to explain the derogatory valance given to Swahili in the example above.

Still, these explanations are secondary to the truly critical matter at hand: that is, the emerging political-economic reality in which such ethnic *specification* had come to matter. As Harold Ingrams notes, the native labor control decree of 1926 "made Africans, but not Asiatics

[Arabs and Indians], liable to compulsory labor and was thus a natural inducement to seek Asiatic status as superior to African" (Ingrams 1962:429). Moreover, British overrule in Zanzibar required the expansion of bureaucracy which in turn necessitated recruitment from the local population. Because the British viewed Zanzibar as an "Arab state,"

members of the Arab community were systematically given preference for the top bureaucratic positions;...through overseas scholarships and differential salary scales, Arabs were actively encouraged by the British to enter the administration. Thus, the Arab regime, which previous to the arrival of Great Britain had consisted of little more than the Sultan and a limited circle of personal officers and agents, grew into a sizeable bureaucratic structure composed of trained and skilled Arab professionals (Lofchie 1965:62-63).

Thus in the early days of the Protectorate, "becoming Arab" meant that one was identifying with a local group that was being privileged by the British colonial government, and that was the first to have a legitimate political voice in the affairs of state. This does not mean that all self-identified Arabs in Zanzibar were or became elite; indeed, the majority were rural shopkeepers, petty traders, and small farmers (a point I return to in a moment).

What comes to light in this brief example is how the terms of identity discourse were shaped by the exigencies of power -- that is, the colonial state. It is also interesting to note here that phenotype did not appear to be a significant barrier to shifting ethnic identities. It is generally assumed that this was because a person's physical

appearance could be read in multiple ways, or that, in Lofchie's words, "racial boundaries" in Zanzibar were "indeterminate" (1965:76).¹⁰⁶ However, it is also possible that unlike descent, placehood, or cultural attributes associated with Islam, phenotype was not a particularly significant marker of social distinction in Zanzibar. In a sense, then, the British assisted in promoting the hegemony of "Arab" identity since it served their project well.

Given these historical and social complexities, Cooper correctly observes that "some scholars have tried too hard to pin down who are and are not Swahili; the point is, they cannot be pinned down" (Cooper 1980:159n; emphasis original).¹⁰⁷ Following Cooper, then, what is analytically more useful and truer to the coastal experience, is to explore the contingencies of meaning -- the cultural milieu, the political circumstances, the structures of power -- that give momentary specificity to the general idea of "Swahili" (this point extends also to terms such as "Arab", "African", or "Shirazi"). In this way, attention is focused on the dynamics of identity construction rather than on the categories themselves. In this way, too, Swahili, together

¹⁰⁶ As Babu (1991) points out, many "Arabs" descended from ex-slave mothers or grandmothers (pg. 224). See also Emily Ruete, Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar (NY: Markus Wiener [first published NY: Appleton, 1888]).

¹⁰⁷ Cooper refers specifically to Carol Eastman's "Who Are the Waswahili?" (1971) and Richard Arens' "The Waswahili: The Social History of an Ethnic Group" (1975).

with other ethnic designations on the coast, emerges not as an "end" but as a "means" for exploring the politics of culture and power that inform the themes of identity discourse at particular times and places.

II. A Political Economy of Images: Colonial Zanzibar

...Arab employers claimed to be indigenous themselves, and that indigenous workers were as threatened as indigenous employers by mainlanders...African workers wished to emphasize the common interest of Africans as against Arabs and Europeans...but they came into competition with the Shirazi Association, whose members claimed a special identity for themselves, connected with Shiraz in Iran. These were the images people had of themselves. They have been widely adopted by writers about the period, as indeed about Zanzibar history as a whole. Yet the understanding and analysis of Zanzibar history depends on thinking of workers as they actually were, that is, workers, rather than as mainlanders or Africans, and to think of employers as employers and not as Zanzibaris or Arabs or Asians. To do otherwise is to write the history of images (Bowles 1991:93).

As B.D. Bowles aptly points out, constructions of "race" dominated both the language of politics in Zanzibar's late colonial period, as well as subsequent analyses of it. In the quote above, Bowles argues that we must once and for all abandon these images and turn our attention instead to the underlying conflict of class interests that shaped Zanzibari participation in the political process. But while the divisive rhetoric of ethnic "communalism" during Zanzibar's colonial period may well have deflected attention away from class relations, it is precisely this "history of images" with which I am concerned here.

The ways in which individuals self-identify and develop perceptions of belonging to particular groups are shaped largely by the political and economic conditions under which they learn to define themselves against others. Thus the

images that get produced in this process, whose experiences they describe, and what messages they are intended to convey, are not incidental or idiosyncratic. Since, as Bowles argues, invocations of ethnicity eclipsed the underlying reality of class relations in Zanzibar's colonial past, it is critical to understand the circumstances which brought these narratives -- Arabs who were "indigenous", Africans who were "Shirazi", "Muslims" who were all of these things -- into vogue during this time. It is especially salient since these were images that at best reflected hegemonic ideas of what Arabs or Africans were supposed to be, regardless of their actual experience under colonial rule.

According to Anthony Clayton, the economy of colonial Zanzibar was based on "British and Indian commerce and trade in Zanzibar City, on clove plantation owners...and on the replacement of slave labour by the importation of mainland African labour in very considerable numbers..." (Clayton 1981:7). The relatively small Zanzibari elite, comprised of the large plantation owners and merchant-financiers, was predominantly of Omani and South Asian descent respectively; by contrast, and the majority of squatters, smallhold farmers, and laborers in Zanzibar were of "African" descent. However, it should not be extrapolated from this that "Arab" and "African" constituted homogeneous (exclusive, or

invariably "opposed", in class terms) ethnic categories.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, self-designated "Arab" Zanzibaris were differentiated in terms of both class background and place of origin outside of the islands. Moreover, by the early 20th century, the majority of Arabs resident in Zanzibar were not members of the ruling oligarchy, that is, the dominant Omani planter class, comprised mostly of the descendants of 18th and 19th century Busaidi immigrants (Lofchie 1965: 77-79). Indeed, by the mid 1920s, the ruling

¹⁰⁸ Because I did not conduct research among South Asians in Zanzibar, I am limiting the following discussion to "Arab", "African", and "Shirazi" actors. Still, it is necessary to mention here that similar problems of over-generalization and of making assumptions about the nature of Zanzibari South Asians' class position and interests (historically and in the present) have tended to promote stereotyped images of these communities as aloof and inward-looking. As a young, well-educated man I knew in Zanzibar Town once explained to me, because he was Indian and clever, people invariably assumed that he came from a wealthy business or merchant family firmly ensconced in the town's Indian community. "But I am from the countryside," he insisted, "we are poor farmers from the south [of the island] and have more in common with our peasant neighbors than we do with the Indians here in town...We are Sunnis, too, and Kiswahili is my first language" (most Zanzibari Asians are Shiite Muslims). Moreover, the British colonial experience in India significantly shaped British relations with Indians in Zanzibar. Most Indians there were given the legal status of "British Protected Persons", which enabled them to maintain legal ties to India, Pakistan, and Great Britain (Lofchie 1965:162), in the long run discouraging any significant participation in Zanzibari politics. Indeed, the Indian National Association, primarily a commercial and financial organization established in Zanzibar just before the First World War initially included both Hindu and Muslim Asians. However, after the partition of India in 1947, "Muslims withdrew from the INA and formed the Muslim Association" (Lofchie 1965:178n, 99). See also M.G. Vassanji's novel, The Gunny Sack (London: Heinemann), about growing up Indian on the East African coast.

Arab oligarchy could best be described, in Lofchie's words, as an aristocracy in decline. With the abolition of slavery, rising costs of migratory labor, the fragmentation of properties through paritable inheritance, and, most significantly, the irregular and sometimes plummeting price of cloves on the world market, many of the large plantation owners were forced to mortgage off their land to South Asian merchant-financiers (Sheriff 1991:252-254; Lofchie 1965:104-107). A protracted period of downward mobility ensued as a consequence of this indebtedness, despite the efforts of the British to back them.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the designation "Arab" also described the more recent immigrants from Oman (often referred to as *Wamanga*) who were not members of the old elite planter class, as well as Shihiri Arabs (from Shihir, a coastal town in the Hadramawt) who were predominantly laborers, water carriers, and petty traders. There were also the Hadrami Islamic scholars, many of whom had immigrated to Zanzibar from Barawa or the Comoro Islands and whose religious or educational preparation had placed them in the professional class of Zanzibari society.

¹⁰⁹ The British needed the planters to produce cloves for their "distillation industry and consumption" (Sheriff 1991:253). In order to handle the rising costs of labor and protect planters from debt, the state organized the Clove Growers' Association which took the monopoly over marketing cloves away from intermediary financiers. By the mid-1930s, the CGA came to act as a parastatal that "borrowed money from British banks to finance the clove crop"; this for the most part cut moneylenders out of the loop (ibid).

Similarly, the "African community" was diverse, reflecting different cleavages at different political periods in the colonial past. The earliest and most significant distinction was between "mainlanders" (descendants of ex-slaves and more recent immigrant workers, many of whom identified themselves as Swahili or by their cultural group of mainland origin [Cooper 1980:159]), and native born "islanders" (also known as Tumbatu, Hadimu, Shirazi, Pemba, and Swahili). Islanders for the most part had communal or privately owned land in the countryside and were smallhold farmers, fishermen, or cattleherders (Lofchie 1965:82). Others were workers living in town (Ng'ambo) who had been squeezed off their land by large planters several generations earlier (Bowles 1991:89). Meanwhile, most "mainlanders were either squatters with no permanent rights to the land", or urban-based domestic or manual laborers also living in Ng'ambo (Lofchie 1965:82). In other words, both "mainlander" and "islander" populations were differentiated along rural-urban lines as well.

In reality, then, neither "Africans" nor "Arabs" were fixed, homogeneous populations. However, in the political structure of communal representation contrived largely by the British, these became reified and opposed ethnic categories inextricably linked to class position and interest, and ultimately, to very different visions of the distribution of power in the post-colonial Zanzibari state.

Below I take a brief look at features of the colonial project that so encouraged the "racialization" of pre-independence politics in Zanzibar.

I will also argue that while the British conceptualized Zanzibari society and its politics in "racial" terms, Zanzibaris themselves conceptualized and expressed their political differences, fears, and claims not in terms of race per se but in terms of a broader ideological theme long embedded in coastal discourses of self and other -- namely the contrast between "foreign" and "indigenous". It ran through the political rhetoric of "communal" and class tensions, and was even invoked around the issues of sovereignty, entitlement, enfranchisement, and, in the Islamic context, secular modernization. "Foreign" and "indigenous" were of course relative, constructed notions which allowed leaders from opposed "communal" and class vantage points to make the same claims for their constituencies and level the same charges against their opponents. I believe the foreign/indigenous construct is especially significant to explore because it was this, and not "race" per se, that constituted the dominant paradigm of difference and identity in Zanzibar, and was drawn on to authenticate and articulate rights to property, citizenship, and the state.

a. Legislating Distinctions: Communalism and the Nationalist Response

In 1914 the British transferred their base of their legislative and executive operation from the Foreign Office in London to the Colonial Office in Zanzibar.¹¹⁰ This launched the imperial project of indirect rule through which the "government of Zanzibar was carried on in the name of the Sultan" (Clayton 1981:5), with the British Resident at the helm. The most critical step in installing local control (and in laying the foundation for a parliamentary government) was the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1926. The "Legco" was an advisory body made up initially of all British officials, then of British-appointed leaders of local "communal associations" which were defined along the lines of "race" (such as the Arab, Indian National, and African Associations [Lofchie 1965: 63-65]).

What is significant here is that membership in "communal" social clubs and political associations was based more on the protection of shared economic interests (for example the Arab Association was first organized by planters seeking compensation from the "cost" of abolition) or on the

¹¹⁰ In addition to several other secondary sources (Clayton, 1981; Cooper, 1980; Bowles, Sheriff, and Babu in Sheriff and Ferguson, 1991; Ingrams, 1962), I draw much of the information for this section from Michael Lofchie's book, Zanzibar: Background to Revolution (Oxford, 1965). While I do not always agree with Lofchie's interpretations of his findings, this work on the politics of colonial Zanzibar is one of the most comprehensive published sources on this period.

shared experience of disenfranchisement (as in the social support provided for mainland migrants by the African Association) than on some primordial notion of "racial" affinity. Indeed, as Clayton points out, the African Association in 1934 (originally the African Association for Immigrant Workers) originated in the "football teams of young Africans" who came to Zanzibar in the late 1920s (Clayton 1981:16). While comprised entirely of mainlanders, the membership of the African Association was extremely diverse, and their different languages "militated against effective organization" (ibid:17). Instead, smaller, informal sub-groups crystallized, often around perceptions of cultural identity: "ex-slave mainlanders were often linked together in dance groups, and the twentieth-century immigrants were linked ethnically in loosely organized savings clubs" (ibid:18). According to Clayton, the function of the official Associations "lay more in the government's need to have communal associations with whom to consult, [this being] a by-product of the typed, classified style of the British administration" (ibid:18).

Tensions around British presumptions regarding the differences between "Arab" and "African" are reflected in a brief report written in 1951 by the Senior Commissioner of Zanzibar on the problems he encountered in "addressing heads

of the Indian, Arab and African communities."¹¹¹ "In this land of *heshima*" [honor, status], he wrote to the Chief Secretary, formal terms of address were not to be taken lightly. At first, the Commissioner had adopted the term *Bwana* ("sir" or "mister" in Kiswahili) when addressing Africans, and *Sheikh* for Arabs. This, however, "greatly insulted the Africans as many of them claimed to have Arab or prestigious ancestry", or were "educated, with government positions." Thus he suggested that "any African with an official position should be called Sheikh, to keep on the safe side". The Chief Secretary of Zanzibar responded by saying that *Bwana* had once been "suitable" but "in recent years [1951] Africans had been referred to as Sheikhs". The Chief Secretary then wrote to his British colleagues in Kenya for information on how they handled this terms of address problem. There, a "confidential circular" had been distributed which recommended "wider use of the courtesy title Esquire", and advised that "care should be taken to avoid racial distinction in this respect." In the end, the Chief Secretary advised that all Arabs and Africans in Zanzibar "with Muslim names" would be called Sheikh, and that Indians, Europeans, and non-Muslim Africans would be called Mr/Esquire. Thus the British learned that they could not, in fact, rely on phenotype as a distinguishing marker

¹¹¹ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB22, no. 45.

of ethnic identity; nor could they assume that because an individual self-identified as an "African", he or she could not also claim "Arab" ancestry. Moreover, Africans too were Muslims, and resented the implication that only Arabs could be "sheikhs" and enjoy the prestige this title conferred. Another note to make from this colonial correspondence is that by the 1950s (explored below), it appears that the term "sheikh" -- typically an honorific for addressing distinguished Muslim men of learning, piety, or rank -- had also become an emblem denoting prestige as conferred by the colonial state: one was called sheikh because one was "educated" and employed by the colonial government.

Most importantly, the structure of colonial power determined that the representation of communal interests be the sole concern of locally appointed (Zanzibari) members of the Legco. That is, as a Zanzibari, one's effectiveness in the affairs of state was circumscribed by British expectations of one's "communal" loyalties. Moreover, Lofchie reports that "Arabs were given the largest representation" in the Legco since its inception in 1926 (Lofchie 1965:65). In fact, the colonial privileging of Arabs (that is, the planter class/incumbent political elite) over Africans in education and foreign scholarships as mentioned above significantly curtailed African participation in formal politics; it was not until 1946 that Africans were given any representation in the Legco at all

(Lofchie pg. 65n; Ingrams 1962:429). In effect, then, it was through divisive means that the British introduced "democratic" institutions into Zanzibari society. Lofchie writes:

Communal identity had been virtually institutionalized as the sole basis of political and social organization...The strength of communal separatism was exemplified in the...practice of racial representation in the Legco, in the presence of innumerable racial and communal bodies, and in the fact that even sports, social life, and the local press were organized on communal lines (ibid:178-179).

This illustrates well Jean Francois Bayart's assessment of the nature and ultimate consequences of colonial power:

Since the notion of ethnic group was one of the ideological premises of the colonial administration it [became] the means of affirming one's own existence and hence the language of relationships between the subject peoples themselves (1993:52).

Unequal access to political power and educational resources manifested in the preferential treatment of Arabs undermined the attempt by Arab nationalists to develop a multi-ethnic, "Zanzibari" nationalist agenda.¹¹² However,

¹¹² Like A.M Babu (1991), I disagree with Lofchie's conclusion that this nationalist effort was launched exclusively by and for the Arab planter class in order to protect their (waning) socio-economic privilege and to maintain their political leverage for control over the independent state. While Lofchie calls attention to the profound impact that British legislation had on shaping relations between "communal groups", he argues uncritically in terms of the reified categories that were the product of the circumstances on which he is reporting. In fact, the nationalist sentiments in Zanzibar were directly inspired by developments in Egypt in the 1950s. The "Arab nationalism" of Gamal Abdal Nasser was explicitly anti-colonial, and,

the final blow was dealt by the British, since they ultimately controlled the terms of political participation. This is illustrated in the case of Ahmed Lemke who in 1953-54 attempted to establish a lasting political union -- the Zanzibar Nationalist Union (the ZNU) -- between the Arab and African Associations. Lemke was from "an extremely wealthy Arab family" in Zanzibar (Lofchie 1965: 140). He was educated in Egypt and, heavily influenced by Nasserism, became seriously involved in radical politics while living overseas. According to Lofchie, Lemke's ZNU had its origins in his work in London where, as a communist, he organized "Zanzibari workers and students into a political, multi-racial club...which protested against Great Britain's reliance upon racial institutions and racial organizations in the administration of Zanzibar" (ibid:141).

Lemke's vision for Zanzibar was to eliminate communal representation in the Legco and to call instead for "commonroll elections, universal suffrage, and the introduction of a ministerial system" (ibid:143-44). In his efforts to weaken the centrality of communal identity, Lemke invoked Islam, urging that Zanzibaris come together as Muslims. Most significantly, Lemke's rhetoric was

under the rubric of "Arab socialism", declared the need for social and economic reform in the Arab world -- of which Zanzibar, according to Zanzibari nationalists themselves -- was a part. However, converting "Arab" nationalism into a "Zanzibari" nationalism in which all Zanzibaris could participate would become the crux of the problem.

unambiguously anti-colonial. He wrote numerous editorials in his newspaper Al-Falag¹¹³ "condemning colonialism as oppressive and unjust", and solicited, indeed required, the interest and support of the African Association (promoting the welfare of the mainlander communities) and the Young African Union (a radical intellectual group seeking social and economic reform).

Lemke was successful in attracting the political support and involvement of these groups. However, the British, who at the time were facing an incipient and potentially violent anti-colonial movement in Kenya (the Mau Revolt) became threatened by an Arab-African collaboration and in 1954 declared that civil servants would be forbidden to participate in political activity of any kind. This was most effective because the "best educated and most politically conscious Africans at this time were civil servants", and it was they who were forced to withdraw from the ZNU (Lofchie 1965:142). With this ruling Lemke's hopes were dashed; he finally dissolved the Zanzibar Nationalist Union because its very identity was based on its being an anti-colonial, multi-ethnic nationalist body (ibid:164).

¹¹³ See Zanzibar Newspapers, 1902-1974 (1981 Diploma Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, School of Journalism) by Mariam Mohamad Abdulrahman which discusses the origins and political significance of the many newspapers that have been published and circulated in Zanzibar, including Al-Falag.

Although political developments in Zanzibar continued to evolve, this juncture nevertheless marked the end of any real communication or formal political consolidation between Arab and African leaders, as illustrated by their separation into two major political parties each envisioning a very different trajectory for independence. One, the Arab-led Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP), saw Zanzibar as an "Islamic, multi-racial society". The other, the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), saw it as an "emerging African state" (Lofchie pg. 214) which had to protect against the threat of Arab as well as European domination.¹¹⁴ This latter sentiment stemmed largely from the fact that comparatively speaking, most Africans lacked the experience and education that the Arab elite had enjoyed and that had propelled them to the forefront of Zanzibari political activity. From their perspective, the African leadership was reluctant to push for nationalism and independence; instead they needed time to prepare themselves and their constituencies for an election that would ensure that Zanzibar emerge as an African-controlled sovereign state. By the time the first Zanzibar-wide popular election was held in 1957, political party rhetoric consisted largely of a back and forth volley

¹¹⁴ There was also the strictly communist position, the Umma Party (which did not formally crystallize as such until 1963) whose rhetoric gave voice to the issue of class struggle and anti-colonialism around which the "real" conflict pivoted. See A.M. Babu (1991), "The 1964 Revolution: Lumpen or Vanguard?"

of accusations challenging the legitimacy of the designated opponent to claim rights to the state. These charges and counter-charges were couched in terms of the (by then) politicized distinction between "foreign" (interloper, usurper) and "indigenous" (authentic, native).

b. Degrees of Nativity: Constructions of "Foreign" and "Indigenous" in Late Colonial Political Discourse

"Foreignness" is a completely relative term. The consistently negative valence it was given in Zanzibari political discourse during the early phase of electoral politics discloses one of the ideological aspects of nationalism in colonial situations -- that one must be of a place in order to inherit it. How are the statuses of being foreign or native determined? Against a colonizing regime, the answer should be obvious: self-determination implies, ideally, the withdrawal of the foreign, colonial power, leaving the formerly colonized population to govern by and for themselves. In broad historical strokes, foreign and indigenous are products of the colonial relations of power. In Zanzibar, however, the British were not alone in their status as "foreigners".

Various Arab groups, Comorians, South Asians, African mainlanders and even Shirazis were all, at different times, accused by other groups of being "foreign" -- or "more foreign" -- than themselves. Being foreign usually meant that one's claims to the state (and to the benefits that

flowed from it) were not rightful and just. In this vein it is interesting to note that Zanzibaris who claimed to be Shirazi turned foreignness on its head: by being the descendants of the original Shirazi immigrants to Zanzibar, they became the "most indigenous" of all. Was there then a hierarchy of foreignness, or degrees of being native? I think this was the case, since constructing others as "foreign" effectively situated and authenticated the nativeness, and thus legitimacy, of a range of players competing in the Zanzibari political arena.

The earliest example of the construction of degrees of being "native" and "foreign" in colonial political discourse stems from the "July riot" or "*Vita vya Ngombe*" (the Cattle Riot) of 1951 based on events in a rural village at Kiembe Samaki (about 2 miles outside of Zanzibar Town). This was a grass roots uprising led by indigenous islanders -- smallholder peasants and cattlekeepers who opposed the ongoing expropriation of their land by the British for expansion of the Zanzibar air strip (Lofchie 1965:148-51; Clayton 1981: 36-37; Bowles 1991:95-96). The uprising was given an Islamic valence since the greatest insult was dealt when the British "sought to take over a parcel of land upon which the village mosque was located" (Lofchie 1965:149). Meanwhile, nineteen villagers who had refused to have their

cattle vaccinated¹¹⁵ by the British during a compulsory inoculation program were "arrested and put on trial for criminal offense" (ibid). When the guilty verdict sounded, the crowd waiting outside the courthouse swelled into a riot, with "cries of 'Jihad'" resounding in the air (ibid). Repercussions and threats of a general strike took several days to subside.

As Clayton notes, the uprising was significant in its "arousal of popular nationalism" (Clayton 1981:37). Indeed, several years later in 1955, the National Party of the Subjects of the Sultan -- the NPSS -- was formed by the villagers of Kiembe Samaki, the first and only peasant-based, anti-colonial nationalist party. In its obvious acceptance of the Sultanate, the NPSS was not concerned with, nor did it recognize, ethnic distinctions among Zanzibaris in the face of independence from British rule. This meant they were also openly opposed to the continuation of communal representation in the Legco. This drew the attention of the Arab nationalists who, according to Lofchie, not only joined the NPSS but took over its leadership and changed its name to the "Zanzibar Nationalist Party". While this move ultimately hurt the nationalists'

¹¹⁵ Clayton points out that this was not due to ignorance or unfounded fears. In fact, villagers were well aware that not long before, thousands of head of cattle in Maasailand had been killed by a defective serum (Clayton, 1981: 37).

efforts to broaden the class and ethnic orientation of their campaign, it enabled them to claim that their political movement and sentiments were African in origin (Lofchie 1965:153-154).

Such claims had become especially necessary. In the eyes of the African Association and the Afro-Shirazi Union (the precursor of the Afro-Shirazi Party), Zanzibar was first and foremost an African nation that had long been dominated by foreign Omani planters. Meanwhile, the pan-Africanist ideas of the emerging nationalist movements on the continent were entering Zanzibar via workers migrating from the mainland (Ingrams, 1962). In Zanzibar's first popular election, held in 1957, Afro-Shirazi Union propaganda asserted that

Both the Arab Association and the Zanzibar Nationalist Party as a whole are composed of a majority of aliens, most of whom are foreign Arabs from Oman. [They] jointly represent the immigrant minority class.... (from Afrika Kwetu May 9, 1957, cited in Lofchie pg.175).

Two years earlier, the Africa Association announced in its newspaper Afrika Kwetu ("Our Africa"):

...it is the adopted policy of the African Association to achieve advancement and endeavor to win rights for ourselves so long as we are sons and daughters of the soil. So our immigrant friends should not forget that our aim is African self-government...not Zanzibari self-government. (from Afrika Kwetu, May 5, 1955, cited in Lofchie pg. 166n).

According to A.M.Babu, a ZNP executive who would later split off to form his own communist Umma Party (see below),

the ZNP was informally split into two camps. One camp was primarily concerned with protecting the interests of the planter class, which meant not alienating the British, while the other was committed to promoting a Zanzibar-wide, anti-colonial nationalism. However, such a split was not easily seen from the outside. Despite their multi-ethnic, anti-colonial rhetoric and invocations of Islamic egalitarianism, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party was dominated largely by wealthy planters and their alleged nationalist intentions, indeed their very image, was severely compromised by this fact. Indeed, as one former soldier who participated in the revolution of 1964 recalled,

"the ZNP used religion [Islam] and their wealth. But my party [the Afro-Shirazi Party] was the party of the Truth, the party of the Oppressed. Many [of us] were Muslim but many were also Christian. There was no discrimination, even Indians [his emphasis] were in our party, even Manga [newer Omani immigrants] and even Arabs were in our party."¹¹⁶

For their part, then, the ZNP needed to rally support from "Africans". In doing so they targeted the Shirazi community, appealing to their identity as Muslims and as "indigenous Zanzibaris" whose loyalties should, in the name of "Zanzibari nationalism", extend to their homeland rather than to the mainlanders who intended to make Zanzibar their own. Thus in Al-Falag ("The Dawn"), originally the newspaper of the Arab Association, the ZNP asserted that:

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bwana Mtumwa Checha, Nov 1, 1990.

the majority of Africans in Zanzibar are aliens...the merger of Shirazis with Africans [in the Afro-Shirazi Union] was not a sensible move and foreign [mainlander] hands are really responsible for the great blunder which Shirazis were led to commit. And that too, for the benefit of foreigners! (Al Falag, April 17, 1957, cited in Lofchie pg. 175).

Self-identified Shirazis were themselves split on this issue. As Cooper has noted, "originally, Shirazi identity [indigenous, freeborn, propertied] was defined, to a large extent, against Africans [unattached, ex-slave, migrant]" (1980: 286n; brackets added). However, by the late 1940s, several additional factors came into play: with the influence of pan-Africanist ideology from the mainland, the emergence of a unifying class consciousness among the urbanizing population in Zanzibar Town,¹¹⁷ and the fear that the ZNP would be dominated by the interests of rich planters, Shirazi political leaders in Unguja joined forces with the Africans (forming the Afro-Shirazi Party). Ultimately, then, in Unguja, "Shirazi identity came to be defined against Arabs" (Cooper *ibid*). In Pemba, however, the sentiment was different. Historically, the Pemba Shirazis did not experience the same degree of land expropriation by Omani planters as did the peoples of Unguja. Thus most Shirazi Pembans did not see "Arabs" per

¹¹⁷ One consequence of this was a workers' strike organized in 1948. See Anthony Clayton's The 1948 Zanzibar General Strike Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976.

se as a problem for Zanzibari self-rule and refused to join with the Afro-Shirazi Party. Indeed, in 1959, they formed their own party, the Zanzibar Pemba People's Party (ZPPP), which, in 1961, formed a coalition with the ZNP.

The elections held in 1963 marked the beginning of Zanzibari self-rule. The ZNP/ZPPP coalition won the majority of parliamentary seats, but not the popular vote (Babu 1991:239). It was during this time that Abdul Rahman Babu broke away from the ZNP to form the communist Umma Party.¹¹⁸ According to Clayton, Babu wanted to appeal to "lower middle class and bourgeois Arab nationalism in opposition to the monarchy and leading families" (Clayton 1981:46).

As Babu recalls, after their victory, the new ZNP regime began to employ repressive measures which included the banning of all opposition political parties (namely, the Umma and the Afro-Shirazi Parties) and newspapers. They also called for the "retrenchment of all police officers of mainland origin" (Babu 1991: 238-239). This provoked an uprising which led ultimately to a revolutionary seizure of power in 1964. According to Babu, the instigators of the revolution were the "lumpen-proletariat," that is, the "frustrated urban youth of the Afro-Shirazi Party", assisted

¹¹⁸ Because the Umma Party was communist (Maoist) and of course secular in political philosophy, it did not invoke religion (eg, "the unity of Muslims") in its promotional rhetoric; nor did it disparage religious faith or practice in any way.

however, by the Umma Party leadership which shaped their program and objectives. Babu writes:

It [the Umma party] broadened the objectives of the uprising from a narrow, lumpen, anti-Arab, anti-this, and anti-that perspective into a serious social revolution with far-reaching political, economic, and social objectives. (ibid: 240).

However, the Afro-Shirazi campaign was short-lived. As I discussed in chapter three, the decade that followed was a grave disappointment. The attempt to dismantle the structure of inequality in Zanzibar was marked by severe mismanagement, "racial" resentment, and anti-intellectualism.¹¹⁹ The opposed, monolithic ethnic categories that had come to dominate political discourse in the wake of the colonial period had become a defining feature of the revolution.

What I want to argue here is that the monolithic racial categories produced during the colonial period meant little until they became politically charged. This politicization was expressed through an ideological narrative that pivoted around the notions and contrasting values assigned to "foreignness" and "nativity". In chapter two I critiqued the use of "foreign" and "indigenous" as acceptable,

¹¹⁹ That is, "intellectual" = "educated" = "elite" = "Arab" = "foreigner" = expulsion from Zanzibar (see chapter three). See also Anthony Clayton's The Zanzibar Revolution and Its Aftermath (Hamden: Archon, 1981) and Amrit Wilson's U.S. Foreign Policy and Revolution: The Making of Tanzania (NY: Unwin Hyman, 1989) for detailed description of the events around the 1964 revolution.

objective categories for historiographical analysis, suggesting instead that they are relative constructs whose meanings have to be examined in the actual socio-political contexts in which people use them. In the political arena of the colonial period just described, claims to "nativity" and charges of being "foreign" were deployed openly and continuously as an ideological basis on which to authenticate one's political right to inherit the state. Indeed, it was through this discourse that the high stakes concerns of entitlement, enfranchisement, and sovereignty were competitively framed. Constructions of "native" and "foreign" ran through the rhetoric of communal tensions, and the same claims could be argued from different class positions. Most importantly, like communalism, the opposed positive and negative values that were assigned to being "native" and "foreign" were largely a product of the colonial structure of power. This is clear because historically and culturally, notions of "foreign" and "native" in Zanzibar and on the coast were not absolute or necessarily opposed categories. As I discussed in earlier chapters with regard to the "paradox of foreignness" (chapter 3) and the "politics of representation" (chapter 2), prestige could be sought by claiming to be both simultaneously; indeed, "foreign" and "native" were ideas that derived meaning from a wider identity discourse which changed over time. Under the colonial tutelage of

communalism and the development of partisan politics based on a western model of statecraft, narratives of "foreign" and "indigenous" became the discourse that connected ethnicity to rights, and ultimately, to power. In this way, ethnicity in Zanzibar came to take on, in the Comaroffs' words, "the natural appearance of an autonomous force."

III. Islam and the Politics of Language: Educational Reform and Muslim Identity

The British colonial presence in Zanzibar had an impact on Islam as a religion of state from its earliest days. The jurisdiction of the Sultan's court -- once based exclusively on the sharia and executed by his kadhis -- was significantly curtailed by the imposition of the British colonial legal system (Anderson, 1970 [1954]). Even though a system of "dual jurisdiction"¹²⁰ was instituted, the Sultan's court was, in organization and procedure, fully assimilated into the British court. Broadly speaking, while the Sultan's court continued to be based on the sharia and applied to the civil cases of all "local subjects" (Schacht

¹²⁰ Dual jurisdiction meant that the "British court had jurisdiction in all cases concerning British subjects, British protected persons...or subjects of any other Christian Power", while the Sultan's court had jurisdiction in criminal and civil cases where all plaintiffs and defendants were subjects of the Sultan "or of some non-Christian Power" (Anderson, 1970 [1954]:58). See also J.H. Vaughan, 1935, The Dual Jurisdiction in Zanzibar, Zanzibar: Government Printer.

1965:117), a series of decrees issued by the British¹²¹ modified the range and contexts of its application, so that by 1947, the "jurisdiction of the Qadis was defined as 'matters relating to the personal status, marriage, divorce, and inheritance of Arabs and Muhammadan Africans...'" (ibid:67).

A particularly interesting arena in which British officials would encounter Islam in managing Zanzibari colonial society was in the realm of education. The cultural and political significance of this encounter is well illustrated by a dispute that unfolded between the Department of Education and Zanzibari Arabs who argued that British educational policy undermined the very basis of their cultural and religious identity -- the Arabic language. Lasting nearly 30 years, the dispute was referred to by colonial officials as the "language question", and began soon after 1924 when the British introduced reforms in rural primary education. Until then, the village Qur'an school was the sole institution of education for youngsters, where they received instruction in Islamic religious precepts ("Diana"), learned the Arabic alphabet, and

¹²¹ These included the Slavery Decree of 1909 and the Land Acquisition Decree of the same year; the Marriage Decree of 1915; the Waqf and Property Decree of 1916; the Succession Decree of 1917; the Courts Decree of 1923; the Penal Decree of 1934; the Juvenile Offenders Decree of 1935; the Marriage and Divorce (Muhammadan [sic]) Registration Decree of 1935; the Land Alienation Decree of 1939; and the District Administration and Rural Local Government Decrees of 1947 (Anderson, 1970 [1954]:61-67).

memorized the Qur'an. The dispute ultimately came down to the question of control over the cultural reproduction of Islam, although it was never actually stated in these terms. After presenting the basic contours of the dispute, I examine the ways in which it may have played into the identity politics of the period.

a. Qur'an Teaching in Government Schools: The Initial Plan

Despite British pretenses to remain nonintrusive in local social and cultural affairs, in 1924 the Department of Education appointed a commission to discuss teaching the Qur'an in rural government schools where English and other secular subjects would be taught.¹²² This was largely because to British eyes, the intellectual and material conditions of learning in rural (Qur'an) schools were deplorable: "The child works from morning to night at a parrot-like stultifying repetition of the Koran in a language which he does not understand and sometimes cannot even read although reading is all that is required of him...This pitiable 'education' is often acquired in ill-lit and insufficiently ventilated buildings where pupils squat about on the floor in postures which may not improve their general physique. It would be altogether to the advantage of the children that Government Schools should effectively take

¹²² Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1 no. 390. All quotes of colonial correspondences in the text below are taken from this file unless otherwise indicated.

the place of Quran Schools."¹²³ Thus the commission agreed that "the actual passages [from the Qur'an] learnt by heart would be reduced to a minimum, that these passages would be made as intelligible as possible to the pupils, and that moral teaching can well be done in the medium of the Swahili language".¹²⁴ According to the proposal, then, Arabic would be replaced with Kiswahili as the language of instruction, accompanied by a shift from Arabic to Roman script.

It is interesting to note for a moment that four members of the six member commission were Zanzibari kadhis. Among them was the renowned Sheikh Ahmad bin Sumayt, who, while in Istanbul in the mid 1880s, had become inspired by the pan-Islamic ideas propagated by Sayyid Fadl and the Sultan of Istanbul, 'Abd al-Hamid II (Martin 1971:542). On his way back to Zanzibar, Sumayt stopped in Cairo where the ideas of "Islamic modernism" dominated much of the intellectual debate at the famous Al-Azhar madrasa (Rahman 1984:63-68). Briefly, pan-Islamism and Islamic modernism were both responses to European expansion in Muslim societies and, as such, they both were intended to confer a strong sense of Muslim identity. Pan-Islamism was an ideology which sought to establish a kind of transnational,

¹²³ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1, no. 390. Minutes written by the Director of Education to the Chief Secretary in a review of the problem, 1930.

¹²⁴ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1 no. 390: W. Hendry, member of the 6 person commission.

political solidarity among all Muslims. Islamic modernism, broadly speaking, aimed to expand the curriculum of higher Islamic education so that it could ultimately help Muslims to become more competitive intellectually and professionally in a modernizing world dominated by western (Christian) epistemology, science, and technology.

Reformist literature from Egypt had reached Zanzibar most likely by the turn of the century since, as Sheikh Abdallah Farsy writes in his biographical accounts of the ulama in Zanzibar, the Islamic scholar Sayyid Mansab (1860-1927) had read "the Tafsir [exegesis] of Sheikh Muhammad Abduh [who championed the modernist movement in Egypt]...in addition to nearly all the other great Egyptian reformist newspapers..." (Pouwels [Farsy] 1989:24). Indeed, Sayyid Mansab's baraza (study group) was among the earliest to propagate these modernist ideas from Egypt in Zanzibar (Pouwels 1981:342n).¹²⁵ As it turned out, Ahmad Sumayt and the three other Zanzibar kadhis consented to the translation

¹²⁵ The real champion of Islamic modernism on the East African coast was Kenyan Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui (1891-1947), but his impact was not felt outside of Kenya until the 1930s (Elmasri, 1987:229-237). His reformist ideas advocated the education of Muslim women, argued that "western secular education did not conflict with Islamic religion and culture", and advanced the position that Islam was indeed a "religion of social progress" (ibid:230). Among his most renowned students was the aforementioned Zanzibari Sheikh Abadallah Salih Farsy. In fact, it is likely that Farsy was in Kenya studying with al-Amin during the period under discussion here since he appears nowhere in the archival correspondences regarding these early educational reforms in the rural schools.

and teaching of the Qur'an in the vernacular, and were not opposed to the idea of establishing Qur'anic study among other "secular" subjects in a youngster's education. Quite possibly, reformist ideas may well have shaped their thinking about the survival of Islam under a modernizing, British regime.

Thus in May of 1924, two books were drafted for use in the government schools. One was a Kiswahili translation of *Risala el Tawhid* (Message of the Oneness of God) which was meant as a primer "for the early teaching of religion". The second was a book in two parts. The first part was comprised of several Qur'anic passages selected for memorization which were written in Arabic with a Kiswahili translation. The second part was a collection of moral precepts written in "simple Swahili" which were accompanied by the Qur'anic passages to which they referred, and a commentary explaining them. The work was completed by the Kadhis themselves.

b. Local Protests, British "Concessions": Control over the Cultural Reproduction of Islam

Despite the consent and participation of these four kadhis, many Arabs in Zanzibar were critical of the changes. In 1926, the first registered protest was directed to the British Resident and the Sultan from one Umar bin Abdallah bin Umar el-Mazrui, an Omani Arab in Chake, Pemba. He asserted that learning only six ayas in Arabic from the

Qur'an (in Arabic) was grossly insufficient, and that the reduction of the Islamic syllabus ("Diana") had "caused a great discontent and has become miserable to us, because the Qur'an is the bone of our religion" (the letter was written in Arabic and translated by the British Resident's secretary). Moreover, the children should still be learning the Arabic alphabet -- not "Swahili in English [sic] characters!" The letter is forwarded to the Chief Secretary who responded to it in a dismissive manner; the Kadhis, he wrote, had "unanimously" agreed to the changes and he personally saw no reason to "teach Arabic in any district school that is not a purely Arab one."

On 21 March, 1927, the subject was introduced into the Legislative Council by an Arab representative, the Honorable Seyyid bin Kindeh. Among other points raised, Kindeh asked: "if the Koran is taught from a Swahili translation textbook, [are we to assume that] an English missionary corrects it for the benefit of the Education Department?" The Acting Chief Secretary assured him that "no member of any missionary society took part in the production [or teaching] of the publications." Kindeh continued:

Is the government aware of a growing feeling in the Arab community as to the present very low standard of education in Arabic and English languages fixed by the Education Department for the children of said community...If not, in view of the fact that Zanzibar is the central place on the east African coast for Arabic culture...will the Government please do something to enhance it?

Unfazed, the Acting Chief Secretary replied:

The Arabic that is taught in Government schools is the same standard as it has been for many years, and the teaching is done by a non-Swahili speaking Egyptian; the standard of English has considerably improved...The government is well aware of the aspirations of the Arab community and is in sympathy with them.

On 14 July of the same year, the Arab Association entered the debate with a letter to the Chief Secretary:

"...The present program enforced in Government schools to lessen Arabic studies and increase Kiswahili has greatly annoyed Muslims in general and Arabs in particular..."

And in 1930, the newspaper Al Falak published letters protesting the reduced Arabic and Islamic syllabus in the government schools. Several of these letters are modestly signed -- "A Country Muslim", "A Muslim from the Plantations" -- which helped make the point (whether intentionally or not) that the protest was "grass roots" in nature, and not dominated by the urban elite. In consequence, the British began to take the matter more seriously. What is especially interesting in the excerpts that follow is how they came to understand that it was politically expedient to reintroduce a more rigorous Arabic syllabus in their government schools.

On 28 October 1930, the Director of Education wrote to the Chief Secretary, explaining that "two aspects of this problem have to be considered:"

a) the teaching of Arabic as the language of Arabs; and b) the teaching of Arabic as the Muhammadan language of the Kuran. These aspects are so intimately related that it is not possible to divorce them.

Recognizing this distinction was a key breakthrough in British thinking about the role of local culture and religion in the operation of indirect rule. The first point they considered with little urgency. "The value of Arabic as an everyday language in Zanzibar is insignificant. In this sense it is of interest only to 20,000 Arabs in the Protectorate, and they themselves have let their language die out." Still, the Director of Education agreed to increase time spent teaching Arabic in the Zanzibar Government Schools, and to "select special boys" to study Arabic in the Teacher Training School.

However, it was with regard to the second observation that the British realized the overall political importance of teaching Arabic in the government schools. "As a result of these concessions", wrote the Director of Education, "it is to be presumed that the hostile spirit of criticism which the Arab Association has evidenced against the Department of Education for the past few years will be replaced by a spirit of friendly cooperation." He then proceeded to the next point (b), where he observed that Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an,

affects all Muhammadans alike. It is essential to the traditional religious education of the Muslim child. Hence it cannot be ignored. Attempts to belittle it are wrong and inevitably fail. The

reduced scheme of religious teaching forced upon the schools with the 1924 commission has always been unpopular. Public opinion has never endorsed it as a sufficient provision for the spiritual needs of youth...[he summarizes the formal protest registered by Arabs, then explains that]...Among the African population the commonest reason put forward against sending children to school is that the religious teaching falls short of the traditional standard.

A school system can never be successful in face of the determined opposition and hostility of the majority of parents and children....*We have to avoid all unnecessary disturbances of the traditional order of things as well as minimize the natural disturbances inevitable to what we call progress. I therefore advocate an increase in Kuran teaching...*The schedule corresponds roughly with the time devoted to religion in Sudan schools where conditions in this respect seem to be similar to those in Zanzibar (Sudan has subsidized the Qur'an schools, provided they undertake to teach secular subjects also, in remote districts where government schools have not been provided) [emphasis added].

While these thoughts were expressed in 1930, it appears that implementing change was slow. The next set of correspondence dates from 1938, when the Agricultural Officer F.B. Wilson reported on "the relation of Arabic to education in the Zanzibar Protectorate", a task assigned to him by the Chief Secretary. Wilson wrote:

"[Because] every good Muhammadan, whether Arab or African, must learn to read or recite the whole of the Holy Kuran in Arabic, many people in Zanzibar who are considered illiterate are able to read and write in Arabic characters...So far as the country people are concerned the teaching of Swahili in Roman characters is only favored in so far as it is thought to be the means of obtaining a government post. Otherwise this teaching is unpopular with the older people and looked upon with suspicion by many.

Thus Wilson's report called attention to another important factor in the debate: the quality of teaching Arabic (via the Qur'an) in the villages may well have been higher than the Director of Education had assumed in 1924, so that the changes implemented did little to help the administration's "public relations" with the villagers. Finally in 1939, the Director of Education described his "concession to considerations in the formulation of new policy now proceeding regarding the 'language question'".

I am aware of the prejudices of the people against too much time being devoted to Kiswahili, and of the fact that government seems to have been a little obstinate in the past over taking cognizance of the political aspects of these demands. New policy is likely to provide: i) far more time for Qur'an teaching, and the reading and writing of Arabic; ii) teaching of Arabic language and later of basic English and the reduction of time on Swahili. It is a matter of no little urgency to keep one's eye on the political and religious aspects of life here, and this alone justifies one's actions in overloading a primary education with foreign [Arabic] languages" (emphasis added).

In 1940, a scheme was implemented to bring local village Qur'an instructors into the government schools to work side by side with government-trained teachers. By 1943, 39 Qur'an teachers had been hired by the government schools.¹²⁶ The Acting Director of Education Patrick

¹²⁶ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1, no. 447. Negotiations around the remuneration, terms and conditions of employment of these local Qur'an teachers took years to settle.

Williams in his correspondence to the Chief Secretary, reported that:

The popularity and success of the scheme are reflected in the increase not only in requests from villagers for the posting of Kuran teachers, but also in the increase of both enrollment and attendance...Kuran teachers have worked very well with the trained teachers...The objects of the scheme are: i) to win over the confidence of the rural people who are prone to suspect our intentions and doubt our methods of teaching Kuran to the point of Hitimu [completion of the Qur'an]...and ii) "To encourage people to take an active interest in the teaching of the Koran in government schools in the hope that this will lead them to take an interest in education generally..."

Williams went on to say that since the need for Qur'an teachers would continue for some time to come, their "services will be at once necessary and politic". He even suggested that Qur'an instructors get involved in teaching "ordinary" subjects in the schools as well.

In 1954, the Director of Education B.W. Blaxland wrote to the Chief Secretary urging that the Qur'an teachers employed by the Government be provided with "the privileges of gratuity and free travel" and raises in their salary:

These men, who provide the platform on which the whole educational structure is based are accorded a status [by the colonial administration] lower than the lowest office boy... Though these men seldom have a good standard of secular education, ...they are far superior in religious knowledge and ability to write in and read Arabic... [Moreover], the teachers are selected by local populations, and therein lies their virtue -- religious instructors per se are essential to every proper school, but in Zanzibar they are in the unique position of being the pillar on which rests the confidence of the parents in Government Schools. It is the Koranic teacher who attracts

the children to school, as proved by the rapid increase in primary education after Koranic classes were attached to the schools."¹²⁷

There is, however, a final irony that is important to note. While the language dispute effectively called attention to the nature of religious instruction in children's primary schools, little notice seems to have been taken of the condition of more advanced Islamic learning in Zanzibar during the colonial period. When Joseph Schacht visited Zanzibar in 1953 to conduct a survey of religious law and learning, the Islamic scholars whom he met, including the Shafii qadi of Zanzibar 'Umar ibn Ahmad ibn Sumayt, assured him that

Islamic scholarship in Zanzibar had fallen on evil days; the last two great scholars of Zanzibar had been the qadi's father, Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Sumayt,¹²⁸ and Shaykh 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad Ba Kathir; now there were no real scholars left, there was no higher education in the shari'a in Zanzibar, and only the former reputation of the place remained. All the books of the deceased scholars had gone back to Hadramawt, and there were no Shafi'i manuscript works left in Zanzibar... (Schacht 1965:116).

What can be made of such remarks, especially when evidence from the period is scant? It is curious that at a time when tempers were flaring over the preservation of traditional Qur'anic learning for children, the qadi of Zanzibar should be lamenting that Islamic learning had

¹²⁷ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1 no. 447

¹²⁸ This is the sheikh who sat on the Commission organized by the colonial Department of Education in 1924.

"fallen on evil days." Schacht himself adds that this statement could also have been an "exaggeration" stemming from the gadi's own modesty, causing him to "belittle his own achievements in comparison with his pious forebears" (ibid). I doubt this, however, because if there was, in fact, a thriving milieu of Islamic scholarship, there would be other colleague to whom he himself could modestly defer (characteristic behavior for men of his stature or heshima [honor]). While further research on Islamic learning during the colonial period is definitely needed, several related reasons that might account for this state of affairs.

It is possible that the political agendas of Zanzibaris in the late colonial period simply left no time or resources for the kind of in-depth study of Islam that had been accomplished in the past. It is also likely that the new social and economic conditions produced under colonialism required investment in a secular, rather than religious, education. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the colonial Department of Education was awarding Zanzibari youngsters with scholarships to study abroad. Furthermore, it is possible that Islamic scholars of the "old school" also had become more dispersed and less visible after the challenges to their hegemony in the late nineteenth century¹²⁹ and the subsequent co-optation of the sultanate by the British.

¹²⁹ See chapter two.

c. Connections: Identity Politics and the Language Dispute

Broadly speaking, the educational reforms implemented by the British encroached upon local control over the cultural reproduction of Islam. In this vein, there are several points of interest that are connected, I think, to the identity politics discussed earlier in this chapter.

Although the British formally recognized the legitimacy of the ruling Omani oligarchy and had selectively privileged Arabs for the administration of indirect rule, it is interesting that they made their "concession" to reintroduce the teaching of Arabic in government schools explicitly on the grounds that Arabic was "the Muhammadan language of the Kuran" -- not because it was the language of "Arabs". This makes sense in light of the political developments that were unfolding by 1940. To emphasize the significance of Arabic in Islamic terms, meant to recognize the cultural needs of Zanzibaris generally, rather than to appear to cave in to the demands of a privileged minority of outspoken Arabs.

Moreover, after the first world war, British rule instigated changes in the Zanzibar Protectorate that could be described as a process of secular modernization. They established a legal separation between "church and state" and, despite constitutional acknowledgement that Arabic was the "first official language" of the Arab Sultanate of Zanzibar (Lodhi 1984-1986: 257), they encouraged the spread of English in all formal contexts at the expense of both

Arabic and Swahili (ibid). As the Director of Education wrote in 1939 regarding the teaching of English in government schools, "apart from its draw, there is much to be said for learning the language of the ruling race"¹³⁰ -- which, clearly, the Arab Sultanate had long since ceased to be. Arabic was regarded as an outmoded "foreign" language unsuited for the language of state, and which the Director of Education doubted would "ever become the language of the home in Zanzibar." However, rather than leaving the teaching of Arabic and Islam to the village Qur'an schools, the British maintained their control. By teaching more Arabic as a part of their Islamic curriculum, by raising the status of local Qur'an instructors in government primary schools, and by promoting secular subjects, they reduced resistance to their educational policy. In other words, it was, ironically, by recognizing the centrality of Arabic in the cultural reproduction of Islam, that the British ultimately strengthened their own hegemony.

The dispute also demonstrates that language had become an important political signifier in the identity discourse of the period. Harold Ingrams was a former Director of Education in colonial Zanzibar and member of the original 1924 commission on Qur'an teaching in government schools. In a piece written 1962, He mournfully recalled the "racial tensions" that had escalated in the late 1950s and that

¹³⁰ Zanzibar National Archives, file AB1 no. 390.

threatened to divide Zanzibari society after independence. In his view, the British campaign to promote Kiswahili over Arabic contributed to the development of a "race-consciousness" which was virtually absent among Zanzibaris before the 1920s (Ingrams 1962:429; Cooper 1980:287; Pearce 1920:158). Indeed, while the prestige attached to Arabic as the language of the Qur'an was recognized by all Muslims in Zanzibar regardless of descent, formal protests against the promotion of Kiswahili at the expense of Arabic (as reported in the colonial correspondences) were all made by individuals who clearly distinguished themselves as Arabs, not simply as Muslims. Ingrams's observation helps to explain this response. He argued that the official promotion of Swahili "led to a growing consciousness among Africans of a status for Swahili which it had not had before."¹³¹ This helped to develop Africanist feelings and disrupt the Islamic society" (ibid). Given the political developments discussed earlier, these "Africanist feelings" may well have helped to consolidate "Arabist" sentiments. Indeed, the excerpts indicate that submitting a signed letter of protest to the colonial government asserted one's identity as an Arab; after all, most Muslim parents

¹³¹ I would qualify this statement by saying that Kiswahili did in fact have "status" among coastal peoples (as discussed in chapter 2), but that with Omani control in the late 19th century and British colonial control in the 20th, Kiswahili was displaced by Arabic and then English as the languages of rule.

registered their protest more simply by not sending their children to the schools. Ingrams also writes that the resentment which Arabs felt toward the changes encouraged them to turn to Egypt for cultural and political cues. In this sense, the Arab nationalist ideas of the early 1950s may also have been fueled by the language dispute.

The language dispute can be viewed as an extension of the social relations of Islamic knowledge. The initial plan to assume control over the subjects and methods of Qur'anic instruction meant that the British were interfering with the social dynamics of the Qur'an school classroom which for the most part were based on the relationship between a Qur'an teacher and his pupils. This relationship, whatever its nature, was considered a formative part of a Muslim child's early education. The assumption of control also meant that interference with a mode of transmitting knowledge that did not simply concern learning to read per se, but also committing to memory the very words of God so that they may be internalized and recited, in their entirety, at will. Quite apart from literacy, this in itself constituted a culturally valued skill that had to be preserved.

Ultimately, then, protesting colonial control over children's Qur'anic education politicized the connection between Islamic knowledge and Muslim identity. By "politicized" I am not referring to its extension into the sphere of party politics, but rather to the consciousness

among rural Muslims that the social relations of Islamic knowledge should not be centralized and managed by the state. Despite the ZNP's failure to inspire "Muslim unity" through the contrivances of their nationalist campaign, it was in the realm of Islamic pedagogy that rural Zanzibaris - - who, in a sense, had existed "outside" of the discourses of policy-making and development -- were drawn into the contested issues of cultural sovereignty and empowerment in the colonial state.

PART TWO

**THE PERFORMANCE OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE:
INSTRUCTION, PIETY, AND HEALING**

PART TWO

Introductory Remarks

Whether it is conceptualized as an historical body of religious precepts, as a virtue of divine blessing, or as the embodiment of God's word with the power to act on the world, Islamic knowledge confers not only identity, and in some cases authority; it also confers a sense of agency upon Muslims as believers.

Belief and agency are important, mutually constitutive elements in Islamic epistemology. Belief sustains a person's engagement with Qur'anic and Prophetic narratives and the discursive practices or performances through which they are reiterated. In turn, these practices create the contexts and social relations through which people actively take part in, define, and comment on the world. Belief, then, constitutes a way of apprehending Islamic knowledge that extends it into the realm of metaphor and analogy, the media through which this knowledge is applied to contemporary, changing realities.

Each chapter in this section describes a particular context or configuration of belief and agency in which Islamic knowledge is socially defined and expressed. **Chapter Five** begins with a brief overview of Islamic religious instruction in Zanzibar, then focuses on several mature women scholars, two of whom are leaders of the Qadiriyya Sufi order in Zanzibar. **Chapters Six and Seven**

examine the various forms and meanings given to Islamic knowledge in contexts outside those of religious education and study per se. While **Chapter Six** examines how Islamic expertise is constituted through the social relations of piety, **Chapter Seven** explores the uses of Islamic expertise in a variety of curative practices, and how this impacts on the social identity of the practitioner. These all foreground the important performative dimension that goes into the definition of Islamic "expertise".

Arranging the material in this way rather than by category of expert permits a view of the connection between a) the differentiation of Islamic knowledge into multiple forms of expertise, and b) the social relations through which individuals come to be recognized as the bearers of Islamic expertise. This is an important connection to explore because it shifts attention from the expectations/boundedness of categories to the actual processes through which such categories are constructed or contested. Moreover, as discussed in chapter one, individuals who are thought to possess some form of Islamic expertise do not necessarily fit into any one agreed upon social category or role; instead, they are identified as "experts" in different ways, by different audiences, depending on various conjunctures of social, personal, and political circumstance.

Thus while most of the material in these chapters is presented through the life stories and commentaries of particular individuals with Islamic expertise, the narratives are not intended to portray discrete categories of experts per se. Instead, they are used to illustrate the commotion of ideas and social relations that make Islamic expertise in Zanzibar an important, varied, and potentially political domain of cultural knowledge and social action.

CHAPTER FIVE
Islamic Education and Discursive Practice:
Women's Voices

This chapter examines the social relations of Islamic study in contemporary Zanzibar Town. I begin with a brief overview of Islamic educational settings and curricula for children and adults. From here I focus attention on a women's study-prayer circle and the personalities that give it guidance and meaning. I introduce three teacher-leaders in particular whose expertise in recitation, textual exposition, and extemporaneous prayer has earned them recognition among women and men alike.

I. Instructional Settings

a. Educating Youngsters

Attending Qur'an school (*chuo/vyuo*) is a formative part of growing up Muslim in Zanzibar. From the ages of about six to twelve, the vast majority of Muslim boys and girls attend either early morning or late afternoon lessons at neighborhood Qur'an schools dotted throughout the town area.¹³² The smallest children are taught the Arabic

¹³² Bwana Saidi Ali and I conducted a walking survey of Qur'an schools and madrasa in Stone Town. In an area of one third of a square mile with a population of roughly 16,000, we located twelve schools, with the four largest and most popular schools taking the greatest share of pupils. Several consisted of little more than one large room, the floor amply covered with mats where the pupils sat for their lessons. According to the rough estimates of the teachers themselves, approximately 2,765 children attended lessons in the schools. We tried to obtain more accurate information

alphabet and later are urged to memorize as much of the Qur'an as they can, beginning with the shortest *suras* (chapters) such as *Al-Fatihah* (the "prologue", also the most recited passage in the Qur'an) and *Al-Falaq* (the "Dawn", the penultimate sura of the Qur'an).¹³³ Most children bring their own *kijuzuu*, a small booklet with the Arabic alphabet and some passages from the Qur'an which can be bought in the shops around town. The youngsters are also instructed about the *shahada* -- the Islamic confession of faith, and how to pray, do their ablutions, and fast when they are old enough.

The madrasas are Islamic schools with a more expanded curricula. For instance, at some of the larger schools such as the Madrasatil-Nur of Maalim Bakathir in Mkunazini, Madrastil-Iman of Sheikh Hassan Ali Kali in Malindi (in Stone Town), and Madrasa Hidayah al-Islamia of Sheikh Burhan Abdi in Raha Leo (in Ng'ambo), teenagers are given more advanced instruction in subjects such as Tawhid (doctrine of

on Qur'an schools and madrasa that also included Ng'ambo. However, at the time, the Zanzibar Government was in the process of conducting its own Vyuo/Madrasa survey, and did not allow us to look at any of the information they had collected. Once the surveys were turned in, they were passed on to the Department of Education. When I asked at the Department of Education why they were conducting the survey, one officer explained it was necessary for the government to keep track of all schools and their condition they were in, and that it was a matter of the "development of the country." Regarding the Qur'an school survey we were told only that the number of schools had increased, since "Islam was on the rise these days."

¹³³ The standard fiqh primers used by most Qur'an schools and madrasa are called Babu (The Chapters [of the Qur'an]), Safina (The Ark), and Hidaya (The Gift).

the Oneness of God), *fihi* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsiri* (Qur'anic exegesis), *tajiwidi* (the rules of precise Qur'anic recitation), *hadithi za Mtume* (the hadith of the Prophet), *lugha* (Arabic language), and *itifaqi al-ulamaa*, the deliberations of the historic imams who founded the four legal schools of Islam.

Another institution for the teaching of Islam is the Muslim School, located about two miles south of Stone Town in Mazizini. The Muslim School was built in 1972 during the presidency of Aboud Jumbe as part of a project to reinvigorate Islamic education in Zanzibar after a period of stagnation in the 1960s. Endowments for the academy came initially from the Islamic Development Fund, which was used for construction, then from the Zanzibari government, and the government of Sudan. While secular subjects (such as math and science) are also taught at the academy, its curriculum consists primarily of Arabic and Islamic subjects. The idea is to train teachers who will be prepared to teach Islam and Arabic in the secular, government-run secondary schools in Zanzibar.¹³⁴ In this way, not only

¹³⁴ Currently, the teachers at the Muslim School are Zanzibar, Egyptian, and Sudanese. The Sudanese are employed by the pan-African Islamic organization called the "Islamic Call", which has established a mission in Zanzibar. One man a met working with the Islamic call has been employed by the Ministry of Education in Zanzibar to revise the Arabic syllabus for primary schools, and to prepare the Diploma Exam in Arabic at the Muslim School. These men also gave an occasional sermon on televsion, in Arabic, with a Kiswahli translator.

would Islamic courses be integrated into the secondary school curricula, but they would be taught by Zanzibaris themselves.

Students begin attending the Muslim School in their early teens, so it is not intended as an alternative to the local Qur'an schools for children. Like many of the madrasas in town, both boys and girls attend the school, and take classes together. As Headmaster Abdul Razak explained, "we have discovered that the nourishment of Islam in our communities begins with the women who raise our children, both girls and boys, as Muslims. Indeed, in this respect, women's role is even greater than that of the men's."¹³⁵

b. Children's Performance: the maulidi

Many of the madrasas and smaller Qur'an schools affiliated with mosques dotted throughout the town also provide instruction in the performance of the *Maulidi Barazanji* -- historical compositions recited in Arabic that praise the Prophet Muhammad and commemorate his birth.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Interview with Abdul Razak, headmaster of the Muslim School in Mazizini, Zanzibar Town, April 12, 1990.

¹³⁶ One of the most popular texts in Zanzibar is Tafsiri ya Maulidi Barazanji kwa Tenzi na Qasida, translated by Sheikh Saidi Musa (1987 Dar es Salaam Lillaahi Islamic Publications Center). They tell the story of the Prophet's mother's pregnancy, his birth, his beauty of countenance, and the significant events in his life that identify him as the last and greatest of prophets.

These are also accompanied by the related *gasida*, poems which are often locally composed and recited in Kiswahili.

Maulidi and *gasida* recitations are among the most popular Islamic discursive practices in Zanzibar and the Swahili coast generally.¹³⁷ Most performances are hosted by women at their homes, and are usually performed for occasions such as weddings, funerals, and the birth of a baby.¹³⁸ While these performances are enjoyed as entertainment and create a festive atmosphere for the mingling guests, the maulidi is also believed to bestow blessings upon the newlyweds, the new baby, or, in the case of a funeral, to send blessings along with the deceased on her/his journey to the hereafter. Since mawlidis are typically performed by the students of a Qur'an school, these occasions give youngsters who have accomplished the

¹³⁷ For analyses of the mawlid in Lamu, on the Kenyan coast, see Alan William Boyd's dissertation "To Praise the Prophet: A Processual Symbolic Analysis of Maulid, A Muslim Ritual in Lamu" (1981: University of Indiana [DAI 41/12A], and el-Zein, The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), who argues that the mawlid constituted an arena through which sharifs positioned themselves as the sole mediators between God and Muslims on earth.

¹³⁸ Maulidi recitations are also performed throughout the month of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (*Mfunguo Sita*). Every year the Zanzibar government stages a formal, outdoor maulidi performance in town to inaugurate the beginning of *Mfunguo Sita*, and local madrasas are invited to send their best pupils to perform. Moreover, given the size of the crowd that gathers, the ceremony provides an opportunity for the ruling party to reflect on its successes and promises for the future.

skill of recitation an opportunity to distinguish themselves publically. Maulidi competitions are also sponsored by one of the larger madrasas in town, which invites students from all over Unguja and Pemba to perform. In the maulidi, expertise is constituted in the lyrical rendering of Arabic recitation in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus as performance, maulidi constitutes a socially significant domain of Islamic discursive (oral/aural) practice in which even youngsters can gain recognition.

A maulidi performance usually lasts about an hour and a half, beginning quietly and increasing in excitement and animation as it progresses. Anywhere from ten to twenty or so youngsters may be involved, their ages ranging from approximately seven to eighteen. While the maulidi text itself is fixed -- no improvisations or modifications are incorporated into the recitation -- and recited in Arabic, the actual performance also includes the *gasida* (poem) section, where recitation of locally composed pieces are permitted. The *gasida* are almost always recited in Kiswahili. It is also during the *gasida* section that one might hear the syncopated rhythms of the *dufu*, the tambourine-like skin drums that the youngsters learn to play at some of the Qur'an schools.

The *gasida* section also usually incorporates choreographed movements for the youngsters. The girls, wearing multicolored kangas around their heads, kneel and

sway rhythmically first from their waist, and then up onto their knees, while the boys, clad in trousers, *kofias* (embroidered caps), and sometimes *kanzus*,¹³⁹ enact a standing and stepping motion. The boys' steps are performed like interrupted, incomplete strides -- a foot goes forward, the body is bent forward, but then is abruptly brought back into a standing position. One madrasa teacher explained the boys' stacatto-like movements to me. Their steps are interrupted because to "complete" any one step would make the movements a dance -- and these performers are not dancing; they are expressing excitement (*jazba*) through choreographed movements, in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. The movements, then, do not comprise a "dance"; they are accompaniments to the recitation. Similarly, the *maulidi* and *qasida* are not "songs", they are devotional poems.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ A *kanzu* is the traditional attire worn by Muslim men in Zanzibar. It is a full length, long-sleeved shirt-dress, usually white, blue, or beige in color. Sometimes it is worn over trousers and a t-shirt, other times over a *shuka* or *kikoi* wrapped around the waist as a loin cloth.

¹⁴⁰ Some *maulidi* ceremonies are performed exclusively by adults. In these cases, the participants are either all women or men, and no portion of the performance is choreographed, although there may be accompaniment of the *dufu*. In a theoretical piece based on research in Mtwapa on the Kenyan coast, David Parkin observes that *mawlid* recitations which are accompanied by bodily movement and music are locally classified as "low" and more "African" in nature, while those in which recitations were unaccompanied were considered to be "high", and more "Arab" (I did not find this sort of distinction in Zanzibar). Parkin combines both political and ethnopsychological approaches in his analysis. He suggests that this oppositional construction is actually a simplification of more complex interpersonal and political tensions in the area around status, freedom

As such, these performances bring youngsters into the act of momentarily converting women's homes and courtyards into spaces that are symbolically imbued with the grace of the Prophet.¹⁴¹ Towards the end of the performance -- a moment of special praise to the Prophet Muhammad -- all guests rise and the hostess walks among them, wafting the smoke of burning incense (*udi*, or aloewood) up into the garments of the guests in a gesture of blessing. She sprinkles them with rosewater, and passes along the "*sadaka*"¹⁴² small cups of coffee and a tray of sweets for all to taste.

from ideologically based strictures on the body, and cultural self-affirmation, all of which are reflected in the actual range of moral assessments on the mawlid: from outright condemnation of the mawlid altogether (the "bida'a" position), to a full incorporation of bodily movement (the "traditionalist" position). But the construction of such reified, oppositional assessments of bodily movement manages also to advance a kind of moral hierarchy in which the body itself (in its pure state but especially its power to defile) becomes the signifier of a Muslim's personal identity -- be it religious, sexual, and social. ("Islam, Symbolic Hegemony, and the Problem of Bodily Expression" in S. Heald and A. Deluz, eds., in Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: An Encounter Through Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁴¹ For an excellent analysis of mawlid performances in Zabid, Yemen, see As Anne Meneley's Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996). In her study Meneley observes that the mawlid is performed on a number of occasions similar to those in Zanzibar. But especially interesting is her point that by "pledging" to sponsor mawlid performances, elite women mediate "the ever-present contradiction between the equality of Muslims before God and the hierarchy of families so evident in everyday life" (1996:178).

¹⁴² A religious offering, or alms.

c. Continuing Education: Men and Women

Men and women interested in furthering their Islamic education or who resume more in-depth study later in life might take classes at a madrasa, or attend discussion groups or lectures organized by themselves or by teachers outside of the madrasa, or they may become involved in ongoing, one-on-one tutorials with a particular mentor.¹⁴³

Gender segregation among adults involved in tutorials, classes, or lectures was present, but inconsistent. For instance, one lecture series I attended was organized by one cohort of sheikhs whom I've described as "essentialist" in orientation. Their series was prepared expressly for women, in order to enlighten them on a variety of Islamic issues. Most of these lectures were delivered by young men (the one exception was a woman from Nairobi who was invited to speak on the concept of *hijab*).

The classroom lessons held by this cohort were gender segregated. On the other hand, I also observed situations where women and men were involved in studies together.

¹⁴³ A survey of mosques in Stone Town and Ng'ambo was being undertaken by the Zanzibar Waqf Commission during the time of this study. The partial results of this survey listed approximately 125 mosques in an area of roughly 2 square miles. All but 24 had a Qur'an school or madrasa with a curriculum that was taught regularly on its premises. Historian Abdul Sheriff counts 51 mosques in Stone Town alone that date back to the mid to late 19th century, including Sunni (Shafi'i and Hanafi), Ibadhi, Ithna'shari, and Bohora sects. Sheriff relates this florescence of mosque construction to the prosperity generated by merchant capitalism during this time (see Sheriff 1992).

Sheikh Burhan's darasa in Raha Leo had both men and women students in the classroom (some of whom were also studying with the essentialist sheikhs), while other male teachers whom I knew sat with women in one-on-one tutorials. One elderly woman scholar, Bi Mwanasha Suleiman (whom I discuss below) had adult male students and teachers.

To some extent, age seemed to be a factor in shaping the mix, or not, of men and women in Islamic study. The younger the students were, the more likely it was that they studied in same sex situations (tutorials were often the exception since most of the instructors at the madrasa are men, and girls do seek instruction and advice from sheikhs). And when space permitted, small boys and girls in most of the Qur'an schools I observed also sat in separate classrooms or areas. And yet at the Muslim School, as I discussed above, teens sat in classes together.

This sort of inconsistency is not surprising, since in Zanzibari society generally, the Islamic construction of sexual segregation is variably interpreted and expressed. Muslim (Shafii) women are relatively unrestricted and move about freely outdoors, with individual variations being visible in the stylistic choices of *hijab* (outer garment),¹⁴⁴ or when and where to travel alone. Moreover,

¹⁴⁴ The *buibui*, or black cloak is the most common style, which purportedly came from the Hadramawt in the 19th century (Bakari 1981:). This is a single piece of cloth worn over the head (face exposed), tied underneath the chin, and which covers one's dress. There are many other styles,

most women's social activities, including religious study, are deliberately woman-centered because they prefer it, not because men have determined it must be so. At the same time, however, I also knew several Zanzibari women of Omani descent who complained that their husbands severely restricted their leaving the house for shopping or visiting. Their husbands were wealthy, Zanzibar-born Omanis, one an officer in the Omani military, and the others successful businessmen in Zanzibar Town. These men signalled their status in many ways, one of which was to conspicuously restrict the movement of their wives. Thus, in the exercise of power -- in this case, men's control over women -- Islam gets read as a set of unambiguous rules, and following those rules is a virtuous act that confers prestige. In a similar vein, I think that the particular manner in which women are treated by the madrasa cohort to which they belong can be used by that cohort to signal or project a particular image of Islamic propriety and morality to the world.¹⁴⁵

The topics and issues that are pursued in classes or tutorials vary, depending on the needs or interests of those involved. For instance, at Sheikh Abdallah Bakathir's

which are discussed in more detail below in chapter eight.

¹⁴⁵ I'm not arguing that the maintenance of same sex classrooms in the madrasa is commensurate to a man's controlling the movement of his wife. My point here is that ideas about power, identity, and status can be communicated through the ways in which people construct and manipulate "the rules" that govern gender relations.

Madrasatil Nur, where different study groups are named after the Companions of the prophet Muhammad ("Fasl Hamza", "Abubakr", "Othman", "Omar"), there are night classes for people of all ages and levels of knowledge. There are even classes prepared specially for adults who never finished Qur'an school, and who want to learn about their religion and how to recite from the Qur'an. In addition to classes (darasa) and study groups, people also consult teachers more casually, discussing questions on performing the *ibada* (prayer, ablutions, fasting, giving alms), or seeking advice on more personal affairs or difficulties at home. Besides these more practical concerns, there is also interest in understanding and engaging issues and debates that have concerned Islam historically or that have emerged in contemporary social and political contexts.

For instance, Abdul Wahab Alawi teaches *tasawwuf* (mystical knowledge) to men at a mosque in town. Abdul Wahab was a town planner by profession, but is now retired. He is also a sharif, and has been a member of the Alawiyya *tarika* (sufi brotherhood) all his life. Most of his students, however, are not Sufis. His lectures on *tasawwuf* teach about the inner purification of the self, how to love God and the Prophet, and all of humanity, how to remain conscious of God's being. He teaches how Islamic practices are related to the spiritual development of every Muslim (not just Sufis), how physical health and well-being depend

upon the condition of one's spirit (*roho*), which is developed by performing the *ibada*. He teaches that fasting is an experience, a discipline that builds self-control; surely one feels hunger, like other animals. But it is the *decision* to fast, the state of mind that is spiritually cleansing, and that renews and strengthens one's spiritual connection to God. It is that which makes us human. Wahab's favorite scholar is al-Ghazali, and he uses his writings in his lectures. Wahab also gives *ijaza* to his students, that is, certification that a pupil has completed study of a certain text.

The issues pursued by students and mentors can also aim explicitly at the condition of the "*umma*" (Muslim community) generally, and can have political undertones. For instance, in the spring of 1990, the essentialist sheikhs asked, "How should Zanzibari Muslims determine the beginning and end of the fast for Ramadhan? Do we follow the announcement on the radio that the Saudis have seen the new moon? Or do we wait until we actually see the moon in the sky [the protocol followed by Zanzibar's Chief Kadhi]?" The essentialists argued that modern technology (the radio) has given us the opportunity to begin and break fast with the Saudis. Why shouldn't all Muslims fast together? However, the Chief Kadhi dismissed this, saying zanzibaris will continue to fast when they cite the moon; the difference in time is a natural one created by geography and distance. And why, he added,

must we begin with the Saudis? In that year, at least, Swahili Muslims in Zanzibar did not break fast together, since loyal students followed the teachings of their own mentors.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, what comes to light here is the importance of personal authority in the transmission, reproduction, and politics of Islamic knowledge in Zanzibar, an issue I return to in chapter eight.

II. Gender, Knowledge, and Agency

One prayer and study group I attended periodically was led by approximately eight women in their late fifties, several of whom were long established leaders of the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya tarika (Sufi brotherhoods) in Zanzibar. However, the group actually revolved around one deeply pious and distinguished Islamic scholar named Mwanasha Suleiman, known affectionately as "Bi Mwalimu" (Teacher) or "Bi Mkubwa" (The Great One), a woman in her late nineties.¹⁴⁷ Every Sunday morning at sunrise, roughly twenty-five mature women¹⁴⁸ would gather together in the front room of a ground floor apartment in an old stone

¹⁴⁶ An interesting point here is that while the essentialists claim not to be Wahabiy -- the state religion of Saudi Arabia -- their purist rhetoric and deference to the Saudis point to deep sympathies with Wahabiy doctrine.

¹⁴⁷ "Bi" is short for "Bibi" which means woman, Ma'am, or Ms.

¹⁴⁸ The women's ages ranged from their mid forties to their sixties.

building in Mkunazini. This is also where Bi Mkubwa lived, and where small children gathered daily for their lessons in her Qur'an school.

During these sessions (henceforth referred to as "the darasa"), the women prayed, exchanged news (such as recent deaths or illnesses that required their prayers), prepared upcoming religious events, and, in each session, studied an Islamic topic or question suggested by one of the participants. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the women's mentors, their activities, their darasa, and the Islamic expertise which has defined a great part of their social and personal lives.

a. The Tarika

Several of the women I met in the darasa were leaders, or makhalifa, of the women's sections of the Qadiriyya or Shadhiliyya tarika, that is, the Sufi or mystical orders of Islam.

Each tarika is named after and identifies with the sheikh who was its historical founder and who remains its spiritual and intellectual figurehead. Indeed, the orders are conceptually organized through the concept of silsilah, the chain of knowledge and blessing which begins with the founder and is passed down from sheikh to disciple (*mouridi*) over the generations. As I mentioned in chapter one, tarika members in Zanzibar are colloquially referred to as the

"watu wa zikiri", "the people of the zikiri", since their most conspicuous identity marker is their enthusiasm for group recitations of the zikiri, that is, remembrance of God through repeated invocation of His names. The tarika also make ziara, or small pilgrimages, to the tombs of their various sheikhs who are buried in the countryside. The most popular order in Zanzibar is the Uwaysiyya branch of the Qadiriyya, founded by Sheikh Uways bin Muhammad al-Barawi in the 19th century (see chapter two).

Both men's and women's sections of the tarika are active in Zanzibar Town and like men, women can achieve positions of authority and leadership.¹⁴⁹ Achieving the position of khalifa involves years of study for men and women alike. It involves Qur'anic memorization and developing skills in recitation in Arabic which are necessary for reciting dua; leading collective khitima recitations (Qur'anic recitation for the dead), and in reciting taawasul,¹⁵⁰ in which appeals to God are made through intercession involving the Prophet, his Companions, or the founding sheikhs of the tarika. Expertise is also based on the study of Islamic subjects including Qur'anic exegesis, jurisprudence, the study of the Hadith of the Prophet, and more specifically, study of the hadith or

¹⁴⁹ See J. Spencer Trimingham, The Sufi Orders of Islam, Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1971, for a comprehensive study of the historical development and dissemination of Sufism.

¹⁵⁰ Or *tawasali*, as discussed in chapter one.

narratives written about the founding sheikhs. These narratives are required for the readings (*wadhifa*) which precede the *tarikas'* particular *zikiri* and *maulidi* recitations. Each *tarika* has its own style of *maulidi* performance which is based on devotional works that praise and tell the story of the founding sheikhs of the order. Depending on the performative style of the *tarika*, *dufu* may or may not accompany the recitation.

Like men, women *khalifa* receive *ijaza*, a ritual conferral of status in which a learned sheikh, usually her own teacher within the *tarika*, acknowledges her as his/her accomplished student and devoted Muslim. *Ijaza* is also received by women and men who become *mouridis*, authorized members of the *tarika*. Only *khalifas* are authorized to give *ijaza*, an act which constitutes a symbolic bond between a student and his/her mentor.¹⁵¹ In an interview with a *khalifa* of the men's branch of the *Qadiriyya*, I was told that receiving *ijaza* often involves drinking water sweetened with sugar and reciting, "*Lailaha illal LAH!*". At this point the sheikh demonstrated what he meant. We were both sitting on mats on the floor in the sitting room of his house (also the *madrasa*). He knelt across from me, so that

¹⁵¹ Every *khalifa* is supposed to keep a registry of his or her *mouridis* to whom s/he has given *ijaza*. At the time I was unable to obtain an accurate count of the number of *makhalifa* active in Zanzibar. This and other basic information on the organization of the Zanzibari *tarika* and their relationship to the mainland are questions I am planning to pursue in future research.

our knees touched. With eyes closed he took my right hand, and moving it slowly back and forth, he quietly and repeatedly intoned, "*Lailahah illal Lah...*" Then he pretended to sip water from an imaginary cup, and handed me the cup to sip after him, as if I was his initiate. "You do this to become a mouridi", he explained.

b. Tarika Women: Bi Rehema and Bi Lulu

As I discussed in chapter two, many of the Sufi sheikhs who came to Zanzibar in the 19th century did so via the Comoro Islands. Indeed, the two women khalifa introduced here were born in Comoro, but were brought to Zanzibar when they were little girls. They are Bi Rehema and Bi Dodo.

Bi Rehema

I was first introduced to Bi Rehema by a man named Seyyid Silima, a sharif (descendant of the Prophet) and khalifa of the Alawiyya tarika in Zanzibar who is revered for his great piety (see chapter six).¹⁵² He took me one day to see Bi Rehema and to visit her Qur'an school; he also

¹⁵² Bi Rehema, Bi Lulu, and Seyyid Silima are all of Comorian descent and live in Ng'ambo neighborhoods within about a hundred yard radius of each other. While it was fairly clear that many of the families in these neighborhoods were Comorian, this not where all Comorian people lived. However, I did not conduct research on neighborhood settlement patterns by ethnicity. See Garth Myers 1992. Moreover, as indicated in the previous chapter, Comorians were, for the most part, educated middle class Zanzibaris. However, among these three informants, at least, it was clear that only Bi Neema could be described as financially secure, if not "wealthy", largely through the support of her grown children.

thought we might have something in common since her eldest son had been studying for some time at a university in the United States. She agreed to meet for an interview the following day.

When I returned to her house the next day, I found Bi Rehema sitting on a table next to a classroom of full fidgety girls and boys, reciting a passage from the Qur'an. Her feet and hands were elaborately painted with henna and a kanga was draped loosely over her head and dress. An ustaadh (one of her assistants, an older teenage boy) stood beside the blackboard, pointing to Arabic letters which the children identified in unison. We exchanged greetings, and then she invited me up onto the table beside her. She began the interview by opening up a photo album with pictures of all her grown children. Her eldest son, Muhammad Dedes, now in his mid-forties, is her only child of six who has chosen to participate in the tarika.¹⁵³ And while her first husband's uncle was a "maalim" (an Islamic teacher), and encouraged her to study, neither her first nor second and present husband were involved in the tarika or particularly interested in Islamic study at all. Bi Rehema is now in her mid sixties, and is one of the most renowned khalifa of the Qadiriyya women's branch in Zanzibar. I asked her how it was that she became so involved in Islam.

¹⁵³ Her son is Muhammad Latif, the khalifa of the Qadiriyya tarika in Zanzibar, introduced in chapter three.

Bi Rehema was born in the Comoro Islands. As a small child she was brought to Unguja (Zanzibar) by her aunt who had failed to have a child of her own. Bi Rehema had an early exposure to and enthusiasm for the tarika. Her mother in Comoro was a khalifa of the Shadiliyya tarika, and her aunt, the woman who raised her in Unguja, a khalifa of the Qadiriyya. She remembers her biological mother going to zikiri recitations that lasted through the night, and as a youngster in Zanzibar she accompanied her aunt to zikiri and maulidi sessions, and studied the qasida (poems) about their founding sheikh which her aunt composed and compiled herself. "I used to listen to my aunt as she read and read; I loved to listen, and tried to imitate her myself; then God gave me the desire to follow the tarika..." Because her mother was in the Qadiriyya and her aunt -- the "mother" who raised her ("mama aliyenilea") -- in the Shadhiliyya, she says "I took both hands" of the tarika. That is, when she matured, she received ijaza from sheikhs in both tarikas.

Bi Rehema says her interest "*kutafuta elmu*" (to seek knowledge) was always keen. After completing Qur'an school, she got married and began her family. When her children were still young, she began taking tutorials with Mwanasha Suleiman and Maalim Hassan Makunga, neither of whom were involved with the tarika. Because the language of instruction was Kiswahili, Bi Rehema began attending madrasa

in order to improve her Arabic;¹⁵⁴ indeed, she later came to be known for her adept pronunciation in recitation. Even in conversation, Bi Rehema's Kiswahili is embellished with many Arabic terms and phrases, which calls attention to --and impresses upon others -- the quality of her learning.

Bi Rehema began her own Qur'an school while in the midst of raising her children. When she discovered that her eldest child's *chuo* instructor could not, in her estimation, recite in Arabic properly, she decided to teach her children herself at home. Later she began to take on others as pupils. Today her *chuo* has expanded into a madrasa where, in addition to Qur'anic memorization and recitation, she teaches youngsters aspects of Islamic jurisprudence, the meaning of the Qur'an, the hadith, and the maulidi/qasida compositions which relate specifically to the tarika. Bi Rehema also received certification to teach the Qur'an in government schools, which she did from 1973 to 1986.

In fact, many women khalifa teach in and supervise their own Qur'an schools for boys and girls. As Bi Rehema says, to be a khalifa is to be a teacher; to be a teacher, is to have knowledge; and to have knowledge is to have status:

Anyone who is a khalifa is also a teacher; [a khalifa] loves to study, and to pursue knowledge. The is one way a khalifa becomes an 'aarif' [in

¹⁵⁴ This was at Sheikh Burhan Abdi's madrasa, mentioned above; in fact, Sheikh Burhan was himself a student of Mwanasha Suleiman.

Arabic], that is, an *mjuzi* [sage]. He/she knows! He/she has knowledge of jurisprudence, of God Almighty, of the Prophet Muhammad, of the founding sheikhs. All that knowledge increases one's power [she says this word in English]; to be a teacher and then a khalifa, one's status [*cheo*] and authority [*uwezo*] can become very great.¹⁵⁵

Another status conferring dimension of Bi Rehema's Islamic expertise and identity as a Muslim is that she is also a *hajji*, a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Her trip was made possible through the financial successes of her children, which also allowed her to rebuild her house in Kisimamanjogoo, and the madrasa attached to it.¹⁵⁶ In 1990, nine women *hajiis*, including Bi Rehema, staged a "mock" pilgrimage for the few Zanzibari women who were preparing to make their first *hajj* to Mecca.¹⁵⁷ For many of these women, it was their first time travelling outside of Zanzibar. At the *hajj* demonstration I attended, while only 16 women were planning to go to Mecca, about 90 women showed up to watch and learn about the prescribed performances expected of the pilgrims at each of the ritual "stations" in Mecca, and to pray for the safety of the *hajiis* on their

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Bi Rehema at her home in Kisimamanjogoo, Zanzibar Town, January 17, 1990.

¹⁵⁶ Her son Muhammad Latif had a high position in the Tanzanian Government as economic consultant before leaving for the United States to pursue his Ph.D. His education was sponsored by a grant from the Tanzanian government.

¹⁵⁷ These trips are often sponsored by grants from other Islamic countries; others are independently financed.

imminent journey. It took place in the front yard of one of the elementary schools at Kibokoni, in Stone Town.

Bi Rehema opened the hajj demonstration with a prayer. Another young woman read, in Arabic, about the significance of the Hajj, then translated in Kiswahili. Another woman read a passage from the Qur'an. Finally, one of Bi Rehema's peers (a teacher who is also a member of the Shadhiliyya tarika), Bi Asha, stood up and discussed how the pilgrim must prepare for the hajj. She began by saying that all pilgrims must have the consent of the parents; they must be sure that their children and elders will all be in good care in their absence; and they must clear up all arguments and debts that may be pending; in other words, they must be "in peace" before they begin their journey. Next, she described to the pilgrims how they must dress -- in a white dress, skirt, or pants, a white tie on headpiece, and white body shawl. They should also bring a pouch for carrying money, and ordinary clothes for travel -- preferably a long green dress.

By this time, the group stopped for the four o'clock prayer. Bi Rehema stood in front of the women and led the group as they prayed. After this, Bi Asha continued, instructing the pilgrims about food and travel safety. She ended by telling them that before leaving, they had to pray two *rakaas* (bending forward at the waist) to bid farewell to

their home, read dua, then pray again while inside the aircraft.

Finally, Bi Rehema and nine other women dressed in the appropriate white attire began to enact the hajj. Everyone, hajjis and onlookers alike, were clearly enjoying the show. The first station is to Medina, where the pilgrims pray at the tombs of Muhammad and his Companions. Then, to Mecca, to circumambulate the Kabaa. This was especially amusing, since the hajjis acted out the commotion of the throngs of pilgrims pushing and fighting to get a chance to kiss or touch the Kabaa. Next they ran seven times back and forth between the mountains Safaa and Marwa, drank zam zam water (where a spring miraculously appeared to Hajar, wife of Ibrahim), gleefully pretending to bathe in the well. Then they continued to the tents at Mina, the rest stop before the going to Mount Arafat. Here they stopped to pray, and a young woman read a qasida (poem) about Muhammad's last speech on mount. The qasida was rather long, and at one point the woman's voice cracked; then she began to cry. But one of the instructors stood beside her, encouraging her to finish the recitation. Many of the women looking on exclaimed, "*Amin, Amin!*" urging her on.

After the poem, the hajjis continued, with Bi Rehema in the lead. They stopped to collect stones, then went on to the peaks for stoning the spirits (*mashetani*), just as Ibrahim had done when they tried to dissuade him from

following God's command to sacrifice his son. Bi Rehema warned that this station, too, could be hazardous, and that one must avoid getting accidentally struck in the head by a stone hurtling through the air. This was the final station, bringing the demonstration to a close.

Bi Rehema is known among women and men outside of the tarika for her excellence in prayer, recitation, and her knowledge of the Qur'an. Her reputation brings her requests from all over town for reciting the Qur'an (especially at funerals) and dua (supplicatory prayer) on various occasions. In 1992, Bi Rehema became the highest ranking woman khalifa in the Qadiriyya tarika. Before then, this position was held by a woman named Bi Arifa Shafiiqa Al-Qadiriyy, known popularly as Bi Lulu. Now in her late sixties, Bi Lulu continues to be a khalifa, but she passed the "flag", the symbol of leadership over all the women makhalifa, on to Bi Rehema.

Bi Lulu

I noticed Bi Lulu in the darasa one Sunday morning after the session was over. I was asking the women about the tarika, and my questions were almost always fielded by Bi Lulu, to whom the others deferred. As we were leaving, I asked if she wouldn't mind meeting me one day to talk about the tarika.

I arrived a bit early on the evening we planned to meet, so I leaned my bike against the cement baraza (veranda) outside her house and waited for her there. It was quiet, and I could hear her bathing inside. The radio was on. I heard her finish her bath, and got myself ready to go inside. "Hodi!" I said, standing in the doorway. She emerged from the back, and received me at the door, still dripping from her bath, a small puddle forming at her feet as she answered, "Karibu, pita!" ("Welcome, come in"). She wore two brightly colored kangas, one wrapped around her waist, the other around her chest. Her face opened into a broad smile as she extended her hand in greeting. I apologized for disturbing her in the evening, but she said this was the best time -- no heat, less interruptions, no "shughuli" (business to attend to).

Bi Lulu describes her commitment to the Qadiriyya tarika as an "inheritance" from her family. Her father, a Zanzibar-born Comorian, was a Khalifa. Her mother was from Comoro, and Bi Lulu herself was born there, but her parents brought her and her sister to live in Zanzibar when they were still small children. Besides her father, Bi Lulu's elders were all sheikhs in the Qadiriyya, and they expected that she too would devote her life to study within the tarika. They even had a will prepared, indicating that she should inherit the responsibility from her father. Thus in contrast to Bi Rehema's experience, Bi Lulu explains that

The khalifaship is something that is granted to you by God, like a gift, do you hear? It is not simply a matter of desire. Take me, for instance. I completely refused to take it on at first. But the sheikhs came to me and said, 'You must accept this responsibility!' Then my father said to his companions, 'You cannot force this upon her, that is written in the Will...Wait until she calls upon you to read for her, then go to her, and do not disappoint her....'¹⁵⁸

In time, Bi Lulu explains, she came to accept and to even love her "inheritance". Thus as the daughter of a Qadiriyya khalifa, she took on the responsibility of teaching and running the Qur'an school for Qadiriyya children, and became the khalifa of the women's branch in Zanzibar. Her father was her primary teacher. She received ijaza (ritual authorization) and studied the history and recitation texts and techniques of the Qadiriyya. Bi Lulu's husband, however, was not a man of the tarika, but got involved through her. "He followed the tarika because of me, his wife!" she emphasized. "During the month of Mfunguo Sita [when there are many large maulidi gatherings], he'd go find a cow to slaughter, and tons of people would come over, he was kept very busy. But he's dead now, he was their grandfather" she said, pointing to the children running in and out of the house.

Bi Lulu is very proud of her Qadiriyya; she tells me of all the places that their sheikhs settled and taught -- the Hadramawt, Somalia, Comoro, Mafia, the Tanzanian mainland.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Bi Lulu at her home in Kisimamajongoo, Zanzibar Town, February 14, 1990.

"Even Mfalme Sayyid Said bin Sultan¹⁵⁹ was in the Qadiriyya!" she exclaims. "It is not necessary that one is born into the Qadiriyya, anyone can become a mouridi, there is no discrimination here, black and white, rich and poor, all are members of the Qadiriyya." However, the fact that Bi Lulu is a "blood" or direct descendant of the Qadiriyya does distinguish her. Mouridis who want to access the "kabuli" or divine power embodied in the founding sheikhs of the tarika will ask Bi Lulu to pray for them. That is, they believe that by passing through Bi Lulu they can reach the grace of her descendants. Thus status can be acquired, as in Bi Rehema's case, or it can be an inherent feature of one's descent (as seen also with Sheikh Abdallah Bakathiri in chapter three).¹⁶⁰

Bi Lulu explained that the internal social organization of the tarika is hierarchical, with several stations or levels that have certain duties associated with them. The highest is the khalifa, who has the greatest knowledge and highest authority. Her/his task is to "read" (study and teach), and give ijaza. Next in authority is the "munshidi", the assistant to the khalifa (e.g. in teaching, leading zikiri recitations). This is followed by the "abamuridi", whose job is to organize the followers and keep

¹⁵⁹ The first Omani sultan of Zanzibar. See chapter two.

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting that both Bi Lulu and Maalim Bakathiri initially declined the position and responsibility incumbent upon them by virtue of their descent.

them informed of any news, and to prepare events and excursions of various kinds (such as visits or ziara to the sheikhs tombs, to organize zikiri recitations, etc.). Fourth in line are the "*mouridis*", and their duty is to participate in the collective zikiri recitations and to study about the *tarika*. Finally there is the "*shawishi*", who are rather like attendants, setting up for gatherings, shopping and preparing food for the activities of the *tarika*, making sure everything that is needed is in place. Individuals occupying all of these levels have taken *ijaza* from their *khalifa*. In fact there are also people who may come along to participate in, say, a zikiri recitation who are not members of the *tarika*, but who enjoy the activity. These people are called "*kipenzi cha mouridi*", that is, the "pets" or minions of the *tarika*. On another visit, Bi Lulu showed me her registry of *mouridis* and the Qadiriyya flag that symbolized her paramountcy. It was red, and the names of several sheikhs, written in Arabic script, were sewn into it in black. This is the flag she handed over to Bi Rehema in 1992.¹⁶¹

The zikiri and maulidi recitations are among the most important activities that define the *tarika*. I had the opportunity to attend zikiri and maulidi readings for both the Qadiriyya and Shadiliyya *tarika*. The Qadiriyya zikiri

¹⁶¹ Visit with Bi Lulu in Kisimamanjongoo, July 18, 1990.

took place in Bambi, a village in the countryside. Both men's and women's branches would be reciting in the village but in separate compounds. The women's khalifa that night was Bi Hoja, who lived in the village; Bi Lulu was not present. It was an all night affair, and drew nearly 100 men and women (mostly tarika members) from town. Food was served at around 8:00 at night, after which most women took a nap in preparation for the long night ahead. There were roughly three sections of readings. Beginning at around 11:00 pm, about 60 women gathered outside, standing together, and opened with the dua (supplicatory prayers). Next they recited the founding sheikh's maulidi, which was the longest portion of the performance, lasting several hours. All of this culminated in the physically intense, rhythmic repetitions of the zikiri, which continued on for approximately two more hours. By sunrise, the women were hoarse and exhausted from their recitations.

The Shadhiliyya zikiri/maulidi was very different. It was held in a woman's apartment one afternoon in the Michanzani Flats in town. There were approximately 30 women, all seated in an orderly circle in the largest room of the apartment. Frankincense was burned, and the text of the maulidi was distributed to all of the women. As always, the performance was opened by the khalifa's reciting a dua, which was followed by the reading. The recitational style of the reading was physically less intense, having the

quality of a mesmerizing and continuous drone with resonating harmonies. The khalifa would conduct it into a crescendo then stop and begin it again, this time with a group of teenage girls leading. At one point, several women went into a trance, screaming "Allah, Allah...!" Some of the other women seemed a bit disturbed by the outburst. Later I asked Bi Lulu what had happened. She said sometimes Muslim shetani are attracted to the zikiri, but in this case, the girls were just showing their "*ahwali*", their ecstasy from hearing the praises of God, in which one loses consciousness.

When I told Bi Lulu that I had attended both Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya zikiri ceremonies, she asked for my impressions. On the one hand, she was adamant that there is never any competition between the tarikas. Their performative styles and words (of the maulidi and qasida) are different, since they have different founding sheikhs, but tarika members are welcome to learn and participate in one another's ceremonies, and even take ijaza in both. After describing the ceremonies to her she laughed, "See! our Qadiriyya lasted all night, and the Shadhiliyya, only a few hours!"

Bi Lulu recalled that during the "Karume years" (1964-1972), they were not permitted to gather for zikiri or go on an excursion (ziara) without a permit from the government. "We used to recite every Thursday, then we were forced to

stop by the government....Some sheikhs were even seized and put in jail." At this point, a companion of Bi Lulu who had joined us in conversation added, "Even *this one* was put in jail!", pointing with her chin to Bi Lulu. Bi Lulu nodded, saying she had been detained for five months. "But I wasn't detained because of reciting, it wasn't because I was stubborn and didn't care about breaking the law; I was taken because I was found with "Hezbu" clothing in my possession. You know there were two parties, ASP and Hezbu [the ZNP, Zanzibar Nationalist Party]...Well, we were Hezbu, and during that time, Karume had already come into power, and he didn't want to see symbols of the ZNP anywhere; so that is why I was detained." As noted earlier in chapter three, restrictions on religious practice were lifted when Aboud Jumbe came into office in 1972. Today, Bi Lulu and her friend agreed, the tarika are free to worship as they please, since religious practice is not being regulated by the present political regime.¹⁶²

In addition to the tarika activities and the Qur'an schools that both Bi Rehema and Bi Lulu ran for youngsters at their homes, they also participated regularly in the Sunday morning darasa with Bi Mwanasha Suleiman. They were among the eight or so women who directed the group, both as

¹⁶² In fact today, the ruling party (the Chama cha Mapinduzi, or Revolutionary Party) avoids confrontation by not detaining dissenting sheikhs, since they have significant influence over their followers.

instructors and, in Bi Rehema's case especially, in leading prayers.

c. Bi Mwanasha Suleiman and the Sunday Morning Darasa

I first heard about Bi Mwanasha and her darasa from Saidi Ali, a French teacher at the Language Institute in town. As a youngster he had attended Bi Mwanasha's Qur'an school in Mkunazini, but has stayed in touch with her through the years. Saidi offered to introduce us. When I met her in 1990, Mwanasha was in her late nineties. She was rather weak, and her attendants -- that is, her students (themselves in their fifties and sixties) and family members alike -- were very protective of her. Still, as Mwanasha told me herself, "I can't see or hear too well any more, but I still have my mind!" In fact, Bi Mwanasha was a warm, candid, and hugely generous person with a familiar sense of humor. She was also a woman long reputed for her knowledge of Islam and her role as mentor to women and men alike. Bi Mwanasha died in 1993. A letter I received from a Zanzibari friend telling me the news testifies to her renown:

The most important news here in Zanzibar is that "Bi Mwalimu" has recently passed away. Throngs of people attended her funeral in Kiembe Samaki. All of Zanzibar has been talking about her death since she was the mentor to virtually all of the women who are teaching Islam today.

In addition to having taught women, several of the elderly men with whom I worked were also students of Mwanasha.¹⁶³

As open as Mwanasha herself was to speaking with me about her life, her advanced age meant that she fatigued easily, and she was not to be stressed in any way. So my few visits with her were always very brief, with her attendant responding to most of my questions for her.¹⁶⁴

Bi Mwanasha Suleiman was born in the late 1890s in Kikwajuni, a neighborhood in Ng'ambo, then later moved to Kiembe Samaki, a village about five miles south of Stone Town. (and which, mentioned for its political activity in chapter four). She moved to Mkunazini in 1966.

After finishing Qur'an school Mwanasha studied with her elders. "*Ilm iko nyumbani!*" she said, "the knowledge was there at home". Her teachers were her father (Suleiman Silima), a relative named Bi Fatma, and her uncle, a renowned sheikh in Zanzibar named Muhammad bin Omari. After she was married, Bi Mwanasha moved with her husband to town to teach Qur'an school. Unlike Bi Mwanasha herself, her

¹⁶³ In addition Sheikh Burhan Abdi, whom I've already mentioned, she also taught Bwana Zuri and Bwana Shaafi, who are both introduced in chapter seven. In fact, Bwana Zuri's mother was Bi Mwanasha's cousin. Bwana Zuri is in his late seventies.

¹⁶⁴ In fact, the attendant's answers were often rather vague. When I asked her about her "wazee" or elders, and where they came from, she said she didn't really know, that some came from Arabia while others were from Tanzania -- which describes, more or less, nearly all Swahili Zanzibaris!

husband was not so involved in teaching. During this time, Mwanasha also continued on with her own studies. Eventually she got divorced, left her husband's chuo and opened up her own darasa for "*watu wazima*" -- mature adults. Indeed, this was the beginning of today's Sunday morning darasa, which dates it back to the early 1930s. As one of the teachers in Mwanasha's darasa today put it, "To tell you the truth, this woman, Bi Mwalimu, she was *born* in the darasa!" All of the teachers in the darasa were (and continue to be) Bi Mwanasha's students. In the early days, the darasa was held only during the month of Ramadhan. But over the years her darasa expanded, by word of mouth and popular demand, into weekly sessions held throughout the year. While not involved actively in the *tarika* herself (she says her life has really been devoted to the darasa), she did receive *ijaza* from Seyyid Ahmed Hamid Mansab. Today she continues her religious study with a young man named Maalim Khamis, who comes to her house. "I don't want to have to stop studying," she says, "but to continue like this to the very end." Thus Mwanasha came to be known as "Bi Mwalimu" or "Bi Mkubwa" for her devotion to learning.

In addition to her teaching, Mwanasha was also skilled in the preparation of amulets (*hirizi*, *azma*, and *zindiko*), curative vapors (*mafuzo*), and *kombe*, that is, writing passages of the Qur'an on a board which are then drenched with water and swallowed. She performed these curative

techniques for adults but mostly for sick children, and to protect them from illness, especially those caused by parasites (*vidudu*). Bi Mwanasha learned these skills from "studying the books", not from apprenticing with a *mganga*, a local healer (see chapter seven). However, her attendant adds that when Mwanasha was a little girl, her uncle, who was a "very great sheikh" (named above), wrote medicinal amulets and *kombe* himself. Thus Mwanasha acquired this knowledge early on, from watching her uncle. Bi Lulu and Bi Rehema also prepared amulets, since, as Bi Lulu says, "*Qur'an shifaa wa rahmat*"-- the Qur'an is the cure of mercy. Mwanasha also recited *dua* on the behalf of people seeking her help. She often recited on the behalf of individuals who believed their suffering was being caused by sorcery or spirits. She called this *kuzingua*, literally to "untie" or "undo" a spell. This work was important to her. "When you succeed in helping people with your amulets and prayers, this gives you the desire to continue; then Almighty God cares for you by giving you the knowledge Himself."¹⁶⁵

Many of the women who attend Mwanasha's *darasa* do so in part just to be near her. Indeed, her presence is especially important in the performance of prayer, since she

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Bi Mwanasha Suleiman in Mkunazini, Zanzibar Town, February 18, 1990.

is believed to be a person *mwenye karama*, someone so loved by God that her prayers are heard directly.¹⁶⁶

Most sessions of the *darasa* begin with Mwanasha's reciting "*Yasiin*", the thirty-sixth chapter (*sura*) of the Qur'an which is thought to have special protective power. Then together they recite the last two *suras* of the Qur'an, "*Al-Falaq*" (The Dawn) and "*An-Nas*" (The Men). Next they read from "*rahhil*", a book of duas, and then they recite in continuous repetition "*Al-Ikhlās*", the "*sura of Faith*". This is followed by continuous and numerous repetitions of *tahliili* (uttering "*La illaha ila Lah!*" or "*Subahaan rahmat!*") which are also recited collectively. The repetitions are counted out by the teachers on their fingers or prayer beads. This is called *kuvuta uradi* (lit. to "pull" the prayer). In reciting these prayers, the women receive divine reward (*thawabu*); and by reciting with other people, an individual can increase the amount of *thawabu* bestowed upon her. Another important purpose of prayer is to send gifts (*hidaya*) to loved ones, to the dead, the infirm, or misfortunate (always specific individuals are chosen and named for the day).

After prayers, the women study various aspects of *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence. "We have to know about ritual purity," one *mwalimu* explained. "We need to know all the

¹⁶⁶For a discussion on the notion of *karama* see chapter six.

things Muhammad obliges us to do as Muslims, so that we may have peace, good health, and salvation." The women often pursue topics that concerned the ritual obligations of women as Muslims, including the proper care of their bodies, how to restore one's state of purity (*takwa*) after childbirth, menstruation or sexual excitement, or how to prepare a corpse for burial. Topics also included discussion on the proper performance of the *ibada* (prayer, ablutions, fasting, and the like), on the rights and obligations of spouses in marriage and divorce. Discussion might also revolve around a question that was raised about a sura from the Qur'an. In addition to the *fiqh* topic of the day, the *darasa* also provided a forum in which the women could discuss issues or events in town that caught their attention, or to make plans for upcoming *maulidi*, *khitima*, or *zikiri* recitations to be performed on behalf of friends or family. Similar *darasa* are often held at the other teachers' homes on different days of the week in order to accommodate the women's various schedules. Thus while approximately twenty-five or so women usually attended the Sunday morning *darasa*, the actual number of women who participated in this extended learning circle was greater than those present on any one day.

Besides Bi Mwanasha, Bi Rehema and Bi Lulu, there are at least six other *walimu* (teachers) assisting Mwanasha.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ They are Bi Mgeni Wa Jabu, Bi Farashuu, Bi Sharifa, Bi Mkubwa Stadi, Bi Fatuma, Bi Mkubwa Musa.

Indeed, several other women besides Mwanasha were called "Bi Mkubwa", which is an honorific sometimes used for women of importance or influence ("-kubwa" meaning great or big). Together the walimu lead the sessions by reading and interpreting passages from a number of books on the Qur'an and basic jurisprudence. In addition to the shorter primers used in most Qur'an schools, they also used an old and very worn book on fiqh called *Rubo-al-Ibada*. This text is printed in Arabic script but written in Kiswahili.

While the teachers demonstrated different levels of knowledge and skill in recitation, altogether, they were treated with deference. As one woman explained, "If someone has studied extensively, she will have more knowledge, more information..." Thus they commanded greater "heshima" -- an important Swahili concept denoting respect, honor, or status. In the darasa the teachers usually all sat together, near to Bi Mwanasha in the far corner, the other women clustered in facing them (the room was only about 12 by 16 feet). There was also some recognition of ranking among the teachers. Women of status, usually the tarika khalifa wore the kangas underneath their buibuis in a subtly distinctive way -- up around their chins, but not covering their mouths. The women emphasized that the distinction conferred upon certain individuals was not a matter of

"ubaguzi"¹⁶⁸ (discrimination -- "never in Islam!") but about the heshima that comes with learning and piety.

Even though Mwanasha had already agreed to my attending the darasa, many of the women were initially rather ambivalent about my presence. Is she a Muslim? What does she want with us? Then, when I was being introduced (and explained) to the women, Bi Rehema announced that she had already met me, and that I also happened to be an acquaintance of the revered Seyyid Silima (discussed in chapter six). The response was extraordinary. Murmurs of "ahh" quietly broke out around the room; they were noticeably surprised by this news, but also nodded their heads in consent. But while the teachers were always cordial with me, a few of the other women who were quite protective of their walimu remained skeptical, and later asked why I wanted to continue attending the darasa if I wasn't even a Muslim. "How can you do 'research' on Islam? Religion is not a matter of research, it is about faith, following God's commands!" There was nothing I could say. But Bi Rehema intervened on my behalf, explaining that my faith was a matter between me and God only, and that my interest in learning about Islam couldn't be a bad thing.

Finally, in addition to her tutorials and the darasa she held every Sunday, Mwanasha also performed readings on

¹⁶⁸ This term is usually reserved to describe racial or ethnic discrimination.

various occasions. Even though she herself did not read, her visible presence was required. One reading I attended was at the Misikiti Gibriil, one of the oldest mosques in Mkunazini. It was a reading of the "*Miraji*", that is, the Prophet Muhammad's ascent to the seventh heaven to receive the "ibada" from God -- the five pillars of the Islamic faith. Bi Mwanasha's apartment is just across the lane from the mosque, and she was escorted there by her elderly sister, also a mwalimu, who lives in Kiembe Samaki, and another woman in her fifties who is her student, attendant, and close companion.

The reading was held in the section designated specially for women. Bi Mwanasha sat cross-legged on a raised ledge facing the women gathering for the reading. Her sister sat beside to her. Bi Mwanajabu, one of the teachers from the darasa also sat with them on the raised ledge. They all had the *Miraji* texts with them, very old books written in Kiswahili with Arabic script. As time passed more women entered, sat down on the mats, wearing buibuis, kangas, and kitambaas (headcoverings) of all styles. When Mwanasha's granddaughter and Bi Lulu entered, they were instructed to sit in the front, just below Mwanasha; the other teachers of the darasa did the same; in this way, their "heshima" in learning was signalled by their proximity to Mwanasha. Approximately sixty women were present. Mwanasha's sister began the reading, in Kiswahili,

with the other teachers taking turns as well.' Mwanasha did not recite herself. The reading took about one and a half hours to complete. Some women dozed, but most listened attentively, keeping the *ubani* (frankincense) burning, and responding excitedly at certain stages of this story of the origin of prayer and Muhammad's journey with the angels. After the reading Mwanasha recited a closing dua, then the "*sadaka*" (cookies) were passed around.

d. Theoretical Considerations

Together, the *miraji* reading, the *mawlidis*, *zikiris*, and various forms of prayer constitute important discursive practices that affirm women's identities as Muslims. Moreover, status and authority are conferred upon those women who are recognized for their expertise in recitation, Islamic textual exposition, and extemporaneous prayer. All told, these do not appear to be domains of expertise that lie exclusively within the control and purview of men.

While the categorical distinction between the "Great and Little Traditions" in Islam has been duly challenged in ethnographic studies of a range of Muslim societies,¹⁶⁹ it seems that women's and men's Islamic knowledge still tends to be rendered as separate and even ranked domains; in other words, the form and substance of knowledge is "gendered"

¹⁶⁹ See for example Talal Asad (1986); M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi (1990); John Bowen (1993a); Michael Gilsenan (1985); Shahla Haeri (1989).

(male/female), with dichotomies such as scripture/praxis, intellect/emotion, public/private, often following from it.

In this vein, in studies of gender in Swahili coastal culture, a common distinction used to distinguish men's and women's social spheres is that between *sheria* (law, specifically Islamic law) and *mila* (local culture or tradition). In Carol Eastman's observations (in coastal Kenya), *sheria* constitutes a "male" or "*waungwana*" domain (with "*waungwana*" denoting prestige, honor, elitism), which is socially separate and ideologically distinct from *mila* or customary cultural practices, the "female domain" (Eastman 1984), which would include weddings, *taraab* music, women's associations, rites of passage, and spirit possession. Indeed, Margaret Strobel (1979), Patricia Caplan (1982), and Janet Topp Fargion (1993) have shown the importance of women's music, expressive culture and gender-based associations as a source and symbol of self-reliance, status, and power in Swahili societies.

However, as Caplan has writes, it is "misleading to suggest that men are in sole control of Islamic institutions, or that *mila* is solely the sphere of women" (Caplan 1982:203). I believe the knowledge and activities of the women introduced in this chapter show that we should question the real value of the *sheria/mila* distinction as a model for understanding how women (and men) define their social, intellectual, and emotional lives. This is not to

say that coastal peoples do not recognize such a distinction. For instance, as I discuss in chapter eight, "religion" ("dini") is reified and opposed to culture ("mila") in essentialist definitions of Islamic correctness and authenticity. Interestingly, however, the essentialists do not specifically "gender" this dichotomy; instead, the practices of all Muslims are subject to the corrupting effects of "traditional" or "local" "culture". Thus taking cues from both the women discussed in this chapter as well as from (ironically) the essentialists, I would argue that the sheria/mila distinction is not, in fact, so neatly gendered (male/female). Sheria and mila are not necessarily opposed, or mutually exclusive categories, and can be used in the mediation of social relations in different ways, depending on various conjunctures of social, political, and historical circumstance. In this vein, culture that is defined as "Swahili" also varies from region to region along the coast and on the off-shore island groups.¹⁷⁰

In particular, as I discussed briefly in chapter one, assuming that Islamic knowledge is defined specifically through "institutions" and the groups who control them precludes an understanding of the ways in which such knowledge enters into -- or better, *is actively brought into*

¹⁷⁰ This is especially true for Zanzibar, since historical factors such as the physical presence of the Omani sultanate and the 1964 revolution sets Zanzibar apart from other regions of the Swahili coast.

-- a range of social contexts which are not controlled by or defined in terms of a dominant group or structure. Thus the women's activities, lessons, instruction, and prayer groups described in this chapter should not be understood as by-products of or subordinate to men's madrasa-based instructional circles, even though, proportionally speaking, a greater number of men than women are involved in such groups. While the "scripture/male" and "culture/female" categories may well describe the expression of Islamic knowledge and practice in some Islamic societies, to overlook the exceptions is to disregard a significant social dimension of the symbolic power and personal authority that Islamic expertise constructs across gender lines.

A final point I'd like to add here concerns the essentialist critique introduced in earlier chapters. The essentialists argue that Zanzibaris need to rediscover Islam in what they have defined as its truest form. This has meant that Islamic discursive practices in which Muslim women have long participated and through which many have gained recognition as experts -- reciting khitima at funerals, performing maulidi, zikiri, and reciting tawasul (intercession through prayer) -- are regarded by the essentialists as accretions, or innovations (bida'a) of Islamic worship, and as such, are forbidden to practice. Thus in their lectures, essentialist sheikhs urge women not to participate in these practices. Secondly, the

essentialist sheikhs attract young people, including young women who attend their classes and their lectures, and have their own social and study groups.¹⁷¹ In other words, they are not studying with the older women, and not growing up, as it were, within the traditions of recitation that is so important to, among others, the tarika women (this is not to say there are no young women in the tarika, there are). And by "forbidding" their pupils from participating in Islamic discursive practices such as those discussed in this chapter, it seems that the essentialists are narrowing the range of contexts in which many Zanzibari women have been establishing their autonomy, agency, and authority as Muslims.

For both women and men, Islamic knowledge, piety, discursive practice, and descent are all aspects that interact in various ways, and in different circumstances, to create a sense of what constitutes "expertise". I've tried to show in this chapter that in the realm of Islamic education and instruction, notions of Islamic expertise are often constructed through practices that are based on social relationships that extend well beyond the mosque and madrasa. In the following chapter, I explore how Islamic knowledge can also be understood as a quality of being

¹⁷¹ One of the appeals of the bida'a group is that they constitute a kind of mutual aid society which is especially helpful in finding spouses and financing weddings -- that is, as long as one marries within the group. I discuss this further in chapter eight.

embodied in a person, Seyyid Silima.

CHAPTER SIX
The Social Construction of Piety:
Portrait of Seyyid Silima

Though charisma is a personal gift, it exists in the minds of other people.

Francois Constantin, 1988, pg. 76

During the course of my fieldwork I met a man named Seyyid Silima Muhammad who was known locally for his exceptional devotion to God. It was through Seyyid Silima that I came to understand piety as a most complex response to living in the world. While piety is a personal attribute that is embodied in an individual like Seyyid Silima, the significance it comes to have for others as well as for Silima himself cannot be separated from the social relations through which it is communicated and reproduced. As I explore below, *karama*, *buruhani*, *baraka*, and *thawabu* are all concepts which imply that the "effects" of piety move well beyond the individual. At another level, piety also constitutes a means for navigating the political through the personal, the past through the present.

This portrait, then, discusses the dynamics of Seyyid Silima's characterization -- not simply as a keenly devout, God-fearing Muslim, but as a person whose profile as such has evolved out of his ongoing involvement in social relationships. These relationships are mediated, on the one hand, by the personal beliefs, information, and commentary that Silima's visitors bring to them, and, on the other, by

a tension between historically politicized notions of difference and identity in Zanzibar that have shaped those beliefs. Finally, this portrait also illustrates the "performative definition of Islamic knowledge" introduced in chapter one -- in this case, how knowledge is constituted in the enactment and communication of piety.

I. Seyyid Silima

Seyyid Silima was born in the Comoro Islands¹⁷² to a family who traces their descent from the Prophet Muhammad; the term "seyyid" is not simply an honorific but signals Silima's identity as a sharif, a descendant of the Prophet. Now in his early seventies, Silima moved to Zanzibar when he was twenty-five. Once a tailor by vocation, Silima later devoted all of his time to studying the Qur'an and became more intensively involved with the activities of the Alawiyya tarika (a Sufi or mystical order in Islam), a responsibility which he inherited from his family. Marriage interested him little, and by his mid forties his family decided they had better arrange a liaison for him. "They had grown impatient with me!" Silima laughed in recollection, so they selected his cousin Khadija as a prospective wife. She consented, and they have stayed married to this day. Today, Silima, his wife and children live in Kisiwandui, an

¹⁷² The Comoro Islands are located approximately 600 miles south of Zanzibar.

Ng'ambo neighborhood just off Creek Road near the center of town. Even though Silima had engaged in advanced Islamic study, is known as a spiritual leader of the Alawiyya tarika and has also received ijaza (authorization) for the Qadiriyya, Shadiliyya, and Dundawiyya orders, it was his character (and, for many, his pedigree), and not his scholarship or credentials that captured the imagination of his many callers.

I first heard about Seyyid Silima from a Malagasy colleague of mine who had been living in Zanzibar for eleven years. Some time ago, Michel had been overcome by a sense of malady: he was depressed and unproductive, and believed he was being unfairly blamed for mishaps at work. He decided to confide in an elderly friend of his, Mzee Shela. Shela had known Seyyid Silima for a long time; in conversation, he often referred to him with a mixture of affection and deference as, "the Shariff". Concerned about the well-being of his friend, Mzee Shela took it upon himself to relate Michel's condition to Silima. Not only was Silima a "gifted" man, thought Shela, but he was also well-versed in *falaki*, Arabic astrology, and might be able to determine the cause of Michel's affliction. Eventually Seyyid Silima did call on Michel, telling him it was likely that someone had cast a spell over him. He prayed for Michel there at his home, and soon after he recovered a sense of well-being. Seyyid Silima had left quite an

impression on Michel; so after several long and meandering conversations about life in Zanzibar and about my own research interests concerning Islamic expertise, Pierre told me his story about Silima, and urged that I try to see him.

At first, Silima eluded our meetings, "forgetting" an appointment or being suddenly pulled away by a needy friend. This only intensified the discomfort I had been feeling about the intrusiveness of fieldwork, so it was with some relief that I decided to end my "pursuit" of Seyyid Silima. Then one morning while walking with Mzee Shela in town, we came upon Seyyid Silima amidst the crowd of shoppers on Darajani Street. In a flurry of greetings and mutual apologies, Silima conceded to a meeting at his home the following day.

When Mzee Shela and I arrived, Silima's nephew, Mansab, a tall man in his mid thirties, met us at the door. Silima was informed of our arrival and soon emerged from the back room. In an exchange of greetings Silima's wife Khadija was also called into the sitting room and introduced. She soon returned to her work in the back, leaving Silima, Mansab, myself and Mzee Sheba to visit. Silima would not allow our discussions to be tape recorded. To tape his words, he later explained to me after we had become more familiar, "would be like sealing them in time".¹⁷³ With this he

¹⁷³ Interview with Seyyid Silima at his home in Kikwajuni, September 5, 1989. Data and quotes from Seyyid Silima in this chapter are taken from interviews and

clenched his fist and made the motion of a stamp coming down on a document -- an official fixing of words in unambiguous and immutable form. Indeed, Silima was a humble but also cautious man. While forthcoming in discussions about Islam, the tarika, even (surprisingly) in disclosing the problems that some of his callers brought to him, he was adept at deflecting questions which concerned most aspects of his own life -- even when I was unaware that I was asking them.

For instance, when I asked Seyyid Silima about karama, what it was that this term described in a person, he smiled and averted his eyes. "*Ni kitu kama Mungu anakujaliwa*," he said -- "It's like something that comes from God's taking care of you." At this point he excused himself to receive another caller at the back door. "He has it, you know," said Mansab, his eyes following his uncle as he left the room. "Does he recite dua for people?" I asked. "Not just that" Mansab replied, "other things too, I don't know what." I then understood the especially evasive modesty Silima had displayed during the course of our first visit. *He had karama, everyone knew*, but of course he couldn't say so himself; this was something I was supposed to have learned on my own. Indeed, karama was a quality or power that was attributed to him by others, a "gift" from God that took on

informal discussions with him on September 5, October 23, October 25, and October 30 in 1989 and February 22, March 5, and July 7 in 1990.

meaning and consequence within the context of social relations.

Seyyid Silima received a continuous stream of visitors at his home, most with a problem or difficulty in which Silima, they believed, could somehow intervene. Even walking in the street, Silima was met with deferential appeals. "I have a problem I need to discuss with you!" implored my elderly neighbor after kissing Silima's hand and pressing it to his cheek in greeting. I was present on a number of occasions when Silima consulted with visitors in his sitting room. One afternoon a young man who was moving his home from Zanzibar to Dar es Salaam asked for Silima's blessings. After discussing the move for several minutes, the young man spread out the *mkeka* (prayer mat) which he brought with him and knelt down on it. Silima's wife emerged from the back room with a *chetezo*, a clay incense burner, the sweet smoke of the *ubani* (frankincense) trailing behind her. She placed it down on the mat and Silima began to recite in Arabic, his eyes closed, and his palms turned upwards in supplication. A few minutes passed, and the visit was concluded.

Another time Silima was called upon by several wealthy Omani men who had just bought a new house in Zanzibar. They asked Silima to recite (from the Qur'an and his own *dua*) in the house before they moved into it so that they would be protected from *mashetani* (spirits) and thieves. There was

also a neighbor with a sick child in the hospital for whom Silima was asked to make a *herizi*, a healing amulet for the child to wear. A fourth case involved two boys who were accused of stealing a large sum of money. They denied both the accusation as well as the outcome of a lie detecting procedure used by *waganga* (local medicinal practitioners) which determined that the boys were guilty. Silima was visibly upset by the boys' appeal to use his favor with God to help them prove their innocence. He chided them and asserted that the only way to God would be to confess their guilt. In the end, the boys left angry and disappointed.

A final example involved my neighbor, Bi Mchecha, a woman in her early twenties whose husband had taken a mistress. Mchecha had heard of Seyyid Silima and knew that I had become acquainted with him. She asked to join me on one of my visits so that she could be introduced to him. Miraji explained that she could not simply arrive at Silima's home one day and appeal to him for help without being properly introduced first. He was not, after all, a "fundi" (general term for a healer). Her hope was that Silima's prayers would induce her estranged husband to leave his lover and to return to her and their baby girl.

II. Karama

From these brief sketches we can see that it was not so much advice *per se* that people sought in Seyyid Silima; it

was his very person they were after. Silima was known as a person "*mwenye karama*", someone who is so loved by God that his prayers are heard and answered directly; as such, he is a vehicle of God's grace (*baraka*).¹⁷⁴ "In this house we don't know about magic -- we are only Muslims," Mansab assured me, in English, lest I misconstrue the nature of Seyyid Silima's *karama*, or spiritual power.

The distinction Mansab deliberately draws on my behalf is an important one. *Karama* is different from magic (*sihiri, uchawi*), and this matters. *Karama* is a sublime power that derives from God's recognition of an individual's exceptional piety. Thus a Muslim's belief in the power of *karama* cannot be dismissed as mere "superstition", that is, a naive reliance on the mysterious manipulation of unseen forces; *karama* is a known, albeit rare, gift bestowed by God, and Silima is among the few living individuals in Zanzibar who is thought to embody it.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, stories of the power of *karama* more typically revolve around the renowned sheikhs of the past.

Two stories about Sheikh Ahmad bin Sumayt (1861-1925) and his son Omar convey vivid impressions of their *karama*. These stories were told to me in a discussion with Sheikh Nassir Azziz, a *tarika* leader on the subject of *dua*

¹⁷⁴ In Zanzibar, the term *buruhani* is used interchangeably with *karama*.

¹⁷⁵ Bi Mwanasha Suleiman, introduced in chapter five, was also a known as a person *mwenye karama*.

(supplicatory prayer) and tawasali (praying through the baraka or divine grace of another person or event) -- two activities Seyyid Silima typically performed for his visitors.

In the first story, about Sumayt the senior, a man praying late into the night invokes Sumayt's name in his appeal to God. Bending over the small clay vessel of burning incense, he implores, 'By the baraka of the great Sheikh Sumayt, I beg you to hear my prayers, oh Lord.' The next day, the man sees Sumayt in the marketplace. Sumayt says to him, somewhat vexed, 'Why is it that you bother me at two o'clock in the morning?! Allah has accepted your prayers.' "Now that's karama!" Sheikh Azziz exclaims, finishing the story. His next anecdote centered on Sumayt's son, Omar, "...who would wake up even in the middle of the night to pray! You can't have karama or be a saint if you just sleep at night. But Omar's father, Ahmad Sumayt, was worried that his son was becoming fatigued. So one night he crept into Omar's room and extinguished the lamp by which he prayed. 'You must sleep!' he scolded his son. Omar looked up, and quietly lifted his finger. His *nur* [spiritual light] emanated from his finger, illuminating the room as would a candle. 'Excuse me, son, I will leave you to pray,' Sumayt said, leaving his son's room in wonder.

While both of these stories delight in the miraculous powers of karama, the second also describes a quality of

being, an intensity of piety that karama, in a sense, requires. In somewhat less fantastic terms, Sheikh Rashid at the Madrasatil-Nur school in town described the qualities that to him, signal the presence of karama in a person. He used the late Abdallah Bakathir as his reference. "He was a man of profound knowledge and wrote many books on Islam. These are the things that elevate a person -- to write, together with something called 'takwa, religious purity. Abdallah Bakathir had very great 'takwa, he was a true *mcha Mungu*, a God fearing man. From morning to night, he served God. Most people are unable to wake in the middle of the night to pray. But those like Bakathir, God exalts them for their knowledge (*elimu*), for their devotion to following His commands, (*matekelezo ya kidini*), and for the purity of their actions (*vitendo*) and intentions (*nia*). His demeanor bore an inner beauty of countenance (*haiba*)...When he prays dua, he puts his hands together and God answers him."¹⁷⁶

As for Silima, an intriguing combination of familiarity and distance surrounds him. He is a gentle, approachable man, and yet what makes him so attractive, even necessary to others, is a depth of piety that makes him seem almost unreachable; it is a quality that signalled exceptional devotion to God and the esoteric knowledge and power with which such devotion is believed to be rewarded. Seyyid

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Sheikh Muhammad Latif, January 2, 1993

Silima's personal appearance and attire characterized this quality, and gave it continuity over time: his long white kanzu was always worn with a dark blue suit jacket covered with a shawl, and prayer beads usually occupied his hands or hung about his neck. This style also marked his status as a khalifa (spiritual leader) among the tarika or Sufi groups. Just underneath his embroidered cap, his forehead bore the mark of true piety -- a small darkened spot left by the countless times he's touched his face to the ground in prostration to God. In conversation, his praises to God ("alhamduli allahi") were continuous yet unobtrusive, and were sometimes accompanied by a subtle upward turn of his palms. His acquaintances said that Seyyid Silima's face shone with his "nur", the "light of understanding" which comes from spiritual peace at heart. It was his almost palpable modesty that held people's attention but also kept them at a workable distance, even when the problems and predicaments his callers brought to him were especially intimate in nature.

While (to most people) Silima already enjoyed a special status in the eyes of God, his modesty in this regard was expressed in his continual efforts to please Him -- a preoccupation for which he received *thawabu* in return. Thawabu are divine rewards that a person can receive for pious behavior, but also for performing good deeds in general. In more transcendental terms, these rewards are

thought to enhance one's condition on the Day of Judgement.¹⁷⁷ Silima used the concept of thawabu to explain the underlying spiritual importance of ijaza -- the recognition a pupil receives from his/her sheikh which brings him/her into the silsilah, the great chain of learning as defined by a tarika. With ijaza, "you will get more thawabu than if you pray alone, because now, you are part of the silsilah; when you pray alone, it doesn't have as much power; but when you pray with your companions, when you pray through the silsilah, you get more thawabu...." Thus in Silima's view, even the revered mwenye karama -- through whom others seek baraka (divine grace), needs to accrue thawabu from God.¹⁷⁸

Silima's appeal was strong despite the absence of consensus on whether or not he actually was a gifted man,¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Dhambi* is its converse, meaning divine retribution, demerit, penalty, or punishment. "*Utapata dhambi!*" is the conventional usage, meaning, "You will receive punishment or penalties [for something]."

¹⁷⁸ To sum, one can access, benefit from, or participate in another person's baraka (grace) by reciting dua and tawasal. One cannot benefit from another person's thawabu. Thawabu is associated with an individual's own actions and relationship with God. Karama, a power embodied in an individual that comes from being in God's favor, brings both baraka and thawabu. Conceptually, karama and thawabu refer to or are associated with the individual; in effect, however, they are catalysts for social interaction.

¹⁷⁹ While many individuals believed that Silima actually did channel God's grace, others simply saw him as a God-fearing man, and that his dua were no more likely to reach God than one's own. Piety alone does not signal the presence of karama in a person; there is instead a certain vagueness to it. While believers do not deny karama exists,

and despite his lack of involvement in the more formal trappings often associated with Islamic authority: he was not a teacher and had no students, he did not preach like an *imamu*, nor did he give *fatwa* or legal judgments as a *hakimu*, *kadhi*, or *mufti* would. Instead, Seyyid Silima's character, his *karama*, was constructed in a space between the public view of religious authority and the remoteness of an almost ascetic piety, a space which many others -- his various visitors, supplicants, colleagues, and family members -- participated in defining. This "space" can be understood as the social dimension of Silima's piety. This served him well, since the notice he received from others reaffirmed his own conviction that he lived because of and for the love of God -- the personal dimension of his piety.

In turn, that conviction (expressed as it was in his presentation of self) called attention to his person, attention that had to be negotiated and channelled in the proper directions, to the appropriate ends, so that the space of "free" piety -- that is, dialogically constructed yet unattached to or undetermined by authority and its restrictions or obligations -- could be preserved. In this way, not only was Seyyid Silima free to pursue his "transcendent project" (Asad 1993:13), but other individuals

it is also indeterminate. This is because, as I discuss in a moment, *karama* comes to be known, or identified, through the social relations of piety. Also, as seen above, images of *karama* are also shaped narratively, in the stories of Muslim heroes from Zanzibar's past.

were brought in (even required) to collaborate in the creation of that "space" which was defined, for the moment, by their own life circumstances, as well as by the beliefs they held about the power of Islamic faith to act on those circumstances.

As Francois Constantin wrote of the charisma of the Sufi sheikhs in East Africa at the turn of this century, Seyyid Silima's power, his charisma, "existed in the minds of other people".¹⁸⁰ What his identity implied for others - - as, say, a mwenye karama, or an expert in falaki -- is contingent in part upon the nature of the beliefs through which personal faith and its fluctuations are expressed. This is significant because in Zanzibar, beliefs about the power of Islamic faith are expressed in a range of cultural forms and discourses, not all of which are viewed by Zanzibaris as equally effective or even acceptable as Islamic practices.

For instance, karama (divine power or "gift"), elimu (textually-based Islamic knowledge), mashetani (spirits), and dua (supplicatory prayer) are all constructs that derive aspects of their meaning from a single paradigm ("Islam"), yet people use them to interpret, refer to or treat that

¹⁸⁰ For an example of the construction of the charismatic personality in Christianity, see Anthony Blasi (1991), who examines the "actual" and posthumous charisma of Paul within the social and political contexts of Christian religious discourse. See also Tom Beidelman (1970) on the construction of charisma and its impact on personal and political relations among the Nuer of southern Sudan.

paradigm in different ways. Analytically speaking, then, what and how an individual believes is not simply a reflection of personal faith. It is a window into how Islamic references are used or brought into the mediation of social relations, and how, in turn, these social relations -- and the personae they help to create -- sustain a lively tension between the form and content of Islamic belief.

III. Memory, Politics, and Identity

In addition to circumstances of personal faith and belief, the meaning of Silima's identity -- in particular, as a sharif, or descendent of the Prophet -- is also shaped by the ways in which Zanzibaris variously interpret the historical past and have experienced more recent changes in the social, political and economic conditions of the island. These are changes which have had an impact, albeit indirectly, on the local perception, position, even relevance of contemporary Muslim "figures", leaders, or personalities. The kinds of changes which have affected the social significance of sharifs in Zanzibar over time include, on the one hand, the historical undoing of the elitism that once protected the prestige of religious pedigree (explored in chapters two and three), and on the other, the development and expression of a more essentialist Islamic discourse which does several things.

First, it has created and offered a "new sort" of Muslim figure, one whose authority (and appeal among un- and underemployed Zanzibaris) is based on a more egalitarian, even political rhetoric that dismisses religious distinctions based on the exclusiveness of pedigree and on the "old boy" learning networks through which the authenticity of Islamic knowledge has long been constructed (see chapter three). Secondly, the "new" sheikhs who are the proponents of this discourse have declared that Islam in Zanzibar has long been corrupted by Swahili "cultural" ideas and practices, and they have warned Zanzibari youth of the need to learn the correct ways of knowing and practicing Islam. And yet, as egalitarian as their message about access to Islamic knowledge (and prestige) may be, the essentialists' urgency about the correctness of Islamic practice -- and their presumption that it is they who know what constitutes "correct" -- both reifies and elevates Islam as something above and separate from the vast majority of (in their view) "tradition-bound"¹⁸¹ Zanzibari Muslims.

Thus the essentialist critique of and intolerance for Islam as it is variously practiced in Zanzibar means that a new kind of distinction or prestige is in the making, one which is based on a) the recognition of different but unequal ways of believing; and b) the essentialists'

¹⁸¹ The term "traditional" is used by one of the main proponents of the essentialists' position.

impatience with the complacency of "traditional" sheikhs who have not taken issue with or action against the potentially defiling impact of western cultural influences that are perceived to be streaming into the island with tourism and foreign investment -- both outcomes of the economic liberalization and privatization efforts of the nineteen-eighties.¹⁸²

While the construction of the historical or "traditional" types of Muslim personalities -- such as the sharif with his karama, the hadrami scholar with his baraka -- may indeed have drawn on less "egalitarian" ideas about access to Islamic prestige and the position it should confer, it is interesting that Silima's prestige, his distinction, his sense of self, in actuality plays itself out through relations of reciprocity that are gauged and presented by his callers -- an act that reflects on and potentially empowers not only Silima, but the callers as well.

Gifts of gratitude are always proffered to Silima in return for his prayer. For his part, Silima would never

¹⁸² Not "taking issue" meant that the old guard or "traditional" sheikhs were accused of complying with the government in order to protect the security of their own positions rather than the security and future of Islam in Zanzibar. For instance, in January of 1993 the chief kadhi of Zanzibar was accused of being a "puppet" of the CCM government when he repudiated a crowd of young Muslims for protesting against tourism and smashing in the window of a new European-owned shop in town. This theme is resumed in chapter eight.

indicate he expected anything in return for his "assistance". Thus the gift typically reflected the social and financial position of the caller. It might be cash, presented to Silima in closed hands so that the amount cannot be seen; or, since Silima and his family lived quite modestly and had little income of their own, the gift might be expensive or hard to get food items such as wheat flour, sugar, tea, dates, or rice. But reciprocity may also be constituted in a kind of perennial social indebtedness to Silima that could remain attached to him indefinitely. This is one way in which deference is reproduced.

Moreover, Silima could not be concerned with the rather melodramatic effort to "protect" Islam from the corruptive influence of "Swahili" cultural beliefs; after all, it was the range or free play of belief that, in part, made his prestige possible, and made it something in which other people, his callers, could participate. Thus Silima's almost radical tolerance of, or reluctance to pass judgement on, the various ways in which Zanzibaris believe, cope with, and express their identity as Muslims, signals an important contrast with the essentialist preachers -- a contrast which contains some interesting contradictions that pivot around political-economic issues as much as they do Islamic ones.

For instance, when I asked Seyyid Silima whether the sharifs had karama by virtue of their descent from the prophet, he waved his hand and shook his head. "...They may

have the blood of the prophet, but it is a person's demeanor, or character, that really matters." This does not mean, however, that being a sharif was not important to Silima. Granted he did not brandish a "pedigree card" like the one proudly shown to me by a relative of his; this was a kind of certificate printed in Indonesia authenticating his lineage to the Prophet Muhammad (this man, by the way, did not have karama). Instead, Silima indicated his concern about being a sharif by telling me how exasperated he got with people who contested his identity as a sharif because he was "black". "When our ancestors came here," he explained to me, "they married with the Africans, their children, and their children's children did the same..." Then he used an example of a popular healer in town with whom I too was acquainted. "After all, Bwana Issa is an Arab from Oman -- his elders are Omani. But he was born here; so he is Zanzibari."

Significantly, the sensitivity Silima showed towards this racial remark concerned more than his identity as a sharif; it also reflected his memory of the ethnic antagonisms that led up to the revolution in 1964, when, as an "Arab" Comorian -- one of the best represented ethnic groups among the educated, professional class during the colonial period -- his entitlement to property and to live in and declare himself as a Zanzibari was severely

contested.¹⁸³ And yet at the same time, to others, being "black" betrayed a less illustrious heritage and suggested that his descent from the prophet was a fabrication, or tinged at best.

Thus for Silima, the legitimacy, in a sense, of his identity had been charged from "both sides." Indeed, when I asked him about the revolution, if he thought it had any sort of impact on Islam in Zanzibar during that time, he sighed, "*Mambo ya mapinduzi ni mambo ya wazimu*" -- "The stuff of revolution is the stuff of madness... Many sheikhs were detained by the government" (for allegedly organizing clandestine, politically subversive gatherings). It was a "tyranny of greed," he continued. "They confiscated plantations, mansions, everything was taken for nothing. God will never forgive such acts of violence." Like Bi Dodo discussed in chapter five, Seyyid Silima himself was detained by the revolutionary government in 1964 for several months. But this I had learned from someone else; and, although impassioned, what I was told was quite vague, almost as though just the idea of Silima's being in prison was enough to conjure my indignation on his behalf.

Characteristically, Silima never spoke of this or anything else political beyond these few despondent words. But for Silima, being a sharif -- a "black" sharif -- was in

¹⁸³ Seyyid Silima was a member of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party.

itself a politicized identity, since, as he experienced it historically, it simultaneously embodied (or evoked in others) both the privilege of elitism and the debasement of impure descent. What is interesting is that today, when the issues of ethnicity and class may be finding expression (again) in multiparty politics, Silima mediates these incongruous images through his piety -- or, as discussed above, in the social dimension or "space" that his piety creates; and in that space, the relations through which Silima's character is shaped and reproduced involve him in a recovery of himself. In this way, his piety constitutes a political act -- albeit a personal, historical one.

IV. Islamic Knowledge: A Virtue of Divine Blessing

This brief portrait of Seyyid Silima illustrates the close connection between Islamic knowledge, faith and piety, where religious knowledge is understood and conveyed not only as unambiguous and literal discourse, but can also be associated with or embodied and signified in the practices, behavior and countenance of individuals. As we have seen, an exceptionally pious individual -- the *mcha Mungu* (one who fears God), the *mwenye karama* -- cannot declare him/herself as such, but instead must deflect any praise of personal endeavor or expertise to God, to his will. Thus while Silima's expertise is demonstrated especially through the performance of supplicatory prayer, spontaneous and

creative, reflecting, among other things, intimate knowledge of the Qur'an, this talent for prayer is considered a virtue of exceptional devotion, and as such epitomizes Islamic knowledge as divine blessing. In this form, knowledge is not thought of as something that is external, to be acquired. It is knowledge that is personified, communicated, and, in its communication, experienced by others.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Work of Islamic Knowledge: Illness, Diagnosis, and the Practice of Healing

The previous chapter explored the social relations of piety, and how Islamic expertise can be constructed as an intrinsic quality of a person's being -- a process that takes its sometimes contradictory cues from historical, personal, and fantastic narratives about the fear of God and divine reward. This chapter also examines the connection between Islamic knowledge and the person, but not in such explicitly religious¹⁸⁴ terms, as with Seyyid Silima, or Bi Mwanasha in chapter five. Here I explore the issues, circumstances, and debates that shape how Islamic knowledge in Zanzibar is used and defined within the social relations of healing, and how this bears on the personal and vocational identity of the healing practitioners themselves.

I. The Epistemology of Illness and Healing

a. Terms of the Trade: Knowledge, Curative Techniques, and Practitioners

Knowledge of illness, its causes, and remedies in Zanzibar is multifaceted in many respects. It is an eclectic epistemology that emerged historically, as practitioners from local and immigrant groups on the islands competed with, drew from, and combined the various ideas and

¹⁸⁴ By "explicitly religious" I mean those activities, ideas, and discourses intended to address, comment on, or express a personal or collective relationship to God.

curative techniques that comprised their vocations.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, knowledge of healing in contemporary Zanzibar, called *uganga* or *utabibu*, combines a broad range of techniques which are both African and Arab in origin. These include the preparation of medicinal plants and roots (*uganga wa miti shamba*); calling and exorcising spirits (*kupunga pepo*; also *kupandisha mashetani* [to mount the spirit], or *kuchuchia kichwani* [to call the spirit into the head]); astrology (*falaki*, or *ilm za nyota*); computational techniques using Arabic numbers and letters called "the (magical) squares" (*hesabu za awfaq*) and "the spreading of the letters" (*ilm za 'basit al hurufi*); divination by drawing in sand on a wooden board (*kupiga ramli*); expertise in undoing magical spells (*kuzingua uchawi*¹⁸⁶); and numerous techniques using the Qur'an, such as extensive readings and prayer (*kisomo*, also used in spirit-calling sessions and in breaking magical spells); *kombe* (passages of the Qur'an written on a board or plate with saffron ink which is then

¹⁸⁵ See chapter two. See also Randall Pouwels, Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900 (1987), chapters two and five.

¹⁸⁶ *Uchawi* (malevolent magic, sorcery) is conceptualized as a potentially harmful force that is practiced by *wachawi*, sorcerers. Their clientele, it is said, are evil-minded individuals who employ their services in order to malign or do damage to specific others. *Uchawi* (also *usihiri*) is distinguished from *kiini macho* and *mazingaombwe*, that is, harmless magic based on trickery, juggling, or sleight of hand, although some people believe that *wachawi* are just swindlers who deceive others by using such techniques.

poured over with water and swallowed); and the preparation of an assortment of amulets (*hirizi*, *zindiko* and *azma*).

Uganga and utabibu are both Kiswahili terms, but while uganga comes from the Bantu root *-ganga*, meaning to bind or put broken pieces back together again, utabibu is derived from the Arabic *tib*, to heal. However, I was instructed that the terms do not refer to or distinguish between "African" and "Arab" techniques, respectively. As one friend from Pemba stressed (and as I often heard repeated), "...but uganga *is* utabibu!"¹⁸⁷ This does not mean that the techniques themselves cannot be categorized with more specificity. Several practitioners used the phrase *fani za kiarabu* or "Arabic techniques" to describe those methods using the Qur'an (*kombe*, *hirizi*, and *kisomo*), and located the use of medicinal plants under the rubric of *dawa za kienyeji* or "indigenous/local medicines". Bwana Zuri, an elderly and very popular practitioner in Stone Town who is of Omani descent and who employs all of these techniques in his cures, explained that the techniques are different because they originate from different places and are learned in different ways:

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Mzee Ngara, August 22, 1989, in Zanzibar Town. In fact, the terms for these various techniques -- like much of Kiswahili vocabulary -- can be denoted with words that have either Arabic or Bantu roots. For an analysis of Arabic loan words into Kiswahili see Sharifa Zawawi, "Loan Words and Their Effect on the Classification of Swahili Nominals: A morphological Approach." Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1974.

The medicine from the mainland is different because most of it is using roots and plants, but here [in Zanzibar] we use knowledge from books, even though I also know how to use medicinal plants...You can read from the books, or be taught the knowledge of medicines by your elders; you can exorcise spirits, use roots and leaves, and cure in this way. Each has [his/her] own way, developed from one's own people; one in the books, another in stones and roots and spirits...Some spirit practitioners have their songs and dances, while others read the Qur'an or the Gospel [*Injili*] and the spirits come.¹⁸⁸

Thus place of origin, language, and even the ways in which curative techniques are learned all emerge as features that can be used to describe and differentiate them. The extent to which these aspects may constitute signifiers of the practitioner's identity, social position, or religious convictions are questions I explore in the discussion below.

While healers tend to specialize in a particular repertoire of techniques, at the broadest level, they can all be referred to as *waganga*, *mtabibu*, or *mafundi*.¹⁸⁹ *Mganga* and *mtabibu* are terms which are used only in reference to healers. *Fundi*, however, is a broad term used to describe a person with specialized knowledge and skill in any sort of craft or vocation and who can take on and instruct others as apprentices. While healers are included under the rubric of "fundi", religious personae like Bi Mkubwa and Seyyid Silima, who also assist ailing or

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Bwana Zuri at his home in Stone Town, August 4, 1989.

¹⁸⁹ The singular forms are *mganga*, *mtabibu*, and *fundi*.

distressed individuals with amulets, prayer, and readings, are not.¹⁹⁰ This suggests that a certain continuity is perceived between healing and other vocations defined by practical applications of expertise, and that unlike Seyyid Silima or Bi Mkubwa, the healer's expertise -- even when based on the Qur'an -- can be separated from his piety or his identity as a Muslim. Thus healers can be recognized as the bearers of Islamic expertise even when they are not identified as an Islamic "expert" per se. In other words, Islamic expertise does not define their social or professional identity.

The techniques healers use for curing illnesses and for protecting or restoring well-being rely to a large extent on demonstrations of Qur'anic expertise. Indeed, the Qur'an is an important resource for virtually all healers in Zanzibar. It is used both as an agent in itself (as with *kisomo*, *hirizi*, and *kombe* [the "*fani za kiarabu*"]) and as a kind of esoteric teaching text which contains instructional knowledge about its power to cure.¹⁹¹ Mzee Chuma is a *mganga* in his early fifties, who was born in Tumbatu¹⁹² and

¹⁹⁰ Bi Mkubwa from chapter 5 and Seyyid Silima from chapter 6.

¹⁹¹ See A. Osman El-Tom 1985 and 1987 for examples of uses of Qur'anic medicines among the Berti of northern Sudan.

¹⁹² Tumbatu is an islet off the northern coast of Unguja (Zanzibar island). Tumbatu is reputed to have produced some of the most powerful *waganga*. Indeed, one Zanzibari cultural stereotype of people from Tumbatu is that they are

raised in Nungwi, a small town at the northern tip of Zanzibar island. In his words,

The Qur'an tells you itself, if you are keen enough to recognize it, *'I am fit for the task of healing.'* But you must study hard, very hard -- it is very difficult material.¹⁹³

In addition to working directly from the Qur'an, which as Mzee Chuma implies requires subtle interpretive skills, there are also uganga manuals, now rare and in limited circulation, that contain generations of accumulated information on how to use the Qur'an for all sorts of illnesses and situations.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, with the exception perhaps of divination (kupiga ramli) and knowledge of medicinal plants (miti shamba), most of the techniques that constitute uganga/utabibu draw in some way on the stories, verses, language, and personae (Muhammad, the prophets, and the angels) embodied in the Qur'an. As Bwana Zuri quipped, "There are many verses in the Qur'an that contain special messages about curing -- aren't you going to ask me which ones?"

Mzee Hasan is a healer in his early fifties who has lived all of his adult life in town but who was born in a rural village in the central region of Zanzibar. Hasan

especially "superstitious" because they have been raised around so much magic.

¹⁹³ Interview with Mzee Chuma, Zanzibar Town, May 23, 1990.

¹⁹⁴ Uganga manuals also contain information and formulae for curing that do not use the Qur'an.

specializes is an *mpungaji*, a specialist in calling spirits.

He tells me that

The Qur'an is used more than other methods because it explains many things. We take everything from the Qur'an. [We learn that] the spirits are created [by God] just as we are, and long ago, they had a leader called Nabii [the prophet] Suleiman bin Dawd. They had their own culture, their own medicines, just like us...Ayas of the Qur'an can make spirits disappear when you read them, while others attract them. The ways of the Qur'an are very great because the ways of the world -- all things, really -- are led by the Qur'an.¹⁹⁵

And Mzee Chuma, who applies a full range of techniques in his practice explained that "As waganga",

...we combine lots of different methods in the cures. You must in order to get inside of a person's very being, her/his essence (*nafsi*). *Nafsi* is a very complex thing [and] you need to know a lot in order to reach in.¹⁹⁶

He continues, asserting that

You always use the Qur'an when you practice uganga. If you follow the Qur'an, you will not get lost.¹⁹⁷ There are some waganga who don't know the Qur'an. They may have knowledge of medicinal

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Mzee Hasan, June 20, 1990, in Zanzibar Town.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Mzee Chuma, November 13, 1990.

¹⁹⁷ This probably means not being derailed in a moral sense, or tempted by the power of your craft. Good intentions, as I discuss below, are a key part of any practitioner's professional persona. This may be especially relevant to Mzee Chuma since he was accused by the people in his home village of being a *mchawi* (sorcerer). I learned this one afternoon on a trip I made to his village in the north; Mzee Chuma and I had arranged to meet there, but he never showed up. In his absence, his former neighbors told me that his reputation was questionable, and that this is why he didn't show up to meet me, and why he moved away from the village in the first place.

plants, like if you were bitten by a snake, they can prepare a cure for you; but this knowledge does not come from the Qur'an, it is taught by one's elders; and if you don't know the Qur'an you can't be a good mganga... Indeed, knowledge of the Qur'an is the knowledge to heal...You use the Qur'an to pass through to God; this, really, is what it's all about.

Moreover, because the Qur'an, as the word of God, is considered to be the ultimate of powers, then healers should be able to demonstrate some facility in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. As Mzee Hasan put it, "the Qur'an is written in Arabic, therefore all the uganga techniques are executed in the Arabic language as well." Indeed, all of the practitioners with whom I worked repeatedly demonstrated their ease in writing, reading, and quoting verses from the Qur'an in Arabic.¹⁹⁸ This in itself might not be so exceptional since many Zanzibaris do learn to recognize Arabic characters and to memorize some passages from the Qur'an as youngsters in the chuo and madrasa. The practitioners' expertise is also manifested in their ability to recognize and apply verses in the proper ways, a skill which requires understanding of the meaning and purpose of

¹⁹⁸ My colleague Khatib Makame Omar, who transcribed my taped interviews, is fluent in reading and writing Arabic, which he studied in Zanzibar and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Thus in compiling the transcriptions, Khatib wrote the Arabic (mostly Qur'anic references and prayers) spoken by the various informants as he heard it -- in Arabic, not Kiswahili. Still, this does not necessarily mean that healers are conversant in the Arabic language. Many of the older uganga texts use Arabic script but are written in Kiswahili; it was not until the early colonial period that writing in Kiswahili was changed to Roman characters.

verses, why they were revealed when they were, and how they can be related to situations in the here and now. In particular, knowing how to use and derive power from the *visa*, or stories of the prophets narrated in the Qur'an, constitutes an important source of a healer's expertise. "In writing for cures," explained Bwana Zuri, "you must be able to know the verse that has a special relationship to the problem [at hand], a verse that harmonizes with your intention to heal in a specific way -- this is the secret of *utabibu*."¹⁹⁹

Moreover, when Bwana Zuri showed me an amulet he had just prepared for our friend's toddler who was suffering from *degedege* (febrile seizures), I asked if the stylized writing around the squares he had drawn was Arabic. He explained that it was actually "*Kiebrani*" (Hebrew), that is, the language of the prophets Ibrahim, Ismail, Yacob, and Ishaak, who are featured in the Qur'an²⁰⁰. After all, he said, "these prophets did not speak Arabic!" It is interesting that Zuri values the curative powers of the language that the prophets themselves spoke, rather than being wholly focussed on the power of Arabic as the language of God.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Bwana Zuri, September 5, 1989 in Stone Town.

²⁰⁰ See especially chapter 6, "The Cattle", Al-Qur'an, A contemporary Translation, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

To assume that a distinction exists between "uganga" and "utabibu" might imply that the former did not include expertise in the Qur'an or in Arabic. However, when the terms are used to describe actual practitioners -- that is, as an "mganga" or "mtabibu" -- subtle differences in connotation begin to emerge. For example, in Mzee Chuma's view, an mtabibu is a person who specializes in (is limited to) astrology and Qur'anic medicine, while a mganga such as himself employs a much wider repertoire of techniques, as he implies above. While Mzee Hasan also states that he is a mganga, he emphasizes that he is an expert in the realm of spirits, an mpungaji, and that this is how he is known professionally. Bwana Zuri assured me that he was an mtabibu, and not a mganga, because waganga used techniques that he considered to be forbidden in Islam, such as divination (kupiga ramli); he also contended that many waganga were charlatans taking advantage of innocent people, and that this too was sinful behavior. Bwana Zuri, moreover, was expert in medicinal plants (miti shamba) as well as astrology and numerous techniques using the Qur'an, and typically combined these techniques in any one cure. A fourth practitioner, Bwana Shaafi, an elderly man like Bwana Zuri, explained that he couldn't identify with any one category exclusively; not only did he employ all of the

techniques listed above²⁰¹, including ramli (divination); he was also a respected imam and religious teacher at his neighborhood mosque.

As social categories, then, -ganga and -tabibu are more open to individual interpretation than when used to denote an abstract category of knowledge. While Bwana Zuri distinguished between mganga and mtabibu, clearly identifying with the latter, Bwana Shaafi identified with no category exclusively; for Mzee Hasan, mganga was too broad a category to describe his work meaningfully, while for Mzee Chuma it was the very breadth implied in mganga that defined its distinguishing character.

Indeed, these categories are not fixed or universal, nor do practitioners assume that they are. Instead, the professional identities, statuses, and reputations of these practitioners emerge out of the social relations that define their expertise and that give it meaning and continuity over time. The remainder of this chapter explores this process through the lives and thoughts of the four practitioners just introduced, with special focus on Bwana Shaafi and Mzee Hasan. In doing so, I hope to show several things. First, that the uses of Islamic and non-Islamic expertise in healing practices are shaped in part by the patients' beliefs about the causes of illness and the powers that

²⁰¹ Though not an mpungaji, Bwana Shaafi had knowledge of the various types and behaviors of spirits.

heal, and by how a practitioner demonstrates his expertise. Second, I hope to show that moral, ideological, and political attitudes and issues are reflected in the choices practitioners make about the techniques they use and the ailments they treat. This is especially significant because the practices they perform convey multiple and often contradictory messages to patients about what is and is not permissible in Islam.

b. Notions of Illness and Finding a Cure

Illness in Zanzibar is conceptualized and treated as a complex amalgam of physical, social, emotional, and psychic experience, so that causes of illness are often thought to be located outside of the body in distress. This means that the patient's interpersonal relations and psychological state become important places to search for signs of disruptive forces, beings, or situations. Fever (*homa*), insects and parasites (*wadudu*, *vidudu*), protracted quarrels (*fitina*) with lovers, spouses, neighbors, or family, spirits (*mashetani*, *majinni*, *pepo*), jealousy or ill-will (*kijicho*), and malevolent magic (*uchawi*) are all recognized as possible causes of depression, anxiety, physical discomfort, and pain. While many Zanzibaris do not believe that they themselves could fall victim to a capricious spirit or be injured by malevolent magic, these images and forces do

define a significant realm of the cultural discourse of affliction.

Thus while western-based medical services are available at the V.I. Lenin government hospital and several private clinics in town, they have not developed into a hegemonic medical industry in control of the diagnosis and treatment of illness. Instead, local healers continue to provide the kind of assistance and treatment that many Zanzibaris desire. This is evidenced in part by the popularity of Saleh Madawa's dispensary, centrally located near the main market in Stone Town. The proprietor, Saleh Madawa (*madawa* meaning "medicines" in Kiswahili), is the most well-known supplier of local medicines in the town area. In addition to a variety of medicinal preparations (*dawa ya kienyeji*, or indigenously procured medicines), one can also purchase items like *mrashi* (rosewater), *ubani* (frankincense), and *sharbati* (a red and syrupy sugar water that many spirits like) at Saleh Madawa's shop. Customers often consult with Saleh Madawa directly about what sort of medicine they may need. He told me that he is not a healer but has learned, over the years of filling prescriptions, what medicines work for which ailments. Other customers obtain a "prescription" from a *mganga/mtabibu* which they get filled at Saleh Madawa's shop. For instance, Bwana Zuri always sends his patients to Saleh Madawa. He writes a prescription for them (Zuri uses Arabic script) and instructs the patient on how

to use the medicine once it is purchased (such as a pulverized plant substance that had to be boiled and swallowed or steamed and inhaled). In some cases patients return to Bwana Zuri so that he can specially prepare the medicine himself.

This does not mean that the town's hospital beds are empty -- many residents want to be seen by a doctor at V.I. Lenin. However, this is a no-fee hospital,²⁰² and most patients must wait for hours for a cursory exam, or to obtain medication from the hospital dispensary. Thus it is common practice for individuals to go one day to the hospital and another to a local healer, a choice that is shaped in part by the accessibility of local healers, but also by the patient's understanding of the ailment and its cause. Moreover, as Mzee Chuma observes, "different fundis have different ideas about what to read [from the Qur'an] and what techniques to use for a cure." Indeed, since local healers in Zanzibar do not all perform the same tasks, nor are they able (or willing) to treat all ailments; individuals discriminate between healers when seeking help.

For example, if a woman (or her family and companions -- social input is important here) expects that her symptoms

²⁰² Few Zanzibaris can afford the private pay-as-you-go clinics.

are being caused by spirits,²⁰³ she will seek help from an mpungaji (spirit practitioner) or even a sheikh to read for her before she would go to the hospital. Interestingly, however, a patient's expectation of the presence of spirits is not always confirmed. As Mzee Hasan, the mpungaji introduced above explains,

The [patient's] problems aren't always caused by spirits. A person may be having arguments at home. You don't need to call spirits for this, and you don't need kisomo [special Qur'anic readings]; the person should just recite the Qur'an there at home, to cool down the words, or even use miti [plants] to cool down the words.

But what does get confirmed in such negative diagnoses is Mzee Hasan's own diagnostic expertise -- a spirit specialist does not simply follow leads or cues provided by the patient; he can read the subtle signs of spirit affliction, and can discriminate between these and other sources of distress. Indeed, by providing a social context in which the potentiality of spirits and their signifiers are discussed, negative diagnoses can actually help to confirm belief in their existence.

²⁰³ Chronic pain or illness, emotional distress or depression, and lethargy are often interpreted as symptoms indicating the presence of a spirit.

**c. Negotiating the "Parameters of the Permissible"²⁰⁴:
Diagnosis, Intentionality, and *Haram***

Because most healers treat the causes of illness rather than the symptoms, diagnostic skill and technique is the first and often most important phase in the patient's treatment and in constituting the relationship between patient (or client)²⁰⁵ and practitioner.²⁰⁶ When a person goes to see a healer with a problem, the healer is expected to extrapolate, through his/her own skills, the specifics of the patient's ailment. However, the patient's opening remarks also cue the healer into the nature of the problem.

For instance, broadly speaking, if a person opens with "*Nina hali*" ("I have a situation [I must discuss with you]"), the healer learns that the patient's problem concerns a specific situation in which he is involved; maybe he is having marital problems, he has a court case pending,

²⁰⁴ The phrase is anthropologist Gail Kligman's, although she uses it to describe a very different issue -- that of the politics of reproductive rights, and the arenas or discourse through which the state has control over the body (in Romania). Paper presented at Anthropology Colloquium Series at the CUNY Graduate Center, [get exact date] 1996.

²⁰⁵ Individuals also consult healers for assistance with problems other than illness (as seen below). I refer to these individuals as clients.

²⁰⁶ Similarly, as Robert Hadloff writes in his study of healing and social control in Bodoukou, a city in eastern Ivory Coast, local (Muslim) healers and their clients are not threatened by the influx of western medical services. This is because "they consider western practitioners to treat symptoms while the *karamokos* (healers) eliminate causes. *Dyula karamokos* are instead desecularizing western medicine and incorporating it into their medical paradigm" (1982:192).

or someone is troubling him with *kijicho* (jealousy). Similarly, if he says "*Nina haja nawe*" ("I need something from you", a conventional appeal for assistance of some kind), the healer learns that this person needs help in executing a plan, to acquire something, perhaps help him select an auspicious day for a wedding or travel; perhaps the client wants an amulet, or to drink *kombe*. By opening with "*Nina maradhi*" ("I am ill"), the *mganga* learns that the patient is suffering from an physical pain, discomfort, or disorientation. The information provided in these opening statements should be sufficient for the skillful healer to proceed with diagnostic procedures which might include *kupiga ramli* (divination), *falak* (astrology), or consulting *uganga* manuals.²⁰⁷

While the question over the permissibility of *waganga* practices vis-a-vis Islam is not a salient issue of public debate in Zanzibar,²⁰⁸ it seems to concern individuals on a

²⁰⁷ Healers rarely give actual physical exams that involve touching or palpating the patient's body. They rely on patient narrative and on their own diagnostic techniques. See also David Parkin's "Reason, Emotion, and the Embodiment of Power" where he argues that among the *Giriama* of the Kenyan coast, the "performative aspect of divination" is a key part of the *mganga*'s image-construction, as well as the negotiative relationship that unfolds between him and his patient (pg. 148 in Reason and Morality, Joanna Overing, ed., London: Tavistock, 1985).

²⁰⁸ Except, perhaps, regarding the exorcision of spirits, which is sometimes interpreted as a form of "spirit worship". In two of the religious lectures that I attended, involvement with spirits -- or spirit *waganga* -- in any way was strongly discouraged, that instead one should be in "control of oneself" (*kujizuia*).

personal level. When I asked healers and their patients or clients to discuss the matter, diagnostic technique emerged as the most controversial phase of the healer's routine. In particular, kupiga ramli -- divining by drawing in sand on a wooden board -- is a commonly used diagnostic technique which also happens to be considered by many Zanzibari Muslims as *haram*, that is, prohibited in Islam.

Sheikh Majid is an Islamic teacher in his late thirties and assistant to Sheikh Bakathir at his madrasa in Ukutani. "We Muslims are not permitted to believe in waganga because they look at the ramli..." Majid explains.

The Qur'an forbids ramli because there is deception in it, and lying is forbidden in Islam...Someone who is learned cannot be easily deceived by a mganga. But there are others, poor souls, who are not. They haven't a thing, and they're apt to take everything the mganga says as the truth. Then Almighty God, by His power He takes care of the innocent and cures them Himself. The patient believes it was the mganga who cured him, but was it not the work of God? So the mganga becomes famous yet all along it is God who is doing the curing."²⁰⁹

To the healer Bwana Zuri, ramli is *haram* because one uses it to foresee the future or to reveal the unknown causes of events and illnesses by interpreting the marks that mysteriously appear in the sand of the ramli board. This is at best guesswork and at worst, deception. Only God can know the future; moreover, God does not communicate through the divining board. For these reasons ramli is *haram*. Thus

²⁰⁹ Interview with Sheikh Rashidi Salim, in Zanzibar Town, July 6, 1989.

Bwana Zuri prefers falak (astrology) as a diagnostic technique:

Looking at how [the stars and planets] are related, and how they move through the sky over time is not haram. Through mathematical calculations we can derive their various configurations, and if these configurations create good or bad conditions for people to do things. For the most part, people use falak to determine auspicious days for weddings and for travel. This is not forbidden in Islam...[But] if you go to a mganga and say you are in pain and he [looks at the ramli and] tells you, 'Ahh, you have been bewitched, someone wants to kill you', this is nonsense; he is lying, and that is haram.

On the other hand, Mzee Chuma and Bwana Shaafi argue that ramli in itself, that is, as a technique, is not haram. It is the uses (*matumizi*) to which ramli is put -- the bad intentions of the client or practitioner -- which can make it haram. If a mganga uses ramli' to help someone to do harm, or if the mganga deliberately deceives the patient or client by lying, stealing from, or exploiting him, then that constitutes haram. Thus intentionality is invoked as the intellectual variable that reconciles ramli with Islamic moral precepts. Shaafi also argues that

ramli is not haram because it was given to the Prophet Idris by the angel Gibriil to endow him with a special power that would convince ordinary people that he was in fact a Prophet.²¹⁰

With this, Shaafi ultimately sanctions ramli -- in particular, its very power to divine -- by locating its origin within the realm of the prophets.

²¹⁰ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, May 10, 1990.

Intentionality (*dhati*, *kusudia*, *kunuia*²¹¹) is also invoked in defining permissible uses of the Qur'an in general. As Mzee Hasan explains,

The Qur'an is, more than anything, Salvation [uokozi]; its aim is to drive out all bad things completely. Therefore it is forbidden to use its power for bad things, to hurt others. But it can be used if someone has had something bad done to them and needs to be protected, or have [a magical spell] reversed."

Even Sheikh Majid mentioned the moral underpinnings of intention to explain why he permits the recitation of special dua or uses of the Qur'an at the football matches in which his madrasa students compete. If your intention to is protect your team from your opponent's offensive magic or spirits, then it is not forbidden to pray dua or work the Qur'an, so to speak, at a game. One should not, however, use the Qur'an to win or to do harm to one's opponent; this would be haram. In contrast, the mganga Mzee Chuma assumes an aggressive role when using uganga for a football team. "In all games there are ways of getting the better of your opponent," he asserted. "These games are competitions and are nothing to joke about!...Now, there are strategies of action [on the playing field], and those of knowledge [uganga]; and there's no stronger strategy than using the power of Qur'an; with it one can smash a stone into powder,

²¹¹ Khatib says *kunuia* is an important part of all uganga practices. It is like forming a wish, or stating an intention in your mind when reciting *bismillallah*, lighting incense, and imploring God for assistance.

and open up the sky...This indeed is the power of the Qur'an, it cannot be surpassed."

Does this mean that Chuma is a lax or immoral Muslim? For some, perhaps. But as Topan points out (1996:121-122), a *mganga* like Chuma does not necessarily believe that his practices compromise his moral integrity or convictions as a Muslim.²¹² Similarly, that Sheikh Rashidi and Bwana Zuri do invoke Islamic ethics in their disapproval of certain diagnostic practices does not make them especially staunch or strict Muslims. Finally, Shaafi's concern with intentionality is not simply an excuse for him to use whatever practice he desires without crossing the threshold of haram.

My point is that the notion of haram is neither monolithic nor absolute; it constitutes a discourse for arguing and negotiating the parameters of and qualifications

²¹² In his research in coastal Kenya, Farouk Topan observed that Muslim *waganga* and even *wachawi* (sorcerers) are not beset with a sense of contradiction or compromise by the practices they perform. When the reality of this-worldly problems requires their intervention and expertise, they willfully operate in that reality, for that moment (Topan in Harrow [ed.] 1996:120-122). As Topan observes, this also raises the theological issue in Islam of free will (*dhati*). That is, a Muslim is free to make the choice when, how, or even whether to follow the word of God or not. Thus an individual is responsible for his/her own actions and choices which in turn constitute and reflect his/her sense of morality to the world. In this sense, morality is constituted in the relationship between person and God. But what if the choices of the individual (the choice to do *ramli*, to drink *kombe*, to call spirits) are perceived to somehow jeopardize the moral order of the collectivity as a whole? I take up this question in the following chapter.

for a morally sound, Islamic paradigm for living. Such a discourse or reference point frames and orients the argument but does not in itself determine, once and for all, the realm of possible, "permissible" (curative) techniques in Islam.²¹³ What is important here is that this sort of implicit, informal argument effectively promotes a heterogeneity of ideas and practices that use Islamic texts, discourse, and symbolism in the management of illness and well-being.

Indeed, one Zanzibari colleague who was commenting on some of my findings on local ideas about healing and Islam advised that I "should not look for a consensus [of opinion] where there isn't any!"²¹⁴ Using his mother as an example, he explained that even one person can do things or maintain beliefs that, on the surface (or to others), may seem contradictory. "She will go to both a *mganga* and to a sheikh in order to secure a remedy for her sick child. But these are not contradictory choices," he asserted, nor does she feel she is compromising her sense of religious

²¹³ While I think it is the theological nature of haram to be discursive and not absolute, ideas like haram can be used by cohorts interested in establishing themselves as a dominant, moral elite. With success, then notions like haram become monolithic and unambiguous and the practices deemed as such, unlawful. I take this up in the following chapter.

²¹⁴ Discussion Dec. 15, 1992, Zanzibar Town. In our discussion, this colleague (a professor of sociology in Great Britain) was also commenting on the absence of "consensus" regarding current political views in Zanzibar and their constructions of the past.

propriety as a Muslim by going to a mganga. Some may disagree with this behavior, or simply dismiss it as "superstitious", as he put it. According to my own findings, consulting both a sheikh and a mganga for assistance is very common, and is not necessarily rendered as problematic behavior for Muslims. Indeed, as one friend remarked on the subject, the best person to consult for any sort of problem is someone who is both a sheikh and a mganga -- someone with great knowledge of the Qur'an, who is adept at prayer, (especially one who has baraka), and someone who also has knowledge of uganga and spirits.

Argument around these issues can arise between spouses regarding the care of their children. When my neighbor Bi Mashavu gave birth to her baby, she wanted to get an amulet prepared for her by Sheikh Bakathiri. Her husband, however, who was an associate of Bakathiri's madrasa, forbade it, so she went to Bwana Zuri instead to have the amulet made. An amulet by Bakathiri would have had the added power of his lineage's baraka; otherwise Zuri's amulet was just as good.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ I did not hear what her husband had to say when he saw the amulet tied around the baby's neck. These two cases involving women -- the sociologist's mother and my friend Mchecha -- are typical scenarios since most infants in Zanzibar wear protective amulets that their mothers procure for them. Some women make their own. Tying a string in consecutive knots while reciting the verses from *Ya Sin* (considered by many to be one of the most beautiful and powerful chapters from the Qur'an) is one method used. The string is then tied around the baby's neck.

Youngsters also work out for themselves (more or less) their own sense possibility or permissibility regarding curative practices and Islam. One morning I conducted an interview with ten students at the Muslim School in Mazizini (described in chapter five).²¹⁶ I asked the students -- ages seventeen to nineteen years old -- for their thoughts on a range of topics, including the practices of waganga, and uses of the Qur'an for cures. One boy opened the discussion, saying that it is not good to use hirizis (amulets) because he doesn't really know what's written inside. Well, even if he knows they are passages from the Qur'an, it is still not good to take them out of context. Nor would he drink kombe. He concluded that if he were ill, or having problems, he would just read the Qur'an himself. "It's best to take the aya into your heart by reading, not by drinking." He would, however, agree to have a sheikh read him a dua, "because when you read dua, the shetani (spirits) that are near will go away." At this point a young girl chimed in, saying she would not agree to be read to because the best dawa (medicine) is to read for yourself. A third student remarked that one should not go to a mganga because "they may do ramli for you and that's forbidden in

²¹⁶ Interview at the Muslim School, Mazizini, April 12, 1990. Students who attend the school have their tuitions paid through subsidies. Students are taken from both Unguja and Pemba Islands. This particular group of students were selected from various classes by the headmaster to meet with me. I don't know on what basis he made this selection.

Islam; it is better that you go to a sheikh who will pray dua for you." A fourth boy added, "But you can go to a mganga who just uses miti shamba (medicinal plants), and not ramli; this is not forbidden." Another student asserted that "if you read the Qur'an a lot, you won't be bothered by shetani, Mtume (Muhammad) says so."

While it is possible that the presence of school teachers or administrators during the discussion could have changed the tenor of the students' responses, I came away with the impression that this Islamic institution did not discourage the expression of independent thinking among the students.²¹⁷ I think this is a reflection of the overall heterogeneity of ideas that surround the "uses and abuses" of Islamic expertise in curative practices. Indeed, it is evident that in Zanzibar multiple discourses are engaged simultaneously -- intentionality, morality, free will, authenticity -- discourses which are informed as much by the personal and political histories of individuals as they are by the Holy Qur'an.

d. Uganga and "Modernity"

Modern medical practice -- represented by the town hospital -- also constitutes a kind of discourse or

²¹⁷ Relatively speaking, the discourse here is freer than among the more dogmatic teachings of some of the "bida'a" sheikhs in town who saw themselves as purveyors of true Islam (see chapter eight).

reference point in terms of which waganga practices are negotiated and defined.

A curious rumor circulated about the hospital physicians from the People's Republic of China, which praised them for recognizing the value of local, Zanzibari healers. One of my neighbors delighted in telling me that the Chinese doctors knew when they were stumped by an ailment, and had no problem advising the patient to go and consult a mganga. On the one hand, such rumors created an impression that the hospital, though a modern medical institution, nevertheless conceded on some level to the efficacy of local healers' expertise, and to the possibility that extra-natural causes of illnesses may be at work; waganga, then, are not just for the poor, the ignorant, or the superstitious. On the other hand, my neighbor also conveyed that there was something about the Chinese themselves that made them different from the other physicians at the hospital (Egyptian, European, Tanzanian): the Chinese, I was told, were more open-minded (than the other physicians), more accepting of alternative medical practitioners and the ailments they are purported to treat.

I think this commentary is important because it signals several things. First, by invoking the hospital to me -- a *mzungu* or westerner²¹⁸ -- local belief and practice are

²¹⁸ "Mzungu" is the broad term for European and Anglo-American expatriates, tourists, researchers (African Americans are not referred to as "wazungu" but as *Wamerikani*

legitimized rather than dismissed as "superstition". On the other hand, the speaker's commentary also signals recognition of the ambiguous and permeable boundaries between things "traditional/local" and "modern/foreign". Even "the" Chinese themselves are stereotypically constructed both as revolutionary modernity-makers,²¹⁹ and as historic intellectuals steeped in their own ancient cultural traditions. In this commentary, then, the hospital and local healing practices are rendered as compatible rather than as opposed or ranked sources of medical care. Finally, while this commentary does not represent the view of all Zanzibaris, it does indicate the presence of an awareness or consciousness that the treatment of illness in Zanzibar is a socially constructed domain of power, in that the distinction between authoritative and spurious forms of therapeutic and medical expertise is actually rather arbitrary; instead, such distinctions are variously shaped by social, cultural and even political trends, all of which inform how individuals conceptualize and cope with illness and well-being. Indeed, a healer's ability to effect a cure (and ultimately, his/her reputation) is based not only on

Weusi, or Black Americans). Most wazungu are perceived to be dismissive of local medicinal practices.

²¹⁹ In the Karume years, much of the island's infrastructure was developed with Chinese, East German, and Soviet endowments. The Chinese in particular gave assistance for agricultural and industrial development (see Clayton 1981).

technical expertise, but also on the continued need for and social relevance of that expertise (cf Handloff 1982).

II. Bwana Shaafi: nganga and sheikh

Bwana Shaafi was born and raised in Kiembe Samaki, about five miles outside of Stone Town, and is now in his early seventies. He is a healer and an Islamic teacher, and is known for his expertise as far as Oman and Dubai. I met Bwana Shaafi through my friend Mzee Ngara, whose wife, Tanu, is a relative of Shaafi by marriage. Tanu has been consulting Shaafi for years, seeking remedies for her children's medical problems or for the intermittant troubles she has experienced with spirits. Today Shaafi lives with one of his two wives in Kwahajitumbo, a neighborhood in Ng'ambo about a half mile from Stone Town.

Just across the unpaved road from his house is the neighborhood mosque, where Bwana Shaafi can often be found teaching inside, or relaxing on the mosque's *baraza* (stone veranda), chatting with colleagues or sitting by himself, smoking a cigarette. His house is like all those in the area, small and square, with smooth cement walls and floor, and a corrugated iron roof. It is dark inside, and cool. Mzee Ngara and I visited Bwana Shaafi many times during the course of my fieldwork in Zanzibar. Shaafi's replies to my questions were always thoughtful and detailed. He had an intense gaze, and was a quietly enthusiastic speaker. On my

first visit to his home, we sat together on the floor of his study, he in his pale blue kanzu, one elbow balanced on his knee, the opposite leg folded underneath him in typical Swahili style.

a. Belief and Qur'anic Expertise: Accessing the Power that Cures

Shaafi was adept at explaining the epistemological continuities linking the different arenas of knowledge and practice that together comprised his livelihood. Those continuities were based on the Qur'an and belief in its power to affect the world:

The Qur'an is a very great book. It is like the ocean. If you go with a canoe, you will catch sardines; if you go with an out-rigger canoe, it will be fish that you catch. If you go with a dhow, you catch the shark, and if you go with a ship, you will catch the whale. The meaning you extract from the Qur'an is relative to the power of your intellect and the imagination with which you approach it. All of these vessels and all the things they are capable of retrieving begin and end in the Qur'an.²²⁰

And yet without belief, the power of the Qur'an cannot be realized:

The Qur'an is the word of God. But one must believe in one's heart that this is so. Then when you drink kombe, it can help you...All of this follows according to your faith...This is not a thing like salt -- no matter what you believe, salt tastes like salt. Why, the Qur'an has the power to help one person but not another on account of [her/his] belief. Even Muhammad said, 'If you believe that a stone will help you, then it shall be so; we have descended the Qur'an with

²²⁰ Interview with Bwana Shaafi at his home in Kwahajitumbo, Zanzibar Town, January 3, 1990.

power inside to heal and have mercy upon those who believe.²²¹

There was a real consciousness among the people I worked with regarding this connection between belief the power of the Qur'an. Belief gives agency to the Qur'an, or better, to the people who know how to use it and to patients or clients who benefit from their knowledge.

Interestingly, however, according to Mzee Chuma, belief in the power of the Qur'an is not necessarily construed as "religious" belief.²²²

"The power of the Qur'an is not about religion", he explained. "If it was, we wouldn't be able to cure people with religions different from ours. Even though Christians were not given the Qur'an, we can still use the power of the Qur'an to cure them. It can cure anyone with a problem. Whether or not you are a religious person, you will still be cured."²²³

This does not contradict the assertion (also voiced by Mzee Chuma) that a person must believe in the power of the Qur'an in order for it to "work"; one simply does not have to be a Muslim to believe that the Qur'an has the power to act on

²²¹ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1989. In fact throughout the Qur'an, the reader is warned that all that is good in this world, and ultimately, salvation, is reserved for those who believe in God and submit to His word.

²²² In Kiswahili, the verbs *-amini* and *-itakadi* -- meaning to believe, trust, have faith in -- have both religious and non-religious connotations that are context dependent. The nouns *imani* and *itikadi* refer to religious faith, belief, or trust and are used interchangeably.

²²³ Interview with Mzee Chuma in Zanzibar Town, May 23, 1990.

the world. In other words, the Qur'an does not fail or discriminate -- people do (by believing or not). As a final note, Mzee Chuma's explanation may well have been shaped by the fact that he was addressing me; he knew, among other things, that I was not a Muslim. Thus his explanation gave me an opening, a choice, a way to be included; and such inclusion might enhance my assessment of his work and credibility as a mganga.²²⁴

But accessing the power of the Qur'an for curing, protection, or for influencing the course of events in an individual's personal life requires more than belief; it requires specialized knowledge or expertise (*utaalamu*) -- of various illnesses, their causes, and their remedies. A case in point is the preparation of amulets (*hirizi*), as Shaafi explains:

"You can't just carry around the Qur'an for protection. The Qur'an is not written like a *hirizi*. A *hirizi* uses specific *ayas* that are analogous to the problem that needs to be redressed. The Qur'an by itself does not protect. In preparing a *hirizi*, you must write a proper heading, indicating you are appealing to God to help cure someone of whatever ailment they have. So first you write [he recites in Arabic] 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet.' Then you greet Muhammad (s.w.a.s.),²²⁵ and state

²²⁴ For a discussion challenging the assumption that "belief" constitutes a universal cognitive category, see Rodney Needham (1972) where he argues that "belief" cannot be located, cannot exist, outside of its language-based referent.

²²⁵ These are the Roman character initials for the conventional Arabic phrase "God have peace upon him", which is uttered after mentioning the name of the Prophet

your problem. Then you say, 'By the truthfulness of the words I write, please cure this person of his problem/illness, protect him/her, and love him/her.' At the end you write, 'There is no one who has surrounded things and who has more power than God.' So you see, the Qur'an is not organized in this way. If you carry the Qur'an, you are simply carrying a book -- the 'msahafu'. If you take a hirizi with you, then you carry protection.

"And besides," adds Mzee Ngara, "in Islam, one should not be careless with the Qur'an by toting it around." Thus belief and expertise are mutually constitutive forms of experience which underlie the practice of healing. However, this contrasts somewhat with the views of Bi Neema and Bi Dodo introduced in chapter five. For them, a person does not need expertise to make the hirizi; after all, it is the power of the aya itself that cures, not the practitioner who prepares it. All one needs is to trust in the power of faith.

b. Books from Arabia to Zanzibar: Political Implications in a Reversal of Fortune

In 1911, Carl Heinrich Becker published a detailed examination of numerous texts which comprised the libraries of at least six local "Muslim teachers" from Tanga, on the northern coast of Tanganyika (Becker in Martin 1968:44).²²⁶

Muhammad. Signaling deference to the prophet in this way also signals one's piety to the world.

²²⁶ Becker's findings were translated by B.G. Martin in an important article entitled "Materials for the Understanding of Islam in German East Africa", (Tanzanian Notes and Records, vol. 68, pp. 31-61). Martin introduces Becker as an accomplished orientalist of his day who

Becker's work, though not a study of texts in Zanzibar per se, lists and analyzes the titles of local and imported Arabic books which were available in the coastal regions at that time, and discusses the importance of these texts in the education, teaching, and edification of local Muslim intellectuals and practitioners there. Since all of the texts dealt in various ways with Islamic subjects, Becker organized them into the following categories:

"jurisprudence"; "religious doctrines"/"Qur'anic sciences"; "mawlidis and similar matters"; "mysticism and sufi brotherhoods"; "[Arabic] grammar and lexicography"; "tales and historical materials"; and "magic", that last of which he notes as the "most extensive." For Becker, these libraries were a significant find because they showed that the use of imported, printed Arabic texts was not limited to "Arabs who have immigrated", but extended also to "Swahilis, as can be seen from the notes of ownership."²²⁷ All the books, particularly those available in several copies, show the signs of hard use. There is manuscript material among

specialized in Egyptian Islamic history but who was also concerned with the potential impact of the spread of Islam in the German occupied territories. According to Martin, in 1910, these walimu had allegedly "come into conflict with the government" and had their libraries confiscated by German officials. Martin speculates that this conflict might have been related to the Mecca Letter Affair (see chapter two).

²²⁷ By "Swahilis" Becker means indigenous coastal Muslims.

them, which is largely magical literature. But most of it is printed" (Becker in Martin 1968:44).²²⁸

The floor of Bwana Shaafi's room was piled along the walls with old books and manuals in Arabic script. I asked him about the books.

"These are books on uganga, and uganga encompasses many subjects. There is astrology, divination, and medicinal cures. Inside of these, there is the 'spreading of letters' (*basit al-hurufi*), and inside of that, knowledge of 'the squares' (*awfaq*), and of the [Muslim] ruhani spirits (*aqsaam al-ruhania*). All of these texts were written in the distant past, outside of Zanzibar, and today the authors are mostly unknown.²²⁹ When they were brought here [from Arabia], many copies were made by hand. But today, people no longer trade in these books, and there are very few remaining. Also, Bwana Karume had many destroyed.²³⁰ But even in Arabia, they are no longer being written."

Bwaba Shaafi went on to explain what had happened in Arabia that put an end to the compilation of such texts, and

²²⁸ Some titles from the libraries of several of my informants include: Abu Maashara Al-Falaqi (on Astrology), Shamsul Al Maarifat-Alkubraa, Saatul-Khabar, Mambagh Husul Al-Hikma, Awfaq Al-Azali, Sirri, (The Secret), and Muluukil Jinni (The Kingdom of Jinns [spirits]). The dates and authors unknown, the texts are written in Arabic script in Arabic and Kiswahili. As one healer explained, "Each book is carefully written by someone with his own knowledge; each has its own techniques for curing, and they all work [in different ways]" (from Mzee Chuma, November 13, 1990).

²²⁹ Mzee Hasan explained that some of the uganga books originated in the days of the Prophet; these include the first duas that were recited for protection which were then written down and compiled with notation on which verses are best used to protect against illnesses of various kinds (visit with Mzee Hasan July 23, 1990).

²³⁰ See chapter 3. Bwana Shaafi comments that he was fortunate not to have been looted by Karume's forces.

why Arabs from countries of the Saudi peninsula now come to Zanzibar in search of local healers:

Even though it was the Arabs who brought us *ujuzi wa kitabu* [curative knowledge derived from texts] in the first place, now they come here to seek it out. The books containing this knowledge had come to be regarded as deceitful and became unavailable Arabuni. [This happened] with the emergence of the Wahabiy.²³¹ They were the denomination of the Saudi government which was extremely wealthy. They wanted to rid the country of all other branches of Islam. [So] they paid lots of money to send people to East Africa and South Africa to look for books that were not of the Wahabiy doctrine. They also bought uganga manuals, and then they burned them. Also, the books were sold by local people because they needed the money, without knowing the value or meaning of the books they were selling. This is one reason why these books are so scarce today, and why there are none in Arabia.²³²

Focusing his point on Oman, Mzee Ngara adds:

Our local cures -- those which rely on texts -- came originally from the Omanis many centuries ago. They were the ones who brought them to us. At that time, we only had medicinal cures from plants [*dawa ya kutumia miti shamba*]. However, when Oman became wealthy, they stopped learning these techniques. Today, only very few people are left [in Oman] who know these practices. So now, people come to Zanzibar [in search of cures]. Some Zanzibaris who go to Muscat, they tell people that there are still *matibabu ya vitabu* [cures using the old manuals] back in Zanzibar. And this is why so many Arabs come to Zanzibar for cures. They want it but there is none left in their own country, even though they were the ones who brought the books to us in the first place. I know

²³¹ The Wahabiy movement emerged with the teachings of Sheikh Muhamad Abd al-Wahab in the mid 18th century in Saudi Arabia. He believed Sunni Islam had to be purged of any and all changes in Islam since the tenth century (such as the development of Sufi practices and ideas). By the early 20th century, Wahabism was established as the religion of state by Ibn Saud.

²³² Interview with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1989.

one man, Saidi Ali Nassor, who goes back and forth to Oman with his practice -- he's a Pemban of Omani descent. Now people from Oman, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, they all come here. Even though today, people in Oman say they despise these backward practices, now that they have become wealthy and have little problems to disturb them. It is our good fortune that we manage these practices, especially since the Arabs are coming here to seek them out.²³³ Isn't it strange that long ago, they were the ones who taught us, and now they are the ones coming to us for the knowledge [maarif]? Even with all their new hospitals, they come here for cures.²³⁴

While not explicitly political in nature, these explanations of the loss of curative texts disclose the speakers' political sensitivities around wealth, control, and the consequences of religious orthodoxy. First, for Bwana Shaafi, the attempt by one sect or political cohort (such as the Saudi Wahabiys or even Karume's regime) to control the form, meaning, and uses of Islamic knowledge for all Muslims is ultimately an oppressive and destructive act. Shaafi also implies that social inequalities exacerbated the problem, since the Wahabiys had the power of the wealthy state behind them, while the poverty of others forced them to sell books because they had no other resources. Ngara's narrative runs in a similar vein. Here, wealth and

²³³ In particular, impotency and spirit problems were mentioned as some of the most common ailments for which Arabs from abroad sought treatment in Zanzibar. Waganga themselves also make trips abroad. As I discuss below, Mzee Hasan has travelled to Nairobi, Mombasa, and Dubai for spirit work, and was planning a trip to Muscat.

²³⁴ My interviews with Bwana Shaafi were informal, and Mzee Ngara, if present, was always free to contribute his own thoughts on the topics at hand.

modernity corrupts the Omanis, turns them against the Omani's own practices, which are now officially despised and dismissed as backward. But because such practices (such as healing with the Qur'an [by reading, drinking, or wearing ayas], or exorcising spirits and reversing magic spells) do continue to be popular among Omanis, they must now turn to Zanzibaris for assistance. Zanzibaris were the recipients or students of such knowledge in the past but today they are the experts whom the Omanis, despite all their wealth and resources, must consult for cures.

c. Shaafi's Career: Acquiring Knowledge

Bwana Shaafi completed Qur'an school as a child, then attended a government primary school through standard VIII. In his early twenties, he attended night school with the hope of becoming a teacher but was unable to complete his course due to a protracted illness. He later travelled to the Labor Office in Dar es Salaam and found work on the mainland until he again fell ill. After his recovery, Shaafi returned to Zanzibar and worked as a customs broker of cloves and copra.

During this time (the 1940s-1950s), Shaafi had been studying Islam, Arabic, and the repertoire of curative techniques described earlier as utibabu/uganga. When I asked him why he sought expertise in these fields of knowledge, he replied that he simply had the desire to learn, and that this, after all, "couldn't be a bad thing."

He smiled and added, "My father's father, God bless him, was also a healer, but I never knew this...I never even met the man. And his son, my father, he didn't study at all." While Shaafi asserts that he was inspired to learn by desire alone, the "coincidence" he relates about his own and his grandfather's vocation is left to stir the imagination.

Even though Shaafi names four teachers with whom he studied Islamic subjects over the years,²³⁵ he describes himself as largely "self-taught". I asked him if his elders had given him any assistance in his studies, or had been his teachers. "My elders were all as poor as you see me here now. It was only through my own determination that I have been able to study, up to today. Now, we [he and his colleagues] learn from each other; there are those more clever than myself, and those who know less. Morning, afternoon, and evening, you will find us together, studying at the mosque." This is "elimu kuitafuta" -- literally "knowledge to look for" -- knowledge that is sought deliberately and that takes one beyond the Qur'an school and the madrasa, and outside of the family.

But Shaafi's response indicates something more. While seeking knowledge is not contingent upon personal wealth, Shaafi also argues that religion cannot be "steadied", it

²³⁵ One of his teachers was "Bi Mkubwa" (Mwanasha Suleiman), also from Kiembe Samaki, introduced in chapter five. He may mean here that it was in his pursuit of uganga that he was largely self-taught.

cannot be "put right" (*haitengenei*) or properly practiced unless a person has food, clothing, and a decent place to live:

Yes, one can study, and pray from the heart, that's one thing. But if you are worrying about your next meal, trying to find work, or if your wage barely pays...is this the way to live? Even when the government is given assistance by wealthy Arab nations, it is not obliged to pass it on the poor; many of us have never seen such assistance.²³⁶

For Shaafi, religious faith and the pursuit of knowledge does not float above the material conditions of life; while Islamic faith may provide some comfort to the poor, Islamic practice is necessarily compromised by the physical and temporal restrictions imposed by poverty.

After the revolution in 1964, Shaafi's license to conduct business at the customs house was confiscated by the government. Curiously, however, it was during this time that he began to gain recognition for his curative practices. "Suddenly," he recalls, "people started coming from all over; through word of mouth, their numbers increased. In this way my knowledge of *utibabu* and its techniques became greater with practical experience, through trial and error. I also worked on expanding my knowledge of Arabic," which, as he explained later, is necessary for studying and interpreting the Qur'an and for preparing the most effective cures.

²³⁶ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1989.

Today, Shaafi's days are split between teaching, leading prayers, and giving lectures in the mosque, and consulting with patients and clients in the privacy of his home. In the mosque, he teaches religious jurisprudence (fiqh), Arabic grammar and word structure, Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), and aspects of the doctrine of the Oneness of God (Tawhid). He adds emphatically that he does not teach uganga.

"What is important is knowledge of the eternal afterlife, of God, and how to praise him in this life. One must know how to pray properly, one must learn about purity, defilement, and ablutions, how and why we give alms, fast, and are asked to make the pilgrimage. But uganga is only temporal knowledge, it is of this world and it is effective only in the here and now. If someone is especially eager to learn these techniques, he would have to be a polite, kind-hearted soul, one who is not lustful of women, who is honest and trustworthy, and who would never use this knowledge to hurt others. Only then would I allow someone to apprentice with me."

Shaafi resists teaching even his own son, who is eager to learn. "If a person with such knowledge is weak, greedy, or covetous, he could use this knowledge to deceive others for his own gain. This is sinful behavior, and thus very dangerous [utapata dhambi]." The theme of morality and intentionality discussed earlier is most evident here.

In this vein, Shaafi explained that his callers do not pay him a fee (*ujira*) for his assistance, but give him a gratuity (*bahashishi*) instead. This is their way of showing thanks for the time and effort he expended, even if he was unsuccessful in curing the ailment. It is an exchange that

formally recognizes Shaafi for his expertise. This is the convention when consulting any fundi, or sheikh, in Zanzibar.²³⁷ Those fundis who do demand, or indicate up front what they expect in return for their services are usually dismissed as imposters or charlatans (*laghai*), and make poor reputations for themselves.

When discussing the question of "reputation" with Shaafi, I got the impression that he felt his own expertise was undervalued. "Take me, for example," he remarked.

"Many people come here [to see me], but I tell you, they surprise me. They don't realize that a person like me could possibly have the amount of knowledge that I have....Right up to the government, they don't recognize who I am [what knowledge I possess]. So it is mostly people who are themselves involved in the vocation who are able to recognize [this expertise].

He continues:

Just recently, a Sudanese named Abdulqadir came to me, he was looking for 'ilm za tib [knowledge of cures, uganga/utabibu] and 'ilm za nyota [knowledge of the stars, falaki]. He told me that when he was in Dubai, he met a man who referred him to me, here in Zanzibar. So he travelled all the way to Zanzibar and tracked me down. Eventually he came to my home and studied. [One day] he asked me, 'How much does the government pay you [for your skills]?' I told him that even though he had heard of me from as far away as

²³⁷ Mzee Chuma used the term *sadaka* to describe the fee he received from patients. This term has a more Islamic nuance, since *sadaka* is the term used for the alms Muslims give to the poor as one of the five pillars of Islam. The most common term I heard (and which I used myself when showing gratitude to informants with gifts) is "*ubani*". "*Hebu, kubali ubani wako*" means "please accept this gift" (or, literally, your "customary due". See chapter two, where *ubani* is discussed as the customary tribute paid by rural households in the form of millet).

Dubai, the government here knew nothing of the expertise I possess."²³⁸

Although Shaafi insists that those who really know what expertise is are those who are learned or involved in learning themselves, he is still resentful that he is not as "recognized" as he feels he ought to be.²³⁹ It is as though the undervaluing of his expertise is more a function of his lack of the elitest symbols that in some ways continue to signify status and learning -- pedigree, authority, and to a lesser extent, wealth. In other words, his lack of wider recognition may be understood as a function of the ignorance of others, especially, of the government. Indeed, while being poor may well impede one's spiritual and intellectual development, as Shaafi stated above, it does not follow that one's simplicity of means reflects simplicity in the knowledge that one possesses.

²³⁸ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, January 3, 1990

²³⁹ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, January 3, 1990. This attitude contrasts with Bwana Zuri, who was excessively modest: "I can't imaging why so many people come here to see me, I don't really know anything...", or with Hajji's and Hussein's rather self-confident demeanor that their expertise was simply indispensable to others. Perhaps, relatively speaking, Bwana Shaafi was financially less secure than the others, but I do not know this for a fact.

III. Mzee Hasan: The Spirits' Interlocutor

God created man of fermented clay, dried tinkling
hard like earthen ware, and created jinns
[spirits] from the white-hot flame of fire.²⁴⁰

a. Spirits in Zanzibar

Spirits in Zanzibar are highly differentiated beings.

Some spirits are Muslims, while others are not:

... 'We [jinns] have heard the wondrous Qur'an,

Which guides to the right path; and we have come
to believe in it, and will not associate any one
with our Lord.

We realized that we could not weaken the power of
God on earth, nor outpace Him by running away.

Some of us have come to submission, and some of us
are iniquitous.'"²⁴¹

Spirits are independent and volitional creatures who can and often do enter into relationships with humans. They are broadly referred to as *mashetani*, *majinni*, or *pepo*, or *mashetani ya kichwa* (the spirits of the head).²⁴² Many spirits enjoy human companionship and sometimes manipulate humans for their own purposes. As Linda Giles writes, "a spirit can be inherited, it may simply like a person and

²⁴⁰ Chapter 55 ("Al-Rahman"), verses 14-15, in Al-Qur'an, a contemporary translation by Ahmed Ali, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1984).

²⁴¹ Al-Qur'an, chapter 72 ("The Jinns"), verses 1, 2, 12, and 14.

²⁴² These are distinguished from *mizimu*, or spirits of the dead and of the ancestors. *Mzimu* (singular) is also the name of a site where people might pray and make offerings to *mizimu* and other place spirits (often at the seashore, a cave, a large tree, or a ruin).

want him/her as its associate, it may possess anyone who passes its haunts (trees, rocks, caves, the seashore) or it may be sent through witchcraft to harm someone" (Giles 1987:240). Spirits can tempt or force an individual to do things she/he normally wouldn't do; they can also cause illness and malaise. But spirits can also protect humans from the malicious acts of other humans or spirits. Mzee Hasan explained that in Pemba, some people actually keep a *shetani* in their homes as a "pet" (*wanamfuga*), feeding and caring for it, like they would a cat. This is because "a spirit can be helpful in one's business, or be employed to do something on behalf of the person who cares for it, like possess someone on request."²⁴³

Spirits are differentiated by types, each of which is distinguished by certain characteristics. For instance, a *kibwengo* is a small and harmless spirit that is bothersome but causes little damage to humans. The *subiani* is large and very dangerous to humans, while the *ruhani* spirit is a Muslim spirit who is attracted to all sorts of pious invocations, such as prayer, *zikiri*,²⁴⁴ and Qur'anic recitations, and who loves cleanliness, rosewater, and frankincense. There are individual personality differences among spirits as well. For instance, some *ruhani* may demand

²⁴³ Interview with Mzee Hasan, June 20, 1990, Zanzibar Town.

²⁴⁴ Recollection of God through repeated invocation of His names.

that their *viti* (their human "chairs" or hosts) become more pious, while other *ruhani* may be remiss in performing their ritual duties. Spirits are also individuals with their own names, likes and dislikes, families, languages, places of origin, and life histories.²⁴⁵ Indeed, the needs and exploits of spirits keep the *waganga* who work with them in significant demand on the islands.²⁴⁶

Belief in the existence of spirits is widespread in Zanzibar, and for the most part transcends class, ethnic, and gender differences. However, while their existence is

²⁴⁵ The material presented in this section focuses on one particular *mganga* and his practice. For a thorough social and historical analysis of spirits and possession in Zanzibar, the Swahili coast, and the Comoro Islands, see Linda Giles, "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-examination of Theories of Marginality" in *Africa* vol. 57, no. 2, 1987, and Michael Lambeck, Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For a psychodynamic analysis of possession, see Vincent Crapanzano, The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), and, especially, Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). My own portrait of Seyyid Silima in chapter six and the sketch below of Sahar were inspired by Crapanzano's treatment of Tuhami. For a phenomenological approach that also challenges the theory of marginality, see Janice Boddy, Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan (1989 Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

²⁴⁶ One friend explained to me why Americans are not bothered by spirits. "It is not that there are no spirits in America," he said. "Spirits go everywhere. It is because Americans don't believe in them like Zanzibaris do" He continued, explaining to me that "...spirits like to be entertained." They go where they are recognized, "where people know their names and how to call them, where people can be manipulated to feed them, give them treats, or to be their friends". In effect, then, spirits simply feel ignored by Americans, and they do not stay where they are ignored."

largely undisputed, attitudes differ widely regarding how people should, or should not, deal with them. "Spirits are our kin", explains Bwana Zuri. At the same time, however, he does not want to get entangled with patients who may be suffering from them.

"I could call spirits, but I prefer not to. They make such noise when they speak, and I don't like it. So I don't do it. If someone comes here and wants me to handle their spirit, I tell them to go to someone who deals with spirits. I have nothing against spirits, they're our kin. Only if you make them angry will they trouble you, make you ill, annoy you.

Nor does he look favorably upon spirit calling sessions, or *ngoma*:

...All that chaos, what with the singing and drumming and whatever else it is they do; I don't know what people get out of it. It's not my work, and I have no interest in it.

However, contrary to Zuri's view, becoming involved with spirits is rarely constructed as a willful act. Spirits are capricious, insistent creatures with varied needs and interests, and it is most difficult to ignore or resist a spirit that is attracted to you, and that is set on making itself known to you. Only the Prophet Muhammad has the power to truly resist the call of spirits. This is because, as both Bwana Shaafi and Sheikh Bakathiri explained, the angel Gibriil (Gabriel) took the "*kibao cha shetani*" (the spirit board) out of Mtume's heart so that he could not be

tempted.²⁴⁷ In fact, while men do get possessed by spirits, it is predominantly women who find themselves inadvertently entering into relationships with them. Mzee Hasan, a spirit specialist, explains why this is so:

Women have lots of worldly problems. A woman can easily recognize her own weakness. Jinns "wear" men just as they "wear" women, but men will not accept that the problem or illness originates with a jinn until he has exhausted all medical possibilities which he has thoroughly researched. It is easy to trouble women, however, because they are always talking to each other about their womanly problems. The way of women is to talk. A woman will talk to three or four people, saying, 'ah! I was like this and that but then I went to so-and-so and I was cured [the spirit was driven out].' But if a man even talks to his friends about any problems or illnesses they will simply say, 'maybe you have the flu.' Perhaps his elders may think his problem is not something for the hospital, and they'll try to take him to someone [a mganga] for help. Many men are afflicted by spirits, but they are stubborn and refuse to accept this; only as a last resort, after all other medicines have failed....

In a way Hasan's explanation reiterates an Islamic construction of female sexuality that underlies the ideology of hijab, that is, wearing concealing over-garments in public.²⁴⁸ Since women are inherently emotional and volatile, they cannot have full control over their sexuality. They are not as strong willed as men are, thus they are too easily enticed and entranced. Moreover, if

²⁴⁷ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, July 19 1990; Interview with Maalim Bakathiri, May 11, 1989, Zanzibar Town.

²⁴⁸ Hijab refers not only to clothing but also to the act of staying secluded in the home, a practice which few Zanzibari women follow today. I take up the issue of hijab in chapter eight.

women cannot control the power of their own sexuality, they may inadvertently attract men and even spirits (many spirits do take human women as spouses, and discourage or disallow to marry men). Thus women must have their modesty controlled for them, that is, by concealing their bodies from the gaze of unrelated men.

In a similar vein, Hasan explains why he prefers his assistants to be men rather than women. He has four reasons. First, women are simply too easily influenced by the shetani, and can be taken over by them in a healing session. Second, women cannot separate themselves from the problems of their women friends. Third, men simply have more physical strength to deal with the spirits than women. This is indeed important, since spirits often cause the *kiti* (the spirit's "chair", or host) to writhe and convulse uncontrollably, and they need to be held down. Sometimes, several assistants are needed to "pull" the spirit from the *kiti*. And fourth, men are freer to come and go at night, to be called in at a moment's notice or to assist in the daily routines of the *mganga*'s work. Indeed, at Hasan's house, many patients come and go throughout the day, and he often attended to several patients at one time in different rooms. But during the day, according to Hasan, women are busy with housework and children.

However, while this may be true for Hasan's practice, women are involved in the work of calling spirits at many

levels, not only as patients (or *viti*). Women are in fact *wasaidizi* or assistants, usually to the *mganga* who called and exorcised their own spirits in the past. Such women may come to constitute a *mganga's* spirit group, and they are called upon when the *mganga* needs assistance with a new patient. Moreover, there are many women who are *waganga* in their own right, and who possess expertise in spirit songs and who play a central role in the social organization and activities of their own spirit cult.

Finally, as Linda Giles points out in her extensive study of the various spirit possession cults throughout the Swahili coast (1987), these cults are far from "peripheral" to "mainstream" society. Besides being highly entertaining to participants and spectators alike, involvement in spirit cults can also be a means for gaining status and authority both within and outside the context of the cults; cults also create close "familial" ties and social networks among participants, and they constitute an arena in which both women and men "interact together on equal footing" (Giles 1987:246-248). But I think Giles' most interesting finding is that the identities, social relations, and narratives or "texts" (spirit songs and discourse) that get expressed in these cults constitute symbolic reflections of and commentaries upon the cosmopolitan social and political

history of Zanzibar, and the Swahili coast generally (pg. 249).²⁴⁹

There is one point I'd like to add here. Even though both Giles and Topan (whom she cites) argue that spirit cults and Islam "are not opposed in the minds of many people but indeed form a single integrated system of belief,"²⁵⁰ they still seem to assume that unlike the cults, Islam constitutes a seamless, monolithic discourse expressive of a "staunchly moral universe" (pg. 250). In other words, in deconstructing the spirit cults, these authors inadvertently reify Islam as an undifferentiated set of ideas that all Muslims adhere to and understand in the same way. In fact, individuals experience contradictions, ambivalence, and compromise in their lives as "Muslims".²⁵¹ Even societal

²⁴⁹For instance, Giles writes, "Many of the spirits are representations of Swahili conceptions of various groups which have impinged on Swahili experience throughout history: Somali, Arab, Galla, Maasai, Mijikenda, and even European. (European spirits are not currently as common as others, yet one finds people with German spirits in Tanga; European spirits with aircraft and submarines in Makunduchi, Zanzibar; and, within Zanzibar Town itself, the Malagasy-Comorian Kibuki cult which involves the spirits of hard-drinking European Catholic priests)" (1987:249). This is wonderful stuff.

²⁵⁰ This is Giles (1987:230) paraphrasing Topan (1971).

²⁵¹ See, for instance, Giles' anecdote about a Qur'an school teacher in Tanga who "underwent initiation in several cults" (pg. 246). "'I refused to be initiated for a long time. I felt it would be shameful. But I finally went along with it because I was ill and could not get well otherwise.' After being initiated he continued to teach in the Koranic school but also began to practice as a spirit medium. The head teacher of the Koran school did object to his initiation, observing that sometimes one had no alternative

definitions of Islamic authority and moral propriety can range from the literal to the more impressionistic (see chapter eight).

b. Hasan's Career

In addition to his work as an mpungaji (a spirit caller) in Zanzibar, Mzee Hasan has travelled to Nairobi, Mombasa and Dubai to assist patients with difficulties caused by spirits. I met Hasan through a young woman in my neighborhood named Najma who had two spirits of her own to contend with. At the time, Najma was living with her grandmother and two aunts, and was having a great deal of trouble getting along with them. She was 17, and had just moved to Zanzibar from Dubai, where she had been living with her father and step-mother. Hasan had diagnosed her condition, identified her spirits, and was continuing to play the role of her spirits' interlocutor.

Hasan was born in Charawe, a rural village in the central region of Unguja (Zanzibar island). His family is descended from the mainland, from a place called Kisarawe, which, according to Hasan, is how the village got its name. Hasan moved to Zanzibar town with his parents when he was

if one was to get well." This head teacher then went on to tell the story of "a renowned sheikh who did not believe in spirits but found that, whenever he tried to pray, the spirits made him need to urinate, thus making him ritually unclean. In the end he relented and was initiated into the spirit cult concerned" (pg. 246).

still a child. He is now in his mid-fifties, married with children, and lives in Kitukuu, a neighborhood in Ng'ambo just behind the Michanzani Flats. [add stuff on meeting him].

Hasan completed Qur'an school as a child, then continued his studies in madrasa. Here he studied the hadith -- about Muhammad's deeds, teachings, and injunctions; he learned about the prophesy, that it was "genuine and true", and about the messages which were descended in the revelations. He read the Qur'an in its entirety, in Arabic, and learned what is "forbidden and required by God." In addition to his madrasa education, Hasan's father instructed him in *dini ya kiislamu*, the Islamic religion. Hasan recalls that it was his father who provided him with the most guidance regarding Islam.

Hasan's study of uganga began within the family. His paternal grandmother, and maternal grandfather were both waganga. "Later," he recalls, he studied with his *baba wa kupanga* (a fictive father) in Pemba. For the most part, however, Hasan explains that

if you are taught uganga, it is because it is there in your family. When it is practiced around you, you are obliged to watch and understand what is being done. These *masomo* [lessons] are your *mambo ya kijadi* [patrimony]. My elders inherited their knowledge from their ancestors.²⁵²

²⁵² From interview with Mzee Hasan at his home in Zanzibar Town, June 20, 1990.

However, Hasan emphasizes that something else was going on in his psyche that encouraged him to become a mganga, something extraordinary.

First, I used to experience strange things. I'd feel like I was a lizard or some other animal. Then, I'd be able to predict things. I'd imagine that a person died, and indeed I'd learn later that he did. Then, when I'd sleep, spirits would come to me in my dreams and discuss their likes and dislikes with me, what made them sick and what medicines they responded to, how to write a kombe that appealed especially to them. These were things that were different from the understandings I received from my elders.

Indeed, Hasan prefers to use the spirits themselves to assist him in his cures and in his spirit calling sessions. There are books on how to write kombe, he explains, and on how to use certain ayas for certain types of illnesses. He inherited these uganga books from his elders.²⁵³ "But books can be wrong," he exclaims. "[This is why] I prefer to use the mashetani themselves. They tell you where they are from, their origin, where they live, what type of jinn they are...what they like -- drums, or special songs." Moreover, he continued, spirits can assist in finding cures for patients who are ill but not because of the spirits themselves.

If you fail at a cure, you can ask them and they will help you to understand -- 'this is the problem,' or 'you've missed something here', or 'there's something inside the body that is causing

²⁵³ Hasan said that "in the past, people wanted to use these books for taking revenge on their enemies; but the elders did not want the books used for harming others, so they buried them."

the problem'. ...This is because some spirits themselves have special techniques of *kiganga* [curing]. They understand plants, and how they can be used in combination with a catalyst which the patient takes to get better.

In addition to using the spirits, Hasan continues to acquire knowledge by exchanging ideas with other fundis (*tunapeana maarifa*), and by borrowing and taking notes on their books. I asked him if he ever consulted with sheikhs (Islamic scholars and teachers) in any of his work. He remarked, rather vaguely, that their work was indeed different -- "I am here alone, they are there."²⁵⁴ Then he continued, explaining that

"Sometimes, I must get help from the sheikhs for things like *kisomo* [the protracted, intensive reading sessions for calling a *shetani*]. For this reason, it is necessary that there is cooperation between sheikhs and *waganga*.

Hasan's work is important to him. It is his main source of livelihood, and he has been involved in it most of his adult life. In the past, Hasan had studied industrial planning, particularly the clothing industry, but was vague about why that petered out. Still, he emphasized how important it was to study. He's since been involved in some small businesses activities (again he is very vague), but today it is his *uganga* practice -- and his interest in expanding it -- that takes up most of his time.

²⁵⁴ Hasan has several apprentices assisting him in his practice, so he does not mean he is actually alone in his work. Instead, this may have been more an intimation of modesty, simplicity, even vulnerability in God's greater scheme of things.

One evening Hasan stopped by my place to ask for a copy of the recording I had made of his spirit calling session. He told me that he had been invited to go to Muscat by some Omanis whom he had treated here in Zanzibar not long ago. Now some of their friends and relations who are having difficulties with mashetani are inviting Hasan to travel to Muscat. He explained that while Oman may have some waganga, they do not have any good "*fundi maalumu*" or specialists who deal specifically with spirits. Thus he is developing a good reputation there by having helped Omanis here.²⁵⁵ A week later Bi Mashavu and I dropped by Hasan's to give him cassette copies of the spirit ngoma I had made (described below). Along the way, we met Najma in the road. She was on her way to see Hasan, too. We arrived at Hasan's together. As the four of us sat listening to the tape, Najma started to stare blankly into space, and began to reel a little. Hasan explained quietly that it was her spirit passing by because it was attracted to the spirit songs that were playing back on the tape recorder. Najma came to after a few moments but was still dull and expressionless. Hasan was happy with the results of the tape, and told me that he wanted to send it to Aden, in the Hadramawt (southern Yemen). He said he knew a man there with shetani problems who liked to listen to these sorts of spirit songs. At the same time, Hasan was using the cassette as a "demo" tape

²⁵⁵ Visit July 3, 1990

with which to promote his spirit calling practice internationally.

Hasan has many patients locally. Those whom he has cured recommend his services to others who are suffering from similar shetani problems. "They tell stories about how I helped them...a person's reputation grows in this way." While sitting with Bi Mashavu, Najma and Hasan sat in the front room of his house (the back rooms and courtyard were used for his practice), three well-dressed Indian women entered, greeted us and proceeded to the back. Bi Mashavu leaned over to me and whispered that the women "must be Hasan's guests, not his patients." But Mzee Hasan overheard the comment and corrected her, saying that these women also had shetani problems. We were a little embarrassed. "You think only Waswahili are affected by spirits?" he laughed. "All sorts of people have shetani... Sometimes a Christian will get a Muslim shetani who wants his/her kiti to convert to Islam."

c. Islamic Symbolism in Spirit Calling Sessions

Reading from the Qur'an, a virtuous act in itself, is a good way to clear one's space of wandering spirits. And yet there are some spirits (like the ruhani) who are actually quite attracted to recitations from the Qur'an. Thus while in some contexts the Qur'an may secure safty from (usually "pagan") spirits, Qur'anic recitation, together with other

Islamic discursive practices (dua, zikiri) and symbols (rosewater, zam zam water²⁵⁶, and incense) can also be used by wapungaji (spirit waganga) to call and communicate with spirits.

One afternoon, Bi Mashavu and I accompanied Najma to her spirit-calling session at Hasan's. When we arrived, we learned that at least eight other women were there to have their spirits called together. Bi Mashavu was frightened of spirits, so she watched from the doorway of the room in which the ngoma was taking place, while I sat amongst the women with Najma, taping the session, and occasionally greeted a spirit who noticed my presence and demanded to know who I was.

The viti (women) were gathered together, kneeling on the floor, their kangas over their heads. Hasan's assistants wafted them with udi (incense) under their kangas, and zamzam water was sprinkled on their heads. Husans began the song. Then the women joined in, and Husan's assistants began the zikiri, intoning *Wahh-al-LAH! Wahh-al-LAH!*...in the next room, one of the assistants was preparing kombe -- writing a Qur'anic passage in Arabic on a plate with saffron ink. He worked slowly and carefully, and

²⁵⁶ This is water taken from a well near the Great Mosque in Mecca which is thought to have healing properties. Zamzam water is drunk by pilgrims in Mecca. It is thought to be the water that miraculously appeared to Hajar, the prophet Isma'il's mother, after being cast out into the desert by Ibrahim (Abraham). Many pilgrims take bottles of zamzam water with them on their return home.

explained, "one of the jinns really likes this aya; when the kiti drinks it, the jinn will be happy and stop causing her trouble."²⁵⁷

"Zikiri is one way of calling those spirits that like it," Hasan explains to me later. "It increases their excitement, their *mori* [great ferocity, bravery]. But some Muslim spirits don't like zikiri, they prefer other songs. These songs would be [and he sings],

'*Mtoto wa jinn kapanda farsi!*' [the jinn's child rides the steed]... or

'*Nabii Suleimani katunga vitabu aina kwa aina!*' [the Prophet Suleiman writes books of all kinds]...., or

'*Lina mianga wee kuba la Mtume linamuanga!*' [the tomb of the Prophet has many lights]....

"These are all songs that would attract Muslim spirits," he continued. "Any Muslim spirit -- if you sing [about] those things which are associated with Islam -- they will be filled with excitement and happiness." In addition to the "feel" of Islam these songs conjure, they also have special meanings to the jinns themselves. "When we sing

'*Shailula, wee, Shailula wee, mtoto wa Ruhani wee, natokea huko Jidah Manga nambiwa nidondoe maua...*' [Shailula, oh, you Shailula, child of the Ruhani spirit, I appear in Jidah, and am told to pick the flowers],

we are asking for the blessing of the Jinn by calling the name of Shailula, the child of Ruhani. In fact you are

²⁵⁷ Spirit calling session (*ngoma*), attended on June 18, 1990 at Mzee Hussein's house in Zanzibar Town.

naming the relationship between the two jins. By invoking this relationship you meet the jinn, who comes quickly because you have sung its shetani song. In this way you cause the spirit to mount the head [of the kiti], and she will begin to sway." Sometimes, Hasan explains, the spirits will answer before they appear themselves, as in the following song: '*Siji, wee, kwani wee nizinguiwa na maji ya mtoni!*', which means that the spirit wants to come but he/she²⁵⁸ is far away, and is surrounded by the rushing water of a stream, so he/she will be late to arrive.

d. Najma's Story

When a person comes to Hasan with a problem, Hussein begins the consultation, not the patient. "First you [the practitioner] must yourself figure out why this person is here; then you explain the patient's situation to her/him. After he/she agrees, then you begin to find a method for curing that harmonizes with the problem; you dispense medicines, you pray for them dua, you prepare an ngoma."

In a sense, then, the patient's experience and the healer's diagnosis of the problem inform each other -- that is, they are mutually constituted knowledges, not discrete categories separated by the inequality of expertise which defines most doctor/patient relationships. This does not

²⁵⁸ Spirits belong to the animate noun class, the pronouns of which do not denote gender.

mean that the healer has no more knowledge of illness and curing than the patients s/he treats. It means that at least in cases of spirit possession, the treatment of illness and distress is negotiated largely through the dialogue that emerges between patient and practitioner, and by the cultural ideas about illness that give meaning to the experiences of affliction that these dialogues address.

Hasan explained that when people begin to experience physical or emotional problems which they did not bring upon themselves, the first thing to be affected is their "*nafsi*" -- their sense of self -- and they become afraid. "Fear troubles people, so first we have to get rid of a person's fear, this is very important." Indeed, in Najma's view, Hasan was a careful listener, and made her feel at ease. By treating the spirits, Najma and Hasan created a discursive context through which Najma's issues of affliction, affection and argument could be articulated and explored. The following is not an account of possession per se, but rather of one young woman's experience growing up. The story is not intended to be "representative" of women who get possessed; I recount it here in order to demonstrate how spirits can enter into the lives of individuals, and how spirit and human narratives are interwoven and come to constitute a single story or personal history. The account is a compilation of information narrated to me by Hasan and Najma in separate visits with them both.

Najma is seventeen years old and was born in Zanzibar. When she was ten, her parents divorced and she was taken to Dubai with her father, who re-married there. Najma's biological mother had three spirits herself. Two had possessed her on their own volition, the third was "thrown" at her by someone else to harm her. Najma watched when her mother's spirits came to her. Today Najma is troubled by two spirits, one from her mother (Kibuki wa Sultani), who died 2 years ago, the other from her step-mother (Sultan wa Kahtani wa Sharif), who threw her out of the house in Dubai last year.

Najma had been feeling unwell for the last three years -- light-headed, with pains in the chest. She was taken to the hospital and seen by doctors who over and over again said there was nothing wrong with her. When she returned to Zanzibar, she continued to feel as though she carried a great weight on her back, all the time, and her stomach was in pain. She moaned and cried, and told her grandmother that maybe she was suffering from "kijicho", and she replied, "Don't say such things!" Finally, it was her brother who brought Mzee Hasan to see her. To Najma's amazement, Hasan was able to discern her problems by studying the palm of her hand -- why she had returned to Zanzibar, and the pain she had been suffering. He determined that she had a shetani, but it hadn't yet identified itself. He said it was a good

and helpful spirit, which caused her to run away from her father in Dubai because he treated her terribly.

In Dubai, Najma's father wanted her to marry a rich man he had chosen for her, but she refused. "You cannot control my life, I will not sacrifice my life for you, I will marry whomever I want!" she exclaimed. She told me that her father spoils her step-brothers and sisters terribly, as well as her older brother. He gives them money and chocolate, but never, ever affection, guidance or discipline -- just things. She says they fight, she and her father, and that he beats her. Her step-mother tells her brother to spy on her, then they collude and tell her father who beats her and tells her she is not his daughter, out of anger, just to hurt her. She is resentful of her older brother, who is "so talented with his hands, he can build radios, bicycles, but he has no ambition!". Instead, he just tells her, "One day I will inherit all of Father's money!" Najma is disgusted with him, saying, "If I had the opportunity you have to work in a garage, to learn new things, I'd take it; but I can't, as a woman, I'm not permitted."

And so it was her mother's spirit that gave Najma the strength to endure all this. It was sent to protect her, and to keep her from becoming desperate and killing herself which she had already tried to do four times.

Najma also complains of trouble at her home in town. Her aunts and grandmother fight with her all the time. They

say she is "*maluni*" (cursed) and a "*malaya*" (a prostitute), a loose woman with no shame, respect, or modesty. Indeed, Najma enjoys wearing revealing clothing and flirting with men. She's known by the men in the area, whom she visits at night ("We are friends!", she says). She's been told by her protective spirit (Kibuki wa Sultani) to stop this behavior, not to go out with men like this. "But I must go out!" she cries.

When Najma returned to see Mzee Hasan a second time, the second spirit spoke (Sultan wa Kahtani), threatening that he would make Najma refuse any marriage proposals, and cause her pain if she didn't. Then he said he would agree to leave her alone if they gave him a goat, a plate of tasty treats (*chano*), a turban, and a ring.

However, Najma's aunts and grandmother insist that she does not have any spirits, and will not help her to attend to them. The *shetani* have demanded assistance from her aunts, that they attend the "*dawa*" sessions ("medicine" or spirit calling sessions) and help to prepare *chano*, but they adamantly refuse. They are frightened. The *mashetani* are angered by people who scorn, insult, or despise them; they will not tolerate it. Consequently, they've caused Najma's youngest nephew to be a sickly child. On the day of the "*dawa*" session, Bi Mashavu and I accompanied Najma instead, but to the spirits, we were only empty "names", we didn't really count since we were not family. The *mashetani*

believe that humans should value their relations with them as family members, and insist on being involved in the affairs of their viti.

At the time I left Zanzibar, Najma was still living with her grandmother and aunts, and continuing to see Mzee Hasan. Najma is an ambitious young woman and has plans for her life. She wants to study other languages, have her own house, maybe even open up a home for wayward children; she wants to learn how to do this right. She also wants to be a good wife to someone, but not yet. Her plan is to leave Zanzibar and move in with some relatives in Dar es Salaam. Perhaps there, her spirits will find the recognition they desire.

e. At the Fairgrounds: A Parody of Spirit Possession

While spirit possession is a serious a problem for some individuals, Zanzibaris can have fun with it as well. Besides the amusement some people take in telling and listening to stories of spirits, this fun is also expressed through satire, a mode of commentary in which the audience's sense of distance from, and familiarity with, spirit possession are played off each other through humor.

Every year, the end of Ramadhan is celebrated with three days of festivities and party-going. As part of the celebration, the Zanzibari government sponsors a large fair in town, which includes rides, games, food, and

entertainment. One area of the fairgrounds is reserved for the performance of various "*ngoma za kienyeji*", that is, traditional song and dance pieces representing forms of local cultural expression from all over Zanzibar and Pemba. Included among these were several short theatrical plays or skits. Each performance was partitioned off with large sections of burlap, creating a line of three-sided enclosures which people strolling by could view with ease.

In one enclosure, the players were performing a skit about a *mganga*, a *kiti*, and her *shetani*. It attracted a large audience which was convulsed with laughter. All the performers were men. In the skit, the *mganga* was all dressed up in a "tribal" costume -- a sort of grass skirt which *waganga* do not wear.²⁵⁹ The *kiti* was seated on the ground with a *kanga* draped over her. The most conventional signifiers of a spirit's demands were present: the *chano* (a spirit's food treats), and the ring (many spirits do in fact demand that their *kiti* procure a ring for them). The *mganga* was telling the spirit to go back to where it came from, and to stop tormenting its *kiti*. Then the *mganga* pulled the spirit out of the *kiti*, only to become possessed by it himself! Next, a second *mganga* entered the scene to pull the spirit from his colleague. Finally, a third *mganga* appeared on stage and theatrically released the spirit from

²⁵⁹ In actuality, some *waganga* do wear special clothing for their work -- but not grass skirts.

the second mganga.²⁶⁰ The audience was delighted, as the performers played the waganga comically, in slap-stick fashion. For the grande finale, a ten-foot shetani appeared on stage, dressed in white, wearing a suit jacket and a tie, with horns on its head, blazing red eyes, and a fierce grin (one man was balanced on another's shoulders). The shetani danced around and around to the rhythmic beat of the drums, and together, the three waganga commanded it to be gone. The play ended in this way. The audience (men and women) enjoyed it immensely, although there were some children peering between the legs of adults, not quite sure whether to laugh or be frightened.

This Zanzibari satire constitutes a stereotyped rendition of the basic features of spirit-calling sessions: the kiti was a woman; the spirit desired chano and a gold ring; and in a dramatic struggle, the waganga succeeded in chasing away the spirit. It is a performance that manages to condense a range of Zanzibari feelings and attitudes around spirit possession -- curiosity, fear, excitement, disdain, familiarity -- which permits a vantage point that mediates between the real and the imagined, and between deliberate cultural parody and cultural reproduction. That is, from the vantage point of humor, Zanzibaris play it both ways.

²⁶⁰ This does happen at some spirit calling sessions. For instance, I witnessed this at Sahar's ngoma with Mzee Hussein and his assistants.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

The ways in which these healers have managed their careers is similar to most strategies for living in Zanzibar town today. All the practitioners discussed in this chapter have had other occupations during the course of their lives (this is also true of most of the sheikhs discussed throughout this study -- Sheikhs Rashidi Salim, Muhammad Latif, Abdulwahab, and Khamisi Jafar). One's expertise may be inherited like patrimony, or learned by choice as a career, which may not occur until later in life (as we saw with Bwana Shaafi).

Bwana Zuri, for instance, now eighty years old, went to government schools and as a young man studied agriculture under the supervisions of British agricultural officers. As an Omani (born in Zanzibar), Zuri may well have enjoyed the privileges which were open to Arabs, especially during the earlier phase of the colonial period. Zuri eventually turned to work in his own shamba and raised cattle and donkeys for selling meat and milk products. He did not come to study utibabu until he was "middle aged", as he put it. Several of Zuri's elders were matabibu, but he also apprenticed with sheikhs outside of his family. Thus Bwana Zuri says he "retired" into the work of utabibu -- that is, in his late forties. It is likely that Zuri's Omani descent may continue to make a difference, since, as Bwana Ngara's

earlier discussion of the books implies, the "original" authors of some of the uganga texts were Omanis.²⁶¹

Still, determining the actual class position of these various practitioners is difficult, partly because class position itself is indefinite. As discussed in chapter three, the majority of Zanzibaris in town survive by working multiple jobs, and by being involved in a network of relationships through which access to both social and material resources (such as a shamba in the countryside) can be maintained. This does not mean there are no avenues for individuals to accumulate wealth. But at least among the people with whom I worked, one must use one's connections to create options and avenues for one's livelihood ("*kutafuta maisha*", that is, literally, to look for life [make a living]). These connections may be as far afield as Oman, as with Bwana Zuri, who has family living there; or in Shaafi's case, just as far as Tanga, on the Tanzanian coast, where his second wife lived; and for Hasan, who had already established "work" connections abroad, plans for expanding to Aden were well under way. Thus people do not always stay in place, and they can be or do many things, often at the same time.

Similarly, the exigencies of social life and political change also have an impact on the definition of social roles

²⁶¹ This relates to my argument in chapter three, that is, to the ambivalence that may surround the former religious elite (that is, of Hadrami and Omani descent).

and categories themselves. While categories of healer, sheikh, kadhi, imam, 'alim, and so on certainly exist, they do not, so to speak, "keep people in place". Instead, people can move in and out of categories, and this is a process which can have an impact on redefining what these categories actually mean to people. Moreover, this is a process that is also shaped by wider social and political conditions, as well as by the particular circumstances of an individual's personal life. Thus the idea that "Islamic experts" are privileged elites who have time to devote to study and meditation refers to a time when the state did in fact support (and to some extent define itself through) an exclusive ulama who constituted the symbols of religious knowledge and propriety for all (see chapter two).²⁶² But the organization of Islamic authority in Zanzibar today is highly decentralized (despite the presence of a Chief Kadhi), and emerges around various sheikhs and their cohorts; as such, ideas about what signals and constitutes Islamic authority (and its responsibilities) often vary.

By presenting the voices and views of the various practitioners introduced in this chapter, I have tried to show how Islamic expertise can be defined and used in the social relations of healing. Together, the narratives of these various individuals convey a kind of life history of

²⁶² Meanwhile, I wager that these men, too, were making amulets and preparing kombe, praying dua for people, and rendering astrological trajectories for the sultan.

Islamic knowledge in Zanzibar. This is because Islamic "expertise" is a product of ongoing social relationships which are themselves established and shaped by peoples' ideas of what Islamic knowledge is and can do. All "Islamic" knowledge begins in the same place, with the same fundamental text and body of precepts for living as Muslims. However, Islamic symbols, personae, and ideas are also renewed in heterogeneous forms as people experience their personal, social, and political realities. Indeed, for this reason, too, Islam in Zanzibar has also been rendered by the the essentialists in more monolithic and restrictive terms, a subject which I turn to in the following chapter.

In closing, I quote the recollections of one man, Bwana Mkazo, who was a soldier under Karume's reign in the 1960s:

Karume drove out all *mambo ya kupungapunga* [spirit possession] and *uganga*,²⁶³ he got rid of it all...But after he died, Aboud Jumbe [the subsequent president] permitted the practices again because the citizens of Zanzibar had continued with them anyway; they went to hospital for some problems, and to *waganga* for others...But Karume had forbade it, and the people hated that. When Jumbe came, then people could continue as they had in the past."²⁶⁴

It seems that as long as people continue to work out their illness and sense of well-being through the services of these practitioners, then the uses of Islamic texts,

²⁶³ Repeated words ("kupungapunga", "uganga uganga") is a way of stressing or emphasizing a point, or denoting a great quantity of something.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Bwana Ali Mkazo, Zanzibar Town, November 1, 1989.

discourses, and symbolism will remain as creative and diverse as the practitioners who rely upon them.

CHAPTER EIGHT
**Critique and Counter-Critique in the
Politicization of Islam**

This chapter explores the politics of Islamic authority in contemporary Zanzibar. Broadly speaking, the discourses that I present here ultimately pivot around a perception that Islam and Islamic leadership in Zanzibar today are in a state of "crisis", as disparate cohorts of followers coalesce around various sheikhs and their teachings, some remaining loyal to their mentors, others quietly breaking away to develop their own Islamic pedagogy for the future. But this sort of decentralized landscape of authority is not uncommon in Islamic contexts; indeed, the personal authority that is created through relations of mentorship promotes the development and expression of multiple voices and visions of what constitutes "authentic" knowledge and practice for Muslims. Among these voices, one -- the "essentialist" -- constitutes a critique of the very heterogeneity from which it emerged, interpreting it as the inevitable outcome of ignorance and fragmentation among Muslims in Zanzibar, a condition which has rendered Islam so vulnerable to corrupting ideas and influences.

In this chapter, then, I focus on the essentialist sheikhs and their followers (who do not, in fact, constitute a single cohort), their ideology, and the various ways in which Zanzibaris have perceived and responded to them. Examining the essentialists also brings to light the complex

relationship between religion and politics in Zanzibar. On the one hand, these "politics" emerge within and directly concern religious issues per se, since the essentialist critique is aimed primarily at the "lax" teaching and incorrect practice of Islam in Zanzibar. On the other hand, certain essentialist sheikhs have been accused by the government of using Islam to comment on the wider political issues that are facing Zanzibaris today; these include the question of Zanzibar's "sovereignty" vis-a-vis the Union Government; Zanzibar's relationship with the Gulf and other Islamic countries; the liberalization of the economy which has brought an increase in tourism and foreign investment, and which has widened the gap between capital-rich and ordinary Zanzibaris; and issues around Zanzibar's domestic policies, such as the introduction of family planning into the school curriculum.

I think that the politicization of Islamic discourse in Zanzibar is in a sense "built into" the relations of mentorship in the mosque schools (madrasas). In these contexts, the personal authority of the sheikh becomes a key factor in the transmission of knowledge. In turn, as seen in chapters three and five, the reproduction of personal authority is contingent upon an instructional style that draws on the relationship between students and mentor, and between the mentor and his/her own teachers. Thus the authority of the mentor's word, and the authenticity of the

students' received knowledge, is determined dialogically, within the context of these relationships. This means that the knowledge is not "separate", in a sense, from the individuals involved in the student-mentor relationship, or from the experiences and perceptions of the world that they bring to it. In this way, personal authority can contribute significantly to the politicization of Islam, as factions crystallize around certain mentors who use their roles as teachers to expound on current events and issues that they see as affecting Islam and Muslim identity in Zanzibar.

I. The Essentialists

a. Background and Context: Situating the Essentialists

The groups I refer to as essentialists in Zanzibar today do not constitute a single, unified cohort by any means. They have been variously called by Zanzibaris at large the *bida'a* people (*watu wa bida'a*, with *bida'a* meaning unacceptable "innovation" or "accretion" to Islamic practice); "religious extremists", used especially in the Zanzibari press (*wenye msimamo mkali*, lit. those who have a fierce/severe/bitter position on religion,); and "political extremists" (*watu wa siasa kali*). I have heard them refer to themselves as "the new Muslims" (*waisilamu wapya*), or simply as religious enthusiasts (*wenye hamasa ya dini*).

Two main essentialist agendas are discernable, although it is not clear if these positions also represent

distinguishable cohorts. One focuses on the renewal of the Islamic community in Zanzibar, on re-envisioning and rebuilding it from the inside, as it were, by concentrating on "correct" practice and establishing families that raise their children in adherence to these practices. Another agenda is more political in emphasis, criticizing the Zanzibari government for its negligence in defending Islam against the impiety of foreign capital and tourism. While the identities of the several sheikhs who promoted these positions were fairly clear to me, the followers cannot be neatly separated out. I spoke with many young people who are students of these essentialist sheikhs, some of whom are now forming their own cohorts.

In addition to the Zanzibari essentialist groups which may have at least three significant teacher-leaders among them, there are the Sudanese missionaries from the Islamic Call Organization, a pan-African, non-governmental organization which is based in Khartoum. The Sudanese refer to themselves, in English, as "fundamentalists" (most of them are not fluent in Kiswahili), and are hoping, "in time and with patience", to institute sheria law in Zanzibar. Indeed, this is what they mean by fundamentalist, that is, living life fully and lawfully as a Muslim, beyond the five pillars of Islam. While several of the Sudanese married couples are teaching at the Muslim School in Mazizini and occasionally lecture on television, they do not seem to have

much of a following (which may be due in part to the fact that they did not speak Kiswahili, only Arabic and English). I think another reason is that the appeal of the Zanzibari cohorts is that they talk about re-envisioning and rebuilding Islam in terms of specifically Zanzibari issues and experiences of change (see below).

Finally, besides the essentialists there are of course many other sheikhs with cohorts who are teaching in Zanzibar town, and whose followers overlap with each other. There are the Sufi sheikhs, the older Hadrami sheikhs who are considered by some as the last vestige of the great sheikhs of the past. Significantly, there is also a younger cohort of educated men who studied in universities abroad (such as in Riyadh and Khartoum), and who are committed to an Islamic pedagogy that is not "essentialist" but which also diverges from the teaching methods of the "older, traditional, local sheikhs", many of whom were their teachers in Zanzibar before they travelled abroad (see chapter three). Taken together, these voices, including the essentialists, are part of a wider discourse on Islamic representation and authority in contemporary Zanzibar.

Essentialist discourse is not new to coastal Islam. In his article on the Islamic reformist Alamin Mazrui in the 1930s and 1940s [check dates], Elmasri writes that Al-Amin's modernist ideas (promoting women in education, translations of the Qur'an into Kiswahili) were in part a response to the

"retrograde" influences of the "bida'a" sheikhs.²⁶⁵ But the history of essentialist discourse also remains unclear. The story I want to tell here begins in the early 1960s, at a mosque in Kikwajuni, with a sheikh named Ali Rashaad. While it is uncertain the extent to which this man preached an essentialist interpretation of Islam, his discursive style was one of the main features which his essentialist students would later emulate.

"Just before the revolution was a time of great political confusion," the story goes. "There was an imam who preached at the mosque in Kikwajuni who was also something of a politician." He was an eloquent and charismatic speaker, and was also known for his skill at interpreting the Qur'an (he had also completed his own translation of the Holy Qur'an). "He was not in the Afro-Shirazi Party, but the other one [the Zanzibar Nationalist Party]," my friend said guardedly. "He was from Zanzibar, and an African like us. At that time of politics, you didn't know what party would win. So he used to campaign for his party by wielding verses from the Qur'an, and this excited people. He used to teach at the Muslim School in town,²⁶⁶ but got sacked

²⁶⁵ However, the existence or significance of any essentialist activity and discourse in Swahili societies since that time remains unclear, since I have found no other mention of such groups in my reading of the coastal literature.

²⁶⁶ This is different from the Muslim School in Mazizini, built in 1972. The school the speaker refers to here was closed down after the revolution.

because rumor had it he was sending political messages through his lessons." However, Sheikh Saidi continued teaching in the mosque, and that is where he mentored a youngster who would become one of Zanzibar's most popular "bida'a" sheikhs today, Sheikh Khamisi Jafar (see below).

After the revolution in 1964, as I discussed earlier, Islamic learning in Zanzibar went through what one informant described as "ten years of emptiness, a complete absence of teaching and reading Islam and Arabic in the schools. When Aboud Jumbe came to power, little by little he began to make changes that were favorable to Islam. When you lose something for ten years, rebuilding and reestablishing what you had, well, it takes a lot of time." Indeed, when Jumbe became president of Zanzibar in 1972,²⁶⁷ he was interested in reinvigorating Islamic learning in Zanzibar. The Muslim School in Mazizini, already discussed, was part of this project. Also, after returning from his pilgrimage to Mecca, he started the Baraza la Misikiti wa Tanzanzia (BAMITA), the Mosque Council of Tanzania, which caused him some friction with the President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. Indeed, BAMITA was viewed by some members of the Tanzanian government as "fundamentalist", and they began to nominate BAMITA members whom that they could control, thereby converting it into a government dominated

²⁶⁷ Abeid Karume was actually assassinated by a political rival; this event had nothing to do with Islam (see Clayton 1981).

organization, not an independent Muslim body. According to my informant, who was himself a long time member of the BAMITA branch in Zanzibar, this ultimately ruined the operating autonomy of the group. "Today, BAMITA has little power. Anything anyone wants to do or organize that is 'Islamic' in nature must pass through the Chief kadhi or the Waqf Commission," he said, shaking his head.²⁶⁸

In 1982 a "Task Force on Islamic Instruction in Zanzibar" was organized by the Zanzibari government.²⁶⁹ The task force assessed the current condition of Islamic education in Zanzibar, and reported that there was a serious shortage of qualified teachers and books of all kinds, and no coherent syllabus to guide them. Moreover, in the beginning of the report they warned against those "fanatics" who scorn the very foundations of Islam in Zanzibar. Thus the plan proposed by the task force was to establish a "true University of the Islamic Religion in Zanzibar."²⁷⁰ Since the early 1980s, then, the government was concerned that Islamic learning in Zanzibar was in desperate need of

²⁶⁸ Interview June 16, 1989. Both of these posts are government-appointed.

²⁶⁹ Ripoti ya Task Force ya Mafunzo Ya Kiislam, Zanzibar. Zanzibar National Archives, File no. BA 81, No. 3.

²⁷⁰ I do not know what ever happened to this task force, or to the project. I learned about its existence from the Archives (just before I left Zanzibar), not from discussions with people at large. This is another area for future research.

development; and as such, it was also potentially vulnerable to the misguided enthusiasm of "fanatics".

Another informant, Sheikh Rashidi Salim, who studied abroad (in Saudi Arabia), and who is now teaching in one of the larger madrasas in town also recalled the early 1980s as the period of time when

...suddenly, these sheikhs started popping up, this one, and that one, each promoting himself. Now these sheikhs try to show that they have such great knowledge of Islam when in fact they don't; they try and get people to follow them...In the past, there were sheikhs who were truly recognized for their great knowledge of Islam. But today, these new sheikhs use piles of words in their lectures, opposing the things that the great sheikhs practiced in the past and that are recognized in Islam. They say, 'maulidi is not permitted, to pray for the dead is not permitted.' They say this but they have no knowledge, no ancestry, no grace [buruhani], but still they oppose these practices, now that the great ones are dead. They oppose all these activities and confuse Muslims; but in Islam, all Muslims should be united. Now, they bring tension and conflict, and they are using Islam for political aims, to oppose the Union.²⁷¹

Rashidi is clearly bitter here, since his own teachings, as well as the historical renown of his madrasa, is greatly insulted by such remarks. Moreover, I was told by several of the essentialist followers that his madrasa was accused of being favored by government (with subsidies).

I turn now to a discussion of the essentialist Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, his teachings, and the activities he has inspired among his students.

²⁷¹ Interview July 6, 1989.

b. Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, his Students, and Teachings

At the time of my research (1989-1990, and a short visit in December of 1992), Sheikh Khamisi Jafar taught at three mosque-madrasas in Zanzibar town and commanded significant authority, which could be measured by his many students and the deference they showed him. In addition to his teaching, Khamisi also owned and ran a successful dry goods store in Stone Town.

Most of Khamisi's followers were young men and women from their late teens to their early thirties. A number of the older students were becoming teaching sheikhs in their own right, and had organized a bi-monthly lecture series for women. While attending these lectures, I was approached by a young woman, Bi Asha, who was curious about my presence. We introduced ourselves, and I told her that I was interested in learning as much as I could about Islamic teaching in Zanzibar. I told her I had heard of Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, that he was quite popular, and that I'd like to meet him one day. She was in fact a student of his, and arranged for us to be introduced.

I met Sheikh Khamisi at one of the classes he teaches for women at his madrasa in Raha Leo. I followed Bi Asha into the classroom, and after getting permission to attend the session we sat down on the mats in the classroom. All the women were wearing buibuis, two with facial veils that left only their eyes exposed. They all held books in their

laps and were reading a story about Muhammad's life. Sheikh Khamisi read the Arabic text aloud as the women followed, then translated into Kiswahili, line by line. After this each woman had a chance to read aloud in Arabic and then Kiswahili as Khamisi listened and corrected them on their pronunciation. There were also a few older women, but the majority were in their twenties.

After class, we approached Sheikh Khamisi. He is a tall man, and his long grey kanzu accentuated this; he was serious and aloof in demeanor. Bi Asha did not address him to his face, but averted her eyes as she explained to him who I was, and that I was conducting "research" (*utafiti*) on Islam and Islamic teaching in town. He repeated, "Utafiti. Utafiti?" I explained that I wanted to interview him about Islam and his teachings, and named several other sheikhs with whom I had already met. He agreed to do the interview at his flat in the Michazani apartment complex on the following day. I was intimidated but also excited finally to meet this man I had heard so much about.

I was accompanied by several of his women students on the afternoon of the interview.²⁷² When we arrived at his apartment, I was relieved to find him lounging about in the shade, wearing a t-shirt and trousers, playing with one of his babies. He was very cheerful and invited us all in. His apartment was well furnished, with lots of books lying

²⁷² Interview with Sheikh Khamisi Jafar, March 27, 1990.

about, mats on the floor, a blackboard for teaching. His wife and mother came in to greet us. Khamisi was engaging, courteous, and very articulate.

Khamisi was born in Kikwajuni, in 1950. His grandfather was Indian, and married an "Afro-Zanzibari" woman in Donge, in the countryside. One of their sons (Khamisi's uncle) was an Islamic scholar. Ever since he was a little boy, Khamisi loved studying the Qur'an. His elders sent him to Qur'an school, and noticed that he learned very quickly. After completing Qur'an school, he continued studying at the madrasa, he went to the mosque, and read as many books as he could find (in Kiswahili) on Islam. The more he read, the more his devotion to Islamic study increased.

Among those figures who inspired him the most were Sheikh Abdalah Saleh Farsy, and his grandfather, who studied with Sheikh Farsy. His grandfather also encouraged Khamisi to continue, and told him that "with my desire to learn, I would some day become a great scholar [*alim mkubwa*]". As I discussed in some detail in chapter three, Sheikh Khamisi's most influential teacher was Sheikh Ali Rashaad. However, he adds that he was especially excited by the "new" pamphlets that were "brought in from outside" of Zanzibar. He did not say why they were so different, nor was he specific about where they were from ("nje", "Arabuni",

"Nairobi"). So I asked him to explain to me the meaning of bida'a.

'Bida'a' is something that a person creates in his own mind without the guidance of God or Mtume [Muhammad] (s.w.a.s); to create something that does not already exist, this indeed is bida'a, and it will ruin the culture of Islam. However, only practices that are accretions to Islamic worship are bida'a. Technological developments like electricity, the radio, bicycles, new constructions for housing, these are all useful things that improve the quality of our lives in this world.

Thus Sheikh Khamisi emphasizes that bida'a ideology is not anti-modern, unprogressive, or "retrograde". It aims to restore Islam to its truest form, to rid it of the vitiating influences of *local* (he says this word in English) traditions (*mila*) and customs (*ada*). "Take maulidi," he adds. "There is nothing like this in the teachings of Islam, it is only a practice that people have gotten used to, that they created for themselves." Another woman student contributed some other examples. "In Zanzibar, women mourn the dead for forty days; but in Islam, you are only supposed to mourn for three...You must leave your local culture to follow Islam. There are ngoma [dances accompanied by drumming] at weddings, where men and women dance outside together! But we're not supposed to mix like that with men. Culture and Islam, they do not harmonize."

Another one of Khamisi's key concepts that is in a sense the converse of bida'a (innovation, accretion) is *hoja*, or *dalili* -- that is, evidence, or proof. "You must

build Islam by using evidence from the Qur'an. Knowledge and practice are not established willynilly, there is a reason for everything. You must determine what to do according to the proof provided by the Qur'an and Mtume." This idea has had a great influence on his students. Later, one young woman student used the notion of *hoja* (evidence) and the problem of *mila* (local culture) to explain why most of Khamisi's students were "*vijana*", youth, not older, more mature Muslims:

If you never received a good religious education in the first place, and your teacher did not provide you with evidence from the Qur'an, then you could only follow the opinions [*shauri*] of people, and the culture in which you grew up. In this way, you can't really understand religion. Our elders were raised and steeped in their culture; now that they are old and set in their ways, they find it difficult to follow the evidence of how religion really should be practiced, as the youth are doing it now. With all this evidence [from the Qur'an], the youth are rising like the moon.

This student went on to say that Khamisi's translation of the Qur'an through his teachings has made all the difference. "In the past, the elders did not allow the Qur'an to be translated,²⁷³ so people just followed whatever their sheikhs told them. But today, we [the youth] know better." Finally, she added, "In the past, the elders didn't

²⁷³ This is not entirely true. The degree to which "local" Islamic teachers had the skills to translate and interpret the Qur'an varied enormously. Moreover, Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy prepared one of the first Kiswahili translations of the Qur'an in the 1950s [confirm date]. Whether or not it was distributed at the time remains unclear.

translate the Qur'an because the waganga [local healers] would know that what they were doing was haram. [Thus] the sheikhs were inadvertently protecting those waganga practices by hiding the Truth of the Qur'an."

Sheikh Khamisi's teachings have been most effective. One colleague of mine who was not one of his students told me that when Khamisi gives a sermon,

everyone goes! The way he speaks and interprets the Qu'ran is fantastic. He provides live examples, and this is the very character of the Qur'an -- it always addresses you, if you are a farmer, or a scientist in your lab, a herdsman in the desert, a poor man in the street, it addresses you personally, as the person that you are. Khamisi manages to do this with his sermons...They are available on cassette in the shops in town, and are very popular.

In fact it was through the cassettes that the women I met at the bi-monthly lectures came to know Sheikh Khamisi.

Bi Fatuma (in her early thirties) has been with Sheikh Khamisi since 1983. After finishing Qur'an school, she and her companions tried to improve their knowledge of Islam by taking classes from different teachers. After hearing Khamisi they went to study with him, and have stayed with him since. "That's how groups form -- you decide to stay with a teacher who has a particular plan, a style, you understand each another; but the groups also cooperate with each other, too." Bi Fatuma was the "leader" (*kiongozi*) of her class. "You get to be a leader if you have consistent attendance, if you know your lessons well, and you are committed just to the class." She keeps an eye on the

students, she knows where all the students live, the situations and conditions of their homes. She reports to Sheikh Khamisi if someone stops coming to class; if a student is having some kind of problem, the classmates are informed, and all try to help. "We Muslims are all one family," she explains.

I told Khamisi that I was trying to understand the basis on which various sheikh-student cohorts were forming in town. He explained that in some cases, students follow certain sheikhs because of the texts that they use; other times, because of their "traditional ways, which match with their own ideas, and are therefore familiar to them. Sometimes, it is also because one sheikh is Hanafii, and another Shafii (that is, they follow different legal interpretations of Islam); so there are lots of groups of sheikhs with their followers." Then he adds, "The old sheikhs just read the Shafii texts, but the younger generation, we read them all, the Hanbali, the Maliki etc..."

At no point did Khamisi mention Wahabism, the doctrine that in fact most resembles his own bida'a ideology. Wahabism, as I mentioned briefly in chapters five and seven, is indeed a "puritanical" doctrine that originated in the late 18th century in the Saudi Peninsula. It happens that Wahabism follows the Hanbali legal school, the one Khamisi mentions by name above (and again later in the interview).

As Fazlur Rahman writes, "The Wahhabis...took up a stringently fundamental position in so far as they accepted only the Qu'ran and the Sunna as the material sources of religion. They even rejected the qiyas, the analogical method of reasoning [see chapter one], to interpret the Qu'ran and Sunna" (Rahman 1979:198; emphasis added). This calls to mind Khamisi's emphasis on Qur'anic evidence and proof as the basis of all religious practice. Wahabism also rejects Sufism and any other practices that developed after the 10th century A.D.²⁷⁴ I am not arguing that Khamisi and his cohort are Wahabiyy and are deliberately neglecting to acknowledge it; but the similarities are noteworthy. It is possible that Khamisi has integrated these ideas into his own thinking.

Another explanation of the nature of this discourse stems from Dale Eickelman's article entitled "Mass higher education and the religious imagination in contemporary Arab societies" (1992). Here, Eickelman argues that one distinctly "modern" trend in Islamic education today is an "objectification of the religious imagination" in which Muslims are asking questions about their religion as a religion in the world, what it is, how it should guide their

²⁷⁴ Another interesting coincidence is that the one place Wahabism never took hold in the Saudi Peninsula is the Hadramawt, a stronghold of Shafii scholars and sharifs. Similarly, those who are most dismissive of the bida'a teachings in Zanzibar are the Shafii scholars of Hadrami descent, and the sufis. It's just a thought.

conduct, and why it should be important in their lives (Eickelman 1992:643). He argues that this trend has shown that a new generation of educators are rejecting or departing from the pedagogical styles of their past, but at the same time "legitimate their practices and beliefs by asserting a return to authentic established traditions" (ibid). This shifts religious authority "from elite specialists recognized as masters of religious texts and often inaccessible rhetorical forms to religious and political activists who seek open religious discussion and action and whose authority is based upon persuasion and the interpretation of accessible texts" (ibid:652). I think that this describes well the Zanzibari essentialists and their discourse.

It important to add to this Aziz Al-Azmeh's point that the extreme pietism that characterizes contemporary "radical" Islamic groups (such as the essentialists here) is in part the result of the failure in the past of an explicitly secular Arab nationalism that "encouraged the separation of political virtues from religious piety" (Al-Azmeh 1993; Mufti 1994:17). Indeed, the very idea that one can remake state and society by returning to an "authentic" past embodied in immutable texts creates the fiction of a timeless and decontextualized homogeneity that defies the very "multivocality" of Islamic legal (and cultural) traditions. Indeed, in this sense, fundamentalist pietism

produces an image of Islam that is similar to the dehistoricized constructions of Islam which emerged out of European imperial writing and representations of the Near East and North Africa.

Sheikh Khamisi also commented on the increasing "tensions" or "conflict" among groups, especially, in his view, between the younger and older generations, as he indicates above. "The differences are based on how we think we should worship God." However, these differences also revolve around other issues, like that of one's heshima, or respect for one's moral and intellectual standing. According to Khamisi, an over arching organization of sheikhs does not exist in Zanzibar "because the older, local sheikhs don't want this. They insist that their ideas are the only ideas; they want to hold onto the traditional customs so that they do not loose the status and respect these customs have conferred upon them."²⁷⁵ They don't want to be 'shown up' by the younger generation...For this reason, they feel resentment."

This sort of talk has indeed caused problems. According to Bwana Shaafi, the healer-sheikh introduced in chapter seven:

Our religious scholars of the past, they didn't have this great desire to promote themselves. They were men of faith, they had affection for each other and for other people. These young competitive sheikhs of today want to show

²⁷⁵ He is not specific what these customs are.

themselves off, that they are better than anyone who came before them, all just to become known. And what do they know? They think they don't have to read any more, or to ask questions, no, they already know everything....²⁷⁶

In a similar vein, Sheikh Rashidi Salim is most critical of the essentialists' style of promoting themselves by criticizing others (he never mentions Khamisi by name). In Rashidi's view, they are the ones who are remiss, preaching as they do, with such superficial knowledge of Islam, all just to make names for themselves and to create conflict among the youth. "You try to explain things to their students, "[Islamic] justice is like this, truthfulness like that, the conditions are these, etc. But they say, 'Oh no, it is not! Sheikh so-and-so says it is like *this*!' Then the problem increases when they bring politics into their teachings."²⁷⁷ While Sheikh Rashidi is quite clear about what he sees as problematic with the essentialists, he never mentions any sheikh by name, but rather describes them as an undifferentiated cohort that is creating discord among Muslims in Zanzibar.

However, as I mentioned briefly above, tensions around the Islamic pedagogy also exist that go beyond the essentialist rhetoric and activity. Frustration has been expressed among a cohort of students, now in their late thirties, who received university educations abroad (with

²⁷⁶ Interview with Bwana Shaafi, September 28, 1989.

²⁷⁷ These political implications are discussed below.

concentrations in religion and Arabic but study in secular subjects as well) and who have returned with a different sense of what constitutes a "qualified" Islamic teacher, mentor, or leader. Indeed, while only a few of these men have managed to acquire positions of authority -- one the head of the Waqf Commission, another the head of the Muslim School in Mazizini, and another (Sheikh Rashidi), who is the assistant head of a large madrasa in town -- their university degrees have posed somewhat of a threat to the older generation of "local" sheikhs.²⁷⁸ Both the essentialists and this cohort of students educated abroad use the terms "local" or "traditional" sheikhs in contradistinction to those "great scholars of the past", such as Sumayt, Bakathiri, Farsy, and Mansab, the likes of whom are long gone.

This "university-educated" cohort²⁷⁹ believes that the "traditional" sheikhs, many of whom were their childhood teachers, are familiar only with the "old methods" of translation, recitation, and grammar, and that they can't actually converse in Arabic. Moreover, as one man who had been educated at a university in Khartoum explained, to be able to translate the Qur'an, one must have knowledge of

²⁷⁸ See also chapter three.

²⁷⁹ I do not have any numbers to work with here. The numbers were quite small, however, and a rough estimation of the number of men who studied abroad in the 1970s may be approximately twenty or thirty.

other human sciences. "A good Muslim must be learned in subjects other than the Qur'an...Studying those subjects [science, technology, math] brings you back to the Q and helps you to understand its message more fully. We can only interpret the Qur'an as far as our knowledge will take us. Thus the more we know about the world, the more we can understand what the Qur'an intends, what its real meaning conveys...Our elder sheikhs say one does not have to research the Qur'an, only accept what it says. But we say that the Qur'an is a book of knowledge, both the beginning and the end, and we must explore it." Thus while the essentialist sheikhs and this cohort of returning scholars (who are roughly the same age grade) may agree that the time has come for the "local" sheikhs to relinquish their authority, these cohorts continue to have fundamental disagreements regarding the ideological interpretation of Islam and its relationship to the social, cultural, and political lives of Muslims in Zanzibar.

At the end of my interview with Sheikh Khamisi, I asked him to comment on using the Qur'an for medicinal purposes. He said

The Qur'an is food for the heart, it is a cure for the heart. What does that mean? It will help a person to recognize and understand Almighty God, and to recognize those things that are morally corrupt, or wicked. That is how the Qur'an functions as medicine. It is not medicine that you take like chloroquine; that is not Muhammad's (s.w.a.s) message. Muhammad said to look for medicinal cures everywhere that you can, even among non-believers. This indeed is the proof that

the Qu'ran itself is not to be used as medicine;
it is medicine of the heart, of the soul.

Thus he never made hirizis, or prepared kombe. "The Qur'an is more than just the power of protection, it is knowledge, and in order to access this, you must read it for yourself." However, he did recite and write out dua for people.

When we finished the interview, we said we would try to meet again to continue our discussions. However, that time never came. While I remained in contact with a few of his students, I did not meet with Sheikh Khamisi again.²⁸⁰

c. The Bi-Monthly Lectures for Women

In addition to the classes they took with Sheikh Khamisi Jafar himself, the students were involved in

²⁸⁰ I know that a number of the students I had met at the bi-monthly lectures were trying to work out how to "deal with" me. On the one hand, people were interested and inviting. And yet on one occasion a group of young women invited me to a study session with a guest speaker -- one of the Sudanese women; then, mysteriously, I got uninvited, their explanation being that since I was not a Muslim, why should I come to learn details about prayer (the topic of discussion)? This actually made sense to me and I thought little more of it. Then a week later, one of the sheikhs (a student of Nassoro) who had given one of the lectures came looking for me at my apartment. He was sent to apologize on behalf of the women for "uninviting" me. He had assured them that I would not be angry with them, and I in turn was grateful to him for having said so. Clearly the students were agitated, trying to act like good Muslims but at the same time not entirely comfortable with my presence. A few days later, a contingent of young women came by my place for a "visit". We chatted, but not about the "incident", and parted on good terms. They were trying to do the right thing, and I appreciated and sympathized with their efforts. After this I did return for one last lecture, but discontinued any further involvement with the students. I think we were all relieved.

organizing a number of other activities as well. One was the lecture series mentioned above.

At the end of every other month, Khamisi's more senior students would lecture themselves, or invite guests to come in and lecture to the women. The lecture began with a formal introduction, followed by a Qur'anic recitation. Then after the lecture, the speakers would take questions from the audience. Some women would write down their questions on pieces of paper and then send them forward, hoping to remain anonymous. Others just raised their hand and asked aloud on the spot. Some of the lectures topics included: how to harmonize your life with Islam (later the sheikh explained that this was a lecture on "the battle of the mind", how to control oneself); the "Day of Judgement"; the "status of women" in Islam; and on "hijabu".

On one occasion, even Sheikh Rashidi, introduced above, was invited to speak with another colleague of his during the month of Ramadhan. they discussed what Ramadhan was all about, the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad, how one should behave during this month, how one should pray, fast, and read the Qur'an. He recited a Hadith from the Prophet in Arabic and then translated and explained it in Kiswahili. He warned against the temptations of "*Iblis*", the devil, which are especially strong during this month, and warned also that the *mashetani* are also especially active during this month. He closed with a discussion on how one should

celebrate the end of Ramadhan, that is, how one should behave during the upcoming holiday festivities. Some of the questions that followed included the following: how, indeed, do you keep shetani away? are all our sins forgiven during Ramadhan? if you receive a guest during the day who is not fasting, do you serve him/her food? During the holiday celebrations, women get so involved in dressing up, buying new clothes to parade in, and even putting on make-up; doesn't this contradict how Muslim women are supposed to behave? The questions often stirred up a discussion, even debate, when the sheikhs would provide answers with which the women did not agree.

The lecture on hijabu was especially interesting. It was given by a guest speaker, a woman named Bi Shemsha who attended the Muslim School in Mazizini, then went to Lumumba College also in Zanzibar. After this she travelled to Nairobi to study, with a concentration on religion (Islam) but is also now one of Khamisi's students. Bi Shemsha was outspoken and as articulate as the men when it came to wielding Arabic quotes from the Qur'an and Hadith. Her lecture emphasized that hijabu is about comportment, not just clothing. A woman really should not go wandering about; if she does leave the house (and she must carefully "weigh out" if it is urgent enough), then she must be sure that her hijab is loose and copious, that she wears no make-up, no jewelry (*kujipamba*, to decorate oneself, is not advised), no

perfume (the latter being extremely popular in Zanzibar), and avoids all eye-contact with men. She continued, insisting that even a woman's voice could be enticing, and we should control the way we speak to men as well. We must always be remembering our shame (*kuona haya*).

Then a woman from the audience asked if "kizorro" -- wearing the facial veil -- was required in the Qur'an. Bi Shemsha responded that the Qur'an states that the hijabu had to cover the arms, legs, and hair but that the face could be left exposed. However, she continued, "there is no such thing as 'too much' in Islam." In fact, Bi Shemsha herself wears a face veil as part of her hijabu that leaves her eyes exposed. Then another woman asked, "but aren't the eyes enticing to men, too?" With this Bi Shemsha turned to her colleague sitting quietly next to her, flipped the hood of her buibui up over her head so that it fell down over her face. She was startled, as was the audience. "Now, can we really go around like this? I don't think so!"

d. Preserving Islam: Living Muhammad's Way

One final activity that Khamisi's students have organized is especially interesting. I learned about it from the electrician at the EACROTANAL office. We often chatted together, and when telling him about my work one day he told me that he too was a student of Khamisi. He explained that a number of Khamisi's students had started a

"Kamiti ya Nursa" -- "The Committee for the Preservation of Islam".

Men and women each have their own branch of the committee. Its function is to rebuild an Islamic society, to strengthen Islam, through the foundation of the family. The committees collect money each month from the followers; then when someone wants to get married, they have the resources to do so (this is a form of *upatu*, a kind of revolving fund for contributing members). However, one must marry within the group, to ensure that men and women with "*mimsimamo mzuri*" (good Islamic standing) will marry each other. In this way, "two devout people will raise their children in pure Islamic fashion, without all the cultural influences that our elders had. Our elders were raised by combining culture and religion, now we must learn from their mistakes...We also oppose *maulidi*, *hitima* (Qur'anic reading at funerals), *mzimu* (place spirits), and *waganga* (local healers)." Indeed, this is why they describe themselves as *Waisilamu wapya* -- the "new Muslims". He concluded by telling me that "if you disagree with a position, then you must fight it, and try to win them over with your own ideas; if you see something is wrong, you must try and change it."²⁸¹

²⁸¹ April 30, 1990

II. Politics and Islam: Dangerous Incursions

As I mentioned earlier, the essentialist sheikhs have been accused of using their religious ideas to incite anti-government unrest among their young followers. They have also been accused by other Zanzibari sheikhs of creating conflict and tensions among Muslims, particularly through their dismissal of the senior sheikhs, their expertise, and their teachings (indeed, as I discussed above, inter-generational tensions around the condition of Islamic leadership and instruction in Zanzibar today do not involve the essentialists alone). While it remains unclear the extent to which the essentialist groups are actually committed to any expressly political goal for Zanzibar, they have organized and participated in at least two demonstrations in which governmental policies and positions were accused of being detrimental to the well-being of Islam and Muslim identity in Zanzibar. What I want to do here is to describe several incidents that occurred in Zanzibar from 1988 to late 1992 in which social protest was expressed in explicitly Islamic terms. While I examine these incidents with an eye to some of the wider political and economic issues concerning Zanzibaris during that period, I do not attempt to make any definitive statements about who actually was behind which incident. Instead, my main concern is to understand the ways in which Islam in Zanzibar has become politicized, how it is being used, defined, and defended.

a. The 1988 Demonstration, and the "Bismilallah" Sticker Affair

In the spring of 1988, the wife of Rashid Kawawa, then the Secretary General of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ruling party of Tanzania, made a statement in a speech implying that, as Muslims, the women of Zanzibar had few rights, particularly in the area of marriage and the inheritance of property. This statement -- made as it was by a mainland Christian -- was taken by Zanzibaris generally as a profound insult against Islam. Meanwhile, another issue that has long concerned many Zanzibaris is the definition of their sovereignty as a nation, and how that translates into political power, especially given the existence of a Union government (tying together the mainland and the islands), a Zanzibari government, and a single ruling party (the CCM) which reigns over both.

I was told by a number of informants (both students of Sheikh Khamisi and others) that at the time, a cassette had been made of Sheikh Khamisi's fervent sermon responding to Mrs. Kawawa's comment, and could be heard playing "in all the shops in town." In fact, three sheikhs, including Khamisi and another very popular essentialist preacher named Sheikh Kondo, were accused of organizing a demonstration in May of 1988 in which hundreds of young people, mostly men, marched through the streets in protest, shouting "Allah Akbar!" Several people were injured, two shot to death by the police, and shop windows -- allegedly those considered

symbols of the Union government and thus of "mainland domination" -- were vandalized. The sheikhs were detained, but given their popularity, the Zanzibari government was most reluctant to convict them because they didn't want to turn them into "martyrs". Sheikhs with followings are most powerful, and while Zanzibari government officials are interested in containing unrest, they do not want to appear as though they are not also interested in the well-being of Islam and Islamic leadership.

In 1989, after I had arrived in Zanzibar, another incident occurred which was also obviously religious in nature. White and green stickers that read, in Arabic script, "*Bismillallah, Rahman, Rahim*" ("*In the Name of God, the Benevolent, the Merciful*") began to appear all over town; in alley ways, on storefronts, even on people's houses. Very little can be said about this except for the fact that no one really knew who was putting them up, or why. There were rumors, of course, which implicated the essentialists. But I also heard from another source that the latest insight was that they were being brought over from Abu Dhabi by Zanzibari expatriots in the interest of inciting "fundamentalist" unrest. The government used the press to dissuade the culprits, stating that while "bismilallah..." ("in the name of God...") is an expression that can be appreciated by all Muslims, the proliferation of

stickers was also defacing property. In time, the incident faded without resolution.

b. The 1992 Demonstration

When I returned to Zanzibar to attend a conference in mid-December of 1992, it seemed that another essentialist preacher had taken center stage, known as Sheikh Kondo. Indeed, I was told that while Khamisi's students were very active (and had claimed responsibility for the 1988 demonstration), Khamisi himself had remained quiet.

One Friday afternoon, several days after the conference, a protest erupted in the streets of Stone Town near the mosque in Forodhani. Later, one participant of the protest explained to me that they were demonstrating against the introduction of a Family Planning program into the schools, as well as against the government's policies on tourism. Also, graffiti could be found on the walls in town which read "*Ondosha Utalii! Weka Uislamu!*" (get rid of tourism and commit to Islam!). It should be noted here that during this time, Zanzibar was approaching its first democratic, multiparty election in decades; an array of political slogans and party acronyms were appearing in anticipation of the struggle ahead. As far as I knew, there

was virtually no serious talk of organizing an Islamic religious party.²⁸²

Several days after the demonstration, the "old guard" or "traditional sheikhs" embodied in the figure of the Chief Kadhi were accused of complying with the government in order to protect the security of their own positions rather than the security and future of Islam in Zanzibar. This accusation was brought on when the Chief Kadhi publically repudiated a crowd of young Muslims for demonstrating in the streets. One student of both Kondo and Khamisi, who is now branching out on his own, explained to me that if they want to gather in the streets and at the mosque to protest tourism, or family planning²⁸³ they don't need permission from the Chief Kadhi; he doesn't represent Muslims, only the interest of the government. The government is afraid of our marching, our lectures, and they try to use the Kadhi to control us. We want a wider, more representative Islamic organization here in Zanzibar, since BAMITA is dead."

²⁸² CUF, the most popular party in Zanzibar used the rhetoric of statehood "Uzalendo!" as its main platform. The idea was not to dissolve the Union between the mainland and Zanzibar, but rather to end mainland domination over Zanzibari affairs. Elections were held in 1995; the CCM ruling party won again, but the election was considered by most to have been rigged.

²⁸³ As one of Kondo's women students explained to me, Family Planning "will bring knowledge of sex, not of the family; it will encourage youngsters to have sex by using condoms."

Two of Sheikh Kondo's students (whom I met through Mzee Ngara, whose daughter had just married "one of them", as he put it)²⁸⁴ explained to me that they agreed with their mentor that Islam needed to be defended from the corrupting influences of tourism. Those youth who are uninvolved in this cause he referred to as "*vijana wa kimaendeleo*" -- "they are modern youth, who like these influences, who wear the new hairstyles, the new clothes, who like to dance and be like Americans."

Indeed, at that time, tourists in Zanzibar had earned themselves a nickname: "*vishuka*", or "*nusu shuka*". A shuka is a sarong-like piece of cloth worn by men (usually underneath a kanzu) around their waist that falls well below the knees. Calling tourists *kishuka* (a diminutive) or *nusu shuka* (half a shuka) implies that they were only wearing half the clothes they would normally wear. In fact many tourists in Zanzibar are young people wearing shorts and t-shirts, carrying backpacks and the like. They are also called "*bahili*" or "*kichua*", that is, "cheapskates", since they are always looking for the cheapest places to stay. So not only are they scantily dressed, but they will even

²⁸⁴ Mzee Ngara was most disdainful of these groups. He says his new son-in-law doesn't want Mzee Ngara to know he's a one of the "*msimamo mkali*" Muslims. "But I know, I've been around," Mzee Ngara says. "I've seen things...They can't convince me their's is the best way for Islam...They have no experience with colonialism, with the *zama za siasa* [late 1950s partisan politics in Zanzibar], with Karume, not even with Jumbe. What do they know? They are youngsters who just want to opposed the government..."

haggle with a "poor old man in the market over the price of a mango."²⁸⁵ This is all considered disrespectful behavior. One colleague told me that in the Friday sermon at Nyerere mosque in Ng'ambo, the imam argued that the two main problems with tourism are that youngsters may begin to emulate the way the tourists dress, and the way that they behave, which is the antithesis of "proper behavior for Muslims." Moreover, he added, "look what's happened in Kenya! Women are not marrying but going to nightclubs and hotels." He added that the situation of "women marrying women and men marrying men is on the increase." The imam is concerned that the present generation is at risk of losing Islam, and will provide no guidance for their Muslim children.

c. "If you want to enter politics, you must first remove your turban!"²⁸⁶

On the first of January, 1993, the front page headline of the Zanzibari newspaper entitled Nuru read:

Wenye Msimamo Mkali Kudhibitiwa
[Protecting Against Religious Extremists]²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ The assumption is that all tourists are wealthy and should be able to afford (respectfully accept) the given price of items and services.

²⁸⁶ From an informant, July 5, 1989, paraphrasing former Zanzibari President Idris Wakil after reprimanding Sheikh Kurwa for criticizing a government official after a Friday sermon in Malindi.

²⁸⁷ Issue no. 24, 1/1/93. Staff writer (unnamed).

The article reported on a meeting the Zanzibari President Salmin Amour held with the Chief Kadhi and Mufti of Zanzibar. The meeting was formally addressed to all imams and religious leaders of Zanzibar, and warned against the "improper use of religion in politics that has been spoiling the faith of the believers." President Amour said he was "shocked by the "political cunning of those sheikhs who used their sermons to besmirch government officials." Religion is about faith, he continued, "which cannot be built by using force or fanaticism...The government of Tanzania has always made an effort to keep religion and politics separate in order to avoid conflict that can harm people's faith, especially during the present period of great political change." On the subject of tourism, he insisted that those people who reproach the leaders of government for allowing tourists into Zanzibar "forget that tourism can have a great financial impact in assisting the development of Islamic countries throughout the world." Given all these tensions, he said that "the time has come to put together a Special Council to organize the affairs of Muslims in Zanzibar, in order to provide and disseminate the best explanations and interpretations of the Islamic religion." Finally, he implored all religious leaders to remain involved in explicitly religious affairs; and if they do become politically inclined, "they must leave religious activities altogether and enter into politics openly."

The President's words are a clear warning that the Zanzibari government was well aware of the essentialists' rhetoric and their potential to incite unrest. His statements also indicate an awareness that, as the 1982 "Task Force" on Islamic learning observed, Islam in Zanzibar needs to be attended to -- that is, the education and faith of Muslim citizens is at risk. But according to government perceptions, the threat of incursion comes from insurgent "fanatics", not from tourism or the affairs of state.

Interestingly, during this period the Zanzibari government also made a political move that pleased not only essentialist thinkers but most Zanzibari citizens. As a nation with a vast Muslim majority, "top officials" in the Zanzibari government decided to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a non-governmental organization that provides interest-free loans to member countries with Muslim majorities. Because the Zanzibari government allegedly made this decision without first consulting with the Union officials, it became an issue that symbolized Zanzibar's political autonomy as a nation.

In a front page story published in the Tanzanian press (the Sunday News, January 10, 1993), reporters Ali Uki and Mussa Lupatu summarized the position of Zanzibari Minister of State Ramadhani Abdallah Shaaban on the matter. The Minister explained that their decision to join the ICO, which outraged Union and mainland government officials,

should not in fact be interpreted as "anti-Union" since Zanzibar does have the constitutional right to make decisions affecting certain non-Union matters (the latter of which are rather ambiguously defined). The point of joining the OIC was to become eligible to receive financial assistance; the OIC does not require their member states to be run by the sheria (Islamic law), only that they have a Muslim majority. The Minister also said that the OIC "aims at safeguarding sovereignty and the right to self-determination." Finally, Zanzibari officials emphasized that they had no intentions of changing their "commitment to a secular government."

In this piece, then, the Zanzibari government appears to be asserting its autonomy around its identity as a nation of Muslims -- while at the same time assuring that such a move should not be interpreted as a threat to the Union or to Zanzibar's relationship with the mainland. Thus while Zanzibari citizens must "remove their turbans before entering politics", the government, in its solicitation for recognition and assistance from abroad, shall continue to bear it with pride.

III. The 1992 "International Conference on the History and Culture of Zanzibar": The Politics of Culture, Memory, and Self-Definition

Besides joining the OIC, Zanzibar's active attention to and recognition within the context of international

relations during this time was being expressed in another venue. In mid December of 1992, "The First International Conference on the History and Culture of Zanzibar" was hosted by the Zanzibar Government and convened at the People's Palace -- once known as the "House of Wonders", or the Sultan's Palace -- located in Forodhani, a neighborhood in Stone Town which overlooks the Zanzibar Harbor. Most of the participants attending the conference came from Europe, North America, Kenya, and Tanzania. While the conference was first and foremost an international forum for the discussion of Zanzibari research and scholarship, it also seemed to constitute an event in itself, a kind of metacommentary through which official "Zanzibar" took stock of its past and positioned itself firmly in the present.

Take the venue of the conference. The People's Palace is so named because it has been party headquarters since the 1964 revolution, when the Omani Sultan of Zanzibar was ousted from his nominal throne and supplanted by the Afro-Shirazi Party. However, at the conference, the past is symbolically reconciled with the present as Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad al Qasimi of Sharja (one of the United Arab Emirates)²⁸⁸ is invited to give the inaugural speech, which

²⁸⁸ One may wonder why the Omanis, given their historical relationship with Zanzibar were not present instead. The relationship between Zanzibar and Oman has been rocky ever since the Revolution. Moreover, in 1989, it was rumored that an official active in the "ideological branch" of the CCM had insulted Sultan Qaboos of Oman by alleging that the "Arabs" in Zanzibar were "wachochezi"

he does in full regalia and with his entourage flanking him on either side of the dais.

When the President of Zanzibar Dr. Salmin Amour steps up to speak, he begins by invoking the past, both as a scholar in his own right intrigued by Zanzibari history, and as a native of Zanzibar himself. He celebrates the arrival of Islam to the islands, the rise of the great Swahili city-states and culture, then alludes to the communal and political tensions that once threatened to divide the Muslims of Zanzibar. Dr. Amour's speech was experimenting with the makings of a national image in which the memory of Arab rule was being reconciled with the present.²⁸⁹ As

(troublemakers), anti-Union agitators, and that they were not welcome there. These comments were preserved in a tape recorded speech which mysteriously found its way to Sultan Qaboos. In retaliation, Qaboos offered that any Zanzibari who could certify his or her Omani descent would be given "asylum" in Oman, that is, would be welcomed as a citizen of Oman, and offered jobs and places to live. While the story itself was kept quiet, Zanzibaris who claimed Omani descent were scrambling for passports and birth certificates, some going so far as to have them forged. This sort of political tension fuels the divisive ethnic animosities that were exacerbated by the revolution. Indeed, as one colleague put it, "for people like me, real black Africans born here in Zanzibar, this situation can have negative effects." He explained that the Omani Zanzibaris who leave might return with capital. "Money will be their weapons," he warns. "They will come with their money, their cars, and buy our properties right out from under us...."

²⁸⁹ A government printed pamphlet published in 1988 entitled Zanzibar in Perspective opens with a dedication to "Reconciliation, Unity, and Progress". This was written by the then Chief Minister of Zanzibar, Dr. Ali Omar Juma during the early phase of Zanzibar's economic liberalization campaign. The dedication recalls in its way the divisive ethnic and class antagonisms of the political past and the aftermath of the revolution.

Muslim brethren at the height of affluence, the Gulf states are now obliged to help advance the development of Zanzibar's infrastructure and cultural resources.

The religion and history that links Zanzibar to the Gulf nations helps to define, in contrast to mainland Tanzania, the cultural and political sovereignty that many Zanzibaris have long declared, a sentiment which has intensified in the current period of multipartyism. This is not to say that Zanzibaris are formally unified against the mainland, or that "Islam" or "Arab" culture are especially "in vogue" or being championed as the dominant emblems of Zanzibari sub-national identity. Indeed, at a Parents' Day celebration I attended at a primary school in Stone Town, the children performed traditional "Swahili" dances, where girls were wrapped in colorful kangas and moved to the accompaniment of drums, as well as dances that were Arab in origin, where the girls wore sleek dresses and danced to imported cassettes of Arabic music -- an explicit if somewhat stereotyped display of Zanzibar's recognition of its "African" and "Arab" heritages.

Similarly, the President's speech -- prepared for an international audience of Zanzibar specialists²⁹⁰ -- amounted to an official statement of self-determination. On the one hand, the statement conveyed the recognition that

²⁹⁰ This is a category which certainly included Zanzibaris themselves, both local and ex-patriot.

Zanzibar had long been the object of a pervasive and authoritative western academic discourse that has had the power, ultimately, to define what Zanzibar is to the world. However, it also constituted a declaration that the Zanzibari state would be claiming an active, rather than subjected role for itself in this process of definition; and hosting this international conference was one certain way to accomplish that goal.²⁹¹ In a similar vein, the Zanzibari government's official stance on containing Muslim extremists -- combined with a call for the reconstitution of Islamic leadership in Zanzibar -- is a work in progress, that of reshaping a national image of Zanzibar that is both politically viable, but also socially and culturally representative.

²⁹¹ As a final note, the 3-day conference was held in English. On the afternoon of the last day, when participants assembled to reflect on the conference and discuss ideas for future meetings, several colleagues asked, shouldn't a conference on the history and culture of Zanzibar be held in Kiswahili rather than in English? While the response was enthusiastic in the affirmative, the answer remained unclear. The question of language poses a dilemma of post-colonial societies that have long been underrepresented in the western dominated, "global academy": should international conferences become the domain for actively demonstrating that language is political not only in the construction of national identities, but in the very production and communication of knowledge about those identities? Zanzibaris may well be newly engaged in international academic discourse, but they are also well aware of the enduring and complex connection between language and power.

However, despite the official script in which Zanzibar's past is reconciliated with the present, the fact remains that Zanzibaris do not all share the same narrative of "the" past. Indeed, that the decentralization of Islamic authority in Zanzibar is interpreted as fragmentation and loss rather than as diversity and debate betrays a sense that things are "out of control", that relations of power have become unmanageable. I think this condition relates to what Vincent Crapanzano has described as a "failure of hegemony":

"Where there is a failure of hegemony, history can no longer serve as such a reference point, for each of the parties to an encounter has his own 'legitimate' position, his own history, his own memory. The artifice of historical assumption -- the incorporation of multiple positions into a single, consuming narrative -- is revealed. The strain -- to share or not to share, to be incorporated into, or to remain independent of, any historical tradition -- is enormous."
(1993:441).

While in Zanzibar this strain exists both within and between Islamic and secular arenas, it is experienced most acutely by those who have the most to loose from a "failure of hegemony" -- the state and the essentialists.

IV. "*Ametia Kininja*": Essentialism and the Renegade

This section examines local language use as a medium of social commentary on Islamic essentialism. I do this by exploring a term coined by Swahili youth -- "*kininja*" -- which is used in reference to a small number of Swahili

women in town who are wearing a veil in public, leaving only their eyes exposed.

While all Swahili women in Zanzibar Town do wear some form of hijabu in public -- that is, the outer garment Muslim women are expected to wear over their dress and hair outside of the home -- facial covering is, today, unusual. Indeed, a great variety of hijabu styles are worn in Zanzibar town; women also wear different styles for different occasions. There is the more "traditional" *buibui*, worn mostly by older women, which consists of a copious piece of unadorned, black fabric with an attached headpiece that ties underneath the chin. There are the more fashionable cloak-like styles worn by younger women, which are made of fine, often sheer black cloth and are decorated with lacy trim. These are usually worn with black, embroidered head scarves. Some women also wear a *mtandi*, colorful printed fabrics over their head and dresses. Another style consists of a long black coat or smock with long sleeves that buttons up the front, and which is usually worn with a white head scarf. Interestingly, this style is often referred to as "BAMITA", which is the acronym for the now defunct Mosque Council of Tanzania²⁹² organized by president Aboud Jumbe in the 1970s. It seems that a woman wearing this style is often assumed to be a follower of one of the essentialist cohorts, or assumed to be someone who is

²⁹² Baraza la Misikiti wa Tanzania.

an especially observant Muslim. Since in all of these styles the face remains fully exposed, the monochrome grey or black veiled hijabu -- which cuts across the face just under the eyes -- is rather conspicuous. Significantly, the ten or so women who have chosen to wear this veil are the students of the essentialists sheikhs.²⁹³

As mentioned earlier, the essentialists organized religious lectures for women which were held at the end of every other month in Stone Town. While attending these lectures I noticed that the few women I had seen around town who were wearing the veil were also present. In the interview I conducted with several of Khamisi's women students, I learned that their choice to wear the veil was based on their own interpretations of particular passages in the Qur'an and Hadith that address the question of women's hijabu, that is, both clothing and personal comportment for Muslim women. "While there are many ideas about proper Islamic dress [for women]," they explained to me, "if you read deeply into the text, you will learn that wearing the veil is the correct and true way."²⁹⁴ They agreed that wearing a facial veil is not required by Islam, and that it is a choice they have made for themselves. "A woman's face," they continued, "can be enticing to a man, so by

²⁹³ The majority of essentialist followers, however, do not sport the veil.

²⁹⁴ Interview with group of women at Bi Halima's home, April 12, 1990.

concealing her face, a woman protects her intimacy and avoids any possibility of sexual advances from men outside the home." While Sheikh Khamisi, their teacher, neither required nor discouraged the wearing of the veil, they explained that it his teachings that however guided them towards a proper interpretation of the Qur'anic concept of hijabu. For these women, then, wearing the veil is a public expression of personal submission and commitment to Islamic precepts of morality, purity, and self-restraint (*kujizuia*). In a conversation I had much later with several other veiled women, I was told that they had seen the veil on television, from Egypt and from Mombasa, and had begun to imitate it. They wear the veil because a woman's face brings "*fitina*" -- discord, gossip.

a. From "Kizorro" to "Kininja": A Short History of the Veil in Zanzibar Town

When I was living in Zanzibar, the imported Japanese Ninja movies were most popular with both children and adults alike, and could be seen in the local cinemas or rented from video stores in town. In recent years, with the liberalization of the Zanzibar economy, there has been a marked increase in the availability of foreign commodities and media culture in town, including the "Ninja" and other

foreign action films.²⁹⁵ I too had seen the video "American Ninja II" with a group of friends at a neighbor's house in Stone Town. In the film, the face of the protagonist, the Ninja, is concealed, leaving only the eyes exposed. Several days after seeing the film, I was walking through the streets in town and I heard a group of youngsters cry out, "*Ametia kininja!*" -- "She's dressed like Ninja!" They were referring to a woman who had just crossed their path; she was wearing a veil.²⁹⁶

Interestingly, the most common term I heard used in reference to the veil was "*kizorro*". I first heard this term used among the women in one of the bi-monthly lectures I attended, and later learned that it was used among adults in general. This word struck me since it conjured up a familiar reference from my own cultural background -- the masked and mysterious protagonist featured in the film "Zorro Rides Again", which was made in the United States in 1937 (Fetrow 1992:774).²⁹⁷ While most of my Zanzibari

²⁹⁵ Indian films, however, were the most common and also quite popular, even though most of the Kiswahili-speaking audience could not understand the dialogue.

²⁹⁶ In Kiswahili, the prefix *ki-* is attached to nouns to create adjectives. *Ki-* is also used to make diminutives and adverbs.

²⁹⁷ The film was based on the novel by Johnston McCulley, The Mark of Zorro (New York: American Reprint Co., 1976 [c1924 by Gosset and Dunlap]). Zorro was a cunning protagonist who plundered haciendas and protected missions in southern California at the turn of the century. He is the most famous of the many "roguish pulp characters" that McCulley invented (Hutchison 1996: 270).

friends and colleagues had never heard of the Zorro films, and associated the term only with the veil, several Zanzibari professors in their mid to late fifties and had spent their childhoods in Zanzibar Town at roughly the same time, had some very interesting stories to tell about the term "kizorro".

First, they confirmed that the Zorro films had indeed been shown at the cinema in Zanzibar Town when they were children.²⁹⁸ One man recalled that in the early 1950s, the standard manner of wearing hijabu for Zanzibari women in town was to cover the entire face with a black, diaphanous veil -- a woman could see through the fabric without being seen herself. The term kizorro, he explained, was taken from the movie and used with derogatory connotations to describe those women who would allow their eyes to be exposed. It was derogatory because exposure of the eyes was regarded as an enticing and thus indecent display. Another colleague corroborated this in his recollection, then added that women exposed their eyes in order to "make mischief" (flirt with men) in public without having their identities disclosed, and that "kizorro" was a term that referred specifically to this mischievous use of the veil. However, one detail this colleague added was that the women who wore

²⁹⁸ This was not a group discussion. I met with each person separately.

the full facial veil were predominantly "upper class Omanis".²⁹⁹

But the most interesting recollection came from a woman of Omani descent named Bi Asha Habibi. When she was a little girl, all women wore the buibui, which at the time, included the diaphanous veil described above. She explains that only women in the countryside left their faces exposed. Wearing the veil was the custom, she emphasized, and not a sign of religious zeal or devotion. Without her buibui, a woman would feel embarrassment -- "children would laugh if you started to develop breasts and allowed them to show through your clothing. There was also peer pressure; you discussed these things with your girlfriends."

Moreover, in those days, she recalled, young girls were not permitted to go to weddings and to taarab music performances as they do today. Instead, youngsters who wanted to attend these festivities had to conceal their identities by pulling a portion of their buibui up in front

²⁹⁹ I was told by Bwana Zuri's wife, an Omani Zanzibari well into her sixties, that it was only "women of 'heshima' [status and respect] -- the Barawa, Hadrami, and Omanis" who wore the full face veil. If this is the case, then the veil likely constituted a symbol that distinguished women of status and rank in town. Still, more accurate data on the history of hijabu in Zanzibar are needed to confirm this, especially since several other informants recalled that all women in town wore the veil, not just the elite. It seems to me that both are correct, and that the discrepancy would roughly correlate to the various demographic shifts that occurred in Zanzibar town from the 1940s to the 1960s, and to changing notions and symbols of what signalled elite status.

of their face, just leaving the eyes exposed so that they could watch the fun and performances. They had to do this because once the women arrived at the festivities, they always removed their buibuis and veils! So it was not that the young women were trying to entice or flirt with men that they wore the veil in this fashion; they were trying to avoid being seen and identified by their mothers, their aunts, and neighbors at activities they were not permitted to attend. It is this sort of half veiling, she explains, that people called "kizorro, from the movie." Bi Asha recalls that as "more people started coming into Zanzibar" in the 1960s due to "changes with the mainland" (she refers here to the Union established between Zanzibar and Tanganyika), women gradually stopped wearing the veil.³⁰⁰ She concluded by reiterating her earlier point, that wearing the veil in the first place was a matter of cultural convention; in other words, hijabu, whatever its form, is not necessarily an indicator of personal piety or the religiosity of the group.³⁰¹

While "kizorro" later became so conventionalized that most people today are not really aware of its origins as a term, "kininja" is still relatively new. When I asked

³⁰⁰ Again, further research on the history of hijabu in Zanzibar is needed to explore how and why this occurred.

³⁰¹ Indeed, according to Bwana Zuri's wife and others, one could say it is more an indicator of status or class than it is of piety.

informants about the exclamation I had heard in the streets -- "ametia kininja!" -- as well as the context in which it was used, they invariably laughed, and explained to me that "kininja" came from the Ninja films. What is especially interesting here is the contrast between the behaviors to which "kizoro" and "kininja" refer. While "kizorro" was used to describe women who were misbehaving, or "being mischievous", "kininja" describes women who are trying to convey an ardent commitment to and sense of Islamic religious propriety.

b. "Ametia Kininja!": Metaphor, Vantage Point, and an Irony of Images

What is significant here is that when we juxtapose the new referent which kininja is used to describe -- the atypical style of hijabu distinguished by the addition of a veil, leaving only the eyes exposed -- with its original foreign cinematic image, we see that the term "kininja" is linking two incongruous domains of meaning through an ironic identity of images. As metaphor, the effectiveness of "kininja" is that it critiques or even satirizes the essentialist claim to religious authenticity but without the explicit appearance of doing so.

In an article on the poetics of lexical borrowing in Shaba Swahili, Johannes Fabian suggests that the function of such borrowing involves not only the instrumental filling of lexical gaps in a language; in addition, he argues, lexical

borrowing can also constitute an expressive or connotative act which extends the borrowed word into new contexts or domains of meaning (Fabian 1982). Because words do exist in Kiunguja (the Kiswahili dialect spoken in Zanzibar) that can be used for veil, such as *shela*, *hijabu*, or *kizorro*, it is likely that *kininja* is not required to fill such a "lexical gap".

Similarly, in an article discussing the social use of metaphor in language, James Fernandez argues that "...metaphor accomplishes an *unaccustomed* linking of [semantic] domains" through the cross-referencing of like structures, parts, or feelings in those domains (Fernandez: 1974:46-47). The use of metaphor, then, constitutes a kind of "assessment by analogy" (ibid:42). I argue that the two domains which *kininja* links are the "essentialist" (women who wear a veil) and the "popular cinematic" (the imported movie featuring a renegade but well-meaning protagonist, the veiled Ninja). These are, indeed, incongruous domains. First, and more generally, regarding the form of the domains, is the incongruity between "essentialist Islam" and popular "entertainment" (movie-viewing). Secondly, and more specifically concerning the content of the domains, is the contrast between the devout, submissive, virtuous female ("essentialist domain"), and the temporal/worldly, combative, suspect, male ("cinematic domain"). The key element that accomplishes the link between these incongruous

domains is the veil and its associations -- foreignness, and concealment of identity. By invoking the foreign cinematic image of a veiled renegade in reference to essentialist women wearing the veil, I argue that as ironic metaphor, the exclamation "ametia kininja!" functions as an inventive medium of social commentary which, in effect, renders anomalous the essentialist orientation to Islam, and distances the critique of Zanzibari Islamic culture with which it is associated -- all without presenting a challenge to Islam itself.

I should note here that the veiled women's intentions are not marginalized or teased; as one young man put it, "Everyone has his/her own way of being, a person knows what motivates him/her deep inside." Instead it is their style of hijabu that elicits commentary. Indeed, the veil, an atypical style of hijabu in contemporary Zanzibar, has come to be associated with the essentialist or bida'a groups. In turn, I argue that "kininja" conveys or implies a sense of ambivalence or even resistance to the religious conformity and control that is perceived in the essentialists' message about Islam.

Not surprisingly, even my own hijab -- on the occasions when I wore one -- elicited comments from youngsters in the streets. One instance was especially interesting and deserves some comment. Whenever I attended Bi Mwanasha's darasa in Mkunazini, I was required to wear two kangas, one

over my head, the other around my waist, and a buibui over this. I felt rather conspicuous, and was glad that the darasa began quite early in the morning before most people were out in the streets. One morning however, on my way to Mkunazini, a boy saw me and shouted out, "*Hey Bamita! Are you bida'a?*" First, to be called "bamita", as explained above, implies that the woman referred to is religiously more observant than others. Then to push the point further he adds, "*are you bida'a?*" -- an extremist. No doubt he was struck by my outfit, since it is very rare to see a mzungu (Anglo-European/American) like myself sporting a buibui; he simply had to comment, to call my attention to the incongruity he saw, and which he "explained" in terms of religious extremism.

Fernandez concludes his essay by stating that "However men [sic] may analyze their experiences within any domain, they inevitably know and understand them best by referring them to other domains for elucidation. It is in this metaphoric cross-referencing of domains, perhaps, that culture is integrated, providing us with the sensation of wholeness" (Fernandez 1974: 58). And, I would add, it is in the cross-referencing of domains, as seen in the exclamation "*ametia kininja!*", that irony -- or the ironic stance -- becomes an inventive and incisive medium of social commentary.

The spirit parody discussed in chapter seven exemplifies how Zanzibaris can "make fun of" or "play with" the familiar problem of spirits. This play does not necessarily detract from the seriousness of the problem, but rather creates a space to deal with it in an inclusive manner; parody does not limit, privilege, or restrict interpretation, nor does it categorize people's involvement in spirit possession as correct or incorrect, traditional or modern, Islamic or pagan. However, in a discussion on the "artifice" of master narrative, Crapanzano writes "There is in all play a danger that the truth alluded to...will break through and arrest the play" (1991:431). Indeed, I think it is this very tension -- that is, walking the fault line between assent and subversion -- that makes the parody so effective. Similar to the spirit parody, the phrase "ametia kininja" also establishes a vantage point. It positions the speaker/observer in relation to the observed, and in doing so, opens up a space in which the veil actually reveals more than it conceals.

GLOSSARY

<i>alim</i> (pl. <i>ulama</i>)	Islamic scholar, learned person
<i>asili</i>	origin, ancestry, source
<i>aya</i>	a verse from the Holy Qur'an
<i>azma</i>	a protective amulet that is made to hang in a doorway
<i>bara</i>	the African mainland, in contrast to the islands
<i>baraka</i>	divine blessing, grace
<i>baraza</i>	veranda; a place of public audience or reception; council;
<i>Barazanji</i>	author (1714-1762) of the most popular maulidi text recited in Zanzibar
<i>Benaadir coast</i>	the Somali coast
<i>bibi</i>	a woman
<i>bida'a</i>	a forbidden innovation or accretion in Islamic worship, according to essentialist thinking
<i>buibui</i>	black cloak-like garment that women wear over their dresses when going outdoors
<i>buruhani</i>	divine gift, power bestowed on a person by virtue of God's love
<i>Chama cha Mapinduzi</i>	The Revolutionary Party. Ruling party of Tanzania
<i>chano</i>	food treats prepared for spirits
<i>cheo</i>	social status, position, rank
<i>chetezo</i>	clay incense burner
<i>chuo</i> (pl. <i>vyuo</i>)	Qur'an school
<i>darasa</i>	a study group or class

<i>dawa</i>	medicine
<i>degedege</i>	febrile seizures
<i>dhambi</i>	religious offense, sin, divine retribution
<i>dhati</i>	intention, free will
<i>dini</i>	religion
<i>dua</i>	supplicatory prayer
<i>dufu</i>	tambourine-like, skin drums played at maulidi performances
<i>elimu, elmu, ilm</i>	knowledge; usually implied to be textual knowledge
<i>falak, falaq, falaki</i>	astrology
<i>fani</i>	techniques
<i>Al-Fatihah</i>	the Prologue, the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an
<i>fatwa</i>	a non-binding judgement or opinion given by a mufti, a Muslim scholar-jurist
<i>fiqh, fiqhi</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>fitina</i>	quarrelling, gossip that brings trouble
<i>fundi</i>	a skilled, specialized craftsperson or expert in various fields of knowledge
<i>Gibriil</i>	the angel Gabriel
<i>Hadith, hadithi</i>	authorized stories of the words, deeds, and countenance of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>Hadramawt</i>	region in southern Yemen
<i>Hadrami</i>	a person who traces descent to the Hadramawt
<i>haiba</i>	beauty of countenance

<i>haja</i>	a need, request, appeal for assistance
<i>hajji</i>	a pilgrim to Mecca (and Medina)
<i>hajj</i>	the pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>hakimu</i>	a judge
<i>hali</i>	condition, circumstances
<i>Hanafi</i>	one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Hanbali</i>	one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>haram, haramu</i>	something that is considered to be forbidden for Muslims to do; an object with which Muslims are forbidden to come into contact
<i>hirizi</i>	a protective amulet containing passages from the Qur'an and which is usually worn on the body
<i>heshima</i>	qualities associated with respectability in coastal societies (honor, rank, dignity, reverence, courtesy, generosity)
<i>hidaya</i>	a wonderful gift
<i>hijab, hijabu</i>	the garment a woman wears over her clothing when she goes outdoors; also refers to the general comportment of a woman in the preservation of her modesty
<i>hijaz</i>	region in the Saudi peninsula where Mecca and Medina are located
<i>hoja</i>	evidence, proof
<i>homa</i>	general term for a fever, and for symptoms of malaria
<i>ibada</i>	ritual acts incumbent upon Muslims in Islamic worship (the Five Pillars of Islam: declaration of

	faith, prayer, giving alms, the pilgrimage, fasting)
<i>ijaza</i>	certification by a teacher that a student has completed the reading of a particular text; ritual authorization that one has become a member of a <i>tarika</i> (Sufi brotherhood)
<i>imam, imamu</i>	an Islamic preacher, leader of prayer in a mosque
<i>Injili</i>	the Gospel
<i>itikadi</i>	belief, religious faith
<i>jazba</i>	excitement, ecstasy
<i>jinn, jinna</i>	spirits mentioned in the Qur'an that were created by God
<i>kabuli</i>	like <i>buruhani</i> : inherent spiritual power bestowed by God's love
<i>kadhi, qadi</i>	Islamic judge
<i>kali</i>	(adj) bitter, sharp, intense, vehement, extreme
<i>kanga</i>	colorful piece of cloth approximately 40 by 60 inches in size with Swahili proverbs written on them. A <i>kanga</i> can be worn in many ways for different purposes; typically it is worn over the head and around the shoulders, and around the waist, mid-calf in length.
<i>kanzu</i>	men's shirt-dress garment, usually white, beige or pale blue in color, with an embroidered placket
<i>karama</i>	like <i>buruhani</i> and <i>kabuli</i> : spiritual power bestowed through God's love
<i>kasida, qasida</i>	poem, usually referring to the compositions recited as part of the <i>maulidi</i> performance

<i>khalifa</i>	leader of a sufi brotherhood or tarika
<i>khitimu, khitima</i>	to complete the reading of the Holy Qur'an from start to finish
<i>khumbaro</i>	a person of mixed Arab and Indian descent
<i>Kiarabu</i>	the Arabic language
<i>kibarua</i>	casual laborer, working for daily wages
<i>Kiebrani</i>	the Hebrew language
<i>kienyeji</i>	adjective describing a person, practice, or thing as indigenous, native to a place
<i>kijicho</i>	feelings of jealousy or envy that have mystical power to harm or do damage to others
<i>kijuzuu</i>	Qur'an school booklets containing the shortest chapters of the Qur'an
<i>kininja</i>	a veil that conceals a woman's face just under the eyes
<i>kisomo</i>	readings
<i>kitabu</i>	a book
<i>kiti</i>	literally a chair, used to describe the host of a spirit
<i>kizorro</i>	like kininja, a veil that conceals a woman's face just under her eyes
<i>kofia</i>	embroidered cap worn by Muslim men
<i>kombe</i>	passages of the Qur'an written on a board or plate with saffron ink which is then poured over with water and swallowed; it is taken as medicine
<i>kubwa</i>	large, great

<i>kuchuchia</i>	calling a spirit into the head of the kiti or host so that she/he sways
<i>kujizuia</i>	to control one's self (self-control)
<i>kunuia</i>	to form a wish, an intention in one's mind
<i>kupandisha mashetani</i>	like <i>kuchuchia</i> , to cause a spirit to mount into the head of the kiti or host
<i>kupunga pepo</i>	to call and exorcise spirits
<i>kusudia</i>	to intend, have a purpose
<i>kuswali, kusali</i>	to pray
<i>kutafuta maisha</i>	literally "to look for life"; to find work, to live one's life
<i>kuzingua</i>	to disenchant or undo a magic spell (often by reading from the Qur'an)
<i>laghai</i>	imposter, swindler (also to cheat or deceive persuasively)
<i>LEGCO</i>	The Legislative Council during colonial period
<i>liwali</i>	governor (in 19th century)
<i>maarifa, maarifat</i>	knowledge, information; a plan
<i>maalim</i>	Islamic teacher
<i>maalumu</i>	(adj) special, recognized, known
<i>madrasa</i>	mosque school
<i>mafunzo</i>	instruction
<i>maluni</i>	prostitute
<i>mapinduzi</i>	revolution, specifically the Zanzibar revolution of 1964
<i>mapozo</i>	cures
<i>maradhi</i>	illnesses

<i>mashetani</i>	spirits
<i>masjid</i>	mosque
<i>masomo</i>	lessons
<i>matibabu</i>	cures
<i>mawlid, mawlidi</i>	a pangyretical text that tells the story of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, the significant moments of his life, and that praises his beauty and goodness.
<i>mcha Mungu</i>	one who is known to be deeply devout, pious, God-fearing
<i>mchawi</i>	a sorcerer
<i>mfalme</i>	a sultan
<i>Mfunguo Sita</i>	month of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>mganga</i>	a curer, healer, medicinal practitioner
<i>Mgaziya</i>	a person of Comorian descent
<i>mila</i>	culture, tradition
<i>Miraji</i>	Muhammad's ascent to the Seventh Heaven to receive the ibada
<i>miti shamba</i>	cures using the leaves and roots of local plants
<i>mizimu</i>	ancestral or place spirits
<i>mjuzi</i>	a wise, knowledgeable person
<i>mkeka</i>	prayer mat
<i>mori</i>	intense feeling, ferocity
<i>mouridi</i>	a person who has been initiated into a Sufi brotherhood or tarika
<i>mpungaji</i>	a spirit specialist or mganga
<i>mrashi</i>	rosewater

<i>Mshirazi</i>	a person of Shirazi descent
<i>msikiti</i>	a mosque
<i>msimamo</i>	(noun) one's stand or position on a matter
<i>mtabibu</i>	a healer, curative practitioner
<i>mtakatifu</i>	a morally pure person; a saint;
<i>mtaalamu</i>	a learned, skilled person
<i>mtawa</i>	a deeply pious person
<i>Mtume</i>	the Prophet Muhammad
<i>muhogo</i>	cassava
<i>mwalimu</i>	a teacher (Islamic or secular)
<i>mwanachuoni</i>	an Islamic scholar
<i>mwanafunzi</i>	pupil
<i>Mwenyezi Mungu</i>	Almighty God
<i>mwombezi</i>	a person who prays on the behalf of another
<i>mzee</i>	an elder, also a respectful term of reference
<i>nabii</i>	a prophet
<i>nafsi</i>	a person's essence, inner self, soul
<i>ndizi mbichi</i>	unripe bananas
<i>ndizi mbivu</i>	ripe bananas
<i>ngoma</i>	drum; any song and dance performance;
<i>nia</i>	intention, resolve, conscience
<i>NPSS</i>	National Party of the Subjects of the Sultan
<i>nur</i>	inner spiritual light

<i>pepo</i>	spirits
<i>Qadiriyya, Qaadiriy</i>	a Sufi brotherhood in Zanzibar
<i>qiya</i>	analogical reasoning
<i>radhi</i>	blessings, consent, or pardon from one's elders or parents
<i>(kupiga) ramli</i>	divination by reading marks in sand on a board
<i>roho</i>	a person's soul
<i>ruhani, ruhania</i>	a particular Muslim spirit
<i>sadaka</i>	religious offering, alms
<i>salat</i>	obligatory prayer
<i>sayyid, seyyid</i>	title for a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>Shadhiliyya</i>	a Sufi brotherhood in Zanzibar
<i>Shafi, Shafi'i</i>	one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence; the one followed by the majority of Zanzibari Sunni Muslims
<i>shahada</i>	Islamic profession of faith
<i>sharbati</i>	sweet, syrupy beverage preferred by many spirits
<i>sharif</i>	a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>sheikh, shaykh, shekhe</i>	honorific for a man respected for his knowledge and social standing; used for Islamic scholars in particular
<i>shela</i>	facial veil
<i>sheria</i>	Islamic law
<i>siasa</i>	politics
<i>silsilah</i>	intergenerational "chain" of learning and blessing, used

	particularly among the sufi brotherhoods; can also be used to described chain of learning among non-Sufis
<i>stadi</i>	an expert, experienced and skilled fundi
<i>Sufi</i>	member of a mystical brotherhood or tarika
<i>sura, surat</i>	chapter from the Holy Qur'an
<i>taawasul, tawasali</i>	intercession through prayer
<i>tafsir, tafsiri</i>	Qur'anic exegesis
<i>tahlilli</i>	the act of saying "There is no God but God"
<i>tajwid, tajwidi</i>	correct pronunciation of the Qur'an in recitation
<i>tarika</i>	a Sufi order or brotherhood
<i>tasawwuf</i>	mystical knowledge
<i>Tawhid</i>	doctrine of the Oneness of God
<i>thawabu</i>	divine rewards
<i>ubani</i>	frankincense
<i>uchawi</i>	sorcery, malevolent magic
<i>udi</i>	aloewood (incense)
<i>ufundi</i>	like utaalamu, specialized skill in and knowledge of something
<i>uganga</i>	knowledge of cures, healing
<i>ujuzi</i>	knowledge, wisdom
<i>ustaadh</i>	an Islamic instructor
<i>utabibu</i>	knowledge of cures
<i>utalii</i>	tourism
<i>Uwaysiyya</i>	a branch of the Qadiriyya sufi order

<i>uwezo</i>	power, authority
<i>visa (sing. kisa)</i>	stories of the prophets recounted in the Qur'an
<i>vitendo</i>	one's actions, deeds
<i>wafuasi</i>	followers (eg. the students or cohort of a sheikh)
<i>wali</i>	cooked rice
<i>walii</i>	a saint
<i>waqf</i>	religious endowment
<i>wasaidizi</i>	assistants
<i>Ya Sin</i>	thirty-sixth chapter of the Qur'an
<i>zamzam water</i>	holy water taken from a well near the Great Mosque in Mecca which is thought to have healing properties
<i>ziara</i>	to visit or make a pilgrimage to a grave or tomb
<i>zikiri</i>	remembrance of God; repeated invocation of God's name in order to achieve spiritual union with Him; typically performed by the Sufi mystical orders of Islam
<i>zindiko</i>	like hirizi, a protective amulet containing verses from the Qur'an

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