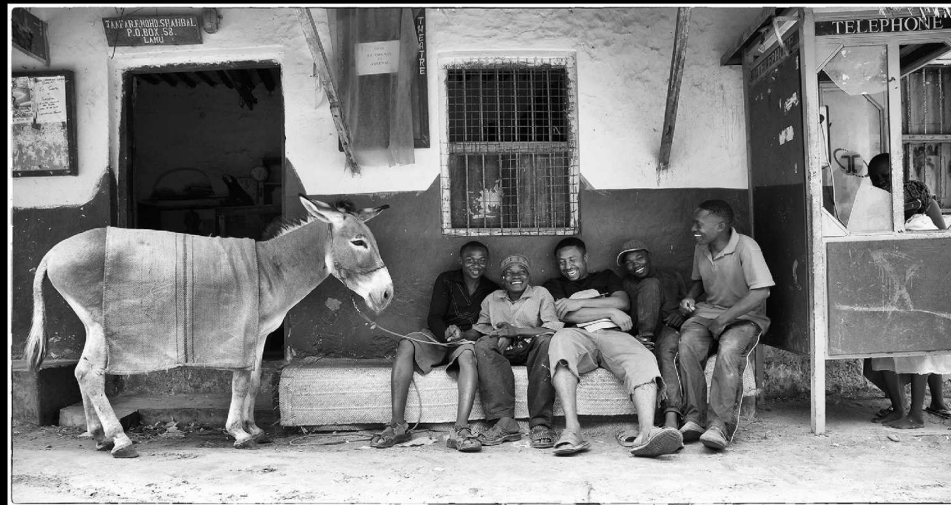
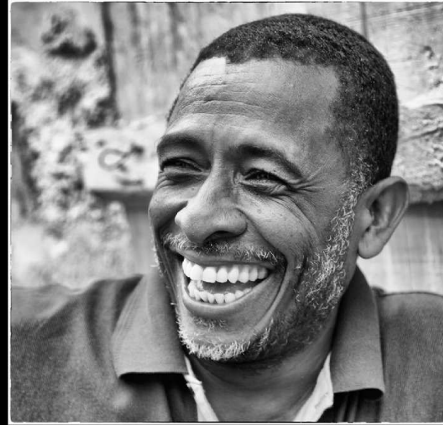


LAMU SMILES



People and Places by Roland Klemp

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This book was kindly supported by Herbert Menzer.

For more information about the island please visit the following websites:

www.lamuholiday.com

www.shela-hat-contest.com

www.lamupaintersfestival.org

www.lamuchonjo.com

www.rolandklemp.de

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Lamu Town 2/2012

Introduction by Hadija Ernst

Lamu is an island off the northern coast of Kenya. It is one of five inhabited islands of the Lamu Archipelago, an area with abundant mangrove forests, plentiful marine life, sandy beaches and a rich cultural history rooted in Indian Ocean trade. Lamu is also the name of the largest town on the island, the oldest continuously inhabited Swahili town with roots in the 14th century. Today Lamu Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its coral-stone architecture, massive carved wooden doors and the intricate geometric patterns etched into the lime walls of domestic and religious spaces.

Lamu is often compared to Zanzibar—they do share similar cultures and even family ties—but Lamu has always been a smaller entrepôt than its southern neighbour. For one, Lamu has no cars, except one or two service vehicles. The streets could not accommodate them for the pathways are narrow and twisting and pedestrians walk single file to accommodate a passer-by.

An island without cars is a marvellous environment. Here donkeys, boats and walking are the way to get from one place to the other. The lack of mechanisation immediately affects the pace of life on the island, slowing it down and encouraging guests to experience life on Lamu's terms. Visitors often describe the island as a place where you "step back in time," referring to the absence of cars, the slower pace and the antiquity of the town.

The island population is predominantly Moslem. Historical evidence points to Islam arriving in the area in the 9th century—a product of trade relations with partners from the Arab Peninsula and India who followed the monsoon trade winds of the Indian Ocean. Religion was not the only product of trade. Merchant city states grew in the region, enabled by the wealth accrued from successful trading links. Lamu's position of power and wealth grew as well. Artisans flourished in this environment, including boat builders, masons and wood carvers who built large dhows the traditional sail boats, created exquisite interior spaces of homes and mosques, as well as magnificent entryways

Lamu's artisans benefitted from skills and designs introduced from China, Arabia, India and Europe. Influenced by these sources, local artisans created hybrid forms utilizing both local sensibility and imported ideas. Out of this mix, a "Swahili" identity was created. This artistic legacy is apparent today in the stately homes of old merchant families and the carved doorways that grace mosques, homes and businesses in the old town. It is also seen in the fine carpentry of wooden boats or dhows plying the channels with their elegant lateen sails.

The Swahili people are not a homogenous group, for Swahili is not a tribe or ethnicity but rather a collection of various peoples who live on the coast, speak Kiswahili as their mother tongue and are united under Islam. Centuries ago, the Swahili coast reached from Mogadishu in the north to Mozambique in the south. Today, the Swahili world is fragmented and marginalised, partly due to modernised methods of trading and the creation of the nation state. By the end of the 19th century, Lamu's affluence and power was in decline and the island descended into economic obscurity. Its religious scholarship and educational centres however continued to be important in the region.

In the 1960s, shortly after independence, Lamu became known as a refuge for European and American bohemians searching for alternative life styles and values. In the 1970s, it rivalled Kathmandu as a preferred destination among backpackers and it continued to be a popular destination for intrepid travellers until the Gulf War in the 1990s, when tourism slowed to a trickle. By the turn of the 21st century, the face of Lamu was changing again. This time more affluent visitors were arriving and purchasing property, renovating homes and investing in the area.

Like most port towns, the Lamu community is tolerant of difference. People are friendly and hospitable to visitors and the community maintains its pride of cultural and religious traditions as well as its historical heritage.

Current Life in Lamu

The pace of life in Lamu is measured by the call to prayers that signal time passing and the progression of the day, bringing a metered harmony and meaning to peoples lives. Days, months and years follow a moon calendar, central for religious festivities, as well as to the lives of sailors and fisher folk who intimately comprehend the connections between the moon and the sea. These measures of time are in contrast to modern living. Visitors feel this; they intuit that Lamu is different and this difference is one of the magnets drawing them to the island. To many visitors, Lamu is the place where time stands still. Of course that is not the case. Yet, the difference between Lamu and the Western notion of time is distinct and compelling.

The people of Lamu, or *Waamu* as they call themselves, dress modestly. Women cover themselves with a *shuga* or burqa as many in the West call it. Male elders wear a white gown (*kanzu*) and hat (*kofia*) to show their respect for their religious traditions. Younger working men wear a sarong and a kofia, a versatile outfit that allows them to move from boat to streets while still maintaining the code of modesty.

Festivals in Lamu are taken seriously. Indeed, they merge the secular and the religious into days of activities and devotions. Maulid and Idd are the most loved of all. The first celebrates the birth of Prophet Mohamed and the second the end of Ramadhan, the month of fasting. These religious festivals follow the moon calendar, which means that the dates shift year by year. The Lamu Cultural Festival is an annual event in November that celebrates life on the islands of the Lamu Archipelago. The Lamu Painter's Festival—held every second year in February—brings artists from Europe and Africa together to paint scenes of Lamu life. All festivals are public and visitors are warmly welcomed to attend, to meander the streets and to watch the celebrations unfold. The festivals are celebrated with dhow and donkey races, poetry and calligraphy competitions and music and dance from different communities on the islands.

Lamu's Future

Lamu is an unique island that engenders cultural and religious pride among the Swahili. Visitors can enjoy local hospitality and the natural gifts of the islands including the wide expanse of beaches, the mangrove forests and the coral reef as well as vistas of culture and history—a tour of Lamu's unique old town, sailing in dhows or simply relaxing in the town square where the heartbeat of Lamu pulses.

But the future of Lamu is not as reliable as its' past. The government is set on a development course that will affect the archipelago and change the way of life here, bringing both positive and negative impacts. Plans are underway for a deep water port and transport corridor, including an oil pipeline from Lamu to South Sudan and Ethiopia. The Lamu community are ambivalent—hopeful for a better economy, yet fearful that their way of life may be consumed and their environment destroyed. The community has long struggled to get needed infrastructure like passable roads on the mainland leading to the island and good hospitals and the port will pave the way for these amenities. But there is a fear that life will change so drastically that fisher folk and mangrove harvesters plying their dhows on the sea will be a thing of the past and the natural resources will no longer sustain the community. Suddenly, modernity is at Lamu's door.

Lamu Smiles, documents life in Lamu today and celebrates its cultural legacy and natural beauty long admired by travellers. The strength, hopes and dreams of the people are brought to light in Roland Klemp's sensitive black and white photographs featured here.

Here is to the past and to the future. May Lamu continue to choose its own course.



Vidaka in Darini House - Lamu Town 8/2008



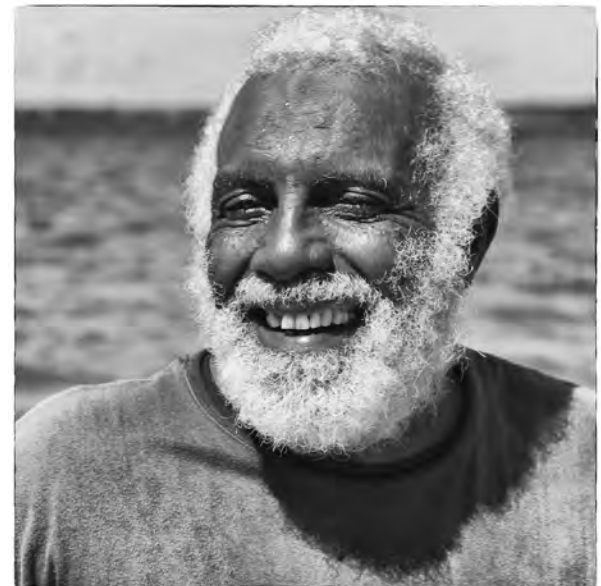
Abdula Bob 9/2008



Omar Mauli 9/2008



Twaib 11/2008



Koto 3/2010



Shop - Lamu Town 8/2008



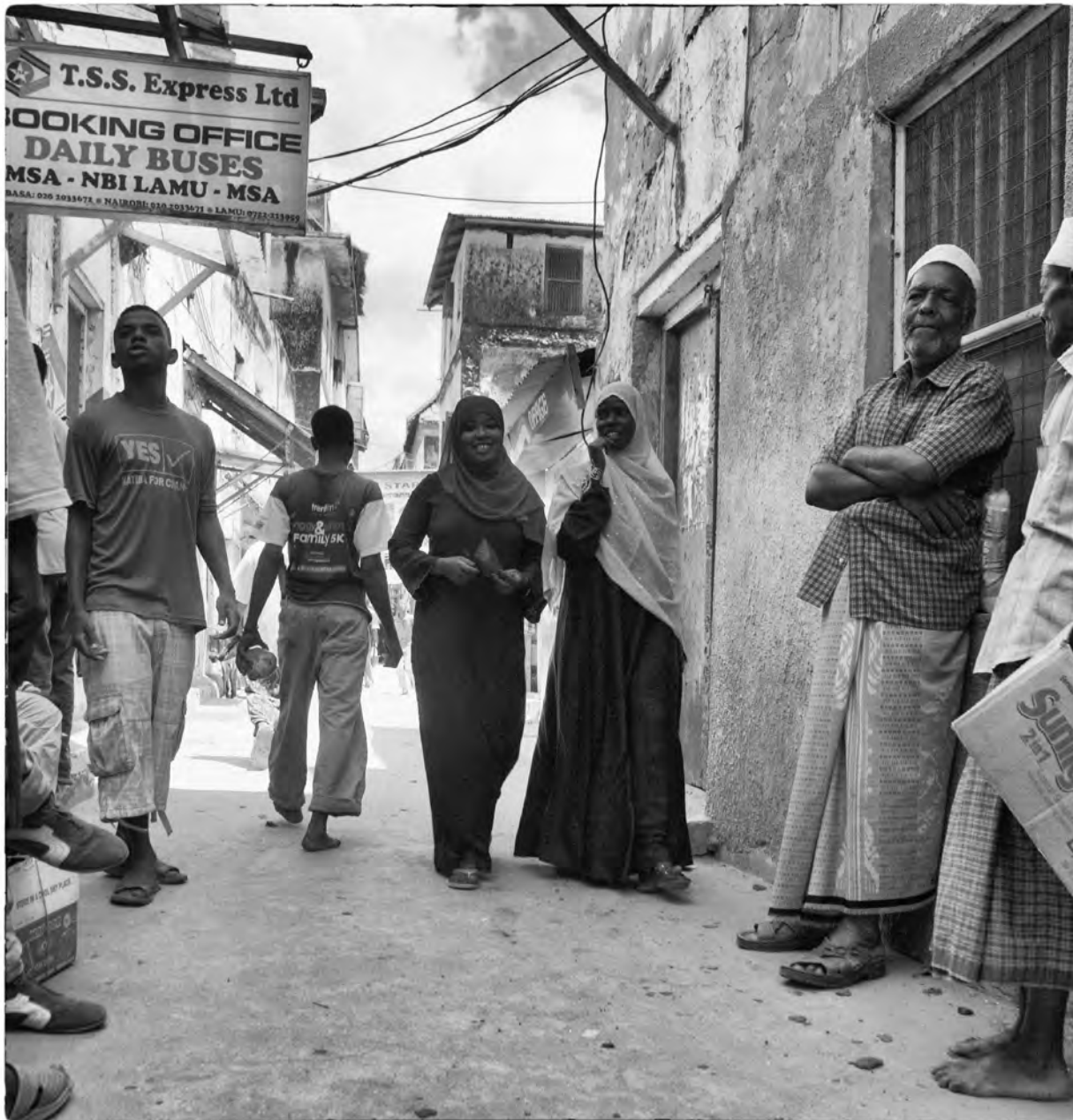
Mafreeza & Jaguar 9/2008



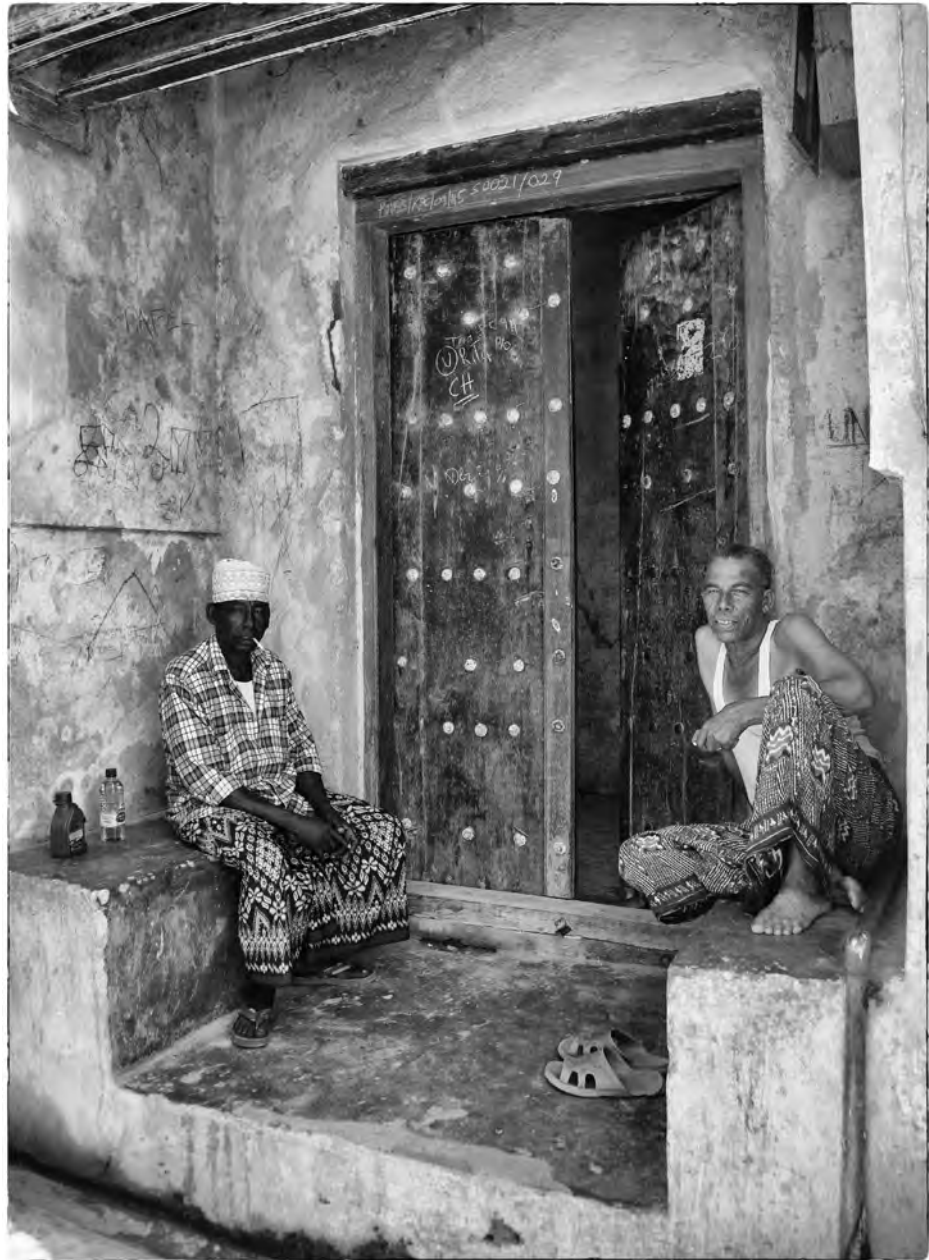
Dhowrace 8/2008



Shop - Lamu Town 9/2008



Main Street - Lamu Town 11/2012



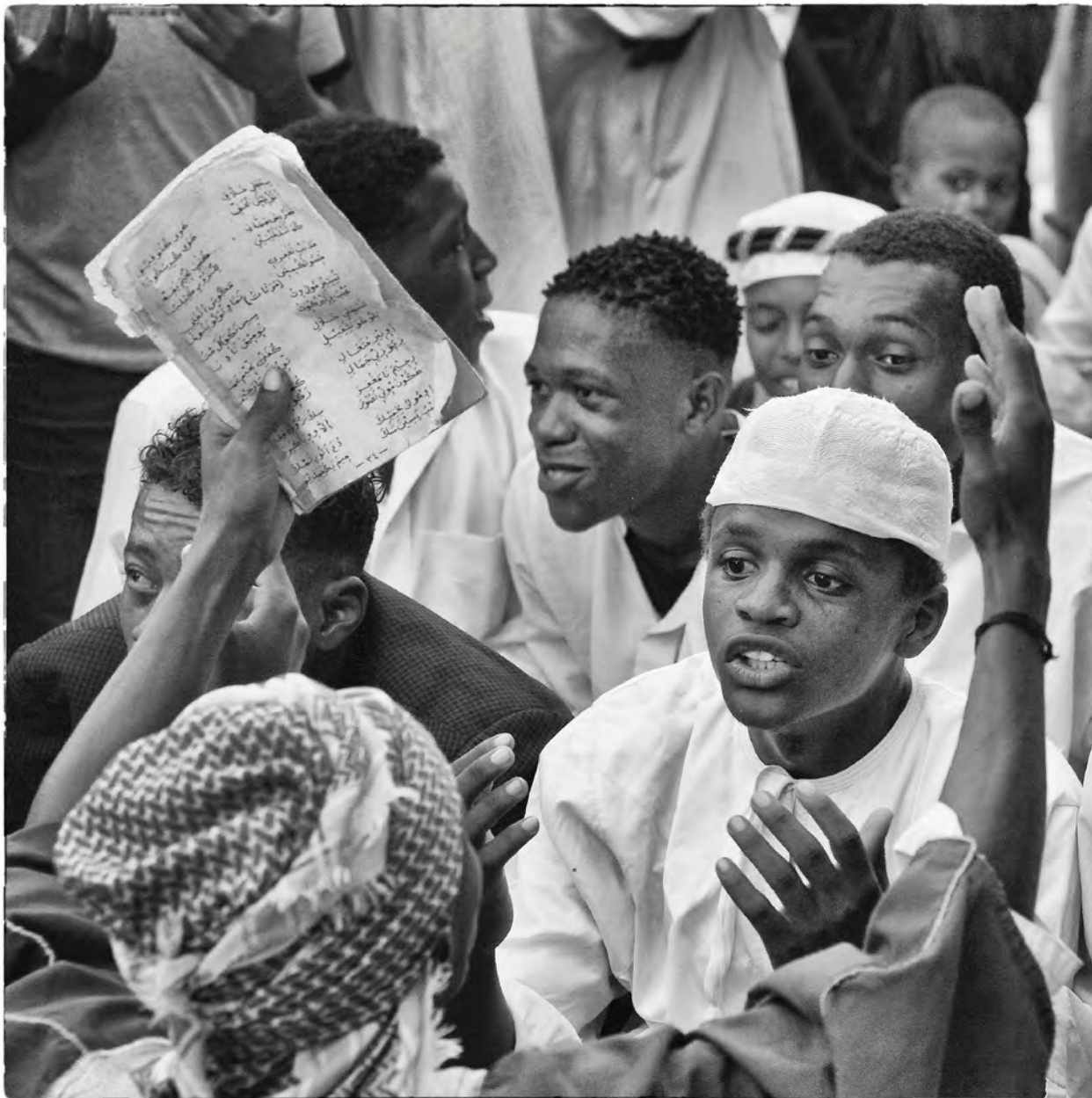
Madaka - Lamu Town 11/2012



Kashmiri 11/1010



Peponi Dhow 11/2010



Maulid 3/2011



Maulid 3/2011



Salama & Tima 3/2010



Shela Village 11/2008



Lamu Town 11/2008



Fatma & Salim 11/2008



Speedo, Abu and Fundis 8/2008



Dhow Race 2/2012



Dhow Race 11/2012



Amana 10/2012



Elisabeth 11/2010



Tima 11/2010



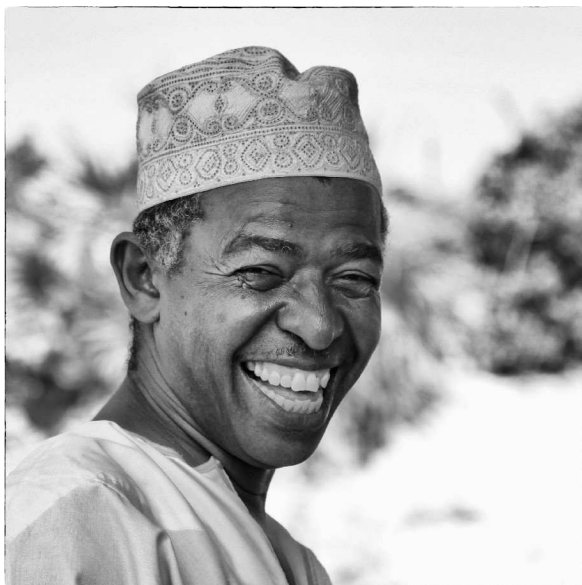
Suhaib 11/2012



Takwa Ruins 9/2008



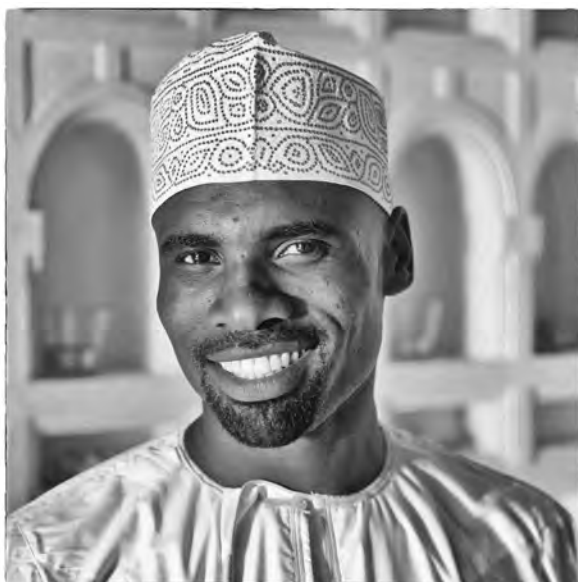
Maweni Village 2/2012



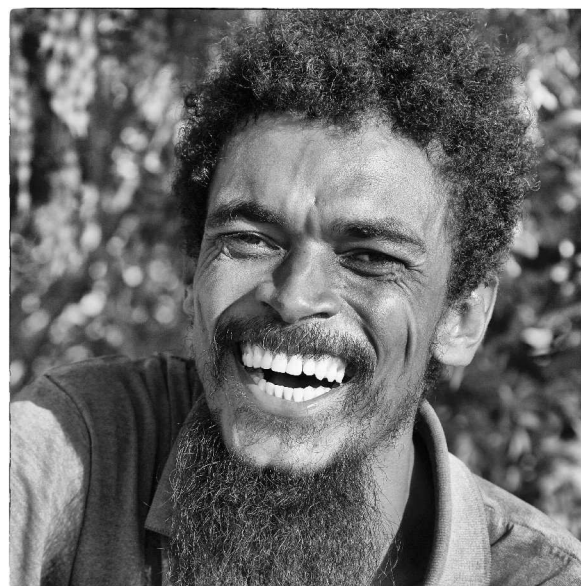
Salim 11/2010



Faraj 8/2008



Ahmed 11/2009



Nawaf 9/2008



Lamu Town 11/2008



Lamu Town 11/2008



Shela Village 8/2008



Paradise Dhow 3/2010



Lamu Town 8/2008



Shela Village 9/2008



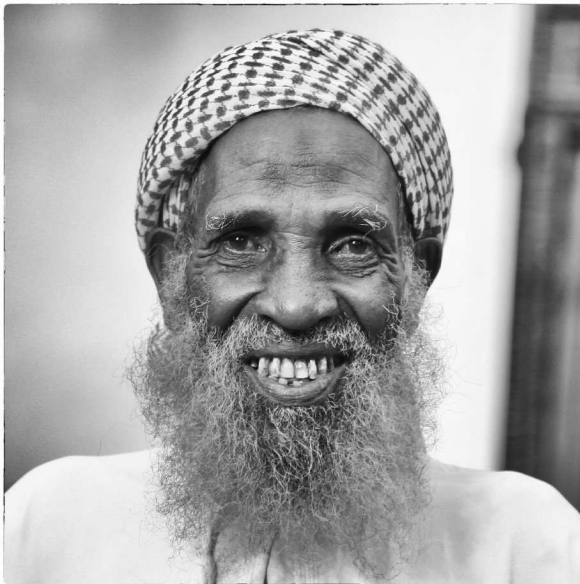
Lamu Town 9/2008



Omar Mafreeza 11/2012



Omar Maziga 2/2012



Ndogo 11/2010



Banana 3/2010



Kiwayu 9/2008



Luru 11/2012



Ruweida 10/2012



Tanwira 11/2010



Fahima 10/2012



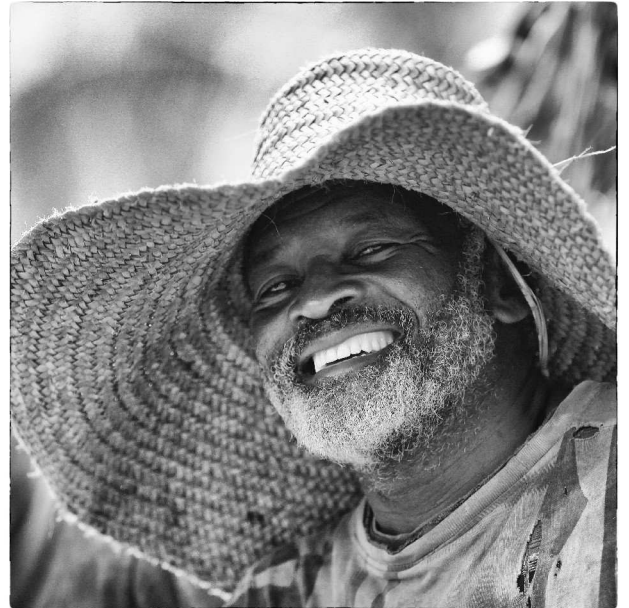
Matondoni Village 9/2008



Samira 8/2008



Ismail 2/2011



Sharef 11/2010



Kurej 9/2008



Mohammed 9/2008



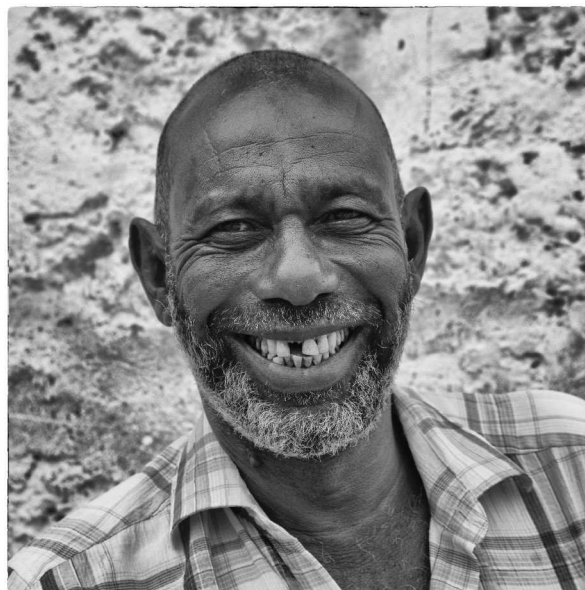
Mirage in front of Peponi Hotel 3/2010



Dhow - Indian Ocean 8/2008



Omar 2/2013



Ali 2/2013



Salim 11/2013



Father of Mafreeza 11/2008



Dhow Race 2/2013