

Baraza, The Space of Public Life in Stone Town of Zanzibar*

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Abstract

One of the most important elements of public space in Stone Town of Zanzibar is the baraza. The baraza is the place where people sit, meet, talk, and even rest. In its simplest form, the baraza is a platform built in front of houses or in open public spaces. Although the baraza was brought to Stone Town from rural areas of Zanzibar in the past century, today it is a part of its identity. The main question of this research is that at the present time, given the formation of new public spaces, as well as the development of communication and social networks, what role do barazas play in the daily life of the inhabitants of Stone Town? Primary research data has been compiled through semi-structured interviews with residents, and secondary reports, articles and books have also been consulted. This research shows that in spite of lifestyle changes and the development of the media, the baraza is still an essential part of the everyday life and culture of the inhabitants of Stone Town: it is regarded as an information base, a place for entertainment, a social unit, a political platform, and a religious base.

Keywords: Baraza, Public space, Qualitative research, Swahili culture, Zanzibar Stone Town

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1. Introduction

In Islamic cities, unlike Greek or Roman cities, public open spaces are rarely seen (Toulan, 1980, In Al-Sayyad, 1987). Von Grunebaum (1961, p. 147) writes about Muslim cities: "within the quarters there is hardly any open space or square to relieve the narrowness of their streets and byways". Nezar Al-Sayyad (1991, p. 6) explains the lack of public open spaces in Islamic cities based on their structure:

The Muslim city is a city whose central node is a Masjid Jami with a well-defined and somewhat central royal quarter and a *qasabah* or major spine extending from one main gate to another along which lies the most important buildings scattered along the linear bazaar which branches out into the city, forming irregular but functionally well-defined specialized markets. The city also has a citadel or a defensive post on its outskirts. Housing was made up of inward-oriented core residential quarters, each allocated to a particular group of residents and each is served by a single dead-end street. As for its spatial structure, the Muslim city had no large open public spaces, and the spaces serving its movement and traffic network were narrow and irregular.

In contrast, Tavassoli (2011), writing in relation to Iranian cities and the Middle East more generally, attributes the lack of open spaces in Islamic cities to climatic, political, religious, social and cultural factors.

Despite the lack of public open spaces built into the structure of Islamic cities, open spaces are largely provided in the form of courtyards of houses, mosques, etc. Describing this characteristic of Islamic cities, Bianquis (2006, p. 849) states: "As seen by a pedestrians, the city looked like a labyrinth inside blank walls; however, upon ascending a minaret, one could see many open

spaces, the courtyards of mosques and houses, and dark green vegetation enveloping nearly every building".

According to scholars, public open spaces in Islamic cities can be classified into two types. The first type comprises public open spaces in front of important buildings such as mosques and schools, in the form of *maydans* or urban courtyards. The second type comprise the circulation spaces in the form of labyrinth alleys (Al-Sayyad, 1987, p. 109). The *maydan* is not equivalent to the agora or forum, in size or function (Toulan, 1980, In Al-Sayyad, 1987); nonetheless, it is used as a distribution node to enter and exit important buildings by the population. The gathering of people takes place at the mosque and its *sahn* (arena) rather than at *maydans* (Al-Sayyad, 1987, p. 109). In addition to mosques, social interactions are largely carried out inside bazaars (markets) and *hammams* (baths)¹, as well as in houses (which also affects housing patterns, for example, creating a special room for guests) (Hwaish, 2015, p. 86).

But what is seen in Zanzibar is different from other Muslim cities. In Zanzibar, social interactions often take place in the streets and alleys, rather than mosques or baths. A large portion of people's daily lives is spent in streets. One of the most important elements of public space in Zanzibar is the "baraza". According to the Collins English Dictionary, baraza is a Swahili² word, meaning "a place where public meetings are held" (Baraza. (n.d.). According to Meier, a baraza is a "built-in sitting area of the front section of the building [which is] a public space of reception and sociability" (Meier, 2016, p. 58). Nowadays in Stone Town of Zanzibar, the baraza is a platform built in front of houses or in open public spaces where people sit and talk, entertain or relax.

In recent times, due to developments in communication

1. These public places could not be regarded as "open public spaces".

2. Swahili is the most commonly spoken language in eastern Africa.

technology and especially social networks, the way people communicate and interact with each other has changed. On the one hand, much of the communication that used to be face-to-face, is now done via mobile and social networks. On the other hand, the Internet and social networks allow the rapid dispersion of news among people, affecting people's conversations and interactions in urban public spaces and changing the behaviors of people in these spaces (Humphreys, 2010, pp. 1-2).

The main question of this research is that in the present time, given the formation of new public spaces, as well as the development of communication and social networks, what role does the baraza play in the daily lives of the inhabitants of Stone Town? In other words, this research aims to understand the position and function of the baraza from the point of view of current inhabitants.

2. Literature review

In all cities, a common way to organize spaces is to divide them into public and private ones. Madanipour (1999) defines these two types of spaces as follows:

Some places are protected and set apart from the rest by a complex system of signification: by spatial means such as signs, boundaries, fences, walls, and gates; or by temporal means such as predetermined working hours [...] Public places, on the other hand, are expected to be accessible to everyone, where strangers and citizens alike can enter with fewer restrictions (Madanipour, 1999, p. 880).

The term 'public space', often brings a public square or public park to mind, but a public space can also be a street, sidewalk, metro platform, or public library (Kishore Rupa, 2015). For Low and Smith (2006, p. 1), the field of public space is broader, and close to the concept of the public sphere as defined by Habermas

(Habermas et al, 1974). For these scholars, the public space is a spectrum of social places, including streets, parks, neighborhoods, shopping malls, and even media and the Internet.

Definitions of public space often emphasize the need for access, including access to the location and its activities. According to Madanipour (2003), public space is public because everyone has the right to have physical presence in it. The purpose of physical access to a location is to access its activities. However, a place may be accessible in the sense that everyone can enter it, while activities held within it are not accessible to everyone and are limited to specific people (Madanipour, 2003). Therefore, the publicness of public spaces can vary.

Public space, whatever its nature, is a social construction (Low, 1996). In fact, it is the presence of people in a space that makes space meaningful. As Hajer and Reijndorp state: "Citizens create meaningful public space by expressing their attitudes, asserting their claims and using it for their own purposes" (2001, p. 40).

In addition to researchers who consider the role of people in shaping public space fundamental, other scholars consider the role of public space to be important in the social construction of individuals. According to these scholars, public spaces, ranging from a small local park to a large metropolitan area, contribute to the social development of everyone; this is because when people with different backgrounds and different thoughts are present in these spaces, they interact with each other and gain new experiences (Gehl, 1987). These researchers argue that culture grows and develops in public spaces. Furthermore, this cultural growth does not take place solely at the society level, but public space also plays a role in the personal growth of individuals, because "It helps in developing personal ideals and values of a particular individual and

realising one's own character and beliefs. Participation of an individual in the larger urban culture creates an opportunity for one's own personal reflection and reassures the uniqueness of one's personality in society" (Kishore Rupa, 2015, p. 5).

In addition to its social role, public space has other roles, including economic and political. In the current era, where cities compete to attract capital, strengthening and improving public space can increase the attractiveness of urban areas and thus attract investors. Attractive urban spaces also improve the image of the city and attract tourists (Madanipour, 2003; Konzen, 2013). In post-industrial societies, tourism has become a new industry and a source of income for cities and creating attractive public spaces has played a significant role in the development of this industry (Konzen, 2013). On the political side, public space can represent the power of a state. For example, when opposition to the state is expressed in the form of demonstrations in urban public spaces, or when statues of political figures are installed in public spaces, the political dimension of these spaces becomes apparent (Madanipour, 1999, p. 880).

While public spaces have always existed in cities, their function and role in cities have changed throughout history. In the past, socio-spatial concentration made the central public spaces in cities important, but today places with similar functions and activities are scattered all over cities, and political discussions, exchanges of goods and services, ceremonies and celebrations take place in different areas. Moreover, with the advancement of communications technology, many of these functions are no longer carried out physically and face-to-face. As a result, public space has lost many of its historical functions (Madanipour, 1999; Kishore Rupa, 2015). Nevertheless, some public spaces still remain and continue to be used for the same vital and important functions as they were in the past (Madanipour, 2003).

A review of relevant sources allows us to provide a comprehensive classification of the most important roles of public space from different viewpoints, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The roles of public space

Dimension	Roles of public space	References
Socio-cultural	Representation of cultures, identities and diversity	Worpole, 2008
	Place attachment	Worpole, 2008; Cattell et al., 2006
	Sense of community and unique identity	Worpole, 2008; Cattell et al., 2006; Kaźmierczak, 2014
	Social interaction, social mixing, social inclusion <i>and socialization</i>	Zukin, 1995; Worpole, 2008; Cattell et al., 2006
	Facilitation of the exchange of ideas and friendships	Worpole, 2008
	Improvement of the quality of life	Nared & Lamovšek, 2015
	Reduction of crime and the fear of crime	Carmona et al, 2004
Economic	Facilitation of the exchange of goods and skills	Carmona et al, 2004
	Retail and commercial leisure activities	Carmona et al, 2004
	Public space as marketplace	Carmona et al, 2004; Kishore Rupa, 2015
	Increase in nearby property values	Shoup & Ewing, 2010
	Attraction of customers, employees and services	Carmona et al, 2004
	Generation of significant private sector investment	Carmona et al, 2004
	Tourist attraction	Madanipour 2003; Urda Peña, 2012
Public health	Physical and mental health and well-being	Carmona et al, 2004; Richardson & Mitchell, 2010; Ward Thompson & Aspinall, 2011; Dinnie et al., 2013
	Urban happiness	Florida et al., 2013; Montgomery, 2013; Sepe, 2016
Political	Stage for political action	Huning, 2008
	Representation of power	Low & Smith, 2013; Abrahão, 2016
	Space of <i>democracy</i>	Goodsell, 2003; Parkinson, 2012

Source: Author's review of literature

3. Research methodology

The explorative character of this research led me to choose a qualitative method. As Beckstead and Morrow (2004, p. 654) state, “qualitative research methods can more clearly capture the complexity and meaningfulness of human behavior and experience by permitting more openness to findings and accessing participants’ full description of their realities”.

The empirical material used in this paper was gathered during a month of ethnographic field research (including interviews and observation) in Stone Town, Zanzibar. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 residents of Stone Town. This method is useful when there is no opportunity to interview participants more than once. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to control the data collection process (Bernard, 1988) and to gain an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Using a semi-structured method allows the researcher to address a specific subject while also allowing participants to respond in their own words (Choak, 2012).

Interviews were conducted with people ranging from 20 to 76 years old, comprising 25 men and 5 women. Interviews were conducted at different barazas in Stone Town and at different times of the day. The duration of each interview averaged between 30 to 45 minutes. To communicate better with participants and in order to gain their trust, a Zanzibari friend accompanied me in all interviews. All interviews were conducted in Swahili, then translated into English by my friend.

Interviews were carried out in the following manner. Firstly, in order to build trust with interviewees, I introduced myself and spoke a little of the historical relationship between Iran and Zanzibar. Then I explained to them the subject of my research,

emphasizing that it was academic research and their statements would be used anonymously in the current paper. In addressing the aims of this research, I asked the participants some guiding questions about their experiences of sitting in barazas: subjects they talk about sitting on barazas, the times of the day when they sit on barazas, the places where they sit, and those with whom they sit.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of barazas, two in-depth interviews were conducted with Zanzibar scholars and researchers to supplement the interviews with ordinary people. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Due to the nature of the data and the research topic, the qualitative content analysis method selected for processing the data was “a systematic coding and categorizing approach” (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013, p. 400). The process of data analysis according to this method is to first transcribe and then reread texts to get to know the data and form some general views. The next steps involve breaking down the text and identifying units of analysis, then open coding, that is, assigning a concept to each analysis unit. Following, the researcher should compare the codes and cluster them according to similar themes/categories, and finally, develop and expand the themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

To complement my fieldwork, I have also reviewed academic reports, books and articles about barazas’ forms and functions in Zanzibar society from past to present, to acquaint myself with the perspectives of other scholars.

4. Background to baraza in Stone Town

Zanzibar Island is located in the Indian Ocean east of the African continent and is considered a part of Tanzania. Stone Town, built on the eastern coast of Zanzibar Island, has been inhabited by humans for more than three centuries. With the support of several

organizations, in particular the Agha Khan Foundation, Stone Town, with an area of about 100 acres, was registered by UNESCO in 2000 as a World Heritage Site. Stone Town is a Swahili city that also has some features of an Arabic city due to its narrow passages, labyrinths and blind alleys (Steyn, 2001; 2015). This city has elements of the Islamic cities: mosques, *hammams*, caravanserais and residential neighborhoods.

In Zanzibar, a great part of social life takes place in public spaces, such as streets and parks, and open urban spaces are a second home to its inhabitants. People come together to talk, drink tea, play and even watch TV in some of these places. In Stone Town, passages and open urban spaces play a significant role in the daily lives of families. The crowding in homes in many cases forces children to spend their day outdoors (Hall, 2009, p. 113).

Barazas are places where Zanzibar residents spend an important part of their daily lives. In terms of form, barazas can be platforms in front of houses or on the side of streets, comprise a verandah with benches to sit down in rural areas or (in the past) indoor rooms or a hall for welcoming guests (Meier, 2016, p. 58). Before the 1964 revolution, Stone Town residents were rich and many had a special room in their homes to host guests. As such, sitting in open areas and streets was limited to people living in rural and some of the slum areas of Zanzibar. But after the revolution, with the emigration of the wealthy inhabitants of Stone Town (because of degradation of buildings and urban spaces) and the arrival of the poor and rural class, barazas were built as platforms in front of houses as well as in the streets of Stone Town (Loimeier, 2009, p. 178).

In Stone Town today, every house has its own private baraza which is used both by men and women. This type of baraza is not counted as public space and is usually used by the household and those who come to visit them. The other type of baraza comprise

platforms that are not in front of a particular house, but are built in public spaces such as squares and openings. These barazas are public, although some are used by a specific group (residents of the same neighborhood) while others located in main streets or squares are more popular (Loimeier, 2005; 2009).

Although authors such as Swartz (1991) and Saleh (2010) have argued that the baraza is merely a special place for men, and that women do not sit in these spaces, Loimeier (2009) has shown that there are barazas for women as well. Our observations in Zanzibar as well as interviews with women in Zanzibar indicate that they also sit in baraza. However, women are rarely seen on barazas in the streets of Stone Town. Since 99 per cent of the inhabitants of Zanzibar are Muslim (United States Department of State, 2019), there are traditionally separate spaces for men and women (Gunnarsson & Johansson, 2004). Semi-private courtyards also comprise open public spaces in Stone Town. During our visits to Stone Town, we have observed that some women cook food in semi-private yards and then sit down to sell it on barazas located in the streets.



Figure 1. A baraza, a platform built in front of houses in Stone Town
Source: Author



Figure 2. A baraza, a platform built in front of houses in Stone Town
Source: Author

5. Research findings

Although the baraza may not seem very important to visitors, and perhaps just a place to sit and spend time, interviews with residents

show that barazas play important roles in residents’ individual and social lives. I identified five themes from my content analysis of the interviews with the residents of Stone Town, illustrating the role and importance of barazas and the ways they have changed over time (see Table 2).

Table 2. Process of analysis

Meaningful Units	Primary Coding	Themes
I like to sit on the baraza with people of different ages. This makes me learn a lot. Especially from old people. Because they talk about and narrate so many things. So sitting on the baraza lets me know about different topics.	Education and awareness	Baraza, the base for information and education
Talking about the issues of society, religion and politics helps individual development of the members and the development of the whole society. We also train each other and critique each other.	Education/ individual and social development	
We have different members on our baraza. The elderly speak here and teach the young on various topics, especially the history of life in Zanzibar. The elderly teach the young, guide them and keep them heading in the right direction.	Education	
People see each other on barazas, they share news and everything they have.	Informing	
Barazas play important roles, like in knowing news, advising and criticizing each other.	Informing/ individual development	
We talk about various issues on the baraza. For example hot domestic and foreign news.	Informing	

I always sit on the baraza. I cannot help not going because I like it so much and it's one of my pleasures.	Happiness and pleasure	Baraza, a place to be entertained, relax and enjoy
I usually spend the afternoon on the baraza. Mostly from 4 to 6. Because I am back from work. I'll sit on the baraza for fun and thinking about tomorrow.	Fun and thinking, relaxation	
I sit on the baraza for rest and entertainment. For my mind to rest.	Rest and hobbies	
Some play, like a card game, some tell stories while playing.	Entertainment	
This is our constant and permanent place of meeting and sitting and enjoying fascinating stories, real stories and other things together.	Recreation, fun and enjoyment	
There are many tasks and roles for baraza. First of all, it increases unity and solidarity. It creates a positive relationship between members and the society.	Social cohesion and solidarity	Baraza, a social unit and a platform for the solidarity of residents
Sitting on the baraza brings people together and causes unity and solidarity. It allows people to express their views on social and political issues.	Social cohesion and solidarity	
We mostly talk about social topics.	Social base	
We live together like blood brothers. Because your problem is also my problem. We help each other in every situation... You cannot always be alone.	Social assistance	
We sometimes see each other here and talk about a wedding in our neighborhood, or a funeral or any other thing.	Social affairs management	

We usually talk about politics, sports, and social issues. It also allows people to express their views on social and political issues.	Circle of political discussions	Baraza, a forum for political debate
Political issues are our main topic every day.	Circle of political discussions	
Our conversations are often about politics, but sometimes we talk about social issues.	Circle of political discussions	
The baraza plays an important role in politics, especially for the opposition factions, because some members hear updated news on barazas and become informed of political tendencies.	Political base	
Politics has changed our lifestyle, because people today are very involved with politics.	Circle of political discussions	
We talk about various issues on the baraza. On matters of life, religious matters.	Religious discussion circle	Baraza, a religious base
Some people would like to talk about religious issues on this baraza.	Religious discussion circle	
The baraza was like school, in which books of other religions were taught and discussed.	A place for religious education	
For example, in the holy month of Ramadan, we talk about issues that cancel the fast... or political-religious issues, such as discussing the legitimacy of the existing government from a religious point of view.	Religious base	

5.1. Baraza, the base for information and education

One of the primary goals of barazas from the beginning has been to inform, raise awareness and educate. "People see each other on the baraza, they share news and everything they have" (female, 42 years old, university professor). The presence of the elderly on barazas is one of the most important reasons for its educational role:

I like to sit on the baraza with people of different ages. This makes me learn a lot. Especially from old people. Because they talk about and narrate so many things. So sitting on the baraza lets me know about different topics. Talking about the issues of society, religion and politics helps individual development of the members and the development of the whole society. We also train each other and critique each other (male, 30 years old, teacher).

From the past to the present day, one of the important roles of the baraza has been education:

We have different members on our baraza. The elderly speak here and teach the young on various topics, especially the history of life in Zanzibar. The elderly teach the young, guide them and keep them heading in the right direction (male, 20 years old, university student).

Today, the presence of people of different ages on barazas provides an opportunity for the education of young people. Baraza members also help children and teenagers with their homework.

5.2. Baraza, a place to be entertained, relax and enjoy

Some Zanzibar residents sit on barazas to have fun, entertain and relax. Talking about topics of interest, storytelling, and various

games make members happy. A 23-year-old male university student says: "This is our constant and permanent place of meeting and sitting and enjoying fascinating stories, real stories and other things together". The form of entertainment favored by each group/individual depends on their taste. Some of them play, for example a card game, some tell stories, some watch TV, etc.

The narrow streets of stone cities lead in some cases to spatial openings that create small and intimate places. Jaws Corner is one of these places, where local people from all parts of the island gather together to discuss different topics or drink coffee. There are several baraza in the form of stone platforms for sitting. In this place, men play dominos and cards for many hours during the day. There is also a large television and a billboard to inform the public. Some barazas also attract people who watch TV from them every night. But our observations and interviews with residents show that this function of barazas become less prominent in recent years, as most households now have their own television set, and only those without their own TV set gather on barazas at night in front of public TVs.

Young people enjoy other entertainments on barazas. One of the topics of particular interest to young people is football: "We discuss topics of interest to young people. Especially the issues of love, football, Premier League and La Liga..." (male, 25 years old, taxi driver). As described above, some barazas have a television set, and members may sit together to watch football. For some people, sitting on a particular baraza is a pleasure: "I like to go to the baraza near my house, Jaws Corner. This is my constant baraza since I grew up, this is the only baraza I know and enjoy" (male, 27 years old, shopkeeper). This shows that each group or individual appropriates a place and feels a sense of belonging to it. By sitting

on a specific baraza (occupying a particular place), groups and individuals negotiate their identities (Leach, 2005).

Barazas are used at different times of day and night by various groups. Each group attends the baraza at a certain time. Most barazas are popular between the afternoon and the *Maghrib* prayers because the interval between these two prayers is short, and people prefer to spend this interval talking and discussing instead of going home and then returning later to the mosque. In general, prayer times play an important role in determining the times of member gatherings on the baraza.

Further, the time people spend on the baraza depends on their job and leisure time. People returning from work will often sit on the baraza at this time: "I usually spend the afternoon on the baraza. Mostly from 4 to 6. Because I am back from work. I'll sit on the baraza for fun and thinking about tomorrow" (male, 30 years old, teacher). A fisherman who is 27 years old expresses a similar view, "I sit at least once in the baraza per day. In the afternoon. I sit about ten times all over the week on baraza". On the weekend, the number of people sitting on the baraza and the time they spend there increases. Some people spend long periods on the baraza: "I sit for around 7-8 hours a day on the baraza. Especially in the evenings" (male, 52 years old, retired). Sitting on the baraza for long periods is not limited to middle-aged or elderly people. Some young people spend long hours sitting on barazas: "I sit 6 hours a day on the baraza, but on a weekend I can spend the whole day here and leave it only to eat" (male, 20 years old, university student). The statement of this inhabitant indicates that the baraza as a public space is an essential part of his everyday life and the importance of baraza for this person is as great as or even exceeds that of his home. But today, because of changes in the employment

and lifestyle patterns of Stone Town inhabitants, some people do not have specific leisure time and state that they sit on the baraza whenever they have time to spare.



Figure 3. The baraza at Jaws Corner
Source: Author



Figure 4. The baraza, a space for entertainment
Source: Author

5.3. Baraza, a social unit and a platform for the solidarity of residents

It is in the realm of social life that people understand each other and interconnect. Putting different people together in space creates interpersonal relationships and leads to the emergence of a social world (Madanipour, 2003). The baraza is a very important social unit in Zanzibar, and social subjects and life affairs are among the most important topics of discussion there. In addition to designating the bench itself, a baraza is also a network of people who know, trust and support each other. Baraza members express phrases like "blood brothers" or "skin and body" to show the depth of their friendship and relationship. Sitting and talking on barazas increases unity and solidarity between individuals and creates a platform for solving neighborhood, community and individual issues. As one 30-year-old male teacher says, "There are many

tasks and roles for the baraza. First of all, it increases unity and solidarity. It creates a positive relationship between members and the society". The collaboration and cooperation between members of the baraza is not limited to a specific age group or gender. A girl of about 25 years old, a university student, describes the role of baraza: "It helps people to meet their needs, raise their problems and find solutions to them. Some like us help each other in the lessons because we talk about the lessons when we see each other". Many neighborhood and family issues, such as engagements, weddings, funerals, and so on, are also decided upon and planned on barazas:

We live together like blood brothers. Because your problem is also my problem. We help each other in every situation... You cannot always be alone. That's why we sometimes see each other here and talk about a wedding in our neighborhood, or a funeral or any other thing (male, 52 years old, retired).

Public spaces used by people on a daily basis have crucial roles in facilitating the interaction between people in neighborhoods, and consequently contributing to wellbeing and social cohesion in the community (Gri, 2010). In Stone Town, the role of women is also remarkable in this regard:

We talk about a variety of topics that relate to life. As you know, we are not like men. We cannot afford to spend a lot of time on the baraza. That's why we see each other just to talk about the important subjects ahead such as a wedding, funeral, to get informed of the latest news and community issues (female, 42 years old, university professor).

In Zanzibar, women gather much less often than men to talk. They sometimes get together to talk about important things while cooking or washing dishes and clothes, often in semi-private courtyards.

Young people are also aware of the baraza's social role: "The baraza has a major role during times of trouble or happiness, for example at a funeral or wedding that we all are together. We will help each other whenever necessary. We cooperate with each other, as if we have a blood relationship" (male, 20 years old, university student). The baraza plays an important role in the social issue of neighborhood management: "The baraza plays a very important role in our society. For example, regarding cleaning and decorating the houses. It keeps our environment safe and clean. We do all these things together" (male, 20 years old, university student).

5.4. Baraza, a forum for political debate

The political role of the baraza can be viewed as one of its new roles, comprising one of the ways in which the modern use of barazas differs from that of the past. Access to media and communication networks that facilitate the dispersion of political news has led to the rise of political awareness in residents, and led them to discuss political issues often. In general, issues are discussed more easily and openly today compared to in the past. Even on the barazas, the coup and the post-revolutionary period have become a common topics (Fouéré, 2010, p. 5). Talking about political issues has changed the baraza's function:

Today, the baraza goals are very different, because of the changed lifestyle in Zanzibar. I have heard from my ancestors that it was already used to enjoy, relax, and also

teach (like school), in which books of other religions were taught and discussed. This has been part of Zanzibar's culture. But politics has changed our lifestyle. Because people today are very involved with politics (male, 27 years old, shopkeeper).

Today, even teenagers and young people talk about politics: "Political issues are our main topic every day" (male, 20 years old, university student). The baraza provides an opportunity for political party members to become informed about news and express their views: "The baraza plays an important role in politics, especially for the opposition fractions. Because some members hear updated news on barazas and become informed of political tendencies" (male, 52 years old, retired). But for various reasons such as conservatism, some people are reluctant to talk about political issues: "Today, when we speak much about politics, we are considered as an enemy or an opposition member. So many people are silent about what's going on in politics. Especially about what goes on in the elections" (male, 23 years old, university student). It is important to note that the baraza differs from *Maskanis*, places established by the Tanzanian dominant ruling party¹ in the 1990s to support particular political parties and host more formal exchanges (Loimeier, 2009, p. 182; Fouéré, 2010, p. 15).

5.5. Baraza, a religious base

Religion and the religious behavior of Muslims, in addition to playing a role in determining the time when people sit on barazas as well as their gender segregation, also play important roles in

1. This party is called Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), meaning "Party of the Revolution".

shaping discussions on barazas. One area of discussion is religious issues, also comprising an area of education in Zanzibar. For this reason, the baraza can be considered a religious institution. "Talking about the life of the Prophet and his companions, religious orders, teaching religious books, how to deal with non-Muslims and living with them, and subjects such as marriage are among our common issues on baraza" (male, 30 years old, teacher). The issues of religious debate on baraza are often jurisprudential or politico-religious:

For example, in the holy month of Ramadan, we talk about issues that cancel the fast... or political-religious issues, such as discussing the legitimacy of the existing government from a religious point of view (male, 50 years old, shop keeper).

6. Baraza, from the past to the present

The baraza's features and functions are consistent with the definition of public space in the UK's Urban White Paper as:

[S]omewhere to relax and enjoy the urban experience, a venue for a range of different activities, from outdoor eating to street entertainment; from sport and play to a venue for civic or political functions; and most importantly of all as a place for walking and sitting out (UK DETR, 1999, In Amin *et al.*, 2000).

However, changes in the nature and function of the baraza have occurred recently as a result of lifestyle changes and new modes of residents' relationship with each other and the space. For example, mobile use in public spaces has become a common phenomenon today (Roll, 2016). People in public spaces are more focused on their mobile phones than they are on their surroundings (Turkle,

2011, pp. 77-78) and although they are physically present in one place, their focus is often not on that place (Turkle, 2011, pp. 155-156).

In Zanzibar, the development of communications technologies and the formation of social networks in cyberspace has led to changes in the functions of barazas. The role of teenagers and young people is important in this regard: "The baraza has already changed and is not the same as before. Now young people manage the discussions, because accessing information through social networks is something that adults cannot do. In the past, adults had more general information than young people" (male, 20 years old, university student).

In addition, some people sit on the baraza and use the internet without talking to others there: "My special place is here in Kisonge Mnarani. Because wi-fi is free here... I sit on the baraza to chat and keep up with news on social networks. I sit on baraza and just chat with my friends and relatives" (Male, 48 years old, shopkeeper). Sitting alone on the baraza as a public space and focusing on one's mobile can be directly attributed to developments in technology. Turkle (2001, p. 19) expresses this phenomenon well: "We are increasingly connected to each other but oddly more alone: in intimacy, new solitudes".

Some believe that to a certain extent, barazas have now been replaced by social networks: "Another reason for the change in baraza is that many people today do not have time to sit on the baraza and it has been replaced by social networks. Everything that was done on barazas today is done in WhatsApp and Facebook groups" (female, 42 years old, university professor).

One of the most important changes of baraza from the past to the present is the presence of teenagers: "Previously, only the

adults sat on barazas. Children were not allowed to sit there, especially in the evenings. They slept too early. But now everyone is sitting on the baraza of all ages" (male, 25 years old, taxi driver). One of the reasons teenagers sit on barazas is to talk to each other about information received from the Internet and social networks. In Stone Town, most teenagers and young people seen sitting on barazas have mobile phones in their hands. While their presence helps transmit some information to older people who do not have access to the Internet and social networks, it can also cause problems. The development is not very pleasing to adults and the elderly, because with the entrance of these new younger baraza members, the way of talking and the behaviors of people on the baraza has changed.

A review of the literature confirms that some researchers view adolescents' presence in adult public spaces as disturbing, while others advocate for adolescent and youth rights in the city and consider their entry into urban spaces as a sign of democracy (Cloke & Jones, 2005, p. 312). In Zanzibar, some adults are unhappy with the presence of teenagers on barazas, because this group can be destructive and sometimes do things that contradict the traditions and customs of Zanzibari society:

Today, the baraza is different from the past. In the past, it was more important. The elderly sat on the baraza, for news, training and guiding others. Today, however, it has become the source of teenagers' deconstruction. Because they usually sit on the baraza to smoke marijuana, drugs and cigarettes. They also speak on the baraza about issues such as robbery, rape, and so on. This difference is very important from the past. Respect on the baraza is decreasing day by day, and this is destructive to the society (male, 30 years old, teacher).

The negative consequences of the presence of some teenagers on barazas also include moral issues:

Today, children sit on baraza and talk about sexual issues. Look at inappropriate photos and videos on their smartphones. Even children under the age of 18 talk about love issues (male, 48 years old, shopkeeper).

Based on the interview data, I argue that this change in the function of the baraza is the result of general changes in the society due to increased communication tools and ease of information exchange, changing lifestyles and youth behavior. In contrast, some scholars argue that young people have been known as main perpetrators of antisocial behavior in public spaces (Burney, 2005; Woolley, 2006; Brown, 2013). In response, some countries have adopted restrictive policies for the presence of young people in public spaces (Burney, 2005, p. 67).

7. Conclusion

Although the baraza (in its current form) was brought to Stone Town in the last century from the villages of Zanzibar Island, it is now an integral part of the everyday life of its people. The baraza plays an important role in all aspects of the life of Stone Town residents. The conversation topics of people sitting on barazas range from serious to fun topics, and the motivations for attending from relaxation, entertainment and playing to debating important political issues. It can be said that the baraza plays the role of several local institutions: social, political, educational, and religious. Today, people's access to the media and the Internet contributes to the diversity of discussions and the rapid circulation of news on barazas. But on the other hand, some believe that access

to the Internet and social networks has led a group of people to no longer need to sit on the baraza. The baraza has undergone some changes due to lifestyle changes, the expansion of mass communications and the wider scope of communications between people and their interactions with the city spaces.

As a result, some age and location boundaries in the barazas have disappeared. Teenagers comprise a new group of people who sit on the baraza today. On the one hand, teenagers sitting on the barazas can facilitate their socialization and building of friendships, and expand their access to information, but on the other hand it can also have adverse effects. The presence of this group and the lack of adherence to societal values and morals on the part of some of them has changed the nature of the baraza in a way that is not acceptable for adults. In addition, due to the expansion of the relationships between city spaces and between local and non-local people, today, many local barazas have become non-local in nature and people from different neighborhoods sit on what were once local barazas. This is not a welcome development for some old baraza members.

In general, it is clear that in Stone Town, Zanzibar, it is the baraza that shapes the dynamics of and movement on Stone Town streets. The findings of this research show that despite changing lifestyles and employment patterns and the development of new media, the baraza still plays an important role in all aspects of the daily lives of the residents of Stone Town: social, political, religious and recreational. Therefore, any future urban planning or development in Stone Town should take into consideration the important functions of barazas.

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