THE AFRICAN ROOTS OF SWAHILI ONTOLOGY:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE AFRICANITY
& HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A COASTAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

For decades, Swahili culture and society have been mischaracterized as an extension of Arabic cultural development. Within the last few decades scholars like Thomas Spear, Derek Nurse, and Chapurukha M. Kusimba have challenged Arabcentric and Eurocentric reductionist notions regarding the development of Swahili society.

This dissertation traces the discourse of the historiographic discourse of Swahili culture and its impact on the way that the Swahili people, culture, and language are conceptualized. Furthermore, the research presented here is not solely focused on the material evidence of the development of African communities on the Swahili coast, but also on the ethical and cultural foundations of Bantu society manifested within Swahili society. The African ethics manifested in early Swahili society which still exists today illustrate a more nuanced understanding of the Africanity of coastal communities.

As demonstrated by the traditional saying of Swahili communities, select folktales, and the construction of philosophical terminology, the ethics and cultural values of an African cultural paradigm. This idea of the essentiality of the African cultural paradigm to the foundation and development of Swahili culture is evidenced by the cross-cultural analysis of Swahili historical and cultural phenomena to other African communities.

DEDICATION

To the matriarchs of my family, Aunt Louvenia Jenkins, and in loving memory of my

grandmother Nana Tuufu who has hopefully transitioned to become an ancestor.

Thank you for the foundation you built for our family.

Odo Nnyew Fie Kwan
Those led by love will never lose their way

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kushukuru hakudhuru.
It does no harm to be grateful.
(Swahili Proverb)

I would first like to acknowledge the Creator who is known by many names and has created a world of possibilities. Our ancestors acknowledged that the seen rules over the unseen and I want to recognize this. I would like to acknowledge my ancestors, many of whom have had their names lost to time or stolen from them. I am constantly reminded that the opportunities that I have taken advantage of have only been made possible by the struggle and foundations created by my ancestors, and the ancestors of the trans-continental African community.

I especially would like to acknowledge the many strong Black=African women in my life. My Aunt Louvenia Jenkins, who I would consider the grand matriarch of my family has been a consistent source of wisdom and affirmation for me as I began my scholastic journey. She has always been a voice of understanding and encouragement. My mother, Tamara Richardson, gave me my name Tarik, after the Moorish general who led the invasion and occupation of Visigothic Iberia. My name and the names of my siblings were a conscious effort by my parents to reorientate our family along our cultural and ancestral lines. This effort is the same effort that has inspired me to pursue an education in the study of Pan-African phenomena. Beyond this effort, my mother has been a vital source of love, encouragement, and support that sustained me when I was physically so far from my family.

My grandmother Barbra Richardson, or Nana Tuufu as we used to refer to her within my family, has recently passed away, and transitioned to the next stage of life, hopefully as an ancestor. In many ways, it was she and her husband, my grandfather Arzinia Richardson, who started the journey to seek a greater understanding of our culture and heritage as African people. Within the first few years after the creation of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization (ASCAC), she and my grandfather had joined the organization. Disillusioned with the United States, my grandparents would eventually leave and settle first in Guyana, then eventually in Costa Rica. There they developed Afrocentric programming, inviting John Henrik Clarke, Asa G. Hilliard III, Runoko Rashidi, Theophile Obenga, Jacob Carruthers, and Nzinga Ratibisha on several occasions to bring Afrocentric discourse to different parts of the African diaspora. This family history was retold to me years ago when I had finished my bachelor's degree and began to consider looking at graduate programs to further my studies. My grandmother, unsure if the organization still existed, suggested I investigate the leaders of this organization as many of its leadership constituted many of the leaders in culturally centered scholarship. She recommended that if I was interested in pursuing an Afrocentric education the organization could be a great place to start.

My investigation into ASCAC led me to introduce myself to Mario Beatty, the international president of the organization, and a professor at Howard University. He advised me that I could apply to study at Howard University, or I could go to Temple University where he had studied under Molefi Kete Asante, one of the leading, if not the leading scholar in the field of Black Studies, and Afrocentric discourse. Dr. Beatty also informed me that Kimani Nehusi, a Guyanese scholar and Kemetologist was currently at

Temple University, and I could study classical African civilizations with him there. Initially, I had enrolled at Howard University, but at the last minute, I switched institutions to Temple University, where I could study Africology and Pan-African phenomena as a discipline.

Upon reflecting on where I am today this was clearly one of the best decisions I could have made. I am incredibly grateful to all of the people who steered me in the right direction which would lead me to Philadelphia and the Department of Africology.

Since moving to Philadelphia, I have met many people who I would come to consider as family and who were vital in my journey as a scholar. Baba Ron McCoy, Mama Cleanise, Ms. Leslie Willis-Lowry whom I worked with at the historic Charles L. Blockson Collection, Mama Amoaba, Mama Ellis, Mama Yaa Asantewa.

I also acknowledge the contributions of my academic advisors and teachers who helped me improve as a scholar, and as an African intellectual. Mokaya Bosire, Melissa Stuckey, and Akwasi B. Assensoh my teachers at the University of Oregon. My good friends and advisors Christiana Jackson and Nedzer Erilus. And importantly, to my master teachers at Temple University who were instrumental in the development of my scholarship and my perspective, Ama Mazama, Kimani Nehusi, and Molefi Kete Asante.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The restoration of Afrikan languages to a position of centrality in the conduct of all Afrikan affairs: political, economic, legal, social, educational, etc. is therefore critical to the restoration of Afrikan cultural autonomy, of the Afrikan personality, Afrikan self-confidence, Afrikan creativity, and sustained Afrikan development. Thus the liberation and development of Afrikan languages is a central aspect of the project of Afrikan liberation, the construction of Afrikan unity, and the building of the Afrikan nation. (Kimani Nehusi, 2003)

The language of the Swahili people, Kiswahili, as it is known within the language, is one of the most widely spoken African languages globally, and certainly one of the most studied. The term Swahili is not indigenous to the language and is etymologically derived from the Arabic *sāḥil*, pluralized as *sawāḥil*, which loosely translates into "of the coast" or "people of the coast".[1] Despite this demarcation of the Swahili language, Kiswahili has spread from the coastal regions of East Africa into the hinterlands of the African continent. An estimated fifty to one hundred million people speak Kiswahili. Beyond its common use, the Swahili language serves an important economic, and political role both historically and contemporarily.

Historically, the structurally Bantu language developed on the coast of East Africa as a *lingua franca.* Kiswahili belongs to the Sabaki subgroup of the Northeast Coast Bantu language family.[2] *Kiswahili* is the term used specifically for the Swahili language.

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[1] Harries, Lyndon. *The Arabs and Swahili Culture*. Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 34, No. 3., Cambridge University Press, 1964, p. 224.

[2] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 41

See Appendix E for the map of Northeast Coast Bantu languages

Mswahili is the term used for a Swahili person, or a speaker of Kiswahili, with *Waswahili* meaning Swahili people. Kiswahili was used as a language of intercultural communication as part of an extensive African maritime network that extended from Mogadishu in modern Somali, to Ibo in modern Mozambique.
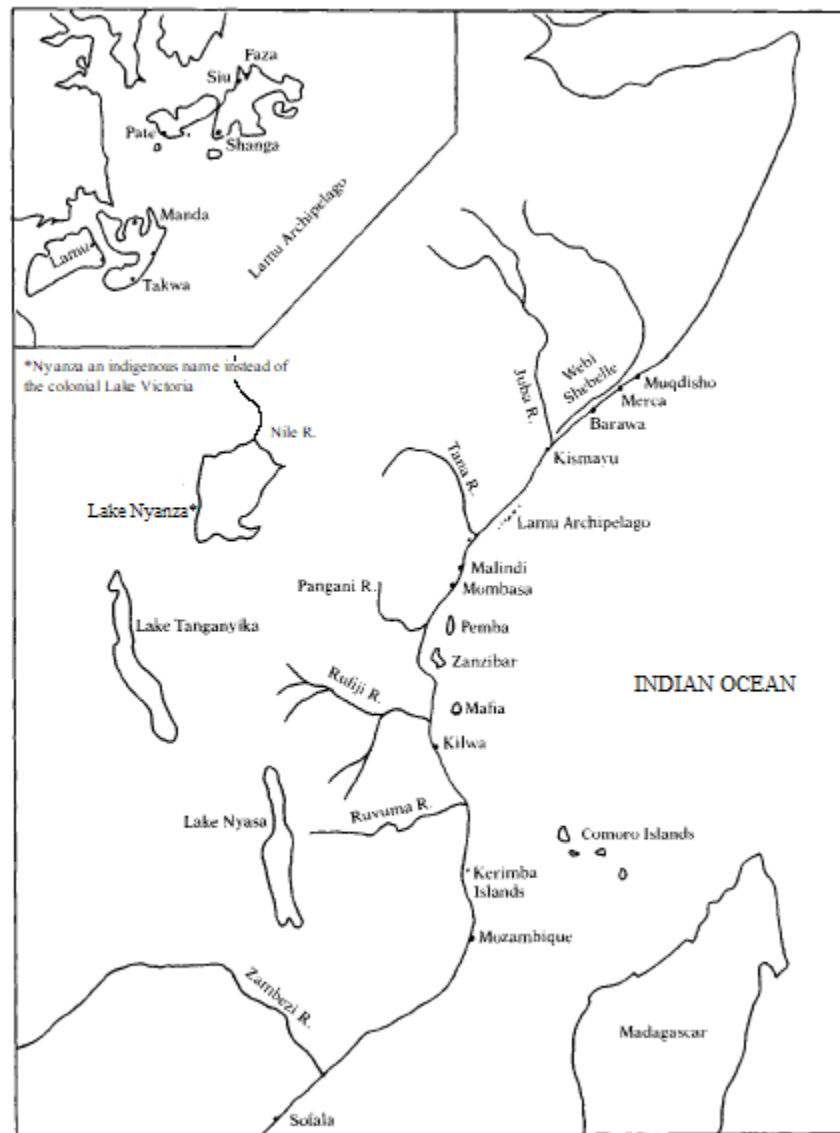
Figure 1: Map of East Africa and Notable Swahili Cities[3]

The language continues to serve an important role in the intercommunal communication of African people in East Africa. After independence was achieved in the late 1950s, Julius Nyerere the first president of Tanzania, and Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta, designated the Swahili language as a language of paramount cultural importance to their new nations. One of the determining factors of this selection was the fact that Kiswahili was not directly associated with any particular ethnic group. The political use of Kiswahili is an attempt to circumvent issues of ethnocentrism. By utilizing the Swahili language, African people from different ethnic backgrounds could work together as a nation, without the development of ethnic chauvinism, or exceptionalism based on language.

Currently, Kiswahili is an official language of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda and is politically utilized to a relative degree by other east African nations including Rwanda, Burundi, and parts of Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the African Union defines all African languages as official, Kiswahili is the only African language that is predominantly used. Kiswahili's political importance has continued to elevate with the formation of the East African Community in 2000, and its adoption of the language in 2013.

Understanding that language is a form of cultural expression, Kiswahili has also been utilized within the African diaspora to reorientate within the parameters of the African cultural paradigm. Members of the African diaspora have within the last several decades looked towards the Swahili language for naming, and through the celebration of Kwanzaa, celebrated African ethical values articulated with Swahili terminology. During the 1960s

the scholar-activist Maulana Karenga developed *Kawaida[4] philosophy* as a theoretical framework for the African diaspora to utilize in their fight for reciprocity, justice, self-determination, and the restoration of culturally grounded African identity.[5] It is out of this philosophy Karenga developed the *nguzo saba[6]*, seven Pan-African ethical principles and internationally celebrated holiday of Kwanzaa. Marimba Ani utilized the Swahili language within her works. In 1980, Marimba Ani pioneered introduced and pioneered the use of the term *maafa[7]*, to describe the calamity of enslavement and foreign intrusion that African people endured for the better part of four centuries.[8] Throughout this text, as well as her other seminal work *Yurugu* Ani utilized the Swahili language to relocate the discourse surrounding Pan-African issues. Marimba Ani's work intentionally gave African names to African problems and solutions.

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[4] *Kawaida* translated from Kiswahili: 'a regulative principle'
 A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 180

[5] Karenga, Maulana. *Kawaida and Questions of Life and Struggle: African American, Pan-African, and Global Issues,* University of Sankore Press, 2008

[6] *Nguzo saba* translated from Kiswahili, literally the 'seven pillars'. *Nguzo* is the Swahili word for a pillar and can be used both literally and figuratively.
  A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 338

[7] *Maafa* translated from Kiswahili: a disaster or calamity. A pluralized and more commonly used form of the term *afa,*
  A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 3

[8] Ani, Marimba. *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora,* Nkonimfo Publications, (1980) 1997, p. 12

Statement of Problem

>*Although most Africans, on the Continent as well as in Diaspora, have, at least in theory, put an end to the colonial rule to which we were subjected for many years, we nonetheless still find ourselves in a state of mental subjugation that has gravely interfered with our ability to recover our integrity and truly decolonize ourselves* (Mazama, 2003).

Despite being one of the most researched African languages on the continent, Kiswahili, and Swahili culture in general, has been the subject of mischaracterizations by culturally dislocated interpretations. Furthermore, as a result of this mischaracterization, the Africanity of Swahili culture has come into question as well as its practical use for contemporary African purposes, both on the continent as well as in the diaspora.

Early historians categorized Swahili culture as an outgrowth of the Arab diaspora and their historical experiences. Tomas Spears, in his investigation of the Shirazi people of Zanzibar, writes that these historians reasoned the development of Swahili culture and society "could only have been the product of Persian and Arab merchants".[9] Spears categorizes these claims as diffusionist, this works to address these claims as part of the ontological reduction of African people, which frames the Swahili people as passive objects within their own history, rather than agents of their own cultural developments and accomplishments. Spears asserts,

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[9] Spears, Thomas. "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions Culture, and History", *History in Africa,* African Studies Association, 1984, p. 291

> [These] historians failed to investigate the possible African roots of Swahili culture in their Bantu language, their religious beliefs, and values, their economy, or their social structure".[10]

Since Spears wrote his indictment of Eurocentric and Arab-centric scholarship on the topic of Swahili culture in 1984, academic discourse has begun to more readily acknowledge Swahili culture as part of Bantu culture. However, as evidenced by the contemporary academic discussion on Swahili culture, this recognition of the African roots seems to be reluctant at best, and progress in this discussion, in general, appears to be minimum. A Harvard Political Review entitled *A Language of Their Own: Swahili and Its Influences,* published in 2015, exemplifies this point. Throughout their discussion of Swahili language and culture this Harvard Review regurgitates the language and rhetoric of Eurocentric, Arabcentric, and Afrophobic scholarship. A section out of this review that highlights the lack of consciousness which has developed around the conversation of Swahili culture and society states,

> This is true nowhere more than in Tanzania. English or French could serve practical purposes as well as Swahili, offering a common tongue for governmental and economic affairs. In fact, both do serve such purposes in various African regions, English still filling that role alongside Swahili in Tanzania and Kenya. But Tanzanians' loyalty is primarily to Swahili—a language they can more easily consider African. Recent linguistic studies have supported this identification, establishing Swahili's foreign influences as only secondary to its development as a language with deeply African roots. More importantly, the very act of identifying with the language legitimizes it. Swahili has become African.[11]

Within this section of the review, the author compromises their ability to engage in the cultural reality of the language by relying on common Afrophobic and reductionist

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[10] Spears, Thomas. "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions Culture, and History", *History in Africa,* African Studies Association, 1984, p. 291

[11] Demaj, Kejsi, et al. "A Language of Their Own: Swahili and Its Influences.", *Harvard Political Review*, Harvard University, 2015

discourse. They recognize that recent linguistic studies have confirmed the deep Bantu roots of the Swahili language, while also identifying that these foreign influences which have always been the emphasis of Eurocentric and Arab-centric scholarship, should only be seen as secondary components to the development of the modern Swahili language. Despite recognizing these facts, the authors of this Harvard Review still write baffling comments such as Swahili is "a language they (Tanzanians and Kenyans) can more easily consider African", or "Swahili has become African". How can something become something that intrinsically already is? This articulation of Swahili culture is indicative of a diffusionist colonial and colonized interpretation of African cultural phenomena.

These Anti-African, Afrophobic sentiments are not only manifested in the work of Eurocentric and Arabcentric scholars but are also internalized within Swahili society. These sentiments, and how they inform the scholarship concerning Swahili culture and the politicized identity within African communities, especially on the Swahili coast, are remnants of colonial or colonized perspectives. These type of perspectives represent the primary problem within the discourse on Swahili culture and historiography.

Despite emblematically putting an end to many of the foreign political and economic constraints that oppressed and subjugated African people during the colonial period, many African communities across the world still find themselves in a position of ontological subordination. The colonial enterprises which Africans had to endure were not only political or economic in nature, but also a cultural attack on African communities. Mazama asserts in her text *The Afrocentric Paradigm,* that this inability to liberate more

cognitive elements of African culture and society has ultimately "interfered with our ability to recover our integrity and truly decolonize ourselves".[12] Furthermore, she explains that,

> The reason for this is that colonization was not simply an enterprise of economic exploitation and political control, as it was commonly held, but also an ongoing enterprise of conceptual distortion and invasion, leading to widespread confusion, and ultimately, "mental incarceration".[13]

Aside from Chancellor Williams' text, *The Destruction of Black Civilization* (1971) the colonial legacy of the Islamic and Arabic assault on African societies has yet to come under the same level of comprehensive Afrocentric scrutiny as the European participation in the Maafa. Similar discussions about economic participation could be had about the Swahili involvement within Indian Ocean Trade, and the Arabs eventual trade in enslaved Africans. The history of the Arab presence in Africa differs in many ways from the history of European intrusion. This difference demands a nuanced conversation about the cultural and political ramifications. Though conceptualized as being different systems of oppression, Afrocentrically, the Arab and European colonial enterprises and their assaults on African culture are just two constituents of the Maafa. Both the European system, and the Arabic system have resulted in the political, economic, and cultural subjugation of African people. As a result of these two systems, African people across the globe have become dislocated from their cultural centers.

This dislocation is masked by conversations of creolization and modernization, where traditional African cultures are thought of as archaic and modern African identity is formulated by the influence of foreign people. Like the conversation on modernization,

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[12] Mazama, Ama. *The Afrocentric Paradigm,* Africa World Press, 2003, p. 3

[13] *Ibid*

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this line of thought robs African people of their agency, by intrinsically linking the future of African people to the epistemologies and political guidance of foreigners. This is a prime example of Michael Tillotson's theory of Agency Reduction Formation. Tillotson identifies that "any system of thought that distracts, neutralizes, or reduces the need and desire for assertive collective agency" of African people is part of this Agency Reduction Formation.[14] The Kiswahili term for the concept of civilization is *ustaarabu.* This term is etymologically tied to the Kiswahili word for Arab, *arabu.* Literally speaking, the idea conveyed here is that to become civilized is to become more like the Arabs.

Within this dissertation, this idea will be further investigated. It is important to note that many of the conversations about the cognitive effects of colonization are not only the result of European influence. In the 1960s African revolutionaries on the island of Zanizbar led by the Ugandan national John Okello, recognized the that Asiatic communities who had now made the island their home would have an important role in the neo-colonial era, and the continued political and economic marginalization of African people.[15] In Zanzibar, the British relinquished power, not to the indigenous African communities, but the privileged "Arab" community on the island. The term Arab here is used to describe a people of both ethnic and social orientation; however, it should be noted that many of these "Arabs" are ethnically miscegenated African people who have politically and socially forsaken their African heritage in favor of their Asian heritage. One of the failures of the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, as will be investigated in this dissertation, is the revolutionary's attack on these miscegenated communities, and not the attack on the epistemologies that

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[14] Tillotson, Michael. *The Invisible Jim Crow.* Africa World Press, 2011, p. 60

[15] Hunter, Helen-Louise. *Zanzibar: The Hundred Days Revolution,* PSI Reports, ABC-CLIO, 2010, pp. 13-18

marginalized indigenous African ontology, encouraged the miscegenation and abandonment of African identities, and supported Asiatic social dominance on the entire East African coastline.

This epistemology which continues to marginalize African ontology represents the same conceptualization that reinforces the mischaracterization of not just key groups on the coast, but the entire Swahili culture. As will be demonstrated thoroughly in the limitations of this study, much of the early history written about Swahili culture and identity misrepresents Swahili culture as an outgrowth of Asian imperialism in Africa. Alternatively, when African agency is recognized, the foreign influences on the culture and the language itself are over-emphasized. The focus on the foreign influences on Swahili language and culture has been used to either support the culturally dislocated claim to foreign ontologies or have been used to debase the Swahili language as a political tool for African communities.

The Swahili language has been used since ancient times as a lingua-franca, a language to be used between different communities. Since its ancient use along the coast, it has been utilized as the primary form of communication from Mogadishu in modern Somalia down to Ibo Island in Mozambique. More recently, the language was utilized by African nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, and Julius Nyerere, Tanganyika's first president, as a tool to promote cultural solidarity within their new nations and circumvent feelings of cultural chauvinism and exceptionalism. Additionally, and for similar reasons, the Swahili language has been utilized for Pan-African organizing both on the continent as well as in the diaspora.

The British-Ghanian social Theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah finds it ironic that members of the African diaspora utilize the Swahili language for nationalistic and educational purposes. He writes,

> There is something of an irony in the use of Swahili as an Afrocentric language, since hardly any of the [enslaved Africans] brought to the New World [could] have known it, and it was, in fact, being used in a culture which slave-trading to the Arabian Peninsula was a major element of the economy.[16]

Though pathologically dismissive and lacking the nuance that a cultural and historical awareness would bring, Appiah's concerns are not unfounded. During the Maafa, the Swahili coast was a central location for the exploitation and extraction of African people. However, this analysis simplifies the realities of this oppressive enterprise based only on physical location. This study seeks to address this concern. As Kwame Appiah is not the first or only individual to raise these concerns and about the Pan-African use of the Swahili language. To address this concern, special attention will be paid to the relationship that the culture had with these oppressive enterprises, as well as how did the individuals who participated in these enterprises relate to Swahili culture. Appiah, a critic of Afrocentric and Pan-African discourse, takes a rather ethnocentric view of these African theoretical frameworks. Appiah accuses Afrocentrists of being ethnocentric in their utilization of not only the Swahili language but also the historical and philosophical use of Kemet, Eurocentrically known as (e.k.a.) Ancient Egypt.

Ironically, Swahili has been historically used to circumvent issues of ethnocentrism, while Kemet is used to discuss the idea of African ontological unity

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[16] Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism", *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation,* Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 49

manifested in ancient times. In both situations, the point is not the solely to celebrate these particular groups of Africans but to study their cultures and experiences to gain a greater understanding of elements within the African cultural paradigm. Kimani Nehusi, Kemetologist, and Afrocentrist notes that the strategic importance of Kemet is not simply the glorification of an ancient culture but the celebration of an ancient manifestation of African culture. Nehusi's work reinforces the idea that the importance of Kemet is not that everything African comes from the Nile Valley civilizations, but rather almost everything that we consider African can be found within these ancient Nile Valley civilizations.[17]

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation aims to investigate the possibilities of the African roots of Swahili culture, which past scholarship has tended to overlook or downplay, from an Afrocentric perspective. One of the principal objectives of this study is to highlight the role of African thought in the development of Swahili society as a Bantu culture. Furthermore, it seeks to address how these African cultural elements informed African identity on the coast while interacting with external pressures, both historically and contemporarily.

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[17] Nehusi, Kimani. "The Strategic Importance of Kemet", *Egypt in its African Context,* University of Manchester, 2009

Significance of the Study

Within the last several decades, Afrocentric discourse has begun to reevaluate African history and issues of identity with a new critical lens, informed by generations of cultural and academic development. In 1980, Molefi Kete Asante published his text *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change.* This text directly challenged hegemonic Eurocentric historiography and epistemology which has come to dominate most of the African world. However, the epistemology of Europeans is not the only hegemonic cultural-intellectual tradition that would compromise African thought, as the Europeans were not the only imperialists that Africans had to contend with. These imperialist enterprises utilized religion as a colonizing tool during their exploits in Africa. Asante agrees with Yosef Ben-Jochanan on the social reality of any of these religious traditions. In his 1980 text, Asante asserts "all religions rise out of the deification of someone's nationalism".[18] Asante continues, "understand this and you will discern the key to our own victory".[19] Within that same section of his text, Asante addresses those scholars who have utilized Afrocentric theories, mythologies, and perspectives, who have done an admirable job in analyzing Christian phenomena and their relationship to the global African community. However, as Asante also addresses, Islam, as part of an Arabcentric cultural paradigm, has yet to come under the same level of Afrocentric scrutiny.[20] Donald Whitcomb in his text, *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archeological Perspectives,* states,

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[18] Asante, Molefi Kete. *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change,* African American Images, 1980, p. 5

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Asante, Molefi Kete. *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change,* African American Images, 1980, p. 5

by 1980, some fifteen years after the nations of East Africa had gained their independence from the colonial powers, the "colonial" interpretation of the Swahili was looking somewhat shaky.[21]

However, since 1980 Asante's critique on the state of discourse surrounding African identity and Islam seems to still largely be true. The process of decolonizing the discourse on Swahili, and Islamic African identity has yet to be realized. The Nigerian scholar Chinweizu Ibekwe[22] has engaged in serious discussion on the political implications of Arab imperialism on the African continent. However, Chinweizu's discussions by in large are focused on the implications of Arab imperialism on the functionality of Pan-Africanism. Within this dissertation, Islam as a faith system will not be the target of scrutiny, but rather its role as part of a hegemonic Arabcentric cultural paradigm, and its implications to Islamic African identity on the Swahili coast. Islamic African identity is a topic which Ali Mazrui and his nephew Alim Mazrui consider within their work. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive Afronography, an Afrocentric analysis of African societies, on Swahili culture from a culturally located position, uncompromised by foreign sympathies and influences or an Islamophilic positioning.

Within the growing canon of Afrocentric research and literature, ideas, topics, and historiographies that have been taken for granted will be challenged. Although Kwame Appiah's concerns were not in the interest of adding to the Afrocentric discourse, questions which he raised must be dealt with. If not for the expansion of discourse within the

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[21] Whitcomb, Donald. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives.* University of Chicago, 2004, p. 70

[22] Ibekwe, Chinweizu. *The Arab Quest for Lebensraum in Africa and the Challenge to Pan Afrikanism,* Global Pan Afrikan Reparation and Repatriation Conference, University of Ghana, Accra, 2006

discipline, for the sake of understanding Africanity within Pan-African discourse and political action.

Whitcomb articulates the importance of understanding Swahili society, as it represents another key battleground in the discourse surrounding African civilizations. Whitcomb states,

> "The view that civilization could only come from the orient was no longer tenable as a valid archaeological (or indeed historical) interpretation. In many ways, the Swahili coast represents a parallel case to Great Zimbabwe, where similar interpretations hid the clear African context of the site".[23]

Whitcomb relates the importance of the Swahili coast to the study of African civilizations. Great Zimbabwe is not the only parallel that can be made in this ongoing battle against Afrophobic scholarship which seeks to obscure African cultural achievements. The battle to decolonize the history of the Swahili coast is reminiscent of the fight decades ago, which in earnest still presents itself within academic discourse, over the Africanity of Kemet. This investigation of African culture along the Swahili coast is just as important as the great debates of Cheikh Anta Diop, John Henrik Clarke, and Molefi Kete Asante were to the reclamation of classical African history, the restoration of African agency, and the process of decolonizing African history.

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[23] Whitcomb, Donald. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archeological Perspectives.* University of Chicago, 2004, p. 70

Swahili Manuscripts & the Limitations of the Study

Within this research two issues have presented themselves in the process of collecting data on the early history of Swahili society. The first concerns itself with the written history of the Swahili coast. Many of these archaic manuscripts are indeed written in Kiswahili, however, are written in Arabic script. This phenomenon of writing in an indigenous African language using Arabic script is not unique to the Swahili literary tradition. The functionalization of Arabic script during the medieval period of African history, is a similar phenomenon as the spreading of the Latin script throughout medieval Europe. For this reason, John Hunwick has described Arabic as 'the Latin of Africa'.[24] The adoption of these scripts is linked to the spread of their respective religious institutions and texts, the Christian Bible written in Latin, and the Islamic Qur'an written in Arabic. Local elites and other converts to these faiths learned to read these scripts so that they could have proper access to the holy texts and pious discourse of their new religious affiliations.

During this process these educated elites adopted the institutionalized scripts of their holy texts to write in their own native languages. As a result, many of the African literary traditions that developed during the medieval period, including the Swahili, the Hausa people of northern Nigeria, the Wolof people of Senegal, and famously the manuscripts of Timbuktu in Mali, primarily utilize the Arabic script in their creative, academic, and pious literature.[25] Although originally used as an Arab pejorative that

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[24] Hunwick, John. "West Africa and the Arabic Language", *Sudanic Africa,* Vol. 15, Brill, 2004, p. 133

[25] Abu-Haidar, Farida. "Introduction: Arabic Writing in Africa", *Research in African Literatures,* Vol. 28, No. 3, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 3

reinforced the ethnocultural superiority complex of the Arabs[26], the term *Ajami* has become "most often associated with the modifications of the Arabic script to write African languages".[27]

This *Ajami* tradition ultimately limits which manuscripts that scholars who are unfamiliar with African languages and Arabic writing have access to. For most not trained within the Swahili *Ajami* tradition, the medieval Swahili manuscript will have to have been transliterated into the Latin script, and then translated into the scholar's respective working language, in this case English, to fully be comprehended the literature. It likely that select words, or even sentences will be adjusted in order to make the original manuscript comprehensible in a non-Bantu language such as English. This may inadvertently alter sections of the original manuscript. Talawa Adodo[28], in his text *Translation as a Cultural Act* warns of the dangers of translating African languages into non-African languages, and suggest that other African languages, including the neo-African languages of the diaspora, can be used to help translate a language into another.[29] Mistranslating a manuscript is a

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[26] During the Islamic Golden Age (8th – 13th centuries) the term *Ajami* was a pejorative term that essentially meant 'barbarian'. It was utilized to 'other' or otherwise alienate the neighboring people of the Arabs, namely the Persians. According to Ngom and Kurfi *Ajami* eventually "evolved to refer broadly to the use of modified Arabic script to write the languages of non-Arab Muslims".
Ngom, Fallou; and Mustapha Kurfi. "Ajamization of Islam in Africa", *Islamic Africa,* Vol. 8, No. 1-2, Brill, 2017, p. 2

[27] Ngom, Fallou; and Mustapha Kurfi. "Ajamization of Islam in Africa", *Islamic Africa,* Vol. 8, No. 1-2, Brill, 2017, p. 2

[28] Formerly published under the name Tristan Samuels

[29] Samuels, Tristan (Talawa Adodo), *Translation as a Cultural Act: An Africological Analysis of Medew Netcher from a Jamaican Perspective,* Doctoral Dissertation, Temple University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021

known issue that has confronted many linguist for decades, and careful effort has been made not to compromise the meaning of the original manuscripts.

James Ritche and Sigvard von Sicard have done this important work in introducing a new body of literature to the anglophone world for general use and public consumption in their text *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents.* Outside of a few select manuscripts including the *Kitab al-Zunuj,* and the *Kilwa Chronicles,* the vast majority of Swahili literature from its early history have yet to be fully translated. The greater part of the history written between the sixteenth and early twentieth century known to western audiences were collected and translated by European scholars "either by obtaining copies of existing manuscripts or by transcribing oral recitations from Swahili historians".[30] These transcribed oral recitations constitute what are known as the Swahili chronicles.

> The Swahili chronicles are transcribed oral traditions relating to the histories of different Swahili urban polities. They are written texts created by Swahili people mostly in Swahili language but occasionally in Arabic—often the earliest texts that exist for the cities and towns—and are thus a bridge between traditionally defined archaeological and historical study.[31]

The other issue concerns itself with the veracity of the *Ajami* literature, as well as Swahili oral history. Much of the Swahili oral history is implicated by the society's cultural location and the diffusionist perspective of the coastal elite. This presents quite an issue in utilizing much of the Swahili oral tradition. Within this tradition, much of the oral history

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[30] Pawlowicz, Matthew; Adria LaViolette. "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective: Bridging History, Archaeology, Coast, and Hinterland in Southern Tanzania", *The Death of Prehistory,* edited by Peter Schmidt and Stephen Mrozowski, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 119

[31] *Ibid*

has been curated to conform to an Islamophilic interpretation of Swahili culture. The political disposition in which literature, both oral and written is produced as a profound affect in the type of information that is shared, and how the information is shared. Works like the *Desturi za Waswahili (The Customs of the Swahili People)* written principally by Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari in the late nineteenth century, while important for understanding aspects of Swahili culture, are implicated by their political position. J.W.T. Allen writes in the preface to his translation of the *Desturi,*

> [That when] the European soldiers and administrators broke in, hardly able to understand what they were taking over and what they were trying to replace. Some Swahili rose in armed opposition, others tried to interpret – "to give a hermeneutics" – of their civilization to the newcomers and thence to the world. The *Desturi* is the outstanding example of this attempt at interpretation.[32]

What has been preserved in this process was the is the prospective of the colonial collaborator who subverted African agency often for their own political gain, who instead of joining their community in armed resistance to oppressive foreign powers sought to become their interpreters. What has been lost, and needs to be recovered, is the myriad of concurrent perspectives of those Africans who rose in resistance.

Additionally, many of these Swahili traditions have become subject to a more contemporary and culturally dislocated interpretations of historical phenomena. In west Africa, in places like Mali, Ghana, and Nigeria, where a more formal and structured oral tradition exist, oral histories have been celebrated as often being more accurate and

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[32] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin, *Desturi Za Waswahili* (The Customs of the Swahili People), edited and translated by J.W.T. Allen, University of California Press, 1981, p. viii

complete than traditional post-colonial attempts to restructure West African history.[33] The Swahili oral tradition includes community chronicles, prose tales (*ngano)*, grand epics (*utenzi*), songs (*wimbo*), and proverbs (*mathali*).[34] Without a formal and structured tradition, the oral histories of the Swahili people subject to more variation and reinterpretations than their West African counterparts. Donald Whitcomb's research into the archeological record of the coast similarly accounts for the same issue. Whitcomb writes that,

> "Historians were looking at the oral traditions and saw that they could not be taken literally: indeed, several were the product of nineteenth-century "Arabization" of the coast".[35]

This issue has been recognized by researchers for some time. In 1870 Edward Steere comments that in his efforts to collect the stories of the Swahili people, the epic of Fumo Liyongo was the "nearest approach to a bit of real history [he] was able to meet with".[36] Although much of the oral history may not provide much in the way of hard historical data, it may prove useful in further understanding the culture, values, location, and cultural memory of Swahili society as presented within the oral tradition.

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[33] Stennett, Lavinya. "West Africa's oral histories tell us a more complete story than traditional post-colonial narratives", *QuartzAfrica,* 2019

[34] Knappert, Jan. "Swahili Oral Traditions", *Genres, Forms, Meanings: Essays in African Oral Literature*, Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford, 1982, pp. 22-29

[35] Whitcomb, Donald. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archeological* Perspectives, University of Chicago, 2004, p. 70

[36] Edward, Steere. *Swahili Tales as Told by the Natives of Zanzibar with English Translation,* William Clowes and Sons, London, 1870, p. vi

Review of Literature

Outlined in the limitations of this study were concerns about how politicized perspectives shape cultural analysis. This concern implicates not only Eurocentric and Arabcentric scholarship but also much of the oral history of the coast. Oral histories, folklore, and mythology are intradiscally cultural and political stories curated by those who divulge them. The stories which are told, and the heroes who are celebrated inform the culture and the ethics of a society. Within the Swahili tradition, there is a lesser-known epic, *The Epic of Fumo Liyongo,* at least lesser known to the Diaspora, which constitutes an important counternarrative to the hegemonic Arabcentric historiography of the Swahili coast.

Fumo Liyongo was celebrated as a powerful African cultural and political leader. The epic itself is a series of poems that often are credited to be the work of Fumo Liyongo himself. The epic of Fumo Liyongo is an old Swahili folktale dating to around the thirteenth century during the period when Arabs began to have more of a presence on the coast. Although a few archaic Swahili manuscripts of the story exist, this story was primarily transmitted through the African oral tradition from generation to generation. Certain elements of the epic's historicity are unclear; however, the themes of the story indicate that it is set sometime between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. What is clear is that this epic, or rather the series of nine poems that inform the narrative of the epic, is deeply embedded within the traditional African ethos. One of the central themes presented within the epic deals with the African cultural resistance against the changing of Swahili society from an African matrilineal society to one influenced by Arab/Islamic patriarchy and dominance on the Swahili coast.

This epic will help inform this dissertation on this early cultural struggle between traditional African culture and that of foreigners and Africans with foreign interests. This epic celebrates many aspects of traditional African culture, many of which, especially in the coastal areas, have become innominate. *The Epic of Fumo Liyongo* is not only a story of resistance, but for many, the retelling of the story itself is an act of resistance. This resistance and preservation of cultural consciousness ultimately undermine culturally dislocated or misinformed claims about the social realities of Swahili people, while providing insight into the nuances of cultural interaction on the coast. A deep analysis of this epic will also help inform this work's understanding of African ethics, traditional African cultural norms and values, within traditional Bantu and Swahili society.

Edward Steere's 1870's text *Swahili Tales as Told by the Native of Zanzibar with English Translation* contains a complete version of the Epic of Fumo Liyongo. His text importantly pairs the original Swahili with an English translation. The version of the epic which was written in his text has since been reprinted in Harold Courlander's *Treasury of African Folklore* (1996). As a brief note, Steere spells Liyongo, as Liongo in his 1870 text, however, I have seen indigenous scholars spell it differently, so I will assent to their orthography. Additionally in 2006 leading experts on Swahili oral history from Tanzania, Kenya, and Germany formed the Liyongo Working Group. This group's insight produced the most up-to-date study of Fumo Liyongo in their text *Nyimbo Za Liyongo (Liyongo Songs): Poems Attributed to Fumo Liyongo.* This text contains useful annotations to the poems of Fumo Liyongo as well as the group's analysis of the original manuscripts related to the epic.

Initially, this research intended to have an in-depth conversation about the nuances, causes, and ramifications of Arab/Islamic enslavement of African people. However, this topic has already been the point of investigation for several texts, including Abdul Sheriff's *Slaves Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987) and *Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius* (2016), Bernard Lewis' *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (1990), Murray Gordon's *Slavery in the Arab World* (1989), Johnathan Brown's *Slavery and Islam* (2019), John Alembillah Azumah's *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa* (2001), and Ronald Segal's *Islam's Black Slaves* (2001). While most of these texts are written from an Africanist, or anthropologist perspective they represent much of the discourse surrounding the issue of enslavement within Islamic civilization. Upon reflecting on this body of scholarship, the parameters of this research were shifted to advance the discussion from what happened to African people to a conversation that seeks to highlight African cultural agency during the *Maafa.*

To reorientate the parameters of this research the investigation into philosophical logic within Islam will be secondary to the investigation of the consequences of this relationship. Along with this relative interest in the philosophy of oppressive enterprises, the investigation into philosophies of indigenous African traditions will need to be emphasized as foundational to African ontology. In 1945, Placide Tempels, a Belgian Missionary published a text on Bantu philosophy. John Mbiti is critical of Tempels' text *Bantu Philosophy* as

> [Tempels'] motive and that of the fellow colonialists whom he addresses, is
> to "civilize, educate, and raise the Bantu." The book is primarily Tempels'
> personal interpretation of the [Congolese Baluba people], and it is

ambitious to call it "Bantu Philosophy" since it only deals with one people among whom he had worked for many years as a missionary.[37]

Furthermore, it appears that Tempels' conceptual framework concerning the dimensions of Bantu philosophy is appropriated from the Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame.[38] Unfortunately, it appears that the work of Alexis Kagame, which was written in French has yet to be translated into English. For this research, the primary reference for a comprehensive understanding of African spirituality will be Mbiti's 1969 text on African religions and philosophy, as well as his 1975 introduction to African religions, and the *Encyclopedia of African Religions* (2008) edited by Ama Mazama and Molefi Kete Asante. Tempels' work may be referenced where it supplements Mbiti's or within the research's analysis.

This dissertation is also in conversation with texts discussing the history of the Swahili coast. Outside of the works of Ali and Alamin Mazrui which provide an Arabcentric Swahili interpretation of cultural and historical phenomena, several other texts have been considered for their discussion on Swahili historiography. Chapurukha Kusimba's *The Rise and Fall of the Swahili States* (1999) is a comprehensive text which outlines key issues within the history of the Swahili coast. This text provides useful information about the context of Swahili culture and politics. Additionally, the work of Thomas Spears', namely *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (1985) will supplement Kusimba's work, as well as introduce important commentary concerning the construction of Swahili identity.

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[37] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 14

[38] *Ibid.*

Methodology

As an Afronography, the primary objective of this research is to explore the dimensions of African history and Africanity on the Swahili coast. An Afronography is the methodological investigation of African experiences and societies from an Afrocentric perspective. As defined in the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, an Afronography is

> A method of ascertaining the condition or state of an event, person, or text related to African people, Afronography projects both ethical and evaluative dimensions. In its ethical dimension, it is concerned with the nature of what is in the best interest of the African community specifically and the world generally. The elusive dimension allows the Afronographer to discern the usefulness of an event, person, or text in the search for truth.[39]

It is understood that there are four approaches, (1) historical, (2) experiential[40], (3) textual, and (4) social, that can be utilized in an Afronography. These approaches facilitate how social data is collected, and then analyzed. The objectives of any Afronography should incorporate a philosophical inquiry into the social realities of Africanity. This research will have a particular interest in the inquiry of Africanity on the Swahili coast, under the cultural strains of assimilation, acculturation, similitude, and foreign domination.

In the spring of 1970, Mazrui engaged Walter Rodney in a debate at Makerere University. The Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney worked as a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania at the time. Rodney had familiarized himself with the Swahili history, language, and culture, and worked to disseminate his findings and perspectives to smaller communities around Tanzania.[41] Walter Rodney would author his seminal text

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[39] Asante, Molefi Kete. "Afronography", *Encyclopedia of Black Studies,* Sage Publications, 2005, p. 75

[40] relating to experiences

[41] Ferrarini, Hélène. "Guyana Turns its Back on its Past", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2020

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa roughly two years after this debate as he continued to teach in Tanzania. Like Asante, Rodney voiced his criticisms and concerns over Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory. Mazrui attempted to create a nuanced conversation about the legacy of colonization on the African continent and situated this legacy as part of a positive and negative heritage. This positioning situated Mazrui as an apologist for colonial enterprises on the continent. During the debate between Mazrui and Rodney at Makerere University Rodney responded to the notion of the Triple Heritage by stating,

> Professor Mazrui has tried to justify the role of colonialism by identifying its positive and negative impact on Africa. But we must understand the principal role of language in the history of a people and the logic of its use.
>
> The colonialists had only one aim or logic in introducing the English language in Africa. It is not a question, as Mazrui puts it, of 'on the one hand this and on the other hand that'. Colonialism had only one hand: the hand of oppression, the hand of exploitation.[42]

Mazrui responded to Rodney's concerns by voicing that "Professor Rodney and I are not really in conflict over this issue of the role of colonialism in Africa. Our only difference is on method of approach".[43] Mazrui continued by implicating his multi-disciplinary approach as the source of his colonial apologetics. Mazrui defends,

> While Professor Rodney adopts a much more dialectical approach in analyzing historical, social, and political phenomena. I prefer a multiple methodology, using pluralistic tools of analysis that various methodologies offer us in the social sciences.[44]

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[42] Dokosi, Michael Eli. "When Prof. Ali Mazrui & Walter Rodney met for a Debate", *BlakkPepper,* Oct. 14, 2021

[43] *Ibid*

[44] *Ibid*

What Mazrui is demonstrating here is one of the epistemological dangers of relying on an inter/multidisciplinary approach to the study of African culture. By uncritically adopting the approaches of other disciplines, Mazrui was, in turn, adopting many of the assumptions and canon of Eurocentric disciplines which implicated his analysis. Mazrui, and many other well-meaning African scholars who uncritically adopt a multi-disciplinary research approach, unwittingly allow Eurocentric epistemology to become their ideological chaperone further alienating them from African epistemes. Through the disciplinary approach to the study of African phenomena, the Eurocentric hegemony over the assumptions and outcomes of Africa can begin to be challenged. The Afrocentric paradigm provides the necessary methodology to constitute a disciplinary approach to the study of African phenomena.

This dissertation is conscious of Asante's assertion that there needs to be a standard for what can be considered an Afrocentric or culturally located project. In his text, *An Afrocentric Manifesto,* Molefi Kete Asante outlines five characteristics that constitute fundamental aspects of the Afrocentric method.

1. An interest in psychological location

2. A commitment to finding the African subject place

3. The defense of African cultural elements

4. A commitment to lexical refinement

5. A commitment to correct the dislocations in the history of Africa[45]

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[45] Asante, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto.* Polity Press, 2007, p. 41

These characteristics, in part, inform the methodology of this dissertation. Methodology, in simple terms, are the methods, techniques, or intentional pattern to which we approach the analysis of cultural phenomena and data. My use of Afrocentric methodology aims to produce clear, concise, and conscious content in conversation with not only scholarship coming out of the discipline, but also in conversation with the cultural values of African people. Asante asserts that "the Afrocentric method seeks to uncover the mask behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position in order to establish how principal myths create place".[46] The understanding of the necessity of clear research methodology, and the utilization of an Afrocentric methodology in my analysis of African phenomena is not overly academic for the sake of intellectualism, and intellectual discourse. But rather to create a culturally authentic scholarship, aimed at decolonizing African historiography. Asante further clarifies that Afrocentricity is not a dogmatic religion or creed; it is a system of analysis and inquiry. He states that

> this is why the constituent of African values is debatable, even though they are central to Afrocentric inquiry. There are no closed systems; that is there are no ideas that are absolutely seen as off-limits to discussion and debate. Thus, when Afrocentricity is employed in analysis or criticism, it opens the way for examination of all issues related to the African world".[47]

Though what constitutes as an element of traditional African culture with a clear system of analysis we can begin to delineate indigenous thought from foreign intrusions and have honest conversations about similitude and syncretism within African cultures and societies. African culture manifests itself in various ways on the continent and in the diaspora. When comparing the cultural similarities in these communities in what they value we can come

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[46] *Ibid*, p. 27

[47] Asante, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto,* Polity Press, 2007*,* p. 41

to a more accurate conceptualization of fundamental, perhaps un-alienable, aspects of a traditional African way of life.

Methods

Three research methods will be central to this analysis of African culture on the Swahili coast. The first is an Afrocentric analysis of Swahili historiography. This analysis will rely on the scrutinization of primary and secondary sources concerning the Swahili culture and history. This analysis is important, to gain an understanding of the cultural and political impulses which inform how Swahili history has been approached. Additionally, it will give key insight into the perspective of how the Swahili elite families, who were influential in the politics of the coast for centuries, view themselves concerning not only African people, but the world at large.

The second method will be a cross-cultural analysis of Swahili cultural phenomena with other African societies. As a Bantu culture, other Bantu cultures are sure to shed light on aspects of Swahili society which are often mischaracterized by Afrophobic scholarship. Additionally, with an understanding of the ontological unity of African cultures, as demonstrated by Mbiti, this research will look into other African groups, and their oral histories and traditions for further insight into the significance of possibly innominate cultural phenomena on the Swahili coast.

The last method which is vital to this research is an Afrocentric analysis of Swahili etymology. Armed with an understanding of the importance of African nomenclature, understanding why certain words are used, and what they really mean, beyond their

ordinary use, is essential for understanding the implications of the cultural location of a society. This research will have a special interest in the investigation of the etymology of Swahili religious terminology. The Islamic faith permeates along the Swahili coast, the adoption of this faith is correlated with the utilization of Arabic religious terminology. Delineation of these Arabic terms and African terms shared with other African communities will help illuminate the nuances in the conceptualization of Swahili ontology.

CHAPTER 2: ARABCENTRICITY, ISLAM & SWAHILI HISTORIOGRAPHY

For decades research into the cultural and philosophical foundation of indigenous Swahili society has been impeded by the scarcity of documents and records concerning the early pre-Islamic history of the Swahili coast. This issue has been confronted by many scholars who have ventured to investigate Swahili culture prior to the introduction of foreign people and their traditions. Donald Witcomb in his chapter "Islam, Archeology, and Swahili Identity", of his book *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives* states that the reality of this scarcity is that "most historians and anthropologist concern themselves with the last two hundred years and have little interest in the previous two thousand years [of Swahili history]".[1] This lack of concern, as well as many of the documents and traditions, give "a static account of a Swahili society, with unchanging social and religious institutions".[2]

These last few centuries of East African history witnessed the period of overt enterprises of cultural domination and the height of Islamization along the eastern coast of the continent. *Islamization* or *Islamification* are terms used to describe the process in which a society or culture begins to adopt the Islamic faith, which was born out of Arabian Abrahamic thought and shifts its cultural ethics to align more closely with Islamic standards. As a faith system emerging out of Arabic culture, the process of Islamization is often, but not always, tied to the process of *Arabization*. Similar to the process of

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[1] Whitcomb, Donald. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives.* University of Chicago, 2004, p. 68

[2] *Ibid*

Islamization, Arabization is a process of acculturation where Arabic cultural standards begin to dominate and influence the communities of non-Arabic cultures. These processes manifest in the spread of the Islamic faith, as well as the utilization of the Arabic language. This utilization of foreign language and thought exacerbated and facilitated social and economic stratification.

Furthermore, Swahili culture and society have often been mischaracterized by linguists, historians, and social theorists. J. Spencer Trimingham's 1961 text *Islam in East Africa* insists that Swahili culture and society owe more to its Asiatic influences in Arabia than to African culture. He begins his text by stating, "The history of Islam in East Africa belongs more to the history of the Indian Ocean than to African history".[3] Trimingham's historiographical interpretation of Swahili culture is an Afrophobic and reductionist interpretation that sees African people as passive objects in their history whose cultural development is owed to the catalyst of foreign intervention. Trimingham articulates this idea with the following diagram, which sees Islam as an agent of change, and Bantu culture as a passive object.

Islam → Bantu Culture = creative tension = synthesis in the Swahili Culture[4]

Louise Rolingher analyzes Trimingham's diagram in their article "Constructing Islam and Swahili Identity: Historiography and Theory" stating that,

> The arrow from Islam to Bantu Culture is the essence of his argument. For him, African cultures were passive and Islam aggressive. Hence, the

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[3] Trimingham, J. *Spencer. Islam in East Africa: The Report of a Survey Undertaken in 1961*, Research Pamphlets: No. 9, Published for the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism by Edinburgh House Press, 1962, p. 1.

[4] *Ibid,* p. 66

"creative tension" was a one-way street. This top-down analysis then leads him to see the spread of Islam into the interior as "penetration" facilitated by the European colonial presence.[5]

It was only by the 1980s that a colonial interpretation of Swahili culture, which focused on the consequences of centuries of Arabization, and Islamization, had begun to be challenged. However, this diffusionist model of the syncretic development of Swahili culture is still generally accepted by academics. Historical linguists have continued to conceptualize Kiswahili as a Creole language, an admixture of Bantu and Arabic. However, they would find that Swahili is not a Creole language but instead "a full member of the Northeast Coastal Bantu group, with surprisingly few Arab (and virtually no Persian) loanwords".[6] The imputation of such a mischaracterization, and how the concept of being a Creole is internalized is not dissimilar to the social implications of African "Creolized" communities in the African diaspora, particularly in the Caribbean.

The process of *Creolization* differs conceptually from the process of Islamization and Arabization, as elements of the original culture are infused with the foreign culture instead of simply being replaced. This process of Creolization is most apparent in languages with high levels of contact with foreign cultures. Within academic and social discourse, diffusionist rhetoric seeks to rob African agency through this process. This diffusionist rhetoric often frames these creole languages "as variants of the dominate colonial language, formed by the interaction with 'substrate' languages (typically

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[5] Rolinger, Louise. "Constructing Islam and Swahili Identity: Historiography and Theory", *Frontier Geography and Boundless History: Islam and Arabs in East Africa,* The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies, 2005, p. 10

[6] Horton, Mark. "Islam, Archeology, and Swahili Identity", *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives,* edited by Donald Whitcomb, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 70

African)".[7] Fundamentally, cultures who undergo this process of creolization do not "emerge" as an altogether new culture, nor are they variants of the colonial language. The Swahili language, as well as the creolized African languages of the Caribbean, best demonstrate this fact. These languages may adopt secondary influences such as terms and names, however, the languages are for the most part structurally unchanged. The Swahili language, for example, does not cease to be a Bantu language structurally simply because a number of its lexicon comes from foreign sources.

In Thomas Spears' investigation of the Shirazi people, one of the main ethnic groups on the island of Zanzibar, he found that "historians frequently viewed the Swahili-speaking peoples of the East African coast as members of the Arab diaspora that spread around the Indian Ocean".[8] Spears rations that this perspective is "essentially diffusionist" and racist.[9] What this perspective assumes is that the level of cultural innovation and societal development which was achieved on the Swahili coast "could only come from elsewhere".[10]

Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory does little to dismiss these diffusionist ideas and many ways it reinforces exogenous notions. The term *'exogenous'* or *'cultural exogenous'* is being functionalized as the politicized belief that one's culture originates

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[7] Glassman, Jonathon. *"Creole Nationalists and the Search for Nativist Authenticity in Twentieth-Century Zanzibar: The Limits of Cosmopolitanism", Journal of African History,* Vol. 55, No. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 231

[8] Spears, Thomas, "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History", *History in Africa,* 1984, p. 291

[9] *Ibid*

[10] *Ibid*

from a foreign land or culture. Many of the social elite on the Swahili coast, and other parts of Islamized Africa, have fabricated claims of foreign Asian heritages. Culturally alienating themselves in favor of potentially legitimizing themselves in the eyes of foreigners.

Conceptually Arabcentrism seeks to place Arab culture, ethics, and perspectives at the center of historical and cultural analysis. Jonathan Glassman in his analysis on Zanzibari cultural politics during the twentieth century addresses the political uses of Arabcentric discourse by the Swahili elite. He states,

> [Arabcentric] discourses were closely intertwined with religion: coastal people regarded themselves as more civilized than their non-Muslim neighbors in the continental interior and, as in many parts of the Islamic world, they imagined that their superiority sprang not only from their faith but also from their access to the entire world of the Islamic Near East.[11]

Alamin Mazrui, the nephew of Ali Mazrui, also deals with the concept of Arabcentricity. However, Alamin Mazrui, perhaps compromised by his own cultural location, mischaracterizes the Arabcentric paradigm as "merely a subset of the Afrocentric paradigm".[12]

Alamin Mazrui seemingly conceptualizes Africanity solely on geographical terms. Therefore, he rationalizes that because many Arabs have now made Africa their home, and much of the continent have been affected by the process of Arabization, the Arabcentric perspective is indigenous to the continent. Alamin Mazrui, like his uncle, is a colonial apologist, whose historical analysis of what is indigenous is informed by their Arabcentric coastal-elite perspective.

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[11] Spears, Thomas, "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History", *History in Africa,* 1984, p. 235

[12] Mazrui, Alamin, and Ibrahim Noor Shariff, *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People*, World Press, 1994, p. 9

The principal thesis of Mazrui's celebrated *Triple Heritage Theory* is that African identity, culture, and civilization are sourced from three different, but equal heritages. These heritages, two of which are foreign, constitute the foundational ontological conceptualization of modern Africanity. Mazrui fails to recognize the heritages of Christianity and Islam as secondary to the indigenous ontology of Africans, but instead as equal constituents. While the Islamic and Christian faiths have played a major role in reshaping African politics in the last millennium, it is erroneous to say that the constitute the foundation of African identity. Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory which promotes a multitude of cultural foundations is reminiscent of Du Bois' Double Consciousness, in that they promote ontological schizophrenia. Marimba Ani's notions of *asili* and *utamaroho,* reinforce a statement made by Molefi Kete Asante in regard to this idea that multiple heritages or consciousness dominate African ontology. Asante writes,

> Consciousness can only be unitary anyways. It cannot be otherwise. One can be conscious of being conscious of conflict; one could have a tortured consciousness because one wanted to be something that one was not and the something that one wanted was perceived to be better than what one was. In such a case this is not double consciousness, but madness. It is stuck in the interstices of our existence because we have permitted a dysfunction between who we are and who we are told we ought to be. Clearly, all of this comes from one's society, family, and peers. We know who we are and to whom we are connected by knowing our ancestors, physical or spiritual. The more fully we know our ancestors, the rounder, the more powerful our sense of identity. […] Thus, the root of the madness is not in the African but in the society.[13]

Although Asante is discussing the concept of Double Consciousness, separated from the Triple Heritage Theory is only conceptual separated by geography, terminology, and perspective. Mazrui's ahistorical theory risks committing historicide by changing the

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[13] Asante, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto,* Polity Press, 2007, p. 158

terms in how not only African culture, but history is interpreted. The vast majority of human history is African history. African people were the first humans and the first to develop their own sense of ontology. These original primordial ontological ideas are still present and dynamically manifest in contemporary African communities. These other heritages of Abrahamic sources are secondary and come rather recently within the larger context of African history. One of Mazrui's limitations is his inability to perceive Africa outside of the historical experiences of foreign interaction.

Ali Mazrui was one of the leading African academics on the continent who were critical of western political influence and control. However, his socialization compromised his ability to consistently be critical of foreign influences. Mazrui who has been described as a western liberal sympathist, or a Muslim propagandist, describes himself "as a living embodiment of the triple heritage".[14] Mazrui as a youth in Kenya, and member of an elite ruling family in Mombasa was socialized Arabcentrically. Mazrui's family, like many of the elite coastal families of the Swahili coast, had intermarried with Omani Arabs. Mazrui defends that although his "own mother tongue [is] Swahili (or Kiswahili) he was taught classical Arabic by his father from an early age".[15]

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[14] Mazrui, Ali. *Islam and Afrocentricity: The Triple Heritage Theory,* Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1994, p. 18

[15] *Ibid,* p. 22

Ali Mazrui and The Islamophilic Afrocentric School of Thought

Mazrui as a youth attended Arab Primary School, and Arab Secondary School which is currently called Khamis Secondary School. Soon thereafter, at the age of fifteen, Mazrui would be employed as a cleric at the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education.[16] Education and schooling represent one of the primary modes of human socialization. A child attending Arab schools their entire life is going to be socialized into having sympathy for the notion of an Arabized identity. These sympathies implicate his research, and furthermore, how he understands his own identity. His socialization as a child is very informative in understanding Mazrui's perspective on African identity. These life experiences shaped Mazrui's perspective and how he would reflect upon African culture. Out of this perspective, Mazrui would develop what he would call *Islamophile Afrocentricity*. This school of thought attempts to combine Afrocentric discourse with a sympathetic response to Islam. It is also worth noting that the Mazrui family who governed the city of Mombasa, notably appear in the historical chronicles of several other the Swahili city states. James De Vere Allen in his text *Swahili Origins* articulates that an early nineteenth century poem from Lamu conceptualizes the Mazrui family as historical antagonist and invaders who also collaborated with the Portuguese.[17]

Afrocentricity is a socio-cultural metatheory that grounds all research on African phenomena to the cultural paradigm relative to indigenous African communities. The theory of Afrocentricity was developed by Molefi Kete Asante in his book *Afrocentricity:*

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[16] Beja, Patrick, and Philip Mwakio, "Thousands gather to bury Kenya's iconic scholar Ali Mazrui in Mombasa", *The Standard,* Mombasa, Kenya, Oct. 20, 2014

[17] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 13

The Theory of Social Changes (1980). While developed by Asante, this metatheory is informed by generations of African scholarship, Pan-African discourse, anti-racist/anti-imperialist rhetoric, and African cultural ethics. Used as an analytical tool, Afrocentric methodology seeks to restore the agency of African people, through studying African people as subjects rather than objects. In other words, studying African people as dynamic agents within their own history, rather than passive individuals who are merely affected by the world around them. Furthermore, Afrocentricity seeks to place African rationale, ethics, and values at the center of analysis concerning African people and culture. Just as the historiography of Africa has been the target of Afrophobic historicide, so have African theorists and their methodologies.[18] *Afrophobia* is the aversion to African people and culture trans-continentally. Afrophobia is a type of racism specifically targeting African culture and people, including the diaspora. It is different from the concept of *Negrophobia* in that the idea of African culture and identity is also attacked. This anti-African sentiment manifests itself through the silencing and opposition of discourse on African historiographies, as well as Afrocentric theories, and assertions for African political agency. Through systems of internalized self-hatred, mental enslavement, cultural dislocation or cognitive hiatus people of African descent can also manifest Afrophobic sentiments. Academically, these Afrophobic sentiments result in the historicide of African civilization.

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[18] "Labeling it "Afrocentrism" rather than "Afrocentricity," conservative critics have claimed that its purpose is to bring disharmony to American society by raising the self-esteem of African American youth". Asante, Molefi Kete. *The Afrocentric Idea.* Temple University Press. 1998, p. Ix

"[…] , the decision by the critics to add "ism" to the concept is to place the concept within political/ideological domain rather than the methodological/theoretical sphere with sound intellectual grounding".
Karenga, Maulana. *The Introduction to Black Studies.* University of Sankore Press, 2010, p. 40

Islamophilia denotes an uncritical love or deep admiration for Islamic civilization, culture, as well as the values of Islamic thought and rhetoric. In 2007, at the University of Michigan, scholars gathered for the first Islamic Studies Institute conference. Out of this conference the text, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend (2010),* was produced. This text supports the argument that Islamophilia, as well as *Islamophobia*, the reactionary aversion to Islamic thought and culture, are both reactionary outgrowths of Eurasian logic systems.

Mazrui with his *Islamophile Afrocentricity* school of thought would develop the term *Afrabia* to describe the relationship between Africa and the Arab world. Ali Mazrui introduces the term in his text *Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the New World Order* (1992). Mazrui situates the African languages of Kiswahili and Hausa, both "profoundly" influenced by Arab culture, as the linguistic manifestation of the idea of Afrabia. Mazrui notes that the majority of Arabic people today live in Africa, with the bulk of Arabic lands located on the African continent.[19] Instead of being representative of this special relationship as Mazrui frames Afrabia to be, these anecdotes seem to be more representative of Arabic lebensraum and the history of Arabic imperialism[20].

In his 1994 essay, "Islam and Afrocentricity: The Triple Heritage School", Ali Mazrui categorizes Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Edward Blyden of Liberia, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, as well as himself as part of this school of thought. This perspective on

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[19] Mazrui, Ali. "Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the New World Order", *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies,* University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), 1992, p. 53

[20] Ibekwe, Chinweizu. *The Arab Quest for Lebensraum in Africa and the Challenge to Pan-Africanism.* Global Pan Afrikan Reparations and Repatriation Conference. Jul. 25, 2006

Afrocentric discourse sees Islam, Islamic philosophy, historiography, and rhetoric as not a threat to Afrocentric discourse but perhaps an "ally of Africanity".[21] It is clear throughout Mazrui's work that he conceptually conflates Africanity, Black nationalist political impulses, with the idea of Afrocentricity. Additionally, by Mazrui's own admission many of these individuals which he considers Islamophilic Afrocentrists, Nkrumah, Blyden, and himself, were initially trained for Abrahamic religious vocations. Mazrui approaches the idea of Islam and Africanity from a more personal perspective. He writes,

> Paradoxically, although Ali Mazrui as a Muslim believes that Islam is the right religion for himself, it was William Blyden who came closer to saying that Islam was the right religion for Africa.[22]

The only paradox here is that Blyden would suppose the right religion for a people is outside of their own cultural paradigm. Mazrui addresses several paradoxes in dealing with the idea of Islamaphilic Afrocentric discourse. Essentially, these paradoxes stem from the cultural dislocation of what Mazrui calls Global Africa. For Mazrui, coming from a family with deep Islamic roots, and Arabic ancestry his Islamophilia is consistent with his cultural orientation. For the non-Islamic Islamophiles, like Nkrumah and Blyden Mazrui can't help but address the paradoxes, or the dislocation between their cultural heritage and politicized stance on foreign religion.

Furthermore, as evidenced by his writings on his own identity within *Islam and Afrocentricity: A Triple Heritage Theory (1994)* and his seventeenth annual newsletter "On Ancestry, Descent and Identity" (1993), that his Triple Heritage Theory stems less from an

[21] Mazrui, Ali. "Islam and Afrocentricity: The Triple Heritage School", Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1994, p. 2

[22] *Ibid*, p. 4

academic inquiry into the cultural foundations of African culture and civilization, but rather a projection of his investigation into his own heritage. Mazrui is not an enigma within Swahili society. His upbringing and perspectives are reflective of how many of the educated elite are socialized. This socialization and dislocation, especially amongst the educated elite who are often preservers of history and culture presents itself as a limitation to the study of African culture and history. Thomas spear accounts for this for one of the limitations of studying East African history. He writes,

> Historians failed to investigate the possible African roots of Swahili culture in their Bantu language, their religious beliefs and values, their economy, or social structure. But this charge does not only apply to European historians; Swahili oral historians have long recounted the development of their societies in essentially the same terms involved genealogies tracing the development of different Swahili families, communities, and institutions back to Persian or Arabian ancestors. When European historians came to study the oral traditions of the Swahili (usually in written, chronicle form), they thus found ready confirmation of their own (racist) assumptions and interpretations.[23]

This presents quite an issue in utilizing much of the Swahili oral tradition. Within this tradition, much of the oral history has been curated to conform to an Islamophilic interpretation of Swahili culture. Although not necessarily censored, much of this history is subject to a contemporary interpretation of historical phenomena. Donald Whitcombs research into the archeological record of the coast similarly accounts for the same issue. Whitcomb writes that,

> Historians were looking at the oral traditions and saw that they could not be taken literally: indeed, several were the product of nineteenth century "Arabization" of the coast.[24]

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[23] Spears, Thomas, "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History", *History in Africa,* 1984, p. 291

[24] Whitecomb, Donald. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archeological* Perspectives, University of Chicago, 2004, p. 70

This issue is the result of not only more contemporary Islamophilic notions, but also the societal stigmatization of traditional African culture in the coastal areas. However, while this may not provide researchers with an authentic historiography, it does provide insight into the cultural location and prevalent perspectives along the coastline.

A related issue which presents itself in the investigation for an authentic Afronography, is how indigenous African cultures have been categorized. Traditional African cultures have become pathologized by Muslim and Christian researchers. This manifests in the terminology used to discuss African cultural practices. Perhaps a remnant of Hegelian thought, African cultures, especially in older literature, are rarely given the respect of dignified cultures with their own religious systems. Instead of religion and philosophy, Africans are pathologized, especially within missionary circles, to have fetishes, superstitions, cults, witchcraft, and magic. John Mbiti, in his book *African Religions and Philosophy,* states that terms like these "show clearly how little the outside world has understood African religions".[25] Furthermore, Mbiti writes,

> Religion is not magic, and magic cannot explain religion. Religion is greater than magic, and only an ignorant outsider could imagine that African religions are nothing more than magic. […] In Missionary circles they have been condemned as superstitious, satanic, devilish and hellish.[26]

This type of ontological reduction works to debase the system African cosmological cultural thought, into at best collection of reactionary beliefs, superstations, and at worst the diabolical tradition of heathens. Despite the Afrophobic implications, understanding

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[25] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*, Anchor Books, 1969, p. 13

[26] *Ibid.*

that this degradation of African culture is systemic within the literature of Swahili culture and history has been useful in the investigation of indigenous thought.

While reports on investigating indigenous Swahili culture may be few and far between, quite a number of research articles have been published detailing various possession cults, and superstitions that have existed in the coastal regions and the hinterlands. For example, in 1869 a European Catholic missionary described a possession cult centered around the Kitimiri spirit[27]. In 1987 Linda Giles published an article on pepo tradition based upon five years of her anthropological findings in her dissertation. The tradition of pepo demonized as *sheitani*, one of the Swahili terms for Satan, is referenced as a possession cult. Giles is not the first or the only individual to write on this tradition, however, her findings seem to be the most comprehensive. Though uncritical of the pathological terminology used, Giles' research,

> provides a reassessment of the conventional theoretical viewpoint that such cults are peripheral to the wider society's value and socio-cultural structure, asserting that in this case they are, in fact, not only central to it but actually one of its most illuminating expressions.[28]

Giles' findings collaborate the idea that despite being pathologized and marginalized within many contemporary African communities these traditions give incredible insight on the indigenous culture of the Swahili coast. Additionally, with an understanding of the ontological unity of African cultures, we can continue to gain a better understanding of these traditions. Furthermore, a cross-cultural examination of other

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[27] Alpers, Edward A. "Ordinary Household Chores": Ritual and Power in a 19th-Century Swahili Women's Spirit Possession Cult", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1984

[28] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 1987, Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987, p. 234

African cultures with similar practices, such as the Kenyan Giriama spirit possession complex, or the Yoruba Ifa tradition, can provide further insight into the cultural significance of these spiritual traditions. Though the African continent is home to thousands of cultural traditions, it is useful to conceptualize them as not separate culturally isolated traditions, but rather unique manifestations of a Pan-African ontology. Mbiti writes that despite the misrepresentation of African religions and philosophies they still "dominate the background of African peoples and must be reckoned with even in the middle of modern changes".[29]

This is not to say that all African spiritual practices are somehow "pure", and completely representative of uncompromised African ontology. As Frantz Fanon's Post-Colonial Theory implies the colonial experiences distorted many realities of African culture and interpretation. The *Maafa* compromised African agency to practice and develop indigenous ontological and cosmological ideas. African philosophy and cultural traditions continued to develop, however, due to the constraints of imperialism and loss of consciousness many of these traditions lost their original cultural context. This necessitates any research on contemporary African spiritual systems must be in conversation with the systems of African ancestors. With a cross-cultural analysis of the various spiritual systems on the continent, and the classical systems of ancestral African communities, we can begin to delineate what ideas are indigenous, authentic, and uncompromised by foreign intrusions within African epistemological and cosmological thought.

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[29] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 1987, Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987, p. 234

In Molefi Kete Asante's seminal text *Afrocentricity the Theory of Social Change* briefly touches on this issue. He writes,

> Adoption of Islam is as contradictory to the Diasporan Afrocentricity as Christianity has been. Christianity has been dealt with admirably by other writers, notably Karenga; but Islam within the African American community has yet to come under Afrocentric scrutiny. Understand that this oversight is due more to a sympathetic audience than it is to the perfection of Islam for African Americans.[30]

This same sort of sympathy indirectly has affected the way which scholarship concerning East Africa, as its history is intrinsically connected to the legacy of Islamic imperialism. Despite this lack of scrutiny, there has been an effort to better understand East African communities. Ali Mazrui, who was once one of East Africa's leading theorists on Swahili history and identity, could provide insight in the way that the Swahili political and economic elite conceptualize their ontology. In the mid-1980s Mazrui popularized the African Triple Heritage Theory, through a 1986 documentary program produced by the British (BBC), and a companion text *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* jointly published by (BBC) Publications and Little, Brown and Company. The series and its accompanying text sought to create a rationalization that contented with the realities of contemporary African ontology with the foreign influence. The Triple Heritage Theory was apologetic of the legacy of Islamization and European imperialism and their impact on African cultural identity. Within this theory, Mazrui posits that these external forces are so inherently tied to who African people today are that they too, no matter how foreign or oppressive, must also be considered equal heritages to the indigenous or traditional heritage of native Africans.[31] Mazrui notes within the first few pages of the introduction of his text, that the

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[30] Asante, Molefi Kete. *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change,* African American Images, 1980, p. 5

[31] Mazrui, Ali. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage,* Little, Brown and Company, 1986, pp. 90-97

European impact on African could be seen a shallow and transitional influence upon African society.[32] Another issue with his text is its lack of conversation with other African scholarship. His fellow Kenyan countryman John Mbiti writes about one of the realities of Africans the adoption of foreign beliefs. Mbiti writes,

> Although Islam has generally accommodated itself culturally more readily than western Christianity, it also is professed only superficially in areas where it has recently won converts. Neither faith has yet penetrated deeply into the religious world of traditional African life; and while this is so, "conversion" to Christianity or Islam must be taken only in a relative sense.
>
> Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religions we must penetrate that ontology.[33]
>
> Mbiti's work stands in stark contrast to Mazrui's perspective on African ontology.

To Mbiti, despite being an ordained Christian bishop, he is able to recognize that the core of African ontology, the *asili,* is principally African. Mbiti throughout his text *African Religions and Philosophy* demonstrates an awareness of the reality that non-African religions have embedded themselves in the continent.

The Africans: A Triple Heritage is not the only instance in which Mazrui deals with the idea of African ontology. Mazrui has published many works containing elements of his Islamophilic perspective on African identity. Although Mazrui does a commendable job attempting to illuminating some of the nuances within African issues, and incorporating the African diaspora, who were dispersed across the world after centuries of enslavement, as part of Africa, close investigation of Mazrui's work won't likely give too much in the way of new and valuable information of the ontology of culturally grounded Africans.

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[32] Mazrui, Ali. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage,* Little, Brown and Company, 1986, p. 14

[33] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 20

Mazrui's work, however, which is representative of the perspective of the Swahili elite, could provide invaluable insight on how this sort of intellectual compromise manifests itself in the worldview of many African people.

To better understand the location and position of Mazrui, and to prepare for this literature review I acquired several of his texts. In his text *The African Condition* Mazrui investigates culture and the impact of the colonial experience upon African people. Mazrui discerns the complexity of modern African experience and the conflict of culture within African society with the influx of foreign, namely European influence. In his lecture, "A Class of Culture", the third chapter in the book, Mazrui writes "To understand the full ramifications [of western assimilation] it would be useful to relate the process of westernization in Africa to seven functions of culture in societies generally".[34] Mazrui proceeds to provide these seven core functions as:

1. Culture provides lenses of perception, a way of looking at reality, a world view.
2. Culture provides standards of evaluation.
3. Culture conditions motivations
4. Culture is a medium of communication
5. Culture provides a basis of societal stratification
6. Culture is connected to material production
7. Culture defines identity

Mazrui's understanding of the important functions of culture is in line with Afrocentric discourse on the topic. Perhaps this is why he was so comfortable labeling himself as an Islamophilic Afrocentrist. His divergence, as evidenced in his debates with Walter Rodney and Molefi Kete Asante, is not how he comprehends African culture, but

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[34] Mazrui, Ali. *The African Condition.* Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 47

rather what he considers African culture. Additionally, despite how expertly Mazrui understands the significance of culture and dissects the impact of European influence through the westernization of African communities, Mazrui fails to continue his analysis beyond the African and European dichotomy. Before Africans were pressured through violence or economic incentives to embrace western culture and values, African people experienced the same sort of pressure from the Middle East. Mazrui in virtually all his texts neglects to discuss this experience of Arabic cultural imperialism with the same ferocity as his expert investigation into the cultural realities of European imperialism.

Mazrui ultimately doesn't believe that the cultural paradigm of African people is threatened by the influx of influence and the impact of cultural compromise. Mazrui questions if an African can be both a Christian and a Marxist. To answer his own question, Mazrui cites Kwame Nkrumah who stated That he is "a Marxist-Leninist and a non-denominational Christian, and [he] sees no contradiction in that".[35] Without divulging into actual Marxist-Leninist theory, such a statement is clearly apologetic and Nkrumah being a scholar and a learned man must've seen the theoretical contradiction being these two foreign thoughts and sought to overlook them for the practicality of his new national agenda. Mazrui continues his interrogation of supposed dichotomies, citing Idi Amin, Ahmed Sekou Toure, and the experience of Millions of African people who balance their traditional African culture to the foreign philosophies they have come to adopt. Mazrui concludes,

> Certainly, every Christian has, in reality at least two religions: his own and Judaism. Every Muslim has at least three religions: his own, Christianity

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[35]Mazrui, Ali. *The African Condition.* Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 54

and Judaism. Every African Muslim has four religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the legacy of his own ancestors.[36]

This quote speaks to a socio-philosophical reality of those engaged in Eurasian convictions. Within Mazrui conclusion, however, there is a lack of agency given to what he has called the 'legacy of our African ancestors'. He doesn't inquiry about its existence on its own ground. It seems that from Mazrui's perspective, this legacy is something that always needs to be balanced or compromised. It's apparent that within this context Mazrui is surmising that traditional African culture may be archaic and in need of this compromise.

Recentering Swahili Historiography: Cultural Historiography

For the sake of clarity, and for more nuanced and accurate historiography of African societies, the Eurocentric framework of dividing African historical experiences based on how they relate to foreign interaction needs to be abandoned. The posture of dividing the history of Africa into the periods of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial histories, place this colonial experience at the center of African analysis. While the colonial experience did have a profound impact in the lives of African people, it is not the core aspect that created the foundation of these societies. Furthermore, the colonial period which lasted between five hundred to less than two hundred years for African societies is dwarfed by the supposed pre-colonial period which lasted for thousands of years and represents the period where African people developed their own societies and culture. For an authentic comprehension of African phenomena, a new framework of historical analysis, which

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[36] Mazrui, Ali. *The African Condition.* Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 55

places a premium on the cultural experiences of African communities needs to be considered.

Chapurukha Kusimba in their text *The Rise and Fall of the Swahili States* attempts to restructure how Swahili history is comprehended. Kusimba attempts to create a uniform chronology based on archeological findings on the eastern coast of Africa. Kusimba writes,

> Thus, despite the richness of the archeological record on the Coast, there is still no single well-established and accepted chronology. […] Here I attempt to unify different regional chronologies into four broad archaeological periods. These include: Period I (100 B.C. to 300 A.D.), representing the earliest iron-working settlements; Period II (300 to 1000); Period III (1000 to 1500), during which most Coastal cities were built; and Period IV (1500 to 1950), the Colonial Period.[37]

What Kusimba's framework is missing is the developments of Swahili culture outside the findings of material goods in the archeological record. Beginning the chronology of Swahili and northeast coastal Bantu in the first century before the common era severely limits an investigation into the cultural historiography of these communities.

The African communities in East Africa, from Nile Valley Civilization down to the Swahili coast, have historically served as one of the primary agents of interaction between African cultures and cultures abroad. Over the span of two millennia relationships were created and cultivated with other African maritime states, Persians, Greco-Romans, Indians, the far-off empires of China, as well as the emerging Arab powers.

Over the course of this period of time, many of the conditions of these relationships began to change, as did the political landscape of East Africa. As the dynamics of these politico-economic relationships built by trade developed and evolved, the identities

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[37] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 33

informed by an altered worldview beset many of the societies of the East African coastal region began to change. The Islamic faith was introduced to African populations through a myriad of methods including economic interest and through military conflict. This Arabic-derived faith system was likewise utilized by its new adherence for a myriad of reasons, including economic or political incentives, and even genuine philosophical intrigue. Regardless of the reason why a foreign thought was adopted, the adoption of Islam had a profound affect in the way that African people would come to understand themselves and the people around them.

Though this change is clearly evident within groups like the Shirazi of Zanzibar, there are many other groups of African peoples, trans-continentally whose histories parallel each other; the Hausa of the West African Sahel, the Tigrayans and Amhara of Ethiopia, the Songhay of Niger, the Mande of Mali, and even African Americans in the Western Hemisphere on a quest for political, cultural, and spiritual self-determination against White supremacy. It is said that Islam came to East Africa and spread through peaceful means, this is far from a categorical truth. War was first waged in the hearts and minds of African people, many of which desperately tried to balance foreign and indigenous ontologies. Subsequently, this cognitive conflict manifested itself within the political aspirations of African people, and these aspirations led to an assault against indigenous African thought. This assault, unrelenting, persists to this day.

The colonial experience in many parts of east Africa can be summarized into four parts. Specifically on the Swahili coast you have (1) the period of cultural interaction before any overt system colonization, (2) the period of more direct Arabic political control and cultural influence (3) the period of European colonial domination (4) the post-colonial or

neo-colonial period where African communities attempt to recover from the proceeding periods of foreign dominance.

Many scholars, particularly Western Africanist, categorize African history into the three chronologically disproportionate categories of the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. This categorization of African history centers the analysis of African history during the colonial period, with the rest of Africa's history being categorized in relation to the colonial experience. Quite frankly, this is a Eurocentric understanding of African phenomena, especially considering the colonial period which is central to this analysis only lasted a few hundred years at best, where pre-colonial history goes back tens of thousands of years. Ali Mazrui[38], as well as many other scholars dedicated to centering African perspectives within their historical analyses have conceptualized the colonial period of African history as a mere, albeit recent, episode in the history of African people.[39] The categorization of post-colonial is defined by the era proceeding African independence movements, where European imperial structures were forced to relieve power on the continent. However,

> when finally forced to decolonize, Europeans sought to devolve power to
> African elites whom they hoped would continue to value these economic
> ties, a relationship some derided as "neo-colonialism".[40]

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[38] Mazrui, Ali. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage,* Little, Brown and Company, 1986, p. 14

[39] See: Ani, Marimba. *Let the Circle be Unbroken,* Nkonimfo Publications, (1980) 1987
   Asante, Molefi Kete. *The Afrocentric Idea,* Temple University Press, 1998
   Carruthers, Jacob. *Intellectual Warfare,* Third World Press, 1999
   Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization,* Third World Press, 1987

[40] Grosz-Ngate, Maria; et al. *Africa.* Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 51

Theoretically, this term neo-colonial is far more useful than the term post-colonial. The term neo-colonial is useful in that it conveys an understanding that while many old colonial systems were abolished, many aspects of the colonial enterprise continued through new systems and institutions.

Ama Mazama begins her text *The Afrocentric Paradigm* by engaging an idea central to this research. Despite emblematically putting an end to many of the foreign political and economic constraints that oppressed and subjugated African people during the colonial period, many African communities across the world still find themselves in a position of ontological subordination. The colonial enterprises which Africans had to endure were not only political or economic in nature, but also a cultural attack on African communities. Mazama asserts that this inability to liberate more cognitive elements of African culture and society has ultimately "interfered with our ability to recover our integrity and truly decolonize ourselves".[41] Furthermore, she explains that,

> The reason for this is that colonization was not simply an enterprise of economic exploitation and political control, as it was commonly held, but also an on-going enterprise of conceptual distortion and invasion, leading to wide spread confusion, and ultimately, "mental incarceration".[42]

She elaborates that the colonial enterprises of economic exploitation and foreign political control must by contextualized and analyzed within the broader context of the foreign cultural ethos which generated such systems.[43] This discussion of the impact of foreign colonization on African people is similarly expressed within the works of Frantz Fanon,

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[41] Mazama, Ama. *The Afrocentric Paradigm,* Africa World Press, 2003, p. 3

[42] *Ibid*

[43] *Ibid*

The Wretched of the Earth (1961), As well as within *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967).

These works constitute the literary foundation of Post-Colonial Theory. In *The Wretched*

of the Earth, Fanon states that,

> Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.[44]

This colonial process of what Fanon calls cultural estrangement, synonymous with later

Afrocentric discourse on cultural location. The Theory of cultural location is part of Molefi

Asante's meta-theory of Afrocentricity. Cultural location is an analytical theory which

works to better understand the relation of academic or social content has to cultural

perspectives grounded in reality. Dislocation occurs when this content, or perhaps

personalities, are estranged from the cultural epistemology relative to their work. In other

words, dislocation manifests when operating from a foreign cultural paradigm. Fanon

elaborates on the cognitive effects of cultural dislocation and estrangement within his text

Black Skin White Masks. Fanon posits,

> All colonized people – in other words, people whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.[45]

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[44] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth,* Grove Press, 1968, p. 207

[45] Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin White Mask,* Grove Press, 1952 (2008), p. 3

Aside from Fanon's use of archaic and pejorative terminology, the process of mental subjugation that Fanon is articulating has merit, however, the situation is far more complex. Fanon is operating out of a type of white-black dichotomy. One of the principal issues in the discourse on the intergenerational and cultural impact of foreign colonial oppression is the focus on the European legacy of cultural domination.

Furthermore, as will be evidenced with this research, authentic elements of African cultures, faced with cultural assimilation were not destroyed, as Fanon implies. Many elements of traditional African ontology have survived the colonial experience, even when faced with overt external pressures to acculturate to foreign ontology. However, it should be discussed that while many of these cultural elements survived through the colonial era, many of these elements, especially cultural elements related to spiritual thought increasingly become marginalized within these 'modern' societies.

Modernity is often used within academic discourse as a euphemism for this process of acculturation to Eurasian economic standards. Ana Monteiro-Ferreira, in her text *The Demise of the Inhuman: Afrocentricity, Modernism, and Postmodernism* states,

> As far as the African continent is concerned the colonial enterprise disposed Africa from its own modernity; deprived Africans from the possibility of developing their own intellectual tradition and material potential; amputated Africa's ability to freely create its own modern institutions.[46]

This section of Monteiro-Ferreira's text is in conversation with Walter Rodney's *How European Underdeveloped Africa* (1974). We do a disservice to the intellectual developments of African thinkers during this period. During this period African scholars

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[46] Monteiro-Ferreira, Ana. *The Demise of the Inhuman: Afrocentricity, Modernism, and Postmodernism,* 2014, p. 38

began to formulate and articulate new theories of cultural solidarity. Kimani Nehusi's work on classical African culture could be used to argue that elements of cultural solidary existed within the philosophical thought of many African societies who had a comprehension of the ontological unity of Africans.[47] However, it within the last two hundred years that African intellectuals began to develop social and political theories centered on Pan-African thought. The Maafa and the colonial enterprise of foreign powers did not prevent Africans from developing intellectual ideas. Instead, this intrusion into the natural development of African societies and intellectual discourse compromised the intellectual heritage of African thinkers with foreign philosophies and necessitated discourse focused on political liberation from foreign oppression. What was robbed from African culture was the agency to plot their own intellectual trajectory free from the pressures of foreign influence and oppression.

This conversation on modernity is the reason why Fanon functionalizes a metropolis, as a physical embodiment of colonial power. It's not that African never had urban centers, but the urban centers of 'modern Africa' were political and economic centers of foreign imperial power. The metropolis could be referencing colonial capitals such as London, or Paris, or perhaps it is a reference to the colonial urban centers on the continent either created or appropriated for foreign purposes.

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[47] Kimani S. K. Nehusi. "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism before the environmentalists." Mammo Muchie, Phindele Lukhele-Olorungu and Oghenerobor Akpor (eds.) *African Union Ten Years After: Solving African problems with Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance*. African Institute of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, October 2013, pp.364-381.

 Nehusi, Kimani. "Language in Recovery of Ourselves: The Medew Netjer in the Construction of Pan-Afrikan Unity", *Africana World: From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance,* edited by Mammo Muchie, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012

Contemporarily, industrialization and urbanization are still used as markers for modernity and economic development. I contend that Europe never deprived Africa of its own modernity as the concept of modernity is intrinsically and thematically tied to the concepts of western development. To be modern is to have acculturated to Eurasian societal and economic standards, and to participate in the Eurocentric global economy with the same nations which dispossessed African communities of material and cultural wealth. To reject such participation is to reject modernity and accept economic damnation.

Aside from Chancellor Williams text, *The Destruction of Black Civilization* (1971) the colonial legacy of the Islamic and Arabic assault on African societies has yet to come under the same level of comprehensive Afrocentric scrutiny as the European participation in the Maafa. Similar discussions about economic participation could be had about the Swahili involvement within Indian Ocean Trade, and the Arabs eventual trade in enslaved Africans. The history of the Arab presence in Africa differs in many ways from the history of European intrusion. This difference demands a nuanced conversation about the cultural and political ramifications. Though conceptualized as being different systems of oppression, Afrocentrically, the Arab and European colonial enterprise and the assault on African culture, are just two constituents of the Maafa. Both the European system, and the Arabic system have resulted in the political, economic, and cultural subjugation of African people. As a result of these two systems, African people across the globe have become dislocated from their cultural centers. Chancellor Williams states that,

> Blacks in the United States seem to be more mixed up and confused over
> the search for racial identity than anywhere else. Hence, many are dropping

their white western slavemasters' names and adopting, not African, but their Arab and Berber slavemasters' names![48]

Though Williams is highlighting an experience of a diasporic community, this confusion, as a result of mental subjugation, is just as present on the continent. This confusion is masked by conversations of creolization and modernization, where traditional African cultures are thought as archaic and modern African identity is formulated by the influence of foreign people. Like the conversation on modernization, this line of thought robs African people of their agency, by intrinsically linking the future of African people to the epistemologies and political guidance of foreigners. And is a prime example of Michael Tillotson's theory of Agency Reduction Formation. Tillotson identifies that "any system of thought that distracts, neutralizes, or reduces the need and desire for assertive collective agency" of African people is part of this Agency Reduction Formation.[49] The Kiswahili term for the concept of civilization is *ustaarabu.* This term is etymologically tied to the Kiswahili word for Arab, *arabu.* Literally speaking, the idea conveyed here is that to become civilized is to become more like the Arabs.

The history of Islam in Africa and the intersection of Islamic foreign enterprises and African agency has yet to come under critical Afrocentric scrutiny. Molefi Kete Asante, in his provocative text, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* addresses that,

The Adoption of Islam is as contradictory to the Diasporan as Christianity has been. Christianity has been dealt with admirably by other writers, notably Karenga; but Islam within the African- American community has yet to come under Afrocentric scrutiny. Understand that this oversight is

[48] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 23

[49] Tillotson, Michael. *The Invisible Jim Crow.* Africa World Press, 2011, p. 60

due more to a sympathetic audience than it is to the perfection of Islam for African-Americans.[50]

Asante reasons that this lack of scrutiny stems from sympathy that the Black community, particularly from the Black nationalist, have for Islam as a politicized institution in America. Muslim contributions during the mid to late nineteenth century fight against white supremacy in America under the leadership of Malcolm X, Khalid Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad, and Louis Farrakhan have all but absolved the academic desire to investigate the relationship between Africans and the Arabian religion within their own social parameters.

Afrocentric research and discussion on the cultural location of diasporic communities' support Williams' claim. However, the investigation into other African communities, such as the Swahili in East Africa, complicates this statement. Cultural dislocation and the search for, and recovery of authentic identities is a global phenomenon.

Like Chancellor Williams' text *The Destruction of Black Civilization,* this work is not a reactionary attack of religious ideas and foreign people in Africa but is a careful analysis of the history and impact that they have had on African agency and identity. In his text Chancellor Williams defends,

> The unthinking Muslim or Christian would likely believe that his religion
> is being attacked rather than those conquerors and enslavers who disgraced
> it in covering their drive for wealth and world domination.[51]

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[50] Asante, Molefi Kete. *Afrocentricity the Theory of Social Change (Revised and Expanded),* African American Images, 2003, p. 5

[51] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 23

Tthis work serves as a careful investigation of the intersection of identity, cultural philosophy, and political mobilization in East Africa from antiquity to contemporary societies.

CHAPTER 3: SWAHILI ASILI

Chapurukha Kusimba in his text *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States* discusses the

first major archeological study along the Swahili coast. J.S. Kirkman, who conducted this

study in 1964, concluded that presence of an extensive network of abandoned towns were

the archeological remains of small autonomous polities, or what is commonly referred to

as city states.[1] Kirkman's conclusion was that these city states were the result of a Muslim

civilization of Arab origin. Kusimba summarizes that, "it was tacitly assumed that the

civilization which developed on the Swahili coast was a by-product of the migration of

people and ideas from the Near East".[2]

This reductionist perspective of Swahili society was the "prevailing opinion in

many academic quarters before 1980".[3] Kusimba writes that this opinion held,

> The Swahili coast as an extension of the Islamic world. It was assumed that
> Muslim peoples of the Swahili Coast were colonist merely interested in
> exploiting the economic resources of the region. [These reductionist] works
> legitimized the tendency to look overseas to explain local Coastal events,
> even though locally made material culture constituted nearly all
> archeological assemblages at all sites.[4]

Despite the dislocated approach that scholars have utilized to engaged the discussion of

Swahili culture and society, it should be understood that fundamentally Swahili people are

an African people. The foundations of Swahili language, culture, and the society which

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[1] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 25

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid*, p. 30

[4] *Ibid*

was born out of this culture are informed by African cultural values and epistemology. Kusimba's work supports this notion, he writes,

> Yet despite all these suggestions supporting extensive Arab settlement and even colonization of the Swahili Coast, many archeologists and historians now maintain that the resulting culture distinctly African in origin and nature. […] Although it is true that the Swahili Coast flourished in an environment of intercommunication with foreign nations and ideas, the underlying basis of the Swahili lifestyle and people were long-established populations and cultural mores of African origins.[5]

In order to fully comprehend the Africanity of Swahili society, this origin which survives as the ideological foundation must be investigated. Marimba Ani identifies this foundation as the *asili* of a culture. In Kiswahili the term *asili* can be comprehended a few ways. It can be understood as a term used to describe the idea of the beginning, the origin, or the source. In this way it can be linked to the ideas of ancestry or family. This understanding of the term *asili* is represented in the expression *watu wa asili,* directly translated to mean 'the people of origin', which loosely conveys the idea of an indigenous people, or as Europeans have identified them, 'aboriginal people'.[6] Alternatively, the expression, *hana asili wala fasili,* which loosely means that a person is "a nobody, [they have] neither good family nor standing".[7] This expression of *asili* conveys the idea that a person is validated through their relation to other people, and idea intrinsically tied to ubuntu philosophy albeit implicated by later social developments.

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[5] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999*,* p. 26

[6] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20

[7] *Ibid*

A distinction must be made to differentiate the various implications within the idea that constitutes a people's origin. *Asili,* within this research is being understood to carry ontological significance, whereas a term such as *nasaba,* which could also be used to discuss a person's origin, has more to do with an individual's lineage or genealogy.[8] Qualities of this alternative concept are indeed incorporated into the discussion surrounding *cultural asili,* however, foundational aspects of human ontology, and the logic of cultural paradigms cannot simply be explained through genealogy alone.

Asili can also be used to describe the nature of something or of someone, in other words their inborn temperament.[9] For example, *yeye asili yaki ni mpumbavu,* 'the nature of this person is a fool'.[10] It can also mean the essence of something, the reason, or the fundamental principle. Lastly, it can also be used in a mathematical sense meaning a numerical denominator.

Marimba Ani, synthesizes these expressions of *asili,* and functionalizes the term in her work as "the cultural essence, the ideological core, the matric of a cultural entity which must be identified in order to make sense of the collective creation of its members".[11] Furthermore, Ani explains that,

> The *asili* is our reference point; explaining cultural phenomenon within the context of a specific cultural tradition. *Asili* has an ideological focus, since

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[8] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 330

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. xxv

> it is concerned with that which compels and demands particulars forms and content of expression.[12]

This *asili* is not only the core of a single ethnic expression of culture, but also represents the core of the cultural paradigm that connects the different manifestation of African culture trans-ethnically. This core is articulated through the ethics and values of African culture. These values are articulated within the proverbs, sayings and aphorisms of African communities. These values, grounded in the *asili,* are also articulate within worldview of a people. Long before the intervention of foreign imperialism, and the adoption of foreign epistemes, African people had developed their own worldview. These worldviews are culturally structured, informed by the *asili.* Marimba Ani identifies these culturally structured worldviews as the *utamawazo.* Etymologically the term *utamawazo* was constructed by Marimba Ani out of the Swahili term *wazo* which loosely means thought or a type of inner word meditation.[13] Ani constructed the out of the Swahili language "to convey the idea of 'thought as determined by culture" within her social theory.[14]

In this way, the *asili* intrinsically tied to the concepts of *utamawazo* (culturally structured worldview), as well as *utamaroho* (spiritual vital force). The *asili* is the foundational essence of a culture. Ani conceptualizes that the ideas of cultural world view and a culture's vital essence are not separate from the *asili*, but instead are its

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[12] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. 13

[13] *Ibid*

  A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 528

[14]Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. 13

manifestations. She writes that these concepts are "born out of the *asili* and, in turn, affirm it".[15]

Part of this worldview deals with notions of ontology, and human existence in the world. Ancestral investigations into ontological thought gave birth to the ethical principles which shaped African ethics and understanding of self. Kimani S.K. Nehusi in "The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa" writes,

> Long before anyone else, Africans developed and elaborated a theory and practice of the person and personality. As may be expected, the person and personality in Africa is different from all others, though there are of course some similarities. It is a different model to that affirmed in Eurocentric social theory and social science research. African normality can therefore be achieved only when Africans live within African traditions, as agents of their own culture, rather than attempting to 'be like' Arabs or Europeans or any other human cultural group different to them.[16]

The last few centuries of Swahili society have been rather preoccupied with the attempt acculturate to Arabs cultural norms, with the social and economic elite alienating themselves from their own cultural identities. To understand how identity is constructed on the eastern coast, and to illuminate these indigenous ontological theories of the construction of identities, the cultural origin of the Swahili people must be in conversation with the development of Swahili culture, societies, and identities.

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[15] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. xxv

[16] Nehusi, Kimani S.K. "The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa", *Regenerating Africa: Bringing African Solutions to African Problems,* Africa Institute of South Africa, 2016, p. 61

Swahili Asili & The Myth of Shungwaya

By recognizing the *asili* Swahili society, the more recent external influences become more easily delineated from the foundations of African culture. Ani writes that the "*asili* allows us to recognize culture as a basic organizing mechanism that forges a group of people into an 'interest group', an ideological unity".[17] This ideological unity extends beyond the coastal Bantu and penetrates the hinterlands (*nyika*) of the African continent.

Evidence of this is shared origin are notably present within not only the archeological record, but also within the folkloric oral traditions of several of Bantu groups in eastern Africa. The Mijikenda peoples, constitute the nine closely related ethnic groups who share a common cultural and linguistic heritage. According to Thomas Spear's text *The Kaya Complex* "Mijikenda is a purely descriptive term and means, quite literally, the '*The nine kayas'*".[18] The *kaya* represented the center of Mijikenda identity, culture and politics, consisting of a council of elders, at least four to six distinct clans.[19] A *kaya* was a type of fortified hilltop village built along the ridge just behind the Kenyan coast often associated with sacred forests. The Mijikenda people inhabit this area near the Kenyan coast as well as just the south of the boarder of Tanzania, and upwards to Somalia. In the south are the Digo people, and north of them, the northern Mijikenda are the Chonyi,

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[17] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994 p. 13

[18] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 4

[19] *Ibid,* p. 6

Kambe, Duruma, Kauma, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, and Giriama.[20] Unlike the Swahili or even

the neighboring Pokomo people along the Tana River, the Mijikenda people "have refused

Islam and have retained their cultural autonomy".[21]Though not coastal people, the

Mijikenda people as agro-pastoralist of the hinterlands developed an economic relationship

with the Swahili people of the maritime cities. The Swahili city states were reliant on the

agricultural good produced by the Mijikenda along with the Pokomo people.[22]

Furthermore, the *kaya* as a cultural and religious center, also served a fortified military

installation. Entering into a mutually beneficial pact with Swahili people, who saw the

Mijikenda as clients, the Swahili gave them gifts of cloths and protection from the coast,

in return the Mijikenda would protect the Swahili against Maasai and Oromo raiders, and

work as mercantile middlemen in trade with the Kamba people of Kenya.[23]

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[20] Gearhart, Rebecca; and Linda Giles. *Contesting Identities: The Mijikenda and Their Neighbors in Kenyan Coastal Society,* Africa World Press, 2013, p. 28

[21] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 43

[22] Gearhart, Rebecca; and Linda Giles. *Contesting Identities: The Mijikenda and Their Neighbors in Kenyan Coastal Society,* Africa World Press, 2013, p. 9

[23] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 43
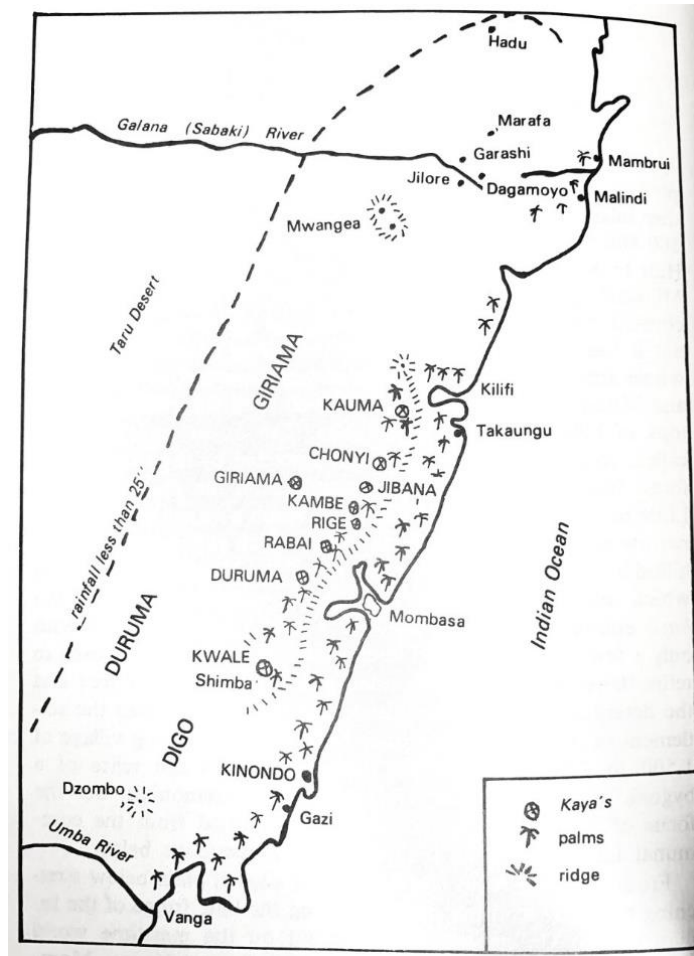
Figure 2: Map of the Kayas of the Mijikenda[24]

In older literature the Mijikenda people have been referred to as *nyika* people, which may have been understood a derogatory term, that infers that these people are people away from 'civilization', essentially bushmen. By the late 1940s the people whose recent ancestors once inhabited the *kayas*[25] selected term Mijikenda to replace the reductionist

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[24] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900*, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 4

[25] Thomas Spear's *The Kaya Complex* (1978) details how by the mid-nineteenth century most of the community had moved out of their kayas, but would return for certain rituals, and continued to identify themselves based on their *kayas*, clans, and local dialects.

and pejorative term *nyika*.[26] *Nyika* is defined literally as a type of treeless wilderness, the savanna perhaps, but can also mean a barren and desolate wasteland. In Zanzibar, one of the principal cities along the Swahili coast, the hinterlands are referred to as *bara,* and often used as a term to distinguish from the land along the coast (*pwani*).[27] It should be noted that *bara* is a rather general term that can mean land in general.[28] The expression *pwani na bara,* the coast and the hinterlands conveys a sense of difference between those in the hinterlands and the coastal dwelling Swahili.

Though their current area of residence stands in contrast to each other, and members of the coastal communities as well as the communities of the hinterlands have developed their own unique expressions of African culture and distinctive ethnic dialects, these groups share a common origin amongst each other as well as other neighboring Bantu groups. According to the oral tradition of the Mijikenda people, their occupation in the hinterlands of what is now Kenya and Tanzania is a rather recent development. Recent, within the span of African history and cultural development that is. The various Mijikenda peoples credit the cultural continuity between each group to their origin in their ancestral homeland of Shungwaya.[29] Furthermore, it is understood that this ancestral homeland is the birthplace

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Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 6

[26] *Ibid*, p. 4

[27] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 28

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 16

to their language, their institutions, such as the structure to their *kaya* complex, as well as where the ritual symbols[30] of the original and ritualistically important *kayas* came from.[31]

The story of how the Mijikenda came to occupy the *nyika* (the hinterlands), is also reflected within the oral traditions and origins of other Sabaki peoples. The Sabaki people are linguistically a part of the Northeast Coast Bantu sub-group, and themselves are understood by Derek Nurse to be a type of genetic subgroup.[32] The Sabaki sub-group includes the Mijikenda, the Pokomo people, the Malankote, Comorians, as well as the coastal Swahili.[33] Like the Mijikenda, many of these groups' oral traditions also trace their genealogies back to ancestral land of Shungwaya.

Oral histories, especially those outside of a structured oral tradition like the *djelis* (griots) of West Africa, often provide an account of history with often inconsistent or dubious historicity. However, like proverbs, aphorism, and local sayings, these informal oral histories provide valuable insight into how a people comprehend who they are, and the world around them. In a sense, this type of informal oral folk tradition illuminates key aspects of a people's ontology, or at least their perspective of their ontology. Christel Temple's text *Black Cultural Mythology* dives into the construction of such traditions, and the transmission of cultural memory within a community.[34]

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[30] These symbols are referred to as *fingo*

[31] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 16

[32] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, p. 208

[33] *Ibid*

[34] Temple, Christel. *Black Cultural Mythology,* University of New York Press, 2020

Along the Swahili coast, several Islamized communities claim a foreign origin. The Shirazi, infrequently also known as the Mbwera people, a major political ethnic group in Zanzibar claim to be descended from Persians, while other groups have fabricated claims about originating in the Arabian holy city of Mecca.[35] Recent scholarship, based in linguistic, archeological, and cross-cultural analyses have substantially disproven these claims. With most experts agreeing that claims of Arabian and Persian descent are the result of a "cultural imperative" and not the result of a "genuine historical tradition".[36] Thomas Spear in his article "Early Swahili History Reconsidered" which reevaluated the findings of his text with Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* explains that,

> People frequently invoke historical claims regarding foreign origins, social and religious status, or genealogy to substantiate contemporary political, social, or economic positions.[37]

This same issue could be said for another origin myth of the Swahili people; the myth of Shungwaya. This myth entails of ancient homeland of Bantu people, possibly located in southern Somalia, where the "'Kings' of Shungwaya also held sway over the surrounding country, once probably more densely populated, now virtually semi-desert land". [38] This myth may serve as similar purpose as the myth of Shirazi origin, as a way to claim a historic

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[35] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 11

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 257

[38] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 11

genealogy. However, what makes this myth historically intriguing is the consistency of the story between different Bantu ethnic groups.

> Oral traditions stressing earlier residence in a homeland in "Shungwaya" are widespread among the Pokomo. These traditions are also shared by Segeju, a majority of the Mijikenda, all Bajunis, a few other Swahili and some Boni. Reference to Shungwaya also appears in some Somali and Orma versions.[39]

Not all Swahili people articulate within their oral histories, but it is quite possible that "the majority of the present-day Shiraz histories in East-Africa [are] nothing but disguised Shungwaya stories".[40] This myth situates Swahili people as part of a cultural-genealogical continuum with other African groups, rather than a foreign import. If basic elements of this myth are to be believed the cultures, identities, and genealogies of the Sabaki and several neighboring Bantu groups all descend from the same common source.

According to this shared oral history, the ancestors of the Mijikenda and the Sabaki peoples lived together in the legendary city of Shungwaya. Shungwaya, whose exact location remains allusive to archeologist, is understood as being north of the Swahili coast, the most prevalent theory is somewhere in southern Somalia.[41] Shungwaya is certainly located north of the Tana River, and Prins claims that the ruins of Shungwaya can be found in Burgabo, Eurocentrically known as Port Dunford, in the Lower Jubba province of

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[39] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, p. 223

[40] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 14

[41] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, p. 223

southern Somalia.[42] Early European maps from English and Dutch cartographers in the late eighteenth century also collaborate the historicity of Shungwaya as a historical place.[43]

Chancellor Williams in his landmark text *The Destruction of Black Civilization* develops a what he calls 'the new approach' to the study of African civilization. In this new approach Williams stresses the importance of studying the migrations of people.

> How and why did a once-great people, with a common origin, splinter off into countless little independent societies and chiefdoms from which 2,000 different languages and dialects developed? Study the migrations. What caused the brother-against-brother internecine wars, hatreds, slavery and mutual suspicion among the various black societies? Again, study the migrations![44]

As history demonstrates, people do not tend to leave their homes without reason; and often such movement forces a migratory people to interact with other group. When a people migrate, moving from an ancestral homeland to a new place they don't often abandon who they are. Culture is not fixated to place. As many Pan-African leaders have declared, 'we are not African people because we are born in Africa, but because the African *asili* is born in us'. In this way, when a people move, they are also moving the culture which was cultivated in their ancestral homeland. This movement of people, culture, ethics, and ideas is what creates a diaspora. As the diaspora disperses from their original homeland their expressions of their original culture tend to adapt to their new ecological or political environment.

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[42] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972*,* p. 10

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 41

Shungwaya represents what could be the original, or rather a significant ancestral homeland following the initial Bantu migration into eastern Africa were the cultures of the contemporary north-eastern Bantu, including the Swahili, were first cultivated. Shungwaya represents not simply an ancestral home, but the *asili,* the germinating seed, the cultural ethical, and ancestral foundation for many of the North-East Coastal Bantu groups.

Shungwaya appears to not have been a monoethnic, or ethnocentric nation, but instead a multi-ethnic federation of various African people who co-existed in a single kingdom. According to the Pokomo oral tradition, there was a core group of Bantu clans in Southern Somalia that constituted the base of Shungwaya. These first settlers created an alliance amongst each other and "gave permission to the clans which arrived later to settle among them".[45] Additionally, the oral traditions indicate the kings of Shungwaya were politically and economically important not only to the urban population within the city but "also held sway over the surrounding country, once probably more densely populated now virtually desert".[46]Though framed as a sort of federation of African people, the tradition of the Digo people articulate that Shungwaya was ruled by one king (*mfalme*).[47] The term *mfalme* was used on the island of Zanzibar centuries later by the Hadimu people who understood the word to mean "supreme ruler".[48] This king governed Shungwaya and its

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[45] Bunger, Robert Louis Jr. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* Eastern African Studies XI, Syracuse University, 1973, p. 10

[46] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 11

[47] *Ibid,* p. 13

[48] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 42

surrounding territory. Depending on the tradition, the federated people of Shungwaya were organized into two or three occupational units. These units consisted of herdsmen, peasants, and townspeople. In summary, "in and around a town Shungwaya a congeries of tribes formed something of a unity".[49] This unity would be reflected in the Bantu ethic of Ubuntu/utu and politically functionalized through the heterarchy of these federated people.

One of the names of these federated people, as described within these traditions is *Kishuru*. This name has been related to the name the Pokomo people call the Giryama people, *Koshoro.*[50] The Teita people of the Kilimanjaro corridor refer to the Giryama people, one of the Mijikenda groups, interestingly enough in relation to the Pokomo people, calling them *Mbokomo.* What could be described as the "instability and interchangeability of [these] ethnic appellations"[51] really is a demonstration of how intertwined these people's identities are with one another, stemming from their shared ancestral origins.

Although the Shungwaya myth is present within several North-East African groups, the nature of these tradition varies between these group to a degree. A.H.J. Prins in his article "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa" distinguishes these traditions into six categories, based on how explicit or involved Shungwaya is in the origin of the various Bantu groups in the north-east coast. The first group included the traditions which are explicitly about Shungwaya, detailing the history and culture of this ancestral state. He refers to these traditions as "'true' Shungwaya

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[49] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 22

[50] *Ibid*, p. 14

[51] *Ibid*

traditions".[52] The second category he calls the 'substituted traditions', like that of the Shirazi of Zanzibar who have substituted Shungwaya for another place, in the Shirazi's case Persia. The third are 'derived traditions' traditions related to Shungwaya but not as involved in the actual participation of Shungwaya as a society. 'Inferred traditions' which don't explicitly state where a people came from, but based on historical, folkloric, and linguistic clues are inferred to have come from Shungwaya in the north. It should be noted that the Upper-Pokomo are part of this group where the Lower-Pokomo are part of the 'true Shungwaya tradition'. It is evident within several of the oral traditions that the Pokomo were part of the first migration out of Shungwaya.[53] The last two groups deal with neighboring communities who have their own migratory traditions separate from the Shungwaya myth or are traditions of people who do not have an oral tradition of an ancestral migration.

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[52] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 21

[53] *Ibid,* p. 15-17

Type of Tradition	People
'True' Shungwaya Traditions	The Lower-Pokomo, Giryama, Digo, Duruma, Segeju, Bajun, Kalindini, Mombasa Swahili[54], and some of the smaller Mijikenda (*Nyika*)
"Substituted" Shungwaya Traditions	Example given the Shirazi, and other Urbanized Swahili
"Derived" Shungwaya Traditions	Teita, Pare, Chagga
"Inferred" Shungwaya Traditions	The Upper-Pokomo, Tharaka, Meru and Mwimbi
Non-Shungwaya Traditions	Kikuyu and Kamba
Traditions of not having migrated	Chuka and Gweno

Figure 3. Presence of the Shungwaya Myth in East African Historical Traditions[55]

R.F. Morton during the late 1970s produced several works[56] aimed at disputing the historicity of the Shungwaya myth. Most works dismissing the Shungwaya myth seem to be primarily based in Morton's thesis. Morton specifically questions the validity of the Mijikenda tradition of Shungwaya myth, believing it to a product of a nearer, twentieth century tradition, and a version of historical revisionism.[57] Morton suggest that the term *Koshoro,* the name for the people of Shungwaya, was originally an Oromo term, and was

[54] According to Prins the Kilindini and the Mvita people form the original population of Mombasa and inform why Mombasa is exceptional for including Shungwaya by name in their tradition. The Bajun and the Kalindini are now considered as Swahili sub-groups.

Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 14

[55] Synthesized from Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 21

[56] Morton, R.F. "The Shungwaya Myth of Mji Kenda Origins: A Problem of Nineteenth-Century Kenya Coastal History", *International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 3 1972, p. 397-423

Morton, R.F. "New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins" *International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 10, No. 4, 1977, p. 628-643

[57] Morton, R.F., "New Evidence regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 10, No. 3, 1977, p. 630

borrowed by the Pokomo people along with several other terms and expressions.[58] He further proposes that the presence of this term, and its derived forms *Kasur, Kishuru* and *Kushura*, in later Swahili literature, such as in the *Kitab al-Zanuj* (Book of the Zenji[59]) is derived from either Pokomo and Oromo influence.

Nevile Chittick in his article "The Book of the Zenj and Miji Kenda" does a convincing job at reevaluating Morton's claim and reaffirming the cultural important of the Shungwaya myth.

> [Morton] maintains that he accounts relating to the Kashur in the *Book of the Zenj* are recent inventions spuriously inserted at the end of the [nineteenth] century. This was done, he claims, in order to justify the people of the Malindi region availing themselves of certain supposedly ancient practices in relation to marriage[60] of which the British administration disapproved. This explanation of the passages is in my view untenable; moreover, it gives the reader a false impression of the nature of the document.[61]

Chittick further lambasts Morton's position as Morton's supposition is unable to produce court document or other evidence, beyond the accounts of European Christian missionary ethnographers to support his claim. It is also noted in Chittick's rebuttal that the Pokomo

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[58] Morton, R.F., "New Evidence regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 10, No., 1977, p. 637

[59] "Book of the Black people".

[60] The British colonial administration opposed several non-western marital traditions including, the postponement of bride wealth, the supposed "pawning" of women, and the tradition of levirate which was the custom where a man would marry the widow of his brother.

[61] Chittick, H. Nevile. "The Book of the Zenj and the Miji Kenda", *the International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 69

tradition of calling the Giryama people *Koshuru* is unlikely to be result of a recently fabricated tradition for the purpose of evading British colonial law.[62]

The works of the early European literature produced between 1900 and 1980 concerning the early history of the Swahili and Sabaki people nearly commit historicide as they take for grant too much of the Arabcentric perspective of the urbanized elite (*Waungwana*). This scholarship struggles to synthesize these oral histories of African origins with Arabcentric historical revisionism. Although at times Prins becomes preoccupied with the Arabcentric narrative, his work to understand how Asiatic places have been substituted in the place of African location begins to remove the veil of Arabcentric obscuring of the Swahili peoples' origin. Despite Morton's attack on the historicity of the *Kitab al-Zenj*, this text remains an important document in the investigation of early East African history. Chittick summarizes,

> Historical documents of the East African coast dating from before the twentieth century are primarily dynastic chronicles, and for the most part ignore the history of the indigenous people outside the Muslim towns. The *Book of the Zenj* is therefore a document of unique importance, since it is particularly concerned with a group of Bantu-Speaking peoples.[63]

Although the *Kitab al-Zenj* and the Shungwaya oral traditions are in agreement to the ultimate fate of this ancestral kingdom, certain aspects of its historicity still need to be scrutinized. Morton in a 1979 response to Chittick addresses the use of the *Kitab al-Zenj* as an infallible historical document. Like many coastal documents, the *Kitab al-Zenj* is the subject of an Arabcentric interpretation of African history. Morton defends his

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[62] Chittick, H. Nevile. "The Book of the Zenj and the Miji Kenda", *the International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 71

[63] *Ibid*, p. 73

interrogation of the *Kitab al-Zenj* as a historical document, and questions Chittick's

reliance on the document in his response to Chittick,

> The question now raised is whether or not the *Kitabu al-Zanuj* is a reliable
> historical document. Mr. Chittick points out that the *Kasur* portions are well
> integrated into the whole, which favors acceptance. I have stressed the
> *Kitab's* "arabicization" of preexisting coastal traditions of origin, which
> does not. I am puzzled why Mr. Chittick who has often alerted us to the
> dangers of using coastal documents should now defend the *Kitab* so
> vigorously, when there are grounds for doubting its reliability.[64]

Chittick summarizes the sections of the *Kitab* that accounts for the conversation of Arabs

and the Galla (Oromo) people[65]. Around the year 684, the sixty-fourth year of the Hijrah,

the Arabs en masse converted to Islam.[66] Not long thereafter, according to the *Kitab al-

Zenj,* some of the Galla people, more commonly known now as the Oromo people followed

the Arabs and converted to Islam.[67] It should be noted that at this time most of the Oromo

people practiced their traditional religion Waaqeffanna and were generally fiercely

resistant to religious proselytization until the sixteenth century, closer to the final

destruction of Shungwaya than the first exodus.[68] In fact the word Oromo derives from the

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[64] Morton, R.F. "Response to H. Neville Chittick", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Boston University African Studies Center, 1979, p. 674

[65] Galla is a name that foreign people gave to the Oromo. It roughly means stranger. This term is now understood as a pejorative. The name Oromo which they prefer to be called loosely translates to mean "the free people".
Jaenen, Cornelius J. "The Galla or Oromo of East Africa*", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Summer, 1956, Vol. 12, No. 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 171

[66] Chittick, H. Nevile. "The Book of the Zenj and the Miji Kenda", the International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 70

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] Levine, Donald. *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society,* University of Chicago Press, 2014, pp. 35-41

expression *Ilm Orma* meaning '[The] Children of Orma', an early Oromo leader fiercely resistant to Abrahamic conversion.[69]

Whether the *Kitab al-Zenj* mischaracterized or overemphasized the Islamic component of the Oromo community in the late seventh century, could be a matter of debate. However, the local histories of people in Ethiopia as well as the Bantu people do illustrate this to be a time, between the seventh and sixteenth centuries as a period of turmoil and ethnic upheaval with Aksum, Shungwaya, and the Oromo community at the center of it.[70]

The economic and political turmoil inevitably led the Oromo people into conflict with the Christian empire in Ethiopia. This period of time is referred to as the post-Aksumite period, where the late Classical African Kingdom of Aksum was in a period of steady decline.[71] During this period Aksum lost much of its territory and economic power. Possibly as a result of the weaking state of Aksum, the Oromo people residing in parts of Somali and northern Kenya were attacked; and in turn the Oromo attacked Shungwaya.[72]

This attack resulted in the first migration out of Shungwaya and southwards into what would become Kenya and Tanzania. This first exodus out of Shungwaya occurred

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[69] Hassen, Mohammed. *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: 1300 – 1700,* Boydell & Brewer, 2015, pp. 109-110

[70] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 11

[71] Derat, Marie-Laure. "Before the Solomonids: Crisis, Renaissance and the Emergence of the Zagwe Dynasty (Seventh–Thirteenth Centuries)". In Kelly, Samantha (ed.). A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea. Leiden: Brill, 2020, p. 33

[72] Chittick, H. Nevile. "The Book of the Zenj and the Miji Kenda", the International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 70

before the development of the Swahili people as a distinct ethnicity separate from the

culture and traditions of their neighbors. As evidenced by the Pokomo people they were

among the first people to leave Shungwaya.[73] It is recognized that during this exodus the

Pokomo also absorbed fragments of Oromo language and culture.[74] Prins suggest that it

was during this exodus that it is possible that the ancestors of the Giryama and Segeju split

off from the main group.[75] Morton's concern with this interpretation of the first exodus

deals with an alternative tradition which is accounted for in *Figure 3*.

> Another tradition speaks of a huge mountain, maybe Mount Kilimanjaro,
> from where a section of the tribe, first having travelled southward with the
> Rabai, returned. A Chagga chiefdom on Kilimanjaro is actually called
> Pokomo to this very day.[76]

It is also likely that if the ancestors of the Swahili were indeed part of the federate people

of Shungwaya, that this first exodus would have included them as well. This could be a

reason why both the Pokomo and Dahalo people strongly identity the Swahili as descended

from the Pokomo, stating that the Swahili are "really Pokomo who have forgotten their

origin".[77] Whatever the case, Swahili architecture and material culture begins to emerge

along the coast around the ninth century, with a distinctive Swahili maritime culture firmly

established by the thirteenth century. During the sixteenth century the ancestors of

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[73] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 17

[74] *Ibid,* p. 7

[75] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 7

[76] *Ibid*

[77] Bunger, Robert Louis Jr. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo*, Eastern African Studies XI, Syracuse University, 1973, p. 25

Khadimu and Tumbatu Swahili people of Zanzibar migrated from the mainland of Africa, and thusly are not incorporated into this history.[78] The remaining *Koshoro* people defended Shungwaya against the Oromo onslaught for the next thousand years. Over this period of time, it is possible that there were several exoduses away from Shungwaya which diminished its economic ability to operate and remain sovereign.

> The Kingdom […] played an important part either passively, or also temporarily actively, in the disturbances and ethnic upheaval of the sixteenth century in which 'proto-Somali' and 'proto-Bantu' waged war against the Galla (the Oromo) for supremacy and mere existence.[79]

By the end of the seventeenth century Shungwaya was finally destroyed with its remaining population forced out of the Horn of Africa and into Kenya.[80]

Kingozi as an Ancestral Language

The Shungwaya myth is not the only oral tradition within the Sabaki language family that articulates an understanding historical and cultural continuity amongst each other. Derek Nurse conducted a series of interviews with elders of the Pokomo people, as well as several neighboring groups along the Tana River in Kenya. Nurse "elicited from several informants the opinion that Pokomo and Dahalo had the same *wazazi*

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[78] Gray, John. *History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages to 1856,* Clarendon Press, 1962, p 16-17, 37

[79] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 11

[80] Chittick, H. Nevile. "The Book of the Zenj and the Miji Kenda", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 70

Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthropos,* Bd. 67, H 1./2., 1972, p. 10

(forebearers).[81] However, it seems to be understood, as evidenced by the oral traditions, that while the Dahalo and Pokomo share *wazazi* (ancestors) there was a period of migration where the Pokomo migrated from the north down the eastern coast. Derek Nurse in his interviews with elders from these communities writes,

> Oral traditions among both Pokomo and Dahalo=Sange suggest a Dahalo presence along the [Tana] river when the "Pokomo" arrived. Intermarriage occurred between Pokomo and Dahalo. When asked with whom the Dahalo had intermarried with in former times, one Dahalo informant replied: *hawa wapokomo wangine* ("those other Pokomo") –not the modern Pokomo, but the ones who have 'disappeared'.[82]

Those "other Pokomo" seem to be the central people in the Shungwaya myth. These original Pokomo, as the Dahalo elder identifies them as, are the ancestral peoples of the Sabaki people and the other groups who share the Shungwaya myth. It is unlikely that these original people called would have identified themselves as Pokomo, but what is being recognized is that the modern Pokomo people's expression of culture and language is one of the more unaltered cultural expressions derived from these ancestral people.

The Pokomo people, therefore, are intrinsically tied to the *asili* of the more urbanized Swahili people of the coast. Their language, *Kipfokomo*[83] originates from the same source as *Kiswahili*. *Kingozi* is understood as either the parent/ancestral language which would later develop into *Kipfokomo* and *Kiswahili*, or as an old dialect of Kiswahili.[84] The root of *Kingozi* is the Swahili word *ngozi* which is understood as a

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[81] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 211

[82] *Ibid*, p. 223

[83] In Kiswahili the language of the Pokomo people is referred to as *Kipokomo*

[84] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 200

garment made from animal skins.[85] With this understanding, *Kingozi* would roughly mean 'the language of the animal skin-wearers' (*Wangozi)*. The connotation here, that this is an ancient language which predates institutionalized Swahili participation in the Indian Ocean textile trade.

Periplus of the Erythean Sea is one of the earliest literary accounts of Maritime activity and African participation in international trade along what is now considered the Swahili coast. The *periplus* is thought to have been written sometime around the mid-to-late first century of the common era, by either a Roman official, a Greek sailor in Egypt, or a Greek-speaking Egyptian.[86] Of course, it is more than likely that Swahili involvement in international trade predates the *periplus,* and any written documentation.

This notion is supported by Kusimba's attempt to unify different regional chronologies along the Swahili coast into four archaeological periods.[87] These periods include:

> Period I (100 B.C. to 300 A.D.), representing the earliest iron-working settlements; Period II (300 to 1000); Period III (1000 to 1500), during which most of the Coastal cities were built; and Period IV (1500 to 1950), the Colonial Period.[88]

Kusimba, also notes due to the broad nature of this archeological chronology, that many of these periods are general approximates. He notes that the material culture of the oldest

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[85] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 337

[86] Kirwan, L.P. "A Roman Shipmasters' Handbook: Review of *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* by G.W. Huntingford", *The Geographical Journal,* Vol. 147, No. 1, 1981, p. 82

[87] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 32

[88] *Ibid,* p. 32-33

settlements, notably fluted rimmed poetry, has been dated to around the fourth century B.C.E.[89]

Archaeological findings are best comprehended within a proper historical and cultural context. With this context, archeological sites can be linked to sites named in classical literature and indigenous folklore. *The Periplus of the Erythean Sea* has become a document of great importance due to this fact. Within the *periplus* locations along the Swahili coast are described and named, albeit with non-indigenous names. Recent scholarship has identified the Pyralaon Islands mentioned within the *periplus* as Lamu, Pate, and Manda in northeastern Kenya. Additionally, the islands of Zanzibar, either Unguja or Pemba, has been associated with the island identified as Menuthias.[90] This is also the first mention of the lost city of Rhapta which "has been a constant source of interest and argument among east African archeologist".[91] Huntingford suggests five possibilities for the location of this lost city:

> (1) Tanga, at the mouth of two small rivers Mkulumuzi and Sigi; (2) Pangani, at the mouth of the Ruvu river; (3) Msasani, about three miles north of Dar es Salaam – or even Dar es Salaam itself; (4) Kisiju; (5) or somewhere in the Rufiji delta.[92]

It is unlikely that Rhapta represents the homeland of the *Kingozi.* The periplus indicates that the island of Rhapta had become a tributary of the king of Mouza.[93] Mouza is thought

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[89] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 33

[90] Huntingford, G.W.B. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* The Hakluyt Society, 1980, p. 84

[91] Kirwan, L.P. "A Roman Shipmasters' Handbook: Review of *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* by G.W. Huntingford", *The Geographical Journal,* Vol. 147, No. 1, 1981, p. 84

[92] Huntingford, G.W.B. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, The Hakluyt Society, 1980, p. 99

[93] *Ibid,* p. 30

to be associated with the city of Mocha in Yemen. From this city, the people of Mouza "send ships with captains and agents who are mostly Arabs and are familiar through residence and intermarriage with the nature if the places and their language".[94]

While not shedding light on the situation of the *Wangozi,* this passage from the *periplus* does provide insight into the social conditions along the coast that would influence the early development of the Swahili language as a lingua franca. Alamin Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Sheriff, two prominent Arabcentric Swahili scholars "overstate the case for an unbroken line of Swahili cultural history from the time of the *Periplus* in the 1st century AD to the present*".[95]*

Mazrui and Sheriff's desire to substantiate this 'unbroken line of Swahili cultural history', is fueled by the effort to validate a creolized notion of the foundation of the Swahili people. The passages in the *Periplus,* that mention the East African coast being dominated by a pre-Islamic Arab king, and of Arabs intermarrying with the locals of Rhapta is used as historical data to validate this Arabcentric perspective. It is worth noting that beyond the locations mention in the *periplus* that there is no cultural evidence to indicate that these locations were occupied by people we could identify as Swahili in the first century.[96] Additionally, it is only during the ninth century that archeological and linguistic evidence suggest the development of a uniquely Swahili culture. Additionally, drawing from a consensus of Sabaki oral history, the final Bantu exodus from Shungwaya

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[94] Huntingford, G.W.B. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, The Hakluyt Society, 1980, p. 30

[95] Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", *The International Journal of African Historical* Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 283

[96] *Ibid*

would have taken place sometime between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.[97] Meaning that it is possible that many of the families who currently occupy the Swahili coast may have resided in more northern territories during the first half of the millennium.

Within the Shirazi tradition in Zanzibar, which as previously discussed included the Shungwaya myth either overtly or in the guise of Persian immigration, they articulate that when their ancestors arrived in Zanzibar there was already an established indigenous population. In these traditions they relate that when settling in Zanzibar they "paid tribute to and intermarried with local inhabitants, and subsequently became the ruling class".[98] This tradition therefore supports the notion that while the social dynamics along the eastern coast that would lead to the development of Kiswahili where indeed present, many of the people who would constitute the ancestors of Swahili communities were not present in these sites during the first century, when the *periplus* was written.

It is possible that during the first century *Kingozi* was still spoken amongst certain Bantu Sabaki groups. However, the etymology of the word does not suggest the same utilization as an inter-cultural commercial language as a language like Kiswahili. It is more likely that the *Wangozi,* as an ancestral people, represented the Bantus of the 'eastern stream' of the Bantu migration.

> The Eastern Stream is associated with the movement of people, beginning in the third century B.C., out of the Great Lakes region onto the coast and into the interior of the continent, populating eastern and southern Africa with the nucleus of latter-day farming peoples.

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[97] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, Cambridge University Press, p. 223

[98] Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 260

[…] these more permanently based settlers attract our attention because they were lineal predecessors of some of the folk who would one day become the Swahili. [99]

It is thought that contemporarily the Pokomo people are the only remaining speakers of something that closely resembles *Kingozi*. *Kingozi* was "formerly spoken at Malindi, Pate, and the northward towns of the Zanzibar coast, now only poetical and hardly intelligible. Hence now used of 'difficult, half-understood speech'.[100] According to older scholarship, *Kingozi* was also the ancestral language of the Mijikenda people, and its diffusion into the present ethnic dialects and languages is a later development, attributed to the urbanization of these Bantu people and increased foreign contact. Kusimba analyzes this development through the introspection of W.E. Taylor's *Vocabulary of the Giryama Languages.*

> In [W.E. Taylor's] study of the Swahili and Giryama, a group within the Mijikenda, he correctly showed the relationship of both languages to a single language, Kingozi. He argued that the divergence of these languages occurred when some Kingozi-speakers became city dwellers and increased their contact with Arab merchants and Islamic language and literature. This contact, changed the native vocabulary and idiom commented on the Giryama for preserving, almost intact, the 'purity' of the old language, Kingozi.[101]

This ancestral connection further affirms the deep cultural relationship between the Swahili people and other African groups prior to their interaction and acculturation to Asiatic cultures. Furthermore, it wasn't until the end of the first millennia that the Proto-Sabaki *Kingozi* language "had differentiated into Swahili, Malakote, Comorian, Pokomo and Mijikenda".[102] Even after this differentiation, and relative foreign influence, the resulting

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[99] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 90-91

[100] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 200

[101] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p.80

[102] *Ibid*, p. 81

contemporary Sabaki languages still "share more than thirty-five percent of their vocabulary roots" with Proto-Bantu, the theoretical ancestral language of all Bantu languages.[103]

The Significance of Cultural Memory

Like the comments made by elders of the Pokomo community, the reality of this cultural affinity between the Sabaki groups, specifically the Swahili and the Pokomo is also recognized by elders from the Dahalo community. Such an elder rhetorically questioned,

"Pokomo si hawa waswahili?"

"Aren't the Pokomo Swahili?"[104]

Within the study of collective identity Peter Burke in his text, "History as Social Memory"[105], and Anna Rita Coppola in her article, "Swahili Oral Traditions and Chronicles" articulate the significance of the concept of social memory. Coppola states that social memory is "the image of the past held by a group and shared by all of its members".[106] Social identity and social memory are in turned, informed and shaped by the

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[103] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 81

[104] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, Cambridge University Press, p. 223

[105] Burke, P. 1989. 'History as Social Memory'. *In Memory: History, Culture and the Mind, edited by T. Butler*, Oxford: Blackwell. p. 97–113.

[106] Coppola, Anna Rita. "Swahili Oral Traditions and Chronicles", *The Swahili World,* Routledge, 2017, p. 147

construction of cultural mythology. In the *Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* Jan Assmann states that,

> Cultural memory is based on fixed points in the past. Even in the cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbols as they are continually illuminating a changing present.[107]

The Shungwaya Myth, the Epic of Fumo Liyongo, the *Kitab al-Zenj,* the local oral traditions of North-East Bantu peoples, even the ahistorical Shirazi Myth, all serve a similar purpose. They represent this 'cast of symbols' in which contemporary people can comprehend their past and aspect of their ontology. Alone, these oral traditions, coastal documents, linguistics etymologies, archeological findings, and cultural aphorisms do not articulate a complete history. Instead, as a 'cast of symbols' they articulate cultural realities and culturally structured perspectives. Marimba Ani identifies this articulation of culturally structured perspectives as a people's *utamawazo.* This term, constructed out of the Swahili language, and functionalized by Ani, is thought to be "born out of the *asili".[108]* Ani articulates that the *utamawazo* is "not to be thought of as distinct from the *Asili* but its manifestation",[109] meaning that how a people understand their past directly impacts how they comprehend who they are presently and the world around them.

Arabized Africans, who have fabricated a foreign *asili* fundamentally comprehend themselves differently than other African people and politicize

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[107] Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory", *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies,* ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, Walter de Gruyter, 2010, p. 113

[108] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. xxv

[109] *Ibid.*

themselves in accordance with their fabricated origin. On the other hand, a people's *asili* also represents an unalienable foundation, that even when not fully comprehended or even recognized, is still essential to the construction of modern identities. Aspects of an ancestral culture emerge in the language, ethics, and culture of contemporary people, whether they wish to recognize this reality or not. This phenomenon is not only visible on the East African Swahili coast, but also has become one of the focal points in the discussion surrounding identity in the African diaspora. As a result of the Arab-Islamic enslavement of African people, the Swahili also maintain their own diaspora in parts of Asia, notably in Oman and the Siddi people in South Asia. This discussion sheds new light on a classical Swahili saying,

Kuzaliwa kumoja, maisha mengi.
The same birth, but many lives.[110]

This saying has usually been translated to mean that despite the realities of human existence, our lives often take us on different paths. In the context of the conversation about African people, this saying illustrates the reality of the creation of diasporas, a people who share a collective origin, but through the circumstances of history become the agents of their own individual dynasties.

Although a people do not often to leave their ancestral land unprovoked, Chancellor Williams identifies the process of a people taking ahold of their own destinies one of the greatest freedom's that African people have. He states,

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[110] Meena, E.A.K. *Misemo: A-E,* The University of California, 1975, p. 35

> This had been one of the Black man's greatest freedoms, the right of every dissatisfied individual or group to withdraw from the community, migrate elsewhere, and either join some other group or set up a new chiefdom. The universal use of this freedom, let it be remembered at every point, is one of the reasons for so many different little societies and language groups throughout the continent, while at the same time indicating a common origin and background.[111]

What Williams is describing her is precisely the social reality that is articulated through the oral traditions of the North-East Coastal Bantu. While recognizing their common origin both historically and linguistically, they maintained the agency to become their own people, find their own niche, and importantly find a way to co-exist with the people around them.

Utamawazo & Coastal Co-existence

Kusimba summarizes that during this early period of coastal history, what would become the Swahili coast "was probably inhabited by a diverse population, using a variety of subsistence economies".[112] Meaning that during this time, the coast was inhabited by hunters, gathers, pastoralist, farmers, and the development of permanent settlements. This diversity of human existence on the coast "is reflected in in both the archeological and historical linguistic evidence"[113]

> These communities probably developed some kind of heterarchical relations with one another, they may even have lived close by each other,

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[111] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 237

[112] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 95

[113] *Ibid*

separate, but interdependent, using different resources of the same habitat. There is no evidence that any one group politically or socially dominated the other. Nor should there be. The activities of these three groups – farmers, pastoralist, and foragers – are so different that they need never have come into direct competition with one another […].[114]

Kusimba's framing of this inter-communal relationship between African societies is rooted in the ethical parameters of African culture. This heterarchical relationship, informs a cultural dynamic where historically African people operating within their own cultural parameters along the eastern coast are not socially or politically oriented in an effort to dominating other societies. Instead, they co-exist in sort of reciprocal relationship with one another utilizing different resources that the land provides from them. The African ethics of Maat, and *ubuntu*, localized in Kiswahili as *utu* provide the ethical framework in how this relationship is functionalized. This is not to say that African societies did not find themselves in conflict with other societies. *Ubuntu/utu* should not be used to insinuate that political conflicts were alien to the Bantu groups of eastern Africa. The presence of the Shirazi, the Mijikenda, the Pokomo, and other Sabaki groups in their present geographical locations is owed by in large by their history of conflict with the Oromo people. What this heterarchical political framework, and African ethical framework do insinuate is that war and societal conflict were not an organizing principal in the development of many of these societies.

It is important to frame these terms and concepts within their relative cultural parameters and should be wary to conflate African relationship with European based ethical frameworks like humanism and egalitarianism. Conflating African ethics with European or universalists and human essentialist ethical assumptions and frameworks run

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[114] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 95

the risk of severely misrepresenting the complexity of African relationships. African ethics and experiences should be allowed to speak for themselves within the parameters of their cultural paradigm. Obadele Kambon engaged this idea when he began to challenge the conflation of the Kemetic principle of *Maat* with the European idealistic ethic of Egalitarianism.[115] Likewise, several scholars, Ndumsio Dladla[116], Sandiswa Kobe[117], and Allan Boesak[118], to name a few, have begun to challenge the general discourse surrounding the ethic of *ubuntu.* The African ethic of *Ubuntu/utu,* as well as the inter-communal heterarchical structure of Bantu societies also do not negate from the formal social, cultural, and spiritual hierarchies that still exist within Bantu societies

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[115] Kambon, Obadele. "Maat vs. The Statue of Egalite: A Critical Analysis of Ataa Ayi Kwei Armah's Wat Nt Shemsw: The Way of Companions", *Legon Journal of the Humanities,* Vol. 31.2, University of Ghana, 2021, p. 33-65

[116] Dladla, Ndumsio. "Towards an African Critical Philosophy of Race: Ubuntu as a Philosophy of Liberation", *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy and Religions,* 6(1), University of Calabar 2017, p. 39-68

[117] Kobe, Sandiswa. "Ubuntu as a Spirituality of Liberation for Black Theology of Liberation", *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies,* 77(3), AOSIS, 2021

[118] Boesak, Allan. *Pharaohs on Both Sides of the Blood red-waters: Prophetic critique of Empire: Resistance, Justice, and the Power of the Hopeful Sizwe – A Transatlantic Conversation.* Cascade Books, 2017

CHAPTER 4: AFRICAN ETHICS OF IDENTITY &
THE CONCEPT OF CIVILIZATION

Mtu siyo kitu, bora utu

Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that seeks to investigate the essence human existence. This idea of ontology manifests itself in the characteristics of culture, ethics, and human interaction. These qualities of human existence are essential elements to how a people conceptualize who they are in the world. These qualities often, but not always, play a role in how a neighboring people are identified and related to. African names are significant as they tap into an individual's ontology, telling you not only who a person is, but what a person is, and potentially what they can become.

The names commonly used to denote African people on the eastern coast are by in large not terms indigenous to these people, and thusly do not always represent an indigenous ontology, instead they are reflective of the worldview of foreigners. To penetrate these worldviews and the ontological perspectives in East Africa, which often serve as foundational elements of African culture and society, the terms and concepts which defined African people, and how they relate to these terms need to be discussed.

As previously discussed, the *Kitab al-Zunuj,* likely written sometime during the late nineteenth century, is an important *ajami* manuscript to understanding early Swahili history. This importance of this document is not necessarily rooted in its historical accuracy, but rather for the purpose of research in Swahili culture the *Kitab al-Zunuj* is valuable manuscript as it encapsulates the worldview or *utamawzo* of the author, and likely other members of the author's class. Despite these particular *ajami* manuscripts being

written in 'bad Arabic', the author/authors has been described as an extremely well learned Swahili scholar.[1] The editors of the *Azanian Trio*, a compilation of important Swahili manuscripts comment,

> The writer(s) [of the *Kitab al-Zunuj*] had a rather inaccurate knowledge of good Arabic and shows(s) many signs that he (they) was (were) thinking in Swahili, which was fairly certainly his (their) native tongue.[2]

This comment, not unique amongst creolized African societies, demonstrates the attempt to functionalize foreign epistemes while still foundationally located in a compromised position within African ways of thinking. The *Kitab* while clear that the Arabs are the primary subject of inquiry within the document, are still situated as more central agents within the story compared to some of the other Sabaki oral traditions. This materializes as a sort of sympathy for Arab people and culture in the manuscript as well as the utilization of Arabcentric terminology.

In the *Kitab al-Zunuj* the Bantu ancestors of the Sabaki and Mijikenda, twelve tribes in total, who resided in old Shungwaya are collectively referred to as the *Kushur.* This is not an indigenous term. The Kisimoyo version of the *Kitab al-Zunuj* gives this explanation for the development and utilization of the term:

> […] when the Arabs arrived at Juba, the Zanj fled from them and they called them Kushur, which means "He who flees".[3]

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[1] Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020, p. 3

[2] *Ibid*

[3] Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. "Kitab al-Zunuj (K)", *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020, p. 29

This section of the *Kitab* articulates two names for these ancestral people, neither of which are reflective indigenous ontology or epistemology. The *Kitab* adds that this term, *Kushur,* is the original Arabic term for the Zunuj/Zanj people.[4] The term *Zanj* merely means 'the black people', where *Kushur* essentially is a term denoting these African people as displaced refugees. The cause of their historical displacement seems to vary depending on the source, either being displaced due to the arrival and fear of violence from the Arabs, or from the assault on Shungwaya by the Oromo people.

The terms *Orma* and *Galla*, antiquated names for the Oromo people who now primarily reside in Ethiopia, are referenced frequently in the early history of the migrating ancestors of the Swahili and Pokomo people. Like the term *Kushur* these terms are not reflective of the ontology of the people that they refer to. These terms are understood as pejoratives by the Oromo people, and for good reason.

> The Galla, who call themselves Oromo, are as uncertain of the origin name as are anthropologists. *Orma* means a foreigner who is not a relative; *gala* means a stranger who is a guest; *galla* is a stranger who joins a tribe; *gala* an imperative, means "go home"; *gala,* a noun, means one who goes home, also for travelling. The Galla language gives us no further hint. The history of these people is indeed a tale of nomadic strangers and guests who are seeking Now they have found that home but they are still designated as guests.[5]

The name Galla works to separate the Oromo people from other peoples of Ethiopia, making them out to at best a guest in Ethiopia, and at worst a stranger and foreigner. This implies that the Oromo are not fellow countrymen in the modern nation state, which had

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[4]Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. "Kitab al-Zunuj (L)", *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020, p. 62

[5] Jaenen, Cornelius J. "The Galla or Oromo of East Africa*", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Summer, 1956, Vol. 12, No. 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 172

forcibly incorporated the land that the Oromo eventually came to occupy known as Oromia during the expansion and consolidation of Ethiopian land during the reign of the celebrated Emperor of Ethiopia Menelik II.[6] Menelik's campaigns in East Africa prior to the battle of Adwa in 1896 against the Italians was fueled by an imperialistic ideology.

> This imperial ideology is based on the myth of three thousand years of history, that Ethiopia was always united, that the whole of Eastern Africa belonged to Abyssinia, and that the peoples who inhabited these regions were their subjects.[7]

This imperialistic ideology coupled with Christian Ethiopian exceptionalism reinforced cultural and ethnic hierarchies in and around the Horn of Africa.[8] The name Oromo, the name the people chose for themselves, loosely means 'the free people' inspired by their history of resistance against the Christian Ethiopians and their Muslim neighbors.[9] The Oromo people according to the testimonies of neighboring people, including the Pokomo indicate the Oromo as a fierce people. Cornelius Jaenen in his discussion on the etymological study "The Galla or the Oromo of East Africa" notes that the Oromo are a people "long famous as cruel warriors and confirmed quarrelers, [and were] described by the sixteenth century monk Bahray as 'born fighters'".[10] Scholarship from the mid-twentieth century seems to indicate that that name Oromo is derived from the phrase *Ilm*

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[6] Haji, Abbas. "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance Against the Shoan Colonial Conquest (1881-6)", Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume, II (1 and 2), Oromo Studies Association, 1995, p.2

[7] *Ibid*, p.1

[8] *Ibid,* p.2

[9] Jaenen, Cornelius J. "The Galla or Oromo of East Africa*", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Summer, 1956, Vol. 12, No. 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 171

[10] *Ibid*

Orm, 'the sons of Orm', a historical king of the Oromo people who "refused to submit to Islam".[11] Incongruously, according to recent data only a minority of Oromo people still practice their original faith system *Waaqeffanna,* with more than half of their population identifying as Sunni Muslims and another sizeable percentage of the population, nearly a third of all Oromo people adhering to the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.[12]

This complicated history of historical aggression that can be traced back more than a thousand years and is preserved in cultural memory of the Ethiopians, the Oromo, the Swahili, the Mijikenda, as well as the Pokomo and other Sabaki peoples. This historical conflict and discourse on collective national identity in Ethiopia, Ethiopiawinet, is at the heart of the disturbances within the Oromo community within the last few years.

Interestingly the name Ethiopia, as well as its historical name Abyssinia are also names adopted from foreign sources. The name Abyssinia is thought to have derived from the term Habesha an multi-ethnic term used to refer to the Semitic speaking people in the Horn of Africa. This term generally refers to people of the Ethiopia and its diaspora, but usually does not include the Cushitic Oromo people. There are several theories of the etymological origin of the term. Arabcentric etymologies of the term tend to favor the hypothesis that the term comes from the Arabic language meaning 'mixed' and is connected to the ontologically reductive notion that the Habesha people are not 'wholly' African. The term appears in the historical record within the language of the ancient Sabean

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[11] Jaenen, Cornelius J. "The Galla or Oromo of East Africa*", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Summer, 1956, Vol. 12, No. 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 172

[12] Minahan, James B*. Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, 2nd Edition. ABC-CLIO, 2016, pp. 319–320

Arabs after their victory over a king of Axum during the beginning of the post-Askumite period in either the second or third century.[13] The term Habesha, seems to have been utilized on the African continent by African people prior to the second century. In Kemet, Habesha transliterated from *ḥbś.tj.w* meaning 'the bearded ones' was a name used to refer to the people of Punt, an ancient state likely near or around Somalia.[14]

Similarly, the name Ethiopia appears to be derived from foreign sources. The term Ethiopia comes from the combination of two Greek terms αἴθω + ὤψ (aithō "I burn" + ōps "face") to form the compound word Αἰθίοψ (Aithiops). Aithiopia (Αἰθιοπία) from which the name Ethiopia derives from, therefore means land of the burnt faces or colloquially translated to mean land of the black people. This term is referenced in Homer's *Iliad,* Herodotus's *Histories,* as well as utilized for the nomenclature of modern nation state.

The concept of the land of the black people is not unique to Ethiopia. In fact, the names of several states classical and contemporary, essentially translate into a form of 'land of the blacks'. A few examples are, Sudan from the Arabic *bilād as-sūdān* (بلاد السودان); Zanzibar from the Persian *zangbâr* (زنگبار), and later the Arabic *zanjibār* (زنجبار) literally meaning 'coast of the Blacks'; *Kemet, km.t* 𓆎𓅓𓏏𓊖 literally, and possibly figuratively 'the black land'; and all of the Guineas, including Equatorial Guinea and Papua New Guinea, from the fifteenth century Portuguese word *guiné,* which was used as a generic term for Black people who lived south of the Moors in West Africa. Not all of these terms are

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[13] Munro-Hay, Stuart. *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity*, Edinburgh University Press, 1991, p.73

[14] Breyer, Francis. "The Ancient Egyptian Etymology of Ḥabašāt "Abessinia"". *Ityopis*. Extra Issue II, p. 2016, p. 8–18.

examples of ontological alienation, as the concept of blackness was not always imposed nor was it universally understood as pathological.

The Qualities of Color Discourse: Classical and Contemporary

Throughout the history of the world's various peoples, blackness was not universally accepted as ontologically pejorative. While qualities that we associate with modern populations within current race discourse existed in ancient or classical populations, many of the values within contemporary racial discourse certainly did not.

Herodotus in his *Histories* famously connected varies peoples of the ancient world, namely the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and the Colchians near the Black Sea together based on culture and phenotypical appearance.[15] In fact, the term Ethiopian, as employed by the classical Greeks, could be seen in many ways as quasi-racial category in the ancient world as the term was generally used to describe any African person south of Egypt, rather than just the people who live in the Ethiopian highlands of East Africa.

In the ancient world people were conscious of ethnicity, color and phenotype, as well as the general understanding of collective culture and cultural continuity. Along with the writings of the Hellenes, the New Kingdom of Kemet's funerary text known as *The Book of Gates* provides insight into how ancient Africans in the Nile Valley during the Middle Kingdom conceptualized racial/ethnic categories. Wallis Budge in his 1905 works

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[15] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, edited by Robert Strassler, Anchor Books, 2009, pp. 129-141

describes this section as "The Four Races of Men".[16] The section in question divides human peoples known to the people of Kemet into four categories *Reth* for the native people of Kemet, *Themehu* for the lighter-skinned people of Libya, *Nehesu* for the Africans south of Kemet; and the *Aamu* for the Asiatics.[17] While unsubstantially dismissed by many Eurocentric scholars, the discussion of race and racial categories in antiquity has produced several significant bodies of work on the topic, including Runoko Rashidi's *The Black Image in Antiquity*, and Benjamin Isaac's *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity.* In 2013 a group of scholars compiled an anthology of primary sources from antiquity on the topic entitled, *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World.* In their introduction to this text, the authors write,

> The ancient theories may not directly correlate to our terms "race" and "ethnicity," but both modern concepts and the ancient texts share the principle that human difference is a product of both internally determined and externally produced influences.[18]

In antiquity otherness and difference was primarily predicated on the concepts of culture, ethics, and the ability to navigate cultural continuity. A distinction needs to be made between the concepts of othering a people and recognizing difference between two groups. To other a people, implies that these two groups share some sort of relation to be in a position to be 'othered'. This process of marginalization is tied to a sense of ontological alienation. To recognize the difference between two groups does not imply a group is being marginalized nor does it imply the existence of a social, ethnic, or racial hierarchy. During

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[16] Budge, Wallis. *The Egyptian Heaven and Hell: The Contents of the Books of the Other World,* Open Court, (1905) 1989, p. 146

[17] *Ibid*

[18] Kennedy, Rebecca; et al. *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World: An Anthology of Primary Sources in Translation,* Hackett Publishing Company, 2013, p. XV

antiquity the difference between groups was recognized, such as the examples from the *Book of Gates,* Herodotus's *Histories,* as well as in the local histories of neighboring people. The concept of 'otherness', and social marginalization during the period of antiquity has best been recorded in regards to Greco-Roman imperialist cultures. Erik Jensen's text *Barbarians: In the Greek and Roman World* demonstrates the evolution of these attitudes and practices in the ancient Mediterranean. In East Africa, as previously discussed these attitudes and practices which sought to marginalize neighboring people was often fueled by ethnic chauvinism and facilitated by Abrahamic religious fervor. Race, as a concept which began to develop during antiquity, is not an invention of the 'modern' world, instead it should be argued the widespread villainization of blackness as a feature of African people is.

Blackness has been used as a delineating identifier since antiquity. For obvious reasons, phenotypical diversity between groups was often used as some of the primary identifiers of difference in the ancient world up as well as in contemporary discourse. In contemporary discourse blackness has become associated with the quality of having melaninated skin, and likewise has become associated with African and her diaspora. It should be noted however that blackness has been used as a delineating quality between groups outside of Africa as well.

> The Arabs, for example, sometimes describe themselves as black in contrast to Persians, who are red, but at other times as red or white in contrast to the Africans, who are black. The characteristic color of the Bedouin is variously stated as olive or Brown.[19]

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[19] Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 23

In this example color, specifically blackness seems to be a relative concept. Furthermore, the significance of color seems to also be subjective to cultural perceptions influenced by the dynamics of inter-ethnic politics.

> In Early Arabic poetry and historical narratives, the Persians are sometimes spoken of as "the red people," with a suggestion of ethnic hostility. This seems to date back to pre-Islamic times – to Arab resistance to Persian imperial penetration in Arabia and Arab reaction to the distain which the civilized Persians showed the semi-barbarous tribes on their desert frontier.[20]

This dynamic would ultimately change and in a sense 'be reversed' after the Arabs converted to Islam and marched their armies into Iran and conquering the war-torn Persians.[21] With Rashidun Caliphates victory over the Persians in 633 CE, the Arabs "were now the imperial subjects, and the Persians their subjects".[22]

The consequences of the Muslim conquests of the seventh century and the subsequent spreading of the Islamic faith are not only relevant to the inter-ethnic dynamic between the Arabs and Persians but would also have a profound effect on African people for the next several centuries, and in many ways still influences contemporary discourse of African identity. the dissemination of Arab imperial attitudes and Biblical epistemology went hand in hand with the Muslim conquests of the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid Caliphates. The Persians, the Christian Nubian states of Noba and Mukurra became targets of a series of Rashidun invasions. Unlike Persia, these African states weren't recovering from a decades long conflict with the Byzantines and under the threat of Arab invasion

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[20]Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 23

[21] *Ibid*

[22] *Ibid*

were able to unite together to face their enemy.[23] Under this united Nubian front they were

able to defeat the Arabs at the first and second battle of Dongola in 642 CE and 652 CE

respectfully, temporarily halting the Arab advance for the next half millennia. However,

this victory came at a price. A treaty, known as the *Baqt,* was signed by Makurran King

Qalidurat and the Arab general Abi Sarh.[24] There were many previsions in his treaty, the

most impactful of the previsions required that some three hundred and sixty African people

were to be enslaved and sent to Arab occupied Egypt on a yearly basis. This treaty

represented the institutionalization of the Arab enslavement of African people and

extraction of African people from the African continent.

Like the later Christians, the Muslim Arabs would use sacred scripture to justify

their trade in enslaved African people. This justification, being part of religious discourse,

as well as being such a vital part in the Muslim world's global economic would be

implanted within the consciousness of Islamic thinkers and literature. This consciousness

would manifest itself with the *ajami* scholarship in East Africa. The *Kitab al-Zunuj,* an

example of this sort of consciousness within the *ajami* tradition, articulates,

> Ham was a handsome man with a noble face, but God changed his colour
> and the colour of his descendants, because of the prayer of his father (Noah),
> because he prayed against him that his face should be blackened, and that
> the faces of his descendants should be black, and that his children should be

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[23] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, pp. 142-144

[24] *Ibid.*

slaves to the children of Sam[25] and Yaphit[26]. Then He increased them and made them grow, and the story of that is set out in the books of history, as is mentioned in *Saba'ik al-dhahab.*[27]

The above passage conveys that the Hamitic myth, also known as the curse of Ham, is understood as the object origin of Black people in the world from an Abrahamic perspective. This perspective, or rather, worldview, had penetrated the consciousness of learned Swahili. As indicated in this passage, this myth which pathologized African people as cursed people destined by God to be enslaved, was situated as part of history, something to be learned within an educational curriculum, and passed on from student to teacher for generations. The Hamitic myth represents a foreign and pathological understanding of blackness and African origins rather than indigenous interpretations.

Within many of the indigenous cultural systems on the African continent, it is recognized that every color has meaning. In West Africa for example, the Yoruba and Akan spiritual systems directly associate colors to corresponding deities. The color black is recognized as a powerful color. Scientifically speaking, black is also recognized as a powerful 'color' that absorbs energy and light. This scientific revelation seems to be reflected in traditional African spiritual practices as in most tradition people commonly wear the color white, which again scientifically speaking reflects light and energy. Mbiti in his text *African Religions and Philosophy* explains that,

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[25] More commonly translated as Shem. According to Abrahamic traditions Sh,em is the successor to Noah, the ancestral patriarch to Muslims, Chrisitians, and Jews. He is also thought to be the ancestor to the Asiatics.

[26] More commonly translated to Japheth. According to medieval Abrahamic traditions Ja,pheth is the ancestor of the Europeans

[27] Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. "Kitab al-Zunuj (K)", *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020, p. 24

> Different religious meanings and uses are given to various colours. A number of peoples regard *black* as their sacred colour. Among the Bevenda, Luo, Nandi, Ndebele and Shona, black animals are sacrificed to God or used in religious ceremonies. On the other hand, the Abaluyisa, Baganda, Watumbatu, and Gofa use only *white* animals or birds for their religious rites, this being their sacred colour. We have little information on other colours.[28]

Mbiti's statement demonstrates one of the many ways that the color Black hold significant symbolic importance within many African societies. This significance is even reflected in Kiswahili. In the Swahili language, black (*nyeusi*) and white (*nyeupe*) represent two of the three colors recognized in the language, the other being red (*nyekundu*). Everything else, all of the other 'colors' that is, are considered more or else to be shades. For example, the 'color' blue a Swahili speaker might say "rangi ya Samaki" which literally means "the color of fish". The color brown could be translated as *kahawia,* but this too essentially means "the color of coffee".[29] According to the *Desturi za Waswahili (The Customs of the Swahili People),* these colors, either worn or painted, are indicative that an individual is going through the process of initiation.[30] Additionally, it is customary for a person who has been mounted or possessed by a spirit to paint their face black and white with red spots during their evening prayer. This is done to "entice the spirit up to [their, but usually,] her head.[31]

The above points add a bit more cultural context to an indigenous conceptualization of the color black. Where Eurasians have convinced the world that the color black

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[28] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 56

[29] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 166

[30] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin, *Desturi Za Waswahili* (The Customs of the Swahili People), edited and translated by J.W.T. Allen, University of California Press, 1981, p. 283

[31] *Ibid,* p. 99

represents the dangers of the unknown and mystery, within in African cultures the color black represents power. In this way when African people, such as those in the Nile Valley, describe themselves or perhaps their neighbors as black, it is not in the same cultural context as Persians calling Arabs and East Africans black.

The Concept of Africanity and Blackness

Africanity is an ontological term regarding the state of being an African. This term has created great confusion within the discourse surrounding the idea of African identity. Since the continental independence movements during the 1950s and 1960s, the conceptualization of Africanity has been divorced from culture and heritage to be conflated with political nationality or geographical location. Africanity is not defined by geography as millions in the diaspora still exist culturally tied to their ancestral heritage. Instead, Africanity is informed by this cultural heritage, as well as cultural expression. Asante makes an important distinction between Africanity and Afrocentricity, which needs to be highlighted. He writes,

> One–Afrocentricity-seeks agency and action, and the other–Africanity-broadcast identity and being. Actually, Africanity refers in its generality to all of the customs, traditions, and traits of people of Africa and the diaspora. On the other hand, Afrocentricity is very specific in its reliance on self-conscious action. To say, for example, that Afrocentricity has no role in Africa because the people there already have an African perspective is to misunderstand the practical dimension of Afrocentricity. To be African is not necessarily to be Afrocentric. It is possible, however, to develop a nexus between Africanity and Afrocentricity in order to generate a more produce architectonic African culture of balance and harmony.[32]

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[32] Asante, Molefi Kete. *The Afrocentric Idea.* Temple University Press, 1993, p. 19

The concept of Afrocentricity lays at the intersection of intellectual academic inquiry, and the functionalization of an indigenous and authentic epistemology for African people. To ignore Afrocentricity as a tool used for the recovery of this authentic African epistemology for African people does the theory a disservice as well as perpetuating the ontological alienation that African people experience in the global struggle to dismantle systems of cultural and political imperialism.

The confusion that modern nation states and the concept of national identity, only reinforces the need to investigate indigenous African epistemologies and ontologies. As evidenced by Swahili history and the millions of self-proclaimed Arabs the virtue of living in Africa does not make a group ontologically African, that is part of the African cultural paradigm. Up until the 1990s, as evidenced by the countless signs produced during the apartheid era, white people in South Africa were quite clear that they were in fact Europeans. It is not until the political dynamic begins to shift towards impowering African have the descendants of foreign people decided that they too would like to access African identity, that is at least in name. This new dynamic which has begun to equate physical location to politicized ontology seeks to include the descendants of foreign invaders while neglecting the presence of the diaspora, many of whom are not currently on the continent because of the political dynamic that these foreigners have originally created. This dynamic is explored in several of the works of Opoku Agymen, as well as in Obadele Kambon's article "Haiti Morocco and the EU: A Case Study on Black Pan-Africanism vs. anti-Black continentalism".

Afrikan=Black is an expression created by Ghanaian repatriate, Obadele Kambon to reinforce a sense of cultural continuity between the experiences of people of African

descent in the diaspora and Africans on the continent.[33] It is a politicized term which takes a culturally grounded stance on this idea of Africanity. As a politicized posture on the notion of *Africanity*, it is useful in connecting the phenotypical description of Blackness, something that in the Twenty-first century, Africans have come to accept, to the quality of being a native African. In this, the idea of Africa represents land, culture, and heritage, something that a term like Black, a vague adjective, cannot. Kambon's tactical utilization of the concept of Blackness as part of an identity intrinsically linked to the heritage of African culture, works against geographical nationalism which disinherits the diaspora from Africa, and includes the descendants of colonizers, foreign invaders, and settlers who have now made Africa their home.

The notion of Blackness separates the indigenous people of Africa, from those who simply live there now. This use of the idea of Blackness is not a new concept, and history has demonstrated its political application. The way that Kambon proposes that the term black be politically utilized is not dissimilar to how it was used during the classical era as a delineating identity.

Africans Before Foreign Interaction: The Philosophy of Utu/Ubuntu

If the concept of blackness applied to African people as a delineating identity; this begs the question, how did Africans reflect on their ontology *before* there was a need delineate themselves from non-black people? Terms like *Swahili, '*people of the coast', or

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[33] Kambon, Obadele. "African=Black Combat Forms in Plain Sight: Engolo/Capoeira, Knocking-and-Kicking and Asafo Flag Dancing". Africology: The Journal of Pan-African Studies, Vol. 12, No. 4. University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies. Accra, Ghana. 2018

zanj, 'the black people', have been discussed as a foreign imposition. These terms describe 'what' are a people are, but do not answer who are a people. To penetrate this ontological question, this line of inquiry must go beyond an investigation of history and literature and incorporate a consideration of African ethics.

It must be remembered that before the world was populated by the various peoples and cultures who now occupy their own indigenous land, people first occupied the African continent. The first people, and the first people to realize that they are people were Africans. Before interactions with foreign peoples, when all humans were black, there was no point to delineate human groups based on color, for they were the people. This reality is manifested in the term *Bantu,* a contraction of *ba-* and *-ntu,* which literally translates to mean 'the people'. While technically an African term, the term Bantu was coined by the German scholar Wilhelm H. I. Bleek to denote all African languages in southern Africa "that were neither 'Bushman' nor Hottentot".[34] Although coined by Bleek, the conceptualization and construction of the term Bantu were already present in Bantu societies. In *Kiswahili*, a Bantu language of the *Sabaki* branch on the east coast of Africa, the term for people is *watu,* the contraction of the pluralized prefix of the noun class for humans *wa-* and *-tu* the term for people.

These terms to describe people are naturally tied to African notions of humanity. Or rather, the ethics of being a human. In many Bantu languages, including *Kiswahili,* the prefix *u-* has the effect of making a word abstract. By contracting *u-* and *-tu*, the term 'human' can become the abstract notion of 'humanity'. There are several proverbs in

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[34] Schoenbrun, David. "Representing the Bantu Expansions: What's at Stake?" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 1, 2001, p. 2

Kiswahili that utilize this philosophical notion. One such saying, *afadhali utu kuliko kitu*[35], loosely translates to mean 'being human is better than anything', essentially the best thing a person can be is a human and uphold the ethics of being 'humane'. Another Swahili proverb, *asiyejua utu si mtu*,[36] 'one who does not know how to be humane is not human', reinforces this idea.[37] *Mtu ni watu,*[38] 'meaning a person is people' best represents this philosophy. At the core of this African ethic is the understanding a person is validated through other people and their relations with other people. These relationships are what make a person 'human'.

Colloquially translated to mean 'I am because we are', the term *ubuntu,* popularized by anti-apartheid activists in south Africa like Desmond Tutu is constructed in this same way. These terms of course have been loosely translated, and the equating *utu/ubuntu* with the notion of humanity or humanism runs many risks. Ndumiso Dladla of the University of Pretoria, among several other scholars have challenged these translations, believing that the English language is 'inadequate' in providing an accurate and authentic meaning to *ubuntu* and other related African ethics.[39]

When African ontological notions were first being formed in the early years of human existence and development, there were only African people in existence. For the

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[35] Riedel, Kristina, et al.. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* Center for African Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, proverb no. 4571

[36] *Ibid,* no. 457

[37] Saidi, M. *Fani Mbali mbali za Kiswahili*, Longman Kenya, 1989, p. 15

[38] Abudu, Maryam. *Methali za Kiswahili: Maana na Matumizi,* Shungwaya Pub., 1981, p. 51

[39] Kobe, Sandiswa. "Ubuntu as a spirituality of liberation for black theology of liberation", *HTS Teologiese Studies Theological Studies* 77(3), 2021, p. 5

vast majority of human existence on the African continent, humanity was defined not by the same dynamics the more recent global interactions of different people and cultures. The ethics born out of African notions were reflections of the relationships African people had with each other, the people around them, who partook in the same cultural paradigm and whose ethics were not dissimilar from their own. The presence of the concept of *utu/ubuntu* across Bantu Africa[40] demonstrates that this is an ancestral African ethic that was present on the continent before the Bantu peoples migrated. Therefore, any humanist notions created by ancestral Africans need to be situated within their proper historical and cultural context. These African notions of humanity are consequently intrinsically tied to an ethical discussion of Africanity.

African notions of humanity, used not as an ethical principle to discuss intra-African relations and instead inter-racial relations divorces these ethical principles from the original context in which they were formed and often times in a modern political sense don't make sense. For example, in South Africa, when African people fought against the white supremacist regime in South Africa, activist such as Desmond Tutu called upon the better nature of humanity to end social injustice. In this noble effort he weaponized and popularized the Bantu notion of humanity *ubuntu*. However, in doing so, Tutu alienated this African ethic from its proper cultural context. Traditionally *ubuntu* was used as an organizing principle for the development of African societies, not unlike Kusimba's discussion of the heterarchical formation and existence of old Shungwaya. Removing

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[40] See Appendix F for examples of Bantu terms for the notion of Humanity

ubuntu from its cultural context altered this principle to become a sort of rhetorical ethic, like the European rhetorical ethics of equality, liberty, justice, and freedom.

In South Africa Archbishop Desmond Tutu misappropriated the ethic of *ubuntu* and conflated it with Christian values. Allan Boesak, another anti-apartheid activist and church cleric recognized this ethical transgression stating that Tutu's Christianized *ubuntu* which preached forgiveness and reconciliation with African oppressors was "disturbing, if not disgusting".[41] University of South Africa professor Sandiswa Kobe explains that, "Tutu used his pastoral experience to induce acts or reconciliation telling black South Africans that Jesus calls them to reconcile with wrongdoers, without demanding justice for victims".[42] Tutu testified that he was inspired by the spirit of *ubuntu* to call for such reconciliation.[43] Boesak critical of Tutu's interpretation and functionalization of *ubuntu* argued that,

> […] if Ubuntu is victim of land conquest, colonialism and apartheid abandoning their right to make demands for justice for gross human right violations, Ubuntu therefore, must be violent towards Ubuntu itself; it is an Ubuntu that needs Ubuntu.[44]

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[41] Boesak, Allan. *Pharaohs on Both Sides of the Blood-red Waters: Prophetic Critique of Empire: Resistance, Justice, and the Power of the Hopeful Sizwe-A Transatlantic Conversation,* Wpf & Stock Publishers, 2017, pp. 119-120

[42] Kobe, Sandiswa. "Ubuntu as a spirituality of liberation for black theology of liberation", *HTS Teologiese Studies Theological Studies* 77(3), 2021, p. 4

[43] *Ibid*

  See: Tutu, Desmond. *No future without forgiveness,* Anchor Books, 1999

[44] Kobe, Sandiswa. "Ubuntu as a spirituality of liberation for black theology of liberation", *HTS Teologiese Studies Theological Studies* 77(3), 2021, p. 4

  Boesak, Allan. *Pharaohs on Both Sides of the Blood-red Waters: Prophetic Critique of Empire: Resistance, Justice, and the Power of the Hopeful Sizwe-A Transatlantic Conversation,* Wpf & Stock Publishers, 2017, p. 120

Utu/ubuntu is not an all-encompassing human philosophy, it is grounded in the cultural reality of its progenitors. It is an African philosophy, rooted in the reciprocal relationship that African have with one another. As Boesak's statement implies, removing African ethics from their proper cultural context disarms its functionality as an organizing principle for African people to protect and maintain their communities. Instead of being used an ethical philosophy to unite Africans against white supremacy it was used to appeal to the humanity of African people's oppressive opposition, the colonist. Christianized discourse which seeks to universalize African ethics such as *ubuntu* actively works to culturally dislocate African philosophy from African people and culture. Dladla and Kobe have recognized this indiscretion in their work. Kobe reflecting upon Dladla's literature summarizes,

> […] since 1994, there has been enormous interest in Ubuntu in academic and public discourse, but this has been without *Abantu* (the Bantu people in which Ubuntu emanates from) and *Isintu* (the culture in which the philosophy of Ubuntu is based).[45]

To universalize these experiences, as simply human experiences, without a careful consideration of the notion of cultural paradigm and culturally structured worldviews, ontologically reduces the diversity of human existence, and distracts from the real celebration of cultural continuity within cultural paradigms. This understanding of shared participation in a cultural paradigm, and the baseline agreement on ethical standards is the socio-political basis of *utu/ubuntu* in traditional Africa. Humanism, on the other hand, is a rhetorical inquiry which developed in northern Italy during the renaissance. This inquiry

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[45] Kobe, Sandiswa. "Ubuntu as a spirituality of liberation for black theology of liberation", *HTS Teologiese Studies Theological Studies* 77(3), 2021, p. 5

has developed into Eurocentric essentialist philosophy predicated on the simple idea that

are people are human, thusly share a common ontology. This philosophical believe, while

a motivating idea for human justice and solidarity, has no basis as an organizing principle

in classical societies. Rather people tended to organize with each other according to their

affiliation of culture, language, and sometimes geography. As previously discussed,

collective human experiences, as well as ecological and environmental factors played a

role in the development of unique culturally structured worldviews (*utamawazo*). For this

reason, social theories such as Afrocentricity, which seek to investigate these culturally

structured worldviews are best utilized within their proper cultural parameters.

Construction of African identity

Discussion on African identity has been central in the development of Afrocentric

scholarship as well as in the campaign to restore culturally grounded African agency. Ama

Mazama in her text *The Afrocentric Paradigm* writes that identity

> determines our place in life, both material and spiritual. To practice one's
> culture *and* to apprehend oneself a in a manner that is consistent with one's
> history, culture, and biology, is to be centered, or to proceed from one's
> center.[46]

This investigation into the appreciation of the authentic construction of African identities

and personalities is a critical component of the conceptual apparatus of the Afrocentric

project. To comprehend the construction of African identity there must be a synthesis in

the discussion on ontology with the culturally grounded ethical concept of humanity. These

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[46] Mazama, Ama. *The Afrocentric Paradigm,* Africa World Press, 2003, p. 25

ethical components must be dwelt with, as African identities are part of a culturally structured worldview. Identities are not constructed in isolation but are informed and affirmed in how they relate to one another and fit into this worldview.

Without grounding this line of inquiry within the conversation of an African cultural and ethical paradigm, the construction of African identities are prone to serious misinterpretation. One such example can be found in Dale Godfrey's 1920 text *The Peoples of Zanzibar: Their Customs and Religious Beliefs.* In this text he writes that,

> The African's idea of personality is of the flimsiest kind. He is part of a group, one of a swarm. The word "father" here would merely mean a complimentary term addressed to a superior force, which demanded submission, quite apart from any moral reasons.[47]

Godfrey's account of the construction of the person in Africa, is an example of the type of ontological reduction and misrepresentation that African cultures have been subjected to through academic discourse. Practitioners of Abrahamic faith systems have no problem calling their preachers and pastors 'father', monastic women 'sisters', other practitioners' brothers and sisters of [Christ/ in faith], or the god of Abraham their faither. Perhaps they too are part of a swarm. John Mbiti in his *African Religions and Philosophy* explains that the concept of the African family is often wider, incorporating members of the 'extended' family into the family unit.[48] Within this worldview, as aunts uncles, grandparents, ancestors, and the

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[47] Dale, Godfrey. *The Peoples of Zanzibar: Their Customs and Religious Beliefs,* The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1920, p. 33

[48] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 104

unborn, become part of the family unit the community then becomes idealized as the extension of the family.

Through the societal ethical foundations of African societies, such as the Bantu *utu/ubuntu,* where a person's existence and validation stems from their connection to other people, the concept of family is paramount. A person does not exist, or at least isn't human, if they have no connection to another person; how can a person be born without parents and the union of a man or woman, and their parent who begot them and so on and so forth? Ndumiso Dladla conceptualizes "Ubuntu is both the source and the embodiment of the ethics of Bantu-speaking people".[49]Spears explains that this is why when two people from Kenya meet, presumably Mijikenda people,

> They instantly seek out the appropriate level of their relationship and endeavor to find any links that may exist between them, no matter how remote. If they do find a common link, they are no longer strangers and can follow a set pattern of behavior appropriate to their relationship.[50]

The family represents a formalized structure, and within this structure, there are clear roles and responsibilities for each member. As Spear's has observed within this structure there are certain appropriate 'patterns of behavior' predicated on just how people relate to each other. This familial structure, or as some scholars have phrased it, the structure of belonging wasn't only about patterns of behavior, roles, responsibilities, or even the structure itself, instead it was a core part of African

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[49] Dladla, Ndumiso. "Towards an African Critical Philosophy of Race: Ubuntu as a Philo-praxis of Liberation*", Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy Culture and Religions*, 6 (1), 2017, p. 51

[50] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. 5

ontology. The text *Bantu Africa: 3500 BCE to Present* remarks that this structure of belonging was "also a philosophical principle, the spirit of which is captured in many Bantu languages through proverbs, sayings, and oral traditions".[51]

This familial structure, as a core part of African ontology is replicated in many other systems within African societies. For example, in many African societies it is uncustomary for a young child to approach their father; instead, they often utilize their relationships with their mother or perhaps older siblings to 'speak through them' to their father.[52] In this same way, in many African societies it is uncustomary for an individual to attempt to speak to God, the Supreme Deity known by many names on the continent, directly. Instead, like a child looking to 'speak' to their father, an individual utilizes intermediaries, priest, ancestors, or even lesser deities, to communicate with the Supreme Deity.[53]

The roles that people play in their families and within their society play a large part in the construction of identity in African societies. As evidenced by the construction of nouns in Kiswahili, the African people along the coast were not concerned with gender identity in the same way that Eurasians were. For example, the construction of a verb for the action of a man and a woman are virtually the same. To say 'he did this' *anafanya hivi,* is the same as to say 'she did this'. The primary way to distinguish the gender of the subject is through context clues, Jamila *anafanya hivi.* Kimani Nehusi in his article "From Mdw

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[51] Fourshey, Catherine; et al. *Bantu Africa: 3500 BCE to Present,* Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 57

[52] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 67

[53] *Ibid*

121

Ntr to Ebonics" recognizes this a feature in many African languages. Nehusi comments that,

> It is worthwhile noting that in many Afrikan languages there are no separate words for 'he', 'she' and 'it'. The identical word is employed for all three. Hence *é* (Ewe), *e* (Ga), *o* (Twi), *o* (Yoruba). Gender distinctions are not made by genderised pronouns but by other means, in another part of the sentence.[54]

Nehusi also recognizes that this feature of many African languages is still present in many of the dialects of the diaspora. This all is not to say that African societies were androgynous unisexual societies, or somehow 'liberated' from gender, but instead the construction of gender, and gender identity was heavily reliant on the role a person plays in society. This dynamic within African societies is further explored in the works of Ifi Amadiume[55] and Oyeronke Oyewumi[56].

The construction of gender-informed identity was briefly discussed in Mark Horton and John Middleton's text, *The Swahili.* In this text they recognize the terms *mwanaume* and *mwanamke* as terms that literally translate to 'male person' and 'female person'.[57] This 'literal' translation should be objects as it is disingenuous to how the terms are constructed as well as not even being a literal translation of the terms. It should also be noted that the terms male and female are terms that could describe any number of things including

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[54] Nehusi, Kimani. "From Medew Netjer To Ebonics", *Ebonics and Language Education of African Ancestry Students*, edited by Clinton Crawford (ed.), Sankofa World Publishers, 2001, p. 19

[55] Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society,* Zed Books, 1987

[56] Oyewumi, Oyeronke. *The Invention of Woman: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses,* University of Minnesota Press, 1997

[57] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 153

animals, plants, and inanimate objects; a man and woman can only be human. The term *mwanaume,* loosely translated to mean man, is the construction of the Swahili prefix *mwana-* (the person) and the term *ume*, which is the Swahili term for husband. So literally speaking *mwanaume,* the word for a man, literary translates to mean 'the person who is a husband'. Likewise, *mwanamke,* literally translates to mean 'the person who is a wife'. *Kiswahili* is unique in this ontological construction, in fact as represented with a few examples from the *Sabaki* Bantu sub-family in *Figure 4*, there are many African societies who understand this correlation.

LANGUAGE	WOMAN (HUMAN FEMALE)	MAN (HUMAN MALE)
SWAHILI	mke	mume
POKOMO	Muke/muche	muyume/mume
MALANKOTE	muke	mulume

Figure 4: Sabaki terms for men and women[58]

Within this context the concept of being a man and being a husband or being a woman and being a wife are inseparable. Marriage as part of an initiation into adulthood, and parenthood. Until a person is married, and subsequently has children of their own they are considered societal children.

Marriage has profound social and spiritual implications. Mbiti comments that marriage is "the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community

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[58] Constructed from Nurse, Derek. "History of Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, Cambridge University Press, p. 209

123

meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born".[59] On the most basic level the procreation of children corresponds with the maintenance and development of a community. Without a new generation being actively created and cultivated the community will cease to exist. On a spiritual level, the procreation of children is related to African notions of reincarnation. Mbiti relates reincarnation to a notion of immortality. Upright African people who have led balanced lives can become ancestors and/or reborn within their own lineage. An ancestor, as a spirit, is the 'most alive' when actively cultivated by their descendants with prayers, offerings, and libations.[60] To refuse to be married and have children, risks ending your family line and damning your ancestors to a state of non-existence. Mbiti relates this to a flame that has been extinguished.[61]

Marriage is seen as an obligation and a duty to a person's family or community. The *Desturi wa Waswahili* accounts that if a woman is married and lacks the love of her husband she is permitted to, and possibly encouraged to go a doctor (*mganga*)[62] who can craft potions and amulets to help 'persuade' the woman's husband to be more affectionate.[63] Within Bantu societies marriage is not idealized, but is recognized as having its own set of hardships. Raising children is recognized as a significant challenge in the

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[59]Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 130

[60] *Ibid,* p. 104

[61] *Ibid,* p. 25

[62] A *mganga* is a Swahili traditional healer

[63] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin, *Desturi Za Waswahili* (The Customs of the Swahili People), edited and translated by J.W.T. Allen, University of California Press, 1981, p. 78-79

marriage of two individuals. The Swahili proverb '*Kuzaa si kazi, kazi kubwa [ni] kulea[64]*' (Bearing children is not so difficult but upbringing, that is real work). *Utu/Ubuntu* becomes a necessary ethic in ensuring that a family is healthy and supported. Ednah Peter referencing Placide Tempels, from his text *Bantu Philosophy,* characterizes African philosophy as collective responsibility and participation in an effort to maintain harmony and order in society.[65] This participation and effort to uphold communal balance, harmony and reciprocity is what they refer to as 'the Ontology of participation'.[66]

A person who on their own accord rejects the notion of marriage and the responsibility of parenthood is not viewed favorably within Bantu society. The Swahili proverb, *Kukosa watoto kwafanya mtu adharauliwe[67],* states that 'having no children makes a person despised'. Mbiti clarifies the logic of this proverb, stating that,

> […] marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but 'under-human'. Failure to get married under normal circumstance means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return.[68]

The person who decides for themselves not to participate in their social responsibility to the maintenance of the community, and instead chooses to be a self-serving individualist

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[64] Riedel, Kristina, et al.. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* Center for African Studies, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, proverb no. 3671

[65] Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy,* HBC Publishing, 1959, p. 49-55

[66] Peter, Ednah. "Modern Philosophy: The African Philosophy of Ntu", *GRIN Verlag,* 2014, p. 1-12

[67] Riedel, Kristina, et al.. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* Center for African Studies, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, proverb no. 3662

[68] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 130

has no place in traditional African society. This resentment towards childless and unmarried 'adults' only pertains to individuals under normal circumstances who have rejected this societal responsibility. This responsibility is so important to the community that many 'contingencies' were created to ensure that every individual belonged to and continued a lineage.[69] This includes additional marriages, or even adoption.

Polygyny, the polygamous practice of a man taking more than one wife is a well-documented tradition on the African continent. Mbiti accounts that if a woman isn't able to conceive or conceive sons, this might be a reason that a husband is allowed to take on a second wife.[70] In Kenya at least three groups, the Kamba, the Nandi[71], and the Gikuyu[72], practice a tradition where a woman is allowed to take on a wife in order to produce children.[73] Eurocentrist and conceptually incarcerated scholars have tried to complicate this practice with the implications of western discourse of queer identities and gender dynamics. However, inquiries into these sort of implications misrepresents the cultural motivations of such practices. Former Temple University Professor Regina Smith Oboler investigating whether this sort of woman-to-woman marriage in Nandi society in western Kenya constituted a problem of 'sexual classification', implying change in one of the

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[69] Fourshey, Catherine; et al. *Bantu Africa: 3500 BCE to Present,* Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 57

[70] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 25

[71] Oboler, Regine Smith. "Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya, *Ethnology,* Vol. 19, No. 1, University of Pittsburgh, 1980, pp. 69-88

[72] Njambi, Wairimũ Ngarũiya; & William E. O'Brien. "Revisiting 'Woman-Woman Marriage': Notes on Gĩkũyũ Women", *NWSA Jounral, Vol. 12, No. 1,* The John Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 1-23

[73] Cadigan, R. Jean. "Woman-to-Woman Marriage: Practices and Benefits in Sub-Saharan Africa", Journal of Comparative Family Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, Comparative Perspectives on Black Family Life: Vol. 1, University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp. 89-98

woman's ontology, becoming a man.[74] The issue here isn't an ontological issue, but rather the Europeans attempt to classify African traditions according to European logic and language. Oboler admits that "the motivation of a woman who becomes a female husband is fairly clear-cut; it is the acquisition of a male heir for her property".[75] Oboler's language here is objectionable, 'female husband' misrepresents this woman's societal role, and the conceptualization of property in the context is reminiscent of European's destructive imperialist logic. However, Oboler's statement has recognized the function and logic behind these woman-to-woman marriages. This logic appears to be the primary cultural logic used across the various African societies who practice this tradition.

> Among the Kamba, a barren woman is a "social disgrace; she is an humiliation" Furthermore, as long as "her husband is potent and fertile, the barren woman is obliged to accomplish her duty of providing the husband with children without interfering with their marriage". A barren wife can resolve her unfortunate social position by engaging in a woman-to-woman marriage. In such cases, the wife bears children for the female husband, which brings honor and glory to the barren woman and subsequently to the husband of the barren woman.[76]

A woman will marry another woman so that this second woman's children will also technically be her children, thus fulfilling her role as a wife in producing children. If a man was to be the one to take on the second wife, they would only be the children if this woman and not the first wife.

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[74] Oboler, Regine Smith. "Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya, *Ethnology,* Vol. 19, No. 1, University of Pittsburgh, 1980, p. 69

[75] *Ibid,* p. 72

[76] Cadigan, R. Jean. "Woman-to-Woman Marriage: Practices and Benefits in Sub-Saharan Africa", Journal of Comparative Family Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, Comparative Perspectives on Black Family Life: Vol. 1, University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 91

Another tradition which as emerged out of East African cultures that serves as a sort of contingency to preserve a family's lineage is the adoption of individuals, normally children, into one's family. The Oromo people call this tradition *guddifachaa* and have traditionally used the practice to expand the Oromo society be the adoption of children both in and outside of the community.[77] Aspects of this tradition seem have been adopted by the various people that the Oromo people had contact with. It is recognized that the Pokomo people in particular had 'absorbed' many fragment of Oromo culture during their long and continuous history.[78] It is unclear how widespread this practice is within Pokomo culture, however the existence of the tradition demonstrates that there are other ways to be a parent when birthing your own is not an option. Through *utu/ubuntu* philosophy, which is reflected in many Swahili proverbs, it is clear that there is a great important placed on what it takes to raise a child rather than the simple act of procreation.

Parents, especially mothers who spend more time with children during their developmental years, play an important role in instilling in their children the values and ethics upheld by a community. The Swahili expression *hana mzee* essentially implies that a child or person is misbehaved, uncultured and had no parents to give them guidance on how to behave in society. To parent is to educate your children on what it means to be an upright person and a proper member of society. Nah Dove's text *Afrikan Mothers: Bearing of Culture, Makers of Social Change* celebrates the contribution of African women to the cultivation of society. In many ways African women were informally the primary

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[77] Yates, Brian. "Cultural Backgrounds of the Habasha State", *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia,* University of Rochester Press, 2020, pp. 17-36

[78] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthripos,* Bd 67, H. 1./2., 1972, p. 10

preservers of Africa culture. This became especially true as African men who began to adopt foreign faith systems had compromised their ability to navigate traditional society. The women one the other hand who were often overlooked within these patriarchal systems were inadvertently given more freedom to practice and preserve their traditional culture. This is evidenced by the number of Swahili women who still engage in the *pepo* tradition.

African Humanity & The Problem of Civilization

At the forefront of discussions of Bantu notions of family, community solidarity, and societal developments is the ethic of *utu/ubuntu.* While scholarship like Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy,* has reintroduced academic investigations into African ethics into public discourse, it should also be remembered that Tempels dedicated an entire chapter of his work to notion of 'civilizing' Bantu people. This mission that Tempels refers to in his work is known as the 'white man's burden' and was used as a justification to colonize the continent of Africa. Tempels' work as well as the works of many of the early Africanist was in an effort to support this mission to spread European 'civilization' and way of life.

African scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop and John Henrik Clark fought to prove that African people were not in need of civilization. Furthermore, they fought to establish the idea that not only were African people not in need of 'civilization', but that the very concept of 'civilization' is born out of the development of ancient African societies. Kemet, Ethiopia the West African Empires, Great Zimbabwe, and the Swahili city states were utilized as case studies to prove the concept that African too had civilization. Studies into

these cultures were fueled by an initial rejection of Hegelian discourse which sought to put African cultures outside of this site outside the scope of civilization. While there was extensive discourse surrounding the Africanity and historiography of these classical and medieval African societies, there was a lack of discourse around just what is this concept of 'civilization'. For decades African scholars were seemingly so preoccupied with proving racist scholarship wrong that scholarship didn't sufficiently begin to quest what are the cultural foundations of the concept of civilization and an even if African cultures and societies should be part of this discussion. In Rwanda, the Abatwa people, who were once referred to as bushmen, are now referred to as the 'ones left behind'.[79]This notion that hunter-gather and non-agrarian African societies, namely in places like Rwanda, Uganda, and Botswana, have somehow been 'left behind on humanity's march to civilization', is not only reductionist, but is reminiscent of European imperialist attitudes. Peoples such as the Abatwa are pressured by the modern nation state to 'modernize'. The term 'modernize' is often used as a contemporary euphemism for 'civilize', and 'westernize'. This effort to get these communities more engaged in the political program of the state is actively, either inadvertently or deliberately playing a role in the destruction of these societies and their culture.

The cultural foundation which birthed African civilizations such as the Swahili city-states along the coast of East Africa are intrinsically tied to an African cultural paradigm, which includes African cultures, peoples, and societies, all of which manifest African culture in their own unique ways. The ethics that come out of these communities and

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[79] Ndaruhutse, Patrick. *The Abatwa: The Ones Left Behind in Rwanda.* Documentary Film, Africa Digital Media Academy, 2013

societies are developed out of a people's historical experience and worldview. Ethics are the functionalization of a community's *utamawazo*. This concept of civilization, however, is not developed out of African thought and collective experience. It is a concept intrinsically tied to Eurasian social Darwinist perspectives on human development along the lines of urbanization. This is why scholars are so ready to discuss the 'civilizations' of urbanized nations such as the Swahili states, while discussion of 'hunter-gather civilizations' are completely absent. The concept of civilization artificially creates a social hierarchy amongst African societies that reinforce a false sense of ethnic superiority and chauvinism.

With this in mind the term civilization is not befitting of a conversation about African cultures and societies. S.K. Damani Agyekum shares these same reservations about the cultural location and orientation of the concept of civilization in his text *Distorted Truths: The Bastardization of Afrikan Cosmology.* In this text he clarifies,

> Even the idea of civilization is a concept that carries a Western cultural value. The label of civilization is only applied to societies that have certain elements, such as irrigation systems, class stratification, writing systems, a high level of craftsmanship, and governmental apparatuses. The qualifications for civilization are materially oriented reflecting a Western proclivity. Hundreds of societies all over the world existed where people live ordered, meaningful lives, i.e., "civilized," without most of the "civilizing" elements listed above.[80]

The conceptualization on the concept of civilization is so grounded within Eurasian thought, that the very concept is antithetical to Afrocentric discourse on the development and existence of African communities, and their respective ethics. The concept of

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[80] Agyekum, S.K. Damani. *Distorted Truths: The Bastardization of Afrikan Cosmology,* Afrikan World InfoSystems, 2012, p. 2

civilization, like many Eurasian concepts, is based on conflict theory, or rather on the principle of dichotomies.

> Later Europeans constructed this distance between European and non-European in terms of ordered civilization versus a lack of "civility" (Enlightenment) and differing stages in the sociocultural evolutionary process (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), but the intellectual trends of the Renaissance in southern Europe, and Portugal in particular, fit most non-Europeans into a dichotomous cosmography: Christian/non-Christian. Muslims, however, occupied the border in both European geographical and cultural imaginations; Islamdom was distinct from western Europe by 1498, but Muslims were understandable - or "misunderstandable" in Said's terms - and familiar.[81]

As Islam and Arabcentric thought began to penetrate the consciousness of Swahili people, similar notions of civilization begin to manifest along the coast. There are two Swahili terms, *utamaduni* and *ustaarabu,* which have been functionally translated into terms related to the concept of civilization. *Utamadumi* seems to be more related to urbanity and urban developed, a distinguishing feature between the people of the coast and many of the people in the interior.[82] Swahili proverbs indicate that *ustaarabu* is the more prominent of the two terms, as it is used in colloquialisms and aphorisms about the behavior of civility, wisdom and purity. *Adabu ni ustaarabu, "*good manners is civility"[83] is one of the many colloquial proverbs that demonstrate this idea. The reality of this epistemological paradigm shift along the Swahili coast in is reflected within *Kiswahili* term *ustaarabu.*

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[81] Prestholdt, Jeremy. "Portuguese Conceptual Categories and the "Other" Encounter on the Swahili Coast, *JAAS XXXVI, 4,* 2001, p. 387

[82] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 18

[83] Riedel, Kristina, et al.. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* Center for African Studies, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, proverb no. 3197

The Swahili concept of civilization, *ustaarabu,* is etymologically derived from the Swahili words for Arabs, *aarabu.* There is a direct correlation between how the Swahili conceptualized *ustaarabu* and the culture of the Arabs. This indicates that an Arabcentric view of civilization and civility are reinforced by the contemporary lexicon of the Swahili language. Arab culture is fundamental to Islamic thought. Islamic thought was born in the seventh century out of Arab culture and Biblical interpretation. Although Islam, like Christianity, have been celebrated as a religion for all people regardless of culture at least at a subconscious level it is known that Arabic culture is permeates within the religion. Arabic holy people, places, ideas, and even the very language are central to the religion. This accounts for non-Arabic Muslims across the world who continue to adhere to Arab, rather than distinctively Islamic, cultural norms in their efforts to be pious individuals.

Horton and Middle discuss that "Swahili thought holds that civilization is based upon knowledge in thought and purity in behavior".[84] This notion of purity, *usafi,* is associated with women, historically freewomen. This implication led to the notion that enslaved women, who usually, if not always were non-Islamic African women of the interior, were somehow impure, thusly disqualifying them and their communities from the consideration of being civilized people.[85] In the Islamic world all non-Muslim peoples, especially those living in lands neighboring Islamic states, were allowed to be enslaved, it was impermissible to enslave a free practitioner of Islam.[86] Although the Islamic institution

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[84] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 182

[85] *Ibid,* p. 183

[86] Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 8-9

of enslaving persons was not strictly race based "the advent of Islam created an entirely new situation in race relations".[87] Bernard Lewis recalls in his text *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* a story from the early-Islamic Arab folktale compendium *One Thousand and One Nights* "the story of the good black slave who lived a life of virtue and piety, for which he was rewarded by turning white at the moment of his death".[88] Within this Arabcentric, ontologically reductive worldview, to be African, was to be uncivilized, removed from the cultural epicenter of Islamic 'civilization'.

To be black, recognizing African ancestral lineages and culture, left open the possibility that one's ancestors were once 'uncivilized people' and subject to enslavement. In Zanzibar, Muslims "held that those who practiced African religions could justly be enslaved".[89]To become civilized meant to enter into a state of becoming like an Arab.[90] The Swahili conceptualization of civilization is irredeemably tied to notions of Arabization. Notions of Arabization/Islamization were used as the "prevailing justification" for the enslavement of African people.[91] The enslavement of African people by Arabs was conceptualized as, "a gift by which the barbarian (typically from the African

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[87] Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 18

[88] *Ibid*, p.20

Burton, R.F. *The Book of a Thousand and One Nights,* vol. 4, 1894, pp. 212-214

[89] Prestholdt, Jeremy. *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization,* University of California Press, 2008, p. 120

[90] Prestholdt, Jeremy. "Portuguese Conceptual Categories and the "Other" Encounter on the Swahili Coast, *JAAS XXXVI, 4,* 2001, p. 235

[91] *Ibid*

mainland) was saved from spiritual death and introduced to Islam and the entire moral environment of *ustaarabu*".[92]

The concept of civilization manufactures a social Darwinist hierarchy, alien to traditional African ethics, that puts a premium on the qualities reflected within Eurasian societies. The concept of civilization places human societies on a spectrum of 'development', creating a dichotomy of the civilized and the uncivilized, the traditional and the acculturated. It is assumed that all societies must progress towards the type of societal development lest they remain 'uncivilized'. Molefi Kete Asante and Nah Dove have gone to great lengths in their book, *Being Human Being: Transforming the Race Discourse,* to discuss how alien racial and ethnic hierarchies are to an authentic African mode of ethics.[93]

Despite the efforts of the *waungwana*, who represented the Swahili socio-economic elite, to acculturate to an Asiatic centered worldview, the colloquial proverbs of the Swahili people exhibit that at some level there was resistance to the correlation between Arab culture and the notion of civility. One such proverb, *Kilemba hakimfanyi mstaarabu mtu,* 'A turban does not make a man civilized', exemplifies this point. In many Swahili proverbs, the turban is associated with the representation of Arabs. Either it is used to describe Arabs of Arabia, or Africans who self-identify as 'Arabs'. In many parts of East Africa, not just along the Swahili corridor, Africans who have embraced foreign ontology, and/or have

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[92] Prestholdt, Jeremy. "Portuguese Conceptual Categories and the "Other" Encounter on the Swahili Coast, *JAAS XXXVI, 4,* 2001, p. 236

[93] Asante, Molefi Kete; and Nah Dove. *Being Human Being: Transforming the Race Discourse,* Universal Write Publications, 2021

mixed ancestry have claimed the identity of Arab. This has garnered considerable confusion as this moniker seems to have more to do with culture expression and assumed heritage, rather than strictly relating to race. Controversially, this loose definition of what it means to be an Arab has gained criticism from culturally grounded Africans as well as Arabist and Arabs from the peninsula. James De Vere Allen in his text, *Swahili Origins,* discusses this discrepancy,

> [This notion of Swahili Arabic ancestry] had been undermined by Arabists and Arabs themselves who felt the need to replace the old, genetic notion of 'Arab' with something more useable couched in cultural and linguistic terms. […] I would argue that the majority of [the Swahili] could not even loosely be called Arabs, among other reasons because even if they could speak the Arabic language (which before the nineteenth century is uncertain), their main language of literary expression was a Bantu one.[94]

The effort to claim this foreign identity, or at least part of this foreign identity through mixed ancestry is directly correlated to the effort to align the first families closer to their epistemological center of civilization, distancing themselves from an African identity who they too began to pathologize as uncivilized. Out of this dichotomous worldview of the civilized and uncivilized, ontologically reductive and pejorative terms like *nyika,* and even *galla* begin to emerge. This worldview, this *utamawazo,* is not as universal to the Swahili as literature would make it seem. Much of the literature produced either by Swahili people or by foreign people is influenced by this worldview of the 'learned' and culturally compromised class. Many of the proverbs of the Swahili people do not reflect this worldview, which begins to demonstrate the epistemological diversity along the Swahili corridor. Once such proverb reads, *Kucha Mungu si kilemba cheupe*, 'Paying respect to

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[94] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 11

God is not the same as the wearing of a white turban'.[95] This proverb indicates that Swahili people to some level recognized that an individual did not have to conform to Arab cultural standards to be pious, ethical, and civilized people.

This effort by many of the Swahili political elite to alienate themselves from their African ancestry, and to conform to Asiatic culture speaks to a social reality on the coast, but not a universal reality for African people. By conceptually incarcerating discourse on African societies by using Eurasian concepts such as civilization, the discourse on African societies will remain culturally dislocated, and detached from an authentic understanding of African ethics.

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[95] Riedel, Kristina, et al.. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* Center for African Studies, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, proverb no. 2365

CHAPTER 5: SWAHILI CREOLIZATION:
ECONOMIC POLITICS AND THE CULTURAL *MAANGAMIZI*

Like the term *maafa,* put forward by Marimba Ani, the Swahili term *maangamizi* has been introduced into African discourse to describe the calamities of foreign colonization and enslavement that African people survived. The term *maangamizi* is a pluralized form of the Kiswahili term *angamia*. What can be appreciated about this term is that there is an implication about the plurality of assaults endured by African people, rather than limiting African oppression to just the single experience of surviving foreign enslavement. The word *maangamizi* loosely translates to mean "that which causes ruin".[1] Within this context, African culture along the Swahili corridor wasn't utterly destroyed but was rather severely damaged and compromised during the period known as the *maafa.*

This experience of resistance and survival was a global phenomenon, one experienced by African people all over the world. Because of this shared experience, this cultural *maangamizi* has resulted in many similar affects within African populations. Like many of the prominent families in East Africa, many of the families of West Africa, like the Kieta dynasty of old Mali claimed descent from Asian, specifically Arab roots.[2] In the diaspora, peoples whose ancestors were forcibly removed from Africa has a result of this *maafa* have begun to alienate themselves from the cultures and identities of their ancestors by claiming to be everything from Jews, non-African Moors[3], and even the indigenous

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[1] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p.17

[2] Gomez, Michael A. *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa,* Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 70

[3] Historically speaking the term Moor was often used to describe African, Berber, or Arab Muslims of Northeast Africa (the *Maghreb*). However, especially after the beginning of the Reconquista, Europeans may have used the term more generally to describe Muslims and Arabized individuals living in Northeast

people of America. Others, as noted in discourse about creole identity and culture, have found solace being able to claim a sort of attachment to the culture of their historical oppressors. These trends in how contemporary African populations have conceptualized their identities are not an enigma but are all intrinsically linked to this shared experience of surviving foreign oppression. Joy DeGruy's *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* illuminates the phycological factors and implications of the trauma that can be cause by rank subjugation

Along the Swahili coast, like so many other places in the African world, African identity regrettably became intertwined with the identity of the oppressed and subjugated. However, unlike so many other places in the African world, Swahili people did not endure foreign domination and rank subjugation until well into the nineteenth century. This dynamic, which slightly differs from the experiences studied by the Frantz Fanons and Paulo Freires of the world seemingly introduces one of the principal challenges for many researchers in their understanding the process in which the African foundational elements in Swahili culture became marginalized and alienated from Swahili society.

Unlike many of the other African societies who have endured their own experience of cultural imperialism, there was never an initial phase of violent Arab invasion or forceful imposition of Arab/Islamic culture upon Swahili people. Even in the case much of West Africa, where Islam was relegated to the courts during the medieval period, Islam was institutionalized by the Mande Kieta dynasty after, according to the oral tradition of the

Africa and Iberia. John G. Jackson and Bertram Thomas comment that during the medieval period most Africans were referred to as Moors in European literature.

Jackson, John G. "Introduction", *The Story of the Moors in Spain* by Stanley Lane-Poole, Black Classic Press, 1990

Mande people, Sundiata Kieta led a revolt against the Ghana of Wagadou Sumanguru Katé.[4] The first serious threat to Swahili societies in the form of armed military aggression came during the sixteenth century when the Portuguese sacked the cities of Mombasa and Kilwa and extorted Swahili rulers for tribute.[5] The Portuguese presence in East Africa was devastating to African economies, but had no profound effect on the language and culture of Swahili peoples. Instead, most of the external cultural influence presently seen in the Swahili culture comes from Arabia.

The theory of Arab colonization through the expansion of an Arab state or the 'slow trinkle' of Asiatic immigrants from the Arabian Peninsula or from Persia has also been largely disproven.[6] While there is evidence of cultural interaction and exchange in early Swahili societies. It was not until the last few centuries that African cultural elements became largely marginalized within Swahili society. Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta, informally referred to as just Ibn Battuta, in the fourteenth century celebrated the Swahili people of Kilwa, who by his own account were "extremely black", as "a religious people, trustworthy and righteous".[7] Battuta's praise of the people of Kilwa stems from their appreciation and adherence to Islamic culture. Specifically, Battuta writes,

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[4] Gomez, Michael A. *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa,* Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 70

[5] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 80

[6] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 10

[7] Battuta, Ibn. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa,* edited by Said Hamdun & Noel King, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010, p. 22

> They are a people devoted to Holy War because they are on one continuous mainland with unbelieving Zunuj. Their uppermost virtue is religion and righteousness, and they are Shafi'i in rite.[8]

Battuta's account that by the fourteenth century the *waungwana* of the city states have begun to put a premium on their relationships with foreigners outside of the African continent at the expense of neighboring African communities who did not practice Islam. This relationship would facilitate the Swahili participation in the enslavement of African people. During these 'holy wars'(*jihads*) African communities were raids and their people captured to be enslaved and transported all over the Islamic world.

Battuta's remarks about what he witnessed during his travels to East Africa (1330-1332) and his travels to west Africa (1351-1354) illuminates a cultural difference between how African societies interacted with the introduction of foreign culture. East Africa, and the Swahili peoples particular, had developed economies and societies based off of maritime practices. Cultivating foreign relationship was a vital aspect in the development of material prosperity in the city states. Out of this a philosophy of 'going-along-to-get-along' referred to as *similitude,* a cultural performance or adaption to appear similar to foreigners, developed along the coast. This is markedly different from how West African people interacted with Ibn Battuta. Battuta writes a brief anecdote about an interaction he had with a man named Abu Muhammad Yandakan in the city of Massufa[9]. Battuta recalls,

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[8] Battuta, Ibn. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa,* edited by Said Hamdun & Noel King, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010, p. 22

[9] The town Massufa mentioned in Battuta's literature is the small oasis community in Mauritania known contemporarily as Oualata. It was first founded by agropastoralists, was once an important trade town in the Ghana Empire and was the southern terminus of the trans-Saharan trade.

Levtzion, Nehemia. *Ancient Ghana and Mali*, Methuen, 1973, p. 147

I found him sitting on a mat and in the middle if his house was bed with a canopy. On it was a woman and with her a man was sitting, and the two were conversing. I said to him, 'Who is this woman?' He said, 'She is my wife.' I said, "What is [the relationship of] the man with her to her?" He said, 'He is er companion.' I said, 'Do you accept this when you have lived in our country[10] and have known the matters of the *shar'* [divine law]?' He said to me, 'Women's companionship with men in our country is honorable and takes place in a good way: there is no suspicion about it. They are not like the women in your country.' I was astonished at his thoughtless answer, and I went away from him and did not go to him after this. Though he invited me many times, I did not respond.[11]

This was not the only instance that Battuta comments on the behavior of West African women. Yandakan, a Muslim man, defended aspects of traditional African culture and societal norms. In doing so, Battuta was offended, even questioning Yandakan that having gone to 'their country' and seen how Arabs behave he would still continue to practice the traditional culture. Indicating that Battuta consciously correlated civil, just, and appropriate behavior with the customs of Arabs. The offended Ibn Battuta comments that he did not return to the company of Yandakan, despite numerous invitations to do so. When two cultures interact, or rather clash, this type of interaction is common. The practice of *similitude* was designed so that that when two people of different cultures did interact, they wouldn't be in a position to offend their guest and lose a potential trade partner or political ally. Losing such a partner could be economically pernicious to a Swahili trader who had to compete with many other merchants along the coast.

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[10] Our country is presumably Arabia. Within Islam, all practitioners are thought to be bound in a blood brotherhood, but as evidenced here, the Arab culture from which Islam emanates takes precedent.

[11] Battuta, Ibn. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa,* edited by Said Hamdun & Noel King, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010, p. 38-39

The Concept of Creolization & The Creole Attitude

The term creole is used most often in the context of African descended communities of the Caribbean and in the Bayou country of the United States. For linguists, there has been debate for decades what are the qualities of creole languages, and how they have been formed. Unlike pidgin, which has virtually no native speakers, and limited practical use, and "a reduced range of structure",[12] a creole language is an intergenerational language. As a formal language and not a pidgin, a creole language includes structured grammar, syntax, and a fairly standardized lexicon.

Though this lexicon resembles that of another language, in the context of the Caribbean, a Colonial European contact language, the creole language is not a dialect of former. This is a common misconception. Understanding creole languages as a "degenerate descendant of their European ancestors", is purely a chauvinistic European understanding of the language.[13] Michael Degraff, a leader in the field of Creole Linguistics, asserts that this idea was popularized at the latest in the eighteenth century by "amateur philologist like Girod-Chantrans" who characterized Haitian creole as "imbecile jargon" or "nothing but French back in infancy".[14] The idea of creole being a degenerate dialect of a foreign language, and thusly inferior, exemplifies Afrophobic and ontologically reductive tendencies that have germinated within language discourse. This culturally imperialist

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[12] Blackshire-Belay. "The Location of Ebonics Within the Framework of the Africological Paradigm", *Journal of Black Studies,* vol. 27, No. 1, Sage Publications, 1996, p. 8

[13] Degraff, Michel. "Against Creole Exceptionalism", *Language,* vol. 79, No. 2, Linguistic Society of America, 2003, p. 392

[14] Degraff, Michel. "Against Creole Exceptionalism", *Language,* vol. 79, No. 2, Linguistic Society of America, 2003, p. 392

narrative situates that everything African is substandard to the purity of Europe or Asia, and only a reaction to Eurasian influence. This is the same type of discourse that was previously discussed regarding the *Ajami* literary tradition on the African continent.

The reality is Caribbean creole languages, like Kiswahili, or any language identified as a creole or a form of Ebonics, are essentially African languages with secondary foreign influences. The term Ebonics was coined by Robert Williams II, an African American social psychologist during his 1973 research on the cognitive development of Black children.[15] This study was the first major research project investigating the language of people of African descent in the United States.[16] The term was utilized, by Williams and others after the publication of his research, to avoid the ontologically reductive connotations that the language that people of African descent spoke were 'non-standard' variations of imperialist languages.[17] Williams reasoned,

> We need to define what we speak. We need to give a clear definition to our language [...] We know that ebony means black and that phonics refers to speech sounds or the science of sounds. Thus, we are really talking about the science of black speech sounds or language.[18]

Once coupled with an Afrocentric perspective the term and usage of Ebonics became more popularized with members of the African American community outside of academic discourse. The Oakland Unified School District in California passed a resolution on December 18th, 1996, formally recognizing Ebonics, the colloquial language of African

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[15] Baugh, John. *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice*. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 2

[16] *Ibid*

[17] *Ibid,* p. 15

[18] Williams, Robert. "Ebonics as a Bridge to Standard English", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1997, p. 14

Americans to be an African language with a genetic link to the Niger-Congo languages still spoken on the continent.[19]

While since the at least the 1970s people in the United States had begun to acknowledge Ebonics as essentially African, there has been a holdout in other parts of the African Diaspora that continue to frame their languages as dialects or derivatives of their colonial oppressors. Mervyn C. Alleyne exposes several fallacies in the linguistic discussion around African people in the Caribbean. He asserts that,

> Among the most widespread fallacies about slave societies in the New World is the belief the [enslaved African] societies were unable to communicate with each other because of the wide diversity and mutual non-intelligibility of African languages and dialects because they [the enslaved Africans] were systematically separated so that members of the same ethnic/ linguistic group would not find themselves on the same plantation. The fact is that African languages were routinely used on slave plantations and have survived in Jamaica up to today.[20]

Alleyne further substantiates this argument, further explaining that European enslavers would often deliberately sought out certain ethnic groups based on stereotyped characteristics or skills that would be common from certain regions of Africa.[21] In Jamaica, the focus of Alleyne's piece, creole and maroon language is based on Twi-Asante.[22] Hubert Devonish, in his book Language and Liberation: Creole Language Politics in the

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[19] Morgan, Marcyliena. "US Language Planning and Policies for Social Dialect Speakers", in Davis, Kathryn Anne; Huebner, Thom (eds.), *Sociopolitical perspectives on language policy and planning in the USA.*, John Benjamins, 1999, p. 173

[20] Alleyne, Mervyn C. *Roots of Jamaican Culture*. Pluto, 1989, p. 122

[21] *Ibid*

[22] Alleyne, Mervyn C. *Roots of Jamaican Culture*. Pluto, 1989, p. 122

Caribbean complements the ideas put forth by Alleyne. Devonish reports that in the Caribbean as a whole,

> In spite of the apparent linguistic diversity among [enslaved Africans] arriving in the Caribbean, there was an underlying degree of underlying linguistic unity. They all spoke languages belonging to the large Niger-Congo language family. [23]

Therefore, like what was argued in the United States, creole languages across the Caribbean largely retained the syntax, semantics, and phonology of their native Niger-Congo languages.

Despite these revelations about the language and culture of African descendant people in the Caribbean another narrative has begun to be pushed. This new narrative seeks to celebrate the intersectional "origins" of creole languages by distancing themselves from an African genesis. This narrative supports an attitude, which hence forth will be referred to as the 'Creole Attitude' is not necessarily a new stance on African identity. During the Haitian revolution people of mixed heritage on the isle of Saint-Domingue, the Mulatoos, distanced themselves from the African base while attempting to claim the benefits of their miscegenation with Europeans.[24] Before exploring Creole as a conceptual identity, we must look at its etymology first. In 1604, when the term began to be used, it simply meant, "a white person born in the colonies [of France, Spain, or Portugal]"[25]. Also, according to the Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Creole, as a noun has four meaning two of

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[23] Devonish, Hubert. *Language and Liberation: Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean,* Karia Press, 1986, p. 41

[24] James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* Vintage Books*,* (1963) 1989, pp. 163-166

[25] "Creole". *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, 1987, pp. 305–306

which are reflective of its original meaning, and one referencing the language as a dialect of French spoken in Louisiana. The definition which we are interested comes third in this four-part list where a Creole is "a person of mixed French or Spanish and Negro descent speaking a dialect of French or Spanish".[26] In this definition, which is the only one to explicitly reference Black people, their African cultural role in that identity and language is omitted. Having the African base excluded, neglected, or relegated to trivial role confuses the reality of what these people are actually speaking; they are speaking an African based language, not a European dialect.

'Creole attitude' epitomized in Jean Bernabé's text, "In Praise of Creoleness", seeks to celebrate this very idea of Creole identity, at the expense of a genuine appreciation of the African cultural foundation of Caribbean creole identity and cultural expression. The 'Creole Attitude' is informed by post-modernist thought, and thusly is part of what Michael Tillotson calls the Post-Racial Project. By claiming to celebrate the universalism of human culture, the 'Creole Attitude' distance itself from its cultural reality. "In Praise of Creoleness", criticizes the Negritude movement, which was a movement by African people to remove the yoke of French cultural repression and embrace their humanity through Africa, and its leaders by calling the movement "[a] violent an paradoxical therapy, Negritude replaced the illusion of Europe by an African illusion".[27] We've discussed the illusion of Europe, how it seeks to subvert and control; but what illusion does Africa hold? What misconception can be had in declaring our Africanity, and acknowledging the

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[26] "Creole". *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, 1987, pp. 305–306

[27] Bernabé, Jean; et al. *In Praise of Creoleness,* Callaloo, Vol. 13, No. 4 Autumn, 1990, p. 889

retention of our indigenous cultural elements throughout intergenerational struggle? What is so impossible about Africa? Instead, Bernabé and the other authors of this text move to celebrate their Creole identity, with an "unconditional acceptance of [their] Creoleness".[28] To them, "Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements".[29] Though these cultural elements may influence the Caribbean, on way or another, they, especially the Asian and Levantine cultural elements, can and should be relegated to superficial influences. There are no substantial claims to be made about the significant influence on the creole language, which is a defining element of its people, by these foreign influencers. The 'Creole Attitude' by actively seeking to diminish its African cultural reality, and the proclamation of the universalism of creole culture "has the potential to set a climate of nonresistance" among African people.[30] The African cultural elements which have bound and protected African communities in the Caribbean, such as the Maroons, if not protected themselves are threatened to be subverted once again by European norms. Ultimately, the 'Creole Attitude', by objective truths, such as the African base of the languages spoken by Blacks in the Caribbean reduces the agency of African people by subverting their history and culture.

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[28] Bernabé, Jean; et al. *In Praise of Creoleness,* Callaloo, Vol. 13, No. 4 Autumn, 1990*,* p. 891.

[29] *Ibid*

[30] Tillotson, Michael. *Invisible Jim Crow: Contemporary Ideological Threats to the Internal Security of African Americans*. Africa World Press, 2011, p. 104.

Creole Discourse & Kiswahili

The authors of "In Praise of Creoleness", comment that the process of Creolization, the brutal interaction and exchange of cultures, is not limited to the American continent.[31] Among the examples of cultural interactions they include in their text is their example of "Arabs and black Africans in Zanzibar". Though the African interaction with the Arabs on the island of Zanzibar is substantial, it must be stated outright that the African language on the island of Zanzibar, and all along the East African coast, Kiswahili, is not a creole language. Recent research by historical linguists articulates that, despite how Kiswahili is commonly conceptualized, it is not a creole language and contains relatively few loanwords from Arabic or Persian.[32]

Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay outlines that "actual pidgins and Creoles are relatively young languages (at most three or four centuries old) in which change has been rapid and primarily convergent, particularly in their formative periods".[33] Swahili on the other hand has its origins during the first millennium of the Common Era, with the emergence of Sabaki speakers along the Kenyan coast.[34] Over time, as these speaker began to spread along the East African coast, Sabaki began to "differentiate into separate dialects

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[31] Bernabé, Jean; et al. *In Praise of Creoleness,* Callaloo, Vol. 13, No. 4 Autumn, 1990*,* p. 893.

[32] Horton Mark. "Islam, Archeology, and Swahili Identity", *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives,* edited by Donald Whitcomb, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 70

[33] Blackshire-Belay, Carol Aisha. "The Location of Ebonics Within the Framework of the Africological Paradigm", *Journal of Black Studies,* Vol. 27, No. 1 Sep. 1996, p. 12

[34] Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 258

and languages, and by the ninth century, Swahili had emerged. This account therefore estimates that Kiswahili is well over a thousand years old.

The antiquity of Kiswahili does not disprove that Kiswahili is not a creole language, as even experts in that field have a hard time clearly defining what a creole language is. Structurally, Kiswahili is arranged like any Bantu (Niger-Congo B) language. The defining structure of Kiswahili are its noun classes. These noun classes with are formed by affixes are a "characteristic and important formative element in many Sudanic and in all Bantu languages".[35] There has been a myth of the overwhelming of Arab and Muslim influence on the Swahili language, which has been perpetuated by scholars such as Ali A. Mazuri. In his text, *The Secularization of an Afro-Islamic Language,* he explores "the Islamic origins of Kiswahili".[36]

> He asserts that "the Islamic origins of Kiswahili partly lie in its readiness to borrow concepts, words, and idioms from the Arabic language and from Islamic civilization." He admits, "Although its structure is completely Bantu and not remotely Semitic, Kiswahili has borrowed a higher proportion of its vocabulary from Arabic than English from Latin. Sometimes there is almost a 'balancing act' in vocabulary between Bantu and Arabic".[37]

This is a gross overstatement of the Arabic influence onto Kiswahili.. However, as substantiated in the article, *Early Swahili History Reconsidered* published in the International Journal of African Historical Studies, Thomas Spear explains Swahili borrowings from Arabic were "largely limited to certain cultural fields where Arab

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[35] Westermann, Diedrich. "African Linguistic Classification". *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 22, No. 3., 1952, p. 252

[36] Mazrui, Ali A; and Pio Zirimu. "The Secularization of an Afro-Islamic Language", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1, 1990, p. 24.

[37] *Ibid.*

influence was strongest such as jurisprudence, trade, religion, non-indigenous flora, and maritime affairs".[38] Spears adds, that Arab influence "occurred relatively late in the development of Swahili, when Arab influence along the coast was increasing. Arabic's influence on Swahili was thus relatively late and restricted, and it had little impact on the development of the basic elements of early Swahili".[39] Unlike the creole languages of the Caribbean Kiswahili's lexicon is still by in large African, with only certain loanwords added into the language. It's important to note the kinds of words added into the Swahili lexicon, as they indicate what sectors of life Arabs had begun to infiltrate.

Despite Kiswahili not being a creole language in nature, but rather developed to become a *Lingua Franca,* it is clear that there are similar social realities present in the African communities of both the Caribbean and along the East African coast. Most notable is the 'Creole Attitude'. Mazuri's *Triple Heritage* of Africa is in essence the same as *In Praise of Creoleness.* Mazuri's idea of Africa as a cultural bazaar "where a wide variety of ideas and values, drawn from different civilizations compete for the attention of African buyers" is critiqued by Hailu Habtu as being "labored to a nauseating degree".[40] There is a massive overemphasis on this aspect of African history. Similitude, a strategy of changing one's aesthetic to appeal to foreign cultural customs was a common strategy for East Africans.

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[38]Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 259.

[39] *Ibid*

[40] Habtu, Hailu. "The Fallacy of the 'Triple Heritage' Thesis: A Critique*". A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 13, 1984, p. 26.

Jeremy Prestholdt in his book, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalizations* outlines this economic. The people known as the Mutsamuduans, living off the coast of East Africa, like the Swahili were experts in this strategy. Similitude was used to "achieve commercial ends attracting customers by evidencing cultural similarity".[41] Prestholdt follows the trends of consumerism and the consumption of user goods such as textiles, and their direct effect on the culture of the trader. What would be more appealing to a foreign trader than to find a trade partner who speaks to you using words that you are familiar with rather than in his own tongue? Because of this strategy of appeal and Arabic would have been used just for the purpose to make a Swahili more attractive to the Arabian trader. This would explain why not only words of trade are borrowed from Arabic, but words of personal emotion, and curtesy, as well.

Despite the Arabic language having no substantial effect on Swahili grammar, and only limited influence on the vocabulary commonly used by people of the coast, the illusion that Kiswahili is genetically related to Arabic has had a profound effect on the formation of modern identities. Like in the Caribbean, this illusion allows acquiescent African people to feign access to the supposed glory of the imperialist.

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[41] Prestholdt, Jeremy. *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008, p. 28.

CHAPTER 6: SWAHILI UTAMAWAZO & BECOMING ARAB

The cruelest thing slavery and colonization did to the Africans was to
destroy their memory of what they were before foreign contact
– John Henrik Clarke

Mark Horton in his chapter of Donald Whitcomb's edited text *Changing of Social Identity with the Spread of Islam* discusses how much of the scholarship produced on Swahili cultural identity gives a 'static' account of Swahili social dynamics with attention only given to the social developments within the past two centuries.[1] Furthermore, the dynamic relationships and expressions of Swahili culture between regional populations is often overlooked. More importantly, the relationship that many of these coastal communities had with other African societies is often neglected in the discussion of the development of Swahili identity.

In this discussion, it is important to remember that 'becoming Arab' is a hyperbolic statement. To 'become an Arab' has less to do with transformation of a population's genetic identity, and more to do with consciousness and the conceptualization of ontology. To many westerners an East African 'Arab' may even be indistinguishable to a self-described African. The Swahili people are not an extension of an Arab diaspora, and at no point in time should be conceptualized as such. James de Vere Allen confronting this issue explains that,

> Swahili after all are not Arabs, and I shall be arguing that a great many of
> them never have been; and although it was at some periods fashionable to

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[1] Horton Mark. "Islam, Archeology, and Swahili Identity", *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives,* edited by Donald Whitcomb, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 68

sprinkle Arabic terms in Swahili and literature it is certain that at any given moment only a proportion of Swahilis would have understood the Arabic language. Historians accordingly have no right to 'arabise' Swahilis by writing them in terms and by names which imply they were indistinguishable from Arabs.[2]

This reality is addressed, perhaps not within Swahili scholarship produced by the same acquiescent Africans who politically benefit from alienating themselves from other Africans, but from these other African communities themselves. Many of the Sabaki peoples, the Pokomo and Malankote especially, share a common ancestry and oral traditions with many of the Swahili people on the coast recognize the intrsinic cultural bond between them. Derek Nurse during his research expedition along the Tana River had a Pokomo elder question him "*Pokomo si hawa waswahili* (Aren't the Pokomo Swahili)?"[3] Ten years earlier in 1973 Robert Louis Bunger conducting research on the process of Islamization within the Pokomo community reported a similar statement. Bunger noted that,

> The upper Pokomo and thus the Malankote tend to deal with the Swahili as equals, even claiming that they are really Pokomo who have forgotten their origins.[4]

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[2] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. xii

[3] Nurse, Derek. "History from Linguistics: The Case of the Tana River", *History in Africa,* Vol. 10, 1983, Cambridge University Press, p. 223

[4] Bunger, Robert Louis. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* Eastern African Studies, Syracuse University, 1973, p. 25

The Swahili people didn't forget who they are, but instead, chose to forget. James Vere

Allen's research on the cultural origin of the Swahili people echoes this sentiment. Allen

explains,

> The African element of [Swahili] cultural patrimony was first modified by
> Islam and later distorted until many Swahilis themselves lost sight of it
> while some non-Swahili denied it altogether.[5]

Although Islam had been present in parts of East Africa since shortly after the time when

the Arab followers of Muhammad converted and the first *hijrah*, it wasn't until the

nineteenth century with establishment of Omani political and economic dominance of the

Eastern Indian Ocean that the social landscape began to change. Derek Nurse and Thomas

Spear, along with several other scholars within the last several decades have begun to

recognize the superficial construction of the social identity of the political elite along the

Swahili coast. Nurse and Spear comment,

> As social relations change, genealogies are manipulated to reflect the actual
> situation, thus explain the widespread transformation of Swahili family
> names into Arab ones during the nineteenth century.[6]

These family names, or *nisbas,* were a source of a family's pride. The Arabic term *nisba,*

is used more as a sort of adjective that describes an individual's ancestral origin and cultural

affiliation. In adopting the *nisbas* of prominent Arab immigrant, these Swahili people

brought themselves closer to the cultural, ethnic, and political epicenter of the Islamic

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[5] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 1

[6] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 30

world. Many of these Swahili would change their cultural identities adopted the *nisbas* of *sharifs,* the descendants of the Arab Prophet Muhammad.[7]

The names that people carry, are given, or more importantly choose for themselves, are often reflective of their cultural and political disposition. A name change is a declaration of this position, indictive of a paradigm shift, and reflective of the ontological center of the individual. This change in the social identity of the Swahili elite does not represent a true change in their *asili,* as the foundation of their culture and ancestry continued to be rooted within an African cultural paradigm. Instead, this manipulation of their social identities constitutes a dramatic change in their worldview *utamawazo,* how they understood themselves and the world around them.

The Disruption of Inter-communal Political Reciprocity

In the fourteenth century Ibn Battuta celebrated the virtue and piety of the Swahili people of Kilwa for their commitment to *jihad,* religiously fueled violence against non-Muslim neighboring people.[8] By the nineteenth century, Swahili participation in the Islamic world became one of the primary motivating economic and political factors along the East African coast. Specifically, the participation of Swahili elite families in the enslavement of African people in the nineteenth century distorted the nature of African

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[7] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 22

[8] Battuta, Ibn. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa,* edited by Said Hamdun & Noel King, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010, p. 22

economies near or along the Swahili coastal corridor. Mark Horton in his analysis of how Islam changed Swahili social identity comments that,

> Widespread slavery seems to have developed in the late eighteenth century in response to Omani settlement on the coast, and the expansion of European slaving interests (mostly French and Portuguese) into the Indian Ocean. Before this time, there is very little evidence that the Swahili kept slaves, beyond the occasional domestic.[9]

In the time between Ibn Battuta's journey to Kilwa in 1332 CE to the 'long nineteenth century'[10], Swahili urban societies had shifted to a philosophy of complete alienation from Africans in the interior, organizing their societies to the determent of their neighbors, and losing themselves in the pursuit of fostering relations with foreign powers. Before the establishment of an Arab sultanate in Zanzibar, the last traditional king (*mfalme*) of *Unguja Ukuu* (Greater Zanzibar) Hassan II "came to an agreement with the Omani sultans that, in return for annual tribute, they would leave him with internal authority over his people and not enslave them".[11] Following this sixteenth century agreement, indigenous power began to wane. At the mercy of the Omani Sultante, no longer was the *Mfalme* of Zanzibar a supreme ruler. During this process, when political and economic power was transferred from an indigenous center to an external people, many in the merchant class began to change their *nisbas,* or family names to better align their ontology with the new

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[9] Horton Mark. "Islam, Archeology, and Swahili Identity", *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives,* edited by Donald Whitcomb, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 68

[10] A European historical term/concept used to convey the trends of history more naturally than just the restrictive definitions of a standard calendar. The only nineteenth-century usually refers to the hundred and twenty-five-year period between 1789-1914 CE.

[11] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 42

Arab ruling party.[12] Although the Swahili may have slowly begun to lose much of their cultural memory in regard to their traditional *asili,* many of the groups the interacted with did not. Nor did these groups forget the betrayal of the coastal people. The Kalindi Lower Pokomo specifically "have not forgotten the fierce Witu raiders of the 1880's and still hold this against the Swahili".[13]

As evidenced by this discussion the relationship of relatively peaceful co-existence between the Africans along the coast and the interior ultimately begins to change with the adoption of foreign cosmologies and epistemes by African people. It is not until the adoption of Christianity and Islam, and the coming of crusades and jihads on the continent, that African societies regularly waged war in an effort to dominate their neighbors and convert them to a worldview that is framed as universal.

There is little evidence that in this early history of Africa, before the adoption of Christianity by King Ezana of Axum in the fourth century or the adoption of Islam as a faith system did traditional African societies to habitually wage war against their neighbors for the purpose of rank subjugation and cultural conversion. Firstly, most of their neighbors operated out of the same socio-cultural paradigm already. Even a relative sense of cultural continuity existed with some of their Arabian allies who still practiced their traditional religion and continued to venerate their own ancestors.[14] The Kisimoyo version of the

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[12] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 22

[13] Bunger, Robert Louis. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* Eastern African Studies, Syracuse University, 1973, p. 25

[14] Hoyland, Robert G. *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, Routledge, 2002, p. 139

Kitab al-Zunuj recognizes this fact stating that when the Arabs first began to arrive in East Africa

> […] they agreed that there should be love and friendship between them, and the Zunuj became familiar with the Arabs in a way that has not weakened up till now. They [the Arabs] did not impose rules upon them [the Africans] at all because in those years Arabs were idolaters.[15]

Another version of the manuscript copied for Alice Werner in 1926 adds a few additional details after this section, stating that "some of the laws of the Arabs corresponded with their [African] laws".[16] Along with this notion that these pre-Islamic Arabs who first arrived in East Africa were considered idolaters, meaning that they kept idols and totems, there is another interesting implication of this statement. It is implied here that is that it is not until the adoption of Islam by the Arabs that they became chauvinistic, imposing their culture, perspectives, and theological interpretations upon East African people. This leads naturally to the second point, given the personal nature of African spirituality and ancestor worship in general, there is little to be gained spirituality by the act of proselytization, having another group worship your ancestors. Thirdly, as Kusimba had articulated, African societies would have nothing to gain by the rank subjugation of a neighboring people who utilized different a different set of environmental resources. The land used for farming by agriculturalist is not necessarily the same land that is used as hunting grounds by hunter gather communities.

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[15] Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. "Kitab al-Zunuj (K)", *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020, p. 31

[16] Ritchie, James; & Sigvard von Sicard. "Kitab al-Zunuj (L)", *An Azanian Trio: Three East African Arabic Historical Documents,* Brill, 2020,p. 72

Along the coast, where mercantile societies developed it was generally understood that war and bloody conflict were bad for business when your potential trade partners could easily find a more peaceful place to do trade.[17] Because of these socio-environmental factors many of the Sabaki cultures developed without war being an organizing principle for their societies. Cheikh Anta Diop's Two Cradle Theory further elucidates the socio-environmental factors which led to the development of heterarchical intercommunal reciprocity in Africa, and the development of war and conflict as an organizing principle for many Eurasian societies.

Furthermore, there is much evidence that coastal Bantu societies were relatively ill-prepared for war, given the nature of their relationships to one another, and thusly relied on foreign allies during times of crisis.[18] For most of Swahili history up until their unwilling incorporation into the Sultanate of Zanzibar (1856-1964) the towns and cities that the Swahili people inhabited on the coast co-existed independent of a unified governing structure.

> Until then they formed a series of mercantile towns, most with a king (*mfalme*) or queen (*malkia*). Lamu was governed by its patriciate and had no single ruler, a system that lasted until the turn of this century. Country-towns have had their own organs of internal government.[19]

The political presence of the Omani Arabs fundamentally changed the political dynamic on the coast. However, centuries prior to the intervention of the Omani Arabs against the

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[17] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p.40

[18] Huxley, Elspeth. "The Book of the Quarter: The Invaders of east Africa", *Journal of the Roya; African Society,* Vol. 38, No. 152, 1939, p. 350

[19] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p.41

Portugues on behalf of some of the Swahili kings, the cultural dynamic within the cities began to change. With the widespread adoption of Islam by the *waungwana*, that in the form of jihads and slave raids directed at other African communities in the interior did conflict between communities became an organizing principle in coastal societies and driving force in coastal economies.

The Epic of Fumo Liyongo, one of the more reputable stories coming out of the Swahili oral tradition, in part deals with the ontological shock of this conversation and the changing of how African people interact and should interact with one another. There are many versions of this epic, most of the variation stemming from the political disposition of the orator. However, in every version, including the Zanzibari abridged version transcribed by Edward Steere in 1870, Liyongo who was part of the Bauri clan, and the son and heir to the king of an early Swahili city. This city is thought have been located on the delta of the Tana River, close to the area occupied by the Pokomo people, and just north of the other major Swahili city of Mombasa. According to Steere's transcription of the story, this was the city of Shanga.[20] Kitula King'ei, a professor in the Department of Kiswahili and African Languages at Kenyatta University notes,

> Shagga (or Shaka) appears in a number of old Arab charts as a richly populated area east or south-east of Faza island. Oral tradition places Shagga city on Pate island before the 13th century. Most probably, Shagga is identical to Shungwaya, a Bantu settlement founded around the 7th century (c. 689). This is the traditional habitation area of the Swahili and other coastal and highland Bantus according to many historians.[21]

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[20] Steere, Edward. "The Story of Liongo: A Tell of the Swahili People", *A Treasury of African Folklore,* edited by Harold Courlander, Marlowe & Company, 1996, p. 583
    Various translations of the epic refer to this city Shaka or Shagga.

[21] King'ei, Kitula. "Historical and Folkloric Elements in Fumo Liyongo's Epic. *Folklore* Vol. 16, Folk Beliefs and Media Group of ELM, Tartu, 2001, p. 81

Eddward Steere begins his rendition by noting that the story takes place while Shanga "was still a flourishing city".[22] This comment indicates that Shanga existing as a center of prosperity is comprehended as something noteworthy on the event calendar in the cultural history/memory of the Swahili people. Steere does not confirm or deny that Shanga is corelated with old Shungwaya. Liyongo's sister after having been married during the course of Liyongo's tale is said to have moved to Zanzibar where her descendants still live.[23]

The central conflict of this story centers around the Liyongo's betrayal at the hands of the coastal elite, the city folks, and Liyongo's brother Mringwari. After Fumo Liyongo's capture and subsequent escape into the interior he finds refuge with another group of African people. Given the geography of where the story is set, these people are presumably the Pokomo who also recognize Liyongo as a cultural hero. This story juxtaposes the ethics and changing of values between Africans in the interior and the Islamified Africans in the urban centers. The final poem (*utendi*) in this epic, composed by Swahili poet Muhammad bin Abubakar bin Umar al-Bakari in 1880, details that even after being restored to his rightful position as king of Shanga, Liyongo's power-hungry son[24] socialized in the new cultural dynamic of the urban centers, and manipulated by Mringwari, is persuaded by the

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[22] Steere, Edward. "The Story of Liongo: A Tell of the Swahili People", *A Treasury of African Folklore,* edited by Harold Courlander, Marlowe & Company, 1996, p. 583

[23] *Ibid*

[24] The mother of Liyongo's son is said to have been an Oromo woman.
   King'ei, Kitula. "Historical and Folkloric Elements in Fumo Liyongo's Epic. *Folklore* Vol. 16, Folk Beliefs and Media Group of ELM, Tartu, 2001, p. 79

rival city of Pate's Sultan to kill Liyongo.[25] Liyongo having been felled by the enchanted blade of an assassin was killed. The townspeople then took Liyongo's body and buried his body in the village of Ozi, on the banks of the Tana River.[26] Reportedly his grave can still be found in Ozi. The historical chronicle of Pate relates how soon after Liyongo's death, Liyongo's kingdom was conquered by the "pro-Arab-Wangwana" kingdom of Pate.[27]

An underlying theme in many of the poems that constitute the epic of Fumo Liyongo deals with the ontological shock and alienation of members of urbanized communities from traditional and ethical behavior. These individuals are seen as conniving, manipulative, and generally deceitful in their actions against Liyongo in their bid for political power. The coming of Islam had disrupted the political and social dynamic in early Swahili societies, as old traditions were challenged, and new players with foreign allies and loyalties attempted to wrestle political, economic, and cultural dominance away from the bearers of tradition. Even according to other early Swahili sources such as the *Kitab al-Zunuj* the political disturbances that lead to the destruction of Shungwaya and the Sabaki migration southward stem from the conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia.

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[25] King'ei, Kitula. "Historical and Folkloric Elements in Fumo Liyongo's Epic. *Folklore* Vol. 16, Folk Beliefs and Media Group of ELM, Tartu, 2001, p. 79

[26] Steere, Edward. "The Story of Liongo: A Tell of the Swahili People", *A Treasury of African Folklore,* edited by Harold Courlander, Marlowe & Company, 1996, p. 587

[27] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins*, Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 204

The Case Against Swahili Exceptionalism

In his text *The Destruction of African Civilization* Chancellor Williams argues that there are pre-conditions for a society to progress and develop into a civilization. Firstly, a people must become famine-free and become sedentary; Leaders of the community through diplomacy must engage in nation building with neighboring people, societies, and fragmented groups; There must be the intentional development of a national consciousness; The society must maintain a strong army for defense; and lastly, the rule of law and justice must apply equally to all members of society.[28] Williams suggest that if these conditions are not a society will begin to decline.

Williams affirms that there is "nothing mystical" about how a society develops beyond meeting these pre-conditions which puts their society on a trajectory to develop along certain lines.[29] Additionally, just because a society does not meet all of these pre-conditions or does not develop along the lines of an urbanized society does not make them an uncivilized, or uncultured people. This reductionist thinking promotes ethnic exceptionalism as well as the *casus belli*[30] for a "civil" society to dominate another society in the name of spreading civilization.

Despite not meeting several of these pre-conditions, Swahili 'civilization' has been the topic of research and debate for decades. The introduction of the institution of slavery

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[28] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, pp. 53-4

[29] *Ibid,* p. 54

[30] Translated from Latin: 'occasion for war'

during the Islamic era complicated the maintenance of human equality in East Africa. The Swahili cities while able to muster levies for smaller military operations, such as raids or jihads against smaller communities in the interior, did not maintain large armies. Additionally, the classical Swahili had no real sense of national consciousness between the various urban centers. What did exist was a relative sense of shared consciousness. John Middleton in his text *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* comments that,

> The various members of the settlements are all conscious of being Swahili, members of one "civilization" that in their view possessed by no other than Swahili. Every town regards itself as unique, is ever-changing according to its own logic, and affected by the world outside in ways particular to itself. Within each town's form of the common "civilization", there is continual difference and conflict that are among its central qualities.[31]

Because of this logic, the nature of mercantile societies, and the essence of political independence within the Swahili city states a sense of cultural exceptionalism began to develop within Swahili societies in regard to other Swahili people in other cities. Within the Swahili cities the socio-economic elites went to great lengths to differentiate themselves from their competitors in local and international trade. So much so that their desire to be seen as 'exceptional' made the value of certain prized objects and artifacts insatiable as these elites were constantly looking for the next best thing to make them stand out from other elites.[32] The emergence and development of regional and class cultural

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[31] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 199

[32] Prestholdt, Jeremy. *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization,* University of California Press, 2008, p. 68

differences became one of the primary motivating factors in which "Swahilis themselves most often use to declare others 'not real Swahilis' (*si waSwahili haswa*).[33]

Along with a sustained effort to differentiate themselves from other Swahili people, after the Islamic era, there was also a sustained effort to distance themselves from other neighboring African people in the interior. This myth of cultural exceptionalism was sustained through discourse which supported the relative economic success of Swahili societies on the basis of foreign influences and the perception of cultural, ethnic, and even at times, racial superiority over other African peoples.

> The Swahili have long stressed differences between themselves and their neighbors, emphasizing their putative descent from Persian and Arab immigrants and their own "civilized" ways (uungwana).[34]

It also cannot be understated how the culture of the Islamic enslavement of African people changed the cultural dynamic between African people. To identify as African/Black often left open the possibility that an individual's ancestors had been enslaved, where to identify as an Asiatic was essentially a declaration that one's ancestry was comprised of free individuals and part of a social elite. F. J. Berg comments on the dynamic of Swahili people embracing a fabricated Asiatic identity in the stead of an indigenous and authentic identity, noting that,

> Generally, 'Shirazi' implies noble or at least non-servile ancestry, and some of its present popularity on parts of the East African coast is attributable to rejection of the pejorative connotations often associated with 'Swahili'.[35]

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[33] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins*, Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 2

[34] Spear, Thomas. "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 257

[35] Berg, F.J. "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900", *The Journal of African History,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 1968, p. 36

This dynamic which paired perceived heritage with social status would inform racial and ethnic identity along the Swahili corridor.

Much of this difference that emphasizes the disparities between the Swahili people from one city to another and from the coast to the interior is largely superficial or wholly fabricated. As will be discussed further in chapter five many of the Swahili elite saw their social identity as malleable and would often change due to external pressures in Swahili society. Due to these same pressures, the Swahili elite would fictionalize their history in the recording of the city-state's historical chronicles.[36]

The Chronicle of Kilwa is such an example. Unlike the traditional historical narratives of Mombasa who attempt to balance a notion of Muslim influence with Shehe Mvita and an indigenous African origin with the community being founded by the African queen Mwana Mkisi, and ancestor the some of the most important families *Thenashara Taifa* (The Twelve Nations),[37] the Kilwa Chroncile opted to fully embrace exogenous notions of their origins. According to the Arabic version of this chronicle, presented to the British consul in 1877 by Sultan Barghash bin Said of Zanzibar[38], in the tenth century of the common era, Ali ibn al-Hassan Shirazi from Persia and his seven sons were said to have been the historical founders of Kilwa, after having bought the island from a Bantu king named Almuli.[39] These fabled Persians then fathered children with enslaved African

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[36] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 174

[37] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins.* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 205

[38] Coppola, Anna Rita. "Swahili Oral Traditions and Chronicles", *The Swahili World,* Routledge, 2017, p. 148

[39] *Ibid,* p. 150

women to begin the ruling dynasty of this powerful Swahili city.[40] Most historians

recognize many elements of this story to be legendary in nature rather than historical.

> It may be objected that the *Kilwa Chronicle* gives a tenth-century date for
> the 'arrival' of the Shirazis; but that date is merely an attempt to capture for
> East African Shirazis the magical power of the Buwayhid dynasty of Shiraz
> in the tenth century.[41]

James de Vere Allen in his text *Swahili Origin* suggests that Ali ibn al-Hassan Shirazi is

presumably the 'Ali of Shungwaya' who appears in the *mtepe*[42] tradition.[43] If this is the

case then Ali and his family were likely to have either been members of the royal family,

or distinguished courtiers, perhaps wealthy merchants or craftsmen in old Shungwaya near

the Horn of Africa.[44]

The purpose of this historical fabrication was to distance themselves from African

culture and society and to legitimate their state through Islam and Asiatic descent.[45]

According to Horton and Middleman in their text *The Swahili*,

> the descent from a noble Islamic family and an Abyssinian (Ethiopian) slave
> 'explains' why the rulers were both black but also with royal Muslim

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[40] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 56

[41] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins*, Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 183

[42] *Mtepe* is the Swahili word for boat, and is often associated within historical literature with a specific type of vessel that ceased to be produced after the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th Century

   A.H.J. Prins. "Uncertainties in Coastal Cultural History: The Ngalawa and the Mtepe" *Tanganyika Notes and Records* No.55, 1959, pp.204-214

[43] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins*, Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 188

[44] *Ibid*

[45] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 174

descent; the giving of cloth to the ruler made him 'civilized' and so his daughter became marriageable.[46]

In this way the *waungwana*, the Swahili social elite, could still claim to be *wenyeji asili*, possessing the legitimacy, the culture, and ethnic phenotypes of the original African people, while claiming these same qualities with the foreign Asiatic cultures, and creating the illusion of proximity to Arabia, cultural epicenter of Islam.[47] It is noted in the Zanzibari memoirs of Ali Sultan Issa and Seif Sharif Hamad which were edited together by Thomas Burgess that this trend of ontological alienation has continued into contemporary times, and was exacerbated by the British colonial regime:

> Many Africans claimed Shiarzi identity to obscure their slave ancestry, to mark their status as landowners, or gain access to World War II rations distributed by the colonial state along ethnic lines. To complicate matters further, the Shirazi usually regard themselves as primarily of Persian ancestry.[48]

Despite these efforts to alienate themselves from other African people and the establishment of more hostile relationship African culture and people would remain intrinsically linked to these coastal communities. This discussion of the cultural continuity amongst these various Bantu groups presents itself as a case against Swahili exceptionalism. The *waungwana* may have attempted to rewrite their history to legitimize themselves in the eyes of Asiatic foreigners, but like the Mijikenda their understanding of institutional development stems from their ancestral past and not their imagined heritage.

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[46] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 56

[47] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 174

[48] Burgess, Thomas G.; et al. *Race, Revolution, and the Struggle for Human Rights in Zanzibar: The Memoirs of Ali Sultan Issa and Seif Sharif Hamad,* Ohio University Press, 2009, p. 19

A fallacy which has been dismissed in virtually all grounded scholarship, but still has embedded itself within the dominate narrative of Swahili society that somehow the coastal communities were politically, culturally, and economically isolated from the African communities of the interior. Matthew Pawlowicz and Adria LaViolette's research of Swahili historical chronicles from an archaeological perspective demonstrates that

> non-Swahili African groups, whose pasts have been dismissed as prehistory, played critical roles in shaping historical outcomes on the coast. Such contributions complicate the dominant narratives about the Swahili world that emphasize Swahili difference[49] p. 118 Swahili historical chronicles

Thomas Spear's text on the Mijikenda people who lived in the Kayas just beyond the coastline demonstrates that "The people of the coast and the interior were in close and interdependent contact with one another".[50] Around the tenth century, during the early development of many of the Swahili urban centers on the coast, when permanent houses were first being built, while certainly engaging in important international trade, the main source of wealth that served as the economic impetus of urban development in these cities was the trade of pottery, cloth, and importantly iron with the communities of the hinterland.[51] By the year 1100 CE there may have been more than a dozen of these early Swahili settlements who were home to relatively small populations.[52] According the Al-

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[49] Pawlowicz, Matthew; and Adria La Violette. "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective: Bridging History, Archaeology, Coast, and Hinterland in Southern Tanzania", *The Death of Prehistory,* ed. Peter Ridgway Schmidt, & Stephen A. Mrozowski, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 118

[50] Spear, Thomas. *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978, p. i

[51] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 70

[52] *Ibid*

Masudi, who is frequently referred to as the tenth century "Herodotus of the Arabs", identifies the population of a Swahili city that he visited, referred to as the island of Kanbalu, as "a mixed population of Muslims and Zanj idolators".[53] This account paints a different picture than the idealized account that these cities were founded by foreign settlers. These Muslims of the early settlements were without a doubt mainly the economic elite. Islam for most of African history served as a court religion and practiced intermittently by the general population. Al-Masudi adds that

> These people have no religious law; their kings rule by custom and by political expedience […] Every man worships what he pleases, be it a plant, an animal, or a mineral.[54]

It is clear by Masudi's testimony that during the tenth century traditional African culture and religion was still used as an organizing principle in early Swahili society. Elements of traditional African culture such as animism, the belief that all things possess a spirit[55]; animatism, the belief that all things are animated by a cosmic force[56]; cultural and religious tolerance and the absence of religious law all seem to be present within these early settlements.

Within traditional African societies, all beings, including, but not limited to humans, animals and plants exist in a formalized cosmological order. Although this could

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[53] Al-Masudi. "Al-Masudi", *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century,* ed. G.S.P.Freeman- Grenville, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 14

[54] Al-Masudi. "Al-Masudi", *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century,* ed. G.S.P.Freeman- Grenville, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 16

[55] Asante, Molefi Kete. "Animism"*,* Encyclopedia of African Religions, ed. Ama Mazama & Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, p. 58

[56] Asante, Molefi Kete. "Animatism"*,* Encyclopedia of African Religions, ed. Ama Mazama & Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, p. 57

be seen as a hierarchal structure, elements of African heterarchy exist within how this system is conceptualized. In this cosmological order, these spiritual beings exist in reciprocal relationships with each other; the deities and spirits must be cultivated, humans exist with nature rather than in competition with it, and importantly, within this system all things in existence are comprised of spiritual energy. This energy is referred to as the 'vital force'. Asante notes that,

> One cannot grant any ethical or moral quality to this active spirit because it is neither good nor evil, neither right nor wrong, but everywhere present and therefore inherently dangerous if it is violated.[57]

This neutral vital force is what Placide Temples believed was at the core of African existence, Marimba Ani functionalized the vital force as *utamaroho,* research regarding the cosmology of central and southern Bantu groups begun to discuss this vital force as *ntu,* in Kemet it is *ka,* the Akans recognize it has the *kra,* and it is remarkably similar to the Igbo concepts of *ike* and *chi.*[58] This vital force is what animates all life and what connects all beings in existence.

This cosmology, referred to as *ntu* cosmology, was a foundational to traditional African philosophies of social organization and their construction of ontology. Shortly, after al-Masudi's visit to the Swahili corridor, new cultural epistemologies began to appear along the eastern coast of Africa, altering the culturally structured worldview of African people. Kevin Shillington finds it unusual the al-Masudi would find very many Muslims

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[57] Asante, Molefi Kete. "Animatism", *Encyclopedia of African Religions,* edited by Ama Mazama and Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, p. 57

[58] Nehusi, Kimani. "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism Before Environmentalist", *African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance,* ed. Mammo Muchie and Phindil Lukhele-Olorunju, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013, p. 368

during the period that he traveled to East Africa, stating " a century later it was more common, as Muslim influence increased".[59]

Between 970 CE and 1050 CE during this early period of urban development and growth on the coast, there became an increase demand for African products such as ivory and gold by Fatimid Egypt and what was left of Byzantine Europe.[60] This increased demand brought an increase in foreign attention to African port settlements. Before the year 1100 CE there is no evidence for the construction of any mosque along the Swahili coast. Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear state that therefore "we must assume that the early Swahili were not Muslims".[61] However after this increased demand for access to African ports and goods, the period between 1050 CE and 1200 CE saw the expansion of not only Muslim influence in East Africa but also in the immigration of Muslim men from the Persian Gulf and Southern Arabia, who would then marry into prominent and established African families.[62] After this first millennia as the Swahili city states continued to grow aspects of cultural dynamic would continue to change. Kusimba writes that

> What is apparent is that the earliest Swahili communities were in contact
> with other ethnic communities, and a number of these people were
> assimilated in the formation of Swahili cities. Before the eighteenth century,
> many Coastal towns were primarily inhabited by African peoples drawn
> from kaleidoscopic ethnicities of the region. The end product was a distinct

[59] Shillington, Kevin. *History of Africa,* Third Edition, Palgrave Macmillian, 2012, p. 135

[60] *Ibid*

[61] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, 70

[62] Shillington, Kevin. *History of Africa,* Third Edition, Palgrave Macmillian, 2012, p. 135

> comity united by an urban sophistication rooted in Islamic culture, steeped in a lucrative maritime commerce.[63]

Despite this early change in the cultural dynamic of the Swahili towns it is during the eighteenth century, when the Omani Arabs begin to dominate trade and the political landscape of the Swahili corridor, that the Swahili coast experiences the greatest episode of foreign cultural influence.[64] It is during this period when Europeans begin to collect Swahili narratives about their history.

> It was then that great numbers of Arabic loans words entered the Swahili language, architectural motifs began to imitate Arab ones, and coastal Islam was revitalized by immigrant *sharifs*[65] from southern Arabia, giving a more Arabian tone to Swahili society.[66]

This change in the cultural dynamic is not reflective of a true cultural change or an alteration of their cultural *asili*, but rather a change in their worldview. As previously discussed with the *Epic of Fumo Liyongo* demonstrates the ontological shock that African people had to navigate. This ontological shock was part of the change in the cultural dynamic along the Swahili corridor and played an important role in the construction of African identity along the coast.

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[63] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 81

[64] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 81

[65] The word *Sharif* comes from the Arabic word meaning 'noble' or 'highborn'. It is used to refer to the descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband the fourth of the rightly guided caliphs of the Rashidun Caliphate Ali ibn Abi Talib.

[66] Nurse, Derek; & Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 81

The First Families & The Formation of Shirazi Identity

As Omani political influence grew in the Indian Ocean so did the benefits of claiming Arabic identity. Early European scholarship, particularly from British scholars, who enjoyed constructing clearly defined racial and ethnic categories found issue with how many along the Swahili corridor. While clearly African in both appearance and in certain cultural mannerisms and customs, the Swahili people who interacted with these British colonial administrators and research gave a distorted account of who they are. The Swahili elite, 'glorified' their supposed Arab ancestry.[67] This distorted account of Swahili ancestry, which for many years was uncritically accepted by westerners alienated not just the Swahili elite but all Swahili people from the African cultural paradigm. There is a colloquial saying that was recorded in Zanzibar that indicates that Swahili people were aware of the dubious nature of falsely changing ones identity.

Mtaka nyingi nasaba hupata mwingi msiba.
He who boast his ancestry unduly will bring much trouble upon himself.[68]

The meaning behind this proverb implies that a person who fabricates who they are will eventually be exposed and fraudulent ancestry exposed. Perhaps this proverb is in response to the nineteenth century trend of Swahili individuals changing their *nisbas* to attach themselves to the legacy and supposed glory of Arab led Islamic imperialism. For it is surely better to be the ones who conquer rather than the ones who are conquered. Ibn

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[67] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 4

[68] Farsi, S.S. *Swahili Sayings from Zanzibar,* vol. 1, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1982, p. 30

Khaldun, the 14th century Arab historian writes about trend in the context of the Arabization of peoples by Islamic forces. Khaldun vaunts,

> The vanquished always want to imitate the victor in his distinctive characteristics, his dress, his occupation and all his other conditions and customs. The reason for this is that the soul always sees perfection in the person who is superior to it and to whom it is subservient.[69]

The Shirazi people of Zanzibar are one of the main ethnic groups on the island. Historical they have represented powerful families who have and still dominate political and economic life. Like the ethnic moniker of 'Arab' along the Swahili corridor the identity of Shirazi must also be unpacked. James de Vere Allen confronts this issue of identity commenting,

> The next problem was what to call those residual Swahilis who, for one reason or another, could not plausibly be called 'Arabs and could not be fitted into any African tribal group either. A solution to this was found in the label 'Shirazi'. 'Shirazi' sounded, in some obscure way, 'purer' and less African than 'Swahili', with connotations of Persian ancestry at some period in the remote past.[70]

The construction of this new identity which drew upon distant Persian ancestry is one of the core components of the 'Shirazi myth'. This myth appears often in early twentieth century writings concerning the origins of the people of Kilwa, Pate and Zanzibar specifically. It wasn't until later in the century that researchers began to question the validity of these assertions. In Thomas Spear's article "Early Swahili History Reconsidered", he explains that,

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[69] Khaldun, Ibn. *The Muqadimma: An Introduction to History,* translated by F. Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 116

[70] Allen, James de Vere. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & the Shungwaya Phenomenon,* Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 4

It is unlikely that these traditions were literally true, however, for there is little archaeological, cultural, or linguistic evidence of Persian influence on Swahili, and the role of Shiraz in Indian Ocean trade had already declined before Shirazi began to appear in Swahili traditions. Not only that, but many of the traditions state that the Shirazi came not from Shiraz, but from Shungwaya, the legendary Swahili homeland along the Kenyan-Somali coast. Those who claimed to be Shirazi, thus, were probably early Swahili who migrated south to establish themselves as the first families, or *waungwvana*, of the major towns of the coast. Given the common practice of adopting the names of prestigious places as family names, or nisbas, they must have taken the name Shiraz as their nisba, just as many were to later take names from Oman in the nineteenth century.[71]

It is more than likely that this myth was created in an effort to create cultural proximity to their Asian visitors and business partners, despite not actually being able to claim Arab ancestry outright. Shiraz, an area located in Persia, is close enough culturally and geographically to Arabia to create the sense of familiarity, but far enough from the actual Arabs to actually know better; assuming the Arabs actually cared. This manufactured sense of cultural proximity to the Asiatic peoples of the Middle East would also play a role in distancing themselves from other Africans.

The Shirazi traditions, through the historical chronicles of the city-states, also detail a dual role that the Shirazi people claim. While claiming foreign origins, these traditions also assert that these initial Shirazi immigrants were the founders of some of the most important of the Swahili city states. Thomas Spear states,

The Shirazi traditions also relate how the Shirazi paid tribute to the local inhabitants, married their daughters, and had some by them, who then became the legitimate rulers of the town through their dual inheritance. The Shirazi traditions are thus elegant models of the historical development of

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[71]Spear, Thomas. *Early Swahili History Reconsidered.* The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 259

Swahili societies. To be a Shirazi was to be a real Swahili who settled along the coast[72]

In this way the Shirazi could still claim access to the supposed glory of Persian conquerors while claiming an indigenous legitimacy as *wenyeji asili,* essentially the original people of the land.[73] The historical chronicles of Kilwa elucidate the process in which the Shirazi are able to claim this type of dual heritage. In the chronicle of Kilwa al-Hassan Shirazi and his seven sons traveled to Kilwa, which at this time supposedly was still connected to the mainland by a land bridge that only appeared during the low tide. Al-Hassan was the son of the *Emir*[74] of Shirazi and an enslaved Ethiopian woman from Abyssinia. Mark Horton and John Middleton state that this story explains why the descendants of al-Hassan and the Shirazi rulers were "both black but also with royal Muslim descent".[75] After arriving in Kilwa, they, al-Hassan and his sons were able to buy the island from the local king *Almuli* for the price of an unfathomable amount of Arabic cloth[76]. Horton and Middleton also suspect that by giving *Almuli,* who was likely an *Wangozi*[77], Arabic textiles, they had in a sense made *Almuli* 'civilized', which allowed al-Hassan's sons to marry *Almuli's*

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[72] Spear, Thomas. *Early Swahili History Reconsidered.* The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, p. 260

[73] Kusimba, Chapurukha. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States,* AltaMira Press, 1999, p. 174

[74] A Muslim, normally Arabic monarch

[75] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 56

[76] Apparently al-Hassan offered Almuli enough cloth to cover the circumference of the island, how much cloth was actually given is unknown.

[77] As previously discussed, the Kingozi is recognized as the linguistic precursor to Kiswahili, the speakers of Kingozi, the Wangozi are thusly implied to be wearers of animal skins.

daughters.[78]Eventually *Almuli,* either realizing that he had made a bad trade or more likely had been deceived, tried to take the island back. This resulted in al-Hassan and his sons destroying the land bridge, thusly turning Kilwa into a proper island.

Marriage as a Political and Spiritual Act

By marrying The Wangozi King *Almuli's* daughters to his sons, al-Hassan Shirazi established his progeny as *wenyeji asili.* Within most every African society, marriage and bearing children are seen as sacred responsibilities to ensure the cultivation of the community as well as the continuation of a spiritual life cycle of birth and reincarnation.[79] The infiltration of this socio-cultural dynamic by foreign peoples hungry to seize African power has been used. By marrying African women, the children of this union would have access to the power of Africa's matrilineal systems, while retaining access to the power within Eurasian patrilineal systems.[80]

> At the core of every Swahili village and town were a number of named series of male and female descendants, matrilineages that passed from mother to daughter and patrilineages of a father to son. Land was often held by corporate matrilineages of a mother and her daughters while political power, wealth, or status passed from fathers to sons.[81]

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[78] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 56

[79] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 25

[80] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 113

[81] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 23

By infiltrating this system, Al-Hassan, if his story is to be taken as a historical truth, affectively centralized political power and land ownership with his mixed-race progeny. Chancellor Williams in his text *The Destruction of Black Civilizations* outlines how Asiatic invaders infiltrated African institutions of power through "the 'New Brotherhood' of integration and amalgamation".[82] According to Williams,

> The African matrilineal system made the Asian route to the African throne easy when compared with the generally patrilineal system of the whites. All the Asian kings has to do, whether in Lower Egypt or on the Asian continent was to promote the marriage of royal males to the oldest sisters of African kings. The first-born male in such a marriage, though Afro-Asian, would be the number one candidate for the throne.[83]

As Kemet began to interact with more people outside of Africa the dynamic of ethnicity also changed. This is especially true beginning around the period of the Middle Kingdom of Kemet. Willians discusses that these foreigners:

> Always kept its own women "sacred" and secluded behind the walls of their homes. They were not allowed to go outside expect under guard. African women had no such restrictions or protection. They were fair game for the men of all races, and for them it was always open season.[84]

This type of cultural logic gives better context to Ibn Battuta's reaction to see the social agency of African women in west Africa. Furthermore, the result of this logic directly relates to the social realties along the Swahili coast. In virtually all of the Shirzai chronicles it is exclusively Persian men coming to East Africa and marrying the daughters of local

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[82] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 99

[83] *Ibid*

[84] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 73

kings. Alamin Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff acknowledge this in their joint text *Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People.* Despite trying to frame the Arabs as "liberal in matters of marriage" they recognize that this liberalness only extended to "'Arab' males with 'African' women, seldom the reverse".[85] This issue here isn't necessarily about social relationships, but rather the politics of power. Opoku Agyeman traces this trend throughout African history looking at the social phenomena of North African, Haiti, as well as the United States. In his analysis of the political dynamics of this type of cultural interaction, Opoku makes an important intervention when discussing the resulting children of these politicized unions. Agyemen clarifies,

> As we employ it here, the term "mulatto" designates a person of mixed blood – party of African ancestry and partly of a non-African race – who puts a premium on the non-African component of his or her blood while despising the Black portion.[86]

John Henrik Clarke, Chancellor Willaims, and Opoku Agyeman have all discussed the historical and political consequences of this sort of inter-personal clashing of cultures. Agyeman in the above quote is trying to create a distinction between individuals who happen to have mixed ancestry, and those people of mixed ancestry who weaponize their heritage at the detriment of African people. Chancellor Williams states that during antiquity "to prove how Asian they were, the mixed Egyptians made hatred of African a ritual, and tried to surpass the whites in raiding for the slaves in all African areas".[87] Just like in Kemet

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[85] Mazrui, Alamin M.; Ibrahim Noor Shariff. *The Swahili Idiom and Identity of an African People,* Africa World Press, 1993, p. 27

[86] Agyeman, Opoku. *The PanAfricanist Worldview,* The International University Press, 1985, p. 45

[87] Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.,* Third World Press, 1987, p. 75

in Kilwa the supposed Shirazi descendants of al-Hassan had made their hatred of Africans into a ritual with regular *jihads* against the Africans of the interior.[88] This ritual seems to have worked as their violent tradition gained the approval of Ibn Battuta.

The Shirazi tradition presents another alternative series of events that led to the development of Kilwa Sultanate. In this narrative the original kingdom in Kisiwani, the island of Kilwa, was founded by two African communities the Mtaka people and the "the people of Jasi from the Mranga tribe".[89] A third group, the Machinga people, led by Mrimba eventually joined these earlier groups. Eventually, according to this version of the tale Mrimba became the leader of Kisiwani.It should be noted here that Mrima, perhaps related to the name Mrimbaor the Swahili word *mlima* (hill), has also been used as a traditional name for the coast of East Africa near Zanzibar, with the peoples there collective referred to as *wamrima.*[90] Similar to the tale of *Almuli,* who might be the same individual as Mrimba, the Persians arrive and marry the daughter of the African king. Mrimba's daughter who is married to al-Hassan, in this version referred to as Sultan Ali, convinces Mrimba to leave Kisiwani for the mainland. After being convinced by his daughter to move to the mainland, Mrimba, like Almuli, resolves to wage war on the Persians, restricting their influence only to the islands off of the coast of the mainland. Eventually, as summarized by Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear:

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[88] Battuta, Ibn. *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa,* edited by Said Hamdun & Noel King, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010, p. 22

[89] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 70

[90] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 56

> Sultan Ali had a child by Mrimba's daughter, a son, who was called Sultan Mohamed bin Sultan Ali. He lived at home [at Kisiwani] until he reached man-hood, and then set off and went to the Ruvumba[91] to see his grandfather, the elder Mrimba. When he arrived, his grandfather handed over his power to him, his grandson. So Sultan Mahomed ruled.[92]

Despite the animosity between Mrimba and Sultan Ali al-Hassan Shirazi, the Persian dynasty eventually won, not by the conquest of armies but by the manipulation of the African family unit. After gaining access to Mrimba's power and resources Sultan Mohamed would then use these resources to extend his dynasties influences into other parts of the mainland. After Sultan Ali al-Hassan died, Sultan Mohamed would consolidate the power he inherited from his African and Persian inheritance for the benefit of non-African political power. The grandson of Mrimba, despite his African heritage, did not present himself as an African king *mfalme,* but instead as a Sultan like the foreign powers of Arabia and Persia.

The Shirazi traditions, which until relatively recently were strictly oral traditions, are not representative of a definite and absolute narrative of early Swahili history. Instead these traditions are reflective of the cultural memory and *utamawazo* of the Shirazi people who have passed down this version of events first orally and then in *ajami* script during either the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Thusly, these narratives reveal what

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[91] Ruvumba is the area inhabited by the Vumba people, the speakers of the Kivumba dialect of Kiswahili. This is the same area associated with the land/coast of Mrima. This gives credence to the idea that the term mrima is associated with the historical king of the area Mrimba.

Lambert, H.E. "Ki-Vumba, a Dialect of the Southern Kenya Coast", *Kampala: East African Swahili Committee,* Makere College, Cambridge University Press, 1957, p. 101

[92] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 71

the Shirazi think, or wish to believe about their ancestors and the people they interacted

with. James de Vere Allen reflects on this reality of the Swahili Chronicles. He laments,

> There is an unsavory image of coastal African kowtowing to newly-landed
> Asian settlers, yielding up their control of commerce without a murmur,
> meekly assisting them to construct great stone walls and houses, happily
> handing over their daughters in marriage, and supinely abdicating political
> power. This image dates from an earlier age in Western historiography, in
> which Africans always appeared as the passive recipients of new techniques
> and types of authority which were introduced from outside their continent.[93]

Version of events contained within the Swahili chronicles and retold by supposed mixed-

raced descendants of foreign settlers actively strips Africans of their agency and justified

their exploitation. The primary political difference between an African of mixed heritage

and the "mulatto" is that the latter embodies the 'creole attitude'. Their Africanity only

take them as far as it is useful. Their Africanity is not a cultural organizing principle, despite

the insistence on preserving their access to African=Black discourse. This 'creole attitude'

would be the primary motivating factor to distort African political, cultural, and historical

discourse. Sultan Ali al-Hassan and the chronicles of his dynasty may not be based in

history, but because it exists within the cultural memory of the Swahili, and the Shirazi

specifically, they have made it true. They have organized their *utamawazo* around a

fabricated *asili.* What's more, is that this myth has been promoted as true history.

> There is an absurdity here – if not a tragedy – in this effort by the mulatto,
> who as capitalizes on his common blood ties with [non-Africans], to
> presume to racialize thought by advancing arguments which purportedly
> hold for the African race as a whole.[94]

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[93] Allen, James De Vere. *Swahili Origins*, Ohio University Press, 1993, p. 10

[94] Agyeman, Opoku. *The PanAfricanist Worldview,* The International University Press, 1985, p. 77-78

With these compromised perspectives existing as supposedly African perspective, the investigation of African issues is only complicated, especially when uncompromised African voices are silence in favor of the compromised narratives. Prioritizing these miscegenated perspectives, who often by virtue of their mixed heritage have foreign interests and sympathies, as representative of the entire community, without the delineation of the cultural and political motivations that exists within a community exemplifies Michael Tillotson's *Agency Reduction Formation*[95]. A people's comprehension of their ontology can only be the articulation of their cultural memory. A people's cultural memory can become distorted or compromised, but it does not fundamentally change who they are, just who they think they are. To answer that question more than just rhetoric has to be investigated.

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[95] "Any system of thought that distracts, neutralizes, or reduces the need and desire for assertive collective agency [of African people]". From Tillotson, Michael. *The Invisible Jim Crow.* Africa World Press, 2011, p. 60

CHAPTER 7: UNCOVERING AN INDIGENOUS SWAHILI COSMOLOGY

The investigation of ontology seeks to address a people's place within the world. John S. Mbiti, a Kenyan philosopher and theologian writes that "African have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religions we must penetrate that ontology".[1] It is better to conceptualize African traditional religions as cosmologies rather than dogmatic institutions. S.K. Damani Agyekum defines a cosmology as "a metaphysical system that treats the universe as an orderly system; a collection of myths that unify the whole of experience".[2] This cosmology was connected to every facet of African life; there was not a separation between the mundane and the spiritual. Spiritual ideals are not 'rhetorical abstractions'. Just as Mbiti implies, the spiritual aspects of this cosmology penetrate African ontology, permeate within activities that African people perform every day, inform how people interact with each other, and guidelines for which people are to live. For these reasons Agyekum argues,

> Afrikan thought never became a rationalized philosophy but remained a *wholistic,* intuitive worldview that encouraged a harmonious existence. Therefore, Afrikan thought is not philosophical but is cosmological, relating to an ordered and harmonious universe. So rather than speak of Afrikan philosophy we should just speak of Afrikan cosmology.[3]

Philosophy, a term derived from the Greek *philosophia,[4]* by definition, is a system of study, a line of inquiry into ethics, values, knowledge, and human existence. The fundament of

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[1] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophies,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 20

[2] Agyekum, S.K. Damani. *Distorted Truths: The Bastardization of Afrikan Cosmology,* Afrikan World InfoSystems, 2012, p. xvi

[3] *Ibid,* p.4

[4] Translated from Greek: Love of knowledge/wisdom

philosophy is debate and logical disagreement, whereas cosmology, as the order to a culturally structured worldview, "leaves no room for such divergences".[5]

Placide Tempel's in his mid-twentieth century text *Bantu Philosophy* uncovers key aspects of Bantu cosmology but prevaricates his findings under moniker of 'philosophy'. As a missionary whose goal was to convert African people, it is only natural for Tempels to see African cosmology as something to be debated, but for African people, the *Ntu philosophy* recognized by Tempels was more than a rhetorical inquiry. Tempels texts attests that Bantu behavior "is centered in a single value: *vital force*".[6] This vital force, *ntu,* is the same concept that Marimba Ani functionalizes as *utamaroho*. Tempels, as well as other proponents of *Ntu cosmology* recognize this vital force as a something that is present within all things in existence. This type of cosmology is referred to as *animatism.* Molefi Kete Asante in the Encyclopedia of African Religion provides a useful definition for the term:

> Animatism, not to be confused with animism[7], is the belief in a supernatural power that animates all living things in an impersonal sense. It is therefore not individualized or specialized in terms of a particular object, such as one finds in animism, but is a rather more generalized belief in an invisible, powerfully impersonal energy that is everywhere.[8]

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[5] Agyekum, S.K. Damani. *Distorted Truths: The Bastardization of Afrikan Cosmology,* Afrikan World InfoSystems, 2012, p. 4

[6] Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy,* HBC Publishing, 1959, p. 44

[7] Animism is the belief that a soul inhabits animate and inanimate objects alike.
  Asante, Molefi Kete. "Animism"*,* Encyclopedia of African Religions, ed. Ama Mazama & Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, pp. 57-58

[8] Asante, Molefi Kete. "Animatism"*,* Encyclopedia of African Religions, ed. Ama Mazama & Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, p. 56

Tempels explains that within all things Bantu people see this living force. As an impersonal force or energy *Ntu* is thought to be utilized for good as well as malicious actions. *Ntu* as a living force permeates in primarily four categories; *Muntu* as a personal force in animated things such as people, animals, and plants; *Kintu* the force inhabiting inanimate objects; *Hantu* the energy present in places and events; and lastly *Kuntu* the force that inhabits abstract concepts and ideas, what Mbiti calls 'modality'.[9]

The Rwandan philosopher, linguist, and historian Alexis Kagame is the first scholar to fit the structure of African cosmology into four distinct categories but has since been adopted in the works of John Mbiti, Placide Tempels, and Janheinz Jahn's text *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World.* Tempel notes that within this framework, "man is the supreme force, the most powerful of created beings".[10] Within African cosmology there is a spiritual hierarchy, however, Tempels is mistaken, man is not the supreme force. Within Mbiti's understanding of *Ntu cosmology* the category of *Muntu* also includes the spiritual forces of ancestral spirits, God, and other spiritual entities.[11] This African cosmological structure in many ways mirrors the structure of the family unit.[12] It is also reasonable to comprehend the family unit as an extension of this cosmological structure. Mbiti elucidates this point commenting,

> In human relationships there is emphasis on the concept of hierarchy based partly on age and partly on status. In practice this amounts to a ladder ranging from God to the youngest child. God is the creator hence the parent

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[9] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophies,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 11

[10] Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy,* HBC Publishing, 1959, p. 97

[11] *Ibid*

[12] See Appendix G for the African cosmological structure

of mankind, and holds the highest position so that he is the final point of reference and appeal. Beneath Him are the divinities and spirits, which are more powerful than man and some of which were founders and forebearers of different societies. […] Most African peoples accept or acknowledge God as the final guardian of law and order and the moral and ethical codes.[13]

To understand the ontological unity amongst African people, it must be appreciated that there is also a cosmological unity. Mbiti's statement, backed by years of observation and research hold just as true for the formalized traditions of West African communities such as Akom in Ghana, Odinani of Igboland, and Ifa of Yorubaland, as it does for spiritual ideas in East Africa. This cosmological manifested through Bantu mythology can found with the Gikuyu, and Akamaba people, the Nilotic Maasai and Kalenjin people, and even within Swahili spiritual thought.

Functionalization of African Cosmology for Political Self-Determination in East Africa

African cosmology has played a major role in the social organization of East Africans. Both the Maji Maji Rebellion (1905-1907) against the German occupation of Tanganika, and the Mau Mau Revolution (1952-1960) against British Settler colonialism in Kenya functionalized aspects of African spirituality in their wars to reassert African political self-determination.

Kinjikitile "Bokero" Ngwale, a member of the Matumbi people as well as one of the early heroes of modern Tanzanian nationalism, was one of the most important revolutionary leaders of the Maji Maji Rebellion. Scholarship on the Maji Maji rebellion which was said to have been initiated by Ngwale in 1905 tend to disagree on what role

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[13] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophies,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 200-201

Islam played in the formation of the rebellion. Ngwale himself is said to have been a practitioner of a kind of folk Islam, a regional variation of the Abrahamic faith that either blended traditional African element or tolerated African cosmology.[14] Scholarship from the mid-twentieth century situate Maji Maji as a type of pagan cult, and the name *Bokero* which Kinjikitle Ngwale would come to adopt was a title of leadership within this tradition.[15] There seems to be several other individuals, labeled as witch doctors, instrumental in launching the 'Maji Maji campaign' against the Germans who also bore the title *Bokero.[16] Bokero* is also the Rufiji[17] name of the supreme deity.[18] Kinjikitle Ngwale was said to have spoken to *Bokero* sometime in 1904, after having been mounted[19] by his intermediary Hongo, a spirit in the form of a snake.[20] *Bokero,* through Hongo, commanded Ngwale to lead the people of Tanzania in a war against the Germans. Ngwale returned from this invocation advocating for the people of Tanzania to overlook their ethnic differences and unite against foreign occupation.[21] In Ngwale's appeal he invoked the name

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[14] Crosse-Upcott, A.R.W. "The Origin of the Majimaji Revolt", *Man,* Vol. 60, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1960, p. 71

[15] *Ibid*

[16] *Ibid*, p. 72

[17] The Rufiji people live along the Rufiji River and near the coast in central Tanzania

[18] Greenstein, Elijah. "Making History: Historical Narratives of the Maji Maji", *Penn History Review,* Vol. 17, issue 2, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 61

[19] Possessed

[20] Greenstein, Elijah. "Making History: Historical Narratives of the Maji Maji", *Penn History Review,* Vol. 17, issue 2, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 61

[21] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Africa and the West*. Nova Publishers, 2000, p. 70

of *Bokero* and their ancestors, this was to be a holy war. The name of the rebellion comes from the Kiswahili word for water, *maji.*

Ngwale and presumably the other leaders who bore the name *Bokero*, distributed blessed medicine water mixed with castor oil and millet seeds that was believed to protect the African warriors from the bullets of the Europeans, perhaps even turning the bullets into water.[22] Just under one hundred thousand Tanganyikans answered this divine call, and *maji maji* became their battle cry.[23] Those initiated and anointed with this sacred water were known as *waskari wa mungu* (soldiers of God) and *watu wa Bokero* (people of Bokero).[24] What's interesting is that this Pan-African movement utilized the Rufiji name for God, as well as the Swahili name for God and other terminologies from Kiswahili. This indicates that Kiswahili was almost certainly used at a certain level as an organizing language that was able to unify a great number of Tanganika's ethnic groups. Furthermore, the cultural continuity of these traditions must have been recognized as they warriors of the rebellion appear to use the terms interchangeably.

The rebellion against the Germans was ultimately unsuccessful, as the *watu wa Bokero* were poorly equipped to engage the German Empire militarily. Kinjikitle Ngwale was arrested, tried for treason, and hanged by the Germans in the first months of the war. Ngwale's brother would assume leadership of the rebellion and continue fighting for the

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[22] Greenstein, Elijah. "Making History: Historical Narratives of the Maji Maji", *Penn History Review,* Vol. 17, issue 2, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 61

[23] East, John W.; & Otto Stollowsky. "On the Background to the Rebellion in German East Africa in 1905-1906", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Boston University African Studies Center, 1988, p. 692

[24] *Ibid*

next two years.[25] As a result of the war and the great famine, known as *njaa*, caused by German scorched earth policies hundreds of thousands of Tanganyikans would lose their lives.

The Mau Mau Rebellion of the mid-twentieth century was a war waged by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) against the British Colonial government in Kenya. During the revolution members of the KLFA would have to be initiated into the ranks of the army. Engaging in a secretive progress which culminated in the initiated ultimately taking an oath symbolizing their commitment to the struggle against foreign imperialism and the restoration of African unity and autonomy.[26] This oath moved the revolution away from the domains of social justice and the fight against colonialism and into the domains of cultural justice and the reaffirmation of African cultural values. The members of the KLFA were a source of inspiration for the fight for African self-determination, and justice across the African world. Activists in the United States of America, such as Mississippi field secretary Medgar Evers[27], and Malcolm X, invoked the spirit of the Mau Mau freedom fighters as they saw the diasporic fight for human rights and justice as the same fight that had been fought against the imperialist and their sympathizers in Kenya.[28] The brutality and strategies employed during the Mau Mau

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[25] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Africa and the West*. Nova Publishers, 2000, p. 70

[26] Njama, Karari; and Donald Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*, Modern Reader, 1966, pp. 131-132

[27] Hall, Simon. "The NAACP, Black Power, and the African American Freedom Struggle, 1966-1969", *The Historian,* Vol. 69, No. 1, Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 2007, p. 50

[28] Meriwether, James H. "African Americans and the Mau Mau Rebellion: Militancy, Violence, and the struggle for Freedom", *Journal of American Ethnic History,* Vol. 14, No. 4, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 64

Revolution invoked memories of Nate Turner (1831), Denmark Vesey (1822), and the African revolution in Haiti (1791-1804), both in the minds of African people, but also the within the subconscious of the foreign imperialist. James Meriwether in his reflection on the connection between the struggle in the diaspora and the struggle in Kenya notes:

> Further, and more deeply, confronting Mau Mau also revealed how African Americans were debating their own freedom struggle, who was heading it, and what was the best path to be following in that struggle. The Mau Mau fought not only whites, but also against the traditional Gikuyu leadership and perceived supporters of the colonial government.[29]

The KLFA was comprised of a multi-ethnic collation comprised of the Gikuyu, Maasai, Kamba, Meru, and Embu peoples of Kenya. The KLFA led a guerilla war against the British that demonstrated to colonial powers that maintaining colonial enterprises in Africa would be a costly affair. While technically a military defeat, with many of their leadership and over 11,000 deaths of KLFA soldiers ultimately succeeded in playing a pivotal role in gaining Kenya's independence from British colonial rule.

There are several theories given about the origin of the term. J.M. Kariuki who served with the KLFA and was eventually detained[30] by the British suggests that the term Mau Mau was invented by the British to promote the idea that the KLFA were savage insurgents.[31] British propaganda worked to make the KLFA out to be terrorist. British

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[29] Meriwether, James H. "African Americans and the Mau Mau Rebellion: Militancy, Violence, and the struggle for Freedom", *Journal of American Ethnic History,* Vol. 14, No. 4, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 64

[30] During the Mau Mau Revolution tens of thousands of Kenyans were incarcerated in British detention/concentration camps and forced to preform hard labor. Many of the people detained had no direct affiliation with the Revolution beyond being members of the same ethnic group as the rebels.

See: Elkins, Caroline. *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya,* Owl Books, 2005

[31] Kariuki, Josiah Mwangi. *"Mau Mau" Detainee: The Account by a Kenya African of his Experiences in Detention Camps 1953–1960,* Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 24

propaganda also made out Jomo Kenyatta, who would eventually be the first president of an independent Kenya to be the political leader of the movement. Kenyatta who, "had enjoyed the best that Britain offered, a course of study at the London School of Economics (LSE) and the love of an English wife[32] was [thought to be] the most likely artificer of the [Mau Mau] oath".[33] Jomo Kenyatta, even by his own testimony, was not associated with the revolution, and almost certainly had little if not nothing to do with the sacred oaths that the warriors of the revolution took. John Lonsdale suggests that Kenyatta was used a political scapegoat because "most whites feared and loathed Kenyatta" because of his marriage to a white English woman.[34] Gikuyu activist, and first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai suggests that the word Mau Mau is either a mishearing of the Kikuyu word for the oath itself, *muuma,* or taken from a Kikuyu phrase "*maũndũ ni mau*", spoken before an oath is taken.[35]

Similarly, the *Dini ya Msambwa[36]* practiced by the Bukusu, a sub-group of Luhya speaking people in western Kenya, was an attempt to reestablish African traditional religion as an organizing epistemology for African people in Kenya against foreign

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[32] Jomo Kenyatta after having first married Grace Wahu in a traditional Gikuyu ceremony, married the Englishwoman Edna Clarke in Sussex during his time in England. They were married between 1942-1946 and the union bore a son named Peter Magana.

[33] Lonsdale, John. "Constructing Mau Mau", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Vol. 40, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 242

[34] *Ibid* p. 246

[35] Maathai, Wangari. *Unbowed: A Memoir,* Alfred A. Knopf, 2006, p. 63

[36] Translated from Luhya: Religion of the ancestors

imperialism.[37] The Bukusu people nearly had their community decimated in the mid-nineteenth century by Arab-Swahili enslavers, The Chief of the Wanga, another sub-group of the Luhya, Mumia welcomed the British as allies against Arab-Swahili aggression , only to eventually become victim of British settler colonialism.

In the mid-1930s Elijah Masinde began to lead an insurgent religious movement, not unlike the Rastafarian movement in the Diaspora, to restore African agency and expel the Europeans and their influence. In this tradition known as *Dini ya Msambwa,* the word *msambwa* correlates to the supreme deity; *basambwa* correlates to ancestral spirits; the term *Wele* used in this tradition appears to be associated with Mount Elgon in Kenya, where like the Maji Maji Rebellion sacred water from the lake at the foot of the mountain was thought to purify the adherents and possibly make them immune to bullets.[38] This *Wele* was often associated with the Biblical Mount Zion. While Christian themes may have been present in the movement at the heart of the movement was the return to African traditions. In the movement Chrisitians, and institutions based in foreign epistemes were seen as the enemies of African reciprocity.[39]

By the middle of the twentieth century, the movement had spread beyond the Bukusu community, and incorporated many other religious and political leaders. On April

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[37] Kustenbauder, Matthew. "Prophetic Movements: Eastern Africa", *New Encyclopedia of Africa,* 4th edition, edited by John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller, Thomas/Gale, 2008, p. 267

[38] *Ibid*

[39] *Ibid*

25th, 1950, Pokot[40] followers of the religious leader and 'hero of Kenya African Nationalism' Lukas Pkech engaged in armed conflict with the colonial administration at Kolloa. This event would later be known as the 'Kolloa Affray'. Within five minutes of the beginning of the conflict Lukas Pkech, twenty of the Pokot tribesmen who followed him, one African *askari,* and three European officers would lose their lives.[41] B.E. Kipkorir, in his analysis of the event, situates the Kolloa Affray as the "last major test prior to the outbreak of the Mau Mau rising" which would indirectly lead Kenya to gain its independence from Britain.[42]

The founding organizer of the *Dini ya Msambwa* movement, Elijah Masinde, would be arrested by the Kenyan government shortly after gaining independence from Britain in 1968 for allegedly fomenting hatred for the Christian religion. The *Dini ya Msambwa* would become 'proscribed'[43] by the new Kenyan government led by Jomo Kenyatta in an effort to kill the movement.[44]

One of the major short comings of the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964 was the failure of the revolutionary leadership to functionalize and organize around African epistemology. Instead, the revolution led by Ugandan native John Okello a member of the Afro-Shirazi

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[40] The Pokot people are members of the Nilotic Kalenjin community who live primarily in western Kenya and eastern Uganda. They are thought to have originated from southern Ethiopia before migrating to Kenya around 2,000 years ago.

[41] Kipkorir, B.E. "The Kolloa Affray, Kenya 1950", *Transafrican Journal of History,* Vol. 2, No. 2, Gideon Were Publications, 1976, p. 114

[42] *Ibid*

[43] Made illegal

[44] Kustenbauder, Matthew. "Prophetic Movements: Eastern Africa", *New Encyclopedia of Africa,* 4th edition, edited by John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller, Thomas/Gale, 2008, p. 267

party, was a reactionary retaliation organized around superficial modern conceptualizations of racial categories and class. The revolution itself was a reaction to Zanzibar gaining its independence from Britain but returning power to the Sultan of Zanzibar, Jamshid bin Abdullah, and the Arab minority.[45] The revolutionaries attack the so-called Arab people of Zanzibar who by in large still represented the social and economic elite.[46] Instead of attacking the base of the historical epistemological foundations of the social disparities between the so called Arabs of Zanzibar and the self-identifying African, they sought to target these so called Arab individuals and their families. Once the revolution was complete and the Sultanate overthrown, there was no bases to continue to build as a people, even after unifying with Tanganyika to form the nation of Tanzania.

The Pan-African organization Afrocentricity International was founded on the principle that the restoration of African consciousness must proceed the political unity of African people. Without epistemological unity the unity of African people can only be superficial and strictly political. Unlike Masinde's revolutions in Kenya which at its heart was about the restoration of consciousness and self-determination, the Zanzibar revolution never penetrated the epistemological issues which had plagued the island for centuries. For this reason, instead of being praised as a hero of the revolution Okello was banished eventually mysteriously vanishing in an Idi Amin controlled Uganda in 1971.[47] For this reason, Zanzibar is still epistemologically divided from the rest of Tanzania, and constantly discusses dissolving the union. For this reason, the Swahili social elite before the revolution

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[45] Petterson, Don. *Revolution In Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale*, Basic Books, 2002, p. 26

[46] Hunter, Helen-Louise. *Zanzibar: The Hundred Days Revolution.* ABC-CLIO, 2010, p.13

[47] Petterson, Don. *Revolution In Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale*, Basic Books, 2002, p. 176-177

were able to return to positions of power and leadership, but now vindictive against Pan-African discourse.

Cultural Continuity, Diopian Historiography & Ethical Symbolism in Bantu Northeast Africa

The Mijikenda people stand by the idea that what links them all together, the source of their cultural continuity between each other and to an extent to the other Sabaki people is their shared ancestral origin in Shungwaya. They believe that the principles that shaped their societies were founded in this ancestral homeland. The social heterarchy inherited by the Sabaki people is grounded in the ethic of *utu* and is reflected in the Shungwaya myth. In this myth, the various ethnic clans and occupational classes co-existing in the kingdom without any single group dominating over the others.

Even after the destruction of this ancestral homeland, the survivors, disseminated along the Swahili coast, and in the hinterlands of east Africa continued to organize their society around the same ethics of their ancestors. Within African societies, in general there exists a relative sense of inter-communal reciprocity, which has garnered the interest of African scholars, like Maulana Karenga, Molefi Kete Asante, Kimani Nehusi, Theophile Obenga, and Cheikh Anta Diop. Karenga's text *Maat: The Moral Idea in Ancient Egypt,* argues that this African ethical principle manifested itself in Kemet, Eurocentrically known as ancient Egypt, as the concept of *maat.* Works like Karenga's, that articulate the cultural continuity of African societies from antiquity to the present, elucidate those ethical philosophies recognized as *maat* and *ubuntu* are not the unique introspections of isolated

198

societies. Furthermore, Karenga's work demonstrates that these moral ideas have consistently existed in Africa as organizing principles of society for thousands of years.

This dynamic relationship between African individuals and communities, which existed both before and to a certain extent after the intervention and adoption of foreign epistemes, was foundational to how African people would philosophically develop a comprehension of their ontology. Kimani Nehusi evidences this relationship by his investigation into African environmentalism before the advent of environmentalist political discourse.

Kiswahili belongs to the Bantu sub-group known as Sabaki. The word Sabaki comes from the Kifokomo language and is generally understood to mean crocodile.[48] The Sabaki river of southern Kenya is the second longest river in the country and feeds into the Indian Ocean. Most of the Pokomo people live along the centrally located Tana River, the longest river in Kenya. This river is said to be teeming, or reportedly, infested with crocodiles. The Pokomo people have a distinctive connection with these animals which is worth noting.

> The Pokomo are among the few peoples (I have not heard of any others) who eat crocodile from choice; they have been known to protest against the destruction of crocodile eggs, lest the supply of their meat should run short. But some clans abstain from the dainty, -- again I know not why.[49]

The Pokomo apparently kept this crocodile 'infestation' in check by the cultural consumption of the reptile.

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[48] The Swahili word for crocodile is mamba

[49] Werner, Alice. "Pokomo Folklore", *Folklore,* Vol. 24, No. 4, 1913, p. 458

> The natives seem singularly fearless as regards crocodiles. "Why, we eat each other!" they sometimes say, *à la guerre comme à la guerre[50]*. A Pokomo once said to me that the Swahili are sometimes caught by crocodiles "because they are afraid of them".[51]

The particularity of the Pokomos relationship with these creatures is interesting, yet not unusual on the African continent. This difference between the relationship of these creatures and these different societal groups of humans does not signify a cultural difference between these social and ethnic groups. Instead, this dynamic relationship between creatures and human groups on the African continent is part of a larger system within the African cultural paradigm. Within this paradigm of cultures, many African societies have embraced special relationships with a particular animal. Ethnographers often articulate the spiritual importance of these relationships by ceremony and the creation of totems.

> The animals chosen as totems reflected the Africans' understanding of themselves and their connection to nature. Africans also regarded animals as an archetype or aspect of an incarnate god. The animals were not god, but a representation or aspect of it and similarly associated with the Ba (spirit/soul) on Earth.[52]

Kimani Nehusi, who traces this tradition as far back as Nile Valley Civilizations, articulates that there are certain qualities to each animal which African people have come to recognize and symbolically celebrate through these animals.[53] These qualities manifest themselves in

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[50] Translated from French: *In war as in war*

[51] Werner, Alice. "Pokomo Folklore", *Folklore,* Vol. 24, No. 4, 1913, p. 463

[52] Andrade, Elizabeth. "Animals", *Encyclopedia of African Religions,* edited by Ama Mazama and Molefi Kete Asante, Sage Reference, 2009, p. 56

[53] Nehusi, Kimani. "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism Before Environmentalist", *African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance,* ed. Mammo Muchie and Phindil Lukhele-Olorunju, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013, p. 375

African naming systems where these qualities are desired within a person or child. Additionally, these qualities might also be manifested in the way that an entire community is organized or ethically directed. In this way, an entire community might come to be associated with a particular animal. Nehusi further conceptualizes this relationship as a form of African environmentalism before environmentalists, as these sacred animals, taken as totems or symbolic patrons, would become protected by the individuals and communities who embraced them.

> Thus what is known today as environmentalism is a cultural principle of Africa that was lived daily in prohibitions against killing or eating the representative animal of one's family, clan or community, against cutting down trees needlessly or indeed against the wanton destruction of any life form.[54]

This tradition when isolated to a single community, a single species, or perhaps a few species are protected within a given area. When conceptualized as system of cultures and communities, part of a paradigm, where many communities are embracing different fauna and flora, these traditions functionally become a Pan-African concerted effort to conserve life on the continent.

This tradition not only exist throughout Africa in geographical space, but also has existed throughout time in Africa. Nehusi writes that "Totemic names are to found throughout the African world from the earliest of times, where families and clans are named for a representative ancestor, animal, plant or object".[55] In this way, the name for the

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[54] Nehusi, Kimani. "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism Before Environmentalist", *African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance,* ed. Mammo Muchie and Phindil Lukhele-Olorunju, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013, p. 375

[55] *Ibid*

grouping of Bantu people known as *Sabaki* can be seen as a sort of totemic name with particular importance to the Pokomo people.

Within the African world, the Pokomo people are not the only community to embrace the crocodile, or the smaller caimans of the Americas. The Bideyet community of nomads in Chad, as well as the Dogon people of Mali also have a comprehensive tradition and deep connection with the crocodile. The *binou* sect within Dogon society functionalizes many animals who they use as totems. The crocodile, despite its monstrous reputation, is celebrated in the village of Amani, where, like the Pokomo of East Africa, the people traditionally live near crocodiles who do not harm them.[56] Dogon community have given the crocodile sacred meaning associating the animal with an ancestral entity, *binu serou,* who once accompanied by a crocodile.

The earliest example of a formulized tradition surrounding crocodiles on the African continent traces itself back to the Nile Valley in Kemet, with the advent of the cult of Sobek by the first King of the unified lands of Kemet, Menes also referred to as Aha and Narmer. Priest of the Kemetic crocodile deity *Sobek* informed the classical Greek historian Diodorus Siculus that the priesthood dedicated to *Sobek* was initiated by Menes after having been saved by a crocodile when attacked by his own hunting dogs. Reportedly Menes escaped his own canines on the back of the great reptile who ferried him across Lake Moeris.[57] Menes would have another eventful interaction with an animal, according

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[56] Queyrat, Jean. "Tribal animals – Crocodile", *Slice* Documentary, ZED & France Télévisions, 2021

[57] Edwards, IES, "The early dynastic period in Egypt", *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press. 1971, p. 22
Siculus, Diodorus. *Diodorus Siculus. Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 1, Translated by C. H. Oldfather. London; Cambridge, 1933, p. 45

to Manetho Menes would be "carried off by a hippopotamus" presumably killed by this hippopotamus during another hunting trip after thirty years of rulership of a united Kemet.[58]

The classical Greek historian Herodotus reported in the fifth century B.C.E. a tradition of animism surrounding the Nile River crocodile, that bares striking resemblance to the traditions in more contemporary African societies. In his *Histories* Herodotus details how certain animals, namely the crocodile and the hippopotamus, were not universally respected as sacred by all Egyptians, but were sanctified, and thusly protected by certain communities.[59] Herodotus comments,

> Crocodiles are sacred to some Egyptians but not to all; there are some who actually treat them as enemies. Thise who live around Thebes and Lake Moeris believe fervently in their sacred status. At both places, they choose one crocodile to raise and feed, taming it completely, inserting pendants of glasslike jewels and gold in its ears and adorning its front feet with bangles. They feed it specially reserved food and sacrificial offerings and give it the best treatment possible for as long as it lives. And when these animals die, they embalm them and bury them in sacred tombs. The people living around the city of Elephantine, however, do not believe crocodiles are sacred, and they even eat them.[60]

What Herodotus reports here is an ancient manifestation of the same system which Nehusi describes in his text "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism Before Environmentalist". These ancient people, like the communities in contemporary

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[58] Vinson, Steve. "Menes" *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Ed. Donald B. Redford, Oxford University Press, 201, p. 378
  Manetho. *Manetho,* with English translation by W.G. Waddell, Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 31 & 33

[59] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, edited by Robert Strassler, Anchor Books, 2009, pp. 148-149

[60] *Ibid*, p. 148

Africa practiced a dynamic form of animism. These African traditions were not universalist traditions, but instead allowed and respected the reciprocal relationship between African communities and their sacred animals as part of a larger cultural paradigm of traditions.

Although the priesthood of the crocodile god *Sobek* would be founded within the first years of the first dynasty, Sobek would find greater importance during the Middle Kingdom of Kemet (2055 BCE – 1650 BCE). During this period there were several kings who took the name *sbk,* including Sobekneferu[61] and at least seven kings named Sobekhotep.[62] King Sobekneferu the last ruler of Twelfth dynasty (1991 BCE – 1802 BCE) was not the first woman to rule in Kemet but was indeed the first woman to adopt the full royal titulary as pharaoh.[63] Sobekneferu, whose throne name was Sobekkare[64], is also the first king during the Middle Kingdom to be associated with the crocodile god *Sobek.* Nehusi uses the name *Sbk,* commonly transliterated as *Sobek* to demonstrate how

> […] names in the ancient African state of Kemet reflect the environment and ultimately articulate the relationship of the people with it. The Nile River has always had a very predominant influence upon the lives of the people of Kemet. During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties the Nile behaved erratically. [...] It is during this time that *Sbk: Sobek* and its variants, the name of the crocodile god, became a part of the names of pharaohs and Sobek becomes the Ancient Egyptian equivalent of the patron

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[61] "The beauty of Sobek"

[62] Redford, Donald B., ed. "Egyptian King List". *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Volume 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001, pp. 621–622.

[63] Gillam, Robyn. "Sobekneferu". In Redford, Donald B. (ed*). The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Volume 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 301.

[64] "Sobek is the Ka of Ra". According to *The Encylopedia of Ancient History:* "As early as the Old Kingdom, Sobek was sometimes associated with the god Horus, and in the Middle Kingdom, he was syncretized with Re and started appearing occasionally as a ram or ram-headed human".
The Encyclopedia of Ancient History, First Edition. Edited by Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner, Blackwell Publishing, p 6294–6295

saint of the Thirteenth Dynasty. […] for Sobek was fundamentally a god (patron saint) of the water and of vegetation. Now the pharaohs evidently elevated Sobek to greater importance, most probably as a way of pleasing him and so ending the disastrous floods.[65]

There is a fascinating correlation between the nomenclature of Kemet's crocodile deity and the name for the language group that Kiswahili and Kifokomo belong to. An interesting example which exemplifies this is the Kifokomo word for crocodile Sabaki, which as previously discussed has been used as the name for a sub-family of Northeast coastal Bantu. The word sabaki can be transliterated in the *mdw ntr,* the hieroglyphic writing system of Kemet, as *sbk* ⎮⏋⏢ and retains much of the same contextual meaning within both languages.

Like the Swahili, the Pokomo people had been culturally influenced by neighboring people and even undergone their own process of Islamization during the nineteenth century.[66] The Pokomo during their migration and ancestral conflicts with the Oromo people were said to have adopted many fragments of the Cushitic culture.[67] According to Joseph Greenberg, considered the founder of modern linguistic typology, he and other linguists classify the Oromo language, known as *Afaan Oromoo,* as part of the Afroasiatic language family.[68] This language family includes the language of Kemet, Biblical Hebrew,

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[65] Nehusi, Kimani. "Humanity and the Environment in Africa: Environmentalism Before Environmentalist", *African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance,* ed. Mammo Muchie and Phindil Lukhele-Olorunju, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013 p. 376

[66] Bunger, Robert Louis. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* Eastern African Studies, Syracuse University, 1973

[67] Prins, A.H.J. "The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa", *Anthripos,* Bd 67, H. 1./2., 1972, p. 10

[68] Greenberg, Joseph. "The Classification of African Languages", *American Anthropologist,* N.S., 50, 1948, pp. 24-30

Arabic, as well as many of the languages in the horn of Africa. However, the Oromo word for crocodile is *naacha*, is etymologically unrelated to the term Sabaki or Sobek. Similarly, the Arabic word for crocodile, *timsah* تمساح, seems to be etymologically unrelated to either the Pokomo or Kemetic word for crocodile.

Within the last few decades several African scholars, such as Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop, Guyanese Kimani Nehusi, Ghanian repatriate Obadele Kambon, and Congolese Theophile Obenga have begun to challenge African language groupings generally accepted by most trained linguists. Fergus Shermon, an independent researcher of African languages and founder of the Kiswahili-Bantu Research Unit for the Advancement of the Ancient Egyptian Language 2014 text *Linguistic Ties between Ancient Egypt and Bantu: Uncovering Symbiotic Affinities and Relationships in Vocabulary* presents compelling evidence to support the need for a closer examination between Bantu languages and classical African languages of the Nile Valley.

Similarly at the 1974 UNESCO Cairo symposium Theophile Obenga challenged Joseph Greenberg's linguistic categorization of African languages by asserting that the language of Kemet, Eurocentrically known as Ancient Egypt, in grammatical structure as well as in its lexicon may be more similar to many of living Africa's Niger Congo languages than Greenberg's Afroasiatic grouping which includes Arabic, Berber, and

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization: Volume III: The Linguistic Evidence.* Rutgers University Press, 2006, p. 72

Tosco, Mauro. "Is There an 'Ethiopian Language Area'?, *Anthropological* Linguistics, Fall, 2000, Vol. 42, No. 3, The Trustees of Indiana University on behalf of Anthropological Linguistics, 2000, p. 340

Biblical Hebrew.[69] Obenga as well as Diop who was also in attendance at the 1974 symposium have analyzed several African languages to support their assertion. Out of this type of analysis Obenga has constructed a new linguistic typological method and framework for African languages.[70]

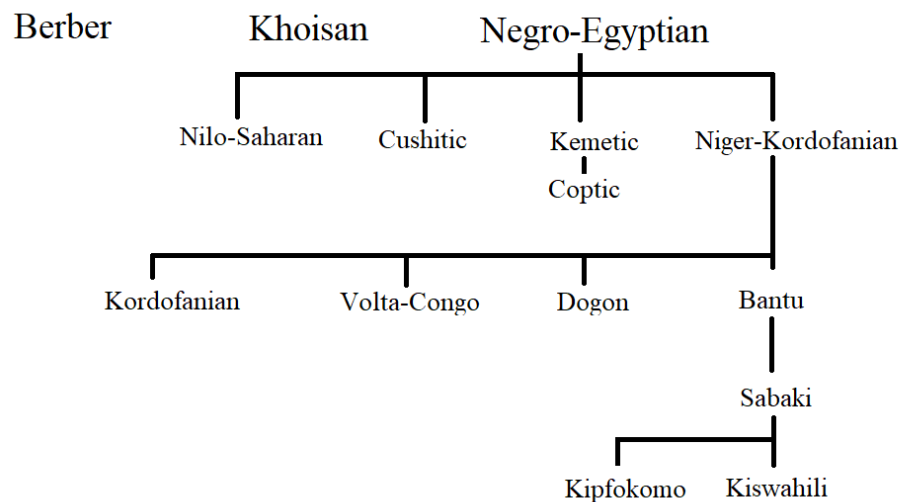## Obenga's Typology to African Language Families

Figure 5: Reconstruction of Obenga's Typology with select linguistic lineages

Figure 5 is the author's attempt to visualize with a few relevant examples Obenga's framework to reclassify African language families. The key difference between this

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[69] Obenga, Theophile. "The genetic linguistic relationship between Egyptian (ancient Egyptian and Coptic) and modern Negro-African Languages", *The peopling of ancient Egypt and the deciphering of Meroitic script: proceedings of the symposium held in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974*, Karnak House, 1997, p. 65-81

[70] Obenga, Theophile. *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa: A Student's Handbook for the Study of Ancient Egypt in Philosophy, Linguistics and Gender Relations*, Karnak House, 1992, p. 110-112

typology and that of Greenberg is that the language of Kemet is recentered in relation to related living African languages and not only to the Semitic languages of the Afroasiatic family. Greenberg's model was firmly centered on the Semitic languages which in part informed how the language families in Africa were classified. Despite Arabic and Hebrew being the only Asian languages of the group with the vast majority of the other languages being located on the African continent, the name Afroasiatic implies an equal co-representation of the languages in each continent. One of Greenberg's major contributions to modern language classification was his challenge to the naming of the language family formerly known as *Hamitic*.[71] This name is a reference to Ham of the Bible who was cursed by his father Noah after witnessing his father's drunken nakedness. The Curse of Ham has been cited as a Biblical explanation for pigmentation of African people and the justification of their enslavement.[72] Western linguists only decided to change the name of this language group to Afroasiatic once research began to indicate that Biblical Hebrew was related to many of the languages of these supposedly cursed people. It is apparent that racialized prejudice as well as religious sympathies have played almost an equal part to scholastic efforts in the construction of linguistic categorization of African languages of the region.

The universal acceptance of these types of categorizations which may be disingenuous of African cultural realities is what motivated scholars like Theophile Obenga and Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop attended at the same 1974 UNESCO symposium that Obenga had presented his challenge to Greenberg's model. Diop's new model of historiography,

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[71] Greenberg, Joseph. "The Classification of African Languages", *American Anthropologist,* N.S., 50, 1948, pp. 24-30

[72] Goldenberg, David M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 170

referred to by Africologists as Diopian Historiography, sought to reconnect classical Africa to living African cultures through history and language. With this historiography, the observations of cultural and linguistic continuity between living African people, like the Wolof, Fulani, Pokomo, Soninke, Dogon, and the Daju people for example, become excellent opportunities for case studies rather than simply being trivial observations. Diop famously wrote that,

> The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in the air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective nor unruffled. He is ignorant, cowardly and neurotic.

The use of Kemet by Africologists and the investigation of Swahili culture and language should not be seen as a case of these societies and cultures being somehow more exceptional than other African societies. Research into these cultures for the past several decades has been fueled by the 'effort to correct the dislocations within African history'[73], one of the minimum characteristics of an Afrocentric project.

Ironically, there is a danger to become conceptually incarcerated within Eurocentric discourse in this effort to challenge reductionist notions about Africa. Specifically, 'developed' societies like Kemet, Kush, Great Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, the West African Empires, the Yoruba and Swahili city-states challenge the racist myth of a primitive Africa. However, many well-intentioned scholars fall into the trap of celebrating the worth of key African societies based on Eurasian standards of success and progress, rather than looking at the qualities and values within African societies that should be recognized.

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[73] Asante, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto.* Polity Press, 2007, p. 41

Considerations in the Swahili Construction of the Soul

The concept of the human soul being comprised of multiple components is not a foreign concept within African societies. The cosmological system of Kemet famously incorporated an understanding that human existence constituted multiple spiritual and mundane elements. Like other African systems, such as the one practiced in Kemet, the language of Kiswahili indicates that understanding the duality of the soul is an essential element to their ontology. In Kiswahili there are two terms which describe the soul.; *moyo* and *roho*. These terms could also mean spirit, but it is clear that they are not the same kind of spirt as *pepo,* but rather indicate the concept of a human soul. Interestingly, these two concepts while both explaining the idea of a human soul seem to have different operations. It is my position that the Swahili conceptualization of the soul is not unsimilar from the Kemetic understanding of the soul as being made up of different parts.

Roho is a noun which literally translates into the soul, spirit, life, and vital principle/force which exists in every living creature.[74] Scholarship on the term indicates that *Roho* is etymologically related to the Arabic *ruhu* or Hebrew *ruakh.*[75] Conceptually, *roho* is not unsimilar to two concepts in Kemet. The first being *kꜣ* : ⊔ [Ka], which is the vital essence which distinguishes the living to those who have transitioned. It could also be related to the concept of ꜣḫ [ankh] which literally translates to life and is reanimated when

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[74] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013. P. 400.

[75] Dale, Godfrey. *The Peoples of Zanzibar,* The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1920, p. 29

the *Ba* and the *Ka* are reunited. The Mbochi people, a Bantu people living in central Africa also share a similar concept.

> In Mboshi, the Bantu language, *ba* means "whole, integral, endowed with full intelligence and personality" in both cases, what is involved is a fundamental philosophical concept.[76]

In Kemet, *ba* was the spiritual aspect that was also associated with an individual's personality. It was conceptualized as the spiritual component that gave an individual a distinct character.

Moyo, a concept used especially in Zanzibar literally translates into the word heart. However, besides being used to describe the physical organ it is also used to describe the soul, feelings, the mind, will, and the self.[77] This concept can be identified with the Kemetic concept of *jb.* Additionally, there is another Kiswahili term used for heart, *mtima.* This term is hardly used now, and I've only seen it used twice, once for my sister's name, and once in an essay written by Marimba Ani. It is likely that this term comes from the interior and is used more frequently by other Bantu people.

Utamaroho is another term which is presented within Marimba Ani's seminal text, *Yurugu.* In this text utamaroho is functionalized as a culture's "vital force" or "energy source", which "gives it its emotional tone and motivates the collective behavior of its members".[78] This vital force is informed by a culture's ecological and historical experiences. Within Ani's conceptual framework, a culture's utamaroho, their vital force,

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[76] Obenga, Theophile. *African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC,* Per Ankh, 2004, p. 175

[77] *Ibid*, p. 296

[78] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa World Press, 1994, p. xxv

is a manifestation of their *asili,* the central seed or foundational essence of a culture. Ani

states that the utamaroho, as well as their culturally structured world view, *utamawazo,*

*"*born out of the *asili* and, in turn, affirm it".[79] John Mbiti connects this African concept of

the vital force to African ontology. Referencing Placide Tempels 1945 text, *Bantu*

Philosophy, Mbiti writes,

> For Tempels the key concept to African religions and philosophy is what he
> calls "the vital force." He isolates this as the essence of being: "force is
> being, and being is force". His philosophy of force explains for him
> everything about African thinking and action.[80]

Etymologically the word, created by Ani, derives from one of Swahili terms for the concept

of the human soul, *roho.* There are several Kiswahili terms for the concept for the soul.

Roho is normally conceptualized similarly to how Ani has constructed the term *utamaroho,*

as a conceptual vital force of the human soul.

There are several terms within the Swahili lexicon which promote the

conceptualization that within Swahili ontology the soul is comprised of multiple

components. It is unclear if these terms are part of a larger cosmological structure or if they

are simply lexical redundancies created by the strain of foreign cultural influence. The

adoption of foreign terminologies and or retention of indigenous African terms may be the

cause of these redundancies. The term *nafsi,* for example, is an Arabic loan word. In Arabic

nafsi (نفسي) is a term which is often translated to mean 'myself'. In Kiswahili the term takes

on new cosmological meanings which align it closely with African ontology. In Kiswahili

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[79] Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior,* Africa
World Press, 1994, p. xxv

[80] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 14

nafsi has been come to mean the vital spirit, breath, the soul, as well as the essence of individuality and the person.[81] Within this conceptualization of *nafsi* there is considerable overlap with concept of *roho.*

This overlap also applies to another set of concepts, *mtima* and the concept of *moyo.* Mtima is a term which presently is scarcely used, especially in coastal regions.[82] It is a term which is used to describe the heart. *Moyo,* the more common term for the physical organ of the heart also is imbued with spiritual implications. It appears that the concept of *moyo* operates in a similar manner as the Kemetic metaphysical entity and component of the human being known as *ib.[83]* In Kiswahili, *moyo* is understood as a term that means the heart but also yet another term that can mean the soul.

Scholars of Nile Valley cultures studying the ancient language of Kemet were confronted with similar issues of seemingly redundant terms and concepts. Raymond Faulkner in his translation of the *Papyrus of Ani,* reasons that "In Egyptian religion old beliefs were rarely discarded, new ideas and concepts were merely tacked on, even when in direct contradiction to existing views".[84] While this is a plausible explanation, it does little to illuminate the complexities of the African cosmological system and understanding of human metaphysical existence.

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[81] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 328

[82] *Ibid,* p. 309

[83] See Appendix M for a comparison of Kiswahili terms to Mdw Ntr

[84] Faulkner, Raymond O. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Papyrus of Ani,* British Museum Publications, 1985, p. 12

While there may be lexical and conceptual redundancies, within the Kemetic system between these Swahili terms, it is generally understood at *moyo* and *roho* are not contradictory terms and instead are concepts that complement each other. It would seem that these terms fit into a complex cosmology system. African societies understood the complexity of human metaphysical existence. Mbiti explains that within these African cosmological systems,

> a person is thought to be composed of physical and spiritual entities and among some societies to these is added a "shadow," "a breath" or "a personality". It is not always easy to divide up a person into more than two parts, and this is an area which requires further research and study.[85]

What has limited further investigation into this idea is the general unwillingness of Africanists to study African phenomena as part of an interconnected system. African societies are isolated and studied in a cultural vacuum, disconnecting them from the social realities of the different expressions of Africanity. Furthermore, disconnecting the cultural expressions of living Africa from ancestral African societies, like Kemet, robs this investigation of valuable insight in how these systems work. Cheikh Anta Diop, famously stated that "the history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt".[86] Kemet, Eurocentrically, known as ancient Egypt, is not the source of African thought and expression, but, like the hundreds of indigenous African societies on the continent and in the diaspora are part of a cultural paradigm. The core of Kemetic society, like that of the

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[85] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophies,* Anchor Books, 1969, p. 209

[86] Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality,* Lawrence Hill Books, 1974, p. xiv

Swahili, is the *asili* of Africa which permeates in all the manifestations of African cultural thought and expression.

Spirits & Traditions of Spiritual Possession on the Coast

There are several types of spiritual entities recognized within Swahili society. Even in Zanzibar, one of the main Islamic cultural centers of East Africa, elements of traditional African spiritual awareness persist. It appears that Arab political and economic dominance in East Africa, and the conversion to Islam did not completely destroy Swahili people's appreciation for the spiritual elements of their environment that had been recognized by their ancestors' countless generations ago. Ironically, instead of abandoning their traditional understanding of African spirits with the increase of Arab cultural presence, Swahili spiritual thought began to incorporate elements of pre-Islamic Arabic spiritualism. These Arabic spirits are understood as separate entities from African spirits, and the Swahili delineate between the two. Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear clarify this point, stating:

> Linguistically, Swahili maintained a distinction today between indigenous religious concepts and Muslim ones. The word *koma, mizimu,* and *pepo* for ancestral, natural and malevolent spirits, for example all derive from proto-Swahili and proto-Sabaki words, as do most words associated with village, farming, and fishing activities. Words denoting Muslim religious, legal, and commercial concepts and institutions, however, are largely of Arabic provenance. Urban spirits are thus termed *jinn,* from Arabic, while rural ones are *mizimu.*[87]

Despite being pre-Islamic the Arabic *jinn* has founded itself disseminated across the Islamic world within folk Islamic thought. This dichotomy between traditional African

[87] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 95

culture and Islamic Arabized culture is clearly indictive of a pattern of Swahili thought. The epic of Fumo Liyongo hints at this growing cultural disparity with the association of urbanized spaces with dislocated Arabized culture. Outside of these urban centers the cultural dynamic of spiritual thought is quite different. Nurse and Spear indicate that, "each village was a microcosm, a mini-universe, with its own specific spirits associated with it. To move to another village was to enter another world".[88] The terms *koma* and *mizimu*, for example are not the name of a spirit, but rather the name of a *type* of spirt. The *Desturi za Waswahili* written by the Swahili scholar Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, makes an excellent effort at identifying particular named spirits within Swahili culture.[89]

John Middleton conceptualizes these spirits as ancestral 'nonliving intermediaries', which is in line with how John Mbiti has conceptualized the 'living dead'.[90] Mbiti articulates that the spirit of a deceased person up to five generations in the past can exists within three states.

> They are still within the *Sasa* period,[91] they are in the state of personal immortality, and their process of dying is not yet complete. We have called them the living-dead. They are the closest links that [people] have with the spirit world. Some of the things said about the spirits also apply to the living dead. But the living-dead are bilingual: they speak the language of [people], with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to Whom they are drawing nearer ontologically.[92]

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[88] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 94

[89] See Appendix O for spirits identified by Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari

[90] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 170

[91] The present, the experience of time navigated within the living world.

[92] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, pp. 81-82

Middleton conflates the terms *mizimu* and *koma* as he believes the terms to be synonyms for each other.[93] Other scholarship seems to suggest that there is a clear distinction between *koma* and *mizimu* spirits. *Mizimu* spirits, not to be confused with *mazimwi*[94], are associated with nature spirits, and are offered food, prayer and incense at special shrines,[95] where a *koma* spirit was once a person.[96] In Kiswahili the word *koma* can be used as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, *koma* refers to this ancestral spirit. As a verb, it means 'to cease', 'to stop', 'to come to an end'.[97]

Mizimu spirits, and possibly, *koma* spirits, are not known by the Swahili to possess people, although it is understood that *mizimu* spirits could make an individual sick.[98] The often-misunderstood *pepo* spirit, is the spiritual force most commonly associated with the possession of Swahili people.[99] Because of this, the *pepo* spirit has become categorized as a 'malevolent' spirit and grouped together with the *majini.* The *pepo* spirit is distinctively African in nature is most certainly not a *jinn* from Arabia. The *pepo* spirit is often

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[93] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 171

[94] The term *mazimwi* could be used to describe spirits but is also used to identify other supernatural beings such as fairies, ogres, lesser demons, and goblins

    A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 541

[95] Middleton, John. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization,* Yale University Press, 1992, p. 172

[96] Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 94

[97] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 217

[98] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 190

[99] *Ibid,* pp.190-191

associated with particular places, most often ruins or places that have experienced disasters.[100]

Due to the cultural alienation of Swahili men who are more readily assimilated into the patriarchal Islamic society, it appears that women who are often overlooked by Islamic societies are the ones who interact with the *pepo* spirit more regularly.

> The belief in spirits may well have been part of Swahili religion for many centuries, but the possession of women by spirits seems only to have become widespread throughout the coastal towns since the middle years of the nineteenth century, and more particularly since the abolition of slavery. Men are also possessed but women form the majority.[101]

The marginalization of African women has allowed them for generation to continue to be the preservers of African culture. In a private conversation Sonja Peterson Lewis, a professor in the Department of Africology at Temple University commented to the affect that there is has been an ironic virtue of being overlooked by western society that has allowed African women to preserve and pass on cultural traditions.

In 1987, only two decades after the Zanzibar Revolution Linda L. Giles published her findings on possession cults on the Swahili coast. The author gives this Zanzibari tradition two names, the *Pepo* or *Sheitani* cult.[102] *Pepo* is likely the name that practitioners use. The term pepo comes from the Kiswahili verb *pepa,* which means to "sway, reel, stagger, totter", and can be conjugated to also mean to fan.[103] This term probably developed

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[100] Horton, Mark; & John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society,* Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 191

[101] *Ibid*, p. 190

[102] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute.* Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987. P. 234.

[103] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2013. P. 374.

as those who became possessed or mounted by a spirit would sway or stagger about as an unearthly being came into their bodies. The other term, *Sheitani*[104], is an Islamic term borrowed from the Arabs. It means Satan. There are only two terms which signify malicious spirits in the Swahili language, *Shetani* and *Ibilisi,* both of these words come from Arabic, and both of these words are specifically used for the devil. Interestingly, the Swahili Oxford dictionary also list pepo as a synonym for these demonic terms. Essentially what is being said about this Pepo tradition is that it is a cult of devil worshipers. Despite the demonization of this African tradition, the author incorrectly identifies the tradition as syncretic.[105] Islamic terms are used within this tradition but it is clear that they really have little connection to middle eastern culture. In fact, the author makes a point when discussing the Swahili phrase *sheitani anapanda mtu*[106]*,* translated to, the [spirit] climbs/mounts a person is "a conception common to West African and Caribbean possession as well.[107]

John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy,* acknowledges that "Spirit possession occurs in one form or another in practically every African society" not just in West African and Caribbean.[108] Linda Giles neglects to elaborate how this *pepo* tradition is part of a spiritually conscious African cultural paradigm and an example the ontological

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[104] Also spelled Shetani

[105] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute.* Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987. P. 234.

[106] Translated from Kiswahili: 'the [spirit] mounts a person".

[107] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute.* Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987. P. 240.

[108] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Doubleday Anchor, 1969, p. 106.

and cosmological unity of that is innominate within a multitude of African traditions. Giles mentions in passing the cosmological consistency between the African traditions in Caribbean and in West Africa but does little in elucidating how these traditions which have been the focus of much more research, connect to what she had researched in East Africa.

Mbiti also makes a point to recognize that "spirit possession is not always to be feared".[109] This also applies to Swahili tradition as well. There is said to be three kinds of spirits, *pepo, sheitani or jinni*, which are able to mount an individual. Many people in Zanzibar have indicated that, "In fact, they are simultaneously general terms and specific types. For example, one can talk about any spirit as a *jinni* or one may refer to a certain type of spirit - a '*jinni* proper'".[110] It also appears that many might use the terms interchangeably as well. Giles does well to also point out that,

> Part of the problem in usage derives from the face that *jini* and *sheitani* are Arabic terms which are found in Middle Eastern and Islamic manuscripts. Thus their local interpretation has been coloured Islamic interpretation and Middle Eastern concepts, which have been adopted to varying degrees by the local coastal people, depending on their literacy, Islamic training or religious tolerance of the spirit.[111]

The adoption of this Arabic terms creates an issue with trying to understand the Pepo tradition. Instead of looking towards other similar African traditions to understand the role that these spirits play with the tradition, the Arabic terms disorientate the focus of the tradition. For example, the term jinni poses a problem. A *jinni*, or more commonly known in the West as a genie, is not capable of possession and the very idea of possession is alien

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[109] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Doubleday Anchor, 1969, p. 106.

[110] Giles, Linda L. "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-Examination of Theories of Marginality", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute.* Vol. 57, No. 2. 1987, p. 234

[111] *ibid*

to a genie. In Islam, the concept of the genie has been folded into the Hebrew understanding of an angel. So rather looking at the etymology of the word *jinni* to comprehend its significance within the tradition it is better to see how it fits within African ontology. A *jinni* quite simply is a spirit. A spirit which does not correspond with human direct ancestors. From an African perspective it could correspond with the idea of a secondary deity, a spirit below the creator. Giles avoids this inquiry in her analysis of the data she had collected. However, she provides another interesting caveat of her own.

> The jini/sheitani/pepo distinction is less important than whether the spirit is Muslim or pagan (shenzi) and whether it is of coastal (pwani) inland (bara) origin. These two distinctions often, but do not always, coincide. For example, although many coastal spirits are Muslim, some shenzi or of a mixed character (i.e. part Muslim and part shenzi). The most important distinction, however, is not whether the spirit is Muslim or but whether it behaves as such. (Spirits, like people, can be 'bad' Muslims).[112]

This statement brings about more questions than it answers. A spirit can be of mixed character, both at the same time a Muslim and not a Muslim. This notion plays at the idea of the coexistence of an ontological duality.

An early twentieth century Swahili scholar, Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, wrote extensively about Swahili culture. It is said that he grew up and studied Islamic sciences in Bagamoyo. However, it is his work on Swahili spiritualism which demands attention. He writes, "the Swahili, both men and women, hold polytheistic beliefs in male and female spirits".[113] Giles gives the impression that the *pepo* tradition is only practiced by

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[112] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Doubleday Anchor, 1969, p. 106.

[113] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin. "Selections from: The Customs of the Swahili People (Desturi Za Waswahili)." *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, edited by Said Hamdun and Noel King, Markus Wiener, 2003, p. 141.

marginalized women, where Bakari makes it clear that this tradition which he too names *pepo* has a larger societal reach.

The tradition that Bakari describes also appears to be within the same paradigm as the Pokomo tradition that has identified its own set of spirits and strategies to appease them. According to Robert L. Burger's research the Pokomo identify several spiritual entities. Within the tradition of the Pokomo they recognize the *pepo* spirit, as well as the *nkoma* (ancestral ghost and nature spirits), *mizuka* (nature spirits), and *maseha* (the ghost of the recently deceased).[114] In the Pokomo tradition it is understood that the *pepo* and *mizuka* spirits are still able to possess a person despite not being what could be understood as a ghost.[115] Similar to what Gile's had observed within the Swahili tradition, they believe that it is normally women who are the ones who become possessed by these types of spirits.[116]

Like the Swahili[117] the Pokomo make the same important distinction between traditional medicine (*uganga*) and sorcery (*uchawi*). Bakari walks through the process in which *uganga* and spiritual dance/ritual are used to treat an illness caused by unwanted spiritual possession. In his writing he states that on the sixth day of treatment the spirit is named. On the seventh day the spirit is released through the sacrificing of a goat.[118]

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[114] Bunger, Robert Louis. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* Eastern African Studies, Syracuse University, 1973, pp. 125 -126

[115] *Ibid,* p. 126

[116] *Ibid,* p. 129

[117] Richardson, Tarik. "The African Medical Paradigm: Delineating Tradition from Pathology During the Coronavirus Pandemic", *National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) Annual Report: The Discipline and the African World,* The National Council for Black Studies, 2022, pp. 127 -133

[118] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin. "Selections from: The Customs of the Swahili People (Desturi Za Waswahili)." *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, edited by Said Hamdun and Noel King, Markus Wiener, 2003, p. 143

Bakari's Islamic training comes out in the language he uses to describe this phenomenon. In the notes for his translation of *wameshiriki pepo* "hold polytheistic beliefs in male and female spirits", indicate that Bakari did not personally follow the pepo tradition. The note states "the awesome and dreadful root *sh-r-k* is used, which indicates the ultimate sin, in Muslim eyes, of associating a person or thing with God".[119] I am not familiar with the etymology of this root but wanted to make a note of this issue within the dichotomy between the traditional African system and the system of the Muslim Arabs. It is indeed a topic which requires further research. The notes also make clear that the word *pepo* is being translated into the word spirit. Bakari states that in addition to pepo, "there are many sorts of spirits; but the first and most important of all is Kinyamkera, originally a pagan spirit. They believe that it lives on the tops of hills".[120] It is interesting that Bakari writes that it was 'originally pagan', pagan meaning African in this context. Bakari writing that it was 'originally pagan' seems to indicate that the Kinyamkera is no longer African and could be conceptualized something entirely different now. This could be an example of how Eurasian culture appropriates indigenous cultural elements as it expands, or it could be an example of one of Giles' original points.

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[119] Mwinyi Bakari, Mtoro Bin. "Selections from: The Customs of the Swahili People (Desturi Za Waswahili)." *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, edited by Said Hamdun and Noel King, Markus Wiener, 2003, p. 151.

[120] *Ibid,* p. 145.

Mungu, the Name of the Most High

Despite Swahili peoples' consistent contact with foreign cultures for the last millennia, and the wave of Islamization and Arabization experienced along the Swahili corridor since the eighteenth century, Swahili people have continued to recognize God, the supreme deity and the creator of the cosmos not on Arabic/Islamic terms but on African ones. The Swahili name for God, *Mungu,* is etymologically tied to a plethora of other East African Bantu's conceptualizations for the term.[121] The Pokomo people refer to the supreme deity as *muungu;*[122] the Taru and Sandawe people of rural Tanzania as well as the Gikuyu of Kenya, refer to God as *Murungu;*[123] a great many people from Kenya to Malawi and into the Central African countries refer to the most high as *mulungu* or *mlungu;*[124] related to this term one of the Zulu names for God is *Unkulunkulu*[125]. In 1920 Godfrey Dale, the British Archdeacon of Zanzibar, in his text *The Peoples of Zanzibar* reminds us:

> in dealing with the African in Zanzibar it is never wise to forget that he is
> an African first and a Mohammedan afterwards. You will only understand
> his type of Mohammedanism if you have some acquaintance with the
> dominant religious ideas of the African.[126]

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[121] See Appendix H

[122] Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970, p. 334

[123] According to Mbiti the Taru people have two names. *Murungu* appears to be a general name for God, whereas the name *Matunda* is designated for the creator. It is unclear if, like Yoruba cosmology, these are separate entities or different names for the same entity.
    Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970, p.330-336

[124] Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970, pp. 327-336

[125] *Ibid*, p. 336

[126] Dale, Godfrey. *The Peoples of Zanzibar,* The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1920, p. 25

Similarly, John Mbiti begins his text *African Religions and Philosophy* by stating that African people are 'notoriously' religious, their ontology and behavior is intertwined with a culturally centered and community-based cosmology.[127] Mbiti adds that "to ignore these traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices can only lead to a lack of understanding of African behavior and problems".[128] The retention of an African name for the most important element/figure within a supposedly monotheistic community indicates an important clue to better understanding Swahili people beyond just being Ibadi Muslims with syncretic beliefs. Within African culture, names are important. Behind each name is meaning and reason.

Names related to the Swahili term *Mungu* do not represent the only names that Bantu people have for the supreme deity. Scholars have recognized that the Bantu concept of God is likely just as old as the Bantu people themselves. The presence of names related to *Mungu* across eastern and southern Africa indicate that this term began to be used and disseminated before or during the later stages of the Bantu migration, but after the initial migration during the fourth millennium before the common era.

An earlier name, *Nyambe,* is still spoken amongst many Bantu communities on the African continent. While people like the Lozi of Zambia, continue to use the name *Nyambe* there are many names who appear to either be etymologically related or derived from the name *Nyambe.* For instance, one of the principal names for God amongst the Akan people of Ghana is *Nyame.[129]* Interestingly, despite this similarity with the proto-Bantu name for

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[127] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 3

[128] *Ibid*

[129] Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970, p.328

God, most linguists group the language of the Akan as Niger-Congo A rather than Niger-Congo B. The Batooro people, native to Tooro kingdom within the modern nation state of Uganda, have several names for their supreme deity one of which, *Nyamuhanga,* seems to be related to the classical proto-Bantu term.[130] The term *Nyambe* derives from the proto-Bantu verb *-amb-* which means 'to begin'.[131] Thusly *Nyambe* is the one who initiated the beginning, the creator.

The text *Bantu Africa* suggests that it was around 3500 BCE, that the concept of a divine creator enters the worldview of the proto-Bantu, just before the first Bantu migration.[132] This date seems arbitrary, as it does not represent the earliest date that this concept became an element of the Bantu worldview, but rather the latest date that the concept could be developed before the original term was disseminated during the first migration. It is probable that an African concept of a supreme deity was already developing in the minds of these, and other, ancestral African peoples. Around this same time, in the Nile Valley of Northeastern Africa, King Menes, the great unifier of Kemet had established a tradition which incorporated the regional deities of the sepats[133] with Amun as the supreme deity. The notion that the creator deity, whether conceptualized within a polytheistic or monotheistic tradition, presides on top of a spiritual hierarchy is present within most every African society. For example, the Watumbatu of Zanzibar,

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[130] Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970*,* p. 336

[131] Fourshey, Catherine; et al. *Bantu Africa: 3500 BCE to Present,* Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 30

[132] *Ibid*

[133] Regional districts in Kemet. Nomes in Greek.

> See God's omnipotence in terms of his being more powerful than the spirits which otherwise are generally considered to be more powerful than [people]. In this context, power is viewed hierarchically, so that God is at the top as the omnipotent; beneath him are the spirits with lesser power; and lower still are [people] with comparatively little power or no power at all.[134]

The Swahili, like most African societies, recognize the omnipotent nature of God but conceptualize God as distant. The remote nature of the supreme deity is why people need to utilize the unseen spiritual intermediaries such as ancestral spirits or lesser divinities. To this point, Godfrey Dale remarks that the Swahili people of Zanzibar have a "vague indefinite idea of God somewhere in the background. It is an idea that does not enter very largely into their everyday life, but it is there".[135] Mbiti warns that many foreign scholars mischaracterize the African conceptualization of God on the bases of this remoteness. Mbiti states that "the attributes of God's transcendence must be balanced with that of his immanence, since these two are paradoxically complementary".[136] African people are not godless, God is not so remote that he is not known by the people.

The retention of the name *Mungu* by Swahili people and the consistency of the core elements of African cosmology found across the continent attest that despite generations of almost exclusively practicing the Islamic faith, the Swahili people were never completely alienated from their *asili*. The development of various historical perspectives, and foreign literature have compromised the way that the Swahili people are conceptualized, and in many ways how their worldview is conceptualized. The Swahili aren't the product of foreign immigration and are not part of an Asiatic diaspora. The

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[134] Mbiti, John S. *Concepts of God In Africa,* SPCK, 1970, p. 12

[135] Dale, Godfrey. *The Peoples of Zanzibar,* The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1920, p. 25

[136] Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, p. 32

227

Swahili owe their culture to no one but themselves. They are the *wenyiji wa asili.* The Swahili are an African people.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

If our study of Black history is merely an exercise in feeling good about
ourselves, then we will die feeling good. We must look at the lessons that
history teaches us. We must understand the tremendous value of the study
of history for the re-gaining of power.
– Amos Wilson

The Swahili people, from south of the Horn to the border of Mozambique, are an African people. Linguistic evidence has indicated for decades the Kiswahili language is very clearly a Bantu language with only marginal and secondary foreign influence on select terminologies. They, the Swahili people, as a community and culture, are not the descendants of foreign people who happened to intermarry with local families. Swahili culture emanates from African culture. It is a unique expression of African culture, formed by the complexities of a millennia of social interactions along the eastern coast of Africa. Like so many African cultures in eastern Africa, and the Caribbean the Swahili exist in a cultural convergence zone.

Yet, despite centuries of foreign interaction, influence, and the manufacturing of exogenous ontologies, African culture and African cultural values have remained central to Swahili cultural thought and expression. The Swahili exist within part of an African cultural paradigm. Swahili ontological and cosmological thought shares an epistemological continuity with many other African societies within this paradigm. Even the way that reductionist theories which attempt to alienate the culture from this paradigm manifest in similar ways as other parts of the diaspora.

The reductionist narrative that the Swahili people, and thusly their culture, descend from Arabia, is only partly true consequently from a certain perspective. Moreover, only for some of the native population along the coast who did intermarry with foreigners. Francis Nesbitt have noted that in recent years the reductionist *Creolist Hypothesis* of the Swahili language which was developed during the colonial period have been revived and promoted by scholars such Mazrui, Shariff, and Bryceson.[1] Nesbitt comments that this revival lacks many of the racial overtones of this earlier period, however this hypothesis does not skirt around alienating the Swahili from the rest of Africa.[2]

Bryceson, ostensibly in agreement with the colonial perspective, even suggest that "east African coastal culture is neither Arab nor African".[3] Mazrui avoids completely alienating the Swahili people from Africa by attempting to include the Arabs as part of the African cultural paradigm within his theories of Islamophillic Afrocentricity, the Triple Heritage Theory, and the simple fact that the majority of people who identify as Arabs in world currently live on the African continent.

The existence of these various theories is the result of ontological reduction by foreign scholarship, rooted in colonial epistemology, and cultural insecurity within African groups which manifests as ontological alienation and a Eurasian validation complex. The great issue that African communities face is not centered around the existence of these sort

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[1] Nesbitt, Francis. "Swahili Creolization and Postcolonial Identity in East Africa", *Creolization and Pidginization in Context of Postcolonial Diversity,* edited by Jacquline Knorr and Wilson Trajano Filho, Brill, 2008, p. 117

[2] *Ibid*

[3] Bryceson, Deborah F. "Swahili Creolization: The Case of Dar-es-Salaam*", The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, edited by R. Cohen and P. Toninato, Routledge, 2009, p. 364

of complexities or alternative perspectives on African ontology, but rather the politicization of identity and cultural memory to the determent of other African people. The history of Swahili people as articulated in the chronicles, as well as the colonial history of Africa and the diaspora demonstrate how African identities alienated from their *asili* have weaponized against inter-communal and inter-ethnic African reciprocity. For many communities in the African world this conflict of culture became an issue beginning in the nineteenth century. For the Swahili, these issues have existed at some level since the time of Fumo Liyongo[4] and Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century.

Histories have been manufactured to better align with these politicized identities. How a people understand their history, informs how they operationalize and construct their identities. This is the relationship between cultural memory/mythology and ontology. While Swahili identities informed by the Arab and Shirazi myths may be representative and informative of certain communities understanding of their ontology and cultural memory, these perspectives should not be conceptualized as universal. On the island of Zanzibar, perhaps one of the first places to develop the Swahili language as we know it today, many groups of Africans, the Hadimu, the Watambatu, the Shirazi, and the descendants of enslaved Africans from the interior have all made the island their home. All these people, diverse in their cultural expression of African culture and articulation of their cultural memory, now declare themselves Swahili, and must continue to work together as countrymen. This requires facing hard truths and finding an impetus to facilitate national reciprocity beyond economic and political stability.

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[4] Sometime between the 9th and 13th centuries

Kiswahili and the Future of Pan-Africanism

In 1974, Cheikh Anta Diop argued that the recognition of African cultural solidarity must be the foundation of Pan-African unity in his text *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State.*[5] Julius Nyerere and Jomo Kenyatta the fathers of modern Tanzania and Kenya respectfully capitalized on Pan-African and culturally conscious rhetoric to galvanize their communities during the era of independence. John Okello the complicated hero of the Zanzibar revolution also utilized Garveyite rhetorical sentiments during the African revolution to overthrow the Arab regime in 1964. A true revolution seeks not only to replace individuals within a power structure but to revolutionize how power is structured. Pan-African political organization without the operationalization of the African cultural paradigm is a superfluous political agenda indictive of the neo-colonial politics on the African continent.

Following Kenyan political independence from Britain in 1963, Jomo Kenyatta, as the first head of state of an independent Kenya continued to utilize ancestral traditions and symbols to galvanize the people of Kenya. Kenyatta utilized Pan-African rhetoric to fight tribalism and ethnic-chauvinism.[6] Mwalimu Julius Nyerere commented in a conference addressing issues in the Congo in 1960 that,

> The African national state is an instrument for the unification of Africa, and
> not for dividing Africa. African nationalism is meaningless, is dangerous,
> is anachronistic, if it is not at the same time Pan-Africanism.[7]

[5] Diop, Cheikh Anta. *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State,* Lawrence Hill Books, (1974) 1987

[6] Okoth, Assa. *A History of Africa: African Nationalism and the De-colonisation Process,* East African Educational Publishers, 2006, p. 53

[7] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era,* New Africa Press, 2006, p. 197

Pan-Africanism was at the core of African discourse on political independence (*uhuru*), and self-determination (*Kujichagulia*), in East Africa. Nyerere as well as Kenyatta promoted Kiswahili as a language to be used for Pan-African political efforts both within their respective countries of Tanzania and Kenya as well as its use in the Organization of African Unity and abroad.

On July 7th, 1954, ten years before the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, the Tanganyika Africa National Union (TANU) political party was formed.[8] This date, the seventh day of the seventh month, would later become known as the annual celebration of *Saba Saba* Day.[9] TANU positioned itself as a political party for African people grounded in Pan-African ideals. Julius Nyerere one of the founders of TANU declared on this first *Saba Saba* Day that Kiswahili was a tool to be used by Africans to fight for political independence, *uhuru*, from European domination.[10] Godrey Mwakikagile in his book *Nyerere and Africa* comments that:

> One of his (Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's) great contributions was to push the growth of Swahili in East and Central Africa. He believed, with good reason, the Swahili could promote African unity, just as it had done in Tanzania.[11]

In 1961, Kiswahili in Tanzania, along with the language of the Amhara people in Ethiopia, were the only two African languages to be declared an official language within the first

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[8] Okoth, Assa. *A History of Africa: African Nationalism and the De-colonisation Process,* East African Educational Publishers, 2006, p. 51

[9] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era,* New Africa Press, 2006, p. 110

[10] Okoth, Assa. *A History of Africa: African Nationalism and the De-colonisation Process,* East African Educational Publishers, 2006, p. 51

[11] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era,* New Africa Press, 2006, p. 409

draft of their constitutions. While recognized as a national language in Kenya by 1964, the Kenyan constitution did not recognize Kiswahili as an official language until 2010 Since the 1960s African political and intellectual leaders recognized the hypocrisy of fighting foreign political, economic, and cultural domination while remaining linguistically and intellectually tethered to their former oppressor. Likewise, since the 1960s African intellectual leaders including Maulana Karenga and the Nigerian writer Wole Soynika have called for the utilization of the East African language for Pan-African, and trans-continental use.

On August 27th, 2016, the East African Legislative Assembly, a sub-organization of the East African Community, which consists of Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and South Sudan as partner states, passed a resolution that urged the Summit of East African Community (EAC) to "amend the Treaty for the establishment of the Community to provide for Kiswahili as one of the official languages of the Community".[12] Hon. Joseph Kiangoi of the East African Legislative Assembly declared that "it was time for east Africans to be proud of their culture".[13] Kiangoi elaborated that East Africans should "embrace Kiswahili, it is part of our culture".[14] The initial hesitation within the East African community, voiced eloquently by Hon. Dora Byamukama was that some partner states, namely Uganda, have a large population that does not speak Kiswahili.[15] East

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[12] Owaka, Simon Peter. "Assembly wants Kiswahili adopted as one of the official languages of the Community", *East African Community Press Release,* 2016

[13] *Ibid*

[14] *Ibid*

[15] *Ibid*

African legislators continued to promote Kiswahili as a lingua-franca and a language to promote solidarity in the spirit of Pan-African unity.

Uganda facing the challenges of embracing Kiswahili established the Uganda National Kiswahili Council in 2019 to facilitate the eventual incorporation of Kiswahili as a second official language in the country. At the twenty-first Summit of the East African Community, held in February of 2021, a directive was issued to expedite the adoption of Kiswahili, English, and French as official languages among its partner states. Burundi had already implemented Kiswahili into its educational and political systems in 2007, and Rwanda adopting the language in 2017. While an official language since 2004, in February 2022 the African Union adopted Kiswahili as the only official working language of the organization indigenous to the continent. A month later, in March of 2022, Uganda announced that they too would adopt Kiswahili as an official language of the country.

Like in Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi the adoption of Kiswahili as an official language in Uganda initials that the learning of the language will become integrated as part of public primary school curriculum. This is a major step in ensuring that the next generation of political leaders, orators, scholars, and creatives will be trained with a newfound respect and appreciation for African language and culture as a legitimate basis of political and intellectual discourse. Much work still needs to be done to shift the epistemological paradigm of African educational systems, which by-in-large are still based on Eurasian pedagogy and institutions.

What the Diaspora Can Learn From Swahili History

In a 1985 interview Mwalimu Julius Nyerere stated that "we should try to revive it (Pan-Africanism). We should look to our brothers and sisters in the West. We should build the broader Pan-Africanism. There is still the room – and the need"[16] Since the early twentieth century the Diaspora has been in constant contact with each other. This contact undeniably played a role in the development of social action both on the continent and in the Diaspora. Maulana Karenga introduced the Swahili language to the average African American through his Kawaida philosophy and the celebration of Kwanzaa.

Since the introduction of the Swahili language to the Diaspora, it has become a tool used to fight against cultural dislocation, and hopefully will continued to be learned to further engage the Diaspora in continental politics. Similar to how Kiswahili is being implemented within the school curricula of partner states of the East African Community prepare the next generation to be Pan-African leaders, the African American Freedom Schools in the United States of America provides the best institutional framework to prepare young people in the Diaspora to engage with other Africans abroad. Kelli Sparrow Mickens in her book *Philadelphia Freedom Schools* defines the Freedom Schools as a response to the "conditions of captivity and oppression that people of African ancestry in America have had to endure.[17] The Freedom School Movement is an attempt to take back community agency in the process of socializing African American youth in realignment with the goals of Pan-African achievement rather than the achievement of the nation state

[16] Mwakikagile, Godfrey. *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era*, New Africa Press, 2006, p. 151

[17] Mickens, Kelli Sparrow. *Philadelphia Freedom Schools,* On the Wings of Margaret Sparrow Publishing, 2016, p. 21

which has perpetually disenfranchised the African American community. It is the result of two centuries of discourse, debate, and educational experimentation.

Within the framework for this movement, students are taught basic Swahili phrases, the Akan Adinkra symbols, and are familiarized with African historical personalities. The Freedom Schools have also adopted the *Nguzo Nane* (the eight principles), from Paul Hill Jr., the founder of the National Rites of Passage Institute, who expanded Karenga's *Nguzo Saba* to include the principle of *Heshima* (respect).[18] John M. Mugane in his text *the Story of the Swahili* reflects on how the African Diaspora, specifically the African American community has utilized the Swahili language. He notes:

> African Americans did not just sprinkle Swahili words into their speeches for solidarity with the homeland: rather, they adapted the language, much like inland communities of eastern and central Africa who had made Swahili their own.[19]
>
> […] They stretched the meanings of original Swahili words, added nuances, and spelled and pronounced them differently to establish a paradigm of their own that placed slavery and racism in the same category as colonialism and neo-colonialism. This conceptual and linguistic linkage proclaimed the parallels between the struggles of African Americans and those of Africans in Africa, thereby capturing what many see as the reality that binds African communities globally.[20]

It should be remembered that Swahili was never standardized language and has always been a language consisting of a plethora of regional dialects.[21] The Swahili that is normally

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[18] Mickens, Kelli Sparrow. *Philadelphia Freedom Schools,* On the Wings of Margaret Sparrow Publishing, 2016*,* p. 250

[19] Mugane, John M. *The Story of Swahili,* Ohio University Press, 2015, p. 256

[20] *Ibid,* p.267

[21] See Appendix L

taught is the Zanzibari dialect which was developed out of social interaction with foreign traders and similitude, thusly containing a high level of loanwords.

Zanzibari Kiswahili served its purpose for its people, but just as Kiswahili has developed in other areas such as in central Africa and the Diaspora, it should be allowed to shift into a new Pan-African for international use. Kiswahili does not need to be "re-Africanized"; it is already an African language. However, in this new paradigm for Pan-African international use, perhaps the language could go through a phase of lexical refinement where select terms with ties to Arab enslavement and European colonization are scrutinized. In this investigation, other African communities on the continent may offer alternative terms that can be used that are more culturally appropriate for Pan-African use. The Swahili language is structured in such a way that terms and concepts from other languages are able to be easily incorporated. In this way, Kiswahili could be used a vehicle to facilitate the creation of a true Pan-African language that incorporates and is conscious of concepts and terms originating in African communities from all over the continent. The adoption of Kiswahili in Uganda and the African Union presents a unique opportunity to see how and if Kiswahili will be adapted as it is embraced as an official language.

The history of the Swahili language, the people, and the culture, represent a microcosm of the beauty and struggle within much of the history of the African world. The struggle of African communities grappling with their Africanity is an ontological issue that it has manifested in a great many African communities both on the continent and in the Diaspora. The beauty in Swahili history is that despite centuries of foreign dominance, influence, and alienation, indigenous African culture has endured and is still a part of the spiritual and mundane parts of countless people's lives. Swahili history, in the form of the

238

Shungwaya Myth, also provides another testimony of ancestral African unity and achievement, while the language, Kiswahili, provides the opportunity to continue to build upon that legacy into the future.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
TIMELINE OF RELEVANT DATES

First Phase of the Bantu Migration: Bantu people migrate southeast into the lowlands around the Sangha and Nyong Rivers in Cameroon………..……..…… ~ 3,500 – 3,000 BCE

Unification of Upper and Lower Kemet by Menes ………......……………… ~ 3,200 BCE

Creation of the Cult of Sobek by Menes …………..……….……..…………… ~ 3,150 BCE

The Fall of Kemet ………………………….…………………………. 525 BCE – 30 BCE

Second Phase of the Bantu Migration: Bantu communities begin to migrate into the Congo Basin …………………………………………………………...… 3,000 – 2,000 BCE

Third Phase of the Bantu Migration: Bantu communities continue to migrate east into central Africa …………………………………………….………………. 2,000 – 1,000 BCE

Fourth Phase of the Bantu Migration: *Mashariki* Bantus (Swahili for eastern Bantus) moved out of the forested regions of Central Africa and into the savannas and grasslands of eastern and southern Africa. …….……………………..………. ~ 1,000 BCE – 500 CE

Swahili Iron Age: Formation of Swahili iron-working settlements ….. 100 BCE – 300 CE

The Hellenic *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* was written: Greek Speaking sailors document the ports of East Africa ………………….....……………………….………... 40 - 70 CE

The Azanian Archeological Period of Swahili History ……..…………….… 300 – 600 CE

The Axumite King Ezana converts to Christianity and Destroys Meroe, Ending the Classical Period of African Antiquity …………….………….………………… ~ 350 CE

Possible Founding of Mombasa …………………………………...……… ~ 900 CE

The Development of Swahili Coastal Communities………….…………1000 – 1500 CE

According to the Kilwa Chronicle, the Kilwa Sultanate is Founded by Ali Hassan Shirazi
………………………………………………………….……………...… 1005 CE

The Proposed Height of Shungwaya's Prosperity ……………….…… ~ 1100 – 1500 CE

Pate Sultanate gains independence from Kilwa Kisiwani ………….……….…… 1203 CE

Ibn Battuta Travels to the Swahili Coast …………………….…....…………. ~ 1330 CE

Chinese Junks Visit East Africa for the Last Time ……………….……….….. ~ 1433 CE

Vasco da Gama & The Portuguese Arrive in East Africa ………………………. 1498 CE

The Portuguese Overthrow the Royal Family of Kilwa and Install an Arab family
………………………………………………………………….…………… 1505 CE

Possible Range of the Final Exodus from Shungwaya …….….………... ~ 1500 -1550 CE

An Oromo is killed during a Mijikenda Age-set Initiation Ceremony Beginning the Oromo-Mijikenda Wars and Mijikenda Migration…………………………………~ 1560 CE

Oromo Warriors Overrun Coastal Towns Eventually Reaching Pate and Malindi
…………………………………..………………………….………...1624 CE

Oman Ends Portuguese Dominance Along the Swahili Coast …………….…….. 1698 CE

Anglo – Zanzibar War: Shortest War in Recorded History, Establishment of British Dominance in Zanzibar ………………………………….. ……...……………… 1896 CE

Slavery is Legislatively Abolished in Tanganyika and Zanzibar ………..………..1897 CE

Maji Maji Rebellion: Tanganyikan Resistance to German Occupation …..……… 1902 CE

Slavery is Legislatively Abolished in Kenya ………………………….……… 1907 CE

1st Pan-African Congress Held in Paris, France …………………….……...….… 1919 CE

The Hadimu Spiritual Tradition Surrounding the *kitimiri* Spirit Begins to Fade from Public Memory in Zanzibar ……………………………………………………... 1920 CE

5th Pan-African Congress Attended by Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Amy Ashwood Garvey …………………………….…….….…… 1945 CE

The Kolloa Affray, Pokot Revolutionaries Attack Kenyan Colonial Authorities ....1950 CE

Mau Mau Revolution: Gikuyu Led Resistance to British Colonialism in Kenya ………………………………..……………………………….…. 1952 – 1960 CE

Saba Saba Day: Formation of TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) ..….. 1954 CE

Tanzania Gains Full Independence from Britain …………………………….…1961 CE

Julius Nyerere Elected as the First President of Tanganika …………..……… 1962 CE

Formation of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) ………………….…... 1963 CE

---

[1] Known in Uganda as the Liberation War and in Tanzania as the Kagera War

The African Union Makes Kiswahili an Official Language of the Organization ...2004 CE

Burundi Makes Kiswahili a Compulsory Subject in Primary School Curricula .... 2007 CE

Rwanda Adopts Kiswahili as an Offical Language …………………..……. 2017 CE

Samaia Suluhu Assumes Office, First Woman to be President of Tanzania ……. 2021 CE

The African Union Makes Kiswahili an Official Working Language ………..…… 2022 CE

Kiswahili adopted as an Official Language in Uganda ………..………………..2022 CE
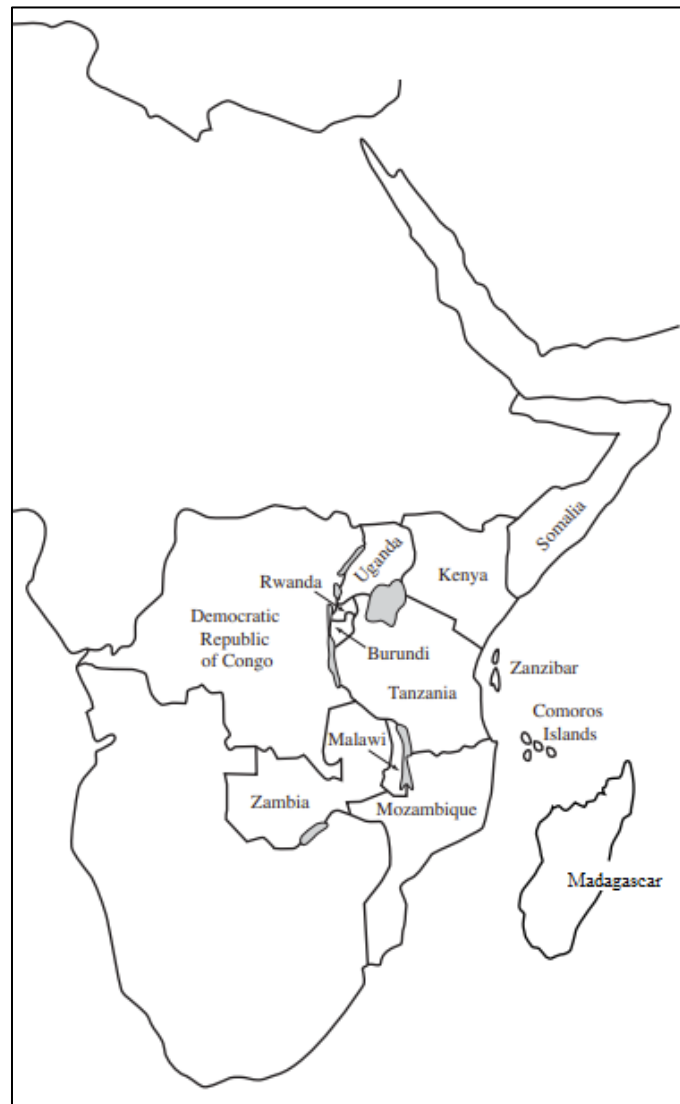
Map of Africa.
Area of interest East Africa.

APPENDIX C:
MAP OF COASTAL EAST AFRICA & THE SWAHILI CITY-STATES[1]

The map shows coastal East Africa with labeled locations including: Faza, Siu, Pate, Shanga, Manda, Lamu, Takwa, Lamu Archipelago, *Nyanza an indigenous name instead of the colonial Lake Victoria, Nile R., Lake Nyanza*, Webi Shebelle, Juba R., Muqdisho, Merca, Barawa, Kismayu, Tana R., Lamu Archipelago, Malindi, Mombasa, Pangani R., Lake Tanganyika, Pemba, Zanzibar, Rufiji R., INDIAN OCEAN, Mafia, Kilwa, Lake Nyasa, Ruvuma R., Comoro Islands, Kerimba Islands, Mozambique, Zambezi R., Madagascar, Sofala

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APPENDIX D:
GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGE GROUPS[1]

LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION

1 NIGER – KORDOFANIAN
  MANDE
  WEST ATLANTIC
  ADAMAWA – EASTERN
  GUR
  KRU
  KWA
  BENUE – CONGO (INCL. BANTU)
  KORDOFANIAN

2 NILO – SAHARAN
  SONGHAI
  SAHARAN
  MABAN
  FUR
  CHARI – NILE
  KOMAN

3 AFROASIATIC
  SEMITIC
  BERBER
  CHADIC
  CUSHITIC

4 KHOISAN

5 MALAYO – POLYNESIAN
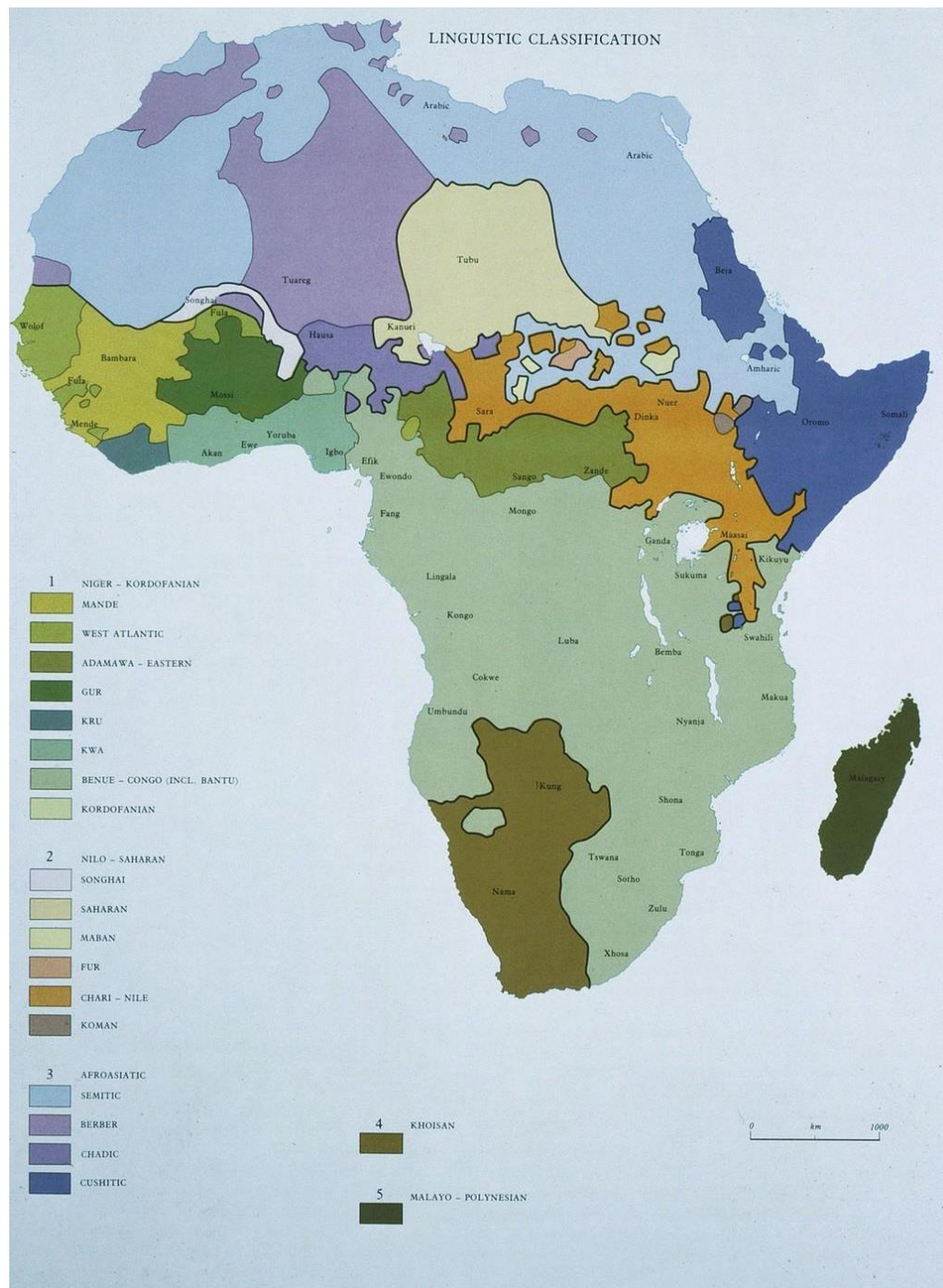
APPENDIX E:
MAP OF EASTERN BANTU LANGUAGE GROUPS[1]

Map adapted from Spears, Thomas & Derek Nurse, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 42

APPENDIX F:
BANTU EXPRESSIONS OF UBUNTU (HUMANITY)

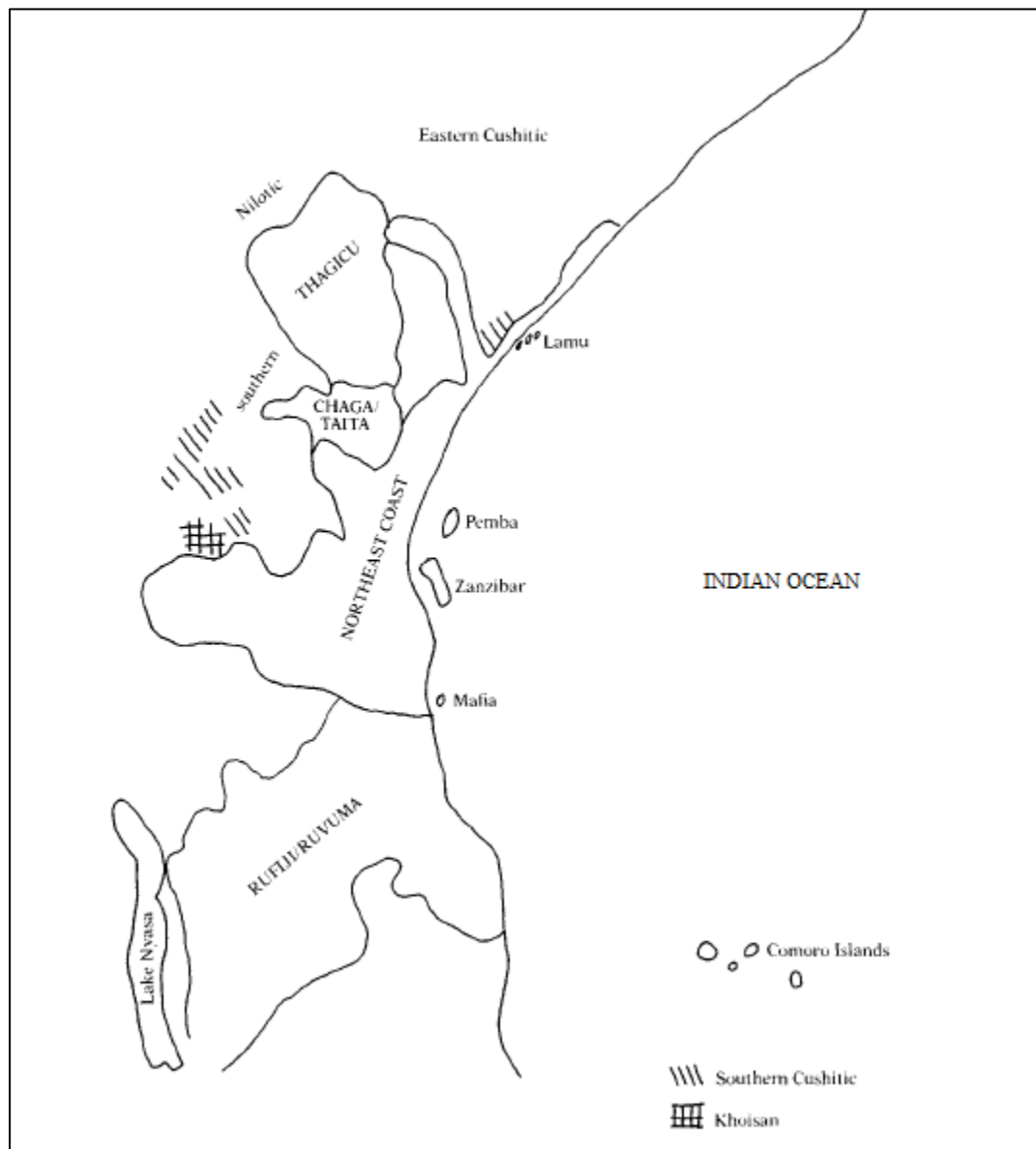| TERM	LANGUAGE	REGION
Ubuntu	isiZulu	South Africa
	Xhosa	South Africa
Umunthu	Chichewa (Chinyanja)	Malawi & Zambia
Ubumuntu	Kinyarwanda	Rwanda
	Kirundi	Burundi
Vumuntu	Tonga	Zambia & Zimbabwe
Gimuntu	Kongo	Angola
Utu	Kiswahili	Tanzania & Kenya
Unhu	Shona	Zimbabwe
Umundu	Kikuyu	Kenya
Omundu	Luhya	Kenya
	Herero	Namibia
Botho	Sesotho	Lesotho & South Africa
	Tswana	Botswana

Table of various expressions of the concept of Ubuntu, commonly
translated as humanity or humanism amongst different Bantu languages.
This is not a comprehensive list but is representative of many of the
expressions found in Bantu communities.

APPENDIX G:
SIMPLIFIED AFRICAN COSMOLOGICAL STRUCUTRE[1]

```
                        /\
                       /  \
                      / God \
                     / Mungu \
                    /----------\
                   / Divinities \
                  /  & Spirits   \
                 / Miungu na      \
                / Mizumu           \
               /--------------------\
              /     Ancestors        \
             /       Wazazi           \
            /--------------------------\
           /          People           \
          /            Watu             \
         /------------------------------\
        /       Animals & Plants         \
       /      Wanyama na Mimea            \
      /----------------------------------\
     /      Inanimate Objects &           \
    /       CosmologicalPhenomena          \
   /          Kila Kitu Kingine             \
  /------------------------------------------\
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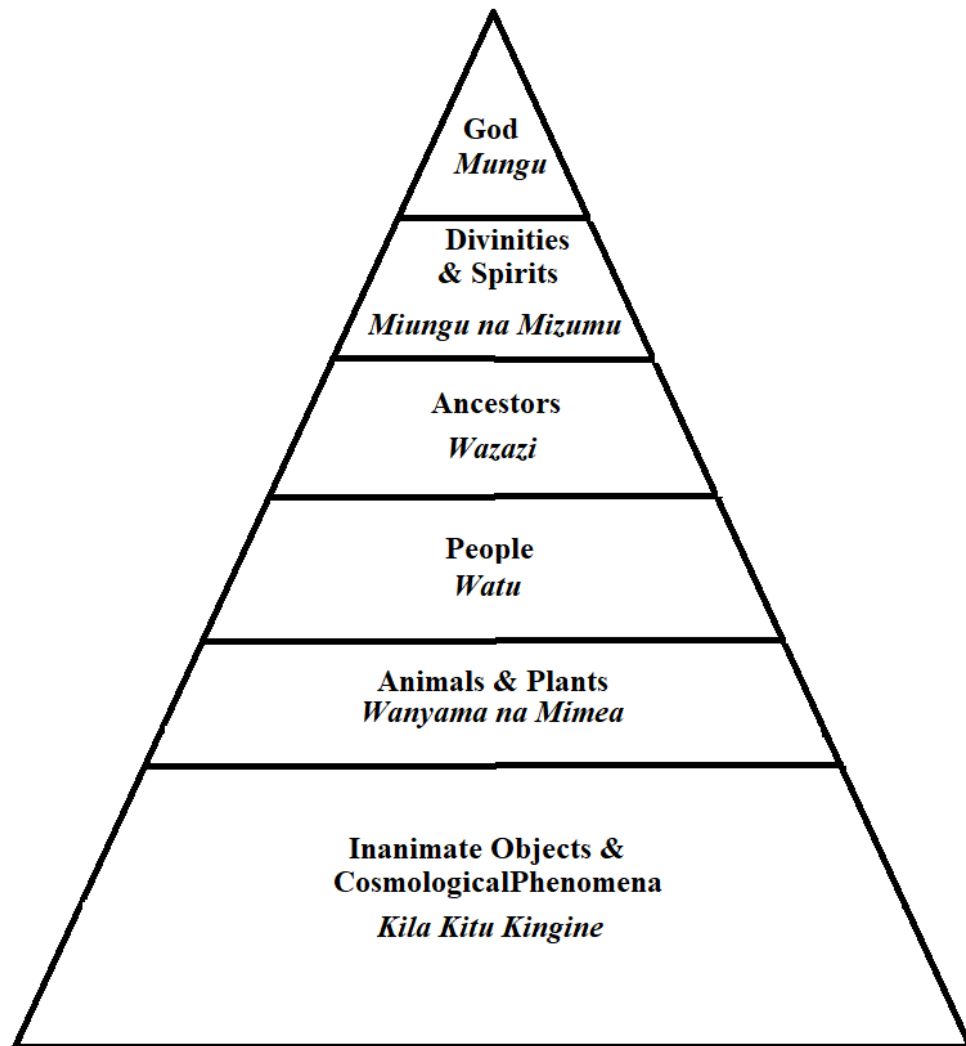
[1] Diagram constructed and informed by information provided by: Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy,* Second Edition, Heinemann, (1969) 1990, pp. 200 – 201

APPENDIX H:
SELECTED BANTU EXPRESSIONS OF GOD[1]

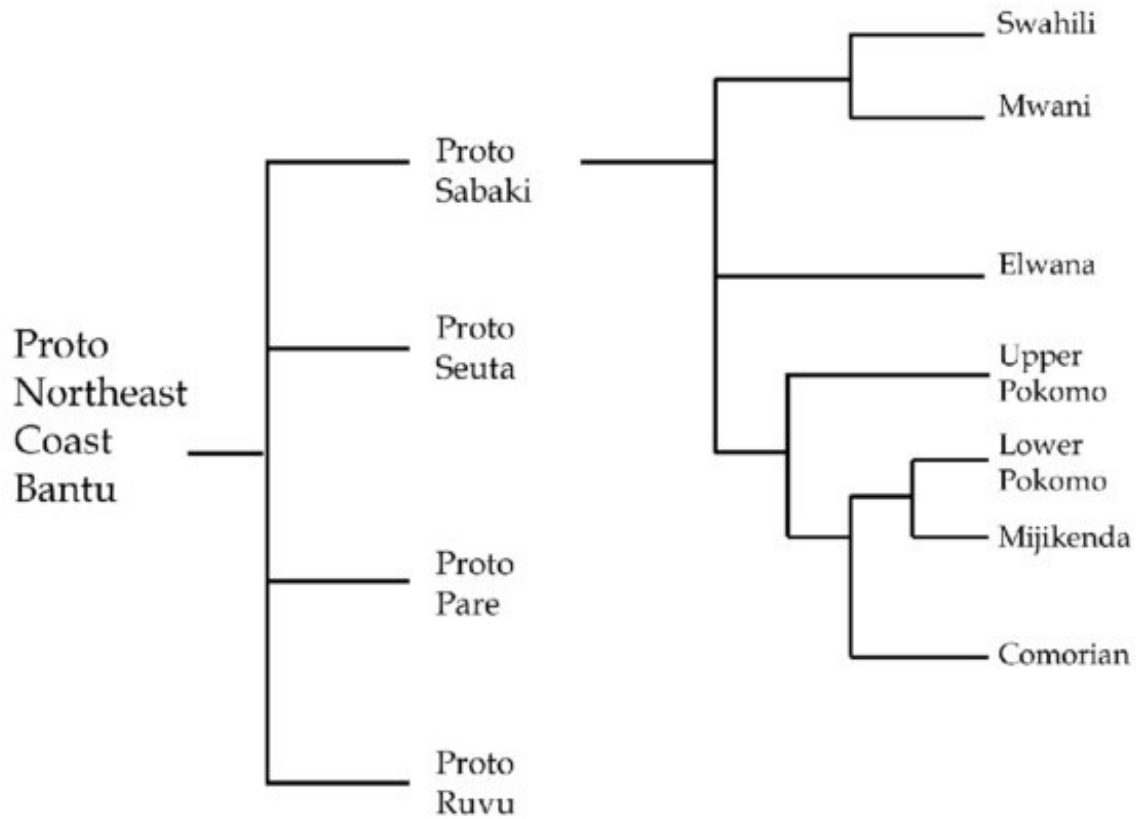| TERM	People	REGION
Mungu	Swahili	Tanzania & Kenya
	Nyamwezi	Tanzania
	Sukuma	Tanzania
	Watumbatu (?)	Zanzibar, Tanzania
Muungu	Pokomo	Kenya
Mugulu	Ganda	Uganda
Mlungu	Bondei	Tanzania
	Teita	Kenya
Mulungu	Akamba	Kenya
	Bena	Tanzania
	Chewa	Malawi
	Digo	Kenya
	Duruma	Kenya
	Giryama	Kenya
	Gogo	Tanzania
	Luguru	Tanzania
	Nyamwezi	Tanzania
	Nyanja	Zambia & Malawi
	Sukuma	Tanzania
	Yao	Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania
Murungu	Gikuyu	Kenya
	Meru	Kenya
	Sandawe	Tanzania
	Turu	Tanzania
Mukuru	Herero	Namibia, Angola & Botswana
	Himba	Namibia
Ukulunkulu	Ndebele	Zimbabwe
	Zulu	South Africa
Kalunga	Chokwe	Angola
Nzambi Mpungu	Kongo	DRC, Republic of Congo, Angola, Gabon
	Vili	DRC, Republic of Congo, Angola, Gabon
Nyambe	Barotse	Zambia
	Bassa	Cameroon
	Fang	Cameroon & Gabon
	Fanti	Ghana
	Lozi	Zambia

Mbiti, John. *Concepts of God in Africa,* S.P.C.K., 1970, pp. 327 – 336

APPENDIX I:
NOMINAL CLASSES IN BANTU LANGUAGES[1]

Singular classes		Plural classes		Typical meaning(s)
Number	Prefix	Number	Prefix	
1	*mu-*	2	*ba-*	Humans, animate
3	*mu-*	4	*mi-*	Plants, inanimate
5	*dɪ-*	6	*ma-*	Objects; class six for liquids and other substances
7	*ki-*	8	*bɪ-*	Various, diminutives, manner/way/language
9	*n-*	10	*n-*	Wild animals, inanimate
11	*du-*			Abstract nouns
12	*ka-*	13	*tu-*	Diminutives
14	*bu-*			Abstract nouns
15	*ku-*			The Infinitive
16	*pa-*			Locatives (proximal, exact)
17	*ku-*			Locatives (distal, approximate)
18	*mu-*			Locatives (interior)
19	*pɪ-*			Diminutives

[1] Chart adapted from Creider, Chet A. "The Semantic System of Noun Classes in Proto-Bantu" *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Indiana University, 1975, p. 128

APPENDIX J:
NORTHEAST COAST BANTU LANGUAGE FAMILY[1]

Proto
Northeast
Coast
Bantu

Proto
Sabaki

Swahili

Mwani

Elwana

Upper
Pokomo

Lower
Pokomo

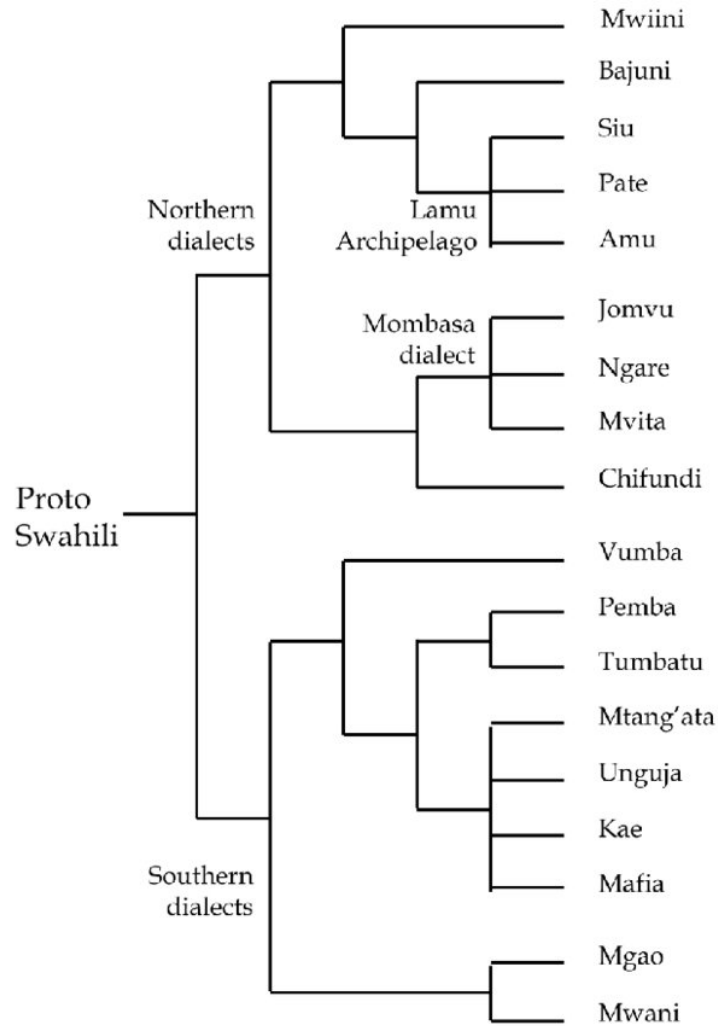Mijikenda

Comorian

Proto
Seuta

Proto
Pare

Proto
Ruvu

[1] Walsh, Martin. "From dugouts to double outriggers: Lexical insights into the development of Swahili nautical technology", *Wacana Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia,* Vol. 22, No. 2, 2021, p. 256

APPENDIX K:
BANTU NOUN CLASSES AS EXPRESSED IN KISWAHILI[1]

SINGULAR CLASSES		PLURAL CLASSES		EXAMPLE	TYPICAL USAGE
Number	Prefix	Number	Prefix	Singular / Plural	
1	*m-*	2	*wa-*	Mtu / Watu	Humans, animate
3	*m-*	4	*mi-*	Mti / Miti	Plants, animals
5	*jɪ- / Ø*	6	*ma-*	Jicho /Macho	Various; liquids, masses, augmentatives
7	*ki-*	8	*vɪ-*	Kitu / Vitu	Various objects, tools, diminutives, manner
9	*n- / Ø*	10	*n- / Ø*	Ndege / Ndege	Loan words & animals (especially foreign / non-indigenous animals)
11	*u-*	-		Umoja	Abstract nouns
15	*ku-*			Kusoma	Infinitives
16	*pa-*			-	Locatives (proximal, exact)
17	*ku-*			-	Locatives (distal, approximate)
18	*mu-*			-	Locatives (interior)

---

[1] Chart adapted from Thompson, Katrina Daly & Antonia Folarin Schleicher. *Swahili Learners' Reference Grammar*, African Language Learners' Reference Grammar Series, National African Resource Center University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2nd Edition, 2006, p. 14

277

APPENDIX L:
KISWAHILI AND ITS DIALECTS[1]

[1] Walsh, Martin. "From dugouts to double outriggers: Lexical insights into the development of Swahili nautical technology", *Wacana Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia,* Vol. 22, No. 2, 2021, p. 256

APPENDIX M:
COMPONENTS OF SPIRITUAL EXISTANCE &
CONSTRUCTION OF THE AFRICAN SOUL

KISWAHILI	MDW NTR	GLYPH	MEANING
Moyo	ib		Heart, feelings, soul, inmost part, core
Mtima	ib		Heart (seldom used now)
Nafsi[1]			Vital spirit, breath, essence, soul
Ntu	Ka		Vital force
Roho	Ka		Soul, spirit, life, vital principle

---

[1] Term derived from the Arabic Nafsi (نفسي) simply meaning "myself".

APPENDIX N:
CATEGORICAL SPIRITUAL ENTITIES
ON THE SWAHILI COAST

NAME	ASSOCIATION	FUNCTION
Pepo	Intrusive spirits	Possession and sometimes the cause of illness; cannot be controlled, often conceptualized as malevolent native spirit
Koma	Ancestral spirits	Oversees living descendants and proper social/cultural discourse
Mizimu	Nature spirits (rural)	Oversees fertility of land, and the success of farming and fishing
Popobawa	A Malevolent Shapeshifting Spirit	A more modern evil spiritual entity, possibly a Jinn, often taking the form of a batlike entity. Scholars have associated Popobawa with the manifestation of collective community trauma in Zanzibar
Jinn	Arab Spirits	Urban areas, urbanization, and Arab culture
Shetani	Evil Spirits	Often conflated with pepo spirits or Arabic Jinn. Mostly associated with Islamic rather than traditionally African spirits

APPENDIX O:
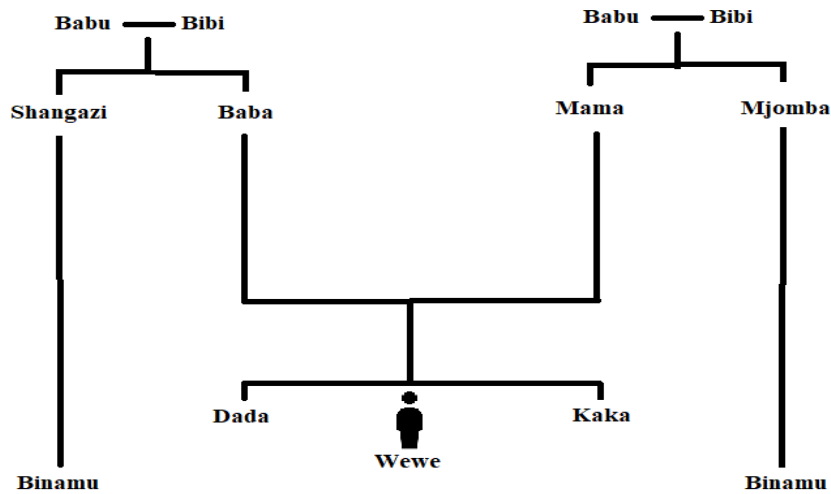ENTITIES ASSOCIATED WITH SPIRIT DANCES
ON THE SWAHILI COAST[1]

NAME	DESCRIPTION	QUALITIES
Kinyamkera	A hilltop spirit	Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari identifies this type of spirt as one of the most important spirits. Originally a traditional African spirit. Can make travelers and hikers ill in the head and belly. Can be exorcised by possessed female initiates and a ritual involving special objects and dogori drummers.
Kilima	A spirit that comes from Kilimanjaro	Nearly indistinguishable from other spirits when present in a possessed person until successful treatment. Exorcised through a six-day ritual of dancing and drumming involving the possessed and initiates.
The Tambourine Spirit	An intrusive Arabian sea-born spirit[2]	To combat this spirit tambourines are the only instruments used in the multi-day ritual. Once the spirit is released a pigeon which is central to the ritual feast is sacrificed. Some people seem to also sacrifice a goat, but it appears that the pigeon is more important. The spirit is confined to a type of ship called a *dhow* and is sent out to take the spirit back to its home in the waters of the sea.
Qitimiri	An intrusive Arabian sea-born spirit	A divining board is used to find a suitable day to expel the spirit. The ceremony and accompanying dance is different from many of the other rituals. Instead of just dancing the patient is instructed to run back and forth to tire the spirit, before the end of the ceremony on the seventh day.

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[1] Bakari, Mtoro bin Mwinyi, *The Customs of the Swahili People: The Desturi za Waswahili,* edited and translated by J.W.T. Allen, University of California Press, 1981, pp. 101- 114

[2] Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari indicates that most Arab spirits are associated with the sea whereas African/Swahili spirits come from inland and are associated with hilltops and big trees such as the massive baobab tree.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	QUALITIES
Dungumaro	A malevolent and intrusive spirit	*Dungumaro* is the name of the spirit but also the name of ceremony and drums used to exorcise the spirit. Special songs are used to conjure the spirit to the head of the possessed to begin the ritual.
The Galla Spirit	A malevolent and intrusive spirit	Unclear if this spirit is associated with the Oromo people. It is said to be similar to the *Dungumaro* spirit, but this banished with the use of tambourines rather than drums and flutes. During the exorcising ceremony the patient wields either an ornamented axe or spear and a cow tail fly-whisk.
Shamng'ombe	An intrusive spirit	A spirit thought to be related to the *Dungumaro* spirit. Doctors advised patients afflicted by the *Shamng'ombe* spirit to not eat beef. Thusly individuals who purchase but do not consume fresh are easily identified as being under the possession of this spirit.
Pungwa	A spirit of Zanzibar and Kilwa	Like most of the other ceremonies that take place over the course of seven days, the ceremony to expel this spirit consists of a special songs and drums. However, in this ceremony flutes are not included. On the seventh day, the patient is bathed to wash away the spirit.
The Paddle Spirit	An African spirit of Zanzibar	The dance to expel this spirit is performed by the Hadimu and Tumbatu people of Zanzibar. This ceremony involves no instruments and consists of singing and call and response as the dancers circle a pole in the center of a special pit.
The European Spirit	A foreign malevolent spirit brought from Europe	This spirit is conjured out of a possessed person by a doctor who sings: "I have white things. I have white things. If you men stay on the verandah. You slander the women. You withhold your own, gentlemen, and want us to give you ours". Once the spirit is conjured the ceremony can begin, consisting of dancing and eating food agreeable to the spirit.

APPENDIX P:
SIMPLIFIED SWAHILI FAMILY STRUCUTRE

```
     Babu ── Bibi                          Babu ── Bibi

Shangazi      Baba                    Mama            Mjomba

                                                         
         Dada        Kaka
              Wewe
Binamu                                              Binamu
```

| SWAHILI FAMILIAL TERMS[1] ||
KISWAHILI	KIINGEREZA (ENGLISH)
Wewe	You
Mama	Mother
Baba	Father
Babu	Grandfather
Bibi	Grandmother
Dada	Sister
Kaka	Brother
Mjomba	Maternal uncle; brother of your mother
Baba mkubwa/mdogo	Paternal uncles; elder/younger brother of father
Shangazi	Paternal aunt; sister of your father
Mama mkubwa/mdogo	Maternal aunts; elder / younger sister of mother
Binamu	Cousin
Ndugu	General term for sibling, can also be used informally
Wazee	Elders
Wahenga	Distinguished elders, trusted to advise
Wazazi	Forebearers, progenitors, ancestors

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[1] "The Swahili dialects, such as Kitikuu, Kiamu, Kipate, etc., which are spoken on the islands off the north coast of Kenya, use other terms but seem to make the same distinctions. Prins (*The Swahili-speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast*, 1967) gives the Northern Swahili terms, but since he gives so many alternatives to each term it is difficult to determine which terms are used in any one particular dialect". (Bunger, Robert Jr. *Islamization Among the Upper Pokomo,* 1973, p. 112)

APPENDIX Q:
COMPENDIUM OF SWAHILI
APHORISMS, PROVERBS, SAYINGS & EXPRESSIONS
(COMPILED BY TOPIC)

Asili

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Watu wa asili	Indigenous people; natives	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20
Hana asili wala fasili	He is a nobody, he has neither good family nor standing	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20
Yeye asili ni mpumbavu	He is a born fool	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20
Sikufanya jambo hilo asili	It is against my nature to do such an action	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20
Asili yake nini hata ymefanya hivi?	What was the reason for your doing that?	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 20

Utu

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Afadhali utu kuliko kitu	Being human is better than anything	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 4571
Asiyejua utu si mtu.	One who does not know how humanity is not human	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 4572
Mtu siyo kitu, bora utu	A person is not a thing, the value is being human	King'ei, Kitula; Ahmed Ndalu. *Kamusi ya Methali za Kiswahili,* Heinemann Kenya, 1989, p. 352

On Family/Marriage/ Parenting

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Adabu ya mtoto huwapatia sifa bora wazazi	A child's good manners give great credit to the parents	Abasheikh, Mohammad. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3608
Damu [ni] nzito kuliko maji.	Blood is thicker than water	Farsi, Shaaban Saleh. *Swahili Sayings from Zanzibar,* Kenya Literature Bureau, 1982, 7.2
Fahari ya nchi ni vijana wake.	The pride of a nation is its youth	Meena, E.A.K. *Misemo,* Transafrica, 1975, *f2*
Hana mzee	That person has no parents (That person lacks proper behavior)	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3634
Kukosa watoto kwafanya mtu adharauliwe	Having no children makes a person despised	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3662
Kuzaa si kazi, kazi kubwa [ni] kulea	Bearing children is not so difficult but upbringing, that is real work.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3671
Mama akifa, mimi wa ndani sitakufa	If my mother dies, I of the family, will not die. I will be taken care of.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3675
Mtu mamae ni mungu wakwe wa pili[1]	A mother is a person's second God	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 77

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[1] This proverb has also been written as "Mam'ako ni mungu wa pili" (your mother is your second God)

On Arabs/Turbans (Associated with Arab Culture)

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Waarabu wa pemba, hujuana kwa vilemba.	The Arabs of Pemba know each other by the turban.	Theonestina, Severe Mesiaki. *Methali Katika Jamii ya Whaya: Fasihi Simulizi ya Mtanzania,* Kiswahili Research Products, 2010, Proverb Number 196
Ukienda pemba, uvae kilemba	If you go to Pemba, you should wear a turban.	Meena, E.A.K. *Misemo,* Transafrica, 1975, p. 7
Alimpiga kilemba cha ukoka	He hit him with a turban (A person has been unjustly praised)	*A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 195

Mungu

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Kucha Mungu si kilemba cheupe	The fear of God is not the wearing of a white turban (to be considered god-fearing you must adhere to Arab culture)	Farsi, Shaaban Saleh. *Swahili Sayings from Zanzibar,* Vol, 1, 1982, p. 17
Mngu na uwinda	God and work	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 67
Mngu mkazi wa ulimwengu shida na raha hutuma	God, the stabilizer of the world, sendeth adversity and prosperity	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 67
Mngu haati p'indize	God never fails [to observe] His appointed times.	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 66
Mngu hakuumba mt'u mbaya	God does not create an evil (bad) person	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 66

Ustaraabu

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Adabu ni ustaarabu	Good manners are civilization	Abasheikh, Mohammad. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 3197
Kilemba hakimfanyi mstaarabu mtu	A turban does not make a man civilized	Middleton, John. *African Merchants of the Indian Ocean: Swahili of the East African Coast,* Waveland Press, 2003, p. 131

The Soul (Roho, moyo,)

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Uzeekao ni mwili siyo roho	What gets old is the body, not the soul.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 4626
Hakuna furaha ya milele zaidi ya uzima wa roho	. There is no greater permanent joy than the welbeing of the soul.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 1200
Usawa ni roho.	Balance (equality) is spiritual	Meena, E.A.K. *Misemo,* Transafrica, 1975, p 25
Roho haina thamani	The soul has no price	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 9
Roho yataka mafuta	The soul needs cleaning	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 2554c.
Kila mtu na roho yake	All human beings have their own soul.	Knappert, Jan. "On Swahili Proverbs", *African Language Studies,* XVI, London, 1975, p. 129

The Heart (Moyo. Mtima)

SAYING	MEANING	SOURCE
Mtu afuatao moyo kaida huijutia	If you follow your heart you usually regret it.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 273
Mashauri ya mtu usiyashike, mtu siri husema na moyo wake	Do not accept anybody's advice, people discuss secrets with their hearts alone.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 1170a
Mwenye moyo wa furaha, humzaidia raha	The owner of a cheerful heart will find joy ever increasing.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 1215a.
Shetani ni moyo wa mtu	The devil is the human heart.	Scheven, Albert. *Swahili Proverbs: Methali Za Kiswahili,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for African Studies, Proverb Number 1697
Mwenye kushiriki moyo asourudi mtima, Hufa maji pondo-ima, na kondoka na kilema	One that gives full play to one's passions and does not restrain the heart, will die by drowning in shallow water, and die with disgrace.	Taylor, William Ernest. *African Aphorisms: Or Saws From Swahili Land,* Kessinger Publishing, (1891) 2009, p. 90
Kutoa (or kupa) ni moyo usambe ni utajiri	Giving is a matter of the heart, don't say it is a matter of wealth	Abudu, Maryam; & Abdalla Baruwa. *Methali za Kiswahili: Maana na Matumizi,* vol. 3, Shungwaya Pub., 1981, p. 3
Usharifu[2] ni moyo	Being a sharif is a matter of the heart. Nobility must come from the heart.	Meena, E.A.K. *Misemo,* Transafrica, 1975, p 26.

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[2] Usharifu: descendant of the prophet Muhammad

APPENDIX R:
GLOSSARY OF TERMS & TERMINOLOGIES

A

Afrabia: A term created by Ali Mazrui to describe the relationship between Africa and the Arab world. Ali Mazrui introduces the term in his text *Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the New World Order* (1992).

*Africanity***:** An ontological term regarding the state of being an African.

*Afrikan=Black***:** An expression created by Ghanian repatriate, Obadele Kambon to reinforce a sense of cultural continuity between the experiences of people of African descent in the diaspora and Africans on the continent.[1] It is a politicized term that takes a culturally grounded stance on this idea of Africanity.

Afrophobia: The aversion to African people and culture trans-continentally. Afrophobia is a type of racism specifically targeting African culture and people, including the diaspora. It defers from the concept of *Negrophobia* in that the idea of African culture and identity is also attacked.

Afrocentricity: The socio-cultural metatheory grounds relevant analyses within African culture. Afrocentricity seeks to place African rationale, ethics, and values at the center of analysis concerning African people and culture.

Ajami: A term which has now become associated with the African literary tradition that utilizes Arabic script. Originally used as an Arab pejorative to alienate their neighboring peoples as uncivilized barbarians.

Animatism: The belief that all life is animated by a cosmological/supernatural force. Within this belief inanimate objects are also imbued with the same spiritual energy.

Animism: The belief that spirits are present in animate and inanimate objects. In this belief a spirit exists within humans, animals, plants, natural artefacts, places, and even words.

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[1] Kambon, Obadele. "African=Black Combat Forms in Plain Sight: Engolo/Capoeira, Knocking-and-Kicking, and Asafo Flag Dancing". Africology: The Journal of Pan-African Studies, Vol. 12, No. 4. The University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies. Accra, Ghana. 2018

Arabcentrism/Arabcentricity: Terns used to denote the methodological perspective which centers Arab cultural standards at the center of analysis.

Asili: A term functionalized the foundational essence of a culture. The term comes from Kiswahili, which as a noun can mean, the source, the origin, the essence, ancestry, fundamental principle, nature, inborn temperament; used as an adjective it can mean "originally", or "by nature".[2]

B

Bantu: A term which denotes either people or languages part of the Niger-Congo language family. The term Bantu is often translated to mean 'the people'.

Bara: A general term in Kiswahili that refers to land. When used by coastal communities the term is often used to denote the hinterlands of the African mainland.

C

Creolization: The process in which a culture is infused with elements of another culture.

D

Desturi: a custom, tradition, or something that is regularly practiced.

E

Exogenous' **or** *'cultural exogenous':* The politicized belief that one's culture originates from a foreign land or culture.

H

Heterarchy: A system of organization in which components of the larger entity share a reciprocal relationship, where no one element dominates the rest.

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[2] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary,* Oxford University Press, p. 20

I

Innominate: To be unnamed or unclassified

Islamization **or** *Islamification:* The process in which a society or culture begins to adopt the Islamic faith and shifts its cultural ethics to align more closely with Islamic standards.

*Islamophilia***:** A term that denotes a love or deep admiration for Islamic civilization, culture, as well as the values of Islamic thought and rhetoric.

*Islamophile Afrocentricity***:** A school of thought which attempts to combine Afrocentric discourse with a sympathetic response to Islam.

Islamophobia: An unjustified and uncritical prejudice against the religion of Islam and its Muslim adherents.

K

Kipfokomo: The indigenous language of the Pokomo people who traditionally reside in southern Kenya along the Tana River. This linguistically *Kipfokomo* is related and thusly similar to *Kiswahili.*

Kilwa: Kilwa or *Kilwa Kisiwani* (Kilwa Island) was historically an important site in southern coast of Tanzania. It was home to one of the most economically powerful Swahili city-states, and eventually between the 13th and 15th centuries was the center of the Kilwa Sultanate that politically dominated the Swahili coast.

Kingozi: An old dialect of Kiswahili. It was formerly spoken in Zanzibar, Pate, and Malindi. This dialect may be what linguists classify as 'proto-Swahili'.

Kishuru: One of the ancient names given to federated multi-ethnic people of Shunguwaya.

Kiswahili: The Swahili language.

L

Lamu: One of the oldest of the classical Swahili city-states located near Kenya's coastal boarder with Somalia. The original and indigenous name for the city was *Amu. Lamu* became an important center for the interactions between indigenous African and Arab political powers.

M

Maafa: A Swahili term introduced by Marimba Ani to Afrocentric discourse. The *Maafa* refers to the disaster or destruction of foreign imperialism survived by African communities. The term *Maafa* is the pluralized form of the Kiswahili root word *afa,* which loosely translates to 'disaster', damage', calamity', 'terror', or 'horror'.[3]

Mazuri: Also spelled Mazar'i was a politically important and powerful dynasty centered in the Kenyan Swahili coastal town of Mombasa. Between the 18th and 20th centuries, this dynasty who claimed Omani Arab ancestry dominated the political activity along the Swahili corridor. This dynasty invested in the trade of enslaved Africans, allied with the Portuguese against the Sultan of Zanzibar, and eventually came to resist British colonial domination. The esteemed Kenyan scholar, Ali Mazrui, and his nephew Alamin Mazrui are members of this dynasty.

Mijikenda: The Mijikenda (The Nine Clans) is a term used to group nine Bantu ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are primarily located along the Kenyan Coast are culturally and linguistically closely related. The Mijikenda includes the ethnicities of the Giryama, Chonyi, Kambe, Duruma, Kauma, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, and Digo people.

Mombasa: An important Swahili coastal town located in Southern Kenya near the Tanzanian border. Unlike many of the other Swahili city states, Mombasa was said to have been founded by the indigenous African Queen Mwana Mkisi.

Mungu: The indigenous *Kiswahili* term for God (the Supreme Deity and Creator). This term is etymologically tied to many other Bantu people's term for the Supreme Deity.

Mswahili: A Swahili person

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[3] *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 2013

N

Ngozi: The Swahili term for skin, a pelt made of animal skin or leather.

Nomenclature: A term used to discuss the system of naming and choosing terminologies.

O

Omani: A term to denote Arab people or culture originating from the country of Oman in Southeastern Arabia.

P

Periplus: A manuscript that documents coastal landmarks and ports.

Pokomo: A Bantu people part of the Sabaki language sub-group who reside along the Tana River in Kenya.

Pwani: The Kiswahili term for the beach, or coast

S

Sabaki: A sub-group of the Bantu language family. The term is derived from the Pokomo word for crocodile.

Similitude: The cultural strategy of manipulating the representation of one's culture to appear similar to another group.

Shenzi: The Swahili word for barbarous or uncivilized

Swahili: The word Swahili is not an indigenous term and is etymologically derived from the Arabic term for coast *sāḥil*, pluralized as *sawāḥil*. Loosely used to refer to the people, culture, the language, of the East African coast, from Kenya to Mozambique. Sometimes used for the coast itself.

U

Ustaarabu: A Swahili term that functionally translates into the concept of civilization or civility.

Utamaduni: Another Swahili term that translates to mean 'civilization'. Often in relation to urbanization.

*Utamaroho***:** A Swahili term, which is functionalized by Marimba Ani, as a culture's "vital force" or "energy source", which informs and motivates a community's behavior. Etymologically derived from one of the Swahili terms for the concept of the human soul, *roho.*

Utamawazo: A Kiswahili term introduced by Marimba Ani, which is functionalized as a culturally structured worldview.

Utu: The Swahili abstraction for the concept of people. This term is often translated to mean humanity. Within Bantu philosophy, it is the Swahili equivalent to the Nguni concept Ubuntu.

W

*Waswahili***:** Swahili people.

Waungwana: Tranlated from Kiswahili to mean 'gentlemen'. The Swahili political elite

Z

Zanj: A medieval Muslim term of Persian and Arab origin, used to describe the black people of East Africa.

Zanzibar: Derived from the contraction, *zanj + bar* meaning 'the coast of the Blacks'. Zanzibar consisting of two main islands, Unguja and Pemba, was once a great center for maritime commercial and was the seat of political power for the Omani led Sultanates between the 17th and 20th centuries. Zanzibar would form a union with Tanganika in 1964 to form the modern country of Tanzania.