

East African Stories of Love: Challenging Cultural Perceptions

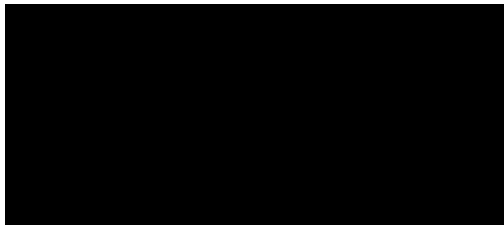
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BA (Hons) in Media Studies

This dissertation is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Murdoch University, December 2019

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution. In addition, I confirm that the fieldwork conducted for the purpose of this thesis was approved by the Human Ethics Committee at Murdoch University. Permit Number: 2014/016. Permit Title: Romancing Authenticity: East African Stories of Love.



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Abstract

In recent decades a call for ‘outsiders’ to cease the dominant practice of perpetuating negative stereotypes of Africa and African people has continued to grow (Achebe 1977; Adichie 2009; Asante 1988; Diop 1974; Mudimbe 1988; Mwenda 2007; Wainaina 2008). The demand is in response to the homogenising of the fifty-four African nations and their complex sociocultural relationships into a sustained colonial perception of ‘Otherness’. This creative arts PhD attempts to answer that call by challenging non-African normative expectations of Africa and Africans. It employs processes of participatory autoethnography (Conquergood 1985) that integrate autobiographical and fictional storytelling to create four ‘stories of love’ with the diverse collaboration of eight East African participants in Tanzania and Zanzibar. The research is structured to achieve its creative praxis goals through the ‘observer and observed’ experience (Robson and McCartan 2016), utilising individual and collaborative ‘workshops’ with participants whose fictional characterisations were fully informed by their personal experiences with the subject of love – and most specifically those of ‘romantic love’ (Singer 2009; Solomon 2006). The resulting creative output, complementing the exegetical approach of the thesis, is a literary work (prose treatment) that reveals complex, multidimensional characters who portray nuanced and universal experiences of love. Throughout the dissertation attention is directed towards the rights and experiences of the human subjects as creative participants. Hence, this self-consciously, outsider-generated project undertakes an exegetical examination of the creative experiences informing the participatory storytelling model, its application of important methodologies (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007; Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015) and the subsequent character and story evolution.

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Acknowledgements

There are two groups of people who absolutely must be thanked first. The local team of people across Zanzibar, Tanzania, and Rwanda who gave their expertise, experience, and time to this project and to me. I learned more from all of you than any book or lecture could ever offer. And the eight participants who gave their unrelenting trust to this stranger from Australia and to the team of East African strangers he had collected along the way. Thank you, thank you, thank you. The stories would end before they begin without you and your willingness to trust – to open your lives to me.

I am grateful to all who took part in and supported this project along the way. There are enough names for the Acknowledgements Section to fill a book in its own right. To everyone I am so very thankful. I hope that this dissertation and any works that follow it are worthy of your contributions. Thank you, Associate Professor Mick Broderick, for sticking with me through thick (jungles) and thin (writing) and for steering some of my more ambitious ideas back into a mostly achievable venture. Thank you, Dr Martin Mhando, for bringing Africa into focus during my undergraduate studies and for all the help and guidance you provided when the project moved to Tanzania and Zanzibar. To my friends and family: I am immeasurably grateful for your love and support throughout the PhD and the two-year medical drama that almost derailed it. A carefully worded appreciation to Carmel Forrest, my aunty – to whom anyone reading this document owes a debt of gratitude for her excellent copy-editing and proofing skills. And a final special thanks to Robert and Margaret Briggs – my ever-supportive mum and dad. You taught me to care about my fellow human beings. This project exists because of the kindness and love you fashioned in me.

Note:

Accompanying this dissertation is the Creative Work: Prose Treatment, *East African Stories of Love* (refer to Appendix 1). It is recommended that it is read after Sections One and Two of the dissertation. The reader will be reminded of this in the opening of Section Three, where an exegetical analysis of the participatory creative process that led to its creation takes place.

Introduction

Shortly before beginning this PhD candidature, my approach as an academic-practitioner was forever changed by a call for ‘outsiders’ to cease the dominant practice of perpetuating reductive stereotypes of Africa and Africans (Achebe 1977; Mwenda 2007; Wainaina 2008). This creative arts dissertation attempts to answer that call by challenging non-African normative expectations of Africa and Africans. The project involved an autoethnographic exploration of collaborative storytelling with a cohort of eight East Africans: four male, four female, from the age range 10-70, residing in (but not necessarily native to) a variety of regions of mainland Tanzania and the islands of Zanzibar. The work produced is based on the contingencies of travel, the PhD candidature, informed consent, government prohibitions, the input of community leaders, the participants themselves, and the local team working with me. The resulting creative output, complementing the exegetical nature of the dissertation, is a novella-length prose treatment that reveals complex, multidimensional characters who portray nuanced universal ideas and experiences of love.

My role as a creative intercontinental academic-practitioner positioned the project’s approach as both a creative ‘experiment’ and a self-reflexive exploration of the act of cultural intermediating (Santos 2004). Via its participatory model, the project looked to harness ‘participatory action research’ (Chevalier and Buckles 2019) to achieve its objective of a non-reductive cultural-mediation resulting from a self-reflexive, ethically minded methodological journey to the final creative output. The dissertation offers a critical analysis not just of past writers or creators of the

West's image of Africa – but of the image created through this project.¹ The moral practice of the methodology and the dissertation take a deep and purposeful focus on self-reflexivity to situate *answering the call* as an *ethical* subject that requires one to 'act upon' oneself, 'to monitor, to test, improve and transform' oneself (Foucault 1978, 28).

Through the participatory process the project sought to reduce my inherent ethnocentric influence using a reflexive critical awareness to acknowledge and negotiate the 'epistemological limits' of my 'ethnocentric ideas' (Bhabha 1994, 4). Further, the participatory process hoped to offer something of an antidote to the 'negating activity' (Fanon 1970, 110) of *third person consciousness* that for millennia has applied to the African a reductive meaning, purpose, and character. In essence, the project set out to explore a lessening of Africa's 'Otherness and perceptual remoteness' (Ibelema 2014, 203) in both product and process while at the same time attempting to seek out, understand, and eliminate the researcher's own ethnocentric influence.

Throughout the dissertation attention is directed towards the rights and experiences of its human subjects who became participants, and in turn the characters of the stories. As such, this highly self-conscious, outsider-generated project undertook an exegetical examination of the creative experiences informing the participatory storytelling model, the application of important methodologies (Conquergood 1985; Pitts and Miller-Day 2007; Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015), and the subsequent character and story evolution.

¹ Throughout this thesis, 'the West' or 'Western' refers to the full Greco-Roman concept of Europe through to contemporary twenty first Century Euro-American identity. As the Western construction of the Other is tied to the Occident – the West is used to encapsulate the tradition that created a 'basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient (and Africa), its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny and so on' (Said 2003, 2).

A Working Hypothesis

This project set out to not only answer the call but to interrogate its own process of reacting and acting on the hearing of that call. As such it was hypothesised that a participatory story-finding process could answer the call to present a non-stereotypical representation of Africanness. It was further proposed that a longitudinal self-reflexive study of the very attempt to answer the call would benefit multiple fields of study, production, and industry that inadvertently find themselves the perpetrators of the reductive stereotype of Africa and Africans.

While hearing the call for change reinvented my approach, the undertaking of this PhD project has developed an intimate understanding of the act of answering it. This dissertation is designed to share that understanding through a self-reflexive critical awareness of the entire process and to provide the advantage of my perspective to others who are preparing to answer or amplify the call for non-reductive storytelling and representations of Africa and Africans.

This self-reflexive analysis begins with the call and how its initial influence impacted my thoughts, actions and the entire redesign of my initial PhD proposal.

Hearing *the call*: discovering the need for positive storytelling

During my preliminary research I came across a video that would dramatically change my modus operandi and my very different ‘well-intended’ project proposal into the one this dissertation is presenting. In December 2012 I typed ‘Africa’ into the TED talk search bar, picked a video from the list, and kicked back for nineteen minutes of TED-logoed learning about ‘Africa’. My idea was to begin a gradual approach to the monolithic subject of Africa before the deeper

research began in the new year. However, as the first video of the ardent Ugandan journalist and economist Andrew Mwenda (2007) played on I realised my entire approach was going to do more damage than any ‘good’ my ‘good intentions’ could have hoped to achieve.

While my initial proposal could continue to have all the hallmarks of a participatory storytelling model, the imagined creative piece and its subject matter were in trouble. The premise of the creative component of the PhD proposal I had submitted in November 2012 read:

An Australian tourist set out on a backpacking tour of an African nation poised between relative peace and civil war. Shortly after his arrival he is kidnapped by rebels and imprisoned in a dark cell. The rebels are soon forced to move him with the tactic of hiding him in plain sight. And so, this innocent tourist finds himself chained inside the home of an Islamic African family, to whom he is the devil.

The idea was that in time the Islamic African family and the Western white man would come to know one another and realise there were little to no differences between them. It was to be a story with a ‘positive’ ending where differing perceptions were broken down and replaced with friendship and understanding – embracing the ‘for good’ binary typology (Said 2003, 206). However, no matter its best intentions, it could not possibly assist in the call that Mwenda had so convincingly alerted me to in his talk, *Aid for Africa? No thanks* (2007):

By displaying despair, helplessness and hopelessness, the media is telling the truth about Africa, and nothing but the truth. However, the media is not telling us the whole truth. Because despair, civil war, hunger and famine, although they are part and parcel of our African reality, they are not the only reality. And secondly, they are the smallest reality. (Mwenda 2007)

Mwenda's argument centres on how Western media has created an image of the continent as 'a place' of complete despair which both fuels and is fuelled by a reductive and repetitive cycle of poverty and 'poverty porn' (Sankore 2006) creating a system that discourages real growth and change. Mwenda's work contributes to an inter-disciplinary, inter-continental canon that argues for the need to reframe both the view of the continent and the way in which its fifty-four countries are 'assisted'. It is an issue that begins with the way in which Africans are characterised – which is profoundly illustrated by Kenyan author and journalist Binyavanga Wainaina, who provides a tongue-in-cheek guide to writing about "Africa" which satirically signposts the story clichés of a continent that finds itself perpetually trapped in inverted commas:

Among your characters you must always include *The Starving African*, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. Moans are good. She must

never say anything about herself in the dialogue except to speak of her (unspeakable) suffering. (Wainaina 2008, 93)

Wainaina's blueprint of a clichéd African Woman reflects the sentiment of the next video I watched – that of Nigerian writer Chris Abani, who dismisses Western portrayals of African narratives:

African narratives in the West, they proliferate. I really don't care anymore. I'm more interested in the stories we tell about ourselves – how as a writer, I find that African writers have always been the curators of our humanity on this continent. The question is, how do I balance narratives that are wonderful with narratives of wounds and self-loathing? And this is the difficulty that I face. (Abani 2007)

Abani chooses to focus on problematising African storytellers' portrayals of themselves, something I needed to consider as an arriving 'outsider' looking to 'localise' the story-finding process. Abani looks to African writers, both on the continent and within the African diaspora, the way Mwenda looks to the non-African media, aid organisations, and international policy makers. They both hope for a change to the singular perception that 'the entire continent has been turned into a place of despair, in need of charity' (Mwenda 2007).² And through Wainaina's guide I had every stereotype and trope to avoid as I attempted to participate in that change.

² With over 18 million views, the most popular TED Talk of this subject, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The danger of a Single Story* (2009), was not found until sometime later, though is acknowledged as crucial to the promotion of this call.

This PhD was immediately influenced by these three Africans as they rapidly moved my perspective, and in turn the project, away from an endeavour delving into the drama of the ‘third world’ and into a project about ‘ordinary’ African people falling in love with other ‘ordinary’ African people.

Methodology Overview: An introduction to the creative process

Methodology is only briefly foregrounded here due to the overall dissertation itself functioning as both thesis and exegesis (Alberts, Willo and Marcelle 2017), problematising and evaluating the methodology used throughout. This first takes place in an ‘ethical’ self-reflection in Section Two, before an in-depth exegetical analysis within Section Three.

In undertaking this PhD I had the intention of working creatively (Robertson et al. 2017) with an autobiographical, autoethnographic interplay of life and work to produce characters to drive the creation of an ensemble narrative. In answering the call, it was then crucial that those characters and narratives be non-reductive – void of as many Western-made stereotypes and tropes of Africa and Africans as possible. As Adichie warns, ‘stereotypes straitjacket our ability to think in complex ways’ (2008, 43) which are required to understand the countless African characters who genuinely exist. Once the revelation of the call had sunk in, the project quickly transformed into one of generating stories of love. Beyond the work of gaining local permission, collaboration, and the recruitment of participants, the project ran through four stages: The Individual, the Coupled, the Story Edit, and the Group Focus Stage.

During the Individual Stage, each participant was separately asked to imagine what they would be like if they were a character in a story – with the knowledge that they were soon to be paired with someone to explore the possibility of imagined love

for the adults, and friendship for the two children.³ The aim of this ‘character imagining’ exercise was to establish a relaxed and creative way for the participants to encourage a self-reflexive exploration of their sense of self with conversations around their lived experiences of love.

Next, in the Coupled Stage, over the course of six weeks across Tanzania and Zanzibar’s main island of Unguja, each participant was introduced to another participant of a similar age and opposite gender from a different region or country.⁴ Paired together, they were presented with the challenge of exploring whether their characters, and by extension themselves, would be able to fall in love. And if they did fall in love: ‘what would your story of love be?’

Once the eight characters and their four stories were developed, I returned to Australia and combined them into the ensemble tandem narrative (Aronson 2010) as a prose treatment (The Story Edit Stage). The format of this prose treatment, which is a literary work in its own right, was chosen to ensure easy accessibility for the participants and adaptability for various publication options beyond the PhD. After this had been drafted, all participants came together on Unguja for the Group Focus Stage to share the ensemble of stories and decide collaboratively on any final story-editing or writing elements. When this process was complete I composed the final prose treatment titled *East African Stories of Love* as a creative output of this PhD endeavour. The reader will be prompted to turn their attention to the prose treatment after Section Two.

³ The children exploring a crush had passed through both my university’s Human Ethics Committee and the governments of Tanzania and Zanzibar. However, as the children were recruited from Zanzibar, I was advised locally to keep their exploration at the level of friendship as it could lead to cultural complications in the communities where we were working.

⁴ The project focuses on heteronormative relationships throughout the creative process and dissertation. This focus on heterosexual relationships occurred due to the legal implications of publicising homosexuality in several East African countries.

Choosing Love

Having chosen to pursue a non-reductive rendering of African characters and narratives I needed to centre the storytelling venture on a particular subject. The decision came quickly, and without any competing candidates. Love, with the focus on romantic love, was chosen as a ‘positive’ and universally relatable subject and as a familiar device the characters could anchor themselves to when reflecting on their own lives and engaging with their project partner/collaborator. Love is relatively accepted as universal – though also unique to an individual’s interpretation, derived from personal experience, environment, age, health, belief (faith), culture, and education (Barthes 2002; Bloom 1993; Cristaudo 2012; Gorer 1989; Jollimore 2011; Lewis 1960; May 2011; Singer 2009; Solomon 2006). This project acknowledged and embraced all of these dynamics and its creative model was designed to allow individual expression and experience from each participant who, through conversation and self-reflection, explored their own notion of ‘self-knowledge’ (Sanford 1980) around love. The objective was to create, not a love story, but a story *of* love – an ensemble of African stories about love and its existence in the lives of a varied group of people through the autoethnographic participatory process (Humphreys 2005; Pace 2012).

It is a project designed to embrace the traditional, social, and cultural (local African and Western) expectations of love (May 2011), whilst at the same time recognising the turmoil and pleasure of its condition (Breillat 1999). There is a risk of homogenising African people and cultures when the modern concept of romantic love takes its roots in the intellectual movement of Western romanticism via the likes of Rousseau and Stendhal (Singer 2009, 39). However, as this collaborative project

left the decisions of narrative and character to its participants, ideas of romantic love's origins were less problematic. Furthermore, the global colonising of ideas and expectations of romantic love (Singer 2010, 1) is instead utilised as a device to enhance relatability for a pan-continental readership. This is reflected upon in Section Three.

Choosing, and Losing, Rwanda

I initially chose Rwanda as the sole African country for the project. By working with Rwanda and Rwandans the project could problematise the existence of an identity that contributes to the macroscopic generalisation of Africa and Africans. Via Western media, Rwanda is chiefly signified by a singular event – the 1994 genocide. When considering the challenge to the notion that ‘Africa is to be pitied’ (Wainaina 2008, 92) the murder of approximately one million people in one hundred days (Corry 1998) is a stark signifier to work from. The genocide is the evidence, when looked at through a narrow historical lens, to justify the notion that ‘the entire continent has been turned into a place of despair’ (Mwenda 2007).

Rwanda is a highly progressive place, both politically and socially, reaching far beyond any international expectations following the genocide (Thomson 2018). In many ways, the task of non-reductive positive storytelling would be an easy one in this country. I was intrigued by how a process focused on a positive rendering of love stories could work where no doubt the genocide has impacted so many people on a deeply personal level (Kohen, Zanchelli, and Drake 2011). I saw the possibility to learn about the process of answering the call, while at the same time offering a space and platform for telling ‘positive’ stories of people and places so recently and violently disrupted (Grayson 2017).

However, after the first two visits to Rwanda, around the time I was nearing the completion of the permissions process, the Rwandan Ministry of Education informed me of new requirements for my research permits. I had an affiliation with the KWETU (Rwandan) Film Institute which, until approximately two months prior, was viewed by the Ministry as a satisfactory affiliation for a foreign researcher and media producer. Colleagues of mine had completed work in Rwanda through an affiliation with KWETU and had assured me this arrangement was ideal for my project. However, the Rwandan authorities advised that the Institute was no longer considered an approved institute for research affiliation.

I used my contacts in-country to try establishing a new affiliation and found the only suitable candidate for my diverse interdisciplinary and cross-research/practitioner project on the ‘Approved List’ was the National University of Rwanda. Unfortunately, no matter which avenues I pursued it proved impossible to contact the professors from outside Rwanda – hence I was at an impasse.

As a result, with my supervisor’s advice, I concluded that the best way forward was to move the project to Zanzibar and Tanzania where, with my contacts from previous work, the project could advance quickly and with minimal bureaucratic imposition. Whilst the decision was heart-wrenching, I believed this change was the best solution – pragmatic and timely. So from late December 2015 the project changed from *Rwandan Stories of Love* to *East African Stories of Love*.

Due to the constraints and logistical costs of changing countries I have had to insert more of myself (both creatively and practically) in periods and processes of the praxis than I originally envisaged. Where appropriate, this is reflected upon throughout the exegesis.

Becoming a Storyteller: Setting aside the filmmaker craft

While the participatory process was video recorded once the eight main participants had provided their signed informed consent, recording was not a priority. The purpose of any footage captured was solely as a digital documentation for use in the creation of the written narratives. This created a new experience for me, as it took away my reasonably well-honed role as a filmmaker whose camera and physical presence were always at the ready to ‘capture’ and create screen-based narratives. Moving away from the tradition of narrative filmmaking into a broader ‘storyteller’ role allowed more time to explore and experiment with the *story-finding* process.

I considered my role as an academic-practitioner more one of finding joy in creatively exploring *process* than one of delivering a story to a reader or audience. In undertaking this candidature, the most important objective was the knowledge gained from the unique experimental creative process that preceded the final creative output. The ‘practitioner-perspective’ facilitating the research of my own practice (Kerrigan and Callaghan 2016, 7) was one focused on my outsider perspective/position and the process leading to the creative output. The ‘process’ was of primary importance, while the creative output (the prose treatment) was, both figuratively and literally, secondary. Rather than focus on telling the most interesting or entertaining story possible, I felt it was crucial to use the time and privilege of my PhD candidature to undertake this experiment in story-finding as a method to explore how characters are created and stories formed via a participatory process. This was firstly due to my love of exploring process as an artist, but also to challenge the Western storyteller’s tradition of choosing Africa as a setting to garner interest and entertainment, rather than substance. Hence my lack of apprehension in using such

an unromantic term as ‘the creative output’ to describe the prose treatment here in the dissertation.

Taking value from creating a *story-finding* model that was not tied to a specific medium of character and narrative expression offered an important creative freedom and in turn a holistic approach to the complex relationships this project engaged (Sawyer 2012, 209). The participants and I were unrestricted by the convention guidelines (Batty 2014; Cowgill 2010; Geraghty 1995; Jeffrey 2006; Snyder 2005) or technical logistics of any particular storytelling medium – especially the logistical effort of creating screen-based content that can challenge or hinder creative agency (Berkeley 2018, 38). The participants’ experiences, both past and present, could be brought into the story without a need for them to be recreated or to have been perfectly (cinematically) captured in the moment they occurred – a fact I reflect on throughout the dissertation.

Important Parameters

Participant Names:

Throughout the thesis participants are referred to by their character names. In some cases, these were also their real names, while in others, changes were made. This was a creative strategy rather than one based on anonymity. During the project the participants were only ever referred to by their character name to keep the mindset continually in the creative space of the stories; that approach continues throughout this dissertation.

Fieldwork: Visits to the continent:

The establishment of the permission for fieldwork and the fieldwork itself took place over six visits to the continent ranging in length from one to four months.

- Visit 1: (Rwanda) General visit, familiarisation, and permissions enquiry.
- Visit 2: (Rwanda) Permissions and surveying.
- Visit 3: (Tanzania and Zanzibar) Permissions and surveying.
- Visit 4: (Tanzania and Zanzibar) Surveying and recruitment planning.
- Visit 5: (Tanzania and Zanzibar) Recruitment, the Individual and Coupled stages.
- Visit 6: (Zanzibar) Group focus.

Ethics Approval:

The project received full ethics approval under Murdoch University HREC permit #2015/121. On consultation with the Human Ethics Office at Murdoch University I was advised that a multi-phased strategy would lead to staggered approvals and allow the committee to assess the project and ethical implications in compartmentalised steps. Hence, the ethics approval for this project was divided into three separate applications. This increased to four after shifting the project from Rwanda to Tanzania and Zanzibar.

In January of 2014 the first application only sought approval for an initial field trip to Rwanda, to build upon established contacts and consult with locals regarding the viability of the project, to assure sensitivity of the design and to further its development. This visit included being present for the official events of the twentieth anniversary of the genocide. In June of 2014 the second ethics application sought permission for the recruitment of participants, the Individual Stage, and the

potential to share my personal video journals online.⁵ This application included approvals for all informed consent forms, scripts, and the process for their use. After moving the project away from Rwanda, in February of 2015 I sought ethics approval to involve Tanzania and Zanzibar in the project.⁶ In May of 2015 the fourth and final application sought approvals for the Coupled and Group Focus stages, and to include two children as participants. All applications were approved outright or with minor amendments.

Chosen creative output format and the final output:

The prose treatment format rather than a ‘script’ was chosen to offer the participants an easily accessible yet mood-setting narration for when we reached the Group Focus Stage. This was chosen, over the alternatives of a standard screen treatment, screenplay, or ‘screen novel’ (Batty et al. 2017, 4), to keep the narration as free of required prior technical knowledge of script processes as possible. The treatment’s heavy focus on dialogue is a deliberate result of drawing upon the type of discourse that was recorded throughout the participatory process. I have attempted to remain true to capturing such naturalistic dialogue – its repetition, cadence, rhythm, playfulness and humour as it spontaneously occurred. This aspect is discussed further throughout Section Three. The prose treatment should be read as a literary work in its own right, however, the expected creative output trajectory beyond the completion of the PhD is first a novel published in English, via print and e-book. Proceeds from the novel will go towards the creation of a Swahili print and e-book

⁵ This was added in case I felt a need to begin doing this during the first parts of the creative work.

⁶ From that point forward Rwanda was not included on any future ethics applications, nor were any more visits made to the country.

translation, and additionally, a freely available Swahili audiobook to ensure the story is accessible to people with limited traditional literacy skills.

The Local Team:

Throughout the dissertation I regularly refer to ‘the local team’. During the fieldwork in all three East African countries I employed locals to assist and collaborate on the project. They worked as translators, cultural advisors, guides, drivers, and generally offered their local knowledge and experiences throughout the entire project. Some were pre-established acquaintances and others joined the project along the way. They came from a range of professions and qualifications – with their lived experiences catering for many of their consultancy contributions. Where appropriate I name some of them individually and describe their roles later in the dissertation.

Language commonality and barriers:

All participants shared the language of Swahili, allowing for communication with each other and the team throughout the participatory process. Many also shared some working ability in English. However, through the presence of translators their limitations with English and mine with Swahili, were carefully negotiated. The interpreters gave attention to the nuances that can be lost through translation in qualitative research (Polkinghorne 2005). Such instances are reflected upon where relevant in the dissertation.

A focus on Africa and a celebration of pluralism:

It is acknowledged that the types of pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial practices discussed throughout the dissertation have affected and continue to affect other peoples and places across the globe. For the purposes of this dissertation and project, the focus is on Africa and Africans. So too the African diaspora has been and continues to be affected by these practices.⁷ However, the dissertation concentrates on the continent itself while acknowledging the diaspora – those who voluntarily moved away from the continent or those made captive by the slave trade or other forced migration. Furthermore, I am conscious of the importance of pluralism in Afrocentricity (Asante 1988, 79) and attempts to avoid homogenising the thousands of cultures and groups that comprise the continent.

Nonetheless, I am conscious that the dissertation and creative output at times appears to homogenise local cultural differences and practice – especially in the discussion of concepts and practices of romance – such as local customs and Islamic culture which is prevalent in East Africa (Lewis 2017). The project never looked to interrogate local cultural practices – which exist both separate from and integrated into colonial cultures (Diop 1974). Local cultural practices are reflected on where relevant to the participants' characters and generated stories, and where their consent extended to these being included in the published research. These inclusions were mediated by collaborations with community leaders and with a consciousness of human ethics requirements and government protocols.

⁷ I acknowledge that the term 'African' is one shared by people of European descent. For the purpose of this dissertation, the use of 'African' refers to those identifying as indigenous to the continent.

Presentation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three sections. The first examines the near three-thousand-year-long Western practice of reductive ‘African’ Othering. Section Two is a critical examination of my experience of attempting to ethically create and enact a project that sought to focus attention on the rights and experiences of living human subjects exposed to the ‘well-intended’ international human rights agenda. Section Three undertakes an exegetical examination of the entire pre-participatory and participatory process. Included within this final section is an analysis of the qualitative results of the participatory storytelling experiment by way of the treatment’s characters, stories, and the participants’ experiences as the *auctōrēs vitae* (authors of life) (Burke 2008, 15).

Section One

The first section looks at the key iterations of “Africa” and the African across Western thought and scholarship with reference to indigenous African perspectives to foreground the challenge presented to a Westerner attempting to answer the call. Section One explores Western portrayals across multiple forms of media, from the characterisation of Ethiopians in Homer’s *Odyssey* through to contemporary storytelling and foreign aid media. Through a narrative of the historical African characterisations, and the motivations of the Western travel writers behind them, this first section offers a context to the way I, as a non-African, view and interact with the continent. The section further highlights why the project set out to collaboratively create and tell a story of ordinary people in an interesting and engaging way to offer an alternative to the otherwise narrow scope of Western-made stories of Africa.

Section Two

Section Two begins a critical reflection via my ethical considerations of undertaking this collaborative participatory creative experiment when I first arrived on the continent with the project premise. This builds further on Section One's analysis of my reflexive experience in relation to the 'Western lens' I draw upon to continually negotiate both on and off the continent.

The initial intention of the exegesis was to focus the theoretical exploration on the mechanics of the participatory creative model and its 'results' (evolving character and story), but the need arose for an examination of ethical considerations. This came from my constant (and often anxious) self-reflexive ethical contemplations throughout every aspect of the 'emancipatory participatory action' research (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 299) process of engaging participation to break down traditional hierarchal restrictions of researcher-participant and outsider-Other. Section Two details the ethnographic experience of trying to invite and engage people in participating on 'a common moral project' (Denzin 2003, 113). I examine the ongoing mindful exploration of the moral dilemmas faced throughout my time as an outsider academic-practitioner, both in the field and from afar.

Section Three

The final section is an in-depth exegetical analysis of the creative acts of finding locations and participants for the project while drawing from the discussions of the first two sections in its holistic analysis of the entire creative endeavour. As an exegetical exercise, Section Three foregrounds the participatory approach as it examines the processes and methodologies undertaken to 'localise' creative agency.

While extending the self-reflexive ethnographic researcher practice of Section Two, this section focuses on my *creative* research-practitioner's self-reflection of the qualitative outcomes of the participatory creative model. These outcomes comprise the experiences of the participants, the local team, and my own, within both the creative methods and the creative output. This is presented as a critical analysis of an Action Inquiry which Torbert describes as, 'a kind of scientific inquiry that is conducted in everyday life' (quoted in Reason 1994, 330). Hence, what is examined throughout Section Three is the 'consciousness in the midst of action' (Torbert 1991, 221) that produced the creative output and undergirds this dissertation.

Section Three engages a range of techniques for researcher-participant rapport building (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007), dialogical interviewing (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015) and the process of relinquishing 'the will' of the ethnographic researcher (Behar 2003). This investigation into the project's processes and practices pinpoints the intent of their design' – for the creative endeavour and the positive impact on the social experience of the participants, which is assessed via ongoing feedback from participants and the local team. Being creatively focused, Section Three critically engages the processes of ethnographic practice with disciplines and practices of creative storytelling – ranging from the creative process and intentions of docudrama makers such as Peter Watkins (Cook 2010; Rose 1964; Rosenthal 1995) to fiction-writing processes via the broad field of novel and screen-writing how-to-guides (Cowgill 2010; Lauther 2004; Snyder 2005) – as a comparison between the process of a single writer imagining the creative process and the intricate process of this project's participatory lived-experience methods.⁸

⁸ While African storytelling and literature traditions are reflected on, the dissertation does not use African based writing guides. Research to locate African writing guides of a similar training intent to those used in this dissertation produced no results. I could speculate that this is due to African storytelling traditionally taking the medium of 'oral rather than in written form' (Tuwe 2016, 4).

Conclusion

The dissertation and exegesis places importance not only on the process of answering the call to offer my self-reflexive learning curve to fellow ethnographers, storytellers, academics, and anyone else with an interest in Africa, but also on the challenges of countering ‘Otherness’. It aims to assist in amplifying the call that led to a dramatic shift in my approach as both a media-practitioner and academic. But further, through its critical self-reflexive voice, it hopes to assist others with its retrospective ‘travel tips’ as they too venture into the journey beyond hearing the call. I believe this critical reflexivity is where this dissertation contributes ‘new understanding and new knowledge’ to media practices and processes – as is essential to the purposes of practice-led research (Knudsen 2015, 179). While the project highlighted the positive experiences of the participants and communities where the work took place, it is this researcher’s belief that a wholly open and honest dialogue of his own misgivings are the most useful knowledge he can offer in exchange for the privilege of having been afforded the time and resources to undertake this endeavour.

However, it is the researcher’s belief that rather than a homogenised idea that a tradition of Oral histories would eliminate modern writing guidance it was in fact an issue of access to databases that include these texts.

Section One. “Africa”: The creation of a character

The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. (Fanon 1970, 60)

This section assesses the long-standing production of Africa as the *wholly Other* that helped ‘define Europe’ (Said 2003, 1). I explore the developmental precursor to my attempts at challenging the ‘restrictive’ Western practice of Othering (Said 2003, 3), which produces the reductive *characterisation* of “Africa” that over millennia has left the continent trapped in the inverted commas of Western vernacular. Following Fanon, I (as a white man) seek to understand before attempting to challenge my own *neurotic orientation* – one inherited and built over millennia.

This section explores the history of the continent’s identity as portrayed by non-Africa (specifically the West), from the characterisation of the ‘Aethiopians’ of Homer’s *Odyssey* through to the twenty-first century. Through a brief look at the West’s historical African characterisations and the motivations of the individuals and institutions behind them, I consider how I have been positioned throughout my life when reading about and gazing at the continent and her one billion people. I am not looking to challenge the thinking or motivations of those across the last three millennia who have characterised and categorised Wainaina’s (2008) African Woman and the ‘idea’ of her continent – a Western invention not unlike that of the Orient that ‘has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West’ (Said 2003, 5).

In following the genealogy of this reductive characterisation I include key post-colonial thinkers who, from the late 1950s, created a major disruption to the tradition of depersonalising African people (Fanon 1963, 293). This analysis begins in Greek Antiquity where my Western lens was first ground.

Millennia of “Africa”: The creation of a character

Cheikh Anta Diop argues that African cultures, which were already old when Europe began, were ‘systematically read out of the respectful commentary of human history’ (Clarke 1974, 76) from the time of non-African involvement in the region of Egypt. Via anthropological analysis of historic cultural artefacts, Diop argues Africa had already been the cradle of human civilisation for ten thousand years, ‘while the rest of the world was steeped in barbarism’ (1974, 10). It is from that critical point that the Western characterisation of the African – or *Myth of the Negro* (Diop 1974) – was written as a *truth* that permeates today.

Greco-Roman Antiquity

Bello-Kano (2004) seeks to demonstrate that European *identity thinking* took shape against the background of the ‘mythical representations’ of African identity and Otherness in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Bello-Kano (2004, 38) maps out the formation of the West’s characterisation of Africa, beginning with the ‘father of history’, and other Greek writers who set the European gaze upon Africa (entirely named Libya during his time):

for in the land of these are found monstrous serpent and the lion
and the elephant, and bears and venomous snakes, and horned

asses, besides the dog-headed men, and the headless men with their eyes set in their breasts (at least so say the Libyans about them), and the wild men and wild women, and a great multitude of other beasts that which are not fabulous like these. (Herodotus 1964, 306)

For early Europe, Africa was the realm of *beasts* – far removed from the *civilised* people of Greece where the characterisation of the African by (and in comparisons to) the Western storyteller began. Herodotus was perhaps the first to situate Africa within ‘the rhetoric of parataxis’ situating Europe as the ‘normal’, beside its ‘abnormal’ Other, the distant, savage, ‘woolly haired’ African (Bello-Kano 2004, 38). In doing so the classical Greco-Roman texts were destined to leave the two continents existing within a ‘valorized binarism’ (38) of civilised and uncivilised.

Smith observes Diodorus’ framing of Africans as a ‘grotesque people among unusual beasts’ who in having adapted to nature find themselves far removed from the ‘civilized and civilizing’ city at the centre of the Greco-Roman worldview (2009, 60). Mudimbe observed that for Diodorus Africans ‘present a striking contrast when considered in the light of our own [Greek/European] customs’ (Diodorus quoted in Mudimbe 1994, 79). Roman era works such as Pliny’s *Natural History*, continued this racial binary tradition, viewing Africans as nameless degenerate ‘human freaks’ (Elder 1991, 70). Mudimbe notes that, as a geographer travelling across the African continent for *Imperium Romanum*, Pliny’s observation ‘evaluates countries and peoples in terms of the presence or absence of Romans’ (1988, 70). Pliny’s sense of Africa as plentiful would later dominate Europe’s interactions. However, during

Europe's medieval era the first 'white saviour' complex (Straubhaar 2015) found Africa fruitful for its missionary ideology of conversion and colonial discourse.

The Missionary Discourse: Medieval Era

Christian ideology during the medieval era saw the 'wild' Africans denounced as heathens in desperate need of a Christian rebirth, as Europe's narrative of Africa became what Mudimbe (1988) calls the 'missionary discourse'. Mudimbe's work negotiates the invented image of Africa that from the early Greco-Roman writers through to the missionary ideology saw these Europeans reconfirming one another:

the traveller had become a colonizer and the anthropologist, his scientific advisor, while the missionary, more vigorously than ever, continued, in theory as well as in practice, to expound the model of African spiritual and cultural metamorphosis. (Mudimbe 1988, 44)

The agenda changed but their writing remained the same, with the African alterity compounded by its Christian Otherness (Mudimbe 1985, 157). This approach laid the foundation for the indoctrination of Africans into the same imperialist ideology:

The missionaries had created an African class of evangelists, teachers, journalists, businessmen, lawyers and clerks who often seemed to accept the supposed cultural inferiority of the Africans, to accept settler colonialism as a fact of life and who admired the

white man for his power, wealth and technology. (Chanaiwa 1985, 197)

Language remained key to Othering the African. Pieterse observes that the writings of many Church Fathers began to frame black as ‘the colour of sin’ (1992, 24) while Christianity ramped up the agenda of inscribing its ideology and global presence over that of Islam, which was forming a dominant presence in Africa. In what was perhaps the first *scramble for Africa*, the African became an object to be secured from Islam for the betterment of the Christian ‘kingdom’. By inscribing the black ‘savage’ as pagan, for both Christendom and Islam an identity emerged to convert in mind, body, and space. However, the Renaissance era situated the continent itself, not just its people, as a commodity.

The Renaissance

Renaissance-era Europe reconstituted Africa for its perceived physical wealth. Loomba observes that the ‘travel tales’ of this era were an amalgamation of the attitudes of earlier antiquity and medieval periods into a new motivation (and justification) to ‘plunder and conquer’ (2015, 71) the lands of Africa. However, as the literate population of Europe began to grow, with it came a demand for entertainment, giving rise to exotic stories of strange, faraway lands (Trotter cited in Bello-Kano 2004, 42). As Europe’s cultural identity was enforced and the geography of Africa (and other continents) mapped and plundered, the literate masses of Europe could be entertained with tales of the distant Other. However, the interest in this *Other* would soon become a greater fascination to new philosophies of science in Europe’s era of Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment

Rhetoric that would render the black African inferior as subhuman through the Enlightenment's scientific discourse was dominated by the likes of Buffon (1831), who viewed the African through a lens of scientific racism. For Buffon Africans were void of culture and individualism as creatures of aesthetics – their noses, skin, eyes and posture were large, dark and barbaric (Nubians of the west and sub-Saharan Africans) or 'well-proportioned', light and beautiful (Ethiopians) (1831, 174). Buffon was not alone in this opinion. Philosophers, the likes of Kant, joined in postulating and categorising the African – aesthetically and intellectually – as the 'lowest rabble' from which the white Europeans 'rise aloft' and earn respect in the world 'through superior gifts' (Kant 1960, 111). According to Kant, it was their appearance, along with their 'large clumsy bones' that confirm their ultimate 'negrone-ness' – over that of any other non-European peoples simultaneously being colonised around the globe (Kant quoted in Eze 1997, 60).

Hegel postulated that 'Africa proper' (sub-Saharan Africa) contained 'unconscious people' who had not 'progressed beyond merely sensuous existences, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further' (Hegel 1975, 172). Mikkelsen, in considering German philosopher and historian Christoph Meiners' work, observes that the Enlightenment discourse was 'a type of primitive ethnographic research':

in which authors – drawing only upon the travel reports of individuals who had actually observed native populations in other parts of the world – constructed monumental histories of the

history of humankind that only replicated their own ethnocentric prejudices and racial stereotypes. (Mikkelsen 2013, 195)

Existing as narrative devices, the demeaned and studied African character helped to prop up the European protagonist, be it in story or in science or philosophy. As if instructing a pet owner, Buffon championed a reductive Western belief that an African's wellbeing is dependent on the outside caregiver, who at this time was the slave owner:

If properly fed, and unexposed to bad usage, they are contented, joyous and obliging; and on their very countenances may we read the satisfaction of their souls. (Buffon 1831, 176)

It is perhaps here during the Enlightenment that the trope of the 'helpless' African was manifested into fact. Where the medieval Christian discourse created a heathen in desperate need of salvation, the Enlightenment turned Herodotus' 'beasts' into a subhuman requiring European 'care' – without which their spirits will 'forsake them' and they will 'droop with sorrow' (Buffon 1831, 176). The Enlightenment discourse degenerated the African to justify the enslavement of Hegel's *unconscious people* (1975, 172), which would further inform the prose and policies of the late Victorian era.

Victorian Atonement and Duty

It is important to note that a great number of African philosophers and scientists were challenging the Western-invented biological determinism that was

being loudly promoted, especially throughout the Victorian era. For example, Edward Wilmot Blyden argued that ‘human races were equal and complementary’ (Okafor 1993, 198). Along with Blyden, Olaudah Equiano (1794) and James Africanus Beale Horton (1868) have been instrumental in ‘educating Western scholars about the natural equality of humanity’ (Okafor 1993, 198). However, Western ideology and policy remained the dominant force.

During the Victorian era a major moral shift in Europe’s interaction with Africa included the abolition of the slave trade. While colonisation was seen as important for European countries, so too was the civilising and *saving* of the African through both religious and other sociocultural means, turning Africa into a place of ‘atonement and duty’ (Robinson and Gallagher 1961, 27):

The chains had to be struck from the African’s neck. He must be converted. He would be civilised. (Robinson and Gallagher 1961, 27)

The move to cease the African slave trade first focused on the African west coast, where European nations had their largest stronghold since the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade for the Americas (Curtin 1969). However, one particularly significant missionary, David Livingstone, traversed many of the areas further inland. Generally, Western knowledge relied on ‘speculators’ who spoke of Africa without visiting the continent (Robinson and Gallagher 1961, 28).

Livingstone’s account of his travels became a bestseller with seventy thousand copies of *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) sold to readers ‘absorbing’ the account of this ‘resolute explorer’, garnering a huge

following and a new Euro-American thirst for travel writing (Bennett 1970, 43). His work was grounded in missionary rhetoric that allowed him to consider himself a 'divinely appointed agent of Africa's betterment' (Bennett 1970, 43). However, he was progressive in his negotiation for the abolition of the Arab slave trade and further considered prejudice against colour as 'stupid', and that the difference between himself and Africans was the result of centuries of living in an environment of 'Christianity and enlightened public opinion' (Livingstone quoted in Bennett 1970, 54). His influence on both African policy and literary representations of Africa would remain significant for a long time past his writing, just as it had been in the immediacy of his travel and work.

At the same time a rise in literacy of the middle classes across Europe fed demand for entertaining stories of distant lands. Some of the most popular travel writers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century drew upon the language of the earlier writers. The semantics of darkness, black, savage, wild, and beast painted the experiences of their '*geographical appetite* to find out, to settle upon, to uncover' and to characterise (Said 2003, 216).

One nineteenth century explorer with a very open distaste for Africa and Africans was Richard Francis Burton (Oliver 1970, 65). For Burton, any notion of Africans as people comparable to his British self was based entirely in the influence Europe had or had not had upon them, arguing that West Africans were only 'more cultivated' and 'superior in disposition' due to the '300 years of European intercourse' that East Africans had not had (1863, 175). Burton's imperial, secular ideology was founded in an era of motivation for the West (European/Christian) to overcome the East (Arabic/Islamic). For Burton and his ilk there was no value in the African until there were European values present. By comparison, Rohlf's at times

spoke kindly of Africans, making a comparison with the ability to ‘civilize’ themselves quite rapidly when compared to the two thousand years Europe took to reach its civility (Schmokel 1970, 216). However, and with a great deal of paternalistic contradiction, Stanley instructed that to ‘rule’ the African ‘it is needful resolutely to regard them as children’ (2011, 377).

By contrast, Charles Darwin’s coeval work made the essentialism of prior scientific thought about race, and particularly the African, largely redundant. Ignoring Darwin’s rejection of typological thinking would be viewed more readily today as ‘justifications of racism’ (Mayr 2000, 82). However, in the late Victorian era, a colonial agenda made it essential to ignore such science, as the later part of the nineteenth century saw a new focus on the value of the ‘dark continent’ that led to the *Scramble for Africa*. In colonial and hegemonic horror, a room full of white men in Germany imperialistically filleted the geography and the countless cultures, language groups, identities, and everything of the subalterns into colonial nations of Europe (Pakenham 2015). Mudimbe argues that the *Scramble* took place ‘in an atmosphere of Christian revival’ where ‘the age of Enlightenment and its criticism of religion had ended’ (1988, 46). With the Enlightenment’s scientific denigration of black African biology and the ideological revival of a Christian discourse, the mid to late eighteenth century saw the synthesis of the West’s historical inventions of “Africa”, readied for a now ‘fully-justified’ organised European colonialism – of its ‘dark’ and relatively uncharted ‘heart’.

The *Ugly Heart of Darkness*

Spurr (1993) highlights an obsession of late-nineteenth-century travel writers through one of Stanley's communications to the *New York Herald*, as he looked westward to the Congo region:

The largest half of Africa one wide enormous blank – a region of fable and mystery – a continent of dwarfs and cannibals and gorillas, through which the great river flowed on its unfulfilled mission to the Atlantic! (Stanley quoted in Spurr 1993, 93)

Stanley's 'unfulfilled mission' reveals an ideological imperative to 'fill' the void that is the Other's emptiness. Essentially, until they are written about, they remain nothing, an objectless absence on a blank map, waiting to become subjects (Spurr 1993, 92). This 'last' frontier of Africa would soon captivate a Western readership when this fascination extended to intrepid travel writer Joseph Conrad who, as a nine year old, had put his finger on the same blank map portion and proclaimed, 'when I grow up I shall go there' (Conrad quoted in Logan 1999, 139).

In 1989 *Blackwood's Magazine* first published the three-part series of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, based on his own experiences travelling up the Congo River as the continent was embroiled in the *Scramble*, with stories of the continent of high interest in Europe.

Heart of Darkness would go on to 'cast a long shadow' over post-colonialism (Bhabha 1994, 212). Achebe argues that Conrad's story projected Africa as 'an antithesis' of the Western world and as 'a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality' (1977, 783). For Achebe

(and many others) Conrad was ‘a bloody racist’ (1977, 788), encapsulating late nineteenth century colonialism’s need to keep Africans ‘in their place’, serving their purpose as the characters they have been intertextually coded as for millennia (1977, 785):

The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us? Who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. (Conrad 1995, 62)

In the midst of adventure Conrad reveals a fascination with the differences his Western gaze perpetuates, propping up one’s own sense of self via the creation of the ‘ugly’ African as a device of difference (Achebe 1977, 785). Conrad’s work builds on an archaic use of African characters as devices to reflect and negotiate the European/Western mind and self. They must be different. They offer drama and intrigue because they are wholly Other. Conrad’s curiosity about his own identity in a world of the Other is recorded in letters to his aunt while he was living what would later become Marlow’s story. In writing to his aunt, Conrad finds himself a victim describing ‘the black savages and the white slaves (of whom I am one) who inhabit it’ (Conrad 1983, 63). The ‘role’ of the ‘white slave’ against the black, savage Other holds a significance to the impending twentieth-century-representations of Africans and their abject poverty and hopelessness continuing as a ‘burden’ of the West (Easterly 2006).

To avoid ‘writing’ the West’s “Africa” it was crucial that I remained conscious of how this trope of difference plays out in my own West-centric mind during my time on the continent and in the work afterwards. This is reflected upon throughout Sections Two and Three.

Early Twentieth Century

Edward Said describes how Orientalism was a ‘style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction’ between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’ – freely accepted by those from the Occident who were ‘writing’ the Orient (2003, 2):

Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind”, destiny, and so on. (Said 2003, 2)

Similarly, a persistent negative representation of Africa was freely accepted by a broad field of nineteenth and twentieth century Western contributors in what Poncian points to as the ‘survival of colonial rule’ where ‘European colonial powers sought to justify their activities and domination of Africa’ (2015, 74). My challenge in contemporary post-colonial times is to consciously avert my practice from what

Doyle describes as the maintenance of empires ‘through processes and policy’ that supposedly exiled Africa during the twentieth century (1986, 45).

While world wars effected the colonial ownership of Africa, Western texts went about their African adventures. In one instance a white Western hero grew up in a jungle, bringing elements of ‘the savage’ into the hero, *Tarzan* (Burroughs 1912). Tarzan was dressed as the savages, though remained a ‘noble Briton’ – offering the ‘best of both worlds’ – remaining ‘uncorrupted by Western civilisation’, yet gifted by its attributes of language, culture, and potential (Street 2016, 20). For Tarzan, love and all the fruits of not being ‘the Other’ were possible amongst a land of ‘savage beasts’ and ‘savage men’ (Burroughs 2012, 12).

By the end of the First World War, both Africa and the Orient were a ‘privileged terrain’ of the West for the intellectual spectacle of itself (Said 2003, 104). Germany lost control of its colonial possessions in Africa, and Ernest Hemingway developed his own interest in the continent after a visit to East Africa in 1933 left him ‘hungry for more of it’ (Hemingway 2002, 57). Karen Blixen’s *Out of Africa* (1937) followed Hemingway’s *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), telling the story of her seventeen years in the same regions of British East Africa – a story Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o critiqued as personifying ‘the great racist myth at the heart of bourgeois Western society’ (1993, 135). Several years later Humphrey Bogart was (cinematically) in North Africa’s Casablanca as Allied forces liberated North Africa (Epstein 1942). Bogart offered a Western hero in the celebration of America and Britain’s conquering of the enemy and taking back of German-held colonial grounds. The trope was later repeated when Bogart returned to sail up the Ulanga River to sink a German gunner (and fall in love) in *The African Queen* (Huston 1951) – an adaptation of C.S. Forester’s (1935) novel. Forester’s narrative brought to life the

Naval ‘African theatre’ of the Great War, in what was German East Africa – a place once more carved up or handed over to a new tactical European rule in the midst of that war (Orosz 2016, 593).

With the Second World War Africa was once again a battleground between warring European ideologies. With over one million Africans recruited from European colonies, a total of at least fifty thousand African soldiers died fighting ‘the European’s war’ (Killingray and Plaut 2012, 8). However, the war-propaganda discourses of ‘self-determinising freedom’ used to recruit African subjects into joining imperial war efforts were soon reappropriated by anti-colonial nationalists across the continent to liberate themselves from imperial rule (Ibhawoh 2007, 221). Subsequently, after the Second World War, African nations began to gain their independence as the banner of a Pan-Africanist, black nationalism rose politically and intellectually (Appiah 1992, 73).

A Shifting ‘Ownership’ of Africa: African Decolonisation

Egypt gained independence in 1922 and South Africa became a sovereign nation in 1934, although it was not a republic until 1961. For decades beyond that, black South Africans were openly subjected to the same oppressive imperial conditions of colonisation via apartheid – which harnessed the same Western-made stereotypes to justify its racist policies and practices (Hook 2012). Ethiopia gained independence in 1941 and by the time Libya also did in 1951, a challenge to the entire characterisation and placement of Western and African characters gathered pace (Birmingham and Magdoff 2010). The two characters – divided ever since they were *invented* – suddenly arrived at a point of collision:

The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. [...] The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. [...] The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs. The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, 'They want to take our place.' It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. This world divided into compartments, this world cut. (Fanon 1963, 38)

The Western protagonists were to lose their place to the lesser character they had written into their own story. Or more so – the colonised subaltern was now found to

be the true protagonist as they began a long ‘objectifying confrontation with otherness’ (Bhabha 1994, 51).⁹

With the beginning of the 1950s came the screen adaptations of two seminal Western travel writers. Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) and Hemingway’s *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1936). Haggard’s *imperialist romance* adventure saw a white explorer discovering the ruins of a lost white kingdom – a common feature of the imperialist romance genre offering its readership ‘proof positive that even in the distant past, something approximating a colonial condition prevailed’ (Patteson 1978, 112). Amidst a closing era of colonial rule, the release of Marton and Bennett’s (1950) screen adaptation had Euro-American post-war audiences watching a late Victorian era explorer hunt the wilds of Africa for an even older lost ‘proof positive’ of colonial imperialism.

African Authorship

Africans and the African diaspora have a rich history of artists, writers, philosophers and scientists producing important works. As the decolonisation of Africa continued through the 1950s, so too came a growing body of African texts that frequently made an impact beyond the continent. One of the most notable of publications in or about Africa is *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. In 1975 Achebe explained his reading of the ‘bloody racist’ Conrad in a lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, before later publishing *An Image of Africa* (1977). However, long before he confronted a Western readership

⁹ Bhabha argued that Fanon saw the ultimate want of the black man as an objectifying confrontation with Otherness (1994, 51).

with that analysis, his writing would influence generations of Africans and non-African readers alike.

Things Fall Apart is considered, besides the Bible and the Quran, to be the most read book in Africa and remains critical to the international literary canon (Okpewho 2003, 3) that as of its 60th anniversary in 2018 had amassed 57 translations and over twenty million sales (Penguin Random House 2018). Achebe described his practice as a ‘novelist as teacher’ – with the task of educating readers in ‘the real lives and problems of Africans’ (2003, 4). Achebe made the characters and their struggles whole – where non-African storytellers continued to keep the African as two-dimensional functionaries. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, half a century later, fellow Nigerian writer Chris Abani (2007) found himself no longer wanting the same ‘job’ Achebe had. He does not wish to perpetuate the struggles and the pains of the African, nor continue to *only* read about them (Abani 2007).

However, Achebe’s novel is crucially important as it is seen as elegising the ‘passing away of traditional Igbo culture’ in ‘a society in which the norms of conduct and institutions of governance are in the process of “falling apart” at a time when Africa was gaining independence in a globalizing world’ (Begam 1997, 397). His African characters have strength, depth, and functions beyond supporting a Western protagonist. From the writer and his African readers’ perspective they are not ‘the Other’; they are the Occident (Colonised) finding themselves globalising with the Other (Coloniser) in a post-colonial world. By 1960, two years past the book’s release, Achebe’s Nigeria gained independence along with seventeen other countries in the year known as *The Year of Africa* (Birmingham and Magdoff 2010).

In 1964 Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) became the first East African novel to be published in English. The Kenyan author sees writing in African languages as a part of the anti-imperialist struggle – as writing in their ‘native’ English only pays homage to the coloniser (Smith 2012, 36). At the time of this first English translation Thiong'o already had a series of books marked by ‘a broadly humanist/liberal outlook’ (Williams 1999, 57) set (and published) in and around Kenya's 1963 independence. Amid the decolonisation and post-colonial cultural struggles with which Thiong'o's name is synonymous (Williams 1999), also came an intellectual movement, both off and on the continent. Crucial to this was Frantz Fanon's 1952 publication of *Black Skin, White Masks*, and in 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth* – as Europe's geographical colonised fillets of the continent continued to gain independence alongside a post-colonial intellectual renaissance.

An Intellectual Challenge

The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing “them” well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system. (Fanon 1963, 35)

Through the discipline of psychology Fanon investigated and articulated the ‘inner effects of colonialism on colonized subjects, and as a means through which they could be resisted, turning the inculcation of inferiority into self-empowerment’ (Young 2016, 275). While the Western canon, influenced by the motivations of ‘empire’, was keeping characterisation of the African narrow, Fanon was delving

into an ontological and psychological study of the colonised Other. Said observed that in *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon was no longer interested in the divide between the Other (colonised) and the Occident (coloniser) but rather in binding ‘the European as well as the native together in a new non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism’ (Said 1993, 331). Fanon wanted to bring about an end to the characterised imbalance of the Occident and the Other. This PhD shares that goal in the presentation of characters and stories that are not unlike those of their target Western readership.

When Achebe’s disruptive lecture was published as *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness* (1977) only Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), remained under European colonial rule.¹⁰ Achebe’s critique of Conrad met with heavy criticism by many scholars – both in the lecture theatre that day and in the years since. Many, including Watts (1983), went to the aid of *Heart of Darkness*, championing it as an important anti-imperialist text. Where Achebe argues that Conrad has easily ‘won the acclaim of white readers by pandering to their prejudices’ (Achebe quoted in Watts 1983, 196), Watts defends Conrad and others asserting they were ‘influenced by the climate of prejudice of their times’ (208).

Said, however, acknowledges that as a creature of his time, Conrad was aware and critical of the enslavement of ‘the natives’, but was unable to see in them the same ‘European’ capabilities to govern themselves and maintain civilisation (1993, 34). Said’s critique of imperialism’s creation of the Orient opened a field of inquiry focused on the cultural mechanisms embedded in representations in ‘Western discourse as they construct, legitimate and represent hegemonic relations of

¹⁰ South West Africa (Namibia) and Eritrea later gained independence from South African and Egyptian rule respectively.

domination between the colonizer and the colonized' (Jarosz 1992, 106). Little is ever written on the post-colonial subject without reference to *Orientalism* or Said in general. It is a 'milestone in critical theory' (Varisco 2017, xi) that is of great value to anyone working anywhere imperialism has made its mark.

The post-colonial intellectual renaissance grew throughout the 1980s as continental issues, such as South Africa's apartheid and the civil rights of the African diaspora in the West, proliferated. Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 and five years later in 1985, Mudimbe published his seminal work *African Gnosis: Philosophy and the order of Knowledge* (1985) and three years later *The Invention of Africa* – championing his commitment 'not to philosophy, nor to an invented Africa, but to what it essentially means to be an African and a philosopher today' (1988, xi). Said's *Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors* (1989) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) furthered post-colonial thought. And a year later Mudimbe's *The Idea of Africa* (1994) gave a further subjective analysis of the creation of the Western 'idea' of Africa from the perspective of one of her people. However, in the early 1980s an event had occurred that led to a new motivation for Western media that would create the West's contemporary image of Wainaina's (2008) emaciated African Woman. The 'event' was the 1983 Ethiopian Famine – and specifically, Michael Buerk and Mohammed Amin's BBC broadcast, *Biblical Famine*, and Tony Suau's Pulitzer-prizewinning photos of the victims (Palmer 1987, 244).

1984: A Characterisation turning point: The Ethiopian Famine

Take up the White Man's burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

(Kipling 1998)

Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, penned in 1899 about the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), articulates a global Western ideology of the saviour complex, the earlier missionary discourse (Mudimbe 1985, 157), and a newly found saviour-by-charity ideology that continues to dominate Western ideas (and creations) of Africa in the twenty-first century (Magubane 2008, 2). Broadcast on the twenty-third of October, 1984 *Biblical Famine*, shot in Northern Ethiopia by Mohammed Amin and reported by Michael Buerk was later transmitted by 425 broadcasting organisations to an estimated 470 million people (Franks 2014, 45). This was a tipping point for the white man's burden (Kareithi 2001) and a rebirth for the Western media's fascination with African trauma. Whilst Greco-Roman philosophers articulated the African as the beastly Other to their civilised status, and the missionary found a need to save the African from paganism (or Islam), popular culture's interest in poverty and suffering generated the contemporary *truth* of Wainaina's (2008) starving African Woman.

George Harrison and Ravi Shankar's 1971 *The Bangladesh Concert*, and the 1979 *Concert for Kampuchea* preceded *Live Aid* – 'a simultaneous super-concert' (Bardia 2010, 4) in London and Philadelphia that is often marked as the birth of the West's obsession with poverty – championed by celebrities drawn to 'the rock man's

burden' (Richey and Ponte 2008, 714). These events cast a 'long shadow' over Western interaction with the continent by establishing 'a hegemonic culture of humanitarianism in which moral responsibility' towards "Africa" is established 'on pity rather than the demand for justice' (Müller 2013, 470).

Whilst post-colonialism both on and off the continent works to deconstruct colonial myths perceiving the West's 'superiority' over Africa (and other colonised lands), 'these *truths* continue to be promoted and to affect audience perceptions' via foreign aid marketing strategies, events, and the media's uptake of this rhetoric (Grant 2015, 311). Four decades on from the Ethiopian famine this *truth* of Africa continues as a dominant presence in Western media. Swedish author Henning Mankell argues that, 'the media tells us everything about how Africans die, but nothing about how they live' (Mankell quoted in Orgeret 2010, 47). Media coverage of famines is important and can be effective in directly stimulating action to help those in need (Campbell 2012, 18). However, perpetuating these truths as the whole *truth* (Ibelema 2014, 8) is what brought Mudimbe's call to my laptop screen in 2012. In coming to that moment, it was important I found some time to reflect on what texts had directly informed my *truth* of Africa.

A Self-Reflexive evaluation: The creation of my "Africa"

The Ethiopian famine and the immense body of media texts that followed it are significant to any scholarly discussion of the 'creation' and maintenance of the Western image of Africa. However, for the context of this dissertation it is important to look at what influenced my Western gaze, long before I set out to do this project. It comprises just a small number of cultural artefacts of the twentieth century. As a young child the Ethiopian famine dominated the news and adult conversations I

overhead about a faraway land called Africa – the place where I had been told my favourite animal, the giraffe, lived. The foreign aid advertisements I saw on television kept the Western interest in African trauma at the centre of my developing understanding of that place of amazing animals and sad people, so far away from my ‘lived world’ in Australia. Second, a film had been released that would later influence my childhood imagination. *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980) was a frequent teacher’s pick for the last day of class before school holidays – chosen perhaps as it was humorous and detached enough from our 1980s country Western Australian classrooms as we waited for the holidays to finally roll in. A comedy about natives who clicked when they spoke with surprise about a Coke bottle that fell from the sky was the only other thing building my understanding of Africa and Africans.

Throughout my formative years Africa was, in my imagination and memory, a place of starving children (you could ‘adopt’ – each for a dollar a day), natives with clicking dialects who were easily enthralled by an empty Coke bottle and imagery of exotic animals. A perception which, as Mwenda (2007) argues, can negatively influence the way in which I interact with the continent.

Broken Pumps and Second-hand Clothes: *The call in practical terms*

Millennia-old Western stereotypes of “Africa” and the non-African world’s contemporary interactions with the continent are complexly intertwined. During field trips to the continent, I discovered several stark examples of where the belief and interpretation of a *helpless and hopeless* Africa is directly influencing non-Africa’s interactions and ‘helping’. Water pumps were one such exemplar. When looking for the Maasai participant in the remote regions of North West Tanzania I often saw children walking along the long stretches of remote roads carrying containers of

water on their heads. Being acutely aware of the many ‘water charities’ that exist, through years of pamphlets and television advertisements showing me images of children with yellow jerrycans on their heads, I asked my guide how far the children have to walk, and if there are plans to pipe water to the villages. He informed me that many of the villages already have the pumps, however, within a short time after installation the pumps fail and lie dormant, leaving the locals to wait for the international organisation to come back and fix them. ‘All because,’ he said with much passion, ‘the locals don’t consider the pumps to be their own as they were not involved in installing them or given the task of repairs’. The locals, my guide pointed out, are perfectly capable of repairing a motorbike with little to no parts, so it is obvious they would have no problem caring for a pump and some piping, ‘if the charities would realise this’.

As of 2009 there were over fifty thousand water supply points on the continent that had ‘effectively died’ due largely to a lack of ongoing maintenance (Skinner 2009, para. 1). Mwenda’s call for change comes from a need for a pedagogical shift in the transmitted image of Africa. The need for ‘a mediated and popular culture that can show how the concept “Africa” is both diverse and multifaceted’ (Orgeret 2010, 49) is arguably as important as the very presence of an aid organisation installing a water pump in a remote village. If the diverse, multifaceted and highly capable reality of the individuals being ‘helped’ is common knowledge, then perhaps the pumps will keep working with ownership afforded to the capable hands of the communities who will be using them.

Another example of the reductive impression leading to a reductive interaction is found in the global secondhand clothing trade. The street stalls and market places of the cities and towns of East Africa are lined with all the colours and

designs of the world's secondhand clothes. Elderly locals told me stories of 'better times', when in place of this new spectacle of the world's secondhand clothes were stalls, shops, and factories designing and manufacturing garments and textiles for both local and international sale.

There is a large economic debate over whether it was the advent of the global secondhand clothing trade or other factors coinciding with varieties of economic liberalisation policies of the 1980s that consigned the bulk of African textile industries to the memories of older generations (Brooks and Simon 2012, 1279; Frazer 2008). However, in some parts of the world the trade has been banned outright in an attempt to protect local textile industries – as in Indonesia and the Philippines (Hansen 2004). In African countries such as Rwanda and Tanzania, recent pushes for protectionist bans on secondhand clothing imports are underway in an attempt to improve local industrialisation (Katende-Magezi 2017, 7).¹¹

Africa receives the largest amount of the trade, with Oxfam reporting over seventy percent of donated clothing ending up on the continent (Kubania 2015). This has produced an industry all of its own providing income to local workers and taxes to local governments (Baden and Barber 2005). Yet this came at the price of a local manufacturing industry that arguably would provide more jobs, infrastructure and wealth, by exporting textiles and clothing. The 'good-intent' said to motivate this trade is arguably just using a rhetoric of 'giving and helping' (Hansen 2004, 3) to shroud the self-financed recycling of the global north's clothing 'waste' (Brooks and Simon 2012, 1276). But, unfortunately, more poverty would likely be created by ending the billion dollar commodity industry that turned 'the developed world's'

¹¹ Tanzania has since rolled back bans and are instead doubling tariffs on the secondhand imports while Rwanda (at the time of writing this) stands firm to implement the ban by the end of 2019 – much to the ire of the Trump Administration (Ligami 2018).

‘cast-offs into desired garments’ (Hansen 1994, 102). Had those who drove the ‘helpful’ ideas to develop intercontinental secondhand clothing trades considered the prospect of partnering with local African textile industries to create garments, one industry could have grown, with jobs and wealth increased locally, rather than the alternative – creation of poverty by closing one industry, thereby giving rise to a new dependence on the ‘giving and helping’ of the ‘developed world’.

The false characterisations of Africans as both helpless and hopeless can lead to actions that hinder more than ‘help’. In coming to this project, I did not want to undertake a storytelling venture that would tell the story of a character (real or fictional) rising from adversity. While doing so would be showing a strength within that African person – I would still just be reinforcing the tired, singular story of a place of adversity and struggle. And furthermore, perhaps only adding to the optimistic spin of the ‘sunshine stories’ of ‘struggling but smiling’ Africans (Orgeret 2010, 48) otherwise portrayed by the Western media. This was an important practice to avoid as I set out to find a way to challenge my ingrained beliefs, practices, and perspectives of the traditionally wholly-Othered African.

Conclusion: Renegotiating the present

Having taken a brief historical look at the formation and maintenance of what I have been challenged to avoid, I can enter into answering the call for non-reductive storytelling with an understanding of the need to be highly conscious of my presumptions of those I am now seeking to tell stories about, or rather, ‘with’. This task of answering a call from Africa is one fraught with the danger of recolonising and falling into the Western heritage of the ‘colonizer’s avowed ambition to civilize or modernize the native’ (Bhabha 1994, 43). In heading across the Indian Ocean, I

needed to begin a localising praxis that looked to avoid all such colonial misgivings by allowing Africans to steer the project and its creations.

Section Two. Ethics and Morals: The (anxiously) self-reflexive outsider

Good will and an open heart are not enough...

(Conquergood 1985, 4)

Through the participatory process this project sought to reduce the researcher's inherent ethnocentric influence, while through a reflexive critical awareness acknowledge and negotiate the 'epistemological limits' of my 'ethnocentric ideas' (Bhabha 1994, 4). My role as a research-practitioner positioned the project's approach as both a creative 'experiment' and a self-reflexive exploration of the act of cultural intermediating (Santos 2004). Via its participatory model, the project looked to harness 'participatory action research' (Chevalier and Buckles 2019) to achieve its objective of a 'positive' cultural-mediation resulting from a self-reflexive, ethically minded, methodological journey to the final creative output. In essence the project set out to explore a lessening of 'Africa's otherness and perceptual remoteness' (Ibelema 2014, 203) in both product and process.

The initial intention of my creative practice was to focus the theoretical exploration on the mechanics of the participatory creative model and its 'results', i.e. the characters and story. However, the need for an ethical exploration was revealed during the experience of my constant, and often anxious, self-reflexive ethical considerations throughout every aspect of the emancipatory, participatory action research as it aimed 'to engender practical critiques of existing states of affairs' (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 299). My focus was on engaging co-participation to break down traditional hierarchal restrictions of researcher-participant and outsider-Other. The experience of trying to invite and engage people into the co-participation of sharing 'a common moral project' (Denzin 2003, 113) became as much an action

research project as the storytelling venture itself. This section reflects upon the ongoing mindful exploration of the moral dilemmas faced throughout my time as an outsider both in the field and from afar.

(ethics is) a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve and transform himself. (Foucault 1978, 28)

Initially, when visiting East Africa I considered the exploration of the legal and ethical processes as something quite formal, and a university requirement, separate to the most important later work of creating stories with the people in the places I visited. As a practitioner I have spent more than a decade ‘working with’ minority groups in Australia, including many collaborative storytelling projects with indigenous Australians, and so I felt that I was well prepared for ‘working with’ the people and cultures of East Africa. The ethical parameters as a white Australian working with Australian indigenous groups are the same parameters I must respect and carefully navigate when working with East African communities. Through my prior experiences I understood that my cultural and physical identity could represent a complex colonising history that *burdened* the receiver of my arrival in their world. For in East Africa, every meeting with me was a ‘meeting with the white man’s eyes’ (Fanon 1970, 110). I was confident in the strength of my liberal goodwill and preparedness to protect and respect the rights of the participants and the people and

places they represent. However, as time in Africa unfolded, the boundaries between the formal paperwork of ethics and government permissions and my place in the personal lifeworlds (Habermas 1981) of East Africans blurred.

Moral Map: Charting the researcher's narrative turmoil

As an academic-practitioner I could have easily assumed enough validation for the project design and results from the goodwill of trying to create something positive. However, as Dwight Conquergood argues (via Wallace Bacon), 'good will and an open heart are not enough' (1985, 4) when outsiders seek to 'express cultural experiences' from beyond their own 'lived world' (Bacon quoted in Conquergood 1985, 4). There was a need to move past the motivation of my goodwill and examine the 'position' or 'positions' of my moral stance and its effect on my actions and behaviours while engaged in ethnographic research and the creation of intercultural stories.

The project's *East African Stories* are a form of 'intercultural performance' as multiple East African cultures and my 'outsider' Euro-Australian culture worked together to create them. Throughout this there was an intercultural performance at play as I self-reflexively experienced the internal narrative turmoil of my own moral and ethical dance with my external actions during the process of this intercultural storytelling venture. Within an intercultural performance, there is, as Conquergood agrees with Bacon, an 'ethical concern' with the validity of the performance, which is founded in the moral stances of both the performer and the audience (Bacon quoted in Conquergood 1985, 4). In negotiating moral stances towards (and in) the performance of expressive art by 'outsiders', Conquergood maps four morally problematic, ethical pitfalls of performative stances towards the Other: The

Custodian's Rip-Off, The Enthusiast's Infatuation, The Curator's Exhibitionism, and The Skeptic's Cop-Out.

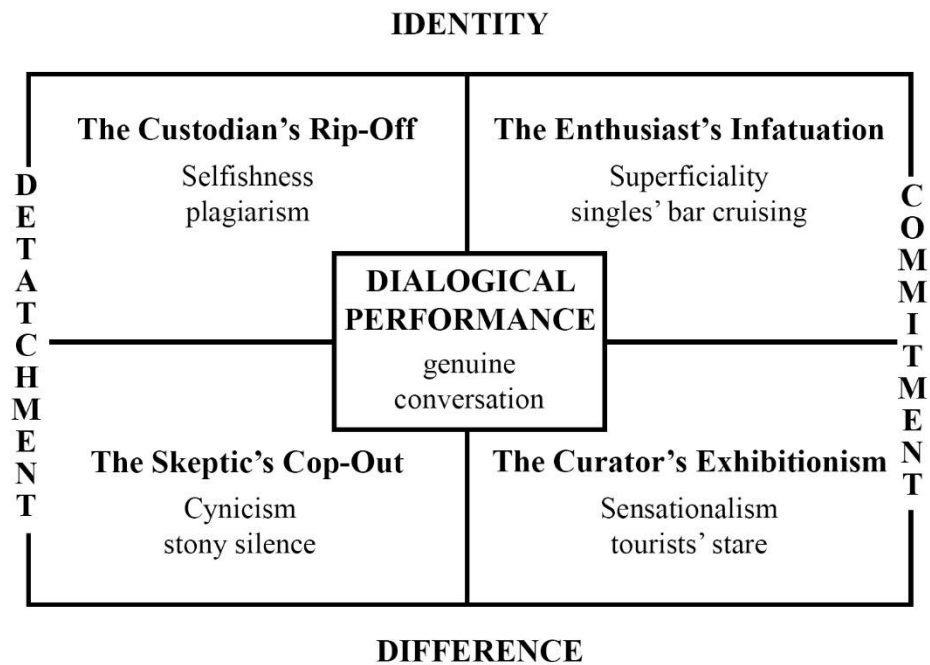


Figure 1. Moral Mapping of Performative Stances Towards the Other
Source: Recreated from Conquergood (1985, 5)

Conquergood describes the four 'problem areas' as being 'graphically represented as the extreme corners of a moral map articulated by intersecting axes of ethnographic tensions' (1985, 4):

The vertical axis is the tensive counterpull between Identity and Difference, the horizontal axis between Detachment and Commitment. The extreme points of both sets of continua represent 'dangerous shores' to be navigated, binary oppositions to be transcended. The center of the map represents the moral center that transcends and reconciles the spin-off extremes. I call this dynamic

center, which holds in tense equipoise the four contrarities,
'Dialogical Performance'. (Conquergood 1985, 4-5)

The Custodian's Rip-Off

Conquergood defines the moral stance of the Custodian's Rip-Off as one of having 'a strong attraction towards the Other coupled with extreme detachment resulting in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance' (1985, 5). Any ethnographer operating from this quadrant, while their fascination with other cultures and peoples may come with goodwill (for example, to save a 'dying culture'), is so far detached from a commitment to the Other that their motivation to 'find some good performance material' leads to an unambiguously superficial 'theft' or even 'rape' of that culture (Conquergood 1985, 4-5). The risk of falling into the actions and attitudes of the Custodian's Rip-Off in my ethnographic work has always been a troubling possibility. To become someone who manufactures a noble mysterious Other was a genuine risk I faced when coupling my desire to identify with the participants while finding the drama and intrigue necessary to secure a readership/audience. Superficially, there was my obvious choice to not play on the stereotypes perpetuated by centuries of outright 'custodian' thinkers, however that goodwill alone was not enough to stop such behaviour from sneaking into the work. I was (and remain) inherently at risk of slipping into this position via the habits of the storyteller, which are instinctively driven to draw in their audience with the drama of conflict and intrigue of the compelling differences of 'the Other'.

The Enthusiast's Infatuation

Struck with fervent fascination, the Enthusiast's Infatuation is marred by a 'facile identification with the Other' (Conquergood 1985, 6) that trivialises the Other. While acknowledging that it is not as transparently immoral as the Custodian's Rip-Off, Conquergood classes the work born out of this opposing ethical pitfall quadrant as 'naïve and glib performances, marked with superficiality' (1985, 6). Situated in the corner of blinding commitment and a hunger for identity, the Enthusiast's Infatuation is a realm through which this project's objectives perhaps take cautionary steps. Conquergood warns that too eager a desire to identify with an 'Other' leads to the distinctiveness between the ethnographer and subject/Other being 'glossed over with a glaze of generalities' (1985, 6). In the realm of the Infatuated Enthusiast he highlights Tzvetan Todorov's question or warning; 'doesn't one culture risk trying to transform the Other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well?' (Todorov 1984, 168). Fanon sees this in colonial and post-colonial mindsets of 'constantly affirmed concern with "respecting the culture of the native populations"' which through 'objectification' holds no consideration of 'the values borne by the culture' and instead objectifies both the culture and the individuals within it (1995, 174).

This project set out to find a relatability between its African characters and their potential Western audience/readership. It looked first and foremost to challenge the notion of a helpless and hopeless people, but also to find relatability or shared identity through the subject of 'love' and its objective of 'normalisation' rather than 'objectification' or 'exoticisation'. There was nothing within this aim that would be a quest to eliminate the uniqueness of a cultural Other, however this aim of an intercultural relatability certainly ran a risk of a facile identification and

‘objectification’ both in its final ‘performance’ and the methodology used to reach said ‘performance’.

The Curator’s Exhibitionism

Performances from the ‘Wild Kingdom’ quadrant of the Curator’s Exhibitionism are borne ‘out of fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote’, where the performer’s commitment to difference aims to ‘astonish’ their audience/reader rather than ‘understand’ the Other (Conquergood 1985, 7). I do not believe the project to be guilty of this as the task was to delve into the personal world of falling in love with the use of personal conversation and an intimately self-reflexive exploration by the participants, and so to challenge the traditional museum exhibit, ‘mute staring’ style of the Curator’s Exhibitionism. The project’s aims and methodology, while risking generalisation of the Enthusiast’s Infatuation, set out to facilitate ‘genuine contact with the lives of strangers’ (1985, 7) in direct challenge to the colonising-master narrative’s commitment to the sensationalism of difference since the Greco-Roman philosophy took root in the quadrant of the Curator’s Exhibitionism. Sensationalism that dehumanises the Other by creating too great an aesthetic, romantic, and political distance which ‘denies the Other membership in the same moral community as ourselves’ (1985, 7) was and is the ultimate antagonist of this project.

The Skeptic’s Cop-Out

However while the colonising fallacies of the likes of the Curator’s Exhibitionism go against this project’s aims and design, the ‘prison-house of Detachment and Difference’ that is Conquergood’s ‘The Skeptic’s Cop-Out’ reveals

the risk of rebelling too heavily against the most obvious pitfalls of intercultural mediation (1985, 8). At its extreme, ‘No Trespassing’ is the mantra of the ethnographic sceptic or sceptical audience-member/reader who finds themselves ‘separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as Other [...] and thus irremediably inaccessible’ (Conquergood 1985, 8). For Conquergood, the Skeptic’s Cop-Out is the worst of all as it forecloses all dialogue. With such paralysing scepticism there is a total resistance to and destruction of the (often difficult) ethnographic discourse that attempts to discover an understanding between different groups, cultures, or people. Within its collaborative methodology this project set out to create a story that engaged simultaneously with multiple cultures via the experiences and voices of its participants. Within my position as an outsider, there was an inability to ‘code-switch’ (simultaneously participate in two cultures) (Conquergood 1985, 8) when I was not a part of any of the multiple African cultures to which this project’s methodology attempted to subscribe.¹² While it was important to acknowledge this difference and the colonising risks, I always considered my moral stances and actions within the process of ethnographic research to ensure that neither I nor the project strayed too far into the Skeptic’s Cop-Out corner.

Dialogical Performance

Conquergood argues that fieldwork should be kept ‘dialogically alive’, allowing a counterbalancing pull between the four ethical pitfalls, alleviating their destructive qualities by facilitating an intimate struggle ‘to bring together different

¹² There is no assumption of a generic ‘African’ or ‘East African’ monoculture. Each East African participant has their own unique cultural background and therefore underwent similar experiences across cultures, which is discussed further throughout Section Three.

voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another' (1985, 9-10). It is 'a way of understanding the intersections of self, other, and context, passionately and reflexively' (Spry 2001, 716). This moral mapping of performative stances assists in the examination of my own ethnographic performative text – the 'performative text' being my actions and reactions in the field while acting as an ethnographic researcher born out of a storyteller/filmmaker background. Within this section and further in Section Three I reflect on the Moral Mapping of my internal thoughts and emotional experiences, many of which are recorded in research journals, as a critical interpretation of the 'performative text' that was my involvement within the domain of other people's worlds and their experiences. It is a negotiation of the narrative of my intellectual and emotional movement in and around the likes of Conquergood's ethical pitfalls, that was then and remains still a sensation not unlike a bouncy ball set loose in a small room.

The Self-reflexive Narrative Journey Begins

Reflexivity implies ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share.

(Sandelowski and Barroso 2002, 216)

During my first journey to Rwanda there was a great deal of anticipation as I sat at the gate in Doha International Airport awaiting my first ever flight to Kigali. I contemplated how my knowledge would grow over the coming years during both short and long stays in a country I was yet to encounter. It occurred to me as I

boarded the plane and took my window seat that I was quite likely to meet the first Rwandans of my journey – if anyone sat next to me. A short while later a couple with a young baby sat down – a Ugandan family from Melbourne Australia. I had to admit to myself that the travelling-adventurer in me was somewhat disappointed to hear my own accent coming out of the friendly ‘African’ sitting next to me, though their insight into their returning to Africa for the first time in fifteen years was interesting. The man was looking forward to seeing his family, the woman was unsure for the health of her baby during their visit, while the man assured her the baby would be fine, ‘just as they had once been’. Several hours later my new friends departed at our brief tarmac stopover in Uganda, leaving me to the final leg of the journey, looking out the window at the transforming landscape as it shifted from flat reds to rich greens.

Landing in Kigali and stepping off the plane marked my third visit to the continent but my first seeing the rich green, rolling hills of *Pays des Mille Collines* (*The Land of a Thousand Hills*). After passing through immigration and collecting my bags I made my first Rwandan acquaintance, a taxi driver, ‘Innocent’ – a name I didn’t question or quiz as my initial cautionary ‘outsider-mind’ told me to tread carefully. As we pulled out of the airport carpark, Innocent drove me through Kigali to my hostel. With our conversation limited to the fragments of English that we shared I soon settled into gazing out the car window where I found myself struggling not to recall the piles of dead bodies filmed twenty years earlier – seared as my only previous image of this small landlocked nation. My Western perspective filtered in to view death and misery where in fact there were only clean, well-kept streets and gardens that would put any of Australia’s ‘tidiest towns’ to shame.

‘Capturing’ Experience

With the wisdom and advice of my supervisors, I removed the proposal to produce a film for the PhD. However, I set out to use my filmmaker background to record the process as a documentation of the research methods and ‘experiences’ of the project – to benefit the development of both the dissertation and prose treatment. Therefore, arriving in Kigali I was already prepared and equipped to ‘digitally’ capture the experience of the project solely for later use by myself and my co-collaborators (the participants). However, from that first day in Kigali there was an ever-present underlying filmmaker’s impulse to project my experience to a public audience via the technologies and craft that I had been utilising as a practitioner for over a decade.

The purpose of my initial visit to Rwanda was as a personal experience to inform my developing ideas around the project and Western perceptions of Africa. However, during that first day driving to the hostel I had a strong urge to point a camera out the window and film the roadside – an instinct to narrate the emotional experience by transposing the global media’s images of thousands of dead bodies onto the clean, well-kept surfaces of the passing Kigali verges. It was my filmmaker’s reflex to share this challenging experience. There was a constant feeling of regret as the car drove on and the camera remained in my bag – knowing it was not a part of the project method and that I did not have permission from my University’s Human Ethics Committee or the Rwandan authorities.

From that first compelling in-country experience, during a simple transit from the airport, I had begun a highly conscious moral journey sparked by the suppression of my ability and power to act on my filmmaker’s instincts. It was in essence the beginning of a fight with and realisation of my screen-based intercultural

mediator's sense of self. I had lost, in many ways voluntarily, the power to enact the intercultural portal and authority of the camera that had for many years automatically activated whenever I was placed in the geographical, cultural, and/or emotional lifeworld of others (Habermas 1981). The legal, ethical and personally inscribed restrictions were facilitating both the time and emotional turmoil required for a moral reflection that is imperative when involved in a humanist practice such as ethnography or documentary (Aibel 1991).

When occupying my documentary-filmmaker role I try to remain as consciously ethical as possible, with consideration to the notion that the praxis 'transforms the Other into an object of knowledge' (Nash 2011, 231), despite the frequent need to film first and ask ethical questions later. In my documentary work the film-first impulse would often take over in compelling times due to the 'split-second' nature of the work where pausing for 'moral reflection' cannot take place when capturing real-life as it unfolds (Aibel 1991, 108). Hanusch reflects on Santos' argument for the ongoing need to learn more about the travel writers' 'perceptions, values, ethics, attitudes and standards' when considering the important role they play as key 'cultural intermediators' in contemporary global-media (Santos cited in Hanusch 2009, 631). By restricting my ability to focus on visually 'capturing' the world around me, I was left to 'experience' it first-hand as my perceptions, values, ethics, attitudes, and standards underwent a challenging, self-reflexive critique and transformation – one that reappears regularly throughout this exegesis.

I excitedly wrote of my experiences in my journal and recorded personal video diaries the moment I was alone. However, I was only ever reflecting on an experience, not capturing it as it happened for a future audience. I was now acting solely as an ethnographer and my actions as a media-practitioner would have to find

a place in the future ‘interpretive reworking’ (Geertz 1983, 48). Now positioned as an ethnographer travelling across major cultural borders, I found my praxis had shifted into a realm where a ‘different sense of discovery is produced’ (Geertz 1983, 48). The discomfort of the loss of my camera-appendage was throwing into question the ability to bring ‘the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away’ (Geertz quoted in Conquergood 1985, 2).

But while doubt was at times damaging to my general well-being, it was this presence of doubt that facilitated a continual questioning of all my actions as ‘introspective-investigator accounts of the self’ in the process of being an outsider research-practitioner (Denzin 1971, 172). The replacement of my reflex to reach for the camera with a response of continual self-examination moulded my role into that of an autoethnographer (Ellis 2004) introspectively ‘interpreting’ experience rather than externally capturing it. As Ellis explains, an autoethnographer starts their research with their own personal life by paying close attention to their own thoughts and emotions in ‘systematic sociological introspections’ via ‘emotional recall’ in order to understand one’s own lived experiences (2004, xvii). By exploring the self-lived experience, Ellis argues one is working to understand a way of life. Through the self-reflexive side effects of the often painful transition from filmmaker to camera-less ethnographer, I assumed the role of autoethnographer increasingly reflecting as much on the troubled nature of my lived experience as I was on the lived worlds I was researching.

I was left to ‘capture’ and deeply enquire into the only participant I had automatic clearances for – myself. I was propelled into a ‘self-reflexive, critical awareness-in-action’ experience as both a researcher, practitioner and general everyday ‘outsider’ far from home (Reason 1994, 325). This created a mindfulness

of my own presence within the praxis and a greater ‘present’ mindfulness of the East African lived worlds I was visiting that could perhaps create a ‘less distanced and more authentic’ (Harbers quoted in Broersma and Peters 2014, xiv) form of research and storytelling. It was an experience not unlike that of tourists who go on safari but quickly discover they have a flat battery in their camera and so find themselves left to look at their unfamiliar surrounds while actually talking – and listening – to their local guides. For the tourists, their experience arguably becomes more authentic and memorable than when obsessed with the task of recording still images and video, just as it did for myself as a researcher. It was a movement into an Action Inquiry where the focus of ‘consciousness in the midst of action’ (Torbert 1991, 221) was not just a method of discovery but an appreciation of the local need for a social fluidity in method and aims.

Manzo and Brightbill argue that an ‘ethic of social responsiveness’ to the needs and perspectives of participants ‘must take priority because collaboration is sought as a means toward developing solidarity and initiating change’ (2007, 38). They argue for a phased-ethics-application approach for participatory action research projects, just as I chose to do with my university’s Human Ethics Committee applications. A phased approach rather than a ‘lump sum’ ethics approval of the entire project did restrict my ability to fluctuate back and forth through different stages of the participatory project. However, it was essential for the self-reflexive ‘ethic of social responsiveness’, to remain fluid ‘in response to different situations and the needs’ of the people and their lived worlds I was socially and professionally experiencing (Manzo and Brightbill 2007, 38). By losing my natural camera-holding practitioner behaviour I was freed to ‘socially’ decode cultural situations, in what

would arguably make me more ‘professional’ as a socially informed, cultural mediator (Santos 2004).

‘Localisation’ of an Outsider’s Methodology

Within the initiative for an ‘ethic of social responsiveness’ (Manzo and Brightbill 2007, 38) I was first approved to visit Rwanda and enquire locally about the design of the project. And as this first stage of enquiry began, so began my internal conflicts. I went to Rwanda with a methodology that had been designed entirely in Australia by my Western self. The project I would soon be presenting to the respective Government ministries in Rwanda (and later in Tanzania and Zanzibar) was one I had designed without local involvement, so I used my time in-country to begin a casual local conversation about the research design with people I was meeting in my travels. This project’s methods were, up until this point in April 2013, designed entirely within my world view and motivated by expectations of the creative output. Therefore, when I began my time in Africa with the initial visit to Rwanda I was entering into an action research learning experience that I expected would not only enhance the project and help it reach its aims, but also enhance my world view and practice as both a researcher and a storyteller/filmmaker.

In *Local Knowledge* (1983), Clifford Geertz emphasises the experiential ownership of local knowledge as ‘practical, collective and strongly rooted in a particular place’ constructing an ‘organized body of thought based on immediacy of experience’ (1983, 75). Corburn identifies Geertz’s ‘particular place’ in the term ‘local’ as knowledge held ‘by members of a community that can be both geographically located and contextual to specific identity groups’ (Corburn 2003, 421). This suggests that ‘local knowledge’ is as much a part of the identity of the

people as it can be that of the location where individuals identify with a ‘knowledge community’ that holds ‘a shared culture, symbols, language, religion, norms, or even interests’ (Corburn 2003, 421).

In an attempt to ‘localise’ the project design by soliciting feedback from the broad range of local individuals I met in my travels, I opened a ‘collaborative inquiry’ (Reason 1994) into the participatory action research project. I was aware the methodology would quite likely require some localised refinement to better bring about the participatory praxis and final creative output – as the project involved a complex bringing-together of the lived experiences of the participants into a culturally intermediating story. There was a requirement to use local knowledge to inform the methodology that would identify appropriate, local knowledge-based stories and characters. As Ladson-Billings explains, ‘the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their world views’ (2003, 258), and as such I would require the consideration of the way people lived and learned to inform this creative social inquiry. The participatory nature of the project would require localised adaptation to appropriate praxis ‘conditions’ of the local participants to reflect the ways in which they live, learn, and express themselves.

I contemplated how my first researcher enquiry was to be an exciting major learning curve. What I expected to find was something I could not possibly *expect* to find. Some kind of mysterious, pure local knowledge that neither academic texts nor the global media could provide me. Something that could only be gained by bringing together a group of strangers who were each from relatively faraway lands.

If, as Peter Reason explains, collaborative inquiry involves not just a practitioner’s continual reflection on ‘their own behaviour-in-action’ but also in ‘simultaneously behaving in a fashion which invites other members of one’s

community to do the same' (Reason 1994, 331), then caution in how I approached this inquiry for local knowledge was required. When positioned as an intercultural academic-practitioner any collaborative inquiry I engaged in would be applying my aims and expectations outside the borderlands of my own lived world and understanding, so I must remain a cautiously self-reflexive action inquirer. I therefore attempted to position myself in a practice of epistemic self-reflectiveness so as to allow a greater 'embeddedness' within my own actions in trying to place the project in local knowledge systems to which I was trying to 'mould' the project design (Geertz 1983). This was, with my liberal good-will, an attempt to avoid enacting another 'conquest' as a Western researcher and storyteller in Africa (Grosfoguel 2013, 73).

Reflecting on Conquergood's moral map, I believe I was internally operating in and around the Dialogical Centre by making a constructive conversation with myself on the moral and ethical consequences of the task at hand. However, I feel that the drive for this reflexive conversation was motivated more by fear of my place within the lived world(s) of 'the Other' rather than in a controlled moral balancing act. I was undoubtedly arriving in Rwanda from the quadrant of the Enthusiast's infatuation, with a 'facile identification with the Other coupled with enthusiastic commitment' (Conquergood 1985, 6). I was excitably keen to 'make a difference' and had arrived in Kigali, full of ambition on my very first visit to Rwanda. I feared being mistaken as sitting in the Custodian's Rip Off quadrant, swooping in to grab up characters and stories before flying away with them as my own. I risked falling into the Skeptic's Cop-Out if I allowed my apprehension to turn me back from a true enquiry and instead stay cowering in cynicism and distance, never to find any connection or meaningful cultural intermediation. But while I flailed around these

three quadrants, my belief in the power of my goodwill kept me confidently clear of the ways of Conquergood's Curator Exhibitionism. I thought I had a good enough heart and professional experience to never sensationalise and disrespect the complex and equally important lives of Others into something that could be appreciated with just the 'mute stare' of a Western gaze (Conquergood 1985, 7).

When arriving in East Africa the project model, while attempting to be as creative and unique as possible, was nevertheless born from my West-centric episteme and as such ran the risk of potentially placing an institutionalised, regulatory framework onto the non-Western participants. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that 'research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized' (2012, 7). To avoid this practice I sought out local knowledge to keep the project and myself, from being yet another goodwill-fuelled colonisation of the African character and story. However, this quest for inclusion would itself prove riddled with a series of moral dilemmas that led me deeper into an autoethnographic self-reflexive inquiry.

Moral Dilemmas

a multiplicity of goals implies a multiplicity in standards of evaluation as well. When there is no agreement on goals, there can be no agreement on the terms by which those goals can be judged as successfully or unsuccessfully achieved. (Bochner 2000, 268)

As I attempted a localisation of the project so began a series of moral dilemmas that facilitated more of an enquiry of 'the self' than that of 'the Other'. First came the discovery of a new barrier in my attempt for social inquiry in the form

of my new title in epistemic privilege – having a PhD candidature. Second, a personal misunderstanding of the difference between the project and myself revealed a major difficulty in my well-intended enquiries. Then within my goodwill for localisation came a realisation of the potential cultural appropriation of local knowledge. This in turn led to a questioning of my expectations of local knowledge as a romanticising of the Other. From this I then questioned the possibility that I was ‘over-Othering’ the Other. I found myself seeking the ‘abnormal’ to better design a project that itself was seeking to discover the ‘normal’ amongst what is so often ‘exoticized’ (Fanon 1995, 175) and romanticised as the noble, or downtrodden, savage – from which colonial cultures’ own normality is measured (Bhabha 1994, 9).

Dr-to-be Briggs PhD

This is Brendon. He is from Australia and he has come here to study to be a professor. (A regular introduction made by multiple guides and translators)

My years of working as a cultural outsider with Indigenous Australians had taught me that gaining respect, trust, and the willingness for collaboration is something that needs to be earned with both time and a great deal of social conversation. While having association to individuals and institutions that had pre-existing, well-respected relationships with the individuals and communities was always an advantage to beginning the conversation, it was up to the passage of time and oneself to reach a point of trust and acceptance before any collaborative creative process could take place. I therefore entered into this project in East Africa ready to allocate the extent of time and resources that would be necessary for the

development of local relationships – long before any of the hands-on project work could begin.

I will use the term ‘surveying’ to describe the time that was spent travelling around Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zanzibar, meeting local individuals, community leaders, tribal leaders, families, and community groups and seeing the physical makeup of the land – both urban, rural, and natural. I would personally have never chosen the term ‘surveying’, and at no time used it myself, as it felt cold, inhuman, and officious to me, but it was adopted by the local team and so it is used here. There was a motivation for the group of participants to come from a broad range of demographics and so this ‘surveying’ allowed both for consideration of place and general conversation with people to explore the aims and methods of the project and its possible ‘localisation’. However, localisation was not an instant, easy phenomenon.

At times during the first three visits to East Africa I discovered social barriers when attempting to engage people in sharing their ideas for ways the project and its methods could be improved to suit local needs and practices. While there was always a welcome (if not surprised) reception to the idea of a project that aimed to show some positive features of Africa, there was at times a lack of connection and conversation with anyone I tried to engage in a dialogue about the project methods. I frequently described this problem in my journals as a ‘social brick wall’. It was a sensation where the attempt for informal conversation and activity was hindered by a formal resistance to talk both around and outside of the project. The brick wall I often faced here was, I thought, a simple yet extremely difficult to manoeuvre case of social etiquette.

However, in time I began to notice a pattern as to when this ‘social brick wall’ would more than likely be in place. Throughout the ‘surveying’ travels in Rwanda, Zanzibar, and Tanzania I was working with a variety of local translators and cultural guides, each of whom had their own social and professional styles and personalities. I noticed the ‘social brick wall’ I was facing would occur mostly when in the company of particular members of the team. However, while what was perhaps better described as a ‘dialogical brick wall’ would go up for me, it was not going up for those team members who continued to find an informal and comfortable connection with everyone we were meeting. I concluded that the issue was not with the personality or particular social style of these team members, but rather related to me or the locations I was visiting. However, as I was travelling across cultural, tribal, and geographical borders in an overlapping pattern with each of the translators and cultural guides it did not appear to be a geographical issue causing this social impasse. I assumed it could just be that I was very much a foreigner – a pale stranger suddenly arriving in the worlds of Others. But again the problem was not an entirely consistent one and so somehow seemed less related to my foreigner identity.

It was then I began to examine the language being used in the initial stages of my introduction to individuals and communities. I discovered a pattern in terminology that was instigating the play of an epistemic hegemony issue the moment I was introduced as an academic researcher, rather than a storyteller, visitor – or ‘Ginger Mun’, as I had become known to the Rastafarian community of Kigali. When I assumed the PhD candidature I had never previously had to negotiate being framed as an academic or ‘doctor-to-be’. I had always been a filmmaker, a storyteller, a practitioner; a Wadjela fella wanting to tell stories with people who

wanted to share their stories.¹³ In this context, I was just an artist who worked for World Vision, a health organisation, or an arts organisation. While there are endless potential risks in engaging with a stranger who happens to be a filmmaker or storyteller, my experience in this candidature tells me there is clearly less of an expectation (or risk) of being ‘researched’ or ‘studied’. I was experiencing the physical manifestation of Smith’s (2012) argument that the underlying codes of imperialism and colonialism are both regulated and realised in the discourse and praxis of research. Her argument pinpointed the hindrance caused to the development of trust by the title ‘researcher’. As she explains, ‘research’ itself has in a very real sense ‘been an encounter between the West and the Other’ (Smith 2012, 8). From my experience I would emphasise the word ‘encounter’ as an appropriate verb for the transformative effect of having that social dialogical brick wall appear whenever I was introduced as an academic researcher, ‘here to study to be a professor’.

The very process of attempting to negotiate the knowledge structure of the project so as to emancipate it from any potential colonising acts via its ‘epistemic privilege’ was being hindered whenever I was framed as a part of that epistemic privilege (Grosfoguel 2013, 74). Through conversation and social interaction, I was attempting to break through some of the neutrality and distance between subject and researcher in order to find a better creative model for the cultural-mediatory practice of intercontinental storytelling. I held no expectations that I would easily or completely break through cultural and language barriers, nor that I would emancipate the historical burdens of whiteness that my appearance represents with just a friendly smile and local representative to sing my praises. From past experience I was aware

¹³ ‘Wadjela’ is the Australian Indigenous Nyungar language term for a white person.

and expecting that both time and careful consideration would be required for any progress towards friendly shared interaction and trust. However, with the relatively light-hearted social project model and lack of urgency to complete the project, I expected I could find a social connection. But my (newly acquired) relationship to the history of travelling ‘academics’ further complicated my identity and the potential reading of my motives, morals, and perceived expectations of ‘Others’. I was now, more than ever before in my travels, deeply connected to the history and practices of colonial exploration, exploitation, and governance.

It felt frustratingly ironic that my label as an academic researcher was hindering my attempts to offer agency in traditionally marginalising practices, creating barriers or social brick walls that would themselves maintain the hegemonic relations which caused such barriers in the past (Herising 2005; Rich 1995). The barriers created between researcher and subject by traditional research practices are uncovered when attempting to challenge the notion of being ‘epistemically privileged’ (Grosfoguel 2013) by offering the traditionally ‘researched’ ‘subjects’ agency and collaboration (Reason and Rowan 1981). The unfamiliar academic label now placed upon me revealed a position both highlighting and problematising the ‘central critical component of critical research practices within marginalised communities [...] to interrogate and challenge the various fields of power authority, and privilege that are embodied and practiced by researchers’ (Herising 2005, 133). It appeared that in order to challenge the traditions of privilege I would need to negotiate the framing of my own privilege – which, my translator explained, was being used at the centre of my introductions as a ‘sign of respect for my hard work and studies’. As the anxious outsider, I frequently saw and felt the guilt of my ‘luck and privilege’ whereas my translator saw my ‘hard work and studies’. In turn I

recognised a need to cautiously negotiate the labels of my ‘privilege’ and ‘hard work’ and do away with ‘Dr-to-be Briggs’.

Relabelling the ‘researcher’

In an attempt to alleviate this situation, I asked the local team to play down the academic researcher ‘who is going to be a doctor’ and talk more around my role as a storyteller and the storytelling project. With less use of the terms ‘research’, ‘university’, and ‘doctor’ there was a noticeable difference in the interactions and inputs I was receiving from locals throughout nearly two years of ‘surveying’. When the focus was more on my role as a storyteller from a faraway place looking to explore positive stories to tell the world, there seemed to be a more grounded connection with the people I was meeting in East Africa. When the idea of an academic university researcher was not framing my identity, there was certainly less apprehension of an open conversation and a greater opportunity to negotiate hegemonic issues within practice of research (Herising 2005; Jones 2008; Reason and Rowan 1981; Smith 2012). There would certainly be an ethical dilemma with disclosure here if the PhD and researcher roles were left undiscussed. However, it was always disclosed at key points and I further argue that the shift of emphasis within the language used remained ethical and beneficial for the locals and the project in its exploration of a more organic and locally inclusive creative model, especially at this early ‘icebreaker’ stage.

‘The Project’ and I

Early on in my interactions with locals I became conscious of my use of the phrase ‘the project’ (rather than say, *my* project). I attempted to always remain

mindful of the inherent connection between the researcher (or practitioner) and the/their project in the context of both responsibilities and benefits. But during the surveying phase I became conscious of a semantic behaviour in which I was hiding behind ‘the project’ when discussing its aims, benefits, and potential outcomes. While I would say that I was visiting from Australia to discuss the way the project would go about finding stories, I would always refer to the aims, needs, and expectations as belonging to ‘the project’. I was essentially removing myself from the scenario by acting as a generic and anonymous voice for ‘the project’, rather than acknowledging that I and the project were one and the same, or to openly acknowledge that there was both ‘the project’ and also, always with it, myself – the researcher and creator who was therefore the individual most intimately connected to the project’s aims and the major beneficiary of its outcomes.

I argue that in hiding behind the phrase ‘the project’ I was not so much in a moral dilemma but an ethical impropriety that had developed from another moral dilemma. When I became conscious of this linguistic subterfuge I had to understand why it was occurring. Over time I had judged the value of semantically separating myself as a justified attempt to remove any risk of past colonial behaviour that the project or its methods could be accused of. I do not believe I was looking to remove myself from the responsibility of the project, but rather to hide from any potential colonial stigma. It was a matter of being an anxious outsider, restrained by the overtly cognisant sensation of treading in the footsteps of my Western forbearers. Psychologically and cognitively at play was a mixture of insecurities in the risks of acting and/or being framed as a ‘colonial agent’ during the initial stages of my physical presence within the lived worlds of the Other.

Some level of anxiety was understandable and being conscious of that anxiety and using it to be a more cautious researcher and practitioner can be constructive. However, to not acknowledge that ‘the person’ is one and the same with ‘the project’ is a failure to recognise and continually negotiate the hegemonic research practices that traditionally posit the academic community and researchers as the beneficiaries of the research aims and outcomes (Reason and Rowan 1981, 119). There is most certainly a moral dilemma of disengaging with my own ‘ethical self-consciousness’ in not acknowledging (and negotiating) my place within and alongside ‘the project’ (Bochner 2000, 271).

While I could hide behind ‘the project’, the recipients of my ‘pitch’ would most likely, from their perspective as the hosts of a far-away visitor, view the whole pitch and discussion of ‘the project’ as one about myself and my needs. I was after all the creator of this project, having brought it all the way from Australia in search of local ideas and input while studying to advance my career prospect and in turn my livelihood. However, these were not specifically the motivations for this East African project as I could have and arguably far more easily have received the same level of qualification without having to leave my lived world. Like many other outsider-researchers I respected that this perception of seeking to benefit from strangers would play a part in my reception in East Africa.

I discovered there was one particular word that inflamed my insecurities around the risk of becoming the colonial outsider and sent me ducking for cover behind the term ‘the project’. At times members of the local team or community representatives would introduce me as someone looking for ‘help’ to make the project more local. Or even more directly that I was here ‘looking for help with my studies’. I found that when I was seeking to make something collaborative the

purpose of my presence as being one seeking ‘help’ inferred that I was looking to be *assisted* rather than *worked with* on an equal, shared objective. The word ‘help’ does not so much describe an invitation to collaborate on shared goals and needs but rather seeks or begs for support in reaching the goals and needs of one individual – via the ‘kindness’ of others called upon by the ‘neediness’ of the verb ‘help’.

Purpose of localising: Negotiating the outsider’s gain

The purpose of ‘localising’ the project methodology was first conceived to benefit the people and places where the project took place. This is an important aspect of participatory action research looking to harness ‘collective thinking’, as opposed to a lone subject or just my self-reflexive researcher self (Chevalier and Buckles 2019, 49). The ‘localisation’ phase took place with the goal of facilitating local participants in a more enjoyable and fitting project design. This was done by consulting local Rwandans, Tanzanians, and Zanzibarians on how ‘the project’ could be better suited to them, their family, village, tribe, city, region, country and continent. The intentions were good, but herein lies a potential issue of cultural appropriation when, without acknowledgement and engagement with myself as the major beneficiary of that local knowledge (Smith 2012), I skirted the edges of Conquergood’s Custodian’s Rip-Off (1985, 6). I was seeking access to something that ‘is often acquired through life experience and is mediated through cultural tradition’ (Corburn 2003, 421). Within a research project such as this there is a multiplicity of goals at play, from the positive experience for participants to my gains as a doctoral candidate. By acknowledging, and continually reflecting on this multiplicity of goals (Bochner 2000, 268) there was a greater chance of forming an openly collective and observably honest, shared objective.

This issue with the semantics of ‘the project’ was a strong example of how the project was operating within an action research tradition, summarised by Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher, as a process of learning by ‘doing and making mistakes’ in a progressive ‘self-reflective spiral’ (2007, 416). Via a self-reflexive consciousness coupled with my colonial anxieties, I discovered an ability to negotiate by opening up my dialogue to include more explanation of who I was and what I aspired to do both creatively and academically. This created a more honest exchange that led to a more likely development of collaborative relationships based in honesty and trust.

Cultural Appropriation and Acquisition

While through the self-reflexive spiral of action research I was able to integrate a more honest dialogue in regard to my place within ‘the project’, the self-reflexive questions of cultural appropriation were not entirely alleviated. In fact, I found the concerns of cultural appropriation transforming into more of a direct and concrete act of cultural ‘acquisition’. Throughout the extensive length of surveying, and further throughout the participatory process, I often felt as if the entire collaborative concept was itself a colonial pursuit. I feared becoming the coloniser like Balfour of Egypt, believing where the Egyptian African at the ‘simplest form’ of *management* ‘must be dominated’ and ‘their blood and treasures put at the disposal of one or another Western power’ (Said 2003, 36). No matter how honest I was about my position within and about the project, I would still be taking away from Africa, via this dissertation and the creative output, the local knowledge in method development together with the characters and stories those methods created.

In reflecting upon my ongoing colonialist paranoia, I found my ‘fieldwork-self’ of the last three years nervously pacing back and forth along the fenceless

border of Conquergood's Skeptic's Cop-Out (1985, 8). This moral dilemma of cultural acquisition can be divided into two sets of acquisition-via-benefits. First, the benefits of localising the methodology/design that feed into the 'successful' findings as an ethnographic researcher. Second, the benefits of rich and unique 'indigenous' local characters (and the narratives they drive) as both a benefit to the readership and a benefit to the 'success' of my work as academic-practitioner. These benefits are in fact two sets of local elements, sourced during the consultation and collaborative stages of the project, that were transformed into acquisitions the moment I boarded my last flight out of Africa in early 2016, not to return within the remaining period of the PhD candidature.

In the six months before my first flight to Africa in 2013 I had contemplated how to make the project as locally beneficial as possible. First, by consulting on how the project could best benefit the local communities, countries, and regions, there was an invitation to give not just input into the stories but ownership of the benefits of undertaking this project. This process can (ideally) alleviate some of the West-centric nature of research and travel writing/storytelling. Second, the project was designed with the inclusion of a 'local' African readership rather than just the 'outsider' readership of the Western practitioner's and his Western institution's demographics and origins. By aiming for a creative output that would be equally as available to the populations where it was created within Africa as it would be to a non-African readership, there was an attempt to ensure that the project's 'acquisitions' would be as fully returned to country as when they were taken away. By breaking the travel-writer tradition of exclusively 'exploring' and recording for those 'back home' I hoped the project could perhaps alleviate the colonial nature of both the praxis of the creative craft and the research institution.

This early preparation contributed to an ever-present mindfulness of my ‘self-Other relationships’ (Foley 2002, 473) in order to examine and avoid the colonial actions of research and the travel-writing craft. To be or be seen as a successful researcher and storyteller I needed to have discovered, learned, and created something interesting and informative from outside my own lived world. To attain this ‘success’ I had to ‘acquire’ knowledge, story, real characters and experiences from within the lived worlds of Others. What was required though, was a self-reflexive negotiation of what I expected might come from those Others.

Romanticising

Within the surveying phase I was seeking an effective project model that would give some answer to the ‘unevenness of cross-cultural exchange’ (Adinoyi-Ojo 2002, 49) by integrating my participatory creative model not just by facilitating participation within it, but by giving a voice to its design.

When I began visiting East Africa I was filled with curious anticipation for the unique changes that would be bestowed upon ‘my’ methodology and project that until then had been established without local consultation. I regularly attempted to predict what uniquely ‘indigenous’ insights and practices would enter and transform the project once I had offered it up to the many people I would meet along the way. While the objective for the project output was universally relatable characters to challenge the Otherness extremes that most of my predecessors had inflicted and/or embellished, I was secretly hopeful for unique Other-worlds to bestow their unwritten knowledge and techniques on the project’s design.

To my surprise, throughout the surveying phase, the feedback never revealed any major changes. The feedback was generally reduced to polite validations of ‘it is

fine', and 'it will be good'. In Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zanzibar, I consulted across a broad range of local people, groups, institutions and organisations, but I never received any advice on localised adaptations to the methodology. The project, by the end of the consulting phase and then further into the participation stages, had not changed its process or story-finding techniques, yielding little to no new collaboration in regard to a remodelling of the methods. I was left to question whether the story-finding model was somehow already globally appropriate. Furthermore, I was left wondering if I was failing as an intercultural mediator. I had the very uneasy sensation of being a failed 'explorer' who would be returning to the empire with nothing of the exotic Other's secrets.

While I have here introspectively framed the failures of a 'Western saviour complex', the objective first and foremost was to make the project suitable locally. The localising was an attempt to build on the project's objective of contributing to the 'balance of who has the opportunity to represent themselves' (Thumim 2012, 88). The attempt to 'localise' the project was to acknowledge the importance in not only having an opportunity to represent one's self, but to have an opportunity to decide how that representation is found and formed in a challenge to colonising 'discursive practices' (Foucault 1971). Essentially, as a researcher I was looking for and expecting both the flagging of cultural intermediary mistakes and answers to those mistakes. Whilst I was not actually looking to 'appropriate' secrets, in acting as a researcher exploring method development, I was hoping for something of a cross-cultural discovery that could reveal and repair 'mistakes' in my West-centric project design.

However, the feedback time and again, was that the project model was already 'good'. This left me feeling I was incompetent as an action researcher when

considering the ‘success’ of good action research comes from ‘action, evaluation and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – changes in practice’ (Koshy, Koshy, and Waterman 2010, 2). I was ‘gathering’ nothing specifically ‘new’ or ‘local’. I soon began to question if perhaps I was deficient in my perception of my fellow human beings by romanticising the wealth of their ‘Otherness’. My idea of romanticising the Other is different to that which Rousseau postulated. I am not referring to a sense of the local people I would work with as being closer connected to a natural state (Lovejoy 1923, 181), but rather that perhaps elements of their lived experiences might provide better insight into *how to tell* stories imagined from their own lived experience.

I had entered the process contemplating the argument that the best solutions are ‘local, singular, specific, adapted, original, regional’ (Serres and Latour 1995, 91). I went forward expecting that inherently there were flaws within the creative design, as it had been born in the discursive practices of the Western institution. And while I continue to believe there are discursive practices that I have not been able to see from within, I began during the surveying phase to consider that perhaps I was overly romanticising the idea of the Other. By placing so much emphasis in finding ways to change the methods to something more ‘local’, something more ‘African’, I felt the project had a greater likelihood of authentically portraying the ‘actuality of the world’ (Zembylas 2002, para. 38) in which the Other (the people behind the characters and stories) lived. It appeared that within my pursuit of ‘an-Other thinking’ to avoid ‘ethnocidal’ practices (Mignolo 2012, 68), I was expecting a radical transformation of the project’s methods into something that would enlighten my Western concept of storytelling and in turn my own approach to the craft. I had romanticised the Other into what I can only describe as a practice of expecting the

gift of exotic wisdom from my exotic Other. I was, essentially, *over-Othering* the Other.

Over-Othering

Self-reflexivity – having an ongoing conversation with your whole self about what you are experiencing as you are experiencing it – is a crucial skill for interculturalists. (Nagata 2004, 139)

The design of the project's creative intercultural praxis had originated out of consideration for the creative integration of personal 'lifeworlds' into what Jackson describes as the 'transpersonal world' of societies and states (2002, 63), or in this case the West's conception of "Africa". The hindrance of my 'supposed' epistemic privilege, mixed with a cultural politeness towards myself as an academic, storyteller, or just 'visitor', not only affected the task of moulding the project into local practices but also left me feeling disconnected and inadequate as both a researcher and a creative practitioner. My sense of identity as an 'outsider' was fuelled by a consciousness of the presence of my position of privilege which in turn created a strong sense of guilt that further internally isolated me from 'centring' the 'subjugated knowledge' of the people and places I was trying to 'get to know' and 'work with' (Brown and Strega 2005, 220). In essence, my 'inward' reflexivity was inhibiting my outward consciousness of the forces that shape inquiry (Sandelowski and Barroso 2002, 216). So in my attempts to be an interculturalist my 'ongoing conversation' (Nagata 2004, 139) of self-reflexivity seemed to be hindering my conversation with *Others*, or rather, my perspective of what constituted *Otherness*.

My objective had been to ‘normalise’ the idea of the Other by using the subject of love to create a universally relatable narrative, in contrast to the Western master narratives that have framed Africa with a ‘universal standard voice’ (Matheson 2000, 564). However, within what can here only be described as my ‘liberal White desire’ (Jones 2008, 480) I was hoping to ‘understand’ my ‘subject’ by discovering something radically ‘different’ (non-Western – essentially exotic). Rather than accept that there was a ‘universal normality’ in the casual social structure of the project design, I tried (and failed) to seek out ‘an-Other’ kind of normal. While trying to ‘normalise’ I was at risk of falling victim (or rather, becoming perpetrator) to the colonial neurosis of ‘exoticism’. As previously mentioned, Fanon describes the simplification of exoticism as something which allows no ‘cultural confrontation’, whereas it was through the ‘confrontation’ of the project’s method development that I sought a way to avoid colonial practices such as ‘exoticism’ (Fanon 1995, 175). Instead I looked for the ‘whole’ structure of the characters, rather than in exoticism where ‘we find characteristics, curiosities, things, [but] never structure’ (Fanon 1995, 175). My constant concern with respecting the cultures of East Africans was at risk of fetishising, rather than offering Bhabha’s recognition of Fanon’s awareness of the ‘fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures’ (Bhabha 1994, 9). This further offered guidance to my objective as it treads the careful line between humanising and fetishising via the neo-colonial impulses of a Western storyteller. It was through a localising process that I sought to remove the cumbersome and blinding influence of my narrow Western gaze – built on millennia of the West’s Othering of those it has traditionally ‘spoken about’ rather than let speak (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, 29).

Seeking ‘Permission’: Discovering a localised ethical/moral process

Bishop (1998) describes an important aspect to emancipatory critical action research referred to as ‘connected knowing’:

where there is common understanding and a common basis for such an understanding, where the concerns, interests, and agendas of the researcher become the concerns, interests, and agendas of the researched and vice versa. (Bishop 1998, 203)

The largest area of development and discovery within my practice was not an adaptation of the creative model but instead a dynamically evolving understanding and adaptation to the cultural methods for ‘localised’ ethical and moral permissions. Here I distinguish the ‘legal’ (governmental) permission process from an ethical and moral permission process that I undertook throughout the surveying phase. Thanks to the lengthy delays from official macro-level legal processes I had an expanded amount of time to engage in the process of gaining both personal and cultural permissions on a micro level. When entering into the surveying phase I was seeking not just to localise the project but to receive permission to proceed with the project in the communities, tribes, villages, families, and social groups of the future participants.

Throughout this phase I was, as Conquergood describes of the ethnographer, an uninvited stranger seeking to be ‘invited’; one whose dependence on the ‘patient courtesies and openhearted hospitality’ of those I was visiting could be realised (1985, 3). The main goal was to respectfully introduce the project and invite people to explore its ideas, aims, and the possibility of their acceptance of it, away from

government protocols pushing them to do so via the official 'invitation' of ministerial research permits and letters.

'Feedback'

In the surveying phase I was not seeking specific locations for the project to occur but instead pursuing a broad range of consultations on whether or not the project would be accepted, in an attempt to give agency where precolonial and colonial practices had denied agency and political will (Christians et al. 2008, 162). Agency was first offered through this surveying phase where I framed my discussion of the project and reason for talking to people as a conversation, to not only find out how they could see the project methodology changing, but how they saw themselves, their community, and their country/region interacting with the project while it was underway and after it had finished. The conversations tended to reveal benefits with little or no expectations of any negative repercussions or hindrances. The key word I continually heard was 'nafasi' (Swahili for 'opportunity').

The key benefits of participation highlighted by individuals and the community were:

- An opportunity to speak to the world in a positive way.
- An opportunity to tell the world that Africans both experience love of themselves and love for each other.
- An opportunity to share with other villages, communities and even regions/countries via the participant exchanges.
- And finally, through sharing across cultures and regions, an ability to show that Africans love regardless of difference, in direct contrast to stereotypes of constant civil war.

It is important to note that no one ever mentioned the possible benefit of financial gain, fame, or a new career. In fact, financial questions never occurred and the discussion of the 'pay' only happened when I raised it.

It is the third bullet point that matters most of all to me as this was one place where the methodology was in some ways adjusted due to 'local' feedback. The project had not specifically focused on pairing people together from across large distances. While it looked to represent a spectrum of lives, though being restricted to a reasonably small number of participants, it was inevitable that there would be some 'distance' between the participants. However, ensuring there was some distance between the paired participants was not a part of the initial design. It was the repetition of feedback about this benefit from sharing across cultural and geographical distance that led to its integration into the recruitment methods. This was a decision that was not taken lightly as the time and cost more than quadrupled as the project moved from the relatively accessible 26,000 square kilometres of Rwanda to the 945,000 square kilometres of Tanzania and additional 2,600 square kilometres of land and sea that comprise Zanzibar. As a part of the original project development was to integrate local feedback, this became a key component of planning the recruitment stage.

Interestingly the perceived benefits were always seen from a community perspective, not from an individual perspective, which somewhat problematised the proposed recruitment methods. I had originally envisaged a very casual, informal, socially experiential recruitment process. Potential participants would be discovered by finding individuals who personally engaged with the idea of the project while generally discussing the project as the local team and I went about the business of 'surveying'. During discussions the team and I looked for individuals who engaged

with the idea of the project and who found it easy to self-reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the subject of love. With the feedback from individuals around the project continually using language that spoke not of the individual but of the community or a ‘We-perspective’ (Schmid 2001, 228) – whether with ‘regular people’ or community leaders – my ability to measure the individual engagement was sometimes difficult. As will be discussed in Section Three, the recruitment process found several ways to engage people in individual self-reflection.

Conclusion: Reflexive critical awareness

Through the participatory process the project sought to reduce my inherent ethnocentric influence, and through a reflexive critical awareness, to acknowledge and negotiate the ‘epistemological limits’ of my ‘ethnocentric ideas’ (Bhabha 1994, 4). Section Two has reflected on my role as a creative, intercontinental research-practitioner who positioned the project’s approach as both a creative ‘experiment’ and a self-reflexive exploration of the act of cultural intermediating (Santos 2004). As self-reflection on the moral dilemmas of an outsider’s attempt at entering an emancipatory, participatory action research project (Chevalier and Buckles 2019), Section Two gave insight into the process of attempting to emancipate one’s self (and one’s research subjects) from the effects of millennia-old Western traditions of *Othering*.

The first step to achieve a non-stereotypical, non-reductive cultural-mediation resulted from a self-reflexive, ethically minded journey through the local consultation of the project model in the lead up to the recruitment of participants. In this first step of challenging Africa’s ‘Otherness and perceptual remoteness’ (Ibelema 2014, 203) I have drawn from the teachings of ethnographers, critical

action researchers, and post colonialists in critiquing the homogenising of method development and the people and places where it takes place.

This dissertation seeks to harness the experience of my constant and often anxious, self-reflexive ethical considerations throughout every aspect of the ‘emancipatory participatory action research’ used to challenge ideologies and instincts formed from my Western Othering of the African (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 302). The experience of trying to invite and engage people into the co-participation of sharing ‘a common moral project’ became as much an action research project as the storytelling venture itself (Denzin 2003, 113).

Note:

At this point in the dissertation I would like to direct the reader to examine the Creative Work: Prose Treatment, *East African Stories of Love* before continuing with this Section's analysis of the participatory process that led to its creation (refer to Appendix 1).

Section Three. Evaluating the Participatory Project Model

While Section Two focused on a reflexive exploration of the moral and ethical considerations of the method development, Section Three shifts to an analysis of the participatory endeavour. The section examines the processes and methods undertaken to ‘localise’ creative agency. Here the method looks to emancipate the researcher as well as the Africans involved from the limitations of thought and action imposed by what could be called Africanism – in consideration of Said’s observations of how Orientalism imposed limitations on subject and thought that go about ‘disregarding, essentialising, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region’ (Said 2003, 108). Section Three also draws on the ethical considerations of Section Two and Section One’s analysis of the formation of the non-African travel writers’ narrative status quo and their formation of the African character.

While remaining in the self-reflexive ethnographic researcher mode of Section Two, Section Three brings into focus a *creative* research-practitioner’s critical self-reflection of the qualitative outcomes of the project’s participatory creative model. The qualitative ‘outcomes’ encompass the experiences of the participants, the local teams, and myself – within the creative praxis and its eventual creative output (the characters and their stories). This is a critical analysis of what Torbert describes as an *Action Inquiry*: ‘a kind of scientific inquiry that is conducted in everyday life’ (Torbert quoted in Reason 1994, 330). What is examined throughout Section Three is the ‘consciousness in the midst of action’ (Torbert 1991, 221) which produced both the creative output and this exegesis.

To undertake the analysis effectively, the section moves linearly through the pre-participatory and participatory stages of the praxis. However, while these

creative stages are presented as they occurred chronologically, the final participatory stage – the Group Focus Stage – will be reflected upon throughout the discussion of the earlier stages to offer the feedback from the participants as they interacted with the final draft of the prose treatment. As this is an analysis of both the participants’ experience through the methodology and their experiential ‘autobiographical’ creation of character and story, it is of greater use to discuss their post-creation feedback throughout rather than to situate it at the conclusion.

Section Three calls on a range of disciplines and practices in its analysis, reflecting on techniques of researcher-participant rapport building (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007), dialogical interviewing (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015), and processes of relinquishing the biases of the ethnographic researcher. This investigation into the project’s processes and practices pinpoints the intent of their design and the positive impact on the social experience of the participants. Being creatively focused, this section critically engages these processes of ethnographic practices with disciplines and practices of creative storytelling – ranging from the process and intentions of docudrama makers such as Peter Watkins, to fiction-writing processes via novel and screen-writing how-to-guides. My use of these is not to intrinsically criticise their value or the quality of their instruction, but first, to deploy them as a comparison between the praxis of a single writer imagining the creative process and those who engage non-professional performance participation, and second, to assess the value of the participatory process against a more imagined counterpart.

Due to the scale of the project, throughout Section Three, a ‘critical incident sampling’ (Tracy 2013, 844) practice has been used to select key incidents and experiences that occurred during the participatory process. First, I analyse the

creative process with the Pre-Participatory Stage and the initial creative endeavour of localising the selection of sites and the recruitment of the eight participants.

The Pre-Participatory Stage: Localising agency

Analysis of the Pre-Participatory Stage examines the authorial involvement of people and factors other than the eight participants, namely, the local team, my input, and unforeseen obstacles that forced alterations to the original method framework. The intention is to explore the success of the key aim of moving creative agency away from myself as the non-African research practitioner, and onto the authority of the people and places where the project was to take place. As the project moved into this initial ‘creative decision’ stage with two sites to recruit from and the participants-cum-characters to recruit, it was imperative to the participatory aims that those early creative decisions be influenced by the people and places the stories would eventually represent. These factors and decisions would ultimately lead to choosing the eight collaborative authors who would create *East African Stories of Love* via their autobiographical, autoethnographic participation – hence the importance that these creative agents be found via a localised process.

This was the beginning of the task of attempting to utilise ‘local knowledge’ to give the project the influence of ‘knowing from within’ (Shotter 1993, 18). To reduce my culturally-distanced observer’s influence, efforts to include local knowledge in the creative decision-making process were vital. This involved a constant negotiation of the methods to overcome an issue of distance which Herzele and Woerkum describe as ‘easily accessible to locals’ but difficult for outsiders to ‘capture’ or utilise (2008, 444). Put simply, if the decisions on the process that led to

the participatory stages were themselves to become collaborative, then the overall project would better identify its local knowledge.

Without the creative storytelling model the initial ‘creative discoveries’ would have been a process taking place entirely within the imagination of a writer. The project set about the task of *imagining* characters and places outside the mind of this Western writer by utilising the real world of several East African countries and the minds of a group of strangers across those countries. Instead of an outsider like me imagining four East African stories of love where I might begin from ‘the foundation of my own fantasies and feelings’ (Swain 2012, 7), the project would instead seek out the localised, lived experiences and feelings of the real world via localised agency.

Acknowledging the authorial role of the researcher

It is nonetheless important I acknowledge my authorial and directorial involvement. This is not to celebrate it, but to admit its existence and critique it. The results cannot be embraced as a ‘perfectly’ localised, wholly participant-driven artefact of African-collaboration. Nor does my training as a documentary filmmaker leave me attempting to perfectly seek out and ‘creatively shape reality without jeopardising notions of objective truth’ (Kerrigan 2010, 6). A critical reflection on my involvement acknowledges my unavoidable, inextricable presence to varying extents throughout the collaborative process and final prose narrative. This project is still far from being a ‘pure’, ‘controlled experiment’, free of its observer. In the very act of being present as an observer, (be that physically or via recording equipment), I am, ‘to some extent a participant’ which leads to a ‘potentially reactive’ work where the creative process is influenced by my ‘observing’ it (Robson and McCartan 2016,

334). This ‘reactivity’ will be analysed throughout Section Three in acknowledging and assessing how, from the moment of my arrival in East Africa, the project worked to ‘localise’ creative decision-making in order to minimise my influence.

To do so, however, I *draw a line in the sand* by beginning the analysis of my ‘authorial’ presence at the point of arriving in East Africa, beyond my initial design of the baseline framework of methods and project objectives. As noted in Section Two, before the project reached East Africa it was both imagined and designed without its ‘local’ participants. The initial idea of a project challenging negative African stereotypes was ‘localised’ in that it came from the call by African economists, politicians, scholars, and journalists for a change to the Western neo-colonial master narrative. I chose the subject of love, designed the creative stages, and chose the methods within them that would drive and facilitate the ‘localised’ invention – all of which remained largely in place after local consultation about its design. Rather than attempting to justify my Western influence, I instead acknowledge that this collaborative project still has its non-collaborative roots in my design and implementation. From the point of arrival in East Africa there was an ongoing attempt to place as much creative agency as possible away from ‘the researcher’ and to engage local collaboration in creative decision-making.

A ‘quest’ to ‘localise’ the use and adaptation of methods that are central to ethnographic practice attempts ‘to capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences’ (Appadurai 1996, 52). Throughout the time in East Africa I was actively open to the influence of the local team, local leaders (government, tribal, and family), and the friends and families of any of these individuals who were intermittently *along for the figurative and literal ride*. Hence,

the following analysis now concentrates on recruitment, and scrutinises the process of attempting to localise decision-making.

Recruitment: Finding/Choosing Sites and Participants

An Action Inquiry practice of ‘self-reflexive critical awareness-in-action’ (Reason 1994, 325) is used to consider the pre-participatory stages of both the recruitment of the participants and the sites for recruitment such as cities, towns, and villages. The focus is on the process of ‘localising’ agency around decision-making to positively engage ethnographic locality in the ongoing process of creative *collaborative* decision-making (Falzon 2016, 30). The project’s informal, collaborative methodology called on a flexible usage of ‘quota’ and ‘snowball sampling’ (Gobo 2008, 103-105) to discover a wide scope of cultural, generational, and geographical diversity. In reaching recruitment and decisions around sites for recruitment, the project embodies a ‘collaborative ethnographic’ practice:

While collaboration is central to the practice of ethnography, realizing a more deliberate and explicit collaborative ethnography implies resituating collaborative practice at every stage of the ethnographic process, from fieldwork to writing and back again.
(Lassiter 2005, 15)

As an independent writer I could have predetermined a range of character traits to embody the eight characters – turning to the likes of Lauther’s (2004) comprehensive writer’s guide to personality traits to bring imagined characters to life. However, by collaboratively localising agency this project could instead find

individuals who would reveal their own traits and personalities from which characters would form. The essential screenwriter's practice of 'honing in on' authenticity (Batty 2014, 195) and interest was one externalised to a collaborative recruitment process. In starting the process of finding the participants (and places) for the project, I was at once discovering the eight characters and the lived worlds their stories would inhabit.

Geographical Locations



Figure 2. Map of Tanzania and Unguja Island, Zanzibar

During the initial work of surveying and acquiring government permissions, I had sought widespread opinions and ideas from East Africans I met along the way on

how best to spread the character and age representation across Tanzania and Zanzibar. Furthermore, the recurring message that there was great reward in participants coming from different regions or countries in order to share in each other's lived experiences had made geographical diversity essential. The team and I decided to split the numbers evenly between Zanzibar and Tanzania with each location containing four participants. My suggestion to the team for endorsing this decision was itself locally motivated, as I wanted to quietly 'tip my hat' to my Zanzibarian friends who believed their country to be both independent from and equal to Tanzania. The participants however did not need to be four Tanzanians and four Zanzibarians. It was more that the location of their characters would be evenly divided between the two countries.

Taking this into consideration, the determination of the locations for the Zanzibar-based participants was then isolated to the main island of Unguja to reduce logistical challenges. This would include one participant from the capital of Stone Town, one from a fishing village, one from a farming village and one from the urban sprawl beyond the World Heritage protected buildings of Stone Town. The exact choices will be discussed later.

For Tanzania, as with Zanzibar, one participant would come from its capital (Dar es Salaam). In surveying I had travelled throughout the northern half of Tanzania by road, but later travelled by air in the participatory stages to accommodate a larger area of Tanzania.¹⁴ When the project switched to Tanzania I had decided that one participant would be Maasai (to be discussed in detail later). This decision localised the northern region around Kilimanjaro and across to the Kenyan and Ugandan borders. The advice from the Tanzanian team was to then

¹⁴ Plans to survey the southern half were cancelled due to financial restrictions.

choose a participant from either the urban or rural areas around Arusha. After some consideration the Tanzanian members of the local team settled on the small city of Mwanza, by Lake Victoria, as they saw this as an ideal opportunity to offer some cultural and tribal diversity without requiring the difficult navigation of southern regions that were not on the main commercial flight lists. It was rewarding to see the project beginning to take form via the collaborative agency of the local team.

Age Sampling

The next collaborative decision determined which ages and genders should come from which locations. The local team agreed with my initial proposal of an even gender split and the age range set in pairs on an even distribution from two children (ideally 8–10 years) through to two ‘elderly’ people (ideally 70–80 years). It was then a matter of what age best suited each location. However, as will be described next in the participant recruitment stage, the decisions on what location would have which ages and genders became less of a predetermined factor and more of an experiential process.

Recruiting the Participants:

Recruitment is discussed in the order that the participants joined the project so as to illustrate the development of this most crucial pre-participatory stage. I offer an analysis of how the method continually adapted to changing circumstances as I attempted to relinquish control. This stage of the creative practice-led research was very much one of a constant reflexive negotiation to improve and innovate (Batty and Berry 2015, 184) the simple informal recruitment method initially envisioned. It was also exciting from a creative point of view, as seeking out the eight participants

was itself a process of discovering the eight main characters. Barthes (1984, 140), in his call for *the death of the author*, argued that an author is ‘simply’ the ‘scriptor’ – *East African Stories of Love*’s methodology sought to celebrate this. In recruitment, the project sought eight strangers to enter a process of a lived experience where, as *scriptors*, their characters and their stories would be ‘born simultaneously’ (Barthes 1984, 140).

Whilst I did not undertake a film project for this PhD, certain cinema techniques have assisted in the guidance of its creation, most specifically that of docudrama which offers a unique blending of ‘fact and fiction which dramatizes events and historic personages’ (Hoffer and Nelson 1978, 21). In docudrama, one director stands out arguably as its master. Ken Loach’s preference for non-actors leads to an aesthetic of ‘the kind of unfussy, understated performance that audiences readily take as a token of first-handedness’ (Paget 2002, 33), that gives the autobiographical nature of docudrama its sense of realism. This *Loachian acting*, as Paget calls it, comes from Loach’s preference for inhabiting his narratives with ‘non-actors’ living both spatially and sociopolitically within the themes of the narrative in a ‘combination of Direct Cinema and Eastern European film styles’ (Paget 2002, 33). Loach’s mastery of ‘realism’ began each time via his preference for working with non-professionals:

What is crucial is the experiences people have had in common with the part they must play in the film, or else the ability to project themselves into it. (Loach quoted in Hacker and Price 1991, 300)

While undertaking a form of 'performative' ethnography (Denzin 2001, 23) to find its stories, our process was somewhat inverted to Loach's. Loach would present non-professionals with a scripted or at least mostly scripted narrative, which they would inhabit while relating to their own experiences within their performances. The local team and I were seeking non-professionals to join a project that presented them with no script and no direction other than to explore love or friendship with a stranger. They would need to 'project themselves' into *the hypothetical* in order to find a story.

In beginning the recruitment, there was no expectation other than the ages and locations, and the preference for a connection of the participants to the themes of the project. As an academic-practitioner undertaking a collaborative inquiry I was aware that the practice would *lead* the research and in turn improve the practice as it unfolded (Haseman 2006, 100). As to how the process would work I was very much unsure, right up until 'the discovery' of the first participant-to-be, Marie.

Marie, the 'city girl' from Rwanda

One of the earliest 'localised' ideas during the surveying of Zanzibar led to the decision (by the local team) to pair a fisherman with a 'city girl'. This idea came from the team's Zanzibar surveying guide, Robert, who, on our visit to Kizimkazi (a fishing village), discussed the idea of meeting city/town women with a group of young fishermen. The fishermen insisted they could never have a relationship with a 'city girl' because city girls see them as uneducated and think they 'smell all the time'. The challenge that this dynamic presented was an attractive opportunity to build drama and interest within the relationship of the couple. The local team insisted this would be an excellent strategy, and so the decision was made to find a twenty-

something fisherman in Kizimkazi and a similar aged ‘city girl’. During the surveying of Tanzania our driver had concluded that his own age bracket, ‘the young people’ (twenty-five years), best suited Dar es Salaam because it is a growing city with new possibilities – just like a young person coming into adulthood. Therefore the initial plan was to find this young woman in the mainland city.

As I sat in a café in Stone Town contemplating the idea of finding this ‘city girl’ from somewhere amongst the UNESCO heritage listed buildings, struggling with the idea of taking the ‘youthful representation’ away from Dar es Salaam, I heard a voice... “Umva!” Looking up from my journal I was met with the broad smile of a young Rwandan woman I had met through a Rwandan friend three months earlier on a previous visit to Zanzibar.¹⁵ She had caught my attention with my favourite Kinyarwandan word for ‘listen’ – ‘umva’. This was word I had frequently heard my translator in Rwanda saying to people with whom he was attempting negotiations.

I wondered immediately if I had somehow already found the ‘city girl’ the fishermen had been speaking of. Moreover, as Marie (as she would come to call her character) sat down opposite me, I realised that I had perhaps found her in exactly the way I had wanted the recruitment to take place – via an informal, longitudinal, social process. I had known Marie for some time and had at no point formally approached her about the project.

However, before asking if she would join the project, I first needed to make sure she ‘connected’ to the ideas, themes, and aims. Fortunately, she immediately enquired how the work was going and asked me to tell her again what the project was. This allowed the kind of natural process the method development had called for

¹⁵ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

and spontaneously, Marie immediately engaged with her own experiences of love and the need for people to view Africa differently. Had Ken Loach been seeking a non-actor who could relate to that of a young Rwandan woman, far from home, finding romance in the most unexpected places, Marie would most certainly have met his casting criteria of in-common experiences ‘to project themselves’ (Hacker and Price 1991, 300).

Several hours later, after discussing it with the local team, I met up with Marie again to propose the idea of joining the project and was relieved when she said she would ‘love’ to join. I was ecstatic to say the least. Not only had the first participant been found, but I had serendipitously reconnected Rwanda back into the project. It was the first major sense of a breakthrough in almost three years.

Haji

With Marie a chance encounter enabled the use of a social recruitment process, but finding the fisherman was not as simple a task. I had less time and so the team asked a community leader to assist in our search. Whilst engaging consultation with local authorities is culturally respectful, it also offered an opportunity to give agency to people and place to shape the creative process of finding the characters (Waugh 1988, 263). The local leader was only instructed that the person must be male, single, twenty to thirty years old and to have had no prior professional performing experience.

Preceding Loach in the docudrama realist style is ‘the father of modern docudrama’ Peter Watkins, whom Loach regarded as an influence (Cook 2010, 227-228). Just as I was attempting in Kizimkazi, Watkins consistently cast ‘non-professional actors’ to bring together people from ‘various walks of life for an

intense communal experience’ (2010, 230). Non-professional in this context means ‘people who had never previously appeared on the professional stage or before a film camera in their lives’ (231). What I was seeking in Kizimkazi and elsewhere were individuals who as non-professionals, ‘could literally embody the part he or she was playing’ (231). Therefore, guiding the local leader to find individuals who were unfamiliar with the storytelling crafts being used was crucial. However, when we were presented with three young men sitting on the deck of a small house in the middle of the village, the situation felt very much like a traditional, formal casting call – which went against the original methods proposed. After Robert and I described the project in the most ‘relaxed’ way we could, prompting the three young men to their own discussion of its themes, I then found a way to ensure that the crucial localised role of agency could remain. I suggested to the three that, as they all liked the project, they could choose who would be the one to join it. This was a last-minute effort to localise the decision-making process. This act of localised agency led to the recruitment of Haji, a vibrant young man with a strong work ethic and dedication to both the project and his own academic endeavours in marine biology.

Mama Agnus

With Haji and Marie recruited, the process moved to the mainland. The participant from Maasai country needed to be thirty to fifty years old (to increase the likelihood of finding an unmarried one) and so too their paired participant from Arusha. Therefore, before heading inland the team and I decided to find an ‘elderly’ participant in Dar es Salaam to be paired with someone from the regional city of Mwanza. Drawing again from Watkins’ technique, while the recruitment methodology was changing, I was continuing to seek real individuals to

autobiographically create characters, avoiding the professional performer/storyteller development of something ‘patently fiction’ (Rose 1964, 834).

With the aid of two local government offices we had visited a year earlier when seeking permission to undertake some ‘surveying’, the local team located three women. The team and I met with them individually at their homes. All three seemed appropriate as each met the criteria of sixty-plus age range, living in Dar and without lacking storytelling experience. All three were excellent choices and in their own ways each had the potential to create unique autobiographical characters. However, while it had been possible with the three fishermen in Kizimkazi, I could not bring these three strangers physically together to decide who would join the project. Feeling some discomfort in having to make the decision, I turned to the team for their opinion. Given that the three women had vastly different socioeconomic circumstances, John, our recently appointed key Tanzanian guide, enquired as to whether I wanted ‘rich, middle, or poor’. I replied that I wanted to challenge the stereotypes of the Western world’s portrayals, but that I was conflicted by the idea of not choosing someone because they were poor. He very matter-of-factly explained that there are many types of poor, and that what I see may or may not be poor. He pointed out that the ‘poorest’ woman we had gone to see, was in many ways not poor, as the empty, half-built home she lived in was hers.

My viewing her as poor perhaps illustrated my ‘crisis of ocularcentrism’, which Jay (1988, 316) critiques as a crisis of perspective relating to the privileged status of Western knowledge and the issue of overly privileging sight in both research and presentation of anthropology. Grimshaw (2001, 25) analyses this ‘crisis’ in relation to visual anthropology and the dominance of vision in her own practice and framework. While her study focuses on the use of visual mediums

within ethnographic practice, my ‘way of seeing’ the women as poor immediately reminded me of the link between Grimshaw’s crisis and the filter of my Western aesthetic sight leading me to my conclusions. Whilst I had focused on a particular ‘aesthetic’ of the woman’s empty and incomplete house, I had taken a Western view to evidentially define her as existing in poverty.

In 1957 Tremblay described a technique of gathering qualitative and quantitative information as local perspectives from a range of key informants within communities to ‘define poverty and wealth within the local idiom’ (1957, 697). Where Tremblay and his research team had half a century before me set out to *locally define* poverty, I had unconsciously projected my own outsider-perspective onto the socioeconomic classification of these prospective participants. Fortunately, having a local team gave me access to nuanced perspectives that could correct my mistake.

In further embracing their local knowledge, I offered the team the authority to choose whoever they thought best suited the project. The team chose Mama Agnus, a sixty-year-old retired widow. Mama remained active in the circles of government, helping with a political campaign underway for the upcoming Tanzanian federal elections. The team were attracted to her active involvement in the community, her openness about being a widow, and her strong character. For the local team of East Africans, Mama Agnus and her life represented something of the educated, skilled working class without being overly Westernised by globalisation. For the team this was extremely important to depict. Mama Agnus joined the project with a great deal of enthusiasm to ‘help’.

Rais, 'the Maasai'

Everyone knows the Maasai. Men wearing red capes while balancing on one leg and a long spear gazing out over the semi-arid plains stretching endlessly to the horizon, or women heavily bedecked in beads, stare out at us from countless coffee-table books and tourists' snapshots. (Spear and Waller 1993, 1)

When the project shifted from Rwanda to Tanzania and Zanzibar it also situated itself within Maasai country. Without hesitation, I decided to include at least one Maasai person to offer the project's unique creative process of autobiographical representation to challenge the often one-dimensional representation of the Maasai. Within the Western image of "Africa" the Maasai represent the ultimate 'exotic Other'. And whilst there is some evidence that 'tribal fixation seems to have diminished more so than the overall elements of otherness' (Ibelema 2014, 12) Rais's experience (as will be described later) reveals it is very much a reality of his interactions with non-Maasai. As Akama describes of Maasai tourism, 'the Maasai are presented as an esoteric community, or "noble savages"; a people who have managed to resist Western influence and have managed to retain their exotic culture' (2002, 46).

The idea of 'resisting' Western culture as some form of strength over colonialism is a strength to be celebrated. However, the 'exoticism' renders the Maasai an object of the Western gaze, captured by the lenses of tourists, perpetuating a fixed two-dimensional character of aesthetics. In the Western gaze, tribal people are trapped in the 'ethnographic present' – a perpetually unchanging way of life that

renders ethnographic subjects as ‘exotic creatures’ without history or complexity of character (Fabian 2014, 25):

Exoticism is one of the forms of this simplification [...] we find characteristics, curiosities, things, never structure. (Fanon 1995, 175)

My intention was to offer a place for a Maasai to autobiographically ‘auto-enrich’ the reductive characterisation of the so-called ‘exotic Other’. To provide, through *participation in representation*, the opportunity to reveal within their own character a depth that offers a ‘normative sameness’ – challenging the reductive ‘cultural distance’ frequently perpetrated through the West’s ‘exotic picture’ of Africa (Mudimbe 1988, 9) or indeed the common East African negative outlook of Maasai as pastoralists averse to education (Ståhl 2012, 64). I saw the opportunity to offer creative agency of self-representation to a Maasai the same way Watkins articulated the use of non-professionals to overcome the place of ‘the public’ to exist only as ‘vox-pop fodder’ in the stories that were in fact wholly about their lived worlds (Cook 2010, 231). For Watkins, the participatory non-professional process was a more ‘democratic form’ of storytelling that ‘not only bypassed but deliberately eschewed longstanding professional media institutions and practices’ (Cook 2010, 232). Kept at a cultural distance, in Western media the Maasai are frequently a voiceless, nameless people dressed in vibrant red and blue cloth (with beads), serving as the exotic ‘vox-pop’ that Wainaina (sarcastically) instructed should exist:

If you must include an African (on the cover of your book), make sure you get one in Maasai or Zulu or Dogon dress. (Wainaina 2008, 92)

By ensuring I included ‘one in Maasai dress’, I hoped via a ‘more democratic’ form of storytelling to reveal the character dimensions and depths of a ‘well-adjusted’, regular young man of the twenty-first century – beyond the aesthetic stereotype of standing on one foot atop a mountain, gazing out over the land.



Figure 3. Map of Maasai Country

Reaching Rais

Based out of central Arusha our plan was to begin looking for the Maasai participant by revisiting several Maasai communities I had met with on the earlier surveying journey. However, I was carrying some discomfort that inspired me to take the team on a long journey around a mountain. On the surveying trip, we had visited multiple Maasai communities along the two main highways out on the north-west side of Arusha. Accessibility was easy with a thirty to fifty-minute drive on almost entirely sealed highway. In many of the villages both the sound and sight of the highway remained as little as a hundred metres from the community. This for me, I will admit, painted a picture of the *noble tribespeople* (Mudimbe 1988, 119) and the bitumen infrastructure of the modernised world. I was consciously struggling with this as the visual storyteller in me sorted out the West's 'exotic picture' of Africa where the Maasai remain in an 'ethnographic presence' (Fabian 2014, 25) as 'the past meeting the present'. While fully aware that this went against the very principles of the project, the lack of an exotic distance from the highway still left me disappointed.

The absence of a 'safari' (journey) and the experience of remoteness ate at me for the nine months between the surveying trip and the return to Arusha. So I stubbornly took action to alleviate my unease by taking the team to a community out in the wilderness behind Mount Mero that dominates the skyline of Arusha. Reaching them involved a four-hour drive far from the sealed highways and urban and rural regions of Arusha. As we travelled my romantic Western-sensibilities were continually satisfied by the ever-changing landscape and ever growing remoteness of this exotic 'land of adventure' (Mezzana 2006, para. 16). I stood in the middle of a dusty track, halfway to our day's destination, watching monkeys watching me, and I

admitted to the team's camera operator and research assistant, Iddi, why we were travelling so far. 'I am caught up in the idea of a remote and mysterious Maasai man... A noble tribesman cut off from the world'. Iddi, himself a filmmaker from the urban surrounds of Stone Town Zanzibar, looked around at the now expanding *alien* terrain, 'I think we will find him out here'.

Later, after we visited the remote group for a thirty-minute introductory discussion, the team and I decided that this tribe and remote location would be too much of a logistical strain. My Maasai cultural advisor, John, asked why I was so interested in such a difficult to reach location. I explained that working from a remote village would help create then elaborate the symbol of the 'noble tribesman', which we were challenging by offering an individual's personal story. I could feel this thinking leading me into generating the 'recurring stereotypes of African peoples' cultural characteristics', stressing 'their "alterity" and inveterate diversity' (Mezzana 2006, para. 17) in contrast to a perceived 'modernised' highway-dwelling life. John pointed out that realistically no one, and nothing, is truly remote or 'disconnected' in East Africa anymore – a fact I knew from my own travels throughout East Africa with its sealed roads and constant mobile phone coverage.

Just as he had done in Dar es Salaam in explaining there are 'many types of poor', John explained that there were many types of 'remote', and that what is seen is not the same as what exists. He explained that a village next to a highway was just as culturally connected to its Maasai roots as the one at the end of a four-hour winding dirt track around a mountain. However, I knew that I was caught up in the visual aspect – even though there were no visual aspects to come from a written narrative – as we could just leave out writing about any knowledge of a nearby highway if I or any of the co-authors so desired. On a map encompassing the entirety

of Maasai country, south of the Tanzanian-Kenyan border, John pointed at a place with the topographical indications of a mountain – ‘to achieve all of our needs, we will want to go to here’. His finger pressed down on the map: ‘Longido’.

Longido Mountain looks over a small Maasai highway town that shares its name. It was there, John told me, as we pulled into town the next day, that we would find representatives of the Maasai who live in the surrounding areas, ‘away from the road’. A guilt that spanned all four quadrants of Conquergood’s Moral Map (1985) enveloped me as I felt myself delegitimising the communities and people I had already met whose position near a highway didn’t meet with the expectations of the Western alterity of African tribespeople (Mezzana 2006, para. 17). The team however felt less concerned. Only the *mzungu* need stress about such inconsequential things.¹⁶

Passage of Authority

Throughout this project I have attempted to engage with what Said describes as the two necessary conditions for ‘knowing’ another culture: ‘uncoercive contact with an alien culture and self-consciousness about the interpretative project itself’ (1993, 150). In recruiting a Maasai ‘character’ I was fortunate enough to engage with a permissions process that checked and ensured there were no ‘coercive’ expectations within the project. Having reached Longido we made a fresh start on the process of following lines of government and tribal authority that we had undertaken in other regions during the earlier surveying phase. Fortunately, John had a local government and community contact who could speed up our introductions and introduce us to local tribal leaders/representatives. The search for our Maasai

¹⁶ ‘Mzungu’ is the Swahili word for white person.

participant with the local permission-seeking process was far more intricate than it had been anywhere else.

The process for me appeared to involve a particular play of physical space. Each time we arrived at a location we parked away from any people who were there – generally around thirty metres away. We then stood around our vehicle as John went over and talked to people about our reason for visiting. On all occasions one or two of the local Maasai men would accompany John over to our group and invite me to explain our reason for visiting. The first men would then leave across that open space until returning eventually with one or two other men of higher authority – and we would repeat the introductions and explanation. At times during this final part of the process, many other men who had been standing across the void would slowly join the group, huddling in a circle around the central conversation. On every occasion this final conversation concluded with an expression from an elder leader that we were welcome and that they would provide us with all the help we could need by working ‘with’ us.

In Longido the process was slightly different. We sat in a small office with a local government representative and two Maasai men. One was the selected representative of a community outside the town, with another member accompanying him. However, when I explained the project to him, I noticed by the tone of his replies in Maa (Maasai Language) that the reception had quickly turned cold. There was a flurry of talk and waving hands of reassurance from John and the local government representative, followed by laughter from everybody – except for the local Maasai leader and my confused, detached-by-language-self. Thankfully he added something in a lower tone, pointing his finger in my general direction before nodding at me. John assured me we now had our permission, and that the leader

would go back to the community, discuss it with them and find some men for us to choose from. I asked what had happened earlier when everything went cold. John laughed again, before explaining that the man had thought we were there to take a Maasai man to Arusha and have him ‘make pornography in a hotel room with a city girl’. Everyone laughed again. Everyone, that is, apart from me and the Maasai leader.

We then returned to Arusha to begin our search for the woman from the city. As previously mentioned, I had planned to find a woman in the age range of forty to fifty years in the local urban or rural area around Arusha. But this had now changed as the last day of meetings and discussions had also revealed that my plan had been misguided and lacking in important local knowledge. Quite simply, I was not going to find an unmarried Maasai man, forty to fifty years old. Furthermore, I was informed that if I did find someone ‘there would be something wrong with them’ and they ‘wouldn’t suit’. While I was intrigued to learn what could be meant by ‘something wrong’ and further to then challenge it creatively, I concluded this was something for another time and project. Therefore, we would now have a Maasai man and a woman from Arusha city in an age range similar to that of Haji and Marie.

The following day we returned to Longido and met with the Maasai leader and two young Maasai men who were accompanying him. Both seemed quiet and relaxed. The discussion of the project took place in the same room and then we set off to explore their lives and homes well beyond the highway. After we had spent some time seeing their homes and discussing life and love I turned to the team to decide who to recruit. During our drive back to Arusha they made their decision through an engagement with the previously discussed recruitment criteria of responsiveness to the subject and aims of the project. The team chose Rais, a thirty-

one-year-old Maasai man who divided his time between caring for his family's livestock, taking the occasional shift on a motorbike taxi and cutting and braiding hair in Longido town. Rais was also a staunch supporter of Arsenal Football Club – with his red soccer jersey always present below his traditional, red Maasai shúkà. He was the embodiment of everything I had hoped to find as he offered everything the Western photographic lens had failed to elaborate. Now we just needed to find him a partner.

Debbie

John and I met with three women (via his local friends and associates) within the age range of late twenties to early thirties. We met one at her house and two in the lobby of the hotel we were staying in. All three seemed as though they could fit the project, if need be. However, none engaged with the content or the idea in the way that any of our previously recruited participants had. There was no spark of conversation around the subject of love or even humour and laughter. And certainly, no thoughts or conversation of the West's negative portrayals of Africa. Essentially, what was lacking was a responsiveness to the subject matter. This again relates to the creative mindset of Watkins. When casting he attempts to locate a 'psychological resemblance' to the characters and subjects that will inhabit the narratives created in his films (Watkins 2001 quoted in Cook 2010, 235). If he had a particular character in mind, perhaps historically linked to a real individual or to the imagined role, he would seek out not just the ideal aesthetic to represent that character, but more importantly some form of psychological resemblance to a 'better understanding' of the character (Cook 2010, 235). This project also sought such a connection between subject and participant.

I was afraid to tell John who had worked hard to find people to talk to that none of them seemed to fit the criteria. Though before I could speak he said that for him none of them suited, as they had not connected with what ‘we’ were ‘all’ trying to do. This was a relief and a fantastic moment of seeing ownership of the project move further away from my own thoughts and direction. Whilst an experiential, informal social finding of participants was long lost to logistics and circumstance, the localisation it embodied was very much alive and well within the project’s local team. Unfortunately, we were still without our Arusha participant to pair with Rais. As it would turn out though, we had already met our Arusha participant several days earlier. She had in fact been the first person we had spoken to on our arrival – the receptionist at the front desk of our hotel – and she had overheard many of the conversations John and I held about the project while sitting in the lobby. On a whim, John had asked her if she would speak to us about the project. Debbie, with a kind smile, had agreed and invited us to her home.

Within five minutes of conversation, John and I and the rest of the team knew we had the right person. She very quickly opened up about her life – and even the reasons why she would as a character perhaps end up meeting a Maasai man out in Maasai country. I refrained from asking her on the spot if she would join the project. However, within an hour of leaving her home the team had John calling her to ask if she would join and she agreed. To complete the adult pairs we now had only to find Mama’s project partner.

Mr Kulindwa, the Sukuma Man from Mwanza

While in Dar I had asked Mama Agnus what she would seek in a partner if she were to meet one in Mwanza in real-life. She asserted she would in fact like a

man from Mwanza as she liked the idea of a tall, strong *Sukuma Man*.¹⁷ To Mama the Sukuma were tall broad-shouldered men with strong confidence. Having her ‘interests and preferences’ to ‘guide and drive the research process’ (Bishop 1998, 204) we began our search. It gave a great deal of joy to myself and the team as we felt ‘life’ beginning to dictate story as we went looking for Mama’s ideal Sukuma Man.

Flying to Mwanza we began our search. Here I had no contacts and had not previously visited the town. The reliance would be entirely on the local government officials we were meeting to inform them of our presence and to ask for their assistance. We arranged to meet one man whom a local official said fitted our description. While he was an interesting person, he unfortunately was married, so we were left facing the possible need to do a media-based call-out for recruitment. This felt completely at odds with the social qualitative research design that had connected me to this site (Mwanza), the local team, and the local authorities now assisting (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, 34). However, our Mwanza driver told us of a man who had the qualities we were looking for so a short while later we visited Mr Kulindwa, a seventy-year-old retired father, grandfather, and tall, broad-shouldered Sukuma man. Riziki, our female translator from Zanzibar, assured me Mama would be pleased. With Mr Kulindwa the project gained an additional character who would not personally participate but would be a part of Mr Kulindwa’s own character – his six-year-old son, Barak, who would later become an important part of the pair’s

¹⁷ There are over 120 ethnic groups in Tanzania, with Sukuma being the largest ethnic group in the country originating in land to the west of the country bordering with Lake Victoria (and in turn Mwanza) (Otiso 2013, 4). For further reading on both the history of the Sukuma and modern identity of the group see: *"I Am Just a Sukuma": Globalization and Identity Construction in Northwest Tanzania* (Wijsen and Tanner 2002).

story and its ability to reach a happy ending.¹⁸ This completed the recruitment of our adult participants, leaving only two children to find back on the Zanzibar island of Unguja.

Zuena

As previously mentioned, in arriving at the recruitment of the children it was made clear by a local associate that it would be difficult and potentially dangerous to undertake a project of working with two children around the idea of a ‘crush’. Nonetheless we set about finding two children to explore friendship in what would be more of a subplot to the three major romantic narratives. While the term subplot engages some sense that their story is of a lower value than the other six participants’ stories, I believe this is not the case. At the time of recruitment I predicted that their contribution would (and still does) work well as a ‘mirror subplot’ (Edens and Lepki 2016, 25), where their pursuit and development of friendship runs concurrently with the three stories of romantic love.

In undertaking our search, it was agreed that a participant would come from the village of Fujoni, which I had been visiting ever since Robert, Riziki and I began surveying the island. We had developed friendships and a rapport with the villagers due to our extensive time spent talking with Riziki’s aunty and other locals. Riziki’s aunty arranged for Riziki, Iddi and I to meet with several girls in the age range of eight to ten on a large mat under an apple tree in the village.¹⁹

¹⁸ Barak is fully covered under the project’s ethics permit. While not a physical participant he is fully cleared for inclusion in the project by Mr Kulindwa who gave informed consent for his presence. This was done as it was unavoidable to have him at least physically present during workshops that were filmed. Mr Kulindwa made the decision that he would be a character, and we agreed, for purposes of ethics, that his character would remain mostly circumstantial with no major involvement or challenges to ensure no possible conflict of interest or defamation towards him.

¹⁹ Riziki and her Aunty chose the gender without my prompting, and further sought permission from the children’s parents for their recruitment consideration to take place.

Using the project's participatory methods we attempted the important work of including African children's agency and voice (Holland et al. 2010, 362) as part of the effort to answer the call. Fujoni presented challenges in that task, however, as the children were both shy and lacking in English skills. I was operating almost entirely through Riziki as translator and the most familiar face to the girls. In the end I gave Riziki and Iddi the decision of which girl to choose. For them only one of the girls was not 'too shy', having been more talkative and playful during their conversation about the project. And so Zuena was asked if she would like to join the project; she smiled and said she would.²⁰ By handing over authority to the local team, I felt that I had still managed to 'relinquish my will' and authority (Behar 2003, 16), even if this had been a very formal and fast process.

Renaldo

Lastly we needed to find the boy with whom Zuena would explore friendship. I knew many children from my years of visiting Zanzibar, however, none fell into the age category I had received ethics approval for – eight to eleven years. But the first boy we met within recruitment, Riziki's friend's child, Renaldo, from the urban district of Kariakoo, quickly proved to be an ideal fit – a happy-go-lucky boy with parents who, like Zuena's in Fujoni, were open to the project.

Renaldo was someone the team and I instantly connected with and enjoyed spending time with. He embodied the personalities of both a child and a small, curious man. Like Zuena, he showed an interest in imagining a story of friendship with a stranger. This met the essential qualifying attribute from the child participants

²⁰ Zuena's mother gave parental consent for Zuena's participation in the project at the same time.

– that of a willingness to enter into some state of autonomy in our research process (Holland et al. 2010, 362). Recruitment, as such, was complete.

Reflecting on Recruitment: *Relinquishing the observer's will*

The recruitment process undertook the first crucial step in ‘relinquishing’ my agency and in turn reducing the impact of my Western authority. Ethnographer and storyteller Ruth Behar (2003) articulates the underlying urge behind the practice of ethnography:

the beauty and mystery of the ethnographer's quest is to find the unexpected stories, the stories that challenge our theories. Isn't that the reason why we still go to the field – even as we question where the field is located – in the 21st century? We go to find the stories we didn't know we were looking for in the first place. I have great faith in the things I learn when I seem to be relinquishing my will.

(Behar 2003, 16)

Offering agency to members of the team and the communities we interacted with was an attempt to relinquish my singular control over the process, to create a better opportunity to *find the unexpected*. This is a process that Watkins embraces in utilising non-actors to escape a ‘single egotistical vision’ (Watkins quoted in Cook 2010, 238). Furthermore, Banister, Bunn and Burman highlight that within ethnographic practice, where ‘participant observers are able to relinquish themselves in the process, observers can share part of the agency in the research process with the participant’ (2011, 78). By attempting to avoid the pull of my own will, as

highlighted in my observation of what constitutes ‘poverty’, ‘elderly’, and ‘remoteness’, the project utilised local knowledge to create a locally driven recruitment process to find its eight participants. Eight participants who would each shortly become the authors of their own characters.

The Participatory Stage: Finding character and love

Following recruitment, the project moved into the Participatory Stage, where the development of character and story took place. This began with the Individual Stage where participants were encouraged into a self-reflexive analysis before entering the Coupled Stage where their stories could be imagined through an interpersonal experience.

The Individual Stage: Finding character via reflexive dialogue

For colonialism has not simply depersonalized the individual it has colonized; this depersonalization is equally felt in the collective sphere, on the level of social structures. The colonized people find that they are reduced to a body of individuals who only find cohesion when in the presence of the colonizing nation. (Fanon 1963, 292)

Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty

inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause. (Wainaina 2008, 94)

In the Individual Stage the characters of *East African Stories of Love* developed with every interaction and conversation that took place. This was where the call for non-Africans to present non-reductive African characters filled with life, vitality, and agency would either be answered or not. As will be explained, this stage of finding character revealed itself to liberate Wainaina's African characters from their long written redundant colonial 'depersonalisation' (Fanon 1963, 292).

The main task of the Individual Stage was to 'warm-up' a process of self-reflection in the participants in readiness for the Coupled Stage. Evoking reflexive dialogue around the subject and lived experiences of love – with a special focus on romantic love for the adults – would prepare participants for their impending interpersonal exploration of story in the Coupled Stage. There was no formal interview process or line of questioning. Instead a social experience approach was used. Way, Zwier, and Tracey, in, *Dialogic Interviewing and Flickers of Transformation* (2015), examine a process of dialogical engagement that looks beyond interviewing 'as a method for empirical research' that 'is often treated as a reporting process where the truth is "out there" to be discovered' (2015, 720). By engaging interviews in a dialogical manner, researchers can situate the interviewing process as a 'transform[ation of] information into shared experience' that encourages participant perspective-taking (Denzin quoted in Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 720). By employing a similar process to create an environment for conversation, I was seeking reflexive dialogue rather than specific 'information' as may come from formal interviewing, in an attempt to 'understand' the participants as characters; to

personalise where post-colonial practices of interviewing may otherwise continue a depersonalization (Fanon 1963, 292). By using the stimulation of dialogue as a social experience I could encourage ‘perspective-taking and non-judgmental engagement to achieve a deep understanding’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 271) leading to the beginnings of their self-reflexive journey towards character and story. The time with each participant was used simply to stimulate a self-reflective dialogue around the subject(s) of love. At this stage the only direct development of the characters was a character name used to situate the participant as the imagined character – bringing both into one.

While the Recruitment Stage worked to give over the agency of creative decisions to the team and other locals, the Individual Stage focused on offering the eight participants as much creative and political agency as possible. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) describe political agency as:

a corollary of heightened understanding and motivation. As affect becomes mobilized and organized, and as experience is more clearly objectified and understood, both knowledge and feeling become articulated and disciplined by the collective toward prudent action. (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 288)

This was problematic in the Individual Stage as the team and I were positioned as ‘the collective’ for the participants to turn to when working alone. In reaching the Coupled Stage the participants’ actions and ideas would be ‘increasingly informed and planned with the support and wisdom of others (their project partner) directly participating in related action in a situation’ (Kemmis and

McTaggart 2000, 288). However, in the Individual Stage, the process required an ongoing shift of agency back to the participants when they turned to us for direction. This will be given due consideration in the discussion of their characters and their ‘character traits’.

Made up of the participant’s personalities and belief systems, these emerging ‘character traits’ showed potential to dismantle the traditional ‘cultural generalization’ that situated Africans as ‘characters-as-designations’ (Said 2003, 119) existing solely as functions in the reductive generalisation of “Africa”. It was important that the characters of *East African Stories of Love* drove the narrative rather than inhabit the ‘functions’ of the plot or story. Robyn Warhol argues that classical narratology supersedes ‘individual characters with “anthropomorphic actants” performing “functions” in the story’, where their character attributes combined with their actions establish ‘their role in the narrative syntagm’ (2012, 119). Characters then essentially contain no ‘psychology, no interiority, no subjectivity’, and are instead ‘representational effects’ that the author imagines when constructing a narrative (Warhol 2012, 119). Therein characters exist merely as functions for the overall narrative, whereas within this project a character is not the function of the story but rather the driver of its creation. These are character-driven narratives where the participants-as-characters are born from real people whose individuality predicts narrative through ‘the ways they react’ (Geraghty 1995, 41). From the Individual Stage, the methods employed sought to unveil the complexity of characters with *psychology*, *interiority*, and *subjectivity*.

In the Individual Stage the use of a ‘dialogical approach’ helped to draw out these characters by engaging ‘with participants as people with complicated and developing world views’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 730). By providing the

participants with both the physical and metaphorical ‘space’ to talk about themselves, we began a relationship between presence with the project and a practice of self-reflexivity. By doing so, the participants would not simply look for ways their characters could ‘function’ in a constructed narrative, but rather enter into the Coupled Stage’s social experience of ‘courtship’ with the practice of exploring self as the most important part of their creative role.

Reducing technological intrusion

Those interested in taking a dialogic approach should work to develop trust with participants either through extended time in a site or a carefully crafted interview guide that first develops a climate of mutual trust and respect. An awareness of the ways one embodies “interviewer” can also help the participant to feel safe and open. [...] Work to minimize physical and psychological distance by dressing similarly to participants, eliminating physical barriers and power distances, and avoiding paying too much attention to notes and recording devices. (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 729)

With informed consent obtained, recording devices were permissible during discussions and interactions with the participants. I was concerned though that the presence of recording devices would hinder the ‘natural state’ of our social interactions and potentially ‘make the respondents anxious’ (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight 1996, 154). Speer and Hutchby argue that researchers often assume that a participant’s ‘concerns are hidden from the researcher’, going on ‘inside the heads of

the participants' (2003, 319). It was perhaps then useful to talk about the equipment. But in an attempt to limit a consciousness of the equipment and in turn its disruption, I kept discussion of it to a minimum and gradually introduced the use and scale of it over time so our interactions remained as unambiguous as possible (Robson and McCartan 2016, 330). I was, however, somewhat caught up in a dilemma that filmmakers and ethnographers fall into in their quest to capture the world in a non-reactive manner. Speer and Hutchby (2003) describe this as the *one-way mirror dilemma*:

Concerns about the problem of reactivity or researcher effect are based on the idea that there is a realm of social interaction that is pristine and natural, but that the presence of a researcher, or, more seriously, of recording devices, can only disturb, distort or otherwise contaminate. 'Natural' interaction, it is implied, could only be captured for research purposes if the researcher could stand behind a one-way mirror or become, in a literal sense, the proverbial fly-on-the-wall. (Speer and Hutchby 2003, 319)

While broadcast-quality footage and sound could be valuable media assets for some use beyond the written stories, it was more important for the participants to feel that the process was as true to informal life as possible. To highlight perceived issues of recording equipment, Speer and Hutchby (2003, 316) draw on Stubbs' argument of the '*contamination by observation* effect' which takes place 'when an ordinary speaker's language changes to a "more formal" style when they know they are being observed' (Stubbs 1983, 224). I find that the presence of recording devices

exacerbates the *contaminating* presence of my academic-practitioner self, therefore the intrusive qualities of recording technology were minimised at the outset and gradually built upon with each new day or session.

Despite beginning with our smallest camcorder resting ‘unobtrusively’ without a tripod or within the participant’s line of sight, I was aware that, even in this first use of equipment, recording ‘may significantly affect what occurs’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 158). While I was carefully embarking on a dialogical approach to ‘function as a rich source of data and a meaningful intervention by creating a safe space for participants to hear themselves articulate their beliefs’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 729), the equipment used to capture that *rich source of data* was reducing the ‘safety’ and natural experience of the space.

I went to great efforts to create an appropriate space for our time together. As instructed by Way, Zwier, and Tracy I wanted to ‘adopt an ethic of empathy and friendship’ by approaching the research ‘as a witness to the participant’s story rather than a spectator; to create participant, self, and social ambiguity; and encourage participant hope’ (2015, 721). To reduce the intrusiveness and formal quality of our interactions I chose locations and scenarios of a relaxed nature/ambience and prompted the participants to choose where we would sit, walk, and relax for our conversations and interactions. I avoided any formal placement across a table or with overly upright chairs in an ‘interview-like’ arrangement. With my body language I attempted to always sit as casually and relaxed as I would do under any normal, informal social interaction of ‘friendship’ (2015, 721).

This attempt at an informal setting and carefully chosen body language would have been worthless if I had a full camera kit ‘leering’ at the participant while set up on a tripod by my side. Therefore, once the small camcorder, sometimes

raised by a book or other object on the table, was familiar to the participant, over several days I gradually built up to a larger camera with long lens and professional microphone. Although I was sacrificing possible cinematic moments for some later media use, much to the discomfort of my inner filmmaker, it was more important the participants began to inhabit the space as their own, uninhibited by bulky and intrusive technology.

Beginning with Marie, I made the transition up through different levels of technology as unobtrusively as possible. The camera was either resting at my side around hip level when seated or placed away to the side of our line of sight (up to and including a profile side-angle of the participant). Whereas in a normal ‘talking-head’ interview (Bowen and Thompson 2013, 198) the camera would be placed over my (the interviewer’s) shoulder to offer a ‘good’ eye-line with the interviewee, I preferred to remove the camera completely from the line of sight. While the image and composition quality was perhaps technically and aesthetically poor, it improved the ‘social experience’ of the interactions and created a sense of a socially ‘normal situation’ as we began the task of finding character and story by encouraging a free and ‘natural’ communication (Stubbs 1983, 225).

It is important to note here that Marie’s analysis occupies significantly more pages than any other participant’s analysis because it introduces the concepts and techniques used for all participants. Furthermore, as she was the first participant to join the project, much of what occurred with her informed subsequent work with the other participants. The aim with Marie, as with every participant following her, was not to make Marie into a performer or an ‘expert’ storyteller, but rather to stimulate a self-reflexive inner and outer dialogue that could benefit the later exploration of possible love between her and *her* fisherman from Kizimkazi. Marie was simply

encouraged to discuss and reflect upon her own life and experiences with love, beginning with family and friendship, moving through life's passions, interests and then on to romantic love. To begin I encouraged some conversation concerning her previous visit to Zanzibar and what had made her return as this was important to her imagined character's story. What I was mostly doing here, however, was offering her a way to discuss the things she 'loved' in her life. This initial conversation was offering her a space to reflect on her love of Zanzibar's culture. Her interest was not so much in the traditional Zanzibarian (and Islamic) cultures, but rather in the social interactions of youth-oriented nightlife and the beach – though not swimming.

At no point was I prodding her with formal questioning. I never prepared or wrote down any questions to ask of any participant. I entered all conversations with the intention of continuing a discussion that allowed them to reflect on their lived experience. The improvised guiding or probing questions served only to continue whatever conversation was underway. Through the use of 'probing questioning' as a dialogical interviewing practice I could 'prompt participants to reflect on, explain, and modify initial statements' (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 723). Whereas in everyday life we may at times gloss over how we enjoyed an experience, here I looked to delve into a deeper, reflexive consideration of what makes an experience enjoyable, in order to garner a greater self-understanding of how the participants and in turn their characters experience love, happiness, and life in general. There was no specific quantitative 'information' or 'data gathering' aims, but simply a continual discussion that was self-reflexive and offered qualitative insight into the personalities of the participants-as-characters as research 'collaborators', not as 'subjects' (2015, 721).

I encouraged Marie to ask questions of me and shared my own experiences and reflections to increase her awareness of the ‘collaborative’ environment. I regularly reminded all participants that they were free to ask me questions as we worked, in order to develop what Pitts and Miller-day (2007) describe as the ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’ level of rapport. This involves encouraging a participant to contribute views around a project and to ask questions of the research. This is an early-stage domain of rapport ‘marked by an awareness that both researcher and participant can benefit from each other and both show interest in developing a potential partnership’ (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 186) within the collaborative process. A process of rapport building was key to this project.

Pitts and Miller-Day describe ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’ as the second of five ‘phases of intimacy’ that describe ‘the rapport development between fieldworkers and participants’ (2007, 185).

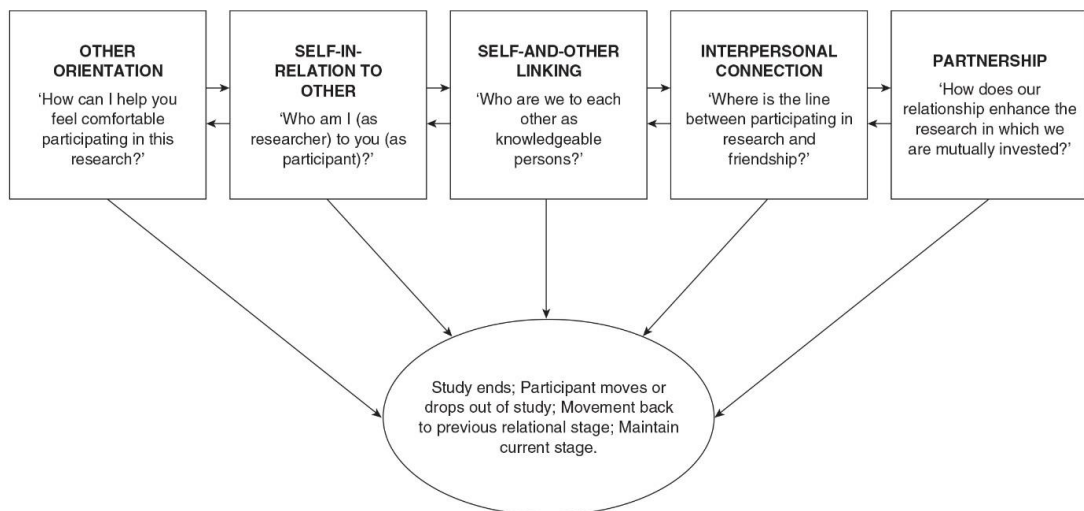


Figure 4. Stage Model of Participant-Researcher Relationships

Source: Recreated from Pitts and Miller-Day (2007, 185)

Beginning with the ‘Other-Orientation’ the researcher is focused on helping the participant feel at ease with the process of disclosing whatever the fieldwork is seeking to learn. In beginning the Individual Stage with the participants, I experienced a ‘minimal sense of connection along with a strong sense of performing the role of the professional when attempting to facilitate their ease with the situation (2007, 188). Without some connection interactions would remain ‘perfunctory’ (188) leaving the purpose of the Individual Stage unfulfilled. Therefore, with Marie and those who followed, I worked to reach the second stage – ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’ – by encouraging her to ask me questions, both personal and project-related. Forming Marie’s and the other participants’ appreciation for the purposes of the project and shifting towards offering my reflexive dialogue and openness allowed a move to this second stage where the participant is key:

Researchers reported that during this phase they would acknowledge that participants were ‘the experts of their own experiences’ and thus, articulated the desire to diminish professional posturing and enhance ‘genuine interest’ in the participant, to ‘talk about him and learn from him’. (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 190)

Pitts and Miller-Day’s findings are of absolute importance to this auto-biographical experiment as the participants were ‘the experts of their own experiences’ (2007, 190). Once at this second stage of rapport building, a researcher-participant relationship will often develop progress. I now briefly describe then reflect on that relationship as each phase was reached in the participatory process.

Following the ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’, the ‘Self-and-Other Linking’ phase is where our shared reflexive dialogue and time bonding offered each participant awareness of one another as ‘whole beings’ beyond our roles within the act of researching (2007, 186). Following this dimension is the critically important ‘Interpersonal Connection’ phase where we acknowledge ourselves through a friendly reciprocity as more than researcher-participant. The final phase is ‘Partnership’ where ‘high levels of open-self-disclosure and a focus on the personal rather than professional relationship’ raise the rapport into one of platonic intimacy beyond the project (2007, 186). All five phases are considered in this project, with the first two of most relevance within the Individual Stage as Marie and I developed our trust and her identity. By developing ground rules for her involvement, we could quickly establish a mutual respect and understanding in a Self-in-Relation to Other rapport by taking care of a most sensitive of subjects at the earliest stages of her participation – the Rwandan genocide.

With Marie the Rwandan genocide was absent from all conversations, be that in our self-reflexive interviews or our general everyday chatter. Marie was attracted to the project’s focus on a positive telling of Africa. For personal reasons, she wished to leave discussion and exploration of the genocide out of the project. I had expected this as I already knew from well before she joined the project, that in her travels outside of Rwanda she had become tired of being asked about the genocide. I saw no issue in omitting this subject. In the initial idea of working in Rwanda, the genocide had presented a stark signifier of the idea of ‘negative Africa’. However, once the project left Rwanda the subject of the genocide was left behind. As a dynamic, interesting, strong woman Marie embodied all the qualities the project could benefit from. Excluding her personal experience of the genocide was no loss to her ‘created’

character or story. Nor would it have been with any participant who may have worked on the original Rwanda-based project.

As previously mentioned, in analysing the process and development of the participants' characters I will draw on several how-to guides concerned with creating characters, plot, and stories. No such guides were used throughout the participatory process nor in the writing stages as I did not want to take the participants into a particularly professional way of approaching story. There is fair warning that 'following the rules' from the ever increasing canon of these guides all too often leads to producing 'formulaic screenplays that fail to ignite the imagination' (Batty 2014, 97). However, the key reason for avoiding any use of the guides was to allow the participants a freedom from considering such rules in their everyday interactions with one another. In this dissertation, these guides are reflected on to assist in the retrospective analysis by exploring how the creative model developed its diverse stories and 'interesting characters'. Alan Rosenthal (1995) describes the 'character dimension' of an 'interesting character' as requiring:

aspirations and goals, needs and demands, virtues and defects, and
on the whole they must be real and believable. (Rosenthal 1995,
69)

As 'real' people Marie and the other seven participants are complex personalities made up of virtues formed across their lived experiences – satisfying Rosenthal's requirements. However, the need for 'goals' and the requirement of 'defects' are also important to this project's methods.

First, the only authorial direction or implanting of goals delivered to the participants was the single task of pursuing love or friendship. As a storyteller I was aware that ‘goals’ bring out emotional qualities in characters and lead protagonists and antagonists to create conflict and drama (Batty 2011, 25); however, achieving their goal was never framed as essential to a participant’s ‘success’. In working with real people (and not yet knowing what their physical or internal antagonists might be), collaborators were only encouraged to explore the possibility of the goal of romantic love – not reach it conclusively. Second, the project did not purposefully pursue weaknesses or ‘defects’ within the participants or their personalities. Nor did it seek to judge any qualities or behaviours as good or bad. Whilst character flaws are an important part of character dimension, it was predicted that through the act of pursuing love (or friendship), the strengths and weaknesses of individuals would play out within the pursuit. We would find their character depth together with their most important ‘magnetism or charisma’ (Rosenthal 1995, 69), via the pursuit of romantic love or friendship.

Marie’s aspirations in life were similar to those of many young people reaching the end of their studies – to travel and to succeed in her career. Her prevailing real-life priorities were exploring the world while working in tourism. The project and in turn the prose narrative had found a spirited and ambitious character. In love Marie’s goal was simply to find someone with whom she could laugh and enjoy life. She did however express one belief of herself as a defect – shyness. Surprisingly I had never met this side of her, but she insisted it did exist at times when her mood would make her so. She added that if she became angry with someone she silently distanced herself from the person. When I asked if she would seek the person out to tell them they did her wrong, her reply was confident and

final. With a shake of her head, she turned her gaze away to the side as she replied, ‘Uh, uh. No. Never’. Strong-willed, steadfast, Marie required the other person to realise their wrongdoing of their own accord.

Geraghty (1995) warns storytellers of the trap of failing to develop complex characters by instead developing ‘playing-card’ characters, simply dropped into plot sequences:

many first-time novelists plunge blissfully into the sea of human trauma, with not the foggiest notion of what makes people tick. The result, inevitably, is playing-card characters whose behaviour is strictly off-the-peg. When grief strikes, they feel the ground opening up beneath their feet. Fright causes their hearts to hammer painfully in their fragile chests. Sadness brings out the hot, salty tears. What makes real people real is their individuality, the way they differ from everyone else, not just in their appearance, but in the way they react. (Geraghty 1995, 41)

This project at no time focused the story development on alignment to a plot sequence framework. This is not to say that plot structure is not important to the development of a story. Batty highlights that plot ‘does not just direct action, it allows feeling to be structured and communicated’ (2011, 25). The project’s methods simply focused first on observing its characters, whose plot sequences would emerge as they developed and interacted. Geraghty describes one requirement to overcoming the playing-card character as the inclusion of idiosyncratic peculiarities within characters. She argues that while the character may react as expected to situations, it

is the ‘touches of individuality’ spread through a story that make a character real (Geraghty 1995, 42). The ‘uh, uh’ of Marie’s response, mentioned earlier, revealed itself as a regular sound she would use in every region of the emotional spectrum – from frustration and sadness through to joy and surprise. Whenever surprised, Marie would raise her eyebrows and let out a surprised ‘uh!’ sound – something Geraghty would describe as a ‘character tag’ (1995, 84). It was contagious too, as I found myself using it at times, as a reaction during our conversation – though not purposefully.

Without any need or intention to interrogate Marie’s personality, the project’s first character revealed herself to be complex and multidimensional. In turning for a moment to authorship and considering our eventual readers, this critical incident with Marie highlights the project’s success in drawing out important challenges to the reductive non-African alternative portrayals and their impact on non-African readers.

Further to the practical value of offering the participants an autobiographical play with fiction, there is value in having the origins of character and story attached directly to ‘real’ people. Bringing the authors to the conscience of the reader offers something personal that adds interest and *charm* for a reader’s relationship to these ‘alternative’ African stories.

The pleasure of the Text also includes the amicable return of the author. Of course, the author who returns is not the one identified by our institutions (history and courses in literature, philosophy, church discourse), he is not even a biographical hero. The author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity, he is a

mere plural of “charms”, the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings, a discontinuous *chant of amiabilities*. (Barthes 1997, 3)

Simion (1996), explores a paradox within the preface of Barthes’ *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1997) in which, via the act of reading, the text becomes separated from the outside world yet remains connected through the ‘pleasures of the Text’ (Simion 1996, 104). The relational power within the ‘chant of amiabilities’, or ‘the plural of charms’, as highlighted by Burke (2008, 44), was believed fundamental to Nietzsche, postulating that ‘the personal element can still interest us’ (Nietzsche 1911, 74). Nietzsche argued that ‘it is possible to shape the picture of a man out of three anecdotes’ and that relief only comes at ‘that point in every system which is a little bit of personality’ (1911, 73).

By situating real people such as Marie in an active, autobiographical interplay of life and work, these nuances of character (such as her stoic ‘uh, uh!’) were revealing themselves as while the project continued a reflexive praxis of ‘revealed’ personality traits equalling character development. Interviewing as a ‘way of writing the world, a way of bringing the world into play’ (Denzin 2001, 24) was a celebrated belief and practice of this project in its generation of characters and story. The personal elements appearing, such as those with Marie, may offer simple yet humanising amiabilities as *chants of interest* juxtaposed against the generic, two-dimensional personality-deficient, suffering, silent African who has traditionally populated Western texts.

In, *Creating Characters: A Writers Reference to the Personality Traits That Brings Fictional People to Life* (2004), Lauther prompts writers to thoroughly

explore the development of their characters. His extremely detailed toolbox of questions, answers, and definitions of traits, fears, types, beliefs and emotions seeks to, ‘encourage considerable thought about who will be charged with driving plot’ (2004, 1). It is self-classed not as a ‘how-to-write’ or ‘paint-by-the-numbers’ guide, but rather as a resource for writers to ‘know as much as possible about their fictional characters before putting one word on the paper’ (2004, 1). While the pen did not meet the paper with the ‘characters’ until well after they entered the participatory process, Lauther offers insight into how characters are brought into life. In discovering Haji as the second participant, there was a great deal of character to be found that would easily have filled many pages of Lauther’s guide for the fiction writer.

Haji was very charismatic. He brought a great deal of commitment to the project – giving himself over fully. However, with this commitment from Haji came a continual, polite for-the-sake-of-the-project focus on what I wanted, rather than a reflexive focus on himself. Haji would continually ask me what I needed to know about him for the success of ‘my research’. Coming from studies in marine biology, his approach to research had been in the context of quantitative collections of empirical data rather than the qualitative nature of this project. Due to Haji’s politeness, diligence, and commitment to the project, he asked more questions than perhaps any other participant about what ‘I needed’ his character to be, while I continually directed him (just as I had Marie) to decide what would be best for his character.

Alternatively, had I wanted to direct Haji and his character I could have offered some basic training in storytelling and character-creating formula – such as Cowgill’s extensive *The Art of Plotting: Add Emotion, Suspense, and Depth to your*

Screenplay (2010). This would have given Haji a framework to imagine both a structure for his character to inhabit and the construct of his character itself. Using Lauther's (2004) personality traits guide, I could have engaged him in extrapolating certain character traits for his own self-psychoanalysis, to discover a deeper character to inhabit the framework of Cowgill's excellent teaching – thereby creating a strong, effective character based on Haji, along with a prepared framework of the plot for his story with Marie. However, in doing so the project would have lost its praxis of celebrating and utilising an *interplay of life and work*.

Gass (1979), examines the interplay of life and work of author Malcom Lowry's creative praxis:

Lowry could not invent at the level of language, only at the level of life, so that having lied life into a condition suitable for fiction, he would then faithfully and truthfully record it. No wonder he felt enmeshed. No wonder, too, that he has to revisit in order to revise; repeat the same difficult passage of existence in order to plunge further into it, make the necessary changes, get it right; and this meant only too often that he had to drink himself back into madness again, to re-see what was to be rewritten; to fall down in a ditch, to find vultures perched on the washbasin, fold fearfully up in a corner like a pair of discarded trousers, or bruise his head between toilet and sink in some dirty anonymous john. (Gass 1979, 36)

Of Gass's observation, Burke asserts that 'the relationship between work and life is (here) one of a ceaseless and reactive interplay in which neither life *nor work* has any claim to necessary priority' (2008, 31). Whilst the participants were free of such a self-destructive approach, there was a conscious celebration of a life-work-life practice.

I could perhaps have approached Haji with Cowgill's 'three requirements of drama' – instructing that he *must* be the protagonist 'who will take us through the action to achieve something' (2010, 3). And in doing so he must 'meet with conflict' and at the story's end he must leave his readers with the whole story having meant something (2010, 66). While Cowgill's book as a whole is an excellent training tool for storytellers it would have turned the participants' mindset away from reflexivity and into a goal-oriented, formal process. Seger's more foundational work articulating drama's inherent need for conflict might have left Haji focused on trying to find conflict (1994, 165). While guiding Haji with this training might have garnered a more 'successful' story, it would have hindered the aim of finding something truer to an experimental *interplay of life and work* where lived experiences and personalities dictate story in whatever form it may naturally take.

When I focused each participant's attention on a contemplative reflection of family and friendship, the narrative of their spoken thoughts opened a window into their values. Haji revealed a strong loyal connection to his family and friends. He was acutely aware of his needs and desires, yet prioritised the needs of others with his selflessness. The ending of past romantic relationships was deemed by Haji to be due to an inadequacy in his circumstances. Haji, while extremely intelligent and capable, believed that because he was not 'wealthy' and was from a small 'distant' fishing village, relationship prospects were limited. When focusing on future

relationships Haji wanted ‘an African woman, so I may have a chocolate baby’. He expressed no cultural or racial reasoning; it was just as he had always envisaged his future – he imagined with joy how much he would love his ‘chocolate baby’ and the woman who would be mother to his baby.

While Haji was pursuing his studies in marine biology, he saw finding a wife and having a baby ‘soon’ as a responsibility to his parents – to provide them with a grandchild. I see the same within my own consideration of having children ‘soon’. To see my parents as grandparents. While there are perhaps some cultural reasons within Haji’s consideration, it was no different than my own in that we shared a value for family – and the continuation of it. As we shared stories of family, and our vulnerabilities in love and loss, the relationship between researcher and participant moved from the previously described ‘Self-in-Relation’ domain into a more ‘personal’ relationship. At this critical point Haji and I were engaging in a shift to Pitts and Miller-Day’s third phase of intimacy – ‘Self-and-Other Linking’ – that ‘appears to occur when the two individuals begin to connect, to link as human beings apart from the roles they are playing as researcher and participant, to establish trust and rapport’ (2007, 191). Sharing my own experiences was of critical importance to the development of our rapport by ‘working alongside the participant, contributing, and making an effort to see the world from the participant’s perspective’ (2007, 191). By offering a personal openness we were able to work towards a closer connection that would allow a greater understanding and familiarity with his character.

In contrast to Marie, Haji had always been the pursuer of a romantic interest. Marie had told me she would never be the first to say, ‘I love you’ but Haji explained he had always been the one to say it first – ‘otherwise the girl would never say it’.

For Haji, this was the case with ‘most African women’, as the need for him to pursue love was not just a habit – but rather something embedded in his belief systems. Here, before Haji and Marie had even met, I was seeing how ‘the chase’ of their narrative might play out. If I had been creating their story, I would have orchestrated a more equal reveal of feelings, but it was clear that for the first couple that aspect would be a more one-sided affair.

It was obvious from the beginning that Haji would create a dynamic character. His broad smile and optimistic outlook on life, along with his ambition to succeed in both his studies and family life, were obvious whenever he spoke. Coupled with Marie’s (so far) quieter yet equally dynamic personality, the inherent possibility of drama did away with the need for any physical antagonist. The pursuit of love itself and the obstacles in their experiences and beliefs around the play of romance could provide the antagonistic needs of the romance genre (Singer 2010, 161). In an ‘imagined’ creation of characters I would not have found the subtleties that existed between these two to create the drama that was likely coming our way when they came together to explore love.

Having finished the work with the first two participants in the Individual Stage it was clear that the most effective method involved simply operating dialogically and not attempting to formally compartmentalise and isolate any parts of their motivation, goals, beliefs, or personality traits. The use of any how-to guides of creative writing would narrow and simplify the real individuals before they had a chance to come together in the dynamic interpersonal activity of the Coupled Stage. As with Haji and Marie, I therefore kept all interactions with all participants as casually constructed dialogical ‘interviews’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015). At the same time I worked to develop and navigate our researcher-participant ‘relationship’

through the ‘Other-Orientation’ along the ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’ phase and then into the ‘Self-and-Other Linking’ phase to share and ‘understand’ our personal lived experiences (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007). In that way the participants would develop a relationship of being with the project by speaking and thinking in a self-reflexive manner, perfectly preparing them for the Coupled Stage.

Several generations older than Marie and Haji, Mama Agnus, or Mama, presented a strong, wise matriarchal presence. She spoke with an assured clarity of thought, often pausing to select her words before speaking. Mama embodied everything I had hoped for from an ‘elderly’ participant. Lauther (2004), however, takes a different perspective on ‘old age’ classing it as ‘a non-human adversary’:

For those who have crossed the broad waters from youth to old age and found themselves miraculously turned into elders on the far shore, the gratitude they feel for having made it that far may be diluted by the losses they have experienced along the way. Gone is the glowing skin that once had never known a wrinkle or a brown blotch. Gone is the eyesight that was once so keen. And gone, too, is the elasticity of the bones that used to bounce without breaking. These losses, and others like them, represent the wounds suffered in a battle with old age—an adversary who simply never loses.

(Lauther 2004, 219)

Unlike the old age that dims Lauther’s character, Mama’s skin, eyes, smile, and personality glowed. Perhaps Mama was too young at sixty for the ‘old age’ described by Lauther. Perhaps for him, as was the case for me during recruitment,

the idea of ‘elderly’ was a decade or so past Mama’s sixty years. She, however, embodied all the qualities I had imagined of an elderly participant – assured inner wisdom, sharp wit, thoughts and speech flowing steadily from a lifetime’s worth of knowledge and experience. Family played a central role in her life as she remained deeply involved in the lives of her infant grandchild and adult children.

Of her experiences, Mama expressed her *story of love* with ease and a fondness for every memory. She was certainly not ‘diluted by the losses’ she had experienced (Lauther 2004, 219). And she was certainly neither helpless nor hopeless, as she would be in traditional Western portrayals. She spoke freely of her husband who had passed away six years earlier. She described how they had come together and married even though their two religions (hers Christian, his Muslim) would perhaps have kept them apart in ‘other parts of the world, but not here in Tanzania where everyone accepts everyone’. The team and I were interested to know if Mama felt she could ever love again. Mama believed she could, though not the same type of love she had shared with her husband. It could be romantic, they could be ‘together’, but for her they would likely not marry – a decision she would decide to change for her character in the Coupled Stage.

There was most certainly no problem in relation to her accepting agency and authorship. In Mama a sense of control and authority manifested as qualities of her personality weaved within the gentle peace that enveloped her character. With her wisdom and calm, constant sense of control, Mama exhibited no hint of any personality ‘weakness’ that might challenge her character in the task of finding and developing romantic connections. Whereas I had foreseen some potential for drama in the personalities of Marie and Haji coming together, if I were following the rule that Mama ‘must meet with conflict’ (Cowgill 2010, 66) I would have needed to

adjust her character so as to more likely have her meet interpersonal difficulties with her prospective project partner. According to the how-to-guides Mama was perhaps ‘incomplete’. But she was complex beyond any sense of ‘complete’.

Mama’s project partner interacted with the project via two names. The team and other participants fluctuated between calling him Mr Kulindwa, and calling him by his patriarchal family status, Babu (Swahili for Grandfather). For Mama Agnus they fluctuated between Mama Agnus and just Mama; the matriarchal aspect was always present in her name, she was never just Agnus. To a large extent Mr Kulindwa’s/ Babu’s distinctions reflected his personality dynamics – the formal statesman and community leader *Mr* Kulindwa and then *Babu*, the paternal-natured, softly-spoken man. These two titles perfectly framed the nature of this participant-cum-character.

Mr Kulindwa had the stature of a proud professional man in his seventies. As an extremely well-respected community leader, there was strength and confidence about him just as there was with Mama. However, his was more direct and outwardly stated. Mama could remain quiet and still, yet somehow have control of the room; with those in it regularly looking to her, she would smile and nod or add some briefly worded perspective to the subject at hand. With his upright, square-shouldered posture and strong, deep voice, Mr Kulindwa was exactly as the sturdy build of the name implies. He was, ‘Mr Ku-lind-wa’, a controlled man – embodying a challenge (as did Mama) to the West’s ‘us and them’ attitude. Bonsu drew on ‘consumer interpretations of advertising images to suggest how North American consumer perceptions of Africa are linked to sociohistorical facilities that support ideological notions of inferior African “otherness”’ (2009, 1). In reflecting with one of his informants (Kate) on how her image had been shaped, she described a need for

her country (America) to ‘graciously reach out to save’ the lives of ‘the poor helpless African people who depend on our assistance for survival’ (Bonsu 2009, 17). Mr Kulindwa, however, personified a complete contradiction of this image. And had Kate known him or Mama, she may have found herself reaching out for their guidance.

Furthermore, the guise of his other title, *Babu*, exemplified a challenge to the Western perception of Africans having been ‘institutionalized as violent savages through colonial discourse’ (Bonsu 2009, 18). Babu was an extremely gentle nurturer – made evident by the very presence of Barak in his life. I had never envisaged an elderly participant having their own young child. Perhaps grandchildren would add to their appearance and nature as a grandparent. But here was a seventy-year-old man parenting a young boy. I am unsure to what extent the nurturing ‘Babu’ (grandfather) character would have revealed itself had it not been for his physical presence as a ‘baba’ (father). Mama appreciated this side of him very early on as Barak was always present with us, since it was school holidays and Babu was his sole carer. In taking on Babu/Mr Kulindwa we had logistically and creatively adopted Barak. This meant that if Mama were to begin a relationship with Mr Kulindwa, she had to bring Barak into her story too. This was a potential source of conflict for their story but there was no sign of such as Mama Agnus (the participant) accepted Barak into her life as much within the story as she did in real life, working with him during the project.

In, *How to Grow a Novel: The Most Common Mistakes Writers Make and How to Overcome Them*, Stein (2014) coaches his readers on the creation of ‘ideal’ characters:

You and I are sitting at a small table outdoors at a sidewalk café in Paris, watching the people stroll by. I invite you to play a game. Pick any passing pedestrian you see in time for me to notice him. Or her. I bet you'd choose someone who was oddly dressed, or walked in an unusual manner, or was carrying something bizarre. One notices people who stand out in a crowd. That is exactly the kind of character you want for your novel. (Stein 2014, 66)

If I were there, in Paris, sitting opposite Stein, choosing a 'Maasai Warrior' would make sense. A character that not only stands out to a readership of non-Africans – but also from the majority of the one billion Africans around him. However, the purpose with 'our' Maasai was not to grab the reader's attention with a character who could 'standout' as 'unusual', but instead to use the character and story-finding methods to reveal what was within Rais – the complex personality makeup of his real-life self that throughout the entire project revealed an ease of relatability to any other thirty-one-year-old living today.

He was a regular, excited young man with a love of globalised popular culture, often rambling on about soccer, music, friends, or displaying quirks – such as his dislike of juice (too sweet compared with Fanta) or his pride in wearing his Arsenal FC shirt wherever he went. Simultaneously he could wholly embody the Noble Tribesman, standing in his Maasai clothing, leaning against his spear, staring out over the land and explaining his ancient culture. I never asked him to *play* the Maasai or any other part of his personality and cultural make-up. And he fluctuated, both in the way he dressed and the way he acted, between a proud 'noble' Maasai man and a modern-day, worldly-wise young person, though these personas were not

two distinct individuals. Rais was simultaneously both characters, manifested in the make-up of his personality, culture(s), circumstance, and lived experience. Three critical incidents occurred later in the Group Focus Stage that are of significance to this duality. First, that of my mistake in the language I used with a simple question, second in Rais's own understanding of the value of his Maasai cultural identity and finally in the value of being called by his name.

My mistake was on one occasion during the Group Focus when I directed a question to Rais about how he would behave on the second time Debbie would visit him in Longido. However, when I asked the translator to 'ask Rais what the Maasai would do', he replied, 'do you want me to ask Rais, or ask the Maasai?' I really had just wanted to know what Rais would do, not what cultural tradition would have him do, leaving me to contemplate how often I had been shifting his character into 'the Maasai' – a common nickname the team had been calling him. Second, throughout the Group Focus Stage, Rais had been wearing regular 'non-Maasai' pants and shirt each day. I had not paid any attention to it, as it was of no importance. However, on the second last day he said he would dress for our last day as Maasai 'for Brendon'. I explained to Rais that he only ever need dress as he wished, for it was his story and his life to live, though Rais was acutely aware of the value of *the Maasai* character (Akama 2002; Wainaina 2008) in his attempts to give me time with its distinct aesthetic appearance. Had I been creating a screen-based text I could have quite effectively utilised this as 'the performative space of costume changes throughout a narrative' symbolising how a character grows and changes (Batty 2014, 81). The town clothes and Maasai shúkà can deeply affect the reading of Rais and he was obviously conscious of this. Throughout his life tourists had frequently taken photos of him (without permission) so he was acutely aware that the non-African or non-

Maasai gaze values what he ethnographically represents. I recalled how the promoters of the *Live 8* concert in 2005, had Bob Geldof bring Birhan Woldu, a young Ethiopian woman who had survived the 1980s Ethiopian Famine, on stage in ‘*traditional* costume and hair style’, even though it had been noted that she normally dressed in Western-style clothing (Grant 2015, 317). In the final stories, being acutely aware of the value of his colonial (mis)representation, Rais tells Debbie the true story he had told me of how he once made a group of tourists hanging out of a safari bus pay for each photo they took of him, with added charge to include his spear – and even each goat in each photo. And so Rais presented himself on our last day together dressed as ‘the Maasai’. The third critical incident came when, at the end of the project Rais expressed gratitude that throughout the project he had ‘mostly’ been called Rais, and not simply referred to by people as ‘the Maasai’ – as would normally happen to him when around non-Maasai people (be they non-African or African). It was clear to him that his individuality was more important to our project than his symbolic representation of a culture – a point that appears to mark a success in the project’s aims.

Rais’s pending project partner, Debbie, had a kindness and calmness to her that reflected similar qualities in Mama. Debbie was most certainly caring but her placid demeanour created questions for us as to how she would play out in the main story-finding process. Yet Debbie revealed in our very first session together that under her quiet exterior she had a peculiar curiosity for the unknown that answered the biggest question of how she and Rais would meet. All participant pairs originated from different locations, but how would a young man from a rural land come to know a woman who lived in the city and worked in hotel reception?

Debbie declared decisively that they would meet in his distant rural setting because she liked to explore faraway places. She embodied what Lauther would describe as ‘The Adventurer’ – with the attitude of ‘nothing ventured, nothing gained’, drawn to ‘possibilities not probabilities’ (Lauther 2004, 148). In real-life it would not be odd for her to travel all the way out to a place like Longido, hoping to find a giraffe somewhere in the sparse, dry countryside. This suggestion and this character trait were in opposition to the traditional characterisation of the African Woman in Western storytelling – her desire for the *unhomely/unheimlich* of adventure and her agency in pursuing ‘everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden’ (Freud 2004, 79) outside the city goes beyond Western characterisations. Debbie’s rural ventures would be distinctive for their purpose of enjoyment, rather than out of necessity in finding herself experiencing the unhomely of a new world through the dislocation of a civil war forcing her ‘migration’. With agency of her desires, the character of Debbie seeks out the unhomely to wander through it for her own pleasure, rather than as a result of a ‘colonial dislocation’ and displacement (Bhabha 1994, 41). She revealed a complex character at play in this one desire to discover how ‘rich and manifold the hidden can be’ (Arendt 2013, 72) beyond the streets of her city home. Debbie had presented the project with an effective challenge to Western concepts of the African Woman.

Later in the Group Focus Stage I would also discover Debbie’s mischievous side. I had suspected she might have understood more English than she was letting on and eventually she revealed to me that she had understood virtually every word I had ever said to her throughout the character development and story-finding stages. While some researchers may have found such a discovery frustrating, I found it fascinating as this was a project in exploring character to reveal complex competition

to the reductive stereotypes. It was also highly entertaining and a healthy sign for the project as it shows a freedom to play. When we completed our individual character development time together I was curious to see how these two characters, Debbie and Rais, would connect. I wondered if perhaps polite, generous Rais and kind-natured Debbie would lack drama in that they would both continually agree to disagree on conflicts of interest and come together without the slightest hint of drama in their narrative to a 'shared self' (Solomon 2006, 24).

As previously mentioned, Zuena the 'girl from Fujoni' was a shy character who would spring to life in flashes of joy and excitement. With regard to other participants she reminded me most of Rais. He too was at times very quiet but would suddenly jump into a conversation or let out a loud approval of its topic. It was difficult, however, to engage Zuena in the open dialogical process (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015) that the Individual Stage had so far relied upon.

It was challenging to learn much at all about her without direct questioning to which she would reply with a brief 'yes' or 'no', or direct, single word answers – even though my documentary training safely kept me asking effective open questions (Rosenthal 2007, 185). She was, after all, an eleven-year-old child, and a stranger coming to ask questions could evoke shyness anywhere in the world. But she knew Riziki well, having spent time with her in the village over the years. Nevertheless, when I removed myself from the situation, leaving Riziki to chat with her, our technique of simply allowing individuals to speak and explore themselves from general conversation topic-starters was still not to be. Fortunately though, this particular stage with the children was beginning after I had completed the Coupled Stages with the adults and I was aware that once left to their own devices, the participants always worked off one another, leaving no reason for my presence or

persistence. Furthermore, Zuena had been far more talkative during her time in recruitment on the mat with the other girl. I therefore concluded there was no need to overly open up the conversation with her yet, as the Coupled Stage would bring about both story and character. But I did ask Zuena how she thought she might meet a boy from town. Her idea, unlike that of the adult couples, was the male coming to the female's lived world. She believed she would find him lost in her village.

Renaldo also had a quiet manner though he was capable of springing into excitement. He was curious and outgoing while skilled at keeping himself from the centre of the social spotlight. He had a confidence about him whenever he spoke, but when not speaking he would withdraw into what could appear as shyness while watching the world from afar. This reclusiveness was just time spent contemplating his thoughts before speaking, as Mama did – the only difference being that Renaldo's body language displayed something of a reticence where Mama's conveyed a calm, wise demeanour. He was an effective challenge to Lauther (2004) and other guides on character traits, as he simultaneously existed as both an introvert and extrovert. Perhaps without knowing it, Renaldo was a master of playing on both. However, as with Zuena, I did not look to pry into an analysis in the Individual Stage as the characters of both Renaldo and Zuena would show through, once away from the physical presence of myself and the team. In their task of exploring the creation of a friendship, the story and the characters would naturally reveal themselves.

For this project to succeed in the Individual Stage, less 'work' done to direct towards 'imagining' or forming a character allowed for an open approach to the Coupled Stage (Cowgill 2010; Lauther 2004). Constraining the team's and my involvement to questioning and reflecting within the 'dialogical interviews' (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015), readied the participants for the exploration of their 'shared

self” (Solomon 2006) story of love. Furthermore, working to develop our researcher-participant ‘relationship’ through the ‘Other-Orientation’ along the ‘Self-in-Relation to Other’ domain and into the third ‘Self-and-Other Linking’ phase facilitated a sharing and ‘understanding’ of our personal lived experiences and the project purpose (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007).

I believe that the most important task of the Individual Stage of this creative model is to develop a relationship for the participant between being within the project and speaking and thinking in a self-reflexive manner in preparation for the reflexive, interpersonal experience of the Coupled Stage. In reflecting on what was revealed of the participants’ characters within this dialogic reflexive method, Watkins’ belief that ‘you can get anything you like’ from the non-professional in a creative endeavour, ‘as long as you handle them carefully’ (Watkins in quoted Rose 1964, 837) holds true to this project’s participatory methods.

The Coupled Stage: Interpersonal in *the alchemy of the moment*

Watkins utilised *cinéma vérité* style and non-professional performers to create ‘an immediacy effect’ where, with a ‘gritty documentary authenticity’, he could render ‘the events of Culloden 1746 as suddenly as fresh and as relevant as a TV news report recently dispatched from the frontline of a modern war’ (Cook 2010, 228). This project, while not looking to create a film, employed techniques to capture the *immediacy* and the *spark* (Rose 1964, 837) of the ‘interpersonal connection’ (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 192) to create a life-work reversal, generating stories of love from the development of our participants’ ‘shared self’ (Solomon 2006). The Coupled Stage was designed to facilitate what Watkins masterfully labelled ‘the alchemy of the moment’ (Watkins quoted in Cook 2010, 233) which *takes over* –

injecting realism into the storytelling craft. The methods of the Coupled Stage focused on facilitating an interpersonal independence and exclusivity for the participants as my role as an action researcher became one of attempting to ‘capture the complex, interactional and emergent nature’ (Cunliffe 2003, 984) of the *social experience* that the participants were undertaking.

As previously discussed, measuring the relationship between participants can best be described by Pitts and Miller-Day’s five phases of intimacy (2007). In the Individual Stage I purposely limited my rapport building with participants to the outer edge of the third ‘Self-and-Other Linking’ phase, where trust is built by ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’ interest in each other (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 192). As the project sought to explore personal lives, it was crucial to enter into that rapport stage where ‘the personal’ is shared willingly with trust and interest from both parties. Although building further on that trust and ‘friendship’ could have offered closer sharing, I was careful to limit myself to a ‘professional’ distance in preparation for the pairing of participants in the Coupled Stage, where they would explore each other’s personalities and lived experiences as they worked to see if romantic love (or friendship) could blossom. In this critical stage, the participants became the researchers of their project partners as they worked to form their own understanding and conclusions on the hypothesis of romantic coupling. Here it was time for me to step back into the role of witness as they took creative and political agency of the project as wholly researching-participants able to exclusively enter the phase of *Interpersonal Connection*:

when the researcher-participant relationship scale was tipped
toward an increasingly personal relationship, then both researchers

and participants were afforded increased access to their lives ‘behind the scenes’. At first, participants and researchers tended to grant provisional access to each other and then, when moving into latter phases of rapport, provided unsupervised access to more private emotions, roles, attitudes, and behaviors. The turning points marking progress into the interpersonal connection phase suggested a movement toward viewing the Other as a whole person and toward fostering a partnership of two unique individuals balancing both personal and professional goals. (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 196)

This ‘fostering a partnership of two unique individuals balancing personal and professional goals’ (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 196) was the key aim of this crucial creative stage. I stepped away, left at an earlier connection and as often as possible physically removed myself from the space so the interpersonal connection and fostering partnership between each set of participants could blossom and then later be ‘carbon copied’ into story. Yet I was careful not to cause an anti-socialising effect by distancing my observer role (Robson and McCartan 2016, 321), so withdrew in a way that gave the participants a greater position as observers of their own process.

The participants needed to first become comfortable with one another, passing through the rapport-building stages with the development of Other-Orientation, Self-in-Relation to Other and Self-and-Other Linking, before their trust, platonic intimacy, and a fostering partnership could facilitate large-scale creative progress. These earlier stages of intimacy and rapport were of equal importance as

they would dictate how their stories would play out. Everything from the moment they were introduced was recorded to capture both the initial settling dialogue and action, in order to inform the beginnings of their stories. Just as Watkins saw the value of keeping apart his non-professional actors playing rival characters, to increase the ‘alchemy of the moment’ (Cook 2010, 237), I too was careful to capture the initial moments where our participants-cum-characters first encountered one another.²¹ Consequently the dialogue within their initial encounters in the ensemble narrative came from these first interactions where, after a brief introduction, the team and I moved away (for approximately an hour), leaving only a small camcorder and sound equipment placed at a distance to capture their dialogue and action.

There was an added purpose to creating (or keeping) my distance. Removing my presence as a resource for answering questions and giving direction further allowed the participants to be self-directing observers (Robson and McCartan 2016, 325). If they had doubts as to what they were supposed to be doing or saying during their time together, they were ‘left alone’ to take agency and decide for themselves, inhabiting the creative process as the *auctōrēs vitae* (Burke 2008, 22) of their own story.

I took the time to frequently encourage the participants and thank them for their invaluable involvement as part of the vital researcher-participant facilitation of ‘reassurance about their thoughts and feelings’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 725). Furthermore, I avoided adding my own thoughts and direction by keeping to regular

²¹ In, *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* (2000), Watkins made a conscious effort to keep the performers playing troops away from those playing rebels until it was time to shoot the crucial scenes of *La Semaine Sanglante (The Bloody Week)* (Cook 2010, 237).

assurances that their characters and stories would be whatever worked naturally, just from them spending time together.²²

The moment participants were together and their interpersonal experience began, the project willingly entered into the unknown. This was the beauty of having a project whose greatest value was within the social experience of the creative collaborative process – predominant over any value of the final creative output (Cunliffe 2003, 985). With no rigorous requirements in character development, plot or story, we were in turn freed of the necessity for a project-micro-managing, directorially-present researcher. This left the researcher within the Coupled Stage as a witness to the process from as great a distance as possible.

As discussed previously, while the project did not set out to physically make a film or documentary, recording devices played an important role in creating a ‘digital memory’ to relieve the incomplete qualities of recollection and issues of the ‘interpretive filtering effect’ (Speer and Hutchby 2003, 316) of note-taking and my own memory. While the team and I kept our distance from the participants, the project required the resource of real-life experiences, actions, and dialogue to feed into story. The Coupled Stage therefore introduced a new method of recording with the participants’ own use of a small point-and-shoot consumer-grade camcorder, a camera they had already developed a familiarity with as it was used as the less obtrusive recording device in the Individual Stage.

As previously stated, it is acknowledged that the very presence of a recording device both signals and accommodates the literal presence and authority of the observer/researcher (Clifford 1983, 118). While I was attempting to reduce my

²² My mantra had become (with a touch of Swahili on the end for ‘no problems’), “what will be, will be. There is no right or wrong. All you need to do is be together and explore what love might be for you – hakuna matatizo!”

physical involvement in the process, I was not seeking to become ‘invisible’.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) reflect on the argument made by Stoddart (1986) that the way for an ethnographer to become ‘invisible is facilitated by participating in the ongoing activities of the participants, without calling particular attention to oneself, rather than adopting the posture of a detached researcher seeking objectivity’ (1994, 67). However, my purposely ‘detached’ position was not to become pure observer but to further facilitate the participants as research enquirers into one another’s stories. I was not looking to be ‘invisible’ just ‘unavailable’. Therefore any authorial presence created by the couple’s camera was not of concern.

I could have further reduced my ‘presence’ and the need for the participants to be involved in the recording process with the use of more discreet ‘forgettable’ devices such as small wearable microphones. However, there were two reasons against this. First, the camera offered the ‘ability to preserve interaction for representation’ (Lomax and Casey 1998, para. 4.1) through a vast array of visual ‘data’ as a window into their personal experience. Second, discreet ‘forgettable’ recording technology creates a lack of authority for the participants. With the physically tangible presence of the small camcorder the participants held the agency to ‘mediate’ the observational presence as they literally held control of ‘the witness’ in their hand.

In the earliest moments of the Coupled Stage, Marie captured this political agency with the saying ‘out of project’. When Marie found Haji was pushing the boundaries of what she felt comfortable saying or doing in character, she would signal that the impending conversation, information, or action, was something to be kept separate by simply saying, ‘out of project’. This occurred both in the presence of the team and in their time alone with just the camcorder in Haji or Marie’s hand –

the recorded footage always stopped within moments of Marie saying ‘out of project now, Haji’.

This saying was later adopted by participants in the Group Focus Stage, however, it was a rare and often in jest occurrence, allowing the camera to capture many ‘in project’ interactions away from the team. Awareness of my presence via this camera was evident as participants sometimes referred to me when interacting with the camera. One such incident took place on an evening when Haji and Marie were on a ‘date’. At one stage during the evening, Haji placed the still recording camera on the table with its lens pointing at the edge of his plate and his soda for twenty minutes. When Marie asked him why he was recording the table, Haji replied, ‘so we can eat our meal, but Brendon can have our conversation for the project’. That evening when Marie and Haji were alone was itself a key method of the Coupled Stage and was purposely called a *date*.

By their third encounter the couples were ‘sent off’ on ‘dates’ without the presence of the team.²³ The inclusion of these ‘dates’ allowed the couples to ‘head out into the world’, further facilitating their interpersonal exclusivity. This offered a space to further increase their interpersonal connection in working towards, what Watkins called ‘a mutually agreed exploration of emotions and feelings’ (Watkins quoted in Cook 2010, 234). These dates further assisted the participants in entering the final phase of research-participant intimacy. Through their dates the participants were able to enter into a ‘high level of open self-disclosure as a focus on the personal, rather than professional (project) relationship,’ which is marked by Pitts and Miller-Day as the ‘Partnership domain’ (2007, 187). The date scenarios offered

²³ The children were chaperoned by an adult for their play outings.

an effective place for the participants to explore, as personal active enquirers, the possibility of romantic connection and the development of a shared self narrative.

Their dates were budgeted for by the project (food and beverages, transportation) but decisions around what the dates would entail were left to the participants to decide. In most cases decisions were led by the ‘host’ participant whose lived world the project was visiting at the time. The motivation behind the chosen outings varied from a participant choosing a restaurant or bar they thought might interest their partner to outings exploring the local world of the hosting participant. At times it was a combination of the two – to combine leisure and an introduction, and *induction*, into the world of the hosting participant. For example, on the first night of our stay in Kizimkazi, Haji arranged for the opening of a restaurant run by members of the village, normally only open in peak season to tourists, so he could exclusively introduce Marie to local food in a private, romantic setting by the beach. While the participants did not use this experience in their story, it revealed characteristics that fed into their imagined characters. This also highlighted the prominence of Haji’s romantic nature and his pride in his community through his choice of an example of his village’s innovative connection between the fishing and tourism industries. With Marie, her enjoyment revealed her love of ‘exclusive’ gestures of romance and her worry at inconveniencing people revealed a caring nature.

Rais and Debbie exploring his home and the bush surrounds before sitting under a tree to enjoy a soda, satisfied both Debbie’s curiosity for nature and Maasai culture, and Rais’s proud connection to his culture and land. In Mwanza, Mr Kulindwa chose to take his partner, Mama, on a romantic dinner at a local restaurant where they could enjoy fresh fish from Lake Victoria, and each other’s conversation.

The *couple's camera*, captured the 'spark' and alchemy of the moment (Watkins quoted in Cook 2010, 233) as these outings directly fed the prose narrative with both dialogue and action.

The children took more to 'play', with Zuena showing Renaldo around the plantations and farm animals while Renaldo introduced Zuena to his pet rooster, Jerry, and the streets around his neighbourhood where he and his friends played. However, play was involved for the adults too, with Haji showing Marie the beaches, trying to convince her to let him teach her to swim. Much to her delight Rais took Debbie to find a giraffe, gifting her his Maasai jewellery as they wandered through the surrounds, shaking their wrists to make rhythmic sounds from the tiny pieces of silver. A trip to a small island on Lake Victoria offered Mama, for whom mobility was limited, a way to explore the interesting rock formations of Mr Kulindwa's natural world.

Providing the participants both distance from the team to develop their interpersonal relationship, as well as authority over their actions, allowed the emergence of both individual character dynamics and story content via the very experience of developing a real-life interpersonal partnership (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 187). Nonetheless, while the camera was present to record the 'minutia of social life', there was a need to investigate the internal thoughts and emotions of each participant, as interpersonal relationships do not entirely take place in what can be seen and heard (Lomax and Casey 1998, para. 1.1). Therefore, one aspect of deliberate researcher-participant interaction took place in what I call 'soundboarding' sessions.

In these I attempted to offer a space to stimulate reflexive 'self-talk' on how they were observing their Coupled Stage interaction developing via occasional sit-

down ‘interviews’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 722). These one-to-ones would often take place at the beginning of a new day before the participants would come together for that day’s activities. I was not seeking information about their time together, but to further stimulate self-reflection by offering probing questions and ‘mirroring’ as a way to sound-board and express their feelings. Mirroring as a dialogical interviewing technique involves simply ‘repeating back to a participant what she or he has said’ allowing ‘the participant to hear what she or he has said as it is expressed by another person’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 725).

As an example, on one occasion when I asked Debbie how she found her time with Rais, she expressed satisfaction in how he took great pride in his family. I asked, ‘you like that he takes great pride in his family?’ to which she replied, ‘yes’, before pausing to contemplate it further. In purposely staying quiet myself, her thoughts developed after a moment of silence, and a further exploration of why she liked it emerged. This led to a more articulate understanding of Rais’s pride and importance in family and her own understanding of her fondness of this character trait. By using mirroring, rather than probing questions that may have led to a sense of an external interrogation into her liking for him, a self-reflection allowed her to articulate this for herself. In addition, this method also provided insights into ways to help collaborators along with their story if they had reached a crossroads. Rather than seeking specific plot or narrative structure objectives, I could just use insights gained in ‘soundboarding’ sessions to help further their conversation on occasions where they had perhaps not had the time to self-reflect.

Linda Cowgill (2010) points to the pivotal development of drama and its link to reaffirming a story’s ideas and meaning:

When we understand that our protagonists and antagonists are people who are shaped by their values and beliefs, we see that they stand for these ideas in drama. When their conflict is constructed in clearly understood oppositions, the ideas behind the story become stronger and more powerful, because they are dramatized in action. (Cowgill 2010, 28)

While a fluid and free character-driven discovery was preferred to any premeditated structure, as Cowgill notes, drama is crucial to any story. It was predicted that drama would inherently occur within the task of finding a way to draw their lives together in an intimate, interpersonal connection. According to Irving Singer, Jean-Paul Sartre's writing, in the likes of *Being and Nothingness* (1969), presents a sense of constant 'interpersonal conflict inherent in human nature' (Singer 2009, 87). This can also be referred to as 'the Ordeal' – a stage where the protagonist 'truly experiences change' (Batty 2011, 66).

However, the question remained – how to find a conflict to meet the inherent human nature of a love story 'Ordeal' that can 'shift in focus from physical to emotional drive' (Batty 2011, 87) when the quest for non-reductive characters and stories might inadvertently resist conflict. Fortunately, the 'soundboarding' technique would provide a first opportunity for conflict and in turn drama, on a relaxed day in the village of Kizimkazi with Marie and Haji. This critical incident provided story, but provides further evidence of the value of the autoethnographic, autobiographical methods used.

My filming partner and second translator, Iddi, and I had reached our second day staying in the village with Marie, whom we had brought from town to spend

some time getting to know *her* fisherman. Prior to this visit they had spent several sessions together. Initially, an afternoon visit to Kizimkazi for their first introduction they spent several hours sitting on the beach getting to know each other via unassisted conversation. This was followed by the first full day they were paired together, freely exploring Haji's village and surrounds and introducing Marie to his world. That day had then ended with their first 'date' at the otherwise closed restaurant. Arriving on the morning after this first full day and 'date', I conducted one-to-one 'soundboarding' sessions, offering a space for them to reflect on that first major day and evening alone together.

Haji revealed that many subjects had come up during their time together, from their studies, to family life, work life, love of popular cultures and beyond. However, it was the topic of marriage in particular that caught my curiosity. Their discussion of it had been minimal, only as a desired outcome in their life path – for both of them, within the next five years. However, my curiosity remained and so I asked Haji about the likely obstacles of their religious differences – which again had occurred by chance in the process of recruitment, not as a deliberate strategy to find difference and drama. Having asked Haji how he would approach marriage across religions, I was then compelled to also ask Marie during her one-to-one. Her answer had crucial differences to his that would require major negotiation, if their story made it that far. Refraining from revealing to either of them what the other had said, or even that anything significant had been said, we returned to the paired interactions.

Iddi had been present for the 'soundboarding' sessions and expressed afterwards that being a similar age to Marie and Haji, and a Muslim from the islands, he found the whole situation of these differences to be very entertaining. He had

previously seen Muslim and Christian people on the island fall in love and marry, but he was unsure how it would go with these two given their strong personalities. He predicted (with laughter) that if they did discuss this then there would be trouble between them. I was of a similar opinion and equally fascinated to see how it would transpire, though I refrained from instigating the conversation.

As time went by, the topic did not naturally reoccur between them, so when we reached the end of their last day together I offered the topic to them. While sitting outside the small, village-owned, tourist cottage where Haji had earlier said Marie would stay when she came to visit him in the story, I asked them both to share with each other their requirements for marriage. This led to a natural unfolding of dialogue and action. A conflict soon centred on Haji's 'right' to multiple wives and Marie's belief in monogamy – or at the very least, equality in polygamy. It was a conversation that rapidly threatened to tear their shared self apart, and held momentum for thirty minutes before a slight lull but soon regained impetus and reached a resolution. A transcript of the conversation is not included here as the dialogue from it feeds directly into the written ensemble narrative – disrupting the plot and pulling the two characters apart in their own 'dark night of the soul' and 'all is lost' plot points (Snyder 2005). At this moment though, Haji and Marie were engaged in a dramatic play of dialogical interviewing throughout the conflict, providing both probing questions and statements, mirroring for further exploration, calling out to expand and complete fragmented explanations, and counterfactual prompting to explore alternative positions (Denzin 2001; Roulston 2010; Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015).

As researching-participants they engaged in a dynamic of both appreciative and dialogic inquiry (Frey 2002, 174) as they searched for further understanding of

the other's beliefs and a transformation towards the requirements of their own – blurring the lines between hypothetical creativity and real-life stakes. This critical incident provides evidence that beyond the role of creating stories, the project's methods provided a unique apparatus for both ethnographic and emancipatory narrative research. Here Marie and Haji fully adopted the roles of Action Inquiry investigators to one another as their conversation and negotiation explored and revealed reflexively generated 'subjective possibilities' (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006, 1024); a process that provided an abundance of autobiographical and cultural insight into the wider discourses and ideologies that shape their lives.

Crucially, the careful facilitation of a development towards their 'interpersonal partnership' (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 192) made such an emancipatory enquiry possible and for their partnership to survive it. The project provided both a safe semi-impersonal creative context to explore their ideological differences while also providing the emotional protection required to explore the subject within the careful development of the rapport of their partnership. From a practitioner's perspective, the ultimate requirement of their story (of love) had been fulfilled in the discovery not only of drama through conflict, but of their antagonist itself – not as a physical character, but as the difference between their belief systems (Cowgill 2010, 28).

Now that Marie and Haji had undertaken – and resolved – a deep conflict, I entered the Coupled Stages of the other two adult pairs with an appreciation for encouraging an exploration of ideological differences in relation to the nature and practice of romantic love. However, in both cases the antagonists would appear in other forms. With Mama and Mr Kulindwa, their rift would come in the form of an external force, which highlights the nature of their relationship to one another and

their respect for the project. While Mama (a Christian) was married to a Muslim man, she retained her beliefs as did he throughout their happy, monogamous marriage. Her story complemented what could be possible for Marie and Haji if their story were to reach marriage. Mr Kulindwa (a Muslim) had only ever had one wife and had had no desire, as he put it, to bring the dramas of polygamy into his previous marriage, nor at his present age of seventy. For Mama and Mr Kulindwa, through patience, respect, politeness, and shared values, there would be no visible conflict.

Herein lies trouble for the contemporary romance where ‘inevitably conflict arises, and the lovers spend a large portion’ of the story ‘trying to work things out’ (Ramsdell 1999, 44). Without conflict the participants might bring issue to the romance ‘genre contract’ which Jameson argues a writer holds with their readers (1975, 135). Though if there were no conflict then I needed to accept that, as this is a participant-character-driven method, not one to be predicated by premeditated structure or formula. However, having achieved Marie and Haji’s drama, I directly suggested to Mama and Mr Kulindwa that they explore what might be obstacles to their coming together. Not an instruction to find a drama as such, but to acknowledge that while love is a positive, it is not an easy road and it cannot always work. Essentially, we were not embracing the storytelling formula’s call for drama – drama was being acknowledged as a natural component of romantic life.

Mama and Mr Kulindwa took time to carefully consider the issue over a date night and morning together and decided their conflict would be externalised. They rather formally announced that the conclusion to their conflict would come from their children disapproving of the newly found love of their widowed parents. They both confirmed that this would be something of a delicate issue if their love were to blossom in the real world, and therefore it was ideal for their story. Momentarily the

project faced a potential ethical issue as real-world people away from the project had just been brought into the story. While we would potentially never meet them, these were real world connections being rendered as antagonists within the story. Mama and Mr Kulindwa astutely decided to protect their children by fictionalising details of their identity such as age, occupation, and marital status.

This conflict was also an issue with the two child participants. In talking to them about how they might have trouble in their friendship, Zuena put forward the idea that her mother might disapprove of her spending time with the boy from town. However, Zuena admitted her mother would not disapprove in real-life, as she is a very giving and accommodating parent. I explained then that this idea would not work, as we needed to make choices that would happen in real-life. In the end, the children decided that distance would be the enemy of their friendship. For them to spend time together they would need to go beyond their comfort zones and *struggle* with the journey, as Zuena does when she rides twenty kilometres to town without even knowing Renaldo's exact address. Distance was a factor for all participants, but for the children it was much greater given their lack of freedom; it worked perfectly as an antagonist to their friendship and correlated with similar adventures of distance in the three stories of romantic love.

In the Coupled Stage for Debbie and Rais, no clash emerged organically. Their personalities and beliefs, while from vastly different cultures, appeared to fit together perfectly. Debbie enjoyed visiting Rais. She felt comfortable with his family in a world far from her own, Rais liked her family and the families appeared to like each other. Everyone around them would accept their love because they would have no choice in the matter. Rais also enjoyed the city and could envisage himself living there and spending parts of his week returning to his home to care for his mother and

contribute to the family. They embodied the perfect coming together of two vastly different worlds into a complex, yet harmonious, shared self in direct contrast to the reductive Western-generated image of Africa's irreconcilable division (Orgeret 2010, 47). For them, like the children, their main challenge would be distance – and Rais losing Debbie's phone number and thus disappearing from her life. However, as it happened, real life directed this part of their story – not a premeditated decision. Another drama of a similar nature also unfolded with Haji and Marie's story. Both took place while I was undertaking the story-editing stage, and reinforced the methodological feature of *life directing story*.

After the Coupled Stage had been completed, and while I was still editing the written ensemble narrative from Australia, two dramas befitting their own separate narratives began to unfold on the other side of the Indian Ocean. As I was nearing the time I would return to Zanzibar and bring everyone to Unguja, I was in contact with many of the participants via WhatsApp – either speaking briefly in English, clumsily using Google translator to have little conversations to maintain contact, or just sending selfies back and forth in wordless communication. For more detailed communication matters I had the team make the travel arrangements for the participants to join us on Unguja island. Unfortunately, when we went to make contact with Haji and Rais, there was no response from either of them.

We were primarily concerned for their wellbeing, but assumed it was due to a technology issue. We were partly correct. In time we would discover that Rais had lost his phone – ironic, considering their story had already seen him lose Debbie's number once. Upon learning that he was missing, Debbie took it upon herself to take a dala dala (bus) to Longido. It was not until she had returned to Arusha that we learned of her journey – having acted independently out of concern for Rais (and

signifying the bond the project helped them form). She had no luck locating him until a second visit (this time with a project-funded driver) when she managed to regain phone contact. He was there and he would join us in Unguja. Most importantly though, we now had a new turn in their story. Where before we had found no ‘internal conflict’ via values or an ‘external conflict’ with other people (Ramsdell 1999, 44), we instead found something more unique –a motif for their story – one of *things lost and things found*, be it giraffes, phone numbers on pieces of paper, phones, the right hotel reception, or lovers. Their story traverses a physical and emotional struggle that, for them reflecting on their story in the Group Focus Stage, shows the world how Africans love, despite differences and struggles.

Resolving the real-life mystery of Haji’s disappearance led to a more radical change in his and Marie’s story. Ironically, my editing had just reached the point where they had overcome the division around marriage and had rekindled something together. Within the romance genre contract our readers were to be satisfied as their ‘hero and heroine reconcile, and their happy future’ was ‘generally assured’ (Ramsdell 1999, 44). However, in remaining with the project’s causal-chain rule that life should dictate story, their relationship would now likely end abruptly and without resolution of their love. When I boarded the flight to cross the Indian Ocean for the Group Focus Stage Haji was still missing.

But as I arrived in Unguja, Haji reappeared in my life via a WhatsApp message. He apologised for not being in contact and explained he was back studying marine biology in Kenya. Both the team and I were pleased to hear he had returned to his studies, and I assured him we understood he could not join the group gathering. I explained that we would work with Marie on their shared story, and that perhaps we would add this narrative of his move to Kenya. He affirmed this idea, but

we agreed to let Marie and the other participants decide if this was right for the story and the project's aims. With that I then waited for Marie to fly in from Rwanda so I could deliver the news that her fisherman would not be joining us in real-life and, by the rules of the project, would also be vanishing from her story of love.

As previously mentioned, our 'elderly' couple presented a development to the project that offered an unusual dynamic in comparison with the younger adult couples. During 'soundboarding' sessions following their first full day together and their first evening 'date', they both expressed the same positive reflections on how they were developing a strong connection and enjoying each other's personalities and company. However, it appeared that their time together was more 'formal' and project-focused than the personal 'play' of the other participants.

Watkins employs a basic framework of his narratives avoiding detailed scripts or laden direction of his performers. He believes that a less professional or formal manner offers 'a greater fluidity and freedom in the creative process' (Cook 2010, 229). For Mama and Mr Kulindwa though, a formal structure and approach offered a way for them to connect. The morning after their first date they both revealed they had directly discussed aspects of what their story would be, having essentially broken the task into story acts. They covered very specific and serious stages of a romantic relationship from first meeting through to how it would end, all during a date that was just meant to be a participant-mediated opportunity for interpersonal exclusivity and relaxation.

Where the two younger couples embraced the experience of being free to 'just' get to know a stranger in these unusual circumstances, our elderly couple's coming together quickly focused on the 'negotiation' of story. Mama and Mr Kulindwa had frequently expressed pride in being accepted into the task of

challenging the Western reductive construction of Africa, and in doing their very best to live up to ‘expectations’. For them there remained a greater focus on the motivation for the project (to challenge the West’s perceptions) than on the method of autobiographically exploring love through *experience* rather than planning. But this was perhaps more a feature of their personalities and a quality in their social standing. As a community leader, Mr Kulindwa was very much focused on meeting agendas and goals. For Mama, as the head of a family and an important figure in her community, both culturally and politically, she took to tasks with clearly set objectives and outcomes. Working with two participants of such personality and lived experience it was made clear that for the project design to work it needed to consider and be flexible to a range of ‘proactive’ behaviours.

Having two highly proactive participants was by no means a flaw or hindrance. These personality features were to be celebrated, adding to the dynamic of characters within the ensemble narrative. Both Mr Kulindwa and Mama presented a stark challenge to the stereotype of the hopeless and helpless African. Although their Coupled Stage was somewhat formally driven, their bond found some intuitive, poetic ideas for their story, especially in the ending – Mr Kulindwa slipping into an eternal sleep, leaving Barak with no father but a new, loving mother.

The Unrequited Men: Phenomenon of the African Woman

Throughout many visits to East Africa I had witnessed the pre-existing *bond* (Kaunda, Morris, and Manley 1966, 32) that reveals itself in the immediacy of new contact between two African strangers. However, yet another excellent disrupter of the Western stereotype of Africans appeared to reveal and reinforce itself in the Coupled Stage: a phenomenon of a silent power of ‘the African woman’ – where

men quickly fall in love then find themselves in a non-reciprocal game. This is in total contrast to the women of Wainaina's guide (2008) and occurred in the real-life interactions of the participants 'out of project', reinforcing the cultural phenomenon I had witnessed throughout my visits to East Africa.

The female participants expressed a playful doubt as to whether 'out of project' love could be possible. All three men, however, doted over their female project partners, willing to continue as much 'out of project' as their characters were 'in project'. In real-life it seemed the men were unknowingly playing their way into the classic 'romantic role' of *the unrequited lover*, 'who chooses devotion over happiness and the certainties of frustration over the possibilities of a real relationship' (Solomon 2006, 226). While it was easy for the men to all accept that their characters could fall in love with nothing more than a glance from their female counterpart, the women insisted that to *fall* there would need to be time and 'hard work'.

This complemented the way the stories themselves begin with the physical movement of the characters. In all three stories, the women would be travelling to the area where they would inadvertently meet the men. However, from there the 'chase' would always work in reverse, with the men falling quickly and the women vanishing from their world leaving them with the 'pure unadulterated' version of love that is 'the unrequited' (Solomon 2006, 85). Again, this was entirely driven by the participants' ideas, and their interactions and behaviour with one another. This phenomenon of the men 'falling' was either a coincidence or the project's creative design had captured a cultural phenomenon that I had witnessed many times.

I had been frequently told by many of my African friends (both male and female) that African men can go a year or more telling a woman they love her before

hearing the same words back – even with full knowledge by both parties that they most certainly have mutual feelings. In consulting with the participants individually, I asked why they thought this phenomenon happened. The male participants at first denied there was a power play but immediately agreed that ‘African women’ hide their feelings. The female participants all insisted that this was a true phenomenon but they could not tell me the how or the why.

A recurring trope in Igbo (Nigerian) romance literature, reflected from contemporary Igbo culture, bestows women with a ‘love medicine’ that leaves them ‘capable of manipulating men sexually and romantically’ (Smith 2001, 142). I attempted to learn more about how this might be in Tanzania. Mama, during a one-to-one session after her second date with Mr Kulindwa, explained that African men believe they are in control and they have power, but that they only believe this because they are led to believe it. When I asked if she could explain further how she went about exerting this power and control – either for the project or off the record – she simply smiled and looked over to Riziki, who explained that I couldn’t know, ‘because you are a man’. This remains my favourite moment in the project: I both discovered and was denied something *unspeakably* significant.

Admittedly, while I do find this ‘phenomenon’ to be of high value to the dissertation, I still find it a difficult subject to describe. First, to celebrate it as unique, denies its global relatability as a ‘mildly tragic phenomenon of *unrequited love*’ that occurs naturally in the power play of romantic love (Solomon 2006, 84). I am perhaps also romanticising and homogenising the African, specifically African women. Furthermore, it could appear as though I am describing, and cautiously celebrating, an immoral, misogynistic pursuit of an unreciprocated love. However, many African women have stated that it is indeed a true (and proud) part of their

interactions with men. African women from across the continent have smiled and nodded with agreement when hearing that Mama once assured me that women have an unspoken social and cultural power over men. At the time she was disclosing that Mr Kulindwa had expressed a desire for their time together to carry on through the night after one of their 'dates' had ended.

While this recurring, critical incident is difficult to describe with scholarly certainty, it is not just an entertaining character dynamic and dramatic genre feature, but also a reflection on a real phenomenon revealed through a process of autoethnographic participation. Simply by bringing the participants together in pairs, the dynamics of their personalities, lived experiences, social and cultural circumstances could naturally generate what the how-to-guides dictate and recommend. Things were slightly different with the two children.

By the time we came to work with the children the methods had been tested with all six adult participants and we were aware of the most successful approaches to use with a variety of individuals and circumstances. Therefore, the children were paired together as quickly and as often as possible. Furthermore, as they were only exploring the idea of friendship, simply leaving them to play and discover in the rural surrounds of Zuena's village and around Renaldo's home and urban environment would inevitably develop their own dialogue and story. This was a fortunate quality of the project's methods as it relates to a key aspect of engaging children in ethnographic research by employing a research process 'in line with and reflective of children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines' and inclusive of 'ways in which children routinely express and represent these in their everyday life' (Christensen 2004, 166). Through the act of play, aspects of their personalities, interests, values, hopes, and emotions surfaced through the presence of

the ‘couple’s camera’ – which was now renamed the ‘kids’ camera’. Just as with our other participants, being from significantly different lived worlds provided them with plentiful conversation and exploration in their socially and ‘interpersonally exclusive’ participation.

To begin the Coupled Stage with the children, we took Renaldo to visit Zuena and *set them free* to explore her village world – with the ‘kids’ camera’ in hand and us adults gone. Removing the researchers/adults was facilitating a ‘fluid’ power dynamic (Christensen 2004, 171) with the physical object representing research – the camera – now being in their control. This dramatically opened up not just their conversation, but their interaction with us when they returned from play.

After they played for some time both in the village, and after our next visit, in Renaldo’s house, we sat down with them and used both probing and mirroring questions about their time together.²⁴ However, while full of life away from our group, they once again slowly became introverts. Being the total focus of attention for a group of adults was understandably a peculiar experience for young children. Within the research space there was a hindrance here due to the issue of power as ‘one of social position with a preconception of children as the least powerful in the institutional settings of their everyday life’ (Christensen 2004, 173). As such it was explicable that it might be difficult for them.

The team and I worked to create spaces where participants felt both ‘comfortable and are not concerned with being overheard’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 729). We chose an apple tree at some distance from Zuena’s home so she could feel confident of not being watched or overheard, and also so that Renaldo

²⁴ I did not begin with the same one-to-one ‘soundboarding’ as we had done with the adults, as I felt that such a process might lead them to a sense of discomfort in being asked to give opinions of one another.

could have the sense of being on neutral ground. Furthermore, in choosing to sit on the mat we worked to ‘minimize physical and psychological distance by dressing similarly to participants, eliminating physical barriers and power distances, and avoiding paying too much attention to notes and recording devices’ (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015, 729). Even though, compared to the adult stories, only a simple, short story was needed, the children’s reserved demeanour would need to be liberated to achieve even the smallest of story developments. Fortunately, the technique to overcome this was discovered by accident in the closing days of the Group Focus Stage when we took a trip to the beach to give the children and the team a break from the work.

Reaching the isolated, tropical beach, the children and I headed into the water. Fortunately, I had taken the opportunity to bring the small couples’/ kids’ camera (which was waterproof) to take some photos and videos to give to their families. To my surprise, for the first time ever in my company in front of a camera, Renaldo and Zuena remained their extroverted selves – playing, talking, and smiling into the camera as they splashed around. However, it was not the smiling snapshots that were of interest to me so much as the dialogue and openness that came with entering the water – where the potentially divisive roles of adult researcher and child participant were washed away. As a result, the development of the children’s story took place almost entirely in one metre of crystal-clear water at a secluded village bay, with Riziki, Iddi and I floating while Zuena and Renaldo pondered and verbalized the makings of their story into the small, waterproof camcorder.

From the moment the participants first met their partners, the Coupled Stage facilitated Watkins’ ‘alchemy of the moment’ to utilise and capture the ‘complex, interactional and emergent nature’ of the ‘social experience’ (Cunliffe 2003, 984).

Through the facilitation of an interpersonal exclusivity that situated the participants as reflexive action enquirers of their own story, the Coupled Stage captured the ‘spark’ (Rose 1964, 837) of their interpersonal partnership (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 192) to create a life-work reversal, generating the development of our participants’ ‘shared self’ stories of love (Solomon 2006). With its careful focus on balancing the development of rapport between the researcher and the participants whilst facilitating a process that would offer a much greater intimacy for their own dialogical process (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015), the project garnered real dialogue and action to feed into the initial writing of their stories.

Furthermore, feedback from members of the local team affirmed that the methods employed had developed strong, rewarding connections between the paired participants – a feature also verbalised by the participants. Their positive experience, and the positive experiences of members of the team, were the most important aims of the project. Centred on a positive and rewarding localised practice, the highest valued achievement at the end of the Coupled Stage was the strength of the bonds formed by the participants. Whilst these did not blossom into romantic connections (much to the disappointment of the men), all the adults expressed the belief that their connection with their project partner was uniquely close. Whilst the end of the Coupled Stage would return them to the large distances that their characters faced in the stories, they would continue a close contact with one another in the months before the Group Focus Stage. As I boarded the plane to Australia I felt relieved knowing that experientially the project had been a success – for the participants and the local team. Furthermore, having received verbal encouragement from all the participants to edit and write up their stories, I was excited about my ‘carry-on’

possession of hard drives filled with conversations, dates, thoughts, and reflections to feed into their stories.

The Story Editing Stage: The observer as co-author

As a story-editor I was tasked with creatively housing the participatory method's four stories into an ensemble tandem narrative (Azcona 2010, 22). Analysis of the Story Editing Stage displays some of its critical features while exploring the ways in which my role moved beyond that of an editor when the requirement for additional characters to support the main characters and their stories arose. The following analysis will consider how, while editing their stories and 'filling the creative gaps', I attempted to follow the objective of minimising the outsider impact by utilising the participatory method's resource of social experiences, at the same time acknowledging my influence as an outside observer-cum-writer of these sequences.

As has been the case since this project first began, the value in the 'experience' of the participatory process has always been more important than the value of the final 'product' of the creative output. As such, an analysis of the content and meaning within the Creative Work: Prose Treatment is minimal throughout the dissertation. However, during the following discussion of my own creative decisions I will critically reflect on my authorial intent in these creative actions and offer feedback and points of view from the participants and the local team – provided during the Group Focus Stage once I had finished this stage of writing from afar.

When the project was set in the smaller geography of Rwanda with a larger time frame for the creative work, the story-edit was to take place while in-country. In doing so, the ability to visit and consult with participants as the process went along

would have offered a thorough, collaborative construction of the ensemble narrative. However, I had to undertake this stage from Australia, before one final trip to East Africa to bring all the participants together on Unguja Island.

I felt quite a discomfort with my sudden relationship to the Western travel writers of the last 2,500 year who frequently scribed fantastical tales of faraway lands from the familiar surrounds of their homelands. I sensed that the whole aim of ‘localised’ storytelling was about to unravel. However, as I began to play back the recordings from the participatory stages I began to feel that by removing myself from the location of the project I was now comfortably enclosed within the recorded happenings.

As noted in Section One, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* was influenced by the memory of his own experiences, written journals, and the ‘interpretive filtering effects’ of those processes (Speer and Hutchby 2003, 227). However, unlike Conrad, I was in possession of digitally recorded direction from the participants, the digitally recorded ‘memory’ of action, dialogue, and a multitude of perspectives, emotions, thoughts, together with the spontaneity of original, *real* people and places. Furthermore, I have the perspective of living in a time long past the colonial days of Conrad’s journey to the continent. Conrad referred to his tales of Africa as the ‘loot I carried off from Central Africa’ (Conrad quoted in Meyers 2001, 153); I left the continent with my ‘ethically garnered’ digital ‘loot’ with which to create stories. I was now *left alone* to use and to tune the digital ‘record of what had happened’ (Speer and Hutchby 2003, 277) with what the participants imagined could happen. Therefore, until arriving at the Group Focus Stage back on the continent, I focused on the recorded results of the project’s methods. I do, however, need to better define my ‘story-editor’ role.

I will continue to use the term ‘story-editor’ within the dissertation, although it perhaps best defines the role I would previously have inhabited had this stage taken place in-country with access to the participants – for regular consultation with those eight ‘authors’. Then my role would have been more of a ‘hired hand’ ghost writer, but now was a much more involved ‘biographer’ role to ‘document and interpret’ other people’s lives ‘from a point of view external to the subject’ (Smith and Watson 2010, 5).

My task first involved taking all the conversations and interactions the participants had experienced with the team and with one another in their interpersonal exclusivity, and using these as a body of material for building the framework of their story. The ‘framework’ of their story had been imagined by the participants during the Coupled Stage. In each case this followed a conventional sequence of life events for a relationship, rather than a technical plot sequence for story. From my working knowledge of the romance genre, it was clear the layout of these real-life romantic relationships indicated they naturally offered themselves to a standard romance plot sequence and so in time would satisfy the *genre contract* with our future readership (Jameson 1975).

With the timeline of their love stories dictated to me by the participants, I could then fill the scenes and sequences using dialogue and interactions from the participants’ time together. Thus I entered into the practice of the biographical method, defined by Denzin as resting ‘on an interpretive process that leads one to enter into the emotional life of another’ (1989, 28). I do not look to problematise my own subjectivity’s influence in this role of editor and writer. I wholly acknowledge that the final ensemble narrative carries aspects of me, such as an obvious male gaze, and I have tried to minimise these. The participatory process and the recorded

artefacts of the process from which I drew dialogue, action, scenes and scenarios, offered the participants' own subjective and intersubjective (Denzin 1989, 28) account to *transcribe* and counter, as much as possible, my own subjective interpretation. I am certainly undertaking the biographer's role of *interpretation* in working with my experiences with the participants and the recorded artefacts as I was always working from the lens of my subjectivity as I 'entered into the emotional life' (Denzin 1989, 28) of the participants through their interpretation of what that emotional life would look like in story form.

My role then is that of a biographer 'assisting' a set of autobiographers whose 'lives' and identities as characters have been formed from the resource of their reflexive 'life narrating' (Smith and Watson 2010, 5) throughout the participatory method. Furthermore, if I had misrepresented them, they would be able to adjust or *re-interpret* both their characters and those of their partners in the Group Focus Stage. Therefore, in the time before we would all be together, I undertook my story-editor's task of biographing. I began the writing process with my own outsider input via the prologue that situates the reader as 'arriving' in Africa.

The opening sequence drifting over clouds, ocean, and eventual land, attempts to offer a sense that in beginning the act of reading, a reader arrives onto the continent. The purpose is to inscribe the significance of coming to this mysterious 'dark' land, – which, as the sequence illustrates, is not dark but in fact rich with colour, texture, and civilisation –. and drifting peacefully onto what is misconceived as violent and erratic. The Western stereotypes are, and will remain notably absent. As a frequent traveller to East Africa I continue to feel the same significance when gliding from ocean onto *the Grandmother Land* (from which we all came) as I did the very first time I saw that land mass some fifteen years ago. Perhaps this *arrival*

sequence signals the story is intended for a non-African readership. However, the project aimed to create a work that is as much for outsiders as it is for an East African readership, both in English and Swahili. The participants themselves communicated their understanding of the need for this sequence and while there is a consideration to remove this sequence for versions of the story produced for any African distributions, no feedback given by participants and local team suggested it hindered their initial experience of the narrative. Therefore, it will likely remain in any versions distributed on the African continent.

Having now *arrived* I began weaving the four stories into a *tandem narrative* (Aronson 2010), choosing to see how the four stories and eight characters played out beside one another, rather than perhaps first writing them as separate stories and then weaving them together. In terms of ‘weaving’ I looked to allow the four stories to unfold their own way without directly drawing the narratives into one another but allowing principles of tandem narratives to create a sense of narrative harmony. As a tandem, or ‘parallel’ narrative (Batty and Waldeback 2019, 195), the stories are interconnected through their themes and also run parallel to one another (Azcona 2010, 22), at times following similar plot points while at others branching out to very different experiences of love and loss.

I chose a process of fluctuating back and forth between their stories without any concern for making them ‘thematically’ align, as taking such authorial control would deny participants the development of their stories. I was fortunate that each of the four stories began with one participant travelling to or suddenly arriving in the region of the other. I was therefore able to begin with the simple idea of travel or arrival for each and then undertake a randomisation of shifts between stories. Since the children’s smaller friendship tale presented a way to move into the grown-up

romances, the stories began with Renaldo having ‘arrived’ under the mango tree. Having arrived first in Africa and then under the mango tree with Renaldo, the readers experience further movement as the three women begin their journeys. The reader joining the characters on their purposeful journeys creates a simple yet effective opening challenge to the idea of the *trapped* and *stagnant* African character – similar to that of Wainaina’s *the Starving African* ‘who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West’ (2008, 93). From there I next randomly chose from the three travelling adults, and continued with the same ‘order of appearance’ as the narrative moved back and forth between their stories.

I kept the process as simple as possible to avoid any deep thinking of careful ‘Westernised’ plot formulas (Cowgill 2010; Snyder 2005). It quickly became clear that there were patterns in the three romance stories – such as the initial chase of about the same effort (by the males) and then similar burdens or obstacles at similar stages in the early development of their bond. Without having to create thematic similarities to link the ensemble, the natural flow of their approach to romance was offering connection between their stories. And these stories were forming into the Western concept of romanticism with which I was already familiar. I can only speculate that this comes from the influence of Western concepts on these regions of East Africa through colonial process (Singer 2010). Throughout the project there was no specifically unique local concept of love or romance culture that differed from my own (outside of the cultural practices of Christianity and Islam). One commonality the participants all seemed to share (both with each other and with me) was the general concept and expectations of romance and romantic practices.

As the scenes and scenarios took form from the content of the digital artefacts, I noticed additional ways the work could present a challenge to negative

Western stereotypes. They came not so much in the obvious fact that the people in the stories were not gaunt and starving, but rather through relatabilities within their character traits.

Through the process of writing, the intricacies of the participants' personalities revealed a clear challenge to the perception of the reductive Other that could *capture* the reader's interest and *hold* their attention in the story (Maslej, Oatley, and Mar 2017, 1). Connecting and relating to the characters in the act of transferring the intricacies of these real people into story was an energetic experience. One example was Debbie's curious nature that had her casually climbing from a dala dala in the middle of seemingly nowhere. I reflected on her blasé explanation that she would do this in real-life. Debbie here reveals a characteristic of *determinism* that Eakin describes as, *lurking* 'at the heart of our identities' characteristically associated with 'values of freedom and autonomy' (2008, 88). Debbie therefore offers a values-based relatability to the reader as she takes her curiosity for life into her own hands.

As the work of the participants turned into written story, the project's methods proved an ability to generate a set of both relatable and highly entertaining characters and stories. Nonetheless, as I continued drafting the stories, I was aware that they were moving too easily, or too unrealistically, through both the character and narrative arcs. There were 'creative holes' in their stories, leaving obvious flaws in the causal chains of each narrative.

Becoming the Autoethnographic biographer: Additional Characters

As I worked to edit and transcribe the eight characters and stories together there was a noticeable lack of agents for motivation, action, or change. Working

alone, the characters would be travelling through the story lacking support for their journey. Therefore, as the need arose, I set about creating new supporting characters around the autobiographically generated ones. But whereas a writer might add supporting and additional characters ‘to give further depth, colour, and texture to the story’, the main purpose of the additional characters in the ensemble narrative was as ‘support’ for the already broad ‘palette’ of our eight main characters (Seger 1990, 97). Where the eight characters were purposely driving narrative rather than existing as *functionary actants* (Warhol 2012, 119) in a predetermined plot structure, the new additional characters were there as *functions* – ‘helping to define the protagonists’ role conveying the theme of the story’, and most importantly in, ‘helping to move the story forward’ (Seger 1990, 98).

In generating these additional characters from my social experiences of being in East Africa, I was now also a ‘life-writer’ (Smith and Watson 2010, 5) – though somewhat hidden amongst the pages, not behind my own *mzungu* likeness, but within the experiences the main characters would have with a myriad of characters related to my own experiences and interactions over my years visiting East Africa. As I have discussed in Section Two, I regularly struggled between my reflex-like desire to film my experiences and my resolve to avoid the ethical misconduct of pointing the lens where *informed* consent had not first been granted. However, as I began to write these additional sequences the anguish of years of not being able to cinematically-document my experiences and the people I met along the way suddenly passed as those experiences and people found life in these new sequences and supporting characters.

The following is an analysis of a critical selection of the characters created to support our eight protagonists. While the dissertation cannot accommodate all the

characters created, those not discussed below were created under the same circumstances and with the same creative intent.

Haji's Rasta fisherman friend

Haji's fisherman friend who assists in the progress of Haji and Marie's story by prodding him to go to town in search of her was directly developed from several circumstances. The character originates first from the recruitment of Haji. A Rastafarian fisherman – and friend of Haji's – was one of the three young men on the porch who decided which of them would join the project. Second, the character's behaviours, values, and expressions are based on my Rastafarian friend, who had acted as my guide and translator during my time in Rwanda. Each sequence is inspired by my conversations with Haji and my own times spent discussing love and life with my Rwandan friend. His dialogue is fictional, but its style and messages relate to conversations and experiences from 'soundboarding' sessions with Haji.

The Boys on the step outside the shop and the 'Zanzibar circle'

The sequence of the boys on the step rescuing Haji when he gets lost amongst the streets of Stone Town relates to my own Zanzibar experience. Getting lost is an experience familiar to anyone visiting Stone Town – be they an Australian tourist or a Zanzibarian who did not grow up amongst the ancient buildings. The children's and Haji's experiences of walking in a loop came from my own experience one evening in Stone Town. I realised I was lost when, after ten minutes of walking, I passed a group of young boys on a blue step for the second time. They kindly helped me find my way out of the maze, with their large personalities imitating those of men all the way.

The boys' dialogue and attitude towards women was inspired by another experience. One day, while floating in the water off the shores of Stone Town, I had a fascinating and eye-opening conversation with a group of local boys who were talking about a Kenyan girl swimming nearby. Culturally speaking, the conversation enlightened me as to how the children who played in this town developed their immature attitude towards relationships with the opposite gender, long before puberty had reached them. They played a game of being men rather than boys when interacting with each other. For myself as an 'outsider' to Zanzibar, these boys were *the eccentrics* – characters displaying 'behaviour that is decidedly different from the norm' so as to 'raise giggles or cause smiling heads to shake good-naturedly' (Lauther 2004, 157).

Giving Haji the sequences with the boys offered a way to bring across his own outsider status within the city and to further his own reflexive conversation about the girl. This would continue as other characters playfully tease him throughout the story. During the Group Focus the participants described these children as entertaining, funny and helpful to the progress of both the story and the challenge to empty, characterless stereotypes. The boys on the step have a crucial function in assisting Haji in his search, but additionally play an excellent role in offering more depth, character, humour, and culture of Zanzibar to the *palette* (Seger 1990, 145).

'The Kenyan Friend': Marie's work friend

The idea for a work colleague to help Marie move towards Haji came from the existence of her real-life work colleague – though the character is not based on the real person. Long before Marie had joined the project I had spent several

evenings socialising with her and her Kenyan work colleague. My relationship to Marie's real-life colleague was as no more than an acquaintance. Not having experienced enough time with her to know her personality, I felt it was better to change the character entirely – except for the job. Therefore, I created the personality from a variety of anonymous people I had met along the way. Her character admittedly exists as what Geraghty warned can be a 'playing-card' character – existing to serve a *function* to Haji and Marie's story (1995, 41). With *the boys on the step* already adding a large, additional character presence just outside her office I felt it best to limit the involvement of any more functional characters in the physical space of her workplace and story. As a result, like other minor characters in the ensemble narrative, she plays an important role but remains a minor, background character.

Debbie's dala dala conductor

Debbie also finds herself interacting with the more colourful characters that often fail to find their way into the Western narratives of Africa. The bold, loud-mouthed dala dala conductor is a familiar character in my travels, and for anyone who has spent time around the public transport systems of East Africa. These conductors operate as the calling cards for their buses. The boisterousness of the character acting as if his dala dala is a stage and the pedestrians and passengers his audience is a common experience. However, to draw more realism into his character (even if just for my own benefit) his dialogue is based on conversations and interactions I had with a member of our team and several other young men –all of whom were forever *dreamers* of their own romantic pursuits (Lauther 2004, 157).

The Old Man on the dala dala on Haji's way to the party

Lauther's character type of the 'eccentric' (2004, 157) that the boys on the step inhabit achieves its full maturity in the old man whom Haji comes across on his way to the all-important party with Marie. The character is derived from several encounters I had with older men in Kigali and Stone Town. Additionally, his dialogue about the 'thick legs' is from Mr Kulindwa, who explained the ideal kind of woman for him when it comes to body type – a 'larger' lady with 'thick legs'.²⁵ As was the case with the fisherman friend, in creating Haji's reactions to this caricature of a man I used both actual dialogue and the 'rhythm' (Seger 1990, 173) and style of talking that Haji used when interacting with some of the more boisterous members of his village.

By including some of the dialogue Haji had shared with me about pursuing and courting a woman, I was able to inject autobiographically-generated dialogue and character into a fictionalised scene that acted as an important moment in the project's mission of revealing the complex, variant, and entertaining characters of East Africa. I could perhaps have continued Haji's journey without any need for the old man, as he influences neither Haji's actions nor the plot. But as I continued to develop these additional characters and scenes, I saw great value in how they added to the 'palette' (Seger 1990, 145) of personalities and experiences within a 'real' African narrative.

Writing these additional characters gave me a great deal of pleasure in feeling 'unpressured' by how 'well' or accurately I wrote their dialogue and actions. Because they were not identifiable participants, I did not concern myself so much with representation of their individual identities. This is quite different to

²⁵ Incidentally, Mr Kulindwa laughed when this line within the narrative was read out.

representing real people and their dialogue – as dialogue conveys attitudes and intentions in ‘revealing’ the character (Seger 1990, 173). This was the reason for the method of capturing the dialogue and action of real interpersonal interactions. As I continued to write and edit the stories into the tandem narrative, the digital resource of dialogue and action from the participatory stage began to run out. Yet I was not completely without ‘assistance’ from the project’s creative design and practice. To set up the reasoning for scenes and the outcomes of any causal chains within them, I had the framework dictated by the participants. I also knew their style of speaking from the time spent with them and what was available in digital record. While I had run out of spoken dialogue to transcribe into written word on the page, the characters had been ‘revealed’ (Seger 1990, 173) by the recorded artefacts of the interpersonal connections the project’s methods had created.

At the Group Focus Stage the participants found the portions of their stories that I had created to be ‘a good fit’. Furthermore, the team, who were not restricted by the same cultural and language barriers as I was, felt the prose treatment had captured a real familiarity of the participants in their written characters. Nonetheless, as I boarded the first of two flights for my return to Zanzibar, I had yet to receive that feedback. In just a few days’ time I would nervously begin narrating the prose treatment to the real-life individuals who autobiographically generated its eight main characters.

The Group Focus Stage: A final return to the participatory

The Group Focus Stage would test my interpretation and writing of the participants’ characters and stories and reveal if my own observations embedded in the additional characters and sequences were as legitimate as if observed by the

participants themselves – rather than this *mzungu* from afar with his albeit romantic, Western post-colonial gaze.

Once we had discovered Haji was in Kenya and would not be able to return, the first order of business was to discuss with Marie and the other participants how this would change their story. They agreed collectively that there could still be a ‘happy ending’ even though it was heartbreaking for their relationship.²⁶ All the stories themselves naturally play into the melodrama and soap opera style of contemporary romance genre. Ramsdell argues that the soap opera genre’s focus on ‘the vicissitudes of life’ allows them to not always find happy endings for all their characters (1999, 49). The doyen of melodrama, Douglas Sirk, describes happy endings as expressing ‘the weak and sly promise’ to the viewer ‘that the world is not rotten and out of joint but meaningful and ultimately in excellent condition’ (Ryan 2004, 1). Where melodrama is made up of the dramas of everyday real-life, Sirk advises that you ‘have to paste on a happy ending’, because the ‘audience doesn’t want to know it could (itself) fail’ (Sirk quoted in Halliday 2011, 119).

The circumstances affecting Haji and Marie highlight how this project’s process naturally leads to a melodrama style because their story was generated from the realities and inevitable possibilities of the *vicissitudes of life*. The purpose of this project to express positive realities of Africa could, however, be damaged by a broken romance. Certainly, Haji and Marie’s story now reaches ‘loss’; but it is not generated by any aspect of the negative stereotypes of Africa. It is in fact the opposite. Haji’s need to leave for his university studies in marine biology is the

²⁶ This activity also spurred an interesting discussion in the Group Focus stage around how long it would take each person to overcome a romantic loss. It revealed interesting differences in the participants and particular places where coping mechanisms varied from outright denial of emotional connection to more mindful practices of grief. It once again showed a similarity to Western post-enlightenment concepts of romance that were automatically playing out in the participatory process.

binary opposite of a reductive African tale. Additionally, the two characters' ability to reconcile and be happy in his good fortune leaves the reader with a 'feeling of hope for the future' (Ramsdell 1999, 49). Furthermore, their version of a happy ending between the characters is one found through a mutual respect that is not 'pasted on' or unwarranted.

For the Group Focus Stage the participants all stayed in one large house on the island of Unguja, spending time on the project and generally socialising. To begin I narrated the tandem narrative of their four stories to them in short sequences. Between each narrated sequence I scribed, via video recording, as the participants took on roles as negotiators, critics and consultants of their own and one another's stories. They were also consultants of my work as their biographer. Their discussions, observations, and negotiations were directed at both the stories and their real-life beliefs, values, and actions driving those stories. Since my role was to facilitate their time and space, I strived to offer enough time for this crucial conversation during the daily reading of the narrative, by stopping the narration at the end of each character's or couples' chapter point.

The participants gave positive reviews of the additional characters and sequences created to assist with their main stories. All five adults present at the overall narration frequently displayed a strong interest in the entertainment value of these additional characters and expressed the view that they appropriately represented real-life characters who exist across East Africa. The absence of Haji was disappointing. However, the other participants and members of the Zanzibar team confirmed that the interactions he had with the additional characters were very familiar to interactions between urban and rural Zanzibarian people. Marie found the representation of her work-colleague/friend to be accurate, without being too similar

to the real person, and also ethically sound. Debbie confirmed that the dala dala conductor character's energy and nature was true to that of many Tanzanian conductors she had interacted with. The overall conclusion from the participants was that these additional characters and sequences were 'a good fit' – meeting both the story's needs and the project's desire to effectively represent East African characters.

Beyond the additional characters there were, of course, the representations of the main characters themselves. The feedback from the participants was again positive and reassuring – my editing and writing work had represented them in a very familiar likeness, both in action and in dialogue. There was only one incident that seemed to require a change. In the narrative Marie does not reply to Haji's first ever text message (sent within minutes of getting her number). However, Marie claimed she would have replied to him, straightaway or within an hour – and have been very 'straight to the point' because for her it was 'no big deal' for him to have her number, as it meant 'nothing special' at that time and it would just be a part of her day-to-day socialising.

Here, the importance of the observation of dialogue becomes clear. Perhaps I had misread Marie as being slow to communicate with men she had just met. Yet Marie had in fact told me during the Individual Stage, that generally, if she liked someone she would wait a day or two before making contact. I reminded her of that when we were discussing this particular point in the story and she explained that she would not make him wait in this circumstance. It became clear in our conversation that she valued Haji receiving the simple words of a quick reply as it was important in revealing something of her character (and in turn the real-life Marie) – friendly and respectful. However, in the story she found her silence was effective, driving him to come to town, so decided her text message reply should take several hours,

and be kept to a short ‘thank you Haji’, so as to leave the more elaborate details of Haji’s original message not fully responded to. This example shows she felt a genuine connection between her own identity and the representation of her ‘fictionalised’ character. Within the conundrum of representing real people there was an interesting habit that took place on occasions throughout the entire creative process. This was a frequent negotiation of what is real and what is fictional, of what is possible for the stories, and what perhaps is impossible in real life. Or, to use Marie’s language for signalling differences – a negotiation of what is true ‘in project’ and what is true ‘out of project’.

There were occasions where participants were allowing some things to occur in the story that would otherwise have not occurred in real-life. I was only made aware of this when I posed the question of whether they would follow the developing storylines of action-reaction in real-life. In a balancing act of wanting the best for the story and staying true to self, the participants were clearly undergoing a negotiation of their own real-life wants and desires. When I asked Marie (during the Coupled Stage) if she saw their characters falling in love, she said ‘yes.’ When I clarified whether she could see her real-life self ever falling in love with Haji, she replied that she did not. I explained that if this were the case it would not be a problem for the story as the aim would then be to learn how their friendship might otherwise develop. Marie later expressed the view that, given the way she and Haji discussed and negotiated during the critical incident of ‘conflict’ over marriage, she could see the possibility of a happy life with Haji – and that (if the circumstances were right) she could fall in love with him.

Interestingly, the discussion of *in* and *out of project* became a regular topic of enquiry between participants, both during the readings and in the evenings away

from the recording equipment. The participants sparked conversations in which they quizzed each other regarding actions they would take in real-life and in the story. At times, Mama led the discussions, conferring with the younger women about how long they would take to respond to male enquiries – be it after the first exchange of numbers or in the midst of drama and conflict. She explained her conviction that there was no real need to wait or to play games. For me, the researcher, this highlighted the fact that she and Mr Kulindwa had never used any interpersonal power games in their story. For them games were not something their generations bothered with. In reflecting on this at the completion of the project, it reveals that I was perhaps misreading their approach to the project as ‘formal’ when in fact it was as natural as their approach to real-life love would be. A simple openness about feelings and emotions, and a conscious dialogue working out what that relationship would look like was simply their effective interpersonal communication.

As previously discussed, there were no clashes of belief for Rais and Debbie allowing their drama to be dictated by real life events such as missing people, phone numbers or lost phones. However, on day four of the Group Focus they did find a cause of opposing views – Maasai boys being circumcised during the coming of age ritual.²⁷ Debbie was respectfully against the practice. Her reasoning was that if she were to have a son she would not want him to go through the pain and trauma. A conversation then unfolded between Rais and Debbie about what would happen if they were to have a son. The negotiation went on with other participants offering their thoughts, but the conversation was very much driven by and focused between

²⁷ I note that only male circumcision came up in conversation. We had previously been discussing Maasai culture and Rais had explained what happens when going through the rite of passage to manhood. He explained how he had to stand perfectly still, not moving or flinching, while his foreskin was cut off. Female circumcision would have been explored here and included in their story had it come up. However, it did not come up and I did not feel it was appropriate for me to purposely inject it into their conversation, which was driving itself.

Debbie and Rais. This generated an additional story about overcoming this conflict with Rais convincing Debbie that she would need not worry about such a ceremony as he would personally ensure any sons were circumcised in the hospital in the first week of their lives.

Final reflections from the Participants

When the reading of the ensemble narrative and its many accompanying discussions had come to an end, I asked the five adult participants to reflect on what they believed was most important about the ensemble narrative and what perhaps had missed its mark. There were no elements raised as being misrepresentative of characters, people or places where the stories take place. One critical point that I queried with the participants (that I continue to assume is an issue at play) concerned losses to translation. Both linguistically and culturally I am certain much was lost in the back and forth translations taking place throughout the creative process. However, there was nothing the participants or local team could pinpoint as a stark example, so perhaps, by their absence, those things lost are comfortably imperceptible. I hope that beyond this candidature, translation to a Swahili text will be able to restore some of what was likely to have been lost by using the recordings from the participatory process alongside the final English text.

The participants cited several specific elements that they found to be essential. The ‘chase’ the men went through with the women, and the times when this chase was reversed, as happened for Marie and Debbie, were seen as vital features. Everyone believed Haji needed to have that struggle, so Marie would take on the role of travelling and ‘wanting’ when his contact ceased. So too, Rais needed to make his long journey to town and to sleep in that park. It was something he said

he absolutely would do, and that he would most certainly not tell Debbie he was going to do it, so that she would not feel guilty – and because it would be no problem for him to sleep in the park anyway. Mama and Mr Kulindwa needed to have their slow-moving development together, revealing the respect and ‘old fashioned’ ways of their ‘courtship’. They too needed to experience the pains of distance between their two cities, like Rais and Debbie’s yo-yoing back and forth between each other’s worlds.

The adult participants voiced that it was crucial to have the continued drama of the pursuit and the ranging motivations that would lead them back and forth between each other’s worlds, because the drama of this ‘pursuit of love’ brought out the best in their characters. Drama was important to the aims of the project to present an alternative narrative of Africa to that of the dominant non-African image. None of the conflicts and roadblocks in the story are unique to Africa and neither are they signs of poverty, disease or any other *realities* of the *Third World*. Of equal importance, is that the drama, conflict and roadblocks the participants faced were overcome with compassion and mutual respect. The notion of helplessness and hopelessness and the idea of absolute tragedy in the never-ending conflict that plagues the dominant Western view of Africa is both literally and metaphorically absent in the melodrama of their everyday life experiences of love and friendship. I join the participants in believing that these stories give the value and entertainment of the romance genre without the reader requiring the usual African additives of war, disease and corruption.

At the end of the Group Focus Stage, the participants gave me their full permission and blessing, along with notes of guidance, to complete the sequences we had compiled in synopsis form at the ends of their stories. They further instructed

that they need not be consulted again and looked forward to the final stories – which I promised they would receive, in Swahili, as soon as I could financially facilitate the translation after this PhD candidature is completed.

After taking everyone to a beach at the northernmost tip of Unguja to relax and enjoy swimming and drinks, we had one last large meal together before the participants began to leave on flights back to their different parts of East Africa. Once they had left, we then turned our attention to the children, who had joined us occasionally throughout the five-day reading, though only to socialise, as their story was yet to be fully developed. We were to complete that in the final two days of my time on the island – and as mentioned, mostly while sitting in the ocean with them playing around Riziki, Iddi, and I.

The work with the children was minimal, as is the case with their story. They provided the wonderful little circumstances that have them on a similar back and forth journey as their adult counterparts. I built their dialogue from their conversation while playing in the water, as well as from their play in Zuena's village and around Renaldo's home. Then at the end of my final full day, Renaldo joined us in taking Zuena back to Fujoni. I said my final goodbyes to the many friends the team and I had made in the village over the year or more I had visited there. It was the most appropriate place for my time in-country to come to an end.

Conclusion: Life directing story

Once back in Australia I used the additional direction given by the participants throughout the Group Focus reading to complete the construction of the narrative as it is now presented. Unfortunately, I was unable to arrange for Haji to read the narrative during the final work of this candidature, and as it stands now on

completion, his feedback is still not included. However, he did verbalise his wishes for the project to go ahead with his content included and any further creations made at the discretion of Marie and the other participants.

I do not wish to make a final analysis on how successful the stories may prove to be in giving a non-African readership a genuine challenge to the negative portrayals of Africa. This is not out of a fear of its analysis ‘sacrificing the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor’ (Ellis and Bochner 2006, 440) but rather just a focus on the importance of the process to the creative output. With regard to that ‘process’ I believe the aim of the project to provide a rewarding social experience to its participants, its local team, and the communities involved has succeeded. This is measurable by both the quality of the stories and the new connections that have been made between communities and individuals who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to come together in such a uniquely interpersonal way. I was (and remain) careful to not assume that as a researcher I have improved the conditions of the participants’ lives (Smith 2012, 175), I know only that their experience in the act of participating was a rewarding one.

The project model itself has proven to offer a unique way into the lives, cultures, thoughts, desires, beliefs, personalities, and stories of a range of people in a relatively short amount of time. Through a careful use of self-reflexive critical awareness-in-action (Reason 1994, 325) the localisation of the vetting process for research sites and the recruitment of participants, the project began a process of localising ownership to relinquish the researcher’s agency (Banister, Bunn, and Burman 2011, 78) and provide important insights and decisions that positively enriched the project’s outcomes. In the Individual Stage, the development of a dialogically reflexive practice (Way, Zwier, and Tracy 2015) with the participants

generated a great deal of knowledge about the individuals and prepared them for the all-important Coupled Stage. Moreover, an active monitoring of the development of researcher-participant rapport to build a productive social environment carefully ensured the participants could develop a closer interpersonal connection (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007) as action inquirers within the Coupled Stage.

A focus on the creative possibilities of the ‘alchemy of the moment’ in the Coupled Stage facilitated and captured the ‘complex, interactional and emergent nature’ of the ‘social experience’ (Cunliffe 2003, 984). In doing so the creative model facilitated and utilised the socially unique ‘spark’ (Rose 1964, 837) of their interpersonal partnership (Pitts and Miller-Day 2007, 192) to create a *life-work reversal*, generating their ‘shared self’ stories of love (Solomon 2006, 24). The Coupled Stage not only found creative value in the ‘output’ of their stories, but further offered its participants a rewarding life experience of developing a unique bond with another individual – with whom all stated they would stay connected *for life*.

Then, when left to write from afar, the collaborative participant-driven methodology provided me with a unique body of recorded witness to their process to develop the likenesses of their selves and their ‘shared selves’ in the ensemble narrative in a way they found to be correct and fitting. I believe the creative process has achieved what it needed to achieve, and that the creative output provides an entertaining and insightful window into a world too often portrayed with a metaphorical and/or literal darkness. If the creative output can entertain its future readership as it provides them with insight into the lives of this group of East African characters – both real and imagined – then I believe this project has been a success. Nonetheless, there are relatable character traits and story features within the entire

narrative that a readership anywhere in the world might find familiar to their own lives or surroundings. As a practitioner, I leave it to the reader, however, to take ownership and interpretation of the stories. Though in coming to the end of the creative participatory work, bad news had met all members of the project.

Several months after the Group Focus Stage, I received word that Mama Agnus had suddenly passed away. The news devastated everyone involved in the project. We mourned the loss of Mama and I continue to do so as I go about the work of completing this dissertation. To complete this project without her presence in the world is heartbreaking. There was a question of whether the project should continue to follow its method of *life directing story*. Should I change the ending of Mama and Mr Kulindwa's story as it had now changed in real-life? In a short time I reached the decision to not change Mama and Mr Kulindwa's story. I believe that *life directing story* had been highly effective in creating something as true to life as possible, and had been a rewarding process to adhere to – even with Haji's sudden exit from the narrative. That particular change was only possible because the participants involved in those changes could voice their approval of the changes. While Haji had left Unguja and would not be joining us, he was still within contact and so could give his blessing for the change to his story.

The passing of Mama Agnus brought our interaction to an end. While I will maintain contact with her daughter so that Mama's connection and dedication to the project is honoured, without Mama we cannot in good conscience change her story. Therefore, Mama Agnus and Mr Kulindwa's story of love continues to end with him passing away in his sleep with their happy ending grounded in the knowledge that while Barak has lost his father, he has gained a loving, caring Mama.

To acknowledge Mama's passing, when the final sentences of the narrative have been read or the screen fades to black, there will be a dedication to Mama, *'who left this world just two months after we gathered together to read these stories.'* Even if she did keep those secrets of the power of African women to herself.

Conclusion

This project set out to not only answer the call but to interrogate my process of reacting and acting on the hearing of that call. It was hypothesised that a participatory story-finding process could answer the call to present a non-stereotypical representation of Africanness. It was further proposed that a longitudinal, self-reflexive study of the very attempt to answer the call would benefit multiple fields of study, production, and industry that inadvertently find themselves perpetuating the reductive stereotype of Africa and Africans.

The dissertation aims to offer an assessment of the experience of hearing the call and absorbing the dislocating effects of its disruption to my millennia-old Western lens. It further offers the self-reflexive unravelling of the ethical and moral dilemmas of a researching practitioner who until hearing this call had been trained to *help* and *tell* the stories of the disenfranchised. The creative methods were designed to subvert – as effectively as possible – the impulses of a Western characterisation of the African by *localising* political agency through collaborative participation. The dissertation articulated the experience of hearing the call through Mwenda's (2007) discomfort with the traditions of the Western *view of Africa* – expanded by the work of Abani (2007), Wainaina (2008), Mudimbe (1985, 1988, 1990, 1994), and Achebe (1977).

Section One offered the experience of unpacking the creation of the 'character' of the African and "Africa" that has left the continent perpetually trapped in inverted commas – in desperate need of studying, civilising, converting, enslaving, saving, controlling, or helping. With my understanding clear on the origins of the call and its purpose, Section Two arrived at a need to turn the critical evaluation onto myself as I entered into an ethical and moral self-reflexive process.

The section offered insight into the critical self-reflection of being left with a need to re-evaluate the ways in which I interact with the people and places where, as an outsider, I work in emancipatory action research as an autoethnographic, participatory storyteller. As well as offering an exploration of the implications of the *Othering* of the African, Section Two brought into prominence the anxiety and apprehensions I had about perpetuating the *Othering* that hinders healthy non-colonising collaboration. Section Three, through a selection of critical incidents, offered a retrospective self-assessment of this endeavour while reflecting on the guidance of practitioners and theorists of emancipatory action research and post-colonialism. The section provides insight into the participatory experience of both the eight main participants-cum-authors-cum-characters as well as the participation and insights of the local team involved in this openly collaborative process. This final section attempted to assess the most valued outcome of the project – the experiences of the people whom it attempted to bring together in an intercultural collaboration. It was this process, rather than the final creative output, that from the very beginning was most valued.

I cannot evaluate the true nature of this project's ability to dismantle the reductive Western narrative of Africa via the final creative output. That is something to be experienced individually by its readership. I do not believe it is my place to declare the ensemble narrative a success. My interest was always in the process that led to the final output – not the output itself. I believe that, as the first of many projects I will undertake in a continued attempt to answer the call, the creative praxis and my self-reflexive development have been a success. I am now a very different storyteller and researcher to the one who sat in front of Mwenda's talk in November of 2012. Furthermore, those involved in the project shared the unique experience of a

variety of different perspectives, cultures and the intimate, often unspoken nature of the ways in which we humans love. However, one experience at the end of the project encapsulates the quandary of answering the call amidst the pain and suffering the West has caused in Africa over millennia.

At the end of Section Three I described how on the final day of the project Riziki, Iddi, Renaldo and I returned to Fujoni to drop Zuena home and to make my final goodbyes to the many people I had come to know over the years. It was the most appropriate place for my time with this project on the continent to come to an end. This was a time and a place for joy and celebration. However, there would be no celebrating. What instead happened is crucial to my final reflection on what answering the call means both personally and professionally to anyone who might choose to answer or amplify it.

As we said our goodbyes we were hit with news that polarises the ethical dilemmas I had faced in attempting something ‘positive’ in a world still experiencing those realities that the reductive image of Africa exclusively portrays. Something that is of use to this scholarly text – but not beyond its pages – will now be explained. A little girl, named Nadrha, whom I had known and played with during my years visiting Fujoni, had just died from a chest infection. I felt a double tragedy in the news of her death as had I heard earlier, we could have saved her life by providing the money (approximately AUD\$150) her family had not had to send her to hospital for treatment. However, no one had told me or any member of the team that she was sick. While perhaps the means to save her had been there in my traveller’s debit card, we had not been asked to help. And so she had died while we were making our ‘positive’ stories of love and friendship.

After years of focusing on the deconstruction of reductivism, romanticism, the depersonalisation of African characters and the homogenising of Africa, suddenly in the moment the work was done, a child was gone through circumstances of poverty. As we drove back to town in silence, I wanted to call out to the Western world – to use every form of social media and news media I could access to tell the world that a little girl had died in our unjust world. That everything colonialism had done to Africa had just been done to this little girl. That her death was *our* fault and *we* did not do what *we* could do to *help* her.

I felt a need to do something, to say something. I could make a video, I thought.

I had a picture of her, because a year earlier I had taken photos of the kids around the village and had them printed for the families to have in their homes (having noticed there were no family photos). I could use the picture of that little girl looking up into my camera with her large brown eyes to emphasise the tragedy of the past, present, and future actions of the non-African world to exploit, repress, and kill the continent's children through both direct and indirect action.

Over the years devoted to the project and not discussed in the pages of this dissertation, death was a recurring reality. Either the loss of people I met along the way or the horrors of the Rwandan genocide or casualties from millennia of colonisation and homogenisation of a continent of diversely complex and cultured peoples. On my first day on the continent for this project, I had stood in the national genocide memorial in Kigali in front of a giant print of a little girl, no older than three, 'who liked rice and milk and was killed by being stabbed through her eyes'. That little Rwandan girl's smile and her large eyes came back to me as I

contemplated the photo of Nadrha – for me, the entire experience of the project was now bookended by the deaths of two little girls.

But in having set out to answer the call years earlier, the decision had already been made long before Nadrha's death and the sight of the little Rwandan girl – such events would not play a role in any projection of the work to a readership/audience. If I did that, I would be reinforcing the reductive image of Africa and Africans and in turn leaving the ensemble narratives as 'optimistic spin' in a land of helplessness and hopelessness. Rather than what the ensemble narrative actually is – a set of stories and characters that authentically represent truths and circumstances of Africa – patently other than the one terrible truth and circumstance that tragically made its impact on Nadrha's young life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Creative Work: Prose Treatment, *East African Stories of Love*

East African Stories of Love

Imagined by:

Debbie, Haji, Mama Agnus, Marie, Mr Kulindwa, Rais, Renaldo, and Zuena

Edited and additional writing by:

Brendon Briggs

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High in the sky an aeroplane drifts.

White clouds below; a perfect, brilliant, blue sky above.

From a passenger seat inside the plane, the gentle sensation of it beginning to descend precedes any sight of the cloud floor. Until eventually the metal bird touches the white cotton landscape, slowly disappearing into it as the blue sky above vanishes in an all-encompassing, beautiful world of light.

Though soon the blue returns. Only this time, it is below.

A brilliant, blue sea below a perfect, white, cotton ceiling.

And then something else. A white triangle on the blue sea.

The sail of a dhow boat.

A small white sail in the middle of a giant blue ocean beneath brilliant white cloud.

It drifts along the blue. As if pointing the way.

The way where, a short while later, the blue ocean is cut with the white of a shoreline.

Land. A coastline of rich oranges, greens and reds.

Africa.

Slowly the ocean is replaced entirely by land. A land beginning to take on signs of life with one small roof, then two, then three spread out. Then four and five—increasing until, finally, an urban sprawl of tin, tile, cement, roads, cars, bikes, trucks, buses, and of course, people. The urban world below grows as buildings reach up to the sky—small houses then giants of glass and steel at the centre of a large city that rises from the cement and bitumen earth, shimmering glass and steel.

Past the glass and steel giants the ground comes closer, as does detail of the world below.

Clearly visible additions—on the moving, living, breathing canvas below.

People in a giant, sprawling market. A myriad of colours in the clothing of the crowd and the stalls they move between.

Reds, greens, yellows, blues, pinks, purples, and orange. An endless array of brilliant, bright materials moving among tables of vivid, brightly coloured fruits and vegetables.

Suddenly, the market is gone—replaced by a field.

And then by the white lines of a bitumen runway.

Lastly, the wheels touch, the speed slows, and the metal bird comes to a halt.

Africa.

The Boy Under the Mango Tree

Large plump mangoes filled the giant old tree, towering high and broad over a small boy staring curiously up at it.

A ten-year-old boy in his yellow, green and blue soccer uniform, under the huge mango tree at the edge of the quiet Zanzibari farming village.

Sun filtered through the old giant's canopy of green, spotted with the yellow and orange hues of hundreds of mangoes—each ripening at its own pace.

The boy stared on with a relaxed interest.

“Hello,” came a girl's voice.

Debbie

Mount Meru rose high into the sky, watching over the bustling city of Arusha, Tanzania, where a young woman, Debbie, stood on the edge of the road, looking across at the busy central *dala dala* (bus) depot.

As she crossed the road amongst traffic, Debbie waved to a boy rattling coins in his left hand to draw people's attention to the wide-weave basket filled with cigarettes and snacks in his right. "Hey! Can you please tell me which one is the *dala dala* to Longido?"

The boy stopped the rattle of coins and pointed his chin to a *dala dala* across the opposite side of the busy square.

"Number 453," he said before tilting his head forward and gesturing with his eyebrows at the contents of the basket. Debbie picked up a small plastic packet of peanuts and dropped more than enough shillings into the boy's hand.

The boy nodded without looking up, "*Asante* (thank you)."

"*Asante sana* (thank you very much)." Debbie watched as the boy disappeared into the crowd with the rhythm of rattling coins in his hand trailing off with him.

"*Namanga! Namanga!*" shouted a young man hanging from the door of the Number 453 *dala dala*. His voice hollered loudly, competing with other sounds and other conductors, to find passengers wanting to travel in the direction of Namanga out by the Kenyan border. Loud and confident—until he spotted Debbie, smiling and walking towards him.

"*Nama—*" he fell silent. His face became stupefied as Debbie smiled right at him as she emerged through the crowd. As she stopped and stood, he blinked... and blinked again. Then finally repeated his call, but as a question, with a low, stumbling, distracted voice, "*Nam...ang...ga?*"

Debbie had a different question. "*Longido?*"

With that he leapt from his dazed state with an excited, broad smile, "Yes, yes! *Longido!* It's on our way to Namanga!"

He jumped from the doorway of the *dala dala*. "Please, *karibu* (welcome)! *Karibu sana!*" he gestured to the doorway, "Please. *Karibu sana.*"

Smiling wide, with dimples in her cheeks, Debbie began to climb into the back of the *dala dala* but the conductor spoke out, "No, no! Please!"

He gestured to the front of the cab, “A woman of your beauty should most definitely sit in the front. Please. Please sit here so you may be comfortable and so the world may see that this dala dala is the dala dala of queens!” he grinned, standing proud, before yelling out to a young guy sitting in the front seat, “Hey, brother! Come on, move to the back! That seat is taken!”

With a coy smile and a bow of her head, she thanked him and climbed into the front seat, settling in before smiling politely at the driver who only nodded at this new companion.

Mama Agnus

Mama Agnus, a sixty-year-old woman, dressed in wonderful greens and blues, with her hair fanned out around her head ready to be styled, sat at her dinner table in the suburbs of Dar es Salaam with her twenty-two-year-old daughter. In front of them was a dish of spiced chicken mixed with a large array of colourful vegetables.

“Have the liver, Mama,” insisted her daughter.

“No, you have it, my dear.”

“No, you are travelling, you should have it. Please, Mama.”

“Okay then,” Mama took the small liver in her fingers. “Asante sana, my daughter.”

Marie

In the back seat of a taxi driving through Kigali, Rwanda, Marie, a young woman with short curls dyed strawberry blonde, leaned forward to look out the windscreen while directing the driver.

“You can go around, maybe,” Marie’s hand snaked through the air, showing the driver a suggested route through the traffic, while her mother sat by her side. They had left the front passenger seat empty to make the most of what time they had left, before reaching the airport where they would part ways for longer than ever before. Their fingers interlocked as they held hands one last time before Marie flew away to the distant Zanzibar islands.

“Did you pack everything?”

“Yes, Mama,” Marie kept her gaze out the windscreen.

“You be careful there,” her mother warned. “Many of the men on the island are from the mainland. They are not good men.”

“Uh! They have no chance with me, Mama!” Marie replied with confidence as she patted her mother’s hand.

The Boy and the Girl under the Mango Tree

Far from home, the young boy in his soccer uniform looked in wonder at the mangoes high above.

“Hello.” The voice pulled him from his mango trance. A young girl of his own height was standing under the tree. She was draped in yellow and blue *khangas* that framed her face and hands.

“Hey, *mambo* (how are you?),” he asked in slight surprise.

“I am fine,” she replied. “How are you?”

“I am fine too.” The boy blinked.

The breeze in the coconut trees around the giant mango tree rustled.

The girl looked the strange boy up and down.

A distant cow mooed.

The boy blinked.

Some nearby chickens clucked.

A goat called out from afar and the coconut trees rustled some more.

“I am Renaldo,” the boy finally said.

“Like the soccer player?”

“Oh yes,” he grinned. “But better.”

“I am Zuena.”

“Like who?”

“What do you mean?” Zuena frowned.

“Who are you named like?”

“Like me. I am Zuena, like me, Zuena.”

“But better?” Renaldo grinned as they continued to stand there at a distance but still both under the broad canopy of the giant, old mango tree.

“Why are you here?”

“Hmmm. Well,” he looked around. “I think I might be lost.”

“Lost?”

But the boy didn’t seem to mind. “Yes. I had a football game. And when I was out on the bench I was bored so I left and went for a walk... and now I am here.”

“Lost here?”

He looked around again. "I suppose so, yes. I was looking around at all the things and looking up at the trees and then..." he turned right around, "...and then I was here."

"Oh."

"Where is here?"

"Here?"

"Yes. Here. What place is this?"

"You are in Fujoni... My village."

"Oh," the boy looked around again at the little huts and the fields beyond them. "Okay."

Zuena was unsure how to take his behaviour. He was clearly lost. But he seemed completely relaxed without a care at all. Just curious about everything around him. But it was getting late and there wasn't time to spend with a stranger in the dark.

"It's getting late. Where are your parents?"

"I don't know, probably at home," he looked up to the darkening sky, relaxed and content in his predicament. "I came with friends, but they would have gone back now."

"Back where?"

"Back to Kwahani. My home. Outside the capital."

"Okay. How will you get home?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, still relaxed, still standing in the same spot where Zuena had found him.

"Do you need to eat?"

"Yes... I suppose I do."

"Well," Zuena pointed to the horizon, "the sun is setting. You need to go home."

The young boy looked to the horizon where the sky was changing colour. "Yes, I probably do."

"Okay, I have to go now." Zuena began to walk away.

"Oh," he craned his neck along the direction she was walking. "Where are you going?"

"I have to go home. It's time to eat and my mum is expecting me."

“Okay,” he shrugged, as he finally moved his feet from the spot where Zuena had found him. “I can come with you?”

“Come with me?” Surprised, she stopped in her tracks. “Why come with me?”

“Because we know each other now. And I don’t know anyone else,” he gestured out and around the quiet village where not another person could be seen.

She paused, looking the boy over. He seemed to not understand that being lost was not a good thing for him. But he clearly needed help. “Okay,” she finally said, much to his smiling delight. “You can come. My mother will know what to do.”

“Asante sana, village girl,” he beamed.

“Village girl?”

He nodded with a grin.

“Okay, town boy,” she replied as she walked away from the mango tree through the middle of Fujoni with the lost boy from Kwahani following her—a big smile on his face as his eyes explored the new world of this farming village surrounding him.

Debbie and the Dala Dala

Debbie gazed out the window as the dala dala left the bustling station of Arusha and began its journey along a main road through the city and out onto the highway towards Kenya. She felt free as they passed a huge crater, signalling she was now beyond her familiar urban world. Her eyes shone at the silhouettes of three young Maasai boys standing atop the edge of land that millions of years ago had been forced skywards. They appeared like tiny toy figurines against the enormous, broad wall of the crater. The sight held her imagination until a voice drew her back into the dala dala.

The young conductor leant through the centre console to talk to Debbie. “Why do you travel out here?”

“I am going for a walk,” Debbie replied politely, as people in the back of the dala dala called out for him to notice a young man who wanted to get off.

“A walk? On your own? Out there? Ah! You are crazy, my dear,” proclaimed the conductor. “A lion will eat you!”

A yell came from the back of the bus, “There are no lions out there, you fool!”

Annoyed by this sudden interruption, the conductor swung around only to meet the man who had been wanting off the fast-moving dala dala for at least the last kilometre. “Can you please stop the dala dala now!”

The driver pulled over. The man got up, slapping the coins for his fare into the conductor’s hand. But then grinned as he climbed out the door. “She will never want you if you don’t show her you are a professional at your work, my brother.” His observation met with a roar of laughter from everyone on board, except the conductor. Even the driver bellowed. But the conductor waved off everyone’s glee as he coyly returned his attention to Debbie. “Why are you going to risk your life, my dear?”

“I just want to explore,” Debbie gazed out at the now broad, red–green landscape stretching to the horizon she had spent all week thinking about.

Mama Agnus and the World Below

Mama Agnus watched out the window as reds and greens passed below patches of soft, white cloud. As the plane passed over the savannah, Mama spotted herds of animals, like tiny ants. She wondered what they were. Perhaps zebras, running along a dusty plain? Then larger grey spots—fat grey ants moving slowly amongst the patches of green. Elephants roaming for a place to eat, like specks of grey paint on a red-green canvas.

A short while later, as the plane drifted under the clouds and tilted to one side, the world below began to reveal even larger grey spots against the red-green canvas. But these were fixed in place, not roaming for food. Huge boulders. And next came the roofs of houses placed almost impossibly amongst hills that were not so much hills but piles of boulders, where houses balanced on the least precarious of precarious places. Mwanza—a town of hills and large, round boulders rising from Lake Victoria. As the plane reached the edge of the small city centre and began its approach, the rocky, suburban landscape framed the waters of the large bay where Lake Victoria stretched to the horizon like a giant inland sea. It was as if Mama Agnus's flight east had reached the Atlantic Ocean—not the middle of Africa.

After landing and passing through the small airport into a waiting car, the boulder-covered hills with teetering houses along the main road now towered above Mama as she looked out the window. Peering further skyward, Mama caught the familiar Mwanza sight of a flock of eagles circling, their eyes fixed on the ground below, in search of prey.

Settling into her hotel room, Mama Agnus took a large wad of papers from her bag before picking up her mobile phone. “Yes, my daughter, I have arrived safely.” She inspected the gold-wrapped chocolate on her crisp hotel pillow. “Yes, my dear, all is fine. I am just going to take a nap and then I will head to the conference dinner.”

Goodbye, Rwanda

Climbing from the car, Marie put on her large sunglasses as she looked up at the international airport terminal in front of her. Her mother climbed from the car too. “You are going to be late, my dear.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Standing at the entrance to the terminal, mother and daughter embraced for a long moment.

“Take care, my dear.”

“I will, Mama. I will call when I arrive.”

“Call every day, my dear.”

“Of course, Mama.”

And with one last smile they released their hands and Marie rolled her suitcase into the airport, disappearing into a crowd of Chinese tourists—fresh from filling their cameras with pictures of gorillas.

At the border control counter a young immigration officer furrowed his brow as he grinned at Marie, “Oh, why are you leaving us?”

“Work experience,” she stated nonchalantly. “For college. At a travel agent.”

The young man behind the counter raised his eyebrows, “Ah! A beautiful woman for a beautiful island!”

“Uh!” Marie shook her head with a roll of her eyes. “Oh my god.”

“Well, please, please...” With a final grin he stamped her passport and wished her safe travels. “Please don’t let Zanzibar take you from Rwanda for long.”

“Okay, immigration man.” Marie shook her head once more as she took back her passport and headed to the gate. “Bye-bye, immigration man.”

Cassava Ugali and the Mystery Boy

On the island of Unguja, Zanzibar, Renaldo, the little lost boy, wandered along behind Zuena, the village girl who had found him under a tree. As he followed, he took in the sights of her small village, Fujoni, in the fading light of dusk until she stopped outside a small tin building with a tin roof.

“This is my home.”

“Okay.” Renaldo stood with his hands in his pockets as he waited for whatever it was that would come next.

“Okay.” Zuena was unsure what to say to this boy who was so relaxed. “We can go in now,” she added, somewhat awkwardly.

Inside, Renaldo discovered a cement block house of three rooms with white painted walls. The first room was a kitchen, where a woman, Zuena’s mother, stirred a pot over a gas hot plate.

Zuena explained that her mother was cooking vegetables to go with *ugali*. She only looked up from her work of stirring in the spices when her daughter asked her if Renaldo could stay for food. Looking to see who this Renaldo was, she saw a young boy with relaxed eyes, his hands in the pockets of his soccer shorts.

“Of course,” Zuena’s mother smiled at the boy. “It will be ready shortly. Welcome, Renaldo.”

“Thank you,” the boy’s tone and body language were tranquil.

Zuena looked to Renaldo. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Renaldo replied.

“Okay,” said Zuena’s mother, unsure what more could be added, before the two children wandered back outside.

She didn’t give it much more thought. She was too busy with the food and assumed the boy must have needed food since he was here now with her daughter. Probably a new friend visiting family in the village, she thought, as her daughter and the boy with the calm manner sat outside, talking.

Renaldo told Zuena about Jerry, his pet rooster, and explained that he lived next to the big fairground where all of Zanzibar’s roller coaster rides and other rides were.

“There is a big Ferris wheel too.” His pride was obvious. “You can see it from my home! And... also... from up on the Ferris wheel, I can see my own mother in our yard!”

He was clearly very pleased with himself, Zuena thought. Though she was impressed too, having never seen a Ferris wheel in real life, let alone lived right next to one.

“It must be amazing to live by a Ferris wheel!”

“It is!” he agreed. “Though you have to pay to go on it. And it isn’t covered in free mangoes.”

“Free mangoes?”

He nodded seriously. “Here you have free mangoes everywhere in your trees. I would prefer free mangoes every day to an expensive Ferris wheel once a year!”

“Oh yes.”

“Though really, it would be good to have both.”

Zuena thought for a moment about the problem of choosing between a free mango tree and an expensive Ferris wheel.

Her mother called out from inside the house, “Okay, children!”

“The food is ready!” Zuena jumped to her feet.

Moments later, laid out in front of Renaldo, were two pots of stewing vegetables and some ugali.

“This is the ugali we make here in the village.” Zuena pointed at the clumps of doughy, light-yellow food. “It’s very special.”

“Yes,” the mother placed a hand on her daughter’s back. “We make it with cassava here in Fujoni.”

“It looks yum!” Renaldo’s eyes were filled with hunger.

“Do you eat chilli?” Zuena asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“You are welcome,” Zuena’s mother gestured across the food as Renaldo dived in, scooping vegetables onto a pile of ugali in his bowl.

The two children fell completely silent as they ate. The mother, having served her portion, paused to look at the boy before eating. For the first time she was wondering who he was and where he had come from. She didn’t ask straightaway, considering perhaps it would be unfair to interrupt him when he was clearly so hungry.

“It’s very nice,” the boy said, sucking in air to cool his mouth.

“You are very welcome, Renaldo,” her mother said before choosing to begin questioning her daughter. “How did you meet this boy?”

“I found him.”

“You found him?”

Zuena watched the boy scoffing the food with his fingers. “Yes, over under Bibi’s mango tree.”

“Who does he belong to?”

“I don’t know... he lives in town. By the fairground. With the big Ferris wheel.”

“He’s visiting family?”

“No.”

“No?” her mother looked at the boy and decided it was time to ask him. “My dear boy, where are your parents?”

“They are at home, I expect,” the boy explained casually without turning his attention from eating.

“Who are you out here with?”

“I am here,” he looked up from the food, “with you and Zuena.”

“No, my boy. Who is it that you are out here in our village to visit?”

“He is not here with anyone, Mama. He got lost and he was just here.”

“He isn’t meant to be here?” Zuena’s mother’s eyes were wide as she looked at the boy.

Her look and her tone shocked Renaldo. In an instant his sleepy eyes widened and his relaxed figure tensed. “I am sorry. I did not mean to be where I was not meant to be!” As strangely as he had appeared, he ran out the door, disappearing into the night, leaving Zuena and her mother sitting in surprise.

Debbie and the Goat

Debbie, dressed for town, took a water bottle from her handbag. She stood amongst the sparse, small, dry trees on the grey-red powdered ground. The highway was now far from view.

Just a few minutes ago she had politely asked the driver of the dala dala to pull over. The driver had been unsure, as they were far from even the nearest village on the long drive to the Kenyan border.

“This is not Longido!” called out the conductor, his head craned out the window of the dala dala. “This is nowhere!”

“This is just fine,” a relaxed Debbie had replied as she climbed from the dala dala. Everyone inside, including the otherwise chatty conductor, sat in silent intrigue as this city dweller stood on the side of the highway in the middle of a vast, open land rarely visited by either city people or rain.

“Asante sana,” she had said, placing the coins for her fare in the conductor’s hand before wandering away amongst scarce trees and shrubs.

And so there she was, sipping her water as she peered into the distance, as if looking for something in particular. Putting the bottle back in her bag, she decided on a direction and began to walk.

Her shoes made a dull, padding noise in the dust, disturbing the silent air. Fine dust lifted around her shoes in puffs of soft, red-grey clouds, like an astronaut’s boots on the moon—ash-like moon dust... if an astronaut were to wear low-cut green, red, and blue beaded shoes for their stroll around a distant, dusty planet.

The city-dwelling ‘astronaut’ wandered amongst the trees for some time, seemingly alone in that distant world—until she suddenly came across a goat, casually meandering along just as she was.

It stopped to look at her.

She stopped to look at it.

And then said sweetly, “Hello.”

“*Baa,*” replied the goat.

It started chewing something hidden in its mouth as it looked up at the woman.

There they remained for a long while, sharing mutual silence, until eventually the goat decided it was done chewing and done standing, and wandered off in the direction it had been travelling. Debbie took her time, remaining motionless as she watched the goat wander away. Once it was gone, she continued on in her own direction. Soon she came across a little lizard basking in the sun.

It looked at her; she looked at it.

It was a mix of colours: bright-red head, deep-blue body, and light-blue tail. Colours so bright and rich it could be mistaken for a gelatine lolly.

Debbie's eyes smiled as she greeted her new friend, "Hello."

It stuck out its tongue and hurried away. She watched it go, admiring the track its swaying tail and tiny feet left in its wake. As her eyes followed the tracks she heard a distant, momentary jingle.

Like tiny bells... chiming... for just a moment.

Scanning the horizon through the sparse, dry trees she saw no sign of anything but more sparse, dry trees. The stillness continued. So onwards she walked.

But then again—the jingle.

And again. Gentle, tiny chimes.

Every time she heard it and stopped to look around, it stopped too. As if it existed only when she moved. And so, with a gleeful smile, she continued on.

After five or six jingles and stops, she found herself making a game of it. A way to play with that mysterious sound.

Step, step, jingle, step, jingle. Stop. Silence...

She soon had a rhythm going, as if the very movement of her body were controlling an instrument hidden somewhere out of sight along the breeze.

Step, step, jingle, jingle, stop.

Step, step, step, jingle, jingle, jingle, stop.

Step, jingle, step, jingle, step, step, jingle, jingle...

Stop.

Now her attention was drawn elsewhere. To the ground. Something certainly unrelated to the sound. Something in fact that might just be the thing she had come looking for—large tracks dug into the sand by a large animal. Something much bigger than the tracks the lizard or the goat had left.

Debbie looked in the two directions the prints travelled. She pondered which way the thing she was looking for had gone. There was nothing in view in any

direction. For someone who spent most her time treading on pavement and bitumen these tracks were not easy to decipher. But she was starting to glean that perhaps the deeper side of each print might be pointing the way to where she needed to go.

“Hello,” came a voice.

Startled, she looked up and around, but there was nobody there.

“Hello,” came the voice again—this time clearly from behind. She turned around.

Her eyes went first to the ground where they found shoes made of tyres and beads. Rising from them were the skinny legs of a tall, slim Maasai man wrapped in a red shúkà, with a large, happy smile on his face.

“Hello,” she smiled.

“How are you?” he asked, looking at her, intrigued.

“I am good, how are you?”

“I am fine.” The Maasai frowned with curiosity as he leant on his long spear-like stick, “but you look lost?”

“No,” she looked around. “I don’t think I am lost? Am I?”

He shrugged, making the jewellery around his wrists chime like tiny bells.

She smiled at the source of the mysterious sound.

He smiled.

And they stood there as still as the trees around them. He wondered what had brought her out to this spot. She wondered the same of him.

“Have you seen my goat?” he finally asked.

“I don’t know? What does it look like?”

“A goat,” he held his hand out, at the height of a goat.

“Aren’t there many goats?” she smirked.

He seemed quite serious though, tapping the top of his own head. “This goat has a brown spot on its head.”

“Oh yes. I saw him over there,” Debbie pointed back over the shoulder of the young Maasai man.

As he turned to look, Debbie looked at the small, silver pieces hanging from blue and white stones strapped to his wrists. The pieces swayed back and forth, chiming a gentle chime.

“Thank you, city girl,” he finally said, turning to leave.

“You are welcome, Mr. Maasai.”

Though he stopped in his tracks. “It’s a girl.”

“What’s a girl?”

“My goat... You said he. Was it a he? The goat you saw?”

“I don’t know.”

“You couldn’t tell?”

“I don’t know.”

“It didn’t have...” He awkwardly raised his hands in front of his chest
“...breasts?”

“Um...” she couldn’t control a large grin at the sight of this young Maasai man holding his hands in front of his chest, causing his jewellery to jingle as his hands bobbed up and down.

“Or balls?” he continued while lowering his hands and bending his knees slightly as his hands travelled to a generous amount of space just below the knees— instantly generating a burst of laughter from Debbie.

“I didn’t look!”

The Maasai let out a giggle as he straightened up, his jewellery jingling as he moved. “Okay... probably her then.”

“Probably,” she agreed.

A silence descended between and around them.

The silence hung in the air, cut only by the chime of his bracelets, anklets, and the necklace hanging down the red shúkà cloth that covered his chest.

But finally, they spoke, at the same time.

“What?” they asked.

“How?” they enquired.

“What do you—?”

“I’m just looking—” she said, before they both returned to silence, waiting for the other to resume.

Finally, he spoke. “What are you doing away from your city?”

“I’m looking for a giraffe.”

“Ah.” He nodded, hiding his surprise.

“These are giraffe tracks, yes?” Debbie pointed to the tracks she had been examining before the jingling Maasai man had turned up.

“What makes you say that?” He walked forward to the tracks, closing the gap between himself and the mysterious, curious woman from the city.

“Well, they look a bit like your goat’s footprints, in the shape,” she tilted her head. “But they are big, and very far apart. So, I thought maybe this is a giraffe.”

“Maybe it’s a very tall goat?”

“Oh... well,” she replied, with a wide-eyed, sarcastic retort. “That would be nice to see.”

“That would be dangerous,” he stated seriously. “A goat that big... No,” he shook his head, “that would mean it was time to run and hide.”

Debbie chuckled before turning her attention back to the large tracks of either a giraffe or a giant goat.

“Are you trying to work out which way this giant goat has gone?”

“Yes, I am. I think...” she paused looking both ways, “I think it’s this way.” She pointed one way.

“Oh yes, why is that?”

“Because... Because of the way the print dents are deep there.”

“Yes, you are right.”

“I am?”

“Yes.”

“Oh good!” She rolled back on her heels with pride.

“Yes,” he continued, “they do dent the ground there. Which means the one that made them is that way,” he stated, turning and pointing the opposite way.

“Oh,” she lowered her gaze to the prints, disappointed but clearly intrigued to be learning. “Of course, that makes sense!” she looked back at her own prints and the placement of the deeper dent in them. “Do you think the giraffe is far?” her tone was wistful.

“Possibly. It has probably gone for water if it’s going that way.”

“The water is far?”

“Very far,” he shook his head, emphasising how *very* the very far was.

“Very, very far.”

“Oh... too far for me to walk?”

“Well... It is already too far for you to walk where you have walked to here, yes?”

“Not at all,” she stated with obvious confidence. “What is your name?”

“I am Rais,” he proudly straightened his already very straight posture.

“Nice to meet you, Rais. I am Debbie.”

“Nice to meet you, Debbie. Very much,” he replied with that same shake of his head, emphasising how *very* the very in very much was.

“I’m going to try and find the giraffe.”

“You will get lost out there,” he warned.

“No, I won’t.”

“Why not?”

“I can see Mount Longido over there,” she pointed to the distant mountain rising from the flat surrounds. “All I need to do when I am done is walk back to there and I will find the highway and the bus.”

“Ah, very good.”

“It’s not difficult,” she stated nonchalantly.

“Maybe, but it is difficult if they have gone to the water.”

“Why is that?”

“Because the water they have gone to is so far that you will not be able to walk there and back to Longido before night has arrived and there is no way home.”

“No dala dala?”

“No, it will be too late.”

“Oh...” she was clearly disappointed.

“And also, there are lions.”

“There are lions!” Her eyes were wide—more excited than frightened.

“No,” he grinned. “No lions here.”

Debbie looked out in the direction of the tracks.

“If they haven’t gone to water though, they might not be far.”

“Not far?” Debbie’s eyes lit up.

“Yes. Not far.”

“How long should I walk before I know it’s too far?”

“No more than a little while.”

“A little while isn’t far!”

“It’s getting very hot. And you are already so far from Longido.”

“I am? No, that is okay though. The heat is no problem.”

“You have no water.”

“Yes, I do,” she took the small water bottle from the small bag slung over her shoulder.

“Thank you for your help, Rais,” she bowed her head slightly. “I hope you find your goat.”

“You are going?”

“I am, yes. As you say, it’s getting hot, so I will go find the giraffe.”

“Okay, let’s go,” he announced with a nod as he began to walk ahead.

“But your goat?”

“My goat will be fine. She is not from the city. I will find her later.”

“Okay, thank you, Rais.” Debbie’s feet sprang with joy as she caught up to her new guide.

Debbie and Rais followed the giraffe tracks for longer than what Debbie had imagined a little while to be. They mostly walked in silence. Once walking, it seemed to Rais that Debbie was happily occupied wandering along the track. So the young Maasai just watched her, trying to read this strange city woman so far from home. He watched as she happily padded her feet on the ground making the dust rise higher. He smiled as she touched the dry leaves and branches of every tree they passed by. And his stomach murmured each time she smiled back at him. Whoever this city woman was, she was welcome here again, he thought with happiness—certain that she would need to return as there was no way they could find a giraffe if it had gone to water.

After more than the *little while* Rais had measured to be a *little while* had passed, he stopped to break the news. “I am sorry, Debbie. The giraffe has gone to water.”

“Oh no.”

“Don’t worry, it will be back.”

“When?” she asked.

“Probably tomorrow.”

“But then it will go again?”

“Maybe. There is water closer but there are people at that water, so the giraffes go out further. But not always. So, they are here a lot. But not today.”

Rais could see her disappointment growing.

“Don’t worry, Debbie. Another day you can see them—I will help you find them.”

“Oh! You will?” she seemed happy again.

“Yes, of course!”

“Well, okay then.” Debbie’s mind raced as it tried to work out when her next day off might bring her back to find a promised giraffe.

“We can go to Longido now?” Rais asked.

“Yes, please.”

“Very good.”

“Thank you.” A warmth in her reply warmed Rais.

Though his words stumbled for something equally warm to give in return, “For what?”

“For offering to help me find a giraffe.”

He turned, hiding his own broad smile. As he began to walk, “It’s no problem, city girl.”

He seemed nice, she thought, if not a little odd in the way he seemed to need to turn his head away every time he smiled.

As they walked to town Rais watched Debbie enjoying the surrounds—no less than she had enjoyed them when she thought she was soon to see a giraffe. A very happy woman he thought, and he warmed with every smile she sent his way as they walked the long walk towards the mountain that rose behind the town of Longido. Debbie was saddened to have missed out on a giraffe, but minded not, as walking through this distant place fed her soul. And this Maasai seemed like a nice enough person to help with finding a giraffe next time.

Reaching the small highway-side town of Longido and its little roadside buildings at the foot of the mountain, Rais considered what to say or what to ask while they waited for the dala dala. It was bad luck for him though that a dala dala was coming into town as they arrived. They had only time to quickly swap numbers into their phones—Debbie to her smartphone, he to his old Nokia. As she climbed on board, Rais quickly explained that Mount Longido could help them, because when Debbie returned they would go up there and he would show her the land to help find her giraffe.

“Thank you, Rais.” A wide smile squinted her eyes before she disappeared inside the dala dala that quickly drove away, leaving the young Maasai standing on the side of the road, having completely forgotten he still had a goat to find.

As Debbie settled into the back of the dala dala her phone beeped. It was Rais, asking when she would return. With another eye-squinting smile, she put the

phone away, turning her attention outside to the passing land that had so caught her imagination.

Mama Agnus and the Sukuma Man

Waking from her nap in the Mwanza hotel, Mama Agnus climbed from her bed and looked out the large window that framed the boulder-covered hills of the lakeside town. High above, eagles circled, gliding on wind currents coming up from the giant lake.

Mama Agnus showered before choosing a dress of intricate orange and gold patterns set against a deep blue background and wrapping a matching scarf around her hair. Leaving the hotel she climbed into a waiting car that whisked her through the hills before pulling into the arched entrance of a large, white building carrying the government crest. As Mama climbed from the car, the driver took her by the arm. “Thank you,” she said with a kind smile.

Entering the building, Mama Agnus was directed down a marble-floored corridor by a young woman wearing a crisp, white waiter’s shirt. At its end a teenage boy, also wearing a perfectly-ironed white shirt, pushed open two giant doors carved in dark wood, to reveal a spacious ballroom with high, ornate ceilings and chandeliers. Large tables draped in smooth white tablecloths held huge vases filled with desert roses.

Around the tables and open spaces stood smartly, beautifully dressed men and women. They were laughing, joking and beaming with joy. Some appeared more serious, with solemn business-like expressions, but even they frequently broke into smiles and laughter.

The men wore carefully pressed suits—some grey, some black, some blue. Two were peach, three were bright white, and one man wore a suit of gold and blue patterns. Another wore a cherry red suit with matching fedora hat. But the women outshone them all—dressed in bright colours with elaborate patterns and many with colourful wraps around their hair to complement their dresses.

One of the women, dressed in reds and yellows, raised her hands and smiled ecstatically as she called out, “Agnus!”

This caught the attention of those around her, sending their gaze towards a smiling Mama Agnus.

The two women embraced, holding each other’s elbows as they spoke.

“It is so good to see you again. Welcome to Mwanza!”

“Thank you, Riziki. It is wonderful to see you.”

“How was your journey?”

“It was fine. Thank you for flying me over. It was nice to see the country from above after so long.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. We couldn’t possibly send *you* in a bus, now could we?”

“Oh. Asante.”

“Let me introduce you to some people!” Riziki placed a hand on Mama’s back as she guided her towards the group where she had just been standing.

Riziki proudly introduced her, clearly showing her excitement at having Mama Agnus there. The women exchanged *hellos* and welcomes. The men offered *hellos* and handshakes, before everyone stood in silence for a moment, each waiting for another to speak. Mama Agnus noticed that while most of the men were older, perhaps in their sixties, the women appeared to be no older than their thirties and forties—a sign of a new age of business leadership in which Mama Agnus, at sixty, was an early pioneer.

When someone finally did speak, it was the elder statesman of the group and, Mama noted, the only one not wearing a jacket. His white, pinstriped shirt with sharp collar and cuffs sat straight across his broad shoulders and hugged his strong arms.

“Have you visited Mwanza before?” Mr. Kulindwa enquired, his moustache revealing a smile.

“Many years ago,” Mama Agnus tilted her head, as he was at least two feet taller than her.

“Ah, do you know our city well then?” His voice was deep but carried a softness within.

“Unfortunately, no. My visits were always for business.” Mama recalled with disappointment the rush of her visits, leaving no memory of adventure. “I had little time to see things.”

His tone showed respect, “Ah, your head is in the work.”

“Only if it must be,” Mama replied as the rest of the group listened, some grinning at an exchange they seemed to have been left out of. At that moment a voice with screeching feedback came through the speakers at the front of the room—everyone was welcomed and asked to take their seats.

As the group dispersed, Mama Agnus put her mind to the speech she would shortly be giving. Mr. Kulindwa, who just minutes earlier had been focused on the

business of the evening, found his mind focused on getting to know this Mama Agnus from Dar.

“Well, you are most welcome here, Mama Agnus.”

“Asante sana, Mr. Kulindwa,” Mama politely smiled before walking away as Riziki showed her to a seat some five tables away from Mr. Kulindwa, who was still attempting to shake his mind back to the business of the moment.

It wasn't long before Mama Agnus was called to the stage, leading Mr. Kulindwa to a concentration level far greater than what he had given any of the earlier presenters. As she stood at the microphone, her strong voice captured everyone's attention. Throughout her short speech, he was struck by her confidence as her eyes moved about the room, not relying on notes as others had. It was obvious to all that she was speaking from her heart and her experience. Mama even glanced at Mr. Kulindwa—who swore he saw a momentary smile no one else in the room had been given, as she professionally made eye contact with each and every attendee in the large ballroom. For Mama the speech was easy as it was just a retelling of what to her came naturally—doing whatever needs to be done in order to get things done, when most would choose to sit on their hands and wait for opportunity to grace them.

The room broke into applause as her speech ended, no one clapping louder than Mr. Kulindwa. Mama was flattered. Conscious that speeches tended to drag on too long, she quickly made her way back to her seat. As she did so, the man sitting next to Mr. Kulindwa leaned towards him, “She was good, yes?”

“Very good.” Mr. Kulindwa nodded.

“She held your attention,” grinned the man. But Mr. Kulindwa ignored the chuckle from his friend as he settled into the next speech.

Mr. Kulindwa occasionally sighed as the speeches following Mama Agnus's dragged on for double or triple their allocated time. When the wait staff realised no end to the speeches was in sight, they began serving the food. Finally, the MC announced it was time to eat and enjoy the evening.

Engaged in the business of the hour at his table, Mr. Kulindwa's usual habit was to lead the conversation. Even men his own age found themselves following his lead. He wasn't forceful, he wasn't demanding, he just held authority by his very presence. Even amongst people of the highest authority, Mr. Kulindwa was a leader. At Mama's table she took more of a listening role. She found more to gain by simply

taking in the conversation around her and contemplating the meaning of it all—though there was some repetition of what had already been said in speeches.

Once the main course was finished, everyone began to move around, relieved and relaxed. They stood, stretched and gathered in groups or else swapped tables—laughing and joking—free to be with those they had been separated from for what felt like an eternity of formalities and speeches. While Mr. Kulindwa was held up by several men who wished to get his advice on their business, he swept an eye across the room to where Mama too was caught up receiving praise and answering questions about her speech and her work.

It was some time before Mr. Kulindwa finally freed himself to reach the group where Mama Agnus stood. He wasted no time taking his chance to speak to her.

“Thank you for your speech.” His strong voice drew the attention of the group.

“Asante, Mr. Kulindwa.” Mama Agnus smiled politely, having forgotten all about him.

“I found your advice about—” Before Mr. Kulindwa could finish, the MC announced that dessert was served.

Luckily for Mr. Kulindwa, people took seats nearest to where they had been standing in conversation. Having just spoken to Mama Agnus, Mr. Kulindwa sat with her for the dessert of fruit and cake.

He immediately shifted his attention away from her speech and began getting to know Mama Agnus, the person behind the speech. “Where are you from?”

Mama Agnus appreciated the change of topic. “I come from Ilinga.”

“Oh,” Mr. Kulindwa’s eyebrows rose with genuine interest.

“Yes, from there originally. From Hondene.” Mama spooned her dessert as she spoke. “In Hondene you cannot count ten houses without finding a local medicine doctor.”

“Really?” he asked, pausing a moment to swallow a spoonful of dessert.

Mama nodded. “If somebody is sick they treat them with local medicine.”

“And do you, Agnus? Do you use local medicine?”

“No, I have not lived there in a long time. But if I am sick I will use both.”

“Oh, I see. Where do you live now?”

“I live in Dar es Salaam.”

Mr. Kulindwa let out an awkward “ah” as he realised he had just asked a question to which he knew the answer from her introduction, her speech, and her bio in the pamphlets on every table. “Yes, Dar.”

“Since I was married.”

“Ah yes.” Mr. Kulindwa was unsure how to approach the question of her marriage status. “I have travelled there many times. I come from Tabora. But I went to Bagamoya for many years when I was young. It was a very different place then. Now it’s turning into a city of Westerners and leisure. But our life there was very tough.” Mama could see the strain of memory in Mr. Kulindwa’s furrowed brow.

“I know Tabora,” Mama nodded. “I studied secretarial services there for two years.”

“Oh, so you know the area well?” Mr. Kulindwa was intrigued although still pondering the marriage topic.

“Yes. It was very hard living there in the college,” Mama Agnus confessed. “And we only ever went to town with the matron... So there was not much chance of fun.” She grinned at the memory of sneaking around the matron.

“I can imagine!” Mr. Kulindwa laughed with a beaming smile at the thought of a young Mama being stuck with the college matron. “But...” his tone became sympathetic, “I understand the hardship. When I was small my mother and father separated, and my mother followed her brother here to Mwanza. So here I came.”

Mama, pleased to be having a real conversation, had a more joyful tone, “So, you are very familiar with Mwanza?”

“Oh yes, when we arrived we started a new life.” He spoke with a lifted rhythm that matched Mama’s brighter tone. “My mother worked hard, and we got a plot of land and built a place with shade to relax in. And life goes on.” Mr. Kulindwa smiled with a fond memory of the time.

“Oh, that is nice!” Mama touched his arm, genuinely thankful for his happy memory.

Mr. Kulindwa’s words fumbled, “And now I... I myself have grown-up children and they themselves have children!”

Mama’s eyes lit up. “Ah yes, I have several myself! And a grandchild.”

“How old is your grandchild?”

“He is two,” beamed Mama.

“Oh really, I have a son, he is five.”

“Oh, a young boy.” Mama’s surprise was obvious.

“Ah, he can be very young sometimes. Not always... but he is my son.” Mr. Kulindwa’s pride was obvious.

And with that he took a breath, and then a chance. “Maybe you will meet him tomorrow?”

“Oh really?” Mama raised her eyebrows, genuinely surprised. “And how is it I would meet him?”

“Well,” Mr. Kulindwa straightened in his chair. “Perhaps you will meet him if I show you around this town of Mwanza?”

“Oh?” Mama’s eyebrows raised again. “You will show me around Mwanza, will you?”

“Well. Perhaps.” As he grinned his moustache turned upwards. “Have you been here before?”

“Yes, I have been to Mwanza several times before, with work.” Her tone was gleefully entertained. “Which you already knew, Mr. Kulindwa, as you asked me that when we first met.”

“Oh. Yes.” He blushed and stumbled. “So... you already know the town well?”

“Actually, I haven’t had a chance to see much of it at all on my visits.”

Mr. Kulindwa nodded, a little lost for words. “I see.”

But Mama offered a change to the subject. “What do you do, Mr. Kulindwa?”

“Well,” he began. “I was a civil servant, but I stepped down. And now I am an adviser. That is what happens when you retire.” Mr. Kulindwa was smiling again.

“Ah yes.”

Mr. Kulindwa gave the best evidence he could that he had in fact been listening and remembering things said earlier. “And you are the chairperson of the Union of Women in Tanzania?”

“Yes, Mr. Kulindwa,” Mama smirked, “you listened well.”

“Of course.” Once again his grin lifted the sides of his moustache.

But their conversation was then disrupted by another request for her to talk to more people impressed by her insight. Mr. Kulindwa needed to collect his boy from a family friend so wished Mama well and took his leave, adding that if Mama Agnus wished, he could “show her around town tomorrow after the business of the conference was complete.”

“That would be very nice of you,” Mama replied as they both rose from their seats.

And so, with plans made, Mr. Kulindwa wished her a good night.

“*Lala Salama* (sleep well), Mama Agnus.”

“Lala salama, Mr. Kulindwa.”

Marie and the Charismatic Fisherman

As her plane flew out over the Tanzanian coastline, a deep, blue sea filled Marie's view. A short while later the small triangles of Zanzibari dhow sails caught the late afternoon sun, hinting that land was once again near. A long, thin sandbar rising from the depths of the sea preceded the sight of a small, crescent-moon-shaped cove dotted with fishing boats and framed by coconut trees and forest.

The plane's wheels touched the tarmac and the pilot's voice came over the radio.

"Welcome to Zanzibar."

Excitement rushed through Marie at the sound of those words she had waited so many years to hear.

Once off the plane and through immigration, Marie stepped out of the small airport building to see her name on a piece of paper held by a short, slim, young man leaning on a pole.

"Karibu Zanzibar," he said with a relaxed smile.

"Ah!" Marie burst with happiness at the welcome a less than excited immigration officer had failed to utter while stamping her passport. "Asante," she beamed to the relaxed young man who explained he was her driver and would take her to her accommodation.

"Okay, let's go, Marie from Rwanda."

He said little more than that as they drove the long, palm-tree-lined streets towards the town. It didn't matter as the whole way Marie's eyes were glued to the window, watching the island world she had dreamt of passing by her window.

On reaching her accommodation, the excitement continued. It was a small room in a small, white building on the outskirts of the ancient town with its winding pathways amongst tall, 200-year-old buildings made of stone and coral.

The joy of having the ancient town close by was outdone by the sight of the large bed, a particularly unique-looking bed. She had seen many pictures of these Zanzibari beds—wide, wood-carved with four posts rising from the corners to meet a frame above. A carved wooden frame, worthy of a giant painting, held a white mosquito net draping the entire bed. The large, majestic bed seemed a little odd inside the room's plain white walls and dark red cement floor. While touching the soft, white mosquito net, Marie's thoughts drifted to the wonder of finally being in

the ancient world of Zanzibar. She had forgotten the driver was standing by the door waiting to leave.

“I have to go now.”

“Oh, thank you.”

He told her someone from her new workplace would collect her in the morning, “so don’t get lost in the maze of laneways.”

“Where should I eat?”

“Lukmaan,” he gestured with his chin out her small window to a small restaurant across the road, before turning and walking out the door. He called out once more before disappearing down the narrow stairs, “Karibu Zanzibar!” But Marie barely heard him. Her attention was now out the window hearing a sound not so familiar in her world of Rwanda. Across the dusky Zanzibari sky, evening prayer sang out of mosques hidden in the maze of Stone Town. Leaning through the wood-framed window, she found the sky painted with reds, pinks and oranges that glowed off the white and cream walls of the buildings of Stone Town and the lower red roofs beyond its taller edges. It was beautiful, still, old, truly old—but very much alive.

Marie crossed the narrow road to the restaurant where she found bain-maries filled with different-coloured stew-like foods with vegetables and rices—greens, reds, browns, whites—and scents she had never smelt before. Spices unfamiliar and in abundance.

Keeping to herself, even though there were smiles and *hellos* from some Zanzibarian men, Marie sat alone at the end of a long table. Even when she left the restaurant with the spices lingering on her palate, she couldn’t quite describe the flavours of the food. Curiosity led her away from her accommodation to the end of the narrow road where an entrance into the old city opened with two laneways. It was an unassuming opening to the unknown depths of this ancient, Persian-designed town, built not of stone but blocks of mined coral.

Curiosity held her at this entrance. She had no qualms. She did not fear getting lost. She relished the prospect of it—the feeling of being lost amongst winding, unfamiliar, narrow laneways would be liberating. After buying water from a small shop window in a nearby three-storey stone building, Marie watched children playing down one laneway. She felt it coaxing her into the unknown. But all in good time, as she was tired from travelling and knew that, soon enough, there would be time to explore this place, to get lost amongst it all.

~

Marie woke in the morning, fresh and ready for her new adventure as she waited on the step for whoever would be taking her to work. Soon enough a short, slim-built young man arrived, greeting her with a big smile.

“You are the new Rwandan woman, yes?”

“Yes, I am, how could you tell?”

“Ah you know... Rwandan women,” he grinned sheepishly. “You look different to Zanzibarian and Tanzanian women.”

“Different?” her eyes widened.

“Oh yes, different.” The young, skinny Zanzibarian man quickly clarified, “It’s good.”

“Okay then. Who are you?” Marie asked with a matter-of-fact tone.

“I am Iddi,” he nodded, as his shoulders straightened with pride. “I drive the bus. And you are Marie.”

“Yes, I am Marie.” She noted his proud posture, wondering if her own had been as mindful. “Good to meet you, Iddi.”

“You too. Okay! Let’s go.”

And with that they entered the Stone Town maze. Inside the winding passageways the air cooled as the sun stayed high on the walls. As Marie followed Iddi they passed under power lines and thick black tubes that she assumed carried water, zigzagging across from wall to wall. Higher up, wooden shutters of greens, grey blues or browns hung open, at times revealing a woman or child peering down. People walked along the laneways going about their day, sidestepping so the occasional passing scooter could effortlessly wind around them and the legs of people sitting on built-in cement ledges, relaxing alone or in groups, talking and laughing.

Eventually they stopped at a shopfront. “This is where you will be working!” Iddi beamed, gesturing to the large, blue doors by a blue sitting ledge. “Karibu sana.”

Entering the travel agency, Marie was greeted by a short, round man in a white shirt, blue pants and black business shoes with a large, shiny, gold watch on his wrist. He greeted her with a smile, welcoming her to the job. He explained the

“other girl” was away. “A Kenyan girl... but you will meet her later because we must go, right now.”

Asking where they were going as they headed out the door, she was told there was a tour group heading to a fishing village at the south of the island for a snorkelling tour—and they were going to join them.

“Do you have bathers?”

“Bathers?” Marie frowned. “What for?”

“For snorkelling with the tourists.”

“Ah! No, I don’t swim.” Marie suddenly felt stressed at the thought.

“Oh, well... you might want to learn.”

Marie felt her excitement drop away in fear of the ocean.

“There was nothing about needing to swim when I applied.”

“No, well, there wasn’t, but you should. Okay, straight to work we go!” Her new boss waved his hand as he ushered her out of the maze, and into a bus where Iddi was smiling at her from the driver’s seat, and ten Japanese tourists sat waiting, eager to leave.

“Up you go!” Her new boss beckoned with an outstretched arm. As she climbed in he whispered, while smiling and looking at the tourists, “You just listen and watch my ways, so you can learn from the best, yes?”

“Okay, boss,” she smiled politely at the tourists before taking her seat. As they headed to the village, her short, round boss waved his arms around as he talked up the town and the island in a strong, happy voice. Marie tried to focus on him but soon found herself drawn to the passing countryside of villages, plantations, and jungle. It was hard to be learning from his tour guide act when the outside world was as new and fascinating to her as it was for the ten Japanese tourists smiling and nodding their heads politely at their Zanzibarian tour guide showman.

After an hour and a half of driving past banana trees, carts, cars, cows, jungle, farms, villages with thatched roofs, cement slab rows of buildings with shops and fruit stands, and fruit trees with giant fruits she did not recognise, they entered a fishing village. In the distance, she spotted bright, brilliant white sand amongst banana trees. The beach curved like a crescent moon around the cove’s clear waters.

Standing in the middle of the road was a young man, smiling widely as the bus slowed to a stop in front of him. “And we are here!” announced the boss. “Ah yes!” he said as the doors opened and the young man climbed aboard. “This is Haji,

everyone! He is our guide here in the village. A fisherman and a marine biologist! Yes, Haji?" the boss said with a slap on Haji's back.

"Yes! That is right, karibu Kizimkazi!" Haji gave a broad smile as he scanned the group, greeting them with a well-rehearsed, Japanese style bow—his own tour guide showmanship already in full swing—though his day was shortly to be thrown off by an unexpected sight amongst the Japanese tourists.

"Karibu sana—" his eyes landed on Marie amongst the tourists.

"Come now! Let's begin!" the short, stocky boss insisted with a friendly smile as he beckoned the tourists off the bus.

Haji gathered the group into a position that framed their view of him with the backdrop of the crescent-shaped beach and the clear, blue waters of the bay. Marie stayed at the back of the group, slightly overwhelmed to already be at a Zanzibari bay, something she hadn't expected from her first day.

"Karibu sana Kizimkazi," Haji gestured with outspread arms to the perfect, tropical paradise behind him. "This is my village. This is where I was born and where I grew up. And you are most welcome here."

As Haji continued his description of the village and a fisherman's life, Marie did not notice how often his eyes and smile landed on her. She was more interested in this new world around her than the young man playing up to the tourists. Rwanda had lakes, beautiful lakes. But this bay was something else altogether—something that until now she had only seen if she stood close to a Kigali billboard advertising a Zanzibari resort. Something she had done more than once.

Once Haji's spiel was over, he guided everyone down to the shoreline where Marie was nervously fixated on the impending task of boarding a boat. Haji continued talking but kept a quiet awareness of the African woman at the back of the group, putting on her life jacket while showing a great deal of concern about the boat bobbing slightly in shallow waters. The tour boss and Iddi stayed on the beach, while Marie climbed onto the boat with the tourists. Her boss explained Haji was the main man from here on. With a bit of a push they were off the sand and on their way.

Marie sat at the front of the group, close to the man driving the boat. Haji sat at the back where he could talk to everyone without his clients having to worry about ocean spray in their faces. Marie listened, trying to ignore her growing anxiety as the boat moved further from the safety of dry land.

Haji was an accomplished tour guide who was aware of his islander accent, so made sure to speak English clearly enough for the Japanese tourists to understand him. His smile seemed to always rise higher on the left side of his face as he moved his eyes around the group, telling them of the coconut shells housed under piles of rocks in the shallower water.

“They soften over time to release their fibres which we then make into rope.” He proudly held up a rope made of coconut fibre.

Haji then began to describe the sea life of the area while the water deepened and Marie held her lifejacket more tightly. He maintained eye contact with everyone, though each time his gaze reached Marie it settled a little longer and his smile widened. To hide her growing concern about their increasing distance from the shore, Marie kept her face as neutral as she could make it. Deep regret had replaced her excitement about reaching Zanzibar. She had been on a boat out on Rwanda’s Lake Kivu before, but the slight bounce and rock of the boat here on the sea, as it left the shelter of the cove, was a new sensation that didn’t come with a gentle boat ride on a huge, flat lake in the middle of Africa.

As the boat came to rest in a calm patch of water, Haji stood on sturdy sea legs to announce they had arrived at their snorkelling spot. He carefully explained that people could keep their life jackets on for the swim if they felt more comfortable, with a noticeable glance towards Marie as he continued. “And if anyone has never snorkelled before, I am more than happy to show you.”

Marie replied only with raised eyebrows as she looked away, clearly not taking up the invitation.

“Who has never snorkelled?” Haji called out, moving his attention to the rest of the group. Several hands went up amongst the tourists, but not Marie’s.

“The rest of you have snorkelled?” he looked across the group, this time catching the small African woman’s eyes. But he was met with a shake of her head and a raised hand dismissing her inclusion.

“Well,” he held his smiling eyes on her while talking to the whole boat, “I am here to make sure you are the very best snorkellers and have the very best experience!”

While everyone went about putting on their snorkelling masks and flippers, joking to one another as they tried talking through the snorkels, Haji noticed that the African woman still had her flippers on the floor by her feet while she anxiously

twirled the strap of the goggles around her fingers. Marie felt herself withdrawing, waiting for this event to pass and that being on the boat felt comfortable compared to getting out into the ocean.

With his clients helped one by one into the water the captain turned to Marie.

“You are not snorkelling?” he asked in Swahili.

“You needn’t swim. You can just float,” the captain tapped the shoulder of her life jacket. “You can never sink in this.”

“Ah—no, it’s too deep.” Marie pulled her arms in close.

“Okay,” the captain shrugged. “Where are you from?”

“Rwanda.” With her decision not to swim accepted by the captain, Marie relaxed slightly.

“Oh. You don’t swim there?”

“No.” The tension gripped her once more. “We have no ocean. Only lakes.”

“You don’t swim in your lakes?”

Her head shook with certainty, “not me. I haven’t. Some do. But not me.” Marie stared down at the flippers sitting on the floor of the boat where a small amount of sea water had collected around them.

“Oh okay.” The captain sensed he should back away.

“Hello there!” came Haji’s voice, having turned his attention to his last remaining guest not floating in the water.

He spoke gently, “Are you not swimming?”

“She doesn’t swim,” the captain explained. “They don’t have an ocean where she is from.”

“Oh really?” enquired Haji. “And where are you from, beautiful woman?”

Marie shook her head and rolled her eyes.

“She is from Rwanda,” explained the captain.

“Oh really,” Haji silently signalled for the captain to go tend to the others.

“I am Haji,” Haji spoke proudly with his hand on his chest as the captain giggled his way to the other end of the boat. Behind him the captain reached a coughing and spluttering client whom Haji chose to ignore as he smiled at Marie, “What is your name, woman from Rwanda?”

“I’m Marie... Shouldn’t you help her?” she gestured with her chin to the girl spluttering in the water.

Haji glanced over his shoulder to the girl who was struggling with water in her mask, but told Marie that the captain would help her, “while I help you.”

“Ah, no. I don’t need any help.” Marie’s hand waved off everything that was happening in front of her.

“Are you sure?”

Her assurance was blunt. “I am fine.”

But at that moment, the girl struggling in the water grabbed hold of the side of the boat causing it to roll sideways. This widened Marie’s eyes and had her gripping her wood-plank seat with white knuckles. But for Haji this was only a comfortable, small tilting of the boat and he stood steady, ignoring the new angle their world had tilted to.

“Don’t worry,” Haji reassured his nervous Rwandan passenger. “This boat cannot tip. I have seen it in large waves, rocking far more than that. You are perfectly safe.”

Marie’s eyes widened, “large waves!”

“Yes.” Haji chuckled, “don’t worry—only in bad weather. When we fish, not when we bring you out here.”

Marie looked out over the perfectly flat water under the perfectly clear, blue sky; it somehow calmed her. Though moments later she realised the view of all that sky and water, completely lacked the safety of land and so the strain returned.

“You don’t want to try the water just in your life jacket?”

“No. I am fine here... It’s too deep for me.” She was ready to be left alone.

“You will be safe. You are with me!”

Haji’s tone had failed in its attempt to reassure Marie, “Uh, uh. Not here. I want to learn to swim but not in water like this... no. I only like water to here,” Marie tapped the side of her hand against her knee, indicating the depth at which she and water could mingle.

Haji frowned. “Mmm, that is not much water for swimming.”

“That is how far I go. Maybe I go further with a life jacket and a teacher. But not this.” Marie gestured again with a dismissive wave of her hand at the open water around them. “Not this far.”

Haji nodded, “Well... I cannot teach you today then since we are here?”

“Uh, uh. No.”

“Perhaps I can teach you another time?” he raised his eyebrows, moments before the boat began to rock again. The captain struggled with the spluttering girl who was trying desperately to climb back into the boat. Marie went rigid as she gripped the seat while Haji finally went to help the captain.

Despite her own fear, Marie watched as the captain stepped away and Haji’s calm voice and gentle approach took control of the situation for the frazzled girl.

“Hey, it’s okay,” he told her. “Let me come in the water there and help you.” He dived into the water, barely rocking the boat or causing a splash.

As he surfaced next to the girl he got to work selling her the enjoyment of the experience. “Now let’s fix your mask so you can relax and enjoy the world below the surface, yes? It is beautiful down there, yes? Did you see the fish?”

“Yes, some,” the Japanese girl wiped the water from her face with her free hand as she kept her iron-tight grip on the edge of the boat with the other.

Marie watched, noticing how the girl’s knuckles relaxed around the aluminium edge of the boat as Haji continued to speak. The young tourist slowly calmed as the smiling, confident fisherman, resting comfortably in the water beside her, talked while he adjusted her mask.

“Let’s first practise the breathing together. And then we will get you back to looking at the fish, yes?”

“Okay,” her eyes blinked, clearing out the salt water that blurred and stung.

He encouraged the girl to begin using the snorkel to breathe with her head above the water until she was confident enough to add the mask and get used to breathing only through her mouth. Eventually Haji had her snorkelling with her face comfortably in the water. She floated around with him pointing out the fish and the coral, showing her joy where before she had only experienced fear. Marie looked on, relaxed in the safety of the boat.

The Boy who Ran Away

When the mystery boy Renaldo suddenly fled into the night, Zuena and her mother had run after him. Neither wanted him to run away and Zuena's mother, feeling a sudden responsibility for the lost boy, was deeply concerned, as was Zuena, since she had found him. But when they reached the road they caught only a glimpse of his soccer uniform as he disappeared into a dala dala headed for the capital. Mother and daughter were left standing on the side of the road in the quiet little village of Fujoni, watching the dala dala carrying a boy away as quickly as he had entered their lives.

When they went back to their meal, they were silent, both finding their thoughts drawn to Renaldo's half-finished bowl of food. That night brought Zuena restless sleep, as she wondered what had gone on with that mystery boy, and if he had found his way home safely. Her mother too felt a pang of guilt. She had scared the boy away. Not on purpose of course. He had simply misread her words. Nonetheless she felt a guilt that kept her away from slumber.

The following morning neither spoke about it, but both had the situation on their minds. Her mother knew there was nothing she could do, unless the mystery boy reappeared so she could welcome him in. But Zuena thought less of there being nothing to do, and more of knowing she was meant to do something. Seeing him snap from his casual ways into sudden, serious concern cut at a guilt she had not felt before.

Getting to school early in the morning did nothing to distract her. In geography class, while the children called out in unison the names of 54 African countries as the teacher drifted a ruler across a giant map of the continent, Zuena's eyes remained on a small dot on the small island off the east coast. Her eyes fixed on an area east of Stone Town where, somewhere, a large Ferris wheel stood next to the home of a boy who had been lost but now hopefully was home.

Time in the classroom dragged on as she waited for the siren and an opportunity to do what she was certain she had to do.

The City Girl Returns

Debbie, the young woman from Arusha, returned to Longido a week after Rais's promise to help her find a giraffe.

Her journey was a quiet one this time. At the station in town the loud conductor was nowhere to be seen. There were plenty of noisy conductors singing out the names of their destinations, but the one that would take her to Longido had no sign of the hopeless romantic from a week ago. Taking a seat in the back of her dala dala, Debbie sighed with relief that she was finally returning to where her imagination had remained during the long hours at work. Throughout the drive she scanned the landscape for a giraffe, but there were none to be seen. Hopefully, she thought, that Maasai man would have found her one by now. And even more she hoped, he would actually be there to greet her when she arrived in the small town at the base of the mountain.

Sure enough, at the end of the nearly two-hour journey, there he was, smiling and waving at her through the window.

"Hello, Debbie," Rais failed to contain his excitement that she had actually returned.

"Hello, Rais," her smile squinted her eyes as she climbed from the dala dala and shook his hand.

"Hello Debbie! Karibu Longido!" he giggled nervously as he kept hold of her hand long after his greeting had passed.

"Asante, Maasai," she waited for the young man to let go of her hand for some time before speaking again with a giggle of her own. "Okay." She looked around at Longido town as he continued his hold.

"Okay." Rais pointed to the mountain with the spear in his free hand. "Let's go up there."

"Up there?" she frowned a little before slipping her hand from his. "Giraffes don't climb mountains?"

He shook his head in agreement. "No, no, they do not."

"Then why must we go up there?"

"Well, you see," his tone was serious, "up there we can see all over the land. And because giraffes move around a lot, we need to try and spot them from afar, then make our way. You see?"

Debbie contemplated the young Maasai's plan and the tall mountain.

"The mountain is fairly tall," Rais admitted with a gesture that made the jewellery on his hand give its familiar chime, "We will only climb to that first ridge."

"Okay, let's go, Maasai man."

Rais nodded in excitement at having her company again—an excitement that had built and built, causing him a restless but joyful sleep the previous night.

"Lead the way, Rais the Maasai."

"I will, Debbie."

Rais led the way up a pathway between small, mud-packed buildings where they passed by locals who looked curiously at the stranger. Debbie politely greeted the local Maasai men and women standing in the entrances to their small shops and homes. Some smiled at her. Some waved. Others seemed to not care much at all for what was happening and just went about their day. Most obvious of all was a group of children who began following them, growing in number to as many as ten. Debbie followed Rais past the last of the buildings, out into the sparse scrubland that surrounded the base of the mountain. The children called out questions to Rais in Maasai. Debbie couldn't make out anything they were saying, but by their gesturing towards her it was clear she was the topic—or more specifically, her hair and her clothes were. Soon enough, one little girl walking alongside Debbie tugged on her sleeve. Debbie tried to say *hello* but as she spoke all the children burst into giggles and ran away.

"They don't see many women in city clothes," Rais explained. "The little one who pulled on your clothes said she wants shoes like yours."

"They are so cute."

Rais frowned at her feet as they reached several large boulders. "I am worried about your little shoes."

"Oh?"

"I like them, but they might not like the mountain."

"They seem as good as your shoes," Debbie pointed to his flip-flop shoes made of old car tyres, with a big loop of rubber covered in colourful beads sticking up between his big and second toes.

"My shoes are the best shoes!" Rais proudly gestured with both hands to his most valued shoes.

“They are very nice,” Debbie agreed. “But mine are enclosed. They stay on easily. They will be good for climbing, yes?”

“They have nice colours on them, and they are nice and small—which suits you. But they look weak. They don’t have the grip of mine. Those soles are made for a nice, smooth city pavement, not a mountain.”

Debbie looked down, pondering his assessment.

“But they are very nice!” Rais added quickly, worried he had upset his guest. “They really suit you and you really suit them!”

“Thank you, Rais. But you will see how good my shoes are when we reach this place up there where you will find me my giraffe.” She waved her hand to encourage him along, “Now, lead the way, Mr. Maasai.”

“Okay, city girl.” Rais turned and effortlessly skipped up the first boulder before turning to her and grinning, “You will be okay?”

“Yes, yes, keep going,” she waved him on as she began to climb with both hands on the first boulder.

Rais climbed ahead with ease, his Maasai shoes gripping the rock as his skinny legs sprang him from boulder to boulder—higher and higher—bending and straightening his legs like a mountain-climbing gazelle. Lower down, Debbie climbed a little more clumsily, taking care with each of the big, round, ancient rocks.

“I am sorry!” Rais called down.

“Why are you sorry?” she called back, crawl-climbing on all fours as she made her way over an especially round boulder.

Rais was unsure why he felt sorry, “I am just sorry!”

“Don’t be sorry!” Debbie righted herself on top of that biggest of boulders, laughing as she swayed on her feet. “I am having fun!”

When she laughed like that, Rais again noticed her eyes squinting with her broad smile. He also noticed a warmth wash over him. “Be careful, Rais,” he warned himself in a low voice.

“What was that?” she called back from five boulders away.

“Oh—” Rais hurried his words “—I just said be careful!”

“Thank you, I am fine.” Debbie leant forward, clasping her hands on the next boulder as Rais, deciding he could help, began to spring back down the boulders on his long limbs.

“Let me help you.”

“No, no, thank you, I am fine,” she assured him confidently as she pulled herself up the next boulder.

“Your shoes are working,” he grinned.

“Yes, yes. My shoes are working fine, thank you.”

“Okay. I will just wait here then.” He crossed his arms and perched on a boulder two boulders above hers.

“No, you go on.” She lifted one hand from her climbing stance of all fours to wave him on. “I will catch you up!”

Rais shrugged, turned, and began to spring on up, looking back every few boulders, checking his guest was still on her way. With each leap, his red Maasai shúkà fanned out, exposing to the light of day his bright blue city underwear. The blue cotton caught Debbie’s eye.

“Why are you laughing?” Rais called down to her.

“No reason, Mr. Maasai.” She kept her eyes on the rock in front of her.

Rais pondered this bright city woman. “You laugh a lot.”

“I am happy a lot.” She clambered over another boulder, smiling directly at its surface between her hands.

“Oh... Well, that is good.”

“You aren’t?” she stood, wobbly on her feet, atop a boulder, still five boulders from his.

“Of course, yes, I am.” Rais pondered his own answer. “I think I am... Yes. I am happy. I am happy a lot.” His skinny chest stuck out as his shoulders rose up with thoughts of his own happiness.

“That is good!” Debbie considered for the first time how much she liked his frame.

“Except when they lose the game.” Rais turned and leapt onto the next boulder.

“Who loses the game?”

No reply came. Just silence.

The silence soon drew her eyes up from the surface of the boulder between her hands. As she climbed higher, she was met with the sight of Rais proudly opening the Maasai shúkà on his chest, revealing a red Liverpool Football Club jersey.

“The Reds!” he called back—his face absolutely beaming with pride.

She laughed back.

“They will win this year!”

“They will?” she pulled herself up her latest boulder.

“Yes!’ Of course! I am sure of it! Who is your team?”

“I don’t have a team.” Debbie clambered further up the boulder.

“You don’t have a team?”

“No.”

“Why do you not have a team? How could you not have a team!” he looked on in disbelief. But Debbie simply laughed off his question, returning her focus to the climb.

They spent the next ten minutes or so in silence. Debbie concentrated on manoeuvring over the boulders while Rais continued to effortlessly spring up the mountain, his mind focused on thoughts of Debbie’s effortless happiness, his football team, the quality of his Maasai shoes for climbing Longido Mountain. And the overall joys of watching and playing football.

When Debbie finally joined Rais at the ledge he had pointed to from the highway, her eyes met a vast and beautiful vista of African plains surrounding the mountain.

“Here we are,” Rais smiled proudly. “My home.”

Debbie looked out over the vast, open space—patched with light green on red canvas. “It’s beautiful, Rais.”

“You see there,” he pointed to a distant opening amongst the small trees and shrubs where herds of goats stood with Maasai standing around—visible as lines of red, blue, purple, as their tall, thin frames stood wrapped in Maasai shúkà. “That is where we come together to trade and sell our animals.”

Debbie looked on, captivated as he talked of the market space and surroundings. Living in Arusha she had met many Maasai, but had never learned of their lives outside the city. As Rais spoke of their lives as herders, and the importance of their goats and cows, she absorbed it all.

When Rais finished talking he looked on as the dust around the marketplace kicked up. In silence he began to consider the task at hand. He knew that this woman had come to meet a giraffe, and he knew it was his duty to help her find it. Her eyes had turned to the land beyond the market place. Somewhere there was a giraffe, she

thought. Maybe even two! Maybe a couple! The excitement made her roll on her feet. Maybe even three, a mother and a dad and their baby giraffe!

“There will be a giraffe out there, Debbie.”

“Will we maybe find a baby too?”

“Oh, I don’t think so.” Rais was instantly pained at having denied her such a request. “It’s not the right time of year for a little baby.”

“Oh,” Debbie felt disappointment as the baby giraffe vanished from the image in her imagination.

“But maybe... maybe a big baby at least!” he masked his racing thoughts—he really needed to step up now and find a baby somewhere. “I will certainly try! And if not today, I will ask around...” His mind raced to solve the problem he had essentially created for himself. “If there is one, someone will have found it.”

Her eyes narrowed with suspicion, “I thought you had already done your giraffe research?”

“Oh yes. I did,” he confirmed. “But I did not ask around about a baby giraffe.”

Debbie was unsure if he understood her humour. “It’s okay.”

As Rais scanned the horizon for a sign of the long-necked prize, Debbie peered out across the same lands, wondering how much less she was seeing than he was. She had no idea what to look for other than the slender neck and head of an animal that was essentially the same colour as much of what she was seeing before her. She wondered what it could be that he was trying to see. Even more so when he suddenly spoke up.

“Okay, let’s go!” Rais excitedly jumped down the first boulder.

“Go? Go where?”

“To the giraffe!” he called back, as he hopped down another boulder.

“What giraffe?”

“The giraffe over there,” he replied casually.

“Over where?” she looked to the distance in a sudden panicked excitement.

“There,” he pointed to the horizon beyond the distant dusty market place.

Debbie squinted to where his finger had briefly pointed, trying desperately to see whatever it was he must have seen.

“What did you see!?” she called out to Rais who was already three boulders down. “How have you seen something there?”

“Easy!” he called back, leaping down yet another boulder. “I can see a giraffe eating from a tree!”

“You can?” she looked again to the distance.

“Yes. Of course. But quickly now! If you stay up there it might move, and once we are down there we won’t spot it as easily. Unless maybe you can follow its tracks for us, city girl?”

“Of course, I could do that!” Debbie called out enthusiastically as she quickly clambered down the first boulder, and the next, excited enough to almost catch up to the gazelle-like leaps of Rais’s skinny frame.

“Go carefully Debbie!” he called back, looking over his shoulder at the awkward but fast-moving woman from Arusha.

Reaching the bottom of the mountain they walked quickly across the town once more. Rais waved at several people, but kept up his pace, avoiding the curiosity of those wondering who this woman was, and exactly why they had been climbing the mountain in the first place.

As they reached the other side of town and headed into the shrub, Debbie felt a need to check on a particular aspect of this part of the world. “Are there lions out here?”

Rais chuckled and said there were none.

“Only on the other side of the mountain. At least, most of the time.”

They walked on for some time through the sparse, dry, green trees and shrubs where the ground puffed up like moon dust around their shoes. But soon Rais stopped and frowned.

“What is it?”

“They were here. This is where I saw them.”

“Oh.” Debbie looked around.

“So,” he grinned, “you will need to lead us to them with their tracks.” He gestured to some large marks in the dirt nearby.

Debbie gave a quizzical look at the many marks on the ground.

“Which way?” he quizzed.

Debbie thought it over, looking at the dents in the red dirt.

“I think,” she crouched down, touching one of the deeper sides of one of the prints. “I think that way,” she pointed to the left. Rais looked to the left, then back to

Debbie, then to the tracks, then back to Debbie, then once more to the left. He took some time, pretending to contemplate what he already knew. “Okay!”

“Okay!” she leapt to her feet.

“We shall go this way,” Rais pointed his long, skinny arm as he began to walk in the opposite direction to which she had guessed.

“I was wrong!”

“Only if today the giraffes are walking backwards.”

“Oh,” Debbie felt disappointed she had got wrong the one thing she thought she had mastered on her last visit.

“Come along, I think I know where they are going.”

“Okay!” The tracks held her curiosity as she walked.

After a short while, Rais looked back over his shoulder to see Debbie looking at her feet and the tracks beside them as she tried to step right next to each of the imprints. Curiosity had her focused, “I think I get it now.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, the dents go this way when they walk forwards, yes?” she inquired, pointing to the deeper part of one of the prints.

“Yes. That is correct, city girl.”

“Ah!” she squinted her smiling eyes. “Wonderful.”

“Your nice shoes are getting dirty.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she passed by the tall, skinny Maasai man. “Come on now! I think I know where they are going!”

“Oh, you do, do you?”

“Yes, I think they are going to find water.”

“Well, yes. Most likely! Well done, city girl!”

She cheerfully matched his volume and tone, “Thank you, Maasai boy!”

“And where is this water?” he quizzed.

“It’s at the end of these tracks, of course.”

Impressed by her sarcasm, he followed her as she followed the giraffes’ tracks.

With each step she walked, Debbie placed her feet besides those of the giraffe prints. Her step felt light.

With each step he walked, Rais placed his feet besides her prints. His step felt light.

She followed, he followed. Until that is, Rais found his focus on the prints arriving at her stationary feet. Looking up he found Debbie staring on ahead in a trance-like state. And, following her gaze, he found two giraffes.

In awe of the sight, Debbie spoke in a low hushed tone, “They’re beautiful.”

“They are.” Rais looked at them, as if he too was seeing them for the first time.

The air was calm, the world silent, but for the sound of the two giraffes’ mouths biting and chewing at the trees.

“Do you think they are a couple?”

“I don’t know. I can’t tell right now.”

“Why not?” she held her gaze on the beautiful creatures before her.

“They aren’t kissing,” he grinned.

“You are an idiot.”

“Thank you, Debbie.”

She glanced at his amused grin for a moment before looking back to the giraffes that were finally, finally, in front of her eyes. “Thank you, Rais.”

“Thank you?”

“Yes. Thank you for finding my giraffe.”

“Oh, you are welcome.”

The silence returned as they watched on.

“Technically, I found you two giraffes.”

“Well, maybe you found us one each?”

“True... But we don’t know if they are a couple.”

“Because they aren’t kissing?”

“Exactly!” he grinned.

A silence fell over them once more as they watched on.

But soon Rais had a question.

“Kissing is always the way to tell if a couple is a couple in the city, yes?”

Debbie giggled, her eyes squinting, unsure where his query had come from.

“Well there are many ways, but yes, that could be one way.”

Rais nodded at the giraffes, “kissing is good.”

Debbie kept her eyes on the giraffes, amused but too distracted by the sight before her. She asked if the Maasai hunted giraffe.

“No, but we used to. Now we watch over them to help keep them safe and well.”

“Oh... well, that’s good.”

“But, when I was a boy, I tasted one.”

“You have eaten giraffe!” her eyes were wide.

“Not the whole thing! I ate a bit,” he clarified. “I couldn’t eat a whole one,” he pointed to the legs with his spear. “Look at that leg meat. That’s too much for one boy!”

Debbie felt a confusion wash over. “No...” her voice was pained, “you can’t eat them.”

“I don’t,” he gave a convincing shake of his head. “I told you we *did*, but now we *don’t*. Now we look after them. Now, well, now I just eat goat.”

Debbie looked back and forth between Rais and the giraffes while he pondered giraffe and goat meat.

“It tastes better, anyway.”

“Oh...” Debbie looked to the ground. It was a lot for her to process.

Rais nodded.

A silence fell over them once more as Debbie pondered everything, and Rais thought about how his stomach was rumbling for goat.

Debbie finally broke the silence with a question she hated hearing fall from her lips.

“What does giraffe taste like?”

“Oh. Well, it—”

“Don’t answer that.” She shook her hand at him. “Don’t answer that.”

“Okay, sorry, Debbie.”

“It’s okay, I shouldn’t have asked.”

“It’s okay. We all do things in our cultures that are different to each other.”

“Yes, we do.”

Rais was matter-of-fact with his words. “But we are the same.”

“We are the same?”

“Yes, I have my culture, you have yours.” Rais’s tone was philosophical as he gestured between himself and Debbie. “But we are talking to each other. We are walking out here together. So, we are the same.”

“But I don’t eat things you eat... well, except goat.”

“No.” He kept his eyes on the giraffes, “Well, we both like football.”

“I don’t, actually.”

“You don’t like football?”

“No,” she looked at him for a moment before turning her eyes to the creatures, “I find it boring.”

“Ah! No, no,” he shook his head. “Football is the most fun thing.”

“Not for me.”

Rais looked to the ground, lost for words.

She glanced at him for a moment. “We are not the same then?”

“A little bit different,” he confessed.

She smiled at the giraffes.

“These two giraffes,” he gestured with his chin, “are only a little different too.”

Debbie looked the two creatures over. Other than being slightly different in height, she saw nothing different at all between the tall, beautiful creatures nibbling on the sharp ends of the trees. “They look so alike to me.”

“Can you see the differences?”

“I suppose their spots are a bit different. And that one is a little taller.”

“One is a male and one is a female.”

“Yes?”

“Yes,” he pointed to their heads. “You can tell by their size of their heads.”

“Oh yes? Their heads?”

“And by his...” Rais grinned, pointing with his spear to the belly area of one of the giraffes.

“Yes, Maasai,” Debbie frowned, “I see.”

Rais grinned.

Debbie shook her head, but still, her grin was there as obvious as Rais’s.

They spent some time standing in silence as they watched the giraffes. Debbie could hear their mouths crunching on the leaves. For Rais, it was a sight he had often seen since he was a baby, but there with Debbie it somehow seemed new. It was as if he had never in his life stood and watched two giraffes chewing on the trees. Time drifted by as they stood with the giraffes, enjoying a cool breeze mixing with warm sun under the big, blue, endless sky.

Rais reached into a small pouch on his belt, taking out his old mobile phone. "It's getting late." His tone was a little sad.

"Already?" Debbie was surprised.

"Yes."

"We will need to get back to town. You don't want to take the dala dala too late."

Debbie dipped her head, disappointed by the time. "Thank you, Rais."

"Unless you want to stay the night?"

She giggled with her squinting smile. "No, Mr. Maasai. I will go home. But thank you."

"Okay."

Debbie spoke sweetly to the giraffes, "Goodbye."

Rais followed suit, "Goodbye, giraffes."

And with that they began the long walk back to town.

Most of the walk was in silence, a comfortable silence. But as they approached town, Rais revealed his thoughts. "Will you visit again, perhaps?"

Debbie thought for a moment. "No."

"No?" Rais stopped on the spot, concerned.

"No," Debbie replied thoughtfully, "you can visit me next."

"Oh!"

Debbie walked on past Rais, now frozen in surprise, "You have shown me around, Rais. It would be fair for me to do the same for you, yes?"

"Oh well—yes. Yes, of course!" Rais beamed with a mix of surprise and happiness as he caught up to her with a spring in his step. "Okay, yes!" he excitedly pointed ahead, "I will do that!"

"Very good, Rais." Debbie listened to the jingle of his jewellery.

"When should I do that?" the jewellery jingled louder as he bounced along.

"Well, when you think you can, and when I am not working."

"Okay..." His eyes searched the horizon. "When is that?"

"I don't know yet, but soon."

His smile stretched wide across his face as excitement took hold. "Yes, yes, okay, very good, Debbie."

She spoke casually, hiding an enjoyment of his clear excitement. "When are you free?"

He declared his availability with confidence and promise. “I will be free when you are free.”

Debbie grinned. “Okay. I will check my work.”

“Very good,” Rais beamed, having had no experience in hiding excitement to play a game of slowly revealing a liking for someone.

Reaching the highway, they spotted the dala dala down the road. Debbie had to run if she was to catch it. There was no time for proper *goodbyes*.

Debbie, without thinking it through, kissed Rais on the cheek and began to run towards the dala dala, calling out over her shoulder “Thank you!”

A stunned Rais was left on the side of the road, having just experienced his first kiss.

As she ran, Debbie waved to the dala dala conductor to wait.

“You are welcome!” Rais finally called back with a huge, excited grin. “I will see you soon, Debbie!”

And with that she was gone and Rais was alone on the side of the road, wondering when exactly he was meant to go and see her.

He took out his phone and typed her a message.

“When should I come and see you?”

He watched the dala dala disappear over a distant hill. And then his phone beeped.

“I will check my shifts tonight.”

Rais bobbed up and down on the spot with a large grin across his face. An instant reply and a smiley face, he thought. This must be good!

Putting her phone away, Debbie settled back into the dala dala, and realised she hadn’t taken one photo of the giraffes the whole time she had been there. But she quickly decided it didn’t matter. They were now forever clear in her memory. And besides, perhaps she would visit Longido again sometime, now her new friend was there.

Marie and the Fisherman

Out in the waters off the fishing village of Kizimkazi, Marie was interacting with her clients after their exciting snorkelling experience. She took photos of them posing in their gear and she posed in their selfies. She was finally at ease on the boat, most likely, she assumed, because it was better than being in the water, snorkelling. Haji stood up to explain to everyone that they were now on their way to a nearby island for some lobster.

He leaned in to Marie, “perhaps you will join us off the boat for this?”

She replied with a confident look, “Yes, fisherman. I will get off the boat if you give me sand to stand on.”

“I will give you the best sand in Africa, beautiful woman from Rwanda.”

She laughed off his flirty compliment with a shake of her head, though the upturned edges of her smile hinted to Haji that she was at least amused.

Arriving at the shore of a long, narrow atoll with crisp white sand, Haji jumped out into the shallows of crystal-clear water. He pulled the boat into the shallowest point, explaining as he went that this small atoll was only visited by those who knew the locals well. Then, one by one, he helped his guests from the boat directing them towards four red rugs laid out on the sand— nearby was a white cloth-covered table and a barrel sitting over a small fire. Steam drifted from the barrel as a young Zanzibarian man added a small bucket of seawater. Haji boasted that here they would taste foods not even restaurants in the expensive hotels could provide. “You will eat the way we eat. The best and tastiest way. For you too,” he held his hand aloft to help Marie down.

“What is that?” Marie gestured to the barrel on the fire, leaving Haji with his empty hand out in the air.

“Boiling sea water, for the lobsters.”

Looking down over the edge of the boat to the shin-deep water, Marie let out a gasp, “Uh! Haji, I said sand, that is water.”

“There is sand, under just a little bit of water.” His tone was apologetic. “The boat can’t go closer. I am sorry. I could carry you if you like?”

“Oh my god,” she rolled her eyes. “I am joking with you, Haji. It’s fine.” She stepped off the boat with a little jump, leaving his hand still in the air as her feet splashed into the water.

“Okay, come on fisherman, I want to try this lobster.”

Slightly confused by what had just happened, Haji finally lowered his hand from the air. “Okay, this way then,” he said.

Reaching the group who were settling onto the rugs, Marie offered to take photos for them. Collecting a phone and a camera from the tourists she took a few steps back to document the romantic, tropical holiday scene while Haji gave everyone the history of the atoll as well as details of the meal they were about to eat.

Their ever-charismatic host was quick to cool the situation when a child in the group began to cry at the sight and sound of a live lobster going into the barrel of boiling water. Not even bothering to try convincing the child of any fiction about the lobster’s fate, Haji simply changed the subject—he had just spotted a passing dolphin. Instantly the child and all the adults were transfixed on the water, waiting for the dolphin to reappear. But the only signs were some fish splashing briefly at the surface as they swam by. The child asked Haji where the dolphin went.

“Oh, it has gone under the water, swimming very quickly to get to its family,” Haji explained with a storyteller’s tone. “Those fish were jumping when the dolphin passed under them.”

The child, and many adults, looked on at the water, imagining the dolphin effortlessly swimming along below the shining surface.

With the lobsters out of the boiling barrel and on large plates with their shells opened, everyone settled down in a circle. They were quick to enjoy their meal of lobster, rice, and vegetables, while Haji explained how the spices that had been used were all local to his village. As he spoke, everyone let out satisfied and surprised *mmms* and *oohs* as they chewed.

A short while later, as everyone climbed onto the boat, the sky began to fill with colour as the sun neared the horizon. When Marie, last as always, let Haji take her hand as she climbed onto the boat, she quietly asked if there really had been a dolphin.

“Not this time,” Haji smiled at the thought of finding her a dolphin. “But next time there will be, when you join me for a dolphin tour.”

“Ah,” she sucked air through her teeth. “I don’t know if my company uses your services for that.”

“Oh, well. Actually they don’t... But what about you?”

“What about me?”

“You could come and see the dolphins with me outside of work?” he offered with a smooth tone as the boat pulled away from the shore.

“For free?”

“Oh. Well,” he looked to his hands, “I cannot do it for free.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, I have to pay the captain of the boat to take us out, and then there is the fuel in the boat—”

“Ah. But you will be free, as my guide?”

“Well,” he was a little off guard, “I do this for a job.”

Marie enjoyed playing with him, “Ah yes. You are asking me to come here and see the dolphins with you as a job?”

“Oh well... I...” He was unsure of his words, or perhaps what he was asking.

But Marie grinned, “Maybe one day I can join one of your tours. But I cannot anytime now as I have no money. I am doing this work for college. They don’t pay me.”

“Oh, yes. You are an intelligent woman, studying, yes?” he asked, getting free of the other subject.

“I am studying, yes. For tourism. Every woman is intelligent, Haji.”

“Oh yes—I know that. I wasn’t ...” Haji’s thoughts stumbled.

“I am joking with you, Haji.”

“Oh yes. Of course—I am studying too.” Haji proclaimed proudly. “I just finished my undergraduate degree. I am going to be a marine biologist.”

“Hey! That’s great!”

“Yes, I am very happy. I worked very hard. Next I will do my masters.” He looked out over the water, “perhaps in Norway.”

“Ah! Norway!” Marie’s eyes were wide with surprise.

His reply came with a longing, “I hope to.”

“But you are a fisherman?”

“Ah, you think I am just a fisherman?” he replied wide-eyed, but playful. “I am much more than a fisherman.”

“I thought you were only a fisherman? You talked so much about the fish and you live in a fishing village.”

“Ah yes but—”

“And you told us all you were a fisherman.”

“Yes of course, I have been a fisherman and sometimes I still am. But soon I will work just as a marine biologist.”

“Ah I see,” she laughed at the next words that lined up in her head before they were said. “I thought you were just a smelly fisherman!”

His face turned to shock, “Am I smelly?”

“Maybe... a little,” she realised for the first time that he really was not. And neither did his clothes look stained with fish guts like workers in the fish markets.

“I am very clean! I wash—and I swim... I am not smelly, am I?”

“No, no.” Marie held up a gentle hand. “I am just saying because you are a fisherman, you know? In town at the market they smell. They are covered in the fish smell.”

“Oh, I see. Yes, they would.” His tone was serious. “They work day and night.”

Marie nodded in acknowledgement. Haji nodded in acknowledgement of her nod of acknowledgement. They were in near perfect silence, but for the amused sniggers of the captain and engine noise.

They didn't speak again until they reached the shore. Marie joined everyone else in looking out over the water, while Haji looked from Marie to the captain who was obviously deeply entertained by Haji's not so successful attempt at wooing this woman. The captain let out a burst of laughter, drawing everyone's attention away from the beautiful surroundings for a moment.

He told them all, in broken English, that he was just laughing because he was happy to be there, before throwing another grin to Haji, which Marie picked up on and chuckled too. This left Haji in the middle of the joke while everyone else enjoyed the beautiful sea and sunset as they sailed back to Kizimkazi.

After everyone had climbed off the boat, Haji made one last brave effort before Marie boarded the tour bus.

“Will you be coming back soon?”

“I can,” she stated, never one to mince her words. “Do you have a phone?”

“Yes,” Haji looked confused.

“Well, take it out, fisherman.”

As Haji did so and looked at her, she pointed to the phone. “Zero six...” she said, waiting for Haji to realise he should unlock his phone and enter her number.

When Haji finally had his phone ready, she read out the rest of her number and climbed onto the bus. The door closed in Haji's face before he could say another word.

As the bus drove away over the hill, the captain of the boat walked up beside Haji, "you going to make her pay for the calls too?" His body shook with laughter as he walked off, leaving Haji standing alone in the middle of the road, unsure what he was supposed to do next.

For Marie and the tourists, the ride back to town was a quiet one, with everyone comfortably tired from the day. Marie gazed sleepily out the window at the passing world of banana, coconut, and pawpaw trees silhouetted against the orange and red background of the setting sun. Her mind was nowhere in particular. This whole place, this whole world was just as new to her as it was to the tourists. Her attention shifted only when her phone beeped.

Looking down she discovered a short message from an unsaved number.

"I look forward to seeing you again, Rwandan Marie. When will you visit me?"

"Ah!" she clicked her tongue behind her teeth and put her phone away in her bag before returning her gaze to the warm Zanzibari sky.

Lake Victoria

The morning after Mr. Kulindwa had met Mama Agnus, he sprang out of bed before the eagles of Mwanza had a chance to take to the sky. With breakfast finished and his son readied for the day, Mr. Kulindwa walked him to school.

“Where are you going, Dad?”

“I am going to work while you are at school. And when you finish, I will be collecting you *by car*.”

“Oh!” Barak’s school bag bounced on his small, excited shoulders. “Where are we going?”

“Down to the lake.”

“Great!” Barak had a hop in his step.

“Yes, we are going to have a guest, who has not seen our town properly.”

“Oh?” the boy looked up to his father, nearly three times his own height.

“Yes,” his father smiled.

“Okay.” The boy’s head wobbled as he nodded excitedly at the thought of an after-school trip to the lake. After saying their *goodbyes* at the school entrance, Mr. Kulindwa headed quickly towards the conference.

Once there, he took little time finding Mama Agnus. He wished her a good morning, she wished him the same—both sharing a kind of smile they hadn’t shared with anyone else in the conference building. As business was in hand, they moved off quickly to separate areas.

Mama’s morning had been a gentle beginning, waking without need of alarm or hurry. With her speech out of the way she found herself relaxing into the second day. Enjoying being past the age of needing to impress and build new connections, Mama had arrived at the conference without a care in the world. However, Mr. Kulindwa’s enthusiastic *hello* had not been lost on her, and she found herself intrigued by the moustached, smiling Sukuma man as the business of the day got underway.

It was a long morning but finally lunchtime arrived and Mr. Kulindwa could suggest that perhaps this would be a good time to leave.

Mama Agnus enjoyed the idea, “You might be right.”

While no-one was paying attention, they made their way to the door where a waiting driver welcomed them. On the drive Mama Agnus learned that he was in fact

a young man Mr. Kulindwa had taken into his home when he was younger and without a place to live. Mama could see the driver had great admiration for Mr. Kulindwa whose own expressions seemed to play down the value of what he had given the young man.

At the school, Barak greeted Mama Agnus with a broad, happy smile. The boy was extra excited to have been picked up before the school day had ended. Mama enjoyed the sight of the small boy in his white shirt and blue school pants with his large backpack, equal in size to his torso, hanging from his shoulders.

“Hello,” Mama Agnus greeted Barak, as he climbed into the back seat next to his father who quickly instructed him on his manners.

“Introduce yourself properly.”

“I am Barak,” he stuck out his hand to shake Mama Agnus’s.

She greeted him softly as she took his hand. “Hello, Barak, I am Mama Agnus.”

“Hello,” the young boy smiled shyly.

Mr. Kulindwa placed his hand on Barak’s shoulder “Okay, now you let go of her hand. A handshake isn’t forever. And sit back now.” He helped the boy into his seat belt.

Driving through town, Barak gave Mama Agnus his own little tour guide speech using single words to name the things he pointed out.

“Boulder. Truck. Building. Factory.” And then with excitement, “Lake!” as he pointed directly out the windscreen as they emerged from boulders and buildings to see a broad, blue inland sea stretching to the horizon.

“Lake Victoria,” Mr. Kulindwa added.

“Ah yes... beautiful.”

“Indeed,” nodded Mr. Kulindwa.

“Indeed,” nodded Barak, imitating his father.

A short while later they parked down near the water. Climbing from the car, Mama found steps leading to a large grassed area in front of several huge boulders rising at least three storeys high above the shallows of the shoreline. To Mama’s surprise, as soon as they reached the lawn they were instructed by a young man, apparently the guard of the grass, that they could not be on this area, “but you can pay and then stay.”

This seemed odd to Mama Agnus, but Mr. Kulindwa took care of the situation quickly with a few words in the ear of this lawn guard. No money changed hands and the young man wished them well before walking away, having been outmanoeuvred by the authority of this old statesman.

While Mama and Mr. Kulindwa sat on a bench, Barak, left free to enjoy this apparently special area of grass, ran to the rocks by the water before excitedly calling out about a multi-coloured lizard.

Taking in the view from the comfort of the bench, Mama Agnus and Mr. Kulindwa continued where their conversation had left off the night before.

“So,” Mr. Kulindwa gestured with his hands to the lake, “welcome to Lake Victoria.”

“Thank you.” Mama smiled at the shimmering light that ran across the water all the way to the horizon.

“May I ask you something?” he asked with a polite tone.

“Of course you can.”

“How long ago did your husband pass away?”

“It was ten years ago.”

Mr. Kulindwa lowered his head, “Oh, I am sorry.”

“It was God’s will,” Mama softly decreed, looking out across the lake. “And your wife?”

“Almost the same... the mother of my other children, that is. Not Barak.”

Mama watched the boy sitting on a boulder watching the lizard. “Your son is very calm.”

“Yes, he is a good boy,” Mr. Kulindwa tilted his head a little, looking at his son. “Most of the time.”

“Where is his mother?”

“She left. We are not together anymore.” Mr. Kulindwa’s eyes remained on the boy as he went deep into thought. “She was lost.”

“I am sorry.”

“Life goes on,” he pulled himself from his thoughts, “and my boy is well and safe.”

“Yes. I can see he is very lucky.”

“Thank you, Mama Agnus.”

“You are welcome, Mr. Kulindwa.”

A comfortable silence fell over them as they enjoyed the view of the endless lake and the sight of the young boy playing and exploring.

Eventually Mama spoke again, asking Mr. Kulindwa about his hopes for the boy's future. Her tone tried to avoid any obvious reference to the fact Mr. Kulindwa was already an old man, but he understood it was something to be considered. He knew he would perhaps not be around to see Barak become a man and begin a life for himself, but he hoped he would live long enough for that. He said he saw Barak having a good education and going to university in Dar, maybe in the Middle East or somewhere like England or America. He believed that as long as the boy had his education and the freedom to decide his future, he would be fine without a father. Mama bowed her head, warmed by the clarity with which he saw the world and the timing of his place in it.

When Mr. Kulindwa turned the conversation to Mama Agnus, she found herself speaking freely and easily. He asked her how she had found life since her husband passed away. She explained that caring for her children, grandchildren and her work with the community kept life full—even when of course she missed the man she thought she would grow old with.

Mr. Kulindwa nodded in agreeance, “losing the one you love before you have truly grown old is the hardest thing to accept.”

A silence returned as Barak moved from the boulders to the shoreline and peered into the water, talking to himself.

Eventually Mr. Kulindwa spoke again, having decided to draw the conversation to his thoughts and feelings, about somehow spending more time with this kind woman from Dar. At first he had considered that perhaps he should move slower on the idea. But he quickly dismissed the thought, as age had taught him that if you find something good, you take the time while you can. While he was debating with himself, Mama was simply enjoying watching the boy explore the shoreline.

“So, Agnus.”

“Yes?”

“I think I would like to—” Before he could finish, Mama Agnus's phone rang. She answered the call. She had to return to the conference for a meeting. Mr. Kulindwa of course obliged immediately, even switching his demeanour back to a somewhat businesslike one as he called out for Barak and waved to the driver.

Back outside the conference building, Mr. Kulindwa and Barak wished Mama well.

Mr. Kulindwa broke the silence, “perhaps I will see you again?”

“Yes, that would be nice,” Mama Agnus smiled at the thought.

Mr. Kulindwa’s mind raced for a plan, “perhaps dinner?”

“Oh, I can’t, I have a business dinner,” Mama Agnus’s voice revealed a hint of regret as she found herself wishing to be sitting back by the lake.

“Oh. I am sorry to hear.” Mr. Kulindwa’s own disappointment was glaringly obvious, even to young Barak.

“Perhaps breakfast before I leave for the airport?” Mama Agnus suggested.

“Yes, that would be fine,” Mr. Kulindwa replied with a large smile.

Barak piped up, “me too!”

“I would like that very much,” Mama Agnus placed a gentle hand on Barak’s shoulder.

With their *goodbyes* finished Mr Kulindwa watched as Mama walked into the building.

“She is nice!” Barak proclaimed.

“Yes,” Mr. Kulindwa smiled, as his eyes remained on the doors Mama had just walked through. “Yes, she is.”

~

The rest of the day and the night moved slowly for Mr. Kulindwa and Mama Agnus who both looked forward to their breakfast together, though not the *goodbye* that would follow it.

The next morning, as Mama got ready to leave, she considered what she would perhaps say to Mr. Kulindwa. She felt a strange desire to know him better. As she left the hotel and greeted Mr. Kulindwa’s driver friend, Mama wondered if it would be possible.

A short while later, when the driver stopped the car they were on a narrow, unsealed road lined with small, cement, rectangular houses. The driver, after helping Mama Agnus from the car, directed her to follow him as he walked to the entrance of a small yard and into a doorway where Mama found a smiling, little Barak.

“Hello, Barak,” Mama placed a hand on the boy’s head, “How are you, this morning?”

“Good!” his eyes shyly avoided contact with Mama’s large, smiling eyes.

“Karibu,” Barak turned and ran to a chair.

“Asante, Barak,” Mama Agnus entered a modest lounge room with three lounge chairs and a small table.

A deep, cheerful voice came through the doorway on the other side of the room, “How are you, this morning?”

Looking up she found a smiling Mr. Kulindwa, dressed smartly in suit, shirt and pants. “I am good, thank you.”

His tall figure and broad shoulders filled the door frame, “You are most welcome, Mama Agnus.” he smiled brightly. “Please, sit, make yourself at home.”

Mama gave a gentle bow of her head, “thank you.”

Mama took a seat on the lounge while Barak sat across from her, perched on the edge of a large chair. His back was held straight to attention, as he studied this kind-looking woman sitting in his home early in the morning.

Mr. Kulindwa disappeared into a side room before emerging with a long, narrow, metal jug producing the strong scent of coffee as steam rose from its spout. After placing the jug on the table he soon returned with a plate of chapatti and boiled eggs, followed by bowls of chicken soup.

Mama watched as Mr. Kulindwa prepared a plate with a small bowl of soup for Barak. She noticed how his large hands gently placed the soup in front of Barak’s small hands before gently touching the back of the boy’s head.

“Eat slowly.”

As Barak leaned in to eat, his attention engrossed on the task, Mr. Kulindwa turned to Mama. “Have you enjoyed Mwanza?”

“Yes, it’s a wonderful place. There are very friendly people here.”

“Oh yes. We are friendly here. Many of us are Sukuma.”

Mama smiled at the memory of the times as a young woman she and her friends back home had spoken of the tall, broad-shouldered Sukuma men. “Yes, Sukuma are good people... Strong people.” Mama watched as Barak’s father scooped soup into her bowl before adding a little more to Barak’s.

Tasting the soup Mama raised her eyebrows approvingly. “This is very good.”

“Very good!” Barak proclaimed, as soup poured from the side of his mouth down his chin and onto his shirt.

“I’m sorry you have to leave so soon,” Mr. Kulindwa confessed to Mama as he handed Barak a tissue. Barak just placed it on the table, preferring to return to the soup in the bowl, and leave the soup on his face and shirt to dry itself.

Mama felt the same difficulty at the end of her stay in Mwanza, “I am sorry I must go too. But of course, I need to get home to my family.”

“I understand.” Mr. Kulindwa took the tissue and wiped Barak’s mouth and shirt while Barak carried on eating.

Mama felt relaxed in their home. She felt comfortable around this Sukuma man, as though perhaps she had known him far longer than two days with only brief periods of shared time. As they ate and sipped their coffee, they spoke freely and comfortably. Mama told him about her children, and about her grandchild—telling Barak that he was of a similar age. But of course, Barak was still busy with his soup, in fact his third helping of it. Mr. Kulindwa told Mama about his children too, and they discussed how parenting had given them a drive for life that continued long after their children had left home. They discovered they had each felt a new life come into them when young children had once again entered their lives just as old age had begun—for both as grandparents, and for Mr. Kulindwa as parent to Barak.

When their food was finished, Barak bounced out the door to play as Mr. Kulindwa stood to collect the dishes.

“Would you like more coffee? Or tea maybe?” he asked the guest he did not want to leave.

“I would... but unfortunately, I have to go.”

“Oh.” Mr. Kulindwa couldn’t hide the disappointment of his slumped shoulders.

“Yes, I am sorry. My flight...”

“Of course,” Mr. Kulindwa replied politely, lifting his posture. “I will call the driver and Barak and I will take you to the airport.”

“Oh, that is kind, but I have a driver already; he will be arriving shortly. I got your young driver friend to tell him the address here, to save you the trouble.” Mama’s tone made her slight disappointment obvious, “but that would have been nice.”

“That’s no problem.” He masked his disappointment as best he could.

“Perhaps I will see you again?” Mama suggested.

“Yes—” Mr. Kulindwa’s mind moved quickly. “—Actually, I will be in Dar in a week.”

“Oh, in a week? You didn’t say! That’s good!”

“Yes,” his tone did not reveal he had just found himself committing to a trip he had moments earlier not known was happening. “I am going there for business.”

“Business?”

“Yes...,” he searched his mind “...family business.”

“Oh, what business?”

“My daughter... wants to sell her fish there.” A truth about his daughter and family that until moments ago had not involved sales in Dar es Salaam.

“Oh, that’s good news then!”

“Yes,” he continued as he built the new plan in his head, “it’s something we have been working towards for some time.” A half-truth that was true enough, he decided.

“Well then, Mr. Kulindwa,” Mama smiled brightly, “we should spend some time together.”

“That would be very fine,” Mr. Kulindwa smiled beneath his moustache as Barak ran back into the house with a worn-out soccer ball under his arm.

“Will you have Barak with you?”

“Yes of course,” Mr. Kulindwa’s mouth beat his mind to yet another decision.

Mama looked to Barak, “Do you like planes, Barak?”

“Planes?” Barak looked confused.

“Yes, Barak,” Mr. Kulindwa patted him on the head. “You are excited to go on your first plane next week, yes?” He hoped the boy would not give away the suddenness of this new plan.

“I’m going on a plane?” Barak shouted, with his eyes wide and the ball falling from his hands.

“Yes, yes. Next week, Barak,” Mr. Kulindwa replied, looking up to Mama. “He didn’t know.”

Mama was slightly suspicious of the situation, “Yes, he is surprised.”

Barak, unable to control his surprise and excitement, ran back out into the yard yelling PLANE at the top of his lungs. Mama’s phone rang. The driver had

arrived and it was time for her to go. She rose from her seat and Mr. Kulindwa rose too.

“Well, Mr. Kulindwa, I will see you next week.” Mama grinned slightly as the sound of Barak making plane noises drifted in through the door.

“Yes, yes.” Mr. Kulindwa bowed his head. “Of course, Mama Agnus. It is great timing. Great luck that we will get to meet again.”

With that Mama wished him well, shook his hand, smiled one more time, and headed out to where her car was waiting. Standing at the front of his house, Mr. Kulindwa smiled and waved as the car pulled away and his son ran around with arms out wide, making plane noises.

“A plane!” Barak called out excitedly.

“Yes, son,” Mr. Kulindwa looked down the road at the car that carried his thoughts. “A plane.”

A short while later, as Mama boarded the plane and took her seat she found a brief message from Mr. Kulindwa saying he and Barak wished her a safe journey. Mama Agnus grinned as she put her phone away and her plane taxied to the runway. Meanwhile, Mr. Kulindwa climbed into his young friend’s car to head to town to buy plane tickets. And to tell his daughter he would now be helping her expand her business beyond the reaches she had envisioned for herself.

The Old Bike Leaning on the Wall

The morning after Renaldo had fled her home and her village, Zuena sat outside her home, waiting for school, worrying and wondering about the boy. Her mother, having spotted her daughter sitting there, sat down beside her— also worried for the boy. They sat in silence for some time.

Her mother had put it out of her mind by the middle of the morning. However, unbeknown to her, her daughter had not. As soon as her first class was over, Zuena acted on a plan that had been forming since morning.

Needing to answer questions about the boy, Zuena headed to a particular wall of a particular building. Upon finding what she knew would be there, she reached out to borrow it.

Zuena climbed onto the old bike and with a push on the pedal began a creaky ride out of Fujoni —along the highway where the night before the dala dala had taken Renaldo. A bus ride that would have taken him maybe 90 minutes would take her much of the day—a journey far beyond anywhere she had been before.

The Fisherman Came to Town

Haji cursed himself for messaging Marie too quickly after she had left on the tourist bus. It was several hours until he did hear back, and her message was short.

“Thank you, Haji,” she had replied, ignoring his question of when she would return. She had put the thought aside, distracted by her new adventure in Zanzibar—still only a day old.

Haji chose not to reply, not to ask again. To wait. To play the waiting game and see if the Rwandan woman reached out to him. Or even, as he liked to imagine from time to time, wait until she just turned up on the beach, “looking for her dear Haji” whom she hadn’t been able to stop thinking about since she last saw his smile.

But nothing further came.

So Haji made a plan while out diving for reef fish. His Rasta friend pointed out to him as they rested in the boat that, “the fish don’t come to us, mon. We go to the fish.” With this wisdom in mind, all be it completely unrelated to women or love, Haji resolved to go to town.

The following morning he found a ride to Stone Town. Determined not to message her, but instead to casually wander by her work, he left home armed with nothing more than his memory of the tour company’s name. It shouldn’t be too hard to find, he thought, as he hopped out of the car amid the bustling Darajani market on the edge of Stone Town.

Standing alone in a place he had only visited several times, he decided to ask if someone there knew the location of the office that housed the Rwandan woman. But this market was far from where anyone using a tour company would be.

Onwards he went, through the market and into a thousand-year-old towering maze of stone and coral brick, where scooters weaved and children played. An old man, trying to sell him spices at the edge of the ancient town, told him to head through to the gardens by the water on the other side of the once Arab maze city. So the fisherman, soon to be a marine biologist, doing the best he could to follow the old man’s directions, made his way into narrow laneways that were filled with the children of Zanzibar.

“You want to go down here, then,” the old spice vendor had explained. “You see that little bend, when you reach that bend you need to go left at the next corner; after which there might be a stack of old coral brick for building. Then there is a

small right through a space about the width of two of you. Take that if they have cleared the coral brick stack, then take a right then a left; head on straight until you come to a mosque with a giant door with polished gold trim. But if they haven't cleared the stack, keep on down past it until you come to a blue step—likely with three boys sitting on it. At the blue step you want to go left again. Then you follow it around a curve until you reach a short, old man sitting on a white step. Don't worry he'll be there, he's always there. But—just in case he has died and isn't there, make sure you keep a lookout for a white step with a worn out spot where the old man had sat for thirty years. That's where you want to be sure to take a right, then choose the middle direction of the three directions you'll see in front of you. If you turn left at the old man or his mark on the step you'll end up at the wrong end of town, as you will if you take the other wrong one too. Now, once you've taken that middle one, all you need to do is keep going and you'll come to the mosque. Then you're half-way to where you want to be! Next you need to..."

Haji's memory of the rest of the old man's directions had faded as he made his way down what he thought might be the second turn he was meant to take.

Until finally, success! A landmark appeared before him. "The blue step!" he said to himself.

And as predicted, on the step were three boys, confirming that it was indeed the correct blue step in a town that likely had more than one blue step.

As he passed by, the three boys sitting on the step greeted him, "Mambo!" came the first.

"Poa, *vipi*?" Haji nodded.

"*Vipi sana*," all three replied together.

Smiling at their odd town accents, on he went in search of the next important sight, a gap no wider than two of him.

Haji wandered on, racking his mind for the next turn the old spice merchant had told him would lead to that narrow gap. But it was no easy task, what with his mind having been taken over just two days earlier by a Rwandan woman who didn't want to swim. He searched through his memories of her, trying to sidestep around thoughts of their future in search of the next turn he was meant to take. As he passed by people, doors, steps, narrowish parts, and more of the same, he took guesses at which way he was maybe meant to go. The sun gave him no help as it seemed to circle around his head and the memory of her eyes circled with it.

“Mambo,” came a small voice with a familiar town accent.

Looking down he saw something he did not expect—three, familiar-looking young boys sitting on a now familiar-looking blue step.

The three children looked up at this stranger with the strange accent and the confused look on his face. A look they saw ten times a day on the much paler faces of the *mzungu* (white people) tourists—faces that reddened more and more each time they passed. But this man, this village man, he wasn’t as stubborn as most of those tourists. He didn’t walk on trying to hold his chin high as though he meant to go around in the circle he had just taken. And further, he was well aware of the sense of humour of some of the boys in Stone Town. Knowing all too well that he could be tricked, he was determined not to be fooled.

Haji asked why they were playing some kind of game with him, running around and sitting on different blue steps. One of the boys, a whole six months older than the others, nearly seven years old and nearly a man himself, he felt, spoke on behalf of the group.

“Yes, we run around to confuse you. We run around with a tin of blue paint and paint the steps before you reach them.”

“The fastest-drying paint you can ever imagine,” the second boy proclaimed.

“See how our hands and shorts are not blue, even though two minutes ago this step was nothing more than a grey step with no children on it!” proclaimed the last, as all three held up their paint-free hands.

Haji was familiar with the wit of Stone Town children. They grew up in a very different world to the small village where he had come of age. They were surrounded by an endless run of other children, each passing to the other the cheek and wit they played on locals and tourists alike as they imitated the adults they already felt they were.

“Okay, okay. Very funny, sirs,” he said respectfully. “Can you tell me how to get to the gap between two buildings that is no wider than me?”

“The one with the coral stack?” asked the boy who was nearly seven.

Haji sighed with relief at the news that the coral stack did indeed exist. “Ah, yes. Well then, how about the mosque with the big wooden doors and polished gold trim?”

All three boys replied in unison, “Which one?”

Haji realised then that without calling to ask her for her whereabouts, his Rwandan love would be more of a challenge to find than he had so falsely expected. “Fish are not this hard to find,” he proclaimed aloud.

“What?” the eldest boy asked. “Fish?”

“You are going the wrong way,” proclaimed the youngest.

“It’s back there where you came from at the beginning,” the middle boy announced.

“The door?” Haji asked.

“The fish market,” replied the boys.

“No, no. I am not looking for fish.”

“You just said you were looking for fish.”

“No, it is a metaphor.”

“What is that? What is a metaphor?” asked the middle boy.

“I think it’s a type of fish,” the youngest boy added.

“No!” the eldest boy proclaimed. “A metaphor is like a lobster. I have seen one!”

“No, my young friends,” Haji explained, “a metaphor is not a fish. It’s something you say when you want to relate something to something else.”

All three boys looked on, frowning.

“I am looking for a woman.” Haji’s eyes lit up. “The most beautiful woman you can ever imagine.”

“Oh,” the eldest boy shook his head. “You are crazy.”

“I am not crazy!” Haji declared. “I am in love.”

“Ah! Yes! You are crazy,” nodded the middle boy.

“Why is he crazy?” the youngest boy asked.

“He is crazy, because he is crazy, because women make us crazy!” the elder boy declared.

“No one has made me crazy!” the youngest boy assured them.

“No, no,” the middle boy added. “Not yet, you are too young. But one day, one day soon even, you will look at a woman and you will become crazy. You will lose your mind like this village man has lost his mind.”

“There will be no hope for you,” the eldest boy decreed. “It almost happened to me, you know. I almost lost my mind at the beach. There was a woman. She was from Arusha—”

“How did you know that?” asked Haji, drawn into the tale.

“Because I asked her!” the elder boy exclaimed. “I have no fear. I swam right up to her and asked her name, and where she was from. She was from Arusha! Her name was Innocent, and she was twenty-three. We swam together as the sun set over Africa!”

“Wow!” the youngest boy’s eyes were wide.

“I tell you, man.” The elder boy shook his head as he spoke, “I nearly lost my mind that day. But my mind is strong. I keep it fit. You need to keep your mind fit,” he pointed to Haji, the village man standing before him who had lost his mind to some woman from Rwanda.

“I will take your advice then, my little brother,” Haji promised, amused by the boys. “But can you tell me how to find my way to the water at the other side of this maze? I need to get to the gardens there, to make my task easier.”

“We will do better!” proclaimed the eldest boy as he stood up. “We will take you there. We will help you find this woman so that you might retrieve your mind.”

Haji was a little hesitant, but the boys were his best bet and their entertaining company was calming his nerves about Marie.

“Come!” the older boy gestured ahead with his hand as he led the stranger from a faraway village through winding pathways below tall, ancient buildings made of stone and coral.

As they went along, the four-foot-tall elder statesman of their tiny group switched into tour guide mode, giving Haji the run-down on the town and its history, backed up by his two companions who walked along on either side of Haji. They reached the narrow gap with the pile of coral, the boys stopping to explain to Haji that for a thousand years those chunks of coral had been used as building material. And, in fact, it was not Stone Town, but Coral Town.

“Yes!” the elder boy carried on, leading the way through town, with left turns, right turns, more turns winding and weaving their way. Haji felt he was being led astray; he felt with the approach of each turn that he was surely going to reappear back where he started. But eventually they emerged from the narrow walls into an open road beside a huge stone wall. “That one is stone, probably,” the youngest boy proclaimed.

“Yep,” the eldest boy confirmed, “that is the Old Fort. “And this,” he announced as they turned out from the fort to a large garden, “is your destination, my brother.”

Upon seeing the sea and port beyond the garden, Haji felt a sense of relief and control once more. Born to a fisherman’s life, his bearings returned at sight of the sea, the chief navigator of his inner compass.

He thanked the boys whole-heartedly, “Asante sana, sirs.”

“*Hakuna matatizo*,” the eldest replied.

They seemed to be waiting for something, as all three boys stood looking at Haji, waiting.

Haji finally picked up on the purpose of the pause. “Oh, I am sorry.” Haji was genuinely apologetic as he took out coins for the boys. But the boys rejected his offer, having been fooling with him.

“Ah, see. I told you, he is crazy,” pointed the middle boy. “We don’t want your money. Geez, that woman has taken all his mind.”

“No, no, my little friends. She has only taken my thoughts.”

The middle boy gave a warning with a shake of his middle finger, “She has taken your whole mind.” He then extended his hand for a shake, “But okay, good luck to you, brother.”

“Thank you, my young brother,” Haji shook each of their hands. “My brothers.”

“What now then?” the middle boy asked.

“Well, I must find her place of work.”

“Ah. Very good.”

“You plan to take her mind too?”

“No, no, my little brother. I only need her heart. You must change your thinking of women and love. You have been poisoned by false ideas. Love is a grand thing. And women are worthy of your lost mind.”

“You just told us she took your thoughts, not your mind?”

“I meant thoughts!”

“Sure, sure,” the eldest waved him off.

“Where is her work?” asked the little boy.

“I don’t know. I only know the name. It’s a travel agent. Named Safaribar Tours—”

All three boys let out a loud, frustrated groan.

“Ohhhhh. You are crazy!” proclaimed the eldest boy, shaking his head.

“What? What do you mean?” the youngest boy frowned.

“You don’t look up when you walk!” yelled the middle boy.

“What do you mean?” yelled the younger boy, right at Haji.

“How will you find something if you don’t look for the signs?” called out the eldest boy as he slapped his hand against his own forehead. “What is the point of having the name of something if you don’t open your eyes to find it?”

“What are you talking about?” Haji frowned, lost in their frustration.

“The sign. If you opened your eyes.” The middle boy let out a frustrated moan. “The sign with the name of this place you need!”

“Yes?” Haji looked at each boy for an answer.

“It hangs above the blue step!” yelled the youngest boy.

“What!” Haji’s eyes widened, “the blue step?”

“The blue step where you found us sitting for our *baraza* (meeting)! You are a fool!”

“Are you kidding me?” Haji blurted.

“No, old man! You were there!” yelled the youngest. “My God!”

“How will you find and have your woman if you can’t even see her building when it is right in front of your crazy face!” called out the middle boy.

“My god,” Haji sighed.

“Come, come,” insisted the eldest boy with a tired tone. “Back we go.”

“Okay. Thank you, little brothers. Thank you!”

“No problem!” announced the younger two.

“Ah!” the eldest stopped in his tracks. “But this time. A test. A lesson for you. You must lead us back.”

“Ohhhhh yes!” called the youngest.

“Yes!” the middle boy was filled with excitement. “Lead us to the blue step!”

Haji was hesitant. “Ah. But I—”

“No, no. You must,” insisted the eldest.

“Okay, okay. I will try,” Haji promised.

Haji led the way as the boys continued to chuckle and tease him at every turn, well aware how far off he was each time he chose the wrong direction. “Oh hey. This

shop. It looks familiar, hey?” they mocked as they began to circle around the inside of the maze.

But finally, after a much longer walk than the one they had led him on, they reached the blue step. And sure enough, hanging from an old metal bar above the blue step was a blue sign with yellow letters “Safaribar Tours.”

“Here, you see? Crazy man?” the eldest boy pointed up. “Right in front of your face she was.”

“Okay,” Haji raised his hands to the boys. “Thank you, young men.”

“You are welcome,” replied the youngest boy.

“What do you do now?” asked the middle boy.

“Well,” Haji looked at the door. “I suppose I go in to greet her.”

“Yes, yes. Then go,” the eldest boy instructed as the three boys stood watching Haji as he stood at the double-glass doors.

“Go on, fisherman!”

“Okay. Thank you.” Haji looked back at the boys. “You can go now.”

“No, no,” grinned the eldest. “This is our step. We will stay.”

Haji knew there was no arguing it. “Okay. See you later.” And with that he pushed in through the door.

Inside his eyes adjusted to the slightly dimmer light. Sitting there before him and looking down at some papers was the girl with short, strawberry blonde Rwandan hair. But Haji couldn’t speak. He was stuck. He just stared and she continued to look down.

“Can I help you?” came a voice to his left.

“Oh,” he turned to find another woman sitting at another desk. “Yes. I am here to—”

“Hey!” came the voice he knew well. “What are you doing here, fisherman?” Marie asked.

“Oh hello,” he brought back his smooth, almost coy tone. “I was looking for someone, you know.”

“Oh yes?” There was a hint of a smile on Marie’s otherwise poker face.

“I am looking for a Rwandan woman,” he grinned.

But her reply was less playful, “I am working now, fisherman.”

“Oh! I see!” came the voice from the woman at the desk near the door.

“THIS is the fisherman!”

“Yes. Yes, I am. Oh,” he continued, pointing to the woman while looking to Marie. “This is your new friend, the Kenyan, yes. The woman you had still not met on that first day of work?”

“Yes,” replied the Kenyan woman before Marie could speak. “I am *the* Kenyan friend, fisherman. What is it you want with *my* Rwandan friend?”

“Oh... I don’t know,” Haji shrugged with a grin, “I just came by to see her because I was already in town.”

“Oh yes?” the Kenyan friend enquired. “And what is it you were already in town for?”

“I—” Haji searched his mind. “I am here—” he stumbled, searching still for an answer but thrown off by the presence of these two women, and thrown off further by the sight of the three boys peering through the window at him. “I am in town...”

“Because he has been made crazy!” called out the boys before bursting into laughter.

“Ohhh!” called out the Kenyan woman to the boys, “and what is it that has made him crazy?”

The boys pointed through the glass, tapping it with their fingertips, gesturing to Marie, “Your Rwandan friend! The skinny one has made him crazy!”

“I see,” she raised her eyebrows as she looked to Marie and then to Haji. “Fisherman, you came to town to see my friend here, yes?”

Haji bowed his head, the jig well and truly up. “Yes,” he replied coyly.

“Well then,” she shot a knowing look at Marie, “I will go to the post office.”

As she went out the door, she shook hands with the boys as they all laughed together, while Haji stood awkwardly, smiling at Marie.

Through the closed door he heard the muffled instructions of her Kenyan friend to the boys. “Be my ears. Tell me everything.” And away she walked, leaving an awkward atmosphere for the Rwandan woman and the fisherman, with three Stone Town boys peering at them through the glass.

Finally, Marie broke the silence, “What do you want, fisherman?”

His reply was sheepish, “Perhaps we can have some time together today?”

“Well,” she looked to the clock on the wall. “Perhaps. But I am working until 6:00 p.m.”

“Well,” he considered, “I can be free then.”

“Okay. What shall we do?”

Her sudden acceptance caught him off guard, having not expected his Rasta friend’s advice to work, “Um—”

“Meet me at the Forodhani Market,” she stated. “The food market at the park.”

“Oh yes, I know that park,” his eyes beamed.

“Okay, fisherman.” She failed to hide a slight smile. “I will see you at 6:00 p.m.” Her tone somewhat gently hinted that he should probably leave now. Not that she wanted him to go, but she felt it best with her boss in the back room and likely to come out at any time.

“Okay. Cool.” He grinned and bobbed on the spot, excitement springing his heels from the ground. “Thank you, Marie.”

“Later, fisherman.”

“Okay. Later!” he gave a giant smile, finally moving his feet from the spot he had been anchored to for what felt like an eternity. His joy at her agreeing to meet him raised an energy inside his chest as he bowed his head, said okay at least two more times, turned and left.

Marie watched on with a smile, “Ah!” she said to herself, shaking her head with a small laugh, as Zanzibar once again surprised and amused her.

“Well, fisherman?” asked the eldest boy as Haji emerged from the office. “Did you succeed?”

“Yes,” Haji beamed. “We will meet at 6:00 p.m. at the food market.”

“Which food market, fisherman?” enquired the middle boy.

“The one at that garden where you took me.”

“Okay, very well.” The eldest boy raised his eyebrows. “Well done, fisherman.”

“Thank you, my little friends.” Haji had the largest smile they had ever seen.

“What are you doing now?” the youngest asked.

“I will go and prepare myself.”

“Prepare yourself?” the youngest enquired with a frown.

Haji nodded.

“How do you do that?” frowned the middle boy.

Haji took a moment to consider. “I don’t know.”

“See!” called out the eldest boy, gesturing to Haji’s head, “He is crazy!”

Fifty Hotels and One Maasai

When Debbie left Longido Rais found his mind travelled away with her. He worked to get on with things. Looking after his animals, working in the barbershop, and doing all he could not to keep taking out his phone to check for a new message—a habit that kept its hold on him as days went by and no messages came. His friend had told him that it was best to wait and not message too much. It seemed like a terrible practice to him, as he felt he wanted to say *hi*, so should just say *hi*. But he held out all the same, aware there were practices in the city that were best to follow.

When Rais finally heard back from the city woman so often in his thoughts, she told him to visit her later in the week. He should call her in a few days once she had her next roster, so they could arrange something.

Rais was excited—maybe even too excited, according to his friend as they walked to Longido town that morning. After reading what Rais had sent back to Debbie his friend let out a loud “Ah! Oh man, you should have calmed that right down before sending it!”

“Why?” Rais had replied, confused as to what he could possibly have done wrong.

Debbie’s mother was helping to brush her hair when her phone beeped. While Debbie read the message, her mother took a peek over her shoulder.

“Oh my.” Her mother let slip as she saw the message.

“Okay, Debbie. That is great, Debbie! I will be there. You just tell me when and I will be there! I miss you! I will call you as you ask!”

“That is a lot of exclamation marks, my dear.”

Debbie giggled, but quickly explained, “he is just a new friend, Mama.”

But her mother figured otherwise as she caught a glimpse of a certain type of smile on Debbie’s face as she read the message for a second time.

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However, days went by and Debbie never got the call. With each new day, nothing came. No message, no call. She tried to message him, but no reply came. She tried to call, but the phone was off.

Rais too, had tried to call—on that day she had said he should and at the first possible moment his friends advised him was not too early to be calling someone who lived in the city. As he stood up on the mountain ledge, he had reached for his phone in the pouch hanging from his beaded belt, but the pouch was empty. Rais stared down at his empty hand where there should have been a phone. His mind wandered back over the last day, looking for the moment where he might have taken the phone from its pouch and placed it somewhere. But no image came. He looked up, over the huge, wide land where in the last two days he had been to so many places herding his goats. In the distance, he made out two giraffes. But of course, no sign of that small phone. That small lost phone in which that most important number was stored.

Climbing down the mountain, slowly and carefully, Rais scanned the boulders and the gaps between. But no phone. For hours he retraced his steps of the last day, following the tracks, searching through his hut, turning over the droppings in the goat pen in case it had been kicked into the ground by their hooves. But no phone.

He followed the path he remembered taking when he went down to the river to bathe. But there was nothing on the ground—just stones and a lizard. And by the river, in the spot where he always put his things, there was no phone. He stood, looking around and over the horizon, back up to the mountain in the distance.

But no phone. It was gone. And with the phone the number in the phone was gone. And with the number gone, she was gone. All he knew was her name and that her eyes squinted when she smiled.

Back in Arusha, as time passed, Debbie put Rais out of her mind. Resigned to fate, she told her friend at the front desk of the little hotel where they worked.

“If he was going to call he would have called, and if he still doesn’t, then I have seen the giraffes, and shared some nice time with a nice person. That’s the way life is, I suppose.”

Unless, she thought, I find myself travelling back that way sometime.

But for Rais, for the Maasai man, it was not the end. It could not be the end. He resolved to find her, to search her out in the city. He knew her name, he told his friend. He knew she worked in a hotel.

“I will just go looking for a Debbie in a hotel and then I will find her.”

“You are crazy,” his friend declared early one morning, as Rais climbed onto the dala dala.

“I will find her,” Rais declared through the window.

“The city is huge; there are hundreds of hotels!” his friend exclaimed through the window.

“That’s okay—I have all day.”

As the dala dala disappeared into the distance, his friend was left shaking his head, dreading the defeated Rais who would return.

But on reaching town, Rais began his task without thought for such things. Climbing from the dala dala he looked around, trying to pick a direction in which to walk. Which way will she be, he thought to himself, as the crowds rushed by him.

“This way,” he said out loud, as he began his walk up the hill towards a row of tall buildings that he thought looked sort of like hotels.

And so his day in Arusha began as he entered the lobby of the first hotel.

Where no one called Debbie worked.

And no one knew which hotels had *Debbies* who worked in them.

On and on like this his day passed, as he visited fifty hotels. Fifty luckless, Debbie-less hotels.

Even as the sun was setting, he carried on checking the full length of every street for another hotel. Visiting one after the other as the sun disappeared and the street lights turned on.

Having circled the town, he stood back, just on the other side of the dala dala station from where he had started hours earlier. Looking up at a pale blue building made of cement and dark blue glass, he wondered how this one would go, just as he had with each and every previous one. Moments later, as he passed in through big, dark-blue, double-glass doors his stomach sank, seeing no sign of Debbie behind the counter. Just another woman, in a white pressed shirt, smiling at him with the greeting smile of a hotel clerk.

As he had done forty or more times before, he asked for Debbie, expecting the same reply that had come every other time. But this time, to his surprise, “Yes, yes, there is a Debbie at this hotel.”

Rais wondered if he had heard correctly; the woman’s eyebrows rose.

“Oh! You are *the* Maasai, aren’t you!”

Rais stood, dazed.

“The Maasai with the giraffes, yes?” her eyes were wide with excitement. Coming out of his daze, he proudly confirmed with straightened posture, “Yes, I am.”

Laughing, the woman told him she knew all about him. But she was sorry to let him know that Debbie wasn't there; she had left just half an hour ago. “She has gone home.”

“Oh,” he lowered his head slightly.

“Perhaps you could call her?” the woman suggested.

Rais explained that he didn't have her phone number anymore and that was why he was looking for her. The woman, impressed by his efforts, said it was no problem as she had her number and that he could call her from the phone there. Rais felt nervous as he was handed the phone, even more so when he heard Debbie's *hello* on the end of the line.

“Hello, Debbie.” he said into the phone while the woman behind the counter grinned at him.

“Hello?” Debbie's voice was polite but unsure.

“It's me... Rais.”

The woman behind the counter sniggered at the great big grin on his face.

“Oh, hello, Rais!” Debbie stood, shocked, in her living room. “Wait, why are you calling me from my work?”

“Oh, yes.” His tone was sheepish as he explained what had happened.

Debbie could hardly believe the story. Never had someone searched high and low for her before, all for a lost number.

“You are kind, Mr. Maasai.”

Rais was certain he could hear her smile and the squint of her eyes travelling through the phone with her voice.

“No, I am quite stupid, Debbie.” He shook his head, “losing things.”

She assured him that he was far from stupid and apologised for not being there.

“Would you like to meet tomorrow morning, Rais? Are you staying in Arusha overnight?”

“Oh, yes, Debbie. Yes, I am. That would be very good.” Happy and content, Rais wished her a good sleep.

After the call ended, Rais stared at the phone, leaving the woman behind the counter wondering how his call had gone.

“Well, Maasai?”

“We are going to meet up tomorrow,” Rais beamed.

“Very good, Maasai!” she grinned.

“Thank you,” his grin stretched wider and brighter than hers. “I will see you tomorrow!”

“Okay, Maasai,” she replied, before calling out as he reached the door.

“Where to now?”

Rais stopped, pondering the question for a moment, “I will go and sleep.”

The woman wished him well, unaware that Rais was off to find a park to sleep in as he had no one in town to go and see.

Mr. Kulindwa's Confession

Mr. Kulindwa's journey to Dar to see Mama under the cover of a business trip, raised his daughter's suspicions as to the reason for his travel. From her enquiries she easily worked out that something more was happening—an extra bounce in her elderly father's step and the glow in his smile as he insisted the travel was purely for business.

“But while I am there I may catch up with a friend,” he grinned, before shifting back to a straight face, having realised what he'd let slip.

She enquired as to who this friend was, and when Barak exclaimed, “Mama Agnus!”, his daughter thought perhaps there was a new love interest in his life. Realising that his daughter was a little put off by the idea, Mr. Kulindwa, added another layer to his story, assuring he saw the potential for Mama Agnus's family to help connect his daughter's business to Dar es Salaam. Suspicious still, yet reassured, she accepted her father's offer in order to see where it might lead. And so, with plane tickets in his top pocket and Barak holding his hand, Mr. Kulindwa climbed the stairs of a plane to Dar.

Throughout the flight an excited Barak jumped up and down on his seat as he looked out the window at the tiny world passing by below. When they arrived in the capital Mr. Kulindwa took his son around town showing him the sights of the big city as he filled in time until they were to meet Mama for dinner. Time felt like it dragged by, but finally the sun began to set over the giant city and Mr. Kulindwa and Barak stood outside the restaurant Mama had suggested.

Within the restaurant there was no sign of Mama and Mr. Kulindwa found himself growing nervous about the dinner while Barak looked at pictures on a menu. Attempting to distract himself from the butterflies in his stomach, he watched his son playing along in his own world, pointing at things in the pictures and naming what they were. Caught up by his own nerves and his boy, it wasn't until Mama had sat down and said *hello* that they both became aware of her arrival.

Apologising for not seeing her come in, Mr. Kulindwa revealed a mild case of nerves to a relaxed Mama Agnus. It was only mild, but Mama found it an obvious change. But soon enough he relaxed as they chatted about the flight over and how the week had been since they were last together. When they ordered their food, Barak became impatient with hunger and his restlessness drew the attention of the

two adults away from each other. Mama Agnus asked him about his favourite foods, to which he replied with gusto, “*kuku!* (chicken)”

Mama laughed and agreed, *kuku*’ing back to him.

Barak giggled as his legs restlessly swung back and forth under the table.

As Mr. Kulindwa gently patted the back of the boy’s head, Mama noticed how it instantly calmed his small frame and restless legs.

“How is the business going then?” asked Mama.

“Oh,” Mr. Kulindwa was somewhat caught off guard by what was going to be an obvious topic of conversation. “It... It is good.”

“Oh good,” she caught his hesitation. “Have you hit a road block with it?”

“Oh no, not all!” his voice lifted. “It’s going very well. I will have some meetings over the next few days, and then everything should move forward.”

Mama replied that she was pleased and offered her help in any way it could be given, “Just as a local who knows the town and a lot of people.”

“Thank you,” Mr. Kulindwa smiled wide. He did have several meetings lined up, so the whole story was no longer an entire lie. But feeling discomfort from the original lie, he quickly veered away from that conversation by asking Mama more about her children. He was saved by Mama’s joy at speaking of her daughter. He listened while admiring how much pride she had in her daughter reaching the end of her business school studies. When she was done talking, he complimented her on it with an almost formal tone, as he negotiated his ongoing nerves.

“It is clear you have a great deal of pride and love for your daughter and her work.”

“Well, yes, I love my children. Just as I see you doing with Barak, and he does with you,” Mama looked to Barak. “You love your dad, yes?”

“Yes!” Barak’s head bobbed in an animated nod that caused his whole body to rock.

Mr. Kulindwa placed his hand on the boy’s back, calming the movement once more.

But a moment later Barak shot upright with excitement, spotting the plates of food being carried directly to their table. There was little that could be done to stop him fidgeting as the dishes were placed on the table. Though once they were eating, the food itself brought a focus to the boy.

Mama took the lead, serving portions onto Barak's plate as he devoured each child-sized serving with gusto.

With each new serve she spooned onto his plate he smiled at her before diving in. Each time another serving came, his belly filled further and his smile widened. On the fourth serving though he did something different. After smiling at Mama, he didn't dive straight into the food. He instead leant over to his dad, climbed his chair, and whispered into his father's ear. Mama noticed Mr. Kulindwa's moustache curled up at the sides as the boy finished his short whisper.

"Me too, Barak. Me too." He patted the boy on the back as he returned to his food, smiling at Mama briefly before diverting his eyes to his plate.

"A secret for your Dad?" she asked Barak.

"Perhaps," Mr. Kulindwa smiled.

"Nope," Barak promptly replied. "I told him I like you."

"Oh," Mama reflected on the firm honest reply which the boy's father had given him after hearing the whisper.

"Ah, yes." Mr. Kulindwa shifted in his chair, aware she would have heard him whisper.

"Yep!" Barak nodded as he lifted another mouthful towards his mouth. "Just like Dad."

"Well, not the same as Dad," his dad replied without thinking.

"Not the same?" Barak asked.

"Yes. Not the same?" Mama added.

"Oh. Yes... I—It's a little different."

Barak frowned, "different how?"

Mama grinned.

"Well, I like her more. Different and more." Mr. Kulindwa made eye contact with Mama before pulling his eyes back to the boy.

"Oh," Barak was clearly unsure of what was going on.

"It's why we are here of course." Mr. Kulindwa was then horrified at his confession.

The words really had shot from his mouth before he could control them. His mind raced over it, wondering if Mama's was racing over it too. The confession, he thought. What did she gather there? Had she discovered the truth? That he had had so little time with her but that he felt something he didn't think he would feel again

in life? And had she now realised, actually worked out, that he in fact had invented the business trip in the moment he told her he was coming to Dar this week?

But Mama, deeply amused by it all, said, “I like you both.”

“Good!” Barak replied, with a big food-filled smile.

Mr. Kulindwa, having said all that he could have and shouldn't have, still found himself lost for words. The table fell silent as the waiters began to clear their plates.

As the last of the plates were cleared, a waiter offered dessert to his three silent guests. It was the woman who accepted the desserts and the boy who gave an excited bounce. The waiter noticed the moustached man, appeared distracted—perhaps lost for words and seemingly thinking about something bigger than the dessert menu.

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Other than the sounds of Barak *mmm*ing as he spooned mouthfuls of ice-cream and fruit into his mouth, dessert was a very quiet, final course. Having confessed the unconfessable to Mama, Mr. Kulindwa remained without words. Though it wasn't uncomfortable. At least not for Mama. She was flattered. In her many years she'd learned that Tanzanian men would go to great lengths when romance entered their heart and preoccupied their mind. This man was harmless—clearly kind, and certainly gentle with his own boy. She didn't mind his company, so had no reason to concern herself with the complicated story of his journey. Of course, it was rather contrived, she thought, with a knowing grin and glance at the clearly anguishing Sukuma man.

When the silence was finally broken, it was in fact broken by Mr. Kulindwa. His tone was somewhat sheepish. “Thank you for meeting us for dinner.”

He only gave her his eyes for a moment, before turning them away quickly.

“Thank you too,” Mama replied kindly, as she watched Mr. Kulindwa obviously keeping his gaze on a sleepy-looking Barak to avoid hers.

“I need to get this young man to bed,” Mr. Kulindwa finally added, resting a hand on the drowsy boy's back.

“Of course. Are you ready for sleep, little Barak?” She was met with a far less energetic nod than before from Barak's small head.

Little more was said as they got up from the table and left the restaurant. Standing by the road, Mr. Kulindwa hailed a taxi for Mama. A taxi to take her away from him, perhaps forever now, having fumbled a confession of feelings as he just did. He watched as Mama said goodnight to Barak, reading the way she held the hug with the boy as saying not just *lala salama* (goodnight) but in fact *goodbye* for ever. But then, as she climbed into the car and Mr. Kulindwa closed the door, she spoke one more time through the window. “Come to my home for dinner the night after next,” she added, much to the surprise of the until that moment deflated Mr. Kulindwa.

“Of course!” his spirits were suddenly lifted, with shoulders squared and his moustache smiling.

“Very good. I will call you tomorrow.”

And with that, the car, and Mama, were gone, leaving the man from Mwanza and his young son standing on the side of the road—the boy rubbing his tired eyes, the man smiling from his.

A Long, Creaking Bike Ride

Having borrowed a bike that often leant against a wall in the village, Zuena creaked along the road as she travelled south.

Riding along the white-grey highway framed by the rich greens of farmland and two farm villages not unlike her own, the young village girl finally reached a T-junction. She had gone left here before, but never to the right, which led south to the capital.

Pushing on pedals that made the dry chain creak as the bike rolled forward, Zuena wobbled to the right and began her journey.

To her disappointment though, at first things were quite similar to what she had already seen and known around her own village. Soon a larger roadside village rose up in front of her, larger than she had seen before. In fact, more a town than a village, with cement block buildings lining the street—shop fronts for repair services, food outlets, a hairdresser's, and a barber's shop. Some of the blocks were two floors tall with what looked like people's homes visible through the windows. But Zuena zipped on through the town on her creaky borrowed bike, focused on her mission.

At the other edge of the town a policeman waved to her, made curious by her very determined-looking expression and bike riding technique. But she didn't stop to talk, she just kept on, leaving the uniformed officer a little taken back as he watched the young girl slowly disappear over a hill out into the countryside.

Soon her slow, creaky momentum came to a halt. A puncture. The back tyre was completely flat, making pedalling near impossible. Not wanting to stop though, Zuena jumped off and pushed the bike along the road. For some time in fact. On and on she went, pushing the bike along the highway until a man sitting on an oil tin next to an old car stopped her. He held part of its motor in his oily hands.

He asked her where she was going and, having spotted the puncture, offered to fix it.

"Why are you going all the way to town on this bike?" he asked as he unbolted the back wheel.

"I have to find a boy who was in my village."

"Oh yes?"

“Yes.” She watched the man effortlessly lift the tyre from the wheel and begin inspecting the tube.

“I can fix this,” the man claimed. “Just a little patch.”

Zuena looked disappointed, “I have no money.”

“I don’t need money.” The man did not mince his words as he went about fixing the tube. “Certainly not as much as that chain needs to be oiled. You are killing yourself riding with it like that.”

“Is that why it makes so much noise?”

“Exactly,” he pointed to her bike. “You probably need the axles greased too.” The man noticed Zuena’s restlessness as she watched on. “You are in a hurry?”

“Yes, it’s important I find the fairground. Do you know it?”

“The one with the big Ferris wheel?”

“Yes! That’s it!” Zuena’s face lit up, as she felt her adventure paying off.

“Okay, yes, that’s Kariakoo,” the man went about his work, finishing with the punctured tyre and greasing the chain. Zuena felt energy returning to her.

“Kariakoo,” she said to herself.

Soon enough he had the bike going again and, with demonstration that the creak was gone, handed it back to her.

“And here,” he handed her a bottle of water. “It is a long way to travel for rides in a fairground.”

“Oh asante. But I am not going for the fairground,” she explained as she took the bottle. “I am going to find someone who lives next to it. Thank you for your help. And for the water.”

“You are welcome,” the man nodded, as he sat down on his tin, returning to his work with the car. He watched the village girl continue down the road, her ride looking somewhat strained on the old bike, at least now without any creaking sound.

Forodhani Night Markets

When Marie arrived at the night markets in front of the old fort of Stone Town, it was already crowded. It didn't take her long to find Haji leaning against an old cannon by the waterfront's limestone wall.

"Hello, fisherman."

"Marie! Hello, welcome!" he beamed.

"I should be welcoming you, fisherman. You are the visitor, yes?"

"Oh yes, but I arrived here in the market before you, so—"

"Ah yes," she grinned, "Very true."

"So," he clasped his hands together. "Are you hungry?"

"Very!"

"Okay, what would you like?"

"I don't know," she frowned, as she looked at the hundred or so stalls, each with their own charismatic vendor and quiet cook wearing chef's hats.

"Would you like me to show you around and tell you of all the different seafoods?" he gestured out over the market.

"Okay then," she bowed her head, humouring his desire to remain the host. Though realistically she needed his help here with all the unfamiliar sea creatures laid out on tables in neat stacks under oil lamps. An endless array of colours, shapes, and sizes.

As they reached a table of particularly large tentacles, some as thick as her forearm, Haji explained why the octopus was so tasty, even though to her it was more a sight bringing terror than taste. "They don't have them in your lakes, no?" he enquired.

She shook her head. "We only have a few fish."

"You like fish?"

"I love *tengesi* (barracuda)!"

"Oh, yes! That's my favourite too," he clasped his hands together as he lied.

"Ah! I love it!"

"Oh okay. You have good taste then, fisherman."

"Are you going to get anything?" he asked.

She shook her hand disapprovingly at the tentacles, "this doesn't look right for me."

“No?” he enquired.

She shook her head. “None of those tentacle things. And the other things,” she gestured to the next table with cooked fish. “These other things I can just make myself when I am home.”

“You can make tengesi well?”

“Oh yes. My tengesi is perfect. Maybe I’ll cook for you?” she added sarcastically.

“Well, yes...” he was a little caught off guard.

“But you will cook for me, of course.”

“Oh?” he touched his hand to his chest. “You want me to cook tengesi for you?”

“Yes,” her sarcasm was gone now, seeing an opportunity for local cooking. “I would expect some fish if I visit a fisherman!”

“Well, okay,” he beamed at being told he would be visited. “I will make you fish if you come for the dolphin tour.”

“The free tour?”

“Oh look, I,” an awkward politeness took over. “I have to pay the—”

“Haji, I know.” she grinned. “Don’t worry, fisherman. You make me some fish, I will pay the local price to the captain.”

“Ah! I will make you the best tengesi your mouth has ever tasted.”

“Ah!” she laughed and shook her head. “Oh my god.”

“What is it?” he asked, worried.

“Ah!” she shook her head again. “The things you say, Haji.”

“Oh, yes.” he sheepishly replied. “I am sorry, I speak my mind. It’s you though... you know, you make me need to say these things.”

“Oh really?” she raised her eyebrows.

“Yes,” his tone was serious. “You see, you walking with me here, the way the lantern light is on your skin and your eyes—”

“Ah!” Marie smiled uncomfortably, shaking her head at the ridiculousness of his play.

“...and your lips.”

“Okay Mr. Fisherman! That will do.”

“Okay.” His eyes grinned. “As long as you know... It is better you know.”

“I know,” she grinned. “Asante, fisherman.”

“Asante sana, Rwandan woman.”

“I am going to get some of this,” she pointed to a skewer of fish meat.

“Oh yes?”

“Yes, I had it once, it’s okay,” she added, before turning to the young man in a chef hat who had already noticed her interest and picked up three skewers. “No, no—one.”

The young man in the chef hat announced the price, to which Haji instantly took offence, interrupting Marie before she had a chance to try for a lower price herself.

“That is not worth half of that!” he protested. “You can’t expect her to pay that price!”

“Okay,” the young Zanzibarian man smiled before offering a quarter the price he had opened with.

Marie handed the money over and took her skewer from the young man who seemed less than impressed by Haji as they moved away.

She nodded in appreciation, “Asante, fisherman.”

But Haji didn’t pick up on her appreciation as he was still caught up in the price. “He should not charge such prices.” He shook his head in disgust.

“It is okay, Haji. This is a tourist place. They can pay more.”

“No. But they still shouldn’t.” He spoke with a gentle passion, “Just because they are tourists doesn’t mean they should be ripped off.”

“Okay, fisherman. Do you want some?” she gestured with the skewer.

“No, not for me, you need it. I will eat back in the village.” he assured her.

“Thank you again for your help there, Haji. I now know the local price.” Her eyes smiled as she took a bite of her fish, genuinely thankful for the insight.

“It is my pleasure, as always, to be your guide,” his smile returned to his face. “But I am sorry,” he looked at his watch. “I must leave you now.”

“Oh. Okay...” Marie hinted disappointment. “But you just got here?”

“I know, I am sorry, I will not be able to get home if I stay later. I have to leave with my brother. You are okay here?” he looked around at the market and the harbour.

Marie was shocked by his need to suddenly leave, but glad to have at least seen him and gotten the cheaper price. “I am fine. I will meet my friend from work.”

“Oh yes. Very good. Your Kenyan friend?”

“Yes, that is the one.”

“Well, Rwandan Marie. I hope to see you soon.”

“Yes,” her tone turned serious. “When?”

“Ah,” he was thrown by her forwardness. “Maybe—”

“I can come Sunday for the dolphin trip?”

“Oh... Okay. The tide will be in in the late morning, I suppose we could—”

“Good. You can make me fish for my lunch and we can go to the dolphins.”

“Okay... I’ll...” his words stumbled.

“Message me Saturday.” Her words came with little emotion to be read by Haji. “Now you go, go to your brother, before he leaves without you. I will eat my fish here,” she instructed, self-assured yet still friendly.

“Okay, I will see you later,” he nodded, before standing awkwardly, waiting to see if there would be a hug or a kiss. But nothing came, as Marie just stood watching him while taking another bite from her fish skewer. “Okay...” he took his leave. “Enjoy your night.”

“Okay, See you Sunday.” Marie watched as Haji walked away through the markets. As he disappeared she shook her head, blushing a little as she let out a small “ah!” at the thought of this young Zanzibarian man who somehow caused nerves that left her acting all formal to hide her unease. Unable to read the reserved ways in which Marie had acted with him made Haji unsure of where the encounter left him.

A Giraffe named Rais

When Rais woke up in the central Arusha park the sun was just coming up over the horizon. He sat and looked at the haze in the air. It was only faint, not like a larger capital city, but it was certainly there and, Rais assumed, going into his lungs. It was unlikely many people would notice it there in Arusha unless they spent their lives out in the clean fresh air of an open plain. Rais didn't much like the way it discoloured the morning horizon. Standing up, he twisted and stretched his body to release the aches caused from sleeping on the uneven ground at the base of a tree.

Debbie, meanwhile, awoke at home in her bed, feeling fresh and well rested. As she sipped tea at the table in the kitchen, her mother asked her what time she started work. She explained that she was on her way shortly.

“Do you have any more adventures to Longido planned?”

“Ah, no mama.” Debbie replied coyly. “I have no such plans.”

Her mother could see by her daughter's expression that other thoughts were working out whether to present themselves or not.

“Actually, my Longido friend is visiting me at work today.”

Her mother raised an eyebrow with intrigue, prompting Debbie to assure her, “He is a gentleman, Mama.”

And sure enough, when she rounded the corner to her work, there he was, standing by the door and smiling.

“Good morning, Debbie!” he beamed.

“Good morning, Rais,” her eyes squinted a smile for she found the sight of his happy face uplifting.

“How are you?”

“I am good, how are you?”

He spoke with the confident shake of his head that Debbie was coming to know well, “I am fine, thank you, Debbie.” Even though he had slept on the cold ground in a cold park and hadn't eaten since yesterday.

Debbie suggested they go to the café down the road for a juice as she had an hour until her shift started.

“That would be very nice, Debbie.”

But then Rais saw a short, round man stick his head out of the hotel door. “Hey Debbie, I need you to start early, yes?”

It was her boss, Rais soon found out as Debbie's attempts to politely decline working early were met with demand and indifference.

"No, no, come on now. I have a meeting and that desk cannot be unattended," he said, standing in the doorway.

Debbie looked to Rais apologetically.

"It is okay, Debbie," Rais smiled with a shrug. "I can catch up with you later."

"Rais, I'm—" Debbie was cut off as the short, round, grumpy manager pushed by, telling her she needed to go in as there was a man waiting—he needed his bill settled and a taxi to the airport. "Come on now, there is no time to socialise when you are on shift!"

"I am sorry, Rais." Debbie apologised.

"It's okay, Debbie, you go in." Rais turned to look at the boss standing on the curb, waiting for Debbie to obey him. "I will go and do other things." He frowned at the manager.

"Okay, I will see you later?"

"Yes, of course you will," Rais smiled as Debbie went through the door with a sad look on her face.

The boss looked Rais up and down, while Rais stared back at him as he leaned slightly on the club-like stick he carried with him. "Yes, boss?" Rais quipped.

The manager, unsure what to say, walked off down the street with Rais watching until he disappeared around the corner. Rais then casually walked into the hotel lobby and took a seat on the leather lounge near the counter.

Debbie looked up in surprise.

He smiled at her as she dealt with the guest and his bill.

When the guest had finally left for his taxi, Debbie once again greeted Rais, but with her professional reception tone. "Hello again, Mr. Maasai."

Rais held the tranquil demeanour and tone of a relaxed hotel guest, "good morning, Miss Debbie."

"Good morning, Rais," she gave a slight bow of her head. "How are you?"

"I am fine, thank you, Debbie," even though he had slept on cold ground in a cold park and still hadn't eaten since yesterday.

"Are you comfortable?"

“Yes, thank you,” he sighed, as he leaned back in the lounge with a little bounce. “I could sleep here.”

“You are tired?”

“No, I am fine,” he smiled through the lie as he rested his head back and closed his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Rais,” she confessed with a slightly sad tone.

“Sorry?”

“I am sorry I didn’t say no to my boss.”

“Ah, it’s okay!” Rais waved off her apology without lifting his head from resting on the back of the chair. “He wasn’t exactly asking you, was he?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“He seems like an ass. Bosses are all asses.”

“Not all the time, Rais.”

“No, true. But that one is. A round ass.”

“Yes,” Debbie giggled with her eyes squinting into a smile, knowing too well the pain her boss could be. “He is.”

“He is like a ball.”

Debbie laughed. “What!”

“Your boss. He is small and round. Like a ball.”

Debbie’s voice lowered to a cautious tone, “Rais, you can’t say that here!”

“Okay, Debbie.” Rais shuffled slightly as he settled in, with his eyes still closed.

“Rais, are you going to sleep?”

“No, no, I am just resting my eyes.”

“You best not fall asleep, Mr. Maasai.”

“I won’t, Mrs. Debbie,” he promised without opening his eyes.

“I have to work now.”

“Okay,” his eyes remained closed and his body still.

“Okay?”

“Yes, okay,” he opened one eye to look at her. “You do your work.” He closed his eye again.

“And what will you do?” she enquired.

“I will be the doorman.” He sat up, suddenly bright-eyed again.

“You can’t be the doorman!”

“No? But I am a Maasai.”

“What does that have to do with it?”

“Yesterday,” he began to explain, “evvvverywhere I went, the doormen were always Maasai. So, I am Maasai, so I can be your doorman for you.”

“You can’t! We have a doorman.” She laughed.

Rais looked around the small lobby. “I don’t see him?”

“That is because he is outside, being a doorman.”

“Oh.” Rais looked over towards the doors. “Where?”

“Over there,” she pointed to the man in the blue uniform sitting on the small wall by the edge of the hotel’s two car bays.

“He isn’t a Maasai?”

“No, he is from Mbeya.”

“Ohhh,” Rais looked out through the glass doors at the man in blue on the small wall. “He is a long way from home.”

“Yes, many people in Arusha are far from home.”

“Yes, we are,” Rais turned back to Debbie with a smile. “Except you, Debbie?”

“Yes, Maasai,” she smiled. “I am home in Arusha.”

“That is good, city girl. It’s nice when you can be where you are from.”

“Thank you, Rais,” she smiled. “Yes, I like it.”

“He didn’t open the door for me,” Rais observed as he put his head back and closed his eyes again.

“What?” she asked confused.

“Your doorman,” he explained, without opening his eyes, “he didn’t open the door for me. I thought he was just a man waiting for someone.”

“No Rais, that is the doorman. You just snuck in before he had a chance to get up.”

“Yes, true. I am pretty quick,” Rais grinned, without opening his eyes. “Now you do your work,” he waved a hand in her direction, “so we can go for that juice you like.”

“You might have to go, Rais,” she explained, with some disappointment.

“Oh?” Rais raised his head to look over at the counter.

“My boss will come back. He doesn’t like anyone who isn’t a guest being in the lobby.”

“Ohhh yes,” he nodded. “The round man.”

“Rais!” she snapped, though without the ability to hide her smile.

“Sorry,” Rais grinned. “Okay, Debbie,” he rose from the sofa with a groan. “I will go then.”

Her smile was wide, “Okay, Rais.”

“Okay,” he adjusted his beaded belt and picked up his walking club.

“We can meet at the end of the day when I finish work?”

“Oh, I will have to go home by then,” Rais realised with disappointment. “I am sorry.”

Debbie’s own disappointment took the smile from her eyes, “Oh...”

“Yes. I have to get home before the end of the day. My cow is sick. I left it with my brother, but now that we have seen each other, I can get your phone number again, and I can get back and check on my cow.

Debbie could see Rais was concerned.

“It is very sick, and we must make it better.”

“I’m sorry your cow is sick,” Debbie frowned.

“Thank you, Debbie. She will be okay.” He smiled as he shook off the signs of his obvious concern.

“I hope so,” Debbie replied sincerely.

“Can I get your phone number again, please?”

“Oh yes! Of course!”

After Debbie wrote her number on a piece of paper, she watched as Rais carefully, consciously folded it and placed it in the bottom of the pouch hanging from his belt.

“Okay, Debbie,” Rais reached for her hand.

“Okay, Rais,” she replied as she shook his hand.

“Have a good day at work, city girl,” he held onto her hand.

“Thank you, Mr. Maasai, safe journey,” she replied, letting him keep her hand a little longer. “I need my hand now, Mr. Maasai.”

“Oh yes, of course!” After another little moment looking at her hand in his, he finally let go.

“Thank you, city girl.” Rais added, as he disappeared out through the glass doors just as the short, round boss walked up to the front of the building.

The short, round man frowned at Rais with a disapproving contortion of his upper lip.

But Rais just returned it with a smile. “I was just enquiring to see if you needed a doorman. But it turns out you already have one.” He gestured to the doorman in the blue uniform.

“Yes. We do,” the boss grumpily pushed by. “Though,” he glared at the doorman sitting on the small wall in his blue uniform, “it wouldn’t hurt him to stand by the damn door from time to time!”

“Oh well,” Rais glanced at the doorman as he stepped casually down the steps. “I don’t want to work for an ass anyway.”

The doorman laughed, shaking his head. “A round ass.”

Mr. Kulindwa Meets the Family

Two days after they had met Mama Agnus for dinner at a Dar es Salaam restaurant, Mr. Kulindwa and Barak stood at her front door, having just knocked on the blue painted wood.

Mr. Kulindwa's confidence was fully restored after having lost it all when he blurted out too many truths about the feelings and actions that had brought him across the country at the drop of a hat.

When she heard the knock, Mama Agnus reflected on the joy she felt. What an odd turn of events this all was, she thought. Opening the door, she found Mr. Kulindwa dressed in a smart suit with young Barak, wearing a well-pressed, collared shirt and trousers and barely reaching his father's hips, standing in front of him, smiling up at Mama.

"Hello, you two," she smiled.

"Hello!" Barak beamed.

"Good evening, Agnus," Mr. Kulindwa's eyes beamed at the sight of Mama dressed in a bright orange and red dress with matching wrap around her hair. She glowed radiantly and Mr. Kulindwa's smile glowed back.

"Please, meet my daughter," Mama gestured to the young woman standing in the kitchen.

Barak was too shy, but Mr. Kulindwa politely introduced himself before coaxing the boy to let out at least a little *hello*. Mr. Kulindwa could see the likeness to her mother in the young woman's eyes.

But he also saw something else as they continued their small talk. Something he had seen in his own daughter's eyes. A suspicion. An apprehension. A difficulty that would need to be navigated if what he was feeling for Mama was going to be reciprocated.

As they sat down to dinner Mr. Kulindwa discreetly got to work on the situation as he quickly recognised an opportunity to bring the two families together. Even though their conversation was mostly floating around family and general life and leisure as a first dinner might, Mr. Kulindwa purposely brought his business into the discussion. In doing so he managed to spark a conversation with Mama's daughter about, "those sorts of business ventures where two sides of a country can help one another."

He knew Mama's daughter had just finished her business studies. He also knew she was a little apprehensive about what life would deliver her now that she had done all that study because Mama had told him, "She doubts whether the world will have something to offer her."

His mind plotted while the words flowed from his mouth, as he tried to perk her interest in the general possibilities of business ventures— "Like this one my daughter wishes to make." He casually explained, "It can be best in business, and here in our country, to not bother with trying to find an advertised job; instead look around, find a gap in a market, a need or want of people, and put the skills and intelligence you have into making something for yourself and for those whom your skills and intelligence will benefit."

"I have heard people talk that way, but it is hard to see what is there," the young woman confessed.

"It is, yes," Mr. Kulindwa's tone was wise. "But what is important is to keep looking, to keep thinking, and trust that before you know it, an idea will spring to mind, and you will see something no one else can see—because they are not you." He smiled confidently.

"Oh," her eyes moved to the table, deep in thought.

"I mean," Mr. Kulindwa added as casually as he could with a shrug of his shoulders. "Even my daughter doesn't have a local partner here yet."

At that moment Mama Agnus caught on to what he was doing. While she saw how he was cunningly playing and weaving towards something more, what she could most see were her daughter's fears and worries leaving the forefront of her thoughts. This Sukuma man from Mwanza was using his wisdom as an elder to convince her there was much to be excited for.

When the time came to leave, and Mama was standing outside the house looking down to Mr. Kulindwa in his car, she placed one hand on the edge of the open window. "Thank you, Jaruph," Mama said with a gentle smile in her eyes.

He couldn't quite remember if she had ever used his first name before, but it somehow reassured him his crazy actions had been worth it after all. He wondered how he would sleep that night. In the morning he had a meeting with a potential partner for his daughter's business, but he knew he would be cancelling that now.

The Faraway Fairground

Riding on and on, Zuena, the girl now far from Fujoni, finally reached the beginning of the urban sprawl as rich green fields of spices and fruits were replaced with houses. Her legs burned. She had been riding for hours now, and Unguja island isn't exactly the flattest part of Africa, so the hills had taken their toll. She felt excitement as she reached a fuel station the man who fixed her bike had told her she would eventually reach.

“When you reach that station, you are close. Very close,” he had said. Adding that all she needed to do was then turn right.

So turn right she did, stopping only long enough to let a large truck race by. She felt the danger of the city as cars and trucks rushed around. She watched several motor taxis skilfully weave through traffic, right next to the giant wheels of the truck that had momentarily stopped her in her tracks.

She knew she was close now, so onwards she pushed, until the handlebars began to rattle. Looking down she discovered she had a flat front tyre. “What is it with this bike?” she asked herself as she sat, looking at the sad flat tyre. But her spirits rose when she looked up to find a different kind of wheel. There before her, was the large Ferris wheel. Not as big as Renaldo's story had claimed, but big all the same.

Unfazed now by the flat tyre, she pushed the bike. “Where are you?” she said out loud to distant, hidden Renaldo, as she scanned the outside of the large fairground looking for houses near its fences. But from where she was, on this side, there were none. So onward she walked, along the busiest road with the largest intersections she had ever seen. She couldn't help but notice the air smelt different—thick with the fumes of cars and bitumen roads. The fairground seemed nice, but she definitely preferred the scent of home.

She eventually came to a road with houses that backed onto the fairground. But something didn't seem right. The Ferris wheel was way over on the other side of the fairground. She didn't imagine Renaldo would be able to see his mother from there. So maybe the boy didn't live here after all. Or maybe she needed to be back over the other side? Where the top of the Ferris wheel might see houses and children's mothers much better? Maybe the boy had used his words wrong when he said his home backed onto the very fence of the fairground?

“Are you okay, girl?” came a voice, suddenly pulling her from her thoughts. It belonged to another smiling man who, like the last man, held part of a car motor in his greasy hands. However, this man was surrounded by old cars under a giant tree where many other men with greasy hands sat, stood or leaned, toying with bits of motors or sipping coffee.

“Are you okay?” he asked again.

“Yes, I am.”

“You rode from Fujoni?”

“Yes,” she frowned, confused by his knowing where she was from.

“Your uniform,” he pointed to her Fujoni school uniform.

“Oh, yes.”

“Why are you so far from home with a sad-looking bike, staring down a street?”

“I am looking for someone.”

“You rode here on *that*?” he pointed to the bike.

“Yes, I did,” her voice was confident. “Though this flat tyre only just happened.”

The man rubbed his face, adding grease to his forehead.

“Do you know a boy who lives next to this fairground. Named Renaldo?”

“The boy with the rooster?”

“Yes!” she beamed, “he has a rooster!”

“Of course, he lives just there,” he pointed to a house, just twenty steps from where they were standing.

Zuena’s eyes widened and the bike left her hands as she crossed the road, leaving the mechanic man standing looking down at the sad bike now lying abandoned on the ground.

As he picked the bike up, thinking to himself that perhaps he had best fix it for her, he looked over to see her standing at the front door of the boy’s house. He noted that, other than the well-oiled chain, she needed a whole new bike. While he wheeled it back to where his fellow mechanics toiled away, Zuena knocked on the light blue door.

The Waiting Game

Sitting in the family room of his home in Kizimkazi on Saturday morning, Haji stared out the window. Watching curiously, his mother frowned at him. He seemed distant, away with the fairies.

“Do you have any work this weekend?” she enquired.

He stared at his phone. “Only one.”

“Oh yes?”

“Yes, tomorrow,” he smiled. “A special one.”

“A special group?”

“No, Mama. A special woman.”

“What do you mean, my boy?”

“I am giving a dolphin tour to a Rwandan woman.”

“A Rwandan woman?”

“Yes, she was on tour here a week ago.”

“And she is coming back for another tour?”

“Yes, Mama,” he smiled with a delighted shake of his head, “she is very special.”

“Oh.” His mother grinned.

“Yes, Mama, she is...” he trailed off, staring into space, caught up in thoughts of this woman his mother was hearing about for the first time.

“Be careful, my boy,” she cautioned. “Make sure she loves you before you love her,” she wisely cautioned.

“Yes, Mama. Though I am sure she will by the end of the tour!” Beaming with his Zanzibari pride, “I will bring her dolphins. What Rwandan man could ever give her dolphins?”

~

Meanwhile, back among the winding laneways of Stone Town, up a blue step past three boys, Marie sat at her desk, staring at the computer screen. Her eyes glazed over as she waited for the long day to pass while pretending to work.

“You are no good at pretending,” came the Kenyan accent from her friend at the other desk.

“What?” Marie blinked her eyes as she came out of her daydream.

“You sit there looking at the screen, but your hands are doing nothing. To pretend to work, you must at least let your eyes move back and forth across the screen, so it looks like you are reading something if the boss comes through the door.”

“Oh yes,” Marie was still dazed, as if awoken from a slumber. “Sorry.”

“There is no need for sorry. I am not your boss.”

“Yes... That’s true.”

“What are you dreaming of?” her friend smiled.

“Oh, there was nothing,” Marie shook her head. “I was just floating in my mind.”

“Floating in the water perhaps?” grinned the Kenyan.

“What do you mean?”

Her grin widened, “perhaps you were floating in the waters of Kizimkazi... with your fisherman there to keep you safe?”

“Ah!” Marie exclaimed. “I was not!”

“No?”

“No,” Marie confirmed confidently.

“Maybe tomorrow you will then,” grinned her Kenyan friend.

“If the fisherman is willing to teach me to swim I might let him. But not from a boat. No. From the shore.” She felt concern at the thought. “In water up to my knees only.”

“Ah no, come now. I am sure your fisherman will not let you drown—and if he does, I will drown him!”

“Hey Rwandan woman!” came a child’s voice through the glass door. The three boys peered inside. “Are you seeing the fisherman? Or have you broken his heart already?”

Before Marie could speak, her friend piped up, calling out with a grin, “he is showing her the dolphins tomorrow!”

“Ohhh!” called the youngest boy.

“Dolphins!” added the middle boy

“Ah, you have him doing what you want already!” proclaimed the eldest boy.

“No!” Marie called back.

“A little bit!” laughed her friend, as the boys laughed too.

“He shows everyone the dolphins!” Marie protested.

“But you, you he is showing the dolphins alone,” her friend grinned.

“Very special dolphin tour for the Rwandan woman, huh?” called the eldest boy.

“Ah!” Marie waved a dismissive hand at everyone, but their attention strayed when her phone beeped.

Debbie and the Missing Giraffe

After Rais left the hotel that morning, Debbie caught herself glancing over at the leather lounge where he had been slouched, and grinning as she remembered their conversation.

“He is a different guy,” she explained to her friend who turned up to work beaming with excitement to hear the story of the Maasai man she had met the evening before when he had come searching for Debbie.

She read the light in Debbie’s eyes, “You like him!”

“No, no. I don’t like him like that!”

“Yes, you do. You really do,” she added, pointing at Debbie’s face.

“No, no,” Debbie waved her off. “He’s just a nice guy.”

“He likes you,” her friend grinned.

“You think so?” Debbie replied, her curiosity getting the better of her attempt to deny her friend’s theories.

“Oh come on! You know it too. He came all that way and went to every hotel in town looking for you! He either likes you or he is a murderer!”

“Ah! I don’t think he is a murderer. He’s had enough opportunities for that already!”

“Well then, he must like you,” Debbie’s friend grinned as her theory found its justification. “When are you going to see him again?”

“I don’t know. He’s going to call me from his brother’s phone in a few days.” Debbie tried to hide any discomfort about not knowing when it would be.

“I bet he doesn’t last a day!” laughed her friend, as she disappeared into the restaurant, leaving Debbie to once again contemplate the lounge.

~

The next few days passed by without a phone call or a message.

And then a few more. Just like before, only this time she had no number to call. Perhaps something had happened with the cow and he was busy. I hope the cow is okay. Maybe the cow died. Oh, that would be sad, she thought and hoped the cow, and Rais, were both okay.

She tried to put it out of her mind, but as her day off approached she consulted her friend at work about what to do.

“Just go back out there if you want!”

“Go back?”

“Yeah.” Her friend shrugged. “He probably just lost your number. If he can lose a whole phone, he can probably lose a piece of paper.”

“But what if he comes here while I am there?” Debbie felt torn.

“I don’t think he will,” her friend felt sure.

“Why not?”

“He is a Maasai from the country whose job is with his goats and his sick cow. Do you think he has the time to get away from there to come and spend another night in Arusha to chase you?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Debbie looked at the spot on the lounge where Rais had once been.

“Why do you hang out with him?” asked the doorman, leaning on the wall at the front of the lobby.

“What do you mean?” Debbie asked.

The doorman frowned, “Why do you hang out with a man who sleeps in the park?”

“Who sleeps in a park?” asked Debbie’s friend.

“That Maasai you are talking about, who was in here.”

Debbie looked at him with surprise, “What about him?”

“He was sleeping in the park the night before he came in here.”

“How do you know he slept in a park?”

“Because I work here all the time,” the doorman replied grumpily. “I saw him leave that night he talked with you, I saw him walk up the hill to the park. And in the morning on my way to work, I saw him waking up in the park. And then he was here with you!”

Debbie turned to her friend in distress, “You didn’t tell me he was sleeping in the park!”

“I didn’t know! He didn’t tell me he had nowhere to go!”

“Oh no,” Debbie lowered her head.

“Why do you hang out with him?” repeated the doorman.

“Go outside and be a doorman!” snapped Debbie’s friend, as Debbie slumped onto the leather lounge as the guilt of having made him sleep out in the cold overnight sank in. And all to then spend five minutes with her at work!

She leaned forward, putting her face in her hands. “I’m terrible!”

“What?” her friend placed a hand on her back. “You are not terrible!”

“I made him sleep in the cold!” Debbie proclaimed.

“No you didn’t!” her friend insisted. “He made himself sleep in the cold! Don’t feel bad.”

“But I do!”

“Don’t worry yourself. There is nothing you can do about it. What is done is done. And you said yourself he seemed fine. Perfectly happy.”

“I thought he was. But maybe... maybe this is why he hasn’t called? Maybe he never wanted to because I kicked him out of here just five minutes after he had spent a night in the cold as well as a whole day and night searching all over Arusha!”

“Relax, sister,” Debbie’s friend rubbed her back. “What’s done is done. He didn’t seem to mind at all when he got off the phone to you here that night. He is a man. He will do anything when he likes a woman! Without any bother to himself, as long as that woman smiled at him. And you smiled at him, yes?”

“What am I going to do now?” Debbie pleaded.

“Well, you can just wait? See if he calls you?” her friend suggested.

“No.” Debbie shook her head with concern. “That doesn’t seem fair to him. What if he ends up trying to come back to town because he has lost the number?”

“Well, you went out there twice, maybe he should come in here twice?”

“I only went out there once to see him.”

“I thought you went to see the giraffes?” her friend grinned.

“Yes, yes, you know what I mean,” Debbie frowned, waving off her friend’s amused grin. “Okay.” Debbie’s tone was determined, “I will go tomorrow.”

“Okay, city girl.” Her friend grinned again. “Go find your Maasai man.”

“He is not my Maasai man!” Debbie protested. “He is his own Rais.”

Her friend grinned again before replying in an imitation of Rais’s accent, “Okay, city girl.”

Debbie didn’t sleep so well that night. The comfort of her bed, compared to what the ground in that park must have been like for Rais, riddled her with guilt. But

at least it meant she was up early. Up even before her mother, so she left a note on the kitchen table, explaining she was heading once again to Longido.

“I should be back by sunset. Love D xxx.”

~

On reaching Longido, Debbie stood in the middle of the road where Rais had stood when she left the last time. But of course, there was no sign of him anywhere along the road.

She looked around while eyes filled with curiosity looked back at her. The Maasai locals sitting in the open entrance ways to the little shops and across the road observed this young city woman standing in the road. She smiled politely, before crossing the road and approaching two women outside a stall selling lollies, chips and sodas. She asked them if they knew Rais and maybe where he was. The women told Debbie they did indeed know him and sent her down to another stall. But the old man at that one sent her on to another that sold Maasai shúkà. The woman there sent her on to a small bar with a pool table, where a young Maasai man leaning over to line up a shot told her to try the barber shop, at the other end of a row of cement, stall-like shops.

“He might be working there today,” suggested the young Maasai man. He fired the cue into the white ball, sending it hurtling around the table before it perfectly skimmed his intended shot into the pocket, much to the disappointment of his friends who threw up their arms as he moved his attention to the black ball. He nodded casually to Debbie as she thanked him and moved on to her next destination.

Further down the street Debbie came to the small, doorless barbershop. Like other shops it was an open space inside three cement walls with a cement roof. The air was cool compared to the growing heat outside and carried a scent of oils and hairspray. Two metal chairs in the middle of the room faced outwards towards the opening where two young Maasai men sat on the step, talking. On one chair a young Maasai man with long, braided hair relaxed while the Maasai barber added new weaves and beads to hair that already jutted out and upwards with beads of blue, white, red and green.

“Hello,” came the deep voice of the tall skinny barber.

“Hello, how are you?” Debbie smiled.

“Good,” the barber kept his eyes on his work.

“Cool,” replied the man in the chair.

“Cool, cool,” replied the young men sitting on the step.

“And you?” asked the barber.

“I am fine, thank you. I am looking for someone. Rais?”

“Ohhhhh. Heyyyyy!” called out the man in the chair.

“What?” frowned the Barber.

“It’s the city girl!”

“Heyyyy! It’s the city girl!” called out the two men on the step. One jumped to his feet.

“We know you!” he proclaimed, beaming and bouncing on the spot with excitement, causing his Maasai jewellery to jingle.

“Ahh yes,” came the deeper voice of the barber. “You are the woman that likes giraffes, yes?”

“Yes, that is me,” Debbie smiled, surprised but pleased to be recognised. Perhaps her quest would now be an easy one, thanks to Rais having told everyone who she was.

“Well okay! You are welcome, please take a seat,” the excited young man gestured towards the spare metal chair.

“Oh, thank you—but is Rais here? I need to find him.”

“No, he isn’t here, sorry,” confirmed the barber. “I haven’t seen him in a few days. He works here tomorrow though.”

“I think I know where he is!” called out the young, thin Maasai man who had remained sitting on the step. “He will be out at the water with his goats.”

“No, no, his brother does that,” replied the excited young man who had jumped to his feet. “He will be helping at his mother’s.”

“Oh, yeah,” added the young man on the step. “Maybe.”

“Do you know where his mother’s is?” Debbie asked. “Is it the same *boma* as where he lives?”

“No, no. It’s the next boma along.” Said the man in the metal seat having his hair beaded.

“Oh yes, I do know. That is out over that way, yes? Over the hill then onto the dirt road and out? On the left, eventually?”

“Eventually.”

“But on the right,” the young man sitting in the metal chair explained.

“Oh. Okay.” Debbie looked out down the road towards the hill over which to turn left, then eventually right.

“I will take you!” announced the young man who had stood up so excitedly from the step when he first discovered who she was.

“No, it’s okay,” Debbie declared. “I will walk. I know the way now.”

All four men frowned.

“You can’t walk out there!” announced the barber.

“Look at your shoes!” the young man on the step pointed to her small, beaded city shoes.

“You will get lost!” warned the young man who had stood up at the start.

“Those are city shoes!” exclaimed the young man sitting on the step.

“It is a long way,” the barber warned.

“You don’t have water!” said the young man standing up.

“Those shoes are very nice,” the young man sitting on the step continued as he pointed at her shoes. “But they are no good for the dirt and stones out here.”

“You should take a motor bike taxi,” suggested the man in the chair.

The young man on the step gestured to her shoes, “Even that will kill her shoes with all the dust.”

“Stop focusing on her shoes!” protested the excited young man who had stood up at the start.

“But the shoes are so important!” protested his friend on the step.

“Yes, but she is from a different culture. For her, those shoes will do just fine.”

“What has her culture got to do with it? It’s about the thin sole,” explained the man getting his hair weaved.

“Leave it alone!” came the deeper voice of the barber. “My dear, you should not walk there alone if you are not used to these conditions.”

“I will be okay,” Debbie replied confidently. “I am used to walking. I walk to work most of the time. It takes an hour to do that, so I should be fine here, no?”

“Perhaps,” the barber looked her up and down. “But at least take some water with you. And one of these young men. To be sure.”

She looked at the two young men, now both standing, smiling at her, with their chests stuck out, competing for selection. “I will just take the water, but thank you,” she smiled as the young men’s chests deflated back into their skinny frames.

“As you wish, city woman,” said the barber as he took a bottle of water from the fridge, refusing her offer of payment.

Debbie wished them all well and headed off down the highway. As she walked towards the hill that would lead to the dirt road, a hundred Maasai eyes watched with curiosity.

A young Maasai man shook his head. “Those shoes will not last the day!”

~

Reaching the dusty track Debbie began the trek that, as she’d been warned, quickly discoloured her shoes. But she wasn’t bothered, wandering along the winding, unsealed road that was deserted until she came across three children on their way to collect water in big yellow bottles carried on their heads and shoulders.

As she approached, the three children stopped in their tracks and stared. They looked confused and surprised when the woman from the city smiled and said *hello* before continuing on down the road. As the city woman walked further into what must surely be the middle of nowhere for her, the two children frowned.

“Did you see her shoes?” asked one of the girls in awe.

“Yes,” the boy shook his head in disbelief. “They are no good at all.”

Further down the road Debbie spotted a herd of goats. Behind them, a boy and a girl, both about twelve years old, tapped their long Maasai sticks on the ground every time a goat turned back or started to leave the herd. Seeing Debbie, the boy stopped in his tracks, while the girl waved to her with a big, fascinated smile.

Debbie attempted a conversation. But it was clear these children didn’t speak Swahili, and it was clear to them this city woman did not speak *Maa* (Maasai language).

“Hello,” Debbie smiled.

“Hello,” replied the children.

“How are you?” Debbie asked.

“What did she say?” asked the boy.

“I don’t know. I think she asked us how we are?”

“Oh yes, I recognised that. We reply poa (cool), I think?”

“Oh yes. That is right.”

They replied in unison, “Poa,” with matching proud smiles.

“Now what do we say?” the boy asked the girl.

“I don’t know? How do we ask her how she is?”

“I don’t know.”

“What was it she said again?”

“I think it was m, ma, mambu?”

“Oh. No. It was mambO.”

“Ohh yes!”

They replied again in unison, with pride and excitement, “Mambo?”

“I am fine, thank you,” Debbie enjoyed watching their faces and listening to their language, wishing she knew what they were saying but enjoying the sounds.

“What did she say?” the boy asked.

“I don’t know. I didn’t hear poa.”

“No, I didn’t either.” the boy frowned.

“Hmmm,” the girl looked up and down the city woman in front of her.

“What should we say now?” asked the boy.

“I don’t know,” the girl pointed at Debbie’s jacket. “Look at her clothes!”

“I know. Look at her shoes!” the boy added.

“They are so pretty,” the girl’s eyes glowed.

“Ha!” the boy shook his head. “They are no good!”

“Okay,” Debbie pointed over to the goats who had now started to go every which way they pleased. “I best keep going, and your goats are starting to spread out.”

“What did she say?” the boy frowned.

“I don’t know! But the goats!” called out the girl.

“Argh!” the boy hurried off, tapping his long thin stick on the ground as he went.

The girl pointed to Debbie’s shoes.

“Oh, you like them?” Debbie asked.

“I like your shoes,” the girl replied in Maa.

Debbie watched as the young girl headed on her way to collect the goats. Debbie relished her conversation with them and the comings and goings of strangers as she walked on down the road until she saw the boma.

A wide wall of dried thorn shrubs had been tightly packed in a large circle around the area, to protect the five *inkajjik* (Maasai huts) and three pens for goats and cattle from predators such as lions. This place, she was sure, was where Rais lived.

Entering the arch-like entranceway made of long branches, Debbie noticed how quiet it seemed. There were no signs of people or animals. On reaching Rais's hut she spotted the locked padlock on the small red tin door. She walked around but there was no one to be seen anywhere within the boma.

But as she left to find his mother's boma further down the road, out of the corner of her eye she spied a girl standing in the doorway of a hut that moments before had appeared empty. The girl looked to be about 10 years old. She was dressed in purple Maasai *shúkàs* and had jewellery covering her arms and ankles, with silver and beads hanging from a dozen piercings across both her ears. As Debbie said *hello*, all the jewellery rustled and with a giggle the girl disappeared back into the hut, leaving Debbie alone once more.

With no sign of the girl coming out again, Debbie headed down the dusty road in search of the next boma. She passed a small clearing with thick branches and rocks lined up in rows facing a small space where four straight, smooth sticks rose up from the dirt to form a half circle. At its centre was the crucifix—formed by using rope to tie another stick at right angles to the thickest and straightest stick of them all. In this small makeshift church an old man sat on a thick white branch at the front of the rows of rocks and branches, looking up to the crucifix in contemplation. As Debbie passed by, he quietly turned and smiled at her before turning his peaceful attention back to the crucifix, as if listening.

Another ten minutes down the road she met someone else out wandering alone. She said *hello* as she approached, but the goat with the brown patch on his or her head didn't reply.

“Have you seen Rais?”

The goat tilted its head as it looked at her.

“Is Rais looking for you?”

The goat let out a goat sound before it turned and walked away out into the

scrub, leaving Debbie once again to her own devices, but also wondering and worrying whether she should have tried to keep the goat with her.

Soon she arrived at the boma where Rais's mother lived. She walked in through the branched arch entrance to find a young girl, maybe 13 years old, standing right in the middle, staring at her. She gave a *hello*, and to her relief, the girl replied in Swahili. Debbie asked after Rais and the girl explained he wasn't there, but she could take her over to Rais's mother, in a hut nearby. The girl gestured for Debbie to follow her as she led the way to where a small, old lady sat on a stone, weaving the hair of a little girl sitting cross-legged on the ground in front of her. The girl translated between Maa and Swahili while introducing Debbie as 'the city girl' looking for Rais. After Rais's mother spoke some Maa to Debbie with a pleased, excited smile, the girl translated that she was happy for her visit. But she was sorry. Sorry that Rais was not there now, that he was out taking the goats to water.

Despite the saga of her ongoing search, Debbie didn't feel at all surprised. She asked if Rais was okay, explaining that she was meant to have heard from him.

Through her young Maasai translator, Rais's mother assured her he was fine, and she didn't know why he wouldn't have contacted her. Especially when he spent so much time talking about her. Debbie blushed as Rais's mother smiled and raised her eyebrows.

"He will be gone. Until dusk," the girl explained. "They leave early in the morning and return just before night."

"Oh, which direction is the water? Maybe I can walk there?"

The young girl laughed with surprise, then translated to the mother who shook her head with a serious frown, before instructing the young girl while pointing at Debbie.

"She said you can't possibly go. You could get lost; it isn't safe for you to go alone.

The mother spoke again.

"She said you are welcome to wait here until he returns."

The mother spoke again, rising to her feet.

"She wants to know if you would like some tea?"

Debbie thought for a moment, looking out in the direction they had been pointing when talking about the water. A long stretch of red dirt and light green trees

—all the way to the horizon. Perhaps it was foolish to go alone. For the first time she felt that perhaps her adventure had not been the best option.

“If it is okay, then I will wait.”

The mother spoke again. The girl replied, explaining what Debbie had said before listening to Rais’ mother speak again.

“She still wants to know if you want tea.”

“Okay, yes please.”

The mother gestured to Debbie to sit on the thick branch opposite the little girl was still sitting cross-legged, who was staring up at the city woman.

As Debbie sat down, the girl who had translated for her walked away.

“Aren’t you staying?” Debbie asked.

“I can’t,” the girl called back. “I have to get to school!”

And with that the girl was gone, leaving Debbie sitting outside a boma, opposite a little Maasai girl with partly weaved hair.

The mother emerged from the hut with a metal kettle and four mugs.

She too was surprised to see the translator girl gone. She looked to Debbie, as if asking where she went.

“She went to school,” Debbie explained, in vain.

“Maybe she went to school?” the mother replied in Maa, before offering a mug to Debbie and another to the little girl who grinned widely as she took the mug.

Rais’s mother poured the steaming, cream-coloured liquid into Debbie’s metal mug, before carefully pouring a little in the little girl’s mug. She then sat back down behind her, returning to the job of weaving her hair. Debbie sipped at her tea. It was sweet and full of flavour. Perhaps the best tea she had ever tasted.

“Thank you,” she smiled.

“You are welcome,” the mother replied in Maa with a smile, understanding at least what asante meant in Swahili.

The little girl giggled, flashing her teeth at Debbie as the city woman took a sip and quietly watched the mother weaving the little girl’s hair —letting the afternoon pass by as they waited for the return of Rais in a silence imposed by the barrier of language.

Mr. Kulindwa's Plan

After the evening at Mama's house, when he talked with her daughter about the world of business, Mr. Kulindwa had the following morning free to show Barak around Dar. He had been meant to meet a potential business partner, a good one, for his own daughter, but he had cancelled, saying the position had already been filled, unfortunately. In fact, the position had not been filled anywhere, except inside his own mind.

And so, father and son headed to the harbour where Barak could see the boats. He loved boats but had never seen the size of ships that travel the seas. To his absolute awe and surprise there was a giant container ship in the port and, further along, a huge cruise ship too. The container ship was more interesting to the boy as he watched a giant crane lifting the huge steel containers off. His father watched tourists from across Europe, other parts of Africa, and the Middle East filing off the cruise ship, ready for either their day in town or whatever safari they had chosen. Between the two large boats on opposite sides of the harbour was a small port with the ferries that travel to and from Zanzibar—a place, Mr. Kulindwa thought, he really must visit sometime.

They stayed there until it was time for their next appointment, a business meeting of sorts, Mr. Kulindwa thought to himself, as the car taking them to their destination arrived.

Barak beamed at the familiar face in the front passenger seat. "Hello!"

"Hello!" Mama replied with a broad smile.

"Good morning," Mr. Kulindwa bowed his head slightly.

"Good afternoon, I think you will find," Mama grinned.

"Ah yes," he looked at his watch showing 12:30 p.m.

As they climbed into the car, Barak asked where they were going.

"We are going to a place by the beach where I like to eat, and my grandchildren like to play."

Barak nearly exploded with joy at the news he was to play on his first ever ocean beach.

The driver grinned at the boy, "we have a towel in the back for you, Barak."

"Yes, we do," said Mama explained as she gestured to the driver. "This is Robert. He is my cousin."

Robert looked at Barak through the rear-view mirror, "I'm going to show you how to swim!"

"Oh!" Barak was still squirming with excitement much to the delight of his dad who rubbed the boy's head.

~

Mama's favourite seaside spot was near a resort. Tables under thatched roof shelters were placed along the sand in front of the pool, the main restaurant and bar.

Mr. Kulindwa was impressed by her choice. "A truly tropical holiday spot."

"You took me to your water, now I take you to mine," she gestured to the ocean that Barak and Robert were already running towards across the broad, sandy beach.

When their juices arrived, Mama broached the subject on her mind.

"What are you up to, Jaruph?"

"What do you mean?" he frowned.

"Last night... You were kind to my daughter. You certainly helped her confidence by saying the things she needed to hear from someone other than her mother. But towards the end there, you seemed to be taking it somewhere."

"Ah," Mr. Kulindwa saw no point in not owning up. He revealed that his daughter had asked a lot of questions about Mama. He explained that he thought a way forward for both their daughters was by giving them an opportunity to work together in business. "At the moment they both have a need that could be met by the other, and it may extinguish their concerns for the needs you and I have by redirecting their thoughts and energy into a business connection."

"Our needs, Mr. Kulindwa?"

"Well," he looked around. "You know. This time we spend together it is—"

"—it is nice." Mama gave a kind smile to relieve the tension that was obviously present in a once again awkward Mr. Kulindwa.

But Mr. Kulindwa, aware his thoughts continued to fall from his mouth without warning when around her, persisted. He confessed he found her constantly on his mind and he would like to have her often in his life somehow, notwithstanding their two lives on opposite sides of the country.

Mama Agnus enjoyed watching him blurting out his wants. It softened the image of hardened older statesman that so many others must see and revealed a softness in the man. She also found herself liking the ideas he was expressing. It would be nice, to have this man and his boy in her life. And it would be nice for her daughter to have a connection to his family as well as to have an established business to join. But she also knew he needed to work a little harder. So she simply smiled, “oh is that right?”

Mr. Kulindwa knew he was perhaps speaking way too soon. Mama felt there was something missing, something more to learn. And depending what she learned, what she found in this man, then perhaps she would reveal her own feelings and maybe move towards sharing her life—a life she had not thought, during the many years since her husband had died, would be shared again.

If it ever happened with anyone, it would never be the same as that, of course. Something different though, something of a sharing of the last years they had, in a bond different to one they may have formed when they were younger. But if... if that something about Mr. Kulindwa was found, was learned, then perhaps... perhaps.

That evening when Mr. Kulindwa and Barak had headed to the airport, Mama found herself looking at the clock when their flight to Mwanza was due to leave, and Mama felt the feeling of *perhaps* grow.

While in the plane, as it lifted from the tarmac, Barak stared out the window at the lights of Dar getting smaller and smaller, while Mr. Kulindwa wondered if Agnus was going to join him in the plan to bring their daughters together.

Karibu, Village Girl

Having knocked on the light blue door, the first thing Zuena heard was the clucking of a rooster inside. Surely, she thought, there cannot be many boys in this town who have pet roosters?

She waited until the door opened, to reveal a smiling woman. The boy's mother?

The woman looked the girl over, "Hello."

Zuena jumped straight to the point. "Hello. Is this Renaldo's house?"

"Yes, it is, my dear. He is my son," the woman gave a curious smile, "but he is not home."

"Oh. I came to see him because... he was in my village at my home and he ran away—"

"Oh my god," Renaldo's mother shook her head. "Yes, he got in trouble when he came home in the middle of the night. He went there to visit you?"

"Oh no. I didn't know him until I found him, looking at a mango tree."

"Ah," the mother shook her head. "Yes, he does love running off. And mangoes."

Zuena smiled, "yes, that seemed to be the truth when I found him."

The woman looked the village girl over. "Come in, my dear. He will be home soon."

"Okay, thank you." Zuena entered the house, passing by a large rooster in the front room. "This is Jerry?"

"Yes, that is him. Renaldo's pride and joy."

Zuena noticed a stand full of lollies and toys which Renaldo's mother explained they sold out on the street. "To make a little extra money."

The mother invited Zuena to have a seat on the lounge or the mat, "whichever you prefer." She watched Zuena sit patiently, and very quietly, on the mat. When the woman left the room, Zuena looked around to see a large TV and many books. The lounge room felt comfortable and cool, safe from the heat of the day outside, so she was happy to see the large glass of cold juice Renaldo's mother returned with.

As Renaldo's mother watched the girl thirstily drinking the juice, she saw an opportunity to learn a little more of her son's adventure. And to find out from a

stranger what her boy was like when he was away, to maybe work out why it was that he ventured away so often. But before she could ask questions, Renaldo walked in through the front door.

He stopped in the doorway, frozen with surprise by the sight of the village girl sitting there on the floor of his home. His mother and Zuena both noticed his legs twitch as he contemplated running again.

“Renaldo,” his mother’s tone was strong. “Your friend is here. Come speak to her.”

With the sound of his mother’s voice, his legs steadied. “Oh.” He was unsure of his words. “Hello.”

“Hello,” Zuena replied with a smile, pleased to see him safe and sound.

“What are you doing here?”

“Renaldo!” His mother scolded him for being rude as she left the room.

He apologised quickly, to Zuena, and his mother. “I’m sorry. I am just surprised.”

“I came to see you... To say sorry for what happened with my mother.”

“Oh,” Renaldo looked uncomfortable. “I am sorry. I was where I shouldn’t have been.”

“No, no! She never said you shouldn’t be there. You misheard her and ran away before we could explain.”

“Oh...” he looked at her uniform. “You caught the dala dala all the way here?”

“No. I rode a bike.”

“A bike!” his eyes widened. “That whole distance?”

“Yes. Well,” she shrugged, “most of the way. Until I had a flat tyre. Then I walked.”

He shook his head with guilt. “I’m sorry!”

“It’s okay,” she replied with a shrug as she gestured to her juice and the cushions around her, “I am unharmed and comfortable.”

“That is good,” he sat cross-legged across from her. “So, you are here for a while?”

“I don’t know. Are you here for long?”

“I am here for the rest of the day. Until evening prayer.”

“Okay,” she replied, before a silence fell over them and she sipped her juice.

“When do you have to get home? How will you get home?” he asked.

Her reply was confident. “I will ride.”

“You look tired. He frowned before calling out to his mother. “Mama! Can we give her some food?”

“Of course,” his mother called back as she returned to the room.

“She rode a bike all this way, Mama.”

“You rode all the way here?” the mother asked, wide-eyed.

“She did,” Renaldo confirmed.

“My god, girl, does your mother know you are here?”

“Oh. No, she doesn’t. She thinks I am at school.” For the first time, Zuena thought about what might be happening with her mother. “Well, she would have. School would be finished now, so maybe she thinks I am with friends.”

“My god!” Renaldo’s mother became insistent as she looked around for her phone. “You must call your mother straightaway!”

“Okay.”

“You rode all this way just to see my boy?” she asked, while taking her phone out of her bag.

“Yes,” Zuena looked to Renaldo. “I wanted to see if he was okay.”

“Here is my phone, please call your mother straightaway!” she insisted, before giving her son a disappointed look. A look that didn’t appear to overly register with the boy who had caused all this drama.

Zuena headed to the front room near the rooster and dialled the number she had been made to memorise years earlier for just such a time.

Marie and the Dolphins

Climbing from the dala dala onto the main street of Kizimkazi, Marie met the familiar sight of a smiling Haji.

“There is no time to waste,” he explained, taking her by the hand.

“Where are we going now?” Marie pulled her hand free.

“To the boat. To be the tourists!”

“Be the tourists?”

“Yes, today we have the boat to ourselves, so we are not workers.”

“Well, I am a tourist yes, but you are still my guide fisherman.”

“Am I a guide or a fisherman?” Haji quipped cheekily as they reached the beach.

“You are both, fisherman tour guide,” Marie confirmed.

“Oh, very well then,” Haji playfully bowed his head.

On reaching the boat, Marie found the captain from the other day sitting by the motor, smiling at her. Within minutes they were out on the bay, heading to where Haji promised there would be dolphins.

And dolphins there were. Three of them, diving, twisting and turning as they swam along with the boat, appearing from nowhere—to Marie’s absolute delight. Haji beamed with pride, thinking to himself that, surely, he had done something that no man back in Rwanda, or even back in Stone Town, could do for her. But Marie of course was not thinking of Haji at all, focusing entirely on the dolphins. So much so that, during the time spent with the three sea creatures, this woman from a landlocked nation completely forgot her fear of the sea. She leaned over the edge of the boat, taking selfies on her phone with the dolphins in the background, until Haji dropped anchor over a section of water, apparently above a reef.

“Okay,” he smiled, taking snorkelling gear out of a bag. “Shall we swim with the dolphins?”

Marie adamantly refused, going rigid on her seat in the centre of the boat. The more he told her she would be fine, the less fine she became and her grip on the seat tightened.

It wasn’t until he went in the water himself that she relaxed, certain she was freed of the task. She had told him he should, and so he did, keen to impress her with his wonderful swimming. Resting his arms against the edge of the boat, he told her

she should at least put the goggles on and dip her face into the water over the back of the boat, so she could see under the sea.

It took some time but eventually she felt brave enough to move to the back of the boat and cautiously place her face in the water. Instantly she could see colourful fish and Haji diving down to the bottom. In awe of the underwater world of colourful coral and fish, Marie forgot her fear of the sea as she smiled, fully at ease with her face under water. Haji waved up to her as a dolphin curiously approached him before swimming on by. Marie enjoyed it so much she felt the need to become more familiar with the sea. She contemplated asking about getting in the water, but before she could, and as Haji resurfaced, their little boat rocked as a commercial boat packed with tourists arrived. As the tourists began to get into the water and snorkel around, Haji suggested moving. To his surprise, Marie asked to go to the shore.

“Somewhere I might try swimming, with you.”

Haji was taken aback. “Oh... well, yes of course Marie! We will head back to Kizimkazi right away!”

“Ah! No, Haji, I am not going to swim there with everyone one from your village watching!”

Haji considered the problem and, after a brief conversation with his captain, worked out the perfect place to go.

“I have the perfect place for us!” he proclaimed proudly. “A cove all of your own.”

“Oh well, that would be something, Haji.”

“And the captain will leave us too,” Haji added. “So that you need not be embarrassed by anyone!” This, of course, was news to the captain.

Soon enough they were on a small, white beach framed by coral rock, hidden away from the world and any chance of people peering in on their swimming lesson. Climbing from the boat into shallow water, Marie and Haji waved *goodbye* to the captain who promised to be back in an hour.

There they stood, in ankle-deep water, alone in a faraway, secret cove, snorkels and goggles in hand, with Marie still wearing a life jacket. Of equal importance were their phones. First, before any swimming lesson they took photos of each other and selfies either in the shallow water or elsewhere around the perfectly isolated cove.

After fifteen minutes of walking on the beach and posing for photos, Haji finally put a stop to it, “Okay, Marie, it is time to swim, yes?”

Marie was anxious, but Haji promised they would start slow. Moving into ankle- and then knee-deep water, he encouraged Marie to sit down in water all the way to her neck.

As she sat, she felt a panic begin to rise, but Haji’s smiling face, bobbing in front of her own, drew her attention enough to stay there. Feeling the sand under her crossed legs meant she felt safe for this activity. It was up to Haji though, to ensure she was distracted from thoughts of what might be swimming nearby, unseen. As Haji started to drift out further from shore, coaxing her into water that meant her feet needed to touch the sand, she felt anxiety take hold of her again.

Haji managed to get her past waist-deep water, all the way to just below her shoulders. He knew for certain she was further than she wanted to be when she straightened up and turned towards the shore in protest.

“No, no, no! This is too far!” she called out, as she thrashed her way back to waist-deep and then knee-deep water, before running out of the water altogether. Haji was left standing in waist-deep water, wondering if perhaps he had undone any good the finding of dolphins had achieved.

Together they sat in silence on the beach for some time. There were no more selfies to be taken at this private cove.

Soon the sound of a boat coming alerted them to the captain’s return.

Climbing onto the boat from the shallowest water possible, they headed back with the captain wondering why his two passengers were so quiet.

But on arrival at Kizimkazi Cove, things soon brightened up. To Marie’s surprise, Haji had the fish she had requested ready and waiting. He had caught it that morning before she arrived, keeping it alive in a bucket so that it would be as fresh as possible. “Because for you, only the best.” While he cooked the fish with Marie watching and taking photos of everything, including selfies with him, Haji felt a sense of his positive impact on her returning.

Marie loved being there and when they sat to eat under the thatched roof by the sea she began to speak openly.

“I wish I could stay here every day. It’s so nice here.”

“Maybe you can stay here every day,” Haji sat back, relaxing in his wooden chair.

“I wish every day could be like this day,” she admitted, as she put her feet up on the chair. Under the spell of Kizimkazi, blue ocean, fresh fish, and maybe a little of Haji’s influence, Marie was relaxing—feeling welcome, feeling at home.

Suddenly Marie realised she had missed the last dala dala back to town. Haji just smiled telling her all would be well as she would be comfortable for the evening.

“Ah no, Haji! I am stuck here now! I have no place to stay!”

“No, no,” replied a relaxed Haji as his mind quickly solved her dilemma. “It is no problem. I have a place you will love. Just wait here a minute.”

And with that Haji disappeared, leaving Marie to wonder what he had planned. A short time later, Haji returned with the village leader who greeted Marie and, much to her surprise, offered her the use of a holiday-home style of hut owned by the village though built by a resort.

“They had to build this hut,” Haji explained with pride as they reached the thatched roof hut. “It was a condition of being allowed to build and profit from the beauty of our cove. The village rents the hut out to people who come here to work with us.”

Though small, the hut had clearly been built by a resort accustomed to building for tourists on vacation. Opening the door, Marie was happy to see a wide Zanzibari bed and a nice bathroom with a good shower. Instantly Marie felt relaxed—like a tourist being shown her room by the bell boy—until the thought arose that this bell boy, Haji, perhaps planned on staying there for the night. Reading her expression, Haji assured her he would be going back to his home. To prove it, he left the moment the sun had set over the perfect cove, visible from Marie’s private porch.

“Before I go, I must first ask you something,” his tone was relaxed yet playfully serious.

“Oh what?” she replied suspiciously.

“Well, you need to let me know what time you will wake so I can bring fresh fruit for your breakfast.”

“Oh.” Marie was caught off guard by the offer. “Okay.” Once again Marie felt like a tourist at a well-serviced resort. Though when she suggested 9:00 a.m. she was met with a surprised reply that wouldn’t be expected from a good hotel room service attendant.

“Oh... *Nine?*”

“Yes.” She frowned, “what’s wrong?”

Haji explained that nothing was wrong, just that, living in this fishing village he was used to rising much, much earlier than many young people from town might.

“Okay,” she contemplated for a moment. “I will be ready at 8:30 a.m.”

“Very well, my Marie.” Haji bowed his head, choosing not to point out that for him early actually meant 5:00 a.m. “I will be with you again at eight thirty in the morning. It will be lovely. You will let me know in the morning if you wish to stay for the day or longer. If you are here, I will help you decide what we might do.”

“Thank you, fisherman,” Marie slowly closed the door to the hut, leaving Haji outside.

“You are most welcome,” Haji smiled at the closed door before strolling off down the road, filled with pride.

Marie sat on her bed, looking around the room, still surprised by the turn of events. Zanzibar was continuing to prove itself full of surprises.

Rais's House Guest

Debbie found the silent, smiling hours with Rais's mother to be some of the most peaceful and pleasant she had ever experienced. Time drifted by without any thought for time itself.

When the goats started arriving, she climbed to her feet with a smile, waiting to see Rais come in through the arched opening of the boma. The sun was low in the sky by then. When Rais came through the gate, he froze in shock at the sight of Debbie standing by his mother's home. A rogue goat turned back and shot out through the entranceway, right past frozen Rais, leaving a small boy to chase after it, yelling at Rais as he went.

Debbie greeted him with a smile, "Rais."

"Debbie! Why are you here?"

Debbie frowned a little, his tone was almost stand-offish.

"I came to see if you were okay."

"How did you get here?"

"I walked." Debbie felt put off by his lack of enthusiasm.

"Oh."

"Well, I took the dala dala, then I walked."

Rais stood confused for some time, while Debbie explained her journey, and how she had waited to hear from him. Then Rais suddenly became deeply apologetic, explaining that he had indeed lost the piece of paper.

"I am sorry, Debbie," he lowered his head. "It must have been on the dala dala back home. My mind was in town with you and at home with worry for the cow and I must have lost it on the journey."

"It's okay, Rais," Debbie replied sincerely.

Rais's mother smiled as she noticed Debbie touch her son's arm.

He explained that he had planned to come to town to try and see her in two days' time—when he had some money from a day's work in the barbershop. He would have come sooner but he had been looking after the goats. He had to help.

"Since the cow died, we need to take extra care of the goats, taking them to water more often so the family doesn't lose them too."

"Oh Rais," Debbie's voice fell with sadness. "I am so sorry about your cow."

Rais's heart warmed, "thank you, Debbie."

His mother, the young girl, and the children who had been out with Rais tending the goats, were all watching Rais and Debbie stand in silence, until eventually Rais spoke in Swahili which few of them understood.

But the kids who had begun to learn in school understood that Rais had just asked Debbie what she would like to do now. They also knew that Debbie wasn't sure, unaware that Rais's mother was standing right behind her, curious as to what was happening.

Then his mother spoke up, asking Rais if his guest would be staying for dinner. The children who understood Swahili listened as Rais asked Debbie, who said that maybe she could, but she would need to go home soon.

"Oh, Debbie. It is probably too late for you to get home now. There might be a dala dala in a while, but it's a long walk to town to maybe find out there isn't one."

"Oh, I—"

Rais's mother asked what they were talking about. Rais explained in Maa that he was sure she had missed the dala dala. His mother agreed it was likely, adding that she must stay the night to be safe. Rais said he had explained that, and his mother insisted he be sure his guest was comfortable.

Even with the news she would have to stay, Debbie waited patiently, enjoying the sounds of Maa and the expressions of mother and son, their Maasai jewellery jingling with the gestures they made.

"Maybe you will need to stay?" Rais finally said, as he switched back to Swahili.

"Oh, I didn't think about this," Debbie replied, with a tone and an expression that showed even the mother and the children who didn't yet speak Swahili that she was perhaps surprised or hesitant. "Where would I sleep?"

"My bed—you can have my bed and I will sleep away from it."

Debbie glanced over as the children who did understand Swahili all burst into giggles, before those who didn't understand joined in the giggles without knowing why they were giggling. His mother smiled at the children before she asked what had been said. His mother seemed a little put off by the idea, suggesting Debbie would be better off to sleep with the single girls. But it was his right to choose for his guest.

Once they were back over at Rais's hut, Debbie asked where he would sleep. He assured her he could just sleep in the other room, where he had his cooking pots

and fire. He showed her the little, flat, raised area was not just a table but also a bed. He seemed proud of his multi-purpose room.

And so, with little other choice, Debbie agreed she would stay, realising she would need to call her mother to explain the situation. Taking out her mobile phone, she was impressed to see she had full phone coverage way out there, in what might otherwise seem like the middle of nowhere to someone from the city.

She grinned at Rais, “It must be handy having full phone coverage out here.”

Rais nodded, getting her jab at his having lost his phone. He then waited while she called her mother. Rais could tell by watching Debbie that her mother wasn't too pleased, but Debbie assured her she would be fine, saying she would stay with Rais's mother, to calm her down.

After the call, Debbie looked out over the surrounds while Rais walked off to prepare dinner. As she looked out at Longido Mountain in the distance, turning red and purple with the setting sun, she fortunately spotted Rais walking over to the goats with his knife out.

“What are you doing?” she called out.

“I am getting dinner,” he stated, puzzled by her question when the answer was so obvious.

“No! That can't be dinner!” she called back in distress.

“Well,” he looked over to the goats and back to the distressed Debbie. “It isn't very often. And you are a special guest,” he raised his arms with the knife loosely bouncing in his relaxed hand, “so we will have a special dinner.”

“No! No!” she called, holding her hands out. “We don't have to have a special dinner!”

Rais stood there confused, just as his mother called out, asking him what was going on, as she came in through the branch arched entrance to the boma. He explained that Debbie didn't want a special dinner. His mother too was confused. He said maybe she didn't want him to kill a goat. The mother laughed, and the children who had followed her laughed. Rais laughed too, though Debbie didn't, her eyes still fixed on the knife.

“Please leave it be.”

“Okay, Debbie,” he put the knife back in the sheath on his belt. “Do you like beans?”

“Yes,” she breathed a sigh of relief. “Beans will do nicely, thank you.”

A short while later, seated in a circle near his mother's hut, they shared dinner with Rais's sisters and brothers as the final light of dusk drifted across the sky to be replaced by a deep and endless sea of stars. His family quizzed her on all sorts of things, asking her about her life in the city, why she came out here, why she liked Rais (to which she replied with a blush that he was just a friend). They told her all they could think to tell of their lives and the reasons for the things Maasai do, wear and believe. The brothers even jumped up and down to show her the dance that all the tourists always asked them to do—falling over each other with laughter as they finished. When she asked why they do it, why it was a part of their culture, Rais simply replied, “because we like to.”

“Not just for the tourists?”

“No, not at all,” one of his brothers, Pablo, replied. “For the tourists it seems anything we do is good, they stop and take our photos so often.”

“They take them all the time?”

“Yes,” Pablo shook his head disappointed. “They will even take them from moving cars when we are out walking and working. They don't care at all.”

“Does it bother you?”

“Well, I doubt they would do it back home. But it is okay. And your man here,” he pointed to Rais with a big smile, “is the best at dealing with them.”

“Dealing with them?”

“Yes. He has managed to stop one of the tour guides from letting tourists take photos of us without permission.” Pablo burst out laughing.

Debbie asked what he meant, what Rais had done. But Pablo, and his family, pushed Rais to explain the story, all beaming with excitement at the prospect of hearing it again. So, eventually folding to the pressure, but with some fear of how Debbie might react, Rais cautiously began to tell the tale. While he was cautious at first, as the story went on his family and Debbie were laughing, so he began to boast about his game.

He described how one day he had been walking his goats along the side of the road when a large Land Rover had stopped, and a number of Chinese tourists had climbed out.

“They just started taking photos of me without even waving to me first.” Rais explained. “So, I walked over.”

Pablo laughed, excited for what was coming.

Rais ignored him, focusing on telling Debbie the story.

“When I went over to them I said *hello* to the tour guide who was with them. Some man from Arusha, a Tanzanian, or maybe a Kenyan,” Rais shrugged. “I asked him why they wanted to take my photo, which they were still doing, even when I was standing just an arm’s length away from them. They still hadn’t even said *hello* to me. The guide told me they were just out seeing the world and wanted photos of the surrounds. I asked him,” Rais pointed to his chest, “if I was the surrounds. He told me not to make a fuss, that they were just tourists. But by now the tourists could tell I was talking about them because they started talking to the guide. I could see he was telling them nothing was wrong by the way he was holding his hands out like this.” Rais held his hands out in a way to show they were lowering down to calm a situation. “So I turned to the tourists and spoke straight to them. I was kind and soft in my speech. I knew they couldn’t understand me, but I also knew if I started talking to them he would have to translate. I could tell he didn’t want any of this to happen, but it’s part of his job, so it was okay.” Rais had no malice in his voice as he spoke. “I asked the tourists, why do you want to take my photo when you don’t know who I am and don’t talk to me first? And of course, he had to translate because these tourists looked curious to know what I had said, because suddenly here was this Maasai man talking to them.”

Rais grinned in a way that caused his family to laugh once more. “So, the guide translated. And then, after they looked at each other, confused for a moment, the tourists said something and the guide told me they said it was because I was interesting, and they wanted to show me to people back home. I asked what people. But he didn’t seem to translate that. So I explained they were free to take my photo, even though they didn’t know me or say *hello* to me first. The guide translated and everyone was happy, including the guide. But then the guide’s face changed,” Rais added, his brothers again giggling. “Because I added that they could take my photo, but it would be ten thousand shillings. And I could tell that got translated because the tourists bobbed their heads in agreement, took out money and gave it to the guide to give to me—even though I was standing right there and they could have just handed it to me! They must have thought I had a disease or something.” His brothers and sisters burst out laughing again as he continued. “Then they started asking questions as they took their photos. The guide told me they wanted a photo with my spear. So I told them five thousand shillings. The guide hated this but he told them, and they

paid without a care. Then they said they wanted to take photos of me with my goats – which puzzled me because they had taken so many already, before they knew me or had said *hello* to me. Which,” Rais pointed a finger, “they still hadn’t done anyway. Not one *hello*,” he grinned, clearly amused by the tourists. “So I told them it would be five thousand per goat!” his face was proud. “And you know what? Some of them paid!” Everyone, including Debbie, burst out laughing. And Rais added a point, “Though some did get back in the car at that. Not even saying *goodbye* or *thank you*.”

“And then they just left?” Debbie asked.

“Well, before the last one, the main one, got in the car, he did thank me. He shook my hand. And I asked him one last thing.”

“What did you ask?”

“I asked him if, when he was back home, going about his day, doing his work, or having a walk, if strangers stopped their cars and took photos of him. Or if he did the same to other people in his country.”

“Oh.”

“And he said he didn’t, and no one did. And then he got in the car with the tour guide and they drove away.”

No one was laughing now. They were sitting, in silence.

But eventually Rais broke the silence. “But hey, that day they did it properly and I had money for this!” he beamed, revealing his Arsenal T-shirt under his Maasai shúkà. The whole family once more burst into laughter and applause, the sound of their joy rising up to the stars and out across the quiet Maasai land.

The stars were in their millions, filling the sky, while the Milky Way stretched over them like a huge, colourful cosmic cloud from horizon to horizon. It was heaven to Debbie.

Soon came time for bed. Debbie was exhausted from her day and Rais, used to early nights and early mornings was also bleary-eyed as he escorted her back to his hut. He quickly attempted to tidy the room, putting down the cloth and blanket his mother had supplied so that Debbie wouldn’t have to sleep on his probably not very clean bedding.

Presenting the room to her under the light of a single candle, Rais wished her a good sleep, before standing, waiting for something. Debbie understood and

thanked him for his hospitality, “Okay, Rais, good night, out you go now,” she grinned.

He nodded knowingly and wished her a good sleep as he went to the small room across the tiny hallway, where he would sleep that night.

Settling onto the small mattress Debbie lay down and listened to the quiet world outside. She noticed how the thick mud walls dampened sound. The scent of the walls was fresh and earthy. It was a comfortable and peaceful place for drifting off to sleep. But she was then surprised to hear the sound of two other voices in the other room. She listened—Rais was in there with his two male friends. They were lying together on the same little platform bed because, as she would learn the next morning, Maasai rarely sleep alone.

She lay still, listening to them talking. She couldn’t understand what they were saying because it was in Maa, and even had she been able to understand, their whispers would have made it hard to distinguish anyway. Eventually they quietened and she was drifting off when she was disturbed by animal noises.

Far from her city home, Debbie rejoiced in the sounds of strange animals in the distance, satisfying her desire for adventure in ways that could only have happened because she found the Maasai the day she hadn’t found a giraffe.

The Family Falters

When Mr. Kulindwa's plane had left the ground in Dar, he had not known if Mama would join him in attempting to bring their children together in a business partnership. He didn't want to push it, even though he saw it as the absolute best idea.

But in Mwanza, as soon as he walked through his front door, his daughter wanted to know if the arrangements for a good business partner had moved forward.

"How was it? When are we going back to meet with people?"

"Well, soon."

"Next week then?"

"Perhaps."

"Tell me about the candidate?"

"I will soon," he replied, quickly leaving the room, "I have to get Barak ready for school tomorrow."

His daughter frowned, "It is only ten a.m."

"Yes—but it is his first day back. There is much to do. I will speak with you later."

And with that Mr. Kulindwa was out the door, leaving his daughter to wander what was going on with her father.

Fortunately though, for her, and more so for Mr. Kulindwa, Mama had talked to her own daughter and it was a real possibility that this partnership could happen.

However, when Mr. Kulindwa's daughter discovered that the potential partner just happened to be the daughter of the woman he had so glowingly mentioned before his sudden trip to Dar, her suspicions deepened.

They both returned to Dar a week later to discuss the deal further. His daughter soon realised that this was all her father's idea. He worked hard, selling her the idea of growing her business rapidly.

The two daughters did get along well—of that Mr. Kulindwa had no doubt. What he didn't yet know was that his daughter saw how much the two older people would benefit from what was being proposed. Without having to do the work of the business, they would gain the pleasure of each other's company by having their families connected via this business.

His daughter was quietly uncomfortable. She had seen her father begin another relationship after the death of her mother, who had been the love of her father's life. The new relationship brought Barak into the world but nearly killed her father during the bitter destruction of a bond that was never meant to be. Sitting there in the meeting, she quietly feared this perhaps happening again. She doubted her father was thinking clearly. The crazy, old man had, in a very short time, created an elaborate scenario involving two families and a big business spanning opposite sides of a giant country—all to have this woman in his life!

But it was not the whole case for Mr. Kulindwa, as he saw a chance for something wonderful to come about for his child and for Mama's—for the two families to benefit as much as he benefited from the company of Mama.

Unfortunately, with the complexity of the situation and his daughter feeling the strain of her business world becoming entangled with her father's love life, the whole proposal soon fell apart. Mama and Mr. Kulindwa found themselves once again saying *goodbye* outside her home, perhaps for good this time. He then joined his daughter at the airport for their flight home. Their flight back to the simple life and business that existed before this crazy love business had stirred up their world.

Mama sat in her home, not looking at the old clock moving toward the time when Mr. Kulindwa's plane was due to leave.

"I am sorry, Dad," his daughter apologised as the plane left the ground. "It's just all too much."

Her father looked out the window at the buildings and roads of Dar shrinking as their plane climbed into the sky. "I want," he caught his words and corrected them. "We want," he glanced back out the window, "the best for our children. So, all is well, my dear."

Jerry the Rooster

As Zuena stood in the front room of Renaldo's house, Jerry, the rooster, stared up at her. It was not clear if the rooster understood that the call with her mother was not going well. But all the same the rooster looked on curiously as Zuena tried to make amends.

"No mama.... No, I am sorry... It just felt like the right thing to do.... Yes mama... I know.... I am sorry, I was wrong to go this way... But it has worked out, mama... I have found him, and it is all okay. Just a misunderstanding... I will not... I will take the dala dala... No, they can put the bike on the roof... I will be okay... No, I don't have money..."

The rooster noticed that Renaldo's mother had put her head in through the doorway.

"Tell your mama that we will make sure you are home safe. Tell her my husband will drive you."

There was a look of concern on Zuena's face at the realisation she was now the stranger appearing from nowhere, burdening someone else's family. "No, it's okay. I can get the dala dala."

"Uh, my dear," Renaldo's mother shook her head. "You did well by my boy, we will do well by you. Tell your mama it is okay. We will drive you home."

"Okay," Zuena was still caught up in the awareness of her mistake. When she relayed the message to her mother, it was clear from her face that this caused her mother distress equal to that which Renaldo's mother had felt when Zuena had turned up at the door to check on her wandering son. Realising this, Renaldo's mother stepped forward.

"Here my dear, let me speak with your mama."

Zuena stood alongside the rooster as they both listened to the one side of the conversation they could hear. Renaldo's mother was very kind and seemed to be doing a good job of reassuring Zuena's mama. When Renaldo came in, he thought it sounded like maybe now the two mothers would be friends. They seemed to be getting along very well, with lots of smiling and nodding happening, as the two bonded over the difficulties keeping track of their adventurous children. When the call ended, all seemed well and Zuena was told she would get a lift home in an hour or so when Renaldo's dad returned from his job as a driver. Before leaving the front

room, Renaldo's mother sternly instructed the boy to be good to be sure of Zuena's wellbeing. "She has come a long way, boy. You be a good host, yes?"

"Yes, mama."

"Maybe start by introducing your eavesdropping friend here," she gestured to the rooster who was still watching them all curiously.

"Okay, Mama," Renaldo nodded, as his mother left the room, promising some food would be ready soon.

Renaldo looked from the rooster to Zuena and back to the rooster, for what seemed like quite a long time to Zuena, and perhaps also to the rooster.

"This is Jerry," he gestured to the rooster, who clucked a few clucks.

"Hello, Jerry," she gazed at this rather proud-looking bird with white and black feathers and a red beak. "Is he food?"

"Ah! No!" Renaldo exclaimed. "He is my friend. Not my dinner!"

"We wouldn't eat him either," Zuena looked at the rooster who was now looking around the ground for something to peck at. "He would be kept for breeding with the chickens. To make more chickens. For eggs and meat."

"Oh yes," Renaldo figured that all seemed correct. "You kill the females?"

"Sometimes... If it's my turn."

"Oh..." Renaldo realised the most he had done was remove the feathers from a dead one bought at the market.

"Can I go find my bike?" Zuena finally asked, after a long silence of watching Jerry look around the floor.

"Of course," Renaldo took to his role as host as he gestured to the front door, leading the way outside and across the street. As he approached the mechanics under the tree, Zuena noticed he seemed to be less of a boy and more of a small man. Zuena's heart froze when she saw the spot where the bike had been, now bare without any sign of a bike. But between the cars, under the tree, she found the man who had pointed to Renaldo's house earlier. He had the bike pulled apart on the ground. "He's greasing and fixing everything for you," Renaldo explained.

The man paused for a moment to take a sip of black coffee from a small white cup streaked with black from the grease and oil on his hands. "It is in no condition for the long rides you like to do."

"Oh, asante sana," she replied with the most genuine tone the man had ever heard.

“Hakuna matata,” the man grinned at the saying only ever used with the occasional tourist who found their way this far from the centre of Stone Town.

“Have you seen the *Lion King*?” Renaldo smiled.

“Yes, I saw it at school once.”

“The tourists—they are all about hakuna matata,” Renaldo giggled, shaking his head.

“No worries, no problems,” the mechanic put back one of the wheels, shiny black grease contrasting with the silver of the hub he had restored.

“Do you have tourists in Fujoni?” Renaldo asked.

“No, not really,” Zuena replied. “But they do sometimes stop for fruit when we have the stands—on their way to the parties and resorts in the north.”

“Oh yes!” Renaldo became excited. “The full moon party! I want to go to that!” he exclaimed, much to the delight of the mechanics who burst out laughing.

“With all the mzungu girls dancing?” one of them laughed.

“Smooth Renaldo on the dance floor, hey?” another called out with a cackle.

Renaldo shook his head at them, but Zuena laughed, imagining him dancing with white women from Europe and America who, at twice his height, would tower above him.

Soon enough the bike was completely back together, looking and sounding better than it probably ever had in its life. Zuena beamed, picturing its owner’s face changing from anger with her for taking it to awe when he saw how new his old bike had become.

“Thank you, thank you,” she smiled to the mechanic.

The mechanic laughed, “Hakuna matata, village girl. No worries, no problems. I am happy to help you.”

She thanked him again as Renaldo pushed her bike across the road, after giving the mechanics a casual nod and a see you later—again speaking in a tone different to the way he spoke with her. Somehow pretending to be a man, she thought. How strange the city boys were, needing to pretend to be men.

Back across the road in his house, with Jerry the rooster in the front room, the boy was very much on display as he invited her to sit down and play a game on his PlayStation. She hadn’t played one before. She’d watched the kids back in the village play them. Either in the houses or outside where they sometimes wheeled out

the tv screens into one place, so all the kids could play together at night—the perfect outdoor arcade under the fruit trees and stars.

But here it was her turn to play. To play soccer, of course, as Renaldo was only ever going to be playing soccer on a PlayStation.

But try as he might to teach her the controls and the way to play, she just found the whole movement disorientating.

“Maybe instead we can walk and see the fairground?”

“Yes, that would be good,” she replied, even though she had already seen the fairground. The game definitely didn’t interest her, so she was happy to get back outside.

So out they went, with permission of course, to wander around the fairground.

He didn’t have much more to tell her than what she could already see looking at the rides, but she found it nice to have a guide in a place so far from home.

“This one has horses that go around and around,” he pointed to the horses on the merry-go-round.

“The roller coaster twists right over as it goes around the bend up there,” he pointed at the part of the roller coaster where Zuena could quite obviously see the way the track twisted.

And the tour continued, with Zuena nodding politely at each thing he pointed out. But the afternoon was getting on, and Renaldo knew his father was now home as he had beeped to them as he passed by, wondering who the girl was walking along with his boy.

At the house Renaldo’s dad learned who the girl was, and frowned at his adventurous son for causing so much hassle.

“Thank you for checking on my boy,” he smiled a smile that gave Zuena a glimpse of what her new friend Renaldo would likely look like when he became a man.

“I can tell you are father and son.”

“Yes, yes” Renaldo’s mother laughed, “they are the same person. Yes?” she chuckled. “Though at least this one can drive you home and make life easier. Which he will do now as I promised your mother she would see you before the sun sets. So off you go. But I hope to see you again, Zuena, and please tell your mother I hope to

see her sometime too. And you,” she pointed to her husband. “You make sure her mother sees she is in good hands with us.”

“Of course,” Renaldo’s dad gestured for the children to head out.

Zuena thanked Renaldo’s mother, and waved *goodbye* to Jerry, the rooster, who wondered when he was going to be fed.

The drive, with the bike in the back of the big van, was a much more pleasant journey than the ride had been. Here, tired from her day, Zuena looked out the window, seeing more of the world than she had on her bike. The car was quiet, with Renaldo’s dad smiling as he looked from his son in the rear mirror to Zuena seated in the front passenger seat, her eyes glued to the world outside. His son was trouble at times, but he sure knew how to adventure through his life.

Good Morning, Marie

Marie awoke to a knock at the door, having overslept till 10:00 a.m. Groggily calling out “what?”, she heard Haji’s reply through the thick wooden door.

He had come by at 8:30, then again at 9:00, then at 9:30 and now at, “10am and I just hope that you slept well. It is no problem,” the muffled Zanzibari accent came through the thick wooden door. Marie was rubbing her eyes as she lay on the bed inside the draped mosquito net. “But please, now that you are awake, please take your time. I will prepare the fruit on the porch while you shower and prepare yourself for the new day!”

When he heard the shower turn off, he called through the door while preparing the fruit, “today, are you taking the dala dala, or are you staying?”

“I am supposed to be at work.”

Haji smiled as he heard her muffled voice through the door explaining she had told her friend to tell the boss she was sick. But she would of course need to be home tonight, so she could go to work the next day. He grinned with joy.

“There are three dala dalas that will suit you. The most suitable is the one you missed yesterday. The one that will allow you to be here with me and Kizimkazi for this whole day!”

The door suddenly opened. Haji looked up from the fruit to see the woman he’d been thinking all night. He’d been unable to sleep knowing she was staying in his village.

“Good morning, Marie!” he beamed.

“Good morning, fisherman.” She rubbed her eyes as they adjusted to the shimmering light of the bay in front of her. The tide was out and the piles of rocks she had seen under the water were exposed. There were three women out at one of the piles.

Haji said they were collecting the husks of coconuts that had been soaking under the rocks. “To make rope,” he smiled proudly, never tiring of explaining his world to her.

The fruit was delicious. She admitted they had many fruits in Rwanda, but the mangoes here were like nowhere else.

Haji spoke with confidence, “Well, if you come and stay here you will be able to have these mangoes every day of your life... And your children will grow strong on fresh fish, mango, and lots of swimming.”

“Uh!” she replied wide-eyed, but smiling, enjoying the way he fantasised so freely of a future. “My children? Haji it is not even 11:00 a.m. and already you speak of children!”

“Mrs. Haji would have all the mango she could eat until we died, old and happy!” Haji proclaimed.

“Uh, uh! That is too much!” she playfully protested. For her though, sitting there in that beautiful place looking out over perfect water, eating the freshest of mangoes, she couldn’t help but feel at ease with it all, and with the thought of such a life.

“Okay,” Haji said when the food was done.

“Yes, Haji?”

“Now we will go and swim.”

“Uh! No,” came Marie’s definitive reply.

“It’s okay. We will go even slower than yesterday.” Haji attempted to coax her. “Just to be in the water, yes?”

“Well,” Marie looked out at the distant, sparkling water. It did look inviting and the day was already starting to get hot. Perhaps she could sit in the crystal-clear shallows again.

“You can try sitting in the shallows maybe,” he suggested.

“Okay, fisherman—but no sneakily pulling me out to sea.” Her serious tone compelled Haji to place a hand on his chest and make a servant’s bow with his head.

“I will do nothing that doesn’t suit you, Mrs. Haji.”

“Uh, my god. Haji, you are too much,” she shook her head with a smile.

“Okay. come. I want to sit in the water. But not in this bay.”

“Of course,” he climbed to his feet. “We will go to a secluded one! And without the need for a boat!”

And so, they set off to find a place for her morning sit in the water, with Haji revealing he had already collected her a life jacket and snorkelling gear, hidden behind a tree nearby. It was not lost on Marie that he had confidently started his day expecting she wasn’t going to be getting that first rushed dala dala out of town.

Once at the secluded bay, Marie found sitting in the water a nice and calm enough thing to do. She enjoyed his company and she found herself advancing to water above the waist—almost to her armpits. Her life jacket made it impossible to touch the sand past this depth and so for at least this swim, she didn't go further. "When you don't have the life jacket next time, maybe you will trust me to take you out to stand in water up to your shoulders, my Marie?"

"Perhaps," she replied, not correcting him on the *my Marie* part—mostly because she was struggling to touch the sand with her feet.

It was clear to Haji that she was becoming comfortable with him. And Marie began to realise that perhaps the comfort of the crystal-clear water, white sand, the fresh fish, fresh fruit, and all the fresh air was not the only reason this place made her so contented. Perhaps this man, with his gigantic, possibly too pleased with himself smile, was a genuine part of it all.

By the end of this swimming lesson, as they walked back to town along the narrow dirt track amongst shrubs and banana trees, Marie found herself playing along with Haji's comments about a life together in Kizimkazi. "You would need to visit me in Rwanda if you want a Mrs. Haji."

"Oh but of course. I will come to your Rwanda to ask your mother if her daughter may become my Mrs. Haji."

"*Would*, Haji," she corrected him. "You *would*—not *will*. I am not your Mrs. Haji."

"Not right *now*, maybe," he grinned.

Wandering through town they bumped into Haji's Rastafarian fisherman friend. Haji was left red-faced as the fisherman told Marie the story of Haji "losing his mind" instead of just going to find her. The fisherman asked if she would be living in the village now. She assured him there was no such plan, that she was only here to eat fish and learn to swim. The fisherman jokingly asked her if she needed him to teach her to swim as Haji could not swim as well as a real fisherman like himself.

"Ah! We must be going now, Marie, to meet my mother," he said, throwing a dirty look to his friend.

The fisherman quipped, "Why does your mother need to meet a woman who is only here for the fishing and swimming?"

“Okay, fisherman.” Haji waved him off, to the amusement of Marie who laughed and slapped the hand of the Rastafarian fisherman.

“Later,” the fisherman walked off grinning.

“You are not a fisherman then, fisherman?” Marie grinned gleefully.

“No... I am a fisherman. But I am much more, so to him I am not a fisherman.”

“Oh yes. Well, to me you are a fisherman,” Marie confessed with a smile.

“I am, yes,” Haji nodded proudly.

“Because you smell.”

“Ah! I do not smell!” Haji protested.

“Calm down, fisherman,” Marie grinned. “I am joking with you. My god, you are so sensitive.”

“Okay, Marie. Let us go meet my mother.”

“Okay, Haji.”

It wasn't at all strange for her to meet his mother. Family is family, and here, like in Rwanda, family mattered more than any social games of waiting or separating family from a new romance. Of course, if they lived in the city, she would perhaps not meet a mother this quickly. But it was a small village, she figured. Surely in a small place like this, you meet a mother because you are right here where the mother is anyway.

When they arrived at the small house, his mother was nowhere to be found. After calling out to an elderly neighbour, they were told his mother had gone to town for a meeting. He said he knew about the meeting, but it wasn't until the afternoon, at which point the neighbour, an elderly woman, pointed out the truth to him.

“It is the afternoon, Haji.”

“Oh...” Haji looked at his wristwatch.

“Oh my god, Haji!” Marie laughed.

“What?” he laughed. “I had not seen the day disappear!” he grinned with his hands spread wide. “With you, Marie, time is nothing!”

“Ah,” she shook her head.

“Oh wait. That means your dala dala.”

“Oh yes—when is it?”

Haji looked at his watch. “It's in about an hour. Shall we go sit on the beach?”

But, to Haji's surprise, she didn't want to sit.

"No, let's go to the beach and swim once more." This felt like the right idea as the heat of the day was still hanging around.

Haji was even more surprised to discover she meant the village cove.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, Haji, there is no time to go elsewhere. And now it is okay as I am used to the water."

He was further surprised that she didn't protest or get overly tense as he guided her out until the water reached her hips. He asked again if she was sure. To his astonishment, she replied, "Haji, if I married you, would you spend our whole lives asking me if I was sure every time there was something to do?"

He apologised, bowing his head a little in awkward excitement at the mention of marriage, taking her joke far more seriously than he should have.

And so, with a few onlookers on the beach and two local kids sneaking into the water behind them, Marie and Haji moved slowly out into the water, with Marie taking Haji by the hand as the water passed her waist.

"Okay, this is far enough."

"Okay, Mrs. Haji."

"Ah! Be serious, Haji!" Marie insisted, her eyes wide as the water rose around her. "Focus on right now and my not drowning. Stop your daydreaming, I don't want to drown here!"

"Okay, it's okay... I am focused. We are reaching your shoulder depth shortly, but your feet are safe on the sand and the life jacket and I am always with you."

"I was joking, Haji," she jumped from her tense stance. "I am fine. This is not scary water."

"Oh! Okay, good!" he beamed, knowing, whether she did or not, that earlier in the day this far out had been much too far for her.

Marie half smiled as she let the life jacket take her weight in the crystal-clear, light blue water. She felt the weightlessness as her hands pushed her through the water in a circle around Haji who was encouraging and reassuring her all the way. "Ah yes, you are very good."

They even moved on to try kicking a little. He encouraged her to flatten out her back across the surface of the water into a doggy-paddle style.

As she found her buoyancy, Haji supported her mid-section with his arms carrying her below the chest of the life jacket on her hips. “Watch your hands there, Haji! I am not your wife!”

“Sorry, dear Rwanda. But surely soon, as I can tell that you love me.”

“Ah! I love you?” she spluttered with surprise, as water splashed her face.

“Why, yes.” Haji guided her through the water, with her legs kicking, her hands paddling and her head sticking up from the water. “You are trusting me here, in water above your head.”

“Above my head!” her eyes were wide with surprise.

“Yes, you do not see?” Haji spoke gently. “You are so good and so confident, your swimming has led us into deeper waters.”

In shock, looking to the shore and then into the water, which had darkened in colour to a deeper blue rather than crystal-clear, Marie yelled out, “Haji! No! Take me back to where I can walk!” she demanded, her swimming technique falling apart as her limbs each took their own panicked course at fixing the situation.

“Okay, okay. Sorry, Marie!” he pulled her back to shallow waters with his own sure legs moving them quickly through the water. As soon as he told her she could stand, she removed herself from his arms and planted her feet firmly onto the sand below the water. “I told you I wanted to go slowly, Haji.”

“I am sorry, I didn’t realise we had gone deeper as we were swimming so well together. I didn’t know until just before I said it,” he promised, trying to calm her. “You are very good at this. You have nothing to fear.”

“I still have fear, Haji.”

“I am sorry, Marie.”

“If you drown me...” she was serious, but found in her own words a reason to grin and laugh a little.

“I will never drown you, I swear,” Haji held a hand to his chest.

“Okay, well, that is enough lesson for today.” Marie turned and headed towards the shore. “I must go for my dala dala.”

They climbed from the water. She dried off and changed behind a towel, with Haji facing the other way. They walked through town to the dala dala stop, with hardly a word spoken. The silence worried Haji—perhaps he had lost his *mchumba* (fiancée). But Marie was simply relaxed in the gentle surrounds of the village. She was relaxed and comfortable there, and with Haji. She was enjoying the peace, and

his company, one last time before the dala dala took her back to the busyness of town.

“I do like it here, Haji,” she said, as they passed by two children playing under a mango tree.

Haji’s relief was enormous, “Yes, it is a most wonderful place to live,” he beamed, “and to have a family.”

“Uh! I mean I like it here and now. But okay,” she turned to Haji and extended her hand to shake his as the dala dala pulled up, “I will see you, fisherman.”

“Oh yes,” Haji took her hand, holding it rather than shaking. “Perhaps you will come again in a few days?”

“I have to work. You should come to town.”

“Oh, I see. Well...” Haji thought about it as the dala dala driver beeped for Marie to hop on. “Okay, I will,” he promised.

“Okay. Come Friday and you can join me for the party at the old fort,” she instructed.

“Oh. Yes, okay, I will try.”

“Okay, fisherman,” Marie took her hand back from his, “See you later,” and, without thinking, she hugged him, “and thank you.”

“Oh,” Haji replied, surprised by her hug. “Thank you, Marie.”

Marie climbed onto the dala dala leaving Haji on the side of the road in his peaceful, seaside, fishing village. The two children who had followed from the beach giggled at the sight of Haji standing there—his arms still partly extended from hugging the strange woman from town, the one who was somewhat scared of the sea.

Good Morning, Debbie

Debbie woke up in Rais's hut to the sound of a rooster announcing the rising sun. Sitting up, she peered at the outside world through a small hole in the thick, mud wall. Rais was already out there, checking on his goats. She watched as he carefully made his way around them all, counting and checking they were all walking well. She climbed from her bed to make her way out through the darkness, with only small pools of light finding their way through the occasional, small hole in the wall. At the red, tin door, a flood of soft blue, early morning light greeted her kindly. Rais smiled at the sight of Debbie straightening up as she stepped through the small front door. He felt a comfort seeing her smiling and stretching right there in the middle of his homelands. Debbie was thrilled by the sight of dawn colours extending to the distant mountain, which was crowned by a large white cloud, the only one in the sky.

“Good morning, Rais.”

“Good morning, Debbie!” he beamed. “How did you sleep?”

“I slept so well. Perfectly, thank you.”

“Oh, very good, Debbie,” he felt relief, having feared that his bed would not have given her the rest she needed.

She asked how he had slept, and if his friends had slept well too. He replied that yes, they all slept well, and he was sorry he didn't come to join her during the night. She replied, with a grin yet rather serious eyes, that he would have been even more sorry had he tried to join her in her bed.

“You would be dead now, Mr. Maasai.”

Rais laughed, “Okay, Debbie. Are you hungry?”

“A little.”

“Then I will prepare you some breakfast,” he stated proudly, taking his knife from his belt and reaching for a goat.

“No, Rais!” she yelled, causing the goats to scatter. Rais straightened up, laughing, and the nearby children laughed too.

“I am joking, city girl.”

Relieved, she pushed him away. “Very funny, Maasai.”

“We can have kuku?”

“Oh, please don't kill a chicken for me.”

“Oh no, it’s okay. I already did.” He smiled.

“Oh,” Debbie was unsure how to feel about that, aware of the value of meat out there.

A short while later they were sitting for breakfast with Rais’s brothers and the children who would soon be heading out for the day of work with the livestock. They all thanked her for being there for breakfast asking her if she was enjoying the chicken with rice and tea. She told them she was, but they took turns repeatedly asking her throughout the meal, their concentration clearly on the well-being of their special guest.

When breakfast was finished, they wished her well before heading off to work. Rais’s older brother, Pablo, speaking in Maa, told him to take the morning off to look after his guest. Debbie worked out what they were talking about and she felt bad for taking Rais away from his work.

“No, it is fine, Debbie.” Rais grinned. “I don’t have a little, round, angry man for a boss.”

She laughed, telling him that unfortunately, that same boss would fire her, if she didn’t get back in time for work that afternoon. Rais agreed to take her back to town. But not before his brother switched back to Swahili to grin and tell her she would be welcome in the family and, “with a change of shoes” would make a good Maasai woman.

“Ah! We are friends!” Debbie laughed.

Pablo held his hands up in defence as they walked away, “Okay, okay,” he grinned.

But Rais seemed not to find it funny. “I can take you to town now,” he said, somewhat forlornly.

“Oh?” Debbie was a little surprised by the sudden plan to head straight to town. “Shouldn’t I say thank you to your mama?”

Rais’s smile returned as Debbie showed respect for his mama, “Yes, I suppose that would be best.” To Debbie, his tone still seemed flat.

“Are you okay, Rais?”

“You have come a long way to see a friend.”

“Well, I was worried about you.” Debbie replied sincerely. “I was worried when I didn’t hear from you after you said I would. And I had no way to call.” She looked over at Rais who kept his eyes to the ground as they walked.

“It’s a long way to come.”

“I know,” she tried to get a smile or even a look from him by keeping her eyes on him. “But you came all the way to find me, so it seemed only fair I do the same for you, yes?”

But still he didn’t look up as they walked. “I suppose.”

“You need to stop losing phones and pieces of paper, Rais,” she grinned.

“I am sorry,” he looked at her with a serious expression. “I am sorry I have lost so many things.”

Debbie laughed, “There’s no need to be sorry, Maasai! I am happy you are okay, and I am happy I got to stay out here and listen to the animals, see the stars and drink tea with you and your mama.”

“She likes you.”

“I like her,” Debbie smiled.

“So, you like it out here?”

Debbie thought for a moment, looking around at the early morning red hue of the land and light greens of the shrubs and trees, stretching to the mountain. “Yes, it’s very nice out here. I like the quiet. And the colours. And the smells.”

“You want to come live out here?” he asked.

“Oh,” Debbie was surprised, “Well, I like to visit. And I would like to visit again. But I don’t think I could live out here, Rais.”

“Oh.” He looked out around the surrounds.

“My family are all the way in town, and I have to work. And…” she blushed, “I like showers.”

Rais laughed. “Yes, city people like to wash all the time, yes?”

“Not all the time, Rais. But it’s so nice to have the warm water, you know?”

“Yes, it is nice, but I prefer the river. That city water isn’t clean.”

“Oh?”

“It smells funny.” He screwed up his face. “Here we can drink the water. If you drink it there in the city, you will get the shits.”

Debbie burst out laughing.

“It’s true!” Rais’s tone was serious, “I once drank the water there. I was as sick as if I had eaten fish!”

“Fish?”

“Yes! As sick as eating fish!” he repeated.

“Fish makes you sick?”

“Fish is disgusting!” he shook his head as his face distorted in disgust, thinking about the taste of fish. “It should make everyone sick!”

Debbie laughed, “You just haven’t had good fish!”

“There is no such thing as good fish.” He looked ill.

“Next time you come to town I will find you good fish. Lake fish,” she promised.

“Please, no.”

“You won’t try it?”

“I didn’t kill the goat when you asked, so please don’t make me eat fish.”

“Okay, Rais, I promise not to feed you fish.”

“Thank you, Debbie.”

“You’re welcome, Rais.”

When they reached his mother’s boma she was sitting under a tree making jewellery with two other Maasai women. The two women said *hello* to Debbie before chattering and laughing under their breath while Rais’s mother got Rais to translate her words to her son’s special city guest. She checked that Debbie had had a nice stay and Rais had given her good food and tea—in spite of his protest at having to translate the last part. Debbie asserted that her son had taken excellent care of her, she had enjoyed every minute of her visit and hoped she would see them again soon. Rais’s mother assured her she was welcome to return to their country and home, anytime. Then placing her hands together as if in prayer, Rais’s mother added she was sorry she couldn’t speak Swahili. Debbie replied that she was sorry she didn’t speak Maa. In translating the message to his mother, Rais included his plan to teach Maa to Debbie. With final *goodbyes* the mother and her new city friend wished each other well. As they were leaving, Rais’s mother said one more thing to him but he didn’t translate for Debbie.

As they walked away Debbie quizzed Rais as to what it was his mother had said—it had obviously made Rais uncomfortable.

Rais took some time to reply, but then confessed she had asked if he had plans to go to town. He had told his mother he wasn’t going today, because he was working. But apparently his mother had asked him if he was planning to move to town.

“To live with you.”

“Oh...”

“Yes,” his tone was serious, “I am the youngest male in the family.”

“Yes?”

“So I am responsible for my mother. I am the one to look after her when she gets old and needs help.”

“Oh, I see. So you couldn’t live in the city?”

“Do you want me to live in the city with you, Debbie?”

“Hey, Rais! That isn’t what I said!” her eyes squinted with her smile.

As they passed by the small open church with the rocks and branches for pews, Rais asked her if she would get married there.

She replied that the view of the mountain behind the altar was a lot nicer than a brick wall in a church.

Rais, noticing he didn’t quite get an answer from her asked again, “Would you like to get married here then?”

“Rais, are you trying to ask what I think you are trying to ask?”

Rais shrugged, hiding a grin, “Hey, I am just asking if this is a place where you might like to get married to your husband.”

“My husband?”

“Well yes, that is who you normally marry, yes?”

“Well, you marry your fiancé, not your husband,” she explained. “Your mchumba, who then becomes your husband when the marriage ceremony is complete.”

“Very clever, Debbie,” he grinned, as they continued their way, having missed out on a definite answer.

Further down the long, dirt road, Rais pointed across through the bushes, explaining they could go that way for a change. Debbie followed him through the shrubs and trees, until suddenly in front of her were two giraffes.

“This is a couple,” Rais pointed at the giraffes.

“Oh!” Debbie looked up. “I didn’t even see them. How do you know it is a couple?”

“Because of the child.”

“Child?”

“Yes,” he pointed past the two adult giraffes.

And sure enough, there was a small giraffe, not much taller than a human, standing on its wobbly, skinny legs, nibbling at a shrub.

“Oh!” Debbie’s voice was low as she tried to hold her excitement under her breath. “It’s so cute!”

Rais smiled, “Yes, it’s very young.”

“Can we go closer?” Debbie whispered, taking a step forward—before Rais touched her arm.

“No, no. We can’t, it’s not safe,” he whispered. “They will attack us if they think we are going after their baby.”

Rais suggested they walk a long way around. Debbie agreed as she watched the tiny giraffe nibbling at a leaf near the protection of its parents’ legs.

After a little time with the tall family, Debbie said *goodbye* with a whisper and they slowly walked away from the most incredible animal encounter she had ever had.

When they reached the highway, Debbie was still beaming from having seen a baby giraffe. A short while later as they came over the hill they saw a dala dala on the side of the road. Rais waved, calling for it to wait.

“Thank you, Mr. Maasai,” Debbie smiled the biggest smile he had seen.

“Thank you for coming and checking on me,” Rais held out his hand to shake. But Debbie leaned forward, hugging him tightly. It took him a moment to register and return the hug. And as he did the men in the barber shop grinned and whacked each other’s shoulders as they watched a huge smile spread across Rais’s face.

And they were even more entertained when Rais went for a kiss, but Debbie came out of the hug, dodging his advance with a grin and a giggle.

“Hey, Maasai man, don’t be cheeky!” she insisted through squinting, smiling eyes.

“Sorry,” he grinned. “Maybe when I come to see you?”

“Maybe what when you come to see me?”

“Maybe, we will kiss?” he quizzed as she walked off to the dala dala.

Debbie laughed and waved over her shoulder. “See you soon, Mr. Maasai, don’t lose my number again, yes?”

“Okay, Debbie! Bye-bye!”

“Bye-bye, Rais,” Debbie waved as she climbed onto the dala dala.

“I like that,” he grinned.

“You like what?” she leant from the doorway while other passengers watched.

“I like it when you call me Rais.”

“Well, I am glad. See you soon, Rais,” and with that she disappeared into the dala dala and it pulled away, out along the highway, once again leaving Rais standing on the side of the road, wondering what was going on.

Laughter and clapping came his way from the barber shop. But Rais was too caught up in his thoughts of the now distant dala dala and the girl inside.

Mr. Kulindwa and Something New

After they had said *goodbye* outside her home in Dar, Mr. Kulindwa and Mama Agnus found themselves living the reality of that *goodbye*. Weeks passed by; they each did their best to get on with life. Mama had seen the rift that seemed to be forming within his family and the difficulty her daughter had perhaps faced, dealing with such a complex situation at the start of her career. She had tried her best to put Mr. Jaruph Kulindwa out of her mind. But he remained there, coming to the forefront of her thoughts at the strangest of times. Be it when sitting in a meeting with the community, looking at the children playing on the street outside her home, having dinner with her daughter, or simply brushing her teeth at the end of the day. The man she had known for such a short amount of time was on her mind. But clearly, there was nothing that could be followed or explored.

Across the country in Mwanza, things were no different for Mr. Kulindwa in his attempts to put the woman from Dar out of his mind. Barak continually asking after her did not make it any easier.

“When will we see Mama Agnus again? Is she coming with us?” he would ask as they went to the lake. “Are we going to the airport to see her?” he would ask, if a car was coming to collect them.

“No, no, my boy,” Mr. Kulindwa would reply. “We are here and she is there and that is just how it has to be.”

As time passed, hope went with it.

He had little to do with his daughter after their return. He felt bad for what he had done, even though he really did believe there was something good for them in Dar. Though finally, one day she invited him to lunch. He was pleased to see her and glad she was happy and in good spirits, after having looked so tired and frazzled the last time he had seen her properly, which was when they parted ways at Mwanza airport.

She had some good news for him about her work. She had in fact decided to set up business in Dar, “but in a simpler, less complex way than you masterminded so quickly.”

“Very good,” he nodded, knowing he had best keep out of her business.

“I found a partner. And have made a connection that is less personal than the type you tried to make.”

“I see. I am sorry for that, I—”

“It’s okay, Dad, you meant well and your heart, while maybe it was blocking your mind, was in the right place.”

“Yes... perhaps.”

His daughter could see the situation was still taking its toll on him. But she knew that bringing him in on an early conversation about the business might give him some strength and the pleasure he clearly needed. Since the new partner was coming to Mwanza the next day, she wanted him to be with her for the meeting. “I don’t want to do this alone, Dad. I want you there to help me.”

Straightening his posture in his chair he nodded, agreeing to help his daughter, and pleased indeed to be involved again.

Young Explorers Tell their Tales

After Zuena's visit on an old, creaky bike Renaldo and his dad drove her back to her village. When they arrived, Renaldo's dad assured Zuena's mother all was well—their friendship was welcome. Any possible punishment for Zuena seemed quelled by the warm connection now formed between the two families. Zuena showed Renaldo's dad around their village and then, much to Renaldo's joy, they all ate mango together under the giant mango tree where the children had first met. His dad complimented Zuena and her mother on how wonderful their world was. He admitted he had been disappointed in his boy for wandering off but was now thankful it had led to something as good as this.

"Maybe I can bring the boy back soon and the kids can go for a swim at the beach?" His suggestion was met with wide-eyed excitement from Renaldo and Zuena as they both looked to her mother to see her response.

"Of course," she smiled.

"Very good, then!" said Renaldo's dad, patting his son on the back.

"Very good," repeated Renaldo.

After they had said their *goodbyes*, weariness from a truly tiring day overcame Zuena, who slept deeply. Renaldo fell asleep on the drive home with his dad, arriving where the dark of night had sent Jerry the rooster to his slumber.

~

In the morning, when Jerry's calls woke Renaldo to start his day earlier than the boy perhaps would have preferred, Zuena was already up and on her way to school where she was met with a thousand excited questions from her friends.

"You disappeared!"

"I heard you stole a bike!"

"I heard you ran away because of your mother!"

"No, no, I did not run away, and I borrowed the bike. And my mother had nothing to do with it."

"I heard there was a boy!"

"Yes, that is right. A new friend in town. He lives by the fairground. He was lost out here, and we helped him."

Her friends went on, asking question after question about what it had been like in town. Zuena soon realised her time there had been so short she had little to share. However, she could tell them about the fairground and a rooster named Jerry, who would never be eaten or bred from.

She didn't need to tell stories though because one of her school friends pretended to know about it already, speaking as though she too was a well-travelled adventurer. Zuena, kindly listened even when the girl got details of the fairground completely wrong. Zuena also stayed silent through the friend's claim that under the big tree there was a juice shop selling all kinds of lollies. When it was, in fact, simply a place where mechanics leaned on old broken cars, drinking strong coffee and listening to the soccer on the radio.

Meanwhile, back in town by the fairground, Renaldo was telling his friends about the village as they walked passed the mechanics under the big tree. "It smells nothing like here!" there was awe in his voice. "And under their big trees you find fruit, just lying on the ground waiting for you! Not greasy mechanics and coffee!"

"That sounds like what Christians call heaven!" one of his friends replied.

"Indeed, my friend," Renaldo nodded. "Though it is better than the Christians' heaven!" he proclaimed.

"Why is that?" his friend asked.

"Because you don't have to be dead to go there!"

Haji and the Party

After her overnight stay in Kizimkazi, Marie returned to work and exploring Stone Town. The work days were long, but even a trip to the post office meant she could lose herself in the labyrinth of laneways long enough to savour the adventure of being so far from home. She found herself wishing for more time floating in the sea, or at least the shallows of a cove, but so far, her work had not sent her back there.

Haji was in the familiar surrounds of his home, working on his study plans for the future to distract his mind. But he found his thoughts continually pulling in Marie's direction. He worked hard avoiding the urge to message and call her. He needed to play it cool, he told himself.

"You need to make her think of you," his fisherman friend advised him when it was late at night, and they sat in their small boat in the middle of the sea waiting for the fish to bite.

But when Friday arrived, Haji set off for town, wearing his best pants and shoes, with his shirt carefully pressed.

Much to the entertainment of his friend, Haji stood at the dala dala stop. "Looking good, city boy!"

On the dala dala, Haji found himself squashed between two large women while a small, skinny, old man sitting across from him stared with a broad smile that revealed his two remaining teeth. "Who's the woman?"

"What do you mean?" Haji frowned at the old man's question.

"You are not going for a job, are you?"

"No."

"Then who is the woman?" the old man asked again, as the women either side of Haji cackled.

But Haji couldn't contain the truth, "She is from Rwanda."

"Ohhhh!" the old man raised his eyebrows. "A skinny one?"

Haji frowned, confused, "Yes, she is. How did you know?"

"That is Rwanda," the old man stated.

"Oh yes?"

"Yes," the old man shook his head, "not for me."

"You don't like Rwandan women?"

“No, no. It’s the skinny legs,” the old man shook his head again.

“Oh?”

“I like a woman with big, thick legs,” proclaimed the thin, little, old man, holding out his bony hands to show his preferred female leg girth while the two women Haji was squeezed between clapped their hands with laughter.

“But,” the old man shrugged, “whatever makes you happy.”

“Well, then, thank you.”

“Where are you meeting this skinny woman?”

“I don’t know for sure,” Haji shrugged. “Apparently, there is a party.”

“Oh! A party!” the old man’s eyes lit up nearly as much as they did when he thought of big, thick legs. “Is she Muslim?”

“No, Christian.”

“Oh! So, there will be drinking?”

“I think she likes to take a beer sometimes, yes.”

“Ah!” the old man threw his arms into the air, “you are lucky!”

“Why am I lucky?”

“The beer. It will make her fat!” he beamed. “You will have a woman with thick legs in no time!”

The entire dala dala burst into laughter as it hurtled down the road among the plantations, where coconut trees and bananas intermingled with giant mango trees and spices.

~

Finally, Haji, the old man who liked thick legs and their cackling, bemused fellow passengers reached town. As they climbed from the dala dala at the main station, the old man wished Haji well.

“Good luck, my boy!” he grinned, before taking him by the arm and leaning in to whisper. “And if it doesn’t work, don’t worry. She is skinny, after all. So not much to lose, yes?”

Ignoring the old man’s inappropriate humour, Haji wished him well and headed through the markets into the winding labyrinth of Stone Town, relying on memory from his one other visit. Sure enough, he eventually found a blue step with

three young boys on it. Today they were dressed in their crisp, white Islamic robes for prayer day.

“Ahhhhh, fisherman!”

“You are back!”

“Haven’t given up yet?”

Haji gave a confident smile, “Hello, little brothers. No, of course I have not given up. There is nothing to give up on. She knows me, so everything is fine.”

“Knowing you is all it takes, hey fisherman?”

Haji shrugged and grinned.

“Okay, fisherman. In you go, hey.”

With a nod to his young friends, Haji stepped into the office, finding Marie sitting there at her desk talking to some clients. Seeing him come in, she professionally gestured for him to take a seat while she dealt with her clients.

He sat down, and of course, the Kenyan woman was there grinning at him. “May I help you?”

“Ah hello,” Haji replied politely, raising his palm. “No, I am fine.”

“Are you looking to book a trip?” she asked playfully. “Perhaps you would like to go on safari to see the dolphins?”

“Ahhh, the dolphins,” Haji raised his eyebrows, “I hear they are very good.”

“Yes, there is a very charming guide who can cook you fish,” she smiled slyly, speaking loud enough to ensure Marie could not avoid listening in. “And if you are lucky, he can also teach you to swim.”

“Ohhh,” Haji matched her enthusiastic volume, “That does sound good.”

“Yes... until he tries to drown you!”

“Hey! There was no drowning!”

“Ah, I heard otherwise, fisherman.”

Marie tried to focus on her clients as the fisherman and the Kenyan bantered in the background. Finally the clients left content with their touring plans, Marie turned her attention to her patiently waiting guest. “Okay, fisherman, how are you?”

“I am fine, thank you, my Marie. How are you?”

The Kenyan cut in teasing, “Ayyyye, you are his Marie?” she grinned wide-eyed.

“Uh,” Marie shook her head, “this is just how the crazy fisherman talks.”

“I see,” the Kenyan friend replied while Haji’s smile gleamed.

“What?” he protested, holding back his own laughter. “I am not crazy.”

“Okay, fisherman,” Marie nodded. “I will be finished work in an hour. You meet me at the old fort and we will eat before the concert.

“Okay, my Marie,” Haji jumped from his seat. “I will see you soon.” He nodded to the Kenyan woman, “Thank you.”

“No problem,” replied the Kenyan, jesting with a nod of her own.

And with that he was outside and off to wander the narrow laneways until it was time to court *his Marie*.

“My Marie?” the Kenyan woman sniggered to Marie.

“Uh! No, he is just crazy,” Marie couldn’t hide an obvious smile.

“Ah well, his Marie is glowing.”

Outside the shop the three boys jumped from the step to question Haji.

“What are the details, village man?” the eldest boy asked as they began to walk with him.

The middle boy reached up to rest a hand on Haji’s shoulder, “Yes, what’s the story?”

“Has she taken your whole mind?” asked the youngest.

“Yeah,” added the middle boy. “Is it worth having no brain now?”

“I have my brain and my mind is whole, thank you.” Haji assured them.

“And I am certain now I am in hers as much as she is in mine,” he glowed.

The youngest boy frowned with concern, “That sounds crowded.”

“My young friend, it’s not crowded,” Haji explained. “In your mind there is a large space kept clear, waiting for the right love to occupy it.”

“No, there isn’t!” the young boy protested. “I have filled all that space with skills that allow me to do back-flips and front-flips and other tricks into the ocean from the wall by the night market!”

“Oh,” Haji raised his eyebrows at the boy, “you have, have you?”

“Yes, yes I have,” the boy juttied his small chest out with pride. “You should see how the tourists watch and take my photo!”

“Well done, young brother.” Haji’s sincerity was met with a proud grin from the boy.

“Where to now, fisherman?” the eldest boy asked.

“I am going to walk around your fine town until Marie is ready.”

The middle boy frowned, “Ready for what?”

“For me. For our night together at the party.”

“Oh!” laughed the middle boy. “You are taking her to the One Love party?”

“No,” Haji shook his head.

“No?” asked the youngest boy.

“No, she is taking *me*.”

“Does it work that way?” quizzed the youngest.

“These days it does, yes,” explained the eldest.

“These days?” Haji frowned.

“Yes,” the eldest boy had a serious look on his face. “It used to be that the man always took the woman out and made the arrangements.”

“No, that’s not true,” Haji assured them. “Women have always done it too. This is not new here in Zanzibar.”

“Oh really?” asked the youngest boy, while the eldest boy shook his head with the expression of an old man being told his ways are wrong.

“Yes, it is true,” confirmed the middle boy on Haji’s behalf. “African women run the show!”

“Well, okay then,” the eldest boy stopped walking, looking a little frustrated. “We will see you again, fisherman.”

“Okay, little brothers.”

“Okay, fisherman,” said the middle boy.

“Good luck with your *One Love*,” grinned the eldest boy.

“I don’t need luck,” Haji proclaimed as he walked away. “All will be fine, my young brothers!”

“*Inshallah*, (if Allah wills it) brother!” the eldest boy called out, as they watched Haji wandering down the laneway with a spring in his step.

“He has lost his mind,” the youngest boy shook his head.

“Oh yes, it’s certainly gone,” the eldest boy confirmed.

The middle boy shook his head, “Poor bastard.”

~

Haji wandered around the narrow laneways for some time. While there in the town he was still within his own country, and on the same island as his village, but he felt like a tourist. None of the Zanzibari trinkets on sale appealed to him, nor did

their prices. Instead he spent his time strolling along, listening and looking at the town life around him. As the sun sank lower in the sky he made his way to the water, down by the old fort and gardens where the markets had been set up for the evening. He sat watching as young boys and young men egged each other on to run and jump into the sea from the high wall, doing backflips, front flips, and awkward belly flops. As the sun began to set, a red glow came off the mainland over the horizon, silhouetting the boys as they jumped through the air before disappearing below the line of the wall.

“Hey, fisherman!” came the familiar voice of a young boy.

Looking up Haji saw the youngest one of his three young friends.

“Now you can see my skills.” And with that he ran and jumped off the wall, effortlessly rolling his head and body backwards, as he smoothly curled through a backflip before landing comfortably in the water. Haji was indeed impressed by his skills and gave him a clap.

When the backflipping boy eventually climbed back up the edge of the wall, he spoke again.

“You see what you can achieve when you keep the space you fill with women free for a love of something as good as backflips?”

Haji was impressed, “Yes, young brother.”

Looking at his watch, Haji saw an hour had passed, and so he wished the boy and his friends well and made his way across the Forodhani gardens to meet his Marie outside the old fort. He found her already there, ready for their night out—dressed in black jeans and a black silver top with matching large, silver necklace,

“Okay, Haji, we will eat now, yes?”

“Very good, Marie. Where shall we eat?”

“We can go to a place maybe on the other side of town. It’s where locals eat.”

“Okay, that would be good, yes, better than these expensive markets where they don’t even know how to cook a fish like I do.”

Marie smiled at the sensibly frugal man from the south, “Okay, fisherman, let’s go.”

In minutes Haji was disorientated. Marie took him through an unfamiliar part of the ancient labyrinth town, with buildings made of coral. She casually led him through on autopilot, taking each turn without a thought, all the way to Lukmaan Restaurant, where Haji was pleased to find an array of local food at a good price.

“Ah yes, this is good!” he exclaimed, looking into the heated bain-maries filled with all the colours, spices, and flavours of Zanzibar.

After loading their plates with food, they sat and ate without a word—just Haji’s moans revealing he was pleased to find food as good as at home.

“Do you like the food?” Marie asked sarcastically.

“Oh yes, it’s very good, thank you.”

Their walk back to the fort was also quiet. The familiarity of their companionship made them comfortable with silence. Haji was surprised by the huge crowd at the entrance through the large walls of the fort.

“Do you like reggae?” Marie asked as they joined the large queue.

“Ah yes, it is nice,” Haji pointed to the One Love concert banner above the entrance. “Good for love, yes?”

“Yes, Haji,” Marie shook her head but couldn’t hide an obvious smile

“You wanted me to join you at the One Love concert, Marie?”

“Uh! I told you I was going to a party and you could come if you wanted to. I did not say anything more.” She did her best to hide the amused smile that had persisted on her face ever since he had entered the office earlier that day.

“Okay, my Marie,” Haji nodded.

“You are crazy, Haji.” she grinned.

“I am just happy to be here with you for the One *Love*,” he grinned as his words bounced along.

Realising that many of the people in the queue were standing looking at their phones rather than making their way into the concert, Marie and Haji sneaked their way through.

Haji shook his head. “Why are these people stuck on their phones?”

“They have free internet in the Forodhani gardens for everyone.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, everyone spends their whole nights on their phones here. But not inside the old fort. Here, everyone is going to be dancing,” she promised, as the sound of music came over giant stone walls that had once protected colonial sultans.

The short corridor through the thick walls led Haji into two large yards filled with people, lights, and pumping reggae. Wasting no time, Marie, nodding to the beat, led him straight to the dancing crowd near the stage, where a DJ played amongst lights and lasers.

“Come, fisherman!” she gestured to his legs, “Let’s see you dance!”

With a confident grin, he followed. “Okay, Rwandan lady, I’ll show you my dancing.”

At once, from his ankles through to his hips, Haji began to move rhythmically, his upper body swaying while his legs danced around. All the while he continued to grin.

Marie was impressed, “not bad for a fisherman!”

“Yes, Mrs. Rwanda,” he grinned, as Marie too danced to the music, moving gracefully from her hips through to her shoulders.

“Ah,” he pointed to her shoulders. “Rwandan dancing.”

“Uh! No. Just dancing. We are all different, fisherman.”

As they danced on, Haji grew more and more confident, moving closer and closer to Marie. But Marie, aware he was dancing closer when their legs touched, slowly moved backwards as they gradually moved across the dance floor.

Enjoying her company, Haji wondered if he maybe could steal a kiss. But as his lips reached hers, she stepped back. “Okay, fisherman,” she spoke casually as if he hadn’t just been so close. “Time for a drink, I think.”

She took his hand and led him out of the dancing pack. Haji, had missed a kiss, but still grinned widely as he looked down at his hand in hers as she led him through the crowd.

Being as happy as he was, he offered to buy her a beer when they reached the bar made of bamboo and old plastic tables. But Marie, knowing his religion banned alcohol from his life, insisted he shouldn’t.

“No, Haji. It is okay. You are Muslim. I respect that. You don’t need to buy me my drink—not that it is a religious thing anyway. I work. I can buy my own drinks.”

“No, no,” he shook his head, “it’s okay. Please,” he insisted, as he reached for the beer, and his money beat hers to the bartender. “Take this beer and enjoy yourself,” he insisted, “this is your culture, yes? To have a beer when you are partying?”

“Ah, that is nice of you,” she took the beer. “Thank you, Haji.”

“You are welcome, Marie.”

As she sipped her beer, they watched the crowd dancing.

“It is nice of you to be okay with this, you know,” she gestured to her drink.

Haji shrugged, “of course.”

“It is not essential to my culture. But it is just nice to have, you know.”

But as she took another sip, he grinned and took a chance to try a joke. “Of course, though, when we marry, you will become a Muslim—”

“Uh!” she laughed. “Me?” her eyes were wide as she pointed to her chest. “Me? Muslim?”

“Maybe, yes,” he smiled.

Marie took a sip of her beer and sat down at a table. “Okay, fisherman,” She looked out over the dancing crowd, then back at Haji as he sat down beside her and she considered a more serious question.

“Yes?” a wide, amused smile still dominated Haji’s face.

“If you were to convince me to be Muslim, if you could explain everything to me about being Muslim, and maybe I became a Muslim... how would you convince me?” she grinned.

Haji considered her question for a moment, looking out over the crowd of smiling, dancing faces, caught up in the music. “You know the big thing is not...” he paused to consider his words, “is not...” he paused, thinking again. “It’s not how I explain being Muslim to you....” He searched for the right words. “But... the big thing is how you have love for me.”

“Uh!” she exclaimed as she raised her beer-holding hand with her finger pointing at him. “But if you too... If you have love for me, then you can be Catholic.”

He shook his head, still somewhat playful, “You know, most of the time, the ladies they fall in love—”

“Uh!” she cut in. “Which lady? From Zanzibar? Zanzibarian lady?”

“African lady,” he confirmed.

“No, don’t say African lady.” Her tone was strong and confident. “Say what you know. Say Zanzibarian lady, because I’m an African lady and I’m not like that.” Her tone was serious, but she still offered a grin.

“If I say African lady, I don’t mean all African ladies, but some of them.” He shuffled in his seat as his eyes moved around, from the dancers back to Marie, to her beer, and back out to the crowd.

“No, you mean all African ladies,” she insisted. “Say Zanzibar lady or Kizimkazi lady,” she laughed, tapping her beer on the plastic table, pleased with her comeback.

“Okay, I say some of them—”

Marie laughed again, enjoying the conversation, even though she felt frustration, “You know, we are not the same, my dear.” She placed her fingers on the table in front of him. “There are many differences. There’s not one type.” She looked out to the crowd and back to him, as she switched the subject back to what they had started on. “I have many friends in Rwanda who have Muslim boyfriends, but they refuse to marry and become Muslim.” As she rested her gaze back on her fingers on the table, her eyes showed Haji she was deep in thought. “But maybe me, maybe I could marry a Muslim and maybe I could become a Muslim too. You see, we are different?”

Haji nodded, his face somewhat serious as he looked back out at the huge crowd rolling like an ocean even as they danced their individual dances. The venue was filled with the sounds of joy and celebration. But their table was quiet. Marie was now looking at the bubbles in her beer, as they each collected their thoughts.

“So, let me ask you,” she finally said, breaking their silence. “If I could change my religion and become Muslim, are you allowed to marry four women, or only me?” she grinned, pleased with the question she was most curious about.

Haji grinned too, but then took a breath as his face became somewhat serious with the task of describing his tradition. “My position is...” he paused collecting his words. “I am allowed to marry four wives, yes,” he confirmed, his eyes out on the crowd. “And if you are the first one, you would recognise I have the right to marry three more wives.” As he reached the end of his sentence his eyes returned to Marie, who was staring back at him with a raised eyebrow and a surprised, yet bemused expression.

“So, me?” she pointed at herself. “What about me?”

“You’d be the first...” Haji confirmed.

“Uh, uh, uh,” she shook her head and her tone changed, “What about *me*?”

“You’ll be the first...”

“Uh uh!” she laughed, shaking her head. “You, you will go off and marry four?” she confirmed, before repeating again, “but what about me?” she pointed a finger from him back to herself, “I can maybe marry another ma—”

“Noooo. You are not allowed to marry another man.”

“Well then,” Marie picked up her beer for another sip, “it’s the same for me too. If I can’t, you can’t.” She chuckled, shaking her head at the conversation at hand. “You are not allowed to go and marry another.”

“Why?” his tone was somewhat serious.

Marie took her time considering her reply, feeling now that this was more a serious than funny situation. “If you say that for me...” she paused, avoiding a stumble in her words by silently pointing back and forth between them. “If you have something... If you are allowed to... Why am I not allowed to?”

“It’s because our religion has allowed us—”

“But—”

“—Let me tell you one thing.”

“If I—”

“—You are the woman.” His statement was abrupt and left Marie falling silent as she waited for him to have his say on what she felt was already a lost cause. “You are the woman. Yes?”

Marie said nothing.

“And, um, our religions tell us you are not supposed to do anything once you are married.” His eyes settled on hers for a moment before he felt the need to lower them to his own hands. Marie, however, kept her gaze steady on his face.

“My dear,” she began softly, “that’s why we study. That’s why we do everything. Don’t say ‘our religion’. Let me tell you—we are not thinking like ten years ago or twenty years ago.” Her voice was serious, strong, confident. “Our elders, they have something they believed and something they did. But in this time, we do not,” she paused. “The world changes every day. Don’t say our religion. It is meant to—”

“Our religion is not changed.”

“Uh, uh! Okay,” she considered his words. “It’s not changed, but,” she gently placed a hand on his arm, “you personally, Haji, you can change.”

But his thoughts were fixed, “nope.”

She frowned, noticing Haji had somehow changed in this moment. He clearly felt uncomfortable. “Your father has four wives?”

“My father has three wives.”

“Oh...” she looked over to the crowd.

“So I wanted to have three too...” his tone was serious as he looked at people far from the conversation and mood he and Marie now found themselves in.

She looked at him, waiting for his eyes to return to hers. “Well then, we divorce now,” she chuckled, though with a somewhat serious expression.

Haji nodded his head, but there was no chuckle, only a serious, slightly sullen expression as he looked down and around. Everything seemed silent, the party now a million miles away, in a glass bubble even, far from the empty air around himself and this Rwandan woman who, just a short conversation ago, had held his hand in hers.

He looked over to her, she was looking back at him, but her face, seemed different. She was looking at him, but nothing more. Marie shrugged, unsure what she could add to the conversation, and unsure what could become of a friendship with a man so set in his ways.

“Okay,” he shrugged.

“Okay,” she replied.

“I should go now.” He rose from his chair. “I mustn’t miss the last dala dala.”

She stayed in her seat as she looked at Haji standing there, contemplating what could be said to break the tension. “Okay.”

“Good night, Marie.”

“Good night, Haji.” She held out her hand and waited for him to finally put his in hers for what was a cold and formal handshake.

Marie watched as the fisherman walked across the ancient yard of the old fort and out the archway of its entrance. Finishing her beer, she headed out the archway and into a taxi to save herself the walk home. As she climbed into her taxi, Haji, on the other side of town, boarded his dala dala.

Neither found a message from the other on their phones during their journey home.

Maasai Kiss

After her overnight stay in his world, Rais next visited town with plans to spend time in her world. Debbie had spent some time pondering where she might like to take Rais. Something as good as climbing a mountain to search for a giraffe. She piqued his curiosity when a dala dala ride took them out to the opposite end of the city from Maasai country, and even more so when they walked down a narrow road leading from the highway into a forest. Rais wondered why they were going into the forest. But after only a short walk along the narrow forest road the trees parted and they emerged before a beautiful, big, round lake in the heart of an ancient crater, surrounded by enormous forest trees rising from the crater's walls.

Standing by the water's edge Debbie could tell by Rais's amazed expression that she had done well. "Have you ever tried to swim, Rais?"

"No. Not really."

"It can be scary."

"Ah, it is okay. I like the water. I like to sit in our river where we bathe when the rains come. The water comes in and our little stream turns into a proper river around me. It's the nicest feeling."

"Okay," she kicked off her shoes, rolled up her jeans, and stepped into the shallows of the lake. Rais followed, putting his Maasai shoes with her city shoes before lifting his Maasai shúkà above his knees as he stepped into the cool water.

As they stood side-by-side in knee-deep water at the edge of the lake, Debbie helped Rais keep his red shúkà cloths out of the water while they watched a fisherman standing on a small pier, his line cast out into the unknown depths.

When the fisherman finally had a bite and pulled the fish in, Rais shook his head,

"He should throw that back."

"Why?"

Rais screwed up his nose, "Even from here it makes my belly ill."

Debbie tried to explain that this fish would be delicious if he ate it right. But as they walked back to the shore, Rais replied with his own theory. "That fish would be delicious if it were a goat."

Debbie found his stance against fish amusing.

“Are there any animals in the lakes or seas that maybe taste like goat?” Rais pondered aloud.

“Well, I don’t know.”

“Maybe crocodile is like goat?”

“I imagine crocodile is probably like snake or lizard.”

“Oh yes. Okay. I suppose I could eat that if the man could catch us one.”

Once back on dry land, Rais asked Debbie if he could take a photo with her smart phone.

“Of course, Rais.”

“Let’s have a selfie,” he said, holding the phone out with his long, skinny arm.

Later, when Debbie would look back at those photos, she would notice how Rais’s eyes were looking down to her cheek touching his as she smiled into the camera. At the time of taking the photo, Rais nearly dropped the phone when he felt her cheek touch his. No wonder people take selfies all the time, he thought to himself, as she smiled into the phone.

About a hundred selfies and poses later, he finally gave the phone back with a smile, saying he would like to get some of those. As she lay down on the grass by the lake, Debbie promised she would print some later, so he could take them home.

Rais lay down on the grass next to her, looking up to the sky that was partly framed by the tall trees at the edge of the crater lake.

Debbie felt a wonderful, relaxing peace lying there. Rais would have, but his mind was preoccupied.

After lying for a while in silence, Rais finally asked her a question, with a soft but serious tone.

“Have you kissed anyone, Debbie?”

Debbie giggled, surprised by the question. “Yes, Rais, I have kissed someone.”

“Oh.”

“Have you, Rais?”

Rais simply shook his head.

“No one?”

“No. No one.” His eyes appeared full of thought.

Her voice was kind, “How is that, Rais? How, by 32, is that something you have not gotten to do?”

Rais just shrugged, distracting himself from an awkward feeling by keeping his eyes to the sky. They were quickly drawn to her with her next question.

“Would you like to kiss me, Rais?” she smiled sweetly.

He smiled shyly, “oh yes, I would, Debbie.”

Debbie felt a spark of joy at the sight of Rais’s eyes racing with surprise.

“Okay, Rais. You can kiss me—on the cheek,” she pointed to her cheek.

Rais hesitated, looking at her cheek in a way he had never looked at a cheek. Debbie wondered if maybe she had read him wrong. Maybe he didn’t want to kiss her? Why was he taking so long, if he wanted to kiss her?

But, finally, Rais slowly moved in. Debbie closed her eyes...

But then, feeling an unexpected sensation on her cheek, she opened them again.

There was no press of lips against her skin. There was no peck. No pressed smooch. Nothing of the sort.

Debbie felt his nose stroke her cheek before his lips grazed it too. She laughed, unable to hold it in.

“What was that,” she giggled.

“I am sorry,” he lowered his head and pulled away.

“No, no. It’s okay, Rais. I just wasn’t expecting that. What was that? A Maasai kiss?”

“No... I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“I don’t know how I was meant to kiss your cheek,” he confessed with his face lowered. “I have not kissed before.”

“Oh, Rais,” she replied sweetly. His face looked somehow innocent. It was as if this 32-year-old man was thrust back into boyhood.

She smiled and through a series of demonstrations, kissing her own arm, then his arm, she showed him how to kiss. Soon, getting his confidence, he leaned in again, placing a proper kiss on her cheek—but changing his pressure from soft to quite hard, caused Debbie to giggle as she felt his nose squash against her cheekbone.

He pulled his head away in panic, “Was that wrong too, Debbie?”

“No, no, Rais. It was good.” She considered instructing him to go softer and whether it might hurt his feelings. When she did, she found his feelings not hurt at all. He seemed keen to learn, trying two more times to get it right. Rais was happy to practise.

“Should I keep practising?” he asked.

Debbie giggled, impressed by his enthusiasm, but feeling it was time to walk. “Not right now, Rais, let’s have a walk.”

“Okay, Debbie, he said, springing to his feet before helping her get up.

When she smiled, announcing he had perfected kissing, he blushed.

“It’s a nice afternoon,” she said, “so let’s walk back to town.”

As they strolled, Debbie was entertained by his boyish excitement, giggling while he walked with a spring in his step.

“Oh Debbie! Oh Debbie!” he beamed.

As they made their way back out to the main road, Rais stumbled through another question.

“Debbie.”

“Yes, Rais?”

“Could I…”

“Could you what, Rais?”

“Well… could I hold your hand?”

Oh Rais,” Debbie blushed, feeling a comfort from his question. “It is very nice of you to ask.”

Rais wondered if that was a yes.

“Yes, you may,” she smiled, holding out her hand.

Rais looked down at it, feeling a buzz of excitement as his own hand twitched by his side.

Debbie’s eyes squinted as she smiled, her hand out, waiting for his.

Rais couldn’t believe what had become of his life. All because his goat ran off. Here he was with this amazing woman from the city, being told he could now hold her hand.

“Rais?” she giggled

“Yes, Debbie?” he asked, looking into her smiling face.

“Are you going to hold my hand then?”

“Oh yes, Debbie!” he jumped slightly, before gently taking her hand in his.

Mr. Kulindwa, the Family Maker

The morning after his daughter had asked for his help with her meeting, Mr. Kulindwa was up early and dressed in his best business suit—an early rise not out of need, but out of joy to be asked to help her.

When he arrived at his daughter's small office, her assistant told him she had gone to collect the man from the airport, and that Mr. Kulindwa should wait in the meeting room where there was coffee ready for him.

He sat and waited in a small room with a round, dark, wooden table. He sipped coffee while centring himself into a professional mode, ready to help his daughter in any way he could with this new partner from Dar. He had an uneasy feeling this was going to turn out to be the man he had rejected when in Dar the first time.

On his daughter's return from the airport, he was surprised to see someone entirely different. He was stunned to see the familiar, smiling face of Mama's daughter. Behind her was Mama herself, who had found out about this scheme only two days before.

Mr. Kulindwa burst out with a short joyful laugh and the professional demeanour he had spent the morning cultivating, completely fell away.

Mama laughed too. When she awoke early that morning, a realisation had come to her—what she had needed to find with Mr. Kulindwa had now been found. She had spent the flight thinking more about it while her daughter was excitedly going on about her new venture, energised and confident.

As they sipped juice by the beach in Dar all that time ago, Mama Agnus had wondered if she would find a particular quality or action or value, and she had—his ability to bring value to her daughter's world, to create and strengthen a bond between two families. It was all she had needed to do the bidding of her feelings.

Both parents attempted to remain professional as the four sat down at the table, but their daughters rolled their eyes, told them to stop pretending and just go and have fun together.

“You don't actually think we need you here for our meeting, do you?” asked Mr. Kulindwa's daughter.

“Mama, why do you think I told the driver not to leave when we got out of the car? Run along now,” Mama’s daughter instructed, gesturing to them both with a giggle.

And so, grinning as they went, Mr. Kulindwa and Mama headed to the lake, collecting Barak on the way, of course. He was as excited to see Mama as his father had been.

When they reached the lake, the man who had tried to get money from them for being on the grass was there again, but he didn’t bother coming up to Mr. Kulindwa. He just waved a *hello* as they made their way across *his* lawn.

Barak immediately ran off to the rocks at the water’s edge, to search for bright, colourful lizards. The elder statesman felt his heart miss a beat when, for the first time ever, the woman from Dar, who had so captured his heart and mind, placed her hand on top of his.

Mama was happy to be back by the lake where she had felt so comfortable on her first visit.

There was no more panic for Mr. Kulindwa, no more worry or stress or pain. His heart was calm, as calm as Mama’s, as she smiled at the Sukuma man from Mwanza. They sat in silence, watching Barak playing by Lake Victoria, in waters that stretched to the horizon like a giant inland sea at the heart of Africa.

Two Small Explorers Reunited in the Sea

The days passed slowly for the two children as they waited for their weekend trip to the beach. Renaldo was eager for the smells and the fruit and to see a clean ocean far away from town.

Zuena was excited to be in the water. She lived close enough, but she didn't go there often. She looked forward to seeing her strange, adventurous new friend again too. He was also looking forward to seeing his new friend in the new world where he could now spend time, thanks to his wandering off and getting lost there.

When the weekend finally came, he nodded along to the radio as he looked out the window at the world passing by and his dad drove towards Fujoni.

His dad could tell the boy was happy as he rocked his upper body to the beat of Roberto's Ama-rulah playing loudly on the radio.

He grinned as Renaldo sung along.

"La la la la la la lalalalala... My name is Roberto ... Ama-rulah ... Oh have you seen my ... Ama-rulah ... So sweet and fine like..."

"Yes, my boy, I have," his father laughed, cutting in on the song. "We are going to see her now. Maybe your *mchumba* (fiancée) one day, hey?" he chuckled.

"Ah!" the boy scorned his father. "She is my friend. We are children! I don't care for that stuff," he shook his head sternly. "We have no time for the things you adults waste your time on!"

His dad nodded seriously. "Okay, boss. That is good, it is too soon for such things."

"You are crazy," Renaldo shook his head as he changed the song.

When they arrived at the village, Zuena was soon sitting excitedly in the van before the two parents even had a chance to say *hello*.

Before driving off, Renaldo's dad made sure to pass on the message from his wife that Zuena's mother was invited to town sometime soon, if she would like to spend time with their family. Zuena's mother replied that she would love to, but it would not be for a while as she had much to do there in the village. He understood, saying the invitation remained open, while both children waited for the adults to stop talking so they could get to the water.

When they arrived at the small bay, Renaldo could hardly believe his eyes. He had seen beaches like this before, small and private, pure white sand, crystal-

clear water, and not a tourist or pile of local town kids in sight. The smell too. He had smelt this same beach smell before, free of anything other than what nature provided, though the sight and the smell seemed somehow better than ever. Perhaps as this was now his beach. He thought with glee how his running away had provided him with a perfect place to swim and play. He felt pleased as he plunged his whole body under the crystal-clear water and opened his eyes to see a blue fish swimming in the shallows.

Zuena had never seen a beach in town so didn't know how good her local beach really was. But still, to be there, to have no jobs for a day, to just play and be in the water out of the heat, it was so good. She was glad she had taken that bike to town because now she would have lifts and friends to swim with in the ocean.

As the two kids played in the water, relishing the reward of their running away, Renaldo's dad floated nearby, enjoying his own adventure by the sea, far from the bustle of town. While his boy caused a lot of trouble with his running away so often, he definitely did a good job of finding places to get lost in.

Marie Returns

After the One Love Concert, a week of silence passed between Marie and Haji.

Haji had anguished, trying to push it all out of his head, certain there was no point. Marie had felt too awkward to make contact, an awkwardness that grew when her boss came in through the front door with an instruction for her day.

“Marie! We’ve picked up an extra group. You are off to Kizimkazi!”

“Oh my,” her Kenyan friend gave her Rwandan friend a seriously concerned look. “I can go on this one,” she offered.

“No, no, it is fine,” Marie insisted. “I will do it.”

The boss, unaware of what was happening, hurried Marie on her way.

On the bus and surrounded by Japanese tourists, Marie spent the whole journey with tension in her brow, wondering if it would be Haji waiting for them on the side of the road when they pulled into the village. And if so, what would come from their conversation. The longer the drive went on, the more her tension built. On arrival, she found no relief, being unable to see from her seat who was standing by the side of the road. Her view was blocked by excited tourists. But then she heard a familiar voice calling out a *hello* to everyone.

“*Jambo* (hello)!” Haji smiled at the large group of Japanese tourists pouring out of the bus.

“Jambooh” they replied in polite chorus.

“Karibu Kizimkazi,” he beamed, having not yet spotted Marie still waiting in line to get off the bus. “Today we will be having a great safari out onto the sea where we will find you dolphins and even Nemo!” Haji beamed. “Do you know Nemo?”

“Yes!” the tourists replied with excitement.

“Okay,” Haji began clasping his hands together as the last of the tourists climbed out. “So now we will—”

The rest of his words were lost as there behind the tourists emerged a most familiar face. The tourists were confused so frowned at this village fisherman who had suddenly stopped talking. Only a few of them picked up on the fact he was staring at the Rwandan woman who had brought them there. Fewer still noticed how Marie only glanced at the fisherman before lowering her eyes in discomfort.

“Um,” Haji tried to find words as he returned his gaze to the politely waiting, excited tourists. “So,” he clasped his hands together again. “Let us go now to the water and take our boat.” He quickly turned, leading the group down the track towards the small cove of perfect white sand and clear blue water where, only a short while ago, he had felt his heart warm as Marie had paddled around him, laughing with excitement.

As he stepped onto the beach and attempted to fall back into his tour guide routine, he felt a heavy weight sinking onto his chest. Behind the large photo-snapping group of tourists, the woman who had floated and paddled in that crystal blue water felt a weight herself, a weight no life jacket could hope to counter, an anguish. Not one of social inconvenience at having to interact, but one of disappointment—because the kindness and comfort between them a week ago had been lost at the concert.

After everyone had climbed on the boat, Marie positioned herself as far from Haji as possible. Haji also did his best to avoid looking at her as he took the tourists through what suddenly felt to him like a worn-out routine. A routine that now just brought him more torment, the further the boat got from shore. Marie felt it too, completely forgetting the fear of the sea that had gripped her during her first boat ride.

When they finally dropped anchor for snorkelling, Haji was quick to join the tourists, welcoming escape into the underwater world as quickly as he could get to it.

Marie stayed on the boat in her life jacket. Not from fear of the water, just for the comfort of distance. She watched Haji diving down and re-emerging as he pointed out the immense array of sea life, or much to their joy, posed for photos with the tourists, deep down by the colourful reef.

“So, you still won’t swim?” came from across the boat, pulling Marie from her thoughts. It was the captain. Marie, lost in her thoughts and internal suffering, had not noticed him.

“No,” she shook her head. “I am not swimming.”

The captain smiled at her. “Ah, but I hear now you know how to.”

Marie said nothing.

“You won’t drown with him there in the water,” the captain explained with a kind tone as he gestured towards Haji.

“I don’t need him to swim,” Marie declared defiantly.

“Oh. Okay then. Sorry.”

“No, you don’t need to say sorry. Nothing is wrong.”

“Oh,” the captain said again. “Okay.”

They sat in silence for some time as Marie looked into the water, attempting to throw off any obvious signs of her discomfort.

“Are you going to go in?” he finally asked.

“Of course,” Marie found herself standing up and moving over to the back of the boat.

“Great!” the captain gave a happy smile. Haji was helping a girl adjust her mask, free from the routine of tour guide speech and in the water where he felt most comfortable. For a moment he had almost forgotten about Marie being there on the boat until, after diving down to pose for another photo, he looked up from the sea floor to see Marie entering the water from the back of the boat.

Marie clung tightly to the ladder as she lowered herself into the water with the captain kindly encouraging her from above.

“Don’t worry. The life jacket has you.”

“Okay, okay,” she felt tension take over as her body entered the water but her feet found nothing but more water as she floated with one hand tightly gripping the ladder. “Uh! Uh!” her face showed panic.

“Well done!” called out the captain.

“I don’t know about that,” Marie stared at her hand on the ladder.

“You can let go of the ladder, you are safe,” came a calming voice from water level. Turning her eyes from her iron-like grip on the ladder, she found Haji floating nearby.

“Ah! I am so proud!” Haji beamed with joy.

“Ah! You are crazy!” Marie was focused entirely on her situation in the ocean, not on their week-long awkward silence.

“You can let go of the ladder, I am here.”

“No, Haji—If I drown, my mother will know it was you and she will come after you.”

“You are not going to drown. You are going to see the world below the sea. The colours, the life. It’s the most wonderful thing you can imagine.”

“I will look in the water maybe, but I am keeping my hand here.

Marie was then silent as she tried to push the panic away.

“Okay,” Haji moved closer. “I will help you with the mask, yes?”

“Okay, Haji, thank you,” she blinked, as he moved forward, reaching for the mask sitting on top of her head.

Haji convinced her to put the snorkelling mask over her face, but she would not use the snorkel to breathe under water. Instead, in the safety of her strong grip on the ladder, she dipped her face into the water to see an amazing world of colour and life, then came back up to gasp for air. Each time her face remained under for longer, as she drifted above the coral, thanks to the captain who quietly pushed a paddle on the side of the boat. In that way, the boat drifted around the axle of its anchor, allowing Marie to move through the water without having to let go of the ladder.

As she settled, Haji went about introducing her to the world below—a world he had known since he was a small child. A week ago, when he had shown her around the village he was showing her his home. Here he showed her his life’s passion as he pointed to and explained the corals, the fish, the tiny crustaceans and the colourful, long, waving sea grasses of his treasured underwater world.

The presence of the tourists faded away as they came together there in the sea. Unbeknown to them, they would be displayed to hundreds of people back in Japan through well documented photos taken by multiple waterproof cameras during that snorkelling safari.

A short while later, when everyone climbed back on board, the life and energy of Haji’s tour guide routine was back to its fullest display as the tour continued and they reached the beach on the small atoll for a meal of fresh seafood. But this time, Haji and Marie found a moment to themselves as they walked along the shoreline in water up to their shins.

“I missed you,” Haji confessed.

“Ah yes, I missed you too, Haji.”

Haji’s tone was mournful, “I am sorry it cannot work.”

Marie felt sombre, “I am sorry too.”

They walked in silence as the chatter of the tourists became distant, leaving only the splashing sound of their legs moving through the water.

“Look out for the urchin,” Haji pointed, as the sea urchin threatening to spike her foot blessed them with a break from the silence.

“Thank you, fisherman,” Marie smiled.

“You are welcome, Rwandan woman,” Haji smiled.

As they walked on silence carried their thoughts for some time until finally Marie returned to what had caused all the anguish.

Marie's voice was soft, "I just wanted to be honest."

Haji's softened too, "Thank you. For being honest."

"If you could stay with me only," she continued, "I too," she shrugged, "I could maybe stay with you only. But if you would go to marry another woman, I would go to marry another man. That is the deal for me, with whoever I meet, if they were wanting more than just me."

"Okay."

Their arms bumped together gently as they walked on; silence returned.

A short while later, Marie spoke again.

"You had already decided on four women, I think." She gathered her words for a moment. "I think even if you treated me well and I treated you well... no." She shook her head. "Because you had already decided."

"Well," Haji paused to collect his own thoughts. "If you would treat me very well then I would stay with one wife." As his words ended, he found himself grinning.

"Uh—Don't," she shook her head, feeling frustration again. "Why? If I treat you very well, then yes. And you?" she stopped on the spot.

Haji, stopping too, began to reply, "If you don't treat me very well—"

"And you?"

"I'm supposed to treat you very well," he explained with his hands turned outwards.

"Of course," Marie felt the frustration lull, but her point was still not understood. "If you treat me very well then—"

"It is my responsibility."

"So, of course," her tone was serious. "If you did treat me well then I would treat you well."

"Okay," he smiled, "hakuna matata."

"Uh, uh!" she raised her chin, wanting confirmation. "So if I...?" she pointed to Haji.

"I would stay with you only."

"Okay." She smiled playfully, "We've got a solution," she laughed, shaking her head as she felt the frustration fall away and beginning to walk again.

Haji laughed and caught up to her.

Marie confirmed again “If I treat you well then?”

“Uh huh, sure,” Haji shrugged with a smile, “If you bring me a baby, if you treat me well. If I go to toilet and you wash my body.”

“Uh?” Marie was wide-eyed, stopped in her tracks again.

“Yah,” he laughed. “It’s part of the arrangement, isn’t it?”

Marie pointed at herself, “and when I go?”

“Yes,” Haji held out his arms. “I will carry you.”

Marie, highly amused, slapped her hand in one of his that hung in the air, gesturing he was still cradling her.

“Okay then,” she turned their clasped hands into a shake of agreement.

“Already, I offered to take you, to carry you like a baby,” he grinned.

“But, toilet?” she frowned. “You mean bathroom?”

He shrugged. “Hey, both.”

“Okay.” She laughed off the oddness of his example.

“I wash your body in the ocean,” he grinned, as they continued their walk. Marie laughed, rolling her eyes.

As the sun sank lower in the sky, Haji realised they had walked halfway around the small island and might not get back to Kizimkazi in time, “We have to hurry back.”

And so, rushing from the water onto the beach, they jogged back, laughing as they went, freed of all the tension that had buried their week in pain.

~

The whole way back to Kizimkazi, the captain grinned when looking from Marie to Haji, who were themselves grinning at each other from opposite sides of the boat, over the group of tired tourists.

Back on dry land the captain’s grin was even wider as he watched Haji try to steal a kiss before Marie got on the bus. He turned away to hide his laughter as Marie pulled away from Haji’s kiss with a laugh. “Ah, Haji, I am working. We are both working. Be professional.”

“Okay, Marie... I can wait a little bit.”

“Okay, fisherman,” she nodded as she placed her foot on the first step of the bus. “Call me tomorrow, yes?”

“Yes, Marie, I will call you as soon as the day begins!” he beamed.

“Not too early. I am a city woman, not a village woman, I need my sleep.”

“Oh yes of course. For now you are, but soon you will be a village woman and you will enjoy the mornings even more than you have enjoyed your late nights.”

“Uh!” Amused, she shook her head as she climbed onto the bus.

The captain slapped Haji on the back as he walked past his friend who was standing in the street with a big smile on his face as he watched the bus disappear over the hill.

“Good work, *fisherman*.”

Rais and the Morning Lie

On the walk back to Arusha from the crater lake, Rais started making jokes. His confidence in holding her hand was slowly growing as they walked along.

“That lake is a good place for children, yes?”

“Yes, Rais.”

He nodded. “A very good place for the children. They will like it there, yes?”

“*The* children, Rais?”

“Well, yes, Debbie. *The* children. I don’t know their names yet, so they are *the* children, yes?” his explanation was met with a genuinely entertained laugh from Debbie.

“I see, I see,” she shook her head.

“It is too soon for things like that, yes?” he asked and stated all at once. “Too soon for talking about the names.”

“Yes, Rais, it is, a bit,” she tried her best to hide her amusement in his giddy, excited confidence.

“That comes after the wedding,” he smiled.

“Ha! Rais! That too is too soon!”

“Oh yes... Okay, I understand. First, with your culture, there is the engagement, yes?”

Debbie giggled. “Yes, Rais, generally you would do that before the wedding.”

“Okay, that is good,” he replied, receiving another giggle from Debbie.

“So...” he collected the order of the relationship milestones on the fingers of his free hand as they walked along. “It goes engagement, then wedding, then the names of the children.”

“Yes, Maasai,” she grinned.

As they walked along, the beautiful colours of the setting sun filled the sky over Arusha sitting at the base of Meru Mountain.

Debbie encouraged their comfortable conversation on the way home. “But of course, Rais, there are many things that would be discussed.”

“Oh yes?”

“Yes, of course. Like where to live, for a start.”

“Ohhhh yes!” his head lifted at the reminder of such an important subject. “Well, I can live in the city,” he offered, rather matter-of-factly.

His answer surprised her, “You would live in the city all the time?”

“Well, yes, Debbie, that makes the most sense,” his tone was serious. “There are opportunities there for me to work and still help my family back home. And it would be good for the children.”

Entertained and curious, Debbie hardly noticed herself following him further into the conversation. And so, on it went, with the details being mapped out as they both wandered along looking at the colourful sky framing Mount Meru. Rais could get a real job. And their kids? Well, their kids, Rais agreed, would need to go to school, even university. City life and their cultures were important. They were a key part of happiness. Debbie agreed with that scenario—children born from two cultures can keep their culture and still be a part of the rest of the world. Rais observed, “our boys can go out for the ceremonies.”

Debbie asked what that involved. When Rais explained the ritual, the easy flow of their conversation fell away because Debbie was told her boys would have to go through circumcision in a very non-medical way.

A clash of beliefs and a silence overwhelmed their comfortable stroll in beautiful surrounds.

“Rais, no,” she protested. “No.”

“No?”

“No. I could never allow my boys to go through that ceremony, that pain.”

“It’s fine. It’s just a part of life.”

But Debbie shook her head sadly and insisted that there was nothing wrong with the ceremony and tradition, but the pain could never be. “I could never agree to such a thing. To send my boys away to pain... no.” she shook her head. “That could not be.”

Silence fell once more.

For Debbie, the anguishing thought of sending young boys away on such a journey was devastating. Rais thought not of boys still to be born, but of his own past. That had been him. He had been through that. That was a part of his culture and of who he was. He knew his mother was not wrong to send him. So, he thought, why would Debbie be?

“Was my mama wrong to have let it happen to me?”

“No, no!” Debbie shook her head. “It’s just that... it isn’t my culture—it isn’t something I could do that way.”

“I understand,” Rais nodded. He could see this was not about what led him to where he was. But what was in the future. An easy thing to resolve, he thought.

Debbie found herself agonising as they walked. The beautiful dusk sky did little to save her from it.

Until Rais spoke. “That is fine.”

“What, Rais?”

“The boys needn’t go through that part with the pain.”

“You can say that, Rais. But imagine having to be me and wondering everyday if it would happen.” The distress in her eyes told Rais she felt their pain. “It would be torture.”

They returned to silence as they both contemplated such a thing while the colour in the sky began to fade—dusk was reaching its end.

“That is easy too,” Rais stated.

“How is that easy, Rais?” Debbie’s tone was tired.

“Well, at birth... in the hospital. I will take the doctor to circumcise them in the hospital, with their... he gestured to his crotch, with it numbed and asleep. So they feel no pain.”

Debbie laughed.

Rais laughed back. “What?”

“Nothing,” she smiled.

“That was funny?”

“You are funny, Rais.” Her eyes squinted with her smile as the street lights turned on.

“I like that.”

“You like what?”

“When you use my name.”

As they reached the dala dala station she looked into his eyes, “Well, Rais, this is where I take my dala dala home the rest of the way.”

“Very good,” he nodded. “I will go to my friends.”

“Okay.”

And with that they said their *goodnights* and promised to see each other in the morning before he left town.

Once Debbie was on her dala dala, Rais made his way to the park for another night on the ground under a tree.

He slept well—a deep and peaceful sleep after a most wonderful day. He dreamt of the kiss he had put on her cheek as they had said goodnight. He slept so well he slept past the rising of the sun. He slept so peacefully he didn't wake until he heard his name. When he opened his eyes, that peace was lost, for standing over him was a sad and confused Debbie.

Rais tried to wake himself quickly so he could gather his words into an explanation. But Debbie, in a meld of anger and sadness shook her head at him.

“Why did you lie to me, Rais? Why did you tell me you were going to your friends when you were coming here?”

“Debbie, I—”

But she moved too quickly with her words and her actions. It was an odd fight, with few words from Rais. He could only really watch and listen. She was angry. There was nothing he could do to quell that. But her anger was a strange anger that confused her as much as him. She was, angry that he had lied about his situation, angry he had risked his wellbeing for her. She was also hurt because he hadn't wanted to tell her he had nowhere to stay. She would then have had to take him in at her house, and he knew that wouldn't be as easy as at his. With that thought, that spoken aloud statement, it occurred to her that perhaps it had been a problem for her to have stayed at his place. Surely, if he had seen this as so bad, then that must have been too?

It was an odd, awkward argument that led them nowhere. Debbie walked away, leaving Rais confused, still sitting on the ground where he had slept.

She went to work; he went to the dala dala stop. He hopped on a dala dala with an especially loud conductor. He sat by a window, wondering what he had done wrong and what he could possibly do now. But he figured it was all over. There was surely nothing more to be done, so it was best he just went home and saved them both from this confusing and difficult connection of distant lives and worlds.

That was until he heard the conductor calling out loudly “the Queen of Longido!” Looking up he saw Debbie standing at his dala dala window. She was ignoring the conductor who was trying to grab her attention. She apologised for being angry; he said he was sorry for lying.

The conductor asked what the hell was going on just as Debbie leant forward through the window, kissing Rais on the lips.

But then it clicked for the wide-eyed conductor. “*This* is the giraffe!”

Barak's Smart Blue Suit

The daughters of Mama Agnus and Mr. Kulindwa moved just as quickly to build their business partnership as their parents had formed their romantic relationship. It was a surprise to both young women how swiftly the two elderly romantics developed their commitment, and they found themselves discussing it nearly as much as they did their work.

In Dar on a sunny spring morning, Mama was explaining to her daughter that with age came the end of playing games, when they heard a small, but rapid knock on the door.

“Not because time is precious, but because love is.” She rose from her chair.

“I see,” her daughter replied. As her mother reached for the door she added, “when you are older you will discover that games played between two people with a blossoming love waste time that can be spent enjoying that rare discovery.”

With that she opened the door to find a small, smiling Barak in a smart, blue suit. He was to be the most important guest that day at the simple, civil wedding of Mama and his father.

While Barak was squeezing her broad, healthy figure with his small arms, Mama placed a hand on his back and turned to say one more thing. Her daughter would carry these words with her for the next ten years until she would herself be watching a ring go onto her finger.

“Marriage is not for tradition, my dear daughter... as it wasn't with your father. This, just as it was that day all those years ago with that beautiful man, is what marriage is made for. This is a marriage of obligation.” Her tone strengthened, “an obligation to celebrate the new life we now feel inside our old chests.”

Young Adventurers and Unknown Futures

After their Saturday at the beach, Renaldo and his dad returned to town, both rather sad to leave. His dad would happily have stayed for days floating in the clear water, he realised, as he considered the entire Sunday of taxi driving he had ahead of him.

For the two adventurous kids, and the dad, life went back to normal.

Renaldo still had the pleasure of bragging to his friends, with awe in his voice, about the wonders of the world to the north, now a part of his life.

“I tell you, the water there was like glass!” he exclaimed, having heard his dad say that to his mother when they got home on Saturday night. “It’s good in town, of course. We are lucky here. But there...” he looked to the north up past the Ferris wheel. “There, my friends,” they hung on his every word, “there it is something else. The water is so clear and so colourful with all the fish! I don’t know why tourists need to put those goggles on their face! You can see it all with your own eyes!”

Zuena’s friends were curious as news of her day at the beach with new friends had spread rapidly. She hoped to go to town again, but they had school tests coming up so, “there is no way I can go.” She was a little sad for adventure not yet with her.

“But when you go,” her friend grinned, “how will you get there?”

“I will take the dala dala.”

“Why not go by bike?” her friend teased.

“That bike would do fine!” she insisted. “That bike is the best bike here now, thanks to my taking it to town. You would be lucky if I were to take your bike next time!”

Marie and the Missing Fisherman

The day after Marie and Haji were reunited, Marie woke with a smile. By the end of the day though, her face wore a frown as her phone had not beeped or rung once. The message he had promised never arrived. Even after she tried to call Haji herself, there came no answer, no reply.

She left it for another day, giving him time. But when nothing came, it seemed he had disappeared. She tried to put it down to him being caught up with tourists in the midst of the peak season, and not having his phone with him when out on the boat.

Four days later, he still had not called. Nor on the next, or the next. When she called, his phone was off. All she could do was wait, trying to put it out of her head. Nothing came. There were no missed calls, and no messages whenever she looked at her phone. She tried forcing herself not to look at it so often—the mystery of Haji’s silence took hold over any other joys of her time in Zanzibar.

When a week had passed, bringing a day off work, Marie decided to go looking for Haji. She climbed from the dala dala in Kizimkazi to begin what would be a frustrating day of no answers from those who might have been able to provide answers. No one seemed to know where he was. They were sure he was safe, as no one had heard of him coming to any harm. But not one of them could give a straight answer as to his whereabouts—every person she asked had a different theory.

“He is away in the north for the tour season,” a woman making rope by the shore had suggested.

“He is in town, I think,” one fisherman told her. “I thought maybe with you?”

Even the captain of the boat, who returned to shore near the end of the day, didn’t seem to have an answer for her. He did tell her of Haji’s father, which was a good lead for her to pursue. But he was not to be found in the village that day. And so, at the end of many long hours of wandering around looking for a man who had vanished, Marie climbed on a dala dala home—with nothing but a phone number for his father who so far had not answered his phone.

She called Haji’s father again, later that night and he did answer. But it was impossible to learn anything from him either. The man seemed to have nothing he could tell her. He fumbled his words from the moment she explained who she was. The call ended with nothing answered and Marie’s confusion growing.

She resolved to let thoughts of the fisherman go. It seemed clear he didn't want her to find him. No sooner had she sat down in her room to rest, after looking all day for the man she now decided was gone, her phone beeped.

There was a message—a long, long message from an international number.

He was sorry. He had wanted to message, to call. He had wanted to explain. He felt bad for leaving when things had become so good. But he didn't have a choice and he had to leave suddenly. When the shame got him, he lost the ability to contact her. He was in Kenya. He'd been offered a last-minute place in a marine biology masters course. He could now specialise and be everything he'd wanted and dreamed of being during the years he had worked and studied. After the long message another followed. A short message.

“I am sorry, Marie.”

Marie placed the phone on her bed. She searched her feelings, trying to make sense of what the news meant to her. She was relieved to hear from him, to know he was safe. She was glad the mystery was solved. She was sad he was gone. She knew what doing a masters meant. It was at least two years. Kenya wasn't a place she'd be likely to visit, given her own current studies and future plans. Although they had been spending time together, no serious thoughts of a future together had really come up. Now that he wasn't right there, the realities of the distances between their countries became real.

But she felt happy for him. Her smelly fisherman was now on his way to becoming a marine biologist.

“I am so happy for you, marine biologist!” began her reply.

A Careful Phone-Carrying Giraffe named Rais

After their kiss through the dala dala window Rais spent the rest of the ride home clutching his mobile phone tightly in one hand and her phone number tightly in the other. He was not going to lose them again, he told the conductor who asked him why his hands were so tightly clenched on a phone and a piece of paper. The conductor was in shock the whole way to Longido, whereas Rais spent the journey in bliss.

Back in Arusha at their workplace, Debbie's workmate grinned at her all day long as Debbie sat in a happy, smiley daze.

"So, when are you seeing this Maasai again, hey?"

"It's Rais."

"Sorry?"

"He prefers to be called Rais," she smiled, staring into space.

Barak's First Day of School

Mama Agnus and Mr Kulindwa's wedding was a simple, civil ceremony. In a small government building, they sat opposite a man at a desk. Either side of the two lovers were their children, all smartly and beautifully dressed in what was perhaps not the most romantic of places. When the man stamped the government seal on the papers they had just signed, the two families, now brought together, all hugged, congratulating and welcoming one another.

As business partners now made sisters, the daughters hugged with delight as their parents watched on smiling. Walking away from the small government building and down the streets of Mama's neighbourhood, they were congratulated by strangers and friends alike. Back at her home, a home that was now absolutely as much Barak's and Mr. Kulindwa's as it was Mama's, family and friends gathered to eat food and celebrate the love that Mr. Kulindwa described as, "A simple one where we celebrate our companionship in the last years of our journey."

Mama smiled, "Bringing our families together is a joy for us both."

~

They had decided to share their time between Mwanza and Dar. However, Mr. Kulindwa soon saw that opportunities for Barak's education meant it would be best to settle in Dar. And so he made plans for them to shift across the country to the capital.

A year later, the day came for Barak's first day of school. Mr. Kulindwa's chest swelled with pride as he and Mama watched Barak walk into the school building with his large backpack bouncing on his small back.

"What do you think he will do when he finishes all this?" Mama gestured to the school.

"Well, ideally when he is done with all this and more, he will do whatever it is he wants to do."

"I don't doubt it," Mama smiled as she hugged the proud, elderly man's arm close to her side.

Two Children, Far from Adventure

For two enterprising children, days passed by, with no hint of adventure.

There were tests at school, jobs at home. Play to be had, yes. But play where play had been played so many times before, with friends who were so similar it was almost as if they were just kicking a soccer ball to themselves. Even the wedding of Zuena's aunty, while it was fun, was still the same people in the same village where she had attended weddings before.

Renaldo wanted to visit, but his dad was too busy to take him.

"You are a ten-year-old boy who likes to end up someplace where you don't know where you are. You are not going alone, I am sorry," his mother apologised, as he stood in the house proclaiming he was bored, and it was time for him to go north.

Zuena's mother trusted her to travel to town. And she trusted the family of this boy enough to know she would be safe.

"But I am sorry, my daughter. After helping with your aunt's wedding, we just don't have the money for you to go."

But Zuena was determined to go, and she knew she could do it without money. But as she climbed on the bike, found once more leaning against the wall, her plans were foiled with her mother's legs either side of the front wheel and her hands on the handle bars.

"No, you are not," her mother's tone was stern. "You think you can do this trick again?"

"It's fine, Mama. I know the way and the bike is good now. I have fruit and water in my backpack. I am prepared this time."

"Get off the bike." Her mother would not budge. "Put it back where you found it and apologise to the man you keep taking it from."

"But he said himself that it was great now and I was forgiven because his bike is now the best bike in the village!"

"And you think because you were lucky enough to have it fixed you can just take it?"

"I don't know," Zuena lowered her head, sensing defeat. "Maybe, yeah."

"Then we will take it back together, and I will decide your punishment for nearly leaving us here, all worried again!"

“I am sorry, Mama.” Zuena mournfully pushed the bike back to the wall where it was always to be found.

In town Renaldo stood next to the mechanics under the giant tree, looking over at the dala dalas down the road while jingling two 100-shilling coins in his small hand. His eyes looked especially relaxed. This revealed to the men watching him that the boy was contemplating a plan his mother and father would likely not be pleased about.

Kizimkazi

Days after learning of Haji's move to Kenya, Marie was surprised to discover how hard the news had hit her. She was happy for him, but she felt a loss. Though she had begun to connect with something that held her heart far more strongly. In the last weeks and days of her placement in Zanzibar, Marie had come to realise she missed her home and she missed her mother. Too much.

She felt her excitement for going home building. She loved Zanzibar, but she loved Rwanda in a way Zanzibar could never claim her heart. She did miss Haji. At times she expected him to come through the office door. And often she had been forced to answer questions from the three boys who sat on the step outside.

“What has happened to the crazy fisherman?”

She was missing Rwanda even more intensely when, just two days before she was due to fly home, she was given her last tour assignment. Back to Kizimkazi.

~

It was a strange nostalgic time for her. The boat captain was the same as before, but the tour guide was another guy—a Rastafarian guy. He was kind enough and the tourists seemed to love him as they kept asking for photos with him. Marie knew these images gave credibility to their claims of having met an island man with large dreadlocks. At least Marie had something she could now do.

“Haji would be proud,” the boat captain smiled as Marie climbed down the ladder of the boat and let herself drift out onto the water, her lifejacket keeping her safe as she took in Haji's colourful underwater world for the last time.

Then on the white, sandy beach of the atoll, while the tourists feasted on lobster, she took a walk alone along the beach. Just long enough to need to run back to the waiting boat.

Two days later, Marie closed the lid of her suitcase resting on her large Zanzibari bed.

The Church of Stone Pews

Two days after Rais had gotten his first real kiss—a kiss through the window of a dala dala—he was in Longido, waiting by the road for another dala dala that he could now see approaching. His phone was in his pocket, a note with Debbie’s number on it was in his other pocket. Her number was also on a piece of paper at home under his bed as well as on the back of the small, red, tin door of his hut. He was not going to lose contact with Debbie again.

She climbed from the dala dala, kissed him softly and grinned as they walked hand in hand out along the road towards his home with Mount Longido behind them.

As they walked, Rais told Debbie he could lose his phone and her number as many times as fate would allow, but it was not going to matter. Even if somehow his door vanished from the front of his house, “there would be no problem.” They stopped on the side of the road by the rows of stones and branches that made up the pews of his church.

“How so?” Debbie smiled, as they sat on two of the roundest and most comfortable stones.

“Because of this.” Sticking out his chest, Rais proudly recited her mobile number and her work number, having committed both to memory.

“Oh, very good,” she grinned, kissing him again.

Lala Salama, Mr. Kulindwa

On the evening of Barak's first day at school in Dar, the family came together to celebrate with a big meal. Everyone was there to congratulate Barak. Barak welcomed all their attention, excitedly telling them everything he had done and learned that day. "There were so many people!" he beamed.

When the evening was done, and everyone had gone home, Mama and Mr. Kulindwa wished Barak a good night's sleep in his bed before going in to their own bedroom down the hall.

As Mama watched her husband brushing his teeth and climbing into bed, she noticed how relaxed he seemed.

"You look truly content, my dear."

"I am, I am," he smiled, as he pulled the covers up to his chest and kissed her on the cheek. "Lala salama, Agnus."

"Lala salama, Jaruph," Mama placed a soft kiss on the cheek of her husband before they both drifted off sleep.

A deep, comfortable sleep, from which Mr. Kulindwa would never wake.

A Basket Full of Mangoes

Having caught her daughter sneaking off on the bike whose owner trustfully left it leaning against the wall, Zuena's mother punished her by filling her day with jobs.

While imagining her journey towards town, she was made to pick fruit into baskets. Once the baskets were filled, much to Zuena's dismay, she was made to sell the fruit to passing cars. Made to stand and sell fruit for the enjoyment of smiling people heading to town in the dala dala, free from the punishment of their mothers. Free to buy fruit from her as they made their way to the very place where she, the girl on the side of the road in Fujoni, wished more than anything she could go.

Halfway through the day, she looked down at the coins in her hand. She saw she had more than enough to get her to town and back on any of the passing dala dalas whose passengers kept calling out for her to bring them mangoes, bananas, and coconuts. She contemplated simply going. Just leaving the fruit in the baskets on the side of the road and heading to town. All she had to do was step onto the dala dala and hand a few of the shillings to the conductor calling out "Stone Town! Stone Town!"

But she refrained, knowing all the ways it would disappoint her mother—to spend the money intended for their home, to abandon the fruit yet to be sold, and to break her mother's heart. So she kept working and when the long day finally ended and the baskets were empty, Zuena headed home, her legs and back tired.

She presented her mother with the empty baskets and the money their contents had raised, and then slumped onto the mat, exhausted, while her mother counted the money. Zuena was happy to bring the money into the family, to spend a day for her mother. But she did not realise quite how happy that day could make her until her mother finished counting the money and handed it all straight back to her.

"Now," she explained, "now you have what you need to go to town."

"What?" Zuena looked at the money now back in her hands.

"I called his mother while you were working. You have a day arranged with your friend tomorrow. They caught Renaldo trying to go on a dala dala out here! So they are pleased to have a way to stop him running off!"

"He was trying to come here?" Zuena asked.

“Yes, his dad had to jump in their car and drive out of town to get him off the dala dala.” Her mother chuckled at the thought. “But as you did not end up sneaking off and you did your day’s work, you will be going in on the early dala dala. But you are to return on the one at dusk. You will come back with a member of the community—so that you don’t travel alone at night.”

Zuena looked at her in confused excitement.

“With Abdulla,” her mother explained. “He will be in town; he will come back with you.

“Which Abdulla?”

Her mother gave a satisfied grin. “The one whose bike you keep trying to take, of course!”

Goodbye, Zanzibar

At Unguja airport Marie sat in a window seat looking out at palm trees.

As the plane lifted from the tarmac it headed south and dipped slightly. Marie's eyes were drawn to the beautiful, crescent-moon shape of the sand and waters of Kizimkazi cove. No words could describe her pleasure at the sight.

Turning towards the mainland, the plane drifted out over the sea. Marie watched a lone dhow sailing out of the cove into the open water.

Debbie and the Lost One

As Debbie strolled through shrubs beyond Longido Mountain, her small, colourful city shoes kicked up dust and came to a sudden halt. A familiar sight stood in front of Debbie. A familiar face was looking up at the city woman, tilting her head with curiosity.

“Hey, Rais!” she called out.

“Yes?” he called back from some distance away.

“I found your goat!”

“Oh. Are you sure?”

“Yes,” she smiled at the goat with the brown patch on its head.

Barak and Mama

By the waters of Lake Victoria Mama Agnus sat down on a bench while Barak set off to search the rock pools for colourful lizards. Mama felt the warmth of the sun on her skin as she remembered her previous visits here with Jaruph, the Sukuma man from Mwanza. She watched as the boy he had left behind ran across the grass to her, an excited look in his eyes.

“Mama! There is a lizard. It’s bright and colourful!”

“Oh, yes?”

Yes!” he bubbled with excitement. “Come see, come see!” he insisted, taking her by the hand.

“Okay, I am coming,” Mama lifted herself from the bench and followed Barak across the lawn.

The waters of Lake Victoria sparkle as small ripples caught the sunlight—an excited young boy called out from the rocks at the water’s edge to a warm-hearted, smiling woman walking across the grass.

“Mama! Mama!”

Two Young Adventurers Enter the Maze

On the morning after her hard day's work selling fruit, Zuena was up early and standing on the side of the road in time for the very first dala dala.

She gleefully watched the world go by as she rode to town—where she discovered the children don't get up as early as children in villages do. When she arrived at Renaldo's house, after nearly two hours of travel, his mother had to wake her boy, something Jerry the rooster had not managed to do.

A sleepy, blurry-eyed Renaldo shuffled out to the loungeroom to greet Zuena, bright-eyed and ready for her day in town with her sleepy friend. It took some time for the boy to wake up properly. His always tranquil expression seemed extra relaxed as he groggily went about having some breakfast and juice. But finally, he sprang to life and proclaimed that, this time, she must see everything in town.

"We are going to go right into Stone Town! You will see the capital properly!" he promised. His father chuckled to himself at his son's sudden, grown-up tourist guide ways.

"There is much to see!" Renaldo proclaimed, ignoring his dad's chortles. "You will likely be surprised when we are between the tall buildings instead of at home where you are between tall trees."

"Oh!" Zuena beamed, wondering if her friend would be pointing out the obvious things again or maybe teaching her new things this time.

"There are many things to learn about in town!" he insisted.

Renaldo hadn't, of course, yet run this idea by his parents. After a private, little conversation out of earshot of his village guest, his parents agreed they had enough trust in their boy not to do his regular disappearing trick when he had a guest to look after.

With breakfast done, Renaldo's dad dropped the two young explorers on the edge of town—by the giant markets, near the bustling main dala dala station.

Zuena had never seen such a huge market before, with so much food in one place and so many people haggling over it. Nor had she seen so much meat and fish on display where sellers sold their catch or kill from that morning.

She was amazed to see piles and piles of spices in amounts she couldn't imagine would be used in a lifetime. But the prices. The prices, set for wealthy townspeople and tourists passing through, were called out by the merchants. Such

prices would never be uttered in the villages and Zuena wondered how so much money could be spared for spices.

They moved quickly through the markets and into the maze of old Stone Town's tall stone buildings which Renaldo knew she most needed to see. As he guided her into the narrow, winding laneways that he pretended he knew well, she was in awe of the tall buildings and all the people who seemed to live stacked on top of each other. It seemed crowded, even though she could not see many people. There were some old people sitting on steps, children playing and other children peering down from windows as high as the tallest mango trees back home.

As they made their way through the maze, Zuena soon had no idea which way was which, but it didn't matter—it was all such a new world, with the air cool and the light bouncing from high walls, glowing golden unlike anything she had ever experienced before. And of course, she believed her guide must know the labyrinth well, as he was, after all, a boy from the capital. She could see European tourists wandering around, looking as lost as she would have looked without her guide.

Renaldo's expression was relaxed. To tourists, his eyes appeared like those of someone who had lived in these streets his whole life. Each turn was made without thinking as he strolled along, relaxed and confident. But of course, inside his head Renaldo was calm only because he was once again where he preferred most of all to be. He was free, he was roaming around the world that interested him so. He was happy and content *because* he was lost, without a clue where they were or where they were headed.

So relaxed was his expression, not even three boys sitting on a blue step had noticed he was not familiar in the way they were.

"Look at those two," the eldest boy gestured to the relaxed-looking boy and the girl whose eyes were wide and looking everywhere in interest as they wandered past the step.

"They are brother and sister?" the youngest of the three asked.

"No, they are definitely friends," the middle of boy asserted.

"No, no. I saw the boy's eyes!" the eldest one proclaimed.

"Oh yes?" quizzed the youngest.

The eldest boy nodded with certainty.

"What of his eyes?" frowned the middle boy.

“He is in love!” the eldest boy proclaimed with a shake of his head. “The poor bastard has lost his mind.”

~

For Mama,

Who left this world just two months after we gathered together to read these stories.