In the Shadow of the Sheraton: imagining localities in global spaces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
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When you call an African woman "woman," no go gree  
She go say, she go say "I be lady-oh"  
She go say "I no be woman"  
She go say "market woman na woman"

- Fela Kuti, Lady

Women struggling to maintain fierce commitment to radical  
feminist womanhood in the face of a culture that rewards  
betrayal want to have a feminist icon who stands against patri- 
archy, who "fights the power."

- bell hooks, 1994

These days, whenever someone says the word "women" to  
me, my mind goes blank. What "women?" What is this  
"women" thing you're talking about? Does that mean me?  
Does that mean my mother, my roommates, the white woman  
next door, the checkout clerk at the supermarket, my aunts in  
Korea, half the world population?

- Jeeyeun Lee, 1995 (quoted in Farmer 1996)
In previous chapters, I have stressed the need to consider popular renderings of urban space when conducting urban-based ethnographic research. This is especially the case with the in-between spaces of the informal economy, spaces that are unlikely to be represented on official maps of the city, or in the official discourses of national and city planners. Working knowledge of the streets, something I referred to as “popular cartographies,” continues to prove essential in helping me to conceive of the world in which most of the people with whom I worked live. Most of those who participate in informal economy networks are engaged in a continual process of occupying public space in the cities. One could say that their work necessitates the “informalization” of formalized space. I have explored some of the ways street vendors re-map public space by taking over sidewalks and busy intersections, and by physically entering into spaces that are officially off-limits to them. Through processes of geographic poësis they call dominant spatial representations into question. In this chapter, I examine some of the ways spaces that are marked by reference to gender, sexuality and desire are linguistically and bodily occupied through popular expression. These spaces have so far proven more difficult to understand, as the discourses that contribute to their making often challenge any single uniform interpretation. The spaces I have examined so far in this book have all been contested, but none are as contested as these.

Adding Women's Perspectives

In trying to understand the processes at work contributing to urban ideas related to gender, sexuality, and desire in Dar es Salaam, I employed varied approaches and methods. My understanding was produced through what can be roughly imagined as three separate and often contestatory discourses: those produced by the young men with whom I worked, those produced by the women who I interviewed, and those produced in popular art forms, including Taarab musical lyrics and performances, kanga cloth design, cartoons, and comics. Given that my research focused primarily on the lives of young men, the views toward sexuality and women that I had collected — views that were markedly misogynous and markedly youthful — needed contextualization. This prompted me to conduct focus group interviews with female food vendors who knew many of the young men from Maskani, as well as individual and group interviews with young women who were also part of the men’s social networks either as their girlfriends or as sex workers. Most of the young women in this latter group were living in Uwanja wa Fisi (see previous chapter) at the time of my research and were considered by many of those at Maskani as typical prostitutes. The food vendors were afforded slightly more respect but were generally considered to have loose morals as well. I felt it was important to try to elicit women’s views on these stereotypes to provide a little depth to depictions of women that were, all too often, simplified to fit into typically sexist moral ideals.
The food vendors, *mama ntilie* or *mama lishe*, as they preferred to be called, all worked at Maskani. I decided to talk to them specifically because of their relations with the young men working at Maskani. These women, all of whom lived in various Usawahilini neighborhoods, awoke early every weekday morning to prepare enough food to serve the tens of people who visited their makeshift stalls at Maskani every day around lunchtime. Although they charged minimally for their meals (300 shillings — less than 50 US cents) for sauce, vegetable, rice or *ugali*, and a small bit of meat), there were days when some of those living and working at Maskani could not afford to pay it. In these cases, it was most often left up to the various *mama lishe* at Maskani to make sure they did not go hungry, to extend them credit for a couple of days, to exchange a small bit of food for work, or to let them finish off the bottoms of their pots at the end of the day. The food vendors would arrive at Maskani every day around 10:30 in the morning, carrying heavy buckets of pre-cooked food on their heads, which they would immediately set about reheating for customers. Most arrived with a flurry of greetings and teasing from the men who lived and worked at Maskani, and inevitably, such greetings were laced with physical compliments and sexual innuendo that would at times anger the women, but on most occasions simply brought good-humored protest or reciprocated innuendo.

Working with the group of *mama lishe* from Maskani allowed me to ask them many of the questions I had asked the men about working in the gray spaces of the economy and, not surprisingly, they produced similar stories on the continual struggle to get ahead and the continual set-backs resulting from harassment by city officials and the police. I was also able to conduct a series of interviews on their perceptions of the young men who were the primary focus of my study, to discuss generational differences and intergenerational conflict and cooperation, and finally, to get their opinions about dominant societal views toward women — specifically working women who were engaged in public interactions with men on a daily basis. Dominant views toward working women were often characterized by a heightened focus on sexuality and desire and were commonly expressed by people from across class, gender, and racial backgrounds. Such views were also expressed by most of the young men from Maskani, many of whom dismissed the women who fed them every day as licentious women who used their food vending businesses as a front for conducting sex work. Needless to say, this was not how the women saw themselves.

In this chapter, I draw on specific examples from popular culture that present women — especially those whose bodies and sexuality are in the public eye — as both desirous and desirable. By drawing on the interviews I conducted among young men from Maskani, along with the women figuring most prominently in their daily lives, I want to create a space for the expression of views toward women's bodies and sexuality that challenges those presented in dominant discourses as represented in both popular and public culture. With this I also want to reclaim a space for desire in academic discourses.
purporting to represent the voices of African women. At the same time I am also making an effort to claim a space for female desire within my own research, which is overwhelmingly informed by male voices.

**Popular Expressions**

The questions I asked during interviews and informal conversations about sexuality and desire were informed by my growing, but limited knowledge of how these subjects were given meaning locally. This was knowledge I was unable to learn from reading books on the subject since few have attempted to tackle the subject. Further, it seemed that when I asked direct questions about sexuality and desire, I would either be laughed at, or told that these were not appropriate questions. In the end, I found that the best sources for understanding these topics were to be found in popular language, music, cloth designs (with proverbs printed on the fabric), and the popular press. In essence, as my knowledge of local views toward gender, sexuality and desire grew – views that were embedded in language and other forms of expression – so did people’s willingness to discuss these subjects with me. It was not that I began asking different questions, so much as that I began asking questions differently.

Examining popular forms of expression was vital to the growth of my knowledge, especially as my interest in particular forms became obvious to the people who assisted me with my research. We would often read newspapers and comic books together, listen to music, and discuss lyrics. In this way, topics related to sexuality that would otherwise be off-limits for public discussion would come up more naturally. With the exception of the focus group interviews, most of my interviews took place on the streets. Such discussions often led to impromptu gatherings of up to five or six people who would offer both complementary and competing interpretations of the same texts. In the context of these discussions it was usually only a matter of time before I was no longer asking any questions at all, but merely observing as other people discussed possible meanings of the texts at hand and offered broader interpretations of the subjects represented in them. These informal conversations, which were usually glossed by those involved in my research as my “Swahili lessons,” and during which I almost never took notes, provided one of the greatest methodological insights I was to gain: in cases of delicate subject matter, sometimes the best mode of questioning is to ask no questions at all but, instead, to create space for conversations.

My command of Kiswahili as a second language is by no means exceptional, though it has been strengthened by my choice to focus on learning colloquial Kiswahili that was essential for understanding discussions relating to life in the streets. I quickly realized that knowledge of colloquial Kiswahili furthered my understanding of discussions related to sexuality, which were very often heavily inflected with popular euphemisms not recorded in official lexicons. Tanzanians are used to foreigners who learn their language and they
even expect people to do so, but that does not pertain to street Swahili. Thus my sometimes rather pathetic attempts to incorporate slang expressions into conversations about sex were always met with uproarious laughter and much appreciation, which I believe also encouraged many to reward me by undertaking to teach me more about the subjects of sexuality and language.

Unfinished Aesthetics

Two factors that struck me almost immediately about these particular forms of urban expression were the rapid rate at which their content and messages changed while the form remained intact, and the degree to which these changes actively incorporated new elements from an unimaginably diverse number of sources. I found the concept of an “unfinished aesthetic” very useful for furthering my abilities to understand the processes that led to this rapid and continual change (Rush 1997; 1999). Building on Arnold Rubin’s (1974) seminal writings on the importance of “accumulation” in west African art and power, and Blier’s (1995) ideas regarding the primacy of conscious “assemblage” rather than haphazard accumulation in the same context, Rush argues that there is in fact a sense of aesthetics at work in west African thinking that differs from Western notions. Her arguments subtly, but resolutely, suggest that Western-trained scholars often have trouble understanding African-based religions and philosophies, not because the religions and philosophies are intrinsically difficult to understand, but rather because much Western scholarship aims to define and order the knowledge in a way that is directly counter to local ways of doing so. In effect, they are trying to represent as finished something that is “forever unfinished;” the very process of representation serves as an act of violence toward that which it seeks to represent. Although Rush, Rubin, and Blier’s work all relate to cultures and people of western Africa, and more specifically to how art is invested with meaning in these contexts, I believe the ideas of accumulation, assemblage, and unfinished aesthetics can provide insight in other contexts where forms of representation rapidly change in content while remaining true to form.

While in Dar es Salaam, I found it particularly difficult to make sense of the chaos that seemed to surround popular representations relating to sexuality. It seemed that as soon as I learned one word for sex, a particular female body part, or a preferred erotic endeavor, another word would be invented. The material I was presented with was rich beyond imagination, but so densely packed with layers of meaning and ambiguity that I found it difficult to imagine any sort of order. The idea of an “unfinished aesthetic” then, allowed me to imagine a local way of knowing based on local aesthetic principles. This helped me to recognize how the linguistic interplay between several different forms of popular expression demonstrated people’s awareness of the power of ambiguity and the need for a continued possibility for change. This is not to suggest that the aesthetic principles in Tanzania are in any way historical-
ly or geographically connected to the aesthetics that the above authors outline for western Africa, only that the possibility for a way of making meaning that differs from Western scientific semiotics must be considered. The “unfinished” quality of Tanzanian forms of popular expression, particularly in relation to sexuality and desire, creates an atmosphere of ambiguity around these subjects imbuing them with a certain power and uncertainty that would have been lost had I relied on asking direct questions.

The Concept of Tamaa

The title of this chapter is “space for desire.” Before proceeding I briefly want to outline what I mean by desire. I immediately noticed the use of the word tamaa to denote desire in discussions relating to sexuality and specifically to AIDS. Previous anthropological research conducted on AIDS in Tanzania has consistently pointed out that many Tanzanian’s recognize AIDS as a disease that results primarily from an excess of tamaa (e.g., Klepp, Biswalo and Talle 1995, Setel 1999, especially pp. 100-140, Schifferdecker 2000, Sheldrake 2002). Though, in most cases, tamaa is translated as desire, I sometimes had the feeling that such a translation was too vague. I found myself asking what sort of desire, desire for what? So, in an attempt to come to a better understanding of the way that tamaa is used in Tanzania, especially in discussions about sexuality and AIDS, I conducted a series of interviews that focused on this word. When people speak of those who have too much tamaa it is most often in the specific context of a desire for the rapid accumulation of material goods, essentially wanting expensive consumer goods without having to work for them. Most often, such tamaa, or longing for material goods was attributed to young women who had recently come to the city, though, to an extent all women were subjected to this stereotype. Young men could have excessive tamaa, too, but in most cases such longing was associated with the physical desire for sex and pleasure, a state considered more natural and more acceptable than having excess tamaa for material goods. The desire for material goods was often imagined as an example of decreasing morality resulting from encroaching capitalism and economic liberalization. Though, I was never able to prove it, I always had the feeling that people’s condemnation of those who manifested excessive desire for material goods was a reworking of socialist slogans made popular during Nyerere’s reign.

In general, many of the men seemed to find women’s desires for consumer goods illustrative of their immorality, as well as their moral inferiority in comparison to men who engaged in sex with multiple partners for the simple reason that they desired many women, this in contrast with women who engaged in sex with multiple partners because they desired many things. These views, almost uncontested among the men I interviewed, were also readily accepted and offered as an explanation for the steady spread of AIDS in the cities by many women. Such analysis unfortunately allowed women, many of
whom considered themselves the exception to the rule, to believe that they were relatively safe from the threat of AIDS. Appeals made by public leaders and by national and international organizations engaged in the fight against AIDS that cautioned women to reduce their *tamaa* often fell on deaf ears, since most hearing this message would agree with it and point their finger at others whom they considered to have excess *tamaa* rather than imagining themselves as such.

Blaming excessive *tamaa* for causing AIDS, then, is more complicated than it would first appear. Not only are such arguments tied to notions of sexist morality, they are also tied to a sort of morality that makes it difficult for anyone to imagine themselves as having too much desire for material goods, a perspective that makes sense in light of arguments put forth in Chapter Two, which argues that many Tanzanians imagine themselves as poor even though they may be relatively well off. *Tamaa* in and of itself is not considered a bad thing. Everyone must have a certain degree of *tamaa* in order to succeed in the world; it is only excessive *tamaa* that is considered problematic. Also, people can experience *tamaa* in many different ways. They may have *tamaa* for another person, for material goods, or an improved standard of living, and losing one's *tamaa* for life is often blamed for otherwise inexplicable death. I will use *tamaa* in reference to people and goods and acknowledge at times that it may be difficult to discern one from the other. If this is the case in my work, it is equally the case in Tanzanian discourses.

Most of those with whom I spoke seemed to agree that an increase of *tamaa* has been one of the unfortunate side effects of recent moves toward increased economic liberalization in Tanzania. This is considered to be especially so in regards to young people and women who, in the past, seemed more content with less access to material wealth and sexual freedom. Themes of excess directly tied to people's ambivalent views toward contemporary society provide glimpses of the unease at work. This is particularly the case in reference to representations of women's bodies. It also shows up in the context of popular language where words must constantly get "bigger" to accommodate the excessive *tamaa* that characterizes everyday life (see below).

During my interviews with women in Dar es Salaam, it quickly became clear to me that their views toward female and male sexuality were often contrary to the views expressed by the young men, as well as those represented in most public discourses. What surprised me most was the insistence by many of the women that their primary motivation for taking a lover was more often related to a longing for pleasure than it was to economics. I was surprised because such views seemed to counter dominant feminist discourses that maintain that most poor women who choose to engage in sexual relations with more than one partner do so primarily for money, assumptions I had taken for granted. I was equally surprised because the views expressed by those women with whom I spoke most often countered the stories of the young men at Maskani as well as, the dominant views of female desire found
in popular representations. Such representations and views consistently characterized female desire as an excessive desire for material goods. *Tamaa* for material goods was routinely blamed for prostitution and AIDS, while female *tamaa* for sexual pleasure was hardly recognized as a possibility.

Women want money and material goods, while men want sex. Both have trouble controlling their desires, but men are, in most circumstances, more easily forgiven for their excesses. Such desire is thought to be natural for men. How can they say no to sex, after all? Obviously, such a paradigm limits the degree to which men and women can engage in meaningful discussions about sexuality. Worse still, the paradigm is replicated in national and international AIDS discourses, intensifying polarities of blame that perpetuate gendered stereotypes as well as AIDS. With this in mind, the final aim of this chapter is to illustrate the need to create a space for female sexual desire within both national and international discourses on AIDS.

**Linguistic Pleasures**

Tanzanians employ great linguistic ingenuity when telling stories. This is particularly so along the coast, where there is a centuries-old tradition of both practical and poetic exchanges in Swahili. Swahili is the national language and the language of instruction in primary schools. It is increasingly becoming the first language of younger people regardless of ethnic background, especially of those who are born in the cities. In Chapter Four, I discussed the relationship between rhetorical skills, a rhetoric of peace, and the avoidance tactics that are often employed by many Tanzanians when confronted with possible violence. I would like to build on this rather pragmatic analysis and suggest that sometimes an individual's use of Kiswahili is celebrated merely because it is beautiful, subtle, and convincing. The importance of language in coastal culture is only heightened in the urban peripheries of Dar es Salaam where knowledge of contemporary vernaculars goes hand in hand with an individual's ability to succeed on the streets. Many people told me they believed that a combination of post-colonial development and the socialist cultural policies of Julius Nyerere helped to contribute to the creation of a national atmosphere where Kiswahili could flourish. This is partially so because Nyerere insisted on the use of Kiswahili, rather than English, as the national language. Perhaps more important for the development of Kiswahili as a subversive urban art form, though, was the fact that from independence until the collapse of socialism in 1985, nearly all artistic expression was fiercely controlled by the government. Although state control and influence over artistic production and dissemination continue today, they are accomplished through methods less direct than those used in the past when the state went so far as to claim ownership of musicians' instruments. Many older residents of Dar es Salaam claim that language was the only thing the government could not really control.
When television, video, FM radio, and a competitive press were introduced to Tanzania in the mid-1990s, artists began to test the limits of expression. It should be no surprise then, that linguistic ingenuity in the form of double entendre, metaphor, and ambiguous meanings decipherable only by those fluent in street vernaculars flourished as important elements in established forms of expression, while also contributing heavily to the development of emerging forms. Street Swahili, Kiswahili cha Mtaani or Kibongobongo – the language of those living in Bongo – figures in all new forms of artistic expression, but is perhaps most notable in music.6

Street Swahili is most commonly spoken among the many young men and women living and working in the streets of the city. Often, those most fluent in it, and thus most respected by their compatriots, are young men, but young women occasionally shine as well. Many older people, including the mama lishe working at Maskani, expressed distaste for street Swahili, calling it the language of hooligans (wahuni) and disrespectful by definition, and yet they could rarely resist demonstrating their own halting fluency in an attempt to appear cool. That Street Swahili is so readily derided by older people, however, does nothing to reduce its value on the streets. As street life becomes increasingly more romanticized in Tanzanian music, Street Swahili seems to exert a greater influence over the language employed by musicians who are attempting to capitalize on that romanticization.

Taarab Transformed

Tanzania has seen the rapid expansion of a music industry with many new performers and even new genres coming onto the scene. Much attention has been paid to the emergence of Kiswahili rap by scholars and locals alike (Haas 2000, Haas and Gesthuizen 2000, Sheldrake 2002). The last five years has seen an exponential growth in both the number of rappers as well as the popularity of the music, which many claim is becoming the first real “Tanzanian” music. Although rappers seem to be emerging from all over the country, Dar es Salaam remains the center of production. The sound produced in Dar es Salaam by a handful of producers from around the world who have set up shop there over the last few years is called Bongo Flava and is most readily defined by its dependence on Street Swahili for lyrics. The success of individual artists heavily depends on their ability to use the language, a fact supported by the many fans, as well as by the many performers I interviewed. Much as middle and upper class American rap artists market “the ghetto” to increase their popularity among fans in the ghetto as well as the white suburbs, Tanzanian musicians use Street Swahili, hoping that a combination of their “authentic” street savvy and ingenious use of language will make them famous. Many of today’s rappers come from middle class families and most have never even spent so much as a night on the streets of the city. Yet, one is rarely able to guess that from listening to their music, which tends to focus on the difficulties youth face in trying to make a mean-
Women's Negotiations of Dar es Salaam

In comparison to rap, very little attention has been paid to how existing musical genres, such as Taarab, have also been transformed by Street Swahili, as well as the changes in methods of production, marketing and consumption that have accompanied the large-scale social and economic changes that have taken place in Tanzania in recent years. Taarab is a musical form that has continually evolved along the Swahili coast since the late 19th century when it was first introduced by Seyyid Barghash, the reigning sultan of Zanzibar (Fair 1994). What began as an imitation of Arab-influenced Egyptian court music evolved rather quickly into a popular music of the Zanzibari masses. In the 1920s, Siti binti Saad, a woman of slave origins, became the first woman to perform Taarab, as well as the first to perform in Swahili (ibid.). Taarab is characterized by its poetic conventions of rhyme, meter, and a heavy reliance on the use of metaphor. As a result of the latter, the pleasure of listening to Taarab is increased proportionately by one’s ability to interpret the layered meanings of the text. At the same time, those who compose the music must have a strong command of the language. In the few examples presented below I hope to illustrate that having a working knowledge of street Swahili and local politics is important too.

There is general agreement among those who listen to Taarab in Dar es Salaam that the music is going through a process of poetic degeneration. People seem to feel that the metaphors are becoming less subtle and the double entendres less double. Songs are now typically laced with matusi, insults or improper language. While I agree that the songs are becoming bawdier and less subtle, I disagree with the assessment that contemporary songwriters are less poetic and less able to manipulate linguistic subtleties. The subject matter of the songs may become more vulgar, but the form such vulgarities take remains imbedded in popular, urban language, a characteristic that has marked Taarab since the days of Siti binti Saad. Some of the changes that are taking place in Tanzanian music today result from the pressure put on songwriters to limit the length of their songs in order to make them more playable on radio. As stated above, it was only in the mid-1990s that FM radio was introduced to Tanzania. Prior to that time, there was only one state-run music station, which in many ways dictated the musical standards. The primary purpose of the station was to promote the growth of “national” music traditions and, for many years, Taarab was portrayed as a foreign music not worthy of airtime in Tanzania.

When FM radio stations began appearing, Taarab finally found its place on the airwaves, albeit in the beginning with some resistance. Deejays at Clouds FM, one of the more popular Dar es Salaam-based stations, explained to me that many people were initially opposed to a Taarab music hour, arguing that the music was basically degenerate, the music of homosexuals. Given such pressure, it should not be surprising that many Taarab bands, wanting to “make it big” on the radio and increase their record sales, began writing songs that flagrantly embraced heterosexuality. Before they began
writing and recording songs for radio play, most Taarab musicians had com­posed songs primarily for live performances. Many songs were as long as fifteen minutes, much longer than would be acceptable for radio play. The need to condense the songs in length led to the need to condense the songs in meaning as well, which has necessitated an increase in the use of less subtle language in order to get the same points across in less time. What I am arguing is that Taarab has changed in recent years largely as a result of the growing trend to write songs for radio play, rather than for live performance. Thus, the music has been influenced by the format of the media at hand as well as by state polices that began permitting the establishment of FM radio in the mid-1990s.

Today Taarab is performed by both men and women but is considered by many as an example of contemporary female popular culture. This is true less so because the performers are women (many are also men) than because most who attend the performances, buy the cassettes, and listen to Taarab on the radio are women. Some men do attend performances, but when they do they usually drift to the back of the room rather quickly (Fig. 8.1). During live performances, female audience members, in particular, engage actively through dancing, directed tipping, and the making of music requests. In her book on Swahili musical performance Kelly Askew (2002) illustrates how Taarab performances can transform otherwise public spaces into a forum where private disputes between women can be aired (see also Askew 2000). Taarab is, at least on the surface, most often about love and desire, and song lyrics provide important views regarding societal norms, gender roles, and morality. The way lyrics are interpreted and re-directed by audience members provides them with opportunities to comment on the behavior of those around them through public metaphors that are often thinly veiled.

In Uswahilini, another type of appropriation was also commonly practiced among people who listened to cassette recordings of Taarab. When walking into Uswahilini one always overhears Taarab music playing. It is easily the most popular music in these areas. In the same way that young vendors in the city center may use Bob Marley or other reggae musicians to sonically

Figure 8.1 Lydia "Mbeijing" Paul, one of Tanzania's only female comic strip artists, offers one woman's take on a taarab performance. A man sitting in the front row observes how nicely the performer on the stage is dancing. His wife, who is sitting next to him, grabs and reprimands him in front of the other audience members saying, "give me my divorce!" First published in Tanzania Leo. (18-20 Jan. 2000)
mark their places of work as places of peace, women in Uswahilini employ Taarab to establish sonic boundaries around their domestic spaces. Often, I would hear a woman play a specific song over and over again, a practice that I was told would be employed when a woman wanted the song to be overheard. In sending out the song, she was most likely sending out a message to one of her neighbors, much in the same way that women at performances used directed tipping and dancing to send a message to another woman in attendance. It was not always necessary to play the song over and over again, however, as she would only have needed to raise the volume on her radio when a particular song was played to achieve the same effect. In undertaking these actions, women occupy the audible space shared with their neighbors, and momentarily transform it into their own. They are able to appropriate musical metaphors embedded in the songs as a means to declare their love for someone publicly, or to declare their knowledge that a neighbor has been spending too much time talking to somebody else’s husband. In addition to communicating with female neighbors, such auditory tactics also allow women to communicate with men. If a woman wanted to send out a message about the type of relationship she desired with a man, or to disapprove of a neighbor’s preferences, she might play Babloom Modern Taarab’s “Jimama,” the song that is rather graphically represented on the cassette cover shown in Figure 8.2.

An Aesthetics of Fatness

Jimama, a term that enjoyed increasing popularity on the street while I was in Tanzania, can loosely be translated as ‘big mama.’ Jimama represents a physical ideal to be sure, but also an economic and a romantic ideal. As many researchers of African culture and aesthetics have long known, larger women are appreciated among many people in Africa. Socio-economic analysis has often credited this to an assumed connection between physical size and personal wealth. I call this the “those who have more money and power tend to have greater access to food theory.” In places where resources are relatively scarce, this is indeed, often the case. I would like to suggest, however, that such economic analyses are too simplistic and consistently fail to allow for the possibility that womanly curves and rolls of sensuous flesh might actually be aesthetically pleasing.

There is an aesthetic of fatness in Tanzania, but it is a very particular aesthetic. To assume that all fat women would be considered beautiful would be a mistake. There is a certain type of muscular fatness that is appreciated, whereas flabbiness is not. It was generally agreed among the young men at Maskani that African women fatten up much better than do non-African women. This point was made clear to me one day when I was sitting at the corner with some of my friends. It was about a half-hour before sunset and business was tapering off for the day, when a group of five overweight Tanzanian women of Indian descent power-walked in front of where we were
sitting. It was not the first time we had seen them, and I had often thought before how out of place they seemed in their sari-Nike combinations. I had often joined the boys in laughing at the incongruity of their presence, but on that day I asked them why they laughed. I was told amidst gasps of laughter, “Wahindi wanenepa mbaya,” or “Indians fatten up badly.” What followed was a hilarious discussion about the aesthetics of fatness, particularly the fatness of certain parts of the body, and what such fatness indicated. And while there was certainly much discussion about the economic implications of fatness, the primary theme was one of desire and physical longing for a shapely woman.

That conversation was like many I participated in at Maskani and many more that I overheard. It is not too difficult to imagine that young men sitting on a street corner in the city day after day choose to pass much of their time admiring women and discussing their beauty. It was not long before I realized how different their ideals were from my own, how differently they thought about what made a woman appealing and sexy. For example, women wearing short skirts definitely earned the attention of many of the men but rarely their admiration. Instead, they seemed much more excited by a woman wearing a long skirt who inadvertently exposed her calf, or even her ankle. I was told that there was nothing more exciting than catching a glimpse of the parts on a woman’s leg that were not regularly exposed to sun, the gradual lightening of a woman’s leg from ankle to thigh being enough to send many young men into a state of rapture. Those women in short skirts who willingly exposed their legs to public viewing left nothing to the imagination, and destroyed any sense among the men that they were experiencing something forbidden, not meant for them.

Some of them — especially the younger ones — were not content to sit at Maskani and passively enjoy the beauty of the hundreds of women who passed by the corner everyday. They would sometimes follow a woman whom they found attractive around the city, not to talk to her, merely to enjoy the sight of her backside gently shaking as she walked. Slang words for this particular female body part — mzigo, wowowo, shangingi, taarabu — seemed to abound, and for many of the men at Maskani a woman’s backside could never be big enough. Women who were particularly well endowed were constantly observed, followed and subjected to unsolicited propositions. Mama

Figure 8.2 Cassette cover for Babloom Modern Táarab’s Jimama. (2000)

Figure 8.3 Tanzania One Theatre’s Mambo Iko Huku cassette cover. (2000)

Figure 8.4 Muungano Cultural Troupe’s Mambo Yapo Huku cassette cover. (2000)
Tugelepo, a *mama lishe* from Maskani, told us how it was difficult for women with a *shangingi* figure like hers to walk about in the city. She recounted to us how one day when she was shopping for vegetables at the market in Manzese she overheard several young men, “boys younger than my own son,” talking about her backside in a disrespectful manner, while suggesting to her the many things they might do for her to bring her satisfaction. Mama Tugelepo, always one for a good joke, turned around abruptly and grabbed one of them while explaining that she was an out-of-uniform policewoman who lived in the area. She advised them that they should learn to treat her and any other woman with respect when she was around if they knew what was best for them. She assured us that, since that time, the only rumblings she hears when she walks through the market are from young men warning others to leave her alone because she is a policewoman.

**Mambo Iko Wapi?**

This fixation on women’s backsides was celebrated in a series of Taarab songs that became popular in early 2000. The first one, *Mambo Iko Huku* (Fig. 8.3), was released by Tanzania One Theatre’s Taarab division (TOT), only to be quickly followed by Muungano Cultural Troupe’s *Mambo Yapo Huku* (Fig. 8.4), which pointedly placed *mambo* into the proper noun class. *Mambo*, the plural form of *jambo*, or daily affairs, is normally employed as a greeting among youth, and increasingly so among older people wanting to illustrate their language savvy. It is the equivalent of “How’s things?” and is answered with “*poa,*” or cool. In the context of the songs, however, *mambo* refers to “what you are looking for,” an allusion to a woman with a nice figure, with *Iko Huko*, or *Yapo Huku* suggesting that “it is right here.” The second song was written as a challenge to the first, and by many accounts it was the better of the two, though the phrase that remained popular in street usage came from the first, *mambo iko huko*.

The long history of the competitive nature of musical performance in eastern Africa first recorded by Terrence Ranger in 1975 is fully explored in the book Gunderson and Barz’s book *Mashindano! Competitive music performance in East Africa* (2000), which devotes no less than five chapters to the topic in relation to Taarab performances (Askew 2000, Topp 2000, Ntarangwi 2000, Lange 2000). Though the competition between TOT and Muungano was perceived by many as merely the latest round in a never-ending battle, it should also be recognized that recent trends in Taarab, associated with the rise of what is usually called “modern Taarab,” have been criticized for being excessively competitive. Both songs were hugely popular following their releases and it was only a matter of time before one could see the phrase painted on the back of buses and printed onto cloth (Figs. 8.5, 8.6).

What neither band could have predicted, however, was how the meaning of their songs was going to be changed through popular reinterpretations that would transform the phrases made popular in the songs once again.
"Mambo iko huku," became "mambo imo umo," or what you are looking for is right here inside. Mambo was appropriated by users of street Swahili as yet another reference for a woman’s backside (as if there were not enough already), and in a matter of a few weeks, the phrase, and even the word Taarab itself was being used to refer to anal sex (Figs. 8.7, 8.8).

This interpretation became so pervasive that when I hung my mambo iko huko kanga on the line to dry outside of my house, my neighbor thought it wise to tell me that I should not wear the cloth in public because it would give men the wrong idea. He explained to me how women were wearing the cloth in Uswahilini to indicate that they enjoyed anal sex. I had heard before how a woman might indicate such a preference by wearing beads around her left ankle, but I had never asked why one might want to display such a preference. My neighbor suggested that in the past when otherwise heterosexual men wanted anal sex they would seek out a younger male to fulfill the role of passive partner, but that now in the age of AIDS women wanted to discourage this behavior and had begun to agree to anal sex with their partners in order to keep them from straying. Some of those I interviewed suggested that it was impossible to get AIDS through anal sex, making condom use in such circumstances almost unheard of. Several men reported to me their preference for anal sex with women, some suggesting that it was especially preferable in the months after a woman gave birth when she would not want to have vaginal intercourse to allow herself to heal and also to avoid becoming pregnant too quickly.

According to those I interviewed heterosexual anal sex was certainly practiced before the release of these Taarab songs, but it was uncommon for people to speak or joke about it so openly. This may have been, in part, due the absence of a common metaphorical language for discussing it. It should be noted, however, that those who composed these songs did not do so with the intention of creating popular euphemisms for discussing anal sex. Heterosexual anal sex did not become popular in Tanzania as a result of the Taarab songs that were released. At first, the songs were not even making a reference to anal sex. The songs simply lent language to a practice that was by all accounts growing in popularity. The emergence of these new referents also allowed me to ask questions about a touchy topic that I would not otherwise have been able to talk about.

Despite reports of the growing preference for anal sex and the obvious popularity of these new songs, there was no public information available during the time of my research regarding how unprotected anal sex could put people at a higher risk for contracting HIV. This was particularly problematic given that several of those we interviewed stated that
they believed that anal sex was safer than vaginal sex and reported making a choice to engage in anal sex in an effort to protect themselves from AIDS and other STDs. National and international agencies engaged in the dissemination of information about AIDS were wholly silent on the subject. While jokes and cartoon portrayals relating to anal sex could be found everywhere, not one public official commented on it. The only public figure to speak out about the practice was the ever-controversial musician Remmy Ongala, who had prompted some to burn his cassettes several years earlier when he spoke up in favor of using condoms. At that time, the government banned the song from radio play and forbade the sales of the cassette. The highlight of Ongala's 2000 performances was the song, Mbele kwa Mbele, or Face to Face, which celebrated his preference for vaginal sex over anal sex. The point, however, is not that Ongala is homophobic, but rather that he was the only public voice to be heard connecting anal sex to AIDS. During his performances, Ongala would often adlib in an effort to get his audiences involved; he had an uncanny skill for reading an audience. During performances of Mbele kwa Mbele, he would sometimes interject commentary about “nyuma,” or back. He would call it dirty or smelly, getting lots of laughs, but he would also inevitably say “nyuma ni UKIMWI,” or “back is AIDS.” When he would sing this phrase, members of the audience would usually shout out in protest, as if he were telling them that their favorite candy was poison. I am not one to point a finger at so-called “cultural” causes of AIDS. Any cultural cause can always be linked to economic and political circumstances with much greater bearing, and quick fixes focusing on cultural causes are rarely very effective. In this particular instance, however, I cannot help but think that many lives could be saved if national and international organizations engaged in educating people about HIV/AIDS would put aside their squeamishness on the subject of anal sex and increased risk and speak publicly on the matter.

There's More than One Way to Skin a Goat

But, back to well-endowed Jimama women. Most of the people I worked with came from the lower echelons of the nouveaux riches in Dar es Salaam — perhaps the nouveaux lower middle class would be more appropriate, since none of them had become particularly wealthy as a result of their informal economy hustles, but neither were they among the poorest of the poor. They worked hard for their money, however, and for most of them the step down to poverty would not
have been a very big one. In many of their eyes, corpulence indicated power and wealth but also indicated freedom to choose a lover of your choice. The reason offered by many of the young men regarding their desires for well-endowed women was that, since she was clearly already well taken care of, most likely by another man, she would be more likely to be interested in them for love than money. The fantasy many young men had of having a wealthy woman, or sugar mamma, to take care of them is captured in an image taken from a popular comic book that reads “Mwanafunzi wangu,” or “my student” (Fig. 8.9). Ideas relating to wealthy women taking on a younger lover, even a schoolboy, were often a theme of popular urban mythology. It was commonly believed that women who take young lovers are primarily motivated by their desire for physical pleasure. Such women are able to occupy the position of desiring lover and desirable woman at the same time, with the latter position often being contingent on the former.

The theme of older men choosing young women and schoolgirls as lovers was also quite common in Dar es Salaam. The truth is that it occurs much more commonly than does older, established women choosing young male lovers. What the male fantasy does, however, is allow young men without money to reconfigure the sugar daddy fantasy to allow them to participate. Unlike in the sugar daddy scenario, where the men are most appreciated for their financial resources and the young women for their innocence and freshness, sugar mammies are appreciated for their sexual prowess as embodied by their fat bodies, while young men are similarly appreciated for their youthful vigor. The only economic advantage young men gain in such situations is being able to sleep with a woman who desires them for sexual purposes rather than for their wallets. In addition, the women, because their desire is focused on physical longing rather than financial gain, are perceived as being desirable and desirous, as well. Simply put, as long as a woman desires sex and not money she is considered desirable, at least among those young men who might not otherwise be privileged to have the affections of an older, more experienced woman.

Most of the young men at Maskani were well aware that their precarious financial situation made it highly unlikely that they would be able to maintain a stable relationship with any woman, let alone an older, wealthier one. Thus, the idea of sharing a woman, well endowed both economically and physically, with an older, wealthier man was often a source of great amusement during street corner conversations. The possibility of taking advantage of such powerful men can provide both women and young men with their own sense of power. “Buzi,” a derivative of mbuzi, or goat, was a popular euphemism I often heard employed to refer to wealthy men. Having “buzi” status places a man in the unfortunate position of always having to wonder whether a woman is with him for

Figure 8.8 Taarabu comic by Adam Juma entitled “The word Taarabu and its confusion.” The mother shows surprise at her child who is exclaiming, “I’ve pricked myself with a tack in my taarabu.” Dar es Salaam. First appeared in Sanifu. (April 2000)

Figure 8.9 Mwanafunzi wangu: “My Student” comic by Ibra Selemani. Dar es Salaam. First appeared in Simulizi za Mapenzi, Volume 6. (2000)
money or love. Women commonly employ the phrase, “kuchuna buzi,” or skin the goat, to refer to the many different ways available to take advantage of such men, who are then derided for their stupidity. The cartoon by Michael Ukani in Figure 8.10 illustrates the complexity of such relations. The woman in the picture is known simply as Changudoa, one of many contemporary slang words for prostitute. You can see she is thinking, “Bonge la buzi,” or “yes, an exceptionally wealthy and stupid man!” He says that he is looking for a young working lady and asks her if she is ready. She replies that if the money’s right she is ready and willing, that she will “give him love so hot that he will soon forget his wife.” Shocked, he says, “no, no, you misunderstand. I don’t want the kind of work you do on your back, I want a young woman to clean the floors and to raise a child in my home.” In disgust she walks away, saying “mtu mzima ovyo” — the use of this final phrase, no doubt, inspired by a contemporaneously popular Taarab song of the same name performed by Khadija Kopa of Tanzania One Theatre (TOT).11 Mtu mzima ovyo generally refers to an adult who should know better doing something considered improper. In the TOT song, mtu mzima ovyo describes someone who is sexually active outside of the bounds of what is considered generally acceptable. Changudoa, however, turns the meaning of the phrase around to indicate that any man who would expect her to give up her life of independence to clean his house and take care of his children is exhibiting extremely transgressive behavior.

Kasheshe, the newspaper in which Ukani’s Changudoa appeared, circulated Monday through Friday during the time of my research, though it has recently been reduced to a weekly. Changudoa appears on the back page of the paper, and many of its readers would turn the paper over immediately upon picking it up to see what she was up to. The paper itself definitely is about as popular as the popular press can be and commonly makes use of street Swahili to make audacious claims in headlines. Although people rarely took the stories reported in it at face value, it was always appreciated for its use of language and focus on topics of popular interest.

The examples from Changudoa presented above are important as they demonstrate how some urban Tanzanian women have carved out a position of relative power for themselves in a society that has traditionally controlled women’s bodies and women’s sexuality very closely. They also illustrate the importance of desire and love for many women involved in sexual relationships with more than one man. Many analyses of such behavior by Western and African scholars alike argue that women are motivated to engage in sexual relationships with several partners primarily for economic reasons. I do not wish to counter such arguments here, but many women in Africa — at least many of those whom I came to know in Dar es Salaam — chose to be involved with certain men for financial gain, and other men for physical pleasure and emotional support.

My argument echoes a similar contention put forth by Luise White (1990) in her seminal The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in colonial Nairobi.
According to White, many women who engage in sex work for economic reasons choose long-term lovers with whom they also maintain a greater degree of intimacy. Most of the young men I worked with had at one time or another been the boyfriend of a woman engaged in sex work, and while they were expected to bring the occasional gift or money as a sign of respect for the woman, it was never considered payment for sex. In fact, to my knowledge it was often these very same young women who would come to the aid of their boyfriends when they were ill or in trouble with the law. These domestic partnerships offered a great deal of comfort and support for many young men and women who were otherwise without family in the city. In the previous chapter, I showed how such relations also offer a certain sense of locality and belonging for people who are otherwise constantly on the move.

Analyses that focus too heavily on the connections between economics and sex while excluding the themes of desire, passion and, in White's terms, "comfort," run the risk of suggesting that only those with enough money can afford love and pleasure. In order to avoid this assumption, it is important to reclaim desire, passion, and love as important themes in understanding sexuality in Tanzania. When I first began asking questions about sexual practices outside of the bounds of monogamous relationships I found it very difficult to understand why people would choose to engage in such behavior when they were so well aware of the risks of contracting AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. I expected women to claim that the advantages of having more than one partner were primarily economic, and to a certain extent that was in fact the case. Many of them did report money and/or gifts as figuring very heavily in their decision to accept a man as a permanent domestic partner.

The mama lishe from Maskani suggested that it was when a man became desperate to gain the attentions of a woman who showed little interest in him that he would offer her expensive gifts and large sums of money to gain her favor. They reported that their own husbands had been known to waste

Figure 8.10
money on such women whom they took as mistresses (vimada), something of which they were resentful. For this group of women, all of whom could sufficiently provide for themselves financially if need be, the choice of a lover was more dependent on his personality, his looks, and on the way he treated them. None of them claimed to be willing to support a man except in the case of a short-term emergency but, then, they did not really expect to be supported by their lovers either. Once the mama lishe had explained this to me, I began asking other women about it and was surprised to learn that even women who are much more economically marginalized and who choose to engage in sex with men other than their primary partner, did so not for the economic benefit, but primarily for the benefit of pleasure. They explained that the relationships they had with their husbands or long-term boyfriends no longer fulfilled their needs and desires in regards to pleasure. Romance, it seems, quickly dissipates when a couple’s primary concerns center on the mundane tasks of running a household and feeding the children. Essentially, poverty motivates both men and women to engage in secret liaisons, not because of lack of money but because of the failure to fulfill their desires, which comes from struggling to get by.

Sexism and Sex

Western feminism problematizes forms of female resistance that involve the appropriation and re-institutionalization of patriarchal forms of power by women, and one reading of the material so far presented might suggest that women who seduce young men with gifts and bodies that signify their wealth are no better than wealthy men who seduce schoolgirls with similar gifts. This was precisely the reading of many of the young men I knew, and for many of them, a justification for taking advantage of wealthy women – African, expatriate, and tourist alike. In the eyes of many of them, they were merely “skinning a buzi” of their own.

But there is a difference. Women who exert economic power in order to gain sexual favors in Dar es Salaam do not do so on uncontested terrain, nor do women who attempt to seduce wealthy men. To make the point, Figure 8.11 illustrates another exchange between Changudoa and a prospective buzi. As he saunters up with his briefcase and belly, she is thanking god for sending her such a powerful buzi while striking an alluring pose for his benefit. She starts to tell him that she knew she loved him as soon as she saw him walking her way, when . . . “Pambaff #!*” he slaps her across the face. Her only recourse is to run away, crying “some people!” while stars circle her head. Many young men at Maskani and elsewhere maintained that the only thing women were interested in was money and they would sometimes even suggest that all Tanzanian women were engaged in some form of prostitution on some level. One young man told with tears in his eyes how angry he had become with women who were only interested in superficial things, and how he was heartbroken when a Taarab song about skinning a buzi came out.
Many young men are frustrated by their inability to compete with older, financially more successful men. This frustration, however, is most often buried under a layer of brutally oppressive views toward women. Unable to direct their anger at their more powerful male counterparts, they instead lash out at women, holding them accountable for their involvement with wealthier men.

Writing about barbershop culture in Arusha, Weiss suggests a relationship between young men's desire to subordinate women and a more general contemporary "crisis of masculinity" that can be seen throughout the African continent (2002:111; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2000:307). More importantly, he argues that these dreams of subordination should be "seen as a form of symbolic violence that both denies women's legitimacy even as it bespeaks these young men's own subjugation." Discussions that centered on the beating of female domestic partners were not unusual among any of the men I came to know in Dar es Salaam. Even those who would not consider beating their own partner found little wrong with it when others did. When questioned about domestic violence, several women at Uwanja wa Fisi reported that public beatings and gang rape were occasionally employed by men wishing to humiliate women who had refused their advances.

During the time of my research several newspaper articles were published providing cultural "evidence" that women from certain ethnic groups liked to be beaten and believed it to be a demonstration of their partner's love. These stories, employing dangerous traditionalizing discourses, were written to explain away domestic violence; they were not very convincing. When I spoke with mama lishe from Maskani about these articles, they quickly pointed out that men were in control of the media in Tanzania and that it was usually men who wrote such stories. While the articles suggested that it might even be a majority of women who preferred to be beaten by their husbands, the women I spoke with reported that it was not beyond their imaginations that some women confused physical violence with love, especially given that some men were seemingly incapable of showing any other sort of physical attention. They even told stories about neighbors who could be overheard engaging in physical altercations. At the same time, they reported that they had yet to meet a woman who claimed to enjoy physical abuse. Generally speaking, despite the great legal advances that have been made in regards to the rights of women in Tanzania over the last several years, most of the
Women's Negotiations of Dar es Salaam

...I interviewed still regarded women as inferior citizens of the country who, like children, needed to be advised, controlled and, when the occasion demanded it, punished, physically if necessary. Perhaps these views were reflective of their relative youth and inexperience dealing with women. I would suggest, however, that such views are more directly tied to the ideas connecting social order and violence as highlighted in Chapter Five. Violence and the violent attitudes toward women that were prevalent among the young men at Maskani must be understood in the broader context of the violence that structures their everyday lives as they struggle to get by.

Not long after the Taarab song about buzii skinning became popular, men began responding with the proverb "unapofikirii unachuna buzii, anakula mkeka yako," or, "while you think you are skinning a buzii, he is eating your mat out from under you," a phrase that became so popular that it was occasionally painted on the backs of local buses. When I asked people about the meaning of this saying, I was told that mkeka (mikeka, pl.) is a reference to the mat under your feet, the very foundation of your life. People eat and sleep on mikeka, Muslims marry on mikeka, and many have sex on mikeka. When I pressed further and asked what it means to destroy one's foundation, I was told by some people that the meaning is likely a reference to AIDS. It warns women with too much tamaa for material goods that they will eventually contract AIDS if they continue to sleep with wealthy men in exchange for gifts. At first I assumed the words of the proverb were those of a buzii attempting to playfully regain some of his dignity in the face of so many buzii jokes, but in fact they were the words employed by young men who feared their girlfriends would contract AIDS in the process of skinning a buzii, and then bring it home to them. Most young men, when asked, would identify this path of transmission as the one most likely to affect them. It seems that young men were not only singling out women as the primary transmitters of HIV, they also condemned the wealthy men with whom the women slept, suggesting that the buzii was in the dominant position in this equation. Most young men expressed feelings of powerless when it came to challenging men who were both older and wealthier, especially when women were seemingly so easily lured away with material gifts. No wonder then that they routinely expressed both anger toward older men, and disgust for young women who demonstrated excessive desire for material goods.

Lest one imagine relations between older men and younger women to be all about lust and material longing, I offer the following example to illustrate that power may be the most important underlying factor. Once, when speaking with several male friends of mine who were at the university, I brought up the subject of professors forcing their female students to have sex with them in exchange for good grades, a subject I had occasionally heard rumblings about. The female students I had approached on this subject always denied it, which, given the humiliation of it, was not too surprising to me. I had failed to imagine, however, how such abuse might also be humiliating for young men and, further, that such humiliation might even be the primary objective
of the august professors in question. As the male students explained it to me, most women enrolled at the university already have boyfriends their own age who are also students. When a professor is interested in pursuing a female student, he will often approach her boyfriend first, threatening him that if he does not make sure the young woman responds to his advances the male student’s grades will be affected. I was asked if I could imagine the humiliation of having to pimp your own girlfriend to your professor and then have to face him every week in class as he smugly addressed you in a roomful of your peers who knew exactly what was going on. I had to confess that I could not, but the extreme distaste and disrespect that many students express toward their professors did become much clearer to me.

The Evolution of the ji/ma Noun Class in “Town” Swahili

Working in Zambia, Spitulnik (1999) has suggested a connection between the fluidity of Town Bemba, an urban form of the Bemba language, and Zambian notions of the modern city. She argues that “Town Bemba is to a great degree perceived and manifested as a fluid code, because ‘it’ quintessentially is a language of ‘the city’ and ‘the modern experience’ —both of which depend on the ideas of flux, hybridity, newness, and experimentation in the Zambian cultural context” (1999:33). I would like to suggest that Street Swahili operates in a similar manner in Tanzania and, further, that specific examples of linguistic fluidity are connected to particular transformations in urban society. In other words, the emergence of new words in Street Swahili occurs because language is needed to discuss the large-scale rapid changes the city and nation have recently undergone.

When I was in Tanzania, I began to notice a pattern emerging in the way new words were being incorporated into local vernacular usage. It seemed as if most new words (like buzi and changudoa) were being incorporated into the ji/ma noun class, which often connotes extremes in behavior, size, and morality. I believe the transformation process language is undergoing in Tanzania is a reflection of the social, economic and political changes taking place in the country and the unease that accompanies such changes. Kiswahili, like all Bantu languages, is characterized by a number of noun classes, with certain of them being reserved for people, animals, plants, fruits, and meat. It is possible to give words new meaning and create neologisms simply by moving a word from one noun class to another. In Figure 8.12 you see the word jibaba, or big daddy, at the top of a comic strip carried in a Dar es Salaam-based comic book recently banned for being pornographic and “leading to the spread of AIDS” (Fig. 8.13). The words jimama and jibaba have been created by moving the human nouns for mother and father into another noun class. The effect is augmentative in that it suggests that mama and baba are now unusually large, perhaps even grotesquely so. Although in this case bigness specifically refers to physical size, there is also a symbolic element at work that implies just what such disproportionate size indicates.
Jibaba was a word that was gaining in popularity among young men operating in the informal economy when I first arrived in Tanzania (Fig. 8.14). Its use was intentionally ironic and caused confusion even among young middle class men. Placing something in the augmentative noun class is generally considered insulting, and to place a person there even more so. A good friend of mine who is the son of a Tanzanian diplomat told me that the first time he was greeted as *jibaba* by a bus attendant he was not sure if it was an insult or not, and that he had to check with his more streetwise friends to find out that this was indeed a compliment, a way of saying he was one with the people.\textsuperscript{14} Needless to say, as *jibaba* was a form of address used primarily among poor urban youth, there was no association between physical size and bigness, except perhaps in a parodic sense. While women who are physically well endowed are considered desirable, men with bellies are often seen as literally embodying *buzi* identity. Additionally, fatness among men is often associated with those in powerful political and economic positions and is thus also recognized as an embodiment of corruption. It is worth noting, however, that the word most often used to describe a man’s belly is *kitambi*, or “little belly,” a noun firmly rooted in the class of diminutives. As long as a man’s belly does not get too big it can still signify dignity and respect, and may even be seen as sexy, but when men accrue big bellies they are seen as corrupt by many, making it morally acceptable, as well as funny for young beautiful women to take advantage of them.

Unlike *jibaba*, *jimama* is specifically connected with physical size, and in most cases also refers to women who seek out sensual pleasure from men (Fig 8.2). Women with sensuous rolls of flesh are thought to enjoy eating, as well as celebrating their sexuality, and it is readily believed that there is a connection between the two. Outside of urban centers in Tanzania, it would be highly unusual to see anyone eating in a public place. This is especially so for women. Even in the cities, most of those who eat publicly are men; respectable women are expected to eat in private. Women who eat publicly, especially when meals are bought by men, are often imagined as being licentious, while the group-eating of *nyama choma*, or grilled meat, may be imagined as an orgiastic feast with men and women enjoying the pleasure of eating mountains of charcoal-grilled flesh with their hands. Very few women would consider eating in public unless in the company of their husband or other family members. Yet it is mostly women who prepare food for public consumption in the cities. White draws a connection between prostitution and food preparation, an equation that is still readily made by many people in Dar es
Salaam today, regardless of whether or not the women selling food are also selling their bodies (1990:11). Mama ishe were constantly leered at while working at Maskani regardless of how virtuous their habits might have been. To call someone jimama then, can be either a compliment or an insult, depending on the circumstances. You might be complimenting a woman on her figure, and welcoming what is perceived as being a physical manifestation of her desire, or you might be condemning the same desire.

As far as I know, usage of the word jimama did not gain in popularity until the Taarab song bearing the name was released, nor did it ever gain a semantic load comparable to that of jibaba, which continued to be used ironically on the streets well after the song Jimama became popular among Taarab fans. The popularity of the word jimama was more fleeting and was rarely appropriated as a respectful form of greeting among women. The people who routinely made use of street Swahili embraced the usage of jimama only momentarily, taking their cue from the song and perhaps illustrating their appreciation for the songwriter’s savvy. Immediately following the release of the song, however, jimama was incorporated into daily exchanges on the streets and also incorporated into other forms of expressive culture (Fig. 8.15). The very ambiguity of the word made it perfect for use in a Taarab song, where meaning is always contingent upon the interactions between the music and the audience.

In Dar es Salaam, language is often employed as a means to establish instantaneous social connections among strangers and casual acquaintances alike. This is part of a constant effort to map out safe zones within the city where one's language savvy is often equated with one’s street savvy. Whether it is yelling out “jibaba” to a passing stranger who looks a little rough, or joining in a street corner conversation while waiting for the bus, knowing how to say the right thing at the right time can serve as a passport to guarantee safe passage through sections of the city that might otherwise prove dangerous.

Will the Real Miss Tanzania Please Stand Up?

Figure 8.16 is one final example of Changudoa illustrating a view that people are less ambiguous about. We see Changudoa approached by a female friend who asks her why she is getting
thinner every time they meet. Changudoa responds that she is maintaining an “English figure.” The other woman, who quickly becomes less friendly, tells Changudoa that if she has AIDS it would be best for her to be open about it so that she will avoid infecting others. In the last frame the artist of the script has provided a clue for readers who may not be as streetwise as either he or Changudoa. He translates mdudu = UKIMWI, or mosquito = AIDS. Mdudu is one of the many slang words for AIDS, and the usage seems to imply that trying to avoid AIDS is like trying to avoid mosquitoes, a task generally considered impossible in tropical Tanzania. This sort of in situ translation of the vernacular use of mdudu is highly unusual, and perhaps suggests the artist's desire to be as clear as possible about an issue he takes very seriously.

This strip also suggests another reading of the fat female body. Thinness is routinely associated with AIDS, which at the start of the pandemic in eastern Africa was commonly referred to as “slims disease.” Another, more cynical reading, and one suggested to me by several of the young men at Maskani, was that Ukani had created this particular installment of the strip in hopes of winning one of the several prizes offered by various NGOs and the Tanzanian government to cartoonists who best communicate ideas related to AIDS. In some people’s minds, this could have been his only motivation for providing a translation for mdudu, as it most certainly would not have been needed for typical Kasheshe readers.

Regardless of Ukani’s intent, however, people are fairly unambiguous when it comes to fear and anxiety relating to AIDS. There tends to be less clarity regarding the ideal female body. Earlier I suggested that fat bodies were an ideal, not the ideal. The cover of a Dar es Salaam-based comic book, Kingo, illustrates the ambiguity regarding the ideal female body type very clearly (Fig. 8.17). The questioned asked is “Tell us the truth, which one is the real Miss Tanzania?” Western-style beauty contests in Tanzania have become popular since 1996 when the first one was organized by an American Peace Corp Volunteer who was also a former Miss Puerto Rico. At the time, she claimed it was her final gift to the Tanzanian people. The winner for the year 1999, Hoyce Temu, was typical of the winners to date. Tall and thin, with chemically straightened hair and light(ened?) skinned, she attended University of Dar es Salaam until the spring of 2000 when she withdrew to pursue a modeling career in the West. Miriam Odemba, a former Tanzanian beauty queen who went on to take runner-up in the South African sponsored, continent-wide Face of Africa contest, became famous when she signed a 50,000 dollar contract with a New York-based modeling agency. This instantly made her the heroine of thousands of young girls throughout Tanzania, most of whom failed to notice when she surrendered the contract and returned to Tanzania less than a year later declaring that the modeling agency wanted her to lose too much weight to conform to their standards of beauty.
While national and high-profile beauty and modeling contests seem to focus on selecting young, educated and beautiful women capable of participating in international contests where standards are established according to a Western ideal, there are also more locally organized contests where women are selected based on their ability to conform to Tanzanian standards of beauty. Such contests, which are often advertised as searching for a “Miss Bantu,” usually tend to favor more voluptuous women, heavy in the hips and sporting a more natural look. Braided hair is preferred to straightened hair and skin that has been noticeably lightened is frowned upon. Miss Bantu contests are hardly to be considered enlightened, however, as the women are expected to parade around stage in kanga cloth fashioned to resemble a bikini while miming “traditional” female tasks like food preparation. The contests, whether nationally organized in search of Miss Tanzania, or locally organized in search of Miss Bantu are all organized with the male gaze in mind. The only difference is that the former also incorporates a Western gaze.

Beauty contests and the rags-to-riches stories that surround them provide backdrops around which people routinely discuss beauty and aesthetics. Such discussions, always polarized, offer essentialized views of African and Western aesthetics and center on people’s awareness of the ambiguities of modernity. The complexities of this debate are intricately tied to issues of class, age and gender. Young, middle-class women aspire toward thinness and the Western identity that it embodies, while their mothers more than likely take pride in their “African” beauty. Girls from lower-income segments of the population aspire toward a certain plumpness that falls somewhere in between the jimama and Miss Tanzania images. The degree to which thinness is stigmatized by its association with AIDS among poorer and older people is greater, not because there is more AIDS in these populations, but because there is more thinness. In fact, HIV infection rates suggest that it is older men and young women who are at greatest risk. The young men I worked with will usually settle for whatever they can get, knowing there is prestige in being seen with either type of woman, but most agreed there was little chance they could
ever economically satisfy a thin woman with a taste for modern things.

What I have tried to illustrate in this chapter is the complexity of ideas that exist in Tanzania in relation to sexuality, desire, gender, beauty ideals and finally, morality. Although I have only touched briefly on these subjects, I believe it is clear that they are not only complex, but also incredibly diverse and ambiguous. While I do not want to discredit national and international AIDS organizations that attempt to capitalize on popular ideas and language related to these issues in order to create more relevant education and prevention campaigns, I would like to caution them that this may not always be as straightforward as they might expect. Employing language that implies women's tamaa for material goods is a leading cause of AIDS, which is by far the dominant public discourse in Dar es Salaam, is not only moralistic, it is also dangerous, as it perpetuates stereotypes that no self-respecting women would be able to identify with, while simultaneously allowing men to feel that they are the innocent victims of female greed.

notes

1 Women did not typically sleep at Maskani and, to my knowledge, mama lishe never did. Other researchers have suggested that some women do sleep in the streets of the city (e.g., Lugalla and Mbwambo 1999, Tesha 2000, Tungaraza 2000). Most young women who find themselves on the streets quickly find ways of securing a place to sleep to reduce the threat of being sexually abused. Some get jobs as cleaning women or sex workers, while others work out deals with night guards who will provide a safe place to sleep in exchange for small monetary or sexual favors. See discussion about Kwa Sheby in Chapter Three for a longer discussion on women who sleep at maskani.

2 Tripp has published extensively about the growing role of women in Dar es Salaam's informal economy (e.g. 1989, 1992, 1997). See also Swantz and Tripp (1996) and Swantz (1985).

3 For an interesting comparative discussion on female negotiation of public space in Cairo see De Koning (n.d.). Though the author is most interested in examining strategies employed by upper middle class working women, the concerns expressed by them are similar to those expressed by women working at Maskani.

4 I thank Dana Rush for organizing and inviting me to participate in a panel on the Unfinished Aesthetic in African Art at the 2001 College Art Association meetings in Chicago. The panel and the conversations that have followed have allowed me to develop these ideas more clearly.

5 See, e.g., Farmer, Connors and Simmons (1996), Schoepf (1993, 1995), and Singer (1994). The work of these authors, in particular, have challenged representations of prostitutes as the primary vectors of AIDS among poor folks from Haiti and the United States to Zaire and Thailand. In previous writings, I have echoed their arguments calling for an analysis of the economic
motivations for transactional sex (Moyer 1997a). And, I do not want to under¬estimate the importance of analyses that have worked to deconstruct the myth of connections between women's heightened sexual desire and AIDS. I worry, however, that such analyses have the potential to go too far, to paint poor women as incapable of becoming involved in sexual relations based on love and desire. Recent work in Tanzania has begun to make space for female desire (Schifferdecker 2000; Sheldrake 2002). It is not surprising that both of these studies (like my own) involved extensive ethnographic research and relied on information provided by women, both sex workers and non-sex workers, to make their arguments. Though neither author specifically calls for a need to examine discourses on women's sexual desire, both recognize the presence of such discourses among young people in Dar es Salaam. Spronk's (n.d.) study of sexuality in middle class Nairobi promises to provide a long overdue discussion on women's sexuality that goes beyond medicalizing discourses related to prostitution and AIDS.

Street Swahili flourished in all of the urban areas that I managed to visit while I was in Tanzania but it seemed that there was a particular degree of respect for Dar es Salaam versions. Youth vernaculars throughout the country are being increasingly influenced by Kiswahili rap, much of which originates in Dar es Salaam.

For more on the history of Taarab and Classical Taarab see Askew (2002), Graebner (1991), Khatib (1992), Knappert (1977), and Ntarangwi (1998). According to Askew, such views regarding the degeneration of Taarab have been ongoing for quite some time, but she agrees that these views have intensified over the last couple of years (Askew 2001, personal communication).

TOT, while being an incredibly popular Taarab group, also carries a dubious reputation of being the voice of Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the current ruling political party. Local rumors indicate that the group received its initial start up funding from CCM, and most people believe that the support is ongoing.

In August 2001, the Tanzanian government banned twelve publications deemed as pornographic tabloids until they clean up their act. There is some suspicion about motives, however, as the publication to receive the longest ban has a reputation for representing government ministers in compromising positions (New York Times, 22 August 2001).
ji/ma noun class. Clearly further research is needed if I am to argue convincingly that such linguistic changes are occurring with any consistency. In this text, my intention is merely to suggest a trend that I have observed.  

14 Despite their seemingly low position in society, bus attendants can wield a great deal of power and often make special allowances for people who are polite to them. These bonds of understanding are formed almost instantaneously through eye contact and greetings. In this particular instance, my friend was complaining that the bus was standing too long at a bus stop while it waited for passengers. In calling him jibaba, the bus attendant was appealing to my friend to show a little understanding for the difficulties of his job.  

15 According to UNAIDS/WHO (2002) statistics for AIDS cases by age and sex, infection rates begin peaking about ten years earlier among women than among men. This is, no doubt, reflective of the tendency for older men to marry younger women but, I would suggest, that it is also reflective of economic differences that lead to older men who are better established economically to entice young women to have sex with them in exchange for expensive gifts.