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'WHOEVER LEAVES THEIR TRADITIONS IS A SLAVE': CONTEMPORARY NOTIONS OF SERVITUDE IN AN EAST AFRICAN TOWN

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INTRODUCTION

Tukisema ukweli utwana wakati hunu wa kwetu … Twaweza kusema kwamba uko utwana.

To say the truth, slavery in our time … We can say that slavery exists.

A contemplative silence followed Hasan's[1] statement. We were sitting in one of Lamu's seafront cafés, sipping a cold juice while enjoying the view of the lagoon. It was late afternoon and the seafront was rather busy. Porters were unloading shipments that had arrived with the latest bus from Mombasa. Tourists wandered around, enjoying the view of the sunset while critically inspecting different cafés for an appealing evening meal. Two young men, sitting on one of the old cannons placed along the seashore, called out to a couple of young Western women who were gallivanting by, dressed in tank tops and short skirts. Encouraged by the girls' smiles, the guys quickly jumped up and approached their potential customers for a sailing trip through the lagoon, eventually joining them in the restaurant next door. Two veiled young women strolled by, their open-design *abayas* fluttering behind them due to the strong sea breeze, and thereby revealing the tight jeans both of them wore underneath the black garments. Hasan smiled as he observed the activities on the seafront and reflected upon how to clarify his statement.

As I watched the *mahamali* (porters) unload boats, carrying heavy bags of cement and blocks of limestone up the street, I had carefully enquired whether Lamu youth were still conscious of the town's slave history, and whether this past continued to shape social relations. To me, the porters' hard labour and their physical appearance – their faces covered with white dust from the cement and limestone, their clothing torn and dirty – had contrasted sharply with the appearance of the elder Swahili men, dressed in their impeccable white *kanzu* (a long garment), conversing on a nearby *baraza* (stone bench), and seemed to form a striking illustration of the social hierarchies that continued to shape life in the Swahili town.

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[1]Hasan is a pseudonym.

My previous enquiries about Lamu's history of slavery, however, had been met with avoidance, from Hasan as well as from other informants. They generally framed their reluctance to answer my questions in terms of the negative portrayals of Lamu in previous ethnographic studies as well as the unnecessary recollection of a history that supposedly was no longer relevant today.[2] Whereas nobody denied the town's historical involvement with slavery, the explicitly voiced consensus appeared to be that slave descent or ownership was no longer a significant factor in Lamu's social fabric.[3]

To my surprise, Hasan had now been quick to respond to my enquiry. His answer, however, was not quite what I had expected. His acknowledgement of the existence of 'modern-day slavery' did not refer to the porters I had observed and who had prompted my question, but rather to Lamu youth. To Hasan, the idea of enslavement was invoked not by observing a particular kind of labour, but by the respectability or *heshima* displayed in an individual's comportment. Following a reflective silence, he pointed to the young Muslim women who had now paused in front of one of the many *baraza* located along the seafront to readjust their *hijabs*, revealing their hair in the process.

Hasan: Kuna msemo ambao kwamba husema *mwata mila ni mtumwa. Mwata mila ni?*

SH: Ni mtumwa.

Hasan: Ni mtumwa. Sawa siyo? Kwa hivyo, huko upande wa kwetu naweza kusema utumwa pia uko. Kwa sababu gani? Kwa sababu watu wengi wameata mila yao. Kwa mfano, nguo ambazo kwamba mabinti zetu wanazovaa siyo nguo ambazo kwamba wakati wa nyuma walikuwa wazee wetu walikuwa wakivaa. Saa hii wamekuwa wasichana wetu wameata mila yao ya kuvaa nguo vizuri kama inavyotakikana. Jambo kama hili waweza kusema mtu ni mtumwa kwa sababu ameata mila yake. Umeona, siyo?[4]

Hasan: There is a proverb that says *whoever leaves their mila* (traditions) *is a slave.* Whoever leaves their *mila* is?

SH: Is a slave.

Hasan: Is a slave. Right? Thus, here in our context, I can say that slavery is also here. Why? Because many people have left their *mila*. For example, the clothes our sisters wear, these are not the clothes that our elders used to wear. Now our girls have left their tradition of wearing proper clothes in a respectful way. In this case, you can say that the person is a slave because she has left her *mila*. You understand, right?

[2]Nowadays, many residents of Lamu tend to be reluctant to participate in ethnographic interviews, especially when more controversial topics such as the history of slavery are to be discussed. The explanation, provided by many of those who refuse (and by others who were asked why people were hesitant to participate), was phrased in terms of negative experiences in the past, whereby researchers had exposed family secrets or had discussed historical facts differently from what people from Lamu had anticipated.

[3]I am not suggesting that an awareness of individuals' actual family lineage and thus of their possible historical status as slaves has become insignificant within Lamu and the shaping of social relations within the town. In this article, I am merely suggesting that the lasting impact of a history of slavery extends beyond this awareness of ancestry to the implicit ideologies that shape assessments of conduct and ascriptions of social status.

[4]Hasan speaks the Swahili dialect from Lamu, KiAmu, and his contributions are transcribed verbatim rather than using standard Swahili.

While notions of heavy labour, low wages and social inequality had informed my enquiry about life in a post-slavery society, Hasan's recognition of *utumwa*[5] ('slavery') in contemporary Lamu was not driven by a shared understanding of possible exploitative labour relations within the town and the social stigma that I had assumed would be attached to such employment. Hasan's conceptualization of contemporary *utumwa* was informed by moral values of *heshima* or respectability and thus by assessments of individuals' moral states based on outward appearances – on their willingness to present and dress themselves in particular ways. According to Hasan, it was not the porters but the young women who were modern-day *watumwa* (slaves) – not because of their employment, genealogy or phenotypical traits, but rather due to their visible abandonment of local, respectful and traditional practices in favour of Western habits and the lack of *heshima* such behaviour implied. It was precisely this publicly displayed admiration and mimicking of others' consumer habits, and the assumed moral servitude that accompanied this adoration, that motivated Hasan's proverbial depiction of the women as *watumwa*.

This article examines contemporary discourses on and conceptions of *utumwa* on the Indian Ocean island of Lamu. It discusses how residents of this Swahili town use historical understandings of servitude as moral rather than mere physical subjugation to assess and formulate judgements on current processes of change. Central to the discussion are ideologies of *heshima* or respectability that historically shaped social stratification in Lamu, and particularly the enduring views that an embodiment of *heshima* and its visible mediation within material practices facilitate distinctions between *waungwana* (noblemen), *watumwa* (slaves) and *washenzi* (barbarians). By examining how these norms are currently incorporated within everyday assessments of young people's public behaviour, this article considers Lamu's status as a post-slavery society. More than an awareness of an individual's family lineage and their historical status, the moral ideologies that shaped social structure during the era of slavery dictate assessments and ascriptions of social standing within contemporary Lamu.

Young women frequently form the focal point of discussions on moral decline within the Lamu community (as Hasan's statement illustrates), and the first section of the article outlines why their public appearances and the material practices they display encourage their (proverbial) likening to *watumwa*. This moral condemnation of young women based on their outward appearances might lead us to assume a gendered notion of contemporary conceptualizations of 'slavery' in Lamu. Indeed, there seem to be parallels between statements such as Hasan's

[5]In this article, I use *utumwa* and *utwana* as synonyms, both referring to local conceptions of 'slavery' or servitude. Similarly, the nominal derivatives *mtumwa* (plural: *watumwa*) and *mtwana* (plural: *watwana*) are used as synonyms, both referring to 'slaves' within the local context. Previous historical discussions of slavery along the East African coast suggest that *mtwana* was used to refer to a 'male slave' whereas *mtumwa* referred to a 'slave' in a broader sense (and thus encompassed *mtwana*) (see, for example, Eastman 1994; Lodhi 1973). One of my informants similarly explained that *mtwana* could be used to refer to a strong man (or male slave). Interestingly, my informant also suggested that *mtwana* was used to refer to a man who lives with a woman without marrying her. Such a man used to be referred to as *mtwanake* or *mtwana* instead of *mwanaume wake* (her husband). While people in Lamu are still vaguely aware of these distinctions, they tend to use the terms *mtumwa* and *mtwana* interchangeably when talking about slavery.

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and ongoing debates within Western contexts on women's (moral) oppression or freedom as it is reflected in their modes of dress. By demonstrating that both young men and women are subject to allegations of subjugation, this article argues that Lamu residents' discourses on the moral enslavement of young women are not formulated in response to such debates, but rather ought to be understood within the town's context as a post-slavery society. Moreover, I argue that young men's moral obligation to provide for their extended family places them in a particularly vulnerable position for moral condemnation, especially in the current precarious economy.

To effectively illustrate this argument, the ethnographic focus of the article is on Lamu's 'beach boys' – local young men who informally provide services to tourists by, for example, taking them sailing through the lagoon on traditional sailing boats or dhows. Specifically, the paper contends that ideological notions of *utumwa* are recurrently, though often implicitly, applied to this particular social group. While their contributions to the tourism industry make them important to the economic survival of Lamu, these young men and their economic activities are often depicted as a blemish on the society. The article explores the moral stakes that underpin this local insistence on framing these 'dhow operators' – as they prefer to be called – as merely 'beach boys', as idle non-adults whose contributions to the economy of the town can be discursively written off as lacking value. Specifically, my analysis demonstrates that the ideologies of *utumwa* and the moral values that accompany it motivate and facilitate the discursive constructions of beach boys' work as 'idleness' rather than gainful employment. Notions of *heshima* – and thus moral value – therefore trump economic value in representations of labour in this context.

I begin with an overview of Lamu's history as a slavery-based society and a discussion of the meanings of *utumwa* along the Swahili coast. I pay particular attention to how concepts such as *uungwana* and *heshima* shaped social stratification during and immediately following the era of slavery. I then analyse discourses of social change within contemporary Lamu and demonstrate the centrality of the supposed loss of *heshima* in residents' evaluations of the behaviours of Lamu youth. I discuss how material practices – ways of dressing – are considered indicative of the individual's internal moral state, and how this permits some Lamu residents to compare youth and *watumwa*, much as Hasan did in the opening vignette. While young women frequently form the focus of these evaluative discourses, I maintain that Lamu's beach boys are also particularly vulnerable to such ideologies. I argue that an explanation for the social sidelining of beach boys cannot rely solely on an assumed condemnation of sex tourism, as academic discussions on beach boys in other geographical areas appear to suggest. Rather, I propose that the disapproval and social dismissal of Lamu's dhow operators can be fully understood only by considering the different ways in which this group of youth is subjected to moral ideologies informed by the town's history of *utumwa*.

SITUATING THE DISCUSSION: SLAVERY AND HIERARCHY IN LAMU

While a historical discussion of East African slavery is not the focus of this paper, a brief overview of this history is necessary to understand how discourses about *utumwa* are grafted onto contemporary moral assessments of particular social groups' characters. Lamu town, located on an island of the same name situated

off the coast of Kenya, is a former centre of trade and Islamic scholarship now experiencing economic and political marginalization. The port city's golden age commenced towards the end of the seventeenth century and lasted for approximately 150 years. During that time, Lamu was the dominant port on the East African coast and formed a gateway for the export of ivory, tortoiseshells, animal hides, ambergris and other precious commodities to Arabia and Europe, and across the Indian Ocean (Horton and Middleton 2000). During this period of prosperity, Lamu's wealthier inhabitants (and slave owners) were traders of Omani and Yemeni descent who had settled in the town since its inception as early as the thirteenth century and who controlled the town's social and political structure (Beckwith *et al*. 2009; Romero 1997; Ylvisaker 1979).

The role of the Lamu archipelago in the Indian Ocean slave trade, as well as the importance of slavery during the archipelago's golden age, has been much debated (see, for example, Eastman 1988; 1994; el Zein 1974; Pouwels 1987; 1991; Romero 1983; 1986; Vernet 2009; 2013). The emphasis of these studies has generally been on East African slavery as a variant of clientship. In contrast to the Atlantic slave trade, these clients, while considered *washenzi* or 'barbarians' of non-Swahili origin, were not considered private property (Eastman 1988; Glassman 1991; 2011; Pouwels 1987; 1991).[6]

More recent research, however, has concentrated on East Africa's involvement in the Indian Ocean slave trade prior to the eighteenth century and describes the successful trade networks between Pate,[7] north-western Madagascar, the Comoros and the Hadramawt. Vernet (2009; 2013) suggests that the Lamu archipelago dominated the Swahili slave trade from Madagascar and the Comoros in the seventeenth century, and that city states such as Pate had been the main ports for slave traders since the end of the preceding century, with an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 slaves being exported annually to the island of Pate (Vernet 2009). He does emphasize, however, that slaves in the Swahili and Comorian communities were not labouring under harsh conditions in plantation slavery, but rather were used in a range of positions, including as servants, concubines, sailors, agricultural labourers and even craftsmen (Vernet 2013: 2). Like Cooper (1979; 1980), Vernet underlines the fact that Swahili city states' clientship relations with mainland communities provided such labour and that servile labour was therefore not in great demand (Vernet 2013: 2). It was only when the plantation economy expanded in the nineteenth century, in response to an increasing international demand for oil, grain and spices, that 'planters – immigrants from Arabia and Swahili-speaking, Muslim Africans from the coast itself – bought slaves, built plantations, and intensified the exploitation of labor' (Cooper 1980: 3).

[6] *Watumwa* were mainly from indigenous African population groups, some of whom came from Tanzania (el Zein 1974) as well as local groups such as the Boni, the Orma and Mijikenda from coastal villages. Because slaves were generally brought from the hinterland or coastal villages on the African continent (rather than the islands that formed part of the archipelago), they were considered 'African' as opposed to the merchants who were their masters and who claimed Arab ancestry. These differences in genealogy were claimed to be reflected in phenotypical appearances.

[7] Pate, one of the islands of the Lamu archipelago, was a successful sultanate and port city that dominated trade along the Swahili coast during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (but had started to bloom as early as the fourteenth century). It was a major rival of Lamu, by which it was eventually defeated in the late nineteenth century (see, for example, Pouwels 1991).

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Understanding the historical context of slavery in Swahili communities is important in order to comprehend the socially situated meanings of *utumwa* as well as the ideologies that shaped master–slave relations. Western conceptions of 'slavery' are dominated by an image of the slave as exploited, ill-treated and confined to the bottom of the social ladder (Pouwels 1987: 50; see also Cooper 1979). In towns such as Lamu, however, *watumwa* either resided in their owners' houses, fulfilling a range of tasks, or worked on the *shamba* (farms) of wealthy merchants and often had a small plot of their own where they cultivated crops. These *watumwa* formed an important part of Lamu society and close relationships were common between the master and, especially, 'house slaves'. *Watumwa*, for example, were companions and conspirators who enabled upper-class women to remain in touch with family and friends through messages and gifts, who exchanged news about possible marriage partners, and on whom women depended to leave the house (Romero 1986). The term '*mtumwa*' therefore denoted 'many different categories of subordinate, including personal dependents who would not fulfil most common definitions of "slave"' (Glassman 1991: 289, footnote 31).[8]

What shaped the relationship between the upper-class merchants and their 'slaves' was therefore not a notion of absolute property. In fact, Lamu's social structure was shaped by an ideological distinction between those who were believed to possess the characteristics either of *uungwana* (which translates as 'civilization' or 'decency') or of *ushenzi* ('barbarianism'), and by the ideologies surrounding how this distinction transpired in material and religious practices, employment and racial traits.

Ushenzi stands for barbarity or savagery and *washenzi* translates as 'savages' or 'stupid, ignorant ones'. The notion not only suggests ignorance and ill manners but also a lack of religious education (see also Bromber 2006). *Washenzi* generally referred to non-Muslim mainland residents and (non-Muslim) newcomers to the island, the latter occupying the bottom of the social ladder (Pouwels 1987). The non-Muslim culture of the interior was therefore considered the antithesis of the embodiment of *uungwana* (Glassman 2004: 736).

Belonging to the *uungwana* social class entailed being wise and urban, displaying 'purity, honour, trustworthiness, and courtesy, as well as knowledge of the world that comes only from belief in God' (Middleton 2004: 4). So while social standing derived in part from wealth and genealogy, it also was an ascriptive status to which all could aspire; it is the latter quality that is described as *uungwana*:

> a mungwana was a person who dressed in a certain way, ate certain foods, earned his livelihood in certain ways, attended to his prayers assiduously, lived in certain types of houses, behaved in certain ways in public, and above all, spoke the vernacular Swahili well. (Pouwels 1987: 73)

[8]Eastman (1994) and Lodhi (1973) discuss how *watumwa*'s positions and responsibilities, and their diverse relations to their masters, resulted in a wide vocabulary used to refer to these different *watumwa.* For example, distinctions were made between *watumwa wa nyumbani* (house or domestic slaves) and *watumwa wa shamba* (plantation or agricultural slaves), but also between *mzalia* (born slave), *mjinga* (unskilled slave), *mateka* (prisoner of war), *mtoro* (runaway slave), *mjakazi* (woman slave) and *mtwana* (male slave) (Lodhi 1973: 7).

Although this terminology of being upper class shifted from an emphasis on *uungwana* to *ustaarabu* in line with the changes in social and political power in the nineteenth century, with Omani Arabs being privileged over local coastal elites, the essence of these concepts remained pretty much the same (McMahon 2006: 200). While *ustaarabu* is often translated as 'Arabness', the ideological reading continued to centre on overall respectful conduct: 'being Muslim, educated, and a good member of the community' (*ibid*.).

While Frederick Cooper (1977) considered the distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi* or *watumwa* insurmountable, Jonathon Glassman argues that the line between 'free' and 'slave' was fundamental only in the minds of the dominant members of society (Glassman 1991: 285). Eastman (1994) similarly suggests that, while a distinction between *uungwana* and *ushenzi* has shaped life on the East African coast for centuries, the concept of *utumwa* mediated the opposition between the civilized and uncivilized over time (Eastman 1994: 87).

Slaves, indeed, tried to straddle this boundary in different ways and with different means, and the distinction between *waungwana* and *washenzi* was much more of an ambiguous continuum than is sometimes presumed. *Watumwa* often endeavoured to integrate themselves into society as respectful (and later as free) individuals by mimicking their masters' respectability and its normative mediation in material practices. Glassman, however, argues that in challenging their ascribed social positions through the appropriation of their patrons' practices, *watumwa* simultaneously endeavoured to be recognized as 'personal clients who shared with their patrons a devotion to Islam, commerce, and the other values of urban life', and thus, in fact, they retained an adherence to a variant of the hegemonic ideology (Glassman 1991: 292).

Heshima *and Lamu's social stratification*

The concepts discussed above intimately link assessments of *utumwa* with notions of refinement and its opposite. These, in other words, are highly moralized appraisals. The morality in question in Lamu's historical discourse around *utumwa* is indeed quite distinct from the ethics that we see in contemporary Western discourses about the immorality of slave owners and slave traders. More importantly, these moral evaluations were deeply embedded in considerations of self-comportment, while notions of respect meaningfully shaped these unequal social relationships.

Respectable behaviour, which is considered essential to being recognized as a nobleman or *muungwana*, can be summarized in the concept of *heshima*, an all-encompassing term describing a Swahili moral code (Iliffe 2005; Kresse 2009; McMahon 2006; Saleh 2004). *Heshima* can be loosely defined as 'having dignity and honour'; it means displaying an awareness of how to properly extend courtesy and esteem to others and thus includes a conception of appropriate social interaction (McMahon 2006). Although *heshima* was viewed as a critical component of having *uungwana* or being *ustaarabu*, and thus was associated with the coastal elite, McMahon emphasizes that lower classes and *watumwa* also worked hard to obtain *heshima*: 'a person's *heshima* showed their standing in the community, how fully they articulated the ideals of Islamic culture and society. People could be poor and not particularly well-educated, but if they maintained their *heshima* they still had a level of respect' (McMahon 2006: 200).

Important for our current discussion is that *heshima* was also linked to understandings of leisure and labour. Because wealth partly determined social status, a nobleman's ability not to engage in labour also imparted *heshima*. This respectability, however, did not derive merely from not working, and an important distinction existed between 'leisure' and 'laziness' (McMahon 2006: 208). Laura Fair, for example, describes how in Zanzibar Town men's leisure time spent on the *baraza* socializing and disseminating news was 'an essential element of community membership' (Fair 1997: 236). In contrast to laziness, leisure could then be defined as 'both non-obligated activities … and activities that involve fulfilling social obligations, such as membership of an association or visiting relatives' (Martin 1995: 7; quoted in McMahon 2006: 208). While noblemen demonstrated their *heshima* by not working, someone who was considered lazy would therefore have less *heshima* than a hard-working person (McMahon 2006: 208).

As a complex of words, gestures, postures and material practices charged with social meaning, indicative of one's position on the local social ladder, *heshima* was not viewed as something stable or inherent; rather, it could be acquired, lost and negotiated. Particularly after the abolition of slavery, former *watumwa* would endeavour to exhibit respectability and honour by mirroring the material practices of their former masters, and the communal recognition of such displays could result in a shift from *ushenzi* (barbarianism) to *ustaarabu* (civilization). In other words, a self-cultivation as respectful, civilized, religious and urban facilitated former *watumwa*'s incorporation into a post-slavery social structure. Laura Fair (2001), for example, discusses how the appropriation of particular consumer habits (clothing and recreational activities, for instance) allowed freed slaves to become valued members of post-emancipation Zanzibar.

Lamu residents' focus on *heshima* and its loss in contemporary discourses of social change refers not only to an actual loss of respect among youth; it also speaks to shifts in an (ideological) social structure in which the *waungwana* are at risk of becoming *watumwa* – or worse, *washenzi* – by forsaking their norms and values in favour of an adherence to non-local, non-Islamic and often Western practices (and thus habits of those who were historically considered to be *washenzi*). *Heshima* can be considered a 'multiplex sign' (Briggs 1988): an ideological notion that not merely refers to but indexically calls upon a whole social system – an entire social order associated with the past (Hill 1998: 266). Talking about a loss of *heshima* in contemporary Lamu not only indicates, for example, impolite language use among the town's younger generation; it also calls upon complex sets of social roles, material practices and socio-political perspectives. The concept of *heshima* and the different evaluative discourses through which it is mediated functioned, and continue to function, as an ideology that justifies and structures the social hierarchy.

Heshima *in everyday practices*

Mwata mila ni mtumwa. Whoever leaves their traditions is a slave. While Hasan was the first to use the proverb to describe to me his sentiments about the changes he observed in contemporary Lamu, the saying would feature in many of my subsequent interviews and discussions with Lamu residents, old and young. To many, the proverb appeared to adequately depict the disturbing moral state of Lamu residents, and of Lamu youth in particular. At the heart of

these worries was a concern about the lack of or disregard for *heshima* in daily interactions, the most evident example of which was the willingness of Lamu youth to forego local norms of respectful dress and adopt others' consumer habits. As in the past, Lamu residents consider clothing, public appearance and interactional practices to reflect the internal moral state of an individual and thus his or her subjection to the values these habits are believed to represent.

In their wilful appropriation of Western practices, Lamu youth are thus seen to resemble former *watumwa* who were similarly eager to adopt the consumer habits of their patrons, thereby facilitating their own (be it partial) ideological domination. The comparison Hasan made – between the Muslim girls on the seafront and *watumwa* – was not based exclusively on assumptions about the young women's supposed slave ancestry or on an observation of their phenotypical traits, as other debates on the lasting impact of slavery in contemporary post-slavery societies might assume (see, for example, Cooper 1977; Eastman 1994; Miers and Kopytoff 1977). Rather, the material practices of these young women – their open-style *abayas*, their tight jeans, their revealing of their hair, their uninhibited interactions, and their presence on the seafront – motivated his evaluation of them as contemporary *watumwa* because this behaviour appeared to signal their ideological hailing to outside, Western influences and their foregoing of local, Islamic behavioural norms. To Hasan, the young women resembled *watumwa* precisely through this seeming obliviousness to or disregard of *heshima*.

As suggested in the introduction, Hasan's comparison is an interesting one and, indeed, appears to draw parallels with ongoing debates in Western contexts, where an individual's freedom or enslavement is believed to translate into their modes of dress and the (lack of) choice these are believed to imply. One is reminded of the classic cartoon image of a woman in a burka and a woman in a bikini, each one pitying the other for being subjugated to patriarchal norms. Enslavement discourses are frequently presented and proliferated by Westerners referring to women who wear the *hijab*. One might read Hasan's use of the proverb to condemn the outward appearance of the girls as an effort to utilize the very language of the 'opposition' (so to speak), turning it back upon itself. My argument here, however, is that Hasan is not necessarily recalling that discourse, but rather is drawing on a lineage of historical, local and highly situated meanings of *utumwa*.

The proverb Hasan calls upon derives its meaning precisely from the historical context (discussed above) in which former *watumwa* straddled a boundary between *ushenzi* and *uungwana* (Eastman 1994). In their attempt to gradually integrate themselves in post-slavery societies as free individuals, former slaves appropriated those material and linguistic practices that were believed to represent *heshima* (Fair 1998; 2001). Yet it was in this abandoning of their habitual practices and traditions that their status as *watumwa* lay; in their desire to mimic the habits and standards of their former masters they displayed their slave descent and thus failed to escape their stigmatized status (Glassman 1991). In contemporary Lamu, young people's increasing appropriation of Western practices in exchange for those modes of behaviour that historically embodied *heshima* motivates residents to (proverbially) liken them to *watumwa*. The embracing of the conduct of others appears to suggest an acknowledgement of the desirability of their social and economic position and, most importantly, of their moral values. Moreover, young people's obliviousness to or ignoring of local notions of respectful and civilized behaviour also resembles the habits of *washenzi*. Like *watumwa* in the past,

these youth are viewed as mediating an opposition between *uungwana* as the ideal Swahili condition and *ushenzi* as the non-Islamic, foreign barbarian.

Young women appear to be at the heart of the anxiety surrounding the perceived obsoleteness of, or indifference to, *heshima* (see also Inoue 2004; 2006). In the not so distant past, a man's honour was mainly based on his publicly observable respectful conduct, whereas a woman's *heshima* rested on her ability to avoid the public eye. In contemporary Lamu, girls and women form part of public life: they attend school, work in public offices, and go shopping at different times of day. While indicative of development, women's presence in public space is simultaneously viewed as a transgression (see also Hillewaert 2016). Thus, in addition to the diagrammatic iconicity of adopting practices of another group (Westerners), young women could also be framed as slave-like based on the presumed resemblance between their conduct and that of slaves.

BEACH BOYS AS MODERN-DAY SLAVES

Hasan's proverbial condemnation of the young girls' conduct was equally applicable to another group of youth present on the seafront that afternoon, although he had not explicitly pointed them out. The 'beach boys' who had been hanging around the old cannons and who had called out to the female tourists were the focus of similar social judgements throughout my fieldwork. Wearing short pants,[9] T-shirts with the image of Bob Marley, and tricoloured Rastafarian bracelets and necklaces, the young men sporting dreadlocks contrasted sharply with other men on the seafront – both with elders who habitually wore the Islamic *kanzu* and with young men such as Hasan who generally wore long pants or a *kikoi* and a *kofia*. More so than the young women wearing jeans, these young men's outward appearance reflected an adherence to Western influences and an ignoring of local expectations of respectful conduct. And while, in contrast to the girls, their physical presence on Lamu's seafront did not in itself cross the boundaries of *heshima*, the way in which they sat around was evaluated as an unproductive kind of idleness that contrasted with the leisurely conversing of the Swahili elders on their *baraza*, and was viewed as lacking respectability.

Although seemingly less subjected to explicit moralizing discourses, beach boys are a heavily stigmatized group within the Lamu community. Whereas young women are singled out as examples of impending moral decline, the young men 'working' on Lamu's seafront are often considered the epitome of the negative outcomes of Western influence, and, indeed, the ultimate embodiment of the proverbial slaves in Hasan's statement. Whereas the young men themselves view their outward appearance and constant presence on the seafront as instruments in their attempts to appeal to Western tourists and thus strategic tools in their commercial endeavours, other community members consider the beach boys' practices to be directly indicative of an altered internal moral state. By discursively linking the young men's consumer habits and idleness to their desire to socialize (rather

[9]In Islam, it is believed that Muslim men ought to cover their bodies from their navel down to their knees, under normal circumstances. Wearing clothing that shows a man's thighs (such as shorter shorts) is thus considered improper.

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than work) with Western tourists, and the lack of *heshima* both of these are believed to entail, many Lamu residents relegate beach boys to the category of modern-day *watumwa*. At the same time, of course, these dhow operators' justification of their self-fashioning is similarly crafted in moral terms, for in the gendered economy of labour in Lamu, it is viewed as a moral imperative for men to be gainfully employed. And in the current economic context, the tourism industry is often the most lucrative for young men who otherwise struggle to find a job.

In what follows, I focus on assessments of the morality of beach boys and how these valuations cannot be fully understood outside the historical and ideological framework of *utumwa*. It is not merely the abandonment of respectful material practices but also the notions of servitude and laziness that these young men's altered conduct is believed to imply that defy the embodiment of *heshima* that historically distinguished local *waungwana* from non-local *washenzi*, and that encourage Lamu residents to liken these young men to *watumwa*. But whereas *watumwa* in the past occupied a middle position as they strove (upwards) towards recognition as *waungwana*, today's beach boys are viewed as foregoing *heshima* in favour of a (downwards) striving for the practices of non-local *washenzi*. Beach boys' work is then depicted as 'labour that does not count' by using the historically significant moral distinctions between *waungwana* and *washenzi*, and the respectful leisure and disrespectful idleness in which these groups respectively are seen to engage. To better appreciate these arguments, I first elaborate on the role beach boys play in Lamu's contemporary economy and subsequently set them in the context of existing academic approaches to the phenomenon of beach boys in the global South.

BEACH BOYS AND THE GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

From its thirteenth-century inception, Lamu has attracted a wide range of traders and explorers and the town continues to attract visitors today, albeit for different reasons. Whereas its status as a centre for trade and Islamic scholarship once placed it at the heart of Indian Ocean networks, it is now Lamu's isolation and the combination of historical urbanity and simplicity of life that appeal to Western tourists. With alleys too narrow for two people to pass each other, Lamu has no motorized transportation – except for one car, an ambulance, and a few motorcycles. All other transport happens on foot, by donkey or by boat. While speedboats were introduced several years ago, local fishermen continue to rely on the traditional dhows, and these same boats offer popular tourist excursions. Dhows sailing across the ocean, women donning black veils, men wearing white *kanzus*, and the *muadhin* calling believers to prayer from one of Lamu's forty-two mosques – it all plays to the tourist's imagination of the exotic and the oriental (Hillewaert forthcoming).

The young man with dreadlocks, wearing a Bob Marley T-shirt and speaking English with a remarkable American accent merely forms an interesting, amusing curiosity in an otherwise authentic experience. Tourists used to tell me that this young man offers an approachable connection to the unfamiliar; he provides them with access to a distant and mysterious world. He will guide them through Lamu's labyrinth of backstreets, explain histories of dilapidated

buildings, and introduce them to veiled women. Using a traditional dhow, they will sail to deserted islands where their guide will prepare an authentic Swahili meal. At the same time, this young man will surprise them with cold beers, which are difficult to find in an Islamic town. He will guide them to hidden local bars and dance with them till dawn. And, for those who crave it, he can always find some marijuana. This accommodation of the tourists' desire for an authentic experience while understanding their need for the comfortable and recognizable makes beach boys an essential part of Lamu's tourism industry. As entrepreneurs, these young men are, in a way, instruments for transforming and – some might say – improving the society's economy. The beach boys' outer appearance – the growing of dreadlocks, wearing of Rastafarian colours, or the display of foreign flags – is then merely part of their semiotic toolkit. As these young men themselves argue, these are strategically used practices that form part of their sales pitch – techniques used to better appeal to foreign tourists.

Yet the broader community's disapproval lies exactly in this accommodation – in the young men's supposed ignoring of local norms of respectful conduct, their changing of daily practices, their alteration of appearances, and the adjustment of their behaviour to fit the desires of non-locals in order to please people who historically would have been viewed as *washenzi*. For the wider community – for previously upper-class members of society, but also for other Lamu youth and even for the beach boys' families – such a willing adaptation to non-locals' demands goes against ideologies that historically shaped Lamu's social equilibrium. To them, the beach boys' behaviour, rather than constituting an innovative and gainful form of employment, is one of unproductive idleness and shameless submission. Despite the important role these young men play as cultural brokers – providing a much desired and needed link between the Western tourists and the somewhat closed-off and conservative Lamu community – their daily occupations are written off as 'idleness' and a 'nuisance' that reflects negatively on the town's reputation. A recent public debate meaningfully illustrates this point.

On 16 April 2014, a member of Lamu's county council who is a resident of the island moved a motion to ban miniskirts, short shorts and dreadlocks in the town. 'Tourists come to behold our culture. If we dress up decently the way we do' – referring to the locally considered proper Islamic dress – 'why shouldn't they emulate us if they really are interested in our culture?' she said, explaining the motivations for the motion. The council member further argued that 'beach boys should equally respect the rules governing our culture'. In response to objections that the motion would damage the local tourism industry, upon which Lamu depends for 70 per cent of its income and in which beach boys play a central role, the council member and her supporters argued that culture ought to be upheld and respected by both visitors and locals (Kazungu 2014a; 2014b; Praxides 2014).

While the motion was not passed, mainly due to the opposing vote from non-local, Christian members of the council,[10] the debate on the so-called 'dreadlock ban' meaningfully speaks to the controversies and contradictions surrounding Lamu's dhow operators and the role they play in the town's economy. The motion and the support it received from within the Lamu community not only

[10]Lamu has an increasing number of Kikuyu residents on its county council, and together with political allies within the Lamu community, they heavily influence decisions made.

openly condemned the young men's outward appearances, they also placed their conduct on the same level as the behaviour of Westerners and the latter's disregard of Lamu's cultural and religious norms. Moreover, the motion dismissed the contributions dhow operators make to the economic survival of Lamu, and thus the framework of employment within which the young men's practices could be justified. Rather than being gainfully employed and contributing to the economic well-being of the community (in itself, one could argue, a moral good), these young men were considered to be idly waiting to entertain Western tourists. And their material practices were evaluated within this same framework of longing joblessness. As Hasan said: '*Mwata mila ni mtumwa*.' To Lamu residents such as the county council member, beach boys were a group of youth who placed pleasing others above their own norms and traditions, and in making such servitude their daily occupation these young men were perceived to embody the proverbial *mtumwa*.

My argument here differs somewhat from other academic discussions on the phenomenon of beach boys in the global South. Just as one might assume that the condemnation of young women ought to be viewed as a response to the headscarf debate in the West, so we might endeavour to understand the negative assessments of beach boys in relation to other globally circulating discourses. That is, one might presume that the Muslim community of Lamu deems beach boys to be morally problematic because of the notion of sex tourism, which is so frequently linked to this phenomenon – as other academic studies propose (see, for example, Eades 2009; Herold *et al*. 2001; Oppermann 1999; Ryan and Hall 2001). However, few of these studies have explored *community* perceptions of beach boys and their activities. Moreover, Lamu differs quite significantly from other localities where research has been conducted, such as Malindi or Mombasa in Kenya (Bergan 2011; Kibicho 2005b), or the Gambia in West Africa (Brown 1992; Nyanzi *et al*. 2005), all of which are known destinations for sex tourists. While it may be the case that Lamu residents who criticize beach boys' behaviour draw in part upon such broader circulating discourses, we cannot fully grasp the moral condemnation of these young men's occupation outside Lamu's historical context of *utumwa* and the moral values that shaped the society at the time.

Recent years have seen an increasing academic interest in the phenomenon of 'beach boys' worldwide – of young men found in the coastal resorts of the global South, ranging in age from the mid-teens to the mid-thirties, who live from the 'unofficial' services they provide to tourists from Europe and North America. While these activities can include tour guiding, selling souvenirs on commission or general companionship, the overall emphasis in scholarship and the media has been on the young men's sexual or romantic relationships with middle-aged white women in exchange for financial benefits (for example, Bergan 2011; Herold *et al*. 2001; Nyanzi *et al*. 2005; Taylor 2006; Williams 2013). Other activities, such as sailing trips, are generally dismissed as strategic moves, leading to the young men's eventual goal of a financially beneficial sexual relationship. Studies of these young men in the Caribbean, South Asia and West Africa either have focused on quantitative analyses of the phenomenon (for example, Oppermann 1999; Bauer 2014) or have tried to determine whether beach boys ought to be considered sex operators (Philips 2008), conmen (Nyanzi *et al*. 2005), or entrepreneurs (Brown 1992; Eades 2009), all the while

keeping the aspects of sex and financial benefit central to the discussion (for example, Kibicho 2005a; 2005b).

Generally, the assumption in this literature is that local communities' negative disposition towards beach boys arises from moral disapproval of the sexual–financial connection. While, of course, the semiotic markers these young men employ in their self-fashioning are targeted towards tourists and signal a global imaginary of male attractiveness, these markers of beach boy identity nonetheless intersect with diverse local moralities. Mining local responses to this seemingly global phenomenon reveals the tense space that these young men occupy in the interstices between 'labour that counts' and 'labour that does not count'.

BEACH BOYS IN LAMU SOCIETY

The scholarly depictions of beach boys in the global South discussed above only partially apply to the young men who work in Lamu's tourism industry. While Lamu beach boys might hope for a romantic connection with Western women, and although several of their friends have married tourists, the sexual–financial aspect does not form the main motivation for their interactions with tourists, nor is it necessarily the reason why members of the local community consider these young men a nuisance.[11] Rather, the combination of servitude and wilful alterations of locally valued, respectful conduct motivates many residents' negative assessments of these young men as a 'surplus population' and of their daily occupation as 'unemployment'.

Lamu residents express their negative opinions of beach boys in different ways, including through explicit criticism of their conduct in public discussions (as illustrated by the previously mentioned dreadlock ban) or indirectly by refusing these young men in marriage negotiations, considering them highly inappropriate spouses for their daughters. Very few families, however, wholly reject male members who commence work on the seafront, a tolerance that illustrates the ambiguous position beach boys occupy in contemporary Lamu. While looked down upon, they are often vital to the family's economic survival.

As Muslim youth, the majority of whom were born in Lamu town, beach boys are viewed as integral members of the Lamu community, distinct from non-local, non-Muslim *wageni* (such as Kikuyu immigrants from mainland Kenya or Western expatriates) and can thus never be fully considered *washenzi*. But, much like *watumwa* in the past, these young men are viewed as lacking in religious knowledge and propriety, something that is reflected in their public behaviour, which deviates from a strict adherence to an Islamic lifestyle. Those familiar with Lamu's social fabric might object, however, that the Bajuni background of many beach boys contributes to the fact that former patricians ostracize these

[11]The current economic context has changed this quite significantly, with tourism being at an all-time low due to the kidnapping of a French tourist on Manda Island in 2011 and because of the repeated deadly attacks by Al-Shabaab on nearby villages and buses on the Kenyan mainland in 2014 and 2015. While one still cannot speak of outright sex tourism on Lamu Island, more and more beach boys view marriage to a Western woman and moving abroad as the ultimate goal, and this is rapidly becoming the main reason for working as a beach boy.

young men. While the previously upper-class *waungwana* families in Lamu do indeed view immigrants from the surrounding Bajuni islands as Muslim *wageni*, this argument does not fully explain the broader community's disapproval of the young men's practices.[12] Firstly, some (although not many) of the beach boys belong to Lamu's former patrician families. And secondly, Bajunis themselves tend to negatively evaluate the practices of young men working along the seafront.[13]

Whether they have a Bajuni background or belong to Lamu's former upper classes, beach boys are similarly evaluated by their own families: as an unfortunate but increasingly necessary blemish on the household's reputation. I have yet to meet a family who encourages their son to become a beach boy or who applauds their cousin's decision to commence work on the seafront. However, the financial contributions these men are able to make to the household during tourist high season or when they move abroad are increasingly welcome in a community that suffers the consequences of economic sidelining. Families then tolerate beach boys, but this often comes with a set of unspoken rules. Many of these young men, for example, cover their dreadlocks with a bandana or *kofia* when walking through town. The majority of them also refrain from introducing their Western female friends to their family (unless wedding plans are in the making). Open discussions about the young men's occupation and where their financial contributions come from are generally avoided.[14] To accommodate their families' wishes, and to lessen the confrontation with undesirable practices, many beach boys rent a room in a house somewhat removed from their family. However, this practice of unmarried men living by themselves is highly uncommon (and

[12]Scholars have long debated (and disagreed on) questions of belonging and identity along the Swahili coast (for example, Eastman 1971; Loimeier and Seesemann 2006; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Pouwels 1987; Prins 1961; Caplan and Topan 2004), and have often underlined that 'a man is never a Swahili and nothing else' (Prins 1961: 11). Pouwels (1987), for example, discusses how an individual living in a Swahili coastal town always exists in 'a web of social relationships of various categories' and often belongs to different social groups at once (Pouwels 1987: 76). The initial recognition of an individual's belonging to the community, however, lies in their being Muslim, and the Islamic character of the community and its ancestors therefore trumps other social divisions (Pouwels 1987). To be recognized as '*wa Lamu*' (from Lamu) rather than *mgeni* (a foreigner or newcomer) thus requires primarily an adherence to an Islamic lifestyle and to local norms of propriety and respectability. The contemporary relationships between Lamu's different social and ethnic groups are quite complex, and tie into even more complicated debates on historical lineages and settlement histories. For a more elaborate discussion on the contemporary social fabric of Lamu, see Hillewaert (2013).

[13]Bajuni residents of Lamu currently contribute significantly to the town's economy as fishermen, craftsmen and traders, and, indeed, are recognized as *waungwana* through the contributions they make to Lamu society. Many Bajuni are working themselves up the socio-economic ladder, doing quite well for themselves as businessmen. Yet wealth in and of itself does not imbue someone with respectability or status. As was discussed previously, while someone might be poor, their hard and honest work can imbue them with *heshima.* While someone might be viewed as lower class, he or she can still be seen as *muungwana.*

[14]While many young men who have married Western women and moved abroad are now reinvesting their money in the Lamu community by constructing their own dhow, building houses or investing in land, this wealth does not necessarily result in a higher status as it is viewed as lacking in *heshima*. Former beach boys who have returned from Europe or North America, having divorced their Western wives, and have settled back into a pious lifestyle, however, are recognized as respectful members of Lamu society.

undesirable) in Swahili culture and is in itself indicative of the young men's peculiar, even marginal, position within Lamu.

Looking at these local reactions is not just important in itself; it also exposes the tense semiotic work at stake in the way in which beach boys themselves and Lamu residents who condemn their behaviour understand morally acceptable forms of labour. In Lamu, markers of beach boy identity – their hairstyles, modes of dress, language use and constant presence on the seafront – are differently read as strategic commercial tools and active scouting (by beach boys themselves) or as a shameless imitation of and an idle waiting for foreigners (by other community members). The latter motivates Lamu residents to draw parallels between the behaviour of beach boys and that of *watumwa*: the elements of moral and physical servitude it purportedly entails, the supposed laziness inherent in the young men's hawking of seemingly useless services, and their assumed insensibility to religious and moral norms that should inform *waungwana*'s public conduct.

LABOUR THAT DOES NOT COUNT

For a town that for centuries distinguished itself from the African mainland as urban and cosmopolitan, but that is now poor and marginalized in relation to the Kenyan mainland, the question is not whether or not Lamu residents desire economic development but rather what that development represents within contemporary society (Hillewaert forthcoming). Elders – such as the county council member who proposed the dreadlock ban – do not see the beach boys of Lamu as entrepreneurs, innovators, or indeed decision makers pursuing progressive change in an attempt to find alternative avenues of employment. Rather, they evaluate the young men's behaviour as a reflection of their moral disposition and social status. Their hairstyles, shorts and jewellery are then not tools strategically used for economic benefit but are considered an index of moral decline. They are emblematic of how Western culture has negatively affected local youth and how Islamic values are in danger of being shunned. While the temptation might be to read beach boys' dismissal and/or censure within local discourse as stemming from their idleness, it is precisely because they are *not* idle that their labour is condemned.

While travel guides describe Lamu as 'an area frozen in time', where 'people live as they did hundreds of years ago', the town has dealt with change and adaptation throughout its history (Hillewaert 2013; forthcoming). Lamu continuously incorporated new waves of immigrants from both the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia, seemingly effortlessly integrating these newcomers into its stratified society. The incorporation of those changes, however, depended on the adjustment of newcomers to Lamu's norms of respectful behaviour rather than the other way around.

With Lamu's altered position in today's geopolitical order, the nature of this social stratification is increasingly being redefined. The changes the community currently faces not only entail a shift within the town's economic and political structures, but they also undermine the ability of indigenous residents to impose and uphold a notion of virtuous or respectful conduct. The postcolonial political economy destroyed the material bases of the higher classes' supremacy and took

away the ideological one (Glassman 2011: 22). The importance of *heshima*, with Islam at its core, is being challenged, and locals experience its insignificance to newcomers, including tourists, as a form of moral dispossession (Hillewaert 2013). In this context, the stigma against beach boys and efforts to legally sanction their hairstyles are therefore not primarily condemnations of idleness, non-productive labour and/or sexual impropriety – as they often are in other contexts. Instead, beach boys are viewed negatively for their facilitation of tourism that is at once economically necessary and always potentially morally repugnant.

Non-locals' undermining of honour and respect are at the core of the debate surrounding Lamu's beach boys. As the county council member argued in defence of the dreadlock ban, tourists ought to emulate local practices if they are truly interested in the culture of Lamu. By appropriating Western practices in an attempt to please Western tourists, beach boys go against this local expectation. However, these young men are doing so not out of mere admiration for Western culture, but out of economic necessity: the accommodation of non-locals' desires has become a route to a lucrative livelihood.[15] Dreadlocks and beach boys' labour have thus become emblematic of the moral and economic decline of Lamu.

While earning money could be constructed as a moral good, the question of employment or unemployment in the case of the beach boys is not one of economic revenue or of contributions to the financial health of the community. It is a matter of morality and honour. The ability to avoid submission to the whims of others is indicative of one's *uungwana* and success as an employer rather than an employee. After all, employees would historically have fallen under the category of slaves. The view of 'the beach boy' as contemporary slave thus entails a form of racialization, of discursively distinguishing the idleness of the African young man from the leisure of the Arab nobleman. The latter's relaxing on a public bench or *baraza* is a sign of success and imbues him with *heshima*, while the former's sitting is a sign of longing for servitude and encourages comparisons to *utumwa*. Both are indicative of social class, moral standing and racialized identity. The fact that the noble Arab who refuses to work in the service of someone else is at the core of Lamu's current economic crisis, while the young man allows the tourism industry to develop, is thereby ignored.

CONCLUSION

Mtwata mila ni mtumwa. As I listened to Hasan explain the proverb that afternoon in 2010, I realized how different our understandings of *utumwa* had been. While

[15]Of course, some of these young men long for the lifestyle of these Western tourists, but many of them would explicitly disapprove of the consumer habits and lifestyles of their European and American customers. When asked about their engagements with these Westerners, and their appropriation of their practices, beach boys would always underline the need for an income and the hope for a better future, if they were lucky enough to leave for Europe. The end goal, however, was not a permanent life in Europe or North America, but rather to earn enough money to provide for their family and to subsequently return to Lamu. Arguing for the moral good of providing for family and maintaining the tourism industry, beach boys would underline that their practices are not indicative of a changed internal moral state.

the *mahamali* (porters), who had motivated my enquiry into contemporary notions of slavery, laboured long hours for low wages, their hard work commanded *heshima*, albeit not one derived from wealth or lineage. It did not, however, evoke images of *utumwa* for Lamu residents. Lamu's beach boys, on the other hand, were compared with *watumwa* in terms of their actions' respectability (or lack thereof). Residents who condemn these young men's occupation read the semiotic markers of beach boy identity not only as the young men's attempts to display their familiarity with Westerners and their habits, but also as a willingness to forego their own (Islamic) values in an endeavour to better serve *wageni*. In their attempts to oblige those people whom Lamu residents historically considered *washenzi*, beach boys are seen to contradict everything Lamu's *waungwana* are believed to represent.

This ideological linking of outward appearances and occupational activities illustrates how judgements and ascriptions of social status in contemporary Lamu are based on a complex intersection of different semiotic markers, or how material practices and outward appearances can become signs of contemporary social standing. Most importantly, it illustrates how different signs can become discursively and ideologically linked to form a representation of modern-day *utumwa*. The lasting impact of a history of slavery therefore extends beyond an awareness of ancestry to the implicit ideologies that shape assessments of conduct and ascriptions of social status.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines contemporary discourses on and conceptions of *utumwa* or 'slavery' on the Indian Ocean island of Lamu. It discusses how residents of this Swahili town use historical understandings of servitude as moral rather than mere physical subjugation to formulate judgements on current processes of change within the town. Central to the discussion are ideologies of *uungwana* (civilization) and *heshima* (respectability) that historically shaped social stratification in Lamu, and particularly the enduring views that an embodiment of *heshima* and its visible mediation within material practices facilitate a distinction between nobleman and slave. By examining how these norms are currently incorporated within everyday assessments of young people's public behaviour, I argue that the moral ideologies that shaped social structure during the era of slavery meaningfully influence ascriptions of social standing within contemporary Lamu. Specifically, the article explores how discourses about *utumwa* are grafted onto contemporary moral assessments of 'beach boys' or Lamu youth working in the local tourism industry. I suggest that the ideologies of *utumwa*, and the moral values that accompany it, motivate and facilitate the discursive constructions of beach boys' work as idleness rather than gainful employment.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les discours contemporains et les conceptions de l'*utumwa* (ou « esclavage ») sur l'île de Lamu, dans l'océan Indien. Il traite de la manière dont les résidents de cette ville swahili utilisent des interprétations historiques de la servitude en tant que subjugation morale plutôt que purement physique pour formuler des jugements sur les processus de changement actuels dans la ville. Cette discussion a pour élément central les idéologies de l'*uungwana* (civilisation) et de l'*heshima* (respectabilité) qui ont historiquement façonné la stratification sociale à Lamu, et en particulier l'opinion persistante qu'une incarnation de l'*heshima* et sa médiation visible dans les pratiques matérielles facilitent une distinction entre le noble et l'esclave. En examinant comment ces normes sont actuellement intégrées dans le comportement public des jeunes, l'auteur soutient que les idéologies morales qui ont façonné la structure sociale au temps de l'esclavage influencent de manière significative les attributions de statut social dans le Lamu contemporain. L'article explore en particulier la manière dont les discours sur l'*utumwa* se greffent sur les évaluations morales contemporaines des « beach boys », terme désignant les jeunes de Lamu qui travaillent dans le secteur du tourisme local. L'auteur suggère que les idéologies de l'*utumwa*, ainsi que les valeurs morales qui l'accompagnent, motivent et facilitent les constructions discursives du travail de ces jeunes en tant qu'activité oisive plutôt que d'emploi rémunéré.