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*Doctors and Imams: Investigating the Integrated
Schools of Mombasa, Kenya*

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“We want to show that a person can be both a doctor and an imam.”

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“The coast was the first to enter school and the last to graduate” –Athman Lali

Abstract

Since the arrival of Europeans in the 19th century there has been tension within the Swahili community between the traditional Islamic madarasa system of education and the new Western model they brought. In recent decades a new dimension has been added to this struggle through schools which combine the two different institutes. There are two types of integrated schools currently operating within Mombasa. The first is a network of integrated nursery schools founded by the Madarasa Program. The Program works through their schools to empower and educate impoverished Muslim areas using ideas of community ownership and development. The Program, and through it the nursery schools, receive aid from many organizations around the world. The money is used to get schools started and to keep their fees at a level where parents can afford them. Unlike Madarasa schools, Mombasa’s integrated primary and secondary schools operate as individual entities. These schools are not part of any networks and obtain all their funds through their school fees. Independent schools follow Kenya’s standard national curriculum for secular subjects, but they alternate them with their own Islamic classes. Despite their differences both these systems ultimately work to promote the welfare of Mombasa’s Muslim children and the Muslim community as a whole. This research paper endeavors to uncover the inner workings of both these integrated systems and the impact they have on Mombasa’s Muslim community using information gathered through interviews and written documents gathered through the course of a two week research period.

“A deep concern for knowledge – and the best ways of sharing knowledge – goes back to the very roots of the Islamic tradition.” –Madarasa Report

Introduction

Education in Kenya has a long history, perhaps the longest of any on earth if one considers that the origins of homo-sapien can be traced to East Africa. Of course much of this history has not consisted of anything similar to what is today considered ‘education.’ For much of their history, the people of modern day Kenya learned through largely informal techniques. Their training, conducted by parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, took place as they went about their daily lives in the houses, fields, and forests of their home areas. This early ‘education’ was concerned primarily with adapting children to their physical environments and transmitting and preserving cultural knowledge (Omar). The essential purpose of these real life classes was survival, of individuals and societies.

Formalized education was first introduced to the region with the arrival of Islam on the coast in the 11th century. Islamic traders brought along with their goods their religion and the madarasa schools that accompanied it. As Islam’s influence grew Muslim traders and their African converts worked to establish mosques and madarasas all along the coast. These Islamic schools brought literacy to the East African Coast as they spread the Arabic language through their students to the entire Swahili population. In addition to learning Arabic Islamic school children memorized the Koran, studied Islamic law or Sharia, and learned Islamic history (Themes 1990: 147). Madarasas flourished among the Islamic Swahili of the coast for several centuries, although they did not make significant strides inland. When the Portuguese and later the British and Germans arrived

in the 15th and 19th centuries, they found the madarasa system already in place. It was the arrival of these Western travelers that led to the next big shift in the education of Kenya's coastal people.

The first wave of Europeans to advance into East Africa included a large number of Christian missionaries. These individuals soon began to set up their own schools with the goal of bringing 'civilization' to their African converts. The first missionary school in Kenya was founded in 1846 by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) at Rabai, a city in the Coastal Province (Themes 1990: 148). This initial school was soon followed by many more as different organizations landed on the continent, all wanting to do their part and make their mark among the "native savages." These early schools were initially regarded with skepticism by many Africans, but soon most realized that education and cooperation with the whites represented an escape out of poverty and village life as well a chance to increase the social standing of individuals and communities.

While most inland communities began to embrace the missionary's education and the colonial system that eventually followed, however, the Swahili people continued to resist. This resistance sprung from several factors. The biggest hindrance for the Swahili was they were unhappy with the Christian outreach that was part and parcel with most missionary schools (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 13). Parents were scared that if they sent their children to missionary and later colonial schools the kids would lose their Islamic morals and adopt European values and behaviors. There was also stiff opposition to the schools among the Koranic teachers who were highly respected and held a great deal of influence among the community. These leaders did not want to lose their pupils to government schools. They were also unhappy with the fact that through secular

education the Swahili Islamic script was being replaced by the Latin alphabet. Finally, the Swahili feared that children sent to missionary schools would be swayed to totally abandon their religion and convert to Christianity (Omar). Because of these uncertainties the Swahili people kept themselves largely separate from the growing education network that developed throughout East Africa during the colonial years.

Eventually some Swahili, alarmed by the declining fortunes of their communities, recognized the need to educate their children in more than just Islamic beliefs and pushed their areas to adopt the secular system. This adoption process was hurried when some Muslim schools began to apply for government funds. They only were able to obtain help on the condition that they begin to teach certain secular subjects in their classes. Thus the Swahili began to join the system that the rest of Kenya had been operating in for several decades as Muslim students began to trickle into colonial schools and secular subjects made their way into Islamic schools (Omar). This slow shift however occurred in some ways too late for the Swahili. By the time they caught on and accepted the importance of secular learning the government was already full of educated individuals from up-country. Even the administration of the Coastal Province was largely in the hands of people brought in from the highlands and western areas of the colony. Thus the Swahili, who were the first people in Kenya to receive their education, were left behind by the rest of the country and 'graduated' into the new era of secular education last.

Today Muslim communities up and down the coast recognize the need to educate their children within the wider Kenyan system, but they have not given up their commitment to madarasas and the religious education they provide. This balance is usually maintained by sending children to regular school in the morning while providing

madarasa classes in the evenings and on Saturdays. Unfortunately this system often places large amounts of stress on Muslim students who have to cope with two separate work intensive curriculums at the same time (Najma). This stress often leads to a conflict of interest for students, who end up caught between their need to succeed academically and their desire to be good Muslim scholars.

A possible solution to this conflict has arisen in Mombasa within the past two decades. A new type of school, one which teaches both secular and madarasa subjects, has been introduced. Through the course of my research I worked to understand the development of these integrated schools. There are two different types of integrated systems currently operating in Mombasa: the Madarasa Resource Center nursery schools, and independent primary and secondary schools. My project investigates the foundations, operations, and future of these two systems, while also touching on the impact these schools have had on the Muslim communities they serve.

*“The Swahili have become second class citizens: misrepresented and misused.”
-Stambouli*

Settings

My research took place in the coastal city of Mombasa, the fourth largest city in East Africa (Kindy, 1972: ix). Through the course of my study I visited the regional headquarters for the Madarasa Program as well as three different private integrated schools: Abuhureira, Al-fa'tihah, and Alfarsy. These schools are all located in average residential areas on Mombasa Island, although they all hope to move to safer, more spacious locations at some point in the future. Two of the three schools I visited have produced extraordinary academic results in recent years, especially Abuhureira which was referred

to in a recent newspaper article as one of the top private schools in the coastal province (Kibirige). The third cannot be compared to the other schools yet because it is relatively new and therefore has yet to produce a standard 8 class. Despite this impressive record, the government officials I spoke with at the provincial education office knew very little about education within the Muslim community and nothing about integrated Islamic schools. This ignorance can be rationalized by the fact that even though Mombasa's population is mostly Muslim, the local government is staffed primarily by non-Muslims. These government officials often are not even from the coast. They are up-country people who have no awareness of the Swahili's culture or religion. An example of this ignorance was showcased when an educational government official informed me that Mombasa's Muslims do not need a madarasa education because they can receive all the religious education they need in IRE (Islamic Religious Education) (Obiero). This opinion reveals a total lack of understanding about the operations and requirements of the Muslim faith.

If the coast's provincial government does not understand the people it is supposed to be governing, how can it do a good job? This unfortunate state of ignorance can be traced back to colonial times when the undefined and uncertain role of the Swahili within the government led to their marginalization. Because most Swahili at that time had little formal education they were not aware of their rights and were unable to access positions in the government. After independence this trend continued as the coast remained divided and largely insignificant within the larger scheme of Kenya's development (Kindy, 1972: x-xi).

Today many Swahili are frustrated over the negligible role they play within their own country. They complain that the power of the coast is being “diluted” by upcountry people (Faraj), and that they are losing their culture and history in the face of poverty and the need for secular education (Stambouli). Therefore, one of the key issues among the Swahili is the need to educate themselves and their children in a way that will enable them to succeed in Kenya today while also preserving their unique history and civilization. I believe that perhaps the best current solution to this dilemma is a system of integrated schools. These institutions represent a way to balance between the Swahili’s need to adapt to the present while still holding onto the past.

Methodology

My research took two main prongs which focused on the two types of integrated schools operating in Mombasa: the Madarasa Program nursery schools and independent private primary and secondary schools. My main source of information on the Madarasa Program was a report published by the Aga Khan Foundation in 2008. This report details the history of the program, the challenges it has faced, its operating procedures, and its goals for the future. Because of the comprehensive nature of this report, I was able to obtain all the information I needed without many interviews. I did interview one teacher at a school near Mombasa, as well as the program’s regional director who directed me to the report. Because of the time limits placed on me, I chose to not supplement the report with interviews. Instead, I focused my efforts on the independent schools about which nothing has been published.

I visited three different integrated schools throughout the course of my research: Abuhureira, Al-fa'tihah, and Alfarsy. At all three schools I was introduced by someone who had connections there, taken to meet the head master, and then allowed to interview various available individuals. For my interviews I prepared a set of key questions, but I generally let the interviews flow and followed topics that came up naturally. By the end of my research period I had interviewed a total of three headmasters and two deputy headmasters. At Al-fa'tihah I conducted a group interview with the school manager, headmaster, and a founding board member. I also talked with a total of four teachers and four students. Unfortunately I only managed to conduct one very short interview with a parent.

Because of the lack of publications concerned with my topic I did not obtain many written sources and almost none of these directly address integrated schools. Instead I gleaned information from newspaper articles, books, and brochures that indirectly touched on my topic. I was able to obtain a large amount of my background and setting information from books, in particular Themes in Kenyan History and Life and Politics in Mombasa.

*“We want to remove the notion that Islam is difficult to understand.”
–Mrs. Zainah Salim*

Assumptions and Biases

Starting this project I had no idea what I was going to encounter. I knew a small amount of information about the history of the coast's education system and Islamic heritage from various lectures, but this base was minimal, but before starting my research I did not know what Islamic education entailed. I knew it involved memorizing the

Koran and learning Arabic, and I could safely rule out the terrorist breeding rhetoric I had sometimes heard proclaimed in the States, but beyond these two issues I was wandering blindly. Despite this readily admitted ignorance, I entered the project with some definite biases about the nature of the schools. Before my visits it seemed obvious that the schools would be highly inclusive and strictly Muslim; by this I mean that the schools would hire only Muslim teachers and teach only Muslim students. It was shocking, therefore, to discover that almost all the secular teachers at these schools were Christian. I also had a suspicion that I may find the girls and boys at these schools being treated differently. Specifically I was worried that the girls might be treated poorly compared to the boys. I most definitely expected them to be kept separate. While I did find that boys and girls were separated I did not observe any difference in the way they were treated.

Along these same lines I was also nervous about the welcome I would receive as a woman trying to gain entry into a Muslim environment. After my first visit I purchased a headscarf to wear as a cultural aid and a sign of respect, but that could not erase my foreign appearance or change my gender. After two months of operating within the generous Swahili culture I was not too worried about being totally shut out. My main concern was that people in the schools would be resentful of my intrusion or would not be willing to go too deeply into issues because they would think the topics were inappropriate or too intellectual for a girl. While I cannot know what, if any, information was held back during my interviews I am confident that my sex did not interfere with the quality of my research. Every individual I interviewed seemed sincere and willing to share information related to all my questions.

Finally I brought to this project my own biases about the Kenyan education system as a whole. As a product of what may be classified as a mildly enlightened American school system, I had a natural tendency to look down on Kenya's rigid, memorization-based instruction techniques. I expected to find many people who were fed up with this black and white, test-based regime, which often places a great deal of pressure on its students. Instead I found that most people were very pleased with the system. They thought that it improved the minds of the students and kept them sharp. Indeed I found that many people look down on America's education system as much as I looked down on Kenya's, believing our students to be sub par and behind their Kenyan counterparts in most subjects.

Findings and Analysis

"I feel that success in the MRC is due to several things. First there is involvement of the community...we don't tell them what to do but engage them in discussion to solve their own problems." - Hajara Ndayidde, former Director, MRC Uganda, Madarasa Report

Madarasa Program

In the 1980s most primary schools in Kenya required their students to take entrance exams before they were allowed to enroll. This meant that students who had not benefited from early childhood education (ECD) were put at a disadvantage and often excluded from public primary schools. Many Muslim students unfortunately fell into this category because of the distrust felt by parents about private Christian-run preschools and their simultaneous desire to have their children attend madarasa. It did not take long for the Muslim communities to realize the importance of pre-primary education, but even as they began to send their toddlers to preschools, they continued to require that the children

attend madarasa courses as well. This dual system left the children with little time to play. It also often confused the children because the two schools they attended every day were so different. This confusion continued to put young Muslim children at a disadvantage compared with Christian students in the area (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 13).

Something needed to be done to help resolve this problem. An opportunity presented itself in 1982 when a group of leading Muslim figures in Mombasa requested assistance from the Aga Khan, the king of Saudi Arabia, to help solve this problem. Over the next few years the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and Islamic communities worked together to evaluate the situation on the ground, cataloging the needs and resources of Mombasa's Muslim communities (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 15). This investigation discovered two key unused resources in the area: madarasa buildings that were not used in the mornings and local young women who were viable candidates to receive training and become nursery teachers. But even after this report revealed the basic shape an integrated system could take, the Program had obstacles to overcome. It was especially challenging to counter skepticism over the idea of a Shia organization sponsoring the education of Sunni children. Despite this and other challenges, on October 2, 1986, the first Madarasa nursery school at the Liwatoni Mosque opened its doors to its first class of four children (Evans and Bartlett, 2008:18). Unperturbed by the disappointing turnout Bi Swafi ya, the first program director, launched a door-to-door campaign within the community. Two weeks later there were 30 students sitting in the once almost empty classroom.

Before long this first school was followed by many others all along the Kenyan coast and eventually into Tanzania and Uganda. But before this expansion took place,

the early leaders of the program had to determine what exactly would be taught in their nursery schools. Their clear goal was to prepare Muslim children for secular primary schools while also giving them a solid foundation in their faith. How to accomplish this was not as clear. The Madarasa Program founders wanted to promote Islam as a way of life, a faith that should be integrated into daily life, instead of just taught as an academic subject in schools. They also wanted to create a curriculum that took into account the learning styles and needs of young children with an active “doing” focus rather than relying on lectures and memorizations (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 18, 20). With this in mind the Perry Pre-school Curriculum (developed by the High Scope Educational Research Foundation) was adapted to include aspects of the Swahili culture. Bi Swafi worked with various community members and religious leaders to ensure that the new curriculum was acceptable to the local population. The newly adapted curriculum involved teaching Muslim concepts such as *Tawheed*- the oneness of Allah and *Hadith*- oral traditions concerning the life and deeds of Muhammad through child friendly approaches such as stories, pictures, and nature walks (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 21). In addition to Islamic values the curriculum focused on encouraging early literacy and numeracy skills, how to work with peers, and age-appropriate problem solving techniques.

The Madarasa Program not only tries to foster the development of individual children, it also seeks to promote the development of entire communities through encouraging “community ownership” of their schools. Madarasa pre-schools are supposed to be funded, operated, and employed by the communities they operate within. Every Madarasa pre-school goes through a two-three year program during which those

involved in the school's establishment receive training and start-up money from the Madarasa organization. The school then "graduates" and is supposed to sustain itself.

Once a location is accepted into the Madarasa family and ready to start its school, it receives an initial US\$1,000 grant to improve its designated school facility and purchase start-up materials. When the Madarasa Program began, all its funding for start-up grants came from the AKF. Today however they receive support from many different governments, NGOs, and companies, including the European Union, World Bank, Ford Foundation, and recently USAID (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 34). At graduation the schools receive an additional US\$2,500 and they can fundraise on their own up to another US\$2,500 which the Madarasa Program will then match (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 42). This money is then put into sources that will continue to produce funds for the school over time, such as properties which bring in rent. The money raised from start-up funds is supplemented by fees paid by the children's parents. Each school independently determines their school's fees based on what they know parents can pay. For example, Rahama Nursery School, a rural school I visited a few minutes north of Mombasa, charges a 500 shilling admissions fee plus 200/= tuition, 40/= for the feeding program, and 30/= for a general school fund. Sidik Nursery School the next town over, however, charges 200/= admission fee, 150/= tuition, and 40 /= for their feeding program.

In addition to funds the Madarasa Program wants its schools to be managed and staffed by the local community, especially women, as empowering women is one of the program's objectives. Madarasa schools are run by a Pre-school Management Committee composed of eight community members, two of whom must be women. This panel controls the school's funds and development plans. Committee members receive training

in areas such as community mobilization, basic accounting skills, and management (Madarasa Brochure). Most Madarasa schools are staffed by young women from the local community who have been chosen as potential teachers and given training at the Madarasa headquarters. These women often have little to no schooling and few opportunities outside of their teaching positions. Neither teacher at Rahama Nursery School has received training at a teacher's college. Zainab Yusuf, the school's head teacher, completed secondary school, but her assistant teacher did not even reach that level. Apart from lacking of training, the Program's schools often have problems with teachers leaving their jobs when they get married. This had recently happened at Rahama leaving Zainab with only one assistant teacher to help her take care of 50 students (Zainab).

In addition to empowering and training local women, the Madarasa program focuses on reaching into impoverished Muslim areas. When a school is established in a town the aim is to bring more than just a preschool education for that community's children. One way this is accomplished is through the training given to teachers and committee members who otherwise would never have that kind of opportunity. This training and the Program's focus on community ownership gives villages the chance to take their children's education into their own hands. This leads to more empowered and active individuals and populations in areas where people are used to being controlled by the puppet strings of poverty, unable to operate on their own terms and control their own futures. Everyone from the parents and teachers to the students themselves are affected by the presence of the program.

Despite this impressive testimony, the Madarasa Program is constantly facing new challenges related to issues such as gender barriers for women and finding ways to deal with religious diversity as an increasing number of non-Muslim students begin to attend Madarasa nursery schools (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 73). But even as they face these challenges the Madarasa staff continues to look to the future. Their goals include expanding their research efforts, gaining recognition by East African governments as a legitimate Early Childhood Development Training program, and expanding into new geographical regions (Evans and Bartlett, 2008: 88-90). The Madarasa program is also currently developing ways to ease the transition their students must make as they graduate into more traditional primary schools.

“Since the advent of the 8-4-4 system, Muslim students have had a hard time trying to cope with both secular and religious instruction.” -TIQET

Independent Primary and Secondary Schools

Foundations

For the moment the Madarasa Resource Program, leery of spreading itself too thin, has chosen to focus its efforts solely on preprimary education. There are however within Mombasa several integrated primary and even secondary schools that serve the city's Muslim population, including Abuhureira, Al-fa'tihah, and Alfarsy Academies. These schools are a rather recent phenomenon. One of the earliest, Abuhureira Academy, began in 1995, almost a decade after the first Madarasa nursery school was established (Niery). Integrated schools are usually founded by a group of Muslim individuals without any help from outside organizations or the government. The composition of these founding groups is not set in stone. Alfarsy was founded by a board of six men

while a group of five female madarasa teachers formed the impetus behind Al-fa'tihah. Regardless of the gender, age, and situation of these groups, they were all motivated to unite and start a school by anxiety over the education of the Muslim children in their communities. As Swahili children put increasing amounts of time into their secular studies, Muslim leaders and parents began to fear that their Islamic education would be neglected, and consequently that the children would lose their moral compass and Islamic culture (Group Interview). This fear formed a strong motivating factor for the schools' founders.

Operations

This strong drive was and is necessary to keep the young schools going because of the high financial burden placed on integrated schools. They are very expensive to start and maintain because an integrated school is essentially two schools with two separate staffs working under one roof (Amos). After the success seen by Abuhureira, other integrated schools started seeking to replicate its accomplishment, but most faltered within a few years and shut down due to the high costs associated with the system (Kanjam). Unlike the Madarasa nursery schools which integrated Islam into every aspect of the school day, independent integrated schools alternate throughout the day between secular and madarasa subjects. Thus, a school must hire separate teachers for both religious and secular subjects. At Abuhureira, the two sets of teachers are actually regarded as two separate staffs with different headmasters united under the same principal. These two separate "schools" are given equal importance within the school. This does not mean that the two areas are not sometimes antagonistic, each striving for more funds and status, but they are both recognized as important by everyone involved.

One secondary standard 3 student expressed this contrast in an interesting way. He said that, “Religious education is good conduct and morals, secular education is life.” By this he meant that a madarasa education is necessary to becoming a good person who knows how to act while secular education is vital if an individual is going to be able to support himself and make a living. Secular education is a fact of life; religious education is what makes a person live a good life.

In integrated schools the practical and the moral sides are given equal time throughout the course of a school day. An integrated student may have math from 7:15-7:50, Hadith 7:50-8:25, English 8:25-9:00, a break from 9:00-9:20, then Arabic 9:20-10:00 and so on (times taken from a Lower Primary schedule seen at Abuhureira). Most schools start classes early in the day, Alfarsy begins at 6:45am (Rashid), and finish around 4 or 5 in the afternoon. The children are usually given two short breaks and a longer lunch break to split up their 9-10 hours of classes. This intense and lengthy school day is a lot for students to handle, but it is worse for teachers who are at the school even longer than their students in order to grade papers and provide extra tutoring.

In fact, the long hours required of teachers, who usually teach at least two or perhaps three separate subjects, was cited as the primary factor behind the lack of female teachers operating at Abuhureira. Among Abuhureira’s 44 secular and madarasa teachers, there are only two female teachers. Amos Otieno Okech, Headmaster of the secondary school, believes that this imbalance can be attributed to the fact that women, who are busy raising their families, do not have the necessary time or energy to devote to teaching. These two women not only have to teach; they are the only authority figures in the school who are allowed to deal with problems associated with the female students.

For example, if a girl falls down the stairs a male teacher is not supposed to examine her; instead he must send for a woman (Caroline). This ratio places extra strain on Caroline, the school's senior woman teacher, and on her associate and often interferes with their lectures and free time. A similar situation exists at Alfarsy where there are no female primary teachers and girls must go to the nursery school to see a woman for help (female students). This trend of an overwhelmingly male staff was not present at Al-Fa'tihah, but its presence at the other two schools and the possible explanation given for it by school officials illustrates the long hours required by this system.

Despite the long hours, all the teachers interviewed expressed satisfaction with their job and their school. This is especially interesting because the vast majority of the secular teachers are Christian rather than Muslim. Despite their religious differences, these teachers report feeling very comfortable and accepted at work. They speak highly of the schools' lack of discrimination and favoritism, explaining that every child, regardless of wealth, ethnicity, or family, is treated equally (Said). The schools have also respected their teachers by being consistent and punctual with paychecks, and therefore have experienced none of the problems with teacher strikes that have recently plagued public schools. The priority given to paying teachers stems in part from religious ideas. There is a verse in the Koran admonishing Muslims to pay their workers before "the sweat dries on their brow." It also stems partly from practical considerations because teachers who are not paid cause problems and do not work hard (Group Interview). In addition to prompt paychecks integrated teachers enjoy the privilege of having input into their schools. At Abuhureira periodic staff meetings are held where the teachers can make suggestions and raise concerns (Caroline). Beyond feeling respected, teachers of

both religions genuinely enjoy working in a Muslim atmosphere. Caroline at Abuhureira mentioned enjoying the opportunity to learn more about Muslim beliefs and practices. She enrolled her own daughter in the academy because of this learning opportunity in addition to wanting her to benefit from the high academic standards of the school. Caroline's daughter, who graduated last year, was one of only two Christian students at Abuhureira, the only one of the three schools visited that contains any non-Muslim students.

The lack of non-Muslims can easily be explained by the Islamic nature of the schools. All the administrators interviewed made it clear that if a Christian student was to apply to their school they would be given an equal chance to attend as long as they took all the classes and followed school rules concerning dress and behavior. One teacher, however, did admit that perhaps the schools would prefer to keep their student population totally Muslim. While not completely politically correct, the idea that integrated schools would not want significant numbers of non-Muslim students in their schools is logical. Parents want to know that their children at integrated schools are surrounded by fellow Muslims who can support and encourage them and not non-Muslims who might negatively influence them. This Muslim environment, in addition to the time and money saved by the dual program, one of the main draws of integrated schools for parents (Sauda). The Islamic accommodations, like uniforms with head dresses, keeping boys and girls separate, and giving students Fridays off for prayers, that are present within the integrated system appeal to parents. In fact, several teachers complained about the fact that some parents have the idea that their children should be taught proper behavior and discipline in school rather than at home. Parents also like that

the integrated system, despite its long hours, leaves their children with more time to study than attending school and madarasa separately would. A child going to regular school generally only has a couple hours after getting home before they leave for madarasa where they often stay as late as 9:00pm. They are then forced to stay up very late to complete their homework. Integrated students have a long day as well, but they are done by 5:00pm and have the evening to rest and do homework. Parents also often save money by using integrated schools because they only have to pay one school fee rather one for a secular school and one for madarasa.

Funding

Most parents of course would not say that they are saving money as the fees they pay are rather expensive. Al-fa'tihah Academy charged 5,000/= for nursery and lower primary students and 5,500/= for upper primary in 2008. In 2009 they were forced to raise their fees to 6,000/= and 6,500/= in order to keep the school operating (Al-fa'tihah Brochure). Alfarsy charges even more, 7,000/= for its nursery charges and 8,000/= for primary (Rashid). Teachers and administrators defend these numbers however arguing that the schools are worth it because of the quality of education and the dual nature of the services provided. Because all integrated schools are by necessity private (according to the constitution the government isn't even allowed to visit a school where religious education is taking place (Obiero)) all their money is obtained through these fees, with no support coming from the government, NGOs, or any other outside organization. Every school does however have some students attending on various kinds of scholarships. Al-fa'tihah supports several scholarship students out of its small profit, including six students who used to be funded by an outside organization which shut down (Group

Interview). Abuhureira currently has over 20 students receiving scholarships from the Universal Education Board. They are afraid however that, like at Al-fa'tihah, these scholarships will soon stop coming (Salim). Abuhureira also provides incentive scholarships based on academic merit. Any student who can achieve and maintain a score of over 80% on the school's internal testing has all their fees and expenses taken care of by the school. However, there are currently only three students with scores at this level (Amos).

Academics

It may seem that achieving 80% on a test is not a great accomplishment but when one considers the system that these students are operating within it becomes clear why there are only three students at this level. All integrated schools use the national Kenya Institute for Education's approved curriculum for their secular subjects. This national curriculum requires primary school students to take six different subjects: math, English, KiSwahili, science, social studies, and religious studies (including Islamic Religious Education (IRE), Christian Religious Education (CRE), or Hindu Religious Education (HRE)) (Rashid). Secondary students have additional subjects, but they also have some choice in what they take. Each of the government syllabi for these subjects contains a vast amount of information that is difficult to cover within the limited class time available and pushed the students to absorb large quantities of information without giving them time to understand and process that information. When testing comes around the students are then required to regurgitate huge chunks of the information they had been cramming

in all semester. This intense system means that achieving anything above a C is considered an accomplishment.*

In addition to this very rigorous set of subjects, each school has developed its own madarasa curriculum. These independent curriculums were generally developed by each school's madarasa teachers who revise and update them every few years. A regulated and unified Islamic curriculum has not yet reached Kenya although there are some programs available in places like America (Shamma) and some people among the Swahili community have expressed a desire to develop a comprehensive syllabus. In fact Mr. Rashid Kipturn, the headmaster of Alfarsy Academy, hopes in the future to have a unified integrated school madarasa curriculum with exams comparable to the national exams for secular subjects. For now, however, each school conducts internal madarasa exams to evaluate their students in addition to their participation in the national secular exams.

Through these national secular exams, which are only administered to graduating primary and secondary students (standard 8 and 4), it can be seen that the integrated schools are performing very well. In 2008 Abuhureira's graduating class contained 58 students whose scores included 2 As, 15 B+s, and 13 Bs (Amos). No student scored lower than a C+, the minimum score required to be eligible to enter university. Alfarsy performed even better with 5 As, 2 A-s, 6 B+s, and nothing below a C+ (Rashid) among their graduating class of 20. There were no results available for Al-fa'tihah because they have not yet had a graduating class. These impressive results have led to increased popularity and enrollment for Abuhureira and Alfarsy. Abuhureira in particular has

* This information was gathered through observation and conversations with my home stay families in Taita and Mombasa and through conversations with SIT staff members.

experienced rapid growth. In 2007 the graduating standard 4 class contained 30 students. This year, 2009, there will be 60, and next year they are anticipating 80 (Caroline).

The outstanding marks posted by the students at these schools are a testament to the hard work of the students and teachers involved. Most people involved in the schools admit that the dual schedule can be “hectic” for students, but they believe that the challenge of shifting between secular and Islamic studies sharpens the students and improves their overall performance. Kanjam likens the students to computers, asserting that they memorize faster and retain information better because of their Koranic memorization requirements. Rashid believes that the alternating subjects prevents boredom and keeps students on their toes. While the students may not be as enthusiastic about their work load as their teachers they seem at least resigned to it. Several students mentioned staying up late to finish homework, never seeing family or hanging out with friends, but instead of looking for sympathy they proceeded to state that the long hours were just part of life- the price they have to pay for success in the future. In fact the students had only positive things to say about the integrated system. The girls especially emphasized that they loved going to school within a Muslim setting where they received proper religious training and were able to behave according to their cultural mandates. The boys, not surprisingly, wanted to be allowed more contact with girls, but they seemed content overall. None of the students could think of any concrete ways in which they wished the school was different, and given the chance, none of them said they would change to attending regular school and madarasa.

Challenges

The easygoing acceptance exhibited by students was not always present among their teachers and administrators. While they were proud of their schools and largely content with their jobs they were also very aware of the challenges present in their institutions. Some of the teachers mentioned the heavy work load and long hours they tackle each day. This is especially a problem for secondary teachers as they work to prepare their increasingly large standard 4 classes for their finals. During the last three months leading up to the national exams, Caroline reports that all the secondary school teachers work together to grade papers and conduct final study sessions above and beyond their normal duties. Another problem faced at Abuhureira is the need to enforce the use of Kiswahili and English as the languages of communication in a student population dominated by Somali tribe people. About 90% of the student body is Somali and it is difficult to prevent them from conversing in their mother tongue (Neiry). The schools also often have issues with parents who do not understand the amount of work and time required of the students. This is especially an issue with international students who are not used to the Kenyan system. There have also been some students who find it hard to mingle and study with students from regular schools because of differences in the pace of learning and the topics emphasized by the regular and integrated systems (Amos).

In recent years new challenges have arisen as the schools, especially Abuhureira, become more successful and well-known. An increase in the number of transfer students, for example, has forced schools to be creative in their scheduling. This is because every child that enters into a school's system after standard 1 is tested to determine his or her proper placement. Transfer students are often on different levels for their secular and madarasa subjects and have to be caught up with special classes in the subjects they are

lacking in. There are also sometimes confrontations with parents who want their children to be placed in a level that they are not ready for (Said). Finally there are always questions and issues concerning where and how a school's money should be spent.

Benefits / Community Impact

The challenges associated with operating an integrated system though are small compared with the possible rewards. Every person involved with the integrated school system believes that they are working to help not only their students but also the Muslim community as a whole. They aspire to produce students who are morally upright and can serve as an example to those around them as they also succeed in the secular world. The staff at Al-fa'tihah envisions their children as emissaries for good Muslim living within their communities. A common picture painted by teachers was that of a doctor who is also an imam (Group Interview). When they teach a child the proper way to pray or that cheating is wrong they expect that child to take what they have learned home with them and pass it onto their parents and siblings.

Eventually the children will start families of their own and pass their knowledge onto their children. By teaching children about their rights, the schools also ensure that the students, especially the girls, will not allow themselves to be abused or taken advantage of (Group Interview). In short integrated schools operate on the ideal of producing all-around good Muslim citizens who respect others, work diligently and honestly, and serve as examples within their families and communities. The schools also hope to provide their students with additional opportunities by opening the door of Islamic education to them (Salim). Most institutes of higher Islamic education are taught in Arabic. Each year, some of Abuhureira's graduating class goes on to attend these

Muslim universities and take jobs within the Islamic field perhaps as madarasa teachers themselves.

In addition to the positive impact integrated schools have on their students and the ripple effect this has on the surrounding community, there are more direct effects produced by a school's presence. For example, many integrated schools have community outreach projects which involve activities such as cleaning up the neighborhoods around the school (Amos). On a more abstract level, successful integrated schools bring hope and inspiration to their areas. The schools and their successful graduates prove that it is possible to succeed in both religion and secular education. The central locations of the schools mean that many families who once had to send their kids far away for school can now send them down the street. This proximity combined with the schools' strong Islamic atmosphere has encouraged more families to educate their girls, who may have otherwise been largely confined to their homes until their marriage (Neiry). The success and dedication of the students has even inspired some of their less educated parents to return to school, taking evening courses in the same classrooms their children occupy during the day (Said).

Future Goals

Though the effects of integrated schools detailed above may seem complex and somewhat extravagant their goals for the future are rather simple. Al-fa'tihah, the youngest of the three schools, hopes to increase its student body enough to be able to hold separate classes for boys and girls. It also is desperately trying to find a nicer facility in a better area of town as their current location is far from ideal. The hope is that with a better building they will be able to attract new students, especially internationals,

and perhaps some benefactors who will help their school continue to develop (Group Interview). Abuhureira hopes to expand into a boarding school. They want to open their school to all Kenyans, not just coastal people. In fact, the school has already purchased a 25 acre farm for this purpose but construction has stalled due to a lack of funding (Amos and Said). Alfarsy Academy far surpasses the other two schools in terms of expectations. Their unabashed desire, shared by staff and students alike, is to be best the school in Africa (Rashid). Although not stated as directly at Abuhureira or Al-fa'tihah I believe that this goal of becoming the best is shared by all Mombasa's integrated schools. Their commitment to academic and religious excellence and achievement is truly impressive and as they develop and become more well-known I am confident the integrated system will continue to spread throughout the coast and Eastern Africa.

“A robust education system must be able to satisfy the mental, physical, spiritual, and moral development of the society, as well as prepare its members for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of social living” -TIQET

Conclusion

Despite the coast's large Islamic population, an integrated education system that caters to the needs of the coast's Muslims has been needed since the arrival and acceptance of Western education in the 19th century. Only in the past few decades, however, have two different systems developed dedicated to providing the area's children with both a secular and religious education. The Madarasa Program focuses on early childhood education and community development in poor Islamic areas along the coast, incorporating Muslim principles and ideas into an activity based child-oriented teaching

system. The program works to foster community development and empowerment while also promoting women's rights, religious tolerance, and children's health.

Once children graduate from Madarasa Program nursery schools their only chance to obtain an integrated education is to attend a private primary school. These independent schools alternate throughout the day between secular and Islamic subjects, maintaining a separate staff for each. Although this mixed schedule can be difficult for students to handle, the time saved by attending one school and the draw of a school operating on Muslim principles has brought increasing numbers of students to these institutions.

Mombasa's Madarasa Program and independent integrated schools developed and operate in very different ways but they both ultimately serve the same purpose of empowering and uplifting Muslim children, their families, and their communities. While the Madarasa Program emphasizes upfront its desire to promote active, stimulated Muslim children and its community-building principles, independent schools take a more circular route. The Madarasa Program is essentially a nonprofit organization. It was founded by the local community with the idea of promoting the welfare of Muslim individuals and villages through early childhood education. Independent schools, on the other hand, operate as businesses. They serve their area by providing a commodity (integrated education) that is desired by the surrounding population. Because this population is willing to pay for that commodity, the schools are able to maintain their operations.

This essential divide between the Madarasa Program and individual Islamic schools explains many of the differences present between the two institutions. For

example it explains the fact that the Madarasa Program is committed to assisting impoverished Muslim populations while independent schools primarily serve the middle to upper class Muslims who can afford their school fees. This springs from the fact that the Madarasa system receives foreign aid (whose sources are interested in charity work, not educating the relatively well off), while the independent schools are completely self-reliant and have to stand alone financially.

The differences between these two systems do not, however, negate the similarity of their effects. These schools are both working to reverse the marginalization and lack of education that Kenya's coast has experienced since the colonial years. The coastal people were the first in Kenya to achieve formal education and all the advantages that come with it. Their natural desire to maintain their culture and faith in the face of a foreign educational system lost them the advantage they once had and relegated them to the bottom of the Kenya's social and political systems. But by incorporating their indispensable Islamic education into what was once a strange foreign system, I believe that the Swahili have taken back what they lost with the arrival of the Europeans. Instead of merely submitting to the new order and losing their cultural and spiritual foundation, they have mixed the two in a way that, despite its challenges, allows them to maintain their connection to the past while also giving them hope for the future. The mixing of these two entities is not simple or easy, but in the end it is worth it because of the hope and anticipation it brings: the possibility of producing students capable of becoming doctors and worthy of being imams.

Recommendations

Things I would have done differently

If I could do this project again I would, from the beginning, try to contact more parents and other individuals that are not directly involved in the schools. When I began, I concentrated only on speaking with teachers and administrators assuming that it would be easy to get a hold of parents later on. That was not the case. When I asked about meeting some parents at the end of my second week, I was informed that most of them don't know English, some don't even speak Kiswahili. If I had started asking about meeting parents and pushing to get introduced to them from the start, then I could have interviewed parents and school staff at the same time. I also would have liked to speak with individuals that were not involved in the schools at all. Individuals who are invested in the schools have natural biases and might hesitate to tell me things they disapprove of or might try to make things seem better than they are.

Recommendations for future studies

There are several interesting studies that could follow this one. An obvious choice would be to compare integrated schools in Mombasa with those in other areas, although this would be difficult to accomplish within the ISP period. While conducting my research I was intrigued by the differences between the boys and girls I interviewed. The girls, even though they were younger, were more articulate and helpful than the boys. This trend has been something I have observed throughout my time in Kenya and would be an interesting phenomenon to investigate further. Finally, I am very curious to know where integrated secondary students, like those from Abuhureira, go when they

graduate and how their career paths are different from or similar to those of nonintegrated Muslim students and those of Christian students.

Appendix

Student Body and Staff

Al-fa'tihah

Students (nursery and primary) - 348

Secular Teachers- 28

Madarasa Teachers- 10

Alfarsy

Students (nursery and primary) - 380

Teachers- 35

Abuhureira

Primary

Students- 639

Teachers- 22

Secondary

Students- 290

Secular Teachers- 14

Madarasa Teachers- 8

Rough Schedule- Al-fa'tihah

Lower Primary

7am-9am: memorize Koran

9am-4pm: alternate madarasa and secular subjects

Upper Primary

7am-8:25am: memorize Koran

8:25-11am: secular courses

11am-2:30pm: madarasa courses

2:30-4pm: secular courses

*All- 9:35-10am: break

12:20-1:20pm: lunch

Term Dates

I - January 5- April 3

II - May 4 - July 31

III - September 7 - December 4

Persons Interviewed

1. Najma Rashid. 3/16/09. Madarasa Resource Center Office, Mombasa. Regional Program Director of Madarasa Resource Center.
2. Zainab Yusuf. 3/17/09. Rahama Nursery School. Head teacher.
3. Kanjam Victor. 4/13/09. Abuhureira Academy, Mombasa. Teacher- Level 6 Math, English, Social Studies.
4. Caroline. 4/13/09. Abuhureira Academy, Mombasa. Teacher- Secondary School English, Geography.
5. Silas Niery. 4/13/09. Abuhureira Academy, Mombasa. Head Teacher of Primary School.
6. Rehema Athuman Bruno. 4/16/09. Al-fa'tihah Academy, Mombasa. Secular teacher- primary level.
7. Zeinab. 4/16/09. Al-fa'tihah Academy, Mombasa. Ustadha- madarasa teacher.
8. Group interview- 4/16/09. Al-fa'tihah Academy. Mrs. Zainah H. Salim- School Director, Madina Mu'min- School Manager, Fahima- School Committee Founding Member, Abdirisak Maulid- School Head Master.
9. Amos Otieno Okech. 4/17/09. Abuhureira Academy. Head Master- Secondary School.
10. Salim Ali. 4/17/09. Abuhureira Academy. Deputy Head Master- Secondary School.
11. Said Ali. 4/17/09. Abuhureira Academy. Deputy Head Master- Primary School.
12. 2 male students- both Secondary Standard 3. 4/17/09. Abuhureira Academy.¹
13. Rashid Kipturn. 4/20/09. Alfarsy Academy. Head Master.
14. 2 female students- both Primary Form 8. 4/20/09. Alfarsy Academy.*
15. Mr. Obiero. 4/21/09. Provincial Education Headquarters, Mombasa. Provincial Quality Assurance Officer.

¹ Names of students interviewed not given to protect their privacy

16. Sauda. 4/22/09. Her home, Mombasa. Parent of a Standard 3 female student at Alfarsy Academy.

Persons interviewed by Katie Barry

-Nairobi SIT student conduction research on political and ethnic identity among the Swahili

1. Faraj Dumila. 4/11/09. Mombasa.
2. Stambouli. 4/13/09. Mombasa.
3. Murshid. 4/16/09. Mombasa.

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