Mashairi: A surviving Art of the Swahili Muslim Peoples of Lamu Town, Kenya

Simon Mwaniki (MWNSIM004)

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Music

South African College of Music

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

October 2020

Supervisor: Associate Professor Sylvia Bruinders
Co Supervisor: Professor Tom Mboya Olali (University of Nairobi)

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date:_____

Abstract

This research focuses on the phenomenon of Swahili poetry and its continued existence amongst Swahilis in Lamu Town, a performative art that is gradually waning in traditional contexts. When people talk about *mashairi* (poems) in Lamu Town they are referring to both Swahili songs and poems, the two terms are used interchangeably. *Mashairi* also refers to a form found in Swahili poetry. I look at the usage of the text from these *mashairi* as lyrics employed in *duas* (special Islamic prayers) and traditional songs and dances specifically performed by women during Swahili weddings. It is an art that has existed for hundreds of years dating back to the 11th century through oral sources. I begin by defining the East African region, who the Swahili people are, while providing a historical background of their origins and the Swahili language. I also explore Arabic influences on Swahili culture, language and literature as part of the Re-Centring AfroAsia project (Musical and human migrations in the pre-colonial period of 700-1500AD) that has sponsored this research project.

Swahili poetry continues to celebrate traditional lyrics in songs and dances performed by women in contemporary Swahili culture. There are specific members of the community who are known to possess *mashairi* compositional skills. Families planning weddings and *duas* will request that these poets compose a corpus of *mashairi* with detailed specifications. They are then used as lyrics in songs and dances attached to these ceremonies or they are performed as stand-alone songs. *Mashairi* had first existed as oral literature and stand-alone songs owing to archaic wedding songs and dances. They continue to be an essential defining feature of Swahili traditional practices. I give a laconic history of classical Swahili poetry; how Arabic facets directly or indirectly influenced this art after Arabs developed ties with Africans living on the Swahili littoral. I provide a condensed historical background on the life of one of the first and most prolific Swahili poets, Fumo Liyongo, and briefly explore factors that influenced his compositions. I rigorously analyse lyrics of songs and dances whose texts have been derived from modern *mashairi* and compare their themes, narratives and structure with classical *mashairi*. I also scrutinize the role and importance of the art of *mashairi* as a source of lyrics and the efforts of two poets from Lamu Town whose compositions are socially impacting the society. This art has survived for hundreds of years and has come to symbolize the enduring spirit of the Swahili people.

This work is dedicated to the Swahili poets in Lamu Town for their continued efforts to keep the art of *mashairi* alive.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Sylvia Bruinders, who encouraged me to pursue my postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Town. She has played a tremendous role in my current studies and research project. Her constant encouragement, positive criticism and worthwhile recommendations kept me afloat and enabled me to see my work through to the end. I am forever grateful. To my lecturers who, one way or the other, helped shape this research project; Professor Rebekka Sandmeier, Professor Veit Erlmann and Doctor Rick Deja. And to Professor Tom Mboya Olali, from the University of Nairobi, I appreciate the time you took to go through my dissertation and for your valuable feedback.

My postgraduate studies would not have been achievable without the financial support of the Re-Centring AfroAsia (RAA) project that prompted me to conduct research along these lines, Jules Kramer Music and Fine Arts Scholarships for International Travel and the Faculty of International Students bursary (FISB). I thank them for their generous monetary awards that went towards my schools fees and fieldwork expenses.

Many thanks to Engela Britz, on all accounts, for providing me with much needed library resources, and assisting me with referencing inquiries in her capacity as Principal Library Assistant at the WH Bell Music Library, especially during moments of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Miss Susan Matu and Maryann Wairimu (my sister) for reading and editing the first and final drafts of this dissertation. Bw. Jaffer Shemanga, who took time off his busy schedule to collect more data in Lamu Town on my behalf.

To all the Swahili people I met in Lamu Town and their contribution, directly or indirectly, to my research project; Abdul, Bw. Mwenje, Bi. Sharrifa, Bw. and Bi. Ali, Imam Tawalib Mbarak Hadi, Bi. Husna and Bw. Ali Mohammed. For all the conversations, stories and meals we shared. For your trust, that allowed me to engage with you intimately, enabling me to have a clearer understanding of the Swahili Muslim idiosyncrasies which resulted in conducting my fieldwork successfully. Monica Sairo for her insightful advice. My experiences with all of you will transcend

this dissertation and I will always hold the moments we shared close to my heart, until such a time when we meet again, *inshallah!*

I would be remiss if I did not thank my parents who, when the opportunity arose for me to pursue my postgraduate studies, cheered me on and were optimistic about my academic endeavours. Without you, this would not have been possible, I am forever indebted.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Glossary of Swahili Terms

Bibi (abbrev. Bi.)	Mistress
Bwana (abbrev. Bw.)	Mister
chai	tea
dini	religion
dua	special Islamic prayers
ghafla	all of a sudden/suddenly
haramu	forbidden
heshima	respect
kadhi	Muslim judge
kesha	vigil
kikomo	full stop
kipande/vipande	section/sections
kipawa	talent
kiuno	waist
kupamba	to decorate
fumbo/mafumbo	metaphor/metaphors
mara moja	immediately
shairi/mashairi	poem/poems
mawaidha	advise
mikaha	officiating of a marriage
mila	customs
mizani	syllables
mtume	prophet
mwimbaji	singer
pembe	horns
shemeji	brother-in-law
siri	secrecy
twari	tambourine
ubeti/beti	verse/verses
ubunifu	expertise
umoja	togetherness
utamaduni	culture
uwezo	capability
waji-waji	didactic poem
waungwana	original local settlers
wimbo/nyimbo	song/songs

CHAPTER 1: THE EAST AFRICAN REGION: NORTHERN SWAHILI COAST

Introduction

> *Bi. Sharrifa clasped her hand around the microphone, adjusted her spectacles and started to sing a shairi she had probably composed as she was patiently seated in the audience waiting her turn to occupy the podium to deliver her speech. This time round, the particular shairi she was performing laurelled the County Government of Lamu Town and the officials from the National Museums of Kenya for their continued efforts to preserve Lamu Town while promoting economic growth. The pin drop silence in the conference room served as a reminder of how highly revered she is amongst local Swahilis in Lamu Town. Her voice permeated through all corners of the room with the help of the speakers strategically placed. She made use of her facial expressions, robust voice, and hand gestures to bring to attention particular topics or emphasize certain didactic messages embedded in her lyrics. She is given a standing ovation as soon as she sang the last note. In all the commotion I turn to one of the locals seated next to me and ask, "Who is she"? "Bi. Sharrifa the poet". A straightforward answer but one that raised my eyebrows with curiosity followed by a myriad of questions.*

This minor dissertation focuses on Swahili poetry and its incumbent usage to compose traditional lyrics sung in *duas* (Islamic prayers) and wedding celebrations in a modern setting particularly focusing on Swahili women's activities. I will encapsulate the specific objectives of my research in three points: Firstly, I am investigating the continued existence of *mashairi* in Lamu Town, focusing on Arabic mores still present to date. Secondly, I present a laconic survey of two modern poets in Lamu Town, their role and contributions to society and how their compositions are socially impacting Swahilis. Lastly, I will demonstrate the usage and role of text from *mashairi* (poems) in traditional songs and dances that existed long before western influences and are still performed during wedding celebrations. This chapter provides a laconic historical background of the East African region, Swahili people and the language, a major component of Swahili Poetry, which is followed by the methodology and strategies I applied when conducting my fieldwork. In order to fulfil my obligations to the Re-Centring AfroAsia[1] research project, I bring to attention certain Arabic influences on Swahili culture, language and music practices that are still present and existed in the aforementioned years of focus of the project.

[1] The Re-Centring AfroAsia project is a multi-disciplinary research project of musical and human migrations in the pre- colonial period; 700-1500AD.

Defining the Region

The concept 'Swahili Coast' is used to refer to the East African coast extending from the 1° North in southern Somalia to 15° South to the mouth of the Limpopo River (Sanseverino 1983, 153; White 1983 cited in Kusimba 1999, 67). This region also includes several archipelagos and islands which consist of the Comoros and Lamu Archipelagos, the islands of Mombasa, Pemba, Zanzibar, Mafia and Kerimba. Historically, the Swahili people believed that their territory stretched from somewhere near Kiwaiyu, in the north of Lamu Archipelago, to Tunge, south of the Rovuma River in modern Mozambique and included smaller islands along this coast and the Comoros. In practice, they extended past the mentioned boundaries (De Vere Allen 1993, 2 and Simala 2004, 18). The East African coastline is divided into two main regions: the Somali Coast to the north and the Swahili Coast to the south. These two regions meet in Kisimayu, the Somali region extends to the Somali border and the Swahili Coast to the Zambezi River. The Swahili Coast's assorted ecological regions and rich resources provided endless opportunities for human settlement.

Although the Swahili Coast is divided into several ecologically, stratified and culturally differentiated stretches, it remains a single entity in which land and sea remain intimately linked. The islands and coastal plains offer not only marine resources, which mainly consist of fishing, but access to trade routes (Kusimba 1999 ,74). Two thousand years ago the Swahili Coast, when it was commonly referred to as Azania by the Greek sailors, was the centre of the Indian Ocean trade, most of the towns along its coasts starting up as trading ports. The ships sailed from southwest of Arabia and western India with the assistance of the northeast monsoon winds. They docked at Swahili coastal ports to replenish and exchange goods with the local settlers and those in the hinterland. In the early years,[2] mid-first century CE, no part of the coast was completely self-providing, nor independent, these littoral regions of the Swahili Coast had to rely on each other for different commodities to sustain their populations (Kusimba 1999, 74). As different ethnic groups settled in the region, the need for materials not readily available compelled local settlers to establish trading links. While Lamu and Mombasa islands had perfect harbour amenities, plenty of freshwater and exceptional fishing grounds, their sand was not conducive to farming. This necessitated trading with locals in the hinterland to meet these exigencies. The ecological assortment of the Swahili Coast was suitable for the development of these local exchanges as a

[2] 'The early years' is a phrase I will continually use throughout this chapter to refer to the mid-first century CE.

way of obtaining unavailable materials and goods. Kusimba (1999, 76) observes that these interactions also necessitated the exchange of cultural ideas. With the establishment of these local trade networks, the sea and river were natural channels for developing more extensive commercial networks in the regions. Scholars have agreed that it is precisely the role of these specific early coastal settlers as intermediaries, traders, merchants and cultural brokers which has given this area its distinctive quality (Caplan and Topan 2004, 2). These humble beginnings would necessitate the establishment of a structured trade and trade route systems with the Far East, which would lead to the growth and development of Swahili states. Thus, Swahili civilization is predominantly a maritime and mercantile one.

Of all the oceanic systems, the Indian Ocean had not received much study. Alpers (2014, 1) notes how scholarly attention on the Indian Ocean has gradually changed with the realization of major economic and cultural exchanges across its waters that date back seven thousand years. Trade was greatly accelerated by the rise and expansion of Islam from the 7th century CE. Blench (2012, ii) also notes that it is now acknowledged that plants, animals, diseases, trade goods, languages and cultural elements all moved around and across the Indian Ocean, often transforming littoral societies and environments into which they were introduced. The earliest account of trade on the East African coast is in the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (Mugane 2015, 20). In it, there are insights into the workings of this ocean, including trading of goods and the existence of major ports of trade. The periplus was a trader's directory, written by an anonymous Greek traveller 100 CE, which gave an account of the trading routes and ports of the Indian Ocean (Alpers 2014, 19 and Mugane 2015, 20). Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta in the 14th century describes the Indian Ocean as a largely Islamic world, outward-looking, analogous to Arabic culture but multi-ethnic (Alpers 2014, 3). He was one of the earliest sailors to make a direct reference to the Swahili when he visited the coast in 1331 (Mugane 2015, 22). Another Muslim writer, the anonymous early sixteenth-century author of the Indonesian text, Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian, describes an Indian Ocean world that is defined by the different 'ways of speaking' around its shores (Alpers 2014, 4).

Beaujard (2007, 16-17) uses two opposing explanations for the 'flowering' of the East African coast. First, Arabic culture was brought to the coast and imposed on the local inhabitants by the migrants. Second, pre-Swahili and Swahili culture emerged from indigenous developments and

owed little to migrants. The developments that were brought about through trade led to a progressive integration of its different regions in a stratified space and to the rise of coastal societies. The exchanges were not only due to an extension of government and policies but also religious expansion and private enterprise. Beaujard also argues that Swahili culture is an African one which developed via long-distance exchange embedded in the Eurasian and African world-system. Beaujard then uses four cycles to elucidate the Indian Ocean trade and demonstrates how each of these cycles contributed to the growth and development of Swahili states. This development of the East African region is heavily affected by these cycles of Eurasian and African world systems in which the Indian Ocean is embedded. It is within this framework that one can discern the growth and spread of the Swahili language as a lingua franca, different regions of the world systems appear to have played a pre-eminent role in the East African coast at different times. The integration of East Africa into the world-system led to the rise of mercantile and religious centres, particularly on islands off the coast, and to the emergence of elites. These elites, who were referred to as 'Zanjian'[3] monopolized contact with the external world and played an intermediary role between dominant regions such as Persia, Egypt, Arabia and India (Beaujard 2007, 18).

Swahili towns have retained memories of evolving urban culture influenced by numerous waves of migration, many centuries of inter-oceanic trade and contacts. De Vere Allen (1993, 14) concurs by writing that the Swahili community is urbanising. It not only comprises of people who have always lived in these settlements but even those that are in transition to becoming Swahili. The population of these towns along the East African coast are predominantly Swahili-speaking Muslims, though as the Swahili society gradually transformed, it remained integrated with its African core (Kusimba, and Walz 2018, 430). Old traditions were not simply succeeded by new ones. As Muslim visitors frequented and started to reside on the Swahili Coast, they too respected the old customs they found in place and Swahilis gradually accepted and accommodated vicissitudes the visitors brought (Fabian 2019, 35). Swahili culture continued to develop with all members, old and new, playing a role while simultaneously shaping the identity of Swahili people.

[3] Zanj is the word used by medieval Muslim travellers to refer to the Swahili coast and its inhabitants.

Origins of Swahili Language

For several years there has been a focus on the greater understanding of the origins of the language of the Swahili Coast. This is a region that had been occupied and settled by several different ethnic groups over the centuries. Swahili people seem to have dominated this region both culturally and politically. Kusimba (1999, 23) and Spears (1984, 301) both agree that Swahili is a Bantu language, borrowing many words from Arabic, a Semitic language. Swahili is also closely related to the Pokomo and Mijikenda languages spoken in Kenya to date. Kusimba (1999) further explains that education for elite settlers on the Swahili Coast was conducted in Arabic which contributed to Kiswahili borrowing Arabic words. Middleton and Horton (cited in Pawlowicz and LaViolette, 2013, 125) believe as Swahilis converted to Islam, they adopted an increasingly Islamised lifeway unique to the Swahili Coast and developed a class of religious scholars, literate in Arabic who produced a collection of anthologies including the historical chronicles.

Early Swahili is very hard to understand fully unless one is conversant in Arabic or archaic Swahili. De Vere Allen (1993, 11) notes that for this reason early archaeologists and historians ignored Swahili literature and its implications on their work which would have had an impact on their attempt to discern the history of Swahili language. Middleton (1992, 190) mentions that classical *mashairi* mainly included chronicles of the history and myths of Swahili states and instructions on Islamic duty. One of the main historic narratives found in classical *mashairi* is that Swahili language had long existed before contact with Arabs and the Asian world. A corpus of epic *mashairi* has since then been translated and published as historical material. Scholars had used the rich historical resources of the Swahili Coast to support a colonial diffusionist model of Swahili culture and history attributing coastal communities' successes to Middle Eastern colonizers (Pawlowicz and LaViolette 2013, 121 and Spear 1984, 291). For this reason, early scholars did not bother to investigate the possible African roots of Swahili language, owed to Bantu languages. One of the first scholars to take Swahili literature seriously was Freeman-Grenville (see De Vere Allen 1993) whose work contested this Arab myth; he was then followed by scholars in the early and late twentieth century such as De Vere Allen (1993) and Kusimba (1999). They challenged earlier stereotypical theories and substantiated that Swahilis and their language had existed in the early years before the commencement of East African trade.

Swahili culture and language are believed to have originated long before the birth of the Prophet Mohammed and continued to develop through contact between Arab traders, sailors and merchants and Bantu groups along the East African coast. Nurse and Hinnebusch (cited in Spear, 2000, 271) believe that the history of Swahili language is fairly straight forward. Far from being a mixture of African and Arabic languages as commonly accepted, Swahili is a Bantu language, not a creole, pidgin nor a hybrid. The language is specifically associated Eastern Bantu, closely related to other Bantu languages of the coastal areas. Its closest relatives are the Sabaki languages of the coast and Kenyan hinterland which are distantly related to northeast coastal languages[4] scattered down the Tanzanian Coast and its hinterland (Spear, 2000, 271). The establishment of Swahili language was parallel to the Early Iron Age Bantu speakers being responsible for spreading the use of iron along the coast and the hinterlands. The historical distribution of Swahili language within Bantu language has increasingly been clarified by linguistics as more data has become available on Swahili language and its close relatives (Walsh 2017, 122). There is little influence of Arabic on Swahili phonology or morphology (Walsh 2017, 124). However, that is not to say that Swahili has not adopted a set of Arabic loan words that are limited to where Arabic influence was mostly visible between the 17th and 19th centuries such as religion, law, administration, trade, sailing, measurement, currency and kinship. In contrast to early north-eastern coastal and Sabaki languages, Swahili and other related languages took a longer period to produce more markedly defined languages. Spear (2000, 272) makes note of the difficulty to reconstruct this period as one must take account of successive genetic processes brought about by population shifts, numerous influences caused by interactions with others and distribution of languages today.

Investigations of different scholars and linguists have proven that Swahili dialects are grouped into two, northern and southern Swahili dialects.[5] Northern dialects split into two main subgroups with Mwinii on the Somali Coast and Chifundi on southern coast of Kenya (Walsh 2017, 125). Dialects

[4] Nurse and Hinnebusch (cited in Spear 2000, 271) note that apart from Sabaki languages, the northeast languages also include Seuta, Ruvu, and Pare. The nature of these languages indicates that there were few external influences in the duration of their evolution evident in Swahili language.

[5] Kingozi (classical Kiswahili) is considered the earliest form of all Swahili dialects. As different Swahili states advanced through trade and maritime activities, each state developed its own evolved and distinctive dialect of the Kingozi (Kusimba 1999, 139). Thus, all Swahili dialects are somewhat linked. Nurse and Spear (1985, 7) elucidate how languages emerge over a protracted duration. As the indigenous speakers multiply, the language starts to diversify internally. When some members of the community break away and even relocate, the language increases in its linguistic differentiation. It was during this period that Arabic interceded over the history of Swahili dialects.

of Lamu Archipelago and those of Mombasa are considered closely linked and are considered to be in the northern region. Where there are variables, they are considered local ones, dependent on region or origin of the people in question. Southern dialects have proven harder to classify and linguistics have to rely on assumptions made from relationships between known settlement histories and dialect development (Walsh 2017, 125). These dialects are normally distinguished by the variations in their respective sounds commonly known as linguistic phonologies (Mugane 2015, 34). For example, in the northern dialects the Swahili word for 'come here' is *ndoo* and in the southern dialects it is *njoo.* The consonants 'j' and 'd' change the pronunciation and the sound of both words. This is consistent in different words evident in respective dialects (see Rayya 2002: Omar and Drury 2002).

Walsh (2017) notes that there is need for extensive research to understand the lexical knowledge of Sabaki and Swahili; even though we possess a list of vocabulary we often lack comparative material from related languages. We are cognizant of word borrowing from Arabic, but we still lack information on words borrowed from languages of the East African hinterland as well as different languages of the Indian Ocean world (Walsh 2017, 127). Research along these lines could develop a better understanding of the humble beginnings of Swahili language amongst Bantu mixed farmers and the spread of this language and its use along the East African coast.

Who are the Swahili People?

Swahilis have typically been known to be mercantile and maritime people over the centuries. They had for years played the role of 'middlemen' in the East African trade. The name Swahili is from the Arabic word *sawahil* which means coast; thus, waSwahili are people of the East African coast.[6] At first, Arabs used the term Swahili to describe, in a non-complimentary way, non-Muslim Africans living along the littoral of the Indian Ocean in Lamu Archipelago (Mugane, 2015, 23). These people were rooted in mixed farming, iron smelting, pastoralism, and a broad connection to other regional groups in the interior through local trade. They had a distinct culture marked by sailing and fishing, trade ties to the Indian Ocean, which eventually led to the gradual conversion of locals to Islam in the latter half of the first millennium through collaboration with Arab traders (Pawlowicz and LaViolette 2013, 118 and Mugane 2015, 22). 'Swahili' seems to have not been

[6] Today people who identify as Swahilis do not predominantly reside on the East African coast. It is common to find Swahilis in the interiors, away from the coast, but they trace their origins and genealogies back to the Swahili Coast.

used as an ethnic term before the 18th and 19th centuries when the Omani Arab rulers of Zanzibar referred to the people they ruled over, living along the littoral of the East African coast as Swahilis while calling themselves Omani or Arabs (Middleton 1992, 1). De Vere Allen (1993, 12) defines Swahilis as those who lived in early East African littoral settlements between c. 800 and c. AD1600. These are people who built boats which sailed the coast of East Africa, produced carved door frames and other arts linked to the East African coastal region, they wrote, sang and listened to Swahili poetry and were involved with the growth and spread of Swahili language as a lingua franca.

Figure 1.1: Swahili sailors preparing to take part in the annual New Year's Eve Dhow Race. Photograph by author.

Early explorers of East African region had no difficulty recognizing that a large community of people referring to themselves as Swahili were existing along the littoral of the Indian Ocean. They were very distinct, separated and unrelated to a second group which comprised immigrants of Arabia and the Gulf. French travellers of the East African coast in 18th and 19th centuries such as Freeman-Greenville, Greffulhe and Guillain had lived amongst Swahilis in Kilwa, Zanzibar and Lamu, respectively. They too made similar automatic distinctions between the Swahili and Arabs (De Vere Allen 1993, 2). Although the Swahili were very distinct to the neighbouring and interior communities, they had maintained meaningful connections throughout the years. These communities in turn made ongoing contributions to the establishment of Swahili society. Swahilis

were not strangers to the hinterland settlers. The oldest songs amongst Swahilis are attributed to Fumo Liyongo. In these songs, there are implications of the hinterland people in their involvement and contributions towards the history of the Swahili people (Mugane 2015, 170). Archaeologists have demonstrated how coastal ceramic objects produced from widely used Early Iron Age types are regularly found in the interior sites. This has set aside earlier hypotheses that these ceramics were 'Swahili' and unique to the coast, they had been distributed through local trade amongst the Swahili Coast residents, and those in the hinterland and interior (Pawlowicz and LaViolette 2013, 125-126).

Most Swahilis when questioned about their ethnicity give a list of names like *waMvita* (Mombasa), *waPate* (Pate), *waKilwa* (Kilwa), *waArabu* (Arabia), *waShirazi* (Persia) and *waBajuni* (Bajun) rather than waSwahili (Mugane 2015). Ylvisaker (1979), Spear (2000), Middleton (1992) and De Vere Allen (1993) also agree that people who have been labelled as Swahili by scholars seldom refer to themselves as such. Swahilis have denounced the word 'Swahili' and considered it a colonial concept (Kusimba and Walz 2018, 430). They identify themselves based on the towns they grew up in, putative origins, status or descent group instead but still recognize themselves as being part of the Swahili society. The origins of Swahili people and understanding their identity is a complex matter. They all share a language, which has different dialects depending on the region from which the persons in question originates. Each community or region displays a diversity of common cultural practises and historical events.

Apart from language, Swahilis share a similar history and, more importantly, a culture though with a great difference in region and social class, but they are not considered a homogenous society. De Vere Allen (1993, 2) notes that, ironically, it is through their culture that Swahilis can differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups or people who are not 'real' Swahilis. Another non-linguistic or cultural factor that defines the Swahili people is that most of them have long been Muslims. In fact, Swahili and Muslim have been used synonymously in East Africa. This has linked them to the Arabs, Persians, Somali and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, all of whom played a role at different times in the development of Swahili towns and states. Islam distinguished the Swahili people from their neighbours and people in the interior which is seen and noted by early explorers and missionaries. Swahilis have historically seen themselves as morally superior using Islam to separate themselves from the people in the hinterlands and interior whom they considered 'impure'

people (Middleton 1992, 161). The cuisine, clothing adornment, poetry, music, naming practices and many other attributes have also contributed to defining them and making them very unique to the East African coastal region.

De Vere Allen (1993, 3) notes that using the term Swahili, in a broader sense means that all people who speak the language are Swahili and in a broader sense Swahili-ness is a cultural phenomenon, devoid of any physiognomic implications. The most common factor of these groups of people is the culture they share in different regions of the East African coast. Middleton (1992, 10-11) notes that four factors characterize Swahili society: the nature of the coast; the trade between Africa and Asia in which the Swahili acted as middlemen; their long subjection to colonial exchange and political systems; and their ethnic composition and the complex historical formation of their society.

Even though there are many dissimilarities amongst people of the Swahili Coast, it is an area which has had civilised settlements defined by its members in cultural terms which have given them cohesion and strength in economic complementarity between its different regions (Middleton 1992, 191). Swahilis seem to be more of a cultural phenomenon rather than a racial one and as earlier mentioned, Swahilis identify themselves according to their area of settlement. De Vere Allen, Kusimba and Middleton amongst other notable scholars all agree that the cultural factor is what defines those who refer to themselves as Swahilis. All urban and Swahili states of the East African coast have their names, traditions, myths, origins, dialect but the Swahili culture and their shared history are what bind them in a stratified region.

Old Lamu Town

In the periplus of the Erythrean Sea, there is mention of an area which Greek sailors referred to as the Pyralaon Island which is a term that they might have used to write about the present-day Lamu Archipelago. Marguerite Ylvisaker (1979, 1) notes, “The Lamu Archipelago off the northern Kenya coast, comprises three main islands, Lamu, Manda and Pate, and several smaller islands which include Ndao and Kiwayuu”. Lamu has a port established over a thousand years ago and one of the best-preserved Swahili settlements and is considered a leading centre of Islamic and Swahili cultures. Lamu Town is recognized both as the oldest existing town in Kenya and as a

World Heritage Site by UNESCO.[7] One of the main reasons it remains preserved is because of all the coastal towns, it is the least accessible. This has protected it from major development and ruining of old settlements on surrounding islands over the years. The earliest known settlement in Lamu Archipelago was in Manda Island in the 9th century. Lamu Town is believed to have been established later in the 13th century. Boyd (1985, 2) writes, "Although the exact dates of the first settlements on Lamu Island are not known, preliminary archaeological explorations suggest that settlements occurred in the vicinity of the present town at least as early as 1200 AD". The earliest mention of Lamu Town was in an Arabic manuscript which describes a meeting in Mecca in the year 1441 AD between the Arab historian, Al-Maqrizi and the *qadi* (judge) of Lamu (Ghaidan 1975, 38). There is also evidence in this manuscript of an evolved culture in Lamu which is perhaps referring to the different multi-ethnic groups that had settled in the island and the use of Swahili language (as a lingua franca) and culture as their social setup, and these people would eventually be known as Swahilis. Chittick and Kirkman (cited in Kusimba 1999, 30) believed that Swahili towns like Lamu had been a creation of overseas colonizers which now has been repudiated by archaeologist like Kusimba. According to later archaeological findings, Swahilis had been building stone structures before Arabs arrived on the coast.

Lamu, in the past had a natural harbour and is fringed along the west, north and north-east by mangrove forests. Monsoon winds blew in sea vessels laden with trading goods to Lamu's coast which resulted in the establishment of a trading port. Lamu was a rich port in the early 17th to early 19th centuries. Exchanges in Lamu Town are axiomatic in the mix of culture and languages, religious practices, architectural and artistic influences and the fusion of cuisine borrowed from local as well as Arabian, Indian and Chinese influences (Laher 2011, 5). Lamu Town also served as an Omani protectorate from the late 17th century to the early 19th century. Although the flourishing of Lamu Town dates back to the 15th century, the town experienced the completion of several mosques and tombs as an Omani protectorate, which is evidence of the spread of Islam and conversion of locals along the East African coast. Archaeological evidence shows many small settlements in the town indicating an increase in population. This means that the coastal towns were growing and becoming prominent thus attracting outsiders through the Indian Ocean, due to their unique ecological position. The narrow streets and the century old buildings represent a

[7] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a functional branch of the United Nations.

continuous entry and exit point for trade into the island's interior. Ghaidan (1975,6) notes that at the time, the more important towns along the Swahili coast were Mombasa and Malindi and what is now known as Lamu County.

Figure 1.2: A major street in Lamu Town; locals walking along the narrow streets. Photograph by author.

Lamu is an administrative centre and the seat of Swahili Coast's largest religious academy. Lamu has a fascinating Friday Mosque[8] which covers an area of 290 square metres. It has a conical minaret approached by a spiral staircase of fifty-eight steps. Mosques like this one, found near the sea were common features on the East African coast. Shores of the Swahili Coast provided suitable conditions for ships to careen once they arrived from the voyages. Open spaces made it possible to build big mosques which were not only used for worship but to transact businesses for local and foreign visitors (Kusimba and Walz 2018, 432). Ghaidan (1975, 33) and Middleton (1992, 168) give accounts of the mosque college founded by Al-Habib Swaleh, a Comorian Arab of Hadhrami

[8] A Friday Mosque is the main mosque in Swahili towns where Muslims host the special Friday midday prayers commonly known as jumu'ah.

stock who migrated to Lamu at the end of the 19th century. He founded the Riyadha Mosque[9] which was the heart of the academy. However, the existence of predominant Islamic activities does not deny the existence of other important structures of political and economic setups. Island politics created opportunities for alliances in which Swahilis could create an exchange of goods with those in the hinterland to sustain themselves.

The population of present-day Lamu island is a mixture of many ethnic groups; Bajunis, Coastal Bantus, Arabs, Mijikenda, Somalis, Wabara and Indians (Laher, 2011, 5). However, it was not until the last third of the 19th century that people from other ethnic groups started influencing Lamu Town's political activities other than the Oromo who in the past had been in control of the politics of the island. Ylvisaker (1979) elucidates how one of the Oromo chiefs decided to abandon his traditional nomadic life and settled near his Muslim allies and she wonders whether this move would have had lasting effects on the Swahili-Oromo people and their political control of Lamu. Currently, Lamu's political organization is closely linked to Islamic religious organization which has had an immense influence on the living standards of the people of Lamu. Boyd (1985, 3) notes that the role of a religious leader is taken up by an *Imam* whose main work is to teach young boys in the community. He also garners a lot of respect from the community as a religious leader even outside the mosque. The *Imam* is surrounded by highly trained teachers who oversee classes and operate madrasas for older youths and young men. They are not only respected for their highly acquired religious knowledge but the significant influence they have on respective families of their students. Amongst these teachers are people referred to as *Sharifs* who are believed to be direct progenies of Prophet Mohammed and such persons are regarded to be of a higher social stratum.

Methodology, Strategies and Issues When Conducting Fieldwork in Lamu Town

I arrived in Lamu Town on the 9th of December 2019. My fieldwork lasted for six weeks. Due to unavailability of some of my research consultants during my fieldwork, I started making plans to travel back in June 2020. The strains caused by the Covid-19 pandemic affected travelling from one county to the other within Kenya hence the second trip did not happen. I had never been to Lamu Town, but I had frequented other towns on the Swahili Coast which gave me a rough idea of what to expect. I had earlier wished to travel by road but there were concerns about security and

[9] In the case of Lamu Town, Riyadh Mosque is considered above the Friday Mosque because of its history.

safety on the roads because of the sporadic Al-Shabaab attacks in the region, Lamu being contiguous to Somalia. I reluctantly decided to fly directly to Lamu. The Lamu county airport is located in Manda Island. We landed at around 11 am. There were light showers which resulted in the temperatures being cooler making it more bearable to walk in the thick humidity, a natural climatic condition expected along the Swahili Coast. From Manda Island, one must take a speed boat to access Lamu Island. Once I had gathered my luggage, I proceeded to the jetty where I procured a speed boat to make the quick trip across to the island. I had a spectacular view of old Lamu Town as we crossed the sea, a reminder of a well-preserved Swahili city.

Figure 1.3: Lamu Town promenade; view from across the sea. Photograph by author.

Swahili people have been known to be exceptionally private and conservative, especially in Lamu Town where they have held onto their traditional practices despite the global wave of modernity and technological advancement. Laher (2011, 6), notes that with a close survey one can notice a distinct relationship between the modern and the ancient. He goes on to write that modern conveniences such as cell phones and use of internet are never absent even in remote rural areas where indigenous people struggle to make a living. I had instances where conversations with Swahilis in Lamu Town were interrupted due to calls and messages on their cell phones. Nevertheless, Islam has continued to play a critical role in how Swahilis live and their idiosyncrasies, which are key features still applied to identify Swahilis. They embrace change

brought about by modernity, but they do not want it to negatively affect their way of life nor destroy their *utamaduni* (culture).

Swahili people do not effortlessly share information about their day-to-day lives to people they consider '*sio mwenyeji'* (not a local Swahili). As a researcher amongst Swahilis, one has to cultivate a trust relationship by casually spending time with them and sharing personal information about one's life. Conventional methods of data collection are not necessarily appropriate when researching Swahilis. Swahilis share information through daily conversation, making use of stories, and not in formal setups, especially when one's aim is to have a better understanding of their cultural practices. Middleton (1992, xi) gives an account of his time in Lamu in which he describes how most of his conversations and information he accumulated amongst Swahilis were considered by them as either confidential or normal private talk. His research consultants were mostly friends and people who trusted him enough to welcome him into their homes. His Swahili friends told him they would most certainly not talk about anything, except in superficial terms, with visitors, male or female. The notion of *siri* (secrecy) is central in day-to-day behaviour in Swahili towns. Caplan (1997, 25), while researching Swahili Muslims, recalls how her informant had initially declined her request to record their conversations. When he finally agreed, he stipulated that they needed to work in privacy away from other villagers to avoid unnecessary gossip and malicious conclusions.

My first contact in Lamu was Zacharia Kiongo, a DPP[10] lawyer, whose contact had been given to me by a dear friend. He accommodated me for the first few days before I could move into a more permanent residence. He introduced me to a Muslim man, Abdul, who sold vegetables at the main market. Through frequent interactions and conversations with Abdul, I was able to make other contacts that would prove useful in my research.[11]

[10] DPP is the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Kenya. They exercise State powers of prosecution.

[11] Abdul was very instrumental in giving me guidance on how to associate with and present myself to my research consultants to avoid committing faux pas that might compromise my study.

Figure 1.4: Abul giving me a tour of the old Lamu Town settlements. Photograph by author.

I was also able to meet the curator of the Lamu Museum, Bw. Mwenje, during a tour of the Lamu Fort. After briefly describing my research focus, he too was able to provide more contacts to whom I could reach out. He also invited me to a UNESCO meeting with various stakeholders in Lamu Town to meet prospective research consultants. The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss the preservation of Lamu Town as a heritage centre, what would be the effects of the new port, commonly referred to as LAPSSET,[12] that was being constructed in Lamu County and how to continue creating job opportunities for the youth to support economic growth.

One more contact I was able to make earlier on before I commenced my data collection was a PhD anthropology student, Monica Sairo from Kenya, who was researching Swahili art and the narratives around them. She was kind enough to share her experience throughout her time in Lamu Town. One of the tips she gave me concerned strategies to apply when conducting interviews. The Swahili people had been a 'middleman' society for many years, being exploited politically,

[12] The acronym LAPSSET refers to the port being built in Lamu District connecting Lamu, Southern Sudan and Ethiopia.

economically and socially. Adherence to Islam meant more than compliance to Muslim rights and acceptance of Muslim religious beliefs, but also acceptance of Islamic law, this has always been in conflict with the local law and at times with laws introduced by various colonial powers that came into play and national governments (Middleton 1992, 161). I realized that traditional interview questions are not always successful, Swahilis see this as a political tool or as potentially socially asymmetrical relations; social status has always been very important to them. Swahilis do not trust the Kenyan government, they believe the government is only interested in exploiting them and is not interested in their livelihood (Laher 2011, 6). Hence, Monica advised me to use informal conversations to collect data. When the information being relayed sounded fascinating, I should casually ask them if I can record the conversation because the information sounded interesting.[13] In this way, one has given them the power to control the conversation, made it clear that one respects them and the time they are giving one while concomitantly and effectively collecting relevant data. One of her other experiences was that information and narratives changed as Swahili people build a trust relationship. Stories they share with one during the first few encounters often change depending on the relationship one builds with them. It is imperative to take time before rushing to collect data.[14] Thereby, one represents the truth as told by the Swahili Muslim people and avoid misrepresenting them as has occurred in the past.[15] It is also preferable to ask research consultants if they would like to 'talk' instead of asking them if one can 'interview' them, this creates a more comfortable environment and they can relax while sharing information; most times over a cup of *chai* (tea).

[13] Gearhart (1998, 24) encourages researchers conducting studies on the Swahili Coast to strive to develop ethical data collecting methods that enhance their credibility as scholars.

[14] This data collection method assisted me as the researcher to gauge the credibility of my research consultants and what specific information they possessed concerning my research focus. This would also advise me on the topics I should raise when conversing with them later.

[15] Several Swahili elders in Lamu Town warned us, Monica and I, to be careful about the content we choose to include in our respective works. Some notable scholars have been scrutinized in the past for their erroneous studies in Lamu Town. As a result, Swahilis are hostile towards researchers (western ones especially) and this is one of the reasons they are inclined to share fabricated information.

Figure 1.5: Photographed: Simon Mwaniki, Monica Sairo and Zacharia Kiongo photographed by the main entrance of Lamu Fort.

In light of this information, I collected my data mainly through day-to-day conversations with my research consultants. I would also join or follow them as they conducted their daily activities or tended to work commitments and observed silently how they related with each other. The main focus of my research was the traditional music performed at Swahili ceremonies. Once I started recording conversations, I would playback and listen to these audios in the evenings and it was through these recordings that I realized that *mashairi* are a major component of Swahili traditional musical practices. During one of my conversations with Monica, Bi. Ali, and Bw. Ali, (02/01/2020) Monica asked if there are any special techniques required to perform *mashairi* and Swahili songs as Swahilis do. Bi. Ali responded by simply saying, *"Nyimbo na mashairi ni sawa sawa hazina tofauti"* (Songs and *mashairi* are the same. No difference at all).[16] It is through the art of *mashairi* that they compose lyrics sung to music performed in their traditional ceremonies, which I happened to be investigating. I decided to change my focus from songs and dances performed by Muslim Swahilis on special occasions to Swahili poetry which has been a part of Swahili literature for centuries. My focus now is the usage of *mashairi* over the years as a source

[16] After Arabic poetic mores influenced Bantu oral traditions, four main types of prosodic compositions emerged *shairi* (melodic rhyming verse), *utenzi* (epic poem), *takhmis* (five verse stanzas) and *wimbo* (ballads) (Ohly 1985, 473). Realistically, these four genres evolved distinctively, *shairi* and *utenzi* being the most common, but it would seem in practice Swahilis in Lamu Town consider them all as *mashairi* and also refer to them as *nyimbo* (songs).

of lyrics, an art whose use is gradually declining in the Swahili performative traditional contexts, making comparisons between classical *mashairi* and modern *mashairi*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to give a historical background of Swahili language and Swahili people. I have also given accounts of the establishment of Lamu Town, its current existence and my fieldwork strategies. I will explore the history of Swahili poetry in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I will look at poets in Lamu Town and analysis of modern *mashairi*. Chapter 4 will provide descriptions of Swahili weddings and the different stages, demonstrate the use of text from *mashairi* as lyrics and offer a musical analysis of sung *mashairi.* Chapter 5 will be a summary and conclusion of this project and I will offer recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF *MASHAIRI* AND ARABIC INFLUENCES

Introduction

Swahilis are known to be very poetic; from working class men and women to those in leadership roles in their communities can be poets (Knappert 1963). Upon inquiry, I discovered that Swahili poets are ubiquitous. Shariff and Feidel (1986, 512) note that some Swahilis do not actively compose *mashairi* but when the need arises, they too rise to the occasion and this is especially noticeable in Lamu Town. Most poets in Lamu Town do not necessarily study to be poets. One of the *Imams*, Tawalib Mbarak Hadi, had this to say about Swahili poets (08/01/2020):

> *Imam: Mashairi ni kipawa ambacho mtu hujifundisha, sasa aweza mtu kujua na mwingine akawa hajui*
>
> *Imam*: The art of Swahili poetry is a skill one teaches oneself, so one person can know how to [do it] while another person does not.

Bi. Sharrifa, a resident of Lamu Town, is currently a Member of County Assembly (MCA) but refers to herself as a Councillor[17] in Lamu County and according to the locals, the best-known poet in the region. I had the opportunity of conversing with her. This is how she replied when I asked her where and how she learnt the art of *mashairi* (06/01/2020):

> *Bi. Sharrifa: Si mimi hukaa hapa. Niko na ile talanta inherited. Ni utamaduni wetu.*
>
> Bi. Sharrifa: I live here (Lamu). I have the talent that I have inherited. It is our culture.

Both the *Imam* and Bi. Sharrifa make it clear that the art of *mashairi*, more frequently than not, is a gift inherited within the family lineage. Over time those who possess the skill nurture it and often excel in the art of composing *mashairi*.[18]

[17] Bi. Sharrifa refers to herself as a Councillor which is a term that was used before the constitution of Kenya was amended in 2010. Presently, leaders in this position go by the title, Member of County Assembly (MCA). It is also noticeable that some Swahilis will refer to Lamu region as a District which is now recognized as a County under the new constitution. Whenever these government terminologies (and others) are inconsistent in my work, please note that I am directly quoting my research consultants, and these might not always be accurate representations.

[18] Olali (2015, 45) gives insights of a place where aspiring poets go to learn how to recite *mashairi* from an expert and are taught different renditions, rhythms and how to sing using mellifluous melodies. This place is known as a *kinara* (a special place for teaching poetry) which is a small tower in the shape of a minaret normally at the top a of a mosque. Olali also notices that coaching poets is a prevalent tradition along the Swahili Coast. However, Bi. Sharrifa and the *Imam* never made any direct reference to the existence of such an academy.

Swahili traditions of oral composition and performance were flourishing before the cities of Lamu and Mombasa became centres of scholarship, trade, religion, and authorship. Knappert (1963, 14) suggests, “It is as if the whole structure of the language invites to poetry, so logical it is, and so harmonious, so rich in vowels and sonorous glides, so euphonious that it can be compared with classical Greek and Finnish”.

Verbal art of narrative as storytelling, remains an essential part of Swahili poetry. *Mashairi* language usage is evident in how Swahilis regularly express themselves with the sole purpose of passing on secretive messages that have a deeper meaning in everyday life. The syntax of their sentences and choice of vocabulary, which is a special characteristic that informs poets, in most cases are hard to comprehend if one (including Kenyans) has not lived amongst Swahilis. The use of *mafumbo* (metaphors) is found in everyday conversations and is seen in most *mashairi* to illustrate moral or religious lessons. Swahili Poetry today is known to be one of the most conversant forms of literature in Africa owing to the prolific writers who have achieved this position through their artistry (Simala 2004, 22).

What influenced this art that is diametrically and indelibly embedded in the Swahili culture? It is an art that is replete with thoughts, wisdom and complexity all condensed into poetic language eventually combined with the allusive style that comes from the deep intimate tradition of oral performance and listener collaboration. In this chapter I give a condensed historical background of Swahili poetry from its inception amongst Swahilis and make note of special artistic styles that comprise Arabic influences that came about after the introduction of Islam to the Swahili coast between 700-1500 AD.

An Art Amongst its People

Artists use language to create different types of literature. Swahili language remains unequalled in comparison to other Bantu languages when it comes to possessing an established form of literature that existed before the society came into contact with Europeans (Werner 1918, 113). The most celebrated and oldest form of Swahili literature is the *shairi,* (sing. of a poem) which has its deep roots in orality that were often sung (Mugane 2015, 148 and Rosenburg 2008, 113). *Mashairi* were normally passed from one singer to the other to live on or be forgotten depending on their importance (Werner 1927, 101). Swahilis seemed to have placed special value on poetry in comparison to other literary genres. It is considered a prized possession when one creates a *shairi*

and equally uplifting to hear it recited. Therefore, the essence of exceptional poetry lies in its capability to intrigue the audience's appreciation and, in a sense to lift their spirits (Simala 2004, 33).

Mugane (2015, 148) chooses the proverb to be the foundation and heart of Swahili poetry because of its function in daily life and *mashairi* almost entirely depict everyday life. Poetry, songs, dances and even non-rhythmic creative writings were used to give insight into the life of Swahili people. Proverbs, for their vital place in Swahili culture, are the entry ticket that allows us an understanding of their culture. Proverbs are hardly ever recited on their own; they are always associated with *mashairi*, narrated stories, warnings, lessons and jokes which thoroughly reinforce proverbs and their meanings when used in these contexts.

Knappert (1982, 26) notes that proverbs are perfect tools for poetry and a source of knowledge about the history of Swahilis. It demonstrates how Swahilis have taken advantage of proverbs to relay important messages, elucidate events and outline general principles that are the foundation of Swahili life (Mugane 2015, 152). The poet's job is not only to pass on the proverbial wisdom of society but to fundamentally use poetry as a medium to criticize or address some of society's issues.

Some of these proverbs originated from lines within verses from traditional forms or were developed in verse according to traditional patterns (Harries 1953, 11). Harries (cited in Masinde 2003, 57) infers that it is mandatory to discuss poetic works by paying attention to their historical content. *Mashairi* contain information of the composition's historical background through introductions and descriptions. This means that *mashairi* should be analysed by closely looking at the background knowledge of the poet's dwelling and the events that the poet witnessed at the time leading up to the composition. In most circumstances, a Swahili poet is the voice of society and through his/her words, he/she reflects and represents the sociological organization of his/her society. Poets rely on their experiences, customs and familiar surroundings to create their own version of proverbs to avoid hackneyed expressions in their works. The meanings of these proverbs can be elucidated through background information found in oral history. For example, a good number of *mashairi* and proverbs from the 19th century portray images of the slave trade which was at its peak at the time. The proverb, *mtumwa mwelewa hafunzwi adabu* (an intelligent servant does not need to be taught good manners) is used to remind the slaves that they have coped with

their status in society despite the hardships. It also unambiguously reflects on the period during the slave trade. It is paramount to analyse *mashairi* within their socio-historical contexts to discern forthcoming narratives and their meanings.

Proverbs play around with homonyms, words that sound the same but have different meanings, determined by a single vowel or consonant (Mugane 2015, 153). Take for example one of the most famous Swahili proverbs, *haraka haraka haina baraka,* (hurry hurry has no blessings); it rhymes and alliterates around the 'r' and 'k' sounds which additionally impels one not to forget the proverb itself. Another good example is *haba haba hujaza kibaba,* (bit by bit fills the pot), this time the sound alliterates around the consonant 'b'. For this reason, proverbs enable Swahili poets to acquire the specific syllable count and internal rhymes which are essential in Swahili poetry. Swahili conservative poets believe that rhyme, regular metre and the use of metaphors are the backbone of Swahili poetry and cannot change despite several attempts by some modern liberal poets (Masinde 2003, 54 and Mazrui 1992).

Metre and rhyme are not thought to have been part of the structural features of *mashairi*. It is believed that this prosodic practice was introduced by Arabs, but it is hard to place the exact time when it was introduced (Mazrui 2007, 51). This uncertainty is as a result of insufficient irrefutable historical documentation in which case it becomes a matter only for supposition. Mazrui (2007) presents an argument by Shariff who claims that the earliest Swahili *mashairi* on record were composed in metre and rhyme hence it should not be attributed to Arabic poetry practices and that by doing so, one is denying Swahilis an independent creative genius. However, Werner (1927, 101) and Vierke (2016, 226) strongly believe that rhyme and metre recognizable in most *mashairi* owe their presence to Arab influence. Though the Bantu people are experts at expressing themselves, Werner asserts that they had no system of versification. Their music and dance, usually accompanied by a drum, has rhythm and a number of different metres. Mazrui (2007, 53) suggests that if we are to admit that Arab poetics influenced Swahili poetics it should be recognized as an intra-African phenomenon of cultural hybridization. It is neither wholly Arabic nor wholly Bantu in terms of content and form. As much as we may try to disregard Arabic influences, Islam hitherto has prominence in this discourse because written literature in Swahili language started after the introduction of Islam (Simala 2004,18). Swahili poets from the northern region created national

literature from sources that are foreign to the Bantu. However, many of the descriptions they used are distinctly African while the influence remains deeply Arabic (Harries 1950, 58).

Swahili history and poetry have had an intimate relationship; poets are inclined to use history and current affairs as their raw materials (Simala 2004, 22). It is through this long intimate relationship that poets can articulate several issues at different times in different ways using this genre (Masinde 2003). This history also includes political powers that came into play at different times. Swahili poetry covers a corpus of issues, but it is noticeable for its persistent attention to political themes elucidating colonial powers that came into play on the East African region (Simala 2004, 17 and Kresse 2007, 108). Some classical poets take up the role of traditional historian and give accounts of narratives and events often inaccurately summarized, zooming in haphazardly and in no discernible chronological order to report and reconstruct their history (Simala 2004, 33). There are instances where history has been distorted by poetry due to the truncation of verse forms determined by the crude and immutable monolithic views of what Swahili poetry should be inspired by laconic and austere Arabic styles. Poetry can also stand as a representation of accurate information and reconstruction of the state of consciousness induced by what is experienced (Simala 2004, 34). This is evident in the epic tale of Fumo Liyongo.

Fumo Liyongo

The history of *mashairi* and songs in Swahili Coast are said to have been popularized by Fumo Liyongo. He was well respected and held in great awe by not only Swahilis, but their neighbours too. He was a Swahili folk hero of the oral tradition, especially of the *gungu*,[19] wedding dance songs (King'ei 2001 and Mugane 2015). He has come to symbolize the endurance of Swahili poetic traditions as well as the early achievements of excellence within this tradition (Shariff 1991, 153). Liyongo lived over a hundred years ago but there is a conundrum determining in which decade exactly he lived, whether he was a recognized King or leader. Shariff (1991) presents two schools of thought regarding Liyongo's existence. One is a letter from the Arabs and Swahilis of Kau to the district commissioner of Kipini which places him in the pre-Portuguese era. For the second school of thought, Shariff gives an account by Knappert who believes that Liyongo died in 1690 or earlier and supports her hypotheses with accounts given by Freeman Grenville and James

[19] Gungu is the oldest type of Swahili song about love (Knappert 1982). Gungu dances and songs are accompanied by drums and are performed at weddings or other occasions of importance to Swahili families (Mugane 2015, 166).

Kirkman who believe the poet lived during the Portuguese era. Scholars such as Joseph Mbele who have done serious research on the Liyongo saga have established the fact that he was not a king in the literal or political sense of the word (Shariff 1991, 155). Written history, however, contradicts Mbele's account. The Chronicles of Pate recognizes Liyongo as the Sultan of the Ozi[20] region although the time frame remains unclear.

One can only be considered an authentic Swahili poet once one has met the cultural and literacy requirements which are refined over time by being part of the Swahili society itself. Liyongo, like other Swahili poets, wrote about his experiences and surroundings. It is imperative to note that *mashairi* attributed to Liyongo have African themes while the verse forms and subject matter at work are influenced by Arabic models (Harries 1953, 6). The Swahili identify with life experiences and in Liyongo's case, confronting and solving problems in his life.

The heart of Liyongo's story, as narrated by different authors, focuses on his contest and struggle to be the rightful heir of the Pate throne which his maternal cousin, Daudi Mringwari, had inherited through a malevolent collaboration with the Arabs. Liyongo may have been the heir to the throne according to matrilineal Bantu customary laws whereby the king's sister's son inherits the throne whereas, in Islamic laws, it is the king's son who ascends the throne, in this case, Mringwari. Mugane (2015, 167) notes that if matrilineal Bantu customary laws had prevailed in Pate, this classical Swahili tale would suggest the extent to which Arabic and Islamic laws had spread and were influencing the politics of the Bantu people. Mringwari plots several times to be rid of his rival eventually succeeding with the help of Liyongo's son who stabs him with a copper dagger bringing to an end the life of a hero as narrated in Swahili oral tradition. Liyongo's *mashairi* surround his achievements, goals, shortcomings, personal life, religious affiliations and the political scene in Pate. Swahili poetry has some of the authority of an eye-witness account by providing the historian with the portrayal and individual attestation (Simala 2004, 23). This is a major characteristic that informed Swahili poets as they crafted their art which was influenced by the circumstances in which they grew up and were educated. Their background heavily affected the meaning, form, role and content of their *mashairi* (Simala 2004, 22).

[20] Liyongo is said to have taken control of the region from Mpokomoni (where the Pokomo live) to Malindi and this district was known as Ozi, now lower Tana Delta region (De Vere Allen 1993, 149).

On the religious front, Liyongo is placed in two different categories other than Islam: Paganism and Christianity. Mbele (in Shariff 1991) reviews the argument of two scholars who view Liyongo as a pagan because he was a poet, dancer, king, warrior, embodied magical powers and human robustness: a follower of the traditional religion of his time and place. Other scholars such as Knappert recognize him as a Christian because they believe he composed his *mashairi* after the Portuguese invasion of East Africa, they also theorized that Liyongo's feud with Mringwari was probably fuelled by their different religious affiliations. Several accounts have proven that Liyongo was, in fact, a hero who existed in the northern region of the Swahili coast, Pate, but there are contradictions in these accounts. Scholars seem unperturbed by these occurrences, for example, Shariff merely mentions the lack of attention to Liyongo's contradicting timeline without further explanations.

My hypothesis is that most scholars have focused more on his existence, analysis of his *mashairi* and those associated with him, plus the remarkable heroic narratives of his life. Scholars also selectively choose the account that best supports their conclusions which present Liyongo either as a king, a common citizen, or a Christian. Shariff (1991) uses Werner's argument in which she claims that oral reports are not always reliable and at most times they contradict overwhelming evidence. In such instances as seen in the Liyongo saga, she calls for employment of 'the general weight of authority' (Shariff 1991, 164). Werner is merely suggesting that more reliable information is possible if numerous sources are at hand. Scholars, therefore, should not draw conclusions by purely selecting evidence that supports their conclusions or theories.

Long before the epic of Liyongo was written down in 1913, it existed in oral tradition and was found mainly in songs (*mashairi*) amongst Swahilis and their immediate neighbours (Eastman 1986, 460). These songs were about his life and it is believed that most of them were composed by him (Mbele 1986, 464). Fumo Liyongo's *utenzi* (epic) is one that has the most extensive evidence from relatively ancient resources. Notably, strong oral traditions about the hero have persisted over the centuries and Swahilis are emotionally connected to him (Shariff 1991, 153). Researchers of Swahili poetry are all in agreement on the existence of the traditional formation of *mashairi* for praise with political themes as seen in Liyongo's tale. (Askew 2015, 221).

Classical Swahili Poetry

A pre-Islamic phase of cultural and linguistic differentiation occurred roughly between 700-1500 amongst the Sabaki Bantu speakers (Simala 2004, 19). This resulted in the rise of special features that are attributed to African civilization of the Swahili coast such as rise of city-states and economies, which were brought about by mixed cultivation and maritime activities. The interface between Swahili and Arabic facets is an essential ingredient because Islamic practices established a foundation for the advancement of literary genres such as poetry (Topan 1997, 299). After Islam had been accepted, traditional forms of transmission through orality gradually stopped to gratify the devotional needs of sovereign people of the upper stratum. This paved the way for writing traditions to take their position and become instruments of cultural and Islamic influence on the educated Swahilis in a society in which poets became keepers of cultural knowledge (Zhukov 2004, 4). Therefore, Arabic symbols (alphabet) were introduced in the 11th century which enabled inscription of Swahili literature in Arabic manuscripts (Mugane 2015, 12, Zhukov 2004, 1 and Spear 1984, 292). When Swahili oral compositions were transferred onto paper they were not viewed as fictional stories but as part of Swahili's history of particular places and periods, ancestry, migration and settlement (Topan 2001, 107-108). Inscription of Swahili literature reached its pinnacle in the 19th century as a result of the Omani gaining political control of the Swahili Coast and extension of Zanzibari influence. Without prevailing oral traditions, a more incumbent setting for poetic expression was made available, allowing new genres of poetry to develop adapting prosodic patterns (Vierke 2016, 227).

When we speak of Swahili poetry, we are generally referring to two forms, *mashairi* (sing. *shairi*) and *tenzi* (sing. *Utenzi*). *Tenzi* were always connected to oral tradition within the limits of sung poetry and had developed before any of these poetic forms were set down in writing (Zhukov 2004, 6). *Tenzi* deal with themes of war, politics or religion and always seem to be in narrative form. They are used in the celebrative commemoration of outstanding people and incidents. Didacticism is paramount in any *tenzi* composition. *Tenzi* will normally have an introduction and conclusion, poet's name, date of composition, number of stanzas and title of the work (Vierke 2016, 228). *Shairi* is applied to other poems and lyrics that are either shorter or longer and may be of a religious nature normally in *ushairi* metre.[21] Many well-known *mashairi* were composed impromptu by

[21] *Ushairi* metre refers to *mashairi* with 16 syllables in each line, normally divided into two sections each containing eight syllables.

poets in competition with each other thus they were *mashairi ya kujibizana* (poems to respond to one another). Another form of *mashairi ya kujibizana* is seen in wedding ceremonies when the bridegroom's family officially pays dowry to the bride's family.[22] Bi. Sharrifa briefly elucidates this encounter (06/01/2020):

> *Bi. Sharrifa: Sasa kwenye arusi huwa tukitunga nyimbo za wakati kuja kupokea mahari, kuna special message ambayo kwamba tunampatia mwenye kuleta mahari na yeye pia kureceive ana respond...*
>
> Bi. Sharrifa: During the wedding, we compose songs for the day of receiving the dowry, there is a special message we give to the family presenting the dowry and after they receive the message, they too respond...

Epic poetry has the largest single corpus of Swahili literature. Epic poetry is simply defined as narrative *mashairi* of about 150 stanzas or more in the *utenzi* metre (Knappert 1982, 27). [23]

Mashairi and *tenzi* were normally performed by a poet who is referred to as a reciter. The tradition of recitation is still alive today whereby a reciter is hired for the night by a sponsor to perform at a gathering. The reciter is commonly known as a *mwimbaji* (singer) because he/she sings the stanzas to a melody that is part of his/her repertoire. Reciting *tenzi* and *mashairi* does not necessarily require any instrumental accompaniment. Reciters own a repertoire of lengthy *mashairi* which makes it possible to sing throughout the night in an undramatic tone.

Mashairi were usually not written down until after the performance, sometimes only years later when the specific *shairi* had won public approval and consequently preserved in a manuscript (Harries 1950, 55). However, *tenzi* were set in writing before their public performances, hence *tenzi* not only existed at the moment of performance but continued to exist due to having been set down in writing before the performance (Vierke 2016 228).

As a result of the gradual introduction of Islam on the Swahili Coast, Arabs brought about their own understanding of dogmas and practices to the Swahilis. Hence religious poetry accounts for a

[22] Gearhart (1998, 54- 55) elucidates a scenario where *mashairi ya kujibizana* are used when the family of the bride uses an elderly woman with poetry skills to block the entrance of the bridegroom's family. The bridegroom's family also arrives with a poet from their family who engages the elderly woman in a moment of '*kujibizana'* which can last for up to an hour. Their entry is granted when the bridegroom's poet demonstrates a high skill in poetic language usage.

[23] *Utenzi* metre refers to the number of syllables in each line of the verses as seen in *mashairi*. *Utenzi* metre has eight syllables in each line.

considerable part of the whole corpus of Swahili poetry. Swahili poetry was a medium in which to convey Islamic ideas to Swahilis along the coast. Religious poetry was concerned with behaviour in society in the context of reward or punishment in the afterlife and individual faith (Simala 2004, 32). Thus, Swahili poetry had a vital balance between social values of the society, systems that ruled over it, and their dynamic culture. Furthermore, Swahilis immensely benefitted from the Qur'an which is portrayed as the perfect *shairi* (Kresse 2007, 107). Its beauty is axiomatic in the proficient use of language and words which give great aesthetic pleasure especially to those listening to its recitation. It is as if Islamic law, through the Qur'an, encourages the use of poetic language where possible to give assured meaning to different circumstances.

In religious discourse, *tenzi* function to remind Islamic devotees of their duties and obligations. *Tenzi* serve to emphasize social values and give purpose to Islamic religious practices (Topan 2001,108). Written poetry was adapted broadly as a medium of communicating religious themes hence early scholars had presumed that Swahili poetry only focused on Islamic narratives. Topan (2001) elaborates that this was because most poets felt the urge to retain manuscripts containing religious values not only for future generations but additionally, to be beneficiaries of spiritual accolades in the afterlife. Contrariwise there was no motivation to retain secular *mashairi* which were mostly transmitted orally and concerned with everyday life in society. Once the incident in which the *shairi* was employed had concluded it became superfluous to document or preserve the *shairi* in a manuscript. Despite lack of ample records of secular *mashairi*, assumptions of poetry solely being employed in religious themes are uninformed views and should be avoided. *Utenzi* form was utilized as a vehicle of political and religious concepts, hagiographies and national biographies as well as narratives of the histories of East Africa (Vierke 2016, 228). Alongside the growth of written literature, *tenzi,* and *mashairi* continued to develop under the influence of written literature.

Many Swahilis will often compose a *shairi* after they have experienced an emotional incident in their cultural life. Simala (2004) further expounds on the relevance of such events by suggesting that a chronological study of Swahili poetry sketches three important and broad phases which disclose Swahili poetic reactions to visitors and colonizers. Firstly, poets continued to imitate the old Arabic culture of writing by using their symbols. *Mashairi* of this period were characterized by chronicle poetry that were based on historical events. *Mashairi* continued to exhibit greater

literary sophistication, particularly as was manifested by character portrayal and thematic development. The second phase was one that Simala refers to as 'schizophrenic'; the Swahili poets found themselves with one eye on the old world and the other on the new colonial culture. Loyalty and commitments were confused as society went through a period of reflection. The emotional feelings of Africans were revealed through the use of imagery, character, plots and different themes. The poets created a melancholic mood as they seriously reviewed their role in society. The third period was one where poetry contributed to protest songs in the wake of insurrections for independence. It was incited by their objection to colonial rule conspicuous in everything African at the time. Swahili poets demonstrated that their art is analogous to other forms of discourse such as religion, politics, economics, education and cultural values in general. The poetry of this generation is more descriptive and aims to relate rather than to rate cultures.

The two Standardized Structures of Swahili Poetry

The classification of *mashairi* is determined by the analysis of components of the composition itself. There are four main components when analysing *mashairi*. First, the syllable counts of each line e.g.

Mwanangu twaa waadhi

After the division of the syllables, which is done after every consonant vowel sound (some are monosyllabic sounds and some have double consonants), the result is as shown below, and in this case the syllable count is eight. (I use a hyphen to distinguish the syllables)

Mwa-na-ngu twa-a wa-a-dhi

Second, is the division of each line in respective verses into two sections, (*Kipande* sing.*vipande* pl.) e.g. (I use a comma to separate the two sections)

Lindani yaliyo nyuma, Ya suri na poopoo

Third, the number of lines per verse (*ubeti* sing. *Beti* pl.). The least number of lines is normally three per verse and a traditional *shairi* can have up to eight lines per verse. Fourth, the occurrence of the rhyme scheme in each verse. Most times all the verses will conclude with the same rhyme scheme apart from the last line, known as *kikomo* (ending, full stop) which, more frequently than not, will have a different rhyme scheme. The *kikomo* can be the same sentence in the whole shairi

or have the same rhyme scheme in all verses but different sentences in each verse (see example below given for *utenzi* metre).

The structure of *Utenzi* is distinct from *shairi. Ubeti* normally consists of four lines. Each line in *utenzi* consists of eight (sometimes 11) syllables which form a specific metre (*minzani)*. The syllables at the end of the first three lines of each *ubeti* are similar and form the rhyme in *utenzi*. The fourth line in *utenzi* is different from the first three thus it forms the *kikomo* (see Knappert 1971, Frolova 2007 and Werner 1927).

Example: *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona* (An Epic Poem by Mwana Kupona) verse 6-7

Mwa-na-da-mu si-u ki-tu
Na u-li-mwe-ngu si we-tu
Wa-la-u ha-ku-na m-tu
A-mba-o a-ta-sa-li-a

Mwa-na-ngu twa-a wa-a-dhi
Pa-mo-ya na ya-ngu ra-dhi
Mn-gu a-ta-ku-hi-fa-dhi
A-mba-o a-ta-sa-li-ya

Notice the *kikomo* at each fourth line in the two verses above are the same and this is seen throughout the whole *utenzi.* This normally works impeccably in didactic poems.

A *shairi* can have more than four lines or less. Each line consists of 16 syllables thus it forms two parts, *vipande.* In each *kipande* (sing.) the ending forms a rhyme scheme, but the last line differs at times. In *tenzi* and *mashairi* it is very common for poets to shorten certain words to achieve the number of syllables required for each line or *kipande* e.g. *usinambie* (don't tell me) instead of *usiniambie* (see Knappert 1971, Frolova 2007 and Werner 1927).

Example: *Risala wa Zinjibari* (A message about Zanzibar) verse 11

Li-nda-ni ya-li-yo nyu-ma / Ya su-ri na po-o-po-o
Mu-si-we mu-ki-la-la-ma / M-wa-po n-le-o-le-o
Ni me-me ya-ke ni me-ma / She-khe ya-m-i-bi-ye-o
Na-nyi mu-fu-ra-hi-ye-o / Ha-ya-si-i ma-yu-to-ye

Today poets do not compose in the proper *utenzi* form. A proper *utenzi* encompasses about 300-900 verses making it a prolonged *shairi* which would explain why poets prefer to compose using the shorter form, *shairi*. It is still hard to understand why *tenzi* became the less used form because

it was the most popular one amongst Swahili poets in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, some *mashairi* may exhibit the *tenzi* form but the length will be that of the *shairi* form. The structural components I have explained above are the traditional standardized versions of *mashairi* and *tenzi* compositions. However, different modern Swahili poets use different variations depending on the nature of the work and on a poet's individual creativity. Hence it is not unprecedented to find *mashairi* and *tenzi* that do not follow the regulations I have explained.

Themes and Narratives arising from Swahili Classical Poetry

Classical poetry is used to refer to cultural verse forms influenced by Arabic forms and serves to distinguish between written *mashairi* from those that were passed down from one generation to another, orally. Many themes and subjects have been explored within Swahili society; however, the Swahili recognize by name, certain themes which can be identified in anthologies for Swahili verses (Harries 1953, 173). In this section I engage with these main themes; religion, love, political, admonition, betrayal, heroism and praise, portrayed in several classical *mashairi*, and narratives that support these themes. I use theme according to Alex Preminger and T.V.F Brogan's definition:

> In common usage, theme refers simply to the subject or topic treated in a discourse or part of it. Thus, to speak of the theme of a poem may be only to give a brief answer to the question, 'what is the poem about?' (Cited in Arege 2012, 19)

I will treat the term theme as the main subject. My goal is to present the main themes commonly found in classical *mashairi* between the 14th and 19th century by using three *mashairi* with different narratives.

The first *shairi* I engage with is a *shairi* from Siu given the name *waji-waji* (didactic) *shairi* written by Sayyid Umar (Harries 1950). The original *shairi* was transcribed using Arabic symbols. The main theme is a religious one which dominates the whole narrative. It is the foundation on which most Swahili poets can build other themes, a common characteristic found in classical *mashairi*. The introduction starts with acknowledging Allah and a prayer of peace for the prophets. This is a conventional opening formula seen in most *mashairi* which begin by evoking Allah's name. This demonstrates the poet's commitment to Allah's word. The poet informs his audience that he is compelled by his heart to write about what is pestering him. He advises Swahilis on how to live, following the teachings of the prophet from their time of birth to their time of death. They should not let worldly possessions distract them and the poet reminds them that they are not immortal,

therefore, they should anticipate the afterlife. This view is derived from the Qur'an and features in most classical *mashairi*. It exhorts that Muslim people should not go against Allah even during trying times and no blame should be put on him whatsoever the circumstances. The second theme that is seen throughout the *shairi* is one of warning and admonition and it is interwoven with the religious theme. Swahili poets have license to admonish as they are believed to see further than regular members of the community. They anchor these warnings with the use of Swahili proverbs. The poet discusses human beings' weaknesses and how they fall short of Allah's word. He pleads with his audience using figurative language, not to pick quarrels with Allah. He cautions those who do to be vigilant of Allah's wrath and encourages them to repent and ask for clemency. He concludes the *shairi* by promising that those who follow the Islamic laws will be rewarded by Allah in paradise.

The second *shairi* I engage with is *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona* (Hichens and Werner 1934), which too is a didactic *shairi* composed by Mwana Kupona, an ailing mother, to her daughter to advise her on marital and religious obligations as per Sharia. Didactic *mashairi* are considered profoundly valuable amongst Swahilis. The *shairi* begins with the poetess confessing that she has information from the heart which she wants to relay. She then offers prayers to Allah and salutations to the Prophet. She too reminds her daughter that life is not everlasting, she needs to uphold Islamic beliefs and traditional practises. The Qur'an mentions that those who love tradition love the Prophet hence Swahili poets will advocate for people in the society to uphold traditional practices. She intertwines the theme of religion with the theme of advice which persists throughout the *shairi*; advice to her daughter as a servant of Allah, member of the society and wife to her husband. She skilfully uses religion and the Qur'an to reinforce her directives to her daughter. The other main theme that emerges is love, love of a mother for her daughter, thus guiding her on how to establish a loving home with her husband and with those around her community.

The third *shairi, Risala za Zinjibari,* is one that carries an arduous political account of the ruling citizens of both Siu and Zanzibar as composed by Kibabina (Shariff and Noor 1986). It serves both as a historical account and a didactic *shairi*. As per Swahili poetic structure, the *shairi* opens with an element of prayer whereby the poet instructs the messenger (reciter) to depend on Allah; this represents the religious theme. He also asks Allah to provide salvation to the messenger. Other themes seen are of warning and admonition. The poet warns the Zanzibari people that doom will

befall them for their heinous act of capturing the leaders of Siu and holding them captive. The other theme is a social one. It is effectively achieved by the use of metaphorical language which is understood by the people to whom it is addressed. This portrays the special social relationship between the poet and the audience. Three sub-themes of war, betrayal and deceit also loom in the background which help the *shairi* achieve its main political theme.

Conclusion

The art of *mashairi* has existed for many decades and is still alive in Lamu Town. Most modern conservationist Swahili poets still adhere to the forms and structures that I have described above. Arabic/Islamic influences are evident through loan words and poets showing their devotion to Allah and his Prophet. Orality holds a perpetual undeterred and lauded position in Lamu culture. Public recitations of *mashairi* are common during special occasions. Swahilis celebrate their heritage and common history through the art of *mashairi*.

CHAPTER 3: *MASHAIRI* IN MODERN LAMU TOWN

Introduction

One of the means of acquiring status and prestige in Swahili society is through scholarship. Poets are considered nonprofessional scholars, they can be either men or women, but must possess the skills and techniques of composing *mashairi*. Impromptu verbal composition of poetry is a highly valued additional skill and through this, a poet may acquire a reputation spreading far beyond his/her town (Middleton 1992, 189). In this chapter I give accounts of two poets from Lamu Town and the skills required to analyse *mashairi*. I conclude by analysing modern *mashairi* sung in Swahili ceremonies and I compare them to classical *mashairi*.

Modern Swahili Poets

Publicly acknowledged poets in Lamu Town remain wholly respected and influential members of society especially if they are religious. Their role as poets has over the years experienced minor changes but their favourable social status in the Swahili society remains unchanged. The art of *mashairi* has also morphed in terms of context and accessibility in society. Kresse (2007, 110) observes that poetry is nonetheless a part of everyday life despite its different uses in the community and different social aspects of the Swahili people are still reflected in *mashairi.* In this section, I examine Swahili poets' specific role of writing *mashairi* whose texts are used as lyrics in ceremonies in Lamu Town. There are two ways in which the text can be used; it can be employed in songs and dances that are performed in these ceremonies or the *shairi* is performed as it is, a stand-alone *wimbo* (song). During my fieldwork in Lamu, I had planned to work and have conversations with two Swahili poets, Bi. Sharrifa, who is a local politician and part-time poet, and Bw. Khalid, who is a full-time poet and performer. The names of these two poets were constantly mentioned in conversations when I inquired about poets who write lyrics for Swahili ceremonies in Lamu Town. Without any hesitation I decided to pursue them both for my research project.

I came to learn from three of my research consultants that Bw. Khalid was both a poet and a performer. I had previously watched him perform at one of the luxury hotels in Lamu Town during my first week of fieldwork. He either performed as a soloist or with a band, backup musicians accompanying him with traditional drums and *twari* (tambourine). My research consultants later apprised me that he is one of the main poets whose skills are sought after when it comes to

composing *mashairi* employed in *duas* and other Swahili-related celebrations. Bw. Khalid is an albino, partially blind, who cannot read or write but is a remarkable poet. Below are two excerpts from my conversations with my research consultants when Bw. Khalid's name came up concerning *mashairi*.

> *Simon: Na lazima ukuwe na ujuzi wa kuandika mashairi kutunga hizo nyimbo?*
>
> *Bi. Husna: Eeh! Lazima. Kuna mwanaume anaitwa Khalid, ni albino yeye. Huyo hajui kuandika wala haoni vizuri lakini aweza kumwambia mtu kaa niku ambie uandike. Anatunga hapo hapo anakupatia hapo hapo.*
>
> Simon: Is it necessary for one to have the skills to write these *mashairi* to compose these songs?
>
> Bi. Husna: Yes! It is a must. There is a man called Khalid, he is an albino. He does not read and write, nor does he have good eyesight, but he can sit down with someone and narrate the text. He composes the poems and hands them over immediately in one sitting. (03/01/2020)
>
> ***
>
> *Simon: Ule anatunga hizo nyimbo lazima akuwe na ufahamu ama akuwe amesomea mashairi ndio ajuwe vile zinatungwa?*
>
> *Bi. Ali: Kunaye mtu wa kuimba anatoa mashairi kwa kichwa chake kama yule Khalid yule ambaye macho yake hayaoni. Ni hawa utiro.*
>
> Simon: The person who writes these songs, is it necessary for them to have the knowledge or have studied the art of *mashairi* so that they can compose?
>
> Bi. Ali: There is a person who sings and composes these *mashairi* from memory, like Khalid, the one who does not have good eyesight. He is an albino. (02/01/2020)

The month of December is a very busy period in Lamu Town because of the high number of tourists and the festive season. It is also during the school holiday, a convenient time for Swahili wedding ceremonies to take place because relatives from distant towns can travel with their families to attend these special occasions (see Rayya 2002, 50). For these reasons, I was not able to converse with Bw. Khalid; his schedule was fully booked, and he was completely unavailable during my time in Lamu Town. I had planned to travel back to Lamu Town in June 2020 to tie up loose ends and engage in follow-up conversations with some of my research consultants including Bw. Khalid. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted my itinerary, I was not able to

return to Lamu.[24] All the information I have gathered concerning Bw. Khalid hitherto was from formal and informal conversations that I had with my other research consultants.

I was lucky enough to have had the opportunity to converse with Bi Sharrifa. I first met Bi. Sharrifa while attending meetings organised by the National Museums of Kenya, County Government of Lamu and members of the community to produce a document that would assist with implementing the mandates provided by UNESCO for preserving Lamu Town as a Heritage Centre. I had heard about Bi. Sharrifa from some of the locals. Through my daily conversations with officials attending the meetings, I was able to meet Bi. Sharrifa. She is from an old established Swahili family that is of high social status[25] in Lamu Town, originally from Zanzibar. As a woman from a high social echelon, she was not easily accessible. I had to approach a male figure who is related to her and request for a meeting to be arranged. This back and forth took over a week. Bi. Sharrifa kept sending Bw. Jaffer, her *shemeji* (brother-in-law), back to me with questions to further clarify my reasons for wanting to meet her. After a considerable amount of intervention, I was able to secure a meeting. Women like Bi. Sharrifa, who hold a high social status in Lamu Town, do not meet or invite men to whom they are not related to their houses. Once Bi. Sharrifa understood that I was a student researching the art of *mashairi,* she agreed to meet me at a café and her *shemeji* had to be present. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bi. Sharrifa is a Ladies' MCA in the County of Lamu. Her husband is deceased and after being granted permission by the male elders in her family, she was allowed to work as long as she continued to adhere to Islamic laws, a condition given to most married women who choose to seek employment away from their marital homes. *Imam* Twalib elaborates further on this (08/01/2020):

> *Imam: Wanawake walikuwa si sana kufanya kazi, ingawa katika Waisilamu, imekubali mwanamke afanye kazi lakini kwa sheria maalum ndio asiwe kama kidude cha kuchezewa, anafanya kazi na heshima yake.*
>
> *Imam*: Women in most circumstances choose not to work, but according to Islamic laws, they are allowed to work despite the accepted and normalised practice. However, they have to work under the Islamic laws, which guide them; they are not a sort of ornament

[24] Unfortunately, online data collection was not possible due to the suspicious nature of Swahilis in Lamu, as explained in Chapter 1. When I inquired about the possibility of one of my research consultants conducting an interview with Bw. Khalid on my behalf, I was met with a lot of ambivalence which resulted in disagreements hence this line of data collection was not feasible in my case.

[25] Social status in modern Lamu Town is often prescribed by both family wealth, and family names however, the latter has more significance.

to be played around with, they conduct their work with the respect expected which in turn earns them the respect of members of the society.

Bi. Sharrifa believes she inherited the *kipawa* (talent) to write and sing *mashairi* from her family lineage, one that has had a long history of prolific poets and musicians. She nurtured this skill and taught herself to compose. She additionally completed a diploma in music in her college years, before she married, which enhanced her singing and performing skills. She explained how by using her skills she can compose and sing a *shairi* in a short period. She occasionally composes *mashairi* for special ceremonies held by her friends and family. Sometimes she composes *mashairi* to honour special visitors to Lamu Town. She described one such an occasion (06/01/2020):

Bi. Sharrifa: …Hii ilikuwa programme ya ladies' night, normally huwa tuko na ladies' night wakati wa culture sasa hii nilikuwa sijajua mgeni wa heshima ni nani. Nilipojua mgeni wa heshima ni nani, ni pale pale wakati tuko kwa venue tunaendelea na program, na nilikuwa master of ceremony mimi, na pia mimi ni mwana kamati. Sasa nilipomuona mheshimiwa waziri amekuja, nilichukua kalamu haraka haraka, nikatunga. Nikatunga hizi one, two, three kumpraise our honourable Fahima Arafat, Minister for lands. Ilikuwa ni wakati wa culture, na si kumcharge lakini wakati wa kuperform weh! Watu walifurahia!

Bi. Sharrifa: …This was a programme from the ladies' night, normally we have a ladies' night during culture week. In the beginning, I did not know who the guest of honour was going to be. She arrived at the venue and I got the information about who she was. At that moment while we were still at the venue as the programme was carrying on, by the way, I was the master of ceremonies and the chair lady of the ladies' committee, I took my pen and very fast I composed a *shairi* to praise the honourable Fahima Arafat, from Minister for Lands. Since this was during the Culture Festival, I did not charge her but when I performed the *wimbo,* the women were overjoyed!

The instance given above is axiomatic of how established Swahili poets are competent to compose a *shairi* at a moment's notice and in Bi. Sharrifa's case, whilst conducting other tasks. Bi. Sharrifa also showed me an example of a *shairi* she had written for her close friend's *dua* in Mombasa (06/01/2020).

Bi Sharrifa: Sasa hii ni dua, nimekaa kwa muda mrefu mpaka imekatika.

Simon: So hii ni prayer?

Bi Sharrifa: Prayer, dua, si unaona. Huyu, this is a lady from Lamu, she had now been transferred to Mombasa Fort. She was working here in Lamu Museum sasa kulikuwa kuna dua.

Simon: Oh Fatuma, ule mpishi?

Bi Sharrifa: No, Fatuma Saidi!

Jaffer: Eeh anasema ndio mpishi.

Bi Sharrifa: Ooh mpishi eeh! Yeye ni Regional Educational Officer, walikuwa wana dua akanipigia simu, nimtungie nyimbo za dua, nikamtungia kisha nikampigia kwa simu nikamtumia, ndio hio.

Bi: Sharrifa: Now this is a prayer, I have had it for so long it is even torn.[26]

Simon: So, this is a prayer?

Bi: Sharrifa: Prayer, as you can see this lady is from Lamu, she had received a transfer to Mombasa Fort. She was working here in Lamu Museum so there was a special day for prayers.

Simon: Oh! Fatuma the cook? (I had heard about her and the transfer hence the question)

Bi Sharrifa: No, her name is Fatuma Said!

Bw Jaffer: He is saying she is the one known for cooking.

Bi Sharrifa: Oh yes, the cook! She is the Regional Educational Officer, they had organized a day for special prayers, so she called me and requested me to write songs for the occasion. I composed them then I sent them through the phone, this is the original copy (showing me).

Bi. Sharrifa also sang a couple of *mashairi* and *tenzi* to demonstrate different performance styles she makes use of when singing. She randomly chose *mashairi* she had in her bag and sang using the text. She sometimes would tap on the table imitating a drum or *twari* which would complement her voice and add to the musical components within the solo performance. Bi. Sharrifa continued to elucidate that she learnt from poets in her family and other known poets in the region how to sing using a particular salient timbre that is specific to Lamu poets (see musical analysis in Chapter 4). Years later she would build on these musical ideas and develop her own performance style but still portray the idiosyncrasies in Swahili poetry. She told me how she would take part in *mashairi* and Qu'ran recitation competitions during the Maulidi Festival when she was younger. The

[26] Bi. Sharrifa had a collection of *mashairi* with her. She normally writes the *mashairi* then sends them via her phone as picture images, so she is often left with the original copies. As referred to in Chapter 1, the presence of such technologies are ubiquitous in everyday Swahili life.

competitions gave her a platform to grow and nurture her composition and performance skills. Lamu Town poetic milieus were also good opportunities to expose herself to both younger and older poets where they would all learn and share their experiences. With all these childhood experiences provided to her, she would go on to pursue a diploma in music.

Poets must utilize their outstanding compositional skills and *kipawa* (talent) to produce *mashairi*. Before they compose, they must pay attention to specific guidelines to ensure that the *mashairi* are well received by the targeted audience. Use of Swahili language must be in the correct form, conforming to the rules of the respective dialects. Choice of vocabulary determines if the text is understood by its audience. Effective use of language begins with selecting the appropriate dialect, an amalgam of dialects can result in incoherence of the message. Good choice of vocabulary will produce alluring *mashairi.* Poets are more comfortable and scrupulous when using their mother tongue dialects, however, when the need arises, they will use neighbouring dialects of the targeted audience. For example, if a ceremony is in Mombasa, *kiMvita* will be the suitable dialect to use and this is evident in *mashairi* from different regions on the Swahili Coast. Hence, a poet must seek out the people he wants to communicate with by using a dialect that they will understand. The use of respective Swahili dialects demonstrates the poet's respect towards the targeted audiences thus making *mashairi* accessible in the society. Swahili poets select topics, dialects, vocabulary and poetically produce texts that are relatable and easy to remember. By reciting and reinserting the text in daily conversation, Swahili people reuse the text to apply it in their day-to-day experiences (Rosenburg 2008, 116).

It is equally important to note that an established poet in Lamu Town is one who can compose and sing. As seen in both Bi. Sharrifa and Bw. Khalid, the two skills go hand in hand. Some Swahilis who request the composition of *mashairi*, at times, require the poet to perform these *nyimbo* (pl. of wimbo, a song). Poets continue to provide *mashairi* for Swahili weddings and *dua* ceremonies. *Mashairi* enhance the elaboration and the allurement of these ceremonies as seen and heard by those present. These poets remain particularly crucial, dignified and influential members of the society. They are responsible for the production and accessibility of *mashairi* in Swahili societies.

Skills Required to Analyse *Mashairi* Texts

> So I became concerned, because poetry should not be composed as if it is specialised knowledge to be understood by an educated few; rather it should be understood by all literate people as well by those who are not literate. (Mazrui 1992, 69)

Above are the sentiments written by Mazrui belonging to a British resident who lived in the then Tanganyika. He spoke fluent Kiswahili, however, he had difficulty discerning *mashairi* published in the local newspaper. Upon asking for assistance from local Africans, he realised invariably that they, too, could not comprehend the text because of *mashairi's* 'semantic opacity' resulting in obscurity of meaning for a listener, reader or any speaker of a different dialect. This is a problem that alarmed him, he believed that *mashairi* should be a means of communication between a poet and his/her audience. *Mashairi* are replete with secretive messages, *mafumbo* (metaphors), Arabic and archaic Swahili words and references to Swahili traditional customs, cultural and religious practices, all of which outsiders would not easily decipher if they are not exposed to the peculiarities of classical *mashairi*. Scholars in the 19th century had to seek assistance from a local Swahili who was either a poet or knowledgeable in Swahili language/culture and lexicons, to assist in analysing *mashairi*. Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany is one of the poets whose skills were put to use by several scholars. He was born in Lamu in 1927, he was a self-trained poet and for many years he had collaborated with several academic researchers to assist them in their research projects. His fluency in *mashairi* language made him a very resourceful contact (see Kreese 2007). He was sought after by notable scholars such as De Vere Allen, Kresse Kai, and Professor Chacha N. Chacha among a host of other scholars. In this section, I discuss essential skills required for one to easily and effectively analyse *mashairi* to fully understand messages within the texts.

The most crucial skill is to understand Swahili culture. Swahili culture is understood in terms of two categories: *mila* (customs) and *dini* (religion). Swahili *mila* are considerably linked to African traditional practices and are advised by *dini.* The dichotomy of *mila* and *dini* has existed amongst the Swahili people for years. After the introduction and gradual conversion of the Swahili people to Islam, *dini* was employed to guide the African *mila* to establish what was *haramu* (forbidden), and what was *halali* (permitted). The two can almost not exist one without the other in Swahili Muslim societies. Knowledge, scripture and lessons in Swahili societies are passed down through the great creations of poets. Such *mashairi* are fraught with excerpts of their cultural practices and day-to-day life. Another factor to consider is the integration of Arab culture into Swahili culture,

which occurred mostly through intermarriage. To discern some of these narratives arising in *mashairi* it is imperative to have background knowledge of Swahili culture and the ability to differentiate between *mila* and *dini*. Islam played a critical role in the development of Swahili as a lingua franca during the period of the East African trade, hence it is entrenched in Swahili lifestyle, a theme that constantly emerges in Swahili literature; myths, chronicles and *mashairi.* Islamic influences were mostly felt in the 19th century when Arabic influences were more pervasive after the establishment of the Omani rule in Zanzibar, a reign that dominated coastal politics (see Spear 1984). There are obvious Arabic and Islamic influences constantly reflected in Swahili traditions and consequently emerge in *mashairi*.

The next skill is divided into two sets, the recognition of Arabic words and Swahili archaic words. Arab and Swahili integration resulted in the Swahili language borrowing loan words in areas where Arabic influence was felt the most. Arabic loan words and Swahili archaic language need to be fully comprehended to analyse *mashairi* to enable one to bring forward the purpose behind the use of such words. Arabic words were first used when Arabs conducted lessons in Swahili languages to teach Islamic beliefs and religion. Examples of such words are *Ramadhan* (the holy month of Muslim fast), *Idd* (Muslim festival), *dini* (religion), *dhambi* (sin) and *jahanam* (hell). Then there was the interaction through trade where we find words like *bidhaa* (goods), *dhahabu* (gold), *fedha* (silver) and *khasara* (loss). Cultural integration between the two groups also led to borrowed words such as *dunia* (world), *amani* (peace), *taji* (crown), *rafiki* (friend), etc. Words related to literature and the arts were also borrowed; *fasihi* (literature), *sanaa* (art), *utenzi* (long poem), *ubeti* (stanza) and *hadithi* (story) (Mwaliwa 2018, 122-123). Mwaliwa (2018, 122) asserts that borrowing of words in African languages hardly reduced the status of the language but, preferably, we should view this as an expansion of the Swahili language vocabulary and therefore its functional dimension. In poetry it is also noticeable that some words take on Arabic pronunciation and orthography, however, this does not change the meanings of these words. Swahili adopted three main Arabic sounds 'dh' 'gh' and 'kh'. For example, instead of *hofu* (fear) it is *khofu* or for *gafla* (suddenly) it is *ghafla* (see Mwaliwa 2018, 123 and Rayya 2002, 100).

The examples given above are but a few of the words that were assimilated with Swahili phonology or using Arabic pronunciation. However, Mwaliwa (2018, 123) elucidates those words borrowed were adapted to comply with the linguistic structure of Swahili. This is partly what necessitated

the use of such words in *mashairi* texts that met the prosody aspect which was duly important to achieve the perfect *shairi*. Furthermore, the singers thought the new pronunciation gave the songs a nice ring to them.

Archaic Swahili language or vocabulary refers to Swahili dialects, which are specific to the region where the poet grew up. When living amongst Swahili people, it is noticeable that they speak two, or more forms of Swahili language; the standardized version taught in all Kenyan schools and the local dialect (see Njogu 2009, 111). Hence, it is imperative for the person analysing *mashairi* to have information on the history of the poet; where the poet resided and the Swahili dialect he or she spoke. Arabic words will almost always represent external influences on Swahili culture, especially concerning religion, while archaic words will serve to show African roots of Swahili traditional customs. Poets will find themselves using archaic words to attain syllable counts required, rhyme scheme or refer to objects and places from the past before Arabic influences.

The competence of recognizing shortened words and the joining of two words is the next crucial skill. As I have explained in Chapter 2, words are sometimes shortened, commonly known as syncope, to achieve the required syllable count in each line. The same case applies to the joining of two words to achieve the same or to achieve the necessary rhyme at the middle or the ends of consecutive lines. This can be confusing to someone who has never analysed *mashairi* texts; a Swahili poet has to be adroit to accomplish this. It is easy to make quick conclusions that these new words are misspelt, do not exist, do not follow Swahili grammar rules or they simply do not make any sense. For example, take the phrase '*sitangane na watumwa*' which means 'do not associate with the slaves', the word '*sitangane*' has been shortened from its full version '*usitangamane*' to achieve the appropriate number of syllables (eight) in this line. Now take the phrase '*mwanangu hutosumbuka*' which means 'my child you will not suffer', the word '*hutosumbuka*' is a version of two joined words, '*hauta sumbuka*' while *'mwanangu*' is a version of '*mwana wangu*'. Some of these words after years of being used in *mashairi* texts have become accepted in formal Kiswahili[27] taught in schools due to their daily usage amongst the Swahili people. *Mwanangu* (my child) is a good example of such words and the different variations are *babangu* (my father), *mamangu* (my mother), *dadangu* (my sister), etc. Shortening and joining of

[27] When I use the term Kiswahili, I am referring to the East African standardized Swahili based on the Zanzibari dialect (Unguja).

words are found in almost all *mashairi*. Some of the words are obvious to distinguish while others may take years of experience and knowledge of Kiswahili and archaic Swahili dialects.

Another form of joining two words is seen in Swahili archaic words to form words in Kiswahili, neologism, to represent terms that refer to western objects and modern technology while avoiding anglicism. Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany was one of very few poets known for constructing new vocabulary in Kiswahili.[28] Kresse (2007, 124) notes that Nabhany uses three criteria that are helpful to create new terms, these are:

- the shape and form of the object in question,
- its function and usage,
- the sound of the word in question.

A good example is the word television, the anglicised version is '*televisheni*'. However, Nabhany uses two Swahili archaic words to form a term to mean television; '*rununu*' a word that was used to mean news from far away that had suddenly percolated in the society and '*maninga*' which was used to refer to eyes. Using the two words he coined the word '*runinga*' which is now commonly used by Swahili speakers when referring to television (see Kresse 2007, 124). This is but one example of neologism of many types of Swahili terms, which, after they are coined, are commonly used in *mashairi* texts when referring to modern technology and special terms from western fields of knowledge. Archaism also has a special place in Swahili weddings. They serve as a reminder of older forms of songs that generate intense cultural impact on the singers and audience.

A major feature found in *mashairi* is the use of *mafumbo* (metaphors). Some of the best *mashairi* are known for the masterful way in which poets use words and phrases to describe objects or actions that are not accurately suitable nor realistic. Use of *mafumbo* provides a useful and deeper meaning to real-life situations that cannot be described using normal language, whilst being succinct and effective. The understanding of these *mafumbo* depends on the reader's ability to deconstruct their hidden meanings and the potential to interpret them in numerous ways which results in *mashairi* becoming accessible in society. To successfully analyse *mashairi* is dependent on how well one can recognize *mafumbo.* This is important so that a reader or listener does not

[28] Ohly (1985, 462) observes that an established Swahili poet has to display an impeccable command of Swahili language, own a list of proverbs and riddles to use at a moment's notice plus the competence to use the language artistically to produce neologisms. Such skills can enable a poet to overcome social barriers in Swahili societies.

lose the flow of the narrative and the meaning of the messages, warnings or lessons the poet aims to deliver. Below I illustrate how *mafumbo* are successfully used by poets to send strong imaginative messages.

Vuani mato muole wayinga muso lenka
Musidhani yondoshele ezi ya Bwana Machaka
Nchi ukifa shinale na tanduze hukauka
Mtakutwa ni mashaka! Hayasii mayutoye

Open up your eyes and see
Unenlightened idiots
Don't think the good deeds
Of Bwana Machaka have vanished
When the trunk of a tree dies
The branches dry up as well
You will encounter trouble
What remorse! Is this not remorse

The above verse is extracted from the *shairi Risala wa Zinjibari* (a message to Zanzibar) composed by Kababina (Sharrif 1986), who is expressing his thoughts on the leadership of Bw. Machaka. Towards the end of the verse, the poet uses a *fumbo* in which he employs a tree trunk, that represents Bw. Machaka's leadership. When the tree trunk dies the branches will also dry up. This particular *fumbo* serves to warn people not to threaten his leadership as dire repercussions will be unavoidable and will affect all those in his kingdom that depend on him.

Analysis of Modern *Mashairi*: Themes and Narratives

In this section I endeavour to analyse *mashairi* I collected from Bi. Sharrifa that she specifically wrote for wedding ceremonies and *duas.* I take note of the main narratives found in these *mashairi* and elucidate the ceremonies, type of scenarios and participants involved in their performance. I also indicate the type of *shairi* dependent on the syllable count in each line of the *shairi* and other internal components.

No.1 *Harusi dua* (Wedding prayer)

The first *shairi* is a solemn prayer ideally performed by a mother or grandmother and is dedicated to the bride. The poet makes use of a variety of terms when referring to Allah; *Mngu* (shortened from *Mungu*), *Rabi* and *Mola*. This helps carry the religious theme throughout the *shairi*. The first verse is solely directed to the bride. The poet pleads with Allah to bless the bride as she enters the

next stage of her life, i.e., marriage. The second verse directs a prayer to the couple and guests who are present, acknowledging that the union has brought two families together and with Allah's guidance they will coexist with each other in peace. In the last verse, the poet invites the guests and family members to join in the celebration of the new union. The poet also directs prayers of blessings to the guests and concludes with a prayer for the bride and bridegroom for everlasting love. This *shairi* is in the *utenzi* metre. Below is the first verse, which displays the rhyme scheme:

Itani yangu miwili	I open up my two arms
Nanyosha kukuombeya	As I pray for you
Kwa Mungu nitawasali	I am praying to Allah
Amina Taitikiya	I hope he will listen to my prayer
Wanangu uwajamili	Bless my children
Ndoa ya kuendeleya.	With a long-lasting marriage.

Notice the rhyme scheme alternates between each line with 'li' and 'ya'.

No. 2 *Dua la mwanafunzi* (Prayer for a student)

The next *shairi* is also a *dua* that is commonly recited to a student reporting back to school. This *dua* is most likely performed by a parent to a child. Again, we notice the poet makes use of several terms when referring to Allah; *Mola, Rabi, Maliki*. In the first two verses the poet reminds the student that he/she always says a prayer on their behalf. The poet encourages the student to continue working hard which will result in his/her happiness. The *shairi* then impersonates the student who prays for grace and forgiveness and that Allah may fulfil all his/her needs in school. The student asks Allah to continue blessing him/her despite any shortcomings and future wrongdoings. This *shairi* is in the *ushairi* metre.

Hukuombea sichoki, Sinyamai ufahamu	I pray I never get tired, please note I never stop
Rabi tiya taufiki, Mazuri yote yatimu	May Allah bless you, so that you achieve your goals
Soma usipate dhiki, Uwe ukitabasamu.	Study and do not get stressed, always be happy.

Notice that the ending of the first sections (separated with a comma) rhyme to 'ki' and the end of the second sections rhyme to 'mu'.

No. 3 *Harusi, kupeleka fedha* (Wedding, to take the dowry payment)

This *shairi* (in *utenzi* metre) is performed by the bridegroom's mother on the day of dowry presentation to the bride's family. The mother opens with a prayer to Allah asking for his blessings and thanking him for gifting their son with a beautiful bride. The mother then encourages the audience to participate in song and dance to celebrate the union. In the third verse she verbally presents the dowry to the bride's parents, sings praises to the bride, announces that a wedding is going to take place and invites all her family members and friends to assist with preparations for the awaited day. In the final verse she impersonates her son by expressing his emotions. She requests for greetings to be sent to the bride which includes a message by her son of their forthcoming union. Below I demonstrate the fourth verse which has the bridegroom's message embedded.

Tamati nyie akramu	Those who will attend the wedding
Mwambieni wangu nana	Tell my wife
Moyo wangu una hamu	My heart is aching
Natamani kumuona	I long to see her
Mpeni zangu salamu	Send her my greetings
Sikufu tu taonana.	We shall soon meet.

The rhyme scheme alternates between 'mu' and 'na' in this verse.

No. 4 *Harusi*

This *shairi* is performed by a grandmother in praise of a granddaughter getting married. She starts by requesting the guests to bless her granddaughter. Through intermittent prayers she requests for the bride's good behaviour to be publicly acknowledged for great things are coming her way. She calls upon the other women to join her as she congratulates her granddaughter with song and dance. She then invites the granddaughter to dance with her, while praying to Allah for all his blessings and kindness. She gifts the bride with a perfume bottle, for her to use on the day when the marriage is consummated. The *shairi* is in the *utenzi* metre. Below I provide text from the first verse to demonstrate one of the classic ways in which poets begin their *mashairi*; by asking for a pen and the best ink.

Nipa Kalamu tuimbe	Give me a pen I write a song we sing
Na wino wenye jamali	Together with the best ink available
Bi. Arusi tumpambe	We need to bless the bride
Kwa dua za Ali Ali	with great prayers of the Prophet
Aenee kuwa pembe	That she may be famous
Yote mazuri anali.	And receive great gifts.

The rhyme scheme alternates between ‘be’ and ‘li’ for this verse.

No. 5 *Harusi*

The final *shairi* is performed by the mother of the bride at one of the celebrations. In the first verse she evokes the name of Allah and sings praises to him for her heart is full of happiness and that is why she sings. She prays that the wedding is successful and for all the activities to run smoothly. She compliments both the bride and bridegroom as they have set an example for others on how to choose a good partner. She concludes by praying for the guests, thanking them for their presence at her daughter’s wedding and for this reason Allah will bless them all. This *shairi* is in the *utenzi* metre. Below I provide the text from the first verse to demonstrate how poets evoke Allah’s name at the beginning of *mashairi*.

Bisimilahi karimu	In the name of Allah the most high
Kwa jina nimetamka	I begin this song in your name
Rahamani rahimu	You are Allah the merciful God
Mueza Mola Rabuka	Lord God, capable of great things
Moyo nimefanya hamu	You have made my heart yearn
Kwa furaha na kuteka.	With joy and happiness.

The rhyme scheme alternates between ‘mu’ and ‘ka’ in the 1st verse.

Comparison of Classical *Mashairi* and Modern *Mashairi*

The *mashairi* I have analysed above are composed in simple and direct language yet retain a sophistication in comparison to classical *mashairi* I analysed in Chapter 2, which are overly convoluted. Presently there is an obligation by modern Swahili poets to create works that are accessible to members of Swahili society. Frequent use of lexicons of Arabic nature, evident in classical *mashairi*, has gradually decreased over the years apart from particular terms that refer to Arabic influences felt in religion, trade, literature, and so forth. This has allowed for the art of *mashairi* to be transformed into a tool of communication amongst Swahili people of Lamu Town. Accessibility of classical *mashairi* was a prerogative of literate Swahilis and this hindered their usage in society at large. With efforts of poets like Bi. Sharrifa, they have given this art a permanent position in society whereby Swahilis of different social levels are able to interact with each other through the use of *mashairi*. Poets have achieved this by using common linguistic knowledge of average Swahili speakers and making reference to more modern social aspects that appeal to the younger generation. Poets will also make use of local Swahili dialects to ensure that the messages

of their *mashairi* are received. Dialect particularities are selected bearing in mind the Swahilis' origins. Such *mashairi* might not be accessible to those out of the selected region or those that purely speak Kiswahili.[29]

Modern *mashairi*, however, comprise pastiches of classical *mashairi*. Modern *mashairi* exhibit alluring texts and messages targeted at different recipients, a major character of classical *mashairi*. The most notable common aspect of modern mashairi and classical *mashairi* is the religious theme. *Mashairi* I analysed in the previous section have an element of prayer or evoke Allah. This demonstrates the constant devotion of Swahili people to Islamic beliefs and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed. Requesting for a pen, paper and ink was a common commencement gesture amongst classical poets and is still practised to this day. Another common notable aspect is the existence of prosody based on metre and rhyme. Traditional poets and Swahili people believe that an authentic *shairi* is one that has a regular metre and patterned rhyme, as they commonly say, "*hiyo ndio utamu wa shairi*" (that is the sweetness of a poem). All the *mashairi* I indicated to be in the *utenzi* metre (four of them) have eight syllables in each line, the single one in *ushairi* metre has 16 syllables in each line.

Modern *mashairi* also contribute to the spirit of unity. Most of the wedding *mashairi* have instances where the singer is calling upon the family members and close friends to join in the singing and dancing, praying for the bride and at the end thanking them for their presence at the ceremony. Such lyrics assist with motivating audiences to participate in these celebrations (see Sanga 2018, 218). This is typical of Swahili weddings. They offer opportunities for friends and family to celebrate together.

It is noticeable that the wedding *mashairi* given to me by Bi. Sharrifa are devoid of *mawaidha* (advice) typically given to a Swahili bride. She randomly chose the *mashairi* she gave me from her collection so this could be a mere coincidence that none of them is didactic.[30] This does not

[29] Askew (2002, 15-16) gives an elaborate explanation of her initial thoughts of taarab lyrics (also referred to as sung poetry) and she continues to write that despite her fluency in Kiswahili she was simply not well versed to understand and unpack the taarab lyrics which she later discovered were drawn from archaic vocabulary and metaphoric references to disguise the meaning.

[30] The other reason could be that such *mashairi* are considered personal and private and perhaps Bi. Sharrifa was not comfortable to share the contents of such *mashairi*. It is also noticeable that Bi. Sharrifa's *mashairi* do not comprise personal attributes, a feature that is normally present in such *mashairi* (see Chapter 4), an ideal example of the notion of *siri* (secrecy).

necessarily mean that such *mashairi* are consistently devoid of *mawaidha*. Bi. Ali, a local from Lamu Town who takes part in several weddings gives the explanation below which shows that transmission of *mawaidha* is crucial in any Swahili wedding ceremony (02/01/2020).

> *Simon: Na maana yake ni nini mkiimba?*
>
> *Bi Ali: Tukiimba huwa Twasherehekea hiyo harusi. Tuna mweleza yale maelezo ambayo mtu anaishi na mumewe. Wajua wasichana wa Kiswahili na nyinyi ni tofauti, maanake wa Kiswahili wana mambo mengi kushinda nyinyi. Maanake wa Kiswahili kuna mambo mengi katika kuolewa kwake kuliko nyinyi. Nyinyi mwaweza kuolewa tu basi ni kupika, ni sima nini kwisha. Lakini sisi tuna mambo mengi ya kufanya.*
>
> Simon: And what is the meaning of these songs?
>
> Bi. Ali: We sing to celebrate the newlyweds. We give her advice on how she should live with her husband. You know a Swahili girl is very different from other girls in diverse ethnic groups. Swahilis have more activities attached to weddings when compared to other ethnic groups. Your people can get married and cooking is simple, you just make ugali[31] and that is it, you do not have too many expectations of the bride like us.

Bi. Ali is simply stating that in Swahili culture, they have to teach a new bride what is expected of her in her new role. She compares the cultural practices of other ethnic groups to those of Swahilis and she recognizes that other communities have less expectations of their brides. Hence, it is mandatory for a Swahili bride to be educated about her obligations before she transforms into a fully married woman. Didacticism is a major component of *mashairi* composed for Swahili weddings despite its absence in the *mashairi* I analysed above.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I aimed to demonstrate the continued existence of *mashairi* in Lamu Town. I gave accounts of two poets I met and their efforts to sustain the needs of Swahili people's desire for *mashairi*. I then analysed modern *mashairi* texts and concluded with a comparison of modern *mashairi* and classical *mashairi*.

[31] Ugali is a traditional Kenyan meal made from maize flour. It is a rather simple dish to make hence Bi. Ali applies the term figuratively to show how other marriages are simpler when compared to Swahili ones.

CHAPTER 4: *MASHAIRI* LYRICS AND MUSIC

Introduction

> *Then came Sultan Ali ibn Sulaiman al-Shirazi, who was a Persian. He came with his ship, his property, and his children… They met with the headman of the land, Mrimba and asked for a place to live… They gave presents to Mrimba, of cloth and beads. The Sultan Ali married Mrimba's daughter and lived peacefully in the town with his people… The tale continues how Mrimba's daughter is persuaded to ask her father to cede the island to her husband…* (Middleton 1992, 31)

The extract above is an example of several chronicles that give accounts of the establishment of several Swahili states, each with relatively minor variations but similar storylines. Immigrants arrived on ships, met with the local leader of the mainland, permission was granted to the visitors upon request to occupy an area of the island, they established legitimacy and rights to the land through marital ties. These myths demonstrate how marriage, from as early as the 10th century, was a critical ritual to allow development of lasting ties between immigrants and the *waungwana* (original local settlers). The second noticeable aspect of these marriages is that these immigrants were especially interested in marrying into the *waungwana* leaders' families for land gains with a pre-plan to infiltrate and grasp rule. Marriage in Swahili society is customarily between people of the same social class, *kufu*[32] (Middleton 1992, 121-122, Rayya 2002 and McMahon 2015). Marriages were and still are a means of protecting wealth, prestige and social status in the family, thus Swahili marriages are largely endogamous.

In this chapter, I explain the songs and dances performed by women at Swahili weddings and describe a Swahili *dua*. I demonstrate how Swahilis use the text from *mashairi* as lyrics, then I give a musical analysis and explain the importance of such lyrics.

Swahili Weddings and *Duas*: Traditional Songs and Dances

Swahili weddings are very important celebrations in Lamu Town. Men and women carry out their celebrations separately until they conclude the occasion. For years, marriages were arranged to ascertain that family status was not altered. The purity of the women determined their worth as brides in the eyes of their respective families. One core event of a Swahili wedding is the presentation of evidence of the bride's virginity. Afterwards, she is gifted by women from her family, a gesture that shows their appreciation, for safekeeping her purity and *heshima* (respect)

[32] *Kufu* means rank or social level in Kiswahili.

for the family. Organizing marriages of first-born daughters is a laborious process. Middleton (1992) observes that wedding ceremonies of first-born daughters are considered the most important in Swahili families. The first marriage of any Swahili woman is considered a valuable life ritual, but that of the first-born daughter is given absolute attention. The marriage of a first-born daughter determines the male successor of the lineage and serves to reassure the maintenance of wealth and status within the family.[33] According to the general Sharia, she is married off to her father's brother's son, her paternal parallel cousin. It unites people who are already united and between whom there is no sociological difference.

In modern Lamu Town, marriages are not necessarily arranged like in the past due to influence from exposure to Western ways and education. Swahili parents, in silent acquiescence, allow their daughters to marry men of their choice. They, however, insist that such unions conform to Islamic Sharia; the couple should be of the same social class, they cannot marry non-Swahili or non-Muslims and the purity of the woman hitherto has to be intact. Sometimes these social criteria are hardly met. Love amongst the Swahili people is prescribed by Islamic notions whereby it is associated with pain and misfortune, love can only exist within a marriage (see Rayya 2002, 32). Couples have to be very secretive; they cannot court each other publicly. Much attention and responsibility are still placed on Swahili brides. The most elaborate celebrations are those linked to the transformation of the bride from a virgin girl into a married woman. The men are not as elaborate in their celebrations, they present the dowry payment at the mosque, the *kadhi* (Muslim judge) performs the *mikaha* (officiating of the marriage), and they recite the Qur'an without much pomp and public display (see Strobel 1975 and Middleton 1992, 142). For this reason, I decided to focus on the women's activities.

Every Swahili wedding starts with a proposal as Bi. Husna clarifies below (03/01/2020):

> *Bi. Husna: Kikwetu kwanza una peleka posa. Utapangia wazazi wa mke watapanga something, bite bite hivi kidogo, sherehe kidogo watapokea hiyo proposal.*

[33] The choice of a suitable bridegroom in Swahili society is normally predetermined by the father of the bride and it is his task to ensure a suitable husband who has met the *kufu* requirements, which involves investigation of the bridegroom's family. Fathers also have the power to refute a proposal from a prospective suitor (see Middleton 1992, 142-143).

> Bi. Husna: In our culture, we first begin by taking the proposal. You send word to the bride's parents who arrange for a small ceremony where some finger food is served to receive the proposal.

This is then followed by an array of activities that last for about a week. Their elaborateness, of course, depends on the financial *uwezo* (capability) of the family (see Rayya 2002, 38). It is during the proposal that a bridegroom gives the date of the wedding. The sequence of events after the proposal is at the disposal of the mother of the bride. These include invitations, dowry payment,[34] *kupamba* (to decorate),[35] *kesha* (vigil), the display of the bride, consummation of the marriage and the *fungate* (honeymoon). Each event is coloured with songs and dances (see Rayya 2002, 8). The women take part in these events until after the conjugal sheet is inspected to prove her virginity. Thereafter they conclude the celebrations and the *fungate* commences. Women engage in songs and dances in the absence of men. For this reason, I was not able to attend a proper Swahili wedding except for a rather 'modern' one which I elucidate at the end of this section. The songs comment on the transformation of a girl into a bride whilst the women bear witness to these procedures. Traditional songs and dances performed in modern Lamu Town by the women include *vugo*, *lelemama*, *kishuri* and *mashairi* (as stand-alone *nyimbo* or as *duas* within the wedding ceremony).[36] I explain each genre hereafter.

Vugo is a buffalo *pembe* (horn) which the women carry (cattle horns nowadays) and strike using sticks as they sing. *Vugo* is mostly performed at the beginning of the celebrations and at different

[34] There are two main types of dowry payments made by the bridegroom and his immediate family before the wedding. First is the *mahari* which is presented at the mosque in the presence of a religious leader (*Imam*) before he officiates the marriage and he officially registers the payment pursuant to Sharia. The second payment is not a prerequisite of the general Sharia. It is a much larger amount than the *mahari* and is administered by the bridegroom to the bride's family. The second payment, every so often, purveys money for wedding expenses (see Middleton 1992, 128-129).

[35] The woman who oversees the bride's decoration is known as the *mpambaji* (she who decorates). She is an elderly woman from the bride's family (ideally an aunt). During the wedding celebrations, the *mpambaji* prepares the bride by washing her body and hair, shaving the edges of her hairline, pressing and straightening her hair, applying henna on her feet and hands and rubbing her body with perfumed/spiced aloes while the bride remains in total seclusion (see Middleton 1992, 144-145).

[36] At the beginning of my fieldwork, I struggled with constructing structurally organized data for these performances and different stages of Swahili weddings. Most of my research consultants gave me contradictory reports in regard to the order of their execution. My disillusionment was probably caused by my Eurocentric approach where I expected a similar sequential progression in all of the data given to me. It is important to note that these performances and events do not have a set order.

stages of the wedding (see Campbell and Eastman 1984: Strobel 1975: Topan 1995). Below is Bi. Sharrifa's explanation of *vugo* performances (06/01/2020):

> *Bi. Sharrifa: …Sasa siku ile ya kufanya arusi huwa kuna vugo, mwanzo wa arusi, mimi nilaianza na vugo. Nikaleta mavugo mawili. Moja lilikuwa kwa hall na lingine lilikuja kwangu lika niescort kutoka kwangu kwenda hall. Hiyo ni system yangu mwenyewe nilitumia ili ku varnish ile arusi ionekane ni nzuri.*
>
> Bi. Sharrifa: …On the day of the wedding there is always *vugo*, at the beginning of the wedding I started with *vugo*. I had two of them. One was in the hall and the other was at my home to escort me from my house to the hall, that was a special system I used to make the wedding look more attractive.

The culmination of *vugo* will result in *kishuri*,[37] a vigorous dance achieved by gyrating of the *kiuno* (waist), similar to chakacha which originated from Mombasa. There are no lyrics in *kishuri* it is simply an entertainment dance, Bi Ali and Bi. Husna explain the transition from *vugo* to *kishuri*:

> *Bi. Husna: Halafu katika hiyo hiyo vugo… vugo ikipanda inapigwa kishuri. Kishuri inachezwa na wanawake kufunga nguo, leso kwa kiuno alafu twisting of the waists…*
>
> Bi. Husna: Then in the same *vugo*… when *vugo* comes to a climax, we change to *kishur*i. *Kishuri* is performed by the women, they tie a kanga around the waist then they dance by twisting their waists… (03/01/2020)
>
> ***
>
> *Bi. Ali: Vugo ni lile ambalo liko ndani ya nyumba. Mko ndani ya nyumba mwacheza. mwapiga vugo, mkimaliza vugo mwakata ngoma ya kike hapo sasa mwacheza na kiuno…*
>
> Bi. Ali: Vugo is a dance that is performed indoors. The women are inside the house and they perform the vugo, when they are done, they now start dancing with the waist (*kishuri*)… (02/01/2020)

Kishuri is performed to change the atmosphere at the venue of the wedding celebrations. It has a faster tempo than *vugo* and embodies a friendly competitive nature. The women form a circle, two women willingly volunteer to dance in the middle of the circle as the rest of the women clap and cheer, motivating the dancers who alternate in pairs.

[37] *Kishuri* refers to 'twisting of the waist' in Kibajuni dialect. My research consultants explained to me that the Bajuni people emulated the distinctive performance style of the c*hakacha* dance from Mombasa then it became a common dance amongst Swahilis in Lamu. It has a faster beat and has a more aggressive dancing style in comparison to *chakacha*. Unlike *chakacha,* which can be performed by young unmarried girls, *kishuri* is exclusively performed by married women.

Lelemama is an elegant dance in which the women aim to show off their balancing skills whilst utilizing different choreographed dance patterns. Bi. Sharrifa explains (06/01/2020):

> *Simon: Halafu lelemama?*
>
> *Bi Sharrifa: Hiyo pia ni entertainment. Na hiyo huchezwa na wanawake peke yake. Na lelemama huwa ina uniform, unavaa nguo mpaka hapa kwenye knees with a trouser. Halafu wakati wa kucheza unaweka the bench, very long bench, from there up to that end. Ladies wanapanda juu, wenye kupiga ngoma wako chini, the ladies who are dancing huwa wako na two sticks. Halafu huwa wana nyimbo zao wanaimba. Kisha ziko different momentum. Kuna different movement na different pattern.*
>
> Simon: What about *lelemama*?
>
> Bi. Sharrifa: That one is also part of the entertainment. It is performed by women alone. *Lelemama* has a special uniform, they wear a dress, whose length is up to the knees, and a pair of trousers. When it is time to perform, they place a long bench on the dance floor. The ladies stand on the bench and the instrumentalists are on the floor, the ladies who are dancing have two sticks. They also have lyrics that they sing. The dance has different momentums and different patterns.

Lelemama is hardly performed anymore but some of the affluent Swahili families from higher social echelons incorporate it in performances to show prestige and offer variations in the wedding programme.[38] *Vugo* seems to be the most important of all the songs and dances. The rest, *kishuri*, *lelemama* and *mashairi* add variety to the entertainment showcased to the guests and bride. Each Swahili wedding has different variations of performances which depend on the choices made by the mother of the bride.

Duas are Swahili special prayers that are sung at Swahili occasions to celebrate an accomplishment, give blessings to an object or a person. These prayers are core during a thanksgiving ceremony for a newly acquired job, the birth of a child, an entrepreneur venturing into a new lucrative business or the purchase of a new home. They are held at the mosque or the private residences of the hosts. Sophisticated *duas* make use of young Swahili students from *madrasa* classes to sing *mashairi* or texts from the Qur'an.

[38] Bi. Sharrifa was the only research consultant who was able to describe the performative nature of *lelemama*. Other research consultants from lower social echelons never mentioned *lelemama*. When I would inquire about the dance, they would simply state that it is not performed anymore.

During my time in Lamu, I was invited to attend a *dua* ceremony for the blessing of a property that one of my research consultants, Bw. Ali Mohammed had acquired. *Dua* ceremonies can be attended by both women and men of the same family. Only invited guests are expected. The hosts of this particular *dua* preferred to have the recitations read from the Qur'an rather than have special *mashairi* composed for the ceremony. It was a rather last-minute decision to have the ceremony, hence, there was limited time to prepare for an extravagant one. At the ceremony, I noticed that none of the guests photographed or recorded videos of the activities which influenced my decision not to undertake any form of recording. When I later inquired from the host about this, he explained that it would have been okay but that sometimes the Muslim religious leaders see it as an intrusion into their private lives. Personally, he considered it an act of respect that no one had attempted to record the ceremony. Again, depending on the financial *uwezo* of the host, refreshments or a light meal may be served after the conclusion of a *dua*.

As for the Swahili weddings, I focused on women's musical activities and as I have already mentioned, men are not allowed to attend or take part in women's activities during wedding celebrations. Through conversations, I made some interesting observations from my research consultants. Those from a lower social class were happy to share photos and videos of weddings they attended (once I had built a trust relationship with them). At one point they invited me to a wedding that took place in a rather public open space; even passers-by could stop and take a peek at the women's activities. It was somewhat unusual for Muslim women in Lamu Town to be seen dancing in public and for the bride to be viewed by other residents that are not her family members (especially men). Much later I came to understand that this was a simple wedding, and all the events took place on one day. There were no traditional performances at this wedding, they preferred to use a radio system to play *buzi* music. *Buzi* are popular Swahili songs produced in Tanzania that are increasingly being used during wedding ceremonies in Lamu Town. The music is predominantly produced using electric synthesizers which offer music accompaniment to the singer(s). The songs sound like *taarab*, except the music accompaniment is not a live band. *Buzi* have an upbeat tempo, and this aspect is what probably appeals to the younger generation in Lamu Town hence they are played on such occasions. The text is evidently from *mashairi*, and the melody is quite similar to traditional *shairi* performances (see music analysis in Chapter 4). When I inquired about *buzi* performances, I was told that sometimes wedding ceremonies might be *ghafla* (all of a sudden) which affects the time it takes to prepare and arrange a proper elaborate traditional

wedding. It was also during a time in Lamu Town when most Swahili weddings are held so identifying or even accessing performers and poets to perform at a 'last-minute wedding' is highly unlikely. Unfortunately, this wedding I was able to observe did not conform to all the cultural practices and Sharia linked to Swahili wedding ceremonies apart from the *mikaha*.

Research consultants from higher social classes enumerated all the activities that take place during their wedding ceremonies. They, however, were not comfortable sharing photos or video recordings because women from such social classes are more private and secretive.[39] Their weddings were also adequately prepared, and they hardly host *ghafla* weddings amongst their families. Additionally, I noticed that women from the lower class were socially freer, less taciturn and not as secluded. Women from a higher class aim to conform to the authentic cultural and religious practices linked to Islamic weddings.[40] This is perceived as consideration for one's family status and *heshima* in the society, while women from a lower class admittedly do not have much to lose socially; hence, they publicly display themselves (a majority still dressed in the hijab) and do odd jobs within the society as long as they remain chaste. One also finds that because of their social status their weddings have fewer restrictions. As an ethnographer, I had to rely on my imagination to understand the descriptions given to me by my research consultants concerning performances during a traditional Swahili wedding.

The Usage of *Mashairi* Art to Compose Lyrics

Singing and dancing form major components of Swahili celebrations. They are used to enhance the beauty of celebrations and to make them flamboyant. This is equally accomplished by the use of alluring lyrics to celebrate special occasions. Wedding songs are *mashairi,* a sub-genre of oral literature, composed to be sung during formal and informal performances (Rayya 2002, 1). Bi. Ali testifies to this (02/01/2020):

Nina: Kwa hivyo arusi haitakuwa ime sawalika bila hizi nyimbo?

[39] Gearhart (1998) notes that even in her case, an American woman researching in Lamu Town, she was not automatically award access to Swahili weddings. She too had to be granted permission to attend private Swahili weddings. Swahili weddings are considered family affairs and only close friends were invited. Several waves of Islamic reform have resulted in women's musical activities being regarded as *haramu* (forbidden) and extremely private matters hence they are hardly photographed or videotaped. Some families still adhere to these regulations and those that do not consider the media generated private.

[40] Curtin (1984, 133) asserts that the decline of Lamu Town, mainly caused by the abolishment of the slave trade, resulted in loss of wealth. Families from higher social echelons, that were economically affected, still aimed to dress flamboyantly and retain appearances of erstwhile wealth through wedding celebrations.

Bi. Ali: Hakuna lazima ziwe hizo nyimbo!

Nina: Arusi inakuwa nzuri kulingana na ngoma?

Bi. Ali: Eeh!

Nina:[41] So, a wedding is not enjoyable without the songs?

Bi. Ali: There is no wedding without songs, the songs must be performed.

Nina: A wedding is considered beautiful because of the songs and dances?

Bi. Ali: Yes!

Lyrics used in these songs and dances always change from one ceremony to the next, they are hardly recycled as especially seen in Swahili weddings and *duas*. Each wedding or *dua* will have its own corpus of composed *mashairi* (see Curtin 1984, 136). They are personalized according to individual attributes of the hosts, brides, and significant guests (see Gearhart 1998, 48). Family members will seek the assistance of a poet, to whom they will give all the details of the ceremony, in order to compose the *mashairi* to be used as lyrics or performed as stand-alone *nyimbo*. This is how Bi. Husna and Bi. Ali explained the process:

Bi. Husna:Eeh sasa huwa waki muuliza yeye. Wewe uko related vipi na bibi arusi? mimi ni mamake ama mimi ni dadake ama mimi ni rafiki yake. Sasa atatunga ile nyimbo kulitia na ile ambayo ume mwambia.

Bi. Husna: Yes, they will ask a poet to compose the *mashairi.* The poet will ask, "how are you related to the bride"? "I am the mother, I am the sister, or I am her friend". The poets will compose these *mashairi* paying attention to the details they are given. (03/01/2020)

***

Nina: Kwa hivyo yule mtu amechomeka anaimba kwa arusi pia yeye?

Bi. Ali: Aah aah si sana. Ukienda kwake sasa... unaona sisi sasa tukiwa tuna arusi twaenda kumtapia, tuna mlipa sasa aka tuandikia nyimbo za arusi mwanzo mpaka mwisho, fulani, jina lake ni fulani, ni mama wa arusi, huyu ni dadake arusi, huyu ni

[41] Nina is the nickname of the PhD art student (Monica Sairo) I met during my fieldwork in Lamu Town (see Chapter 1). On this particular day she had accompanied me to meet with Bi. Ali and Bw. Ali for an afternoon conversation because I had apprised her that one of the couple's daughter was an artist. This particular conversation was very fruitful because Nina's presence created a more suitable environment to engage in an auspicious and riveting discussion with the couple.

ndugu yake arusi, huyu ni hivi na hivi… uka mwelezea yeye aka kutungia zile nyimbo zako alafu ukifika pale mkisha kuanza kuimba kisha watoa ile karatasi ukasoma yale mashairi yake ambayo ame andika pale.

Nina: So, the poet who is albino also sings at the wedding ceremonies?

Bi. Ali: Not that much, if you go to his place now… you see when we have a wedding ceremony, we go look for him and we pay him, he then composes these songs from the beginning to the end. This one's name is so and so, she is the mother, sister or friend of the bride, this one is like this and that…you give him all these details and then he will compose your *mashairi.* When you get to the ceremony you remove the paper with the *mashairi* and use the text to sing. (02/01/2020)

Poets will use the information they are given to compose *mashairi* with specific details of the person(s) in question. This is the reason why *mashairi* cannot be reused in other ceremonies because they consist of personal details that cannot be applied in a different ceremony. Bi Ali. confirmed this in her response below (02/01/2020):

Nina: Kama bibi wa kwanza mashairi yenye ataimbiwa yeye na bibi wa pili, itakuwa ni tofauti? Maanake mawaidha anayo pewa wa kwanza na mawaidha anayo pewa wa pili ni tofauti?

Bi. Ali: Yule msichana lazima apewe mawaidha yale yale kwa sababu yule hajui kuolewa lakini yale mashairi yatakuwa tofauti.

Nina: The *mashairi* that were sung for the first wife, will they also be sung for the second wife or will the advice given to the first wife be different from the advice given to the second wife?

Bi. Ali: That bride has to be given the same advice because she has never been married before but the *mashairi* will be different.

Sometimes the poet is a member of the family hosting the ceremony and he/she will compose and sing the lyrics impromptu at the ceremony. The lyrics must come from *mashairi* text. Bi. Ali and her husband had this to say about using *mashairi,* poets and the lead singer (02/01/2020):

Simon: Lakini hizi nyimbo ni kama lazima mtumie mashairi?

Bi. Ali: Sindio nakuambia hizo nyimbo, yeye atoa nyimbo lakini azitunga yeye mwenyewe hapo kwa hapo.

Simon: But these songs, must you use *mashairi*?

Bi. Ali: Of course, yes, as I am telling you the poet composes these songs, and he does so himself there and then.

Nina: Na kuna mtu ambaye anaongoza?
Bw. Ali: Kuna mtu mmoja ama wawili ambao ndio wanaongoza hizo nyimbo.

Bi. Ali: Kuna nyimbo za zamzani utaanza kuzitoa uzitoe uzitoe. Kisha mwisho sasa ndio utachukua ile list ambayo umeandikiwa nyimbo pia za ule bibi arusi, sasa utaziimba...

Nina: Is there someone who leads the performance?

Bw. Ali: There are one or two people who lead the performance when they sing the songs.

Bi. Ali: Some songs are old, and the melody is well known, and the leader will start singing them. In the end, you will take the list of *mashairi* about the bride that were written by the poet and start singing them.

In these excerpts Bi. Ali and Bw. Ali emphasizes that Swahili people rely heavily on the art of *mashairi* to produce lyrics used in songs they sing at Swahili weddings. The poet is given the duty to produce text. Campbell and Eastman (1984, 474) note that the meaning of the words is of primary importance followed by prosody based on metre and rhyme. There is a specific woman (or two) chosen to lead the singing as the other women dance.[42] The songs have familiar melodies and the women, both performers and audience, sing specific sections (most likely a repeated chorus), the leader uses composed *mashairi* text to sing (perhaps the verse) about the bride. These songs and dances are what constitute a wedding or performance. The best weddings and *duas* are remembered for their alluring lyrics. The lyrics are dependent on how cleverly the poet can tie up personal details and Swahili values into sophisticated *mashairi* language. Such performances are important in reaffirming social status amongst different Swahili families.

Musical Analysis of *Mashairi*

As performative signs, the figures[43] of *wimbo* and *ngoma*[44] not only represent human social actions, relations and experiences in the imaginary worlds of these poems – the

[42] Gearhart (1998) notes that occasionally, relatives of the bride will meet with the lead singer(s) several days before the wedding to deliver the lyrics composed for the bride for them to see beforehand. The leader is supposed to memorize the text and set it to a tune that is familiar to the guests so they can also join in or enjoy the singing.
[43] Sanga uses the word 'figure' to imply musical objects such as music instruments, musical sound, musical performances and musical styles that are used in *mashairi* to symbolize particular facets of the human social involvement.
[44] Ngoma is a term commonly used to refer to songs and dances.

> worlds which readers are invited to enter and experience – but more importantly they evoke, enact and construct them. (Sanga 2018, 215)

Imani Sanga (2018, 215) recontextualizes Louise Meintjes' perception of figures as recurring musical motives, especially of timbre subjected to ornamentation and variation, then used to represent, constitute and establish social identities such as Africanness, South Africanness, Zuluness and/or human social relations in general. The performance of a *shairi* brings forth familiarity to the audience through the use of a recognized timbre and melodic contours that are set to the traditional Swahili metre[45] hence creating 'Swahili-ness' as an identity. Poggenpoel (2018, 21) asserts that *mashairi* are intended to be sung and melody is an integral part of Swahili verse. Bi. Sharrifa supports this statement by saying:

> *Shairi ukilizungumza tu kwa maneno huwa halipendezi, halivutii. Ukilitia kwenye mahadhi huwa likivutia likipendeza. Watu hutega masikio wakawa wako tayari kukusikiza kwa sababu huwa tayari usha wachangamsha. Kwa hivyo sasa ile attention watakupatia wasikize ile message na kila kitu. Shairi ukilitoa kwa mahadhi hupendeza zaidi kuliko kutoa hivi hivi.*
>
> When a *shairi* is recited without inserting a melody it does not sound pleasing. Once you combine rhythm and melody, the *shairi* is transformed, it captivates and sounds attractive. An audience will be ready to listen to the reciter because their feelings have been aroused by the prospects of a *shairi* being performed. The audience awaits eagerly to listen to the message. A *shairi* that is sung is much more pleasing than a spoken word *shairi*. (Bi. Sharrifa 11/07/2020)

Bi. Sharrifa, from the excerpt above, corroborates that *mashairi* in Swahili culture are supposed to be sung, which is expected from both the *mwimbaji* (reciter) and his/her audience. From time immemorial, *mashairi* have always been sung and is a defining feature of Swahili poetry. Below I give a musical description of the performative styles of *mashairi* and specify the traditional instruments used in these performances.

Bi. Sharrifa was kind enough to demonstrate two different styles of singing *mashairi*. She started with *utenzi.* At first, the singing sounded like an Islamic call to worship, comprising melismatic type of signing, which I had become accustomed to because of my time in Lamu Town. Bi. Sharrifa

[45] Traditional metre is the fixed time signature, which is hard to place (approx. 5/6 quavers in each bar), found across most Swahili songs and dances sung in Lamu Town. For this reason, poets have to adhere to strict *mizani* rules to necessitate the *mashairi* to be sung in the traditional metre. *Tenzi* are quite fluid and have no regular metre but strict *mizani* regulations enable the *mwimbaji* to sing effortlessly and flawlessly.

explained the meaning of the *utenzi*, this time round it was a lullaby. She briefly elucidated the text and how it is common for the mother, poet, or performer to relay emotions most times concerning her marriage and social environment. One of the verses she sang talked about a beautiful necklace given to another woman, by her husband. As she lulls the child, she promises to retrieve the necklace and gift it to the child. Bi. Sharrifa intrinsically knew the note to start the melody and hardly needed a moment to identify a suitable key.

Next, she performed a *shairi*. There was great distinction in the performance style. Before Bi. Sharrifa commenced singing, she made simple rhythmic noises to the sound 'du' which would be replaced by her hands tapping on the table. There was a clear indication of a sense of metre and at the beginning she identified the beat which would give her guidance for the whole performance. She performed two examples both of which were excerpts from wedding *mashairi*. Both *mashairi* sounded like what I had heard when I attended one of Khalid's performances. An underlying sense of metre and ostinato rhythms are heard throughout the song. The timbre of the singer makes it easily identifiable as Swahili music to any Kenyan, it sounds nasal and mellifluous, and the melody employs micro intervals like Indian or Middle Eastern music. The first *shairi* started in the form of a prayer asking Allah to grant the newlyweds endurance to live in unity, no darkness or evilness should seek them out and for peaceful wedding celebrations. The second *shairi* advised the bride on her marital duties in the bedroom and she is warned that if she does not fulfil them, she might lose her husband to another woman.

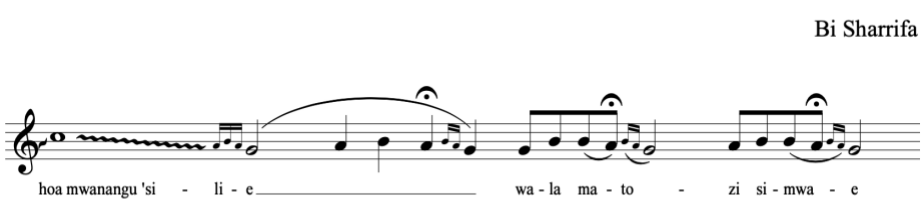
One important aspect of these performances was the importance of meaning. Bi Sharrifa, aware that I was a visitor to Lamu Town inadvertently knew I was not fluent in *kiAmu,* the dialect she predominantly uses to compose her *mashairi*. She took time to explain the details of the text, so the meaning was straightforward to me before she started the performance. Sometimes she would pause in between verses simply to offer further explanations of certain sections of the *mashairi.* In a way she assisted me to engage emotionally with her performance using the underlying text. The text did not seem to influence the nature of the melody. Bi. Sharrifa employed her own idiosyncratic melodies (all the *mashairi* performed had different melodies) which, at most times, were done in the moment of the performance but they never deviated too far from how the Swahilis traditionally perform *mashairi*. However, the melody would remain the same throughout each given *shairi* and in wedding celebrations where audience participation is expected, performers

such as Bi. Sharrifa would choose her/a publicly known melody. The beat, tempo and nature of the music is also what is used to determine the type of songs and dances explained in the above section. Ostensibly, meaning of the text is always given more emphasis over the actual musical attributes.

Performance of an *utenzi* is analogous to the Muslim call to prayer. *Tenzi*, as I explained in Chapter 2, are mostly of a religious nature. Instruments are hardly utilized and *tenzi* lack emphatic rhythms, which results in creating a solemn mood. The melody of a performed *utenzi* is undramatic but mellifluous, the melodic intervals comprise a small range and lacks a regular metre (free metre). *Utenzi* encompasses melismatic chanting in a few chosen syllables of each line, singing one syllable whilst changing between a succession of different notes at the end of each line. The rest of the syllables are sung to different notes, and they offer variance and an interesting melodic contour which simulate spoken Swahili. The *mwimbaji* normally inserts a short interlude from one verse to the other whereby she hums the melody, preceded by the dropping of the melody to a lower/higher register at the end of each verse. This performative style is used to blazon the endings and beginnings of consecutive verses. The *kikomo* (ending, full stop) is repeated twice in every verse. *Kikomo* in *utenzi* typically serves to conclude the content of each verse which perhaps gives the *mwimbaji* (reciter) the incentive to repeat the *kikomo*.[46] Repeated lines are sung in different pitches; the first time it is sung in the common melodic register of the whole *utenzi* and the second time it is sung in a higher or lower melodic register thus emphasizing the text. *Utenzi* is performed solely by the *mwimbaji* and does not call for any kind of audience participation, on the contrary, it is supposed to provide the *mwimbaji* with an opportunity to show off his/her performing skills.

Sample of a sung *utenzi*

[46] More frequently than not, the text from the *kikomo* is the same throughout the whole *utenzi*.



A sung *shairi* is more rhythmic and has a sense of metre. *Shairi's* rhythmic aspect enables the performers to dance, this is hardly seen or felt in *utenzi*. In shairi, the timbre of the voice is similar to that of *utenzi*. Performance of a *shairi* does not incorporate any melismatic chanting and prolonging of specific syllables, as heard in *utenzi*. Exclamatory type of singing is quite common in *mashairi* to call to attention or emphasize messages within the text. The words are performed as written without excessive use of ornaments, variations, or artistic features to the syllables. The *mwimbaji* will traditionally repeat the first half of the *kikomo*[47] at least two times before he/she finally sings the last half in a higher or lower melodic register, concluding the respective verse. This type of repetition encourages and cues in members of the audience to sing along. Repetition of the *kikomo* can serve as a chorus in every verse.[48] Below I demonstrate one type of repetition; I first provide the lyrics from a *kikomo.*

> *Iwe mzuri arusi, yenye kheri na baraka* (may the wedding be successful, one with plenty of blessings)
>
> (*Iwe mzuri arusi*, x2 *yenye kheri na baraka*) x2[49]

The *mwimbaji* does not make use of interludes between consecutive verses, he/she moves from one verse to the next forthwith. *Mashairi* texts and performative styles are commonly used in *duas*

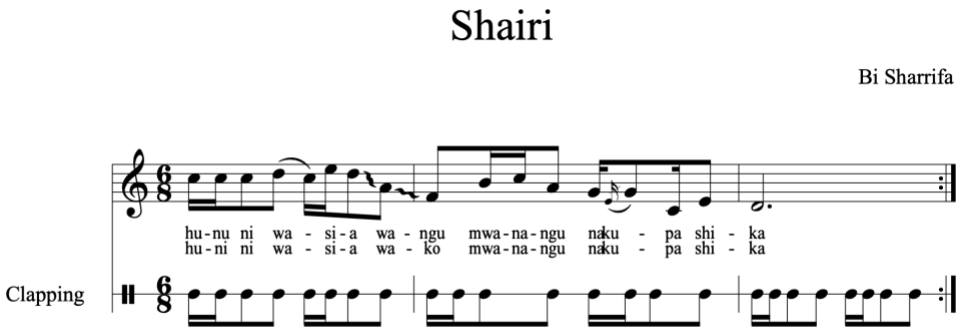
[47] If the particular *shairi* lacks two halves of the *kikomo*, the last two lines of each verse will be repeated by the singer.

[48] Occasionally the *kikomo* in *mashairi* has the same text in all the verses which enables the audience to effortlessly remember the *kikomo*.

[49] This example is but one of many variations. Each *mwimbaji* has his/her own special performance style of repeating the *kikomo*. The example given above is Bi. Sharrifa's method.

and the songs and dances I elucidated in the earlier section. *Utenzi* in weddings can be incorporated in exceptional circumstances where they are performed as a solo in praise of the bride or as a *dua*.

Sample of a sung *shairi*[50]



Instrumentation of *mashairi* together with the songs and dances performed at weddings include cattle horns (*vugo*), tambourines (*matwari*), trumpet (*tarumbeta*), drums (*vyapuo*) and a Swahili cymbal (*upatu*). Cattle horns are played by a number of the women; they use sticks to strike the horns while waving them in the air as they dance. Band members, normally placed at the corner of the stage, play the rest of the instruments. The trumpet typically follows the melodic line sung by the leader. Drumming keeps the beat, and each drum is tuned to a different pitch (see Campbell and Eastman 1984, 480). Drums also offer rhythmic variation and signal performers to transition from one song and dance to another (as seen in the transition from *vugo* to *kishuri*). Finally, the

[50] Agawu (2003) instigates four main concerns emanating from theoretical advances made in the 20th century spearheaded by Hornbostel and Ward to Arom and Kubik; "what constitutes a pattern, whether metre exists, how many metres are in operation within a given composition, how to notate rhythm/melody, and so on". He also argues that there is a propensity amongst musicologists analysing African music to use anachronistic approaches to promulgate what he terms as "universalising discourses" on incongruous musical objects and processes. Sometimes the nature of African music does not fit within the parameters of western staff notation. The above samples of transcription given are occasionally estimations of the melody and rhythms heard in the recording. Some of the notes were hard to place in the western chromatic scale and the rhythms were at times hard to identify due to the multi rhythmic and irregular metrical patterns found in Swahili music. The samples may not be as accurate as I would have wished but they offer the reader an inkling of the nature of performance of the two styles of singing *mashairi* which I have encapsulated in the analysis section.

cymbal consists of a metal disk, placed on the floor by the player. Swahili cymbals emit a ringing sound when struck with a metallic object which offer a range of percussive sounds.

The Importance of Lyrics in Traditional Swahili Weddings

Songs and dances are important in Swahili ceremonies, but more emphasis is placed on the lyrics. Music plays the role of supporting the lyrics in a way that emphasizes the message concomitantly making the whole performance exceptional. Language is one of the vital ways of expressing emotions and communicating with others. When it comes to Swahili performances, this is no exception; using *mashairi* language makes it easier to convey messages to an audience. Lyrics will resonate with the audience especially if they are relatable. In her research of the competitive nature of Zanzibari, Fargion (2016, 168) observes that for a song to become popular it should have meaning for the wider community. This explains why Swahilis prioritize lyrics sung in ceremonies, some of which transcend the ceremony itself.

Lyrics give meaning to the songs and dances performed by Swahilis. When these performances are executed without lyrics, they do not engross the audience, but once the lyrics are inserted, they inject interest in the audience in a sociological setting whereby the audience relates with the performers. When guests attend a Swahili ceremony, they wait in anticipation to listen to the different messages being passed on through these lyrics. When lyrics are employed in Swahili songs and dances, the performances are undeniably transformed.

Families from a higher social class will use *mashairi* to announce wedding celebrations whilst inviting close family and friends to help with the preparations. This announcement is made publicly and serves to show that the union is a suitable one, both parties are satisfied with the match and it is not a secret *haramu* (forbidden) wedding. The lyrics conjointly encourage family members and friends to attend, sing and dance together as the hosts celebrate the newlyweds.

An important aspect of these lyrics is to offer entertainment. Weddings and *duas* give Swahili people, their family members and friends an opportunity to congregate and celebrate together, an appreciation of *umoja* (togetherness). During these gatherings, entertainment is necessary, it is customary to keep all the guests engaged during the week-long celebrations. One way in which lyrics do so is by encouraging guests to participate in the songs and dances. Poets do this intentionally so that members of the audience can sing along certain sections of the songs. I

presume this is a kind of call and response scenario, a feature that is unmistakable in African music practices. A poet can successfully achieve this by using familiar proverbs, and the alliterations in these sayings make it easy to remember specific sections of the songs. Poets will also use playful language to keep the audience engaged. They use familiar images and impressions so when the audience hears them, they are drawn in instantly.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, *mashairi* almost always have an element of prayer, visible at the beginning and in the concluding sections. Bi. Sharrifa (06/01/2020) unequivocally explained to me that *dini* amongst Swahili Muslims is the most important visible feature of their society and defines them in the region in which they live. Every action is guided by *dini*. The element of prayer demonstrates Swahili Muslim people's devotion to Allah and the Prophet's teachings. In all things, Allah's name and presence must be acknowledged. The element of prayer in *mashairi* is said to have been influenced by Qur'anic texts. Swahili poets acknowledge that text from the Qur'an form the perfect *shairi* in existence. Poets aim to duplicate the same level of artistry and aesthetics in their compositions. *Mila* and *dini* are inextricably blended in Swahili Muslim societies so it is easily achieved by poets. Swahili people are inclined to use poetic language whenever possible, especially to give authoritative meaning to an event (Kresse 2007, 107). At the beginning and final stages of weddings, *mashairi* are composed specifically to be sung as *duas* and they are directed to the newlyweds. The singing of *mashairi* on such occasions are somehow perceived as the equivalence of reciting the Qur'an.

During wedding ceremonies, the bride is given *mawaidha* (advice) on her new role as a wife. She is advised on how to live peacefully with her husband and in-laws, given instructions on how to prepare Swahili delicacies, encouraged to be subservient to her husband, and taught how to always keep herself and the household clean, and so forth. All these lessons are tied up in poetic language and are sung by older women at a particular stage of the wedding. They rely on the *ubunifu* (expertise) of poets to create alluring lyrics which will not only render lessons, but also entertain the guests. After a marriage is consummated and the evidence of the bride's virginity is inspected, the women will again sing songs to respond in gratitude towards the bride for keeping her purity and good behaviour intact on behalf of the family. Such lyrics reflect on the social values of Swahili people. The broader cultural knowledge, moral and social expectations are revealed and

invoked through *mashairi.* They entertain whilst transmitting cultural values and preserving indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion

The lyrics drawn from *mashairi* imply that they provide inspiration, entertainment and education no matter the ceremony in which they are performed. There has always been a close relationship between music and lyrics in Swahili oral performances. The delights of the lyrics derived from *mashairi* are evident when the audience participates by singing and dancing during the performance. Swahili people value lyrics and they use them to elevate their celebrations. Thus, they seek to have the best *mashairi* sung in their traditional ceremonies.

CHAPTER 5: SURVIVAL OF THE ART OF *MASHAIRI*

Endurance of Swahili Poetry

The use of *mashairi* as lyrics in performative traditional contexts, like Swahili weddings, is gradually waning and being replaced by the use of recorded Swahili popular songs axiomatic in modern weddings like the one I elucidated in Chapter 4. Below is a recorded conversation with Bi. Ali, Nina and I. Bi. Ali briefly explains the changing times in a modern Lamu Town.

Bi. Ali: Ninge kuwa nime wajua jana ninge wachukua muende mkaona, mkaona arusi, mkaona Bi. Arusi akingia steji, akiingia Bwanake, wakikata keki, ungeliona...

Nina: Wanakata keki pamoja? Nilidhani hawapatani?

Bi. Ali: Eeh! Wanapatana wakiingia steji.

Nina: Kutoka kitambo zamani za kale walikuwa wafanya hivyo?

Bi. Ali: Sasa hivi, kitambo ilikuwa haifanywi hivyo.

Nina: Basi ni lini wameanza kubadilisha hayo mambo?

Bi Ali: Wamebadilisha hii sasa kuinukia watoto wa kisasa ndio maana wanapenda nyimbo za kisasa kuliko za wahenga.

Bi. Ali: Had we met earlier on, I would have taken you to witness a Swahili wedding, you would have seen the bride as she entered the stage, then her husband, as they cut the cake, you would have seen…

Nina: They cut the cake together? I thought they hardly meet during the wedding celebrations.

Bi Ali: Yes! They meet as they make their entrance to the stage.

Nina: According to your cultural practices and heritage, is this the norm?

Bi. Ali: Our ancestors never engaged in such type of weddings.

Nina: So, when did everything start to change?

Bi Ali: They have changed some practices recently to appease the children born in the modern times and that is why they prefer popular music more than our traditional music.

From this conversation one can easily deduce that there are nuances of westernization evident in Swahili weddings attributed to modernization and influences from what is commonly referred to as 'white weddings.' Inadvertently, their influences have also extended to the type of music played and performed in Swahili celebrations, like weddings, just like the introduction of wedding cakes (never seen in the past) and the actual ceremony of 'cutting the cake' done by the bride and bridegroom. One can also fathom the gradual decline of usage of *mashairi* and performance of traditional songs and dances in Swahili weddings in Lamu Town. However, this has not halted the emergence of poets in modern Lamu Town and the practice of old oral traditions of composition and recitation. I recall Bw. Ali Mohammed recounting an incident that had occurred when he attended an open day at his son's school in Malindi.[51] During the entertainment part of the programme, he noticed that his son was going to perform an originally composed *shairi*. This came as a shock to Bw. Ali Mohammed as he had never heard his son sing nor had he ever imagined that he had the *kipawa* (talent) to write *mashairi.* He continued to explain to me that his family lineage had produced several known poets both in Lamu Town and Mombasa. It was not therefore by chance that his son had also inherited this *kipawa*. The fact that he was not aware was what had surprised him the most. What was even more fascinating to me, was that Bi. Sharrifa (the poet) was a relative of Bw. Ali Mohammed, the more he talked about his son's *kipawa* and the poets in his family, the more I became intrigued. In a conversation with Bi. Sharrifa, she had talked about how her family was poetic and insinuated that this is how the skill had been passed down to her. I was intrigued to encounter another younger family member who had also inherited the skill through the aforementioned family links. Bi. Sharrifa was also related to Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany (see Chapter 3), who was one of the most eminent poets of the 20th century. The possibility of Bw. Ali Mohammed's son to become a leading poet in Lamu Town, by virtue of a skill he presumably inherited through his family's genealogy, was thus foreseeable.

Stories such as Bw. Ali Mohammed's son's sudden interest in *mashairi* and performance contribute to the survival of the art of *mashairi* in Lamu Town. Swahili poetry continues to survive while many Swahili traditional practices such as the ceremonial public inspection of the conjugal bedsheet, sequestering of the bride for fourteen days before the wedding ceremony, functions like the sorting of the cotton to stuff the mattress, stuffing pillows with kapok for the bridal bed and

[51] Malindi is a town in Kenya located at the mouth of the Galana River on the Indian Ocean coast, 137kms from Lamu Town.

old forms of songs and dances, amongst other practices, have gradually waned and eventually presumed as outdated. For this reason, poets like Bi. Sharrifa worry that their skills might become worthless as more people gradually prefer the use of recorded Swahili popular songs. I, however, strongly conjecture that Swahili poetry will continue to exist amongst the Swahili people. It is noticeable that even lyrics from Swahili popular songs (including *buzi*) possess prosody aspects. These artists too, rely on poets to compose their lyrics. Kresse (2007, 109) observed that in Mombasa, popular singers and *taarab*[52] groups rely on the most highly revered local poets to supply them with lyrics. This reflects the expectation of even common Swahilis for lyrics and poetic language of high standard. This suggests that Lamu poets are likely to remain essential members of the community despite the drastic changing times.

Several eminent scholars acknowledge the existence of prosody based on metre and rhyme in lyrics derived from Swahili music and dances. They implicitly use words such as wordsmiths, lyricists, composers and songwriters to refer to these poets. However, I have yet to come across any academic work in print that solely explores the use of *mashairi* in modern Swahili societies as lyrics or the efforts of different poets who produce these lyrics. Scholars have previously focussed on the transliteration from the Arabic alphabet, the translation and analysis of acclaimed *mashairi*. They also explore and provide historical backgrounds of distinguished Swahili poets concentrating on their contributions to their respective Swahili towns. Thus, this research project aimed to demonstrate the incumbent role of these *mashairi* as lyrics in a modern setting in Lamu Town.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have demonstrated the continued existence of Swahili poetry as a source of lyrics in a contemporary setting in Lamu Town. I have given a historical background of the Swahili people and language in Chapter 1. I reviewed the history of *mashairi* including African and Arabic influences some of which are still evident in modern *mashairi*, as seen in the analysis and comparison that I conducted in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. I also demonstrated types, forms

[52] *Taarab* is one of the most common Swahili genres studied as lyrical poetry by a cohort of researchers and academics. In one of my unrecorded conversations with Bi. Sharrifa, she explained that Lamu people view taarab as a music of the visitors brought by the Omani court musicians from Zanzibar. This was after I had inquired about performance of taarab at weddings. There was hardly any acknowledgement of the existence of taarab amongst my other research consultants. In his dissertation, Caleb Owens (2010) alludes to how taarab in Lamu was not highly popularized and when performed musicians did it for leisure, for free or for very little pay unlike in other Swahili urban centers (Mombasa and Zanzibar) where it has been over-popularized. He notes that in the latter years it has become even harder to identify bands that play taarab in Lamu Town.

and structural components of *mashairi*. In Chapter 4, I have shown the efforts of poets who continue to produce *mashairi* used in Swahili weddings. The reason poets continue to exist and flourish in Lamu Town is because their skills are constantly being put to use by Swahili people's need for *mashairi:* for lyrics and entertainment. I have examined and emphasized the importance of lyrics drawn from *mashairi*, showing reasons why the Swahili people retain a strong desire for them. Furthermore, I have demonstrated where and when these lyrics are sung in different songs and dances during wedding ceremonies and *duas.* This research has aimed to investigate the use of *mashairi* as a source of traditional lyrics amongst the residents of Lamu Town, focusing on both *duas* and women's musical activities during weddings. It is an art that continues to fulfil the social needs and high expectations of Swahilis both in traditional and modern contexts.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Plenty of research has been done on *mashairi* and Swahili songs and dances. There is, however, need for further research focused on the incumbent role of modern Swahili poets in their specific towns of origin and how they socially impact their respective societies with their skills. Tracing poets' genealogies to investigate the passing down of poetic skills within specific families would be important. It would also be beneficial to recognize different ways in which *mashairi* are used in modern Swahili societies, in the same way that intense investigation of the prevailing Swahili songs and dances would be informative in a review and re-examination of the changes that they have undergone over the years to adapt to modern practices.

References

Agawu, K. 2003. *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions.* Great Britain: Routledge.

Alpers, E. A. 2014. *The Indian Ocean in World History.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Arege, T. 2012. *Narration in Swahili Narrative poetry: An Analysis of Utenzi wa Rasi'Lghuli.* PhD Thesis. University of Nairobi.

Arnold, N. 2002. "Placing the Shameless: Approaching Poetry and the Politics of Pemba-ness in Zanzibar 1995-2001." *Research in African Literatures* 33 (3): 140-167.

Askew, K. 2002. *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Askew, K. 2015. "Tanzanian Newspaper Poetry: Political Commentary in Verse." In *Remembering Julius Nyerere in Tanzania: History, Memory, Legacy,* edited by M. Fouéré, 213-250. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.

Askew, K. 2016. "Everyday Poetry from Tanzania: Microcosm of the Newspaper Genre." In *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century,* edited by D.R. Peterson, E. Hunter and S. Newell, 179-223. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Beaujard, P. 2007. "East Africa, the Comoros Islands and Madagascar Before the Sixteenth Century: On a Neglected Part of the World System." *Journal of the British Institute of Eastern Africa* 42 (1): 15-35.

Beaujard, P. 2010. "From Three Possible Iron-Age World-Systems to a Single Afro-Eurasian World-System." *Journal of World History* 2 (1): 1-43.

Blench, R. 2012. "Theory, Methods and Results in the Reconstruction of African Music History." *Review at Azania*: 1-22.

Blench, R. 2014. "Using Diverse Sources of Evidence for Reconstructing the Prehistory of Musical Exchanges in The Indian Ocean and Their Broader Significance for Cultural Prehistory." *African Archaeological Review* 31 (4): 675-703.

Boyd, A. W. 1985. *Music of the Waswahili of Lamu, Kenya*. New York: Folkways Records & Service Corp.

Campbell, C. A. and Eastman, C. M. 1984. "Ngoma: Swahili Adult Song Performance in Context." *Ethnomusicology* 28 (3): 467-493.

Caplan, P. 1997. *African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village.* London: Routledge.

Caplan, P. and Topan, F. 2004. *Swahili Modernities: Culture, Politics, and Identity on the East Coast of Africa.* Trenton: Africa Word Press.

Chittick, N. 1965. "The 'Shirazi' Colonization of East Africa." *The Journal of African History* 6 (3): 275-294.

Chittick, N. 1969. "A New Look at the History of Pate." *The Journal of African History* 10 (3): 375-391.

Chittick, N.1980. "Indian Relations in East Africa Before the Arrival of the Portuguese." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (2): 117-127.

Curtin, P. R. 1984. "Weddings in Lamu, Kenya: An Example of Social and Economic Change." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 24 (94): 131-155.

De Vere Allen, J. 1993. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon*. Nairobi: East African Educational Press.

Eastman, C. M. 1977. "The Emergence of an African Regional Literature: Swahili." *Cambridge African Studies Review* 20 (2): 53-61.

Eastman, C. M. 1986. "Introduction." *Research in African Literatures* 17 (4): 459-463.

Fabian, S. 2019. *Making Identity on the Swahili Coast: Urban Life, Community, and Belonging in Bagamoyo.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fargion, J. T. 2016. *Taarab Music in Zanzibar in the Twentieth Century: A Story of 'Old is Gold' and Flying Spirits*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Frankl, P. J. L. 1995. "The Word for 'God' in Swahili: Further Considerations." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25 (2): 202- 211.

Frolova, N. 2007. "The 'Renovated' Poetry of Theobald Mvungi Said Ahmed Mohamed: on Mechanisms of Transformation and Traditional Swahili Verse." *Swahili Forum* 14: 5-15.

Gearhart, R. K. 1998. "Ngoma Memories: A History of Competitive Music and Dance Performance on the Kenya Coast." PhD Thesis. University of Florida.

Ghaidan, U. 1975. *Lamu: A Study of the Swahili Town*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

Greenberg, J. H. 1947. "Swahili Prosody." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 67 (1): 24-30.

Gunderson, F. 2008. "Music Performance on 19th-Century Sukuma-Nyamwezi Caravans to the Swahili Coast." *African Music* 8 (2): 6-25.

Harries, L. 1950. “A Poem from Siu from the Swahili-Arabic Text*.” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13 (3): 759-770.

Harries, L. 1950. “Swahili Epic Literature.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 20 (1): 55-59.

Harries, L. 1964. “The Arabs and Swahili Culture*.” Journal of the International African Institute* 34 (3): 224-229.

Harries, L.1953. “The Form and Content of Traditional Swahili Literature.” PhD Thesis. University of London.

Hichens, W. and Werner, A. 1934. *The Advice of Mwana Kupona Upon Wifely Duty from Swahili Texts*. Hampshire: The Azania Press.

Horton, M. 2004. “Artisans, Communities, and Commodities: Medieval Exchanges Between North-Western India and East Africa, Freer Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian Institution and Department of the History of Art.” *Ars Orientalis* 34:62-80.

Keefe, S. 2016. “Women, Work, and (Re)Marriage: Entrepreneurship among Swahili Women in Coastal Tanzania.” *Africa Today* 62 (3): 110-131.

King’ei, K. 2001. “Aspects of Autobiography in the Classical Swahili poetry: Problems of Identity of Authorship.” *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 16: 87-96.

King’ei, K. 2001. “Historical and Folkloric Elements in Fumo Liyongo’s Epic.” *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 16:78-86.

Knappert, J. 1963. “Patterns in Swahili Poetry.” *The New African*, January 16th, 1963.

Knappert, J. 1971. *Swahili Islamic Poetry*. Leiden: Brill.

Knappert, J. 1974. “Fifteen Swahili Songs.” *Cambridge Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London* 37 (1): 124-136.

Knappert, J. 1982. “Swahili Oral Traditions.” *Gorog-Karady* XIII: 22-30.

Knappert, J. 1990. “Swahili Songs for Children.” *Annales Aequatoria* 11: 99-114.

Knappert, J. 1991. “Liongo's Wending in the Gungu Metre.” *Annales Aequatoria* 12: 213-226.

Kresse, K. 2007. “Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany Swahili Poetry and the Conservation of Cultural Knowledge.” In *Philosophising in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast,* edited by J. D. Y. Peel, S. Heald and D. James, 105-138. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kusimba, C. M. 1999. *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*. California: Altamira Press.

Kusimba, C. M. and Walz, J. R. 2018. “When Did the Swahili Become Maritime?” *American Anthropologist* 120 (3): 429–443.

Laher, L. 2011. “Lamu District at the Crossroads: A Narrative of Chronic Trauma and Community Resistance.” *Africa Insight* 40 (4): 81-92.

Masinde, E. W. 2003. "Language and Swahili Free Verse: Disparities, Implications and the Way Forward." *In Papers Presented at the Disparities in Developing Countries: Types, Challenges and the Way Forward Fourth International Conference, Kenyatta University, September 17th - 19th, 2003,* 53-59. Nairobi: Association of Third World Studies, Kenya Chapter.

Mazrui, A. 1992. “Conservationism and Liberalism in Swahili Poetry: The Linguistic Dimension.” *Research in African Literatures* 23 (4): 67-76.

Mazrui, A. 2007. *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries: Literature, Language, and Identity.* Athens: Ohio University Press.

Mbele, J. L. 1986. “The Identity of the Hero in the Liongo Epic.” *Research in African Literatures* 17 (4): 464-473.

Mberia, K. 2015. “Misrepresentations and Omissions in Kiswahili Phonology.” *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication* 3 (1): 97-111.

McMahon, E. 2015. ““Marrying beneath Herself”: Women, Affect, and Power in Colonial Zanzibar.” *Africa Today* 61 (4): 26-40.

Middleton, J. 1992. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization*. Michigan: Yale University Press.

Mugane, J. M. 2015. *The Story of Swahili*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Mukuthuria, M. 2009. “Islam and the Development of Kiswahili.” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2 (8): 36-45.

Mulokozi, M. M. 1975. “Revolution and Reaction in Swahili Poetry.” *Kiswahili* 45 (2): 46-65.

Mulokozi, M. M. 1992. “A Survey of Kiswahili Literature.” *Afrika Focus* 8 (1): 50-61.

Mwaliwa, H. C. 2018. “Modern Swahili: The Integration of Arabic Culture into Swahili Literature.” *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 55 (2): 120 -133.

Njogu, K. 2009. Ed. *Culture Performance & Identity: Paths of Communication in Kenya*. Nairobi: Twaweza Communications.

Nurse, D. and Spear, T. 1985. *Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800- 1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

O'Budha, F. 2009. "On the Musical Patterning of Sculpted Words: Exploring the Relationship Between Melody and Metre in a Somali Poetic form." *African Music* 8 (3): 97-116.

Ohly, R. 1985. "Literature in Swahili." In *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys,* edited by B. W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz and W. Tyloch, 460-492. London: Cambridge University Press.

Olali, T. 2015. "Performing the Swahili Hamziyyah and the Pyeongtaek Nongak: A Comparative Analysis of Community Dance and Rituals." *American Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2): 43-48.

Omar, Y. A. and Drury, A. 2002. "The Swahili Manuscripts Project at Soas." *Swahili Forum* 9: 9-17.

Omari, S. 2016. "Swahili Modern Proverbs: The Role of Literary Writers and Social Network Users." *Swahili Forum* 23: 21-46.

Owen, C. E. 2010. *It was Just for Fun: Taarab and the Construction of Community Identity in Two Kenyan Towns*. Bachelors Thesis. University of Oregon.

Parkin, D. 1989. "Swahili Mijikenda: Facing Both Ways in Kenya." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 59 (2): 161-175.

Pawlowicz, M. and LaViolette, A. 2013. "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective: Bridging History and Archaeology, and Coast and Hinterland, in Southern Tanzania." In *The Death of Prehistory*, edited by P. R. Schmidt and S. A. Mrozowski, 117-140. United Kingdom: Oxford Press.

Plane, M. and Biersteker, A. 1989. "Swahili Manuscripts and the Study of Swahili Literature." *Research in African Literatures* 20 (3): 449-472.

Poggenpoel, E. D. 2018. *Echoes Across the Ocean: The Pre-Colonial Assimilation of Arab Influences in Music and Dance on the Kenyan Coast*. Honours Thesis. University of Cape Town.

Rayya, T. 2002. *Mombasa Swahili Women's Songs: A Stylistic Analysis*. PhD Thesis. University of Nairobi.

Rayya, T. and Swaleh, A. 2013. "A Thematic Analysis of Utendi wa Mwana Kupona: A Swahili/Islamic Perspective." *Journal of Education and Practice* 4 (28): 8-16.

Rosenburg, A. L. 2008. "Making the Case for Popular Song in East Africa: Samba Mapangala and Shaaban Robert." *Research in African Literatures* 39 (3): 99-120.

Sanga, I. 2018. "Musical Figures and the Figuring of Tanzania's Social Life in the Poems of Kulikoyela K. Kahigi." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54 (2): 214-225.

Shariff, I. 1991. “The Liyongo Conundrum: Re-examining the Historicity of Swahilis' National Poet-Hero.” *Research in African Literatures* 22 (2): 153-167.

Shariff, I. N. and Feidel, J. 1986. “Kibabina's “Message about Zanzibar” The Art of Swahili Poetry.” *Research in African Literatures* 17 (4): 496-524.

Simala, K. I. 2004. “Swahili Poetic Text and African Historiography.” *Sudanic Africa* 15: 17-38.

Spear, T. 1984. “The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History.” *History in Africa* 11: 291-305.

Spear, T. 2000. “Early Swahili History Reconsidered.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33 (2): 257-290.

Strobel, M. 1975. “Women's Wedding Celebrations in Mombasa, Kenya.” *African Studies Review* 18 (3): 35-45.

Thompson, K. D. 2017. “Beginnings and Endings: An Autoethnographic Account of Two Zanzibari Marriages.” *Anthropology and Humanism* 42 (1): 149–155.

Thompson, K. D. 2017. “Secrets of a Swahili Marriage.” *Anthropology and Humanism* 42 (1): 118–126.

Topan, F. 1974. “Modern Swahili Poetry.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London* 37 (1): 175-187.

Topan, F. 1997. “Biography Writing in Swahili.” *History in Africa* 24: 299-307.

Topan, F. 2001. “Projecting Islam: Narrative in Swahili Poetry*.” Journal of African Cultural Studies* 14 (1) 107-119.

Topan, F. M. 1995. “Vugo: A Virginity Celebration Ceremony Among the Swahili of Mombasa.” African Languages and Cultures 8 (1):87-107.

Tramutoli, R. 2017. ““Discord Melted Away”: Metaphors of Emotions in Swahili Literacy Texts.” *Research in African Literatures* 48(1): 62-76.

Vierke, C. 2016. “From Across the Ocean: Considering Travelling Literary Figurations as Part of Swahili Intellectual History.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28 (2): 225-240.

Walsh, M. 2017. “The Swahili Language and its Early History.” In *the Swahili World*, edited by S. Wynne-Jones and A. J. LaViolette, 121-130. New York: Routledge.

Wamitila, K. W. 1999. “A Rhetorical study of Kiswahili Classical Poetry: An investigation into the Nature and Role of Repetition.” *Research in African Literatures* 30 (1): 58-73.

Werner, A. 1918. “Swahili Poetry.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London* 1 (2): 113-127.

Werner, A. 1927. “Swahili Poetry.” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 26 (102): 101-111.

Whiteley, W. H. 1956. “The Changing Position of Swahili in East Africa.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 26 (4): 343-353.

Ylvisaker, M. 1979. *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade, and Politics*. Boston: African Studies Center.

Zhukov, A. 2004. “Old Swahili-Arabic Script and the Development of Swahili Literary Language.” *Sudanic Africa* 15: 1-15.

Appendix 1: Classical *Mashairi*

Risala wa Zinjibari (message about Zanzibar),

Translated by Sharrif and Feidel (1986)

1. *Risala wa Zinjibari, milele utumikao*
   Ngiya kachika bahari, umtumai Molio
   Nusura ndako Ghafari, waja utunusuruo
   Kwa qadha ipisiyeo, hayasii mayutoye

   Messenger of Zanzibar
   Who always delivers messages
   Go down to the ocean
   Depend upon your Lord Salvation rests upon You
   You who always save us
   As for what has taken place
   What remorse! Is this not remorse?

2. *Kwa qadha ipisiyeo, khabari t'awaarifu*
   Siyu watuut'ukiyeo, wenye ghamidhi na swafu
   Na dhichuwe nyoyo dhao, pasiwe na khitilafu
   Kwa quduraye Latwifu, hayasii mayutoye

   As for what has taken place
   I will reveal it to you
   Those who hate Siu lividly
   With spleen and animosity
   Let their souls be calm now
   Let there be no differences
   With the will of God
   What remorse! Is this not remorse?

3. *Kwa quduraye Latifu, muuwai akifufuwa*
   Wendee pasina khofu, kwa yao majaaliwa
   Walikwanda Yuusufu, na nduza kubughudhuwa
   Nanyi mungafurahiwa, hayasii mayutoye

   With the will of God
   Who takes away and resurrects
   They went bravely to Zanzibar
   Because it was His plan
   In the same way Joseph first went
   And his brothers who bullied him
   Even if you are glad
   What remorse! Is this not remorse?

4. *Nanyi mungafurahiwa, kufarikana nyi nao*
   Si kwema kupungukiwa, kwa kuku muwafugao
   Lakini mwalowatowa, ni wale wazazi wao
   Lingasitawi lendao, hayasii mayutoye

Even if you are glad
To be rid of them
It's not pleasant to lose
Mere chickens you have raised
But those you have sacrificed
They are citizens of your land
The Lingasitawi is sailing
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

5. *Lingasitawi lendao, twayuwa ni makutubu*
Wendee walina cheo, wana wa lubu-li-babu
Nda hao wasaliyeo, mbole na maswahibu
Yatakapo kuwaswibu, hayasii mayutoye

The Lingasitawi is sailing
We know it has been willed
They went, men of wealth and rank
Children of nobles among nobles
Those of you who remain
Await certain disaster
Repentance will crash down on you
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

6. Yatakapo kuwaswibu, tuli hai duniyani
Mtakutwa ni aibu, ya dhila na nukhusani
Mutoleweo naswibu, watoovu wa imani
Ole wenu fahamuni, hayasii mayutoye

Repentance will crash down on you
While we are here on earth
You will encounter shame
Humiliation and hard luck
You will be without honour
You who are without compassion
Remember the punishment
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

7. *Ole wenu fahamuni, watumbuizi wa ole*
Mumengiya ghafulani, musaliyeo wavule
Ghamidha yenu na kani, hizayae nda milele
Vuwani mato muole, hayasii mayutoye

Remember the punishment
Awake and open your eyes
You have longed for confusion
You, the men who have remained
Your ill will and evil actions
Will heap shame on you forever
Open up your eyes and see
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

8. *Vuwani mato muole, wayinga muso lenka*
Musidhani yondoshele, ezi ya Bwana Machaka
Nchi ukifa shinale, na tanduze hukauka
Mtakutwa ni mashaka, hayasii mayutoye

Open up your eyes and see
Unenlightened idiots
Don't think the good deeds
Of Bwana Mataka have vanished
When the trunk of a tree dies
Then the branches dry up as well
You will encounter trouble
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

9. *Mtakutwa ni mashaka, wapishi wandika nyungu*
Hapo mtamkumbuka, siku mnywapo matungu
Shekhe amesitirika, kwa yo amri ya Mungu
Mkazi wa ulimwengu, hayasii mayutoye

You will encounter trouble
Mischievous cooks who brew disaster
Then you will remember
The day you drink the bitters
The sheikh is protected from shame
With the will of God
Dwellers of this earth:
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

10. Mkazi wa ulimwengu, shida na raha hutuma
Kule kukhalifu pingu, ni ahadi zimekoma
Wana waume wa bangu, weendee na khatima
Lindani yaliyo nyuma, hayasii mayutoye

Dwellers of this earth:
One's trials and pleasures are his alone
They ended up in chains
Because of what fate planned for them
The brave warriors went to prison
With good deeds, having done no wrong
Just you wait for what follows
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

11. Lindani yaliyo nyuma, ya suri na poopoo
Musiwe mukilalama, muwapo nleoleo
Ni mema yake ni mema, Shekhe yamsibiyeo
Nanyi mufurahiyeo, hayasii mayutoye

Just you wait for what follows
You will be like a nut in a nutcracker
Do not lament, then

When you see yourselves as outcasts
It is good, it's fine, you say
The troubles that befell the sheikh
You who rejoice today
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

12. *Nanyi mufurahiyeo, ni watovu wa fikira*
Nyungu muwandishiyeo, haikupuwa tijara
Muruwa wenu na cheo, mumeuza kwa hasara
Wala hapana nusura, hayasii mayutoye

You who rejoice today
You just violate the mind
You who have prepared the dish
It has yielded no nourishment
Your morality and rank:
You have sold them at a loss
Surely there is no salvation
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

13. *Wala hapana nusura, wapungufu wa aqili*
Muivutiye izara, na kukosa t'ajamli
Khila zenu na busara, ndiwo msinji wa dhuli
Kumbukani ya aswili, hayasii mayutoye

Surely there is no salvation
You're short of intelligence
You have attracted shame
Missed out on good deeds
Your cleverness and wisdom is
The base of humiliation
Remember the past
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

14. *Kumbukani ya aswili, waqati wa Fumo Luti*
Walikwenda filihali, kina Sefu Masikati
Shekuwe na Lalikali, wakatoweka hiyati
Nanyi musiyo laity, hayasii mayutoye

Remember the past
The time of Fumo Luti
Together they went to Muscat
Seifu and company Shekuwe and Lalikali
They perished, discovered death
Now you who don't feel sorry
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

15. *Nanyi musiyo laity, haya muyachendeeo*
Sitiraji na waqati, umeondoka si yeo
Yadhihiripo mauti, furahaze ni kilio
Munao ole munao, hayasii mayutoye

Now you who don't feel sorry
For what you are doing
Do not expect the times
To be as they were before
When death comes there is
No rejoicing, only crying
You are cursed, you are cursed
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

16. *Munao ole munao, mungatimba lenu shimo*
Hawangii pweke yao, nanyi mutangiya momo
Mangi muyachendeeo, yasokuwa na ukomo
Mfiipi na mwenye kimo, hayasii mayutoye

You are cursed, you are cursed
Even though you dig a pit
They will not fail in alone
You, too, will end up in it
All the mischief you have done
Mischief which has no end
The short ones and the tall ones
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

17. *Mfupi na mwenye kimo, uchambo umewashika*
Ngala hapowi fumo, nyumba haifugwi nyoka
Yaliyomo ya momomo, achaiwao huteka
Wana wa Bwana Machaka, hayasii mayutoye

The short ones and the tall ones
The trap has caught them all
A spear is not given to a Galla
Poisonous snakes are not raised at home
What's taken place was caused by guile
Those who are told of it would laugh
The children of Sheikh Mataka
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

18. *Wana wa Bwana Machaka, kwenu angawa aduwi*
Ni kwema kama kondoka, mungamba kwenu ni wawi
Mtakuja wakumbuka, na mungashika ukawi
Zizi mutiziye tuwi, hayasii mayutoye

The children of Sheikh Mataka
Though you made them your enemies
Better had they not perished
Even though you thought them evil
You will surely miss them
Though you refuse to see the facts
You placed a leopard in your herd
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

19. *Zizi mutiziye tuwi, khasara hiyo nda ng'ombe*
Hono ni mwiso mwiwi, fahamiyani dhiumbe
Mvunda kwao hakuwi, huwa kama seserumbe
Kisima cha t'imbet'imbe, hayasii mayutoye

You placed a leopard in your herd
The loss is your own cattle
This is the loss of our city
So remember this well, mortal
The traitor won't amount to much
His enemies and his own won't trust him
A well without a solid wall
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

20. *Kisima cha t'imbet'imbe, mayi nda mtakalifu*
Yangayaa lembelembe, muchowa hayawakifu
Mato yenu ni mafumbe, Mashekhe kwa Masharifu
Kwa nyoyo dhenu dhaifu, hayasii mayutoye!

A well without a solid wall
Holds water that is muddy
Even if the well is full
Drinking will not quench your thirst
Your eyes have lost their focus
All you sheikhs, all you sharifs
Because of your wicked hearts
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

21. *Kwa nyoyo dhenu dhaifu, mutakiona kichendo*
Deuli kwa masanafu, zisiwatie mishindo
Mungawa hai muwafu, simba kuvundakwe ondo
K'aa akosapo gendo, hayasii mayutoye

Because of your wicked hearts
You'll see what will follow now
Those robes and suits you got as gifts
Know that they'll do nothing for you
Though you're here, in fact you're dead
When a lion is forced to kneel
When a crab's without its shell
What remorse! Is this not remorse

22. *K'aa akosapo gendo, haiba hupunguliya*
Hausitawi mwenendo, henda akidukuliya
Ladha ya nguo ni pindo, na wawili si mmoya
Shimo mungawatimbiya, hayasii mayutoye

When a crab's without its shell
It no longer has prestige
It cannot move with grace
The crab walks clumsily

The cloth's beauty is in its seam
And a pair is not like one
Though you dug a hole for them
What remorse! Is this not remorse?

23. *Qaditamati kalamu, mahshumi li gibriya*
Siyu inganihukumu, itakao wajiriya
Allahu ya Aalamu, ayuwao ni Jaliya
Mayi yakiwayaliya, kucha kwata ipindeni.

I'm ending my poem
The respectable, the mighty
Of Siu, judge me!
What is in store for them
The One to whom it's known is Him
God knows, only He could tell
Now the water has reached the brim
So make sure it ends up well.

A Poem from Siu; *Wajiwaji*

Translated by Lyndon Harries (1950)

1. *Bisimilahi nabtadi yangu nudhuma,*
Na Alhamdu kiiratili kama kusomna
Sala na salaamu nda niitumi na walo nyuma
Ali na Sahaba na dhuriya wenye karama
Na wafuweseo wafuwasi tariki njema.

In the Name of Allah I begin my composition
With Praises setting it in order for reading
Mercy and Peace be to the Prophets and those after them
To their kinsmen and companions, to the gifted descendants
And those who have followed others in the right way.

2. *Nduza na wendani pulikani nina shauri*
Penda kuuonya moyo wangu kwa ushairi
Utaghafalie hawandami ndiya ya kheri
Bahati nda mja mwenye moyo wa tafakuri
Asa nami kawa soyo mwelewa mema.

Brethren and friends, listen, for I have somewhat to say
Fain would I admonish my heart in verse
For it has neglected without pursuing the way of happiness
Blessed is the devout man whose heart loves contemplation
Would that I were like him who appreciates good things.

3. *Moyo siwe pite kama jura mwenda wazimu*
Kwanda tafakari umbo lako ulifahamu
Ni tono la mai lalokaa likawa damu
Tabaraka Llahu kaliumba Mola karinmu
Katia mifupa na mishipa, ngozi na nyama.

Oh heart ! Be not ignorant or foolish, like one insane.
First consider your creation and understand it
'Tis but a drop of water changed into blood
Blessed be God, the Most Bounteous who created it
And formed it into bones and veins, skin and fresh.

4. *Ndio yalokuwa si maneno ya ati-ati*
Na nyezi tisia matumboni walimo kati
Ukaruzukwa kwa masiku na mtikati
Thama wapunguzi wateshele hawakupati
Kukupa chakula wangafisha zao huruma.

That's what it was, there is no uncertainty about it
And for nine months you were deep in the womb
Being nourished night and day
While the midwives marvelled at not being able to reach you
To feed you, even though they hid their kind concern.

5. *Zikisa kuutimu nyezi kenda zaloandikwa*
Ukapiswa ndiya za mashaka zisopitika
Ukaya kwa raha pasi shida na kusumbuka,
Jamii ya watu walioko wakatamka,
"Allahuma sali wa salimu wa taslima".

At the completion of the nine months decreed
You were led through dangerous and impassable ways
And came you out blissfully without trouble or difficulty
The company of the people present acclaimed
"Great Allah ! Mercy and Peace be upon the Prophet".

6. *Ukisa kuzawa ukaweza kuta kishindo*
Utunushiyelo ni kwa Mola kupija kondo
Na kumsikiza mambo mawi yenye uvundo
Haramu hukuwa shaakiru zake zitendo
Ushishie fumo hungurumza liketetema.

Once you are born, you dare to make a commotion
What you desire is to make a quarrel with God
And to bring evil, malodorous charges against Him
Never were you grateful for all that He has done
Spear in your hand, brawling and trembling with anger.

7. *Ushishie ngao kama kwamba una jununi*
Huwaliza kondo kumpija Mola Manani
Hela ukiteta zita zako zamdhuruni
Hasara inawe utetapo wenda motoni
Nyumba jiza-jiza na uvundo usio koma.

Holding a shield as though you were mad
Considering conflict against the All-Kind God
Well, then! If you fight, will your quarrel bring Him harm?
You are the loser, for to Hell will you go if you fight
To pitch-dark abode with unceasing stench.

8. *Wataka kuteta na mateto siyo yawao*
Wateta na mtu kwa chakula chake na nguo
Hela zituruku na makazi ukazieo
Dabiri mangine ukafanye yako makao
Nti zake gura, situlie ukasimama.

You seek a quarrel without a reason
You quarrel for His own food and raiment
Come, then! Do without them and give up your dwelling-place
Look out for another place and make it your abode
Leave His Domain without further delay.

9. *Ukisa kugura uti zake usizikae*
Chakula na nugo ukawata usitumie
Dhali Hapo ndipo zita umeweza kuteta nae
Dhati ya mateto utakalo kaifanyie
Akusukapo huila shaka wamsukuma.

When you have left His Domain, never to dwell therein
And renounced food and raiment, never to use them again
Only then dare you make conflict with Him
A real combat, which you seek, then engage upon it
No doubt you can retaliate if He so much as pushes you.

10. *Ela Uli mumo yuu lati tinii niwa mbiingu*
Huwezi kuteta Hi muonlgo nafusi yangu
Kheri ufuase taa yake Moliwa Mngu
Rei Rahimu Gliafaru mfuwasi hupata fungu
Na kuwatutiza waja wake fili kiyama.

But so long as you remain on earth, under the canopy of Heaven
You dare not fight, know ye, my false self
Better far to follow the light of Almighty God
The follower receives his share from the Merciful Forgiver
Who heaps rewards on the faithful on the resurrection day.

11. *Kheri ufuwate uwe pote la wafuwasi*
Lo lote liyalo uridhie usikikisi
Zi Usikasirike, kisirani haikupasi
Zamani za nyuma kwali watu wenye ziyasi,
Lo lote liyalo huridhia likiwegema.

Better to follow and be a slave of the faithful
And submit to whatever befalls you without complaint
Do not be angry, for anger ill becomes you

In times gone by, there were righteous people
Whatsoever befell, they were content as it drew nigh them.

12. *Kwanda tanabahi ufikiri yamezopita*
Mitumi teule Mola wetu aloiyeta
Hapa duniyani kuongoza japo wa zita
Sambe walihiti ndio huja ya kuwakuta
Mauti ni siku zikomapo mtu hukoma.

Take care first, and consider the past
The chosen Prophets whom our God has brought
Here on earth to lead us against the enemy
Do not say that they sinned and so met with what they did
Death comes on the appointed day, and a man is no more.

13. *Kupambaukiwa sifurahi iia kutwelewa*
Ukamba umri uko mbee nalondikiwa
Hizi siku zote zipitazo huhasibiwa
Sharuti uyuwe kula siku hupungukiwa
Zikomapo siku na umri wako hukoma.

Do not rejoice when dawn and evening come upon you
Nor boast that your life decreed still lies ahead
All these passing days are counted
You must realize that each passing day lessens the time
For when the days come to an end, your life ends with them.

14. *Zundushanya ito siwe kamna ulo ndeoni*
Ulao zileo au ulo usinidizini
Umri hupita kamwe huzundukani
Sahibu muovu ufenyeo kuwa mwendani
Wa kukuliwaza na Sirata Mustakima.

Open your eyes, and be not like one intoxicated
Who takes strong drink or is in sleep
Life passes by and never do you realize
The evil companion whom you make your friend
He it is who lures you away from the right path.

15. *Hiko upetecho kifahamu umechopata*
Usambe umri uko mbee huya ukuta
Wangapi watoto kulikowe wamezopita?
Dhahika inashibu hatta yeo huyaiyeta
Toba hungojani ushengee uhali mama.

The life you have had, think well upon it
And say not that your life is still to come and not yet near
How many younger than you have passed away?
Even at this obvious old age you have not as yet
Repented! For what do you wait in this state of stupor.

16. *Ajali husonga nyuma yako hukufukuza*
Na usoni mwako Sheitani hukupambaza
Kwa hili na hili mfahamu hukuangamiza
Tabibu mshiri ni ambao aloyokoza
Hapa duniyani na akhira kenda salama.

Fate presses upon you from behind, it runs after you
And facing you is the Devil, deceiving you
By this and that remember that he is destroying you
A clever physician is the one who cures himself
Both here upon earth and in the next world he goes in peace.

17. *Yenye kukokoza ukitaka kuyafahamu*
Siwe na zitimbi na nduguzo wana Adamu
Safi moyo wako yambo iwi usizuumu
Dhahiri ushike arikani za Isilamu
Shahada na sala na zakati hija sauma.

If you really want to know what will save you
Stop intriguing against your brethren, the children of Adam
Let your heart be clean and do not think of evil things
Hold fast in public to the pillars of Islam
The creed and prayer, alms-giving, the pilgrimage and fasting.

18. *Hija na zakati hukupasa kwa sharutize*
Nikuwa na mali na saumu usangamize
Shahada na sala sura zote zikupasize
Ala kuli hali ukiweza usiziweze
Sharuti utende faradhize ni mahatuma.

The pilgrimage and almsgiving are of obligation provide
One has the means; but do not away with fasting
Nor recitation of the creed, nor prayer, for all these you must perform
In any case, whichever you are able to do
You must fulfil the duties prescribed, for they are of obligation.

19. *Hizi nguzo tano ukidumu kuzishika*
Sala ukasali kwa wakati usiyatoka
Ukafunga tumu ukahiji ukapa zaka
Ghafaru dhunubi akujazi hapana shaka
Kwa amali hiyo na shahada ukilisema.

If you continue to hold fast to these five pillars
Praying without leaving off before the appointed time
Keeping Ramadhan, taking the pilgrimage and giving alms
The Forgiver of Sins will most certainly reward you
For what you have done and for your confession of faith.

20. *Ukitoyatenda mambo sayo yakupeseyo*
Ukaipumbaza yamlezi mla zileo
Umeikupiza ufahamu yuwa wendao

Fazaa ni bora ya mauti yakungojao
Kufa ni ndiyare mtu hendi kauya nyuma.

If you fail to do what you should
Playing the fool like a drunkard
You will have made trouble for yourself, know where it leads
Disquiet is better than the death that awaits you
Death is a long road; no one goes and is able to return.

21. *Ukinuka kufa ukigura ya duniyani*
Nyumba ukitiwa tini mwati mwa ufukoni
Ukiwa na mali uwasiye ulimwenguni
Karaba hunena walioko makaburini
Tondokapo hapa tuze mali twawanye kima.

When you are dead and departed from the world
And placed in the sepulchre beneath the ground
If you have any wealth left behind in the world
The relations there at the cemetery will say
"When we leave here, let us sell his property and divide the proceeds".

22. *Hawasikitiki kufa kwako hawakujali*
Watindie zite mashughuli yao ni mali
Wataka kwawanya hima-hima kwa tasihili
Kafani na nguo zakoshezwa zikiwa ali
Ini huwatinda kama kwamba ndao mapema.

They are neither sorry nor care about your dying
The mourning at an end, their concern is for the property
They wish to divide it at once without delay
And if the shroud and the burial-cloths be valuable
Their inmost feelings are stirred as if the things belonged to them already.

23. *Karaba na mbasi kaburini wakutiyapo*
Ukawa we pweke usione mtu kuwapo
Neno la Munkari na Nakiri watongowapo
La kutia huma na baridi yenye kitapo
Kwa kucha zimondo za motoni simbo za chuma.

When relatives and friends have placed you in the grave
And you are left alone with no one there at all
And the Angels, Munker and Nakir, begin to interrogate you
You feel feverish and cold with trembling
From fear of Hell's flame and the beating with iron-rods.

24. *Kuna na fazaa bora mno yalosifiwa*
Zaidi mauti na kaburi kuhadithiwa
Nayo siku hiyo huitwa siku ya kufufuwa
Mato ya paani hayaoni yangafumbuwa
Hakutambuwani mzaliwa hayui mama.

There is another disturbance, far better, which is praised
More worthy than death or the grave to be related
And that is the day called the Day of Resurrection
Watching eyes see nothing, though they be opened wide
No one is recognized, not even a child by its mother.

25. *Baada ya kwisa kufufuwa kuna hisabu*
Na kuwaziniwa amalimbi na za thawabu
Mtu enushao hasanati hana adhabu
Na ambao kwamba zainama una ikabu
Huenda ole wake nyumbani ya Jahanama.

After the Resurrection, then comes the Judgment
When evil actions are weighed against the good
The man who abounds in good works has no punishment
But he whose evil outweighs the balance has trouble
Woe is he, for he goes to the dwelling of hell.

26. *Hapo pana nida Siratini ndoni upesi*
Watu watapita kama kali pepo za kusi
Na wangine tena watapita kama farasi
Wangi watapita kama kwamba ni mahabusi
Wapitao ndiya zenye nyeta na mingulima.

There is there a call on the way to Hell "Come quickly"
People will go through like a fierce wind from the south
Others will pass like galloping horses
Many will pass as though they were prisoners,
Making their way through paths along cliffs and precipices.

27. *Hapo Siratini watu wangi takao tea*
Mmoya kupita wangukao zaidi mia
Na kuanguka hoko ni sharuti kusikilia
Hawiya Sakaru na Jahimu kududumia
Kwa kucha Sairi, Jahanama, Ladha, Hutama.

Many people will slip on that road to Eternity
For every one that passes by a hundred will fall
While that fall must carry them down
Deep into the pits of Hawiya, Sakaru and Jahimu
For fear of Sa'ir, Jahannam, Laza and Hutama.

28. *Walo akhiyari Siratini hawataona*
Shida na fazaa ila nuru zake Rabana
Hali nyuso zao hunawiri kama mtana
La Ilaha Illahuwa tawajazi katika Jana
Kwa fadhili zake Mola wetu majazi mema.

The chosen ones on that road will not feel
Any trouble or confusion, but they will see the light of the Lord

While their faces shine bright as the day
He who is God Alone will reward them in Paradise
By his kindness, our God, the bestower of good.

29. *Tamati waadhi idadiye alifu bee*
Na mwenye kutunga ni aini, Mimu na Ree
Ibunu Amini musidhani uzo uzowezee
Yale kuweleza waji-waji na uwelee
Aonao kosa akitowa hana lawama.

Concluded is this poem, while the verses are the number of the alphabet
And the composer is Aini, Mimu and Ree
Son of Amini; do not consider him to be experienced
He means to explain in a poem what you may understand
And whoever finds a mistake is not to be blamed for correcting it.

Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona (An Epic Poem by Mwana Kupona)

Translated by Hichens and Werner (1934)

Below, I have provided a QR code to be scanned to access the poem in both Swahili and English as provided by Hichens and Werner. The poem encompasses 98 verses, and it would have been superfluous to include the whole poem in the appendix section because of its length (see page 31-32).

Appendix 2: Modern *Mashairi*

No.1 *Harusi dua* (Wedding prayer)

Itani yangu miwili	I open up my two arms
Nanyosha kukuombeya	As I pray for you
Kwa Mungu nitawasali	I am praying to Allah
Amina Taitikiya	I hope he will listen to my prayer
Wanangu uwajamili	Bless my children
Ndoa ya kuendeleya.	With a long-lasting marriage.
Rabi tawa jaaliya	May God bless them
Auni Mola karima	Oh God bless us
Taa ya kutuwakiya	May the light shine
Mianga mbele na nyuma	Brightness front and behind
Tima twa wamombeya	I pray they last forever
Na uwezo wa karima.	By the grace of Allah.
Imbani mpige kusi	Sing and clap your hands
Mulokuya harusini	Those who are present at this wedding
Ya Rabi uwanafisi	May Allah bless you all
Bwana na bibi arusi	Together with the bride and bridegroom
Wapendane maishani.	May they love each other forever.

No. 2 *Dua la mwanafunzi* (Prayer for a student)

Hukuombea sichoki, Sinyamai ufahamu	I pray I never get tired, please note I never stop
Rabi tiya taufiki, Mazuri yote yatimu	May Allah bless you, so that you achieve your goals
Soma usipate dhiki, Uwe ukitabasamu.	Study and do not get stressed, you will be happy
Huomba kwako maliki, Yailani ulo bora	I am praying for your studies, you are the best of all
Mazuri niyabariki, niyatakyo imara	Be blessed for your goodness, and achieve your goals
Rehemani niafiki, niwe na sura hungara.	Rehema make me proud, that I may be happy.
Mikono yangu miwili, Yailahi hukuomba	I raise my two hands, praying for goodness
Nisipate ya thakili, Yote niloyasomeya	May I not be in trouble, for what I have done
Kila la kheri ninali, Mola tanibarikiya.	May I achieve my goals too, God bless me.
Hukuomba yajaliya, Illahi Mola Karimu	Again I am praying for you, you are the only God
Yote kunitimiziya, Masomoni kikhitimu	Fulfil all my needs, even in my studies
Nizidi kuendelea, Sasa Nakoma nudhumu.	May I proceed further, as I conclude this prayer.

No. 3 *Harusi, kupeleka fedha* (Wedding, to take the dowry payment)

Mikono yangu itani	I open up my arms
Huomba Mola mkwasi	Praying to Allah
Tungiapo harusini	We are starting the wedding

Illahi utunafisi	May Allah bless us
Twataka kupeka shani	We want to send dowry
Fedha za bibi arusi.	We pay the bride price.
Iwe furaha ya kheri	Let us all be happy
Mazuri kula namna	We will enjoy ourselves
Ziwe mbali zote shari	Let us be stress free
Tupambe kwa muafaka	Bless us all Allah
Zitangamane swadiri	with one love and one heart
Bibi arusi na bwana.	One Bride one bridegroom.
Sasa twanyosha miwili	We raise our hands
Kukweteya haki yako	to bring you dowry
Kijana mwenye jamali	What a beautiful bride
Tucheze arusi yako	We dance in your wedding
Mpendane kweli kweli	May you both love each other
Wewe na mpenzi wako	You and the love of your life.
Tamati nyie akramu	Those who will attend the wedding
Mwambieni wangu nana	Please tell my wife
Moyo wangu una hamu	My heart is aching
Natamani kumuona	I long to see her
Mpeni zangu salamu	Send her my greetings
Sikufu tu taonana.	We shall soon meet.

No. 4 *Harusi* (Wedding)

Nipa Kalamu tuimbe	Give me a pen I write a song we sing
Na wino wenye jamali	Together with the best ink available
Bi. Arusi tumpambe	We need to bless the bride
Kwa dua za Ali Ali	with great prayers of the Prophet
Aenee kuwa pembe	That she may be famous
Yote mazuri anali.	And receive great gifts.
Vigele gele na kusi	Sing and clap your hands
Mulokuja harusini	All of you present here
Tushangilie Harusi	Let us all celebrate this union
Tulioko Uwanjani	Now that we are at the venue
Bwana na bibi arusi	Bridegroom and Bride
Sote tuwe furahani.	We are all very happy.
Ngoma mimi husakata	I like to dance
Muyukuwa humpemba	Dancing with my granddaughter
Na dua nikizileta	I bring forth prayers of blessings
Atubariki Muumba	Allah bless us all
Ni Kichupa cha Mafuta	I have a small perfume bottle
Tumia kwenye kiemba.	Spray it on your wedding night.

No. 5 *Harusi* (Wedding)

Bisimilahi karimu	in the name of Allah the most high
Kwa jina nimetamka	I begin this song in your name
Rahamani rahimu	You are Allah the merciful God
Mueza Mola Rabuka	Lord God, capable of great things
Moyo nimefanya hamu	You have made my heart yearn
Kwa furaha na kuteka.	With joy and happiness.

Harusi iwe ya kheri	Let this wedding be a great celebration
Ya baraka na afiya	with blessings and good health to all
Na mambo yawe mazuri	and all activities be perfect
Mambo yote kutengeya	A well organised wedding
Wanangu mutanawiri	My children you shall be successful
Bibi na bwana arusi.	Bride and Bridegroom.

Mulioko arusini	Those who have attended
Nawaombea mazuri	I pray for good things
Kwa nyote asanteni	to all of you, thankyou
Mupate mambo mazuri	May you all be blessed
Ni Sharrifa Naibani	It Is Sharrifa Nahbany
Mngu awajazi kheri.	Allah bless you all.

Appendix 3: Translation of Recorded Swahili Conversations.

Recorded conversation with Bi. Sharrifa (06/01/2020)

Bi. Sharrifa: Sasa kwenye arusi huwa tukitunga nyimbo za wakati kuja kupokea mahari, kuna special message ambayo kwamba tuna mpatia mwenye kuleta mahari na yeye pia kureceive ana respond, hiyo ya kwanza. Then the second one it is during the celebrations sasa za arusi. Na katika arusi kuna stages tofauti tofauti. The first stage ni hiyo ya kupokea dowry. The second stage ni mgawanyiko wa arusi yenyewe wa kualika watu, utafanya special day ya kualika watu ukipropose the date. Huwa wana compose mashairi na unawalika watu. Unawalika through reciting the mashairi. And then from there you give a space maybe of one month or two weeks sasa ndio unaanza arusi yeneywe. Wakati wa bibi arusi anakuja kwa hall kudisplay pia huwa tuna nyimbo zake. I wish I knew ningebeba zile pale nikakuonyesha.
Bi. Sharrifa: During the wedding, we compose songs for the day of receiving the dowry, there is a special message we give to the family presenting the dowry and after they receive the message, they too respond, that is the first stage. The second stage is during the celebration of the weddings. During weddings, you see, there are different stages. The first stage is to receive the dowry. The second stage is the separation of the men and women for the celebrations and inviting people. You arrange for a particular day to invite guests once the date has been set. We normally compose *mashairi* to invite people. You invite them by reciting the *mashairi*. And then from there you give a period of a few weeks or a month then you officially start the wedding celebrations. When the bride comes to the hall for the display, we also sing for her special songs. If I knew I would have carried I show you.

Simon: Halafu sasa unaweza explain hizo wimbo, hiyo vugo, lelemama pahali zina ingiana katika hiyo sherehe?
Simon: Please explain where all these songs and dances like vugo and lelemama, when exactly they are performed during the celebrations?

Bi. Sharrifa: Unajua hutegemea na uwezo wa mtu. Kama mimi nilipo fanya maharusi za mtoto wangu, siku ya kwanza nilipoletewa mahari mimi nilirespond mashairi, ya kuwa nimereceive nimeshukuru. Haikuwa only family members wangu pekee, bwana arusi anakuja na family members of his side. Halafu tunakaa na music na drums huwa tunapiga analeta tunapokea, tuna respond mashairi kushukuru. Then mwanaume huwa asha propose date, ni lini ataka arusi ifanywe. Sasa siku ile ya kufanya arusi huwa kuna vugo, mwanzo wa arusi, mimi nilaianza na vugo. Nikaleta mavugo mawili. Moja lilikuwa kwa hall na lingine lilikuja kwangu lika niescort kutoka kwangu kwenda hall. Hiyo ni system yangu mwenyewe nilitumia ili ku varnish ile arusi ionekane ni nzuri. Huku hall yaendelea na huku ninatolewa na vugo mpaka kule kwenye hall. Halafu kwenye vugo huwa kuna nyimbo za kueleza kwamba leo namsherehekea mtoto wangu.
Bi. Sharrifa: You know it depends on the financial capability of an individual. When I did the weddings of my children on the first day when they brought the dowry, I responded with *mashairi* to thank them and acknowledge that I have received the dowry. It was not only my family members; the bridegroom also comes with his family members from his side. We sit and entertain each other with music and drums that we play to receive the dowry and thank his family. The bridegroom normally proposes the date of when the wedding will take place. On the day of the wedding there is always *vugo*, at the beginning of the wedding I started with *vugo*. I had two of them. One was in the hall and the other was at my house to escort me from my house to the hall,

that was a special system I used to make the wedding look more attractive. At the hall one *vugo* was going on, while the other escorted me from the house. In *vugo* there are songs to alert people in the community that I am celebrating my daughter's wedding.

Simon: Na vugo ina maanisha nini?
Simon: What does *vugo* mean?

Bi. Sharrifa: Vugo is a sort of horn. Tunatumia horns na ngoma, yani muscial instrument that is noted with poems halafu wengine huwa wakiweka na trumpet kuna mpigaji pia ambako kwamba afuta zile nyimbo asupport. Sasa wenye ngoma wanapiga ngoma kwa ile tone ambayo mimi nataka, mimi naimba, kuwaelezea leo ni siku ya arusi, ni kama introduction ya arusi.
Bi. Sharrifa: Vugo is a sort of horn. We use horns and drums that are played to support the poems. Then some people use a trumpet, there is an instrumentalist who does so, and she follows the melody. Those who play the drums play in accordance with the tone I want as I sing to alert everyone that today is the weddings day, it is like an introduction to the wedding.

Simon: Halafu lelemama?
Simon: What about *lelemama*?

Bi. Sharrifa: Hiyo pia ni entertainment. Na hiyo huchezwa na wanawake peke yake. Na lelemama huwa ina uniform, unavaa nguo mpaka hapa kwenye knees with a trouser. Halafu wakati wa kucheza unaweka the bench, very long bench, from there up to that end. Ladies wanapanda juu, wenye kipiga ngoma wako chini, the ladies who are dancing huwa wako na two sticks. Halafu huwa wana nyimbo zao wanaimba. Kisha ziko different momentum. Kuna different movement na different pattern.
Bi. Sharrifa: That one is also part of the entertainment. It is performed by women alone. *Lelemama* has a special uniform, they wear a dress, whose length is up to the knees, and a pair of trousers. When it is time to perform, they place a long bench on the dance floor. The ladies stand on the bench and the instrumentalists are on the floor, the ladies who are dancing have two sticks. They also have lyrics that they sing. The dance has different momentums and different patterns.

Simon: Na watu wanakulipa ndio uwaandikie mashairi, kuna mtu nimesikia ana andika, ule albino naskia yeye... kuna watu wana mlipa wakiwa na arusi ana andika shairi.
Simon: Do people pay you to compose *mashairi*? There is a man who writes, he is albino, I hear he… there are people who pay him to compose *mashairi* for weddings.

Bi. Sharrifa: Hutegemea, ni watu gani, ni shairi la aina gani. Ikiwa ni shairi la msiba huwa silipishi. Pengine you want to praise your husband ama you want to express your feelings to your husband, ninakulipisha, express na mimi ni survive. Ama if you are going to Mecca I do compose if you pay me. Sasa kama hii is the display of the bride, inaitwa kupamba. Hii ilikuwa program ya ladies' night normally huwa tuko na ladies' night wakati wa culture sasa hii nilikuwa sijajua mgeni wa heshima ni nani. Nilipojua mgeni wa heshima ni nani, ni pale pale wakati tuko kwa venue tunaendelea na program na nilikuwa master of ceremony mimi, na pia mimi ni mwana kamati. Sasa nilipomuona mheshimiwa waziri amekuja, nilichukua kalamu haraka haraka, nikatunga. Nikatunga hizi one, two, three kumpraise our honarable Fahima Arafat, Minister for lands. Ilikuwa ni wakati wa culture, na si kumcharge lakini wakati wa kuperform weh!

Bi. Sharrifa: It depends, who are the people? What type of *shairi* is it? If it is a *shairi* for a funeral, I do not charge. Sometimes if a wife wants to praise her husband, or they want to express their feelings to him, that one I will charge, express yourself and I continue to survive. Or if you are going to Mecca, I can compose for you if you pay me. Like this *shairi* is for the display of the bride, called 'to decorate'. This was a programme from the ladies' night, normally we have a ladies' night during the culture week. In the beginning, I did not know who the guest of honour was going to be. She arrived at the venue and I got the information about who she was. At that moment while we were still at the venue as the programme was carrying on, by the way, I was the master of ceremonies and the chair lady of the ladies' committee, I took my pen and very fast I composed a *shairi* to praise the honourable Fahima Arafat, minister for lands. Since this was during the Culture Festival, I did not charge her but when I performed the *wimbo,* the women were overjoyed!

Bi. Sharrifa: Sasa hii ni dua, nimekaa kwa muda mrefu mpaka imekatika.
Bi. Sharrifa: Now this is a prayer, I have had it for so long it is even torn

Simon: So hii ni prayer?
Simon: So, this is a prayer?

Bi. Sharrifa: Prayer, dua, si unaona. Huyu, this is a lady from Lamu, she had now been transffered to Mombasa Fort, she was working here in Lamu museum sasa kulikuwa kuna dua.
Bi. Sharrifa: Prayer, as you can see this lady is from Lamu, she had received a transfer to Mombasa Fort, she was working here in Lamu Museum so there was a special day for prayers.

Simon: Oh Fatuma, ule mpishi?
Simon: Oh! Fatuma the cook? (I had heard about her and the transfer hence the question)

Bi. Sharrifa: No, Fatuma Saidi!
Bi. Sharrifa: No, her name is Fatuma Said!

Jaffar: Eeh anasema ndio mpishi.
Jaffar: He is saying she is the one known for cooking.

Bi. Sharrifa: Ooh mpishi eeh! Yeye ni Regional Educational Officer, walikuwa wana dua akanipigia simu, nitungie nyimbo za dua, nikamtungia kisha nikampigia kwa simu nikamtumia ndio hio.
Bi. Sharrifa: Oh yes, the cook! She is the Regional Educational Officer, they had organized a day for special prayers, so she called me and requested me to write songs for the occasion. I composed them then I sent them through the phone, this is the original copy (showing me).

Simon: Wewe ulijulia wapi, najua ni talanta lakini?
Simon: Where did you learn from, I know it is a talent but?

Bi. Sharrifa: Si mimi hukaa hapa. Niko na ile talanta inherited. Ni Utamaduni wetu.
Bi. Sharrifa: I live here (Lamu). I have the talent that I have inherited. It is our culture.

Recorded conversation conducted by Bw. Jaffar with Bi. Sharrifa (11/07/2020)
Bi. Sharrifa: Shairi ukilizungumza tu kwa maneno huwa halipendezi, halivutii. Ukilitia kwenye mahadhi huwa likivutia likipendeza. Watu hutega masikio wakawa wako tayari kukusikiza kwa sababu huwa tayari usha wachangamsha. Kwa hivyo sasa ile attention watakupatia wasikize ile message na kila kitu. Shairi ukilitoa kwa mahadhi hupendeza zaidi kuliko kutoa hivi hivi.
Bi. Sharrifa: When a *shairi* is recited without inserting a melody it does not sound pleasing. Once you combine rhythm and melody, the *shairi* is transformed, it captivates and sounds attractive. An audience will be ready to listen to the reciter because their feelings have been aroused by the prospects of a *shairi* being performed. The audience awaits eagerly to listen to the message. A *shairi* that is sung is much more pleasing than a spoken word *shairi*.

Recorded conversation with Bi. Husna (03/01/2020)
Simon: Na lazima ukuwe na ujuzi wa kuandika mashairi kutunga hizo nyimbo?
Simon: Is it necessary for one to have the skills to write these mashairi to compose these songs?

Bi. Husna: Eeh! Lazima. Kuna mwanaume anaitwa Halidi, ni albino yeye. Huyo hajui kuandika wala haoni vizuri lakini aweza kumwambia mtu kaa niku ambie uandike. Anatunga hapo hapo anakupatia hapo hapo.
Bi. Husna: Yes! It is a must. There is a man called Khalid, he is an albino. He does not read and write, nor does he have good eyesight, but he can sit down with someone and narrate the text. He composes the poems and hands them over immediately in one sitting.

Bi. Husna: Kikwetu kwanza una peleka posa. Utapangia wazazi wa mke watapanga something, bite bite hivi kidogo, sherehe kidogo watapokea hiyo proposal.
Bi. Husna: In our culture, we first begin by taking the proposal. You send word to the bride's parents who arrange for a small ceremony where some finger food is served to receive the proposal.

Bi. Husna: Halafu katika hiyo hiyo vugo… vugo ikipanda inapigwa kishuri. Kishuri inachezwa na wanawake kufunga nguo, leso kwa kiuno alafu twisting of the waists…
Bi. Husna: Then in the same *vugo*… when *vugo* comes to a climax, we change to *kishur*i. *Kishuri* is performed by the women, they tie a kanga around the waist then they dance by twisting their waists…

Simon: Kwa hivyo hawa watu wengi wanamuuliza atunge wimbo za kufanya sherehe?
Simon: So many people normally ask him to compose *mashairi* to for Swahili celebrations?

Bi. Husna: Eeh sasa huwa wakimuuliza yeye. Wewe uko related vipi na bibi arusi, mimi ni mamake ama mimi ni dadake ama mimi ni rafiki yake. Sasa ataunga ile nyimbo kulitia na ile ambayo ume mwambia.
Bi. Husna: Yes, they will ask a poet to compose the *mashairi.* The poet will ask, "how are you related to the bride"? "I am the mother, I am the sister, or I am her friend". The poets will compose these *mashairi* paying attention to the details they are given.

Simon: *Halafu kishuri na chakacha, mbona ilibadilika ikawa kishuri sasa?*
Simon: Now, *kishuri* and *chakacha*, why did it change to *kishuri*?

Bi. Husna: Kwa sababu chakacha ilikuwa ikiitwa chakacha kwa sababu, walikuwa watu wa Mombasa wakiita chakacha. Sasa Wabajuni sasa sana hii chakacha inachezwa na Wabajuni zaidi. Sasa Wabajuni jina lake wakasema ni kishuri si chakacha. Kwa hivyo saa ile utaambia mtu habari ya chakacha atakuambia hakuna chakacha tena, siku hizi ni kushuri.
Bi. Husna: Because *chakacha* was called *chakacha* in Mombasa. The Bajuni people are the ones who dance *chakacha* more than the other Swahilis. So, they decided to call it *kishuri*. So now when you tell people about *chakacha* they will tell you it does not exist it anymore, it is now known as *kishuri*.

Simon: Kwa hivyo hapa ilikuwa inajulikana kama?
Simon: So here it was known as?

Bi. Husna: Chakacha, all that time. Sasa kulipokuwa na Wabajuni kutoka huku, vile kutwist kiuno, wanakuambia ni kishuri si chakacha. Chakacha ni kucheza ile pole pole kwenda hivi na hivi, kishuri ndio ile ya kupeleka kiuno mbio mbio.
Bi. Husna: *Chakacha* all that time. Now the Bajuni from here, that twisting of the waist, they call it *kishuri* and not *chakacha*. *Chakacha* is danced very slowly from side to side, while in *kishuri* you dance faster and aggressively.

Simon: Na saa hizi kishuri inachezwa?
Simon: And is *kishuri* still performed?

Bi. Husna: Sasa hivi kishuri inachezwa na akina mama waliolewa. Wasichana pia wacheza lakini sio sana kama akina mama waliolewa kwa sababu chakacha ilikuwa si kiuno kucheza sana kwa hivyo wasichana walikuwa waweza kucheza. Lakini sasa unajua msichana akicheza kishuri ataonekena kama tayari si msichana kwa sababu kiuno kikiregea zaidi ni mtu ambaye tayari ameolewa. Chakacha ni ile ya pole pole lakini kishuri ni ile ya haraka haraka ambayo sana sana inachezwa na mtu ambayo tayari is not a virgin. Lakini wasichana pia wanacheza lakini msichana aki cheza watu wataanza kuulizana ni mwana kweli ule? Kwa sababu vile kinachezwa sana sana na watu ambao wameolewa.
Bi. Husna: Right now, *kishuri* is performed by women who are married. Young girls dance but not like the married women, *chakacha* is not that aggressive so young girls were allowed to take part in the performance. But right now, if a young girl is to dance *kishuri*, she will look like she has lost her virginity if she can gyrate her waist that fast like a woman who is married. *Chakacha* is very slow but *kishuri* is very fast and it is performed by women who have already lost their virginity. Sometimes the young girls do dance but when they do, people question about their virginity. It is performed exclusively by women who are married.

Recorded conversation with Bi. Ali, Bw. Ali and Monica (02/01/2020)

Simon: Na maana yake ni nini mkiimba?
Simon: And what is the meaning of these songs?

Bi. Ali: Tukiimba huwa twasheherekea hiyo harusi. Tuna mweleza yale maelezo ambayo mtu anaishi na mumewe. Wajua wasichana wa Kiswahili na nyinyi ni tofauti, maanake wa Kiswahili wana mambo mengi kushinda nyinyi. Maanake wa Kiswahili kuna mambo mengi katika kuolewa

kwake kuliko nyinyi. Nyinyi mwaweza kuolewa tu basi ni kupika, ni sima nini kwisha. Lakini sisi tuna mambo mengi ya kufanya.
Bi. Ali: We sing to celebrate the newlyweds. We give her advice on how she should live with her husband. You know a Swahili girl is very different from other girls in diverse ethnic groups. Swahilis have more activities attached to weddings when compared to other ethnic groups. Your people can get married and cooking is simple, you just make ugali and that is it, you do not have too many expectations of the bride like us.

Nina: Vugo na buzi tofauti yake ni gani?
Nina: *Vugo* and *buzi*, what is the difference?

Bi. Ali: Vugo ni lile ambalo liko ndani ya nyumba. Mko ndani ya nyumba mwacheza... mwapiga vugo, mkimaliza vugo mwakata ngoma ya kike hapo sasa mwacheza na kiuno, usha nielewa? Na ngoma ya buzi ni utazunguka tu si unanona.
Bi. Ali: Vugo is a dance that is performed indoors. The women are inside the house and they perform the *vugo*, when they are done, they now start dancing with the waist (*kishuri*). You understand. *Buzi* is danced by forming a circle and going around as you can see.

Simon: Na hizi nyimbo zote lazima zifanyike katika sherehe ya arusi?
Simon: Do you have to perform all these songs at the wedding?

Bi. Ali: Lazima nyimbo zifanyike.
Bi. Ali: All the songs have to be performed.

Nina: Kwa hivyo arusi haitakuwa ime sawalika bila hizi nyimbo? Kila wimbo iko na maana yake.
Nina: So, a wedding is not enjoyable without the songs? Each song has its own meaning.

Bi. Ali: Hakuna lazima ziwe hizo nyimbo.
Bi. Ali: There is no wedding without songs, the songs must be performed.

Nina: Arusi inakuwa nzuri kulingana na ngoma?
Nina: A wedding is considered beautiful because of the songs and dances?

Bi. Ali: Eeh!
Bi. Ali: Yes!

Nini: Kuimba nyimbo na kuimba mashairi lazima mtu awe na talanta ya mashairi kuliko nyinyi?
Nina: Singing songs and singing *mashairi* is it mandatory for one to have the talent from the art of *mashairi* more than normal Swahilis?

Bi. Ali: Nyimbo na mashairi ni sawa sawa hazina tofauti.
Bi. Ali: Songs and poems are the same, there is no difference.

Nina: Lakini mwenye kuimba mashairi ni tofauti na mwenye kuimba nyimbo?
Nina: But the one who sings *mashairi* and the one who sings *nyimbo*, is there a difference?

Bi. Ali: Hapana, ni hivyo hivyo.
Bi. Ali: No, it is the same.

Nina: Kwa hivyo yule mtu amechomeka anaimba kwa arusi pia yeye?
Nina: So, the poet who is albino also sings at the wedding ceremonies?

Bi. Ali: Aah aah si sana. Ukienda kwake sasa... unaona sisi sasa tukiwa tuna arusi twaenda kumtapia, tuna mlipa sasa aka tuandikia nyimbo za arusi mwanzo mpaka mwisho, fulani, jina lake ni fulani, ni mama wa arusi, huyu ni dadake arusi, huyu ni ndugu yake arusi, huyu ni hivi na hivi… uka mwelezea yeye aka kutungia zile nyimbo zako alafu ukifika pale mkisha kuanza kuimba kisha watoa ile karatasi ukasoma yale mashairi yake ambayo ame andika pale.
Bi. Ali: Not that much, if you go to his place now… you see when we have a wedding ceremony, we go look for him and we pay him, he then composes these songs from the beginning to the end. This one's name is so and so, she is the mother, sister or friend of the bride, this one is like this and that… you give him all these details and then he will compose your *mashairi*. When you get to the ceremony you remove the paper with the *mashairi* and use the text to sing.

Nina: Kama bibi wa kwanza mashairi yenye ataimbiwa yeye na bibi wa pili itakuwa ni tofauti maanake mawaidha anayo pewa wa kwanza na mawaidha anayo pewa wa pili ni tofauti?
Nina: The *mashairi* that were sung for the first wife, will they also be sung for the second wife or will the advice given to the first wife be different from the advice given to the second wife?

Bi. Ali: Yule msichana lazima apewe mawaidha yale yale kwa sababu yule hajui kuolewa lakini yale mashairi yatakuwa tofauti.
Bi. Ali: That bride has to be given the same advice because she has never been married before but the *mashairi* will be different.

Simon: Ule anatunga hizo nyimbo lazima akuwe na ufahamu ama akuwe amesomea mashairi ndio ajuwe vile zinatungwa?
Simon: The person who writes these songs, is it a must they have the knowledge or have studied the art of *mashairi* so that they can compose?

Bi Ali: Kunaye mtu wakuimba anatoa mashairi kwa kichwa chake kama yule Khalid yule ambaye macho yake hayaoni. Ni hawa utiro.
Bi. Ali: There is a person who sings and composes these *mashairi* from his head, Like Khalid, the one who does not have good eyesight. He is an albino

Nina: Ahhh yule mzee anafanyanga Lamu House ule mweupe inakaa nikama amechomeka?
Nina: Yes, the elderly man who works at Lamu House, he is white and looks like his skin is burnt?

Bi. Ali: Eeh yule ndio atoa mashairi yeye mwenyewe.
Bi. Ali: Yes, He is the one who composes *mashairi*

Simon: Lazima ukuwe umesomea hiyo ushairi ndio ujuwe?
Simon: Is it a must you study Swahili poetry to know how to compose?

Bi. Ali: Yeye mwenyewe ni kipawa Mwenyezi Mungu amempa, hakusomea.
Bi. Ali: For him it is a gift from God, he has not studied.

Simon: Lakini hizi nyimbo ni kama lazima mtumie mashairi?
Simon: But these songs, must you use *mashairi*?

Bi. Ali: Sindio nakuambia hizo nyimbo, yeye atoa nyimbo lakini azitunga yeye mwenyewe hapo kwa hapo.
Bi. Ali: Of course, yes, as I am telling you the poet composes these songs, and he does so himself there and then.

Simon: Kwa hivyo yeye ni kipawa amepatiwa na Mungu?
Simon: So, it is a gift from God?

Bi. Ali: Eeh!
Bi. Ali: Yes!

Nina: Na kuna mtu ambaye anaongoza?
Nina: Is there someone who leads the performance?

Bw. Ali: Kuna mtu mmoja ama wawili ambao ndio wanaongoza hizo nyimbo.
Bw. Ali: There are one or two people who lead the performance when they sing the songs.

Bi. Ali: Kuna nyimbo za zamzani utaanza kuzitoa uzitoe uzitoe. Kisha mwisho sasa ndio utachukua ile list ambayo umeandikiwa nyimbo pia za ule bibi arusi, sasa utaziimba...
Bi. Ali: Some songs are old, and the melody is well known, and the leader will start singing them. In the end, you will take the list of *mashairi* about the bride that were written by the poet and start singing them.

Recorded conversation with *Imam* Tawalib Mbarak Hadi (08/01/2020)
Simon: Na kama Imam, una ujuzi wa mashairi, lazima ukuwe na ujuzi wa mashairi?
Simon: As an *Imam*, do you have to have the knowledge of composing *mashairi*?

Imam: Mashairi ni kipawa ambacho mtu hujifundisha, sasa aweza mtu kujua na mwingine akawa hajui.
Imam: The art of Swahili poetry is a skill one teaches oneself so one person can know how to while another person does not.

Imam: Wanawake walikuwa si sana kufanya kazi, ingawa katika Waisilamu, imekubali mwanamke afanye kazi lakini kwa sheria maalum ndio asiwe kama kidude cha kuchezewa, anafanya kazi na heshima yake.
Imam: Women in most circumstances choose not to work, but according to Islamic laws, they are allowed to work despite the accepted and normalised practice. However, they have to work under the Islamic laws, which guide them, they are not a sort of ornament to be played around with, they

conduct their work with the respect expected which in turn earns them the respect of members of the society.