

ROMANTIC DESIRES AND POLYGYNOUS INTENTIONS:
ISLAM, GENDER, AND DIVORCE IN COASTAL TANZANIA

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: EXAMINING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN COASTAL TANZANIA

'We are all Muslims here.'

In August 2002, while I was conducting my pre-dissertation research in Tanzania the plight of Amina Lawal, a divorced, unmarried, and pregnant Northern Nigerian Muslim woman, garnered a great deal of international attention. The Nigerian *Sharia* courts in her town sentenced her to death, by stoning, because she was an unwed expectant mother. I did not expect to discover ordinary women in Tanzania engaging with the plight of a woman in Nigeria, much less discussing it in relation to their own lives, but I learned this representation of Muslim gender attributes circulates beyond the West and what it means to be a Muslim Swahili African woman or man, is constantly being (re)negotiated.

During a visit with Fatuma, a thirty-one-year old divorced Muslim woman who works as a teacher at a primary school, we discussed Amina's case. Fatuma brought the subject up because she wanted to know my opinion, and if such things occurred in America. She asked:

Do you know about this woman, Amina? I cannot believe that she will be killed or stoned for being pregnant and not married. This is so terrible for this woman. Do you think it will really happen, that she will be punished? This [pregnancy] happens all the time here and no one would ever

consider punishing or blaming or killing a woman for this reason. Sometimes a girl gets pregnant to catch the husband and sometimes she gets pregnant to show that she can have a baby, and some times accidents happen. Mostly people do not want girls to get pregnant before getting married, really they do not want them to even be active [sexually] with boys before marriage, but we cannot really stop this from happening, and we would never do something like this [stoning]. And, I heard on the radio that it is because she is Muslim that this is happening. I've never even heard of this. We are all Muslims here and this is not being a good Muslim.

Fatuma was sympathetic to Amina's situation; and furthermore, she was astounded that this was being done under the auspices of Islam. It was a new consideration for Fatuma, and other women like her, that being Muslim could result in consequences such as those Amina faced. She explained it was the first time she truly realized that what being a good Muslim meant to her was not necessarily the same for Muslim women in other parts of the world. In discussing Amina's case, Fatuma explained that Muslim women in Tanzania do not face such consequences. Divorced women are not subject to the same expectations as never previously married girls and have a great deal of freedom from both their families and society. In fact, many divorced and single women have children outside the boundaries of a legal marriage and are not legally impacted in any way. What is also apparent is that they are not socially criticized, and in some cases they are applauded. In addition, sexual relations outside marriage (for young, never previously married girls) are not condoned, however, there are many examples of unwed girls/women who experience pregnancy and are not punished by any religious or civil authority. My discussion with Fatuma, and her response, begs the question: What role does Islam play in the lives of Swahili women and men in Tanzania? And, what are the experiences and expectations of never married, married, and divorced women and men.

Although Tanga is a recognized Muslim center in East Africa, *Sharia*¹ courts do not have a presence there, or anywhere else in mainland Tanzania (see Stiles 2005, 2009 for analysis of Islamic courts in Zanzibar). This absence of *Sharia* courts undoubtedly has a significant impact on the lives of Swahili women and is a key element in the variability of Islam cross-culturally. Each community has its own history – and hence, there is the need to periodize Muslim discourses in specific locations as well as referring to broad similarities (Moghissi 2005). The actual lives of women and men in Muslim societies show similarities, but also enormous differences from one period of time to another, between different communities, and within the same societies at any point in time.

The story of Amina Lawal ends well for her. Despite months of unnecessary legal battles,² her conviction was overturned and she has since remarried. The conversations I had with Swahili Muslim women and men regarding Amina's case highlighted their own sense of the possible meanings of Islam in their lives and how this is different from other Islamic communities in Africa and the world. The gendered dynamics of Amina's case, and the gendered conviction she received from male Islamic judges, highlights the power that Muslim men wield in some Islamic settings. Furthermore, one cannot help but wonder about the father of Amina's child. Why was he not likewise sentenced to stoning? In fact, he was not prosecuted due to a "lack of

¹ "Also meaning 'path' in Arabic, *sharia* guides all aspects of Muslim life including daily routines, familial and religious obligations, and financial dealings. It is derived primarily from the Quran and the Sunna--the sayings, practices, and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. Precedents and analogy applied by Muslim scholars are used to address new issues. The consensus of the Muslim community also plays a role in defining this theological manual" (Vriens 2009).

² Nigerian and international humanitarian organizations overturned Amina's conviction using the "sleeping fetus" argument put forth by the *Malilki* school, in which a fetus is thought to be able to "sleep" in the womb for up to 3 years, so a divorced or widowed woman's former husband can have legal paternity even for a baby born long after the union ended (Delong-Bas 2004).

evidence” and was deemed innocent by the court. In our discussions Fatuma also never questioned the responsibility of the man in this scenario. Finally, it should be noted that *Sharia* law was only recently established in northern Nigeria's mostly Muslim state of Zamfara, the state in which Amina Lawal resided, in 2000. Under *Sharia* law, pregnancy outside of marriages constitutes sufficient evidence, in some but not all Muslim areas, for a woman to be convicted of adultery with a punishment of stoning. Among the world's countries with Muslim majorities, very few exercise this form of punishment and then only rarely (examples include Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iran – working to omit it, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan). Islam, despite scholarly work that links it to a traditional-like past, is like other major world religions and is, by definition, a globalizing project (van Binsbergen and van Dijk 2004).

I begin with this discussion I had with a Swahili woman about a Nigerian case because it highlights three key aspects of my study—1) the concept of Islam is a changing construction based on geographic location, social norms, interpretation of judicial/civic structures, history, etc. 2) gender identity is a second factor through which we can more fully analyze the role of Islam as well as better understand the interpersonal relationships of Muslim men and women by looking at both men's and women's experiences and attitudes, and 3) the specific attitudes and expectations towards love, sex, pregnancy, marriage, divorce, remarriage, polygyny, etc. that this research focuses on are undoubtedly effected by processes of social change.

This is a dissertation about marriage and divorce practices among Swahili Muslims in Tanzania (Figure 1) and was conducted in Peponi,³ a coastal village in the Northeastern part of the country south of Tanga. Throughout this dissertation I keep three main lines of inquiry central to my analysis: the role of gender, Islam, and social change.



Figure 1: Map of Tanzania. Peponi is a small fishing village in the northeast of Tanzania, south of Tanga and north of Pangani.

Swahili marriage has long been characterized by serial monogamy, men's aspirations for polygyny, and high levels of divorce. Based on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork, this research incorporates methods and theory from the fields of anthropology and population studies to address marriage and divorce in the context of the dynamic relationship between Islam, gender and culture among Swahili Muslims. A crucial aspect of understanding these processes is to explore the complex and

³ Peponi is a pseudonym for a village of 2400 people located between Tanga and Pangani in coastal Tanzania.

multidimensional nature of relationships between men and women in Swahili society. In order to do so, I depart from the traditional woman-centric approaches to marriage, divorce, and polygyny and consider premarital relationships, weddings, marriage, polygyny, divorce and remarriage from the perspective(s) of both men and women.

In this dissertation I build upon the existing anthropological literature of marriage and divorce among Muslims in Swahili society. What stands out the most about this literature is the lack of a gendered person-centered approach. To date, divorce has been analyzed as an attribute of women only, while the experiences of men have been ignored, or, if they are included, are treated as secondary (Caplan 1968; Caplan 1984; Gomm 1972; Hirsch 1998; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979). Moreover, Muslim women are portrayed as having little, if any, agency and no options for surviving without a husband (see Stiles 2009 for an exception). Research on Christian women in other parts of Tanzania, in contrast, demonstrates that gender relationships are changing and women have expressed reluctance to marry and/or they are more likely to dissolve marriages in which they are unhappy (Setel 2000; Stambach 2000). These studies have linked this to women's assertion of more control over their life course. My research demonstrates that coastal Muslim women, like Christian women in other parts of Tanzania, have new opportunities today and are making similar choices with respect to delaying first marriage and a reluctance to remarry. The literature also presents divorce and marriage as static events without considering the social trajectory into which they fit. These analyses have been useful, but have not been rooted in intensive ethnographic participant observation which acknowledge divorce as a process in which both men and women act and are acted upon.

CONTINUING AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISLAM IN AFRICA

Bernal points out, in her analysis of changing Muslim traditions in northern Sudan, that Islam and gender intertwine in complex ways (Bernal 1994). I aim to enrich our understanding of gender and religion in the Muslim world. I illuminate this intertwining of gender and religion by investigating how Swahili women and men navigate the processes of marriage and divorce and address their gender-specific needs, concerns, and aspirations. Islam forms an essential axis on which everyday activities, communications, and transactions in Peponi turn. Prayer punctuates everyday life and sets a rhythm for the progression of daily rituals. For the Swahili, marriage and religion are intricately linked, for they see marriage as a moral institution that reflects Muslim values (Caplan 1984; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979; Colson 1963; Creighton and Omari 1995; Landberg 1986; Le-Guenec-Coppens 1987; Mirza and Strobel 1989; Stiles 2002; Stiles 2005). Some scholars, such as Yusuf in Nigeria, describe marriage for Muslims as a “religious responsibility to be undertaken by those who are ready to live according to rules guiding the institution” (Yusuf 2008:3). Others, such as Jones (2008) argue that the classical jurists regarded marriage as the “normal ultimate state of human beings that inevitably [resulted] under normal circumstances in offspring” (62). While Islam is a key attribute of Swahili marriage Yusuf’s description of marriage might be an ideal Swahili people aspire to, however, it does not adequately represent Swahili marital life in practice.

This dissertation contributes to the research on Muslim women in sub-Saharan Africa that are conspicuously absent in the literature (notable exceptions include Alidou 2005; Callaway 1987; Caplan 1984; Coles and Mack 1991; Cooper 1997; Hirsch 1998;

Masquelier 2009; Popenoe 2004; Saunders 1978, Stiles 2005; Strobel 2009). Masquelier aptly observes that the literature on Muslim women is plentiful in countries deemed Arabic, such as Sudan or Egypt, however, it is “as if Muslim women from other parts of Africa were somehow irrelevant, a hint perhaps that the field of Islamic studies still largely operates under the premise that African Islam is not ‘real’ Islam” (Masquelier 2009:26).

Talal Asad, in his paper *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (1986) recognized an increasing interest in something called the “Anthropology of Islam.” He posits, “What, exactly, is the anthropology of Islam?” (Asad 1996:1) (emphasis mine). He is critical of how anthropologists have investigated Islam as a category of analysis. His survey of the anthropology literature revealed that there are three common answers to his question: “(1) that in the final analysis there is no such theoretical object as Islam; (2) that Islam is the anthropologist’s label for a heterogeneous collection of items, each of which has been designated Islamic by informants; (3) that Islam is a distinctive historical totality which organizes various aspects of social life” (Asad 1996:1). Like Masquelier (2005, 2009) and others (Mahmood 2005), my exploration of Islam and Muslim practices among the Swahili of coastal Tanzania is influenced by Talal Asad’s concept of “discursive tradition” (Asad 1996:14). According to Asad, Islam is “neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition” (1986:14). Anthropologists writing about Islam must therefore begin, “as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the *Hadith* [the preserved records of the Prophet’s words and deeds]” (Asad 1996:14). This means essentially recognizing that Islam

consists of discourses “that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice, that precisely because it is established, has a history” (Asad 1996:14).

Masquelier builds upon Asad’s definition: “tradition here is not an unchanging set of cultural prescriptions, a mere repetition of old forms that buffers its practitioners from a threatening modernity; instead it is a set of discourses that instruct how a practice is best secured and provides justification for why it should be maintained, modified, or rejected” (Masquelier 2009:9). Asad’s concept of discursive tradition, and Masquelier’s further definition, enables us to consider what Islam might mean to ordinary Muslims, regardless of their degree of literacy and education and their religious ideologies (Masquelier 2009). Asad further argues that what makes a practice Islamic is that it is “authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims” (Asad 1996:14). From this, Masquelier determines that competing modes of religious discourses, which have emerged in her field site, are all Islamic (Masquelier 2009:9) (my emphasis). The traditions of the Swahili, and all Muslims, are far from being fixed in time, they are continually reformulated, and the “practices they authorize acquire significance insofar as they are thought to be historical, established, and authentic” (Masquelier 2009:9).

Furthermore, Masquelier argues there is “. . . only one Islam. To deny or doubt it is, most Muslims would agree, tantamount to blasphemy.” (Masquelier 2009:20). A young man from Peponi discussed Islam in an in-depth interview in 2004:

My religion is very important. I think it is important that we are given training at school and we read books on religion to understand it. Islam in Peponi is the same as Islam in Nigeria, Saudia Arabia, India, it is exactly the same, no differences all. Although the *Sharia* is different in different

places. We don't hit women like Nigeria, myself, I think this *Sharia* is *sawasawa*, (OK), because it helps people to be good and it reduces adultery.

Omari, another young man from Peponi said: “We Muslims, all over the world, share one God, *Allah*. But, sometimes we do things differently, for example, here we aren't very strict. I think these *Sharia* things, like Nigeria, are bad. We do not want them here.” So, we are faced with how to reconcile the very real fact that there are “very diverse – if not diverging – religious beliefs and practices of Muslims [that need to] be comprehended with a single idea of ‘Islam’” (Launay 1992:5). There is, then, a need to both document the diversity of Muslim societies and trace the development of Islam in the context of specific cultural and historical conditions, without violating the unitary nature of Islam (Masquelier 2009:21). Masquelier is critical of:

analyses emphasizing the pluralistic, localized character of Islam at the expense of its global dimensions tended to overlook the historical connections between Muslim societies (Bowen 1993; Marsden 2005; Soares 2005). In their concern for localized expressions of religiosity, Anthropologists often focused on elements that distinguished the societies they were studying, while ignoring what they shared with other Muslims. Muslim practices were reduced to cultural idiosyncrasy (Masquelier 2009:21).

The concept, put forth by Asad, of “discursive tradition” allows scholars to consider how Muslims discursively engage with and reflect on the past to articulate meaningful formulations of the problems and possibilities of the present without appearing to reject past traditions or invent new ones (Asad 1996; Masquelier 2009). Additionally, gender relations can also govern Islamic beliefs and practices at times, as women and men understand their faith differently and engage in divergent religious acts – as was demonstrated in Masquelier's case in Niger where women actively resisted attempts by men to reduce or eliminate bridewealth payments to brides and their families.

Just as gender is socially constructed, and reconstructed, yet somehow always appears primordial and constant, Islam is reinvented to meet new needs (Bernal 1994; Bernal 1997).

This dissertation addresses the culturally specific and personalized strategies through which Swahili men and women navigate their relationship life courses and their religious identities. “By focusing on actors rather than institutions and by tracing the meanings Islam has for people instead of assuming that Islam always determines their choices and constraints,” (Masquelier 2009:24) my study seeks to illuminate how men and women relate to doctrine in practical ways and how they selectively use Islam since Muslim identity is central to the ways that Swahili people constitute themselves as persons (Middleton 1992). Inspired by recent studies on the personal experience of Muslim women (Masquelier 2009; Mahmood 2005; Abu-Lughod 1998; Deeb 2006), I try to particularize Swahili women and men’s understanding of Islam as it relates to their marital choices and divorce experiences.

TWO SIDES TO THE STORY: FROM WOMAN-CENTRIC TO GENDERED

In her comprehensive review article on what feminist contributions could offer to the field of demography, Riley concluded that evidence and research called for “culturally grounded research on gender that does not assume that western notions of any institutions or concepts, including gender, status, and power, are necessarily similarly valued or interpreted in societies” (1999:383). Some have criticized gender studies saying that it is a discipline that “philosophizes, theorizes and politicizes on the nature of the female gender” as a social construct, to the point of excluding the male gender from

analysis (Nathanson and Young 2006:28). They also claim that the “gender” in gender studies is “routinely used as a synonym for ‘women’” (Nathanson and Young 2006). Historically, anthropology, like other academic disciplines, was andocentric with a “deeply rooted male orientation” (Reiter 1975:12). The feminist and gender studies research of the 70s, 80s and 90s was a direct response to the andocentric research that preceded it. In the 1990s research on masculinity resurged all over the globe (Gutman 1996; Herdt 1981; Herzfeld 1986; Higgins and Coen 2000; Townsend 2002).

My research moves beyond these women-centric, and previously andocentric, studies and employs gender in a way that considers both men and women. Amina Lawal’s case in Nigeria was about a woman subjected to the powerful and complicated structure of a gendered Islamic *Sharia* court. It is necessary to do more than ask: “Where are the men?” Everyone assumes that men have all the power, but by speaking to individual men, women, and couples I gained more substantial insight into the gendered role and experience of Islam in analyzing the processes of marriage and divorce. Social Scientists working in Tanzania have noted that there is a theme that has been “strangely neglected in studies of gender relations in Africa and that is masculine studies (Creighton and Omari 2000:4).

If scholarship on women has achieved anything over the last several decades, it is the recognition that gender is not a given but is historically and socially constructed according to particular local realities (Bernal 1994). For Muslim women the case is even more complicated because they have been, and continue to be, further defined by assumptions about their religion. Many scholars of women in Islamic society partly define their mission as one of demystifying Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women,

such as subservient wives or erotic harem girls (Bernal 1994). Yet Bernal, and others (Bernal 1994; Abu-Lughod 1998; Abu-Lughod 2002; Abu-Lughod 1989; Obermeyer 1994; Obermeyer 1992), describe this scholarship itself as shaped by Orientalist views of Islam as timeless, monolithic, and a rigid system. It is therefore, necessary for research, like my own, to consider the agency of both women and men with an analysis grounded in the complex intertwining of gender and Islam.

The importance of gender as a category of analysis over the past four decades cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the definition of gender over this time period has changed, grown, and evolved. For me, a gendered analysis involves considering the views, expectations, and experiences of both men and women, and the relationship between them. If we truly want to understand an institution such as marriage, which involves both men and women, we undoubtedly must consult both men and women. It is this that has guided me in my research and influenced me to conduct my research in such a way that the experiences of both women and men are included. During my time in Peponi I endeavored to give both men and women equal opportunity to share their opinions, experiences, and expectations with me and I attempted to observe both the actions of men and women.

SOCIAL CHANGE: WOMEN AND MEN INVOKE GLOBAL DISCOURSES FOR PERSONAL LOCAL ASPIRATIONS

For the past two decades anthropologists have examined how the encounter between local and translocal/global cultural currents reshapes social practices and cultural configurations (Grosz-Ngaté and Kokole 1997). Grosz-Ngaté criticizes the focus on the socioeconomic dimensions of capitalist expansion and globalization rather than on the

gendered nature of cultural flows across social boundaries or the ways in which such flows are mediated by local gender constructs and relations (Grosz-Ngaté and Kokole 1997). Hirsch et al. examine how the field of anthropology has shifted in its approach to a “spectrum of gendered possibilities; from a concern with socially structured roles to analyses of culture, performance, and political economy; and from a narrow localism to a concern with gender as a dialectical construction of both local and global forces” (Hirsch et al. 2009:9). In *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture* the authors challenge the dominant view that globalization is a primary threat to African societies (van Binsbergen and van Dijk 2004). Instead, they emphasize African agency in situating globality, that is, in selectively and creatively appropriating elements of the emerging global culture. They present the idea that African societies respond to globalization:

by the pursuit of at least two forms of social and cultural resilience. First, there is a form of resilience which emphasizes a proud conscious and innovative return to their own time-honoured resources of spirituality, values, world view, forms of social and political organisation, and secondly, another form of resilience can contradict and contest globalization by resisting it on its own terms and by fighting its influence with its own weapons, so to speak (van Binsbergen and van Dijk 2004:40).

Mesquelier’s research in Niger is an appropriate example of this, where women’s active engagement in redefining marriage as a traditional, female-centered process highlights the complex ways in which globalization and belonging work to:

simultaneously encompass and reject imported forms as they transform them. Put differently, women’s participation in the matrimonial economy and their selective appropriation of foreignness is a striking illustration of how globalization, far from simply leading to an erasure of local traditions, is directly implicated in the “production of locality” (Appadurai 1996:178) (Masquelier 2009:203).

Not unlike relations between men and women in Masquelier's fieldsite, in-depth interviews and survey data from my time in Peponi equally demonstrate that men and women have dramatically different, gendered, expectations of their life course in terms of relationships, which are related to the broader changes in local practices of Islam and modern notions of love and romance:

As elsewhere in the world, Islam has recently taken on new meaning for Dogondoutchi residents searching for viable alternatives to the perceived failure of Western models of gender, family and society. New modes of religiosity, new expressions of piety, and new definitions of morality have emerged in past decades to affirm the centrality of Islam in public and private life (Masquelier 2009:xvii).

Women and men invoke different discourses when discussing their expectations of marriage and their relationship life cycle. Men refer to their rights as outlined by Islam. They engage with the discourses of Islam – even if their actions do not necessarily reflect them in practice. Women refer to expectations of love and romance, which they describe in terms of material demonstrations of affection and monogamy.

Beach Boys vs. Al-Qaeda: A Peponi Football Match

An example of men's appropriation of global discourses of Islam is evident in the following anecdotes that occurred during my time in Peponi. These examples serve to illustrate the multiple ways difficult and contested ideas find new and unusual meaning. Three afternoons a week the local football (soccer) teams play on the field adjacent to the main road (which bisects the village). When I learned that the teams had names, I asked my friend Jumaa, who played for the Beach Boys, the name of the other team. He hesitated to tell me, although eventually he did tell me that the other team was called Al-Qaeda. The irony of the Beach Boys vs. Al-Qaeda was not lost on me – in a world of

global discourses it was in some ways fantastical that these two “teams” were to meet on a dirt football pitch in Peponi. Jumaa described the situation of naming: “We just choose names that are cool. It’s not because they [the Peponi football players] are part of Al-Qaeda, or because they support those ideas, it’s just a famous name, like Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Elvis, or Arnold Schwarzenegger.” So, they appropriate internationally “famous” names for their own purposes – part of which is to gain their own notoriety.

There appeared to be an endless list of famous American or “Western” names to choose from. I had already noticed all the youth wearing Osama Bin Laden t-shirts with images of the twin towers in NYC burning up in Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Nairobi, Zanzibar, Tanga, and even Peponi. Several times I had interesting conversations with young men about these t-shirts. One young man appeared embarrassed to be wearing the shirt in front of me. I asked him about the shirt, and what it meant to him. “I don’t like that this happened. I’m not wearing this because I like what happened. It’s just funny. Bin Laden is funny.” Of course, to me this image did not represent something “funny” and the young man was sensitive enough to realize that. I don’t think his explanation of funny is quite accurate. I believe he was more precisely referring to the fact that it is famous, well known, notorious, and talked about, not funny. Some find these explanations naïve, and I would not disagree. Friends and family were slightly appalled when they heard this story – and worried about my safety as a result. They thought of the 1998 attacks to U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The fact is, those attacks, like the attacks in the U.S, were not perpetrated by Kenyans or Tanzanians. When I think about the appropriation of names like “Al-Qaeda” for a football team name I think back to

conversations I had, mostly with men, in Peponi about religion and world history.

In the U.S., I often encounter criticism by people who claim I am naïve to think Muslims in Tanzania who name their soccer team “Al-Qaeda” are not nefarious. Rather than “funny” or “naïve,” they argue that Peponi team nomenclature indicates that they are, in fact, “dangerous.” Of course, I attempt to describe the situation more fully. I share a conversation I had with a man I considered to be one of the most worldly and educated people I knew in Peponi. This man did not know about Judaism as a world religion; he knew about WWII, but not what happened or why it happened; he did not know the word “Holocaust”, or to what it referred. I would argue, and I believe many would agree, this lack of knowledge about world history is naïve. Many Peponi people do not know these facts. Given this naiveté with regard to another tragic world circumstance, I find the “naïve” explanations of team names believable. This is not at all to say that there might not be people in Tanzania who agree with the philosophy or actions of Al-Qaeda.

Another time I was about to board a *dhow* (see Figure 2) with two friends visiting me from New York City. They lived in SoHo Manhattan during the September 11th



Figure 2: A *dhow* is a traditional Arab sailboat. It is primarily used along the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, India and East Africa. *Dhows* continue to make journeys from the Persian Gulf and East Africa using sails as their only means of propulsion during the monsoon season.

attacks to the World Trade Centers. It was midnight and we were about to embark on a sailing adventure from Peponi to Zanzibar – a technically illegal trip for foreigners because the boats do not have motors. The trip can take anywhere from 6 to 12 hours depending on the wind and tide. Local traders make the trip daily and the timing of the trip depends on the tide. Each boat has a government issued ID number and a name given by the owner. Figure 3 shows the bow of a boat with the name/ID of “M.V. SAFIA No. 2.”



Figure 3: A *dhow* always has a name and I.D. number. This *dhow* is "M.V. SAFIA No. 2" and is seen here in the harbor of Tanga.

The omnipresent Islamic symbol half crescent and star is located just below the name of the boat to the right. My neighbor in Peponi, a captain of his own boat, permitted us to sail with him to Zanzibar. It was dark, but with the help of a full moon, we noticed the “name” of the boat: “Al-Qaeda.” My friends began whispering furtively, nervous and unsure. I quickly explained to them that naming the boat “Al-Qaeda” did not indicate any connection to Al-Qaeda, or other Islamic terrorist organizations, but was rather something famous and notorious from the Muslim world that locals appropriate in their

own way. My friends were, I think, calmed, by this explanation. Later, once we were underway, the captain asked me if my friends were nervous because of the name of his boat. I replied honestly, “Yes, at first they were a bit worried. I explained that you are not a representative of Al-Qaeda, but that people here like the name because it is famous.” He agreed with my explanation and was happy that my friends were not anxious.

Earlier I noted my surprise that Fatuma was even paying attention to the story of Amina Lawal. Fatuma noted, “We are all Muslims here.” I shouldn’t have seemed surprised. Her discussion of Islam highlights the tremendous impact of these global discourses in communities, between countries, and globally.

Women and Romance

Love, romance, and monogamy are themes, to which women in Peponi commonly refer and aspire. Padilla et al., in their edited volume *Love and Globalization:*

Transformations of Intimacy in the Contemporary World, recognize that love is:

a particularly useful lens for social analysis, providing as it does a glimpse onto the complex interconnections between cultural, economic, interpersonal, and emotional realms of experience. Love, in a word, is holistic. As a master trope as pervasive as it is variable, love is highly productive as a tool for social analysis, revealing some of the most basic ways that human societies organize social life, meaning, and intimate experiences, as well as show individuals enact, resist, or transform social discourses of love within specific cultural and historical contexts (Padilla et al. 2007:ix).

Again, like cultural constructions of gender and Islam, love is an often “naturalized” category, and it is this that makes it powerful in its capacity to shape the most fundamental characteristics of social organization (Padilla et al. 2007:ix). In Figure 4 a

dalla dalla with the words “I love so much” is an example of the way love is adopted and adapted. *Dalla Dalla* owners are known for choosing only “cool” and “modern” phrases for their vans.



Figure 4: "I love so much" a *dalla dalla* (minibus) in Tanga.

Cole et al. in their volume *Love in Africa* demonstrate that Africans have long engaged in remaking local affective ideals and practices by adapting, utilizing, and manipulating those from elsewhere (Cole and Thomas 2009). They persuasively point to involvement with Christian missionaries, European colonial regimes, as well as the impact of Islam or the mid-twentieth century arrival of South Asian films as areas where Africans have interacted with and adapted to outside influences (Cole and Thomas 2009:5). “Contemporary discourses and practices of love in Africa emerge from the entanglement of such influences with endogenous ideologies and economics of affection” (Cole and Thomas 2009:5).

The work of Hollos and Larsen demonstrate a shift from “traditional” marriage to “companionate” marriage in a half Lutheran half Muslim community in northern Tanzania (2003). Hollos and Larsen conclude that the determining factor for

contraception and thus for fertility limitation in this society is the nature of the conjugal union.

The ethnographic research and the in-depth interviews found that a marital union where the interests of men and women converge and where the partners communicate about decisions facilitates the acceptance of fertility limitation. It was found that women's education and increasing autonomy, in the context of an increasing reliance on the cash economy by the men, resulted in the development of a form of marriage new to this part of Africa (Hollos and Larsen 2003:267).

This work on companionate marriage and contraception is in response to a body of literature on East African women, particularly in patrilineal societies, where women were portrayed as relatively powerless. "This subjugation is effected primarily through the institution of marriage in which, with the payment of the bridewealth, the husband acquires rights to the wife's productive and reproductive lives" (Hollos and Larsen 2003:258). More recently, research has contested these portrayals of women as powerless and demonstrates that there are myriad avenues open to women through which they can assume power. Hollos and Larsen, as well as others, indicate "women no longer have to resort to alternative or surreptitious routes of attaining power and authority within their marital union, but assume a position of equal power and responsibility for the welfare of their family unit with their men" (2003:274). Research in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades indicates that the expectations and experiences of women and men in their relationships, particularly their marital relationships, are changing, expanding and shifting. The experiences, and expectations of women, in particular, are influenced by their engagement with modern and global ideas about love and monogamy. Whether they are able to achieve it is another question altogether.

FIELD SITES REVISITED: LONGITUDINAL COMPARISONS AND CHANGE

The research for Pamela Landberg's dissertation *Kinship and Community in a Tanzanian Coastal Village* (1977) and her chapter in the edited volume *Widows in Africa* (1986) was conducted in 1968 in the same coastal community in which I conducted my own research. I deliberately chose to revisit her field site because I found "re-studies" like Hutchinson (1990) and Cligget (2005) compelling. The ability to examine a question with the capacity to look at particular people (the same interviewees/informants) and communities with the benefit of longitudinal data was enticing to me. Landberg's dissertation explored marriage and divorce at length. Her work, however, had a particular bent on what marriage tells us about the nature and structure of cognatic descent groups, on inter-village relations, and on the process by which migrants were assimilated into coastal communities (Landberg 1977:137). Anthropologists have documented marriage and divorce practices of Swahili people for the past century, and Landberg's research in the 1960s in Peponi provided an excellent opportunity to compare changes in the marriage and divorce practices and processes in a Swahili community.

Contemporary anthropologists have undertaken many important re-readings of colonial-era ethnographies. Sharon Hutchinson's work with the Nuer (1996) is a noteworthy example because she explicitly engages with Evans-Pritchard's work. Not only does she correct⁴ Evans-Pritchard in a number of instances, she brings the story of the Nuer up to date. Hutchinson spent considerable time conducting her own fieldwork in Nuer communities, visiting the same sites as Evans-Pritchard. Her work shows not only what has happened to the Nuer since their 1930s encounters with Evans-Pritchard,

⁴ Hutchinson says "Evans-Pritchard was mistaken about this last point: the concept of *thung yiika* applied only in cases of impregnated girls whose lovers, for whatever reason, failed to marry them" (1990: 396).

but, more importantly, what is to be gained from a thoroughly historicized treatment of ethnographic materials (Hutchinson 1996). For example, Hutchinson compares divorce practices, rates and processes among the Nuer over time by comparing her own data on marriage and divorce to that of Evans-Pritchard (Hutchinson 1990). She is specifically motivated by what she sees as a problematic view of marriage in Africa:

many anthropologists continue to take a view of African marriage which ethnocentrically equates stability with the degree of rights husbands and their kin formally acquire in a woman through bride wealth payments. . . this idea surfaces . . . in a host of recent . . . studies, all of which assume that the greater these rights, the less likely is jural divorce” (Hutchinson 1990:393).

She sees that anthropologists quite readily created a link between ‘marital stability’ and the completeness of men’s control over women within marriage so much so that there “appears to be a kind of naturalization of these ideas inherent in the very terms of these discussions” (Hutchinson 1990:394). It seems particularly appropriate that she returned to the fieldsite(s) of Evans-Pritchard to conduct this work because it was the publication of Evans-Pritchard’s influential *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* in 1951 that began the ‘bridewealth/marriage stability’ debate (Hutchinson 1990:395). Furthermore, Evans-Pritchard’s classic monographs on the Nuer are still widely viewed as the “prototypical example of a ‘low-divorce’ society – complete with ‘high’ bride wealth payments, patrilineal descent, polygyny, ‘strong’ father rights, the ‘house-property complex,’ ‘woman-to-woman’ marriage, the levirate, and so forth” (Hutchinson 1990). She refutes the numerous anthropological analyses of divorce that more rights for husbands and their kin equals less divorce and increased marital stability with her research that demonstrates that the rise in jural divorce rates among the Western Nuer

accompanied an increase in the specific rights the husband and his kin were assumed to have in the wife, rather than the reverse (Hutchinson 1990:408).

Another example is the research of Lisa Cliggett (2005) whose work on the patterns of social change among Gwembe Tonga communities in Zambia makes several important contributions to the literature on Africa. She revisited the fieldsites of Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder in the Zambia with their enthusiastic support. Colson and Scudder suggested she conduct her doctoral work in their fieldsites and provided contacts, research assistants, and access to 50 years worth of census material – a substantial foundation of knowledge to start a Ph.D. thesis, indeed (Cliggett 2005:26). Cliggett's study gives an excellent account of historical changes of farming, social institutions, and access to land and livestock among Gwembe people in the past 40 years. Her research deals with socioeconomic change in Zambia, its effects on family relationships, and how Gwembe Tonga people, especially older persons, have learned to cope in an economy of scarcity and ongoing food insecurity of varying intensities. Specifically she documents responses to hunger and food stress, particularly the differential impacts experienced by the elderly, and how gender influences their ability to cope with food shortage. Cliggett shows how aging people, as they become less capable of self-sufficiency, use their social and kin networks to mobilize support. Contrary to the widely held view that most Africans invariably look after the aging generation, Cliggett demonstrates that older women must utilize intersecting spheres of support through their matrilineage and immediate descendants to encourage younger people to protect their welfare in times of food scarcity. To achieve the same end, men use different tactics, of more overt intimidation and coercion, supplemented by their abilities to marry

polygynously and thus ensure they have a younger and abler wife as they age.

Particularly relevant to my own chapter on *Women, Work & (Re)marriage* (Ch. 7)

Cligget discusses gender and generating livelihoods. Her example of how women in her study benefit from brewing beer, which there is an insatiable market for (Cliggett 2005) was compelling because beer sales are an efficient way of redistributing men's income to women (Colson and Scudder 1988). One group of women, consisting of four divorced sisters and their divorced mother, developed a niche because they had established the equivalent of a full time bar, which was unusual because most women were unable to maintain an on-going supply of alcohol (Cliggett 2005). In these discussions, Cliggett demonstrates the resourcefulness and personal agency that characterize rural Africans, and illustrates the heterogeneity of communities we often ignore.

Research, like that of Cliggett (2005) and Hutchinson (1990), is persuasive in its own right, but even more compelling because they engage with not only the ideas of the work of scholars whose work came before their own, but with the exact same place and often the same people. Interacting with the work of previous anthropologists gives a historical aspect often missing from contemporary research and further allows for a discussion of the impact of social change in meaningful and engaging ways. I conducted my research in the same fieldsite as Pamela and Leif Landberg and engaged, specifically, with Pamela Landberg's research on kinship, marriage, divorce, and weddings. It is my hope that this engagement with her work has improved my own. Furthermore, that interacting with her work better enables me to speak to the theme of social change which threads throughout this dissertation.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Historically, the Swahili people are recognized for their high divorce rates; indeed, serial monogamy, that is marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce and so on, is, and has been, described as a common pattern for both men and women. Approaches to understanding marriage and marital instability among the Swahili have varied, but what is unequivocal is that divorce remains common. In this dissertation I demonstrate the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, meanings and realities of gendered identities and relationships as they are related to demographic behavior. I also contend there are many acceptable ways to be a good woman/wife or man/husband and experiencing divorce is not stigmatized as previously described in the literature. The premise of this research is that marriage and divorce are cultural processes and they are not isolated events, moreover, that nuptiality should be examined from a gendered perspective. That is, I consider the differences, and similarities, that exist between men and women (young, middle aged, and elderly) in terms of the expectations and practices surrounding marriage and divorce. Further, I explore the multiple meanings surrounding the practices and interpretations of Islam (Moghissi 2005; Mahmood 2005; Masquelier 2004; Mir-Hosseini 2000), as well as those surrounding modern African love (Cole and Thomas 2009; Smith 2009; Lewinson 2006), as vital to understanding the ties between women and men's motivations, values, and goals associated with these demographic processes.

By using a gendered approach, with particular attention to the agency of men and women, in which action or practice is constituted in dialectical relation between persons acting and the settings of their activities, and where the experiences and opinions of both men and women are explored, I provide a framework for considering marriage and

divorce among the Swahili. I am interested in the meaning and expectations of marriage in the context of contemporary and apparent long-standing high rates of divorce among Swahili peoples. Given the many changes in Swahili society and anthropological inquiry since the 1960s and 70s, when most studies of divorce among the Swahili were conducted, this dissertation provides a contemporary nuanced understanding of current practices and perceptions of marriage and divorce in the coastal community of Peponi through the lens of Islam, gendered analysis, and global discourses.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Chapter Two, “Setting, a Fieldsite Revisited, and Methods” provides a background of the location, a definition for Swahili, and an overview of the village including a presentation of the data derived from the household census and a survey of 350 ever married men and women. Also, I provide an explanation for why I chose this particular field site and in-depth explanation of methodology.

Chapter Three, “Premarital Practices and Swahili Weddings,” explores the changing landscape of courtship and pregnancy among the Swahili. In the last 50 years, with the growing emphasis and importance of education, especially primary education, age at first marriage has been postponed significantly, however, age at first pregnancy appears to have remained the same, leading to a rise in what is often categorized as “premarital fertility” (Bledsoe and Pison 1994). In Peponi, premarital fertility and even abortion are not unusual. In addition, young men and women who have children together do not necessarily find this reason enough to marry. I examine the impact these

processes are having on Swahili weddings and question the role of Swahili weddings as the ultimate rite of passage determining adult status.

Chapter Four “*Looking outside the marriage: Choice and Fidelity in Marriage*” builds upon the existing anthropological literature of marriage among Muslims in Swahili society and asks what role Islam plays in Swahili marriages historically, and today, by contesting narrow portrayals of Islam in relationship to men’s and women’s expectations. This chapter points out that the symbolic importance of marriage among Swahili Muslims misleadingly suggests partnerships are static, stable entities over time, when in fact they are highly fluid for both men and women. Even the point at which a marriage ends is ambiguous. Women and men move out of, and back into, a single marriage, as well as will likely transition into and out of a series of marriages over their life course. This reality is in contrast to, especially women’s, expectations of marriage. Women have romantic, monogamous, and partner oriented hopes for their life course. They describe their expectations in terms of hopes but most acknowledge that these hopes are unrealistic. Men present an entirely different set of relationship expectations and concerns. Most young men do not expect their first marriage to endure and they have no intention of staying married to the same woman for their entire lives. In fact, they look forward to exercising their rights, which they describe as being acceptable by Islam.

Chapter Five “Gendered and Generational Perspectives on Polygyny” points out that the fear, threat, or reality of polygyny is the most frequently cited explanation for wanting a divorce among women, and concomitantly, is one of the most frequently cited desires of men to achieve in their lifetime. As in each of the chapters of this dissertation there are three theoretical threads with which to consider polygyny: 1) I evaluate

polygyny from a gendered perspective, incorporating the views and attitudes of both men and women; 2) I consider the role of Islam in this community, and beyond, in terms of its influence on this aspect of life; and 3) I account for the impact of social change in this community and the manner in which it has impacted this part of people's lives. To date research on polygyny in Africa has taken a decidedly women-centric approach. This chapter considers women's views, but also examines men's expectations, desires, and realities. Furthermore, I explore how our (mis)understandings and representations of Islam, as a world religion, have influenced previous research on polygyny. And, finally this chapter explores what women's and men's goals and fears regarding polygyny tell us about marriage, more generally, and divorce more specifically.

Chapter Six, "Swahili Divorce: Process, Agency, and Power" provides a nuanced understanding of current practices and perceptions of divorce in relation to the ideals and norms of marriage in a Swahili community. I argue that, despite popular portrayals and understandings, Muslim women do have power in the marital relationship, although not in expected ways. Previous research also describes women as having little, if any, agency in the marriage and divorce process. Gender disputes are an important part of the cultural landscape and one learns a significant amount about the nature of gender relations and the struggle for rights and obligations in an examination of divorce. Men have certain institutional advantages over their wives and children and benefit from social patterns such as polygyny, patriliney, patrilocality, and political/economic authority. Women, on the other hand, can use their sexuality, kinship networks, supernatural threats, and marital protocol to counter their husbands' actions. In addition to exploring the gendered nature of divorce this chapter considers the process of divorce. In Tanzania, the civil codes of

Sharia are in force but, unlike Kenya and Zanzibar, state courts, and not Islamic ones apply them. Individual judges – regardless of their religion – use customary (traditional), civil, or Islamic family law, depending on the religious background of the accused. Peponi does not have a court, although a traveling judge visits several times a year. Thus, most divorce is informal and done by repudiation. Despite this, in all Swahili communities divorce is accepted as a normal part of most marriages (Caplan 1968; Gomm 1972; Hirsch 1998; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Mirza and Strobel 1989; Stiles 2005).

Chapter Seven, “Women, Work, and (Re)Marriage” examines the role of women’s entrepreneurial work in fashioning opportunities after a divorce, and in creating a “back-up plan” for women who are considering or anticipating a divorce. The possibility of earning money provides the chance for women to remain single after a divorce for as long as they need, or want. Women are choosing this new path with greater frequency, knowing they can manage to support themselves through a combination of entrepreneurial work and living with other female kin. Informal work is by no means new to the women of Peponi, however, today women have expanded their horizons and conduct a wider range of entrepreneurial activities. Along with other small businesses the burgeoning of *hotelis* (small restaurants) demonstrates that women have increased ability to support themselves independent of a husband. This has dramatically impacted women’s outlook on marriage and relationships. Previous research describes women as having little, if any, agency in the marriage and divorce process. Furthermore, the literature describes women as having few resources to support them independently after a divorce. Today, Swahili women do have options outside of marriage; they are not

forced into a quick marriage after a divorce. Remarriage is no longer their only choice. Increasingly women are taking advantage of the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Ultimately, I believe that a grounding in the local context and a commitment to local peoples' actions and words offers a perspective not found in most discussions on marriage, divorce, and polygyny. By focusing on the local we can explore from the ground up, and we can unravel our assumptions about what goes on in families and communities. We develop a much more sensitive vision of what constitutes peoples lives and livelihoods, and can better understand how, exactly, higher level systems, such as national political agenda and global economic forces, impact different groups of people in different local contexts. The stories presented in this dissertation place local people at center stage and focus on their actions, words and thoughts. An alternate analysis could have focused on the broader political-economic systems but by placing people center stage, we come away from the story with an ability to break down stereotypes and generalizations of "poor Muslim people" in rural Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

SETTING, A FIELD SITE REVISITED, AND METHODS

LOCATION

The setting for this research was a Swahili Muslim coastal fishing village, which I call Peponi, a pseudonym that means paradise or heaven in *kiSwahili* – and is inspired by the beauty of the coastal location (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: A view of the Indian Ocean from Peponi village, *dhow* and *ngarawa* sailing boats used by local fishermen, and thatch rooftops in the older section of the village near to the beach.

Region

Peponi is located in Tanga Region (Figure 6– highlighted in red) south from the city of Tanga (the region’s administrative center) and is positioned between Tanga and the once flourishing Arab port town of Pangani.



Figure 6: Map of Tanga Region, includes Pangani District, Pangani Town, and Tanga City. Map courtesy of www.maps.com, used with permission.

Through its location on the Tanga-Pangani road, Peponi has ready access to urban markets and to the amenities provided by a large urban center. Transportation to either Tanga or Pangani is provided by local busses (to Tanga is 80 U.S. cents and to Pangani is 40 U.S. cents), which travel between the two places. A bus passes through Peponi every hour, in each direction, between 6 am and 7 pm. Smaller vehicles, which cannot be relied upon with the same accuracy (because they have no set schedule), pass through as well. In addition, people use the bus to transport goods to, or from, Tanga. For a small additional fee the bus workers will stow your goods. Most people who have consistent buying and selling needs use a local pick-up truck business. In addition, some people travel by bicycle, either to Tanga or Pangani, to avoid the bus fee and to have transportation once arriving in the town.

The village's relationship to Tanga and Pangani has undoubtedly changed over the years, particularly as Tanga has come to dominate the northeastern coastal area of Tanzania. The city of Tanga is the administrative center of Tanga District and Tanga Region and many of the Governmental and Party decisions which affect Peponi and other rural coastal villages are made there. Pangani Town is the administrative center for Pangani District, but both are subsumed under Tanga Region. Pangani is no longer a thriving port town and the district, as a whole, is not well situated in terms of modern economic development. In fact, it is mostly a town in decay with few tourists going out of their way to visit the once beautiful and thriving town because of the terrible conditions of the road and the disrepair of the once beautiful accommodations.

While it does not have the stores and services of Tanga, Pangani remains a destination for the villagers because of the small post office, bank, government run electricity office, hospital (with trained physicians who perform a variety of small surgical procedures), several primary schools, and a secondary school. Pangani is also closer to Peponi than Tanga⁵ and the bus fee is half as much as the bus fee to Tanga. Villagers have family in both Tanga and Pangani, but more people have family and friends in Pangani. The secondary school is one of the most important features for Peponi villagers, as Peponi itself has no secondary school. Pangani is close enough that a student can take the bus to school in the morning and return to Peponi after school in the evening. Most secondary school students, however, prefer to live with relatives in Pangani and visit home on vacations. Occasionally, the local village football (soccer) teams play the Pangani teams in football tournaments.

⁵ It takes nearly an hour to reach Tanga by bus, and only 20 minutes to reach Pangani.

For villagers from Peponi, the large town/small city of Tanga has numerous attractions. There are many people with relatives who live in Tanga, either because they married someone in Tanga, they were able to find a job, or they sought advanced education or training. One of my research assistants who helped with the census, a secondary school graduate, just completed a computer education secretary course in Tanga and returned to Peponi until she could find a job. After a month she left Peponi for Zanzibar where an uncle helped her to organize a job in an office. Many Peponi people use the medical facilities of the city at one time or another. The village has a dispensary and small clinic, but only minor problems are dealt with there. A frequent concern is that the clinic can administer a cure for malaria but cannot test a patient for malaria; resulting in many inaccurate diagnoses and treatments. Those who can afford it travel to Pangani or, preferably, Tanga for any serious medical attention. Tanga has several large markets and many people travel from rural areas to buy and sell there. The *duka* (small general store) owners in Peponi obtain all of their goods from wholesale stores in Tanga. In fact, in recent years one man has made his livelihood through delivering goods to and from Peponi with two small pick-up trucks. In addition, other people go to Tanga from time to time to shop at the stores, visit relatives, attend weddings, and to travel to farther destinations.

In addition to Pangani and Tanga, people from Peponi travel to Zanzibar. In fact, there are numerous examples of women who have married someone from Zanzibar, or men who have moved to Zanzibar and have made a successful living maintaining business ties with Peponi. Most of the village's relationship to Zanzibar hinges on the productive trading in which village businessmen engage. Local young men look to

Zanzibar for new entrepreneurial opportunities. The most common trade is smuggling *sukari*, sugar. It is a lucrative business and quite dangerous as the mainland authorities wish to stop the smuggling. While Zanzibar is part of Tanzania, it has its own independent government and taxes. Many goods, including sugar, are much cheaper on Zanzibar. Mainland authorities conducted raids of sailboats returning from Zanzibar several times during my year in Peponi. Captains of *dhow* sailboats transport people (visitors and businessmen), livestock, and local goods (like coconuts and bananas) to Zanzibar, and return with smuggled goods such as sugar, electronics, etc. Women, as well, travel to Zanzibar for business purposes: to purchase *kanga* (fabric), beauty products, undergarments, etc. in bulk and then sell them locally at a small profit.

Peponi Village

In the late 1960s Pamela Landberg's census indicated a population of approximately 900 inhabitants in Peponi. In 2004, my own census determined a population of 2362 inhabitants, 1144 men and 1216 women. The village has grown substantially in the past 36 years and is 2.6 times larger than it was in 1968. As illustrated by the population pyramid (Figure 7) Peponi fits the pattern we expect to see in a developing country like Tanzania. This type of pyramid indicates a population in which there is a high birth rate, a high death rate and a short life expectancy.

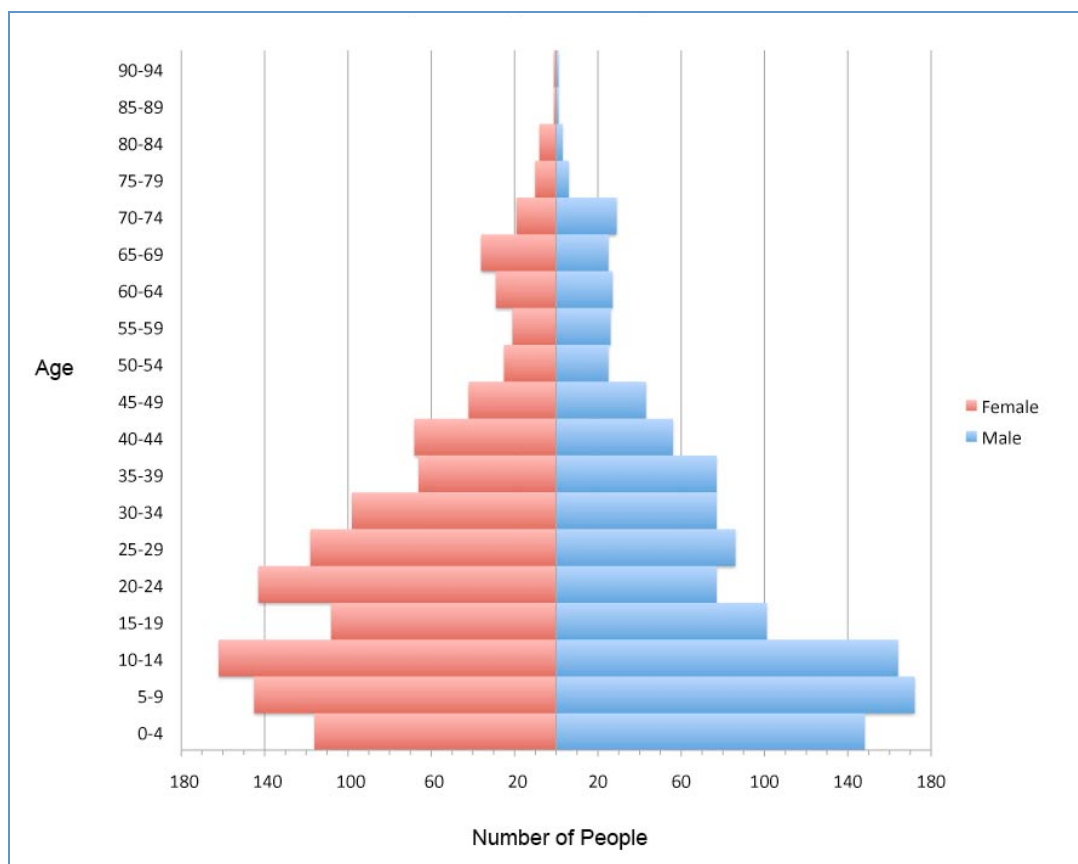


Figure 7: Population Pyramid for Peponi 2004, Peponi Census 2004.

Given the size and location of the community, it is neither peripheral nor flourishing. In many ways life remains quite similar to the life described in the 1960s by the Landbergs (Landberg 1977; Landberg 1986; Landberg 1975). The community is largely rural and houses remain simple in structure. Life is, for the most part, relaxed in a way often associated with coastal life. Fishing, trade with Zanzibar, and farming remain the livelihood for most people. While many things appear to have remained the same, other things have changed. The footprint of the community is much larger, and continues to grow. As the population has grown the village has expanded inland, away from the beach towards the *porini* (bush) to the west and towards the sisal estates, to the north and south (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Sisal Estate on the Southeastern edge of the village.

The sisal estate neighboring the village employed a few men from the community over the years, and continues to do so, but these men have had above average education and were employed in administrative roles. Most of the employees at the sisal estate originally came from Southern Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi and they live on the sisal estate in permanent sisal estate “camps.” Several of these families that have retired from their work at the sisal estate and have moved to the village proper but are on the periphery of the village – both spatially and culturally.

Since the 1960s with the near tripling of the village, many more houses, roads, *dukas* (small stores), *hotelis* (small restaurants), small businesses, and mosques have been built. In the late 1960s Peponi had a primary school and one *madrassa* (Islamic school for children), a small health clinic, a few *dukas* and one *hoteli*, and one operating mosque. The newest sections of Peponi are those above the beach. The newer section is bisected by the Tanga-Pangani Road (Figure 9), which runs from north to south following the coastal line.



Figure 9: The main Tanga-Pangani road, which bisects the village. Buses and mini-buses pass through all day long, as well as people and goats. (photograph courtesy of Katherine Stanfield).

Landberg (1975) and Landberg (1977) both noted the importance of building up from the beach near to the road during their fieldwork in the late 1960s. They indicated that the construction near the road is indicative of the economic, political, and social importance to the village. Almost forty years later I can affirm this is still true. While the waterfront of the village is important to the fishermen, the central area of the village is that area which runs parallel to the road. It is the center of activity and attention. Of the 31 small stores (*duka*, *maduka*) in the village all but three are located on or near the main road. Also, of the 26 *hoteli* (restaurants) and 6 tea/coffee shops in the village, all but seven are located on, or near, the main road. The focus of the road reflects the orientation of the villagers to that, which lies beyond the village.

The school, government court building, government offices, hospital, produce market (which was built in the late 1960s but is, to this day, unused because the people in the village grow their own fruits/vegetables, purchase from bicycle salesmen, or from one

of the 24 small produce *dukas* in town), soccer field, and main Friday mosque are all located on the main road. Women and children also sell prepared foods near to the shops on the main road.

All main village level activities are held near to the main road (in front of the mosque, political party buildings, school, hospital, or on the soccer field). Figure 10 shows a number of Peponi businesses. Table 1: List of businesses, offices, buildings, and places of interest in Peponi. Table 1 lists the number of each type of business, government buildings, and other important sites in the village. In February 2004 a cell phone tower was installed in the village.



Figure 10: Four local businesses. (Top Left) A *duka* receives a delivery. (Top Right) A young woman and man make a purchase at a *duka*. (Bottom Left) A bicycle *fundi* at his bicycle shop. (Bottom Right) A woman at her *hoteli*.

Table 1: List of businesses, offices, buildings, and places of interest in Peponi.

Business/Office	Number
Duka (shop)	31
Hoteli	26
Produce Stand	24
Mosque	12
Wells	11
Tailor	8
Office	7
Coffee Stand	6
Madrassa	4
Carpenter	3
Bicycle Repair	3
School	1
Market	1
Hospital	1
Police	1
Kinara	1
Grain Machine	1
Game Area	1
Bar	1
Dhow Maker	1
Cell Phone Tower	1

Peponi village is also the center of local level Government administration and party organization. It is the center of the smallest unit of administration in Tanzania, the ward. It is called Peponi Ward after the village, but it includes other coastal villages and some sisal estate camps (where employees of the sisal estate live). In terms of increasing size, Peponi belongs to the following Governmental divisions: Peponi Ward, Pongwe Division, Tanga Area, and Tanga Region. Its position as an administrative center is indicated by the presence of several Government buildings. Government buildings include: a court, primary school, the dispensary, housing for school teachers and veterinary officers, and a District Council produce market.

The primary school (Figure 11), which dates from the 1940s, teaches Standard I through VII (basic elementary education). Prior to the construction of the Peponi Primary

School, the closest school was at Tongoni, the local level administrative center under the German and British colonial systems, and several miles north of Peponi.



Figure 11: Peponi School with Standar. IV class which participated in an art exchange project I facilitated with an art class at a Elementary School in Durham, NC..

In addition to the students from Peponi, children from neighboring villages come to the village for their primary school education. In the census of the village I asked the education level attained for each member of the community. The vast majority of adults completed Primary School, but did not continue, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Years of Schooling for all adults $\geq$ age 15. Fifteen is the age students typically complete St. 7

Years of Schooling	# People $\geq$ 15 y.o.
No Schooling	251
St. 1	9
St. 2	36
St. 3	32
St. 4	136
St. 5	42
St. 6	44
St. 7	833
Form 1	24
Form 2	7
Form 3	2
Form 4	35
University	2

Students who finish through Standard VII and want to go on to secondary school must take a Government exam. Not only must the student take the exam but also score near the top in order to attend a Government secondary school (the closest being in Pangani or Tanga). Currently, the local government and community are working to obtain funds and support to build a secondary school in Peponi. They argue that all children from Peponi finish primary school but few further their education because of economic constraints associated with sending children away for school. It is their belief that a secondary school in Peponi would fulfill the apparent desire for continuing education by students and parents alike.

Peponi village also has an important position in local level political organization. Tanzania used to be a one party state and the party, TANU (Tanzanian African National Union), had its administrative divisions parallel the government divisions. At the lowest level, the Peponi branch of TANU covered the same area the government of Peponi did. TANU meetings and those involving higher level Government and party officials visiting the area were held in the TANU office in Peponi. The villagers constructed this building. Today Tanzania is no longer a one party state. In January 1977 the TANU merged with the ruling party in Zanzibar, the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) to form the current Revolutionary State Party or *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM). The policy of TANU was to build and maintain a socialist state aiming towards economic self-sufficiency and to eradicate corruption and exploitation, with the major means of production and exchange under the control of the peasants and workers.

Today, the two main parties in Tanzania are reflected at the local level in Peponi. The CCM (Revolutionary State Party) is the ruling party of Tanzania. CCM has

dominated the politics of Tanzania since independence, and first allowed multiparty elections in 1995, which its candidate Benjamin Mkapa won. He was re-elected in 2000 with 71.7% of the vote. After a multiparty general election, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete was sworn-in as the Fourth President of the United Republic of Tanzania in December 2005. In Peponi, however, Civic United Front, or CUF, has had the majority of the votes since multiparty elections were introduced to Tanzania. CUF has its origins in Zanzibar. Although Zanzibar is part of Tanzania, it elects its own president who is head of government for matters internal to the island. A House of Representatives makes laws specifically for Zanzibar. CUF has popular grass-root support, especially along the coast of Tanzania and Zanzibar.

Peponi is remarkably engaged in local, regional and national politics. It is the early village branch of TANU to which this engagement can be attributed. Furthermore, even today regional and national politicians and party members campaign and visit Peponi whenever visiting Tanga and Pangani. Figure 12 depicts a political rally held in front of the mosque on the main road.



Figure 12: A CUF political rally for a regional politician outside of main mosque near to main road.

Peponi is the only small village in between the Tanga and Pangani where both parties stop for rallies, speeches, and meetings. Members of CCM continue to campaign hard in Peponi but CUF wins every election by a landslide. It is evident that people in Peponi identify more closely with the culture, history, and politics of Zanzibar, and even Arab countries, than they do to mainland Tanzania. Since CUF is the dominant party in Zanzibar it is not surprising that CUF is so popular in Peponi. Furthermore, CUF makes strong connections to Islam. In fact in the weeks before the local level elections in November 2004 (which overlapped with *Ramadhan*) one of the local mosques made frequent positive references to CUF over their loud speaker several times a day. During *Ramadhan* this particular mosque would lecture over the call-to-prayer loud speaker. I repeatedly was told that this was an abuse of the loud speaker – both the lecturing and the blatant political support. Most of the orating was about how to be a good Muslim. Each lecture would have a specific theme – not to commit adultery, etc. These lectures would also attempt to influence members of the community to vote for CUF. This caused quite a stir in the community because most people recognized that 1) the call-to-prayer loud speakers are only to be used for calling people to prayer – not for sermons and 2) the mosque should not be influencing people to vote for a political party and the political party should not be using the mosque (during the most important religious time of the year) to influence voters. Also, many people were just annoyed by the noise and disturbance the mosque made at all hours of the day/night in an effort to influence the local elections.

Several other public buildings in the village are important religious structures. The majority of people in the village are Sunni Muslims who follow the Shafi'i sect.

There are two large main competing mosques in the village; with two medium sized mosques, and eight smaller neighborhood mosques with membership of less than 15 men.



Figure 13: Men socializing outside of main mosque.

The mosques in Peponi are first and foremost places of worship; but they are also places for men to gather, gossip, and discuss politics. The “old” mosque near the beach, called the Ijumaa Mosque (Friday mosque) was the main mosque in the village during Landberg’s research (where everyone gathered for noon-time prayer on Fridays).

Today the two main mosques are near to the main road, with one being situated right on the main road (Figure 13); the other is the equivalent of a short block back from the road. Both Mosques are on the West side of the main road, opposite the beach side. The mosque near to the road was built in the late 1980s. The mosque situated a few buildings back was built in the mid-1990s. These two mosques represent the two main factions in the village. The mosque near to the road, the main mosque, has the largest membership in the village and most people identify with this mosque, including women and children. This mosque, and its members, advocates a practice of Islam, which

embraces local traditions. The largest difference villagers' note between the two mosques is that during Islamic holidays the main mosque celebrates with singing, dancing and drumming. It is also considered to be less strict. Its members consider themselves to be good Muslims who follow all of the Islamic tenets, but may not pray every day, or all five times a day, at the mosque. Seventy-seven of the 129 (59%) male respondents to my survey said that they attend mosque every day. Sixty-two percent pray five times per day and 27% do not pray at all.

The smaller, more conservative mosque has fewer members (although, these members tend to be the most influential and wealthy men in the village) and they claim to follow a more strict interpretation of Islam. An example one man gave me during *Ramadhan* was, "These villagers, they stop fasting when the sun goes down, we are true Muslims and we fast with our brothers in Mecca." Because of the wealth of the male members of this mosque, and because of money supposedly originating in Saudi Arabia, this mosque is visibly more affluent with its own well, electricity, and a loudspeaker for calling men to prayer. Another unique feature of this mosque is that instead of having a small *Madrassa* school, which children attend in addition to governmental primary school, there is a private school, which complies with compulsory government academic objectives but also combines the *Madrassa* school objectives (Islamic teachings and Arabic). Approximately 200 students are enrolled at this school.

Another religious structure in the village is the *Kinara*, a small, open, minaret-like structure (Figure 14). In the past it was used once a year for the annual celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, the *Maulidi*. Today this celebration takes place in



Figure 14: The *Kinara* is located in the older section of village, near the beach.

front of the main mosque or the main road. Finally, there are also several *Madrassa*.

The history of Peponi and its present day social composition are the products, in part, of its location on the East African coast. Both Peponi and the Peponi Sisal Estate are located in the heart of the sisal producing area of northern Tanzania. To the west, and across the Pemba Channel, Peponi faces the island of Pemba. Also off the mainland coast, lies the island of Zanzibar, once the main port for trade goods (ivory, slaves and spices) in the East African section of the Indian Ocean. Today, local traders (or the men who work for them) make the 6-12 hour sail to Zanzibar several times a week to deliver local goods (goats, fruit, baskets) from the village and import goods (sugar, cloth, electronic equipment) from Zanzibar to the village which have a high tax on the mainland. To the west of Peponi and only slightly inland lie the Usambara Mountains. These mountains are so close to the coast that local fishermen can see the mountains from out at sea and use them as a fixed point for taking their bearings.

About one mile north of the village is a small beach resort (est. 1999) owned and operated by white Tanzanian citizens in their early 60s who have lived in East and South Africa for their entire lives (their parents are originally from England). The beach resort

is important to the village because it provides working opportunities to about 50 local people (as wait-staff, cook-staff, cleaners, landscapers, boat operators, mechanics, etc.) from Peponi. There are approximately 20 people employed full-time with benefits (paid salary and vacation) while the rest work on a daily basis for seasonal work with no benefits. I knew one divorced woman in the village who applied for a position cleaning at the beach resort. She was overjoyed at the opportunity. The ability to earn \$50 U.S. a month was astounding to her. She was amazed at how her life was about to change. The beach resort land was purchased from a local farmer who owned beachfront property, which connected to the main road. The land was cleared and 15 bungalow type structures were built. The resort can accommodate 30 guests (not including campers). Most visitors to the resort are backpackers touring East Africa; others include ex-patriot Europeans and North Americans who work in Dar es Salaam or Arusha who travel to the north coast of Tanzania for short vacations. Few of the visitors to the resort visit the village – although the occasional *mzungu* (white person, foreigner) does make the trip into the village to check out the local scenery. The beach resort has an amiable relationship to the village. Most villagers value the beach resort and the employment opportunities it provides. Full-time workers at the resort earn approximately \$50 per month for 40+ hours per week. In addition they receive one month of paid vacation per year. Day workers earn \$1.50 U.S. per day and have no benefits. The owners have cultivated a respectable relationship with the local government and provide assistance to the village in the form of a good faith duty tax each year (approximately \$1500 – a sizeable amount to a local government). In exchange, the local government encourages

the villagers to respect the privacy of the beach resort and their guests (especially when they are bathing on the beach).

WHO ARE THE SWAHILI?

The Swahili-speaking people have a complex history, both ethnically and culturally. They in no sense form a tribe or a single political unit. They derive from Arabs, Africanized Persians, and coastal Africans. Those who are called Swahili, rarely apply the term to themselves. The justification for treating them as a single ethnographic unit lies in the fact that they share a common habitat, a common language, and many common ways of life. They occupy a narrow coastal strip, never reaching more than five or ten miles inland, from the mouth of the Juba River in the north to the Lurio River beyond Cape Delgado in the south. They also occupy offshore islands (Colson 1963:468).

John Middleton, in his book *The World of the Swahili*, notes that the name Swahili is “generally taken to come from the Arabic *sawahil* (coast), so that the Swahili people are the ‘People of the Coast’” (Middleton 1992:1). As an ethnic name, it was not used previous to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. It was the Omani Arab rulers of Zanzibar who referred to their local subjects along the coast as Swahili (Middleton 1992). Others write that, “There is no single ‘definition’ of the Swahili. Different people, in different situations, may appropriate this ethnonym, or apply it to others, according to their perception of their own advantage. The Swahili are not a discrete, enduring unit – but neither are they members of any other tribe” (Willis 1993:12). Landberg used “Swahili as a generic term for those communities of the East African Littoral which are predominantly Muslim, Swahili-speaking, and share a common coastal culture. Traditionally this area stretches from southern Somalia in the north to part of northern Mozambique in the south and includes the offshore islands” (Landberg 1977:45).

According to Landberg (1977), people in Peponi only occasionally referred to themselves as *mSwahili* and referred to themselves as *watu wa mwambao*, or “people of the coast” more frequently (Landberg 1977:46). Today people in Peponi refer to themselves as *watu wa pwani* “people of the coast/beach,” or their customs as *mambo wa pwani*, “matters of the coast/beach.” This is similar to what Lienhardt found in Kilwa where people also referred to themselves descriptively as *watu wa pwani* (Lienhardt 1968). Previously, in some areas referred to as Swahili, the term Swahili was considered pejorative because it referred to people of slave decent (Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Landberg 1975; Lienhardt 1968). Since independence, in Tanzania and Kenya, “Swahili” has become a term of self-reference (Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Landberg 1975).

Peponi villagers frequently made the distinction between people of the coast and people not from the coast (people from upcountry). “A person may generally refer to herself as *mtu wa pwani* (person of the coast/beach), they also can claim an ethnic or *kabila* (tribe) label, which is traced patrilineally. Such identification, however, except possibly for the very recent upcountry migrants, has little meaning culturally. Thus while *kabila* is translated as tribe, it does not constitute a tribe in the usual meaning of the term” (Caplan 1968:123). Most people in Peponi can tell you their *kabila*, if asked to do so, but the number of *kabila* listed in my survey resulted in 40 ethnic affiliations. Of the 286 respondents to the survey, 28% identified as Mdigu, 14% identified as Mbondei, 7% as Mshirazi, and 6% as Mzigua. Ten percent reported, “I do not know,” 3.4% gave no response, and one person said, “I have no tribe.” In some cases, *kabila* is an indicator of from where a person, or their parents, originally came. For example, three respondents indicated their *kabila* as “*Mzanzibari*” which is not an ethnic group, but indicates that

they are originally from Zanzibar. For most Swahili people *kabila* does not have any real meaning for their lives and their identity; being Muslim and from the coast are much more important markers for them. This is in contrast to most of the rest of the country where ethnic identity is primary

Along some parts of the East African coast some people, in some places; refer to themselves by their ethnic place of origin or local name. In the rest of Tanzania for example, people of Pemba Island refer to themselves as *mPemba*, people from the Pare Mountains are *mPare*, and people from *Maasai* Land are *Maasai*. Middleton notes that all people along the coast recognize themselves as Swahili in contradistinction to others not of the coastal area – this was the case in Peponi (Middleton 1992). All villagers referred to themselves as Swahili first, and if pressed, would give their ethnic origin (*mDigo* etc). Mostly, people in Peponi identify with the people and culture of Zanzibar and Arabs. I frequently heard comments, for example at a wedding, “Does she [the bride] look white enough?” In other parts of Tanzania or Africa, this might refer to wanting to be Caucasian in appearance. Along the coast this means wanting to make a connection to an Arab ancestry, even when one does not exist.

To be Swahili there are several criteria – one must be a native *kiSwahili* speaker. *kiSwahili* is the de facto national language of Tanzania, making it one of a few African countries in which a local language has gained importance to the disadvantage of the ex-colonial language. Therefore everyone, including those who do not identify as *mSwahili* ethnically/culturally/tribally, in Tanzania speaks *kiSwahili*. For the coast of Tanzania, *kiSwahili* is the mother language of Swahili people, and quite possibly the only language that people speak. In other areas of Tanzania – for example in Ugweno, people learn to

speak *kiGweno* as their first language; because they are from the Pare Mountains they are *mPare* (ethnicity) and therefore learn to speak *kiPare* (language) as well. Thus, *kiSwahili*, is usually their third language, and English their fourth. In the coastal Swahili area the first language is Swahili. There are different dialects of Swahili in East Africa but the most “pure” form of *kiSwahili* is said to be the *kiSwahili* spoken along the coast. Each community also has its own insider language that is based on Swahili, but can literally be unique to each village. People take great pride in stumping the anthropologist with different greetings from this insider *kiSwahili*. Also, those who have learned Arabic will further stump the anthropologist by throwing some Arabic greetings or expressions into the mix!

The most important nonlinguistic criteria for being Swahili is being Muslim.

“The Swahili have long been Muslims” (Middleton 1992:2) and this has distinguished them from:

their neighbors and those of the interior, from their former European rulers, and from the present rulers of Kenya and Tanzania It has linked them to Arabs, Persians, Somali and Muslims from the India subcontinent, all of whom have played important roles in Swahili history. The Swahili, particularly the wealthier inhabitants of the older towns, have for centuries enjoyed a high standard of living and have constructed a clearly distinguishable Swahili culture.(Middleton 1992:2)

WHY PEPONI?

While conducting my pre-dissertation research in 2002 I spent most of my time in the areas close to Tanga – far enough away to be small villages but close enough to Tanga for easy access. After a few weeks I determined that the proximity to town was too close. The overall feeling I got in these semi-urban communities was that they were

stuck in the middle – not rural, and not urban – and this added a level of complexity to their lives that distracted from my own questions.

During a weekend break during my pre-dissertation trip in 2002, I visited the small back-packers beach resort 30 km south of Tanga, which I mentioned earlier. While at the resort I ventured to the local village a mile south. It was not until I returned to the U.S. to write dissertation proposals that I made the connection between the village I visited that weekend and the work of Pamela Landberg whose chapter “Widows and Divorced Women in Swahili Society” I read in Betsy Potash’s edited volume *Widows in Africa* (1986). During the late 1960s Landberg conducted her dissertation research, titled *Kinship and Community in a Tanzanian Coastal Village (East Africa)* (1977). Her work examined a wide range of social life, but her chapter on “Marriage and Divorce” was of immediate interest to me. She wrote about how widows and divorced women had a similar status in the community, and enjoyed much freedom. I also wanted to study marriage and divorce; this seemed like an ideal location because I could make comparisons to Pamela Landberg’s work identifying changes since the 1960s. The ability to conduct longitudinal comparisons was compelling (see Hutchinson 1990 on comparisons to Evans-Pritchard’s work with the Nuer).

I was extremely disappointed I was unable to meet or communicate with Pamela and Leif Landberg before I left for my year in Tanzania. It was strange to me that Pamela published in the mid-1980s, but nothing since. I had no connection to Pamela and Leif Landberg, other than reading her chapter and their dissertations (Leif’s dissertation was on men and fishing practices). I searched for them in academic circles before departing to Tanzania but could not locate them. Before meeting anyone in the

community I was nervous about whether or not to mention the Landbergs and their time in Peponi. It was unclear if they would be remembered, and if the memory of them would be an asset, or hindrance, to me. I was curious about what happened to them and disappointed that I did not have more information.

At the time, and even now, it seemed like the biggest coincidence that the first person I met during the onset of my dissertation research was Jumaa, the son of Pamela and Leif Landberg's primary research assistant during their fieldwork in the late 1960s. Meeting Jumaa was a stroke of luck. He was a bartender at the backpacker's beach resort a mile north of the village where I was staying until I could make arrangements to live in the community; I met him while he was working. The owners of the resort arranged a meeting for me with the *Mwenyekiti* (village mayor) and I was preparing to explore my options in the village. After a few days acclimating at the resort Jumaa asked me how long I planned to stay. He was making conversation with a person he assumed was another backpacker staying for a few days – part of his job. I replied, in Swahili, "I hope for a year." He repeated in English, to make sure he understood me correctly, "You are staying for an entire year?" The conversation continued; I explained I was a Ph.D. student in Anthropology and I wanted to do my research in Peponi. He got an excited look on his face and explained to me that his father, Muhammedi, was the main research assistant for two anthropologists when he was a young man. Surprised to learn this I said, "You mean Pam and Leif Landberg?" Jumaa did not know names of the researchers because it was before he was born. Through our conversation we were able to determine that, in fact, his father (now living in Iringa working for the Government) worked with the Landberg's in the late 1960s. This marked the beginning of our friendship. It was

also at this point that Jumaa took it upon himself to be my goodwill ambassador to Peponi. I could scarcely believe that Jumaa was the first person I met and that he would become my closest friend in Peponi and eventually work with me on my research.

In my first meeting with the *Mwenyekiti* (village mayor) of Peponi I started to explain who I was, where I was from, the reason for my research, and my hopes to work in the community for one year. Initially, I did this without making any connection to the Landberg's previous tenure in the community. After a few minutes of explanation I abandoned that plan and asked the *Mwenyekiti* (a man in his late 50s) if he knew of Pamela and Leif Landberg. "You mean Pam and Leif?" Lucky for me the Landbergs were remembered by the *Mwenyekiti*, and many others, with positive and fond memories. Furthermore, people in the community were able to recall what Pam and Leif had spent their time doing in a way that they could easily translate to me, another young anthropologist conducting dissertation fieldwork. I did not have to spend lots of time explaining or justifying what my plans were and people did not find it odd that I wanted to hang out and get to know them. At times people even offered their advice in ways that reflected their memory of Pam, specifically: "You know, you should learn how to cook *muhogo* (mashed cassava) – Pam learned how to cook all of our dishes." Overall the positive legacy the Landbergs left helped me in ways I do not even know. I feel grateful to them for being such a positive influence in the community that endured for more than 40 years.

After learning that people in the community remembered the Landbergs fondly, they also wanted to know more about them; thus, I decided to continue the search for them. No one in the community had heard from the Landbergs in decades. I eventually

did locate them in New York City, thanks to continued and relentless Internet searches. I asked a college friend, who lives in NYC, to call the phone number I found and ask if they were in fact the Landbergs who conducted research in Tanzania in the 60s. The friend was also about to depart for Tanzania to come and visit me for a few weeks. The phone number was the right one and Pam and Leif were enthusiastic, supportive, and helpful. The reason I was unable to find them in academic circles is they did not continue with anthropology, after completing their doctorates, but rather pursued careers in academic administration. Since returning from the field I have met with the Landbergs on several occasions and keep in touch with them by phone and email. They have been incredibly supportive and I have enjoyed hearing their memories of their time in Tanzania, juxtaposing that with my own experiences and comparing it to their written work (dissertations and published works).

After viewing photos and video from my own research the Landbergs commented that the community appears more “Islamic than before.” This comment was made after seeing photos of school children. Today schoolgirls wear a head covering as part of their school uniform, which they did not do in the 1960s. Wearing the head covering is not required as the government runs the primary school. While this is not necessarily a reflection of an increase in devoutness to Islam, it is certainly an outward expression of a cultural and religious influence that did not exist previously. My Swahili friends wanted me to make outward expressions of Islam and Swahili culture. The most important of which, they wanted me to paint henna and asked me over and over again. I repeatedly said: “My husband will be upset if he learns I am trying to attract other men while he is not here.” As soon as my husband arrived in Peponi I had a number of women at my

house offering to paint me (See Figure 15).



Figure 15: (Left) Outward expressions of Islam and Swahili culture. A photo of me in the process of receiving my head-to-toe henna painting. (Right) Attending the wedding of a dear friend I allowed my hosts to dress me up and paint my eyebrows. They were so very happy to have the opportunity to dress me up.

The Landbergs noted many outward signs, such as this, have changed. Stories from my own experience indicate this change, as well. During my time in Peponi I was, not surprisingly, compared to Pamela Landberg quite often. Usually as a commentary on my behavior, dress, or approach. People always asked me what I had for lunch or dinner and I quickly learned they wanted me to be eating local foods. If I said I had *ubwawa* or *muhogo* they were delighted. If I reported eating something ambiguous in origin, like eggs, they said “Oh Pam, she ate/prepared all our foods!” I can remember joining some older men for a cup of *kahawa* (coffee) by the road. I was wearing a pair of long, dark, loose pants – I was on my way to the city to run errands and after many trips to the city, I realized it was easier for me to leave the skirts and dresses in the village. Usually when in the village I wore only skirts/dresses, if I wore pants I would also wear a *kanga*, (a piece of local cloth) around my waist. I often received comments on my style of dress, but mostly in a teasing way. On this particular day the men chastised me. They said:

“You know, Pam never wore pants. She always wore long skirts and dressed only in the local style.” In my year in Peponi a day never went by without a comment on how Pam did things. Mostly I took it in good humor – and trusted it was usually a reflection on how well Pam was remembered.

When I returned to the U.S. and actually met Pam we talked about her experience in Peponi. She also showed me photographs from her own time there. In fact, I was quite surprised to see her wearing knee length skirts and tank tops! While I was willing to stretch the “rules” a bit and wear pants I would never wear a tank top or short skirt/pants – mostly out of respect for local customs but also because of the unwanted attention I would receive if I were to wear such revealing clothing. This was often with great discomfort as the weather was frequently over 100 degrees with high humidity, as coastal Tanzania is on the equator. Imagine my surprise at discovering Pam did not wear long clothes, but in fact wore more revealing clothing than I. When in the village I almost always wore *kanga* around my waist and shoulders, and, for formal occasions over my head. The irony of the situation made me laugh – there were definitely moments when I questioned my abilities and how well I was received in the community compared to Pam. Pam was certainly larger than life in the memories of community members, even if those memories were not entirely accurate. It made me feel better to think that, perhaps, I too would be remembered equally as well.

SYSTEM OF NAMING AMONG THE SWAHILI

Throughout this dissertation you will see references to women and men with different forms of address. A child is given a unique first name and takes the first name

of his/her father as the last name. Example: Hamadi Muhamedi is a 2-year-old little boy. He is the first child, and first son, of Muhamedi Hamadi and Flora Abdallah. His father's father is Hamadi Muhamedi. When Flora's son was born her friends and family began calling her Mama Hamadi, and her husband became Baba Hamadi. Hamadi Muhamedi's grandfather is known as Mzee Hamadi now that he is an old man with grown children and grandchildren. Mzee is a title of respect given to old men and Bibi is a title of respect given to old women.

One older woman I met did not have any of her grown children living in Peponi. She was entrusted to raise the son (Hamadi, 6 y.o.) of her oldest daughter (living in Dar es Salaam) from the time he was 2 years old. She became known as Bibi Hamadi. This name does not follow the traditional naming structure as her first child was named Mwanamvua. And, for most of her adult life she was Mama Mwanamvua. Because she is Hamadi's full time caregiver, in the absence of his parents, she is called Bibi Hamadi. In some respects, this system of naming is done to draw connections between people. So, it evolved organically that Mama Mwanamvua became Bibi Hamadi given her situation.

Once, while at a funeral in my 4th month of fieldwork, I was sitting outside under the shade of a tree with a group of women. I came to the funeral with a neighbor, but she left to attend to a grieving woman inside. I remained with the women in the shade, as was considered proper. At the time I had already been working with Mama Rukia, my primary research assistant for more than a month. I had not met this group of women before and they curiously asked me a number of questions about my research. Then they asked me who was helping me with my work. I said "Hadija, a woman who lives down by the beach." No one knew whom I was talking about "Who is Hadija?" When the

Mwenyekiti introduced me to my research assistant he told me her given name, Sakina Shabani. I then called her Sakina. No one corrected me and in our interactions I never heard anyone call her anything else. The women at the funeral asked me many questions – “Is she short, tall, skinny, fat? What house does she live in?” I replied “Oh, she is short, and not too round, and she lives down the hill from the main road by the beach, on the Pangani side of the village, near the opening where the *Kinara* is located.” The ladies countered: “Who are her children?” I admitted: “I do not know. They are grown and traveling for *biashara* (business). She and her husband rent a room in a house and there are two very old women living there, too.” The ladies all agreed: “This is Mama Rukia. We know her. She is good and will help you well. You can call her Mama Rukia now.” And I did.

METHODOLOGY

This research draws on innovative approaches stemming from the field of Anthropological Demography. The study design combines quantitative surveys with a range of qualitative techniques, including participant observation – to understand more comprehensively the social norms and community understandings underlying daily activities; observation—to gain an understanding of the ways in which men and women interact with each other; and life narrative interviews—to gain a wide range of in-depth individual data. These interdisciplinary approaches are complementary and work together with each one informing the other.

I spent one year in Tanzania to accomplish this study. The first two months in Peponi I spent living with a family (father, wife, and 1½ year old son) in their small two-

bedroom house, with an indoor living room, indoor latrine and bathing area, outdoor cooking hut, and fenced in courtyard. I met the husband, Baba Jumbe, during an initial visit to the village with Jumaa. Jumaa took me around the village with the *Mwenyekiti* (village mayor) to look for a place to live. We determined the choices of finding a reasonable place to live included one of the following: live with a family, rent a house that was unoccupied, or find someone who was finishing building a new house and offer to rent it. After investigating several options and a meeting with Baba Jumbe in which I saw his wonderful, but unfinished new house, we negotiated a rent for the remainder of my time in Peponi. He agreed to let me live with his family in his smaller house until construction on the new house was complete (initially meant to take another 3 weeks, eventually taking 2 months).

At the onset, because I was living in the community, participant observation in everyday activities provided the basis for understanding more comprehensively the social norms and community understandings that underlie daily activities. During this initial phase of my research I collected a community history of Peponi village as well as interviewed people in positions of authority. A central focus of this time was assessing changes that occurred in Peponi over the past forty years in order to determine the focus of my inquiry during the remaining months. I spent these first two months establishing rapport with women and men in the community, as well as, informally discussing gender relationships in the context of present day cultural, social, economic, and political possibilities.

I devoted much of my time to observing and spending time with the family and much of my day-to-day life in Peponi centered on the activities of this family. I got to

know their habits, the rhythm of their life, and their social network. Officially, Baba Jumbe⁶, Mama Jumbe, and Jumbe lived in the little house. But this does not accurately capture the number of people who were a natural part of the daily life in this household. Baba Jumbe's mother, BiJumbe, spent all of her waking time at the house. The house was hers until Baba Jumbe and Mama Jumbe wed. At this time Baba Jumbe's father, Mzee Jumbe, sold the house to his son who did not have his own house and because Mzee Jumbe needed funds to pursue his second wife and set up a new household. At this time BiJumbe was effectively without her own home, despite still being married to Mzee Jumbe, so Baba and Mama Jumbe permitted BiJumbe to live in the second small bedroom in the house. Soon after the marriage, however, it was clear that it was not a good arrangement for Mama Jumbe; and BiJumbe, sensitive to this, decided to move out. She bounced around the households of her other children in the village, but spent most of her time at Mama and Baba Jumbe's house. Mzee Jumbe, despite having a separate household, spent much of his time at the house as well to spend time with his namesake grandchild, Jumbe. He also ate his mid-day meal with the family. In addition, Mama Jumbe's younger sisters Dada Yetu (13 y.o.) and Akili (8 y.o.) spent a large part of their days helping Mama Jumbe. Other extended family members came and went and became a part of my own growing social network.

My days consisted of informal research, I spent time with the family as they cooked and cared for the children and extended household (BiJumbe's younger unmarried sons would eat their evening meal here). I accompanied them to the markets, schools, relatives' and friends' homes, parties, weddings, condolences visits, and other

⁶ It is common for Swahili men and women to take on the name of their first child after they are born. They still use their given name for official business, but they become known as Father of so-and-so or Mother of so-and-so.

formal occasions. I spent considerable time observing the meaning(s) and processes associated with marriages and their dissolution. In these settings, I paid attention to issues such as how marital status shapes routine activities. I examined differences among and between widowed and divorced women, and took note of their exchanges with other men and women, including their parents, former in-laws, other family members, and friends. I was especially interested in conversations surrounding pregnancy and parenting, polygamy, infidelity, marriage conflicts, divorces, aging, and health. At places such as weddings and other family events, I watched how men and women interacted with each other, the content of their conversations, and how individual wedding participants described the process of courtship and marriage more broadly.

I also arranged to have daily language session with Mzee Issa, a 72-year-old man I first met while walking through the village with Jumaa. The first two times I met him in passing he took it upon himself to teach me a local *kiSwahili* expression not already a part of my repertoire. The first time we met I was returning from playing *boa*, a Swahili board game. Mzee Issa asked me “*Umefanya kiwa au umeshindaje?*” Did I win, or was I defeated? This was a new way of wording/phrasing for me. Instead of brushing my ignorance aside Mzee Issa took the time to teach me the meaning and practiced it with me. Each subsequent time I met him he would teach me something new in a very deliberate way, and test me on previous lessons. I decided to ask him to make it more official and it was at that point that we began our daily language discussions. I was already conversationally fluent in *kiSwahili* but as each village has its own nuances Mzee Issa’s assistance was invaluable. He was an outgoing and enthusiastic man who enjoyed his role as mentor and cultural broker. He became much more than a language teacher to

me, he was also a dear friend and research assistant, conducting 95% of the male surveys on his own.

After I moved into my own house I broadened my social network. Jumaa's younger sister, Sofiya (22 years old) moved in with me. Originally I wanted to live on my own in order to have some privacy. Baba Jumbe suggested I have his mother as a companion. While I liked and respected BiJumbe, in fact she became a mother figure to me, I wanted more autonomy in my homelife than could be attained if she were my companion. Several people independently encouraged me to consider the benefits of not living alone. In the end, I acquiesced and invited Sofiya to stay with me. Our arrangement was as such: I would provide room and board and she would take care of keeping the common areas clean. Sofiya also cooked the noontime meal and I cooked the evening meal; we both shared in cleaning the kitchen. Sofiya, having completed secondary school, expressed interest in learning to use a computer and she assisted me in entering the census data. In addition, once the survey was underway, and I was having trouble with one of my female research assistants, she suggested herself as a replacement and conducted nearly half of the female surveys. The beginning of our relationship was a bit rocky. In some ways I think she would have been more comfortable with a more defined relationship. I did not pay her for duties involved with living in the house. Instead we shared responsibility for the house and meals and I paid other people to wash my laundry and fetch our water. I think the idea of being a "roommate" or living with a friend was novel to her, especially since her roommate was one, and then two, *mzungus* (white foreigners). Her personality was quite different from mine. Most of the time she was quite reticent and not particularly willing to discuss things that might be construed as

feelings or personal. Getting to know her, in some ways, was much more difficult than any of the in-depth interviews I conducted during my time in Peponi.

The *Mwenyekiti* introduced me to a woman, Mama Rukia (briefly introduced earlier), whom he thought might make a suitable research assistant. She was a middle-aged woman, married, with three young adult children (ages 18, 22, and 24), all of whom were unmarried. While her English was limited and not all that useful to me, she was a natural teacher of all things Swahili and was well loved and respected in the community and was therefore invaluable to me in facilitating much of my work. She also took on a motherly role towards me and we spent nearly every day together for the rest of my time in Peponi. She delighted in teaching me the appropriate way to behave and talk, chastising me when I made mistakes, praising me when I did the right thing. In addition, she particularly enjoyed explaining Swahili female secrets. One time I said to her: “Why do women keep stopping by, trying to sell me beads? I’ve never noticed women here wearing beads. Why would they want to sell them to me?” She loved this question. She laughed and dragged me into the privacy of my bedroom where she yanked down her skirt and lifted up her shirt to reveal 5 or 6 strands of brightly colored beads about her hips. “THIS, we wear it for our husbands, or our lovers. We wear it for ourselves. It is beautiful and sexy, right? You must buy some before your man Daniel arrives. This he will like, right?”

Our first project was to draw a map of the entire village, every building and structure, (including houses, government buildings, madrasas, mosques, stores, restaurants, and small businesses – tailor, carpenter, repair shop) and which included building materials of each structure, presence of electricity, and TV antenna (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Hand drawn maps of Peponi. (Left) First version, (Right) second version.

Initially, the map was hand drawn by myself, without the use of a GPS. Luckily the newer part of the village is set up in a grid and the older part of the village had the beach, a cliff, and the Sisal Estate as natural boundaries. During the map drawing sessions Mama Rukia introduced me to the occupants of each house and business. Once the map was complete in April, I redrew (Figure 16) it so my research assistants and I could use it while conducting the census.

I began a census of the entire community with help from six research assistants; three men and three women. This took two and a half weeks. Each household in the community was visited and we attempted to speak with the head of each household.

Figure 17 is an example of a census form. We recorded the same information for each household: 1) list of all the occupants in the house; 2) relationship of each member of the household to the head of household; 3) age and sex of each member; 4) level of education for each person; 5) current relationship status; and 6) a list of previous relationships and how they ended (death/divorce). During May, I entered and analyzed the census data using Microsoft Access, a database program, with the help of Sofiya.

10-11-04 8-8-04

Namba ya Nyumba: 029 Sehemu Gani: Chamji mashaki Jina ya Mtu ana andika: Hadiga baudi

Namba	Jina	Mwanamume au Mwanamke	Umri	Ukoo	Kaa au Haikai sasahivi	Darasa la ngapi?
1	Hadiga	ke	1950	2	1	4 1.0.0.1
2	Hamad	me	1932	1	1	4 1.0.0.1
3	Hakiki	ke	1976	3	1	2 1.0.0.1
4	Mashai	ke	1981	3	1	2 - - -
5	Kiumu	me	1984	3	1	2 - - -
6	Ally	me	1986	11/2	1	1! - - -
7	Shaban	me	1988	11/2	1	0 - - -
8	Moham	me	1990	11/2	1	0 - - -
9	Hakiba	ke	1995	11/2	1	1! - - -
10	Shaban	me	7	11/2	1	0 - - -
11	Pili	ke	3	11/2	1	0 - - -
12	Nemgar	ke	6	11/2	1	0 - - -
13						
14						
15						
16						

Figure 17: Raw data from Peponi Census 2004.

Dan Keefe, my now husband, arrived in Tanzania in the 9th month of my fieldwork and offered his expert services in computer data visualization. He suggested we digitize the location of the houses from my hand drawn map and input the census data into a multi-variable visualization. The result was an interactive visualization tool that I was able to run on my laptop to analyze the census data. Figure 18 is a “screen shot” of the tool, which demonstrates its use.



Figure 18: Interactive Digitized Map of Peponi.

This is an interactive map. Like Google Maps, when I click the mouse and drag, I can scroll through the map to see the entire village. In Figure 18 I have zoomed in on the central area of the village. At the top is the older part of the village all along the beachfront, East of the main road. The main road bisects the village, and the newer areas of the village are, for the most part, West of the main road. The black rectangle, in the bottom left hand corner, represents the entire village, and the exact section I have zoomed in on is highlighted with a red box. The black rectangle shows the entire village zoomed out so the entire village can be seen (too large to be shown here). The areas North of the main village are small satellite villages.

Variables of interest plotted for each house included:

- location
- census ID number
- gender of head of household
- number of occupants
- number of men
- number of women
- number of children
- number of divorced men
- number of divorced women
- number of remarried men
- number of remarried women
- divorce rate for the house
- businesses associated with or near the house
- census data for house occupants

The key to the map is illustrated in Figure 19. Because of my interest in gender and divorce Dan created visualizations to help identify patterns and trends, see household composition, as well as connect multiple data sources. Each square indicates a house. If the house is unoccupied it is grey, if it the house is headed by a female, it is red, if it the house is headed by a male, it is blue. Each square is divided into three columns, the left for men, the center for women, and the right for children. Each row of the “house” represents the number of occupants, by sex. Each small light blue box represents each individual in the household. A light blue box indicates the person has never been divorced. If the light blue box contains a yellow triangle they have been divorced, if the

triangle is orange they have remarried.

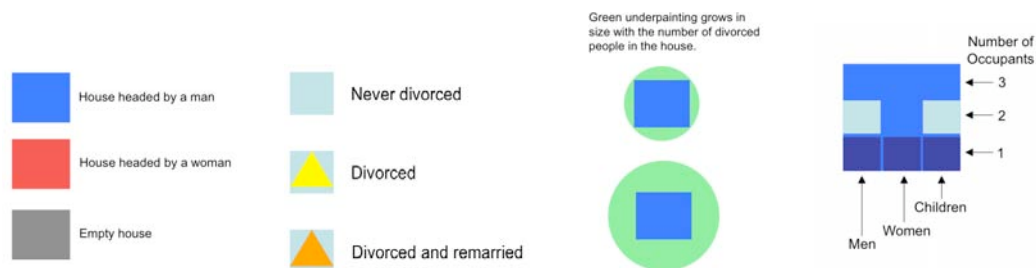


Figure 19: Key to Interactive Digital Map.

Figure 20 is a case study of how this interactive digital map helped me with my work. As you can see, the large green dot that surrounds house 193 indicates that there are a large number of divorced people living in the household. The house is red, which indicates that a woman is the head of the household. The yellow triangles in column two indicate there are four women, all of whom are divorced, living in house 193. The map is interactive so when I place the mouse over a household the census data for that household pops up; I can see the relationship each member of the household has to the others. Here I can see there are two sisters, in their 60s, living with their children, one of which is a man (married, but living separately from his wife). I can also see whether they are currently residing in the village, years in school, marital history, and relationship to head of household for each member of the household.

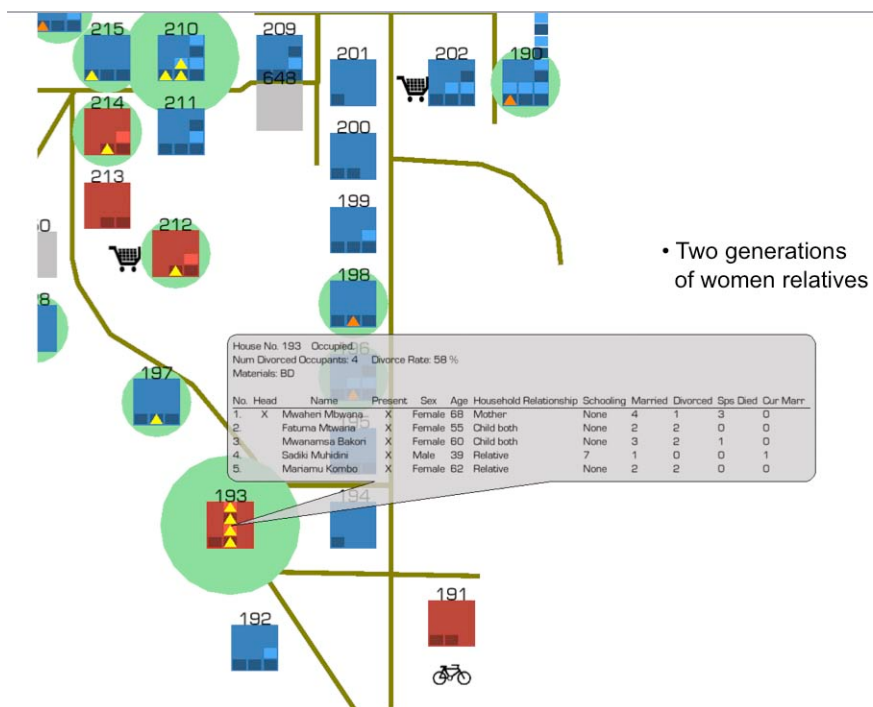


Figure 20: Case study 1.

Figure 21 is another case study and caught my attention because it is a male headed household with four women who have been divorced, two of which are remarried.

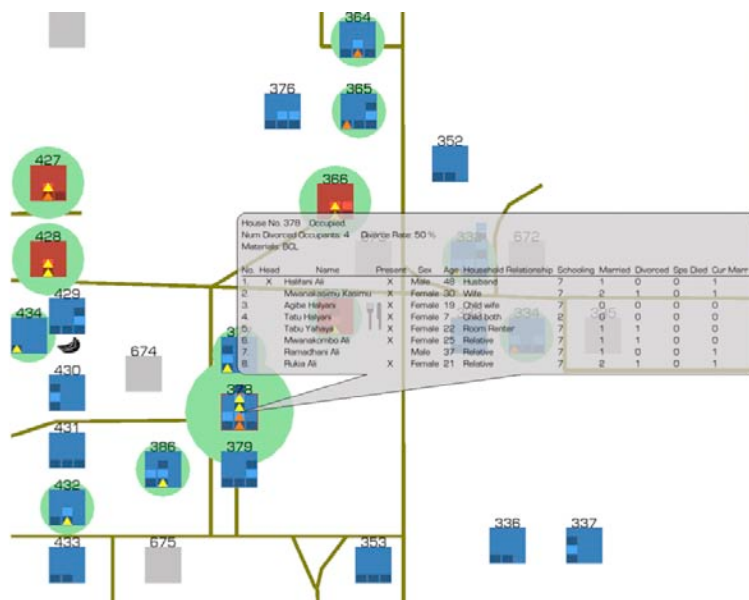


Figure 21: Case Study 2.

The ability to see my different types of data together allowed me to see household

composition in a unique way and also gave insight into households that might be worth additional investigation in ways that could not be achieved without this useful tool.

I also conducted in-depth life narrative interviews. All interviews, and other research, was conducted in *kiSwahili* and translated by me. Some people, especially men with secondary school education, do speak a little English. And everyone who attended primary school did learn a little English as some instruction is in English. As most in Peponi did not attain more than a Standard 7 level of education, this did not translate into an ability to converse in English. In addition there are people who might understand some English when spoken, or be able to read certain phrases, but most people were comfortable speaking *kiSwahili*. Some men endeavored to teach me basic Arabic (in addition to the ubiquitous phrases that all Swahili Muslims use in the course of their daily lives – *Alhamdulillah* (praise to Allah), *Insha'Allah* (God willing), *Salam Alaikum* (Peace be upon you) – and some women taught me some local, Peponi specific, variations on the usual *kiSwahili*.

Life history and life narrative interviews provide a unique opportunity to grasp the concrete dailiness of people's lives in the process of change (Davison 1989). Life narrative interviews are a technique that incorporates the reflections and thoughts of the informant. The abundance of *hotelis* (small restaurants) was one of the most dramatic changes to have transpired in the village since the time of Landberg's research. I wanted to understand the circumstances of each of the operators and what led them to open their business. I conducted a total of 23 interviews with *hoteli* operators⁷. I conducted each interview and Mama Rukia attended each interview. Typically, she would introduce me, explain the objective of the interview, and ask if there were any questions.

⁷ Specific data from *hoteli* interviews provided in Chapter 7.

In addition to the interviews with *hoteli* operators I conducted life history narratives with twenty couples, or former couples (20 women and 20 men⁸, for a total of 40 interviews). Because one of the major aims of this research is to have a gendered approach to marriage and divorce, I interviewed men and women from several categories: 1) never married; 2) newly married; 3) once married; 4) in polygynous marriage; and 5) married and never been divorced. This was essential to gain a gendered perspective of the same event(s), or rather the same process(es). This methodology, I believe, added insight to the process of divorce by allowing both men and women to share their perspectives on the same relationship. Because I view marriage and divorce as processes, and not isolated events, these interviews of married couples at different stages of marriage were critical. The results of these interviews appear throughout the dissertation as the extended examples given in each chapter. These interviews covered a range of questions regarding family marital history, self marital history, expectations of relationship trajectory, source of livelihood, and feelings about a variety of issues, including marriage, polygyny, divorce, and extra marital affairs.

In the last six weeks of fieldwork I conducted a marital history survey of 350 ever-married men and women, randomly selected from the census. After coding there were 287 surveys (158 women and 129 men) to analyze. Many of the respondents over the age of 50 were unable to answer many of the questions because of memory, confusion with dates, numbers, etc. My main purpose in conducting a survey, and the census as well was to establish concrete data on marital history. I created a survey instrument allowing me to gain a better understanding of the types of relationships men and women are engaged in present day Swahili society. The survey was conducted strategically at the

⁸ Jumaa assisted me with these interviews, conducting several on his own.

end of the research because the qualitative research preceding it was vital to establishing a sound and useful survey instrument and helped to develop the survey so as to reflect local customs, values, and expectations. I gathered information on household composition, union patterns and histories, religious practice, economic resources and activities, fertility, and reproductive health history. For respondents who were married, there was a separate form for each wife/husband and a separate form for each divorce with specific questions about the divorce process. In addition, I designed the survey instrument and tested the questions with my research assistants. Their input, in terms of what questions to ask and how to phrase them, was critical in creating a survey instrument that flowed smoothly.

It is unusual for an anthropologist to conduct such a large survey and census but I know that it was not necessary to do so. As I stated above I was concerned with obtaining adequate and accurate data on marriage, divorce, and polygyny. Collecting data on these topics, both quantitative, and qualitative, presents various challenges. For example, I am certain there is underrepresentation of a number of marriages and number of divorces in the survey and census. There were cases of people deliberately misrepresenting the number of times they were married/divorced, people simply losing track, determining that some marriages were not worth mentioning, and some which were secret and thus not revealed. It was my hope that collecting these various types of data would allow me to capture as accurate an account of current marriage and divorce practices in Peponi as possible. I anticipated that conducting a census of close to 2500 people would be difficult, as well as a survey of 350 individuals. And I did experience difficulties along the way. What I did not anticipate was how complicated it would be to

decide which data to use, and when. Because my ethnographic data is so rich, so full of life – and it is just this, which makes me an anthropologist – I have relied predominantly on the qualitative data in this dissertation. In key places I have relied on the census and survey to serve as a corroborator of key points and facts.

CHAPTER THREE

CHANGING PREMARITAL PRACTICES AND SWAHILI WEDDINGS

Discussions of weddings are everywhere among Peponi residents and ideals of premarital relationships, marital payments, and weddings are widely understood to be grounded in Islamic *Sharia* principles. Yet my research in Peponi challenges the practice of these ideals. In fact, it reveals tensions between the ideals and realities of premarital courtship, weddings and marriage itself. Academics, and Peponi residents themselves, rightly regard weddings as a tremendous rite of passage for young women, and men, too. The realities, however, of premarital pregnancy, abortion, postponement of marriage, and the emergence of young unmarried women with children without intentions of marrying the father challenge the local popular understandings, and academic notions, of first marriage as a ubiquitous rite of passage for young people. This chapter contrasts contemporary premarital practices, and weddings themselves, with the historical anthropological framings of weddings.

PREMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS AND PREGNANCY

Historically, Swahili girls married soon after their first *mwari* (period), as early as 13-years-old. In the last 50 years, with the growing emphasis and importance of education, especially primary education, age at first marriage has been postponed

significantly for girls in Peponi, among the Swahili, and also most of Africa; many young women are well past finishing school when they eventually marry (Johnson-Hanks 2006). The youngest bride I observed during my year in Peponi was 18 years old (three years past completion of Standard 7, the average education of people in Peponi); the oldest was 26. Technically, a girl is still permitted to marry after she has her first period, but this is no longer the common practice, and the importance of finishing primary school, or greater if possible, is the reason given for this (Stambach 2000; Creighton and Omari 1995; Stiles 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2006; Vavrus 2003).

Bledsoe and Pison (1994: 6) note that although the age at first marriage for women has increased on the continent over the last fifty years, age at first pregnancy appears to have remained the same, leading to a rise in what is often categorized as “premarital fertility.” Rising premarital and teen pregnancy rates indicate that postponement of marriage has not changed the onset of sexual activity among young men and women. Bledsoe and Pison further stress that not all of these pregnancies are “illegitimate,” rather, there may be a whole range of different forms of unions that, although not falling under the category of official marriage, are nonetheless committed or legitimate in one way or another. Yet a focus on teen sexuality as illegitimate, forced, or exploitative has grown as the development literature has turned its attention to issues of so-called “survival sex,” and as the potential demographic and socioeconomic effects of teen pregnancy on the continent gain attention – given that with population growth, the teenage population has come to represent one of the largest and most socially significant groups across Africa.

Premarital pregnancies were a major concern of parents and youth during the period of my field research. Older men and women spoke of out-of-wedlock pregnancy as an epidemic of the postcolonial age, and believed the situation to be intensifying. A study of teenage sexual behavior among unmarried urban youth, conducted in Dar es Salaam, demonstrates that teenage sexuality, especially with regard to teen pregnancy and abortion, is more complicated than previously acknowledged (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001). A recent hospital-based study from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania indicates that of the 362 women who had allegedly miscarried, the majority had in fact had an illegal abortion, and half of these women were under the age of 20 (Rasch et al. 2000a; Rasch et al. 2000b). Adolescent girls are normally seen as victims and easy prey of (often older and married) men's sexual exploitation. Silberschmidt's research, which is based on a qualitative study of 51 adolescent girls who recently had an illegal abortion in Dar es Salaam reveals that, "these girls are not only victims but also willing preys and active social agents engaging in high-risk sexual behavior" (2001: 216). These studies are consistent with the opinions, attitudes, and estimates of people I spoke with in the rural setting. Parents attributed increases in premarital sexuality to disrespect for elders and tradition, and the problem is often construed as one of morality.

The issue is even more controversial when it concerns adolescent girls, who are not expected to be sexually active, although it has been repeatedly documented that they are (Bledsoe and Cohen 1993). Their early sexual activity is generally attributed to fundamental socio-economic change, the erosion of moral codes, familial control and abandoned rituals such as initiation ceremonies, which served to prepare adolescents for their roles and responsibilities as adults. Given all of this, early sexual activity is

perceived as a moral problem (Stiles 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2006; Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001).

Youth, however, articulated a more complex negotiation of devotion to parents and custom with an interest in personal expressions of romantic love. In a study of youth sexuality in southeastern Nigeria, Smith notes, “Even as [youth] have come to see sexual relationships in more individual terms, they have also internalized their parents’ sense of the importance of kinship” (Smith 2001:101). Furthermore, he remarked, “the meaning of premarital sexuality to young people is heavily shaped by the contest between collective kin and community interests in marriage and fertility and individual interests in intimacy, romantic love, and a more individualistic modern identity” (Smith 2001:101). The same tensions existed in Tanzania, and specifically Peponi, where both urban and rural youth experimented with premarital intimacy as a part of their individual coming of age experiences, while often respecting their parents’ wishes for arranged marriages, even when marriage ended other love affairs.

ROMANCE AND INTRODUCTIONS TO TEEN SEXUALITY

Kabisa, a 13 year-old schoolgirl and Mama Jumbe’s second youngest sister, is called Dada Yetu (our sister) by her younger and two older sisters. The nickname began when she was first born because the older girls always said, “this is Our Sister.” The nickname stuck and now everyone refers to her as Dada Yetu. She is a sweet, earnest, and helpful girl. She spent most of her time, when she was not at school, helping her older sister with household chores – mostly running errands, because Mama Jumbe was not permitted to leave the house without the permission of her husband. During my first few months in the village I spent time with Dada Yetu each day. Over the course of two

months I saw her develop from a young, sweet, awkward girl into a teenager exploring her sexuality with a young boy from Pangani.

One day we were sitting in the courtyard together; Dada Yetu was grating coconut in preparation for the evening meal and I was playing with Jumbe (the 1½-year-old son of Mama Jumbe). Mama Jumbe was inside attending to some laundry and ironing. A school friend of Dada Yetu burst through the gate. She rushed towards Dada Yetu, giggling and waving a letter (an 8 ½ x 11 size piece of paper folded down until it could fit in the palm of her hand). “It came!” she whispered. The girl passed the note to Dada Yetu and said, “It just came on the 4 pm bus; my cousin brought it. Read it!” Dada Yetu looked over her shoulder, noting the coast was clear, then she looked at me and whispered, “Don’t say anything!” with a conspiratorial wink. She unfolded the letter and giggled and gushed about her new boyfriend and all the romantic things he wrote to her. They met recently at a wedding in Pangani, which she was permitted to attend because she did not yet have her period.

The young man was four years her senior. In the few weeks since the wedding they had been secretly exchanging notes with the help of young friends who travel back and forth to the secondary school (Pangani has the nearest secondary school and a number of the secondary school aged kids in the village attend and commute daily or stay in town for the school week and return to Peponi for the weekend). Dada Yetu was excited by the prospect of a “real boyfriend” and the secrecy added an additional thrill. Her friend asked, “So, when will you see him again?” Dada Yetu relayed it was unclear when her new boyfriend would be able to get to Peponi, but he would keep writing to her and he was thinking of her. Dada Yetu shared a few pieces from the letter, “He is

thinking about my lips! And, he cannot wait to kiss me and hold my hand. He is so romantic. Isn't he romantic? Oh I wish I had a cell phone! Then we could text." At this point she looked at me expectantly, pointedly to the cell phone in my lap. That's where I had to draw the line in participating in the cloak and dagger activities. "No way, you can't use my phone to flirt with this boy!" The two girls laughed, knowing it was a pipe dream. "I wish I lived in Pangani, then I could see him. He is so handsome and romantic."

Dada Yetu continued her letter exchange and relationship with the young man, until her mother intercepted one such letter. Her parents became stricter – she was escorted to and from school and was no longer permitted to come to Mama Jumbe's house to help out, since there she spent much of her time unsupervised. Mama Zainabu, Dada Yetu's mother, told me, "She is just 13, this is much too young. Mama Jumbe was 19 when she married, and yes she was pregnant, but the age was acceptable. She was finished with school. Dada Yetu is still in school; she does not even have her period. There is no way we can permit this behavior."

Dada Yetu was a paradoxical mix of naiveté and sophistication. She knew that her young man's words were romantic and to her that was everything; however, she did not seem to comprehend, naively, the direction the relationship was headed. It was clear she thought all he wanted was to kiss her and hold her hand, but according to her mother, "this boy, we know his reputation in Pangani. He is a big flirt and likes the younger girls. He would take her virginity and discard her when she got pregnant. He is not serious. How could he be? Dada Yetu is only thirteen. She is not ready to be a wife. She is not ready to have a child."

Dada Yetu was curious and hopeful about her new romantic interest and explicitly stated her interest in exploring this new part of her life. It is unlucky for Dada Yetu that her young man lived in Pangani. This, however, was part of his appeal. He lived in a big town, he had a cell phone, and participated in what she rightly perceived as a more sophisticated world. Her parents, however intervened, and quite harshly. This response by Dada Yetu's parents was a deliberate departure from the expectations of young women of previous generations. It was expected that Dada Yetu would complete her education, even continue beyond primary school. Her mother realized that Dada Yetu was still very much a young girl and not ready for, or interested in, the responsibilities of mother or wife. Dada Yetu's experience speaks to the tumultuousness of teen sexuality in rural Africa. Forty years ago, girls Dada Yetu's age were getting married, today they are expected, and want, to stay in school. Their sexuality and interest in romantic relationships have not, however, diminished and often sets up an confusing situation for young people.

HOW YOUNG IS TOO YOUNG? PREMARITAL PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

Jumaa sent me a text message to my cell phone to cancel our meeting later that day. I replied and asked why he needed to cancel. His response: a emergency family meeting. Later, he stopped by to apologize for having to cancel our meeting. I asked what the emergency family meeting was about. He hesitated, something he rarely did in our conversations. "You don't have to tell me if it is too personal," I told him. "Well, it is in regard to Hamadi [age 15]." "Your younger brother, the one who is in secondary school in Pangani," I asked? "Yes," he began:

He got a girl in Peponi pregnant. It is stupid. I gave him condoms! All the time I'm giving him condoms. Everyone else says, "Don't have sex!" Well, I know this is unlikely; he's not going to stop having sex. So, I give him condoms to avoid exactly this. I don't want him to make the same mistakes as me. But now this has happened. The girl's family has proposed that she have an abortion in Pangani. They want us to pay for it. So, we had a family meeting to discuss it and figure out how to pay for it. And figure out what should be done with Hamadi.

In the end, Jumaa, and his extended family members came up with the money, 50,000 Tsh (\$50 US)⁹, to pay for the technically illegal abortion at the Pangani hospital. An abortion can be purchased if a family has the funds and the knowledge of how to navigate the situation. In Tanzania, abortion is illegal in most circumstances; unless the mother is in some danger, she is not permitted to have an abortion. Although Hamadi's young lover was not in danger, the family planned to take her to the hospital and obtain an abortion. In Tanzania, illegal abortions are punishable by imprisonment of up to fourteen years for the abortionist, seven years for the woman herself and three years for any person supplying drugs or instruments to induce such an abortion (Silberschmidt 2001). Illegal abortions, however, are hidden realities. Although the law is very strict, prosecutions for abortion are rare (Tumbo-Masabo & Liljeström 1994).

This was a particularly sensitive situation as Hamadi was 15-years-old and the pregnant girl was only 14. It was considered completely outside the realm of possibilities that the girl would have the child, or that they would get married. Neither family wanted, nor suggested this. Both Hamadi and the girl were considered much too young. And even then, getting a girl pregnant was not considered reason enough to force a marriage. Jumaa was quite upset, even angry, about the situation. He felt his brother, a bright and smart young man, stupidly ignored his advice. Jumaa also admonished the situation at

⁹ This is equivalent to a respectable amount of *mahari* (bridewealth) given for a first marriage.

large – this is the 10th young girl in Peponi to go for an abortion this year (this was in April of 2004, only 4 months into the year). “This is such a big problem. You see it, I know you do. The girls are sent by their mothers to fetch water, or flour from the *dukani* (shop), or some other small things and the men they are all sitting around and they flirt.”

I was completely stunned he could name ten girls he knew, for certain, had been to Pangani for an abortion this year. It seemed remarkable to me, but I agreed with him. Men, and boys too, have ample opportunity to flirt with young girls. I had seen it often enough walking through the village. It is common to see a young girl carrying a pail of water on her head, sashaying through the village on her way back home. Men frequently flirt with girls who are out and about in the village running errands for their mothers. Men comment on a girl’s technique of carrying water, or her smile, or her development (giving specifics about her breasts or bottom). All seemingly rather harmless in the moment, but the sexual innuendo was neither subversive nor hidden; even as a passerby, I was aware of it.

As Jumaa pointed out, Hamadi’s case is not unusual in Peponi, and as research in urban areas of Tanzania demonstrates, this is likely a growing trend among youth in Tanzania and Africa. My research shows that young people who are still in school are likely to seek an abortion with the encouragement and support from their families; however, not all young people choose an abortion. If they have completed their education they are not likely to do so. One might expect that the alternative for these young people is to get married, and some do. The following example illustrates an unexpected, but frequent, route of young people today.

FIRST COMES MARRIAGE, THEN COMES THE BABY



Figure 22: A Swahili Bride with her newborn. One of several weddings I attended where the bride and groom already had a child. (Not the same bride as discussed below).

The preference, both historically and currently, for Swahili marriage is for a young man and woman to be married before having children, with the women preferably still a virgin. Mjoa, a 22-year-old unmarried fisherman said:

Yes, I have a lover, her name is Duni, she is 19. Now it seems that she will become my wife because we have already gotten pregnant. I like her well enough and we will need to marry for the child. She is acceptable to my family as a wife. I asked my father if we could marry and he said yes. I did not tell him about the pregnancy right away, so he gave permission before knowing this. Then we went to her father, he is cousin to my father. Their fathers were brothers. So, Duni is a good first wife. They approve. It is ok that she is pregnant. We are deciding now if we should proceed with the wedding and parties soon, or wait until the baby is born. We are consulting the Imam on an auspicious date.

Mjoa considered himself ready for a wife, although, he was worried about raising the *mahari* funds to get married. “My father and uncles will help me now, especially since Duni is pregnant.” The circumstances of young couples like Mjoa and Duni demonstrate that the norms regarding weddings are changing. When Mjoa and Duni’s parents began

to plan a lavish wedding, with both families contributing in ways traditionally reserved for young couples without children, specifically when the bride is still a virgin, it did not come as a surprise to people in Peponi. In fact, no one criticized the families, or the couple, for the situation or the families' response to it. The fact that Duni was clearly not a virgin did not stop the families from planning an elaborate wedding. Indeed, I attended the wedding of Mjoa and Duni and it was one of the most lavish weddings during my time in Peponi. Before the hand grabbing ceremony, their child, 3 months old at the time, was brought into the bride's room for photographs with the bride. Mjoa and Duni's marriage was not the only wedding I attended where the couple already had a child. This case, and cases like it, illustrates how the marital landscape is changing in Peponi. While it is not the preferred trajectory for an engagement and wedding, to have the baby first, it is becoming more and more frequent in Peponi, Tanzania, and other African countries. Yet another path is increasingly common among young people who have finished school, not marrying at all.

'I DID NOT AIM. I WAS FOOLISH': PREGNANCY AND NO MARRIAGE

Jumaa, 24, works for the small beach resort several miles north of the village. He grew up in Iringa¹⁰, from where his mother is originates. His father pursued a secondary education and moved to Iringa for a government job when he was young. He still holds the same government post in Iringa. "My parents divorced when I was young, after having four children together. My mother died not long after. She was very sick. Cancer. We did not spend much time in Peponi as children. Mostly we were in Iringa. My grandmother [mother's mother] raised us. My father helped some, but mostly we did

¹⁰ Iringa is in central Tanzania several hundred miles away from Peponi, and two days by bus.

not see him even though he too lived in Iringa.” Jumaa moved to Peponi after completing secondary school and did not pass the exams to continue on. “I decided to come and to know my father’s family, and to seek help from them. I’m not a fisherman, and since I had completed secondary and some high school, my English is good, I got a job at the beach resort as a bar man, serving drinks to *wazungu* [white people].”

After working at the beach resort for four years, Jumaa became restless, despite acknowledging he was one of only a few people from the village with steady employment. He earned \$50 U.S.dollars a month, a generous and substantial income for a young single man living in a village. He was one of the few men with a cell phone, wore new western clothing (dark jeans, crisp white t-shirts), and completed the building of his own house on a piece of property he purchased from the local government at the northwestern part of the village, near the *porini* (the bush) and on the edge of the Sisal Estate. The house was large by local standards, but built with local materials of clay bricks and thatch. “I wanted to build a nicer house, with cinder blocks and metal roof, but I had enough money to proceed with this house. I wanted to live in my own house, not with relatives, so I built it.” Jumaa, shortly after finishing his house, discussed wanting to quit his job and move to Arusha where he might have more opportunities. This was just a few weeks before the end of my fieldwork. I asked him what he would look for in Arusha, he replied, “I want to find a more fulfilling job, not just have the same conversation over and over again with another traveling *mzungu*. Also, I want to meet a wife, a partner, someone to love. I cannot find that person here. This is just *kijijini* (village).” I inquired about his girlfriend, Binundu, the 23-year-old tailor who sews

clothing from her home. I was aware of their relationship. “Oh, she is a nice girlfriend, but I have goals, she knows that I do not want to marry her.”

Since returning to the U.S., Jumaa and I have communicated via email, and even Skype¹¹, checking in every couple of months with each other to learn how each other’s families are doing. In December of 2008, three years after I returned to the US, he wrote me this letter via email:

We received the news about Obama and we were very glad, as are Americans. Everyone was very happy. How is life, Susi? I think you have heard Sofiya has a new baby. I also have a baby; I have her for many days now. The child is called Fatuma, she is now a little girl and is now almost three years. I had such bad luck but because I did not AIM. I was foolish. You remember Binundu, the tailor of sewing clothes, my girlfriend? We had this child together outside of marriage. Sofiya and Mwanahaji are now in Tanga and Mwanahaji now she has returned to school and will do the test in the November. Sofiya watches both her baby and Mwanahaji’s baby. How is your Swahili? I see you still remember much.

Jumaa was disappointed that he did not “AIM,” referring to the goal he had of meeting someone outside the village, someone he could love, a partner. Instead, he “foolishly” got Binundu pregnant. Pressure from both extended families resulted in an engagement between Jumaa and Binundu. Since their engagement 5 years ago, however, he has spent 4 of the past 5 years living in Arusha working at another backpacker’s hotel, bar and club. He has visited Peponi seldom during this time with only a few short visits.

I don’t go back there. Arusha is much calmer for me, I have opportunities to work and meet interesting people. When I am in Peponi there is pressure to marry, to marry Binundu, or someone else. There are so many weddings – even when I was there recently there were 6 weddings in two weeks. Every night there was a party with dancing. Swahili people love a wedding (email communication January 2010).

Jumaa went on to say that during that particular visit he was nervous he would be coerced into actually marrying Binundu. It is not unusual for couples to share a wedding

¹¹ Skype is online video chatting.

day and wedding activities. And, it is not unheard of for a groom to be coerced into a wedding. In fact, Jumaa had good reason to fear a forced wedding as his father (research assistant to the Landbergs) was forced into an unanticipated marriage. Landberg writes about it in her dissertation. She called him “The Reluctant Groom”:

K.T., a young man of about 15 or 16, went off to another village for the wedding of a young female cousin, related to him through his father. The wedding was a disaster from a number of standpoints. The proposed groom, who had threatened to pull out of the arranged marriage once before, did not show up and refused to marry the girl. All of the marriage payments had been made, the necessary monies had been collected for the various festivities, which had been planned, and relatives had come from other areas for the celebration. The girl was extremely upset K.T.’s father turned to him and said that he should marry her there and then. K.T., who had other plans for his immediate future, broke into tears himself and begged his father not to make him get married at this point . . . K.T. returned from the wedding with an unexpected bride (1977:141).

Landberg stresses that most people in the village expressed the opinion that the young man’s father behaved inappropriately, and his motives were selfish; he had been one of the primary organizers of the original match, so he wanted to save face by offering up his son. Despite the inappropriateness of his request to his son, people also believed K.T. did right by his father. Interestingly, K.T.’s parents were divorced and the main opponents to the marriage were K.T.’s mother and her brother. They raised and educated K.T. with little help from his father. This marriage usurped their role and they were not involved in ways they would have been if K.T.’s marriage were to have been arranged in the more typical fashion. Landberg describes this type of marriage as rare. In light of this, Jumaa, the son of K.T., is perhaps correct to be nervous about the pressure to marry Binundu.

In another recent email (January 2010) Jumaa said, “I still think about marrying, but I do not know when I will do it. I am still looking for my life. I am still engaged to

Binundu, she is *mchumba* (fiancé), but we don't see each other and it is not my priority. Even now I'm not sure what I want from my life, I am thinking about it." Jumaa desires and seeks a different life for himself, while at the same time succumbing to the same pitfalls he identifies of his "village" family members in Peponi. Jumaa is in a unique position because he has greater than average education and is able to procure employment. His work has brought him into greater contact with the outside world and he is on the one hand interested in a more worldly marital relationship, as well as a better life for himself. On the other hand, he sees himself as foolish because he did not "AIM." He sees himself as having been unable to resist the pitfalls of the village because he got a girl pregnant. He did manage to avoid the situation of an unwanted marriage, unlike his father. Like many young people in the village the birth of his children has not, at least up until this point, meant a precipitous and unwanted marriage. I was amazed at the number of young women who had babies but were not married, nor had they previously been married, yet another example of how life in Peponi has changed.

PREMARITAL PRACTICES CHALLENGE WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE

All these tales of young people challenge cultural ideals regarding expectations of young people, weddings, and even marriage itself. There are examples of young men and women who still hold true to the 'ideal' and marry without pregnancy and/or marry the parent of their child/ren. Many of the unmarried men and women I interacted with in Peponi; however, have since had children, or fathered children, outside the bounds of marriage. Furthermore, they have no concrete plans to marry the parent of their child/ren or marry anyone. What then, is the role of a wedding in Swahili society?

Auspicious Beginnings

Most stories of Swahili marriage begin with a wedding, and mine did, too. My arrival, marked by a big family wedding, was a particularly auspicious beginning to my fieldwork in Peponi.

*It was mid-morning on a Saturday when I officially moved to the village. I arrived by taxi and that was enough to attract a lot of attention – a car driving down the dirt path! We were loaded down with my luggage for the year so I received even more attention – what is all that stuff for?! And, I am a white American woman in my late twenties – **Mzungu, anakuga!** A white person is coming! Children chased after the car and once we parked, neighbors poured out to see what was going on.*

*I was looking forward to settling into village life after spending my first month, predictably, procuring my research permit and my residency pass, arranging to live in the village, and securing my own house to live in. Since it was Saturday I knew that everyone would be around and I'd have a chance to meet a lot of people. Plus, they were expecting me since we arranged today as the day I would arrive a week or two ago. The taxi dropped me off outside the thatch fence of my landlord, Rama. The plan was for me to live with Rama and his family for a few weeks until he finished building the house I was to live in. After hauling myself out of the taxi, paying the driver, unloading my luggage, and helping to carry it into the courtyard I realized that I did not recognize any of the few people there, save Rama's toddler, ½ year old Jumbe, whom I had met before. An older child was sent to fetch either Rama or his wife, Mama Jumbe. While waiting I learned that it was the wedding day of Mama Jumbe's younger sister, Saba (17). Saba was to marry the son of her father's sister -- her paternal cross cousin, Bakari (19). A few minutes later Mama Jumbe came running into the courtyard, breathless and enthusiastic about my arrival: "Do you have **kanga** (colorful local cloth)? You must have **kanga**, and then I will show you how to wear it and we will go to see the bride. You have a camera, yes? You can bring it. That will be wonderful."*

*After offering me a meal and beverage Mama Jumbe lent me some **kanga** (I purchased some in Tanga (anticipating a need for it), but did not have time to take it to a tailor to be cut and sewn). After satisfying her need to have me properly garbed (**kanga** tight around my waist and covering my hair, neck, and shoulders) we proceeded to her **baba kubwa's** (her father's brother) house where her sister was sitting with her **kungwi** (female marriage sponsors) waiting for her groom to arrive for the hand grabbing ceremony.*

*We arrived at the house a short walk across the **barabarani** (the main road which bisects the village – ocean side and bush side) in the direction of the ocean. Once again I attracted a lot of attention: an **mzungu** with a fancy camera wearing kanga in the local way. "Who is this?" "Why is she here?" "**Mzungu!**" "What is she doing?" "Can I have your camera?" "Who are you?" "Do you need a husband?" "Take MY picture!" These*

were all questions and comments I heard shouted at Mama Jumbe, or me directly, as we wound our way through the thick crowd outside her uncle's house. The DJ was blasting Swahili music with a beat and a high-pitched female singing voice. Women danced in a circle under a tarp that was strung between houses/buildings in the courtyard. Their feet rarely left the ground, shuffling and dragging along. Their hips swayed, emphasized by the extra kanga wrapped around their waists, their hands lifted to their upper lip with a piercing "aiieeiaieeeee" marking their enthusiasm, they did not seem to mind the heat and they seemed unaware of all the spectators and commotion.

Mama Jumbe ignored the questions, held her head high, and dragged me inside. There, she explained my status "**Mzungu huyu ni rafiki yangu**, SUSSSSI." This white person is my friend, Susi. She is staying with us, she will live here with us for one year." Inside it was dark and the loud music outside was muted but the call of the bride's song was loud coming from the bride's room. Many women milled around carrying food and water, some leaned against the wall, some sat on the floor, others were lucky to have small stools.

Women waited in a somewhat haphazard line to gain entrance to the bride's room where the **kungwi** sang out "**Njooni kina Mama, Biharusi amependeza. Njoo, Njooni Mama Harusi**" "Come, The bride, she is beautiful. Come, The bride she is ready. Come all women. Come see the bride. Come Sister. Come Auntie. Come Mother of the Bride." Mama Jumbe pushed through the line, confident in her role, and women readily made way for the sister of the bride and her **mzungu** friend. When we entered the room I saw the bride, Saba, sitting on the bed in the traditional Swahili bridal way – her legs extending out in front of her on the bed, her arms limp at her side and her head and gaze directed at her lap. She glanced up and tried to hide her smile, glancing quickly back down at her hands. Her hair and face were covered with a sheer green veil. She wore a shiny, green dress with many layers of green chiffon, beading and embroidery on the skirt and bodice. The sleeves were puffed and big. It was a few sizes too big for the petite Saba, but she was beautiful and beaming in her wedding finery. I later learned the dress was rented in town for about \$10. The bride does not accompany her **kungwi** to choose her own dress, hence the poor fit.

The rest of the room was filled with women who were tidying up the space, making last minute adjustments to the bride's veil, shoes, dress, hair and make-up; getting dressed themselves, and singing the song. The women gasped out loud and shrieked when I entered the room. They were equally excited and astonished by my presence. They were full of the same questions for Mama Jumbe. After a few questions they directed their interrogation at me. "Where are you from?" "Do you have a husband?" "Have you ever seen such a fine bride?" "Doesn't our bride look so white [fair]?"

Soon word came that the groom and the men were coming from the mosque. The conversation shifted, the singing picked back up in intensity and volume. Women continued to flow in and out of the room making their compliments to the bride with words and coins. Eventually the women looked to me to make my offering to the bride. It

is customary for all the women who come in to the room to bring some money for the bride.



Figure 23: The lap of a Swahili bride with coins and notes.

*Women enter the room, comment on the beauty of the bride, dance and sing, and perhaps offer up some witty advice. Then they put money on a metal tray on the floor, place it in the bride's hand directly, or fling it at the bride (Figure 23). I quickly dug in my pocket, under my kanga, searching for some money. All I could find was 1000 Tsh, about \$1 US, which was a lot in comparison to what other women were giving. I placed it on the tray and watched Mama Jumbe grasped her sister's shoulders. With tears in her eyes Mama Jumbe shouted to her sister: "This is it! It is not a test. This is the real thing. You are no longer a schoolgirl. You are about to be a woman a wife." Then, we were ushered out of the room and pushed up against the hall wall as the groom and his men and family burst through the front door and made their way to the bride's room for the hand grabbing. I could not see the hand grabbing, there were so many people. But, moments later, the couple was pushed out of the room to a taxi (hired from Tanga town for the occasion) waiting outside. They were to ride the few blocks to their first home as a married couple. It took the couple a few minutes to reach the car and then the car had trouble exiting because the crowd was so large. Once the couple departed everyone's attention turned towards the wedding feast of **pilau**, a spiced rice dish with beef. The bride's female family serves all the guests and men and women sit separately on grass mats on the ground surrounding the house.*

WEDDINGS AS GENDERED RITUALS

Weddings are clearly an important event for the entire community. Strobel's work in Mombasa demonstrates the intensely gendered nature of Swahili wedding celebrations in the 20th century (1979). She argues, and I agree, that weddings reflect

broad patterns of social change and reveal much about a society's values, social structure, and ethnic consciousness (Strobel 1979). Swahili weddings are segregated by sex; men and women attend separate gatherings. They are especially significant for women; they offered, and continue to offer, women a chance for gossip, discussion, and entertainment (Strobel 1979). Men, on the other hand, fulfill these needs in neighborhood mosques, political associations, social clubs, or in the activity of daily life, which affords them more freedom and opportunity for such activities. Women, however, are not a part of these all-male realms and rarely get the type of opportunities, that men have daily, which a wedding provides. For married women with strict husbands, attendance at a wedding and related activities are a rare chance to move about freely: a husband would not be able to deny his wife's participation in a large extended family event without suffering censure from others, especially elder women.

Activities leading up to a wedding give women multiple occasions to gather, including; the rice sorting party, preparation of foods for various gatherings, visiting the secluded bride in the weeks before the wedding to give her "lessons" in the form of advice on the duties and expectations of a wife, as well as to contribute to the beauty preparations, night time dance parties, and wedding day activities. For the groom's



Figure 24: Here a woman sorts rice; which comes in 50lb bags from China. The rice available in Peponi is typically the least expensive and worst quality, with many broken pieces, stones, and debris. Before cooking the rice women sort the rice to remove stones and debris.

female kin there are additional gatherings that involve preparing feasts for the groom's family and also gathering gifts to present to the bride on the wedding day. Each of these activities involves groups of women spending hours together, singing, dancing, talking, telling stories, cooking, and preparing in venues and with large groups of women which they do not ordinarily encounter in their daily lives.



Figure 25: Women dancing and singing outside the bride's house. The bride's family has provided a covered area to provide guests with shelter from the sun and/or rain.

Weddings are an opportunity to display the wealth of the newlywed couple's families and that of their guests. Not unlike weddings in the U.S., the bride and groom's families are expected to spend generously providing feasts and dances. Scholars have described this as an opportunity to enhance the prestige of each family (Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979). Formerly, wealthy people's weddings extended over four or five months, giving them time between feasts and dances to accumulate necessary funds (Strobel 1979). This type of wedding celebration is virtually non-existent today. An elaborate wedding celebration might last several days to a week, at most. A modest wedding might last for one day only. Economic hardship largely accounts for the reduction in duration and extravagance; also, it is not unusual for several weddings to occur simultaneously during one weekend, where families might share the expense of a

DJ. I attended twenty wedding celebrations and associated women's activities over the course of my fieldwork. Most of these weddings were clustered during certain months/weekends of the year, the reason for which is certain times of the year, months, days, and times are considered more auspicious than others and the timing changes each year.

At one feast preparation party a group of 40 women gathered to sort ten 50 lb bags of rice. We sat in the shade busily throwing out stones and debris. The bride's family provided a DJ with a sound system. The DJ, from Tanga, was in town all week providing Swahili wedding music for various events and three nights of music and dancing late into the night. They served *mandazi* (donuts) and cold juice to the women sorting rice. The women commented: "Oh, we get *juisi* (juice) and it is cold." "Mmm, these *mandazi* are so sweet, and they used cardamom, this is how a *mandazi* is supposed to be, it is so good. I came yesterday to help prepare the *mandazi*, they did not hold back on anything." Serving a cold beverage, like juice or soda, was assuredly an indicator that the family was spending money on the guests. These comments were frequent, including critical ones, such as: "Tsk tsk, these *mandazi* (donuts) you taste that they did not use much sugar. They are not sweet enough." This criticism offered an example of how a bride's family was cutting corners and not putting enough money into the festivities.

Responsibilities for the wedding preparations and marriage ceremony continue to be divided by sex. So much so that men are not permitted into the vicinity of many of the preparation activities. Men supervise the legal and religious aspects of marriage, while women organize the wedding festivities. Strobel describes men's activities as being, "a

minor ritual compared with the six or seven days of feasting and dancing that comprise the women's celebration" (Strobel 1979:10).

There are three main phases involved in Swahili marriage ceremonies: the proposal (*uposo*), the Islamic contract ceremony (*hutuba*), and the presentation of the groom to the bride, which includes *kupa mkono* (to give the hand). The last provides occasion for feasting and for other festivities for kinsmen and neighbors. The second and third phases of the marriage ceremonies need not occur on the same day, but usually do. The dates and times for these three phases are determined by divination. The parents and kin of the prospective bride and groom consult with a local *Mwalimu* (Koranic school teachers) or some other person who is known as an expert at divining by using the *Koran* or other Arabic literary sources (see also Landberg 1977). These people determine the dates and times of all phases of the wedding process.

The Proposal and Pre-Marriage Payments

Landberg, in her dissertation chapter "Descent Groups and Ritual" discusses weddings:

marriages follow a basic format which share at least two features common to Muslim marriages elsewhere. The two components of Islamic marriages as required by Islamic law are the formal contract ceremony and the marriage payment made by the groom to the bride. There are other traditional payments in the Swahili area which are made in the course of events from proposal through the marriage ceremony . . . These additional payments and the various different ritual events and festivities involved in many first marriages are not required by Islamic law. Instead they are the result of local custom (*mila*) and not of Islamic legal requirements (*sheria*) (1977: 306).

Today, as in the late 1960s, a man wishing to marry a young girl must first present his proposal to her parents and kinsmen and negotiate the marriage payments with them. He

cannot do this himself and must delegate the duty to a mediator, usually his father's brother, his father, or grandfather. In the absence of a close male relative, the mediator can be any male kinsmen or even a particularly good friend. At first, the mediator does not approach the parents of the girl directly and instead consults with close male relatives of the prospective bride's father. He approaches the father's oldest brother, younger brothers if the father is the oldest; if no brothers are available then the bride's father's father should be approached. Whomever the mediator approaches becomes the official representative for the bride's family. The bride's representative plays a critical role in the marriage payment negotiations, even though he does not set the payment amounts, he acts as a mediator in the negotiations between the two families and accepts payment on behalf of the girl's family.

Who sets the *mahari* (marriage payment) varies but is usually the prospective bride's father, or some combination of her patrilineal male elders, again depending on who is available. Both men and women maintain that the *mahari* is the only fee that is required by *Sharia* (Islamic law) and there is no specified amount, it is open to negotiation. There are various other payments, which are said to be *mila* (custom). The financial resources and willingness of the prospective groom's male kin to cooperate influence the number, type, and amount of these *mila* payments. *Mahari* is the main marriage payment and is made in all legal marriages. The amount of *mahari* offered and paid does reflect, often times, the type of union. Higher payments are made for first time marriages. The type of union also impacts the bride's involvement in the process as well. A woman entering her second or third marriage is likely to negotiate her own *mahari* and receive payment directly. The *mahari* is considerably less for subsequent marriages. For

a first marriage, the payment is made to the father of the bride but as *Sharia* denotes it is intended for the bride. Among other things, a portion of this money should be used to purchase wedding furniture for the young couple, the most important of which is a large fancy bed (see Masquelier 2009 for an example of this in West Africa). Stiles notes that: “*Khadis* and other religious experts maintain that the *mahari* is solely the property of the bride to dispose of as she pleases, it is common for parents of the bride to take some or all of the *mahari* themselves” (2004: 115). In fact, in Peponi there is tremendous pressure on the bride’s parents, from extended family members, to get their “cut” of the *mahari* (see Stiles 2004 and Caplan 1984). Landberg refers to numerous conflicts and fights due to failure to completely pay *mahari*; and there continue to be tensions between families regarding *mahari* payments in Peponi today (Landberg 1977).

During Landberg’s research she reported *mahari* payments ranging between 200-600 shillings (\$28-60 U.S. dollars at that time) for a young girl, although her informants reported *mahari* as high as 2000 shillings (\$285) in a few instances (Landberg 1977). Landberg also lists more than 20 different types of *mila* payments made by the groom or groom’s kin to the bride, her kin (both male and female), and her *kungwi* over the course of the engagement/wedding. Most of these *mila* payments have disappeared from Peponi marriages, although some persist, including payments to the *kungwi*, and to the bride’s kin. It was repeated to me many times that the most important payment is the *mahari*. Current *mahari* payment amounts can be seen in Tables 4 and 5. Similar to what Stiles’ describes in Zanzibar, women in Peponi are unaware of the amount of the *mahari* for their first marriage and many receive their portion as wedding gifts meant to establish her home (2004). In fact, Table 8 specifies that the *mahari* payment went to the parents, not

the bride, for 90% of women's marriages. In in-depth interviews, women described they often did not know the full amount of the *mahari* and that they were rarely informed of any details regarding the marital payment negotiations (see Table 6). Men, on the other hand, reported paying the bride directly in 28% of marriages, compared to just 5% as reported by women (Table 7). Women and men, young and old, discuss *mahari* as having increased in recent years, so much so that they are prohibitive to engagement and marriage. Many point to this increase in *mahari* as the explanation for why young men and women are postponing marriage and/or not marrying in the case of pregnancy. Today, men report paying between 20,000 Tsh and 100,000 Tsh (\$20-100 U.S. dollars) for their *mahari*, and 12% reported providing a bed and furniture.

Table 3: Amount of *Mahari* paid as reported by women from survey. N=181 marriages, at time of research 1000Tsh = \$1 U.S..

Amount <i>Mahari</i> Paid	# of Marriages
No response	10
None paid	2
Less than 10,000Tsh	6
10,000Tsh+	1
20,000Tsh+	3
50,000Tsh+	1
100,000Tsh	2
200,000Tsh+	1
Furniture (including a bed)	3
2 cows	1
Does not know	105
Does not say	44
Forgot	2

Table 4: *Mahari* paid in full as reported by women N= 181.

<i>Mahari</i> paid	Number
No response	4
Yes	170
No	7

Table 5: *Mahari* paid in full as reported by men in survey, N=186.

<i>Mahari</i> Paid	Number
No response	1
Yes	183
No	2

Table 6: *Mahari* payment made to ? as reported by women in Survey, N=181.

<i>Mahari</i> Payment made to	Number
No Answer	5
Did not know	2
Bride Directly	10
Bride's Parents	164

Table 7: *Mahari* payment made to ? as reported by men in Survey, N=186.

<i>Mahari</i> Payment made to	Number
No response	13
Bride Directly	53
Bride's Parents	120

The Groom's Women Offer Gifts

*The day of Muhammedi's wedding I joined his female kin (mother, sisters, aunts, cousins, etc.) to prepare the wedding meal and gather gifts for the bride. We made **mandazi** and **pilau** with beef in large quantities. Around 10:30 am we took a break from cooking and the women began to pack two small black suitcases (carry-on style with wheels) full of presents for the bride.*



Figure 26: Women preparing gifts for the bride. Gifts include luxury items such as scented body lotion, perfume, lingerie, and fabric.

*The groom's mother folded and organized all the gifts (fabric, perfume, soap, lotion, lingerie, kitchen goods, and other luxury items). She held each gift up to show the rest of the women before placing it in the suitcase. The room was packed with nearly 30 women, brightly dressed, and singing enthusiastically, in a call and answer style, a song about **Kina Mama** "women's things" – they called out to each of the groom's female relatives to "**lete tunywe dada/mama/shangazi harusi**" (bring us your contribution sister/mother/aunt of the wedding). This is an exclusively female domain. Young unmarried women are not permitted, it is a sphere where married, or previously married, women gather to celebrate marriage. At one point the groom's mother stood up and began to dance in the center of the room and shockingly (to me and everyone else) the groom's father entered the room with his arm raised above his head swaying a 5,000 Tsh (about \$5) note above his head. The room erupted in giggles and the high-pitched celebratory calling associated with Swahili women and Muslim women throughout the world. The volume and enthusiasm of the singing increased and the verse switched to "**Baba harusi**" (Father of the wedding) and all the ladies delighted in his "intrusion." The groom's father passed the note to his wife, who persisted in waving it above her head while she continued to sing and dance. He stayed for less than a minute dancing in the style of the women, sashaying his hips, and then he departed. It was the only time I ever saw a man enter this exclusively female domain. The women were slightly shocked, and mostly delighted at his daring, and approved of his "donation" to the bridal gift. Later, after the cooking was finished, and just before the groom and his men were finished with the wedding ceremony at the mosque, the groom's female relatives processed from their house, stopping by the mosque to join the groom and his men, and then they all processed to the house of the bride together. It was a large party of women and men, that increased in numbers as we danced/sang our way through the village. Women carried the suitcase and two large bowls full of gifts (covered with brightly colored cloth) on top of their heads at the front of the procession. When we reached the bride's house the women delivered the gifts into the bride's house to her **kungwi** (wedding sponsors) and the groom and his men entered the house for the hand grabbing ceremony.*

Kungwi and Bridal Preparations

Not unlike weddings in the U.S. there is a particular order to events on the day of a wedding. Usually a bride spends the week before her wedding with her *kungwi* (wedding sponsors) in seclusion. These women are responsible for her beautification and teaching her about what to expect from her wedding day, night, and married life. One particular bride (Rahema) stayed with her *kungwi*, Mama Hamadi, who was my next-door neighbor,

and I was easily able to see many of her preparations over the course of the week.

Typically the bride is confined for the week and is not to show her face (in fact, her *kungwi* keep a *kanga*, brightly colored cloth, over her head at all times). Another time I was riding the bus to Tanga when a bride, who was being taken to Tanga on the bus to go to a professional beauty salon, and her *kungwi* stumbled onto the bus with the help of others as the bride was completely covered, including her face and eyes. The bride is also required not to speak or show emotion during this time until after the wedding. One afternoon five days before the wedding, my neighbor invited me over to watch her mix the beauty skin lightening cream for the bride's skin. The *kungwi* and several other women sat together on a woven mat mixing the cream. Mama Hamadi exclaimed: "It's like mixing a cake batter!" The cream consisted of skin lightening cream, lotion, and coconut oil. Rehema, the bride, was alone inside while the rest of the women were outside socializing and enjoying the breeze in the courtyard. When the cream was finished the women moved inside to where Rehema was waiting. Once we settled into the room I asked the bride how she was feeling. She did not respond. I asked her if she was excited for her wedding. She shyly nodded her head. At this point Mama Hamadi, her *kungwi*, said to me "She's not supposed to talk." Then, she turned to Rehema and said: "Answer her question, you can speak." The *kungwi* are in charge of the bride in a literal way – the bride is instructed not to speak or move unless directed to do so. The *kungwi* then lifted the bride's covering and began to smear the cream onto her face, neck, chest, hands, and arms. The bride sat limply and allowed the *kungwi* to manipulate her body as necessary. Mama Hamadi said to me: "See, I should be able to lift her hand and find no resistance when I move it, like this." Henna is also applied, for the first time

properly, and can take two or more days to apply the elaborate design such as that in Figure 27. Middleton describes this time as a liminal period, in both location and appearance, “while her body is transformed from that of a pre-sexual girl to that of a physically adult woman, process known as *kufuga ukuti* (to bring out her beauty) (Middleton 1992).



Figure 27: A bride poses for photos with a professional photographer from Tanga. Here she cups her hands, showing she is ready to accept what awaits her. Her hands, arms, chest, feet, and legs are painted. Some women elect to also paint their stomach, pelvic area, back, and buttocks in an effort to please their new husbands.

The day of the wedding the bride is kept in a room and initially only her *kungwi* are allowed in. The first thing they do is put the bride in her wedding finery. The bride’s hair and make-up is then done by the *kungwi*. At this point other female relatives of the bride are invited inside. They filter in a steady stream of short visits to offer advice to the *kungwi* and to the bride. One of the things that struck me about the process as being so completely different from a wedding in the U.S. is that the bride has no say in clothing, hairstyle, or make-up. She does not pick out her dress; rather it is usually rented from Tanga and chosen by the *kungwi*. Every bride I saw was dressed in a green frothy gown, although no one could offer a particular reason for the choice of color other than it was

fashionable). I never once saw a *kungwi* offer a bride the chance to look in a mirror to see the final result and no bride ever requested a mirror to see her image. *Kungwi*, and other female visitors, repeatedly told the bride, and each other, how beautiful she looked.



Figure 28: Another bride, painted with henna and wearing a green gown, sits on a bed with her legs and arms extended in front of her. All brides are instructed to sit like this with eyes downcast and no smile.

Once the bride is prepared for her wedding ceremony the *kungwi* inform the male elders (the bride's father's brother, or another elder male relative) and the *mwali*mu. They enter the room to ask the bride if she is formally entering into the marriage of her own free will. Middleton writes that there are brides, in Lamu, known to refuse at this late stage (Middleton 1992). Once the bride assures the male elders she is marrying by choice, the *kungwi* begin to sing and invite women (married women only) to come see the beautiful bride. The women who come are her relatives, the groom's relatives, and her friends. Women bring money for the bride and sing her praises. The money she receives is meant to be her start-up funds for her marriage. Meanwhile, the groom, his male relatives, and the bride's male representatives are all at the mosque participating in the *hutuba*, the contract ceremony. This ceremony follows religious and government

requirements. Only men are present including the groom and his male kin as well as male kin to represent the bride. At this time the groom gives his formal agreement to the marriage and her representatives announce the agreement of the bride. Vows are given in Arabic and the process of making these vows is referred to as *kusoma ndoa* (literally, to read the marriage). After the groom and his male family members process from the mosque to the home of the bride they then enter the room where the bride awaits the groom with her *kungwi*. The actual moment with the groom and bride consists of *kupa mkono* (to give the hand) done at the bride's home. In addition to giving the bride his hand, the groom lifts the veil. Middleton describes this: "He places his right hand on her head and blesses her by reading an appropriate verse from the Koran" (Middleton 1992). I saw this, or a version of this, several times only. Most grooms only lifted the veil to "see" the bride. It is usually a quiet, relaxed atmosphere where the groom grasps the bride's hand, supported by her *kungwi's* hand.

The Wedding "Fight"

At the wedding of Bimwinyi and Miguu an unusual situation transpired. The *kungwi* were singing and celebrating the bride in the usual manner when the groom and his relatives were spotted processing from the mosque. Everyone was ushered out of the room and the two *kungwi*, the bride, and I remained. I was invited to stay as the official wedding videographer and as a friend of the bride and *kungwi*. The senior *kungwi* quickly hopped up onto the bed and placed herself behind the bride with her legs surrounding the bride (said to symbolize the *kungwi* giving birth to the bride). The two *kungwi* held a furtive conversation. I heard the younger *kungwi* say: "What are we going to do about the payment? The groom's men never paid us the final payment." As the

groom and his men entered the house the senior *kungwi* shouted over the ruckus from outside: “DO NOT LET THEM IN UNTIL THEY PAY!” The next thing I knew the men were at the door and a lively argument ensued. The men denied the accusation that they never paid the *kungwi* their fee for sponsoring the bride. Eventually the weight of the thirty, or so, men pushing against the door was more than the junior *kungwi* could handle. The groom and his male relatives gushed into the room filling the small space. More of the bride’s female relatives entered. Several arguments developed at once and the groom was pushed and shoved to the front. He lifted the bride’s veil to peer at her face. The groom smiled knowingly and said “*Amependeza*” (She is beautiful). The bride attempted to control her shy smile, but was unsuccessful. She did manage to keep her gaze averted to her hands. Meanwhile, five or more arguments between the bride’s *kungwi* and the groom’s male relatives continued with each side holding their ground. The senior *kungwi*, sitting behind the bride, was yelling at the top of her lungs and pointing her finger and flinging her arms about, jostling the bride. It was loud and heated. At one point, a young man, related to the groom, shouted at me, “Hey Susi! This is how we do things in Peponi! Woohoo! This is a wedding, African style!” He laughed and laughed, and so did everyone else. The arguments were impassioned as everyone was trying to save face, but the underlying feeling turned to humor. It was obvious the arguments were mostly a joke to everyone. Eventually, one of the groom’s male relatives shouted “HOW MUCH?!” To his, and my surprise, it was only 1000 Tsh (the equivalent of \$1). He reached into his back pocket, pulled out a 1000 Tsh note and threw it at the senior *kungwi* sitting on the bed – she promptly grabbed the note and stuck it into her bra while everyone else cheered. In the middle of all of this, the groom took the bride’s hand

(supported by her *kungwi*'s hand) and clasped it between his two hands. After a few seconds a female relative of the groom entered the room and said, "Enough! He has grabbed her hand. *Tuende*, let us go!" And with that the fight was over. It was an intense situation, and fortunately, it ended well. It certainly highlighted the symbolic importance of the various wedding payments and the necessity to respect, especially women's rights to payment.

My example of the wedding fight highlights women's role and the agency they possess to maintain it. In West Africa, Masquelier notes that marriage was also the business of women. By insisting that marriage was their own realm Masquelier concluded it was a way for women to:

Resolutely challenge patriarchal authority and define wedding prestations as a female arena of power from which men should be excluded, at least theoretically. She further implied that women should systematically resist Islamic ideologies that undermined forms of accumulation through which women traditionally created value and generated status for themselves. Her testimony echoed the beliefs of numerous Mawri women similarly anxious to secure some measure of autonomy and preserve their power bases at a time when economic forces and religious reforms are increasingly working against women's interests and agendas (2009:175).

Unlike the situation in Masquelier's case, the men in Peponi did not fail to make the final payment to the *kungwi* as an outward expression of an adherence to a reformed or revitalized Islam, which discourages excessive bridewealth payments. Rather it was on the one hand pushing boundaries and on the other hand an attempt to see with how much they could get away. These particular *kungwi*, not unlike many Swahili women, were not to be trifled with and demanded their payment. For them, lack of payment was the ultimate disgrace given the importance of their role in preparing the bride, hence they fought for their payment despite the scene they caused. In some ways this fight was

outrageous and unusual, although it spoke to the constant tensions between men and women and also demonstrated women's ability to negotiate for what they are due.

After the fight ended, and the *kungwi* received their final payment, the bride and groom were jostled out of the room. They squeezed between all the onlookers outside where a pickup truck awaited them. The bride and groom crammed into the front cab of the truck. Twenty, or more, people crammed into the back of the truck. The pick up truck had only a short distance to go and a large crowd of people followed the couple to their new home: a small mud brick and thatch home in the older section of the village near to the beach. Following the hand grabbing ceremony a photographer usually photographs the bride and groom together and with others. Most often it is a young man from the village with a point and shoot film camera. Several weddings, where the family had the funds to splurge, hired someone from the city with a nice camera, including bright lights, and even a video camera. During the photo session the bride and groom are tossed about into various "romantic" poses by female relatives, like the pose of the new couple in Figure 29. Others crowd into the room to shout and offer suggestions for poses.

On this particular wedding day I was asked to come to the home of the bride and groom to take photos of the newlyweds in their bedroom. The couple in Figure 29 was a particularly shy bride and groom. The photos from their post-wedding photo shoot illustrate their awkwardness with the public displays of affection, despite their loving relationship. The romantic nature of the poses reflects women's increasing fascination with, and expectation for, love and romance in relationships. This juxtaposition of the "modern" combined with the Islamic and Swahili tradition of weddings indicates yet another way in which local people adapt global ideas for local purposes.



Figure 29: A new couple posing as directed by overzealous happy women.

Another wedding proceeded more typically. After the hand grabbing at the wedding of Zainabu and Omani the groom was called out of the room to join his male relatives in a wedding feast provided by the bride's family. The men eat separately from the bride and female relatives. At this moment the bride found herself alone in the room with just me. Her hand grabbing ceremony, in contrast to Bimwinyi and Miguu's wedding, was quiet, almost reverent. There were maybe ten people in the room and it was quiet except for the music coming from outside. Omani lifted his bride's veil and grabbed her hand. He held tight for several long moments, then bent over and kissed her cheek. It was simple, but quite lovely. The marriage was widely acknowledged as a non-kin love match and women had been gossiping and fawning all day over Omani's romantic pursuit of Zainabu. His *mahari* payment to her and her father was generous, and his courtship involved many gifts and declarations of love and fidelity to the bride, as well as assurance that he would never take another wife and never divorce her. Once everyone departed the room I took the opportunity to ask Zainabu if she was happy. She

shyly nodded her head yes. I pressed her further and asked, “Are you a little happy, or a lot happy?” She tried to hide her laugh and said, “*Sana, tu*” (a lot).

CONCLUSION

The narratives of weddings are important to understanding current practices of marriage. Some of the experiences of young people in Peponi today contest the historical importance of weddings as being the beginning of a woman’s life. As young women raise children without husbands, a stage of life ordinarily associated with married (or previously married) women, the boundaries of womanhood are blurred. What rights do women, who are mothers and have never married, have? Mama Abadallah, who was married and divorced because the union did not produce children, gave birth twice without marrying after her first marriage ended in divorce. She participated as a full woman in community rituals, such as weddings, despite her unusual path to adulthood.

Weddings do continue to have an important role in Swahili society – they are an important symbol, they provide opportunities for extended families, and they bring together intense moments where you can see the social dimensions of marriage and what it means to be a Swahili man and woman. In fact, it is these dynamics that make weddings more visible and invested with symbolic, social, and material resources and therefore, I argue, should not be under-emphasized. In some ways, however, what I learned does undermine the story of Swahili weddings as young people, and their families, redefine the characteristics of a bride and groom and reconsider the important and necessary elements of weddings.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘LOOKING OUTSIDE THE MARRIAGE’: CHOICE AND INFIDELITY IN MARRIAGE

Anthropologists and Demographers have spent considerable time investigating marriage in sub-Saharan Africa. While their approaches may differ, both sets of academics continue to find questions surrounding the topic important, salient, and necessary. The legal, political, economic, and social consequences of marriage for women and men have been well documented. In fact, “Across the social sciences, marriage has always been a topic of great interest, both because of what it reveals about universal aspects of the human social condition and because of the tremendous diversity of marriage customs that characterize the world’s societies” (Hirsch et al. 2009:2).

Nearly forty-five years ago Evans-Pritchard (1965) posited that in simple societies, there was no such thing as an unmarried woman; companionship was weak and women had little choice in whether they will or will not marry. "The concept of romantic love [was] non-existent; and women could not choose a career instead of marriage” (Bledsoe and Pison 1994:147). In this view, marriage is a universal, or nearly universal, social institution across African societies. It plays a fundamental part of what has been termed the “development cycle in domestic groups.” This concept defines the family as a process unfolding over time (Fortes 1949). In 1962, Fortes proclaimed that the topic of

marriage had been exhausted in anthropological thought given the breadth of kinship studies across sub-Saharan Africa. Borneman cynically quotes Fortes' declaration "So much is now known about the customs and institutions of marriage in all human societies that it might seem doubtful if anything new can be added. Nor are there conspicuous lacunae in the theoretical study of the subject" (1996:215). The prevalence of marriage across the continent, however, masks its heterogeneity, the historical changes the institution has undergone in local contexts, and the shifts and variations in social roles and statuses of people both within, and outside, of marriage.

Hirsch et al. state that the:

. . . institution of marriage sits at the nexus of large-scale social processes and intimate life, between the concrete tasks of economic subsistence and the biological and social imperatives of reproduction, and in the unfolding of an individual's life course. As such, marriage is the focus of pragmatic strategies and behavior, and the locus of intense moral scrutiny and social preoccupation (2010:2).

The re-examination of marriage in Africa since Evans-Pritchard and Fortes' proclamations has revealed marriage to be more diverse and more fluid than previously implied (Bledsoe 2002; Cooper 1997; Dyson-Hudson and Meekers 1996; Falen 2008; Griffiths 1997; Jackson 2007; Jankowiak et al. 2005; Masquelier 2005; Nyamwaya and Parkin 1987; Phoofolo 2007). Current trends in African marriage, "include greater instability of marriage, increasing fluidity and flexibility of sexual relationships, and women's increasing use of relationships with men to obtain resources and opportunities for furthering their own social and economic ambitions" (Gage and Bledsoe 1994:148). During my year in Peponi, I was aware of numerous types of relationships (flirtatious friends, boyfriend and girlfriend, sexual friends) and marriage (arranged marriages, kin marriages, love marriages, secret marriages, and polygynous marriages). These types of

marriage are not mutually exclusive; I saw examples of the coming together of these various types: an arranged love marriage between kin; a secret polygynous marriage; a love marriage between kin that was not arranged; a love marriage with two children already born prior to the wedding. The type of marriage a couple contracted did not automatically reflect the type, or amount, of satisfaction derived from the marriage; nor was it necessarily a predictor of the duration and trajectory of a marriage.

This chapter examines marriage, and associated processes, polygyny and extra-marital affairs. I complicate understandings of marital love by examining women and men's experiences and hopes. As example, for men marital love exists, it is real and important to them, but is not mutually exclusive of the need for other (sexual) relationships. For women, love is a quest that involves certain demonstrations (usually economic), and is companionate. Changes to marriage in the past 50 years reflect inherent paradoxes that conflict with previous research on the Swahili. Men and women's expectations of the institution of marriage, especially in a context of historical and current high rates of divorce, demonstrate the nature of the institution, its cultural relevance, and its impact on the community. I build upon the existing anthropological literature of marriage among Muslims in Swahili society and ask what role Islam plays in Swahili marriages historically and today, by contesting narrow portrayals of Islam in relationship to men's and women's expectations. This chapter points out that the symbolic importance of marriage among Swahili Muslims misleadingly suggests partnerships are static, stable entities over time, when in fact they are highly fluid for both men and women. Interviews with men and women illustrate the fluidity of

marriage, and all the gendered expectations of relationships. The role of extra marital affairs is also considered.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MUSLIM

The most frequent question people asked me, especially in the beginning of my field research, was: “Are you married?” In other Muslim African settings academics have fielded this question as well (Furth 2005). In fact, Furth noted that the two most common questions she received were, “Are you married?” and “What religion do you practice?” Our experiences diverge with regard to the question of religion. People in Peponi assumed I was *Mkristo* (Christian). Most people were uninterested in this feature of my identity and did not particularly care, nor did they question me about it. Early in my research, several different older men approached me to ascertain the nature of my research/work/studies. Mostly they wanted to make sure I did not have a Christian missionary agenda or I was not a spy. For the most part people were not interested in my religiosity, nor were they concerned with converting me to Islam. This greatly deviated from my Master’s research experience in a half Lutheran, half Muslim community where the Lutherans obsessed about my religiosity, or lack thereof, even going so far as to demand my public displays of devotion to God (Krehbiel Keefe 2006). Furth (2005) describes these questions as important to the West Africans in Guinea, where she conducted her fieldwork. “[They] see the social legitimacy of adults as tied both to marital status and to religious affiliation” (Furth 2005:140). Despite the lack of interest in my religion I would claim, like the Muslims in Furth’s work – Islam is fundamental to everyday activities in Peponi. For the Swahili, marriage and religion are inextricably and intricately linked, for they see marriage as a moral institution that reflects proper Muslim

values. This view of marriage, however, did not necessarily translate into moral practice. Men, in particular, saw no impediment to marrying me, an American *Mzungu*, presumably, *Mkristo*. “Divorce that husband of yours and marry me, you can become Muslim, and we could be useful together.” Converting to Islam would be a requirement of marriage to a local, but was not seen as a large impediment.

SWAHILI MARRIAGE TYPES

Bledsoe and Pison assert that:

Many forms of union in Africa are not well described by classical survey categories of celibate, married, widowed, and divorced. Earlier approaches assumed marriage across the continent to be a single, undifferentiated category, wherein people were married or unmarried, and all marriages had the same social significance. However, many African societies recognize a range of union types: those endorsed by legal statutory ceremonies, consensual arrangements and various religious or customary procedures (Bledsoe and Pison 1994:4).

Historically, the Swahili are known for a multitude of marriage types and possibilities. John Middleton, the authority on Swahili culture, directs attention towards marriage in his influential work, *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* (1992). In fact, he largely criticizes previous descriptions of Swahili marriage:

Of all Swahili institutions, perhaps marriage has been the most badly described. Most writers have considered it unimportant, part of a pattern of sexual looseness in everyday life demonstrated by the high divorce rate. There is no truth in this view. Marriage patterns vary from one town to another, as do rates of divorce, forms of marital residence, transfers of property, and everyday sexual behavior (Middleton 1992:120).

In his description of Swahili marriage(s) Middleton points, rightly, to the diversity, which exists both within and between communities. An extensive range of male-female unions is recognized among the Swahili – although not all forms of union are found everywhere:

marriage regarded as "proper" and lawful in Islamic and customary law by their definition as *ndoa*, the consequence of *kuoa*, the verb that is (correctly) translated into English as "to marry"; to concubinage, which is lawful but not *ndoa*; to unions defined as unlawful (*harimu*), which are also not *ndoa*. The lawful unions include the "official" marriage, known as *ndoa ya rasmi*, properly registered by *kadhi* (judge), *khatibu* (preacher), or *mwalimu* (teacher); the so-called secret marriage (*ndoa ya siri*); and concubinage. Both forms of marriage involve a wedding (*arusi*, *harusi*), while concubinage does not. Unlawful unions include intercourse with a recently deserted or divorced woman and with prostitutes (Middleton 1992:120).

It is important, to note, that, marriage is a male action among the Swahili — in *kiSwahili* men *marry* women (*kuoa*) whereas women *are married by* men (*kuolewa*).

Middleton also explains that relationships with divorced or deserted women, as well as prostitutes, are unlawful although not considered sinful or particularly condemned. Furthermore, although technically permitted, serial polygyny is disapproved of when excessive, and in the cases Middleton refers to they are exclusively secret marriages (1992:120). Additional forms of sexual union include casual heterosexual love affairs that are also condemned if too frequent or indiscreet, as well as homosexual unions. Casual love affairs are, indeed, a frequent part of the relationship trajectories of most people and homosexual affairs occur as well. In Peponi, homosexuality usually occurs within the bounds of marriage. One example, Mzee Jiliani, an older man in his 60s has been married, with children, to the same woman for 40 years. He is also known for his relationships with young unmarried men; it is one of the worst kept secrets in the Peponi. His homosexuality is regarded like a hobby and is considered to be separate

from his responsibility to his wife and children. In fact, despite his 'hobby,' he is well-respected because he is a good husband and provides for his family.

The marital unions described by Middleton, and others (Caplan 1968; Gomm 1972; Hirsch 1998; Landberg 1977; Strobel 1979; Creighton and Omari 1995; Landberg 1986; Mirza and Strobel 1989; Stiles 2002; Stiles 2005; Hirsch 2003) also vary in significant ways:

the kind and rank relationships between the partners [this applies mostly to historical Swahili Stone towns in Kenya such as Lamu, Malindi, and Mombasa]; the degrees of affinity concerned in and created by the union; the transfer of forms of property and wealth; the patterns of residence; the formal establishment or not of a household (*nyumba*); the duration or expected duration of the union; the modes of public and legal recognition of the union; the affiliation of children born of the union; and the kind of wedding rite performed (Middleton 1992:121).

Traditionally marriages were often considered to be part of long-term strategies pursued by corporate groups. These strategies were often concerned with rights in property and acquisition of power and in large part determined the choice and range of spouses (121). Also, concern with purity and reputation played a part in deciding the type and contents of the marriage rituals and rites. And, equally as important, the wealth and ambitions of individuals and their families also affected the choice of particular forms of marriage and of spouses.

Less common today, concern with descent group and lineage played a larger part in marriage and marital arrangements. *Mtu haowi mke huowa ukoo* (A man does not marry a wife, he marries a descent group) (Middleton 1992:121). Islamic law and also non-jural elements, some of which can be found in other Muslim societies and others not, are found in all types of Swahili marriage (Middleton 1992). Although women and men were treated unequally, Islamic law defined certain rights for women with respect to

marriage, divorce, and property (Strobel 1979). Women had a guardian, her father or another male relative, whose duty it was to ensure a good match and adult women, unlike young girls, could not be offered in marriage without consent (Strobel 1979). A guardian could only object to a marriage on the ground that she was marrying beneath her status, thus tainting the family's reputation.

Gendered Rites of Passage: The Historical Significance of Marriage

For a woman, marriage is the first marker she is no longer a child. It affords her certain rights in the community that endure beyond the marriage. In terms of both the status of women and descent group ritual events, first marriages of females are more important than subsequent marriages. First marriage is the main ritual occasion marking the change of a female's status from that of young girl (*mwari*, virgin) to that of an adult woman (*mtu mzima*, adult). Previous to her marriage, a young girl is excluded from almost all of the main activities undertaken by women. With her change in status, however, she can participate fully in the rituals of her cognatic descent groups, primarily funerals and weddings. In addition, during Landberg's research, being married also allowed women to belong to a woman's dance group, no longer exists in Peponi (1977:138-9).

The most important rites of passage, subsequent to marriage, for Swahili women are pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood. They are critical to completing a woman's transition to adulthood. Other than the ritual feast at a child's funeral, women who have never given birth are not excluded from participation in any other part of village life, including important ritual and political activities (Landberg 1977). In fact, some of the

women most active as ritual and political leaders are precisely those women who have not had children and have turned their energies to extra-household activities (Landberg 1977:139).

For a man, although not as critical in terms of rights, becoming a husband is also a rite of passage, which gives him new and increased status, especially among other men. Adult male status begins with the acquisition of skills and acceptance of a fully adult occupation. In addition, in order to marry, it generally requires that a man have an occupation – loosely defined as a means of earning money, which will provide the *mahari* payment to the bride's family in full, or with help from his extended family. Further, an occupation is seen as necessary in that it will enable him to supply a livelihood for his wife and family. Although marriage does not have quite the same importance in terms of marking a new status for young men, the most elaborate celebrations are usually those for the first marriage of both bride and groom.

Marital Preferences: Cousin and Kin Marriage

Marriages between paternal parallel cousins have been, and remain, the preferred form for women's first marriage in most Swahili settings, although the frequency with which it is practiced has declined (Caplan 1968; Gomm 1972; Hirsch 1998; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979; Stiles 2002). According to Islamic custom (Murphy and Kasden 1959) the preferable type of marriage in many Muslim societies is that with a patrilineal parallel cousin {{908 Murphy, R.F. 1959;}}. Moghissi writes, "The most over-studied aspect of endogamy has been . . . patrilineal parallel cousin marriage; that is, marrying one's father's brother's daughter. It is repeatedly written that this type of

marriage is the one traditionally favored in tribes, village and closely knit communities” (Moghissi 2005:157). Paternal parallel-cousin marriage means that both spouses belong to the same lineage; therefore, rights in lineage property are retained within it (Middleton 1992). It was common for such marriages to begin with a betrothal, which was the agreement between the two families that their children marry when they come of age (Middleton 1992). Middleton notes that paternal parallel-cousin marriages are said to have been highly stable and rarely to have ended in divorce in Lamu, although this relationship does not hold for people in Peponi.

In the late 1960s Landberg documented that 61% of first marriages were between kin; and 31% of all kin marriages among Peponi men and women were with a real or classificatory patrilineal parallel cousin. Cross cousin marriages, however, formed the largest portion of all kin marriages for a total of 47% of her sample (1975). Caplan, who worked in another Swahili community off the coast of Tanzania (Mafia Island) conducted her research around the same time as Landberg and found similar patterns regarding kin marriage (1968). The percentage of kin marriages in Peponi has declined by nearly one-half since Landberg’s research; (Table 8 summarizes the data on kin marriages) with 32% of marriages reported as kin marriages.

Table 8: Reported Marriage as Kin (any type) Marriage, by Gender, Peponi Survey 2004.

	# of Marriages	# of Kin Marriages	Percent Kin Marriages
Men	186	83	45%
Women	181	37	20%
Total:	367	120	32%

The reason, commonly given by members of societies that practice cousin marriage, for this preference is that it prevents fragmentation of property (Moghissi 2005). Yet, it has been pointed out that this occurs only when *Koranic* inheritance law is strictly followed

(Murphy and Kasden 1959; Tanner 1964). Elsewhere Tanner (1962) suggests that cousin marriages are frequent on the coast because the bride wealth payments between kinsmen are either dismissed or reduced. Landberg, however, found no evidence of this for Peponi marriages (1977). Marriage, between kinsmen or non-kinsmen, involved the highest payments for a virgin, regardless of whether or not it was a kin marriage.

Matrilateral parallel cousin marriage ought to serve a similar purpose for descent group cohesion as the other forms of cousin marriage yet it is not at all a preferred marriage. Anthropologists who study the Swahili have reached various conclusions on this topic. In fact, according to some, it is not a proper marriage at all (Middleton 1992). Tanner comments that this form of marriage is considered by many coastal peoples to be an unclean marriage (1964). Marriage with the mother's sister's daughter is legal but widely considered as *harimu* (forbidden), since sisters of mothers are also considered “mothers” to children. This was true in Peponi during the time I spent there: a woman’s children call her sisters *mama*. For example, a mother’s older sister is called, “*Mama Mkubwa*” – Big/Older Mama; for a younger sister, “*Mama Mdogo*” – Little/Younger Mama. Middleton remarks that a sister may even suckle another sister's children, although I never saw, or heard of this, in Peponi. Everyone in Peponi widely agreed that you should not marry the child of your mother’s sister as this type of marriage is considered to be incestuous.

Landberg indicates that, for the most part, people in Peponi were not opposed to matrilateral parallel cousin marriage. In fact, although they are in the minority, matrilateral parallel cousin marriages did account for 5% of the marriages in her sample, although the villagers did not agree upon the impropriety of this type of marriage.

Landberg encountered such a marriage when obtaining genealogical data on a particular household. Further inquiry revealed that two older women living in the household declared it a proper marriage and professed not to have heard otherwise. An old man, one of the village elders, was also consulted and he agreed with their statements, but added, “[There are] others who did not approve of such marriages. He said that there is nothing in Islamic law prohibiting such a marriage (this is apparently true). People who argue otherwise, he said, were ignorant. Rather, he added that such admonitions against this type of marriage derived from custom (*mila*) only and not from religious law (*sheria*)” (Landberg 1977:163-4).

In 2004, kin marriages still exist and of the twenty weddings I attended during my year in the community, 6 of them were considered cousin/kin marriages. Each of these cousin/kin marriages appeared to be, and were described by the bride and groom, as love marriages. The extended families, supposedly, did not initiate the relationship. Rather, the bride and groom were in love, chose each other, and the families were more than happy to support the marriage.

WHO TO MARRY: CHOICE, AUTHORITY, AND STRATEGY

Pierre Bourdieu focuses on the strategy involved in marriage practices, arguing that marriage, and endogamy in particular, is not merely a reproduction of a set of rules and relationships, but an outcome of decisions and practices made by individuals.

Bourdieu likened marriage to a card game in which a person’s options in the game depend to some extent on the hand person has been dealt — his social position, social

history and material wealth — and to some extent on his or her skill in playing that hand (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1980).

If the marrying of each of the family's children is seen as the equivalent of playing a card, then it is clear that the value of this move (measured by the criteria of the system) depends both on the quality of its 'hand' — the strength of the cards it has been dealt, as defined by the rules of the game — and on the skill with which it plays its hand.... In short, for each individual, the matrimonial opportunities that are generically available to descendants of the same family by virtue of its social position, as defined, mainly though not exclusively by the economic value of its patrimony, are specified by the mode of succession, on the basis of sex and birth rank (Bourdieu 1980:148).

In addition to various material standings, Bourdieu argues that players in the game come to the table with different social and symbolic capital. Social capital refers to “the value of a family's whole set of kin, in both lineages and over several generations, by its style of life, which had to manifest its respect for the values of honour, and by the social consideration that surrounded it” (Bourdieu 1980:148). Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital encompasses social capital but refers more generally to social honor and prestige (Bourdieu 1980).

Bourdieu also stresses, however, that marriage strategies tend to reinforce ordinary — or existing — relationships. One of the main functions of marriage, Bourdieu asserts, “is to reproduce the social relations of which it is a product” (1980: 180). Marriage thus maintains unity and distinction. He argues that it does so through unconscious strategies in which individuals choose certain marriage relationships with the unconscious understanding of their correspondence with conventional relations (Bourdieu 1980). This unconscious knowledge is imbedded in *habitus*: the socially acquired, embodied dispositions, tendencies, or proclivities that inform individuals' behaviors, outlooks, attitudes, expectations and social interaction (Bourdieu 1977).

Marriage strategies are inseparable from inheritance strategies, fertility strategies, and even educational strategies, in other words from the whole set of strategies for biological, cultural and social reproduction that every group implements in order to transmit the inherited powers and privileges, maintained or enhanced, to the next generation. Their principle is neither calculating reason nor the mechanical determinations of economic necessity, but the dispositions inculcated by the conditions of existence, a kind of socially constituted instinct which causes the objectively calculable demands of a particular form of economy to be experienced as an unavoidable call of duty or an irresistible impulse of feeling (Bourdieu 1980:161).

In Bourdieu's formulation individuals of similar social backgrounds share *habitus* and are attracted to others from the same social stratum. "This spontaneous decoding of one *habitus* by another is the basis of the immediate affinities which orient social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships, encouraging well-matched relationships, without these operations ever having to be formulated other than in the socially innocent language of likes and dislikes" (Bourdieu 1984:143).

While Bourdieu's card game metaphor of marriage is in many ways appropriate, I find his notion of unconscious strategy limited. To begin with, it suggests that individuals are not fully aware of their motives for selecting particular marriage candidates. My own research with people in Peponi suggests that marriage strategy is often quite deliberate and that individuals and their families are at least partially aware of what they have to gain and lose in particular marriage arrangements. Bourdieu's conception of strategy also relies on the notion that different forms of capital are complementary, rather than competing, and suggests that the rules of the game are always known or inherently understood. In contemporary Swahili society, however, high status associated with material wealth may challenge the social preeminence of aristocratic ancestry (this would be families who could tie their roots to Zanzibar or Arab ancestry, such as Oman). The

expansion of the global economy, a changing political terrain, and religious shifts mean the rules are not always so evident and individuals may find themselves “gambling” on uncertain ground rather than playing at a table where the rules and consequences of the game are apparent. Sticking to ordinary marriages that reinforce relationships among members of the same social strata may no longer be a sure means for maximizing social, symbolic, or material capital. For example, I attended the wedding of Arusha and Mwanamvua, a match that would, for previous generations, be considered imprudent for the bride, Mwanamvua. Arusha is the son of a local carpenter who moved to Peponi 15 years earlier looking for a place to make a comfortable living with his trade. Building furniture for people in the village, the surrounding area, and even for the beach resort, Arusha’s father has established himself as the best carpenter in Peponi. Arusha, who apprentices to his father, also makes a good living and anticipates being a master at his craft, like his father. Mwanamvua’s family is one of the most prominent, established, and well-respected families in the community, although their wealth is not as great as it once was. Mwanamvua and Arusha describe their marriage as a love match, and in fact, they are both quite devoted to each other. Arusha’s father is thrilled with connecting his family in a permanent way to such an important and prominent family in the village. Mwanamvua’s parents view the marriage in two simultaneous ways – they do not love the fact she is marrying someone technically an “outsider”, however, they do appreciate the connection to one of the few families in the community that has a growing and profitable business.

Finally, Bourdieu’s focus on ordinary marriage and on the reinforcement of conventional relationships is based on a rather limited conception of marriage, in which

marriage either corresponds to or breaks with conventional relationships. In polygynous societies, however, marriage may both conform to and break with convention. A man may purposefully choose different wives to represent different elements of his identity or to increase access to different forms of capital, which changes over the course of his life. Similarly, a woman may agree to an initial marriage to conform to her family's expectations; having complied, she can then gain support for divorce, if required, and will be freer in choosing subsequent marriage partners. Recent work on marriage in Africa has demonstrated that marriage is a means through which men and women express different sides of themselves by maintaining marriage unions that fulfill conventional expectations while also forging parallel unions that meet personal desires for, among other things, love, cosmopolitanism, traditionalism, or intellectualism (Karanja 1987; Karanja 1994; Mann 1985; Mann 1994). In short, rather than viewing ordinary and extra-ordinary marriages as mutually exclusive, a broader view of marriage allows for the possibility that marriage can both reinforce group identity and forge extra-group ties.

Women incorporate expectations of subservience to parental authority into their strategies for accepting or rejecting marriage candidates. On the whole, Swahili women have less choice in marriage than men. Some women select marriage partners freely, obtaining their parents' blessing after the fact, but a majority of women agree to marry men whom their parents or other relatives have selected, whether they are kin, or not. This is especially true for women marrying for the first time. Women have the right to reject a marriage candidate presented by her parents, but to do so they must stand up to the authority of their elders and risk losing support. And, if a woman marries against her parents' wishes it is more difficult to return to her family for sympathy or support in the

event of a divorce. Peponi women I spoke with echoed this sentiment repeatedly. Part of women's marriage strategy includes agreeing to marry a candidate their parents approve of or select. In doing so, women garner parental support and reassurance that their relatives will back them in conjugal disputes or even divorce. Women understand that, should they divorce or become widowed, they have a greater degree of freedom in choosing a second husband; if they have complied with the wishes of their relatives in their first marriage then they can usually rely on family support in subsequent marriages.

REASONS FOR, AND EXPECTATIONS OF, MARRIAGE

In Peponi, all men and women marry, and all men and women discuss their desire to marry¹². I asked each man and woman I interviewed about reasons for marrying and what they considered to be features of a good wife and good husband. Reasons for marriage range from not having to worry about the consequences of having multiple sexual partners to having a steady home life. Women have romantic, monogamous, and partner oriented hopes for their life course. They describe their expectations in terms of hopes but most acknowledge that these hopes are unrealistic. Men present an entirely different set of relationship expectations and concerns. Most men, especially young men, do not anticipate that their first marriage will endure and many have no intention of staying married to the same woman for their entire lives. In fact, they look forward to exercising their rights, which they describe as being acceptable by Islam.

Strobel effectively summarizes the relationship between women's status and Islam among Swahili women in Mombasa (1979). She notes that Islamic doctrine could

¹² The only examples of persons not marrying are those with physical or mental problems, however, there are many examples, of women, with mental impairment who marry and have children.

have been used to support some rights for women, as has been the case in some Muslim settings, but “[at the] turn of the century religious leaders and respectable Muslims expected a proper woman to be religious, chaste, and obedient” (Strobel 1979: 56). Furthermore, in Swahili Islamic literature women’s subordinate status is depicted vis-à-vis men:

Men are thought to be endowed with great intelligence and judgment (*akili*) and thus ought to make the decisions that women must obey. Similarly, women are considered weak, easily falling prey to tricksters. Being more subject to earthly desires, women must be protected from themselves, while men must beware these “lascivious temptresses.” These assumptions about female nature have not led to the conclusion that females are “bad” as such, for the literature applauds a certain category of women – “devout and patient wives.” Rather the assumptions support the idea that women must be protected – by legal rights, by a man mediating between her and the outside world (Strobel 1979:56).

Strobel’s description of women inadvertently speaks to the issue of fidelity/infidelity and affairs; women cannot control their “earthly desires” and men must simultaneously protect women from themselves, and protect themselves from such women. This is in contrast to much of the literature, which depicts extra-marital sex as something that “men do because their bodies demand it and women can’t stop them” (Hirsch et al. 2009:3).

‘Useful together’

Because of her marriage on my first day in Peponi, I felt connected to Saba, and particularly interested in her experience as a new bride. I wanted to know about her courtship and expectations of marriage, and the realities of her married life. In my first weeks in Peponi I encountered Saba’s husband, Asani, (who I did not meet at the wedding) more often, as Saba was confined to the area of her home for the first two weeks of their marriage (expected of most new brides). After the first two weeks she was

not to leave the home unless accompanied by her husband. For most couples, after this period of time has elapsed the wife is allowed to go about her business in the village without her husband's escort. Some husbands, like Asani and Baba Jumbe, confine their wives at home unless they have specifically asked for permission to visit someone in particular with the logic, as Strobel described above, that a woman cannot control herself. In the mean time, Asani stopped by to see his new brother-in-law, Baba Jumbe, quite often during those first few weeks when Saba was confined at home. The first time he came by everyone cheered and joked with him about leaving his bride alone so soon. His demeanor was confident and nonchalant. Baba Jumbe sent one of the older girls to fetch some sodas; "*Soda KiArabu kwa mimi!*" "An Arab soda, for me!" (see Figure 30).



Figure 30: A bottle of "Arab" soda.

Asani shouted after the girl. "I don't like the American cola. I am an Arab man," he said, thumping his chest¹³. The next time he stopped by to visit it was late afternoon and

¹³ By saying that he is an Arab man, Asani is attempts to show what he thinks of as his superior family connections to Zanzibar, and the Arab world beyond.

Baba Jumbe was not present, he was at the mosque for the late afternoon prayer – Asani, the “Arab man” was out visiting instead of being at the afternoon prayers. I was sitting in the living room writing field notes when Asani entered. I saw a different side of Asani that day. Asani spoke in stilted English and said things that, at first, sounded a bit like gibberish. After listening closely I realized he was impersonating, performing, what he thought a “cool American guy” would sound like. He did not greet me properly, he did not show me any of the usual signs of respect, and he was, by local standards, quite rude to me. I asked him why he was neglecting the typical greetings and interacting with me in an inappropriate way. He gave me a big smile and said “I’m like Arnold [Schwarzenegger], don’t you like it?” An Arab Arnold? I told him that, no, in fact, I did not enjoy the way he was acting and asked him why he was not at afternoon prayer. His response: “Oh, I don’t always have time to go.”

Asani and I developed a rapport and I settled into a somewhat joking relationship (common among the Swahili, for more see Landberg 1977) where I reprimanded him and attempted to teach him some manners. He continued his performances and enjoyed thwarting conventions by bossing me around. Over the course of the rest of my time in Tanzania, Asani would show up at Baba Jumbe’s house, and later at my house, alone and sometimes with his new wife, Saba. Always, Asani ignored culturally appropriate greetings and means of interactions and choose to interact with me in a way he learned and adopted from the action movies he’d seen. This, he thought was a “cool” or “modern” way to interact with the village *mzungu* (white person). Our interactions were bizarre and he stuck to his need to perform the paradoxical Arab Arnold. I continued to remind him that he was ignoring the local greetings, signs of respect, and in general,

polite behavior. His wife, Saba, on the other hand, was always courteous and polite. I would thank her, deliberately, and in front of Asani, for her “respect.” During these interactions she would talk back to Asani: “See, I’m polite, and she likes it.” Asani would always treat Saba heavy-handedly in front of me – performing his “cool American” masculinity. It was a bizarre combination of him wanting to demonstrate his “modern American-ness,” his masculinity, and his Muslim/Arab-ness.

Once, Asani barged into my house, after dark, with Saba and said “*Lete Kamera!*” Ordering me to bring my camera. When I asked him why, he said, “I want pictures of my wife and me.” Despite being annoyed that he would “order” me about (as if I were his wife) I retrieved my camera and agreed to take photos. When I returned to the living room Saba was putting on a *buibui* (a black, formal, robe and headdress/veil) over her ordinary clothes. I asked why she was putting on the *buibui* and Asani replied, “My wife is a good Muslim woman. Let your pictures show this.” I took pictures and what transpired was truly unusual. Asani adopted poses and mannerisms atypical of a Swahili husband. In general Swahili married couples do not spend time together in public spaces, and they do not go visiting together at night, or any time. So, their presence at my house, this time and many others, was unusual. But on this occasion Asani wrapped his arms around his wife, held her hand, held her hand up so it was visible in front of their faces, and performed his version of an American/Western/Modern romantic husband. The paradox between his heavy-handedness, his “good Muslim wife,” and the romantic poses for the photographs was spectacular.

Asani is a “businessman” and his business is to bring sugar from Zanzibar. There is a profitable smuggling business between Zanzibar and the community. Men deliver

goods, food, produce, grains, livestock, and people intending to visit Zanzibar in their *dhow*s (sailboats, some with motors, most without). When I asked him why he chose this as an occupation he said, “I saw that people who did this business were able to ‘develop’ they have money and nice things, so I choose to do it too.” Nine months after his wedding Asani, in an in-depth interview, said:

For now, I live here in Peponi with my wife in this house with my brother. Myself I have not earned enough to buy my own home. This is my first wife ever. My wife and I were both born in this village. I choose this wife myself because she has nice behavior. I liked her because she is not concerned with having many things. I love my wife a lot. I like the life of a married person; I was not that useful before marriage. Together we are useful together. I married February 19, 2004, so I have been married for 9 months. After deciding to get married to this wife, I waited a long time to marry. I was unable to marry directly, my ability to raise the *mahari* was small, and so I had to save. But my wife was my lover before marriage. My wife is a relative of mine, her father is one *Baba Mdogo* (one of my father’s younger brothers), but it is a good thing, no one considers it to be a forbidden marriage. We were even lovers for a long period before I approached my *Baba Kubwa* (father’s older brother) for help with the marriage proposal and arrangements. The *mahari* I paid was 50,000 Tsh, (\$50 US), along with furniture for our home. I paid all that they asked for, I did not hold anything back. Before my marriage I had several lovers, but now I have one wife. My wife and I aren’t using family planning now because we want to have a child first, then we will use family planning. I would like to have 5 children in total because I think I can take care of this many, and also you don’t know the luck of your children, if they will live or die.

Asani takes pride in his ability to pay the full amount requested for the *mahari* and he is happy to be married to his father’s younger brother’s daughter. Asani describes being married as being “useful together.” When I asked him to elaborate on what being “useful” meant he said, “Before we were married we were just two young people, now we are together, we live as married people. She takes care of things in the house, and I take care of things outside, and we take care of each other. When we have children, *inshallah*, (God willing), we will take care of them. This is the way it should be. We

should be useful together.” I asked him if being married was important, and he said, “As a Muslim, I must say yes.”

Saba discusses her relationship with Asani before marriage, “Oh, he was so charming. And, he is so handsome. He was always visiting me, bringing me small gifts – you know, sweets, or an ice cream. He said the nicest things, told me I was beautiful. I liked this. It showed me that he would be a loving husband.” Saba truly loves her husband and said: “He provides everything for me. We live together nicely.” After 9 months living together I asked Saba about the charming and romantic *mchumba* (fiancé) that Asani was before marriage. “Oh yes, he is still romantic with me. You know he travels quite a lot and he always brings something back for me, he is thinking of me.” I asked Saba what her hopes and expectations for the marriage are, and she said, “Well, I really want to be pregnant. It is taking so long. We have been married 9 months and no baby. Even before marriage, no baby. So, I hope for a baby, I want 4 babies. My parents had 4 daughters. I would like 4 children also, but maybe, at least one boy would be nice.” I specifically asked Saba her feelings regarding polygyny and she replied, “No, I do not like it at all. My parents are married many years and not once has my father taken another wife. And I am glad for my mother. I do not even know how to be a wife to a man with another wife. I would not like this. But, Asani loves me, he shows me this, and he would not want to make me unhappy. I know this.”

Saba and Asani both appear to be happy in their marriage, albeit for somewhat different reasons.

Four Wives and Unlimited Girlfriends

In January 2010, in a Skype conversation, Jumaa¹⁴ updated me on life in Peponi. I had a lot of questions about my friends, particularly how certain relationships were doing. At one point he laughed and said: “You know us, we are a bit crazy, we are permitted four wives, and unlimited girlfriends, and we take full advantage.”

Asani, in the same 9-month interview, said: “Yes, I have a lover outside of my marriage. She lives in Zanzibar, you know, I am there every week. Before my marriage I had several lovers, but now I have one wife. My lover in Zanzibar is just a lover. I will not consider her for a wife. I am not ready for another wife, not yet.” I asked him if he would ever take a second wife: “In my life I think I will marry three times: as a youth, as an adult, and as an *mzee* (old man). I think it will be necessary to be with *wake tofauti tofauti* (different wives). It would be nice to never divorce, and if I have good luck, I will stay married to each wife.”

I found men incredibly free and relaxed when discussions included extra marital affairs, and not in a boastful way. Women, on the other hand, were more reticent to discuss their own extra marital affairs, and the actual affairs of their husbands. In the survey I asked each man and woman if they ever had an affair since marrying: 19% of men and 3% of women said they have had an affair, as illustrated in Tables 10-15. I also asked each man and woman if they thought their spouse had ever had an affair. Women decisively answered no, whereas men said they did not know. This speaks to what Hirsch et al. (2009) say about the importance of keeping men’s secrets. While men admit to affairs more than women it seems that women engage in affairs regularly.

¹⁴ His case is discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, as well.

Table 9: Men's Infidelity as Reported in Peponi Survey 2004, N=129.

Since marriage have you had an affair?	#	%
Answer Missing	3	2%
Yes	24	19%
No	101	78%
Answer Refused	1	1%

Table 10: Women's Infidelity as Reported in Peponi Survey 2004, N=158.

Since marriage have you had an affair?	#	%
Answer Missing	3	2%
Yes	5	3%
No	98	62%
Answer Refused	52	33%

Table 11: Men's Response to Wife infidelity from Peponi Survey 2004, N=186.

Do you think your wife has a boyfriend?	#	%
Yes	5	3%
No	39	21%
Do not know	142	76%

Table 12: Women's Response to Husband infidelity from Peponi Survey 2004, N=181.

Do you think your husband has a girlfriend?	#	%
No Answer	3	1%
Yes	2	1%
No	168	94%
Do not know	8	4%

'Looking outside the marriage': Gendered Expectations of Fidelity

Dotto is a content 37 year-old fisherman. He likes his work: "In fact, it is nice because you do not need lots of money to keep it going. I started this work when I was quite young helping my father once I finished primary school." He lives together with his "*mke wangu wa pili*" (my second wife), not his *mke wa pili*, indicating he has a first wife and is in a polygynous marriage. *Mke wangu wa pili* indicates that this is not his first marriage.

The first woman I married, Fatuma, I divorced her because we had problems in our family. She was not trustworthy in our marriage. *Alikuwa ana wanaume wengine nje mbali na mimi*. (She went outside of the marriage with other men). Also she was not respectful to my parents. Every day my parents were saying she was out meeting with this man or that. My mother had many complaints about her behavior in the household and outside. She herself, my first wife, she said she was tired of living with me and she asked me to give her her *talaka* and it was necessary and expeditious of me to give it to her fast. After staying with this first wife for 5 years and having two children I divorced her and then I paid to marry another wife.

Dotto spoke of his first wife with great distaste. It upset him to discuss her and think of the impact the relationship had on his parents, especially. She was, in fact, a wife chosen for him by his family, a cousin on his father's side. The engagement and wedding pleased his family greatly. In the beginning he was quite happy. He trusted her and thought she was content and happy. But, slowly, especially after the first year, and after her first pregnancy, she showed a lack respect for everyone. It was upsetting to him that she sought relationships outside the marriage. Dotto was especially upset by the fact that she was not discreet about these relationships, particularly where his parents were concerned. Furthermore, extended family pressure made no impact on her behavior and Dotto felt quite hopeless about the situation. Despite his discontent Dotto did not initiate a divorce. When she eventually approached him for a divorce he was quite happy to provide her with one. Dotto admitted he did not love his first wife. He mentioned, after substantial criticism of his first wife's infidelity that he sought out other women during his first marriage, "Yes, I had *hawara* (lovers). When things at home are bad a man must look elsewhere." It is expected for him to cheat and does not constitute a major infraction. It is justified because his wife made things difficult at home. For his wife to cheat, on the other hand, that is unacceptable and insulting. If not for family pressure and his own desires he would have initiated a divorce:

When I was young I thought I would get married just once. I wanted to be with just one woman. I don't like the idea of changing wives and I did not like divorcing. But it was necessary. There were big problems. I cannot imagine a need, ever, to divorce this wife. She has respect and she listens. Divorce is a big problem here in our village. Men and women are prostituting themselves here, especially men.

Fatuma, Dotto's first wife, presented an entirely different account of their marriage:

Dotto, he was not happy to marry me. He was fulfilling a sense of duty to his father, and mine. That was ok with me. He was handsome, and a good fisherman. I was not against the marriage. But Dotto, he did not even try. He did not even pretend to be interested in me. He did not try to love me. He never courted me and he was not romantic. He only did the minimum amount as a husband.

Fatuma's account of the marriage and her disappointment in Dotto's apathy toward the marriage pushed her to act outside the bounds of respectful wifely behavior. She said:

I knew that my behavior was bad. I knew that showing off my lovers, my habits, was not the behavior of a good wife. I did not enjoy the criticism and judgments for my actions. But, it was clear to me that Dotto was content to live in a marriage without love. I was so sad about this in the beginning of our marriage. And then I was pregnant and had a baby. After the first baby I realized for me this was not ok. When I had the opportunity to take a lover, at first it was just to find some happiness. When I was caught, at first it was not on purpose, I saw the reaction of Dotto. He was not happy. He lectured me on the behavior of a good Swahili [Muslim] wife. He did not teach me anything new. I saw that this could be a way to get a divorce from Dotto. I saw that if I continued in this way that eventually he would agree to a divorce, even though divorce was not something he wanted. He would have stayed married to me.

Dotto and Fatuma's accounts of their marriage and the reasons it failed indicate the intensely gendered expectations of marriage in Peponi. I interviewed Dotto first and, initially, it appeared that he was the aggrieved party. Because my research methodology called for interviewing former couples, I was able to ascertain both perspectives on the "failure" of this marriage. Having learned Fatuma's explanation for her behavior I am not convinced Dotto would have changed his behavior in any way if he did know Fatuma's feelings of discontent about the nature of their marriage at the time. Hearing from both Fatuma and Dotto I understood that neither of them was happy and that their affairs were attempts to seek what the marriage was missing. Dotto, however, could not live with a wife who shamed him in this public way.

Dotto met his second wife in another small village not far from Peponi:

When I met her I knew she had a good character and I married her *mara kwa mara*, directly. I choose this wife because I liked her disposition in its entirety – she prays a lot. Because she prays and religion is a part of her character she was appealing/attractive to me. I love this wife a lot; this marriage has a lot of meaning and significance for me. Before, with my first wife, I did not like the life of a married person. With this wife I like the life of a married person a lot. For this reason I do not even consider having a girlfriend. I am too happy with this marriage.

Dotto is capable of loving and respecting his wife, and even providing her with some romance. He courted his second wife and says he is happy with his choice. She is pious, respectful, faithful, and most importantly she was his choice. He is happy in the marriage and claims he is faithful because of his happiness.

Adult relationships outside of marriage were a preoccupation of Swahili men and women. During my field research, extra-marital affairs were frequently the subject of conversation. They came up in gossip sessions, during casual conversations, and at judicial hearings. Eighty-four percent of men reported they would be jealous if their wife took a lover (Table 13 summarizes this data on jealousy regarding infidelity for both men and women). Men explained their jealousy: “This is not the way of Islam.” “It is not good to know this information.” “If I learn it I will divorce her.” “No man can keep his respect and not be jealous.” “For our religion it is *Kharamu* forbidden.” “I would feel such resentment.” Only 28% of women replied they would be jealous. Rather, 57% of women reported they would not be jealous, and elaborated: “It is our custom.” “It helps the marriage.” “It is normal here for men to have lovers.” “This is our way.” and “The conditions of marriage are difficult.”

Table 13: Jealousy regarding Infidelity for Men (N=158) and Women (N=129).

Jealous if husband took a lover?			Jealous if wife took a lover?		
	#	%		#	%
No Answer Given	15	11%	No Answer Given	8	6%
Yes	45	28%	Yes	108	84%
No	91	57%	No	10	8%
I do not know	7	4%	I do not know	3	2%

People expect their partner, both men and women, to have affairs, if given the opportunity. This is why I often heard from women that their husbands would not permit them to leave the house, or area near to the house, without permission. Women, on the other hand, did not have the ability to restrict their husband's movements. Women do, however, prefer their husbands take a lover instead of a second wife. A lover, or girlfriend, is not permanent and while a lover might make some claims on a husband's time and resources her extended family cannot. This is in contrast to the demands a second wife could potentially make on a husband.

What do men and women seek in extra-marital affairs and how are they explained or rejected in Swahili discourse? How are women and men's gendered identities reified, negotiated, or contested through love affairs? In their article on marriage and extra-marital sexuality, Comaroff and Roberts argue, "the ambiguities surrounding the formation of a marriage provide the context in which the nature of heterosexual relationships may be debated" (Comaroff and Roberts 1977). In other words, whether a relationship is construed as extra-marital or not depends on cultural conceptions of marriage itself. Questions about when a marriage begins stem in part from what is often described as the processual nature of marriage in Africa (Bledsoe and Pison 1994; Bledsoe and Cohen 1993; Nyamwaya and Parkin 1987; Comaroff and Roberts 1977; Van de Walle and Meekers 1994). As a process, marriage extends over time and includes

multiple exchanges of goods, rights, and responsibilities; therefore, it cannot be clearly defined or marked by any particular event. Although marriage is also a process of multiple stages among the Swahili they share rather fixed notions about when sexual rights are transferred and seem to have little difficulty in declaring a relationship as legitimate or not.

Extra-marital affairs were a common topic of conversation, gossip, and joking. Just as men joked with me, asking if I would become their wife. They also teased me about becoming their lover, especially once they learned I was married¹⁵. Usually the jokes started with the question, “*Una mpenzi?*” (“do you have a lover?”), and then unfolded into men listing multiple reasons why I should select them as my lover: “I will build you a beautiful house.” “Am I good looking, or what?” “I have things to give.” “Don’t you want me?” In response, I would play on Swahili perceptions that white people live a life of luxury by asserting that they could not possibly have the means to support my needs, to which they would usually reply, “But, you can take care of me!” It did not matter that they thought I was already married, “Divorce is easy,” they would remind me. Often, I was treated like a man in these conversations because men would tell me that I could send my husband a written *talaka*. Before Dan¹⁶ arrived in Peponi, people, women especially, would tease me, “Are you worried he will chose me for a second wife?” or, the ever popular, “Tell Daniel I’m a good lover.” When Dan arrived in

¹⁵ See Chapter 4 for more about this.

¹⁶ At the time Dan was my long-term boyfriend. We decided to wait to get engaged until after I returned from my year in Tanzania. Dan was able to take a semester off from his Ph.D. program in Computer Science to experience Tanzania and fieldwork with an Anthropologist. Before I left for the field we discussed my/our strategy regarding my relationship status and how we would present him when he arrived in Tanzania. In the end we decided to present ourselves as a married couples and in an effort to not “blow my cover,” I held firm and fast to this fact – even introducing him to other *mzungus* as my husband. We arrived at that decision after considering that by Swahili standards we were essentially married – we were in a committed relationship, cohabitating, and sharing finances. And, most importantly, we intended to, and did, get married upon returning.

Peponi, for the last three months of my fieldwork, we were constantly teased about his “ability” to have more wives in Peponi. People played with the rules, knowing he is not Muslim, and that *Wazungu* do not permit polygyny. No problem, he can become Muslim. Women loved to try and get a response from me. Knowing Dan did not speak *kiSwahili* they would shout, “Hey Daniel (which they pronounced DanYell), wouldn’t I make a nice second wife?” This would be received with loud laughs and waggling eyebrows from everyone in earshot. Some times women would hop on the back of his bicycle when we would ride through the village – only a wife, relative, or lover rides on the back of a man’s bicycle.

Dotto and Fatuma, the couple discussed above, had a tumultuous relationship. Their infidelities were obvious to everyone, including each other. Even before the relationship had truly deteriorated they were aware of the infidelities on both sides. It was not until Fatuma became sloppy and indiscrete with her lover that the extra-marital affairs compromised Dotto’s, and his parent’s, dignity. Men and women will discuss affairs with friends and will even help friends arrange meetings, but as long as indiscretions are kept “secret” there is no infraction (Hirsch et al.2009). In the village couples have fewer options and must find creative ways to keep affairs secret. Above all, one should never reveal their affairs in a way that makes them undeniable. In other words, they should not be “caught in the act,” specifically, by two or more witnesses whose testimony would make the affair irrefutable. Affairs may operate in a “secret” realm of social interaction, but they are governed by implicit rules of conduct that protect the honor of men and women. Furthermore, Kibabu, a twenty year old young man, had an insightful take on the situation: “If a man starts cheating on his wife it’s likely that the

wife will begin to also, so if you want a faithful wife, you must be faithful also. That is it. And then they are divorced because of these problems.”

Swahili people typically justified men’s affairs as a response to biological need. Women and their husbands say they abstain from sexual intercourse with each other during pregnancy and, presumably, for two years following the birth of a child. Polygyny could enable men access to other legitimate partners while a wife is pregnant or nursing – and I was only able to find one example of a man who is married to two wives where both wives are still of child-bearing age. This polygynous union was a secret marriage and the first wife did not know about it. Although extra-marital affairs are formally prohibited by Islam and by social norms, men I spoke with openly claimed a right to take lovers if they had “needs” that could not be met by their wives for one reason or another. Women also recognized men’s sexual needs as something distinct from their own. More than just a means to a biological end, lovers are also a source of social honor and prestige for men (Hirsch et al. 2009).

Married women I spoke with cited myriad reasons for having affairs. Some women stated that they liked their lovers because, “he pleases me,” and they were less attracted to their husbands. Other women had affairs out of jealousy or revenge for their husbands’ own marital transgressions. Women explained that they were very selective in who they chose as boyfriends or lovers. In particular, many women stated the importance of finding a man who protected their privacy, who showed them respect and affection through gifts and support, and who helped them smooth out problems, or meet financial needs. Women also perceived gifts as evidence of men’s dedication, respect, and love, and of their own power to divert men’s affection and resources to themselves. Most of the

adult married women I spoke with who had previously had or were currently involved in extra-marital affairs, had chosen their lovers freely. Others, however, sought relationships with men out of necessity to feed their children, pay school fees, or purchase other essentials when a husband failed to provide. From an American perspective, we typically view entering into a romantic relationship for reasons other than romantic love as “using” a person or, in the case where money or gifts are exchanged, prostitution. This is not how Swahili people typically see such relationships. It is important to stress some of the similarities between love affairs and marriage in terms of gender roles, expectations, and rules of social networking. Like marriage, love affairs entail support and exchange. Women offer their lovers cooked food, treats, and other small gifts while men support their lovers by giving them money, clothes or food, and in some cases, lodging. Furthermore, through their jobs, connections, and even family networks, lovers help their boyfriends and girlfriends get jobs, a new house, cheap deal on roofing materials, or a loan, without disclosing their relationship.

The common responsibilities shared by lovers and kin were underscored by the kinship terms used as euphemisms for lovers by men and women. When women, or men, wanted to refer to their lovers they would use the term *kaka* (big brother) or *binamu* (cousin). In fact, a number of men who pursued me, either in jest, seriousness, or hopefulness, called me *binamu* (cousin), *dada* (sister), or *shangazi* (father’s sister), *shemeji* (sister in-law). When confronted by men asking if I would be their lover, I would politely decline the offer by saying that I was married. They would respond: “*Binamu*, your husband is so far away,” or, “*Shemeji*, don’t you need a ‘second husband?’” These substitutions of kinship terminology were forms of indirect speech, but they were also

symbolic of the common role of caretaker played by older brothers, husbands, and lovers.

Sofiya, the 22-year-old woman who lived with me, was unmarried and adamant that she did not have a boyfriend, and never had a boyfriend or lover. She was embarrassed by the question and, to be honest, I did not believe her. A few months later I found my research assistant's youngest son, Aibu (23), lingering around my house chatting with Sofiya. Initially he carried some type of message for me from his mother: "She is feeling ill and cannot work tomorrow," or "She wants to start early tomorrow because there is a wedding in the afternoon." Eventually he stopped having messages. Once I encountered him inside the house, which was unusual because technically two young single people should not be alone inside. Aibu said to Sofiya: "I will see you later *shemeji* (sister in-law)." Calling her *shemeji* gave her a false kin relationship and connection to him. It was after hearing Aibu call Sofiya *shemeji* that I suspected their relationship to be sexual. In fact, less than a year after departing Tanzania I received an email from her brother telling me that she had a baby. I asked him who the father of her child is and if they intended to get married. He was able to tell me the name of the father, Aibu, but said: "Sofiya does not talk about it [a wedding], and won't answer any questions. They are not engaged."

Nonmarital relationships provide an alternative to formally recognized heterosexual unions that enable men and women to explore forms of romantic intimacy and sexuality and form bonds of interdependence to enhance social prestige, ensure basic needs, or create opportunities for advancement. While not officially sanctioned, both premarital and extra-marital liaisons had become a prominent part of social life among the Swahili. Most people do not like to discuss the subject and might even feel shame

that it is highlighted here as an element of life; nonetheless, nonmarital relationships are an important aspect of how men and women navigate contemporary challenges to daily survival, conjugal life, and cultural prestige. For youth, premarital sexuality held possibilities for individual expression and freedom from parental authority. As youth continue to struggle between their interests in exploring premarital heterosexual relationships and their dedication to their parents, the symbolic significance of virginity wanes. On an overt level, extra-marital relationships are perceived as subversive acts that threaten the sanctity of marriage, yet in their covert existence they are not without their own set of rules and mores. The same issues of shame and honor that drive parents to marry daughters to men of different social rank in order to avoid premarital pregnancy sometimes motivate men and women to have affairs, rather than avoid them. These issues also govern conduct within extra-marital relationships. Ties of mutual dependence among men and women in extra-marital affairs mirror that of marital relationships, reemphasizing cultural notions of gender and sexuality. At the same time, women's agency in creating and sustaining some extra-marital affairs challenges cultural stereotypes of dependent and subservient women. In short, extra-marital relationships should be understood not in opposition to marriage — the lawless, anything-goes sexual sphere of interaction — but as an informal arena of exchange, dependence, and mutual assistance in which men and women meet a variety of specified needs and desires that have not been fulfilled in marriage.

LOVE IN MARRIAGE

Omari, the 37 year-old fishermen, is a testament to the complexity of love in marriage. He said:

I have one wife and not once, not for one day, have I ever wanted to divorce her. *Hatasiku moja*. We met here in the village she was my neighbor growing up for a long time. Her character attracted and fascinated and pulled at me and that is why I choose her to marry me.

Omari professes to love his wife, “My wife I love her a lot, again I love her a lot.” He describes his wife as someone he noticed as being beautiful, and loving, and busy (keeps herself occupied with good tasks to make the house comfortable) from a young age. “I knew she was the one for me from the time she was a small child, you see she is my cousin.” Omari, while professing love for his wife, also says:

I’ve had girlfriends since marrying, but right now I do not have any. When I have a girlfriend we meet up when I’m having a problem at home or if she [his wife] is having a problem with me¹⁷. But it is never anything permanent. I do not want a second wife or third, because life is difficult plus my wife would not tolerate it for one second she would *katakata*, (cut me into fine pieces). In my life I think I will be married just one time, only, but maybe I will have bad luck and my wife and I would divorce if this happens, I would have to marry again.

Here, Omari differentiates between lovers and a second wife. This is an important distinction in Swahili marriages and one that women make as well as men. Extra-marital affairs are much preferred, by women, and even women’s responses about infidelity indicate that they expect and accept this feature of Swahili marriage.

¹⁷ Meaning, his wife is refusing him sex.

CONCLUSION

Today, there continue to be numerous types of marriages in the Peponi community and it is a significant part of life. Marriage is a topic very much on the minds of nearly all Swahili men and women. Men worry about how to control adulterous wives, and women worry about how to escape dependence on adulterous husbands, how to pry them loose from their girlfriends, or keep them from taking a second wife. Even men and women in long-term faithful marriages express concern about when, or if, their mate would fall prey to an enterprising person. All of this discussion of social manipulation and potential tensions does not mean that Swahili marriages are never happy. On the contrary, there are, indeed, examples of happily married couples where both husband and wife are content and happy to be monogamous and faithful¹⁸.

I build upon the existing anthropological literature of marriage among Muslims in Swahili society and ask what role Islam plays in Swahili marriages historically, and today, by contesting narrow portrayals of Islam in relationship to men's and women's expectations. This chapter points out that the symbolic importance of marriage among Swahili Muslims misleadingly suggests partnerships are static, stable entities over time, when in fact they are highly fluid for both men and women. Even the point at which a marriage ends is ambiguous. Women and men will move out of and back into a single marriage, as well as will likely transition into and out of a series of marriages over their life course. This reality is in contrast to especially women's expectations.

¹⁸ See also the Chapter 5 for more on polygyny.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENDERED AND GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLYGyny

Polygyny, a frequent topic of conversation in Peponi, is a common fear among women. It is with good reason that women are concerned because it also happens to be the goal of many men. Men cite, “I wanted an additional wife,” as one of three main reasons for seeking a divorce and 15% of women say, “He wanted an additional wife,” as the reason for their divorce¹⁹. Women readily discuss their intentions and are known to precipitate a divorce if they suspect their husband is making moves to acquire a second wife. The actual number of men with multiple wives is quite low and this undoubtedly has to do with the fact that women do not want to be in a polygynous union. Many women work quite hard to get out of a marriage once it is clear that their husbands are about to take an additional wife.

To date, research on polygyny in Africa has taken a decidedly woman-centric approach. Changes in marriage(s) and sexual relationships influence the demographic trajectories of reproduction and fertility. Practical political interests and ultimately the financial impact of high fertility rates in poor countries often drive academic interest in reproduction and fertility. Demographic studies of marriage have resurged in recent years

¹⁹ Please see Chapter 6 on Divorce for more detailed analysis of reasons for divorce.

but their objective in examining marriage is often situated in solely determining impact on population growth vis-à-vis studies of high fertility with women being the principal subjects (Blanc and Gage 2000; Gyimah 2009; Marston et al. 2009; Njau et al. 2009; Green et al. 2009; Alene and Worku 2008). Gage-Brandon (1992), in her analysis of polygyny and divorce in Nigeria, criticizes the demographic research on polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa. Noting that the emphasis has been placed on examining the relationship between polygyny and fertility. Questions, like those posed by Njau et al., about Tanzanian secondary students intentions to remain a virgin until marriage are explicitly about curbing fertility rates and population growth (Njau et al. 2009). A recent study, concerned with how “uncontrolled fertility has adversely influenced the socio-economic, demographic, and environmental situations” in Ethiopia, examines the persistent high levels of fertility and “important factors influencing fertility behavior,” including polygyny practices (Alene and Worku 2008:40) emphasis mine). Due to its presumed demographic impact, polygyny is constructed as a valuable research question, not because of an interest in nuptiality, but because of a concern with fertility. This seems to necessitate an emphasis on women. Where are the men in these studies? And why are their expectations, desires, and realities ignored when they clearly have a considerable impact on the outcome? These studies are limited and have led to an incomplete picture. In response, Anthropologists have noted the importance of considering marriage and relationships in a more fluid and gendered manner (Cole and Thomas 2009; Bledsoe and Pison 1994) and not just within the context of these narrow policy oriented questions.

How do our larger understandings and representations of Islam influence our approach to polygyny? For example, Peter Gray and others have hypothesized that

Islamic religious affiliation negatively associates with HIV seropositivity. He presents the practice of polygyny as one that would positively associate Islam with HIV.

Furthermore, he engages with what he perceives to be the features of Islam, which would make it a practice/religion that puts its followers more and less at risk:

While Islamic marital codes permit men to marry as many as four wives and divorce relatively easily, potentially increasing the number of lifetime sexual partners—a known risk factor for acquiring HIV (Stanberry & Bernstein, 2000; Wasserheit, Aral, Holmes, & Hitchcock, 1991), prohibitions against sex outside of marriage may outweigh these risks. If followed, codes against sex outside marriage for both males and females could reduce premarital and extra-marital sex as well as reduce sexual activity with commercial sex workers. Prohibitions against homosexual sex could reduce the risks of, for example, unprotected anal sex (Gray 2004:1751).

Gray concludes there is no evidence that Islamic religious affiliation increases sexual behaviors constituting risk factors for HIV and the link between Islam and sexual risk factors is ambiguous and varies among populations (Gray 2004).

Are men and women in Peponi likely to enter a polygynous union because they are Muslims, Africans, both, or neither? Do we expect the men and women of Peponi to have a high rate of polygyny? Why or why not? What do women's and men's goals and fears regarding polygyny tell us about marriage, more generally, and divorce, more specifically, in this context? What does the past tell us about polygyny in this area? In what ways have social change transformed polygyny? Have feelings, thoughts, and attitudes towards polygyny in Peponi changed? Have the rates of polygyny remained consistent? If the rates have remained constant, what, perhaps hidden, changes are there?

It would be easy to describe all Swahili men as desiring polygynous unions. In fact, during my year in Peponi I was inundated with men boasting, bragging, plotting, and planning toward this end. And, it would be straightforward to categorize all or most men,

even the majority of men, as having serious intentions for polygyny. Perhaps they do have serious intentions of polygyny even if they do not attain them. In the same vein it would be easy to describe all Swahili women as hating and fearing polygyny. There are, however, men who are monogamous and marry only once, and there are women who marry a man and become a second wife.

The reality is that most men never have more than one wife at a time. Most relationships in Peponi are not enduring and few couples actually continue throughout the life-course. In the following pages I will provide an in-depth look at the gendered nature of polygyny in this community by examining the attitudes and expectations of men and women from a generational perspective. Wa Karanja argues that, “What is significant is that not only do conceptions of marriage differ between male and females generally, but also between generations as well as different educational backgrounds” (Karanja 1987:247). How do women and men differ in their expectations and desires? While most men never actually have more than one wife at a time it can be argued that polygyny, the reality of men’s desire for it, and the fear it incites in women, is among the most frequent reasons given for the cause of divorce in Peponi. In general terms – most men aspire to polygyny and talk about it, seriously and jokingly, with frequency. Women, on the other hand, complain about it, and are simply not interested in being a part of a polygynous union; even those women who do enter into a polygynous union as a second wife can rest easy knowing that most women do not want a husband with more than one wife and will fight to secure a divorce. Interviews with both men and women demonstrate that polygyny is not as straightforward as it appears.

GENDER: WHERE ARE THE MEN?

Meekers et al. acknowledge the widespread interest, academically and politically, in polygyny, but lament the lack of consideration for the “attitudes of men and women toward polygyny” (Meekers and Franklin 1995:315). Regardless of their recognition of the need for a gendered approach to polygyny, Meekers’ et al. only incorporate the attitudes of women, and any comments regarding men, elders, or the Church are taken from women’s views of these categories alone (1995). “Little is known about how the practice of polygyny influences men’s lives,” (Blanc and Gage 2000:163) although it is fairly well established that polygyny is associated with an increased number of children, wealth, and prestige for men. Blanc and Gage argue these shortcomings in the demographic literature are partly due to a lack of data because until recently most large scale demographic surveys focused exclusively on women of reproductive age, with limited information on their husbands (Blanc and Gage 2000).

An exception to ignoring men is the work of Al-Krenawi et al. in Israel; they note that, “while a growing corpus of research has considered the impact of polygyny [among Bedouin-Arab Muslims] on the marital satisfaction and psychological and social functioning of women and their children . . . no research, to date, has considered such factors in relation to men who are part of polygynous marriages” (Al-Krenawi et al. 2006:173). Al-Krenawi et al. do consider Muslim men’s perspectives regarding polygyny and conclude that Bedouin-Arab men have significant problems “that are associated with polygynous family structures, indicating that beyond the products of the political and economic repression, family structure, and family functioning have their

own influence on the psychological well being of Bedouin-Arab men” (Al-Krenawi et al. 2006:185). The results of their survey indicate that polygynous men encounter more psychological problems than their monogamous counterparts. Furthermore, compared to monogamous men, polygynous men’s satisfaction with their marriage is low and their perceived relationships with their children are more problematic. This research does not, however, incorporate men’s own feelings, thoughts, hopes, or ambitions, and focuses exclusively on men’s mental health. My research presents a distinctive approach because it incorporates the attitudes and hopes of both women and men; and in doing so highlights the gendered variability that exists within a Muslim Swahili community.

Blanc and Gage (2000) also contributed to the demographic literature with an aim (again) of describing the relationship between fertility and practice of polygyny in Africa with men as the units of analysis. They concluded that a:

desire to have many children has traditionally been one of the incentives for men to marry polygynously. The evidence suggests that this desire continues to play a role in men’s decisions to enter into polygynous unions. Thus, the declines in overall fertility desires, which have been observed in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, may weaken the incentive to polygyny (Blanc and Gage 2000:180).

THE DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE

Polygyny, a form of nuptiality where a husband has more than one wife, is known throughout the world and exists in many forms in numerous cultures. Hirsch et al. use polygyny, effectively, to tease out the problem of analytic categories:

For example, anthropologists may describe two societies as polygynous – and thus they may be coded in the Ethnographic Atlas – but that does not necessarily mean that polygyny looks the same in these two societies. In one society, wives may live together, and in the other, wives may have separate houses. In one society, the husband may be having sexual relations with his wives concurrently, while in the other, a man may cease

having sex with his first wife upon marrying his second wife. In one society, the co-wives may have roughly equivalent social status, while in the other, they have quite hierarchical relationships. Polygyny is not polygyny. Depending on the questions asked in a comparative study, these differences will be profoundly significant, so that using “polygamous societies” as an independent variable and comparing it with “monogamous societies” will lead to spurious conclusions. “Polygynous” and other such broadly descriptive terms often operate (1) to mark difference in the “other” – in other words, all polygynous societies are “the same” only in the sense that they are assumed to differ from Western monogamous society, and (2) as a shorthand for signaling the kinds of questions that might be at issue in a polygynous society (Hirsch et al. 2009:28).

The incidence of polygyny is rarely as high as in sub-Saharan Africa (Goldman and Pebley 1989:212) and the practice continues to reinvent itself (Hirsch et al. 2009; Falen 2008; Karanja 1994; Gyimah 2009; Meekers and Franklin 1995; Bove and Valeggia 2009; Cook 2007; Madhavan 2002a). According to all Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) of sub-Saharan African countries conducted since 2000: “[The] percentage of married women aged 15–49 with at least one co-wife varies from 11.4% in Zimbabwe, to 26.5% in Ivory Coast to 53% in Guinea. For married men, the percentage with two or more wives ranges from 4.9% in Zimbabwe, to 14.1% in Mozambique (median value), to 36.7% in Guinea” (Bove and Valeggia 2009:22). In addition, polygyny rates are positively associated with rural residence, older age, and low educational attainment (Bove and Valeggia 2009).

In Tanzania about one-quarter of currently married women are in polygynous unions, representing a slight decline since the 1996 TDHS when 29 percent were in polygynous unions (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005). The level of polygyny increases with age. For example, 12 percent of currently married women age 15-19 are in polygynous union compared with 35 percent of those ages 45-49 (National

Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005). Rural women, women with less education, and those from lower wealth quintiles are more likely than other women to be in polygynous unions. Regional differences are marked: 34 percent of married women in Zanzibar North and Mara regions are in polygynous unions, compared with less than 8 percent of women in Dar es Salaam (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005). One in ten men age 15-49 are in polygynous unions. This proportion varies by background characteristics. Similar to women, older men, those living in rural areas, and those with less education are more likely to be in polygynous unions. Men in Zanzibar are more likely to be in a polygynous union (18 percent) than men in the mainland. 76.2 percent of women are in a monogamous union, 17.7 women are with another co-wife, and 5.2% are with 2 or more co-wives. For men, 88.9% are in monogamous unions, with 10% in polygynous unions.

In the region of Tanga, where Peponi is located, 23 percent of women are said to be in a polygynous union with 20.9% with 1 co-wife and 2.1 with 2 or more co-wives (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005). 19.7% of men in Tanga region have 2 or more wives. These are among the highest percentages for men in Tanzania, rivaled only by Zanzibar and Mbeya region. For women these rates are among the highest but not in the top three.

In Peponi, men's desire for multiple wives is more of a dream than a reality. Few men ever have multiple wives. At the time of this research the average number of wives for men (n=597) is 1.09. There were only 31 men with 2 wives, 5.1% of men, one man with three wives, .0167 % of men, and no men with four or more wives (Figure 31).

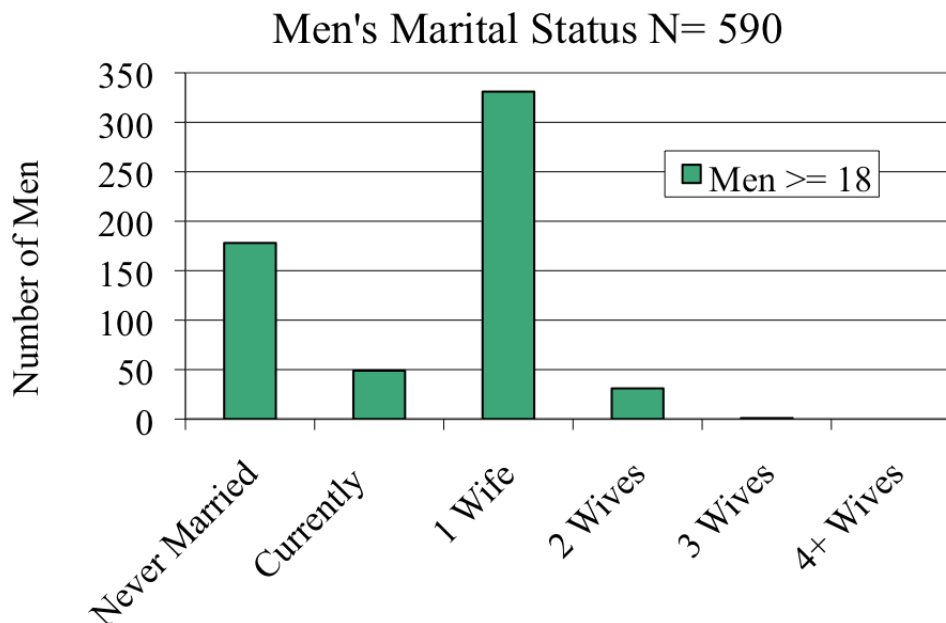


Figure 31: Men's Marital Status, Peponi Census 2004.

The vast majority of men have one wife at a time – this is due to economics but also is indicative of women's desires – they often thwart men's plans by forcing a divorce.

Furthermore, 24 of the 31 men with two wives are over the age of 50 – demonstrating that polygyny is something a man can realize with age. And, in this community, it is a man's sons who help him financially to afford a second wife, as it is not something he can attain on his own.

Landberg noted that polygynous unions affected the marriage figures, although perhaps less than might be expected (Landberg 1977). For example, only nine men (or 6.5% of the total male sample of currently married men) had more than one wife at the time and none had more than two wives. During Landberg's research, polygynous marriages represented only a small portion of total marriage and the men that had more than one wife had the wealth necessary to support several households. Similar to my own findings, Landberg noted that under Islamic law, a man can have up to four wives at a

time, provided that he is able to properly maintain separate households. During her tenure in Peponi it was also considered reasonable to provide at least separate rooms, for all four wives, if separate houses could not be procured (Landberg 1977). Landberg provides an interesting quote from local literature of the time:

the first page of *Nikahi: A handbook of the Law of Marriage in Islam* (Hemedi 1959, Swahili and English versions) contains the transcriptions: 'He who cannot maintain more than one wife may not marry more than one wife.' The same sentiment was voiced by the villagers (1977: 145).

Landberg took this, probably correctly, to mean that only men with a better than average income could support more than one wife, and more than one household. Certainly in looking at the nine individuals in Landberg's sample, this seems to be the case. Of the nine polygynous men in Landberg's sample, five were successful fishermen who owned their own outrigger canoes and also own or have part ownership of nylon fishing nets. Another man owned nylon nets and was also the owner of a small store at one of the Sisal Estate camps. The three remaining men included a civil servant, an owner of a truck and trucking business, and one man who owned a rather extensive coconut plantation. Thus, in the late 1960s, polygynous marriages represented only a small portion of total marriages contracted. Given the national and regional statistics for polygyny in Tanzania and Tanga it is, perhaps unexpected, to find such a low percentage of polygyny in Peponi. Landberg's data demonstrate that rates of polygyny have been low in Peponi and the higher rates of divorce in this community clearly impact the percentage of polygynous unions.

THE RELATIONSHIP TO ISLAM

Islam in Africa

Polygyny has long been considered a central aspect of marriage in both the African and Islamic context. In Africa today we find the largest percentage of polygynous unions among Muslims (Timaeus and Reynar 1998). Furthermore, demographers Hayase and Liaw found that, “In the three [African] countries where both Christian and Muslim religions are identifiable in the survey data, we found that Muslim women were significantly and substantially more prone to be in polygamous unions than Christian women” (1997:308). The demographic research makes the connection between Islam and polygyny in Africa quite clear.

Misinterpreted, Misunderstood, and Misused

Islamic scholars, such as Jones, argue that polygyny is an institution that has been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misused (2006). Obermeyer, in a socio-cultural analysis, considers the Middle Eastern/Arab context and questions the assumed natural association between Islam and polygyny:

images of the harem still color Western perceptions of Islamic marriage, with an emphasis on the man’s right to take up to four wives and on his unilateral and arbitrary right to divorce his wife (Baer, 1964, Kirk, 1968; Patai, 1973). In fact, in the Koran, polygyny is limited by the obligation to treat all wives equally, and it has actually been the privilege of the few who could afford to support more than one wife. The level of polygyny has been found to be as low as 1 percent in Damascus and 2 percent in Cairo (Ghallab, 1984), with most estimates putting it at no more than 10 percent (White, 1978) (Obermeyer 1992).

Hale, another Middle Eastern feminist scholar, criticizes research that, “. . . suggest[s] that everyone who is polygamous is Muslim, that all Muslims are polygamous, that

behavior in polygamous families is uniform, and that all women living in these societies are powerless victims is simply wrong” (1995:78).

As anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod explains, “Polygyny is an institution oppressive to women in that it causes them pain, but it is not necessarily the pleasure for husbands that Western fantasies about harems suggest” (1993). Abu-Lughod goes on to discuss the nature of polygynous marriages and emphasizes that although polygynous marriages may share some characteristics no two are the same. Personalities and circumstances deeply impact the experiences of those involved and since relationships change over time the experience is not static. A final point from Abu-Lughod, some people use “the Qur’an to justify polygyny as Islamic, others use the same passage to condemn the practice as not favored by God” and thus there is no single opinion on the topic much less a uniform understanding (Abu-Lughod 1993).

In some Arab countries, polygyny was severely restricted or prohibited during the twentieth century:

In 1953, the Syrian Law of Personal Status allowed a man to have a second wife only under the condition that he could prove that he could support both wives. In 1956, Tunisia banned polygyny, the lone Islamic country to do so (Ahmed 175). Khadduri notes that this was a significant decision at the time because it was the first law in an Islamic country to revoke a basic tenet of the Quran. The justification for this was the second Quranic quotation (Sura 4, verse 129) that states that a man can never be just to multiple wives (Jones 2006).

The Tanzania Marriage Act of 1971 prohibits polygyny for Christian marriages, but still allows it for civil, Islamic, and traditional unions (Meena 1992:16).

The argument that men have a much “greater sexual potential and thus cannot restrain themselves when their wives are unable to satisfy their needs because of menstruation, giving birth, or any other reason” is put forth by Mashour as one that

illustrates how patriarchal societies interpret the texts to favor men (2005). She counter-argues that these kinds of contentions do not rely on either the Quran or Sunna for justification and refers to Engineer who elucidates the original meaning with which the Quran allowed polygamy (Mashour 2005:42). Engineer states: "The Quranic spirit in permitting polygamy is very clear—to help widows and orphans and not to satisfy men's extra-sexual urge" (1992:157).

Researchers, and Africans themselves, link men's motivations regarding polygyny to naturalized desires regarding sex. Mitsunga et al., working in Nigeria, note that in sub-Saharan Africa: "it is widely believed that men are biologically different from women in their need for sex. This has resulted in the perception that men may have unlimited sexual freedom, whereas women are expected to be faithful to only one partner at a time" (2005:147). Orubuloye et al. contend that views about male sexual needs are colored by the very existence of polygyny; their research demonstrates that men and women both consider men to be sexually polygynous by nature (1997:1195). They further assert that:

Even though polygyny has economic and reproductive justifications, its central position in society inevitably means widespread social and ethical acceptance of the proposition that many men need more than one wife, and by implication and extension, that many--perhaps most--men need sexual relations with more than one woman (Orubuloye 1997:1195).

AFRICAN EXAMPLES

Gage-Brandon (1992) in her demographic analysis of the "polygyny-divorce relationship" in Nigeria points to the ethnographic literature which suggests that "Although polygyny is one of the most important structural factors governing divorce in traditional societies, no systematic analysis to date has been done to examine the polygyny-divorce link" (1992: 285). She attributes this to the lack of data as most

demographic surveys only include information for women who are currently married.

Her study revealed that:

unions with two wives are more stable than those with three or more wives, and that this effect is independent of childlessness, duration of marriage, religion, and other socioeconomic variables. On the contrary, one would expect the odds of divorce to increase steadily with the number of wives in the union due to age differences between co-wives and to an intensification of co-wife conflict and of economic constraints at a given level of household income” (Gabe-Brandon 1992:291).

The explanation for her findings is that polygyny is often advantageous for the senior wife who in many cases exercises considerable authority and control over the junior wives. She concludes that, “Wife rank, the age of the husband, and residential patterns of polygynously married women may be relevant to the analysis of the polygyny-divorce relationship” (Gabe-Brandon 1992: 291).

Bledsoe considers the context of West Africa where, “for everyone in rural Gambia, polygyny is in one way or another, a fact of life” (1980:73). Indeed, West Africa has the “highest rates of polygyny in the world” (Ezeh et al. 1996); in fact, “So common is polygyny that even women who are not currently in such a union for the first part of their married life are likely to be in one at some point because of divorce or widowhood” (Bledsoe 1980:73). Bledsoe examines the impact polygyny can have on a woman’s reproductive life. Both Bledsoe (1980) and Madhavan (2002) account for the variability in sentiments women have regarding polygyny.

Similar to my own findings in Peponi, Bledsoe notes that men who were especially likely to be polygynous were middle-aged or older (Bledsoe 1980): “A young man's father usually pays for his first wife, the second wife, married perhaps a decade and a half later --sometimes over the protests of the first, sometimes at her insistence--is

usually acquired by the husband himself" (Bledsoe 1980:73). My research departs from Bledsoe's case. Like men in West Africa, in Peponi a father and his male relatives help pay for a son's first wife; however, unlike Bledsoe's case it is usually a son who has some financial success that helps pay for his father's second wife.

The literature on polygyny portrays women fitting into two categories – competitive or collaborative (Madhavan 2002a). Others note that women's attitudes may vary both within and between societies (Meekers and Franklin 1995; Adams and Mbuguru 1994; Dorjahn 1988; Kilbride 1994; Potash 1986; White and Burton 1988). Indeed, in some contexts polygyny is considered advantageous for women. In such societies, women sometimes favor polygyny because it provides them with labor assistance (Dorjahn 1988). Another example, where women find benefits to polygyny, includes Ware's study of women's attitudes toward polygyny among the Yoruba. This work found that a majority of women surveyed (60 percent) indicated they would be pleased to be in a polygynous relationship because they could then share the burdens of work and also have another woman with whom they could gossip and play (Ware 1979). In some African societies it is not uncommon for a woman to participate in the choice of her husband's next wife or even to refuse to let her husband make that choice himself. There are, however, many other instances in which women disapprove of polygynous unions. In some societies the potential for jealousy or rivalry is reflected in the terminology used to refer to co-wives. Indeed, even among the Swahili there are examples of common proverbs, which illustrate this:

Swahili: *Mke mwenza!! haa!! Mezea*

English translation: Cowife! Ha! Just swallow it!

Meaning: A wife tells her husband to never even think about having a second wife! The statement "mezea" (just swallow it) is Swahili slang, which means, "Let it pass" or "Forget it!" The alliterative quality of this proverb makes it especially witty and enticing.

Swahili: *Naona ni shoga yangu, kumbe ni mke mwenzangu.*

English translation: I thought of you as my girlfriend, but alas! You are my co-wife.

Meaning: A woman is "messaging around" with her friend's husband, so she is not a friend after all. Here, co-wife is used as a derogatory word, an insult.

Kiru, in a Kenyan publication on social and religious concern notes that:

We have proverbs which appear to be insulting to the wife, but which in reality explicitly indicate the sufferings of the woman in a polygamous marriage, and so implicitly condemn polygamy as an institution that brings out the worst in a woman's nature: If you dance with your co-wife, don't close your eyelid (Burundi). Two wives are two pots of poison (Gĩkũyũ, Kenya). In this way, these proverbs complement the proverb: If a wife has kicked her co-wife, it is on the husband's shoulder she has found support (Fulani, Senegal) (Kiru 1999).

Caplan examines women on Mafia Island, Tanzania, who are also Swahili Muslims. The Swahili of Mafia Island also practice polygyny, and it is rare for a man to reach the Muslim maximum of four wives. About one-tenth of the men are reported as having two wives (Caplan 1984). She sees them as less oppressed than women in some Islamic societies. For example, she points to the fact that women can now attend the mosque, although only possible since 1960. Despite viewing them as less oppressed than women in other Islamic societies, Caplan considers Swahili women to suffer in marriage,

divorce, and polygyny because of the patriarchal nature of Mafia society, which favors men in most ways (Caplan 1984).

Solway, in a study in Botswana, argues that women are likely to have conflicting feelings regarding polygyny (Solway 1990). Their lives might be better off because sharing the care of the husband across wives decreases their workload and increases leisure time. On the other hand, polygyny might create a structural reality in which the household's economic resources are divided, and perhaps unequally. In addition, many young wives told her they would leave their husbands if they took second wives. Solway points to changes in the expectations of marriage and changing material investment in children and the household. She continues on to say that it may be that women are grappling with frustrations regarding the institution of marriage, not just polygyny. She refers to the fact that widowed and divorced women also wish to maintain their independence and prefer not to remarry. In other words, some of the negative sentiments expressed by women toward polygyny are connected to a growing negative attitude or indifference toward marriage itself. In contrast, Ware (1979) relates women's attitudes to the value of marriage, but she contends that women may be more willing to share their husbands, rather than divorce them, when husbands are not valued very highly.

Meekers et al. find in a Christian context in Southern Tanzania that, “Women who had been in polygynous unions and those who had never been in polygynous union have similar opinions regarding polygyny” (Meekers and Franklin 1995:31). In Peponi, I also found that women who were, or had been, polygynously married, as well as those who had not, equally disdained the practice. Women who were in polygynous unions as a second wife agreed to such a union because they were not successful at taking care of

themselves, seeking help from family members, friends, or boyfriends. Becoming a second wife was almost always a last resort. And, in most cases the husbands of second wives had terrible relationships with their first wife and spent most of their time, energy and money on the second wife. The first wife usually was unaware that her husband took a second wife, at least when it was happening; she usually found out after it was too late. Secret marriages are not uncommon among the Swahili (Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992). Most women whose husbands take a second wife are already in the care of their adult children and have not relied on their husband for quite some time. The relationship is a formality and their only interactions occur around big family decisions – such as the funeral arrangements at the death of a child. These first wives are usually long accustomed to fending for themselves and not relying on, or having any expectations, of their husbands. Despite being long accustomed to this type of relationship with their husbands, women, for the most part, are not pleased and complain about this situation. Yet, they are not motivated to divorce because they do not feel it is in their best interest to do so. Others, however, push relentlessly until they are successful at procuring a divorce.

Similar to Solway's (1990) work in Botswana, Meekers et al. (1995) discuss one way in which women negotiate their husbands desire for a polygynous union: divorce threats. Women who think their husband may be looking for an additional wife will threaten divorce; others who seek to prevent such looking around for a second wife indicate to their husband that a divorce would be imminent if such a process began. Meekers et al. note that among the Kaguru, "Such threats of divorce are generally not actual divorce attempts, but rather attempts to avoid or resolve problems without

dissolving unions” (1995:315). Hirsch, in her study of how gender relations are negotiated through marital disputes heard in Kenyan Islamic court, notes that:

Sadly enough, marriage to an additional wife is interpreted as evidence that a couple’s love has faded (see also Fuglesang 1994:260), yet love is not the language through which protest is articulated. Rather, rights to maintenance and money are central to how women frame their disapproval . . . of polygamy. Feelings of betrayal and embarrassment, as well as fears of economic decline, lead some wives to make claims that have the force of law; only a few women bear this situation calmly or silently (Hirsch 1998:103).

In his research on the Gusii of Kenya, Hakansson (1994) notes that a Gusii wife may return to her parents in order to force her husband to abandon a new partner (:529). Meekers et al. (1995) further describe that Kaguru women instead of initiating a divorce themselves rather would, or did, tell their husbands to divorce them. Meekers et al. indicate that threats or requests for divorce among Kaguru are probably most effective when the woman has a strong support network. Finally, their interviews demonstrate that, “Although threats of divorce are not uncommon, only a few women actually left their husbands and returned to their parental home” (Meekers and Franklin 1995:31). To some extent, this apparently low prevalence of women divorcing their husbands may be related to the fact that women may lack better marital alternatives, which implies that remarriage may not be an improvement.

PEPONI AND POLYGyny

In Peponi, divorce is not an empty threat. This is apparent given the lower rate of polygyny, the high rate of divorce, men’s desire for polygyny, and women’s dislike of the practice. Unlike other studies (Dorjahn 1988; Amadiume 1987; Madhavan 2002b; MacCormack 1982), Swahili women failed to mention any benefits of having a co-wife,

such as the reduction of one's workload or the friendship of a co-wife with whom one can bond and share gossip (Ware 1979; Bowen 1964). This is, again, similar to Meeker et al.'s (1995) findings in Kaguru where, despite institutionalized social support for polygyny through initiation ceremonies, most Kaguru women do not support polygyny. Those women who have not experienced polygyny are wary of the institution and the effect it may have on their lives, and those who have had a co-wife express only negative remarks about polygyny.

Women's views toward polygyny underscore gender conflicts among the Swahili because women oppose polygyny as an institution, and yet institutionalized support for it exists through Islamic understandings and elders' demands on younger men. Unlike women of other societies, Swahili women have no active role in co-wife selection, nor do they form any bonds of friendship or camaraderie with co-wives. Indeed there is no expectation that co-wives would have any interactions and in fact this is the case. Co-wives generally want nothing to do with each other, and the fact that they maintain separate households makes it quite possible to avoid any interaction.

While living with my host family one day something rather awkward occurred. Initially I was not aware of what was causing the tension associated with the visit of a woman to the household. It was not until after she left that I was able to determine this woman was, in fact, the younger second wife of Baba Jumbe's father, Mzee Jumbe. The younger co-wife stopped by to ask Baba Jumbe (not her son, the son of her co-wife Bi Jumbe) for financial assistance. She wanted him to contribute to the wedding of her daughter (from a previous marriage). The entire encounter was incredibly awkward and tense. From the moment she arrived I could tell that everyone disliked her and did not

want her there. Baba Jumbe, however, was summoned. He did not have any animosity towards his father's second wife and in the end did contribute to the wedding. After the second wife left both Mama Jumbe and Bi Jumbe had a fit and talked at length about their dislike for her. Mama Jumbe: "Can you believe that woman came here?!" Bi Jumbe: "She has no business coming here, to my home, asking my son for something. She is so greedy." I asked them: "Who was that woman? Why did she make you so angry?" Mama Jumbe replied, "THAT is Mzee Jumbe's other wife, the second wife. We don't like her, you can see why."

Opposition to polygyny remains, regardless of the age of the woman or her years of experience with polygyny. The discussion in the literature on polygyny in Africa generally posits women's attitudes toward polygyny as either competitive or collaborative (Madhavan, etc.); forced into this dichotomy, women of Peponi would certainly be described as competitive. This research suggests that women in polygynous unions might compete for the husband's resources and attention, but co-wives do not interact with each other. The fact they maintain separate households does make this possible. They do not have to interact, and so collaboration is not even an option for them.

Given the reality that opposition to polygyny is not strong enough to prevent polygyny, or its new manifestation, girlfriends or outside wives, women have attempted to devise their own coping strategies. Many, if not all, women who faced polygyny in their previous marriage(s) do not wish to remarry if widowed or divorced. For most women, this is achievable because of the possibility of entrepreneurial work (discussed in Chapter 7) and/or living with other women to share costs. Throughout it all, women

appear to be resigned to, but frustrated by, the practice of polygyny and skeptical that a change will ever occur.

In contrast, in Peponi polygyny remains a goal for many, if not all men; however, few achieve this goal. In previous chapters I've described that men (and women) are more likely to engage in serial monogamy, having multiple spouses over the course of their lives, but not simultaneously as polygyny permits. Alternatively, men are formally married to one woman and have informal relationships with other women. Men and women, undeniably, have differing feelings about polygyny and this is related mostly to their differing expectations of marriage. In-depth interviews, and survey data, equally demonstrate that men and women have dramatically gendered expectations of their life course in terms of relationships. These contradictory expectations reflect broader changes in the national political economy of Tanzania and in the local practice of Islam in the Peponi community. Today women view marriage within modern constructs of love, romance, and monogamy. In response, perhaps, men turn to Islam to validate their contested expectations of marriage, particularly polygyny. In the past women remarried rapidly. Today, however, women consider their options, such as informal entrepreneurial work, and frequently choose to enjoy the freedom associated with the status of a divorced woman rather than remarry. Islam does, indeed, make provisions for polygyny. In fact, any Swahili Muslim man can tell you he is entitled to a maximum of four wives at any given time. He is required to maintain all four of them equally, although not all men openly admit to the necessity of this requirement, and few achieve it.

Men in Tanzania find they have political, cultural, and religious backing to the practice of polygyny. Evidence from other parts of Tanzania suggests that before

Christianity and Islam arrived polygyny was a practice embraced by the traditional gender-segregated localized form of religion (Meekers and Franklin 1995; Hollos and Larsen 2004; Keefe 2008). Islam, too, reinforced this previous practice.

A MULTI-GENERATIONAL VIEW OF POLYGyny

Mama Jumbe, a 23-year-old mother of one, discussed her contradictory feelings regarding her marriage:

I do not want to be divorced and on my own. But I also do not want to be treated with disrespect and I do not want a second wife. I will leave my husband before that happens. I know he will take another wife someday and then I will take our son and go to my parent's house. They will have me. I will make juice and sell it at my sister-in-laws *hoteli* [small restaurant] and that will be all that we need. I will be able to take care of myself. I'd rather be on my own than have a husband with a second wife. I have respect for myself.

Mama Jumbe is adamant that she will not remain in a marriage that is polygynous and she is confident about her plan when, not if, her husband, Baba Jumbe, takes a second wife. Mama Jumbe and Baba Jumbe have been married for three years. The relationship is not an easy one. Mama Jumbe got pregnant before marriage and her mother threatened witchcraft in order to persuade Baba Jumbe into marrying her daughter. Mama Jumbe described their early relationship in romantic terms. Baba Jumbe, on the other hand, did not consider the marriage to be a love match. Although he did marry Mama Jumbe, she was not the first woman whom he got pregnant, and his treatment of her did not reflect a "caring, doting, romantic" relationship she said she desired.

She says he is "stingy" and does not buy their baby the things he needs like baby powder (a marker of a well taken care of child). Baba Jumbe says she is "high maintenance" and "frivolous". Mama Jumbe resents that her activities are restricted and

that he (despite having a successful business) does not buy her the things she “needs.” Baba Jumbe says he has countless responsibilities and that many people make demands on his income and “buying my wife a new dress is not my top priority.” He wants a “good Muslim wife,” one who does not make demands of his time and money. The wife he envisions does not make such demands and does as she is told, takes care of the home and children without questioning him, and does not work outside the home. She says he has threatened to divorce her if she does not obey him in all things. He is most insistent she not leave their house, even to do errands. She must ask for permission to visit relatives and friends and to participate in community events, celebrations, and activities. She must rely on other people to do things for her. There were countless times in my year of interactions with this couple when Mama Jumbe said she had to ask permission of her husband to go visiting or participate in a community activity, more often than not, she was denied that permission. She also reluctantly deferred to her husband, in both small and large matters. He talks openly of wanting a second wife as soon as he can manage to organize it. Despite the situation she finds herself in Mama Jumbe does not desire a divorce: “I want my husband, but I also want him to care for me, for us. I want him to be a proper husband.”

During my year in Peponi I spent a lot of time with this particular family as I lived with them for the first two months and were my landlords for the remainder of my year there. Mama Jumbe was someone I sought out frequently for assistance, but we encountered the obstacle of her husband quite often. Whenever I would invite Mama Jumbe to my house or ask her for help that would involve tracking something down or visiting someone else’s house she would always say, “Baba Jumbe will not permit it.”

After a few months in the village I purchased a cell phone. The next time I asked Mama Jumbe to accompany me somewhere she replied, “Maybe you could call or text Baba Jumbe to ask him if I might come with you.” It was an awkward position for me to be in, but I did, in fact, need her assistance. Baba Jumbe never denied Mama Jumbe permission when I requested it on her behalf. Eventually, Mama Jumbe caught on to this and it became obvious she was using me to gain access to life outside of her house. Personally, I was torn. On the one hand, it was convenient to be able to get Baba Jumbe’s permission when I needed Mama Jumbe’s help, and initially Baba Jumbe’s restriction on Mama Jumbe seemed unfair. Other wives were not restricted in the same way. On the other hand, after some time it was clear that Baba Jumbe’s restrictions were, not unfounded. Mama Jumbe proved herself to a bit of a manipulator, both with her husband, others, and me. In fact, over time I came to have some sympathy for Baba Jumbe’s situation, although he was also never the model husband, at least not from Mama Jumbe’s perspective.

Baba Jumbe references the second wife his father desired. In fact, he helped his father, Mzee Jumbe, attain that goal and now has the same goal for himself. According to him, as a good Muslim man he has to wait until the time is right because he does not intend to take a second wife until he can afford it. He discusses his desire for a second wife and the manner he will go about it in terms of his rights and obligations as outlined by Islam. Baba Jumbe said, “It’s not even that I want the hassle or demands of a second wife. And you know things here [with Mama Jumbe] will get more difficult. But, as an important successful businessman, a Muslim man, having a second wife is important. People [men] expect me to show my success in this way.” Mzee Jumbe lives with his

second wife on the outskirts of the village in a small mud and thatch house. He is effectively retired and is supported by his children, namely Baba Jumbe. He spends some time each morning farming his *shamba* (farm land) where he has a coconut grove and also grows beans, corn, and other vegetables. Older men and women in the community, who have effectively retired from the work that characterized the (re)productive part of their lives take over the task of seeing to the *shamba* they have inherited. This is often a task older men and women take on because it does not yield any cash income but does provide the household with resources.

Mzee Jumbe would spend a part of each day with his namesake grandson, Jumbe, at the household of Baba Jumbe and Mama Jumbe. Frequently, his time at the household overlapped with time that Baba Jumbe's own mother, BiJumbe, spent at the household. Mzee Jumbe never mentioned his other wife during these visits and his interactions and conversations with BiJumbe were primarily based on their grandson Jumbe. As Jumbe got older he would venture from the household together with Mzee Jumbe riding on the front of his bicycle handlebars; they went visiting, praying at the mosque, or running errands. The relationship between the older couple was obviously strained. In my year of interacting with this family on a daily basis I only saw Mzee Jumbe act "husbandly" towards BiJumbe once. That was on the day that my own husband arrived in Peponi in the ninth month of fieldwork. I took him to Baba Jumbe and Mama Jumbe's household for an introduction and both of Baba Jumbe's parents were present. Mzee Jumbe jumped up and heartily shook Dan's hand. Pumping his hand up and down Mzee Jumbe spoke rapidly in *kiSwahili*: "Yes, I am Mzee Jumbe. I have two wives (a comment I had never heard him utter before), this woman is my first wife, the mother of my children (while

saying this he pointed to, and then beckoned BiJumbe to join him). I also have a second wife who is not here.” The enthusiasm and delight with which Mzee Jumbe delivered this brief speech stunned me: in nine months of time I had never heard these words from him. He did not make this speech to me upon my arrival. He did not make this speech when he met other visitors I brought to introduce to him and his family. This speech, indeed, was reserved for my husband. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, this was a topic that villagers were eager to discuss with Dan. Men and women alike enjoyed teasing both Dan and me about his prospects for a second wife in the village. It is common knowledge that Americans do not practice polygyny and many people liked to tease us about it. Frequently, I felt it was half teasing, half in earnest.

BiJumbe lives between Baba Jumbe’s household and that of his younger sister, given that her own husband, Mzee Jumbe, is now married to a second younger wife, and no longer provides her with a home. Unlike her husband, it did not take a visit from my husband to inspire conversation about her situation. She is quite vocal about her displeasure that her own husband has a second wife. It is, in fact, her favorite subject to complain about. She feels disrespected but powerless to do anything. Ultimately, she is proud she has managed to remain married to this man for 40+ years with 8 children. Despite hating her current situation she does not seek a divorce. There is a part of her that feels she deserves to maintain her married status, and another part of her that feels that it would be letting Mzee Jumbe off the hook. Even though he does not provide for her, their children take good care of her, especially Baba Jumbe, so she does not harass Mzee Jumbe for maintenance or a divorce.

Mama Jumbe, despite the difficulties of her marriage, does want to remain married to Baba Jumbe for the time being – he is a prominent and successful man whom she once loved. Baba Jumbe admits that one of the reasons he is so strict with Mama Jumbe is that he does not trust her and worries that if she were to have the freedom she might not be faithful. While the marriage of Mama Jumbe and Baba Jumbe is riddled with difficulties and is not based on the earlier romantic and companionate notions Mama Jumbe described, so long as the marriage remains monogamous Mama Jumbe desires to remain married to Baba Jumbe. Fear surrounding divorce and polygyny, however, weigh heavily in the framing of her contingency plan to leave Baba Jumbe, return home, and sell juice. She would rather be alone and dependent upon herself than be disrespected in such a way. Baba Jumbe describes his desires in terms of his rights as a Muslim man. He would be disappointed to have his marriage dissolve. He admires the fact that his own parents have been “unhappily” married for 45 years. He is aware of his wife’s feelings, however, this will not prevent him from taking a second wife. He knows his own mother’s feelings – her sense of betrayal and disrespect – and this too will not stop him from taking a second wife.

Above all else, women do not want to be part of a polygynous relationship and (today) they are not dependent on other men (relatives or new husbands) if they want out of a polygynous relationship. Most men, however, dream and aspire to have multiple wives – while women detest the notion and, like Mama Jumbe, strategize and have a “back-up plan.”

GENERATIONAL REALITIES: MEN'S POLYGYNOUS ASPIRATIONS

Men present an entirely different set of relationship expectations and concerns. Most young men do not expect their first marriage to endure and they have no intention of staying married to the same woman for their entire lives. In fact, they look forward to exercising their rights, which they describe as being acceptable by Islam. Many Swahili Muslim men see polygamy as part of being devout, as well as a status symbol for men. Affluence, rather than any other factor, usually determines whether or not a man has more than one wife. Frequently even men who start out wanting to be monogamous change their minds as they grow older. As they become more prosperous, they are better able to afford having multiple wives and some men see polygamy as an obligation, if they can afford it. Specifically, men describe with pride that they are allowed 4 wives at any given time (some will acknowledge that Islam requires them to equally maintain each wife, some don't). The ideal and respected Muslim man is one who can afford multiple wives. Compared to Landberg's research conducted in this community from the late 1960s men's expectations of wives and marriage reflect a re-vitalization of Islam in the community. During a visit with Pamela and Leif Landberg, after my return from the field, they noted (after observing photographs and video) how much more Islamic the community seemed. They offered examples of dress (school girls wearing head coverings) to demonstrate the changes they noted. While practices and expectations have not changed, the language and justifications have. As we saw with Baba Jumbe, a good wife is one who is obedient and undemanding.

Today the desire for multiple wives continues to be more of an ambition than a reality. Few men ever have multiple wives. At the time of this research the average

number of wives for men is 1.09. There are only 31 men with 2 wives, one man with three wives, and no men with four or more wives. The vast majority of men have one wife at a time – this is economic but also is indicative of women's desires too – they often thwart men's plans for a polygynous union by forcing a divorce. Furthermore, 24 of the 31 men (77 percent) with two wives are over the age of 50 – demonstrating that polygyny is something a man realizes with age as it is not something he can easily attain on his own. And, similar to the 1960s, it is a man with access to resources who can afford a second wife. Today, it is not a man who is necessarily wealthy in his own right but a man whose son(s) who can help him to afford a second wife.

Associated with the unrealized dreams of polygyny is the fact that men exercise their rights to divorce and serial monogamy frequently. Men perceive themselves to be entitled, by Islam, to the unilateral right to divorce a wife for any reason at any time. This is done through a process of repudiation called *talaka*. Husbands can either pronounce a *talaka* or write a *talaka*. Even in this one community there are various understandings of how many *talakas* it takes for a divorce to be final and how much time is allowed to elapse before it is not returnable. The most often described form is that a husband has three verbal *talakas* to give a wife. He can say one as a warning and continue living with her. If he gives three *talakas* in a row it is final, although he has thirty days to change his mind and invite his wife back. If the thirty days pass and he decides he wants to take her back then they have to get married once again. There are many examples of this. Most cases are when a man takes a second wife and the first wife persuades him to give her a *talaka* (women have their ways) – eventually the husband divorces the second wife and returns to the first wife.

Mzee Issa and his wife, Bi Issa, of 40+ years are an example of this. He is in his early 70s and was married to his first wife in 1957. Together they have seven children. Today Mzee Issa has two wives and maintains them in separate households. Mzee Issa explained that his first wife is an old lady, 65, although younger than he is. He said she is not able to do difficult work because of her health and age. He told me she is no longer able to have sex because she is an old lady. I replied, “but you are also an mzee (old man)!” His reply was: “Yes, but she is a woman, and I AM A MAN!”

Bi Issa presented some additional information: when they got married Bi Issa already had a child, a son (who died in adulthood) from a previous marriage that ended in a divorce because her husband treated her poorly. Since their first marriage in 1957 Mzee Issa and Bi Issa have been divorced and remarried twice. Both instances were due to Mzee Issa taking a second wife. Both times Bi Issa insisted on a divorce, because she would not stand sharing a husband with another woman. Each time Mzee Issa eventually divorced the second wife and came back to Bi Issa. This pattern of women divorcing their husband when he takes a second wife was one I encountered a number of times. Today, they are still technically married despite that 10 years ago Mzee Issa took a second wife, Hidaya. Mzee Issa speaks with authority about what Islam and the Koran will allow and how a man is supposed to interact with all of his wives, and presents himself as a good Muslim man who achieves these requirements. He has managed to provide separate households for each wife and he insists he spends his time equally between the two households. In addition, he claims to pass by the house of the wife he is not staying with each morning to ask if there are any problems or needs. For example, a wife might need sugar, or might not want *ugali* (corn meal porridge) so he’ll go to the

duka (small shop/kiosk) to pick up what she needs. Both wives contradicted this information stating he sleeps and eats exclusively with Hidayya, the second wife. In addition, Bi Issa complains that Mzee Issa contributes little, if nothing, to the household needs and she is quite angry about this. She insists the only reason she is able to survive is because of her children and grandchildren who take care of her (and perhaps this is why Mzee Issa does not find it necessary to contribute to his wives' livelihoods equally. What is interesting is that he felt the need to present himself thusly, to me). She does not like that her husband has a second wife, but if she is going to be in a polygynous union she is pleased she is the first wife, not the second wife. She also acknowledges that she refuses to sleep with her husband any longer. Her explanation differs, however, from Mzee Issa's. She says that her husband has always pursued women outside of their marriage. In the past she did not refuse him sex based on this. She told me, however, that, "I am not interested in getting any of the diseases [meaning HIV/AIDS]", which she is certain her husband will one day have.

WHO ARE SECOND WIVES?

My survey data reveal that no women, who are second wives, entered into a polygynous marriage as their first marriage. All second wives are in their second, third, or fourth marriage. In addition, they acknowledge they entered into a polygynous union as a second wife because they felt they had run out of options. If given a choice, they would prefer not to be in a polygynous union.

Hidayya, the second wife of Mzee Issa, is 40 years old. She has two adult children (who both live in Uganda, the home country of their father) and three grandchildren (two

of whom live with her and Mzee Issa). She divorced from her first husband a little over 10 years ago because he wanted more children and she was barren. While she was disappointed to be divorcing him, she did not blame him his reasoning. After the divorce she returned to her home village (a neighboring village to Peponi). Shortly after returning, she opened a *hoteli* (small restaurant) and met Mzee Issa when he came to her village on business. She was very happy to marry him, despite his marital status, because she saw him as a smart, kind, and fun man. She said, “I wasn’t looking for a man that was already married. It was not my first choice to be a second wife. But my situation [being infertile] made me feel like I didn’t have a lot of choice. Really, I felt lucky that such a good man wanted me.” The fact that Mzee Issa did not want any more children made it a perfect match. Hidaya is among few women in the village who are a second wife.

Given how vocal most women are about their fear of, and hatred for polygyny I did not expect to encounter any women who were happy in their situation as a second wife. Hidaya acknowledges the difficulties between her husband and his first wife, but is not bothered by it, as it is clear to her that despite being a second wife, she is the preferred wife. I will say that after observing their relationship for nearly a year it was apparent their relationship was unusual. They appeared to have a more companionate and romantic relationship than other couples I encountered, both couples in polygynous and monogamous marriages.

DIVORCING LATE IN LIFE

Mzee Simu, another older man in his 70s came to me in my final weeks of fieldwork and told me he finally acquiesced and gave his wife, Bi Abdallah, of 40 years a written *talaka* (divorce note). She had been harassing him for a divorce for 7 months (see chapter five for the actual written *talaka* Mzee Simu issued). What precipitated the request and harassment for a *talaka*? Mzee Simu recently took a second wife. Bi Abdallah felt betrayed, disrespected, and ridiculed. Why did Bi Abdallah insist on the divorce? What made her, and her situation, different from that of Bi Jumbe? Bi Abdallah, for the months before her divorce, was quite determined in her quest for a divorce. She was outraged. She said she had stood by Mzee Simu's side through many difficult times, differences of opinion, etc. Bringing a second wife into their life was the last straw for her. In their 40+ year marriage he had never before taken a second wife. It was a blow to her pride.

At one point, before the *talaka* had been issued, Bi Abdallah came to my house. I was surprised to see her. We had not actually met before. She just showed up at my house and introduced herself. Previously, my primary relationship was with Mzee Simu, who worked with me on the census and survey. Thereafter, Bi Abdallah came to discuss her frustration with me. She came to enlist my support for a divorce from Mzee Simu. She wanted me to attempt to persuade her husband to give her a divorce. It was her hope that I, as someone who “employed” Mzee Simu, would have some ability to “reason” with him. She was not interested in remaining with him even if he divorced the second wife. She was humiliated and angry and did not want to be his wife any longer, under any circumstances. Other times she would come to complain that the “salary” I gave to

her husband never reached her. She wanted to know if I would issue her his next *malipo* (wages) as he was not sharing any of his income with her. This was, indeed, her main grievance with regards to her husband. She felt after all the years she had given him she did not deserve this type of disrespect. Of course, I had to tell her I could not do either of these things. Later, I brought up the visit with Mzee Simu. He was stunned, and I think a bit embarrassed, that his wife would come to me. In a way, I think his wife's visit to me inadvertently helped persuade him that she was earnest and intent on getting a divorce. He was disappointed by this outcome because he truly hoped he could have both wives.

This couple was well known for their differences. Villagers joked about them and commented on this aspect of their relationship frequently. Most notable was their different political affiliations. Mzee Simu is the village secretary and serves for the CUF party. Bi Abdallah works as an active volunteer for the majority party, CCM. When Mzee Simu took a second wife, for the first time in their 40 year marriage, there was wide spread speculation for his reasons. Many said it was because he was tired of arguing with Bi Abdallah and wanted a wife of his own political persuasions. When Bi Abdallah began her campaign for a divorce from Mzee Simu, the village continued to speculate. Again their political differences were brought up but now people started to joke about Mzee Simu's age and his inability to satisfy Bi Abdallah sexually.

One man explained:

Well, the truth is, Bi Abdallah was sick of his politics. You know she's a member of CCM!? [the national party of Tanzania, but represents a minority of the local community]. Mzee Mohammed is of course CUF.²⁰

²⁰ A minority political party in Tanzania that dominates local politics and is closely associated with Muslim politics in Zanzibar and happens to be the majority party in Peponi.

Another woman contradicted this explanation by saying: “It’s because he can no longer perform his husbandly duties in bed!” I asked her: “What about his second wife, doesn’t she care about that?” Apparently, the second wife, according to the woman, and others, was so desperate for a provider for her and her children that she wasn’t concerned about husbandly duties in bed, and this way Mzee Simu got to keep up appearances. Mzee Simu blamed the divorce on the fact that he did not have the money to maintain both wives equally. What he failed to understand was that Bi Abdallah would have sought a divorce regardless of his ability to maintain them both.

SURPRISING CASES: MODERN MEN?

At first it was a surprise to me to discover there are men in Peponi who are not interested in polygyny. In fact, there are even men who are not interested in serial monogamy or in extra marital affairs. These are those “mythical” men, the men that women hold out for, who are interested in being with only one woman for their entire lives. These men are definitely in the minority, but in the interest of capturing the full spectrum of men’s perspectives, their opinions and expectations will be discussed here.

I spoke with one such man, Baba Zainabu, a 50-year-old man who has remained with the same wife for 30 years. He has four daughters, ranging from 8 years old to 24 years old. He pointed out that he has no interest in an additional wife or a different wife. He also says he has remained faithful to this one wife for the entire marriage. He acknowledges this is unusual behavior for a Swahili man, but said, “Life is too hard, there are too many demands, too many costs. If a man is smart he will wait until he finds the right woman and then he will stay with her and work through life together.” I was

astonished by Baba Zainabu's explanation. In my months of living in Peponi I had not once heard such a thing. I wondered about his ability to shed the need to prove himself, both in terms of masculinity, and in terms of religiosity.

Later I spoke with Kichwa, a 19-year-old newlywed, and discovered that Baba Zainabu was not alone. Kichwa said:

One of the reasons I only want to have one wife and marry only once in my life is because I am afraid of *Ukimwi* (HIV/AIDS). Having many wives over and over again increases your chances of getting AIDS. I think the married life is good because it is honorable, and also for yourself it has a certain value, if you change your behavior and you don't have any respect, you won't have any irritation from other women.

I don't think I could ever marry a second wife. I think my wife would be very unhappy and also there is the cost, I think I will not be able to afford it, it is very costly.

In my life I think I will only marry once. In my life I want to stay with just one wife, that's it. I don't want to make many changes with *wake tofauti tofauti*, with many different wives. I married a wife that I would never want to divorce, unless there is some unforeseen major and big problem that I can't even imagine. I could only imagine a divorce if my wife had no respect for my parents, or if she prostituted herself by staying with another man outside, or if she has no respect for me, if she is foolish and has no regard for me I would not hesitate to tell her, "you refuse to recognize my authority, and I would use my authority *mara kwa mara* (directly)." People here are prostituting themselves. Also, men are sleeping with so many different women, and also they don't spend their wages in their home. My own father has been married 5 times and divorced 4 times. My own mother married 3 times and divorced 3 times. Now she lives alone with no husband.

Kichwa hopes to remain with one wife over the course of his life. At the same time, he is quite clear about the type of behavior he expects from his wife and under what circumstances he would consider divorcing her acceptable. He did not bring up any conditions under which he would consider it appropriate for his wife to seek a divorce from him. It is clear that Kichwa thinks about a bigger picture and strives to live his life

according to a certain ethic. I would be surprised to learn he was having an extra marital affair. In fact, Kichwa appears to possess all those “mythical” qualities that women in Peponi wish for in a husband. On the other hand, he is only 19 and his standard for authority and expectations seem exceedingly high, and a bit naïve given the community norms.

In conclusion, divorce and serial monogamy in Peponi allow men to exercise their rights and expectations in a context where women are extremely displeased about polygyny. Attaining multiple wives, much like the romantic hopes of women, remains a fantasy.

CHAPTER SIX

SWAHILI DIVORCE: PROCESS, AGENCY, AND POWER

In Tanzania, popular responses to the high prevalence of divorce rates among Swahili women reveal a complex, and sometimes contradictory, sense of the moral virtue and social status of divorced women. Divorced women are commonly cast as passive victims of the political economic shifts that have left Tanzanians increasingly vulnerable to poverty. Misconceptions of Islam only compound this question of women and agency in marriage and divorce. It is erroneously believed by many that Islam does not permit for divorce and that Muslim marriage is “stable” because women are oppressed. This is further complicated by the fact that rates of divorce among Muslims in countries around the world vary tremendously and perhaps has less to do with being Muslim and more to do with local cultural models of marriage and kinship. Muslim states that possess an extensive legal infrastructure are empowered to enforce families to take care of their kin. If these mediations fail, these institutions enforce the terms of the divorce. Fearing the enormous economic consequences, husbands are less likely to divorce their wives²¹. By contrast, in all Swahili communities, divorce is accepted as a normal part of most marriages and of an individual’s relationship lifecycle (Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Mirza and Strobel 1989; Stiles 2002; Fair 2001).

²¹ In Egypt the state can deduct spousal/child support directly from a man’s wages (see Sonneveld 2007)

Rarely do any of these popular treatments or anthropological investigations of divorce in Tanzania adequately address the agency women possess as they negotiate their marriage trajectories (see Stiles 2002 for a notable exception). I argue that Swahili Muslim women do have power in marital relationships, and its dissolution, although not in equal and expected ways. Further, changes in the last quarter century have transformed the possibilities for women and thus changed their abilities to make claims for their support both within marriage and through divorce.

This chapter will focus on the disputes surrounding marriage I have observed in Peponi. There are different lenses through which one can examine gendered forms of agency and inequalities in divorce (Stiles 2005; Sonneveld 2007) for legal approach). Further, I evaluate acts of divorce through the everyday conversations, negotiations, and arguments in which men and women in Peponi engage. I see these disputes as a lens onto the nature of gender relations more broadly, and the struggle for rights and obligations within families, more narrowly. Men, I observed, have certain institutional advantages over their wives and children and benefit from social patterns such as polygyny, patriliney, patri-locality, and political/economic authority. Women, on the other hand, use their sexuality, kinship networks, supernatural threats, and marital protocol to counter their husbands' actions.

In addition to exploring the gendered nature of divorce, this chapter seeks to understand the *process* of divorce. Formal institutional structures for obtaining a divorce exist in Tanzania. The civil codes of *Sharia* are in force throughout the country but, unlike Kenya and Zanzibar, state courts, not Islamic ones, apply them. Individual judges/magistrates – regardless of their religion – use customary (traditional), civil, or

Islamic family law, depending on the religious background of the accused. Peponi does not have a court, although a traveling judge/magistrate is supposed to visit once per month. During my year there, however, this individual came less than eight times. This lack of a permanent judge/magistrate and the infrequency with which one is available results in people, especially women, having little or no experience with the state and legal system. Most people are unaware of their legal rights and obligations as outlined by the Tanzanian government. Instead, Swahili subscribe to a combination of religion, state law, and custom (Stiles 2002).

Thus, in a context where these legal forms are largely absent, misunderstood, or hidden, I have observed divorce unfold exclusively through informal negotiations. Divorce is not a legal process so much as it is a process that invokes an array of social structures: kinship, community, work, and even the supernatural realms. Acts of divorce are almost exclusively done by verbal or written repudiation²², and not through legal mechanisms. Historically, repudiation is a form of divorce common in all Muslim cultures. In many Muslim states today, however, repudiation is illegal because – Islamic leaders argue – it favors men and violates women’s human rights. Making repudiation illegal, as established in countries like Egypt, does not necessarily improve women’s options, but rather, may make it even more difficult for them to obtain a divorce (Sonneveld 2007).

Sonneveld’s work demonstrates that legislation is sometimes used for purposes other than that for which it was intended (2007). According to Sonneveld:

Some women in Egypt use the divorce law as a strategy; they try to get their way by threatening a divorce. Christians also make use of Islamic law. They are unable to divorce under their own Christian law, so they

²² to cast off or disown, to reject, to refuse to acknowledge.

turn to Islam to get a divorce. There was a lot of resistance to the law. Now judges can determine the marriage settlement themselves and make it very difficult for the woman. They [judges] raise the small amount of money specified in the marriage contract, for example, under the argument that the man has also paid a betrothal gift” (Sonneveld 2007: 10).

The new divorce law was, and continues to be, harshly criticized in the Egyptian public debate, although the legislature and women's organizations at the time presented it as being in accordance with Islamic law. The fear, or assumption, is that women will supposedly abandon their families for insubstantial reasons, thereby destroying Egyptian family life. Sonneveld remarks that the presumption was that only irrational, rich, westernized women would make use of the law. This, however, was a misjudgment, according to Sonneveld: “The majority of the women who come to court for a divorce are from the lower classes. Wealthy women don't go to court at all, as this damages their reputation; they try to organize it within the family” (2007:6).

A “Real” Swahili Family

My first experience in East Africa was as a young undergraduate student participating in a cultural immersion study abroad program. It was in this context that I first became aware of the prevalence and widespread acceptance of divorce. I encountered and formed a friendship with a young woman during my studies in Kenya. I met Amina, a divorced working mother, in 1997 during my first trip to East Africa. For my first “home stay” I was invited to stay with her, a health aide in a local clinic on the island of Lamu off the coast of Kenya. I was paired with this woman because of my interest in global health issues. At first I was disappointed I was not invited to stay with a “real” family like most of my fellow students and was concerned I was not getting the

full experience, or exposure, to the Swahili family. It was my first week in Kenya and my first time in a non-western setting, I was 20 years old and full of my own ethnocentric understandings about what an African family looked like: a large harmonious extended family consisting of multiple generations of married couples living together with their children – which contrasted with my own American, divorced, and fractured family. I did not anticipate divorce would be common in Kenya and especially not among Swahili Muslims of the coast. I did not anticipate meeting a single independent woman like Amina.

Amina lived in a one-room “apartment” with her 8-year-old daughter and 13-year-old sister. She shared her kitchen and bathroom with other renters and worked every day at the local clinic. Amina supported her daughter and younger sister without assistance from her extended family, who lived on the mainland and was largely inaccessible to her on the island. It did not take me long to realize that a divorced woman was not an exception to the norm, but rather a common occurrence in Swahili culture. During my semester abroad I met divorced women all along the Swahili coast – Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. They were elites and poor women, they were old and young, and they were finding ways to make it work without a husband.

Over the course of six weeks, I spent time each day with Amina at the clinic and with her friends. In addition, I spent each weekend staying at her home with her family. Amina was not unique in her status as a divorced woman; what made her unique was she had a job and was therefore able to support herself without having to move in with or return to her family and rely on them for support. As Amina explained to me, she felt

fortunate not to need to depend on her family to support herself and her child²³. In fact, her family sent her younger sister to live with her because Amina was able to provide for her. Amina's story effectively demonstrated the many contradictions and frustrations directly related to being a divorced woman in Swahili society. She reflected on the delicate balance of being a Muslim woman of good standing in her community, a good mother, and an independent woman.

My time with Amina led me to a set of research questions that I found not adequately addressed in the scholarly literature on Swahili women. This relationship provided me with the beginning for a new way to conceptualize marriage and divorce among Swahili men and women. What accounts for the high rates of divorce in Swahili society? Is divorce stigmatized? Is infertility the only reason for divorce, as presented in the literature? Is infidelity tolerated? What role does polygyny play in marriage stability? In what ways do women have agency in this presumably male-privileged system? What do people expect their relationship/marital life cycle to be like given the high rates of divorce? How does independence factor into women's conceptions of marriage and decision to dissolve a marriage? How do men, who do have more control over the process, feel about it? How is it gendered, beyond the obvious conclusions already made?

²³ The complicated, and sometimes contradictory, feelings women possess around rejoining their families after they are divorced are dealt with in more detail in chapter four.

DIVORCE IN SWAHILI SOCIETY

Previous research on Swahili marriage and divorce presents divorce as an indication of the instability (Caplan 1968; Landberg 1977; Tanner 1964) and the insignificance (Gomm 1972; Le-Guennecc-Coppens 1987; Prins 1961) of marriage in Swahili society. Subsequent research refutes this understanding of Swahili marriage and demonstrates the importance of marriage in this society as it relates to the cognatic descent group, extended family solidarity, or creating new and powerful alliances (Caplan 1968; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992). Roberts and Tanner (1959) have a different tack, and relate high divorce rates primarily to high levels of infertility. While infertility does indeed typically end in divorce, my research shows that reasons for divorce are many and not limited to infertility. These views of marriage in Swahili society and these presentations of women strip them of their agency.

The Swahili have long been recognized for their high divorce rates. Serial monogamy, that is marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce, and so on, is the common pattern. Strobel's examination of the historical record in Mombasa reveals that one in two first marriages ended in divorce between 1915 and 1959 (1979). Middleton notes that: "Among the Hadimu [an historically elite group of Swahili associated with the island of Zanzibar] in 1958 the divorce rate was well over 70%" (1992:217). Le Guennecc-Coppens (1987) describes matrimonial instability as a feature often found in Muslim societies. His work in Lamu, Kenya shows a "very high" rate of divorce (73%) and he argues: "[This high rate of divorce] could very well, by its excess, be regarded as social pathology" (1987:244). Others observe, as well, that divorce is high among the Swahili (Caplan 1984; Hirsch 1998; Middleton 1992; Stiles 2002; Fair 2001).

In 1968, in the same community where my research was conducted, Landberg's census and marital history data indicate that nearly 50% of marriages ended in divorce (1977). My research in 2004, determined the frequency of divorce had not changed with nearly 50% of all marriages still ending in divorce. Approaches to understanding marriage and marital instability among the Swahili have varied, but what is unequivocal is that divorce remains common.

REPUDIATION: ISLAM AND LOCAL OPTIONS

Islam provides fairly clear guidelines for who, where, when, why, and how a divorce can be achieved. As many aspects of Islam, the malleability or interpretability of those guidelines is locally and culturally specific. Islam provides a means for divorce that is unilateral and is for men to exert, for the most part. This system of divorce, or repudiation, is illegal and outdated in most Islamic countries because it provides men alone with the means to divorce (Stiles 2002). In Peponi, and other Swahili communities, repudiation is the main method of divorce.

In Peponi, divorce takes place informally by repudiation, and can occur in a variety of ways. There is a surprising lack of consensus about the details of *talaka* and there are many examples of what constitutes a proper divorce. Male repudiation, written or verbal, is the most common form divorce takes and is called *talaka*. Most men and women discuss divorce in terms of *kuacha* – to leave (Stiles notes that this is true for Zanzibar as well). A woman will typically say: “*Alniachwa*” (he left me), which indicates her husband divorced her, or “*Tuliachwana*” (we have left each other), to indicate they have both agreed to a divorce. Most women will then describe the manner

in which they received their *talaka*. The two most common methods involve *kuandika* – to write or *kutamka* – to pronounce verbally. Both forms of *talaka* can be directed at the wife or her father (or other male relative). In addition, a man can issue a *talaka* by proxy if he is away from home, or if he does not wish to see his wife or in-laws. He can send a male relative to present the written *talaka*, or even give the verbal pronouncement on his behalf. Most men reported they gave the *talaka* directly to their ex-wife, and most women reported they received the *talaka* directly (summarized in Table 14 and Table 15).

Table 14: To whom did he give the *talaka*?
Men.

To Whom?	Number
No Answer	5
Wife	57
Her Father	20
His Grandfather	1

Table 15: To whom did he give the *talaka*?
Women.

To Whom?	Number
Wife	18
Her father	2
Another person	14

Landberg refers to *hului* or *khului* – an agreed upon payment a woman can make to her husband if she wants to initiate a divorce, but I never encountered this form of divorce in practice (Landberg 1977; Stiles 2002)). A few people mentioned it as an occurrence in Zanzibar, but not Peponi. In fact, *hului* is common on Zanzibar in the court system (Stiles 2002). Stiles refers to a form of divorce which is also not present in Peponi called *kuandika pesa* which means “to write for money” and involves a man asking his wife for money for a divorce without her requesting it (Stiles 2002).

Women in Peponi reported they receive written *talaka*, not verbal *talaka* (Table 20). Stiles discusses that a written *talaka* is more highly valued than a verbal one in her community – and this has to do with the ability to provide proof and prevent problems later on (2002). This makes sense since many repudiated divorces end up in the *kadhis*’s

court, and a written *talaka* makes things easier in that event and eases the pressure to provide witnesses. Women and men in Peponi did not articulate a preferred form of *talaka* – but written *talaka* were more commonplace (summarized in Table 17-20).

Table 16: Men's reported method of giving *talaka*.

How did you give the <i>talaka</i> ?	Number
No Answer	6
Verbal	6
Written	71

Table 17: Method women reported receiving *talaka*.

How did your husband give the <i>talaka</i> ?	Number
Verbal	0
Written	34

Table 18: Number of *talaka* Men issued.

Number of <i>Talaka</i>	Number
No Answer	4
1	42
2	21
3	16

Table 19: Number of *talaka* women received.

Number of <i>Talaka</i>	Number
1	3
2	1
3	30

Table 20: Did you want to divorce? Men.

Did you want to divorce?	Number
No Answer	2
Yes	73
No	8

Table 21: Did you want a divorce? Women.

Did you want to divorce?	Number
Yes	13
No	21

Table 22: Did you love your wife when you married? Men

Did you love your wife when you married?	Number
No answer	1
Yes	80
No	2

Table 23: Did you love your husband when you married? Women

Did you love your husband when you married?	Number
Yes	32
No	2

A Verbal *Talaka*

A verbal *talaka* can proceed in several different ways – a husband can issue a triple repudiation and say, “I divorce you” three times in a row. This effectively nullifies the marriage immediately. This type of repudiation is unusual because it does not permit having a “change of heart/mind” or allow for “taking back” the *talaka*. On the other hand, the declaration of divorce does not necessitate three *talakas*. For example:

Rama, 30-year-old, married man, would like to live without divorce, but:

If my wife had an affair, was disrespectful to me or my parents, if she went looking outside the marriage, didn’t listen to me, if we were quarreling every day, I would decide to divorce to find another wife, I would give just one *talaka* and then I would never return again to that wife. *Nimekwisha*. I would be finished.

Rama’s response reminds us that it does not take three *talakas* to make it final and that if a man is resolved, one *talaka* is sufficient. In addition, while he does not desire a divorce, and does not expect to divorce, he does have a very clear sense of what behavior it would take from his wife to justify a divorce and knows precisely how he would respond and how he would issue his *talaka*.

There are also examples of women asking her husband for a *talaka*. For instance:

Mama Hamadi, a 32-year-old divorced woman said:

My husband was unfaithful and this was not so bad. As a wife, you must expect this sometimes. But it became more difficult when he spent more of his time and more of his money outside of our marriage. I began to suspect that he was making arrangements for a second wife. This was not acceptable to me. Every chance I got I told people what was happening. I told his mother, I told our neighbors, I told everyone. People thought this was funny and he got very upset. He did not like being the joke. I went to him, when he was having coffee, and I said, “If you want her as a wife you will have to give me my *talaka*.” A few days later he came to our house and gave me my *talaka*.

Mama Hamadi did not particularly enjoy publically airing their business, but knew it would upset her husband and he would take her seriously.

While a man does have three *talakas* to issue to his wife, he does not have to issue them all at once. This is the process many divorces take. Most people in Peponi describe it the way Mzee Issa did:

It is like this. Let's say you want to divorce her. You can say, "I divorce you, leave." Maybe she goes to her father, or her mother, or her brother, it does not matter, she must leave. You have 30 days to change your mind. You don't have to change your mind. This could be the end and permanent. But, you can change your mind. Maybe you were angry or upset and not thinking clearly, or maybe your heart changes again. So you go to her father, or brother or to her, and you say, "Come home, come back." Maybe you apologize and she agrees, or maybe you don't apologize and she agrees, or maybe she doesn't agree, but if you want her back, she is yours. Usually her family will make her go back to you if there is no reason for her to resist. A good reason to resist would be maybe he beats her and he's been warned to stop but he doesn't stop. So, now you are back together. You, the man, can do this again at a later time; say "I divorce you, leave" and then you must go through the entire process again. If you tell her to come back a second time you must know that there is only one more *talaka* left. If you use it, that's it. It is final and there is no going back. Then you must choose a new wife. Some times, not often, there are cases where a man does three *talakas* but then he wants her back. If this is the case the wife must marry another man first and divorce him. Then the first husband must pay *mahari* (bride wealth) to his wife and then they can be married, again.

This process, as described by Mzee Issa, is the one that most Peponi people depicted.

The main variable in the process of divorce is the amount of time that is allowed to pass between a *talaka* being issued and "taking it back." Some say a man has up to three months, others 30 days, and one man told me you have just one week.

A Written *Talaka*

In my final month of fieldwork Mzee Simu²⁴, a man in his early 70s, presented me with a carbon copy of his written *talaka* to his wife. As the village secretary he had access to the necessary supplies and was instilled with the importance of documenting. Mzee Simu worked with me on the village census and when he heard I was interested in seeing a written *talaka* he brought a copy of the written *talaka* he provided to his wife of 40 years. After 7 months of “being harassed” for a divorce by his wife, Mzee Simu finally acquiesced and gave her a written *talaka*. What precipitated the request and harassment for a *talaka*? He recently took a second wife. His first wife felt betrayed, disrespected and ridiculed²⁵. Mzee Simu’s *talaka* was straightforward and exactly as a written *talaka* was described to me:

Simu Abdallah
Peponi Village
December 7, 2004

Dear Mrs. Bakari²⁶,
Talaka 1:

I, Mr. Simu Abdallah, with all of my intelligence intact, and with no pressure from any person am giving one *talaka* today December 7, 2004 to my wife.

Mr. Simu Abdallah’s Signature.

I am giving a copy of this letter to the following people.
Mzee Bakari (wife’s father), Muhamedi Bakari (wife’s brother).

Also, I am permitting Mrs. Bakari to remain in my home with our children for as long as she would like. However, none of her male friends, boyfriends, or lovers is permitted in the house. Furthermore, if she is to remarry she will have to move out.

Mr. Simu.

²⁴ Also discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁵ See Chapter 5 for a more in depth description and analysis of this situation.

²⁶ Women keep their father’s first name as their last name.

The written *talaka* had an interesting postscript – outlining that his ex-wife was allowed to live in the house he provided her with for their entire marriage along with their children, indefinitely; however, she was not allowed to have other men (lovers or boyfriends) into the house and if she were to ever remarry she would have to move out.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Habiba, an unmarried woman of 24, articulated the significant changes to divorce practices that many others have noted:

Things have changed, a husband can give a wife her *talaka* but they still live in the same house, just a different room. He does not have to send her away to her father's house. This happens now, but it is not the right way. Also, some men do not require in *edda* (seclusion) anymore, and some women just refuse it. There is no discussion, she does not observe it. They just want to move on. Before, after a divorce, you had to stay separate, from other men, for three months to prove you are not pregnant. After this then you could be free.

In the past, according to Landberg (1986), women in Peponi who had recently been widowed adhered strictly to the required period of seclusion and the strictures surrounding it. Most women went to their mother's house to be cared for during their time of *edda*. Landberg notes that although divorced women might not remarry within this period, they did not otherwise seem unduly restricted in their movements or behavior, either by their ex-husbands or by their kin. In fact, Landberg contradicts herself, somewhat, and says that, "Indeed, some young Peponi women did not hesitate to take lovers soon after separating from their husbands. Despite Islamic regulations concerning paternity, most husbands of divorced women show little interest in claiming children born after divorce, whether or not they are their own biological offspring" (1986:116).

Moghissi (2005) makes the point that each community has its own history – and there is a need to periodize Muslim discourses in specific locations (Moghissi 2005). Furthermore, she argues that the actual lives of women and men in Muslim societies show not only similarities, but also enormous differences from one period of time to another, between different communities, and within the same societies at any point in time. Habiba's point demonstrates that there are changes in practices over time and not all people adhere to the same practices at a given point in time. For example, divorce and polygyny are very common and unremarkable in Muslim communities in Nigeria (Pittin 1983; Smith 1981), but uncommon and currently regarded as shamefully embarrassing in India and Bangladesh (Moghissi 2005). Similarly, women's seclusion practices, *edda*, are widespread in Bangladesh, northern Nigeria, Mombasa, Kenya, and in northern Sudan. In these countries the practice of seclusion is regarded as intrinsic to Islam (Moghissi 2005). Yet, seclusion is virtually unpracticed in Indonesia, Senegal, the Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

Further, the very forms of seclusion and the strata of women and men implicated in seclusion practices in both northern Nigeria and in Bangladesh have changed in the last fifty or sixty years – but for different reasons and in different ways (Feldman and McCarthy, 1983 and Imam, 1994, for instance). Evidently the simple reference to “Islamic seclusion” in discussions of sexuality may obscure more than it clarifies (Moghissi 2005:53).

Interactions with Civil Law

It should also be noted that marriages are not, for the most part, legally recognized by the state because most people do not actually officially register their marriages. This has a negative consequence for most women who will find it difficult to utilize the only means they have to a divorce, the state legal system, if they do not have a marriage

license. Most women do not even know of the possibility of a state issued divorce, and if they do, the logistics and fees involved are prohibitive.

Miriamu, a 27 years old woman with a five-year-old daughter, lives with her mother and older sister, both of whom are divorced. Miriamu initially described herself as married in our first interview. After further discussions she admitted she had not seen, or heard, from her husband in nearly five years. I asked her how she managed to take care of herself and her daughter:

My mother and sister and I all do different jobs to earn money and we live together and share what we have. It is fine. Sometimes I wish I could have a divorce from my husband so that I could move on with my life. I do not really want to marry anyone else. But it does make my life more difficult because I have this missing husband. I don't even have the possibility of marrying again.

I asked Miriamu why she did not pursue a divorce:

Oh, I have, I have asked his father and his uncles and his brothers to contact him, to help me to have a divorce. Everyone agrees that I have a right to a divorce because he has abandoned me. But, no one has heard from him. I mean, he could even be dead. We don't actually know. We even discussed it with the *Mwenyekiti* (mayor) and he said I could have the judge issue me a divorce, but I don't know about this. He says I have enough evidence and people to speak for me. But this will cost me 20,000 Tsh (\$20 US). This is not possible. I'll have to continue living as I am.

Miriamu, unlike many women, has pursued her situation outside the normal range because she has been abandoned. Unlike women in Zanzibar, where the court system is extensive and women take advantage of it to formalize their repudiated divorces (Stiles 2002; Stiles 2005), women in Peponi do not have access to such a system, although they are well aware of the Islamic courts in Zanzibar. They technically do have access to the Tanzanian state judge/magistrate who is scheduled to come once a month; however, even when women are aware of the options provided by the traveling judge, like Miriamu, the

logistics and fees prove to be unaffordable or deemed not worth it. Miriamu does not want to remarry, now or ever, but she does imagine that if she ever wants to remarry her new husband would pay the fees. At first glance Miriamu's case might appear to be an example of a woman with unequal rights, no agency, and the inability to navigate the system available to her. I would argue, however, that Miriamu, in declining the civil option, is exerting her agency. She would say she is not disempowered by her situation and she has made her choice freely. Further, Miriamu acknowledges that if she truly needed the divorce she could bring pressure upon her father, brothers, father in-law, or brothers in-law to help pay for a civil divorce.

While Swahili women are unfamiliar with these formalized systems they are intimately familiar with the *talaka* system. Some women expressed outright frustration at the system, which gives them no direct power or control in their marriages. Others acknowledged this system is inherently unfair, but in their own way delighted at having to creatively seek a divorce.

MAMA MBWANA'S FRUSTRATIONS WITH DIVORCE

The down side of living with a family is I did not have much privacy – not so important for myself, but my first week in my own house I learned that certain visitors would not come and certain conversations would never occur while living with a family. Sofiya, the young woman living with me, went to the *duka* to buy some lunch supplies when Mwantum, the young woman from next door, came asking for Sofiya. I told her Sofiya was out. I then noticed that an older woman was standing behind her. I explained Sofiya would be back soon and that they/she could wait inside with me if they/she

wanted. Mwantum said she had to get back to help her mother. The other woman seemed hesitant. I said “*Karibu*” (welcome), three times, and then asked “*Una aibu? Una ngopa? Kwa nini?*” (Are you shy? Afraid? Why?). She came in, but dragged Mwantum with her. The woman asked Mwantum many questions about me as if I was not there – about the house, furniture, my life. Then she asked Mwantum if I had children and I employed a typical Swahili strategy, and jokingly scolded her: “You know I can speak Swahili! So ask ME your questions, not my neighbor, if you want to know the answers!” She laughed and her attitude completely changed. Mwantum returned to her mother and Mama Mbwana and I carried on without her.

Mama Mbwana, a woman in her mid-thirties, seemed like the other curious women who had been stopping in all week long. She looked familiar but I could not place her. Since moving into the house, visitors (those who I knew and others were unfamiliar to me) were stopping by all week long. These women were visibly curious about the new house and about me living alone (without a family, although I did have a local young woman living with me for respectability and safety’s sake at the urging of several people – senior men and women – in the community). I assumed she was there to check out the new house and to see what I’d done with the place. In fact, warming up she made a full perusal of the house and my things. She liked the house – she commented on the layout, the spaciousness, the orientation; and she especially liked my things – a double hot plate, a mini fridge with freezer, a big tall bed. In particular, she liked a pair of green leather flip-flops I brought from the U.S.. I thanked her for her compliments and declined her offer to take my flip-flops²⁷.

²⁷ I’d already learned in my time living with the family that people cannot help but ask me for my things. This is in part, a joking way of being familiar and becoming friendly and, in part, hopefully serious. Even

Eventually Mama Mbwana sat on the couch and looked around; she made comments as if I was not actually there: “I wonder what she will do with all of these things when she leaves? Why did she buy these curtains, they are not dark enough . . .” and so on. I’d been hearing this kind of commentary all week long, so I was not particularly surprised by her interest and comments. In due course, however, Mama Mbwana got to the point of her visit, which as it turns out had nothing to do with Sofiya, my house, or my green flip flops. She said: “Do people in your country get divorced?” At first I was too surprised to answer: I was thinking, “How does she know my research question?” I had not revealed much about my specific research question as I did not want my conversations to be disproportionately affected by what people thought I wanted to talk about early in the process. Instead of revealing my surprise I replied by saying, “Yes, about half.” Then I asked her the same question “Is divorce common here?” she replied, “Yes, it is too common.” Shaking her head in disappointment and annoyance, she said:

There are so many divorcing, people will build a nice house together and then just get divorced. It is too easy to divorce. People [men] are not serious about marriage. I’m angry about it. My husband has given me two *talakas*. And for no reason – maybe I went visiting without his permission, or he did not like me talking to a particular person. But, he does not need to be so strict. I am a trustworthy person. Now, after this second *talaka* he has asked me to come home and I don’t have any choice but to go back to him, but nothing will change. I do want to be married to him, but I want him to improve as a husband. What do women in your country do?

This stimulated a rather lengthy discussion on the differences and similarities between marriage and divorce in our two cultures. Mama Mbwana came to talk to me at the first

If they know I need something, like my shoes, they ask anyhow, hoping I might single them out with a gift, or I might remember them if and when I decide I don’t want them anymore. No one was ever particularly disappointed when I declined to gift my possessions. My shoes were particularly coveted).

opportunity she had to talk to me alone. She happened to be the business partner of Bakari, my landlord and the head of the household I lived in for 3 months. She heard a lot about me from her husband and from conversations she heard him having with others (namely Bakari). The first thing I wrote down following this conversation was what a coincidence it was that the first visitor to my house wanted to talk about divorce and that unbeknownst to her my objective was to learn about marriage and divorce. I also noted that Mama Mbwana specifically wanted to learn about U.S. customs regarding marriage and divorce as a potential method for arguing her own point or case with her husband, family, and friends. She was looking for a practical source of information to defend her own situation. This was the first of many visits Mama Mbwana made to me.

During another visit a few weeks later, Mama Mbwana discussed her mother and father and how “selfish” her father was. He married four times and divorced three times: “My mother was his first wife. She married one more time and was also divorced by that husband. Now she is alone. My father is dead and left a widow.” Then she asked me, “Are your parents married?” After weeks of discussing marriage with her, and others, this was the first time someone asked me specifically about my own family history. I answered truthfully, “No, they divorced when I was three.” She replied, “Ah ha! Your father gave your mother a *talaka* then? What happened?” I told her that my father did not give a *talaka*. Rather, my mother went to a judge and divorced him on grounds of infidelity. Mama Mbwana’s response was to laugh: “Oh, if we divorced a man for infidelity everyone would be divorced!”

Another day Jumaa²⁸ and I were talking on my porch. We were discussing the map of the village and where I should begin. We had just decided I should begin at the

²⁸ The young man I met my first days in Peponi, and also referred to in Chapter 3 regarding pregnancy outside of marriage.

north part of the village by the *pwani* (beach). Mama Mbwana approached the house, “*Hodi!*” she shouted. “*Karibu,*” Jumaa and I replied in unison. We made our greetings and after noticing Jumaa’s cell phone she said, “Let me use your phone!” Jumaa replied, “Hey! Your husband has a phone, use his!” “Oh, he doesn't share anything, much less let me touch it, you know he's a *mSwahili* man, not an *Mzungu* (white guy). If I asked to use his phone I’d get that third *talaka*.” This conversation revealed that Mama Mbwana thinks *mzungu* men share more with their wives – for Mama Mbwana, this was a good and romantic quality in a husband.

Most women and men did not perceive divorce as a community problem and did not go out of their way to present it to me as a problem. Mama Mbwana, with one *talaka* left, was tired of being strung along by her husband. She did not want to be divorced, but not because she loved her husband. She discussed her situation as one of need:

My marriage is not the best, but if I did not have my husband I know he would not help me, not even a little. He has children with other women, not ex-wives, and he does nothing to help them. I’m certain he would not help us. It would be hard work to provide for my children and myself. I could do it, but it would be much more work than what I do now. But, he does not make it easy on me. He is quite strict and demanding. It would be easier if he were a typical relaxed Swahili man, but he’s not, he’s a big business man, and he’s strict.

Her husband, a successful entrepreneur, is able to provide for her and their children nicely. She did not, however, like the fact that he dangles the third *talaka* over her head. Mama Mbwana acknowledges that she could just request her *talaka* and be done with it, and she could survive post-divorce; but she knows she has a pretty good life, new house, and many nice amenities that most women in the village will never have. She is not willing to give up that life too easily.

AGENCY IN MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Stiles, in her article *When is a Divorce a Divorce? Determining Intention in Zanzibar's Islamic Courts*, notes that, "In Zanzibar, as elsewhere, neither divorce by repudiation nor divorce through wifely compensation is always a straightforward process women can be active agents in their own marital status in a seemingly male-privileged legal tradition " (2003:286-7). In Zanzibari courts, women are agents in their own marital fate and both the court *khadis* (judges) and the community see them as such (Stiles 2003). The local *kadhi* even acknowledge a woman's ability to engender her own divorce in multiple ways – even non-legal ways including manipulating her husband. Anthropologists have long pointed to women's non-legal ways of obtaining a divorce. Women have long conducted campaigns of irritating behavior with the intention of convincing husbands to issue a divorce. This is particularly true in situations where women may not have any legal recourse (Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979; Stiles 2002; Fair 2001). Mzee Simu's wife, Mrs. Bakari, referred to here as Mama Abdallah²⁹, is a particularly good example of a woman who essentially waged a war or campaign of irritating behavior. Other women, such as Mama Hamadi³⁰ also, cleverly, used what she knew was her husband's weak spot to obtain her *talaka*. Other women, such as Waziri, used her extended family and the extended family of her husband to negotiate a divorce.

²⁹ Mama Abdallah is discussed in Chapter 4 and above in the section on Written *Talaka*.

³⁰ Discussed above in the section on Verbal *Talaka*.

MARITAL INSTABILITY

Landberg (1977) agrees with other analyses that present marriage as unstable because of high rates of divorce; however, she disagrees with Prins (1967), and others, who present the community as unstable because of this. She argues that divorce:

while contributing to individual mobility, does not necessarily create an unstable social system. Instead, in Swahili society there are certain institutionalized ways for legitimating the role of unmarried women and for providing for the socialization of children outside of the nuclear family. Further, it is the divorced woman who provides the stranger, the *mgeni*, with an entrée into the local community (Landberg 1977:137-8).

Obtaining data on divorce can be tricky. Marriage and relationships are fluid and it is not always obvious in what stage a relationship is. Also, because a person might have many marriages and relationships over the course of their lives it is often difficult to keep track.

Landberg (1977) also notes that it is difficult to get really accurate data regarding divorce (Landberg 1977:148). In my work, I encountered inconsistencies in marital history information in my census. Sometimes the inconsistencies reflected unintended mistakes and sometimes they were deliberate. For example, a *fundii wa seramala* (expert of carpentry), who worked on a few projects for me, told me he had been married twice, divorced once. I knew two of his ex-wives as well as his current wife so I knew this could not be true. In the census he told the research assistant he had been married three times, divorced twice. Further complicating the matter, his son, who participated in an in-depth interview, relayed that his father had been married four times, divorced three times. I asked him about it and he shrugged, “Oh, it’s hard to keep track.” It is unclear what reason, if any, the *fundii* had for telling me he had fewer marriages than he had actually had. I’m not even certain it was deliberate. I also encountered a woman in her late 60s who told me she had no children. I was surprised and persisted, I said: “Not a

single child? You were never pregnant, not once?” She finally relented, “OK, yes, I had many children, 8. But I am old and you will want to know dates and details and it is all complicated.” We laughed and I did not pursue her fertility history.

REASONS FOR DIVORCE

Personal relationships, as one would expect, are also important elements in the stability of marriages. Peponi people, when questioned about their marital histories, were often reluctant to say exactly why a particular divorce had occurred. When they did give a reason the most common response was simply “*tuligombana*” (we fought). This was given as the most common reason by Landberg (1977), as well as others (Roberts and Tanner 1959). Pressures from relatives can also affect the stability of a particular union. Landberg described the following, “If divorce on the part of a woman would require return of part or all of the marriage payments, a woman’s relatives might attempt to talk her into staying with her husband” (1977:151). The top three reasons men gave for divorce were: “I wanted another wife”, “She was a lazy wife”, and “She was a bad wife” (Table 24). Women offered fewer explanations for divorce with: “He was not kind/gentle” as the most common reason (Table 25).

Table 24: Men's Reasons for Divorce, N=83

Reason for Divorce	Number of Men
Answer Missing	1
She did not want more/enough children	1
Other	2
I did not love her	4
She was unable to have children	4
She did not do the house work	6
I wanted another wife	19
She was lazy	22
She was a bad wife	24

Table 25: Women's Reasons for Divorce, N=34

Reasons for Divorce	Number of Women
Answer Missing	1
He wanted too many children	1
He wanted another wife	5
He did not love me	7
Husband was not kind/gentle	20

Infidelity and marital stability

Akili, 28-year-old, divorced man, remarried, with girlfriend(s)

Faiza, 28-year-old mother of four children, hotel owner

I met Akili soon after moving into my new house. He was frequently hanging out near by – flirting with my neighbor's 21-year-old daughter, Mwantum (see Chapter 3 for more about this relationship). In the evenings he would often hang out on my porch with Mwantum and Sofiya talking, joking, and laughing late into the night. It was not until I interviewed his ex-wife, Faiza, that I learned he was divorced. Up until that point I thought he was a young unmarried man playing the field. Faiza was also the one to tell me he was remarried, which is how I learned the relationship he was having with Mwantum was an extra-marital affair.

Faiza:

That man, he is no good. He had lovers all throughout our marriage. Even I was his lover before we were married. And, we married because we had a child together. We didn't actually get married for some time, though. Our son was three years old when we had our wedding. Our families gave us no choice but to marry. But, Akili took a long time to save up for the *mahari*, bride wealth. It was ok. I liked him. Akili is a very charming man. He is very funny. He likes to have fun. Even during

the time we were waiting to be married he had other lovers. He cannot be contained. Look at him now. We have only been divorced a few months. He is already remarried and he has at least two girlfriends! We were together for a long time and I did not mind the girlfriends. No, I mean, I did not want him to have girlfriends, but it was preferable to another wife. *Risk imeisha*, luck it was taken, and *kamua tu, mwenyewe* he forced it himself. He wanted a second wife, and I was not part of it.

Akili:

I like women, a lot. You know, that is a healthy thing. I like women, and it's my right. Why wouldn't I want to be with many women? I wanted to stay with Faiza, but she was not putting up with a second wife. *Bahati mbaya*, it was bad luck. I met Fatuma, my current wife, and I spoke with her father. It was all set, but Faiza was not having it. She was so mad. She was mad a lot, but never this mad. I thought to myself, I want two wives, why is she resisting? She does not mind the girlfriends. But this was different. So, I decided it was too much work having her be mad all the time. I gave her the *talaka* she demanded. So, now I have just one wife again, Fatuma. But, I have lovers. There are always others.

Akili and Faiza are not unusual in their relationship. Many women openly admitted they prefer a husband who dabbles with girlfriends to a husband who takes a second wife.

This did not mean they were not jealous or upset by the infidelity of a husband, but pursuing a second wife is much more egregious to women than a husband with casual lovers.

Dotto, 37-year-old man, once divorced, currently married:

When I was young I thought I would get married just once. I wanted to be with just one woman. I don't like the idea of changing wives and I did not like my experience with divorcing. But, it was necessary. There were big problems with my first marriage. My wife was unfaithful and disrespectful. As a man, I could not tolerate this. I cannot imagine a need, ever, to divorce this wife [his current wife]. She has respect and she listens. Divorce is a big problem here in our village. Men and women are prostituting themselves here, especially men.

Dotto was quite angry with his first wife. In our first discussion he focused solely on his ex-wife's infidelity.³¹ Later, he confessed that he too was unfaithful in their marriage.

³¹ See Chapter 4 for further analysis of Dotto and infidelity.

Fatuma, 32 year-old mother of three, divorced, not remarried:

Dotto blames me, but he was here and there and with everyone, outside our marriage. When he gave me the divorce he said it was because he was tired of my lack of faithfulness, because he could not trust me. I was with lovers because I wanted to make him jealous, I wanted him to pay more attention to me. Our marriage was arranged by our families, it was not a love marriage, but I wanted some love. He only had love for other women.

Dotto and Fatuma were both angry and frustrated by their marriage and the infidelity on each side.

AGENCY IN THE FACE OF AN UNWANTED MARRIAGE AND ABANDONMENT

I became friends with Waziri over the course of my year in Peponi. At first I knew her only as the woman who came to help Mama Jumbe with her laundry. Even though Mama Jumbe was not very nice to her, Waziri was always quite cheerful and took Mama Jumbe's temper in stride. Mostly Mama Jumbe was rude to her because Baba Jumbe, her husband, was kind to Waziri. It was, therefore, surprising to learn that Waziri was, in fact, his paternal cousin and related to the family. Because of her twice-divorced status she would never be considered a suitable wife for him. She frequently asked Baba Jumbe for financial help and he would often assign Waziri to help Mama Jumbe with household duties as a way to give her work and help her out. He explained he did not want to simply hand out money to her on an ongoing basis because he knew she would continue to need it. He did not want to encourage her, or others, to see him as a source of unlimited funds. Instead, he looked for opportunities to give her work. Because so many relatives and friends come to him for assistance he prefers to think of ways they can help

him and his family rather than just giving handouts. Waziri relies on help from extended family members, like Bakari, because her father is dead and her mother lives in Kenya.

Waziri's first marriage was at the age of 18 to a husband of her *Baba Mkubwa's* (father's older brother) choosing. He was not a relative, or cousin, but a business contact to him in Pangani who often came to Peponi to work with local fisherman and fish himself. Waziri said:

I did not want to marry this man. I did not find him appealing. But really, I wasn't consulted on this decision. I guess I could have resisted, but I was a good daughter and wanted to do the right thing. He paid the *mahari* and we had a very big wedding celebration. I was proud to be a bride with a father who put so much *hela* (money) into the celebration for everyone to enjoy. We lived together for four and a half years. We had a daughter two years into our marriage. But, we did not get along. We never did. We never lived together happily. We did not understand each other. We both wanted to divorce. He wrote the talaka and gave it to my father. I wanted a divorce, but not at that moment, because I was pregnant again. It would've been better for me to wait until the baby was born and a little older.

After the divorce her father helped her; once her second child, a son, was born she moved to Dar es Salaam to help her older sister with her *hoteli* (small restaurant) business.

When her son was four she sent him to Zanzibar where her daughter was also living, "My son and daughter live in Zanzibar with *Bibi ya Baba* (their father's mother) and I have not seen them in years." Men and women both reported their children reside with someone other than the children's mother after the age of 5 (Table 26 and Table 27).

Table 26: Do your children live with your ex-wife? Men.

Do your children live with your ex-wife?	Number
No answer	16
Yes	9
No	58

Table 27: Do your children live with you? Women.

Do your children live with you?	Number
No answer	1
Yes	1
No	32

Waziri stayed in Dar for eight years. It was hard work but she liked living in the city; “I like Dar better because there are more chances for a woman to work. Here, everyone needs to work and everyone wants some money.” She only came to Peponi a few times during that period. After eight years in Dar she met her second husband, a man from Mombasa, who worked in Tanga. They met when he was on *biashara* (business) in Dar. Together they moved to Tanga where they *funga ndoa* (closed their marriage) with a ceremony and small celebration. “I was pregnant at the time so he sent me to Mombasa to stay with his mother. I stayed there until I had Salimu [the son who is with her now] and then when he [the husband] went to Dar instead of coming here I decided to go to Peponi to be with my family. I didn’t like his family.”

Waziri was full of regret about this marriage, too. Once her husband sent her to Mombasa she never heard from him and once she returned to Peponi he never helped with the baby. Both men and women indicate that men, for the most part, do not help financially, or otherwise, with the care of children while they live with their mother (Table 28 and Table 29). After 10 months of this she went to her *Baba Mkubwa*

Table 28: Financial help for children, Men.

Did/do you help your ex-wife with the children?	Number
No	66
Every week	4
Every month	13

Table 29: Financial help for children, Women.

Did your ex-husband help with the children?	Number
Yes	4
No	29
I do not know.	1

(father’s older brother) and told him she needed help to find her husband in Dar to seek a divorce. Her *Baba Mkubwa* helped her to do this.

He was willing to help me because he saw that Salimu and I had no help. He saw that my husband was neglecting us. So, I was able to go to Dar. I brought Salimu with me because he was still nursing. I found him. It was not good. He was living a bad life. He did have a job. But, he had several girlfriends. And, none of these women knew he was a married man. I was so angry and I asked for a *talaka*. He just laughed and would not give it. I went back to Mombasa to tell his family and to seek a divorce if he did not want me.

Eventually, after pressure from his family, he did respond to her request for a divorce by sending a relative from Dar to Mombasa to give her a verbal *talaka*. Waziri returned to Peponi where she lived with her *Bibi* (grandmother) for one year at which time her grandmother was very sick and was sent to Dodoma to the hospital. She then lived with her *Shangazi* (father's sister) for some time but, "We had problems. She was quite bossy and I've been bossed around enough." Now she rents a small room for 1500Tsh (\$1.50 US) per month. "I carry water, wash clothes, and do anything that can be done to earn money." Her son, Salimu, is still with her and will remain with her until he is seven years old, at which time he will return to his father's family. Most likely his father will delegate the responsibility of him to someone else:

I don't want to marry again, not now, not ever. Husbands are just a problem. I have a boyfriend and he helps me with some things. He has a wife, so he does not bother me too much. His wife knows about it and doesn't like it. I hope she doesn't want a divorce because I don't want him for a husband. He's good just because he gives me some money and that's fine with me.

Waziri effectively used the means available to her to achieve divorce in both of her marriages. She also prefers to remain single.

INFERTILITY

The relationship between infertility and divorce in Africa has been well documented (Balk 2000; Callaway 1987; Henin and Mwobobia 1982; Hollos 2003; Pitten

1979; Saunders 1978; Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000). Infertility is undoubtedly devastating for a couple. It is also one of the reasons most frequently cited by researchers for divorce among couples in Africa. The need for children and the inability to produce them is often considered to be the underpinning factor in the dissolution of marriage. Today, and in the late 60s, villagers claimed that failure to conceive would lead to divorce, not necessarily only because the husband and wife themselves desired it, but because parents and extended family would pressure the couple about children. Infertility is generally blamed on women, although there were several situations during my research where people “blamed” the infertility on the husband. In these instances after a divorce the woman easily conceived or the husband was at least 30 years older than the young wife and his ability to conceive was cause for ridicule/joking/teasing.

Islamic personal status law does permit men and women to divorce their spouse after a period of time with no children. Women and men in Peponi both listed myriad examples for when a divorce is permitted; however, they unanimously agreed (according to my survey of 350 ever married men and women) that the only time divorce is unacceptable is due to infertility (for either the husband or wife). This is one point where people’s ideas (not their practice) diverge from Islamic personal status law. Infertile women in the Arab world often live in fear that their marriages will “collapse.” Islamic personal status laws lead to fragility of the marital bond through procedures to terminate marriage (repudiation and divorce), the legality of polygyny, and the absence of community property between husband and wife (Charrad 2001). A wife’s barrenness, especially the failure to produce male heirs, is considered a major ground for divorce among most Muslim societies (Moghissi 2005). Although Islam also allows women to

divorce if male infertility can be proven (Hattem 1986), a women's initiation of divorce continues to be more difficult to secure and women rarely choose this option unless their marriages are truly unbearable (Inhorn 1994). Men and women in Peponi agreed is that it is not fair to punish a man or woman for something, which is beyond their control, infertility specifically. Accordingly, it is not justifiable to divorce someone on the basis of their inability to produce children, although, there is plenty of evidence that in practice people do divorce each other for reasons of infertility.

Roberts and Tanner, in the late 1950s, suggested that the frequency of divorce on the coast is partially related to a high rate of infertility in this area (Tanner 1964; Roberts and Tanner 1959). They also point out, however, that the causes of marital instability are complex. While infertility is feared and there are certainly visible examples of women who are unable to have children, the actual number of women and men without children today is not that large (Table 30 and Table 31). Ulla Larsen's (1997) demographic analysis of infertility in Tanzania demonstrates a declining trend of infertility, especially along the coast where between 1973 and 1991 the percentage of women having an open birth interval for 5+ years decreased by about 50%. This decline in infertility can also be demonstrated by comparing Landberg's research to my own. Landberg observed that, "Whether or not infertility is a frequent cause of divorce, there did seem to be a large number of men and women in the village who either have never had a child or had had only one which had died in childhood" (1975:146). My observations are the opposite – there is not such a great number of men and women with no children. Table 30 and Table 31 illustrate women and men's response to a question about troubles getting

pregnant, 17% of women and 5% of men report having difficult getting pregnant when they wanted to.

Table 30: Women's self-reported experience with infertility.

Did you and or your husband have troubles getting pregnant when you wanted?	#	%
No Answer	4	3
Yes	27	17
No	75	47
I do not know	52	33
Total	158	100

Table 31: Men's self-reported experience with infertility.

Did you and or your wife have troubles getting pregnant when you wanted?	#	%
No Answer	3	3
Yes	6	5
No	118	91
I do not know	2	1
Total	129	100

Table 32: Men's reported use of infertility treatment.

After seeking treatment were you able to have children?	Number
N/A	124
Yes	2
No	1
Not Yet	2

Table 33: Women's reported use of infertility treatment.

After seeking treatment were you able to have children?	Number
N/A or no answer	149
Yes	4
No	4
Not yet	1

Few people were able to successfully conceive after seeking a combination of treatment (medical doctor, village “witch doctor”) (Table 32 and Table 33).

A similarity between the two periods of research, however, is that people who are infertile do seem to contract a high number of marriages throughout their marital careers – reflecting great efforts to have children. Landberg (1977) noted a particular case where a man kept marrying different women in the hopes that eventually he would find one who would give him a child (the implication being that the fault lay with the women, not with him). This sentiment still exists for both women and men. Most people have no desire to stay in a union without children. Some women leave Peponi, such as Binundu³²,

³² More on Binundu in Chapter 7.

although she did not leave Peponi permanently and is back and forth between Tanga, her home, and Peponi.

While sitting in the late afternoon shade preparing the evening meal, Mama Jumbe discussed her contradictory feelings regarding her sub-fertile sister-in-law:

I feel sorry for her – only one child – and so many miscarriages! Did you know she miscarried 4 times!? But she has Pili now and she has her *hoteli* [a small local restaurant]. She has a good business. She gets to do whatever she wants. If she wants to go to Tanga, Pangani, Dar, Zanzibar – she goes. She has to ask no one for permission. She has no husband to threaten her. I envy that freedom.

Mama Jumbe both pities and is jealous of her sister-in-law. She envies Mama Pili because she has freedom to travel, make her own decisions, and spend her money how she pleases. She also has the ability and power to make money and control her own destiny³³. Mama Jumbe also considers Mama Pili to be worthy of her pity, because by the age of 35, Mama Pili suffered both in marriage and reproduction – 4 marriages, 4 divorces and 8 miscarriages. Mama Pili's efforts to conceive were difficult – and she suffered greatly with each attempt. Mama Jumbe's own fertility is not in question as she easily conceived her first child (a son who is now 2) but her husband restricts her own activities³⁴. He has threatened to divorce her if she does not obey him. On the other hand she has carefully outlined her plans for when (not if) her husband takes a second wife. She plans to divorce him and sell juice at Mama Pili's *hoteli*.

Mama Pili, is a good contemporary example of a woman marrying multiple times in the effort to conceive. Eventually she quit marrying, opened her own business, which is very successful, and in the end had her one and only child with a boyfriend, Salimu, (who had also been married several times, but was single during their relationship, which

³³ See Chapter 7 on Work for more regarding this.

³⁴ This couple's relationship is outlined in chapter 4 and 6.

is now over). Salimu offered to marry Mama Pili but she was content with, and accustomed to, her own life. They continue to have an amicable relationship, although she does not need his financial assistance, and while he has other children, he contributes to their daughter's upbringing. This is unusual in general and is especially so, since they were never married. Most men, all women will tell you, who are not currently married to the mother will contribute very little, or not at all, to their children's upbringing.

On the other hand, there are examples of infertile/sub-fertile women whose marriages are not negatively affected by the lack of children – like Fatuma and Mzee Issa³⁵. In fact, I think it is accurate to say that having many children does not assure a stable union. Several women in the village who had never had any children remained married to their original husbands, although these husbands had other wives who did produce offspring. More importantly it should be noted that many women, whether they have children or not, do end up getting divorced from their husbands. In short, men and women want divorce for a variety of reasons, not only because of infertility, and while infertility may contribute to divorce, it is by no means the only factor involved.

CONCLUSION

Not unlike divorce in the U.S., and other Western settings, divorce in Peponi is the result of many reasons, and one explanation does not suffice. Personal relationships, as one would expect, are important elements in the stability of marriages. Under Islamic law, marriage is viewed as a contract, easily broken if one or both members are dissatisfied. The right to dissolve that contract is not, however, shared equally. While women talk about divorce as something that impacts them unequally, because they

³⁵ See Chapter 5 on Polygyny for more description and analysis of this relationship.

maintain majority of responsibility for the children, they demonstrate their agency and power in creative, nefarious, and even unrestricted ways.

Men presented varying views of divorce. Some were completely against it and had no interest in divorce. Others anticipated divorce in their future, not for a specific reason, but because they could not imagine being married to the same woman for their entire life. Even those who did not want or anticipate divorce could imagine circumstances that would push them to divorce, such as:

Omari, a 24-year-old man, married, against divorce:

I don't want a second wife, or third, because life is difficult. Plus my wife would not tolerate it for one second, she would *katakata*, cut me into fine pieces, and she would demand her *talaka*. In my life I think I will be married just this one time, only, but maybe I will have *bahati mbaya*, bad luck, or, *risk imekwisha*, luck would run out, and my wife and I would divorce if this happens. Then I would have to marry again. People here, they do divorce, because people are not trustworthy. Both men and women are not trustworthy. They crave to be with *watu tofauti tofauti*, many different people. My father married 4 times and divorced 3 times, and right now he has one wife. My mother was never married.

Women are able to negotiate their marital trajectories in spite of institutional disadvantages. In fact, many women do not even identify the system of repudiation as a disadvantage, finding the civil process to be more prohibitive. During my year in Peponi I also encountered women who spent months advocating for a divorce – utilizing their own networks and skills to achieve this. Finally, in looking over individual marital histories, one finds a wide variety of marital careers, including those people who have only been married once in their lives as well as those who have had as many as five, six, or even more marriages.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WOMEN, WORK, AND (RE)MARRIAGE

This chapter examines the role of women's informal entrepreneurial work in fashioning opportunities after a divorce, and in creating a "back-up plan" for themselves when considering or anticipating a divorce. Polygyny and divorce have been important factors that have stimulated the independent income-earning spirit in women. The possibility of earning money provides the chance for women to remain single after a divorce for as long as they need, or, want. Women are choosing this new path with greater frequency, knowing they can manage to support themselves through a combination of entrepreneurial work and/or living with other female kin.

In the 1960s and 1970s Anthropologists working among the Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania reported that women had few options after a divorce – they could immediately remarry, return to a father's household (if he would have her), or do sex work (Gomm 1972; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979; Mirza and Strobel 1989). In the past women remarried rapidly (Caplan 1968; Gomm 1972; Landberg 1977; Middleton 1992; Strobel 1979; Mirza and Strobel 1989). In the late 1960s Landberg described Swahili women's options after a divorce: "With few exceptions, a woman has scant resources to support herself independently. A number of women cite this as a reason for remarriage" (Landberg 1977:217). Today, however, women consider their options, such

as informal entrepreneurial work, and more often than not, women choose to retain the status of a divorced woman, rather than remarry.

WORK, NOW AND THEN

Informal work is by no means new to women of Peponi. In the 1960s Landberg (1977) reported that a few women in the village prepared and sold coffee, fried fish, and *mandazi* (breakfast donuts). She also noted that women would weave and sell floor mats, haul water, collect firewood, or do laundry for villagers who had the means to pay for the help. A number of studies (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990; Rutashobya 1990, 1991) suggest that women's participation in business in Africa is essentially rooted in the informal sector. In the Tanzanian context, therefore, as with most sub-Saharan African countries, it is difficult to assess female entrepreneurship without examining the development of the informal sector in general. This is partly because small businesses, especially the traditional type, form an important part of the general informal sector activities in these countries. Moreover, informal sector activities have enabled some operators to accumulate capital to start relatively large and legally recognized businesses. The growth of the informal sector in Tanzania has often been linked to the economic crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s. Declining real wages, inflation, and the impact of stabilization and structural adjustment policies all reflect the difficult position of the Tanzanian economy as a whole.

Today, women have expanded their horizons and conduct to an even wider range of entrepreneurial activities. They purchase large bolts of *kanga* or *kitenge* or other fabric in Tanga, Dar es Salam, or Zanzibar for wholesale and sell for a small profit to other

women in the village. This is especially prevalent during the weeks before a wedding. Women involved in the wedding, the bride or groom's extended family, frequently wear dresses made from the same fabric (similar to the bridal party in the U.S.). Enterprising women will purchase a large quantity of the same color/pattern of fabric and market it specifically to women she knows are preparing for a large wedding. Other women buy cosmetics, shoes, undergarments, lotions, perfume, kitchenware, baby clothing, etc., to sell in the village. Customers are usually other women, especially married women, who may find it difficult or impossible to leave the village to buy these things in the towns and cities. Women typically sell their wares for a very small profit. Asha, a young divorced woman with no children, returned from a trip to Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam and came to see me hoping I might purchase some of her newly acquired cosmetics. Cleverly, Asha attempted to sell her goods in parts to make them more affordable and marketable.. For example, if a face cream was too expensive, she was willing to sell half of it (squirting some into another container) for half the price, break a lipstick in half, etc.

Women reported a wide variety of work related activities (Table 35). The majority of women, 71%, reported they do not work outside the home. Ten percent report preparing and selling foodstuffs, 6% report selling items, such as cloth, tomatoes, mats, rooftops, coal, and 5% are farmers. Ninety percent (167) men report that their wives do not work (Table 34). In some ways it is difficult to capture women's work because often they said: "I do not do work," or, "I do not have any work." They do not see the small jobs they do to earn money in a pinch as "work." Instead, these small enterprises are just a means to earn quick money when necessary. "Work" is a job, employment, or something consistent and permanent, like running a *duka* or a *hoteli*.

Over the course of a year I saw that women moved into and out of money earning activities depending on their situation; and because of the fluidity with which this happens they often did not consider these activities work.

Table 34 Men's reporting of wife's work status, N=186.

Does your wife work?	Number of Men
No Answer	5
No	167
<i>Hoteli</i>	2
Sell fish	3
Sell other goods	4
Farmer	4
Vegetable shop	1

Table 35 Types of work as reported by women, N=158.

Type of Work	Number of Women
Small business	4
Braid hair	1
Shop owner	1
Work in a shop	1
Tailor	1
Teacher	1
Prepare/sell (ice cream, ice. Donuts, milk, coffee, oatmeal)	4
Fry fish, sell fish	5
<i>Hoteli</i> owner	7
Sell single items (tomatoes, cloth, coal)	5
Weaves/sells roof tops/mats	5
Farmer	9
Do Not Work	114

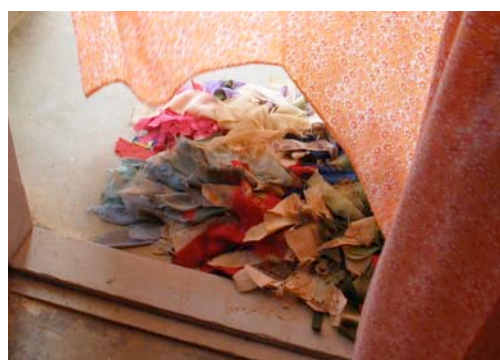


Figure 32: (Left) Bags of coal, ready to sell (Right) Doormat fashioned from scraps collected from tailors in the village.

Other women sell items such as limes, eggs, beads, skin lightening cream, or tomatoes to name a few. I met one industrious woman who collected scrap materials from local tailors/seamstresses and fashioned doormats (Figure 32). I bought one for my front

door for 500 Tsh (50 cents U.S.). Another enterprising woman sent her daughters to my house with a pile of 20 small mangoes from their farm: “Our mama says 200 shillings (20 cents U.S.).” I replied, “Each? That’s robbery!” “No, no, no 200 shillings for all of them!” they corrected. “Ok, I’ll take them!” I sheepishly agreed. The girls stuck around to color and became frequent visitors, usually with something to sell from their mother (Figure 33). For these enterprising women the price they charge is entirely her profit, as they did not have to pay for any materials.



Figure 33: Two girls with mangoes.



Figure 34: (Left) A woman weaves strips for a mat. (Right) After dying and weaving strips, a woman hand sews the strips together.

Yet others continue the informal work that women did during Landberg's time, such as collecting firewood, hauling water, weaving, doing laundry, etc. (Figure 34). Women develop niches and are most successful if they focus on doing one thing particularly well. For example, Mama Mwantuum, a divorced woman, sold tomatoes and was known throughout the community for always having ripe and good tomatoes. Other people sold tomatoes, in addition to many other items, but the quality did not match Mama Mwantuum's. These women were able to have lesser quality tomatoes because they sold many other items. If a woman finds a niche, and is reliable within that niche, i.e. she always has tomatoes that are ripe and not rotten, she'll have a regular customer base. The fact that she may not make a large profit on her tomatoes is overshadowed by the fact that she can regularly turn over her product and she does not actually have to do much work to maintain the business. Mama Mwantuum still has time to pursue other



Figure 35: A tomato vendor piles tomatoes high.

endeavors and duties, but will also have a small income from her tomatoes. She traveled to Tanga nearly once a week, or sometimes asked someone else who was already going to Tanga to help her by picking up her tomatoes. She purchased her tomatoes in bulk from a farmer who sells his produce at the main market in Tanga. Mama Mwantuum

organized a deal with the farmer for a reduced rate on his tomatoes – promising in return to buy a minimum amount each week. Mama Mwantuum would sell her tomatoes by the kilo, half or quarter kilo, or even group tomatoes and charge per pile (a pile of four tomatoes cost 150 Tsh – 15 cents U.S.). She also charged different prices depending on the quality of the tomato. The more you buy, the cheaper the tomatoes. How little women charged for things frequently surprised me. It was clear that there is a delicate balance between under- and over-charging; women who are successful at their business are able to find the middle ground.



Figure 36: Men fishing with nets at low tide right off the beach at Peponi village.

Men, on the other hand, engage in more consistent full time money earning activities. Ninety one percent of men report that they are currently engaged in work (Table 36): 51% of men are fishermen (Figure 36), 12% are farmers, 6% are some type of fish selling middleman between Peponi and other areas of Tanzania, such as Tanga and even as far as Arusha (Table 37).



Figure 37: *Fundis* – (Left) bricks (Right) thatch roof.

Table 36: Means of earning, men. N=129.

Do you have a way of earning money?	Number of Men
No Answer	3
No	6
Work	118
Request	2

Table 37: Types of work men do, N=129.

How do you earn your living?	Number
Guard	1
Small Business	6
<i>Fundis</i> (Bicycle repair, Masonry, Carpenter, Construction, Tailor)	6
Transport goods/cargo in pick-up truck	1
Rent bicycles	1
Smuggle Sugar	1
Sell door-to-door by bicycle (cassava, water)	2
Sick/Ill	1
Manager at Sisal Estate	1
Buy and sell coconut and bring to the road	1
Madrassa teacher	2
Primary School Teacher	2
Fish Business	7
General shop, food supplies, and retail trade	5
Farmer & Fisherman	3
No Answer	5
Farmer	16
Fisherman	67



Figure 38: A small food shop.

The remainder do other small business enterprises such as selling cassava door-to-door on bicycle, renting bicycles, selling clothing/cloth, delivering water, etc. (Table 37). A few men are *fundis*, considered to be skilled technicians: tailor, carpenter, masonry, bicycle repair, construction, etc. (Figure 37).

HOTELIS: A STABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN

The most frequent entrepreneurial endeavor women engage in and the one with the most stability is *hotelis* (small restaurants). One of the first things I noticed in Peponi is the main roads and paths are lined with *hotelis*. The types of *hotelis* vary, and depend mostly on what a woman wants, needs, and expects from her business. Of the many entrepreneurial activities women engage in, it is the women who operate *hotelis* who have the most success making enough money to support their families. The food business is one of the areas where women have the ability to do something more permanent and profitable.

Gendered Change

In the late 1960s there was only one *hoteli* in operation in the village, run by a man in his early 30s, Bwana Bakuli (Landberg 1977). He opened his *hoteli* in 1953. From 1953 until the late 1960s he remained the only *hoteli* operator. In 2004 there were 23 permanent, profitable, and established *hotelis* running in Peponi and women ran all except one. Much to my surprise it was the same man from the 1960s, now Mzee Bakuli! He continues to serve lunch and dinner every day of the week. He prides himself on the fact that he has maintained many of the same clientele throughout this time. His peers have supported him throughout, which is evident when visiting his *hoteli* as most of his patrons are the same generation as he is. During a visit to Mzee Bakuli's *hoteli* his patrons chimed in that, "The food is still great," but they chuckled and jokingly complained that, "The portion has decreased while the price has increased!" Mzee Bakuli's niche, in addition to catering to older men, is that his is the only *hoteli* which posts – on a large chalkboard – what he is serving each day. And, on Fridays, the Muslim day of community worship, he always serves *pilau*, a special spiced rice and meat dish usually served at weddings, funerals, celebrations, and holidays. When asked, Mzee Bakuli replied that he does not know why more men have not followed his example and opened *hotelis*, but suspects it is because most men do not know how to cook, "Women are taught to cook from an early age, so it is probably more natural for them to take on a *hoteli*."

The Relationship between Entrepreneurship and Divorce

The women who run the *hotelis* range from age 22-56. All of the women have children, except for one who is infertile. Twenty of the women intend to keep their business indefinitely; two plan to keep their business until they are remarried. From the beginning I was intrigued by the women who run *hotelis*. I wanted to know more about them and hypothesized they would be women who were divorced, abandoned by their husbands, or widowed. The majority of the 22 female *hoteli* operators (63 %) were, in fact, divorced when they began their business (Figure 39).

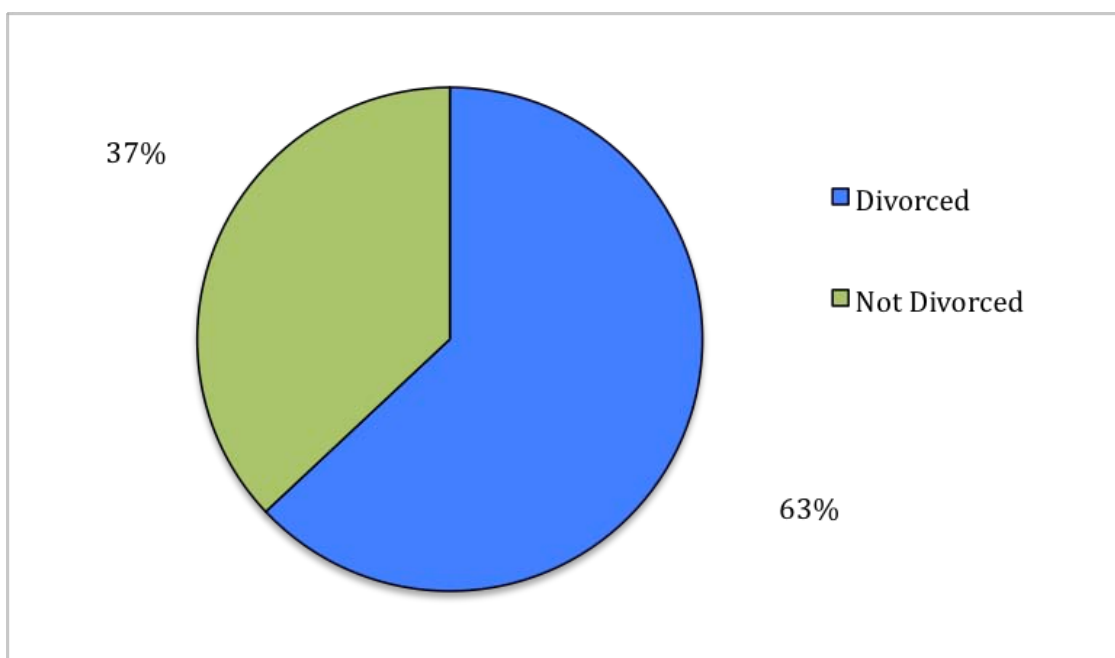


Figure 39: Marital status of women who have a *Hoteli*, divorced and not divorced (N=22).

This alone is a strong majority. Figure 40 demonstrates 14% of the sample fit into a category of “other” – not married, not divorced. These are women who are widowed, abandoned, or were never married but have children.

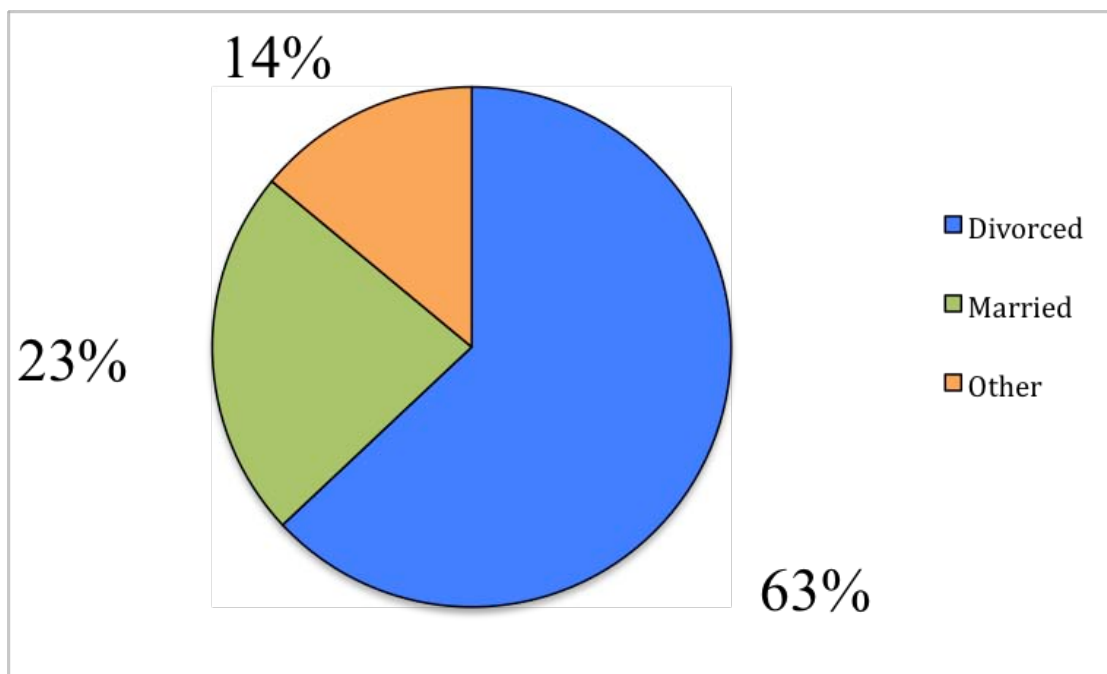


Figure 40: Marital status of women who own a *Hoteli*, married, divorced, other (N=22).

Ordinarily, I would not collapse the categories of divorced, widowed, abandoned and never married with children. The experiences of these women are disparate, but what unites them is they are single with children and must rely on themselves to support their families. They look to entrepreneurial activities, such as *hoteli* operation, as a way to support their families, live independently, and avoid remarriage.

Once I collapsed “other” and “divorced” into a category of “single,” 77% started their business as single women with children to support and no assistance from a husband (Figure 41).

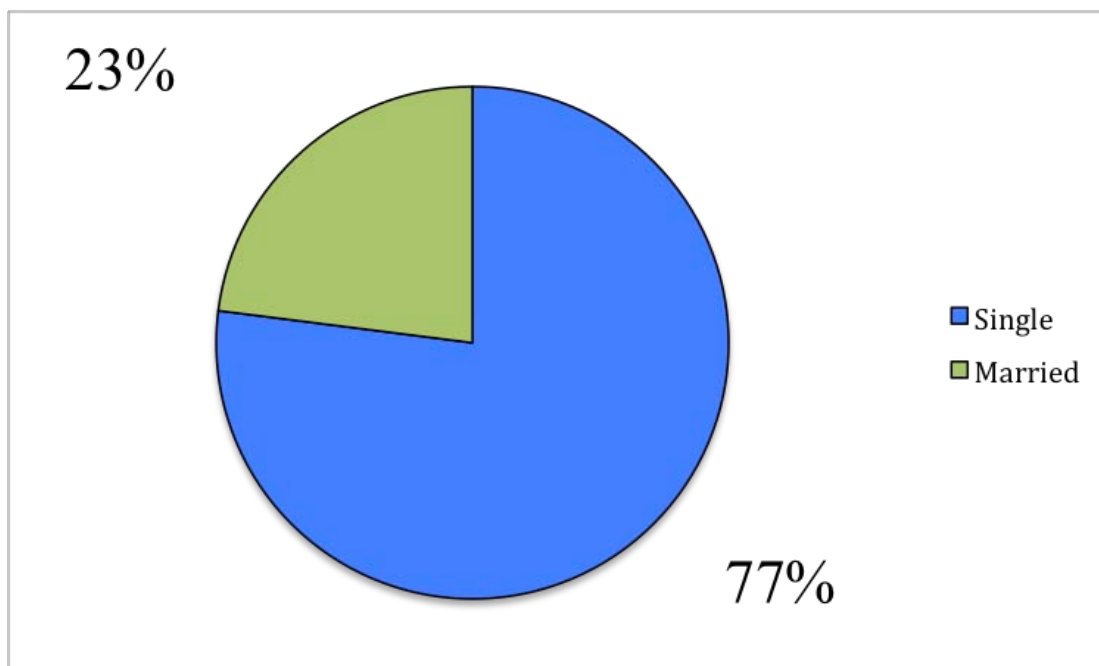


Figure 41: Marital status of women who own a *Hoteli*, married/single (N=22).

After considering the relationship status of women when they began their *hoteli* business, I became interested in how many of these women, who started off single, remained single after starting their own business (Figure 42).

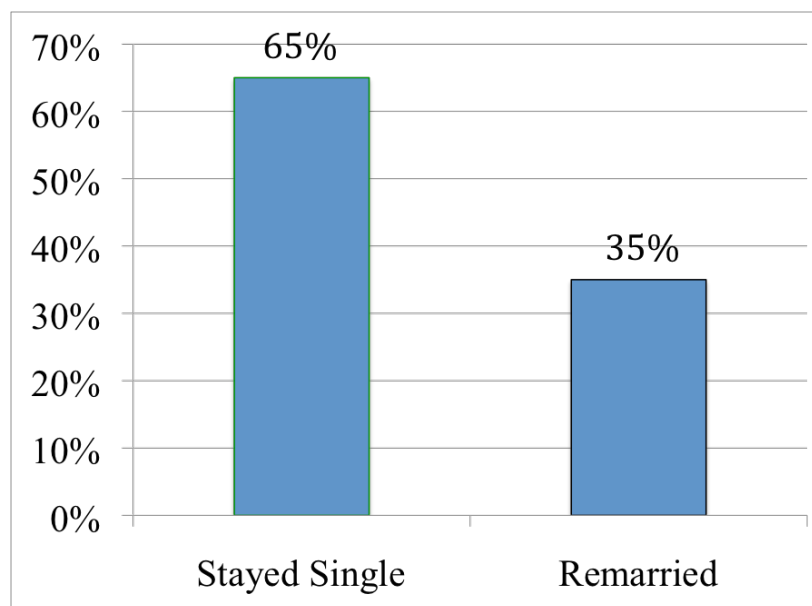


Figure 42: Single women who own a *Hoteli* who stayed single or remarried.

Given how women discuss marriage, men and relationships it was not surprising to learn that 65% of the women remained single and only 35% did eventually remarry. Of the 35% who remarried all of them waited at least 5 years between marriages, and many waited even longer. In short, it is mostly single women who open *hotelis* and most of them remain single for an extended period after opening their business.

Why is a *hoteli* business attractive to a divorced single woman? First, and foremost, the women *hoteli* owners all agreed that the most beneficial aspect to operating a *hoteli* is that it allows a woman to be independent. Second, they all described it as a relatively easy business to begin and continue because it is a skill set women already possess. Lastly, it provides them with a reliable and dependable income. The work, they say, is not that difficult. In fact, many of them pointed out that if not cooking at the *hoteli* they would have to cook for their children and other extended family at home. They do not see preparing food at their *hotelis* as being all that different from what is expected of them in their daily lives and, in fact, many of them reported that their *hoteli* responsibilities free them from household responsibilities. Most of the women feed their children meals they prepare at their *hotelis*; therefore it is not necessary to cook twice, or to have someone cook for their children at home. Several women have established their *hotelis* adjacent to their homes and actually prepare the food in their home cooking areas.

Getting Started, Daily Operations, & Making a Profit

Women unanimously acknowledged that the most difficult part of the business is getting started. Gathering enough cash to build the *hoteli*, building the structure (or finding a structure to buy/rent), and purchasing the necessary supplies (utensils, coal,

food, dishes, pots, pans, chairs or benches, and tables) are the hardest part. In my interviews with *hoteli* owners I learned that it is actually not that expensive to start a small restaurant. Most women began their business with start up capital between \$10-20 dollars U.S..³⁶ Many of them noted that the cooking supplies they initially needed, and used, came from their own homes. Some still use their home equipment, while others have purchased separate equipment for their *hoteli* after earning enough money. Creating or finding a space for the business is yet another challenge. The wide range of structures that exist for *hotelis* in Peponi reflect women's creativity, innovation, and circumstances. Mama Pili, undoubtedly the most successful *hoteli* owner, has a large cement and cinder block building with electricity, a metal roof, and three separate rooms (one for serving/eating, one for cooking, and one for cleaning). Most *hotelis* are small mud and thatch structures that women build themselves, (sometimes with the help of family or friends). Typically they include a space for eating with a small table and bench, as well as, a space for cooking. Some women have only a covered space for their customers and cook outside next to the structure. Some of the structures have four walls and a roof, while others have a lean-to like structure with only one or two walls and a roof.

³⁶ It should be noted that this is not a small sum of money for these women and many borrowed the money to start up their business.



Figure 43: Four different *hoteli* structures.

Women charge between 150 and 500 Tsh (15-50 cents U.S.) for food. Breakfast, *chai* and *chapati* is 150 Tsh, lunch is 300Tsh, and dinner is 500 Tsh for a full meal. Women acknowledge that they do not raise their prices frequently. Except for two or three *hotelis*, all employ young unmarried or divorced women. They pay 500Tsh per week (50 cents U.S.) to each employee and feed her meals while she is working. In exchange women help with cooking, shopping, serving, and cleaning. Some women, with adolescent daughters, require that they work for no pay. Mama Akia employs two younger girls to help her with the *hoteli* and provides lunch and dinner to her patrons. Her *hoteli* is located in a prime spot on the main road and she has a successful business. Her *hoteli* is a small structure with a large table and two benches. She sells about 30 meals a day – lunch for 300 Tsh (30 cents U.S.) and dinner for 500 Tsh (50 cents U.S.)

for total earnings of \$12 U.S. per day. She estimates her daily costs to be about \$7 (including paying her employees), and her profit is \$5 per day. A less successful *hoteli* might make a profit of only \$1 per day, but women argue that \$1 is not an insubstantial amount and they are also able to feed herself, their children from the *hoteli*.

Who are the Patrons?



Figure 44: *Hoteli* owner, with male patron in background.

Patrons of *hotelis* are almost exclusively men. Most of the patrons are young men who otherwise would have to cook themselves or burden a relative with cooking for them. A full meal at a *hoteli*, which is a generous portion including a starch (coconut rice, *ugali* (corn meal porridge), or *chapatti* (an Indian style flat bread), meat/fish, and leafy greens, costs much less than purchasing all the ingredients necessary to prepare a meal, not to mention the time involved. In a kitchen where meal preparation is done with a *jiko* (a small, metal, coal burning stove similar to a BBQ grill) it is significantly less work and time to buy a meal for one person than to prepare a meal for oneself. There is

also a contingent of older married men who take a meal, or all of their meals, at a *hoteli*, not because they cannot get this meal at home, but because there is status involved with being able to meet friends for a meal. Younger married men also frequent *hotelis*: “If we [husband and wife] are fighting, I eat at a *hoteli*.” Others said: “Eating at home is for women and children.” It is not unusual to find men hanging out at a *hoteli* after finishing their meal. They joke with each other, and the women working there, and discuss village gossip, plans, and activities. Certain *hotelis* are known as a place where older and influential men gather, while other *hotelis* are known as a place for young men. Each *hoteli* has a reputation or niche, and customers are usually loyal to one *hoteli*. Mama Flora’s, for example, is known for quick no-nonsense service; Mama Pili for her clean, modern (electricity), and “modern” style; Mama Akili is known for her joking and quick wit; Mama Habiba for her large portions of meat/fish; and Mama Binamu for her flavorful seasonings.

Men might choose to frequent a *hoteli* based on any of the above criteria. Some men want to be seen at a particular *hoteli* for a particular reason. For example, Mzee Muhammedi told me he enjoys being seen in the center of the village, *barabarani* (by the road) because people will know he is important. Kichwa, a young man, chooses Mama Maembe’s *hoteli* because it is close to his house and convenient. Jumaa, prefers the cleanliness of Mama Pili’s *hoteli*, but after an argument with Mama Pili about a dirty table he refuses to dine there. Now he rotates between several *hotelis* throughout the week, depending on his schedule; he likes to spread his business around as several of his cousins run *hotelis*.

Occasionally, you might find a woman at a *hoteli*, but it is unusual. At the beginning of my fieldwork while living with a family, Mama Jumbe, would send someone (usually a young girl, a neighbor, or her sister) to buy *mandazi* and *chapatis* in the morning once she learned I did not like to eat savory leftovers for breakfast. From time to time she would send someone to buy *chipsi* (fried potatoes, similar to french fries) in the evening, or a fried egg, if someone (like me) were sick. These purchased items were considered supplemental to her cooking. She would never go to the *hoteli* herself and the full meal was never purchased. During my numerous visits to *hotelis* (as interviewer and as patron) I never once observed a woman taking a meal at a *hoteli*.

BACK-UP PLAN

Women discuss their plans for when – not if – they get a divorce. Mama Jumbe, who feared that her husband would take a second wife, said:

I do not want to be divorced and on my own. But I also do not want to be treated with disrespect and I do not want to be a second wife. I will leave my husband before that happens. I know he will take another wife someday and then I will take our son and go to my parent's house. They will have me. I will make juice and sell it at my sister-in-laws *hoteli* and that will be all that we need. I will be able to take care of myself. I'd rather be on my own than have a husband with a second wife. I have respect for myself.

Mama Jumbe currently sells juice, ice cream, and sugar when she has a need for money. She does not engage in these activities consistently but rather if there is something she wants or needs, such as a new dress for the wedding of a relative (something her husband will most likely not buy for her) or, baby products, such as baby powder, for her son. She makes these items in her home and has a young unmarried girl sell the juice on the main road at her sister-in-law's *hoteli*. She is required to employ this young girl because her

husband does not allow her to leave the house without his permission. While he encourages her small business enterprises, he does not consent to allow her to sell juice out and about. She also occasionally makes “ice cream” but sells it from her house. Her husband has a freezer for his business (he is the middle man for a seafood collective). She often purchases sugar in bulk for her juice and ice cream and will sell it by the kilo, at a reduced price compared to what the *duka* owners charge, and makes a profit. She considers these ventures flexible and profitable. It suits her life that from day-to-day and week-to-week she can adapt and change her strategy depending on what her needs/goals are and what else is happening in her life. Occasionally, she will also sell sweet rice bread or *mandazi* (donuts) – she described this as something she would do when she had a hankering to bake something or a craving for a particular sweet. Women in Peponi do engage in additional entrepreneurial activities, but most of their efforts center around food, and are things they can do from their homes. So, if they are married but want to earn some money, women can do so without having to rely on their husband’s permission.

Why do women think about a back-up plan and anticipate a divorce? As discussed in Chapter Six, the Swahili have long been recognized for their high divorce rates. Serial monogamy – that is marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce and so on – is the common pattern. Divorce rates have remained consistent, but what, if anything, has changed? So far, this chapter has demonstrated that small businesses, such as *hotelis*, are burgeoning and provide women with the social and economic freedom to live independently. Women in Zanzibar are making similar choices: “[Both] divorcées or widows remarry, but older women may decide not to, either because of previous

experience of married life, or because a second husband may deny responsibility for her children from previous marriage(s). Some women may therefore consider the social costs of remarriage to be greater than the prestige one gains from having a husband, especially now when they have the means to take care of themselves"(Ako 1995:173). Women are able to live independently of a husband – most often with the support of friends and relatives. It is often a household or households of kin, particularly female kin, which enables a woman to maintain herself and support her children. In fact, 28% of households in Peponi are headed by women and consist of multiple generations of women without husbands (Figure 45).

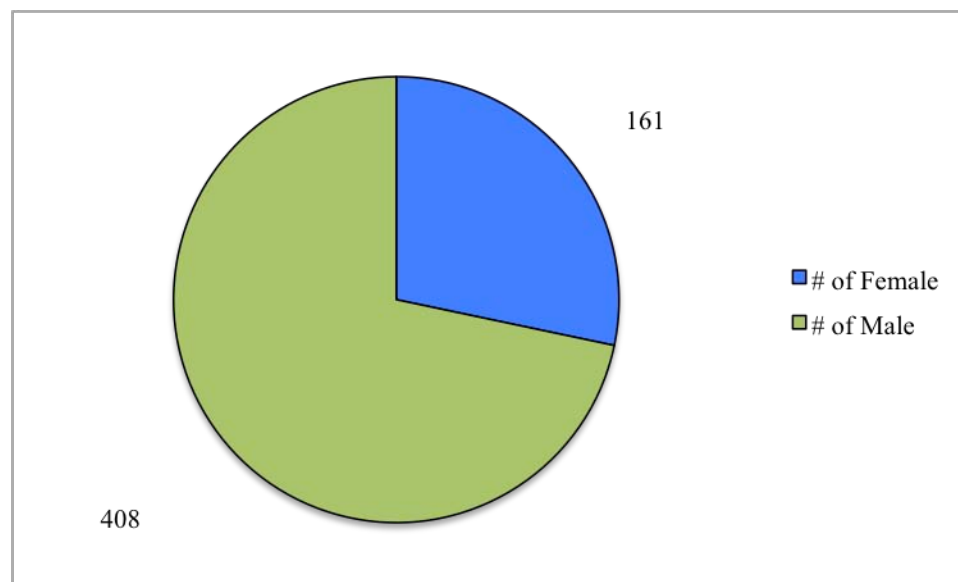


Figure 45: Heads of household by gender, N=608.

A break down of female heads of household by marital status indicates that 65% of female heads of household are divorced, or previously divorced (Figure 46).

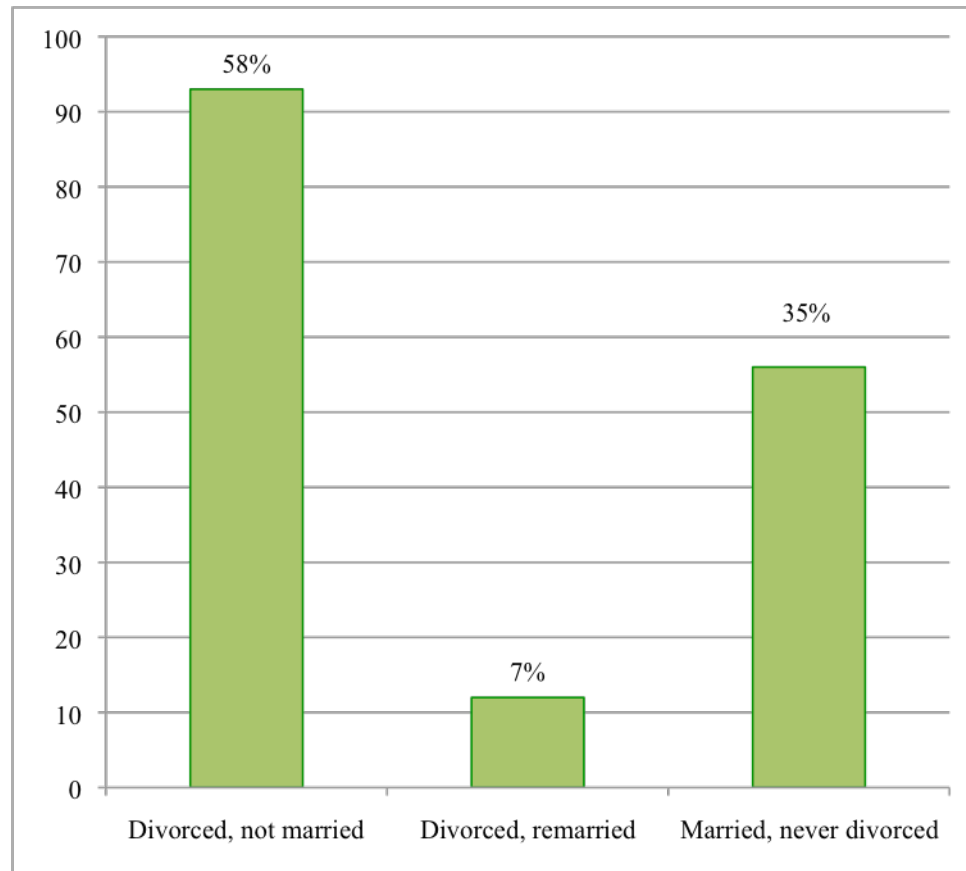


Figure 46: : Marital status of female heads of household, N=161.

Landberg commented on the fact that “[it is one of the] ironies of Swahili society that the nature of the marriage contract and the frequency of divorce weaken ties between a husband and wife while emphasizing and strengthening those between a woman and her mother. Since a woman’s security usually rests with her mother and her uterine kin, she strives to maintain those ties first and foremost. Efforts to keep up those relationships may be factors contributing to the high divorce rate” (Landberg 1977:119).

In his analysis of the 1993 Tanzanian Demographic Health Surveys Omari notes that rural districts of Tanga have the lowest proportion of female-headed households with just 8.8% (1995:215). My research in Peponi demonstrates a shift to more female-headed households. I expect that the 28% of households my census captured under-reports the number of families headed by females since many female headed households have

multiple female headed families under one roof, and some women rent rooms in male headed households, and others live with male relatives.

Much feminist analysis has been guided by the assumption that a major factor in the oppression of women has been a culturally widespread definition of their primary role as that of wife and mother (Eisentstein 1984; Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi 1983; Mukangara 1994; Tong 1989). Secondary roles and activities are subsequently defined by this primary role, which places women in a position of dependency on the male head of household and restricts other economic and social opportunities. Men, on the other hand, as the head of households or family units, are heirs to resources in most cultures and dominate the public domain. Consequently, men have generally dominated decision-making power over household management. The extent of male dominance within and outside the household has, however, been historically and culturally variable. As a result, much attention has been paid to exploring the factor, which account for such variation, and in particular the extent to which particular processes of economic change have increased or weakened male power.

Some writers have argued that the opening up of new income sources for women that coincided with the erosion of the economic position of men, in both urban and rural Tanzania, has led to an increase in female autonomy (Tripp 1992), although it is perhaps insufficient on its own to signify a major change in patriarchal power relations. This positive evaluation of economic participation is supported also by liberal views of the market. As Elson comments in her discussion of these, “the market appears to treat women as individuals in their own right. If women can sell their labor or their products and get decent cash income of their own, this lessens their economic dependence upon

men, increases their economic value, and may increase their bargaining power within the household” (Elson 1992:37). My research in Peponi pushes this further and demonstrates that it not only lessens their economic dependence on men, it can, and does, free them to remain unmarried for an indefinite period of time.

Fluidity of *Biashara Ndogo* (small businesses)

Throughout the year I lived in Peponi I saw numerous businesses begin and end. Mama Saumu needed money to contribute to her daughter’s wedding, so she began making *mandazi* (donuts) to sell for breakfast. She would then send her 9-year-old daughter through the village on foot selling fresh warm *mandazi* to people in their homes. Sending her daughter door-to-door was a smart business angle; most other women send their daughters to sit near a *hoteli* and require people to go there or to their home for purchase. Mama Saumu sold her *mandazi* for about a month at which time she earned the amount of money she desired and then quit. Mama Saumu explained, “I do not need the money normally. We have enough for the things we need and want. But, the wedding is so expensive. Making *mandazi* is something I could do to contribute. Once the wedding is over I’ll be done with the *mandazi*. It is a lot of work.”

Mama Sitini, an older woman living with her husband and several adult children and grandchildren, decided to set up a small tomato and lime stand in front of her house. For the first week or two she had fresh and wonderful tomatoes and limes and she, or one of her family members, was always present to sell. After a few weeks I noticed there was no one present most of the time, making it difficult to purchase her produce. Then the quality of the produce began to diminish. After about a month her little table stand was

empty. Mama Sitini said, “Well, it was a lot of work, and I had other things I wanted to be doing. It would be nice to have some small money for myself, but really that situation [the tomato/lime stand] was too much work for the amount of money.” She was brainstorming alternative ways to earn money with less work involved.

Mama Pili, who owns, undoubtedly, the most successful *hoteli* in Peponi, surprised me by closing down her restaurant for the entire month of Ramadan. Her *hoteli* is only open for breakfast and lunch and since Muslims who observe the fasting of Ramadan do not eat during day light hours, according to Mama Pili, it did not make good business sense to keep the business open. Once Ramadan was over she re-opened and continued her success with no ramifications.

HOTELI WOMEN: THE DECISION TO NOT REMARRY?

Women in Peponi talk freely about the ineptitude, philandering, and general faults of men: men don’t communicate, they stay out late, they do not give women enough money for the needs of the family, they have girlfriends, they aren’t motivated, and so on and so forth. While women complain openly, they do not presume to be able to change men, and they do not expect men to change; they also acknowledge that not all men are bad, but the good ones, for the most part, are taken. They discuss their ideal man. They want to know about men in America – are they like the men in the movies played in the village? The Terminator? Rambo? Or, are they like Brad in *Bold and the Beautiful* (an American soap opera). Are they like men in Peponi? Is it true that they cannot have more than one wife at a time? Is it true that a woman can divorce a husband

herself? Is it true they are required to pay child support? These are some of the topics and questions women approached me with – without even knowing my research interests.

Mama Akida told me of her first marriage when she was 16 to a much older man (in his 60s). For 5 years they produced no children, nor any pregnancies. “My family, especially my mother, wanted me to demand a *talaka* (a divorce). But he was a nice man, an old man. I didn’t want to leave him for this reason. I did want children, but I figured he was old, and I was so young – that there would be plenty of time later.” In the end, they did divorce amicably – her explanation was that he acknowledged his infertility and wanted her to have a chance with someone else. She did not, however, remarry right away. “I was in no rush. I was free to have my own life – to earn my own money.” Instead, like other divorced women, she considered her options and realized that she needed to *biashara* (go into business). After some time she decided to start her own *hoteli*. She enjoys the freedom and independence the *hoteli* provides her. Within a year of her divorce she became pregnant with her first child, a daughter. “No, I did not marry the father, he offered, but I was in no rush. I have two children with him now.” Today she continues to run her *hoteli*.

Remarriage is not driven solely by the need for support from a husband; in fact, cases like Mama Akida indicate that the opposite is true. Initially, Mama Akida was in no hurry to remarry because she wanted to make sure she could get pregnant with a prospective husband. She was not faulted for this decision. In fact, she was considered clever for making sure her next husband was capable. Even today she receives little pressure to marry her boyfriend from her family and the community. Baba Akida, the boyfriend of Mama Akida, is another story. He would like very much to marry her as

soon as possible and maintains that he has wanted to marry her for the past 8 years, before their first child was even born. Mama Akida maintains she has a good thing going with her business, she is independent, and can take care of her children. She already has the status of a married woman from her first marriage, and she is a mother. She has the best of both worlds and is not sure if she will ever marry her boyfriend.

In Kenya, some young women, having been married once, are also choosing not to remarry (Bradley 1995:160). Like women in Peponi they have lovers and raise their children by themselves. In fact, these women describe their preference for the unmarried state as one of relative freedom; they describe their desire to remain free of the restrictions imposed by marriage and the marriage contract. Not all women would resist remarriage in Mama Akida's situation. Many would be happy to remarry a man like Baba Akida. Women do have romantic, monogamous, and partner-oriented hopes for their life course. They describe their expectations in terms of hopes but most acknowledge that these hopes are unrealistic. Of the 22 *hoteli* owners, the divorced women with children mostly articulate no active desire to be married again. They refer, somewhat lackadaisically, to the fact that they would like a man to take care of them, to give them a rest from their difficult life, but their "realistic" side prevails noting that a "good man" is unlikely to show up and they are not willing to marry just any man. They have learned that no man is better than a bad/lazy/drunken/promiscuous/uninterested/unsupportive man. Despite their romantic hopes, these days, more and more women are choosing to remain unmarried instead of remarrying quickly after a divorce. A *hoteli* provides women with the means to do so.

MEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Husbands and boyfriends of *hoteli* owners are, for the most part, supportive of women's *hoteli* businesses. Most of the husbands, however, married the women after the business was already well underway. There was never a negotiation or need to seek permission to start a business. Several of the women remarked that they required an agreement permitting them to maintain the business after marriage. Even women, like Mama Jumbe, have husbands that expect them to conduct a small business, like selling ice cream or juice, in order to make personal or luxury purchases. In Zanzibar men are not uncomfortable with the new position [working women], as long as women do not display publicly that they are 'feeding the house'" (Ako 1995:176). Mama Pili, currently unmarried, does not find men's support of *hotelis* that surprising. She explained: "Well, he (a husband) will benefit, no? Money from the *hoteli* helps the family. Even if the woman does not share her money with her husband, which she does not have to do, you know, she doesn't need money from him. So, he's going to have an easier time and have more money for other things, like his girlfriend!" All twenty-two of the women said their income from the *hoteli* went directly to her household costs. Women who were married reported that they were able to put some money aside, saving it for a day when they needed it or for a large, more expensive item. Some women admitted that they do not reveal to their husbands, or many other people, the exact amount they earn, or save, because they do not want demands made on that money. Married women will give their "savings" to a trusted friend or relative so that a husband might not accidentally find it.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: THE IMPACT OF INHERITANCE, RESOURCES, AND WORK

In this section I reference two women (sisters) that were lauded by all people in the village as success stories who inspire other women to entrepreneurship. I draw on two cases that represent the ideal. Both women struggled with infertility and in Peponi infertility is the exception not the norm in these cases³⁷. Most women who are independent do have many children and the children are integral to their motivation to start businesses. In these two cases, infertility illuminates some of these ideals, the symbolic and material, which bring together some of the pieces that show why women's work is so important. They show how a woman can be successful, and that these opportunities are complex. It is a constellation of factors that make these women's situations ideal cases.

At first glance it is clear that Mama Pili, at 5'9" is a powerful woman in the village, and not just because of her height! She did, however, tower over every other woman in the village and was the only woman close in height to me (5'11"). Hands-down she had the most successful and lucrative business run by a woman. Her *hoteli* earns approximately \$15 U.S. a day. Tanzania remains a very low-income country with a per capita GDP of less than \$300 (GoT, 2004). Mama Pili's earnings are close to \$400 per month; after expenses (supplies, employees, electricity, travel, etc.) her profit is closer to \$250 U.S..³⁸ She is open for breakfast and lunch (with lunch items being served until they run out, which some times extends into the early dinner hours). She serves a variety of foods, but her top sellers in the mornings are her *chaptis and chai* (a tortilla-like bread with spiced sweetened milky tea). For lunch she always serves local fresh fish

³⁷ Discussed in Chapter 6 at length.

³⁸ She would not give a specific amount.

with sauce and a choice of *ubwawa* (coconut rice) or *ugali* (dense cornmeal porridge). On Fridays she cooks a local favorite usually reserved for holidays and weddings - *pilau*, a spiced rice dish with beef or fish. Most people say they patronize her *hoteli* instead of the many other small-scale *hotelis* because hers is more "modern." Her *hoteli* has a cement floor, high ceilings, painted walls, an indoor kitchen (they still cook over charcoal and firewood on the floor), an aluminum roof, nice furniture, and ceramic dishes (not plastic). Her prices are similar to the prices of the other *hotelis* in town and so are not prohibitive. She employs four other women (two unmarried young women and two older divorced women).

It is unmistakable that Mama Pili's success has impacted her life significantly. She has privileges that other women do not. She is a leader and is used to making decisions and having them carried out. She is also different from other women in Peponi because she has an urban flair and confidence that other women do not. This is not to say that other women are not confident, rather her confidence exceeds Peponi life. She travels to Tanga at least once a week for her business or for her own personal interests. She supports five people in her household, including a male cousin. She has been married and divorced four times. She is 40 years old. She had eight miscarriages between her four marriages over a 15-year period. She began her business 10 years ago before her last marriage ended, and set up shop in a small thatch building not far from her current location. After her fourth marriage ended, Mama Pili's father gave her the building, which is now home to her *hoteli*. He did so, after she divorced for the fourth time, as an early inheritance. Muslim women come to own property in two ways, by inheritance and by purchase. Islamic law regulates inheritance and a woman cannot be given any property

in cases of divorce (Ako 1995). If still married on the death of a husband, his house is usually divided among his children or his wife is given a token sum of money.

According to Islamic law, a wife cannot be given immovable property that belonged to the husband, such as house, coconut trees, and similar items (Ako 1995). If a man particularly wants to leave something for his wife he may build a separate house for her, which she retains on his death. Inheritance from parents is a common means of inheritance and the aim is to achieve a fair distribution among children of all sexes.

Many women do have at least small plots, coconut trees, or even a house handed down by parents. Male and female children both inherit women's assets. Mama Pili explained that her father, "Wanted to give me something that I could keep and that would give me the chance to have the type of success necessary to support myself."

After her fourth marriage ended Mama Pili decided she did not want to be married again. She was tired of marriage. She wanted to determine her own future and said she was tired of always being "the wife who was unable to have a child." About a year later she became pregnant with the man who is still her boyfriend today. Their relationship, while not a marriage, is accepted and lauded because of the child she conceived - Pili. Pili is now four years old, unique in Peponi because she is an only child and everyone treats her as such. In fact, she is an only child who knows that she will not have siblings. And, she is an only child whose mother is a powerful worldly woman. Pili herself, is a worldly child with grand ambitions. Like her mother, Pili is a four year old who commands respect and is a leader among her peers. She often came to my house, bold as could be, and inserted herself into whatever activity I was engaged. If I were cooking she would ask to taste each ingredient and let me know precisely what she thought of it. She was

not shy and relished her boldness, especially when it came to bossing the *mzungu* around! Her mother, and the community, sees her as a miracle child. Mama Pili was not expected to have a child after 15 years of trying and eight miscarriages.

Mama Pili's younger sister, Binundu (age 36), is also a successful businesswoman. Binundu was married and divorced three times and had five miscarriages. She now lives in Tanga, the city an hour north of Peponi, in a property owned by her mother (who inherited it from her father and it belongs exclusively to her, not her husband). Binundu will inherit this building from her mother. The building is in a prime location close to the main road in Tanga. It is a substantial sized building with eight large rooms, which she rents out. The tenants share a kitchen area, latrine, and showering area. Binundu keeps the rent money (\$35 U.S. per month) as part of her income. Her main source of income, however, comes from her business. She travels between Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Tanga, and small communities between Tanga and Pangani (including Peponi). Binundu sells *kanga* (Swahili cloth decorated in elaborate patterns with *kiSwahili* proverbs inscribed along the bottom), fabric, *hijab* (special black head scarves worn by Muslim women, mostly for special occasions but also buy women who consider themselves more devout or whose husband's consider themselves more devout and require their wives to wear the *hijab*), cosmetics, lingerie, etc. She mourns the lack of children in her life – but also enjoys her free lifestyle, which is unlike that of any mother in Peponi. She acknowledges she has a privileged and special life. Married women with children, and divorced women with children, do not have the same freedom as Binundu and Mama Pili. Binundu and Mama Pili both know that they are even further

lucky in that their parents gifted them with property, which they have wisely managed and turned into profitable ventures.

Both of these women spent a big portion of their lives trying to get pregnant without success. They both tried with numerous men and husbands to conceive. In the end, they “accepted their fate.” Today they both reflect somewhat sardonically on their fate – they both see their situations as unfortunate but they are also aware that their unique positions are because they are (or in Mama Pili's case were) childless. Their parents gave them their inheritance early because of their unique circumstances. This is a distinct advantage over other women, infertile, or otherwise in Peponi who have no assets. Mama Pili and Binudu could have easily been absorbed in to the households of male kin and assumed dependent roles. They were fortunate to inherit property but were also better positioned to make their businesses profitable.

In Nairobi, Kenya middle-class women have choice of occupation their poorer counterparts lack, in addition they also seem better able to expand the businesses they begin. McCormick's work in Nairobi further argues that small enterprise studies usually ignore business owner's social class, implicitly or explicitly, assuming class differences to be minimal or unimportant. For, “...women business owners at least, class was not irrelevant. Poor women suffered from lack of business opportunity, whereas middle-class women outperformed their petit bourgeois counterparts (McCormick 1996:193). Her study of women entrepreneurs notes, like mine, that a disproportionate number of women were single, widowed, or divorced. In her study 24% were single, widowed, or divorced, compared with 16% of men (McCormick 1996:203). In addition:

poor women without the capital to start a tailoring or dressmaking business [respectable] may be forced into less remunerative and more

precarious occupations like petty trade, beer brewing, or prostitution (Nelson 1979, Bujra 1979, Greenstreet 1981), whereas similarly situated men can choose metalwork, carpentry, or wood carving (McCormick 1996:196).

Access to a decent income of their own tends to be highly valued by women, not only for what it buys but also for the greater dignity it brings (Elson 1992). “Decency” here is socially and culturally determined, therefore contextual. Ako notes that for women in Zanzibar:

Work such as prostitution and concubinage, whatever the level of income they bring in, may warrant the same 'low decency' definition as begging the husband for money after experiencing bodily or verbal abuse. Hence, in many ways working for and controlling one's own income is seen as advantageous, not only because it addresses practical requirements, but also because of its transformative impact on existing gender relations (Ako 1995:176).

A question I frequently asked women in casual conversation about life was, “If you could have one thing to help you now, in this difficult time, what would it be?” The majority of the time women responded with a single phrase, in English, “Capital.” When I asked them to explain, inevitably, women would describe that having some cash to start a small business would be the most helpful thing to them. They would love to start a tomato stand and buy/sell tomatoes or build a *hoteli* and sell lunch. They look to the women who are already doing these things, such as Mama Pili and Binundu, with admiration and see the entrepreneurial endeavors of these women as something in which to aspire.

Particularly relevant to my this work, Cligget (2005) discusses gender and generating livelihoods and her example of how women in her study benefit from brewing beer, which there is an insatiable market for. Colson and Scudder also note that it was compelling because beer sales are an efficient way of redistributing men’s income to

women (Colson and Scudder 1988). Because men are the predominate patrons of *hotelis* in Peponi, men's income does get redistributed to women here as well.

Rapaport's (2005) historical examination of the frequency of divorce in Maluk³⁹ society forces a re-thinking of gender relations in medieval Muslim societies, and in particular their economic and legal dimensions. From an economic perspective, he argues that we need to reconsider women's economic independence within and outside marriage. His work illuminates the fact that women could not have been as dependent on their husbands as Muslim jurists would have us believe because divorce was so common. Frequent divorce suggests that marriage was not a promise of financial security and that alternative sources of revenue must have been available to divorced (as well as widowed) women. In fact, he takes his analysis even further:

That remunerative work was undertaken by women, both within and outside marriage, is crucial for an understanding of the balance of power that existed between husbands and wives, as well as for a comprehension of the phenomenon of frequent divorce. Wages, mostly from work in the manufacture of textiles, allowed many women to remain single for long periods of time, so forming a sizable and often unacknowledged minority in medieval Muslim societies (Rapaport 2005:6).

Rapaport also wonders if it was acceptable for women to remain unmarried for long periods of time and determined that they could, in fact live on their own without fear for their reputation or safety (Rapaport 2005). His research proves that many women remained unmarried for long periods of time, far beyond the legally prescribed waiting period of three months, and sometimes for the remainder of their lives (Rapaport 2005:39). Also paralleling my research in Peponi, Rapaport notes that women worked at home, and carried on working whether they were married or unmarried. In fact, an

³⁹ A Medieval Islamic society.

increase in opportunities allowed more women to become economically independent, and thus more women remained single for long periods of time.

CONCLUSION

Previous research describes women as having little, if any, agency in the marriage and divorce process. Furthermore, the literature describes women as having few resources to support them independently after a divorce. Today, Swahili women do have options outside of marriage; they are not forced into a quick marriage after divorce. Remarriage, sex work, or dependence on male kin is no longer their only choice. Increasingly women are taking advantage of the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Along with other small businesses the burgeoning of *hotelis* demonstrates that women have increased ability to support themselves independent of a husband. This has dramatically impacted women's outlook on marriage and relationships. Above all else, women do not want to be part of a polygynous relationship. Today most Swahili women are not dependent on other men (relatives or new husbands) if they want to avoid, or get out of, a polygynous relationship. Most men, however, continue to dream and aspire to have multiple wives – while women detest the notion and, like Mama Jumbe, strategize a “back-up plan.” Women are planning for the future and strategizing about how they will respond to the inevitable cheating husband or second wife in ways they were previously not. Thus, women's ability to earn money, primarily through informal entrepreneurial work, affords them new options with significant consequences for marriage. In the past women remarried rapidly. Today they consider their options and chose to enjoy the freedom associated with the status of a divorced woman rather than remarry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: ISLAM, GENDER, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

“A good marriage [is] full of love and honesty.”

Mama Rukia’s neighbor, Mama Kanga, brought me two eggs. She heard I was ill and wanted to give me eggs (produced by her own chickens) to help me feel healthy and strong again. Mama Kanga is a small woman, no taller than 5’2”, and despite her small stature her body is strong and her smile is big. I thanked her for the eggs.

Throughout my year in Peponi she continued to occasionally bring me eggs as a gift, particularly if she heard I was ill. One time she accepted my offer for juice and came inside. We sat on my sofas and she told me her story:

Did you know that my Hamisi is not my first husband? We’ve been married a long time. He is a good husband, not like most others. We have a poor but happy life. My first husband was no good. We did not get along. Our fathers arranged that marriage. We only had one child together after 6 years of trying and he was always spending his time with other women. Eventually he divorced me and I married my current husband. We’ve been so happy together for 25 years. We had one child together. Yes, we would have liked more children, but we stayed together. We are quite poor; so many children would be difficult for us. So, it is ok that we do not have so many children. I’m happy to have a good marriage full of love and honesty. That is better than many children and an unhappy marriage, or no marriage at all.

Mama Kanga described her husband as honest and loving. In observing their relationship I was struck by the humor, joking, and flirting embedded in their interactions, apparent

whenever I saw them together. Further, she illustrates their relationship as one in which they work together to make decisions in all aspects of their lives, not unlike the companionate marriage described by Hollos and Larsen (2003) in northern Tanzania. Mama Kanga continued her description by highlighting that her husband, “a good Muslim man,” never expressed an interest in polygyny, nor did he lament his inability to take additional wives. Hamisi was a faithful husband who did not seek outside girlfriends or lovers. It was the combination of these things that pleased Mama Kanga and was her explanation for their enduring and loving marriage.

Mama Kanga and Hamisi, while previously divorced and remarried to other partners, exemplify that a couple can achieve a long-lasting and happy relationship. Despite the stories of divorce, dissatisfaction, and infidelity, which are strong themes throughout this dissertation and more importantly are realities for Swahili women and men, there are many marriages that do work in Peponi. Even when faced with adversity such as poverty and low fertility, like Mama Kanga and Hamisi, there exist many couples that are happy and remain together.

Throughout this dissertation I have kept three main lines of inquiry central to my analysis: gender, Islam, and social change. In order to understand these processes, I’ve examined the complex and multidimensional nature of relationships between men and women in Swahili society. I have considered premarital relationships, weddings, marriage, polygyny, divorce, and remarriage from the perspectives of both men and women.

I visited coastal Tanzania for my pre-dissertation research trip in 2003 with the intention of stepping back from the focus of my previous research on family planning, specifically, permanent sterilization. Over time, the questions surrounding that work began to feel too narrow in scope. I often felt my research subjects considered it unusual and somehow inappropriate for me, an unmarried and young 23-year-old, presumably sexually inactive woman, to be asking questions that essentially, in their view, boiled down to topics of sex. That work, however, demonstrated the value of examining relationships between men and women and encouraged me to widen my focus and explore marital relationships.

During my pre-dissertation trip, Amina Lawal's⁴⁰ story became international news. Newspapers, radio, and TV all relayed her story, both at home and in Tanzania, and undoubtedly everywhere. At the time, I did not realize the conversations I had regarding Amina's case would impact not only the approach I would ultimately take in conducting my dissertation research, but also the method of analysis. As it turns out, it was those very conversations that got me thinking about Islam in a more complicated way, not just looking at the difference between ideals and practice, but also the variation within a local setting, historical factors, and the impact global discourses of Islam had on women and men in the community. Just as my initial home-stay in Kenya as an undergraduate with a single divorced woman stimulated my thinking about what constituted an African family, and challenged my perhaps naïve assumptions about family, kinship, and women's status, power and agency.

I returned from my pre-dissertation trip and read *Widows in Africa* while preparing dissertation grant applications (Landberg 1986). I came across Pamela

⁴⁰ Amina's case is outlined in Chapter 1.

Landberg's chapter on *Widows and Divorced Women in coastal Tanzania* and discovered the village I was considering for my fieldsite was also the location for her dissertation research. Her work examined kinship and community and included a chapter on marriage, divorce, and weddings. While her dissertation did not focus on my specific questions, it did provide me with an interesting opportunity to make some longitudinal comparisons on kinship, weddings, and marriage. The ability to do so gave me the unique opportunity to consider social change in a real and dynamic way.

I knew, from my experience as an undergraduate in Lamu, Kenya, that Swahili couples did divorce and that divorced women, in particular, were not ostracized in any way. What I was not aware of was that most scholars consider divorce to be substantial among the Swahili. In fact, the more I reviewed the literature on Swahili people the more I discovered the long-standing high rates of divorce in Swahili settings. This seemed somewhat in contrast to the apparent importance of weddings and the institution of marriage. Initially my main questions revolved around, "What does marriage mean, especially to young people, in the context of historical and current high rates of divorce?" I knew that I wanted to determine: 1) if divorce rates are still high, and 2) what marriage means to people given the high rates of divorce. I believe I successfully answered and complicated those questions in this dissertation. My experiences in Peponi, however, pushed me further. My dissertation is about so much more than divorce and what it means. I grapple with the changing patterns of premarital relationships, shifting importance of weddings, the fluidity of marriage relationships, the ordinariness of infidelity, the competing sentiments regarding polygyny, the varying processes of divorce, and finally the importance of women's work in negotiating remarriage today.

From the beginning, it was my intention to approach my research through a gendered lens because my research topic necessarily involves both men and women. Feminist approaches have pushed gendered analyses from not only an attribute of individuals, but as an organizing principle of social and cultural institutions. In this dissertation I have illustrated the set of gendered meanings and activities relegated to men and women, with specific attention to the processes of marriage and divorce in a Swahili community.

From the beginning I also sought to combine my training in Anthropology and population studies. Although not required, I was aware of the persuasiveness of combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. I knew it would suffice to rely on ethnographic work to demonstrate that divorce remains common in the community; however, I also knew that if both methodologies corroborated this, it would be more convincing. Because my ethnographic data is so rich and full of life—and it is that which makes me an anthropologist—I have relied predominantly on the it in the dissertation; however, in key places I have also relied on the census and marriage survey to serve as a corroborator of key points and facts. The resulting methodological approach is unique for a dissertation in anthropology but brings together the fields of anthropology and population studies in a compelling and effective way.

I departed from the traditional woman-centric approaches to marriage and divorce among the Swahili, where men are taken for granted, women are without agency, and Islam is a monolithic force controlling people's lives. Swahili marriage has long been characterized by serial monogamy, men's aspirations for polygyny, and high levels of divorce. Despite all of this, my research and others' demonstrates that marriage remains

the most valued institution among Swahili Muslims. Furthermore, divorce continues to be accepted as a normal part of most Swahili marriages. Popular treatments and anthropological investigations of divorce in Tanzania, and other Swahili communities, seldom adequately address the agency women possess as they negotiate their marriage trajectories. In contrast, I evaluated acts of divorce through everyday conversations, negotiations, and arguments in which men and women in Peponi engage. I see these disputes as a lens onto the nature of gender relations and conflicts more broadly, and the struggle for rights and obligations within families. Men, I observed, have certain institutional advantages over their wives and children and benefit from social patterns such as polygyny, patriliney, patri-locality, and political/economic authority. While women, on the other hand, use their sexuality, kinship networks, supernatural threats, and marital protocol to counter their husbands' actions.

In each of the chapters of this dissertation I applied three lines of inquiry in my analysis: I considered the role of Islam in this community, and beyond, in terms of its influence on people's relationships; I examined relationships from a gendered perspective, incorporating the views and attitudes of both men and women; and I accounted for the impact of social change in this community and the manner in which it has impacted this part of people's lives. My main findings with implications for the anthropology of kinship, marriage, Islam, and gender include:

First, divorce is a common experience for Swahili men and women, and whether or not they want to experience divorce, they anticipate it will be a part of their relationship life cycle. Unlike most Muslim communities, especially those outside of Africa, divorce is mainly achieved through repudiation. While many consider this to be a

disadvantage to women, my research demonstrates how women are active and agentive in this process. For people in Peponi divorce is less a legal issue, and more a social process, than it is for people in places with *Sharia* Islamic courts. Not unlike divorce in the U.S., and other Western settings, divorce in Peponi is the result of many reasons and one explanation does not suffice. Personal relationships, as one would expect, are important elements in the stability of marriages. Under Islamic law, marriage is viewed as a contract, easily broken if one or both members are dissatisfied. The right to dissolve that contract is not, however, shared equally. While women talked about divorce as something that impacts them unequally, because they maintain the majority of the responsibility for the children, they demonstrate their agency and power in creative, nefarious, and even unrestricted ways. Men also presented varying views of the dissolution of marriage. Some were completely against it and discussed it as a problem and have no wish to divorce in their life. Others anticipated that their relationships would not endure, not for a specific reason, but because they could not imagine being married to the same woman for their entire life. Even those who did not want or anticipate divorce could imagine circumstances that would push them to divorce. Individual marital histories in Peponi indicate that a wide variety of marital careers exist, including those people who have only been married once in their lives, as well as those who have had as many as five, six, or even more marriages (and divorces).

Second, premarital relationships are changing with the postponement of age at first marriage. While the impact of this is only starting to unfold it appears that the role of weddings, for both men and women, as a rite of passage into adulthood, is changing. Weddings and marriage are still held up as the standard; however, more and more young

people are having children before marrying, and many people are not marrying the parent of their child/ren. This does not mean that weddings and marriage itself are unimportant, but rather that young men and women are assuming adulthood in the absence of a wedding/marriage.

Third, infidelity is common and is viewed by women as less egregious than polygyny. People expect their partner, both men and women, to have affairs, if given the opportunity. And, indeed, both men and women conduct extra marital affairs, although men do so more often. Women, however, prefer their husbands take a lover instead of a second wife. A lover, or girlfriend, is not permanent and while a lover might make some claims on a husband's time and resources, her extended family cannot make claims on her boyfriend in the same way they could on her husband. This is in contrast to the demands a second wife could potentially make on a husband.

Fourth, women and men both refer to global discourses when discussing their expectations of marriage, and their relationship trajectory over their life course, albeit different global discourses. Women refer to themes of romance, love, and monogamy. Men use Islam to shape and justify their desires; while they may not abide by all the tenets of Islam, they manipulate it to fit their needs.

Fifth, polygyny is something that women fear, and actively plan their course of action if their husband begins to pursue it. It remains an elusive goal for men, and is most definitely one of the main factors that fuel the cycle of divorce in this community. For people in Peponi, the fluidity of relationships is driven by both women's fear/anticipation of polygyny and men's aspirations for the practice. A gendered, and generational, look at relationships in Peponi demonstrates the reality is that most men

never have more than one wife at a time and most women prefer their husbands to “look outside” marriage for lovers rather than take a second wife. Women’s views toward polygyny underscore gender conflicts among the Swahili because polygyny, as an institution, is opposed by women, and yet institutionalized support for it exists through Islamic understandings and elders’ demands on younger men. Unlike women of other societies, Swahili women have no active role in co-wife selection, nor do they form any bonds of friendship or camaraderie with co-wives. Indeed there is no expectation that co-wives would have any interactions and this is the case, for the most part. Co-wives generally want nothing to do with each other, and the fact that they maintain separate households makes it quite possible to avoid any interaction.

Finally, women’s entrepreneurial work, and the possibility of earning a small but dependable income, has dramatically changed women’s agency within marriage and their options following a divorce. Women are able to run small food related businesses, *hotelis*, to support themselves and their children. This discovery is a large departure from previous research on Swahili women. Today, women do have options outside of marriage; they are not forced into a quick marriage after a divorce. In fact, many women articulate a “back-up plan” for their current marriage – considering or anticipating a divorce in their future. Women are choosing a new path, a combination of entrepreneurial work and living with other female kin, with greater frequency, knowing they can manage to support themselves through informal and entrepreneurial work. Along with other small businesses the burgeoning of *hotelis* demonstrates that women have increased ability to support themselves independent of a husband. This has dramatically impacted women’s outlook on marriage and relationships. Previous research describes women as

having little, if any, agency in the marriage and divorce process. Furthermore, the literature describes women as having few resources to support them independently after a divorce. Remarriage is no longer their only choice.

Marriage is an important part of Swahili life and while some may argue that it is an unstable, and therefore unimportant, institution, I do not believe, nor did I find evidence that the fluidity of marriage equates to the instability of Swahili life. This is not to say that life in Tanzania is necessarily stable. As I write this conclusion I think about the instability of life in Africa, in general. I've just learned that several people, important to my experience in Peponi, have recently died.

In his most recent letter (January 2010) Jumaa reported on life in Peponi, after a 3-week visit:

You will be happy to get greetings from your many friends in Peponi. And, you will be sad to hear that some of your friends have died. The old *fundi* that lived near to your house, he has died. Also, Mama Rukia and her husband have both died (no one says why, but she was very sick for a long time and I suspect *Ukimwi* (AIDS), but no one says this. Also, Akida, that young boy Sofiya brought to your house often for lunch, he died, too. He was sick for a few days and then he died. Probably malaria. You didn't know it, but he was my son, with a girl who lives next to my *Bibi* (grandmother, father's mother), I don't think you knew her.

Mzee Shona, a tailor who lived next door to me spent most of his days sitting on his porch with his sewing machine, waiting for business. I stopped to talk with him every day and when I had a need for sewing (curtains, pillow cases, etc.), I would give him my business. He talked fondly of his youth when Pam and Leif conducted their research. He died single and of natural causes after a long life full of marriage, lovers, divorce, and an unfulfilled quest for polygyny.

I was quite sad and surprised to hear the news of Mama Rukia's death – she was in her late 40s and in good health. She was a good friend of mine and also helped me with my research, accompanying me while I drew my map of the village, introducing me to people, and acting as a research assistant on the census and survey. Both Mama Rukia, and her husband worked closely with government educational efforts on HIV/AIDS in the village and that they both likely died of AIDS is therefore extra heartbreaking. Also, I was very surprised to hear that Akida was both Jumaa's son and that he had died at the age of 8, despite that malaria can be treated at the local clinic. I asked Jumaa why he did not tell me Akida was his son while I was living in Peponi, "You know, we Swahili, we are like this. I am trying to be different, but I was ashamed to tell you that I had a child when I was not married and only 24. And, now I have two children. I should know better, this is the behavior of a village man, a traditional man, not the behavior of the type of man I want to be."

This dissertation demonstrates that the symbolic importance of marriage among Swahili Muslims misleadingly suggests that partnerships are static, stable entities over time, when in fact they are highly fluid for both men and women. Even the point at which a marriage ends is ambiguous. Women and men move out of, and back into, a single marriage, as well as, will likely transition into and out of a series of marriages over their life course. This reality is in contrast to, especially women's, expectations. Women have romantic, monogamous, and partner oriented hopes for their life course. They describe their expectations in terms of hopes but most acknowledge that these hopes are unrealistic. Women draw from ideas, which they perceive as new, they look to modern global discourses about women's autonomy and romance in the framing of their

expectations surrounding what it means to be a woman and married. Women have increasing opportunities for small businesses and income generating activities in public spheres. But within marriage they are confronted with increasing constraints because husbands are simultaneously unable to provide for them and some times have rigid and strict expectations of them. This complicates their ideals and necessitates their need to work. Men present an entirely different set of relationship expectations and concerns. They draw upon recent global discourse about the practice of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim man. At the same time men's ability to provide for a family in the ways that their wives expect is increasingly difficult in the village today. Most young men do not expect their first marriage to endure and they have no intention of staying married to the same woman for their entire lives. In fact, they look forward to exercising their rights, which they describe as being acceptable, and encouraged, by Islam.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation leads us to re-engage with two concepts that continue to occupy the discipline of Anthropology.

First, it is well established that Islam is not monolithic. This research directly contributes to the literature on Islam in Africa. It does so by not only engaging with Islam as a “discursive tradition;” where the individual voices and experiences as well as local understandings and history matters, but the connections to a historical past and global discourse are vital.

Second, new scholarship on marriage in Africa highlights the fluidity of relationships and marriage. Grounded in a gendered analysis/approach, this research

pushes studies of marriage in Africa to consider the expectations and experiences of both men and women, young and old. Not only are relationships in contemporary Africa characterized by greater fluidity but also by gendered, and widely divergent, expectations.

GLOSSARY OF KISWAHILI TERMS

<i>Alhamdulillah</i>	Praise to Allah
<i>Allah</i>	Islamic God
<i>Alniachwa</i>	He left me
<i>Amependeza</i>	She is beautiful
<i>Baba harusi</i>	Father of the wedding
<i>Baba kubwa</i>	Father's brother
<i>Bahati mbaya</i>	It was bad luck
<i>Barabarani</i>	The main road
<i>Biashara</i>	Business
<i>Bibi ya Baba</i>	Father's mother
<i>Binamu</i>	Cousin
<i>Buibui</i>	Black, formal, robe and headdress/veil
<i>Chai</i>	Tea
<i>Chapatti</i>	Flat bread
<i>Chipsi</i>	Fried potatoes, similar to french fries
<i>Dada</i>	Sister
<i>Dhow</i>	Swahili sailboat
<i>Duka</i>	Shop
<i>Edda or Idda</i>	Women's seclusion practices

<i>Fundii wa seramala</i>	Expert of carpentry
<i>Funga ndoa</i>	Closed their marriage
<i>Harimu</i>	Forbidden
<i>Hijab</i>	Special black head scarves worn by Muslim women, mostly for special occasions but also by women who consider themselves more devout or whose husbands consider themselves more devout and require their wives to wear the hijab
<i>Hoteli</i>	Small restaurant
<i>Hului or khului</i>	An agreed upon payment a woman can make to her husband if she wants to initiate a divorce
<i>Hutuba</i>	Islamic contract ceremony
<i>Insha'Allah</i>	God willing
<i>Juisi</i>	Juice
<i>Kabila</i>	Ethnic group, tribe
<i>Kahawa</i>	Coffee
<i>Kaka</i>	Brother
<i>Kamua tu, mwenyewe</i>	He forced it himself
<i>Kanga</i>	Colorful cloth with proverb
<i>Khadis</i>	Religious experts, judges
<i>Kharamu</i>	Forbidden
<i>Kijijini</i>	Village
<i>Kinara</i>	Maulidi celebration structure
<i>kiSwahili</i>	Swahili Language
<i>Kuacha</i>	To leave
<i>Kuandika pesa</i>	To write for money and involves a man asking his wife for money for a divorce without her requesting it

<i>Kuandika</i>	To write
<i>Kfuga ukuti</i>	To bring out her beauty
<i>Kungwi</i>	Female marriage sponsor
<i>Kuo</i>	Men marry women
<i>Kuolewa</i>	Women are married by men
<i>Kupa mkono</i>	To give the hand
<i>Kusoma ndoa</i>	To read the marriage
<i>Kutamka</i>	To pronounce verbally
<i>Madrassa</i>	Koranic School
<i>Mahari</i>	Marriage payment
<i>Malipo</i>	Wages
<i>Mama Mdogo</i>	Little/Younger Mama
<i>Mama Mkubwa</i>	Big/Older Mama
<i>Mandazi</i>	Donuts
<i>Maulidi</i>	Islamic celebration
<i>Mchumba</i>	Fiancé
<i>Mgeni</i>	Guest
<i>Mila</i>	Local custom
<i>Mkristo</i>	Christian
<i>mSwahili</i>	Swahili person
<i>Mtu mzima</i>	Adult
<i>Muhogo</i>	Cassavah

<i>Mwalimu</i>	Koranic school teachers
<i>Mwari</i>	Virgin
<i>Mwenyekiti</i>	Village chairman
<i>Mzee</i>	Old man
<i>Mzungu</i>	White person, foreigner
<i>Pilau</i>	Spiced rice dish with beef
<i>Porini</i>	The bush
<i>Ramadhan</i>	Islamic holy month, fasting
<i>Risk imeisha</i>	Luck it was taken
<i>Salam Alaikum</i>	Peace be upon you
<i>Shamba</i>	Farm
<i>Shangazi</i>	Father's sister
<i>Sharia, Sheria, Shari'a, Sheri'a</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shemeji</i>	Sister in-law
<i>Talaka</i>	Divorce
<i>Tuliachwana</i>	We have left each other
<i>Tuligombana</i>	We fought
<i>Ubwawa</i>	Coconut rice
<i>Ugali</i>	Cornmeal porridge
<i>Uposo</i>	Marriage proposal
<i>Wake tofauti tofauti</i>	Different wives

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