

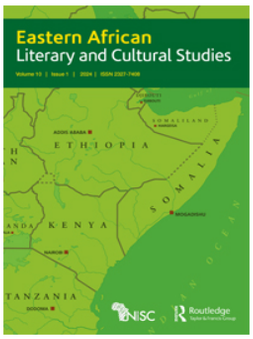
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# Bahari Imekufa The Sea is Dead Local Perceptions of Ocean Health and Ocean Wealth among Fishers on the Kenyan Coast

**Jauquelyne Kosgei**

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**ABSTRACT**

Using narratives that I recorded in June/July 2021 on Kenya's south coast with fishers belonging to three different generations, this paper provides insights into local articulations of changes that have happened in the sea over time. These changes — which call to mind ocean wealth and ocean health — have culminated in the increasing unproductivity of the ocean, which has led some shore folk to imagine that 'the sea is dead', as one of my interlocutors phrased it. What has caused the death of the sea? What does it mean for the sea to die? What will a dead ocean look like and what implications will it have for fishers? How are fishers responding to threats of a dying sea? By examining the local articulations of changes that are happening in the sea, I attempt answers to these questions. I also ask: How do the shore folk on the Kenyan coast account for these changes? In trying to seek answers to the factors underlying these changes, I am confronted with accounts of rituals that have been discontinued and find that these discontinued rituals have been put forth as explanations for the changes in question, most of which are negative.

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Kenyan coast; ocean health; ocean wealth; dying sea; fishing rituals

## Introduction

In the course of my research on local perceptions of the sea among the Digo community on the Kenyan coast, I encountered practices of marine conservation that are articulated through local forms of expression, particularly *mashairi,* Swahili oral poetry, the results of which I have published elsewhere (Kosgei 2021). The success with which the Digo — and by extension Kenyan coastal communities — have incorporated local knowledge on the conservation of the sea into dominant forms of expression shows that there is an acute awareness among them of the need to maintain the health and the wealth of the ocean. This piqued my interest in finding out how the Kenyan coastal community at large articulates climate change from a local standpoint, a question that I pursued in the interviews I held with my interlocutors, who are Digo fishers and divers. The deep

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knowledge of the sea that the Digo possess arises from their strategic position in relation to the sea — they have lived on the shores of the Indian Ocean for centuries. They are mostly fisherfolk and largely rely on the sea for survival, and within the community is to be found a large concentration of seafarers, including sailors, divers, and fishers. Through interviews with Digo seafarers, I aimed to understand how experiential knowledge of the sea that shore folk possess articulates climate change. In the end, I hoped to find local terminologies with which Kenyan coastal communities refer to climate change. This, however, proved to be a challenging task as I found it difficult to broach this subject successfully. What I realized and what changed my approach, is that my interlocutors were more open to talking about changes that have taken place in the sea over time. This became my entry point and forms the basis of this paper.

Using narratives that I recorded in June/July 2021 on Kenya's south coast with Digo fishers belonging to three different generations, this paper provides insights into the role that local experiences, particularly those of the Indian Ocean on Kenya's south coast, play in articulating changes that are happening in the sea. The narratives I gathered show that the degenerative practices that successive generations of fishers have engaged in have contributed to negative changes in the sea, symptomatic of climate change. The fishers do not name climate change, but they are aware of and punctuate their narratives with vivid descriptions of negative changes that have taken place in the sea over time.

In these narratives, an emphasis is placed on rituals and practices that have been discontinued by younger fishers, and an assertion is made that the discontinuation of these rituals and practices has precipitated a lack of care for marine ecosystems. From the narratives it is evident that decreasing attention paid to the sea has affected the close relationship that fishers previously enjoyed with the sea and that this has in turn negatively affected ocean health and ocean wealth. Paying attention to these local articulations of the fragile state of ocean health and ocean wealth allows us to take stock of the existing climate change inequalities with respect to Africa: compared to the nations in the Western world, Africa's contribution to the climate crisis is negligible and yet the effects it suffers are large scale. Scholars like Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014) have highlighted these inequalities, arguing that:

> as of 2008, the advanced capitalist countries or the 'North' composed 18.8% of the world population, but were responsible for 72.7% of the $CO_2$ emitted since 1850, subnational inequalities uncounted. In the early 21st century, the poorest 45% of the human population accounted for 7% of emissions, while the richest 7% produced 50%; a single average US citizen — national class divisions again disregarded — emitted as much as upwards of 500 citizens of Ethiopia, Chad, Afghanistan, Mali, Cambodia or Burundi. (62–69)

What this means is that whereas countries in the Global South are the lowest contributors to anthropomorphic activities that negatively impact the climate and our ecosystems, they are the most affected. Data from the Comparative Risk

Assessment (CRA) by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that 99 per cent of the disease burden from climate change is concentrated in developing countries (Patz et al. 2007, 397–405). This culpability of the Global North and the vulnerability of the Global South, generalizing as these principles may be, puts into perspective what Laura Pulido (2018) terms the 'racial geography of the Anthropocene' (120). Pulido maintains that the Anthropocene should be largely viewed as an outcome of race-related practices, since the 'meta-processes which have contributed to the Anthropocene, such as industrialization, urbanization, and capitalism, are racialized' (117). The extent to which the Anthropocene is limited in its capacity to portray climate change justifiably is explained by the fact that the fishers with whom I recorded narratives of changes that have taken place in the ocean have no term for climate change. They only witness its effects.

Climate action, however, remains a global concern. In the Paris Agreement of 2015, a climate pact was made to limit global rise in temperature to between 1.5–2.0 degrees Celsius annually when compared to pre-industrial levels. At the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) held in Glasgow in the United Kingdom in 2021, it was agreed that 1.5 degrees Celsius was in sight, but more action was needed. The overarching goal is to secure global net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 which implies a complete eradication of greenhouse gas emissions. This is because a rise in temperature of 1.5 degrees Celsius is already damaging. A look at the health of the ocean helps us to visualize this. Because oceans trap the excess atmospheric heat, they are warming faster than before, and marine heat waves are rampant. This is why the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 14, life below water, which aims to 'conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development,' is critical.[1] Its objectives are to curb plastic pollution, overfishing, the increasing acidification of the seas, and the warming of the ocean's surface, all of which threaten marine life and destabilize ocean-based economies.[2] It is therefore imperative to spotlight local articulations of these changes that are taking place in the sea.

## Dead and Dying Sea: Towards Local Perceptions of Ocean Health and Ocean Wealth

In one of my interviews, a fisher pronounced resignedly, *bahari imekufa* [the sea is dead]. What has caused the death of the sea? What does it mean for the sea to die? What will a dead ocean look like and what implications will it have for human life? How are fishers responding to threats of a dying sea? These are some of the questions that I grapple with in this paper, a quest that leads me to interrogate local articulations of changes that are happening in the sea on the Kenyan coast which, arguably, are symptomatic of climate change. One of the questions I ask with respect to these changes is: How do the shore folk on the Kenyan coast account for these changes that are happening in the sea? In

trying to seek answers to the factors underlying these changes, I am confronted with accounts of rituals that have been discontinued and find that these discontinued rituals have been put forth as explanations for the changes in question, most of which are negative.

Before delving into the changes in question and the rituals that relate to them, I ponder on the image of a dead and dying sea. We can usefully look to the Dead Sea for straightforward answers. Located in the Jordan Rift Valley, the Dead Sea is one of the most saline water bodies in the world. Its waters consist of more than 30 per cent dissolved salts, eight times the average salinity of the world's oceans (Steinhorn and Gat 1983, 102–111). The salinity of the Dead Sea has dramatically increased in recent years, following the diversion of fresh water sources for irrigation purposes, in addition to an evaporation rate of about 1 m/yr (Yechieli et al. 1998, 755–758). Due to the high concentration of salts, the Dead Sea is devoid of aquatic flora and fauna. In the early nineteenth century, some biologists and zoologists failed to detect signs of life in the Dead Sea, which led them to conclude that the Dead Sea is 'entirely sterile,' entrenching previous descriptions of the Dead Sea as a 'prime example of a completely barren and lifeless body of water'[3] (Nissenbaum 1975, 139–161). Relying on this image of lifelessness, sterility and barrenness of the Dead Sea, therefore, a dead ocean is an empty sea, a plain mass of water.[4]

Thinking with this image of a dead and dying sea bears upon us the urgency with which pronouncements such as those made by my interlocutor should be taken. From his perspective, the sea has withered over time, to an extent that it is now dead. The experience of this negative transformation is very particular to shore folk and its measurability very subjective. From a scientific standpoint, the health of the ocean is measurable in quantitative terms. There is, for instance, the quantitative index of ten societal goals for Global Ocean Health, derived from data from hundreds of coastal countries and territories. The ten goals are: food provision, artisanal fishing opportunities, biodiversity, clean waters, sense of place, coastal livelihoods and economies, tourism and recreation, coastal protection, carbon storage, and natural products (Halpern et al. 2015, 2). In this case, however, we are presented with an articulation of two interlinked aspects — ocean health and ocean wealth — in a qualitative and subjective manner.

To fully grasp this perception of ocean health and ocean wealth, which is in this case mediated through local articulations of changes in the sea, the lived experiences of the three generations of fishers on Kenya's south coast are important. Their narratives paint a picture of the changes that have taken place in the ocean over time, which present to us an image of an increasingly unproductive ocean. The fishers are based in Shimoni and Diani, two of the most prominent Beach Management Units on Kenya's south coast. The oldest of the three generations of fishers is represented by Mzee Omari, a ninety-eight-year-old active fisher based in Shimoni, whom I interviewed on 25 June 2021. Mzee Omari has

been going to the sea for over 60 years and has fished as far north as the Suez Canal and as far south as Mozambique. Mzee Omari, who has seen it all, says, *Baharini siogopi kitu. Nangoja kufa tu sasa* [I fear nothing in the sea. I am only waiting to die]. The second generation of fishers is represented by Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim[5] from Diani. Mvuvi Halim was born in 1954. He started going to the sea in 1968 when he was fourteen years old, in his father's company. By 1972, he was experienced enough to go fishing on his own and has never taken a break. Mvuvi Salim, on the other hand, was born in 1965 and started going to the sea at the age of 13. The father of a friend of his owned a boat that would take tourists to the sea on a daily basis, and Mvuvi Salim often joined his friend and his father on such trips. With time, Salim and his friend operated the boat. Two years later, in 1980, Mvuvi Salim stopped working as a tour guide, and became apprenticed to Mvuvi Halim named above, then a fisher already, who was eleven years older than Salim. Salim and Halim have worked together ever since. They are inseparable, and I interviewed them together on 27 June 2021. At first, Salim and Halim worked on their own, but they soon thought it wise to work alongside older fishers in the community. The elders bequeathed them knowledge of the sea to which the two, now the oldest fishers in Diani, are custodians. The third generation of fishers is represented by Mvuvi Diani, a diver and fisher in Diani Beach, who I interviewed on 24 June 2021. Mvuvi Diani has been going to the sea for twenty-seven years, during which time he has witnessed the sea wither and, in his words, die.

In the following pages, I lay out the narratives by the four fishers named above and show how their lived experiences characterize the sea differently, across the three generations. Attention is paid to the changing relationships between the fishers and the sea over time. Evidence from the narratives shows that the care with which generations of fishers treated the sea, based on their performance of certain rituals of nurturing the sea or their lack thereof, directly correlates with the health and wealth of the ocean. Lack of attention to and decreasing care for the ocean, the narratives show, explain the degenerative state of the sea and coastline.

## Fishers' Changing Relationships with the Ocean and the Intricacies of an Increasingly Unproductive and Dying Sea on the Kenyan Coast

This section examines the changing relationship between the three generations of fishers and the sea, to ground claims that the sea is increasingly becoming unproductive to a point that it is dying. From the narratives detailed below, the health of the ocean, captured in terms of its perceived flourishing, withering, or dying nature; and its wealth, captured in terms of its productivity, reflect how close the fishers' relationship with the sea is. An apparent widening gap in fishers' experience of and relationship with the sea over time becomes visible when we read the fishing regimes of older fishers against the practices of younger fishers

on the Kenyan coast. A look at Mzee Omari's fishing regime shows that it differs from that of younger, modern fishers. In his experience, engagement with the sea is rigorously planned and certain requirements must be met. Before one ventures into fishing, Mzee Omari says, one should visit a medicine man, for guidance and blessing. The medicine man will bless the fishing paraphernalia. After a few fishing trips, the fisher will report their success or lack of it to the medicine man, who reinforces the potency of the fishing paraphernalia from time to time. When Mzee Omari was younger, he says, fishers would collectively make this trip to the medicine man. Presently, however, it has become an individual affair because very few people still observe this tradition. The significance of this practice, Mzee Omari says, is that people did not enter the sea haphazardly. Engagement with the sea was conscientious, planned and orderly. The ocean took on the image of a respectable entity to which people needed to submit.

Adding to this treatment of the sea as a live entity deserving of respect, Mzee Omari says that on a regular basis, people would placate the sea with offerings like livestock including cows, goats and chicken, and foodstuff like bread and sweets. In return, the people enjoyed a steady supply of fish. The implication is that the ocean had to be fed for it to produce. Presently, Mzee Omari partakes in this practice, especially during low seasons, as he says, *Mimi mara nyingine hukaa halafu ikabidi nifanye bwana. Sababu huwa nachoka kwenda baharini, na sipati kitu, halafu nadaiwa mafuta ya boat* [Sometimes I am forced to do it. Because I get tired of going to the sea and getting nothing, yet I have to pay for fuel for my boat]. The results, he claims, are immediate, *Ghafla. Yaani ukifanya leo, kesho unakwenda baharini unarudi umenona* [Immediate. You placate the sea today, and tomorrow you come back with a heavy catch]. At the time of our interview, Mzee Omari was waiting for one renowned specialist to return from Zanzibar, after which he would placate the sea one more time. Mzee Omari however acknowledges that people are paying less and less attention to the sea, with the result that the sea is being starved and in turn its productivity is dwindling. Mzee Omari has watched the sea dry up, he says. Reflecting on past and present experience he says:

> *Waweza enda baharini — mimi nina nyavu hizi kama kumi na nane, nazimwaga zote naweza nikarudi mkono mtupu. Hata samaki moja! Lakini zamani ilikuwa huwezi kwenda urudi mkono mtupu. Zamani ilikuwa waweza kuvua samaki mpaka ukawaacha. Wavua samaki ukabakia samaki hizi nyavu ukaziacha huko baharini. Ukaja kuuza samaki halafu ndio ukazifuata nyavu. Na ukafika tayari zina samaki tena. Uvuvi ulikuwa una faida kubwa sana, kinyume cha sasa.* [Fish were in abundance. Now you can go to the sea — I have fourteen nets, and I can cast them all but still come home empty handed. Not even one fish! In the past one couldn't come back empty handed. In the past, one could catch so many fish that they'd leave some behind. One would leave their nets at sea because they had caught more than they could carry. You'd sell your fish and go back for your nets. And you'd find them full again. In the past, fishing was very profitable, unlike now].

About five years ago, he says, he would catch up to five tons of fish in a day. Of those, he would give about 50 kilograms to the needy. Presently, he says, the best

he can get is 200 kilograms in a day. This has directly affected his economic security; financially, he is ailing. He laments that he has not saved a shilling in the past month because there is nothing in the sea. He still hopes to earn enough money to marry another wife after losing his wife two years ago.

To Mzee Omari, the future is bleak. He cannot keep up with the changes that are taking place in the ocean. Beside reduced fish stocks, Mzee Omari is concerned about giant waves that have made fishing difficult, particularly for artisanal fishers. Mzee Omari's observation feeds into recent research which has found that warming oceans and in effect rising sea levels are making ocean waves more powerful, particularly in the southern hemisphere (Odériz et al., 2021, 1–12). The strong waves cause fish to retreat deeper into the sea, beyond the reach of fishers. Mzee Omari now wishes to retire from fishing, but he first has to sell his boat as he has no life savings. This is however proving difficult because many more people are turning away from fishing, in search of alternative livelihoods.

The second generation of fishers, represented by Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim, embodies the changing relationship with the sea, showing that the close relationship that fishers belonging to Mzee Omari's generation had with the sea has not been maintained. Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim closely worked with their elders until a decade ago when the last of the elders passed on. From the elders, Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim learned that the sea needs to be nourished at all times. Years back, the two actively took part in *chano*, the practice of "feeding" the sea, which was initiated by the elders. They did this more often during low seasons when people caught fewer fish. During *chano,* Mvuvi Halim says: *Watu wanapika vyakula kama mikate, vitumbua, chapati, viazi, mayai, wanachukua yote wanaweka kwa sinia, wanaenda mahali maalum. Wakifika pale wanaongea yale maneno yao ambayo wanajua halafu ile kitu yote wanaiweka pale. Na hazimaliziki siku tatu, hazimaliziki siku tatu, watu wanashika samaki wengi.* [People prepare foods like bread, cake, chapatti, potatoes and eggs, put them all in a tray, and take it to a specific location. They then make their prayers and leave the tray there. Within three days, within three days, people catch a lot of fish].

People prayed not only for a good catch. They also prayed for good health. They would utter, *Ni sisi, tunataka kitu fulani, na tukipata ile kitu fulani tutaleta mbuzi, kuku* … . [Here we come, we want such and such a thing, and when we get it we will bring a goat, a hen … .], as Mvuvi Halim says. *Chano* therefore kept both the ocean and society healthy and wealthy, and people were keen to fulfil any promises they made to the sea, because the sea gives and takes in equal measure.

According to Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim, there are several locations where *chano* was done. These were specific locations that had been consecrated, and they were portals to the soul of the sea. The two fishers quickly listed six prominent places: Makadide, Njau, Bwanga, Maruhuni, Kisima Mlungu and Mwagogo. These locations are spread across land and sea and people needed to conduct

themselves well around these portals to the sea. These spots were distinct — they were either filled with rock, or had plenty of water, or had very little water, or very cold water, or very strong waves, or had unusually still waters. The names of these places are derived from distinctive characteristics of the place in question. During *chano*, people would prepare enough food to go round all these spots. Any leftovers were shared equally among those who were present and none of it would be returned to the villages. These places where *chano* was conducted are still widely known, but they are quite dormant now that *chano* is a discontinued practice.

Since Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim accompanied their elders on these trips to nourish the sea, they know all the steps and requirements. However, they do not practise it themselves. The elders who placed emphasis on this practice passed on one after another. It is nearly twenty years since this practice was done consistently, the two fishers say.

Like Mzee Omari, Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim increasingly find fishing to be time consuming and less rewarding now than it was in the past. They make only about 300 or 400 shillings per day, they say. This has caused them to venture into other income-generating activities. Their favourite preoccupation is to take tourists on fishing and snorkelling trips, from which they earn 3000 or 4000 shillings per day.

Mvuvi Halim's and Mvuvi Salim's experience is consistent with that of younger fishers who find fishing less rewarding by the day, especially now that that the economic climate is harsh. The current generation of fishers, represented by Mvuvi Diani, lives a life of discontent. What I found interesting, however, is that this community of fishers hardly takes into perspective the role of external forces in their plight. Whereas it is clear that decreased fish stock is a global concern and global warming (to which the contribution of artisanal fishing communities is negligible) is partly to blame, these fishers situate themselves in this crisis, perhaps in order to make meaning out of it.

Mvuvi Diani blames the current generation of fishers for not caring for the sea. Since the passing of older fishers who frequently assessed the productivity of the sea to decide if something needed to be done, fishers have neglected the sea. He says, *Lakini wazee wote wamekufa. Sasa waliobakia ni vijana, na vijana hawashughulikii tena kitu* [But all the elders have died. Only the youth are left now, and the youth don't care about anything]. He does not extricate himself from this blame either but points out that those older than him instigated this inattentiveness to the sea: *Mimi, kusema cha ukweli hata sikushughulika na mimi kwa sababu kulikuwa na wakubwa wangu, wakubwa zaidi kushinda mimi. Yaani wao ndio ilikuwa yaani washughulike na hayo mambo lakini nao pia hawakushughulika na hayo mambo*. [To be honest, I did not care about these things either. There are those who are older than I am. They are the ones who should have paid attention to these things, but they did not]. Mvuvi Diani places this responsibility on fishers like Mvuvi Halim and Mvuvi Salim discussed above, who broke the cord.

Like Mzee Omari, Mvuvi Diani has watched the sea change drastically and more rapid in recent years. Reflecting on this, he says:

> *Yaani maadiliko ya bahari, nilipoanza kuvua mwanzo, na mpaka dakika hii hapa, mabadiliko yako makubwa sana. Sababu, hapo mwanzo ilikuwa vitu vimo vingi: unapata pesa nzuri, yaani nikitoka ninafurahi. Lakini saa hii … yaani pesa yenyewe ukipata hata ni ya wasiwasi. Yaani vitu hakuna tena. Vimeisha au hata kama havijaisha lakini sasa yaani saa hii wavuvi ni wengi na sasa kipato yenyewe ni kidogo. Ni kidogo kama vile unavyoniona.* [Talking of changes in the ocean, when I started fishing, compared to now, big changes have taken place. Because, in the past, resources were in plenty: you would get a lot of money, as in I would always be happy. But right now … money is hard to come by. There is nothing. {Resources are} either finished or there is too little for many fishers to fight over, so we earn very little].

Situating the current generation of fishers at the centre of this crisis and holding them responsible, Mvuvi Diani declares, *Sasa, imeachwa tu bahari, sasa bahari imekufa* [Now, the sea has been neglected, now the sea is dead]. In proclaiming so, Mvuvi Diani blames the current generation of fishers for the decreasing attention paid to the sea and, hence, for the distant relationship between the shore folk and the sea, which has negatively impacted ocean health and ocean wealth.

At this point, I revisit the question of the death of the sea posed earlier. There are three ways through which we can imagine the death of the sea or of water bodies in general: through shrinkage; drying up; or by having inhospitable, lifeless waters. The causes of these forms of "death" vary from anthropogenic to natural causes and climate change. Shrinkage and drying up go hand in hand. To give a picture of this is the example of the Aral Sea, a terminal water basin located in central Asia, which has shrunk mostly due to anthropogenic causes. The Aral Sea was once the fourth largest lake in the world, after the Caspian Sea in Asia, Lake Superior in North America, and Lake Victoria in East Africa, but is now one of the world's fastest drying saline lakes. In 1960, the lake had a surface area of 67,500 $km^2$ and water levels of 53 m. In the same decade, however, water in River Syr Darya and River Amu Darya, the two rivers that fed the Aral Sea, was diverted for irrigation purposes, as happened with the Dead Sea. By 2010, the surface area and water levels of the Aral Sea had reduced by 88 per cent and 92 per cent respectively (Micklin 2010, 193–213). The diversion of inlets also led the salinity of the lake to increase by about twenty times. Further, consistently decreasing water levels led the lake to split into four parts by 2009 (Micklin 2010, 193). A dike and a dam constructed to save part of the lake were completed in 2005, and they have succeeded in salvaging the northern division — salinity has reduced, the ecological environment has improved, and fishery has been revitalized. However, complete rehabilitation of the Aral Sea is not possible in the foreseeable future (Micklin 2010, 206).

The more relevant image to this paper is that of a dying sea constituted by lifeless, empty waters. This may be the result of high pollution, over-extraction of

marine living resources, or inhospitable waters, like those of the Dead Sea. The perspective of the fishers whose narratives I recorded lean towards the crisis of over-extraction of marine resources. Whereas in the past care was taken to fish sustainably, there is currently a tendency to fish exhaustively, even in areas where young fish are bred. This depletes the fish stock and leaves hardly anything for the future. The fishers decry this culture of taking from the sea without giving anything back. Not only has so much been extracted from the sea that there is hardly anything left, but also the condition in which the sea is left makes it difficult for marine life to thrive. Marine pollution is a widespread challenge and because actors range from communities to large parastatals, it has become difficult for artisanal fishers to contain it. Vessels used at sea, especially big ships, remain a threat to a healthy marine environment. For example, there is unrelenting oil spillage from oil tankers into the ocean, as well as waste that the crews dump into the sea, some of it even radioactive. These actions harm marine life and have turned the ocean into "a basin for waste" (Deloughrey 2010, 707). Commenting on the dwindling productivity of the sea, Mvuvi Diani concludes that *Bahari imekufa. Kwa sababu haizai tena mazao yale yaliyokuweko mwanzo* [The sea is dead. Because it no longer produces like it used to]. This statement calls to mind the images of lifelessness, sterility, and barrenness discussed earlier.

## Conclusion

An analysis of narratives by four Kenyan coastal fishers belonging to three different generations has shown that practices of caring for the sea have been abandoned over time. The result, we have seen, is that the ocean has become increasingly unproductive to the point that the current generation of fishers imagines the sea to be dead. The oldest generation of fishers, represented by a ninety-eight-year-old fisher who boasts more than six decades of seafaring experience, has age-old knowledge of rituals and practices to nourish the sea. A robust regime of continuously replenishing the sea through partaking in these rituals and practices — which involve offering sacrifices in the guise of feeding the sea — ensured that the sea remained plentiful. With time, however, fewer and fewer fishers showed concern for the sea. The second generation of fishers studied in this paper (represented by two fishers in their sixties), helps to illustrate this point. Despite having knowledge of rituals and practices to maintain ocean health, this generation of fishers did away with this practice. The weakened relationship between fishers and the sea has best been illustrated by the current generation of fishers who have little knowledge of these rituals and therefore do not practise them at all. Reflecting on the productivity of the sea over time, a fisher representing the current generation of fishers remarked that the sea is dead. Responses to threats of a dying sea vary from continued extractive uses of the sea, which signifies lack of action, to increasing cases of fishers turning away from the sea to find alternative sources of livelihood.

## Notes

1. United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals," accessed at https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14.
2. United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals."
3. This pronouncement may, however, have been premature as soon after, certain forms of bacteria and algae were discovered in the Dead Sea (see Nissenbaum 1975, 139–140). Nonetheless, the Dead Sea does little to support human life in the traditional sense in which large water bodies serve humans – as a source of food and income (the Dead Sea's usefulness as a natural resource for chemicals and salts notwithstanding).
4. I note, however, that this image of an empty sea is inconsistent with recent research in oceanic studies, which challenges the perceived emptiness of the sea. See, for example, Clarke (2019, 153–72), and Bystrom and Hofmeyr (2017, 1–6).
5. These are not the real names of the four fishers.

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## Interlocutors

Mvuvi Omari, Shimoni, interviewed 25 June 2021.
Mvuvi Halim, Diani, interviewed 27 June 2021.
Mvuvi Salim, Diani, interviewed 27 June 2021.
Mvuvi Diani, Diani, interviewed 24 June 2021.