Music, Sound and Space

Transformations of Public and Private Experience

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As the site of an ancient Muslim 'mercantile civilization' (Middleton 1992) of the Indian Ocean world, Kenya's Muslim-dominated 'Swahili coast' has always held a problematic place within the Christian-dominated Kenyan postcolony. Viewing the region in the light of its history of Omani Arab rule and movements for political autonomy, up-country Kenyans typically see it as 'neither completely African nor, by extension, Kenyan' (Prestholdt 2011: 6). Meanwhile, coastal Muslims, viewing it in the light of their marginalisation in the postcolony, often see it as having been 'colonized' (Brennan 2008) and 'looted' by up-country Kenya (Mazrui and Shariff 1994: 154; cf. Yahya 2000). These competing narratives amount to an ongoing symbolic struggle (Bourdieu 1989) over coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya, a struggle over understandings of how coastal Muslims have been treated, what they deserve and how they fit within the Kenyan nation. Scholars have taken a renewed interest in this struggle in recent years, as debates over the status of Islamic courts and Kenya's entanglement in the 'global war on terror' have opened the possibilities for new forms of oppositional politics among the coastal Muslim population, including separatism and Islamism (Brennan 2008; Goldsmith 2011; Kresse 2009; Prestholdt 2010, 2011; Seesemann 2007). Recent scholarly interventions have done much to historicise and demystify the symbolic struggle over coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya. But they have largely left untouched the essential problem of how this struggle inheres in Kenyan coastal Muslims' quotidian, visceral experiences of being (subjectified as) Kenyan citizens.¹

Recognising the centrality of ritual sounding and listening practices for Muslim subject-formation (Qureshi 1996; Hirschkind 2006), this chapter approaches the subjective dimension of the symbolic struggle over coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya through a 'sounded anthropology' centred on 'the soundscape and the politics of aurality' (Samuels et al. 2010: 339). Drawing on eighteen months of fieldwork on the Kenyan coast (2004–6), I take an 'ethnographic ear' to affective (i.e. pre-discursive), embodied spatial

¹ An exception is Kresse 2009, who reflects on the Kenyan coastal Muslims' (subject) position on the 'double periphery' of the Kenyan postcolony and the global Muslim umma.
practices through which denizens of the coastal city of Mombasa negotiate the literal and figurative place of a Muslim community within the bounds of a heterogeneous Kenyan metropolis. My primary concern is with the architectonics of Islamic vocalisations that every day resound in the public spaces of Mombasa’s historic Muslim–Swahili Old Town. Working in dialogue with other anthropological work on Muslim subject-formation (Hirschkind 2004, 2006; Mahmood 2005; El Guindi 2008), I argue that this ‘Islamic soundscape’ recruits a set of bodily practices through which Muslims in Mombasa Old Town transform the ostensibly public spaces of their neighbourhood into de facto private spaces of a Muslim–Swahili community.

Steven Feld’s (1996) ‘acoustemology of place’ in Papua New Guinea provides a model for my approach to the dynamics of the Islamic soundscape in Mombasa Old Town. As with Bosavi auditory practices according to Feld, I argue that Muslim auditory practices in Mombasa Old Town serve as ways of understanding and enacting the material environment as a place-in-the-world. I depart from Feld, however, in focusing heavily on acoustemological multiplicity and contestation, phenomena that are likely more common in postcolonial African cities than in the rainforest setting of Papua New Guinea. While I do hear a relatively coherent Islamic–Swahili ‘acoustemology of place resounding’ (to borrow Feld’s phrase) in Mombasa Old Town, my interest lies with the ways in which this acoustemology interacts with competing acoustemological commitments, particularly those fostered by the Kenyan state’s broadly liberal–democratic logic of urban public space. My aim is to reveal something of the subjective dimensions of Muslim citizenship on the Kenyan coast by asking how such acoustemological disjuncture shapes Muslim denizens’ visceral understandings and experiences of being ‘Kenyans’.

The approach I am outlining stands in tension (productive, I hope) with the influential work of Nilüfer Gölé and her academic interlocutors (see inter alia Gölé 2002, 2009; Gölé and Ammann 2006), who also explore Muslim belonging in contemporary societies with an empirical focus on

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7 Affective, embodied spatial practice has become a major concern in human geography in recent years, particularly with the turn to so-called ‘non-representational’ (or ‘more-than-representational’) theory (e.g. Lorimer 2005; Anderson and Harrison 2010). In writing this chapter I have garnered a great deal of insight and inspiration from geographers’ recent attempts at mapping ‘how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions’ (Lorimer 2005: 84).
'concrete' public space. In the first place, my approach challenges Göle's emphasis on Islam's public 'visibilities', an empirical bias that is problematic in light of the many, high-profile public and legal-juridical debates over the electrical amplification of the Islamic call to prayer in recent years. But this chapter ultimately offers a more radical challenge to Göle's approach than simply a methodological exhortation to 'listen'. My focus on acoustomological disjuncture makes audible something that gets lost in Göle and her interlocutors' approach to concrete public space as a 'space of appearances' (Arendt 1989 (1958)): namely, that contestations in concrete public space may also be contestations of concrete public space, driven by (epistemological) disagreements over how space can be known to be public or private and (ontological) disagreements over what constitutes public or private space in the first place. In contrast to Göle and her interlocutors, I approach concrete public space as something that is enacted, and potentially enacted in multiple forms (cf. Mol 2002; Hinchliffe 2010), in everyday life. Concrete public space on the Kenyan coast, as I will argue, is deeply 'multiaccentual' (Vološinov 1986 (1973)) by virtue of the constant struggle between Islamic–Swahili and broadly liberal–democratic understandings of publicity and privacy. It is my task here to listen in to the practices and politics of this multiaccentual public space to hear the conditions of Muslim citizenship on the Kenyan coast.

Mombasa Old Town and its Swahili context

Like other surviving 'Swahili stone towns' of the Kenya–Tanzania littoral, Mombasa Old Town was a bastion of Islamic urbanism, surrounded by little more than ocean and wilderness, for centuries. By linking the Mombasa area to the African interior by rail, British colonialists fostered the growth of a 'New Mombasa' at the turn of the twentieth century – a new urban settlement with a new mix of inhabitants, including labourers from up-country

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3 Göle takes the notion of 'concrete public space' from Arendt, who 'insists on the notion of a concrete public space (öffentlicher Raum) rather than an abstract public sphere (Öffentlichkeit)' (Göle 2009: 291). I use 'concrete' in this chapter also with Henri Lefebvre's abstract/concrete distinction in mind. For Lefebvre, 'concrete space is the space of gestures and journeys, of the body and memory, of symbols and sense' (Elden 2004: 189).

4 Debates or disputes over the amplification of the call to prayer have received scholarly and/or journalistic attention in Singapore (Lee 1999); London (Eade 1996); Hamtramk, Michigan, USA (Weiner 2010); Cairo, Egypt (Smith 2005); and to a lesser extent (but apropos the present work) Kenya, where the passage of anti-noise legislation in 2009 provoked a brief uproar from Muslim organisations concerned that the move was aimed at silencing mosques.
as well as the Indian Ocean world – just outside the bounds of (what then became) the Old Town. Today, Mombasa Old Town’s tight assemblage of ‘Swahili’- and ‘Indian’-style buildings abut a sprawling metropolis populated by nearly one million Kenyans of various geographical, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Remarkably, however, the ethnic character of the neighbourhood has changed little, save for the introduction of significant numbers of Somalians following the Somalian civil war in 1991 (MCP 1990: 43–55). The northern section is still dominated by the same Swahili-speaking Shafi’i Sunni Muslim clans that are thought to have settled the area as far back as the fourteenth century; the southern section is still home to a mix of coastal communities and Indian Ocean diasporants: Swahili, Arabs, Baluchis, South Asians (Hindu and Muslim), Somalians and a small number of African Christians.

While diverse in regard to ethnicity and sect, Mombasa Old Town’s Muslims share a common language of everyday intercourse (Swahili) and a social imaginary grounded in a distinction between their own civilised Islamic urbanity (uungwana) and the supposed barbarism (ushenzi) of others (Kresse 2007: 55–6). These cultural connections, which Kai Kresse (2007) refers to as the ‘Swahili context’, determine shared ‘patterns of speech and behaviour, greetings and terms of status and emotional states of being’, as well as sartorial, culinary and musical practices (Kresse 2007: 55–6).

The most important unifying factor for Mombasa Old Town’s Muslims, however, is place. Their neighbourhood and its surroundings provide them with shared sensory experiences while reaffirming ‘the bitter reality of their political marginalization’ in contemporary Kenya (Mazrui and Shariff 1994: 155). The constantly expanding city of Mombasa reminds them of their shared history of dispossession: every major stage in the development of New Mombasa was accompanied by a move towards the economic and political downfall of those in the Old Town. New Mombasa’s emergence in the late nineteenth century coincided with the dismantling of slavery, an institution that had propped up Mombasa Old Town’s Arab and Swahili patricians (Salim 1973: 100–1). The city’s first growth spurt, in the 1920s, then saw the relocation of shipping activity from the Old Port to the other side of Mombasa Island (De Blij 1968: 41; Willis 1993: 146–7). Finally, New Mombasa’s postcolonial boom saw an influx of newly empowered up-country Kenyans, among whom were ‘men ... hand-picked by President Kenyatta to ensure the incorporation and integration of the coast (remote, exotic, and largely Muslim if viewed from Nairobi, and certainly a former [opposition] stronghold) into the mainstream of Kenya’s economic and social life’ (Yahya 2000). Thus the urban spatial practices that every
day reproduce the Swahili context are inherently political, reflecting and refracting the larger symbolic struggle over coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya. Most of these practices are not overtly political, however. Only when Mombasa Old Town residents actively defend the cultural/moral character of their neighbourhood - for example, when male residents decry the ‘immodest’ dress of young Christian women who enter the bounds of the neighbourhood - do we find an overt politics. In this chapter, however, I detail a subtler but ultimately more significant spatial politics in Mombasa Old Town - one that proceeds in and through sound.

An Islamic soundscape

Mombasa Old Town is every day awash with electrically amplified male voices delivering Islamic devotional and moral texts in Arabic and Swahili. Five times a day a polyphony of cantillated Arabic calls to prayer emanates from the rooftop loudspeakers of dozens of neighbourhood mosques, its ‘soaring yet mournful, almost languid harmonic webs’ (Hirschkind 2006: 124) somewhat harshened by the crackling of overstressed or substandard sound reproduction technologies. The constant rhythm of this key ‘sound-mark’ (Schafer 1994 (1977)) is further punctuated each week by the polyphony of Arabic and Swahili sermons that emanate from many of these same loudspeakers. Between these periodic sonic events, a random assemblage of radios and computer speakers in local shops and homes supply the neighbourhood’s private and semi-private spaces with layers of Qur’anic recitations, sermons in Arabic, Swahili and sometimes English, and religious songs in Swahili and Arabic (Swa. kaswida; Ar. qaṣīda) - producing a continuous (e)merging of vocal performances that I refer to as an Islamic soundscape.

Though most of its constituent elements involve a recitation of, or reference to, a key text (the Qur’an), an Islamic soundscape is less an intertextual field than an architectonics of audible events resounding in local spaces and sensibilities. As will become clear, what makes the Mombasa Islamic soundscape a coherent entity is not its intertextuality but rather its ‘inter-practicality’: the ways in which its sounding and listening practices relate to each other and to the originary Islamic ‘recitation’, the Qur’an.

5 Mosques throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia commonly employ loudspeakers. The electrically amplified adhān came to Mombasa Old Town in the 1970s, after years of creative attempts by local muezzins to compete with the increasing volume of the city by using other makeshift technologies, including horns cannibalised from gramophone players.
Above all, an Islamic soundscape must be understood as deeply implicated in processes of subject-formation; it is an *apparatus*, 'a machine that produces subjectifications' (Agamben 2009: 20). At the simplest level, the Islamic soundscape *qua* apparatus recruits those within earshot as particular types of inhabitant–subjects (residents, visitors, etc.). The call to prayer, or *adhān* in Arabic, is key: as a literal act of hailing a community of believers (*umma*), its role in demarcating the space of a Muslim community is always at the forefront (Lee 1999). Indeed, the *adhān* is one of the primary '[subliminal] cues' that enable both residents and visitors in a heterogeneous city to recognise a 'Muslim quarter' (Abu-Lughod 1987: 160). In Mombasa, the sound of the *adhān* marks the Old Town as a 'Muslim quarter', even though the neighbourhood is not the only part of the city in which the call can be heard. This is because outside of the Old Town, Mombasa's *adhāns* are simply part of the urban din. In the market area, for example, though *adhāns* ring out from powerful loudspeakers mounted atop the high minarets of the large, Saudi-funded mosques, their sounds get lost in an urban din of rumbling cars and trucks, popular music soundtracks of *matatu* taxi-vans, and voices of touts and peddlers. In the Old Town, meanwhile, a thick polyphony of *adhāns* easily reaches the ears of anyone present. Since Swahili-style mosques typically lack minarets, the voices are close to ear level; moreover, they are relatively unfettered by the rest of the acoustic environment. Some of the humanly produced sounds that could potentially compete with *adhāns* in the Old Town (shouts, laughter, music, etc.) give way as pious Muslim residents receive the call; others, such as the throbbing *matatu* soundtracks, are simply absent in any case (*matatus* ply no routes through the Old Town's narrow streets).

In its guise as a 'subliminal cue', Mombasa Old Town's Islamic soundscape is not just an apparatus but also a sign-vehicle. For outsiders, especially, the Old Town's Islamic soundscape is part and parcel of a multisensory tableau that ties together the neighbourhood's other typical sights, sounds and smells: Indian-style wood doors, women in black purdah robes, Arabic- and Indian-inflected *taarab* music, aromas of incense and coconut rice and so on. Mediated by narratives of the Kenyan tourism industry, this tableau reflects the 'Arabian Nights ambience' (MacDonald 1956: 13) that has long been marketed to foreign tourists and is now increasingly marketed to middle-class up-country Kenyans as well. But for some Kenyans this tableau signifies something more repellent and frightening: a number of Mombasans not from the Old Town (including one Muslim) informed me that they avoid the neighbourhood for fear of being harmed or seduced by genie magic, homosexual practices or transnational jihadism, all of which
are rumoured to be common among the Old Town's Arab(ised) inhabitants (Porter 1995; McIntosh 2009: 89–126).

An Islamic acoustemology

The subject, according to Georgio Agamben (2009: 14), 'results from the relation and, so to speak, the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses'. It is in this more energetic sense that the Islamic soundscape serves as an apparatus for the production of Muslim subjects – only what Agamben describes as a 'relentless fight' Muslims describe in quite different terms, as sacred obligation (fard) and submission ('islām).

The Islamic soundscape's apparatival character is most apparent in its attendant practices of 'reception' (a somewhat imperfect term in this context). Consider the adhān once again. Unlike the Christian church bell, which is also a 'call to prayer' in the most literal sense, the adhān hails its subjects by initiating a participatory communicative practice (Fennes 2010: 79). Proper audition of the adhān implies an active process engaging not only the ears but also the entire body, including the voice. Upon hearing the first line, pious Muslims repeat the first words 'Allahu Akbar' (God is Great) quietly to themselves, along with other prescribed responses to subsequent lines (El Guindi 2008: 135). The obligation to respond in this way to the adhān is laid out in the hadīths, the authoritative narratives of the Prophet's words and deeds. But the idea of a vocal response is also embedded in the institution of the adhān at a more basic level, as the text includes the Shahāda, the testimony of faith ('There is no god but God, and Mohammed is his messenger'), the enunciation of which is the first 'pillar' of Islam. Pious Muslims who do not engage in such vocal responses (the question of whether women are obligated, or even allowed, to do so is actively debated in many parts of the Muslim world) typically respond with an attentive, otherworldly silence and, if necessary (and it often is), silencing actions: the muting of televisions and radios, the silencing of unruly children and so on. Women, meanwhile, adjust their headscarves. All these actions are habitual, undertaken with a 'calm serenity' (El Guindi 2008: 138) and 'a spontaneity analogous to the reflex adjustments of the muscles of a driver approaching a curve' (Hirschkind 2006: 125).

The adhān is not unique in demanding a particular form of participatory listening from Muslims. Sermon-listening also calls for habituated bodily techniques. Charles Hirschkind (2001b, 2006) describes Islamic sermon audition in Cairo as an 'ethical performance', which 'demands a particular
affective-volitional responsiveness from the listener ... while simultaneously deepening an individual's capacity to hear in this manner' (2001b: 624). Habituated responses to the Islamic soundscape therefore index a lifetime of ethical practice: 'These are the motions of the heart, limbs, and will ... as they continuously accommodate themselves to the familiar demands of a sonorous moral acoustics' (Hirschkind 2006: 124). Accordingly, pious Muslims place a great deal of emphasis upon the acquisition of pious listening habits in the earliest stages of physical and social development. In many parts of the Muslim world parents quietly perform the adhān and iqāma (the echo of the adhān, recited in the mosque) into the ears of their newborn children (Trimingham 1980 (1964): 126). Two influential works of Swahili autoethnography, Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari's nineteenth-century work The Customs of the Swahili People (1981: 8) and Hyder Kindy's Life and Politics in Mombasa (1972), attribute great importance to this practice, citing 'a belief that children who do not experience [it] when they are born will go astray and become bad characters' (Kindy 1972: 5).

In the context of contemporary social theory, a discussion of shared bodily dispositions evokes Bourdieu's (1980) theory of the habitus. But as some anthropologists of Islam have argued in recent years, Aristotle's theory of the habitus, which has left a strong mark on the writings of Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Khaldun, provides a more powerful theoretical perspective on Muslim subject-formation (see inter alia Starrett 1995; Mahmood 2005: 136–9). Unlike Bourdieu's theory, which stresses the unconscious and ineffable nature of embodied dispositions ('body hexis'), '[habitus in the] Aristotelian tradition is understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person' (Mahmood 2005: 136). In other words, it is a cultivated bodily orientation, which 'does not simply express the social structure but also endows the self with particular capacities through which the subject comes to enact the world' (Mahmood 2005: 139). Armed with this Aristotelian notion of habitus, we begin to see and hear how habituated modes of sounding and listening are also acoustemic capacities that enable Muslims in Mombasa Old Town to actively transform, or 'convert' (El Guindi 2008), the physical spaces of their neighbourhood.

Understanding how Muslims call upon their acoustemic capacities to enact the world requires an understanding of the Islamic ontology of the divine word. Muslims regard the Arabic text of the Qur'an as God's ipsissima verba, his very words, which were revealed to the world through the Prophet Mohammed's (mantic) recitation and were thereafter 'intended
to be rehearsed and recited by all believers; the Qur'an is literally 'the reciting' [al-quran] (Graham and Kermani 2006: 115). In an Islamic cosmology, sounded sacred words link the material world to the immaterial realm of God. In the process of forging this connection, sacred sound creates sacred space. A Swahili interlocutor in Mombasa directed me to a hadith passage (from Al-Bukhari, one of the most trusted collections of the Sunni canon) that beautifully illustrates this sonorous process of spatial sacralisation. 'When the Imam comes out, the Prophet is reported to have said, 'the angels present themselves to listen to the khutba [the Friday sermon]' (Al-Bukhari 1997: 23). The image here is one in which angels literally make themselves present within the space and time of the khutba's sounding (the Arabic root used in the passage, ḥ-d-r, connotes physical presence in space and time). That is to say, heavenly beings listen to the khutba not through some mystical mode of hearing but by temporarily joining with human beings in the profane world (dunya). Sound thus becomes a material tendon linking sacred and profane realms, thereby transforming (sacralising) the latter; or, better, sound becomes a potential tendon linking the sacred and the profane, as human beings also play an essential role in this sonic sacralisation of space.

In a boldly panoptic ethnographic study of spatiotemporality in Islamic cultures, Fadwa El Guindi (2008) outlines the effects of this spatial sacralisation on the concrete spaces inhabited by Muslim individuals and communities. She describes a 'rhythm of Islam', which is grounded in pious subjects' periodic 'movements ... out of ordinary time and space and into sacred time and space and back' (2008: 134). Such movements, El Guindi contends, may be effected by individuals or by groups: they are 'effected singly' in the act of prayer, when a 'Muslim, stripped temporarily of worldly identity, is in a sacred state'; they are 'effected collectively' in contexts of collective ritual practice, such as 'the mosque during Friday noon prayer and the annual pilgrimage to Makka' (2008: 136). In Mombasa Old Town, as in other Muslim places, the constant movements 'out of ordinary time and space and into sacred time and space and back' are effected to a significant extent in and through the acoustic capacities associated with the Islamic soundscape.

A resonant privacy

Mombasa Old Town's Muslim denizens' constant movements 'into sacred time and space and back' effectively transform, or 'convert' (El Guindi 2008),
the neighbourhood as a whole into something of a sanctuary. As in the Arab world, the notion of ‘sanctuary’ in the Swahili context is a concept that ‘connects sacred places, like mosque and pilgrimage centre, house of worship and house of learning, [and] also applies to women, women’s quarters, and family’ (El Guindi 2008: 150). Another way to understand this sanctification is as a kind of ‘communitarian privacy’ (Ammann 2006: 98–110), understanding ‘privacy’ in the Arab/Swahili sense, which ‘does not connote the “personal”, the “secret” or the “individuated space” [but rather] two core [social] spheres – women and the family’ (El Guindi 1999: 82).6

In the literature on the ‘Islamic city’, communitarian privacy is classically described as a function of architectural form: winding streets and mazes of courtyards make public space ‘defensible’ (Abu-Lughod 1987: 170) by fostering multiple ‘(gradations of] private, semi-private and semi-public space’ (Ammann 2006: 102). But to the extent that a Swahili stone town counts as an ‘Islamic city’, it suggests that Islamic communitarian privacy may be acoustical (or acoustemological) as well as architectural. Indeed, in the Swahili context a sanctuary is inherently resonant. Take, for example, the ideal-typical Swahili sanctuary, the domestic sanctum (ndani). As Swahili architecture scholar Linda Wiley Donley (1982) describes, the traditional house of a Swahili stone town is constructed not only with stones but also with sounds. Donley (1982: 72) offers the example of the elite Swahili ritual kutolewande, in which a forty-day-old infant is introduced to the house that will become her ‘very cosmos for several years’. In this ritual the mother and other female members of the household make audible the differences between the various rooms of the house, making each room vibrate with its own didactic songs (1982: 70).

In the Swahili context, humanly produced sound can also turn public (i.e. extra-domestic) spaces into sanctuaries. Indeed, for centuries residents of Swahili towns and villages have used sound to distinguish their settlement from a surrounding wilderness, or one moiety within the settlement from the other. Until the late twentieth century, along the coast, Swahili Muslims performed a yearly ritual of spatial demarcation and purification in which a sacrificial bull was led counter-clockwise around the town or moiety to the sounds of siwas (decorated side-blown horns of ivory, brass or wood which historically served as symbols of power in Swahili towns) and

6 Neither Arabic nor Swahili (the latter of which borrows much of its philosophical lexicon from the former) has a word that adequately expresses the classical Western notion of ‘privacy’ as the domain of an individuated subject (on Arabic, see El Guindi 2008: 147–50). El Guindi glosses ‘privacy’ in Arabic with reference to three intercalated cultural categories of ‘sanctity–reserve–respect’ (El Guindi 1999: 77–96).
verses from the Qur’an were recited (see inter alia el-Zein 1974; Ghaidan 1975: 69; Bakari 1981: 189–90).

A multiaccentuality of space

While the question of whether or not Kenya counts as a true liberal democracy is hotly debated today, it is nevertheless clear that the Kenyan state espouses a broadly liberal–democratic conception of the public/private distinction and the role of religion in public life, treating physical public spaces (at least in urban areas) as embodiments of the ‘arena of “neutral principles”’ on which it can justify its policies towards individual citizens and communities (Mitchell 1997: 165–6). What does it mean, then, for a resonant Muslim sanctuary – Mombasa Old Town – to be constantly superposed on the public spaces of Kenya’s heterogeneous ‘second city’? To approach the question, I want to move briefly away from Mombasa, to an area just north of the city.

In July 2006 the quiet, verdant area of Kikambala played host to a highly publicised dispute between a local imam and a female member of the coast’s foreign expatriate community. The trouble started soon after the imam’s mosque had been fitted with new rooftop loudspeakers that happened to be aimed in the direction of the expatriate’s nearby home. Early one morning, the expatriate made her way over to the imam’s mosque to register her consternation at being jolted out of bed by the pre-dawn adhān. She arrived outside the mosque while the elongated tones of the sacred recitation were still sounding, and began to shout her complaints towards the edifice. The imam soon emerged to investigate the disturbance. Upon finding an angry woman vocalising a dissonant counterpoint to the adhān, he offered what he would later calmly describe as the only appropriate response: he punched the woman squarely in the eye.

The imam’s response (that is, attack) was received with general approval from Kenyan Muslims. Leaders of Kenya’s national Muslim organisations were soon standing shoulder-to-shoulder with him in hastily organised press conferences, arguing that his violent response, however regrettable, was carried out in accordance with Islamic law as well as common sense. The local community of worshippers offered a similar defence, only more

7 The woman, who was of apparent East Asian extraction, was described as ‘Chinese’ in local news reports. In interviews she demonstrated knowledge of Swahili, indicating that she was a long-time resident.
performative in nature: in the gaze of television news cameras, a group of male worshippers constructed a stone wall to block the footpath that the expatriate had used to reach their mosque. Given that it was only wide enough to block the footpath, the wall was clearly a message meant to communicate that the expatriate's actions were an attack of an equivalent brutality to what she herself had suffered at the hands of the imam.

The story of the imam and the expatriate in Kikambala makes visible and audible the presence of competing logics of public space on the Kenyan coast, which is the essence of what I call the 'social multiaccentuality' (Vološinov 1986 (1973)) of public space on the Kenyan coast. In both the formulation and delivery of her complaint, the expatriate situated herself within the ostensibly 'neutral' public space of a liberal democratic republic, a space in which even sacred sound may be marked as noise and any subject may address any other without regard to minority norms of social intercourse. The imam's response, meanwhile, was grounded in a different logic of public space, an Islamic–Swahili logic, which bears its own rules of conduct and address.

V. N. Vološinov's (1986 (1973)) heuristic concept of multiaccentuality captures the ontological nature of the competition between logics of space on the Kenyan coast. By resisting the false dichotomy between representations and 'concrete material reality' (1986 (1973): 65), Vološinov reveals that the multiaccentual sign – whether it be a stretch of urban public space or a verbal utterance – 'does not just exist as part of a reality – it reflects and refracts another reality' (1986 (1973): 10). An active competition between logics of space thus marks an 'ontological politics', 'a politics over what there is and who/what can know it' (Verran 1998: 238; Mol 2002; Law 2010; Born forthcoming). By acting upon (and thereby enacting) divergent logics of public space, the imam, the expatriate and any others who became involved in their dispute were waging just such a politics.

Ontological politics, it must be stressed, is about more than the conflicts and clashes that arise from ontological disjuncture. Subjects can and do engage strategically with multiple, discrepant ontologies. The idea of a multiaccentuality of public space allows for the fact that subjects may strategically navigate and negotiate multiple logics of public space. This is particularly important for the context of the African postcolony (Hecht and Simone 1994; Mbembe 2001), whose subjects often 'learn to bargain in [a] conceptual marketplace' of multiple, 'entangled ... logics' of public space (Mbembe 2001: 104). In the case of the imam and the expatriate in Kikambala, it is possible the disputants may have been engaged in active, self-reflexive negotiation of multiple ontologies of public space. Indeed, the
fact that both primary parties to the dispute sought recourse to public opinion through the national media suggests that one or both may have been strategically refusing to recognise the underlying logic of their adversary's actions.

To bring this discussion back to Mombasa Old Town, some Muslim residents may comprehend the communitarian privacy of their neighbourhood *doxically*, as 'the way of the world'. Others, recognising the political power of communitarian privacy as an alternative to Kenya's dominant liberal–democratic logic of public space, may comprehend it as a provocative collectivist variation on the liberal–democratic theme of the individual right to privacy (i.e. a group of individuals claiming their right to be 'left alone', together). These two possibilities are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

A sonorous ontological politics

The multiaccentuality of public space in Mombasa Old Town thus engenders a sonorous ontological politics. I want to get deeper into this politics by attending to the Old Town's weekly polyphony of electrically amplified Friday sermons, or *khutbas*. Delivered by an imam or designated preacher, a *khutba* is an essential component of the all-important Friday midday prayer (*Jumu'a*). The highly structured sermon is always delivered in Arabic; however, in East Africa most (though not all) preachers include a Swahili portion (technically speaking, it is a separate sermon). While it is ostensibly meant to provide a translation or explication of what is conveyed in the (sacred) Arabic sermon, the Swahili sermon is often the lengthier of the two.

At first blush, there is a bit of irony in my using the *khutba* to discuss politics in Mombasa Old Town, as *khutbas* in the Old Town are understood locally to be far less 'political' than *khutbas* in other parts of the city. A number of Mombasa's preachers attached to newer (mid-twentieth-century) mosques outside of the Old Town have received their training at Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, Iran or other Muslim countries on scholarships. Their preaching, influenced by Salafi reform movements, often draws upon the rhetoric of global political Islamism, condemning Western values and Jewish Zionism. In contrast, the 'traditionalist-' or 'sufi-'style *khutbas* delivered by the locally trained preachers of the Old Town tend to focus on general ethical concerns (though references to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are not uncommon). It would seem, then, that *khutbas* broadcast by preachers at mosques outside the Old Town are far more 'political' than
those broadcast by preachers in the Old Town. But this is only true 'on paper', and the \textit{khutba} is not primarily a written genre. My argument here is that \textit{khutbas} in the Old Town are deeply political because of the ways in which they resound in the neighbourhood's multiaccentual public spaces.

The political timbre of the Old Town's \textit{khutbas} becomes audible upon considering the question of audience with respect to the Swahili portions. The fact is that the Old Town's electrically amplified \textit{khutbas} bear the potential to reach a broad and diverse audience that includes many Swahili-speaking Christians who reside, work or simply pass through the neighbourhood each day. On Fridays there are even more non-Muslims in the Old Town than on other days, because Friday is the day for Muslims to distribute charity (\textit{sadaqa}) to the poor. Needy Mijikenda and Kamba women, many of whom are Christians, flood the city with children strapped to their backs to make their rounds after the prayer. Not all of these women are highly competent Swahili speakers, but their aural comprehension of the language is likely to be fair. Intended or not, they are a potential audience for the Swahili portions of the neighbourhood's \textit{khutbas}.

When I asked Mombasan preachers and imams from within and without the Old Town about the significance of non-Muslims hearing a broadcast of the Friday \textit{khutba}, some allowed that a non-Muslim may be able to learn something from lessons (Swa. \textit{mawaidha}) in the Swahili sermons, but all averred that the words of the Friday \textit{khutba} are not meant for a non-Muslim's ears. A \textit{khutba}, I was reminded, is a \textit{sacred} oration mediating the relationship between the audience and God (Hirschkind 2006: 39). While Muslim preachers may speak directly to non-Muslims or expect non-Muslims to listen while preaching in a public park or in a radio broadcast, this is not the case when they are preaching in or from the mosque during Friday prayers. When I asked why the \textit{khutba} is then broadcast on loudspeakers into public space, the answer was once again unanimous: all my interlocutors mentioned the homebound Muslim women, insisting that electrical amplification is a practical solution to address the fact that pious women wish to (and are encouraged to) listen to the \textit{khutba}, but Swahili mosques do not have women's sections that would allow them to attend in person.

This characterisation runs contrary to the opinion I heard from some up-country Christians in Mombasa, who asserted that the \textit{khutba} is most likely broadcast in Swahili precisely so that it may reach the ears of non-believers.

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8 I conducted formal interviews and informal conversations with a number of Islamic leaders and intellectuals in Mombasa. Two consultants who can be named are Sheikh Abu Hamza of Sparki Mosque and Sheikh Mohammed Dor of Mbaruk Mosque. The latter is General Secretary of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya.
This belief is understandable given the growing number of preachers outside of the Old Town who use their Friday Swahili sermons as a platform for communicating with other communities as well when necessary (Topan 2000: 102). It also conforms to a liberal–democratic logic of public space, which is operative (if not always dominant) in Mombasa. To some extent any public broadcast in the Old Town is a true public broadcast, which must ‘[abandon] the security of its positive, given audience’ (Warner 2002: 113). ‘Public discourse’, Michael Warner writes (2002: 113), ‘promises to address anybody. It commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger. It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility.’

Discrepant understandings of the publicity/privacy of the broadcast khutba occasion ontologico-political struggles over public space every Friday afternoon in Mombasa Old Town. I first became aware of these struggles by committing a faux pas (a time-honoured ethnographic method). One Friday, early on in my research on Mombasa Old Town’s Islamic soundscape, I set out to make an audio recording of an amplified khutba from a window of the flat I had rented in the neighbourhood. Though I was trying not to be conspicuous, neither was I attempting to hide what I was doing, naively confident in the knowledge that neither Kenyan law nor my professional ethics dictated that any permission was necessary to record a ‘public broadcast’. As I later learned, some congregants who noticed me with my microphone expressed concern and called a meeting to discuss possible ways of preventing me from making any further recordings. Fortunately, friends of mine who were respected members of the Old Town’s Swahili community caught wind of the developing situation and helped to defuse it by arranging for me to meet with the mosque’s imam to explain my (purely academic) interest in their khutbas.

When I first learned that something I had done had stirred suspicion among some local Muslims, I was not entirely surprised, given that Kenya’s entanglements in the ‘global war on terror’ had given coastal Muslims reason to suspect any white stranger who is not a tourist of being a spy (see Prestholdt 2011). I wondered, however, how my act of recording a public broadcast could be seen as threatening? A Swahili friend – I will call him Ahmadi – helped to answer this question, and in the process opened my eyes and ears to the nature of the Old Town’s sonorous ontological politics. Ahmadi asked me to consider the case of Mbaruk Mosque in the Old Town, which is situated across a narrow street from Mombasa’s Central Police Station, a building occupied by up-country Christians who literally embody the authority of the Kenyan state. ‘You know’, he said, ‘those polisi hear every
word of the *khutba* while just sitting there in their station. But if just one of them would stand outside like this' – he crossed his arms and puffed up his chest, imitating a police officer's posture – 'listening!', he stressed, and then he completed his thought with a characteristically Swahili 'eh-heh', meaning 'just you see!' In other words, according to Ahmadi's hypothetical narrative, Mbaruk Mosque's leaders and congregants understand, and perhaps even accept, that their weekly *khutba* is audible to agents of the state; but if an agent of the state should suggest, even through a simple bodily gesture, that he or she had the obligation to make sure the *khutba* accorded with the laws and regulations governing urban public space in Mombasa, this would be taken as an attack against or transgression of the communitarian privacy of the Muslims of Mombasa Old Town.

Ahmadi's ethnomethodological thought-experiment reveals a constant process of negotiation (or mediation) in Mombasa Old Town, a kind of social choreography whereby Muslims and non-Muslims with conflicting acoustemological commitments respond to the Islamic soundscape according to a shared set of normative behavioural expectations. Missteps are constant in this negotiation, but they are usually small and subtle, such as (to take one example from my field notes) when an old Muslim woman bluntly informed a young non-Muslim woman that the ostensibly public setting in which a traditional *maulidi* recitation was being delivered for the annual commemoration of the birthday of the prophet Mohammed was 'no place for infidels'. Such micropolitical controversies are part and parcel of the seemingly impalpable 'social tensions' (Prestholdt 2011) that obtain between Muslims and non-Muslims on the Kenyan coast. As such, they set the conditions for larger 'blow-ups' (Göle 2002), like the one involving the expatriate and the imam in Kikambala, or the one that might have resulted had no one intervened on my behalf after I was spotted recording a *khutba*.

Conclusion: communitarian privacy resounding

I have described a sonorous production of Islamic communitarian privacy in the public spaces of Kenya's major coastal city. As a palpable alternative to a liberal–democratic social imaginary, this communitarian privacy bears a powerful resonance for struggles over notions of coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya. Much of the scholarly work on coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya focuses more heavily on another resonance, however – the resonance of the past. Historian James R. Brennan (2008: 859–60), for
example, stresses the 'surprising resonance' of coastal Muslims' memories of their unsuccessful struggles for political autonomy during the late colonial era; and Jeremy Prestholdt (2011: 6–9) writes of 'histories of alienation' whose mnemonic resonance feeds tensions between coastal Muslims and the Kenyan nation state. While the resonance of the past is always central to debates and struggles over coastal Muslim citizenship in Kenya, the communitarian privacy that resounds in Mombasa Old Town and other Muslim-dominated spaces of the coast has taken on equal, if not greater, significance since the run-up to the final referendum on the new Kenyan constitution (enacted in 2010). During these debates, coastal Muslim activists and politicians raised the quixotic yet highly provocative idea of complete political autonomy for the coastal strip (Ndurya 2009). While the idea of coastal autonomy is partly grounded in particular interpretations of historical events (Brennan 2008), it is certainly given impetus by the model of communal autonomy provided by the Islamic communitarian privacy that resounds daily in Mombasa Old Town. Enacted through affective, bodily practices of ritual sounding, listening and responding, the Old Town's Islamic communitarian privacy supplies a model of communal autonomy that does not need to be recollected from the past. It is a living model, experienced, bolstered and defended every day through sonorous ontologico-political struggle.