ISSN: 2524-1354 (Online), ISSN: 2519-7851 (Print)
Africa Habitat Review Journal
Volume 19 Issue 2 (August, 2024)
http://uonjournals.uonbi.ac.ke/ojs/index.php/ahr

To What Extent is Old Town Mombasa a Swahili Town?

An Analytical Framework for Assessing Heritage Richness

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Received on 5th February, 2023; Received in revised form 20th June, 2024; Accepted on 4th July, 2024.

Abstract

The identity of the Swahili remains fluid and contentious due to varying ethnography but also a history of intense contact and exchange with the outside world. This paper uses Mombasa Old Town in Kenya to illustrate an analytical framework that can be used to assess the authenticity of Swahili towns. The study utilized literature review, content analysis of archaeological and historical-cultural discourses, and interviews with key informants. Based on weighted variables across social logic and spatial practices, the study qualified Mombasa Old Town as a Swahili town at a moderate score of 60.5%. The study concluded that Mombasa Old Town is a mid-ranking town on the continuum of Swahili heritage. The study recommends that the approach to urban heritage should pay attention to the entire range of urban space discourse, including the way space was conceived, structured, and used, while pragmatically paying tribute to elements of place-making from the past.

Keywords: Swahili; heritage; identity; urban; culture

INTRODUCTION

Old Town, Mombasa, is one among many Swahili towns dotting the east coast of Africa; although generally sharing a distinct culture, these towns feature significant intra-cultural variations thus posing some identity contestation. This paper seeks to characterize the notion of Swahili heritage and its underlying socio-spatial logics and their varying prevalence and relevance in Mombasa Old Town landscape in order to gauge the town's authenticity along the heritage continuum. Through literature review, content analysis of archeological and historical-cultural discourses, and interviews with key informants, this paper sketches a logical framework anchored on the socio-spatial characteristics of Swahili urbanism plus their significance and manifestation in urban landscape, which will seek to measure the heritage richness of Mombasa Old Town (and by extension other Swahili Towns).

The history and identity of the Swahili have for long been fluid and shifty, hence contentious, and they continue to do so. Any attempt to define the Swahili is complicated by the varying and contrasting ethnography of this society. Two broad hypotheses exist; Mazrui A and Sherif I. N (1994) interpret Swahili as an Afro-Arab pidgin that first developed in the 1st century AD and subsequently evolved into a local creole that ultimately shed its Arabic forms and replaced them with Bantu ones. On the other hand Horton and Middleton (2000) view Swahili society as comprising of a single 'oikumene' or maritime civilization, with marked regional and temporal variations brought about through differing historical experiences, trade relations, descent, marriage patterns, and religious beliefs. This model broadly structures the Swahili civilization under the following timelines: African-Bantu [Sabaki] (800-1100AD); Shirazi (1100-1600); Portuguese (1498-1697); Arab/ Omani (1697-1888AD) British (1888 – 1963); and post-colonial (1963-present).

The study is anchored on a socio-spatial approach, based on theories of hybridity and the social production of space (Bhabha 1994; 1996; Le Febvre 1991; Kaiser, et al., 1995, Cuthbert, A. R. 2006). The paper frames Swahili as a hybrid society of African Bantu-Cushitic tribes and Asian, especially Persians, who were engaged in the Indian Ocean trade in the northern east African coast – Sabaki region to Southern Somalia. Historical evidence

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points the Swahili to "African" in origin, even though many aspects of their civilization have been borrowed from Arabia and even India. According to Middleton, The Swahili see themselves as neither "African" nor "Asian," but as having their own unique civilization, different from both those of Arabia or of their African neighbors). The rulers of the Sultanate of Zanzibar would refer to the Swahili as "The People of the Coast", as coastal merchants who faced both towards Africa and towards Indian Ocean cities abroad, mainly in Arabia and Asia. Factual evidence of historical, archaeological, and linguistic nature discredits the claim that the Swahili have come from Arabia or Persia. Thus, Swahili urbanism being a product of diverse and complex claims of positions of historical, cultural, political, social, and economic nature makes it difficult to pin-point it to singular urban characterization but to a continuum of identification. Despite the difficulty in describing a discrete Swahili urban identity, it is possible to isolate shared orientations that define the internal organization of the Swahili civilization that can be manifest in the organization of towns.

Mombasa Old Town is a historical district of the island-city of Mombasa, Kenya, situated on the south-east side of the island ($4^0$3'32"S, $39^0$40'35"E). The Old Town district covers an area of about 72 hectares (180 acres). Mombasa Old Town is home to the old harbor and explains the strategic location and contact with the outside world that the history of the town posits. Mombasa Old Town has been inhabited, through space and time, by a mix of locals (largely Swahili), Arabs, Asians, Portuguese, and British settlers (**Figure 1**).

THEORY

The study was anchored on socio-spatial approaches concerned with the physicality of urban space and its configuration as products of social-cultural processes, political strategy, and economic policy (Le Febvre, 1991; Kaiser, et al., 1995, Cuthbert, A. R. 2006). Against this background, it is deemed possible to isolate certain variables of culture and those of urban landscape (especially the built environment) that interact at different levels of feasibility. Thus, culture can be disaggregated into world views, values, ideals and meanings, norms and rules, lifestyles, activity systems, and social structures (kinship, family structure, social networks, status, institutions e.t.c). The built environment on the other hand can be disaggregated into the organization of space, time, meaning, and communication; system of settings; and cultural landscape features. This approach sees every city is a mosaic of environments reflecting the complex interaction of natural and social forces that have evolved through time. Identity of a given time is based on the continuity of the built environment which draws its life from a matrix of ever changing activities. Design then becomes a process of negotiating the future (time) of cities that are constantly experiencing forces of change at the same time struggling to retain their identity (placeness). Through the years, the cultural landscape has emerged as a battle ground a general problematic in the way it has been defined and its importance to urban designers, including from a political economic perspective (Cuthbert Alexander, 2006). authenticity is linked to concepts of truth, reality and experience and to the actual representation of urban space and landscape. It seeks to retain own identity in the face of universalism such as globalization by expressing accepted urban meanings, whose manifestations are tied to place and place-making. (Said 1978, 1994; Bhabha 1994). The variables investigated under this framework included those under social logics of space, spatial practices, and physical structuring elements of space (**Figure 2**).

Contextualizing Swahili Urban Heritage

The Swahili urbanism can be viewed in different frames that depict an accumulation of various qualities acquired in space and time; the degree of characteristic prevalence of these frames equally varies within and across towns. Historically and culturally, Swahili urban landscape is a result of triple heritage, with smaller components within. These include the Indigenous African-Bantu (Pre-800AD) - before the arrival of the Indian Ocean merchants, whereby the Swahili engaged in both sea-based and agro-based subsistence economy supplementing farming with fishing; Mercantile-Islamic (800—1589 AD) - driven by trade and Islamic ideology propelled by an Afro-Oriental interaction, between indigenous Africans and merchants from Persia, Arabia, India, Turkey, and China who also intermarried; and Imperial-Colonial (1589-1963 AD) – marked by dominance of Swahili society by Portuguese, Arabs, and British. The degree of dominance transformed from ideological and territorial to protectionist patronage, and ultimate colonial

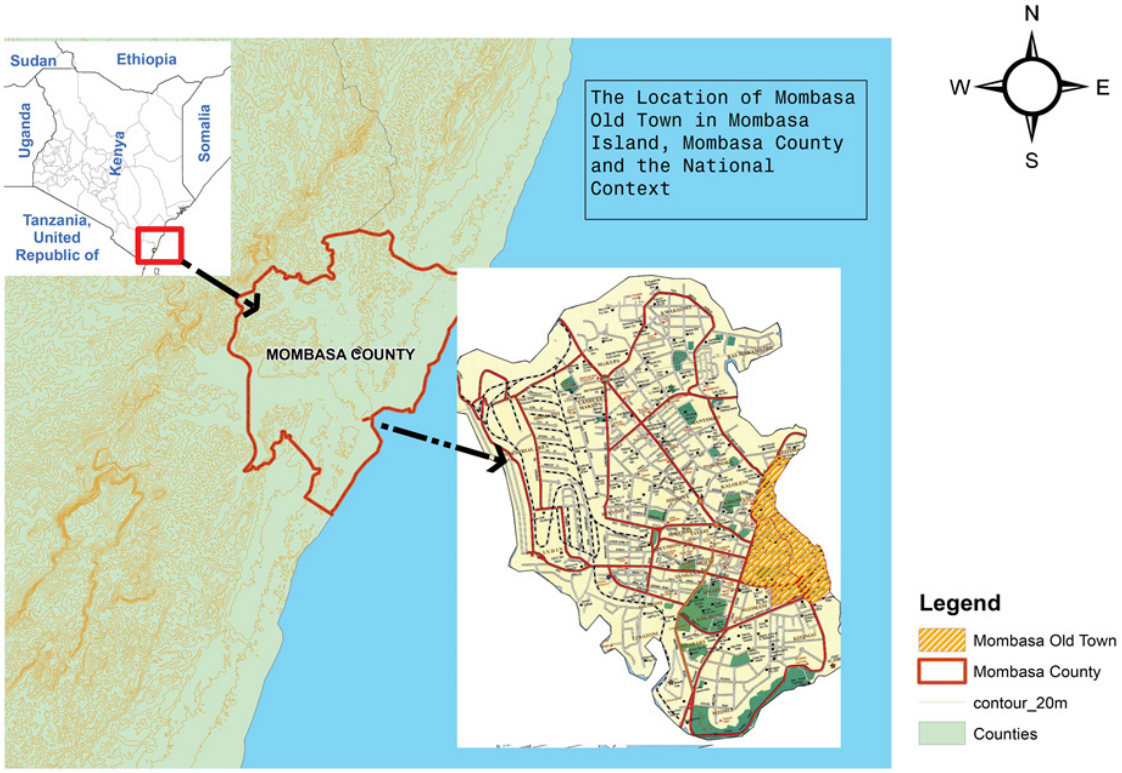

FIGURE 1
Locational context of Mombasa old town
Source: Adapted from integrated strategic urban development plan for Mombasa, 2015

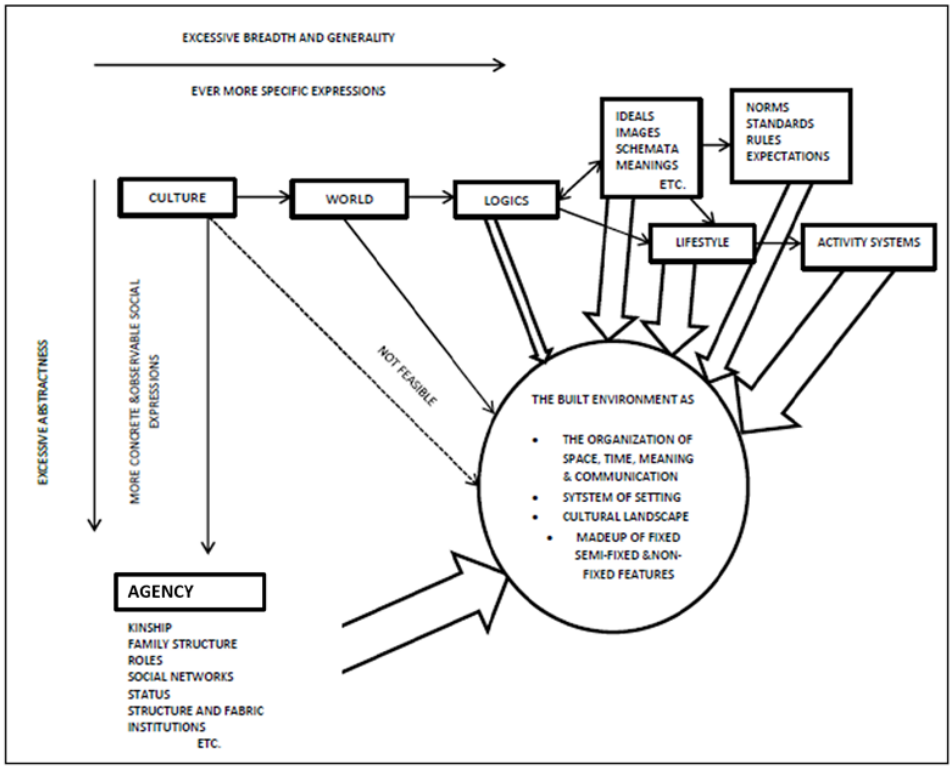

FIGURE 2
Relating culture and identity to the built environment
Source: Adapted from Rapoport and Warner et al, 2000

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imperialism. These periods were not exclusive but characterized by overlaps with some qualities and identities carried across all the way to the contemporary times. The Geographical model locates the range of the Swahili influence as North to South, from Somalia in the horn of Africa to southern Mozambique and including Lamu Archipelago, the major offshore islands of Pemba, Zanzibar and mafia; the northern tip of Madagascar and Comoros islands. The model longitudinally divides the east coast of Africa into three broad categories as the northern Swahili that comprises mostly of settlements and/or towns in the Somalia region; the middle Swahili comprises of the Kenya section and stretches into Tanzania up to north of Dar salaam; and the southern Swahili; and the southern Swahili cover all those settlements lying to the south of Dar-es-salaam in Tanzania stretching all the way to Chibueni in Mozambique. The social model of situating Swahili urbanism revolves around language, ethnicity and kinship, socialization and collective action, music, moieties, and gender issues. As a language, Kiswahili was a unifying mode of communication, instruction, and administration. Kiswahili went ahead to become a lingua franca in various centres across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, as well as beyond in Somalia, northern Rhodesia, northwestern Madagascar, and Comoro islands (Krum, 1940:22). Musically, through the concept of Ngoma, the Swahili used the notion of performance to articulate social situations in terms of role and status. Ethnicity and kinship were responsible in organizing the Swahili as a society of linked people in tribe, clan, and family. The ecological model situates Swahili urban landscape as an adaptation to two phenomena; first is the tropical-maritime climate characterized by hot, humid conditions, two rainy seasons, and monsoon winds. This affected the architectural and building systems but also the building orientations to take care of elements of weather and also facilitate passive cooling and ventilation (MeierP 2016 and Meier S 2007).

The religious model of Swahili society can be viewed from three perspectives - indigenous African religion, Islam, and, to a lesser extent, Christianity - without a clear and exclusive delineation in timing. The belief in the power of natural forces personified as spirits or gods and the role of ritual and worship had a bearing on the layout and detailing of human settlements (Caplan 1975). Islam was instrumental in shaping both the software (ways of life and attitudes) as well as the hardware (physical fabric) of Swahili towns, guided by Islamic teachings (sunna). Christianity in Swahili towns appeared first through the Portuguese in early 16th century and later through the British and Germans in late 19th century. It did not feature prominently in the structuring of Swahili towns but there are traces of cathedrals built in honour of European missionaries in Swahili towns such as Mombasa.

The dual model builds the dualism in Swahili urbanism based on the coast-hinterland axis, which was also translated in town-building, whereby the coastal sites predominantly featured larger, more permanent settlements referred to as stone towns. On the other hand, the hinterland featured relatively smaller and less permanent settlements made of mud and wattle/daub, often with thatched roof; these were otherwise referred to as country towns. The economic-mercantile model conceives Swahili towns as intermediate sites of convergence of foreign Indian Ocean traders and indigenous African inland producers (Braudel 1966; Chaudhuri 1985), with the Swahili as middlemen. This strategic position of the Swahili engendered a kind hybridism that groomed the Swahili into successful mercantilism. Politically, the Swahili civilization was fragmented and there was no single polity but included hereditary dynasties and oligarchies, sultanates, dynasties, and local government structures towards the close of pre-modern Swahili whose common feature was delegated authority and representation of central authority. The globalization model views Swahili urbanism in the context of maritime societies, whose inhabitants have a long history of cross-cultural contact and a tradition as cultural brokers and middlemen, such that, over the centuries, their identities have been forged and re-forged many times. Modernization model looks at the traditional applied anew. According to Meier (2007) Swahili modernity is enacted through the re-ordering of new forms within coastal frames of cultural reference (**Figure 3**).

Swahili Urbanism and Identity Logics

Swahili urbanism and the resultant landscape were anchored on development of indigenous knowledge as well as transfer and exchange of ideas through economic (trade), religious (mainly Islam), socio-political interactions, and

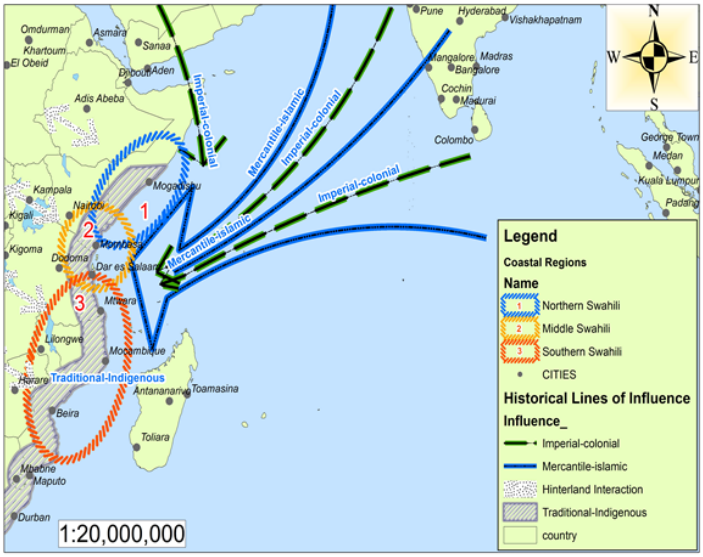

FIGURE 3
Swahili tripple heritage landscape
Source: Author's construct, 2022

environmental adaptation to the littoral space that was transition between the Indian Ocean landscape and the African hinterland. Throughout its evolution some key values have been carried along:

Socio-Cultural Identity and Logics

Ritual and Spiritualism: These were anchored on routinized traditional social, political, and religious ceremonies and festivities that used to happen in key town public spaces such as streets and squares, but also sacred places of sacrifice (*mizimu*). Rituals were a way of actors arranging themselves within the society but also regulating the relationship between humans and spirits on the level of town as a whole. Time, rituals, and ceremonies were the preserve of the civilized urban folk (*waungwana*). Today, such occasions have been commodified as cultural products for touristic consumptions.

Socialization and Community Life: This was a uniquely African developed trait anchored on kinship and moiety that engendered indigenous traditions of social contact, participation, collective action, and welfare. Socialization as an urban phenomenon of the Swahili responded to local needs as well as indigenous economic and socio-political development. The character of the traditional Swahili town was sympathetic to involvement and participation of community members, including aspects like ownership and disposition of land and property, inheritance, safety, settlement patterns, and house construction as joint community undertakings.

Hierarchy: Hierarchy in Swahili urbanism was expressed socio-spatially whereby space was codified along continuums of importance that revolved around; spiritual (sacred-profane), social (public-private), and socio-political gradients (Master-servant). Sacred space was perceived as holy and its use was controlled, unlike profane space where secular uses were permissible. In terms of privacy gradient, spaces were deliberately disposed to achieve sequential environments that would graduate from public to semi public, semi-private, and private. Only residents (insiders) would be allowed access to private space. Hierarchy was also expressed in terms of building systems, whereby the degree of permanence increased towards the central areas of the town, relegating the more temporary buildings to the periphery.

Communication and Collective Memory: Communication in Swahili sense was anchored on language and use of oral traditions such as; folk tales [*hadithi*], proverbs [*methali*], and poetry [*ushairi*]), social memory, myths, and symbols and meaning systems. As a mode of communication, public space was seen as a symbol of collective well-being and sites of public encounter and formation of civic culture (Amin 2006). These public spaces were seen to increase opportunities to participate in communal activity. Another dimension of

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space-based communication was that of legibility, whereby town layout was so configured to enable easy navigation by residents, especially visitation by women folk and connecting to the mosque for daily prayers by male folk (Ghaidan, 1975).

Linked Economy: Swahili economy was structured and operated at two but linked levels; the macro-scale and the micro-scale. At a macro-scale Swahili civilization developed maritime commercial hubs at various points on the coast, linked by multidirectional spokes to distant towns and cities involved in the Indian Ocean trade as well as connecting rural regions to the major city-states across the entire East African coast before the twentieth century. At a micro-scale, Swahili economy took the form of local retail and cultural cafes that were mostly operated at street level. The merchandise of trade was brokered from the macro exchanges between the global markets and Africa's hinterland.

Politics and Power Relations: The traditional Swahili did not have a single polity; instead the Swahili Coast was divided up into about 40 city-states, including Mogadishu, Barawa, Mombasa, Gedi, Zanzibar,and Kilwa. Each city was governed separately by a group of local nobility, who were selected either by birth or by qualification. These independent polities were linked by trade as well as by a common culture and language, *Swahili*. Particular towns sought to extend their political power over others at different periods (Horton et al, 1996; Horton 1996; Allen 1993; Strandes 1899) and women as well as men did govern the city-states, the first recorded being Mwana Mkisi a ruler of Mombasa around 1500 (Municipal Council of Mombasa, 2009). The politics of the subsequent years entailed hegemonic powerbase and dominating affluence created by the urban elite.

Security and Defense: The security of Swahili towns was anchored on two concepts, namely, solidity and permanence. Most medieval Swahili towns of around the 15th century were surrounded by some form of perimeter barrier, relatively short (not more than 6 feet high) and of irregular outline. Surveillance and enclosure also played a crucial role as security mechanisms; houses were laid out in such a manner to achieve defensible spaces by use of the policing eye and the identification and filtration of strangers. Thus areas exposed to enemy raids tended to be closely packed and often surrounded by palisades.

Temporality and Flexibility in use of Space: Time had a significant role in programming the set-up and use of space in Swahili towns. Time cycles were central in structuring certain activities and their accommodation in urban space; these included trade, rituals, and city celebrations. Annual rituals such as *hitma ya mji* (prayers for town) and *maulid* (prayers/celebrations for the prophet) that take place at particular times of the year and involve processions in specific areas of the town . This does not mean those spaces are for the exclusive use of these activities, instead it implies that during these functions the said spaces acquire certain peculiar qualities never experienced in any other part of the year. The overall effect of this temporality was that urban space could manifest different qualities, moods, and identities at different times that paved way to unparalleled richness.

Connectedness: Connectedness in Swahili towns was in two forms; Towns- hinterland connectedness- where certain town activities directly depended on resources and materials supplied from the interior, including ivory, gold, and slaves. The Swahili towns were converging points for the engagement of foreign merchants and indigenous traders from the hinterland. The second form is Citizens-environment connectedness. Connectedness was also achieved in other forms; Spatially- achieved using interlocked spaces and housing layout; socially-founded on ethnic structure, while ideologically it was by religion. The overall effect was the emergence of socio-spatially compact *mitaa* clusters with the mosque as a unifying element. Each *mtaa* would have as low as three and as high as twenty households, all related by blood.

Materiality: Studies on the materiality of Swahili urbanism were largely facilitated through the archeological study of settlements on the eastern coast of Africa. Archaeologists have excavated some of these Swahili sites and described the finds, house-plans, mosques, tombs and walls of the towns. Swahili materiality has been associated with several key factors of its civilization leading to the formation of distinctive Swahili social and visual practices. Operationally, materiality was used to distinguish what is more permanent

from what is ephemeral, translating to what is worth preserving or re-assigning new tasks and what should be relegated or rejected altogether. Materiality was about both materials and materiele; materials are indispensible and durable: for example stone brick, block, cement, and concrete. On the other hand, materiele consists of tools and directions for their use. Certain types of artifacts are thought representative of the different groups and had an active role of material culture (Fleisher 2004). Later years studies suggest that objects did not just passively reflect different peoples or activities, but were also constitutive of various social relationships, particularly the creation of a majority Swahili elite group in coastal society, where material symbols were important in the creation of status (Chittick 1975; Donley 1982; Middleton 1992), of which material culture appears to have been especially important.

Spatial Identity and Logics of the Swahili

Dual Urban Landscape: Swahili towns are largely, but not exclusively, a product of dual heritage: the African-Bantu and the Arab-Islamic. The former was manifested in the Swahili country/ mud towns while the latter is testified by the Swahili stone towns that were mainly along the coastline. Swahili pre-Islamic towns had a strong African-bantu heritage. The towns were open, inclusive, and egalitarian. The city was owned by all the residents and these were presided over by egalitarian councils of elders. Swahili stone towns also depict, in their spatial disposition, a polar hierarchy, mainly revolving around spiritual (*sacred/profane*), social (*public-private/insider-outsider*), and socio-political (*master-servant*). social hierarchy is an intricate interweaving of building and street disposition that divides the community into proprietors (*wenyeji*) and strangers (*wageni*).

Environmental Adaptation and Control: Swahili urbanism had to adapt to a unique environment defined by two main environmental situations; first is the tropical-maritime climate that was hot and humid, with monsoon winds blowing in the northeast-southwest axis where the vector depended on the season (Datoo 1974). These winds essentially create the conditions for a cyclical seasonal pattern of maritime trade, enabling long-distance travel throughout the Indian Ocean (Breen and Lane, 2003). Second was the littoral environment, which was transition between sea and land that featured an exchange of winds between the two but also generated diverse landscape and site features that varied from estuarine mangrove marshes to sandy dunes and beaches, and coral reefs and cliffs. These inherent environmental qualities dictated the Swahili urban landscape in terms of placement of buildings on site to ensure compatibility and reconciliation of building and site qualities; the need for passive cooling and ventilation achieved through building technology , orientation of streets and buildings to capture coolant winds, the use of courtyards and open spaces to create well effect, and provision of smaller openings to regulate heat exchange between buildings and their environments.

Town Planning (Layout): Traditional Swahili town-building showed little evidence of overall planning concepts. The layout of towns was not a highly conscious activity but laden with informality, intuition, and spontaneity. It has been explained that foresight in conventional planning was not considered necessary; instead problems that arose were solved as they were encountered.

Morphology (Urban Form and Structure): The overall urban form and structure design of the Swahili town evolved to accommodate specific functions across cultural, social, and economic realms. Archeological evidence on Swahili towns reveals that the fabric is compact and densely aggregated with a labyrinthine layout of alleys and lanes disposed in a distorted grid (Steyn 2002, 2017). The shape (outline) of Swahili towns varied from circular (for example Siyu), regular rectangular (for example Lamu and Ungwana), and irregular walled enclosures - for example Pate and Gedi (Caplan, 1975). Houses could be attached into a cluster but also some were free standing. Fully developed housing was organized into compact and interlocking clusters occupied by related people, resulting in a socio-spatial entity called *mtaa*, a form of moiety.

Townscape and Space Typologies: Swahili towns had a significant level of variation when it came to urban form that were influenced by different cultural regions. The various components of urban form emerged at different intervals and were introduced through different processes enshrined in trade, religion, and colonialism. As a result, there were certain space types that were common in many Swahili towns.

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Domestic Buildings: The traditional Swahili house seems to have been constructed as a complete self-contained form right from the beginning. Planning of the domestic building applied the principles of orientation, communal approach and co-operation, compactness and economy, and simultaneity.

Moieties (Mitaa) and Neighbourhood Mosque: Mitaa is the lowest urban socio-spatial organizational units constituted by several components: a cluster of Swahili houses and the local mosque. The neighbourhood mosque was a focal point for and served as a ; meeting point of the male members of the mtaa, daily prayers, intimate communal functions like social meetings, funerals, dispute resolution, and a venue for political discourses on neighbourhood matters.

Main Street (Usita/Ndia kuu)- Usita was the main street that facilitated mass movement and leisure activities. It served as a community-wide interaction area where major social events and ceremonies could be held in form of processions, dances, and even mock fights.

Friday Mosque- The Friday Mosque served higher functions at the town level and would be the focal point of a conglomeration of several mitaas or neighborhoods where the men of the town would meet for weekly (Friday) prayers. The planning of mosques revolved around accessibility, orientation, and ritual and the placement of activity spaces and conveniences.

Monumental Tombs- These belonged to rulers or influential religious leaders, built as reminders of status/legacy of the deceased. They also served as symbols of a common ancestry and history, hence a source of collective memory, connecting past to present through visible representations of the continuity of the urban community. Many were also centres of ritual (prayer and special offerings - makafara).

Open Space and Town square - Open spaces in Swahili towns offered important contexts for social memory, political authority, and town-based production and consumption (Fleisher 2014). The different functions of open spaces in Swahili towns included open-air meeting points and places of assembly, market areas, protected space for future town growth, gardens and/or orchards, impermanent architecture and industrial production. The town square would serve as both a functional (gatherings) and structural (termination of the main street) role. It formed the main public area for the town and would host a broad spectrum of activities of town-wide interest.

Forodhani (Port)- A sea/land entry-exit point equivalent of modern day port. Thus forodhani would combine both utilitarian and leisure functions, with the former being the core.

Market- The market was a high-order space located near town square. The main market (utuku mkuu), would host activities such as auctions and market days for the entire towns. The Swahili market would integrate the bazaar concept, which integrates element of the street.

Palace-The palace was a closely knit complex of houses that was the epitome of authority and would provide the official physical address and often residence of the Swahili rulers or dignitaries – kings, sultans, sheikhs e.t.c.

Objects and Details- Swahili towns were furnished with objects and details mainly for aesthetic and symbolic value. These were to be found in form of curved doors and balconies, decorated walls, ornamented furniture, ceramics, ceremonial or status garments, and sculpture.

RESEARCH METHODS

Using literature review, key informants, and questionnaire were used to collect data. The survey some key identification variables of Swahilwere instructed, based on their familiarity with Mombasa Old Town, to assess the characteristic features of the town against each of the variables, with 1 being the least featured and 5 being the most prevalent. Respondents were then asked to assign weight values based on perceived importance and degree of prevalence. The overall score assigned was a product of the weighted value multiplied by the prevalence score assigned. The values generated thus indicated the significance and degree of prevalence for each variable, but also the overall average of all variables. This data was then used to situate Mombasa Old Town on the continuum of Swahili urban heritage.

RESULTS

From literature review and input by key informants, Swahili urbanism and the resultant image of Swahili town has been associated with/attributed to the socio-spatial variables broadly categorized as social-cultural or physical in nature. Based on the two information sources, the study sought to assign value of importance (weighting) for each of the variables under the two categories on a scale of 5, where 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important. Overall, the social-cultural and physical variables were stated to be of almost equal weight, with the latter slightly outweighing the former at averages of 3.4 and 3.5, respectively. The specific variable scores are summarized in **Table 1.**

In addition, through the questionnaire surveys, key informant interviews, focused group discussions, and field observation and profiling, the performance of Mombasa Old Town as a Swahili town was assessed against the above criteria by seeking to established the perceived prevalence of these identity variables in the town landscape, where 1 is the least prevalent and 5 the most prevalent. Findings revealed that socialization (4/5); ritual and spiritualism (3.2 /4); were among the highest ranking among the social-cultural category while compactness (3.2 /4); street layout (3.2 /4); mosques (5/5); and street bazaar (5/5) scored the highest on the physical variables. The detailed scores are summarized in **Table 2**. The overall average score was used to quantify the level of authenticity of Old Town Mombasa on the Swahili heritage continuum. An overall score of 60.5% placed the town as a mid-ranking in the heritage continuum.

DISCUSSION

Based on the above analysis, Old Town Mombasa scores 20.6 out of 34 i.e 60.5% qualification for ideal Swahili Town from a socio-cultural dimension, as compared to its qualification of 35.1 out of 46 i.e 76.3% from a physical dimension. This means that in terms of underlying values and dispositions, Old Town Mombasa has witnessed significant transformation and may not be the most ideal town to base such qualities of a Swahili Town. This can be explained by the its adjacency to the modern port city of Mombasa, which has exposed the Old Town to intense forces of modernization. Overall, the town scores 55.7 (i.e 20.6 + 35.1) out of 80 (i.e 34 + 46), which amounts to about 70% performance. This points to the fact that a substantial amount

TABLE 1
Value score for Swahili identity variables

SOCIAL-CULTURAL		PHYSICAL	
Variable	**Score**	**Variable**	**Score**
Socialization & community life	5	Compactness & density	4
Ritual and spiritualism	4	Shape & street layout	4
Status, hierarchy, and power	3	Transition areas & thresholds	3
Communication and collective memory	3	Streetscape: elevations & skylines	3
Connectedness /kinship	4	Mitaa/moieties: clustering & enclosure	4
Territoriality and defense	3	Mosque	5
Temporality & flexibility in use of space	3	Market /bazaar	5
Linked (traditional)economy	3	Swahili house	3
Materiality	3	Monumental tombs/cemeteries	2
Ecology & environmental control	3	Town square and commons	4
		Port (forodhani)	3
		Palace	3
		Objects and (aesthetic) details	5
Average for social-cultural	**3.4**	**Average for physical**	**3.6**

Source: Author's construct based on key informants and archives, 2022

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TABLE 2
Performance of Old Town, Mombasa, against weighted variables

Guiding question: Based on your familiarity with Old Town, Mombasa, assess the characteristic features of the town against each of the variable on a scale of 5, with 1 being the least featured and 5 being the most prevalent									
ITEM	**VARIABLE**	**WEIGHT ASSIGNED**	**SCORE**					**WEIGHTED SCORE (Weight x Score)**	**MAX. EXPECTED WEIGHTED SCORE**
			1	2	3	4	5		
1.0	**SOCIAL-CULTURAL**								
1.1	Socialization & community life	1.0				4		**4.0**	**5.0**
1.2	Ritual and spiritualism	0.8				4		**3.2**	**4.0**
1.3	Status, hierarchy and power	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
1.4	Communication and collective memory	0.6			3			**1.8**	**3.0**
1.5	Connectedness /kinship	0.8				4		**3.2**	**4.0**
1.6	Territoriality and defense	0.6			3			**1.8**	**3.0**
1.7	Temporality & flexibility in use of space	0.6		3				**1.8**	**3.0**
1.8	Linked (traditional)economy	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
1.9	Materiality	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
1.10	Ecology & environmental control	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
	Subtotal for Aspatial (t1)							**20.6**	**34.0**
	Average for Aspatial t1/n1							**2.06**	**3.40**
2.0	**PHYSICAL**								
2.1	Compactness & density	0.8				4		**3.2**	**4.0**
2.2	Shape & street layout	0.8				4		**3.2**	**4.0**
2.3	Transition areas & thresholds	0.6			3			**1.8**	**3.0**
2.4	Streetscape: Elevations & skylines	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
2.5	Mitaa/Moieties: Clustering & enclosure	0.8			4			**2.4**	**3.0**
2.6	Mosque	1.0					5	**5.0**	**5.0**
2.7	Market/bazaar	1.0					5	**5.0**	**5.0**
2.8	Swahili house	0.6		2				**1.2**	**3.0**
2.9	Cemeteries/tombs	0.2	1					**0.5**	**2.0**
2.10	Town square and commons	0.8					5	**4.0**	**4.0**
2.11	Port (Forodhani)	0.6					5	**3.0**	**3.0**
2.12	Palace	0.6	1					**0.6**	**3.0**
2.13	Objects and (aesthetic) details	1.0				4		**4.0**	**5.0**
	Sub total for Spatial (t2)							**35.1**	**46.0**
	Average for Spatial t2/n2							**2.70**	**3.54**

Source: Author's construct based on key informants and field survey, 2022

of identity associated with Swahili Towns is not depicted in Old Town Mombasa that this far can be attributed to its omission in the formative stages of the town and/or its disruption in space and time due to developmental factors whose analysis is outside the scope of this paper. From literature review, the contribution of omission to the identity performance of Old Town Mombasa is relatively low based on the fact that respondents were able to identify the town with every variable listed in the table provided for scoring. It emerged in this study that Swahili urbanism was based on a rich mixture of values and logics, however, largely informal and lacking the modern-associated precision in techniques and standardization. The study went further to gauge, in terms of values and logics, the extent to which Mombasa Old Town manifests typical qualities of a Swahili town. The town registered scores of varying strengths across all variables of measure indicating that it qualifies to be described as a Swahili town. However, the less than 100% score coupled by internal variations across the variables depicts the richness of Swahili towns in terms of differentiation, wherein one Swahili town can uniquely differ from the other in hardware and/or software. The study postulates that it is these internal variations as scored herein that will distinguish one Swahili town from another in terms of image and identity.

CONCLUSION

This paper looked into Swahili traditional values and logics with the aim of understanding how they defined/interpreted their space (perceived space) in the world; how they expressed/structured it (conceived space) and how they used/experienced those spatial settings (Lived space). This study has conceptually retraced Swahili traditional values and logics to their socio-cultural underpinnings and their placement in production of space. It further attempted to explain how spatial forms represented socio-cultural organization in the Swahili town of Mombasa. This study has provided a framework to measure the authenticity of Swahili towns in terms of identity but also provides an approach to gauge the richness of the prevailing heritage. Based on these, the study scored Old Town, Mombasa, as a mid-level town on the Swahili heritage continuum. By extension, the framework can serve to gauge the degree of similarity and difference between Swahili towns. As a limitation, the model faces, and must control, high level of discursive subjectivity along the identity spectrum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the approach to urban heritage should pay attention to the entire range of urban space discourse, including the way space was conceived, structured, and used. The approach to Swahili heritage must pay tribute to the pragmatic elements of place-making from the past. There should be additional consciousness beyond the tangible, often architectural, approach to heritage to embrace the underlying social logics and spatial practices, which constitutes the software of heritage. The study recommends the use of this analytical framework across various Swahili towns to articulate the constants and variables in Swahili urban heritage. Further studies should seek to expose the underlying causes of such variations between towns.

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