Seeking ʿilm on Lamu: Ustadh Mau's library and services for the benefit of his community

Raia, A.; Vierke, C.

Seeking *ʿilm* on Lamu: Ustadh Mau's Library and Services for the Benefit of His Community

Annachiara Raia

The way in which Ustadh Mau urges people, parents and teachers both to educate children and not to neglect their customs and faith is intertwined with his poetic compositions, and also lies at the core of his educational and religious services as a teacher and imam. For a better understanding of Ustadh Mau's view on Muslim education and learning culture, it is worth delving deeper into a talk he once gave on the benefits of knowledge and language ("Faida ya elimu na lugha"). Before doing so, I shall discuss Ustadh Mau's Islamic upbringing and his thirst for knowledge. This latter quality becomes evident when one explores Ustadh Mau's library, a storehouse of wisdom that nurtures his soul. I shall use his library as my departure point, a "breathing home archive" that enables him to disseminate knowledge and education to his Lamuan community.

1 *Dibaji*, introduction

I had the opportunity to be welcomed at Ustadh Mau's library for the first time in August 2014, and once again in March 2018. During my meetings and interviews with him there, people would routinely drop by to ask for advice or to commission poems. To fulfill their requests, he would turn not only to the books and pamphlets stacked on his shelves, which in some cases he would give his visitors as gifts, but also to his own poetry, in order to pass its lessons on to his community and open their minds.

From these experiences, I gradually realized the value of Ustadh Mau's library as a dynamic archive and its relevance in the making of social and intellectual practices on the island of Lamu. Furthermore, as I will consider at greater length in what follows, the dynamics of island communities are important to understanding Africa's connected histories and intellectual practices.

This investigation into Ustadh Mau's library and his services to Lamu will also help shed light on a yet-neglected hub of Islam on the island. Indeed, whereas much attention has been paid to the Riyadha Mosque, built by Sayyid Swaleh, who migrated to Lamu from the Comoros in the 1880s, there are much older mosques on the island. Ustadh Mau has waged his reformist battle from

within the Pwani Mosque, located in an area called Nyuma ya Gereza ("Behind the Prison," referring to Lamu Fort, the stone fort located in Lamu Old Town), where he currently gives his Friday sermon or *hotuba* (Ar. *khuṭubah*, Anglicized as khutbah). In the past, the madrassa where he first began studying was also located close to the mosque; his teacher's private library—an apartment that he rented and called the *Baytu Thaqafa* (the "House of Culture")—was located in the area called Kijitoni or Farasi. While it is difficult to trace the network and circulation of ideas among sites that are no longer in existence, it is surely time to reconsider the legacy of classical Islam on Lamu as a dynamic tradition, able to provide us with a sense of identity, continuity, and modernity and to tell us not only where Muslims have been, but also where Ustadh Mau wishes his own Lamuan people to be.

2 Ustadh Mau's Thirst for Knowledge

2.1 *Preparing* L'Adulte initié*: Ustadh Mau's Islamic Education and Background*

> La pédagogie coranique ne se limitait pas à l'apprentissage de la lecture [...] mais visait plutôt à la formation totale de l'individu, à la transmission d'un modèle d'homme adapté à son état de société [...] C'est une initiation vers un statut nouveau, celui d'adulte initié.1

In classical Islam, the Islamic education of a student begins with being taught by select individuals representing a specific religious authority. As Loimeier notes, in the case of Islamic education on Zanzibar, students studied in circles that could have been hosted at the madrassa, but also at the mosque or a scholar's home. The existence of libraries at the mosques themselves is also attested, but in general, it is known that any collection of library books—comprising books in any specialized field of art or science—was "the result of purely human sentiment and love of learning and knowledge in the extreme."2 Ustadh Mau's education was carried out under the influence of a close friend of his father, Ustadh Sayyid Hassan Badawy, who became his private

1 Renaud Santerre, *Pédagogie musulmane d'Afrique noire: L'École coranique peule du Cameroun* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973), 346–347; quoted in Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 155.

2 Mustafa Siba'i, *Some Glittering Aspects of the Islamic Civilization* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1984), 213.

teacher. Since the arrival of Islam on the East African coast, Swahili pupils have received their formal education at Qurʾānic schools (in Swahili known as the *chuo*, pl. *vyuo*, as well as madrassa), where they become acquainted with Arabic, learn to recite the Qurʾān, imprint suras in their memory, and study how to compose qasidas, poetic odes. His closeness and companionship (Arabic *ṣuḥba*) with his teacher Badawy has influenced Ustadh Mau's Islamic education well into adulthood. Indeed, at that time, the selection of texts (not yet disciplines) each pupil would study was chosen by the precise scholar the pupil studied with.3 In this sense, Ustadh Mau received what Loimeier describes as "an education judged not on *loci* but on *personae*,"4 namely in the form of Ustadh Badawy.5 As a schoolchild, Ustadh Mau was part of a community that strongly believed that the secular school system was haram; this is why he never followed the secular Kenyan school system and classes, something that he quietly regrets and has not prohibited his own children from doing.6 However, Ustadh Mau himself has fond memories of the time he spent at the Qurʾānic schools; as a student, he remembers how much he enjoyed attending madrassa, always being the first to enter the class, never "wanting to arrive late" (*sikuweza kuchelewa*). He still keeps a so-called *kibati* with which the madrassa students used to be beaten. In 2013, Ustadh Mau sat an exam for a certificate to teach primary education, and passed the national examination—a distinction that resonates with public opinion of him; as Peter Frankl describes:

3 Such an strategy, however, has encountered difficulties at times, as we find recorded in the newspaper *Sauti ya haki*. Along the lines of thinkers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui took to the newspaper to warn his coastal community, "[B]ecause there is a lack of religious expertise in our towns, and a lack of religious schools (madrasa) agreeable to all Muslims, our Islamic community has been entered by a disease of sheikhs who are not known for the degree of their education in religion. So much so that anyone having a shawl, a board and a piece of chalk can call himself 'sheikh' and pose to have religious knowledge." August 1972, 5–6; quoted in Kai Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 112–113.

4 Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23; quoted in Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th-Century Zanzibar* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 150.

5 Focusing on Cairo in the Middle Ages, Jonathan Porter Berkey analyzes how the transmission of religious knowledge was indeed a highly personal process, one dependent on the relationships between individual scholars and students (Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*).

6 Azra, for instance—Ustadh Mau's so-called *kipande cha ini* ("piece of liver")—has attended formal schools, and as a father, Ustadh Mau has never been afraid to put her in a secular context in which Muslims were the exception. Azra is currently a doctor and a caring mother to her child Afnan.

> In a booklet issued for the investiture at State House, Nairobi, on Jamhuri Day, Sunday 12th December 2004 one reads on page vii: "Mr. Abdulkadir [...] is a renowned Kiswahili poet [...] despite lack of formal education. He is a social philanthropist who has single-handedly mobilized resources for communal projects within Lamu District, including a school for the mentally handicapped. He is currently actively involved in spearheading advocacy and publicity on hiv/aids in Lamu District. He is awarded the Head of State's Commendation for his immense contribution towards national development."7

At this juncture, Frankl has the readers reflect on a specific passage acknowledging Ustadh Mau's merits. His reflections are as follows:

> A renowned Kiswahili poet [...] despite lack of formal education" is an interesting observation. The perception seems to be that those who have acquired "formal education" have acquired a form of that education which was first introduced to East Africa by European-Christians in the 19th century. If so, it would follow, for example, that the author of the 18th century poem *Inkishafi* composed his masterpiece "despite lack of formal education.8

Adding to Frankl's example of a well-known poet who has produced masterpieces "despite lack of formal education," we can also mention the name Abdilatif Abdalla, a master poet from Mombasa, famously known for his poetic anthology *Sauti ya dhiki* ("The Voice of Agony"), composed on toilet paper during his time in jail.9 During a brief talk that I had with Bwana Abdilatif—whose modesty makes him reject Swahili epithets such as *profesa* and *sheikh*—he told me how little he liked going to "formal school," precisely the same kind from which Ustadh Mau was prohibited. Everything Abdilatif Abdalla knows comes from his intimate relationship with books and his passion for poetry.10 Ustadh Mau learned English and many other subjects through self-study; as

7 Ahmad Abdulkadir Mahmoud and Peter J.L. Frankl, "*Kiswahili*: A Poem by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir, to Which is Appended a List of the Poet's Compositions in Verse," *Swahili Forum* 20 (2013): 16.

8 Ibid.

9 Cf. Abdilatif Abdalla, *Sauti ya dhiki* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973).

10 As in the case of Ustadh Mau, the height of Abdilatif Abdalla's bookshelves in Hamburg are taller than he is, and are definitely another "island" that requires future investigation.

the excursus on his book collection will show further, he knows about history, literature, and religion, but is also interested in psychology and motivational literature of all sorts and from all the corners of the globe. Besides this, he knows the fragilities of his people; he is the best keeper of their secrets, and particularly of women's desperation and hope.

Peter Frankl's remark, stressing the journalist's account of Ustadh Mau's achievements "despite lack of formal education," is reminiscent of al-Zarnuji's concern with "whole education" versus "mere academic attainment" by highlighting and distinguishing between what is education and what is rather knowledge. Al-Zarnuji (d. 1223), who flourished in Turkistan, was among the first to write on the theory and practice of professional education. His work *Instructions for the Student* was used as a standard textbook for over six centuries, and was translated into Latin in 1838. It is as if al-Zarnuji seems to say, you can have a PhD and yet still be uneducated—a common sentiment in contemporary Muslim societies. What one learns from al-Zarnuji's work *Instructions for the Student* is indeed that education is acquired through effort, aspiration, pursuit, and persistence, whereas knowledge is about moral and ethical acumen.11

Returning to the didactic yet intimate way Ustadh Mau received his own Islamic education, it is well known that the major aim of memorizing the Qurʾān—as taught at madrassa with the use of the *loho* (Swahili *ubao* "tablet, chalkboard")—is "not to inculcate rigid discipline, but to provide skills and social knowledge that could be translated in meaningful ways into social competence, when quoting the Qurʾān in public debates, for instance, in order to strengthen, legitimize and sanctify a particular."12 In this regard, we can see from Ustadh Mau's upbringing that he went well beyond the objectives of classical Islamic education; as he also preaches in his poem *Mwalimu*, he encourages the use of more than just the *ubao* in teaching one's children. He firmly believes in people as the source of transferring knowledge and imparting skills, as being models of the change they seek.

Ustadh Mau serves as such a model, reinforcing what classical scholars, philosophers, and thinkers have claimed as "what a good education ought to be": "a good education, they thought, is not simply about transmission of know-

11 See Burhān al-Dīn al- Zarnuji, *Instructions for the Student: The Method of Learning* (US: Starlatch Press, 2003), vii–x. For a complete list of further classical works, see the concise article "The List: Ten Key Texts on Islamic Education," *Critical Muslim* 15.1, July–September 2015, https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-list-ten-key-texts-on-islamic-education/.

12 Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 155.

ledge but also includes emotional, social and physical well-being of the student. It is about creating a well-rounded moderate person with passion for thought and learning."13

Emotional, social, and physical well-being are all well balanced in the figure of Ustadh Mau, as a result of the successful way he has attained the knowledge he seeks and become the *adulte initié* so in vogue and so prominent in each society. In other words, acquiring a Qur'ānic education in classical Islam was meant to build what Santerre defines as "une formation totale tant religieuse, morale et sociale, technique et professionalle, qu'intellectuelle et littéraire [...] La pédagogie coranique ne se limitait pas à l'apprentissage de la lecture [...] mais visait plutôt à la formation totale de l'individu, à la transmission d'un modèle d'homme adapté à son état de société [...] C'est une initiation vers un statut nouveau, celui d'adulte initié."14 Ustadh Mau's *modèl d'homme* corresponds perfectly to the *société* represented by Lamu island, where he was born and has lived ever since, as he says in the final stanza of *Amu*: *Makazi ni hapa Amu / Na ndiko nilipozawa*, "My home is here in Lamu / This is also where I was born" (stz. 57).

This also explains my personal interest in investigating his home library, the cradle of his quest for *'ilm* and the core of his daily social-philanthropic activities and responsibilities. Ustadh Mau's seasoned experience in the service of his people was already anticipated, in his own words, in the opening line of his *utendi* poem *Wasiya wa mabanati*, in which he utters: "Listen, my child, to the advice I shall give you. I understand the ways of the world; I have spent many years on this earth, and what I tell you now, you should bear in mind." In fact, in this early work, Ustadh Mau fictionalizes his experience by depicting himself as a mature man in his sixties—though he was not yet even married when he wrote the poem. To some extent, we can say that he became a mature thinker before his time, eager to have a say in how young minds should be nurtured, thanks to the incredible speed of his learning, his thirst for knowledge, and his great compassion for his fellow man, which he acquired from a very early stage of his youth.

13 "Ten Key Texts."

14 Renaud Santerre, *Pédagogie musulmane d'Afrique noire: L'École coranique peule du Cameroun* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973), 346–347; quoted in Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 155.

2.2 *Ustadh Mau and His Breathing Library*[15]

This section will focus on the private "home" library of Ustadh Mau.[16] As Derrida would say, "Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive";[17] I shall rather proceed to highlight how Ustadh Mau's joy lies in his books, and how this joy permeates his library, turning it into a vital place. More precisely, the poet says, "Books are my joy. This is the reason why I have set this area [i.e., the library] apart for myself, so that I can be alone with my books."[18] Whether or not the Greek definition of *arkheion* as "a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded"[19] can be applied to Ustadh Mau's private library, this is more than a mere "place for books" (*mahala pa vitabu*) to be stored, as this place exists through and because of the learned literary individual who spends day upon day there—hence the term "breathing" as most suitable for describing the living magic of his library. Ustadh Mau's library, located on a first floor in the Langoni area, is indeed truly a living and lively space—one to which he returns after swimming early in the morning, where he rests, keeps and stores his material, reads, receives people in search of help, and teaches those who need some guidance. In other words—namely, his own—the two-room library, which also has a couch and toilet, is his refuge, a *kituo* ("station") where he spends many of his daily hours, and where people are sure to find him, unless he is out at the mosque or on related duties. All the texts stored there—books in Arabic, English, and Swahili, spanning varied subjects and genres—are interconnected with each other in that they all contribute to expressing the thirst for knowledge of a singular scholar and his commitment to his people.

It is interesting to recall that an important feature of an archive is the so-called "principle of provenance," according to which "all the records that belong to it are strongly interconnected. In the past, archivists liked to use organic

15 A concept Yun Lee Too also uses to describe how "the library needs not be a physical collection of texts, and it explores the phenomenon of the learned literary individual who becomes a virtual library." See Yun Lee Too, *The Idea of the Library in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–28.

16 For further criticism on the Riyadha manuscript collection, see Anne Bang, "Localising Islamic Knowledge: Acquisition and Copying of the Riyadha Mosque Manuscript Collection in Lamu, Kenya," in *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, ed. Maja Kominko (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 136–142.

17 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 11.

18 My translation, from Ustadh Mau's interview for the Kiswahili Bila Mipaka corpus, ELLAf, minutes 17:7–12: *Raha yangu iko kwenye zitabu. Ndio maana nimetengwa sehemu hii [makataba] niwe yangu, mimi peke yangu na vitabu vyangu*.

19 Derrida and Prenowitz, "Archive", 9.

metaphors to address this key point: an archive was not artificial, but 'natural.' They suggested that the 'organic unity' of the archive expressed the life of the organization or the organism which created it, in our case Ustadh Mau. Other metaphors used in the same context are 'body' and 'organic growth,' for instance"20—as if, indeed, this place can be regarded as the core of his service to the community.

In a speech on connected histories and their relevance to Africa, Shamil Jeppie stresses the importance of islands in the reconfiguration of continental history. In the following, I shall outline the significance of Ustadh Mau's personal efforts to build his own library on the island; similarly to Ahmad Bulʿarāf, the erudite scholar from Sus, Morocco who migrated to and settled down in Timbuktu, Mali,21 Ustadh Mau can be regarded as a true bibliophile in search of and hungry for knowledge. I shall consider both scholars in their role as bibliophiles: just as "Ahmad Bulʿarāf accumulated works from great distances away from Timbuktu[,] bought works and commissioned copies,"22 Ustadh Mau's own library houses books that were ordered and transported from Cairo and Mumbai.

When he was just twelve years old, Ustadh Mau began ordering books on his own from a bookshop in Cairo run by Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī and his brothers. This Cairene bookshop is a well-known printing house located near Al-Azhar University.23 It has played an important role not only in Ustadh Mau's quest for knowledge, but also in the early printing history of other renowned Shafiʿi thinkers from East Africa, such as Aḥmad b. Sumayṭ of Zanzibar.24 Aḥmad b. Sumayṭ's early works were printed there—a link that contributes to mapping both the earlier as well as the current Islamic book network across East Africa, and more broadly across the continent. Cairo was, after all, a favored destination for pilgrims and students on the hajj, which explains why it became an important cosmopolitan center for West Africa and the Sudanic routes as well as East Africa.25

20 Dietmar Shenk, "Getrennte Welten? Über Literaturarchive und Archivwissenschaft," in *Archive für Literatur Der Nachlass und seine Ordnungen*, ed. Petra-Maria Dallinger, Georg Hofer, and Bernhard Judex, Literatur und Archiv 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 18.

21 Shamil Jeppie, "ATimbuktu Bibliophile between the Mediterranean and the Sahel: Ahmad Bulʿarāf and the Circulation of Books in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 65–77.

22 Jeppie, "A Timbuktu Bibliophile," 69.

23 One of the brothers, Isa, was still in business up until a few years ago, but it seems that even this business may have closed (Scott Reese, personal communication).

24 Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea. Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925* (London: Routledge, 2003), 93.

25 With regards to the trans-Saharan book trade, as Krätli and Lydon note, "books were

As Anne Bang writes, the great contribution of the Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī family was printing and distributing books on Islamic learning throughout the world.26 As Reese describes, "it was a firm with a growing reputation for publishing a wide variety of Sufi-related texts and other works that were often implicitly, if not explicitly, opposed to the growing trends of literal-minded scripturalist reform."27 They were active in disseminating Islamic religious works not only in Arabic and several African languages, but also in India and Southeast Asia. Indeed, they appeared to have been "the publisher of choice for Somalis as well as pro-Sufi, anti-scripturalist elements from East Africa and Aden to Southeast Asia."28

Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī—also known as Halabi & Sons—has played an important role in the "modernization" of African Islamic literary production in this period. The regular correspondence that Ustadh Mau has had with Cairo up to recent times shows how the trajectory of such modernization pointed not only toward Zanzibar, but also toward Lamu. In the following, I shall delve into some of the eye-opening books that have made an impact on Ustadh Mau's thought and compositions. Surprisingly, it is not only the printing house that established the connection between Lamu and Cairo, but also the works of scholars precisely from Cairo who have become transregionally influential in shaping Ustadh Mau's self-learning and understanding of Islam.

---

ordered by the Emperors, or else were brought back from the *ḥajj* by returning pilgrims. Meanwhile, West African students were sent to places like Fez and Cairo to study"; see Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon, *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21. Reese also points out the two major factors that increased Muslim mobility from the 1850s onwards: advances in steamship technology and the opening of the Suez Canal after 1869. "The number of Muslims traveling on the Hajj during the second half of the century, for instance, increased exponentially with more believers taking part in the pilgrimage to Mecca than at any other time in the history of the faith"; see Scott Reese, "Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi and the Pious Believer's Dilemma: Local Moral Guidance in an Age of Global Islamic Reform," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2015): 489.

26 Anne Bang, "Authority and Piety, Writing and Print: A Preliminary Study of the Circulation of Islamic Texts in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Zanzibar," in "Print Cultures, Nationalisms and Publics of the Indian Ocean," special issue, *Journal of the International African Institute* 81, no. 1 (2011): 103.

27 Reese, "Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi," 497.

28 Reese, "Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi," 497–498; see also Michael Laffan, "A Sufi Century: The Modern Spread of Sufi Orders in Southeast Asia," in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 25–39.

2.2.1 Pockets of Knowledge: Ustadh Mau's Literature of Ideas

A tour of Ustadh Mau's books also tells us about the network and details of Islamic intellectual production on Lamu—in other words, how ideas circulated in the East African region, and through which texts. This research is situated against the backdrop of the discipline of the history of books, which flourished in the eighties and is known as the *histoire du livre* in France, *Geschichte des Buchwesens* in Germany, and "book history" or even "book arts" in English-speaking countries. It is indeed useful to know that this can teach us "how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the last five hundred years."29 Secondly, this investigation shows the formation of a precise literary canon, the so-called "core curriculum"—which, little by little, Ustadh Mau has acquired over time. I am particularly interested in seeing how the library reflects the existence of his private canon of learning.

In total, his books now number around one thousand. Among the Arabic books, the works that have particularly influenced and expanded his knowledge have been not only those of older writers, but also those of contemporary ones writing about Islam, Sufism, Muslim brotherhoods, literature, philosophy, and theology. To begin with, it is possible to recognize a strong Cairene influence on Ustadh Mau's library, which should not come as a surprise if we take into account that, from the twentieth century, "Cairo was regarded as a capital of Arabic printing and book production"30 while also becoming an increasingly important center for the training of East African scholars. This Cairene influence can also be regarded as a consequence of the vibrant intellectual era in which Egyptian writers of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century found themselves; indeed, at the turn of the century, many political and intellectual movements arose. These movements also mirrored the rapid changes that Egypt was undergoing in its relationship with the West as well as with the other Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire. As we also find in other regions, such as Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti, Egyptian publishing houses—in particular, those that spawned from the activity of the Bābī al-Ḥalabī family—were instrumental both in printing the Arabic books of Muslim scholars and in diffusing Arabic Islamic literature in the Swahili coastal region. To cite but a few names, Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873), also known as "the father of Egyptian nationalism and of modern Islamic educational thought," actively contributed to the cultural renaissance (*naḥda*) of Egypt.31

29 Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65.

30 Reese, "Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi," 497.

31 For a comprehensive account of the life and works of this scholar and his stay in France,

2.2.2 Ustadh Mau's Cairene Network

One of the first scholars who, in the form of his printed works, traveled from Cairo to Lamu is ʿAbbās Mahmūd al-ʿAqqād (1889–1964), whose modus vivendi and writings have had a strong influence on Ustadh Mau's own learning experience. Ustadh Mau admired this Cairene thinker so much that, when he was just sixteen years old, he took "al-ʿAqqād" as his nickname (before becoming "Mau"). This moniker became known among his network of scholars, who would eventually begin addressing him by precisely this name. For instance, in 1389 eg, when the Egyptian Islamic theologian Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (1926–) sent Ustadh Mau the book *Al-Nās wa-al-ḥaqq*, the envelope of the book was addressed to "Ustadh Mahmud Ahmed al-ʿAqqād." His nickname in homage to ʿAbbās Mahmūd al-ʿAqqād and his correspondence with Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī already reflect the influence of his Cairene network, comprised of Cairene role models, books, and writers.32

It is interesting to note that some details of al-ʿAqqād's life also apply to Ustadh Mau, as both writers can be regarded as the products of similar circumstances; it is attested, for instance, that al-ʿAqqād received little formal education, completing only elementary school, and that what he learned later on was thanks to the books that he bought and read on his own. As mentioned above, Ustadh Mau also enriched his knowledge by ordering and reading books on his own. Moreover, just as al-ʿAqqād's "ideas and activities aptly reflected the mainstream current within the intellectual community,"33 Ustadh Mau's social and literary services—as a poet, teacher, and imam—also mirror the society he lives in and its cultural challenges. This is reminiscent of what Ngũgĩ wa

---

see Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al- Ṭahṭawi, *An Imam in Paris. Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi Books, 2011).

32 Another work of al-Qaradawi, which I was shown and given by Ustadh Mau, is the English-language *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (London: Al-Birr Foundation, 2003), first published in 1423 eg. As for the scholar ʿAbbās Mahmoud al-ʿAqqād (1889–1964), he was born in the town of Aswan. His father was a government clerk who died quickly after ʿAbbās's birth. His Kurdish origins mother, remained widow and devoted her life to the upbringing of her children. al-ʿAqqād received only primary education and through his own initiative he became well acquainted with English literature, also thanks to the newspapers available in Aswan through the years because of the presence of British army officers and engineers in the flourishing center of tourism of his home city. (For further criticism see Awad, Louis *The Literature of Ideas in Egypt*. Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1986):166–175.

33 Israel Gershoni, "Liberal Democratic Legacies in Modern Egypt: The Role of the Intellectuals, 1900–1950," *The Institute Letter Summer 2012*, https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2012/gershoni-democratic-legacies-egypt.

Thiong'o says with regard to the "social character" of literature, which "cannot elect to stand above or to transcend economics, politics, class, race or what Achebe calls 'the burning issues of the day' because those very burning issues with which it deals take place within an economic, political class and race context."34 Two major works by al-ʿAqqād are found in Ustadh Mau's library: *Muṭālaʿāt fī al-Kutub wa-al-ḥayāh* ("The Readings on the Books and the Lives") and *Al-ʾAthar al-ʿArab fī al-ḥadārah al-ʾUrubiyyah* ("The Arab's Impact on European Civilization"). This latter book was first published by Dar el-Maarif in 1960, followed by many reprint editions, which serves to indicate the wide popularity of this title. The last of these editions was published by the Hindawi Foundation in 2013; Ustadh Mau has the 1966 edition published by the Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabiyy in Beirut at his disposal.

Among the other eye-opening books that have influenced Ustadh Mau's learning, we must also mention the works of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), regarded as "the St. Thomas of Islam,"35 whom Ustadh Mau calls simply "Imam Ghazali." Among the works of this author, Ustadh Mau has commented particularly on *Iḥiyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn* ("The Revival of Religious Knowledge"), which is well known as a monument of theological knowledge from the Islamic Middle Ages. A concise description of the work describes it as follows:

> Peppered with hadith (not all particularly authentic it has to be said), aphorisms, and pearls of wisdoms from pious sages, The Book of Knowledge [the first book of the work] offers a discussion on the value of knowledge, the praiseworthy and objectionable branches of knowledge, the qualities needed in teachers and students and ends with a blistering praise of the "noble nature" of the intellect.36

34 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1981), 6. This is further reminiscent of what is said of the role of the intellectual in West Africa: in a section titled "Islam et modernité, le rôle de l'intellectuel," Penda M'bow reminds her readers that "l'intellectuel musulman n'est pas né au xxe siècle. L'example le plus intéressant reste celui d'Ahmad Baba de Tombouctou qui a beaucoup réfléchi sur les problèmes de son temps comme la question de l'esclavage." Penda M'bow, *Être intellectual, être Musulman en Afrique*, Série Conférences 24 (Rabat: Institut des Études Africaines, 2005), 23.

35 "Il san Tommaso dell'Islam"; see Massimo Campanini, *Il pensiero islamico contemporaneo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005) and Campanini, ed., *Al-Ghazali, Le perle del Corano* (Milan: Rizzoli-bur, 2005).

36 "Ten Key Texts."

What particularly attracted Ustadh Mau's interest to this book was, firstly, the different ways (*ndiya*) the author has addressed and commented on religious questions (*maswali ya kidini*), and secondly, his style (*mtindo*) of explaining things in a light and simple way (*ndiya pesi*), differently from other scholars of his era.

Among the Egyptian works that have influenced Ustadh Mau's thinking and knowledge, we must also mention *Laisa min al-Islam* ("Not From Islam"), by Muhammad al-Ghazali (1917–1996). At a time when Sufism was very much prevalent on the island of Lamu, this book opened Ustadh Mau's eyes (*kufungua macho*) and induced changes in his thinking (*mabadiliko kwenye fikra*) about the movement: "This was an eye opener book that considerably helped me and caused a change in my thoughts while Sufism was on Lamu." (*Kitabu ambacho kilinisaidia sana kufungua macho na kilicholeta mabadiliko kwenye fikra zangu wakati huko Lamu Sufism ilikuwapo*.)37

Indeed, whereas until 1968, Ustadh Mau was a follower of the Alawiyya tariqa, the discovery of al-Ghazali's book changed his thoughts on Islamic doctrine. This change of heart caused strain in his relationship with his teacher, reformist scholar Sheikh Harith Swaleh, to whom Ustadh Mau was particularly indebted; once he abandoned his teacher's order, he became a Salafi supporter (literally, a follower of the *salaf al-salih*, or the "pious ancestors"). Like other thinkers from Mombasa, such as Sheikh Alamin bin Ali na Sheikh Abdalla Swaleh al-Farsiy, as well as Sheikh Muhamad Rashid Ridhaa of Egypt,38 Ustadh Mau too now defines himself as a Salafist: *Mimi ni mtu wa salafi* ("I am a Salafist man").39 When he distanced himself from the Alawiyya tariqa, however, some of his madrassa teachers were so disappointed that they "started saying he had become a Wahabi."40 However, in matters of *fiqh*, he follows the *fiqh* of Shafi'i, although his grandfather was a Hanafi, a common trend amid Swahili with fathers or grandfathers of Indian origins.41

37 Ustadh Mau, personal communication, March 2018.

38 As Reese notes, "by the early twentieth century, religious texts printed in Cairo and Bombay were readily available in the coastal towns of East Africa, as were reformist newspapers such as Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*" ("Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi," 490).

39 Ustadh Mau, personal communication, May 2018.

40 Rayya Timammy, "Shaykh Mahmoud Abdulkadir 'Mau': A Reformist Preacher in Lamu," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12, no. 2 (2015): 86.

41 A similar example is Sheikh Yassen, owner of the book shop Adam Traders—also known as Maktaba ʿAlawiyya—in Mombasa. Whereas Sheikh Yassen and his brother are Shafiʿi and were born in Mombasa, the father Haj Ali Muhammad who started their press in the 1964 was Hanafi, born in 1920 and originary from India.

Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926) is another one of the prominent Muslim thinkers who have had an impact on Ustadh Mau's education. The poet is particularly indebted to the work *Al-Nās wa-al-ḥaqq*, another eye-opener of a book, as he says,42 that helped him to begin understanding and accepting difficult and controversial aspects of the law (*jambo la haki laweza kupingwa na wengi*).43 As Ustadh Mau explains it, Qaradawi's way of writing was light and easy to understand for him. He highlights that the author intentionally wrote it with a broad readership in mind.

Unlike Qaradawi's writings, Ustadh Mau was not initially attracted to Sayyid Qutb's *Maʿalim fi al-Tariq* ("Milestones") when he read it for the first time, and indeed was not able to consider its interpretation. According to him, the author seemed to be addressing expert readers, whereas he was not yet mature enough in terms of age and thinking at the time (*kwa umri na kwa fikra*). Ultimately, by reading it again, he came to fully understand the image of Islam that the work conveyed and wished to impart it to every Muslim (*taswira ambayo yatakikana kila muisilamu awe nayo juu ya isilamu*).44

Beyond the Cairene network that has contributed to the forging of book history on Lamu, from the very beginning of his career as a poet, Ustadh Mau has also been inspired by Shaykh ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭawi. Born in Damascus, ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭawi (1909–1999) was an influential Mecca-based, Salafi-oriented reformist scholar, one of the most famous, prominent, and best writers and preachers of Islam in the modern era (Munir 2014, 251). In his memoirs, he gives a vivid description of his school days at the then-prestigious school of Maktab Anbar in Damascus. This provides an insight into the system of education that was available in the early twentieth century in Damascus. Ustadh Mau was inspired by ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭawi's *Ya-bintī* ("Oh My Daughter"), a pamphlet in prose form composed in 1954. His reading of this pamphlet inspired him to compose his first poem, *Wasiya wa mabanati*.

2.3 Faida ya elimu*: Debating Muslim Education and Learning Culture in Kenya*

What is the value of books in Islamic culture? In his speech "Faida ya elimu na lugha" ("The Benefits of Knowledge and Language")—which this paragraph will mainly reflect upon—Ustadh Mau tells an anecdote: during the Abbasid caliphate, under the aegis of the caliph Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the caliph

42 *Kilinifunguwa mato mapema* (personal communication, May 2018)
43 Ibid.
44 Ustadh Mau, personal communication, April 2018.

used to remunerate the person in charge of translating Greek texts into Arabic with a quantity of gold equaling the weight of the book, thus showing the extent to which people valued science. Yet if one is looking for a bookshop on Lamu nowadays, will the search be successful? I came across only two bookshops on Lamu: the Mani bookshop, close to Lamu Fort, and the Faiz bookshop, in the Langoni area. Yet the main books sold are the compulsory readings that the government has mandated for primary- and secondary-school syllabi in Kenya, along with books on information technology and English for passing exams and acquiring skill certifications. The books available represent only the so-called educational publishing, but say nothing about Islamic education, let alone the reading culture of a region.45 This is indeed a paradox, given that Muslim education is famously religious in nature.

To begin with, the Qur'ān is widely regarded as the first, holiest example of wise writing, which Muslims were instructed to learn by heart. The oral memorization and transmission of texts was one of the first and foremost means of acquiring knowledge, which was regarded as knowledge only when it was truly "incorporated" as a body of knowledge in the memory, without the physical need to resort to any texts as a support material.46 Still, as Bloom notes with regard to the Abbasid caliphate in the middle of the eighth century, "book and book knowledge became the aim of Islamic society."47

Ustadh Mau also proudly highlights that in Islam, learning represents the key to knowledge (*kusoma ndio ni ufunguo wa hikma*), and that the first order given to the Prophet Muhammad and his followers was اقرأ, "Read." To start out by learning "the signs of the Wise Book" (*āyāh* 10:1) means for Muslims to start reading the Holy Qur'ān in Arabic even before knowing the letters of the *ʿabjād*.48 As Ustadh Mau points out in his own wise words:

45 This is in line with an observation on educational publishing in Africa, which, "though lucrative and safe," "says nothing about a region's culture. Besides it, fiction is hardly part of educational publishing and this does not help in a better understanding of a regional literature." Stanley Gazemba, "African Publishing Minefields and the Woes of the African Writer," *The Elephant*, December 13, 2019, https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2019/12/13/african-publishing-minefields-and-the-woes-of-the-african-writer/.

46 See Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 155.

47 Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 111.

48 For other *ʾāyāt* referring to the "Wise Book," see also 31:1–2, "Those are the signs of the Wise Book for a guidance and a mercy to the good-doers who perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and have sure faith in the Hereafter. Those are upon guidance from their Lord; those are the prosperers," and 36:1, "By the Wise Koran, thou art truly among the Envoys on a straight path."

> *Na dini yetu yote msingi yake ni msingi ya ilmu, msingi wa kusoma; kwa hivo swali la ilmu katika uislamu ni zitu zile haziwezi kuziachana: Usilamu na ilmu ziko sambamba*.
>
> The foundations of all our religions are educational ones, the fundaments of learning; therefore, the question of knowledge in Islam represents two facets that cannot be separated from each other: Islam and knowledge run parallel. (My translation)

That said, Ustadh Mau problematizes and laments the presence or absence of knowledge and education in contemporary Islamic society, and urges individuals to study and to reacquire what one should not forget as his or her own right (*haki*). In the following, I will reflect on specific selections from his speeches and poems; this analysis will help in further understanding his passion for books and his engagement with knowledge production in his community.

2.4 *Contesting Knowledge*

> *Hikma, maarifa, ujuzi ni kitu cha muislamu kilichompotea*.
>
> Wisdom, expertise, knowledge—this is something that Islam has lost.
> ustadh mau (my translation)

It seems that he lives in a sort of "frustrating postcolonial present" exactly like the one perceived among coastal Kenyans in Mombasa and investigated by Kai Kresse.[49] By saying this, Ustadh Mau wishes to reconfigure the value of knowledge in his own Lamuan community.[50] In his speeches, he expresses a nostalgic longing for a past golden age of Islam, when knowing Arabic was a source of pride; a time in which Islam, passing through Greek culture and texts, returned home in a new form, both fortified and different from Western culture and customs.[51] As he says in his nostalgic excursus on travelling Islam and

49 Kai Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 3.

50 The fear that their own customs will fade away is also expressed in a short *shairi* poem titled *Mila yetu hufujika* ("Our Traditions Are Being Destroyed"); see Sarah Hillewaert, *Morality at the Margins: Youth, Language, and Islam in Coastal Kenya* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2020.

51 On the impact of Greek philosophy on early Islamic thinkers, see the chapter on Greek

the edification of its own sciences, Ustadh Mau implicitly refers to the Christian religious propaganda used in proselytism, which has not characterized the spread of Islam. He also situates his narrative by making reference to Qurʾānic *āyāt* 12:65 (from the Sūrat Yūsuf) and 35:28 (from the Sūrat Fāṭir).52

Yet his complaint comes out loud and clear with regard to education, which is a facet of Islam that has deteriorated rather than improved; for this, he blames his own people, himself included:

> *Makosa yetu ni kwamba kuna kipindi hatukujiendeleza, walichotuatia wazazi wetu hatukukipeleka mbele; tukashughulika na mambo ya ugomvi wa kisiasa na kutaka kutawala na elimu ikazorota*.
>
> Our mistake is that there was a time/phase in which we did not improve; what we were given by our parents, we did not pass forth. Instead, we would deal with political disputes and governance, while education deteriorated.

In this complaint, we can see also the lack of responsibility that he ascribes to parents, as he also reminds us in the poem *Mwalimu*, where he pleads with relatives and teachers to set good examples for their own children and pupils. Education should not be at the whim of politics, as the above excerpt from his speech clearly shows, nor should madrassa classes be limited only to those skills taught through *ubao*, as he points out in the stanza that follows. It emerges

heritage in Carmela Baffioni, *I grandi pensatori dell'Islam* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1995): Baffioni shows, for instance, how Aristotle's *Poetics* was summarized by Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindī, and was also commented on by Avicenna and Averroes. To name but a few examples, the author further tells us that Khwārizmī, in his *Mafātīh al-ʿulūm* ("The Keys to Science"), describes poetics as the creation of works able to touch listeners. Al-Fārābī distinguished the technical part related to prosody, and introduced the concept of syllogism, based on which every poetic comparison implies a syllogism (Baffioni, *I grandi pensatori*, 25).

52 The Qurʾānic verses, in their entirety, read as follows, based on Arberry's translation: 12:65, "And when they opened their things, they found their merchandise, restored to them. 'Father,' they said, 'what more should we desire? See, our merchandise here is restored to us. We shall get provision for our family, and we shall be watching over our brother; we shall obtain an extra camel's load—that is an easy measure'"; 35:28, "[M]en too, and beasts and cattle—diverse are their hues. Even so only those of His servants fear God who have knowledge; surely God is All-mighty, All-forgiving." Arthur J. Arberry, *The Quran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 233, 447.

clearly from the examples taken from his speeches and poetry how much Ustadh Mau stresses the value of teaching our children by guiding them in life:

> *Haitoshi kusomesha, kwa kwandika ubaoni*
> *Ni dharura kufundisha, kwa mwendo wa maishani*
> *Sura njema kuonesha, wanafunzi igizani*.
>
> It is not enough to teach by writing on the blackboard;
> It is important to teach them how to live in this world.
> The good example you provide, pupils will imiate it!
> *Mwalimu* ("Teacher"), stz. 8

Still, the importance of preserving those good morals (*tabia njema*) that make Muslims pious and trustful people runs parallel with acquiring knowledge (*elimu*), as is reiterated in another excerpt from the poem *Mwalimu*:

> *Bila ya uwaminifu, na ucha Mungu moyoni*
> *Hatupati ufafanifu, si wa duniya si dini*
> *Natupange zetu swafu, kwa kite tusomesheni*.
>
> Without being faithful and pious at heart,
> We will never succeed, neither in secular nor in religious education.
> Let us join hands; let us educate them with empathy.
> *Mwalimu* ("Teacher"), stz. 10

As the above excerpts show, the lyrical "I"—be it in his sermons or in his poems—is always a polyphonic "we," which includes himself to begin with. He also indeed acknowledges the impact that his Friday *hutba* has on people, as such sermons serve to enlighten Muslims to their own forgotten Islamic knowledge. He tells one anecdote about a man who used to be a teacher in a madrassa and was having hard time earning a living from this; however, he wrongly used to believe that taking a side job would be considered haram, i.e. not allowed in Islam. The revelation he experienced after Ustadh Mau's sermon on *kazi katika Uislamu* ("work in Islam") is told as follows:

> *[...] baada ya ile hutba, yeye akaamua kwamba 'kumbe si makosa yoyote mimi nikifanya kazi bora kazi iwe halal.' Akaanza kubadilisha mipango yake, akaanzakaziyakuajiriwa, kibarua cha kujenga. Munguakambarikia, akaweza kununua hayawani; baada ya miaka minne mitano alhamdulillahi [amekuwa] mutanaffiz (mtu mwenye nafasi ya pesa), ana maduka,*

> *hutoa zakat na kadhalika. Na chanzo cha mabadiliko yake ni alisikia hutba ya jumaa na watu wengine pia wameathirika. Kwa hivo hiyo ni jambo ambalo mimi naona ni muhimu: na la kuchangia katika kuweka mabadiliko ya mujtamai*.
>
> After that Friday sermon, he was surprised to discover 'there is no problem if I take a better job, as long as the job is allowed (halal).' He started changing his plans: he began employment as an assistant mason. God blessed him, and he was able to buy animals; after four or five years, thank God, he became a wealthy person; he runs shops, he gives money to the poor (*zakat*), and the like. The catalyst for his change was that he listened to the Friday sermon, and other people were also influenced. Therefore, this is something that I consider useful: to contribute in seeding change (*mabadiliko*) for the benefit of the community (*mujtamai*). (My translation.)

The last opinion that Ustadh Mau shares here reflects the improvement and change he wishes to see in his community. A change, in my opinion, should aim for that fair balance between intelligence (*akili*) and soul (*roho*) that Islam is representative of, as Sheikh Abdilahi claims in his Ramadan lectures of 1998.53 Ustadh Mau also clearly stresses his social commitment to attaining that change. What Ustadh Mau's *hutba* on *kazi katika Uislamu* triggered was not intended merely to prescribe norms, but also to make his people reflect.

Ustadh Mau's social engagement with his fellow Lamuans finds expression through the vehicle of his Friday sermons—as the abovementioned anecdote shows—as well as, and particularly, through poetry. As Ustadh Mau says:

> *Sisi mpaka sasa alhadulillahi utamaduni wetu unategemea mambo ya mashairi*.
>
> For us, up to now—thank God—our culture relies on poetic composition (My translation).

Ustadh Mau mentions all the diverse occasions for which people might need a poem to be composed and recited—funerals, weddings, graduations, and the

53 See Kai Kresse, *Philosophising in Mombasa. Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice at the Swahili Coast* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 195 ff.

like. He understands and fulfills a very basic need that his community is constantly seeking: to know about what he calls *mambo ya kimaisha*, "the things of life," which Chinua Achebe before him would call "the burning issues of the days."[54] Aside from his religious teaching at the madrassa and during Ramadan, he feels most at the service of his society—in Arabic, *mujtamai* and or *jamii*—through his writing and poetry:

> *Kwa hivo nahisi kwamba nasaidia kiasi fulani* kutumikia jamii yangu kupitia upande wa uandishi wa mashairi, *[…] alhamdulillahi nashukuru, nahisi kwamba nafanya kitu kwa ajili ya mujtamai wangu; natekeleza isipokuwa ni sehemu ndogo jukumu ambalo* nahisi jukumu langu.
>
> Therefore, I feel that I am helping, to some extent, in serving my society from the angle of writing and poetry […] I am grateful to God; I feel I am doing something for the benefit of my community; I make an effort despite the fact that it is just a tiny portion; I can see it as my responsibility. (My translation).

2.4.1 The Knowledge We Seek

The pleas to Ustadh Mau's community—expressed in the plural *sisi* "us" or *tu* "we"—work like a refrain in his speeches and poetry: *tusione … tusome … tusomeshe … tusifuate … tufanye* ("we should not think … we should read … we should teach … we should not follow … we should do …").

To begin with, he states the things that his community ought to know and learn:

> *Tusome ilmu, kila sampuli ya ilmu; hakuna makosa ya kusoma ilmu. Ilmu ni mali ya ulimwengu si mali ya nchi maalum. Ni kitu ambacho ni haki yetu na lazima tukikumbatie tukitie kwenye kitujo zile ambazo hazitufai, lakini yale maarifa na ujuzi na ilmu zenye faida tuzifuate popote zilipo*.
>
> We should study every kind of subject, because there is nothing wrong with learning. Knowledge is the universal good, not the good belonging to a powerful country; it is something that is our right, and we have to embrace it and use a sieve (*kitujo*) to sift out the things that are not good for us; but beneficial knowledge and skills, we should follow them wherever they are. (My translation).

54 Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, 6.

Ustadh Mau's belief in the right to education is quite clear in this speech, and also clearly stresses the importance of incorporating into one's own culture any sort of benefits derived from learning other epistemologies. He reminds listeners how such a universal good—knowledge—is not a pricey commodity far removed from themselves and their customs; he further points out that no matter how much you take from knowledge, it only continues to grow, whereas when you use your wealth, it becomes ever less—hence his motto, "knowledge is richness beyond wealth" (*elimu ni utajiri kuliko mali*).55

In *Tupijeni Makamama*, he compares his community to a ship and foresees that it will wreck unless customs are rediscovered and ignorance is replaced by cultural awareness:

…

Tusiiyone ni dufu mila yetu tukapuza	We should not see ourselves as ignor-
Chombo chetu kitasoza	ant or neglect our customs,
	Otherwise our ship will sink.

Tupijeni, stz 2

In comparison to the first excerpt, in this stanza we find a parallel to his plea for knowledge, namely in calling for the community to revisit their own customs.56 From this point of view, Ustadh Mau promotes a sort of rebuilding of confidence in and respect for Lamu's own customs. Such confidence should derive first and foremost from the local people, as he sees this as the only way that others may also respect and appreciate the local customs. His reference to the Swahili saying *kilio hulia mwenye na mtu mbali naye akalia* (see below) also adds to the idea that the change should begin at home, and serve as a model for those who are far:

> *Chetu kama hatukithamini sisi wenyewe na wangine piya hawawezi kukithamini; lazima mtu ajihishimu yeye ili wangine wamhishimu. Waswahili husema: "kilio hulia mwenye na mtu mbali naye akalia."*
>
> If we don't value our own things (or: knowledge/products), others can't value them either; a person must respect himself so that others may do the same. As the Swahili people say, 'Change begins at home.'57

55 Uttered by Ustadh Mau in a reply to my provocative question of whether "knowledge is richness" (*je, elimu ni utajiri?*) during our interview at his library in March 2018.

56 See also Ustadh Mau's poem *Mila yetu hufujika* ("Our Traditions Are Being Destroyed") in Hillewaert, *Morality at the Margins*, 44–45.

57 See the poem in this volume titled *Kulia hulia mwenye*, inspired by the saying *Kulia hulia*

It is interesting to note that change is a recurring theme in his didactic voice and agenda. While in the excerpt here it is represented by *kilio* ("the cry"), we may also notice the term *mabadiliko* ("change") mentioned above, which the Muslim devotee underwent by listening to Ustadh Mau's Friday sermon.

2.4.2 Ustadh Mau's *Art de vivre*

Ustadh Mau's speech "Faida ya elimu na lugha" closes on this impressive note, which Ustadh Mau himself considers his calling (*mwito*) and credo (*nashuhudiya*, lit. "I testify"); in Ustadh Mau's call to action, one can sense the emphasis on tirelessly inviting every Muslim to change things for the better, that "we should make an effort" (*tufanye bidii!*).

Doing one's own best is exactly what Ustadh Mau tries to pursue in his ordinary life. At every small step, wherever there is a need to reform something, Ustadh Mau feels a duty to be there and do his best. As the Gujarati people say, ' "The son of the tailor will sew clothes so long as he is alive," and if he is still with a needle in hand when his time arrives, he will have accomplished his masterpiece.'58 I personally believe that the social-philanthropic responsibility that Ustadh Mau feels and indulges every single day will never abandon so long as he is alive. As he puts it, "You have to live in a community (*jamii*) where you are ready to help and care of the issues of the others"; *kuishi maisha yangu si maana ya maisha kwa maoni yangu* "living only for the sake of my own life it is not the meaning of how to live for me."59

Ustadh Mau concludes his call to action with the Arabic saying that he uses to prescribe to his Muslim community the basic steps for improving their state. How? Through education:

> *Kwa hivo huo ndo mwito wangu kwa wenzangu wote nashuhudiya tufanyeni bidii, tusione elimu ni ghali [...] elimu mwisho wake utapata faida, kuinvest katika ilmu ndipo mahali bora zaidi. Na mtu ametuambia:* [switching to Arabic] *'ma naḥala walidun waladahu afḍalu bin ʿadabin ḥasanin; Hakuna mzazi aliyempa mwanawe kitu bora kuliko ilm na maarifa* [Swahili translation of the Arabic passage].' *Kwa hivo sisi kama hatukupata fursa*

---

mwenye, *na mtu mbali kalia*, "If the affected one cries out, another will join in from afar," meaning that if you want to change something, you first have to do it yourself, so that others may then join in support.

58 Paraphrased in English from the Italian version in Alberto Bassoli and Davide Monda, *M.K. Gandhi: L'arte di vivere* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989), 72–73.

59 Ustadh Mau, personal communication, July 2019.

kusoma, tusomeshe watoto, watoto wasomeshe wasomesheke: hiyo ndia ya pekee ya kugeuza hali yetu ilivo.

Hence, this is my call to my peers, I testify: we should make an effort; we shouldn't think that knowledge is pricey. Investing in knowledge that rewards you with benefits is a better strategy [of investing] (*mahari*). We were indeed told [here Mau is referring to a hadith in Arabic by the Prophet Muhammad], *ma naḥala walidun waladahu afḍalu bin ʿadabin ḥasanin*, 'There is no better gift that parents can impart to their children than knowledge and science.' Therefore, if we do not have the chance to study, we should teach our children so they may be properly educated: this is the only way to change the state in which we are.

References

Abdalla, Abdilatif. *Sauti ya dhiki*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973.

ʿAqqād, ʿAbbās Mahmūd al-. *The Arab's Impact on European Civilisation*. Cairo: Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, 1960.

Arberry, Arthur, J. *The Quran Interpreted*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Awad, Louis. *The Literature of Ideas in Egypt*. Part i. Arabic Writing Today 3; Studies in Near Eastern Culture and Society 6. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.

Baffioni, Carmela. *I grandi pensatori dell'Islam*. Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1995.

Bang, Anne. *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea. Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Bang, Anne. "Authority and Piety, Writing and Print: A Preliminary Study of the Circulation of Islamic Texts in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Zanzibar." In "Print Cultures, Nationalisms and Publics of the Indian Ocean." Special issue, *Journal of the International African Institute* 81, no. 1 (2011): 89–107.

Bang, Anne. "Localising Islamic Knowledge: Acquisition and Copying of the Riyadha Mosque Manuscript Collection in Lamu, Kenya." In *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, edited by Maja Kominko. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015.

Berkey, Jonathan Porter. *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Bloom, Jonathan. *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001.

Campanini, Massimo. *Il pensiero islamico contemporaneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

Campanini, Massimo, ed. *Al-Ghazali, Le perle del Corano*. Milan: Rizzoli-bur, 2005.

Darnton, Robert. "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65–83.

Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression."*Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 9–63.

Gazemba, Stanley. "African Publishing Minefields and the Woes of the African Writer." *The Elephant*, December 13, 2019. https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2019/12/13/african-publishing-minefields-and-the-woes-of-the-african-writer/.

Ghazali, Abu Hamid. *Iḥiyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn* Beirut: Dar al Jayl, 1985.

Ghazali, Muhammad. *Laysa min al Islām*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1983.

Gershoni, Israel. "Liberal Democratic Legacies in Modern Egypt: The Role of the Intellectuals, 1900–1950." *The Institute Letter Summer 2012*. https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2012/gershoni-democratic-legacies-egypt.

Hillewaert, Sarah. *Morality at the Margins: Youth, Language, and Islam in Coastal Kenya*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020.

Jeppie, Shamil. "A Timbuktu Bibliophile between the Mediterranean and the Sahel: Ahmad Bulʿarāf and the Circulation of Books in the First Half of the Twentieth Century." *Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 65–77. doi: 10.1080/13629387.2014.983734.

Krätli, Graziano, and Ghislaine Lydon. *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Kresse, Kai. *Philosophising in Mombasa. Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice at the Swahili Coast*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Kresse, Kai. *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018.

Laffan, Michael. "A Sufi Century: The Modern Spread of Sufi Orders in Southeast Asia." In *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, edited by James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, 25–39. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Loimeier, Roman. *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th-Century Zanzibar*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Mahmoud, Ahmad Abdulkadir and Frankl, Peter J.L. "*Kiswahili*: A Poem by Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulkadir, to Which is Appended a List of the Poet's Compositions in Verse." *Swahili Forum* 20 (2013): 1–18.

M'bow, Penda. *Être intellectual, être Musulman en Afrique*. Série Conférences 24. Rabat: Institut des Études Africaines, 2005.

Munir, Ahmad. "Sheikh Ali al-Tantāwi and His Educational and Literary Services." *Shaykh Zayed Islamic Centre: University of Peshawar* 29, no. 2 (2014): 254–272.

Qaradawi, Yusuf. *Al-Nās wa-al-ḥaqq*. Kuwait: Dar al-Manar, n.d.

Qaradawi, Yusuf. *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. London: Al-Birr Foundation, 2003.

Qutb, Sayyid. *Maʾalim fi al-Tariq*. n.d: n.d., 1964.

Reese, Scott. "Shaykh Abdullahi al-Qutbi and the Pious Believer's Dilemma: Local Moral Guidance in an Age of Global Islamic Reform." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2015): 488–504.

Santerre, Renaud. *Pédagogie musulmane d'Afrique noire: L'École coranique peule du Cameroun*. Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973.

Shenk, Dietmar. "Getrennte Welten? Über Literaturarchive und Archivwissenschaft." In *Archive für Literatur Der Nachlass und seine Ordnungen*, edited by Petra-Maria Dallinger, Georg Hofer, and Bernhard Judex. Literatur und Archiv 2. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.

Siba'i, Mustafa. *Some Glittering Aspects of the Islamic Civilization*. Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1984.

Ṭahṭawi, Rifāʻa Rāfiʻ al-. *An Imam in Paris. Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)*. Translated by Daniel L. Newman. London: Saqi Books, 2011. First published 2004.

Tantawi, Sheikh Ali al-. *Ya-bintī*. Medina: Mujawharāt al-Maghribal, 1985.

"The List: Ten Key Texts on Islamic Education." *Critical Muslim* 15, no. 1 (July–September 2015): https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-list-ten-key-texts-on-islamic-education/.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Writers in Politics*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1981.

Timammy, Rayya. "Shaykh Mahmoud Abdulkadir 'Mau': A Reformist Preacher in Lamu." *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12, no. 2 (2015): 85–90.

Too, Yun Lee. *The Idea of the Library in the Ancient World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Zarnuji, Burhān al-Dīn al-. *Instructions for the Student: The Method of Learning*. US: Starlatch Press, 2003.

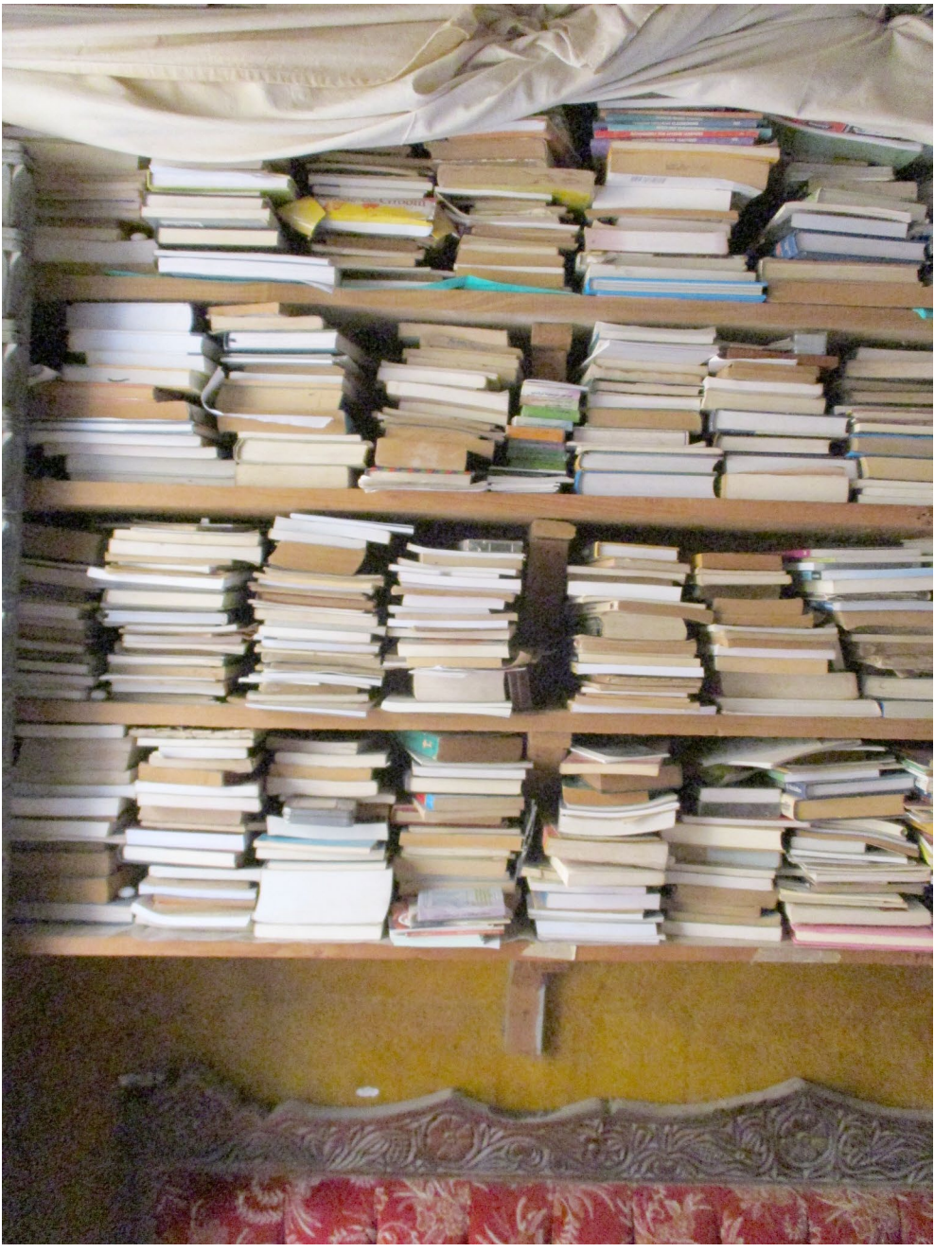

figure 7 A book shelf in Ustadh Mahmoud Mau's private library