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**Tales of the everyday city:
geography and chronology in
postcolonial Mombasa**

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Abstract

Grounded in ethnographic research conducted amongst Mombasa's small and heterogeneous Muslim population with roots in what is today the Indian state of Gujarat, this thesis explores the mobilities, insecurities, notions of Islamic reform and patterns of claims-making that circulate in the city. These themes are examined through the lens of 'everyday' discourse and practice, paying particular attention to the multiplicity of dispositions towards time and space that inform these broader urban processes.

The thesis describes Mombasan Muslims struggling with history and with the future. Through Art Deco façades, deep-fried delicacies and discourses of decay, I consider some of the ways individuals historicise their relations to the city, marking status and relations of affinity, as much as arraighing others for the political, economic and religious uncertainties of the present. Unpacking a blood donation drive and a gated community in-the-making, I trace the histories and geographies of piety that colour this Indian Ocean port, and how these are entangled with material aspirations and regional anxieties. The 'Mombasan urbanism' that emerges in these pages is as scopic as it is rooted; it is infused with memory and with futurity.

The discourses and practices of the littoral residents we encounter bring us into dialogue with a range of literatures, from the anthropology of architecture to ethnographies of insecurity, as well as studies of memory and mourning. These, and other thematic issues, are considered in tandem with the regional scholarship on Islam in Kenya, Asians in East Africa and Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms. The research presented here offers possibilities for thinking beyond the racialised social categories that continue to structure stereotype and scholarship in East Africa, and expands the literature on 'being' Muslim in Mombasa. Through the geographies and chronologies shown to constitute the Mombasan everyday, this thesis evinces the city as always in the making.

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A note on language

The Mombasans I knew pride themselves on not speaking any language ‘properly’. They are, however, indubitable polyglots: the people I spent time with traversed easily through contexts involving English, Swahili, Gujarati, Kutchi, Urdu and Arabic. While most of my research was conducted in English, the range of languages used here reflects the idiomatic timbres that reverberate through Mombasan daily life. The mix makes it impossible to follow a standardised orthographic or transliteration system. I have thus avoided transliteration and spell words here according to what I saw or heard most commonly in Mombasa. This includes using the word *Ramadhan*, instead of *Ramadan*, and *imambargah*, instead of *imambara*. The text contains Anglicised plurals of non-English words, such as *jamaats* (plural for *jamaat*) or *buibuis* (plural for *buibui*, the Swahili term for the loose black covering that many Muslim women wear when outside). The same applies to possessives (e.g. *jamaat’s*). These reflect usage in Mombasa.

When mentioning one of the 12 Shia Imams in this thesis, Imam is capitalised, except in quotations by others. Imam Husain’s name is subject to orthographic variation – including Hussain, Husayn, Husein, Hussein – both in the academic literature and in community texts. I have used Husain throughout, unless quoted differently by an author or organisation.

The names of the people I met in Mombasa have been anonymised with pseudonyms.

‘Pick up the phone sweetie! Pick up the phone sweetie! Pick up the phone sweetie!’ Latifah eventually responds to her commanding ringtone, its imperative made all the more abrasive by the Tweety Bird cartoon voice in which it is spoken. She holds the phone to her ear with her shoulder, continuing to stir the sizzling *bhajiyas* – bite-sized balls of chickpea dhal, onions and spices – as they swim in the cavernous wok of oil below. Kasuku and Kasuku, the household’s two parrots called Parrot,¹ are as squawky as ever, gnawing at the bars of their cage and dribbling like old men. Luqman, the youngest addition to this joint household, is crying in a back room, while Juma, one of Latifah’s servants, who today sports a faded orange ‘Vote Joho’ t-shirt (a reference to the incumbent Mombasa County Governor), surveys the mountain of washing up.

Latifah, whose unbridled generosity is combined with a rather brusque demeanour, ends her conversation and flips the phone shut: she is not amused. It’s the woman who ordered the *bhajiyas* again. ‘Now she wants me to take a photo of everything before sending. Some people have problems’, she clucks, ‘I don’t know, maybe she doesn’t trust me’. Latifah vents some of her annoyance on the start button of the blender, turning desiccated coconut, chilli, lime and salt – the essential chutney accompaniment to *bhajiyas* – into a thick pulp.

It’s Ramadhan and Latifah is making a vast quantity of *bhajiyas* for a woman from the same Shia denomination as her; both are Khoja Ithna-Asheris, one of Mombasa’s many religious communities with origins in the Kutch and Kathiawar regions of contemporary Gujarat. Latifah calls her client ‘the Dubai lady’, in reference to the city in which the latter spends half of her time. This itinerant woman has paid for three-quarters of the *bhajiyas* to be distributed as *iftar* (fast breaking meal) amongst ‘the most needy people’. ‘But her husband is very strict’, Latifah tells me.

He wants to give to people who are fasting properly. I know many needy people but I don’t know if they are fasting. Maybe they say they are but they are not. I can’t guarantee. So I just told her, I know many needy people. She doesn’t want Shia. So I’m giving to mix people. Some African, some Bhadala, Kumbhar, Gamrai.

¹ *Kasuku* means parrot in Swahili.

The latter three proper nouns refer to Sunni communities whose members, like Latifah, trace their ancestry to the Kutch region of Gujarat. I learn that all the people Latifah is planning to distribute food to live in Kibokoni, the area of Old Town where her home is also located.

Latifah will do the rest of the *bhajiyas* ‘half-fry’ and stick them in her industrial, if ageing, freezer: her client will be taking them back to Dubai with her in a few days. ‘Everyone who’s left this place, they always ask for *bhajiyas*’, Latifah explains. ‘Or *mabuyu*’, Mahreen, Latifah’s daughter-in-law, interjects. *Mabuyu*, baobab seeds preserved in a spiced sugar mixture of luminous red hues, are another hugely popular coastal snack.

‘That was the first thing I wanted when I got back from *ziyarat* [pilgrimage]’, Latifah admits, smacking her lips at the memory of the *mabuyu*’s irresistible tartness. Mention of Latifah’s relatively recent trip to Mashhad (in Iran) prompts me to ask Mahreen if she has ever gone on *ziyarat* to Iran or Iraq. She hasn’t but Daria, Latifah’s other daughter-in-law, appears, ready as ever to extol Iran’s virtues. An assertive young mother, Daria spent eight months in Qom before she married, teaching science and English in a school there. Unlike Mahreen, Daria keeps her headscarf on when inside the house. ‘Iran is such a nice country’, she exclaims with her usual vigour. ‘There are government subsidies so you hardly find a beggar. There’s no music. Everywhere you go, you feel it’s so peaceful’.

‘Not like here’, Latifah sighs heavily, coating the room with a sombre mood. ‘*Inshallah* no more of this *fujo* before Eid [*fujo* meaning chaos in Swahili]’. ‘*Inshallah*’, her daughter-in-laws repeat reflexively. Within the last month al-Shabaab, the most prominent militant group in the region, has claimed involvement in an attack that killed over 60 people in Mpeketoni, a town north of Mombasa; there have also been several violent incidents in and around Mombasa, including the shooting of a second white woman in Old Town just a few days ago. ‘We really thought it was you’, Latifah clucks; she had very sweetly called me the morning after the incident to check I was still alive. Qaasim, Latifah’s teenage son, asserts that he had no such doubts: ‘That girl had a skirt. You usually dress like Samantha’, he jokes, associating me with Samantha Lewthwaite, the white British widow of one of the London 7/7 bombers, rumoured to be at large in Kenya. Qaasim is by no means

the first to make comparisons between me and the ‘White Widow’, who is always dressed in hijab, as I often am in Mombasa.

Oblivious to this chatter, Tariq, Latifah’s four year-old grandson, is running in and out of the kitchen playing with a toy *alam*, a battle standard used in ritual commemorations of the Battle of Karbala. This event, which occurred in 680 CE, involved Sunni forces associated with Yazid – the Umayyad caliph who held court in Damascus – who surrounded and ultimately killed a small band of Shia followers near the banks of the Euphrates. The Shia were led by Imam Husain, a grandson of Prophet Mohammed, and, according to Shia doctrine, his fourth rightful successor. Karbala is the defining event of Shia history and a critical part of Khoja Ithna-Asheri daily life. Tariq’s toy, made of a plastic broomstick and a piece of old curtain, mimics the *alams* that decorate the *imambargah* (congregation hall) round the corner, where Latifah and her family go daily during Ramadhan. Latifah reduces Tariq to squeals of delight every time he comes near the kitchen entranceway by making silly faces. At one point she tries to get him to say hi to me. ‘*Mbusu mzungu* [Give the white person a kiss]’, she says in Swahili. Tariq giggles and runs off. Tariq and his little sister Shahla live nearby and are often at Latifah’s. Both understand Kutchi (a language also spoken in Kutch) and some English but prefer to speak in Swahili.

A few moments later the electricity goes off; humidity tightens its soggy grip but at least the small kitchen window provides enough light to see. Latifah, still standing over what must be the seventh batch of *bhajiya*s, is reminded of the problems with the new electricity meter they’ve been required to install. ‘In six days I’ve spent 2000 shillings [approximately 13 pounds sterling at the time]. Before, it used to be 6000 a month’. I remark that at least there are much less power cuts than earlier in the year. ‘Bah, everything is too much expensive’, Latifah retorts. ‘Mombasa was not like this’. I ask Latifah if she would ever considering moving to the Jaffery Complex, the enormous gated residential, religious and commercial complex her *jamaat*² is building in the centre of the island. ‘No way! I was married in this house and I’ll die

² The term *jamaat* (meaning assembly in Arabic) can apply to the congregation in a particular place – e.g. ‘the Mombasa *jamaat*’ – or to a place of gathering, such as a mosque.

in this house!' comes her categorical reply. Mercifully, the power cut only lasts a few minutes, and the fan soon whirs us back to life.

Introduction

Grounded in ethnographic research conducted amongst Mombasa's small and heterogeneous Muslim population with roots in what is today the Indian state of Gujarat, this thesis examines various political, economic, religious and demographic processes through the lens of 'everyday' discourse and practice. In Mombasa and East Africa more broadly, people of South Asian heritage are often referred to as 'Asians', a colonial category of lasting endurance.³ Writing about 'Asians', who are the first to distance themselves from the Subcontinent, in a place often described as 'neither completely African nor, by extension, Kenyan' (Prestholdt 2011: 6), has proved fertile ground for considering dispositions towards time and space. In the pages that follow, my analysis is particularly concerned with the heterogeneity of geographies and chronologies that shape life in the city. The above vignette, which I return to in the Chapter Outline at the end of this Introduction, introduces the major themes explored here.

I came to Mombasa with a research agenda that sought to understand what it meant to be Muslim *and* Asian in the city, adding a minority angle to decades of scholarship on Islam in the region, and its thorny place within the Kenyan nation. The size of the task and the complexity of the city soon swamped what had seemed like an innocent and practical research question. Not only were there many Asian Muslims, quite careful to distinguish themselves from one another, I began to question what it meant to understand life in Mombasa, a sprawling postcolonial city touched by geopolitical instability, neoliberal economics, historical racial and class inequalities, and a century of marginalisation in relation to the state. Over the course of 18 months of fieldwork, repeated conversation and careful observation led me to focus on the themes of mobility (social and physical), Islamic reform, insecurity and

³ Aptly described by Shiva Naipaul (1979: 107) as 'a peculiarly East African political category', the term 'Asian' refers exclusively to those of South Asian provenance. 'Asian' gradually replaced 'Indian' over the course of the colonial period, particularly after Partition, distinguishing those in East Africa from their counterparts in independent India. 'Asian' is used for official purposes, as well as in everyday life, and the term 'Indian' is often employed to refer exclusively to those who reside in the Subcontinent. People of Gujarati-origin in contemporary Mombasa use both terms, and a host of others, to describe themselves.

patterns of claims-making, and how each of these intersect with notions of time and space. These processes are both abstract and expansive, and therefore quite difficult to root in description. I thus open each of the subsequent chapters with an ethnographic vignette as a concrete way into the broader transformations that pervade everyday life on this particular urban littoral. In conclusion, I propose the concept of ‘Mombasan urbanism’ and consider it in relation to my original research motivations.

Writing the city

But I lacked the vocabulary to tell the story of the boa constrictor and the elephant. All I had were drawings of hats (Roy 2016: 201).

The above quote describes urban theorist Ananya Roy’s (2016) recourse to the allegories of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s (2009 [1943]) *The little prince* as she struggled to come to terms with the disjuncture between the theories of urbanism she had been trained in and her efforts to explain city life in Calcutta, site of her doctoral research. Roy initially conducted fieldwork in the mid-1990s and is of a generation of urbanists whose ethnography helped seal the collapse of a ‘modernist’ ontology of the city as a spatial or social whole, shifting the debate away from myths of coherence and stark dualisms – city/country, formal/informal – towards the multiplicity and heterogeneity of metropolitan forms. This trajectory has permitted lines of inquiry such as, ‘Whose urban experience is necessarily negotiated at spatial scales that implode the city?’ (Roy 2016: 206).

In consonance with Roy, recent urban scholarship in Africa eschews categorisations that position the African city as a site of crisis, or as a target for development and civic planning, turning instead to the myriad ways in which cities on the continent are lived, a mode of research that frequently highlights the municipal bounds exceeded by the urban quotidian (de Boeck & Plissart 2014; Mbembé & Nuttall 2004; Myers 2011; Simone 2004, 2009). Ato Quayson’s (2014) analysis of Accra’s principal commercial boulevard, Oxford Street, is exemplary here. At the heart of Quayson’s sophisticated weaving of history and ethnography are the transnational itineraries embedded within the urban spaces on which he focuses. His chapter on

fitness studios, for example, explores the intersection of IMF policies, contemporary unemployment and urban ‘gymming’, and describes how gymmers’ corporeal ambitions draw on both Hollywood and local military notions of the muscle-masculinity nexus.

The multi-scalar messiness enlivened by contemporary urban studies finds echoes in decades of anthropological scholarship on space and time. Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson’s observation that space has ‘always been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected’ succinctly summarised what ethnography could not but expose (1992: 8). Building on seminal histories of global connection by scholars such as Eric Wolf (1982) and Sidney Mintz (1986), the inextricable intermeshing of local and global has long been central to the anthropologist’s view, and demonstrated through cultural forms as diverse as soap opera (Abu-Lughod 1995), homemade biodiversity dictionaries (Tsing 2005) and opinions of tinned soup (Wilk 1999). Ever-mindful of interconnection, this thesis retains a focus on the ways in which space is imagined, allowing me to highlight *contiguous and divisive* spatial visions from Mombasa.

The collapsing of scales regarding space is mirrored in the anthropological literature on time. Describing increasing attention to issues of chronology in two recent review articles, Laura Bear finds evidence of a disciplinary ‘temporal turn’ (2016: 488), and makes a compelling case for the ‘heterochrony’ of the contemporary era (2014a: 20). The mutual interdependence of time and space – made explicit in Bakhtin’s (1981 [1934-1941]) ‘chronotopes’, Gell’s (1992) ‘time-maps’ and Massey’s (2005) ‘throwntogetherness’ – is assumed by Bear and others working in this field, often under the label of ‘timespace’ (see also May & Thrift 2003). In her own research on the subject, Bear (2014b) argues that attention to the multiplicity of temporalities that infuse workplaces offers productive avenues for unpacking processes of capital accumulation: her analysis of the timespaces of labour on the Hooghly demonstrates the piecemeal activities such as the mapping carried out by river pilots – grounded as an ethical approach to time in the sense that it enables seafarers to prevent accidents by sharing knowledge – that permit the flow of goods along its watery course. Amongst the plethora of other recent works on time’s multiplicity, Holbraad & Pedersen (2013) highlight the varied temporal logics that characterise experiences of

and responses to (in)security – these are not simply future-oriented – while Guyer (2007) charts parallels between macroeconomic and evangelical conceptualisations of time, and how this overlay may enable us to better historicise contemporary uncertainty. This thesis will return frequently to intersections of time, religion, insecurity and political economy.

What the aforementioned accounts demonstrate so vividly is the capacity of ‘everyday’ discourses and practices to reveal structural processes of impressive chronological and geographical reach. Implicit in much contemporary anthropology, my understanding of the everyday draws on the incisive scholarship of Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1947, 1961, 1981]). In volume one of his oeuvre, Lefebvre writes, ‘[t]he immediate – the given human raw material of everyday life – at one and the same time reveals and disguises the deepest of realities both implying them and concealing them’ (2014 [1947]: 209–210). By this, Lefebvre means that while the habits and chatter of daily life may appear natural, self-evident and trivial, it is these gestures and enunciations that contain – and therefore have critical potential to illuminate – moments and processes of monumental significance, from the alienation of labour to the workings of state power. Veena Das (2007) has taken up this line of thinking with lucidity, demolishing the distinction between extraordinary violence and everyday life by demonstrating how two catastrophic moments of Indian history – Partition and the assassination of Indira Gandhi – are woven into rumour, neighbourhood jealousies and refusals to bathe. The sociality of aftermath, in other words, encodes the horrors that preceded it: neither history nor violence stops at the event itself.

How to feed this back into an understanding of the city? Based on fieldwork conducted along the US-Mexican border, comparative urbanist Michael Dear (2005) employs the term ‘articulation’ to account for the conjunction of multiple temporalities and spatialities that infuse the ‘postborder city’ (see also Dear & Leclerc 2013). For Dear, thinking in these terms allows him to examine the pervasiveness of the border, as much as the rooted histories of contemporary *mestizaje* (mixed race) cultures. Articulation is familiar terrain for anthropologists, who have long drawn on Antonio Gramsci’s (1971 [1929-1935]) observation that social constructions such as race, class and gender are always inter-related in lived

experience. This is not articulation in an anatomical or architectural sense of appending distinct joints, but rather a framework for emphasising the indivisibility of particular categories of subjecthood. I use articulation here in three senses. At the level of the individual, this thesis frequently points to the ways in which class intersects with racialised notions of piety and ‘origin’ in Mombasa. Equally, I use articulation to conceptualise the collision of temporalities and geographies as urban residents envisage and act on the city. Throughout, I consider the articulation of urban processes and everyday life.

This constellation of articulations, I suggest, offers critical purchase on the concept of ‘cityness’, a term advanced by AbdouMaliq Simone to describe the city as ‘always in the making’ (2009: 3). Urban planners, government institutions and development agencies in Mombasa indubitably play a role in shaping the form and flow of the city; they are, however, not my concern here. The ‘cityness’ I explore in the following pages emerges from everyday interactions between residents, interactions which are always both imbued with, and revelatory of, broader historical, political, religious and economic processes, as well as diverse temporal and geographical imaginaries. Applying ethnographic exegesis to the ways in which Mombasa is made and remade through discourse and practice is the central concern of the chapters that follow. I return to how the metropolitan tales presented here might enrich the theoretical constructs of ‘cityness’ and ‘Mombasan urbanism’ in the conclusion.

Introducing Mombasa: physical and social geographies

The Municipality of Mombasa, home to approximately 1.2 million people, is divided into six parliamentary constituencies which stretch over the island of Mvita⁴ and the surrounding mainland, as can be seen in the maps on the following pages (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The second map (Fig. 2) details some of the key neighbourhoods discussed in this thesis, including Old Town (on the eastern side of the island, near the Old

⁴ Mvita, the historic and official name of the island, was not used by my informants, who referred to the island as ‘Mombasa’ or ‘Town’ when wishing to distinguish from the surrounding mainland. For instance, the question ‘Does she live in Town?’ serves to clarify whether someone lives on the island or not.

Port), Kizingo (south of Old Town) and Nyali (the south coast of the northern mainland). With a handful of exceptions, the people I did research with all lived on Mombasa island, which is a mere five kilometres long and three kilometres wide. Most people had homes in Old Town, or the residential suburbs of Kizingo and Ganjoni (a neighbourhood in the island's southwest). Others I met lived in Makupa and Tudor in the north, or in the central neighbourhoods of Tononka, Saba Saba and Bondeni. All of these can be seen in the map on the next page (Fig. 2).

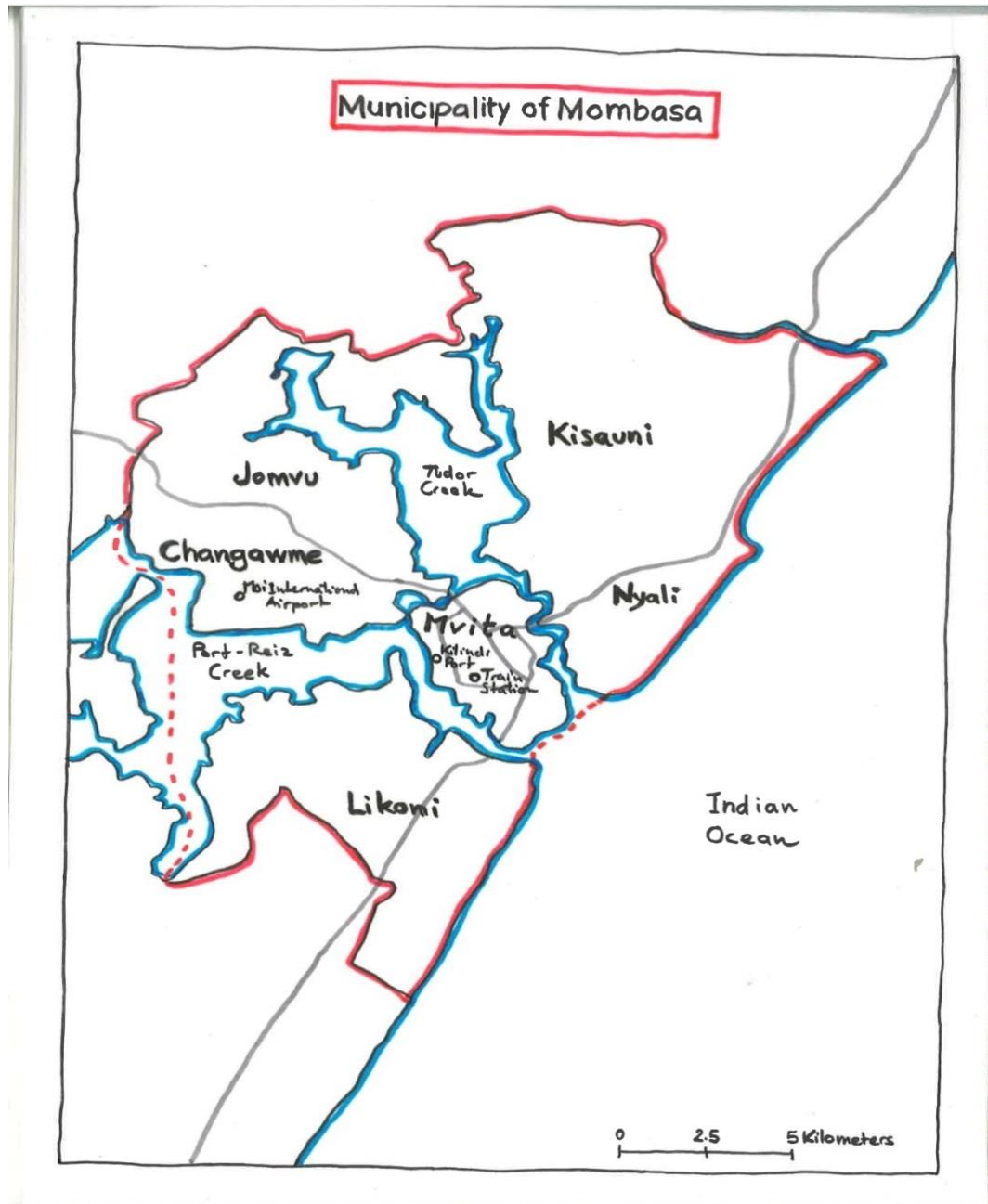


Figure 1: Municipality of Mombasa.
Map created by Pablo de Roulet.

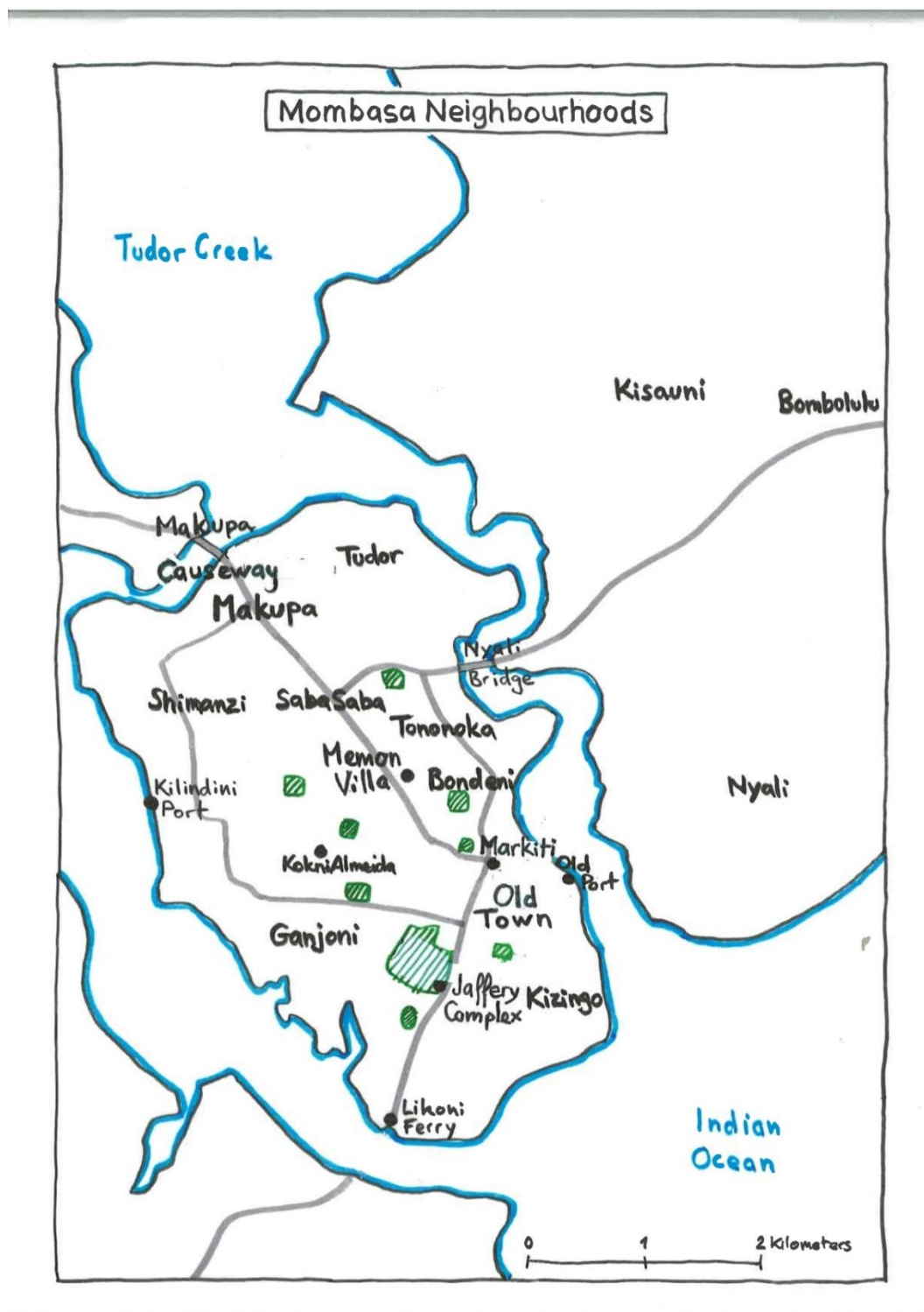


Figure 2: Mombasa neighbourhoods.

This map details the neighbourhoods and locations discussed in the thesis. Some of the island's numerous Muslim cemeteries and sports clubs are marked in green.

Map created by Pablo de Roulet.

Combining the most recent estimations available regarding the size and distribution of Kenya's Asian population, I suggest that around 35,000 live in Mombasa, although this is a very approximate figure (Adam 2006; Nowick 2015). As will be discussed further in the Historical Prelude that follows this Introduction, the term 'Asian' describes a colonial social category of enduring political traction; it also subsumes – and is often superseded by – a remarkable variety of other social divisions. 'Asians' in Mombasa include Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims; each of these groupings is further divided into numerous castes and sects. Hindus include people of the Bhatia, Lohana, Kutchi Leva Patel, Brahmin and Surat Prajapati castes who worship a pantheon of gods such as Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Ganesh, and might be followers of saintly individuals such as Swami Narayan, Jalaram Nivas or Sai Baba, or part of movements such as Arya Samaj or the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (also known as Hare Krishna). Jains are divided into several *vanik* (communities), of which the vast majority in Kenya are Visha Oswal. Sunni Muslims include Baluchis, Koknis, Memons (further divided as Nasserpuria, Okhai and Halai, groupings which relate to place of origin), as well as Punjabi and Surati Muslims. There are many 'Kutchi Sunnis', an umbrella term which comprises myriad sub-castes with origins in the Kutch region of Gujarat, including Bhadala, Luhar, Kumbhar, Gamrai, Sonara and Dhobi, categories which relate to historical professions. Shia Muslims comprise Khoja Ismailis, Khoja Ithna-Asheris and Daudi Bohras. Sikhs and Goan Catholics complete this heterogeneous picture.

Latifah, who we met in the opening vignette, is Khoja Ithna-Asheri. Latifah lives in the Kibokoni area of Old Town, which, as the name suggests, constitutes Mombasa's historical centre. Whether or not they now reside there, almost everyone I knew in Mombasa traced their family roots to Old Town, evidencing the area's position as the epicentre of city life for most of its existence. Clustered around Mombasa Harbour – long known and referred to here as the Old Port – Old Town is a stark contrast to the city beyond. Located on the eastern side of the island, many of the area's labyrinthine streets are impassable to vehicular traffic. Latifah's house, where I spent many mornings, is a simple, one storey stone construction, characteristic of the area; others are grander, rising several storeys with godowns (warehouses) or small *dukas* (shops) at the bottom and residential quarters above. This contrast is

demonstrated in the photographs on the following page (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). Old Town's many fine wooden doors and ornate balconies, one of which is depicted below (Fig. 3), evince the fortunes upon which it was built. Today, although many with wealth still live here, the area is synonymous with poverty and drugs, a number of the most impressive houses appear abandoned. Long the city's commercial and administrative, as well as religious, heart, Old Town's secluded corners and crumbling waterfront are commonly perceived as junkie's paradise, the heroin hotbed of the city. Humble or grand, almost everything in this part of the city is heavy with the patina of time.



Figure 3: A permanently shuttered godown with elaborate wooden door, Old Town.



Figure 4: An ornate 'Mombasa balcony house', Old Town.



Figure 5: More modest homes, Old Town.

Old Town is an appropriate place to start an introduction to Mombasa, not only because of its historical eminence, but also because a journey through its streets provides a map of the city's religious and social make up critical for understanding the littoral and this thesis. History is followed by three further sections which introduce the lives of a handful of the individuals that appear in the pages that follow. I introduce glimpses of their quotidian habits to give some indication of the social categories necessary to understand the rest of the chapters, as well as illustrate the multiplicity of ways of living the city, and the myriad sites of my research. These snippets are by no means intended to portray any of the people described here as 'representative' of the communities to which they belong, a mode of analysis I hold no store in. The mix of details presented here reflects the very different modes of access I had to people and places in Mombasa; methodological issues are returned to at the end of the Introduction.

A brief religious history through Old Town's mosques

Although mosques proliferate throughout the municipality, Old Town is widely perceived to be the city's Islamic core, home to the conically shaped mosques of Basheikh⁵ (which likely dates from the 13th century) and Mandhry (built in 1570), and tens of smaller Islamic religious spaces, the majority built by Swahilis and Arabs adherent to the Shafii school of Sunni jurisprudence.⁶ Old Town's mosques are frequently juxtaposed to places of worship in the rest of the city, many of which are perceived to have been 'taken over' by 'Wahhabis'⁷ (Eisenberg 2013; Kresse 2007a). Regardless of the veracity of this correlation between urban and religious geographies, the stereotype retains discursive traction in the city.

⁵ Basheikh is also known as Mnara or Tangana mosque.

⁶ The Shafii school, which dominates East Africa, is one of the four principal Sunni *madhhab*, the others being Hanafi, Hanbali and Maliki, each named for the classical Islamic jurists who founded them in the two centuries following the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632 CE. Omani Arabs in Mombasa were originally followers of the Ibadhi *madhhab*, but adopted Shafiism at the end of the 19th century (Kresse 2007a).

⁷ As I explain further below, 'Wahhabi' is a term used by people who do *not* imagine themselves as part of this social category, glossing a broad constellation of Muslims who are seen to align their belief and practice with interpretations of Islam followed in the Gulf. Wahhabism is believed by many to be increasingly prevalent at the coast.

Old Town also hosts all the oldest religious sites of the city's Asian Muslims, indicated in the map below (Fig. 6).

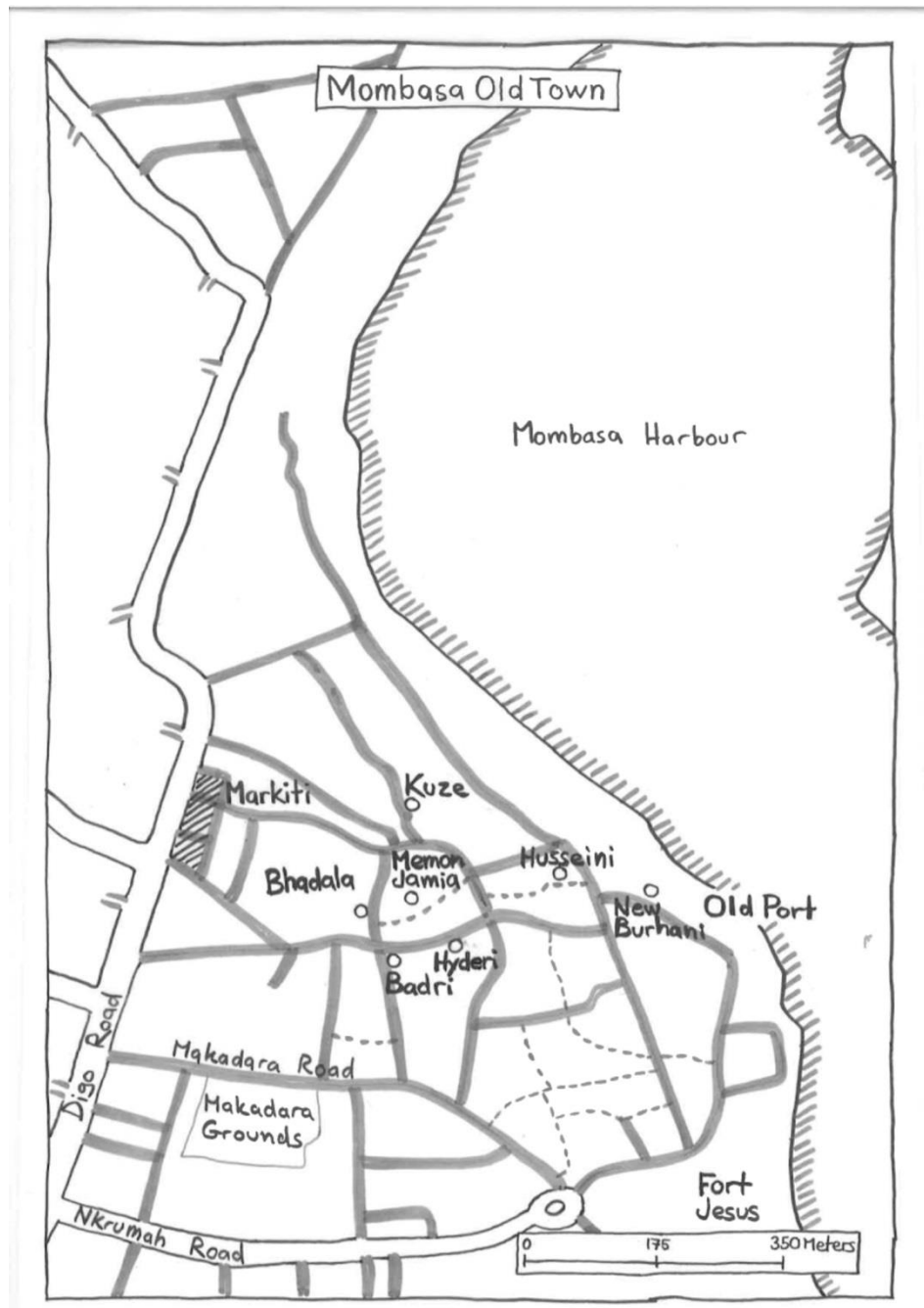


Figure 6: Mombasa Old Town.

This map details the numerous Shia and Hanafi mosques described below.
Map created by Pablo de Roulet.

In 1880 Hajji Mohamed, a trader who arrived in Mombasa from Mandvi, in Kutch, via Zanzibar and Bagamoyo (Tanzania), financed the city's first Memon mosque, the Memon Jamia Masjid. Hajji Mohamed was Nasserpuria Memon, Sunni Muslims of

the Hanafi school of jurisprudence who trace their ancestry – via Gujarat – back to the town of Nasarpur in Sindh province, present day Pakistan (Nasserpuria Memons continue to distinguish themselves via this genealogy from the other Memon communities in Mombasa).⁸ The mosque's delicate minaret, which can be seen below (Fig. 7), was added in 1908. Although now dwarfed by other buildings, I start with this mosque as it was long the tallest structure in Mombasa (Salvadori 1996). The Memon Jamia Masjid is regularly re-painted and still in use, but, as a religious and social hub has been eclipsed by the larger Memon Villa, located in the centre of the island. Memon Villa now hosts most significant Memon celebrations, as well as welcoming a wide variety of Sunni Muslims on Fridays.

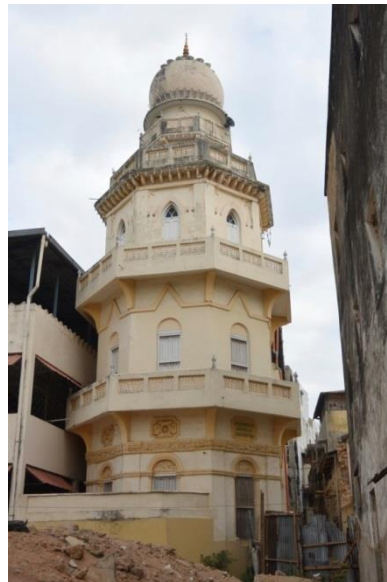


Figure 7: Memon Jamia Masjid, Old Town.

⁸ Mombasa is home to three Memon communities, with Nasserpuria being by far the largest. The others are Okhai and a single extended family of Halai, each of which draw on origin narratives emphasising links to different places in Gujarat and Sindh.

The best view of the cupola of the Memon Jamia Masjid is from in front of the Hyderi *imambargah* (congregation hall)⁹ and adjacent mosque, the centre of Khoja Ithna-Asheri religious life, and place where Latifah, who we met making *bhajiya*s at the outset, spends much of her time.¹⁰ Khoja Ithna-Asheris are Twelver Shias who adhere to the same branch of Shiism as practiced in Iran, parts of Iraq and Lebanon, although there are various ways in which Khojas imagine themselves as distinct from this wider following. Although the contemporary structure (which is depicted in Fig. 38 on p.257 and will be considered in the final chapter of this thesis) reveals nothing of historical schism, this building was at the heart of one of the most acrimonious religious feuds of late 19th century Mombasa, involving the Khoja Ithna-Asheri and Khoja Ismaili communities. As their shared ‘Khoja’ appellation suggests, Khoja Ismailis and Khoja Ithna-Asheris share a long and often tense history, which is the subject of numerous accounts (Shodhan 2001; see also Akhtar 2016; Amiji 1971; H. Jaffer 2012). Both sects hail from the Khoja caste, traders with origins in the Kutch and Kathiawar regions of present-day Gujarat. Until the mid-19th century Khoja religious practices could be said to comprise a mix of ‘Shia Ithna-Asheri’, ‘Sunni’, and ‘Ismaili’ aspects, as well as ‘Hindu’ elements, keeping in mind that what it meant to identify with any of these categories in that era bears little similarity to contemporary understandings. In 1846, the Aga Khan, leader of the Ismaili sect of Islam, arrived in Bombay¹¹ from Persia. Along with many of his followers, the Aga Khan believed himself to be the undisputed spiritual leader of all Khojas and attempted to assert greater control over ‘his’ congregation. This spurred a series of

⁹ An *imambargah* is a Shia congregation hall used for religious events including weekly *majalis* (religious gatherings or the sermons around which such gatherings are structured; sg. *majlis*), birth or death anniversaries of members of the Prophet’s family, ritual commemorations of the Battle of Karbala, as well as communal feasting, funerals and weddings. An *imambargah* is different from a mosque in that it is not the site for daily prayers, but rather hosts events structured around *majalis*. Like *mehfiles* (privately owned religious spaces used for similar events), the *imambargah* in Mombasa contains a large number of relics, including replica mausoleums of the Shia Imams and various objects associated with their martyrdom.

¹⁰ Old Town also houses a second Khoja Ithna-Asheri mosque, Husseini, which we return to in Chapter 5. Latifah’s sons attend this mosque. Neither the Hyderi nor Husseini mosques include a prayer space for women, although women are welcome in the Hyderi *imambargah*.

¹¹ I use both Bombay and Mumbai in this thesis, depending on the historical period to which I am referring.

acrimonious court cases and Khojas ultimately split along three doctrinal lines: Ismaili, Ithna-Asheri and Sunni. Dewji Jamal, one of the Aga Khan's most prominent critics, was 'outcasted' and permanently left Bombay for Zanzibar (where he had already been trading for some years), establishing the first Khoja Ithna-Asheri mosque in 1881.

From the 1870s on, Jamal played an influential role in encouraging Khojas in Bombay and East Africa to declare their allegiance to the Ithna-Asheri fold (and, safe from the reprisals common in Gujarat and Bombay, many formally did so upon arrival in East Africa). At the end of the 19th century, Jamal shifted his headquarters to Mombasa, keen to exploit the growing commercial opportunities of this expanding trading hub. Upon arrival, Jamal quickly bought up a large amount of property (including much of the land between the railway and Kilindini port; Salvadori 1996), and donated the plot for Mombasa's first Khoja Ithna-Asheri mosque and *imambargah*, on the site now known as Hyderi. His timing could not have been more significant: the Aga Khan had visited Mombasa the previous year (1897) and, frustrated by the growing number of Khojas formally rejecting his authority, issued a particularly fiery *firman* (directive) upon his return to Bombay. The *firman* predicted the demise of the Ithna-Asheri faith worldwide within 100 years and instructed his following to keep well clear of Khoja Ithna-Asheris, including avoiding food and water touched by them (H. Jaffer 2012). In this thesis I refer to Khoja Ithna-Asheris as Khojas and Khoja Ismailis as Ismailis.¹²

The significance of Mombasa as a site of struggle between these two factions helps explain the size and opulence of the Kuze *jamaatkhana*, the largest and oldest of the Ismaili religious halls in the city. Kuze is about five minutes' walk away from Hyderi, heading in a northerly direction. Greatly expanded and re-opened with fanfare by the previous Aga Khan in 1914,¹³ Kuze has hosted the present and former

¹² The global Khoja Ismaili population is far larger than that of the Khoja Ithna-Asheris, and in many places 'Khoja' refers particularly to Ismailis. Here I use the term Khoja (or Khojas) to refer exclusively to Khoja Ithna-Asheris. This reflects usage in Mombasa, where Khoja Ithna-Asheris refer to themselves as Khojas and Khoja Ismailis generally prefer the term Ismaili.

¹³ See: 'The visit of H. H. the Aga Khan to East Africa: the pope of the Ismailiah community'. *East African Standard*, 11 July 1914. Article obtained from a personal archive in Mombasa.

leaders of the Ismaili faith, a position that is both divine and hereditary,¹⁴ on a number of occasions. Although now counting a regular attendance of only a handful of congregants, Kuze, which draws its name from the area of Old Town that surrounds it, was long the religious and residential heart of the Ismaili community in Mombasa. Its volume and intricate plasterwork, typical of the Imperial classical style, can be seen in the photograph on below (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Kuze Jamaatkhana, Old Town.

Continuing southeast to the Old Port sits the vast New Burhani Masjid of the Daudi Bohras (henceforth Bohras). Like Khoja Ithna-Asheris and Khoja Ismailis, Bohras are also Shia Muslims, but their religious life is centralised around the figure of the

¹⁴ The Aga Khan is considered to be a living Imam by Ismailis. Divine intervention dictates who the Aga Khan will appoint to succeed him; although choice is always from amongst his male progeny, it does not necessarily follow birth order or generation. This method of designating leadership is also followed by the Daudi Bohras, discussed below.

Dai al-Mutlaq¹⁵ or Syedna, their divinely appointed religious leader who heads his global following from his palatial headquarters Mumbai. This angular and imposing building, exhibited on the next page (Fig. 9), was allegedly modelled on an ancient mosque in Sana'a, Yemen, a design choice that speaks to on-going efforts to unify disparate elements of the Bohra diaspora, which includes a large number of 'Yemeni Bohras', and underscore the hegemony of the 'reformist' faction of Bohras formally allied to the Syedna.¹⁶ New Burhani Masjid remains the centre of religious life for the vast majority of Mombasa's large Bohra population (who also sometimes use the smaller and older Badri mosque nearby).

¹⁵ Hereafter referred to as Dai, distinct from *dai* or *dais*, which denotes other senior clergy.

¹⁶ The New Burhani Masjid sits on the site of what was probably the most impressive of all the colonial era mosques: the decorative detail and size of the original Burhani Masjid – a very large white complex overlooking the Old Port, right next to the city's original Customs Office – is evident from photographic archives. The mosque was built in 1901-3 by Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, a hugely successful merchant who travelled regularly between Karachi, Bombay, Mombasa and Nairobi. What is most interesting about the original mosque – sight of which would have greeted all arrivals to the Old Port for most of the 20th century – is that it is no longer there. Burhani Masjid was raised to the ground in 1982, an action which Jeevanjee's granddaughter argues cannot be divorced from her relative's prominence within the anti-establishment Bohra reform movement, which has demanded fiscal accountability from the Syedna since the 1910s (Patel 1997). The Bohra establishment does not recognise any of Jeevanjee's philanthropic or commercial contributions in East Africa or beyond. Globally, the schism between Bohras who claim allegiance to the Syedna and those who reject his authority continues to this day (Blank 2001): the handful of reformists I met in Mombasa do not attend community religious functions and no one from the *chitti warah* faction (allied to the Syedna) speaks of the old mosque.



Figure 9: New Burhani Masjid overlooking the Old Port, Old Town. Nyali, the wealthy suburb of the northern mainland, can be seen in the distance on the left.

There are several other mosques in Old Town built by communities with roots in India. The last I mention here takes us back into the centre of Kibokoni, and is known as the Bhadala Masjid, a photograph of which can be seen on the following page (Fig. 10). Originally built by Bhadalas, one subgrouping of Mombasa's variegated Kutchi Sunni population, this mosque was, like the Memon construction mentioned above, established in the late 19th century (Berg & Walter 1968). As well as sharing a Hanafi Sunni orientation and date of origin, the two buildings both boast an onion domed minaret not seen on old or new Shia constructions. Historically a seafaring caste, Bhadalas trace the longevity of their roots in Mombasa to the *nakhoda* (captain) Jurab Adam, who is said to have settled in the town¹⁷ in 1705 (Mehta & Wilson 1958). As with some other Sunni mosques formally adherent to the Hanafi school, the Bhadala mosque is today frequented by a diverse male Sunni population. Many Bhadalas continue to live in Kibokoni and go to the Bhadala mosque, although a larger number prefer the mosque in Saba Saba, an area in the centre of the island now the focal point of their *jamaat*.

¹⁷ Following local terminology, I use both 'city' and 'town' to refer to Mombasa.

The island's centre also houses a Kokni mosque, frequented by the last Muslim community addressed in these pages. Koknis are originally from the Konkan coast of Maharashtra state and, like Memons and Bhadalas, are Hanafi Muslim.¹⁸

Reference to Koknis indicates that not all Muslims of South Asian heritage in Mombasa are from Gujarat; Mombasa is also home to Punjabis and Baluchis, who have founded a number of the city's older mosques, but amongst whom I conducted very little research. The vast majority of my informants – and the vast majority of Asian Muslims in Mombasa – trace genealogies to either Kutch or Kathiawar.



Figure 10: Bhadala Masjid, Old Town.

¹⁸ In some places, Koknis are also referred to as Konkanis, a term I did not hear in Mombasa.

As the above descriptions suggest, I learnt much more about the religious history of particular Shia sects than I did of Sunnis in Mombasa. This relates not only to the documented significance of history in Shia lived experience (Fischer 1980; Hyder 2006; Pinault 1992), but also, I suspect, because Sunnis of Indian origin share a majority faith in this city.

Living Old Town: part I

Old Town is a hive of commercial, as much as religious, activity. Small shops selling fabric, sliced bread and gas cylinders line the pavements; hand painted adverts for electrical appliances, uniforms and fish food decorate the walls. The area's character – and its social heterogeneity – is captured through a cursory glance at some of its myriad commercial ventures. Half London Barber's, an establishment owned by Bajunis (close cousins of the Swahili), enjoys a steady stream of male custom. The name, currently used to designate many Mombasa establishments, is a play on the title of a recent Kenyan Oscar-entry, *Nairobi half life* (dir. Gitonga 2012), a film about the challenges of city living, and, according to a Bajuni friend of mine, intended to demarcate the fact that life in Mombasa is 'half as good as London'. A few streets away the word Banadir, an administrative region in Somalia, currently decorates the front of a long-standing café now popular with young Somali men (see Fig. 11 on the following page). Island Dishes, a Swahili restaurant whose décor includes postcards from some of the established anthropologists named in these pages, sells the best *kima* chapatti (stuffed with fried egg and minced beef) in town. Down a smaller side street, The Gunner's is a tiny fruit and veg stall run by diehard Arsenal fans with roots in the coastal interior. Before he passed away, the gentle Mr Jamshed, who, like Latifah, is of the Khoja *jamaat*, ran the last workshop specialising in the ornate brass work that has historically decorated doors and chests in this part of the world. Hajji Mohamed & Sons, a venture run by descendants of the Memon mosque patron mentioned above, is famed for its herbal medicines as much as its Islamic texts. The small shop is panelled, walls and ceiling, in 'Burma teak', brought over from India at the turn of the century.



Figure 11: Banadir Café, Old Town.

Old Town's streets, and the food available on them, change dramatically according to the time of day. Early in the morning, ambulant fruit sellers, set up shop in prime locations, a daily ritual illustrated in the scene on the next page (Fig. 12). Soon after dawn, areas of Kibokoni become archipelagos of benches, where people breakfast on milky chai and thick chapattis, as well as *mahambris* (the local donut) or *mithai* (the Swahili term, which also means sweet in Gujarati, for bite-sized dough balls covered in sugar). The women and men who serve these items pack up by about 9am.

Around four o'clock, a new army of food producers emerge, sitting on *barazas* (stone stoops)¹⁹ or walking with buckets through the streets selling *bhajiya*s, *vibibi* (rice cakes) and various incarnations of *viasi* (potatoes). Chapattis are made-to-order on particular corners; one of my favourites was run by a two-woman team whose faces were covered by *niqab* (a veil revealing only the wearer's eyes). Dusk marks the arrival of *choma* (short for *nyama choma* or barbecued meat); the ubiquitous

¹⁹ A *baraza* is a stone bench built into the front of many houses in Mombasa, particularly in the Old Town. A social institution throughout East Africa, *barazas* have been much studied as a meeting place for men to chat and debate (Kresse 2007a; Loimeier 2007).

charcoal stoves forming evening extensions of the established cafés to which they belong.



Figure 12: A fruit vendor preparing for the day to begin at a central junction, Old Town.

For Latifah, city life is largely enacted in her home and at the many religious and social functions organised by the Khoja *jamaat*. Latifah buys most of the produce that sustains her family and her home catering business from one of the ambulant fruit and vegetable sellers who pass down the dusty pedestrian lane in front of her house. Accompanied by one of her sons, she makes periodic trips to A-One supermarket, located on the major thoroughfare of Digo Road (outside of Old Town), for non-perishables. A-One is at the lower end of Mombasa’s supermarket spectrum but is still pricier than many of its tiny corner shops.

Latifah, like many Asians, would never breakfast on a roadside bench in the street, although she buys *vibibi* to resell at Khoja social functions, and enjoys the occasional evening meal at Mubin’s, the Memon-owned *mishkaki* joint in the centre of the island, unanimously assessed as the best place in town for the coast’s much-loved barbecued meat skewers (Latifah’s favourite is *nundu*, roasted ‘fat of cow’). Latifah knew of MNKafe – a trendy, air-conditioned eatery on the edge of Old Town

that I visited with a number of wealthier and younger Khoja women – but balked at the price of their cupcakes.

Latifah's house is only a few minutes' walk from Hyderi *imambargah*, introduced above, where she, like other Khoja women, attends ladies' *majalis* (religious gatherings; sg. *majlis*) every Friday afternoon, as well as several evenings a month for events associated with the 12 Shia Imams and other holy personalities whose lives structure the Khoja liturgical calendar. Religious events are particularly concentrated in the Islamic months of Muharram and Ramadhan. Latifah also occasionally attends events at one of the various *mehfiles* – religious spaces usually located in private homes²⁰ – or when someone wealthy hosts a *majlis* in their house, for instance as part of wedding celebrations. Aside from going to and from religious functions, Latifah rarely travels around Mombasa or outside of Kenya, but she has been to Mecca for Hajj and on *ziyarat* (pilgrimage) to both Iran and Iraq, visiting mausoleums of the 12 Imams. These trips were heavily subsidised by the *jamaat*. Qaasim, the youngest of Latifah's children, goes to school at the Jaffery Academy, located in the upmarket suburb of Kizingo (an area we explore shortly), home also to the approximately 50 percent of the Khoja *jamaat* that does not live in Kibokoni. Like many of Mombasa's best educational establishments, Jaffery originally catered to a specific Asian community (in this case Khojas), but is now open to all those who can afford the fees (although fees are waived for poorer members of the Khoja *jamaat*). We return to Latifah and some of the religious and residential concerns of Khojas in two of the following chapters; the extended focus on this particular religious community necessitates a brief contextualisation here.

Khoja Ithna-Asheris

If the multiplicity and fluid nature of subjectivity is axiomatic to most contemporary anthropology, I have sought to capture something of its complexity in Mombasa, by

²⁰ Some Khoja families in Mombasa have dedicated a room in their house for worship, where others will be invited for *majalis* during Muharram and other commemorative events. These rooms contain relics, such as mausoleum replicas and battle standards, associated with the Battle of Karbala and the 12 Shia Imams. Given their small size, events in *mehfiles* are always either for men or women (not both).

shifting between registers in the structure of this thesis. While the ways in which particular subject positions constantly intersect with others is highlighted throughout, three chapters are based on research amongst a broad swathe of Muslims of Gujarati origin (Chapters 1, 2 and 4), while Chapters 3 and 5 are based primarily on the discourses and practices of Khojas. Weaving between these two frames reflects the enduring importance of sectarian affiliation amongst my informants, as well as the many ways in which it is superseded by other modes of identification.

My decision to focus on Khojas is intended to provide a Shia angle to the much studied question of what it means to be Muslim in Kenya – both in relation to the state and the littoral beyond. While Kresse’s (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2009) research discusses the lectures of prominent Swahili Shia personality, Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, his work is not concerned with the everyday life of Shias in Mombasa. For Khojas, daily life and ritual is centred around the commemoration of the 12 Shia Imams, believed by Shias to be the spiritual and political successors of Prophet Mohammed. The first Shia Imam was Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed (an individual who is known by Sunnis as the fourth leader of the Rashidun Caliphate). The third Shia Imam was Husain, grandson of the Prophet, and key protagonist of the Battle of Karbala. The 12th Imam, also known as the Mahdi, is believed to have been in occultation since 868 CE; according to Shia eschatology, he will reveal himself and restore rightful Islamic government on earth at an unknown date before the Day of Judgement. Unlike Ismailis and Bohras who believe that their divinely appointed leaders are the descendants and chosen representatives of the 12 Imams, Khojas believe that no mortal being can take the Mahdi’s place. Instead, for guidance in this period of occultation of the 12th Imam, Ithna-Asheris around the world (Khojas and others) are encouraged to follow and emulate one of the numerous Shia Ithna-Asheri *maraji* (singular *marja* or *marja al-taqlid*), clergy of the highest authority (*marja al-taqlid* means source of emulation). *Maraji* are mostly based in Najaf, Qom or Beirut. While the decision of who to emulate is formally an individual one, Khoja *jamaats* and their members generally follow the interpretations and guidance of Ayatollah Ali

al-Sistani, who is based in Najaf.²¹ Like Muslims around the world, Ithna-Asheris give a percentage of their income to charity as *zakat* annually; unlike Sunnis, Ithna-Asheris also pay one fifth of their earnings (calculated after subtracting living costs) as *khums*. For Khojas, this tithe is presented to al-Sistani annually. Al-Sistani has provided a dispensation, meaning that half of this sum (the half collected for the Imam in occultation) remains with Khoja *jamaats*, and is reinvested into community development projects (Akhtar 2016).

Khojas, like many Mombasa residents, imagine themselves part of extensive diasporas that span the globe. Khojas with roots in Mombasa often differentiate themselves from ‘Somali’ Khojas or ‘*Jangbaris*’ (Khojas from Zanzibar), as much as those from Karachi or Toronto. Today, there are approximately 125,000 Khojas worldwide (H. Jaffer 2012: 1). The global network of *jamaats* come under the umbrella of the World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities, as well as regional bodies such as the Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaats of Africa (hereafter the Africa Federation), which is older than the larger London-based World Federation. Many in the Mombasa *jamaat* have intimate relations with others in Dar es Salaam, Arusha, London and Canada; some have family ties to Karachi, but the majority have no or very limited contact with Khojas on the Subcontinent. The global reach of Khojas and other East African Asian communities is in no small part due to the extensive outmigration that occurred in the early postcolonial period, spurred by ‘Africanisation’ policies in the region and culminating in Idi Amin’s infamous expulsion of Asians from Uganda.²² Being part of a global caste and religious community is central to some aspects of Khoja daily life, as it is for many in the city, and my analysis in this thesis highlights instances where a diasporic imaginary is important. However, perhaps due in part to the longevity of Asian settlement along the littoral, the lens of diaspora does not capture

²¹ Some older people continue to follow al-Sistani’s predecessor al-Khoei, a practice that the former has explicitly permitted. An individual’s relationship with their *marja* is usually but not necessarily a life-long affair: some of the younger Khojas I knew in Mombasa discussed the possibility of transferring their allegiance to Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of Iran. The decision to change *marja* is taken very seriously, those who articulated it as a possibility also emphasised the need for extensive research before doing so.

²² ‘Africanisation’ policies and the climate they generated are discussed further in subsequent chapters.

much of what I encountered in the city, or many of the ways in which my informants purported to imagine themselves. Remaining true to my ethnography, I highlight diaspora's shifting relevance in Mombasa.

Living Old Town: part II

The focal point of Latifah's life, Kibokoni, is also cherished abode to Shahina, a Memon who we spend some time with later on (Chapter 2). Shahina, who usually lives in a Memon widows' compound near Piggot Place (a market square now used predominantly as a car park), comes to inhabit the flat below me whenever her sister-in-law is required to travel out of Mombasa, usually to care for an ill relative in Nairobi. Shahina is, in other words, temporarily summoned to cook for her brother and nephew; the family's sassy Christian maid Lillian would never be trusted with such a task. Shahina and her brother are Nasserpuria Memons, while her sister-in-law is from a different branch of the Memon tree: Yaqeen is Okhai Memon, claiming roots in the small coastal town of Okha on Gujarat's Kathiawar peninsula. Memons, like most people I knew in Mombasa, are 'aspirationally endogamous': while many marry other sects in practice, union within caste and religious affiliation is considered the ideal. Marriage outside of one's own community often involves conversion: for instance, I knew of a number of Bohra and Memon women who had converted to Ithna-Asherism upon marriage. Marrying non-Asians is less common but by no means unheard of. In this context, marriage between different factions of Memon remains relatively rare, and ancestral difference is but one of the many things that Shahina and Yaqeen fault in each other.

Shahina does the odd sewing job to earn a bit of extra cash, but is otherwise entirely dependent on welfare support provided by her *jamaat*. Most of her time, is spent cooking, praying and relaxing in her tiny but wonderfully light and breezy apartment, a self-contained room in the Memon widows' compound. Shahina is a devout Sunni (Hanafi) but only goes to Memon Villa – which comprises the *jamaat's* main mosque, school and various social institutions – for the occasional wedding or *majlis*. Not only is the Memon calendar ostensibly less exigent than that of Khojas, Shahina has neither the money, nor the company to make the trip regularly. Shahina would

never travel by tuk tuk or *matatu* (minivan) alone; she and the other ageing women that occupy her block of flats prefer not to venture out at night. The decorations in her home include a *Hijri* (Islamic) calendar – memorably sponsored by ‘Fantasy Lingerie Fashions’ – and a clock with a picture of the Taj Mahal on its face. ‘It’s from Nairobi’, Shahina told me proudly; she has been to the capital once. As well as occasional trips to visit her sister in Malindi, a town 120 kilometres up the coast, Shahina hugely enjoys pottering around the market and beyond – she has firm opinions about who sells the freshest carrots and the cheapest notebooks (defying wider Mombasan preference for the Bohra-owned establishment of Salmanji’s, Shahina opts for the place run by her niece in the Soko Ndogo area of town).

Shahina almost never eats out, but we had the chance to visit Jawad’s Cold Store during the afternoon of *maulidi* (the Prophet’s birthday, an occasion marked by a major procession through Mombasa’s streets and an evening religious programme on Makadara Grounds, a large field adjacent to Old Town). Run by Kabir, a Bhadala who we meet again several times in this thesis, Jawad’s interior is painted lurid green and orange; Uhuru Kenyatta’s bloodshot eyes peer down from a photo near the entrance (all businesses in Kenya are required to display a photograph of the president) and the Coca Cola branded plastic table cloths are sticky with the delicious green chilli and coconut chutneys that accompany his famous *bhajiya*s. Kabir lives with his wife in a place nearby; he has no time for mosque in-between his running this perpetually-busy café and raising his nine children (even though they usually stay with his mother who lives a few streets away). ‘Family feuds’, he grins languidly, his wife and mother do not get on. A number of Kabir’s children go to the Santokben Nanji Kalidas Mehta Nursery School, an institution founded by one of the region’s most successful Hindu industrialists.

Markiti and beyond: ‘Town’, Kizingo and the northern mainland

Markiti, officially known as MacKinnon Market after a pre-colonial administrator,²³ is the main market place in town. A bustling border zone between the Old Town and the rest of the city, this is where Shahina does her shopping. The large stone and wrought iron structure which houses the market proper is filled with stall-owners who sell Chinese and Kenyan garlic (the latter smaller and more expensive but prized for its superior taste), the coast’s famous ‘apple mangoes’ (a succulent local variety), tomatoes and onions, as well as vegetable gourds such as *tindora* and the cankerous *karela*, indigenous to the Indian Subcontinent. Depending on the *Munisipali*’s (Municipal Police) shifting stance on street vending, a host of others sell their wares in the surrounding streets. Fruit vendors push overladen *mikoketeni* (wooden carts) between tuk tuks and the odd car, deftly negotiating potholes and the width of the road. Young men peddle handbags, curtain wires or cashews. A number of ‘ration shops’ sell rice, lentils and spices; in one, the Digo shop assistant, Ali, claims to speak more Gujarati than its Hindu proprietor.

Markiti is where Hashim’s shop is located; it his haven of salt and sugar which commences Chapter 2. Hashim’s family have sold sweet and savoury snacks from this establishment every day except Sundays since 1868. Like many other confectioners in the city, Hashim is a Bohra whose life is intimately bound up with that of his religious leader, the Syedna or Dai. Trained in archaeology at a Scottish university, Hashim had dreams to ‘change the face of Egyptology’ but consulted the Syedna for career advice during one of the Dai’s many visits to Mombasa. This is normal practice for Bohras, who confer with the Syedna, or, more frequently, his local representatives, for blessings and guidance before many small and large life events, from naming a child to taking a trip. The Bohra leader advised Hashim to continue in his father’s footsteps, counsel Hashim has dutifully complied with for over three decades.

²³ MacKinnon founded the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC), the commercial organisation that administered East Africa from 1888 to 1895 before the British government assumed direct control over the newly created Protectorates of British East Africa (now Kenya) and Uganda (Gregory 1993b).

Although I never went to Hashim's home, I heard quite a lot about the dimmer switches and other accoutrements he had added to his flat in the Bohra housing estate in Bombolulu, an area on the mainland north of the island, where he and his wife moved five years ago. It can easily take an hour to commute to Markiti from Bombolulu, a journey which Hashim makes by *matatu*. Travelling by the minivans that form the most common source of 'public' transport in Mombasa allows Hashim to avoid having to negotiate the traffic, plus, as he explained, 'There's nothing like being able to properly enjoy the sea breeze as you cross Nyali Bridge' (which connects the island to the northern mainland). His wife, always dressed in the colourful *rida* (a two-piece ensemble that covers the head and body) expected of Bohra women – an outfit Khadija paired with equally bright trainers – drives in with their Rav 4 on Saturdays. 'Everyone else has a Toyota Probox', Hashim told me one day, remarking on the city's latest vehicular fashions. 'At least I can find mine easily!'

West of Markiti is the island's centre, an area sometimes hyperbolically referred to as the Central Business District (CBD), but more often simply known as 'Town'. Town is a bustling place, everyday but Sunday; it is densely built up but the majority of its skyline is low level. The island is dusty and often chock full of *matatus*, tuks tuks and other vehicles vying for space on its ageing roads. Its green spaces are predominately either Muslim cemeteries or sports clubs; many of these are owned by communities of Gujarati origin and marked in green in the map we saw above (Fig. 2, p.23). The centre is crisscrossed by several major boulevards: Digo Road, which becomes Nyerere Avenue, runs north south, past the marketplace; Moi Avenue, Nkrumah Road, Haile Selassie and Mwembe Tayari run east west; Jomo Kenyatta Avenue leads northwest from the centre to the Makupa Causeway, which connects the island to the main road to Nairobi and the Kenyan interior. Myriad smaller lanes connect these roads, but it is the larger avenues that are dotted with major supermarket chains and more established commercial ventures, from telephone companies, hotels, spare parts suppliers, and Mombasan catering institutions such as Fayaz Bakery and Blue Moon. To give but one example, Blue Room, caters to a broad swathe of Mombasa's more affluent, its spacious interior includes a large framed photograph of the Ismaili leader the Aga Khan, next to a wall of humorous aphorisms, including 'Déjà poo: the feeling that you've heard this crap before'.

Town also comprises many mosques, from the towering Konzi to Sheikh Jundani, described to me by one individual as ‘Ottoman-esque’. A number have been built or refurbished with Saudi funds in the last three decades.

Much of the most westerly part of the island is taken up by Shimanzi, the industrial zone that borders Kilindini port. Shimanzi houses many large godowns, as well as a range of shipping and trading corporations. It is here that I first met Rabi Jalal, key protagonist of Chapter 6, in his office at the imposing headquarters of Grain Bulk, the biggest grain cargo handlers in East Africa. Grain Bulk is Khoja-owned, its founder and many of the top management executive are members of the *jamaat* (this includes Rabi). The road to the office is one of the worst in Mombasa, eroded daily by the steady stream of trucks going into and out of the port. While the potholed tarmac lays bare the contradictory economics of the coast – a regional trade and transport hub sorely lacking in state investment – the headquarters is a gleaming tower block; a selection of African flags flutter outside. On my first visit to Rabi’s office, I pass an enormous watercolour mural, depicting Grain Bulk’s grain and fertilizer handling terminal, the infrastructural centrepiece of Kilindini port. The artist’s thrilling homage to industrial capital glimmers against an Indian Ocean backdrop. Up one more flight of stairs and I’m ushered into Rabi’s office. He sits behind a vast wooden desk, which seems all the larger for the absence of other things in the room. It is here that I learn Rabi spent his childhood in Moshi (Tanzania), but came to Kenya as a teenager and managed to secure a Kenyan government scholarship to attend university in Lahore, eastern Pakistan, in the early 1970s. Today, Rabi prides himself on dedicating all his free time to *jamaat* activities: since 2012, he has been at the helm of coordinating the construction of the Jaffery Complex, the Khoja gated community and religious centre that is the subject of Chapter 5.

We now head to Kizingo, a residential suburb on the south eastern side of the island whose sizable houses and luxuriant vegetation are unambiguously indicative of the wealth that has characterised the area since colonialists began to build there at the onset of the 20th century. Nadesh, a vivacious Ismaili woman some 70 years young, lives in a large colonial bungalow, filled with knickknacks from her travels and nestled in a garden beautifully maintained by her Digo servant Abdullah. Nadesh and

her late husband were long at the forefront of Ismaili community life in Mombasa and met their leader, the Aga Khan, on a number of his visits to the city. Nadesh remains a fixture at Ismaili religious and social events – of which there are many – usually held in one of the two Ismaili gated compounds on the island (located in the northern areas of Makupa and Tudor); built round *jamaatkhanas* these residential hubs have constituted the centre of Ismaili social life since the 1950s. Nadesh, however, is one of the very few Ismailis that still attends daily dawn and evening prayers at the Kuze *jamaatkhana* in Old Town. She grew up in a house near the enormous prayer hall; her excursions to Old Town these days are do not divert from driving to and from the walled *jamaatkhana*.

Always accompanied by Abdullah, Nadesh has shopped in Markiti (the marketplace introduced above) every Tuesday for as long as she can remember. She is also a self-proclaimed ‘culture buff’. Although often lamenting the poverty of the contemporary Mombasan theatre scene, she loves going to see plays at La Veranda (a posh Italian restaurant on the northern mainland that includes a small stage) or the Little Theatre Club, a colonial institution currently being reinvigorated by a generation of youthful coastal actors. Nadesh also enjoys the occasional trip to the cinema, an outing which usually involves dinner at Bollywood Bites, the upmarket South Indian restaurant (whose chefs reportedly come from Chennai) adjacent to the Nyali Cinemax. Cinemax, a shopping mall with Cineplex, is now the only remaining movie hall in a city that used to count six. Cinemax always has at least two Bollywood and Hollywood films on offer, on one occasion we watched *Ram-Leela* (dir. Bhansali 2013). ‘No one stands for the national anthem anymore’, Nadesh remarked as ‘*Eemungu nguvu yetu*’ (‘Oh god of all creation’) played in the background. Nadesh, like all Ismaili women in Mombasa, dresses in blouses and skirts, or a shirt and linen trousers, although she dons glittering *salwar kameez*²⁴ for functions like the Aga Khan’s birthday. This is a marked contrast to most other Muslim women in

²⁴ This is an outfit that usually combines a long-sleeved and knee-length top with loose trousers and a scarf.

Mombasa: Shahina and Latifah always wear a *buibui* (loose outer garment) and hijab when outdoors; this is the norm for women in both their *jamaats*.²⁵

Cinemax is one of the three opulent shopping plazas on the northern mainland, an area which includes the municipality's most expensive real estate along the beachfront areas of Nyali and Bamburi, as well as large segments of its working class, who reside in Kisauni and Kongowea. Access to zones of conspicuous consumption such as Cinemax is closely policed: vehicles undergo an obligatory bomb check and those who choose to enter by foot are turned away if deemed to lack sufficient capital by the diligent security guards. These plazas house establishments such as Mr Price, a South African clothing and home store, or the recently opened and exorbitantly priced Planet Yoghurt.

Ghalib's, the *paan* shop we visit in Chapter 3, is located on the same street as Cinemax. Ghalib's is a small institution in a wealthy neighbourhood. Its proprietor, Nadim, whose life story I present at length in the aforementioned chapter, is Kokni, of the Sunni Muslim caste with roots in the Konkan coast of Maharashtra state. Nadim, like Nadesh and many of my wealthier informants, lives in Kizingo. He occasionally attends the Kokni mosque in the centre of the island, but otherwise simply prays in the tiny office behind his café. Nadim's wife, who I greeted briefly once, wears a *niqab* when helping her husband on the till.

Accessing urbanity

What each of the urban theorists cited at the outset of this thesis emphasise is the multiplicity of ways in which cities are inhabited and inscribed with meaning.

Accessing urbanity in Mombasa thus entailed 'living' the city with my informants;

²⁵ *Buibui* refers to the loose, black, floor-length and long-sleeved dress worn over the top of women's other clothes when outdoors, or whenever in front of men (however, most women I knew did not cover themselves in front of their male *mahram*, meaning unmarried kin, a category which includes close blood relations and in-laws). While in Arabic, hijab refers exclusively to the scarf that covers a woman's head, shoulders and chest, in Mombasa, *buibui* and hijab were used interchangeably to refer to head-to-toe covering, i.e. long dress and headscarf. Accordingly, the verb *to buibui*, or *to hijab*, means to dress in clothing that conceals everything but one's face and hands. I follow these local iterations here.

following their routes and routines made evident the many different ‘Mombasas’ that coexist in this port town. As the descriptions above suggest, I was warmly received in a number of Mombasan homes, by people I gradually met at religious and social functions, or on my excursions around town. Latifah and Shahina were quite happy for me to while away long mornings and extended lunches in their domestic realms; I also accompanied both on shopping trips, visits to family members and to religious gatherings. Visits to Nadesh’s house were structured by our Gujarati lessons; we also went to the cinema, as well as Ismaili socials, together. Others would invite me over for the occasional lunch or afternoon chai, and I visited a number of Khoja houses in the context of *majalis*. The people introduced above are aged between 40 and 75, and indeed, many that I spent time with in Mombasa were middle aged or ageing. This reflects not only a demographic that had more time, but also patterns of youth outmigration. However, as will be seen in the chapters that follow, there were also many young people in Mombasa who shared something of their lives with me. To protect the anonymity of the people I met, the names used here are pseudonyms.

In line with Islamic stipulations on sex segregation followed by the majority of my non-Ismaili informants, most of the people who invited me to their homes, or on their travels around the city, were women, although I was free to talk to brothers, husbands and sons once indoors. Two men, one of whom I met through his sister, the other a Khoja community historian with whom I had initiated correspondence via e-mail, also invited me to their homes on a number of occasions; their wives would usually remain within earshot. Most of the homes I called on were located either in Old Town or Kizingo (or in the area that connects the two), although I also visited houses in Ganjoni, a residential area on the south western side of the island, and Nyali, the elite suburb on the northern mainland. Households in Kizingo tended to be markedly wealthier than those in Old Town, although there were several exceptions that bucked this trend. While none of the subsequent chapters starts inside a house, conversations and considerations derived from within dwellings are an integral part of the ethnography presented here. This reflects the fact that, for many of my informants, city life is a thoroughly domestic affair.

A lot of my time was spent wandering the city, observing its rhythms, roads and residents. My conclusions from these sojourns underpin my observations of the

city's architecture and its social meanings. These urban journeys led me into many of the city's ubiquitous cafés and small commercial ventures run by people with roots in Gujarat, including Hashim's sweetshop. Hashim, who has befriended anthropologists in the past, introduced himself by calling out, 'You're not a tourist, are you?' a conclusion he had surmised from my leisurely pace. Male entrepreneurs such as Hashim, Nadim and Kabir (each of whom were introduced above), were happy to chat with me within the context of their businesses: their words pepper these pages. Business can be slow in Mombasa these days, I think our discussions were something of a welcome distraction.

Almost all my interactions with Muslims in the city – be they Khoja, Ismaili, Bohra, Memon or Swahili – would involve some allusion to the openness of the speaker's community above all others. 'Who else are you doing research with?' Shanaz, a Khoja with family roots in Mogadishu, asked me as we sipped sugary chai after ladies' *majlis* one afternoon. Explaining that I also spent time with Ismailis and Bohras, among others, there was no need to guess what her next question would be. 'And do they let you into their mosques?' Shanaz asked with the rhetorical flourish of one who already knows the answer. 'No', I confirmed; Ismailis and Bohras do not allow non-Ismailis and non-Bohras into their religious spaces (although I attended and sometimes helped cook for a number of the social functions that follow Ismaili religious events). This prescription helps explain why much of my time was spent at Khoja religious functions in the *imambargah* and *mehfiles*. The women's blood donation drive that concerns us later (Chapter 3), held as part of Khoja Muharram commemorations, was one such function. Khojas formally allow anyone into their religious spaces, although this invitation was not extended to Mombasa's black Ithna-Asheri population, one of the many realities which caused me to reflect on the effects of my skin colour and class on this research. Being a white woman, I was also afforded ease of access to places such as Cinemax, described above.

Khojas are firmly invested in proselyting, largely through the Bilal Muslim Mission, a charitable organisation that promotes conversion and social development through centres around the coast (we return briefly to Bilal, as it is known, in Chapter 2). Many Khoja women expressed the conviction that I had been guided to Mombasa by Allah and would eventually become a Shia Muslim, an explanation I came to view as

logical as any other for my presence in the city. Others – Khoja and not – were less concerned with the fate of my soul, but keen to demonstrate the welcoming values of what many called ‘true Islam’, a category juxtaposed with the ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘Wahhabi’ versions imagined to threaten life on the littoral, and which I turn to below.

Research in uncertain times

Although not present in Kenya for either event, my research was bookended by the September 2013 attack on Nairobi’s Westgate shopping mall and the Garissa University massacre of April 2015, where gunmen claiming association with al-Shabaab killed 150 students in the country’s northeast. These tragic incidents – and the numerous raids, attacks and targeted killings that took place along the coast during my fieldwork – had significant impacts on life in the city and my research.

Kenya’s relationship with what is often problematically referred to as ‘Islamist terrorism’ began with the US embassy bombings of 1998, where coordinated attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam killed over 200 and brought al-Qaeda into broad public notoriety for the first time. I mention this previous event to indicate the longevity of Kenya’s experience of ‘terrorism’; the embassy bombings initiated a period of close cooperation between Kenya, US and UK security forces that continues to this day. Reflecting Kenya’s prominence as the site of major commercial interests, as well as the region’s key diplomatic, UN and NGO headquarters, Kenya has been positioned as an important ally and key battleground in the ‘war on terror’ since its inception. While security analysts have concluded that the US embassy bombings were carried out by individuals born and trained elsewhere (Shinn 2007), in the intervening decades the nature of the ‘terrorist’ threat in Kenya is perceived to have shifted, particularly with the rise of al-Shabaab in the region (see below) and the often-associated ‘radicalisation’ of Kenyan youth (Botha 2016). It is against this history that I consider the security situation that structured my fieldwork.

The Westgate siege began on a busy Saturday afternoon shortly before I arrived in Mombasa, when masked gunmen stormed Nairobi’s largest and most expensive haven of elite consumption. Shooting, involving a difficult to determine range of

national and international actors, went on for four days, leaving over 65 people dead and at least 200 wounded (Williams 2014: 907). The attack was quickly claimed by al-Shabaab, the militant organisation that emerged as the most powerful mobilising force in Somalia following the breakup of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the coalition of *sharia* courts that vied for power with Somalia's Transitional Federal Government during the early 2000s, an evolution of Somalia's unremitting civil war. Following the defeat of the ICU by Ethiopian forces in January 2007, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was formed. Backed by the UN, AMISOM's primary objective is to reduce the threat of al-Shabaab and other armed opposition groups, as well as promote peace-building in the country. Kenya was not initially involved in this mission, but, following a series of kidnappings and other incidents on Kenyan soil attributed to al-Shabaab, Kenyan Defence Forces launched Operation Linda Nchi ('Protect the Country') and entered Somalia in October 2011. Kenyan troops were formally integrated into AMISOM a few months later, and have played a pivotal military and policing role within it since.

Al-Shabaab explicitly framed the Westgate attack as retaliation for crimes committed by Kenyan troops in Somalia. These tensions have a long history. Kenya and Somalia share a lengthy and porous border and ethnic Somalis have always been a significant demographic in the country (particularly in the northeast), constituting what Mwakimako & Willis describe as 'Kenya's most intimate enemy'.²⁶ Kenyan forces fought the so-called *shifita* war (*shifita* meaning bandit or rebel) against secessionist ethnic Somalis in the decade following independence (Whittaker 2012); the antagonistic legacies of this brutal conflict have been amplified since the early 1990s, with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the Somali civil war. Many have settled in the vast complexes of Kakuma and Dadaab – which count amongst the largest refugee camps in the world – but those with family connections or financial means have sought livelihoods and residence in Nairobi and Mombasa. Somali success as urban entrepreneurs and real estate investors in both cities has

²⁶ See p.11 of H. Mwakimako & J. Willis' paper for the Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Sécuritaires dans la Corne de l'Afrique, 'Islam, politics, and violence on the Kenya coast'. 2014 (available online: http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/sites/lam/files/note4_observatoire.pdf, accessed 13 August 2017).

only heightened tensions, an issue we return to in subsequent chapters.²⁷ Although many Kenyans are now reported to be part of al-Shabaab, the group's association with Somalia underpins the 'Somali as terrorist' imaginary in Kenya, a construct only exacerbated by Westgate. Under the pretext of addressing the threat of 'terrorism', the Kenyan state periodically attempts to distinguish between Somali citizens and refugees, compelling the latter to 'return' to refugee camps in the north, most recently through Operation Usalama Watch (*usalama* meaning peace in Swahili), which was launched in March 2014.²⁸ Following thousands of arrests and the temporary detention of many in a Nairobi stadium, this xenophobic population transfer was eventually quashed by the Supreme Court. I discuss these tensions further in later chapters.

Westgate was followed by numerous other attacks in Kenya, some claimed by al-Shabaab, others not. In Nairobi during the course of 2014, churches, *matatus*, markets and police stations were targeted by bombs and grenades, often in the Eastleigh suburb of the city, which is home to a large Somali population. At the close of 2014, an attack on a bus transporting teachers and government workers killed 28 in Mandera County (that borders Somalia);²⁹ a few days later nearly 40 quarry workers were killed in the same area.³⁰

At the coast, the first significant incident of this nature during the course of my fieldwork was the police raid of Masjid Musa, a mosque in central Mombasa, which

²⁷ See the Chatham House report by F. Abdulsamed: *Somali investment in Kenya*. 2011 (available online: <http://somalithinktank.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Somali-Investmen-In-Kenya1.pdf>, accessed 13 August 2017).

²⁸ See the Human Rights Watch article: 'Kenya: end abusive round-ups'. 2014 (available online: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/12/kenya-end-abusive-round-ups>, accessed 10 September 2017).

²⁹ See M. Otsialo & A. Hajir: 'At least 28 killed in Shabaab attack on Nairobi-bound bus in Mandera'. *Daily Nation*, 22 November 2014 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/28-dead-suspected-Al-Shabaab-attack-in-Mandera/-/1107872/2531256/-/ljsywl/-/index.html>, accessed 19 August 2017).

³⁰ See C. Stewart: 'Kenya bus attack: al-Shabaab gunmen behead and shoot 36 non-Muslim labourers at Mandera quarry'. *The Independent*, 2 December 2014 (available online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/kenya-bus-attack-gunmen-kill-36-at-mandera-quarry-9896973.html>, accessed 19 August 2017).

was allegedly holding a meeting aimed at recruiting al-Shabaab members.³¹ The mosque had long been at the centre of controversy as the platform for Sheikh Aboud Rogo, a ‘radical’ preacher shot in August 2012. Police raided Masjid Musa in February of 2014, officially for resisting a police order not to convene the meeting, and over 100 men were arrested. Further raids on the Musa and Sakina mosques occurred in November 2014, during which 480 officers from the General Services Unit (GSU) and the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) arrested hundreds of people, killing several.³² According to prominent local human rights NGOs, Muslims for Human Rights (Muhuri) and Haki Africa, some of those arrested were eventually released, others were charged. Details of these raids and the cases that followed are hard to verify but both organisations condemned the heavy handed actions of the police, part of a long tale of persecution of young Muslim men by state security forces.³³

In June 2014, Mombasa awoke to the news of the ambush of the small town of Mpeketoni, located in Lamu County some 300 kilometres north of the city. Armed attackers burned shops and vehicles, and murdered some 60 people. Claimed by al-Shabaab (a claim reiterated by various foreign governments), this event was much politicised, with President Kenyatta placing the blame on ‘local politicians’ and the Mombasa County Police Commissioner explicitly accusing opposition leader Raila Odinga of involvement; both inferred that this was an ethnically motivated attack against the Kikuyu population that have settled in Mpeketoni since the 1970s.³⁴

³¹ See: ‘Deadly clashes after police raid Kenya mosque’. *Al Jazeera*, 2 February 2014 (available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/02/clashes-after-police-storm-kenya-mosque-20142213377444840.html>, accessed 8 September 2017).

³² See: ‘Deadly raids on mosques in Kenya’s Mombasa’. *Al Jazeera*, 17 November 2014 (available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/11/deadly-raids-mosques-kenya-mombasa-2014111715249473661.html>, accessed 8 September 2017).

³³ See the report by Muhuri (Muslims for Human Rights): ‘*We’re tired of taking you to the court: human rights abuses by Kenya’s Anti-Terrorism Police Unit*. 2013 (available online: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/human-rights-abuses-by-kenya-atpu-20140220.pdf>, accessed 10 September 2017), as well as the Al Jazeera documentary: *Inside Kenya’s death squads*. 2014 (available online: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/kenyadeathsquads/>, accessed 19 August 2017).

³⁴ See I. Ongiri & B. Namunane: ‘Uhuru blames massacre on tribalism, hate politics’. *Daily Nation*, 17 June 2014 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Uhuru-blames-massacre-on-tribalism--hate-politics/-/1056/2352306/-/wyy11az/-/index.html>, accessed 19 August 2017).

Other senior officials asserted that Mpeketoni and a similar attack two weeks later was the work of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a secessionist organisation whose prominence has waxed and waned at the coast over the last two decades.³⁵ In the wake of Mpeketoni, mentioned above, several people were killed by hooded attackers in the Likoni area of Mombasa.³⁶

‘Minor’ events involving guns and explosives occurred throughout 2014. In March, two people were arrested in Mombasa after improvised explosive devices were found in their vehicle.³⁷ Two months later, three people were killed and 15 injured when a hand grenade detonated inside an overnight bus, recently arrived in the port city from Nairobi. Explosives were recovered near a beachside hotel later that same day.³⁸ Within the same month, a grenade was thrown at a police vehicle, injuring two. In addition to these incidents involving explosives, six Muslim clerics (as well as one of their alleged financiers) were killed in Mombasa during the 18 months of my fieldwork, apparently targeted either by state security forces for being ‘too radical’, or by others, for ‘not being radical enough’.³⁹ Finally, as mentioned in the opening vignette and much discussed in Mombasa was the shooting of two white female

³⁵ See: ‘Hindi, Gamba attacks work of MRC – Kaindi’. *The Star*, 6 July 2014 (available online: http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2014/07/06/hindigamba-attacks-work-of-mrc-kaindi_c966758, accessed 20 August 2017).

³⁶ See: ‘Deaths in Mombasa shooting rampage’. *Al Jazeera*, 21 July 2014 (available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/07/deaths-shooting-rampage-kenya-mombasa-20147214444141458.html>, accessed 20 August 2017).

³⁷ See: ‘Kenya arrests two after bombs “found in car”’. *BBC News*, 18 March 2014 (available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-26624387>, accessed 20 August 2017).

³⁸ See: ‘Kenya blasts: three dead after twin attacks in Mombasa’. *The Telegraph*, 3 May 2014 (available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/kenya/10806810/Kenya-blasts-three-dead-after-twin-attacks-in-Mombasa.html>, accessed 20 August 2017).

³⁹ See the Al Jazeera documentary: *Inside Kenya’s death squads*. 2014 (available online: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/kenyadeathsquads/>, accessed 19 August 2017), as well as the IRIN news agency’s report: ‘Gunned down in Mombasa – the clerics that have died’. 2014 (available online: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100412/gunned-down-mombasa-%E2%80%93-clerics-have-died>, accessed 20 August 2017).

tourists in separate incidents in Old Town in July 2014.⁴⁰ While the first had been widely assumed as a robbery gone wrong, the second shooting, less than two weeks later, left the city on edge. It was after this that I moved out of Old Town (and went to live on one of the major thoroughfares in town), although I continued to return to Old Town almost daily.

In light of these local and national events, it is unsurprising that concerns about insecurity pervaded everyday life in Mombasa; understanding how people experience, manage and mitigate insecurity soon became a key theme of my research, and led, amongst other things, to a focus on the Jaffery Complex, the gated community that forms the subject of the final chapter. The literature on insecurity in the region is often oriented towards policymakers and, although regularly identifying the role of state violence in fomenting radicalisation,⁴¹ also highlights more reductive variables such as ‘personality type’ and birth order (Botha 2016). Some authors continue to rely on the problematic notion of ‘African Islam’ to explain the limited potential for radicalisation at the coast (Vittori et al. 2009). More thoughtful analysts have eschewed such essentialist narratives, and instead consider the consequences of state violence and global geopolitics on the entrenchment of Muslim marginalisation within the nation-state (Pretholdt 2011; Seesemann 2007).⁴² Highlighting the growing cooperation between the North American and Kenyan administrations, these works detail the racial profiling, torture, detention and murder of coastal Muslims, particularly young men of Afro-Arab descent. I take a more everyday approach to insecurity, examining how it affects residential choices, and how it intersects with themes such as aspiration and diaspora.

⁴⁰ See: ‘Gunmen kill female tourist on Kenya coast’. *Daily Mail Online*, 7 July 2014 (available online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2704556/Gunmen-kill-female-tourist-Kenya-coast.html>, accessed 20 August 2017).

⁴¹ See the report by Muhuri (Muslims for Human Rights): ‘*We’re tired of taking you to the court*’: human rights abuses by Kenya’s Anti-Terrorism Police Unit. 2013 (available online: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/human-rights-abuses-by-kenya-atpu-20140220.pdf>, accessed 10 September 2017).

⁴² See also H. Mwakimako & J. Willis’ paper for the Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Sécuritaires dans la Corne de l’Afrique, ‘Islam, politics, and violence on the Kenya coast’. 2014 (available online: http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/sites/lam/files/note4_observatoire.pdf, accessed 13 August 2017).

Whether blamed on the state, ‘radical youth’, ‘Wahhabis’, al-Shabaab, coastal secessionists or local politicians, all of these events were understood to be inseparable from the rise of Islamic ‘extremism’ in the region and beyond, exacerbating a climate of hostility towards Muslims that, as outlined above, was already well established in the Kenyan context. What effects did this have on my research? My interlocutors’ acute awareness of the crisis of representation regarding Muslims that currently plagues public imagination in Kenya and beyond was made obvious through frequent requests I received, like the following from Sahil. Sahil, a respected Khoja community adviser who appears on several other occasions in this thesis, always had time to receive me in his office, a shabby room attached to the Bilal proselytising headquarters. During our first meeting, Sahil warned me, ‘Many people here are scared of outsiders because there are so many stories of the CIA and FBI sending agents. I only ask you, don’t do anything that will aid our enemy. We are also a target’. A few weeks later he reminded me, ‘If I share with you, you must be just. Don’t publish anything that will harm Islam’. Sahil, the frontline of community outreach, was a picture of welcome in his demeanour – but also clearly worried about where my research might lead his beloved community.

Sahil’s comments succinctly summarise the oft-repeated maxim that I, as someone doing research about Muslims, was either a government spy or motivated by malicious intent. Not only did many fear that I was out to ruin the name of their religion, others seemed to suggest that I could be part of the ‘terrorist’ threat, as captured by Qaasim’s comments comparing me to the ‘White Widow’ in the opening vignette. This comparison, however, was generally made jokingly and I took it to be symptomatic of the extent to which ‘terror’ pervades Mombasan thought, rather than a personal accusation. The suspicion many expressed towards me was a permanent feature of my research: while causing many challenges and frustrations during my stay in the city, I came to understand the difficulties I faced as indicative of what it means to be Muslim in Mombasa in the contemporary historical moment, and became important aspect of my inquiry. Suspicion towards me waxed and waned but never abated. To the best of my ability I sought to reassure the people I spent time with that I was neither a spy nor a ‘terrorist’, and that my research agenda sought in part to redress the generalisations and misconceptions about Muslims that feed global Islamophobia. It is my hope that these pages are a testament to this.

A note on clothing: cosmopolitanism as method

Qaasim's comments about me as dressing like the 'White Widow' lead me to a final methodological issue: clothing. On my first visit to the Khoja *imambargah*, the disjuncture between my outfit and everyone else's was only the most visible element of my sense of out-of-place-ness that day. Amongst a sea of black *buibuis* and black headscarves – in accordance with the fact that this was the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husain – I stuck out like a sore thumb, in a flowery long-sleeved shirt and baggy trousers. Loosely draping a colourful scarf over my head did little to improve the picture. I was very grateful when Rahila, a woman with luminous skin and a placid demeanour, volunteered to bring me a black headscarf for the events that evening; she gently suggested it might be nice if I wore black. Upon re-entry, the Chairlady was so delighted with my transformation she exclaimed, 'Now you are my daughter!'

Needless to say, I had soon acquired a *buibui* and, like many anthropologists before me, found clothing to be an important technique of fieldwork (Gold 1988; Gupta 2015). I want to complicate this picture somewhat by considering my *buibui*-wearing as spatialised practice, a performance that generated a range of sentiments, both in myself and amongst those I encountered, depending on the setting. I came to feel very comfortable wearing hijab while wandering the streets of Old Town – this was the area I lived for over half of my fieldwork; it is also the location of many of the religious spaces and homes I have described above. Although the hijab is by no means universally adopted in Old Town, only the occasional tourist would be seen exposing much flesh. In Old Town, my *buibui* generally elicited respectful *salaam alaikums* from men and women alike. *Not* wearing hijab in the *imambargah* or in other Khoja religious spaces quickly became unthinkable. However, largely related to the contexts in which I met and spent time with others, this was not the case elsewhere.

Although I always dressed modestly, usually in a *salwar kameez*, I rarely ventured outside of Old Town in a *buibui*, at least not on foot. Very simply, wandering around Markiti, the town centre or the various residential areas mentioned above, I did not feel comfortable in hijab. My different experiences in these locations expose something of the different sensibilities that dominate different parts of the city. I felt

it would have been ‘impossible’ for me to sit in Hashim’s sweetshop in hijab, or wear a *buibui* while traipsing around the building site that concerns us later. Nadesh and Aishani, my Ismaili and Hindu (Kutchi Leva Patel) Gujarati teachers, both respected my decision to wear a hijab for the purposes of research with Khojas – a community they both viewed as particularly insular – but made it crystal clear that a *buibui* would not be welcome in their homes.

Admittedly, these rather eclectic dressing habits baffled my immediate neighbours, who would make friendly jests, ‘*Leo ni Mwislamu*’ (‘Today you’re a Muslim’), and watch in bemusement at my various costume changes (I would often nip home between chats and social events to change into what I considered appropriate for the next). Clearly inconsistent on one level, I came to see my clothing changes in terms of the theories of cosmopolitanism discussed further in Chapter 2 (Osella & Osella 2007; Simpson & Kresse 2007; Werbner 2008). These authors define cosmopolitanism as an awareness of difference and a range of strategies for managing that diversity. As an anthropologist, attempting to construct and maintain relationships with a broad range of Mombasa’s inhabitants, I came to see cosmopolitanism as *method*, in which clothing was a prop. Clothing changes were a way of recognising and respecting the differences between my interlocutors, and perhaps sometimes reducing the divergences between myself and others.

How did my principal informants respond to my shifting apparel? For a start, I never had to buy a headscarf during fieldwork, being the lucky recipient of donations from a number of women. Even people I never really chatted with otherwise were incredibly forthcoming with their gifts of headscarves. This was coupled, throughout my fieldwork, with frequent compliments about my ability to headscarf appropriately. Women of all ages often proclaimed, ‘You wear it even better than us!’ This was a generous lie at the best of times – I looked like a chipmunk in a nun’s habit, never managing to achieve the folded ridges that add that all-critical volume, or the effortless ‘just tied’ look. Many would elicit my experience of wearing hijab; variations on Rahila’s questions, ‘Don’t you feel so good? You see that everyone respects you now, no?’ were oft-repeated. In many contexts I interpreted the commentary on and contributions to my modest appearance as evidence of a desire to bring me into the fold: this mode of dressing would at least help me see the merits

of Islam, if not eventually facilitate my conversion. Clothed as if I might convert, the potentiality my apparel symbolised in this regard undoubtedly eased my access to some people and places. In some instances, the borderline figure I represented was a positive thing.

In other contexts, my dressing decisions went down less well. On a handful of occasions, I was castigated in the street for not wearing hijab, by women accustomed to seeing me it. ‘The hijab is a commitment for life. You can’t just put it on and off!’ Maalia exclaimed after bumping into me, without hijab, near the marketplace. I apologised profusely and explained that I wore it out of respect in many contexts, but that I was not Muslim, a response Maalia found no comfort in. Returning to the idea of cosmopolitanism as method, this was of course the opposite of what I was attempting to achieve through clothing changes – I never wanted to upset anyone, let alone act in ways perceived as disrespectful towards Islam. I worried about this, and asked many for their advice on what to do; no one advocated my total abandonment and agreed that there were lots of places it was not appropriate for me to visit without hijab. I thus continued to wear a *buibui* in Khoja religious spaces, as well as in homes where I knew that women wore hijab when outdoors. My fluctuating fashions were a visible manifestation of the social geographies I traversed daily in Mombasa; a cartography in which I could easily not be mapped. Occupying a liminal space certainly did nothing to improve the suspicion I generated, but I saw no easy way out of these wardrobe conundrums as I sought to maintain relationships with a diverse urban population.

Chapter outline

I conclude this Introduction by explaining the chapters that follow in relation to the conversation in Latifah’s kitchen that initiated the thesis.

Latifah complains frequently about corruption, power cuts and the rising cost of living, but is not ‘political’ in the conventional sense of the term. She votes – ‘for anyone but the Kikuyus’ – but is otherwise largely uninterested in the politics of state. She is, however, profoundly attached to Mombasa. This sentiment is not unique to her or new to her generation. The first chapter of this thesis tells a 20th

century history of the city, focussing on the ways in which Asians have shaped littoral urbanity through buildings. An established body of scholarship has challenged prevailing stereotypes about the lack of Asian participation in national politics, demonstrating the minority's critical role in trade unionism and anti-colonial struggles. The façades I consider in Chapter 1 shift the focus away from the world of formal politics and provide a street-side view of engagement with empire, demonstrating how building patrons forged alternative (post)colonial landscapes in Mombasa. Beginning with Art Deco, the building style that dominated the major urban expansion of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, I consider Asians as agents in the construction of a racialised colonial order. Harnessing an architectural vocabulary linked to Europe and Bombay, Asians deployed Art Deco to position themselves as 'imperial citizens' (T. Metcalf 2007: 2), registering both their commitment to and critique of empire, as well as their superiority in relation to Mombasa's heterogeneous 'African' majority. The chapter concludes by reading building façades against narratives of Asian emigration and national apathy around independence, considering bold additions to the cityscape as investments in a postcolonial future despite the rampant anti-Asianism of the era.

While Art Deco is revealed as a quintessentially transoceanic style in the first chapter, Chapter 2 considers everyday food practices as a means to complicate this view of littoral connectivity. The *bhajiya*s Latifah is cooking in the opening vignette, as with many of the delicacies sold in the sweetshop that grounds this chapter, look to be emblematic of the transoceanic histories emphasised in the literature on Indian Ocean cultural forms. However, Latifah's own emphasis on the iconically *local* status of these deep-fried delicacies – as foods that evoke Mombasa and entice Mombasan palettes – indicates the limitations of this lens. Mombasa is fundamentally connected to wider worlds, a reality decades of anthropological and historical scholarship has revealed to be true of every locale. Through the lens of everyday consumption, this chapter argues that focusing on Indian Ocean connections misses how much quotidian practice is perceived in the city. If research on Indian Ocean urbanity and ethnographies of cosmopolitanism more generally have tended to focus particularly on the ways in which worlds beyond are valorised or concealed, discourses and practices of eating in Mombasa compel us to examine the ways in which such connections are often not imagined at all. In calling for

attention to the ways in which Indian Ocean webs are ‘already local’ (Pennycook 2010: 70), the ethnography presented here demonstrates Mombasa’s ‘inherent connectedness’ (Kresse 2012: 36) to be a contingent and contextually specific social fact in Mombasa.

Latifah’s life outside the home, like that of many of my informants, is structured around religious functions. As is normal for Khojas, her existence is infused with the metaphor and materiality of Karbala, an event of far less significance to Mombasa’s Sunni majority. Moreover, conversation in Latifah’s household, as much as at the *imambargah*, is never far from debates about Islamic reform – the politics of headscarves, music and fasting were alluded to in the above vignette – influenced in part by Khoja connections to Iran and Iraq. At first blush, Latifah’s life might seem to bypass the city and fit neatly into the stereotype that suggests that an orientation towards communally defined religiosity segregates Asians from the concerns of their compatriots. Demonstrating the ways in which the broader religio-political landscape of Mombasa implicates Khoja ritual practice, Chapter 3 provides a Shia perspective on the subject of Islamic reform that has long absorbed scholars of the Swahili coast. Through the lens of a Muharram blood donation drive, initiated by Khojas in 2014, I examine how a multiplicity of reformist discourses intersect in the city, always entangled with other concerns. Khoja ideas about blood and the performance of Karbala mourning rituals are shown to be infused by perceptions of local sectarianism, regional insecurity and global geographies of reform. In addition to bringing new topologies and idioms of piety into the literature on Islam in Kenya, this chapter suggests that, rather than serving as a barrier, there is much slippage between piety and nation: globalising religious histories shape how Khojas imagine their relations to fellow citizens, as well as provide a lens for understanding contemporary local and national events.

Nostalgia, which appears as a sense of loss for an era of religious harmony in Chapter 3, is the focus of Chapter 4. In the opening vignette, Latifah laments a bygone era, wherein the city was more peaceful, orderly and economically stable. Mentioning the culinary desires of those who have left, and emphasising the distance between herself and ‘the Dubai lady’, she also alludes to some of the patterns of mobility – social and geographic – that shape Mombasa in the present moment.

Starting in Nadim's *paan* shop, this chapter examines the ways in which Mombasans deploy time as witness to make particular claims on place. I examine nostalgia as a source of social capital, a trope which, although also registering the vagaries of the postcolonial era, enables residents to record proud stories of wealth accumulation, made possible on the back of transoceanic trade. This adds nuance to the stereotype of Asians as wealthy exploiters and illuminates some of the contradictions of contemporary coastal economics. By historicising the speaker's relationship to the city and fostering links to a broader mnemonic community of Mombasans, nostalgia talk is shown to reinforce the claims of some littoral inhabitants to the city over others, thus enabling Somalis and people from upcountry to be positioned as a source of contemporary urban anxieties.

If Chapter 4 looks towards the past, the final chapter is concerned with the future, and the ways in which Khojas seek to act on it through space. We start with a site tour of the Jaffery Complex, a Khoja gated community being constructed around 'a mosque for all'. Our guide here is Rabi Jalal, the *jamaat* member in charge of coordinating this ambitious project, a man whose opinions contrast markedly with Latifah's dismissal of it. The chapter examines the motivations for and reception of the Complex, as well as particularities of its design features, considering the global geographies of reform, diaspora and 'terror' that have shaped its development, as well as the mobilities and aspirations it gathers. The chapter concludes by thinking about the interplays of time and space the Jaffery Complex evinces, as Khojas both preserve and erase histories embedded in community landmarks as a means to secure a place for themselves in the city's future.

The conclusion draws the themes discussed in the preceding chapters together, and outlines the main features of the 'Mombasan urbanism' that emerge therein.

Mombasa is steeped in history, some of which is essential for understanding the pages that follow. Before commencing the chapters described above, I provide a short Historical Prelude, detailing key events and texts that contextualise the city, as well as the history of Asian settlement in East Africa.

Historical Prelude

Mombasa and Asians in text and context

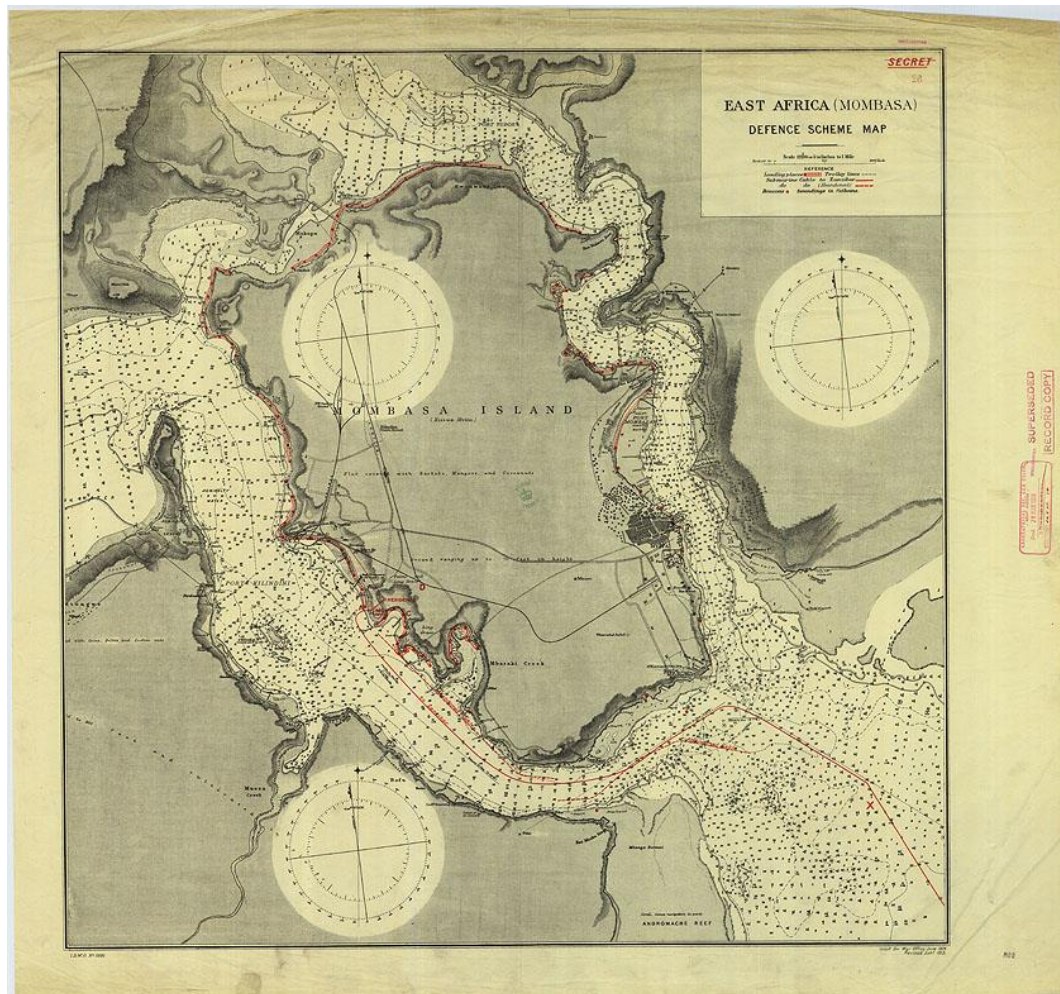


Figure 13: Mombasa as colonial object.

'East Africa (Mombasa) defence scheme map'. British Library (available online: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/maps/africa/largeimage136509.html>, accessed 7 September 2017).

Mombasa, an island nestled into the surrounding mainland on three sides, has had a long and sometimes glorious history as an Indian Ocean port. Flanked by two natural harbours, this happenstance of geography has had immeasurable consequences on the city's history. Mombasa is one of the oldest urban settlements in East Africa and has been inhabited by Swahili-speaking Muslims, their slaves and farming tenants,

as well as people from around the littoral for over 1000 years, procuring its fortune from trade connecting the African interior to the Indian Ocean world beyond (Horton & Middleton 2000). Mombasa's integration within global circulations of goods and people made it one of the most powerful Swahili city states; its optimal location and immense wealth was not lost on the Portuguese (Strandes 1961 [1899]), who sought, over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries to assert and maintain their control of the city. Mombasa was then ruled by a succession of Omani dynasties – Yarubi, Mazrui and Busaidi – who reigned through a *liwali* or governor, but in many respects left power in the hands of local Swahili patricians.⁴³ Following a succession dispute in 1834, the Busaidis established a sultanate in Zanzibar, from where they maintained control over most of the East African coast.

By the late 19th century, the Europeans were jockeying for power in the region. British dominance of the coast began in 1887, when the British East Africa Association (later known as the Imperial British East Africa Company), leased a ten-mile strip of the coast from the Sultan of Zanzibar (Salim 1972). Over the next several years, the Company sought to entrench its domination of what is today Kenya and Uganda; this included brutally repressing local revolts, such as the Mazrui rebellion of 1895. In the face of growing local discontent, the British government took over from the Company in 1895, proclaiming the East Africa Protectorate from its capital at Mombasa in 1895. The rest of Kenya was declared a colony in 1920; although a de facto British dominion throughout the colonial period, the coastal strip (that included the city and its environs) remained officially under the sovereignty of the Zanzibari Sultan until independence in 1963. Imperial power in British East Africa was administered from Bombay, through the agency of the Bombay Presidency, which ruled as if its western outpost 'were a district of a presidency of India' (Colonial Order-in-Council quoted in T. Metcalf 2007: 23).

⁴³ Decades of scholarship on what constitutes Swahili identity illustrates the fuzziness created by centuries of Indian Ocean exchange (Eastman 1971; Mazrui & Shariff 1993; Parkin 1985, 1989). Throughout this thesis, my use of the term Swahili refers to people with roots in the urban areas of the East African coast, who call themselves Swahili and may also highlight their Arab, African or South Asian ancestry.

Much more than legal code was transported from Bombay. One of the most significant consequences of British hegemony in East Africa was the expansion and permanent settlement of Indian trading communities in the region, encouraged by colonial officials in India and the UK who believed that Indians would help entrench capital and ‘civilisation’ on the African continent (Mangat 1969; T. Metcalf 2007). By this means, tens of thousands of Indians, of wealthy and impoverished trading, farming, artisanal and professional backgrounds, came to settle in East Africa, many arriving and settling permanently in Mombasa. The majority of those who migrated were from the Kutch and Kathiawar regions of contemporary Gujarat, and came eventually to be known as ‘Asians’ (as explained in footnote three on p.17). The British defined and governed over the region’s populace according to the three-tier system that segregated Asians, Africans and Europeans in law, as well as in terms of education, work, taxation and residence. This hierarchy of races prohibited those classed as ‘African’, also known as ‘natives’, from most professions other than farming and manual labour, as well as excluding them from political representation and imposing strict rules on their mobility. ‘Asians’ occupied an intermediary position, accorded some political power, but far less than ‘Europeans’; this discriminatory set up that was persistently challenged by Asians, with incremental success, throughout the colonial era (Gregory 1993a; Mangat 1969; Patel 1997). Prohibited from owning prime agricultural land, Asians became integral to all levels of commerce, establishing themselves as principal economic actors in urban areas (including Mombasa), as well as setting up tiny *dukas* (shops) throughout the interior (the stereotype of the Asian as *dukawallah* or shopkeeper continues to this day). Asians sold and traded commodities imported from India, the US and Europe, often in return for raw agricultural produce, which they were also involved in buying from local producers.

Karim Janmohamed’s (1978) doctoral thesis gives extensive attention to the effects of Asian migration to Mombasa. His analysis charts the town’s development from 1895 to 1939; three chapters outline the role that Indians played in transforming the economy and physical structure of the city. Focussed on the dynamics of urban growth, Janmohamed examines colonial infrastructure and the rise of Mombasa as the region’s most important trading hub (surpassing the previously dominant Zanzibar), as well as the role of Indian traders, middlemen, craftspeople and shopkeepers – and the system of credit which they operated and extended – in

transforming the city's economic system. Janmohamed details the emergence of a distinct class of land magnates that cut across particular racial and occupational divisions, as well as the expansion of the city's built environment resulting from colonial town planning schemes and Indian investment; the latter favouring the Art Deco style that I discuss at length in Chapter 1. These developments fostered an exponential influx of wage labourers from inland, which in turn brought far reaching changes to the city and precipitated the emergence of an impoverished – and heavily policed – urbanising working class. A number of Janmohamed's reflections on the significance of Indians in shaping the colonial urban landscape are reiterated in Berg & Walter's (1968) article on mosque construction in the city. I return to both Janmohamed and Berg & Walter in the following chapter.

Janmohamed is one of many authors to stress that the three-tier system was at best a partial reality in Mombasa. For a start, the British had great difficulty in deciding which urban residents should be classed as 'native'. By 1910, those who styled themselves as 'Arab' – elites who had long wielded power at the coast through their proximity to Omani rulers – had convinced the administration that they should be classified as 'non-native', thus avoiding the Hut Tax imposed on all 'Africans', and securing marginally better rights (Salim 1976; Willis 1993). The 'Swahili', for whom status had long been derived from an emphasis on their Arab ancestry, confounded imperial classificatory systems. As Jeremy Prestholdt has summarised,

Those who could qualify as Arab or Asian benefited from the advantages offered to Non-Natives, but most [Swahili] occupied the awkward position of having neither a recognised African 'tribal' identity nor the higher legal status of Non-Native (2011: 6).

As we shall see below, this ambiguity continues to structure the relationship between the coast and the central government.

In addition to posing a challenge to colonial taxonomy, Mombasa's long history – an urban history of living together – made residential segregation in the city 'not practicable', to quote a Provincial Commissioner of the 1930s (in K. Janmohamed 1978: 405). Janmohamed writes,

The single most important and a “natural” factor militating against [residential segregation]... was the reality that Mombasa was a “Native Town”.⁴⁴ Here the African urban tradition pre-dated European colonisation. The town’s social structure had evolved as a result of ethnic interaction between diverse elements...(1978: 413).

Despite the best efforts of the British (see below), Asians, Swahilis and Arabs already constituted, and in many cases remained, major landowners and commercial players in the town.

If colony provided commercial opportunity for some, the British construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway and the deep-water port at Kilindini in the early 20th century marked the end of Arab and Swahili trading supremacy, which had largely been conducted via caravan and dhow, and channelled through Mombasa Harbour (today known as the Old Port) on the opposite side of the island to Kilindini (Berg & Walter 1968; Cruise O’Brien 1995; K. Janmohamed 1978). This was coupled with the abolition of slavery and the usurpation of agricultural land, destroying the social underpinnings of status, patronage and dependence that had formed the basis of Swahili power, and structured relationships between the city and the surrounding coast, for centuries (Salim 1972). Ground-breaking histories of the city have examined the effects of colonial labour policies on ‘Swahili’ and ‘Mijikenda’⁴⁵ ethnogenesis along the Kenyan seaboard (Willis 1993), as well as the emergence of new forms of class consciousness amongst labourers on the Kilindini docks (Cooper 1987).

Although initially the epicentre of colonial rule and the site of major infrastructural development oriented towards the expansion of international trade, Mombasa was demoted from its position as the capital of the Protectorate in 1907, as the British

⁴⁴ Here, Janmohamed is not employing the colonial sense of the term ‘native’, but rather emphasising the *already* urban structure of Mombasa at the onset of British rule. Beyond the coast, Kenya did not have other significant urban settlements; at the start of the colonial period, Nairobi was a sparsely inhabited plain.

⁴⁵ ‘Mijikenda’, a term coined in the 1930s, was used to assert a collective identity for a constellation of nine ethnic groups who presented themselves as the autochthony of the coastal hinterland (Willis 1993). Digo and Giriama are the largest of these and today constitute a significant proportion of Mombasa’s working class.

increasingly focussed their attentions on the development of Nairobi and the ‘White Highlands’, an exclusively European agricultural zone in the interior. The relocation of the capital marked the beginning of coastal marginalisation in relation to the rest of Kenya, a pattern that continues into the present era. The colonial powers made their views of ‘lazy’, ‘suspicious’ and ambiguously ‘native’ coastal Muslims evident through labour and development policies, investing heavily in missionary activities in the interior and systematically preferring Christians from inland (Cruise O’Brien 1995). This legacy has had profound implications for post-independence Kenya: political and commercial power, as well as land, remain firmly entrenched in Christian hands (Gifford 2008), including at the coast.⁴⁶ Kenyan politicians court the coast, but power, even after devolution to the counties created in 2013, is a thing that littoral residents largely imagine to exist elsewhere. This was made obvious in the aftermath of many of the police raids, described in the Introduction, which occurred during my fieldwork; it was common knowledge in Mombasa that county officials were as much in the dark as urban residents prior to these incursions by central government police units.

Since independence, Kenyan politics has been dominated by the Kenyatta and Odinga dynasties, whose latest electoral showdown is being played out as I write. Jomo Kenyatta was Kenya’s first president, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga his deputy. The Kikuyu ethnic group to which the Kenyatta family belongs have provided three out of the country’s four post-independence leaders; Daniel arap Moi, of Kalenjin ethnicity, retained power for 24 years through close coalition with Kikuyus. Kenya was effectively and then officially a one-party state between 1969 and 1992. During this time, Raila Odinga, son of the first vice-president and from the Luo ethnic group that dominates western Kenya, emerged as the central, if controversial, opposition figure. Since the re-introduction of multiparty politics, Raila, the perpetual underdog of Kenyan politics, has headed a shifting coalition of those who feel excluded from decades of ‘Kikuyuisation’, a term I heard widely in Mombasa.

These tensions came to a head in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 elections. Raila and his supporters (organised under the banner of the Orange Democratic

⁴⁶ See the report by S. Yahya: *Who owns the Kenya coast? The climaxing of land conflicts on the Indian Ocean seaboard*. USAID and CERTI. 2000.

Movement), contested the results, which reinstated incumbent Mwai Kibaki. Two months of clashes followed, in which over 1200 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced (although there were riots and looting in Mombasa during this two month period, the city was spared the carnage seen in the Rift Valley and other areas).⁴⁷ Most of Kenya's political heavyweights are believed to have played a critical role in mobilising violence along ethnic lines. In the aftermath, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, two politicians who were later to be elected as president and vice-president (the former being the son of the country's first president), were put on trial for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court. Charges against both were eventually dropped with the prosecution claiming that witnesses had been bribed and intimidated, and that crucial evidence had been withheld by the Kenyan government (of which the defendants were by this point the apex). Despite these allegations and Raila's protests, the 2013 elections installed Uhuru as president.⁴⁸ In sum, the Kikuyu-Luo domination of national politics in the postcolonial era has helped solidify a narrative of nationhood that imagines Kenya as a coalition of 'tribes' with roots in the country's rural interior and a Christian religious orientation (Lonsdale 2004). This imaginary leaves little space for the historically urbane and Muslim littoral, inhabited by peoples whose 'African' heritage has long been questioned, and indeed often downplayed by themselves (Kresse 2007a).

⁴⁷ See: 'ICC drops Uhuru Kenyatta charges for Kenya ethnic violence'. *BBC News*, 5 December 2014 (available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-30347019>, accessed 19 August 2017).

⁴⁸ Uhuru was returned to power in the recent August 2017 elections, the results of which were once again contested by Raila through the courts. In a move that surprised many, the election was annulled by the Kenyan Supreme Court the following month, on the grounds of procedural failures. The poll will be re-run in October 2017. See the article by C. Mwangi: 'Kenyan court flexes muscle and annuls poll'. *Daily Nation*, 3 September 2017 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/Opinion/Kenyan-court-flexes-muscle-and-annuls-poll/440808-4080662-al8clpz/index.html>, accessed 10 September 2017).

Writing coastal Muslims

Against this backdrop, many academic accounts highlight discrimination towards Muslims in political, educational and employment settings, as well as the difficulties they face in obtaining national documentation (Ayubi & Mohyuddin 1994; Bakari & Yahya 1995; A. A. Mazrui 1993; A. M. Mazrui 1993; Ndzovu 2014; Oded 2000). Here I should note that the littoral is not the only part of the country with a substantial Muslim population – the northeast and particular areas of Nairobi are home to significant numbers of ethnic Somalis, many of whom are Kenyan citizens, while others are refugees who have arrived since the onset of the Somali civil war. The UNHCR estimates that there are over 300,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, some of whom have settled in Mombasa.⁴⁹ As I examine further in Chapter 4, Somalis face much discrimination at the hands of the state (Lochery 2012)⁵⁰ and from other Kenyans, but they are not my focus in this review. Mombasan Muslims' (non-Somalis) engagement in national politics have been assessed in terms of pre-independence efforts to secure coastal autonomy (the failed Mwambao movement; see Brennan 2008; Kindy 1972; Salim 1970), the emergence and subsequent state-sponsored destruction of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in the 1990s (A. A. Mazrui 1993; A. M. Mazrui 1993; Oded 2000), and muted efforts by Muslim umbrella organisations to advance religious minority rights (Mwakimako 1995; Ndzovu 2014). Reflecting its actual and metaphorical distance from state power, the seaboard is an opposition stronghold and coastal voting patterns have also garnered attention, particularly in the aftermath of broad Muslim support for the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) in the disputed 2007 elections (Mwakimako & Willis 2016).

⁴⁹ See the UNHCR website: 'Horn of Africa – Somalia situation: Kenya'. 2017 (available online: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn/location/178>, accessed 20 August 2017).

⁵⁰ State discrimination against Somalis is also detailed in two Human Rights Watch reports, see: *From horror to hopelessness: Kenya's forgotten Somali refugee crisis*. 2009 (available online: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/03/30/horror-hopelessness/kenyas-forgotten-somali-refugee-crisis>, accessed 19 August 2017), as well as *'You are all terrorists': Kenyan police abuse of refugees in Nairobi*. 2013 (available online: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/29/you-are-all-terrorists/kenyan-police-abuse-refugees-nairobi>, accessed 19 August 2017).

Perceptions of marginalisation are an integral component of several anthropological accounts of littoral Muslims. Andrew Eisenberg's (2009, 2012, 2013) 'acoustemology' of Mombasa's historic centre adds ethnographic colour to the sentiment that Old Town, the city and the coast more generally are besieged by people from upcountry and the social mores of inland. His work considers how a distinctly Swahili ethnicity is vocalised through Old Town's soundscapes. In line with the scholarship of Hirschkind (2006), Eisenberg is attentive to the ways in which the *adhan* (call to prayer) and the *khutba* (Friday sermon) produce particular responses amongst those residing, working in or passing through the area. Many Muslims respond to the *adhan* through 'cultivated bodily orientations' (see also Mahmood 2005), repeating its opening salvo (*Allahu Akbar*), ceasing other activities and muting competing sounds in order to engage fully in the 'participatory listening' expected of the pious (Eisenberg 2013: 192). These sounds, in other words, produce particular performances of pious subjectivity, distinguishing Muslims from others in the area. However, non-Muslims are also expected to respond to this soundscape according to specific normative prescriptions. As Ahmadi, one of Eisenberg's informants explains, if any of the (Christian) police officers at the station adjacent to Old Town – a building within earshot of several mosques – so much as dared to appear that they were listening to the *khutba* in their capacity as agents of the state (by, for instance, standing haughtily, as if to confirm its accordance with national law), this would be taken as an affront by the area's Muslim population. Ahmadi makes clear, attentive posturing on the part of a police officer – participatory listening from the wrong kind of subject – could not but evoke some kind of retaliation. The soundscape produced via Old Town's mosques ultimately constructs an 'Islamic communitarian privacy' (2013: 201) and effectively transforms the area's ostensibly public space into a zone which Muslims demarcate and defend as theirs. The notion of life in Mombasa as threatened by rapacious outsiders is a recurring theme of this thesis, addressed particularly in Chapters 3 and 4.

Kai Kresse (2009: S78) takes notions of coastal marginality a step further, employing the concept of the 'double-periphery' in order to capture the interplay between Kenyan Muslim perceptions of themselves in relation to the state and a global Muslim *ummah*. Kresse's work (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2009), which draws on his intimate relationship with a number of Mombasa's prominent Muslim

intellectuals, highlights the significance of the impact of discourses of Islamic reform on life in the city. Many customary Muslim practices at the coast – such as the use of traditional healers or the celebration of Prophet Mohammed’s birthday – have, particularly in the last three decades, been derided as ‘unIslamic’ by an increasingly powerful constituency who draw their authority, and often financial resources, from the Gulf. The growing prominence of ‘Wahhabis’, as they are known by their others, has helped foster the sentiment that coastal Muslims are not only materially and ideologically excluded from state power, but also occupy a space at the ‘edge of Islam’, an assertion reiterated by McIntosh (2009). Although careful to avoid essentialising the dichotomy between so-called ‘reformists’ and their others – see Seesemann (2006) for an excellent outline of the pitfalls of this binary in relation to Kenya – Kresse highlights the significance of this division for Muslim daily life in the city, as well as the emerging forms of solidarity it has fostered. ‘Wahhabis’ appear frequently in the latter chapters of this thesis, and Kresse’s scholarship is an important buttress to my own considerations of reform.

Others have focussed on the everyday life and ritual of Muslim women in the city. Margaret Strobel’s (1979) thesis on Swahili women charts nearly a century of tradition, change, social mobility and subjugation, focussing particularly on dance societies, puberty rites and wedding celebrations. This text, accompanied by her collection of life histories co-authored with Sarah Mirza (Mirza & Strobel 1989), provide a fine-grained picture of the lives of urban Swahili women in the colonial and early postcolonial eras. Based on research conducted at the coast, two further works consider intersections of gender, Islam and the state. Susan Hirsch’s (1998) legal ethnography of *Kadhis’ Courts*⁵¹ (Muslim personal and inheritance law courts), located in Malindi and, to a lesser extent, Mombasa, describes the production and negotiation of gendered subject positions through discourses relating to marital conflict in these trials. Mary Porter (1998) examines the way gendered ideologies around modesty, modernity and success shape the experiences of students at a girls’ school in Mombasa.

The literature on Muslims of Asian origin in Kenya is sparse and tends to be divorced from the issues discussed above. Most studies provide general overviews

⁵¹ A *Kadhi* is an Islamic judge.

(Bakari 1995a) or brief outlines of particular Asian Muslim communities, often mentioning but not specific to Kenya, let alone Mombasa (Amiji 1971, 1975; Le Cour Grandmaison 2015; Gomes 2015; Rizvi & King 1973; Salvadori 1983; Walji 1995). We are only afforded glimpses of their everyday lives, and see little of their relationships to the state *as Muslims*, or of the effects of reformist discourses circulating at the coast on their perceptions of and practices of Islam. More often than not, people of Gujarati ancestry have been written about as ‘Asians’.

Writing (without) ‘race’: constructing ‘Asians’ in text

The racialisation of most aspects of daily life during the colonial period inscribed a legacy of politicised antagonism, the effects of which remain visible today. By the end of imperial rule, the privileges and commercial successes afforded to Asians had sowed deep resentment amongst the disenfranchised and exploited African majority. Post-independence politicians sought to rectify decades of political and economic subjugation by institutionalising ‘Africanisation’ policies, while lambasting Asians through media and rhetoric (these issues are taken up again in Chapter 1).

Grievances towards Asians in Kenya were summarised by historian Mougo Nyaggah (1974) to include: their collaboration with colonial powers, and the privileged treatment they were accorded as a result, coupled with a failure to recognise this collaboration in the postcolonial context; systematic abuse of their commercially dominant position in Kenyan society; and their lack of attachment to the country, defined particularly in terms of their residential and scholastic segregation (the latter made illegal at independence), and their failure to participate in politics, intermarry or obtain citizenship. Michel Adam (2015b) finds ample evidence of the persistence of these stereotypes in the Kenyan press in the late 1990s. Today, the minority continue to be referred to as *wageni* (foreigners or guests) or ‘paper citizens’ (i.e. citizens in name alone) by others, despite having lived in Kenya for generations (Herzig 2006).

The otherness of Asians within wider Kenyan imaginaries was frequently reiterated to me in Mombasa. Early one morning at the city’s Moi International Airport, a plump, jovial looking immigration officer – somehow managing to stay cool in his

navy green blazer – examined my passport for what seemed like an age, carefully thumbing through its pages. Eventually he asked me what I was doing in Kenya. ‘Research’, I responded as cheerfully as the nocturnal hour allowed. ‘So what’s your area of specialisation?’ he inquired. When I told him I was studying the *Wahindi* (Asian) communities, the bureaucrat assumed a knowing tone, ‘Ah, culture. You’re studying introverts, how they’ve managed not to change. At all. I know a guy whose grandfather came here in 1909’, he paused for effect, ‘and he still thinks he’s Indian even though he’s never been to India!’ The officer laughed, thoroughly pleased with his own joke, and waved me through to the departure gates.

Acknowledging these stereotypes helps unpack the form and content of the literature on Asians in East Africa. Published against a backdrop of the distinctly racialised nationalism that has dominated East Africa in the postcolonial era, writings about Asians have sought to make a maligned minoritarian experience intelligible to a wider audience, emphasising their contributions to the economics and politics of the region during the colonial period. Jagjit Singh Mangat’s (1969) seminal account is indicative of this style of counter-narrative: drawing on English- and Gujarati-language sources, he provides a rich historical overview of Asian migration histories, patterns of travel and settlement, growing economic power, and efforts to secure political parity (see also Bharati 1972; Delf 1963; Ghai & Ghai 1965; Hollingsworth 1960; Seidenberg 1996). In a similar vein, Robert Gregory’s extensive research on the subject includes a detailed exploration of Asian commerce and secondary occupations (1993b), Asian involvement in the formal political realm, trade unionism and journalism (1993a), as well as philanthropy (1992).

Cynthia Salvadori’s (1983) indispensable contribution was the first comprehensive overview of Asians in Kenya according to denomination, problematising the category ‘Asian’ while continuing to frame her work under its banner. Salvadori details the history of each sect in terms of place of origin and belief, describes their arrival in Kenya and outlines key aspects of their contemporary religious and social life in the country. Salvadori’s and Mangat’s works are more than just texts: they have a social life of their own in Kenya. On my first encounter with Hashim, the sweetshop owner who we meet below and again in Chapter 4, he immediately pulled out a well-worn copy of Salvadori’s recognisable hardback from a drawer beneath

his till. Similarly, consulting Chand, owner of Nairobi's best-stocked bookstore, what else he could recommend written by or about Asians, he responded with his affable grin, 'If you've got Salvadori and Mangat, what more do you need?' (albeit eventually helping me source a number of other publications).

Salvadori's first publication on Asians was followed by *We came in dhows* (1996), a beautiful three-volume collection combining snapshots of oral history, newspaper clippings and photographs arranged according to the approximate location in Kenya to which they pertain (i.e. coast, railway line, Nairobi and the interior). In the two decades since, a number of other scholars have followed the style she established, detailing the differences that characterise particular religious communities, while retaining the category 'Asian' as organising principle. Based on ethnographic and survey data, Pascale Herzig (2006) considers the role of gender and generation in shaping inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic and family relations amongst Asians in Kenya; her research draws largely from the Nairobi context. Taking a regional rather than country specific perspective, Gijsbert Oonk's (2013) latest book brings together some of the themes of his earlier works – on shifting preferences for meat or marriage partners (2004) and business suits (2011) – to chart 120 years of 'settling and unsettling' by Asians in East Africa. Although supplemented by ethnographic examples which suggest a more complex picture, Oonk's prose tends towards generalisation at the level of region-wide generations. For example, speaking of the consumption practices of 'third generation' youth, he writes,

They are raised in East Africa and they study, or have studied, in the West. In addition, they speak English, Gujarati and Swahili. When it comes to food habits, some of them would state that they "eat everything". Others even emphasised that they "eat everything but Indian food" (2013: 124).

The variations Oonk charts are typically explained with recourse to internal family or community politics, rather than exploring how they might relate to particular regional locations. Many of the contributors to Michel Adam's (2015a) *Indian Africa* write in similar terms. Each of the works cited in this section are, and were intended to be, general overviews. Each simultaneously complicate and perpetuate the tripartite vision of race in the region sedimented in the colonial period: the category 'Asian' is persistently demonstrated to gloss social complexity, and yet abstractions

are frequently made in racialised terms. Moreover, whether regional or Kenya-specific, what is often lost in these accounts is the significance of locality and the everyday. ‘Asians’ or ‘Hindus’ or ‘Bohras’ are written about in general terms: the life we do see often appears to happen in something of a vacuum, ultimately replicating the notion of the minority(ies) as insular and detached from the particular places in which they reside.

Other scholars have eschewed race in favour of exploring internal dynamics of change amongst particular Asian communities. Early studies by David Pocock (1957) and Agehananda Bharati (1965, 1967) examined the evolution of patterns of caste distinction for Hindus in East Africa (see also Twaddle 2001 regarding the development of communalism in the colonial period). More recently, Iqbal Akhtar’s *The Khōjā of Tanzania* skilfully weaves historical, political, linguistic and ethnographic analyses to trace the development of an ‘Afro-Asian Islamic identity’ (2016: 1). Particularly interesting is his examination of written language use amongst Khojas, tracing how religious transformations relate to a shift from Khojki (the now dormant Khoja ‘caste script’) to Gujarati, English and Arabic. This work marks a new standard for scholarship on religious minorities in the region. Also based on research in Dar es Salaam, Richa Nagar’s careful ethnographic examinations of Asians in the city focus on communal politics, such as the processes through which Hindu communal organisations came into being (1997b) or Khoja Ithna-Asheri debates around the Shia institution of temporary marriage (*mut’a*) (2000). Although still framed as ‘community studies’, these latter works from the Tanzanian context provide deeper insights into everyday life, as well as how this is affected by the broader politics of place, addressing issues such as the effects of liberalisation following the end of President Nyerere’s socialist era.

These more nuanced academic publications have been accompanied by an outpouring of biographical and autobiographical works on East African Asians in recent decades; I focus here on those that specifically address Kenya. MG Visram (1990) draws on the documentary evidence available to provide a semi-fictionalised biography of Allidina Visram, undoubtedly the most influential of the early Indian traders in East Africa. Allidina, who arrived in Zanzibar from Kutch as an impoverished 12 year-old, had moved his headquarters to Mombasa by 1899, while

continuing to travel extensively throughout the region. His monopolisation of trade around the turn of the century is hard to exaggerate: with commercial outlets and industrial ventures throughout the region, in the early years of the railway, it was principally goods traded in his name that traversed the line (see also Mangat 1968). The turn of the century diaries of two Indian travellers, brought to publication by Salvadori (1997), gives a more humble, and first-hand, insight into the lives of early itinerant traders. In the realm of biography, Zarina Patel's scholarship is unparalleled; her major works consider the lives of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee (1997), a hugely influential early trader and key architect of Nairobi, as well as Makhan Singh (2006), father of trade unionism in Kenya,⁵² and Manilal Ambalal Desai (2011), a luminary of Kenyan politics and journalism in the 1920s.

A number of other works give something of an update to the colonial-era focus of the aforementioned publications. These include Madatally Manji's (1995) autobiographical *Memoirs of a biscuit baron* and Hassan Jaffer's (2009) *Relentless endeavours*, a biography of Asgarali Jaffer, scion of the Khoja Ithna-Asheri *jamaat* in Mombasa. Ameer Janmohamed's (2008) autobiography, *A Regal romance and other memories*, offers intimate glimpses of a childhood and early adulthood in Mombasa. Finally, Rasna Warah's (1998) and Neera Kapur-Dromson's (2007) family histories-cum-autobiographies provide contemporary gendered perspectives on being Kenyan Asian women. Many of these accounts are rich and reflective; they also, unsurprisingly, illuminate the lives of prominent Kenyan Asians. The trope of the pioneer – in terms of commerce, politics, community and philanthropy – is at the heart of all these texts, as many of their titles suggest.

This mode of structuring the 'story' of 'Asians in Kenya' was reproduced by the Asian African Heritage Exhibition, hosted by the Nairobi National Museum from 2000 to 2005 and being made permanent at the time of my fieldwork. The tone of these textual and material productions indicate that there is still much to be done in terms of reimagining relations between the state and this long-standing minority. This thesis shifts this narrative in two ways. Chapter 1, where I chart Asian contributions to Mombasa's built environment and racialised colonial landscape,

⁵² Makhan Singh's (1969, 1980) own works on the development of trade unionism in the country also merit mention here.

demonstrates the influence that the absence of Asians within Kenyan national narratives has had on my own perceptions and agenda as a researcher. However, my intention in the chapter is to shift our focus away from prominent, politically active Asians, providing a street-side view of attachment and investment in the nation. The building façades I discuss both reinforce and break apart ‘Asian’ as a category, serving as an appropriate metaphor for the term’s shifting relevance to daily life in Mombasa. The rest of the thesis pursues a different narrative mode. Rather than examining ‘Asians’ in general or the evolution of particular religious communities in particular, I explore how lots of different kinds of people of Gujarati origin and Muslim faith go about living and imagining the city of Mombasa. Put differently, instead of writing about Asians as a ‘race’ still striving to be a part of an ambivalent nation state or focussing on their development *as communities*, I take as axiomatic that the Mombasans I encountered are first and foremost residents of a very particular place, and write their lives accordingly. This thesis thus strives to move away from the teleological view encompassed in notions of pioneer and communal change, focussing instead on the multiplicity and heterogeneity of everyday urban life.

The problems posed by neat racialised categories is implicit in the literature that considers the effects of centuries of Indian Ocean exchange on the littoral’s cultural forms and ways of being (Fuglesang 1994; Green 2011; Hofmeyr et al. 2011), a body of scholarship I consider in Chapter 2. Gurav Desai’s (2013) lyrical *Commerce with the universe*, which considers what he calls the ‘Afrasian imagination’ evident in over a century of fictional and nonfictional writing, is one of the finest examples of this scholarship to date. Desai draws on the textual narratives of East African Asian businessmen, travellers, novelists and political activists, illuminating imaginative projects that eschew racial and national categorisations. Desai explicitly aligns himself with Gilroy’s (2001) project of ‘imagining political culture beyond the colour line’, however, his recourse to linguistic gymnastics with the term ‘Afrasian’ demonstrates the difficulties of thinking and speaking outside of these categories in East Africa.

The characters that fill the pages of this thesis are Asian and would claim themselves to be so in particular instances, such as when explaining to me that Asians are

excluded from the political landscape in Kenya because, as Zarina put it, ‘We have no tribe’.⁵³ My informants were also fond of making remarks like ‘Only Africans live in Majengo’ – denoting that an area of the city was predominantly inhabited by ‘black’ people – while at the same time also referring to themselves as African. The racialised social categories ‘African’ and ‘Asian’ have meaning – even if blurry and contextually specific – in Mombasa. However, the people I spent with frequently employed more specific social categories to explain themselves and their social universe. Following the ethnographic precision of my informants, and in an effort to portray their lived experience, I use the terms ‘Asian’ and ‘African’ with care in this thesis, relying primarily on the more nuanced lexicon that defines social life in Mombasa.

⁵³ The broad purchase of this perception is evidenced by the recent campaign initiated by a group of Asians in Nairobi to have ‘Asian’ reclassified as a tribe. See K. de Freytas-Tamura’s article: ‘Asian Kenyans seek to be declared a “tribe” of their own’. *New York Times*, 25 May 2017 (available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/25/world/africa/kenya-ethnic-groups-asians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share>, accessed 19 August 2017).

Chapter 1

Constructing (post)imperial citizens

As they flocked to the new colonial territories and took up positions within them, Indians increasingly came to imagine their own identities in new ways. Above all, they conceived of themselves not merely as colonial subjects but as imperial citizens (T. Metcalf 2007: 2).



Figure 14: Art Deco house, near Nyerere Avenue.

We start the body of this thesis in front of the house depicted in the image above (Fig. 14). A capacious ‘urban villa’ (FitzGerald Khan 1996: 139), its curvilinear balconies mimic the glide of the corner on which it sits. An elaborate glass staircase tower accentuates one of the walls, its verticality juxtaposed against the flat roof. More delicate than the frosted glass frontages I’ve seen elsewhere on the island, its upper panes appear coloured, a couple are missing. The house is creamy off-white in tone;

a vivacious bougainvillea spills over its perimeter wall, accompanied by rather more straggly banana fronds. Humidity has left her stain in places, but the paintwork is relatively fresh by city standards. A white, concertina-like plasterwork pattern – a recurring Mombasa motif – ribbons along the top of an enclosed roof terrace, as well as above the building’s entrance bulge. The window shading fins, which offer limited protection against the already blazing sun, are also painted white, underscoring their protrusion. The top balcony boasts a modest colonnade, decoration more than support to the staggered roof above. Wrought iron swirls provide seclusion, and security, to two lower balconies. Several shutters and upper doors are flung open, beckoning Mombasa’s morning breeze. Louver windows – a favourite throughout this town – adorn the uppermost rooms. The air-conditioning unit looks old, the water tank and little satellite dish much newer. The house behind appears to be in the midst of a paint job.

This house is but one of Mombasa’s many Art Deco gems. This chapter reads a range of Mombasa’s 20th century buildings as a means to provide a contextually-specific account of the construction of what Thomas Metcalf has productively termed ‘imperial citizens’ (2007: 2). Considering the Indian Ocean world from the perspective of the Bombay Presidency and all that emanated from it, Metcalf describes a new notion of citizenship emerging as Indians moved, with the British, to new colonies and into new social positions around the littoral. Indians, he argues, envisaged, and sought to position themselves, not only as superior to the majority populations amongst whom they lived, but also as critical players in the ‘spread of wealth and knowledge to all’ (T. Metcalf 2007: 2). In this sense, British and Indians held something of a shared civilising mission vis-à-vis East Africa. If colonial discourses encouraged migration to the continent on the basis that Asians could ‘be a “teacher” to the African’ and facilitate ‘a salutary process of racial improvement’ (T. Metcalf 2007: 174), Kresse & Simpson (2011) find Gujarati accounts of the era to paint Africans in equally pejorative, if ameliorable, tones (see Sampat 1946 as an example). As well as seeing themselves as different from and superior to the ‘others’ amongst which they lived, Metcalf (2007) notes that Indians in British colonies began to think of themselves *as Indian* in this period. Employing the façade as heuristic device, this chapter fleshes out some of the complexities and contradictions embedded within the notion of imperial citizenry in Mombasa.

The chapter is particularly concerned with Art Deco, the architectural style that characterises the house depicted above, and is found throughout the island. Accounts of Asians in East Africa rightly emphasise the far-reaching consequences of the three-tier system on (post)colonial antagonisms and ways of imagining the self (Gregory 1993a, 1993b; Mangat 1969; Twaddle 2001); my intention here is to consider racialised distinctions as something constructed in part through the architectural practices of the colonised, in other words, to consider Mombasans as agents within, rather than simply subjects of, the three-tier system. It is in this sense that I read Art Deco in Mombasa. Specifically, I examine how the three-tier system was *concretised and criticised* through edifice. Art Deco façades, I contend, were an important means through which some Mombasans in the 1930s, 40s and 50s constructed an elite intermediary position for themselves, both within the Kenyan colonial order, and between the city and the world beyond. Putting colonial history into conversation with the literature on architecture and empire, my analysis considers the implications of architectural decisions for relations between the colonised on both sides of the Indian Ocean, as well as in relation to the British.

Extending Metcalf's gaze into the postcolonial era, the chapter then reads building façades against narratives of Asian detachment and departure in the years before and after independence. In contrast to the widely held stereotype that Asians, 'foreigners' and British subjects loyal to the imperial powers, played a negligent role in supporting self-rule, there are now a range of accounts which highlight the involvement of particular Asian personalities in fostering trade unionism, equal rights and nationalism in Kenya (Gregory 1993a; Mangat 1969; Patel 1997, 2006,

2011; Singh 1969, 1980).⁵⁴ This important body of work centres on prominent personalities, organised politics and explicitly political discourses. The building façades I consider throughout this chapter – dating from the 1930s to the late 1960s – shift the focus away from these more formalised political structures and provide a street-side view of the ways in which Asians contested imperial policy and sought to construct alternative (post)colonial landscapes. Much as Asians remain largely unrecognised for their contributions to the independence struggle (despite the aforementioned revisionist literature), these buildings have *not* been taken up as evidence of Asian involvement in imagining and shaping new kinds of political space. Part of the reason for this, I argue, is because façades hide as much as they reveal.

⁵⁴ The pivotal roles played by Makhan Singh, founder of trade unionism in the country, and Pio Gama Pinto, his successor, have been especially highlighted. So too, has the Asian contribution to the production of national sentiment in text: during the colonial era, a proliferation of Asian printing presses and newspapers helped write the nation into being, fostering the construction of an imagined community of Kenyans who deserved to rule themselves (Carter 1970; Gregory 1993b; Singh 1969; see Anderson 2016 [1983] for the origins of this idea). These efforts well predate the violence of the 1950s. In the 1920s, Mombasa was the centre of print journalism in Kenya; in 1923, Sitaram Achariar founded the *Democrat*, a Mombasa weekly printed in English and Gujarati, that promoted equal rights for Africans and Asians (Gregory 1993b). Achariar also printed *Mwigwithania (The Conciliator)*, the Kikuyu Central Association's press organ edited by future president Jomo Kenyatta. The *Kenyan Daily Mail*, founded in Mombasa by J. B. Pandya in 1927, had a similar position on racial equality and political representation from its outset. By the early 1950s, Felice Carter (1970) notes that various Asian-owned newspapers, including the *Daily Chronicle*, *Colonial Times* and the *Tribune*, were at the forefront of demanding equal rights for Africans. Moreover, various pro-independence circulars written in Kikuyu, Swahili and other vernacular languages were also printed on Asian presses, usually for free or at very subsidised rates. Many of these print-active Asians incurred heavy fines and imprisonment on charges of sedition, particularly via the emergency legislation brought in during Mau Mau. However, as noted by Carter, the colonial government 'permitted a remarkable freedom to the press' (1970: 243), a situation which Asians effectively exploited to circulate alternative narratives of nationhood. As surmised by Gregory, 'African journalism, as well as African nationalism, clearly owes much to the Asians' (1993a: 187).

Contextualising the Mombasa Renaissance

As attested by the dates which feature prominently on many of the Art Deco façades we will examine below, most construction in this style occurred between the 1930s and early 1950s. This was the era of what a newspaper at the time labelled the ‘Mombasa Renaissance’⁵⁵ (in K. Janmohamed 1978: 308), a building boom spurred by demographic, economic and political factors. This section considers some of the events that preceded an Art Deco explosion in Mombasa. The building boom cannot be understood without reference to the ‘revolutionary’ impact of the Kenya Uganda Railway on Mombasa (K. Janmohamed 1978: 53). The railway, which from 1901 connected Mombasa to the eastern shores of Lake Victoria and Kampala beyond, profoundly expanded Mombasa’s centrality within vast international trading networks, in terms of both speed and geographical scope. Ensuring cheaper, faster and more reliable access to the vast African hinterland beyond (source of ivory and agricultural produce, and site of untapped markets), the railway meant that imports and exports previously routed through Zanzibar came to cross paths at the Kenyan coast – cotton from Uganda met cloth from India and candles from the UK. Mombasa’s importance as a trading entrepôt increased exponentially with the building of a deep water port at Kilindini, built to accommodate ocean liners too large for the shallower waters at Mombasa Harbour (now the Old Port). In 1907, traffic coming through Kilindini was valued at one million pounds; this had increased to 18 million in 1925 (Sabini 1993: 76). Dhow traffic to the Old Port also grew considerably during this time, particularly via the multiplication of vessels of Indian origin. The effects of these developments on Mombasa cannot be overestimated:

Railway and port, far more than innovations consciously devised by the colonial administration, wrought a far-reaching economic and social restructuring of urban life. The major gainers from the transformation were the Indians, the major losers the Swahili and, to a lesser extent, the Arabs (Berg & Walter 1968: 67).

⁵⁵ The term was first used by the *Mombasa Times*, a colonial era broadsheet, to describe the 1926 Town Planning Scheme and the phenomenal building explosion that it helped spur (K. Janmohamed 1978: 308).

As suggested by Berg & Walter's observation, Indians were key drivers and beneficiaries of this commercial expansion. While only a few individuals amassed fortunes on the scale of Allidina Visram, Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee or Dewji Jamal (men, mentioned in the Introduction, who had arrived in Mombasa on the back of already successful trading careers in Zanzibar, Australia and beyond), there are countless rags to riches stories from this era. Janmohamed (1978) recounts the tale of Fatehali Dhalla, now a household name in Mombasa, who started a tiny stall near the main marketplace in 1922. Dhalla reinvested the profits made selling bread, rice and sugar to a clientele made up largely of labourers and, in the early 1930s, opened Mombasa's first 'supermarket', City Grocers Ltd. Located off one of the town's new main roads, City Grocers catered to Mombasa's European and Asian elites. Increasing commercial opportunities in turn led to a population boom, particularly on the part of Asians and people from elsewhere in Kenya (some from the surrounding coast, others from as far away as the country's western border). If the island population sat at 23,000 in 1921, it was 92,000 by 1945 (K. Janmohamed 1978: 257). The Asian population, which constituted 20 to 35 percent of the total throughout this period, had doubled in the 1920s, remained relatively stable in the 1930s and increased by another 60 percent in the early 1940s (K. Janmohamed 1978: 257).⁵⁶ Buoyed by migration from India in the 1920s, particularly of those of Hindu faith,⁵⁷ Gregory (1993b) notes that immigration from India to East Africa ceased almost completely in the 1930s, a consequence of the global economic depression. 'That the economic depression of the thirties had so profound an impact on Asian immigration illustrates the continuing importance of economic opportunity as a motivation [for

⁵⁶ This early 1940s increase may be somewhat misleading, especially given that *all* populations, including the otherwise relatively stagnant 'Arab' population, doubled in this time – suggesting that figures became more accurate after 1945, rather than actually increasing to the extent presented here.

⁵⁷ Gregory states that by 1948, the total Hindu/Jain population of Kenya was over 45,000, compared to less than 28,000 Muslims (1993b: 26). These proportions would not have been as marked in Mombasa, given Asian Muslim preference for this 'Muslim' town, particularly during the colonial era.

migration]’ (Gregory 1993b: 4), and gives some indication of the effects of the global economic downturn on East Africa.⁵⁸

As attested by the turn of the century photographs below and on the following page (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16), Mombasa island was largely *shamba* (farmland) at the onset of the colonial era, and remained so until the 1920s, covered mostly in coconut trees and small-scale cultivation (K. Janmohamed 1978). Stone construction was confined to the Old Town (which housed, according to one colonial report, ‘Muscat Arabs, “better class” Swahilis, Indians and Goans’; in K. Janmohamed 1978: 272), with additional pockets to the south (predominantly inhabited by Europeans) and north (inhabited by a mix of Swahilis, Africans, Arabs and Indians). Elsewhere, settlements consisted of earthen *makuti* (thatched roof) dwellings, examples of which can be seen in these photographs.



Figure 15: Mombasa looking from Fort Jesus.

Fort Jesus is a 16th century Portuguese Fort south of Old Town.
‘Mombasa looking from the fort’. ca. 1897-1901, Mss.afr.s.1493, Photographs of British East Africa belonging to Arthur W. Read, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁵⁸ While the extent of building construction in Mombasa in the 1930s and 40s might thus seem quite remarkable, it suggests that the city itself weathered the depression rather well and that those building had already amassed considerable wealth (or had opportunities to do so during this era).



Figure 16: Thatched dwellings, Mombasa.

‘A native residence in Mombasa’. ca. 1897-1901, Mss.afr.s.1493, Photographs of British East Africa belonging to Arthur W. Read, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

After years of indecision and debate over town planning, the colossal expansion of imports and exports eventually heralded significant colonial investments in the town’s infrastructure in the late 1920s, essential to accommodate this flourishing international trade and growing population. Particularly important was the building of the city’s main arteries – Kilindini Avenue (now Moi) leading to the port, Salim Road (now Digo) around the main market place and Makupa Road (now Jomo Kenyatta Avenue) leading to the railway bridge (known as Makupa Causeway) in the northwest (K. Janmohamed 1978). This was supplemented by the building of the Nyali Pontoon Bridge, connecting the island with the northern mainland in 1929, as well as a new railway station in the centre of the island in 1932. Station Road (now Haile Selassie), which served as a link between the central market (Markiti) and the new railway station, opened three years later. These axes laid the foundations for the rapid expansion of the city’s built environment. As the Mombasa Medical Officer of Health remarked in 1932, ‘Everywhere in Mombasa, agricultural activities are giving place to residential and commercial expansion...’ (in K. Janmohamed 1978: 271).

Politically, the Mombasa Renaissance was preceded by an era of hardening tensions within the colony, and a growing politicisation along racial lines. Aware of their indispensable role in developing the commercial sector and cognisant of their numerical supremacy, Indian political associations in the country had long demanded equality with Europeans, particularly regarding access to the fertile agricultural land of the 'White Highlands', parity in terms of political representation, and an end to segregationist policies and threatened immigration restrictions (Gregory 1993a; Mangat 1969). European settlers, on the other hand, were increasingly vocal in their calls for 'white dominion' (as seen in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe). This culminated in the UK parliament's 1923 Devonshire Declaration which, via the principle of African paramountcy (proclaiming, at least in theory, that African interests should override those of Europeans and Asians), sought to appease both sides (Maxon 1991). In practice, the Declaration did little to change colonial policy in Kenya, and, by reaffirming Asian exclusion from agricultural land, only entrenched the latter's orientation toward urban areas and commercial activity.

With white settlers' efforts to bolster their rights and limit those of Asians continuing throughout the 1920s, Gregory (1993a) notes that the economic depression of the early 1930s was also the beginning of a vocal and explicitly anti-Asian sentiment on the part of the African majority, linked to the marked drop in prices offered by Asian middlemen to farmers for their produce. African demands for legislation curtailing Asian agricultural activity were enacted to a limited extent, a move which saw Asians retreat further from the sector and (re)turn to urban centres. While this only directly affected Asians in contact with Africans living on agricultural reserves – probably a small minority of Mombasans – this background gives some sense of emerging patterns of racialised tension in Kenya at the time.

However, as also suggested in the Introduction, racial dynamics in Mombasa differed markedly to Nairobi and the rest of Kenya, a product of the island's history, size and historically concentrated pattern of residency. Mombasa, when the British arrived, was already a town with a heterogeneous population that had long lived side by side around what is now the Old Port. Urban residents were, as various colonial officials including Thornton White remarked, rather good at living together:

...the social discipline evidenced in the low crime rate of this densely inhabited and mixed township. People have sorted themselves out, and one hears of many acts of neighbourly kindness and of a mutual give and take (in Sabini 1993: 81).

Moreover, from the very early days of colonial rule, the town had a heterogeneous commercial and land-owning elite, composed of wealthy Swahilis, Arabs, Asians and Europeans who often worked in close partnership (K. Janmohamed 1978).⁵⁹ The power of the non-European elite and the constrained nature of space on the island are certainly part of what compelled the British to move the capital to the sparsely inhabited plains that now encompass the metropolis of Nairobi. With the increasing development of the interior, Mombasa became the ‘periphery of [white] settlerdom’, with a small European population never exceeding more than around 1000 individuals (K. Janmohamed 1978: 414). The relative power of Asians in Mombasa, in contrast to Nairobi where Europeans were unmatched, is made evident by the composition of the city’s first Municipal Council, finally established in 1928,⁶⁰ whose members (all nominated by the Governor), included equal numbers of Europeans and Indians (seven apiece), plus one Arab (K. Janmohamed 1978: 301). Thus, while the British certainly harboured desires to institutionalise residential

⁵⁹ Circa 1910, Provincial Commissioner Hogley noted, The antagonisms between the Asiatic and the European which has so unfortunately developed upcountry, is little evident at the coast; much business is daily transacted between the merchants of the East and West and trading cannot be successfully constructed if bad temper exists on both sides (K. Janmohamed 1978: 275).

⁶⁰ The lateness of this date, in comparison to Nairobi, arose in part from the complex nature of Britain’s legal authority with regards to the town’s residents. Although the British were de facto rulers, the ten mile coastal strip which included Mombasa remained formerly under Zanzibari sovereignty throughout the colonial period. British rights to tax the city’s heterogeneous trading population – British, Indian, German, French Comorian – was only resolved, via legislation, in 1914. Following this, a lack of required expertise in municipal matters, among other excuses, was used to stall the creation of a municipal body, reflecting British attitudes towards coastal Muslims (K. Janmohamed 1978).

segregation in Mombasa,⁶¹ these plans largely did not materialise with the exception of the predominately European area of Kizingo.

By the late 1920s, many thousands of Asians had been in Mombasa for several decades, if not longer. They had not only benefited from the impressive expansion of trade and infrastructure in the city, many knew no other home: it was a moment where there was both the desire and the possibility to invest in property. This was coupled with a phenomenal increase in population in the era – of both Asians and city dwellers more generally – and a resulting need for new abodes, as much as new modes of status performance in a rapidly changing social landscape. Building was made possible because of the ready availability of construction materials: improved trading links had brought cheap cement and steel, in addition to wealth (FitzGerald Khan 1996). It was also facilitated by the fact that Asians were significant landowners, and largely free to build where they wished. On the back of these developments in the urban political economy, people of Gujarati origin came to construct hundreds of commercial-cum-residential premises (ranging from the very large to the very small) along the city's new central thoroughfares and the small lanes that came to connect them. Moreover, it was Asians who pioneered the 'systematic opening up of new areas' of the island (K. Janmohamed 1978: 308). With vastly improved connections to the commercial and political heart of the city, concrete dwellings sprung up in areas such as Ganjoni and Tononoka, which became the established residential neighbourhoods that they remain to this day. Most of these buildings were constructed in Art Deco fashion.

Architecture and empire

In order to unpack some of the meanings and effects of Art Deco in the Mombasan context, I turn first to the rich literature on architecture's relationship to colonial rule.

⁶¹ From the early years, colonial officials voiced their desire to organise the city's residential patterns along racial lines. In 1910, Coast Provincial Commissioner Hobley urged the government to invest in land to make way for a 'native' living area. Similarly, Simpson's 1913 report on Sanitation in East Africa strongly recommended zoning on health grounds, and, in 1915, Ainsworth suggested that the whole island should be recognised as a 'non-native' area (K. Janmohamed 1978).

Much has been written about the role of architecture in structuring European imperial power, particularly in British (Dossal 1991; Evenson 1989) and French (Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991) dominions (see King 1995 for a review of this literature). In *An imperial vision* Metcalf (2002 [1989]) examines architecture in India as a manifestation of the shifting politics of the British Raj between 1857 and the early 1920s. From the formal declaration of crown rule, the British invested heavily in monuments of gothic and European classicism to denote power, authority and sovereignty over Indian subjects. Carefully located and imposing government buildings, churches and centres of learning not only ‘made visible Britain’s imperial position’ (T. Metcalf 2002 [1989]: 2), these edifices conveyed the Raj’s intention to remain permanent rulers, and asserted the superiority of the Christian faith. The classical revival of early 20th century Raj architecture is presented in a different light. Metcalf sees this revival, also known as neo- or orientalist classicism for its selective incorporation of ‘Indian’ design features within a European classical idiom,⁶² as directly linked to the rapid expansion of empire in Africa. The revival referenced Rome (and the glories of an expanding empire), but its Indic elements were necessary to ‘proclaim that the Raj was now Indian as well as British’ (2002 [1989]: 227). For all its pomp, the revival ‘masked a growing sense of insecurity’ (2002 [1989]: 177) about the future of empire, with threats to British imperial dominance – particularly from Germany – and rising nationalist movements in India and South Africa.

If Metcalf is concerned with architecture as a tool and indicator of imperial power, scholars such as Swati Chattopadhyay (2006) consider colonial era-architecture from a different perspective: architectural form is shown as equally integral to the construction of Indian elites. Chattopadhyay’s account takes us to Calcutta. While pre-colonial houses in the city focussed on interiority, imperial powers popularised ‘the European notion of a façade’ (2006: 157), producing entirely new modes of relating outwards towards the street. The sweeping changes wrought by the British also included an increasingly commodified housing market. Attentive to the social implications of these rapid shifts – ‘[t]his was, after all, no longer a town where

⁶² These features included *chattris*, *jaalis*, and *chajjas*. The *chajja* is a wide, overhanging eave, the *jaali* a latticed screen often made from stone and the *chattri* is a ‘free-standing canopied turret’ (T. Metcalf 2002 [1989]: 224).

status was easily recognised' (2006: 200) – Chattopadhyay suggests that the façade became a particularly significant theatre for defining social location, as well as making a claim to the city. 'Where land and buildings had become commodities, one had to claim a presence by displaying one's wealth, performing one's "culture"' (2006: 200). Calcutta's new façades, characterised by venetian balconies and highly articulated doors and windows, in other words, became 'part of a celebratory ritual of belonging to the city' (2006: 224).

Coupled with residential façades, the formation of a 'modern' Bengali identity was produced through the construction of new public spheres. Chattopadhyay considers precursors to the theatres, cafés, cinemas and parks built in the early 20th century through her analysis of 19th century *dals* (socio-religious groups) and voluntary associations. These institutions, in both form and function, facilitated the production of new kinds of sociality and subjectivity for the Bengali elites who sponsored and patronised them. The 1840 construction of the Nat-mandir by pious aristocrat Radhakanta Deb, for example, accommodated both religious and social gatherings and combined a Palladian façade with Hindu temple architecture and a large public hall. The 'definitional challenge' (2006: 159) posed by the building enabled Deb and others like him to distance themselves from European rulers and Calcutta's lower classes and 'claim their own ground within the colonial order' (2006: 141). In sum, Chattopadhyay and others like her (see Hosagrahar 2005 for a description of similar processes in Delhi), highlight the significance of fluency and ingenuity with regards to various spatial vocabularies in the construction of elite Indian subjectivities during the colonial era. While certainly influenced by European architectural forms, these new modes of performance and presentation of the self were by no means determined by the colonial regime.

The centrality of Art Deco to these colonial projects of positioning has been emphasised by various scholars of colonial Bombay (Dwivedi & Mehrotra 2008; Lang et al. 1997; Ramani 2007) and Hong Kong (Lau 2016). Before considering Art Deco in Bombay and then Mombasa, I first present a working definition of the style and its meanings. Derived from the French *arts décoratifs*, Art Deco originated in early 20th century Paris and was intended, according to art historian Bevis Hillier who coined the term, 'to reflect a marriage of art and industry' (1985 [1968]: 16). In

his recent intervention on the subject, Michael Windover (2012: 3) presents Art Deco as a ‘mode of mobility’. Not only is mobility ‘present on the very surfaces of Deco objects and architecture’ (from the zigzag bas-relief to the curvilinear balcony), the style was a product of ‘intersecting forms of mobilities’ (Windover 2012: 3), including the rapid expansion of mechanised and mass production, transport and communications technologies and urbanisation, as well as colonialism and rising nationalist tides. In a broad range of local contexts, architects, designers and their patrons responded to the particular conditions they faced – the particular intersection of mobilities – with visions ‘of what they thought modernity *should look like*’ (2012: 7, emphasis original). In this sense, Art Deco was always ‘embedded in local, public culture while gesturing to other places’ (2012: 3) and parallel processes elsewhere. ‘[S]elf-consciously a *modern style*’, Art Deco was both cognisant and symbolic of the increasing plurality of modernities (2012: 6, emphasis original). If other scholars have judged Art Deco to be anti-elitist – rightly pointing to its implicit rejection of the inaccessible nobility enshrined in the classical styles that had dominated Europe until then – Windover refines this position, conceiving Art Deco as a sort of ‘popularized elitism’ (2012: 11) which coupled references to what had, until very recently, been the height of aristocratic luxury (the ocean liner, the cinema) with individualism and mass consumer culture. Against a backdrop of scarcity caused by the Great Depression, Art Deco provided ‘an optimistic future vision of prosperity’ (2012: 30); this vision, however, was premised on the extension of pre-existing patterns of capitalist consumption. Consequently, Windover argues, Art Deco should be viewed as a fundamentally conservative phenomenon, promising social mobility without broader societal transformation, and reinscribing existing social hierarchies through its very novelty.

Art Deco has always had its detractors, with one recent curator of New York’s Museum of Modern Art proclaiming that the style ‘hasn’t any ideology’ (in Woods 2014: 234). Contrary to this dismissal (which is also clearly rejected by Windover), architectural historians working on the Indian Subcontinent have argued that Art Deco cannot be disentangled from a broader politics of thought in India of the 1930s and 40s. Art Deco in India centred on Bombay, with most construction in this mode occurring between 1930 and 1947, a period marked by the rapid expansion of the city’s commercial elite, along with the population more generally (Dwivedi &

Mehrotra 2008). Home to the Sir JJ College of Architecture – Asia’s first architectural school (est. 1913) – and the first professional architectural association, Bombay was indisputably ‘the centre of architectural discussion and production in India’ (Lang et al. 1997: 158) – at least in terms of formal, professionalised architecture. While Indians trained in Western architectural traditions, if not the West itself, had played a significant role in Bombay’s architectural scene since the beginning of the century, Lang, Desai & Desai (1997) link Art Deco to the decline of British hegemony at the upper echelons of the sector in Bombay, which, by the 1930s, comprised a majority of Indian-owned firms. It was these companies, and their Indian clientele, who constituted Bombay’s Deco pioneers.⁶³ If Anglo-Indian firms moved increasingly towards a modernised and often orientalist classicism – which, as also noted by Metcalf (2002 [1989]) above, the colonial powers saw as an appropriate response to the rise of Indian nationalism – Indian architects embraced Art Deco precisely because it represented a break with imperial traditions, and ‘by extension, questioned the logic of colonial rule’ (Dwivedi & Mehrotra 2008: 9). If not an outright rejection of British power, Lang, Desai & Desai argue that the style was certainly imbued with ‘nationalist overtones’ (1997: 137) – a way in which Indian architects and their wealthy clientele could express their fluency in an architectural language infused with notions of Western modernity, while at the same time distancing themselves from the Indo-Palladium hues favoured by the imperial regime.

Part of what made this style possible was the introduction of reinforced cement concrete – a building material that was both cheap and highly versatile. In Bombay, Dwivedi & Mehrotra (2008: 277) note that ‘[b]y 1936, construction costs had reduced by 50% [compared to] the very early 1920s’ making possible previously unthinkable (and unaffordable) modifications to verandas, balconies and outer walls, in terms of depth, length, shape and decoration. For its critics, Art Deco’s myriad influences and hybrid forms are what make it impure, its buildings the ‘mongrels’ of the architectural world (Goldberg in Woods 2014: 234). However, for the authors cited here, it was this very adaptability that offered in Art Deco the possibility of the construction of definitively Indian modernities. Drawing inspiration from Bauhaus,

⁶³ A few of the more ‘progressive’ Anglo-Indian firms, particularly those associated with Claude Batley, also constructed Art Deco buildings (Lang et al. 1997).

Tutankhamen's tomb, cubism and the Ballets Russes (to name but a few of Art Deco's more commonly cited influences), Art Deco architects in Bombay also added various 'Indian motifs' (Dwivedi & Mehrotra 2008: 288), such as bas-reliefs reflecting Hindu religious iconography, or depicting toiling Indian farmers and craftspeople. Premised on amalgamation, it is evident that this was an architectural form one could make one's own (whether incorporating 'Indian motifs' or not), through the novel conjunction of various features. In other words, it was Art Deco's creative potential and novelty that made it so well suited to the construction of a vanguard Indian elite. Moreover, Art Deco's neoteric quality made it a particularly apt style to adorn the explosion of new sites of sociality emerging in Bombay. Dwivedi & Mehrotra (2008: 46) underscore cinemas as '[t]he real trailblazers of the Art Deco movement': the city counted 60 cinemas in 1933, and nearly 300 by 1939, many of them Art Deco gems.

Deciphering Deco in Mombasa

The literature discussed above provides a rich foundation from which to consider Art Deco in Mombasa. Unlike Miami, Mumbai or Asmara, Mombasa is not known for its Art Deco architecture: the city boasts no architectural tours or 'Mombasa Deco' coffee table books. This, I argue, is an oversight, not only for the rich heritage of the buildings, but also because of what the genre tells us about the city and its history. Art Deco façades, I suggest, are indicative of complex interplays of agency, power and subjugation, as well as the local and littoral concerns at the heart of what it meant to be an 'imperial citizen'.

Art Deco is a material manifestation of the profound effects of migration, coupled with the colonial three-tier system, on ways of imagining the self in Mombasa. As Metcalf has written, 'Residence overseas...by its very nature *encouraged Indians to conceive of themselves as Indian*' (2007: 3, emphasis added), a form of collective identification that the Raj in colonial India had done all they could to divide and deny. The fact that so many people from diverse backgrounds, places of origin and faith in Mombasa opted for this style served to construct and reinforce the notion of some kind of unity amongst this population. Art Deco adds further evidence to the

observation that the racialised division of life in East Africa affected projects and possibilities of self-hood in the region (Gregory 1993a, 1993b; Mangat 1969; Twaddle 2001): Deco, in many ways, projected ‘Asian’ – as a distinct social category – onto the Mombasan cityscape.⁶⁴

At the same time, Art Deco emphasises that the three-tier system was not simply an imperial imposition: these façades evidence the involvement of Asians in the construction of a unique position within the colonial hierarchy. Art Deco was a choice, one that emphasised the numerical presence of those of Gujarati origin, their ties to each other, as well as their distinction from both Europeans and the African majority. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the British built a selection of government offices (such as the Law Courts and the Treasury), an Anglican and a Catholic cathedral, a few hotels and a number of houses in the southern Kizingo area; several of these buildings were designed and built by architects from India and evoked the Indian neoclassical and imperial bungalow styles of the Raj (FitzGerald Khan 1996). Until the beginning of the Mombasa Renaissance, non-European buildings, which centred around Old Town, comprised a mix of large, three-storey stereometric coral stone constructions and more humble one or two storey buildings of the same material. As noted in the Introduction, larger buildings generally combined a godown at street level – often decorated with an impressive wooden door (Aldrick 1988) – where business was conducted and commodities warehoused. Upper floors were residential quarters, decorated with wooden shuttered windows and, frequently, wooden balconies composed of ornate geometrical fretwork, ‘supported by clusters of carved brackets’ and shaded by ‘prominent eaves’ (Sabini 1993: 183).

Art Deco, when it emerged in the 1930s, was a marked contrast to all of these styles, enabling those who constructed houses in this style to proclaim their difference within the social order. Deco was different, not only from European edifices, but also from the stone houses – balconied or not – favoured by other pre-colonial and early

⁶⁴ Here I should clarify that many people of Gujarati origin did not have the money to build at all, while others chose not to build in Art Deco style. Some built neoclassical edifices; others opted for a modernist look. Art Deco may have been the most common architectural preference of the 1930s, 40s and early 50s amongst sufficiently wealthy individuals, but it was not the only one.

colonial merchant traders. While many Deco constructions retained a mixed commercial-residential pattern favoured in Old Town, they also helped define a rapidly expanding Asian elite.

As the name suggests, Deco is decorative: Art Deco articulations and colour schemes are assertive and unequivocal, designed to stand out, not blend in. Turning to the photographs on the following two pages (Fig. 17, Fig. 18 and Fig. 19), one can see that the frontages of the buildings constructed in this era are frequently accentuated with plasterwork, glasswork, and coloured paint, which further highlight design features such as window fins, balustrades and geometric patterns. As Chattopadhyay (2006) has suggested for Calcutta, part of being an imperial subject in Mombasa involved showing status on the exterior of buildings, projecting the results of capital accumulation towards the street for all to see. Through Art Deco, Asians very visibly proclaimed their wealth: status was not to be confined to the courtyard. Indian Ocean migration precipitated impressive social mobility for some in Mombasa, a trajectory that was etched onto the cityscape, particularly through Art Deco. Moreover, in representing Asians as purveyors of progress – encapsulated in the movement and mechanised aesthetic that defines its façades – Deco helped to emphasise their place as partners in the advancement of the colony and of ‘Africans’ in particular. This was not, however, to be achieved through radical social change: Art Deco made manifest the potential riches to be gained from the colonial context, but via patterns of accumulation inaccessible to the majority. Art Deco, following Windover’s (2012) perceptive observations, reflected the social mobility of some, while entrenching a social order which rested on the economic, legal and political disenfranchisement of those classified as ‘African’.



Figure 17: Freed Building, Moi Avenue.
Pink plasterwork piping and quirky mustard cupolas adorn the building.



Figure 18: Turquoise and white Art Deco house, Mwembe Tayari.



Figure 19: Kampee House, above the Copy Cat Limited, Moi Avenue.
An oversized ventilation grill forms its central pillar.

From the 1930s onwards, many of Gujarati origin with means opted for an architectural style previously unseen in East Africa. Novel and premised on creative amalgam, Art Deco not only marked burgeoning wealth, it was also particularly well suited for the construction of an elite that imagined its presence in Africa in pioneering terms. The notion of the pioneer was at the heart of early colonial encouragement of Indian migration to Africa – epitomised by British commissioner Harry Johnston’s memorable proclamation, in 1900, that ‘East Africa, is and should be, from every point of view, the America of the Hindu’ (Mangat 1969: 64)⁶⁵ – a vision reflected in various biographical and autobiographical accounts of the early days of African adventure (Patel 1997; Sampat 1946; Visram 1990). While many of these works emphasise intrepid adventures into an ‘untamed’ interior, 19th and 20th century settlers were also at the forefront of the construction of new forms of *urbanity*, fostering new ways of living, and new ways of living together, in the city (see also A. Janmohamed 2008). Various original types of residential construction

⁶⁵ This view was reiterated by Winston Churchill a few years later: ‘The mighty continent of tropical Africa lies open to the colonizing and organizing capacities of the East’ (in Mangat 1969: 64).

emerged in the Art Deco style. As FitzGerald Khan (1996) has noted, these new residential patterns are indicative of capital accumulation; they also suggest new ways of imagining and organising relations between kith and kin, structured around smaller family units. While the stone constructions of Old Town had housed large extended families (and often multiple extended families) under the same roof, the apartment complexes that emerged along the city's newly constructed main roads, were matched with 'urban villas' and smaller blocks of flats in the newly settled areas of the island; examples of these building styles can be seen below and on the next two pages (Fig. 20, Fig. 21, Fig. 22 and Fig. 23). Some of these constructions undoubtedly continued to house many people, but nevertheless imposed the boundaries of the family unit on urban space in stark – and decorative – ways. Art Deco's novelty helped to underscore these changes.



Figure 20: White and green Art Deco apartments with commercial premises below, Mwembe Tayari Road.



Figure 21: Art Deco apartments with commercial premises below, Digo Road.



Figure 22: Urban villa, Ganjoni.



Figure 23: Urban villa, Ganjoni.

As discussed in the context of Bombay and Calcutta above, Asian elites in Mombasa funded and patronised various novel public spaces, such as cinemas, cafés, voluntary associations and large commercial premises. Some of these – such as Oriental Building and Hassanali’s Building – were unambiguously neoclassical in style: these expansive commercial buildings both feature imposing columns, the former also boasting a pagoda-like roof. Many more, however, were Art Deco. The Fontanella Building (referred to by some as Karachiwallah’s, after its original patrons), a large commercial and office space, wrapped round an entire corner at one the city’s main roundabouts in classic curvilinear mode. Cafés and *paan* houses⁶⁶ – Love & Joy, Stavrose, Cosy Tearoom – all bore Deco exteriors, as did many schools (such as the Goan School, now Sacred Heart) and voluntary associations (such as the Free Mason’s building). These buildings fostered the performance of new modes of identification, new kinds of sociality and new modes of doing business, and new patterns of middle class consumption. As in Bombay, cinemas were at the forefront of this emerging littoral urbanity. As can be seen on the next page (Fig. 24), the exterior of Moon’s, a much-loved but long closed movie hall, comprised six vertical

⁶⁶ *Paan* is a chewable stimulant made of betel leaf and areca nut, and sometimes mixed with tobacco. We return to *paan* houses, and their demise, in Chapter 4.

accents with an iconic shooting star pinnacle, its name spelt out in large bubble font. Kenya Cinema combined a rising pyramid shaped roof and prominent vertical accents with Corinthian column plasterwork. While the latter's façade paid homage to Deco and classicism, its interior was decidedly Deco, with futuristic mosaic tiles and an embellished main screen. As is evident from the colonial era photograph of Naaz Cinema on the following page (Fig. 25), these new zones of consumption would have not been accessible to Mombasa's majority population. These spaces were simultaneously indicative of social mobility and exclusion: off limits to those without means and, in some cases, those of the 'wrong' skin tone.⁶⁷



Figure 24: Moon's Cinema, Tononoka.

⁶⁷ As outlined in the Introduction, coastal inhabitants posed persistent problems in relation to colonial classification systems; the fluidity of social categories in Mombasa makes it impossible to know who would have been able to frequent its colonial era cinemas. Labourers from the coastal interior or further inland would most likely not have had the money or social capital to attend. However, as also attested by Eisenberg's (2009) informants, these movie halls were, frequented and remembered with great fondness by a broad spectrum of the Mombasans I knew – Bohra, Ithna-Asheri, Hindu, Swahili, Memon, Arab, Baluchi – until well into the 1980s. We return to cinemas in Chapter 4.



Figure 25: Naaz Cinema, Makadara Road.

Saved by Alexander Erz-Gehölz to Pinterest. (available online: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/492370171744000074/>, accessed 23 August 2017).

The above illustrates how reading the contemporary cityscape can help illuminate how racialised urban relations were entrenched over time. However, other façades effectively obscure colonial-era efforts to produce alternative patterns of encounter in Mombasa. A quiet side street perpendicular to Haile Selassie Road today houses a range of small business – Hermes Hotel (somewhat less opulent than its luxurious appellation suggests), Hussein Hardware and a ‘Tours & Safari’ company whose name has been effaced. The tarmac is in fine condition compared to some of the smaller adjacent lanes – smoothing the way for *matatus* (minivans), tuk tuks and other vehicles – but the bustle of the main roads it connects feels distant. As can be seen by turning to the page after next (Fig. 26), a large, rectangular building sits disconnected from its neighbours – this is unusual in this area, where edifices more often appear to be falling over each other; the spacing emphasises its clean lines. The creamy exterior of this two-storey establishment is broken up by six long vertical protrusions that give it its Deco flair. Topped with a flag-less flagpole, a signboard at roof level bears the distinctive orange and purple logo of the KNLS, the theatre-like entrance way reads Kenya National Library Services: Seif bin Salim Branch.

Wrought iron arches over the two modest gates to the property repeat the word ‘Library’ above an abstract motif; these are clearly older than the signage on the façade. Thinly spaced wires, possibly electrified, add a layer of security to the original, waist-high perimeter wall.

Although many decades have passed since they last frequented it, the Seif bin Salim Public Library and Free Reading Room was remembered fondly by a number of my informants: ‘We still didn’t have books at home then’, explained Jamal, an Ismaili accountant who visited the library often as a schoolboy in the early 1970s; ‘It was a haven’. Jamal and others I spoke to associated the Library’s construction with Seif bin Salim: ‘He was a public figure in the true sense, we don’t have people like that anymore’, remarked Abedi, a development practitioner from a Lamu Swahili family. This version of history is repeated on the internet, including on the Wikipedia page of the Kenya National Library Service, under whose jurisdiction the Library now falls. I cite Wikipedia here to evidence the accepted nature of this version of the building’s past. Obscured from these narratives is the history – and vision – of racial interaction on which this vanguard institution was premised.

In 1903, two prominent businessmen of Gujarati origin, Jaffer Dewji and Allidina Visram, provided the necessary endowment for the Mombasa Public Library. From its outset, membership was open to all, making the Library the ‘oldest inter-racial cultural institution in East Africa’ (Gregory 1992: 104). While the Library undoubtedly catered to Asian and Arab elites during its early history, the significance of its avowedly non-racial admissions policy should not be underestimated. Decades before the commencement of organised anti-colonial struggle in Kenya, the Library’s pioneering founders imagined and helped bring into being a reading public and new modes of citizenship, composed of citizens who had a right to knowledge, regardless of their place within the imperial order. Under reinvigorated leadership and with an expanding membership, the Library moved to its current location in 1939, a building that also housed the Mombasa Indian Association. The Library was vigorously supported by Sir Ali bin Salim, the *liwali* of the time (Mombasa’s leading Arab political figure), and was renamed after his brother that same year, following Sir Ali’s pledge to provide 100 pounds sterling annually for the institution’s upkeep. It is not surprising, given the renaming, that the

Library is now associated with Seif in the public imagination, nor is it odd that the building's Deco façade and current signage tell us little of the visions of racial equality on which it was premised. The building's exterior conceals the stories of encounter and cooperation behind its present façade. It is easy to walk around Mombasa and be oblivious to such signs: façades obscure as much as they reveal.



Figure 26: The Seif bin Salim Library, off Haile Selassie Road.
Photograph by Keval Devani.

Imperial citizens: Deco and colonised critique

The above demonstrates a significant degree of overlap between Asian and European ideologies of racialised hierarchy in Mombasa, as well as the effects of the three-tier system in producing particular ways of imagining – and projecting – oneself into the world. However, as the example of the Library suggests, Art Deco might also be read as a tool in the realm of colonial critique, which as I argue here, was part and parcel of being an imperial citizen. As suggested by several of the scholars referenced in the section on architecture, Art Deco demonstrated Asian fluency in European spatial vocabularies and the visions of modernity with which it was associated. However, Asian preference for a style that was simultaneously indisputably European in origin but not favoured by the colonial powers allowed them, if not necessarily to contest imperial power, to distinguish themselves from the

European population while demonstrating a mastery of European fashions. Art Deco implied critique by simultaneously *obscuring and marking* Asian distinction from European rulers.`

This concurrent display of commitment to and critique of empire occurred on a transoceanic scale. The coeval development of Art Deco in Bombay and Mombasa is suggestive of the ‘imperial connections’ Metcalf (2007) has extensively addressed. If Metcalf’s research highlights the flow of ideas, laws, people and commodities radiating out from Bombay into the Indian Ocean realm, Art Deco façades in Mombasa point to littoral dialogues traversing the sea in both directions. Although Art Deco in Mombasa likely drew inspiration from Bombay trade magazines (FitzGerald Khan 1996), the identical construction peak in both cities suggests that Deco in Mombasa was not the imitation of an Indian trend, but rather a common language that littoral elites of Indian origin employed to speak to each other, as well as to their respective social orders. Deco indicated conceptual and material proximity between Mombasa and Bombay in the era, and allowed elites to demonstrate their parallel levels of wealth and shared visions of what ‘modernity *should look like*’ (Windover 2012: 7, emphasis original).

Moreover, in favouring Art Deco over the styles of empire, Indians presented an edificial challenge to British rule on both sides of the Indian Ocean, and implied a transoceanic debate over the future of its colonies. In this sense, I suggest that Art Deco adds a further dimension to the rich literature on the Indian Ocean as productive of universalisms (Bose 2006; Ho 2004; Hofmeyr 2012; Ravinder Frost 2004), as well as with regards to the role of Africa in the formation of Indian nationalism (Burton 2016; Hofmeyr et al. 2011; Markovits 2003). In posing a challenge to the notion of a singular, European ‘modernity’, Art Deco exposed *modernities* as a fundamentally plural phenomenon.⁶⁸ Moreover, Art Deco was a foundation of notions of imperial citizenship, allowing Indian-origin elites *within*

⁶⁸ Joel Kahn (2001: 664) is one of a number of theorists who prefers to use modernity in the singular, to denote a ‘process that is global and multicultural from its inception’. Cognisant of this debate, I retain the plural form in this context, as further evidence of the *universalisms* often written about in the Indian Ocean literature.

and between littoral locales to imagine their connections to each other, as much as structure relations of proximity and distance to those around them.

In both Mombasa and Bombay, Art Deco was favoured by emerging elites precisely because it was not Indian, at least not in an historical sense. However, some aspects of Art Deco architecture in Mombasa suggest that it may also have been a way in which those in the city marked subtle distinctions from their counterparts in Bombay. Specifically, while Art Deco in Mombasa includes many of the same motifs and elements popular in Bombay – sunbursts, geometric shapes, rounded balconies and nautical features – there are almost no buildings with large ‘Indian’ motifs⁶⁹ as described by Dwivedi & Mehrotra (2008). Aside from a few Om symbols, those in Mombasa did not adorn their Art Deco houses, cinemas or commercial properties with Indian labourers, agriculturalists or artisans, nor with religious iconography. Part of this can be explained by the faith of many building financiers: human and animal imagery is avoided in most interpretations of Islam. However, that Hindus, Jains, Christians and Sikhs also eschewed such embellishments is suggestive of an Asian desire to distance themselves from a farming and artisanal past, valorised in some Bombay Deco, as well as in nationalist discourses on the Subcontinent. I see this as part and parcel of the ways in which people in Mombasa marked their difference from Indians in India, a recurring theme in this thesis (and also taken up by Kresse & Simpson 2011). Imperial citizens did not simply come to think of themselves as Indians as Metcalf (2007) has suggested; they thought of themselves as particular kinds of Indians, in a persistently ambivalent relationship with their country of origin.

Above I have argued that in favouring Art Deco, people of Gujarati origin in Mombasa helped to bring into being a racialised colonial order which positioned them as part of the amorphous social category of ‘Asian’. However, Art Deco façades also constituted a fundamental challenge to the three-tier system: through architecture, imperial citizens in Mombasa entrenched and contested the racial triptych. Epigraphy played a significant role in this process, an aspect of building façades that receives scant attention in the Bombay Deco literature. Casting your eye

⁶⁹ The exceptions here are two Jain and two Swaminarayan temples (only one of which could be described as Deco), which I return to below.

over the buildings depicted below and on the next page (Fig. 27, Fig. 28 and Fig. 29), you can see that Art Deco façades in Mombasa were frequently embellished with surnames – Moosajee, Zawery, Nathwani, Sequeira, Panesar – or, less commonly, explicit communal descriptors (like Memon House) and place names (such as Cutch Castle, which we return to at the end of this chapter).⁷⁰ This fashion of naming buildings may at first sight appear quite banal. However, read against the political backdrop of the time, such epigraphy lodged a weighty critique of the three-tier system, which lumped together Asians in a single homogenous category. By individualising building patrons, and positioning them as part of communities defined in non-racialised terms, epigraphy problematised the category ‘Asian’ in a context in which its heterogeneity was persistently overlooked by the colonisers. While the Swahili sought to be categorised as ‘non-native’ by emphasising their Arab pedigree (Salim 1976; Willis 1993), people of Gujarati origin employed architectural vocabularies to unsettle colonial classificatory systems.



Figure 27: Zawery Building 1949.

⁷⁰ Cutch is an alternative spelling of Kutch, the region of Gujarat from which many in Mombasa trace family roots.



Figure 28: Huseinali Building 1952.



Figure 29: Moosajee Building 1949.

The variety of inscriptions on Art Deco buildings make plain that their financiers were communicating to a broad range of colonial others, not simply the imperial powers. These edifices speak to Muslim and Hindu populations defined by their knowledge of English *and other languages*. This relates not only to Arabic, Gujarati and Hindi (which I discuss below), but also the language of caste. Because Asian surnames are so often associated with a particular caste (or *jamaat*), their inclusion on buildings does more than demonstrate individual wealth: by indicating caste and religious affiliations, surnames simultaneously proclaim the existence, and affluence, of their associated communities. These associations were – and are – common knowledge amongst Asians. Memon House is explicit in this regard, but many other names would be equally obvious to people of Gujarati origin: Nathwani is a common Lohana (Hindu) surname, Panesar is Sikh, Shah is Jain, Moosajee is Bohra,⁷¹ Jaffery is Ithna-Asheri, Sequeira is Goan (Roman Catholic) and so on. Some names are less definitively attributable but still point in a general direction: Huseinali could only be Shia (the building it designates was built by Khoja Ithna-Asheris); many are identifiably Muslim (Noorani, Mustafa, Amir) or Hindu (Parti, Savani). Combining Art Deco with communally legible epigraphy, in other words, allowed a heterogeneous population with origins in the Subcontinent to speak a common architectural language while marking hierarchy and distinction within and between communities. Here I should note that while many, if not most, Mombasan residents would not have been literate at the time of construction, it is partly in *expecting* their publics to be able to read that these buildings denote the status of their proprietors.

⁷¹ Bohras have long tended to spell their last names with double e, rather than the i preferred by other Muslims in Mombasa.

Mombasan epigraphy is interesting not only for the fact that the vast majority of it is in the Latin alphabet,⁷² it also frequently included references to English edificial nouns: Huseinali Building, Savani Villa, Shah Mansion, number among the explicitly named ‘houses’, ‘flats’ and ‘castles’. Needless to say, some of these descriptors exaggerate the size of the building in question, but, I contend, were important for demonstrating a linguistic, as well as architectural, fluency: English was – and is – the language of power in Kenya. The coupling of Indian surnames with English script and sometimes English nouns *on an Art Deco backdrop* defined Asians as masters of at least two ‘European’ idioms (i.e. linguistic and architectural). However, epigraphy also worked to probe the limits of European hegemony in the linguistic domain by including words that some readers of the Latin alphabet would not necessarily have been familiar with. Although written in Roman script, many buildings, including the one on the page overleaf (Fig. 30), are marked by the Arabic word *manzil*, meaning house or inn in Arabic, as well as one referring to one of the seven parts of the Quran. Others are worded with phrases like Shiv Bhuvan (see Fig. 31 on the next page). *Shiv Bhuvan* designates a ‘home of Lord Shiva’ in Hindi, identifying its residents with the Shaivite branch of Hinduism. Following Foucault’s (1990 [1978]) well known maxim that knowledge is power, some building patrons in the city were able to exert power by marking the urban landscape in a way that potentially excluded colonial rulers and other subjects.

⁷² To my knowledge, the only Art Deco residential property marked with Devanagiri script in Mombasa is the Shree Ram Nivas (House of Lord Rama) building. The script which adorns the upper floor of this building, a block of flats with commercial premise at street-level, includes the horizontal bar above the letters not used in Gujarati. The Shree Swetamber Sthanakwasi Sangh, a Jain temple on Haile Selassie Road, combines Art Deco and Jain religious iconography, and is inscribed in both English and Gujarati script. A red-brick community hall, resolutely not of Deco style and belonging to Hindus of the Surat Prajapati caste, includes the words Shree Surat Prajapati Sanstag in Gujarati. Most Hindus and Jains, like their Muslim counterparts, opted for Latin script in their building epigraphy. However, the fact that the very few buildings in Mombasa engraved with non-Latin script are associated with Hindus and Jains speaks to the widely held stereotype that they retain a closer connection with India in comparison to Muslims of Gujarati origin. The veracity of this stereotype was regularly proven and disproven in my experience, but it nevertheless circulates in the city. Hindus and Jains are assumed to speak ‘proper Gujarati’, in contrast to the mongrelised tongue most Muslims pride themselves on. Moreover, when referring to people or food, the term ‘Gujarati’ was used by my Muslim informants to mean Hindus and Jains in Mombasa.



Figure 30: Jer Manzil 1940.



Figure 31: Shiv Bhuvan 1950.

Mombasan Deco was clearly a tool for various projects of distinction. However, it also very assertively claims an affinity to place. In *Imperial connections*, Metcalf writes that, 'For many Indian traders... East Africa was little more than an extension of Gujarat' (2007: 182). This comment, while undoubtedly true in some instances, implies a sense of detachment from the locality of Mombasa that also appears frequently in colonial records; the stereotype that Asians repatriated most of their wealth to India circulated widely in Mombasa in the early 20th century (K. Janmohamed 1978). However, Janmohamed cites the comments of an American doctor who visited Mombasa in 1937 and provided a counter narrative to the prevailing perceptions of the time:

Much is heard of Indians bleeding the Colony by remitting their earnings to Bombay, but reference to the building records of Mombasa, however, showed me that hundreds of thousands of pounds have been invested by Indians in business and residential properties (Wallbank in K. Janmohamed 1978: 207).

Following Dr Wallbank, and in concluding this section, I contend that the contemporary cityscape exposes a more complicated story than that allowed by stereotypes of detachment and metaphors of 'extension'. Art Deco was certainly deployed to demonstrate distinction and distance from a disenfranchised majority. The style illustrated and helped reinforce the convergence between building patrons and the racialised and civilising ideologies of empire, as well as their concern with transnational patterns of distinction that defined them in relation to elites in western India. However, Art Deco was also a defiant assertion of affinity to the East African littoral. As evidenced by the photographs in this chapter, Deco's colour schemes and embellishments make very public declarations of settledness, and an intention to stay in Mombasa. Of course, as Metcalf (2002 [1989]) has written elsewhere with regards to neo-classicism being revelatory of imperial anxieties over the future of empire, the assertiveness of Art Deco could equally be read as indicative of Asian uncertainty over their future in the colony. These bold additions to the urban landscape claimed belonging to a place that was both increasingly 'home', but in some ways increasingly hostile, as racial divisions continued to thicken. Settledness, prosperity and uncertainty, as well as distinction and affinity, appear intimately bound up in

architectural form. The Mombasa Renaissance can thus be seen as a product of the opportunities and anxieties of empire, a tension that Art Deco – the style that dominated the building boom – was particularly well suited to mediate.

Postcolonial anxieties: before and after independence

Kenya was declared a sovereign nation in 1963, following a protracted nationalist struggle known as Mau Mau, which took place between 1952 and 1960. Pitting groups led largely by Kikuyus against white settlers and the British Army in the country's central highlands, this conflict saw hundreds of thousands detained and tens of thousands killed at the hands of the colonial state (Elkins 2005).⁷³ While some people of Gujarati origin were sharply critical of Mau Mau, a Colonial Office intelligence report of the time concluded that most supported the insurrection, even if they (like most non-Kikuyus) did not participate in it (Gregory 1993b). Mombasa was sheltered from the violence of Mau Mau, which largely occurred inland, but change was clearly afoot on the littoral. In 1951 the editor of one Asian-owned Mombasa broadsheet, the *Kenyan Daily Mail*, opined, 'This land belongs to the African and in all affairs, political and economic, it is their word that must count' (in Gregory 1993b: 171). In 1957, the colony's governing Legislative Council allowed the election of African representatives for the first time (eight, compared to six Asians and 14 Europeans), one of many signs that colonial rule was coming to an end (Salim 1970: 217).

This was also a moment of rising tensions between Africans and Swahili-speaking Muslims at the coast. Salim (1970) notes that Ronald Ngala, a coastal politician of upcountry origin, along with other newly elected African members of the Legislative Council, started making vocal attacks on the land rights and other privileges of Swahili-speaking Muslims. This battle pitted the coast's increasingly empowered but less historically established 'upcountry' population (the majority of whom had arrived in Mombasa during the 20th century), against those who could count centuries of residence at the coast. Fearing upcountry domination in the approaching

⁷³ Precise figures on the number of deaths and detentions relating to Mau Mau are the subject of much debate, but not my concern here.

postcolonial era, older coastal elites sought ways of securing their power. This struggle took form in the Mwambao movement (meaning coast or coastal in Swahili). Involving multiple groups with often-divergent aims, the protagonists of Mwambao were loosely united in their desire for some sort of coastal autonomy (see also Brennan 2008; Kindy 1972). The idea for an independent (or semi-independent) coastal strip was born of the peculiar legal status of the Kenyan littoral throughout the colonial period, as a British Protectorate officially under Zanzibari sovereignty. Those involved in Mwambao attempted to use the separate legal status of the strip as a bargaining chip, hoping to secure colonial assurances of independence/autonomy that would accord Swahili-speaking Muslims local control following the British handover of power. I mention Mwambao here, a political project which ultimately failed,⁷⁴ to describe something of the volatile political climate of the 1950s. As British subjects with relatively privileged positions within the imperial hierarchy, Asians had neither the Swahili heritage claims nor the political will to participate in Mwambao – but, as demonstrated above, they were also long time littoral residents and colonised peoples often critical of empire. As I will show below, while not involved in Mwambao, people of Gujarati origin were nevertheless keenly engaged with the emerging postcolonial landscape.

Following independence in 1963, long-standing antagonisms between ‘African’ and ‘Asian’ Kenyans came to a head. As illustrated above, these should be seen as a product, not only of imperial policy, but of Asian efforts to distinguish themselves as superior to Africans, including in concrete form. Against this backdrop, and given continued Asian commercial influence, it is unsurprising that anti-Asianism became particularly virulent during the 1960s, as politicians and a rights-bearing majority population sought to wrest power from Asians by delegitimising their claims to the

⁷⁴ The British government eventually followed the Robertson report’s recommendations to reject coastal autonomy and the Sultan of Zanzibar, facing growing unrest in his own territory, ceded his rights over the strip in September 1963 (Salim 1970). Likewise, the postcolonial government soon abandoned the principle of *majimbo* – regional federalism, an idea enshrined in Kenya’s first (pre-independence) constitution – signifying the end of the Mwambao movement (McIntosh 2009). In addition to failing to achieve political security for Swahili-speaking Muslims, the Mwambao movement also positioned the coast as ‘traitors to the cause of Kenyan independence’ (Prestholt 2011: 7), shoring up their ambivalent position within the postcolonial nation.

new nation. Asians were positioned as a foreign minority whose loyalties could not be trusted. Their foreign-ness was evidenced on two counts. Not only, as I unpack further below, did they retain British passports ‘[sticking] to these precious documents...like leeches’ (in the words of a 1960s radio commentator), their hearts and souls were divided, with, to paraphrase a speech by then-vice-president Moi, one leg in Kenya and the other in India (Theroux 1997 [1967]: 67).

Given the unbridled racism circulating at the time (reaching its zenith with Idi Amin’s expulsion of the Ugandan Asians in 1972), it is hardly surprising that many Asians did not immediately opt to obtain Kenyan citizenship, preferring instead to either leave while still able to enter the UK as British subjects or stay in the country but retain British passports (see below). Many families sought to hedge their bets by obtaining Kenyan passports for some members (often men involved in business), while retaining British citizenship – and alternative escape routes – for others. Again, in light of the anti-Asian political climate throughout the region, this strategy could only be expected. Moreover, the allegation that Asians did not jump at the chance at Kenyan nationality obscures the independent government’s seemingly intentionally slow processing of Asian citizenship applications: writing in the same year these laws came into being Theroux reported that ‘14,000 applications for citizenship remain unprocessed, and that some Asians have been waiting over three years to become citizens’ (1997 [1967]: 69). Importantly, the accusations pertaining to passports fallaciously equate formal citizenship with a desire to live and remain in Kenya, or a perception of oneself as Kenyan.

Anti-Asian sentiment involved the very public denigration of Asians by postcolonial politicians, articulating sentiments that received broad coverage in the press. At the beginning of 1967 the *Daily Nation* ran the headline ‘Mombasa moves on Asian boycott’, reporting that KANU leaders at the coast (representatives of the Kenyan African National Union, the party that held power until 2002), critical of Asians’ failure to attend political rallies, were advocating a boycott of their shops (Theroux

1997 [1967]: 64).⁷⁵ A few months later both President Kenyatta and Vice-President Moi used speeches on Madaraka Day, a national holiday commemorating the attainment of self-rule, to threaten Asians. Jomo Kenyatta did not mince his words:

This is a final warning to them and unless they change their ways, they should not blame the government for any measures that may be taken to deal with their nonsense (in Theroux 1997 [1967]: 63).

The travel writer Paul Theroux, who lived in Kenya in the 1960s, argued that this racist discourse had quickly become a trope via which many in the postcolony came to position themselves as nationalists: the rhetoric was so fashionable, he mused, it was ‘as if every good Kenyan must be anti-Asian’ (1997: 63). (The irony that this should be the case, given that Asians had played a critical role in the achievement of majority rule, was not lost on Theroux). As historian Robert Gregory argues, this discourse was particularly useful for post-independence politicians, given that the transfer of political power had not translated into ‘the anticipated economic progress’ (1993a: 359).

Asian preponderance within the commercial sector – itself, as we have seen above, a product of imperial policy – came to be viewed as a critical impediment to the development of the nation. The Kenyan government, in line with its neighbours in Tanzania and Uganda, thus embarked on a project of ‘Africanisation’ (headed by the Kenyanisation Bureau), designed to put commercial power and public sector jobs firmly in black Kenyan hands. In Kenya, two legislative acts were particularly significant in this regard: the Trade Licensing Act, which came into force in 1969, and the Kenya Immigration Act of 1967 (Herzig 2006). While the Trade Licensing Act revoked the licenses of all non-citizen traders, the new immigration policy required all non-citizens to obtain work permits or face dismissal; such permits were

⁷⁵ That the Nation Media Group, the largest private media company in East Africa, was established in 1958 with ‘massive financial backing from the Aga Khan’ (Carter 1970: 258), leader of Ismailis in Kenya and beyond, seems to have little consequence for the *Daily Nation*’s editorial policy with regards to Asians. Today, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development remains by far the largest shareholder of the Group. See the Dhahabu Kenya blog: ‘Top ten Nation Media Group shareholders’. 2015 (available online: <http://www.dhahabu.co.ke/2015/09/10/top-ten-nation-media-group-shareholders/>, accessed 23 August 2017).

only granted once the Kenyanisation Bureau had determined that no citizen was qualified for the position. These policies intentionally targeted Asians, given, as Maxon (1991) states, that the overwhelming majority did not choose to become citizens at independence, opting instead for British passports which they were entitled to as former British subjects. Doing business was suddenly a lot harder for Asians and many, even those with citizenship, lost their jobs in the police, railway, civil service and teaching professions (Theroux 1997 [1967]: 69–70). Concurrent to this, the British government of the mid-1960s started discussing restrictions on entry to UK, proposing to limit entry to passport holders who could prove that either they or their immediate forefathers had been born in the British Isles (Herzig 2006; Mattausch 1998).

With increasingly restricted economic rights and employment opportunities in Kenya and the looming possibility of near statelessness at the hands of the UK government, thousands of Asians chose to leave Kenya in the late 1960s, a period described as ‘the Exodus’ (Gregory 1993b; Herzig 2006; Salvadori 1983). From 192,000 in 1967–8, the Asian population of Kenya had dropped to 78,000 by 1979 (Salvadori 1983: 10). As these numbers suggest, the 1950s and 60s was a moment of intense unease for Asians regarding their fate in Kenya’s future.

Building to stay: post-imperial citizens

What is perhaps, then, most striking is the *extent* of Asian construction in Mombasa in this era. Despite the uncertainty, Asians were building to stay. This is made evident studying the adverts that bookend *Mombasa: the official handbook* (1971),⁷⁶ a 1971 publication for the Mombasa Municipal Council that clearly sought to promote tourism and investment at the coast. Published at the height of anti-Asianism in the country, the *Handbook* is replete with adverts for Blanket Manufacturers (Kenya) Ltd (providers of “Kenya” Quality Blankets’), Trifoil (the ‘unsinkable fibre glass boat’) and the ‘Latest London fumigation for all pest problems’ (1971: 7–13). These are far outnumbered by pages sponsored by building contractors and hardware merchants, all of which were owned by people of Gujarati

⁷⁶ Hereafter referred to as the *Handbook*.

origin. Mistry Ruda Limba and Sons' two-page spread features photographs of some of their best known projects, all built in the 1950s. These include Khaderbhai Building (built 1953), an iconic commercial building on Nkrumah Road, featuring an Art Deco staircase tower below a minaret-like dome and balcony, the Bohra School (built 1954), as well as several apartment blocks and houses (Municipal Council of Mombasa 1971: 26–7).

In addition to commercial and residential properties, a number of Asian mosques and temples were built at this time. Berg & Walter (1968) list eight 'Indian' mosques built between 1940 and 1961 (most in the 1950s), and note the leading financial role played by Asians in the construction of several non-communal mosques in the same period. At least two of these mosques were exclusively Asian religious spaces, namely the Ismaili *jamaatkhanas* (religious and social halls) in Makupa and Tudor, enclosed as they are within surrounding gated communities, both built at the same time. The Sunni mosques, including the communally marked Memon Villa, did not formally exclude Muslim others, but some were, and remain, predominantly Hanafi in orientation. Hindus and Jains were equally engaged in the expansion of religious space, producing some of Mombasa's most opulent landmarks shortly before independence. These include the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, the first to be built outside of India,⁷⁷ and the Lord Shiva Temple (its futuristic spire crowned with a mass of gold), both constructed in 1955 (Jewell 1987). The Shree Jain Temple, a vast, gleaming structure composed of Indian marble and built by a team of architects and artisans from Kathiawar, was completed in the year of independence (Municipal Council of Mombasa 1971).

These religious edifices underscored the wealth of the communities that constructed them; they are also a testament to the continued significance of communal ties amongst Mombasa's Asian population and the patterns of distinction – grounded in a South Asian past – through which they sought to identify themselves. The Shree Jain

⁷⁷ BAPS stands for the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, a Hindu socio-spiritual organisation of global reach, organised around the teachings of the 19th century ascetic Swaminarayan. See the website of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha for information about its temple in Mombasa: 'Murti pratishtha mahotsav, Mombasa, Kenya'. 2012 (available online: <http://www.baps.org/News/2012/Murti-Pratishtha-Mahotsav-3878.aspx>, accessed 23 August 2017).

Temple, in particular, makes tangible the on-going proximity of the Subcontinent to Asian projects of selfhood. As with Art Deco, these buildings could, in many ways, be read as monuments to Asian insularity and desire to differentiate themselves from others in the city – stereotypes I am sure they have done little to trouble. However, echoing my reading of Art Deco above, I suggest these buildings also reveal a different narrative. These buildings constitute major investments in the local landscape: at a time of uncertainty over the decolonisation process, coupled with mounting anti-Asianism and separatist momentum at the coast, Asians were investing heavily in a Mombasan future. Many of these buildings draw on a rich Indian religious heritage and certainly designate distinction; however, in light of their dates of construction, they also demonstrate a firm intention to be part of a multi-faith and multiracial future in Kenya. These prominent places of worship indicate faith, not only in a particular religious tradition, but in a pluralistic future for Kenya. Most guides and publications about the city make brief notes about these religious buildings as places of interest, particularly the Hindu and Jain temples (visitors are guided to Swahili mosques, rarely those associated with Hanafi or Shia Islam). My argument here is that these edifices must also be read as evidence of a different kind of interest: specifically, a desire to stay.

Mombasa's built environment also paints a rather different picture to the narratives and numbers of 'Exodus' described in many scholarly accounts (Gregory 1993b; Herzig 2006; Mattausch 1998; Salvadori 1983). I suspect that emigration figures from Mombasa were significantly lower than the overall trend in the country at the time, based in part on my informants narratives: many I met agreed that community numbers had dropped markedly in the late 1980s and 1990s, a fact they attributed to the growing dissonance between educational trajectories and employment opportunities at the coast (an issue I consider in Chapter 4). That emigration from and to Mombasa in the postcolonial era has been less marked than in the rest of the country is bolstered by Nowick's recent estimation that three-quarters of Asians living in Mombasa were born in the city, a proportion that falls to less than half in Nairobi (2015: 131). Rather than leaving, Asians in Mombasa in the 1950s and 1960s were concretising their roots *despite* the political turmoil. Turning again to adverts of the Municipal Government's *Handbook* (1971) – most of which were placed by Asian builders and building suppliers – a number specifically reference the

newly independent government as clientele. Godrej & Sons, specialists in roofing, tiling and flooring, provide a list of their satisfied customers: these include State House (the official residence of the president in Mombasa), the city's Municipal Council and 'His Excellency the President's Beach Bungalow at Bamburi' (Municipal Council of Mombasa 1971: 21). Huseini Electrical Store similarly promotes its state connections: 'Contractors to local government authorities and Mombasa Municipal Council' (Municipal Council of Mombasa 1971: 11). These adverts illustrate that Asians remained significant players in the construction sector in Mombasa of the early 1970s. They also evidence Asian desires to make a home, and a living, in the postcolony. The emphasis on government contracts serves to underscore Asian anxieties around, but also underlying commitment to, the project of nation building.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a Mombasan perspective on what it meant to be a (post)imperial citizen, tracing how buildings helped forge various kinds of ambivalent relations, not only between ruler and ruled, but also between what Jon Soske has called 'also-colonised other[s]' (2009: 188). Art Deco reveals many of the mobilities, modernities and elsewhere encapsulated in imperial citizenship, as well as the tension between social change and hierarchy on which colonial society was built. Mombasa Deco, I have suggested, allowed elites of Gujarati origin to demonstrate their commitment to and critique of empire, their dialogue and distance with India, as well as their superiority and status in a hugely unequal and rapidly changing colonial city. The assertiveness of Deco, however, should also be read as revelatory of the anxieties that were part and parcel of being at the middle wrung of a racialised colonial order. The same could be said of the many impressive religious, commercial and residential buildings constructed shortly before and after independence: these bold additions to the cityscape say little of the decolonising apprehensions and intense anti-Asianism that lay at their foundations, but the historical context, I have suggested, helps explain how and why they came to be built at all. In a moment of flux, these buildings make a steadfast claim to the city, rooting their patrons and wider communities in a postcolonial urban future.

The edifices discussed here – whether in the shape of Art Deco apartments or communal mosques – could be read solely as manifestations of Asian distinction. However, as I have sought to show, buildings tell multiple stories. The façades examined here, I suggest, both marked and muddled their patron’s difference in relation to wider Mombasan society. While concretising some forms of social distance, each also proudly proclaims presence and affinity to place, and a commitment to shaping a pluralistic future in Mombasa. From urban villas to towering temples, 20th century individuals of Gujarati origin have used architecture to claim the city as theirs, marking a material and emotional investment in the urban littoral.

Of course, much has happened in Mombasa in the intervening years, as the city has continued to grow and change, strikingly captured in the photograph below (Fig. 32).



Figure 32: Cutch Castle 1947.

The epigraphy – Cutch Castle 1947 – which adorns the Art Deco house on the right can be seen faintly above the bush in the foreground.

The ageing Art Deco house on the right, engraved with the (mostly hidden) words ‘Cutch Castle 1947’, is dwarfed by a luminous green apartment block. The block, as one architect in Mombasa informed me, ‘...speaks to the gaudy neoclassicism of the Gulf’. The following chapters shift our focus from history to ethnography, further

elaborating the processes of mobility, insecurity and claims-making introduced here, as well as adding Islamic reform to the picture. This chapter has considered some of the more assertive ways in which people have laid claim to the city, fostering dialogues around the Indian Ocean and connections with Mombasa in the colonial and early colonial eras. We now turn to the present and to food, considering some of the more taken-for-granted forms of claims-making that characterise daily life in Mombasa, practices that reveal a multiplicity of ways that the city, and its relations to the world beyond, are imagined.

Chapter 2

The world in a sweetshop? Localising the Indian Ocean

As I walk in, Hashim is signalling to his favourite *chaiwallah*,⁷⁸ a young Digo⁷⁹ man who circulates the market place with a large tin kettle and a selection of mugs, which are temporarily loaned out to the purchasers of tea. Hashim greets me warmly and I gratefully accept his offer of a cup; cardamom-infused sweetness being a tried and tested antidote to the sweaty bustle of the market. ‘It’s *days* since my last cup’, Hashim remarks jovially, enjoying the rare(ish) exception to his diabetic regime.

Five small round tables are squeezed into the tiny seating area behind the glass cabinet that displays Hashim’s wares – salty snacks on the top, a garish collection of sweets on the shelves below. As usual, Hashim is positioned at the table that provides the best vantage point onto the market beyond – ideal for people watching and catching the eye of a potential customer. The back wall of the shop behind him is covered in an orientalised painting depicting a brown skinned, moustachioed gentleman in pink military uniform (replete with medals and matching turban), extending a love heart to a pale, blue-eyed woman in front of the Taj Mahal. She wears a tiger print top, her headscarf blows glamorously in the wind. On this warm morning, a Swahili woman, seated to the left of the painting and dressed in a *buibui* and canary yellow head covering, is sharing a plate of *kachoris* – mouth-wateringly delicious deep fried balls of moong dhal, chickpea flour, green mango and spices – with a friend who is similarly attired. At the table next to them, a woman in a short denim ensemble is nonchalantly eating chips drenched in Peptang, Kenya’s radioactive-looking ketchup brand.

⁷⁸ A *chaiwallah* is a person who sells tea.

⁷⁹ As mentioned in the Historical Prelude, people of Digo ethnicity have roots in the coastal hinterland and are one of the nine Mijikenda communities.

Hashim gestures for me to sit down and he is about to take a sip of tea when a plump Swahili man in a long white *kanzu* and embroidered *kofiya*, (the cotton robe and skull cap worn by Muslim men throughout East Africa), comes to the counter. Hashim and his client exchange a long chain of greetings, as is customary in Swahili, after which the *kanzu* waddles off, content with his large packets of *chevro* and *ghatiya* (crunchy snacks made of chickpea flour and spices).⁸⁰

A black woman in a simple trouser suit and heels also wants 50 shillings worth of *ghatiya*. She taps her manicured nails on the counter top while waiting for Hashim to sort out her change.

Hashim returns to his chai and is launching into a polemic about Somalis when a middle-aged Asian lady in a *kurta* (a knee length top) and baggy trousers arrives. She repositions her sunglasses on top of her head and beams at Hashim, ‘*Aje tamara Holiness ni birthday che, nahi?* [Today is your Holiness’s birthday, no?]’, she asks in English-inflected Gujarati, gesturing to the large, framed photograph of a man in white robes and turban, sitting before a hollowed grave. Hashim confirms, today is the Syedna’s birthday.⁸¹ Parti nods knowingly, but she’s not just here for small talk; she’s also after some of Hashim’s freshest *penda*, round sweets made predominately of concentrated milk and sugar, to take to her temple as *prasad* tonight. ‘*Badam avtha kaju ni penda?* [Almond or cashew sweets?]’, Hashim inquires. Settling on a portion of both, I learn that Parti will be taking these offerings to the futuristic if dated looking Shiva Temple later, just as soon as she can finish work at Grain Bulk. Grain Bulk is the largest grain handlers in East Africa, a company owned by Khojas.

As Hashim is sorting out Parti’s sweets, Nuru, one of his two employees comes into the shop front from the kitchen behind, carrying a mountain of fresh *tikha ghatiya* (another spicy chickpea flour snack) to replenish a nearly empty compartment at the counter. Dusted in soot from hours spent over the large charcoal *jikos* (burning

⁸⁰ Known in the UK as ‘Bombay mix’, *chevro* includes a range of ingredients, such as roasted peanuts, dried peas and puffed rice, in addition to crunchy sticks of deep fried chickpea flour.

⁸¹ To remind the reader, the Syedna is the leader of the Daudi Bohras, the Shia sect Hassan belongs to.

stoves) in the semi-open air space behind the shop, Nuru deposits her creations and returns to her labours.

Indian delights?

Those familiar with South Asia, particularly Gujarat, or its many diasporas will find a host of recognisable references in the above vignette. From the chai Hashim slurps to the *kachoris* munched and the *penda* purchased for *prasad*; the Taj Mahal wall painting is only the icing on the cake. In various respects, the sweetshop seems like exactly the kind of place scholars have analysed as sites for the (re)production of diaspora. Food and foodscapes are often positioned as mechanisms *par excellence* for the reproduction of community, facilitating home-making in contexts of displacement and the construction of national imaginings well beyond state borders (Law 2001; Mintz 2008; Sutton 2001). Purnima Mankekar's (2002) reflections on 'India shopping' are a case in point. Mankekar traces the role of grocery stores in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 'ongoing construction of India and Indian culture' (2002: 76). For Sunita, one of Mankekar's informants, such shops are the source of the Glucose Biscuits which constitute her breakfast; dipping them in her tea is a daily reminder of mornings in her parents' home. The brand name biscuits, drenched in nostalgia for a childhood spent in India, root Sunita in 'the shifting signifier that is the homeland' (Mankekar 2002: 86) even if she has no desire to return there.

Mankekar usefully specifies the range of imagery and discourses available for consumption in such settings – these shops, and her analysis, go well beyond tasty morsels – and she is attentive to the tensions these stores evoke about the nation and its discontents. These stores are by no means experienced uniformly and play a role in the reproduction of regional and gendered hierarchies. A shop in Sunnyvale called India Palace, for instance, stocks a vast range of CDs and cassettes; however, its 'South Indian Music' section does not distinguish between Tamil, Malayalam and Telugu productions, lumping together the south of the country in ways that reproduces hegemonic Northern assumptions about what constitutes 'Indian culture'.

Although ostensibly amenable to the sort of diasporic analysis thoughtfully elucidated by Mankekar, I argue here that Hashim's sweetshop is not 'Indian' or

‘diasporic’ – or at least that these lenses are at odds with the way he and many of his customers perceive it. This is perhaps best illustrated by starting with an example of individuals who *did* see such sites as intimately connected to the Subcontinent. On one of my first nights in Mombasa, I dutifully accompanied a new friend to an expatriate networking event at an upmarket Italian restaurant. After managing to extract myself from a conversation with an Austrian whose business card, depicting a zebra in jaunty sunglasses, promised ‘African fantasy tours’, I took refuge by the peanuts with two young Indian men. Both had just finished university in India – one in Delhi, the other in Mumbai – and had been recruited by shipping companies to come and work in Mombasa. When I inquired about their impressions of the city to date, their responses were unequivocal. ‘Everything is the same as India’, they assured me, ‘the architecture, the food, the tuk tuks’. This assessment chimes with Simpson & Kresse’s (2007) observations about the selective nature of attention to disjuncture and difference around the Indian Ocean. Drawing on the work of Kirti Chaudhuri (1990, 2006) they put forward the idea that it is because individuals experience a sense of ‘equivalence’ amongst disparate littoral locations – i.e. a sense that things like ritual practices, modes of social organisation and architectural forms are similar – that ‘essentially allows people to be blind (to not see) to the differences between home and the place they have travelled to’ (Simpson & Kresse 2007: 23). It is this lack of attention to difference that in turn allows individuals to imagine themselves as part of various transoceanic collectives, in the face of evidence that disrupts such shared imaginaries. This observation rings true for the population of (relatively) recently arrived Indian and Pakistani migrants I met in Mombasa. Known as ‘rockets’ by the city’s long-standing Asian minority,⁸² the name itself alludes to the social division that is generally maintained between the two: rockets and their more established Asian counterparts that I knew from various communities all reported that length of stay in East Africa determined the intimacy of social relations in Mombasa.

However, in contrast to rockets who often testified to the equivalence between the ‘India’ they found in Mombasa and the ‘India’ they knew back home, most other city

⁸² ‘Rockets’ refers to the propensity of more recent migrants to shoot back and forth between India and East Africa.

dwellers I met – Asians and others alike – assessed what might at first blush be taken as manifestations of ‘India’ in ways that eschewed the Subcontinent entirely.

Engaging with research on cosmopolitanism – from along the East African littoral and beyond – I argue here that the sweetshop is one of many sites in the city where the Indian Ocean is made local, enabling the construction of Mombasan ways of being in the world for a wide range of residents.

Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms: consuming beyond the nation

A rich body of work examines the effects of centuries of Indian Ocean exchange on the region’s cultural and material forms. This scholarship spans a great variety of domains, from oceanic circulations of print (Burton 2016; Green 2011; Hofmeyr et al. 2011), to 19th century wooden doors (Aldrick 1988). If the literature on Indian Ocean print cultures is often particularly concerned with the texts and lives of prominent individuals – such as Mohandas Gandhi (Markovits 2003) and Rabindranath Tagore (Bose 2006) – others have turned their attention to more everyday matters. A number of academics have considered the role of Bollywood films (Fair 2009; Fuglesang 1994) and Hindi film melodies (Eisenberg 2009) in the construction of Swahili subjectivities. Minou Fuglesang (1994), for instance, highlights the repertoire that Bollywood afforded to young Swahili women in late 1980s and 90s Lamu for dealing with notions of femininity, sexuality, emotions and marital strife. For a generation whose educational and employment expectations made their life trajectories quite different from that of their elder female relatives, gossiping about Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan’s latest escapades proved instrumental for negotiating life in changing Lamu. Fuglesang highlights cinema as resource for her informants precisely because standard Bollywood tropes – such as the challenges created by stringent societal expectations, coupled with storylines that condemned extra-marital sex while illuminating the intimacies of amorous exchanges – found echoes in Lamu society.

Others have considered the role of Indian film and photography in the construction of littoral urban subjectivities more broadly (i.e. not just Swahili), particularly during the colonial era. This scholarship is significant in that it helps unsettle what Jon

Soske (2009: 3) has called the ‘bifurcated’ historiographies that continue to structure scholarship on the region. The East African literature mirrors that of South Africa, on which Soske writes: in both contexts historical and ethnographic accounts tend to address either ‘Africans’ or ‘Asians’,⁸³ with forms of interaction between the two often limited to more formalised political spheres (Gregory 1993a; Mangat 1969). Historian Ned Bertz’s (2015) careful and imaginative reading of the Tanzanian archives highlights the limitations of this approach in the context of colonial Dar es Salaam. Focusing on urban life, part of Bertz’s analysis is concerned with cinema halls, an important feature of city living since 1929. From its inception, Tanzania’s cinema industry was a product of Asian investment and ingenuity – by 1976 Asians owned almost all of Dar’s 36 movie theatres (Bertz 2015: 186). However, Bertz pools ethnographic and archival evidence to demonstrate that it is erroneous to view cinema halls as ‘the privileged domain of a diasporic minority’ (2015: 91). From the 1940s onwards, Africans constituted an important (and ever-growing) element of racially mixed cinematic audiences, who were fed on a diet of Bollywood and, to a lesser extent, Hollywood productions. Foreign films – of Indian or North American origin – were not subtitled but nevertheless drew large crowds; cinema going was a cheap and much-loved form of urban sociality throughout the colonial period. Even following vague attempts to Africanise Tanzania’s cinema scene following independence, Bollywood films remained by far the most popular fare.⁸⁴ Bertz provides an apt illustration of this from the early 1970s: in 1971 almost 10,000 people watched *Kal aaj aur kal* (*Yesterday, today and tomorrow*, dir. Kapoor 1971) in a single day, while a Hollywood production starring Harry Belafonte the following year sold less than 6,000 tickets over six days, despite the fact that Belafonte himself had come to help boost sales (2015: 183). For Bertz, the cultural significance of Bollywood within urban life in Dar for much of the 20th century, ‘complicate[s] simplistic but prevailing labels like ‘African cinema’ or ‘Indian films’, terms that conflate and collapse nation and race’ (2015: 92–93).

⁸³ Or ‘Indians’ as they are known in South Africa, the location of Soske’s research.

⁸⁴ Eisenberg reports that the same was true in Mombasa, where, between the 1950s and mid-1990s, ‘going to see a Hindi musical film (in Hindi, with no subtitled translation) at local a cinema was, undoubtedly, the most popular form of leisure for most Mombasans’ (2009: 192).

Bertz is careful to demonstrate that cinema halls were implicated in the racialisation of urban space in Tanzania, citing numerous instances of Asian staff restricting entry to Africans during the colonial period. However, he shows that movie theatres were also important spaces for interaction, where the lines of what is ‘Indian’ and ‘African’ blurred and what he sees as Indian Ocean cultural forms were brought into being. In sum, Bertz argues that positioning cinema halls as ‘Asian’ or ‘diasporic’ belies the historical evidence. Instead, he sees the ‘enduring popularity of Bombay cinema in Tanzania’ – at least until the 1980s⁸⁵ – as evidence of a ‘cosmopolitan culture of Indian Ocean exchange’ (2015: 195).

The scholarship of Heike Behrend (1998) and Isolde Brielmaier (2008) reiterates this conclusion. Both focus on Asian-owned photography studios along the Kenya coast, prominent sites for the performance of urban life until the 1980s.⁸⁶ What both scholars’ lucid analyses underscore is the *range* of influences Asian studio photographers and their diverse clientele drew on to construct representations of themselves. From Corinthian columns to saris, Omani turbans to Zippo lighters, poser and photographer drew on a wealth of elements to emphasise, often simultaneously, their urbanity, individuality, modernity, Indian-ness, Swahili-ness or Western-ness. The work of Bertz, Behrend and Brielmaier provides robust evidence for the futility of the labels ‘Asian’ and ‘African’ to describe these public spaces and patterns of consumption in East Africa, a conclusion which dovetails with my own analysis, as I demonstrate in the following section. Where I aim to build on these accounts, however, is with regard to the place of wider worlds within these performances of urbanity. The cited works focus particularly on the ways in which wider worlds are *drawn on* to produce specific – and multiple – subject positions. The ethnography I present below shifts our focus to contemporary food practices,

⁸⁵ Bertz (2015) argues that the above was true until the economic liberalisation of the 1980s, when, in part because of the rise of televisions and video cassettes, the urban cinema scene was decimated, replaced by a single, multiplex cinema-mall shopping complex. Although cinema houses still draw mixed crowds, and Bollywood still features heavily on the bill, cinema-going has become a more exclusive and less commonplace affair. As I explore below, shifting entertainment preferences and the concentration of wealth within the Dar cinema scene has strong parallels with Mombasa.

⁸⁶ All these studios, once dotted around Lamu and Mombasa, have now closed, linked in part to the emigration patterns I discuss in Chapter 4.

and examines how worlds beyond might be valorised, concealed *or not imagined at all* in the act of consumption.

Before returning to Hashim's sweetshop, it is necessary to introduce a further element I find underdeveloped in the aforementioned literature; namely the political implications of the practices and performances he so successfully describes. What does it mean – at the level of the city and the nation – for the Indian Ocean to be so integral to everyday urban entertainment and subjectivity?⁸⁷ This question is taken up in the work of Andrew Eisenberg (2009, 2012, 2013), whose approach to Old Town's soundscapes was outlined in the Historical Prelude. Beyond the sonorous politics of Friday prayers, Eisenberg has conducted research amongst hip-hop artists and Indian *taarab* players in Mombasa, and politicises 'Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms' by starting with a consideration of the littoral as viewed within Kenyan national imaginaries. Mombasa is the country's second largest urban conglomeration, *the* critical transport hub for regional trade and an important (albeit diminished) tourist destination, for both domestic and international travellers. However, it remains an exotic 'internal Orient' (Eisenberg 2012: 566) in the eyes of most Kenyans. This coastal othering has a long history, as described in the Introduction and Historical Prelude. To recap some key elements here, Cruise O'Brien (1995: 202) describes colonial policy towards the coast as one of 'benign neglect' – the construction of roads, telecommunications and social infrastructure, such as schools and health centres, was very limited. Successive postcolonial governments have, to a large extent, perpetuated colonial inequalities. Mazrui describes the government's coastal economic strategy as one of 'internal colonisation' (quoted in Cruise O'Brien 1995: 215) – objectives remain firmly oriented towards the interior and the development that does occur in Mombasa is often controlled by people from upcountry or foreign nationals. The tourism industry, for instance, is seen as a haven for Kikuyus, Luos, Italians and Anglophones (Eastman 1995). This is coupled with the continued neglect of the coast's social infrastructure. In a country

⁸⁷ This absence, at least in Bertz's work, probably stems from the very different relationship Dar es Salaam has with the nation of Tanzania when compared with Mombasa's position within Kenya. These differences are in turn related to the fact that marginalisation in Tanzania does not coalesce around religion in the way that it does in Kenya; the population of Tanzania, and the country's government, is comprised of a relatively even mix of Christians, Muslims and others.

chock full of universities, Mombasa's tertiary education sector is almost non-existent, despite being Kenya's second city (see Chapter 4). The standard of primary and secondary education is well below Nairobi's, something that many of Kresse's informants see as a deliberate effort on the part of the central government to keep coastal people 'dominated and "backward"' (Kresse 2007a: 61; see also Ayubi & Mohyuddin 1994; A. A. Mazrui 1993; A. M. Mazrui 1993). As also mentioned previously, this has gone hand in hand with the political silencing of Muslims. In the early 1990s, the government was notoriously involved in the destruction of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), whose support base centred around Mombasa (A. A. Mazrui 1993; A. M. Mazrui 1993; Oded 2000). More recently, national 'anti-terrorism' strategies over the last 15 years, financially and logistically supported by the US, '... have compounded an already deep sense of alienation among those most severely affected by the new measures: Kenyan Muslims, particularly those of Arab and Somali ancestry' (Prestholt 2011: 4).

In light of this history, it is perhaps unsurprising that, the coast is largely absent from symbols of nation, such as the currency. As Eisenberg notes, only the city's faux elephant tusks, themselves a colonial instalment arching over Moi Avenue, are included on the 50-shilling bill. The banknote also 'inexplicably fades into an image of camel riders in Kenya's untamed north-east' (Eisenberg 2012: 563), which only compounds the city's oriental associations. This imaginary was made evident to me in a restaurant one evening when the waiter, a Kikuyu from near Athi River, near Nairobi, informed me, 'Swahili are not true Kenyans. Legally, you are a Kenyan if you're born here. But you're only a true Kenyan if both your parents are Kenyan, not from foreign places'. The implication here was that few at the coast could claim such pedigree. Mombasa's distance from the state was further emphasised during celebrations for the 50th anniversary of Kenya independence in December 2013. Aside from one subdued political rally, the main evidence of this historical moment was the mass exodus from the city (with people making the most of a day off). In contrast, Nairobi was a mass of bunting and celebration for weeks before the date itself. The lack of state-sponsored pomp and circumstance is no doubt also due to the fact that Mombasa is an opposition stronghold (Mwakimako & Willis 2016); this voting record itself reflects the city's antagonistic relationship to the state.

It is in this context that Eisenberg (2012) suggests that the mobilisation of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms must be seen as a political act. Given the absence of the Kenyan coast – and the alternative littoral histories it represents – within the Kenyan national imaginary, Eisenberg writes that the use of Bhangra beats and orientalist Indian imagery in the songs and music videos of his rapper informants is a way in which artists of South Asian and Swahili descent emphasise the fundamentally interconnected nature of the city to places around the littoral. He employs Ong’s notion of ‘cultural citizenship’ – defined as ‘self-making and being made in relation to nation states and transnational processes’ (Ong 1996: 737) – to argue that such artistic decisions problematise hegemonic notions of the nation’s boundaries and force us to consider Kenyan citizenship in terms of broader geographies.

Considering cosmopolitanisms

Eisenberg’s analysis is very useful for thinking through the consumption of *kachoris*, and much else that goes on in Hashim’s sweetshop. I share his observation that particular practices, whether chomping on *chevro* or sampling Bhangra, root Mombasa and its inhabitants in a world well beyond (and often at right angles to) the contours of the Kenyan state, and are thus ‘already political’ (2012: 574). However, I think what is perhaps underexplored in Eisenberg’s account is the everyday and taken-for-granted nature of many such acts. Moreover, if Eisenberg suggests that hip-hop artists proudly and explicitly demonstrate their long-standing personal connections with worlds beyond the city, I argue that it is the fact that these wider worlds are *not* imagined that makes the food consumption described here political. In contrast to the literature on Indian Ocean subjectivities described above, as well as the scholarship on cosmopolitanism more generally – which I turn to below – I suggest that a Mombasan way of being in the world often emerges not from the valorisation *or* concealment of the littoral’s intimate connections to the world beyond, but rather from their localisation.

The line of thinking I wish to pursue here is in dialogue with cosmopolitan theorists who consider the mutually constitutive relationship between parochial subject positions and wider worlds (Appiah 1998; Werbner 2008). In contrast to earlier

understandings (e.g. Hannerz 1993), this body of literature problematises the myth of cosmopolitanism as divorced from, and superior to, patterns of loyalty linked to kin and country, and sees it as axiomatic that tactics for coping with difference may reinforce prejudice, ethnocentrism and indifference as much as civility, accommodation and dialogue. Some scholars in this field have pointed to wider worlds as a source of local differentiation and status. Osella & Osella's (2007) work amongst Koya Muslims in Kozhikode, Kerala and the Arabian Gulf illustrates this point nicely. The authors argue that being Koya is simultaneously dependent on genealogical connections to a particular area of Kozhikode (dominated by matrilineal joint households) and historically grounded ties to the Gulf and Gulf Arabs. In other words, '[t]here is an extremely specific and exclusivist Koya identity...' but this is itself '...recognised to be an outcome of wider links' (Osella & Osella 2007: 350). Descent from and long-standing affiliations to Gulf Arabs (stemming from Kozhikode's historical position as a busy port within Arab maritime trade, and continuing today through extensive labour migration to the Gulf) is also what Koyas believe make them 'true' followers of Islam – especially in contrast to the other Muslims they interact with in Kozhikode or imagine in the north of the country. In other words, not only is a highly localised and particularistic Koya sense of self derived from these wider connections, Koyas also articulate narratives of historical and contemporary mobilities to differentiate themselves from those who cannot lay claim to such ties. This has strong parallels with the East African literature described above, where young women construct themselves in contrast to their elders via Bollywood (Fuglesang 1994), or use Omani turbans to emphasise their superiority within racialised Mombasan landscapes (Brielmaier 2008).

In contrast to those who cultivate local prestige through emphasising transoceanic connections, Brink-Danan's (2011) work amongst Jews in Istanbul reminds us that another means of dealing with diversity may be in understanding when to conceal it. She demonstrates that many Jews choose to keep manifestations of Jewishness away from the public eye, avoiding the use of Ladino or French, as well as particular types of clothing or symbols suggestive of their religious persuasion, when outdoors. Brink-Danan emphasises that Jewish displays of cosmopolitanism – linguistic, architectural and stylistic practices that connect them to worlds beyond the Turkish republic – are perceived as 'dangerous' by Jews themselves, a threat to their personal

security in a context where such articulations are seen by some onlookers as an affront to the ‘secular’ and Sunni status quo. Accordingly, investigating Jewish cosmopolitanism involves paying attention to knowledge: Brink-Danan argues that ‘[b]eing a Jewish cosmopolitan means not only knowing about different ways of being, but knowing in which context one should (and should not) perform difference’ (2011: 448). Keeping this ‘cosmopolitan knowledge’ of multiple audiences – and the types of performances each demands in mind – is what, Brink-Danan suggests, enables Jews to ‘maintain a delicate balance between being “too Jewish” and “too assimilated”’ (2011: 465).

Magnus Marsden’s (2008) article on the dynamics of cosmopolitan discourses in Chitral, northern Pakistan, adds a further dimension to the emphasising/concealing strategies provided in the above examples. Marsden notes that for people in Rowshan, a village characterised by an oft-shifting mix of Chitralis and ‘refugees’ from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, certain histories of transregional mobility are a source of social capital, while others are a source of shame. Through personal and family narratives, Chitrali elites frequently assert their long-standing connections with Afghanistan – in recent years, such claims have been reinforced by a growing number of return visits to the country. In contrast, those who originally migrated as seasonal labourers from Afghanistan’s Wakhan corridor do all they can to conceal their Wakhik origins, and the simpleton, impoverished associations such roots (and routes) signify locally. In Rowshan, transregional pasts convey a range of meanings for contemporary interactions, the consequences of which must be carefully managed, particularly by those with histories of ‘improper mobility’ (Marsden 2008: 239). Marsden’s example demonstrates that cosmopolitan histories may be both resource and burden.

What I find especially useful in Marsden’s account is his attentiveness to the multiple and contextually specific meanings accorded to relationships with the world beyond. In Mombasa, people similarly constructed a variety of relationships between the things they ate (saw, said, did) and the world beyond the city. Some, like Yash, a wiry Hindu management consultant, were quick to point out the Gujarati or Indian origins of particular cultural forms. ‘*Bhajiya*’, he informed me, picking one up from the plate in front of us, ‘is a Gujarati word. Everywhere else they’re called *pakoras*’.

Later during the same conversation Yash asks if I've already sampled *mishkaki*, skewers of chargrilled meat, sold in the evenings outside cafés alongside various other types of *choma* (as barbecued meat, *nyama choma*, is often referred to). 'Although the name is Swahili', I learn, 'it's definitely not a Swahili way of preparing meat. You can tell by the way it's marinated and barbecued, there's definitely an Indian influence'. Compared to many of my Muslim informants, Yash, like some of the other Hindus and Jains I knew, was far more invested in (i.e. more likely to point out) linkages of this nature. This is in line with the fact that my non-Muslim acquaintances were more likely to visit India, more likely to have family there and more likely to be glued to their televisions on the 26th of January (Indian National Day, an event that went by unnoticed for most of my interlocutors). The allegedly more proximate nature of Hindus/Jains to Gujarat/India was also voiced by Asian Muslims, who would refer to Hindus as 'Gujaratis', a term they did not apply to themselves. This pattern of difference between Muslims and Hindu/Jains and the idea of Gujarat or India has been observed by many other scholars of the Subcontinent (see Ghassem-Fachandi 2012 regarding Gujarat).

In contrast to Yash's attention to and valorisation of Gujarat, many of the Asians I spent time with in Mombasa were more intent on explicitly downplaying connections with India – in other words, 'seeing' while simultaneously making an effort to extenuate said links. 'We make *bhajiya*s the same like they do in India but we would never put them with yoghurt', Fayruz explained over a post-*majlis* lunch at the home of a family recently migrated from Pakistan. The comment, made while we were being served *dahi wara*, a dish composed of *bhajiya*s in yoghurt, underscored Fayruz's distance from South Asia, and difference from our hosts.

Hashim's relationship to the painting of the Taj Mahal, emblazoned on his shop's back wall, tells a similar story. As Hashim would often remind me, this artwork is the creation of one of his dearest friends from his youth: the former Belgian consul's son. Jean, now long returned to Brussels, Hashim and a motley crew of educated Africans, Asians and Europeans, were all part of the same social circle during their late teens and 20s – enjoying frequent outings to the Drive-In (see Chapter 4) and hosting their famous biryani parties on special weekends. Soon after taking over the family business, Hashim asked Jean, known for his creative bent, to contribute to the

décor. And so Jean began to paint, allegedly with little input from Hashim. The Taj Mahal, the turbaned military man and the pale hijab-ed woman together produce a mythical, faraway scene; the image conjures fantasy. Ultimately, both Hashim's account of how the painting came into being and the image itself work to distance Hashim from the Subcontinent – it was not him who brought 'India' into the sweetshop, and the representation itself positions India as a figment of the imagination. This is consistent with Kresse & Simpson's observation that Asians in East Africa are 'in a constant dialogue with their own senses of cultural difference' in relation to India (Kresse & Simpson 2011: 9; see also Oonk 2004).

Yash, Fayruz and Hashim's narratives clearly speak to the cosmopolitan literature cited above, wherein connections to wider worlds are either underscored or obscured. However, another prevalent mode of imaging the world from the Mombasan littoral is untouched by the aforementioned texts. While my appreciation for the intertwined nature of transcendent and particular modes of self-understanding has benefited greatly from the cosmopolitan theorists quoted here, none captures what I saw in places like Hashim's sweetshop, where, as I now elaborate, the world beyond was often neither glorified nor concealed.

Localising the Indian Ocean

Kachori, ghatiya, chevro, bhajiya: all of these words, and the ingredients the foods themselves consist of, suggest South Asian origins. However, following the mode of analysis introduced through the work of Bertz (2015), Brielmaier (2008) and others cited above, to see them *as South Asian foods* is to fundamentally miss the point. A quick perusal of Hashim's clientele demonstrates that these edibles cannot be defined as 'Asian' or 'African', diasporic or Kenyan in any straightforward way; they are staple elements of many littoral diets. This was made evident to me one Sunday afternoon, when I went to see how the Women's Economic Upliftment Programme was progressing, a three day trade fair and training opportunity organised by the Bilal Muslim Mission (Bilal, as it is usually referred to, being the development and proselytising charitable trust affiliated to the Khoja *jamaat*).

Women from Bilal centres around the coast⁸⁸ had come to Mombasa for crash courses in financial literacy and marketing, as well as the chance to sell their wares (including soap, woodwork and avocados). ‘We even had county government officials attending this morning’, Bilal’s young and purposeful CEO tells me, ‘we’re looking for contacts where women can sell and distribute their goods’. On this particular afternoon, a training event is being organised by the Creative Cooking Committee, one of the numerous groups run by (and usually for) Khoja women.

I settle down amongst an audience of women from around the coast, most clad in *kangas* (brightly patterned printed cotton cloth worn by women throughout East Africa), expertly wrapped around their heads and bodies. The woman sitting next me introduces herself as Beatrice, she’s younger than most of the other attendees and keen to practice her already excellent English. The members of the Creative Cooking Committee, all Khoja women dressed in *buibuis*, arrange themselves behind two long tables at the front of the room. Adorned with a black and white chequered tablecloth, along with matching blue and white tea towels – not to mention a wok, two gas stoves, an electric mixer and a series of neatly labelled Tupperwares – the table and its contents begin to make me feel distinctly aware of the wealth disparities in the room. The afternoon’s MC carefully adjusts her gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses around her headscarf, and informs her audience of the day’s menu: ‘*Leo tutapika sev, keki ya isingi na chevro* [Today we are going to cook *sev*,⁸⁹ an iced cake and *chevro*]’.

Almost immediately, I find myself feeling annoyed. In addition to the ostentatious culinary gadgetry on display, it seems to me that these dishes have been chosen with little regard for what the women in the audience might be able to reproduce and sell

⁸⁸ Bilal’s proselytising activities are organised through its headquarters in Mombasa, as well as its 15 rural centres, located along the coast and further inland. Comprising a mosque and *madrassa* often along with other facilities, these centres aim to promote the spiritual and material ‘upliftment’ of the communities living around them, combining Shia religious education and worship with various development initiatives related to health, women’s empowerment and primary school study. See the website of the Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya: ‘About Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya’. (available online: http://www.kenbilal.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=141&Itemid=107, accessed 13 September 2017).

⁸⁹ *Sev* is the Gujarati word for a vermicelli-shaped chickpea flour snack.

in their home villages. ‘Who wants to buy *sev* in Shimoni?’ I wonder incredulously to myself (Shimoni, a small village some 80 kilometres south of Mombasa, being the location of one of Bilal’s numerous centres). The disjuncture is made particularly acute when, having observed the process of pushing chickpea flour paste through a specially crafted vermicelli-producing tube, a member of the audience asks where one might obtain such an item. ‘*Unaweza kupata katika Nakumatt na Nawal* [You can find them at Nakumatt and Nawal]’, the MC responds, citing the city’s most expensive supermarket chain and a more affordable but still definitively middle class shopping centre as options. I can’t help but snort. Beatrice asks me what’s funny. ‘I don’t understand who is going to be able to make this at home’, I whisper, ‘do you even eat *sev*?’ Beatrice looks at me sharply. ‘*Bila shaka!* [Of course!]’, comes her admonishing reply. ‘*Sev* is my favourite snack’. I learn that it was the audience who determined the menu for the day (based, no doubt, on their knowledge of local preferences), and leave Bilal feeling humbled, guilty of assuming that the poor, coastal women that surrounded me in the audience would not be familiar with *sev*, let alone able to make a living out of it. *Sev*, it turns out, is as local in Shimoni as it is in Surat.

The entrenched locality of particular items is further underlined when we consider the relations of production that make many coastal consumption practices possible. As evident in the opening vignette, various forms of consumption in Mombasa are predicated on a confluence of Asian capital and black working class labour. In Hashim’s shop, it is his two Giriama employees who produce the goods so fundamental to everyday Mombasan snacking habits. Giriama have historically hailed from the area between Mombasa and Malindi to the north, as well as further inland, constituting one of the nine Mijikenda ethnic groups with roots along the Kenyan coast. Members of these communities have long been linked to the city through relations of dependence with wealthier urban elites (Willis 1993), and today form the backbone of the lowest rung of Mombasa’s labour force. To be sure, low paid jobs are done by people from all over inland Kenya, who have flocked to the city to find work over the course of the last century, but it is the Mijikenda who make up Mombasa’s service underclass; it is Mijikenda who tend to have the most

precarious and poorly remunerated jobs. From the *thali*⁹⁰ chefs at New Chetna's, the men frying *bhajiyas* at Jawad's, to the people cleaning the temple where Parti will donate Hashim's *penda*: all these *a priori* 'Asian' zones of consumption are structurally dependent on Mijikenda labour. *Kachoris* – whether eaten by a poor Khoja seamstress or an international school teacher from a wealthy Swahili family – must be seen as a product of urban structural inequalities that reproduce racialised class hierarchies at the same time as exposing the fundamentally entangled nature of what is 'African' and 'Asian' in Mombasa.

Beyond labour, what are the conditions that produce a taste for these goods? Certainly, as the master of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) pointed out long ago, class is an important factor. Hashim's wares are significantly more expensive than the hard boiled eggs sprinkled with salt and chilli that you can buy on the ferry to Likoni, the southern mainland where much of Mombasa's working class live. His foods are not filling like *maharagwe wa nazi* (kidney beans in coconut sauce, served with thick, buttery chapattis, are a lunch-time favourite). Hashim's speciality is snacks (although many people lunch on this kind of thing, as well as the chips he also sells). Buying at Hashim's is a possibility for those with a greater degree of expendable income, allowing his customers to distinguish themselves as part of the better off.

More importantly for my purposes here, in choosing Hashim's for a late morning snack, *prasad* purchase or takeaway treat, his customers simultaneously *affirm and ignore* Mombasa's longstanding connections with wider worlds. In one sense, the decision to consume these foods affirms a preference for tastes that look east, towards the Indian Ocean and its myriad littorals, rather than inland. *Ghatiya*, *chevro*, *kachoris* – the spices that give these foods flavour are not only absent from inland Kenyan cuisine, they are generally not appreciated. Nairobi residents also have plenty of access to 'Asian' cuisine, reflecting patterns of Asian settlement, particularly since independence, when Asians largely relocated away from small towns and settled in the country's three largest cities. However, my experience of the capital's 'Asian' eateries suggests that these are sites of occasional, rather than everyday, consumption for most Nairobians. I suspect that this is partly because the

⁹⁰ *Thali* refers to a set meal (consisting of rice, dhal, vegetables and other additions), as well as the metal plate on which it is served.

capital's food scene is bigger and more diverse – there's more choice so people eat less 'Indian' food – but also because the history of local connections with 'Asian' cuisine is far less entrenched. Drawing on Eisenberg's (2012) observations above, these geographies of consumption must be seen as intricately entangled within long histories of coastal marginalisation: if the coast was not so at odds with the nation, *bhajiyas* and the other foods described here would not be so emblematic of, nor so particularly rooted in, the littoral.

I use Hashim's sugary emporium as an example, but it is hard to overestimate the predominance of establishments serving cuisine of ostensibly Indian Ocean heritage in Mombasa. *Bhajiyas*, pilau, chicken tikka, paneer rolls – these are sold everywhere from Hashmi's and Barka (restaurants owned by Swahili families) to Jawad's Cold Store and Bollywood Bites (whose proprietors trace their origins to Kutch and Kathiawar respectively). Part of this indicates the overrepresentation of people of Gujarati-origin in the catering sector, and middle class who can afford to eat out. However, given the relatively small size of the city's Gujarati-origin population and the broad appeal of such eateries (they are not ethnic enclaves by any stretch of the imagination), it is clear that eating out in Mombasa is inseparable from centuries of Indian Ocean exchange. From roadside tables serving chai and chapattis to the labourers who descend on the island at dawn, to small cafés like Hashim's which accommodate Mombasans' penchant for deep fried everything, or the many possible gentrifications of paneer that can be found in the beach resorts in the north, the city caters to littoral tastes.

The point I want to underscore here is that while such foods might speak to the presence of elsewhere in Mombasan palates, *they are often not imagined as such*. From the *chevros* to the chips, the food served in places like Hashim's is considered ordinary, everyday and local. Several examples help demonstrate this point. Salwa, a Swahili friend at university in Nairobi was ecstatic when we met at Shaam-e-Bahaar one day for lunch. 'Finally, a chicken tikka worth eating!' she exclaimed, tucking in to a leg. Nairobi tikkas, I learn, just aren't up to scratch. 'Everyone knows that tikka is a Mombasan specialty', she pointed out prosaically between mouthfuls. I happened upon a similar conceptualisation of Mombasan cuisine when in the capital myself. Inspecting the wares at Diamond Plaza, Nairobi's largest Asian mall, my

eyes were drawn to a small, handwritten sign at the counter of Seth's Food and Sundry Goods store: 'Special Mombasa Bhagwanji Kachoris, available Tuesdays and Fridays'. Returning to Mombasa, I learn that the Bhagwanji family – competitors of Hashim's – continue to send their *kachoris* to Nairobi twice weekly, but used to export them all over the world. 'We still have the boxes', Ashish tells me, indicating towards the cardboard containers – each embossed with 'Special Mombasa Bhagwanji Kachoris' in swirly green and yellow font – that used to transport his family's famous *kachoris* across the East African Asian diaspora and beyond. There are customs difficulties these days apparently, but Ashish hopes to rejuvenate his *kachori* empire again soon. I nod sympathetically, wondering how wistful this desire is. The point, however, is clear: *kachoris* born of a Mombasan *terroir* have a special place in the imagination of many (the same is true of samosas, which everyone knows should only be consumed if produced by hands with an East African connection).

Further examples I would like to consider here involve an expedition with my sometime neighbour Shahina, a tiny Memon woman with cherubic cheeks and an always slightly smudged ring of kohl encircling her eyes. It's the 50th anniversary of Kenyan independence and Shahina and I embark on a cross-town mission to visit relatives she hasn't seen in months. On our way out of Old Town, Shahina points out a café I've not yet been to. La Chooza, she tells me, is owned by her cousin Mohammed. 'What is *chooza*?' I inquire, perplexed by the name. 'You know, it's the sauce', Shahina explains matter-of-factly. This was my first encounter with *chooza*, a sauce made principally of chillies, cumin, ginger, garlic and lime to which I was to become totally addicted. Each recipe is slightly different and everyone has their own theory as to which of the various establishments in Mombasa that serve this fine condiment make it best. Absent from menus elsewhere in the country, it usually accompanies chicken, but also paneer rolls and occasionally fish. I continued to find *chooza* rather an odd word and asked many after Shahina what it meant; no one had an explanation that offered more clarity. Only after many months of fieldwork did a perusal online for a *chooza* sauce recipe lead me to the fact that *chooza* means 'chick' – young chicken – in Urdu and Hindi. No one, including the various Urdu speakers in Mombasa who I had asked about *chooza*, had pointed this out. This is not to

suggest that they didn't know, rather that *chooza* does not mean 'chick' in Mombasa: *chooza* has been entirely localised.

On the day of our outing, Shahina and I make our way to Buxton, the *matatu stage* (minivan depot) for commuters heading north. *Matatus*, privately owned minivans running day and night within and between major cities, are common throughout East Africa. After *boda bodas* (motorcycle taxis), *matatus* are the cheapest form of transport for travelling around the city – much cheaper than *tuk tuks* (which provide a door-to-door service), but more expensive than buses for longer distances. Driver-conductor teams charge their passengers fixed rates for transport; prices generally only fluctuate when a *mzungu* – white person – appears. Profits are shared between the driver, conductor and owner of the van; livelihoods depend entirely on speed and fullness of the vehicle and the competition is thick. Conductors, always dressed in distinctive crimson shirts, spend a lot of time shouting out their destinations ('Bamburi, Bamburi, Bamburi, *beba, beba, beba!*'⁹¹) and attempting to bully potential customers – i.e. anyone in the vicinity looking vaguely interested in the mere possibility of travel – into riding with them and not their rivals. *Matatus* congregate at key junctions – known as *stages* – but also stop frequently to pick up those walking along the road. The intensity of harassment by *matatu* touts, particularly at *stages*, has resulted in a system by which potential passengers do everything in their power to look as disinterested as possible, allowing them to imperceptibly size up the competition before making the slightest of movement of the head, indicating to the conductor that they would like to proceed with his ride (*matatu* conductors and drivers are always men, but you do occasionally see female *tuk tuk* drivers). Today, Shahina and I find an almost full *matatu* and squeeze in. As the last passengers follow behind us, Lady Jaydee – *bongo flava*⁹² star of the moment – comes blasting through the speakers, the conductor slams the sliding door shut and we're off. I glance around, searching for any gems to add to my collection of 'matatu wisdom' and am not disappointed: a red and white sticker above the windscreen reads 'Weather never beats fashion'.

⁹¹ This means 'Bamburi, get on!' with Bamburi being an area in the northern outskirts of Mombasa (on the mainland) and *beba* the imperative form of *kubeba*, meaning to load or carry in Swahili.

⁹² *Bongo flava* refers to a genre of Tanzanian hip-hop.

As we edge into the heavy traffic – it seems the whole city is choosing to mark this public holiday by escaping – I note a huge new flour advert above a building along the Nyalali Road. ‘*Kama si Jamii si chapatti!* [If it’s not Jamii, it’s not chapatti!]’, the billboard advises sweaty commuters and perambulators alike. In this sign, not only is the word chapatti naturalised as part of local language and cuisine, the advert suggests that if a chapatti is not made with Jamii flour – a popular Kenyan brand – it is not deserving of the name. Of course, this is an advert. But the words *chooza* and chapatti, and the foods they describe, have a local genealogy that cannot be explained away through reference to other places: they are Mombasan.

A similar point could be made about various herbs. This was made clear to me one day when I accompanied Nadesh, one of my ever-patient Gujarati teachers, on a trip to Markiti for her weekly shopping trip. While Nadesh was verifying with a stall owner that the garlic she wanted was grown in Kenya (‘The Chinese stuff has no taste’), his assistant turned to me. ‘*Unasema Swahili?* [Do you speak Swahili?]’, he probed with an affable grin. I told him that I was learning, an answer he took as his prerogative to assess my progress. ‘*Hii ni nini?* [What’s this?]’, he asked, pointing to a stack of neatly tied bunches of plants with small, clover-like leaves. ‘*Methi* [fenugreek]’, I replied confidently. ‘*Na hii?* [And this?]’ he implored, brushing his fingers through an adjacent pile. ‘*Dhaniya* [coriander]’. He confirms that I’m doing well, ‘*Unajua Swahili!* [You know Swahili!]’. I smile, thinking back to the Gujarati exam I took in London that has helped me pass this Swahili test. *Methi* and *dhaniya* are the Gujarati and, at least in Mombasa, Swahili words for fenugreek and coriander, herbs embedded in coastal cuisine as much as littoral lexicon.

These linguistic legacies have implications on both sides of the Indian Ocean. On Tuesday afternoons during fieldwork, I would make my way to Aishani’s house for our weekly efforts to improve each other’s linguistic repertoire; before rewarding ourselves with chai and snacks, Aishani and I would spend a couple of hours chatting first in Gujarati and then in English. Aishani grew up in Madhapar, a town in northwest Gujarat, but came to Mombasa 26 years ago to marry her now deceased husband. Madhapar’s East Africa connections are long established, and it is not unusual that Aishani’s grandmother spent most of her life in Nairobi; her mother was born in Kenya shortly before the family returned to India, unable to maintain profit

margins in an increasingly Africanised construction sector. However, it was only after arriving in Mombasa as a young bride that Aishani realised that many of the words she had grown up using were actually Swahili. ‘*Ndizi, mfuko, nyanya*’, Aishani reels off the Swahili for ‘banana’, ‘bag’ and ‘tomato’, telling me that she had no idea these were Swahili words before her arrival in Kenya. The biggest shock, I learn, was peanuts. ‘How could *jugu* not be *jugu*?’ Aishani remembers her disbelief at learning that *jugu* (peanuts) was *not* a Gujarati word. ‘We would never say *singhdana* or *mughfari*’, Aishani knows the Gujarati terms but makes a face while saying them, emphasising their foreignness to her tongue. Aishani and her in-laws speak Gujarati to each other; the family return to Madhapar every two years, they have opinions on Narendra Modi. India was present in their lives, in a way that was simply not the case for most of my informants. Nevertheless, Aishani’s linguistic discoveries in later life demonstrate that connections between Kenya and Gujarat are often not seen in India either.

Returning to my outing with Shahina: when we finally arrive at her extended family’s home, the door opened by a young woman lost somewhere under a large shawl, clearly hastily donned in the interests of modesty. Off comes the scarf as the two greet each other warmly; Ruksar is one of Shahina’s numerous great-nieces. The family welcome us with some bemusement – Shahina has kept her visit and unusual companion (me) a surprise. Nevertheless, we are quickly included in the easy chat that flows through their breezy living room. What I would come to appreciate as standard fixtures of middle class Mombasan interior design are all present: decorative wallpaper (in this case red and curiously fluffy looking, with a pink tiger stripe motif below the coving), watercolour paintings of the mountains-behind-streams variety, louver windows and a large TV surrounded by a heavy crimson sofa set. The most remarkable feature, though, is an enormous cage – almost two metres high – in which is perched an African grey parrot. Another of the many African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) I would meet in Mombasa, this ‘Kasuku’, as he was known, was a keen whistler, and not shy to participate in the conversations going on around him.

Because we arrive so late, the family has already eaten lunch. There is, however, plenty leftover and Shahina and I are soon ushered to the dining table. Serving up a

generous plate of mutton biryani and sweet mango pickle, Ruksar turns to me and asks, ‘Do you like African food?’

I add these verbal articulations to the everyday eating practices documented elsewhere in the chapter as a means of emphasising the *locality* (by which I mean bearing local qualities) of tastes and foods that might be perceived as bearers of Indian Ocean heritage to those not from the city. Contra to what we might expect from the cosmopolitan theorists that introduced this section, the ‘wider world-ness’ of these foods is neither celebrated nor veiled: Indian Ocean historiographies are frequently not remarked upon at all, if anything, it is the local qualities of these same foods that is emphasised. In some cases, I suggest that my informants experience of and ideas about items like *kachoris* accords with what Engseng Ho has called ‘resolute localism’ (2006: 68). Ho’s Hadrami informants in the city of Tarim, southern Yemen, made a point of emphasising the superior value of ‘local’ products, such as rice, even when these products were known to be of foreign ‘origin’. This hierarchy of valorisation, Ho contends, is resolute ‘because it is not always unaware of the trajectories of localisation; it is resolute despite that knowledge’ (2006: 68). Sitting down to a feast centred around steamed white rice, one of Ho’s hosts notes the *Jawa-nese*⁹³ roots of a preference for this staple, while at the same time positioning it as ‘local’ in contrast to the greasy, red-tinted stuff served in the town’s two restaurants. ‘Foreign’ products are denigrated and avoided: Ho is usually one of the only customers in the establishments selling ‘foreign’ rice.

A foreign/local binary does not have traction in Mombasa, nor did I see a demonising of ‘foreign’ products in the way that Ho describes. However, the point is Mombasans may be – and, in the case of Asians, often were – aware of the South Asian historiographies bundled up in items like biryani or *kachoris*. But these histories are frequently localised in the experience of eating. The difference, as I see it, between the cosmopolitanism literature described above and the position laid out by Ho, is that in the former, wider worlds (and knowledge of/access to them) are discursively glorified or obscured. In contrast, in the case of Tarim and Mombasa, these connections are often not so much downplayed as made local.

⁹³ *Jawa* refers to ‘island Southeast Asia’ in local parlance (Ho 2006: 66).

Ho's remarks certainly appear to ring true for some of my informants. However, his 'resolute localism' depends on a foreign/local binary that assumes some things actually are local, and other things are not – and that it is possible to distinguish definitively between the two. For many Mombasans I submit, it is not simply that wider connections were 'resolutely localised', but that they were not imagined to exist at all. In the same way that Britain's long history of exchange with China is completely irrelevant when I make myself a cup of tea, I contend that Indian Ocean historiographies are often absent when Mombasans like Beatrice or Ruksar catch up over *kachoris* or snack on *sev*.

My thoughts on this subject have benefitted from Alastair Pennycook's (2007, 2010) work on the relationship between language (particularly English) and locality. Analysing the lyrics of 'If I die tonight' by Malaysian hip-hop group Too Phat, Pennycook notes that the song, rapped in English and peppered with 'local' references, could easily be interpreted as 'the kind of English localization that is the meat and drink of world Englishes' (2007: 111). The lyrics take listeners on a journey through the rappers' last day on earth 'to do' list, which includes making time for a final pre-dawn prayer, breakfasting on fried *kuay teow* (a popular noodle dish) and organising their shoe collection for distribution amongst friends:

...line up my shoes one by one/Start with Jordans and end with Air Force Ones/Put a Post-it on the tongue of each one with the name of each dun/I think I know my homies and who would want which one (Pennycook 2007: 111).

If English is '[localised] through [reference] to local cultural elements' (2007: 111), Pennycook asks the reader to consider the (im)possibility of distinguishing the local, in this instance and beyond. If, for example, we take *kuay teow* to be paradigmatically local (itself something of a challenge given the long histories of migration and exchange that have given rise to Malaysian cuisine),

...can we assume that other references are not local? Or, put another way, when do... [Air] Jordans become local? Once we take into account the localization that has already occurred previously, and once we consider enactment and recontextualization as localizing processes, it is far less clear

whether we can take this as a global or a local reference...’ (Pennycook 2007: 111, emphasis added).

Pennycook points to the need to challenge the linearity bound up in existing accounts of language localisation, which, in privileging narratives of origins, spread and adaptation, endlessly perpetuate notions of centre/periphery, local/global, original/copy. ‘Rather’, he urges, ‘we have to understand ways in which [languages] are *already local*’ (Pennycook 2010: 70). Accepting the multiple, simultaneous origins of locality leads us away from ‘asking whether... language use is local or not’ and towards ‘how it is rendered local in the doing’ (2007: 111).

Applying Pennycook’s observations to my informants unmarked, everyday consumption of various foods – be that chapattis or *chevro*, chips or *choma* – provides a means of capturing the discourses and practices outlined in this chapter: in many instances, these foods are ‘already local’. Moreover, following Pennycook’s rejection of attempts to determine what is local, I see no utility in creating hierarchies of Indian Ocean significance in Mombasa. In some instances, and for some people, Indian Ocean histories were intimately bound up in the experience of eating, even if these experiences were also ‘resolutely local’. In many others, these histories were not simply irrelevant, they were not there. Sometimes Indian Ocean historiographies mattered and, more than that, were imagined to exist; in others they were not.

Conclusion: *bhajiya*s as already local

Kresse writes of Mombasa’s ‘inherent connectivity to other regions’ (2012: 37). ‘Indeed’, he emphasises, ‘without reference to these [other places], urban life here cannot really be understood’ (2012: 37). However, Kresse also rightly underscores the importance of not lazily assuming ‘an all-embracing and unifying “Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism”’ (2012: 37) based on contemporary social diversity; his thinking on the subject, traces Mombasa’s long history of integrating outsiders, in order to demonstrate how the city’s ‘inherent connectedness’ (2012: 36) is made and remade. Some of the examples provided in this chapter, such as Yash’s remarks about *mishkaki* or Hashim’s Belgian Taj Mahal, illustrate these processes clearly: wider

worlds were frequently brought into being, whether valued or devalued, in urban discursive practice. However, to overlook the way in which wider connections were often *not valued at all* is to miss much of what I saw in Mombasa.

Mombasa is intimately and evidently connected to wider worlds. Where I diverge from the cosmopolitan authors cited here is that I think these ‘inherent connections’ are often absent from everyday practice, just as England’s long-standing historical relationship with China is not a feature of my tea-drinking habits. In buying *bhajiya*s, cherishing *chooza* or guzzling *ghatiya*, people in Mombasa enact ways of being in the world that, although always embedded in elsewhere, are ‘already local’. Moreover, building on Eisenberg (2012), I have suggested that it is the everydayness of these practices that makes them ‘already political’, implicitly and persistently underscoring the coast’s distinction from the Kenyan nation.

This conclusion points to the need for a more nuanced approach to Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. Following earlier trends in the study of community or diaspora, which powerfully demonstrate that such categories only make sense when people imagine them to exist (e.g. Sökefeld 2006), I have sought to show that the Indian Ocean is not always an appropriate lens in Mombasa. Drawing on Pennycook’s (2007, 2010) incisive observations, I have suggested that we ‘localise’ the Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean interconnections are a ubiquitous part of daily life in Mombasa – but they are often not imagined as such by the people whose activities scholars like myself are trying to describe. The ethnography presented here demonstrates the need to start by describing what people understand as local – to localise the Indian Ocean from the bottom up – in order to represent how the world beyond is imagined, *and not imagined*, from this particular urban littoral.

This theme of understanding Mombasa within a shifting spectrum of geographies is continued in the next chapter, where I turn our attention to discussions of Islamic reform, and add a host of chronologies to the emerging analysis of the city.

Chapter 3

Reform and the body politic

Even under the gazebo the sun is blistering. I'm standing in a queue in the car park of the Khoja Ithna-Asheri *imambargah* (congregation hall) with about 30 Khoja women, each waiting our turn to donate blood. There's a steady stream of people in and out of the small tent, as people come and go in cars, tuk tuks or on foot. Five reclining chairs have been installed, on which donors are lying upright as their blood runs through clear plastic tubes into collection bags below. Those donating are having their photos taken by friends and relatives. Chatter and giggles abound, the jovial atmosphere is quite a contrast to the solemnity that has characterised the many *majalis* (religious gatherings) I've attended since the start of Muharram. Every now and then someone calls out '*Labaik ya Husain*' ('We are at your service Husain'), to which the rest of us respond in kind. I notice that fewer cries of allegiance are coming from the men's gazebo, which is stationed about five metres away, further to the front of the car park.

Screens encircle three sides of the ladies' gazebo; these ensure privacy, as women have been instructed to remove their headscarves while donating by the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS) staff. The medics, dressed in starched white uniforms and coordinating the event, explain that this is a precautionary measure, designed to prevent women from overheating in a moment when they are also being drained of their vital energies. Yasmine, a member of the Zainabiyya Ladies' Committee (responsible for the women's section of the Khoja *imambargah*), periodically reminds the assembled crowd not to circulate any of the images being snapped on smartphones – photographs of women without hijab must not end up on Facebook. While waiting for the next chair to free up, we fill out official forms, declaring our weight, age, medical history and current medication regime, as well as confirming that we have not recently been tattooed or pierced. Maalia is distributing

and collecting the forms, but the donating itself is organised by the NBTS team, none of whom are Khojas.

The medics are efficient at finding veins but the small number of donating stations means the process is all quite slow. I start chatting with Tameen, who's about the same age as me. Both of us are excited, we've not donated before. 'You feel so good, no?' Tameen chirps, 'It's so good to give back'. Masuma, who's in front of us, agrees with a simple 'Ya Husain'. She has cleverly bought a little handheld folding fan with her, which Tameen and I eye longingly. 'It seems even hotter than usual today', I remark. 'Tell me, I'm in socks!' Tameen replies, pointing her right foot out from under her *buibui* to display snow-white socks under her black sandals. Sock-wearers are a minority amongst Khoja women and I haven't noticed Tameen in them before. Querying her about it, she explains, 'I've been meaning to start for ages and finally decided to do it on the first of Muharram'.

I'm curious to know more but it's Tameen's turn to donate and she's whisked off to a chair further down the line. Now at the front of the queue, I see Sakina grinning as Mubina takes a photograph of her blood-donating daughter. Sakina is dressed in the Jaffery Academy's distinct green and white school uniform and I wonder if those who want to donate have been given time off from class.⁹⁴ 'I'm sending it straight to Laila', Mubina exclaims with a proud mother smile; Laila, Mubina's eldest daughter, has recently given birth in Toronto. 'I think the blood drive [in Toronto] is later today, but of course Laila won't be giving this year', Mubina informs me with more glowing pride.

Once Sakina has given the requisite blood, the needle is carefully removed by an NBTS attendant. Rearranging her hijab, Sakina starts heading towards the table where cans of Azam Cola have been laid out to help rejuvenate blood sugar levels. Azam Cola, produced in Tanzania, is Khojas' preferred alternative to Coca Cola, which is boycotted by many and not distributed in religious or social spaces associated with the *jamaat* because of its links with the Israeli state. A number of cafés in Mombasa also only serve Azam soft drinks. Seeing it on the table, I ask

⁹⁴ As mentioned in the Introduction, the Jaffery Academy is linked to the Khoja *jamaat* but educates a diverse swathe of Mombasa's more affluent children.

Mubina if Coca Cola ever found its way into her home. ‘No, no’, she pressed, ‘we avoid as many Israeli products as possible. L’Oréal, Nestlé, Johnson & Johnson. There’s the list online’, Mubina added. Although not endorsed by the official Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement (which advocates the avoidance of products and services linked to companies that play a direct role in Israel’s violations of international law), such lists were regularly circulated on WhatsApp groups I was part of, forwarded by Khojas and other Mombasan Muslims.

At this moment, Sakina, who had finished adjusting her headscarf and was reaching for a drink, faints. She’s clearly completely blacked out and there’s some commotion as we try to resuscitate her and get her back onto one of the reclining chairs. One of the NBTS nurses takes charge of removing Sakina’s headscarf and getting people to give her some air. Still looking like a ghost, she eventually moves with her mother to leave and very nearly faints again. A woman from the NBTS advises that Sakina *not* put her headscarf back on this time, so Mubina drives their 4x4 right up to the entrance of the gazebo, ensuring that her daughter does not expose her uncovered head to the outside world; they eventually get away.

Finally it’s my turn. Everything goes smoothly but I too almost faint afterwards; blood donating in the sun suddenly feels like something of an extreme sport. Regrouping on a chair near the refreshments table, my eyes are drawn to the murals which have recently been painted on the outside of the building that constitutes the car park’s western wall.



Figure 33: Muharram murals in the car park of the Khoja *imambargah*, Old Town.

The paintings, (Fig. 33 above), which I haven't had the chance to observe properly until now, display the artwork of the winners of the annual children's drawing competition, held in the weeks leading up to Muharram. The winning images have been enlarged and transposed onto the wall – each over two metres wide – presumably by a professional sign painter. One of them depicts a small group of blank-faced people praying in the middle of a barren desert; an army approaches the beleaguered worshipers and arrows are already flying towards them. The aphorism above reads 'Verily prayers keeps [sic] you away from all indecency and evil – Al-Quran. Imam Husayn in a state of war did not forget prayer'. The second painting shows a pair of hands bringing a sword down on a man's bleeding shoulders. Resembling Atlas, the man is holding up the world, which is simultaneously being attacked by arrows, each of which is labelled with a negative attribute (power, greed, deprivation, slavery, to name a few). The world drips blood, creating pools of blood below it. Next to each red pool is the name of a particular geographic location: Gaza, Iraq, Latin America, North Korea, Bahrain, Burma, among others. Above this image are the words 'Imam Husayn sacrificed his Life to fight injustice. Never accept any kind of injustice in society'. The final painting is a diptych with hands shackled in

cuffs in front of a fiery orange background on one side; on the other, open hands release a dove against a blue background. The message reads: Imam Husayn ‘If you don’t believe in any religion or the hereafter, at least be free in this world. Don’t be a slave to your worldly desires’.

As with the Muharram placards that decorate the interior of the *imambargah* at the moment, what strikes me most is the collapsing of scales between Karbala and other places, and the claims to universality that the messages portray. Feeling revived by the sugary cola, I find my things and say goodbye to the remaining donors; many are also heading home for lunch. Maalia holds a flap of the gazebo open for me, ‘Did you enjoy? So organised, no?’ she waggles her head, admiring the scene one last time. We confirm we’ll see each other at the *majlis* in a few hours.

Writing reform

Islamic reform has received a great deal of anthropological attention in recent decades; perhaps the key conclusion to emerge from this rich body of scholarship is that the term itself does little to illuminate the complexity it names. In broadly linking ‘projects whose specific focus is the brining into line of religious beliefs and practices with what are held to be the core foundations of Islam’ (Osella & Osella 2013: xi), reform suggests a consistency, and imposes an always questionable dichotomy – between reformists and their others – upon the blurred realities of lived experience. Rather than precipitating the term’s abandonment, however, ethnographic studies have proved well-suited for illustrating the geographical and historical specificity of reform: the ideas and practices considered to fall under its banner shift across time and space, can wear a variety of garbs within the same place and change over the course of individual lifetimes (Ewing 1997; Gardner 1993; Green 2005). Careful ethnography has helped illuminate that what emerges as reform in a particular context stems from *local* concerns and interactions, as much as engagements with an imagined ‘global Islam’ (Alam 2011; Haniffa 2013). Projects of reform, moreover, do not exist in isolation, often deeply enmeshed within and motivated by wider political, social and personal landscapes. Reform is neither ‘simply’ nor solely a religious affair; as Edward Simpson (2008) has persuasively

shown in the context of Gujarat, individual opinions around reform are shifting and the positions expressed at any given moment might have more to do with lovers, bureaucratic mishaps and local political calculations than religious doctrine and belief. Finally, ethnography has helped to unpack the significance of the trope between reformists and their others; although always at best a partial truth, the dichotomy forms an important part of social life in many parts of the world, a lens through which Muslims in different contexts imagine themselves in relation to proximate and distant others (Kresse 2006; Marsden 2005).

The aim of this chapter is to tease out some of this complexity as it relates to Khojas in Mombasa. The opening vignette paints a scene infused with reform. Discussions around reform feed concerns about being photographed or seen without headscarves: wearing a hijab when outdoors is now practiced with near uniformity amongst Khoja women, but only became commonplace in the 1980s. This gendered intersection between sartorial and religious politics – of which the adoption of socks is a further manifestation – is the subject of numerous scholarly accounts (L. Ahmed 2012; Akhtar 2016; Mahmood 2005; Tarlo 2014). In Mombasa, the political economy of reform is also embedded within cans of Azam Cola. Products associated with the state of Israel are boycotted by many as commodified emblems of a central threat to the global Muslim *ummah*. For Khojas, consumption is not only motivated by pan-Islamic solidarity, it is also understood to *cultivate and deviate* religious resolve: as others have also noted, crafting pious subjectivity involves following food prescriptions that extend beyond halal (Fadil 2009; Gillette 2000).

Rather than clothing or food, this chapter focuses on how reformist discourses inform blood donation itself, as well as structure its relationship to other commemorative acts. Using the blood donation drive as a lens, I examine how shifting ideas about the soteriological potential of mourning rituals (which mirror debates in the wider Shia world), meet concerns about *bid'a* (undue Islamic innovation) and the threat of Wahhabis (discourses which animate the Swahili coast), as well as notions about the need for Asians to make ‘productive’ contributions towards national development. Highlighting how these themes intersect with questions of class and insecurity, the blood donation drive is presented as a multivalent event, imagined to respond to enmeshed religious and political goals.

Thinking with blood donation

The link between religious reform and blood donation form a central part of Jacob Copeman's (2009b) analyses of blood donors and donor recruiters in North India. Copeman describes blood donation as an important way in which giving mechanisms have been 'made social' and more able to serve the goals of reformist conceptions of Hinduism (2009b: 50). Customary giving practices – such as monetary donations to temples or the sponsoring of public feasts for one's congregational fellows – have come to be viewed as wasteful, non-productive forms of worship, activities in need of reform. In replacing these conventional rites, Copeman argues that blood donation performs a 'substitutive ennoblement' (2009b: 58), leaving giving practices intact (and thus avoiding rupture in people's giving experiences), but at the same time co-opting these structures to affect new – and various – outcomes. If previous modes of giving involved a 'centripetal aim' – namely 'securing the soul's peace' – blood donation achieves the same and more, by producing 'centrifugal (socialized) effects' (2009b: 62).⁹⁵ In other words, blood donation does not efface the spiritual goals of giving; rather, the practical utility of blood donation – its secular outcomes – becomes a way of achieving individual salvation (via, and at the same time as, contributing to wider society). Not only does blood literally reproduce and multiply in the body of both donor and recipient, it is blood donation's incontestable social utility that make it so amenable to the ideology of 'action as worship' (2009b: 57) at the heart of reformist Hinduism.

As Copeman's research makes plain, blood donors' motivations are by no means exclusively religious. For many of Copeman's informants, one of blood's principal and most lauded effects is its capacity to traverse difference, an imaginary based on the anonymous nature of donation. He writes,

⁹⁵ An imagined shift from centripetal to centrifugal blood flow also relates to the on-going transformation of the Indian blood service. Copeman notes that donations were historically motivated by the needs of a known, specified recipient, usually a family member. While such donations were rarely received by the ailing person themselves, they were 'nevertheless given "for" them in order to facilitate their treatment' (2009a: 95). This is being phased out in favour a centrifugally-oriented voluntary system, with the emphasis on blood going to anyone one (and potentially to many people).

...anonymity makes it possible for blood donation to almost mechanically transgress caste and community boundaries, and then for those involved in the donation to construct any number of possible meanings linked to this transgression (2009b: 10).

The national significance of this is the focus of another article, where Copeman (2009a) finds Nehruvian ideologies of integration alive and well amongst medics and donors alike (see also 2009b: 149–168). Those involved with blood camps frequently underscore their heterogeneous character (these events draw together thousands of people from various castes, religious affiliations and parts of the country), as well as imagine their blood as having the potential to link diverse constituents. A Hindu interlocutor is portrayed as far from unique in hoping that ‘his one donated unit would be split and transfused into a Christian, a Muslim and a Sikh respectively, in order to show that all people and religions are one’ (Copeman 2009a: 90). In addition to anonymity Copeman notes that it is blood donation’s ‘systemic properties of gathering and disbursal’ that make it ‘particularly amenable to congregative thought’ (2009a: 72): not only do blood camps bring together a diverse swathe of humanity in a specific place, the body tissue donated by a single donor is then divided into its constituent parts and distributed to a range of recipients. Thus, while anonymous, non-reciprocal blood donation may seem to run counter to the principles of classic anthropological gift theory, Copeman concludes that giving blood in fact contributes to the construction of the enduring social relations envisaged by Mauss (2016 [1925]), albeit offering a nationalist variant.

John Harrington (forthcoming) similarly finds discourses of national integration pivotal to discourses surrounding blood donation in Kenya following the attack on Westgate. Even while the events at the shopping mall were still unfolding, thousands of Kenyans, predominantly in Nairobi but also in Mombasa and elsewhere, lined up to give their blood, collecting five times more than would usually be expected in a single week. This collective bloodletting was much remarked upon by politicians and on social media, as well as in the national and international press. Both President Kenyatta and online dialogues under the #Weareone Twitter hashtag held up blood donation as evidence of national unity, proof of the ability, and desire, of Kenyans to overcome the ethnic divisions that appeared to structure the violence that followed

the 2007 elections. President Kenyatta described the enthusiasm around blood donation as affirming, ‘deep inside, where it counts most, we are one indivisible national family’.⁹⁶ In a photograph widely circulated on Twitter, seven donors’ arms were tattooed with the words ‘Now our blood flows through each other’. Echoing Copeman, Harrington argues that it is the indiscriminate nature of blood transfusions, and the process via which it is gathered, mixed and distributed, that make it uniquely positioned to dissolve ethnic boundaries, constructing a ‘biopolitical collective’ in the process. For Harrington, blood donation also served as a ‘barometer of civilisation’ (B. Simpson 2009: 105). The order exhibited by a functioning national blood system – sustained by medical professionals and a cadre of educated and productive citizens ready to give blood – helped to reaffirm Kenya’s membership within the international community, a position which had been called into question following the post-electoral violence of 2007-08 and the on-going International Criminal Court case involving several of the country’s leading politicians (President Kenyatta among them).

Blood donation became evidence of civic engagement, but also patriotic sacrifice – a way for Kenyans to productively counter the senseless, wasteful loss of blood that characterised the Westgate disaster. Harrington argues that the trope of patriotism encompassed within blood had particular resonance for two groups of ‘pariah’ citizens, who strategically sought to use blood donation to demonstrate their commitment to the nation. Harrington cites the example of the Somali ambassador, who called on Somalis and Kenyan Somalis to follow his much-publicised example of donating ‘so that Kenyans could see that we are with them’. Given that it was the Somali-based group al-Shabaab who claimed responsibility for the Westgate attack, blood donation became an evocative symbol in attempts to reconfigure Kenyan-Somali relations. Kenyan Asians were similarly at the forefront of responses to

⁹⁶ Quotations in this paragraph, as well as the following two, pertain to Harrington’s (forthcoming) article.

Westgate, a fact often cited in the press.⁹⁷ Armed security teams associated with various Asian communities were involved in helping to secure the mall itself, and Asians were prominently engaged in the provision of emergency care and support throughout the attack and its aftermath. As John Sibi-Okumu ironically noted in an online opinion piece,

“Westgate” came to be seen as the South Asians’ finest hour. At last, South Asians had made it clear to all that they were well and truly Kenyan and, once again, the media found a perfect hook upon which to hang a sentimental narrative of unity in adversity.⁹⁸

Sibi-Okumu rejects this narrative for overlooking the long history of Asian settlement and contributions to the country; it was, however, common parlance at the time, and bolstered by Asian blood donation. Harrington notes that blood donation has a long history amongst at least one Asian community, linked in part to an explicitly nationalist aim. As the founder of Jain blood donation drives – running since 1978 – explained to him, giving to the National Blood Transfusion Service was motivated both by *seva*, the principle of selfless sacrifice central to Jainism (and Hinduism), and by a desire to demonstrate to ‘...the government [that] we are not only doing things for ourselves but for others’. Following Westgate, images of Asians as donors and emergency support volunteers were drawn on to reframe narratives of insularity and alterity that have dominated discourses about the minority since the colonial era.

Although Harrington does not dwell on the religious motives of Jain donors, it is clear that, as amongst Copeman’s Indian informants, blood donation in the aftermath

⁹⁷ See: ‘Westgate attack: Asians, a selfless community’. *Daily Nation*, 26 September 2013 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/video/1951480-2007660-nab7mqz/index.html>, accessed 27 September 2016), as well as J. Verini’s article: ‘After Westgate siege, new respect for Kenya’s Indians’. *National Geographic*, 4 October 2013 (available online: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/131004-nairobi-westgate-mall-kenyan-indians-gandhi-kikuyus-world/>, accessed 23 August 2017).

⁹⁸ See J. Sibi-Okumu’s article: ‘Alternate angle – love belatedly’. *Awaaz*, 25 January 2014 (available online: <http://awaazmagazine.com/previous/index.php/archives/item/477-alternate-angle-love-belatedly>, accessed 7 January 2017).

of Westgate served a range of goals and produced multiple effects. Both scholars also observe the ambivalent relationship between voluntary blood donation and liberal market ideology. In India, Copeman (2009a) asserts that while the move to non-remunerated donation in India appears to run counter to liberal logics,⁹⁹ blood banks often target key beneficiaries and locales of liberalisation – such as the customers and employees of shopping malls and multinationals – and seek to persuade donors by offering them discounted health insurance and other marketised returns. Moreover, both Copeman’s and Harrington’s analyses demonstrate that notions of productivity and waste are at the heart of contemporary donor imaginaries. If in Kenya donated blood was juxtaposed with the wasted blood tragically shed during the attack on the country’s ultimate zone of liberal consumption, Hindu reformists in India valorise the utility of blood donation against profligate forms of giving. Blood, in other words, allows ‘the human body’s productivity to be sutured not only into the productivity of markets but also into productive national and supranational imaginings’ (Copeman 2009a: 72; see also Waldby & Mitchell 2006).

Commemorating Karbala: the reform of mourning

The blood donation drive I attended in Mombasa was the first event of its kind to be organised by Khojas in Mombasa. As explained in the *jamaat*’s synopsis of the day’s proceedings, the drive was held ‘in commemoration of Ashura the great martyrdom of Imam Hussain (A.S.)’.¹⁰⁰ Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram, is the most important moment of the Shia year; it is on this day that Karbala commemorations reach their peak. As mentioned in the Introduction, it is hard to overstate the significance of this historic event in Khoja daily life and ritual. Nadia, a dynamic female reciter surmised the sentiments of many when she told me one morning, ‘We were born to remember Karbala’.

⁹⁹ Paid donations for blood were banned by India’s Supreme Court in 1998 (Copeman 2009a: 75).

¹⁰⁰ See the Africa Federation website: ‘Mombasa Jaffery Medical Centre – blood donation to commemorate Ashura’. (available online: <http://www.africafederation.org/jamaats/kenya/mombasa/1044-mombasa-jaffery-medical-centre-blood-donation-to-commemorate-ashura>, accessed 23 August 2017).

Given the centrality of Karbala commemorations to Shia Islam, it is unsurprising that studies of Shia Muslims around the world allocate significant attention to the history and practice of mourning rituals, particularly those that take place during Muharram (Flaskerud 2010; Hyder 2006; Khosronejad 2015; Pinault 2001; Ruffle 2014; Schubel 1993). Scholars in this field have long been attendant to debates around ritual commemoration: how should Husain be remembered? What are the merits of different modalities of grieving? What is the historical provenance and ‘accuracy’ of particular styles of commemoration? Before considering commemoration as an object of reform, I first outline key modes of remembrance in Mombasa. Throughout the year stories of the Battle conclude every religious function – *majalis* always end with the *masaib* (from suffering in Arabic), an emotionally charged recounting of a part of the Karbala tragedy, usually told from the perspective of one of its key protagonists. During the *masaib*, Khojas at the very least put their heads in their hands in quiet contemplation, many wail loudly; crying is particularly impassioned during Muharram. The various death anniversaries (*wafat*) of holy personalities marked annually – including during Muharram – involve the singing of *marsiyas* and *nauhas* (haunting a cappella eulogies evoking Karbala’s martyrs in Urdu). During the first ten days of Muharram, which culminate with Ashura, a number of other forms of commemoration are added to this repertoire. These include funeral processions (held for each of Karbala’s key protagonists within the *imambargah*),¹⁰¹ as well as various additional bodily performances of mourning, such as *matam* (ritualised breast beating),¹⁰² *saph matam* (breast beating conducted while moving in a rhythmic circle) and, amongst some male worshippers, *zanjir*, self-flagellation with

¹⁰¹ Funeral processions involve the solemn parade of a *taziya* or coffin, specific to the particular martyr being remembered, around the congregation hall, along with *alams* (battle standards) and various other relics. Funeral processions serve a mnemonic and didactic function, one of the multiple ways in which Shia hagiography is internalised over the course of a lifetime (Flaskerud 2010). For instance, on the day that Abbas, Husain’s half-brother, is commemorated, an ornate silver water vessel hangs from one of the *alams*, symbolic of the fact that Abbas was killed while attempting to acquire water for his encircled kin.

¹⁰² *Matam* is a broad term for all forms of self-flagellation (i.e. it can include *zanjir*, described in the next footnote), although in Mombasa it usually refers exclusively to ritualised breast-beating performed by bringing the right hand to the left side of the chest.

metal blades (an act of intentional bloodletting).¹⁰³ *Matam* and *zanjir* are strenuous activities. Amongst the female worshipers that I knew (who, as women, only engage in *matam*), degrees of vigour vary widely; some pummelled their chests with both hands, but I suspected that even the less energetic went home with bruises. The effects of self-flagellation receives attention in numerous accounts (Hegland 1998; Hyder 2006; Pinault 2001). As Tameen explained to me after my first encounter with the practice, ‘The whole point is to take us back to that time’. Self-flagellation serves as a means of transport, back to the merciless plains of Karbala, back to 680 CE. In this vein, blood’s noted ability to make the past viscerally present (Carsten 2013) helps explain its centrality in Khoja mourning rituals and décor: even for the majority who do not participate in *zanjir*, descriptions of the bloody suffering of Husain and his companions at Karbala form an important part of the *masaib*, while ‘bloodied’ cloth (produced through reddish tie-dye) decorates the Khoja *imambargah* and *mehfiles*, particularly during Muharram.

Suffering through *matam* or *zanjir* makes the Karbala tragedy a corporeal one – it instils empathy for Husain and his companions and an embodied appreciation of their efforts. These and other Khoja mourning rituals speak to the ‘incorporating practices’ that Paul Connerton (2013 [1989]: 94) has identified as so fundamental to collective memory (see also Halbwachs 1992 [1925-1944]). Via the body, Karbala is brought into every *imambargah*, into every Shia heart: Karbala is deterritorialised, globalised, internalised (Hyder 2006). Such performances not only transform congregants into some kind of whole, unified by rhythmic commemoration, their beat resonates far beyond its walls. As forms of lamentation practiced by Shia all over the world, participating in such rituals is about staking a place within a global *ummah*, bringing a shared sense of belonging into existence. Moreover, it is through their willingness to inflict suffering on themselves that Shias demonstrate their devotion to Husain; this is an oath of allegiance inscribed on flesh, be that bruises or cuts (Hegland 1998).

¹⁰³ *Zanjir* refers specifically to the metal flail but is used in Mombasa to refer to the practice more generally (also *zanjir matam*). *Zanjir* is the Urdu and Gujarati term for a practice that has numerous appellations and variations around the world, such as *zanjir-zani* in Hyderabad (Pinault 2001) or ‘hitting *hydar*’ in Beirut (Deeb 2006: 135).

The blood donation drive described above must be considered in terms of a wider geography of debates about how to commemorate Karbala. Based on research conducted in Iran around the time of the Islamic Revolution, Mary Hegland charts a distinct shift in ‘the central meaning of Shi’i Islam among the Iranian masses’ (1983: 219). Hegland plots two contrasting images of Imam Husain, and associates each with a particular political ideology. Prior to the Revolution, Hegland argues that the notion of ‘Imam Husain as Intercessor’ dominated Iranian conceptualisations: mourning the Imam was principally motivated by an individual’s desire to improve their current worldly predicaments, as well as gain admission to paradise. ‘The believer strives to show his respect and devotion to the imam in every way possible, hoping thereby to become close to him, that the imam will feel disposed to provide assistance’ (Hegland 1983: 221). Hegland suggests that modifying one’s behaviour to accommodate the desires of the Imam – thereby currying favours and protection – was mirrored in the approach of many Iranians with regards to political and economic elites:

The art of pleasing – the strategy of forming connections with the powerful and of modifying one’s behaviour to please them – practiced in relations with the imams, is also applied to political dealings in the real world (1983: 224).

However, with the popularisation of the teachings of Ali Shariati¹⁰⁴ in the years prior to the Revolution, this quietist approach was increasingly abandoned and associated patterns of commemoration became the subject of critique. As one of Hegland’s informants in Aliabad explained, ‘crying does not get you anywhere. It is not following in the way of Husain’ (1983: 230). Imam Husain’s martyrdom was thus revalorised: proximity to the Imam was achieved through emulation of his revolutionary behaviour, not mournful devotion. In this modified understanding, Husain’s most important lesson to the faithful was the importance of standing up against oppression and injustice, focussing more on improving society rather than your own personal lot. The ‘Husain as Example’ ethos, Hegland argues, played a fundamental role in galvanising Iranians against the Shah (see also Flaskerud 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Shariati, a sociologist of religion, was a hugely influential Iranian intellectual in the lead up to the Islamic Revolution.

Lara Deeb (2006) traces a remarkably similar contrast between what she calls ‘traditional’ and ‘authenticated’ approaches to Husain in Beirut. As in Iran, these contrasting modes of commemoration are related to a reappraisal of the soteriological potential of grief. Divine reward is, for ‘authenticated’ mourners, no longer primarily believed to stem from tears but social action. Proponents of ‘authenticated’ interpretations of Shia Islam – who Deeb defines as being particularly concerned with ‘historical accuracy and the use of rationality’ (2006: 27) – condemn many customary mourning rituals.

While traditional forms of commemoration involve embodying emotion in blood and tears, authenticated forms involve embodied emotion through realised activism’ (Deeb 2006: 158).

Thus, processions organised by Hizbullah (the political organisation who many of Deeb’s ‘authenticated’ informants are associated with) are characterised by regimented solemnity, and supporters are strongly encouraged to involve themselves in community (and/or military) service.

If Deeb is one of a number of scholars to explore the significance of the Iranian Revolution in shaping Shia discourses elsewhere (see Leichtman 2009 regarding Senegal), Justin Jones (2015) historicises these claims. Jones traces the reformulation of attributes accorded to Husain to Sayyid Ali Naqi Naqvi’s writings of the 1930s and 40s. Ali Naqi, perhaps the most influential (if controversial) of South Asia’s 20th century Shia scholars, propagated his revolutionary interpretation of Husain from Lucknow. Many decades before the Islamic Revolution, Ali Naqi espoused a ‘Husainology’ (Siegel 2001: 153) which, as in late 20th century Iran and Beirut, ‘firmly established Husain as a figure to be imitated rather than invoked’, calling on his readers to ‘emulate Husain’s struggle against injustice in all its forms’ (Jones 2015: 91). Jones suggests that Ali Naqi’s contribution was particularly noteworthy in its ‘attempt to open Husain’s significance to all of humanity’, with consistent emphasis placed on ‘reaching out externally to other Muslim and non-Muslim communities’ (2015: 103). Jones also points out that while it is difficult to ascertain the veracity of arguments that suggest Ali Naqi directly influenced Khomeini’s interpretation of Husain – both men laid particular stress on the Imam as a figure of unifying reach –

the claim's very existence offers clear evidence of how, far from blindly following their counterparts in Iran or Iraq, the Indian Shi'a have perpetually conceived themselves as developing their own religious traditions and literatures *in situ*, as having meaningful influence upon religious thought and leadership in the wider Shi'i world (2015: 102, italics original).

While both Hegland's and Deeb's accounts are attentive to the mobilisation of Karbala by political actors, Jones stresses that, even in the 1930s, '[t]he application of Imam Husain to forms of political resistance was nothing new in South Asia' (2015: 92). He writes

Shi'i languages of martyrology had crept into anti-colonial mobilisations in Awadh as early as 1857. From the 1900s, but especially by the 1930s, a number of writers and poets...were evoking the Karbala tragedy, with distinct recourse to the more political elements of Husain's struggle, as a metaphor for the on-going existential battle between righteousness and iniquity (Jones 2015: 92).

If the 'application of Shi'i martyrology as a tool of "state-making"' (Jones 2015: 98) is well documented in the context of post-revolutionary Iran (Aghaie 2005; Kaur 2010; Wellman 2015, 2017), Jones' research demonstrates 'a comparable usage in pre-independence India, with the clear incorporation of the Karbala paradigm within the rhetoric and methodology of a late-colonial Indian nationalism' (2015: 98–99). Gandhi, for instance, drew especially on Husain as a model for pacifist struggle and civil disobedience, while Nehru emphasised Husain's appeals to universality, and the capacity of Karbala commemorations to bring together people of different faith. Both figures, in other words, invoked Husain to support their particular visions of the pathway to, and form of, a postcolonial future.

The striking overlap between interpretations of Husain in very different contexts and historical moments demonstrate the fluidity of the 'Karbala paradigm', a term coined by Fischer (1980: 21) precisely to stress its multivalent significance and adaptability. We now turn to the ways in which Husain's martyrdom is commemorated, debated and applied to particular political goals in Mombasa.

Tears of cognisance

Edith Szanto (2013) has criticised the work of Deeb and Hegland (in a manner that could also apply to Jones), arguing that conceptualising mourning rituals in terms of a shift from redemption to revolution is too simplistic. Szanto contends that the problem with the binary 'is that it simultaneously depoliticises salvation and desacralizes revolution' (2013: 78). Drawing on her research in the seminaries of Sayyidah Zainab, the town in southern Damascus where Zainab (daughter of Imam Ali and granddaughter of Prophet Mohammed) is said to be buried, Szanto argues that rather than a binary or a shift, mourning gatherings 'encompass both salvation and revolution' (2013: 85). By way of example, Szanto cites a group of South Asian seminary students who registered their disavowal of the Iranian political process (which saw Ahmadinejad re-elected in 2009) by cutting their foreheads with swords, a commemorative act known as *tatbir*. Through this practice, the students inscribed their objection to Khamenei's support for Ahmadinejad and liberated themselves from the Ayatollah's authority (Khamenei is opposed to *tatbir*).

In my reading, neither Deeb nor Hegland position the redemptive/revolutionary binary as definitively as Szanto suggests. Hegland (1983) notes that once the fervour of revolution had dissipated, the Husain as Intercessor/Example binary could better be understood in terms of a 'symbiotic' relationship (1983: 230). Attitudes towards previously discredited mourning rituals softened, and came to be seen by some as essential for keeping the memory of Husain alive. Similarly, although I find Deeb's choice of the terms traditional and authenticated misleading, she recognises that these differing conceptualisations of mourning exist side by side in contemporary Beirut: even in 'authenticated' versions of Ashura, notions of redemption have not been entirely negated, 'rather that the primary tone of the commemorations has been altered' (2006: 151). However, what Szanto's critique usefully points out is that it is often difficult to distinguish between 'reformed' and 'unreformed' mourning practices. This section considers the example of crying for Husain in Mombasa and demonstrates that while shedding tears is denigrated as a disputable activity in some instances (i.e. as a performance in need of reform), many experience and narrate their tears in reformist terms. In other words, reformist discourse informs and legitimates what might be seen as a 'traditional' mourning practice. This indicates

the inseparability of approaches to Husain in Mombasa, as much as the broad purchase of reformist discourse amongst Khojas.

As Syed Akbar Hyder (2006) has pointed out, remembering the suffering of Karbala is always also about remembering the events that led up to it: in other words, to commemorate Karbala is to legitimate a Shia interpretation of history following the death of Prophet Mohammed. Hyder underscores that what is being mourned is a distinct and highly politicised version of history, an understanding echoed in the terms through which many Khojas described their ritualised grieving. Sitting in Sahil's office one morning, he explained:

When you cry, people will ask "Why are you crying?" We are crying to remember those atrocities suffered by Fatima, the *Ahlul Bayt*¹⁰⁵ and all the Imams. From then until today, we are a target. There is no weapon for us today, crying is our weapon. And you get *sawab* [blessings] for crying. Imam Sadiq has written in one stanza, if 50 people cry, *jannah* [paradise] will be yours.¹⁰⁶

Sahil's commentary makes clear that crying, in his eyes, is not a passive pursuit. Crying gives expression to 1400 years of discrimination, it vivifies historical *and* contemporary persecution. Crying also has a particularly emotive agentive power: it provokes curiosity in others, it informs. This was reiterated by Nadia, the female reciter mentioned above. Looking out at the Indian Ocean from her family's breezy high-rise flat, Nadia stated, 'We cry to rectify ourselves. To know our religion and to stand up. To tell everyone: we are active Muslims. If there was one thing I would say that defines Shias is that we are active Muslims....The Sunnis are passive'. Crying, according to Nadia, is a source of self-improvement, knowledge and action, as well as a community-making practice. Malik, a man who, by his own estimation, is

¹⁰⁵ Literally 'People of the House', this term refers to the family of Prophet Mohammed.

¹⁰⁶ Throughout the month of Muharram, a large poster in the Khoja *imambargah* depicted a photograph of a child crying next to a quote attributed to Husain:

Every Mu'mim [believer], whose eyes shed tears upon the killing of Husayn ibn 'Ali and his companions, such that the tears roll down his cheeks, Allah shall accommodate him in the elevated rooms of Paradise.

Mombasa's third or fourth most successful spare parts dealer, provided a similar interpretation: 'Crying is critical to making us fresh'.

I see many parallels between the aforementioned accounts of crying and Saba Mahmood's (2005) much cited intervention in the literature on Islamic reform. Mahmood's research on the women's mosque movement in Cairo positioned repeated bodily acts – such as wearing the veil or behaving modestly – as the *markers and makers* of pious subjectivity. In addition to demonstrating the cultural and historical specificity of a desire for freedom from social conventions (exposing the liberal heart at the centre of anthropological conceptions of agency), Mahmood problematised the idea that innate desires stimulate conduct: 'action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them' (2005: 157). Explaining how she developed her modest comportment, Nama, one of the women Mahmood worked with, described that it was through wearing the veil that 'your inside learns to feel shy' (2005: 157). Similarly, for my informants in Mombasa, crying *cultivates*. And, in the aforementioned Khoja narratives, crying cultivates precisely the kind of action-oriented believer privileged in discourses of Shia reform.

Crying was also frequently positioned in relation to tropes of rationality and historical accuracy that Deeb and others have noted as critical elements of reformist discourse. One evening, Ifza and I were sitting on the floor of the *imambargah*, waiting for Ammar Nakshwani, a well-known and somewhat controversial British-Iraqi preacher hired by the Khoja *jamaat* to deliver the 2014 Muharram *majalis*, to begin the night's sermon. Ifza had expressed her intrigue in 'doing ethnography' since we were first introduced, and on this occasion asked me what I thought of the displays of mourning when I first arrived. I confessed that on my first day in the *imambargah*, I was surprised by the intensity and collective nature of grief. Ifza nodded vigorously,

Me too! I was too scared to ask about the wailing when I was little... I was ten or 11 when I had my first wail. It was a result of knowledge.

Ifza went on to explain that it was only through her *madrassa* studies (religious studies, which Khoja girls attend weekly throughout primary school) that she came to understand the history behind the grief; it was this history that enabled her to cry.

Aqilah, who I would meet for an hour on Saturday mornings in-between the two *madrasa* classes she taught, had a similar interpretation. Aqilah, who is in her sixties, is one of the most respected female Khoja religious authorities, regularly reciting *majalis* and other educational lectures in Mombasa and around the Khoja diaspora (our weekly chats were interrupted when she went on a three-month trip to Karachi, Bujumbura and Dar es Salaam). Discussing correct comportment during the *masaib* (the part of the *majlis* when Karbala is invoked), Aqilah explained,

‘You cry in order to think about what you are doing. You shouldn’t be crying crocodile tears, but your tears should turn into following the example set by the holy 14.¹⁰⁷ You shouldn’t cry thinking about the torture they suffered, but rather ask yourself, why did they accept those tortures? They should be tears of cognisance’.

In contrast to the above individuals, all of whom were firm advocates of ritualised grieving, Leila and Hayat, close friends in their twenties, often promulgated what at first blush seems to fit closely with Deeb’s description of ‘authenticated’ approaches to crying. Under the glare of Hayat’s garishly lit sitting room one evening, Leila proclaimed, ‘Many people here cry without reflection’. ‘Yup’, agreed Hayat, ‘all they want is *josh!* [fervour, ardour, zeal]’. This set us off laughing. ‘The theatre’, Hayat continues, ‘it’s just too much’. Leila points me to Ayatollah Motahhari’s book, *Misconceptions of Ashura*, in which the Iranian cleric, killed during the Revolution, ridicules the practice whereby *alims* [Islamic scholars and preachers]¹⁰⁸ embellish the history of Karbala just to make people cry. Although both are careful to maintain the comportment of grief during this part of the *majlis* (by looking down, head in hands), Leila admits that she’s increasingly annoyed by the mournful theatrics; Hayat jokes that she sometimes uses the *masaib* to take a nap.

These criticisms do not prevent Leila from reminding us, ‘Crying is highly encouraged in Islam’. Turning to me she suggests,

¹⁰⁷ This grouping, often referred to as the 14 Infallibles within Shia Islam, includes the Prophet Mohammed, his daughter Fatima-Zahra and the 12 Imams.

¹⁰⁸ The plural form of *alim* in Arabic is *ulama*, a term I did not hear amongst my informants in Mombasa.

Crying is a sign of connectedness. If you're unable to cry, it's a sign that you've sinned a lot, that you're not connected. If the truth is apparent in front of you, will you stand up for it? How will change ever come if you don't? That's why we cry. Because we fail in so many ways. The point is to introspect: what are you doing to stand up for truth?

Leila, happy to jest 'inappropriate' outpourings of grief in some instances, continues to see crying as an instigator for action. The interlocutors I cited earlier would never criticise crying, yet they valorise it in similar terms: as a transformative act, steeped in knowledge and political potential. This section has sought to highlight the ways in which global discourses of Shia reform find echoes in perceptions of commemorative grief in Mombasa, whether or not they lead to a rejection or modification of mourning practices. The following considers how approaches to mourning rituals are also in a constant dialogue with wider (i.e. non-Shia) reformist discourses at the coast.

Negotiating *bid'a* in Mombasa

Islamic reformism emerged resurgent in Kenya in the 1920s, but has been particularly prominent – and possibly dominant – since the 1980s (Kresse 2007b), a product of increased Arabian investment in mosques and *madrasas*, coupled with the growing prominence of graduates from Middle Eastern universities amongst the city's religious elite (i.e. Kenyans returned from funded Islamic study abroad) (Bakari 1995b). Although variegated in terms of doctrinal background, funding sources and agendas, reformists are commonly glossed as 'Wahhabis' (an appellation I follow here) and imagined by their others as a group, united by their 'rejection of a wide range of practices... as unacceptable religious innovation (*bid'a*)' (Kresse 2007b: 230). Amongst other things, the *bid'a* label has been used to denounce *maulidi* commemorations for the Prophet's birthday, the role of customary healers (*waganga*), as well as the significance of *local* moon sightings (with implications for the start and end of Ramadhan). As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, a straightforward dichotomy between reformists and non-reformists does not stand up to ethnographic scrutiny: not only are reformist positions far more

heterogeneous than the ‘Wahhabi’ label allows, many allegedly ‘customary’ practices encompass histories that trouble this categorisation. Rüdiger Seesemann (2006) demonstrates, as one example, that contemporary *maulidi* commemorations, often dismissed as *bid’a* and held up as emblematic of the ‘traditional’, Sufi-inspired, ‘African’ or ‘Swahili’ Islam imagined as indigenous to the coast, are in fact a 20th century import from the Arabian peninsula. Recognising the limitations of the dichotomy does not, however, detract from its significance in East Africa. So embedded is this division, Kresse writes,

...one can argue that *the debate on maulidi* – i.e. whether, and in which ways, the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday is permissible and recommendable – in everyday life is itself a characteristic feature of Islam along the Swahili coast (2006: 210, emphasis original).

As Kresse (2009) has elucidated elsewhere, this assertion can be expanded well beyond discourses pertaining to the Prophet’s birthday: whatever one’s stance, the debate around *bid’a* is an integral aspect of Muslim life in Mombasa.

Muharram commemorations are very much part of this discussion. Kresse (2007b) traces oppositional approaches to Muharram that took place in 2003. At the start of the month an ‘Open letter to the preachers and imams of the *sunna*’ (Kresse 2007b: 247) circulated in pamphlet form in Mombasa, exhorting readers not to engage in Muharram commemorations of any form. Asserting that such activities were *bid’a*, the letter also stated that many accusations directed at Yazid, commander-in-chief against Husain at the Battle of Karbala, were outright lies. The communication was addressed to adherents of the *sunna* – i.e. people who follow the sayings and deeds of the Prophet – and signed ‘Ahlul Tawheed’ (Kresse 2007b: 247) – i.e. people who believe in the oneness of god. This, Kresse asserts, is representative of the way in which Wahhabis position themselves as bearers of these two central pillars of Islamic faith, implying that those not in their camp are failing to comply with the core principles of Islam. No less universalising, however, were the written and oral responses to this pamphlet provided by Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, one of Mombasa’s most eminent Muslim scholars, who retains a prominent, if controversial, status

despite his conversion to Shia Islam in the 1980s.¹⁰⁹ Kresse examines how Abdilahi, through pamphlets and a series of lectures, sought to employ two key rhetorical modes to delegitimise the Wahhabi position. Abdilahi demonstrated the breadth of opposition to Yazid's behaviour within Islamic scholarship, particularly citing well known Swahili champions of reform, while at the same time arguing that the details of Yazid's behaviour appeared to directly contradict the principles of Islam. By invoking Sheikh Farsy and other local reformists, Abdilahi sought to externalise the Wahhabis,

...isolating and alienating [them] from the social community of local Muslims, by showing how they actually seem to think and act counter to established common standards of what it means to be properly "Muslim" or "Islamic" (Kresse 2007b: 248).

Through his lectures, Abdilahi emphasised the unity and solidarity amongst Muslims at the coast – be they Sunni or Shia, reformist or otherwise – and the otherness of Wahhabi doctrine.

While Kresse's work is focussed on the discourses of prominent scholars, there is substantial overlap with the rhetorical strategies employed by my informants. Echoing Abdilahi were frequent affirmations of solidarity amongst Muslims at the coast, with Wahhabis painted as an exception to this long-standing rule. During a quiet moment with Ruqaya, a Swahili Ithna-Asheri who worked as a caretaker at the Khoja *imambargah*, she told me, 'The difference between Sunni and Shia is not much – just praying and a few things like that. But the difference between Shia and Wahhabis is very big'. When I asked her to elaborate she explained that Wahhabis would never use a *turbah*, a clay disk (ideally made from the soil of Karbala) mandatory for the performance of Shia prayer, nor do they have Imams. 'They say that we commit *shirk* [idolatry]. It's not Sunnis but Wahhabis that say that we worship these things'. Although the examples Ruqaya provides could equally

¹⁰⁹ Sheikh Abdilahi, who comes from a long line of Sunni preachers, describes himself as turning increasingly towards Shiism from the late 1960s, publicly proclaiming his conversion while living in Nairobi in the 1980s (Kresse 2007a). His conversion narrative does not touch on the Bilal Muslim Mission established by Khojas.

distinguish Shias from Sunnis more generally, for her what is important is the Wahhabi interpretation of these differences. Sunnis (non-Wahhabis), in Ruqaya's estimation, *know* that Shias are not idol worshipers; Wahhabis possess no such knowledge.

Time and again, Wahhabis were exculpated for introducing division at the coast. Hafiz, an erudite elderly gentleman with a deep appreciation for Urdu poetry, situated the decline of Asian Sunni participation in Muharram celebrations explicitly with Wahhabi intervention. 'The Memons, Bhadala, Kokni, they all used to have Muharram. Then, after the oil boom, Sunni participation went down. That was when propagation by the Wahhabis started'. Hafiz notes that a similar wedge has emerged between Khojas and their Shafii brethren:

It's been a shock to us in Mombasa. We had excellent relations with Shafii Muslims. But the Wahhabis are coming now, spreading anti-Shia propaganda. There are one or two mosques here that are openly talking against us. It's worrying, the extent of the madness.

Finally, in the same manner that Abdilahi juxtaposes Yazid's barbarism with the principles of Islam (thus calling into question the latter's faith), a popular strand of public commentary amongst my informants involved outlining the contradictions of the Wahhabi position on *bid'a*. As Sahil asserted on another occasion,

Wahhabis kill other Muslims because they say we have deviated. They are saying we are all doing *bid'a*, innovating things. But Saudis go to Frankfurt for a night of clubbing, come back, take a shower and pray. They are very narrow-minded people and have been so since the time of the Prophet. Even the Prophet said that the horns of Satan will come from Najd.

'That's in Saudi Arabia', he added pointedly. Here, the interchangeability of Wahhabis and Saudis emphasises adherents as distant others who unfairly attack a common 'we', composed of coastal Muslims. At the same time, these discourses imply that the Wahhabi stance on *bid'a* is illegitimate because of their alleged proclivity for other activities considered by many in Mombasa as *haram* (the music and consumption of alcohol associated with clubbing being particularly referenced

here). This position is fortified through references to Wahhabis' allegedly insular and demonic temperament, grounded above by Sahil in the annals of Islamic history.

A similar mode of rhetoric frequently circulated via WhatsApp. One day, I received a forwarded message from Sushaila, a woman originally from the *jamaat* in Dar es Salaam, explaining that Saudi Arabia celebrated its 83rd national day with a cake so large that it had entered the Guinness Book of World Records; although there was no photographic accompaniment, the cake was said to be decorated with 'a huge Saudi emblem and a photo-print of the first monarch of Saudi, King Abdul-Aziz. But', the text continued, 'to them, to celebrate Maulidi, the birth of the Prophet of Islam (s) is haram or bida'ah'.¹¹⁰ The gist of the message was clear: the Saudis could not have their cake and eat it too. How could this extravagant anniversary celebration, complete with the veneration of a particular mortal personality, be acceptable Muslim practice while commemorations honouring the Prophet were not? Describing the cake to me the following day, Aqilah shook her head in disbelief, 'Saudis have forgotten god in favour of a king'.

Such sentiments find material form within the Khoja *imambargah*. Illuminated by four spotlights, a large framed photograph next to the pulpit at the front of the men's hall (where ladies' Friday *majalis* are held) portrays a handful of Khoja men praying at the desecrated graves of Jannat al-Baqi. Destroyed by King Ibn Saud¹¹¹ in 1926 on the grounds that the visiting of such sites is prohibited in Islam, the cemetery of Jannat al-Baqi, located in Medina, once contained the graves of many of Prophet Mohammed's relatives and companions. That photographic evidence of its destruction is displayed so prominently within the *imambargah* is a testament to the significance of difference vis-à-vis Wahhabis within Khoja Islam.

While each of the above cited interventions denigrate Wahhabism, they also demonstrate an intimate knowledge of Wahhabi critiques of Shia and local Muslim practices. The *bid'a* debate has profound effects on how Shias (and others) view their own practices; in some instances it also structures the rationale behind the need to change them. An example of this relates to *zanjir*, the form of self-flagellation

¹¹⁰ One of the numerous alternative spellings for *bid'a*.

¹¹¹ Ibn Saud, known in the Arab world as Abdulaziz, was the founding monarch of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

mentioned above, wherein male Shia mourners whip themselves using a flail ending in metal blades. A common and highly valorised manner of mourning Husain in some parts of the world, *zanjir* has also been a controversial element of Shia practice – and a focus of Shia reformism – since the 1920s, with the publication of Lebanese cleric Mushin al-Amin al-Amili’s robust critique of the practice (Ende 1978; Pinault 2001). Echoing Ali Naqi’s emphasis on the need to reach out to other Muslims (Jones 2011), al-Amili sought to improve the ability of his coreligionists to proselytise by advocating the abandonment of what he saw as some of the more disturbing aspects of mourning rituals. However, as Deeb (2006) points out, debates around *zanjir* were confined to the seminaries and writings of religious scholars (in places like Jabal Amil, Damascus and Najaf) until the 1980s. This changed when Khomeini made his disapproval clear shortly before his death in 1989, and the practice was declared *haram* in Khamenei’s 1994 *fatwa*. Various Lebanese clerics, as well as Hizbullah, soon followed suit. Despite disapproval and unease around *zanjir* amongst many Shia and Shia *maraji* (eminent clerics), the practice remains common (if much debated) in various locales, including parts of Beirut (Deeb 2006), Peshawar (Hegland 1998) and Hyderabad (Ruffle 2014).

In contrast to the aforementioned contexts where self-flagellators take to the streets in long and bloody public processions, *zanjir* in Mombasa has always been a private affair. After the *majlis* on the night of Ashura each year, Khoja men who choose to perform *zanjir* congregate in the enclosed courtyard in front of the men’s section of the *imambargah*. Women, who remain upstairs in the ladies’ section, are not privy to this sight (although the clang of blades and shouts of ‘*Ya Husain*’ can be heard), nor is the wider public. That this has always been the case is indicative of the minority position of Shias and Asians in Mombasa. While this element of *zanjir* has remained consistent, the popularity of the practice has declined significantly in recent years. Raza, actively involved in the *jamaat*’s Young Men’s Union and his family’s mango export business, described the demise of *zanjir* in the following terms.

Everybody does *matam* [ritualised breast-beating]. But *zanjir*... Anything that portrays a bad picture of Islam is slowly diminishing. It’s too easy for others to attack as *bid’a*. It’s just tradition but it makes us cold targets for Wahhabis.

In Raza's estimation, *zanjir* is both fodder for global Islamophobia and a threat to Shia moral and physical integrity. He continued by explaining its waning prevalence in Mombasa:

Now only about 20 percent do it. Before it was 100 percent. I've never done it, because I'm afraid of blood. As illiteracy declines, so does *zanjir*... But I don't want to hurt others by talking about mosque activities. Everyone has their own ideas.

Hayat was more categorical in her rejection. She welcomed opposition to *zanjir* as expressed by various Lebanese and Iranian clerics, and found Ayatollah al-Sistani's position on the matter unsatisfactory:

Zanjir, for me, is a no-no. Al-Sistani has been too diplomatic about it. He hasn't explicitly rejected or accepted it. On the other hand, Fadlallah [a prominent Lebanese *marja* who died in 2010] and Khamenei have both strongly stated that it is not allowed. I find it barbaric and nonsense. I cannot defend it against [accusations of] *bid'a*. The people doing it put the rest of us at risk, you're just asking for trouble from Wahhabis. We're always going to be [seen as] the "crazy Shia" as long as *zanjir* is around. I'd like Sistani to have a clear position on it.¹¹²

Hayat's and Raza's discourses mirror a long history of Shia reformists' emphasis on image and outreach: phasing out *zanjir* is framed in terms of a Shia public relations project, a means to improve perceptions of Shias held by other Muslims and non-Muslims alike. At the same time, both express their concern for the practice in terms of *bid'a*. Although Raza is more cautious, both see *zanjir* as particularly susceptible to accusations of undue innovation. Moreover, it is their appreciation of Wahhabi opposition to the practice that make it a necessary object of reform: *zanjir*, by association, threatens the bodily and moral integrity of a wider Shia public, both locally and globally. Although no Shia I knew had faced physical assaults in Mombasa, many believed this was only a matter of time. As Raza explained to me,

¹¹² Leila took a different view. For her, al-Sistani's position was clear: 'If it's prohibited to do anything to harm the image of Islam, then of course you should not be participating in *zanjir*. He doesn't need to say it'.

‘If a Wahhabi sheds the blood of a Shia, they believe he goes straight to *jannah* [paradise]. So the Shia will be the first target’.

Here I should note that perceptions around *zanjir* and its effects were far from uniform. Khadija, a graphic designer, had a very different stance to the one expressed by Raza and Hayat. Born and raised in Bujumbura, her brothers, who still live there, are known for their *zanjir* prowess. While helping her toddler negotiate a meal of rice and dhal that we had been served after *majlis* she argued,

All this rubbish around *bid’a* – it’s only Wahhabis that say that, not any other Sunnis. *Zanjir* is our culture. As long as it is not harming anyone else, what’s the problem? It’s only showing love for Husain.

Khadija went onto explain the dangers of accepting such narratives. ‘Look at *maulidi*, it’s being played down now’, she noted, referring to the fact that celebrations for the Prophet’s birthday are more subdued and less numerous than they used to be (although the annual procession through town is still a major event). ‘This is a big mistake. You can’t pander to these *bid’a* people. It makes others think they [i.e. Wahhabis] are right’. For Khadija, responding to *bid’a* accusations ultimately strengthens Wahhabi dominance. In her reading, *zanjir* is a source of heritage, as well as a bulwark against Wahhabi power, and meritorious of protection on both counts. Although she differs from Raza and Hayat, Khadija’s account further emphasises *bid’a* as a social force in Mombasa, something that affects the way some people view their own practices, even if they reject the notion itself.

Intersections of reform and insecurity

Recognising the multiplicity of stances on reform, what the above also makes clear is its entanglement with other issues in Mombasa. I want to extend these comments by considering concerns about Wahhabis in contemporary Mombasa in terms of the wider temporal and geographical frames from which my informants persistently drew. In a provocative contribution written shortly after 9/11, Engseng Ho (2004: 210) assesses the history of encounter between Western maritime empires and Muslim societies around the Indian Ocean from the perspective of ‘the other boat’.

Tracing a discursive pattern that links the 16th century jurist al-Malibari to Osama bin Laden, Ho examines how Hadrami personalities around the Indian Ocean have, since the earliest days of Portuguese expansion, sought to mobilise Muslim opposition to Western domination by internationalising the site of struggle. ‘Geography’, Ho writes, ‘is key here. Peoples native to old diasporas have geographical sensibilities as large as whole empires; possessed of folklore, ritual and literature, their cultural memories reach back even further’ (2004: 241). Although distancing himself from Huntington’s (1996) infamous clash of civilisations thesis, Ho asserts that contemporary Indian Ocean imaginaries are usefully conceived of as involving ‘geographical equal[s]’, pitting the US, an ‘empire without colonies’, against a Muslim diaspora which has long envisaged its victimisation in expansive terms (2004: 241, 237).

Cognisant of the homogenising pitfalls implicit in this argument, the scopic geographies of which Ho speaks nevertheless provide a useful framework for understanding contemporary debates around *bid’a* in Mombasa. Concerns about the Wahhabis’ reformist agenda cannot be disentangled from a wider geopolitics of insecurity, or from the particularities of Shia religious history. Khojas, like many other Shia Muslims in the current historical moment, imagine themselves as the progeny of 1400 years of victimisation, succinctly described by David Pinault as a ‘paradigm of persecution’ (1992: 56). Beyond the frequent retelling of the martyrdom of Shia Imams since the time of the Prophet, more contemporary events – from Netanyahu’s speeches against Iran at the UN to the ‘accidental’ trampling of Shias at Mecca in 2014 – are articulated within a framework of persistent attack. As Akbar, whose permanently furrowed unibrow seemed to embody something of this anxiety explained,

Everything that is happening in the world at the moment is against the Shia.
Everything that is happening in the Middle East. In Bahrain. In Iraq. In Syria.
Even Kenya. Here the Wahhabis are coming for us. Because we are the truth.

The trope of persecution is often coupled with notions of Shia exceptionalism in this manner; Shia are thought to be targeted because their enemies know they are on the right path.

In Mombasa, this expansive geographic and temporal frame for understanding Shia relations with others is often translated into a vocabulary of global terror. This was made apparent one evening when I was accused of secretly recording a *majlis* in the women's section of the Khoja *imambargah*. When the device in question was eventually established as an umbrella rather than a camera, Yasmine, a leading figure within the Zainabiyya Ladies' Committee explained matter-of-factly,

We're never going to open up to you. It's a shame you came at this time. Westgate, the terrorist attacks, we're not going to trust anyone because it's not safe now. You've seen the security downstairs.

Yasmine refers here to the three female security guards installed outside the *imambargah* for the first time a matter of days ago, and concludes her commentary with a definitive, 'This place is not safe'. This framing of local occurrences in terms of the wider geopolitics of the region, and within a language influenced by the long-standing 'war on terror' is by no means unique to Khojas. Constance Smith (2015: 135) traces similar patterns of what she terms a 'linguistic scaling up' amongst residents of Kaloleni, a housing estate in Nairobi. Discussing a 2014 shoot-out between individuals involved in a nearby robbery and the police, Kalolenians described being 'held hostage for several hours' and that those involved were 'just terrorists' (Smith 2015: 140, 133) – such articulations were made often, both in speech and online. Even if these iterations garner little attention from the Kenyan state, Smith argues that framing local violence in the language of 'terror' adds legitimacy to Kalolenian experiences of insecurity, at the very least from the estate's diaspora. Duncan Omanga's (2014) analysis of the shifting figure of Osama bin Laden within Kenyan editorial cartoons mirrors this: although the nature of the threat posed by bin Laden is shown to change over time, Kenya is pictorially positioned at the centre of the global 'war on terror' of which bin Laden was once principal icon. As these examples show, 'terror' is very much alive in the Kenyan imagination, a theme we return to in the two following chapters.

Khojas in Mombasa draw frequently, and often simultaneously, on these expansive and shifting temporal and geographic scales. Anxieties about how Shia practice is viewed by reformists is linked to a fear of attack which pertains both to Shia history and contemporary regional insecurity. Historical narratives of persecution are used to

frame rising tensions locally, and the historical event of Karbala is itself frequently retold in terms of global discourses of insecurity: Yazid, commander-in-chief against Husain during the Battle, was often described to me as a ‘terrorist’.

Commemorating Karbala, moreover, was also presented as a way of supporting government efforts to prevent the threat of terrorism. As reported in the national press, Khojas and other Kenyan Shias have long urged ruling elites to designate Ashura as a public holiday, this would allow Muslims a day off to preach peace and non-violence amongst their compatriots.¹¹³ As these examples ascertain, there is much slippage between reform and insecurity, religion and nation, past and present, Mombasa and Karbala.

Blood donation in Mombasa

The recent move to hold a blood donation drive during Muharram in Mombasa should be understood in relation to these overlapping themes. Examining donors’ narratives, this section considers the ways in which giving blood is mobilised to respond to concerns related to ‘active’ worship, innovation and insecurity, outlined above, bringing together notions of piety, nation and hierarchies of value defined by productivity. We start by returning to Copeman’s (2009a, 2009b) distinction between centripetal and centrifugal modes of gifting, as well as centripetal and centrifugal modes of blood donation, which I find productive for thinking about the significance of the direction of flow in shaping the meanings ascribed to blood in the context of Muharram rituals.¹¹⁴ Writing on Beirut, Deeb (2006) notes, that while self-injurious *latam* (or ‘hitting *hydar*’ as *zanjir* is known in Lebanon) is still practiced in parts of the city, it is critiqued by others as backward and quietist:

¹¹³ See the article by G. Bocha: ‘Shia Muslims in Mombasa mark Ashura’. *Daily Nation*, 12 October 2016 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/mombasa/Shia-Muslims-in-Mombasa-mark-Ashura/1954178-3414458-133iv1z/index.html>, accessed 23 August 2017).

¹¹⁴ While a comparison between Hindu and Shia discourses of reform is beyond the scope of this thesis, I see important parallels between the focus on ‘active’, socially oriented worship and the associated reconceptualisation of soteriology outlined by Copeman and the scholars of Shia reform cited here.

...the association of blood with quietism may seem contradictory *but violence is directed at the self, not outwards*, implying a personal expression of grief, an internal struggle with regret, and the potential for individual salvation, rather than collective political or social action (2006: 150, emphasis added).

Hizbullah and other advocates of 'authenticated' Shiism have encouraged 'those who feel the need to shed blood during Ashura to do so for the community good' (Deeb 2006: 135): blood donation drives have been part of the Muharram landscape in Beirut for a number of years, producing large surpluses during the month when Karbala commemorations are at their peak.

The distinction between *zanjir* and blood donation in Mombasa was often relayed to me in similar terms. 'People do [*zanjir*] to honour Husain, to honour his sacrifice and show their devotion. But what good does it do?' Farida asked me. She continued,

I've heard many stories, that people don't feel any pain when they're doing *zanjir* [such is their devotion]. But you cry and bleed and then what? It's not enough. You have to go beyond yourself; this is the way of Husain.

Here, *zanjir* – drawing one's own blood in a vivid display of devotion to Husain – is critiqued because of its individually-oriented focus and lack of worldly utility. Moreover, in the assessments of *zanjir* provided by Hayat and Raza above, practitioners were portrayed as bordering on selfish for failing to consider the implications of their actions for a broader Shia populace. The latter's narratives draw on a long-standing association between outpourings of blood – whether intentional or accidental – and danger (Carsten 2013), in this case threatening the reputation, and possibly the life, of Shias.

These negative connotations should not be read outside of the relationship between *zanjir* and constructions of class distinction in Mombasa and beyond. Although careful to state that *zanjir* was a matter of personal choice, Raza's commentary, relayed above, unambiguously associated the practice with the less well educated, a position echoed by many. As Leila intoned one afternoon, 'It's usually not the people who are the most respected who do it'. Leila went on to tell me of her *zanjir* traumas from a childhood in Karachi.

As a kid I was dragged onto the streets to watch [Muharram processions involving *zanjir*] by my relatives. I always hated it. All that blood, it makes no sense to me. Even here [in Mombasa], I feel squeamish just hearing the noise [of men performing *zanjir*] on Ashura. But at least I can't see it.

In this narrative, Leila consigns *zanjir* to the backwater of South Asian traditionalism. Her comments are but one example of the way in which the Subcontinent is often evoked by Khojas (and Asians more generally), as the location of all things 'backward', characterised by poverty and an adherence to less accurate versions of Islam. *Zanjir* performances in Mombasa, though still problematic in Leila's eyes, at least do not occupy public space in the way they do in Karachi.

Blood donation is not tainted with any of these associations. In the same way that *zanjir* – self-centred bloodletting – is portrayed by some as a lower class pursuit, blood donation has become a marker of social mobility within the Khoja diaspora. Driving home from the *imambargah* one evening, Sushaila recounted her frustration in trying to convince community elders to hold a blood donation drive in Mombasa.

My family has been doing it in Dar for years; it's done by Shia communities all over the place. Whenever I tried to propose it, the elders were like, "Ha, ok, we'll try". It's only now that things are finally changing.

With this comment, Sushaila employs donation as a marker of distinction between the Khoja *jamaats* in Dar es Salaam and Mombasa: Dar is significantly larger and widely imagined as more progressive than the proudly conservative *jamaat* in coastal Kenya. Moreover, as mentioned above, reports of blood donation drives are posted on the Africa Federation's website, a means through which *jamaats* present themselves to each other; these accounts are careful to highlight the medicalised orderliness of the procedure. Sharing in the experience of donation, as well as sharing photographic evidence – as Mubina did in sending a picture of one donating daughter to another, whose *jamaat* in Toronto was also holding a blood drive – is another prong in a long history of Muharram commemorations as productive sites for the imagination of community. At the same time, donating is a way in which Khojas communicate their 'civic enlightenment' (Harrington forthcoming) to each other. Although they would never explicitly boast (seeking worldly recognition is

widely disapproved of), donors nevertheless do communicate their act to others, forming ideas and judgements about who does and does not donate, in terms of both geographical areas (such as South Asia) and specific *jamaats*. In this sense, although blood is donated anonymously, the performance of donating is not.

Blood donation was frequently evoked as being in line with the example set by Husain, mirroring the emphasis on emulation (over mourning) described by Hegland (1983), Deeb (2006) and Jones (2015). Imaginaries of centrifugal flow were central to this understanding. At the evening *majlis* following the blood donation drive described earlier, I chatted with Zahra and Zainab, friends in their mid-30s, about the significance of the morning's events. Zainab explained,

Husain shed his blood for all humanity. Today we gave our blood for the humanity of Kenya. Of course, you cannot even begin to compare his sacrifice with what we did today. But it's a small gesture.

Zahra agreed:

Donating [blood] is a small thing. In some ways it's nothing. But maybe it will save even one life. Even in the Quran, it explains that if you save one life, it's as if you've saved the whole of mankind.¹¹⁵

What Zainab and Zahra valued about blood donation was its infinite *potential* reach, which links Husain's and their own (decidedly lesser) sacrifice. Unlike amongst Copeman's (2009a) Indian informants, Zahra and Zainab were not concerned with ethnic or religious enumeration: they did not dwell on the possible Swahili, Kikuyu, Christian or Hindu recipients of their blood. Rather than the capacity of blood to construct unity in diversity, they emphasised the universality constructed through a

¹¹⁵ Here Zahra is referencing Surah al-Ma'idah (5:32): 'And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely'. Zahra and Zainab's discourses are reiterated on the website of the Africa Federation, the regional body that links Khoja Ithna-Asheri *jamaats* on the continent. The Federation's general information page about blood donation concludes with a large black and red banner that reads, 'Donate your Blood for a reason, Let the reason be to save life in tribute to the Great Martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Husain (AS), he sacrificed his life for Humanity'. See the Africa Federation website: 'Health bulletin – blood donation'. (available online: <http://www.africafederation.org/boards/education/education-team/1263-health-bulletin-blood-donation>, accessed 23 August 2017).

single donation. Their imagined recipients – like Husain’s – are members of humanity. Although different to the Indian case, in both instances it is the indiscriminate nature of blood donation – its capacity to reach all, whether defined in the specific or the general – that is crucial. This also relates to the anonymity of donation: in Mombasa it is because blood’s recipients are not known that a generalised ‘humanity’ can be imagined as beneficiary.

Religion and nation often emerged as entangled within these discourses of donation. Sipping one of the Azam Colas we’d been given as *fateha*¹¹⁶ following a morning *majlis*, I asked Maalia, who had helped coordinate the blood donation, whether she had also given blood. She had, and presented her experience within a national topology of charity.

You know, giving food to Africans. That’s what Asians do. We have to stop this mentality. We have to stop producing the culture of dependence. Giving blood is different.

Rabaab, a retired teacher, interjected, ‘Food is just one meal. Blood is a life’. ‘So giving blood is better than giving food?’ I probe. Latifah’s response is cautionary:

I’m not saying that giving food is bad. There is so much poverty in Kenya, so many are in need of a good meal. But it’s about figuring out how best to stand up to injustice. We can only strive to follow Husain.

‘So blood donation is a way of standing up to injustice?’ I seek further clarification.

Of course. People who need blood are sick or injured. These things happen according to god’s will. But the medical care in a place like Kenya – it’s not sufficient. People die because of lack of money, lack of medicines, lack of blood. Donating is just a drop in the ocean. Fighting injustice has to become part of your life. The struggle is endless.

¹¹⁶ *Fateha* refers to the votive foodstuffs distributed after religious functions, which are believed to be imbued with curative properties and spiritual sustenance due to their exposure to a place of worship. *Fateha* is sought after for the sick, thought to redirect the wayward and enjoyed by all as a regular boost to religious resolve. Items given as *fateha* are never discarded (see Wellman 2017 for similar practices relating to votive foods in Iran).

In one of the large Muharram murals reproduced in the opening vignette of this chapter (Fig. 33, p.155), Husain's suffering is visually paired with contemporary bloodshed in a variety of contexts around the world, a number of which are not associated with violence against Muslims, let alone Shias. Blood in this image evokes not just Karbala, but human suffering everywhere. Rabaab and Maalia's discussion on blood donation mimics this collapsing of scales between past and present, Karbala and Kenya; donation becomes another of the myriad ways in which the Karbala paradigm is globalised (Hyder 2006). As pointed out in numerous contexts, Karbala is a prism for understanding the world, and a source of inspiration for shaping it.

Moreover, as in India (Copeman 2009b), it is blood's productivity and durability – contrasted to the ephemeral nature of food donations – that is valorised. Maalia and Rabaab imagine blood donation as mimicking Husain's attention to injustice, enabling them to better emulate the third Imam *at the same time* as redefine their position as Asians in relation to the state. In other words, it is in part via Karbala that Khojas reconceptualise their place in the Kenyan nation. Blood donation helps Khojas recast themselves as a different breed of Asian: moving beyond what is now seen as the less useful charity of the past towards a more enlightened donating future. Blood becomes part of the way in which Khojas imagine themselves as contributors to *sustainable* national development, rather than simply givers of charity. The national benefits of blood donation were emphasised in the short account of the day written by the *jamaat's* Medical Board and circulated on the Africa Federation's website. The write-up emphasises the drive's success as a product of the collaboration between the Jaffery Medical Centre (a health clinic located in Old Town next to the Hyderi *imambargah* and associated with the Khoja *jamaat*) and the National Blood Transfusion Service, and concludes, 'Since the National Blood Bank is perpetually short of blood, this gesture by Jaffery Medical Centre and the Community at large was well appreciated by the National Blood Transfusion Services'.¹¹⁷ Unlike the Somali ambassador cited by Harrington (forthcoming),

¹¹⁷ See the Africa Federation website: 'Mombasa Jaffery Medical Centre – blood donation to commemorate Ashura'. (available online: <http://www.africafederation.org/jamaats/kenya/mombasa/1044-mombasa-jaffery-medical-centre-blood-donation-to-commemorate-ashura>, accessed 23 August 2017).

Khojas did not seek to publicise their blood donation beyond the regional *jamaat* website. But this emphasis on national contribution – and its demonstration to diasporic peers – is suggestive of on-going conversations about community-state relations amongst Khojas. If Husain has long been evoked as inspiration for (regime) change in various contexts, in 21st Mombasa Karbala becomes a metaphor for a different mode of civic engagement. This has parallels with the Jain donors cited by Harrington (forthcoming), although perhaps in addition to wanting to be seen as patriots by others, Khojas deploy donation as a means to see themselves as more productive citizens.

While the above points to an intertwining of Karbala and contemporary political concerns, it is in some ways blood donation's imagined status as an *apolitical act* that gives it its social value amongst Khojas. In contrast to the controversial status of *zanjir* – of debatable soteriological use, susceptible to accusations of *bid'a* and evocative of the 'crazy Shia' – donating is not burdened with such associations. It is what Copeman has described as blood donation's 'unambiguous... social utility' (2009b: 69) that underpins its 'depoliticised' image: the value of the act cannot be contested. Asking Aqilah about the merits of blood donation in comparison to *zanjir*, she explained, 'There are too many, always looking to attack us. But what can they say against giving blood?' Blood donation is presented here as a means to ameliorate the image of Shias, unlike many other practices which often exacerbate tensions with their others. This confidence was reflected in the staging of the donation drive: unlike *zanjir*, done at night in an internal courtyard, the drive was a (quasi) public event, with the gazebos placed in the middle of the Khoja car park, in full view of passers-by. Although the car park is in a relatively quiet part of the city – the narrowness and labyrinthine nature of the streets means that most vehicles avoid it – it is nevertheless located on one of Old Town's main roads, with a steady stream of pedestrians, pushcart vendors, tuk tuks and the odd car. Moreover, while the women's gazebo was screened off in order to allow for the removal of headscarves, the men's was wide open and members of the public were welcome to donate (a number of people from the wider Old Town community were reported to have done so in the aforementioned event write-up).

Blood donation in Mombasa has been promoted in part due to the growing prominence of the Who Is Hussain organisation within the Khoja diaspora. The domain name *whoishussain.org* is painted below the murals that coloured the *imambargah* car park; the web address also appears on many of the placards – each telling of Husain’s contribution to humanity in universal terms – that decorate the Khoja mosque during the month of Muharram and that are carried by men during the Ashura *juloos*, a public procession through town.¹¹⁸ The organisation supports a global community of representatives who ‘... aim to inspire people through the timeless example of Husain and bring positive change in the world we live in’, principally through blood donation drives, soup kitchens and the provision of ‘campaign resources’ (such as the aforementioned placards).¹¹⁹ On its website, the youth from various communities across London that started the organisation in 2012, stress ‘that we are *apolitical, areligious and a-everything else* that should divide us from one another!’ (emphasis added).¹²⁰ Blood donation emerges as an optimal means ‘to live up to the values inspired by Husain’, as well as support the organisation’s universalising goals.¹²¹

Conclusion: from outpouring to containment

This chapter has analysed the introduction of a Muharram blood donation drive in Mombasa, a context shaped by multiple and entangled discourses of Islamic reform. These discourses have been shown to influence how Khojas present and experience Karbala mourning rituals, including in cases where reformist logic is rejected, thus

¹¹⁸ This procession, which occurs in the morning of Ashura, involves hundreds of Ithna-Asheris of various backgrounds, and brings Mombasa’s main arteries to a standstill. Such processions form an important element of the Muharram literature (Korom 2003; Vahed 2002).

¹¹⁹ See the Who is Hussain website: ‘About us’. (available online: <https://whoishussain.org/the-organisation/about-us/>, accessed 23 August 2017).

¹²⁰ See the Who is Hussain website: ‘About us’. (available online: <https://whoishussain.org/the-organisation/about-us/>, accessed 23 August 2017).

¹²¹ See the Who is Hussain website: ‘Save a life...give blood’. 2013 (available online: <https://whoishussain.org/save-life-give-blood/>, accessed 23 August 2017). Who Is Hussain is one of a number of organisations that link Karbala and blood donation; the UK-based Imam Hussain Blood Donation Campaign, which started in 2006, is another example.

illustrating the difficulty of separating what counts as reform and what does not. Reform has emerged as a source of both aspiration and anxiety. Engaging with reformist challenges to ritual practice has, for Khojas and others in Mombasa, become ever more imperative in recent years because of the perceived growth of sectarianism and anti-Shia sentiment in the city, themselves seen as effects of the entrenchment of Wahhabi Islam. Unease pertaining to Muslim division and geopolitical insecurity are occurring at the same time as on-going debates about the place of Khojas as Asians within the nation state.

Blood donation, I have demonstrated, is imagined as a *productive* response to these intersecting concerns. Unlike self-centred forms of commemoration such as *zanjir*, blood donation is valorised for its useful, worldly purpose that allows Khojas to better *emulate* Husain and his focus on humanity and injustice, central goals of Shia reform. By shifting attention away from the body of the self-flagellator, blood donation is imagined to ameliorate the image of Shias as a collective, locally and globally, and perhaps reduce the risks they face at the hands of others, particularly ‘Wahhabis’, in a moment of pronounced fears about regional insecurity. Giving blood is also seen to enhance their standing in relation to other Shia (such as those on the Subcontinent), and other Khojas (such as those in Dar). Moreover, the gift of blood is positioned as a sustainable one, a mechanism for crafting new kinds of relations between Khojas and their compatriots. In sum, giving blood underpins an ethical self-fashioning that facilitates Khoja constructions of themselves as ‘progressive’ Shias, Muslims, Kenyans and members of a particular *jamaat*.

In her reflections on the anthropology of blood, Janet Carsten (2013) positions blood’s uniquely emotive power as resulting from its physical properties and symbolic associations: blood is striking, not only for its colour and liquidity, but also its capacity to *flow*, literally and metaphorically, between domains that are usually kept separate. To conclude this chapter, I suggest that the move from *zanjir* to blood donation is linked to the ways in which blood’s *mobilities* have been welded onto particular imaginaries of religion and nation. The (on-going) repackaging of blood within Khoja mourning rituals, I contend, is fundamentally an issue of containment and direction. Blood’s ability to evoke heightened emotional responses was keenly appreciated by people like Raza and Hayat who suggested that the uncontrolled flow

of blood, gushing from the bodies of *zanjir* practitioners, had the potential to both discredit and threaten Shia lives in Mombasa and beyond. Their disdain and fear relating to what they see as the bloody excess of *zanjir* contrasts sharply with the pride with which many memorialised their participation in the blood donation drive. Photographs of donors were shared around the world, and the orderliness of the procedure much commented on: this powerful, life-giving force had been controlled, put to its 'proper' use, as a source of vitality. Thus, although the flow of blood is contained through donation, its continued liquidity is precisely what makes it an important 'vector of connection' (Carsten 2013: S7) with fellow citizens and the divine. Through donation, blood remains at the heart of Khoja commemorations of Husain's martyrdom, but is rechanneled in ways that allows this evocative bodily tissue to underpin action-oriented notions of reform and citizenry.

As I have shown above, the particularities of blood's mobility – the manner and direction in which it flows in Karbala mourning rituals – is linked to notions of social mobility, with the regulated passage of blood into collection bags at donation drives firmly associated with material and cognitive progress in the eyes of many. As the substance which connects the Khoja *jamaat's* path from *zanjir* to donation, blood, for some in Mombasa, represents a trajectory towards a more enlightened pious and civic future. In this sense, blood's symbolic power is also associated with its role as a temporalising force: '...blood has the potential to carry multiple historicities, and to dissolve the distinctions between past, present, and future' (Carsten 2013: S18). This remarkable fluid does more than simply evoke a bloody history: as my informants' narratives suggest, blood can also be infused with anticipatory logics. A sustainable and life-giving gift, blood has the capacity to act on the future.

What emerges from these reflections is blood's rather extraordinary capacity to encompass antinomies. As Carsten has noted:

...blood may be associated with fungibility, or transformability, as well as essence; with truth and transcendence and also with lies and corruption; with contagion and violence but also with purity and harmony; and with vitality as well as death (2013: S2).

Blood's multivalent qualities and the instability of its significances was made abundantly clear through my informants' discourses and practices. Blood donation, I have argued, brings together idioms of blood and reform, and is an equally productive host for ambiguities and tensions. A voluntary and unremunerated act, it serves the utilitarian goals of reformist Shiism in part because it is shot through with liberal market ideals of productivity. Giving blood is both 'apolitical' – unequivocally useful – and a tool in support of the ultimate political battle, against injustice. Donation allows a corporeal 'stitching together' of Kenya and Karbala, religion and nation; it also forges a connection through multiple temporal frames. Its anonymity conjures a universal humanity, but knowledge of who does and doesn't donate fosters distinction individually, regionally and globally. Its very selflessness allows for the imagining of the self as superior to others. These intersecting concerns with status, time, religion and insecurity continue into the following chapter, which shifts our attention from blood donation to nostalgia.

Chapter 4

Nostalgic desires: on the social value of loss in Mombasa

Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy.

Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. *The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface* (Boym 2001: xiii-xiv, final emphasis added).

You can't help but be struck by Nadim's face. His perfect teeth positively gleam, offset by the dusting of henna that highlights his hair and beard. His eyes relay nothing of his woes; they are disarmingly tranquil.

Nadim's café – Ghalib's – is empty at this postprandial hour and Nadim is telling me its history. Nadim's grandfather came to Mombasa from a tiny village near Mhasla in Maharashtra. He came to Kenya in a dhow, and was later joined by his wife and children. 'My grandfather opened his first *paan* shop in Kibokoni. I know the exact location. It was just next to the shop of Hijri Lakha... Or was it Samji Kala?' Nadim reaches over to draw me a map of the premises, emphasising its minute size in contrast to the more notable establishments that flanked it. 'Then he graduated to a shop on Piggott Place'. Now little more than a car park strewn with rubbish, Piggott Place used to be a bustling market square, prominent enough to house a bust of the towering figure of Allidina Visram in the decades before independence.

Over time, Nadim's own father learned the intricacies of the *paan* trade and opened his first shop on Makadara, opposite *Posta* (the Post Office), 'Where Kitchen Queen

is now', Nadim adds helpfully (popular with lower income white-collar workers, Kitchen Queen caters to a mix of coastal and upcountry tastes). Eventually, sometime around 1968, Nadim's father got together with two of his brothers and opened Ghalib's Paan Shop near Sheikh Jundani Mosque, incorporating the family surname into the business for the first time. 'Why are we hiding our name? We're so famous', Nadim explains the rationale behind this decision. The Ghalibs, as many others confirmed, were indubitably the best *paan* vendors in the city. 'There was a big opening. The mayor was there and everything'. Nadim remembers seeing photos of the event as a kid, his father and uncles adorned with flower garlands, surrounded by throngs of people.

From the outset, the shop was a resounding commercial success, catering to the desires of a bustling port city. In addition to the thriving local client base, a steady flow of sailors, travellers and other itinerant souls frequented the shop. Descending from ships like MV Karanja – Nadim still remembers the stickers associating each huge metal travelling trunk with a particular liner –

They all used to come to Ghalib's.... The parking lot outside the shop, that used to get absolutely packed. It was a night-time place. It opened in the day, but really it got busy at night. It was buzzing.

Nadim's grin looks as if it might actually pop out of his face.

When I was younger, I remember we were turning people away at night. It would be 12 o'clock [midnight] and we'd say, "No, we're going home!"
Some people used to try and bribe the waiters to get in. Imagine! These days the streets are deserted at night...

His smile fades. From a very young age, Nadim helped out in the shop on weekends. Paid in packs of Smarties, he and his siblings would spend hours cutting stems off the betel leaves. The shop sold *paan*, as well as its usual sweet and savoury

accompaniments: *faloodas*,¹²² milkshakes, *madafu* [fresh coconut], *bhajiyas*, samosas.

Initially the small *paans* for children – the *totos* [from *watoto*, meaning children in Swahili] – were free. My dad never used to charge for them. You would ask for some extra *totos* with the big ones you bought. As times got harder, people started coming in to get one big one and five *totos* – they were eating the small ones.

Sometime in the early 1980s, in an effort to revive his declining profit margins, Nadim's father started charging for *totos* too.

Nadim took over the family business in his 20s and things went fine for a while – but he sold up about ten years ago to try and make it in Leicester. 'Business here just wasn't what it used to be... and I already had family over there [in the UK]'. His relatives had been very successful – another friend of mine credited the Ghalibs with 'bringing *paan* culture to the UK'. However, for Nadim, Leicester was tough. He worked in a call centre, before running a discount store and eventually a *paan* shop. The profits were abysmal. When he started contemplating a return to Mombasa, Nadim spoke to the person who had bought the original Ghalib's from him about the possibility of buying it back. Unfortunately, the new owner asked for double what Nadim had sold for, telling him, 'The Somalis are willing to pay that'. Nadim wasn't having any of it: 'Fine, I said, sell it to the Somalis...' Nadim looks as if he wants to add something else, but he holds his tongue.

When I came back [to Mombasa], I did my research. I saw places weren't doing proper *faloodas* or American milkshakes the way they're supposed to be. People know my name. So, let's see.

The café in which we are sitting, located in the upmarket suburb of Nyali, on Mombasa's northern mainland, opened six months ago. Business has been improving tolerably, but Nadim is planning to start running a *falooda* happy hour during the week to help entice a broader clientele. 'You know, this new Nyali crowd,

¹²² *Faloodas* resemble a glorified milkshake, composed of rose syrup, milk and/or ice cream, vermicelli, tapioca pearls and basil seeds, along with various other embellishments.

they're not used to *faloodas*', he surmises, referring to the shifting palates and demographics that the whereabouts of this venture brings. Moreover, Nadim can no longer rely on the custom of the after dinner stroll – it's not just that *paan* has lost out to television he explains, no one walks around in town anymore (i.e. on the island), let alone in Nyali, a suburb built on the premise of car ownership.

Nadim calls one of his staff, a young woman dressed in a little red waitress outfit, to give me a taste of Oreo-flavoured milkshake, it's one of his bestsellers. The menu board – coloured in every shade of pastel sugariness – lists a range of other options: Kinder Bueno, Cadbury's, Ferrero Rocher. Nadim's ice cream flavours – the basis of his *faloodas* and milkshakes – speak to taste buds with cultivated brand affinities. A prominent section of the menu reads, 'All our juices are prepared using UV filtered water'. As well as a counter for *paan* and another for ice cream, Nadim's shop stocks other miscellaneous wares: *achari* (spicy dried mango), FUDCO brand *sopari* (betel nut), bottles of Vimto, Snickers bars, Lay's crisps (universally referred to as *crisps* in Mombasa) and little pots of citric acid, for preparing *paan* at home.

Nadim looks round his small establishment; there's just space for three plastic tables and chairs, with a couple more outside.

Now we have one *paan* counter. In the old days, we had four. Each one would be busy. We would constantly have 30 metres of sweet *paan* ready, 30 metres of sweet *paan* with *sopari* [betel nut], 15 to 20 meters with *sada khara*. And a few *totos*. People would often come in and say, "I'll buy 5 metres".

'What?!' I exclaim, completely taken aback by the amount. Nadim laughs. 'You see in those days there was a thing called the Drive-In'. Nadim speaks of the Drive-In Cinema like a long lost and much missed friend, embellishing his description with a drawing of the set up (complete with the speakers for each hump where you parked your car). 'Every Tuesday it was only 20 shillings a carload. And Tuesdays was my dad's day off!' Nadim beams.

He used to tell us, "Tell your friends, I'm going [to the cinema]", and we'd all pile into his Bedford Transit van. I still remember the number plate: KPV40.

At this point in the story I hear a hammering sound and Nadim glances back at the CCTV screen located near the till, showing the interior and exterior of his shop from 12 different angles. One of the frames is blacked out; Nadim explains that his technician is here fixing a glitch in the system. ‘There are so many robberies and muggings these days...’ Nadim searches my face thoughtfully; ‘Shall I show you what’s really going on in Kenya?’ With this interrogative I am introduced to Tycoonews, a Telegram chat group (and Twitter feed) set up by a Mombasan now residing in Essex. The Telegram group’s 166 (and counting) members send information about incidents in Mombasa to their offshore administrator who uses his connections within the Kenyan security apparatus to verify the information before posting it to all members. Nadim isn’t sure about the details of the verification process but he relies on the network for security updates, and helps expand the group by recruiting some of his shop customers as new members: ‘In case they’re in some kind of accident or attack, I have their names and number plates’. I make a joke about Nadim taking on the role of Big Brother. Nadim is rueful, ‘We never used to need anything like this’.

Our discussion moves to an examination of the dramatic decline in tourist numbers post-Westgate; the attack on Nairobi’s most upmarket shopping mall happened less than three months ago. One of Nadim’s friends runs a car rental business: ‘He usually doesn’t see a single [vehicle] in November or December. This year, they’re all parked’. The government, I learn, have no clue what they are doing, regarding security or anything else. ‘At least with the Brits there was order, today it’s pure corruption. Just look at the electricity supply!’ he laments, gesturing around him; the lights have gone off twice during our chat. Power cuts, as Nadim is only too aware, pose a particular problem for ice cream – and profits.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about Nadim’s narrative, many readers will have heard similar nostalgic musings in other contexts. What was striking, however, was the ubiquity of such discourses in Mombasa. Nostalgia appeared to be embedded in the very fabric of the city, a critical component of daily chat, voiced by

old and young alike. What explains this? What are the conditions that produce nostalgia talk and what social role did it play in everyday urban life?

This chapter analyses nostalgia in contemporary Mombasa in terms of economic and demographic change, and associated perceptions of rising insecurity. Over the following pages I outline some of the economic and demographic shifts happening in Mombasa to which nostalgic rhetorics point and think through some of the things nostalgia *does* on the East African littoral, i.e. to delineate the tensions and contradictions that nostalgic discourse is deployed to respond to (although by no means necessarily resolve). In contrast to the existing literature which tends to tie nostalgia to decline and stagnation, I suggest that many of the Mombasans I encountered were nostalgic because they have benefited from decades of rising prosperity. Nostalgia, I propose, is not only partially produced by economic gain, it also serves to indicate it. In other words, Mombasan nostalgia can be a source of status, memorialising proud stories of social mobility. Certainly, nostalgia talk in Mombasa also registers loss and rising economic insecurity, but this is only part of the picture. If in other contexts nostalgia appears to ‘desire...its own absence’ (E. Simpson 2005: 245) – i.e. the nostalgic yearns for a time before they were nostalgic – I propose that, on this particular urban littoral, nostalgia is at least sometimes a desirable asset and a source of social capital.

Moreover, I argue that nostalgic rhetorics are a critical way in which some people stake a claim to belonging in the city, constructing a shared and historically grounded Mombasan subjectivity based on a mutual appreciation of the city’s decline. However, as I show below, nostalgia is as much about exclusion as it is relatedness. In addition to being indicative of wealth, I suggest that the second factor that makes nostalgia desirable in Mombasa is that it creates a hierarchy of urban belonging that privileges some residents’ rights to the city over others. Highlighting the multiplicity of roles nostalgia plays, I demonstrate that this form of memory talk works as a source of distinction *and* affinity, disjuncture *and* continuity in Mombasa.

Reviewing nostalgia: observations from a postcolonial archipelago and a post-Soviet littoral

As noted by both Bissell (2005) and Berliner (2012), anthropology's origins are intimately bound up in a yearning for a past now lost or vanishing, epitomised by Malinowski's (1992 [1922]: xv) assessment that the discipline as a scientific endeavour was coming into being at the very moment 'its material of study melts away'. However, as Angé & Berliner point out in their recent edited volume, 'fine-grained ethnographies of nostalgia and loss are still scarce' (2015: 1),¹²³ with much of the scholarship to date focused on post-socialist Eastern Europe (Berdahl 1999; Boyer 2006; Todorova & Gille 2010). As the authors delineate, this developing body of scholarship is taking nostalgia in various directions – unpacking the multiple meanings of nostalgia in particular contexts (Stewart 1988), identifying the objects in which nostalgia resides (Parkin 1999; Bach 2015) and exposing complex synergies of past, present and future in its yearnings (Boyer 2010; Bryant 2008). While it seems to me that these strands are perhaps less distinct than Angé & Berliner suggest, the springboard I find most productive for launching into my own field site considers nostalgia in terms of its agentive potential. As Dames has noted, nostalgia is 'a force that does something' (2010: 272).

During his research in Zanzibar in the early 1990s, William Bissell (2005) remembers being initially dismissive and later unsettled by his informants' nostalgia for the colonial era. Urban Zanzibaris, many of whom were born long after the end of empire, lamented the affordability, cleanliness and orderly nature of life under British rule. Unsurprised by the fact that the archives presented a very different story, Bissell asks,

How exactly do we come to terms with expressions of colonial nostalgia by the descendants of those who struggled long and hard to overcome the effects of European domination and exploitation? ...What social and political desires are postcolonial Africans giving voice to when they speak well of the colonial past? (2005: 217).

¹²³ The following are noted by the authors as exceptions: Berliner (2012); Bissell (2005); Graburn (1995); Ivy (2010); P. Metcalf (2012); Schneider (2000).

Although his informants often conceptualised changing conditions to be a result of greed or a loss of faith (rather than in structural terms), Bissell argues that nostalgia in 1990s Zanzibar was spawned by the contradictions wrought by neoliberalism, which brought vast sums of capital investment to ‘historic’ Stone Town while public services and majority living standards slumped.

Writing against representations of nostalgia as a uniform and pervasive social fact, Bissell is careful to portray the multiplicity of nostalgic discourses circulating in Stone Town, identifying various ‘regressive nostalgias’ and ‘counternostalgias’ at play (2005: 239, 228). A highly orientalist and selective vision of 19th and 20th century Zanzibar was deployed by investors, developers, conservationists and state officials, as well as some older elites, all keen to maximise on the opportunities offered by economic liberalisation and the growth of the tourism industry. Central to these nostalgic posturings was the invention of Stone Town as a coherent and named entity – ‘located somewhere in the imagination between Ruritania and Narnia’ (Younge in Bissell 2005: 230) – as well as a source of shared heritage. In contrast to this commodified nostalgia, many ordinary urban residents evoked aspects of the colonial and revolutionary eras to denounce present conditions. Fatuma, for instance, recalled colonial procedural prowess as much as the sanctity of public space enshrined in revolutionary government policy to condemn the rapacious and haphazard approach to urban development she saw around her. If colonial and revolutionary nostalgias represented different genres of mnemonic narrative – the former was usually associated with the rule of law and ‘gracious’ urban maintenance; the latter was used to evoke the social welfare provisions of the 1960s and 70s – individuals such as Fatuma deployed both, sometimes interchangeably, for similar critical ends. Extolling the values of the colonial and – to a lesser extent – revolutionary eras served as a trenchant mode of critique against rising socio-economic inequality.

In making his analysis, Bissell proposes a distinction between nostalgia and other forms of memory practice:

...rather than evoking community and commonality, [nostalgia] works as a mode of social memory by emphasising distance and disjuncture (2005: 216).

In contrast, ‘collective remembrance typically emerges out of efforts to forge a shared (if illusory) sense of group identity, cohesion, and long-term continuities’ (2005: 226). For Bissell, nostalgia works to disrupt conservation efforts that depict the city as the product of a shared history – he does not consider nostalgia *itself* as a form of community-making practice.

Svetlana Boym (2001), in contrast, positions nostalgia as shot through with community. Her lyrical excavation of nostalgia begins by tracing its genealogy, from a 17th century *maladie du pays*, a provincial and curable disease, to an incurable *mal du siècle* (Boym 2001: xviii). She posits the ‘global epidemic of nostalgia’ (2001: xiv) that has accompanied the last two centuries as a product of the contradictions of modernity, a defence mechanism against the acceleration of time and socio-economic upheaval. Nostalgia, in her reading, is inextricably linked to modernity, not only because it depends on a modern conception of time as ‘unrepeatable and irreversible’ but also because time-space compression intensifies ‘*an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory*, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world’ (Boym 2001: xiv, emphasis added).¹²⁴

Boym locates cities as particularly significant nostalgic sites, given the pasts – lived and dreamt, visible and invisible – that urban conglomerations gather: ‘The past of the city...is not entirely legible... it suggests other dimensions of the lived experience and haunts the city like a ghost’ (2001: 76). Urban ruins, Boym helpfully points out,

...are not elegiac but rather dialectical; they suggest the coexistence of many historical layers, the plurality of possibilities. The ruin is a kind of

¹²⁴ Boym distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia, restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia is concerned with the reconstruction of the past. This strain, which importantly does not see itself as nostalgic, is an integral part of nationalist discourse in some contexts. Restorative nostalgia involves selective amnesia, an emphasis on (mythical) ‘origins’ and a smoothing over – a silencing – of the histories that would complicate narratives of a more glorious and re-creatable past. Reflective nostalgia is equally selective but, in contrast to its counterpart, ‘lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and time’ (Boym 2001: 41). For the reflective nostalgic, the past is not something that can or should be restored, but rather endlessly longed for – the impossibility of return is precisely what makes the longing so (bitter)sweet. I find Boym’s distinction useful, and although not specified again, this chapter is concerned with reflective nostalgia.

spatialisation of history, an image of what [Walter] Benjamin called “dialectic at a standstill”, where various visions of the city clash and coexist (2001: 136).

Boym considers past and present nostalgia talk in Moscow, Berlin and St Petersburg. Post-Soviet Petersburgian nostalgia focuses on particular ruins – such as Saigon, a Leningrad-era bar popular amongst a motley crew of poets, black marketeers and KGB informants – as well as the now decommissioned trams, which served the city so faithfully during a time where taxis and cars were unaffordable luxuries. Boym suggests that nostalgic posturings position St Petersburg as ‘a humane reminder of [an] old-fashioned urban cosmos’, and valorise ‘a common urban culture that defies the boundary between high and low, artistic and commercial’ (2001: 168). In other words, outpourings of nostalgia in this once great city are as much about ‘cultivating a different kind of civic consciousness’ as they are about ‘wounded pride’ (2001: 147).

Via nostalgia, St Petersburg residents quarry the past for alternative possibilities, uniting people through the memory – lived or imagined – of other ways of being in the city. As well as constructing a sense of civic relatedness, reflective nostalgia affirms that alternative futures are possible, precisely because the past was so (even if none of the alternatives offered by the past are desired in their entirety, or even in part).

This chapter builds on the arguments put forth by Bissell and Boym. Nostalgia in post-socialist Eastern Europe and Zanzibar (a place that is both postcolonial and post-socialist) has emerged from political economies quite distinct from that of Mombasa. However, creating a dialogue between these regionally divergent accounts is precisely what allows me to unpack the multiplicity of drivers and effects of nostalgia in Mombasa in this chapter. Like both authors, I see nostalgia as inextricably linked to economic and demographic transformations. However, I am cautious of the tendency, exemplified by Boym, to tie nostalgia too simply to accelerated modernity, or to neoliberalism, as Bissell does. That we live in a time relatively faster and more uncertain than the past is, in my mind, too readily assumed by much of the contemporary social science literature, including and well beyond nostalgia studies. Given, as anthropologists, we accept the subjective nature of

temporality and risk, it seems to me rather difficult to prove that time or uncertainty is relatively and progressively speeding up or increasing. Even if it is, what does it add to our understanding of the world if we find proof of this quickening everywhere? To put it another way, tying nostalgia to accelerated modernity cannot account for its pervasiveness in some contexts and not others.

The need for a historically and geographically contingent approach to nostalgia is in line with Bissell's (2005), and the latter part of Boym's (2001), text. Moreover, Bissell's consideration of the relationship between colonial nostalgia and economic liberalisation has helped me to see that something more complex is happening in Mombasa. Over the course of the chapter I demonstrate that that my informants' experiences are not neatly captured by words like economic 'liberalisation' or 'neoliberalism', and that these categories belie the nuances their nostalgic tales actually tell. Moreover, unlike Bissell's informants who are nostalgic because they have been failed by neoliberalism, nostalgia in Mombasa is more often a product of prosperity.

Bissell's emphasis on nostalgia as an 'irreducibly plural phenomena' (2005: 239) is fundamental to the argument I pursue here, as is his recognition of the sentiment as a political endeavour: as I show below, nostalgia for the colonial era in Mombasa, like in Zanzibar, serves as an important source of critique through exposing disjuncture between past and present. However, my ethnography challenges Bissell's suggestion that nostalgia has little place when it comes to community and continuity. As Boym (2001) has highlighted for St Petersburg, I argue that nostalgia in Mombasa brings into being a community of Mombasans united by the memorialisation of alternative pasts.

Nostalgic soil: economic and demographic seeds

Tracing the location of *paan* shops owned by members of the Ghalib family over the course of the last century – from a tiny kiosk in Old Town, to the economic heart of island, and eventually the elite commercial suburbia of the northern mainland (not to mention establishments around the UK) – is as appropriate a guide as any to the changing economic fortunes of many of my informants. Nadim's emphasis on the

size of his family's first shop ('It was a counter really'), and his grandfather's 'graduation' from Kibokoni to Piggott Place, speak to the relatively humble beginnings of the family *paan* trade. Clearly, fortunes had been made by the time the flagship store was opened amidst great fanfare in the late 1960s, by which point the family surname was synonymous with quality *paan*. However, Nadim's acknowledgement of the economising tactics adopted by a 'toto-buying' clientele from the 80s onwards, coupled with his own decision to go to Leicester the following decade, denote entanglements of economic growth and downturn, which I unravel here.

In Mombasa, Asians play a significant role at both ends of the hospitality and retail sectors, owning most of the city's luxury hotels, as well as most of its tiny hardware stores. Many, like Nadim, are significantly wealthier than their parents' generation: Nadim works in Mombasa's wealthiest district, his children go to one of the city's more expensive schools. That said, 'Business is not what it used to be', and Nadim is certainly struggling more than he expected to earlier in life. Samarah's story is more acute. She is, without question, getting a far better education than her parents ever did, thanks to the school's improving standards and the *jamaat*'s sponsorship of her fees;¹²⁵ she hopes that she'll be able to do a computing course at the professional training centre attached to the school when she graduates. But that all depends; Samarah's father had to close their small 'ration shop' (selling dried goods and spices) some years ago, unable to compete with the city's retail giants. Largely dependent on *jamaat* welfare and odd jobs provided by other members of the community, the family has very little disposable income.

This story is not unique or new: the number of *dukawallahs* (small shopkeepers) in Mombasa has decreased markedly since the 1980s, undermined by a shifting

¹²⁵ All Asian communities make substantive welfare provisions for members in need of financial support, with the amount given dependent on the wealth of the community as a whole and the assessed need. Amongst Khoja Ithna-Asheris, it is common for poorer families to have health and education costs covered by the *jamaat*, some also receive assistance with rental payments. Those unable to work and with no other means of support are also provided with food rations and basic necessities. See Blank (2001) for an extended discussion of welfare and community taxation amongst Bohras, and Akhtar (2016) regarding Khoja support networks in Tanzania.

economic landscape, epitomised by the rise of the supermarket (although this pattern of wealth concentration goes well beyond the food sector). I suspect that Nadim's father's decision to charge for *totos* (small servings of *paan*) around this time is no coincidence. Outlets of Nakumatt, Tusky's, Budget and Uchumi, the country's biggest supermarket chains, now dot the city; one main thoroughfare has three options for clientele to choose from. Some of the supermarket chains are owned by Asians (a Shah family, for example, remain the majority shareholders in Nakumatt). At the same time, the supermarkets have, in less than a generation, put many smaller *dukawallahs* out of business. Gulshan, an Ismaili woman with a medium-sized bread factory, selling cheap white bread to *dukas* in the city's outskirts, predicts that she'll be able to stay in business for another five years before she totally loses out to the supermarkets. Many others have already closed shop. Both of these stories illustrate the uneven and often contradictory nature of wealth accumulation in recent decades: while Samarah's family livelihood is more precarious since her father was put out of business, growing community prosperity has afforded them access to various welfare provisions from the *jamaat* that would not have been so generous in the past. Gulshan, on the other hand, has made a small fortune on the back of liberalisation, even if these same forces will soon bring about the demise of her white-sliced empire.

The tension between waxing and waning fortunes – at both a household and city level – is further illustrated in terms of changing educational patterns. By the time Nadim was in his late teens, his family could afford to send him to Allidina Visram High School, one of the few institutions offering A-Level examinations at the time, and certainly the most prestigious. Nadim, however, like most Mombasans I met over 40, did not go on to attend university. Mombasa's educational landscape has transformed markedly in recent decades, exemplified by the changing face of Mombasa's many 'Asian' schools. For a start, despite retaining their communal names, Asian students constitute a minority (sometimes a significant one) in each of these private institutions.¹²⁶ This in itself is demonstrative of the rapid expansion of

¹²⁶ To name but a few, these include the Jaffery Academy (originally a Khoja institution), the Oshwal Academy (set up by Oshwal Jains) and the Aga Khan Primary School (which, in its earliest years, catered to Ismailis).

the Kenyan middle class since independence.¹²⁷ Moreover, particularly since the mid-1990s, all of these institutions have offered internationally recognised examinations (GCSEs, A-Levels or the International Baccalaureate); many now also boast state of the art facilities. I take these significant scholastic investments as evidence of Mombasa's bigger, more affluent and more educated middle class (who pay the school fees which fund the majority of investment).

However, this has not been matched by an expansion of the tertiary education sector. In contrast to many other smaller urban centres in Kenya, Mombasa's university scene is limited to a teacher training college and a series of outlets that offer distance learning (no one I knew had successfully pursued this latter set-up). During the period of my fieldwork the Mombasa Technical Institute gained university status (its courses remain largely vocational), while Pwani University – the coast's first fully-fledged university – opened in Kilifi, a town some 70 kilometres north. As elucidated in Chapter 2, the very limited availability of higher education options in Mombasa must be seen in the light of more than a century of coastal marginalisation by both colonial and postcolonial governments. For Nadim's generation, the absence of higher education opportunities was perhaps less noticeable. However, on the back of improvements in educational standards at the primary and secondary levels, some form of tertiary study is now normal practice for much of Mombasa's middle class – certainly for most Asians but also well beyond this demographic. Given the limited availability of options in Mombasa, all who can afford to do so pursue further education elsewhere (and these elsewhere are diverse: Nairobi, Manipal [India], Qom, Semenyih [Malaysia], Cardiff, Montreal).

¹²⁷ During my fieldwork, Kenya was declared a (lower) middle-income country, according to the gross national income per capita (GNI) measures employed by the World Bank. This announcement was first made by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and later confirmed by the World Bank. See articles by J. Kiseru: 'Why our country is now a middle income economy'. *Daily Nation*, 29 September 2014 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Kenya-National-Bureau-of-Statistics-Income-Economy/1056-2469476-ppi4ggz/index.html>, accessed 31 August 2016), as well as the World Bank website: 'WB update says 10 countries move up in income bracket'. 2015 (available online: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/07/01/new-world-bank-update-shows-bangladesh-kenya-myanmar-and-tajikistan-as-middle-income-while-south-sudan-falls-back-to-low-income>, accessed 31 August 2016).

While an increasing number of students leave the city, the skills they acquire elsewhere often do not translate into jobs back home. Part of this is due to increased competition: many Kenyans of diverse backgrounds now have the educational qualifications to pursue professional and/or entrepreneurial careers – and are often willing to do the same job for less than middle class Mombasans. The discrepancy between improvements in education, lifestyle expectations and employment opportunities was made evident to me by Faisal Faraj, a Khoja with luminously black hair:

My son studied law and wanted to come back to practice in Kenya. He wanted to give back, you know. I told him, “Fine, that’s all well and good, but let’s go and sit outside the Law Courts tomorrow morning”. We were sitting there in our Pajero, and he saw all the other lawyers arrive in tuk tuks or on foot.

Faraj’s son is now a lawyer in the English city of Peterborough.

Another reason for the dearth of white-collar jobs is that Mombasa’s economy has slumped. Both of the city’s economic mainstays – tourism and shipping – have suffered major losses as a result of two decades of regional insecurity.¹²⁸ Tourism nose-dived in Mombasa following a 2002 car bomb at an Israeli-owned coastal hotel, an incident that occurred at the same time as a failed attempt to down an Israeli airliner departing from the city’s Moi International Airport (Prestholdt 2011).

Having recovered somewhat in the decade that followed, tourist numbers have gone from bad to worse since 2011, when Kenyan troops entered Somalia on the pretext of preventing al-Shabaab incursions south. All of these factors feed into each other – Mombasans and the city’s economy pay heavily as Kenya, the US and AMISOM attempt to defeat al-Shabaab, which in turn feeds into growing local frustration, attacks and more state security roundups. While most of my informants did not fit the racial or age profile that is usually targeted by the police, they are by no means unaffected. As Kajji Abbas, referring to a recent spate of grenade attacks, put it to

¹²⁸ Shipping fortunes have, however, improved since the dramatic decline in Indian Ocean piracy since 2013, itself a result of the now-standard practice of employing security personnel on all international vessels.

me one afternoon, ‘You can’t do business in this climate’. He relocated his family to Birmingham a few months later.

As Kajji Abbas’s move suggests, this economic landscape – a history of rising incomes, coupled with growing politico-economic insecurity in the present – has produced various demographic shifts amongst the city’s elite. Many with money and passport potentialities (a spouse who chose to remain British at Kenyan independence, a child now married in Canada), have left the city. This is particularly true of Asians, but goes well beyond.¹²⁹ While Asian emigration has been a feature of life in Kenya since the late 1960s, everyone I knew in Mombasa spoke of recent decades as those most marked by declining community numbers (for all communities), indubitably accelerated by the trend of pursuing higher education abroad. This steady trickle has in turn resulted in the closure of many Asian-owned urban landmarks – from the original Ghalib’s Paan Shop to the Regal Theatre and the Drive-In: certainly, a waning clientele base precipitated Nadim’s decision to move to Leicester in the mid-1990s.

While Nadim is unusual in that he returned after a decade away, his ability to reinvent himself speaks to a second demographic shift: elite relocation to the northern mainland. Despite the disappointments of Leicester, Nadim has been able to draw on sufficient family resources to set up shop in Nyali. Formerly populated predominantly by luxury beach resorts, this area of the city has only become a residential and commercial hub in the last ten to 15 years. It is the preferred location for more recently arrived individuals of means, as well as increasingly attracting older residents with deep enough pockets. As also discussed in the preceding and following chapters, wealth aspirations and insecurity often go hand in hand in Mombasa. Choosing to reside in Nyali not only allows for ease of access to the most upmarket malls, eateries and hotels, the area is also perceived by many as less congested (and hence easier to police, as well as escape from). ‘On the island, you’re stuck’, Yash explained to me over a masala chai latté, pointing out that a

¹²⁹ The effects of outmigration are particularly marked for Asians not only because they, as business elites, are more likely to leave, but because of their relatively smaller numbers to start with (i.e. lots of middle class Swahili have also left but their absence is less marked).

simultaneous attack on the bridges leading northeast and northwest would imprison the city's heart (the ferry heading south being a less than ideal getaway vehicle).

On past longing and present distinction: nostalgia as status symbol

It is in terms of this confluence of economic and demographic factors that I suggest we understand the prevalence of particular forms of nostalgia in Mombasa. Certainly, the glorification of earlier eras cannot be divorced from the position of relative privilege that Asians and some others (such as those classed as 'Arab') were accorded under the colonial three-tier system, a fact not lost on a number of my informants. Preparing her daily dose of beetroot and ginger juice one morning, Nadesh confided, 'We all bought land for [the price of] peanuts. Everyone did in those days. Maybe it wasn't fair... but they were happy times'. Nadesh hails from a wealthy Ismaili family, many others were far less able to capitalise on the opportunities offered by colonialism. However, even today's youth often alluded to the on-going implications of the change of Asian status that accompanied independence. Jumana, a young Khoja woman who finished university in Nairobi during my fieldwork, struggled for months to get an accountancy job in Mombasa. 'It's so hard to get jobs these days. So many places prefer Africans', she surmised wryly. Jumana, grandmother concurred, 'It was never like this when I was young. Asians were always first in line'. These oft-repeated statements evoke an idealised past where Asian prerogatives and a far smaller middle class meant that jobs were easier to find.

As the above examples suggest, nostalgia in Mombasa is sometimes an indicator of diminished (post)colonial privilege. However, in contrast to Bissell, who positions his informants as the nostalgic losers of neoliberal reform, my suggestion is that many in Mombasa are nostalgic because they have benefitted from decades of rising prosperity. In Mombasa, I see rising wealth as both *productive of and indexed by* nostalgia. In this East African town, nostalgia marks present wealth, but not through a commodification or trivialising of the past. The nostalgia talk I heard usually valorised the past, memorialising rags to riches tales that simultaneously record trajectories of migration and social mobility. Nostalgia in Mombasa is less a

commodity than a source of social capital, one that is nevertheless intimately connected to economic gain and a history of Indian Ocean trade.

My argument, thus, is that in lamenting a lost era, older Mombasans are indexing a marked improvement in household incomes over the course of their own and their families' lifetimes. Bemoaning the fate of the *paan* industry is a case in point. As Nadim and many others explained to me, evening strolls in search of *paan* and *faloodas* date from an era before the domesticating tendencies of home television. Although the loss of Mombasa's ruminating culture is much mourned, it also clearly denotes a lifestyle shift and wallet upgrade. One of the reasons why Ghalib's is (re)gaining popularity is because Nadim is providing a *paan* experience that caters to this change. 'He's brought the finesse back from the West', Yash remarked as we drained the last of our *faloodas*, referring to Nadim's stint in Leicester. 'Those [*paan* shops] in Kibokoni, we grew up in them, but who would want to go now?' While the few establishments to which Yash refers continue to survive, they provision a diminishing and lower class of *paan* chewers.

Similar stories of upward mobility mark much nostalgia talk in the city. Supping afternoon chai with Hashim (who we met in Chapter 2), he recounted the long line of *mithai wallahs* (sweetshop owners) from which he descends, ending with a rueful, 'But I know my sons will never sell sweets!' Although nostalgic for the familial loss of a profession, Hashim's sons will not become confectioners because they are busy importing paper from Guangzhou and advising Airtel, Kenya's second largest mobile network provider, about expansion – careers of which Hashim is also immensely proud. In other words, these rhetorics of change and loss are also markers of status. In a similar vein, Mubina remembers the old days where grandchildren would never have lived so far away and Jaffer recalls the vibrancy of the Khoja debating society when community numbers were double. Mubina misses her daughter's twins, but loves the bi-annual trip to Edmonton ('Although I would never go in winter, these people are mad!'). Jaffer is distraught about the decline of community institutions (struggling against this downward slope is his *raison d'être*), but each of his four children pursue distinguished occupations elsewhere. Assessments of the city as a site of employment opportunity tell analogous tales. While people bemoaned the increased competition in the job market and the

difficulties of finding work, such commentaries often served to denote privilege. As Faraj pointed out to his son from the comfort of the family Pajero above, the reason that many cannot find jobs in Mombasa is because their professional qualifications and lifestyle aspirations have outpaced local salaries.

This trajectory of wealth was also evidenced via the frequent valorisations of what might be called a ‘sociality of less’. People had very fond memories of the sharing economy that predated expendable incomes. Faraj remembered the bounties to be made walking around the market at closing time, ‘There were no fridges in those days so the *mithai wallahs* used to give all their leftovers to the kids at the end of the day’. Khadija, similarly, recalled the excitement of going to see whether she and her brothers could augment the evening meal at the Old Port: ‘Sometimes Mum used to send us to get fish from the fishermen. For them it’s good luck to give something to children so we would get free fish!’ To my mind, these iterations demonstrate the entwined nature of loss and gain within nostalgic discourse in Mombasa. Faraj and Khadija mourn the solidarity of an impecunious past, as much as depict their journeys away from poverty. This pattern is mirrored in many of the frequent allusions to growing insecurity. If, as in the vignette above, Nadim’s frequently malfunctioning CCTV system is a reminder of the social harmony of days gone by, it is also a testament to the model of his car and the price of Nyali real estate. This was echoed in Mohammed’s lament, ‘Now we have an *askari* [watchman] 24/7. When I was a kid we didn’t even lock the door!’

But nostalgia talk did not always relate to economic gain, and was also a register of the uneven and unpredictable nature of prosperity. Nadim’s narrative – which juxtaposes a time when Ghalib’s sold *paan* by the metre with the necessity of *falooda* happy hours today – captures this, in its delineation of the decline of the *duka* economy. Thanks to the success of previous eras and the support of family abroad, Nadim is lucky enough to have fairly substantial resources to help get his latest venture off the ground – but he is only just hanging on. ‘At least the supermarkets still don’t sell *paan*!’ he quipped on another occasion. Located little more than a stone’s throw from a major shopping complex – which boasts, *inter alia*, a Cineplex and a trattoria selling imported Italian ice cream – Nadim is, in some senses, getting by because he is selling nostalgia. Now a rarity, his *faloodas*, the *toto*

paans, even the name of his establishment all evoke a bygone Mombasa that some are only too happy to return to, at least once in a while.

Samarah's father, the now occasionally employed former ration shop owner, has been less fortunate. 'Ladies used to come specially for our *dhana-jeera* [coriander cumin powder]', Samarah remembered wistfully. 'We got all our masalas straight from India. The quality was much higher than those tiny packets you can buy in Nakumatt', Samarah contrasts her family's wares with that of the supermarket giant. It's not just quality that has been set adrift – it is a veritable style of shopping and interaction. 'Some people used to stay for hours, my dad had a special seat for customers', Samarah smiles in recollection. Nowadays, there are still a number of ration shops in Mombasa, and I observed more than one 'customer seat' in continued use – but that life is over for Samarah's family. 'They wiped us out', she explains, articulating her loss as a direct result of supermarket power. Samarah's nostalgia, which tells of declining fortune on the back of the consolidation of power by economic elites, is, of the stories relayed here, most similar to that expressed by Bissell's (2005) informants.

For many others, lamentations regarding decreased livelihood security were inseparable from insecurity more generally. As Nadim makes clear with the tale of his friend's decimated rent-a-car business, Mombasa's tourism-centred economy is the first to suffer from violent attacks and their political consequences. Speaking after Thomas Cook's 2014 decision to suspend chartered flights to Mombasa (itself on the back of a British Foreign Office advisory against all but essential travel to the coast), Mansoor did not mince his words, 'It'll never be the same again. The Brits have ruined it for us here'. Us, in this case, refers to the large 'destination management' company for which he works. At least Mansoor could console himself with the continued custom of the more intrepid Italians and French.

It was by no means only the tourist sector that has suffered in the city of late. Gulnar, proud proprietor of Mombasa's oldest perfumery, importers of alcohol-free oil-based fragrances from Paris ('None of this cheap stuff from Dubai'), was one of many to attest to a direct link between insecurity and profit margins.

Mombasa used to be the very best place in Kenya. Now it's stagnant. Last year [2014], with all the terrorist attacks and everything, it's the first year we didn't do well.

About a week after an explosion on a bus arriving from Nairobi killed at least four, I heard parallel sentiments from the owner of Jawad's Cold Store. 'Everyone is staying home', Kabir observed, passing me a plate of piping hot *bhajiyas* and gesturing around the unusually empty café. 'Mombasa was never like this.... If you want to do jihad, go to Pakistan'. Nadim was feeling the effects even more acutely as *faloodas* and *paan*, everyone knows, are best consumed at night (when even more customers chose to remain indoors). 'And to think, me and my friends used to walk from Kibokoni to Tudor at 3am!' Strolling at night is now most definitely avoided.

I return to the nostalgia-security nexus again below. For now, what I hope is apparent from this section is that Mombasan residents use nostalgic rhetoric to narrate histories of wealth improvements against a backdrop of growing insecurity and diminishing economic opportunity. Nostalgia certainly served as a register of loss and decline, but also of economic advancement and upward mobility. As I have sought to highlight, much of the commentary I heard points to a complex interplay of loss and gain embedded within Mombasan nostalgia. These allusions to changing fortunes – recording economic appreciation and depreciation – connect those who tell them to the political economy of the Indian Ocean realm: fortune and loss are closely linked to the transoceanic trade of which they have been so integral a part. Nostalgia, in other words, subtly reinserts Indian Ocean historiographies into everyday interactions. This is significant to the notion of nostalgia as evocative of community and solidarity, an idea I explore further below.

Claiming the city: nostalgia and civic relatedness

As in Bissell's (2005) account of Zanzibar, the nostalgia I encountered in Mombasa often specifically referenced the colonial era, and served as a register for critiquing contemporary conditions. Echoing sentiments in the nearby archipelago, the colonial regime in Mombasa was often painted as being premised on the principles of orderliness and justice, now seen to be lacking amongst political elites. Nadim's

frustration with the erratic electricity supply, and his assessment as to its source (corruption; ‘At least under the Brits there was order’) was mirrored by Mohammed, a Baluchi *mzee* (elder) many years his senior. ‘There were so many problems with colonial rule but at least they were educated in what it meant to be fair’, he told me between slurps of iced tamarind juice at Jahazi Café. ‘Ah, and the roads!’ his younger friend Abdul interjected, ‘the traffic in Mombasa used to flow. Can you imagine? The Brits actually *invested* in maintaining them’, he looks at me with a despairing smile. Mohammed snorts in agreement. Like in Zanzibar, these standardised narratives were voiced by many, regardless of age: Abdul was born the year Kenya gained independence but often alluded to the positive attributes of empire. Eisenberg (2009) found identical discourses amongst his Swahili informants in Mombasa’s Old Town.

The trope that kept emerging was a set of binary oppositions relating the way things had been during the days of the British Protectorate and the way things had come to be after independence. The shift was from “clean” (*safi*) to “dirty” (*chafu*), “efficient” to “corrupt,” “safe” to “dangerous,” “prosperous” to “impoverished,” “functional” to “dysfunctional,” and “quiet” (*kimya*) to “noisy” (*kelele/fujo*) (Eisenberg 2009: 55–56, italics original).

Drawing on these narratives, part of what I would like to add to Bissell’s (2005) observations on nostalgia’s critical potential is a consideration of the way in which such discourses can forge *unity through the exposure of disjuncture*. As Boym (2001: 168) has written with regards to St Petersburg, the past offers a rich array of ‘humane reminder[s]’ for urban dwellers disillusioned with the present. In harking back to the (idealised) fairness and civility of times gone by, the Mombasans I met not only used the past to critique the present (exposing the disjuncture between the colonial and postcolonial eras, as Bissell suggests), they also used the past to imagine other ways of living together in the future. Even if the past imagined is rose-tinted, nostalgia talk in Mombasa simultaneously memorialises and projects different modes of living the city. Valorising the integrity of colonial civil servants and the seamless circulation system over which they presided, Mohammed and Abdul question the legitimacy of the contemporary political landscape and affirm their shared desire for alternative styles of urban governance. In a context where, for various reasons, people feel

disenfranchised by the political system,¹³⁰ nostalgia for a past era represents an outlet for discontent and the articulation of alternatives where other forms of protest are deemed lacking. Thus, in contrast to the prevalent stereotypes that Asians are apathetic businesspeople and that inhabitants of the coast are too lazy to be political, I see nostalgia as evidence of a desire for change, even if ways to push for this at a county or national level are far from crystallised.

Political critique is but one of nostalgia's many faces in Mombasa. Reminiscing over particular people, places and patterns of consumption that now no longer exist – from the lady selling *bhajiya*s in Piggott Place to the legendary *mishkaki*¹³¹ at Ricoda ('The old Ricoda, the new one is crap') – is nothing short of a Mombasa pastime. Regardless of age, origin or sect, almost everyone I met had stories of fabled places of past. Here I should note that most of the people I spent time with in Mombasa hailed from families with long-standing connections to the place. I spent very little time with people who had recently migrated to the city (be that from upcountry Kenya, India or elsewhere). I suspect nostalgia would seem a less ubiquitous urban phenomenon had I done so. That said, at least amongst my informants some nostalgic posturings were widely shared. Recounting the lost joys of the cinemas and the food at particular establishments like Splendid View and Nosh were especially prevalent – Nadim's love for the Drive-In is exemplary in this regard.

Younger people had plenty of means for appropriating these discourses, even if many of them were born long after the ruin of the institutions in question. Chatting with Farhana and Faharin – twins in their mid-teens – before *majlis* one evening, the two agreed, 'It's so sad you can't just walk around Lighthouse anymore'. When I asked what the Indian Ocean promenade had been like when they were kids, the pair looked at each other. 'We only went when we were really small', offered Faharin. Many others – young and old – continued to map Mombasa according to now-absent

¹³⁰ As discussed previously, this includes the perception that central government will continue to neglect the coast, and that contemporary politicians have little regard for much more than their own pockets. Hassan Ali Joho, Mombasa's County Governor, was widely reported to be more concerned with maintaining the port's lucrative narcotics trade than governing the county. Finally, as also mentioned above, Asians feel marginalised by prevailing patterns of patronage which continue to be structured around 'tribe'.

¹³¹ *Mishkaki*, as previously noted, are barbecued skewers of beef or mutton.

institutions. Consulting Zarina about the location of her granny's house, she explained, 'You know the place, it's just behind Naaz Cinema'. Naaz, pictured in Fig. 25 on p.105, was renamed (to Lotus) and then torn down well over a decade ago, but the building's demise has not dented its position as an urban landmark. Finally, city residents were quick to point out the deteriorating standards of fabled institutions within their own lifetimes. After a trip to the once iconic Rozina's, Nargis asked me, 'Did you eat the *poussin*?¹³² Meh, I used to love it but I'd never go now... It just doesn't taste the same'. The people cited in this paragraph would describe themselves as Kokni, Khoja Ithna-Asheri, Ismaili and Swahili respectively, and span five decades in age – the point being that I heard strikingly similar narratives from many mouths.

Another favourite focus of attention evoked 'lost' or 'vanishing' patterns of sociality. Malik remembered growing up next to several Swahili families, 'We were the only Khojas. But nobody minded if you picked their *ndimu* [limes]. The Swahili have such a good culture of neighbourhood'. Saima, on the other hand, was one of many to remember the mythical ladies' evenings at Majestic Cinema: 'If you lived in Old Town, you were there'. When I asked whether she and her friends ever go to watch films at the Cineplex in Nyali these days, Saima shook her head, 'Have you seen the prices?! *Ni ghali sana!* [They're so expensive!]. And plus', she gives me a mischievous look, 'they don't even sell sesame seeds'. The old movie halls, I learnt on multiple occasions, used to crunch with sesame seed shells after each screening, covered in the debris of this essential cinematic accompaniment.

Dwelling on decline, I contend, is a form of social intimacy in Mombasa. Precisely because it is articulated by people from many walks of life (and often constitutes a pattern of discussion amongst friends, as illustrated in various instances above), engaging in nostalgic iteration evokes a community of Mombasans – of different racial and religious backgrounds – that have all been in the city for a long time. Angé & Berliner's notion of the 'mnemonic community' (2015: 10) is usefully applied here: decline forges a community of strangers all (imagined to be) united in their knowledge of better days. Nostalgic reminiscences, I suggest, are a means through

¹³² *Poussin* refers to a young chicken in some countries; in Mombasa it denotes a chicken dish prepared with a spicy sauce.

which individuals demonstrate the longevity of their ties to the city (and, as I elaborate below, position themselves in contrast to those with less rooted genealogies).

Of course, as Kathleen Stewart has observed, nostalgia does different things, ‘[depending] on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present’ (1988: 227). In this regard, although the discourses I have discussed here were espoused by a broad range of Mombasans, I suggest that claiming longevity of connection to the city via nostalgia was perhaps particularly significant to Asians who cannot claim ‘local-ness’ via skin colour, in a context where being brown is not a sign of ‘privileged autochthony’ (Mbembé 2002: 256). As Achille Mbembé writes of the racially based nationalism that characterises the continent,

[r]acial and territorial authenticity are conflated, and Africa becomes the land of black people. Since the racial interpretation is at the foundation of a restricted civic relatedness, everything that is not black is out of place, and thus cannot claim any sort of Africanity (Mbembé 2002: 256).

In this vein, I contend that while nostalgia provides an important means of place making for all long-time inhabitants, these claims to belonging perhaps have a particular resonance for Asians, who continue to be perceived as second-class citizens. These rhetorics not only root the speaker firmly in the history of the city, they construct a sense of civic relatedness precisely because they position her as part of a broader mnemonic community of Mombasans.

Coping with uncertainty: nostalgia and narratives of blame

As I have argued above, intimate – often corporeal – knowledge of pastimes, buildings and delights that now no longer exist is a way in which established residents create ties with each other, and the city itself. However, nostalgia is also a way in which a particular subset of Mombasans distinguishes themselves from those who cannot claim access to this heritage. Nostalgia roots the speaker in the city’s history, from which others are implicitly or explicitly excluded. In other words, these discourses deploy temporality to create a hierarchy of urban belonging. Those who,

personally or through family lineages, cannot claim a Mombasan past, are positioned as not belonging. Put simply, long-standing residents constitute a decreasing percentage of the city's population: many, especially (but not only) Asians, have moved away, while Mombasa's population is perceived to have increased markedly since 1990. Most people I knew described a 'ballooning' or 'explosion' of urban residents in recent decades, due to the large influx of Somali refugees fleeing civil war in the north, as well as ever-growing numbers of people from upcountry and the surrounding coast.

People from inland Kenya have been making home in Mombasa and its environs since the beginning of the 20th century. As elucidated earlier in the thesis, the systematic preference for employing upcountry Kenyans where possible – as stevedores, hotel receptionists or civil servants – dates from the colonial era, and has been perpetuated in certain sectors to this day. Young coastal residents interviewed by Kresse spoke of the discrimination they face in the job market, with many public and private employers in Mombasa openly privileging Christian 'black Africans' (2007a: 61). While the extent to which upcountry 'invasion' continues in the contemporary economic moment is debatable, the perception that coastal wealth – and public space – continues to be usurped by non-Muslim outsiders remains widespread. Even with the economic downturn, as Kenya's second largest urban conglomeration, Mombasa remains a hotbed of opportunity in comparison to other parts of the country. Both in terms of Somalis (see below) and upcountry Kenyans, Mombasa is viewed by many long-time residents as being taken over by the wrong kind of people.¹³³

Kenya and Somalia share a lengthy and porous border and, as noted in the Introduction, people of Somali origin have a long history in Kenya. However, their presence in the country increased markedly following the escalation of violence in Somalia in the early 1990s. As explained earlier, those with family connections or

¹³³ Mijikenda populations from the surrounding coast have also long flocked to the city in search of work (Willis 1993). While looked down upon by others as poor and less urbane, they are not viewed with the same contempt as those from upcountry. This relates to the adherence of many to Islam (even if they are often considered 'inferior' believers; see McIntosh 2009) and enduring connections with Mombasan families, historically through relations of servitude and agricultural tenancy.

financial means have sought to escape the vast refugee camps of the country's north, making their way to Nairobi and Mombasa. In Mombasa, many took up residence in Old Town, the part of the city historically inhabited by Swahilis and Asians (Eisenberg 2013; Kresse 2007a). In certain areas of the historic centre, Somalis are now a very visible presence, owning shops, cafés and residential homes, as well as constituting a vibrant part of street life. Areas such as Kilifi Corner or Mlango wa Papa – northern areas of Old Town – are imagined as Somali enclaves, which many non-Somalis now avoid. This is because, in addition to changing Old Town's economic and spatial dynamics, Somalis are imagined to threaten the Islamic status quo and, by implication, security in the city. Put simply, Somalis are frequently assumed to be Wahhabis, al-Shabaab sympathisers and potential 'terrorists'. That most ethnic Somalis are Shafii Sunni (not Wahhabi), that Wahhabism has a long history in Mombasa that well predates the Somali civil war, and that many preachers in Mombasa that espouse Wahhabi doctrine do not have Somali origins, does little to dislodge these stereotypes (McIntosh 2009; see also Chapter 3).

This conflation between Somalis and urban insecurity often finds form in Kenyan government policy. Following grenade and gun attacks in Nairobi and Mombasa in March 2014, the government launched Operation Usalama Watch, ordering all refugees (the majority of whom are Somali) living in urban areas to 'return' to the camps of Dadaab and Kakuma in the north of the country. Over the next few weeks many thousands of ethnic Somalis (both refugees and Kenyan citizens), particularly in Nairobi but also Mombasa, were arrested and detained as part of this national 'anti-terror' strategy.¹³⁴ The government's perception and treatment of Kenya's large ethnic Somali population was encapsulated in the title of a Human Rights Watch report: '*You are all terrorists*': *Kenyan police abuse of refugees in Nairobi*,¹³⁵ which was issued following a previous attempt to 'return' Somalis to refugee camps. Unsurprisingly, such sentiments also find outlets in the media. In a heinous editorial

¹³⁴ See the Human Rights Watch article: 'Kenya: end abusive round-ups'. 2014 (available online: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/12/kenya-end-abusive-round-ups>, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹³⁵ See the Human Rights Watch report: '*You are all terrorists*': *Kenyan police abuse of refugees in Nairobi*. 2013 (available online: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/29/you-are-all-terrorists/kenyan-police-abuse-refugees-nairobi>, accessed 19 August 2017).

published in the *Daily Nation* in March 2014, a senior editor of the country's best-selling newspaper opined, 'It would appear that every little, two-bit Somali has a big dream – to blow us up, knock down our buildings and slaughter our children'.¹³⁶ I cite these government policies and newspaper articles to demonstrate that Mombasans' perceptions of the link between Somalis, Wahhabism and 'terror' are not divorced from broader national imaginaries.

Here I should note that many Mombasans, such as café owner Kabir, distinguished between 'original' Somalis – who have been part of the Kenyan social landscape for generations – and the 'new' post-1990 crowd. For Kabir and others, it was the latter that posed a problem – not only did they have more money and influence, they were also more likely to be linked to Islamic extremism. 'They are more radicalised than the rest', he asserted, pushing thick locks of hair out of his eyes for the fifth time, 'these are the ones going to Iraq and Syria'.

In a moment of population 'influx' and rising geopolitical insecurity, I interpret nostalgia for places that are no longer there (or are no longer what they once were) as a tactic by which older elites attempt to define Mombasa as 'theirs', as a city they have more rights to than others. Neha Vora (2013) notes similar processes at play in Dubai, where many of the older businessmen she encountered enjoyed recounting tales of gold smuggling along Dubai Creek, long before the liberalisation of the Indian economy. In addition to propping up performances of masculinity, the evocation of these daring days gives older Dubai Indians a claim to the city that cannot be corralled by newer migrants. This narrative positioning not only fashions us/them, insider/outsider dichotomies, it also makes it easier to arraign newer arrivals as culpable for contemporary problems. Relishing a plate of *kachoris*¹³⁷ at Hashim's one afternoon, I asked him what he thought about the *Munisipali*'s (Municipal Police) crackdown on street vendors, who had been subject to aggressive

¹³⁶ See M. Mathiu's article: 'Are we just going to sit around and wait to be blown to bits by terrorists?' *Daily Nation*, 20 March 2014 (available online: <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/blogs/Are-we-just-going-to-sit-around-and-wait-to-be-blown-to-bits/1949942-2252048-format-xhtml-iyakqz/index.html>, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹³⁷ As noted in Chapter 2, *kachoris* are deep fried balls of moog dhal, chickpea flour, green mango and spices.

round-ups since the start of the year.¹³⁸ ‘Some of the hawkers should’ve been cleared up, some of them should’ve stayed’, he responded diplomatically. Hashim explained that in contrast to the coastal Digo women who, according to him, had traditionally done most of the street vending, the behaviour of many upcountry hawkers was simply not acceptable. ‘We never used to have problems...’ he remarked, ‘But these people have not been trained in the mannerisms of Islam’. Hashim’s discourse closely echoes well-established ideas about what kind of place Mombasa is, tensions about who has a ‘right’ to be here (Muslims), and understandings of the provenance of many coastal problems (inland).

In a similar vein, my trips to the market with Shahina would often be punctuated with derogatory commentary about Somalis. Detailing the absence of rubbish and the presence of order in an ostensibly pristine pre-Somali era, one morning she concluded her polemic with something of a rhetorical flourish, ‘These people are very dirty. I don’t know why. If you want to do business, you must be clean, no?’ This sense that Somalis have affected a change in the very character of the city was most keenly felt with regards to Old Town. Nuria, a woman in her mid-30s explained, ‘Old Town used to be so good. But these Somalis... They are noisy, loud, dirty. So not *mstaarabu* [lit. civilised person in Swahili]’. At a Khoja ladies’ social bringing together grannies and their granddaughters, I get chatting with Aamena, as she reapplies foundation on top of her already heavy make-up. Aamena now lives with her family in Kizingo, but this wasn’t always the case.

¹³⁸ On 1 January 2014, constitutional reforms approved via a referendum several years earlier came into law. The most significant change brought about by the new constitution is the devolution of power to the newly created counties. County governments are now in control of their own finances – and also responsible for raising much of their expenditure locally. During my fieldwork, the Mombasa County Government’s efforts in this regard centred on raising licence fees – tuk tuk drivers, juice bar owners and restaurateurs all complained to me about exorbitant hikes of between 100 and 400 percent from December 2013 to January 2014. At the same time, a licence fee was imposed on anyone selling items in the street: ‘hawkers’ – as street vendors are commonly referred to in Mombasa – had essentially been priced off the street. Everyone without a licence – i.e. everyone – was regularly rounded up by the *Munisipali*. For the first few months, when this policy was enforced with a vengeance, the change it brought to commercial centre of the city was hard to exaggerate. The streets were empty, not only of people selling mangoes, tomatoes, cashews, hairpins, curtain wires or handbags, but also of customers.

We lived in Old Town until 2008, opposite the police station. I loved it... but then we shifted. There were too many Somalis where we used to live. And there are six girls and one boy in my family. Our parents were worried.

Fatima agreed, 'Old Town used to be so safe. Now it's full of druggies. It's all since the Somalis came – ten, 15 years ago'. Fatima's precautionary measures included carrying the smallest possible handbag with her, as well as ensuring she returned home – to her apartment in another part of the island – by 5.30pm. The spectre of thieves, junkies and more generalised but equally threatening 'others' looms large in contemporary Old Town – and these threats are frequently associated with Somalis.

Here I should clarify that the prevalence of racialised stereotypes did not preclude more nuanced interactions. Shahina, for instance, always stopped for potatoes and a chat with Fatuma, a Somali woman with a wonderful open smile ('She's so nice and very beauty, my god'), and bought her dates from a little Somali-owned *duka* on one of Kibokoni's main thoroughfares. 'He always gives me *kwa kawaida*', she explained. *Kwa kawaida* literally means as usual or usually in Swahili, a term which Shahina used to implore vendors to maintain established price and quality arrangements with her.

However, there was a real sense of Somalis usurping urban space amongst many I spoke to. Chatting with Maryam while she heated some of last night's leftovers for our lunch I learn that,

There used to be so few people in Mombasa. Now there are Somali people selling everywhere. They're on the streets, in the shops, they've bought houses. They're breaking the old houses and making new buildings.

Many were quick to explain that it was Somalis fuelling the construction boom and rise in real estate prices, as suggested by the fact that Nadim was priced out of buying back his old *paan* shop by Somali investors. Somali cash reserves, real or imagined, only added to the impression of 'invasion'. This sentiment was emphatically reiterated to me during a meeting with one of the city's more prominent Shia clerics of Swahili origin. In his assessment, 'From the 60s to the 90s Mombasa belonged to Mombasans. We had influence, we were involved in every activity. Now we are dominated. The way has been given to non-Mombasans'. When asked who

these non-Mombasans were, the Sheikh responded in his patrician tone, ‘Kikuyus and Somalis of course. You need only to look around you’.

Shahina, like countless others, positioned Somalis as having *materially and morally* polluted the city, bringing Wahhabi Islam to the mosques as much as trash to the streets. Although as mentioned above this association does not stand up to scrutiny (the majority of Somalis are not Wahhabi and the doctrine has a long history in Mombasa), people were wont to use Wahhabi and Somali interchangeably, exemplified by Kabir’s matter-of-fact assessment one afternoon: ‘Somalis have taken over the mosques and people are afraid’. Accusations that Somalis have had a detrimental impact on the form and content of Islam in Mombasa was often evidenced via a nostalgic take on women’s clothing. Passing a woman in a face veil on the street would almost always elicit one of Shahina’s rather magnificent tuts, after which she would sigh heavily and tell me, ‘Ladies in Mombasa never used to dress like this’. The presence of *ninjas* on the street, as women in *niqab* or face veil were commonly described, was a reminder of their absence in days gone by, an era where everyone allegedly shared more similar Islamic principles. Melancholia for a now lost Islamic harmony was never far from Sahil’s lips, ‘There was always such good relations between Muslims before, all Muslims used to get along’. The *niqab* was a visible reminder of a shattering of this idealised past. For many Mombasans, the *niqab* denoted an incorrect interpretation of the Quran, which failed to accord sufficient rights for women – just one of the many things wrong with Wahhabism and, by association, Somalis.

From here it is a small jump to blame Somalis for the city’s declining security situation. With Operation Usalama Watch in full swing, the Mombasa County police chose the Easter weekend in April 2014 to set up a series of security check points around the county, including on the two bridges leading off the island. Good Friday and Easter Monday are public holidays in Kenya, and many people use the opportunity to journey out of the city for a day or two. The road blocks caused an impressive traffic snarl-up, and led to hundreds being arrested over the course of two days, mostly for not being in possession of correct documentation (throughout 2014 the police interpreted it as their mandate to incarcerate anyone – not just people of Somali origin – unable to produce a national identity or alien card, or the money to

pay a bribe). Kabir, who I meet on the following Tuesday, was deeply unimpressed. ‘It took me two hours to cross Nyali Bridge!’ he exclaimed, putting a damper on a family outing to Pirates, a public beach on the northern mainland. A delayed Sunday sojourn was the least of it, Kabir simply could not comprehend the number of ‘terrorist’ incidents in the last three months – and was unequivocal in his analysis, ‘What has happened to this place? You don’t see Arabs or Asians doing this kind of thing. Only Somalis’.

As this range of examples shows nostalgic discourse – for Tuesdays at the Drive-In or evening strolls at Lighthouse, for a time before *ninjas* or ‘uneducated’ hawkers – constructs the city as belonging to some people and not others. As much as excluding these ‘others’, nostalgia is a way in which older residents make a claim to the city in the face of rising insecurity and perceived religious and demographic change.

Conclusion: the desirability of nostalgia in Mombasa

This chapter has examined the multiple drivers and social functions of nostalgia in Mombasa. Taking an ethnographic approach to the political economy of nostalgia, I have sought to highlight the nuances nostalgia talk can illuminate, be that in terms of the contradictory nature of prosperity or the intertwined nature of loss and gain, inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Mombasa. While attentive to the ways in which nostalgia is used to narrate politico-economic insecurity, I have suggested that it can be a source of social capital in two senses. Countering associations of nostalgia and economic stagnation, I have demonstrated that nostalgia in Mombasa registers wealth improvements, as much as laments decline. Moreover, rather than something to be eschewed or wished away, nostalgia can constitute a resource, frequently reiterated because it denotes a privileged claim on the city. This chapter underscores the irreducible plurality (Bissell 2005: 239) of nostalgia in Mombasa and its significance in everyday interaction for a diverse community of Mombasans struggling to get along with each other, and with social change.

I have argued that nostalgia can be a source of *distinction*, marking the speaker’s contemporary economic standing through alluding to histories of wealth

accumulation, or their position as more Mombasan than ‘others’, based on a historically grounded appreciation of the city. At the same time, nostalgia creates bonds of *affinity* amongst long-standing Mombasan elites who (are also imagined to) remember places and patterns of old – be that sesame seeds at the cinema or the chicken tikka at Splendid View. Through its power to exclude those who cannot claim access to this epistemology of decay, nostalgia is simultaneously a vehicle for demarcating ‘others’ and a trope via which older inhabitants seek to shore up their claims to the city. Nostalgic discourse often points to the *disjuncture* between past and present, structuring critical commentary about political elites, demographic change and the quality of chicken *poussin*. But it also posits *continuity*, underpinning a sense of shared history and bringing into being a community of Mombasans united in their remembrance of alternative pasts. Often drawing on equally rooted histories, the following chapter turns our attention to the ways in which urban residents strive to act on its future.

Chapter 5

Negotiating the future: aspiration, anxiety and reform on a building site

Dust deposits its all-encompassing cloak the instant I emerge from Rabi's car. The place is already heaving with workers, decked out in gumboots and boiler suits, some green, some orange. Three Asian overseers are giving instructions from the centre of the field; one of them has the remnants of a red *tika*¹³⁹ on his forehead. Someone comes over to give us hard hats and Rabi suggests we start in the mosque, by far the most complete of the buildings.

Rabi Jalal, the man overseeing the major Khoja building project known as the Jaffery Complex, has kindly agreed to take me on a tour. Rabi is enthusiastic in speech and manner, and he's a nimble navigator of the site. Stroking his stubbly grey beard, he stops in front of the mosque entrance to explain his architectural vision. 'It's not traditional Islamic. Neither coastal. It's a mix of African, regional and my own inspiration. The mosque will not be dedicated to any particular Islamic faith'. 'Really?' I ask in surprise. 'It won't be a Khoja Ithna-Asheri mosque?' 'No, no', Rabi is adamant.

This mosque will be open to all Muslims. A few non-Khojas come to our [existing] mosque, but it's minimal. It's because it's branded as ours. This will be different. We're opening it with the Chief Kadhi [Kenya's preeminent Muslim legal authority] in May. This mosque is for everyone.

Rabi then describes how impartiality is reflected in the building's design. 'The minaret has coastal features, more or less. But that's also mixed in with Portuguese. The long windows represent the idea of divinity, going towards god'. Pointing to the plasterwork ventilation windows on the side he continues, 'The border windows are purely Swahili culture. But the arches', he points to the arcs that frame the building's

¹³⁹ Also called *tilaka*, this is a Hindu ritual marking worn on the forehead.

many frontal windows, ‘they are my own personal creation’. Rabi smiles with the satisfaction of a Cheshire cat.¹⁴⁰

He can see the confusion on my face and is ready to elaborate. ‘You see, a Persian arch is like this’, Rabi makes a slightly pointed shape with his hands. Switching to a more elongated half oval he states, ‘That’s the Arabian or Mogul style. And the Swahili is like this’, Rabi makes a third hand display that seems to be wider and more rounded – although by this point I’m not entirely sure if I’ve understood these handmade distinctions. ‘I went for something different’, Rabi points again to the wide arches in front of us. These rise in an ogee-style pinnacle, and can be seen in the photograph below (Fig. 34).



Figure 34: The religious nucleus of the Jaffery Complex, including its ‘unidentifiable’ arches.

This building will comprise a mosque, *imambargah*, *madrasa* and *ghuslkhana*, as well as a large kitchen and social hall.

Eager for him to continue, I feign comprehension. ‘So how did you go about designing this shape?’ I query. Rabi is all too happy to elaborate.

¹⁴⁰ Made famous through Lewis Carroll’s (1974 [1865]) *Alice’s adventures in Wonderland*, this fictional figure is known for its iconic grin.

I looked at many books and websites, researching what is a coastal arch, a Persian, a Turkish. In the end, it's a bit like a coastal arch, but it doesn't reflect any particular thing. I wanted a neutral thing. Let's have our own arch!

Rabi frames his desire for pan-Islamic neutrality squarely in terms of outreach.

There are so many misconceptions about the Shia community. Muslims think we're a non-Muslim entity. These are purely wrong concepts. I want this [Complex] to put out a clear message. Number one: we are open, we don't have grudges. Let's let other Muslims know. Let them attend [our mosque]; let them get a better understanding of us. Let's make ourselves known better, rather than staying in seclusion. We're very few in numbers; we'd be wiped out. They should know who we are.

The emphasis on unity continues as we head inside what is still a shell of a building.¹⁴¹ Stacks of tiles, waiting to be laid out, cover the floor. 'These are Moorish', Rabi says. 'They will go up to window sill', Rabi indicates to about hip-height up the wall. 'The ones at the top will have Arabic inscriptions. They will praise Mohammed and his family. They all say very neutral things, like the names of Allah'.

As we carefully ascend what will eventually become a staircase, Rabi chuckles, 'One Khoja tradition that we are incorporating is something that is not really Muslim. We don't like toilets to be in the mosque, so we'll put the toilets to the side', he indicates round the corner.

Pointing to a white box-like building, Rabi continues his commentary,

That will be the nerve centre. It will house the generator, the transformer, the CCTV. And then on the other side of the commercial centre [a large, yet to be started block that will face onto the bustling Nyerere Avenue], they'll be a water facility. We're going to have a bio-digester to purify the water through osmosis. All the water will be under our control.

¹⁴¹ The photograph (Fig. 34 on the previous page) to which this discussion speaks was taken several weeks after the conversation described here.

From the first floor we have a good view of the foundations at the southern end of the cricket ground. These foundations, part of which can be seen to the left of the photograph below (Fig. 35), will eventually support three blocks of flats, alleged to become the tallest buildings in Mombasa. ‘Each block will have 20 floors each. We’re going vertical!’ Rabi exclaims proudly, ‘The cricket ground has been the heart of our community for nearly a hundred years. So we just decided to build around it!’



Figure 35: Jaffery Complex with apartment block foundations to the left. A small corner of Kilindini Harbour, leading to the port, can be seen to the right of Jaffery’s religious nucleus. The area of Likoni that comprises the city’s southern mainland is visible in the distance.

The Jaffery Complex, I am reminded, is being built on hallowed community ground. Purchased in 1923 by three wealthy scions of the *jamaat*, the land was bequeathed to the community for sporting purposes and became the site of the much loved cricket pitch. A clubhouse was added in the 1930s. The area belonging to Khojas is one part of a huge field that takes up a significant part of the southern centre of the island, divided into plots owned principally by different Asian communities: the Hindu ‘Coast Gymkhana’, the Bohra ‘Burhani Sports Club’ and the ‘Goan Institute’ are here, as well as the non-denominational ‘Mombasa Sports Club’ whose chairmen have been drawn from a range of communities, Asian and otherwise. A sense of the

Jaffery Complex as part of this wider space is provided in the following photograph (Fig. 36).



Figure 36: Jaffery Complex in context.

Jaffery occupies the middle distance of this photograph. Part of the fields belonging to Coast Gymkhana and Burhani Sports Club can be seen to the right. A tea trading company and new bank constitute the other large buildings in the foreground.

A number of older men I talked to reminisced about the inter-Asian cricket competitions of days past: the Khoja Ithna-Asheri team was widely remembered as one of the best by Khojas and non-Khojas alike. Although there is still a vibrant cricket scene in Mombasa, the sport now competes with a number of other past times, from football to Facebook; it has lost its centrality within Asian male sociality. Rabi added, ‘Since all the migration to the West, the club is not fully utilised’. Despite cricket’s waning popularity, the preservation of the pitch was a fundamental concern behind the design of the Jaffery Complex. ‘That was the big question’, Rabi explicates, ‘how to preserve the ground? So we went vertical!’ Rabi repeats his favourite phrase.

Mention of the site's origins reminds me of the various discussions I've heard regarding the challenges this land has posed to mosque building stipulations. 'So, can you explain, is this land *waqf* land now or not?' I ask Rabi.¹⁴²

'Yes, now the building is a mosque', he affirms. 'The government gave us a document assuring no repossession'. I look at him blankly.

Before building, a delegation went to visit al-Sistani [the Shia legal authority followed by most Khojas]. There were five, six people, including the Chairman [of the *jamaat*]. First we communicated by e-mail and phone – these *maraji* [leading Shia clerics] are not as free as they should be. We sent him all the documentation two or three months before visiting. When we asked him if we can build on non-*waqf* land, he asked, "Will you get confirmation from the government [that they will not reposes the land]? If not, call it a *bayt-ul-salaat* [a prayer hall]. If yes, call it a mosque".

The difference between these two buildings, I learn, is that saying prayers in a *bayt-ul-salaat* reduces the potential amount of *sawab* (blessings) accrued from the act of praying. Praying in congregation is highly valorised in Islam, and praying with others in the context of a mosque is most meritorious of all. But this doesn't bother Rabi, 'They say [a *bayt-ul-salaat*] reduces the amount of *sawab*, an orthodox would never settle with it. But for me you can pray anywhere'.

'So is it a freehold property now?' I inquire.

It's a leasehold. But that's not a problem. In England all property is leasehold. And according to the new constitution of Kenya there is no freehold land. In many places, there is no freehold land and they still build mosques. Islam is progressive; you have to follow the laws of the land. The national government has given us its consent – they are not going to repossess this particular mosque space. So it's a mosque.

Rabi also shows me where the state of the art *madrassa* classrooms will be located (above the mosque), and takes me inside the soon-to-be-demolished Art Deco sports

¹⁴² Under Islamic law, mosques are to be constructed on land that has been designated as inalienable and intended solely for religious or charitable purposes.

pavilion which contains an architect's model of the proposed site. Laid out in miniature I see the flats, *jamaat* offices, a religious complex (comprising mosque, *imambargah*, *madrasa* and social hall), plus a new sports pavilion – complete with roof-top pool and flanked by sports courts of various kinds – not to mention the multi-storey commercial space along the eastern edge, rents from which will help subsidise the rest of the estate. The almost impossible proximity of the many high-rise buildings, both to each other and to the central cricket pitch, makes me wonder how cricket balls will be prevented from smashing glass; but mostly I am struck by the ambitiousness of the project. While the area of the site is not particularly large, it will eventually hold a quite extraordinary range of facilities. 'This is about securing the future', Rabi tells me at the conclusion of our tour.

The religious economy of urban space

This chapter considers the confluence of factors that drive the development of the Jaffery Complex, bringing together a host of tensions discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Examining the intersection of aspiration and religiosity, notions of social distance and proximity, local attachment and global connection that the site encapsulates, I explore what it reveals about Mombasa's changing social and material landscapes, as well as how the buildings reflect Khoja efforts to reimagine their relations to the city and secure a place for themselves within its future.

A number of academics have turned their attention to the ways in which religious building projects *reflect and affect* neoliberal urban transformations (Lanz & Oosterbaan 2016; Ukah 2016). Markha Valenta (2013) describes the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai, a golden-roofed tower block that attracts some 100,000 visitors daily, as a prism reflecting wider changes in the city since the 1980s. Housing a small statue of Ganesh (the elephant-headed deity) in its inner sanctum, Valenta writes that the building's present-day monumentality, as well as its self-sufficiency, are wholly unexceptional when read against the backdrop of Mumbai's economy. Located in Prabhadevi, the centre of Bombay's now moribund textile industry, Siddhivinayak's conspicuous wealth reflects the luxury apartments and multinational headquarters that now increasingly eclipse the mill towers of an earlier era, material

manifestations of the government's prioritisation of business over labour.

Liberalisation has brought vast wealth for some, at the exclusion of others; while rent hikes have forced many former mill workers out of Prabhadevi, Siddhivinayak has been a beneficiary of the fortunes of the city's growing middle and upper classes. A critical source of Siddhivinayak's ability to manipulate global economic flows and maintain a generous revenue stream pertains to its capacity to transmit blessings beyond itself. Visitors to the site present themselves in front of Ganesh in order to receive *darshan* (blessings); *darshan*, however, is by no means limited to those within the temple's vicinity. Various rituals are broadcast live on television, as well as through Siddhivinayak's website, which generates four million hits a month (Valenta 2013: 106). In other words, the temple is embedded within a 'global dispersal of spiritual enrichment' (2013: 111), spreading *darshan* through vast electronic networks that in turn help sustain its coffers through equally extensive financial circuits.

Although in some ways indicative of the intensification and increasing visibility of communalism that Valenta and numerous others have examined as accompanying neoliberalisation in India (Corbridge & Harris 2000; Hansen 1999), Siddhivinayak's visitors are drawn from an extremely divergent demographic and its pluralist appeal is a key element of the temple's marketing vocabulary. Its website, for instance, tells of the Muslim artists who carved the frame of the sanctum sanctorum, as well as the Marathi artisan that constructed its crown.

The building, then, is *presented as literally carrying within its body* – through not only the religious identity but also the religion-specific styles – the skills and traditions of the craftsmen who made it, *the very pluralism that it celebrates in its visitors, and by implication in Mumbai as a whole* (Valenta 2013: 109, emphasis added).

If the temple '[presents] itself as encompassing the world', Valenta writes, it is also heavily invested in '[protecting] itself from that world' (2013: 109). Siddhivinayak has a security apparatus to rival many airports. Visitors are subject to rigorous scanning and surveillance procedures, wealthy regulars can opt for a biometric identity card to facilitate entry and the temple's security personnel are trained by Israeli security forces. Moreover, the roof's solar panels provide all its electricity

needs, ensuring that an energy-dependent security set-up is never beholden to external power failures. Finding close parallels between Siddhivinayak and the city's burgeoning appetite for gated residences, Valenta positions many of these measures as being heavily influenced by the increasingly close cooperation between the Israeli and Indian governments in the wake of the Mumbai attacks of 2008, as well as the global security circuits that have emerged under the logic of the 'war on terror'. In this sense, the temple reflects both the privatisation of security that has accompanied late liberalism, as well as the increasingly interconnected logics of state and private security in a context of global 'terrorism'.

While Valenta considers the confluence of religiosity, aspiration and security in the context of a temple, others have written on the conjunction of these factors with regards to gated communities and estates. Research in this area adds a further dimension to the literature that demonstrates the close interplay between fear and aspiration in the political economy of residence (Davis & Monk 2008; Davis 1998; Low 2004; Smith 2015). Smith's (2015) interlocutors in the Nairobi estate of Kaloleni (also referred to in Chapter 3), go to great lengths to secure their bungalows through hedges, fences and padlocked verandas, enclosing what used to be communal space. The securitisation of domestic space in Kaloleni is in part a product of a widespread disillusionment with government capacity (or desire) to protect urban residents from rampant violent crime. But it is also because of the 'desirability of [the] enclave' (Smith 2015: 145), portrayed on billboards throughout Nairobi (as well as proliferating within Kenyan cyberspace), and materialised in the elaborate security apparatuses that envelop sites of leisure and residency frequented by the city's elite. As Smith observes, '[a]rchitectures of security are also markers of exclusivity' (2015: 144). Smith's interlocutors assessed their more modest modifications to their houses in utilitarian *and* aesthetic terms. Fences, for many in Kaloleni, are beautiful, symbolic of having 'made it', at least to a certain extent. Gates mark status, and entrench particular kinds of social difference, in this case class.

Bringing religion into the picture, Ayşe Çavdar (2016) examines assemblages of Muslim and middle class values in the context of an Islamic gated complex in Istanbul's western outskirts. While Basaksehir started life as a social housing project,

it is now a constellation of gated communities around a vast enclosed park. Reflecting the rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been heavily involved in its development (first as mayor of Istanbul and later as president of Turkey), an increasingly wealthy segment of religious Istanbulites have sought residency in the area. Residents articulated their desire to escape the immorality and lack of safety that they associated with urban poverty, citing alcohol and drug abuse along with fear of theft. For many, Basaksehir offered a sanctuary, allowing them to live a more Islamic lifestyle at the same time as providing a secure environment for themselves and their property. Others had moved to Basaksehir from poorer religious neighbourhoods: for them Basaksehir provided a space to flaunt their new-found wealth, as much as avoid gossiping neighbours who used to criticise aspects of their lifestyle (such as allowing their daughters to return late from university). Basaksehir was thus a middle class haven, offering respite from the city's secular evils, and distance from interpretations of Islam positioned as 'traditional' and out-dated. One resident summed up his preference for the area in the following terms: 'In Basaksehir neither my car nor the headscarves of my wife and daughters cause any problem' (2016: 507). Within these explanations, religious, security and economic justifications are closely interlaced.

Building aspirations: the Jaffery Complex and (trans)local status

These reflections find close parallels in Mombasa. Speaking of the Khoja Ithna-Asheri *jamaat*, Ali explained, 'Back in the 90s, almost the entire community was still living in Old Town. Now, most people who can afford to live in Kizingo or nearby'. The need to move out of Old Town – which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is widely considered a locus of poverty by many former and current residents – is one of the key drivers behind the building of the Jaffery Complex. As Rabi recounted to me during a meeting before our site tour,

The idea to move out of the centre has been around for a long time. Every day there are more muggings and druggies and so on. These things are getting worse, especially with the influx of Somalis. And we're a conservative community. We're worried about our youth being influenced by

these things. Before we never had security concerns. Now there are frequent snatchings.

In light of the perceived decline of Old Town, the original impetus around Jaffery was to move the *jamaat's* religious institutions out of the area. Importantly, this was linked not only to increased security risks perceived to be associated with growing wealth disparities, but also middle class logistical constraints: more and more members of the *jamaat* live outside of Old Town and come to the *imambargah* by car. Many Old Town alleys are not navigable by car; those that can accommodate a vehicle are all one-way. Members of the Young Men's Union were expert valets, efficiently squeezing cars into the car park we encountered in Chapter 3, however, there would often be long tailbacks on Old Town streets, particularly on major occasions and during the months of Muharram and Ramadhan, when the majority of the *jamaat* attend evening *majalis*. 'It's a nightmare; you can sit in the car for hours', bemoaned Sushaila. The *jamaat's* car-owning wealthier members were increasingly inconvenienced by the *imambargah's* location. Much of this discourse evoked the interplay between nostalgia and social mobility examined in Chapter 2. Leila's views on Jaffery were a case in point.

We need a new mosque. It's so hard to park around Hyderi. Especially around Ramadhan. Last time we were stuck for two hours! So yeah, I think it's a good idea. But in a way being stuck is a nice thing, we used it to discuss the *majlis* for two hours! And we stopped for ice cream. But I can't wait for the new mosque.

Already cognisant of the forms of sociality she would miss with the move to the Jaffery Complex, Leila nevertheless saw it as a step forward for the *jamaat*.

Another way in which class concerns drive the project is via a desire to 'uplift' those still 'stuck' in Old Town. To quote Rabi,

Those living in there [i.e. Old Town] are missing out on amenities. We realised, we couldn't leave them behind. Jaffery will have all mod cons and security. It's all about economic upliftment.

The Jaffery Complex, in other words, is helping the *jamaat* to construct distance, both from a declining area of the city, and an impoverished past. Promotional videos for the Jaffery Complex on YouTube reflect this trajectory and indicate the kinds of subjects the project intends to construct. One short clip takes the viewer through artistic impressions of the forthcoming apartments, showing sleek, minimalist furniture in each.¹⁴³ In the state of the art kitchen, something that looks suspiciously like a bottle of white wine stands on the central table. I did not know any Khojas who drank alcohol and I do not think that the *jamaat* in any way wishes to encourage its consumption; however, its inclusion reflects the bourgeois liberal subject that is both appealed to and produced through advertising campaigns around the world, and the kind of lifestyle parallels the Jaffery Complex aspires to. A more recent video provides an aerial view of a tuk tuk struggling through a water-clogged street in front of the existing *imambargah* (Hyderi) before panning to the pristine environs of Jaffery, gleaming cars parked carefully in front of the towering, freshly painted Complex.¹⁴⁴

Old Town residents, those intended to be helped along this march to a progressive future via the housing project, had mixed views on the matter. Sabiha, the wife of a prominent if less affluent community figure, was very proud of being gifted an apartment in thanks for her husband's services to the *jamaat*. Latifah, whose very different views on the matter were articulated in the vignette at the start of this thesis, emphasised her attachment to the area of Old Town in which she has lived for the duration of her married life, 'No way I'm leaving. I love Kibokoni. I've been here for 31 years'. (Latifah move to Kibokoni from Tononoka, another area of the island, when she married). She was also unimpressed with the relocation of the *jamaat's* religious institutions that, to her mind, unfairly discriminated against the already poor. 'Are they thinking we're going to take tuk tuks every time [to attend religious functions]?' she queried. Like most who live in Old Town, Latifah's family does not own a car; she walks to the existing *imambargah* in less than five minutes. Although

¹⁴³ See the Jaffery Complex Mombasa YouTube channel: *Jaffery Complex apartments*. 2016 (available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=794garhDoyA>, accessed 23 August 2017).

¹⁴⁴ See the Jaffery Complex Mombasa YouTube channel: *Exclusive footage on Jaffery Complex Mombasa (drone view)*. 2016 (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B0Y9PIInds>, accessed 23 August 2017).

only a short, 50 shilling ride (approximately 35 pence) from Old Town, this expense, especially considering the busyness of the Khoja liturgical calendar, would be an additional strain on the family finances (not least because they would require more than one tuk tuk).

No one is required to buy into the Jaffery Complex housing scheme. However, the *jamaat* has institutionalised a three-tier payment system to encourage and enable families of varying socioeconomic status to relocate. Wealthy Khojas are encouraged to buy outright; apartments for sale are, in Rabi's terms, 'the most well furnished'. While priority in one block will be given to Mombasa residents (Block B), apartments in Block C will be available for 'community members worldwide' to purchase for below market rates. A designated cache of apartments provides for those in Mombasa who can afford eight to ten year payment schemes, paying 'rent' towards the ultimate purchase of their homes at a rate established by the *jamaat* according to household income. Finally, as one promotional video explains,

Block A will be allocated to economically challenged members of the community, who are not able to go for the tenant purchase scheme, these will remain as property of the Trust Board and given to deserving members of the community. Also included in this block are two floors each of self-contained bedrooms for *Bewakhana* [widows' flats] and *Musafirkhana* [travellers' lodge].¹⁴⁵

Flats in Block A will be rented out for 'bare minimum rates', thus, in Rabi's words, 'enabling [poorer households] to start saving because they are no longer paying [much] rent'.

As observed in the literature on gated communities, the Jaffery Complex is evidence of increasing class segregation, which in the Mombasan context intersects with racialised patterns of residence. While many Asians have long preferred to live in apartment blocks or small housing societies, often with people from the same

¹⁴⁵ See the YouTube video created by S.KreationZ: *The road to Jaffery Complex: a unique blend of religious, social, residential, commercial & sporting facilities*. 2016 (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYHPj-EmdPs>, accessed 23 August 2017).

religious community, ostentatious gated complexes such as Jaffery encode and entrench social hierarchies in a far more visible way, especially when compared to the social heterogeneity and residential proximity of Old Town. An aspect that has received less attention in the literature on gated communities is the way in which such building projects may work to *reduce*, as much as reinscribe, differences amongst residents, as well as between residents and the city beyond. Jaffery will enable poorer *jamaat* members to live in apartments that are similar in size and design features to the homes of some of the richest Khojas, as well as potentially give the less wealthy a step up on the property ladder. In this sense, the project is clearly designed to promote a degree of socio-economic levelling amongst Khojas. At the same time, the payment schemes and economic segregation of the flats serve to re-inscribe Khoja class hierarchies. As Latifah's concerns about the cost of transport to and from the new Complex illustrate, it may even contribute to further impoverishing those who choose not to leave Old Town.

This tension between reducing and reinscribing class difference is also visible when one considers Khoja relations to the city's Asian population more generally. Via the Jaffery Complex, Khojas often presented themselves as 'catching up' with other communities who have already sought estate-style segregation: 'The Ismailis have had proper [gated] housing for so long, even the Memons now have', remarked Sabiha, carefully avoiding the oil spitting from the pan where she was deep-frying *puris*.¹⁴⁶ 'It's time we joined the club!' Sabiha's comments construe a variegated Asian middle class, status within which is in part measured via the gated enclave. Many Ismailis, long-standing rivals of Khojas Ithna-Asheris (see Introduction), have lived on estates since the 1950s. There are three Ismaili gated communities in Mombasa, two on the island (in the northern neighbourhoods of Makupa and Tudor) and one on the northern mainland. On the island, the two estates comprise a large central *jamaatkhana* (Ismaili prayer hall) surrounded by blocks of flats, coupled with a few low-key enterprises such as a gym and a hairdresser. Although now showing their age, these estates were seen as the height of modernity when first built; yet another way in which the Ismaili prosperity and 'advancement' in relation to other

¹⁴⁶ *Puris* are a biscuit-shaped, savoury snack made of deep-fried chickpea flour and spices.

Asians was made manifest in the eyes of some of my informants. Memons and Bohras have constructed large estates north of the island within the last decade. Encircled by impressive outer walls, replete with glass and barbed wire trimmings, both estates resemble fortified citadels.

This trend towards gated complexes amongst Asians, however, is by no means universal. When I asked Kabir whether any of his fellow Bhadals lived on similar estates, he responded with a withering laugh, 'Only rich communities have such things'. Even though there are a growing number of wealthy Bhadala, Kabir's comment adds further evidence to the ways in which social differences find spatial form in Mombasa. He added that it would be impossible to leave Old Town, he could never forgo the pleasure of sitting out and watching the world go by at night. A Baluchi family I spent time with were also unimpressed with the idea. There had, in the past, been talk of building a gated complex for Mombasa's Baluchi population, 'But nobody wants to live in a community!' laughed Hamida. Her husband Azim added, 'Too much gossip. It's better if we're spread out'. Baluchis tend to speak Swahili at home and have allegedly intermarried to a far greater extent than most other South Asian origin communities in Mombasa.

Importantly, the communicative power of the Jaffery Complex is not limited to shaping class divisions in Mombasa. Chatting with Ali one afternoon, I asked for his opinions on Jaffery.

You want to know what I think? It's too big. We're not big enough to afford something like that. It's a luxury we cannot afford. And we've already paid too high a price for the bling bling. A lot was sacrificed for that.

I ask him to clarify what.

Finances. These are resources we already have elsewhere [i.e. there is already a mosque, *madrassa* and *imambargah* in Old Town]. Maybe one block of flats would've been ok. But not this.

If this is the case, I enquire how he thinks the project came to fruition in the first place.

I think there's a bunch of people who want to make a mark. Other [Khoja] communities have big [housing] complexes and we don't, even though Mombasa is where the core of the community came from.

Here Ali is referring to Mombasa's central node in patterns of migration and emigration that have shaped the global Khoja diaspora as it appears today. Ali looks at me, perhaps worried that he's been overly critical of the *jamaat* hierarchy. 'For the record, it's not that I want them to fail... A lot of people want them to fail, but I want them to succeed, I wish them every success'. The project is a means through which current *jamaat* leaders construct their legacies in Mombasa and beyond.

Indeed, it is partly through architectural projects that other locations of the Khoja diaspora is assessed from Mombasa. People would often ask me if I'd been to the *imambargah* in Dar; 'It's huge, big enough for life size tombs [of the Imams]', explained Sakina, apparently exaggerating only slightly. Nadia wanted to know if I'd visited the Lavington Complex in Nairobi (which hosts the capital's Khoja mosque, *imambargah*, library, kindergarten and various other facilities). 'It's state of the art. They even have a rubberised running track!' It is within this global geography of edifices that Khojas in Mombasa often positioned the Jaffery Complex: 'This is the one of the oldest and most important *jamaats* and we've had no new buildings for so long!' With this comment, Khadija asserts Mombasa's historical significance as worthy of contemporary investment. The absence of such projects is at odds with Mombasa's place in Khoja history; buildings are seen to give material value to the *jamaat*'s prominence within a global Khoja narrative. Befitting of its historical prominence, Jaffery attempts to ameliorate the Mombasa *jamaat*'s 'edifice complex' (Grant 2014) on a diasporic scale.

These discourses are also reflected in textual form. One morning, I am chatting with Sahil in his office when he gets temporarily called off somewhere. Waiting for him to return, I reach for the April 2013 copy of *Federation Samachar* lying near his desk. The English language magazine of the Africa Federation of Khoja Ithna-Asheri *jamaats* is published somewhat sporadically every few months.¹⁴⁷ *Samachar*

¹⁴⁷ Mentioned above, the Africa Federation unites the Khoja *jamaats* of Africa. Its secretariat is located in Dar es Salaam.

meaning news in Gujarati, the first part of the periodical is dedicated to updates, activities and events from the *jamaats* ‘Around Africa’, with a smaller section about *jamaats* elsewhere. This is followed by various general sections on health and family issues, as well as snippets of Khoja history in the ‘Trips down memory lane’ section. On the front of the issue in Sahil’s office is a picture of a collapsed building, with an ambulance in the foreground and people searching through rubble. The front-page headline reads ‘Tragedy in Dar es Salaam’. Inside, I learn that in March 2013 a privately owned 16-storey block of flats being built next door to the Khoja mosque in Dar had tragically collapsed, killing 36 people including four young Khojas who had been playing football. The article details the relief effort – which involved various segments of the *jamaat*, as well as arms of the state, volunteers and construction companies who came together in what was ‘no lesser than the aftermath of an earthquake’.¹⁴⁸ A relief fund had been established on the Africa Federation’s website to help support the victims’ families.

Buildings are not just a focus of the *Federation Samachar*’s pages when collapsed. Studying the issue more carefully when I get home, I find articles on five construction projects currently being undertaken by Khoja *jamaats* worldwide: at the time of publication, a ‘middle-income’ apartment block in Dar had just been completed, while ground had been broken commencing the construction of the ‘AFED Commercial Complex’. Also in Dar, money accrued from renting this commercial space will help fund Africa Federation activities and was heralded as a ‘landmark in self-sufficiency’.¹⁴⁹ Construction had reached the sixth floor of the ‘Al Qa’em Building Housing Project’ in Arusha (consisting of apartments for *jamaat* members), while the Ja’fari Islamic Housing Corporation in Toronto detailed its plans to construct a suite of one-bed apartments for the elderly. The periodical also contained a three-page spread dedicated to Mombasa’s Jaffery Complex. As well as

¹⁴⁸ See: ‘Tragedy in Dar es Salaam as building collapses’. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 21. (available online: http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹⁴⁹ See: ‘AFED Commercial Complex takes off in Dar’. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 13. (available online: http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

outlining the dignitaries who attended the ground breaking ceremony in September 2012 (the Chairman of the Africa Federation and the President of the World Federation, among others), excerpts of the Africa Federation Chairman’s speech emphasised the importance of the ‘towering personalities’ of the Mombasa *jamaat* within the evolution of the Khoja diaspora and the development of Kenya.¹⁵⁰ The article outlined the Africa and World Federation pledges to the project, and ends by describing a meeting hosted by the Mombasa *jamaat* chairman after the ceremony in which ‘current challenges encountered by Shias globally’ and various housing issues faced by other African *jamaats* were the main points of discussion.¹⁵¹ The report includes a one-page ‘Fact file’, detailing the reputed architects, lawyers, engineers and surveyors involved with the project, as well as listing various key elements of the project:

Plumbing, Drainage and Fire Hydrant systems, Electrical systems, Emergency backup power provisions, Power and lighting and A/C points, generators, Bio digester provisions, water systems, elevators....¹⁵²

As is evident from the number of building projects discussed in a single issue of *Federation Samachar*, buildings are an important medium of communication – and competition – amongst different parts of the Khoja diaspora.

The political economy of *sawab*

The final section of the Jaffery Complex ‘Fact file’ is entitled ‘Masjid or musalla’.¹⁵³ It explains the ‘fervent efforts’ underway to try to secure the allocation of a small

¹⁵⁰ See: ‘Jaffery Complex launched in Mombasa’. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 44. (available online:

http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹⁵¹ See: ‘Jaffery Complex launched in Mombasa’. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 43–45. (available online:

http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹⁵² See: ‘Fact file: the Jaffery Complex Mombasa, Kenya’. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 45. (available online:

http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

freehold area on the otherwise leasehold land on which the Complex is situated, thus enabling the construction of a mosque (*masjid*), rather than simply a prayer hall (*musalla* or *bayt-ul-salaat*). At the time of the article's publication, although the site's most important building was already taking form in '[t]he shape of a Masjid...' it currently held the status of a prayer hall, until further notice. The section ends by reassuring readers that,

Donors will continue to get the benefit of Sawab-e-Jariah (perpetual benefit) for as long as the place is utilised as a Musalla (Bayt us Salaat) for the purposes of performing Salaat.¹⁵⁴

By the time of my site tour with Rabi, nearly two years after this article was written, the Jaffery Complex's core religious edifice had achieved *masjid* status. However, in attempting to reassure donors that they would still accrue the blessings that come from donating to the project, the *Federation Samachar*'s plea indicates the concern that people would be less willing to donate given the *bayt-ul-salaat*'s lower position (relative to a mosque) within what I am calling the 'sawab economy'. *Sawab*, meaning reward or spiritual merit, can be obtained in many ways in Islam, such as through prayer, Quranic recitation and the annual giving of *zakat* and *khums*. However, many other acts, provided they are done with the right intention (an assessment that is made by god alone), also have the potential to produce *sawab*. 'Bringing a glass of water to your husband can bring *sawab*', explained Rahila by way of explanation, 'it all depends on what is in your heart'.

Much as Valenta (2013) has written in the context of the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai, the Jaffery Complex's capacity to garner funds – and in the Mombasan

¹⁵³ For this and the following quotes in this paragraph, see: 'Fact file: the Jaffery Complex Mombasa, Kenya'. *Federation Samachar*, April 2013, 34(5): 45. (available online:

http://www.africafederation.org/images/stories/federationsamacher/issues/Federation%20Samachar%20April_2013%20fnl%20mail.pdf, accessed 10 September 2017).

¹⁵⁴ Both parentheses in this quote appear in the original. Bayt us Salaat is the *Federation Samachar*'s spelling of *bayt-ul-salaat*.

case, to be completed – is linked to its ability to disburse blessings (*sawab*). Although in Rabi's mind praying in a mosque or *bayt-ul-salaat* did not affect the merits of collective prayer, the *Federation Samachar* article suggests that others were not of the same view, and that the distinction had implications for the financial feasibility of the project. As Rabi explained, 'Of course people are more likely to donate if there's a mosque. It doesn't make much difference to me, but some people feel that a mosque brings more *sawab*'.

It is in part because the project depends greatly on donations from the diaspora that it was desirable to ensure the building was a mosque, not a *bayt-ul-salaat*. Drawing on diasporic links makes sense from a financial perspective – Khojas now settled in Europe and North America are often wealthier than those who remain in East Africa. Of course, it is not simply the potential for spiritual reward that drives these donations. As Rabi explained during our site tour, 'Many people originally from Mombasa, they love it here. They want to visit, they identify themselves with here, so they donate. If you're intentions are right, *sawab* can be the cherry on the cake'.

As suggested by the YouTube videos and *Federation Samachar* article, various media platforms have been mobilised to help foster this flow of donations and *sawab*. The Jaffery Complex has a presence on Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook and YouTube; news about the project is also advertised on the World Federation and Africa Federation websites. These platforms update those in Mombasa and well beyond about the project's progress. One video, entitled 'Revamping! Ongoing progress July 2016 – Jaffery Complex Msa' takes the viewer through the various construction activities occurring onsite – including the laying of conduit, concrete slabs and ducting.¹⁵⁵ The steel reinforcements being put in at various levels around the elevator shaft are also emphasised, as are the impressive cranes involved in the activity of building. The video ends with a message thanking the Mombasa *jamaat* Chairman for his tireless contributions to the Complex and concludes, 'Now we ask

¹⁵⁵ See the Jaffery Complex Mombasa YouTube channel: *Revamping! Ongoing progress July 2016 – Jaffery Complex Msa*. 2016 (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujR8MytYlaI>, accessed 23 August 2017).

for all you, for your support and duas [supplications] for successful completion of whole project [sic]'.¹⁵⁶

While watching such videos does not in itself accrue blessings (as in the case for Siddhivinayak), Rabi and others hope they will encourage Khojas to reach into their pockets in ways that offer the *potential* of gaining *sawab*. The Jaffery Complex, in other words, is brought to fruition through a global circulation of prayer, finances and spiritual reward, to which the *masjid* at its heart itself contributes. Jaffery is embedded within intersecting media, financial, migration and spiritual flows, as much as politico-economic competitions.

The intersection of political, material and religious factors is also apparent if one considers how the *masjid* status was finally achieved. As elucidated by Rabi, a delegation visited al-Sistani to seek advice regarding how to proceed in order to address the issue of non-*waqf* land at the earliest stages of the project. The fact that al-Sistani held an audience with the delegation is in part testament to Khoja political connections and financial resources (a number of Khoja men I knew had also met the Ayatollah on separate occasions). Although all stressed the accessibility of al-Sistani (and other Shia *maraji*) as one of the defining features of Twelver Shiism, this sort of access is only possible for those who have the resources to make the trip to Najaf. The *jamaat's* ability to secure the mosque site as *waqf* land is also suggestive of its

¹⁵⁶ In addition to promotional videos showcasing the apartments for sale and the facilities the site offers, these media productions evidence the various activities already underway at the Complex. Videos uploaded in the last year include the 2016 Ramadhan lectures of the well-known British-Iraqi preacher Ammar Nakshwani, mentioned previously. These were recited from a pulpit at Jaffery and available through the Jaffery Complex's Facebook and YouTube pages. In this series, one video shows lecture attendants bidding 'Kwa heri & kuonana' (goodbye and see you in Swahili) to Nakshwani. The camera evidences many non-Khojas among the attendees. Another video depicts the success of a recent medical camp for children from orphanages around Mombasa. Flanked by smiling Khoja volunteers and various medical professionals, young Mombasans receive triage, medical and optical check-ups; there's also time for games and lunch. As promised, the Jaffery Complex is reaching out. See the Jaffery Complex Mombasa YouTube channel: *Copy of safari njema bwana Ammar – kwa heri ya kuonana! (Dr. Sayed Ammar Nakshwani)*. 2016 (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezUX53ISpH4>, accessed 23 August 2017), as well as *Medical camp for orphans at Jaffery Complex Mombasa*. 2016 (available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoouVUh5pJM>, accessed 23 August 2017).

financial and political connections in Kenya. This, a number of my informants explained, was in no small part due to the Chairman's political clout. Sajjad Rashid (commonly referred to incorrectly in the press as Rashid Sajjad) has been a hugely successful economic and political actor at the coast for at least three decades. In an article published in the mid-1990s, Mohamed Bakari described Rashid as the 'political king-maker at the Coast' (1995a: 67), noting his then recent nomination to parliament by the then-president Moi, as well as his appointment as Chairman of the Kenya Ports Authority (the body which controls Kilindini Port). Without going into further detail, Bakari mentions the potential leverage available to the Ithna-Asheri community via Rashid's position, speculating that,

[Rashid] should at least be able to ease the bureaucratic bottlenecks for his community in terms of frog-jumping the often cumbersome administrative requirements for acquiring licenses, work permits, passports... (1995a: 67).

Rashid's vast real estate fortune came to light during my fieldwork in March 2014, when, following years of court battles (including with his former ally President Moi),¹⁵⁷ he was forced to surrender 1.6 billion shillings (nearly 12 million pounds sterling) of 'prime public property', handing title deeds of 'irregularly' acquired land back to the county government.¹⁵⁸ Hassan Joho, Mombasa's expansive governor, presented the handover as part of a crackdown on corruption in the county more broadly. Rashid's political connections, however, still run deep: in early 2016, a road in the city was renamed after him, provoking a well-known pastor and housing rights

¹⁵⁷ See the article by K. Some: 'Why former Kenyan president is restless in retirement'. *Africa Review*, 6 November 2011 (available online: <http://www.africareview.com/special-reports/Why-former-Kenyan-President-Moi-is-restless-in-retirement/979182-1268184-7jkbwtz/index.html>, accessed 23 August 2017).

¹⁵⁸ See the article by W. Mwangi: 'Tycoon cedes Sh1.6bn property'. *Daily Nation*, 13 March 2014 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/mombasa/Rashid-Sajjad-Land-Public-Property-Title-Deeds/1954178-2243500-11pbcvt/index.html>, accessed 23 August 2017).

activist to comment on twitter, ‘We now glorify grabbers as Mombasa Governor names road after Rashid Sajaad [sic]’.¹⁵⁹

Rashid remains one of the most powerful businessmen at the coast, owning glass and fruit processing facilities, among numerous other ventures. He has been elected by the Khoja *jamaat*’s adult male population as Chairman (a renewable two-year post) on numerous occasions; his most recent stint as *jamaat* leader endured from 2011 to the end of 2015.¹⁶⁰ By all accounts, Rashid has been a driving force behind the Jaffery Complex. There is no evidence to suggest that the granting of a small part of the area as *waqf* land has circumvented the law, however, that Rashid’s political influence facilitated this process was common knowledge. ‘Such things are impossible without connections in Kenya’, commented Khadija, ‘I’m sure Rashid’s relationships in government have helped. But in a good way’, she added quickly, ‘I’m not saying he’s done anything wrong’. Khojas are intensely proud of their audit culture, a legacy Hafiz positioned in terms of the longevity of their exposure to the British. Always ready to joke when not reciting Urdu verse, ‘The Brits’, he mused, ‘they made us squeaky-clean’. Nevertheless, earthly political connections – both in Iraq and Kenya – have helped Khojas construct a new *masjid* in the centre of Mombasa island, thus also generating additional potential *sawab* and further donations associated with this designation as a more pious space. The road to Jaffery Complex demonstrates entanglements of market, religious and political economics.

¹⁵⁹ See the article by D. Tsuma Nyassy: ‘Plan to rename road after Fidel sparks protests’. *Daily Nation*, 27 January 2016 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Plan-to-rename-road-after-Fidel-sparks-protests/1056-3050198-jjjsi9z/index.html>, accessed 23 August 2017). This article also describes protests relating to the renaming of another road in Mombasa after Raila Odinga’s deceased son Fidel.

¹⁶⁰ Elections for office holders within the Khoja *jamaat* occur every two years, at the annual general meeting attended exclusively by men. Although lauded by others as democratic, Ali was unimpressed with the process, ‘Usually there’s only one person standing. They’re just formally appointed. If there are two, quite a lot of behind the scenes campaigns take place. But there are no actual debates’.

‘Live in Confidence!’: coping with insecurity

If security motivations behind the Jaffery Complex relate in part to growing class divisions and the fear of property theft, they are also closely linked to perceived religio-political transformations in Kenya in recent decades. As outlined in the chapter on Islamic reform, Mombasa is now often articulated as being plagued by a previously absent sectarianism and an often associated risk of ‘terrorism’, spurred particularly by the growing prominence of ‘Wahhabis’. The Wahhabi threat is frequently articulated in racial and class terms by many in Mombasa, assumed in part to be associated with the expansion of the city’s allegedly more ‘fundamentalist’ Somali population, as well the growing number of under-employed youth (a demographic that has expanded as tourism has dwindled).

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, these perceived demographic and religious changes at the coast, and the associated rise in attacks on Kenyan soil, often result in a discursive shifting of scales, which positions Mombasa as a node in a global nexus of ‘terror’. Conceptualising the local landscape in terms of impending threat, many of the people I spent time with in the city were exploring ways to improve their personal security. Here I should clarify that the city’s Asian communities have been taking security into their own hands for a long time. The speed at which the Ismaili security phone tree functioned was made evident to me on the day that Masjid Musa, a mosque allegedly recruiting youth to al-Shabaab, was stormed by police.¹⁶¹ Within minutes of the raid Nadesh, with whom I’d been running errands at *Posta*, the general post office, had received a security alert by text advising recipients that an incident was afoot and that people should avoid travelling around town. We drove quickly to the Aga Khan Club, which, although central, was an excellent safe space according to Nadesh. The Club, which includes a social hall and café famous for its

¹⁶¹ This event, also mentioned in the Introduction, occurred in February 2014. Hundreds were arrested (mostly young men) and miscellaneous paraphernalia seized, including what was allegedly an al-Shabaab flag and recruitment videos. Judging the veracity of the mosque’s ‘extremist’ ties and the legality of state actions was the subject of much discussion in the weeks that followed. People I knew were appalled that the national authorities had allowed policemen’s boots to desecrate the sacred space of the mosque, while Faizle, owner of a popular café believed that the vast majority of those arrested had been at the mosque for the free biryani.

meat pies, is surrounded by high walls. Entrance to the grounds is restricted to those who comply with the class and racial profiling meted out by two security guards.

Khojas, like Ismailis, have their own security committee and procedures: the city is divided into zones, with a designated team leader in charge of contacting everyone in a particular area in the event of unrest. Security remains a particular concern around elections, especially in the wake of the violence of 2007-08 in which, as mentioned in the Introduction, hundreds were killed and thousands displaced following the disputed poll (although there were riots and looting in Mombasa during this two month period, the city was spared the carnage seen in the Rift Valley and other areas). Responding to the fear of clashes around elections, Khojas always conduct a community census prior to polling day: 'That way we can be sure everyone is accounted for', explained Ali, 'in case there is any unrest'.

'Terrorism' was seen to pose a far more ubiquitous threat, and gated communities, such as the Jaffery Complex, were often framed as responding to this shift in the nature of urban insecurity. In other words, gated compounds represent the latest, and most upmarket, iteration of some of the wealthier Asian communities' efforts to secure themselves in the city. As Enisa said to me while waiting for the commencement of the ladies' afternoon *majlis* one Friday,

We don't want to leave Africa. We've spent all our lives here. But this terrorist situation, it's worrying. And now these two shot in Old Town... Mombasa is not such a place. Why was it done? They've [the government and the media] played it down because the tourist industry is already suffering. But all our family elsewhere are ringing us worried. My family has been here for generations, but I don't see a future for my kids in this city. We're considering our options.

Enisa's dialogue references the palpable rise in anxiety that followed the killing of two European tourists in Old Town in June and July of 2014. As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, early one morning, a Russian lady was shot while wandering near Fort Jesus, just south of Old Town; two weeks later a young German woman was killed near the northern edge of the historic centre. Although nothing conclusive emerged from these separate incidents, gangs, sometimes rumoured to have links to

al-Shabaab, were widely believed to be responsible. In light of this growing sense of urban risks, Enisa described her mitigation strategies:

We're planning to move to Jaffery – *inshallah* the apartments will be completed soon. But I don't know, everything depends on what happens with all this *fujjo* [chaos].

Enisa currently lives in a relatively upmarket apartment on the edge of Kizingo; her family has been able to afford one of the units available for purchase.

Jabran, a travel agent with a fondness for animated political debate, had a similar analysis. Extolling the virtues of Khoja institutions in Mombasa he asserted, 'Everything a person would want to go to Europe for, we have provided it: education, health, housing'. 'So why have so many gone elsewhere?' I quizzed. 'Security', Jabran replied right off the bat, 'Security is one thing over which the Khojas have no control'. Squinting out across Tudor Creek, the body of water adjacent to the restaurant where we had met, he added, 'If you want to stay here, you have to think carefully about how'. Jabran pulled a business card out of his wallet and told me of one Khoja family who had started specialising in bulletproof cars; the company slogan read 'Under one shield'. Moving into this venture, Jabran suggested, provided financial and personal security for the family, who now owned a bulletproof vehicle themselves. A niche market, to be sure, but reflective of the rise in drive-by shootings in recent years. As detailed in the Introduction, the targets of these shootings were often Muslim clerics and their financiers.

Jaffery's marketing slogan, 'Live in Confidence!' reflects this concern for a securitised future. At a Khoja-owned chemist one afternoon I asked Mehdi for his thoughts on the Complex being built. 'It will give the *jamaat* control of critical security features', he replied. 'Just imagine if they bombed the bridges...' he paused pensively, reflecting on the precarity of Nyali Bridge and Makupa Causeway, the island's connections to the mainland.¹⁶² 'At least with the bio-digester, we would have water'. 'Oh, so are you planning to move to Jaffery then?' I asked, unaware of these plans. Mehdi looked at me with mock horror, 'No way! Moving out of Old Town nearly killed me', Mehdi had moved out of the area five years ago, 'but now

¹⁶² This echoes Yash's comments about the risk posed by the bridges in Chapter 4.

I'll never leave Kizingo. I need my peace'. Despite his aversion to the idea of living in the Complex, Mehdi was reassured by the fact that the *jamaat* would, if necessary, be able to provision water to Khojas on the island more generally; he had heard there would always be plenty in reserve.

In line with the literature cited above, many aspects of the project designed to promote 'confidence' were also taken to indicate class. When I mentioned the bio-digester to Faraj a few days later, he smiled broadly: 'Top of the range! None of the other communities have this'. As Faraj's comment suggests, the class appeal of particular health and safety features was also a prop for intra-Asian competition. These discourses demonstrate a close interplay between different kinds of urban anxieties, as well as aspirations. The numerous and interrelated issues that make living in Mombasa insecure – from crime and power cuts, to rising rents and the threat of terror – are all responded to by the Jaffery Complex.

'Unidentifiable' arches: designing outreach and reform

Well beyond bio-digesters and CCTV cameras, security concerns have also shaped the architectural form of the religious nucleus of the site, which combines a mosque, *imambargah*, *madrassa* classrooms and *ghuslkhana*.¹⁶³ In order to examine the significance of its architectural features, I turn first to the growing body of research that considers the construction of mosques and Islamic centres in Europe (Roose 2009, 2012; Saleem 2013; Verkaaik 2012) and North America (Biondo 2006; Dodds 2002; B. Metcalf 1996). This scholarship is attentive to the ways in which mosque patrons, committees, architects and congregants select, justify and experience particular architectural choices, highlighting the range of motivations and political manoeuvrings behind ultimate decisions. In line with the literature on Islamic reform discussed in Chapter 3, designs are often valorised because they have shed 'regional' or 'cultural' features in the name of what are considered purer or more authentic materialisations of Islam. In other instances, Muslim denominations mark their distinctive sectarian affiliations and/or migration histories through architectural choices. As illustrated in the work of Eric Roose (2009, 2012), there is no necessary

¹⁶³ A *ghuslkhana* is where the body is ritually washed prior to burial.

correlation between architectural styles and pan-Islamic or sectarian orientation, nor between materiality and place of origin. Roose (2012) analyses discourses pertaining to a mosque in Rotterdam and another in Amsterdam, both of which are based on the mosque in Medina established by Prophet Mohammed (known as Al-Masjid an-Nabawi, the Prophet's Mosque). Although both of Roose's key interlocutors sought to draw on the Medina design as a source of 'Islamic authentication' (2012: 303), Roose finds that they did so in completely different ways. For Gaffar, a man who moved to the Netherlands from Surinam in 1990 in order to help unite the Dutch branch of the Barelvi order¹⁶⁴ under the World Islamic Mission (WIN), Medina was the perfect example of the structure common amongst Sufi mausoleums, comprising a central dome with corner turrets, built over Mohammed's tomb. Gaffar used a number of WIN publications to visually pair the Green Dome of the Medina with that of his Amsterdam mosque, as well as hung posters of the Prophet's tomb within the building. However, he also added a smaller cupola to his Amsterdam construction, intended to symbolise Abu Bakr (the first caliph of Sunni Islam), through whom the Barelvi caliphs trace their genealogy. Gaffar was, moreover, at pains to ensure that his architect designed minarets that were distinct from the Saudi-built constructions that surround the Medina mosque, reflecting Barelvi emphasis on countering Wahhabi (and Ahmadiyya) proselytising agendas. He installed a multitude of lights within the dome's interior, which, according to Gaffar, symbolised Sufi saints channelling Mohammed's light from heaven (and gave material form to Barelvi practices of saint worship). Gaffar, in other words, drew on Medina to develop a specifically Barelvi mosque.

In contrast, Ajdid, the Dutch Moroccan project manager for the Esslam mosque in Rotterdam, confounded his architect and municipal authority by *not* drawing on Moroccan iconography or Dutch architectural styles when designing a new prayer hall. Instead, Ajdid sought to achieve a pan-Islamic style, specifically by referencing the mosque at Medina. Medina was an optimal choice for Ajdid because, 'all Islamic styles were included in it and all Muslim nationalities had worked on it, symbolizing the political unity of the *Ummah*' (Roose 2012: 295, italics original). In emphasising

¹⁶⁴ The Barelvi movement is a Hanafi order dating from the late 19th century, whose name derives from the Indian town of Bareilly in which it originated. The movement today counts millions of followers worldwide.

Medina's and Essalam's pan-Islamic features, Ajdid sought to avoid associations with official Moroccan Islam, Sufism and Salafism, as well as reject the hybridised elements proposed by his architect and local council. The political meanings ascribed to design features – and the agendas they are intended to affect – is, as Roose's analysis shows, hugely varied, even when drawn from the same source.

In many places, construction discourse revolves around the extent to which a mosque should blend in with its surroundings: these conversations also often overlap with debates around Islamic reform, but can do so in markedly different ways. In contrast to the 'amalgam of vernacular and Islamic styles' that characterised mosque building in Britain in the post-war era, Shahed Saleem points to a trend towards the mosque as 'a more completely "Islamic" object' visible in the UK today (2013: 198).

Particularly since the early 1990s, several mosques have been remodelled or expressly commissioned *not* to reflect their surroundings: gone is the red brick and tiled roofs that were preferred by many Muslim communities in earlier eras. At a design meeting that Saleem attended in East London, one participant expressed his dissatisfaction with a proposed design – and with the mosque leadership he was striving to unseat – '...we do not want a multicultural minaret, we want an *Islamic* minaret' (2013: 196, emphasis original). Oskar Verkaaik, on the other hand, describes a young Dutch Moroccan's desire to build an 'anti-mosque' (2012: 166), in order to better reflect the simplicity of Islam's first mosque, as well as avoid the orientalisising baggage he associated with minarets. With his supporters citing research into the *sunna* (which, they vouched, did not stipulate the need for a minaret), Said reasoned, 'We want a nice looking, inviting building, that fits within the Netherlands. We want people to think: "Wow, what kind of building is that?"' (Verkaaik 2012: 166). Such a structure was also seen to be more appealing to youth. Blending in with the surrounding environment is often couched within discourses of security: Said's design preferences were in part aimed at avoiding the vandalism and vitriol that Muslim edifices have been exposed to throughout Europe and North America. While others in his community were not necessarily won over by Said's ideas, Verkaaik asserts that it was support from the municipality that eventually led to the inclusion of two glass minarets in the building design: the minaret won, not so much because members of the community saw it as an essential symbol of Islam but, according to several informants, because local authorities wanted the new

construction to speak directly to the anti-Islam position of Geertz Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV).¹⁶⁵ In the above analyses, authors point to the range of interlocking religious, security and political agendas at play in mosque design.

Rabi's discourse pertaining to the design of the Jaffery Complex similarly aims to make a variety of appeals. His emphasis on the coastal flair of the side windows grounds the building's relationship to the littoral, while the planned opening by the Chief Kadhi affirms its connection with official Islam in Kenya. Rabi's arches, however, were proudly described to me as 'unidentifiable'. These arches are certainly intended to build on long-standing Islamic traditions. However, he is attentive to the geographical and sectarian histories embedded in specific features, and it is precisely these particularities that he is concerned to avoid. Rabi's aim was two-fold: to construct a complex with pan-Islamic appeal, void of most denominational and cultural associations, at the same time as positioning the site's residents and principal patrons (Khojas) as unambiguously Muslim. This public relations project was essential, according to Rabi and others, in light of the increasing sectarian tensions in the city. Chatting in the sitting room of his decadent home one evening, Malik, seated under a large photograph of Khomeini, explained,

We're a very closed society. We have a tendency of disliking outsiders. We never mingle with the Sunnis, even if we're invited. Maybe one or two persons will go [to an event they organise]. Today, there is *some* anti-Shia sentiment in Mombasa. But a time will come when there's friction [with Sunnis] as in other places – Iraq, India, Nigeria. Before it comes, let us tell them who we are. We're not doing enough to advertise who we are. We need to come out, interact.

I asked Malik how he thought this might happen.

Jaffery, for example. The design says it all: this is a mosque for all Muslims. I'm sure Rabi told you, it's going to be opened by the Chief Kadhi. And we'll organise big *iftars* there [the fast breaking meal during Ramadhan], and health camps. It's going to be such a space.

¹⁶⁵ Wilders is a right-wing Dutch politician with a staunchly anti-Muslim political agenda.

‘Is the *jamaat* really planning to let *any* Muslim in?’ I wanted to know; Malik assured me they would. I nodded carefully, not quite believing it. Malik spotted my hesitation and went on,

Why is fundamentalism getting so strong? Two reasons: they have a lot of money and they accept everyone. We are too insular. We say I’m a Shia or I’m a Khoja and only Shias and Khojas are allowed here. We need to accommodate everyone. Fundamentalists are wide open. This is one lesson we can learn from them.

In addition to helping reduce sectarian antagonisms and the associated prospect of violence, the emphasis on inclusivity was also seen to have religious merit. This was often articulated to me in terms of *sawab*, discussed in the previous section. As Sahil noted, ‘We get so much *sawab* when our Ismaili, Bohra and Shafii brothers come to mosque. Jaffery will increase this’.

Commentary on Jaffery must be read in light of the discourses of Islamic reform that were discussed in Chapter 3. The Jaffery Complex is not only imagined to help mitigate sectarianism in Mombasa through its appeals to a universalist Islam, the building also positions Khojas as adherents of a ‘correct’ interpretation of Islam. With the Jaffery Complex’s mosque opening only a few weeks away, I asked Wadee, an ebullient middle-aged accountant, how he felt about the planned transformation of the existing Khoja institutions – Hyderi and Husseini – into a hospital and school for Old Town residents. ‘Oh it’s great!’ he exclaimed. ‘We want to give back to the place that has nurtured our community for so long. Plus’, he went on, ‘they [the buildings] hardly look Islamic as it is!’ I asked Wadee to elaborate. ‘Husseini is fine’, he replied, ‘but Hyderi, you can walk past it without even knowing it’s a mosque!’ Husseini, which can be seen in the image on the next page (Fig. 37), with its green and white minaret, was, for Wadee, a suitably recognisable Islamic space. Hyderi – which comprises the existing Khoja *imambargah* and adjacent mosque – does bear a sign saying ‘Shia Ithna-Asheri Mosque’, but this is set some way back from the building’s frontage and is only really visible if standing in the car park opposite, not while walking down the street. The building, which also appears on the following page (Fig. 38), does not bear any ‘obvious’ indications of being a Muslim place of worship, and both mosque and *imambargah* are invisible at street level.



Figure 37: Husseini Masjid, Old Town.

This mosque is principally used by Khoja men and some other male Shias; the building also includes a *madrassa*.



Figure 38: Hyderi imambargah and mosque, Old Town.

The faint sign, at the top of the building set back from the street, reads 'Shia Ithna-Asheri Mosque'.

The ageing building next door, however, which used to house *jamaat* offices, bears a discrete plasterwork star and crescent,¹⁶⁶ coupled with the digits 786 embossed in Gujarati numerals (this can be seen in the photograph on the next page, Fig. 39). According to contested interpretations of Islamic numerology, 786 stands for *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim* (meaning ‘In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent’, an invocation that, *inter alia*, commences religious functions). In this system, the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet are assigned numerical values; the total numerical value of the *Bismillah* phrase produces 786. Asking some in Mombasa about the number’s significance produced swift dismissals, ‘It’s just tradition’, explained Ifza as we sat in her family’s small and immaculately tidy sitting room, part of a modest block of flats near Nkrumah Road. ‘We don’t really believe that stuff anymore’. ‘In India, they’re obsessed’, added her younger sister Tameen, elongating the word obsessed to reinforce her point; ‘Mobile phone numbers with 786 are sold for millions’. Saleema, the young women’s grandmother who I had thought was engrossed in CitizenTV’s lunchtime Swahili news programme (‘Habari’), turned to us. ‘*Su kaho chho?* [‘What are you saying?’ in Gujarati]’, she looked at the pair disapprovingly, before informing me that I shouldn’t listen to everything young people tell me. Ifza and Tameen gave each other a knowing look; minor altercations relating to Islamic practice were all too familiar in this household.

¹⁶⁶ This symbol has a long history and multiple meanings; it is associated with Islam in many parts of the world, and is also a target of reformist critique.



Figure 39: Former *jamaat* offices embossed with the Gujarati numerals 786 above a star and crescent.

As mentioned in the discussion on European mosque construction above, some communities choose to build in styles that reflect the architectural patterns in which they are situated, a blending that is often articulated as intended to improve relations with wider society. In other cases, Muslims have chosen mosques that explicitly eschew features perceived to be evocative of the local context, in favour of forms that speak to a ‘global Islam’. In Mombasa, Rabi’s designs combine both. Rabi’s emphasis on the ‘coastal’ and ‘Swahili’ features of the mosque specifically reference the locality. At the same time, the building’s character – that he positions as unambiguously Muslim but not sectarian – attempts to mark in concrete the similarity between Khojas (Shias) and other Muslims at the coast. Mombasa houses an extensive and heterogeneous collection of mosques that eschew simple categorisations. However, the mosque being built as part of the Jaffery Complex shares very little with the Khoja buildings it replaces. It is also markedly different from the onion-domed minaret style that characterises the long-standing Memon- and Bhadala-built mosques of Old Town (images of which appeared in the Introduction, Fig. 7 and Fig. 10), and has none of the ornate plasterwork that flatters the Ismaili *jamaatkhana* at Kuze (also exhibited earlier, Fig. 8). That styles have

changed is not surprising: these Old Town mosques were all built nearly a century ago (or more). But architectural shifts reflect the changing religious landscape, both within Asian communities and the city itself. Even if it does so in the most vertical way possible, Jaffery's religious building strives to reduce markers of cultural and religious difference, as well as appealing to reformist architectural fancies.

Preserving Khoja Mombasa

At the same time as striving to evoke a distinctly pan-Islamic identity, the Jaffery Complex also encodes Khoja-ness on the Mombasan landscape in a more prominent and definitive way than ever before. Sitting on Halima's blue sofa while we packaged green strings¹⁶⁷ for a *majlis* she was hosting in the *mehfile* of her home the next day, I asked her what she thought about the building project. 'What's the point?' she replied rhetorically,

In six or seven years we will only be 600 to 700 [people] here. It will only be old people. All the children now, they go [away] to study. And their parents follow. The community is becoming lesser. So what's the point?

To my mind, Halima's discourse answers her question: it is in part *because* of dwindling numbers that the Jaffery Complex is going up now. Currently dotted around the city in various locations, the Complex will centralise Khoja residential patterns, and encircle a significant part of the *jamaat* within the confines of a single wall. Jaffery will not bear any inscriptions defining its residents as Khojas, but it is a statement of unity – and distinction – nonetheless.

The need for this is linked to the oft-repeated notion that Khoja youth are increasingly less interested in being Khoja. This issue is dealt with expansively in a number of publications written by the *jamaat's* keenest historian and cultural conservationist, Hassan Jaffer. His works, which include titles such as *An endangered species* (2012) and *Whither Khoja?* (2008), lament what Jaffer sees as the growing lack of youth engagement in community affairs throughout the diaspora. This narrative was emphasised to me during an afternoon meeting with Ameer at

¹⁶⁷ These are worn for spiritual protection on the right hand.

Pizza Inn in City Mall, Mombasa's most upmarket shopping complex, situated north of the island. Sipping on bottled water, he tells me,

You know, minorities are often avoiding to mix with others. The Arabs and Persians have married with locals, and they have lost their identity. It's amazing. Our forefathers have come and they have stuck with their cultures and identity. We have been saved. Older generations recognised that without community we are nothing. If you belong to a community, you know you are something... But now we are forgetting our mother tongue, we face so many challenges from our youth denying their identity to be Khoja. They don't understand the importance to remain unified, to remain one.

While a number of young people rejected such analyses in discourse and practice – volunteering for the *jamaat* and its various charitable activities was a major preoccupation for many of the younger people I spent time with – centralising Khoja residence was seen as perhaps helping to reverse this trajectory. The project will not only unite the community physically, it also leaves little space – literally – for a lack of participation in community affairs. As Iqbal noted, 'They want people close to mosque. If they're here, there's no excuse not to come'. If Foucault (2012 [1975]) is one of many to have noted the regimes of discipline and subjectification made possible through particular architectural designs, it seems to me that the centralisation of community life in this way is a case in point. Here I should note that while Iqbal was less than comfortable with the surveillance made possible through Jaffery, others were keen to live in the same compound as the mosque, which would make it easier – and safer – for Khojas to pray and socialise together. As Marinabai, a gentle octogenarian who currently lives in Old Town told me, 'Now I have to rush home after night *majalis*. If we were just there [i.e. living next to the *imambargah*], I could stay and chat with my friends'. Although Marinabai's flat is only a short walk away from the existing *imambargah*, she's careful not to be out late at night.

Features of the mosque and *madrasa* classrooms above it were also seen to increase participation in religious affairs by appealing to particular demographics. 'The only way to get the youth more involved is by adapting to their needs', Zaaifira, a retired teacher, informed me. 'Jaffery will be a modern era mosque. And the [*madrasa*] classrooms won't be traditional. All modern facilities, each one will have a TV'.

Mehnaz, who had recently begun a career in the same profession as Zaaifira, was one of several women who couldn't wait for the opening the Jaffery Complex mosque: 'We'll finally have space for ladies. There'll even be a separate space for ladies on their periods'. At present, neither of the Khoja mosques in Mombasa includes a female section, although some women go for prayers at the Bahman mosque (established through Kuwaiti funds, Bahman includes a mezzanine for women above the main prayer hall). This again links back to the *sawab* economy discussed above; praying in congregation is highly meritorious in Islam and the opportunity for women to do so was eagerly awaited. This gendered modification of Khoja religious space was also articulated as demonstrative of 'progress'. As Farida remarked, 'We're finally entering the 21st century. I couldn't believe it when I first arrived in Mombasa. In Toronto we've had a women's space in the mosque for years'. In sum, as well as being seen as needed interventions in the face of community decline, the upgrading of Khoja religious and religious study space enabled those in Mombasa to mark their 'modernity' in relation to their diasporic peers.

Investing in such a monumental project at this historical juncture in many ways makes sense. Despite the much-touted political and economic insecurity, Mombasa was a hive of construction during my fieldwork – both on and off the island – suggesting that many have seen this as an opportune moment to build for the future. Although I do not have details regarding relative real estate or construction costs, periods of instability have long been noted as moments of potentiality for those with capital (Klein 2008). For a collective feeling the decline of its numbers, the project encourages more to stay and invest in the city, thus helping to perpetuate the community. The project also reiterates the enduring connections between Khojas and the city. Hafiz was unequivocal in this regard:

We are investing in this grandiose housing project. It shows our commitment to this place. It shows our love for Africa, our attachment. Other Asians here keep one foot in India, or the UK. And they're always ready to run away in case of trouble. But not Khojas.

As discussed in the chapter on façades, building projects are about both leaving a mark on the urban landscape, and staking a claim in the city's future. Buildings *last*. They also cost money and often take a long time to build. In this sense, the Jaffery

Complex encapsulates many of the tensions of the buildings of a century earlier, which mark distinction as much as affinity to place.

Finally, attention to preserving a specifically Mombasan Khoja-ness helps explain the care with which the cricket pitch at the Complex's centre has been preserved. Speaking of the grounds in its previous incarnation as a cricket pitch and pavilion, Malik was wistful, 'Jaffery Club was our nucleus. Today nobody wants to go. Everyone used to be there, every Saturday and Sunday'. 'Even ladies?' I ask. 'No, no ladies. We used to keep them locked in the house', he grins making sure I've understood the joke.

But men used to love it. If you didn't go you were missing out. There were no hotels, or any of these things. The only entertainment was Jaffery.

The original Jaffery Sports Club has nurtured a number of Kenyan sporting heroes. Chief among these are Yusuf Karim and his son Aasif. Yusuf, the unrivalled 'King of Mombasa Courts', dominated coast tennis for 25 years and was also an outstanding cricketer, his contributions to the city's sporting scene immortalised via the renaming of a city road after his death.¹⁶⁸ Aasif, who honed his left-arm spin on the Jaffery wicket, went onto become a world-class player and Kenya Cricket Chairman. Aasif relocated to Nairobi decades ago but, Malik told me, 'They still serve "Aasif Karim chips" at Shaam-e-Bahaar [a popular Mombasa restaurant] in his honour'. Everyone hopes the Jaffery Complex will reinvigorate – and expand – the Khoja sporting scene, squeezing tennis, badminton and volleyball courts, as well as a rooftop swimming pool onto the site, as well as retaining the cricket field. The cricket pitch preserves Khoja history in the city, while the Complex attempts to secure the *jamaat's* future.

¹⁶⁸ See the article by E. Ondieki: 'The Karims: story of one family's dominance in sports'. *Daily Nation*, 20 May 2017 (available online: <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/lifestyle/The-Karims/1214-3935096-fdgu3i/index.html>, accessed 23 August 2017).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the Jaffery Complex, a gated community being constructed around a ‘mosque for all’, holds together many of the key themes of this thesis. The project is driven by mobilities, relating to wealth accumulation and the movement of people, and is embedded within circulations of media, finance and *sawab*. Its form is a product of Khoja diaspora politics and Shia religious elites in Iraq, as well as deep local political connections. It conjoins a host of anxieties and aspirations, related to insecurity, piety and notions of ‘progress’. Jaffery carves a distinctly Khoja space onto the Mombasan cityscape, at the same time as seeking to reduce social difference through features perceived to align with the ideals of Islamic reform and Muslim unity. It is, moreover, an impressively vertical affirmation of urban attachment. The Complex will lead to the radical modification of some elements of Khoja history (transforming the existing *imambargah* and Old Town mosques into welfare institutions), while ardently preserving others (the beloved cricket pitch), for posterity. The building site, in other words, is infused with many of the geographies and chronologies that characterise contemporary Mombasa.

Conclusion

...even those who are well informed comprehend it not.

– Muyaka ibn Haji al-Ghassani, 19th century Swahili poet,
quoted in an anthology by Abdulaziz (1979: 20).

The above line, from a poem about Mombasa by Muyaka, the city's most celebrated poet, indicates that life on this littoral has long been recognised as a puzzling and opaque affair. As a means of illuminating the urban forms described above, the conclusion starts by highlighting the interventions this thesis has sought to make in relation to the bodies of literature from which I have drawn. I then bring together its key themes to outline the central facets of the 'Mombasan urbanism' that has emerged from these pages.

The body of this thesis starts and ends with chapters about the ways the people I did research with have transformed the Mombasan landscape through buildings. I have added an East African perspective to the literature on architecture and empire, examining how mid-20th century building patrons employed Art Deco to carve out a place for themselves as particular kinds of citizens within a colonial Indian Ocean realm. These historical reflections emphasised the agency of the colonised in the construction of the three-tier system, as well as demonstrated how imperial rule was challenged, not through the political channels that others have carefully documented, but through edifice.

The decorative finesse of Deco and the segregated verticality of the Jaffery Complex could be read purely in terms of the 'elsewheres' to which they speak, and certainly provide a material scaffold to forms of social distance. I have argued, however, that the buildings addressed here must also be seen as indicative and productive of attachment to place, borne of historical longevity and a desire to shape the urban yet to come. The city's first library co-opted high-end fashions by way of Paris and Bombay, at the same time as envisaging an urban future beyond the racialisation of

empire. The size and style of the Jaffery Complex is motivated by Khoja diasporic politics and clergymen in Najaf, as much as a desire to forge new solidarities between urban residents. Engaging with academic accounts of Art Deco, religious buildings and gated enclaves, I have demonstrated that these architectural forms can both *deepen and diminish* social distance. The physical environment of contemporary Mombasa also serves as a chronicler of social change: the contrast between Art Deco and the pan-Islamic features of Jaffery demonstrate urban residents drawing on different sources for notions of collectivity over the course of the last century, from India and Europe and towards a deterritorialised ‘global Islam’.

This thesis expands the literature on Indian Ocean subjectivities, much of which has considered the texts and lives of prominent businessmen, politicians and philosophers, or examined the littoral entanglements embedded in Swahili cultural forms. Adopting a perspective grounded in the lives of people of Gujarati origin, this thesis has provided an alternative angle to this scholarship, highlighting discourses of nostalgia, practices of food consumption and Art Deco façades as objects of Indian Ocean research that both confirm and contest imaginaries of littoral connectivity. Considering this scholarship in tandem with the anthropological literature on cosmopolitanism more broadly, the ethnography presented here has examined how worlds beyond are valorised, concealed, resolutely localised *or not imagined at all* from Mombasa.

In the field of memory studies, I have drawn on academic examinations of nostalgia from a broad range of contexts in order to consider its catalysts and consequences in Mombasa. Countering the notion that nostalgia is simply a product and testament of decline, I have demonstrated nostalgia to be a source of social capital, a form of rhetoric in which established urban elites narrate histories of wealth accumulation and mark privileged claims to the city over others. Mombasa has long been seen as a place inundated by people from upcountry, my analysis has added Somalis to these imaginaries of siege, and illuminated how nostalgia apportions urban woes to people from both of these aforementioned social categories in a moment of tangible political, economic and religious uncertainty.

This thesis has sought to break up the racialised triptych that continues to structure stereotype and scholarship in East Africa. While acknowledging the political and emotional traction of the terms ‘African’ and ‘Asian’ for many, my informants included, this thesis has demonstrated that one means of minimising the racialised and exclusionary baggage they carry involves an attentiveness to the more precise social categories through which urban life is lived and imagined. I have endeavoured to move beyond teleological accounts of people of Gujarati-origin as trailblazers, or as individuals whose lives are determined by internal communal dynamics.

Pioneering narratives and the significance of sectarian affiliations emerge often in this thesis, but these are considered in terms of a wider politics of locality. I have shown, for example, that rags to riches tales historicise claims to the city, and that communally-defined buildings also attest to a grounded investment in colonial and postcolonial futures.

Regarding the study of Islam in Kenya, this dissertation has helped flesh out the category of ‘coastal Muslims’, which, although always acknowledged as encompassing a broad swathe of people (including those of South Asian origin), has usually been studied through Swahili or Mijikenda perspectives. Here I have added Khoja Ithna-Asheris, Ismailis, Bohras, Memons, Koknis and Bhadals to the picture, demonstrating some of the ways in which individuals from these diverse denominations relate to the state and the wider Muslim world, as well as to others in Mombasa. Bringing ethnography on Shia reform in the Middle East and South Asia into conversation with studies of reform along the Swahili coast and an emerging scholarship on blood donation, I have introduced new objects and geographies of reform in Mombasa. Presenting blood as a means and target of reform amongst Khojas, the thesis has engaged with the extensive scholarship on the transformation and political application of Karbala commemorations, as well as with debates about *bid’a* on the East African littoral.

My informants’ lives have been shown to be embedded within local and global politics of piety, as they both critique and corporealise notions of reform. The ethnography demonstrates that questions of faith are never ‘purely’ religious: efforts to cultivate better Muslims often bleed – sometimes literally – into projects of civic self-fashioning, as well as performances of affluence. These intertwined processes of

identification are being contrived in a moment of heightened security concerns, itself imagined as deeply entangled with the resurgence of reform and rise of Wahhabism in East Africa. My considerations of the Jaffery Complex provided further evidence of the interlaced geopolitical, economic and diasporic concerns that shape material constructions of piety.

Affirming the significance of an imagined dichotomy between reformists and their others in the city, several of the chapters highlight a nexus between insecurity and Islamic reform within urban imaginaries. Concerns about the shifting shape of religiosity in the city underpin much littoral nostalgia, for the days before the *niqab* and a Muslim unity of old. Changes to Karbala commemorations and ‘pan-Islamic’ architectural interventions simultaneously appeal to reformist notions of a culturally unadulterated Islam, while striving to reduce Muslim division and the possibility of sectarian violence in a moment where reformism is perceived to have exacerbated these tensions. Reform, in Mombasa, emerges as both threat and goal: while a ‘Wahhabi’ agenda is frequently derided, it is also often through the adoption of reformist language and practice that the ‘Wahhabi problem’ is addressed and ‘more pious’ Muslims brought into being.

This thesis has described Mombasan Muslims struggling with history and with the future. Legacies of coastal marginalisation and the effects of present-day national security logics have been charted through new frames, shown to produce, among other things, residential and ritual changes in the contemporary moment. This everyday approach to insecurity enriches existing accounts of the implications of state-sponsored ‘anti-terrorism’ initiatives and rising political violence along the East African seaboard, which tend to paint the region in broad brushstrokes, or focus on the lives of the young men who bear the brunt of both policy and insurgency. A blood donation drive and a building site were demonstrated to gather a host of insecurities, Islamic reforms and aspirations. Appeals to coastal Muslim unity in the face of a perceived ‘Wahhabi’ threat, evident in the texts of prominent Muslim intellectuals considered by others (Kresse 2007b), are also to be found in architectural features and idioms of blood.

For the people described in these pages, Islam frequently plays a role in their implicit and explicit attempts to defend the city as a particular kind of place, be that in ideas

of the kind of people that ‘belong’ to Mombasa, or in patterns of food consumption that cannot be extricated from long histories of Muslim marginalisation in relation to the state. While some Muslim ‘others’ are imagined to underpin many of the city’s problems, Islam is also understood to be critical to a more amicable future; this tension structures novel engagements and disengagements with urban others. Reaching out to fellow Muslims from behind a gated community is one example here; giving blood to assuage global injustice is another. In a postcolonial context saturated with the policies and imaginaries of the late ‘war on terror’, the Muslims I have described here are acutely aware of the sectarianism and solidarities offered by the present.

These conclusions provoke further questions. Who are the ‘Wahhabis’ and ‘Somalis’ that form such an important part of the Mombasan imaginaries discussed above? What themes would emerge if we were to focus our lens on the myriad ‘Kutchi Sunnis’ – such as Gamrais or Kumbhars – who are *not* building gated communities or driving Toyota Proboxes? This study, the first, to my knowledge, which considers the slippage between Karbala and Kenya, augments the sparse literature on Africa as a site of Shiism. This field of research merits expansion through an investigation of the changes to coastal religiosity wrought by the Bilal Muslim Mission. Bilal has played a small part in this thesis, and brief outlines of the organisation exist (C. Ahmed 2009; A. Jaffer 2013; Penrad 1988). However, sustained ethnographic study of this proselytising and development charity, and of the relationships between Khoja Ithna-Asheris and the many thousands they have helped convert, would add a new layer to the study of Shiism on the continent. This is particularly the case, I contend, because, although Iran and the charisma of Khomeini loomed large amongst the Shias I knew in Mombasa, Khoja proselytising activities in East Africa long predate the formation of the Islamic Republic.

As a contribution to the field of anthropology, this thesis adds to the scholarship on the challenges of ‘being’ Muslim in the current historical moment, and, as outlined above, speaks to the anthropology of ritual, Islamic reform and insecurity. I have offered a Mombasan lens to the discipline’s rich reflections on material culture, cosmopolitanism and memory. The questions this thesis raises, as well as its contributions to various regional and thematic bodies of scholarship, have resulted in

part from taking seriously the prescription against bracketing anthropological research in terms of geographically specific literatures and concepts (Appadurai 1986). This study has brought theory and ethnography from a range of locations to bear on the East African littoral, demonstrating that accounts of self-flagellation in Syria, nostalgia in St Petersburg and cosmopolitanism in Chitral can also enliven and enrich the study of Mombasa. To my mind, this sort of theoretical and ethnographic flexibility is critical as the discipline continues to struggle to put the long-standing goal of ‘writing against culture’ into practice (Abu-Lughod 2014 [1991]).

Mombasan urbanism through everyday timespaces

The diverse themes described above are held together by the city, the anthropology of which this thesis has also sought to advance. In terms of the study of African cities, these pages provide evidence for the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan forms on the continent, bolstering ‘everyday’ ways of telling urban experience in this region of the world. In the narratives I have presented, Mombasa certainly emerges as a place of uncertainty, but my analysis underscores the myth of seeing African urbanity purely through optics of crisis and poverty. This thesis makes the case that African cities, and cities more generally, are particularly amenable to study through the chronologies and geographies embedded in everyday experience. Through the chapters presented here, I have suggested that investigating the dispositions towards time and space that circulate in urban discourse and practice can help tease out the multiplicity of ways in which a city is lived and imagined. Temporalities and spatialities expose the city as a shape-shifting object – whose boundaries wax and wane according to context – as much as an evolving and unfinished one, in which the present is endlessly remade in relation to past legacies and future imaginaries. Attention to the articulation of chronologies and geographies, in other words, helps to excavate some of the contradictions and connections that make the city what it is, and provide ethnographic evidence for the city as ‘a thing always in the making’ (Simone 2009: 3).

Putting time and space at the heart of my explorations of the everyday has allowed me to explore ‘Mombasan urbanism’, a concept I present by way of conclusion. The

Mombasan urbanism I have traced is fuelled by patterns of mobility linked to both economics and migration. These mobilities shape the built environment, and run through discourse and practice. Rather than assuming Asians as a uniformly affluent minority, I have examined contradictory patterns of wealth accumulation over the course of the last century, and how these uneven processes link to a broader political economy shaped by imperial trading regimes and the unevenness of postcolonial economic fortunes, associated, in recent decades, with contemporary regional insecurity. Against this backdrop, my analysis has considered how social mobility is *performed in and projected onto* the urban landscape. The ethnography demonstrates social mobility to be embedded in architectural forms, from bas-relief zigzags to ‘top of the range’ biodigesters. Social mobility is found in eulogies to sesame seeds, and concerns about the future of a confectionary shop; it converges with ideas about the flow of blood. Throughout, I have pointed to the ways in which social mobility in Mombasa intersects with physical movements through space, as people – particularly those of Gujarati, Somali and upcountry origin – have arrived, settled and departed from the city, fostering new patterns and practices of distinction in the process.

Mombasan urbanism extends across time and space. Its buildings – old and new – speak to others across the littoral, and around the world. Memories of colonial order inform how people understand contemporary religious and demographic change, as well as stake a claim to the city in the present. Geopolitical anxieties pervade the most intimate corporeality and colour children’s paintings, while anticipatory logics structure the shape of arches. Building on the burgeoning anthropological literature on security – which has been particularly attentive to issues of time – this thesis has considered the varied *temporal and spatial* logics that characterise experiences of and responses to insecurity in Mombasa. This approach, as outlined above, has also allowed me to trace the intersections between insecurity and Islamic reform.

Scholars of Ithna-Asheri Shiism have long been concerned with the expansive histories and geographies that adherents around the world draw on to understand contemporary encounters between themselves and others, a mode of conceptualising encounter also noted by Ho (2004) with regard to Hadramis. Drawing this together with evidence from Kenya that demonstrates that multi-scalar imaginaries of insecurity are by no means limited to coastal Muslims, I am left to suggest that

systematic attention to the overlay of geographies and chronologies will be useful for the anthropological study of *insecurity and reform* in many contexts.

If the above collapses the city as a spatial and temporal scale, I have also traced how notions of time and space are made to coalesce around the object of Mombasa, informing patterns of claims-making that construct this port town as a distinct geographical and historical object, inhabited by people with deeply rooted histories. The taken-for-granted locality of *bhajiya*s is one example of the ways in which Mombasans often do not so much claim rootedness, as live it. *Bhajiya*s and other patterns of food consumption construct Mombasa as a place divorced from Kenya and the Indian Ocean beyond, demonstrating that the city is a product of divisive, as much as contiguous, spatial imaginaries. Long-standing relationships to Mombasa and its distinctiveness as a spatial entity are further emphasised through discourses of nostalgia, which, by excluding those who (allegedly) do not possess a rooted epistemology of decay, serve to sever the city from the Kenyan interior and Somalia to the north. Thus, while this research is aligned with the historical and anthropological scholarship that demonstrates the mutually constitutive nature of local and global, my ethnography suggests that acknowledging this interplay should not prevent us from investigating how these constructs are imagined – and produced – as distinct in daily practice. Nostalgic rhetorics, coastal snacks and additions to the built environment reaffirm and challenge ideas of Indian Ocean connectivity, and suggest that we should be mindful of its shifting utility as a lens of analysis.

The Mombasan urbanism outlined here provides ethnographic testimony for how, to return to Roy (2016) with who we began this thesis, urban experience is necessarily negotiated at scales that *implode and reinforce* the city. The performances of urbanity I have traced here can smell a *bhajiya* a mile off, speak Swahili to its parrot and Kutchi to its granny, and conjure Karbala as a means to address insecurity in Mombasa. The city's façades tell of imperial and local connections, of pan-Islamic and coastal reform. These performances, material constructs and modes of being in the world are simultaneously emplaced and hard-to-place. They paint a Mombasan urbanism that is rooted, expansive and always in the making.

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