COSMOPOLITANISMS IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS

Perspectives from the Past

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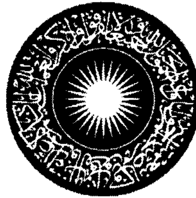

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58. *Missionsblaetter* 52 (1948), pp. 158–62; interview with Issa Juma Nangalapa, Rwangwa-Dodoma, 13 October 2003.
59. *Missionsblaetter* 34 (1930), p. 274; 39 (1935), p. 137.
60. *Missionsblaetter* 45 (1950), p. 140; Jimbo la Lindi la Kanisa Katoliki, ofisi kuu Lindi, takwimu za parokia za jimbo (statistics of Lindi diociese, Lindi head office, selected years from 1950).
61. This term is taken from Steven Feierman, who states that in pre-colonial Shambaa ritual, "Knowledge was not collective; it was socially composed". See Steven Feierman, "On Socially Composed Knowledge: Reconstructing a Shambaa Royal Ritual", in James Giblin and Gregory Maddox (eds), *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp. 14–32, here p. 15. The point that social struggles took the form of arguments over the interpretation of commonly held norms is also made by Jonathon Glassman with regard to the coastal towns.

Chapter 3

Interrogating "Cosmopolitanism" in an Indian Ocean Setting: Thinking Through Mombasa on the Swahili Coast

Kai Kresse

Preliminary Remarks

"Any conception of 'cosmopolitan society' ... ought to reflect the historical struggles on which it builds".[1] This conviction, that Edward Simpson and I formulated when discussing a string of research projects on Islam and cosmopolitanism in the western Indian Ocean, might provide a guideline for this discussion of representative historical narratives of Mombasa, an ancient port town on the East African Swahili coast. As early as 1505, when the Portuguese first conquered and destroyed it, Mombasa was a city with about 10,000 inhabitants and multi-storey stone buildings; it was at the centre of Indian Ocean trade networks exchanging gold and cloth between Sofala and Cambay, and also an important port for ivory and lumber trade. The population consisted largely of Africans, had a notable minority of Indian (Gujarati) traders, and was ruled by "Moors" of Arab and African complexion.[2] My aim here is to interrogate the historical underpinnings of the town's seemingly obvious cosmopolitan character. The historical sketches I use are necessarily selective, and the point here is to think through some of Mombasa's urban features and the historical processes behind them in order to think critically about "cosmopolitanism" more generally. Readers should note that Ibn Battuta's brief descriptions of fourteenth-century Mombasa,[3] Portuguese accounts of the city,[4] historical dictionaries on Swahili language use,[5] and biographies of urban residents all provide further entry points for discussion, beyond the scope of this chapter. But let us first turn to some general considerations.

To my mind, cosmopolitanism is not an exclusively urban phenomenon. Even though in pronounced urban contexts we are more likely to encounter cosmopolitan attitudes and ways of living – reflecting an open, receptive and

well-informed perspective on a world that seems interconnected – this does not mean that people in less urban contexts could not become cosmopolitan. This is documented, for example, for rural Anatolia from the late nineteenth century,[6] or for contemporary northern Pakistan;[7] in littoral contexts, this also applies to coastal southern Tanzania,[8] and for the historically developed Hadrami networks spanning the Indian Ocean.[9] Also, urban experience does not necessarily lead to a cosmopolitan attitude. Georg Simmel's foundational essay in urban sociology, on the "metropolis and mental life",[10] helps to illustrate this. There, Simmel shows how individuals confronted with the constant presence of others develop protective mechanisms in their psychology and social behaviour. These shield them from an over-stimulus of pressures, demands and signs that might otherwise harm their mental balance. Such a fundamental ambivalence, leading to social distance and estrangement among citizens, is often seen as a characteristic experience of Western urbanity and modernity. Living among strangers, without the comfort and orientation that comes with being a member of a social community, individuals develop habits to avoid social interaction and set themselves apart from others – though in fact they are yearning for company. So if the "metropolitan" context does not include a "cosmopolitan" sense of being but offers potential for as well as resistance against "cosmopolitanism", there is little basis for assuming that the social world of human experience becomes more "cosmopolitan" by default or historical progress(ion).

The realisation of cosmopolitanism as a social and intellectual project remains a challenge to people in different contexts and regions around the world. This links us back to Immanuel Kant, who was a major inspiration for Simmel and a leading advocate of cosmopolitanism himself. For Kant, cosmopolitanism, as the vision of a common society of all human beings, is a given task emerging out of the fundamentally ambivalent nature of being human. As Kant put it, human beings taken collectively are "unable to do without peaceful conviviality while at the same time they cannot avoid disliking and despising each other".[11] These internal tensions between needs, feelings and obligations lead to the idea of a global unity that is constantly threatened from within. The possibility of its realisation then seems linked to the successful use of strategies of "adaptivity" as the means by which to alter and adjust oneself to changing circumstances of social interaction and possible confrontation. For Kant, humans are truly awkward social beings who are driven by an unsettling "unsociable sociability" (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). From this perspective, the need to be sociable creates a drive to further exposure to more human beings, an increase of social contacts. Once established, these lead to more tensions and antagonisms, and finally a renewed need to re-adjust society from within. Thus we see a kind of progressive circular movement at work, pushed forward by the discrepancy between a moral vision of cosmopolitanism (as a unifying force) and the empirical human diversity. For

society, this means we should expect a continuous process of shifting phases of social approximation, opposition and re-ordering – a picture of ongoing struggles and ever-changing alliances within which individuals find their own pathways.

Interestingly, an ethnography of cosmopolitanism in Jamaica[12] uses Kant and Simmel to retell "modernity" in terms of local experience, bringing into view a largely negative side (or under-belly) of the common Western narrative through the historical experiences of displacement, slavery and colonialism, and their eventual overcoming. These experiences have shaped the larger social sphere of interconnectedness within which Jamaicans now interact. Local consciousness of historical woes and social ties to the wider world underpins distinct performative ways in which this experience is creatively expressed and negotiated in everyday life, for example in music, verbal art, ritual, religion and politics. Wardle's ethnography shows how Jamaicans have cultivated emphatic and locally peculiar senses of individuality, apocalypse and egalitarianism, and he argues that this represents a more pronounced case of cosmopolitanism than the prototypical "Western" one, for better or for worse.

As we are concerned here with the historical dynamics that constitute cosmopolitanism on the Swahili coast, some of these comparative features may play a role, such as forms of colonial experience and slavery, religion, and different social groups and hierarchies interacting and shifting in their relationships. Recent research in Indian Ocean contexts has claimed that cosmopolitanism may coexist in parallel with "parochialism",[13] or with a "resolute localism" of groups whose diasporic networks are organised around a "homeland". The label "local cosmopolitans" for these people[14] indicates no contradiction, just like "cosmopolitan patriots" for others.[15] These aspects however will not play a major role in the discussion here, nor will the programmatic aspects of "Islamic cosmopolitanism".[16] What I suggest, in the concluding conceptual reflections below, is that undergoing a certain set of social experiences under particular historical conditions may bring people to cultivate specific ways of dealing with their social world, navigating it more skilfully. In conclusion, I reflect on the relevance of what I have come to see as three interrelated sub-aspects of cosmopolitanism (that we may encounter in Muslim contexts as well as elsewhere). These are – and casting them in German provides better conceptual clarity and visible consistency here, with a view to how the world is perceived, experienced and navigated – *Weltoffenheit*, openness to the world; *Welterfahrung*, significant experience of the world; and finally, *Weltgewandtheit*, the skill of dealing flexibly with the world.

MOMBASA AND THE SWAHILI COAST: "COSMOPOLITAN"?

Mombasa and the port towns of the Swahili coast belong to the kind of social urban environments that invite the adjective "cosmopolitan" – an outlook of openness to others and the world as a whole, building upon experiences and connections that go well beyond the established realms of family, community or nation. Over a millennium of coastal social history including the presence of Islam and trade networks that connect the urban port settlements to places across the western Indian Ocean attest to this. So too does a long established lingua franca that has facilitated communication between groups and individuals of widely different backgrounds. This is Kiswahili, an African language which has integrated a large amount of vocabulary from a variety of linguistically unrelated languages (most prominently Arabic) through long periods of social contact. Finally, interactive connections to relatives and social and religious peers all over the world, whether new or long established, are all factors that play an important role. Thus the Indian Ocean networks established and facilitated through trade, religion, kinship and language are regarded as the pillars on which such assumptions of cosmopolitanism can be built. Indeed, the social and historical features typical of the towns on the Swahili coast – in terms of architecture, the variety of languages heard and the kinds of people seen in the streets – may call for the qualification "cosmopolitan" provides more emphatically than many other places, and we can find the label readily employed in the literature.[17]

Yet we have to take care that the use of "cosmopolitanism" does not become superficial or meaningless, nor should it be imposed by the social scientist with a particular heuristic intention or research goal in mind. To represent social dynamics appropriately, the analytic terms used for reflection upon the historical or ethnographic material should emerge from social experience. In this respect, a focus on Swahili urban communities may suggest the use of "cosmopolitanism", as multiple and extended connections to the world outside obviously shape the inside of their social world. This is well documented in the literature, and below I will recount historical processes of urban reconstruction in which outsiders become members of the social community. As strangers become insiders, insiders may well become cosmopolitans. Indeed, they may become likely to see themselves, and act toward others, with a view to a variety of possibilities and options, including previously foreign perspectives that have been integrated into their own social world. This could be called an attitude of "having a wider world in mind" – which is generally what I would describe as "cosmopolitan". The aspect of having options is significant here, since we are concerned with a social world that envelops or incorporates others, or at least important aspects of them. Such a plurality for the Swahili context has been emphasised by a

range of scholars, also with a view to Islam and Muslim identity.[18] Loimeier and Seesemann[19] relate this plurality to an emphatically "global" outlook of Muslims in the region, through networks of education, pilgrimage and trade. Using the expression "the global worlds of the Swahili" (in itself not unproblematic in presenting "the Swahili" as a unitary group), they highlight a "cosmopolitan outlook" for this region. Without such a connotation, the term "global world" – coined by Claude Markovits in his historical study of Hindu merchant networks from Sindh to emphasise their all-pervasive presence and effective global networks[20] – would seem tautological or redundant.

Here, I want to convey how such an enduring impression of cosmopolitanism in the region has led to Mombasa being shaped by historical processes of outsider integration, in both real and potential terms. Looking at these, I discuss the fundamentally related matters of unity and diversity, in relation to simple and more complex conceptions of "cosmopolitanism". Hereby, notions of fundamental social "ambivalence" and "adaptivity" internal to the described urban context will become crucial. My reflections seek to take on the social and cultural specifics of the case of Mombasa but also to contribute to more general reflections on cosmopolitanism. I sketch out how a process of "integrating difference" shapes the profile and outlook of an urban community that, with a view to its sustained yet ever-changing internal diversity, can be described as a "community of strangers".[21] Through phases of common historical experience on the same social platform – rather than through a glossed-over "shared history" – groups and individuals create and sustain a heightened awareness of internal tensions and ambivalence, in Mombasa and elsewhere. Based on the knowledge of difference, then, this also encompasses the sense of an ever-widening potential of unity – a possible wider world to live in, so to speak. Still, the vision of such a potential draws from the experience of coping with disunity: "If it makes sense to speak generally of 'Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism', it is in this sense of social contestation based on a struggle with history that is not so much shared as held in common".[22] This also resonates with Kwame Anthony Appiah's reflections on cosmopolitanism as an approach to the way that human beings, while living in a "world of strangers" under heightened conditions of globalisation, need to engage and interact with each other.[23]

Introducing Mombasa

With well over half a million inhabitants, Mombasa is Kenya's second largest city. Having East Africa's biggest modern port terminal, it is the most important regional entry point for international trade goods. It has a long and chequered history under changing rulers and colonial administrators – the Portuguese, the Omani Arabs, the British – attracting merchants, traders, labourers and

sailors from along the shores of East Africa as well as across the Indian Ocean, integrating newcomers and sheltering refugees. In each case social connections between Mombasa and the wider world were fostered by these processes. The movements of people back and forth, in and out of the city, shaped different historical layers of social networks that were more or less fragile and became more or less rooted with every wave of immigrants and emigrants that were coming to and leaving the town in intervals that were determined by economic cycles, wars or political expansions.

To illustrate the inherent connectedness of local experience in everyday life in Mombasa today, to a diversity of places across the Indian Ocean, let me turn to the street where I lived during a year's fieldwork in the late 1990s. I stayed in the Old Town, in the neighbourhood of Kibokoni, near Fort Jesus, built by the Portuguese in 1593. The people living around me came from a variety of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Most families residing in the neighbourhood had been there for a couple of generations. My flat, rented from a Bohra landlady, was on the first floor of a house, above an Ethiopian restaurant. Next to me, a flat of the same size was occupied by a young Swahili bachelor (and later also his wife). Underneath him was the practice of a medical doctor of South Asian descent. Across the street, a Hadhrami-Arab in his sixties ran a repair shop for electric appliances together with his son, sub-specialising in second-hand fridges. His wife was of part-Arab, part-Indonesian background with most of her family based in Bahrain. Next door to them was a Hindu-Indian ironmonger's shop on the one side, and a couple of private houses on the other. Then came a barbershop run by a Baluchi, completing the string of ground floor shops. On the corner, there was a small bakery run by Somalis. Opposite it, on my side of the road, was a newly opened Swahili restaurant offering popular local dishes for affordable prices, well frequented by the Old Town community.

The shops on the ground floor on the other side of the road included: a small convenience store run by Somalis; a pan-leaf shop where a middle-aged Hindu man with a fancy rockabilly haircut was in charge; a simple gym or fitness studio for men offering weights, boxing and karate classes, from which male voices emanated; a laundry; several more convenience stores; and finally, another Swahili restaurant further down. The street itself was also creatively turned into business space, with Mijikenda women from the coastal hinterlands using the pavements as vending spaces for fruit and, on two other spots on the pavement, a couple of male tailors (one Mijikenda and one from upcountry) with pedal-driven Singer machines were strategically placed; a few more small open food and grocery stalls completed the picture. This was rounded off by a small mosque with some concrete benches in front of it. Around afternoon and evening prayers, groups of men would socialise here in *barazas*, exchanging

their views on local events or discussing the daily news of the world. At home, many had satellite TV and followed global news closely, on CNN, the BBC or Al-Jazeera, in addition to the national channels. For many, the interest in what was going on in other parts of the world had very personal dimensions, as they had relatives and friends living abroad. Indeed, many of my Kibokoni friends and acquaintances had siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles living in North America, Europe or one of the wealthy Gulf States. People in Mombasa, in my experience, were often not only well informed about the world, but also well connected to its economic and political regions of power, through kin and social peers. Also, many of those based in Mombasa at the time had already had long and significant travelling and working experiences abroad.

This scene may well evoke a sense of docile intermingling of diverse people, and of a vivid sociability on the streets of Old Town Mombasa. It may also convey an active interest in the wider world in relation to one's own (by following global news and politics). And it mirrors a sense of inherent connectivity to other regions, from the coastal hinterlands almost in sight to faraway places in upcountry Kenya, on other Indian Ocean littorals and elsewhere. Indeed, without reference to these, urban life here cannot really be understood. This illustrates the need for a translocal research perspective, one that anticipates and includes the many possible ways in which a spatial as well as historical "beyond" (the "trans-") informs and shapes social action and interaction.[24] In Mombasa – as elsewhere around the world – appearances on the surface of social life already refer to such a beyond and thus bring attention to how the town and the wider world are invariably interconnected. From the perspective of social actors, such interconnectivity links us to the theme of "cosmopolitanism" as a conscious sense of being fundamentally connected to, and embedded within, a wider social universe beyond the actual sphere of one's own immediate experiences. Thinking, acting and behaving "with the wider world in mind", so to speak, constitutes a cosmopolitan attitude for individuals.

Still, the presence of social diversity in a place underpinned by historical layers of comings and goings is not sufficient to qualify "cosmopolitanism" completely. While it is clear that Mombasa and other Swahili port towns in different historical phases cannot be understood without a view to their connectedness to the Indian Ocean and the wider outside world, it does not follow that an all-embracing and unifying "Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism" can easily be assumed due to the presence of social elsewheres in the local here and now. This would be a "lazy" use of cosmopolitanism[25] that does not aim to grasp the complex social reality and the historical processes leading to it.

HISTORY OF MOMBASA: INTEGRATING OUTSIDERS

I will now recount a historical sketch of Mombasa's urban social dynamics based on two seminal accounts of the history of Mombasa.[26] Over different periods and on different levels, the city's structural demographic process can be described as "integrating outsiders". Elsewhere I have discussed how the label "Swahili" was used as a variable relational term for a range of people in different historical phases, and how a "Swahili context" emerged out of the negotiation vis-à-vis others, such as "African" and "Arab" – but also "Indian".[27]

With a focus on the Mijikenda hinterland peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Justin Willis introduces a characterisation of the ethnonym "Swahili" as people "*of whatever origin*, whose personal networks of patronage or clientage were located within the towns, participating in a patronage system based ultimately on access to the credit networks of the Indian Ocean",[28] and functioning largely under the mantle of Islam. This usefully incorporates both patrons and clients, which is provocative since it makes the urban patricians (*waungwana*) and their dependants, servants and slaves (*watumwa*) fall into the same general category, as citizens. Wealthy urban traders sought further dependants, since people (in terms of labour) were the ultimate source of status and power.[29] Newcomers became Muslims and were integrated into the respective trade and subsistence systems while accepting dependency status.[30] There were, however, many levels of dependency, and through success in trade, reward by patron or marriage, upward social mobility was possible. In exceptional cases, people could transform their status from dependant to patrician, from *mtumwa* to *mwungwana*.

According to Frederick Berg,[31] paradigmatic processes of the integration of related outsiders into the city are clearly documented from the seventeenth century onward, when a particular socio-political structure of the Swahili urban community of Mombasa developed, the so-called "Twelve Tribes" (*Thenashara Taifa*). The "Twelve Tribe" structure of Mombasa developed out of political instability in the neighbouring hinterland regions, causing groups of refugees and migrants to move to Mombasa for shelter and security. An urban core structure of four *taifa* evolved on Mombasa Island, around which five incoming *taifa* from urban environments on the northern coast were grouped, forming the Nine Tribes (*Tisa Taifa*). In complementary movements from the south and west of Mombasa, three *taifa* merged forces on the island by the 1630s, to form the so-called Three Tribes (*Thelatha Taifa*) in their own settlement in the southwest of Mombasa Island. This spatial division marked the long-ongoing rivalry between these two urban moieties. Still, altogether Berg described Mombasa as "an exceptionally successful example of a pre-colonial Swahili city state" because of its readiness to adopt "foreign" Swahili into the urban community.[32]

As urban subgroups that originated from elsewhere and later became recognised as authentic insiders, the Twelve Tribes mark historical processes of integration. These could only take place because of a common (or unifying) religion, language and trade interests. The town thus functioned as both centre and guarantor of political power and social interaction.

So far, I have emphasised how the integration of outsiders was crucial to the formation of Mombasa's urban community, involving aspects of demographic social diversity that created a wider social unity. Nevertheless, despite such integrative features and appearances, the established public ideology of Swahili urban society seemed to be strongly hierarchical and exclusive. Thereby, the sphere of civilisation, *uungwana*, inside the town is juxtaposed to *ushenzi*, the wilderness, outside of it. Characteristics of *uungwana* also include politeness and good manners, with a refined vocabulary and elaborate ways of talking. Being Muslim is part of this conception too and, ideally, being wealthy (through trade). As most of these features are performance-related and can be acquired and developed through practice, there is no categorical division line between citizens, despite the hierarchical character of urban ideology.

Mombasa's urban subdivisions and rivalries of the colonial period were also reflected in dance societies, such as the *beni* for men[33] and the *lelemama* for women.[34] These organisations served as vehicles for the integration of outsiders into urban society, while at the same time they pronounced existent rivalries between groups, mostly associated with town quarters, *mitaa*. As such, they were part of an intermediary Swahili continuum, which was open-ended at the bottom. Somewhat paradoxically, it allowed access to a society characterised by its internal inequality while it was, in principle, open to everyone. While inside this urban continuum everything depended on the negotiation of status, no one was excluded from the outset. Still, the ideology of hierarchy and status in actual social discourse was an important means to conserve the existent hierarchical structure of society. This may be why dependency in terms of serfdom or slavery (*utumwa*), structurally a kind of funnel through which outsiders were integrated into urban society, was ideologically cast as a concrete layer of distinct status. The ambivalence of *utumwa* expresses the inherent tension between open integration and strict subjection to social hierarchy. In practice, both aspects worked and were employed in different ways at the same time. *Utumwa*, a dependency system linked to urban and Indian Ocean trade networks, sustained the patrician class (*waungwana*) through a wide scope of services by labourers and dependants (*watumwa*), but it also posed a potential danger to it from within. Such ambivalence and interdependence has historically been at the core of social relationships in Swahili urban contexts.

Through this historical sketch, we have seen integration processes making incoming migrants members of the inner urban community. Their integration

also increased the scope of social experiences from which Mombasa could draw in the future. The *mitaa* and *taifa* represent a wider political unity, which, however, could never be without tension. Rather, internal differences and antagonisms were part of the unity that was gained, highlighting the ambivalence of urban cosmopolitanism and the processes producing it. Systems and relationships of dependency could also be employed as access points and channels into the urban community, bearing the possibility of transforming one's personal status. Thus the urban scenario, boosted by the multiplicity of sources, resources and experiences underpinning the community, broadened the citizens' outlook on the world. Yet a restrictive and exclusivist urban ideology remained strong, and its proclaimed antagonisms and hierarchies continued to be important reference points.

South Asians in Mombasa

Another example demonstrating Mombasa's cosmopolitan potential is that of the South Asian communities. Here I deal with the Badala, Sunni Muslims from Cutch[35] who, as a historical group of sailors and shipbuilders, are reported to have integrated well into the Swahili urban community – in contrast to most other South Asians.[36] I base my account on Cynthia Salvadori[37] who worked closely with members of the communities and provides personal narratives and life histories of Cutchi and Gujarati immigrant families from the mid and late nineteenth century.

Trade connections between the West Indian and East African coasts have existed for many centuries, and a major boost in economic interest for Cutch merchants and traders in East Africa was triggered by Sultan Said's move from Oman to Zanzibar in 1837. This included political and economic control of most of the Swahili ports and opened up many opportunities for traders, suppliers and middlemen, so that the scale of economic activity and the number of people engaged in it reached a whole new dimension. Indian businessmen became the financiers not only of the Sultan's house but also increasingly of Arab and European traders. This continued throughout the British colonial period (beginning in 1895). Indian merchants financed major economic investments, including trade and transport infrastructure; for Mombasa, this meant especially the modern port and the East African railway line. Over time, a remarkable diversity of South Asian residents, with a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, social status and religious affiliations was developing.[38] Among the Muslims, three groups of Shias with origins in Gujarat were especially prominent: the Ismailis, the Shia Ithnasharis and the Daudi Bohras. Other significant groups included former railway workers (mostly Punjabis) who stayed on after completing their contracts. There were also merchants, traders and shop owners of Muslim and Hindu backgrounds, and a number of caste groups who found or

created opportunities matching their professions. According to the accounts, incoming Indian migrants had a good sense about the services needed, and were quick to adapt and contribute, finding their own niche. Often male immigrants would come for a trial period before returning to India (or Zanzibar, or Lamu) to bring their spouses and families back with them. The occupations of Indian groups were very diverse: ironmongers, goldsmiths, launderers (as *dhobis*) and dairy farmers, among others. But probably most prominent and historically significant were the merchants and traders who invested in, and partly organised and conducted, the trade with African interior markets as well as the trade with economic centres and markets across the Indian Ocean, particularly Bombay.[39]

The Badala: Indian Muslims becoming "Swahili"?

The Badala, as sailors, seafarers and ship builders from Cutch-Mandvi, have had important, long-standing relations with Mombasa. As seasonal visitors, incoming citizens ("marrying in"), part-time residents and labour force, they have featured in the urban demography for centuries. They were not typical of the South Asian immigrants of the nineteenth century, as they were neither "newcomers" nor "businessmen" who took advantage of the extended opportunities. Salvadori highlights as characteristic for the Cutchi Sunnis (which include the Badalas) that they associated freely with their Swahili neighbours, conversed in good Kiswahili and blended into the urban community – very unlike many other South Asians. Having come in as "strangers", they dissipated into and became part of the Swahili social fabric that underlies urban relations.[40] Indeed, due to their readiness to adapt one can argue that they are the true cosmopolitans out of a diverse range of South Asians in Mombasa. This resonates with observations about Badala–Swahili relations by others[41] and, in hindsight, also with my own.

For instance, I worked with two prominent local Swahili intellectuals who were brothers: a poet and healer, and an Islamic scholar and former politician and publisher. Their paternal grandfather was a Badala captain (*nahodha*) called Juma Bhalo from Cutch who married and (partly) settled in Mombasa in the nineteenth century. Both are among the best-known "Swahili" intellectuals, in terms of knowledge, verbal capacity, habitus and mannerisms. On many different occasions during the months of my fieldwork, I would see them with South Asians who were, as I found out, their direct relatives. A close cousin of theirs is also known by the name "Juma Bhalo" all along the coast as a famous singer of the popular Swahili *taarab* music, which itself has absorbed prominent features of various Arabic and Indian traditions. In fact, the *taarab* known as the prototypical popular "Swahili" music is actually called "Indian *taarab*" among musical experts in Mombasa.[42] Most interestingly, such Swahili music, drawing

heavily from influences across the ocean, can be qualified in parallel to the way that the singer Juma Bhalo is characterised, as "in some way part Indian" yet at the same time also as "iconically Swahili".[43] Thus on a different level yet along the lines of our discussion above, the Swahili world is again characterised as integrating related perspectives, thereby widening its own scope of experience and potential in a manner that can aptly be described as "cosmopolitan".

It is hard to imagine a better illustration of the absorption into the wider Swahili community. Under the common mantle of Sunni Islam and under conditions of cohabiting in the neighbourhoods (*mitaa*) of Mombasa's urban space, close interrelations increased and the sense of community developed accordingly. Within the scope of everyday social interaction, intermarriage and common participation in religious rituals occurred, as well as in artistic forms of cultural creativity (like music). All this contributed to a merging (but not complete blending) of groups under the "Swahili" umbrella. There is no lack of evidence that urban "Swahili contexts" have absorbed people from various other groups over the centuries in similar fashion. Notable examples from "Arab contexts" include the Hadhramis and Omanis; from "African contexts" they include the Mijikenda and incoming labourers from upcountry.[44] For these cases too, Islam is a basic common denominator on which social integration is founded. We can observe an integration into the Swahili–Sunni–Shafii networks and practices, whether on a common historical basis, as in the case of the Hadhramis, from a very early stage, or through the blurring of differences between Ibadhi and Shafii orientation in the processes of becoming Shafii as in the case of many Omanis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or through conversion to Islam in the first place as was the case with some Mijikenda groups and upcountry Africans. Beyond religion, the ability to communicate fluently in Kiswahili also unites these groups of incoming social agents.

Interestingly, the Badalas and other South Asian Sunnis hardly feature in the research literature on the Swahili coast, while work on the other groups has been more prominent. Perhaps this is because their ability to blend into their Swahili environment has kept them outside the focus of most research conducted so far. In comparison, other South Asian communities are seen to be rather inward-looking and exclusive, keeping to and marrying among themselves. Largely, this applies to the Muslim Shii Ithnasharis, Ismailis or Bohras, but also the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Jains – somewhat reflecting the central relevance of caste and social hierarchy in Indian society back across the ocean. Consisting then, of a string of distinct social and religious groups linked (partly) by shared geographic origin and language, South Asians have overall been seen largely as outsiders in East Africa, despite the longevity of their presence. In Kiswahili this status is captured nicely by the term *wageni*, which means both "foreigners" and "guests".[45]

Individual Efforts Against Communal Parochialism: An Example

As an extraordinary example among Mombasa's South Asians, I now discuss the case of a prominent Hindu educationalist, social reformer and political activist known as "P. D. Master", following the accounts of his children as given by Salvadori.[46] He was engaged against norms and restrictions that were imposed upon Hindus from within the community, and also against racial bias in colonial politics. His example sheds light on the ongoing power of traditionalism, as well as liberating activities against it, by committed individuals. P. D. Master was born in 1899 in rural Gujarat under the name Purushottandas Dhanjibhai, into the Patel community. His journey to Mombasa began when, aged sixteen, he ran away from home and school to seek a better education in metropolitan Bombay. He enlisted in a school and supported himself as a shoe-shiner. There, he was spotted and then employed by a British army officer, first as a valet during the First World War and later as a private teacher for his children. They called him "Master" as a term of respect, adding this to the abbreviation of his first name ("P. D."), which their father used to call him, and this became the name by which he was known. P. D. Master accompanied this family to a farm near Jinja in Uganda. Then he left them, heading for Mombasa where he became the clerk and administrator for A. B. Patel, an Indian advocate and well-known political activist. He became involved in campaigns for civil rights and mass education, and helped to build local welfare organisations like the Mombasa Women's Association and the Kenya Theosophical Society. A recognised citizen of Mombasa, well beyond South Asian circles, he was elected to raise the Indian flag during the independence celebrations in Mombasa.

His critical engagement with colonial Kenya is illustrated in a political pamphlet ("Master 1923"), in which he spoke out against colonial racism against Indians and protested against the ruling of the so-called "white highlands". This had determined that only ethnically "white" people of European origin were allowed to own property in the fertile highland region around Nairobi or live in certain designated urban areas (also in Mombasa), excluding even wealthy Indians who were colonial subjects and had ample financial means. His booklet, like other Indian notes of protest, exposed and rejected a basic racist attitude, not just among the white settlers but also by the London-based colonial administration. This, the South Asians felt strongly, actually went against both the spirit and the letter of the established rules and conventions of the common (and equal) status as "British subject" in a global empire.

In his own community too, P. D. Master was critical and non-conformist, wearing a long beard (against common conventions) as a sign of his "ecumenical" leanings and mediating efforts between different religious and social groups. As it happened, he seemed to push his liberal views too far when he challenged the

traditionalist Hindu prohibition to (re-)marry a widow as unjustifiable. After the death of his first wife, P. D. Master decided to look for a Hindu widow as his next spouse. He travelled to India and publicised his intentions there, despite strong objections from the community and his own parents, who even threatened to shun and disown him. He proceeded, and found a much younger "child widow" whose parents agreed to marriage. They married and settled in Mombasa where they eventually had six children. Yet Mombasa's Hindu Patel community would not accept this rebellion and turned against him, despite all his previous achievements. Community leaders decided to shun him and his family from community rituals and social interaction.

In retrospect, one of P. D. Master's children called her father's activities of social reform "a clash of Global Outlook versus Narrow Views".[47] Her father had lived according to his moral convictions that were based on a long educational pathway. He rebelled against the rules governing his own community and paid the price. We may call this a case of individual cosmopolitan conviction struggling against the strong and ultimately prevailing currents of traditionalism and parochialism. This account shows that the emergence of more open-minded perspectives and practices by individuals does not easily lead to wider social agreement and unity. There is no such rule of "progress" in place, toward a more rational or sensitive social world. Similarly, the integration of outsiders into an urban community does not resolve the issue of internal conflict, whether between or inside groups.

Conclusion

The Dutch anthropologist A. H. J. Prins[48] provides some suggestive ideas about the Swahili context as part of a "maritime culture" in general. These are useful to consider when thinking about cosmopolitanism in Mombasa as they also help us reflect upon the integration of the Badalas into their Swahili urban environment in terms other than Islam, highlighting sea-related cultural and occupational dimensions in littoral societies with a view to urban dynamics. According to Prins, a "maritime culture" is characterised by a specific coastal urban context, placed in a wider network of related port towns. It has a range of social contacts and reference points to social "elsewhere" in the (far or near) distance who are also largely oriented towards the ocean.[49] As the basis of a "maritime ethos", underlying a corresponding sense of being or attitude to the world by people, Prins sees "adaptivity" to ever-changing circumstances within a scenario of urban "ambivalence" and opposition as an analytic key to the understanding of social behaviour. He links this to a certain flexibility, forbearance and tolerance of the people towards co-citizens, neighbours and kin. He mentions relatively open marriage rules and frequent changes in group affiliations, and he also points at

openness toward strangers, who he says "have always been accepted into society on an equal footing, provided they embraced Islam".[50] Prins also refers explicitly to the historical example of Mombasa and its "Nine Tribes" who are presented as "original" groups of the town although they were clearly constituted by fugitive groups seeking shelter in Mombasa, as mentioned above.

Prins develops a conceptual emphasis on "adaptivity", including openness, tolerance and the integration of strangers as social features of Swahili ports, in response to "ambivalence" as basic social experience. This does not mean that intolerance, prejudice, ethnocentrism and unease towards "outsiders" did not occur – the ethnographic and historical literature attest to these as well. Yet the overarching model of social relations provided pathways, loopholes and justifications to declare someone in whom one had an interest an "insider"– and thus to increase one's number of affiliates, associates and dependants within the given framework. Even though distinct and exclusive ideologies of urban social hierarchy existed – emphasising difference rather than unity – social practice in the Swahili context historically tended to facilitate the integration of outsiders, or at least maintain it as a possibility. From here, we could argue that "maritime cosmopolitanism" is characterised by the following: the creation of a wider urban unity, through the multiple connectivities that a specific maritime context facilitates, leading to a wider perspective upon the world at large. This also includes the potential of a larger arsenal of experiences, and of responses to social problems that can be drawn from – which again could not be had without the kind and scope of connectivity that "maritimity" provides.

This would lead us to think about cosmopolitanism along the lines of a "resource" (that can be drawn from) and a set of acquired and developed "skills" (that can be employed). If cosmopolitanism could be seen as a kind of resource, this would mean it was a pool of knowledge, ideas and related practices, drawing from experience and a longer period of exposure to the presence of, and interaction with, knowledge, ideas and practices from elsewhere. In social settings like Mombasa, which build on the historical underpinning of the integration of "other worlds" into the common social experience, something like a "widening of horizons" of experience and of knowledge and perspective happens, and this can then be used as a resource to address and tackle challenges posed to the community. In this way, conscious reference to and active use of skills is made – skills originating from a wider world than the immediate social context. Through such reference and use being made, the scope of the actual social world itself is broadened, becoming more of a "global world". But this does not mean that internal differences are thereby eradicated, diminished or appeased for good (even if this were attempted). The renewed and intensified eruption of social tensions and antagonisms always remains within the scope of possibilities, and part of the challenge.

Overall, the processes of "integrating outsiders", seen here as central to the discussion of Mombasa, happen through mediatory channels within which the incoming outsiders are already anticipated or identified as a (remote) part of the social world. This is not a process of integrating a (pronounced) "other" or turning aliens into equals. Rather, the social funnels and channels through which outsiders are integrated could draw from an expanded yet blurred field of "potential dependants" and "potential partners". Due to a certain quantum of previous contact, however limited or indirect, these are not aliens but "related strangers" who, while outsiders, are already somewhat familiarised (at least partly) with the community they have come to join – comparable perhaps to distant relatives.

For the conception of cosmopolitanism in Mombasa, we could perhaps say that in terms of social dynamics urban society here seems always "ready", on the lookout, for newcomers. It has cast a net toward the outside world, half invitation, half bait, to attract potential contributors from within a kind of cultural corridor that is "facing both ways",[51] looking seawards and towards the hinterland. This corridor is marked by a sphere of influence made up of the towns and individual merchants or traders, as well as by political, military or religious bodies that create (and hold together) networks of partners, members, dependants and followers. Thus we could speak of a historical process of "being in touch" with an urban network that precedes and gradually turns into one of becoming integrated or linked into. From an internal perspective we could speak of a consciousness and anticipation (even if loose or vague) about a wider social world beyond the one that is immediately visible and to be experienced. In this sense, then, urbanites on the Swahili coast (and in many places elsewhere) are "living with a wider world in mind". If appropriate, this may be a suitable characterisation of cosmopolitanism more generally.

I have focused here on conveying a picture of the ways in which historical urban dynamics that underpin and envelop the social action of individuals were themselves shaped and transformed, in relation to and in interaction with the (nearer and wider) world outside the town. Here it seemed important that the divisions between town and related hinterlands (or other towns) were not drawn clearly, so that interaction with, and integration of, outsiders could remain potential steps and stages of the same process of recruiting further citizens. Through this process, the standing, scope, outlook and sphere of influence of the town would be boosted while for individual actors (in different historical contexts and with changing needs) promises and rewards of security, prosperity and liberty could be sought and (sometimes) realised. At the junctions described here, we have seen that certain intersecting aspects matter particularly in marking or shaping cosmopolitanism. Due to an emphasis on the historical social processes here, an

initial openness toward the wider social world was particularly prominent in this discussion, in connection to the ways in which forms and cases of interaction between town and outside world work, creating a large pool of experience that can be drawn from as a resource for the future.

To my mind, these two, firstly an openness to the world (in German: *Weltoffenheit*), opening up and leading to secondly, a pool of experience of the world (*Welterfahrung*), characterise two out of three core instances of an overall conception of cosmopolitanism. The third and perhaps most relevant one is well summed up in the German word *Weltgewandtheit* – what in English we could call the "skill to navigate the world", based on one's previous knowledge and experience.[52] Literally, this means something like one's flexibility to move in the world and deal with it. If this is what really marks cosmopolitanism in instances of concrete and observable social action, this had to be neglected here as we were concerned mostly with the historical struggles and social contexts underpinning, framing and enveloping it. Having here explored and interrogated the kinds of *Weltoffenheit* and *Welterfahrung* that characterise cosmopolitanism in Mombasa, we could, in a next step, investigate *Weltgewandtheit* because we now know how it is framed. This would mean determining, documenting and discussing how the *skills* acquired within such a framework, based on particular sets of experiences, are employed and made to work in specific cases by individuals.[52] What I have tried to do here is to clarify the perspective on some of the internal features, instances and processes that mark Mombasa, in its setting on the Swahili coast, as "cosmopolitan".[53] As we have seen, Islam here was an important factor helping to link "town" and "outside world", and to act as the social glue that holds diverse citizens together – but it was by no means an exclusive determinant aspect.

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NOTES

1. Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 2.
2. Justus Strandes, *The Portuguese Period in East Africa* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1961), pp. 60–79. Pearson, 1998, pp. 45–50.
3. See, for example, Said Hamdun and Noel King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 2003).
4. See, for example Strandes, *Portuguese Period in East Africa.*
5. As used by Jeremy Presthold, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
6. Florian Riedler, "Public People: Temporary Labor Migrants in Nineteenth Century Istanbul', in Frank Eckhardt and Kathrin Wildner (eds), *Public Istanbul: Spaces and Spheres of the Urban* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2008), pp. 255–78.
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11. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (ed) (Otto Schoendoerfer Koenigsberg, 1800), p. 226.
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13. Edward Simpson, "Sailors that do not Sail: Hinduism, Anthropology and Parochialism in the Indian Ocean", in Helene Basu (ed.), *Journeys and Dwelling: Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008), pp. 90–120.
14. Ho, *Graves of Tarim.*
15. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan patriots", in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 91–116.
16. See Peter Mandaville, "Sufis and Salafis: The Transnational Discourse of Political Islam", in Robert Hefner (ed.), *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 302–25.
17. Most recently, Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (London: Hurst, 2010).
18. See, for example, David Parkin, "The Politics of Ritual Syncretism: Islam Among

the Non-Muslim Giriama of Kenya". *Africa*, XL, 3 (1970), pp. 217–33, David Parkin, "Being and Selfhood Among Intermediary Swahili", in Joan Maw and David Parkin (eds), *Swahili Language and Society* (Vienna: Afro-Pub, 1984), pp. 247–60, David Parkin, "Invocation: *Salaa, Dua, Sadaka* and the Question of Self-Determination", in David Parkin and Stephen Headley (eds), *Islamic Prayers Across the Indian Ocean: Inside and Outside the Mosque* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 137–68, Susan Beckerleg, "Medical Pluralism and Islam in Swahili Communities in Kenya", *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 8, 3 (1994), pp. 299–314, Janet MacIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims: Embodied Hegemony and Moral Resistance in a Giriama Spirit Possession Complex", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10, 1 (2004), pp. 91–112, Janet MacIntosh, *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) and Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania.*

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20. Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
21. See Simpson and Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History*, p. 25.
22. Ibid., p. 14.
23. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
24. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Boston: Brill, 2010).
25. See Simpson and Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History*, p. 2.
26. Fred J. Berg, *Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate: The City and the Hinterlands in the 19th Century* (University of Wisconsin: PhD thesis, 1971) and Justin Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
27. Kai Kresse, *Philosophising in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam, and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 36–69.
28. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda*, p. 20.
29. Ibid., p. 8.
30. Ibid., pp. 54–5.
31. Berg, *Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate.*
32. Fred J. Berg "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500–1900", *Journal of African History*, IX, 1 (1968), p. 35.
33. Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970: The Beni Ngoma* (London: Heinemann, 1974).
34. Margaret A. Strobel, "From *Lelemama* to Lobbying: Women's Associations in Mombasa, Kenya", in Bethwell A. Ogot (ed.), *History and Social Change in East Africa. Hadith* 6 (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), pp. 207–35 and Margaret A. Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa, Kenya, 1890–1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
35. Edward Simpson, *Muslim Society and the Western Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of Kachchh* (London: Routledge, 2006).
36. It may be worthwhile to look more closely at what unites both groups by way of social background and religious orientation. In terms of the latter, among the

Swahili Shafii Muslims, many are associated with the (Hadrami) Alawiyya and the (Somali) Qadiriyya, while Salvadori highlights long-established Sufi traditions of the Badala to the Qadiriyya. See Cynthia Salvadori, *Through Open Doors: A View of Asian Cultures in Kenya* (rev. ed.) (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1989), p. 188.

37. Cynthia Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows* (Nairobi, 1996), vol. 1 and Salvadori, *Through Open Doors*.
38. Salvadori, *Through Open Doors*.
39. See also Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and Jeremy Presthold, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
40. Others, especially the Digo on the southern Kenyan and northern Tanzanian coast, have been Muslim for as long as they (and historical records) can remember.
41. For example, Andrew Eisenberg, *The Resonance of Place: Vocalizing Swahili Ethnicity in Mombasa, Kenya* (Columbia University: PhD thesis, 2009).
42. Eisenberg, *Resonance of Place*, p. 220.
43. Ibid.
44. See, for example, Ahmed I. Salim, "Early Arab-Swahili Political Protest in Colonial Kenya", in Bethwell A. Ogot (ed.), *Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), pp. 71–84, Hyder Kindy, *Life and Politics in Mombasa* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), Abdul H. M. el Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), David Parkin, *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual Among the Giriama of Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and McIntosh, *Edge of Islam*.
45. Still, the Ismailis have been engaged in many social and educational activities, funding schools, kindergartens, other educational projects and also hospitals, dispensaries and medical projects all over East Africa. Also, Shii Ithnashari activities of Islamic missionary work among African peoples have been successful over the last decades, thus breaking up the previous unity of descent and Ithnashari denomination.
46. Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 1, pp. 146–8.
47. Ibid., p. 147.
48. Adriaan H. J. Prins, *Sailing from Lamu: A Study of Maritime Culture in Islamic East Africa* (Assen: van Gorcum. 1965).
49. Ibid., pp. 263–75.
50. Ibid., p. 269.
51. David Parkin, "Being and Selfhood among Intermediary Swahili", pp. 247–60.
52. See Simpson and Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History*, p. 15.
53. I have recently sketched out some instances of this for the contemporary setting of coastal Muslims in Mombasa, albeit without explicit reference to "cosmopolitanism" (Kresse, 2009).