Weddings in Lamu, Kenya : An Example of Social and Economic Change
Madame Patricia Romero Curtin

Résumé
P. R. Curtin — Mariages à Lamu (Kenya) : un cas de changement économique et social.
L'étude comparée des conditions et rites du mariage dans quatre des classes sociales de la société musulmane de Lamu souligne les tendances générales de l'évolution sociale et les relations entre les diverses strates : l'ancienne aristocratie arabo-bantu essaie de maintenir une tradition peu compatible avec son appauvrissement actuel ; elle reste le modèle imité par la classe montante des Hadrami, arrivés d'Arabie au cours du xxe siècle, et par les descendants de ses propres esclaves, avec qui elle constitue un sous-ensemble distinct de celui des Kore, immigrants récents de souche continentale, toujours considérés comme étrangers.

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'L please your husband all the day
you live with him...'
Mwana Kupona's advice to her daughter, Lamu, 1850s.

Lamu is on the northern Kenya coast, on an island bearing the same name. Throughout the 20th century, the town population has remained at between 5,000-7,000, although there was a decrease of perhaps 1,500 people during the height of the depression in the 1930s. The periods covered in this paper are the early 1930s, when the population was relatively stable; the early 1950s, when many middle-aged informants were married; and, in the early 1980s, when I was undertaking fieldwork and was, therefore, a participant-observer of the recent weddings under discussion.

While much of this paper is concerned with analyzing class behavior, and the interrelationships between various classes of women in Lamu, it is also in some respects concerned with family history. Family and class are closely linked, as this paper demonstrates.1 A brief and somewhat superfluous sketch of the groups living in Lamu town, and the surrounding small farms (shamba), in the 20th century is necessary to place in perspective those families under discussion. First, there were the old Afro-Arab families, a mixture of the progeny of the merchants (and later settlers) and African women. There were, still, African slaves who intermarried with each other and, among the women, with their owners. A few Bajun, an ethnic group of Afro-Arab ancestry, from nearby islands; and the representatives of the ruling class: Arabs from Zanzibar; and the

1. This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in Lamu in 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983. I am grateful to Sally Griffith, B. Marie Parinbam, and Marguerite Ylvisaker for their comments and criticisms on earlier drafts. I am also indebted to Binta Leila A. Abdalla, my research assistant, for verifying my data with Lamu informants. Unless otherwise noted, references to 'Lamu women' include freeborn Afro-Arab women and ex-slave women. Altogether, I interviewed eight women in these groups for this paper. See also COPPENS 1981.

British, who never numbered more than five or six in appointive positions. Also present in ever decreasing numbers were members of the Indian community: Hindus, Muslims, and a few Parsees. Among Muslim Indians, there were two distinct groups, traditional Muslims, and the Bohra community (whose practices included Hindu elements, and whose mosque was and is off limits to all other Lamu Muslims). Most Hindus left Lamu over the course of this century, as did most of the others, with the exception of the Bohra community which is still present. These Indians may be the wealthiest people in Lamu, but also the most remote in cultural contacts with others in the town.

By the beginning of the 20th century, there was a growing number of ‘new’ Arabs from the Hadramaut in southern Arabia. While old Arabs, new Arabs, and most slaves (in addition to some Muslim Indians and the Bajun) had in common their faith in the Sunni sect of Islam, they were stratified along distinct class lines. As the century progressed, new people entered Lamu, and some established residents departed, but the established class hierarchy has remained intact. The last known group to enter Lamu on a permanent basis were the Kore, who arrived in small numbers from the 1940s until the present time (Curtin 1985). I have chosen four groups, and their interrelationships with each other, to present a changing view of Lamu in economic terms while showing that the social hierarchy remains very much the same although slightly altered over time: the Afro-Arab old families; the Hadrami ‘new’ Arabs; the slaves and their descendents; and the ‘strangers’, or outsiders, the Kore.

In the late 1830s, John Studdy Leigh, an Englishman based in Zanzibar, noted that a wedding was taking place near his quarters. Although the description was not complete, some facts emerge which illustrate that a Zanzibari wedding of that period was not very different from a Lamu wedding in quite recent times. The bridegroom had paid bride price to the bride’s father, who, in turn, had used the money to provide gifts for his daughter. Free women and slave women mingled in a separate area reserved for them celebrating the occasion; men, in their area, engaged in the traditional sword dance. A wedding in those days among the upper class in Zanzibar lasted one week, with each day featuring dancing, singing, and sumptuous feasts (Kirkman 1980).

Lamu, a prosperous seaport in the 19th century, looked to Zanzibar for her culture from the early days of Omani influence there until Zanzibar was eclipsed to some extent by Mombasa. From the beginning of Omani rule (1837 and on), Lamu was known as a religious center; the leading families were considered pious. The cultural changes that occurred in the town came from outside influences, and hence began what may be called a copycat mentality which brought in customs from Zanzibar (which may have come there from Oman), later from Mombasa, and today some elements from the West. A combination of economic factors brought rapid decline to Lamu’s prosperity during this century. The
end of the slave trade, in which Lamu merchants played a significant role; the growth of Mombasa as a major seaport, tied to the East African interior through the rail line; and the end of slavery on the mainland plantations which were owned by the Lamu Afro-Arabs—all contributed to closing off her busy port to contact with the wider Indian ocean world (Ylvisaker 1979).

By 1910-1911, District Commissioner reports began the litany of Lamu's poverty which continued with few exceptions until the end of the colonial period. Yet, one constant persisted among the upper-class Afro-Arab old families who remained in town—their desire to dress well and to maintain the appearances of their former wealth through their wedding celebrations. We will examine critically the wedding practices of the four groups currently living in Lamu. Roughly, the three time periods (1930s, 1950s, 1980s) are useful to measure social and economic change among the Afro-Arabs; the new, early 20th-century arrivals from Hadramaut; the slaves (and ex-slaves); and the Kore. Class lines were tightly drawn in upper-class families as to who married whom. The exception in this century (and even earlier) were the BuSaid family who, as Arab rulers over the area, were quickly absorbed in the lineages of the town's leadership. Space does not permit a detailed genealogical approach to lineage in Lamu, but the most important families in the 20th century were the el-Maawyi, el-Bakari, and el-Hussein (a Shariifan family of long duration on the Kenya coast), and, by the 1900s, the Jahadhmy. All intermarried with the BuSaid offspring of Hamid bin Sud bin Said, the often appointed liwali ('administrators') of Lamu, and a grandson of the first Omani sultan. All intermarried with each other as well. These families had owned large tracts of land on the mainland across the channel—which they call 'Africa'. But the end of slavery saw the total decline in agricultural production, and therefore in revenue from these possessions.

The Afro-Arab families were unaccustomed to working for a living; they believed paid employment beneath their dignity. According to District Commissioner reports and oral testimony, their style of living altered only slightly on the surface, although many of the old families eventually lost all of their property through default on loans and their youths left Lamu for employment elsewhere. Because of their poverty, they were unable to keep their Lamu stone houses from falling into disrepair. Afro-Arab men were reported as literally sitting on their porches (baraza), and watching their houses crumbling behind them. Their

2. DC/LMU/1/5 Kenya National Archives (hereinafter KNA), Nairobi.
4. Handing Over Report, 1934, KNA. The el-Bakari family, once a large and prosperous group in Lamu, was reduced to only two elderly members in 1982.
dwindling resources were further reduced when the government changed currency from rupees to shillings in 1920-1921. Arabs who had hoarded their rupees, and had failed to pay the non-native hut tax, were unable to come forward to exchange their money with British officials. Instead, they were again at the mercy of the Indian traders—who made exchanges on a rate very favorable to themselves, and thus helped deplete even further the limited resources of the Afro-Arab families.

Despite their declining prosperity those remaining Afro-Arabs carefully continued their old practices of arranging marriages between family members, usually cousins (cross and parallel cousins marry in Lamu), to keep their few assets—usually property—within the family. Cousin marriage also insured that daughters were well taken care of since they were marrying within the family.\(^5\)

Older informants were unable to remember wedding costs well enough to provide extensive data for the 1930s, but they were able to detail many of the celebrations and feasts which accompanied their marriage in this period. The majority of informants for this study were women—freeborn as well as ex-slave. Because of strict purdah in Lamu, I am not at liberty to name my female informants, but old ladies remembering their own weddings stated that they differed little from those of their parents earlier in this century.\(^6\)

Upper-class young girls were almost always married off just after they entered puberty and were never told that their marriage was arranged until the wedding day itself. They did, of course, hear rumors from their slaves, and preparations were going on around—but there were always preparations in process among the women who marked occasions which young people seldom paid attention to. There was no right of refusal. In the 1930s, as was still the case in the 1950s, girls often cried and begged their parents not to marry them off; or, they retreated to a far corner and sulked about the husband their fathers (usually) had chosen for them.\(^7\)

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5. Arranged marriage between cousins is the custom in most of the Arab world; see Caplan 1975: 25-26. See also M. F. Smith 1954: 102-105; Goody & Goody 1966. Bloch (1978) found that the Merina of Madagascar never marry sisters' cousins to each other. See also Heggoy 1974; Tillion 1966. Schwartz (1982) and Allen (1981) have published on Swahili marriage customs but their findings elsewhere on the East African coast do not reflect those in Lamu.

6. Sheikh Ahmed Jabadhmy; Ali bin Mohamed BuSaid, personal interview, Lamu, February 1982; Lamu women. These statements do not suggest that no changes took place between 1830 and 1930, but they indicate that there was continuity in wedding rituals over time and between Lamu and Zanzibar. Yet, Nath (1978: 177) makes the point that maritime societies change more rapidly than pastoral or rural communities because of their exposure to foreign cultural patterns. For comparisons with 19th-century French customs, see B. G. Smith 1981: 55-59 and passim.

7. For negative response to arranged weddings elsewhere see Jeffery 1979; Wazan 1911: 126. In Morocco, resistance at moment of consummation took place—which is part of the ritual. See Westermarck 1921: 231; Quimby 1979.
On the appointed day, young brides were descended upon by household slaves, who took them away for the lengthy processes of applying henna to their hands and feet, dressing their hair for the first time in grown-up fashion, and otherwise beautifying them to meet their husbands.

Meanwhile, the households of both bride and groom buzzed with activity. Gargantuan feasts were in order, and they invited all members of their extended families—which meant nearly every member of the upper class then living in Lamu. They slaughtered calves and goats. They cooked huge kettles of rice pilaf, baked long loaves of bread filled with ghee and sugar; and made the special wedding bread, for which they bought an expensive grain, ngano. Slaves did all of the domestic purchasing for their mistresses, who never went shopping. The bride’s father settled bride price with male members of the groom’s family, and made the more expensive purchases. Bride price in the 1930s for a virgin upper-class girl ran from 400 to 800 or 1,000 shillings (roughly translated, 1,000 Sh. was worth US $250 in 1930), which, with few exceptions, had to be paid before the wedding day. Young men were often aided by their fathers, who were forced to arrange loans with local Indian merchants, because Arabs did not borrow from one another. The single exception to ‘borrowing’ came about when families were especially close. Grooms, then and now, can unofficially arrange to make a down payment on bride price and then are obligated to the bride (wife) until they pay off their debt. This practice is discouraged. It has in the past often been the cause of discord between husbands and wives—especially when husbands discard first wives before they have discharged their obligation of bride price toward them.8

The structure of the Lamu stone house has been connected with the wedding ritual. Some writers have suggested that the receding chambers in the living area, going from open courtyard to chambers leading off of each other in ever more decorated fashion, yet featuring more seclusion, were originally designed for the wedding ceremony. This supposition is refuted by all living informants whose lore does not include why the houses were designed as they were. Even the decorated, special Lamu chair, which in the past was often inlaid with ivory and gold, is reputed to have been designed for weddings. As important as weddings were, especially to the female members of the Lamu community, the concept of ‘wedding chair’ is almost certainly an error. In fact, the design of the Lamu chair was originally Portuguese; and informants uniformly agree that the specially decorated chair was (and is) reserved for guests of importance, such as the senior male head of the extended family, or a guest of high status.9

8. CLIVE (1933: 88) wrote that Indians ‘to some extent live at the expense of the Arabs. I cannot give statistics but I believe they own as much of Lamu Island as the Arabs, on whose mortgages they have foreclosed’. 
Among the old Afro-Arab families, lavish display of fine clothes was the order of the day in the past as well as now. Wedding celebrations ran seven days, with dancing, singing, sometimes paid entertainment and, always, feasting. Although the bride did not appear in public (meaning a public group of women) until the day after her wedding, or the third day of the celebrations, her mother and sisters required new dresses for each of the seven days. The bride, as the center of attention, needed the finest and most beautiful dresses, especially for the day after consummation when it was the custom to ‘display’ her before all of the upper-class women and their slaves. It was the custom in the 1930s, 1950s, and until quite recently, for women to dress as closely to Zanzibari (Omani) fashion as possible. In the 1980s, most upper-class old family brides have turned toward the west, with white wedding dresses and long veils, although their makeup still reflects that used in the Indian and Arab world, including henna designs on the feet and hands. One or two brides from the family which claims the longest continuing residence in Lamu have worn western style dress on the first day they are displayed; and then have changed to expensively designed Arab style dress for a second appearance on the following day. This extravagance reflects the women’s desire to tie the past with the present; and it represents a show of wealth (even if the bride has had to earn the money herself).

In the 1930s, and continuing into the 1950s, Hadrami Arabs and Indians were not invited to these weddings because of the highly stratified notions of class which persisted among the Afro-Arabs. Slaves of the extended families of both bride and groom played a significant role in weddings. Slave women danced while their men played musical instruments to accompany them. Songs, often newly composed for the occasion, were sung by slave women. Although, by the 1950s some free, upper-class women also joined in singing with their remaining slaves, or ex-slave female companions. Homosexual men, or men from the lower class, took the place of slave men as time passed and slavery gradually died out in Lamu. Slaves also carried wedding presents between the homes of brides and grooms.

It has been traditional in the 20th century for the bride’s family to send a series of gifts to the groom—kanga (‘cloth’), soap, sandals—thus displaying wealth and goodwill publicly even when there was no real wealth to cover the expenses. The groom’s family sent extravagant gifts to the bride—perfumes, silks and other expensive material, and stylish items of the time. Gold for the bride was a must, and usually the responsibility for providing it fell on the mother, who paid for gold jewelry with any income she might have inherited from her father. Sometimes the very poor among the old families borrowed gold bangles and chains from

9 Allen & Wilson (1970), where Allen claims (pp. 16-17) that Swahili houses in Lamu were partially constructed with the wedding ritual in mind.
their wealthier relatives for the major display, but no girl went to her wedding without some gold jewelry of her own. An estimate of the total cost to a bride’s family for a single wedding ran between 2,000 and 3,000 Sh.10

One informant believed that the high price of Lamu weddings drove Lamu men from the town to further down the coast—Malindi, Mombasa, or even Dar es-Salaam—where they were anonymous, and therefore did not have to face the prospect of paying bride price, or later marrying off their own daughters in the highly competitive, materialistic Lamu atmosphere.11 What further complicated the lives of Lamu residents was the high incidence of divorce (see Table I). The marriage of one cousin to another, purportedly to stave off divorce, did nothing to keep some men from deserting their wives; or, worse, from taking a second wife after the lapse of a few years.

**Table I. — Selected Data on Lamu Marriages and Divorces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Divorce</th>
<th>Divorce/Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>2,541</td>
<td>2,826</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>2,540</td>
<td>1,865</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Although not stated in the District Commissioner reports, 1911-1913 seem to represent the Lamu district—or reflect a higher population on Lamu island before the population flight decreased the numbers of people. These data represent recorded marriages and divorces, and are therefore not accurate. Many ex-slaves and lower-class members of the Lamu community did not bother to have their marriages and divorces recorded.

Upper-class Lamu women resented a second wife, as undoubtedly did all Lamu Muslim women, especially if their husbands took younger wives after their first wives had born children and had aged. Families were large, eight children not being considered unusual (though in the 1930s some may have died off before reaching marriageable age). As far back as the 1930s, and increasingly so as the decades have unfolded, the more wealthy among them tried to force their husbands to divorce them after

10 Lamu women. Sheikh Ahmed Jahadhy. **Ikrumullah** ([1930]: 31, 34, 39) described similar preparations for weddings in Pakistan, including expensive jewelry and fine dresses, and the use of henna in makeup. For women and the symbolism of dress see B. G. Smith 1981.

11 Mohamed bin Ali BuSaid spoke for himself and others of his generation who left Lamu at least partially for this reason. Interview, February 1982.
they took a second wife. In some cases, force was limited to mere suggestion because it was easier to support a new wife and her children alone. In other cases, older wives were cold, distant, disruptive, or enjoined any combination of behavior to get their husbands to pronounce the sentences of divorce, so that they could escape to the natal home and the comfort of fathers or brothers. Although Islamic law requires that a father provide for his children, with little or no income available to them, Lamu fathers rarely did so—and this despite the familial relations between husbands and first wives.

Some enterprising women, on return to the homes of their fathers, began surreptitiously earning money by sewing and embroidering kofia. In the 1930s kofia (Muslim caps for men) were selling for 0.50 Sh. on the open market. Allowing for a mark up of at least half that amount, and probably three quarters, their small return per cap could hardly have afforded them much buying power even in the depressed market of the 1930s. Yet, the fact that they turned to this, and other means of earning money, illustrates the desperate straits in which some upper-class women found themselves. In the rare families not broken by divorce, but facing economic ruin because their husbands would not work, women also started small cottage industries in their homes. In theory, the money they earned was their own. If there was a surplus beyond family needs, women saved their money to buy gold for their daughters. The economic role of mothers in their daughters’ wedding was important whether the mother was poor or rich.

As early as 1938, there were five Lamu girls attending a private night school; but community pressure as a whole, including more conservative members of the Afro-Arab class, discouraged all but one stalwart scholar, who, by 1940, was the only one still in attendance. Classes consisted of homemaking hints and hygiene courses, and were taught by two women imported from Mombasa. In the 1950s, members of the old families founded a day school and girls from the leading families attended in increasing numbers from then on. The first students, from the Jahadhmy and el-Maawyi families, had to avoid being pelted with stones. Fathers and other male relatives escorted them until open confrontation changed to critical murmurs behind their backs.

The die had been cast. Now, the Lamu Afro-Arab ‘new woman’ no


13. The role of mothers in arranging their daughters’ weddings and in providing for them economically is mentioned in Swartz 1981; Maher (1974: 42) found that in Morocco ‘women arrange marriages and take charge of all the ritual’. Landberg (1982) refers to the high numbers of divorce in Swahili society.

longer looked to her wedding celebration as the major event in her life. Gradually, over time, life outside the home in such occupations as teaching opened new vistas and opportunities to these educated young women. For their parents, however, the wedding production continued to be important as symbol of status, with the father often providing education for his daughter, and the mother supplying traditional wedding gifts. Values for the educated young women changed too, but most girls adhered to their parents’ wishes and, to follow tradition, saved money for their earnings to help pay for their costly weddings.

Social change over time is reflected in the home as well. With slaves no longer available for domestic chores, Lamu Afro-Arab women join forces to prepare wedding feasts, turning their labor into something of a party within the celebration itself. Ex-slaves and freeborn women mingle together at weddings as Strobel (1979) found in her Mombasa study. But in Lamu there are some exceptions. In roles formerly reserved for the head-slave during vugo celebrations, ex-slave women still reserve the right to act as head-slave (if they had been such previously), and lead both dancing and singing for certain songs. Despite the almost casual mixing during these performances, everyone knows the social position of the other, and all defer to the women of the old families. Fifty or even thirty years ago, all women of the Afro-Arab class who were able, attended weddings of family and friends. In the 1980s older women stayed away, regarding the more egalitarian approach as ‘disgrace’. The pacesetters of change—women in their forties and younger—attend most weddings of rich and poor: if for no other reason than the opportunity it affords them to come out of seclusion; and, the additional chance to show off their new dresses and their gold jewelry.

Even though the burden of expense fell most heavily on men earlier in the century they, too, relished the excitement of a Lamu wedding. They engaged in several styles of dance: kirumbizi ngoma, a night stick dance; chama, a sword dance which originally came from Oman; and, in the groom’s house, they danced tarabu. Tarabu is said to be an Arab dance which features men shuffling their feet back and forth while they sway their hips, and vigorously move their heads from side to side. Young and old danced together, but they were separated by class. As class barriers broke down, ex-slaves as well as others from outside the circle of old families started attending these ceremonies. In fact, in recent years they have become public events with tourists gawking on the sidelines and sometimes attempting to join in the dancing. The older men have withdrawn. When a member of their family marries, they pay a call on the parents or the bride or groom (or both). As an informant explained, weddings, even though festive occasions, were quiet and controlled. Class integration and riotous youths with rock music affront the ‘dignity’ of the pious elders.

Earlier in the century, Afro-Arab men dressed in a jokho (sort of caftan),
with an Omani-style dagger at their belt. Clothing for a single groom cost in the neighborhood of 700 Sh. On alternative days the groom and friends feasted at his home, or at the home of the bride (with women alternating feasts accordingly). No household involved with a wedding spared expense, and somehow money was produced to put on the show.

A wedding which cost 200 or 300 Sh. in 1930 had for some soared with inflation to as much as 8,000 or 10,000 Sh. by 1950, with bride price alone rising from a high of 5,000 (US $700 in 1950) to a low of 1,000 to 2,000 Sh. for an upper-class virgin girl. The exact sum depended on family agreements. And girls were still married off at the onset of puberty. For those members of the Afro-Arab old families who remained in Lamu in the 1950s, income varied even more considerably than in the 1930s, when almost everyone was poor but proud. Among these families pride outweighed practicality. If a poor but respectable cousin or extended kin offered to marry his young daughter, a father often arranged lesser sums than those paid by the more wealthy. Or, in other words, there was more variation among the upper classes in bride price in the 1950s than had been the case in the 1930s. There were also less grooms. The shortage of eligible bachelors meant that some virgin Afro-Arab girls were married off as second wives to older men with the proper family background.

Upon her marriage the bride took at least a cupboard, bed, dresser, and stools with her. Most of these items were constructed and carved in Lamu or in Mombasa. The quality of materials the bride took to her marriage depended on the wealth of the family; and to some extent, on the wealth paid by her groom.

In the 1980s, bride price for a girl from an Afro-Arab family ran from 10,000 to 15,000 Sh. (an exception being a girl from one of these families who married an American—he paid 20,000 Sh., or about US $1,540). Lamu salaries have not risen according to inflated bride price (see Table II). It is still traditional to marry a daughter to her cousin, but the number of young unmarried males in this category is even less than in the 1950s. As a consequence, marriages are sometimes arranged with outsiders, but the criterion is wealth or potential earning power if not family.

One daughter of an old and respected family married a young man whose father originally came from the Comoro islands and established a business in Lamu. His son had a trade. The marriage broke up after the birth of two children, and after the family moved to Mombasa where the husband began to abuse his wife. If the couple had been related, family members would have intervened. In this case, the woman’s father encouraged her to return home. Her younger sister was later married to a cousin—but this was a love match and both bride and groom were active in negotiations for the marriage and in planning their wedding. It was big, expensive, and traditional.15

15. Lamu women; Ali Abdalla el-Maawyi.
Table II.—Sample Wages, Bride Prices and Wedding Costs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930s</th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bride price (wealthy)</td>
<td>400-1,000</td>
<td>1,000-5,000</td>
<td>10,000-15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bride price (slaves and descendents)</td>
<td>less than 100</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>1,000-2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bride price (Kore)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled wages (per day)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>10-20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porters (per day)</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>20-40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houseboys (per month)</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>40-60</td>
<td>350***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculturists (Kore only 1980s)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>50-75</td>
<td>100-150****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sandals (poor quality)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>35-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding costs (wealthy, including Hadrami 1980s)</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>8,000-10,000</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding costs (poor)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In current Kenya shillings. Data compiled from combination of oral interviews, data provided by Leila A. Abdalla, and District Commissioner reports (KNA).

** Dependent on how many jobs they can find a day; and how many days they work; skilled labor work six days a week regularly.

*** Wages set by government.

**** Includes herding, growing foodstuffs, and caring in general for a 1-5-acre shamba.

As the upper-class families departed from mila ('tradition'), reducing the costs and duration of their weddings, and have emphasized education for their daughters, the Hadrami emerged to carry on the tradition. Bringing with them some of their customs from Hadramaut, they quickly adapted to Lamu cultural practices as well—a few through marriage to ex-slaves. The Hadrami were poor when they arrived in Lamu at the end of the 19th or early in the 20th century; but the British District Commissioners resident in Lamu in the 1930s regarded them as 'very different virile, hardworking and grasping' when compared to the Afro-Arabs.16

Most Hadrami immigrants willingly took the basest of jobs when they arrived in Lamu. Often competing with slaves and ex-slaves for low-paying jobs such as porters on the docks or as general laborers for the British government. A few set up stands along the street, buying items cheaply and mostly illegally from dhows which called in port, and reselling these items at lower prices than were available in the duka ('shops') owned by Indian merchants. Some Hadrami boys jumped ship in Lamu

16. Clive, Handing Over Report, DC/KTI 2/1 1934 KNA.
and begged members of the old families to employ them on their *shamba*, where they tended cattle and delivered milk to the townhouses. Whatever their occupations, they saved their money, lived as cheaply as possible in the southern end of town (Langoni) among slaves and ex-slaves, and as soon as possible entered business. As the Indians began to leave Lamu for better opportunities elsewhere, the thrifty Hadrami bought them out. They made no effort to mingle socially with anyone but themselves, nor did they attempt to gain any political power until quite recently. Education for their daughters was strictly forbidden; their sons sometimes attended primary school (when education became free), to learn arithmetic and to speak a bit of English in order to accommodate Lamu’s latest economic boom—the tourist trade.

By the 1980s, the Hadrami surpassed the Afro-Arabs in numbers of businesses owned, and were among the wealthiest families in Lamu. Their daughters are married at puberty, if possible, by age fifteen at the latest. After the onset of menstruation, Hadrami girls are kept in rigid seclusion. The one exception is that a few select girls are chaperoned by their mothers to and from the home of a teacher, where they spend an hour a day learning to read and write in English and Swahili. The Hadrami girl, like the Afro-Arab girl in previous years, is notified of her forthcoming marriage when it is at hand. She, like her Afro-Arab counterpart of yesterday, has no right of refusal.

The Hadrami have been in Lamu long enough by the 1980s to have established a kin network of sorts, and they try to keep their wealth in the family by marrying off cousins. If family connections are not possible, a merchant tries to marry his daughter into the group of Hadrami merchants and to one who has at least equal income to his own. Bride price is high—the same as for an Afro-Arab girl—and, at least partially to show his new status and wealth, the Hadrami father spends lavishly on his daughter’s wedding. The ceremonies are reduced to three days, but much activity is crowded into them—including the traditional feasting and dancing. Clothes are purchased from Mombasa or Arabia. Wedding cakes, other delicacies, and bands and singers are sometimes flown in from Mombasa for the biggest night of the wedding—the night consummation takes place. One wedding I attended in 1982 contained all of the features described above, but also included a rented video camera which was operated by a man. This man and his assistants openly filmed the bride being displayed, her attendants, and all of the women who were present and unveiled. Because the women were congregated together in an area separate from the men, they sat completely exposed in their finery while the cameras whirled. Informants estimated that this Hadrami wedding cost the bride’s father 40,000 Sh.18

17. Hadrami women; Sheikh Ahmed Jahadhmy.
18. Personal observation, 1982; Binta Leila A. Abdalla.
Neighbors in the *mtaa* (‘ward’) of the Hadrami bride and groom are invited to weddings; and they can, indeed do, include most of the female dwellers of Lamu stone houses as well as women from the lower classes. Large numbers of women guests are regarded as symbols of triumph. In recent years, members of the Afro-Arab families invite wealthy Hadrami women to their weddings, as well as ex-slaves and a few members of the Bohra Indian community. Lines between Bohra and other wealthy or old families are still closely drawn, but a few Indian women have developed neighborly ties and do socialize at weddings. For these ceremonies at least, ethnic and class barriers are down.

Certain ritual differences between the Hadrami and other Lamu residents persist. One is the bathing ceremony. On the night of consummation, female friends and neighbors are invited to the bride’s home, where married women congregate in a large open area to serenade the bride with lewd songs. They dance in her honor and they joyfully celebrate the fact that she is joining their ranks in just a few hours’ time. Perhaps remembering their own experiences in meeting their husbands for the first time (at least since puberty) in the compromising position of sitting on the bed, and waiting for him to perform the sexual act with her, they try to bolster her for the ordeal ahead. While the women sing and dance, the bride is bathed, massaged, and perfumed. Henna had been applied earlier in the day, covering not only her hands, but her wrists, and sometimes flowerlike designs are carried up her arms to her elbows. Henna is also applied more heavily, and hence is darker, on a Hadrami girl.

The women’s dances differ, too, as do some of their songs. The night after she satisfactorily proves her virginity, a criterion common to all Muslim women in Lamu, the bride is officially displayed. All groups practice this tradition, too, except for the very poor who cannot afford the dress or the ceremonial treats for guests. The Hadrami bride, however, does not sit for the entire evening in stoic silence, staring blankly into space, as do other Lamu brides on ‘display’. After sufficient time has elapsed to allow all of the women present to admire her in her most beautiful clothing, saturated in gold jewelry, the bride unravels her long black hair, and begins to rotate her head, flinging her hair from side to side, and back to front. Lamu women call this ritual *warabu* (‘Arab’), and oral tradition suggests the Hadrami women brought the custom with them when they came to Lamu earlier in this century.

On the wedding night, after the men have danced *tarabu* and feasted, male relatives and youthful friends prepare the groom to meet his bride. Both Afro-Arab and Hadrami grooms try to emulate their models of yesteryear by wearing something resembling the Arab *jokho*, and if the family has or can obtain an Omani-style dagger, the groom places that in his wide cumberbund. Some Lamu families have a family turban which is handed down from generation to generation and from groom to groom within generations. If not, the groom buys material and a colorful
turban is fashioned for him. When he is dressed in his finery, the groom leads a procession of men, accompanied by musicians, and often followed by young women (covered and veiled) to the bride's house. The celebrants are loud and joyful. The groom is often terrified.

While the bride sits encased in flowers and silky covered pillows on her new bed waiting alone for her groom, he must present an outward appearance of calm and control. After his arrival at his destination, he is met at the door by family members and led to his new wife. Even in the 1950s most upper-class grooms were introduced to their wives by slaves (or ex-slaves serving a role). In the 1980s usually a maternal aunt takes the groom to his bride, where after introducing them to each other, they are left alone while older female members of the family stay close by to wait for the sheet with its stain of blood to be brought out by the husband. The wait can be interminable. If, after a night and part of the morning have passed, no sheet appears, members of the bride's family become nervous. Gossip tends to circulate from house to house and worries about return of the spent bride price start to haunt the immediate family. Virginity is an absolute essential; the groom has been guaranteed it when the bride’s family accepted his bride price. While gossip may center around the virginity of the bride (especially among young unmarried girls), the problem is most often with the groom. Several male informants discussed the difficulties involved in performing a successful sexual union with their brides under the conditions described herein. Interestingly, in Lamu, talk concerns money and virginity rather than what seems to be a common problem to young grooms.

After wedding celebrations are over, the Hadrami woman (and most other women in the first three groups under discussion), retires to her husband's home, where she remains in strict seclusion until the next wedding—no matter how many weeks or months pass in between—when she makes her first public appearance. The life of a Hadrami woman, from her wedding until her death, is spent in childbearing and child-rearing, with only the occasional social outlet available to her.

Hadrami men used to dance the zamil at their weddings, but today they follow the tradition of the Afro-Arabs and mainly perform stick and sword dances. The Hadrami also introduced the tambourine to Lamu, to accompany the siwa (no longer played), and drums. Their songs, too, differed earlier in the century, and some older men still sing them at weddings. Hadrami men often provide music for Afro-Arab men at their stick and sword dances because the old families do not make it a practice to play musical instruments themselves. Even if they are very poor, they hire outsiders to perform at their weddings.

One controversial form of wedding also is practiced in Lamu, and this can be touched on but briefly here—the secret marriage. As slavery died out, and concubines were no longer available to prominent men in the community, many turned to ex-slaves, divorced women, or poor Bajun women for sexual pleasure.20 Under the guise of 'secret marriage' a man arranged to have a good friend stand as witness, and repeated a phrase or two implying that a marriage had taken place, but the marriage was not recorded by the kadhi, nor did he often pay bride price. If he did pay something, it was only a token to the bride's parents. Informants say this practice is widely engaged in even today, and the result is that sometimes larger families come from secret marriages than from the formal marriage with the legal wife. One well-known man is said by one of his sons to have fathered eighteen to twenty children, and over half of these from secret marriages. In this case, it is alleged that the father supports his several families, but most do not. The economic implications of this kind of marriage are severe. Daughters of already poor families, living in mud and wattle houses behind the town, are often the victims. Their fathers—extremely poor men—are glad enough to be relieved of at least partial support for them and thus agree to the secret marriages. When their 'husbands' tire of these women, they are abandoned and thrown back on the strained resources of their parents. While it is mostly the Hadrami and men of the old Afro-Arab families who practice this custom, their wives and daughters are seldom its victims. The exception is a divorced woman from an old family who agrees to a secret marriage on her own. This is license for sex and seldom produces children. The 'secret' aspect of this kind of marriage is usually to keep the older wife uninformed.

It is in the ex-slave community that the burden of weddings falls heavily. Within this community, stratification is based on increasing social class and economic differences; overall generalization is therefore difficult. At legal emancipation, in 1907 (1910-1912 in Lamu), many former slaves departed for work elsewhere on the coast (Cooper 1980). Others stayed on, were pensioned off by the British government, and moved to mud and wattle houses on the fringes of town. Their children and grandchildren remain in the lowest stratum of today's Lamu. Contrary to government law, but in keeping with Islamic law, a large body of slaves stayed on with their masters in a servile relationship until very recently (Curtin 1983). Those slaves who stayed on, as well as their descendents, have enjoyed the greatest social mobility—within the confines of their class—and have also continued their association with their former families, visiting their homes frequently, and taking part in their weddings. In the last fifteen or twenty years, too, women of the

upper class have begun attending ceremonies, especially weddings, at the home of their former slaves—thus extending the network of communication to one of exchange in social relationships. This is especially true among women; except on rare occasion, it does not hold for former masters, who are more likely to give alms or otherwise, or meet with male relatives of ex-slaves in their shops, or in the seclusion of their homes. They do not socialize.

Traditionally, education of slaves was limited. Few descendents are educated beyond madarasa, although currently some attend the local primary school. Slaves were totally familiar with the rituals surrounding weddings—those who belonged to Hadrami as well as to the Afro-Arab old families. They danced and sang at vugo ceremonies, because in the past it was totally forbidden for freeborn women to dance. It was a slave woman, usually the head-slave, who instructed her freeborn charge on her wedding day; who massaged and prepared her for the wedding and for consummation. The slaves joined the freeborn women in cooking the wedding feasts, and served both men and women at these large celebrations. It was the older slave women who stayed behind the bride’s door, waiting for proof of virginity to show the families, and who then cleaned the bride after intercourse.

In no area of wedding ritual were slaves uninvolved. Their model for weddings were those of the upper classes. Slave weddings, too, were festive occasions. Their marriages were mostly arranged by their owners, and celebrated on a much reduced scale within the homes of their masters. On such occasions, dondaro was danced by men and women together. Ex-slaves recall the pleasure they had dancing at weddings and celebrations marking the end of Ramadan. Dondaro is still occasionally danced at wedding celebrations of ex-slaves descendents in the shamba, or in Langoni. Afro-Arabs had instructed their slaves in the more controlled Arab-style dances, too, and some of the old families kept special Arab-style costumes for their slaves to wear when they performed. Among the women (but not the men) sexually lewd dances are common even today.

Each slave expected to receive at least two presents on his or her marriage. For men, two sets of clothes, new kikoi and leso—both of these are strips of cloth which men use to cover their bodies from the waist down; and for women two sets of kanga. By the 1930s, those still living as slaves in their masters’ homes also sought paid employment as time allowed. If a man was employed, he was expected to pay part of the bride price, but the marriage was still arranged between masters. In the 1930s, bride price for a slave (or ex-slave) was less than 100 Sh. (about US $20). Informants agreed that most masters helped

21. Strobel (1979: 10-11) describes vugo ceremonies for Mombasa which are similar to those in Lamu, although her analysis of class change there differs from Lamu.
their slaves raise money—if they had any money themselves; and they also provided some few gifts for the groom to give the bride, usually locally made jasmine perfume or a pair of sandals. Sandals, in 1934, cost 1.50 Sh., perfume even less.22

In 1936, the British government paid daily wages in the form of 2.50 Sh. to carpenters and masons. Old pensioned ex-slaves were getting 9 Sh. a month (and the liwali, 500 Sh. per month with housing provided as well). A common laborer received 90 cents per day and one free meal. Indians and other businessmen probably paid less for labor than the British government, but it is clear that ex-slaves and other poor men were not well paid. Slaves (and ex-slaves) working part time outside the home had to scrimp and save to raise any part of the bride price. Their situation was even more complicated because many were helping to support their former masters (Curtin 1985). Some resorted to loans and others simply negotiated for bride price they had no hope of paying. Few slave women could afford gold jewelry, but all earned whatever extra income they could in order to have a silver bracelet or two; or, a small gold piece which they placed in pierced sides of their noses.23

Informants believed that ex-slaves earned between 40 and 60 Sh. per month in the 1950s. At that time women said they earned 3 Sh. by sewing kofia in their homes—or, if they sewed for thirty days, they earned a total of 90 Sh. This was more than double the earnings of their lowest paid male counterpart. Ex-slave women were prohibited from engaging directly in trade, or from working for pay in shops, but they could and did set up small cottage industries in their homes. Furniture makers often sent wooden bedsteads and long stools for these women to weave coconut fronds around into finished pieces. Some ex-slave women competed with poor members of the old families for sale of their freshly baked bread. Those who could afford to, bought kanga and perfume for resale to other poor women. Like the free women, slaves (and ex-slaves) were allowed to keep their earnings, unless they were divorced and forced to support their children. This was a common occurrence in Lamu. And, like their mistresses, slave women treasured the acquisition of jewelry for their daughters. Nose rings of gold, it not acquired for their weddings, were high on their list of priorities.

It is traditional in Lamu even today for owners to contribute toward the expenses of descendents of ex-slaves to whom they were close. In fact, many may feel obligated to them because their parents helped support the old families when they suffered economic reversals. In the 1950s, the total costs of a wedding for slave descendents ran to about 700 Sh., with former owners supplying 200 or 300 Sh. as part of their wedding gift. Since descendents of slaves were often as prolific as their

22. Lamu women; DC/KTI 2/1 1934 KNA. 23. Lamu women.
former owners in producing children, there might be five or six children to marry off. *It was and is their goal to copy the upper classes in their wedding rituals, as far as borrowing and gifts can take them.* This, of course, contributed to their perpetual poverty.

In recent times economic mobility placed even larger financial strain on the descendents of slaves. A privileged few work as houseboys for Europeans. They earn around 350 Sh. per month. They also represent the highest paid group in their social class. A few descendents of slaves have acquired property in Lamu in recent years. And, among them, one or two owned shops briefly. Ex-slaves marry within their class, and because they favor practices followed by the Afro-Arabs, cousin marriage is said to be preferable, but seldom practiced. Social status and potential income take priority over any other considerations. Many today marry other poor people in Mombasa.

Porters working on the Lamu waterfront earn up to 10 Sh. per working day, and they usually do not work a full week. Their incomes are among the lowest in Lamu today, as they were throughout the century. They are also the least desirable marriage partners, and tend to marry their children off to each other. Not all porters are descendents of slaves. Some are very poor members of old families who lacked initiative to leave Lamu; some are mentally retarded, but can carry loads on their backs or push carts to earn minimal income. Informants disagree as to whether or not porters and people in the lowest income group celebrate their children’s weddings. Ex-slave informants declare that they do. Upper-class informants describe their celebrations as limited to invitations to a few relatives—fifteen or twenty—to eat *halwa* and drink coffee before the bride and groom meet to consummate their marriage.

Ex-slave men copy their former masters in divorce patterns as well as in wedding rituals. They marry and divorce at a high rate, with increasing economic strains placed on them with each new wife and the birth of more children. Most men do not support children by former wives, forcing these women back on their already poor fathers and brothers. Or, more accurately, on their mothers, who have also been divorced by their husbands. What has been created is a cluster of single women with children, no education, and little opportunity to earn even subsistence income. Yet, with each new wife, following in the tradition of the former master, slave descendents pay bride price for the virgin wife, and go through the manifestation of the Lamu wedding ritual.

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24. Binta Leila A. Abdalla; Lamu women.
26. One case was my houseboy in 1980. He had been married four times—each time to a virgin, and each time had paid bride price. He had two children by his first marriage, and two by his fourth. Abdul Nassir; Mohamed A. Jahadhmy, personal interview, 1982.
The most recent newcomers to Lamu, the Kore, differ from the other groups described in both their courtship rituals and their wedding customs. The Kore trace past descent from the Maasai and their traditions are more closely related to them than to the Lamu dwellers (Heine & Voßen 1979; Curtin 1985). From the Depression on, an increasing number of young Lamu men left the island. Their absence was not felt in the economic sphere except on the shamba behind Lamu town where slaves and ex-slaves had continued harvesting fruits and coconut crops until their departure. Some shamba, now owned by increasing numbers of Hadrami as well as the old families, also contained small herds of livestock. It was into this void that the Kore moved beginning in the mid-1940s.

Like the Maasai, the Kore were a livestock-based culture. During the 20th century they gradually drifted from northern Kenya to Mokowe, across the channel on the mainland, and settled in small hamlets until they lost their cattle during an epizootic. Some few then began to trickle into Lamu. Over the next forty years their numbers increased to around two hundred men, women, and children. The Kore practice neither strict endogamy nor exogamy. Some have intermarried with ex-slaves in Lamu; others have married into the Kore communities on the mainland; and a small number try to marry within their own community on Lamu island. Their marriages are also arranged, although not in accordance with Lamu customs.27

Kore occasionally send their male children to madarasa in town, but only a few allow their sons to attend the government primary school. Girls receive all of their education in the domestic sphere. Marriage for girls comes as soon as possible after puberty—it is expensive to keep a girl at home. Young boys are taught to herd cattle; to plant; to cultivate the variety of fruits grown on the shamba. Marriage for young men comes only when they have an income and can raise bride price—which on the mainland consisted of cows and other livestock. In Lamu, because the Kore have no cows, bride price is in the form of money and goods.

Men are paid very low wages—about 100 to 220 Sh. (US $7 to 10) per month—for tending an acre of land and also herding cattle (if any are on the land). They have access to fresh fruits in season but they must share fruit and any other produce with the shamba owners. Their housing is very primitive as is usually the case with sharecroppers and herders.

In 1981, one young groom living and working on a shamba owned by an Afro-Arab family was earning less than 300 Sh. a month, but had, by

27. One ex-slave informant had been married to a Kore and reported to me as well as Leila Abdalla. Personal interviews with two Kore women, 1983; Sahaal Gure, personal interview, 1983.
the age of 23, raised the 1,000 Sh. (about US $100) to pay bride price and to provide required gifts for each member of the bride’s family. This included aunts and uncles. The groom had been working for ten years by the time of his marriage, but even then he relied on help from his extended family to raise the necessary money. There is an element of sharing among the Kore that seems not to be present among other older Lamu ethnic groups. It is more the rule than the exception for members of this community to contribute whatever they can to help finance a wedding. Those who have more, give more. Inflation has soared, but wages have not, so the announcement of an approaching wedding goes to the Kore community along with pleas for funds. All too often the bride and her family have little or nothing. The burden of the wedding itself and the demand for excessive gift giving falls on the groom. He, in turn, looks to friends and relatives for contributions. If a wedding is in the offing, a Kore man closely related to the groom will call a meeting on Friday afternoon when they are in town for worship at mosque. The wedding is planned around the possible amounts of contribution pledged at the meeting—and in keeping with the amount of money the groom has raised.

In 1981 and again in 1983, bride price for a Kore girl was approximately 2,000 Sh. (US $200 for bride price; wages at between US $20 and 30 per month). Weddings last only one day. Festivities are carried out at the home of the bride and groom, with women especially gathering in the late afternoon to dance and sing. Their dances and their music differ significantly from other Lamu groups, but because they are often joined by members of the ex-slave community in wedding celebrations, elements of traditional Lamu are also present. Drumming and ululating (not common to Lamu) are both major features of the vugo ceremony, as well as sexually explicit dancing. The latter, however, may have come to them by way of the ex-slave community. One Kore wedding I attended featured two elderly ex-slave women dancing together—acting out the sexual union—in the center of the ring formed by Kore women.

There are two vugo ceremonies for the Kore. One is held at the groom’s house, the other at the home of the bride. Groom’s female relatives and friends gather at the same time as friends of the bride are celebrating near her hut in the shamba. After the vugo festivities are concluded at the groom’s hut, participants gather up the groom’s gifts to the bride, line up, and with one of them beating time on the drum, all march across the shamba until they reach the bride’s hut. There the wedding party is greeted by a hostile camp of women—symbolically representing the bride’s reluctance to wed. This symbolism, according to informants, is also foreign to Lamu. It is deemed in very bad taste by men and women of the Afro-Arab families. Hadrami girls do not witness it. Anything seems to go among those in the ex-slave families,
and although they find the rituals amusing, they also separate themselves and their practices from the Kore.

When the members of the Kore wedding party reach the bride's compound, one of them throws a pebble in. If no one catches the stone, the two groups are expected to engage in hand to hand combat. The result is playful pushing and showing until the bride's family gives way to their guests. Informants say that this 'combat' symbolizes the groom taking his bride by force. Once the two groups are congregated, light refreshments are served (may be only a glass of juice) while a member of the groom's family distributes his gifts to the bride and her relatives. Neither bride nor groom are present during prenuptial festivities.

Relatives of both groups gather for a feast on the night of consummation. There is little segregation between the sexes, and the women, who do not veil, intermix with the men who roast and carve the calf or sheep. The bride is secluded in a room in her hut, and the groom comes to her after he has feasted outside. Priority is placed on virginity and some older female family member stays outside the hut and waits for the blood-stained sheet—yet, this custom is somewhat a sham. Kore men sometimes engage in intercourse with their women before they marry them (Curtin 1985). There is no display of the bride on the day after her wedding. Both she and her husband return to their respective tasks.

The Kore, like the descendents of ex-slaves, and despite their spatial and ethnic distance from other Lamu groups, believe in providing the best wedding for themselves that their meagre earnings allow. They differ from townspeople in that their rituals reflect a synchronism of customs they brought to Lamu and those they acquired in intermarrying with ex-slaves. The ex-slaves, and their descendents, however, prefer wedding rituals associated with the Afro-Arab families with whom their contact was greatest in the past. Indeed, their ability to produce a wedding with dancing, refreshments, and other criteria established by the old families represents to them a step up the social ladder.28 For the Hadrami, outsiders early in the century, and once very poor, large wedding productions for their daughters is a literal as well as symbolic statement to society at large that they have arrived. In fact, in terms of income, they have surpassed most of the old families who remain in Lamu.

The Afro-Arab families, still confident in their position of cultural dominance, meanwhile educate their daughters as well as their sons. Their weddings, though often of shorter duration and less expensive than the most extravagant Hadrami ceremonies, still represent to them an era when, even in their poverty, they reigned supreme.

Time has taken its toll on the highly stratified hierarchical society of

28. The display of meagre economic mobility seems important to lower-class Muslims elsewhere in Africa. See HEGGOY 1974; MAHER (1974: 127) found that paying bride price was a sign of social advance in Morocco.
old Lamu. Social barriers between women have broken down as they pertain to wedding celebrations. But, where old barriers have crumbled, new groups entering society have caused new ones to be raised. In Lamu, as almost everywhere else in the world, when one group rises, another comes to take their place at the bottom of the social and economic ladder (Gregory 1984). The Hadrami, through thrift and determination, started the 20th century in social stigma. Through their acquired wealth, they now put on the extravagant productions that used to mark the weddings of the old families. Hadrami and Afro-Arab women intermingle freely at wedding celebrations. Ex-slave women attend and some assume roles from their slave past; Kore women seldom are invited to Hadrami or Afro-Arab weddings. Even today, however, social barriers between these groups exist on most other fronts.

Former slaves and their descendents, still somewhat dependent socially and economically on the old families, were initiated into Lamu society on these (and other) rituals. They have continued copying their former owners and have placed less emphasis on rising economically and more on emulating rituals. The more they imitate the more they will be like their image of themselves as assimilated members of the upper class. Ex-slave women and their female descendents freely visit former owners, and still provide the same source of gossip and knowledge of the outside world as has been the custom of the slaves.

Visiting between these two classes of women is still almost a one-way passage. While ex-slaves and their descendents drop in frequently at the homes of Afro-Arab women, the women of the old families confine their visits to the poorer area of town to the occasional wedding of someone to whom they are close. Among the men, with the exception of the exploitive secret marriages, the lines are even more tightly drawn. The Afro-Arabs may be scornful toward the lack of economic mobility of their former slaves and their descendents, but they observe a noblesse oblige attitude which reenforces the socially mutual interdependence of one group on the other.

The Kore, strangers in Lamu, are of little concern to the old families or the Hadrami, except for the low-paid agricultural tasks they perform for each group. For the former slaves and their descendents, the Kore provide another dimension. Their weddings, which some ex-slave women not only attend but participate in, offer a variation on entertainment—an amusement. Yet, even the Kore outsiders have succumbed to the rituals attending Lamu wedding celebrations. They have changed bride price from cows, which they had on the mainland, to money which they have little of in Lamu—keeping them economically handicapped but not advancing them socially.

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