Built Environments and Implication on Gender Identities in Gede Archaeological Site

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Abstract

For decades, the archaeological work of the Swahili Civilization has mainly concentrated on exploring city-state economic and political dynamics. This paper explores how gender roles were formed, maintained, negotiated, and re-negotiated through time and space in Gede City. Unlike other Swahili city-states, Gede was located around two miles away from the shores of the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, the city was characterized by security walls, stone houses, mosques, and tombs typical of Swahili City states such as Kilwa. The study employed several data collection methods: archival research, a survey, a re-examination of collected materials, and excavation of the Gede archaeological site. Since the study aimed to examine gender roles across different social classes, three areas were excavated based on their spatial distribution. Thus, the areas were roughly categorized as belonging to elite, middle-class, and lower-class structures. These structures were located in the inner, second, and outer walls of Gede City, respectively. Key findings show that gender identities differed considerably along classes in Gede archaeological site. For instance, the women of the elites and middle class were active participants in Gede's international trade through the production and consumption of imported goods. This participation corresponded with the commercialization of Gede households, especially in elite' areas where they hosted international traders. On the other hand, in middle-class houses, women concentrated on running light industries to supply goods to the urban community. Thus, they were able to afford exotic goods like their elite counterparts. Lastly, the gender roles of the lower class entailed subsistence-gendered roles with little participation in Gede formal commerce. Interestingly, gender roles in Gede were dynamic in nature and response to cultural diffusion, the spread of Islam, the intensification of trade, the diversification of subsistence patterns, and urbanization. Therefore, these findings demonstrate the centrality of gender in the reconstruction of the social lives of the Swahili Civilization.

Introduction

The issue of gender and sex as social categories has been central to the study of humans in pre-historic and contemporary times. Initially, anthropologists attributed gender categories to what they perceived as essentialist differences in biology (Moore, 2013; Green, 2020; Schall et al., 2020). Murdoch (1949) argued that men had superior physical strength, which meant they undertook strenuous work such as quarrying, lumbering, mining, and clearing land. On the other hand, women were more involved in domestic chores such as fetching water and cooking. Jacob and Stern (1952), while employing the same thinking of biological determinism, opined that since women were child bearers, they could not venture into highly mobile activities such as hunting.

The same argument was put forward by Hoebel (1958), who concluded that certain behaviors were biologically determined, albeit with cultural modifications. Keesing (1966) went further and outlined what he believed as biological differences based on genetics, such as men being more aggressive and women passive. These thoughts influenced the early interpretation of archaeological data. For instance, it was automatically assumed that men carried out hunting. Overall, most human inventions, such as animal domestication, were depicted as men's affairs while women were confined to domestic chores.
Nonetheless, after the 1960s, the growth of feminist movements started raising issues by questioning the essentialism of gender, sex, and other social categories (DuBois & Shattuck-Heidorn, 2021).

With the increase in the interrogation of non-western societies in the mid-twentieth century, gender gained prominence. This new interest in gender archaeology emanated from the development of feminist and queer theoretical frameworks, which aimed to address the interpretation of archaeological evidence (Alberti & Back Danielsson, 2014). Therefore, there was an impetus to reduce generalization in archaeological interpretation. As observed through ethnography, gender roles vary considerably from one society to another, as documented by Levi-Straus work on South American indigenous communities (Rubin, 1975; Garofalo & Garvin, 2020). That is, the essentialism of gender roles has been debunked, as documented in current literature ((Voss, 2008; Lozano Rubio, 2011; Sørensen, 2013; Brown, 2014).

Rubin (1975) argued that gender was a cultural aspect while sex was biological. According to her observation, she perceived gender as a cultural aspect used to undermine women. In other words, the past explanation of women's insubordination based on their sex was culturally constructed. It was during this period that archaeologists started to interrogate gender issues in antiquity critically. Therefore, new inquiries started to take shape, with some scholars asking, "were they all men?" (Geller, 2009). They borrowed from anthropologists who had pointed out androcentric biases in interpreting gender (Rogers, 1978). That is, archaeological and anthropological interpretation was based on the personal experiences of researchers, which corresponded closely with the western ideology of gender roles.

Conkey and Spector (1984), in their seminal paper, "Archaeology and Study of Gender "assert that androcentric perspectives have ignored women's contributions. That is, what was perceived as an objective presentation of gender was false since they were based on untested and unverified adaptive behavior. In the case of gender roles, archaeologists interpreted them using contemporary thinking that was not backed by data. This was detrimental to the archaeologist as it affected other areas of archaeological inquiry, such as household organization, division of labor, and social status are almost always anchored on gender (Conkey & Gero, 1991). Butler (2002) cautioned against dividing gender and sex as two entities. She postulated that sex and gender identities were anchored on cultural context. The implication is that sex and gender as social categories are defined by culture (Wilson, 2019). In the archaeological context, gender roles were often recreated using the personal experiences of researchers and generalizations (Alberti et al., 2006). As such, hypotheses such as "man the hunter" became a dominant depiction of past societies. This approach of examining gender roles from androcentric views dominated archaeological inquiry in the past (Gilchrest, 2012).

This argument of questioning archaeological methods and interpretation concerning gender elicited criticism from mainstream archaeologists concerned about losing objectivity in what they term "historical revisionism (Alberti, 2006). Despite gender being fundamental in studies of household organization, division of labor, social hierarchies, ideology, and production, it has little attention in East African archaeology. This is despite it being central to the human social organization (Onjala, 1994). Conkey and Tringham (1995) outlined what was wrong and missing in archeological inquiries. Most importantly, they
pointed out androcentric biases in interpretations of data. Gilchrist (1991) gave insights into conceptualizing gender and sex in archaeological inquiry. Butler (1990) rejected the essentialism of biological sex since it denied humans a chance to transform themselves. These assertions have been supported by empirical evidence that shows biological sex is not always the basis of "female" and "male" (Moore, 1993). Meskell (1996) points out the importance of perceiving sex as fluid rather than a normative female-male dichotomy. The implication is that there are no universal experiences of gender categories.

Hill (1998) warned that any attempts to create exclusive feminist theories in the study of gender in archaeology might lead to isolation since some scholars do not identify as feminist scholars. She also cautioned against the overt politicization of archaeology as suggested by post-processual archaeologists (Shanks & Tilley, 1987). Sorenson (2000) went further and asserted that gender archaeology has to be dissociated with political overtones and associations that border on activism. Nonetheless, some scholars have argued that ignoring feminist approaches in archaeology is catastrophic (See Conkey & Gero, 1997; Wylie, 1997, 2007, 2012). Based on the above observation, I borrow skibor and Schiffer (1995), who argued that gender could be studied using the same theories employed in other archaeological questions.

Meskell (1995) has lamented that examining gender as conceptualized by feminists may lead to bias which gender anthropologists have pointed out. Therefore, gender study is an examination of men and women relations in antiquity and is not necessarily the study of one gender per se (Conkey & Spector, 1984). In this paper, I incorporate processual, post-processual, and feminist approaches in interpreting archaeological data from Gede. The aim was to minimize generalizations that have plagued archaeological gender studies in the past. To that end, the centrality of gender studies in archaeology is anchored on questions asked, inferences made, and interpretation through androcentric views. Therefore, the androcentric bias can be eliminated using existing theoretical frameworks drawn from evolutionary, processual, post-processual, and feminist perspectives.

Since gender archaeologist advocates for the explicit theoretical framework as a departure from the traditional approach that generalizes gender roles based on contemporary experiences (Wylie, 2007). It is fundamental to formulate a methodological paradigm anchored on the materiality of "gender actions. Therefore, in this paper, I incorporate a multivariate approach as first conceptualized by Hill (1998) in investigating gender identities in the study of the Gede archaeological site. This approach advocates for using different types of evidence to investigate gender identities. This strategy aims to use two or more lines of evidence and formulate a hypothesis that is tested against the data. Incorporating more than methods minimizes generalization while inferring gender identities in antiquity. To that end, I employ spatial analysis in examining gender through different signatures such as architecture, division of labor, distribution of gendered materials, and usage of public and private spaces. As such, I strived to interrogate how gender identities were materials in the above-identified parameters, which I refer to as signatures.
Subsequently, gender as a social category is fluid in nature; in this paper, I conceptualize gender as a social construction that influenced (in) access to resources in Gede society. Furthermore, I perceive gender to have been closely correlated to sex in the Gede context. That is, the biological sex of an individual was the primary determinant of an individual gender and subsequent roles. In this case, I conceptualize access to resources as dictated behaviors of an individual by society in terms of space they can access or activities they can undertake. In this paper, I aimed to document how gendered actions differed in private and public spaces. Also, how gender roles varied between social classes in Gede society. This trajectory of differentiating gender actions in private and public spaces has been informed by the realization that gender identities are sometimes expressed in private and public spaces. On the other hand, gender experiences differ when examined through the lenses of social classes.

This paper aimed to examine how gender identities are expressed as reflected in material evidence from Gede archaeological site. The paper was premised on the assumption that an individual gender often leads to (in) access to specific resources. Therefore, attempts were made to correlate gender identities with specific materials. The inquiry’s base was how gender identities in Gede were formed, negotiated, and re-negotiated through time and space and its implications in the archaeological record. The paper is divided into five major parts. The first part introduces the study by highlighting various debates examining gender in antiquity. The second part explores the geographical area of the Gede archaeological site. The third section outlines the methods that were employed in the collection of data. The fourth part presents and discusses the result, while the last part concludes the study by highlighting the main arguments of the study.

Geography of the Study Area

Gede is an archaeological site that lies along the Indian Ocean along the Kenyan coast (Fig. 1.0). As such, Gede is among the city-states associated with the Swahili civilization that stretches from Somalia to Mozambique, covering a distance of over 2500 km in length (Chami et al., 2002; Ichumbaki & Pollard, 2021; Pawlowicz, 2019). Surprisingly, the civilization did not stretch beyond fifteen kilometers inward (Fleisher et al., 2015). The coastal people had contacts and traded with hinterland communities (Chami, 1994). The climate geography of Gede is classified broadly as that of the Swahili coast. Gede lies within East Africa mangrove forests and is captured by Indian Ocean monsoon winds. Gede, situated around ten miles South of Malindi, Kilifi County, is one of the most magnificent cities associated with Swahili civilization along the East Africa Coast.

The name Gedi or Gede, as it is commonly known, is a Galla name, a Bantu ethnic group that lives along river Tana, which is about 85 miles away from Gede but adjacent to the Indian Ocean coast and it means ‘precious’ (Kirkman, 1974). Though the name Gede is of African descent, the architecture and materials collected from the site show a mixture of African and Arabic culture. Nevertheless, like other coastal regions, Gede was occupied by native African people who interacted with people from other areas, including the Middle East, and who formed the Swahili civilization (Fleisher et al., 2015; Ichimbaki, 2017). The Swahili culture and contact with other regions spun over two millennia (Chami, 1999b; Ichimbaki,
The local communities interacted with other cultures, and the intensification of trade at the end of the first millennium set up the urbanization process in Swahili Coast (Fleisher et al., 2015).

Therefore, the Gede site was established by Swahili people who borrowed some cultures, including Islam, from foreign traders (Pawlowicz, 2017). Historically, the site is unknown, and by the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese lived in Malindi, there was no mention of Gede in their writings (Matveiev, 1984). Kirkman (1974) speculates that the site may have been formed after a ruling family feud in Malindi; hence a breakaway group settled in Gede. Thus, we cannot reconstruct the history of Gede in isolation since it was a product associated with other Swahili civilization city-states such as Kilwa, Mombasa, and Lamu, among others. The city was established around the 11th century, and by the 14th century, it was in the golden age when some of its mosques and palaces were built (Baumanova & Smejda, 2017; Pawlowicz, 2019). The big mosque is located on the innermost side of the city. Besides the big mosque, other mosques are small, so it is possible they were private. The palace is adjacent to the great mosque, and it seems it was not roofed but open courtyards, typical architecture at the time, including other coastal city-states such as Kilwa. The palace had private quarters with latrines and baths, which members of the royal family used. The palace’s open courts are divided and interpreted as gendered.

Gede, history is closely connected to the history of the Swahili coast, entailed maritime trade and other linkages with Bantu and Cushitic communities that lived in the interior (Chami, 1999a; Kusimba & Waltz, 2018). Archaeological evidence shows a combination of local and foreign goods traded from Asia, including China, Persia, and Arabia, among other areas (Kirkman, 1974; Chami, 2019; Pawlowicz, 2017). As such, monsoon winds favored it, which made it possible to sail to the Swahili coast and back within the same year (Ichimbaki & Pollard, 2021). The availability of trading goods, including ivory. Ambergris, shells, leopard skin gold, among others (Matveiev, 1984). Mangrove forests provided timber for shipbuilding and export to Arabia (Spear, 2000).

Methodology

The study relied on archival research, survey, re-examining excavated materials, and actual site excavation. The archival research was undertaken to establish what has already been done to reconstruct gender roles in Gede. The survey of the site was insightful in mapping areas with great potential for identifying gender identities in antiquity. The re-examinations of already excavated materials were undertaken concerning the new question of examining gender identities. This was done because no previous studies emphasized gender roles on the site. Lastly, excavation was undertaken due to inadequate data already excavated in previous research. During the survey of Gede, attempts were made to identify houses that functioned as basic units of identity and public spaces. The rationale was to explore the material implication of gender, for instance, at the house level of households in specific social hierarchies, and compare them with others.
As such, test pits were done in areas suspected or proved to possess the above characteristics in Gede. Therefore, four test pits were dug, two inside the wall and two outside the wall, to understand the spatial patterning of social identities. From the initial findings, a total of six trenches were excavated, with one outside the wall and others inside the wall. The six trenches were excavated within the areas hypothesized to be crucial in examining how gender identities were experienced and practiced in the Gede archaeological site. For analysis purposes, the house excavated in the affluent area has named the house of “Mbarak”; the second area, which was the industrial area for the production of beads, was named “house of Khadija”; and the last area was referred as “house of Katana.” In the house of Mbarak, four trenches were excavated, which included the kitchen, the dining room, the toilet, and the backyard. In the other houses, which were made of wattle and daub, a single trench was dug in each house.

Results And Discussion

Gede, like other city-states located along the Indian Ocean, is one of the most preserved sites of pre-colonial Swahili civilization (Kirkman, 1964). On the academic front, Gede offers insights into the cosmopolitan life of the Swahili people civilization, especially subsistence strategies which relied heavily on maritime trade with other regions such as Persia, India, and China (Kusimba, 1999). For instance, Kilwa and Mombasa city-states thrived almost entirely by offering services to Indian Ocean traders. The Indian Ocean maritime trade brought great wealth to these city-states and created elaborate social structures visible from cultural remains. On the other hand, Gede emerged a century after the second millennium's start and reached its apogee from the 14th-century current era before declining two centuries later. At its peak, Gede had contact from different regions, as evidenced by archaeological materials from the site, such as China, Arabia, Persia, and India.

In the last seven decades, archaeological inquiry of Swahili civilizations has gone through phases where the discourse has shifted to a long different theme. Initially, there was a consensus that Swahili civilization originated in the Middle East through maritime trade (Kirkman, 1974). The conclusion was through the assumption that Swahili civilization which did not extend into the hinterlands, was a product of Arabs settled in the coastal region (Wynne-Jones & Fleisher, 2015). These assumptions were from the archaeological inquiry that concentrated on large pre-colonial Swahili cities and their exotic material remains which were foreign.

The second wave of inquiry concentrated on the life of elites, especially rulers and merchants (Kirkman, 1964; Chittick, 1984). Even so, these studies explored the political and economic life of elite communities without necessarily venturing into their social lives. Over time, African roots were recognized in the Swahili civilization, characterized by innovation. However, in the last two decades, attempts have been made to shift debates to explore the lives of ordinary people. Various researchers have explored the commoners who lived in the Swahili cities in the last few decades (e.g., Chami, 1994; 1998; Kusimba & Walz, 2018; Pradines, 2019). These studies were informed by realities of cosmopolitan life that entail different social groups living together where the centrality of exchange and trade is essential. In Swahili
cities, where maritime trade was a significant economic activity, creating a supporting system comprised of different social groups offering services was essential.

Nonetheless, gender as a social identity has not been tackled inclusively by the past researchers of the site. This does not mean there was no mention of different identity groups that lived in Gede in the past, especially commoners, elites, and women. Kirkman (1974) had already named one of the areas of "The Palace" as a women's court, and there are abundant materials that can be described as items used by women. In the following sub-sections, I discuss how gender was experienced and expressed in Gede and its implication in the archaeological record. I discuss how gender identities were expressed in architecture, division of labor, and usage of public and private spaces. I also discuss how the intensification of international trade and the spread of Islam influenced how gender identity was expressed in Gede's archaeological site.

Build Environment and Gender

A corpus of literature now exists concerning the created human environment, including architecture and social implications (Hudson, 2014; Rodning, 2010; Steadman, 1996; Bsir & Zrigui,2018). Overall, this has led to the growth of ‘architectural’ and ‘house’ archaeology as sub-disciplines in the last few years (Morris & Betty, 2000). Generally, debates persist concerning the architecture of Swahili civilization in terms of influence by the external world (Pawlowicz, 2019). Currently, the archaeological record shows that the Swahili civilization stone building emerged after the end of the first millennia (Pradines, 2003). The association of stone building and the spread of Islam does not hold as some of the mosques before that were built using wattle and daub (Moustakim & Chami, 2019; Fleisher, 2019). Therefore, the use of coral for building and stone masonry corresponds with the expansion of the Indian Ocean trade rather than the diffusion of these architectural techniques from the Arab world. This paper argues that architectural changes were a response to economic development and the accumulation of surplus capital, creating a conducive environment for the invention. In addition, these developments had an impact on social organization, including gender identities.

Perter Garlake's (1966) was a pioneer in examining Swahili architecture from Mozambique to Mogadishu. His study was followed by Thomas Wilson's (1982) study of the spatial layout of Swahili towns, settlement size, and structural components. Also, Linda Donley (1987, 1990) conducted an ethnoarchaeological study on the social structure of Swahili houses in Lamu. In the last decade, Fleisher (2013) studied the usage of open spaces and the monumentality of Songo Mnara in Tanzania. LaViolette (2013) explored wattle and daub as well as stone houses and implications on social identities. This study narrows down on Gede's architecture and how it was reflective of gender as an identity. As hypothesized earlier, this paper correlates materials with a specific gender. As such, architectural designs are conceptualized as gender signatures in this study. The study combines evidence from previous materials excavated by various gender scholars, especially James Kirkman and Stephane Pradines, who excavated Gede in the 1950s and 2000s.
This study investigates social and symbolic dynamics by exploring how public architectural designs reflect gender identity. Nevertheless, some of the architectural designs diffused from different areas, and Swahili people customized them to create unique designs. Portuguese sources note Kilwa stone and mud houses having narrow streets, a similar trait in some of the areas in Gede. The stone-walled areas also had stone benches, indicating how critical public spaces were in a commerce center like Kilwa at the time. They also noted palaces with at least one or two floors showing the sophistication of Kilwa would match other areas of the world at the time. On the Swahili coast, Gede ruins are one of the most well-preserved buildings in the region, with some of the walls still at their original height (Pawlowicz, 2018).

Thus, the architecture of Gede was set up to reflect their values, including political and social ideologies. The evidence points out that the society of Gede was relatively inclusive from architectural evidence. The religious and political spaces were constructed to cater to the two genders. The fact that the city invested heavily in the construction of religious spaces with women's spaces as per Islam doctrines as well as women's courts where decisions and arbitration matter was quite a phenomenon. For instance, the palace, which acted as the center of political power, had women's quarters where they could debate their matters (Kirkman, 1974).

The architecture of Gede resembles some other parts of the Swahili civilization along the coast. Some architecture was characterized by the spread of Islam, evidenced by the increase of mosques construction at the beginning of the second Millennium second era (Fleisher, 2019). Arabic sources paint somewhat contrasting narrations of Swahili people, whom they perceive as different from them in terms of their culture, which sometimes borders on romanticism. The Arab writers claim that waswahili people lived mainly in clay glass/palm-thatched houses. These houses formed villages and, in some instances, a town that practiced a mixed economy that was characterized by hunting, fishing, and agriculture. Inevitably, those villages close to the ocean developed more rapidly, and their architecture also entailed stone houses. In the case of Gede, the town was complex and included the development of fortified buildings at the center.

The architectural design of Gede incorporated their cultural and commerce consideration as evidenced by the general layout of buildings and public and private spaces. The city acted as a trading center for local and foreign ware. At the same time, spaces were used to form, renegotiate and reinvent social identities in response to changing commercial and cultural landscape. The architecture, therefore, reflects the emergence of Swahili elites as fueled by local, regional and international trade and Islamization, one of the products of foreign contacts. Therefore, the general layout of the city is reflective of affluence associated with the Indian Ocean trade leading to the accumulation of massive wealth by individuals.

Moreover, Gede, just like city-state architecture, reflects their political dynamics by demonstrating a close correlation between the political and economic elites. The spatial patterning of public buildings is closely associated with mosques which shows how Islam played an essential role for the elites. The elites maintained their social status by building massive stone houses with amenities such as private baths and water well. Their homes also contained courtyards where politics and commerce were discussed. Ibn
Battuta claimed that in Mogadishu City state, merchants were hosted in local brokers' private homes during their stay. As such, private homes were dominated by what would have been perceived as public amenities as they were used to host foreign merchants. This was probably why private homes in Gede had private wells and some self-contained rooms.

In Gede, building entailed private and public spaces with different dynamics regarding how gender was experienced and practiced. Since the two were fragmented into classes, architectural designs, including how spaces were used, corresponded with the social organizations of these societies (Gensheimer, 2017). As such, Gede society had elaborate public and private spaces usage, which reflected their ideology on social identities. These elite spaces were not as they were accessed by support groups who were crucial in the quotidien maintenance of these spaces. Goffman (1979) suggests that spatial metaphors usually reflect social structure divisions micro ecologically. The implications are profound in the long run because the space loses its 'neutrality,' representing certain ideologies and exerting some form of influence.

Mathews (1980), in her integration of community actions, argues that spaces and spatial constituents influence identity actions. In other words, space usually influences people in it and vice versa. For instance, public recreation area may change to a trading area in specific periods. The correlation between space and individuals also extends to social groups that are sometimes pre-determined (See Ardener, 1978).

Since Gede was an urban center, the town was dominated by both public and private buildings. This section discusses the architectural designs of public buildings concerning how gender identity was expressed and maintained in public life. As such, an extensive city survey was undertaken to establish to what extent open spaces and public buildings were areas where gender differences were expressed, maintained, and renegotiated. Kirkman (1974) claims that near the Great Mosque is where the town center was suited, as evidenced by large houses and including 'The Palace' (Baumanova & Smejda, 2018). Structural dynamics of spatial complexity at the ‘Palace of Gede,’ Kenya. Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa, 52(1), 71–99. The Sultan of Malindi probably owned the palace he claimed due to its size and design. However, I argue that the palace may have acted as a public building for hosting foreign merchants with accommodation facilities. My assumptions emanate from its design which shows several rooms having private toilets/bathrooms. The implication is that it was not a private home as contrasted by other houses which did not have private toilets.

More interesting, the toilets of the palace were made differently to accommodate biological sexes, unlike those in private places. Therefore, it seems sex is a difference, and to some extent, gender was a basis of difference in Gede society in some instances. To that end, men and women occupied different spaces while using toilets in public spaces. The same principle was applied while designing Mosques in Gede in line with Islamic values. As such, mosques were portioned into two. Ethnographic evidence shows that men typically occupy the front section while women occupy the back section. However, the small private mosque excavated within a private compound does not have such a partition, demonstrating that gendered spaces in public spaces sometimes became obscured at the house level. The implication is that
those gender identities, especially the usage of spaces, change depending on the context, as shown by available evidence.

Kirkman (1974) concluded that the palace had been partitioned into two with women's and men's courts. He concluded his idea of Haramlik (women's court) with his findings of comb and bead excavated there. Although, at present, this assertion must be questioned as we cannot assume identity based on a few artifacts. In fact, other archaeological schools have debated this premise in the past, including Binford (1981) and Schiffer (1985). Nonetheless, ethnarchaeological evidence of Swahili people supports the notion of architectural differences partitioning men's and women's areas. Thus, from a contextual point of view and available archaeological materials, it is viable to argue that gender identities informed Gede's architecture in part. That evidence of women's court based on contextualization of materials recovered and Ethnoarchaeology support Kirkman's claims (Donley, Gensheimer; 2017)

Private and Public Spaces

Private spaces, especially houses, contain the fundamental social of most societies. Based on the above observation, houses offer a glimpse of day-to-day activities of individuals in their private spaces (Fleisher, 2015). In this section, I discuss gender as identity and how it was expressed in private spaces in Gede as manifested in the material record. The rationale was to examine how spaces were used concerning gender as an identity. For analysis purposes, this paper defines a household as the smallest social unit with material remains that demonstrate routine and habitual activities (Rødland, 2021). To that end, households also function as units of production, processing, consumption, and disposal of resources (Baumanova, 2016). This section discusses data from three houses that I excavated at Gede archaeological site. The first house is stone-walled in the inner wall, the second house is made of wattle and daub (mud and wood houses) at the inner wall, and the last one is just outside the outer wall made of wattle and daub.

Historically and in contemporary society, a house which is the physical manifestation of a household is always set up in consideration of gender roles. The architecture and use of house spaces correspond with gender roles hence the material evidence. Borden et al. (2006) argue that men are perceived as “authority figures or ‘breadwinners,” which correspond with spaces associated with such roles. They have special sits in the dining area and, sometimes, a study to guarantee “work ‘even at home. On the other hand, women’s spaces are associated with ‘service responsibility,’ including the kitchen as a ‘cook,’ the master bedroom offering leisure,’ the dining room ‘offering food’ as well as children’s bedroom ‘nurturing children.’ Therefore, I discuss each house and its material implication on gender as identity in Gede.

In Gede, the design of private and public spaces shows how gender identities were expressed through space and time; these designs include gendered toilets, which are more visible in the innermost part of the city. The most unique thing about the women’s and men’s toilets is that they were constructed in ‘the palace,’ which can be described as a public building. Also, private houses can be described as public due to the commercialization of households as a result of the intensification of international trade. Thus, it is evident that gender division in public spaces was more elaborate as compared to private areas. This
evidence also brings us possibilities concerning gender identities in terms of what was considered ideal and reality. In other words, gender division was more likely observed in public than private spaces. The above observation has been made in the ethnographic study of the Swahili people, where different households often have unique ways in which gender differences are expressed in public and private spaces.

This house of Mbarak was situated to the North East of the great mosque in an area with several other stone buildings. The house layout corresponds with designs employed in the construction of Swahili houses, as documented by Donley (1984, 1987) in Lamu. At this house, the excavation was carried out in the kitchen, bathrooms, inner room, and backyard. The rationale was to examine variations and similarities of materials in order to correlate them with gender roles. This strategy was based on assumptions that we can correctly identify what space was used for based on the totality of material remains.

Also, how social spaces changed over time in response to internal and external factors as reflected in the archaeological record. The evidence shows that area was initially occupied by people who lived in wattle and daub houses and then replaced by stone houses, with later evidence of the site being rebuilt with wattle and daub houses. To that end, the house of Mbarak showed a sequence of Gede before it became a sophisticated urban center, during the golden era and after its decline. The materials excavated from the site corresponded with the area they were retrieved, which proves that often spatial patterning of materials is indicative of space usage. Therefore, in the kitchen, there was the discovery of charcoal, cooking pots, water pots, domesticated animal bones, and marine resources, including shells. Also, there were several grinding stones indicative of the processing of plant resources for consumption. In the inner room, there was the discovery of copper ornaments, a water pot in situ, imported ceramics of Chinese and Islamic origin, beads, and cowrie shells. In the toilet, coprolites were excavated, beads and shells. Lastly, the backyard had two drainage pits which were excavated and are situated a meter apart.

The house of Mbarak contrasted with the palace in the sense that it did not have gender-specific toilets. The toilet, which was in the innermost area of the house, was one; hence it was not divided based on sex or gender. However, there was a toilet outside the house which, based on ethnoarchaeological data of the Swahili, acted as a public toilet for visitors. To that end, it is evident that in private spaces, gender differences in accessing some areas were more abstract compared to public spaces. These differences could be explained by religious believers of Muslims, where close interaction between women and men is only allowed within the family. Second, it could be explained by differences between reality and ideal gender identity expressions. In public, there is pressure to maintain social ideals that may be ignored in private spaces.

The Khadija house was located inside the wall of Gede, an area associated with the elites. However, unlike other houses, mainly made of stone, this was made using wattle and daub, materials associated with commoners. The house was near a mosque, public bath, and public well, indicating that it was near necessary social amenities and a good location. Furthermore, since it was inside the wall, it was in a
secure place. In this house, I only excavated one room with plenty of local pottery and a considerable number of foreign ceramics, Chinese and Islamic. Thus, every indication shows that this house was occupied by people who were active in the urban life of Gede during its golden age. The people who occupied this house were most likely in the cottage industry, where they made materials for local and regional consumption. As such, several beads’ grinders and shell refuse (waste) were revered on the site, which indicates it was a manufacturing area. A notable find was the kohl pencil used by women for decoration, as evidenced by ethnographic data. This imported kohl pencil was one of the most imported women's goods imported in the sixteenth century. Thus, we can define them as the ‘middle class of Gede’ based on material finds and the geographical area of the site.

This house of Katana was located outside the outer wall and fell under the category of the lives of commoners (Pawlowicz, 2019). This was just outside the city's east gate near an area with a public well, indicating there were efforts to invest in those areas (outskirts of the city) as well. The site was dominated by hunted animals and fishbone, lacking any identified domesticated animals. Furthermore, most potteries were local, indicating repairs in some potteries. The implication is that these people did not live in affluence as their counterparts in the inner wall of the city. In this house, there was a small number of beads made of local materials, and most wild bones were charred.

The people who lived here and away from the city were most likely in the lowest class in Gede. Furthermore, the presence of wild animals, which are not commonly consumed in Islamic culture, indicates non-Muslim dwellers most likely occupied this place. However, they also participated in Gede’s urban life and consumed imported materials, including Islamic ceramics. The food remains of hunted animals, marine resources, and the presence of marine resources suggests a division of labor in the house. What is evident is that the people in the house did not accumulate many materials hence making it challenging to leave tangible traces of gender as a social identity.

Division of labor and Gender Identities

Gede was an urban center that relied on exchange and interdependence due to specialization. Therefore, the city’s main economic activities, as reflected in the archaeological record, include cottage industries, hospitality, fishing, animal husbandry, crop agriculture, and local, regional, and international trade. From excavated evidence from the house of Mbarak, Gede started as a clustered village dominated by wattle and daub houses during the first century of the second millennium. This evidence emanates from Chinese ceramic dated the eleventh century excavated in the house at the level where there are postholes in the earliest occupation of the Kitchen floor. At that level, they subsisted mainly on fishing, hunting, and gathering and processing crops, as evidenced by the presence of grinding stones. From the above substance strategies, ethnographic data of Swahili people shows that men were engaged in fishing and hunting while women practiced crop farming. Although there was an exchange of goods with other regional and international areas, it was minimal. Thus, gender division of labor was more evident at the household level, with some intersectionality when circumstances allowed.
However, the second phase, sometimes called the golden age, was characterized by the intensification of Indian Ocean trade. The evidence shows sophistication in a building that even created drainage systems. These water disposing systems show that Gede was already an urban center where hygiene was a priority. In fact, excavation in the backyard of the house of Mbarak shows two drainage systems separated by a few meters. The period of the building of the house of Mbarak corresponded with the extension of the palace, which is indicative of the intensification of international trade. The archaeological evidence of the palace shows amenities such as women's courts and toilets to demonstrate that women participated in public life and, in this case, trade. So, the evidence shows that gender roles entailed women moving from their previously held roles in the homestead and becoming an integral part of commerce.

As part of the Swahili civilization's economic activities, Gede was dictated by geographical, environmental, and external factors. Archaeological evidence shows that Gede's economic activities included fishing, mixed farming, and trading. Even so, there is evidence of hunting as documented by the presence of wild faunal. Since the Gede community was urban, other economic activities associated with urban life have been documented in Gede, including pottery and iron smelting. This mode of economic activity was the norm of Swahili people, as mentioned by Arab and Swahili writers. For instance, Al Masudi, writing in the first century of the second millennium, notes the presence of the following crops: coconuts, coleus, bananas, and yams. (Matveiev, 1984). On the other hand, an anonymous Portuguese writer notes that fiftieth-century Kilwa Kisiwani cultivated maize, lemon, sweet oranges, onions, and betel nuts while keeping cattle, goats, and sheep.

International trade in the Indian Ocean relied on monsoon winds which required merchants to stay in one area for a considerable time. The implication was an emergency of hospitality industry practice in private homes or public places. As I have argued above, in Gede, the palace may have offered a public building as well as a form of the hotel for visiting merchants during their stay, which often spun in weeks or months. Ibn Battuta noted in his writings how Mogadishu city, brokers often received merchants and hosted them in their private homes. Based on the size of some of the private houses in Gede, the same principle may have been applied in Gede.

In that case, this created a thin line between private and public houses with implications on gender roles in several ways. First, the commercialization of labor was done at the household level, which created an avenue for the accumulation of materials by both men and women. Second, the rise of cottage industries, including pottery making, iron smelting, and beads manufacturing, coupled with service industries, necessitated the diversification of gender roles in Gede. Therefore, I postulate that they possessed some form of purchasing power based on the availability of exotic women's goods rather than relying entirely on their husband's economic activities. To that end, I hypothesize that intensifying international trade in Gede ultimately created commercial opportunities for women leading to the renegotiation of gender roles.

At Gede, just like other Swahili city-states, Islam became a major religion with tremendous influence on the social fabric (Chami, 2007). Unlike other areas in the Middle East, the spread of Islam in Gede was
gradual. It entailed the customization of certain ideologies with African belief systems, a trend that has been observed in other city-states such as Kilwa (Sinclair & Håkansson, 2000). (Pradines, 2019). Nonetheless, Islam acted as a point of reference for traders from the Arabic world and their African counterparts. In some instances, it was dominant in influencing the commercial and social behavior of the Swahili people. Rothman (2002) notes that in the commercial sphere, there was the insistence on fair trading deals in line with koranic teaching leading to the creation of the position of market inspector ‘muhtash’ responsible for checking measurements of goods during transactions (Matleive, 1984). At Gede, the Islamic influence of the city is evidenced by numerous mosques, Islamic architectural designs, and the presence of madrassa, tombs, and Islamic ceramics, among other Islamic signatures.

Interestingly, Islamic doctrine influenced gender roles in Gede, including the accessibility of certain materials and spaces. For instance, mosques, public courts, and public buildings were all gendered according to Islamic doctrines of separating men and women. What is evident is that Islamic values were considered in the overall construction of the city. To that extent, I argue that gender roles were not only maintained through public buildings using Islamic values but extended to other matters such as division of labor, usage of private spaces, utilization of specific resources, and religious rituals. Therefore, the women's space excavated in the daub house inside the wall, examined under the Islamic gender prism, fits into a women's space. Based on the above observation, I conclude that Islam often dictated gender in terms of expected behavior (actions), which had material implications.

Similarly, Gede practiced fishing and crop production, which was crucial in maintaining their urban life. The urban life of Gede dictated the commercialization of food production, including fishing and marine resources. The marine resources could be used to make spoons, beads, or vessels for other usages. The exploitation of marine resources ultimately led to activities such as boat making and the emergency of people specialized in issues such as navigational astronomy. Circumstantial evidence points out this reality where inhabitants of Gede and other coastal cities were not merely passive to Indian Ocean trade. The accumulation of wealth, as evidenced by extravagant investments in private homes, points to people who were not merely middlemen but also activated in the Indian Ocean trade. The possibility of local Swahili people building and owning large ships is supported by archaeological evidence that points to active regional trade. Conversely, Indian Ocean trade had many levels which would have made it impossible to be carried out without the active role of the Swahili people. In Gede, for instance, there is the consumption of products that have an African origin, such as ornaments made from ivory.

Matveiev (1984) notes that trade was profitable, fueled by the perception that made imported goods seem more valuable than they were. The implication was that Arabs would get gold and ivory for the ceramics they brought. These imported goods, which were sometimes made using African exported goods such as ivory and creating a more complex culture, often influenced local manufacturers to innovate and replicate those goods locally. This has been evidenced in Gede and elsewhere, where highly sorted ceramics from China were replicated in other areas, including the Arab world, due to their profitability. Gede's economic activities seem to have been diversified due to its proximity to Malindi, a major Indian Ocean trading center. Al Indrisi, an Arab writer in Malindi, claims that ‘iron is their main aim...
of trade and revenue' (Matveiev, 1984, p. 460). This forms an interesting economic activity which was probably shared by Gede city. Furthermore, it cements the hypothesis of active regional trade between Swahili City states and beyond.

Although Arabs and Portuguese sources do not mention Gede, they talk about Malindi as an exporter of iron, fish, and leopard skin to other regional cities of Swahili civilization. The proximity of Gede to Malindi City state shows a close relationship between the two cities. In Gede, there is evidence of iron ore and iron smelting on the site. The iron was most likely smelted for commercial purposes, like bead or pottery making. If we use Portuguese sources, which indicate that Malindi was exporting iron tools, Gede was more likely part of this trade. In fact, Gede would have been more efficient in producing iron due to its relatively inland location and new forests, which were crucial for producing fuel for smelting. This dissertation hypothesizes that iron for export led to the creation of new industries in Gede with implications on gender roles. Since iron processing entails different stages and the realities of the time that required cooperation at the household level, iron smelting likely entailed collaboration. In that case, using ethnographic data, women were more likely to participate in firewood acquisition. Nonetheless, iron smelting was done for commercial purposes, making this activity prestigious in case of reward.

Conclusion

The paper has examined how gender identities were expressed in Gede archaeological record and the implication on material culture. At Gede, archaeological evidence shows that gender identities were expressed and practiced through architecture, division of labor, and usage of public and private spaces. Furthermore, the intensification of trade led to the commercialization of households with implications on how gender identities were practiced and expressed. Archaeological evidence shows that gender identities in Gede were fluid and responsive to cultural diffusion, especially the spread of Islamic values. This corresponds with attempts to create a built environment that reflected gendered differences, especially in public spaces. Notable changes included gendered public toilets, mosques, and public spaces such as courts. As such, the commercialization of houses led to architectural designs that incorporated gendered public spaces. The implication was that the commercialization of households led to the incorporation of women into Gede's formal economy.

As illustrated by archaeological evidence, women became active in public affairs, creating their spaces in Gede society. Besides gendered spaces, there was a high frequency of private wells, which is closely associated with Islamic values of washing before they performed religious rituals. Therefore, a desire to build private houses per Islamic values was done to owe traders who used them as "hotels" during their stay. The intensification of trade also led to the rise of gendered industries, creating contested gendered spaces. As observed from archaeological evidence, the house of Khadija shows women's participation in beads making and their overall integration into the Indian Ocean trade. The women increased participation in trade and subsequent economic empowerment corresponded with their integration into public life, including political matters, as evidenced by public architectural designs.
Declarations

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interests to the best of my knowledge

References


41. Sørensen, M. L. Stig 2000: Gender Archaeology.


43. Walsh, M. Sewn boats of the Swahili coast.


Figures
Figure 1

Kenya Map showing Gede