

Imagining coherence

Local discourses about identities, tradition and religion in Pangani, Tanzania



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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Master's degree

Department of Social Anthropology

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Kwa marafiki zangu wa Pangani: Sitawasahau.

Ahsante sana. Thank you.

Glossary

From Swahili to English

<i>Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)</i>	the Revolutionary Party
<i>dawa</i> (pl. <i>madawa</i>)	medicine, medicament
<i>dini</i>	religion
<i>jini</i> (pl. <i>majini</i>)	spirit, jinn
<i>kanga</i>	colorful cloth wore by women
<i>kitabu</i>	book
<i>madrasa</i>	Quran School
<i>maji</i>	water
<i>Marekani</i>	America
<i>matatizo</i>	problems
<i>mganga</i> (pl. <i>waganga</i>)	traditional healer
<i>mila</i>	tradition, custom
<i>mkoba</i>	container, used for mixing herbal medicine
<i>mshenzi</i>	barbarian, savage
<i>mwalimu</i> (pl. <i>walimu</i>)	teacher
<i>mzee</i> (pl. <i>wazee</i>)	elder, old man
<i>mzimu</i> (pl. <i>mizimu</i>)	ancestor spirit
<i>mzungu</i> (pl. <i>wazungu</i>)	person with European decent, foreigner
<i>ngoma</i>	drums
<i>shamba</i>	field, agricultural land
<i>shehe</i>	Muslim leader, someone learned in Islam
<i>shetani</i> (pl. <i>mashetani</i>)	spirit
<i>ujamaa</i>	familyhood

Map of Tanga Region and Pangani



Map of Northeastern Tanzania. Source: Google Maps

Note on pictures

All the pictures in this thesis are taken by me. Even though I have shown pictures of local people in Pangani, this is done in a way that preserves the anonymity of my informants. The purpose of the pictures is to contribute to setting the mood of sceneries and giving information words cannot give. Because, is it not true, that a picture is worth a thousand words?

Chapter 1:

Introduction

When walking through the streets of Pangani Town, one thing that in particular stands out, is the diversity. The town is filled with smells; of the ocean, of dried squid arranged outside a house, of boiling coconut rice and washed clothes, of gasoline and sewage, and of incense and strong Arabic perfume. The women are dressed in colorful *kangas*, black niqabs or jeans and T-shirts, and the call for prayer from the various mosques mixes with the sounds of gospel music from the Pentecostal churches, only to be drowned by the music of a local record shop playing American hip-hop. The diversity is kept together within town, by endless green fields of sisal and red mud roads on the western side, by the mighty Pangani River with its mangrove forest in the south, and to the east, by the Indian Ocean. It was within this complex field I conducted my fieldwork, and its diversity within its unity will form the backdrop in this thesis.

Setting the stage

Pangani is a small coastal town in the Tanga region northeast in Tanzania. When I arrived in Pangani, my plan was to explore Muslim-Christian relations in the town, mainly in women's saving groups. I knew that togetherness and unity was commonly stressed as important factors in the Tanzanian society, and I was curious on how the country's heterogeneous population could live so peacefully together, while many other places in the world people were fighting over the same differences. This plan changed after my arrival to Pangani, as I discovered my theme of study to be somehow unpopular among many of Pangani's inhabitants. People were genuinely reluctant to talk to me about the political and religious situation in contemporary Tanzania, although they continued to emphasize harmony and unity.

Because of these challenges I decided to adjust my focus. I observed that there seemed to be a division between the local population and Pangani's many migrants, where the latter had a generally negative view on the town. A dichotomous relationship between inland and coast seemed to be reinforced in this meeting. I was further made aware that Pangani is widely known in Tanzania because of its many traditional healers, and I found the traditional healers

and traditional religious beliefs to play an important role in Pangani's social scene, also among those who categorized themselves as Christians or Muslims. I realized that this was such an important part of people's world view, that I could not ignore it. A subsequent observation was that there was a strong division between my informants' view on spirit possession, healing and traditional religion, and that these different views seemed to be reinforced and produced by factors coming from outside of the community. People were commonly labeling each other as 'true believers' and 'not true believers', 'proper Muslims' and 'not proper Muslims', and people seemed to identify with being either 'Muslim' or 'Christian', 'Pentecostal' or 'Sunni' (or rather 'not Shi'a'). A pressure for defining what was seen as proper religious practice seemed to create and reinforce social boundaries.

So, the town where people generally stressed togetherness and unity, was highly affected by notions of difference and otherness. However, the emphasis on togetherness had to originate from somewhere. I started wondering if the categorizations and boundaries of beliefs and religions were becoming increasingly important in organizing identities, togetherness and traditions in contemporary Pangani, which is also what I seek to answer in this thesis. In retrospect, I realized how I somehow ended up looking at what I had intended in the first place, concerning Christian-Muslim relations, although my approach advanced according to the complexity in town. I will throughout this thesis present a story of Pangani, a story in which these different processes, groups and boundaries become visible.

Major arguments

This thesis is about different aspects of local life in Pangani, many which are linked to larger scale issues on a historical, national and global level. I will argue how there is an ongoing redefinition of religious boundaries in relation to what is perceived as 'proper' religious practices. These processes exert a pressure for 'discursive coherence' (Asad 1993), and can be found within different fields of the local community. I will explore these ongoing processes in relation to dynamics between the concepts of *dini* (religion) and *mila* (tradition), *dini* referring to practices and beliefs perceived as Islamic, and *mila* referring to practices and beliefs seen as 'traditional' or indigenous to the Swahili, often in regard to traditional religion. I will also explore the link between the ongoing changes within the religious field, and changes in the social field in regard to group relations, interaction with the larger world and national policies promoting unity.

The thesis will explore these issues of boundary setting and discursive coherence mainly within three conceptual fields: identity, religious practice and traditional healing. As argued by Fredrik Barth, social groups and categories are created in their meeting with others, and are maintained through their boundaries which are social, dynamic constructions (1969). In culturally complex societies, however, the creation of identities should be seen within large-scale systems, and as affected by different ‘dimensions’, such as class, gender, age and religion (Barth 1983:81–82). I will argue that how people in Pangani identify themselves and others, is highly linked to greater socio-political and historical processes, and that the stereotyping and ongoing boundary setting between social groups in Pangani should be seen accordingly.

In Pangani, global discourses of religion and a process of dichotomizing tradition (*mila*) and religion (*dini*), seemed to reinforce and create social boundaries, resulting in a pressure for defining what was seen as ‘proper’ religious behavior. This was especially noticeable in the field of religious practice, such as in rituals and festivals. The traditional religious field in Pangani, often described as *mila*, was characterized with syncretistic elements, which are often seen in relation to ‘tolerance’ (van der Veer 1994). However, the process of identifying what is seen as ‘proper’ religious practice, leads to a further increasing trend of anti-syncretism (Stewart and Shaw 1994), and the meeting between global and local religious discourses makes differences between local and textual Islam visible (Lambek 1990). These differences in Pangani were never solved with violence, and major structural changes were in fact often explained through the mythology, drawing on older materials to solve new challenges (Lévi-Strauss 1962:21).

Contrary to previous theories are beliefs in the ‘occult’ and in the spirit world as widespread and popular in the modern world as ever before (Moore and Sanders 2001; Geschiere 1997), and the modernization process does not seem to be equivalent to secularization (Asad 2003:181). In this regard was also traditional healing expected to be bypassed by biomedicine, which has not been the case (Rekdal 1999). On the contrary are traditional healers, or *waganga wa kienyeji* (singl. *mganga*), in Tanzania popularly visited, and as we will see, Pangani was often described as a center for traditional healers. Traditional healers are often presented as flexible and modern symbols (Geschiere 1997:13), or as critiques on modernity (Comaroff 1997:10; Moore and Sanders 2001:18). However, in Pangani, this image was juxtaposed with the image of the traditional healer as something traditional, unmodern and pagan, drawing links to the dichotomous relationship between tradition (*mila*) and religion (*dini*) that was often presented in town, also constructing boundaries between

people who visited the local healers and those who did not. Yet, it will thorough this thesis become clear that the boundaries that seem to be drawn between *dini* and *mila*, religion and tradition, are not rigid nor unchangeable. They are in fact, as social boundaries (Barth 1969), constantly changing and shaped according to time and place.

Theoretical framework

It has in the anthropological tradition been a tendency of studying objects marked by their persistence, although anthropological studies on cultural and religious change have become increasingly common in recent times (Robbins 2014). What Joel Robbins (2014) refers to as a ‘science of continuity’ has thus not focused much on disappearance, and Robbins argues that there is much to be learned from studying the *process* in which things disappear, as this might be just as interesting as the question *why* things disappear. In this thesis, I wish to explore social and religious practices in the light of change, and through the thesis approach questions of continuity, renewal, identification and disappearance.

Several anthropologists have argued how it today is not possible to look at societies as merely local and static units, and that having a global perspective therefore is essential (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Grønhaug 1978). This is also what I attend in this thesis, as I consider it important to investigate how changes in small societies might be affected by greater structural changes and influence. Nothing we study is isolated, and everything is a part “within the wider system of meaning” (Lambek 1981:60). While having a global perspective in mind, I also want to stress the importance of avoiding a dualistic approach and a micro-macro perspective. Feminist anthropologists have been claimed to present only one part of the societies they study because they are thought to study women exclusively, and therefore miss the whole picture (Abu-Lughod 1991:141). As Abu-Lughod (1991), I find it wise to rather focus on ethnographies of the particular, to help outdo partial, static, dualistic and homogenous presentations of culture.

Global influence will always be processed locally, and focusing on the combination of the local and the global is thus necessary. In this regard, I have found it useful to use Grønhaug’s field analysis (1978) from Herat in Afghanistan. This has helped getting a perspective on the field both while conducting fieldwork and in the following process of analyzing and writing, and also helps avoiding a micro-macro perspective. Grønhaug suggests a method for analyzing the field that allows us better to understand the society’s social construction, by looking at different social ‘fields’ as analytical units within the society, and the ‘scale’ of these fields.

What Grønhaug refers to as ‘locality’, or the local field, is a unit that includes small-scale fields as the religious or kinship systems, but the people within these fields are also part of larger scale social fields as the state, the ecology, Islam and the global economic-political system (Grønhaug 1978:86, 121). Grønhaug writes that “[t]he analytic task is then to locate and evaluate the significance of the impact of such larger fields, and study the process of change whereby specific macro-fields become more or less determinative in the lives of people in Herat” (Grønhaug 1978:21). This is what I intend to do also in the case of Pangani, to better get an overview and fully comprehend the organization of social life. Where Grønhaug focuses on ecology, I would like to focus mainly on the different levels in religious organization (Grønhaug 1978:97). In regard of catching what is ‘local’ it can further be necessary to see the ‘local’ as Michal Lambek, who proposes an alternative perspective, considering activities and concerns as ‘local’ “precisely insofar as they are understood as internal rather than external to the practices that engage people, even when such practices entail the ostensibly global” (Lambek 2011:216). Furthermore, I have found it useful to approach group relations and identity through the theories of Fredrik Barth, both in his classical “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” (1969) and in the later monograph on Sohar (1983). Barth’s theories will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter Three, and will further be relevant for the rest of the thesis.

How to approach religion?

It is not my intention nor purpose to give a discussion on the definition of religion in this thesis. One of the main challenges when it comes to defining religion is giving a definition that is applicable in cross-cultural situations (Asad 1986:16). Asad argues that it is not possible to give a universal definition of religion, because it will always be founded in historical elements and relationships, and because the definition itself is a creation within a discursive process (Asad 1993:29). The entire task of finding a universal definition might hinder investigation rather than help exploring new processes (Asad 1983:252). Thus, my focus will rather be on *religious practice* and the *process of defining religious boundaries*. When I talk about ‘religion’ it should be understood in the analytical way such as Asad uses it.

Furthermore, when I use the labels ‘Christian’, ‘Muslim’ or ‘religious group’ it refers to the emic perspective and the self-identification of the groups or person. It is important to remember that these are classifications which cover groups with much internal variation in practice and discourse. The boundaries are not fixed, and the society is highly intermixed, although I found these categories to be important factors of identification for people in Pangani.

When I describe someone or something as ‘Christian’, ‘Islamic’ or ‘traditional’, it is as a label for heterogeneous items and practices described as such by my informants, although taking into consideration the paradox that people not necessarily agree on these characterizations (Asad 1986:2–3).

This thesis’ approach to religion will draw on the work of Talal Asad, Michael Lambek, Peter Geschiere, Reidar Grønhaug and Kjersti Larsen, among others. I have found the work of Talal Asad to be especially helpful in approaching religion. As Asad (1986) suggests, it can be useful to look at religion through the *discourse of religion*, which again is part of and affected by a greater discourse of knowledge, and through that, a discourse of power and authority. What is perceived as ‘religion’ is thus affected by other discourses that authorize this question, and ‘instruct’ a person on how to behave as a ‘proper’ Muslim (Canton 2006:42–43). This is what Asad calls ‘authorizing discourse’, by which he also offers his critique on Geertz’s (1977) conception of religion as a system of symbols as being too simple, leaving out important aspects of power, such as law, sanctions, social institutions and control of bodies (Asad 1993:35). Asad (1986) has suggested to focus on Islam as a ‘discursive tradition’, to avoid a false dichotomy between local/global and normative/popular, rooted in the Orientalist distinction between ‘orthodox’ and ‘un-orthodox’ religious practices. It can although be necessary to look at different discourses within Islam to capture the complexity of the whole (Lambek 1993:190). The term ‘orthodoxy’ is often found in anthropological literature on Islam, and is for many anthropologists a way of explaining one, out of many forms of Islam focused on doctrine, law and textual authority (Asad 1986:8). When I use the term ‘orthodoxy’, it will be in the sense Asad uses it. Asad sees ‘orthodoxy’ as the domain where “Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones” (Asad 1986:22). Also, I would like to state that my goal is not to dichotomize Islam and tradition, nor to essentialize religion. Neither do I wish to offer an Orientalist view on Islam as a theological, scriptural and unchanged system (Bruinhorst 2007; Said 1978).

As local practices meet global practices, and as tradition meets modernization, changes in the society are likely to take form according to these meetings. Asad describes how changes in religious practices in Saudi Arabia are not to be seen as the *ulama*’s¹ ‘traditional opposition’ to modernization, but as an attempt of defining religious ‘orthodoxy’: “a (re)ordering of knowledge that governs the ‘correct’ form of Islamic practices” (1993:210). This attempt of

¹ Islam’s religious authority or divines.

discursive dominance is recognized by practices of judging and abolishing “long-established indigenous practices”, such as worship of saints and other practices seen as un-Islamic by the religious elite (Asad 1993:210). Asad argues that these processes towards discursive dominance in conditions of change, includes an attempt towards achieving ‘discursive coherence’. He argues further that “[o]rthodoxy’ is not easy to secure in conditions of radical change, this is not because orthodox discourse is necessarily against any change but because it aspires to be authoritative” (Asad 1993:211). Attempts to archive a discursive coherence is made especially visible in the modernizing world with its social forces of industrial capitalism, creating new conditions for discourses of religion (Asad 1986:23).

Throughout this thesis I will use Asad’s concept of discursive coherence to explain what I see as an ongoing process of redefining religious boundaries in Pangani. In Islam, there are different terms for classifying behavior, from what is recommended, permitted, disapproved, and forbidden. Asad asks how new elements and behaviors coming with modernization are put into these categories (Asad 1993:212). In the case of Pangani, one could put the question the other way around, asking how traditional elements and local behavior are put into newer categories that are reinforced and strengthened through modernization processes and the stressing of the local religious communities as members of a global (and dominant) religious discourse.

To supplement Asad’s concept of ‘discursive coherence’, I would like to include the field of ‘ordinary ethics’. ‘Ordinary ethics’ has been closely related to religion as it is through religion that ethics historically have been materialized and intellectualized (Lambek 2010:3). Today, in ‘secularized’ societies, the field of ethics is more closely related to law and regulation. Maurice Bloch sees religion as at the expense of the ordinary (Bloch 1992 in Lambek 2010:2), and the ordinary ethics is found embedded in language, manner of speaking, actions, behavior and in the categorization of things. Further, the ‘ordinary’ is based on ethics that do not have to be spoken out loud, such as agreement, practice and happening. On the other hand, ethics will become explicit in the meeting with its breaches, ethical problems or the unknown, in social and ethical movements towards renewal, and when a religious elite try to educate and rationalize (Lambek 2010:2). I would argue that the latter argument is relevant in the case of Pangani, where the ‘ordinary ethics’ in regard to religion is becoming more explicit, due to social and ethical movements towards renewal and a pressure for discursive coherence.

The Christian perspective might seem underrepresented in this thesis, but the simple explanation to this is that the great majority of people in Pangani are Muslims. Still, I have

found it important to have their perspective as a part of the thesis. Christians form a significant part of the social scene in Pangani, as well as the trend towards seeking a ‘purer’ religious identity by distancing oneself from tradition, was also important among the Christians with whom I met in Pangani. Christian priests and missionaries have long been counteracting ‘traditional beliefs’ in Tanzania (Iiffe 1979:368), labelling certain traditional practices as disapproved or forbidden. This is especially noticeable within the Pentecostal churches in Pangani, with their applied focus on sin, confession and purity, and their active linking of tradition to ideas of the Devil, as also noted by Geschiere (2013:187). Notions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘purity’ and the pressure for discursive coherence is important among Muslims as well as Christians in Pangani, and changes within both fields should thus be seen in relation to each other. Therefore, the dynamics between tradition (*mila*) and religion (*dini*) will be important aspects in discussing religion in Pangani.

The concepts of *dini* and *mila* will be valuable aspects in the analysis in this thesis. *Dini*, ‘religion’, refers to practices and beliefs perceived as Islamic, brought to the Swahili coast by the Arabs. Many of my informants also described Christianity as *dini*. On the other hand is *mila*, ‘tradition’ or ‘custom’, used to describe practices seen as traditional or indigenous to the Swahili, or sometimes on a more general term to describe ‘African’ customs (Topan 2009:58). Most of my informants described traditional religion as *mila*. By ‘traditional religion’ I thereby mean religious practices that were present in the past, especially before the arrival of Islam and Christianity in the area. It is important to note that due to lack of sources from this period, it is difficult to determine if certain social and religious practices did exist before the arrival of Islam and Christianity, or if some practices were introduced later on. ‘Tradition’, or *mila*, is however not to be seen as something passive and unchanged, but as something that evolves, changes and adapts according to time and place, as well as it is always understood and interpreted in the present.

Dini and *mila* can be seen as dual concepts (Topan 2009) as both concepts relate to how people perceive the world and its meaning, and represent religious practice and rituals. They are also dual in the way they often complete each other and form a unity (which will be illustrated especially in Chapter Five). Aspects of *dini* are often found within aspects of *mila*, and the other way around. However, in Pangani these concepts were often presented in a dichotomous relationship to each other. In this regard, they are not dual, but the opposite, drawing on conceptual differences between ‘tradition’ and ‘religion’. In this way was *mila* sometimes presented as something unmodern and traditional, while *dini* was presented as

something modern. I will explore the dynamics and contextually of the concepts throughout the thesis, and also (in Chapter Four) illustrate how local people in Pangani sometimes disagreed on what to label as *dini* or *mila*.

Religion manifest itself in different ways, and religious differences are often used as explanations to ongoing problems across the globe. Political, economic and social conditions are often left outside these explanations, although these might be better suited at explaining religious differences as exactly expressions and reactions to the ongoing problems (Larsen 2009:11). Although I in this thesis will explore social issues related to religion in the small town community, the thesis intends to show how religion itself is not the issue, but that historical, social, structural and global processes are always behind, because local beliefs and practices “do not exist in a zero-sum relation with macro-forces of modernity”, and what is perceived as ‘local’ is related to a complex and shifting interplay between different structural forces (Comaroff 2012:25).

History of Tanzania

Tanzania and the Tanga region’s history is a valuable fundament in this thesis. Tanzania’s history will only briefly be presented here, but is important for understanding the processes taking place in Pangani, as well as in Tanzania today. Looking at the region’s history will also help in comprehending its complexity, as well as the fact that this has been an area characterized by change and contact with the outer world for centuries. The Swahili language is a suitable metaphor illustrating this, with its combination of Bantu languages and Arabic, Portuguese, German and Hindi words. The heterogeneity of religious life in Pangani is much a result of the town’s history and position, and the history presented here will be that seen as of most relevance for this thesis.

The 8th century in East-Africa was characterized by the adoption of Islam in the coastal area. The Swahili coast, where the monsoon wind since the dawn of days has brought travelers and traders between two world continents, became an important area for the contact between inland Africa and the Indian Ocean, and thus the ‘Swahili’ culture emerged (Caplan 2016:12). In the 16th century, the Portuguese tried to take over the area of today’s Tanzania, but were defeated with help from the Omanis who had strong interests in the area. During the time of the Omanis trading of goods and slaves flourished, and the plantation economy grew. Many Omanis also settled along the Swahili coast and married local women (Caplan 2016). In the late

18th century, the Busaidi dynasty in Oman ruled in the coastal regions, and Seyyid Said bin Sultan in this period moved his court to Zanzibar, only a short distance from the mainland town of Pangani.

In the 1880s Tanganyika was colonized by the Germans (Ilfie 1979:88). During this time, the country's population experienced the dominant cultural and social influence of the Lutheran Church and a rise in missionary activities (Baroin 1996). The first Pentecostal churches were established in the southern highlands in the 1920s (Ilfie 1979:545). Islam in Tanganyika was also changing at this time, and imperialism led the country's Muslims to become a more integrated part of the global Muslim community. Already in the early 20th century, Islamic books from Egypt, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia became popular, and educated Muslims became increasingly engaged in questions and conflicts concerning Muslims outside of the country's borders (Ilfie 1979:215).

After the First World War, Tanganyika's population again experienced global changes when the country went under British control. Much missionary work collapsed in this period, and created new opportunities for Africans to develop own ways of believing (Ilfie 1979:240). Some years before independence, in 1954, the Quran was translated into Swahili (Ilfie 1979:550).

Tanzania after independence

Tanganyika won its independence in 1961, under the leadership of Julius Nyerere and his socialist party TANU (Tanganyika African National Union). Three years after, the Sultan of Zanzibar and his mainly Arabian government was overthrown in the Zanzibar Revolution, and many Arabs were killed and fled the country. Zanzibar and Tanganyika joined together to form Tanzania in 1964. The Arusha Declaration from 1967 stated the new state's values, based on African socialism and unity (Caplan 2016:11-14). TANU and Nyerere saw modernization as the ultimate goal, and based on socialist developmental policies, they developed the *ujamaa* ('familyhood'). The *ujamaa* village campaign lasted from 1973 to 1976, and intended to resettle the country's population into villages (Scott 1998). As many other projects aimed at improving human conditions, this one failed (Scott 1998:225). However, as TANU and Nyerere failed in some fields and *ujamaa* became a disaster, the scholarly and historical work on Nyerere found in Tanzania today is mainly positive, presenting an almost romantic view on the 'Father of the Nation' (Fouéré 2015).

While the question of class hardly threatened TANU, the question of religion was seen as a greater threat (Ilfie 1979:543). The country had a diversity of religions, including different indigenous faiths, schools of Islam, missionary societies and Hinduist societies. In the beginning of the 20th century, there were about two per cent Christians in Tanganyika (Ilfie 1979:543). As elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, the number increased considerably throughout the century. Ilfie notes that already in the 1950s, Christianity was seen as the religion of modernity, especially since the government refused to subsidize Quran schools and the educational differences between different regions increased considerably (1979:345, 543). Nyerere and the politicians in TANU were modernists, and were said to speak “of indigenous religions with an embarrassed smile” (Ilfie 1979:550). Traditional religions and their role in Tanzania’s politics is seldom discussed, while Christianity and Islam has had apparent influence on the country’s politics. TANU formed several Muslim organizations, but none were especially popular among the population (Ilfie 1979:551). In 1968, the government banned the East African Muslim Welfare Society, and created the governmental Supreme Council of Tanzanian Muslims, BAKWATA, which has not had a high endorsement among the country’s Muslim population (Bruinhorst 2009:128).

According to Gerard van de Bruinhorst (2009) many Tanzanian Muslims still feel suppressed, and experience a mistrust in the government. Bruinhorst argues how trust in the ruling party CCM², which succeeded TANU in 1977 and has ruled since then, seemed to have reduced during the last years, and how it is sometimes referred to as the ‘Catholic Church Movement’ (2009:127). Today, there exist no official statistics of religious groups in Tanzania, and the government has never included it in any questionnaire (Bondarenko 2004:445).

During the last decades, Tanzania has undergone massive changes in its politic, economic and social fields. These changes are highly influenced and driven by external forces, where the most influential ones are the World Bank and IMF and their structural adjustment programs (Sanders 2001). Tanzania has been praised by these multilateral institutions because of its growth in GDP, and the country has a goal of becoming a middle-income country within 2025 (Tanzanian Ministry of Finance and Planning 2017). However, life has become increasingly difficult for many Tanzanians, and ordinary people now have to struggle to be a part of the competition-oriented and interconnected global society.

² Chama cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution)

Life in Pangani



Street view in Pangani with one of the town's old Omani buildings.

Pangani lies on the eastern coast of Tanzania, 50 kilometers south of the region's capital, Tanga. Pangani District is the smallest district in the Tanga Region, and is divided into thirteen smaller wards. It is hard to find an accurate number on the population in Pangani, but according to a consensus in 2012, there were 54,025 people in Pangani District (National Bureau of Statistics 2016). The number of people living in town was said to be somewhere between 12 000 and 20 000.

The local people of Pangani mainly work as fishermen, in the coconut plantation or have their own small businesses. Unemployment is widespread, especially among women. Tourists come to Pangani from time to time, but most of those who came during my fieldwork left after not long. The local population did not always approve on tourists dressing off on the local beach or wearing short dresses in town, and most tourists quickly left for the beach areas south of Pangani Town, or rented local boats to take the shortcut over to Zanzibar.

Pangani is one of Tanzania's oldest towns, and rumor has it that Vasco da Gama arrived in Pangani on his travel around Africa³. Pangani was an important town during the time of the Omanis, as well as during the German and later British colonial rule. In the 18th century the town had become a central hub for the caravan trade, and had because of its proximity to Zanzibar become an important port on the mainland. Indian traders came to town following the

³ This was enthusiastically argued by a local historian in Pangani.

caravan routes, Arabs came in from Zanzibar and the Omani had sugarcane, banana and coconut plantations in the area. One of the three largest long-distance trading routes in the 19th century followed the Pangani River up country towards Kilimanjaro and Maasailand (Iliffe 1979:42). Kikokwe, a small village outside of Pangani, was according to a local historian in town the first area in Tanzania to get a sisal plantation. It was planted with seeds brought directly from Yucatán, Mexico, seeds that we will see affect Pangani up until these days. Because of its sisal estates, Pangani became one of the first towns in Tanzania to get electricity in 1945. However, a commonly told joke in town, was that the electricity had not improved either, since that time.

Historically, there has been a Muslim majority in Pangani. Under the Arabs, and during the colonial period, slaves and workers from the inland were brought to town, either to work in the plantations or to be sent to Zanzibar as slaves. Many Arabs and Indians had settled in the coastal town. Remnants of Indian shops were still visible, although the owners were said to have moved as the economic situation in town worsened. I was told by a local historian in Pangani that the violence against Arabs during the Zanzibar Revolution also had spread to Pangani, forcing most of the Arabs who had been living there to flee.

More recently, there has been an increased migration from the highlands towards the coast, especially from the Lushoto and Kilimanjaro areas. Most of these people are Christians coming to work in governmental offices, the hospital and in tourism. Outside influence on the religious field was highly visible. The migration to town has led to the establishment of many new churches, and the Pentecostal influence was particularly notable. There were a number of Christian missionaries in the area, but most of them stayed in the rural areas outside town. One Tanzanian missionary argued that Pangani was in great need of missionary activities, and called for international help to spread the word of God in town. The British based organization Islamic Help was also present, and built mosques and gave aid in the area, but was frequently blamed by many Muslims in town to promote Shi'a Islam⁴.

My impression was that people in Pangani somehow felt left out. During the rainy seasons the road to Tanga often floods, making travel to and from town difficult. Pangani had been promised a new road from Tanga for the last 20 years, but until today nothing had happened. They had also been promised a bridge over the Pangani River, but at the time of my stay there was only a ferry that repeatedly broke down. The water quality was also bad, and sometimes the water supply was cut off for days without notice, at the same time as electricity

⁴ Although the organization itself claimed to be having a neutral position.

was never available for long at the time. The area has experienced an increase in tourism, especially because of its beautiful, uncrowded beaches, and a number of resorts and hotels have been built along the coastal stretches in the district, but not a single one of these are owned or driven by Tanzanians. Still, it is said that the general situation in Pangani have improved during the last decades. A number of new schools and medical clinics have been built, and more girls are going to school. The town recently got 3G covering, and has two Internet cafes.



The coconut plantation near Pangani Town where many locals worked.

Introducing the chapters

This thesis arguments draw heavily on field based examples. Even if I do not have time to give a thick description of all cases, I hope to have covered the most salient aspects of variation. Chapter Three, Four and Five are majorly empirically based chapters, focusing on different ‘fields’ in Grønhaug’s (1978) sense of the term. Towards the end I will demonstrate how these fields have an obvious connection.

I have dedicated a whole chapter, Chapter Two, on my field experience. I have found it useful to have a rather thorough methodology chapter because it reflects so neatly on what I present later in this thesis. It reflects on the issue of talking about differences, problems and religion in Pangani, illustrated in how my theme of study was received negatively in the town, and how brotherhood and unity was stressed instead. It also illustrates the issue of secrecy, and gives a better understanding of the importance of secrecy for some of my informants, as well as it describes how I was eventually able to get insight in this private field. Furthermore, I hope

this chapter will be of interest to those concerned with anthropological research methods and qualitative studies.

Chapter Three describes social processes and everyday life in Pangani Town, and link them to issues of boundary setting, identity and history. I will look at the common emphasis on unity and togetherness in Pangani, and present examples that illustrate how social boundaries and stereotypes are created in the meeting between local people and migrant workers in town, but also show how there is an ongoing redefinition of religious groups among the local population. The chapter will further explore local people's relation and frustrations over structural changes and situations they are not in control of. This chapter will be an important backdrop for the following chapters.

Chapter Four explores religious knowledge and local religious practice. I will in this chapter look at the meeting between 'global' and 'local' religious discourses, and argue that there is a pressure for discursive coherence within the religious field in Pangani that make some people turn away from traditional practices. We will see how previous traditional festivals in Pangani focused on the town as a whole and stressed togetherness, while the new festivals put a greater emphasis on the education of 'proper' religious practice and the unity of the global religious communities. I will further explore how the search for becoming 'proper' Muslims has led to the destruction of some local holy shrines used in ancestor worship, and discuss some aspects of radicalization in the area. Finally, the chapter will turn to the mythological field, and illustrate how people might still be coping with difficult situations and instability through traditional tales of spirits.

Chapter Five focus on the role of traditional healers, or *waganga*, in Pangani Town, and relate it to the issue of discursive coherence and new boundary setting in town. I will introduce the traditional healer Ali and his family, and show how the role of Ali is a highly dynamic one, adopting to the current changes in the local community through his combination of tradition (*mila*) and religion (*dini*), as well as through his openness to biomedicine and governmental influence. Further, the chapter will show how there is an increased skepticism towards the work of the local *waganga*, and how different groups in the small town community see their practices as contradictory to Islam and Christianity.

Finally, I end the thesis with a Chapter Six, where I summarize the overall theme of the thesis. This final section explains the connections between different levels and fields of analysis discussed in the thesis, and will also try to relate it to a greater context.

Chapter 2:

Methodology

Entering the field

I arrived Tanzania in the beginning of January 2016 and spent the first four weeks on a language course in Stone Town in Zanzibar. On the 12th of February I arrived Pangani, my backpack filled with anthropological textbooks, mosquito repellent and the anthropological virtues of objectivity, patience and motivation. I had been put in touch with a man working at the Cultural and Tourism Centre in town, Mr. Kabaka, who would help me find a place to live. He was also a local expert on the town's history, and had offered kindly to assist me with my research. When I met with him the morning after, he had already found me a host family and made a 5-week study plan where I would go on excursions with a local guide and attend history classes with him. Politely, I declined the offer, and tried to explain how I would conduct my research without a guide and a fixed program, though this was not the last time I had to explain and advocate the anthropological methods. My host family's house was just next to the market place in town, and I was living with my host mother, her three children and about eight fishermen renting the room next to mine. The family was Muslim as most families in town. After six weeks living with the host family, I moved some hundred meters down the road and rented a room in the house of a friend. The first month in the field consisted mainly of the process of getting research permits, which turned out to be a long and rather complicated process. After three weeks of office waiting and travelling back and forth between different places and offices, I had finally gotten my local permit and made the necessary introductions.

Though I had spent the last years studying anthropology and preparing for this fieldwork, no textbook could prepare me properly for what I met. The first thing that struck me when I entered the field was how complex it was and how hard it was to get an overview. Everything seemed to overlap and nothing in particular struck out. What and where was this field that had seemed so easily graspable before I left? Of course, I had read a dozen articles about this, but I guess nothing can really prepare you for what you meet the first time you do fieldwork. The town was bigger than I expected, and I spent the first days getting lost in the narrow dirt roads twisting between houses and shops in the town's center. Pangani's Muslim population was also much bigger than I had been told before coming there, and about

80 per cent of the people living in town were said to be Muslim. As I had spent four months in Tanzania some years previous to my fieldwork, I had certain expectations and assumptions on how Pangani would be. I soon realized that Pangani and the coastal area was different from the in-land areas I hitherto had learned to know. After spending some time in town, my previous expectations and assumptions disappeared, and eventually, out of the complex, ungraspable field, grew a better understanding of the organization of social life in Pangani.

Methodological considerations

The data upon which this thesis is based is from fieldwork conducted in and around Pangani Town. The research is based on participant observation, informal and unstructured interviews. I spent time with my informants on a regular basis, participating in day-to-day activities, doing what Geertz refers to as ‘deep hanging out’ (1998). I also participated in events more out of the ordinary, such as weddings, festivals and healing rituals. On some occasions, I conducted interviews of a semi-structured manner, for instance when I visited the local government offices or when I met with someone who had specialized information and limited time. Since this thesis is dealing with change, much of the presented material is ethno-historical, and gives glimpse into the people of Pangani’s tales of the past.

Anthropologists use different terms on the people with whom they interact during fieldwork, from informant and interlocutor to collaborator and friend. The term ‘informant’ could be criticized for presenting a hierarchical relationship between the informant and the anthropologist, as well as objectifying the informant. Further, it might contribute to present a picture that all the information the anthropologist gets during fieldwork, come from those regarded to be his or her informants, thus presenting others as less informative, and underestimating the value of everyday aspects such as small chats, rumors or conversations with children. I have still chosen to use the term ‘informant’, by which I mean people in Pangani who were well aware of the purpose of my fieldwork, who had seen my research permission, and who had offered to assist me in my research, in this way distinguishing these from other people in town who were not aware of the purpose of my stay.

I had a wide range of such informants, varying from different age, gender, education, social class and religious affiliation, although most of my key informants were women. According to Bernard (2011:150), good key informants are “people whom you can talk to you easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for

you". I would say I had three to four informants like these, varying from the age of 21 to their mid-thirties. I also had a couple of specialized informants (Bernard 2011:150), like Mr. Kabaka who was a local history expert, and Ali, who was a traditional healer.

I was mostly allowed to take notes and pictures, but I always made sure to ask in advance. As they did not mind, I usually made notes during conversations with my informants, and people eventually got used to seeing me with my note pad in hand. On some occasions, often related to traditional religious rituals, I was refused to bring a camera. On other occasions, like when I attended a wedding and had deliberately left my camera back home, I was politely ordered to go back home and fetch it so I could properly document what was happening. I would see this in relation to what I will explore later in this thesis, concerning the field of secrecy. Traditional religious rituals were highly affected by notions of secrecy, while religious practices related to *dini*, such as for instance weddings, were made public. This explains why I could bring my camera to the 'public' rituals, and not to the 'private' traditional rituals.

Language and interpretation

When I arrived Tanzania, my Swahili skills were rather limited. After one month of attending Swahili classes and some weeks in Pangani, my language skills improved considerably, but I was still depending on people who spoke some English, or on having someone with me who could interpret when my language skills did not reach. If I had interviews with people or met someone for the first time, I would always start speaking in Swahili. I found that speaking English often created a distance between me and with whom I spoke, as if the English language was a symbol of our worlds apart. Tanzanians are proud of their language, and my utterances in Swahili often resulted in appreciative cheers. The majority of Pangani's population do not speak English, but most of my informants spoke it to some degree. This could have been an issue of representation had it also meant that they were all from the upper class in the Tanzanian community, as it often is, but most of my informants had learned English regardless to their background and social and cultural capital. My friends or informants who spoke good English acted as interpreters on some occasions, and I did not have a permanent one. Sometimes this worked out fine, other times I wished I had found a permanent interpreter as I often ended up on the 'outside' of the conversation. Once, a young man named Jumaa came with me to talk to a man claimed to be the town's oldest. He was sick, and I only had this one opportunity to meet him. I heard he told stories about slavery, spirits and former religious traditions, and I eagerly waited for Jumaa to translate so I could understand more accurately what the man was saying.

After half an hour, the man stopped talking, and Jumaa finally looked at me while he pulled his shoulders and said “He said that things have not changed that much”. The old man started coughing heavily, and we had to leave. I was more disappointed than ever that I had not learned the language properly.

When conducting fieldwork in a cultural context different from your own, knowing if you have understood and interpreted something correctly might be a challenge. Language is not just the way people express themselves, it is also a part of the local discourse and habitus of the individual. Speaking the language and understanding the way people formulate themselves and talk about certain issues, can be one of the first steps towards understanding a community, as it gives an insight to what occupies people’s minds, how people relate to each other and what the local taboos are. As one does not speak the language fluently, different nuances, underlying meanings and aspects might get lost. Geertz argues that the ethnographer can never fully comprehend the way his or her informants think and feel, and that the only thing he or she can understand are the concepts, metaphors and symbols which his or her informants perceive ‘through’, ‘with’ or ‘by means of’ (Geertz 1974:30). Unni Wikan disagrees with Geertz, and claims that words can be misleading, and therefore the knowledge which one achieves through a language and discourse based approach alone is limited. She argues that we have to go “beyond the words” and thick descriptions through participation in daily life and “sharing a world with others” (Wikan in Hollan 2008:479). After conducting fieldwork in Pangani for five months, I hope I will be able to present an understanding which my informants would consider reasonable, just and true. All misunderstandings and misconceptions, if any, both on translations and interpretations, are my own.

When “sharing a world with others” anthropologists are in the unique position of studying embodied knowledge. As I became better at understanding the language, I learned the importance of proper greetings, introductions and humility. I also became better at interpreting people’s body language. While I was living with my host family I experienced the importance of bodily knowledge. I was constantly made fun of when I was washing my clothes, cutting vegetables or fetching water. I would always have an audience consisting of some fishermen and some neighbors saying “Mzungu⁵ hajui”; “the mzungu does not know”. The bodily knowledge of the different tasks at home would definitely take years to master, and the thought of Bourdieu’s theories on embodied knowledge somehow helped. Just the fact that the women

⁵ *Mzungu* (pl. *wazungu*), a person with European decent. Commonly used on all white-skinned people.

used five buckets (instead of the two I was using) when washing clothes, remained a mystery to me for quite some time. One morning the fishermen returned from a night at sea. One of them had gotten a huge cut on his leg, and was in a lot of pain. His friend came with a box of hair conditioner to clean it. I stepped in, and told them the wound had to be cleaned and that hair conditioner definitely would not help on an infection. I cleaned his wound and gave him some of an antiseptic cream I had. After this morning and throughout the next week I was no longer known as “the *mzungu*”, but as “Doctor Idunn”, and the fishermen treated me with more respect. This incident was quite liberating, and made me realize how I could become a somehow respected part of the family and the society, despite my obvious lack of certain bodily skills, and by using my own knowledge.

On being the Other and finding one’s place

The issue of ‘otherness’ and being an ‘outsider’ has been widely discussed in anthropological literature over the last decades. The anthropologist is not as neutral and objective as sometimes presented, and is not perceived as a ‘blank sheet’ by the people whom he or she meet during fieldwork (Schramm 2005:173). The phrases ‘other’ and ‘outsider’ has to be used wisely and with great caution, as the ‘outsider’ is always part of and within a greater historical-political system, and is not standing outside, but in “a definite relation with the Other of the study”, as stated by Abu-Lughod (Abu-Lughod 1991:141). Trouillot would agree with Abu-Lughod, and argues that “[t]here is no Other, but multitudes of others who are all others for different reasons, in spite of totalizing narratives”(1991:39). If we are to follow Trouillot and Abu-Lughod, the people of study are never ‘the other’, but the anthropologist could be an Other relative to the people of study.

As for me, I learned a great deal on ‘being the other’ as a white, young woman living in a small town in Tanzania. To begin with, I was quite concerned about my own positionality, and while I was trying to objectivate the subject of objectivation, that would say myself (Bourdieu 2003:282), the people of Pangani were trying to understand who I was and who I was relative to them. On one occasion, I was even accused of being a Freemason, because what could I possibly be doing there, if I was not a volunteer, not a tourist and not working in the nearby resorts? We will throughout this thesis explore how the concept of otherness was quite central in Pangani, not in regard to the ethnographer, but in the meeting between different social groups and their way of relating to each other.

In the beginning of my fieldwork I was struggling quite hard to become ‘one of them’. I wanted to show people I could do the same things as they did, be a part of the family and integrate in the society. I remembered the text by Katharina Schramm (2005), about her experiences as a white, young woman in Ghana, and I knew I was also carrying my cultural luggage, consisting not only of my physical appearance, but behind this, symbols of the culture and society I came from, including my culture’s values and history. It was sometimes hard to escape some people’s stereotypical impression of ‘Westerners’ as “someone rich who likes to sit inside and read books while other people prepare his food and wash his clothes”⁶, though I tried to face these stereotypical impressions by proving them wrong. I had to take into consideration that the way people saw me was affecting the way they behaved around me, what they chose to tell me, and where I was welcome. Being ‘the other’ in a small-town society also resulted in the fact that everybody knew what I was doing at all times and who I spent my time with. As Coffey (1999:23), I would not necessarily consider “cultivating strangeness” an advantage, as I on several occasions was met with skepticism and mistrust. Still, I felt that because I was perceived as an outsider, people were more willing to share some thoughts and experiences with me, maybe to a higher extent than with a local asking the same questions. Sometimes, being an outsider might allow you into arenas you otherwise would not be able to enter, and might be a unique way of getting information. As Berreman (2012:156) states in his famous “Behind Many Masks”, he inhabited the role as a confidant during his fieldwork among the rather sceptical Paharis in Sirkanda, and was in this way able to gain a better insight into their lives. This was something I experienced on several occasions too, when my informants after some time told me stories or ideas that would not necessarily be well perceived by the rest of the community, but which they felt they could share with a foreign anthropologist seemingly oblivious and somehow indifferent to the cultural norms.

As being someone from outside of the community, oblivious to norms, language and other skills, one might also preferably take upon a role as a child (Briggs 2008). I found myself being taught how to dress, eat and talk, but I also gained interesting information when the persons with whom I spoke described in detail how they practiced their traditions and why. I could ask the ignorant questions nobody else would ask, and surprisingly often this resulted in new information and a discussion among those with whom I spoke. I was often told what was seen as ‘proper’ behavior, and even more frequently what was seen as ‘not proper’ behavior. In

⁶ This was a local woman in Pangani’s description of Western people.

this way I quickly understood what most people perceived as good moral behavior, especially in regard to religious practice.

Being perceived as an outsider contributed in creating my social network. After the first weeks in the field, I suddenly found myself spending most of my time with people who could be characterized as outsiders in the society. After some time, I found it wise to spend most of my time with the women, and the network of women who wanted to be my friends, informants or assist me in my research suddenly grew. Still, many of these women could be characterized as ‘outsiders’, either because they had recently moved to Pangani from elsewhere in Tanzania or because they had stories and reasons for not feeling like absolute parts of the community. As being an ‘other’, I was able to get in touch with these women, and they again became my gateway into the society and a world of knowledge, norms and stories.

In the aftermath of my fieldwork, I realize that the thought of an anthropologist expecting to become a fully accepted member of the society just by staying there for some months, is both unlikely and very self-centered. Still, it became important for me during my fieldwork, and I also realize that it was a good motivation for learning and understanding as much as possible. As time passed in Pangani, I did not feel as ‘other’ as I had done when I arrived, but I was still frustrated by the way I was sometimes treated, and I felt like a target of gossip and glaring. One day, I told one of my friends and informants Fatuma about my frustrations. It turned out that she had the exact same experiences. After this I started opening up to the people I spoke with. I told them personal stories of how I had been treated or talked to, or things I found hard to relate to especially as a woman in Pangani. This opened a new door into the lives of several of Pangani’s people, and I realized I had been blinded by thoughts of being ‘the other’ and by ‘carrying my cultural luggage’, to realize that many of my experiences were also experiences lived by local people.

Secrecy and the importance of time

Sharon was one of my best friends in Pangani. She mostly preferred staying at home, but we would often walk through town on different errands or to visit somebody. Every time we walked somewhere Sharon took a new shortcut. “Do you know this shortcut?” she would ask me, always pleased when I responded the negative. We would walk on mud paths between houses, balanced on sticks over small streams of dirty water and waste, and walk the longer routes through people’s out-door kitchens, only to end up in the same road we left. I would make fun

of Sharon, calling her the ‘Shortcut Master’, but she would just laugh and continued to show me new shortcuts. It was not until the end of my fieldwork I realized why Sharon had taken all these shortcuts. She had moved to a nearby city to go to school, and when she came back one weekend she told me why she did not like Pangani. It was mostly because of the gossip; you could not walk anywhere without people gossiping about you. That was when I understood that Sharon was not taking shortcuts, but by taking the alternative routes she actively avoided being a target of gossip.

Sharon’s case is far from unique. Several of my main informants and friends took different measures to avoid the main areas of gossip in town. Not until the end of my stay, I realized how the issue of gossip in Pangani was affecting how I could conduct my fieldwork. Since the day I arrived, I had been having the feeling that some people were quite reluctant to speak to me, but I never really understood why. On one of my last days in Pangani, I asked one of my informants, Ali, who was working as a traditional healer, if he and his brothers could help me take some pictures in town. They told me they were happy to do it, but that I could not come. I was both surprised and disappointed, and demanded an explanation. Ali told me that since I had been so honest and sharing my problems with them, they would be honest with me. He explained that if I was seen with them, people would start gossiping about them being rich. This would not only give the wrong impression, it would also hurt his reputation as a traditional healer as people would think he cared too much about money. In the end, we agreed to meet at 5.30 in the morning, before the town came to life, so we could take our pictures without harming Ali’s reputation and business.

These two incidents, among others, led me in to the field of secrecy, which we will see was an important aspect of social life in Pangani that will be dealt with later in this thesis. The incidents also made me realize the importance of staying in the field for a longer period of time. It took me several months to comprehend the significant role that gossip, reputation and secrecy played in town, and how this was essential in understanding people’s actions, social relations between different people, and how it was affecting how people behaved around me.

Lying and looking for problems

During my fieldwork, I ran into several challenges. Some were expected, as the ones discussed earlier on interpreting language and cultural norms and being a young, white woman. Other challenges came as a surprise. One of the first things I noticed after entering the field, was how

easy it was to ‘look for’ certain answers. If you search well enough, you are most likely to find something that supports your theory. The research can be manipulated in this mostly unconscious way, by formulating questions, talking to certain people, and going certain places which are more likely to give you the information to support your theories and expectations. This is much according to the issues of objectivation as discussed by Bourdieu (2003), as our cultural as well as scholarly background affects our way of thinking, acting and interpreting. In the middle of my fieldwork I discovered, by coincidence, that one of my key informants, Melinda, had been giving me a good deal of false information on different issues. Melinda converted from Islam to Christianity some years back. She told me how she always wanted to study and become a teacher, but how her family had refused her to go to school. Then after converting to Christianity and marrying a Christian man, he and his family had encouraged her to study and had paid for her education. This explanation supported both my assumptions and theories I had previously read on educational differences between Muslims and Christians, stating the latter to be better educated in the Tanzanian community (Bondarenko 2004). It later turned out that a British volunteer had encouraged and payed for Melinda’s entire education, and that her current husband and family had not contributed with a single shilling. So why would Melinda lie to me about this fact? First of all, Melinda had been telling me exactly what I wanted to hear, and I had probably also asked questions leading her to the information I was looking for. Also, Melinda was interested in putting her new family in a good light and saw all the good things that happened to her after she converted to Christianity as results of being in a Christian community. This incidence taught me to become more aware of how I formulated my questions and how my preconceived assumptions somehow affected not only my interpretation of the answer, but also my informant’s answer. As the ethnographer might become biased by her nearest informants, and they by the ethnographer, it is central to realize that ethnographic representations are partial, but also positioned truths (Abu-Lughod 1991:142). This also rose my awareness to be less focused on the fact that people were lying, and rather focus on *why* they were lying, which is mostly as interesting as the truth itself.

I was not fully prepared on the level of resistance I would meet in the field. While some people were happy to speak to me, others were more reluctant and met me with a great deal of skepticism. For quite some time I was struggling with getting the information I wanted, I felt like my host family never told me what was going on, and my contacts at the Cultural and Tourism Office would only put me in touch with certain people in town. I came to realize that my subject of study was rather unpopular among many people with whom I spoke. On several

occasions, I was advised to study something else. Mr. Kabaka at the Culture and Tourism Office, wanted me to study the traditional Muslim culture in Pangani instead, and recommended me not to talk to the different Christian groups in town, since these were not traditionally a part of the coastal culture. My neighbor, a devote Muslim and self-claimed Islamic scholar, told me I was not at all suited to study religiosity in Pangani, especially not as a woman. He became quite angry, and told me it was so typical that Western academics, too young and without the proper experience, came to Africa to look for social problems and conflicts. He told me I would never be able to find any real answers, because people would just lie to me. Another incident happened when I was walking home from a meeting with one of my informants. A girl and a boy sitting in an office called me in. They knew my name and started asking me about my research. I told them a bit in my broken Swahili, before I realized they already knew what I was studying. “So have you found any problems yet?” the girl asked me, in a rather demanding tone. I tried to explain to them that I was not at all looking for social problems in Pangani, I was interested in how people from so many different religious groups could interact and live peacefully and naturally together, while in countries as Kenya one would find separation and conflicts between different religious groups. “Oh, well, that is better. Because you know, we don’t have any problems here”, the boy said, and they both seemed happier and let me go, with an invitation to drop by the next time I passed the office.

This phrase though, kept entering my field notes; “There is no problem here”. Every time I asked people about religious life in Tanzania, the immediate response was always the same; that the Nation’s father, Julius Nyerere, created one unified nation of brothers and sisters, erased tribalism and gathered people through introducing Swahili as the national language. People in Tanzania are raised up on the thought of brotherhood, community and peace, and their answer when you ask about these things comes as naturally as where they come from. After some time, I started interpreting what people told me in a different way, and I learned to ask questions a bit differently. If I first asked about the general situation in Tanzania, the response would usually be as stated above. Then, if I started asking more personal questions, regarding people’s family situation and close friends, the answer would have a quite different character. People would tell me about family members being forced out of the family, siblings losing their right to inherit and women being physically and mentally abused after running off with someone seen as unsuitable to marry. A reason for this, will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Although some issues were more difficult to get information on, there were other issues people were more than happy to discuss with me. These were for example issues regarding spirit possessions, traditional healers, religious traditions and legends. To recognize what people want and do not want to talk about, is also to recognize certain social truths, and thus a process towards understanding a community.

Ethical considerations

When doing fieldwork among people in their everyday life, there is a lot take into consideration regarding ethics. This research project has been approved by the NSD⁷ and COSTECH⁸, and all informants and participants have been informed about the research project and anonymized. All names of people in this thesis are pseudonyms. The issue of anonymization has raised some challenges as I want to conceal my informants' identities without losing important aspects of their personal characteristics and life-stories in the process, however this anonymization is essential because of the rather small size of the town in which I did my fieldwork. As some of my informants also became my friends, the blurred boundaries between researcher and friend sometimes raised issues. How could my informants know if I was talking to them as a friend, or if I did it out of my own academic interest? Usually, I would solve this by taking my notebook and ask if I could make some notes on what we were discussing, something that was always accepted. Certain stories have been disregarded due to my own ambivalence on if it would be ethically correct to include in the study. Faith and religiosity are personal fields, and I do not intend to focus on single individuals' personal beliefs in themselves, but rather on the link between the field of people's religious life, and the bigger landscape consisting of social and religious discourses, political changes and the dynamics of time.

According to Geertz has the role of anthropologists been "pulling up rugs" and "upsetting tea tables" (2001:64), but this has to be done wisely. I wish not to pull up rugs were there are none, or upset tea tables just to break some cups, but anthropologists have an important ethical responsibility of giving a voice to those who otherwise would not be heard. I will do my best to present what people with whom I spoke told me without miscommunicating what they wished to say, without taking it out of context, drawing on stereotypes and generalizations, and with their best interest in mind.

⁷ Norsk senter for forskningsdata

⁸ Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology

Chapter 3:

Forming boundaries of social identity. Two views on Pangani

The first time I met Joyce was on the bus from Pangani to Tanga. “Are you stuck here, too?” she asked me, and sighed. Joyce was a woman in her early thirties. She was originally from the Kilimanjaro area, but had a year back been sent by the government to work in the District Office in Pangani. The second time I met Joyce was in a local restaurant run by some Catholic nuns. Joyce had just returned from Tanga where she had applied for a transfer. “I want to move to Tanga. I really don’t like Pangani. And the water is so bad. I’m allergic to it”. She also did not like the job: “There is no money here in Pangani. I’m a real estate agent, but there is nothing to do here. People do not afford buying land or houses”. Joyce also complained about her social life: “There are only Muslims here in Pangani. There must be 99.5 per cent Muslims. We are only about 200 in my church, and I think the Roman-Catholics are normally the biggest group in Tanzania”. I asked if that was another reason why she wanted to move to Tanga. “Yes, of course”, she said. Joyce often called in sick from work, and frequently ‘ran away’ to Dar es Salaam or Tanga without proper excuse, and seemed careless that this could get her sacked. After our meeting, Joyce drove back home in her husband’s car with dark-tinted windows. She preferred driving through town, she said, so she could avoid the crowded streets, glares and dirt.

This first ethnographic chapter will investigate the complex environment in which Pangani as a society is set. First, it will turn to the view of the many migrant workers in town, and discuss how people from the outside might look at the town and its people, and what stereotypes are used in this meeting. As we shall see such stereotypes are mostly negative, and Pangani and its people appear as a negative ‘Other’. Secondly, the chapter will turn to the local people’s perspectives on their own town. Here we shall see a common emphasis on togetherness, a togetherness that over time seemed to disappear. What appeared were local stereotypes focused on internal boundaries in the town, some of which were related to the views held by outsiders, but they were also linked to a series of other factors that I shall discuss further throughout the thesis. In this chapter we will see the impact of history, the role of well-educated migrants, and the influence of governmental policies and education. We will also see global

factors entering the picture, particularly linked to what can be labelled a ‘global Islam’. I would argue that both the external and the internal view of Pangani that I have pointed at are important for understanding current changes in the town’s social field. A continuing pressure for defining social boundaries will be explored, and we shall see that in this process, dynamics in the religious field emerge as important, particularly the issue of what is seen as ‘proper’ religious practices.

The migrant workers of Pangani: A view from outside

Joyce’s attitudes as presented above, were common among many of Pangani’s migrant workers. It was especially noticeable among the employees in the District Office, whom I was lucky to have several meetings with. Joyce had arranged so I could come and spend a day with her at work, and one morning I set out to *Ofisi ya ardhi na maliasili* (Lands and Natural Resources Office). The office was in a part of town where most of the governmental offices were based, as well as the local hospital and the police station. Most of the offices were located in former colonial buildings, somehow seeming to be on the limit of giving in to the ravages of time. During my day at the District Office, I did not meet a single employee from Pangani. The number of Christians surpassed the number of Muslims, and women were in a clear minority. One of the departments I visited, had 58 employees. Out of these were only ten women, and out of the ten women were only three Muslims. None of these 58 employees were from Pangani. The head of the department was a Christian man from Arusha, and the head of the Administrative Department was a Christian woman, also from Arusha.

Joyce shared her office with two other women. Halima was a Muslim woman from Tanga, and Tracy was a Christian woman from Dar es Salaam. Joyce was wearing a beautiful tailor made dress, golden earrings and a golden necklace. The other women also wore make-up and had fashionable, Western styled clothes. None of the women liked working in Pangani, and Joyce explained that all of them had been placed here by the government after applying for a general job within the field of their studies. The women told me that they did not have any friends in town, and mostly spent time with fellow migrants.

Joyce: Since I came here I did not make any friends from Pangani. Tracy too, and she has been here for one year. We try to look for places to live, where we don’t have to live with local people. [Joyce giggles] We call them “the local people”...

Idunn: So you look for places to stay away from the locals?

J: Yeah, because of the local cultures, we try to stay away. They live in *uswahilini*. They have the local dances and *taarab* music. The Swahili live in areas with a lot of noise and disturbance. Even the kids living in *uswahilini* are dirty.

I: What do people in other parts of Tanzania say about Pangani?

J: People still think you can find *majini* and *mashetani* here. They think it is still a 'Devil town'! All of Tanzania is saying that Pangani is a Devil town!

Halima suddenly laughed and pointed at Joyce, exclaiming that “They [the Chagga]⁹ have tribalism!” Halima explained that the Chagga always found problems everywhere, but agreed with Joyce on some of the issues. Halima was also planning to get a transfer, and said that she travelled from Tanga every day because she did not want to live in Pangani:

I don't like Pangani. I come from Tanga every day. After one year I will make sure that the process of transfer is done. This is not a good life for us to live. The only thing people know to do is talk about others.

At this time, a young man called Noah entered the office. Noah was from Moshi and worked as an electrical engineer in the Department of Water. “Come and tell us how few local friends you have, Noah”, Joyce laughed. Noah explained that he had lived in Pangani for three years, but that he had only two or three local friends. Noah also expressed difficulties with living in Pangani, although his attitude was more positive than that of the women:

At first, I did not like it. The place sucks. Now I like it a little more, compared to the moment I arrived. [...] You have been to Dar, right? Here it is so different. It is hard to blend in, in fact. It is easier to make friends here that are not from Pangani. [...] It is hard to be a Christian with the big percentage being Muslim. When I arrived I found the big population of Muslims, I found it hard to establish myself as a Christian. After a while, I found some Christian friends and managed to settle. It is not bad to be a Christian, but it would be easier to be a Muslim.

Joyce and her three colleagues were not happy with the governmental employment policy of locating its workers away from their home towns. However, two other employees, Lisa and Joshua, at the Department of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries, explained what they saw as positive effects of the system:

⁹ Tribe from the Kilimanjaro area

The advantage is that people from different places have different cultures, and you can learn and teach each other. We are based on professionalism. We are not biased. It does not matter what religion you come from. We all believe we are one family.

Before I left the office that day, I made a comment on how few women from Pangani that worked in the office, and wondered if it was because they were repositioned in other towns. Halima shook her head, and said it was not because they were located elsewhere:

H: It's because they don't have enough education. They also don't want to bother themselves with education. Most of the coastal women they feel they should stay at home, cooking, taking care of the children. Social interaction with other people is limited, this is another issue.

J: Most of them have not gone to school. [...] They have education on Islamic law, Quran studies... But you cannot get employment with this.

H: Many of them don't have the motivation. Also because of their local beliefs, that men are more suited to work than women.

Looking at the previous dialogues, it becomes clear that there is a division between the local people of Pangani and the migrants coming to work in town. Most of the educated people living in Pangani, were actually not from Pangani, and often came from culturally distant areas in the highlands. Many of them were Christians, while the majority of the local population were Muslims. Similarly, the majority of the workers in the hospital came from elsewhere, and none of the doctors were from town. During my time in Pangani, I met a couple of higher educated locals, but every single one of them had moved to Tanga, Dar es Salaam or Zanzibar with their businesses. In this way, the migrants in Pangani formed an 'educated elite'. This 'educated elite' further stood out from the locals in their way of dressing and acting, and also in their way of locating themselves in and around town. As Joyce explained, she lived outside of town, distancing herself physically and mentally from the local people. Also when in town, she preferred to distance herself behind the dark-tinted windows of a car. The same was for Halima, who choose to live in Tanga. Within town, there was also a material division between the local people and the migrant workers, as the local restaurants and bars were mostly visited by the latter. The local population commonly bought food in the streets at night, where local women had prepared beans, grilled meat and assortments of bread. The more established restaurants were expensive and therefore excluded many locals, although there were also cheaper restaurants locals would go to, that the migrant workers did not visit. In the beginning of my

fieldwork, I sometimes met up with my local informants in bars or restaurants, but I soon realized that most of them had never been to these places before.

Furthermore, the migrant workers stood out in their way of practicing religion. They brought with them ideas and knowledge, which in the meeting with local ideas and knowledge did not always correspond. Joyce often referred to the ‘coastal people’, ‘the Swahili’ and ‘the locals’ in a negative sense. She made fun of Pangani as a ‘Devil town’, and said she felt bad for all the children who had to wear *hirizi*, protective amulets against witchcraft. She characterized the area as traditional and backwards, and she even saw the water as impure. Joyce, Tracy and Noah were concerned about being a Christian minority, and mostly spent time with other Christians. Joyce and Tracy were not happy with their church in Pangani either, and saw it as too influenced by ‘the Swahili’. I found a similar attitude among several Muslim migrants in town. These were often higher educated Muslims who had taken a clear stand in the debate on what they saw as ‘proper Muslim behavior’, and were among those who strongly condemned the practices of the traditional healers and different traditional rituals. This will be explored further in the following chapters.

TANU’s policies on unification are still present in Tanzania’s political reforms, and governmental workers are frequently placed in towns and villages far from their homes to fulfill their duties. During the time of Nyerere, this strategy was part of the nationalization process in Tanzania, intending to nationalize the Swahili language and abolish tribalism (Iliffe 1979). Today, it is also arguably a means of preventing corruption and unifying the nation’s diverse population. However, as the example of Pangani illustrates, the governmental policies intending to avoid social problems, were also creating social challenges. Stereotypes are reproduced and differences are often highlighted in the meeting between the local people of Pangani and the transferred governmental employees. The fact that education and welfare is not equally distributed across the population is further emphasized in this meeting. When Joyce refused to participate in the local social life in Pangani, called in sick and frequently ‘ran away’ from work, she actively resisted the governmental policies, emphasizing materially with her absence that she would not be a part of the local discourse.

Groups, boundaries and stereotypes

Fredrik Barth argues that groups and categories are created and defined precisely in their meeting with others, and that these social relations are maintained by their boundaries (Barth

1969). The process of identifying ‘us’ is thus dependent on the construction of a ‘they’ (Jenkins 2008:59). The boundary that separates social groups is a social construction which is constantly changing and which’s importance varies over time (Hylland Eriksen 2002:38). In his earlier work, Barth saw ethnicity as the main organizing factor in the creation of identity¹⁰. However, he later developed a new approach to group identity in his book on Sohari (1983), seeing that ethnicity was not the primary organizing factor among the Sohari. Barth’s new approach focused on cultural pluralism and complexity, and saw it as useful to go down to the individual level and look at actors’ social relationships on this level. Barth saw identity as formed within large-scale systems (1983:12), much according to what Grønhaug discusses from Herat (1978). Grønhaug’s (1978) thinking on scale and structural complexity can therefore be useful as a supplementary to Barth when approaching identity and groups, and help see how a person can be part of social groups in several fields, and have different roles accordingly. Within the large-scale systems, Barth found different ‘dimensions’ of social and cultural diversity that should be considered. Among the Sohari, these were categories such as gender, generations, class, occupation, religion and location (e.g. townfolk and country folk) (Barth 1983:81–82).

In the case of Pangani, I would argue that many of the elements mentioned by Barth were just as important factors for identification as ethnicity. We have seen that Joyce and the governmental workers saw religion, class and education as determining factors, at the same time as location was relevant in their case due to their non-local origin. Ethnicity and tribes were seldom discussed or referred to among most people. As argued, the boundaries separating social groups are social constructions in a constant process of change, and these boundaries become especially visible in the meeting between different groups. By physically distancing themselves from the local life and people in Pangani, many of the migrant workers like Joyce, Tracy and Halima defined themselves in relation to the locals. They furthermore pulled on stereotypes to highlight the boundaries. The stereotype of local ‘Swahili culture’ characterized by unemployment, poverty and tradition, was put up against the culture of the people in the highlands, which Joyce described as hard working, educated, rich and modern. Joyce, Tracy and Noah clearly identified themselves as Christians (more precisely Roman-Catholics),

¹⁰ According to Barth, an ethnic group is to be understood as a population which: 1) is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, 2) realized in overt unity in cultural forms, 3) makes up a field of communication and interaction, has a membership which identifies itself, 4) and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969:10–11).

distancing themselves from the local Muslims. Halima also distanced herself from Pangani, describing the nearby city of Tanga as more developed and suited for living ‘a good life’.

According to Hylland Eriksen, stereotyping is a concept referring to “the creation and consistent application of standardized notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a group” (2002:23–24). Stereotypes are typically found in societies with power differences, and are held by both dominating and dominated groups. The stereotypes given by others are often different from the stereotypes of the self, the latter typically more positive (Hylland Eriksen 2002:24). External definitions, by ‘they’ on ‘us’, also play a significant role on the internal definition (Jenkins 2008:59). This is apparent in the case of Pangani, where a widespread trend was referring to one’s own negative stereotype and blaming the Swahili culture if something was not going well. This notion of ‘blaming Swahili culture’ was also noted by Caplan in her studies on Pemba (Caplan 2009:226). Further, stereotypes can justify groups’ different privileges and access to resources (Hylland Eriksen 2002:25). As showed above, Joyce and the office workers, much privileged in the society with their lucrative jobs, cars and education, drew on the Swahili stereotype when explaining why there were no local women working in the governmental offices and other locals inhabiting their positions. Thus, these stereotypes contributed to a process of dichotomization, and enforced an ‘Us-Them’ kind of relationship between the migrants and the locals in Pangani.

Historical memories of difference

To explore the group relationships and stereotyping on a deeper level, it can be necessary to look at some historical factors that have contributed to their creation. The dichotomization between inland and coastal Tanzania made by the governmental workers from the Kilimanjaro area, might be better understood looking at the area’s history. The coastal area of Tanzania has distinguished itself from the inland with its religion and culture for centuries. In the 18th century the coastal culture was highly diverse, but its ideal was ‘Arabness’ (Ilfie 1979:38). Many Omanis settled in the coastal region, also in the small coastal town of Pangani. During the Omanis and the colonial period huge amounts of slaves were brought from inland to the growing plantations in the coastal region (Glassman 1995). For people in the inland, the coastal area might therefore have become a place of Muslims, Arabs and slave trade, already at this time creating an area of the ‘Other’. The coastal area was mainly Muslim at the time when the first missionaries came to Tanzania, and the Christianization project of the colonial power mainly focused on the inland areas. Missions and Christianity had strong links to the colonial

state, and Christian churches played a huge role in education and politics. In 1961, Christian churches controlled 75 per cent of primary schools and 56 per cent in secondary schools, and thereby also educated many of the nation's future leaders like Nyerere (Iliffe 1979:546). This again resulted in an increased difference in the educational level, which further might have contributed to creating differences between inland and coast. Christianity was long perceived as the religion of modernity by the country's rulers, contributing further to a dichotomization between Islam and Christianity, and thus inland and coast (Iliffe 1979:543–552). The Kilimanjaro area where Joyce, Tracy and Noah were from, had a high number of missionaries, and as we have seen, Joyce described people in the Kilimanjaro area as educated, in contrast to what she saw as a mostly uneducated local population in Pangani. It has further been argued that British conceptions of African tribes constructed imagined tribes into real ones in Tanzania, and it was not until the 1960s that anthropologists left the image that precolonial Africa had been characterized by a chaotic relationship between hostile tribes, and recognized that it on the contrary had been characterized by interaction, intermarriage, trade and assimilation (Rekdal 1999:464). In this regard, we see how differences, groups and stereotypes are created in dynamic and historical processes of meetings, interaction, domination and change.

So far, the chapter has illustrated how the migrant workers in Pangani distanced themselves from the local population, and has explored some historical reasons on how social boundaries might have been shaped, created and renewed. We will now turn to the local people's perspectives, and investigate how identity, groups and boundaries are created, maintained and renewed within the local population, and explore how they perceive others and identify themselves. Also here we see the use of stereotypes, but the content of the stereotypes and thus what they signify is different. They belong to different discourses than what we see in the cases of the migrants from outside.



Unemployment among local women in Pangani is a big issue.

Understanding themselves: A view from inside Pangani

We have already explored some historical factors that might have been part of the process in which stereotypes, identity and boundaries are created and evolved. However, the local population in Pangani also have their historical memories, which describe how differences have been created within the local community. Before we go further, we will turn to some tales that illustrate how boundaries and groups have been formed historically in Pangani. The town's older generation still remembered the time before independence, and an old, local man I spoke to, called Mzee, described how the Arabs had enforced differences within the local population:

At that time [before independence] there was so much separation between Arabs and Africans. They stayed separately, and there were certain places for Arabs the Africans could not go. That time, the missionaries were here, but they had no power, because most people believed in Islam. Sometimes, the Arabs would kill the missionaries, so they could not spread their religion. This was in 1911. There are graves from the missionaries next to the hospital. [...] [Around] 1914, there were two main tribes in Pangani, Bondei and Zigua. Zigua were mostly Muslims, and Bondei mostly Christian. The Arabs kept these separated. Today they mix more, this separation was before. All this was before the independence. Zigua and Bondei wanted to intermarry, but the Arabs split people, and brought tribalism. Before the Arabs came they used to marry. After

independence they came together. Now there are no real Arabs, only mix. The change up to this time, is that people live together now.

My host grandmother, Bibi, also told me some stories of how she remembered Pangani. She said it had been horrible there before independence, and claimed that she had seen slaves being taken until the time of Nyerere:

I saw many Arabs taking slaves here. If you went against them, they would kill you and throw you in the water. I saw Arabs kill slaves because they went against them or did mistakes. They took them to Pangadeco [the harbor area], slit their throat and threw them in the water. If you didn't follow Sharia they called you *mshenzi* [barbarian/savage].

My host sister was with us at this time, and contributed to Bibi's story on how others had come to Pangani and formed the local life:

You know, the Portuguese destroyed African religion, medicine, separated families. When the Arabs and the Europeans came, they introduces slaves. The agriculture needed slaves. They took land by force. They saw Africans as ignorant and took their land and exploited the land. There was a big disunity before independence. *Mwalimu* Nyerere brought unity.

The common factor in these local stories, is the perception of an earlier time of togetherness, until someone, primarily Arabs, from the outside interfered and separated groups and brought disunity, and finally how this changed and harmony was reestablished. This stress on harmony, we shall see, is a common perception in Pangani, and needs to be explored further.

Underplaying differences and emphasizing togetherness

A common tale in Pangani was the tale of togetherness. The phrases "there are no problems here", and "we are all brothers and sisters" were commonly uttered. People generally stressed togetherness, and social as well as political problems were seldom discussed openly. There seemed to be an agreement, some kind of invisible contract, between the nation and the people, that differences were to remain unspoken, thus undermining variations and potential conflicts. On one occasion, I was having an interview with an older man in his house, and casually asked him in Swahili if he had noticed any change in the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Pangani during the last decades. The man's wife, who had been cleaning in the room next door, pretending to be uninterested in the conversation, suddenly entered the room and

interrupted her husband: “Tuko pamoja! [We are together!]”, she exclaimed. “Everything is just fine”. She sat down and did not leave the room again. Most locals with whom I spoke were not much concerned with different religious groupings, in contrast to the view of the governmental employees presented above. I once asked two Muslim brothers what ‘branch’ within Islam they belonged to, were they Shi’a or Sunni? One of them looked at me strangely: “What do you mean? We are just Muslims”. However, as we shall see, the everyday life in town was highly affected by differences; between and within religious groups, among locals and non-locals, educated and uneducated, and between older and younger generations.

The notion of togetherness and the subsequent discovery of internal processes of differentiation reminds me of Eldar Bråten’s case from Batasan in Java (1999). Bråten found a similar trend in the village of Batasan, where there was a consensus that ‘all are genuine Muslims’. The struggle to maintain social harmony thus concealed variation and differences among the Muslims in Batasan, and different actions were taken to preserve the agreement that all were ‘true Muslims’. In Bråten’s case, certain religious practices were privatized, such as those related to spirits, people accustomed their behavior according to the social context they were in, and expressed their identity in ways that could be interpreted in several ways (Bråten 1999:101).

All of these actions were also present in Pangani, although there the homogeneity was also extended beyond the community of Muslims. In Pangani it seemed important to present everybody as equals and part of the same ‘us’, not regarding religious affiliation and ethnicity. But in general, the processes studied by Eldar Bråten were also at work in the town. Religious practices in Pangani, usually related to spirits, ancestor worship or traditional healing, were often privatized, or performed in secrecy. People were highly affected by the contextual situation they were in, and adjusted their behavior and identity much according to context and setting. Further, people often expressed themselves in ways that could be interpreted in different ways. For instance, traditional healers frequently referred to the Quran in their practices, legitimating their practices through the same discourse often used to present their critique. This field of secrecy will be explored on a deeper level in Chapter Four.

Defining oneself in relation to others

As we have seen, the migrant workers in Pangani drew on stereotypes and dichotomies to define themselves in the social scene. However, an Us-Them relationship also existed within the local

population in Pangani, a relationship that become especially apparent in times of change and conflict. Some Muslims with whom I spoke, could not disagree more with the previous statement of the Muslim brothers that ‘we are just Muslims’. A typical classification was that of ‘proper Muslim’ or ‘not proper Muslim’, ‘true believer’ or ‘not true believer’. Fatuma was a woman in her thirties who I spent a great deal of time with during my fieldwork. She was a Muslim originally from north of Pangani, but had moved to the town after she married a local man called Abu Bakr. Fatuma was Abu Bakr’s third wife. When describing herself, Fatuma often used the term ‘true believer’. Yet, she incorporated herself in the Swahili stereotype, perceiving herself as somehow ignorant when it came to Islamic knowledge: “You know, we only practice, but we don’t have any schooling in Islam”. Because of this she often called in someone from the street she knew had studied the Quran, or called her husband when we discussed questions on Islam. Most of these ‘experts’ Fatuma knew, were critical to other Muslim groups, especially towards Shi’a.

One warm afternoon we had a discussion outside Fatuma’s house. “The Shi’a are different”, Fatuma and her husband, Abu Bakr, explained.

Abu Bakr: They are the only one who have their own mosque where only Shi’a go. The other groups can go freely to each other’s mosques. [...] The Shi’as do not practice Islam in the correct way. First of all, they pray only three times a day. They also put Ali higher than Muhammad.

Idunn: Why are there so many Shi’a in Pangani?

AB: There used to be many, but now they are not [...]

Fatuma: Many people joined the Shi’a because of the Islamic Help. They gave *buibuis* to the girls, food... When they realize the Shi’as are against Muslim religion, they leave.

I: It does not seem like you like them that much?

F: Hatupendi [we do not like]. They are teaching against Islam.

An Islamic scholar in his forties also joined in on the discussion. He expressed why he did not approve on Shi’a either: “Shi’a are divided in two groups, one for black people, the Bilal Muslim Mission, and Koja, for Indians and Arabs. The Shi’a separate into races!”

This attitude towards Shi’a is not something unique for Pangani, but is part of a greater historical dispute and the longest lasting split in Islam, dating back to the time shortly after the death of Muhammad (Sedgwick 2006:172). In this way, the attitude found in Pangani represents global Islamic (and political) discourses’ influence on Pangani’s Muslims, who are indeed

highly affected by the outer world. Among Muslims in Tanzania, there is a perception that countries in South Asia and Arabia have a ‘higher’ Islamic culture and that their practicing of Islam is ‘purer’ (Parkin 2014; Larsen 2014). During my time on Zanzibar I noticed that many Muslims looked towards Saudi Arabia and aspired to practice Islam like they did there. It was much the same for Tanga and Pangani, although they also looked to Zanzibar. Some Muslims in Pangani, who were less conservative, sometimes complained to me that some of Pangani’s Muslims wanted Pangani to become a mini-Zanzibar. In Zanzibar, some of my more liberal friends complained further that the old generation and many conservative Muslims wanted Zanzibar to separate from the mainland and become an Islamic state.



‘Islamic Help’ had monthly distributions of food in Pangani, but was often blamed by local Muslims for promoting Shi’a Islam.

During Ramadan there was an ongoing discussion between different Muslim groups whether they should begin the fast on the day of the crescent of the moon in Saudi Arabia, or according to the official dates of BAKWATA¹¹. On the 5th of June one of my informants, a young man named Modi, who was working in a nearby resort, eased his frustration on this: “[...] only the non- real Muslims, the Shi’a and the Answari¹², start tomorrow. They are not

¹¹ The National Muslim Council in Tanzania

¹² Probably a local version of ‘Ahmadi’

Muslims, they follow some new rules that are not in the Quran. The real Ramadan starts the 7th". The day after he was just as frustrated: "Shi'a and Answari don't follow Saudi Arabia. They start Ramadan today, while [we] the Sunni start tomorrow"¹³. Modi's hostile attitude against Shi'a and Answari shows how he defined himself as a 'good Muslim' in relation to what he saw as 'non-real Muslims'. He also had an attitude towards Saudi Arabian practicing of Islam as more correct, and in this way defined his identity in relation to Saudi Arabia.

Modi, Fatuma and her husband, as well as the governmental workers in the previous section, all identified themselves in relation to others. This processes of dichotomizing largely pointed towards religious factors such as Muslim/Christian, Shi'a/Sunni, believer/non-believer, but was also directed towards location, constructing a dichotomous relationship between inland Tanzania and the Swahili coastal area, or Tanzania, with its 'African Islam', and Arabia, with its 'pure' Islam. Ethnicity was not the main identifying element, and factors such as education, class, clothing and appearance were also important parts of the process of constructing identity, much according to what Barth found among the Sohari (1983).

I would further argue that in the case of Pangani, what was conceived as important identification factors was highly contextual. People emphasized different factors according to who they wanted to relate to, or rather who they not wanted to relate to, in a given situation or context. The unity and the 'us' of the nation was especially stressed in comparison to neighboring counties, often described as less peaceful and harmonic than Tanzania. In other contexts was the 'us' of Africans stressed, for instance in contrast to Arabs. Pangani was also sometimes contrasted to Tanga as more peaceful, especially during a period of increased violence in Tanga. This will be explored further in Chapter Four. The complexity of roles and 'contextual identities' were even more visible on the individual level, and we can take into consideration Barth's arguments that it is always important to look at the level of individual actors in search of the social structure (1983:247). Fatuma, for instance, sometimes identified herself with other Sunni Muslims, separating herself from Shi'a Muslims, as illustrated above. This happened mostly when she was with other Muslims. Sometimes, she referred to a Muslim 'us' and a Christian 'them', but on other occasions, like when we spent time with her Christian neighbor, she stressed the togetherness of Muslims and Christians, and said that they were all one, since their God was the same God, and only their practice differed. Even more frequently,

¹³ After fact checking the date, I found that Saudi Arabia started Ramadan on the 6th, not the 7th as most people in Pangani did. There was obviously some confusion here.

she seemed to identify as a poor woman in Pangani, separating herself from men and wealthy, educated women in the country.

Conversions: On leaving a religious discourse



Local women on their way to a Muslim wedding.

The general example given to me by people with whom I spoke to prove the harmony in the community, was that people could marry whoever they wanted. A person could marry, remarry and convert according to his or hers preferences and beliefs. A friend of mine, a Muslim, highly educated man from Tanga, explained that tribes, ethnicity and religious barriers were abolished with Nyerere, and that Christians can now marry Muslims and the other way around. He said that the only conflict between Christians and Muslims was before a football match between Simba and Yanga, as Simba is considered a Muslim team, and Yanga a Christian: “Then they will fight for like three days and then be OK”. “There is a lot of respect and tolerance for example during Ramadan”, he explained. “The Christians will not eat and drink outside, and the bars will put curtains. My boss, who is a Christian, won’t even drink water in the meetings during Ramadan”. I wondered what would happen if somebody ate or drank openly during Ramadan. “Then he is a thickhead, and he will be told to show some more respect”. Fatuma had a similar approach, and spoke about the peaceful relationship between Christians and Muslims in Tanzania, how they live, work and spend time together. “It is not a problem to marry

a Christian if you are a Muslim”, she told me the first time we met. The same day, she told me about her sister who she had not talked to in five years. It turned out that her sister had married a Christian man, and had lost all contact with the family. I asked Fatuma what would happen if she married a Christian man too, and she laughed: “Oh, if I wanted to marry a Christian man I would be disowned!”

My friend from Tanga put into perspective how tolerance is great as long as the respect is great, and the moment somebody breaks with the expected level of respect, by for instance drinking openly during Ramadan, the tolerance between the different religious groups will be challenged. One aspect is the discursive way of *talking* about religion and togetherness in Tanzania. Another aspect is what is played out in real life and the actual stories of people who choose to leave their religious discursive field in favor of another, like Fatuma’s sister. I will here present two cases that show how difficult it can be when someone in this way challenges a discursive religious field by leaving it.

The case of Melinda: “I took off my hijab and went to church”

Melinda was one of my key informants whom I spent a great deal of time with during my stay in Pangani. She grew up in a Muslim family in Pangani and worked at a local nursery school. When I met her, Melinda was in her early thirties and was married with a Christian man with whom she had two children. Some years back, Melinda had been troubled by *mashetani* (spirits). After several visits to the hospital and the *mganga* (traditional healer) without any improvement, she had decided to visit the local Pentecostal church to attend a healing session. After this she got well, and had decided to become a Christian, or as Melinda put it: “I took off my hijab and went to church”. She also changed her name from Mwanakombo to Melinda. Her family did not accept her decision, and she was so badly beaten by her aunt that she broke her nose. I could still see the black scar on the upper bridge of her nose. After this she had not spoken to her family in four years. “Also my friends became angry”, Melinda explained. “Now I have more Christian friends. It is more easy”. During these four years she lived with a family from the church. Then she met her current husband, a Christian man in the same Pentecostal congregation. Only her mom came to their wedding. Not until she got her first child her family had started to accept her again, Melinda added.

The case of Isaac: From Islamic scholar to Pentecostal

One evening in June I attended a Pentecostal youth meeting in Pangani Town. The meetings called ‘Youth Worship’, were held every week, and there were about 20 young Pentecostals attending. After the meeting, a man called Isaac approached me, and said he wanted to tell me his story. “My original name is Riduan Ali”, Isaac begun. “I converted from Islam to Christianity in July 2012. At that time I was *mwalimu wa Quran* [teacher of the Quran]”, Isaac elaborated. He told me that his father was a known *shehe*¹⁴, or local Muslim leader, and had intended for Isaac and his brother to become imams. Isaac said that he had not wanted to become a Christian, but that God came to him in a dream and told him about his future and that he had to become a Christian.

[My family] was disappointed. They had invested so much money in giving me a Muslim education, and now it was all for nothing. [...] For three years I had no contact with my family. Last year we started communicating. I was not hating my family. I tried to communicate with them.

At first, he had tried to convert his family as well. This had created a tense relationship within the family, and his brother, who was now an imam, was still not speaking to him. Despite this, Isaac was content: “I am happier now, because I believe in things that are present, while Muslims believe things that are not there.” Isaac had a Christian girlfriend from Moshi, and they were going to marry the following month. I asked if he thought his family would attend the wedding, and Isaac spent a long time thinking: “I don’t think they will come...”

The case of Melinda and the case of Isaac shows how challenging one’s religious discourse by leaving it, might have severe consequences for people’s family life and stability. Although Melinda and Isaac were coping well, and had found a new sense of belonging and togetherness in the Pentecostal community, the years after their conversions had been hard on them both. In the process of converting, they had created a new ‘us’, and thereby also a new ‘them’. The ‘us’ within the Pentecostal community in Pangani was especially strong, and as another young Pentecostal put it when asked about his relationship with other Christian communities in town: “We are different from them”. Finally, what these stories show, is an underlying emphasis on difference, unveiled when boundaries are crossed and harmony is challenged.

¹⁴ A *shehe* is a Muslim cleric, or a local Muslim leader. Possibly from Arabic *šaykh*, or Sheik.

The school system as a religious authority

While groups and identities are formed in the meeting with others, groups and identities can also be socially constructed through other fields. A wide range of NGOs, missionaries and governmental measures can be discussed to influence the construction of social and religious boundaries in Pangani. Here, I will focus on how the school system can play such an identity constructing role.

In many Muslim countries, there is an ongoing moral edification of youth to form ‘good’ Muslims and secure a discursive coherence (Asad 1993). As showed by Adely (2012) in her studies from Jordan, the school is a much used space to form, renew and legitimate religious knowledge. While “[p]ublic schools – state pedagogical institutions – throughout the Middle East are officially charged with the task of defining correct practice and asserting dominance” (Adely 2012:298), these attempts to reach discursive coherence have been of a different character in Tanzania. In Tanzania the state policy has been secularization, and as seen in the introduction, Nyerere and TANU’s modernization policies did not include promoting religious views, although it is not to be seen as completely neutral either, often favoring the Christian religion (Iliffe 1979:453). However, this is mostly relevant for the country’s public schools. Tanzania also have a range of private schools and missionary schools, the latter which we have seen controlled the majority of both primary and secondary schools at the time of independence in 1961 (Iliffe 1979:546).

Pangani did not have any Christian schools, but had several Muslim schools and nurseries. Some were described as ‘Answari schools’, and other ‘Sunni schools’. One of these, was the Al-Hijra primary and secondary school. The school uniform for the female children in secondary school was hijab, although most of the girls wore niqabs. It was said that even the Christian girls who went to Al-Hijra had to wear hijabs in class. After school ended, the streets in Pangani were crowded with niqab-dressed girls, a sight I was told had been unusual until recent times. These private schools were also expensive. Fatuma sent her ten-year-old son to a private Muslim school, but she often complained that she did not have enough money to pay the school fee on 250. 000 TSH¹⁵, and considered “taking him out of school”. She did not like

¹⁵ About 110 USD

the thought of sending him to a public school, she said, and preferred the Muslim one which she described as “the good looking one with glass windows”.

Most of the Muslim children I spoke to also went to Quran School, *madrasa*, in the evening, although girls were often taken out from *madrasa* earlier than boys. Sending their children to *madrasa* was considered prestige among many Muslim families, and one local woman complained that many Muslim families would rather send their children to *madrasa* than school if given a choice due to economic reasons, leaving their children with no other than religious education. The Pentecostals also had their ways of educating Pangani’s younger population in religion. Many Pentecostal youth participated in the ‘Youth Worship’ mentioned earlier, arranged four evenings a week in a local church. In these meetings the young Pentecostals were taught how to behave as proper Christians, and could ask questions and discuss challenges they faced as Christians.

Although these arrangements are not governmental, Adely’s argument can still be valid, as there is clearly a moral edification of youth also in Pangani, looking at the Muslim schools, the *madrasa* and Pentecostal ‘Youth Worship’. Separating the children according to religious beliefs in school, arguably creates a greater focus on different religious groups, as well as it creates a greater focus on class, giving that there is a difference in the school fee charged in the respective schools. This religious edification of youth in Pangani in many ways intends to create a discursive coherence, manifested in the arrival of strictly Muslim schools, school costumes and worship meetings. Much like the new religious festivals that will be discussed in the following chapter, the edification of youth in Pangani is part of the current pressure for identification and boundary setting in religious practice.

A second aspect important to discuss is the aspect of generational change. As will be seen throughout this thesis, skepticism towards traditional religious practices is often found among the young generation. As expressed by one informant, “[t]he new generation think more about *dini*”. Generations are often in opposition to each other, and the new generation in Pangani grow up in a different town than their parents. First of all, they have greater possibilities to get education compared to their parents. This education can involve religious schooling such as at Al-Hijra, as well as the bigger variety of schools allows families to be more selective when choosing a school. Furthermore, higher education itself might make people rethink their identities, and put pressure on identifying and labelling certain religious practices. As stated earlier, the higher educated people in Pangani were also the ones who counteracted traditional religious practices the most. Secondly, the young generation have access to the global world on

a completely different scale than their parents, through access to Internet, mobile phones, international media and television. This undoubtedly affects young people's way of identifying and relating to the local community and its traditions and customs, and how they perceive themselves and others.

Local frustration with historical marginalization

Modernization, capitalism and consumerism has not led to a 'demystification' of many African societies, contrary to previous beliefs (Geschiere 1997; Asad 2003; Moore and Sanders 2001). Although there is a pressure for identifying and defining religious practices in Pangani, as well as a growing skepticism towards traditional religious practice, expressions of major structural changes and social distress can be found in the traditional mythology. The complex world in which the local people of Pangani find themselves in, is highly affected by global changes and relations of power. In regard to understand the hitherto discussed cases from the local perspective, it is useful to have the area's history in mind. The older generation in Pangani has first-hand memories of slave trade, colonialization and the challenging years after independence, as Mzee and Bibi showed previously in this chapter. A strong still-standing symbol of how Africans were enslaved and their lands exploited, might be the one of the plantation. As the first area in Tanzania to get a sisal plantation, this symbol might be especially relevant in the case of Pangani. A myth commonly told in Pangani will help to illustrate my point further.



The sisal plantations in Pangani cover most of its coastal stretch.

A bloodthirsty shetani in the bankruptcy of a plantation company

For the first time in almost two months, it was raining. Most of the crops around Pangani were already spoiled, but the flowers were blooming and the people were sighing with relief, though most of them knew it was a little too late. In the afternoon I went to visit Fatuma. We ate dinner together on the floor. Beans, chapatti, bananas and *badijas*. Just before we finished, Fatuma's husband Abu Bakr, came. This was the first time I met him. In the beginning we did not talk much. Then Fatuma broke in "Why are you so shy, Idunn? Ask him your questions!" I did, and it resulted in a two hour long discussion on Islamic faith, religious clothing and the belief in spirits. After some time Abu Bakr asked me if I had heard of the Amboni plantations and what had happened there. Then he eagerly told me the story:

In the earlier days, the administration of the plantation used to slaughter cows for the workers. The site where they slaughtered the cows, was near to a lake. In this lake there lived a small *shetani*. The small *shetani* got fed with so much blood from the slaughtered cows that it grew big. One day, the plantation owners stopped slaughtering cows. The *shetani* had gotten used to getting blood, and wanted more. It turned angry and evil, and attracted dangerous animals to the area. These animals were not animals, but *mizimu*, ancestor spirits, sent by Satan. In the centre of the lake there were still many big snakes. Until this day, most people avoid the area, and it is now covered with vegetation. Fatuma concluded the story: "Now it is very dangerous there. If you go to the lake with three friends, only two will return! I would never go there!"

The story dwelled in my mind until the next day when I was invited to a dinner party. Among the attendants, was a former manager in Amboni Plantations, Edward. I used the opportunity to ask him about the story from the day before. Edward's first reaction was to laugh: "What are they saying about us now?" He explained that there had been a big cattle ranch in Mwera, owned by the plantation company. Every year they used to slaughter about 200 cows, approximately 15 a month. Some of the meat was given to the plantation managers, but most of it went to the locals. In the 90's the company went bankrupt, and the ranch was put down. Amboni was split between different companies, and a lot of people were left without a job. Edward said that every time he spoke to elders in the area they liked to remind him of the time of the cattle ranch. "They remember those good, ol' days when they had meat every month", Edward sighed.

Spirits and the spirit world are seen by many Tanzanians as predictable and trustworthy if treated with care and respect. This is opposite to the human world with its human beings, seen as dishonest, jealous and unpredictable (Larsen 2014:23). The legend of the *shetani*, which after a long period of reliability and stability was neglected, is thus an expression of society's limitations and unpredictable events. The myth can therefore represent local people's frustrations over the changing times and the loss of the cattle farm. What people saw as a stable, and regular source of food and work, suddenly disappears due to changes they are not in control of. Furthermore, the myth can express a feeling of frustration that the local people are not in control of their local resources, and that people from the outside, dating back for centuries, have demanded ownership of huge pieces of land in the region¹⁶. Even today, the relationship between the plantation management and the local people in Pangani cannot be described as good. Most local people in Pangani did not care much about the plantations, and said they had never benefited from the plantation income. People with whom I spoke in the management, said that they barely had any employees from Pangani. This was said to be due to two reasons; first of all, hardly any locals applied for jobs in the plantation. Secondly, the local people who were employed, were usually quickly sacked as they were said to be lazy and bad workers. The myth expresses peoples distrust in the plantation company, which again might be an expression of the fact that the company did not hire local workers and thereby contribute to the town's economy. The myth can thus be interpreted as an expression of marginalization and a local critique of the plantation company¹⁷.

Local responses: Laziness as a critique

Critique is an important way of expressing marginalization and dissatisfaction, and can be found in other aspects of the society. As previously shown in this chapter, there is a divided relationship between some of Pangani's different social groups. The plantation managers describe the town's locals as lazy and bad workers, while the local people distance themselves from the economic elite in the district, often represented by white Kenyans and other non-locals.

¹⁶ The sisal plantations in the region are currently owned by the Amboni Plantations, a subsidiary of the Kenyan plantation company Rea Vipingo.

¹⁷ There is also a second aspect to the myth, regarding Abu Bakr and Fatuma's way of telling the story. When I asked about the link between the *mizimu*, ancestor spirits, and Satan, Abu Bakr explained that the *mizimu* always come from Satan, because the ancestors are satanic. This reflects on issues to be discussed in the following chapter, and illustrates how Abu Bakr and Fatuma, although telling the story and somehow believing it, distanced themselves from ancestor worship and local myths by labelling it as 'satanic'.

The 'Swahili' were often stereotyped as lazy and bad workers by other people, but also by themselves. This stereotype has historical roots, and might also be traced back to the colonial times. During my fieldwork I ran into people who had different explanations to this. One older man in Pangani, originally from Kenya, said that this was because people in the area were not used to have to work. In the earlier days, they would sit on the beach, and "bananas and coconuts would fall on their heads". "They don't see the value of payed labor and spending so much time working, when they could rather spend time doing other things", the man explained. A manager in a hotel in Tanga, said it was because the local people in Pangani were not used to dealing with authorities, and preferred having their own small businesses. Fatuma had a somehow different explanation to the high level of unemployment in town. Fatuma explained how she could not complain and protest on her bad salary and working condition because there were so many other people willing to take her job for the same low salary and bad conditions. "If you complain on earning 120 000 a month¹⁸, you might lose your job, and somebody else takes it". Fatuma also said that many people do not see the use in working so hard for such little money, and that they would rather not work than "wasting their time on nothing". She herself, would rather do something than just sit around the house, at least for her own self-development. "But many people do not think like me". Some people would also be employed, but because of the low salary and bad working conditions, they would not perform their best at work, Fatuma explained. In this way, the 'laziness' and the negative view on authorities can be seen as a critique on the low salaries and bad conditions people face in their everyday life, also reflecting on historical memory and social power relations.

Imagined communities and spirits of tolerance

As we have seen throughout this chapter, togetherness, unity and harmony are emphasized as important features in the Tanzanian society. However, when listening to my informants and looking at the situations in which they act, it becomes apparent that the actual situation in Pangani today is also characterized by differences. To understand this, I think it is important to look at dynamics at different levels, one level of Tanzania as a nation, and one local level in which Pangani emerges as a focus.

¹⁸ About 50 USD

For the national level, the notion of unity and harmony dates back to the time of independence, and was an important part of the unification of the country. Baroin argues that Tanzania since the time of independence, has been marked by a strong ‘spirit of tolerance’, manifested in education for all, non-tribalism and liberty of the press (1996:530). Socialism under TANU was further characterized by conciliation and a constitution that stressed religious liberty (Baroin 1996:530). An important issue was unifying the country’s 120 ethnic groups and the number of different religious communities, and tribalism was seen as one of the greatest threat to national harmony. The Swahili language became essential in the unification process of Nyerere (Baroin 1996:530), and has since the time of independence been an important national symbol of the togetherness of the Tanzanian nation. The ‘spirit of tolerance’ is however strongly affected by the firm foothold of CCM and limitations of the media, and the country is influenced by a low level of development, unemployment, educational differences and general poverty (Baroin 1996:531).

To explore how the ‘spirit of tolerance’ has gained ground in Tanzania despite these differences, it could be useful to see a nation through Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of ‘imagined community’, a nation in which its citizens will never meet but still identify as part of the same communion. The image of this community is formed through media and education, and the modern state has to transcend identity markers such as class, religion and gender to unify its population and make citizenship the main identifying factor¹⁹ (Taylor 1998 in Asad 2003:4-5). This was in many ways what Nyerere intended to do in Tanzania, and to a certain degree accomplished. Abolishing tribes and unifying the nation, was part of this project. This ‘imagined community’ was taught in school, communicated through national media, and felt in the physical movements of people during the ujamaa. However, creating national unity is perhaps not as easy as sometimes presented, and in the struggle of unifying people, differences are likely to be underplayed and potential conflicts trivialized.

This is what we see so clearly in the case of Pangani. There, the ‘spirit of tolerance’ is found in discourses of everyday life: in people’s way of speaking, acting and relating to each other. On the other hand, it is increasingly challenged. Splits between coast and inland are found in the relationship between migrant workers and locals in town. Joyce separated the coastal

¹⁹ Asad argues that this transcendent mediation of national identity is in fact secularism, as far as secularism is seen as “an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion” (2003:5).

‘Swahili area’ from the rest of Tanzania, seeing it as having a different culture and a different people than the inland, and was in this way in fact representing the opposite of what Nyerere intended to establish. Differences are also found among the local population. The categorization of people according to faith and religious practice was especially visible in town, sometimes between Christians and Muslims, but also within the Muslim and Christian communities, constructing boundaries between Sunni and Shi’a, ‘proper’ and ‘not proper’ Muslim, and Pentecostal and not Pentecostal.

If we stay in the language of Benedict Anderson on ‘imagined communities’, we can ask what has affected these notions of harmony and of differences. Two important factors to be considered are those of media and education. First of all, media is considerably less controlled by the state, and is today represented by various globalized communities rather than the national government. Bryan Turner (2007) argues that the new mediation of Islam, made possible through new technology, has resulted in a competition between different religious authorities, such as the traditional *ulama*, the new intellectuals and the state. Turner argues that this systematization of religious knowledge experienced in many societies today, often leads to questioning of traditional forms of religious knowledge (Turner 2007:132). This, I would argue, is also what is happening in contemporary Pangani. Global media has provided communication channels, not to defend tradition, but to create new forms of Islamic consciousness. Internet can thus create an ‘imagined community’, connecting religious groups all over the world, and on some occasions bypassing the authority of traditional religious authorities (Turner 2007:128). Secondly, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the school system is becoming increasingly formed by religion and class, unifying religious groups rather than the community as a whole. Nyerere’s ideas on togetherness are still present, but sometimes seem to function more as a veil, covering and holding together a complex and diverse population, partly hiding it from the outside, but still not making the differences any less real.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored identity, social groups and relations in Pangani, and has investigated two different views: the one of the migrant workers and the one of the local population. It has also turned to history to give a more profound picture of the contemporary situation, and should be a valuable background for the following chapters. The historical backdrops, the local stereotypes and the myth about the cattle ranch, have shown how the creation of identity and

groups is highly influenced and characterized by ‘others’. Bibi and Mzee’s stories showed how people in Pangani had been separated by the Arabs, and how differences were created and the social harmony disrupted, and Fatuma explained how ‘laziness’ can be interpreted as a silent critique to outside dominance and bad working conditions. However, current governmental reforms to promote togetherness are in some situations also enforcing differences, and creating new boundaries on the local level, as seen in the separated relationship between Pangani’s migrant workers and local population.

Pangani’s local population frequently stressed togetherness and turned to measures of secrecy to preserve a sense of sameness and harmony. There was a trend of underplaying differences and advocating a unified ‘us’, although as we have seen, this ‘us’ was greatly affected by underlying notions of otherness within itself. These differences and conflicts become visible in situations when boundaries are crossed, like when converting from Islam to Christianity, such as in the cases of Melinda and Isaac. In these situations, social harmony is challenged on the ground level, which is exactly where some of the social relationships in town become most profound.

I would argue that the social boundaries in Pangani are going through a face of redefinition and change, much influenced by interaction with ‘others’, and that the local people’s social identity is changing accordingly. Furthermore, a pressure towards discursive coherence originating from an authoritative religious discourse and authoritative religious elites contribute to strengthening the ‘us’ of a religious group, creating a ‘they’ in groups of people not seen as part of the same religious discourse. As much of the dynamics in Pangani is related to a Muslim religious field, my discussion in the following chapters will focus on the developments mainly within this field. I will show how Muslim discourses are influenced not only as theological discussions, but as parts of broader discourses in which non-religious factors mentioned in this chapter become Islamic by being brought into the discursive fields of Muslim people.

Chapter 4:

Changing ritual practice and destroying holy shrines

It was the morning of the 21st of April, and I was on a bus back from Dar es Salaam to Tanga when I got a text from a friend: “Shootings in the Central Bakery in Tanga, 7 shot and 4 killed. Hope you’re all safe”. There were several rumors of who was behind the shooting in the bakery popular among expatriates as well as locals. Some said it was simple thieves, others said it was al-Shabaab. Most said it was both. Later that week the local police shot four suspects who they claimed were behind the robbery and were affiliated with al-Shabaab. About a month later, on the 31st of May, eight villagers were beheaded with machetes in a village five kilometers from Tanga town, next to the Amboni caves. The word on the street and in the newspapers was that armed men had entered the village during the night, had broken into three houses and killed eight men. Sixty people from the village had escaped and were at this time living in a nearby village, too scared to return home. Tanga had experienced an increase in violence during the last months, and people were frightened and angry that the police did not handle the situation. The same day as the beheadings, rumors circulated of a bomb-threat in Tangamano, Tanga’s big market held every second day. For the next couple of days, most people avoided big crowds and the market area. Everybody agreed that the times were changing.

This dystopian description will set the stage for the coming chapter. The Tanga Region in Tanzania is experiencing times of social distress, not only due to the recent increase in violence, but also due to environmental changes and the country’s struggle to be a part of the capitalist world economy. Bearing in mind how the ‘ordinary ethics’ (Lambek 2010) become explicit in the meeting with its breaches, ethical problems or issues, and social and religious renewal, we can draw links to Victor Turner’s argument that looking at a society in a marginal phase might be useful in understanding its underlying structures, meanings and taboos (Turner 1969). This chapter will intend to show how people in Pangani cope with changes by looking at the society’s underlying structures and meanings expressed on the religious level in relation to renewal, change and conflict. I will show through the cases of religious festivals in Pangani, how the society is adopting and evolving as a result of bigger political and religious changes and a pressure for discursive coherence. Further, I will show how this in some cases has led to attempts to abolish certain traditional practices in the area, such as shrine worship. Although

social, political and religious changes are manifested in the renewal and change in religious practice, major structural changes might lead to social distress, which can also be expressed in the field of traditional religion and in the spiritual side of social life. This will be illustrated towards the end of this chapter.

Looking at change through the aspect of religious festivals

The festival which disappeared: Zinguo la mji

As I had spent some months in Pangani, my interest in the spiritual side of social life increased. Whenever I talked to people about issues regarding social life, illness or religion, the subject of traditional healers, spirit possessions and animal sacrifice came up. I started out investigating the state of the traditional religion and practices in the area, believing this could also give me an impression of how the social situation and the relationship between different groups in town were. I knew a man called Mr. Makange who had offered to arrange a meeting with some village elders in the nearby village of Kikokwe, so I could learn more about the state of traditional religion in Pangani. I met with the elders on two occasions.

Kikokwe is a small village some kilometers south of Pangani. It has approximately 250 inhabitants, and was as mentioned in the introduction the first place in Tanzania to get a sisal plantation. Since that time, there has been a high number of Christian migrants living in the village, and today it has nearly an equal amount of Christians and Muslims. It was the month of Ramadan, and the three men I met were fasting. They were more than willing to share some knowledge and old stories with me in the warmest hours of the day. The three men were Mr. Makange, Feysal and Hassan. Mr. Makange's son, Abu, also joined us, and assisted me when my Swahili skills were insufficient. The men told me of a world they saw as problematic, unjust and chaotic. Hassan and Mr. Makange had been working in the *shamba* (field) that day, and were worried that they would lose their crops because of the drought. They were concerned about the climate changes, but also expressed a sadness about the current social situation: "The younger generation do not care about *mila* anymore". According to the elders, people's indifference to old traditions had led to an increase in social and environmental problems in the area. I was told that the problems had started after the people of Pangani had stopped celebrating a festival called *zinguo la mji*, meaning "protection of the town". The *zinguo la mji* was a festival held each year to protect the town from evil. The locals would bring a healthy, well-

formed black cow in a circle around town, and in the end slaughter it on the beach. I have found support in the literature that this kind of protective festival was commonly held in many towns along the Swahili coast. Pat Caplan notes that it was held in Pemba until the time of independence, there under the name of *kuzingua mji* (2016:22). Bruinhorst notes that the ritual was still performed in small-scale in Tanga in 2007 (2007:138). In Pangani, the festival was last held in 1987. Mr. Makange described what happened:

They [the people of Pangani] are facing problems after leaving it. People die swimming in the sea, there are *mashetani* [evil spirits] and crime. The festival stopped because the older generation died out. Then the problems started. Before the festival stopped there were not many problems in Pangani. The year the festival stopped there was no rain, there were social problems, diseases, *matatizo mengi* [many problems]!

This was also when spirit possessions started to be a big problem in Pangani Town, Mr. Makange explained, and the three men claimed that things had been bad in Pangani ever since. “The new generation do not want to introduce *zinguo* again”, he said. I was interested in knowing why, and asked what kind of festival *zinguo la mji* had been; was it *mila* or *dini*, and who was it for? The question turned into an interesting and up-heated discussion as the men could not agree. Hassan immediately said *dini*. The two others disagreed; they thought it was *mila*. Mr. Makange shook his head; “I don’t know...” They discussed the issue for a long time. Eventually Abu summarized:

Zinguo is not for Muslims or for Christians. It is for all of them. [...] After they kill the cow, everybody will have a piece of the meat, without looking if they are Muslim or Christian. It is *mila*. The new generation think more about *dini*. That is why the festival is no longer.

Here, the complexity of the concepts *mila* and *dini* become apparent, and we see that what is considered as *dini* and *mila* is not something fixed or static.

I later discussed the *zinguo la mji* with several of my informants in Pangani. Most of them told me the same stories as the elders in Kikokwe, and some of my Muslims informants laughed it off as old superstition. Even though the ritual has diminished, I was able to find that it was still held on some occasions. My host grandmother, Bibi, told me the ritual was held when times were difficult. The local *shehe* would summon some of the elders to the beach, where they would sacrifice an animal: “They did this *zinguo* in 2014 because of the strong

winds and the lack of fish in the water”, Bibi explained. I asked if they did it openly, but Bibi shook her head and whispered “They go in secrecy. It is not OK, but they do it in secret”.

The ancestor festival in Kikokwe

Looking back in the past, remembering a ‘golden age’, is a common feature in most societies. This was a feeling also expressed by the elders in Kikokwe. They remembered a time when there was less crime, more fish in the sea, when the rains came every year and when the number of spirit possessions was low. Still, the elders confidently told me that the people of Kikokwe did not experience nearly as many problems as Pangani Town. They had two main explanations on this. First of all, Pangani was bigger and therefore attracted more spirits. Additionally, the people of Kikokwe were still celebrating a festival similar to that of *zinguo la mji*, which left the village protected by God and the ancestors. The festival was called *Hauli*, and was held every year in the small village²⁰. The three men did not know for how long the festival had been celebrated, but it had been celebrated for as long they could remember. As I had heard rumors of this festival, I had it especially in mind when I came to see the elders in Kikokwe. The rumors said that this was a traditional religious festival, quite unique in the area since most of the festivals like this had already disappeared, and that it was celebrated equally among Muslims and Christians.

“The festival is held to remember Ibrahim and how he wanted to kill his son”, Hassan explained. He continued to elaborate the proceedings of the festival:

You go to the mosque and you slaughter animals. We start with the *Poah* – apologizing to God. This is done in the mosque. Then each family slaughter a sheep. This is done to remember the ancestors, and the bones must not be broken. The sheep is an offering to our ancestors.

The festival resembles the Eid al-Adha²¹, but also has some characteristic differences. I asked if it was a Muslim festival, and if any of the Christians in the village would join. Hassan looked at me, and told me in a matter-of-fact kind of way that Christians celebrate Easter and Christmas. “They also celebrate Hauli”, Abu added. “But they do not go to the mosque or slaughter animals. They cook and pray to the ancestors”. After some discussion, I was told that the Christians in Kikokwe had participated in the festival on the same basis as Muslims some

²⁰ Unfortunately, the time of the festival was not during my fieldwork.

²¹“Festival of the sacrifice”. A worldwide Muslim festival held to honor Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God.

years back. Now people were more reluctant to attend it, and mostly came to the feast. While the *zinguo la mji* was described as *mila*, the Hauli was gradually becoming more like *dini*, Abu explained, and since it was *dini*, it was Islam, and the Christians would not attend. I asked Abu if he thought the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Pangani was less close today, since they did not meet in *mila* as they used to. Abu looked at me with surprise and shook his head: “They continue to meet, just not in the festivals”.

The new festivals: Assemblies of ‘proper faith’

While festivals like *zinguo la mji* and practices of ancestor worship are disappearing, new festivals are emerging in Pangani. These festivals seem to be more according to what Tanzanians describe as *dini*. I went to three festivals like these. One was a Muslim assembly in the town center. Some streets were closed off, and Muslims from all over Tanzania and Kenya came together to pray and discuss Islam for three days. Fatuma took me there on a Saturday evening. She had told me to come to her place before we went to the festival; she wanted to dress me properly. Usually, Fatuma was dressed in colorful *deeras*, but this evening she wore a black *niqabu*. She had also put on socks to hide her bare feet in her sandals. I was given a hijab, and was told that I had to wait while she did the evening prayer. The festival was held in the streets next to the Friday mosque, one street for men, another for women. There people sold Muslim clothes and different books on Islam. Fatuma said that the festival was held to show the togetherness of Muslims. On another occasion, while we were discussing the work of the traditional healers and spirit possessions, Fatuma reminded me of the festival we had gone to: “Idunn, do you remember the festival we went to? The Muslim one? It is to enlighten and educate people in proper faith”. Although I had known Fatuma for a while at the time of the festival, I had never seen her pray nor wear a niqab before. She also left out the normal Swahili greetings, and only greeted her fellow Muslims *salaam aleikum* during this event. The festival seemed to enforce her Muslim identity, and Fatuma became more attentive on how to act and how not to act, to be what she called a ‘true believer’.



Fatuma before going to the Muslim street festival

There were also several Christian festivals in Pangani. One was held in the month of Ramadan, in the Lutheran church by the beach, hidden away from the rest of town. This kind of festival was held three-four times a year, and was popular because of the healing practices done by its pastors, sometimes coming from abroad. One of my informants was a Lutheran and went to this festival each time it was held. He explained that missionaries from Dar es Salaam and Arusha would come to Pangani for these festivals or ‘seminars’, to educate, heal and pray with the people. During these festivals, Christians from the district, mostly Lutherans, but also other Christian denominations, would gather to cook, spend time and discuss faith. I also attended a seminar in a nearby Pentecostal church. This seminar was held for a couple of days, and was highlighted by the presence of a Pentecostal pastor from South Africa. Eight other pastors from other parts of Tanzania were also present. Their mission, they said, was to “plant churches” and “teach people how to be just to God”. The South African pastor spent most of his speech blaming the spectators for being lazy, greedy and for “robbing God”. At one point

he pointed at an empty seat, and exclaimed: “The woman who should be sitting on the bench there choose to farm instead! She is robbing God of his Sabbath day!” People’s way of practicing Christianity was not good enough, and the paganism in the area had to be defeated.

The Lutheran festivals and the Pentecostal seminar bear resemblances to the Muslim street festival in their manner of educating people in ‘proper faith’ and in their focus on creating a global religious community. The global focus is stressed by the presence of the foreign attendants, reinforcing the local religious community’s part of the global religious community. In the Muslim street festival, the sale of Islamic books from Asia and the Middle East and Muslim clothing from the same areas, further stressed Pangani’s Muslims’ part of the *ummah*. While the Lutheran festival had been going on for some time, the Pentecostal seminar was held for the first time this year. The Pentecostal church was also recently built, as the pastor, originally from the Tanzanian highlands, had seen “a great need for missionary activities in the area”. The Muslim street festival was also new, and was held for the sixth time this year. These newer festivals differ from the traditional festivals of *zinguo la mji* and *Hauli*. While the focus in the traditional festivals was on protection and sacrifice, the newer festivals focus on education. The social focus is also different. In *zinguo la mji* and *Hauli*, the people in focus were the locals, and the town or village is stressed as a collective whole, symbolized in the sacrificial cow’s circulation around the town and in the common feasts where everybody participates. In the newer festivals and seminars, the people in focus are the members of the specific religious group, and their identity is attached not to the town or the village, but to the global religious community. Victor Turner’s (1969) concept of ‘*communitas*’ shows how the participation in festivals and rituals create a common feeling of a shared reality. When previous festivals and rituals for the community as a whole are replaced by festivals for certain groups, the feeling of ‘*communitas*’ will be felt *within* these groups. As shown by Deborah Kapchan (2008), global ‘sacred’ music festivals in Morocco, create a mutual affection among people from different nations and backgrounds, thus exceeding the local feeling of ‘*communitas*’. These global festivals stress what is conceived as “universally sacred”, creating “new transnational categories that mediate religious sentiment and reenchant the world” (Kapchan 2008:467). In the case of Pangani, although linking the local community to the global, one might argue that these new festivals are drawing and reinforcing boundaries between different social and religious groups on the local level. Further, the festivals seek a discursive coherence within the religious groups, and are in this way counteracting certain local practices seen as anomalies in the desired coherence.

Redefining religious boundaries

The destruction of shrines

Abu and I were struggling ourselves through some bushes full of thorns. We had been walking for almost one hour in the intense heat, and I was starting to doubt the wisdom of my decision to come here. The old path had almost completely disappeared, and I could see traces of other paths partly retaken by nature; not many people walked here anymore. Eventually, we reached the site of the shrine. The worship place was behind some bushes not far from the beach. There was a hole in the ground which looked like a well, though it was bigger and deeper. A huge pile of rocks lay next to it, and some rocks were scattered along the path. Abu pointed to the other side of the hole, explaining that it was the place where people had used to leave their offerings. I could still see remnants of some cups, plates and bottles, although nobody left offerings here anymore. In 2000 the holy shrine had been destroyed, and so had another shrine in the area. Abu explained that people were now taking the rocks to build things, but also to remove the shrine completely.

It was during my talks with the elders in Kikokwe that I was made aware of a number of old, holy shrines in the area. There were at least three important shrines like these around Kikokwe, which had frequently been visited by different groups until recently: “Many Indians and even *wazungu* like you came from afar to visit the shrines”, Feysal, the oldest of the three men, told me. “They are *mila zote* [our tradition]”. It was because it was *mila* it had been destroyed, he explained. The shrines were destroyed by some Muslim men who did not see it as proper to Islam. The elders and Abu expressed a sadness over the vandalization, and they all knew who had destroyed the shrines:

Muslims broke it. They break it because they say it is not place for prayer. After seeing some go there to pray, they say why? And [they] go to break it [...] Their houses later burned down, two of them died and the other one went crazy. Things are changing now; the young people do not care about *mila*.

A legend concerning this old, holy shrine outside the village of Kikokwe, is a good example of the synthesis between Islam and traditional religion in the area, which might also have been the reason for the shrine’s destruction. The legend tells a story of the importance of prayer, and how God will always listen if you pray. The interesting part is how the legend

stresses the importance of using one's ancestors as intermediators when praying to God. Abu explained it this way:

[...] They use the ancestors for some ways in prayer. You know, according to African tradition, if you have a fight with your father you have to bring an elder with you to apologize. In the same way you can bring your ancestors to apologize to Allah.

By praying and giving animal sacrifice to the ancestors, both during the current *Hauli* and previously by the shrine, people would be assisted by their ancestors in their prayer to God. In this way, one would please both the ancestors and God, keep one's *mila* and practice *dini*. The three elders and Abu said they still used the ancestors as intermediators when they prayed to God.

Syncretistic elements in worship of shrines is well documented in anthropological work, especially from India, where there are thousands of shrines worshipped by Hindus and Muslims alike (van der Veer 1994:205). Syncretism in shrine worship has been discussed among Muslims for centuries, and the most central issue has been if the practice of assigning divine powers to a site or a saint is contrary to Islam's monotheistic nature (van der Veer 1994). This reformist discourse has sought to redefine the Muslim community's boundaries, and has in several cities in India led to a deterioration of the Hindu-Muslim relationship²² (van der Veer 1994:206, 208). Talal Asad also refers to similar practices of destruction of saints' tombs and other practices seen to be un-Islamic by the Wahhabi reformers in Saudi Arabia (1993:210). The same tendencies can be found in Pangani, as there is a clear redefinition of religious boundaries. Looking at the previous examples, one might argue that there is an ongoing tendency of anti-syncretism and skepticism towards *mila* in relation to traditional ritual practices such as shrine worship and traditional festivals. Although Abu and the elders of Kikokwe kept preserving their *mila* by praying to the ancestors and remembering the shrines, they might seem to be rather the exception to the rule.

Local and textual understandings of Islam

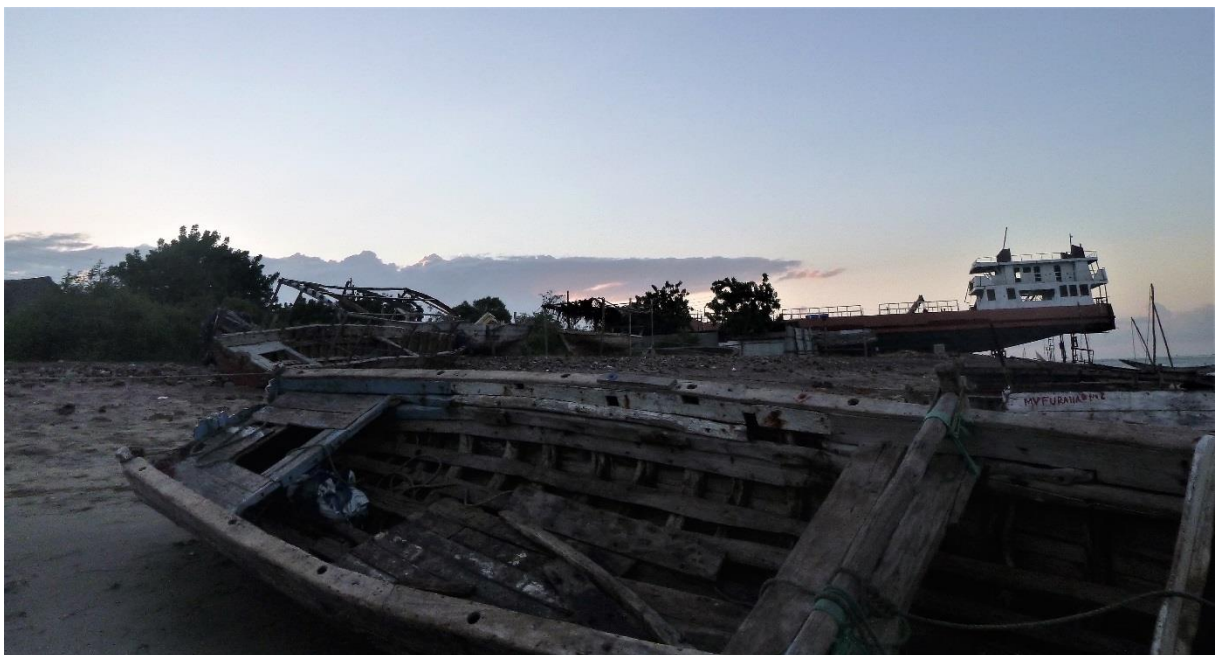
As we have seen in the examples from the festivals in Pangani and the destruction of the shrines, there is a pressure on defining what 'proper' religious practice is. Festivals and religious

²² It is thus important to reevaluate before one, as an outsider-anthropologist, labels a practice like shrine worship as syncretistic, as one at the same time might end up taking a stand in an ongoing debate in a religious community (van der Veer 1994:210).

practices with syncretistic elements are by some seen as ‘old-fashioned’, ‘impure’ or even ‘satanic’. Along the Swahili coast, Islamic scholars have long been counteracting certain local traditions, such as spirit possessions. As Islam spread further inland, its meeting with indigenous beliefs, combined with the lack of Islamic institutions as an established school system, religious leaders and finance, led to a quite tolerant level of synthesis between Islamic and local practices (Ilfie 1979:368). This is opposed to the Christian churches in Tanzania, with their school system, priesthoods and external finance, which actively counteracted traditional local beliefs. This might explain the more liberal attitude towards traditional healers and traditional religion which I experienced among Pangani’s Muslim population. This inclusive attitude among many of Tanzania’s Muslims has thus led to a division of the group, between what my informants referred to as ‘true believers’ and ‘not true believers’, an issue that was also discussed in Chapter Three. Fatuma’s husband Abu Bakr, claimed this when I asked him why so many Muslims in Pangani went to the local healer and not the *shehe*: “You know, people don’t have faith in God. They have weak faith. [...]”. He and Fatuma agreed that “[t]he people along the coast believe the satanic force is stronger than God’s”. This attitude towards the ‘weak-faithed’ people along the coast was widespread among both Muslims and Christians in Pangani, and especially among many migrants who frequently referred to the coastal culture as backwards and its people as lazy, and is according to the Swahili stereotype discussed previously. This way of blaming the Swahili *area* for its lack of modernity was also found by Caplan in her studies on Pemba (2009).

On the other hand, there were several people who did not see a contradiction between going to traditional healers or a *shetani* drum ritual, and still being a good Muslim. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Ali, a traditional healer, frequently referred to passages in the Quran where *majini* (spirits) were mentioned to defend his practice, using *dini* to legitimize *mila*. This is also shown by Lambek, who argues that “Islam brings heterogeneous textual knowledge, including accounts of spirits, which have tended to oppose to it” (1990:36). As showed by Lambek (1990) in his studies in Mayotte, there are oppositions between lived and textual Islam. In Lambek’s case from Mayotte, he presents two brothers who are Islamic *fundis*, or scholars, and shows how the popularity of the two brothers is not necessarily according to who has the best knowledge about Islam, but about charisma, open-mindedness and the *fundis*’ relationship with the local community. In these cases, it would perhaps be more useful to talk about a number of different ‘Islams’. Islam should therefore be understood through the community, not the other way around.

Accepting that there are a number of ways of practicing Islam, is although not done by everyone, and Iliffe (1979) notes that there has been quarrels in the region since long before the time of independence. The disagreements went down to questions on the use of drums and dancing in rituals, and women's presence in the mosque. Quarrels on these questions occurred in Pangani and Tanga already in the 1940s and 50s (Iliffe 1979:369). Frida Adely (2012) notes how there has been a similar process towards defining 'proper' religious behavior in Jordan, where traditions, and local and global processes of Islam are compared to textual, or 'orthodox' Islam. The charismatic *fundi* in Lambek's study, supported and attended rituals on spirit possessions, but made sure to do it in secrecy (1990:32). This is much according to what happened in Pangani, where people went to the traditional healer in secrecy, or held secret sacrificial rituals on the beach in times of crisis. Seemingly, some greater authoritative definition of religious boundaries affects people's actions and ways of practicing their religion.



Pangadeco. This beach area in the town was historically an important place for ancestor worship and animal sacrifice.

Coping with new boundaries, violence and change: A culture of secrecy

The ongoing tension in defining religious boundaries forces people into taking stands and rethinking the ordinary. People cope with changes in different ways, some with skepticism, some with renewal, and others try to remain in the same position. When what has been conceived as part of the ordinary everyday life, such as praying to ancestors, worshipping

shrines or visiting the traditional healer is challenged, it is likely to be put into a new category. Authoritative definitions of ‘proper faith’ and pressure for discursive coherence might have led people to take alternative measures related to secrecy.

We have already seen in Chapter Three how practices of ‘privatizing’ religion can be used to maintain a feeling of togetherness, in relation to Bråten’s findings from Java (1999). I will here try to examine the field of secrecy further, drawing on Georg Simmel’s (1906) classic writings on secrecy. Simmel explained secrecy as a way of information control in societies, which becomes increasingly important in modernization processes where there is an increased interaction with ‘strangers’ (Marx and Muschert 2009)²³. Simmel’s ideas on secrecy can help us to understand how new forms of social interaction are formed in developing communities. If ideas and activities perceived as valuable in one group, are seen as threatened by people outside the group, these ideas and activities are likely to be organized in secret (Marx and Muschert 2009). Secrecy is closely linked to risk, and keeping secrets can make people more aware of the fragility of their knowledge and their unsafe position in society. Further, the discourse of secrecy is associated with conceptual metaphors, manifested in the language in the form of whispers, lies, rumors and confessions, in hidden spaces or nightly activities (Jones 2014:54-57). Looking at the hitherto presented ethnography, we can see these kinds of aspects of secrecy in several different fields in the local community. The concept of secrecy should be seen as a complex phenomenon, manifested across several domains (Jones 2014:58), which the coming examples will show.

First of all, the new boundary setting related to religious practices in Pangani results in tendencies of secrecy as religious practices are highly privatized. Practices which were not perceived as ‘proper’ were often performed in secret. This is found on two different levels. First, practices of praying and celebrating was often done at home. When the call for prayer was heard around the town, most Muslims closed their shops or restaurants and went home to pray, and not to the mosque. Most went to the Friday prayer in the mosque, but I was whispered that many went home to perform their prayer at daytime because they would rather spend some time sleeping and eating. During Ramadan I found doors to be closed more often than usual, and by several occasions when I visited families at home during this month, I found them eating during mid-day, often laughingly telling me that they woke up with malaria. Secondly, practices

²³ Simmel’s essay on secrecy is somehow diffuse, but is useful as groundwork for further research (Marx and Muschert 2009). It also contributed to make anthropologists recognize the potential of secrecy for constituting the self, the society and the culture (Jones 2014:54).

related to traditional religion was often performed in secret. This was manifested in practices of veiling and going at night when visiting the traditional healers to prevent recognition, or performing secret rituals on the beach in the protective darkness of the night. Furthermore was secrecy used when hiding certain practices not seen as proper to the leading authoritative religious discourse, such as eating pork. Some of the local restaurants in Pangani would on special requests give out black bags with pork, although this was strictly secret activities, only known among pork-eaters.

A second aspect is shown in the field of the ritual practices of the traditional healers, the *waganga*, as secrecy was an important element in the way they practiced and operated. Ali, a *mganga* we will meet in the next chapter, had a great deal of secrecy surrounding how he became a *mganga* after three months disappearance into the forest, where he achieved his knowledge on spirits and medicine. There was also a great deal of mystery surrounding where Ali got his medicine from. As Ali was considered a specialist in Islam, he was able to give advice and argue how his practices were according to Islam²⁴. Ali's brothers would always refer to Ali when I asked questions concerning the Quran, because "Ali has studied the Quran and knows it very well". Even though the Quran exists in Swahili, most Muslims I met had not read the holy book, and its stories and teachings was mostly passed orally. According to Simmel (1906), this control of information is a deliberate way of maintaining a condition of ignorance, allowing the 'experts' to be the contributors of knowledge. Similar practices and the importance of secrecy was also found among the Mende *morimen* of Sierra Leone, who's expert knowledge was based on secrecy and their abilities to interpret Arabic texts (Bledsoe and Robey 1986:209–210).

A third aspect of secrecy is found in the social field. This was illustrated in Sharon's case in the methodology chapter, which showed how several of Pangani's women turned to different measurements to avoid gossip. As mentioned, these measurements included actively avoiding public areas or main streets, or walking longer routes around the town in order not to be seen. This example demonstrates how secrecy is essential not only in events such as rituals, but also in the ordinary, everyday life.

However, local notions around secrecy are also challenged in their meeting with global religious discourses aiming at the public sphere. Some practices related to *dini* are meant to be public, such as the new religious festivals in the town, the Friday prayer in the local mosque

²⁴ Although he also admitted that his practices were contrary to Islam.

and wedding ceremonies. This construction of *dini* as something public, and *mila* as something secret, is further illustrated by an example mentioned in Chapter Two, that I was never allowed to bring a camera to traditional rituals, but politely asked to do so in Muslim weddings.



A Muslim wedding in Pangani Town where some girls from a local Muslim school had a dance performance.

Towards a radicalization of religion?

Islamic ‘fundamentalist’²⁵ developments across the world has certain similarities for instance in their anti-syncretistic dispositions (Stewart and Shaw 1994:12). It has been argued that these anti-syncretistic dispositions are not reactions to tendencies within Islam, but reactions to Islamic communities’ integration into a capitalist world economy dominated by Western countries and ideology (Stewart and Shaw 1994:12). Further, the Islamic reformist ideas are spread throughout the globalized world through the increasing mobility of middle- and upper-class Muslims through education and work abroad and pilgrimages as the hajj. These reformist ideas are also found in Pangani, materialized in the destruction of the holy shrines. The ideas

²⁵ Geschiere (2013) has argued for the more appropriate term ‘reformist’.

were commonly spread through Islamic books, TV and Internet. My neighbor, a self-declared Islamic scholar, had gotten his education through reading and studying online, he told me. He expressed similar reformist ideas as he for instance refused to speak English because it was a 'sinful, heathen language' and saw it as highly inappropriate that a young, Western woman like me was studying religion. My teenage host brother, spent most of his weekend afternoons watching Islamic preaches on TV. These TV shows were mostly from Saudi Arabia and in Arabic, a language my host brother did not speak. With this, I am not indicating that my host brother was a reformist, but that global Islamic discourses are spread through popular media and embraced on different levels. These issues are highly politicized, and I was told by one of my informants that al-Shabaab officially had threatened to kill 3000 people from Tanga to Dar es Salaam within the coming three years because of Tanzania's assistance to Kenya in the fight against the group.

How are we to interpret the destruction of the shrines? And how are people in Pangani reacting to what might be an increased threat from al-Shabaab as presented in the introduction of this chapter? Asad argues that "the notion of a totalitarian Islam rests on a mistaken view of the social effectivity of ideologies" (1986:18–19). It is in fact not the ideology, texts or laws themselves that matter, but their degree of influence and regulation on social practices (Asad 1986:19). Although Islam on its structural level might be seen as a hegemonic ideology through its written word, it is the town's people and local Islamic scholars who interpret and have the final authority of people's actions, an interpretation necessarily made within the boundaries and norms of the local society (Lambek 1993:189).

Simplified, one could argue that the destruction of the shrines outside Pangani are related to a reformist idea of a 'pure' Islam, and that the al-Shabaab affiliated attacks are linked to greater global questions of religious opposition and religiously motivated violence. The answer is obviously not that black and white, and other social and political factors should be closely investigated before these kind of statements can be made. What I am in the position to state, is what local people in Pangani told me regarding these issues. As we have already seen, the elders of Kikokwe condemned the destruction of the holy shrines in the area. They expressed a disappointment over the resistance and vandalizing of practices they saw as *mila zote*, our tradition. People also distanced themselves from the al-Shabaab affiliated attacks in the Tanga region by linking them to the political and social problems in Kenya and Somalia. People highly condemned the attacks, and told me that the responsible people were not Tanzanians; they were Kenyans bringing their problems across the border. I have argued previously in this chapter that

religious boundaries are being redefined and strengthened, and that this pressure on identification is resulting in an increased feeling of togetherness with global religious communities, sometimes challenging the togetherness of the local community. However, in this situation, the boundaries are also set around the nation state, enforcing the Tanzanian ‘us’ in relation to the neighboring countries. In this regard, the issues of identity and context, as discussed in Chapter Three, is highly relevant. I found similar tendencies when I talked to people about the current situation in Syria and issues regarding ISIS. Two Muslim teachers with whom I met at a local school, shook their heads when I asked how they felt about the current situation: “They bomb Muslims. They decrease our number. This is Arab, not Muslim”, Amar, one of the teachers, said. Amar and his colleague distanced themselves from practices often labeled as ‘Islamic extremism’, by labeling it as ‘Arab’. In this way, they separated it from Islam, and reinforced the boundary between Arab and African.

Reactions to these kinds of events can although be found in other spheres of the social (and spiritual) world, as will be illustrated in the following section.

Mythological expressions of social distress

We have seen how there is an ongoing change in religious practices and how people’s religious identities are becoming gradually more attached to global religious communities. Religious boundaries and the definitions of ‘proper faith’ are affecting and challenging old traditions and rituals. At the same time, there is a different perspective to be found in the parallel discourse of traditional religion. People in Pangani often turned to traditional religion and mythology to explain social distress and change. As illustrated in the beginning of this chapter, are people in the Tanga district experiencing difficult and unreliable times, with climatic challenges and the threat of al-Shabaab affiliated groups in the area. I will here present a case to illustrate how change presents itself in tales of spirits.

Spirits of change: The Popobawa

Spirit possessions were a frequent subject of conversation and an issue for many people in Pangani. I spoke to several people who had experienced sickness and even muteness as result of long-time possessions. My host-sister once came running home from school, claiming to have seen a *shetani* in the forest. She explained that some of her fellow students had become

possessed, and had run screamingly into the sea, even though none of them could swim. There were rumors of a female spirit luring men with her to bed, to further punish them for their unfaithfulness. The most known and feared spirit was a *shetani* referred to as Popobawa. Popobawa means “bat wing”, and is a spirit said to fly around at night, attacking people. In the town, the Popobawa was said mostly to attack and sodomize adult men in their sleep.

In the aftermath of my fieldwork, I found that the Popobawa was widely feared in the entire coastal region. Since independence, it has been reported on several incidents of ‘collective panic’ related to spirit attacks in the coastal areas of Tanzania (Walsh 2009). The incidents has in some cases resulted in severe attacks, and even the killing of people alleged to be the Popobawa in several Tanzanian towns. A severe panic broke out in 1995, before the country’s first multi-party election, and spread from Pemba to Unguja (better known as Zanzibar) , and to Dar and Tanga (Walsh 2009:25), and it has been argued that the spirit “has a habit of sweeping across large areas of the Zanzibar islands of Unguja and Pemba at times of political crisis” (Parkin 2004:114).

A rich literature supports the fact that spirit possessions and witchcraft-related practices increase in times of social distress. It has been argued that there was a flourishing belief in witchcraft and sorcery in Tanzania in the first half of the 20th century, as the society became increasingly individualistic and mobile (Ilfie 1979:367), as well as after IMF and the World Banks’ structural adjustment in the post-independence period (Sanders 2001). In fact, contemporary witchcraft and occult practices should not be seen as returning to traditional practices or lack of progress, but as “thoroughly modern manifestations of uncertainties, moral disquiet and unequal rewards and aspirations in the contemporary movement” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999 in Moore and Sanders 2001:11). Parkin asks if the Popobawa can be a recreation of the fears and terrors of the past, a materialized collective memory of the suffering and suppression experienced during slavery (2004:115). As the previous generations, the people of the Tanzanian coast are reliving the experience of something ‘evil’ and unknown coming from the sea at night, to humiliate, vandalize and attack people’s safety. Next to its relation to discourses of politics, the Popobawa can be related to national discourses of homosexuality through the Popobawa’s sodomization of its victims. Parkin also relates the Popobawa to themes of power, control, purity and the state of spiritual uncleanness, which is perceived by some in the area (2004:115).

Lévi-Strauss saw mythical thinking as a way of re-using older materials to solve new challenges, as “it would seem that mythological worlds have been built up, only to be shattered

again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments” (Boas in Lévi-Strauss 1962:21). Lévi-Strauss used the word ‘bricolage’ to explain this: “[...]it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa” (Lévi-Strauss 1962:21). It might seem like this ‘bricolage’ is also highly present in local mythology in Pangani, drawing on historical memory and socio-political situations. The tales of the Popobawa and its attacks on people along the coast during time of distress, further contributes to an argument that traditional religion, mythology and the spirit world is commonly used to express social distress and change. The way it draws on a collective memory and uses elements of common Swahili tales of spirits, relates closely to the ‘bricolage’. An example presented in the following chapter will substantiate this further. Although religious changes in Pangani are manifested in the renewal and reorganization of religious practices and festivals, people’s feelings and explanations to social changes are still commonly expressed through the same fields these religious changes are moving away from, namely traditional religion, spirit possession and local mythology.

Concluding remarks

Although there seems to be a trend towards seeking a ‘purer’ religious identity in Pangani, the fundament of people’s worldview seem to be lying in the traditional religion, as it is through mythological tales of spirits and ancestors, the disappearance of festivals and through assaults by evil spirits, that change is commonly described and perceived. There is not necessarily a contradiction between mythology and religion, as mythology can be seen as *mila*, and therefore a part of people’s history. By distinguishing between *dini* and *mila*, labeling everything ‘traditional’ as *mila*, the people of Pangani are gradually separating the field of tradition from the field of religion. The separation moves towards a ‘discursive coherence’ in the field of *dini*, and a pressure for identifying what is seen as ‘proper’ religious practice, at the same time as it allows *mila* to be *mila*. Furthermore, this separation enables a justification of a common fundament and worldview through *mila*. One issue to be raised here, is that practices of *mila* are not always accepted if they come to close to the field of *dini*, as seen with the case of the destruction of the holy shrines, or in the negative attitude towards the traditional religious festivals.

This chapter has explored local religious discourses’ meeting with global discourses of religion, by investigating the difference between previous and contemporary religious festivals

in the town. I have argued that the new festivals aim at educating the local people of Pangani in 'proper' religious practice and further stress the local religious communities' togetherness with the global religious communities, sometimes surpassing the local feeling of togetherness stressed in the previous traditional festivals. Further, the chapter has sought to show through the case of destruction of holy shrines how religious boundaries are being redefined. Lastly, it draws on the case of the al-Shabaab affiliated attacks presented in the beginning of this chapter, and shows how expressions of social distress and change are still popularly found in traditional beliefs in spirits. I have also argued that there is a tendency of secrecy in Pangani, both in the ritual and spiritual side of life and in the everyday life. The pressure for discursive coherence in some cases leads to privatization or secretization of certain religious practices not seen as part of this coherence, such as visits to the traditional healer, ancestor worship and traditional protective rituals.

In the following chapter, we will continue with the focus on traditional religion and the ongoing boundary setting between different religious practices, but we will turn to a different field. In this field, *dini* and *mila* are in fact combined to legitimate traditional practices, but we will see how this is also often conceived as problematic.

Chapter 5:

Healing, spirit possession and skepticism: The *waganga* in Pangani

In Tanzania, Pangani is known nation-wide for being a spiritual center. My first meeting with this was in Dar es Salaam, where an acquaintance of mine, a Tanzanian engineer with a university degree from London, told me that the first and only time he had visited Pangani, he had been hunted by a strange looking figure during the night. The next morning, he packed his things and never returned. I was warned that the area attracted spirits of all kinds, and that there were ‘witch doctors’ all over. I did not pay much attention to this then, as my original plan did not include focusing on spirit possession and local healers, but as I arrived Pangani, this turned out to be such an important aspect of people’s daily life, that I could not ignore it. It was a frequent subject of conversation and something that concerned most people in Pangani in some way. Spirit possession was often the explanation for a variation of occurrences, and a visit to a traditional healer was usually the solution. Most of the local women whom I talked to, had experienced to be possessed or had some close relatives who had been possessed. This rose my interest further, especially as non-locals did not have the same experiences. I quickly found that there was a division among Pangani’s population on the subject of the *mganga*, varying from presenting the healer as a ‘Good Samaritan’, to an ‘evil sorcerer’ in league with Satan. I never succeeded in finding an accurate number of how many *waganga* there were in Pangani, but one informant told me, laughingly, that there were so many that “if we start to count we will finish tomorrow in the morning!” Another informant could not answer more accurately, either: “In Pangani there are many *waganga*. I can’t explain how many there are!”

In this chapter, we will enter the field of traditional healing to explore on this level how influence from authoritative religious discourses and the redrawing of social and religious boundaries are affecting people’s way of practicing religion. My focus will be to demonstrate how the subjects of traditional healing and spirit possession are influenced and formed by global religious streams and socio-political changes in Tanzania, and how these changes redefine and challenge traditional religious practices in Pangani. To investigate the role of the traditional healer further, I will present the case of Ali, a young *mganga* with whom I spent a great deal of time during my stay in Pangani. Much of the information below, I got from Ali and his family,

who welcomed me into their home and declared that I was their true *dada*, sister. I will try to show how the role of Ali is a highly dynamic one, and how different, and sometimes what one might see as contradictory elements, are used in the process of establishing the healer's role in the contemporary society. Further, I will show how the changing role of the *mganga* is linked to governmental policies as well as global discourses of religion, and how the *mganga* can be interpreted as a symbol, both on modernity and adaption, and on the traditional and 'backwards'. First, I will present some background theory on the matter.

Healing, spirit possession and modernity

The modernization process was long believed to be equivalent to the process of secularization (Asad 2003:181). Recent times has shown that it is not. Geschiere notes that "[t]o many Westerners, it seems self-evident that the belief in witchcraft or sorcery is something 'traditional' that will automatically disappear with modernization" (1997:2). This stereotype does not fit with actual developments in Africa today. In fact, the opposite seems to be taking place in many African countries. Todd Sanders (2001) argues that there has been a recent rise in occult practices in Tanzania as a result to IMF and the World Bank's structural adjustment that led the country into the global consumerist capitalist society. According to Sanders, this is because of people's need of having a familiar way of debating and explaining changes, and because the 'free market' led to a commodification of 'occult' goods. Witchcraft has also be interpreted as a critique, and Moore and Sanders refers to several anthropologists who have argued that "witchcraft can be seen as indigenously-inflected critiques of modernity(ies), capitalism and globalization, and the inherently problematic relations of production that accompany them" (2001:18), and can thus help demystifying modernity (Comaroff 1997:10).

Healing and spirit possessions have long been classical research topics in the field of anthropology, but have after some time in the dusty corners of the field, again come out to be recognized as highly relevant topics also in the modern, globalized world (Mackenrodt 2011). Traditional healers are found all over Africa, and their practices held the leading discourse within medicine before the arrival of biomedicine. Contrary to previous beliefs, "the acceptance of biomedicine did not cause the rejection of traditional medicine" (Rekdal 1999:471). Ever since the end of the colonial period in most of central East-Africa, the role of African traditional healers has been going through a phase of change and redefinition. The term 'traditional' is in this regard misleading, giving the impression that traditional healers have static, unchangeable

roles, which we will see, could not be further from the truth. In Tanzania, traditional healers, also known as *waganga wa kienyeji* or simply *waganga* (singl. *mganga*) exists in most towns and villages, and offer a wide range of services, varying from general advice, health checks and diagnosing, to love potions, exorcisms and medicine curing HIV and AIDS. Traditional healers were by the early missionaries and European explorers made symbols of the pagan and primitive Africa, and were portrayed as evil and given names as ‘devil doctor’, ‘witch doctor’ and ‘wizards’ (Rekdal 1999:463,465). By the British colonial power, traditional healers were long seen as obstacles for the Christianization and civilization of the people subjected to the colonial project (Rekdal 1999:453).

Locating the *mganga*

One aspect that should be discussed before we enter the office of Ali, is the aspect of *location*. As have been mentioned earlier, Pangani is in many ways a different place, and as a center for traditional healers and spirits, it distinguishes itself from other areas in Tanzania. Several anthropologists have discussed the importance of traditional healers’ distance, both culturally and geographically, from his or her clients (Rekdal 1999; Parkin 2014; Sanders 2001; Kamat 2008). Travelling far to seek help with a traditional healer is sometimes seen as part of the treatment, and can be compared to the *Hajj* or other pilgrimages (Parkin 2014:24). While Rekdal found that “[d]iagnosing the cause of illness, which in Africa is so often linked to interpersonal relations within the local community, requires the objectivity and impartiality characteristic of the ‘stranger’ (1999:468), I found relations between healer and clients to be more personal. A female traditional healer with whom I met, only treated her relatives and friends. Another healer had local, regular clients, and I was told that “[t]hey always return!” Although the healer could be seen as less objective and impartial through his knowledge of his clients’ former medical history and life situation, they would continue to return as long as they benefited from their visit. I never observed that people traveled far from Pangani to visit a healer, but I was told that this could occur if a person wanted specialized treatment that was not available in the town, making the journey a practical necessity, rather than travelling for the value of the journey itself, as argued by Parkin (2014). On the other hand, I heard several stories of people traveling *to* Pangani in search for healing. There can be several explanations to this. First of all, Pangani is known as a spiritual center, and has a wide range of traditional healers. This explains why people came from elsewhere to Pangani, and why the local people of Pangani did not see the value of travelling somewhere else to see a healer. Another explanation is that

there is a public hospital and some private clinics easily accessible in the town, which is often cheaper than going to a healer, and might be the better option than travelling in many situations. Parkin (2014) might be right in arguing that there is a trend for travelling in search of healers in parts of eastern East Africa, but this did not seem to be valid in Pangani, where people on the contrary searched for help within the diversity of local healers.

With this knowledge in mind, we are ready to enter the office of a traditional healer in Pangani.

Getting to know a *mganga* and his practices

First of all, it is important to stress that traditional healers in Africa cannot be viewed as a homogenous group in any way, although they are often presented as such. Traditional healers do not only variate in modes of practice, but also in sex, level of education and religion (Gessler et al. 1995:145). Although the following cases are not meant as a generalization, I have found much support in previous literature that corresponds with my findings (eg. Gessler et al. 1995; Larsen 2009; Lambek 1990; Mackenrodt 2011; Parkin 1968; Hurskainen 2004). The first thing Ali asked me, was what kind of *mganga* I wanted to learn about. I told him I wanted to know more about him and his practices, and that is how the story begins.

Meeting Ali

It was another warm day in March. It was around noon, and Melinda²⁶ and I were sitting in the shadow outside her school, enjoying the weak summer breeze. I often used to come to Melinda's school at this time of the day to spend the lunch break with her. We were discussing spirit possessions and I was interested in why so many women compared to men were possessed by the *mashetani*, or spirits. It was this day I met Ali. Ali was one of Pangani's many traditional healers, and was an old friend of Melinda. He came by the school to greet Melinda, and turned out to be more than willing to help me with my research. Later that week Melinda and I were invited to Ali's office. The office was a small room in his family house. The walls and the floor were covered with flags and carpets with Arabic writings. The window was covered with a red blanket which left the room in a dark, red atmosphere, only cut off by small sunrays coming through on the sides, falling on small streams of smoke from the incense. In one side of the

²⁶ Melinda was introduced in Chapter Three.

room he had laid out several Islamic books, bottles with strangely colored mixtures, and different equipment he used in his healing rituals. In the corners, there were pieces of strange wood, roots and shells. Next to the door hung a black robe and some headwear with red and white pearls which he would wear performing rituals. Next to the Quran was a laminated certificate from “Tanzania Traditional Medicine Research for Chronic Epidemic and AIDS Association”, stating Ali as a “prominent traditional doctor/healer and researcher”.

The first *majini* came to Ali when he was ten years old. They wanted him to become a *mganga* as his grandfather had been. Ali did not want to become a *mganga*, and had resisted the *majini*. He was sick for a long time, and eventually, five years later, he went into the forest for three months and returned as a *mganga* with his *mkoba*²⁷, which he had inherited from the *majini* of the forest. He had then decided that he would devote his life to help and cure people. Ali was now in his early thirties. He had a round, good face, short hair and was usually dressed in a red Adidas football t-shirt with matching shorts. He was married, had two children and all his brothers living in his house, assisting him in his practice. As many other families in the town, Ali’s family was struggling to make ends meet, and the house was scarcely equipped and had no furniture or proper windows. Ali’s brother Farouk was always assisting him when he had clients, and often functioned as my interpreter because of his good English skills. They had both studied in Dar es Salaam, at what Farouk referred to as a ‘school for *waganga*’, but had returned to Pangani to be able to stay with their family. When Ali talked, everybody listened. He never talked for a long time, and often seemed restless or bored if he had to sit down for longer periods of time. Often his restlessness resulted in jokes that made people around him cry of laughter. On one occasion, he seemed to grow tired of my endless questions, and suddenly stormed out. After a couple of minutes, he returned with some snails which he left on the floor and dared me to eat, to the amusement of the spectators.

I once asked Farouk what kind of people came to see Ali. The response came immediately, and as something obvious:

Everyone! All people come to see Ali; poor people, rich people, children, Muslims, Christians [...] They have come here the white people and the Arabic people. A lot of different people come here from districts around, from Arusha, Kenya, Dar, different places.

²⁷ Small containers in which the *mganga* mixes medicine.

I wondered how they knew about Ali. “Ali is so famous. If he was a musician, he would be... What can I say, like Diamond²⁸!” Farouk said, grinning. I was impressed. “Does he also have a *mganga*-profile in Facebook, then?” I asked, half joking. “Yes, he has got an account in Facebook and What’s App, but he does not like to advertise there”, Farouk said seriously²⁹. The family explained that in Pangani, they received mostly women, and that most of these were Muslims, like the majority of the population in the town. Many Christians would presumably prefer going to church to receive help from their pastor, although many of them also came to Ali for help. Sometimes Ali travelled to Dar es Salaam, where he explained that most of his clients were Christians. In his office in Pangani, Ali received about 30-40 clients a month, but sometimes as many as four clients a day.

Ali and Farouk informed me about the different types of healers. While some follow *dini* (religion), and others *mila* (tradition), Ali combined both *dini* and *mila*; he was an Islamic expert *and* he had the secret and inherited medical knowledge of his ancestors. This seemed to be a common practice in Pangani, and is also an including one, allowing the healer to reach out to a myriad of people and practices. Ali was an especially popular healer, and was able to provide for his entire family through his income. By combining roles not only of a healer, but also of a conversation partner, advisor, Islamic expert and a keeper of tradition, Ali managed to adopt to the changing community, giving people what they sought. I would argue that Ali’s popularity in Pangani was due to his ways of adapting.

Legitimizing and dealing with skepticism

Ali’s practices as a traditional healer were legitimized in several ways. First of all, his role was legitimized on the local traditional level, having inherited his occupation through generations. His family history in the town made his position one to be respected. On the other hand, Ali’s practices were legitimated through the global discourse of Islam through his knowledge and his use of the Quran. This use of *dini* to legitimize the *mganga*’s practices was also found by Farouk Topan, who argues that “*mila* draws on *dini* for its legitimacy and acceptance where appropriate” (2009:61). Ali’s Islamic knowledge made him popular among his Muslim clients, at the same time as his practices not attached to Islam, were practices everybody in Pangani

²⁸ Diamond is one of Tanzania’s most popular Bongo Flava artists.

²⁹ By using the word ‘advertise’, Farouk commercialized the services of the *mganga*. This further substantiates the argument that the traditional healers are indeed modern, and that that there in recent time has been an increase in ‘occult’ economies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Sanders 2001)

could relate to. He thereby also attracted many non-Muslim clients. As the use of *dini* could legitimize *mila*, *mila* was also used as a means of getting around taboos introduced by *dini* (Topan 2009:62). For instance, the healer could perform a practice seen as contrary to Islam while being possessed by a spirit, thus making the spirit responsible for the action. In this way, *dini* and *mila* are approached in different ways to legitimize the healer's practice, and are not dichotomized in the same way as we have seen for instance in the religious festivals. Additionally, Ali's license from the government, presented in the introduction of this chapter, legitimized his practices on a national level.

Paradoxically, some of the same reasons that are said to legitimize the healer's position, are also used to delegitimize it. As will be illustrated later in this chapter, Pangani's traditional healers also met a lot of skepticism and resistance. One time I asked Ali about this issue, and it turned out that Ali was very aware of the skepticism towards his practices as a *mganga*, practicing both *dini* and *mila*:

[...] It is bad. Even in Islam, it is bad. But when you get bad disease, you know you will go. You have already had all the check-ups, been to hospital [...] It does not matter if you are Christian or Muslim, you must go. Then you will find your problem and be all right.

Many of Ali's clients would come at night to limit the risk of being seen. The Muslim women would often cover up with a hijab or *niqabu*, Farouk told me. With a smile on his face, he also added that the Christian women often wore hijabs when visiting the office as well³⁰:

F: Some are afraid when they come here. Others are afraid of their husbands, their wives, they don't want to be seen by the people if they go to the witch doctor.

I: Why would they hide it?

F: It would be difficult for them and their religion if they were seen. Others have their secret problems, and they don't want to be seen.

It was May, and the month of Ramadan was approaching. I was told that Ali would close his office during this month, only working in the night or if there was an emergency. He was reluctant to tell me an exact reason for why he closed his office, and said it was because his Muslim *majini* were also fasting, so it would be highly disrespectful to summon them. I continued to ask throughout the month, and was eventually told that they could get problems if they practiced the healing rituals during the Holy Month, and therefore closed the office out of

³⁰ I observed that the niqab was often used by local women in situations where they did not want to be seen or gossiped about.

respect. What kind of problems they could get was left unclear, although Ali and Farouk expressed that they sometimes felt stigmatized. A female *mganga* expressed the same issues as Ali, and she could not summon her spirits during Ramadan. The social and religious control during Ramadan was felt by them both, and the control was manifested within their bodies; they were not able to summon the spirits or perform healing rituals. It has been argued that the Swahili spirit possession is not a ‘possession’ signifying total takeover of the person’s body and mind, but rather an ‘embodiment’ of the spirit (Larsen 2014:10). If spirit possession is seen as an embodiment of spirits, the religious control of the healers’ bodies during Ramadan can arguably be an ‘embodied control’. However, Ali managed to find his ways of working also during Ramadan. His Christian *majini* were not fasting, and were still present in his body and could assist him if it was an emergency. He also received some clients during the night, and assisted them with advice and medicine.

The *mganga* and his spirits

As we have seen, Ali had become possessed by spirits. He had, among others, American, Arabic, Maasai and Chinese spirits. There are two main categories of spirits, *jini*³¹ and *shetani*³² (pl. *majini* and *mashetani*). *Mashetani*, are explained as evil, demonic spirits who mostly cause harm. The *majini*, on the other hand, are good spirits as long as you accept them, and might give you great fortune and knowledge. The *majini* have different characters, but are seen to be subject to the will of God. They also have a will of their own, and some enjoy smoking and drinking, and could easily lead someone in the wrong direction. The spirits come from different tribes or continents, and can explain a great deal about Tanzanians meeting with the outer world. The *jini wa kitabu*, spirits of the book, are often Arabic spirits. These are Islamic experts, and educate the *mganga* in Islam (Larsen 2014:17). They reflect on the feeling that ‘pure’ Islam derives from Arabia (Parkin 2014). The *mzungu*³³ spirit, speaks English, and reflects on a stereotypical view on Westerners, as it enjoys money, cigars and is rather lazy. Maasai spirits are also common spirits in Pangani, and it has been argued that these spirits became common during the times of slave trade, as Swahili traders traveled inland and interacted with other ethnic groups (Mackenrodt 2011:16). The Maasai spirit is useful as a protective guardian

³¹ From the Arabic *jinn*. Also spelled djinn, jinni or genie. I have chosen to use the Swahili spelling, *jini*.

³² Deriving from the Arabic word for the Devil, *Sheitan*.

³³ *Mzungu* (pl. *wazungu*), a person with European decent. Commonly used on all white-skinned people.

(Mackenrodt 2011:16), which easily draws links to the fact that the Maasai are popularly used as guards around Tanzania. In this way, talking about spirits is a way of talking about the world.

During one of my visits to Ali's office, I witnessed a ritual where one of Ali's *majini* took control over his body and mind. Ali had many spirits, but he wanted me to meet one of them in particular. This *jini* was a *mzungu jini*, named Jackson. The entire family was gathered in the office, and we were sitting in a half circle around Ali. Ali prepared by putting on a black skirt, a shirt, a red headband and covered himself with a black cloth. He started making weird sounds, like vomiting or burping. This went on for some minutes. In the beginning, everybody seemed like nothing was going on and continued talking. After some time, everybody turned quiet, and some nervously left the room. Ali, or Jackson who he had become, came out of the cloth. He had covered his head with pearls that went down to his eyes, partly hiding his face. Farouk welcomed him in English, and I was told to come closer. I was explained that Ali wanted to surprise Jackson with a *mzungu* visitor. He told me that Jackson was from *Marekani* (America). The spirit talked in a light, almost unheardable whisper, a very high voice and a smile on his lips. "He asks for news from your world", Farouk explained. I felt a bit ashamed and nervous, and the changing, tense atmosphere was almost touchable. We talked for some time, and I was given some advice. Farouk finally said it was time for Jackson to go. Ali moved his neck and head around, and then returned. He looked up and put on a sleepy, but curious look. "He does not remember anything", Farouk explained. Ali pointed up above my head, and I saw I had been asked to sit directly under a package hanging in the ceiling. "What is it?" I asked. "It's a bomb", some of the boys said, and everybody laughed. I asked to take some pictures before I left. Ali took his *mkoba* and posed happily.



Ali and his mkoba in his office. Ali gave me his permission to use this picture in my thesis.

Based on the information on spirits, it becomes clear that the work of the *waganga* and the ‘traditional’ African religion, is highly influenced by the outer world. Not only are the *waganga* claiming to be possessed by spirits from Arabia, China and America, but they claim to know healing practices, medicine and languages deriving from these parts of the world. The *mganga* would summon different *majini* according to the problem of the client, and sometimes chooses spirits that resemble the client, for instance like he did with me in the example illustrated above. The *mganga* is using global influence as a tool, and his toolbox, is the world.

Rituals of synthesis

One day it was particularly hot, I went down to the beach with Ali, his brothers and Melinda. The breeze was cool, and Ali immediately ran into the waves, pretending to be drowning. Farouk and I sat in the hot sand. “We bring clients down here sometimes,” Farouk said. “Every person has his own star, and sometimes, if you have a lot of bad luck over a long period of time, it means your star might be falling [...]”. He explained further how the ritual proceeded. The client would be brought into the sea by Ali, and then washed with a special herbal medicine, while Ali prayed to the *majini* and the ancestors. This would symbolize the ‘washing of the

star', and the client's bad luck would turn. The ritual is an interesting mix between different 'religious traditions', and is a good illustration of Ali's syncretistic approach to healing. That every person has a 'star' is believed by many Tanzanians. The star is a common symbol both in Christianity and Islam, but it is usually not used in this manner, and might be a symbol dating back to the times before the arrival of Christianity and Islam. Further, the ritual bears resemblances to the Christian baptism of immersion, where the body of the baptized is fully submersed into a river or the sea. The ritual differentiates from the Christian baptism in the use of herbal medicine and prayer to what Farouk explained was Islamic spirits and ancestors. Ali combined different practices of 'purification', through the material cleansing of the body, and the symbolic cleansing of the soul, customized to all his clients through the synthesis of Christian, Muslim and traditional rituals.

Ali was unique in many ways through his specialized combination of *mila* and *dini*, charismatic figure and young age. To illustrate the variation in different traditional healers' practices, I will briefly present the case of a female *mganga*, whom I was introduced to by my informant Fatuma.

Meeting Rehema, a female *mganga*

Rehema was a female *mganga* also practicing in Pangani Town. At first, Rehema was very reluctant to meet me. Contrary to Ali, she did not like to talk about her abilities, Fatuma explained. Rehema eventually agreed to see me, and we met one afternoon in the shadow outside her house, where she also had a small vegetable shop. It was during the month of Ramadan, and Rehema was fasting. She was wearing a yellow *deera*, and looked much older than her forty years. Unlike Ali, Rehema had become a *mganga* as an adult, and had only been practicing for two years. She told me she had started to feel sick, had lost her eye sight, and eventually, after several visits to the hospital, a healer had told her that she was possessed with *majini*. After communicating with the *majini*, it became clear that they wanted her to become a *mganga*. Rehema said that she never wanted to become a *mganga*, but that the choice was not hers to make: "Sifurahi [I am not happy]. But there is nothing I can do because the *jini* is already in my body. Life is just normal". Rehema mostly treated her friends and family, and did not take any new clients. The *majini* tore on her energy, and she therefore sought to limit her healing practices. She never took payment from her family members, but she said that she enjoyed feeling more powerful and in control now that she had the status of a *mganga*. Rehema was a

Muslim, but did not have any special knowledge within Islam as Ali, nor did she have the same support around her as him. What Rehema and Ali did have in common, was their wide range of different clients, and Rehema told me that she treated Muslims, Christians, young and old. A rich Christian family from Pangani, now living abroad, would always come and seek her help when in town, she explained, although they liked to keep it a secret.

The possessed women of Pangani

During my time in Pangani, I met a great number of women who were ‘troubled with shetani’, but a considerably smaller amount of men. The possessions further struck out as a bigger problem among local, Muslim women. Several women whom I talked to, converted from Islam to Christianity because they had been troubled with the *mashetani* as Muslims. Other studies in different African societies have had similar findings, for instance Kiernan’s (1994) study among the Zulu Zionists in South Africa and Hurskainen’s (2004) study among the Maasai. People with whom I spoke, had several explanations for this, although most of them said they had not given it much thought. Melinda was one of my informants who had converted to Christianity because of spirit possession. She said that mostly women were possessed because of their hard life situation, bad marriage and poverty, and explained that she had been possessed when she was miserable and unhappy with her life. Rehema explained that women easily get possessed because they are impure once a month, and attracts the *shetani*. Giving birth was also explained as a liminal period where women are vulnerable, a statement fully supported by the theories of Mary Douglas (1966). Additionally, men were said to be unattractive for the *mashetani*, because they smoke marihuana, take drugs and drink alcohol, while women are beautiful, dress up and use perfume. Fatuma was harsher, and said that women probably get possessed because they only sit outside their houses and gossip all day.

Melinda’s statement might be the one closest to my findings, as I found the healer to have an important role in assisting people in different social situations. Many of the women who came to visit Ali and Rehema came because of their life situation; some wanted help in their love life or career, others wanted general advices, and many women came with problems concerning their marriage. Several of Ali’s female clients came to him to tell him stories of difficult family situations. Some were beaten and abused by their husband, others were refused money. In these kind of situations, Ali would normally just talk and listen to the woman. He would not tell anybody about their conversation, and the woman would get some advice on

what she could do to improve the situation. Sometimes they would suspect that the husband had a *shetani* who made him act this way. Rehema explained that the woman then would be given some medicine she could secretly put in her husband's food or shower bucket. I would argue that only this small action of secretly medicating an abusive husband, would at least give hope and a sensation of doing *something* to improve the situation, and in this way, be important for the woman's sense of self. Lack of money and institutions to take care of women mistreated in their homes, as well as mistrust to the criminal justice might be some of the reasons why women would rather visit a *mganga* than other institutions in search for help. For instance, during my first month in Pangani, a woman sued her husband for abusing her. She was ridiculed among the people with whom I spoke, called a liar, and people said she would never win the trial. It is arguable that women in Pangani, sometimes feeling marginalized and suppressed in a patriarchal society, find it easier to search for help within the marginal parts of society, because although the *waganga* are highly recognized and visited in Pangani, they also meet skepticism and resistance.

Skepticism, resistance and defining religious boundaries

As argued by Kamat (2008), the position and practices of traditional healers in the coastal areas of Tanzania might not be as popular as often claimed to be. We have already seen that Ali was aware of the level of skepticism towards his practices as a *mganga*, combining *dini* and *mila*. To build up the thesis' argument, I therefore wish to present some empirical examples which show how there is a growing tendency of skepticism towards the traditional healers. I will argue how this tendency, is closely related to the global discourses of religion, and how it has affected Pangani especially during the last decades of migration to and from town, and with new access to Internet and TV.

I once had a conversation with Melinda, her friend Peter and a pastor. We discussed the practices of the *mganga*. They were all Christians, but spoke about the work of the *mganga* with great interest and respect, though they also said that they would never participate in the healing practices and rituals. Later that day, I convinced Peter to take me to a so-called Demon Dance ritual, or *ngoma*. He seemed nervous, and refused to enter the area and insisted that we kept at least 10 meters between us, and the area of the ritual. He said the place was full of spirits, and that it was only safe for the members of the group who had already been possessed. This was a typical behavior among many of the people whom I met; they claimed not to believe in

spirit possessions and the work of the *mganga*, but they were often terrified of the rituals that were performed. I met many Christians from outside of Pangani who were even more skeptical than Peter. Some of them compared the *waganga* and their clients with devil-worshippers and saw it as a sign of bad faith, equally for Muslims and Christians. Joyce, a Lutheran from the Kilimanjaro-area who was presented in Chapter Three, said that the *waganga* were popular because of the Swahili culture along the coast: “We are in *uswahilini*”, she said, explaining what she used as a negative term of the Swahili area, referring to how people there were more traditional and believed in things from the past.

Several of my Muslim informants were also skeptic to the practice of the *mganga*. Fatuma was one of them. She was not originally from Pangani either, and often referred to herself as a ‘strong believer’. She had an Islamic *mwalimu* (teacher) giving her private classes each Friday, and frequently read articles, discussions and poems in international Islamic forums online, which she gladly shared with me. Fatuma said that Muslims who went to the *mganga* had ‘bad faith’ and were not strong believers in Allah. The *waganga* often cared too much about money, she said, and they would fool you into believing you were possessed so that they could earn more money. She arranged so I could talk to a Muslim scholar, who she wanted to confirm that no ‘true believer’ would visit the *mganga*. The scholar, a young man called Abdallah, agreed with Fatuma: “The work of the *mganga* is not proper to Islam. I advise people to visit the local *shehe*”.

Fatuma was always eager to assist my research, and on another occasion, I met with her and her husband Abu Bakr. We sat on the floor in Fatuma’s small room and had dinner, when Fatuma encouraged me to ask some questions. The conversation went on in English, as Fatuma and her husband both spoke it fluently:

F: Idunn, ask him about the *majini* and the *mashetani*!

[...]

AB: There is a belief in the satanic force all around the coastal areas. They used to play the drums and dance the demon dance, cry and roll around. The young people don’t believe now. They [the older generations] used to find some good life with help from the satanic forces.

Me: But many people still go to the *mganga*? And the *mganga* also have the Quran in his office!

AB: You know, people don’t have faith in God. They have weak faith. He [the *mganga*] is misusing the Quran. The *jinis* were created by God to help with his worship, but some use it for

their own benefit. The problem is that the *mganga* pretends to know and have control of it. He will drag your hair and strangle you, and say it is *mashetani*.

F: Maybe it is because we [read: the Swahili] don't have work, we have so much free time, that we start believing in the possessions. I think it is because we are uneducated and don't have a strong faith. That is why there are no *majini* among you Christians in Europe, because you are so busy. You don't have time for it.

Me: But even Christians here go to the *mganga*?

F and AB: Yes! The people along the coast believe the satanic force is stronger than God's. Even you Christians go to the witch doctor to get power. They go to get more people to their church.

AB: [...] The *mganga* also uses God, but why do you need to use him as a bridge? You don't need a bridge!

I found this attitude to be common among many of Pangani's Muslims, especially among non-locals and educated Muslims. Although the traditional healers in Pangani were popular and commonly respected, an ongoing trend of skepticism towards the *waganga* is clearly read in the previous dialogues. The cases above also illustrate how people kept blaming the town or the 'Swahili-area' for its people's beliefs. It was commonly referred to as 'traditional', 'pagan', 'satanic' and 'superstitious', and was sometimes used as an explanation for the lack of development. The Pentecostals in Pangani were especially critical to traditional practices in town, and strongly condemned the work of the *waganga* by linking it to greater questions of good and evil. These arguments will be further illustrated in the following case.

Pentecostalism, moviemaking and the cosmic fight between good and evil

It was late June, and I was going for one of my daily morning walks around town, when I decided to drop by the shop of a friend and informant of mine, James. James was a young man in his late twenties, originally from Muheza. He was a shop-keeper, movie-producer and a Pentecostal. James' shop was small and dusty. He sold candy, biscuits and some schoolbooks, though I had never seen him have a single customer. In the corner of his shop, which he mostly referred to as 'his office', was a broken Norwegian Henning Olsen ice cream box, which had probably come to town in one of the ships that regularly arrived Pangani with hundreds of tons of garbage coming from all over the world. When I arrived, James was working on his

computer, editing a movie he had recently shoot. I asked if I could see some of the clips. It turned out that James' movie was about a war between a Pentecostal pastor and a powerful wizard. The writer of the story and the movie's main character was the pastor, acted out by a man who was a pastor in real life too. The movie followed his struggle to fight the evil wizard and spread the word of God. There were also several *waganga* in the movie, whom James explained to be not as evil as the wizard, but guilty of leading people away from the light and binding them to old traditions. In one scene, a group of people were gathered around a *mganga* who was dancing intensively around a fire next to a big baobab tree. He bore a staff, was dressed in animal skins, and had painted his otherwise naked skin with red, white and black paint. While he danced, the spectators surrounding him went gradually crazier, and by the end of the clip, most of them were lying on the ground, shaking and talking in tongues.

There are several things to be read out from this scene. First of all, the symbolism used to portray the *mganga* illustrates how the movie-producers want to present him to their audience: as someone primitive and uncivilized, dancing half-naked around a fire dressed in animal skins. Though many *waganga* have special clothes they use in their rituals, and the colors red, white and black are regular in their practices, this illustration of a *mganga* seemed to be taken more out of a 1900th century missionary letter. Comparatively, the pastor was dressed in formal-looking black trousers and a white shirt. Another central symbol is the one of the baobab tree, a tree which literally has roots into Tanzanian traditions. The tree is often used as a meeting place, and has traditionally played an important role as a site for performance of rituals or worship, and frequently occurs in myths. A recognized Pentecostal view on witchcraft is precisely this, that the devil works through tradition (Geschiere 2013:187). Finally, in the end of the scene, there was an obvious situation of chaos when most of the spectators apparently get possessed. In this way, by presenting the *mganga* as uncivilized, and at the same time linking him to the baobab tree, using it as a symbol of something traditional and unmodern, the scene shows how the belief and support of the *mganga* will eventually result in chaos. As James explained, the *waganga* in the movie are not evil themselves, but they are disturbing the ongoing war between the pastor and the wizard by pacifying and stealing potential supporters of the pastor. James' movie portrays not only the pastor's fight against the evil wizard and the misleading *waganga*, it portrays, through the dichotomy of tradition/modernity, an actual war between the good and the evil. Knowing that Pentecostal ideas of tradition are linked to ideas of the devil, one can see how the traditional healer, played out as a primitive and heathen

symbol, is here linked to a greater question of world-view, and made part of the cosmic battle between good and evil.

This is not a unique example. Peter Geschiere argues that there has been a new mediation of witchcraft in Africa the last couple of years (2013:187). Witchcraft is frequently a topic in the radio and newspapers, and it is being made numerous movies and TV-series about the topic in all of Africa. The Pentecostal impact on many of these movies and TV-series is undiscussable (Geschiere 2013:186-187), and it can be argued that Pentecostal churches all over Africa are using the tools of media to try to change people's attitudes against witchcraft and traditional healers. James' movie was obviously sponsored by the Pentecostal church, and based on a clear message. The Pentecostal influence is spreading throughout most parts of the African continent, and Birgit Meyer has argued that there in Ghana is a "pentecostalization of the public sphere" (Meyer in Geschiere 2013:188). Still, from an emic perspective is the belief in wizards and spirits among many of Tanzania's people as real as anything. This is well illustrated by the fact that James and the movie-producers had problems finding an actor willing to play the evil wizard, due to the fact that the actors were scared that people would mistake them for being actual wizards. Both Pentecostals and Muslims in Pangani were creating a distance between their faith and the traditional religion in the region. Geschiere (2013) has noted that Pentecostal and Islamic influence on traditional African beliefs in spirits and the occult is similar, as both Pentecostals and Islamic scholars often attach the existence of spirits to the devil. They are in this way permitted to recognize the existence of such spirits, although their faith not necessarily permits it (2013:200).

Crossing boundaries of biomedicine and healing

Witchcraft and healing has often been stamped as something static within a 'closed system' (Moore and Sanders 2001:12). A dichotomy between the traditional and the modern has in this way been reinforced, giving the impression that healing is a static phenomenon. I will here present a case which shows how it is not. Although the healer frequently takes use of syncretistic practices in his approach to healing, the healer's clients are also bending and crossing the boundaries of different healing practices. Halima was a young Muslim girl who was finishing her studies at the upper secondary school in town. As soon as she finished, she planned to move away from Pangani to start at the university in one of the nearby cities. I had known Halima for

many months, when she one evening told me that she had been possessed by *mashetani* when she was young:

I was sick for two years. I was falling down, screaming a lot. I did not have any friends, I was always sick. I liked to stay alone, did not like to be with other people. Sometimes I could be more than one person, I could be two or three persons, speaking with their voices. Even two men! I would run and scream in the streets, almost naked. Maybe with only one piece of clothes. I went to the hospital many times, but they found no disease. So auntie's brother took me to the *mganga*. [...] [The *mganga*] said I had to live there with him for two weeks. My family could not be there. Everyday he gave me medicine. And the food was so bad [...] But it worked. When my uncle came to pick me, I was OK. Then auntie also took me to the *shehe*, and I was even better.

Halima seemed ashamed that she had stayed with the *mganga*, but after being sick for two years without getting the right treatment in the hospital, her family was left with little choice. As Halima explained, her aunt had later taken her to the *shehe*, a local Islamic scholar, who had read from the Quran. Halima had during her time of illness crossed the boundaries of biomedical healing, traditional healing and Quranic healing, and was not well until she had been through all three of them.

The aspect of biomedicine was believed to surpass the popularity of traditional healers, but later studies have shown that the position of traditional healers remain a relevant and popular one (Rekdal 1999). This can also be compared to the contemporary situation in Western Europe and the US, where 'alternative' medical practices have become increasingly popular. My informants in Pangani never saw a contradiction in going to the traditional healers and the hospital. In fact, most people combined the two, or even drew in a third field of Quranic healing as in the case of Halima. A doctor working in a clinic in Tanga, complained that families often brought traditional medicine with them to the hospital, giving the patient a double treatment. Furthermore, traditional healers sometimes take use of biomedical methods, wearing white doctor coats, and sending their patients to hospitals for blood and urine samples (Gessler et al. 1995:152). In this way, the boundaries between biomedicine and healing are made blurry, and as biomedical methods travel across the border towards traditional healing, traditional medicine and people's believe in it, travel with them to the hospitals.

Still, there are certain differences. As noted by Parkin (2014:33), biomedical clinics and hospitals are commonly seen as more competent at treating acute conditions, while healers are seen as better at curing chronic diseases. Like Halima, most people would go to the hospital

prior to visiting a healer as long as they did not suspect that the sickness was caused by a spirit. Ali and Farouk often complained that some *waganga* fooled their clients into believing that they were possessed, when they actually had what they referred to as 'hospital disease'. This was a problem for modern healers, Ali said, and stressed that he always cooperated with the hospital and frequently sent his clients there if he could not cure them. According to a study done by Gessler et al. (1995), many traditional healers in Tanzania did not feel accepted by Western trained health staff. The lack of communication and collaboration between traditional healers and western trained health staff, and also between traditional healers, led to mistrust and suspicion (Gessler et al. 1995:154). During the last decades, traditional healers have become increasingly recognized by the World Health Organization as valuable parts in health promotion programs, and it has been opened for research on traditional medicine and healing practices³⁴ (Rekdal 1999:465).

Visiting a traditional healer instead of a biomedical clinic has several advantages that explain people's choice of healing. Traditional healers are often more flexible when it comes to payment, while clinics and hospitals normally have fixed prices and expect payment to be made instantly (Parkin 2014:32). Ali usually took payment according to the client's economic situation, and stated how this was a normal, and also appreciated tendency among many traditional healers. Often, if the client could not pay, the client could return with the payment when he or she had managed to get enough money, though on some occasions they would not give out medicine until the payment was completed. Other healers, like Rehema, who focused her healing practices on family members and friends, would usually not take payment. The informal sector of traditional healers charge more over time than biomedical clinics and hospitals, but among the local population there is a common understanding that hospitals are more expensive, and that healers care more about the actual well-being of their clients than biomedical practitioners do (Parkin 2014:32). The previous examples on how healers often assist clients in social situations and with a wide range of issues, further substantiates this argument. With the previous examples in mind, it is arguable that many locals have more trust in the uncommercial ethics of traditional healers, than to commercial biomedical centers. The 'blurred boundaries' between traditional healing practices and biomedicine demonstrates the healers' flexibility, as well as people's flexible and open attitude towards different types of healing, and shows how the relationship between biomedicine and traditional medicine is not a

³⁴ This research has in some cases led to traditional medical knowledge and heritage being taken from the locals, and commercialized by international medical companies, without acknowledging its origin (Parkin 2014:29).

dichotomous one. However, critique by African scholars on the subject argues that traditional medicine and biomedicine are not at all comparable, and that the use of Western medical terminology when discussing African traditional medicine sets for an uneven comparison (Tangwa 2007). The critique also address the fact that Western medicine is often referred to as ‘orthodox’, while traditional medicine is ‘unorthodox’. Tangwa argues that in the African setting, where the majority of the population are said to be using traditional medicine, it is rather Western medicine which is the ‘unorthodox’ one (2007:43).

Governmental influence and licenses to heal

Between the Quran, bottles of medicine, Arabic scriptures and different requisites for healing sessions in Ali's office, there was a piece of laminated paper. This piece of laminated paper, was actually more centralized in his office-arrangements than the Quran itself. As mentioned in the introduction, the license was from "Tanzania Traditional Medicine Research for Chronic Epidemic and AIDS Association”, stating Ali as a “prominent traditional doctor/healer and researcher”.

Sanders (2001) argues how Tanzania's introduction of capitalism, consumerism and structural adjustment, has given traditional healers a strengthening position. Although it might be a strengthening one, their position is also increasingly controlled by national and global authorities. Since the colonial period, there has been a certain centralization and control of healers’ knowledge (Keida 2010 in Parkin 2014:28). Traditional healers in Tanzania increasingly experience their practices being controlled and affected by authorities. During the colonial and early post-colonial period this authoritative control of healers also occurred, and some healers were even prevented from practicing at home due to sporadic government inspections (Parkin 2014:27–28). The German colonial power tried to ban exorcism dances, but were met with resistance, and had to give in for the ban (Iliffe 1979:206). Parkin (2014) shows that traditional healers in lack of a license, are sometimes hindered from travelling to patients or forced to pay bribes to continue their travel. Many healers are still unlicensed. Rehema, who mostly attended to her relatives and close friends, did not have such a license. Ali, on the other hand, operated on a bigger scale, and frequently travelled to Dar es Salaam, and was therefore in need of a license. Officially, the license requires a supplication and an interview by the District Medical Officer (Gessler et al.1995:154), but far as I understood, most traditional healers could get this license as long as they could pay for it. Although the license demonstrates

an increased authoritative and governmental control of the healers, it also has positive effects for the healers. The license can for instance help healers if the treatment fails, and legal action is taken by the families (Gessler et al. 1995:154). Additionally, the central position of the license in Ali's office, demonstrated how proud Ali was of this governmental approval of what he was doing. It also shows the importance of the license for his clients, and thereby also the position of governmental influence.

Traditional healers as flexible and modern symbols

Though the *waganga* are often referred to as 'local' or 'traditional', this does not mean that they are not very much affected and influenced by national and global streams. Many traditional healers in Tanzania are linked to the outer world through Islam and the purchase of herbal medicine from South Asia and Arabia. Medicine and medical textbooks on how to practice certain healing rituals, travel across the Indian Ocean from countries often perceived as having a 'higher' Islamic culture, and ends up in medicine stores and homes along the Swahili coastline (Parkin 2014:29–31). Ali had several types of books from countries outside of Tanzania, and on some occasions when I visited, Ali was out to "get medicine". This was always said with some secrecy, as if mystifying where Ali got his *dawa*..

Peter Geschiere (1997) shows in his study from Cameroon how traditional healers' abilities to adopt and be flexible, made them capable of exploiting and adopting to people's feelings of anxiety and frustrations, which came with the rapid changes in society. In this way, the occult is constantly reinterpreted and made something 'constructive'. Geschiere notes that "[i]t is precisely through this ambivalence that discourses on the occult incorporate modern changes so easily" (1997:13). Traditional healers are in this manner made political symbols, and has throughout history played important roles in the making of the country. Traditional healers were the key figures in the *maji-maji* rebellion in 1905-1907, perhaps Tanzania's most remembered uprising against European colonial rule. The resistance was inspired and provided by traditional religion, and people were gathered and motivated by traditional healers. A prophet named Kinjikitile, distributed a medicine, *maji* (meaning water), to protect people during combat. The medicine later gave the name to the rebellion (Iliffe 1979:168–170).

Traditional healers are, as shown by Rekdal (1999), highly adaptable and open to the alien and unknown, and have managed to adapt to social changes in a way that has made them important symbols of cultural change. People in Eastern-Africa have long been used to different

types of healing practices, and has traditionally been accustomed to travel in order to find the best possible healing, preferably culturally distant healing (Parkin 2014). Rekdal (1999) argues that this is part of the explanation on how biomedicine has been so easily adopted in Eastern-Africa. This could also be used as an explanation on healers' ways of adapting to the new era and greater structural and social changes. Rekdal also argues that the "noble witch doctor is a representation of the critique of modern medicine" (1999:466). Traditional medicine is seen as more personal than biomedicine, at the same time as biomedicine does not offer a cure for spirit possession.

I would argue that a healer such as Ali, has a role as an intermediary between traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. He combines elements from different religious belief systems, and attracts people of different backgrounds and religious affiliation with his multicultural *majini*. He can therefore be seen as a symbol, not only of religious synthesis and tolerance, but of global change and adaption. On the other side, the healer is used as a symbol of the opposite, as illustrated in the case of James' movie, where the healer is made symbol of the uncivilized, traditional and satanic. These opposing symbols of the same *mganga*, illustrate the opposing views present in Pangani today: a dispute on the definition of religious boundaries, and on the different positions taken within greater religious discourses.



Ali preparing for one of his rituals.

Concluding remarks

Who is in the position to define religious meaning in contemporary Pangani? It has been argued that one can define authority roles through the idiom of control of medicines (Parkin 1968:430). From the cases illustrated above, I would argue that the traditional healer still inhabits an authoritative position in the small-town community, although the healer has to adopt within, and according to the dynamic and changing discourses of religion. The authority of biomedicine is also challenging the role of the traditional healer, even though many manage to cope with the changes through their dynamic roles. With inspiration from Michael Lambek (1990), I would argue that the contemporary organization of knowledge is changing towards a greater focus on textual knowledge and the legitimated knowledge of global religious communities. This forces the traditional healers to adopt according to the new discourses, for instance through the use of the Quran and cooperation with the biomedical sector. Global hegemonic discourses of religion, as well as the nation state, are increasingly controlling the bodies of the *waganga* in Pangani, through restrictions during Ramadan, governmental inspections and licenses to heal. A question to be raised is also if people in Pangani actually see the practice of a *mganga* as a religious practice, and not merely a way of getting treatment. Considering Ali's combination of *dini* and *mila*, and many healers frequent use of Islamic texts and Christian, Muslim and ancestor spirits, I would say yes. People's critique and reluctance against the traditional healers further substantiates this. While many aspects of traditional religion seem to be disappearing, the position of the traditional healers, or *waganga wa kienyeji*, remains strong. I would argue that Ali's popularity is not only a result of his ability to adjust to the contemporary religious situation, but also a result of his way of offering what people want and need in daily life: a conversation partner, an explanation of the ways of life and an alternative to biomedicine. In his somehow increasingly marginalized position, he keeps attracting people who themselves might also feel marginalized. As Moore and Sanders (2001) have argued, witchcraft can be seen as critiques of modernity, capitalism and globalization. The traditional healers' popularity and the big amount of spirit possessions in Pangani might thus also reflect on the social, political and economic situation in the area, much according to what is discussed in Chapter Three and Four.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to look at syncretistic movements by themselves, but using the concept of synthesis to see how boundaries are drawn and formed, and how previous syncretistic and traditional practices now are changing due to global and local

discourses of religion. I have used the case of traditional healers to do this. Although the term ‘traditional healer’ might give an impression that healers are somehow static and non-influenced by the outside world, I have intended to show how aspects of traditional healing is on the contrary highly influenced by greater national and global processes, but also how people’s different views on the local *waganga*, uncover a possibly greater dispute over the definition of religious boundaries, synthesis and evolving traditions in Pangani. Lastly, I would argue that the belief in ‘spectral beings’ (Larsen 2014), ‘witchcraft’ (Geschiere 1997; Iliffe 1979) and the ‘occult’ (Sanders 2001), are social phenomenon that can give insight in people’s concerns of daily life and social changes, and are therefore highly relevant and modern topics to study also today.

Chapter 6:

Tuko pamoja. “We are together”.

Concluding remarks

I have in this thesis presented the town of Pangani, and have explored some aspects of the complexities in which people live, focusing on the field of religion. The thesis can favorably be seen as a story of Pangani, a story in which different parts and organizing elements in the processes of social and religious boundary setting become visible throughout the chapters. The thesis has explored how coherence is imagined, searched for and lived through discourses about identities, traditions and religion. I have argued that in Pangani there is an ongoing pressure for defining religious boundaries between what is perceived as ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ religious practice. This is a process closely related to the dynamic relationship between *dini* and *mila*, as well as to the meeting between local and global discourses of religion. The main argument of this thesis is that the people in Pangani experience a pressure for identification in these times of increased global connectedness. To explore this argument, I have divided the thesis into three ethnographical chapters on social identity, religious practice, and traditional healing. This is a useful approach because it allows perspectives from different angles, levels and fields.

Initially, I argued as Robins (2014) that anthropology as a ‘science of continuity’ should also focus on change, disappearance and the process in which things disappear. This thesis has explored the disappearance and redefinitions of religious practices and rituals, such as the holy shrines and the traditional festivals in Pangani, renewal and continuity in the case of traditional healers, as well as the forming of social groups and identity in relation to these changes. These processes of change, renewal, disappearance and continuity are thus essential for understanding the processes in which boundaries are formed.

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I experienced that differences between migrants and locals in Pangani seemed to define the social groups and boundaries in the town. The migrant workers at the District Office’s relation to the town’s local people created differences, and reinforced a coast/inland dichotomy, stressing the coastal area as ‘traditional’ and ‘unmodern’, and the inland as ‘modern’. Yet, throughout my fieldwork, it became apparent that this ‘Barthian approach’ had to include aspects of age, gender, class, education and religion. Although the migrants in Pangani seemed to identify themselves in relation to the ‘other’ locals,

the local people had their own ways of categorizing each other. On the surface, the local people in Pangani stressed unity and togetherness, and generally underemphasized differences. However, they often tended to identify themselves in relation to others whom they perceived as different. Within this cultural complexity, religion was an important factor. People often labelled each other as ‘true believers’ or ‘not true believers’ , making the boundary setting in regard to what was perceived as ‘proper’ religious practice generally important. The school system was an important arena in the town where identities were formed and created, and was strongly linked to the field of religious education, creating separate schools for Christians and Muslims, but also separating public from private schools, creating a class difference according to who could afford to pay the private school fee. Differences within Pangani were perhaps most visible when breaches occurred, such as when someone left their religious discourse by converting to another religion.

The boundaries between groups, people and practices are related to a complex set of factors, but religion plays an important role in constructing these boundaries, which has led me to Talal Asad’s (1993) concept of ‘discursive coherence’. It is although vital to note that religion often plays a subsequent role in reinforcing already existing boundaries and differences, like those between migrant workers and locals, educated and uneducated, between sexes, generations and social classes. Barth’s way of thinking about boundaries, social constructions and identity should thus be embedded within Asad’s concept.

After exploring the social field in Pangani Town and finding that religion is an important factor for identification, it is interesting to move on to the field of religious practice, to see how the boundaries between what is perceived as ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ religious practice are, as Barth’s (1969) social boundaries, social constructions changing and renewing themselves with time and place. While the old, traditional festivals in Pangani Town focused on protection, ancestor worship and the unity of the town as a whole, the new religious festivals focus on education in ‘proper faith’, and stress the local religious communities’ connection to global religious communities. In this process of turning from old traditional festivals to new global festivals, the distinction between *dini* and *mila* becomes visible as the traditional practices within the field of *mila* are not perceived as part of the ‘discursive coherence’ (Asad 1993) the new festivals aim at creating. Thus, it becomes apparent that the discourse of religion is closely related to the discourse of knowledge, and through that a discourse of power. Lambek (1990) argues that knowledge is always socially mediated, and that knowledge has authority. In Pangani, most local religious practices seen as improper to the authoritative religious discourse

are disappearing, such as the traditional festivals and the holy shrines outside the town. Notions of what is perceived as ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ are in this way materialized as the ‘improper’ practices are destroyed. Furthermore, religious practices that were seen as belonging to the field of *mila*, or other practices seen as not proper to the leading religious discourse, were often moved to the private and secret sphere. In this way, people managed to conserve a sense of unity and feeling of togetherness. However, the field of *dini*, represented by the new religious festivals, Sunday sermons in the church or prayers in the mosque, is made explicitly public. This might increasingly challenge previous notions of using secrecy to maintain a sense of unity, and might thus affect how boundaries are redefined.

In Pangani, a dichotomous relationship is created between the otherwise dual concepts of tradition and religion, presenting *mila* as something unmodern and *dini* as something modern and ‘proper’. In relation to this, Pangani and the coastal area was often presented as ‘traditional’ and ‘unmodern’, both by the local population and by people from the outside, and was regularly used to explain the lack of development in the area. However, this raises a question about what ‘modern’ is. I have explored elements suggesting that the ‘traditional’ is also highly ‘modern’. I have presented local myths and tales of spirits that illustrate how contemporary changes and challenges can be explained and interpreted through and within the traditional field. Modernity can therefore also be manifested in the traditional. The boundaries drawn between *mila* and *dini* are not rigid nor unchangeable, but are in fact, as social boundaries, constantly changing and adjusting according to context. This is especially apparent looking at the role of traditional healers in Pangani. As a local *mganga* (traditional healer), Ali was open to biomedicine, used social media and was an ‘official’ healer with his governmental license. He was aware of the skepticism towards his practices, but by being an Islamic specialist, he legitimized his practices related to *mila* by combining it with *dini*. Because of this, I have argued that Ali can be seen as a symbol of renewal and change in his way of adapting to the current situation. This is much according to the arguments discussed in this thesis, that the belief in ‘witchcraft’, spirits and the ‘occult’ is in fact on the rise with ‘modernity’, and can be interpreted both as critiques and explanations to modernization processes (Geschiere 1997; Comaroff 1997), as well as modernization itself has led to a ‘commodification’ of the occult (Sanders 2001).

Yet, strong forces are also counteracting the traditional practices of the *waganga*, labelling them as ‘traditional’, ‘unmodern’ and ‘satanic’. In the case of Pangani, the traditional is thus not always perceived as modern, making the previous arguments not valid in all aspects of life in Pangani Town. In this thesis, I have shown that what is ‘modern’ is highly contextual

and dynamic. Likewise, what is perceived as ‘proper’ religious practice, is also changing according to time, place and context. Sometimes, approaching practices within the ‘traditional’ (and sometimes ‘improper’) field is the only ‘proper’ thing to do when the spiritual drama is played out in one’s own body, when the rain is not coming and when there is no other solution.

I would further argue that what is perceived as ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, ‘proper’ and ‘improper’, should be seen in relation to what is perceived as ‘local’. As this thesis has explored local life in Pangani, it has also become apparent that the ‘local’ cannot be viewed as an enclosed unit, unaffected by greater structural and global processes. Local life in Pangani has for a long time been changing in a dynamic relationship to history, national and governmental changes and contact with the outer world. In Pangani, the American hip-hop music and the gospel music from the Pentecostal churches presented in the beginning of this thesis, are perceived as just as ‘local’ as the drums from a traditional *shetani*-ritual, at the same time as the hip-hop, gospel music and drums have connotations to the global. So then, in the end, what is ‘local’? I would as Lambek (2011), argue that it is the dynamic activity’s relation to the attraction and potency of a place that makes the local, and creates the tension between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’. It is within this field, highly affected by outside notions interpreted on the inside, that meaning is created.

In the introduction, I addressed Asad’s question on how new elements and behaviors coming with modernization are put into previous, traditional categories (1993:212), and asked how, in the case of Pangani, traditional elements and local behavior are put into newer categories that are reinforced and strengthened through modernization processes and the stressing of the local religious communities as members of a global (and dominant) religious discourse. To answer this, I would argue that ‘ordinary ethics’ (Lambek 2010) in regard to religion, is becoming more explicit in Pangani, due to social and ethical movements towards renewal and a pressure for ‘discursive coherence’, illustrated in how boundaries are drawn between what is perceived as ‘proper’ religious practice and what is seen as ‘traditional’ and ‘improper’ religious practice. Accordingly, the overall theme in this thesis is the pressure for identification experienced in times of increased global connectedness, and how people in Pangani are coping with this. What I have argued in this thesis is grounded in how local people in Pangani perceive, categorize and organize the world, and I hope to have presented the complexity, continuity and dynamics of religious life in Pangani in a way that the people in this small coastal town would find just and true.

Gazing towards a bigger picture

Conclusively, I would like to extend my focus beyond Pangani and Tanzania, towards a bigger picture, and discuss how the findings and theme of this thesis is relevant in a larger perspective. Although anthropologists tend to focus on small scale qualitative research, what is valuable about this research is that it can give us a better understanding of the world as a whole. The world is made out of small units, all changing and blending, and to understand the whole, one must understand its units. I have argued that in Pangani, there is an ongoing pressure for identification of social and religious boundaries that is closely related to the town's increased global connectedness. However, this is also valid in the global landscape, as the world today seems to be defined by notions of difference. Fences, walls and borders are built to keep people out. The 'Us-Them' relationship is perhaps most visible in today's refugee crisis, increased skepticism towards Islam and a right-wing wave sweeping across Western countries. Too often are these notions of difference resulting in violent conflicts, as we have seen throughout history, as well as in contemporary conflicts. In many places that are somehow similar to Pangani in terms of different religious and ethnic groups living side by side, violent conflicts have broken out. This is especially apparent in Tanzania's neighboring countries. We have also seen in this thesis that Tanga was experiencing a time of increased violence, especially regarding the threat from al-Shabaab. However, conflicts and differences in Pangani never took a violent turn. Although people regularly expressed disagreements, and notions of difference were highly present, people continued to stress unity and togetherness, and in many ways managed to maintain a state of harmony. I have in this thesis explored how Pangani in many ways is a different town in Tanzania. It is also different in the way that it copes with notions of difference, presenting a feeling of unity and togetherness across the boundaries within the town.

So, why have these religious disagreements, social differences and boundary setting in the town of Pangani not taken a violent turn, as they so often do? What can we learn from the people in Pangani? First of all, the heritage from Nyerere is important, and the fact that Tanzania has experienced a relatively stable political period after independence. Additionally, I would say that the concept of *mila*, as it expresses an openness towards the unknown and new, is important. *Mila* represents a common fundament binding people together, allowing them to remember a common past and acknowledging a common present. What we can learn from the people in Pangani, is that social boundaries are highly dynamic and complex social constructions that can be highlighted or underplayed, and in this way they can also be constructed to hold people together, as a nation, as a town or as a people.

Human relations will always be characterized by differences. Without communication, no problems will be solved, and dialogue about differences and social problems is a way of handling them before they possibly break out into open conflicts. Instead of striving to be similar and search for a unified 'us' based on homogeneity, building walls and fences and drawing borders, we would perhaps do better if we embraced and valued differences in the way they allow us to learn from each other, and thus preserve a unity not despite our differences, but because of our differences.

Research on issues related to how people perceive each other, how they cope with differences and how social boundaries are created and redefined, is essential in contemporary societies to promote cooperation, communication and understanding. This is a field in which anthropologists could contribute greatly, and providing knowledge on these issues should be a valuable task for scholars in anthropology.

Final personal remarks

Lastly, I would like to reflect on what I personally have learned after conducting fieldwork in Pangani. The people with whom I met have taught me a great deal on openness, friendship and togetherness. I have learned that people regardless of their difficult and sometimes unfair life situation always strive to make the best out of what they have. A part of me was expecting to return from fieldwork with a view on the world as an unjust and difficult place, but instead I returned with hope, good friends and a love for the town and the people I have learned to know and appreciate so much. Although we have seen that differences are important in Pangani, what is even more important is togetherness. Therefore, a commonly uttered phrase in Pangani will end this thesis: *tuko pamoja*. We are together.

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