In the Shadow of the Sheraton: imagining localities in global spaces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
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Signs of Discontent:
Whispers of Violence in the City of Peace

Don't you know, talk about a revolution sounds like a whisper?

- Tracy Chapman
Introduction

In the previous chapter I attempted to illustrate the ways in which global phenomena can become uniquely localized as reinforcements of ideas and ideals already in place. Using similar approaches, I would now like to turn my attention to an analysis of the ways in which violence was represented, celebrated and perpetuated through popular forms of art and expression in order to come to a better understanding of how violence was understood among those with whom I worked most closely at Maskani.

In addition to the everyday stories about violence that I heard at Maskani, this chapter provides examples of several forms of state-sponsored violence that seemed to hold an important place in the popular imagination during the time of my research. In order to provide what I believe can serve as a bridge of understanding between everyday stories about violence and state-sponsored violence I explore one of the primary ways that violence is represented among youth in Dar es Salaam: the display of imagery associated with international cultural heroes who could be seen as embodiments of violence. This practice was at least as popular as the display of the sorts of peaceful imagery discussed in the previous chapter.

Violent imagery, drawn from a global collection of rap artists, movie bad guys, professional boxers, dictators, war villains, drug lords, and criminals seemed to fuel the imaginations of the many of young men with whom I worked. Nicknames like Tyson, Osama and Sadaam were de rigueur, assigned to those with a fierce temper or a fierceness on the football pitch that demanded respect. Like so many young men throughout the world, those living and working at Maskani pumped iron and exercised to encourage their bodies to conform to their expectations of masculinity. A set of weights fashioned out of old iron bars and cement-filled paint cans served as the center of an evening ritual that strengthened both bodies and social bonds. Strength was associated with power and brute force was considered a reality of their everyday lives. As a woman, I was generally surprised at how rarely my gender isolated me from the lives of these young men. I was, however, often forced to face the limits of my own understanding and acceptance when confronted with the ways that violence shaped their worlds, especially in regards to the ways they sometimes chose to celebrate and contribute to its perpetuation. This chapter, then, is an attempt to come to grips with the forms of everyday violence that framed my research, something that I am perhaps not entirely capable of doing.

Violence manifests itself in many and varied forms in contemporary Dar es Salaam. For the purposes of this chapter it also serves as the rhetorical opposite of peace as explored in the previous chapter. While in Tanzania, I was often perplexed by all the talk of peace in the face of so much everyday violence. How is it possible for people to proclaim they live in a peaceful society while being routinely exposed to various forms of personal and political violence? What role does a nationalist rhetoric that declares Tanzania...
as a "peaceful" nation play in perpetuating the denial of violence in Tanzania? Many of the stories told to me by those working at Maskani centered on the ways that everyday violence, primarily perpetuated by the police and the judicial system in Tanzania, disrupted their daily efforts to make a living. Though these stories were marked by a violence that I often found difficult to comprehend, I should point out that this was rarely the case for those telling the stories. I was often made uncomfortable by their readiness to share and even celebrate the violence of these stories with me. I was shocked by the stories but more so, and perhaps more significantly, by the way those at Maskani seemed to accept them as par for the course. Perhaps this is why I was so confounded about all the talk of peace.

About mid-way through my research, I remember I noticed that I was beginning to nurture a growing feeling of disgust toward what I had begun to see as a central hypocrisy in Tanzanian society. These feelings and the sweeping generalizations that inspired them worried me immensely, forcing me to look more closely at relationships between peace and violence. Most of my experiences at Maskani were comfortable, and even enjoyable, but there were moments when it felt like I was seeing between the cracks into a much darker world. It seemed that violent fights could erupt with little warning even amidst all the talk of peace and love. Many of those working at Maskani thought nothing of stealing from customers. They would say that they only stole from people who "deserved it" but I know this was not always the case. Though they often spoke of the bonds of trust between them, they often stole from each other as well. And, while their behavior was generally peaceful at Maskani, at least on the surface, their activities were clearly much more violent when they journeyed to other parts of the city. That some of them were thieves was no secret, that others, in fact, most, routinely abused women was often celebrated as a sign of manliness. And yet, the continual banter about "One Love." In many ways, this chapter was born out of my perplexity with this seeming paradox.

Over the last six months of my research I often found myself in heated, sometimes quite unprofessional, discussions about the nature of peace and violence in Dar es Salaam. I suppose I wanted to believe in the ideals put forth in the previous chapter as much as many of those who worked at Maskani did. But like them, I was forced to confront the violence of everyday life, forced to face the realities of living on the street. This chapter attempts to make sense of these seeming contradictions and is inspired by what Achille Mbembe has called "the "aesthetics of vulgarity," (2001: especially Chapter 3). Mbembe questions the "banality of power in the postcolony," paying special attention not only to the routine everydayness of bureaucratic formalities and arbitrary rules instituted by the state, but also to "those elements of the extreme and grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin (in Rabelais) claims to have located in 'non-official' cultures but that, in fact, are intrinsic to all systems of domination" (2001:102). What I am hoping to achieve, by drawing from both Mbembe and Bakhtin is a representation of the balance
between the routine-ness of everyday abuses of power and the absurdity of it. This is a precarious balance that allows for the perpetuation of violence, which in itself serves as a marker of the banality of power that characterizes so many post-colonial states in Africa and elsewhere.

The claims made in this chapter may be seen as both contentious and controversial. Much of what I present here has come to me by way of stories told to me by everyday people in Tanzania. For reasons that may seem obvious to the reader these stories are not only rarely documented in public records but they are also often challenged by official representations and histories of the state. Such popular stories or 'public secrets' are often difficult if not impossible to confirm. Given that my objective here is a social rather than historical one, however, I believe it is vital to present them as stories that were truly told, allowing the reader to determine whether or not they are true stories. This chapter opens by drawing on stories told to me by the car washers at Maskani and takes a closer look at the ways that police brutality and corruption, as well as other forms of violence, shaped their lives. It then turns to what I call "signs of violence," that is, representations of violence in popular culture. The final sections of this chapter examine state-sponsored forms of violence.

Irony is central to many of the arguments put forth in this chapter. The power of irony is not to be understated. Fernandez suggests that it can serve as "the main covert weapon against oppressive authoritarian situations of domination and subordination" (1986:268), while Roberts convincingly illustrates the ways irony can be employed by artists and other "technology brokers" from western Africa to successfully create meaningful lives in otherwise fairly oppressive circumstances (1996:82-101). What I want to suggest in this chapter is that while the state often cloaks violence in the language of peace, Wamaskani respond to it primarily through irony and humor. Organized protest was almost unheard of at Maskani but everyone routinely employed irony, one of the most powerful weapons in their arsenal, to register their protests against the state's control over them.

Narrating Violence

While I was waiting for the bus to take me into the Dar es Salaam city center one day, a heavily laden cart that was carrying bananas and being pulled by a bicycle stopped next to a nearby fruit stand to make a delivery. I knew from previous experience that there are many young men who go to the central markets early in the morning to buy fruit and vegetables at the lowest possible prices and then deliver them to suburban vendors. The only way one can really make money in these sorts of endeavors is by relying on human-powered transportation rather than on more expensive modes. This kind of work is physically demanding as was evidenced by the sweat pouring from the young businessman's face. Many carts like his are painted with amusing sayings on the back pertaining to the difficulties and expectations of capitalist
labor. This cart was painted with the phrase "Mконони мва Полици," or "In the Hands of the Police" (Fig. 5.1). No doubt, like so many other people whose ways of earning a living involve working outside the confines of the formal economy, this man's profit margin was often connected to the number and amount of bribes he would inevitably be expected to pay corrupt police who might imagine him an easy target. Most likely he was hoping his ironically honest sign would earn him a smile and shake of the head from the police rather than feigned anger and a shake down. This example illustrates the way people employ humor and irony as a mode of living with violence and routine abuses of power while also challenging and resisting them.

Narrating violence, making sense of violent events through the telling of stories, takes many forms. There are three that I would like to focus on here. The first, what I call habari stories (habari is news in Kiswahili), involve the telling of events that have transpired in the time between the meetings of two separate people or parties. The second takes the form of reminiscences, which often characterized the stories I would hear when I would elicit them in-group settings. The third form is more strictly narrative and reflective, employed as an explanation for current life circumstances. These last resemble life stories. They often begin with tales of abuse inflicted in youth and end with a summing up of events in the present.

Habari

When I returned to Tanzania in January of 2002 after an eighteen month absence, I quickly began to notice similarities between the stories told to me by most of my old friends when I went to greet them for the first time. After inquiring after one another's families, friends, and acquaintances, we quickly progressed beyond pleasantries. As things turned more serious I would often say, "нипе habari yakо," or give me your news. This would usually create an opportunity for them to fill me in on some of the more difficult things they had undergone in the year and half since I had seen them last. Sometimes this habari was shared in a group setting but, more often than not, individuals would find a way to pull me aside to share these events in private. I cannot be sure what motivated this behavior since most of what was shared with me at these times was more or less common knowledge but I know what effect it had on me. I felt singled out, selected to hear their stories one-on-one. I was suddenly given access to the interior worlds of several of the young men with whom I had worked so hard to establish bonds of trust, some of whom had barely even acknowledged my presence during my

Figure 5.1 Unayo Mayo? or "Do you have what it takes?" sign on bicycle cart near Magomeni. This cart, though empty, is similar to the one I observed with "In the hands of the police" painted on the back. Dar es Salaam. (2000)
previous trip. The setting was also changed because at the time, I had not
gone to Maskani to conduct interviews or undertake new research. I went
there without an assistant or translator, relying on my own language skills; I
took neither notebook nor tape recorder. I went simply to greet my friends
and to get their news, which is exactly what I got.¹

Although I spoke with most of them separately, or in groups of two or three,
I noticed similarities between their stories in regards to form, to be sure, but
even more so in regards to content. With little prompting from me each of
them would deliver a litany of their experiences, most significantly listing their
encounters with police that had landed them in prison since I had last seen
them. In some cases this was not particularly surprising to me, especially
given that several of the young men who shared extensive greetings with me
had already been in prison when I had left Tanzania a year and a half ago. In
the intervening time, several others who had previously been free were now
incarcerated. It made sense that prison would feature in stories told to me
when I would inquire about those particular individuals. In the stories I heard
people usually focused on the experience of being in prison itself, especially
the physical hardships, the length of time spent there, how they finally man­
gaged to get out, and the amount of time it took to recover from the illnesses
and injuries sustained while in prison. They never broached subjects related
to why they had been imprisoned in the first place or why they had not man­
gaged to pay someone off to avoid imprisonment. Sometimes, the stories of
brutality, which where often quite detailed, had me shaking my head in disbe­
lief—not in disbelief of their stories but, rather, a disbelief in humanity. So
quickly after my return I was once again being confronted with subjects that
while almost incomprehensible to me where commonplace in the lives of
those with whom I worked most closely.

One young man named Madole who had spent three months in Segerea
prison in Dar es Salaam the previous year showed me the scars on his arms
where the police had beaten him at the time of his arrest. Laughing uncom­
fortably in a way I had come to associate with stories about prison, he told
me how at first the police had started beating him on the legs, but when he
joked with them saying, “Sina gari nje. Gariyangu ni miguu yangu,” or “I don’t
have a car outside. My legs are my car,” they started laughing and then
began beating him on the arms. He told me how he got very ill when he was
inside and that when he came out he was forced to return to his mother’s
house in Arusha where it took her over two months to nurse him back to
health. In a retelling of the story a couple of days later in a completely dif­
ferent context, he told me how disappointed he had been in his friends from
Maskani, most of whom never visited him in Segerea. He told me how he
always made a point of taking money, cigarettes, clean clothes, food, and
sandals to his friends when they ended up in prison and that he had expect­
ed them to do the same for him in return. This was the reason he gave me
when I questioned why he seemed to be getting in so many fights around
Maskani in the preceding months. This young man, one of the first to begin
working at Maskani during the time of the Sheraton's construction and considered by most of those at the corner to be by far the toughest of them all, had tears in his eyes as he told me of his disappointment and frustration with the people he had helped out over the years. I knew from a previous experience, when another young man from Maskani ended up in prison, that it was not uncommon for the others to let someone sit in jail as punishment for causing trouble on the corner. Madole was certainly one of the top troublemakers at Maskani, so I was not particularly surprised that he ended up serving his time in prison with very little support from his corner comrades, but this did not make it any easier to hear his story without feeling that their abandonment was just another example of the injustices he was forced to face.²

There is an important difference between jail and prison that should be considered: jail is the place where one is taken when one is picked up by the police, while prison is where one is taken after being convicted of a crime. Most of the young men who shared their stories with me about prison had served their time in Segerea Prison, a state-run maximum security prison located in the Dar es Salaam suburbs where the conditions and guards are notoriously brutal. While it was fairly common for the young people with whom I worked to end up in jail, it was pretty unusual for them to end up in prison. The reasons for this are fairly simple. Unless one commits a major crime or is absolutely destitute, it is usually pretty easy to get a case dropped before it is brought to trial, or to make sure that it is dropped before sentencing. In most cases, police tend to target people for prosecution (persecution?) whom they believe will be able to pay a small bribe to get off. In the best-case scenario, money is exchanged before anyone even makes it to jail. If one is unfortunate enough to not be carrying sufficient funds at the time, the chances of ending up in jail are much higher. Once in jail, the price one will be expected to pay to make sure the case is “lost” increases exponentially. It is a commonly known fact that corrupt police collect bribes to supplement their own paltry incomes, as well as for their superiors who usually take a cut. If a patrolling agent is able to procure payment before he gets to the station he will not have to share his profit with his coworkers and, thus, he will usually settle for a lower payment. Once in jail, it is not only officers who must be paid off, but also the clerk responsible for processing the case. This is the time when it is essential to have friends on the outside who are willing to pool their resources to buy one’s freedom. Without this support, it is not impossible to get out, but it is definitely more difficult. In most instances, when people tell stories about making payoffs at this stage they refer to the clerk and some of the officers in specific terms (often even by name), as each of those who participate in the perpetuation of the system is usually well known on the streets, and most people know beforehand approximately how much they will be expected to pay depending on the individuals involved. Certain police stations are also characterized as being particularly corrupt and one expects that prices will be higher there. Once in prison, it is
almost impossible to get out unless one has great sums of money and influence at one's disposal. The general belief on the streets is that it is the people who are able to buy their freedom from prison who are the real criminals in society — those who engage in smuggling activities (illegal drugs, coffee, cloves), large scale thievery, the sale of drugs, and even murder — and then use their money and power to shield themselves from punishment.

It should be understood, however, that everyone I ever spoke with on this topic was grateful for the opportunity to pay bribes. In their minds, corruption was not defined by the fact that police take payments in exchange for dropping charges, but by the fact that they were picked up on trumped up charges to begin with, or by the fact that they might be expected to pay an excessively high amount to a specific police officer, clerk, or at a specific police station. For this reason, people would sometimes go to exceptional circumstances to avoid police confrontation in certain areas of the city for fear of ending up in custody at a police station where they would not be able to afford the get-out-of-jail fees.

The stories that people told about prison were different from those they told about jail. Most significantly they were much more violent. While prison stories were filled with brutally descriptive details, stories about jail normally centered around those who were involved in making the arrest and processing the case, how the amount of the bribe was negotiated, the degree of help that was received from friends on the outside, and the final amount that was paid. Stories about jail are so common and considered so much a part of routine life that people often do not even talk about arrests unless there is something humorous or particular about the incident. Unless I went out of my way to solicit stories about jail they were almost never shared with me. This was in contrast to prison stories like the one shared with me by Madole when we exchanged news after being out of touch with one another. A few days after Madole told me about his prison experience several young men from Maskani were picked up by the police. I did not find out this for several days, however. This was not as a result of me being unobservant or because they were hiding it from me. When I asked them why they had not thought to mention it to me, Madole spoke up. With his typical bravado he asked me what the point would have been in telling me and wondered what I could have done to help them. The others who were looking on nodded in agreement while laughing at Madole's efforts to tease me. One asked if I would have come to the station to help them out. I joined in the laughter but not without realizing how right he was. They had paid the funds requested of them and were back on the streets in less than twelve hours. No big deal. If I had gotten involved, no doubt the expected fees would have been much higher. When I pressed for details of the arrest I was met with a bored resistance that had very little resemblance to the focused detail I received from the same young men when they talked about their harrowing experiences in prison.

No matter how much I would have liked to be told about daily police harass-
ment when exchanging news, or habari, it never became a common occurrence. I usually heard about harassment and arrests second hand, either from Mbelwa or from someone else not directly associated with Maskani. They seemed to be able to recognize the value of such knowledge for helping me to understand the everyday lives of Wamaskani, but Wamaskani rarely thought it worth mentioning. Perhaps they were embarrassed, perhaps they did want to present themselves as victims to me, or perhaps it was simply, as Madole had pointed out, that they could not see how telling me would help. I can only guess that they had their reasons for sharing the intimate details of their prison forays with me, though, empathy was the only thing I can imagine I was able to offer them. Perhaps in such contexts my disbelief, my disgust, and my echoing of their sentiments of injustice were welcomed.

People's stories of prison were less commonplace than their stories of jail. They were definitely more significant, if only because they were so much more violent. Apparently news, or habari, involved the disclosure of such significant details. If people had bothered to tell me about every time they were picked up by the police or harassed on the streets for money we would have had very little time to talk of anything else.

Reminiscing

Once I had gotten to know some of the car washers at Maskani I asked a group of them to sit down with me and Mbelwa once a week for a couple of hours in order to allow us to ask more focused questions and, more importantly, to be able to record some of the stories I had already heard them tell. At these gatherings, stories about the police, experiences in prison, and encounters with violence would often structure our conversations. Sometimes I would ask questions to elicit these stories but they also seemed to come up on their own. In these group settings such stories would often be told and re-told amidst much laughter — laughter that seemed to create a sense of unity in the face of shared absurdities. This form of group storytelling can perhaps best be described as a sort of reminiscing. In most cases, the stories being told were already known to many of those gathered and anticipatory giggling was not uncommon. I often found myself laughing along while the stories were being told. Yet, when I later listened to the tapes I sometimes became aware of how little there was that was actually amusing in the stories, and also at how forced and uncomfortable the laughing sometimes sounded. The stories were absurd and ironic to be sure, but hardly amusing. There was something about the group settings, however, that encouraged laughter, leading me to wonder if a sense of belonging and community was not in some way tied to a shared appreciation of the ironic circumstances that shaped their lives. In such instances I was often reminded that one must laugh in such circumstance if one hopes to avoid crying.

I had several different opportunities to hear the retelling of the same prison story from a young man called Mdogo (meaning, "the small one"). Mdogo
has been in jail on countless occasions, but only once in prison. Although he was only imprisoned for two weeks, the experience was harrowing enough to make him go out of his way to ensure that he does not go back. On several occasions, he assured me that he would do everything in his power never to return again. When he told his prison story it often had the ring of a cautionary tale to which he added his own moral perspectives. Although I eventually heard him tell this story several times, it was only on the first occasion that I had the opportunity to record it. As was the case with most stories like these when told in a group setting, those who were present laughed throughout. Some added details that he left out, while others interjected with tales of similar experiences when appropriate. As a result the story as he told it that day was fragmented and not overly detailed. This was in sharp contrast to stories about prison that were told to me in the context of habari. He told this story the first time we gathered together as a group to record in the context of a larger discussion on the subject of men being raped by other men. I only came to realize how significant this story was to Mdogo after hearing him tell it again over a year later in less disruptive circumstances.

Mdogo begins his story with little warning and at first I am not sure of its connection to the topic at hand. Juma had just completed a story about being propositioned by another man at a video hall when Mdogo mentions that life in Segerea (prison) is tough, that it is almost too hard to explain to me. He says that his sentence there forced him to suffer (kusota) and that he was persecuted (kuteseka). He tells us that when he and Dixon, another young man from Maskani, were sent to prison his clothes were destroyed in less than two weeks. They were new when he went in but only rags were left by the time he got out. Not long after arriving there he saw a man whom he had thought was a bully (mteme) being fucked (kutombwa) by a guard. He says you see that thing all the time in jail, big, powerful people consenting to being fucked in exchange for food, bathing water, and other privileges. He says he was beaten by guards, as well as by other prisoners, without mentioning if the abuse was sexual in nature. He says that one of the worst things was when he and Dixon were forced to fight one another for the enjoyment of several prison guards. Friendship was important in prison because you could not expect to eat properly without it. With incredulity he told about the food distribution system known as “ugali mbele, mboga nyuma,” which requires prisoners to form partnerships in order to guarantee they get both ugali (a stiff fufu-like porridge made from maize or cassava flour) and mboga (vegetable based sauce for dipping) at a meal (Fig. 5.2). These two components are served at opposite sides of the cafeteria and there is not enough time for an individual to get through both lines. This was the only official meal aside from a breakfast of watered down meal (ujl). Those who had developed special relationships with guards or powerful prisoners (usually sexual relationships) could expect to get a third meal in the evening too. He told us that
nighttime was the worst. Powerful prisoners and guards prey upon new inmates, fighting among themselves as to who gets the honors. But consenting to being sexually molested will at least guarantee a descent night's sleep. Most prisoners are forced to sleep on dirty mattresses in the same bed with several people. Tuberculosis is endemic and most inmates sleep with their shirts tied over their mouths to protect themselves. The prisoners are packed so tightly in their beds that they must sleep lying on their sides, all facing in one direction. He laughed in amused amazement as he told that if one wanted to roll over, it was required to get everyone on the bed to do so at the same time. He finished his story with a flourish of bravado. You have to be a real man to survive in prison he says, directing his comments to me, you have to be smart, to have a mastery over street Swahili if you want to avoid being beaten by and raped by the guards and other prisoners. He tells me I would never be able to survive in there and I believe him.

The prisons are extremely over crowded in Dar es Salaam. People say that the prisons are never full though. Not because there are empty cells but, because regardless of how crammed they are, there is always room for one more. People are kept in close proximity to one another and diseases and illness spread easily. Although he never told me so directly it was understood among several of his friends that Mdogo was also sodomized while in prison. Following a short pause at the end of his story he adds on that some men who agree to being fucked make a point of pleasing their sex partners. Sometimes they are in great demand he tells me, suggesting that there is choice involved for some and perhaps even a degree of power.

Forced sex is not uncommon in the prison system and stories abound about the abuses from both guards and other inmates. The aggressors, known on the streets and in the prisons as mabasha (bash; sing.), usually single out individual young men to whom they offer protection in exchange for sex. In prison, such an arrangement might also result in better treatment, access to better food and better sleeping conditions. On the streets, Wamaskani reported being most susceptible to such demands when they first moved to the city, particularly if they were young and inexperienced. In prison, being small of stature increases the likelihood of being victimized by mabasha, either guards or other inmates and, if one does not acquiesce quickly enough, by both. Many mabasha among the inmates work together with the guards, serving
as overseers of the other prisoners. These men, also called *mipara*, are usually men who have experience in prison and were particularly despised among those who spoke to me. There are some who choose to become lovers with particular *mabasha*, and others who acquiesce only out of fear. Yet, all who assume the passive position in male-to-male intercourse, both in and outside of jail, are known as *wasengi* (*msengi*, sing.). These men are not considered homosexual, however, as long as they are being forced to engage in male-to-male sex, are responsible for forcing themselves on someone else, or fulfill the role of *basha* with a consenting partner. Those who are forced to submit to being sodomized when they are small, young, and inexperienced are expected to become *mabasha* as they get older and bigger. If they fail to do so, it is likely that their manhood will eventually come into question.

One young man, who was held on remand for eight months at Keko prison (also in Dar es Salaam), told of an infamous seven-foot tall beggar who was granted special privileges in prison by the guards. In exchange for payment, he was allowed to keep four adolescent boys whom he routinely sodomized in his sleeping quarters, which was known among the other prisoners as "*kwa watoto,*" or the place of the children. The main way to gain special privileges in prison is by making payments to the guards. Some prisoners have access to money through the outside, but others earn money on the inside by sewing and embroidering Muslim prayer caps (*kofia*), which they then smuggle out of the prison (with the help of the guards) to be sold. Access to such moneymaking schemes is reserved for *mabasha* and their lovers. The notorious seven-foot beggar, who had reportedly earned enough money on the streets in a lifetime of begging to pay off the guards at Keko, eventually died in prison. Apparently, his spine was fractured when his friends, the guards, dropped him while they were carrying him to the toilet. The young man who told me this story suggested that everyone knew he had really died of AIDS. He was so thin and sick that he could not walk on his own and it was thought that the fall that eventually killed him was too minor to have done any real damage to a healthy person.

The person who told this story spoke about it during a group discussion on AIDS rather than on one that centered on prisons. It was told less to illustrate the injustices of the prison system than to illustrate how it was possible to be exposed to HIV/AIDS through means beyond an individual's control. If this story, and the one above told by Mdogo, are examples to go by then it is clear that prisons serve as centers of HIV transmission for urban youth in Dar es Salaam and that the guards in charge of the prisons, as representatives of the state, are playing an instrumental role in furthering high rates of infections. Worse yet, what is happening in the prisons in regards to rape and brutal sodomy is just a microcosm of what is happening on the streets where predatory male-to-male sex is an everyday threat for most of the young men who sleep there.

Stories about male-to-male sex—consensual, forced, and transactional—
were among those most often told to me at Maskani. In many cases they focused on incidents occurring on the streets rather than in the prisons. As suggested above, those who engaged in consensual male-to-male sex once they had begun to mature sexually were derided for their lack of manhood. Since most young men who live on the streets have been forced to engage in sex with other men, and many of them have returned the favor by forcing themselves on other, younger boys as a mode of regaining their respect, it was unusual for them to express critical views toward either practice. Although in most cases people told stories about other people they knew who either raped or were raped by other men, there were several occasions where people admitted to having been victimized themselves, and others to having forced themselves on younger boys. The latter incidents were among the most difficult of my fieldwork experiences, as I was made to acknowledge how the everyday ironies of street life had led to circumstances where the individuals who were among my better friends in Dar es Salaam were also responsible for committing acts that I considered among the most despicable possible.

Among the stories that gave rise to the greatest amount of laughter regarding male-to-male sex were those that centered on transactional sex. It was not uncommon for individual men—locals, foreign expatriates, and visitors—to proposition young men at Maskani. The stories that were told were always about some wealthy man who would offer money in exchange for one or more of the guys from Maskani to allow him to masturbate them, perform oral sex on them, or for them to perform anal sex on him. Although they insisted they only took advantage of these propositions when they were desperate for money, several did admit to it. In these stories the man doing the propositioning was always portrayed as a msengi, which seemed to allow those telling the stories to position themselves as mabasha who exploited weak and submissive others. The reason most often given for rejecting a proposition was the belief that the person presenting himself as msengi was actually a basha in disguise who might then try to force himself on the young man he hired. Therefore, it was agreed that it was better to accept propositions only from men who were smaller in stature, and when someone would agree to a proposition he would often bring a friend, or friends, along, or would insist that they complete their business in a public place where others could observe.

Inevitably, whenever I would bring up the topics of sex, HIV/AIDS, or homosexuality at Maskani, the first stories told would always be about white people who had made various sexual propositions to the young men who worked there. I am sure that this was a way of not so subtly reminding me that the sexual lives of Africans were no more perverse than those of Europeans. One story I often heard repeated involved an expatriate who had lived in Tanzania long enough to speak Kiswahili fluently. He went to Maskani one day and picked up two young men who had previously agreed to his terms. He then drove them in his Datsun10 to his house in the wealthy Mikocheni
section of the city. At first, the man rolled a couple of big joints and proceed-
ed to smoke with the young men. After a while they protested because it was
taking too long, prompting him to take them into a back room that had been
prepared for their visit. He gave them some oil and asked them to take turns
performing anal sex on him, insisting that they not use condoms. Each of
the young men received 5000 shillings (about $10 at the time) for their serv-
ces, a little more than they could have earned in a good day of washing cars.
Another story was about a mzungu who always cruised by the beach at night
in his red Coronado looking for big men to sodomize him. One evening he
asked Mdogo to help him find “someone with a big enough penis to satisfy
him.” The first guy Mdogo brought him was inspected and turned away for
being too small. The second, however, was deemed suitable and asked to
get into the car. Mdogo was given 3000 shillings for brokering the deal, while
the other man received 30,000 for “being able to satisfy the mzungu.”

It was also understood at Maskani that the msengi of a powerful basha can
earn a great deal of money. There were two stories often told to make this
point. One involved a wealthy Arab who would come into the city on business
and stay at the Sheraton. He reportedly had a favorite taxi driver whom he
would pay to drive him around town in the daytime with the understanding
that he would also come to his room in the evening. In exchange, the driver
would receive 200,000 shilling (about $400 USD) for his services. During
the time I was in Dar es Salaam this same taxi driver got a new car, prompt-
ing many to speculate that it was either a gift from his Arab benefactor or at
least bought with the proceeds of their evenings together. Another story
involved an infamous night club owner known as Macheni, in reference to the
many gold macheni, or chains, that he always wore around his neck. Over
the years, Macheni, who is also a noted msengi, has acquired a great deal
wealth as a result of his exploits and many say that his identity as mtajiri
(wealthy person) supercedes his identity as msengi. In addition to providing
his own services to very special customers, he also acts as a pimp by arrang-
ing liaisons between young boys and wealthy European, Arab, and Indian
men. His nightclub was known as a safe place where reputable gay men
could go to freely explore their sexual desires without fear of violence. It was
also known that he paid the police quite well to stay clear of his establish-
ment.

Regardless of how varied the stories were about male-to-male sex, one
theme remained constant. It was nearly impossible for the young men at
Maskani to imagine willingly allowing themselves to be sodomized. It was
understood that there were those who eventually came to like it and who
could no longer get erections, but such people — referred to as wasengi wa
ndevu (wasengi with beards) — were derided in stories told at Maskani.
Wasengi wa ndevu also take on gender roles normally considered to be
female; they cook and wash clothes for their mabasha, and some even dress
like women, wearing women’s clothing, shoes and jewelry. In most cases
wasengi are younger than most mabasha, but there are some occasions,
especially when men choose to remain wasengi as they age, where they will take on younger mabasha as lovers as a way of maintaining dominance in the relationship despite what is perceived as their sexual passivity. Because of the general disapproval of adult men acting as wasengi, many of them are forced to hide their sexual preferences, making it no surprise that so many of them resort to hiring young men living in the streets for sexual pleasure, or that establishments like Macheni are able to thrive when wasengi have enough money and power to buy a certain degree of tolerance, if not outright acceptance, from society.

Although several of the stories about forced sex that I heard at Maskani did take place there, there was general agreement in our discussions that one of the things that made Maskani a preferred place to be—a space of peace, following the terminology of the previous chapter—was that there was a relatively low chance of being sexually assaulted there. Since most of those who slept at Maskani were of about the same age and size they seemed to feel that there was less of a chance that any one of them would attack another while he slept, the time when they felt most vulnerable. This is not to say that male-to-male sex never took place at Maskani, only that, when it did, it was for the most part transactional, occasionally consensual, and only rarely forced. Most of those I interviewed did have at least one story of being bothered (kusumbuwa) by someone else at Maskani in this capacity but most reported being able to fend off the aggressor.

From the information I was able to gather, it was fairly apparent that condoms were almost never used during male-to-male sexual encounters, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Many young men and women were surprised to learn that one could even get AIDS from anal sex. This is an easily understood misconception given that virtually no public information has been made available on the subject in Tanzania, or for that matter, in Africa as a whole (with the possible exception of South Africa). State and international agencies alike have maintained virtual silence on the subject of anal sex, whether taking place between men or between men and women. Although homosexuality, or at least homosexual sex, has long been implicitly accepted along the Swahili coast as a fairly common occurrence, there has been little if any explicit acceptance in public forums. If one were to rely on official representation alone, one would be led to believe that there was very little homosexuality in Tanzania and that it would be a waste of limited resources to try to increase public awareness of the possibilities for contracting HIV through anal sex. In Chapter Seven, I will explore some popular beliefs related to heterosexual anal sex in Dar es Salaam as made evident in popular language and music, but suffice it to say here that many people believe that engaging in anal sex is a reasonable way to avoid contracting HIV from possibly infected individuals, and as a result of this notion, some people see anal sex as a preferred alternative to vaginal sex when the infection status of a sexual partner seems questionable.
Narration

Finally, I would like to turn to the mode of storytelling that I call narration. People most often employ this mode when they are trying to make sense of where they are in their lives. Such stories usually begin with early youth and extend into the present. The story Madole told me about his encounter with the police, which I presented in the above section on habari stories, stuck in my mind, not because it was exceptional in its detail or brutality, but because it was the first time he really opened up to me, given that he had refused to become involved in my research during my previous trips to Tanzania. Once he started talking, however, he did not waste any time bringing me up to date on his life story. I found the several efforts he made to take me aside and tell me his story intriguing, as it gave me a glimpse of what he must have been led to believe were my research goals through conversations with others who had previously participated. Although I had not intended to collect new data on my brief follow-up trip, I thought it was an interesting opportunity to find out how my research activities were viewed by those who had helped me with it, and in the case of Madole, by those who did not. The stories he chose to tell me were very similar to those I had gathered during prior research even though I gave him almost no direction. This may have been because the other young men at Maskani told him these were the types of stories I liked to hear, or because they were actually representative of the types of stories they would normally tell. Madole was no stranger to the streets. Over the years he had many opportunities both to take advantage of and be taken advantage of by people in positions of power, and as a result he was much more distrusting than many of the other young men at Maskani. He made his distrust of me quite public right from the beginning.

I have a very clear memory of the first time this became apparent. It was a Sunday afternoon and I had passed by Maskani by chance. A large group of young men were playing football in the relatively deserted streets with a ball made from plastic bags bound together by rubber bands and string. Mbelwa and I were watching the game taking place with the Sheraton in the background, which was at that time throwing long shadows across the area. I remember it clearly, because it was the moment when I first came up with the title for this book. Excited, I took my camera out without thinking and began taking pictures of the guys playing with the Sheraton in the background (Fig. 5.3). One of them, whom I later came to know as Madole, began waving his arms and yelling, forbidding me to take any more pictures. The motion brought the game to stop and I was suddenly the center of attention. I was embarrassed and felt terrible. What I had done was completely wrong, so I put my camera away and apologized. What else could I do? The others who were playing assured me there was no problem and that I should just ignore Madole, but my camera stayed away until a future date when I was explicitly asked to bring it out. When I returned to Maskani in 2002 I made sure to bring the photos from that day along as well as a lot of others. As I
was giving people their photos as gifts I made a joke to Madole, saying that I was sorry I had none for him. As he had forbidden me to take his picture, I had always been afraid to do so. I also said it was a pity, because I was sure that since he was so handsome I could have sold it for a huge profit, reminding him of the fear he had expressed a year and a half ago. Somehow this interchange finally earned me his trust. He was ready to talk and not willing to take no for an answer.

When I finally asked him why he had refused to work with me in the past, I was stunned to hear that he had been afraid of me. He told me he thought I must have been working for the police, or some other organization gathering information on "street children," and that he did not want to share anything with me that might eventually be used against him. He also implied, however, that he felt I should have tried to convince him to work with me. The fact that I did not make him feel that I had rejected him as well. Once our mutual feelings of rejection were dealt with, it turned out we had a lot to talk about.

Madole, who was only in his late teens at the time, had come to Maskani from Arusha in the early 1990s. In the beginning he hung out with a rough crowd in the Kariakoo section of Dar es Salaam. Unlike some of the other young men at Maskani who have a weakness for women, alcohol, or drugs, Madole's weakness was for kamari — a local card game — and various other forms of gambling. He had already won and lost great sums of money in his short lifetime. He came to Maskani around the time the Sheraton was being built after being invited there by Dixon, a friend he knew from his Arusha maskani. He began washing cars at Maskani under the supervision of Rashidi, the night guard, with the intention of cleaning up his life. Previously, he had relied exclusively on stealing and gambling to get by but in moving to Maskani he hoped to be able to support himself legitimately through washing cars. Since then he has tried to save money, "banking" whatever extra income he earned with Masha, the owner of the stand where music is sold at Maskani (see Chapter Four). He told me that his efforts never paid off, though, and that it seemed impossible to get ahead. As soon as he would save some money there would be an emergency. Inevitably, he would either get sick, have to pay off the police, or someone in his family would need financial assistance. He told me how he had seen his life at Maskani as a transitional phase when he had started working there, but now, after ten years of fruitless labor, he was beginning to get fed up with it all. His last stint in prison, which had eaten up all of his savings, had made him more bitter than he had been before. Perhaps he thought talking to me would provide him with an opportunity for escape, but he probably knew better than most of the others just how unlikely it would be that I would be able to help
him in any significant way. Like most of those I interviewed, Madole came to the city from one of the up-country regions of Tanzania in search of a dream. He also came to escape from a brutally oppressive home life, another factor that was not uncommon among those trying to make a living on the streets. Madole's father, who used to be in the army, beat him several times a day, every day, as a matter of course.

Other interviews I had conducted on concepts of good parenting suggested that corporal punishment was the norm in Tanzania, and that it was only bad parents who failed to beat their children regularly. In response to my questioning on the reasoning behind this view I was often answered with a Swahili proverb that says, "you cannot bend a dried fish," suggesting that it was necessary to use force to shape children while they were still young and their minds were supple. The aim of such measures is to wipe out the natural ujauri temperaments that some children are born with, that is, the tendency many children have to disobey and question their parents. Many of those I interviewed suggested that the failure to beat ujauri children would inevitably result in them being improperly socialized adults who would shrug their responsibilities. Among the female food vendors at Maskani it was suggested that perhaps the reason why so many of the young men working at the corner harassed them was because they had not been beaten enough as children. Regardless of the pervasiveness of these views, however, very few would have agreed that it was acceptable for Madole's father to beat him as often, or as severely, as he did.

A great majority of those who spoke to me about their reasons for coming to Dar es Salaam in the first place reported a combination of looking for better opportunities to make a life and attempting to escape the physical violence they had routinely suffered in their childhood homes. Many were beaten and/or sexually abused by step-parents after one or both of their birth parents remarried, while others were abused and neglected by other family members who took them in following the death of a parent or parents, which are sometimes caused by AIDS. Although there is a lot to be said for the way people in Tanzania are willing to take care of the children of deceased relatives, a great many of the young people who do end up on the streets do so as a result of the abuses inflicted upon them in their new homes. As the number of young parents dying of AIDS and leaving children behind steadily increases and already scarce family resources are stretched even further, it is inevitable that more and more of those made orphans by the disease will end up the streets of cities like Dar es Salaam.

In a sense, Madole is lucky. He still has a mother he can return to when he gets sick and, as far as I know, his father is now safely out of the picture. Yet, when he tells the story of his life one cannot
help but be struck by the violence in it. Beaten from an early age, he was still a child when he began stealing and gambling in Arusha town. Once there, it took no time at all for him to join a gang of thieves. When he eventually got into trouble with the police, which did not take very long, he hopped on the back of a lorry and found his way to Dar es Salaam where his escapades continued. In the weeks after his arrival, before he fell in with another gang of thieves, he was taken advantage of and sexually abused. Afraid of ending up in prison, he eventually attempted to lend some respectability and stability to his life by settling into street life at Maskani. Though, even there he is regularly harassed by the police, finds it difficult to trust anyone, and sees little hope for the future. As dismal as it sounds, however, he is one of the lucky ones. He has a fairly stable income, never goes hungry and, in fact, gets fatter every time I see him, which hopefully is an indicator that he still has his health. He still struggles to get by and still makes new friends. And, the next time I see him, he will have a whole stack of pictures of himself that he can hold onto to remember his youth spent in the shadow of the Sheraton (Fig. 5.4). The final reason Madole gave me for not wanting to participate in my research was that he did not want to be represented as a Dar es Salaam “street child,” an identity he considered confining and static. Despite everything that has happened to him he still has dreams of a better future; I can only hope my representation of him has not done any further violence.

Signifying Violence

One of the more difficult tasks of this chapter is to represent violence in a way that does no further damage. I struggled over
whether to include sections on rape because I felt I could never be sure how the reader would perceive such information. This is true of all the material in this book but I think it is fair to say that some subjects leave more room for misinterpretation than others. Many of the above stories were difficult for me to comprehend and I had the advantage of listening to them in context and of being able to ask questions. For these reasons I focused a large portion of my research time looking not only at violence but also at the way those with whom I worked most closely represented violence. In the above section I tried to focus on some of the ways they did this through different modes of storytelling, when exchanging news, when asked to “piğa story” in a group setting for the benefit of research, and when doing the same among friends. In this section I want to turn my attention to an examination of artistic representations of violence in Dar es Salaam.

As should be clear from the last chapter, the reasons for the growing popularity of Bob Marley and Rasta beliefs in Tanzania are numerous and fairly complex. When people at Maskani discussed Marley they tended to focus on his messages about peace and love rather than his messages about revolution and violent change. The fact that people did not normally discuss the violent aspects of Marley’s work was not surprising given the relationships between discourses on peace and Tanzanian nationalist agendas. These are issues I will examine more closely in the final section of this chapter. Despite public and state silence on the topic of violence, however, I observed what seemed to be a fair degree of popular respect demonstrated for harbingers of violent change. This was especially so among young men and even more so among young men working and socializing in public spaces. Images of Marley were routinely juxtaposed with the likes of Mike Tyson, Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., and even Osama bin Laden (Figs. 5.5, 5.6, 5.7). On some level there did seem to be awareness that Marley’s revolutionary aims would never be achieved without some recourse to violence. Popular figures renowned for their public displays of violence have become culture heroes in post-socialist Tanzania almost as quickly as Bob Marley has, as the growing popularity of their images in sign art in Dar es Salaam surely attests.

In Tanzania, sign art is most often found near the entrances to small barbershops, music stalls, Internet cafés, and the studio-stalls of artists themselves. Most artists who paint signs work in a range of styles. They may be employed to do hand lettering on businesses or buses (Fig. 5.8), to paint images representing merchandise for sale in a particular establishment (Fig. 5.9), to paint public proclamations and information at the behest of a government or aid organization (Fig. 5.10), or to paint images of popular culture heroes (Figs. 5.11, 5.12). It is this last that I am most interested in here. In most cases artist paint portraits of popular figures when employed to do so and, as such, they have little influence on the choice of subject. Sign painters in Dar es Salaam see themselves as businessmen but also as artists. They normally use the word msanii, or artist, to describe themselves. As the case of Ras Swedi demonstrated in the previous chapter individual
Figure 5.8
"We need Peace & Bread" delivery truck at intersection in Magomeni, Dar es Salaam. (2000)
artists do make reputations for themselves based on their skill for painting particular images. Sometimes choices made by individual artists to master certain images may be a representation of their own personal and/or political views, views that can often be ascertained by observing what sort of images they use to decorate their own studios. Signs displayed outside of a business usually say more about the proprietor's views than about those of the artist. In this sense, sign art can be a form of social and/or political commentary. Neither the representation nor the popularity of specific culture heroes, whether Bob Marley or bin Laden, is arbitrary. Certain figures have a greater likelihood of becoming popular. What Marley, bin Laden, Shakur and Tyson all have in common is that they had already been made well-known through international media and marketing prior to their rise in popularity in Tanzania, and that their images were already available in the form of mass-produced merchandise. There were some exceptions, of course, and I did occasionally see images of less well-known public figures represented in sign art. However, these were usually isolated examples that did not produce the same effect as images of better-known public figures. When people commission specific images it is to represent something about themselves and their businesses; the representation is only successful if potential customers and passersby are able to "read" the meaning behind the image. The odds of this occurring successfully obviously increase if the image is already known. Business proprietors and artists both employ sign art to demarcate their commercial space in ways they hope will be meaningful to potential customers and passersby are able to "read" the meaning behind the image. The odds of this occurring successfully obviously increase if the image is already known. Business proprietors and artists both employ sign art to demarcate their commercial space in ways they hope will be meaningful to potential customers. Since most commercial establishments that display sign art also serve as centers of social activity, business owners are able to simultaneously demarcate both physical and social space. This is particularly so in places where young people gather.

Weiss (2002, n.d.), focusing on barbershop youth culture in Arusha town (the town where many of the car washers originated) takes a close look at the connection between local imagination and processes of globalization in an effort to demonstrate the "ways imaginative acts are in fact materially grounded in social activities" (2002:93). He is particularly interested in the popularity of gangster rap music and imagery among young male proprietors of barbershops, as well as among their customers and wonders to what degree their consumption of these goods allows them to "inhabit the processes of their own displacement" (2002:105). As is the case elsewhere in Tanzanian, barbershops in Arusha can also often serve as both maskani...
and *kijiweni* for those who hang out and work there and, like myself, Weiss seems to be interested in the way such places of informality are occupied, demarcated and inhabited. His main argument regarding the popularity of violent imagery in barbershops is that it is reflective of the everyday violence, primarily economic, to which the young men who work in and frequent barbershops are subjected. Unlike the young men at the Sheraton Maskani who occupy zones far more precarious than barbershops, the young men who worked with Weiss were rarely subjected to physical violence or harassment from the police. While they were by no means wealthy, it seems from his description they did have a fairly reliable social networks on which they could rely on in times of trouble. Though I am in full agreement with economic arguments put forth by Weiss, I wonder at his lack of attention to aesthetics. He recognizes that there is order in the conscious juxtapositioning of global imagery but fails to ask what motivates that order. In my mind much can be gained by understanding such collages of images as intentionally ironic; the popularity of violent imagery is not only reflective of larger violence within society, it is also a commentary on it.

I find Weiss' work a valuable complement to my own primarily because of the differences between the types of people with whom we each worked and because he was able to conduct in-depth ethnographic research on the popularity of violent imagery. As I made clear in the previous chapter, Maskani was a place primarily marked by peaceful imagery. Though violent imagery was popular in Dar es Salaam as a whole, it was not among those with whom I worked most closely. Like in Arusha, one was most likely to see the portraits of violent figures displayed at barbershops and on city buses. In retrospect I wonder if this was not a reflection of class differences between different types of *maskani* and/or of how precarious occupation of a particular place was. Displays of globalized imagery express a degree of awareness of global commonality, if not global solidarity. This sense of awareness is echoed in other forms of expression including dress, language, and music. All of these forms of expression are influenced by many factors, not least of which include class background and accessibility to certain commodities. There is likely a connection between the failed expectations of educated urban youth belonging to respectable families with long-term connections to the city and their preference for imagery associated with violence. Perhaps they are able to imagine violence as a reasonable response precisely because they feel they have had something taken away from them, while young urban immigrants, like those living and working at Maskani feel that at least they have been given a small chance of moving up in the world through
hard work. This belief can perhaps best be summed up in the phrase, “One day yes!” which I heard many of them employ when engaged in the process of imagining a better future. They chose to represent themselves as peaceful because they believed it would allow them access to a better world, while others chose to celebrate violence as commentary on what they believed had been taken away from them.

The information I do have regarding violent imagery was collected in interviews conducted with people whom I did not know as well. I contextualized what I did learn about violent imagery in relation to what I had learned about peaceful imagery associated with Bob Marley and the Rastafari faith and through more generalized discussion about perceptions and experiences of violence in Tanzania. In many ways this entire chapter and the research behind it was part of a larger sense-making exercise undertaken to help me resolve some of my own perplexities with the nature of violence in general and, more specifically, in the context of Tanzanian society. From this position of perplexity I focused on understanding what signs carrying images of violent public figures really represented for those who displayed them, as well as for those who “read” them. Surely they were not demarcating “violent spaces” in the same way that images of Marley worked to demarcate “peaceful spaces.” Most people in Tanzania I interviewed about this subject suggested that certain figures were not popular because they represented violence per se, but rather because they represented a certain awareness of the world among those who recognized the figures. Those who possessed this awareness were perceived of as “cool.” But then, why do most of the images represent violent individuals? Why not Britney Spears, Madonna, or Mother Theresa?

Wewe ni Mswahili: A nation of talkers

I would like to argue that the popularity of certain images can be explained in part by the way those who they represent fight. For example, Marley is a fighter, but he fights with words, expertly illustrating the power that language has to transform both thought and action. A similar argument could be made about the popularity of young rap artists, both American and Tanzanian. Mike Tyson, while certainly no Mohammed Ali (physically or verbally), commanded a certain respect because he was a champion, and even more so because he was seen an underdog, always misunderstood by those in power. I have also been told that Tyson best represents the brute force and absolute power of the United States: big, strong, inarticulate, and guilty of rape (Fig. 5.13). The trope of underdog is also important for explaining the popularity of many rappers, as well as Marley. They are deemed “authentic” as a consequence of their “ghetto” beginnings. Many of the young men with whom I worked saw similarities between localities in their own concrete jungle and those situated in East Los Angeles and Trenchtown. Many even used the English term “ghetto” to refer to their own rented rooms located in less affluent parts of
town. The popularity of Osama bin Laden’s picture is something that might be difficult for some Westerners to understand. In the minds of many, however, bin Laden represents the ultimate underdog fighting against the greatest of military powers, the United States. The more he is discredited in the press, the greater is his popularity (5.14). As my good friend Dennis put it, “I think for us Tanzanians bin Laden and Marley and even Nyerere himself are respected because they stand up for the oppressed, they fight on behalf of people who can’t fight for themselves.”

What Marley, bin Laden and Nyerere all have in common is their rhetorical skills. They utilize language to proclaim a space for themselves in the world, but also to fight for what they believe in. Many Wamaskani employed language in much the same way. Whenever a disagreement would arise at Maskani, a long drawn-out discussion would ensue, in most cases continuing until consensus was reached or one of the parties would grow weary of the argument and acquiesce (see Chapter Four). Discussion was the preferred way of disagreeing, and as stated in the previous chapter, this was the way in which “peace” could best be maintained. This does not mean that the threat of physical violence was not often lurking just beneath the surface or that language itself did not sometimes serve as a form of violence. What I want to illustrate in this section is the way that language, even language about peace, can be a form of violence. To understand how this works, however, it is important to consider the connections between Kiswahili language and identity —local, coastal, and national.

An individual’s rhetorical skill was often held to be a measure of his or her identity as a citizen of the streets of Dar es Salaam. Residents of the city lovingly and amusedly refer to it as Bongo, Kiswahili for “brain”— the advanced development of which is necessary if one hopes to be successful in the city. Notions of Bongo were invoked to explain the absurd, ridiculous and irrational realities that constituted the utterly banal problematics of everyday life in a city where laws were easily gotten around, and where lawmakers were often among the worst offenders. Many, though certainly not all, residents of Bongo speak “Kibongobongo,” a dialect of Kiswahili heavily inflected with slang and ironic neologisms that are often created on the spot.17 Although many upper and middle class people seem to disdain street Kiswahili in its various forms, I have yet to meet one who is able to refrain from smiling when in the presence of an individual capable of performing the linguistic virtuositites for which Kibongobongo is best known, regardless of his or her class background. In fact, many middle class people working in the vicinity of Maskani would stop
by several times a week to partake with seeming joy in the ongoing debates and discussions that were always unfolding there. Linguistic skill is a measure of one's intelligence, one's ability to think on one's feet, to talk oneself out of trouble, and re-present the world in a way more in line with one's own worldview. All of these skills are believed to be necessary to survive and thrive in the streets. In this sense, the way that someone speaks can say a lot about who he or she is. This is true not only in regards to one's street or Bongo identity, but also in regards to one's Swahili and national identity.

Being aware of the ongoing scholarly debates on Swahili identity, and of the opinion that such debates seem to be somewhat elitist to the extent that they tend to focus their attentions on understanding Swahili identity as it pertains to those relatively wealthy coastal dwellers who have long lived along the eastern coastline of Africa, I decided to center a series of interviews around the question of "what is Swahili identity?" Anyone who has spent anytime trying to get answers to this question will not be surprised to learn that it was rare to find two people in agreement on the subject. The one thread that did run through everyone's definitions, however, was a love for talking and skilled verbiage. "Wewe ni mswahili," literally, "you are a Swahili person," but more figuratively, "you're talking nonsense, but in a very convincing manner" was a phrase not uncommonly heard in the midst of heated debates at Maskani. The reputation coastal people have for loving to talk, debate, and argue is well known throughout Tanzania and eastern Africa in general. Though they are admired for this, it also makes them the butt of many jokes. Kenyan's often deride Tanzanians for their verbosity, joking that the reason Tanzania is so underdeveloped economically in comparison with Kenya is that Tanzanians would rather talk about development than partake in it. Nyerere, himself, was considered a master-wordsmith. One of his nicknames, Chonga, which is a reference to his filed teeth, is also used as a verb – anachonga sana – used to describe someone in the act of speaking overdramatically as a way of covering up lies (kuchonga also means to carve — sculptures, teeth, and tall tales). As the leading force behind making Kiswahili the national language of Tanzania, one might argue that he is partly responsible for helping to earn Tanzanians their reputation among their neighbors as a nation of talkers.

As much as I would like to challenge this stereotype, my experiences in Dar es Salaam have given me very little reason to do so. Tanzanians love to talk, a fact that seems to increase exponentially as one nears the coast. Talking is a way of passing the time. More importantly, it is easily the most effective tactical weapon of the weak, allowing them to fight and win battles without ever raising a fist. I do not want to suggest that people never resort to physical violence in Tanzania, only that it is highly frowned upon outside of certain domains. Physical violence is usually portrayed as a last resort to which one turns when one has already been verbally overpowered. It is obviously not possible for me to speak of "Tanzania" and "Tanzanians" without making sweeping generalizations, but the tendency for Tanzanians to employ lan-
guage to avoid physical violence and to promote a peaceful atmosphere — the stereotypes I reify here — does in fact exist, if not always in terms of behavior, then at least in peoples’ minds and words. Figures such as Marley, Shakur, and bin Laden are popular in Tanzania in part as a response to this love for language and respect for skilled speakers.

In 1997, while conducting research in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, I found myself confronted with a wholly different scenario where recourse to violence characterized dominant discourses regarding change on both individual and state levels. The history of Haiti has been presented as a history of violence. Cosentino deftly illustrates the relationship between Haiti’s violent past (and present) and the popularity of heroes like Rambo and the Terminator, as well as the relationship between these proponents of violent change and the Vodou spirit Ogu/Sen Jak, the ultimate warrior figure (1995:243-263). Initially, I assumed that I was witnessing a similar phenomenon in Tanzania with the popularity of Tyson and the like, but the more I considered this possibility in the context of Tanzanian history and society, the more difficult it became to justify. Violent culture heroes in Tanzania are not respected because of their brute strength as much as for the strength of their words.

At first glance, Tanzania seems to be the extreme opposite of Haiti where dictator, revolution, and coup d’etat are words in every child’s vocabulary. And yet, when I listened closely to the stories about survival in Tanzania, I also heard people talk about state-sponsored oppression and routinely heard horrific tales about individual and group acts of violence involving rape, robbery, and mob justice in the form of deadly beatings and burnings. Although it was relatively easy for me to make the connections between the stories I heard about state-sponsored violence and the acts of individual violence experienced by so many Haitians, I often struggled to understand how people could face similar physical and structural violence in Tanzania while continuing to proclaim they lived in a peaceful country.

Discourses related to peace and violence are intricately interwoven in Tanzania. This is perhaps most eloquently expressed through sign art and the ways in which people are able to transform otherwise unruly public space into “zones of peace,” zones most often demarcated by images celebrating the skill and audacity of those globalized word slingers who tend to direct their anger against structural violence and oppression. In the following section, I want to illustrate connections between the popularity of these peaceful warriors in street iconography and nationalist discourses on peace and violence, hopefully demonstrating that in some ways street discourses on these subjects are merely a replication of the official party line.
Tanzania as a Peaceful Oasis

The love Bob Marley sings about is a love that actively resists the negative side of human nature. Like the love of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesus Christ, and Nelson Mandela, it makes passive and peaceful resistance possible (Fig. 5.15). The option for peaceful resistance that Marley advocates is extremely important in mainland Tanzania as it goes hand-in-hand with a strong national identity that posits Tanzania as a peaceful, civilized country in what is construed as an otherwise violent region of the world. Tanzania has been characterized by many outsiders as the most peaceful country in Africa. With the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya as bordering neighbors, it should come as no surprise that many Tanzanians take great pride in claiming allegiance to a land where, at least on the surface, peace routinely prevails. I say on the surface because, as even a precursory examination of state-sanctioned violence that has occurred in reaction to recent political events such as the 2000 elections would show, there is a great potential for violence boiling just below the surface. One might even argue that one of the primary reasons that Tanzania has been able to remain so peaceful for so long is a result of the thorough effectiveness of state-sponsored tactics of violence and repression.

Through my daily conversations and interactions with people in Dar es Salaam I gradually became aware of the existence of a sort of “rhetoric of peace” that was employed to conceal common acts of violence and aggression, as well as more generalized acts of political oppression. The process of rhetorically reconfiguring violence so that it can be represented and understood as peace occurs on two primary levels: on a government level largely supported by international discourses on governance, and on an individual/group level. While the state is most interested in diverting attention away from and concealing violence in Tanzania in order to please international funding agencies and to maintain a sense of public order, individuals rely on a rhetoric of peace as part of a complex coping mechanism that allows them to experience violence while labeling it as peace. In the previous section, I attempted to illustrate that, on the whole, people are not inclined to embrace physical violence as a reasonable recourse to action. They prefer to fight with words rather than fists. I also suggested that despite this inclination physical violence is a fairly routine occurrence. On an individual level, a rhetoric of peace is resorted to as a way of evading violent confrontation and as a way of condoning it. From this perspective, violence is only embraced as a last resort and only if it is undertaken in the name of restoring or promoting peace. This perspective, and the peaceful rhetoric that accompanies it, characterize national discourses on peace and violence.

The reasons for the emergence and continued dominance of this rhetoric are difficult to figure out, but I believe the following example will demonstrate that they are at least in part tied to economic and political events that have
helped to shape Tanzanian post-colonial, and to some extent, pre-colonial, history. When searching for explanations for the relative peacefulness of Tanzania I would often be reminded of the commonly shared belief that Tanzania has been spared ethnic conflicts similar to those seen in bordering nations for the simple reason that no one ethnic group is able to claim a significant majority in the country. There are over 120 ethnic groups in Tanzania, and no single group has been able to obtain sufficient power to create the sort of ethnic tensions seen in many other countries. While this is true to an extent, there are certainly large numbers of individuals concentrated in specific ethnic groups in Tanzania who have wielded a greater degree of political and economic power since before independence was achieved in 1961. Concerted and specific attempts that were made to level the playing field among different regions of the country during the Nyerere regime continued into the mid-1980s. Many areas of the country that benefited economically under colonialist regimes (specifically the mountainous coffee growing regions of the country including Kilimanjaro, Bukoba, Iringa and Mbeya) suffered under the Ujamaa regime. Instead of fostering continued growth in these areas of the country after independence the Tanzanian government instituted a number of policies aimed at stripping power from these regions. Its policies were generally considered repressive among those who were most greatly affected. Forty years after independence, however, those same regions continue to boast the best secondary schools, many of which were established by colonial era Christian missions. People from these regions of the country form the heart of the emergent nouveau riche classes discussed in Chapter Two.

During the time of my research, especially in the months following Nyerere’s death, it was not uncommon to hear middle-aged Tanzanians who had migrated to Dar es Salaam from these regions of the country freely criticizing both Nyerere and socialism for the perceived economic injustices to which they had been subjected. I did not consider such observations new or particularly enlightening, especially given how much scholarly work has been devoted to critiquing both Nyerere and the policies he championed, but I was surprised at how vehemently people expressed their views at the time. It seemed to me that many people experienced Nyerere’s death as a cathartic experience and the official mourning time that followed as a chance to voice long-withheld criticisms.

This brief look into a set of policies that shaped Tanzanian economic and political history illustrates how the subtleties of oppression work within the country. Both official and popular views hold that there are no ethnic-based tensions in Tanzania, an observation that is held up as both cause and proof of the country’s peacefulness. Yet, the supposed national unity celebrated as innate to peace-loving Tanzanians misrepresents tensions that do exist, while denying the brutality of post-colonial nationalist policies that were created to cancel out those tensions. Much of the political tension that does exist in Tanzania today can be linked to historically grounded regional, ethnic,
and economic differences that were simultaneously denied and repressed by the socialist government led by Nyerere. This simultaneous “denying and repressing” is one of the main strategies employed by the state to promote a “rhetoric of peace.” Anyone or anything that threatens to challenge the nation’s stability or its reputation as a peaceful oasis will be quickly reigned in. In accordance with the status quo, all such threats are denied verbally in public speeches (another example of how language can be used as a weapon) then repressed, violently if necessary.

The oft-quoted paradox that Tanzania held more political prisoners in its prisons when Julius Nyerere was in office than did South Africa at the height of apartheid, whether true or not, does much to illustrate many Tanzanians’ awareness that the “peacefulness” of their country often comes at a heavy price. That people can simultaneously criticize the state for perpetuating policies of physical and structural violence, while maintaining that they live in a peaceful society, can be partially accounted for by acknowledging the hegemonic success of a state that consistently proclaims Tanzania a peaceful country. When there are outbreaks of violence, whether fostered by the state or not, the state normally maintains that such occurrences are an exception to the rule, and decidedly “un-Tanzanian.” This situation provides a text-book example of both Foucauldian governmentality and Gramscian hegemony at work, with the former contributing to the success of the latter and vice versa. The state continues to generate a discourse of peace. Most of its citizens are happy to engage in the perpetuation of it, reproducing a generalized rhetoric of peace while freely acknowledging the occurrence of specific acts of violence that are deemed exceptional. Violent acts are recognized as violent, but by portraying them as exceptional their meaning is denied. In this way, the Tanzanian state is able to mask violence and routine repression as the necessary tools for maintaining the “peace.” Tanzanian citizens, as well as foreign investors, have come to expect and accept this as normal.

Sanctioning Violence

Throughout its post-colonial history, Tanzania’s foreign supporters have downplayed the repressive nature of the state in the international arena while lauding the country’s lack of political unrest, in effect sanctioning continued state-based violence for political and economic reasons. Money from the Soviet Union and China poured into Tanzania during the socialist years. Repressive social policies enacted in the name of furthering the aims of socialism were not only accepted but also celebrated. When the Cold War came to an end and new sources of foreign aid were needed, it did not take long for Tanzania to change its political ideology, if not in practice then at least in name. Now Tanzania is hailed as one of the fastest growing capitalist democracies in the world and continues to be a recipient of a seemingly endless flow of foreign aid. International pressures resulting from the agendas of donor agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, NGOs, and pressures from individual
Western governments responsible for doling out huge sums in bilateral aid enable and even encourage the continuation of certain repressive measures meted out by the Tanzanian state when undertaken to promote stability.

As I stated in Chapter Two, when discussing the economic successes and failures of Tanzania, it is common for people in Tanzania to credit or blame their own leaders. It is routine for people to distinguish the three successive presidential regimes that guided the country through a socialist period, a period of liberalization, and a period of structural adjustment. What such discussions often fail to recognize is the degree to which the Tanzanian economy is affected by international economic policies. Despite the lack of clarity that many people in Tanzania (and the rest of the world) have on the relationship between these issues, there does seem to be a growing awareness in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar that appeals made to international bodies, particularly to those that serve as gatekeepers of foreign aid, could potentially lead to a change in repressive government policies.

A story I heard from a former UN employee shortly after my 1999 arrival in Tanzania illustrates the point. According to him, early in 1999, an opposition political party took their protest against government policies to the steps of the United Nations’ offices in Dar es Salaam believing the state would never authorize police action to break up the protest, despite the fact that they had not received government permission to assemble publicly. Unofficial reports claimed that the police barely hesitated before engaging in their typical strong-arm tactics. The former UN employee stated that as he stood at the window that day watching the violence unfold he overheard top agency officials proclaim loud enough for everyone to hear, “We didn’t see anything.” No accounts of this event ever appeared in public documents, making it difficult to verify this story and others like that I heard in Dar es Salaam.

Many people I knew had trouble reconciling how the UN and similar bodies that claim to promote democracy could quite literally look the other way when the principles of democracy were being violated on their very doorstep. Gradually, I came to see a connection not only between people’s passivity and the rhetoric of peace generated by the state but also between the state’s activities and the international actors that offer both explicit and implicit support of the Tanzanian state. Once one recognizes this connection, it becomes difficult to resist the temptation of cynicism. When the harbingers
of democracy are also engaged in the reproduction of repressive governance, the promises they make for social change are difficult to believe in. As my research continued, I began to see that any attempts to bring about large-scale social change in the near future in Tanzania —the goal of most AIDS prevention strategies— were likely to be frustrated as long as people continued to view repressive governance as inevitable and to believe that the state’s repressive tactics would be condoned by foreign democracies and international governing bodies.

Zanzibar Yawa Kosovo – Kosovo in Zanzibar

I do not want to give the impression that international organizations and foreign donors never challenge oppressive actions taken by the Tanzanian state. It was, after all, only after a great deal of international pressure and the promise of IMF, World Bank, and bilateral funding that multi-party democratic elections were introduced in Tanzania in 1992. Not surprisingly then, it was in response to election irregularities and political violence surrounding the 1995 and 2000 general elections that aid was suspended to Zanzibar, the region where most of the irregularities were concentrated. Although numerous opposition political parties have been formed since this first became possible in the country, the only one to challenge seriously the dominance and near absolute rule of CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi) has been the CUF (Civic United Front). Support for CUF has come primarily from the Zanzibar archipelago, which consists of the islands of Unguja (also known as Zanzibar island) and Pemba, with the greatest support coming from Pemba. The leadership of CUF has protested and continues to contest the official results of both the 1995 and 2000 elections (Figs. 5.16, 5.17). Following the 1995 elections, the CUF boycotted the government in response to alleged vote-rigging in favor of the ruling party, which managed to win a slim victory that returned Salim Amour to the office of president for the islands with a margin of less than 1 percent. After the boycott was initiated, the Zanzibar government arrested eighteen CUF officials, charging them with conspiracy, and eventually treason. There was a great deal of public outcry against these actions within Tanzania, as well as from international organizations, but the prisoners were held until after the 2000 elections.21 The 2000 elections were similarly marred but this time the CUF reacted by calling for, and organizing, a large-scale, countrywide political protest to take place 27 January 2001. The protests, which also demanded constitutional reform, enjoyed broad support from opposition parties and, though well
attended, were generally peaceful on the mainland. The protests in Zanzibar, however, were met with brutal state-sanctioned police action. According to a Human Rights Watch report (2002), at least 35 people were killed, 600 injured, and approximately 2000 Zanzibaris were forced to flee to mainland Kenya to escape further persecution. The brunt of the attacks was felt on Pemba Island, which has been considered a hotbed of political opposition since independence was achieved in 1964. In 1964, following a bloody revolution in Zanzibar in which thousands of people of mostly Arabic descent were killed, a political union was quickly formed between the islands and mainland Tanganyika. In addition to the killings, thousands were detained, while others were forced to flee the islands. It is still quite easy to elicit stories that recount the horrors surrounding the revolution in both Zanzibar and on the mainland. Although the union unites the islands and the mainland, Zanzibar remains semi-autonomous, and retains certain powers and also the right to elect its own president, legislature, and judiciary. Following the revolution, the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), led by Abeid Karume, fulfilled the role of the sole political party. Eventually, ASP joined with the mainland TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) to form CCM, effectively uniting the leadership of the two constituencies. Mainland members of CCM have helped to assure that their comrades remain in office in Zanzibar by aiding and supporting the perpetuation of election irregularities since 1995.

The revolution was socialist in nature but it was also injected with ethnic and religious overtones. Most wealthy business and landowners were either of Arabic or Asian descent, and the great majority were Muslim. Most of those involved in orchestrating the revolution were Africans descended from those who had previously been enslaved to work the islands' plantations. Following the revolution and the establishment of the union, the Zanzibari government actively meted out severe punishment to anyone who had been against the revolution, and most of these retaliations were directed at Pembans. Since the CUF has come into being, efforts have been made by CCM to portray it as a “Muslim fundamentalist” organization, funded by terrorists, and even to link it rhetorically to Osama bin Laden. Although such portrayals were initiated before the United States-led “war on terror” began following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the rhetoric employed by
CCM has been hauntingly similar to that which has since emanated from the Bush, Jr. administration. The majority of CUF members are indeed Muslims but the party also has a great deal of support among non-Muslims, especially among mainland youth who are similarly dissatisfied with the government’s treatment of anyone it considers as a threat to national unity.

Electoral tensions were ironically illustrated on the signboards posted outside of the local headquarters for CCM and TLP in the Tandale section of Dar es Salaam (Figs. 5.18, 5.19), with one branch being named “Tawi la Kosover,” or Kosovo Branch, and the other, “Tawi la NATO,” or NATO branch. Significantly, Kosovo itself became a Kiswahili verb signifying violent action in the months following NATO intervention in Kosovo. Nitakukosove, or “I’m going to Kosovo you,” became another way of saying “I’m going to beat you up,” while drivers began painting “Kosove” on their vehicles as an ironic signifier of violent powerlessness in the face of absolute power (Figs. 5.20, 5.21). On 20 January 2000, the headlines of Majira, a Dar es Salaam newspaper, proclaimed, “Zanzibar Yawa Kosover,” and “Zanzibar Yageuka Kosover,” essentially declaring that Zanzibar had become Kosovo as a result of a battle that took place between police and CUF members who had gathered around the Zanzibar High Court show their support for their fellow members who were about to be tried for treason. On the same day, the paper carried a political cartoon (Fig. 5.22) penned by Ali Masoud, otherwise known as “Kipanya,” which graphically and humorously portrayed the violence in Zanzibar and Kipanya himself running away proclaiming “Hii sasa Kosover,” or “this is now Kosovo.” Masoud, who considers himself Tanzania’s first and preeminent political cartoonist, told me in an interview that he is neither for CCM nor CUF, but that he considers it his duty to speak out against the abuses of power he feels would take place regardless of who was in office. For the time being, however, some of his most critical work is directed at CCM (Figs. 5.23, 5.24).

The “union,” as it is generally known in Tanzania, simultaneously serves as a symbol of national unity and peace and as the primary challenge to it. In the time leading up to Nyerere’s death and immediately following it, there was a great deal of public dialogue concerning the fate of the union, which many believed he had personally held together. Although splitting up the union has never been part of CUF’s official platform, many CCM supporters believe it would be the inevitable outcome if one political party would come to represent the islands and another the mainland. Since the very beginning of the union there has been a fair amount of resistance to it, the reasons for which are beyond the scope of this chapter. The greatest resistance, however, continues to be centered on the island of Pemba where CUF support is greatest and where the CUF leadership resides. Since the union has come into place, national
policies, both official and unofficial, have continued to work to "underdevelop" and isolate Pemba from the outside world. This causes much resentment among its residents, as was made clear to me during a brief visit to the island prior to the 2000 elections. The challenges that the CUF presents to CCM and the ruling government are directly tied to the injustices that have been aimed at Pemba, and to a lesser extent Unguja, since the formation of the union. This has helped to earn CUF an underdog status in Tanzania and, as a result, has also led to their increasing support among others who see themselves as underdogs, including many youths in Dar es Salaam.22

In response to the various atrocities committed by the Tanzanian state in connection with the 1995 and 2000 elections, most donor agencies and governments have suspended aid to Zanzibar. Most, however, are reluctant to put similar pressures on the mainland government, even though it has consistently condoned, supported, and lauded the brutal actions taken by the police surrounding the protests. This refusal led some at Maskani to conjecture that once again international organizations and foreign governments claiming to be interested in promoting democracy were not really willing to challenge the absolute authority of the Tanzanian state, President Mkapa, or CCM.

Mwembe Chai Riots

The example of Zanzibar provides a particularly clear case of political violence being perpetrated by the Tanzanian state. I would like to explore one
final example of state sponsored violence in connection with the police shootings that occurred at the Mwembe Chai mosque in 1998 and, in particular, the follow-up violence that occurred on 13 February 2002, to which I was an unfortunate witness. The mosque at Mwembe Chai, which is situated on the main road in the Magomeni area of Dar es Salaam, has been the site of periodic violence since 1998. At least two people were killed when riot police used excessive force to break up a protest being held there. In 2002, local Muslims who wanted to sponsor a hitma, a reading of Koranic scriptures in memory of those who were killed, requested permission to gather at Mwembe Chai mosque on the anniversary of the killings. They were summarily denied permission to assemble by the government. Local police forces, as well as the Field Force Unit (riot police) were dispatched in advance to guard the area surrounding the mosque and deter any would-be troublemakers.

As chance would have it, I had planned to conduct an interview in Magomeni Kagera that day, about 500 meters away from the mosque. It was my first time meeting with this group of young men and they were still in the process of welcoming me to their maskani when we heard the first shots being fired. Within a few minutes people started running in our direction, covering their faces with pieces of cloth and the corners of their shirts. The people I was with immediately read this as an indication that tear gas had been fired and suggested I also cover my face. After a few minutes things began to settle down and we began talk about my reasons for being there. Suddenly a shout was heard declaring that the vendors at the nearby Kagera market were abandoning their stalls to escape the tear gas. To my surprise, several of the young men in my company began running back in the direction of the mosque. I was told they were intent on grabbing whatever they could from the market before the vendors returned. It is my understanding that it was in response to the looting in the market that the riot force began firing off tear gas canisters one after another. In a matter of minutes, the air was thick with gas. People were once again running and covering their faces. My newly found friends returned empty-handed from the market, laughing all the while. They suggested we all start walking down into the valley away from the main street. They assured me that the gas would pass over our heads once we were in the valley. In the meantime they brought out a container of water so we could wash our hands and to reduce the stinging effects of the gas. What struck me most about the whole incident at the time was the seeming normalcy of it all. Despite my confusion, everyone down to the smallest child knew what tear gas was and what to do to protect oneself from it. Most people quickly locked themselves up in their homes and those who were not from the area calmly began walking down into the valley. People seemed to be used to this sort of thing. I remember thinking, this must be what is implied by the phrase “everyday violence.” This is not to imply that people were not disturbed by the events at hand, only that they had become so used to such brute displays of violence and their seeming inability to prevent them, that
they just reacted in the best way they could. As we walked down through the valley, I could not help but note how helpful people were, not only toward me as the incongruous mzungu, but to everyone in general. Water, news and advice were freely shared as people shook their heads in frustration. One man, waving an identification card from the Japanese Embassy where I assume he worked, walked rapidly in our direction disgustedly saying, "Mwonyeshe mzungu amani ya nchi yetu," "Show the mzungu our country's peace." Throughout the entire time, from the firing of the first bullets until a couple of hours later when I was safely seated on a local bus headed toward my home, he was the only one to express visible anger at the events.

According to official reports, the police resorted to violence and excessive force that day in order to dispel an unruly group of "Muslim fundamentalists" intent on taking over the mosque. From my position, I saw absolutely no evidence to support this claim. I had passed by the mosque by bus only minutes before the first bullets were fired. One would think that I might have observed a terrorist mob had there been one in the neighborhood. When all the violence was over, two people were dead. One was a policeman beaten to death on his way to work by a gang of youths, the other a carpenter who worked in the area. Dozens of tear gas containers had been fired, as had live bullets. Immediately following the incident, Venance Tossi, the head of the Field Force Unit, Dar es Salaam, told a reporter for The Guardian (14 February 2002) newspaper that "it should be understood that the problem was not religious at all. The government is battling with some unruly people. These people are hooligans and bhang smokers." This statement, while certainly disparaging of my new friends, was, in my opinion, not far from the truth. Yet, within a couple of days the incident was being painted as a primarily religious one by both the government and Islamic religious groups in the city, plainly illustrating the power of discourse to refashion an event to meet the political aims of the day.

At the heart of the ongoing disputes between the government and Islamic representatives in Dar es Salaam is the accusation that the government is prejudiced against Muslims who, despite making up about one-third of the population, are continually underrepresented in the police and armed forces, as well as in civil service positions and public office. One of the defining characteristics of Dar es Salaam as a "city of peace" is religious tolerance. In most cases, Muslims, Christians, Hindus and followers of African-based religions all live together in a relatively unproblematic fashion. So when accusations are levied against the state of being prejudiced it is most often read and portrayed by the state as a threat to national unity. In certain over-determined circumstances, like in Zanzibar, it can even be considered treason. When the state represents the leaders of opposition political parties as "Islamic fundamentalists," the aim is to convince the voters that any support for such an opposition will lead to a breakdown of the rule of law and the "peacefulness" that Tanzanians have come to expect in their country. In essence, any challenge made to the authority of the state is interpreted as
being divisive, and divisiveness is assumed to lead to chaos.

**Everyday Acts of Irony**

In the above account of the February 2002 Mwembe Chai riots I tried to emphasize the "everydayness" of violence in Tanzania and the normalcy of people's lives in the face of what can sometimes feel like surreal circumstances marked by hypocrisy and senselessness. As a result of my own personal appreciation of both the absurd and the ironic my writings may sometimes seem to focus too closely on examples that illustrate a similar appreciation that existed among some of the Tanzanians who worked with me. I began this chapter by focusing on the ways people tell stories about how violence affects them in their everyday lives. Though the brutalities of the stories sometimes make them seem surreal, I think they also illustrate the banality of living in a landscape marked by everyday violence. In the second part of this chapter I purposefully juxtaposed images of figures like Osama bin Laden and Bob Marley, in part to illustrate the ways that space can be occupied and transformed through irony, a tool that Fernandez reminds us is "the main covert weapon against oppressive authoritarian situations of domination and subordination" (1986:268). Similar tactics of irony can be observed in the ingenuity of speakers who incorporate "Kosovo" as a word and concept into Kiswahili in order to capture what Mbembe terms "the banality of power in the post-colony" (2001:102).

Those who lived and worked at Maskani were constantly threatened by state sanctioned police harassment and/or brutality. Street hawkers routinely had their goods confiscated without compensation, female food vendors had their make-shift eating establishments destroyed and their cooking implements confiscated, and young men who hustled foreign tourists and local businessmen often found themselves incarcerated under one of the many loitering laws originally established to curtail urban migration. Female sex workers and food vendors alike experienced sexual harassment and the threat of violent rape, both from customers and police, to say nothing of the verbal abuse they endured from other women. Many boys and young men living in the streets experienced sexual intimidation and rape.

Alternatively frustrated and perplexed by the seeming passivity of many Tanzanians in the face of such injustices, "peace" no longer made sense to me. I sometimes found myself longing for the confrontational violence of Haiti where people may have more easily engaged in physical violence but rarely had trouble holding political leaders, whether local, national, or international, accountable for their dire economic predicaments. It was not that people in Tanzania were unable to see when and where the government was at fault. In fact, this was a common subject of discussion. For many, however, there seemed to be no recourse. The power of the state, especially power directed at the poorest of the poor, was seemingly irrefutable. Violence exists in Tanzania but it is rarely directed against the structural forces that
contribute to peoples' poverty and frustration. Instead it is most often meted out in the form of individual violence, directed from one oppressed individual toward another, weaker individual. As long as it is done in the name of maintaining peace it is rarely questioned and, astonishingly often, it is celebrated.

notes

1 Such a context makes it virtually impossible for me to provide direct quotes from the stories that were shared with me during that time. As a result, most of the material I offer in this and the following sections is presented as summaries. Though I sometimes regret not having better documentation of many of the stories that were shared with me I cannot help but think that at times the absence of a tape recorder or notebook helped to promote an atmosphere of mutual trust between myself and my interlocutors. This was especially the case when we were exchanging greetings and news (habari). It would, no doubt, have been considered extremely insensitive and disingenuous to turn up at Maskani after an 18 month absence with a tape recorder in hand and say, “please tell me how you’ve been because I really care about you personally, but please remember to speak clearly into the tape recorder.”

2 More details about Madole's experiences are given below.

3 Mdogo's choice of verbs here is interesting. Kusota literally refers to the way a person without legs will shuffle along on his backside while begging, while kuteseka is usually used when referring to a long-term period of persecution. Remember, he was only in prison for two weeks but to hear him tell the story one would think he had endured a long period of persecution.

4 Kutombwa is the passive form of kutomba, a vulgar verb normally used to describe the role played by a man in heterosexual sex. Kutombwa is used to describe the female role. In the instance of anal intercourse it is used to describe the role played by the man who receives.

5 The word commonly used to refer to this practice is mchongoma, which is a thorny type of shrub used in hedgerows.

6 On the street, the term basha is used to describe anyone who forces sex on another person, though in most cases it refers to a man forcing himself on another man. Sometimes women jokingly and affectionately refer to their lovers as basha, as well. According to the Oxford dictionary, basha is also the name given for kings in a deck of playing cards. Basha was as an aristocratic title used in the Ottoman Empire to refer to powerful landowners (sometimes the Pasha was used as well). The term continues to be used as a title of respect today in some lands that were formerly under Ottoman control. There is likely a connection between the Kiswahili term basha and its usage in these other lands, particularly in that it is used to refer to someone in a position of power.

7 Findings reported by KULEANA, an NGO for street children located in Mwanza, Tanzania, suggest that gang rape is often used as a way of initiating young men into street life (Rajani and Kudrati 1996; Lockhart 2002).
Whispers of Violence in the City of Peace

When I asked those at Maskani about whether or not this occurred in Dar es Salaam I was told that there was nothing as organized as what had been described in the KULEANA article and none of them were familiar with the term, kunyenga, used to describe it. They suggested that a new boy in town would be more likely to be approached by one basha but that he might use the threat of gang rape to encourage the boy to acquiesce.

8 Msengi is a slang word used to denote men who fulfill the passive role in male-to-male intercourse, voluntarily or not. In most cases it is used in a derogatory way and can also be employed more generally to deride individual men regardless of their sexual preferences. I have so far been unable to link it linguistically with other Kiswahili words.

9 For a longer discussion on homosexuality on the Swahili coast see Shepard's (1987) work on Mombassa. It should be noted, however, that on several occasion individual young men at Maskani mentioned they would never travel to Mombassa because of what they believed was the high degree of normalization regarding homosexual practices. See Reid (2001) for an interesting comparison in South Africa.

10 Detailed descriptions of cars figured into many of the stories told at Maskani. This was not too surprising given that most of them made their living either washing/guarding cars or selling parts to car owners. Sometimes I wondered if they didn’t know the owner and driver of every car in Dar es Salaam. When they told these stories about being propositioned I am sure that they were all aware of the perpetrators’ identities based on the descriptions of their cars (sometimes even license plate numbers were given), though I was mostly kept in the dark in this regard.

11 These issues were discussed in interviews with the food vendors who worked at Maskani and the young men who sold car parts; several members of both groups were already parents.

12 Had I made better recordings of these different modes a more in-depth level of discourse analysis would no doubt prove enlightening. This is certainly an avenue I would be interested in exploring further in the future.

13 When I speak of sign art, I mean painted images posted outside of business establishments that serve as commercial signs. For a more detailed discussion of urban sign art see Vogel (1990) and Jewsiewicki in the same volume.

14 Rush, discussing why certain Hindu images are incorporated into Vodou suggests that certain images are more easily incorporated into existing systems of belief because, although new, there is something about them that is “already known” (1997, especially Chapter 4). A somewhat imprecise extension of her argument might suggest that, in Dar es Salaam, certain images embody a representation of violence that is already known, already understood.

15 Though this chapter focuses on the way those who operate businesses that are either on the street or open up directly onto the street employ sign art to demarcate their business spaces, I have noted that those who operate
businesses from more private enclosed shops employ similar techniques. Thus, many Asian shop owners display images of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, in their shops, or alternatively keep active shrines to the saint Sai Baba who is well known for his messages of religious tolerance. This last practice resonates particularly strongly with ideas discussed in the previous chapter regarding the demarcation of business spaces as peaceful, tolerant spaces.

16 Though arguably inarticulate it is worth noting that Tyson is most often observed in the context of press conferences where he must rely on his rhetorical skills. I have no statistics but I would venture to guess that he has spent more televised time being interviewed than fighting.

17 Also known as Kibongo, Kiswahili cha mtaani (street Swahili) Kiswahili cha wahuni (troublemaker's Kiswahili), among others.


19 Stambach’s book on education in the Kilimanjaro examines assumptions about the relationship between the quality of education in that region and colonial-era schools. She acknowledges the stereotype held by many that the best schools are found in Kilimanjaro but shows how local people see this as a result of their hard work rather than as the result of colonial missions. Regardless of the reasons, however, she convincingly demonstrates the way people connect the availability of quality schooling to success and modernity (2000:39).

20 There are no statistics available regarding the birthplaces of Dar es Salaam businessmen. The information provided here was gleaned from personal contacts with businessmen whom I met during the course of my research in Dar es Salaam. While they were never the focus of my research activities per se I had little difficulty meeting and talking to them in public places. As a white woman moving about the city on my own or in the company of people they might have considered irrelevant I was often approached out of curiosity. This was especially so in the bars and nightclubs many of them frequented in search of female entertainment.

21 Much of the information discussed in these paragraphs was made known to me during discussions that took place preceding the 2000 elections. These subjects were also commonly reviewed in newspaper articles published at that time.

22 When asked who they were planning on supporting in the 2000 elections most reported the CUF, though many also said that they had little hope that CUF would ascend to power since CCM would surely rig the vote. Almost all of the people I worked with reported that they and nearly everyone they knew had voted for Mrema in the previous election, to no avail as CCM had rigged the votes on the mainland to ensure their continued dominance.