

*Istilahi za Paje na Jambiani*  
(Terminology of Paje and Jambiani)

**Commented [HG1]:** This was the location of my research in Zanzibar on the community influence of sponge and coral aquaculture – my intent was to share pieces of my routine during my time there.

**Commented [HG2]:** This poem was written in response to a prompt – something along the lines of “experiment with dictionary definitions.”

*nyumba* (house):

an orange roof, glassless windows, sagging walls;  
cinder blocks crowned with shards of green bottles;  
a rusted baby blue gate that does not shut, only slams;  
electricity failures, unpredictable plumbing, dishes unclean;  
twin couches damp with sweat and a cracked laundry bucket, almost unusable;  
the space I live

**Commented [HG3]:** I used Kiswahili words because most of my communication was in Kiswahili, so the language is inextricable from my experience. I included English translations so minimize the amount of meaning lost to audience members.

*chakula cha asubuhi* (food of the morning):

a humble beginning accepted by each day;  
purchased the previous evening from the shy man at his roadside stand;  
cheap, from the runt chicken;  
cooked in a faulty frying pan, seasoned with a damp clump of salt;  
delectable in simplicity, the anticipation of which lifts one from the bed;  
my sacred silence as the sun rises

**Commented [HG4]:** I intended each line to exist as sort of a separate dictionary definition, each of which are true for the subject of the stanza.

*daladala* (public bus):

one who excels at making me wait;  
blue, the color of deep sea, paint chipping, wheels squeaking;  
the way there and the way back;

**Commented [HG5]:** In this stanza I wanted to capture the experience of the daladala in which for some reason, despite the immense discomfort, it was often a quite enjoyable and fascinating experience – I really grew to love it.

bodies sardined together, some sitting, some squatting, a few hanging  
precariously off the rear platform;  
open windows let the breeze mix our sweat;  
cost of one silver coin each ride

*mwanafunzi* (student):

budgeted existence with all expenses documented;  
having an immense desire to study the world, striving to understand its workings;  
one who conducts interviews in a foreign tongue;  
not a tourist, not on vacation, not sleeping in, not wandering aimlessly, not so far  
away from people and their villages;  
observation, cultivation, translation, communication;  
the reason I am here

**Commented [HG6]:** I think one of the primary challenges when operating outside of one's home country is trying to navigate how one "fits," for lack of a better term, into the fabric of society and this stanza illustrates the wrestling I had in this respect.

*shamba kitika bahari* (farm in the ocean):

soft floating ropes, cement anchors flocked by urchins, crusty buoys;  
impossible to find for the untrained eye;  
the setting of study, the place to grow sponges;  
where I work at low tide;  
at the mercy of all weather and the sea;  
a square plot of opportunity for the destitute

**Commented [HG7]:** I utilized descriptive definitions and I frequently wanted to use details (like this line which focuses on physical aspects of the sponge farm) as defining characteristics – I thought this would parallel the fact that the full meaning of a word is really only understood if one reads all of the definitions

*majani* (green algae):

a plague, a nuisance, the devil's desire;

sickly fluorescent shade of grime;

stuck to clothes, to *kangas*, tools and skin;

a murderer and sponge's nightmare;

source of unending toil;

accompanying the rain, the months, cyclical, and like the seasons going away only to return again

**Commented [HG8]:** I wanted to use sounds in this stanza to illustrate the nature of the nasty green algae that suffocated sponges on the farm – lots of “s” sounds paired with the hard c /k sound – it just felt right.

*mkulima wa spongi* (sponge farmer):

woman of immense strength, independent;

tough, diligent, patient, fierce;

one who creates history despite poverty, divorce, catastrophe and death ;

dedicated entrepreneur, swimming champion, mother, teacher;

kind to me always, generous and warm;

deserving of the utmost respect

**Commented [HG9]:** I included this word because it is a great achievement for sponge farmers to become “independent,” meaning the successful completion of all training and the ability to operate their own farm.

*wali na maharage na mchicha* (rice and beans and spinach):

unnamed specialty of the Hungry Lion restaurant;

a bargain, complete with belly satisfaction;

signaling the close of a strenuous day's work;

to be eaten with *chapati* on special occasions;

with familiar service and an expectation of return the next evening;

for meeting strangers, in many tongues

**Commented [HG10]:** This I had to include because it's what I ate every single day and thus was a significant part of my experience. I think this stanza illustrates the many ways of looking at this simple, routine meal – sustenance, a place to meet a wide variety of folks, a means for celebration, uncomfortable becoming comfort, time to decompress and socialize, etc. - which I came to value a great deal over the course of my research.

*nyumbani* (home):

the comfort of a well-tucked bug net and excitement of discovering a new insect species;

ringing with laughter from stories relayed over a deck of cards;

where it is ok to lie on the floor, deflated from the day's frustrations;

more than an assortment of physical and utility inadequacies;

the place where family gathers, biological or otherwise;

what I have created here

**Commented [HG11]:** I thought it was really cool that the word for home (*nyumbani*) is just adding “ni” to *nyumba* (house) – the “ni” usually makes the meaning “in,” for example *baharini* means “in the ocean” (from *bahari*, ocean). The idea that being in the house makes it a home reflects the immense hospitality shown to me by Swahili women, specifically the sponge farmers, and I wanted to emulate that in this piece.

**Commented [HG12]:** I hoped that the simplicity and brevity of the definition-style form would draw attention to details and creatively convey the meaningfulness of my time spent on this research project.