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THE ART OF CONNECTION:
NEGOTIATING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN KENYA'S CURIO INDUSTRY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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How does the social and economic context in which new communication technologies are introduced shape the ways small-scale traders understand, gain access to, and use them? How does the digital divide in access to communication technologies reproduce or counter pre-existing inequalities? This dissertation is based on 26 months of participant observation in Kenya since 2001, when I investigated the competition and economic precariousness found among art traders, exporters, and art-producing organizations and cooperatives. In this dissertation I focus on the recent effects of cell phones and the internet. To clarify the contemporary importance of mobile communication technologies for Kenyans working in the shadow of the coastal tourism industry, I discuss the history of social inequality in Mombasa, the consolidation of curio art traders and cooperatives in the port city, and Kenya's political economy of ICT access. Following the removal of the roadside kiosks housing my initial sample of 2001, I investigated the strategies of small-scale art vendors as they struggled to survive economic change. This dissertation captures the story of the rise of the cell phone entrepreneur and the related decline of the cooperative societies around which Kenya's curio industry had long been structured. For

economically disadvantaged actors, cell phones and email have become important for negotiating disparities in access not only to technologies, but also to jobs, capital, personal networks, and political representation. I argue that when state policy is not conducive to the formalization, legalization, and development of small-scale traders, ICTs can heighten social insecurity and economic precariousness among these businesspeople. Because the responsibility to manage risk has been abandoned by the Kenyan state and left to individual citizens and informal social and ethnic networks, the story of the digital divide among my research participants became one of ups and downs, repeated connection and disconnection, and intense competition. I demonstrate how the use of ICTs has left its mark on the individual men and women who drive Mombasa's curio industry, as well as the art itself.

Preface

I first visited Kenya in January 2001 as a college junior studying abroad with the School for International Training's Kenya Coastal Studies program in Mombasa. This dissertation is in many ways a continuation of the independent study project I conducted in April 2001 with curio vendors working along the roadside outside of Mombasa's Fort Jesus. While my initial focus was not limited to the curio trade or the effects of cell phones or the internet – such technologies were only just beginning to become readily available in Mombasa at the time – as I continued conducting research as a graduate student at Rutgers University, it became clear to me that an assessment of the effects of new communication technologies on Mombasa's curio industry would not only be thought provoking but also highlight the major struggles, contradictions, and lived experiences of Kenyans, many of whom I knew as friends before participating in this research. My most important thanks go to those curio traders and artisans who, unpaid, gave me their time and energy, their life stories, their views of their country and world, and substantial advice on how to structure my research project. It is to these individuals that this dissertation is dedicated.

Since my first days in Kenya, I have received valuable support and mentorship from the School for International Training's staff based in Mombasa, and especially Athman Lali Omar, who has been a wonderful friend and advisor. This research could not have been conducted without my language skills, for which I thank Reuben and Lydia Jemase for their outstanding support and friendship, as well as Charles Bwenge and John Mtembezi Innis.

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Portions of this work have been presented at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association and the African Studies Association in addition to conferences at Rutgers University, Princeton University, and in Mombasa, Kenya. I thank fellow participants and audience members for helpful comments and suggestions.

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Chapter 1
The Art of Connection:
A Theoretical Framework

Now it is so much easier and better because of the internet and cell phones. It is really incredible. In the old days, there were always problems with communication and nothing seemed to work right. Before these things, you had to arrange everything ahead of time. When to call. When to be at the pay phone. What time it would be. It was very problematic because communicating was so difficult.
 - Art exporter, Nairobi.¹

Few visitors to urban East Africa after 2000 could help but experience the popularity and usefulness of cell phones and internet cafés. These new technologies were at the center of a cultural negotiation and performance of modernity, decorated with the advertisements and billboards of service providers selling access to new means of communication and socio-economic connection.² Corporate marketing of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to urban Kenyans in the early 21st century was dangling the chance of economic success and social mobility before the eyes of those who had long been denied full and equal participation in world affairs and economic development. The possibilities were as numerous as the unanswered questions: who was benefiting from these new technologies: Kenyan citizens, service-providing companies, or was it more complicated? How were the obvious benefits of communication technologies being distributed? Were the marketing slogans empty promises or could these new technologies help boost the economy and jump Kenyans

¹ Author's interview, January 9, 2006, Nairobi. This Kamba trader was born in the small town of Kangundo in 1972. He completed his primary school education before moving to Nairobi in search of work in the late 1980s. Lacking a formal job, he was employed by several large curio shops and exporters in Nairobi's downtown before setting off on his own as an independent exporter during the 1990s.

² For more on modernity and globalization, modernity on the East African coast, and "performing modernity," see Appadurai (1996), Caplan (2004), and Schein (1999:361, 2000:258-62) respectively.

into international networks? To what extent have education, literacy, age, gender, ethnic background, and personal connections contributed to economic success or failure?

To answer these questions, I conducted an ethnographic study of the effects of new ICTs on Kenya's curio industry of ethnic and tourist arts and crafts.³ I focused on those intermediary traders and production organizations that were the foundation of Mombasa's curio industry, including the popular product lines of Kisii soapstone and Kamba (or Akamba) woodcarving.⁴ A study of the international art trade helps make academic discussions of the elusive phenomenon commonly termed "globalization" more specific. Like modernization or world systems theories, "globalization" as a process is often de-historicized and as a concept is limited for assuming a coherent direction of change experienced universally (Cooper 2001; Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Friedman 2003). According to Frederick Cooper, "what is missing in discussions of globalization today is the historical depth of interconnections and a focus on just what the structures and limits of the connecting mechanisms are" (2001:190). I therefore stress the deep historical context of the contemporary situation of ICTs in relation to Kenya's curio industry because, as scholars such as Saskia Sassen have suggested, such an approach helps us to "recover the noncorporate components of economic globalization and to inquire about the possibility of a new type of transnational politics, a politics of those

³ For more on the ethnographic study of handicrafts industries of the global South, see Chibnik (2003), Graburn (1976), Phillips and Steiner (1999a, b), and Steiner (1994) among others.

⁴ Kisii-speakers of Nyanza Province in southwestern Kenya can also be called the "Gusii" or "Wagusii" in Swahili. My point is not to essentialize ethnic groups or communities. But because most of the cooperatives and marketing of soapstone was done with the "Kisii" spelling, I have also chosen to use this spelling to refer to members of the ethnic group, a language, and a region of Kenya. There is also a Kisii Town and Kisii District. Similarly, the word "Kamba people" in the Kamba language is "Akamba," using a prefix of -A whereas in Swahili the prefix is -Wa. I have tried as frequently as possible to use the English "Kamba" for consistency. However, because the name of the Kamba woodcarving cooperative in Mombasa was named the Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society Limited and was commonly referred to as "Akamba Industry," both "Kamba" and "Akamba" appear regularly in this dissertation.

who lack power but now have ‘presence’” (1998:xxi).⁵ Kenya’s art traders and exporters are just such non-corporate and often immobile yet transnational actors, who despite being politically and economically disempowered, play an important role in negotiating cultural differences and economic change.

Davis was one such trader.⁶ Born in Western Kenya in the early 1970s, he moved to Mombasa in at the age of 16 and soon found employment selling curio art. After working outside of Mombasa’s Fort Jesus selling handicrafts and carvings to tourists for ten years, Davis lost his roadside kiosk in a wave of municipal demolitions in January 2002 (see ch. 3). But with the help of a cell phone and a personal email account, he found that he could maintain long-term connections with overseas buyers even after being abruptly displaced from his prime location outside of Fort Jesus – Mombasa’s most frequented tourist attraction. Using ICTs meant Davis was also no longer dependent on Mombasa’s precarious local tourism industry and was able to shift his curio business almost entirely into exporting.

Understanding a variety of such individuals’ experiences of ICTs allowed a fuller understanding of the socio-economic impact of new communication technologies in urban Kenya. I was concerned with traders’ economic histories in relation to state policy and both local and global events and trends. For example, in another reversal of fortunes, by 2007 Davis could not afford his website and had stopped receiving orders from his American and British customers. His major foreign client in the United States, who had

⁵ Similarly, Clark (1988) called for focused attention on street traders and other “informal” economic actors who have been increasingly emerging as significant political and economic actors. Also see similar models, such as Behrend’s (2000) “globalization from below” among Mombasa, Kenya’s roadside photographers and Simone’s (2001:16) concern with how urban Africans act through a process she termed “worlding from below.”

⁶ All names of research participants are pseudonyms.

even supplied him with his own ATM and business cards, told him quite directly (although by email) that his services would not be needed and his employment was being put on hold indefinitely. The U.S. economy was declining, the dollar was weak, and with fewer Americans traveling and spending money on small souvenirs, the company was cutting back on orders from their overseas suppliers like Davis. With no orders and no income, he was suddenly stranded – ejected from the international networks in which he had once been a major actor. He had even lost his beloved mobile, a small Samsung flip phone, to a moneylender who took it as collateral until the money he had lent to Davis was returned. Amid all of the optimism – for jumping scales into international markets, meeting new buyers, and realizing the potential of new technologies – Davis found himself living in abject poverty between mud walls and under a rusty roof. Davis’s story, and those of the nearly one hundred other carvers, artisans, traders, and shop vendors I interviewed during nearly 26 months of ethnographic research in Kenya between 2001 and 2008, exquisitely narrate the contradictions, hopes, and anguish of so many aspiring Kenyans competing within an economic environment that despite seeming more “free” in certain practical senses, is by no means stable or secure.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing in the 1960s and 1970s, migrants mainly from Nairobi and Machakos and Kisii Districts found the trade in handicrafts and carvings very lucrative in the coastal port and tourism hub of Mombasa. Even before Kenyan independence in 1963, the government had supported the formation of cooperative organizations to provide curio producers with protection from intermediary traders and to help migrants to cities like Mombasa develop a social safety net. With substantial state assistance and insistence, cooperatives like Mombasa’s Kamba

woodcarving and Kisii soapstone cooperatives became the foundation of Kenya's curio trade during the 1970s and 1980s.

But the Kenyan government's supportive role changed with the Co-operative Societies Act and Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1997 titled *Co-operatives in a liberalized economy*. While it did not put an end to government regulation of cooperatives and traders, the act officially removed the government's obligation to assist and subsidize cooperative organizations, making them "free enterprises" forced to compete directly with other privately owned businesses (Kenya 2002:37). The 1997 legislation signaled a reversal in state policy and would give individual traders the upper hand in competing against the once-dominant cooperatives. While tension and competition between the cooperatives and intermediary traders was as old as the cooperatives themselves, this act would tip the scales toward private intermediaries and compromise the usefulness of the cooperative societies.

Local economic instability in Mombasa was substantially shaped by the state's relationship with cooperative societies and the urban informal economy. Demolitions of roadside structures and kiosks in Mombasa in 2001 and 2002 continued a trend practiced since colonial times of clearing small-scale traders from the city. The demolitions further isolated migrant traders and craftspeople like Davis from the potentially lucrative curio and tourism industries. This massive restructuring of Mombasa's economy was a major impetus for small-scale traders operating in the city to turn to new technologies to access a market for their products. During the same years as the demolitions (2001-02), cell phone and internet use expanded rapidly in Kenya,⁷ providing many disenfranchised

⁷ In 2002, demand for mobile phones increased by 69.6 percent, with the number of mobile phone subscribers increasing from 630,000 in 2001 to just over 1 million in 2002 (Kenya 2003:28).

traders with a potential means to negotiate and overcome recent political and economic barriers to enterprise and industry development.

During the primary phase of my research in 2005 and 2006, I found that every one of the 30 research participants who were actively exporting and selling curios and handicrafts internationally were using either a cell phone or email address for business (see Appendix 1, Tables 13 and 14). But new ICTs alone are not sufficient for the expansion of Kenya's handicraft industry or growth in profits for producers and small-scale curio traders.⁸ Patron-client relations, education, and personal politics, connections, and networks can quickly augment the potential benefits of new communication technologies. While new technologies offer promise and hope to many traders, the initial bubble in ICT-based curio enterprises has slowly deflated as many of those who had access to new technologies, like Davis, have been out-competed and eventually driven into deeper poverty (see ch. 5).

As a few individual traders have come to out-compete production organizations like cooperatives, a majority have been left out. These realities are important for understanding the socio-economic effects of new technologies. In this dissertation I concentrate on the socio-cultural context of ICT appropriation, use, and dependence, which emerges not simply from the interactions among government bodies and multinational corporations but from localized and personal stories, experiences, and economic ups and downs of the Kenyan artisans and handicrafts traders who are my primary focus.

⁸ For more on the broader impact of ICTs in Africa and within an African socio-cultural context, see Gyekye (1997), Jules-Rosette (1990), Mazrui (1977, 1978), Taylor and Obudho (1977), and van Binsbergen (2004).

There is sparse literature on the precariousness caused by new communication technologies and how such unforeseen effects might be addressed. It is true that ICTs play an important role in migrants' maintenance of close ties with a homeland in a way never before possible (see Burrell and Anderson 2008:204; Cohen 1997; Glick Schiller 2004; Kivisto 2003; Portes 1999; Smith 2002; Smith and Guarnizo 2002). Burrell and Anderson (2008:203) discussed how Ghanaians became transnational actors by using the internet to "realize migratory aspirations," or to search the world in exploration of opportunities, information, contacts and new ideas. They found that ICTs not only helped maintain connections to a homeland but also enhanced the exploratory aspect of migration, as many Ghanaians in their study used ICTs such as internet web sites to make new connections and learn new information and ideas (Burrell and Anderson 2008:204). Use of ICTs can, in fact, be very similar to migration as people use new technologies to experience and access more ostensibly "global," cosmopolitan lifestyles (Burrell and Anderson 2008:205).

But the study of the precarious livelihoods of small-scale traders is a crucial yet largely absent part of the story of contemporary globalization. As Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey elaborated, "globalization is generally thought of in terms of multinational companies and the changing relations between nation states and peoples as they become enmeshed in the world economy" (2000:3). But such a perspective often loses sight of the individual traders who are risking their life savings daily to maintain important socio-economic networks and make them work to their benefit. The traders I studied *were* enmeshed in the world economy. But few people – Kenyans, tourists, or

development practitioners – took the time to listen to their stories and dreams to understand their economic strategies and potential.

During my first months in Kenya as an undergraduate, it was not African art but the traders of African art who really fascinated me. I have been drawn to Kenya's art traders precisely because the case allows us to, as James Ferguson has suggested, "conceive, theoretically and politically, of a 'grass-roots' that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well-connected, and opportunistic" (2004:394). Kenya's curio traders and other small-scale tourism operators were modern businesspeople with dreams of moving out of Kenya and operating transnationally as empowered social and economic actors. I share Christopher Steiner's sentiment when he wrote:

...the African art trader has been relegated by silence to an invisible cog in the wheels of a complex transnational market – a market which functions because of, *not* in spite of, the African middleman. Analysis of the African art trade not only sheds light on a "forgotten" people, it also illuminates an important facet of African art which has generally been neglected in the literature (1994:10).

But what would the study of the insecure and precarious livelihoods of Kenyan art traders reveal about global change at the turn of the 21st century? Risk is an inherently important factor when discussing small-scale enterprise development (McCormick 1993; Bowen 1999). For example, many Kenyan traders will not seek loans for fear of having their investment removed or demolished and then losing their property to a bank or lender for non-payment of a loan. It is typical for traders to prefer to remain debt-free and poor rather than seek capital through many of the formal channels that have been opened up in order to help them develop enterprises (McCormick 1993; Bowen 1999). Within such an environment, new technologies are not adopted and used similarly by everyone. As

Mansell has argued, ICTs must be understood to have a politics “in the sense that every stage in the production and consumption of these technologies is marked by inequalities, by uncertainties and by the ways that technological innovations configure their producers and users” (Mansell 2006:903 citing Silverstone and Mansell 1996:903 and Castells 1996:5, 2001). From such a perspective, the digital divide is not simply a gap between those with and those without access to new technologies. Rather, as my research participants’ stories demonstrate, business development requires personal connections to kin, ethnic communities, and political patrons, as well as relationships with overseas buyers. More than simply accessing technologies and opening web sites, climbing the economic ladder requires capital, education, strong social networks, information, and state support.

Connection and *precariousness*, two central themes of this dissertation, are essential to understanding how international socio-economic networks of actors function and are maintained. An increase in access to ICTs often increases precariousness, as demonstrated by Davis’s story. “Global shadows,” “friction,” “fragmentation,” and cases of “disconnection” from regional and international markets also characterize the contemporary political-economic situation, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Burawoy 2001; Ferguson 2006; Tsing 2005; Harvey 2005). This could seem counter-intuitive since we are frequently exposed to marketing campaigns and political rhetoric that speak of the “magic” of technologies and the “free” market, or that imply increased connection and market integration is good, and would, at least theoretically, *increase* security (McChesney 2000). But as I will demonstrate, insecurity has long characterized the

precarious socio-economic environment that surrounds the decision-making of small-scale traders.

The *connected*, successful, and mobile are often the ones whose voices and stories carry the most weight. It is because the connected are those with the most voice that the story of the digital divide is so difficult to capture without an ethnographic approach. The digital divide is not natural or inevitable but emerges because of concrete policy decisions that have complex, reverberating social, cultural, and economic effects. As individuals become dependent upon ICTs for life and leisure, life becomes “completely contingent with the fickle and unpredictable nature of the contemporary global economy for which risks no one but themselves is expected to take personal responsibility” (Deuze 2007:12).

Michael Burawoy (2001) has written insightfully on the topic of co-existence of connection and disconnection and their co-construction through the process of globalization. He stressed that “money, technology, goods, services and people do not flow on a level plain, but are propagated through inequalities of power between transmitter and receiver” (2001:150). For Burawoy, “globalization is not just the production of (dis)connections, but simultaneously it is the production of a *convincing ideology* that obscures the source of those (dis)connections and presents them as something natural and eternal” (2001:150). It is just such an ideology – of connection, technological determinism, or transparency – that helps ensure that the success stories stand out and obscure the realities of the majority who are blamed individually for failing in a highly competitive and nearly flooded market. As I illustrate in this dissertation, because the responsibility to manage risk has been abandoned by the Kenyan state and

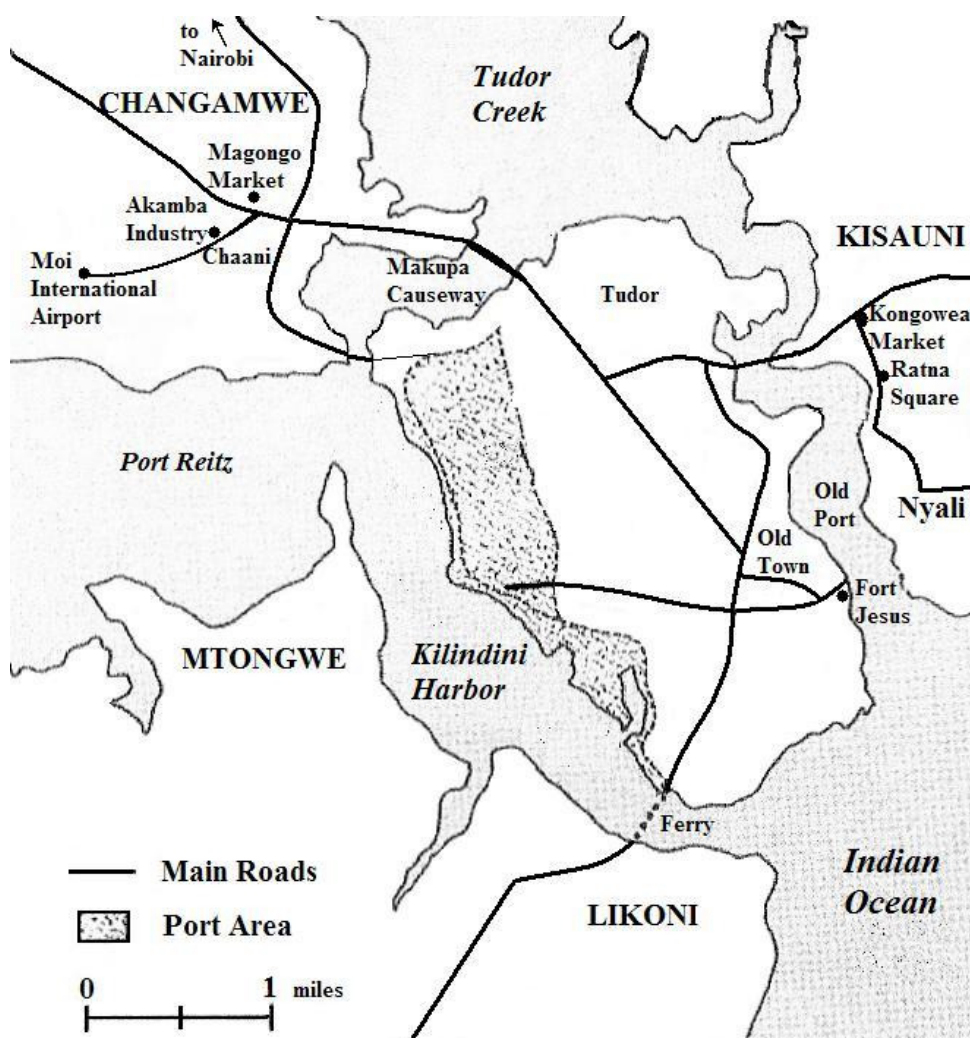
left to individual citizens and informal social and ethnic networks, the story of the digital divide among my research participants became one of ups and downs, precariousness, and intense competition.

In sum, I argue that when state policy is not conducive to the official recognition, legalization, and development of small-scale traders, ICTs can increase economic precariousness and social insecurity among small-scale traders. I stress that the Kenyan socio-economic environment into which cell phones and internet cafés were suddenly injected in the early years of the 21st century was one of flux and insecurity even before the introduction of new technologies. For this reason, much of this dissertation focuses on the historical narrative of economic precariousness to understand the environment into which new communication technologies would become important social and economic tools. But also beyond the effects of ICTs, I demonstrate how their use and importance has left its mark on the individual men and women who drive Mombasa's curio industry, as well as the art itself.

Mombasa: A City of Connection

I first arrived in Mombasa in January 2001 as a student participant in a study abroad program during my junior year in college. I remember landing in Mombasa's Moi International Airport and feeling the East African coast's signature humidity as if I were stepping into a cloud. I felt a distinct shock driving through what I would later know as the neighborhoods of Changamwe, across Makupa Causeway and onto Mombasa Island itself – an island surrounded on three sides by mainland (see map 1.1). I remember slowly riding along Jomo Kenyatta Avenue and into the central business district before descending down Nkrumah Road, through the square outside of Fort Jesus,

and into the “Old Town.”⁹ The area immediately outside of Fort Jesus was the southern edge of the most concentrated “Swahili” settlement in Mombasa and the area where I stayed during my first week in Kenya (see photo 1.1).¹⁰



Map 1.1: Mombasa Island and the Surrounding Mainland.¹¹ Most mass tourism is found on the north or south coasts, particularly between Bamburi and Mtwapa to the north past the wealthy enclave of Nyali. Changamwe is the primary connection to Nairobi and is the home to Moi International Airport, Mombasa’s oil refinery, and its export processing zones.

⁹ Fort Jesus (see photo 1.1), built by the Portuguese and later used and modified by various Omani, Swahili, and British governors of Mombasa, became a museum and tourist attraction only after Kenyan independence in 1963. With the rise in Kenyan tourism in the late 20th century, Fort Jesus was significantly renovated and rehabilitated and became the coastal headquarters of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). By the turn of the 21st century, Fort Jesus consistently ranked as one of the most frequented tourist sites in Kenya, particularly among Kenyans (see Kenya 2003, 2005a).

¹⁰ “Swahili” in this case is what the first British administrators termed the racially-mixed society of Mombasa and other port cities of the East African coast through the 19th century. See chapter 2 for more on the multiple and highly contested meanings of “Swahili” in Mombasa.

¹¹ Adapted from a similar map in Cooper (1987:1).



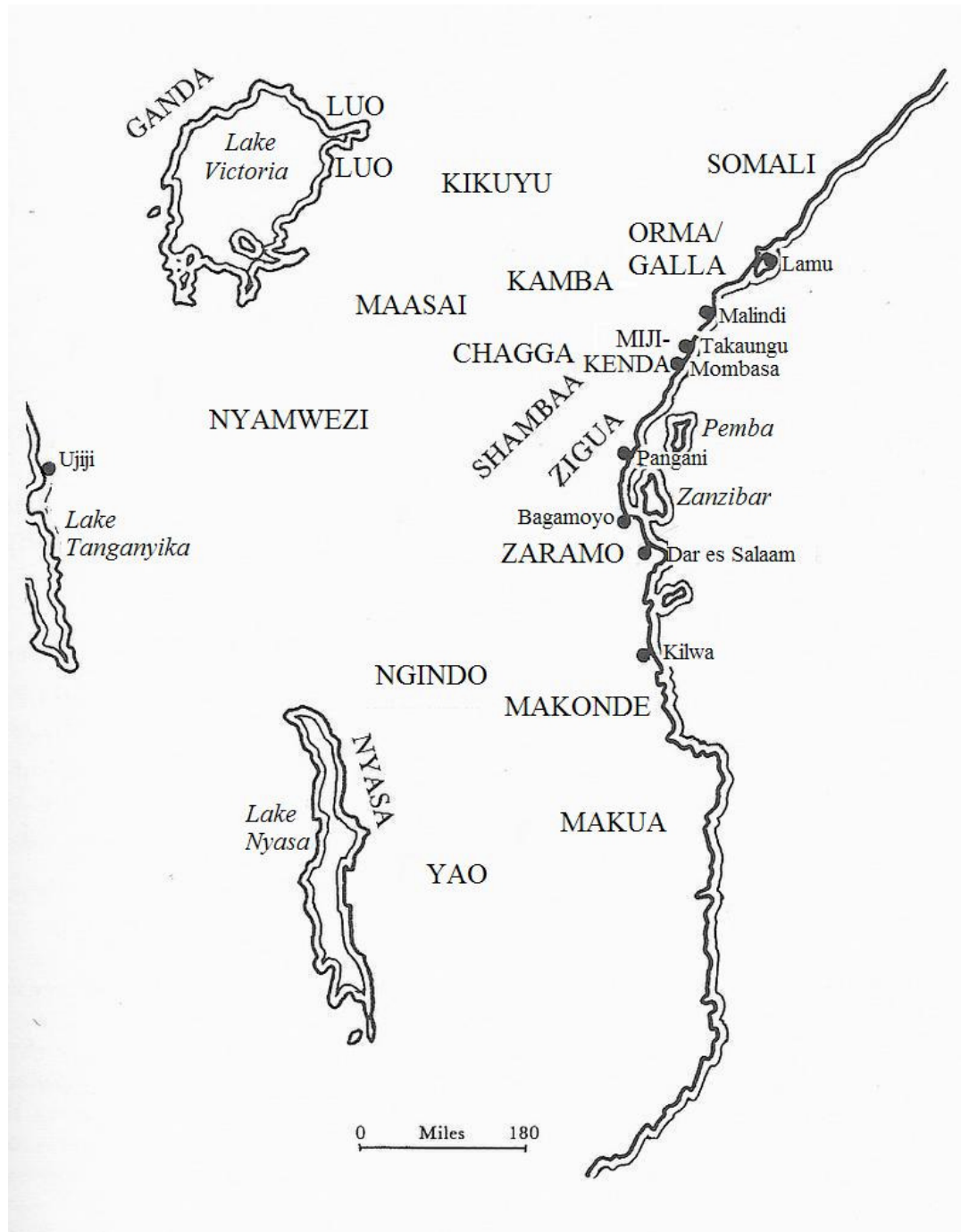
Photo 1.1: Fort Jesus, looking east toward the Indian Ocean.

Mombasa's streets were informal social and economic marketplaces in which young white Americans were assumed to have large amounts of both symbolic and economic capital – although initially we did not necessarily understand why or how. Every day the other students and I were required to navigate passage through the square outside of Fort Jesus, an obstacle course of salespeople, agents and tour guides (often collectively termed “hawkers”), who aggressively offered a variety of services and commodities. Taxi drivers would call at us repeatedly with hands raised in the air, pleading to give us a ride. The tour guides grabbed at our clothes and called us “*rafiki*,” Swahili for *friend*. Amid the apparent chaos, the safest place seemed the roadside furthest from the fort, which all-the-while loomed seemingly undisturbed over everything.



Map 1.2: Central Mombasa.¹² This map demonstrates the layout of Mombasa's central business district and the adjacent Old Town. Mombasa's tourism and curio industries were once organized spatially around tourists arriving at the dock on cruise ships and walking down Moi Avenue (formerly Kilindini Road) to the downtown and Fort Jesus. Kiosks and shops selling curios were scattered along the roadsides of Moi and Nyerere Avenues, Digo Road, and outside of Fort Jesus through the 1980s. But as part of economic restructuring and "city cleaning" in the 1990s, roadside structures were removed and tourists and hotels moved away from the downtown and into the privatized circuits and walled resorts of the north and south coasts.

¹² Adapted from "Mombasa City Map" by Interland Publications, 2005.



Map 1.3: East Africa and its Interior, 19th Century.¹³ From the perspective of caravan organizers and European colonizers, the economic prize in East Africa was the Ganda or Buganda Empire in the densely-populated region to the north and west of Lake Victoria. While most pre-20th century trade into the East African interior came through present-day Tanzania and Mozambique to the south, the agricultural Mijikenda (MK in this map) and pastoral Kamba (both Bantu speakers) played crucial intermediary roles in the more arid areas to the north.

¹³ Adapted from a similar map in Cooper (1977:121).

The far side of Nkrumah Road opposite the fort borders the Mazrui cemetery (see map 1.2), the final resting place of several governors of Omani descent who had struggled to order Mombasa's highly-politicized and internationally connected economy during the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁴ The fort and Old Town's age and rich history have made the neighborhood a popular tourist attraction and addition to resorts' and tour companies' "city tours," which offer one of the few opportunities for travelers in Kenya on package tours to leave the confines of their resorts and visit a public part of the city. The space between the Mazrui Cemetery and the fort's towering yellow walls remains a landmark site of interaction between the privileged and the underprivileged, commanding the attention of most visitors to the city.

Within this competitive and politically charged economic environment, Fort Jesus's curio vendors sold an assortment of small crafts, baskets, jewelry, and wood and soapstone carvings, almost all of which could be found in other major cities and tourist sites around the country. Tourists and travelers bought these small material representations of "Kenya" or "Africa" to take home and use to demonstrate their cosmopolitan sensibilities and worldly experience (c.f. Graburn 1976; Steiner 1994; Phillips and Steiner 1999a; Chibnik 2003). I also entered into such socioculturally conditioned consumption patterns and was interested in Kenyan arts and crafts, having

¹⁴ For a history of Mombasa in the 19th century and the important role of the Mazrui, see Brantley (1981:19-25), Cooper (1977), Morton (1990), Salim (1973), Sheriff (1987) and Willis (1993). The following draws on these sources. The Mazrui were an extended Omani family originally given the responsibility of ruling the Sultan's East African interests in the 18th century, when the capital of the Omani Sultanate remained in Muscat. When the Busaidi assumed control of the sultanate, the Mazrui opposed the transition and remained the independent governors of Mombasa. The standoff lasted until 1837, when the Busaidi took control of Mombasa and Fort Jesus after almost one hundred years of Mazrui rule. Particularly after the movement of the Omani capital to Zanzibar in 1840, the Mazrui of Mombasa relocated to Takaungu, just south of Kilifi Creek in the north, and to Gazi in the south (see map 1.3). The unsuccessful Anglo-Mazrui rebellion of 1895 was a final attempt by the Mazrui to resist the rule of the British, who had entered East Africa under a deal with the Sultan of Zanzibar.

read about the impact of African artistic motifs, such as the abstract facial mask, on celebrated European artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and Braque.¹⁵ I found that giving money to an art vendor working along the roadside felt good in the sense that I was helping someone who was working hard, or admirably pursuing a familiar American ideology of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps.

I was fascinated by both the diversity among the vendors selling the art as well as the variety of products being sold. Certain wooden kiosks were literally packed full of colorfully painted soapstone sculptures, carved into the shapes of animals, bowls, chess sets, or abstract interconnected figures. Other vendors specialized in what I would come to know as Kamba woodcarving, which consisted of a variety of wooden masks and carved animals, bowls, and figurines. Still other kiosks sold printed t-shirts, colorful fabrics known locally as “*kangas*” or “*kikois*,”¹⁶ woven sisal bags, small pieces of carved furniture such as boxes, stools, or bookends, as well as a variety of beadwork adorning sandals, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets.

As my interest grew, I realized that the Fort Jesus community of curio traders provided an interesting window onto larger social and economic processes in Mombasa. For example, Davis was a vendor whose father was Luo and whose mother was Kisii but who spoke Kikuyu (in addition to Kisii, Swahili, and English) fluently after growing up in Nairobi (where he frequently heard and spoke Kikuyu). As a result, Davis had several situational ethnic identities to draw upon. His ethnic identity carried some ambiguity, challenging the notion that ethnic categories in Kenya were rigid and inflexible. Wanjiru

¹⁵ See Steiner (1994:4-5) and Kasfir (1999).

¹⁶ These are the anglicized terms to refer to these products. In standard Swahili the plural of *kanga* is *kanga*, and the plural of *kikoi* is *vikoi*. But they were commonly anglicized in local communication with tourists to *kangas* and *kikois*.

was a research participant who the government categorized as Kikuyu. This was printed on her identity card, even though she was born and raised in Mombasa and did not speak Kikuyu fluently. She identified herself as “one of the Mombasani,” a term used by many young Kenyans in Mombasa from non-coastal ethnic groups. While she and other Kenyans were often seen as “outsiders” on the Kenyan coast, as I will discuss in chapter 2, claims to tenure and belonging along Mombasa’s roadsides are very complicated. Other curio vendors like Juma, a Kenyan born in 1978, had migrated to Mombasa from near the town of Samburu in Kwale District of Coast Province. He had lived in Mombasa for less time than either Davis or Wanjiru, but was generally categorized by the government, scholars, and local communities as “a coastal person” (*mpwani*) while the others were seen as migrants or “upcountry people” (*watu wa bara*).

Together, these traders represented the complications and contradictions of some of the working poor whom statistics showed every year made up the largest sector of employment creation in Kenya under the heading of the “informal” or *jua kali* sector (Kenya 2005b:iii).¹⁷ *Jua kali* literally means “harsh sun” in Swahili. Originally a spatial term used to refer to traders and craftspeople lacking shelter and working in the open sun, by the late 1980s the term had come to refer to those businesses that functioned with minimal government regulation and oversight. *Jua kali* simultaneously became the economic identity of many small-scale traders and entrepreneurs in Kenya who struggled daily in diverse economic circumstances.¹⁸ *Jua kali* art traders, who had the important

¹⁷ For more on the history of the term and the sector in Kenya, see Bowen (1999), Daniels (1999), Ferrand (1996), Kabecha (1999), Kenya (2005b), King (1996), Macharia (1993, 1997), McCormick (1987, 1993), and chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁸ The Kenyan government and development agencies have more recently begun referring to the majority of such businesses as “micro and small-scale enterprises,” or MSEs. While the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005 defined MSEs as employing 1-50 workers (2005b:5), the authors admitted that over seventy percent of MSEs employ only one person (2005b:6).

job of selling images of Kenya and representing the country to tourists and travelers, found themselves in a particularly awkward economic environment because they were often at odds with the municipal authorities and local communities, making their role as Kenyan culture brokers all the more precarious.

African Art as Global Commodity

Writing about the commercial or economic side of the African art trade seemed surprising and counter-intuitive to many Americans with whom I discussed my research. This was primarily because African art in North America and Europe is generally understood to represent a romanticized, pre-colonial ritual setting that was ostensibly free of the political and economic pressures that structure the contemporary world. But it is important to remember that Kenya's curio industry is economically substantial. The woodcarving component alone was estimated during the mid-1990s to earn as much as \$20 million annually (Choge et al. 2005 citing Obunga 1995 and Choge 2002).¹⁹ While it is nearly impossible to calculate the number of carvers, sanders, decorators, and vendors working in the woodcarving industry, Obunga (1995) estimated during his mid-1990s survey that there were 60-80,000 active carvers in Kenya with over 400,000 dependents (cited in Choge et al. 2005:33).²⁰

¹⁹ In their comparison of global woodcarving industries, Belcher et al. (2005:4) cited Kenya's as "a middle way" between the "two extremes" of Bali, exporting nearly \$100 million in carvings annually (Belcher et al. 2005:3 citing Rohadi et al. 2005:121), and Zimbabwe, whose carving industry earns only \$1-2 million per year.

²⁰ The sale of Kenyan art and crafts is divided between local sales and export, primarily to the United States, Japan and Western Europe. As an example of market diversification, the Kamba cooperative in Mombasa, officially titled the Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. and commonly referred to as "Akamba Industry," makes 50% of their sales to the domestic market, 30% to international buyers through exports, and 20% directly to tourists through their showroom (author's interview with Head of Records and Books, Akamba Industry, Sept. 26, 2005). The main destinations of carvings exported from Kenya in the mid-1990s were as follows: U.S. (47 percent), Japan (10 percent), Spain (7 percent), South Africa (7 percent), Germany (6 percent) and the U.K. (6 percent), with a wide variety of other countries receiving the rest (Choge et al. 2005:42 f.n. 1 citing Obunga's 1995 estimate).

But the study of African art has tended to focus on the forms of the art, including functions and aesthetics found primarily in localized settings (Steiner 1994:7). As

Steiner reflected in the introduction to his study of the African art trade in Côte d'Ivoire:

Since the collection of African art is often associated with an idealized Western vision of static, "primitive" culture, most collectors, I believe, would prefer to read about the uses of African art in a putative unchanging pre-colonial milieu than about the commoditization of African art in a post-colonial transnational economy (1994:9).

While not an example of primordial ethnic difference or an unchanging, pre-colonial cultural milieu, Kenya's curio art is as deeply symbolic as any globally circulating commodity. Its trade is a fertile ground for the ethnographic study of the production of meaning throughout an international commodity chain.²¹ One way to construct an ethnography that pushes beyond earlier anthropological preoccupations with bounded social systems or the "tribal unit" has been to follow the change of a commodity's meaning through its "social life" (Appadurai 1986a, b; Steiner 1994). This is particularly important because the global integration of international trade networks of late 20th- and early 21st-century commodities has hidden the effects of such changes on social relations at the points of production and distribution (Collins 2000:97). As Mintz (1985) did with sugar and Wolf (1982) did with numerous commodities, the contributors to Appadurai's (1986a) edited collection sought to examine the movement of commodities around the world and thus the *process* of change of objects' meanings as they circulated.²² African woodcarving industries, Steiner (1994) has demonstrated, are fertile ground for such studies. Steiner (1994) emphasized that not only did African art

²¹ See Appadurai (1986 a, b), Collins (2000), Haugerud et. al (2000), Mintz (1985), Stone et. al (2000), and Wolf (1982).

²² The major argument made by Appadurai in his introduction to *The Social Life of Things* was, as he put it, "Economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged" (1986b:3). Because of this, "what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, constructed broadly" (1986b:3). It is therefore a correlate that "commodities, like persons, have social lives" (1986b:3).

represent a commodity that is circulating through the world across a range of local, national, and transnational economies, but:

Because the merchandise that the traders buy and sell is defined, classified, and evaluated largely in terms of Western concepts such as “art” and “authenticity,” the traders are not only moving a set of objects through the world economic system, they are also exchanging information – mediating, modifying, and commenting on a broad spectrum of cultural knowledge (1994:2).

The examination of ethnic and tourist arts thus demands the deconstruction of commonly held assumptions about the term and concept of *art* itself. As Marcus and Myers put it in the introduction to their volume, *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*:

Despite long-standing debates and challenges to the problem and ideal of art’s autonomy in the West, for many people engaged with the arts the category of ‘art’ remains a resolutely commonsense one, associated with essential value in relation to a generalized human capacity for spirituality and creativity (1995:7 cited also in Stoller 2003:211).

The object is assigned meaning, for example, when placed in the home and the curio cabinet, as the artifact is removed from the public space of the museum to a private, domestic space.²³ The terming of Kenya’s commodified carvings and crafts as “curios” is traceable to the initial categorization of African art by Europeans as “curiosities,” or objects that were considered “worthy neither of scientific investigation nor aesthetic appreciation” (Steiner 1994:108). It was common practice for Europe’s elite to arrange the objects gathered from the conquest and exploration of foreign lands into “cabinets of

²³ Phillips and Steiner’s (1999b) discussion hinged upon the separation of “the public space of the museum,” which they called “the site of art and artifact,” and “the private space of the home,” or “the site of the commodity” (1999b:16). They drew particular attention to interior decorating texts that lauded the effects of decorating the home with ethnic arts. They identified three major themes in such discourses, “(1) that ‘ethnic’ art is closer to nature and therefore less artificial than its modern counterpart; (2) that the ‘ethnic’ arts of all regions share a common denominator, marking them largely interchangeable and somehow comparable on a formal level; and (3) that ‘ethnic’ art represents the final, fleeting testimony to the tenuous existence of rapidly vanishing worlds” (1999b:17).

curiosity” or “curio cabinets” (1994:108). As Phillips and Steiner (1999b) described, initially seen as simple curiosities:

The incorporation of non-Western objects into the disciplinary fold of art history that began around the middle of the twentieth century was a liberal gesture of inclusion typical of its era. Formal recognition was extended, like the political sovereignty granted to a newly independent colony, but the infrastructure of Western knowledge formations remained firmly in place. To be represented as “art,” in other words, the aesthetic objects of non-Western peoples had to be transposed into the Western system of classification of fine and applied art (1999b:7).

Ethnic and tribal arts have long figured into generalized cultural comparisons that hinged on underlying ethnocentric assumptions of cultural evolutionism. Using art to place diverse human cultures into an evolutionary hierarchy was useful to Westerners during the 19th and 20th century “because [art] constituted ... the ultimate measure of human achievement” (Phillips and Steiner 1999b:7). As Phillips and Steiner described, “The presence or absence of ‘true art,’ defined as free creation unfettered by functional requirements, could be used as a kind of litmus test of the level of civilization a group of people had supposedly achieved” (1999b:7).

The inevitable and necessary deconstruction of the concept and category of “African art” is not unlike that of cultural anthropology itself. Marcus and Myers called for a “renegotiation of the relationship between art and anthropology,” pointing out that American anthropology’s cultural theory was rooted “in the very matrix of aesthetics and Romanticism from which modern art sprang” (1995:11). As social and cultural anthropology emerged through the early 20th century, the stage was set for the so-called “discovery” of African (and other “primitive”) arts by European artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Vlaminck, and Apollinaire (Steiner 1994:4).

While the initial 20th century demand for African art, especially in France, was limited to the Cubists, a curiosity about Africa following the First World War helped slowly stimulate demand for African art among European consumers in other sectors of society (Steiner 1994:4-5). Particularly with the onset of mass international tourism following the Second World War, ethnic and tourist arts became what Phillips and Steiner called “a special category of exotica, ...constructed not just to represent the idea of the handmade, but also to display iconographic motifs and forms that signified ‘old’ ways of life imagined as simpler and more satisfying” (1999b:13). As Europe modernized through the 20th century, exporting ideas and dreams of technological breakthrough and global social and economic integration, the art of the non-West provided the “Others” and their handmade, unsigned crafts against which the American or European intellectual could compare himself or herself to feel reassured of one’s modernity and civility (Chibnik 2003; Graburn 1976; Kasfir 1999, 2007; Phillips and Steiner 1999a, b; Steiner 1994, 1995, 1996; Stoller 2003).

The source of continued Western interest in African art is a complicated and interesting story that has been described elsewhere (Miller 1975; Steiner 1994; Stoller 2003). When Nelson Rockefeller, a collector of “tribal” art from Oceania, Africa, and the Americas became the director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1950, the museum began paying much closer attention to unsigned objects from foreign lands, which seemed to only have an “ethnic” or “tribal” authorship (see Stoller 2003:213). As Paul Stoller described:

Just as MOMA’s attention to modern art gave it a widespread aesthetic legitimacy and economic appeal, so its exhibitions of ‘tribal’ art increased the desire for and the

economic value of objects produced by nameless artists in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (2003:213).²⁴

The desire and allure underlying Western curiosity about Africa and its art had not dissipated by the end of the century. In a discussion of late 20th-century museum presentation of African art, Steiner (1996) discussed how African art still relies upon a process of mystification and discovery to be palatable and desirable for Western consumption. He described how African art, while often unchanging in form, has continued to be represented for the American public (particularly in New York City museums and exhibitions) as a newly discovered form of primitive art that was proof that “Others” are capable of exotic masterpieces. Steiner compared New York City’s attraction to African art in the 1990s to that of the 1930s, arguing that the production and reproduction of images of Africa in the West rely on a continual erasing and re-discovery of Africa’s past.

It is, indeed, the erasure of Africa’s past that has allowed the singular concept of *Africa* to emerge as a socio-cultural reality in the early 21st century. This erasure underlies the process of illusion and mystification I wish to highlight in the production of meaning by Kenya’s art traders and handicrafts dealers. For Kenya’s art brokers and exporters, the history of the art industry, which emerged out of the colonial period (see ch. 3), has the potential to challenge the authenticity of the art itself by revealing that it is not the product of a pre-colonial cultural milieu. Yet I wish to demonstrate that revealing the nature of curio art’s production and explaining the contemporary economic situation of Kenya’s curio traders does not necessarily challenge the art’s authenticity or reduce its value. Products labeled as “Fair Trade,” for example, generate value by informing the

²⁴ Also see James Clifford’s discussion of the MOMA’s controversial 1980s exhibition “Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern” (Clifford 1988:ch. 9).

consumer about production conditions (see ch. 6). Understanding the production and trading networks of Kenyan art makes transparent a process that I believe, by its own nature, brings the art to life, assigns it meaning, and generates symbolic capital. While Kenya's curio art may not represent a pre-colonial African cultural system, when understood for its modern role in marketing Kenya and developing artisan networks, the art tells a very real, contemporary story about the cultural politics of neoliberal capitalism, new technologies, and international tourism.

Project Design, Language, and Methods

This dissertation is the product of my relationships with people who could be termed "informants" or "research subjects." Such categories, however, deceptively suggest that such individuals were passive participants in the overall project who simply gave me information or were observed. This ethnography is the result of my ability (or inability at times) to stay in contact with curio vendors over a period of years as I worked to finish my dissertation and they tried to sustain and expand their businesses.

At the core of this research and my own exercise in international social connectivity was my ability to communicate and use language to my benefit rather than allow it to be a hindrance. Knowledge of Swahili and overall linguistic flexibility gave me the social mobility needed to live and function within the array of communities found in urban and semi-urban coastal Kenya. Urban and well-educated Kenyans tend to be multi-lingual, knowing some English and Swahili as well as additional indigenous or foreign languages. I found that many urban Kenyans, especially those from multi-ethnic areas of Nairobi and Mombasa or who had gone to school with Kenyans from around the country, knew at least some of the language of their parents' ethnic group(s), as well as

bits and greetings from Kikuyu, Luo, and the languages of other large Kenyan ethnic groups. Kenyans I encountered, from domestic help to academics, found it strange yet fascinating that a foreigner such as myself would take interest in the local languages of Kenya. But Kenyans tended to view my language skills positively, and language became an important way to demonstrate that I was not a tourist. I could explain my language interest and questions by pointing out that it was, indeed, my job to know the bits and pieces of Giriama, Kikuyu, and Luo that were slipped into everyday speech in Mombasa, just as it was theirs to learn enough German, French, and Italian to greet tourists and conduct a simple business transaction with a variety of foreigners who may not speak English.

I discovered quickly that language training and proficiency were not only about learning *kiswahili sanifu*, or standard Swahili. The standard Swahili taught in most schools, in both Kenya and abroad, differs dramatically from what is spoken colloquially and on the street (“*mtaani*”) in Kenya. For research purposes, the practical strategy was to become linguistically flexible, developing a formal voice while also being fluent in the colloquialisms and code switching of *sheng*, a mixture of Swahili, English, and slang from both. *Sheng* incorporates loan words from English and other languages into the basic Bantu grammar structure of Swahili similar to the way Swahili itself developed by adopting loan words, primarily from Arabic.²⁵ While the use and teaching of *sheng* are intensely debated in the media and in academic circles and is considered by many Swahili

²⁵ For a thorough background on *sheng*, see Githiora (2002). It is also worth mentioning that standard Swahili is more widely spread throughout East Africa than *sheng*. *Sheng* is largely a Kenyan phenomenon, although because it is a mixture of several languages, different versions of *sheng* are spoken throughout East Africa and there is little formalizing force beyond popular music. Tanzanians and Ugandans frequently hear Kenyan *sheng* in Nairobi-produced pop music, and slang does travel selectively across the region. For a discussion of a Tanzanian counterpart of *sheng* known as *Swahinglish*, see Higgins (2007).

teachers to be an inauthentic form of the language, my knowledge and use of *sheng* are what enabled communication for this dissertation.²⁶

In addition to wonderful language teachers, I was greatly aided by watching Kenyan television and listening to *sheng* pop music and particularly hip-hop, which also gave very pertinent insight into contemporary social issues. When I was first in Kenya in 2001, suspiciously uniform, aqua-colored bootleg audiocassettes of very poor quality could be purchased throughout downtown Mombasa, where they were sold from roadside stalls to passing pedestrians. The cassettes usually cost from 80 to 100 shillings (\$1.20). By 2005 CDs had taken the place of the cassettes and at a much higher quality were sold for the same price. It was a technological shift that allowed me access to a wide array of Kenyan pop songs that were circulating rapidly on the internet as mp3s and via “pirated” albums before being “burned” to mix CDs sold to the public. At the same time, VHS tapes were replaced with DVDs, and Kenyan television shows also became readily available in the same way. This accessibility greatly enhanced my ability to learn *sheng* and develop a useful knowledge of Kenyan popular culture.

The array of interviews I conducted, performances I observed, and shops and cultural material I perused, together constituted what Louisa Schein (2000:26-28) has termed “itinerant ethnography.” The fragments of discourse that I would piece together to complete this ethnography were vital to my larger project and research method.

Knowledge of *sheng* as well as language ideologies, accents, and the basic greetings and

²⁶ See “Ban Sheng to Save Other Languages,” by Onwonga Yabesh of Moi University, *Standard*, School and Career section, May 25, 2006, page 2, for an argument against the use of *sheng*. See “Language is basically a tool for communication,” by Paul Ochieng of Nairobi, *Daily Nation*, April 18, 2006, page 10, “The futility of fighting sheng,” by John Mwazemba, *The East African Standard* online edition, Oct. 8, 2006, and “Overlook Sheng at your own risk,” by Mwingirwa Kithure, *The East African Standard* online edition, Oct. 15, 2006, for arguments for the use of *sheng*.

phrases of many other languages, such as the Mijikenda, Kamba, Kisii, Luo and Kikuyu languages, deeply enriched my interactions with research participants and my ability to extract deeper meaning from conversations. Because I found myself regularly speaking with Mijikenda, Kamba, Kisii, and Kikuyu traders, I focused most of my attention on these languages. I also picked up greetings and phrases from Luo (*dholuo*) and learned some of the subtle differences between the Mijikenda languages. My goal was to be able to say “things are good” (*mambo ni mazuri* in Swahili) and “we’re together” (*tuko pamoja* in Swahili – a phrase of endearment and sign of cooperation) in the languages I encountered on a regular basis. For example, “things are good” is “*mautu ni madzo*” in Giriama (Mijikenda), “*maundu ni maseo*” in Kamba, and “*maundu ni meega*” in Kikuyu. This example also demonstrates the similarity between these closely related Bantu languages.

My language ability was particularly useful as an icebreaker and for gaining rapport. From September 2005 through August 2006, I spent several hours every day in regular conversation in Swahili and *sheng*. Naturally, many people were cautious of being interviewed by a stranger, particularly a white American about whom they knew little and who knew *sheng*. It might be safe to say that most Kenyans initially thought I was some type of police, although I was probably referred to as “*chizi*” (crazy), just as often. I am sure that many first interviews only happened because of the interviewees’ curiosity about the questions I was asking and the type of information I was collecting. However, my research topic tended to be well-received by Kenyans, who saw a discussion of small-scale business practices and the curio industry as interesting and even important, particularly when it was their line of work.

During April of 2001, I lived in the Hermes Hotel in downtown Mombasa and walked ten minutes to Fort Jesus daily to sit and chat with the curio vendors (see map 1.2).²⁷ This first month of research in 2001 was spent on the roadside or in the park outside of Fort Jesus, playing chess and checkers, getting rained on, and primarily just talking and telling stories. My goal was to understand the basic components of the traders' businesses, how they had come to occupy their dilapidated roadside structures, and how they related to the residents of the immediate Old Town neighborhood. I also considerably expanded my knowledge of Swahili and developed strong friendships with many of the vendors, who were in some cases as interested in being friends with a young American as I was in learning about their livelihoods.

When the kiosks that provided the basic infrastructure for the population of my original study were demolished with the rest of Mombasa's roadside structures in December 2001 and January 2002 (see ch. 3), a new element of economic change and urban cleanup began to steer my project. I had initially been interested in the realities of conducting a business along the roadside in urban Mombasa. Now my informants, many of whom kept in touch with me by phone and email, were struggling to capitalize on any opportunity available.

The importance of cell phones and email access to my participants was something I felt needed emphasis. The path my research took was framed largely by my ability to remain in contact with research participants, Kenyan friends, and associates even while away. A longitudinal research design allowed me a better grasp of the effects of ICTs. Chowdhury and Wolf (2003:16) found, there is a significant time lag between the initial

²⁷ One of the few downtown hotels that did not close or change name during my extended research period (2001-08), the name was locally pronounced "*hermz*." See location 12 on map 1.2.

investment in ICTs by entrepreneurs and the eventual impact of the technologies on business advancement. Rather than sidelining ICTs, I decided to bring them to the fore, making the impact of new communication technologies a central component of my year-long dissertation research project (2005-06), titled “The Digital Divide and Kenyan Art Traders.”²⁸

Just after the turn of the 21st century, there was a serious desire by researchers of “the digital divide,” or the gap between those with and those without access to ICTs, to rethink the concept (see Rodino-Colocino 2006:489 citing Gumpert and Drucker 2002; Jung et al. 2001; Light 2001; Mossberger et al. 2003; Warschauer 2003). Despite the consensus that ICTs have great potential for connecting people, there has been considerable evidence that the benefits of ICTs are unevenly distributed, particularly in Africa (see Ahmed 2007). To complement such discussions of the politics of development and new technologies in Africa, in 2005 and 2006 I focused on the symbolic and economic effects of new ICTs on the Kenyan trade in tourist or “curio” art. This meant studying the use of these technologies by Kenyans in their everyday businesses to understand how Kenyan traders’ ambitions and personalities were adapted to a new set of communication technologies. A very specific, longitudinal ethnographic study seemed fitting. As Miller and Slater (2000:1) advised:

The Internet is not a monolithic or placeless ‘cyberspace’; rather, it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations. Hence, there is everything to be gained by an ethnographic approach, by investigating how Internet technologies are being understood and assimilated somewhere in particular (2000:1).

While only two of my research participants from 2001 had email addresses when I started the research, this quickly changed at least partially because of the help of other

²⁸ This research was funded by a Fulbright-Hays dissertation research grant.

students and sociable travelers like myself. For example, in at least one case in 2001 I took a curio vendor from outside of Fort Jesus to a nearby internet café to open an email account and use a computer for the first time. During that same semester abroad, two other fellow students took two other separate vendors, both young men, to open their first accounts. For the Kenyan curio vendors, working around popular historical and tourist sites clearly had its advantages, at least in terms of meeting new, often friendly people with access to new information not being supplied to small-scale roadside traders by government ministries, development organizations, or labor groups.

The 2005-06 project called for examining the effects of cell phones and the internet on commodities that were circulating within very complex socio-economic networks that covered vast distances. While interviews and participant observation were the foundation of my methods, tracing the “social life” of a commodity (Appadurai 1986a, b) through space was a more daunting and complicated methodological task (see Steiner 1994; Chibnik 2003). A multi-sited approach is, as Chibnik discussed, “especially well suited to analyses of the trade in ethnic and tourist arts, which often involves long commodity chains in which the participants are producers, merchants, and consumers scattered around the globe” (2003:16).²⁹ Further, focusing on ICTs added a new element to multi-sited research because it meant that at times I was literally conducting research in multiple locales at once. Remaining in contact with research participants via email and cell phone even when outside of Kenya eroded the separation between “the field” – where research was conducted – and “home” – a place to which I returned after completing research.

²⁹ See Marcus and Fischer (1986) and Marcus (1995) for more on multi-sited research and “experimental” ethnography.

Multi-sited research does not necessarily mean doing research in multiple sites but tying the “local” into the “global,” or conducting ethnography of a larger global system of interconnections by analyzing the individual and local experiences and understandings of the wider systemic change (Marcus 1995). Yet I found that organizing a research project around a variety of sites located relatively close to one another aided in capturing variations in perspective and multiple links on the larger commodity chain I was studying.

During the primary phase of my dissertation research (2005-06), I focused my daily activities on three research zones: (1) the area of Mombasa’s Old Town outside of Fort Jesus; (2) Changamwe, home to the Kamba and Kisii cooperatives, Magongo Curio Market, and many of my research informants; and (3) the beaches of the North Coast, including the tourist venues and informal economic networks built up around the public beach, locally known as “Pirates.” I rented an apartment in the middle of Mombasa Island and roughly geographically in the center of my three research zones. With the help of local *matatu*, or mini-bus routes, it was possible to access all sites regularly, rotating the order in which I would arrive at each.³⁰ On many mornings, I would ride with other commuters into downtown Mombasa, alight at the General Post Office, buy a newspaper and walk down Makadara and Nkrumah Roads toward the Town Hall, municipal offices, and Fort Jesus. After a few hours of chatting with the vendors as they set up their businesses and began their days, I would head back toward the Post Office to catch a *matatu* to Changamwe. Coming back into Mombasa in the late afternoon usually afforded enough time to eat before heading to the North Coast for the evening.

³⁰ For a history of *matatus* and their operators in Nairobi, see Mutongi (2006).

Throughout the 12 months I was based in Mombasa (2005-06), I frequently made excursions across East Africa to track down economic networks that I had found converging in the port city. I have spent considerable time conducting informal surveys in Lamu, Malindi, and Nairobi, and my research has at times taken me to areas of Machakos, Wamunyu, Kitui, Tabaka, Kisii, Kisumu, Lunga Lunga, Arusha, and to small shops throughout the United States. These trips were important for contextualizing the production groups and intermediaries I found in Mombasa.

Profile of Study Participants

In total, 121 individuals participated in the research on which this dissertation is based. Of those participants, 84 were involved in the curio industry as carvers or traders while 37 had no direct connection to the handicrafts business. Of the 84 research participants who worked in the curio industry, 24 had been part of my original study from 2001, while 60 were added between 2003 and 2006. Eighty six percent (72 of 84) were male while 14 percent (12 of 84) were female.³¹

Of the 37 non-curio research participants, seven were academic colleagues doing research in Kenya, two were American students studying abroad, and one was a Kenyan Swahili language instructor, whom I consulted regarding issues of language and translation throughout the research and writing phases. One individual worked in a Mombasa Export Processing Zone making clothing while another worked for a major cell phone company in Nairobi. Three of the 37 were staff members of organizations that did not deal directly with the curio trade but supplied important contextual information for my study. For example, one participant worked for the National Museums of Kenya, one was an American administrator of a Mombasa-based NGO focused on problems of drug

³¹ For more of the demographic breakdown of my sample, see Appendix 1.

and heroin abuse, and a third was an American doctor working for a Mombasa-based NGO concentrating on HIV/AIDS and sex work on the coast. Three more of the 37 worked in shipping, two as clearing and forwarding agents and one as a staff member for the Mombasa branch of a large shipping company. Six of the 37 were policemen or private security guards, two being regular Kenyan police, three tourist police, and one a private *askari*, or security guard. Finally, thirteen of the 37 were private, small-scale tourism operators who did not work in the curio industry. Of these, two were tour guides who worked regularly outside of Fort Jesus; two were male beach operators not involved in selling curios – each originally from Lamu but working in Mombasa as personal tour guides, mainly for female tourists; and nine were the female counterparts of the male beach operators, not involved in selling curios but exchanging a mixture of sex and local company for money and gifts from tourists. All of these individuals were important for adding context to my project and for my larger understanding of Kenya's political and economic realities.

In Mombasa, vendors were most frequently accessible in their public places of work, both at Kenyatta Public Beach and in the Old Town. At the beach, I used convenience sampling to select willing individuals for informal and semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2002:184, 204-5). In Old Town I also used convenience sampling to set up informal and semi-structured interviews with vendors and hawkers who worked along the roadsides. Prolonged research in the same area led me to investigate the new “free mark” shops established in Old Town in order to sample vendors from these shops, many of whom had formerly operated from roadside kiosks elsewhere in the city. After the kiosks were removed in 2001-02, Mombasa's municipal council pressured vendors to

enter into the formal commercial space located along the bottom floors of most urban city blocks. When an individual could not afford to rent and stock an entire shop, traders were encouraged to pool their resources and form a “free mark,” which was divided among them. I thus created several sets of analytical comparisons: between two separate production cooperatives (the Kisii and Kamba cooperatives – see ch. 5), between a cooperative and a market (the Kamba cooperative and Magongo Market – see ch. 5), between two venues for sale to tourists (Old Town and the beaches of the North Coast – see ch. 4), and between two infrastructures for selling to tourists (kiosks and free marks – see ch. 3 and ch. 4).

Locating intermediaries, wholesalers, and international traders was an essential research component. Because the intermediaries, who are an important focus of my study, often do not work in public, I used purposive, or judgment sampling (Bernard 2002:182-84) to actively seek out individuals who worked internationally buying and distributing Kenyan art. Purposive, or judgment sampling also helped me to find others who were less accessible or had become disconnected or alienated from the industry’s dominant socio-economic networks. By using snowball sampling, I located candidates for my research by asking key participants to introduce me to other individuals who fit my project description. Snowball sampling is particularly useful for the study of social networks and difficult-to-find populations (Bernard 2002:185). Well-known and successful vendors, who were a major focus of my study, emerged frequently through snowball sampling. As others have found, snowball sampling using personal contacts and extended participant observation is essential for researching activities that are clandestine, like much of Kenya’s curio trade, since trust and rapport are essential to

penetrating the inner workings of such networks (see Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey 2000:24).

Because many intermediaries carefully protect their business contacts and the secrets of their trade, I tried to make many interviews transparent sessions of *“I’ll tell you what I know if you tell me what you know.”* While it was important to reassure research participants that personal business secrets, such as the prices paid for certain products, remained private, there was a considerable amount of general information about industry organization – such as the economic situation at the beaches or plans for new markets – that was known to me but unknown to many participants. I also frequently found myself giving traders advice on how to use their cell phones or email accounts. I received many questions about emails soliciting bank account numbers or informing the account holder that he had won a large sum of money. Such emails, popularly known as “spam” in the United States, were new to many Kenyans, whose eyes lit up at the opportunities and possibilities offered by such scams.

I remember one case from November 2005 when I had set up an interview with an exporter based in Changamwe’s Magongo Market to the West of Mombasa’s downtown (see map 1.1).³² We had only met before briefly, and he most likely thought I was a potential customer as much as a researcher. After sitting down to a cold soda in the shade outside of the market, I gave him a brief introduction to my research and questions. Like

³² Unless otherwise noted, all information from this source comes from author’s interview, Nov. 25, 2005, Changamwe, Mombasa. This exporter and wholesaler, 37 at the time of interview, sold exclusively woodcarvings. Born and raised in the small rural town of Wamunyu, the original center of Kamba woodcarving, he studied through secondary school before moving to Nairobi in search of employment. Referring to the curio trade as “the work of poor people,” he hesitantly entered into the business in 1989 with a job supplying stores in downtown Nairobi with carvings made by carvers in Wamunyu. He moved to Mombasa in 1999 when the coast became the site of the cheapest wood after the stiff restrictions against cutting in the central forests. When Magongo Market opened in 2000, he immediately secured a stall, which was still his main storage location and office at the time of interview in November 2005. For more on Magongo Market, see chapter 5.

many other exporters he quickly appeared annoyed that I was not, as he had hoped, looking for the “best price,” which he was ready to offer. My goal during such reciprocal research became to make the interview and discussion worth his time.³³

On this particular day, I remarked in my fieldnotes that I did most of the talking during the first half of the interview, prompting him with bits of information about the carving business to see if he would agree or disagree. Once it became apparent that I had done my homework, I was barraged with questions. This particular trader was most concerned about the high cost of wood. It was, he told me, the reason he had come to the coast from Nairobi in 1999. This was soon after it became nearly impossible to obtain cheap wood for carving in the capital city.³⁴ Although I did not know of the cheap supply of wood he was seeking, I could give him important information about the efforts taking place on the coast to educate traders about “good woods” such as neem. I also offered my assessment of the curio business from what I knew of both the wood crisis and the decline in tourism.

By the end of the interview, this particular trader was grateful for the information and deep in thought, remarking to me that he should probably shift to selling soapstone or a non-wood commodity. More important to my research, I learned about the major problems of his business and his experience of migration to Mombasa, which was caused by the certification of wood and the banning of the cutting of certain species from forests in central Kenya. Not only was I able to obtain all of the informant’s basic information

³³ Special thanks to Louisa Schein for suggesting I dub such a method “reciprocal research.”

³⁴ Much of the wood for the woodcarving industry had come long come from the Karura and Ngong forests near Nairobi (author’s interview, Nov. 1, 2005 with Kamba carver and founding member of Mombasa’s Akamba Woodcarving cooperative, Changamwe, Mombasa). With increasing environmental degradation and problems caused by deforestation, cutting from the central Kenyan forests was slowly limited before being essentially banned for the purpose of woodcarving by the late 1990s (author’s interview Nov. 25, 2005 with Kamba wholesaler, Magongo Market, Changamwe, Mombasa). For more on the regulation of cutting of wood in Kenyan forests, see Choge et. al (2005) and Schmitt and Maingi (2005).

such as ethnic background, age, and education level – important to the economic histories I recorded – but he also invited me back for a follow-up discussion any time. Such working relations with my research participants, with whom I could regularly check in, have since 2001 been the foundation of my research method.

An introductory, icebreaking strategy was often important for initiating the discussions that would continue for the months and years after a participant's initial interview. When I first started research in Kenya I quickly found the leading Kenyan newspapers (*Daily Nation* and *East African Standard* in particular) to be useful. When conducting long-term participant observation, my method would at times involve buying a newspaper in the morning on my way to one of my research sites. The morning newspaper was a hot commodity, whether for the political headlines, the photos of the previous day's events, or the latest update on holiday festivities and the feuds and antics of popular Kenyan musicians. I would usually let the newspaper circulate, following close behind to engage in conversations about current events, popular culture, politics, and most importantly, how they all co-existed in giving meaning to life in urban Kenya.

Because most interviews were informal, they consisted primarily of conversations (often dozens per day) that could not be recorded. Particularly for interviews done in public places, it was also difficult to record audio because of the spectacle and attention that it brought as well as the background noise. While I recorded many interviews, I often did so only after a conversation had progressed and the interviewee had become sufficiently comfortable to allow recording. I primarily took notes during interviews, which was both easier for me and more acceptable to interviewees. I generally used a piece of paper folded many times to be unobtrusive, sometimes into eighths or even

of continued political manipulation of voters based on their ethno-regional backgrounds. Traders, in turn, sold a form of “tribalism” to a Western audience through “Kamba,” “Maasai,” or “Kisii” art. This was despite the constructed nature of these categories and the fact that Kenyan handicrafts were often made by individuals from backgrounds other than those of the labels used to market the art. For example, Kamba woodcarvers most commonly carved “tribal Maasai” sculptures, and Kenyans from a variety of non-Maasai ethnic backgrounds made “Maasai beadwork.” Dorothy Hodgson (2001) has discussed how the prevailing colonial image of the Maasai as proud patriarchs and “primitive” warriors has remained into the post-colonial era. Such assumptions about the Maasai, often perpetuated through Kenya’s tourism and curio industries, can undermine the initiatives coming from these very people to change or become small-scale traders developing their own enterprises. The curio trade was at the center of the construction of ethnicity in Kenya.

Max Weber wrote of the constructed nature of ethnic groups, nations, and nationalism at the turn of the 20th century (1968:ch. 6). Weber recognized that ethnicity was not a natural phenomenon given at birth but a subjective category. For Weber, the deployment of ethnic or racial categories for political action was what most frequently gave rise to the internalized identity often mistaken as biological, “in the blood,” or given at birth. In conclusion, Weber defined ethnic groups as:

those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (1968:389).

But as the anthropologists of the early and mid-20th century concerned themselves with the cultures and societies of “primitive peoples” (Evans-Pritchard

1951:4), the naturalization and essentialization of ethnic or “tribal” categories continued. The ostensibly remote and isolated “tribes” of classic anthropological investigations were categorized separately from “modern,” Western societies. As part of the greater colonial project, British social anthropology was dedicated to mapping the populations unknown to the Western world rather than showing their subjective and ambiguous qualities.

The *tribe* was an easily applicable unit for both colonial mapping and socio-cultural or linguistic study. Julian Steward (1958) argued that *tribe* was the ideal unit for anthropological analysis because it provided a unit of social interaction in a setting theoretically free of outside influence. “Tribal” groupings and associations were often represented as unchanging and rooted in a primordial, ahistorical past. For example, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1971) in *The Nuer*, a colonial-era study of pastoralists living in the southern Sudan, wrote of the Nuer and their relationship to the neighboring Dinka in a way that made the Nuer appear naturally warlike and dominant.³⁵ As the anthropologists of the mid-20th century sought to preserve the pre-colonial cultures of different peoples, they also made them appear unchanging and thus the opposite of “modern.” For example, Hopen (1958) and Stenning (1957) both wrote of the symbiotic relationships that existed *between* ethnic groups or “tribes,” not considering the ways that the boundaries between groups were created, broken down, or were porous. Such models justified colonization and the domination of people seen as “backward” or locked in the past. Rather than exploring how individuals negotiated the difference between cultural or economic norms, simple conclusions that ignored political realities and systemic change perpetuated ideas that “primitive” people were locked into the space and time in which

³⁵ For a more contemporary and historically contextualized study of the Nuer and violence in the southern Sudan, see the writing of Sharon Hutchinson (1996, 2000).

the colonizers had found them. Such a view of ethnicity and ethnic difference is typically termed “primordialism.”

Clifford Geertz’s classic explanation of primordialism is that “[o]ne is bound to one’s kinsmen, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto” by the “congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on,” which according to Geertz have their own “coercive power” over individuals. He continued:

The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural - some would say spiritual - affinity than from social interaction (Geertz 1963:109-110).

It is the assumption that there is anything “natural” and apolitical or ahistorical about individuals’ ethnic affinities that brought Geertz criticism.

The theory of the bounded population soon became unrealistic in a changing 20th century world. Bronislaw Malinowski himself wrote: “The scientific anthropologist must be the anthropologist of the changing Native. Why? Because what exists nowadays is not a primitive culture in isolation but one in contact and process of change” (1961:6). In *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Edmund Leach (1954:281) became one of the first anthropologists to conclude that “ordinary ethnic conventions” were “hopelessly inappropriate.” “Tribe,” he said, was an “academic fiction” (1954:291), concluding: “The ethnographer has often only managed to discern the existence of ‘a tribe’ because he took it as axiomatic that this kind of cultural entity must exist” (1954:70).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the solidification of ethnic boundaries as experienced today was often largely the product of colonial policy and control mechanisms that declared that every individual has his or her own ethnic identity (Vail 1989). But while

the unit of “the tribe” has rightfully become an issue of concern within anthropological circles, the “tribe” remains today a powerful symbol for the Western imagination of “Others,” particularly those of sub-Saharan Africa. The term “tribe” itself alludes to a wild, potentially dangerous and hostile frontier at the edge of the expansion of civilization. Such imagery would haunt many African nations during the 1990s, as “tribal violence” was reported in Western press coverage that largely ignored the deeply historical and political roots of political and economic crises. As James Ferguson described with great concern, “When we hear about ‘Africa’ today, it is usually in urgent and troubled tones” (2006:2).³⁶ During the 1990s, as the power of many states waned due to debt and structural adjustment, some Western policy and academic circles argued that the world was fraught with primordial ethnic conflict and that emerging violence was fueled by insurmountable group loyalties and cultural differences.³⁷ But as Bowen pointed out in his comparison of the violence in the Balkans and Rwanda, while some conflicts involve ethnic or cultural identity, “most are about getting more power, land, or other resources” (1996:3).³⁸

The violence and insecurity of the 1990s would also affect Kenya, which just a few decades earlier, during the 1970s and 1980s, was portrayed in the West as an “economic miracle” or as an island of hope within a sea of African despair (Akama 1999; Haugerud 1995:4). Feeding off of such promise, by 1976 Kenya had become Africa’s leading recipient of World Bank assistance (Miller and Yeager 1994:56-7). When

³⁶ Also see Zeleza (1997, 2006).

³⁷ See Besteman (2005), Bowen (1996:3), Bringa (2005), Brown (2005), Gusterson (2005), and Peluso and Watts (2001) for discussions and critiques of assertions by writers like Robert Kaplan (1994, 1996) and Samuel Huntington (1996) that the world at the end of the Cold War was degenerating into conflict and violence over access to resources as the world split into warring factions fighting for overall survival.

³⁸ For further deconstruction and analysis of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, its history, and its aftermath, see Des Forges (1999), Jefremovas (2002), Lemarchand (1994), Newbury (1995), and Prunier (1995).

politico-ethnic violence emerged in Kenya prior to the 1992 election, it fit the African stereotype, even if it was a new phenomenon for the West's longtime ally in East Africa. The challenge the election violence brought to Kenya's reputation as a calm, peaceful country would hurt the country's image as a peaceful tourist destination through the 1990s. Particularly following the politically organized harassment and killing of migrants in Mombasa in 1997 (see ch. 2), Kenya's tourism industry went into a deep recession from which it would not begin to recover until 2004. Despite a revival between 2004 and 2007, a similar tourism slump hit Kenya in 2008 following the contested December 2007 election, after which images of Kenyans killing one another spread through Western media outlets.³⁹

As I will discuss throughout this dissertation, such violence was neither inevitable nor solely ethnic in nature. Ethnic diversity per se does not lead to violence. Ethnic violence in Kenya is rooted in a colonial legacy of divide-and-rule and shifting national political alliances between politicians who draw on ethnic patron-client networks for support.⁴⁰ Caught in a contradiction, many of Mombasa's curio vendors were ironically selling "tribal" artistic images to avoid political "tribalism."

ICTs and Political Crisis in Contemporary Kenya

I am challenged to be careful and precise in representing and differentiating between the realities and myths of ethnicity in Kenya. As Angelique Haugerud warned:

³⁹ See, for instance, Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Tribal Rivalry Boils Over After Kenyan Election," in *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 2007.; Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Disputed Vote Plunges Kenya Into Bloodshed," in *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 2007.; Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples Into Post-election Chaos," in *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2008.; "Tribal violence spirals in Kenya; Mob torches a church, killing dozens, as post-election riots worsen," in *International Herald Tribune*, News section, page 1.

⁴⁰ See Barkan (1984), Berman and Lonsdale (1992), Bravman (1998), Haugerud (1995), Ndegwa (1997, 1998b), Nyangira (1987), and Oucho (2002). Also see the 1998 special issue of *Africa Today* (vol. 45, no. 2), The Future of Democracy.

Both burnished and tarnished images of Kenya are misleading. They recreate essentialist oppositions between ‘the West’ (‘us’) and Kenya (‘them’), as well as between Kenya and the rest of Africa. Prevalent myths assume that for ‘them’ (Africa), but not for ‘us’ (‘the West’), coups, corruption, and violent ‘tribal’ conflicts are inevitable. Kenya’s avoidance of these presumably endemic political and economic maladies until 1990 was thus constructed as ‘miraculous’ (Haugerud 1995:4).

This reminder is all the more important following Kenya’s December 2007 election. On December 27, 2007, Kenyans voted peacefully and in record numbers in parliamentary and presidential elections.⁴¹ After days of waiting, during which time opposition leader Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) was consistently leading in the vote count, on the afternoon of December 30, 2007, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) suddenly announced the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU), the winner. The announcement that Kibaki had won the vote triggered protests throughout the country. Mass demonstrations, along with widespread post-election violence and the brutal police suppression of opposition rallies, plunged the country into political crisis. Violence erupted, particularly in Rift Valley Province, Nairobi, and Mombasa, as angry citizens burned and looted shops and homes – particularly those belonging to people from communities thought to be supporters of Kibaki. The most targeted were ethnic Kikuyu (HRW 2008:35-43). But in some cases attacks were aimed at Kamba, Kisii, Luo, Luhya and other Kenyans who were living

⁴¹ For more on Kenya’s 2008 general election, see the 2008 special issue of *The Journal of Eastern African Studies* (vol. 2, issue 2), which includes numerous articles discussing the political changes since the 2002 election and the roots of the post-election violence. See Anderson and Lochery (2008), Bratton and Kimenyi (2008), Cheeseman (2008), Ghai (2008), Githinji and Holmquist (2008), Githongo (2008), Gona (2008), Kavulla (2008), Lonsdale (2008), MacArthur (2008), Mueller (2008), Osborn (2008), Throup (2008), Weis (2008), and Willis (2008), as well as the Human Rights Watch Report, “Ballots to Bullets: Organized Political Violence and Kenya’s Crisis of Governance” (HRW 2008). Despite the eventual announcement by the ECK that Kibaki won the general election, in the parliamentary elections the opposition ODM won 99 of the 210 seats. Incumbent Vice-President Moody Awori and 14 of Kibaki’s top ministers lost their seats. Human Rights Watch, independent observers, and the government’s own Waki Commission investigation into the elections (Kenya 2008), all found that the presidential vote count was tampered with to such an extent as to make it impossible to determine who actually obtained the most votes in the presidential election.

outside of their ostensibly “home” regions of the country and found themselves an ethnic minority at an inopportune time.⁴²

It was during this crisis that ICTs and the media were desperately needed for opening lines of communication and passing along reliable information. But within the context of an authoritarian state and corporate-controlled access to ICTs, technologies did not live up to their hype as tools that would necessarily increase transparency, the flow of information, and potentially even “democracy.” Immediately following Kibaki’s swearing in, which was only aired on the government-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), all live news broadcasts were immediately and indefinitely suspended by John Michuki, Kibaki’s Minister of Internal Security and one of his most loyal supporters.⁴³ While the government argued that the ban was necessary to control hate speech, it was widely condemned by national and international human rights organizations as an attempt to control and doctor information about the crisis and the suppression of opposition supporters (HRW 2008:63).⁴⁴ As disbelieving viewers watched (in my case, via KBC online, which I sat watching live on my laptop in the United States), news broadcasts on the major Kenyan television networks were suddenly suspended. Even KBC cut to American cartoons. What had happened?

Internet blogs following the election, many of which were updated from Europe or North America, exploded with reports as soon as people took to the streets looking for

⁴² While Kikuyu were the primary group targeted in the Rift Valley (HRW 2008), different groups were targeted in different situations. For example, early reports from Human Rights Watch found that in some cases, Kisii and Luhya migrants were attacked, particularly around the town of Eldoret. See the Human Rights Watch press release of January 24, 2008, titled “Kenya: Opposition Officials Helped Plan Rift Valley Violence,” available on their website, <http://HRW.org>, as well as the full Human Rights Watch Report from March 2008 (HRW 2008).

⁴³ The ban on live broadcasts would be in place until February 4, 2008 (HRW 2008:63).

⁴⁴ The ban did little to control hate speech being broadcast from radios, such as KASS FM of Eldoret. See the Human Rights Watch Report for a further discussion (HRW 2008:36-7)

answers. The sporadic violence, riots, and protests that took place in different parts of the country were not inevitable.⁴⁵ Both the Human Rights Watch and the government's own Waki Commission investigation found that leaders on both sides were involved in organizing and fomenting violence following the 2007 election (HRW 2008). Much of Mombasa, where I returned for a survey of the effects of the post-election violence in July 2008, was lost in fear during the first days of the new year, as finding security and food became imperative and holidays were put on hold. For many Kenyans, the apparent manipulation of the 2007 election results was the final betrayal of the agenda for change that had initially brought Kibaki to power in 2002 (see ch. 4). Despite the ban on public gatherings, young men in Mombasa and Kenya's other major urban centers took to the streets, burning and looting shops and businesses they thought were owned by Kibaki-sympathizers, while residents hurried to hang orange towels from their windows and write "ODM" on their doors and the outsides of their homes – not necessarily because they supported ODM, but because they wanted to avoid being attacked. Roads were blocked and the transportation system in East Africa's busiest port came to a halt. As food immediately became scarce, small shops and stores were the first to be looted, for things as simple as milk, bread, and cell phone credit.

⁴⁵ Kenya's post-election violence had several major precipitating factors. The election itself was only a catalyst that made the larger reaction take place (Mueller 2008). Mueller (2008) examined three precipitating factors in detail, which are a bit more complicated but not far from the problem of Kenya's "duality": that it was, on the one hand, doing very well, with six percent economic growth rate and a new government (in 2002); yet on the other hand, it was rocked by scandals at the top of the political hierarchy and was doing little to improve security, improve infrastructure, and make the country a top-notch destination for investors. Mueller's (2008) three main factors were: 1) "A gradual decline in the state's monopoly of legitimate force and a consequent generalized level of violence not always within its control"; 2) "Deliberately weak" public institutions, infested with personalization and clientalism to the point that they could not do their job (particularly of checks and balances) if needed; 3) Political parties without platforms that "were driven by ethnic clientism, and had a winner-take-all view of political power" (Mueller 2008:186).

The Western press turned to ethnicity as the root of the violence. The BBC, CNN, *New York Times* and other news agencies covered the protests and street fighting closely, bringing Kenya's political violence into the households and living rooms of potential international tourists. The economic and political conditions that created the crisis were downplayed in favor of sensationalized CNN images of protestors throwing teargas cans back at riot police or *New York Times* headlines, such as "Tribal Rivalry Boils Over,"⁴⁶ "Vote Plunges Kenya Into Bloodshed,"⁴⁷ or "Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples Into Chaos."⁴⁸ The pegging of the violence as tribal was contagious, as *The International Herald Tribune* ran the headline "Tribal violence spirals in Kenya."⁴⁹ The Western media jumped at the chance to capture sensationalized images of young African men standing in smoke-filled streets holding machetes. It was not for three weeks, on January 21, 2008, that the *New York Times* ran the article, "Signs in Kenya that Killings Were Planned."⁵⁰

But as I sat in the United States writing this dissertation and watching the events unfold, I could not help but wonder: what about ICTs and democracy? Where were the technologies? How were they functioning? Bringing Kenyans together? Overcoming social differences? Increasing political transparency? Creating new lines of communication? Giving the public new freedoms?

⁴⁶ See Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Tribal Rivalry Boils Over After Kenyan Election," in *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 2007.

⁴⁷ See Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Disputed Vote Plunges Kenya Into Bloodshed," in *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 2007.

⁴⁸ See Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples Into Post-election Chaos," in *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2008.

⁴⁹ See "Tribal violence spirals in Kenya; Mob torches a church, killing dozens, as post-election riots worsen," in *International Herald Tribune*, News section, page 1.

⁵⁰ See Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Signs in Kenya that Killings Were Planned," in *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2008. These *New York Times* headlines were used earlier by Angelique Haugerud to make a similar point during a presentation, "Kenya In Crisis, 2008," February 20, 2008, Rutgers University, sponsored by Center for African Studies.

With the majority of Kenyans using pre-paid, top-up cell phone plans, expensive and fancy phones were no better than cheap ones. Unlike in the United States, in Kenya few people have monthly calling plans and instead rely upon being able to regularly purchase credit from stores. Nobody could make a call without credit, which was inaccessible if people could not leave their homes and if stores were not open or had been looted. For nearly a week after the announcement of Kibaki as the victor, cell phone scratch cards in Kenya were in desperately short supply and in many cases were completely unavailable. During the first few days after the announcement that Kibaki had won, one of the major crises facing Kenyans with whom I was in contact was that they could not get credit to use their phones and verify the safety of friends and loved ones. Kenyans living abroad and others like myself scrambled to online websites like MamaMikes.com and Sambaza.com, which allowed individuals in the United States and Britain to purchase Safaricom or Celtel airtime online and have it automatically sent to the recipients' mobile phone lines in Kenya. But even those services were inadequate, particularly when employees of the businesses could not reach or open their offices in Nairobi.⁵¹

Combined with the government ban on live media broadcasts, the lack of communication and reliable information played a major role in creating panic and chaos and fomenting violence throughout the country. During conversations with Kenyans in 2008, many told me they received SMS text messages from unknown numbers, some inciting violence and using harsh and derogatory language in reference primarily to

⁵¹ In the days immediately following the announcement of Kibaki as the victor, I tried sending phone credit to several Kenyan friends in Mombasa, Mtwapa, and various parts of Nairobi using one of these sites. For days the service did not work. I finally received an email from the phone credit company apologizing and informing me that they were completely overwhelmed and had not been able to open their office in Nairobi.

Kikuyus.⁵² In Eldoret in the Rift Valley, the Kalenjin-language radio station KASS FM became infamous, not for actively disseminating hate speech itself, but for not preventing call in guests from using the airwaves to do so (HRW 2008:36). Other Kenyans with whom I spoke during the days following the outbreak of violence told me of the enormous number of false news stories circulating, usually involving the arrest or death of well-known politicians on both sides. This was particularly problematic as internet blogs took the place of news reporting. Misinformation spread quickly, often being written online from Kenya or abroad, read in the United States, Britain, or elsewhere overseas, then transmitted back to Kenyans via cell phones, and relayed to neighbors and friends. During the first night alone, as I sat transfixed reading internet sources in the United States with access to much more information than most of my Kenyan friends could get from their homes in Kenya, I repeatedly read false reports that Raila Odinga had been assassinated, that top ODM leaders had been arrested, that the Ugandan military had invaded western Kenya, and that there had been a military coup. In addition, there was significant ethnic hate discourse, as various sites and blogs identified openly with a particular party or ethnic community.

The violence was sporadic and localized throughout the country and even within Kenya's major cities. Worst hurt were the cities of Eldoret, Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa, particularly the multi-ethnic areas of these cities' outskirts (see HRW 2008). The walls that segregated the wealthy from the poor isolated many Kenyans from the worst of the violence. Rumor had it in 2008 that the bars in the Westlands and wealthier

⁵² Mueller (2008:203) also mentioned the use of text messaging, and particularly the term *madoadoo* (spots in Swahili) to refer to those who had to be "removed."

parts of Nairobi “never skipped a beat” throughout the election chaos.⁵³ On Mombasa’s North Coast, in Malindi, and in Lamu, hotel owners protested that the beaches were safe and tourists were going about their vacations unaffected by the election and its aftermath.⁵⁴ People I knew living in Mtwapa to the north of Mombasa laughed off my concerned phone calls checking on their safety, insisting that things in Mtwapa were completely fine. Unable to see the news, they had only heard rumors of violence elsewhere. The only problem from their experience was the sudden lack of fuel, food, and scratch cards.

But in areas like Changamwe, the violence was much closer to home, and the impressions of residents there were polar opposites of other Kenyans living only a few miles away. The country, as one friend told me, appeared to be in “civil war.” A Kenyan friend who worked in Nairobi who had returned to her hometown of Mombasa to vote and for the Christmas holiday spoke to me on the phone while she watched men loot a store below her window. During one conversation I had with Davis, he held his phone up over the wall of his housing compound so that I could hear the sounds of the yelling and rioting in the street just outside. I heard a constant and steady roar. It was days before he would try to leave his home, and even then, because *matatu* mini-buses were not operating, he had to walk onto Mombasa Island across the Makupa Causeway (see map 1.1) to find an open store to purchase diapers and milk for his son.

⁵³ This is what I was repeatedly told by friends living in Westlands while staying with them, from June to August 2008. While “never skipped a beat” might have been an overstatement, the point made to me through such anecdotes was that the violence had little effect on residents of wealthier neighborhoods of Nairobi.

⁵⁴ For example, Mohammed Hersi, the general manager of Mombasa’s Sarova Whitesands Hotel and the head of Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC) Coast branch, told Nairobi’s *Business Daily*, “We have not seen any tourists leaving, cancel or even heard of evacuations.” He continued, “The situation is exaggerated.” See Maina, Wangui. “Kenya: Hoteliers Dismiss Claims of Tourist Exodus,” in Nairobi’s *Business Daily*, available through AllAfrica.com, Jan. 2, 2008.

Safaricom CEO Michael Joseph announced several days into the crisis that the company was hiring helicopters and chartering flights to airlift engineers, equipment and airtime to the parts of the country that had been undersupplied.⁵⁵ The company claimed it lost 400 million shillings (\$5.7m) in the weeks following the election because of their inability to get airtime to customers.⁵⁶ But while Safaricom would recover, the larger economic fallout of the election violence would be nearly catastrophic for Kenya's tourism industry and the social fabric of the nation. The human suffering and economic slump following the elections revealed the precarious state of Kenya's and its tourism industry's economic stability. As an article in the *East African Standard* described the coast following the 2007 election: "Mombasa 'Raha (fun)', the once beautiful, fun-filled region with fun-loving people and tourists, became Mombasa 'chungu (bitter)'."⁵⁷

On February 28, 2008, two months and one day after the election, Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki signed a power sharing deal that made Odinga the executive prime minister and mandated power sharing of cabinet positions based on the strength of the parties in parliament.⁵⁸ But the damage to the economy, the country's image, and the social stability of the nation had been done. While many tourists may still be attracted to the "tribal" aesthetics of Kenya's tourism and curio industries (see ch. 6), violence portrayed in the press as "ethnic" was something to be avoided while on vacation.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See Nation Correspondent. "Safaricom acts on airtime shortage," in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 3, 2008.

⁵⁶ Bonyo, Joseph. "Safaricom lost 400m shillings," in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 10, 2008.

⁵⁷ Ombara, Omwa. "Kenya: Mombasa Deserted Following Protests of Poll Results," in *The East African Standard*, Jan 5, 2008.

⁵⁸ See Wachira, Patrick. "Joy as Kibaki, Raila sign power sharing deal," in *Standard*, Feb. 29, 2008. The power-sharing agreement signed on February 28, 2008 was titled "Acting Together for Kenya: Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of the Coalition Government," Nairobi, 2008. The agreement was signed by both Odinga and Kibaki as well as the witnesses, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Jakaya Kikwete, President of Tanzania and Chairman of the African Union.

⁵⁹ Not all sources were guilty of such profiling and simplistic interpretations. As one BBC report attempted, "A more complete headline might be: 'Tribal differences in Kenya, normally accepted

With the British Foreign Office warning against all but essential travel to Kenya, British tour operators placed a blanket ban on all package holidays to the country.⁶⁰ While the warning kept some British citizens out of harm's way, it began a landslide decline in tourist arrivals and overall industry earnings in Kenya. Just two weeks following the announcement of Kibaki as victor on December 30, 2008, it was estimated that 20,000 tourism jobs had already been lost amid the panic.⁶¹ Several cruise ships skipped Mombasa's port, Kenya Airways cancelled flights to Mombasa from Johannesburg and London, and European tour operators were forced to bring empty flights to Kenya to return tourists to their home countries.⁶² In January alone, tourist arrivals were down 90 percent from the previous January of 2007.⁶³

peacefully, are exploited by politicians hungry for power who can manipulate poverty-stricken population.” See Doyle, Mark. “Kenya Stokes Tribalism Debate,” in *BBC Online*, Jan. 4, 2008. Academics also took to the press, such as Jacqueline Klopp, who argued in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “contrary to popular belief, it isn't simply ‘tribal’ or ‘spontaneous’,” and that ethnicity was a category being manipulated by strongmen on both sides. As she pointed out, placing blame on the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, or other ethnic groups because a member of that ethnic group is president can be a ploy to shift attention away from the massive land grabbing and corruption that was continuing from previous regimes. See Klopp, Jacqueline M. “The Real Reason for Kenya's Violence,” in *Christian Science Monitor*, Jan. 14, 2008, as well as the online publication *Open Democracy* (www.opendemocracy.org), which hosted a series of articles exploring the specifics of the post-election violence. See, for example, in chronological order, Holman, Michael. “Kenya: chaos and responsibility,” Jan. 3, 2008; Prunier, Gerard. “Kenya: roots of crisis,” Jan. 7, 2008; Masinde, Wanyama. “Kenya's trauma, and how to end it,” Jan. 10, 2008; Lonsdale, John. “Kenya: ethnicity, tribe, and state,” Jan. 17, 2008; Haugerud, Angelique. “Kenya: spaces of hope,” Jan. 23, 2008; Klopp, Jacqueline M. “Kenya's path to peace,” Feb. 7, 2008; Prunier, Gerard. “Kenya: histories of hidden war,” Feb. 29, 2008.

⁶⁰ Redfern, Paul and Justus Ondari. “Ban on package holidays stays,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 5, 2008.

⁶¹ This was according to KTB managing director Dr. Ong'onga Achieng speaking to the *Daily Nation*. See Ndurya, Mazera. “Tourism sector out to correct negative image,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 14, 2008. Dr. Achieng estimated that if the situation did not improve, 120,000 jobs could be lost by March of that year. Also see Njiraini, John. “Earnings for Tourism Down to Sh8 Billion,” in *Standard*, May 3, 2008; and “Five Hotels Close,” by Nation Team, *Daily Nation* online, Jan. 21, 2008. The five hotels mentioned in the latter article were all in Malindi. 4,000 Kenyan workers were laid off in the closure of just those five hotels alone.

⁶² See Ndurya, Mazera and Mathias Ringa. “Kenya Airways plans to cancel flights,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 15, 2008.

⁶³ Marete, Gitonga. “Tourist arrivals drop by 90 per cent,” in *Daily Nation*, Feb. 12, 2008.

A Note on Naming

To further complicate the task of writing about ethnicity in Africa, many categories, politically-constructed or not, exist as linguistic or geographic entities. For example, “Swahili” people are called the “*waswahili*” in the Swahili language and their language *kiswahili*. Kenya’s coast is also often simply called “the Swahili Coast,” despite the minority status of “Swahili” in the region. This is a separate issue from the old question of “who is a Swahili?” (see Eastman 1971), the answer to which is largely historically and geographically dependent. While it is necessary to refer to ethnic communities in this dissertation, I only do so with hesitation. My goal is not to reproduce political essentialization of groups, but rather to capture and represent the linguistic reality. To give another example, Kamba speakers are called “*wakamba*” in Swahili and “*akamba*” in their own language, *kikamba*. It is therefore just as common to hear of the “Kamba” as the “Akamba” cooperative. For convenience, I have used the common English root term “Swahili,” “Kamba,” or “Giriyama” to refer to ethnic groups and languages. But I have also tried to problematize ethnic categories when possible, and I have noted in footnotes cases that are less clear.

Because of the sensitivity of some of this dissertation’s topics, I have omitted or changed all the names of traders and research participants to maintain their anonymity. The names of the cooperatives and organizations, however, are real when used. In most of these cases there was little I could do to hide the identities of the workshops or cooperative groups. If I felt my representation would be of no harm, I decided to leave the names of web sites, groups, or workshops.

Another problem arose in naming the types of wood carved. Anthony Cunningham raised this issue, asking: “When you are told that a wood is mahogany, ironwood or ebony, for example, which one of the 30 tree species commonly called ‘mahogany,’ 100 species called ‘ironwood’ or 40 species called ‘ebony’ do you think this refers to” (Box 1.1 in Belcher et al. 2005:8)?⁶⁴ Most trees and woods sold in Kenya have names in Swahili and other African languages as well as in English. This is, however, an imperfect process. The very dark colored African blackwood, for example, is called “*mpingo*” in Swahili. *Mpingo* in turn is translated into English as “ebony,” even though African blackwood, *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, is not a “true ebony” of the *Diospyros* genus.⁶⁵ In a similar case, the most preferred wood, called *muhugu* by the carvers and usually translated as “mahogany,” is actually a hard guava wood and not a “true mahogany” (Jules-Rosette 1984:119). However, because these woods are commonly sold and marketed as “ebony” and “mahogany,” I often use the same terms as the traders themselves use and note any inconsistencies in footnotes.

Chapter Outline

In this introduction, I have outlined my primary argument: that despite the hope that ICTs will lift small-scale traders out of poverty, ICTs often increase social and economic precariousness and insecurity. As I will demonstrate throughout the rest of this dissertation, Kenya’s small-scale curio traders and the members of the industry’s

⁶⁴ This quote can be found in Box 1.1, “The Name of the Rose (wood)” by Anthony Cunningham on page 8 of Belcher et al. (2005).

⁶⁵ As Cunningham (Box 1.1 in Belcher et al. 2005:8) pointed out, what is generally referred to as ebony or *mpingo* (Swahili) in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and northern Mozambique is not related to what Cunningham called “true ebonies,” which are of the genus *Diospyros*. While black or dark brown in color and called African blackwood or African ebony, it is scientifically of the non-ebony species *Dalbergia melanoxylon*.

cooperative societies have seen many of their businesses and organizations crumble in the face of new, privatized, and divisive communication technologies.

Chapter 2 focuses on the history of social inequality in Mombasa and the conflicting discourses of marginality predominant in the city – one produced by migrants claiming they have been denied their rights as Kenyan citizens and another produced by communities indigenous to the coast, many of which have been actively disenfranchised and manipulated by both the colonial and post-colonial governments of Kenya. After tracing the historical narrative of Mombasa’s roadside art traders and tourism operators, I draw on examples from my initial research with the Fort Jesus Curio Group in 2001 to paint a clearer picture of the lives of my research participants. While essentialized ethnic language pervades identity politics and discourses of difference in Mombasa, much of this speech is a reflection of Kenya’s century-old legacy of political divide-and-rule. As I will demonstrate, Mombasa’s roadside kiosk economy allowed the development of important cross-ethnic, inclusive socio-economic cooperation and the formation of economic- rather than ethnic-based organizations such as the Fort Jesus Curio Group – an organization that I will discuss in detail.

In chapter 3, I trace the development of Kenya’s tourism and curio industries from the early 20th century through the present. I focus on the formation of ethnic cooperatives for selling curio art. I argue that such groups were successful through the 1980s because of government support and by conforming to the expectations of Western consumers as well as the regulation and surveillance apparatus of the Kenyan government. The 1997 declaration by the Kenyan government that all cooperatives must compete as independent entities within a “free market” reversed decades of support for

cooperatives and left some large organizations and cooperatives in a precarious state. After tracing the history of “city cleaning” and kiosk demolitions in Mombasa, I argue that government policies since the 1990s have led to the fragmenting, privatization, and segregation of urban space in Mombasa. This state is particularly responsible for pushing Mombasa’s tourism industry out of the urban center and into walled-off beach resorts.

The fourth chapter concerns the relationship between curio vendors and the Kenyan state, particularly following the kiosk demolitions of January 2002. Many Kenyan curio vendors I interviewed saw the government as increasingly parasitic and opposed to Kenya’s small-scale traders and roadside hawkers. But while curio traders saw rising taxes and license fees from the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) and the Mombasa Municipal Council as hostile given their struggles following the kiosk demolitions of 2001-02, many were in favor of official recognition and oversight when it meant being granted secure access to commercial space. I offer three examples (the Fort Jesus tour guides, the North Coast beach vendors, and the licensing of exporters) to demonstrate the effects of government regulation of the coastal tourism and curio industries. As the Kibaki state lost legitimacy in the eyes of small-scale traders because of corruption scandals and increased taxation, many accepted an informal system based on bribes as their best option. As taxation has become increasingly regressive, informal arrangements and bribery can appear progressive at times.

In the fifth chapter, I dissect the history of ICT liberalization in Kenya, focusing on the impact of new communication technologies on the curio industry. Through several ethnographic examples, I demonstrate both the positive and negative impacts of ICTs on the curio business and the sustainability of the handicraft cooperatives. Lacking

state subsidy and regulations, cooperatives have been pressed to compete with individual entrepreneurs with equal or better access to technologies and artistic innovation. As a result, Mombasa's Kamba woodcarving cooperative has lost much of its economic as well as spatial significance to the curio industry, demonstrated by its relationship to the nearby Magongo Market. I argue that an increase in access to ICTs can increase precariousness within an economic context in which the state has allowed the economy to operate informally and where private actors with access to capital, personal connections, and information have gained an upper hand.

Chapter 6 addresses how the forms and symbols present in Kenyan curio art have changed due to the political and economic factors I discuss in the previous chapters. As I demonstrate, Kenyan curio art is heavily influenced by the structural organization of the curio industry itself: the political and economic environment in which producers and traders operate; the environmental restraints and regulations that affect supplies of raw materials; and the symbolic strategies and aspirations of the intermediary traders. Intermediaries have the crucial role of performing their worldly sensibilities to tourists while simultaneously relaying orders to production networks. By using several examples including that of Fair Trade labeling, I argue that ICTs have been used to create an *illusion of transparency* in order to increase the value and price of a commodity.

The effects of telecommunication expansion in parts of Africa are not inevitable and are primarily dependent upon the state's role in regulating access to new technologies and formal commercial space, helping traders minimize economic risk, and providing the important technical and educational information necessary to maximize the positive aspects of new technologies. It is necessary to use a deeply historical, ethnographic

approach to evaluate the context into which new technologies have become important and to understand the often-unintended consequences of their use. Kenyan art traders and small-scale traders working in the shadow of the international tourism industry often invest in such precarious jobs because of the hope that they will eventually gain access to international markets and business networks. As I will demonstrate beginning in the next chapter, ICTs provided a potential means of circumventing or altogether avoiding the hazards and social tensions of Mombasa's roadsides.

Chapter 2
Mombasa Marginalized:
Claims to Land, Labor, and Legitimacy in a Tourist City

Nearly everyone arrives on the coast at Mombasa, a much more enjoyable place to spend time than Nairobi. Kenya's second city is a tropical centre *par excellence*: steamy, lazy, at times unbelievably dilapidated, but genial.

- *The Rough Guide to Kenya* (Trillo 2002:441)

I was initially drawn to Mombasa and its Old Town for reasons similar to those that have enticed hundreds of thousands of American and European travelers to visit the Kenyan coast every year since the late 1960s. Our predictable imaginations, desires, and spending habits were the economic foundation of Mombasa's tour guides, hawkers, and the occupants of the roughly 20 wood and sheet metal kiosks that were built on the roadside outside of Old Town's Fort Jesus. These structures and their occupants were the focus of my initial study in 2001, during which time I befriended many of their resident art vendors, who were selling Kisii soapstone and Kamba (or Akamba) woodcarvings, as well as handmade baskets, paintings, and jewelry outside of Fort Jesus.

I found it easy to emerge from even a brief foray through Mombasa with two quite different stories of the social landscape. On the one hand, the city has since the 1960s been a major international tourism hub, a destination for European beach prowlers, American safari seekers in transit, and a multitude of international cruise lines navigating the western Indian Ocean. Even among Kenyans, Mombasa occupies an imaginative space of vacation, warmth, and welcome, as summed up by the oft-heard phrase "*Mombasa raha*," or *Mombasa fun*.¹ Tourist art adorns even local bars and internet cafés

¹ A well-known song by the Mombasa singer Nyota Ndogo was titled *Mombasa Raha*, and included lines like "*Naipenda Mombasa kwani raha yake, haifananishwi na kokote*," or *I love Mombasa for its fun, it has no comparison*. It is worth noting that the song, while played in tourist venues, was in Swahili and primarily intended for a Kenyan audience. While it described Mombasa tourist attractions like Mama

in the city, and a sign in French, Italian, German, English and Swahili welcomes visitors entering Mombasa from the airport, Nairobi, and the continental mainland.²



Photo 2.1: The public beach on a Sunday, Mombasa's North Coast, July 2003. Kenyans often enjoyed being tourists in their own country (see ch. 6).

But despite the promise inspired by depictions of Mombasa's warm climate, "leisurely" way of life, and slow pace, for centuries the port city was locally called *Mvita*, often translated as "place of war."³ Indeed, as much as Mombasa's history is of cosmopolitan socio-cultural mixture and sharing, such interactions have taken place

Ngina Drive and the local beach on Sundays (see photo 2.1), these were hotspots for Kenyan rather than international leisure-seekers. See chapter 6 for more on Kenyan domestic tourism.

² I, however, noticed in July 2008 that the sign had been painted over in white when the roundabout was renovated.

³ The name *Mvita* does not necessarily derive from the Swahili word *vita*, or *war*. Blij (1968:5) wrote, "the Swahili name for Mombasa is *Mvita*, which, according to the most generally accepted interpretation, means 'place of war.'" However he added, "The derivation of the word *Mvita* is still a matter of debate" (1968:5 f.n. 4). He noted, for example, that the name could have come from the word *kufita*, or *to hide* in the *Mvita* dialect of Swahili (*kuficha* in standard Swahili). Another explanation from Swahili oral tradition is that the original settlement was simply named after the Shirazi leader Shehe *Mvita*, who according to certain traditions established *Mvita* town after acquiring land from an earlier, non-Islamic ruler - a Queen named *Mwana Mkisi* (Nurse and Spear 1985:73). Loaded with symbolism, such stories, which are found along the East African coast, have questionable historical accuracy.

within the context of larger structures of violence and inequality such as slavery and colonization. Mombasa has most recently been in the Western press, not as a tourism hotspot but as a destination of travel warnings, human and drug trafficking, and international terrorism.⁴

While ethnic or “tribal” motifs were useful in marketing Kenya and Kenyan handicrafts to foreign tourists, such images had less romantic connotations for many Kenyans who had witnessed the politicization of ethnicity during the 1990s. This was despite the fact that many of these art traders were quite consciously using “tribal” artistic images to sell their way out of Kenya’s hazardous socio-economic context. But in Mombasa, one’s often politically-imposed ethnic identity could be a source of social and economic insecurity, particularly when compared to many rural areas of Kenya (Rakodi et al. 2000:157 citing AMREF 1999). Essentialized ethnic discourse was apparent around Mombasa’s tourism industry, but not always representing the “authentic,” pre-colonial culture desired by tourists. The 42 ethnic groups Kenya officially recognizes as indigenous have been heavily politicized over the past century.

Most traders I interviewed did not hesitate to tell me the precise ethnic group or “tribe” (*kabila* in Swahili) to which they belonged. This was even true when an

⁴ International terrorism became a major issue in Kenya following the 1998 bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi, which killed more than 250 people including 12 Americans (Oded 2000:82). Following September 11, 2001 and the onset of the US-led “war” on international terrorism, many anti-terrorism operations in Kenya were focused on the coast and Mombasa. This was particularly true following the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel just north of Mombasa and the firing of a missile at an Israeli passenger jet leaving Mombasa’s Moi International Airport in November of 2002. The perception of Mombasa as a terrorist hideout continued after the arrest of a suspected terrorist in Mombasa in August 2003, who after being arrested allegedly detonated a hand grenade outside of Mombasa’s Central Police Station, killing himself and one policeman. For more information, see Kithi, Ngumbao. “Threat hovering over coastal region as security forces step up surveillance,” in *Daily Nation*, Aug. 31, 2003, pp. 18-9. For more on Mombasa as a major transit point for human traffickers, see Kithi, Ngumbao. “Mombasa hub for human trafficking,” in *Daily Nation*, Nov. 24, 2006. For more on the related drug trafficking through Mombasa’s port, see Mayoyo, Patrick and Dominic Wabala. 2006. “Alarm over port fraud and drug smugglers,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 8, 2006, pp. 1-2.

individual could not speak his or her ethnic language or had never been to the area of Kenya where his or her assigned ethnic community had lived prior to the onset of British colonialism. But despite the extent to which ethnicity could seem hidden or arbitrary in urban Kenya, many Kenyans took ethnic categories (or “tribes” as they are frequently called in Kenya) very seriously. Bill Bravman has cautioned against suggesting “that ethnicity somehow lacked reality,” arguing instead that ethnic groups in Kenya, despite being historical constructions, could at times become “a deeply felt – indeed, deeply assumed – part of people’s individual and collective identities, to the point of being internalized or embodied as an aspect of their basic ‘nature’” (Bravman 1998:14).⁵ The job of the researcher and student is therefore to understand how, when, and in what contexts these categories and associations emerged and have been historically deployed.

Economic histories were often explained to me through a discourse in which ethnic stereotypes acted as legitimate explanations of action and change. Studying Mombasa’s largely non-Swahili, migrant curio vendors operating in the city’s historical “Old Town” provided a unique opportunity to study Kenya’s so-called “indigenous” traders as they worked in a part of Kenya where they were considered by many local inhabitants to be outsiders and unwelcome. In this chapter, I will describe how migrant curio vendors developed their own economic and symbolic strategies for legitimizing their place and role in Mombasa, where they were at times seen or labeled by some residents and coastal elites as outsiders and a social, political, and economic threat to the advancement of other communities. I argue that ethnic and social marginality in Mombasa are not constant, nor the product of cultural and social differences, but emerge

⁵ For more on the historical and political roots of the contemporary reality of ethnic difference in Africa, see Haugerud (1995:40-41), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Hodgson (2001), Schatzberg (1988), van Binsbergen (1992), and Vail (1989).

from changes in political patronage and the ethnic dimensions of national political coalitions. It was out of the context of what John Lonsdale has called “politicized tribalism” in Kenya in the 1990s that many of Mombasa’s curio vendors attempted to “jump scales” (Smith 1993) into larger, international markets, when possible.⁶ It is important to note that Kenyan traders and entrepreneurs do not always or naturally view “jumping scales” or even using information and communication technologies (ICTs) as necessarily beneficial or strategic.

First, this chapter provides a history of Mombasa, the largest port in East Africa and a historical bastion of social inequality. After discussing the historical significance of ethnicity in Mombasa, I turn to conflicting discourses of marginality in the coastal city; one produced by migrants claiming to have been denied their rights as Kenyan citizens, and another produced by communities indigenous to the coast, many of which have been actively disenfranchised and manipulated by both the colonial and post-colonial governments of Kenya. After tracing the historical narrative of Mombasa’s roadside art traders and tourism operators, I draw on examples from my initial research with the Fort Jesus Curio Group in 2001 to paint a clearer picture of the lives of the primarily migrant curio traders as they struggled to cope with the political and economic insecurity of Mombasa’s roadsides. While essentialized ethnic language pervades identity politics and discourses of difference in Mombasa, much of this speech is a

⁶ In describing the roots of the violence following the 2007 general election in Kenya, John Lonsdale chose his words carefully when describing the political nature to ethnicity in Kenya. In his description there is no room for understanding ethnicity in Kenya without including the role of the state “as a cockpit of variously contested but unequal power.” See Lonsdale, John. “Kenya: Ethnicity, Tribe, and State,” in *Open Democracy* (www.OpenDemocracy.org), Jan. 17, 2008. For recent literature on the politics of ethnicity in Kenya, see Haugerud, Angelique. “Kenya: spaces of hope,” Jan. 23, 2008; Klopp, Jacqueline M. “The Real Reason for Kenya’s Violence,” in *Christian Science Monitor*, Jan. 14, 2008; Klopp, Jacqueline M. “Kenya’s path to peace,” Feb. 7, 2008; Prunier, Gerard. “Kenya: roots of crisis,” Jan. 7, 2008; Prunier, Gerard. “Kenya: histories of hidden war,” Feb. 29, 2008. Also see Bravman (1998), Haugerud (1995), Ndegwa (1997, 1998b), Nyangira (1987), Oucho (2002), and Throup and Hornsby (1998).

reflection of Kenya's century-old legacy of political divide-and-rule. As I will demonstrate, Mombasa's roadside kiosk economy allowed the development of important cross-ethnic, inclusive socio-economic cooperation, and the formation of economic- rather than ethnic-based organizations such as the Fort Jesus Curio Group – a traders' organization which I will discuss in detail. I conclude with a rethinking of discourses of marginality on the Kenyan coast, particularly with regard to the trajectory of Kenya's tourism industry.

Mvita, "the Swahili," and Coastal Marginality

Deriving from the Arabic word *sahil* or *sawahil* for "coast,"⁷ *Swahili* was the original term for the inhabitants of various city-states that stretched along the East African coast from Somalia in the north to present-day Mozambique and Madagascar in the south. Through the late 20th century, the largely Muslim population of Mombasa's Old Town was well known not as representative necessarily of Mombasa and the Kenyan coast, but as the last surviving remnant of the coast's so-called "original" or "indigenous" inhabitants and rulers. The term "Swahili" has become intermixed with such ideas and categories as the "indigenous" or simply "real" people of the East African Coast. Further, the present minority status of Muslim Swahili on the coast has nurtured a tendency to naturalize the Swahili as an inherently marginalized people. For example, after reviewing the history of Swahili society on the East African coast, Horton and Middleton wrote of the contemporary Swahili:

They have been used, exploited, and largely discarded by both colonial powers and the independent governments of Kenya and Tanzania, so that the term 'Swahili' has

⁷ As John Middleton (1992:1 f.n. 1) pointed out, the Arabic word also means *edge* or *border*. The "Swahili" as originally termed were therefore not only the people of the coast, but the people at the edge or border of Arabic or Islamic civilization. In this sense, the *Swahili* were the *ethnics* of the Arab world – the "Others" at the border of empire.

come to refer to a marginalized and internally divided category of people without any obvious sense of single political identity, an ‘Other’ conceived as a means of self-definition of those who so define them (2000:14).

The Swahili and the peoples of the Kenyan coast more generally have since colonial times been interpreted and referred to as backward, lazy, underdeveloped, and marginalized (Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Waaijenberg 1993; Willis 1993). The result, for better or worse, is that there is currently a related exotification, appropriation, and commodification of “Swahili” culture and aesthetics on the Kenyan coast, which markets the region as a landscape of leisure populated with unchanging and often highly sexualized “Others” to travelers and tourists (Kasfir 2004). The dynamic history of coastal Kenyan cultural change has been washed away to create a blank slate for tourist consumption. As Sydney Kasfir noted, tour operators rarely rely on foreigners’ interest in stone towns and Swahili culture but rather “the Indian Ocean’s warm water, coral reefs, and white sand beaches” (2004:322), a setting she compared to the Caribbean, where tourists spend little time away from their beach resorts. As a result, when tourists do encounter local Kenyans it is generally during what Kasfir described as “optional forays to restaurants and souvenir stalls” (2004:322).

While the meaning of “Swahili” has long been debated and politicized (Arens 1975, 1976; Caplan 2004; Eastman 1971; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Salim 1973; Parkin 1989), it is a flexible category that, from my experience, has and will probably long have a variety of meanings dependent upon the context of its use.⁸ The qualifications for being

⁸ I do not wish to dwell on the question of who is and who is not a “Swahili,” as the term itself is extremely flexible. It can be an empowering category in certain instances and used as a derogatory term in others. Like other Westerners who learn Swahili, I was often called *mswahili* (a Swahili) by other Kenyans, demonstrating the term’s multiplicity of meanings. For more on questions and complications of Swahili identity, see Arens (1975, 1976), Caplan (2004), Eastman (1971), Mazrui and Shariff (1994), Salim (1973) and Parkin (1989).

a *true* “Swahili” of Mombasa are as complex and contested as anywhere else on the East African coast.⁹ Since at least the 18th century, the inhabitants of Mombasa Island were organized through their own kin and patron networks as a political entity known as the *Theneshara Taifa*, or “Twelve Tribes” (Berg 1968; Swartz 1991). Of interest, most sub-groups of the *Theneshara Taifa* are simply the Swahili names for people of various other coastal settlements outside of Mombasa Island, be it Mtwapa, Kilifi, Kilindini, or Changamwe (see Berg 1968:45; Swartz 1991).¹⁰

Like Mombasa’s *Theneshara Taifa* Swahili, the predominantly non-Muslim Mijikenda of the immediate coastal hinterland are also a confederation of closely related ethno-linguistic groups (Brantley 1981; McIntosh 2005; Morton 1972, 1977; Parkin 1989; Spear 1978, 1981; Waaijenberg 1993; Willis 1993). Mijikenda itself means nine (*kenda* or *chenda*) towns (*miji* or *midzi*),¹¹ but the term has only been used to refer to the non-Swahili coastal groups of Mombasa’s hinterland since the 1930s and 1940s as a result of the formation of the Mijikenda Union (Willis 1993:28).¹² Before that time, the people of the hinterland were called either by the pejorative term “*wanyika*” or simply

⁹ For more on the specifics of the Mombasa Swahili, see Salim (1973), Swartz (1991) and Willis (1993).

¹⁰ The formation of the *Theneshara Taifa* during the 16th century resulted primarily from the expansion of Galla (a generalized and somewhat derogatory term for the ancestors of Kenya’s Oromo or Orma) pastoralists to the interior of Malindi along the Sabaki River. This violent expansion pushed both the “Swahili” and the hinterland populations, upon whom the coastal merchants relied for trade goods, to the protection of Mombasa Island and its fortified *kaya* ridge in the immediate interior (Berg 1968:40, 46; Willis 1993). Berg (1968:40) suggested that by the early 17th century, Mombasa had become a “refuge and reintegration point for dispersed populations from up the coast.” After Kilifi was sacked by the increasingly hostile Segeju, also apparently displaced by the Galla (Spear 1981), much of the coastal population to the north as far as Malindi moved to the protection of Mombasa Island and the walls of its Stone Town, blending with the remnants of Mombasa’s *waungwana* elite as the *Theneshara Taifa* solidified (Berg 1968:46).

¹¹ “Miji-Kenda” is in fact Swahili, “*Midzi-Chenda*” being the very similar term in the languages of the various Mijikenda peoples. This example also demonstrates the closeness and at times interchangeability of the Swahili and Mijikenda languages. For more on the similarity and recent history of the Mijikenda and Swahili languages and dialects, see Nurse and Hinnebusch (1993) and Nurse and Spear (1985).

¹² In addition to his 1993 book *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda*, Willis has also discussed the emergence of the Mijikenda Union in a paper titled “Election, Ethnicity, and Incumbent Power: the Politics of Representation in Kilifi District, Kenya, 1940-1970,” given at St. Cross College, 13th Nov. 2007.

“*the people of-*” one of the nine main *kaya*, or fortified settlements of the Mombasa hinterland (Spear 1978; Willis 1993).¹³

Whether discussing the *Theneshara Taifa* Swahili of Mombasa or the various communities of the immediate hinterland, the important point is that before the early 20th century, identity and belonging were flexible and subject to complex gender, labor and trade relations among all of these communities (Waaijenbergh 1993; Willis 1993).¹⁴ The ethnic categories themselves are linguistically linked to the places where these peoples, however internally diverse, were residing when the British attempted to formalize and structure rights of access and ownership to land and property in the early 20th century.

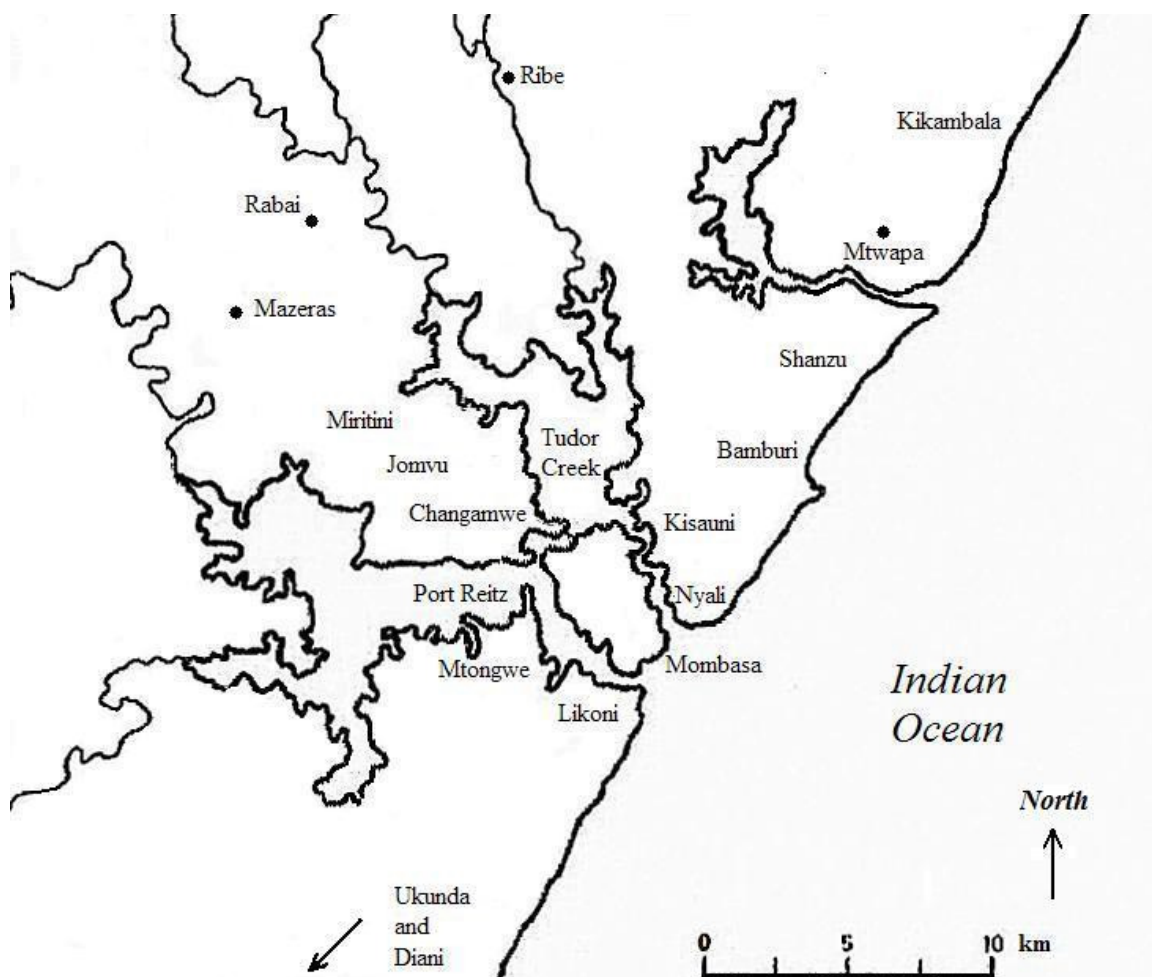
While never a dominant Swahili city-state until the Portuguese conquest and the building of Fort Jesus in the 1590s, Mombasa’s unique geographic features make it a highly contested point of entry into the coastal hinterland, historically attracting diverse populations from throughout the region (often as refugees from elsewhere). Small and easily defendable, Mombasa Island itself is only five square miles, roughly two miles across at its widest and three miles long (see map 2.1).¹⁵ The island and its immediate

¹³ For example, the people of Kaya Giriama were simply called the “*Wagiriama*” in Swahili (*Agiriama* in the Giriama language) or *people of Giriama*. Likewise, the people of Kaya Chonyi were called simply the “*Wachonyi*” in Swahili (*Achonyi* in the Chonyi language), or the *people of Chonyi*. There was tremendous cultural and linguistic similarity among the various hinterland populations, as well as the Swahili, to whom they are intimately linked socially, historically and economically. See Spear (1978, 1981) for the most comprehensive analysis of the history and primary institutions of the communities of Mombasa’s immediate interior.

¹⁴ Making any natural or ancient differentiation among the various communities of the East African coast is difficult since the region has a long history of linguistic, genetic, and cultural exchange. There is now very good linguistic and archaeological evidence that there was continuous occupation of the coastal hinterland from the early Stone Age through the modern period, with considerable mutual influence among the dominant Bantu-speaking groups occupying the area during that time (Spear 2000:269). Summarizing largely linguistic and archaeological interpretations of historical migrations of the Northeast Bantu, Spear (2000) concluded that the descendants of the communities that would become the Mijikenda, Pokomo, and Swahili were present on the Kenyan coast by the first century AD. The differentiation into separate dialects took place throughout the first millennium, with Swahili emerging as a distinct language by the ninth century (Spear 2000:258-59 citing Nurse and Spear 1985 and others).

¹⁵ This paragraph borrows from the description offered by Willis (1993:21-2).

surroundings are not exceptionally fertile since coral lies just below the topsoil and the ground holds little water. Rich in fish until very recently, the sea was traditionally the primary source of protein for Mombasa's population, making the settlement sustainable even if politically or geographically isolated from the hinterland communities.

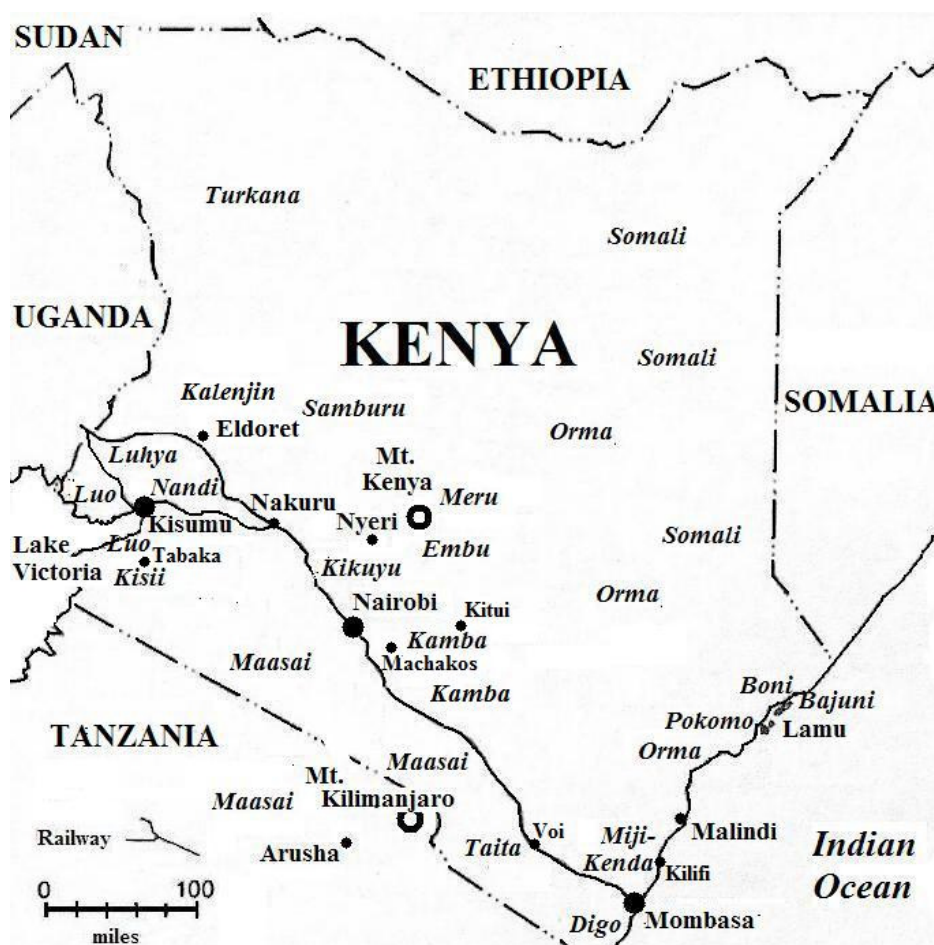


Map 2.1: Mombasa Island and the Immediate Vicinity.¹⁶ Rabai and Ribe were the sites of the respective Mijikenda *kaya*. Kisauni, Changamwe, and Likoni would become, along with the island's Mvita, the four constituencies of Mombasa District. The outlying settlements such as Mtwapa and Mazeras are outside of Mombasa District.

A few miles inland from the coast, the land climbs into a steep ridge, which provides a relatively fertile and well-watered area, rich for growing crops and historically cultivated with sorghum, rice, and later maize by the residents of the hinterland *kaya*

¹⁶ Adapted from a similar map in Willis (1993:48).

(Willis 1993:21-2). The Mijikenda *kaya* originally functioned primarily as ritual centers and defensive settlements where farmers would return at night after spending days working in the fields on the interior ridge (Spear 1978). This fertile agricultural region of forested hills extends only a few miles before becoming dry and slowly turning into the Taru Desert (Willis 1993:21; Brantley 1981). This vast area of dusty red soil receives very little rainfall and was a crucial historical deterrent to passage until the British crossed it by rail in 1897, reaching Voi on the Western edge in December of that year (Miller 1971:315; see map 2.2).



Map 2.2: Modern Kenya within East Africa.¹⁷ The ethnic groups listed are only rough estimates of the geographic locations where the British found certain ethno-linguistic groups primarily concentrated in the early 20th century. These groups have since moved throughout Kenya, although these particular areas are still considered by some to be the “home” areas of these certain groups.

¹⁷ Adapted from a similar map found in Cooper (1987:1).

Before the onset of late 19th-century British colonialism, intensive trade in slaves, ivory, cloth, and other goods had already powerfully shaped East Africa's political and economic organization. While slaves, ivory, and gold were the most valuable exports from East Africa, the most common imports to the region were cloth, beads and brass wire – commodities often brokered by Indian and European merchants through Zanzibar (Prestholdt 2004:763, 2008). The interior trade in what is now Kenya was long in the hands of traders from Kaya Giriama in the Mombasa hinterland in partnership with Kamba speakers working primarily through Kitui, who by the mid-19th century were conducting business directly with Mombasa's merchants (Brantley 1981; Krapf 1860:144; Steinhart 2001 – see map 2.2).¹⁸ Beginning in the 1840s, large Kamba caravans began regularly arriving in Mombasa carrying from 300 to 400 *frasilas* of ivory (Kimambo 1970:81).¹⁹ It was not long before the onset of late 19th-century British rule²⁰ that Arab and Swahili traders began to first penetrate deep into the Kenyan interior.²¹

¹⁸ Most of the slaves and ivory leaving East Africa came from the southern interior of present-day Tanzania as well as Mozambique, where the land was more open and fertile than the immediate interior of Mombasa and the Kenyan coast. The caravans accessing Unyamwezi, Ujiji, and the Lake Tanganyika region were formed primarily in Bagamoyo, about 40 miles north of Dar es Salaam on the northern Tanzanian coast and not far south of Mombasa (see Hobley 1979[1929]:196-197). As Hobley, the Provincial Commissioner at the coast from 1909 to 1919, pointed out, Bagamoyo had the advantage of being closer to Zanzibar. Further, caravans leaving Mombasa were hindered by the Taru Desert, the dryness of *Ukambani*, and the marauding bands of Maasai warriors, which often numbered in the hundreds. Rather than a hub for dealing in slaves and ivory, Mombasa's major exports prior to the 19th century had been gum copal, grain and tortoise shell traded from the inhabitants of the immediate Mombasa hinterland.

¹⁹ By combining a number of sources, such as the writings of the missionary Krapf, Spear (1978:136) estimated that the Mijikenda still controlled the interior trade with the Chagga and Kamba through the 1830s. It was during the 1840s, after Mombasa had fallen to the Busaidi Sultan in Oman (in 1837) that the Kamba came to dominate the trade route to Mombasa (Spear 1978:136). The missionary Krapf wrote of the Kamba in the 1840s that they “go in caravans of from 200 to 300 persons into the interior to fetch ivory, and form in a general way the commercial medium between the coast and the interior, into which they journey a distance of from 200 to 250 leagues” (1860:144). Krapf added that “[o]n these journeys the Wakamba are often attacked by the tribes of the interior, especially by the Galla, who, however, are as often stoutly repelled and beaten” (1860:144). It was beginning in the 1850s that Mombasa and other “Swahili” of the coast had become the most common on the Chagga route and had made inroads in the trade with Kamba ivory traders operating through Kitui (Spear 1978:136; Steinhart 2001).

Despite the economic success of traders from Kitui and elsewhere in the far interior, as recently as the turn of the 20th century the colonial administration viewed the Muslim population of the port cities, who provided the most accessible labor pool, as the most fit for many of the jobs they needed done in Mombasa, whether as porters, managers, or even policemen (Willis 1993:110). But beginning in 1906, the underlying connotation associated with Mombasa's Muslim "Swahili" began to change "from civilized allies into the anti-social dregs of Mombasa" (Willis 1993:110-11). By 1910 the British were actively constructing "the Swahili" as lazy, listless, and a lost cause (Willis 1993:111). As Willis (1993:chs. 5-6) has described in detail, discourses that constructed "the Swahili" as a "contagion" allowed the British to keep Mombasa's urban, African Muslims from trading and owning land in the hinterland. Idleness and immorality would become discursively associated with "the Swahili" as the British and even other Africans viewed them as a contaminating influence (Willis 1993:chs. 5-6).

The result of this British re-construction of "Swahili" was that Mombasa's long-term Muslim inhabitants became increasingly involved in organizing themselves as "Arab" and therefore *non-African* and non-"Swahili" (see Nabende and Musalia 1999; Salim 1973). Official census figures for the coastal population covering the 50 years before independence in 1963 showed a consistent increase in the number of "Arabs" and

²⁰ In 1885 the affairs of the British East African Association were headquartered in Mombasa. In 1888 the British presence increased with the commissioning of the Imperial British East African Company, which would form the backbone of the British East African Protectorate declared in 1895. Kenya would not officially become a colony until 1921. For a comprehensive look at the role of the coast in East Africa's and Kenya's history, see Brantley (1981), Cooper (1977, 1980, 1987, 2002), Kanyinga (2000), Kirkman (1983), Morton (1990), Nurse and Spear (1985), Oded (2000), Ogot and Kieran (1968), Pouwels (2001), Prestholdt (2004, 2008), Salim (1973), Spear (1978, 1981, 2000), Sheriff (1987), and Willis (1993).

²¹ By the early days of the Imperial British East Africa Company, Hobley (1970[1929]:198) wrote that it was not uncommon for caravans of five to six hundred strong to depart Mombasa headed for Uganda. Hobley (1970[1929]:197) recollected that first, "recruiting agents combed the town persuading men to engage." Every man received an advance upon engagement, the result of which was, according to Hobley, that "[t]he Indian shops did a good trade; the Swahili ladies all appeared in new clothes, and the vendors of palm-wine flourished exceedingly" (Hobley 1970[1929]:197).

a corresponding decline in the number of “Swahili,” a fact James Allen suggested “could only be accounted for by huge numbers of the latter reclassifying themselves as the former” (1993:8). There was also the important issue of paying hut taxes. In addition to encouraging labor, the hut taxes put in place by the colonial administration were, according to Cooper, “frankly intended to make life expensive for Africans” (1980:237), and something to be avoided if possible.²²

But avoiding the hut tax and the negative views of the British was not the only reason to claim to be *non*-“African.” While the 1908 land ordinance allowed certain “Arabs” and “Swahili” to make private claims to coastal land, it was the Special Ordinance of 1910 that made clear that while Muslims of Asian or Arab ancestry could make private land claims, all other land belonged to the “Crown,” and the inhabitants of such land were officially labeled “squatters” (Cooper 1980; Kanyinga 2000; Waaijenberg 1993; Willis 1993).²³ Under the premise of protecting the “Africans” of the Mombasa hinterland from being “cheated,” it forbade private landowners on the coast from selling land and gave coastal Muslims, ostensibly “Arab” and non-African, a significant advantage in access to private land. But while the sub-groups of the Mijikenda had communal land set aside for them, urban Muslims who could not attain the coveted “Arab” status were denied a communal reserve. For example, the British colonial

²² While the first hut tax of 1901 was set at 1 Indian rupee, in 1920 it was raised from 3 to 5 rupees. By the time Kenya officially became a colony in 1921, the tax was raised to 8 rupees, or, officially at that time, 16 shillings (Cooper 1980:265).

²³ At the onset of British involvement in East Africa, Muslims (as opposed to non-Muslim Africans) had a significant advantage in acquiring land, partly because the process was dominated by Arab administrators and partly because the announcements for registration were made inside of mosques (Kanyinga 2000:59). The result was, as Kanyinga has suggested, a massive dispossession of land farmed by hinterland populations as it was claimed by the coastal Muslim elite, many of whom had close ties to the Busaidi sultanate in Zanzibar. In the early days of British rule, huge tracts of land were given to a very few Muslim “Swahili” and Arab families, including the Mazrui, opening up this land for sale to other Arabs as well as Indian and European investors (Cooper 1980:198-201; Kanyinga 2000:59).

Attorney General ruled that the *Theneshara Taifa* Swahili of Mombasa were neither “a tribal entity” nor agriculturalists, but private actors to be treated as such (Willis 1993:125).²⁴ After initial efforts at gradualism and the use of Arabs and Swahili in establishing the protectorate, colonial officials eventually taxed much of this element into poverty (Cooper 1980:234). By failing to build an adequate transportation infrastructure on the coast, the British quickly economically marginalized the region surrounding Mombasa, especially in comparison to Nairobi and Kenya’s central highlands (Cooper 1980:234).

Much of Mombasa’s contemporary ethnic diversity is a result of the city’s labor shortage problem prior to the 1920s, which caused an influx of not only upcountry Kenyans but also Indians and Hadhrami Arabs from South and Southwest Asia (Cooper 1980:ch. 6; Willis 1993:ch. 3).²⁵ Because the British initially needed significant labor for Mombasa’s port and for their coastal plantations, wages on coastal farms and for day laborers at the docks tended to be much higher than for similar work in Nairobi. As early as 1903, wages for work on coastal plantations were two to three times what they were in the highlands and twice that of western Kenya (Cooper 1980:243). The demographic result was that between 1913 and 1931, Mombasa’s “African” population grew from 19,600 to 30,000 in a span of less than 20 years, a significant number of whom had recently migrated from upcountry Kenya, some having walked from as far as Lake Victoria to find better employment terms at the coast (Willis 1993:184-185).

²⁴ As suggested by Willis (1993), it was this development that led many Giriama, particularly in Malindi, to begin converting to Islam in order to gain access to the private ownership rights of the Swahili.

²⁵ Immigrants from the Hadhramaut (also Hadramaut) region of the southern Arabian Peninsula are generally termed “Hadhrami” (also Hadrami) in Mombasa. The Hadhramaut region corresponds roughly to the contemporary nation-state of Yemen. For more on the Hadhrami Arabs on the East African coast, see Swartz (1991:29, 40) and Middleton (1992:13).

In 1916, port workers were required to register so that shippers would only employ certain workers at pre-set wages (Cooper 1980:249). This further complicated the labor market by creating a system of agents who were employed to sub-contract laborers and who usually drew from particular ethnic groups (Cooper 1980:249). For centuries laborers had entered the coastal economic system by accepting Islam and thereby slotting into a hierarchy of religious status and prestige that gave little priority to specific ethnic heritage. By not converting to Islam and remaining attached to their ethno-linguistic affiliations for pragmatic reasons, upcountry migrants broke past traditions and powerfully challenged coastal labor networks that had been in place for centuries (Cooper 1980; Willis 1993). The result was that closely related Bantu-speaking populations began to see one another as competitors rather than relatives and important trade partners. In some cases, politics moved related communities in opposite ideological directions. The pivotal turn in the 20th century “Arabization” of Mombasa’s “Swahili,” the *Theneshara Taifa*, came with their official recognition as “Arab” by the colonial government in 1952 (Oded 2000:63). This primarily meant that they were taxed and voted as “Arabs,” particularly during the important pre-independence elections of 1957 and 1961 (2000:63).²⁶

Independence in 1963, however, brought a new challenge to coastal Muslims, who had worked tirelessly during the colonial period for the coveted non-native status.

²⁶ Post-World War II colonial favoritism toward the Arab, Indian, and Swahili merchants and urban gentry was at least partially a result of a British attempt to keep Mombasa from being drawn into the Mau Mau resistance of the 1950s. When the Emergency began in 1952, the effects of Mau Mau could barely be felt on the coast. Salim (1970) suggested this was largely because the Swahili and Arabs of the urban coast, primarily Mombasa, were enjoying a time of late-colonial prosperity. Salim gave the examples of the Arab Secondary School and the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education (MIOME), completed in 1950 and 1951 respectively, as examples of the “educational, economic, and cultural revival” of the time period (Salim 1970:216). This was combined with the expansion of the radio program “Sauti ya Mvita,” “the voice of Mvita,” which according to Salim “became the found and focus of a coastal Muslim cultural revival” (1970:216).

After independence, reversing this political distinction was essential for urban Muslims on the coast to maintain claims to land and over indigenous labor (Waaijenbergh 1993:18-19).²⁷ In the newly independent Kenya of the 1960s, residents with Arab status or ancestry had to re-affirm their Kenyan citizenship to support their occupation of land and the economic privileges gained or retained during the colonial era. While the Swahili language became the *lingua franca* of newly independent Kenya and Tanzania (Swahili became Kenya's national language in 1969), it was only after fierce debate and opposition (Mazrui and Shariff 1994).²⁸ For example, Attorney General Charles Njonjo declared, "Swahili is just as foreign to Kenya as the English language" (Mazrui and Shariff 1994:79). Despite concessions that were made to coastal elites during Jomo Kenyatta's presidency (1963-78), leading politicians made frequent statements "reminding" the Swahili that they were actually "Arabs" and that their land claims had a precarious legality (Mazrui and Shariff 1994:143). This helps to explain why it was mentioned in the Mombasa District Monthly Report of August 1965, "Persons originally registered as Arabs are still frequenting this office trying to have changes effected on their Identity Cards so that they read Bajun instead. It is regretted that this procedure was suspended sometime ago."²⁹ Then again in 1968 it was recorded,

with legislation enacted amending the Trade Act, Immigration Act and Transport Licensing to give more opportunities to citizens, there was a notable rush by people

²⁷ For more on the particulars of Mombasa Island politics from the 1950s through the late 20th century, see Ombongi (2005:300-305).

²⁸ For more on the contrasting politics of national development in Kenya and Tanzania from independence through the 1970s, see Barkan (1984).

²⁹ See "Mombasa District Monthly Report, August 1965," by C.K. Githinji for District Commissioner, Mombasa, signed Sept. 10, 1965, document 24 in the file "Mombasa District Monthly Reports, 1963-1972," from the Coast Provincial Administration Files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number CA/16/149, box 81, shelf 4651, room 6.

of Arab origin to change their identities to African. This did not prove to be easy as it appears on the surface (*sic*).³⁰

Independence-era politics of the 1960s largely positioned Mijikenda tenants and squatters against “Arab” and “Swahili” landowners, no longer simply differentiated by religion since many Mijikenda (particularly Digo and Giriama) had converted to Islam but retained their non-Swahili ethnic identities – again, largely for pragmatic reasons (Kanyinga 2000; Parkin 1989; Salim 1970; Waaijenberg 1993; Wolf 2000). While many Mijikenda preferred *majimbo*-ist, or federalist governance, because of their numerical majority within Coast Province, many Swahili and Arabs living on the Kenyan coast were in favor of *mwambao*-ism, a political platform that proposed the separation and independence of the 10-mile coastal strip, which had been originally leased to the British government by the Sultan of Zanzibar in the 1890s (Salim 1970; Wolf 2000). After persistent division among coastal peoples of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, neither position succeeded as Kenyatta’s government followed the British example and centralized power and economic development in Nairobi and the neighboring, highly fertile Central Highlands by 1969.

As political power and economic development consolidated in Nairobi and away from the coast, conflicts developed as landless coastal people blamed upcountry migrants for the perceived shortage of coastal land (Kanyinga 2000:117).³¹ Feeding off these tensions, ethnic as well as regional identities were heavily politicized during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly as migrants from densely populated areas in the interior continued

³⁰ See “Mombasa District Monthly Report, February 1968,” by G.H. Omondi for District Commissioner, Mombasa, dated March 27, 1968, document 50 in the file “Mombasa District Monthly Reports, 1963-1972,” from the Coast Provincial Administration Files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number CA/16/149, box 81, shelf 4651, room 6.

³¹ Here I say perceived shortage because the problem is not a net lack of land but a highly politicized uneven allocation of land that left very large parcels in the hands of very few landlords and the vast numerical majority without property.

the nearly century-old tradition of moving to Mombasa and the Kenyan coast in search of work (Kanyinga 2000; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; McIntosh 2005; Oucho 2002; Wolf 2000). During the elections of the 1990s, political tactics were used to divide and disenfranchise Muslims (in 1992) as well as poor squatters and migrants (in 1997).³²

Mombasa's case reminds us that ethnic groups in Kenya are of different sizes and have highly variable access to resources, historically and today. This is a major reason why "national consciousness" has developed unevenly among the various social groups and regions of the country (Haugerud 1995:40 citing Hobsbawm 1990:12).³³ Kenya's diversity of internalized national and sub-national identities was particularly evident at the historically cosmopolitan coast, where many residents viewed the Nairobi-based government to be more parasitic than nurturing of economic development.

Belonging in Mombasa

As I have suggested in the previous section, belonging in Mombasa and its "Old Town" is socially complicated and largely contingent upon the history of the ethnic or social group to which an individual belongs. During my research, Old Town, a small area located immediately adjacent to the central business district of Mombasa Island, was the only area of the city considered to be predominantly Muslim "Swahili," although the

³² The multi-party 1992 and 1997 elections were the first since independence and were followed with much expectation and scrutiny. See Barkan (1993) and Throup and Hornsby (1998) for evaluations of the 1992 election. For more on the 1997 election and a discussion of political change since the 1992 election, see Barkan (1998), Barkan and Ng'ethe (1998), Harbeson (1998), Holmquist and Ford (1998), Kiai (1998), and Ndegwa (1998a, b). Oucho (2002) has focused on the ethnic conflict that emerged in various parts of Kenya during the 1992 and 1997 elections. Wolf (2000) also has discussed both elections, with an emphasis on Mombasa and the Kenyan coast. For more on violence in Mombasa surrounding the two elections, see the Human Rights Watch report (HRW 2002), which focuses on the 1997 "Kaya Bombo" violence but makes multiple connections with events related to the 1992 elections. See Oded (2000) for a discussion of the politicization of Islam in Kenya, and for an in depth discussion of the impact of the 1992 and 1997 elections on Kenyan Muslims.

³³ As Haugerud remarked of the Kenyan case, "it is essential to keep in mind the very different experiences of, for example, peoples in Central as opposed to Western Province, or those officially classified as 'Luo,' 'Kalenjin,' 'Gikuyu,' 'Luhya,' 'Maasai,' and 'Somali,' with regard to access to state resources and perceptions of the nation" (1995:40).

area had long had large Indian, Arab, and Somali communities (see map 1.2, page 14). Beyond the fascinating niche to which the Old Town curio traders had adapted, my research interests stemmed from a longing to understand the identity politics that led most of the curio vendors operating outside of Fort Jesus to frequently view themselves and be viewed by others as *outsiders* in Old Town. Non-“Swahili” roadside vendors initially interested me precisely because their views complicated those of my Mombasa-based academic programs’ lectures and suggested readings. In contrast to scholars who have examined the late-20th-century development of “Swahili” ethno-nationalism on the Kenyan coast in opposition to a negligent central government (Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Ntarangwi 2003), I witnessed the development of Kenyan nationalism on the coast as constructed by rural-to-urban migrants to Mombasa.

The research I conducted in June and July of 2003 focused specifically on the experiences and economic histories of migrant curio vendors. I quickly found that asking traders about their “migrant” status often started a debate about whether any Kenyan could indeed be considered a “migrant” within his or her own country.³⁴ I found such questions to be especially problematic for long-distance traders who regularly traveled and did business throughout Kenya. As Davis, a curio trader who had moved to Mombasa at the age of 16 from Nairobi told me one day in 2003, as I tried to interview

³⁴ The official Swahili word for migrant is *mhamiaji*, but I found not only was the word not regularly used, but participants also did not like being associated with it. The word technically came from the root verb *kuhama*, which meant “to move.” The point they were making by rejecting such a title was that they did not intend on moving anywhere. Other terms used included just the English “migrant” as well as the Swahili term *mgeni*, which literally means “foreign.” By rejecting such a term, they insisted they were not at all foreigners in Mombasa.

him about his experience as a “migrant” to Mombasa: “There are no migrants in Kenya. It’s ridiculous. In Kenya you should not have migrants.”³⁵

While it was not the response I originally expected, Davis’s use of the word “*should*” made the interaction particularly interesting. His statement cast light directly on the tension in Kenya between ethnic regionalism and nationalism. As he continued to elaborate his argument, it became clear that his inclination to view all internal migrants as simply “Kenyans” came from what he claimed to be discrimination against “migrants” from “upcountry” in finding employment and housing in Mombasa. Davis placed blame on individuals he clumped together rather arbitrarily, including “Indians” (literally *wahindi* in Swahili), “Swahilis” (literally *waswahili* in Swahili), and “Arabs” (literally *waarabu* in Swahili). These groups, which he described as “foreign,” “different,” “Muslim,” and even simply “Asian,” were grouped in a way that would support his argument to me that he was, indeed, a victim of coastal elites from communities he claimed had serious economic advantages. By downplaying his own status as a “migrant” and claiming that others were the “real immigrants,” Davis was staking a claim to his right to do business on the coast, based on his own, subjective understanding of what it meant to be a “*real* Kenyan.” But by using the word “should,” he accepted that the view he was expressing to me was not always the norm.

A variety of alternative discourses that made claims to coastal belonging were also present. They were, in fact, intimately produced within a complex web of ethnic discourses revolving around overlapping sets of local, national, and supra-national (pan-African or pan-Islamic, for example) identity constructions and boundaries present in

³⁵ Author’s interview, June 10, 2003, in Davis’s house in Chaani near the Kisii soapstone cooperative. Davis had lived in Nairobi and Western Kenya earlier in his life and explained that he did not like being told that he was not welcome in any part of his country.

Mombasa. The power dynamics structuring the competition outside of Fort Jesus were revealed through the verbal battles and almost endless chatter between curio trader and tour guides. Both curio vendors and tour guides alike were competing for tourist dollars, and I observed a tour guide demanding commission from a vendor as frequently as I witnessed a curio trader scoff at a guide and call him the derogatory term “beach boy.” While many of the guides from the local Old Town community told me on separate occasions that they felt it their “right” (*haki* in Swahili) to elicit “*ushuru*” (literally *tax* in Swahili) from the curio traders, curio vendors typically responded that the problem with the local guides was simply that they were “beach boys without a beach.” Referring to the tour guides as “beach boys” was a derogatory remark to bring them down in the social hierarchy outside of the fort and in Mombasa more generally.

In truth, a visitors’ typical first experience of the square outside of Fort Jesus involves a self-described “guide” who attaches himself, often unwanted, to a tourist or group of travelers. The discourse produced from these guides was often (though not always) uniquely “Swahili” and coast-centric. The guides were aware of competition from other sites on the coast as well as from the game parks and Nairobi, and they used their roots in the ostensibly “Swahili” Old Town as their claim to legitimacy and coastal authenticity. Unlike other tourist destinations on the Kenyan coast, such as Zanzibar or Lamu, Mombasa was more open to contestation from migrants from the mainland.³⁶ It was, therefore, more important for “Swahili” tourism operators to reaffirm both the coastal nature of Mombasa and their authentic belonging in such an environment.

³⁶ Special thanks to David Hughes for his help in elucidating the complexities of such discourses with regards to the specificity of marketing Mombasa’s own authenticity within the context of the East African coast. For a look at artisans working in Lamu, see Dziedzic Wright (2008).

I often heard short phrases during tour guides' interactions with tourists, as the Swahili language was commonly used to entice tourists into an authentic experience of the coast or Kenya as a whole. There were phrases such as "*Mombasa raha*" (Mombasa fun), "*Lamu tamu*" (sweet Lamu), or simply, "Mombasa is surrounded by coral reefs while Nairobi is only surrounded by Maasai." The choice was offered to the tourist in simple terms by the guides, who presented themselves as people connected to the heart of Mombasa and "authentic" coastal culture. As one guide told me in September of 2005, Old Town was a neighborhood with "real culture," revealing tourism operators' awareness of the important search for "the authentic" in marketing the Kenyan coast and making it appealing to tourists.³⁷

Tour guides, usually young men from the local Old Town community who proudly pronounced themselves "*real* coastal people" if not just "Swahili" (which tended to carry this connotation), would often jump into transactions between tourists and curio vendors, demanding commission or tax from traders for "attracting customers." One of the phrases common among tour guides operating outside of Fort Jesus was "*Kibokoni kiboko yao!*" This phrase referenced a neighborhood not far from the fort named Kibokoni and was essentially a statement that Kibokoni is excellent or exceptional. It was used primarily by self-proclaimed "Swahili" men from Kibokoni as a means of performing their belonging – not just to Mombasa but to the location where they daily

³⁷ I recorded this transaction in my fieldnotes, Sept. 9, 2005. The Fort Jesus tour guides had their own organization with numbers that varied between 20 and 30. They arrived every morning and drew numbers to determine the order that they would take tourists as they arrived. It was customary in 2006 to arrive in the morning and see them all sitting in their neat, white collared shirts in a nice line. They became very used to me because they realized quickly I was one of the several foreigners who frequently passed by Fort Jesus but who did not need a guide. For more see chapter 4.

competed and operated next to the curio vendors, few of whom had been born and raised on the Kenyan coast.

The response from the curio vendors of diverse ethnic backgrounds was to produce and perform their identities as Kenyan citizens for both tourists and other economic actors. The wearing of jewelry and clothing in the colors of the Kenyan flag or the reciting of well-known slogans used to market Kenyan tourism, such as “*hakuna matata*” (there are no problems), functioned to ease curio vendors into economic spaces that were not necessarily as calm and problem-free as marketed. Hanging a Kenyan flag inside of one’s kiosk next to a picture of the president – as required by law in formal shops – allowed traders to market Kenya as an attractive tourist destination for the consumption of leisure and to demonstrate their economic legitimacy on the roadsides of Old Town and urban Mombasa.

It was from within this context of socio-economic contestation that oppositional ethnic subjectivities often emerged, many of which placed migrants at odds with Muslim “Swahili” of the local Mombasa and Old Town neighborhoods. Long-term migrants to Mombasa often told me their own stories of exploitation at the hands of the urban coastal elite or the Kenyan government, complicating suggestions that indigenous Muslims are the only “marginalized” in Mombasa. Through such stories, migrants made their own claims to rights over coastal land, despite being from non-coastal ethnic groups.

For example, Mama Wanjiru, ethnically Kikuyu and born in Nairobi, came to Mombasa to live with her father’s older brother in 1978 after both her parents passed away.³⁸ Her uncle had lived on a plot of land in Mombasa’s middle and working class

³⁸ Although I first met Mama Wanjiru in 2001 and saw her and her family on a regular basis throughout my research, unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Mama Wanjiru come from author’s interview Oct. 27,

Tudor residential estate, which she told me he had purchased with money saved from a lifetime of dock work he had begun in the 1940s. Immediately following the death of her uncle soon after her arrival in Mombasa, three “Arabs” (“*waarabu*” as she called them in Swahili) produced a title deed, claiming the plot she had inherited was theirs. Mama Wanjiru interpreted the challenge from the “Arab” landowners to be a part of a larger pattern of Kikuyu dispossession following the death of Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta (in 1978), and the replacement of his client base by that of Daniel Arap Moi. Mama Wanjiru’s opinions were based on the fact that these events took place during the first years of Moi’s presidency, when there was a dramatic restructuring of patron-client networks within Kenya at the same time that the economy began to falter due to a variety of internal and external factors (Barkan 1993, 2004; Miller and Yeager 1994; Throup 1987).

From the time he became president through the 1980s, Moi would push Kikuyu out of prominent civil service positions throughout the country (Barkan 1993:88). Ever the populist in theme, he replaced them with members of “disadvantaged” groups, particularly his fellow Kalenjin, but also numerical minorities such as the Swahili and immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East living on the Kenyan coast. This replacement of Kenyatta’s patronage networks with Moi’s own clients played out in Mombasa as the replacement of Kikuyu with Moi’s signature “Asian” (Indian and Middle Eastern) clientele.³⁹ Several Kenyan banks, which were “owned by Kikuyus – collapsed

2005, in Mama Wanjiru’s house, Mombasa. While she had family from Nyeri, Mama Wanjiru grew up and lived in Nairobi before moving to Mombasa in 1978. While 1978 was also the year of Kenyatta’s death, Mama Wanjiru’s move to Mombasa was unrelated to these changes in national politics.

³⁹ This is not to suggest that there were inherent ties among the Tugen, Kalenjin, Indian, and Arab communities in Kenya. Rather, like the Swahili, Mijikenda and Muslims from throughout the country, all these groups were minorities who felt they had been marginalized by the Kikuyu and other large ethnic groups during Kenyatta’s presidency.

during the period in what was widely believed to be a move to dislodge the Kikuyu from economic and political power” (Kanyinga 2000:10 f.n. 1).

As Mama Wanjiru interpreted, the “Arabs and Swahilis” saw an opportunity to take whatever Kikuyu migrants to the coast had attained. As she told me two decades after the fact, she took those making the claims to court, where their deed was declared a forgery. But they returned, threatening to burn her house if she stayed. Out of fear, she abandoned the property to the developers. She relayed her anxiety to me twenty years later, saying there was a wave of such attacks at the time, when many Kikuyu and migrants from upcountry were “burned out” as Moi’s largely Asian and Arab patronage networks took hold on the coast. Such stories complicated arguments about both “indigenous” rights on the coast and claims to the status of “the marginalized,” suggesting instead that ethnic marginalization changed in relation to shifts in national political alliances and patron-client networks. This is important for a realistic assessment of the politics of ethno-regionalism (or *majimbo*-ism) and Kenyan democracy.

Majimbo-ism

While there have been suggestions that regional-specific development policy would benefit Kenya (UNDP 2002:34-6),⁴⁰ attempts to decentralize political power have often resulted in fierce debates over the rights of non-indigenous ethnic groups operating

⁴⁰ While Coast Province had an estimated 57.6 percent poverty index in 2004 (Kenya 2005b:217), the estimated poverty indexes in Mombasa 1999/2000 were lower than this average. Mvita had a poverty index of 34.5, Likoni 44.6, Changanwe 45.5, and Kisauni 45.6 percent (2005b:222). While the coast has the lowest adult literacy rate in Kenya at 62.8 (UNDP 2002:15), the per capita income is second only to Nairobi – largely because of Mombasa and the vast difference in development between urban and rural Kenya (UNDP 2002:15). While Mombasa’s overall Human Development Index score is low, it is not as low as Nyanza, Western, or Northeastern Province (UNDP 2002:15). While only 13.5% of the coastal population has access to a modern flush toilet, this is still better than every other province except Nairobi (UNDP 2002:59).

outside of their so-called “home” regions of the country.⁴¹ Such sentiment peaked just prior to the 1992 general elections and as a response to the legalization of multiple political parties in Kenya in late 1991. In 1992, for instance, Moi’s KANU used proposals for *majimbo*-ism as a type of alternative to multi-party politics, since under one proposed form of *majimbo*-ism, the residents of each region would belong to a political party affiliated with the dominant ethnic group of the area (Ndegwa 1997:610). But such a rigid ethno-regional political structure also sparked violence between communities that had cooperated for centuries as neighbors. Potentially more damaging in the long term, demands for “*majimbo*” by KANU hardliners just prior to the 1992 ethnic violence in Kenya’s Rift Valley tainted the idea of a federal solution in the minds of many opposition leaders (Barkan and Ng’ethe 1998:46-7).

At the heart of the politicization of Kenyan federalism was the assertion by many pro-*majimbo* politicians that only the indigenes and natives of a region would have access to land and jobs after the implementation of the policy (Oucho 2002:112-13). As political scientist John Oucho clarified of the Kenyan case, “The misconception *majimbo*ists have been having is that this system of government would rid all provinces of non-natives, leaving the natives to run their own affairs uninterrupted by ‘foreigners’” (Oucho 2002:118). Such arguments were found regularly in everyday discourse, political speeches and newspaper editorials.

⁴¹ At independence, *majimbo*-ism referred to a federalist form of government in which the basic political units would correspond to the current provinces (Barkan 1998:214). Such a system was highly favored by the opposition party KADU and its supporters, who mainly came from Kenya’s smaller ethnic groups, such as the Mijikenda on the coast, who feared being marginalized within national politics by elites from larger ethnic groups (see Oded 2000; Salim 1970; Throup 1993; Wolf 2000). For more on the link between *majimbo*-ism and constitutional reform in Kenya, see Barkan (1989, 1998) and Barkan and Ng’ethe (1998). For more on the politicization of *majimbo*-ism during the 1990s and the violent results, see Harbeson (1998:171), Haugerud (1995:41-2), HRW (2002), Oded (2000), and Oucho (2002:112-18).

For example, a resident of Mombasa's Old Town, writing to the *Daily Nation* newspaper in 2006 regarding land rights and ethnicity on the coast, argued that the Swahili were a distinct "tribe" in Kenya since "[t]here is no language without a tribe and there is no tribe without a language."⁴² As the author continued: "Kenya consists of many tribes. We say the central belongs to the Kikuyu, Luo Nyanza to the Luo, Kakamega to Luhya, and Mariakani to the Giriama," demonstrating the way ethnic identity and region are intimately linked in such discourse. "But ironically Mombasa belongs to every one! This is not true," he concluded, asserting that it belonged to him and his people, "the Swahili." As he argued: "The Swahili are the ones who founded the East Africa coastal strip after clearing the bush some 2,000 years ago. The Bantu and other upcountry peoples settled in the interior just over 300 years ago."

Despite its many contradictions (like suggesting that the Swahili are not Bantu or that Africans from the interior had little agency in constructing Swahili society and the coastal economy), such arguments continue to have a profound impact on claims to coastal land and labor. Such arguments are in some ways popular continuations of those made for *majimbo*-ism by Kenyan academics like Mombasa's own Ali Mazrui in the early 1990s, regardless of his initial intention. Mazrui (1994) was outspoken, for example, in arguing for *majimbo*-ism, supporting his argument by claiming that coastal Muslims owned less than 15 percent of the businesses on the coast (cited in Nabende and Musalia 1999:148). But such arguments for *majimbo*-ism were often viewed as problematic and hostile by migrants to Mombasa as well as Christian coastal Mijikenda, due not only to the assertion that coastal Muslims were the only true indigenes (and

⁴² Zenudin Ali Modamed. "Writers have distorted history of the Swahili people," in *Daily Nation*, April 3, 2006.

therefore deserving and rightful people on the coast), but also that upcountry Kenyans and other non-Muslims were primarily responsible for disenfranchising coastal Muslims. In the eyes of many poor migrants from upcountry Kenya, such arguments by the coastal elite were vindictive and misplaced.

Such arguments were also seriously challenged by studies that have found contradictory evidence. For example, to quote Rakodi et al. following their study of poverty and political conflict in Mombasa:

By 1989, Asians and Arabs and people of Asian and Arab extraction constituted only about 12 per cent of the population, yet are reputed to control almost 80 per cent of Mombasa's formal business interests and dominate membership of the Federation of Kenya Employers at the coast (2000:158).

It was common for roadside curio vendors to view this Indian or "Asian," "Arab" and ostensibly "non-African" element (into which the Swahili were frequently placed) as their primary competition and roadblock to economic development, regionally or nationally. Such views are deeply historically rooted. For instance, in 1971 two thirds of the non-farm private assets in Kenya were "Asian" (meaning largely Indian) owned (Leys 1975:119). With "Africanization" a driving force of Kenyan development during the 1960s, the Muslim Swahili urbanites of the coast (the Mazrui included), were seen by many Kenyans from elsewhere in the country as a foreign, contaminating influence that needed to be economically replaced.

Small-scale curio traders and other tourism operators had had to overcome serious disadvantages in competing with such businesspeople and the advantages they had obtained during colonial times. For example, at independence in 1963, at least 40 "mostly Asian-owned" (meaning Indian) "variety and souvenir" shops lined the streets of Mombasa's central business district, all but two of which targeted a mainly pedestrian

tourist market (Blij 1968:129-130). But while Indian traders continued to run most of the large art boutiques and formal shops, by the 1970s, Kamba, Kisii, and Kikuyu-speaking traders of various other Kenyan ethnic backgrounds began regularly selling to tourists from small wooden and sheet metal kiosks set up along the same major roads. The simple difference in economic infrastructure between the competing groups marked the stark disparity in access to wealth and power in newly independent Kenya.

But unlike the highly contested roadsides of the central business district (like those of Moi Avenue – formerly Kilindini Rd.), Mombasa’s Old Town was long closed to the vending of curios. In the 1962 Master Plan for the city of Mombasa, it was recorded: “Although possibly the greatest tourist attraction in Mombasa, it is rather significant that no curio or other purely tourist shops exist within the Old Town.”⁴³ This would slowly change, as competition on Moi Avenue intensified with increased unemployment and a continued influx of upcountry migrants looking to profit from the coastal tourism industry.

“Civilizing” Old Town

Many curio vendors with whom I spoke referred to the area outside of Fort Jesus as “*msitu*,” or a *forest* before their arrival. This was at least partially due to what many viewed as the urban, ostensibly non-“African” and rather “Arab” culture of Mombasa’s Swahili inhabitants. Through such stories and constructions, these traders metaphorically “cut back” the orientalized jungle that Old Town represented to them, opening it and making it accessible for tourist consumption.⁴⁴ Of interest, there were few attempts by

⁴³ National Museums of Kenya. 1990. “A conservation plan for the Old Town of Mombasa, Kenya,” Municipal Council of Mombasa, UNESCO, UNDP, and NMK, page 135.

⁴⁴ There was a conceptual linkage between the cutting and planting of trees and land ownership in much of Kenya and on the coast (Parkin 1972:ch. 4; Waaijenberg 1993; Willis 1993:120). For example, on the

migrants from non-coastal Kenya to commodify or market the “Swahili” elements of coastal culture and sell it to tourists. While European and South Asian hoteliers, as well as coastal Muslims, decorated hotels with “Swahili” furniture or sold “Swahili” woodcarving, non-coastal Kenyans tended to opt for the savannah, game park images of Africa and Kenya that had developed around Kenya’s European settlers and in cities like Nairobi during colonial times.

By claiming that they and their ancestors (as opposed to the Swahili) had long been traders and comprised the labor force on the coast, migrant curio vendors argued through their daily conversations and through the products they sold that *they* were the ones (as opposed to the local Swahili) who had done the important work of not only building but now also civilizing Old Town and Fort Jesus, thereby making these sites accessible and a part of the Kenyan nation.⁴⁵ Building on colonial stereotypes of the coast and Swahili as undeveloped and lazy, many upcountry traders felt they were at the forefront of steering national development by bringing a strong work ethic to what some saw as a foreign corner of their own country. This indigenous appropriation and exploitation of colonial stereotypes ran parallel with the similar process of selling Westerners colonial “tribal” assumptions back to them in the form of tourist art.

According to multiple sources, through the 1970s a single Kikuyu woman sold baskets and shells outside of Fort Jesus and was well known and accepted by everyone I

coast as in the hinterland of Kenya, through the late 19th and early 20th centuries trees and tree crops could be bought, sold, and mortgaged (Waaijenberg 1993:14-15; Willis 1993:120). In much of Kenya, land rights were obtained through “first settlement,” as land became the property of the first inhabitant to cultivate and make productive use of the land (Kanyinga 2000:32).

⁴⁵ I heard such discourses during fieldwork in 2001, and the same came up later in discussions with roadside vendors working outside of Fort Jesus on October 17, 2005.

interviewed as having been the first to do so.⁴⁶ While men tended to dominate the production and sale of carvings of both soapstone and wood, baskets and beadwork were often made and sold by women. Born and raised in Nairobi, the first vendor began selling sisal bags in 1972 from a wooden shack on a small plot about 50 yards in front of the fort's main entrance on the roadside between the fort and the Mombasa club. The land itself was owned by the National Museum at Fort Jesus, but apparently nobody minded a middle-aged woman selling items to passing tourists. At the time, the only other vendor in the area was a Digo man frying and selling cassava brought from Likoni, Mombasa's southern constituency.⁴⁷ In 1979, the woman employed her 15-year-old grandson, Njoroge, to supply her regularly with sisal *viondo* bags from Nairobi.⁴⁸ When she passed away in 1988, Njoroge moved permanently to Mombasa and took over his grandmother's modest business, mixing woodcarvings and other items with the shells and baskets she had sold for 16 years. Njoroge would become a close research participant as he operated from his shop outside of Fort Jesus. He was a Kikuyu trader from the first family to tap the area's tourist market, and in his mind, a proud Kenyan as deserving of access to Mombasa's tourist market as anyone.

⁴⁶ Interviews, Oct. 17 and 18, 2005 with former employees of Mama Wanjiru; Oct. 19, 2005 with Njoroge; Oct. 27, 2005 with Mama Wanjiru. Because Njoroge's grandmother passed away before I was ever able to speak with her I was not able to interview her and learn more about her own past. Long-term vendors outside of the fort acknowledged that she was the first to sell curios. This was also the opinion of Mama Wanjiru, who was the first to erect a kiosk on public land outside of the fort. The grandson of this first vendor, Njoroge, still worked outside of Fort Jesus at the time of writing. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Njoroge come from author's interview, Oct. 19, 2005. While he was unsure of her age, he was born in 1964 in Bahati Estate in Nairobi. His best estimate was that she was around 50 years of age when she came to the coast in 1972, although he could not be sure. He supplied her with sisal bags from Nairobi from 1979 to 1988, when she passed away and he took over her business.

⁴⁷ Interviews, Oct. 17, 2005, with former employee of Mama Wanjiru; Oct. 19, 2005 with Njoroge; Oct. 27, 2005 with Mama Wanjiru.

⁴⁸ This paragraph from interview with Njoroge, Oct. 19, 2005, Old Town, Mombasa.

Mama Wanjiru was the first Kenyan to sell curios from the roadside outside of the Mazrui Cemetery across Nkrumah Road from Fort Jesus.⁴⁹ When she arrived in 1984, she settled in next to the cassava vendor, Njoroge's grandmother being the only other curio vendor outside the fort, but operating on museum land on the other side of the square. There was a tradition of female Kikuyu traders working in urban Kenya during the decades following independence. This was particularly true among landless Kikuyu who had migrated away from Central Province and Nairobi beginning in the 1960s. While many Kamba and Kisii vendors had wives and daughters who tended their farms in rural Kenya while they plied the curio trade in Mombasa, many Kikuyu women like Mama Wanjiru did not have any stake in rural Kenya. After abandoning her uncle's plot in Tudor, where she had run a small kiosk selling beer, Mama Wanjiru and her husband, who had a stable but low-paying job in a tourist hotel, had moved into a small residence in a middle class apartment in Kizingo, not far from Fort Jesus (see map 1.2, page 14). She first tried selling curios along Moi Avenue, but the competition was too intense, and the male vendors made it difficult for her to sell. She said she had a Kisii vendor on one side and a Luhya on the other, both men, who were generally "rude" to her and resented the competition she brought. She said police would also harass her, disapproving of a Kikuyu woman working along Moi Avenue in public and threatening to arrest her for prostitution.

When her first daughter, Wanjiru (hence the name by which she was called), was born in 1982, she would take her daughter for walks to the fresh air around Fort Jesus. During one such trip she met Njoroge's grandmother, another Kikuyu woman struggling to make a living in Mombasa. Unlike Moi Avenue, where curio traders had operated as

⁴⁹ Interview, Oct. 27, 2005, with Mama Wanjiru.

hawkers or from roadside kiosks for decades, Njoroge's grandmother told her that outside of Fort Jesus she "could not sell enough." But Mama Wanjiru said that once there were two Kikuyu women working outside of the fort, one with a young daughter, young "Swahili" men from the immediate Old Town neighbourhood came and told her that she had to leave. With little love for the people of Old Town, she told me: "Those Swahilis, they are bad people with hate in their hearts. They don't want to let people have a chance."

Out of fear, she would leave her kiosk empty at night, selling only what she could carry to work during the day. In desperation, she went to the Mombasa Municipal Council, who gave her a license for her kiosk, and she returned to sell from the roadside across from the fort. Local Old Town residents, who this time had support from some Fort Jesus museum staff, immediately confronted her again. They insisted she move or local youth would destroy her kiosk. But she deterred them by revealing that the municipal council, which was based nearby just up Nkrumah Road, had legally licensed her. "They never came back and never burned me out," she told me proudly in 2005.

Several other Kikuyu women, one of whom was married to a local Swahili and had converted to Islam, followed Mama Wanjiru's example, and built small kiosks along the roadside outside of the Mazrui Cemetery from which to sell curios to passing tourists. By the late 1980s, even local Swahili men and women from Old Town began building kiosks along the roadside to operate or to rent to coastal Mijikenda or migrant upcountry vendors. By 1988, following the arrival of a Kisii entrepreneur from Moi Avenue who built numerous kiosks in the remaining spaces, the entire roadside facing the fort was

lined with sheet metal and wooden structures of varying sizes and shapes, almost all of which sold curios to tourists visiting Old Town and Fort Jesus (see photos 2.2-2.7).⁵⁰



Photo 2.2: Curio vendor in the kiosk he rented outside of Fort Jesus, April 2001.



Photo 2.3: Curio vendor watching over his shop outside of Fort Jesus, where he sold mostly painted and heavily decorated soapstone, April 2001.

⁵⁰ Interviews, Oct. 17, 2005, with former manager of these kiosks; Oct. 27, 2005, with Mama Shiroo.



Photo 2.4: Curio vendor at the kiosk where he was employed outside of Fort Jesus, April 2001.



Photo 2.5: Curio vendor standing next to his table, which he set up daily outside of Fort Jesus, April 2001.



Photo 2.6: Curio vendor reading a *Vibe* magazine while passing time at the kiosk where he was employed outside of Fort Jesus, April 2001.

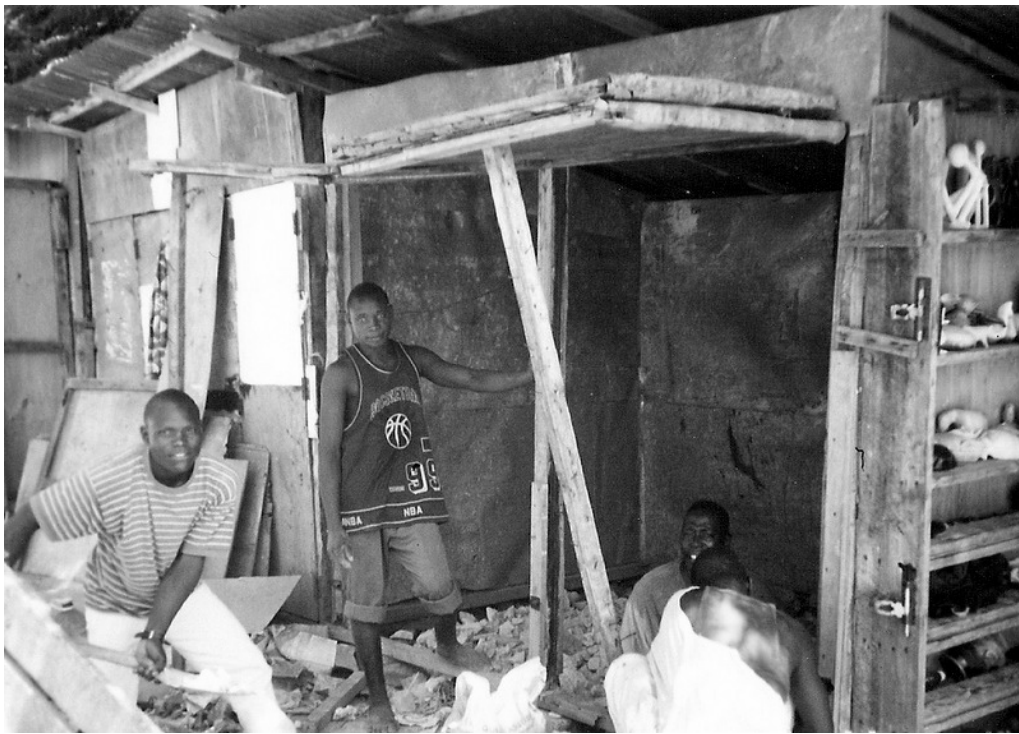


Photo 2.7: Men work to reconstruct kiosk outside of Fort Jesus, April 2001. Despite their informal appearance, a great deal of money was invested in the maintenance of the kiosks.

Religion and the Political Division of Coastal Muslims

While tourism became Kenya's leading source of foreign exchange by the late 1980s, the promise of the industry would be shaken during the 1990s (Akama 1999). The return of multi-party politics in 1991-92 would mean turmoil and violence for many Kenyans, especially in strategic cities like Mombasa, where social stratification had long been politicized and new opposition parties became outlets for decades of frustration. While the 1990s would be an important period for the development of Kenyan democracy, the economic downturn and political violence would shatter many hopes of economic development and modernization.

President Moi maintained political control through the 1980s, despite an attempted coup in 1982 and several short-term economic slides relating to changes in the global market for important Kenyan exports (namely tea and coffee).⁵¹ While opposition political parties were illegal, several events, including the suspicious murder of Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Robert Ouko, in February 1990, galvanized Kenyan opposition movements – particularly the loose affiliation of Moi opponents named the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) (Miller and Yeager 1994:107; Barkan 1993). International and domestic pressure for “democratization” combined with continued Kenyan opposition to Moi came to a head in a key Paris meeting in 1991, in which donors announced that they would withhold aid if President Moi did not

⁵¹ When Moi became president in 1978, Kenya's economy was already on shaky ground. In 1973, OPEC countries took control of fossil fuel production and caused oil prices to increase by 400 percent in 1975 (Lewellen 2002:15; Rapley 2002). Most African countries fell into debt during the economic slowdown that followed. The problem was compounded by global fluctuations in the prices of coffee (one of Kenya's key exports) during the 1970s. Corruption in the Moi administration deepened during the 1978-1979 recession, which was followed by a slow economic slide through 1980 and 1981 preceding the 1982 coup attempt (Barkan 1993; Barkan and Chege 1989; Chege 1987; Miller and Yeager 1994:100-105; Throup 1987). For more on the background to the movement for multi-party politics preceding the 1992 general election, see Barkan (1993), Haugerud (1995:ch. 2), Kiai (1998), Miller and Yeager (1994), Ndegwa (1998b), Throup (1993), and Throup and Hornsby (1998).

implement political and economic reforms (Barkan 1993:91; Miller and Yeager 1994:108). In December 1991, just two weeks after the suspension of funds, Moi and KANU announced they would overturn the 1982 constitutional amendment that had made opposition parties illegal (Barkan 1993, 1998; Haugerud 1995:25; Ndegwa 1998b).

But despite the extensive changes that would be needed to ensure democracy in Kenya, the constitutional reforms of 1991 did little more than simply legalize multiple political parties, through the repeal of section 2A of the constitution (Ndegwa 1998a:193). The presence of multiple political parties increased competition among political elites and in some cases precipitated political violence. This is not to suggest that the ethnic violence that President Moi predicted following the return to multi-party politics was inevitable or natural. Rather, it was the result of KANU's attempts to maintain its monopoly on the legitimate use of power and force within Kenya, even if it meant squashing opposition movements.⁵²

The would be true in Mombasa (as elsewhere in Kenya), where under both Presidents Kenyatta and Moi, coastal Kenyan Muslims had been incensed (to varying degrees) at their own marginalization in national politics as well as the close association between Christianity and the Kenyan government (Oded 2000:9).⁵³ With the return of multiple political parties, violence became a prominent tactic used by KANU to prevent the political unification of coastal Muslims into an opposition movement to Moi and KANU (see HRW 2002; Oded 2000; Wolf 2000). The ruling party's targeting of the

⁵² For more on the specifics of the onset of multi-partyism and violence that followed, see Barkan 1993 (91-92).

⁵³ This was particularly true under Moi. In the early 1990s, Muslim leaders and scholars such as Hassan Mwakimako of the University of Nairobi began arguing publicly that separation of church and state operated against Muslims because the state was controlled by devout Christians who were openly biased regarding religious matters (Oded 2000:78).

Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) aimed to divide and destabilize Muslim unity, which KANU saw as a direct challenge to its political dominance (HRW 2002; Oded 2000; Wolf 2000:141-142). Amid the turmoil, tourists and investors would stay away, and the tourist city of Mombasa would slip into a state of persistent insecurity. It was this environment of intimately linked political and economic insecurity that structured the views and strategies of small-scale traders and art vendors who participated in my research between 2001 and 2008.

Much of Mombasa's Muslim community and several Mombasa Muslims I interviewed on the subject of political violence blamed the political and often violent tactics of Khalid Balala, who in the early 1990s went from being a relatively unknown young preacher in Old Town to the vocal leader of the IPK. Born in Mombasa in 1958, Balala was the son of a Mombasa butcher originally from Yemen (Oded 2000:149). Balala, who had studied Islam and comparative religion at Medina University in Saudi Arabia as well as in India (Oded 2000:149), helped bring the IPK to prominence in the early 1990s. At the time of Balala's rise in popularity, the IPK was an alternative to the Christian opposition parties, which were seen by many coastal Muslims as avoiding their issues and needs, particularly the blatant and well-documented discrimination against Kenyan Muslims in attaining identification cards and travel documents (Oded 2000:105; Nabende and Musalia 1999:150). But according to some informants, Balala isolated Muslims from the broader political opposition by attacking "*Oginga mjinga*" as he called him, or *stupid Oginga*, driving a religious wedge between opposition parties.⁵⁴ This was

⁵⁴ This information came from an interview with a college-educated, self-identifying "Swahili" who was born and raised in Mombasa's Old Town and was in his early 30s at the time of interview on March 22, 2006. He remembers having been in school during Balala's and the IPK's rise to fame in the early 1990s

despite the interest that some Christian opposition leaders had shown in the IPK and Balala's message. For example, in 1992 Ford-Kenya leaders such as Paul Muite and James Orendo attended mosques to hear Balala's sermons and obtain his support (Oded 2000:151).

Balala's frequent arrests for inciting opposition to the government became a rallying point for his supporters. The IPK's first great demonstration came on August 22, 1992, two days before a planned visit by President Moi to Mombasa. It was attended by tens of thousands of Muslims demanding Balala's release from prison (Oded 2000:153). When the government declared the IPK illegal soon after its formation, they cited Kenyan law stating that ethnic and religious parties could not be registered. In the face of government pressure, the IPK would eventually merge with Ford-Kenya but remain a powerful presence in Mombasa following the 1992 elections. With such popular support, by 1993 it was estimated that the IPK controlled over 100 mosques in Coast Province (Nabende and Musalia 1999:150).

Moi countered with his own Muslim clients on the coast, which included MPs Shariff Nassir and Rashid Sajjad, as well as Omar Masumbuko, who was a prominent KANU activist and leader of the disbanded Coast Youth for KANU '92 (HRW 2002:38). After the 1992 elections, Masumbuko, a coastal Mijikenda, would help establish the United Muslims of Kenya (UMKE), which would later become the United Muslims of Africa (UMA) – a play on the word “*umma*,” Swahili for *public* and deriving from the Arabic term “*umma*” or “*ummah*” for the *world Islamic community*.⁵⁵ UMA's goal was

and being particularly lured by his message. It was several years afterwards that he admitted identifying many of the contradictions in Balala's message.

⁵⁵ The irony of the pronunciation of UMA (ooh-muh) continued, since the verb *uma*, pronounced the same way, means “to hurt” in Swahili.

to counter the influence of the IPK by claiming that the latter was a party of Arabs (ostensibly foreigners) since their vocal leader, Sheikh Balala, and the lawyer representing the party, Taib A. Taib, both had recent Arab heritage (Nabede and Musalia 1999:150). KANU politician Karisa Maitha would become the public leader of UMA, an odd choice since he was Christian. But it made political sense for KANU, since in Maitha's bid for MP of Kisauni in 1997, the Muslims of Mombasa's Old Town and the IPK were his most formidable opposition.⁵⁶ While Maitha was not Muslim, he was a Mijikenda with a history as a coastal populist dating back to the 1970s, which he used to his benefit in fracturing the vote.

But in Balala's own words, "The question of black and Arab does not arise in IPK. It is the voice of the oppressed and humiliated people – the Muslims of Kenya." Some of his fiercest attacks came, in fact, against the coastal Muslim elite. On May 21st, Balala was brought before a Mombasa court under charges of having threatened to kill Maitha, Shariff Nassir, and Rashid Sajjad, the latter two Muslims.⁵⁷ In one statement from Balala's cell, he claimed that the IPK was the "messiah of peace and unity for all the Kenyan people. It is the old KANU politicians who will be the eventual losers in time."⁵⁸ The Kikuyu Mombasa-based cleric, Reverend Linus Mwangi of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, joined in demanding the release of Balala, claiming that Christians and Muslims had long been living together in harmony and that Christians should pray for Sheikh Balala.⁵⁹ Christian, upcountry opposition politicians Raila Odinga and Mukhisa Kituyi, both of Ford-Kenya (ethnically Luo and Kamba respectively), led the

⁵⁶ Despite the location of Mombasa's Old Town on Mombasa Island proper, this section of the town was officially part of Kisauni constituency.

⁵⁷ Kampaka, Freddy. "Balala charged over death call," in *Daily Nation*, May 22, 1993, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸ Raymond, Francis. "Balala: My Arrest is not Fair," in *Daily Nation*, May 23, 1993, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Mwaniki, Wanjohi. "Arrest Maitha, demands cleric," in *Daily Nation*, May 24, 1993, p. 5.

political call for Balala's release, arguing that rather than view his harassment as government attempts to marginalize Muslims, "It is more revealing to view it within the context of recent arrests and harassments of leading opposition personalities."⁶⁰

With Balala still imprisoned, in Mombasa a protest strike was called for Friday the March 28, 1993.⁶¹ On March 26, thousands of unsigned leaflets appeared throughout downtown Mombasa, warning "dire consequences" against any who tried to break the strike.⁶² When the day arrived, the strike paralyzed the town, making it arguably one of the most successful in Kenya's post-colonial history.⁶³ In Old Town, battles raged as narrow streets were blocked and petrol bombs were hurled at easily ambushed police vehicles. Kenya's coastal tourism hub remained a ghost town as heavily armed riot police patrolled the rainy streets with dogs. Again in May of the same year there were fierce clashes between the IPK and UMA in June and July and another successful strike in Mombasa and Malindi in September (Oded 2000:156-57).

Balala's story eventually ended in downfall, as its own leaders expelled him from the IPK in June of 1994 (Oded 2000:160). The early struggles of the IPK demonstrated not only the potential of marginalized Kenyans to resist the government through opposition parties and organizations, but also the extent to which both the Kenyan government and the opposition were fragmented in multiple political conflicts and struggles for power, revenge, or reparations. In Mombasa, while the violence of the IPK in the early 1990s encouraged many Muslims to openly speak out for their democratic

⁶⁰ Nation Team. "Anti-Govt anger rises over Maitha," in *Daily Nation*, May 24, 1993, pp. 1-2.

⁶¹ Raymond, Francis and Benson Abele. "IPK Distributes Leaflets," in *Daily Nation*, May 27, 1993, p. 2.

⁶² Karimi, Ephantus. "PC: We're ready for IPK strikers," in *Daily Nation*, May 28, 1993, p. 1.

⁶³ Mutonya, Njuguna. "Strike Paralyzes Mombasa Town: Balala freed on bond," in *Daily Nation*, May 29, 1993, pp. 1-2. Mazrui and Shariff (1994:152) also called the strike one of the most successful in East African post-colonial history.

rights as Kenyan citizens, it simultaneously cast fear of economic collapse into tour operators, investors, and the largely Christian migrant curio vendors.

Kaya Bombo and the Targeting of Migrants

President Moi and KANU had an extra challenge on the coast preceding the 1997 general election, as it was Moi's final legal term as president and Mombasa had become a haven of opposition following the 1992 election.⁶⁴ The call for constitutional reform had only grown since the 1992 election, and additional stipulations were added that would make it more difficult for Moi and KANU to emerge victorious in both national and local elections (Barkan 1998; Barkan and Ng'ethe 1998; Ndegwa 1998b; Wolf 2000). The corruption in Mombasa's local affairs had become more obvious to the voting population, and there was a noticeable decline in living standards in the city and across the country (Ndegwa 1998b; Oded 2000; Wolf 2000).⁶⁵ Tourism had been declining since the beginning of the 1990s, and much of the investment moved out of Mombasa town to the walled protection of coastal resorts (see ch. 3). By 1997, migrants from upcountry Kenya were seen as "ipso facto, opposition supporters" in Mombasa, which had the potential to politically unite upcountry migrants and coastal Muslims, such as IPK supporters, against Moi and KANU (Wolf 2000:148). But prior to the elections, KANU's coast branch chairman and Mvita MP, Shariff Nassir, forecast ethnic (rather than political) violence, suggesting any impending fighting would be non-political, stating: "We are very afraid

⁶⁴ It is worth noting that while Mombasa was considered a bastion of opposition supporters during the elections of the 1990s, this was not true of all of Coast Province, most of which remained supportive of Moi, especially when he and his KANU clients spoke of *majimbo*-ism. For more on the 1997 general election, see Barkan and Ng'ethe (1998) and volume 45, issue 2 of *Africa Today* from 1998, specifically Barkan (1998), Harbeson (1998), Holmquist and Ford (1998), Kiai (1998) and Ndegwa (1998b).

⁶⁵ In Kenya, between 1992 and 1997 absolute poverty increased from 44% to 52%, with life expectancy declining during the same period as HIV/Aids began to have a powerful demographic impact (UNDP 2002:7).

because all the tribes of Kenya are mixed up in Mombasa. It is just like petrol and a match box” (quoted in Wolf 2000:146).

A male Kamba curio vendor and research participant named Andrew had, as usual, returned to Likoni on Mombasa’s South Coast after work on the night of August 13, 1997.⁶⁶ He had been playing cards in a small bar next to the police station before heading home earlier than usual. But upon arriving home, where he lived in a complex of rooms with other Kamba, Kisii, and Digo men (some Muslims from the coast and others Christians from upcountry), he heard shots from the area of the police station he had just left. As he recalled, he and his neighbors had no idea what was happening, and they spent the night in fear with the doors locked and the lights off.

During that first night of violence raiders attacked the Likoni police station, killed six officers, stole over 40 guns, and then went on a violent “rampage” through the neighborhoods on Mombasa’s South Coast (HRW 2002:39).⁶⁷ Andrew informed me that some of the men with whom he had been earlier in the night had been hurt or killed during the violence. He had only avoided it by minutes. Widening the rift between Christian migrants and coastal Muslims, many of the raiders wore uniforms, which according to Human Rights Watch,

consisted of a black cape or robe with two bands of fabric, one red and one white, crossing the chest in an ‘X’ pattern and also featured a star and crescent moon at the front and, at least in some cases, the Islamic saying, ‘There is No God but Allah’ (2002:61-62).

⁶⁶ Interview with Andrew, Oct. 24, 2005. This individual was born in 1973 and raised in Kitui. He moved to Mombasa in 1991 after finishing primary school. He came to the coast for the purpose of finding employment in the curio business, particularly since his elder brother had already become established on the coast selling from a kiosk near the elephant tusks on Moi Avenue. He had, like many other migrants from upcountry, found that the cheapest rents were in Likoni to the south of Mombasa Island.

⁶⁷ For full details of the violence on the Kenyan coast that began on August 13, 1997, commonly called “Kaya Bombo,” see HRW (2002), Kagwanja (1998), and KHRC (1997, 1998).

The raiders targeted primarily Christian Kamba, Kikuyu, Luhya, and Luo migrants living in Likoni, just south of Mombasa Island. The tense issue of land tenure and ownership on the coast, as well as issues of access to public jobs, had led many to blame unemployment and underdevelopment on an “‘invasion’ of ‘up-country’ businesspeople” (Wolf 2000:142). In addition to the six police killed the first day, six civilians were killed and hundreds of others were beaten and maimed severely with multiple machete wounds (HRW 2002:61). Following the attacks on the police, raiders went house-to-house threatening upcountry migrants. Some who testified to Human Rights Watch admitted using language, calls, and accents to identify peoples’ ethnic backgrounds. Some raiders even defected on the first night due to the bloodshed and violence, for which they told Human Rights Watch they were not prepared (HRW 2002:60). As Andrew explained to me several years later:

We did not know what it was about since there was very little problem between coastal and upcountry people. We were all poor. There were all types of rumors about who it was, but Kenyans are peace-loving people. Whatever this was, it was a matter of politics.

As is the case with much of the political violence that has occurred in Kenya over the last century, the police played a major role in allowing the violence to continue through their own inaction. Even before August 13, 1997, police had received reports of coastal politicians inciting primarily coastal Mijikenda against upcountry people, and there was considerable evidence that the police participated in training the raiders (HRW 2002:43). The police killed at the Likoni Ferry police post were, as Human Rights Watch reasoned, the immediate government forces that had to be removed and kept from interfering with further attacks, which were aimed at striking fear into migrants (HRW 2002:59).

A Kisii curio vendor whom I interviewed in 2005 had lived in Likoni since the 1970s and remembered the first night when the raiders came to his house.⁶⁸ Like most houses in the area, several families of diverse Kenyan ethnic backgrounds resided in his single housing compound, each in a separate room. The raiders banged on the doors and forced everyone outside at gunpoint. They lined up the inhabitants and asked them to declare their “tribe” or ethnic background (*kabila* in Swahili). As a Kisii from southwest Kenya, my informant was told to kneel down while those of coastal heritage remained standing. But the Luo men, he told me, were beaten severely rather than told to kneel. They were all finally told, “*Ukitoka bara, ondoka kesho*,” [translation] *if you are from upcountry, leave tomorrow*.

He immediately contacted his brother, who was a policeman in Mombasa and who came to help him evacuate his property and family using a police vehicle. When the raiders returned the next morning, they began shooting at the police, who were still helping my research participant move furniture from his home. He abandoned most of his property, he told me, and headed straight to Changanwe, on the mainland to the west of Mombasa Island, never to return to Likoni in the nearly ten years since the events transpired. It helped to have a police vehicle, he said in 2005 from his family’s one-room home in Chaani, a neighbourhood in Changanwe (see map 1.1, page 12). “This is where I came,” he said. “I moved straight in here. I salvaged only what you see. And I was very lucky,” he added.

⁶⁸ All information from this interview from interview conducted on Oct 26, 2005. This individual was born in Tabaka, Kisii District, in 1969 and studied through form 2 before moving to the coast to work in soapstone in 1990. Like many other migrants who lived in Likoni, he worked on Mombasa Island from a kiosk located on Moi Avenue near Uhuru Gardens.

Rather than squashing the instigators with a rapid response, the government's overall lack of action created a "virtual security vacuum" for the raiders to continue their killing and looting on the South Coast in the following weeks (HRW 2002:61).

Reminiscent of the Rwanda genocide of 1994,⁶⁹ up to four thousand refugees sought protection at the Likoni Catholic Church for weeks following the initial attacks (HRW 2002:71). With no aid or police protection, they were continually attacked by armed raiders, who killed at least two people on August 22, 1997 (HRW 2002:71).

As Human Rights Watch concluded: "The response of the government's security forces to the violence was so lax as to raise widespread suspicion of government complicity in the attacks" (HRW 2002:64). It was more than a month before the raiders were flushed from the forests. When they finally were, it was followed by a violent crackdown on the Digo (Mijikenda) population of the South Coast as individual police, mostly from upcountry Kenya, sought personal revenge for what would come to be known as the "Kaya Bombo" killings (HRW 2002:73). Unknown numbers of innocent Digo civilians were tortured, raped, and killed by Kenyan security forces in the months following the violence (HRW 2002:73).

From a political standpoint, Human Rights Watch found the Kaya Bombo violence to be a complete success. The investigators were convinced that the areas targeted for attack were those where upcountry people were most concentrated, with the violence displacing at least 75 percent of the upcountry population (HRW 2002:96). But even more importantly, identity documents and voting cards were in many cases confiscated by the raiders or lost in the looting and burning, making it impossible for

⁶⁹ Although the scale of the killing in Rwanda was much greater than in Mombasa, the comparison to the Rwanda genocide, which took place only three years earlier, was prominent in the Human Rights Watch report on the Likoni violence in 1997.

these migrants to vote even if they did not permanently leave Coast Province (HRW 2002:96). Further, the violence struck fear into the hearts and minds of migrant curio traders from upcountry Kenya, who had once seen Mombasa as a locale of opportunity, but were increasingly viewing the city as inhospitable and both politically and economically insecure.

Ethnic Essentialism on the Kenyan Coast

Following the political violence of the 1990s, daily interactions among small-scale traders working in Mombasa's Old Town produced oppositional discourses of ethnic essentialism and marginality, such as those described earlier among curio traders and tour guides. Such oppositional discourses are produced more easily in urban environments such as Mombasa because communication so often automatically assigns individuals to groups and groups to places, as identities are strongly associated with particular regions of the country. As I have already discussed, this was nurtured by British colonial policy that ruled through interlocking categories of place and identity. As Angelique Haugerud wrote of post-colonial Kenya, "to speak of particular districts or regions today is to convey messages about ethnic categories and dominance as well" (1995:40).

Interestingly, ethnic affiliation and organization often emerged in Africa's single-party states as an alternative to the dominant political parties, which tended to place the nation first and demand complete obedience to the government (Vail 1989:2). According to Leroy Vail, "ethnicity became the home of the opposition in states where class consciousness was largely undeveloped" (1989:2). Ethnicity, or ethnic particularism, in many cases undermined the efforts at unitary nation building (Vail 1989:2). But rather

than emerging from a political opposition, in Kenya, dominant political factions and empowered regional elites have at times created and perpetuated ethnic categories. Particularly under Moi, presidential power was used to enhance and manipulate ethnic tension (see Kiai 1998). As John Oucho (2002:33) explained of the Kenyan case, “governance has exploited legacies of the administrative structure that is coterminous with the ethnic structure of the country and perpetuated certain biases and prejudices toward some parts and against other parts of the country.” President Moi, his allies, and clients engaged in political deception by consciously orchestrating violence that would appear “tribal” and rooted in primordial tendencies.⁷⁰ As Kagwanja explained:

Through the sponsorship of ‘tribal militias’, naked and painted with red ochre or clad in traditional *shukas* (cotton sheets), which assaulted their victims with spears, arrows or swords, the Moi government succeeded in hiding behind images of the ‘communal’ and ‘primordial’ attached to ‘tribal warriors’ to conceal its role in grossly violating the human rights of its citizens (2005:56).

The language of ethno-political violence and oppositional discourse was shaped by national political competition and did not necessarily represent the feelings I found existing among individual Kenyan traders. Nor could essentialized ethnic discourse and stereotypes explain individuals’ political views or economic strategies, which were diverse and nurtured by a variety of non-ethnic factors such as class, gender, and experience. I found that although not all ethno-linguistic communities were equally represented, the Fort Jesus vendors preferred to belong to a multi-ethnic cooperative group (the Fort Jesus Curio Group) in which they all acted as individual Kenyans with equal rights, and most importantly, individual security. This was a stark contrast to most

⁷⁰ See Haugerud (1995:38-45), Kagwanja (2005), Mueller (2008), Oucho (2002), and Throup (1993a) for a further discussion of ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley. The government’s official “Report of the Judicial Commission Appointed to Inquire into Tribal Clashes in Kenya,” commonly referred to as “The Akiwumi Report,” gives detailed information and testimony regarding violence relating to both the 1992 and 1997 elections, including the Likoni violence (see Kenya 1999).

of the original production cooperatives and markets, which tended to be organized by ethnic group, be it the Kamba cooperative or Nairobi's "Maasai Market." The kiosk system combined Kenyan traders of diverse ethnic backgrounds (including coastal Mijikenda, "Swahili," Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii, Luhya, Luo, Maasai and a variety of other groups) into an inclusive, public economic space that was not fractured into privatized or ethnically exclusive enclaves. More than anything else, a notion of *security through diversity* – an idea several of the younger vendors and kiosk owners mentioned to me regularly in 2001 – which made the roadside kiosk setup desirable for the vendors themselves.

Organization and the Fort Jesus Curio Group

At the time of my initial research in 2001, Kenya's tourism industry had yet to recover from the massive declines in tourist arrivals suffered following the violence of 1992 and 1993 and especially after Kaya Bombo in 1997. A strong sense of economic and ethnic insecurity pervaded the economic outlooks and strategies of my research participants, nurturing desires by many to find a way out of Kenya altogether. Despite the "tribal" and "primitive" images often portrayed in tourist art, especially (but not exclusively) young Kenyan research participants looked to the curio trade as a means to potentially move out of Kenya and into a larger, international market that was free of local politics and the differences that divided them as Kenyans. Using Kenya's curio industry in such a way was paradoxical since many traders were essentially using ethnic and so-called "tribal" art to save them from the social insecurity of ethnic politics. Yet in their own interactions, it was a unified Kenyan identity that some felt could give them security once they entered into international markets. As they witnessed daily,

international tourists not only had money to spend, but did not typically discriminate based on the categories of local Kenyan politics, about which they tended to know very little.

An analysis of the individuals working outside of Fort Jesus in 2001 revealed the ethnic and social diversity of Mombasa's curio and kiosk economies. During the last year of the kiosk era in Mombasa (2001), of the 21 kiosks doing business outside of Fort Jesus, built of varying sizes and materials, I counted 16 lining the roadside outside of the Mazrui cemetery along Nkrumah Road and facing the north wall of Fort Jesus (see map 1.2, page 14).⁷¹ Focusing on these 16 structures, as well as the shops built on museum land between Fort Jesus and the Mombasa Club, I counted 31 individuals in my original 2001 census, all connected to the Fort Jesus curio trade. Twenty-four of those 31 were research participants. I never met the remaining seven, all of whom were absentee kiosk owners. Unable to meet with them in person, I obtained information about them from their employees and other acquaintances of theirs with whom I spoke.⁷²

Of those seven absentee owners, one Kamba and one Kisii man who both had formal employment outside the curio or tourism industries were co-owners of a kiosk. Another kiosk owner was identified for me as a Kisii man who was a schoolteacher but whom I never met, although I was quite familiar with his employee who ran the business (a Giriama [Mijikenda] man from near Kilifi to the north of Mombasa). Finally there were four owners who were identified for me as simply "Swahili." Two were women whom I was told lived in Old Town, another was a man living in Old Town but originally from Lamu, and the fourth a man originally from Malindi who also ran a "Swahili

⁷¹ In addition to the 16 kiosks along Nkrumah Road, four other expanded-kiosk shops were located on museum land between the entrance to Fort Jesus and the Mombasa Club.

⁷² For a complete profile of my research participants, see Appendix 1.

woodcarving” workshop in Mombasa’s Old Town. In summary, of those seven from my original 2001 census who were not research participants, four were “Swahili” (two women from Mombasa, one man from Lamu, one man from Malindi), two Kisii, and one Kamba. Appendix 1 provides a complete breakdown of my research participants.

Of those 24 individuals who were research participants in 2001, one was a Kisii man from Tabaka in Kisii District. He was the absentee kiosk owner of four kiosks outside of Fort Jesus. He employed other individuals to sell from them daily. Six other individuals were kiosks owners, who had built on the roadside outside of the Mazrui Cemetery and came in person to sell curios from them daily. Of these, five were Kikuyu women, three of whom had moved to Mombasa and two of whom were born and raised in the coastal city; two were Kikuyu men, one of whom moved to Mombasa in his teens and one of whom was born and raised in the city; and two were Muslim “Swahili” men of the local Old Town community, one originally from Lamu and the other from Mombasa’s Old Town. Of the three individuals who rented the kiosks from which they sold curios daily, one was a Kisii man who had never lived in Kisii District in his life; one a Luo man who had grown up in Nakuru and had lived in Mombasa since attending Mombasa Polytechnic; and one a Giriama (Mijikenda) man who came from Kilifi District to the north of Mombasa. Of the ten individuals who were employed selling curios from kiosks outside of Fort Jesus, one was a Kamba man from Kitui; two were Kisii men, brothers from Tabaka in Kisii District; one a “Swahili” man who had recently moved to Mombasa from Malindi; two Giriama (Mijikenda) men from Kilifi District; three Duruma (Mijikenda) men, all relatives from near the small town of Samburu in Kwale District to the west of Mombasa; and one a Digo (Mijikenda) man from the south of Mombasa.

Finally, one individual, a fourth Duruma relative of the aforementioned three, sold from a table built along the roadside rather than from a kiosk.

In sum, of those individuals who either owned or worked in the kiosks outside Mombasa's Fort Jesus in April 2001, eight were coastal Mijikenda (3 Giriama, 4 Duruma, 1 Digo), seven were Muslims of the Kenyan coast who either self-identified or were identified by others prominently as "Swahili," seven were Kikuyu, six Kisii, two Kamba, and one Luo, for a total of 31 individuals, all Kenyan, working in this one small section of Mombasa's kiosk economy and curio industry (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Work Status, Ethnicity, and Gender of Fort Jesus Curio Traders, April 2001⁷³

Work Status	Kamba		Kisii		Kikuyu		Luo		"Swahili"		Mijikenda		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Kiosk Owner (Absentee)	1		3						2	2			6	2
Kiosk Owner (Worker)					2	5			2				4	5
Kiosk Renter			1				1				1		3	
Kiosk Employee	1		2						1		6		10	
Hawker											1		1	
Total	2		6		2	5	1		5	2	8		24	7

Table 2.1 above shows the breakdown of those individuals from my 2001 survey by ethnicity, gender, and work status. The man I have listed as a "hawker" sold at the time of my initial research in 2001 from a table rather than from a permanent kiosk. Those listed as "employee" neither owned nor rented the kiosk from which they operated. Rather, they were paid a monthly salary, on commission for selling above a certain "preferred price" on the shop owners' items, or most commonly through a combination of

⁷³ This chart was created from a survey I conducted in April 2001 and later verified through follow-up interviews in June-July of 2003. "Owner (absentee)" refers to owners of kiosks who were not regularly present and tended to have formal employment and rent their kiosks to other vendors. "Owner (workers)" were individuals who both owned and worked in their kiosks. "Renters" were individuals who rented a kiosk directly from the owner. An "employee" at a kiosk generally worked on commission or salary for products sold from an absentee owner's kiosk. The lone "hawker" was an individual vending curios outside of Fort Jesus but from a table rather than a kiosk. This survey included all of those invested in vending curios in the square outside of Fort Jesus, but was not inclusive of the formal shops located along the streets of Old Town itself, further away from the fort. This can also be found as Table 6 in Appendix 1.

the two. “Renters” were individuals who rented the kiosks from which they sold their own items. While cases existed in other markets, I did not find a single case of double renting, whereby one individual rented a kiosk from the owner only to rent it again to another trader. In one case, a participant was in the process of buying his kiosk from the owner, from whom he had rented for several years. It took him over two years to slowly pay off the 75,000 shillings (\$1,000) to purchase the small wooden structure, which he finally did only a few months before its demolition in January 2002 (see ch. 3).

Owners were usually not present and generally had access to either formal employment or their own capital for operating small businesses. Such entrepreneurs tended to own their kiosk(s) as a side investment, and many did not belong to the Fort Jesus Curio Group. The significant exception was that all Kikuyu represented in my sample were not only owners, but also worked in their kiosks on a regular basis and tended to sell a variety of woodcarvings, baskets, soapstone, and jewelry. It is also significant that while eight Mijikenda – all of them men – were selling curios outside of Fort Jesus in 2001, all but one of them were employed on commission or low salary. The prevalence of Kamba and Kisii traders represented the primary crafts and production networks of Kamba woodcarving and Kisii soapstone, which were the most common items being sold. Almost all of the Kamba and Kisii men had connections, either through geographic origin or kin, to production networks and handicrafts cooperative societies such as the Kisii soapstone cooperative or the Akamba Handicrafts Co-operative Industry, both located in Changamwe.

My method for determining ethnic identity was usually direct questioning, and in almost every case I was given a direct response. However, there were a few exceptions

that reveal the complexity of ethnic identity in urban Kenya. In one case, a Muslim vendor in his late teens who had moved to Mombasa's Old Town from Malindi in order to sell curios from his uncle's kiosk accepted "Swahili" as his ethnic background when I suggested the category, even though he had initially responded to my question by simply saying he was "from Malindi." Such a case reveals the complexity of the category of "Swahili," particularly in relation to other Kenyan ethnic identities that were linked to very specific regions. As I have already discussed in this chapter, while the long-term Muslim inhabitants of the urban East African Coast were often generalized as "Swahili," such categories became problematic within local settings, where the term "Swahili" might have negative connotations and its lack of specificity limited its usefulness. This young man stressed that he was from Malindi and not to be confused with the young Muslim men of Mombasa, who were culturally similar and could also be called "Swahili," but who had grown up in different neighborhoods, gone to different schools, and had different family connections. As had long been true historically, identity within Swahili society of the East African Coast generally emerged first and foremost from Islam and family heritage from a specific port city in Africa or Arabia.

In yet another case, Davis, a vendor whose father was Luo and whose mother was Kisii, spoke Kikuyu (in addition to Kisii, Swahili, and English) fluently after growing up in Nairobi and had several situational ethnic identities. I have seen him pose as Kikuyu in Nairobi to get a better deal on a taxi fare and be told directly on another occasion that he was Luo because that was his father's ethnic group. But despite the fact that most Kenyans assumed the identities of their fathers, for young men and women living in urban Kenya who were raised by their mothers, the strict rules of patrilineal descent were

often simply ignored. The main reason that Davis identified as Kisii was that because his Kisii mother had raised him as a small child, he spoke Kisii as his first language. This was also the primary reason he was identified as being from Kisii on his government issued identification card.

Despite what often appears a fierce rigidity to ethnic boundaries in Kenya, such a case reveals how socially-constructed and flexible Kenyan ethnicity actually were. As important as ethno-regional identities were, in daily speech they were social constructs with flexible meanings. For example, contrary to essentialized links between ethnic group and region, Davis, who had lived on the coast since 1994 stressed in 2005 that despite his upcountry ethnic identity, he was a “coastal person,” particularly when it came to politics. As Davis told me: “I am Kisii, but I have lived in Mombasa for a long time and know this place. I can’t just go to Kisii. I don’t have those connections. If my business is burned out, I could go to Nairobi since I know people there. But for now, this is home.”⁷⁴

The discourse in the political space of Mombasa’s urban roadsides was not simply one of coastal versus upcountry opposition. McIntosh,⁷⁵ in her study of essentialist language ideology on the Kenyan coast, stressed that connections between language, ethnicity, and religion are not timeless or primordial but a “distinctly local formulation that has emerged from a series of historical shifts on the coast” (2005:152).

Characterizing the socio-political situation on the coast as a “crucible of inequality,”

⁷⁴ Interview with Davis, Oct 7, 2005.

⁷⁵ McIntosh (2005) examined the performative construction of language ideology among Giriama in Malindi on Kenya’s coast. She focused on how code switching can reinscribe an ideological worldview and reinvigorate and naturalize language ideology (2005:152). She was specifically interested in how code switching acted as a means to project the self and thus reify essentialist ideologies of interlinked language, ethnicity, and religion on the Kenyan coast.

McIntosh described how Giriama, caught between the coastal-upcountry binary, simultaneously hoped that “upcountry people living on the coast might be heavily taxed or barred from working there” while “Arabs and Swahilis alike might be ‘sent back to Arabia’” (2005:155).

Many Mijikenda, who made up the majority of indigenous coastal farmers and laborers, were aware of the advantages held by some upcountry traders, even if I rarely heard words of direct animosity by Mijikenda traders toward them. As one Giriama (Mijikenda) vendor named Kahindi told me from his stall where he was employed in the Kisii soapstone cooperative in Chaani:

It’s a huge advantage to come from upcountry. But it’s a problem of us Africans, Kenyans, that people put so much emphasis on *kabila* [tribe]. They help each other out and favor each other. Kisiis, they do it with soapstone. And it helps to be Kisii because you need to go upcountry to get the raw materials. It’s easy. And if you want to speak to the other people selling at the beaches, the Kambas have taken over everything.⁷⁶

While Kahindi accepted that several ethnic groups had developed their own market niches, which they controlled through code switching between languages, this was not to suggest that this individual found himself ethnically opposed to migrants from elsewhere in Kenya – the Kisii, Kikuyu, or the Kamba. It was a fact that soapstone could only be obtained in a very isolated area of southwestern Kenya, around which Kisii speaking communities had lived and worked their farms for generations. Many of the Kamba vendors on the beach had been working there since the 1960s, and often sold products on commission for family members who were carvers in one of the several

⁷⁶ Interview with Kahindi, July 26, 2003. He was born in Takaungu in Kilifi District in the early 1970s. He later moved to Kisauni on Mombasa’s North Coast to find work in the early 1990s. It was there that he met a Kisii school teacher who owned a kiosk outside of Fort Jesus and who hired him to work in his shop daily selling mostly soapstone acquired cheaply from the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative located in Uhuru Gardens along Moi Avenue and later in Chaani in Changamwe. After the demolition of Mombasa’s kiosks in 2001-02, the same Kisii employer helped my participant find employment working in a kiosk selling wholesale soapstone from the Kisii cooperative in Chaani.

primarily Kamba woodcarving cooperatives located in Kenya (see ch. 3). Such economic connections, which went back decades, were hard to compete with for a lone trader looking to enter the curio trade. But this competition, as ethnic as it was in appearance, was not simply rooted in ethnic difference but an economic, historical, and geographic reality. Kahindi did not use such realities as a reason to discriminate against migrants, even if the resulting marginalization and disadvantage he experienced caused him to group the other traders together based upon their ethno-regional backgrounds as from “upcountry.” Indeed, continually using generalized oppositional terms, “upcountry” and “coast,” helped him to situate himself as a *legitimate* coastal person.

Such arguments by individuals of Mijikenda heritage that they were indeed the *true* people of the coast (as opposed to the Swahili) were common, and often were not intended simply to oppose migrants from upcountry. There was also opposition to the coastal elite. Opinions often depended upon the location on the coast from which the individual migrated. Many Giriama traders from the Kilifi and Takaungu area who had migrated to Mombasa from further north along the coast looked down on the Mombasa “Swahili” and often identified with upcountry traders. For example, Kahindi, who said he was simply from “the reserve” in the Kilifi-Takaungu area, told me: “But if you go there, the Mazruis own everything.” While he insisted to me that “the Swahili” were an ethnic group (*kabila*) that included the prominent Mazrui family, he added that they were “very small in number. But they like to think they are *wengi sana*,” or “*very many*.” “The people of the coast are the Mijikenda,” he stressed to me.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Interview with Kahindi, July 26, 2003. See previous footnote for more specifics on this individual. He was among several research informants, all of whom were Giriama, who had come to Mombasa from the Takaungu area of Kilifi District. Two other such individuals were part of my initial sample of 2001 working outside of Fort Jesus.

As such, some of the most powerful challenges to “Swahili” claims on the coast came from Mijikenda Muslims. A Muslim Digo⁷⁸ (Mijikenda) vendor I interviewed in 2001 said he did not identify with anything he sold. “It’s all Swahili stuff,” he said, differentiating himself, a Muslim Digo, from a Muslim “Swahili.” He cared little for the item such as the “Swahili horn,” models of *dhow*s (boats), carved “safari chairs,” and other woodcarvings labeled “Swahili” but often produced by Mijikenda (especially Muslim Giriama or Digo) employees.⁷⁹

In another interview, a Christian Giriama who said he felt himself to be a relative to “the Swahili” and was definitely “a coastal person,” added that he admired the upcountry traders and did not think of them as “invaders,” an English term I heard sometimes used among long-term residents of Old Town. When I asked why he thought the upcountry people did so well, he said plainly, “because they are very hard working, while the Swahilis are very lazy. Many of them are sleeping right now, while others need servants, while they themselves do nothing at all.”⁸⁰

Competitive and essentialized discourses further emerged within the context of entrepreneurial capitalism, which many traders adopted as personal guidelines and used

⁷⁸ The Digo are the only sub-group of the Mijikenda who are considered to be primarily Muslim (Spear 1978). While many Giriama have converted to Islam during the 20th century, the other seven Mijikenda sub-groups are predominantly Christian. The conversion of Digo and Giriama to Islam was largely due to pragmatic reasons related to coastal politics, in the Digo case during the 19th century and in the Giriama case during the 20th century. See Parkin (1989) and Willis (1993) for detailed discussions of the phenomenon of conversion to Islam.

⁷⁹ Interview, April 20, 2001. This individual was physically handicapped, most likely from polio, and worked in the kiosk as a means to making money to pay his school fees. He was attending secondary school, also with the financial assistance of his father, although he was in his mid-20s at the time of interview and somewhat older than most secondary school students due to his health and financial condition. A local Muslim who did not work in the kiosk itself but used it to provide employment opportunities to other such disabled Muslim youth from the coast owned the particular kiosk from which he sold.

⁸⁰ Interview, April 20, 2001. This individual was in his early 20s, and though Giriama, was Christian and originally was raised for part of his life in Lamu, where he was a religious minority despite coming from a coastal ethnic group. Well educated, he attended secondary school in Malindi before moving to Mombasa to find employment in the late 1990s not long before this interview.

to blame “the Swahili” for their and the coast’s marginalization and lack of development and opportunities. As Davis, in his late twenties and with his array of situational ethnic identities told me in April 2001:

This is individual competition. Actually nobody can fight with tribalism. This is like you alone, you have to work very hard to survive. That is the competition. You have to struggle hard, you don’t have to, like, say I don’t like to do this, somebody else will be right there to do that. If you are just sleeping, or you just do this sometimes, there is nobody who will wait for you to wake up. That is the competition I am talking about. That’s why I’m saying like Swahili, in the coastal region, they are kind of lazy. And they should accept that their major problem is that ‘we are being lazy’ and ‘we have to adjust that and join others’ struggle for life.’ And then I think it would be fine.⁸¹

As a twenty-five year old Luo curio vendor and kiosk renter named Ronald told me in 2001:

The Swahili, they are lazy because they can’t manage to do a job like this (sell curios). They cannot come and sit here from morning until evening. He can do it from, let’s say nine in the morning to twelve. Then he goes home, sleep a little bit, he comes back from two o’clock to four. If he gets a little money, he buys *miraa*⁸² and goes sits there (gesturing to the park outside the fort). He calls it a holiday. But us, we must struggle. I think because we come from very far. But them, their home is here. Everything is here. Their family is here so they can’t go hungry. But somebody like me, I have only my sister here, or sometimes some people they don’t have anybody. It’s you for yourself. Your other family members are very far, so you must struggle.⁸³

Much of the blame curio vendors placed on “the Swahili” – particularly the tour guides and “beach boys” of Old Town – mentioned “Swahili laziness,” which in many ways was the perpetuation of early colonial discourses or stereotypes about “the

⁸¹ Interview with Davis, April 18, 2001.

⁸² *Miraa*, better known as *khat*, is a mild stimulant legally grown and consumed in Kenya. It is also a major export, primarily to Somalia, the Middle East, England, Italy and Germany. For more on the substance and its use in Kenya, see Anderson and Carrier (2006), Anderson et al. (2007), Carrier (2005, 2006), and Goldsmith (1988).

⁸³ Interview with Ronald, April 27, 2001. Ronald was ethnically Luo, but had never lived in Nyanza Province, the so-called home of the Luo ethnic group. He was born in 1975 in Nakuru in the Rift Valley, where he was educated through high school by his mother and older sisters, all of whom were nurses. He moved to Mombasa in the late 1990s in order to attend Mombasa Polytechnic. It was after graduating with a certificate in accounting and failing to find a job that he began selling curios.

Swahili,” or the urbanized Muslims of the coast. But in the early 21st century, traders’ endless descriptions of “Swahili laziness” were also a combination of frustration at “Swahili” complaints of marginality blended with the reality of migrants’ own, often desperate economic situations. Rather than equate *Swahili* with the marginalized people of Kenya’s coast, as has become common among academics (Horton and Middleton 2000:14; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Wolf 2000), the migrants’ own narratives made *them* the marginalized, if for no more reason than their migrant status itself. While the “Swahili” and other Kenyan Muslims and people from coastal ethnic groups were marginalized within Kenya on the national level, the contradiction arose because the “Swahili” were still considered by both Mijikenda and migrants from the interior to have significant local advantages on the coast.

Organization and Cooperation

I have attempted thus far to underline the multiple discourses of marginality that exist within Mombasa and which I found along the roadsides and outside of Old Town. When questioned directly, most traders working along the Mombasa streets told me that from their experience there was very little tension brought by ethnic difference, gender, age or background. As I have explained throughout this chapter, ethnic differences were largely the product of historical stereotypes and political messages meant to divide and rule the populace from the top down. I have stressed the presence of attitudes of cooperation and the formation of Kenyan nationalism from the bottom-up, particularly when designed to counter the divide and rule tactics of the political elite.

The case of the Fort Jesus curio vendors demonstrates the extent to which religious, ethnic, and upcountry-coast binaries of violence, resistance, and conflict, while

prominent in political discourses (and even in the answers some traders gave to my questions about ethnic difference), were not representative of the everyday interactions I witnessed between individuals identifying or identified as belonging to one group or another. I found that most Kenyans, especially small-scale traders who regularly did business with people of diverse backgrounds from Kenya and abroad, attempted to create a spirit of inclusion, which at times crystallized around the kiosk infrastructure. A spirit of inclusion and the reality of security through diversity is not only what helped to market Kenya as a welcoming and relaxing tourist destination, but also what some experts on Kenya have suggested is precisely what is needed for the country to overcome the impasse created by the failure of the government to create and nurture multi-ethnic institutions (see Githinji and Holmquist 2008).

In the face of political divisiveness, there had been a stated ideal from its initial organization and founding to make the Fort Jesus Curio Group egalitarian. The chairman, a Giriama man of 35, told me in 2001 that he did not feel there was any hierarchy based on age or gender within the group. Advantages were acquired in other ways, such as “work ethic” as he put it. I almost always witnessed mutual respect among the traders during the weeks I spent with them in the first stage of research. This is not to say that there was not still competition and animosity among individual traders. Some vendors even chose not to belong to the organization, at least in one case because this young vendor had only just begun selling from the kiosks and was cautious of the others. But from my experience, minimizing conflict and cooperating when necessary was a way of developing new networks by investing in one’s own security through the group. Further, cooperating and never allowing rivalries to devolve into public arguments or

fighting was important for performing to tourists and ethnographers like myself the ever-important image of a Kenya populated by friendly people and where “*hakuna matata*” – *there are no problems*.

While many of the Kikuyu women had an economic advantage as kiosk owners with superior access to capital, the chairman pointed out in 2001 that many of these women, or “*mamas*” as he called them, had taught several of the younger men how to make “Maasai beadwork,” how to run a business, and at times acted as surrogate kin to younger migrants to Mombasa from upcountry or elsewhere on the coast.⁸⁴ It did not matter that neither the teacher nor student was actually “Maasai.” What mattered was the symbolic value of selling an item marked with the ethnic label (Maasai) most popularized through Kenya’s tourism marketing, and there was considerable appreciation for the older Kikuyu women who had taught many of the younger men how to make the popular beadwork. While I earlier identified a variety of structural inequalities based on wages, employment versus ownership status, and overall connection to production networks and cheap commodities to sell, the idealized sense of equality and lack of ethnic, gender, or generational hierarchy helped hold the Fort Jesus Curio Group together and allowed many individuals to profit from the sale of curio art in a single location. Many traders remarked to me that the curio group “worked” because members were all “individuals” who could not be marginalized or relegated to a lower status by age, ethnicity, religion or gender.

⁸⁴ Interview April 26, 2001, with the Chairman, Fort Jesus Curio Group. This man, born in 1966 in Takaungu, Kilifi District, had studied through form 2 before having to move to Mombasa in 1988 at the age of 22 to look for work to support his ailing father. He regularly returned to the Takaungu area to visit his wife, children, and extended family, all of whom lived on a farm they owned in the area.

While Muslims were few in the curio business, those who did sell were welcomed into the community of vendors outside of Fort Jesus. To some extent, this was because the items sold by coastal Muslims tended to be different from those sold by the Kisii or Kamba traders. “Swahili woodcarving,” which did not include representations of animate beings such as wild animals or Maasai caricatures, was locally produced for tourists and included its own motifs and geometric patterns different from those found among the Kamba carvings. There were other “coastal” products, such as wooden models of boats and baskets made of palm fronds, which tended to be sold by the few Muslim “Swahili” working in the curio business. In at least one case I witnessed in 2001, a young “Swahili” vendor was welcomed into the community selling outside of Fort Jesus because he was thought by at least one of my research participants to provide the curio vendors and their kiosks with some security from the local community. As he told me at the time, if all groups were represented, then ethnic group (*kabila*) could not be used as the basis for their removal or harassment.

But selling curios was not always socially acceptable to Muslims of Old Town for religious reasons. As a religion based on the critique of idolatry, Islam and its teachings understandably caused many Muslims of Mombasa to take offense to curio art, or at least to avoid selling it in person. While several kiosks were owned by local Muslims of Mombasa, very few of these owners worked in their own shops, unlike the Kikuyu of my sample, all of whom owned the kiosks in which they worked daily. As a result, one conclusion that could be drawn from a quick survey of tour operators and curio vendors was that few coastal people or “Swahili” were invested in tourism or the curio business,

as Eastman (1995) has done, although this was far from reflective of the economic reality.⁸⁵

One young Muslim man of Old Town named Jamal had, along with his brother, inherited a shop on museum land from a relative.⁸⁶ Because of its location, it was not removed with the other kiosks in the demolitions of 2001-02 (see ch. 3). Before the demolitions, Jamal had been a young Muslim Kenyan with a secondary school education, struggling along with the other curio vendors but selling mainly shells and baskets. Like the other traders, he deeply resented the tactics of the large-scale Indian dealers and the way they would pay (or “bribe,” “*honga*” in Swahili) buses and tour companies to bring customers. But after the removal of the kiosks on Nkrumah Road and his primary competition in January 2002 (see ch. 3), he joined with an upcountry (Kisii) trader in his mid-40s named Jimmy and began selling the full variety of curios, including woodcarvings, soapstone sculptures, beadwork, paintings, and even sunglasses, film, and music. Lacking competition from the kiosks, the local tourist market was open to Jamal and Jimmy. Jamal had the location and Jimmy knew the curio business.

Despite the broad oppositional statements I mentioned in earlier sections, there was very little animosity between upcountry and Swahili curio vendors of the same economic level. Much of this was doubtless out of sheer economic necessity and the fact

⁸⁵ It was common for international observers and researchers to make the superficial assessment that few coastal Muslim Swahili were invested in the tourism industry because few could be found working along the roadsides. I heard such assessments from not only tourists but fellow academics and colleagues working with the National Museums of Kenya. This was quite contrary to what I found, as the tour guides of Old Town were largely Muslim and Swahili and a large number of kiosk owners were Swahili from the local community. See Peake (1989) for an excellent analysis of Swahili social stratification and tourism in Malindi. Also see Kasfir (2004) for detail on Swahili woodcarvers and the use of Swahili aesthetics in marketing the Kenyan coast.

⁸⁶ Interview, Oct. 24, 2005. Born in Old Town in 1978, Jamal studied through secondary school before turning to the kiosk he inherited. When my research first began in 2001, he ran a public telephone, “*simu ya jami*” from the shop, and also sold drinks and souvenirs, although not the typical curios per se. It was mainly after the demolition of the kiosk on Nkrumah Rd. (see ch. 3) that he turned to selling a wide array of curios.

that most vendors were concerned about representing themselves and their businesses as conflict-free. Yet, as I got to know both Jamal and Jimmy better during extensive participant research in 2005 and 2006 and during the years that followed, it became clear that they were inseparable business partners. It mattered much more that Jamal owned a shop directly in front of Fort Jesus and that Jimmy could provide their business with soapstone from Kisii at bottom price than the fact that Jamal was a 27-year old Swahili of Old Town and Jimmy was in his 40s, from Kisii, and a former chairman of the Kisii Soapstone carving cooperative. Jamal still referred to Jimmy as family, “*ndugu*,” his *brother*, or co-worker of equal status. As business partners, they depended on each other, worked together seven days a week, and demonstrated the extent to which economic necessity produced new understandings of ethnic and familial ties in Mombasa.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has briefly reviewed the complex economic and political history that has shaped contemporary ethnic relations in Mombasa. Essentialized ethnic discourse was particularly apparent around Mombasa’s tourism industry, but not always representing the “authentic,” pre-colonial ritual context desired by tourists. Tourists would rather see ethnic difference without conflict. Kenya’s many ethnic groups have become highly politicized over the past century and are loaded with contemporary economic and political relevance. While essentialized ethnic language pervades identity politics and discourses of difference in Mombasa, much of this speech was a reflection of Kenya’s century-old legacy of political divide-and-rule as manipulated during contemporary political rivalry among elites. While Mombasa’s curio vendors often use “tribal” images and appropriate colonial stereotypes to further their businesses, their own

⁸⁷ Interview with Jamal, Oct. 24, 2005.

understandings of ethnic and social differences are in most cases quite different from those presented by the tourist art they sell. In fact, Mombasa's roadside kiosk economy, while problematic for a variety of public planning reasons, allowed the development of important cross-ethnic, inclusive socio-economic cooperation and the formation of economic- rather than ethnic-based organizations like the Fort Jesus Curio Group.

So who are the marginalized on the Kenyan coast? Often, in everyday speech, a gradient of marginalization emerges, as disadvantaged or exploited individuals turn to often arbitrarily-constructed ethnic or religious groups to compete over who is *more* marginalized and in essence more *deserving* of immediate government assistance or aid from international organizations. I caution that when ethnic categories are used within such competition, they are commonly reproducing political discourse and rivalries. These categories often continue to divide and marginalize. This problem is compounded by the power of ethno-regional identities in Kenya.

As I will demonstrate in the rest of this dissertation, divisive local politics in Mombasa have created individualistic and nationalist subjectivities among migrants from upcountry who have internalized the tenets of economic neoliberalism. Very often such traders seek the means to circumvent state regulations or “jump scales” into larger transnational markets through the relatively unregulated economic transactions made possible using new technologies. The tourism industry already offered the chance to meet foreigners who could bring a poor Kenyan into a transnational world. When combined with personalized cell phones and email addresses, printed on individual business cards, modernity and “fair” trade, through the so-called “free” market, had a powerful potential to become realities for Kenya's aspiring entrepreneurs.

As an ethnographer, it was important for me to see beyond local political discourse and understand the deeply historical and contradictory aspects of identity politics in Mombasa. While animosity existed, it was largely produced out of the local economic competition found between traders of specific ethnic backgrounds. Ideals of individuality stand in direct contrast to assumptions about ethnic or religious affiliation, as demonstrated by the Fort Jesus Curio Group or the business partnership of Jamal and Jimmy.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the economic restructuring and political changes of the 1990s would powerfully alter Mombasa's socio-economic landscape, setting the stage for the rise of the cell phone entrepreneur and the decline of the cooperative society. As I will demonstrate, individuals' aspirations for climbing the economic ladder, increasing their economic security, and simply making more money, would directly challenge the authority and permanence of Kenya's handicrafts cooperative societies, developed beginning in the 1950s and 1960s with the help of government agents, and for decades the center of crafts production.

Chapter 3
Cooperatives and the City:
Consolidation, Fragmentation, and Tourism in Mombasa

When they say [the kiosk demolitions] were about chasing out upcountry people that was just an excuse. It was also about chasing out coastal people. It was about cleaning the city of the poor.
 - Curio vendor, Old Town.¹

Since the 1960s and the early days of Kenyan mass tourism, when cruise ships arrived at the port and tourists strolled past roadside kiosks to the central business district, the spatial configuration of Mombasa's tourism industry has changed considerably.² In this chapter, I trace the development of Kenya's tourism and curio industries, including their historical consolidation in Mombasa. I then examine the political and economic changes of the 1990s, particularly the politics of privatization and "city cleaning," which have largely denied small-scale traders secure and legal access to urban commercial space. It is within this larger context of privatization and the formation of walled enclaves that personal cell phones and email addresses have helped traders avoid arbitrary government regulation and formalization of the urban informal economy. While the Kenyan cooperatives for producing curios and particularly woodcarvings were for decades the economic foundation of the country's handicrafts industry, I argue that they were also important spatial hubs. As I will develop in future chapters, it is this spatial in addition to economic significance that has been lost as ICTs have enabled producers and,

¹ Author's interview, Feb. 10, 2006. The individual quoted here, named David, was born in 1982 in Samburu, Kwale District to the West of Mombasa in Coast Province. Ethnically a Duruma (Mijikenda), he was also a Christian and considered himself a coastal person with close ties to Mombasa since his father had worked in the city in order to educate him through standard 8.

² For more specifics on this issue, see several exemplary files in the Kenyan National Archives, Nairobi, including: Coast Provincial Administration, Tourism 1965-1971, serial number CA/21/53, Room 6, Box 105, Shelf 4659; Hotel Trade – Beach Security 1959 – 1983 from the Coast Provincial Administration, serial number CQ/18/1, Room 1, Box 14, Shelf 353. These files represent early changes (1960s, 1970s) in the industry. Files covering the 1980s and 1990s are not yet open to researchers.

more importantly, intermediary traders to connect overseas customers and tourists with more marginalized and easily exploitable producers.

This chapter deals with Mombasa's prominent handicrafts cooperatives. In discussing artisan cooperatives in other parts of the world, Eber (2000), MacHenry (2000), and Milgram (2000) have focused on their importance for helping disadvantaged rural populations find a market for their products. These cases, however, are quite different from Kenya's. The Nepalese cooperatives described by MacHenry (2000) are not as old as those in Kenya, and while the Nepalese cooperatives are predominantly rural-based, women's groups, Mombasa's Akamba Industry is predominantly male, is located in a city, and was founded in the early 1960s. Further, while Eber (2000:54) found artisan cooperatives in Chiapas to be "symbols of change," I found Mombasa's handicrafts cooperatives to be commonly viewed, particularly by the younger generation and by independent traders, as unchanging, bureaucratic, and dominated by a generation of older men who had migrated to Mombasa and Nairobi prior to the 1980s.

Kenya's cooperatives developed with significant state support during both the colonial and independence eras (Kanogo and Maxon 1992).³ However, Kenyan government support of cooperatives through direct assistance and subsidized services ended with the Co-operative Societies Act and Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1997 on *Co-operatives in a liberalized economy*. This act officially ended the government's obligation to assist and subsidize cooperative organizations, making them "free enterprises" forced to compete directly with other privately owned businesses (Kenya

³ For example, the major curio cooperatives formed the Kenya Craft Cooperative Union (KCCU) in 1982 for the purpose of opening channels of communication with the government (Choge et al. 2005:34; Kanogo and Maxon 1992:372). Another government-supported organization, the Kenya External Trade Authority (KETA), played an important role in aiding the cooperatives in the early 1980s, particularly in pushing them to diversify their production line in response to market demand (Jules-Rosette 1984:190-91).

2002:37). The biggest competitors would be individual traders who were often cooperative members and who, through the use of cell phones, email, and personal connections, no longer needed the cooperative for market access.

As the cooperative societies lost both economic and spatial significance, municipal markets, roadside kiosks, and the beaches of Mombasa's North Coast became essential yet insecure hubs for conducting business. More specifically, the demolition of Mombasa's roadside kiosks in December 2001 and January 2002 increased the overall economic insecurity within the industry and precipitated the formation of new economic arrangements in all three of my primary research sites: Mombasa's Old Town, Mombasa's North Coast, and Changanwe. It was in this economic context that cell phones and email accounts became irresistible alternatives for traders looking to maintain market connections through international, virtual space, while local commercial space became a pandemonium of election politics and insecure competition.

Mombasa's case is representative of larger international and regional patterns of land privatization, grabbing, accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2005:178-79), and the building of socio-economic "walls" (Caldeira 2000) that fragment and divide urban space. Much literature on globalization and political economic change has focused on the breakdown of barriers instead of their production and solidification. David Harvey specified that it was the breakdown of spatial barriers that has made capital more sensitive to variations among places, as specialized destinations have differentiated themselves so as to attract capital (1989:295-96). As Harvey wrote, "the result has been the production of fragmentation, insecurity, and ephemeral uneven development within a highly unified global space economy of capital flows" (1989:296).

As I will demonstrate in the case of Mombasa, the recent reorganization of the tourism industry has been geared toward attracting foreign investment rather than creating a legal and enabling environment for Kenyan-owned micro-enterprises. The result has been the disconnection of a large number of traders who have close ties to production networks but who lack the means to access customers. This disconnection has taken place just as new walls and networks are being created that separate producers, cooperatives, and small-scale traders from tourists and international markets.

The Human Geography of Kenyan Tourism and Handicrafts

Kenya's tourism industry is one of the oldest in Africa, first gaining fame between 1900 and 1945 for its big game hunting.⁴ Because tourism in Kenya has generally been accepted as an economic boon and a valuable asset to the national economy (Ondicho 1999:49), tourism development was initially aided by the government through the building of important infrastructure such as the railroad and roads networks, which connect the parks and beaches to the transportation hubs of Mombasa and Nairobi (Ondicho 1999:51). Kenya, long the center of international capitalism and investment in East Africa,⁵ came to dominate East African tourism after the 1947 establishment of the East African Tourist Travel Association (EATTA) (Alila and McCormick 1997; Ndege 1992; Sindiga 1999; Ondicho 1999). Based in Nairobi, the EATTA was considered to privilege the development of Kenyan tourism over Uganda and Tanzania (Alila and McCormick 1997:7).⁶

⁴ There have been several reviews of the development of tourism in Kenya. See especially Akama (1999, 2002), Ndege (1992), Ondicho (1999), and Sindiga (1999).

⁵ See Miller and Yeager (1994:3), Cooper (2002), Leys (1975), Marris and Somerset (1971), and Throup (1987).

⁶ Other notable government acts included the 1945 National Parks Ordinance, which protected national parks as a valuable resource and asset for attracting tourists, and the creation of the Ministry of Tourism

After independence in 1963, President Jomo Kenyatta's government followed the colonial lead and developed Kenya as one of Africa's most popular tourist destinations. During the 1960s, international tourism was largely seen in terms of economic development and therefore almost entirely in a positive light (Crick 1989:314). The United Nations, for example, declared 1967 "International Tourism Year" (Crick 1989:315). That same year, the U.S. government gave three million dollars to Kenya for tourism development, most of which went to strengthening infrastructure in Nairobi and Mombasa (Akama 1999:15). By 1969 tourism took the place of coffee as the country's single largest source of foreign exchange.⁷ Large government-supported bodies such as the Kenya Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), the Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC), and the Development Finance Company of Kenya (DFCK) were exemplary of the early independence period, when development policy was focused around enabling the government to carefully control investment (Leys 1975:131-32).⁸ Such investment in infrastructure created the slate upon which the messages of Kenyan tourism could be written and consumed by the world's leisure class.

African tourism "is as much a structure of power as it is a structure of meaning," writes David Bruner (1991:240). In Kenya, much of that meaning is produced, conveyed, and consumed through curio arts and crafts sold to tourists. Kenya's tourism

and Wildlife in 1958, which Ondicho termed a "hallmark event pointing to the prime-moving role the government was going to play in promoting the growth of tourism" (1999:51).

⁷ See report, "Development of Tourism in Kenya," dated March 4, 1970, from the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, document 108 in the file "Coast Provincial Administration, Tourism 1965-1971," Coast Provincial Files, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number CA/21/53, box 105, shelf 4659, room 6.

⁸ For more on the interest and investment of the Kenyan state in the development of basic infrastructure for the tourism industry, see the memo, "Coast Tourist Development," by J. Knightly, Coast Provincial Town Planning Officer, to the Coast Provincial Commissioner, dated May 24, 1971. In this memo, the major infrastructural areas for concern were roads, electricity, and water supply. See document 113 in the file "Coast Provincial Administration, Tourism 1965-1971," in the Coast Provincial Files, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number CA/21/53, box 105, shelf 4659, room 6.

and curio industries were traditionally built on images of “tribal” Maasai pastoralists and wildlife motifs. These relatively tame, primordial images successfully marketed Kenya during the 1970s and 1980s, when the young nation was perceived internationally as “an ‘island’ of stability in a ‘sea’ of political turmoil in the African continent” (Akama 2002:8). But rather than being representative of a socio-cultural reality, the images of early Kenyan curio art were rooted in the early 20th-century British colonial imagination, developed by the colonial settlers, administrators, and travelers who were the original consumers of Kenya’s carvings and handicrafts. While the initial 20th-century demand for African art, especially in France, was mostly limited to the Cubists, curiosity about Africa following the First World War helped slowly stimulate demand for African art among European consumers in other sectors of society (Steiner 1994:4-5).⁹ The period between the First World War and Kenyan independence in 1963 was crucial for the consolidation of production and distribution networks for the colonial market. It was at this time that the “tribal Maasai” figurines and carved animals of the East African savannah would become the dominant symbols of Kamba woodcarving and Kenya’s tourism industry more generally.

I am not suggesting that crafts and manufactured goods did not exist or were not important in East Africa before the colonial period. Iron objects were vital to both pastoralists and agriculturalists (Wandiba 1992:17). Kikuyu and Kamba speakers produced baskets called *viondo* (*kiondo* singular) by weaving locally accessible fibers (Wandiba 1992:30, 32). Other important skills found in Kenya included the manufacture

⁹ Tourist art itself is not just a 20th century phenomenon. Mount noted that in certain parts of Africa, Afro-Portuguese ivories were created as early as the 16th century for sale to the Portuguese as souvenirs (Mount 1973:xvi, 41-2). This was well before the moment when African art was again “discovered” in the early 20th century by European artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Vlaminck, and Apollinaire (Steiner 1994:4).

of salt, pottery, house building, woodworking, stone working, and leatherworking (Kitching 1980:13; Wandiba 1992). But while Kamba speakers of the pre-British era decorated and carved household items, were blacksmiths, and had the tools for carving, their artistry did not distinguish them from other neighboring ethno-linguistic groups in its style or production capacity (Elkan 1958:314-15). In other words, before the colonial era, Kamba speakers living to the south and east of present-day Nairobi had not yet acquired the reputation as renowned woodcarvers that they would attain during the 20th century. Elkan, who published one of the only colonial-era studies of the East African woodcarving industry, noted that before the arrival of the British, “woodcarving was, in fact, widespread, if inconspicuous, in a belt of country between the coast and the Highlands” (1958:315).

Kenya’s Kamba traders and artisans were in many respects unlikely candidates to develop and profit from commercial woodcarving. While large-scale carving in pre-colonial Africa was almost exclusively practiced by communities living in heavily forested areas (Pruitt and Causey 1993:138), less than two percent of Kenya is covered by closed-canopy indigenous forest (Choge et al. 2005:31). Further, much of the region from southeastern Machakos District stretching east to the town of Kitui, commonly known as “*Ukambani*,” is now rather arid and heavily deforested. It was, in fact, *Ukambani*’s aridity and frequent droughts that made woodcarving an attractive alternative to growing cash crops during the colonial period (Mount 1973:54). In addition to having been blacksmiths during pre-colonial times, Kamba speakers were renowned ivory traders, and frequently traveled between the coast and the African interior as independent entrepreneurs dealing in commodities such as ivory, iron tools,

and cloth (see ch. 2; Kasfir 1999:108-109; Munro 1975; Steinhart 2001).¹⁰ Kamba (as well as Giriama from the coast) men were also heavily recruited to serve in the British Carrier Corps during the First World War.¹¹ The history of trade and entrepreneurship combined with recruitment into military service gave certain Kamba speakers access to new ideas, information, and mobility as they traveled broadly across eastern and southern Africa and as far as Europe at a time when few Africans were able to do so.

The man heralded by older carvers and previous researchers of Kenya's curio industry as the first Kamba woodcarver, Mutisya Munge, was "already renowned as a carver of ceremonial sticks before 1914" (Elkan 1958:314; see Jules-Rosette 1984:107; Miller 1975). Elkan postulated in 1958 that he had learned additional carving skills from members of the Zaramo community living in the hinterland of Dar es Salaam, where he was stationed during the First World War as a member of the East African Carrier Corps (1958:315).¹² Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984:107) clarified that Mutisya Munge did not simply learn to carve from Zaramo artisans, but he also witnessed the potential revenue

¹⁰ Trade among ivory hunters and traders at the coast was not the only important pre-colonial long-distance trade. There was steady trade by many groups in salt from Lake Magadi, and there were deep and important trade relationships among communities that would later be differentiated as Kikuyu and Maasai (Kitching 1980:14). The Kamba speaking ivory traders emerged largely from around Kitui, which developed within Kamba culture as a frontier area with a "remote pioneer reputation" characterized by "a high degree of individual social and geographic mobility" (Steinhart 2001:336). This was most likely a famine survival strategy that called for mobility of residence and the willingness to relocate a considerable distance from home in times of ecological stress (Steinhart 2001:336).

¹¹ For more information on the British Carrier Corps, see Wolff (1974:108-09), according to whom Africans generally avoided Carrier Corps service if possible. An estimated one third of the Africans from the British East African Protectorate who served in the Carrier Corps during World War I died in combat or of disease while in service (Wolff 1974:108).

¹² Although academic sources (Elkan 1958; Kasfir 1999; Jules-Rosette 1984) have Mutisya Munge first learning to carve while in Tanzania, many carvers I have interviewed who were born in the 1930s and 1940s believed that he also witnessed carving traditions in the Congo and Malawi before returning to Wamunyu to develop his own techniques (see particularly author's group interview, Nov. 2, 2005, with three Kamba members of Mombasa's woodcarving cooperative). Whether these stories are factual or not, they worked to emphasize the main message: that Munge incorporated a variety of Central and East African artistic elements into what would eventually emerge as a unique, "Kamba" form of art.

that could be earned by selling carvings, as many Zaramo had begun doing before the First World War with the help of Lutheran missionaries (see Elkan 1958:315).

After the war, Munge returned to his hometown of Wamunyu, located in Machakos District between the larger towns of Machakos and Kitui in the *Ukambani* region to the southeast of Nairobi (see map 2.2, page 72).¹³ Under his tutelage, family members and others in the immediate Wamunyu area would thereafter develop a unique style of woodcarvings that they could sell to European settlers during the period between the world wars (Elkan 1958; Jules-Rosette 1984:107).¹⁴ The popularization of Kamba carvings was, as Elkan noted, because “[i]t was after the First World War that Europeans began to enter Kenya in large numbers and to provide a ready market for carvings, especially at Christmas time” (Elkan 1958:315). The Second World War brought a further increase in demand for woodcarvings due to the rise in the number of British soldiers based in Kenya. This demand continued after the war, aided by the global rise in international tourism and expenditures on luxuries more generally (Elkan 1958:316).

When viewed economically, the carvings of the Wamunyu artisans and traders were not unique. Mount (1973) noted that in the mid-20th century, souvenir art could be found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, although he noted that production was concentrated in cities of countries like Kenya that either attracted large numbers of white tourists or had large settler populations (1973:39).¹⁵ What made the initial Kamba

¹³ Wamunyu is a very small and rural town, located along the route connecting the larger towns of Machakos and Kitui. According to the Kenya Population Census of 1999, Wamunyu only had a population of 214 men and 194 women for a total of 408 individuals (Kenya 2007:16).

¹⁴ Jules-Rosette (1984:107) noted that the exact year when Mutisya Munge returned to Wamunyu was unclear. Some of her sources set the date as early as 1918 while others as late as 1935 (Jules-Rosette 1984:107 f.n. 4). From her evidence, she concluded that he returned sometime between 1918 and 1929, although the exact date will probably always remain unclear (Jules-Rosette 1984:107).

¹⁵ Mount (1973:40) noted that the majority of African souvenir art dealers came from only a few ethnic groups, such as Hausa and Wolof speakers of West Africa and Kamba speakers of East Africa.

carvers and traders so successful was their quick adaptation to colonial stereotypes of the East African highlands, where the settler population thrived, away from the tropical coastal environment. Unlike in West Africa, where there was an old tradition of carving masks and sculptures prior to the 20th century, the Maasai figurines and animal carvings of East Africa were produced as a result of the colonial fantasy of Africa as a frontier inhabited by wild animals and “tribal” peoples.¹⁶ The Kamba did not sell their own culture to their colonizers – they capitalized on the assumptions that international travelers had of them and other peoples of East Africa, like the Maasai.

But it should not be surprising that the initial Kamba woodcarvings prominently featured representative, naturalistic images of the animals of the East African savanna, which were not simply carved to meet tourists’ expectations. Even before the carvings of Mutisya Munge, representational images of animals were a typical Kamba artistic motif. Writing of Kamba art and carving prior to the First World War, Lindblom highlighted that while, “No sculpture in wood or any other kind of ornamental woodcarving is found” (1920:366), the art the Kamba did produce contained representations that were, “for the most part, reproductions from nature, and [were] thus in the style of free imitative art” (1920:357). He continued of the Kamba: “The most important contribution to ornamental art is made, as one might expect, by the animal world, and by the animals in it” (Lindblom 1920:357-58). The animals represented in Kamba art tended to be wild and from the Savannah rather than domesticated animals such as cattle. The roots of 20th century Kamba woodcarving, therefore, can again be said to be the result of a convenient correlation between colonial anticipation and Kamba pragmatism, traceable through at least the early 20th century and reflecting Kamba artistic and economic practices.

¹⁶ I thank Christopher Steiner for noting this contrast. Personal communication, February 1, 2009.

As Kenyan tourism grew following the Second World War, so did the profitability of handicrafts. Walter Elkan wrote of Kenyan handicrafts in the 1950: “The Gusii make attractive stoneware, but it is bulky and fragile and therefore not easily exported; the Kikuyu and some of the Luhya make various sorts of baskets, but again they are almost impossible to pack” (1958:317). Interestingly, Elkan (1958:317) mentioned that the “mats and fruit-plates made in Uganda” failed on the crafts market of the 1950s because they were “not distinctively African.” In contrast, the popular and economically successful Kamba carvings were described as an array of “salad-servers crowned by Masai or Nandi heads, figurines of warriors bearing spear and shield, and models of elephants and leopards” (Elkan 1958:314), clearly more fitting to the colonial and Western imagination of “Africa” at the time.

Despite Kamba woodcarving’s early prominence and popularity with tourists and the government regulatory bodies, all of the other products mentioned above by Elkan in 1958 are still sold regularly in Kenya through its curio industry. Possibly most significant for this dissertation, Gusii (or Kisii)¹⁷ carvers of southwestern Kenya had made soapstone utensils, bowls, and pipes before the colonial era (Kitching 1980:13; Miller 1975:25). As with Kamba woodcarving, it was after the First World War that “Kisii soapstone” began to develop and adapt to the local settler and tourist market as artisans learned to carve animals and modern European household items like candlesticks, ashtrays, and vases (Miller 1975:25). One of the first well-known Kisii

¹⁷ The Gusii or Kisii come from an area of lush but densely populated agricultural land in southwestern Kenya, bordering on the Luo and Kuria of the Lake Victoria region and the Maasai and Kipsigis of the southern Rift Valley (see map 2.2, page 72). See Maxon (1989) concerning the colonial relationship between the British and the Kisii and Maxon (2003) for an investigation of agrarian change and population pressure among the Kisii during the colonial era. Levine and Levine (1979) and Silberschmidt (1999) have written on issues of gender and change in Kisii district. Bantu-speakers, members of the Kisii ethnic group comprise between five and ten percent of Kenya’s population, and are well represented in national politics and the education system.

carvers was Mzee Moseti Orina, who began teaching carving in 1918 (Miller 1975:30). Soon after the Second World War, an Indian entrepreneur opened a shop in Kisii Town selling soapstone items, and by the 1950s the pattern had continued until Kisii soapstone could be purchased in most of East Africa's major towns and cities (Miller 1975:30).

But unlike the lush farmland of Kisii, the dryness of the *Ukambani* region between Machakos and Kitui and the precarious nature of Kamba agriculture made woodcarving particularly popular among government officials mandated to promote African development. Following the Second World War, Kamba woodcarving had become such a popular economic strategy and social pastime that Kamba men who were held in detention camps during the Mau Mau land and freedom movement of the early 1950s spent much of their free time carving (Kasfir 1999a:109). By independence in 1963, woodcarvings depicting the "tribal Maasai" and African animals were being carried by Wamunyu-based, Kamba speaking traders "to every part of East and Central Africa, to the Rhodesias and the Sudan, the Congo, and, exceptionally, to England" (Elkan 1958:314). Kenya's Kamba art was further popularized through international exhibitions, such as the African Culture and Arts exhibit held in Minneapolis in 1967, organized by the African Development Corporation of New York among others (Miller 1975:29). Kamba woodcarvers and curio traders were not alone among Africans pushing the limits of mobility under British colonial rule. But in Kenya they stood out as an example of successful African entrepreneurship and grass roots development through the late 20th century.

The Cooperative Society

In Kenya, from the 1950s through the 1990s, the colonial model of the cooperative society proved an important foundation for the development of indigenous African industries (Kanogo and Maxon 1992:372).¹⁸ Most of the first African cooperatives registered after the passing of the Co-operative Societies Ordinance of 1945 and the founding of a cooperative department under the Ministry of African Affairs were not initiated by Africans but organized by the colonial administration (Kanogo and Maxon 1992:373-4). This was indeed the case with the first Kamba woodcarving cooperatives. During the Second World War, the Machakos District Commissioner (DC) was active in licensing Kamba traders to sell their carvings to tourists and soldiers outside of barracks and hotels in Nairobi (Elkan 1958:316).¹⁹ As the demand for exported woodcarvings increased rapidly through the 1950s, the DC and other administrators viewed the Kamba carvers as a successful case of indigenous development. Woodcarvings also provided a relatively reliable alternative source of income for the populace of an area that suffered from frequent crop failures.²⁰ In 1950, the colonial administration helped to organize the initial Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, which was officially registered in Nairobi by J. McDonald, acting Registrar of Co-

¹⁸ Members of a variety of ethnic groups such as the Kikuyu, Kamba, Luo, and Kisii, conducted certain duties during pre-colonial times through kinship or membership groups that performed tasks in a rotation from one member to another (Kanogo and Maxon 1992:372). While often not as voluntary as contemporary cooperatives, they did provide important duties such as building housing, plowing land, herding, and hunting (Kanogo and Maxon 1992:372).

¹⁹ Also see the file "Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958", which was compiled largely by the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services. It can be found in the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615 in the archive.

²⁰ During a tour of the cooperatives of Machakos District in 1950, J. McDonald, the acting Registrar of Co-operative Societies, noted that the carving cooperative at Wamunyu had great importance because of "frequent crop failures." See document 6, "Notes on Visit to Machakos District, 21st and 22nd September, 1950" by J. McDonald in the file "Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958" from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

operative Societies, on August 3, 1950.²¹ One government officer assisted in Nairobi while another officer helped from Wamunyu at the site of most of the carving (Elkan 1958:318). But after barely two years in existence, the cooperative society was de-registered by the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services and stopped receiving government support. This was at the suggestion of the Co-operative Officer, who felt that the cooperative was not working to the benefit of the group and instead benefiting only some individual traders.

Elkan (1958:318) considered why, despite colonial efforts to bring the Kamba carvers into a cooperative group, they would not readily form and work within such an organization. He postulated that the failure was due to two factors: first the distance between the urban center and the production networks in Wamunyu and second, as Elkan (1958:318) put it, “a comprehensive co-operative society is not well adapted to an industry in which vertical specialization had by then become a salient feature.” Elkan suggested that the social stratification already prominent among the Kamba stood in the way of cooperation and that “the division of profits created endless troubles” (1958:318). Interestingly, Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984:108) cited carvers who attributed the initial cooperative’s failure simply to “bad management.” Whatever the reason for the original cooperative’s demise, Elkan (1958:318) made it clear that in the 1950s the woodcarving industry was primarily controlled by individual traders who, while actively drawing on complex production networks, still accumulated wealth and operated primarily as individuals. Rather than cooperatives, the industry of the 1950s was organized around

²¹ See the “By-Laws of the Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd.,” and the “certificate of registration official,” documents 3 and 4 respectively in the file, “Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958,” from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

workshops, whose owners would supply wood to carvers and carefully control labor and the output of carvings for export or sale to tourists.²²

My own research in the Kenya National Archives has revealed a prominent trend of competition between the cooperative society and individual intermediary traders. From the earliest days of the original Wamunyu woodcarving cooperative, colonial officials perceived a lack of loyalty and witnessed individual cases of mismanagement that challenged the group's sustainability. In a letter dated August 2, 1950, a Mr. Hayes, Machakos District Co-operatives Officer, remarked to the Registrar of Co-operatives in Nairobi that he thought the name "Akamba Industries" was most appropriate, since from his point of view, the carvers were organized as more of a "company" than a "cooperative."²³ He even suggested that it be registered as a "marketing society" rather than as a "cooperative" to avoid confusion. In October 1951, the Co-operative Inspector reported that "they have no manager, the old one having resigned, so the group does not know what exactly had been ordered and of what description."²⁴ He continued, pointing out the prominence of individual traders working within the cooperative: "the committee too, is of a class of people who do more buying than carving: no better than a ring of buyers who are only interested in orders if they have the things themselves while the actual carver is so ignorant as to be unable to lead a Commercial life." He added, "Originally it was intended that actual carvers should be the members. Now, for the most

²² These apprentice-based workshops, Elkan (1958:319) noted, served as warehouses for stockpiling carvings, making it possible to assure quick turnover on large orders.

²³ Letter from Mr. Hayes, District Officer, Co-operative Department, Machakos District, to Registrar of Co-operatives, Aug. 2, 1950, document 2 in the file "Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958," from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

²⁴ See letter from Andrew Ndeti, Co-operative Inspector, to Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Oct. 11, 1951, document 30 in the file "Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958," from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

part it consists of ex-carvers who have turned to petty traders.” By February 1952, the Rural Industries Officer, Machakos District, had become so fed up with the Kamba cooperative in Wamunyu that he wrote to the Registrar of Co-operatives in Nairobi, remarking: “During its two years of trading there is reason to doubt if the society has at any time met an order in a satisfactory manner.”²⁵ It was after visiting Wamunyu and finding only a group of forty carvers working privately for an “educated” curio trader based in Nairobi that Andrew Ndeti, the Co-operative Inspector, finally recommended the group’s cancellation as a cooperative society.

But the official cancellation of the initial Wamunyu cooperative did not mean that there had been any hitch in the economic development of the woodcarving industry or Kamba production and trade networks. To the contrary, this was a time when Kamba traders were rapidly spreading across Eastern and Southern Africa. The Kamba shift to “hawking,” or selling along the roadsides in the major trade centers such as Nairobi and Mombasa, was initially with the blessing and support of the colonial government. After the collapse of the Wamunyu cooperative, the Registrar of Co-operatives in Nairobi wrote to the Machakos DC recommending that, while he continue trying to revive the society, “My idea would be ... to allow the present hawking trade to go on. This type of trade which deals largely with the gullible tourist probably brings the maker a very good return.”²⁶ To the roadside they were to go, said the state planners. Such a policy would

²⁵ See letter from Rural Industries Officer, Machakos to Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Feb. 7, 1952, document 35 in the file “Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958,” from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

²⁶ See letter from the Acting Registrar of Co-operative Societies to the Machakos District Commissioner, dated Feb. 28, 1953, document 41 in the file “Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958,” from Ministry of Co-operative Development files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/103, box 108, shelf 6615.

come to characterize relations among representatives of the state, the tourism industry, and the curio dealers for decades to come.

After independence in 1963, the government continued a dual policy of allowing hawkers to vend along the roadsides in Mombasa, Nairobi, and other urban centers while encouraging woodcarvers to form cooperative societies that were designed to protect producers and keep profits out of the hands of intermediaries. The newfound attraction to the cooperative model was particularly evident among migrants from rural Kenya, like the Kamba carvers who came to Mombasa in the 1950s and 1960s in search of cheaper wood for carving and direct access to the local tourist market.²⁷ While Kenyan Africans were initially slow to register their cooperatives, this had changed by the 1960s, by necessity and because of relaxed government regulations and supervision that allowed profits to find their way to the government officials responsible for licensing and surveillance as well as to advantaged traders who came to dominate cooperative groups (Kanogo and Maxon 1992:374).

In 1965, carvers attempted to revive the Wamunyu cooperative that had failed in 1952 (Jules-Rosette 1984:117).²⁸ However, the cooperative failed again after one year and carvers remained dependent upon Asian (Indian) intermediaries to buy carvings and find a market (Jules-Rosette 1984:117). This failure was at least partially due to the fact that many Kamba traders from Wamunyu were involved in their own enterprises aimed at

²⁷ Only the third attempt to register the Mombasa cooperative, officially titled the “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society Ltd.” was successful. The first two attempts, made in 1960 and 1961, were not accepted. It was only with the help of J.L.P. Pinto, Co-operative Officer, Mombasa, in late 1963 that the cooperative was finally registered by the Commissioner for Co-operative Development. It officially became a “body corporate” on 23rd December, 1963, when it was issued Certificate of Registration No. 1030. For more, see the file “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978,” from Ministry of Co-operative Development, located at serial number TR/8/816, Room 2, Box 236, Shelf 6658.

²⁸ For more on the causes of the failure of the cooperative, which are complicated, see the file “Akamba Industries Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1950-1958” from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the Nairobi National Archive, serial number TR/8/103, Box 108, Shelf 6615.

finding a market among tourists in Nairobi or Mombasa. The major production networks had largely moved out of Wamunyu and closer to the steady wood supplies and crowds of tourists in Nairobi, Mombasa, and other rapidly developing tourist centers in the country. It was not until 1975 that a third attempt to organize a Wamunyu-based cooperative succeeded, largely by drawing on the mobile population of carvers and artisans who returned home from Mombasa and Nairobi to tend their farms (Jules-Rosette 1984:117). By 1981, 500 carvers belonged to the cooperative, and the organization's office and workshop building was the largest and most imposing structure in the town (Jules-Rosette 1984:118).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the center of carving in Nairobi was on Quarry Road near Gikomba market in Pumwani, where carvers could rent sheds from investors who supplied wood and agreed to purchase completed carvings (Miller 1975:27; Jules-Rosette 1984:118). In 1968 the Nairobi Handicraft Industrial Cooperative Society was formed, but was never able to reach the success of Mombasa's industry due largely to the expensive cost of rent and wood in the capital (Jules-Rosette 1984:122-23). By the 1970s "Kamba woodcarving" and "Kisii soapstone" had become the dominant genres or "art movements" (Miller 1975) of Kenya's curio industry. Kamba woodcarving in particular had become a global marketing phenomenon and one of the world's most commercially successful souvenir art products (Mount 1973:52). As Mount noted: "They can be purchased, in fact, in every East, Central, and South African city, and can be secured as readily in such cities as London and New York" (1973:52).

Consolidation in Mombasa

While the original market for both Kamba and Kisii carvings was in Nairobi among foreign settlers and missionaries (Miller 1975:25), the spatial organization of East Africa's artisan networks quickly changed with the rise in mass international tourism beginning in the 1960s. Following the Second World War, Kenya's coast had increasingly become a popular holiday destination for resident Europeans, particularly at Christmas and Easter (Sindiga 1999:227). Kamba carvers from the original carving centers near Machakos, Wamunyu, and Kitui were drawn to Coast Province to access these tourists and the cheaper wood available in coastal forests (Choge et al. 2005:38). By the late 1950s, many of the unemployed Kamba who had moved to Mombasa had begun carving under the city's trees and selling directly to tourists (Jules-Rosette 1984:109). Independence in 1963 brought an even larger migration of Kamba speakers to Mombasa in search of employment. Four carving communities developed, at Mtongwe, Tudor Four, Magongo, and Kalahari.²⁹ When they could pay for licenses, the traders built small roadside stalls, or kiosks, along Salim (now Digo) Road and Kilindini Road (now Moi Avenue; see map 1.2, page 14).

Facing constant conflict with municipal authorities, the carvers slowly consolidated in the African residential estate of Tudor (see map 1.1, page 12) during the 1960s. Harm de Blij remarked in his urban planning outline of Mombasa: "Visitors to the Tudor (African) residential development ... will come upon a most unusual sight – literally mountains of wood shavings, upon and within which stand some modest huts"

²⁹ The prime site, some carvers told me, was Mtongwe to the south (see map 1.3, page 15) since the ferry would take them across the channel to the downtown area of Moi Avenue. See author's interview, Nov. 2, 2005, with a carver who was born in 1946 in the town of Yata, which was located near Wamunyu. His father had been killed in the Second World War and he had never attended school. He started carving in Wamunyu at the age of 11 and moved to Mombasa to work with other Kamba carvers and traders in 1964.

(Blij 1968:76). The wood carvers, Blij wrote, had “been at work for so long that the shavings form veritable mountains – on top of which they continue to work at their lucrative trade” (1968:79). But the carvers had not been located there for long, and the pile of shavings spoke more to the amount of wood they were carving than how long they had occupied the site.

The initial Kamba cooperative in Mombasa, officially registered as the Akamba Handicrafts Industry Co-operative Society Ltd, formed in Tudor in 1963 with open membership rules after several attempts at registration with the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services (Jules-Rosette 1984:112). For a fee of 100 shillings (about \$12 at the time; see Jules-Rosette 1984:112) carvers could gain cooperative membership and access to the work area. The cooperative itself took 15 percent from the sale of products through the cooperative, and carvers were encouraged to also sell privately, primarily from roadside kiosks in the central business district (Jules-Rosette 1984:113). This, however, did not sit well with the Ministry for Co-operatives and Social Services, which saw the small number of carvings being sold officially through the cooperative as problematic to its sustainability. In fact, the Mombasa Co-operative Officer initially reported the cooperative as being “semi-active with no progress,” due primarily to what he simply interpreted as “members apathy.”³⁰ Meanwhile and despite the cooperative ministry’s views, many of those individual members were making significant profits from their businesses.

As early as 1964, a government agent visiting the coast reported:

³⁰ See letter from O.K.O. Oulo, Co-operative Officer, Mombasa, to the Commissioner for Co-operative Development, dated 5 July 1965, document 144 in the file “Monthly Reports Mombasa – Department of Co-operative Development 1957 – 1967,” Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/292, box 489, shelf 6743.

The number of curio hawkers continue to swell, and at times, they tend to obstruct traffic in the town. In Tudor area where curios are carved, the chopped up bits and pieces have piled up and overflowed to the extent of killing several trees through heat and lack of respiration in the roots.³¹

By early 1967, the carvers located in Tudor had stretched their relationship with the Mombasa Municipal Council too far and had their carving sheds burned by the municipal authorities,³² much to the chagrin of the Department of Co-operative Development. A representative from the Department of Co-operative Development wrote to the Mombasa Municipal Council expressing his dismay on April 6, 1967, stating:

I have received a delegation from the above society (Akamba Industry) that your Council has burnt their Carving shed in Tudor and that they are not having a place to carry out their business...

While I appreciate and respect the Council's decision to clean the Town it would have been wise for the Council to provide an alternative place so that this important Industry is not lost.³³

After this burning in 1967, the carvers and traders organized through the cooperative moved to Kaa Chonjo, another site in Mombasa's Tudor Estate.³⁴ But after being there for only a short time and under constant harassment from the council, they

³¹ See Mombasa District Monthly Report, December 1963, from "Regional Government Agent, Mombasa" to "The Civil Secretary, Coast Region," dated Jan. 10, 1964, document 2 in the file "Mombasa District Monthly Reports, 1963-1972," from the Coast Provincial Administration Files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number CA/16/149, box 81, shelf 4651, room 6.

³² During interviews with carvers who were present working in Tudor at the time, it was emphasized to me that they were not "removed," nor did they have their structures demolished, but "*tulichomewa*," literally in Swahili, "*we were burned out*" or "*we were removed by burning*." This came from author's group interview dated November 3, 2005, with three members of the cooperative, two of whom had been members at this time period. All three of those who participated in the interview were men originally from Wamunyu who had taken up permanent residence in Mombasa working as carving members of the cooperative.

³³ This letter was from B.E. Oyaro, Co-operative Officer, Coast Province to Town Clerk, Municipal Council of Mombasa, dated 6 April, 1967. See document 6 in the file "Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978," from the Ministry of Co-operative Development files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2.

³⁴ In Swahili, "*kaa chonjo*," ironically for the purposes of this case, means "stay alert" or "on guard," and was still a known area of the Tudor estate at the time of writing, located not far from the author's residence during research conducted in 2005-06.

were removed permanently from Tudor and Mombasa Island in 1968.³⁵ With limited options, the members of the cooperative took a major step toward communal development, pooled their resources, and in 1969 paid 45,000 shillings (about \$6,500 in 1969) for an 8.6-acre European-owned farm lying in the center of what was rapidly becoming a sprawling suburb of Mombasa known as Changamwe (Jules-Rosette 1984:114; see map 1.3, page 15).³⁶ This location would for several decades solidify the Kamba cooperative as both an essential economic and spatial hub of Kenya's woodcarving industry.

Entering the 1970s, Changamwe's Kamba cooperative, operating from its privately owned plot, was the only cooperative society to make profits in Mombasa and was quickly growing in numbers. The 1971 annual report from the Ministry of Cooperatives and Social Services found:

³⁵ See interview, Nov. 3, 2005, with a male Kamba carver who was born in 1946 in the town of Yata, near Wamunyu. His father had been killed in the Second World War and he had never attended school. He started carving in Wamunyu at the age of 11 and moved to Mombasa to work with other Kamba carvers and traders in 1964.

³⁶ It was written in a letter from Daniel A. Oyoo, Examiner of Accounts, Coast Province, to the Chairman of Akamba Industry, Mombasa, dated 8th January, 1971, that the 8.6 acres of land were purchased in early 1970 "at an unbelievable throw away price of Shs. 43,765/- only," with a resale value estimated around 100,000 shillings. This was because the European owner of the farm sold to the cooperative was looking to leave Kenya and apparently was not willing to wait for a better offer. See un-numbered document, in the file "Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978," from the Ministry of Co-operative Development files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2. The Monthly Report, July, 1969 from the Co-operative Assistant, Mombasa, to the Coast Provincial Co-operative Officer, signed Aug. 19, 1969, mentioned that the purchase of the land had already taken place and was done primarily "to escape the monthly payment of two thousand shillings to the Mombasa Municipal for the rent of the area they are working on. Preparations are underway for their shifting to the new place." See document 20 in the file "Mombasa District Monthly Reports – Ministry of Co-operatives 1968-1972," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/293, box 489, shelf 6743. According to the Monthly Report, October, 1969, the carvers moved to the site in Changamwe on Oct. 30, 1969. See report by J.C. Kamunga, Co-operative Assistant, Mombasa, to Provincial Co-operative Officer, signed Nov. 15, 1969, document 22 in the file "Mombasa District Monthly Reports – Ministry of Co-operatives 1968-1972," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/293, box 489, shelf 6743. The official opening ceremony for the site, however, was not held until July, 4, 1970. See "Monthly Report for July, 1970, Mombasa District," from B.M. Nduati, Assistant Co-operative Officer, Mombasa, to Coast Provincial Co-operative Officer, dated Aug. 20, 1970, document 30 in the file "Mombasa District Monthly Reports – Ministry of Co-operatives 1968-1972," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/293, box 489, shelf 6743.

The only successful independent society in this group [African cooperatives] is for the wood carvers the sales of which stood at Shs. 783,778 Shs. from two of its main activities as compared to Shs. 576,680/- for the year 1970. Membership increased from 418 for year 1970 to 628 in 1972...³⁷

During the same time period, the cooperative society opened a curio shop on Kilindini Avenue, but was charged 3,000 shillings per month in rent by the owners, a tour company named “Tausi Tours.”³⁸ After occupying the downtown shop for three months, the cooperative had paid 15,000 shillings in rent in addition to other expenses such as electricity and employees’ salaries, while total sales during the same period only totaled 8,645.15 shillings. In the end, the cooperative’s attempt to compete with the major Mombasa intermediaries and private South Asian curio traders ended in utter failure, as the shop took a total three month loss of 8,183.75 shillings (about \$1,150 at the time).³⁹

Rather than invest in a formal shop, and lacking a municipal curio market, roadside kiosks located in the downtown quickly became the preferred means of directly accessing tourists in Mombasa. These roadside stalls provided shade for hawkers and the overhead was much less than for formal shops. Largely due to the short distances linking the production cooperative, the wood supply, the downtown kiosks and the tourists themselves, Mombasa’s woodcarving cooperative quickly became the center of crafts production in Kenya. But being denied a downtown location meant the cooperative

³⁷ Ministry of Cooperatives and Social Services, Department of Cooperative Development, Annual Report for 1971, Mombasa District, 21st Jan 1972: Section 2.6, page 4, Kenya National Archives, Mombasa.

³⁸ See letter from J.K. Muthama, Commissioner for Co-operative Development, to the Provincial Co-operative Officer, Coast Province, dated Aug. 30, 1971, document 44 in file “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978,” from the files of the Ministry of Co-operative Development, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2. Also see document 64 in the same file for more on the conflict that ensued between the cooperative and Tausi Tours after they decided to vacate the premises after their three-month lease had expired.

³⁹ These numbers come from a letter from P.M. Mwadime, Coast Provincial Co-operative officer, to the District Co-operative Officer, Mombasa, dated 26 Oct. 1971. See document 60 in file “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978,” from the files of the Ministry of Co-operative Development, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2.

would need intermediaries to connect customers to the site of carving. Further, even as the kiosk and hawking system solidified as the most efficient means for carvers and their close Kamba associates to find a market for their crafts, the local government was increasingly targeting hawkers and urban curio vendors. In June 1972, the Coast Provincial Commissioner, E.M. Mahihu wrote to Mombasa's Town Clerk stating clearly:

Regarding carvers operating on Digo Road ... I would like once again to bring to your council the growing tendency of allowing hawkers' licenses along the main roads in the town is most undesirable... advising you most strongly against continued licensing of hawking of food etc. on the highways. It is easy to build these shanties but a problem to get them out and it is, therefore, my concern that at this time of the year we have six months period to put right what has been wrong. Let us see while renewing licenses for 1973 that particular effort is made to ensure that hawking licenses for vegetables, canteens, tea-rooms, carvings etc. are not renewed in 1973.⁴⁰

The Kamba were the dominant ethnic group selling curios in Mombasa only until the Kisii began to arrive in the early 1970s.⁴¹ The first Kisii traders to sell in Mombasa set up stalls on Salim (now Digo) Road in downtown Mombasa (see map 1.2, page 14). The majority of Kisii traders and carvers in Mombasa consolidated in Uhuru Gardens along Kilindini Road (now Moi Avenue), which connected Mombasa's central business district to the port. Others moved to a location near the colonial-era Manor Hotel, located along present-day Nyerere Avenue, where they did good business until the hotel was purchased and demolished by a developer in 1996 (see map 1.2, page 14).

⁴⁰ See letter from E.M. Muhihu, Coast Provincial Commissioner, to Town Clerk, Mombasa, dated June 6, 1972, document 149 in the file "Hawkers Trade 1956-1974, Mombasa District," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number CQ/18/4, box number 14, shelf number 353, room number 1.

⁴¹ Early traders to work on Mombasa's roadsides repeatedly stated this fact. For example, a founding member of the Kamba woodcarving cooperative, who started selling carvings in Mombasa in 1963 at the age of 22, estimated that it was not just that Kamba traders had dominated the business, but that they had been primarily all Kamba from Wamunyu until the Kisii traders from Tabaka began arriving in the early 1970s (author's interview, Nov. 3, 2005, Changamwe). Others supported this, including a Kisii carver and vendor from Tabaka who first came to Mombasa in 1974 as part of what he called the first group of soapstone vendors. Before that, he told me, there were only Kamba traders selling woodcarvings. According to him, the first Kisii trader to sell in Mombasa was named Mwagere, whose success beginning in 1970 was the inspiration for other young men of Tabaka to move to Mombasa to sell directly to tourists (author's interview, Nov. 7, 2005, Old Town).

But few products could match the success of Kamba woodcarving in terms of its rapid spread across Eastern and Southern Africa. As recently as 1978, the special Handicrafts Committee formed under the Kenya Export Transit Authority (KETA) lamented that Kisii carvers had not developed as quickly as Kamba carvers. In 1977, in a remark about the recent employment of Kisii carvers by “African Heritage,” a major curio outlet in Nairobi, it was noted that for the Kisii, “their problem is workmanship,” which was apparently not comparable to that of the woodcarvers.⁴² But the soapstone business was different from that of woodcarvings, due largely to the differences in the raw materials. While wood for carving was attained from different parts of East Africa and usually long distances from the sites of carving, soapstone could only be found in a single location, from a number of privately owned quarries in the small town of Tabaka in Kisii District, just southeast of Lake Victoria. Because soapstone quickly dried and became brittle and hard to carve after being removed from the soil, most carving must take place near the quarries and soon after the stone leaves the ground. Also unlike wood, which is quickly depleted, the supply of soapstone as a raw material for carving has barely been tapped. Miller (1975:31) noted the low price of wholesale soapstone in 1975 and mentioned the profits that could be made when the carvings were sold at two to five times the cost of the raw material.

Like the Kamba, individual Kisii traders were less interested in the redistributive elements of cooperative societies than the help they could provide in accessing raw materials and building economic legitimacy and stability. Mombasa’s Kisii soapstone

⁴² This particular comment came from page 5 of the document “Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Handicraft Committee Held on Tuesday, November 8th, 1977,” document number 15 in the file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984”, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

cooperative was modeled on a number of others, the first having been located in Tabaka in Kisii District at the site of the quarries. But like the Kamba, despite the significant government support the Kisii attracted, the cooperative model was not immediately adopted. The first organized investment in the production of soapstone came in 1964 with a “soapstone manufacturing factory” built with money from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Miller 1975:31). While KETA and the government’s Handicraft Unit wanted to bring the Kisii carvers into the fold, it was only through a cooperative angle that they would be allowed to gain government support. For example, F.O. Okwiri of the “Handicraft and Small-Scale Industrial Planning Unit” wrote to the “Head of Planning and Management Section” on Nov. 28, 1980:

Internal differences within the stonecarving community in Kisii have so far hampered the Handicraft Units (*sic*) efforts to create a viable Co-operative Society for stonecarvers. Unless a solution will be found within the next few months, it may be necessary to drop the Kisii stonecarvers from the first phase of the project. The Kisii society was not included in the original project plan, but was incorporated as it was prepared to have a satisfactory potential.⁴³

As H.P. Povlsen of the Handicraft Unit reasoned in his “Final Report” of March 1983:

This socociety (*sic*) was prematurely registered and at the same time there are some variables that made it impossible to implement project activities as relates to Kisii, which are as follows: 1. Strong individual marketing channels. 2. High temperament of the people and the family relationships, which tend to operate in isolation. 3. Existence of alternative income earning opportunities especially agriculture.⁴⁴

But despite the difficulty of getting all craft-producing communities and groups to form and register as cooperatives, by 1978 sixty to seventy percent of full-time

⁴³ This is from page 9 of the letter from F.O. Okwiri of the Handicraft and Small-Scale Industrial Unit to the Head of Planning and Management Section, dated Nov. 28, 1980, in file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

⁴⁴ For these comments, see page 10, H.P. Povlsen, Handicraft Unit, “Final Report,” to the Nordic Programme Coordinator, dated March 31, 1983, document 123 in the file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

handicrafts artisans in Kenya had been organized into cooperative societies.⁴⁵ This directly reflected the government's own emphasis on the development of production cooperatives, which aided producers but left traders and vendors to the controversial kiosks that lined streets throughout urban Kenya. By 1978, a document titled "Handcraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, estimated that 80,000–100,000 people in Kenya were employed in the production of handicrafts (1978:2).⁴⁶ But interestingly, of those, only 2,500–4,000 were estimated to work as "full-time artisans" (1978:2). The same paper found that, "By far the largest society is Akamba Handicraft in Mombasa with 1226 registered members" (1978:5). By 1981 the cooperative had 1,720 members, with over 500 men working there regularly (Jules-Rosette 1984:114).⁴⁷

Instability within the curio vendors' kiosk infrastructure continued through the late 1980s. Curio vendor and hawker organizations in downtown Mombasa pushed the municipal government to regulate and formalize their industry to little gain. In 1989, for instance, the Mombasa Kiosk Hawkers Working Sub-Committee of the city's municipal council recommended allotting a half-acre plot of Uhuru Gardens to officially

⁴⁵ This was an estimate made on page 2 of document "Handcraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January, 1978. This document can be found in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

⁴⁶ The total market value of production at the same time was estimated at 60-70 million shillings per year. These particular numbers come from page 2 of the document "Handcraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January, 1978. This document can be found in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

⁴⁷ Jules-Rosette (1984:116) called the Chagamwe cooperative the oldest and largest of the Kamba cooperatives in Kenya, and noted that its apprenticeship system was stricter and division of labor more pronounced than other cooperatives such as those in Nairobi, Wamunyu or Makindu (the latter two in *Ukambani*).

accommodate the 600 curio vendors of Moi Avenue they accounted for in their survey.⁴⁸

Nothing happened, however, and the traders were allowed to remain in an insecure economic environment, licensed by the council but without secure access to commercial space and tourists.⁴⁹

As was the case with the tourism industry, Kenya's cooperatives did not develop without significant state support during both the colonial and independence eras (Kanogo and Maxon 1992).⁵⁰ But although by 1999, Kenya's 9,000 registered cooperative societies supported over 2.5 million people (Kenya 2002:37),⁵¹ the cooperative movement was having trouble surviving Kenya's economic restructuring and "liberalization." Kenyan government support of cooperatives through direct assistance and subsidized services changed with the Co-operative Societies Act and Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1997 on *Co-operatives in a liberalized economy*. This act officially ended the government's obligation to assist and subsidize cooperative organizations, making them "free enterprises" forced to compete directly with other privately owned businesses (Kenya 2002:37). The biggest competitors, as I will discuss in future chapters, would be individual traders who were often cooperative members and who through the use of cell

⁴⁸ Ministry of Cooperatives and Social Services, Department of Cooperative Development, Annual Report for 1971, Mombasa District, 21st Jan 1972: Section 2.6, page 4.

⁴⁹ Records from the Municipal Council from the late 1980s and 1990s attest to the repeated harassment of curio and other vendors operating from downtown kiosks, particularly when formal business owners complained to the council and vendors who had been in place since independence were told to move without being given alternative locations. Minutes from meetings of the municipal council reveal that kiosk-based traders brought several cases before the municipal council, most of which were thrown out before being heard.

⁵⁰ For example, the major curio cooperatives formed the Kenya Craft Cooperative Union (KCCU) in 1982 for the purpose of opening channels of communication with the government (Choge et al. 2005:34; Kanogo and Maxon 1992:372). Another government-supported organization, the Kenya External Trade Authority (KETA), played an important role in aiding the cooperatives in the early 1980s, particularly in pushing them to diversify their production line in response to market demand (Jules-Rosette 1984:190-91).

⁵¹ Forty six percent of these Kenyan cooperatives were agricultural, 38 percent being savings and credit cooperatives, or SACCOs (Kenya 2002:37).

phones, email, and personal connections, no longer needed the cooperative for market access.

The 1990s - Insecurity and Economic Collapse

The economic downturn of the 1990s, while not inevitable, was long in the making. “Colonial states,” Fred Cooper (2002:5) has written, “had been gatekeeper states. They had weak instruments for entering into the social and cultural realm over which they presided, but they stood astride the intersection of the colonial territory and the outside world.” In Africa, many colonial and post-colonial “gatekeeper states” became powerful by submitting to international capitalists and powerful outside interests, enriching certain heads of state and elites while doing little for national populations. In 1973, OPEC countries took control of the pricing and production of their fossil fuels, causing oil prices to increase by 400 percent in 1974 alone.⁵² Most African countries experienced extreme economic slowdown and growing debt (see Arrighi 2002). The result within the post-colonial gatekeeper states was often that rulers temporarily in control of the gate refused to relinquish control (Cooper 2002:6). During the 1970s, despite fluctuations in the prices of many commodities on the global market, countries like Kenya remained relatively stable, relying on tourism, government investment in infrastructure, and the export of crops like coffee, tea and pyrethrum. Western allies in the Cold War were comfortable with allowing Kenya’s political elite to monopolize control of the gate, since at least it remained open to them (see Arrighi 2002; Cooper 2002; Kitching 1980; Schatzberg 1987).⁵³

⁵² See Lewellen (2002:15) and Rapley (2002) for full discussions of these global economic shifts in relation to international development.

⁵³ For instance, by 1976 Kenya had become Africa’s leading recipient of World Bank assistance (Miller and Yeager 1994:56-7). Kenya (along with Nigeria and South Africa) is one of three “anchor states” in

During the Cold War, Kenya's favorable image in the West had combined with incentives that benefited foreign firms and attracted investors who helped tourism flourish during the 1970s and 1980s (Kareithi 2003:6). But this rapid expansion, which relied heavily on foreign investment capital, was characterized by poor planning and haphazard development (Kareithi 2003:8). As has been clear in hindsight, important environmental and social issues were never factored into tourism planning (Akama 2002:7). The open policy resulted in an "unplanned and haphazard mushrooming of tourism and hospitality facilities" and an overall "tourism resource degradation" (Akama 2002:7; also see Ondicho 1999; Sindiga 1999).

While tourism generated more foreign exchange than coffee and tea combined from 1990 to 1994, employing an estimated 120,000 Kenyans (Akama 1999:17), shockwaves rippled through the tourism sector in the early 1990s as tourist arrivals rapidly declined. The first major hitch in Kenyan tourism came with the political unrest during 1990 and 1991. This was quickly followed by the U.S.-led Persian Gulf War, during which time tourist arrivals to Kenya fell by 60 percent (Miller and Yeager 1994:149). The violence surrounding the 1992 Kenyan general election continued the downturn in national tourism (see ch. 2), evidenced by the drop in tourist arrivals by 114,000 that year alone.⁵⁴ In response, tour companies participated in unregulated "price slashing," which did little to help the industry as beds remained empty and unemployment in the tourism industry rose as wages declined.⁵⁵

sub-Saharan Africa because of its stability within the region (Barkan 2004). As a result, Kenya has long been a focal point of North American political activity in East Africa.

⁵⁴ Redfern, Paul. "Holidays in Kenya at their cheapest," in *Daily Nation*, May 15, 1993, page 11.

⁵⁵ Redfern, Paul. "Holidays in Kenya at their cheapest," in *Daily Nation*, May 15, 1993, page 11.

While the 1992 election violence hurt Kenya's image as a pristine and welcoming tourist destination, the Kaya Bombo killings in 1997 were particularly harmful because much of the fighting took place in close proximity to Mombasa's South Coast resort area. For example, one of the many attacks took place at Shelly Beach on September 5, 1997 (HRW 2002:62). A week later on September 11, 1997, raiders looted shops and killed several bystanders at the tourist junction of Ukunda (HRW 2002:62). The episode would eventually end in a firefight with police at the popular Diani Beach. The crash in tourism that followed the 1997 violence was made even worse by the El Niño rains that year, which caused some of the worst flooding in 40 years and damaged roads that would not be fixed for more than a decade (also mentioned by Wolf 2000:148). Other external factors that compounded the decline in tourism included the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and nearby Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1998,⁵⁶ and the bombing of a tourist hotel just north of Mombasa and the firing of a missile at an Israeli passenger jet leaving Mombasa's Moi International Airport in November 2002.⁵⁷

The result for the curio business was, as one 36-year-old vendor told me from behind the counter of his shop in a posh Nyali hotel, "*Sasa hakuna pesa. Hata hakuna wateja.*" *Now there is no money. There are not even customers.*⁵⁸ He had been employed vending curios since the early 1990s and had entered the business because at that time it still offered a great deal of potential for upward mobility as long as tourism continued to grow. By the time of our conversation in 2005, he was simply grateful to

⁵⁶ The 1998 bombings of the East African embassies killed more than 250 people, only 12 of whom were American (Oded 2000:82). Also see the special issue of the *Daily Nation* with the front-page headline "Lest We Forget," dated Aug. 3, 2008.

⁵⁷ For a review of press coverage of the 2002 attacks in Kenya, see Taylor, Ros. "Kenya Hotel Bombing: What the Papers Say," in *The Guardian* online, guardian.co.uk, Nov. 29, 2002.

⁵⁸ Interview, Oct. 7, 2005, with a male Taita trader born in the town of Wundanyi in 1969. He completed secondary school and also had a three-year degree in business administration. He came to Mombasa in the late 1980s and originally worked as a clearing and forwarding agent before moving into the curio business.

still have a job, albeit employed by an Indian shop owner who lived in England and continued to maintain the shop in case Kenyan tourism rebounded.

I was at times surprised that even after the steady rise in tourism beginning in 2004, curio traders remained so skeptical about the future of their businesses and the industry. It was clear that curio vendors' high profits of the 1970s and 1980s were a phenomenon of the past. The economic downturn that began during the 1990s was not only due to the violent events mentioned above, which undeniably led to a reduction in the number of tourists visiting Kenya. But the national and regional economic context out of which the curio business originally developed had also changed dramatically as a result of the economic restructuring that began during the 1980s.

Through the 1990s, this restructuring revolved around five key areas, identified by Kibua and Nzioki (2004:12) as including (1) the removal of export licensing, (2) the repeal of the Exchange Control Act, (3) the reform of trade and business licenses, (4) the reform of government price control mechanisms, and (5) the removal of duties.⁵⁹ As Kibua and Nzioki put it: "By 1994, all prices including petroleum prices, exchange and interest rates, had been decontrolled and market forces allowed to be at play for all goods and services, except wages" (2004:15; also see Manda and Sen 2004). The primary effects of cutting funds from public services in order to repay debt and increase foreign exchange would be that by the 1990s a large majority of the Kenyan population was unable to afford health care and education (UNDP 2002:6). As government expenditures

⁵⁹ In 1992 most requirements for import licenses were removed as importers were only required to fill import declaration forms and present them to their commercial banks (Kibua and Nzioki 2004:13). In 1994, the Exchange Control Act was repealed. Through the Budget Speech of 1997/1998, the government announced radical reforms to the 1968 Trade Licensing Act (CAP 497 of the Laws of Kenya). Price controls, which had been implemented by the government "to enhance social welfare and economic growth for its people" (Kibua and Nzioki 2004:14) through the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on *Socialism and its Applications to Planning in Kenya*, had by 1994 been virtually completely removed.

on basic social services as a proportion of total government spending declined from 20 percent in 1980 to 12.4 percent by 1997 (UNDP 2002:44), literacy, which had increased from 47 percent of the population in 1980 to 75 percent in 1994, sank back to 70 percent by 1999 (UNDP 2002:7). Absolute poverty simultaneously increased from 44 percent of the population to 52 percent between 1992 and 1997 (UNDP 2002:7).

The Nyali shopkeeper and many other Mombasa businesspeople cited the devaluation of Kenya's currency in the early 1990s as a major landmark of economic setback.⁶⁰ According to the shopkeeper, who had a college degree in accounting and who had once worked as a clearing and forwarding agent, in the early 1990s, "The economy was still very strong." As he continued:

You know, back then you could buy dollars at 25, 30 shillings. Most people had a couple dollars in their pockets, which meant they were doing okay. But then one day, you go into this store, and the salt is ten shillings. The next day you go in, and it is 15 shillings. The next day you go in, and it is 20 shillings. And you say, hey, what is going on here? How are we going to survive this? This is crazy. And we go to the wealthy people for help [crosses his hands as though asking for a gift], and they say, 'it is not just you. Even we are on hard times now.' So it was really hard.⁶¹

Choge et al. (2005:33-4) suggested that a weakening Kenyan shilling against international currencies during the 1990s had created a favorable environment for tourism and the trade in woodcarvings, particularly their export. But while a weak shilling could potentially have helped attract more tourists or buyers to Kenya and thus indirectly benefited curio vendors, the numbers of tourist arrivals steadily declined through the 1990s before crashing following the Kaya Bombo violence of 1997 (see ch. 2; Akama

⁶⁰ The value of the Kenyan shilling has declined greatly since independence in 1963. Between 1964 and 1973, the average exchange rate to the dollar was 7.1 (Kenya 2002:6). The shilling had steadily depreciated since the early 1990s following the liberalization of the exchange rate. In 1994, the government repealed the Exchange Control Act and stabilization measures were put into effect (Kenya 2002:6). The shilling reached as high as 61.6 shillings per dollar in 1994 (Kenya 2002:6).

⁶¹ Interview, Oct 7, 2005, with a male Taita trader born in the town of Wundanyi in 1969. He completed secondary school and also had a three-year degree in business administration. He came to Mombasa in the late 1980s and originally worked as a clearing and forwarding agent before moving into the curio business.

1999). Just as it became important for Kenyan entrepreneurs to circumvent the country's internal insecurity and do business internationally, a weak shilling made this all but impossible.

As tourists returned to Kenya in large numbers beginning in 2004,⁶² they no longer frequented Mombasa's downtown roadsides or public spaces as they had in the past. As described earlier in this chapter, the first Kisii and Kamba traders had established their kiosks on Mombasa Island near the downtown because at the time tourists would stay in the city's central business district (particularly along Kilindini Road – later Moi Ave. – and Salim – later Digo – Road), visiting on cruise ships, and partying late into the night at Mombasa's several downtown hotels, clubs, and casinos (see map 1.2, page 14). As much as the beaches to the north and south, the city was known for cheap drugs, prostitution, and gambling.

In 1967, a Ministry of Lands and Settlement document titled “Kenya Coast Line Development” found in its Hotel Survey that of the coast's 32 major hotels, 20 were in Mombasa.⁶³ Ten years later, a similar survey from July 1977 found that of the coast's 99 licensed hotels, 78 of them were in Mombasa (15 were in Malindi, 3 in Kilifi, and 3 in Lamu).⁶⁴ But after the insecurity of the 1990s, tourists were regularly escorted from the airport by the new tourist police unit, mandated by their hotels to wear colored identification wristbands, and warned against buying from anyone not endorsed by their

⁶² Between 2003 and 2004, tourism earnings increased significantly nation-wide by 51.9 percent (Kenya 2005a:194), with the number of fourth quarter (high season) visitor arrivals for holiday increasing from 180,900 thousand in 2003 to 258,400 thousand in 2004 (Kenya 2005a:195).

⁶³ See “Hotel Survey,” in document “Kenya Coast Line Development,” prepared for the Ministry of Lands and Settlement by Mr. S.C. Lock, the ministry's “Town Planning Advisor,” Aug. 1, 1967, documents 49 and 49a in the file “Coast Provincial Administration, Tourism 1965-1971,” from Coast Provincial files in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number CA/21/53, box 105, shelf 4659, room 6.

⁶⁴ See list, generated by P.M. Otsianda for Provincial Commissioner, Coast, dated July 13, 1977, document 102 in the file “Hotel Trade – Beach Security 1959-1983,” from the Coast Provincial Administration files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number CQ/18/1, box 14, shelf 353, room 1.

official guide or hotel. For better or worse, tourism moved away from the city center through a combination of public opposition to tourists' behavior, as well as rapidly dilapidating roads, infrastructure, and security. I made that very specific note to myself in my fieldnotes during research conducted on July 15, 2003. That year, tourism was still extremely low following the late 2002 bombing of a tourist hotel just north of Mombasa, the onset of the US-led invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent cancellation of all British Airways flights to Kenya due to warnings of further terrorist attacks. Those tourists who did visit Mombasa avoided the city and remained behind the protection of resorts' walls. I, on the other hand, was living with a curio exporter in his small home in Changamwe, only a stone's throw from the Kisii soapstone cooperative. It was clear to me that many of Mombasa's residents saw the indirect expulsion of tourists very positively.⁶⁵ Not only did it remove the often unwanted "*wazungu*" (whites or Westerners) from the streets of the city, but it led to a collapse in the housing and real-estate market, which was a huge boon for international investors, especially those from the Middle East, South Asia, or Nairobi who were keen on buying up plots in Mombasa.

As tourists stayed within the confines of resorts and beach hotels, many of the urban, once-popular downtown hotels and tourist venues like the Hard Rock Café, the massive Polana Hotel, or the popular Splendid Hotel closed (see map 1.2, page 14). Others were simply removed, like the nationally gazetted Manor Hotel on Nyerere Avenue, which was purchased and demolished for commercial development.⁶⁶ With a

⁶⁵ Tourism had long been a target of Muslim and Christian leaders on the coast. Tourism had been a major target of the IPK, as Balala warned young Muslims that tourism was morally corrupting and spoke out against wearing foreign attire and frequenting bars and discotheques (Oded 2000:150).

⁶⁶ Manor Hotel, once used as a barracks for British soldiers during the First World War, was the prime and oft-mentioned example of this larger shift in real estate and tourism out of Mombasa to the beaches. Many curio vendors and even NMK employees said the removal of Manor Hotel significantly changed Mombasa's downtown. In 1996, with tourism declining rapidly, Manor Hotel was purchased and

vaguely-defined and heavily-politicized wave of “city cleaning” and “economic cleanup” at the forefront of political campaigning on the national and local level, at the turn of the 21st century, curio vendors were being squeezed off of Mombasa’s roadsides and out of the tourist circuits, as both were re-directed toward private interests, located behind glass-topped or electrified walls and away from the city’s public spaces.

Nassir’s Demolitions and “City Cleaning”

The kiosks that were the focus of my 2001 study were only a few of the estimated 15,000 that lined the roadsides of Mombasa’s four parliamentary constituencies, primarily on land officially reserved for use by the municipal council.⁶⁷ When not in use, this public land had for decades been licensed to traders to generate revenue for the city and to aid in creating jobs. In an attempt to deal with the hundreds of thousands of Mombasa residents who lived below the absolute poverty line of \$1 per day (38.3% of Mombasa’s population in 2000),⁶⁸ the council began in the late 1960s and 1970s selling business licenses to enterprising Kenyan men and women.⁶⁹ Yet the kiosks occupied an only vaguely legitimate economic space between structure-less hawkers, who were frequently targeted by the municipal council for removal, and the formal *duka* shops of

demolished by a developer to build high-rise office blocks. Conservationists were kept from intervening by armed guards who were hired to seal off the hotel during the demolitions. But because Manor Hotel was a national historical site and was demolished illegally, nothing has been built in its place, leaving an empty plot in downtown Mombasa as a haven for the homeless. The National Museums of Kenya have been instrumental in keeping any other structures from being built on the plot, as was confirmed for me in 2006 by the museum’s head of sites and monuments. See also Kithi, Ngumbao. 2007. “War tunnels may be vital tourism site,” in *Daily Nation*, May 26, 2007.

⁶⁷ Due to their informal nature, the exact number of kiosks in Mombasa was nearly impossible to estimate with any precision, even after my own meeting with the assistant Town Clerk, Mombasa Municipal Council in 2005. This particular number of 15,000 comes from John Mbaria’s column of December 27, 2001, entitled “Urban Chaos: Why kiosks in Mombasa had to go,” in the *Daily Nation*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ See Rakodi et. al (2000) and AMREF (1999) for the complete Mombasa District Participatory Poverty Assessment (1999). Also see Kenya (2002:8), The Mombasa District Development Plan (2002-2008).

⁶⁹ *Daily Nation* (online edition), “Is Nassir Above the Law?” December 26, 2001.

colonial Mombasa, which required much greater overhead and were stereotypically run by traders of Arab or Indian ancestry.

On December 22, 2001, Sheriff Nassir⁷⁰ (MP representing Mombasa Island's Mvita constituency and the coast branch chairman of ruling party KANU) led the demolition of an estimated 1,500 of Mombasa's kiosks from the protection of his personal limousine. Without warning, the demolitions began along Nyerere Avenue at the Likoni *matatu* terminus. Carried out by hired youths, the demolitions left the city looking like it was "in the throes of a civil war."⁷¹ Traders had to scramble without warning to find storage locations like Mombasa's General Post Office to temporarily deposit the stock from their small shops. Others arrived to find everything on which they and their families had depended had been swept away or charred.

The 2001-02 demolitions highlight the role that a politics of "city cleaning" played as a justification for gerrymandering and the manipulation of votes prior to the 2002 general election, as ruling-party KANU's highest ranking politicians, facing stiff competition from opposition leaders, allowed Nassir a free hand in destroying Mombasa's licensed roadside structures. Indeed, the demolition of Mombasa's kiosks made little sense from a strict urban planning standpoint. As one *Daily Nation* article made clear, "if it's a clean Mombasa you want, you don't start with the kiosks. You start with the garbage, which is everywhere."⁷² But removing the kiosks was a profoundly effective way of removing the poor from Mombasa's central business district and main

⁷⁰ Nassir solidified his political prominence by being one of the first to vigorously support Moi's candidacy as president immediately following Kenyatta's death in 1978 (Oded 2000:30). His friendship with Moi would continue for more than two decades, as Nassir was a devout supporter of Moi's Nyayo ideology and worked hard to garner support for Moi and KANU at the coast (Oded 2000:30).

⁷¹ Mwajefa, Mwakera and Edmund Kweni. "Tension rises over demolitions," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 24, 2001, p. 6.

⁷² Warigi, Gitau. "Baffling behavior from a Cabinet Minister," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 30, 2001, p. 8.

thoroughfares. Further, the political assumption was that removing Mombasa's kiosks would economically destabilize the opposition and largely migrant voting bloc while simultaneously drawing praise from the private sector, the formal tourism industry, and the high-capital investment community.

The political motives were discussed openly in the press. As Gitau Warigi described in a column of the *Daily Nation*:

The timing of the demolitions is interesting. Voter registration begins in February, just a month away. The upcountry folk living in Mombasa have never been great fans of Mr. Nassir, nor are they a reliable voting bloc for the *mama na baba* [KANU] party. Mr. Nassir and company have all along been itching for an opportunity to punish these elements. The city-status thing has provided them with the perfect excuse.⁷³

The official explanation for the demolitions was to qualify Mombasa for "city status," a level of political and economic specialization that until recently only Nairobi had held. In November of 2001, a little over one month before the demolition of Mombasa's kiosks, Kenya's third largest city, Kisumu, had been upgraded to a "city," a political move widely considered a way for President Moi and KANU to garner support from Kisumu politicians and residents. As Mombasa's demolitions began without warning just three days before Christmas of 2001, the official line was that Mombasa, Kenya's second-largest urban center, could not officially become a "city" until the roadside kiosks were removed. While several municipal councilors publicly denounced the demolition of the licensed kiosks as "illegal," Nassir took the lead in the demolitions,

⁷³ Warigi, Gitau. "Baffling behavior from a Cabinet Minister," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 30, 2001, p. 8.

claiming that he was “flushing out drug dealers,”⁷⁴ calling the kiosks, many of which had been in place for over 30 years, “dens for thugs, drug peddling, and chang’aa selling.”⁷⁵

Despite such rhetoric, kiosks from which curios were sold were some of the first targeted in the demolitions since they were the most numerous in the central business district, especially along Nyerere and Moi Avenues. Looters quickly began stealing goods from kiosks as well as from the sidewalks surrounding the downtown post office, where wood and soapstone carvings among other items were being deposited in the absence of any safe storage location. “No notice. No warning. Nothing,” one female Kamba trader whose kiosk had been located on Moi Avenue near the elephant tusks told me in 2006. “And nobody even stepped in to put a stop to it. The government was leading it in fact.”⁷⁶

Traders attempted formal negotiation on December 24, when an estimated two hundred former kiosk owners and employees, led by Shimanzi Councillor Luyai Liyai, went to Town Hall to see the town clerk and “demand that he stop the ongoing demolition of their business premises,” wondering why their kiosks were destroyed just prior to the Christmas holiday and without the council’s notice.⁷⁷ Following the initial confrontation, the angry crowd of traders agreed to move outside, where at 11:15am an estimated fifty club-wielding youths stormed the Town Hall and pounced on the unsuspecting hawkers and kiosk owners. Many people were “brutally felled” by the

⁷⁴ Here quoting Mwajefa and Kwenya from the *Daily Nation*, page 6, Dec. 24, 2001, “Tension rises over demolitions.”

⁷⁵ Mwajefa, Mwakera. “Minister supervises demolition of kiosks,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 23, 2001. “Chang’aa” is a locally brewed alcohol in Kenya, similar to “moonshine.”

⁷⁶ Interview, March 28, 2006, with a female Kamba trader who had been born in Machakos in 1974. After completing her secondary school education she moved to Mombasa in 1995 to sell curios, which she did from her Moi Avenue kiosk until it was removed in December 2001. Following the kiosk demolitions, she, like many other such individuals, began renting a shop along Ndia Kuu Road in Old Town.

⁷⁷ This paragraph, including the quotes, draws on Mwajefa, Mwakera. 2001. “Youths beat kiosk owners in scuffle at Town Hall,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 25, 2001, p. 3.

assailants, hired by some anonymous party to counter resistance to the demolitions. After being “kicked, slapped and whipped to submission,” one man told the *Daily Nation*, which covered the story in detail, “I am dying. I am dying for nothing. What have I done to be beaten like a wild animal? I only came here to complain about the stealing of my wares by people claiming to be council workers.”

After being badly injured in a separate incident, town Councilor Liyai told the press that “the demolition of kiosks in Mombasa was tantamount to a declaration of war against the poor by the government,” and urged kiosk owners and hawkers to arm themselves and fight back.⁷⁸ On Wednesday December 26, 2001, as demolition crews entered largely upcountry Changamwe constituency, rioters cut off Mombasa from Moi International Airport and the mainland to the west.⁷⁹ As the Nassir-led team reached the Changamwe roundabout, Changamwe MP Ramadan Kajembe threw himself to the ground in front of the bulldozers, risking his life and forcing the crew to temporarily skip over the area and continue toward the airport. When Nassir reached the Kamba woodcarving cooperative, he and his entourage were surrounded and violently attacked.⁸⁰ Individuals called “hawkers” in the newspapers and who no doubt lived in the surrounding neighborhoods of Chaani, Magongo, Kwa Hola, and Migidini, barricaded the road with burning tires, cutting off Mombasa from the airport. Armed with stones and other makeshift weapons, the “hawkers” fiercely defended their livelihoods until the police escorting the demolition crew opened fire into the crowd. Nassir, leading the

⁷⁸ Nation Team. “Protests as kiosks clear-out continues,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 26, 2001.

⁷⁹ Nation Team. “Chaos and death as kiosk riots shut down Mombasa,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 27, 2001.

⁸⁰ Nation Team. “Chaos and death as kiosk riots shut down Mombasa,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 27, 2001.

demolition team from his limousine, was personally targeted in the melee and badly injured by a stone that struck him in the head.⁸¹

I received several emails from people I had known who were about to lose their already precarious roadside livelihoods. For example, I received this one from Davis on December 28th, 2001:

Now we are done. They just gave us a notice to vacate and move our stuff before the 31st of December. That is when they will demolish our kiosks. I am worried what to do next. You can imagine how much it cost me to have it, 75,000 Kenya shillings [\$1,000]. That is the money I have been working hard for many years to own that shop. Now it is going to be demolished in one day. I have already removed all my items from it, just staying at Fort Jesus doing nothing, waiting for the 31st to see my kiosk destroyed. Anyway, Dillon, this is Kenya, and so now I am going back to square one, and I don't know where to start. This is part of life. So my friend, I keep my fingers crossed until the 31st.⁸²



Photo 3.1: The square outside of Fort Jesus after the kiosk demolitions, July 2003. The kiosks had occupied the far side of Nkrumah Road, top left in this photo. Ndia Kuu Road leads into Old Town in the right-center. In the lower right are the curio-selling shops that were not demolished because they had been built on museum rather than municipal land.

⁸¹ A huge traffic jam developed, trapping tourists and diplomats including the Indian High Commissioner. Rioters, however, allowed tourists to pass through from the airport to access their hotels. In the end, two chiefs (local government representatives) were among scores arrested in the riots that raged into the night. While the police claimed there were a few deaths of people trampled by the rioters, others claimed many more were shot by police and did not make themselves known for fear of arrest. One well-known young Kamba carver was shot and killed by police during the fighting that raged into the night (author's interview with two male Kamba curio traders in their 30s who were present, Nov. 2, 2005).

⁸² Spelling has been corrected from the original email. See photo 3.5 for a view of what the square outside of Fort Jesus looked like after the demolition of the kiosks.

Even after Mombasa was declared a city in President Moi's 2002 New Year's Day address,⁸³ the demolitions continued sporadically through January until the roadsides were cleared. According to the *Daily Nation*, on January 14th alone, property worth millions of shillings (tens of thousands of dollars) was destroyed along with more than one thousand kiosks.⁸⁴ Several kiosk owners who resisted were beaten and robbed by the demolition squad of youths, some of whom were reportedly drunk.

In mid-February, continuing his cleanup of Mombasa, Nassir began the demolition of informal villages surrounding Mombasa, stating: "Slum dwellers will not be spared. Let them go back to their homes." In his first week of slum demolition, more than two thousand people were left homeless.⁸⁵ On the of February 26, 2002, Macharia Gaitho, Special Projects Editor for the *Daily Nation*, wrote a column entitled "Tribal violence looms at the coast." Gaitho argued:

The kind of violence we are talking about is nothing less than ethnic cleansing. It is engineered with the evil aims of uprooting certain population groups from certain areas simply because they are deemed to hold contrary political views.

If Mr. Nassir still insists on kicking 'foreigners' out of Mombasa, then he should do the decent thing and set an example by booking the first dhow to Oman. Was that not his ancestral home?

As Nassir continued the demolitions, which had become flavored with a uniquely coastal *majimbo*-ist discourse of "city cleaning" (see ch. 2), the press openly criticized his actions. As one editorial began, "Would any sane person leave their home to go and live in a slum where there are no services, not even space, where crime and depravity are the

⁸³ Nation Team. "Action group plan for new Mombasa city," in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 2, 2002.

⁸⁴ Kithi, Ngumbao. "Millions lost as squad pulls down more kiosks," in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 15, 2002.

⁸⁵ Nation Correspondents. "Nassir 'clean-up' now targets slum dwellers," in *Daily Nation*, Feb. 25, 2002.

order of life, where there is no hope of even basic material liberation?”⁸⁶ Calling the demolitions “inhuman and unacceptable,” the same editorial questioned how a political leader could deliberately make “some 7,000 men, women and helpless children refugees in their own country.”⁸⁷ As the demolitions continued into 2002, another writer from Nairobi would conclude his short letter to a Nairobi newspaper stating: “The minister seems to have struck a few birds with one stone, creating religious, political and social chaos in an otherwise quiet town. One can hardly wait for November 2002 for us to show those doddering old men where they belong.”⁸⁸

But when I presented parts of this research at a conference held at Fort Jesus in July 2006, some of the well-educated coastal elite in the audience suggested that Nassir’s politics and demolitions were very popular among many of Mombasa’s residents. A well-educated Muslim member of the audience and also an American academic suggested that I was “politicizing the demolitions,” as they both argued to me that Nassir’s actions were primarily non-political. Expressing similar opinions, one letter to the *Daily Nation* from January 10, 2002 was titled “At last, a kiosk-free city called Mombasa.” The author of the letter argued in support of Nassir and claimed that the “erection of illegal structures had led to an influx of jobless people.” It concluded: “All Coast MPs should cast aside their differences with Mr. Nassir and support his clean-up bid.”

⁸⁶ See “Nassir got it wrong – again,” in *Daily Nation*, March 3, 2002, p. 8.

⁸⁷ The demolitions, not surprisingly, did little to help Nassir’s reputation. Prior to the demolitions, Nassir might have been best known for his role in the government’s mismanagement of the 1999 famine in Northeastern Province. As the government’s inaction during the famine became an international embarrassment to Moi’s government, Nassir, the Minister of State responsible for famine relief in the President’s Office, shockingly denied there was a famine, famously stating that if people were dying “it is because they follow water for long distances, they become tired ... it is fatigue which kills them and not hunger.” This episode and the quote from Nassir are documented in “Going for broke,” in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 40, no. 25, pp. 1-2, Dec. 17, 1999.

⁸⁸ See “Kiosk demolitions well-calculated,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 31, 2001, p. 10.

While such a diversity of opinions and analyses is to be expected, the kiosk and slum demolitions of 2001 and 2002 very clearly fit the historic model of violence accompanying land reform and socio-political change in Kenya (Kanyinga 2000; Klopp 2000; Waaijenberg 1993). The image of shanty and kiosk demolitions had been a symbol of resistance to political hegemony during colonial times and in the early 1990s during the push for multiple political parties. As Angelique Haugerud (1995:29) pointed out, demolitions such as the 1990 “shanty” demolitions in Nairobi were compared in popular music of the time to colonial demolitions and outright removals (such as 1954’s Operation Anvil). Images of bulldozers demolishing structures appeared at the same time on the covers of music cassettes labeled “seditious” by the Kenyan government (see Haugerud 1995:28-9). Continuing this historic pattern, between 2002 and 2007, towns in Kenya consistently saw their roadsides cleared of traders and their kiosks, as images of running battles between police and roadside hawkers became regular headlines of newspapers and the nightly news.

Several academics have been tempted to interpret Nassir’s leadership of the kiosk demolitions as simply “a bid to cajole the Moi administration to make Mombasa a city” (Ombongi 2005:f.n. 7). Whatever Nassir’s motives, Ombongi did accepted that “[t]he majority of non-Muslim kiosk owners read ethnic and religious intolerance in Nassir’s acts.” While Ombongi appears to have over-simplified the case – referring, for example, to Mombasa’s population of migrants as mere “sprinkles” (Ombongi 2005:300) – there is little question that Nassir, as Ombongi pointed out, “emerged from the demolition saga as an enemy of the ‘small’ people’s economic empowerment” (Ombongi 2005:318-19). A

Daily Nation editorial of December 26th made possibly the most poignant point about the demolitions:

Whether Mr. Nassir wants to clean up Mombasa so that it can be considered for city status is irrelevant here. Also irrelevant is the issue of whether Mombasa needs sprucing-up at all. What matters is whether the Laws of Kenya still exist. Undisciplined and ill-trained private militia should never, ever be drafted in to do the work which is supposed to be the preserve of disciplined forces.⁸⁹

Indeed, the demolitions would spell the beginning of the end for Nassir's long political career, as they would be used against him in his 2002 re-election bid as MP for Mvita constituency. Nassir protested that no one had attacked his political rival, Najib Balala,⁹⁰ for leading the cleanup of the Airport Road when he had been mayor of Mombasa in the late 1990s. A businessman of Mombasa birth but Arab descent, Balala first rose to power as a nominated KANU councilor (later elected mayor) and chairman of the Coast Tourist Association who made good on his promises to beautify the city (Rakodi et al. 2000:161). Balala's political intrigue, Ombongi (2005:306) suggested, was due to his popularity among both "the 'political tycoons' and the wider business community." During his brief stint as mayor, Balala gained support for improving garbage collection, paying council workers, and initiating successful public-private partnerships in the restoration of public parts of Mombasa that were falling into a state of dilapidation (Ombongi 2005:307). Balala became a powerful ally of Mombasa's civil society, which was becoming "a popular mechanism of mobilising, agitating and bargaining with the increasingly repressive state" (Ombongi 2005:307). Like Nassir,

⁸⁹ Private militias are an important component of Kenyan politics, local (in)security, and vigilante violence in urban Kenya. See Anderson (2002) for a discussion of the links among the informal economy, political order, and the violence surrounding the rival militant groups in Nairobi known as Mungiki and "the Taliban." Also see a similar discussion by Mueller (2008).

⁹⁰ Najib Balala, who was a successful local and national politician from the late 1990s, is not to be confused with Khalid Balala, the vocal leader of the IPK in the early 1990s discussed in ch. 2.

Balala had built his political career largely at the expense of Mombasa's small-scale traders. He had denied licenses to curio traders working in downtown Mombasa (in 1998), and was also a primary supporter of the re-organization of tourist circuits so as to minimize the time visitors spent walking around the city center (Rakodi et al. 2000:161). But in 2002, much to Nassir's consternation, Balala's actions as mayor in the late 1990s were remembered warmly while Nassir was pegged the enemy of the poor (Ombongi 2005:318-19). When Balala, of the newly formed National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), soundly defeated Nassir (16,000 to 2,000 votes), it was widely considered a humiliating loss for the 78-year-old politician who had dominated Mombasa politics for 28 years.⁹¹

The Economic Fallout of the Kiosk Demolitions

The 2001-02 demolition of Mombasa's roadside kiosks was particularly shocking and troubling to me because I had been in the city less than a year earlier conducting participant observation with curio vendors working from these kiosks. The demolitions would become an early focus of my investigation. Having conducted a survey of the Fort Jesus curio vendors less than a year earlier, I was in a position to conduct a longitudinal study and evaluate the effects of the demolitions by tracing how the displaced chose to adapt to their new situations.

From what I have been able to ascertain from their former tenants, most of the absentee kiosk owners moved out of the curio business completely, having been previously involved in the business almost solely as landlords. I was never able to interview seven of these owners who were among the original 31 individuals in my 2001

⁹¹ Mutonya, Njuguna. "Nassir era ends in humiliation," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 29, 2002, p. 12. For more on the 2002 Kenyan general election, see Barkan 2004. For more on the political competition between Nassir and Balala preceding the 2002 election, see Ombongi (2005). In 2002, Mvita elections were, as in the past, characterized by organized propaganda combined with "bribery and violence" (Ombongi 2005:300).

census, and so I am unaware of their economic strategies following the kiosk demolitions. One of the female “Swahili” owners sold her kiosk just months before it was demolished. Another man, who was likely to have remained in the curio business, was a Muslim “Swahili” man originally from Malindi who also ran a woodcarving workshop. I was, however, unable to find him following the demolition of his kiosk.

What did the 24 research participants who had been part of my 2001 census of curio vendors operating outside of Fort Jesus do following the demolitions? Nyambuto, the one absentee landlord I interviewed, left the curio business after the loss of his kiosks and moved back to Kisii Town – near his home town of Tabaka (the site of the quarries) – where he was working as a taxi driver the last time I saw him there in 2006. Two Fort Jesus kiosk owners who had worked in their kiosks, both Kikuyu (one male, one female), left the curio business after the demolitions. While I was not able to follow up with the female, the male vendor was in 2003 selling vegetables in a market in Kisauni, Mombasa’s northern constituency. Two other Kikuyu women who had owned the kiosks in which they worked (Mama Wachira and Elizabeth) remained in the curio business by joining a “free mark,” or shared shop, located in Old Town.⁹² Mama Wanjiru’s daughter, Wanjiru, worked in the free mark for a short time before moving to the North Coast and renting a shop in a tourist hotel on Mombasa’s North Coast. From interviews and visits to the shop it was clear that her goal was to find a white boyfriend or husband rather than make a career of selling Kenyan crafts. Mamu Wanjiru eventually found a site from which to sell fabrics and jewelry at Bamburi Beach on Mombasa’s North Coast. Three

⁹² Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina mentioned the free mark craze and its origins in Nairobi’s Uhuru (Freedom) Park, where a giant market called “Freemark” was established around the year 2000, selling all types of goods from small, partitioned stalls (p. 89). See Wainaina, Binyavanga. “Generation Kenya,” in *Vanity Fair*, July 2007, pp. 84-94. For more on the curio “Free marks” of Mombasa’s Old Town, see ch. 4.

individuals whose shops were built on museum land were left untouched by the demolitions. These included the shops owned by Jamal and Njoroge, both of whom were mentioned in chapter 2. All three owners of the spared shops were men, one of whom was a Kikuyu (Njoroge), the other two Muslim “Swahili” of the Kenyan coast.

Of the three traders who were renting the kiosks from which they sold, Davis moved to Changanwe and became a full time exporter, working primarily for a U.S.-based company. With the help of local Peace Corps volunteers, he had made contact with the company while working outside of Fort Jesus. He used his knowledge of email and the internet to convince the company to hire him as their purchasing agent in Mombasa (see ch. 5). Ronald, a Luo male in his late 20s with a college degree in accounting, moved out of the curio business. He first sold clothes at Kongowea Market in Kisauni before marrying a white tourist he met, who eventually moved him to Germany to live with her. We still keep in touch regularly online through email and programs like Facebook, although he has not sold curios since the loss of his kiosk in January 2002. The third former renter, a Giriama man from the Takaungu area, returned to his farm in Kilifi District to sell palm wine. When I last saw him in 2005, he had returned to Mombasa, but had become very destitute and was making less than one dollar per day selling firewood on Mombasa’s North Coast.

Of the ten men who had been employed selling curios from the kiosks outside of Fort Jesus during my April 2001 census, two Kisii brothers (Dennis and Boniface) struggled but eventually found an opportunity to sell soapstone to tourists in the town of Watamu just south of Malindi to the north of Mombasa. Two other men, one a Duruma and the other a Giriama (Kazungu), both in their 20s, found employment in two of the

three shops outside of Fort Jesus that had not been removed. The former settled into the spot, where he continued to work through 2008, while the latter, named Kazungu, left after two years of working for Njoroge when he was hired to work for an Old Town-based curio exporter. Two other men, one Kamba (Andrew) and one Duruma (Juma), both in their 20s, joined with two of the Kikuyu women mentioned above in a free market shop located in Old Town near Fort Jesus. When the free market failed, Andrew, joined another free market located on the same street, while Juma set up his own table as an informal “hawker” operating along the roadside outside of Fort Jesus. David, also Duruma, found employment working in a privately owned Old Town curio shop, which was run by a Maasai man in his early 40s who had originally owned a kiosk along Moi Avenue before it was demolished in December 2001. Kahindi, who was Giriama, found work finishing and selling soapstone in Chagamwe’s Kisii Soapstone Cooperative, a connection made for him with help from his former boss, a Kisii man who had lost his kiosk outside of Fort Jesus. Two other young men, one a Muslim “Swahili” in his late teens and originally from Malindi and another Muslim Digo, also in his teens, moved away and I was unable to follow up with them. Hassan, the Duruma hawker who had sold from a table even before the demolitions, remained as before.

Upon further investigation in 2003 and 2005, it became clear that the kiosk demolitions, while persuading some to abandon the urban curio industry, also led to an influx of primarily Kamba, Kikuyu, and Kisii traders from elsewhere in Mombasa to Old Town and Fort Jesus. The cross-ethnic linkages of cooperation and employment continued as they had within the Fort Jesus Curio Group (see ch. 2). As the following brief outline of traders’ stories reveals, the production cooperatives and markets in

Changamwe, the remaining shops in Old Town, and the area immediately outside of Fort Jesus became the areas where traders concentrated. For example, nine of my research participants from 2005-06 had owned or worked in kiosks located along Moi and Nyerere Avenues just prior to the demolitions. Some had occupied their kiosks since the early 1970s, when Moi and Nyerere Avenues were spatially central to the tourism industry and curio trade. Of these nine, one moved into exporting and selling wholesale from the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative in Changamwe following the demolitions. One moved to a kiosk in the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative in Changamwe. Another moved to exporting and selling wholesale from Magongo Market in Changamwe. Three former Moi Avenue kiosk owners who had not been exporting moved their businesses to Old Town after the demolitions, where they each rented individual shops. One former Moi Avenue kiosk employee moved to Old Town to work for a shop owner after the demolitions. One former Nyerere Avenue kiosk owner found employment working for an exporter in Old Town. And the final Moi Avenue kiosk owner (Jimmy) moved into an Old Town free mark shop following the demolitions before joining with the owner of a shop built just outside of Fort Jesus (Jamal).

While the demolitions were as much about clearing the city of the poor as they were about removing physical structures, in Kenya class and class-based violence cannot be understood outside of race and ethnicity (Khadiagala and Schatzberg 1987; Nyangira 1987; Schatzberg 1988). As Schatzberg argued, “Class, like ethnicity, is contextually fluid. The identity, composition, and boundaries of social class often vary according to the contexts of the moment” (1988:9). One of Schatzberg’s (1988:ch. 2) primary aims was to dwell, not on the strength of Africans’ internalized identities, but on the

multiplicity of them. These various categories resonate differently at any single point in time or in any particular situation (see Schatzberg 1988:8-11).

For example, while it was assumed by many that Mombasa's kiosk demolitions were most harmful to upcountry migrants, Mijikenda traders I interviewed afterward provided the least heard and most complicating perspective. Mijikenda migrants from the rural coast were often written off the landscape when political discourse structured the debate over the demolitions as representing a conflict between upcountry migrants and the coastal elite. The Mijikenda occupied the lower class of coastal people who were often hired to work for migrants from upcountry or patrons from the urban coast. As David, a Duruma Mijikenda in his early 20s told me in 2006, "So many of those people with kiosks were Mijikenda. When they say it was about chasing out upcountry people, that was just an excuse. It was also about chasing out coastal people. It was about cleaning the city of the poor."⁹³ According to David, the demolitions were especially trying for people in the outlying areas of Mombasa, such as Magongo and Bamburi (Changamwe and Kisauni constituencies respectively), where many people had turned portions of their kiosks into permanent residences. "The kiosks were an economic system that worked," he stressed. "We paid for licenses. We had to maintain our own kiosks."⁹⁴

Kazungu was a Giriama trader in his early 30s from Kilifi to the north of Mombasa. With only a primary school education but significant experience in the curio

⁹³ Interview with David, Feb. 10, 2006, with a Duruma male in his early 20s. He had originally been born and raised in Samburu in Kwale District to the west of Mombasa before moving to the city to find employment after completing standard 7 in school. While a Christian, he had several relatives who were also Duruma from Samburu who worked in the kiosks, and he saw himself very much as a "coastal person" who was among family in Mombasa including its Old Town.

⁹⁴ From receipts I saw in various traders' shops and kiosks, in 1999 kiosks were licensed for 1,000 shillings (\$15) for the year. This increased to 3,400 shillings (\$50) in 2000 and 2001 before the demolition of the kiosks in January 2002. I will discuss more specifics of fees and taxes in chapter 4.

business, he was able to find alternative employment in Old Town following the loss of the kiosk in which he was employed. He downplayed my suggestions in 2003 that there was any ethnic or religious cause to the demolitions.⁹⁵ For Kazungu, it was about “*maskini na matajiri*,” or *the rich and the poor*. He returned the question to me, “Who owns the big shops that are now making money and getting the business?” While social inequalities were not new to him, he viewed the demolitions as a direct act against the poor. He said that talking about “tribalism” took attention off of the real problem.

Kazungu found himself in an interesting situation since he self-identified as both Muslim and Christian and had Christian, Muslim, and Giriama names that he could use as he saw situationally. Being Giriama, one of the larger Mijikenda sub-groups, gave him great social mobility on the Kenyan coast. Further, by being Muslim he could at times pass for “Swahili” if it meant endearing himself or building on genuine commonalities between himself and an employer or neighbor. While I would later know him by his Giriama name (Kazungu), when I first met him, knowing I was a student studying Swahili language and culture, he introduced himself and I knew him by his Muslim name, “Rashid.” It was only several years later that I came to know him by his Giriama name, for him the more intimate “Kazungu.”

As a non-Swahili coastal person, he had always found himself employed by non-Mijikenda traders who had superior access to education and capital. After moving to Mombasa from Kilifi in 1991 at the age of 18, Kazungu had found employment working with a Luhya-speaking trader originally from western Kenya. He sold a variety of curio products from a kiosk located near the elephant tusks and Uhuru Gardens on Moi

⁹⁵ Quotes from this paragraph from interview with Kazungu, July 11, 2003.

Avenue.⁹⁶ Despite their difference in ethno-regional background and economic power, Kazungu could not say enough good things about his original employer, who he claimed taught him all the tricks of the trade, including where to buy the cheapest soapstone and woodcarvings. In 1995 when the curio business in Mombasa began to decline with the continued influx of migrants from upcountry, rising unemployment, and a steady decline in tourist arrivals, Kazungu's Luhya employer left the business. But before doing so he helped Kazungu find a job working for a Kisii trader selling soapstone outside of Fort Jesus.

The kiosk outside of Fort Jesus was jointly owned by one Kisii and one Kamba man, neither of whom worked selling curios themselves but found it profitable to maintain the shop to supplement their formal incomes made in Mombasa. The kiosk was divided evenly down the middle with one half displaying Kamba woodcarvings, brokered by a self-identified Kamba trader from Kitui named Andrew,⁹⁷ and the other Kisii soapstone carvings, sculptures, and chess boards sold by Kazungu. Again, despite the ethnic difference, Kazungu and Andrew were close friends who had much in common. Both of them were born on farms in 1973 and both came to Mombasa in 1991 after nearly completing primary school. Since even their salaries were identical, the main difference between the two was that Andrew chose to live among other upcountry

⁹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the following information comes from author's interview with Kazungu, Oct. 25, 2005, in Old Town, Mombasa.

⁹⁷ Born in 1973 in Kitui, Andrew studied through standard 7 before moving to Mombasa in 1991 at the age of 18 to look for employment. His older brother had moved to Mombasa in the 1980s and helped Andrew find employment first in the Kamba woodcarving cooperative, "Akamba Industry," and later from a kiosk along Moi Avenue. In 1995 he was employed, along with Kazungu, to sell woodcarvings from a jointly owned shop outside of Fort Jesus. In 2005, more than three years after the kiosk demolitions, Andrew returned to Mombasa and worked from a free mark shop before eventually going broke and again returning to Kitui in 2006. While I knew Andrew throughout the course of my research (2001-07), specific information contained here comes from a formal author's interview, Oct. 25, 2005 in Old Town, Mombasa.

migrants in Likoni to the south while Kazungu lived in the primarily Mijikenda town of Mtwapa to the north.

Following the demolition of the kiosks, Kazungu and Andrew were both left unemployed, but Kazungu had a significant advantage since he had nearby family who could support him while he looked for alternative employment. While Andrew was forced to move back to Kitui where he had inherited a small family farm, Kazungu continued coming to Fort Jesus after the demolitions until he was finally hired by Njoroge, a Kikuyu, whose shop – built on museum land – had not been destroyed. In fact, following the demolitions, Njoroge and the others selling from the three remaining curio businesses invested significant capital and energy into expanding their shops, strengthening the roofs and floors, and making them more permanent and larger than the kiosks on Nkrumah Road had been.⁹⁸ In Njoroge's case, it was also worth investing in the extra labor, and Kazungu's job became to attract and coax the tourists who pulled up in safari vans outside the fort to step into the shop. As Kazungu and others would regularly say, "looking is free!"

After working for Njoroge for two years, Kazungu found employment with a Muslim woman who owned an exporting and wholesale business dealing in soapstone carvings, fabrics, and bags. College-educated and a proud member of the Mazrui family, she had entered the curio business in 1989 as a local buyer for an Indian-owned export company based in Mombasa. She shifted jobs and worked for both Indian and British-owned exporting companies before finally opening her own business in 2005. The business relied on Kazungu and another long-term curio trader who was born and raised

⁹⁸ I discussed these issues with Njoroge during an interview, Oct. 19, 2005 at his shop outside of Fort Jesus.

at the site of the quarries in Tabaka, Kisii District, and who provided the small business with important connections.

While Kazungu's Kisii partner had a secondary school education and had worked in Mombasa from his own privately owned and licensed roadside curio kiosk from 1974 until its demolition in January 2002, they both appreciated the opportunity for work. As Kazungu and Andrew had been, these two employees, despite differences in ethnic background, education, and age, found themselves dependent upon one another in their daily activities. Many days they both sat with me in the small shop in which they worked on Ndia Kuu Road, kindly buying me cold soda and offering me their small fan as they watched me desperately try to cope with the Mombasa heat while they told me stories of their past and the way the curio business and the city had changed. It was remarkable and endearing that two men who made only a few dollars each day would still buy me soda (despite my frequent refusals). Even though each of them told me privately that he had aspirations of breaking away and running his own private business – and both would have appreciated a loan – Kazungu and his partner were both grateful for any footing in the curio business.

It was difficult for such struggling, migrant traders to blame their economic hardships on any particular migrant or ethnic group. The multi-ethnic and inclusive economic environment I witnessed nurtured subjectivities that blamed political elites for hardship rather than other Kenyans of the same economic status or even their employers. Like Kazungu, David, a Duruma Mijikenda, blamed most of Kenyans' hardships on the political elite. He clarified his perspective for me in greater depth:

The problem is these coastal politicians, these coastal leaders who blame it on the upcountry people. Okay. You will always have a difference between the coastal and

the upcountry people. But it's the Mijikenda who really have the problems, and they are from here. They have nothing. They sit on farms, and then will come here [Mombasa] and do anything. Look at me. When I started I made eight hundred shillings per month [about \$10]. Eight hundred per month. I had to pay six hundred for a place to sleep. So what am I supposed to do with two hundred shillings for a whole month? But the difference is this. The Mijikenda compete with the coastal upper class.

But at the same time, they also compete with these upcountry people. These are the two competitors for coastal people. But the thing is this. The upcountry people bring productive competition. He will come and build a big house to rent to people, so that challenges you to build a bigger one. But don't destroy that house he's built, that's not development. But those are the tactics of these coastal leaders, these people who would rather use these tactics of destroying someone else's development rather than letting the competition take place in a way that might lead to development. And they always use the Mijikenda. The youth. Those without education who will just follow. Even they [Mijikenda youth] were the ones who helped with the demolitions, 'clean our city, clean out the upcountry people,' and where are they now? Homeless living in slums.⁹⁹

Such opinions, which were held by traders of widely diverse economic histories, cast new light on socio-economic marginalization in Mombasa. Blaming leaders, however, did little to improve one's economic situation. Having pointed out issues of age, ethnicity, and class, David was formulating his own ideas of who the powerful were. Most importantly, he was not among them. What options were left? What hope could he realistically have? In such cases, one option was to find a way out of Kenya, jumping scales into larger, international markets, and circumventing an oppressive system that played on inequalities across social categories.

But particularly in 2002, traders also turned to the polls and their democratic right to fire their elected leaders. The 2002 elections would see the incumbent party KANU lose widely across the country as Mwai Kibaki became Kenya's third president, having

⁹⁹ Interview with David, Feb. 10, 2006, with a male Mijikenda (Duruma sub-group) trader, born in Samburu in Kwale District of Coast Province in 1982. He finished his primary school education before moving to Mombasa in the late 1990s to work vending curios with several of his cousins who had been working outside of Fort Jesus through much of the 1990s.

united opposition parties through his NARC coalition (see Barkan 2004).¹⁰⁰ In Mombasa, NARC candidates were popular across social divides in an election that would be viewed internationally as a successful show of democracy in Africa (Barkan 2004).¹⁰¹ Karisa Maitha, who was elected MP of Mombasa's Kisauni constituency on a NARC ticket, was later made Minister of Tourism under the new NARC government. This was a popular decision on the coast and instilled great hope in curio traders, many of whom liked the tough-talking Maitha – a Christian Mijikenda who was seen by many as the leading Mijikenda statesman in Kenya.

Learning of Maitha's appointment, the former directors of the Mombasa Island Curio Vendors Association met him in person to express the hardships they had endured since the kiosk demolitions.¹⁰² After the meeting, Maitha promised them a new curio market and even said they "would each have a key to that market." "But then Maitha died," the former vice-chairman related to me – of a heart attack during a trip to Germany in 2004. "It was even in the papers that money had been allotted for our market, but where is that money now?" he asked. Maitha had been a brief flash of hope for the cause of Mombasa's curio traders, struggling for commercial space and access to tourists. Further letters written to Mombasa's mayor went unanswered, and no alternative site

¹⁰⁰ Then 71 years old, Kibaki beat Uhuru Kenyatta in the 2002 election with 62 percent of the vote. The most important political factor behind Kibaki's 2002 victory was the formation of a unified opposition under an umbrella coalition party, which brought together two other coalitions, one with a large Kikuyu contingent under Mwai Kibaki's National Alliance of Kenya (NAK), and the other a broad contingent of politicians united as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in their dissatisfaction with Moi's KANU. See Barkan (2004) for more on such specifics of the 2002 election.

¹⁰¹ Barkan (2004), for example, felt that while some democratic progress had been made during the 1992 and 1997 elections, Kenya's "transition to democracy" could not be discussed realistically until the defeat of KANU by a unified opposition in the 2002 election.

¹⁰² This paragraph based on interview with former vice-chairman, Mombasa Island Curio Vendors Association, Nov. 7, 2005.

materialized for the curio vendors who had lost their kiosks.¹⁰³ As the vice-chairman explained to me: “Politicians don’t want to be bothered. But they had no problem tearing down peoples’ shops and destroying our property.”

After the demolitions, there were still some options for curio vendors removed from Mombasa’s downtown. For example, traders could still operate from the Shanzu curio market on the North Coast and the beaches themselves were relatively easy to access.¹⁰⁴ But both of these locations quickly became crowded with displaced traders. Ratna Square in Nyali, only a few hundred yards from the massive municipal Kongowea Market, gained significant early hype as Mombasa’s new curio market. But very few traders I interviewed between 2003 and 2007 ever bothered doing business at Ratna. Others who had tried their luck complained of the large amount of money they needed for the necessary licenses, to pay rent, and to stock a shop with decent merchandise.

Jimmy, my only research participant to be involved in organizing the Ratna Square curio market, called it a “money pit” in 2005.¹⁰⁵ He and a partner invested almost 100,000 shillings (\$1,250) in their site at Ratna Square in the first year and were required to pay 1,500 shillings (\$23) rent per month to the municipal council – something they had never had to do with the kiosks, which had only required yearly licenses of 3,400 shillings (\$50 in 2001). “But the major problem,” he emphasized, “was that tourists and other travelers never went to Ratna Square. The only customers were Indians who owned

¹⁰³ I was shown copies of some of these letters, which were kept in an organized file by former organization officers.

¹⁰⁴ I know some vendors who tried this, but the market was rather remotely located and only accessible by tourists staying at a scattering of hotels in the immediate area.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Jimmy, Dec. 6, 2005, with a man in his 40s who was from Kisii District but not Tabaka. He had entered the curio business in the 1980s and only moved to Mombasa in the 1990s, when he worked selling primarily soapstone from his Moi Avenue kiosk built near Uhuru Gardens and the elephant tusks. While he had left the cooperative when it was relocated to Chaani in Chagamwe, he remained popular and well respected for his education among other curio vendors, and was at the forefront of planning of markets and the administration of various organizations.

the big shops in the hotels and who wanted to pay wholesale prices.” As Jimmy put it: “I thought, if this is the clientele, why on earth pay this overhead?” Some vendors still remained at Ratna Square through 2006, although many had shifted to selling electronics and second-hand goods.

While tourist arrivals to Kenya began to break records in 2005 and 2006, many Mombasa curio traders I interviewed said that there had been so many structural changes since the boom of the 1980s that it was impossible for them to reap any of the benefits. The infrastructure for accessing the market had become exclusionary since the tourism slump of the 1990s, particularly with the removal of Mombasa’s kiosks and the re-routing of tour circuits away from public locations. Maybe more importantly, the tourists had also changed. Americans and Israelis, who were the big buyers of curios in the 1980s and 1990s, were no longer common customers of small-scale vendors. The events of September 11, 2001 and the resulting U.S.-led “war” on terrorism compounded the Kenyan tourism industry’s problems by increasing propaganda and fear against Muslims, ensuring the placement of the Kenyan coast on travel advisory lists from the U.S. and British governments. This was devastating for Mombasa’s tourism industry, which had been struggling to attract and appeal to this wealthy clientele.¹⁰⁶

Even after the return of American, British, and other high-spending European tourists beginning in 2004, Mombasa’s security concerns meant that tourists were increasingly arriving on all-inclusive packages that left most of the profits with foreign

¹⁰⁶ For example, in terms of hotel bed-night occupancy by foreign visitors, German bed occupancy dropped from 721,000 in 2002 to 420,000 in 2003. Between 2000 and 2003, yearly American bed-nights in Kenya declined from 229,000 to 110,000. Between 2001 and 2003 British bed-nights declined from 606,000 to 324,000. A similar pattern was true for tourists from France, Italy, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. The only nationality for which numbers rose was among Kenyans, whose bed-nights rose from 656,000 in 2002 to 739,000 in 2003. For a full chart of this data, see Kenya (2005a:198). I have rounded numbers to the nearest thousand.

agents and allowed tourists only a brief, often expensive bus tour of the city before returning them to the confines of their hotels. This made life hard for the coast's small-scale tourism operators, who relied on public spaces for meeting with clients. The issue of all-inclusive packages was frequently covered through the news media, where foreign-owned firms tended to receive little love for denying Kenyans the benefits of tourism. In May of 2007, the Pubs, Entertainment and Restaurant Association of Kenya (PERAK) launched a campaign to have the government review all-inclusive bookings, claiming it left little profit in the hands of Kenyans.¹⁰⁷ As the PERAK national chairman, Mr.

Walter Reif explained to the *Daily Nation*:

If they pay their money in foreign currency abroad, there is a danger of the destination becoming cheaper than when they pay directly to individual hotels. In such cases there is very little left for other places such as pubs and entertainment joints that depend on tourists for their businesses.

But others, like the general manager of the famous Sarova Whitesands hotel on Mombasa's North Coast, claimed that the all-inclusive concept should not be feared since it was common in other countries and that eighty percent of tourists' money still came back to Kenya, particularly in the form of taxes and the cost of labor.¹⁰⁸ But such arguments were clearly insufficient for many parties, such as those represented by PERAK and among traders who could no longer access tourists who were kept within walled-off, pre-paid, "all-inclusive" spaces.

One result was that traders continued to consolidate around the already-crowded production networks, especially in Changamwe. This would have its own effects on the communities there, as well as the economic competition around Changamwe's

¹⁰⁷ This story was covered by Ndurya, Mazera. "Lobby attacks tourist booking system," in *Daily Nation*, May 16, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ This interview was from Ndurya, Mazera. "Lobby attacks tourist booking system," in *Daily Nation*, May 16, 2007.

cooperative societies and workshops. Among traders who had lost their kiosks in the 2002 demolitions, I found a structural “abjection” similar to that described by James Ferguson (1999) in the case of Zambia’s mining towns. Abjection, as Ferguson defined it, was a sense of humiliation or expulsion, as well as the “process of being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded” (2002:140). Also built into his concept were implications of debasement and humiliation at having not conformed to expectations of advancing or modernizing. For traders with dreams of “jumping scales” into wider, international markets, losing one’s local commercial base was economically as well as psychologically devastating.

But what also struck me was the response to this abjection – that of modern Kenyans *actively* maintaining connections with international customers and largely avoiding the most negative fallout of the demolitions and restructuring. Many of my former contacts had acquired email accounts accessible through internet cafés and actively used their knowledge of computers and mobile phones to improve their economic conditions and in some cases to travel abroad. While keeping them struggling as modern Kenyan entrepreneurs, email and mobile phones provided a vital means for traders to compete and circumvent some of the spatial restrictions and limitations confronting their enterprises. These are the themes to which I will turn in the upcoming chapters.

Conclusion

During research conducted between 2001 and 2007, I witnessed significant improvement in the beautification of downtown Mombasa and the island more generally. The traffic lights at the post office and *Saba Saba* intersections were fixed, many new

buildings were constructed, old ones re-painted, trees planted along some of the major thoroughfares, and roads “re-carpeted” with asphalt. But what must not be forgotten from episodes of “city cleaning,” “beautification,” or kiosk and slum demolitions is the human cost of such operations and the way they work, often for political ends, to sustain the status quo and segregate the city. City “cleaning” or “beautification” is never just about the city itself. As my research participants stressed to me, Mombasa’s kiosk demolitions were about removing poor traders from the city. In Kenya’s case, such actions have ignored the underlying causes of poverty and unemployment while allowing and nurturing the formation of privatized enclaves, the building of segregating walls, and the cordoning off of public space.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the history of Kenya’s tourism and curio industries, emphasizing the consolidation in the coastal hub of Mombasa. Particularly following independence in 1963, Mombasa and its downtown were attractive to curio traders because of the proximity to cheap raw material, the local tourist market, cooperative production networks, and transportation and shipping infrastructure. The consolidation of the curio cooperatives during the 1960s was a reflection of the larger government policy supporting cooperative development. Ethnic cooperatives were appealing and legible to both the state regulatory apparatus and customers looking to consume images of an “ethnic” or “tribal” Africa.

While the consolidation of the curio cooperatives during the 1960s was a reflection of the larger government policy of cooperative development, by the time of the revival of tourism in 2004, Mombasa’s tourism industry had been re-structured in a way that kept tourists in private networks operated and controlled by tour companies and

hotels. Cooperatives were important both economically and spatially, and as Mombasa's tourism industry and curio industries were re-organized, the cooperatives were also compromised. Tourism and the curio business had largely evacuated Mombasa and moved into the walled enclaves of beach resorts and internet cafés. ICTs would not overcome the walls created through such privatization. Rather, they would provide a private means for some individuals, mainly well-educated intermediary traders with access to capital and personal connections, to re-organize the curio industry's production and distribution networks, free of the cooperative societies that had been the foundation of the industry during the second half of the 20th century.

The relationship between curio vendors and the state has raised serious questions about the goals of the Kenyan government in promoting tourism and in the actual effects of tourism as a development strategy. Although tourism is economically important on the Kenyan coast, it has done little to develop the region as a whole (Sindiga 1999:223). Similarly, because many facilities catering to tourists are foreign-owned and large portions of the income made through tourism is repatriated to developed countries, tourism has, according to some analysts, only a "marginal positive effect" on Kenya (Alila and McCormick 1999:1). Sustainable tourism needs careful planning. Amid the Kenyan government's shifting policy between *laissez faire* and at times open hostility (such as unwarned kiosk demolitions), those with social connections and capital persevered at the cost of the poor and the legitimacy of the government. As I will discuss in chapter 4, this would have a profound effect on the way struggling curio traders viewed the Kenyan state during Kibaki's first term as president (2002-07) and its attempt at economic "cleanup" through increased oversight, taxation, and revenue collection.

Chapter 4
***Curio Vendors and the Kenyan State:
 Negotiating Formality in Mombasa***

“Mwai Kibaki, multi-party, *mali hatupati*” (*we get nothing – no property*)
 From the song “Stay Strong,” by Ukoo Flani Mau Mau¹

The hope and expectation that accompanied the 2002 victory of President Mwai Kibaki’s NARC coalition on a platform of constitutional reform, economic growth, and fighting corruption was short lived in Mombasa and many other parts of Kenya.² During my time spent conducting interviews along Mombasa’s roadsides from 2003 to 2007, I discussed national politics with many Kenyan art traders and “culture brokers,” most of whom had never completed secondary school. As the hope many had once had in Kibaki began to dwindle as his presidency became mired in corruption scandals, I was surprised to hear fond allusions to the time when Daniel arap Moi had been president. As Juma, a male Mijikenda trader who had only been to school through standard 7, told me, he respected Moi because he was not as well educated as other politicians and appreciated the importance of average Kenyans.³ He told me a story of when Moi ordered his driver

¹ I first heard this song in 2007, but it was most likely recorded in 2004 or 05. The group *Ukoo Flani Mau Mau* is well known for their political music, directed at the youth using hip-hop and *sheng*. The line quoted here is taken from a refrain, part of which goes as follows: “*After siku saba za hunger, za Sabbath, saa nataka aman(i), usiniangamie, uhai bahati kaa tangu aingie, Mwai Kibaki, multi-party, mali hatupati, ningekuwa na storage ya food, ningezistock angalia that is, just circumstance, ni vile wengi wanaangalia, wengi washaaga dunia, system ya wakoloni, uchungu ya homeless, machozi always ako lonely, wengi wako clubbing, wengine wana food starving, na wengi have a lot, and still wanting*” (author’s transcription). [Translation] “After seven days of hunger, the Sabbath, now I want peace, don’t attack me, life is just luck since he came in, Mwai Kibaki, multi-party, we get nothing (no property), if I had food storage, I would stock up look that is, just circumstance, it is how many see it, many have already passed away, system of the colonizers, bitterness of the homeless, tears always he is lonely, many are clubbing, many have food and starving, many have a lot and still wanting.”

² As mentioned in the previous chapter, NARC, also often written NaRC, stood for the National Rainbow Coalition.

³ Interview with Juma, Dec. 19, 2005. Juma was a male Duruma trader born in 1978 near Samburu to the West of Mombasa. After going to school through standard 7 he came to Mombasa in 1994 to find an older brother who had earlier migrated to the city in search of work. That same year he joined his brother

to stop his limousine in front of a roadside vendor so that he could buy a piece of *mahindi choma*, grilled maize. As the story went, Moi gave the roadside vendor a 1,000-shilling note for the five-shilling piece of food, telling him to keep the change. For Juma, relating the story to me in 2005 from where he sat next to his own roadside table, topped with small carvings and beadwork, the anecdote demonstrated how Moi had appreciated “the average Kenyan” and had promoted the “informal” or “*jua kali*” sector.

In this chapter, I focus on the main themes of informal economic development in contemporary Kenya: formality versus informality; legality versus authenticity; and taxation versus bribery.⁴ I am particularly interested in how the traders of Kenya’s handicrafts industry, which developed in the 1960s and 1970s with significant government support, viewed themselves, often proudly, as members of Kenya’s *jua kali* sector. This identification relates to a longer history of the relationship between small-scale Kenyan traders and the Kenyan state. For example, Juma’s story about Moi’s extra expenditure on grilled maize was not necessarily about Moi himself. It was really about Mwai Kibaki, the president in 2005 when he told me the story. Juma was reminiscing of the days before Kibaki’s rise to power. The story was his way of reflecting on how much harder life had become along Mombasa’s roadsides, not necessarily on how benevolent Moi had actually been. Such perspectives developed out of traders’ localized perceptions of national political change and had a powerful impact on the way that small-scale traders viewed the government and were willing to either work with or circumvent state regulations. These views would also be powerful in uniting Mombasa against Kibaki’s re-election in December 2007, when the opposition Orange Democratic Movement

working selling curios outside of Fort Jesus, where both of them would be employed until the demolition of the kiosks in January 2002.

⁴ Special thanks to David Hughes for helping clarify these main themes.

(ODM) would sweep all four of Mombasa's parliamentary and presidential elections (see ch. 1).⁵

In 2002, Kibaki and NARC had run against Uhuru Kenyatta, Moi's chosen successor, on a platform of implementing immediate economic reform, increasing revenue through tax collection, and strengthening anti-corruption legislation.⁶ Despite the diverse positions shared among NARC politicians, they all seemed to agree on the primacy of economic growth to fight poverty.⁷ I show in this chapter that while the curio traders I interviewed saw rising taxes and license fees from the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) and the Mombasa Municipal Council as hostile given their struggles following the kiosk demolitions, they were in favor of official recognition and formalization when it meant being granted secure access to commercial space. I offer three examples (the Fort Jesus tour guides, the North Coast beach vendors, and the licensing of exporters) to demonstrate the effects of government regulation of the coastal tourism and curio industries. I argue in this chapter that because the Kenyan government has played a crucial role in structuring the economic culture of Mombasa's roadsides, it also has the key role in stabilizing and nurturing its growth and sustainability.

My primary goal in this chapter is to clarify how Mombasa's curio traders related to the Kenyan state in daily interactions. Before Mombasa's 2001-02 kiosk demolitions, roadside traders in Mombasa were licensed primarily because they generated revenue for

⁵ See Weis (2008) for an analysis and discussion of the results from the 2007 election.

⁶ See Barkan (2004) for an overview of the 2002 general election. Kagwanja (2005) has focused specifically on politicization of the youth voting bloc preceding the 2002 election. Githinji and Holmquist (2008) and Mueller (2008) also explain the politics of the 2002 election and how the fallout eventually led to the political alliances of the December 2007 election, which was too close for international observers to call and which eventually led to a constitutional amendment that allowed for the sharing of power between President Mwai Kibaki of the coalition Party of National Unity (PNU) and Prime Minister Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

⁷ See "Mwai's moment," in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 43, no. 24, pp. 1-3, Dec. 6, 2002.

the municipal council and council employees. Allowing the kiosks to exist in this temporary and insecure situation made their removal altogether quite easy when a new wave of formalization of the urban informal economy became politically expedient and popular among the urban elite and civil society. As Chabal and Daloz (1999) have argued, uncertainty, disorder, and insecurity in African state systems are not a result of an irrational political culture or system, but rather the products of the very rational and often premeditated political instrumentalization of disorder.⁸ I focus on the views and economic histories of small-scale traders themselves. As in previous chapters, I am interested in how curio vendors negotiated the economic instability and haphazard regulation of the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly with regards to Mombasa's tourism industry.

Kenya's "Informal" or Jua Kali Sector

When discussing small-scale traders' relationship to the state, it is common to discuss the boundary between ostensibly separate "formal" and "informal" sectors of the economy. This is particularly true in cases of the so-called "developing" world, where many countries have had less time or resources to create and maintain thriving, regulated, "formal" economies. The first academic and development attention to the "informal" economy came from the cases of Ghana and Kenya (Hart 1973; ILO 1972), sub-Saharan African countries whose cities were developing much more quickly than either the formal economic sector or the (colonial or independent) government's ability to develop adequate infrastructure.

⁸ Chabal and Daloz (1999:xviii) define the "political instrumentalization of disorder" as "processes by which political actors in Africa seek to maximize their returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty, and sometimes even chaos, which characterizes most African polities" (Chabal and Daloz 1999:xviii).

Kenya was, in fact, where the concept of the informal economy was originally developed in 1972 as part of an International Labor Organization (ILO) World Employment Programme mission (King 1996:xiv; ILO 1972). The ILO mission that visited Kenya in 1972, while there to investigate unemployment, was working under the assumption that Kenya's "unemployed" were, in fact, "the working poor," pushed into desperate situations due primarily to lack of rural land (Leys 1975:258-59). The ILO Kenya mission was largely inspired by an anthropologist who had earlier coined the term from research conducted on unemployment in Ghana. Similar to the ILO Kenya mission, Keith Hart's goal had been to explain how the urban poor in Accra survived despite widespread unemployment. Hart (1973) argued that the majority of the population participated in an "informal economy," which was not recognized, regulated, or taxed by the state. In Hart's (1973) original model, the informal economy was one half of a dual economy of the formal and informal working symbiotically. Accordingly, the informal economy was an essential component of any national economy since it had to underwrite much of what the formal, state-sponsored economy attempted.⁹

But as the example of Kenya's handicraft industry demonstrates, the distinction between the so-called "formal" and "informal" sectors is arbitrary and problematic. I am particularly interested in how, despite decades of government support for the formalization of the curio industry, a majority of curio traders who participated in my research viewed themselves as "*jua kali*" or "informal," even though they paid taxes, had government licenses, and worked from stalls rather than under the fierce sun. As early as the 1950s and 1960s, the Kenyan government was working through the Ministry of Co-operative Development and Social Services and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry

⁹ It is worth noting that Hart would revisit the thinking behind his original model. See Hart (1992).

to organize handicrafts producers and other artisans into cooperative organizations that were regulated and legible to the state.

Even before the 1972 ILO mission and the naming of the “informal sector,” previous ILO studies in Kenya had focused very specifically on Kenya’s handicraft producers and had argued that the government had an important role to play in formalizing these traders to ensure that Kenyan producers might see a larger percentage of the industry’s overall profits. The most notable example is the 1971 document from United Nations (ILO) Senior Advisor Thomas H. Tudor titled “Recommendations on Policy and Organization for Handicrafts and Cottage Industries,” which was directed to the Ministry of Co-operative Development and Social Services.¹⁰ In this document, Tudor lamented that few suggestions from several earlier studies by the ILO during the 1960s had been implemented and called for clarity and centralization in the operations of the Ministry of Co-operative Development and Social Services.¹¹

Through the 1970s, the ministry paid special attention to Kenya’s handicrafts industry. In particular, government agencies played a key role in organizing the various producer organizations into cooperative societies. In the late 1970s the Kenya Export Trade Authority (KETA) even organized a special Handicrafts Unit, which would eventually help develop the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU), which was an attempt if not to formalize then at least to provide some structure and protection for

¹⁰ See Thomas H. Tudor, United Nations (ILO) Senior Advisor, “Recommendations on Policy and Organization for Handicrafts and Cottage Industries,” to the Honourable Masinde Muliro, Minister of Co-operative Development and Social Services, dated Dec. 15, 1971, document 1 in file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

¹¹ On page 3 of the document “Recommendations on Policy and Organization for Handicrafts and Cottage Industries,” Tudor wrote, “as early as 1963 the International Labour Office detailed an advisor at the request of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, to undertake a survey and prepare recommendations [on handicraft development].” The result of that 1963 study was the release of an ILO report, “East African Regional Survey of Handicrafts and Small-Scale Industries, Part III, Kenya,” Geneva, 1965.

artisans.¹² These government bodies consistently recommended an increase in the Kenyan government's financial support of the handicrafts industry. For example, the Ministry of Co-operative Development's 1978 paper, "Handicraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," called for extensive technical assistance for cooperatives, the formation and support of a national crafts union, and a large government-assisted loan for marketing and to fund the production of new designs.¹³

Both the Handicrafts Unit and the KCCU were funded by the Nordic Development Funds money, which came packaged with Nordic development advisors from northern European countries.¹⁴ The showroom at Mombasa's Akamba Handicraft cooperative, for example, was built with special funds from the Nordic Project. However, the Nordic Project was short-lived, and the KCCU had a very difficult time making a profit to ensure its sustainability. As had been the case as early as the 1950s, when Machakos District officers and commissioners had worked with the Ministry of Co-operative Development and Social Services to organize the Wamunyu carvers into a cooperative society (see ch. 3), problems of internal competition and individualism led to the demise of the KCCU.

¹² The document "Handicraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January, 1978. This document can be found in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

¹³ See "Handicraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January, 1978, in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

¹⁴ The handicraft unit of the Ministry of Co-operatives became operational in July 1980, and the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union was formed and registered under the Co-operative Societies Act Cap 490 in June 1981. For more information, see the file "Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

External advisers throughout these decades agreed that the only way to ensure that profits found their way to producers was through direct government assistance. However, by the late 1980s, organized government support for the industry had dwindled. As the concept of the “informal economy” gained a new strategic importance to the Kenyan government in the 1980s (King 1996), government aid was replaced with the official recognition that the industry operated “informally” and was beyond the responsibilities of the state. The global expansion of informal economies was the result of the spread of new capitalist modes of production and service provision, as governments reduced spending on economic reform and shifted away from the development-oriented, welfare state model of the 1960s.

As Leys had recognized in the 1970s:

What stands out about the so-called ‘informal sector’ is that most of what it covers is primarily *a system of very intense exploitation of labour*, with very low wages and often very long hours, underpinned by the constant pressure for work from the ‘reserve army’ of job-seekers. ... The ‘informal sector’ was in fact a euphemism for the particularly intense forms of exploitation to which the articulation of the capitalist and ‘peasant’ modes of production gave rise (1975:266-67).

Keith Hart (1992:215-16) himself later noted that his coining of the term “informal economy” was a reflection of the dominant Cold War ideology of the early 1970s. For many policy-makers of the 1970s and 1980s who latched onto the idea, the informal economy represented the conceptual negation of Keynesian macroeconomics, which called for economic management by a strong welfare state (Hart 1992:217). As Hart (1992:216) put it, his initial terming was the product of a conceived “frozen opposition between the state and the market,” which appealed to policy makers for its simplicity but functioned to obscure the struggle between citizens and bureaucracy by assuming the dominance of the latter. To local government, labeling a massive sector of the economy

as simply “informal” or “*jua kali*” naturalized the problematic “mushrooming” of small-scale businesses without applying the same pressure to formalize and regulate that had existed, for example, through the early 1970s. Not only did the Ministry of Co-operative Development and Social Services and the KCCU receive less funding and advisory assistance (following the reduction of funds from the Nordic Program for example), but as is clear from reports made by local government officers from the 1960s through the 1980s, the quality of officials and their reports also declined. The result was the “mushrooming” of small-scale enterprises that lacked significant government support and internal co-ordination – precisely what advisors of the 1950s through the early 1970s stressed was needed for economic sustainability.

With the rapid rise in Kenya’s population and increased migration of young Kenyans to urban centers through the 1970s and 1980s, the “informal economy” became, as problematic as it was, a crucial component of the national economy. Dorothy McCormick (1987) was one of the first to argue that the notion of an “informal” sector has several definitional problems in the case of urban Kenya. She suggested a continuum model, preferring to view businesses as varying in the extent of their formality, since in many indigenous industries like handicrafts production, the line between formality and informality was rarely clear. This is true of many small-scale Kenyan enterprises existing around the tourism industry, since these particular businesses were under the scrutiny and regulatory heavy-hand of the Kenyan government since well before independence.

With economic structural adjustment, the spread of neoliberal economic policies to former colonies, global market integration, and the onset of the ICT era, a distinction between the so-called “formal” and “informal” sectors has become even more confused

and problematic. Under Kibaki's first term in office, the Kenyan government recognized its "informal sector" as that which "covers all small-scale activities that are not registered with the registrar of companies and generally use low level or no technology" (Kenya 2005b:78). But as I will explain in this chapter, those trades and enterprises that are often lumped into the "informal economy" are *not* necessarily marked by a lack of interaction with the government or a lack of technology.

I will demonstrate that when government agencies intervene on behalf of traders or for rational economic management, such as the vetting of beach vendors or mandating that tour guides wear uniforms and carry licenses, regulation and economic re-structuring can be quite successful, greatly appreciated by traders, and have the potential to increase the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of small-scale entrepreneurs and businesspeople. In this sense, formality, rationality, and legality can lead to the acceptance of government taxation. However, as the Kenyan case demonstrates, when informal economic systems are accepted as the norm, traders often lack legality and economic space is often commodified privately rather than allocated by the state through municipal markets. The result in such a case is an acceptance of a system of bribery that emerges in relation to the dwindling legitimacy of the state in the eyes of small-scale businesspeople.

President Kibaki the Economist

At least partially because of his experience as a former Minister of Finance and trained economist, Mwai Kibaki's presidency was accompanied by unprecedented expectations of economic growth and renewed government emphasis on revenue collection and job creation. But it soon became apparent that most of the new jobs the government intended to create would, quite paradoxically, come from what had long been

known as the “informal sector” and which had more recently come to also be called the Micro and Small Enterprise (or MSE) Sector. According to Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005, the majority of the 500,000 new jobs that the president had promised to create annually during election campaigns would come from the MSE Sector (Kenya 2005b:iii).¹⁵ While the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005 defined MSEs as employing 1-50 workers (Kenya 2005b:5), the authors admitted that over seventy percent of MSEs employed only one self-employed individual (Kenya 2005b:6).

Well before the 2002 election there had been serious doubt about whether Kenya’s small-scale traders would ever be able to amass enough capital to be considered an autonomous part of the national economy (McCormick 1987). The 2005 sessional paper on the development of the MSE sector did not focus on limiting risk, securing land and market tenure, nor giving loans or grants for firm growth, security, and development – all factors researchers had previously agreed needed to be addressed before MSEs would be able to grow effectively (see Ferrand 1996; King 1996; Macharia 1993; McCormick 1993). Rather, the authors of the 2005 sessional paper concluded very clearly that “the Government will intervene in the market only when there is a market failure” (2005b:39), making the continuation of a *laissez faire* policy regarding Kenya’s MSEs an explicitly stated goal. The government’s job was to tax.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, through 2005 and 2006, as President Mwai Kibaki’s government increased pressure to tax Kenya’s so-called “informal

¹⁵ The Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005 on *Development of Micro and Small Enterprises for Wealth and Employment Creation for Poverty Reduction* (Kenya 2005b) reviewed policies and strategies outlined in the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 1992 on *Small Enterprises and Jua Kali Development in Kenya* (Kenya 1992). The Honorable Newton W. Kulundu, M.P. and Minister for Labour and Human Resource Development who wrote the foreword to the 2005 sessional paper stated directly, “critical to the success of the sector is its integration into the national economic grid” (Kenya 2005b:iv).

economy” or *jua kali* sector, I heard several roadside curio traders make nostalgic references to President Moi for what some felt had been a greater appreciation for small-scale entrepreneurs during the former president’s time in office.¹⁶ Or had it been, rather, the fact that it was during Moi’s time as president (1978-2002) that informality had been allowed to develop with only periodic government interference?

In the early years after his election in 1978, Moi had a reputation as a populist man of the people.¹⁷ Several curio vendors who lacked significant formal education loved President Moi because, as Juma put it in 2006, “Moi understood the problems of the little guy. This NARC government,” he continued, “they do not understand Kenyans.”¹⁸ He pointed to the fact that during Moi’s presidency, the kiosks had been allowed to flourish while taxes and license fees were less than during Kibaki’s first years in office. It had also been easier to simply bribe municipal officials to gain access to urban commercial space. In 2003, several research participants like Juma told me they resented the loss of the old system, in which a “small something,” “*kitu kidogo*,” or *bribe*, could secure a trader a place to sell in the city. But despite the hopes of Kibaki’s anti-corruption platform, the system along Mombasa’s roadsides had by 2005 reverted back to how it had been before Kibaki’s election.

¹⁶ The politicians’ styles were indeed quite different. Unlike Moi, who micromanaged all aspects of the government, Kibaki’s approach was to appoint competent ministers and delegate authority to them (Barkan 2004:92). But with a style described as ‘laid back’ and lacking clear guidelines, most prominent members of Kibaki’s government quickly pursued their own agendas, resulting in conflict and confusion within the coalition (Barkan 2004:92).

¹⁷ When Moi became president in 1978, he had to negotiate a difficult political playing field. He was, however, successful very early at addressing citizens around the country and acquiring a populist image for appealing directly to Kenyans (Haugerud 1995:81). Early in Moi’s career, diverse political factions within Kenya joined his side, as his regime solidified and he vowed to end political factionalism and corruption (Miller and Yeager 1994:99-100).

¹⁸ Interview with Juma, Feb. 4, 2006. He was born in 1978 near Samburu to the West of Mombasa. After going to school through standard 7 he came to Mombasa in 1994 to find an older brother who had earlier migrated to the city in search of work. The same year he joined his brother working selling curios outside of Fort Jesus, where both of them would be employed until the demolition of the kiosks in January 2002.

While traders told me in 2001 that they usually could pay “*kitu kidogo*” to get out of having a license, many traders were arrested with time. Some had stories about “that one time” when they were arrested for selling without a license, and most traders I interviewed accepted the system of small bribes, long in place along Kenya’s roadsides, as natural and not something that the government should necessarily work to fix.¹⁹ This is not to say that traders, or even the average Kenyan citizen, saw a system of bribery as ideal or had much respect for Kenyan policemen or government employees who might accept a bribe. However, underpaid officials who could be bribed played an important role in traders’ daily routines. The ability to bribe officials decreased confrontation and enabled the roadside economy to function, albeit on the edge of the law. As Andrew told me in 2005, because his single business permit to sell curios had risen to over 3,500 shillings (\$55) per year, it made more sense for him to go a year on 400 – 600 shillings (\$8-10) of bribes rather than purchase the actual license, which he could not afford anyway.²⁰

Although all Mombasa businesses were licensed by the year, it was not generally until late May and June that municipal *askaris*, a particular type of local police, began circling on foot and asking to see licenses for the various shops, often targeting individual traders who had a history of delinquency. For curio vendors, it was convenient to have the first half of the year to accumulate the money necessary for licenses (1,000-4,000 shillings or \$15-60), although by the time the *askaris* came looking, it was often the

¹⁹ This is not a fact taken from any single interview. Rather, being arrested for small crimes was a part of life for working Kenyans in Mombasa. For the curio vendors, the most common offense they were charged with was vending from an unlicensed kiosk or roadside table.

²⁰ Interview with Andrew, Oct. 18, 2005. Andrew was a male Kamba vendor born in 1973 in Kitui. After completing primary school he came to Mombasa in 1991 to work vending curios for his older brother along Moi Avenue. His brother had come to the city several years earlier and had become a member of the Kamba cooperative in Changamwe.

middle of the low tourism season, when most shop keepers in Old Town were in debt, behind on rent, and could still not afford the required licenses. It was normal to bribe the “*munispaa*,” as the municipal *askaris* were frequently called, with small amounts to get an “extension” of the license deadline. But even this system was confused since there were different sets of *askaris* for checking the licenses of the formal shops and for regulating roadside hawkers, or those who sold from tables that were set up daily. I was told that these *askaris* were legally supposed to remove traders from the roadsides for operating without formal structures and trade licenses, but this would inevitably have led to confrontation unwanted by all parties.

The result was that the *askaris* who regulated the roadside traders collected an informal or unofficial “tax,” which went to the *askaris* themselves, but allowed vendors to remain on the roadsides. They often had different ways of dealing with this “tax.” Sometimes traders would pay 20 shillings (\$0.30) per day and sometimes even received receipts. But as Juma made clear, the money went directly “*mfukoni*,” *into the pockets* of the *askari*. Yet Juma, a born-again Christian himself, insisted that the *askaris* were not bad or corrupt people and were just doing their jobs. He said they often sat and chatted a bit before taking whatever the traders could pull out of their pockets and moving on. He

appreciated that it was, first and foremost, non-confrontational.²¹ The practice was naturalized with the oft-heard phrase, “everyone has to eat.”²²

But the system did not always work out smoothly, particularly when the power of numbers upon which the traders relied was not present. One day, Juma’s brother Hassan told me he arrived to set up his roadside table outside of Fort Jesus as he usually did, around 8 o’clock in the morning and well before most tour groups had arrived at the fort. While arriving early gave Hassan a competitive edge, on this particular morning the municipal *askaris* reached his location before any of his fellow traders. He did not have even 50 shillings (\$.75) for a bribe and no one from whom he could borrow the money.

To his chagrin, he was handcuffed and walked the short distance up Nkrumah Road to the police station where he was held until the next morning when he went to court, after which Juma and another of his brothers came and paid the 1,500 shilling (\$22) fine with borrowed money. The judge also ordered him never to sell curios again,

²¹ There could be an ethnic component to the relationship between any individual trader and the municipal *askaris*. The *askaris* themselves, however, were just as frequently Giriama from the coast as Kikuyu from Nairobi, and the traders themselves were also of mixed ethnic background. There was a worthwhile appeal to be made for favouritism by traders confronted with *askaris* of similar ethnic background, although such appeals were not always successful. In general on the coast, private security companies who guarded office buildings and private apartment buildings hired almost exclusively migrants from Western Kenya, and most of these private *askaris* were Kisii or Luhya, since they were assumed to have few connections on the coast, which could compromise their integrity as a security guard. This was not, however, always the case with the municipal *askaris*.

²² For a complex look at politics and corruption in Africa, see Jean-François Bayart’s (1993) *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. The association between corruption and “eating” has long existed in many parts of Africa. I did, indeed, hear the term “eating” used to describe corruption in regular conversation with Kenyans unrelated to my research as well as with my research participants discussing police, fees, and bribes. In Swahili, the verb to eat is *kula*, which was used even more powerfully in Swahili to refer to corruption or the squandering of money. It was common when discussing the disappearance of money or assets to say that *pesa zimeliwa*, “the money has been eaten,” in stating that someone has fraudulently used the money or asset to his or her advantage, or has simply been wasteful. It was also common to hear the phrase used when a Kenyan was discussing the giving of small loans to friends or relatives. One female friend of mine who lived in Mtwapa to the north of Mombasa would frequently complain to me that every time she gave her family members money, “*wanazikula tu*,” or “they just eat them” (referring to the money). It was also common among my Kenyan friends to joke about large or overweight Kenyan men by saying “*amekula*,” literally “he has eaten,” but usually with the additional connotation that some corruption, fraud, and the *eating of money* was at the root of affording so much *literal* eating.

Hassan told me, laughing from where he sat in the shade next to his roadside table. But his laughter did not suggest that he had enjoyed the experience. Rather, it reflected his view of how illegitimate and ineffective the local government's attempts at regulation actually were. Despite the joking and laughter, the presence of the "*munispaa*" and the importance of licenses were very real.

For many successful traders, the steady increase in license fees was the biggest restraint to enterprise growth. Kiosk licenses had become much more expensive just prior to their demolitions. In 1999, licenses for kiosks had been issued for 1,000 shillings (\$15) per year.²³ But in 2000 and 2001 the licenses were issued at 3,400 shillings (\$50), an increase of 240 percent just prior to their unwarned demolition. By 2005 the curio license reached 3,900 shillings (\$60) per year according to some receipts I saw. With additional fees and licenses, such as the 500 shilling license to sell shells, it often cost as much as 5,000 shillings (\$75) per year in licenses to legally operate a small business in Mombasa. It was a regularly held opinion that politicians would continue to raise the license fee until only the very rich were left to run their businesses.

Steadily increasing license fees only compounded the financial constraints to remaining active in Mombasa's curio business. By 2006, the Single Business Permit required by all formal Mombasa businesses had risen to 4,250 (\$65) shillings.²⁴ Such

²³ This information comes from viewing the licenses themselves during research 2001-07. While the value of the shilling fluctuated during this time period, these fluctuations were only very minor. For example, through early 2001 I could buy just fewer than 80 shillings for one dollar. Through 2003 and 2004 the shilling declined slightly in 2004 before gaining on the dollar considerably from 2005-08. Through my stay in Kenya in 2005-06, one dollar could buy between 70 and 75 shillings. In 2007 the value of the dollar had declined to the point I could only buy 65 shillings. In May 2008 when sending money to Kenya via Western Union I received only 59 shillings to the dollar, a drop of 20 shillings since mid-2004 that had to do with the combined effect of a strong shilling/euro economy in Kenya and Europe and a weak dollar/American economy during that time period.

²⁴ In addition to the business permit, there were other taxes and fees for hanging goods outside of a shop or for employing someone to work in the street attracting customers into the shop. In one case, the 4,250

important and expensive licenses were usually kept locked in a safe, while the official receipt was framed and hung on the wall in case the *munispaa* passed by. In 2005 and 2006, as the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) pursued an additional policy to increase revenue by requiring all businesses to use an electronic tax register that calculated the 16 percent value added sales tax (VAT), maintaining a business became even harder for small-scale businesses. Shop-owners across the board resented having to turn over 16 percent of their sales to the government, since the tax cut directly into their slim profit margins.

It was usually not difficult to get curio vendors to talk about the effects of these taxes and fees on their businesses. As Jamal, a male, Muslim shop owner in his 20s working outside of Fort Jesus put it: “These are locally-produced products and should not be taxed. They are not imports.”²⁵ Jamal was relatively well educated, having completed secondary school, and considered himself as having a good understanding of business regulations. This only furthered his frustration with the job the KRA was doing under Kibaki. From his perspective, it was “illegal” for the KRA to try to tax him. In Jamal’s opinion, the government was determined to steal from his own meagre profits. Within a context where the government put little emphasis on legalization and instead privatized and commodified urban economic space, it was not surprising that many traders resented taxation more than bribery.

The same day I recorded Jamal’s rant against Kibaki and the KRA, another Old Town shop owner relayed similar opinions to me. The two shop owners appeared at first

shillings (\$65) for the Single Business Permit became 7,480 shillings (\$110) with the additional fees (these licenses viewed during author’s interview, Aug. 12, 2006).

²⁵ Interview with Jamal, Oct. 24, 2005. Jamal was a Muslim “Swahili” shop owner in his mid-20s. Born and raised in Mombasa’s Old Town, he had inherited his shop from a relative after having completed his secondary school education.

only similar in their economic situation and their negative view of Kibaki's government. Unlike Jamal, this individual was in his late 40s, ethnically Kamba, and had never completed primary school. But he could not hide his disappointment in Kibaki's government. As he put it:

The government is not supposed to tax businesses that make less than one million shillings [\$14.2k] profit per year like mine. Now they want us to purchase these tax registers for seventy five thousand shillings [\$1,100]. Then in the papers today I saw that the ministers are receiving five million shillings [\$70,000] each to purchase a car. What an embarrassment our leaders are in this country.²⁶

He pulled out his receipt book, which had only one receipt in it. There were three items purchased, one for 200, one for 600, and one for 1,500 shillings. That's about 35 dollars worth of business, he said. But that was all he had made in several days. He had made 35 dollars, and now the government wanted five of it. "How can I pay an additional tax on that? It is outrageous," he told me, echoing the opinions of many of Mombasa's shop owners.

While traders' biggest fear during my research of 2001 had been the upcoming 2002 election and the potential for violence, by 2006 traders' concerns had turned to the increased cost of overhead and the issue of electronic tax registers. "They want us to buy these tax registers for 80,000 or 100,000 shillings," said Andrew from his shop in Old Town in 2006. "The stuff that we have in this store might be worth 100,000 shillings, but that does not mean we have that money free to buy a tax register."²⁷ Andrew, who had originally been employed selling curios from a kiosk outside of Fort Jesus, was

²⁶ Interview, Oct. 24, 2005, with a male Kamba shop owner in his late 40s. While having never completed primary school, this trader had risen through the ranks of several Mombasa-based curio associations after getting his start hawking curios along Moi Avenue in the 1970s. At the time of interview he sold curios from a shop he rented along Old Town's Ndia Kuu Road while also selling periodically at Mombasa's port to ships that docked there.

²⁷ Interview with Andrew, Aug. 12, 2006.

chronically lacking the capital needed to succeed in the curio business. In his early 30s, he had a wife and two children who lived on a farm near Kitui. It was difficult to make enough money to send home, particularly when the government was trying hard to increase its revenue collection out of his pockets. Paying taxes required costly equipment. Paying bribes did not.

As the issue of the electronic tax registers heated up through 2006, traders continued to refuse to purchase the registers, and the deadline for compliance was pushed back repeatedly.²⁸ Although the Ministry of Finance employed a top public relations company to educate shopkeepers on the merits of the policy, this met with little success, even among traders who had originally voted for Kibaki and NARC.²⁹ Despite empty claims by the KRA only weeks before the January 31, 2006 deadline that “most traders” had complied,³⁰ the deadline was eventually extended again. While the KRA gave a final extension to December 31, 2006, with only two weeks left to comply it was reported in the national newspapers that 85 percent of traders had still not purchased a register.³¹ Through 2007, the KRA continued its crackdown on traders who had not installed the registers, arresting and charging violators with “defrauding the Government.”³² Many of my research participants simply continued to operate without the ETR, bribing officials for an additional “extension” when necessary. Compliance from traders would only come when they felt a sense of trust in the government. Despite the early promise NARC

²⁸ See, for example, Kazungu, Nyabonyi. “State and business community at loggerheads over new requirement for tax collection,” in *Daily Nation*, April 2, 2006, p. 15, for coverage and a discussion of a demonstration that took place in late March of 2006 in Nairobi when traders closed their shops and held a sit-in at the KRA headquarters Times Tower to protest the requirements that they install the electronic tax registers.

²⁹ Nation Reporter. “Deadline on tax registers still Jan. 31,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 10, 2006, p. 21.

³⁰ Nation Reporter. “Deadline on tax registers still Jan. 31,” in *Daily Nation*, Jan. 10, 2006, p. 21.

³¹ Wahome, Mwaniki. “Taxman faces showdown with traders over VAT,” in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 17, 2006.

³² Nation Correspondent, “KRA nets traders over cash register,” *Daily Nation*, April 6, 2007.

and Kibaki had given to many Kenyans, after several years in office it was understandable why roadside traders remembered Moi and KANU so fondly.

While Kibaki received some credit for helping stimulate the economy during his first term in office (2003-07), economic growth alone did not mean the economy was moving in the right direction. For example, while there was a 24.5 percent increase in overall volume of trade in 2004, the Kenyan national trade deficit widened to nearly 150 billion shillings as a result of a faster growth in imports compared to exports (Kenya 2005a:116). While GDP grew steadily between 2004 and 2007, only some sectors of the economy actually experienced growth. When GDP grew by 5.8 percent during the 2005-06 fiscal year,³³ the newspapers had a field day reporting that the wealthiest ten percent of the population continued to control nearly half of the country's wealth (42%), as the divide between the rich and poor increased, with the poorest ten percent (over 3 million people) controlling less than one percent of the national wealth.³⁴ As one editorial pointed out, a 5.8 percent growth rate meant nothing when the inflation rate during the same period was 10.3 percent.³⁵ For many Kenyans, the real slap to the face came with the announcement of a 2006 hike in Kibaki's own salary to \$528,000 per year, making him one of the best paid presidents in the world.³⁶ As one male Kamba shop owner told me from the doorway of his curio business in Mombasa's Old Town: "You know, they

³³ Wahome, Muna and Samuel Siringi. "Kenya's economy booms as growth sets 10-year record," in *Daily Nation*, May 26, 2006, pp. 1, 4.

³⁴ See Munene, Mugumo. "The 10 per cent who control Kenya's riches," in *Daily Nation*, May 23, 2006, p. 1 and "Policy makers must close poor-rich gap," in *The Standard* May 24, 2006, p. 12. Both of these articles were citing a study by Action Aid Kenya that made a big splash in May 2006 when released to the public, stressing the wealth inequalities in the country at a time when the economy was supposedly "booming." The latter article called the "much-hyped economic growth" simply "ridiculous."

³⁵ See "Growth of the economy is laudable, but..." in *The Standard*, May 26, 2006, p. 12.

³⁶ See "Knocking out the lion's teeth," in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 47, no. 25, pp. 1-2, Dec. 15, 2006.

say this is economic growth, but what is that? If Kenyans are still starving, that means nothing.”³⁷

Despite Kibaki’s statement in his early-2003 inaugural speech that “corruption would no longer be a way of life in Kenya,” *Africa Confidential* and other investigative sources reported that “within a year, graft was back up to the worst level of Daniel arap Moi’s regime.”³⁸ By 2006, many Kenyans were convinced that Kibaki’s government was at least as corrupt as that of his predecessor.³⁹ In February of 2006, *Africa Confidential* concluded: “President Mwai Kibaki has been fatally wounded by his government’s corruption scandals.”⁴⁰ The rumors of corruption in Kibaki’s government would seriously hamper the legitimacy of the development initiatives put in place under his administration.

Despite attempts by government-aided bodies such as the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) and Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) to help small-scale traders through special development initiatives, very few traders I interviewed ever participated in these programs. For example, when I relayed to some of my participants that the government’s TTF reportedly dispersed 225 million shillings (\$32.1 million) to tourism-related small-scale enterprises in 2005, the typical response was that the money must have “been eaten” or found its way into someone else’s pockets. Agreeing with journalists covering

³⁷ Author’s interview, Nov. 8, 2005. This vendor was born in 1958 near Makindu. He came to Mombasa in the late 1970s to look for money to send home to his newly wedded wife. Having originally had no intentions of working in curios but lacking formal employment and having only been to school through standard 7, he quickly found it the most profitable option. He owned a kiosk along Moi Avenue before its removal in December 2001. After this loss he, along with many other such traders, began renting a shop along Ndia Kuu Road in Mombasa’s Old Town.

³⁸ See “Mwai’s muddle,” in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 46, no. 25, p. 7, Dec. 16, 2005.

³⁹ See “The anti-corruption collapse,” in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 47, no. 21, pp. 1-3, Oct. 20, 2006.

⁴⁰ See “The hawks are circling,” in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 1-2, Feb. 17, 2006.

the same story,⁴¹ it was nearly impossible to find a trader who had benefited from such grants and loans.

The question among Kenyans remained: if the tourism industry was growing, who was profiting? Some newspaper articles covering the issue began referring to “cartels” that had come to control the tourism industry by locking out small-scale traders.⁴² Paying off drivers and tour guides by ensuring them 10 to 20 percent commission had become so standard throughout Kenya that most traders who could not afford this investment or did not have personal connections with tour operators were denied business, whether on the beaches, in Old Town, in Mombasa, or in Nairobi. Undeniably, the interest of the government and government agencies such as the KTB was not in aiding small-scale traders but large-scale and often international operators and investors. It was not hands-off market liberalism but highly selective corporate welfare with a dangerously naive assumption that some of that money would trickle down to Kenyans. The KTB and the government stressed international marketing and the promotion of all-inclusive packages to attract large numbers of tourists to the country. As a result, tax revenue from tourist entries increased, airlines did more business, East African Breweries’ business boomed (with an estimated 16% of sales going to tourists), and several large hotel and tour operator chains reported record profits.⁴³ But at the same time, many long-term, small-scale tourism vendors were pushed out.

⁴¹ Wandera, Noel. “Operators miss tourism gravy train,” in *The Financial Standard* Jan. 10, 2006 p. 3. The TTF was formed in 2002 with the help of 22 million euros from the European Union. The major goal of the TTF was to fund the KTB’s international marketing efforts and new tourism projects. With its “key objective” being to help eradicate poverty through tourism, the TTF openly gives preference to “projects that maintain and preserve the environment, traditional culture and work closely with local communities...” See “Millions from fund for public beach hawkers,” in *Coast Week*, Sept. 1-7, 2006.

⁴² Wandera, Noel. “Operators miss tourism gravy train,” in *The Financial Standard* Jan. 10, 2006 p. 3.

⁴³ Wahome, Muna. “KTB backs fully paid tours,” in *Daily Nation*, Nov. 18, 2005, p. 26.

The continued emphasis from the government planners was on large-scale projects aimed at international tourists and the Kenyan elite. This was particularly true at the coast, where the government's Vision 2030 called for the building and development of at least two "high class resort cities."⁴⁴ Kibaki's government continued to concentrate on foreign interests, as Tourism and Wildlife Minister Morris Dzero announced in March 2007 that new international investors in tourism would be given tax holidays.⁴⁵ Official policy had reached the point where international investors were allowed to operate tax-free while small-scale Kenyan traders were being taxed out of the business. Bribes became progressive alternatives to regressive taxation and licensing regimes.⁴⁶

The Rise and Fall of the "Free Mark"

After the demolition of Mombasa's kiosks in early 2002, the municipal council's suggestion to traders who could not raise enough capital to rent a formal shop was to work cooperatively with others, dividing the rent and market space. This was very common with clothing, electronics, and handicrafts. The resulting shops, which rarely functioned as cooperatives, were divided among several traders and called "free marks." Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina mentioned the free mark craze and its origins in Nairobi's Uhuru (Freedom) Park, where a giant market called "Freemark" was established around the year 2000, selling all types of goods from small, partitioned stalls.⁴⁷ According to Juma, who was the former secretary of the Fort Jesus Curio Group, the new free mark phenomenon was initially viewed as the primary solution for many

⁴⁴ This was according to Dr. Ongong'a Achieng, the KTB's managing director, who was speaking at Fort Jesus during celebrations to mark the opening of a KTB office at Moi International Airport in early December of 2007. See Ndurya, Mazera. "Give Coast new status, urges KTB," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 10, 2007.

⁴⁵ Barasa, Lucas. "Tourism to get boost," in *Daily Nation*. March 15, 2007.

⁴⁶ Thanks to David Hughes for helping me clarify this point.

⁴⁷ See Wainaina, Binyavanga. "Generation Kenya," in *Vanity Fair*, July 2007, pp. 84-94.

poor traders who had lost their kiosks.⁴⁸ To me, it appeared a rather half-hearted attempt by government planners to console traders who had lost their kiosks by telling them that with the “free mark” system they would, indeed, have more “freedom.” I could not find anyone in Mombasa who had ever heard of a free mark before the demolitions. In Juma’s opinion, Mombasa’s free marks primarily benefited landlords, who immediately started making money after the demolitions forced traders off of municipal road reserves and into privately owned shop space. He protested that the money the traders were paying to the municipal council was now going to private landlords, who in most cases belonged to different patron-client networks than those of the curio dealers.

But for many vendors who had lost their kiosks because of the demolitions of 2001-02, entering into a free mark was not just a last resort but a realistic opportunity worth trying. Three months after the demolitions in early 2002, six former members of the Fort Jesus Curio Group, men and women all of whom had previously worked from the kiosks outside of Fort Jesus, started a free mark in Old Town along Ndia Kuu Road. Members included Juma, Mama Wanjiru and her daughter Wanjiru, Elizabeth, Mama Wachira, and Andrew. They had to pay 2,000 shillings (\$30) per person to enter and made their own IDs to avoid harassment from municipal *askaris*. But in 2003, when tourism crashed after British Airways cancelled all flights to Kenya due to terrorist warnings (see ch. 3), the free mark was on its last legs, with many members like Wanjiru and her mother no longer bothering to even come to work. According to Andrew, “it was terrible.”⁴⁹ He had to pay 1,550 shillings (\$22) every month to the landlord as his portion of the rent. In addition to the high rent, he was still competing against the other members

⁴⁸ Interview with Juma, Oct. 10, 2005.

⁴⁹ Interview with Andrew, Oct. 10, 2005.

of the free mark. Further, the number of vendors in the shop could easily swell to as many as 12 if family members or employees were present. The crowded sales environment was simply not conducive to selling souvenirs that attained value for their authenticity and uniqueness. The curio free marks aimed at the local pedestrian tourist market made the carvings and crafts appear all the more generic. Largely due to the competition among the individual members, the curio free marks of Mombasa's Old Town were on their last legs through 2005 and 2006, four years after the demolitions.

Andrew was eventually forced to move back to his home near Kitui after the initial free mark folded. When he returned to Mombasa in 2005, he joined Elizabeth, Mama Wachira, and David in a new free mark. The advantage of entering into a shop through a group was that he was only required to pay one quarter of the 10,000 shillings rent for the shop in which they formed the free mark. But this still left him with 2,500 shillings of monthly overhead to cover while working in a competitive environment. As he complained to me in October 2005, joining the free mark again placed him into a crowded shop where the vendors all competed and tourists were intimidated even to enter.⁵⁰ Further, KRA agents had already been coming by for several weeks, telling them the shop needed an electronic tax register to calculate and ensure the traders were paying sales tax to the government. There were many unanswered questions, such as how they would divide up the taxes in a free mark with multiple vendors. Who would pay what? Would each of them have his or her register? But as they joked at the absurdity of the new requirement, the threats from the KRA continued.

As 2005 approached its end, this particular free mark's landlord, who they described simply as "an Arab," demanded three months rent up front if they wanted to

⁵⁰ Interview with Andrew, Oct. 24, 2005.

stay in the shop entering 2006 (30,000 shillings or \$450). With plenty of would-be tenants looking for commercial space, landlords had no need to be lenient with tenants who could not make ends meet. David, who had only been employed to work in the free mark, eventually left when his employer began renting his own small shop just up Ndia Kuu Road. When Elizabeth and Andrew could not come up with their share of the rent, Mama Wachira eventually pushed them out, making the shop hers alone. By doing so, she also demonstrated her dependability as a renter to the landlord, who cared mostly about whether or not the monthly rent was being paid. She still allowed Elizabeth to sell some items from the shop, but mainly because they were both Kikuyu women and Mama Wachira had more sympathy for Elizabeth than Andrew. Andrew, with his close friendship to Elizabeth, was certainly not happy with Mama Wachira and complained to me that she was only interested in her own economic development and cared little if they had all once worked from the kiosks outside of Fort Jesus. But Mama Wachira was also concerned about her own economic survival. While she cared about how the other traders like Andrew viewed her, because she was almost twenty years older than him and had owned a kiosk outside of Fort Jesus and thus been of a higher economic standing before the demolitions, she felt it her right to take over the shop as her own. The communal atmosphere central to the free mark ideal would soon dissolve as pre-existing inequalities, such as access to capital, education, and information, allowed certain individual traders to eventually drive the rest out of the business.

It was hard as a researcher to watch curio vendors who were research participants slowly fall out of the business and into abject poverty and ill health, as was the case both after the demolitions and after the collapse of many of the Old Town handicraft free

marks. Andrew began to regularly show me sores that broke out on his body before asking for some money to get the needed shot at the hospital. He was not alone. I would usually not ask what the disease or problem was, sparing traders like him the discomfort of admitting they had a disease like HIV or other common ailments such as chronic bowel problems. Yet these were problems that frequently kept traders away from work and limited their productivity, especially in times when individuals could not even afford basic health care, clean water, and sufficient food. As the low tourism season began in 2006, some traders started going as much as a week without selling or making any income. Although I generally did not pay research participants for interviews, it was at such times that I regularly would “promote” vendors by giving them some badly needed business, even if just worth a few dollars. It was the least that I could do. Despite the record-breaking numbers of tourists arriving every day through the airports, few of them were buying from the curio vendors in Old Town and outside of Fort Jesus. Other vendors became noticeably thin and sick as they lacked income for food and basic healthcare. Others simply disappeared for weeks at a time, seeking out alternative livelihoods selling second hand clothing or food in more formalized municipal markets. The goals of many traders changed from trying to “outlast the rest” to trying to “get out as soon as possible.”

While Kibaki’s NARC government stressed its role in bringing greater security to Kenya, its policies of licensing and regulating small-scale traders were creating new opportunities that primarily benefited advantaged traders with personal connections. This was particularly problematic since the government planners expected the MSE sector to be at the forefront of job creation (Kenya 2005b). But little was being done to formalize

traders or to give them a legal and secure economic environment in which to operate. As Andrew would tell me, it was because of the incessant precariousness that people were further necessitated to work and compete as individuals. Alluding to his curio group in the free market, he told me:

There is no security in the group. Because of the insecurity, people need to just all look out for themselves. If some kind of a cooperative forms, like the one at Fort Jesus [referring to the original Fort Jesus Curio Group], then that cooperative is destroyed with kiosk demolitions. If people aren't all ready to just fend for themselves, they don't have a chance.⁵¹

From this perspective, doing business individually was not necessarily a preferred strategy but a last resort upon which traders increasingly relied. Without the cooperatives and associations that had previously provided security and ensured access to a market for their goods, traders had few options besides working on their own. In this sense, artisans often sought to move up through the commodity chain, from producer to exporter or intermediary, not only because of the attraction of working internationally, but because of a lack of other options.

Traders, Artisans, Formalization, and Mobility

While traders resented the increases in taxes and licenses, I stress that there was little opposition to registering with the municipal council, forming organizations, wearing uniforms, and carrying licenses. Rather, my participants largely desired regulations that took into account existing systems of commercial access and tenure and that did not place a financial burden on the traders themselves. While such a system seemed a fantasy to many, the desire by those of the informal economy to formalize makes it difficult to simply romanticize them as the antithesis of the state (Clark 1988:6). Research on so-called “informal sector” traders consistently points out that, as Gracia Clark put it,

⁵¹ Interview, Oct. 24, 2005, with one of the male Kamba vendors in his early 30s discussed above.

“traders evidently value specific state relations that they feel improve enterprise survival and long-term profit level” (1988:6). It is similarly not uncommon for “informal sector” enterprises to look to formalize voluntarily (Nelson and Bruijn 2005). Nelson and Bruijn (2005) called for policy that views formalization as a voluntary transaction between entrepreneurs and the government, and which would highlight the mutual benefits to formalization, particularly the reduction of risk to small, fragile enterprises and livelihoods. As Moyi (2003) has discussed of Kenyan micro-enterprises, many are left in the unregulated and unstable “informal sector” due to an overall lack of formal organizations (like cooperatives) to help producers and traders find markets.⁵² Such organizations do not emerge out of so-called “free” or de-regulated economies but develop from state financial and administrative assistance.

The Fort Jesus kiosks provided an interesting example of the contradictions accompanying the regulation of Mombasa’s small-scale, self-employed traders. The 1990 National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Conservation Plan for the Old Town of Mombasa discussed the kiosks at length, and it was highly recommended that money be allocated to fix the kiosks’ “haphazard structure.” The report recommended building five groups of three connected kiosks, 15 in total, which would all have been a standardized three meters in width. But the project was never funded and the kiosks were never given permanence. While the poor physical state of the kiosks continued to be blamed on the curio traders themselves, nobody knew better than the individuals actually working at the kiosks that most of the structures needed new roofs and siding. As was true of kiosks built throughout Mombasa (and Kenya), the lack of state support was a product of a larger debate about the kiosks’ very existence. As a result, there was no directed effort at

⁵² See Migiro (2006) for another study of the barriers to ICT development in Kenyan SMEs.

organizing the traders or enabling them to organize and upgrade the kiosks themselves. Many structures were flimsy and in disrepair by the time of their eventual removal in January of 2002 (see ch. 3).⁵³

Lacking the infrastructure for attaining formal state protection, “jumping scales” or attaining individual mobility was often the only option left for artisans and traders alike. Because producers were perpetually exploited within the handicrafts industry, an ideal of mobility from artisan to international trader developed as a means to moving out of poverty. But while some traders were able to use their backgrounds as artisans to develop enterprises as art traders, most were conservatively realistic about their potential for upward mobility. This was especially true of the carvers and producers themselves, who received the smallest percentage of the eventual profits. Particularly as technological literacy and the math and English skills acquired from a formal education became crucial components of being a successful long-distance trader, those with less education and limited access to capital were structurally demobilized. As Davis put it:

If you go to the carvers, none of them will ever tell you that he will one day be a seller. But if you go to those shop owners, you ask them, ‘how did you come into this business?’ He would say he did some kind of finishing school and then came to invest in this business. For the producer to do well, they need the government to come in and come up with some kind of sponsor or marketing for promoting this tourism and trade.⁵⁴

Interestingly, Davis prided himself on being the exception. He had never belonged to a cooperative organization or been a carver. He had, however, been a painter, applying colors and polish to soapstone items that he sold originally from a kiosk he rented outside of Fort Jesus. While he would eventually become a regional wholesaler

⁵³ Interview, April 20, 2001, with an intern working for the National Museums of Kenya.

⁵⁴ Interview with Davis, Sept. 23, 2005. Davis was a male Kisii curio trader and exporter who had moved to Mombasa from Nairobi in 1989. With only some primary school education, he began decorating and selling soapstone outside of Fort Jesus in 1991 after having worked as a houseboy for two years.

and occasional exporter of an array of handicrafts, he regularly mentioned that he had worked his way up from the ranks of the producers. His sense of pride was also rooted in the fact that he had never completed primary school and had still risen to a level from which he could compete with well-educated and well-funded traders who had, unlike him, never been artisans and had little respect for or knowledge of the production end of the business. Although his job as an intermediary and exporter meant that he sought out the cheapest goods and only agreed to pay low prices for the products he shipped, he considered himself deserving of his intermediary role since he had once been an artisan himself.

Research participants, like Davis or who worked in the curio industry, fell into roughly one of three categories based upon their status as artisans versus traders. Of my total 84 research participants who worked in Kenya's curio industry, I assign research participants to one of the following three categories: *non-artisan traders* (53) are businesspeople who bought and sold curio art but who did not carve, decorate, or produce art with their own hands. *Artisan-traders* (17) are businesspeople who bought and sold curio art that they themselves often carved, decorated, or produced in some way as a skilled artisan. *Non-trader artisans* (14) are carvers, painters, weavers, sanders, and decorators who either sell their products to an intermediary or are regularly employed to fill orders but do not sell their products individually (see table 4.1; table 7 in Appendix 1).

Table 4.1: Curio Industry Category and Gender

	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Male	41 (81%)	15 (88%)	14 (100%)	72 (86%)
Female	10 (19%)	2 (12%)	---	12 (14%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

As these numbers show, men clearly dominate the industry from production to intermediary. This was obvious from first hand observation as well as the opinions of both men and women in the industry. It was typical for men, particularly male carvers, to tell me that women were simply unable to succeed in the male-dominated curio and carvings industry. Women vendors had their own stories of sexual harassment and gender prejudice within the industry. While my sample was small, it appears to be representative of women's participation in the sales end of the handicrafts business. For example, before the demolition of Mombasa's kiosks in 2001-02, the Mombasa Island Curio Vendors Association, with 300 listed members, consisted of 52 women (17%) and 248 men (83%), a gender ratio similar to that which I found at Fort Jesus.⁵⁵ But although there are fewer women than men selling curios, many women have been able to develop successful enterprises and use ICTs to the benefit of their personal businesses. The small number of women who participated in my study who were non-trader artisans is less representative, since a large number of women were employed through various associations and cooperative groups to make items like sisal bags (called *viondo*), beadwork, and other jewelry. The small number of such women in my sample is because I was primarily focused on traders rather than artisans.

Data on generation and category of participation in the curio industry reveals the demographic makeup of Mombasa's curio business (see table 4.2; table 8 in Appendix 1). Artisan-traders tended to be older than either non-artisan traders or non-trader artisans.

⁵⁵ I compiled these numbers from a list of members that had been submitted to the Mombasa Municipal Council by the officers of the Mombasa Island Curio Vendors Association following the demolition of the kiosks in December 2001 and January 2002. I know from discussing the list with the former vice-chairman of the association that several non-member curio vendors were added to the list to make it appear larger. While not a complete survey, it included as many names of curio vendors as the association's staff could compile before appealing to the council for assistance in early 2002. While 309 names were listed in total, because some were partial or unclear, I could only discern gender for 300.

For example, 47 percent were born in the 1960s, which is a reflection of the boom years of the curio industry in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the slow rise in urban unemployment during the same time, which together worked to draw many young men into the curio business. The non-artisan traders of my study, while some had been artisans at one time, tended to be relatively younger individuals, 47 percent of whom were born in the 1970s (in their late 20s, early 30s in 2005), and many of whom had better educations than either the older traders or handicraft producers, like carvers. Until recently, the curio industry was a haven for Kenyans who had lacked formal educations and had few other employment opportunities. But over the last two decades of rising unemployment among secondary school and college educated Kenyans, there has been an increase in the number of younger traders with superior educations entering the business.

Table 4.2: Curio Industry Category and Generation

	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
1940s	1 (2%)	---	2 (14%)	3 (4%)
1950s	9 (17%)	2 (12%)	1 (7%)	12 (14%)
1960s	10 (19%)	8 (47%)	1 (7%)	19 (23%)
1970s	25 (47%)	5 (29%)	6 (43%)	36 (43%)
1980s	8 (15%)	2 (12%)	4 (29%)	14 (17%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

While two of the non-trader artisans in my study were born in the 1940s (14%), one in the 1950s (7%), and one in the 1960s (7%), the majority were young men born in the 1970s (6, 43%) and 1980s (4, 29%). This reflects the large number of young apprentices, finishers, and sanders who were still working on the production end of the industry but had not found their own buyers or market connections necessary for moving up the chain to become traders.

Education was clearly very important in the mobility of individual artisans and traders (see table 4.3; table 9 in Appendix 1). At least half of the non-artisan traders (26 of 48, 54%) had at least some secondary school education, even though a significant

percentage (14 of 48, 29%) did not finish primary school. This is highly reflective of the importance of literacy in conducting a formal export business, particularly one that depends upon the use of text messages and emails. The highest concentration of well-educated individuals (with at least some secondary school) was among artisan-traders, demonstrating the importance of an education for balancing both the production and sale of handicrafts. Non-trader artisans were the group with the least education. Only three (23%) of these individuals had ever attended secondary school and six (46%) had not completed primary school, demonstrating the low level of education attained by producers within the curio industry. It appears from my data that most artisans who had the education to also work as traders took advantage of that opportunity.

Table 4.3: Curio Industry Category and Education⁵⁶

Education	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Some Secondary +	26 (54%)	10 (67%)	3 (23%)	39 (51%)
Finished Primary 8	(17%)	2 (13%)	4 (31%)	14 (18%)
< Standard 7	14 (29%)	3 (20%)	6 (46%)	23 (30%)
Total	48 (100%)	15 (100%)	13 (100%)	76 (100%)

Comparing curio industry category to regional background and ethnicity demonstrates the diversity of East Africans working in Kenya's curio industry (see tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6; tables 10a, b and 11 in Appendix 1). Several observations can be made from these regional and ethnic data, worth examining together due to the general correlation between region of origin and ethnicity. First, it is worth noting that all curio industry participants in the study who were born and raised in Mombasa were non-artisan traders. In other words, individuals born and raised in Mombasa tended to move into the curio business as vendors and traders but not as artisans. It can be further noted that all

⁵⁶ I had no data on education for five non-artisan traders of the 53 in my study, making 48 the total number of those whose education was known to me. I had no data on education for two artisan-traders of the 17 in my study, making 15 the total number of those whose education was known to me. I had no data on education for one non-trader artisan of the 14 in my study, making 13 the total number of those whose education was known to me.

non-trader artisans came originally from rural areas of Kenya, or at least outside of the major cities of Mombasa and Nairobi.

Table 4.4: Curio Industry Category and Regional Origin (Kenyan Coast vs. Non-coast)⁵⁷

Regional Origin	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Kenyan Coast	18 (36%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	23 (29%)
Non-coast	32 (64%)	13 (81%)	12 (86%)	57 (71%)
Total	50 (100%)	16 (100%)	14 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 4.5: Curio Industry Category and Regional Origin

Regional Origin	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Mombasa District (of Coast Province)	8 (16%)	---	---	8 (10%)
Coast Province, Other	10 (20%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	15 (19%)
Coast Province – Total	18 (36%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	23 (29%)
Eastern Province	13 (26%)	3 (19%)	11 (79%)	27 (34%)
Kisii District (of Nyanza Province)	4 (8%)	7 (44%)	1 (7%)	12 (15%)
Nairobi Province	5 (10%)	3 (19%)	---	8 (10%)
Central Province	6 (12%)	---	---	6 (8%)
Rift Valley Province	2 (4%)	---	---	2 (3%)
Western Province	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Tanzania	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	50 (100%)	16 (100%)	14 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 4.6: Curio Industry Category and Ethnic Heritage

Ethnic group	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Kamba	16 (30%)	4 (24%)	11 (79%)	31 (37%)
Kisii	5 (9%)	7 (41%)	1 (7%)	13 (15%)
Kikuyu	11 (21%)	3 (18%)	---	14 (17%)
“Swahili”	8 (15%)	---	---	8 (10%)
Giriama	1 (2%)	1 (6%)	2 (14%)	4 (5%)
Duruma	4 (8%)	1 (6%)	---	5 (6%)
Digo	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Chonyi	---	1 (6%)	---	1 (1%)
Taita	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Luo	3 (6%)	---	---	3 (4%)
Luhya	2 (4%)	---	---	2 (2%)
Tanzanian	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

In Mombasa, artisans and traders tended to come from specific towns in particular districts in rural Kenya. In most cases, migrant networks between rural Kenya and Mombasa had existed for several decades and were essential for circulating labor and

⁵⁷ Four of the total 84 had no data on regional origin. Therefore, total individuals for this table is 80 instead of 84. Because 3 “non-artisan traders” and 1 “artisan-trader” had no data on regional origin, the totals for these groups are 50 and 16 respectively.

information within the curio industry. For example, most traders in Mombasa vending soapstone had a connection not only to the Kisii soapstone cooperative in Changamwe but also to the rural town of Tabaka in Kisii District in western Kenya. Because Tabaka was the site of the soapstone quarries and source for all soapstone carvings, anyone with a family connection to Tabaka had a serious advantage in the soapstone business.

Likewise, most traders in Mombasa selling exclusively Kamba-style woodcarving were not only most-likely of Kamba ethnic heritage, but there was also a good chance they or their families were originally from near the rural town of Wamunyu in Machakos District to the east of Nairobi.

Because Wamunyu was the site of the first carving and the first carving cooperative, networks linking the rural families to urban trade networks have been developing for nearly a century and have been actively maintained for generations. But unlike the case of Tabaka and soapstone, wood for carving is found a long way from Wamunyu, and so it also common for Kamba traders and carvers from other towns like Kitui and Makindu to become connected to the curio industry in urban settings, like Mombasa, where woodcarving ceased to be identified with people from Wamunyu and ostensibly became the economic and artistic property of the entire Kamba ethnic group.

Migrants from the rural coast also came from specific areas, such as Kilifi District to the north of Mombasa or near the town of Samburu in Kwale District to the West of Mombasa. These origins have less to do with traditions of craftsmanship and more to do with networks of migration to Mombasa for the purposes of finding employment. Mombasa's curio industry was just one of many options for migrants from nearby towns in Coast Province like Samburu and Kilifi.

It is also worth noting that many more Kisii than Kamba artisans who participated in my study were artisan-traders. This was largely due to the fact that most of the Kisii non-trader artisans worked in Tabaka in Kisii District at the site of the quarries rather than in Mombasa. The Kamba non-trader artisans, however, were more concentrated in Mombasa, especially in and around Changamwe's Akamba Industry because of the availability of raw material for carving.

It can be further noted that among the Kamba carvers and traders from Machakos, Wamunyu, and Kitui, there was a great deal of stratification, as individuals specialized as either non-trader artisans or non-artisan traders while few had either the talent, time, or initiative to balance the two. Because carving members of Akamba Industry Co-operative Society could place their carvings in the cooperative's showroom, many such individuals had limited aspirations for becoming traders or leaving the protection of the cooperative society. Usually once an individual chose to become a trading businessperson rather than an artisanal producer, the shift was complete and often led in the Kamba case to former carvers and cooperative members being evicted from the society to take up their trade elsewhere (see ch. 5).

In addition to those successful Kisii and Kamba traders who were rooted in the migrant and production networks that characterize Kenya's curio industry, there were also Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, and other traders from a variety of East African and South Asian ethnic groups operating in Mombasa. My sample is particularly revealing of the large number of Kikuyu traders invested in the curio industry on the coast. Most of these individuals sold a variety of items, including woodcarvings, soapstone sculptures,

beadwork, paintings, and woven baskets, much of which was indeed made by Kikuyu artisans both in Mombasa and Nairobi.

For most individuals working in the curio industry, the ideal trajectory and potential for upward mobility involved moving through a series of unwritten and informal steps from artisan to trader. The potential for producers to be exploited was the major driving force precipitating the movement of individuals *up the chain*. The economic risk central to each artisan and trader's livelihood within the handicrafts industry had been passed off from the cooperative and government organizations, which had for decades worked to nurture and regulate the industry, to the individuals themselves.

I will now turn to three examples of state interaction with small-scale traders to demonstrate the rather arbitrary nature of state presence in the daily lives of research participants.

Case 1: Fort Jesus and the National Museums of Kenya

In May of 2005, the National Museums of Kenya hired Mohamed, a young, ambitious and dynamic college graduate from Mombasa's Old Town to serve as Public Relations officer at the Fort Jesus Museum. One of Mohamed's early tasks was to monitor the tour guides operating outside of the fort on the museum's behalf. His first month on the job he called a meeting for all guides, mandating that they create their own organization with an elected chairman and that they give Mohamed a list of all registered tour guides in the case of any tourist complaints, which had become increasingly common. The job was challenging, and Mohamed, with whom I regularly met, updated me on the progress. Many of the tour guides were over 30 years old and had started working as guides in the 1980s when tourist arrivals were higher, fewer visitors came on

all-inclusive packages, and there was a steady demand for local tour guides.⁵⁸ With the national economic decline and the crash in tourism by the late 1990s (see ch. 3), many of the tour guides had started openly using if not selling hard drugs (most problematic being heroin and cocaine) outside of the fort.

As Mohamed complained to me, “How can I have people who are supposed to be tour guides dosing off on heroin right there in front of the fort on that bench like this (making a wobbly movement)?”⁵⁹ When he first took the job he had met with several large tour operators who had stopped bringing tourists to the fort simply because of the bad impression given by the local tour guides, particularly as they ran up to approaching busses, clawing at the windows and fighting for customers. “In this era,” he said, referring to the insecurity and travel advisories in coastal Kenya, “you simply cannot do that,” he admitted. “It scares the tourists.”

Mandating them in mid-2005 to begin wearing a simple uniform of a collared white shirt with black pants was the first step. After a month, half of the guides had readily complied while the other half remained rebellious, not respecting Mohamed’s authority and continuing to dress as they wished. In distress, he went to officers at the Ministry of Tourism office in Mombasa, who liked the idea and drafted a letter for him to give to the tour guides. The letter directed the guides to wear the uniforms, wear nametags, and always carry licenses issued by the municipal council. Qualifications and

⁵⁸ The Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife began working with tour guides from the early days of mass tourism on the Kenyan coast. In a quarterly report from the Assistant Tourist Officer in Mombasa, dated January 16, 1971, it was mentioned that his office had begun arranging for the training of tour guides. He further mentioned, “[a] group of 20 started the training and were lectured by Mr. Kirkman, Curator, Fort Jesus regarding the Fort Jesus history.” The letter was from A.M. Ali, the Assistant Tourist Officer, Mombasa, to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, document 97 in the file “Coast Provincial Administration, Tourism 1965-1971,” in the Coast Provincial Files, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number CA/21/53, box 105, shelf 4659, room 6.

⁵⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in this section from the Public Relations officer came from an interview conducted in his office on Oct. 10, 2005.

training were left to the tour guide organization itself, which would be formally approached should there be problems with individual guides. The letter gave the guides until October 1, 2005 to comply. But what if they did not? “They are children of Old Town,” Mohamed told me. “I can’t fire them. They grew up here. They live here. This is what they do.” But once he had the letter from the Ministry of Tourism, the tourist police started arresting the guides who had not complied. “What else could I do?” he asked.

Going through formal channels was a risk, but by late October 2005, the tour guide association was turning to Mohamed to help differentiate between the legitimate guides and those who were involved in illegal activity. He received several formal letters from the newly elected chairman of the tour guides association asking for help in regulating the guides. The legitimate guides readily wore the uniforms and carried their licenses, wanting to secure and maintain the jobs upon which their families depended. Especially as the 2005 high tourism season arrived, many unlicensed and unknown guides started working outside the fort. This brought additional problems that could be overcome by formalization and legalization such as that nurtured by Mohamed. As he told me, when the guides began coming to him for help, it was “a major coup,” which would eventually lead to what I witnessed as visible change in the formalization and regulation of the tourism operators working outside of the fort and the overall economic environment of the area.

Case 2: Regulating Beach Vendors

The beach curio vendors provide an example similar to that of the Fort Jesus tour guides. The vendors on the beaches of the North Coast had not been directly affected by

the kiosk demolitions, although they had been hurt both by the drop in tourist arrivals beginning in the mid 1990s and by the increasingly negative view of beach operators and guides (often simply called “beach boys”) held by many tourists, hotel owners, and Mombasa residents. The vetting of the beach operators by the Ministry of Tourism began officially in 2003 in the first months after Kibaki’s NARC won the December 2002 general election.⁶⁰ While the beach operators were in direct economic competition with the guides and shop owners located inside the hotels, the government (specifically the Kenya Tourist Police, Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, and Coast Provincial Administration) decided to license legitimate beach vendors and legally formalize their businesses.

The first wave of formalization came through a mandate that all legal curio vendors and tour guides wear licenses and uniforms while working. A group of mainly Kamba beach curio vendors with whom I spoke during the height of the 2005 high tourism season said they welcomed these regulations for giving them permanence,⁶¹ although they suspected (correctly) that the vetting was only the first step in a plan that eventually called for their complete removal from the beaches.⁶² While the government intended to eventually remove the vendors, traders whom I interviewed appreciated whatever legality and protection they could get, even if only in the short term. By 2005

⁶⁰ In the Mombasa District Monitoring and Evaluation Report of 2004/2005, the writers pointed to progress made in licensing around tourism areas – a major part of their initiative. They discussed 180 “tour guides,” 123 “tour operators,” and 115 “curio shops,” registered with the municipal council and the Ministry of Tourism in order to “install order on the beach and minimize harassment of Tourists” (Kenya 2004/2005:17).

⁶¹ Group interview and subsequent conversations with male Kamba beach vendors, Nov. 8, 2005, from their place of work on Bamburi Beach.

⁶² The government plan made quite clear that the initial regulation and formalization process was intended to “restrict the trade to genuine operators only while the second phase involving relocating the operators away from the beach is underway” (Kenya 2004/2005:17).

most legitimate operators carried identification badges and wore uniforms daily.⁶³ There had previously been a series of organizations, such as the Bamburi Beach Association. But after the vetting of the vendors and the implementation of the new regulations, all coastal organizations from the Tanzanian border to Malindi were combined into the Coast Beach Curio Operators Association at the end of 2004.

As I was told, the new laws were important because they helped differentiate between vendors deemed legitimate and others, such as unlicensed tour guides, drug dealers, and both male and female sex workers. As a male Kamba vendor told me from his location on the North Coast's Bamburi Beach:

It is a good system now because with the shirts and IDs, we can police ourselves. If someone is selling curios and is not a member, we will chase them away. You cannot sell *bangi* [marijuana], cocaine, or do any illegal activity, which is good for all of us.⁶⁴

He stressed to me that the new organization was about gaining trust and legitimacy for curio vendors in the eyes of tourists, hotel owners, and the police.

As another male Kamba trader operating outside of Nyali Beach Hotel told me: "The regulations are better, to everyone's advantage."⁶⁵ He had formerly belonged to a smaller curio organization, "but then we didn't have IDs from the Ministry of Tourism," he said in comparison. He showed me his ID, which was also marked with "Nyali Beach Hotel," outside of which he and several others were the only vendors permitted to do

⁶³ This point was also mentioned by Neta Peal in the article "Ambitious Plan for new Tourist Beach Markets," *Coast Week*, issue 2933, August 18-24, 2006.

⁶⁴ Interview, Nov. 8, 2005, with a male Kamba vendor in his late 30s who had originally begun selling along Bamburi Beach in the late 1980s, well before the demolition of Mombasa's kiosk. He was also the former secretary of the Bamburi Beach Association, which had represented curio vendors operating on the beach before the formation of the Coast Beach Curio Operators Association.

⁶⁵ Interview, Dec. 22, 2005, with a male Kamba vendor who claimed to have begun selling curios outside of Nyali Beach in the late 1960s, when he had moved to the coast in his late teens. Whether this was true or not, he used the story to defend his occupation of the site, claiming that he had been there before most of the younger vendors and beach operators had even been born.

business. “As long as we work from 8am to 6pm regularly, they let us stay here,” he told me. He continued, “In fact, one of the reasons they let us stay here is that we provide security for the hotel.” In case there was an incident, he pointed out that they all had nametags, so anyone officially licensed could be sought out and dealt with individually while the rest were allowed to remain.

This is not to suggest that all traders were in favor of these regulations. Ideally a trader would find a job exporting or wholesaling so as to avoid the wind, uncertainty, and sun of the beach. While the regulations were protective for some vendors, they also allowed the tourist police unit to harass other Kenyans who were not carrying IDs or wearing the appropriate uniform. This was particularly the case with young women who, if they were not involved in sex work when they arrived at the beach, had often been charged with such a crime by the time they were released from jail, simply for being present on the beach without an appropriate license.⁶⁶

Through 2007, I continued to observe curio vendors operating on Mombasa’s beaches, particularly those of the crowded North Coast. However, beach operators were increasingly a concern for hoteliers and tourists themselves, who often found their sales strategies annoying. While I did not conduct many interviews with tourists, those tourists, students, and visitors I knew while in Kenya frequently complained to me about the beach vendors, as if they thought that I could make a difference through my research. While I was not present for the beach vendors’ official removal by a government

⁶⁶ On multiple occasions during my stay in Kenya from September 2005 – August 2006, I received phone calls from female friends and research participants asking me to retrieve them from Bamburi Police Station, where they were being held on charges of attempted sex work for having been a female Kenyan walking alone on Bamburi Beach without a trade license. Such charges, hardly legally defensible, were blatant attempts to solicit bribes, usually from an individual such as myself, called in to retrieve the imprisoned individual.

authority, it could take place at any time. While formalization was a good initial step, as with the Fort Jesus case, more direct assistance from official government bodies is needed for organized, structural change to be successful. If the beach vendors are removed without being given an alternative location, the pressure will only increase in the other spatial nodes of Mombasa's curio industry, such as Old Town and around the production networks in Changamwe. Because Mombasa's curio artisans and traders lacked permanence, customer service training, an organized municipal market, or even a weekly wholesale market for artists, it was very difficult for many individuals to realize long-term enterprise growth and development.

Case 3: Licensed Exporting and "Clearing and Forwarding"

While the 2001-02 kiosk demolitions in Mombasa forced many curio vendors into Old Town shops, to the port, to the beaches, or out of the business completely, several traders, such as those who had used their kiosks as storage units for filling larger orders, still had the capital and connections to "jump scales" (Smith 1993), skipping around the cooperatives and into the full-time export industry. This often required moving to a cheaper location outside of the downtown. On the one hand, moving one's business to a suburb such as Changamwe was economically efficient and meant paying lower rents than on Mombasa Island. It also meant being located closer to both the seaport and airport. But on the other, it meant distancing oneself from the local market and becoming more dependent upon connections with overseas buyers for future success and entrepreneurial survival.

Studies of woodcarving production worldwide have shown that exporting has become increasingly important to carvers and traders as tourist arrivals decline in certain

countries due to terrorist attacks, travel advisories, or changing attitudes among tourists (Belcher et al 2005:3). By looking at the destinations of woodcarvings shipped from Kenya, Obunga estimated that the countries buying the most carvings were the United States (47 percent), Japan (10 percent), Spain (7 percent), South Africa (7 percent), Germany (6 percent) and the Great Britain (6 percent), with other countries such as Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Mexico, South Africa, and India also receiving some carvings (Choge et al. 2005:42 f.n. 1 citing Obunga 1995). The government and various organizations tried to hold regular meetings for exporters. But as customs regimes around the world become increasingly controlled by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Customs Organization (WCO), governments have less control over the process of importing and exporting (Chalfin 2006).

Some of my research participants were invited to meetings for exporters, but none of them actually attended.⁶⁷ The reasons were varied. Some people said they would feel uncomfortable and possibly not be allowed into the meetings, assuming the majority of exporters present would be wealthy individuals of Indian or European descent. Others said that the meetings were on Tuesdays, and since that was also Maasai Market Day in Nairobi, there was no way to attend the meeting. Another trader felt convinced that the invitations had been sent to those exporters registered as shipping the most goods and were geared toward lecturing them about regulations on wood. In this case, the exporter I interviewed preferred to avoid such meetings so that he could plead ignorance if ever caught exporting wood that might be illegal or require special certification to sell.

More than anything, exporters were cautious of any additional intermediaries, agents, or regulations cutting into their profit margins. The essential and most despised

⁶⁷ This paragraph based on participant observation, interview, and fieldnotes of April 27, 2006.

intermediary for curio exporters was the clearing and forwarding agent, an individual who did little more than sign forms and supply the correct licenses for exporting. A clearing and forwarding agent was, however, needed for any international shipment leaving Kenya. Dealing with clearing and forwarding agents could only be avoided by shipping through the General Post Office, which worked well for small items like books, but was not efficient for large shipments since the rates quickly rose with weight, and the maximum for any individual package was only 20 kilograms. The next option was the airport, which charged three dollars per kilogram but at a minimum of 100kg, meaning \$300 was a minimum price for a shipment. And this was not including the agent's fee, which could be in the hundreds of dollars. For large shipments in the tons, it was only efficient to ship through the seaport and by the container, a steel box of either 20 or 40 feet in length.⁶⁸

Facing expensive rates, exporters were particularly disdainful of clearing and forwarding agents. As one soapstone exporter told me:

We lose a lot of money to them, but there is not much that they do. Just stamp some documents. There are some times they come to you with stories. They used to charge more, but now it has gone down because I've been able to catch the little things they do to add weight, or they'll write down something that isn't there.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The final price of shipping would essentially depend on the shipping line and the destinations. For example, in one case, an exporter who was shipping a container to Tampa, Florida in the United States had two options: to ship through Durban, South Africa, which would take 39-45 days and would cost \$2200 per container, \$2630 after the additional fees such as clearing and forwarding, or to ship via Europe, which would take 70 days but would be a bit cheaper at \$1800 per container, \$2282 after the additional taxes, fuel costs, and fees (author's interview Oct. 10, 2005). For an excellent history and analysis of the impact of the standardized shipping container on international trade, see Levinson (2006).

⁶⁹ Interview, Sept. 24, 2005, with a male Kisii member of the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative who regularly exported containers full of soapstone through the port each year, working in essence in competition with the cooperative society of which he was also a member. His economic advantage came primarily because he was born and raised in Tabaka at the site of the quarries. He also relied on family members to supply him with most of what he exported. Born in the early 1970s, he finished his secondary school education before moving to Mombasa to sell soapstone. He regularly used a cell phone and email address to facilitate his export business. He had customers throughout North America and Europe.

Clearing and forwarding agents were often even blamed for factors out of their hands. The soapstone exporter I quoted above complained to me one day that his clearing and forwarding agent had tried to cheat him by charging 22,000 shillings (\$300) to ship a 77 kilo shipment of soapstone through the airport, not including the agent's own individual fee. Although I knew that was the regular rate, he was doubtful and upset, mainly because the soapstone itself had only cost him 20,000 shillings (\$280) to purchase. The exporter protested to me that the agent must have still been pocketing some of the money. But the real problem in this case, and in the case of many curious exporters, was that the heavy soapstone was cheaper to purchase wholesale than it was to ship. The exporter just shook his head, admitting that he was powerless in such a situation.

Despite the discomfort with and suspicion of them, clearing and forwarding agents were essential for exporting handicrafts from Kenya. As one trader told me, it was nearly impossible for an exporter to attain his or her own clearing and forwarding license, which requires taking a special course.⁷⁰ Even with the license, he admitted, the job requires buying one's way into the favor of taxation officials and others at the airport and seaport. Like all exporters, he inevitably submitted to turning a portion of his profit over to the clearing and forwarding agent. At times it puzzled me that several exporters continued to use the same agent, even after repeatedly complaining to me about his corruption and cheating. There were larger companies, but they either handled much larger orders or were unknown to my research participants. On one occasion Davis told

⁷⁰ Interview, Nov. 23, 2005, with a male Kamba trader who was born in Machakos in 1960 and had been a member of Mombasa's Akamba Handicrafts Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd., before moving to the nearby Magongo Market in 2003 (see ch. 5). At the time of interview he had three main overseas customers and regularly complained about the loss of profits to clearing and forwarding agents.

me that it could cause genuine trouble for his business if he did not use his regular agent, who was also Kisii and who he called a “tribalist” for pushing his business on him and other soapstone exporters because of their ethnic connection.⁷¹

In such cases, traders needed to seriously weigh the costs and benefits of specific connections and associations and whether exporting was even a profitable endeavour. Many vendors who could maintain access to the local market in Mombasa were wary of the hazards of exporting and a reliance on ICTs like expensive cell phones. Those who had remained but seen their competition removed during the 2001-02 kiosk demolitions had their own opinions of exporting – a practice upon which they were not forced to rely.

Some successful local curio vendors such as Njoroge outside of Fort Jesus were very wary of moving into exporting. Because his shop was situated on museum rather than municipal land, it had not been touched during the demolitions and he had seen his profits increase tremendously with the decreased competition just outside of the popular tourist attraction.⁷² He had a social connection through his aunt’s granddaughter, who had married a German man and lived in Germany. But while he admitted to me that he had thought of shipping some carvings or handicrafts to her so that she could find him a market in Europe, he decided that for all the trouble of exporting there was very little profit.

Sitting relaxed in the shade next to his shop outside of Fort Jesus, Njoroge was of the opinion that exporters ruined the local market by putting the best quality products on the international market and exposing potential tourists to new products before they ever

⁷¹ Interview with Davis, Nov. 23, 2005.

⁷² This paragraph from an interview with Njoroge dated Oct. 18, 2005. Born in 1964 in Nairobi, he studied through standard 6 before beginning work for his grandmother who was based outside of Fort Jesus. When she passed away in 1988, Njoroge moved permanently to Mombasa and still sold from the same spot at the time of writing.

even stepped foot in Kenya or Africa. He told me his customers regularly complained to him that they could find everything in his shop being sold in their home country. For him, exporters were part of the reason why the local curio business was declining. He was against the practice of exporting on principle, and since his shop had one of the best locations in Mombasa, he definitely did not want to make the problem worse.

Njoroge was not alone in holding this opinion of exporting. In fact, many exporters, including the chairman of Mombasa's Kisii Soapstone Cooperative, also reflected on this issue during an interview. But in the case of the chairman, since he made most of his money from exporting, the trick became to conceal one's products so that they remained unique and were not copied. He told me he regularly guaranteed his overseas buyers that no one else was selling the styles of carvings that he had to offer at wholesale prices (whether this was entirely true or not). He did, however, tell me that he had several models of items that he kept secret and that he would not show me, since he genuinely feared losing his edge. As several exporters would remark to me over the course of my research, the most valuable items were no longer the antique looking or "tribal" products, but rather *new* items that buyers had never seen before (see ch. 6).

Conclusion

By placing the onus on the individual trader and making even cooperative groups function as private entities competing transnationally, a particular relationship has developed between Kenya's small-scale entrepreneurs and the state. Kenya's artisans and crafts traders are moving into risky international markets both because of perceived opportunities for better profits and because of the lack of economic protections and regulations at home. While many of the Kibaki administration's attempts to regulate the

economy and increase revenue collection could appear to be a move toward formalization, they were viewed by many small-scale traders as parasitic and misinformed about the economic realities on the ground.

But many Kenyan traders are supportive of government regulation, protection, and legalization. In the cases I examined, regulation and formalization were successful when implemented in an unbiased manner that took overall economic stabilization as a goal. As Akama suggested, government initiatives “should concentrate mainly on the establishment of an enabling socio-economic and legal environment, and the creation of a level playing field for private sector initiatives to appropriately operate and develop” (2002:10). If they do not, the friction between Kenya’s small-scale tourism operators and the government and political elite could increase.

Chapter 5
The Digital Divide and Kenya's Curio Industry:
The Political Economy of Technologies and Competition

Now, as we have this internet, most Kenyans are learning, they have... the ability to go to the internet... You know, they sense the internet they can use to sell their items. And there they find buyers for their items... Actually, you know, the connection, it was the problem.

- Davis, a Kenyan curio exporter, 2005.¹

The words of Davis – the Mombasa-based curio exporter quoted above – are full of promise. They inspire hope – in Africa, in entrepreneurship, and in the ability for new ICTs to finally overcome the barriers that have prevented so many from enjoying the fruits of progress and modernity. After working outside of Mombasa's Fort Jesus selling handicrafts to tourists for nearly ten years, Davis lost his roadside kiosk in a wave of municipal demolitions in January 2002 (see ch. 3). But despite this setback, like many other traders in his position, with the help of a cell phone and email address, Davis thought he had finally found a new and secure way to access customers for the handicrafts he sold. Davis was lucky because, with the help of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers he met in Mombasa, he had made certain connections with overseas buyers when he had still been working along the roadside. He found that he could maintain these connections with the use of a personal email address and cell phone. Further, he was no longer dependent on Mombasa's precarious local tourism industry and was able to shift his curio business almost entirely into exporting and selling to local vendors at wholesale prices and in large quantity.

In 2005 and 2006, as an art exporter with American clients who placed regular orders, Davis woke up every dawn and was frequently on his cell phone and in and out of

¹ This quote is from an interview with Davis, Oct. 10, 2005.

carving cooperatives, wholesale markets, and internet cafés until the evening hours when the roads and small paths near his house in the Mombasa suburb of Changamwe were too unsafe to risk passage because of the high level of crime in the area. The Americans who eventually bought the items from their final destination in Florida never knew the actual story of what was involved in coordinating the production and shipping of containers full of handicrafts and carvings. Mystifying and obscuring the realities of the production of Kenyan art is what gains it value (also see ch. 6). Intermediaries like Davis – the key links in the commodity chain – do not want their intermediary positions to be known. The revelation that non-artisan intermediaries dominate Kenya’s curio industry could detract from the authenticity and symbolic value of the products being sold. The challenge for Davis was to remain technologically connected to his customers while demonstrating to them that he had firm grass-roots connections to carvers and production organizations.

But following another reversal of fortunes, by 2007, Davis could not afford his website and had stopped receiving orders from his American and British customers. His major foreign client in the United States, who had even supplied Davis with his own ATM and business cards, told him that they had enough “product,” as Davis generally referred to the assortment of carvings, beadwork, and handmade goods he exported. His primary employer, who had for three years given him several hundreds of dollars in profits every month, informed him quite directly (although by email) that Davis would be receiving no additional orders. The U.S. economy was bad, the dollar was weak, and with fewer Americans spending money on small souvenirs, the company was cutting back on orders from their overseas suppliers.

Just like that, Davis lost his job and any market connection for his livelihood. While interacting with tourists directly was the most common way of finding future business contacts, since the loss of his downtown kiosk in 2002, Davis had isolated himself from the tourist hotels and beaches. He had opted for Changanwe's upcountry neighborhoods, which were in close proximity to the cooperatives, airport, and seaport, but far from the main tourism circuits. With no orders and no income, he was suddenly stranded, ejected from the international networks in which he had once been a major player. He was a dejected actor, lacking mobility at the center of an international transportation hub. He had even lost his beloved mobile, a small Samsung flip phone, to a moneylender who took it as collateral until the money he had lent to Davis was returned. Amid all of the optimism – for jumping scales into international markets, meeting new buyers, and realizing the potential of new technologies – Davis found himself living in abject poverty between mud walls and under a rusty roof. He was a casualty of the fierce competition among individual entrepreneurs vying for access to and profit from the fiercely competitive Kenyan tourism and handicraft industries. What had happened? What for all the promise?

Davis's story, like the stories of so many other carvers, artisans, dealers, and shop vendors who participated in my research, exquisitely illustrates the insecurity haunting so many aspiring traders. Of the 84 research participants who were involved in the curio industry, 30 – or 36 percent – worked regularly in exporting or in trading Kenyan handicrafts internationally. Maybe not surprisingly, all of these international traders used either a cell phone or email for work.

But despite the obvious importance of ICTs, 54 research participants were not using email or a cell phone for work or business. This does not mean the remaining 54 participants lacked access to cell phones and email. Many had access but lacked the ability or knowledge to maximize the economic potentials of new technologies. For example, as Davis's story reveals, access to ICTs alone does not determine economic success or advancement.

It should not be surprising that the marketing of new technologies on the open market in Kenya has perpetuated what Ferguson (2002:141) has termed "*structures and processes of disconnection*," like those experienced by Davis. The privatization and liberalization of telecommunications does *not* necessarily lead to widespread socio-economic development. Privatization of African telecommunication sectors has tended to ignore and instead reproduce pre-existing disparities in access to both capital and technologies. Kenya has pursued privatization and liberalization of the government-owned monopoly Telkom Kenya under the assumption that such actions would attract international investment and increase market competition. But making ICT provision the job of corporations has also intensified competition among small-scale Kenyan-owned enterprises that are operating with minimal security, insurance, and legal protections. As Davis's story illustrates, individual traders, despite the possibility of becoming rich that ideals of "going it alone" promise, are operating in a very risky and unstable economic environment.

Despite the hope generated by advertisements and success stories, ICTs often increase precariousness among small-scale traders. As I describe in this chapter, this is much more likely when the political and economic environment is not conducive to the

formalization, legalization, and nurturing of small-scale traders. New communication technologies should not be expected to act on their own to expand enterprises and successfully jump traders into new markets and networks.

Africa and ICTs in the 21st Century

Entering the early 21st century, Africa appeared to be the continent on the verge of a technological breakthrough. Despite growing inequality in nations such as Kenya, expectations were never so high for these countries to overcome the gaps in access to wealth and technology. But liberalization of African telecom sectors has been slow and highly politicized (Muiruri 2007; Wilson and Wong 2007a, b). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, despite the promises of telecommunications for expanding enterprises, little can be done without state support for fair and affordable licensing and the maintenance of a regulated and nurturing economic environment (also see ch. 4).

The Kenyan government has retained significant control over not only the primary companies providing internet and cellular service, but also over the means by which the monopoly formerly enjoyed by government-owned Telkom Kenya is slowly broken through the licensing of private service providers. Systematic privatization, while nurtured by policies supported by the World Bank, IMF and other dominant policy circles, has further reduced the capacity of African nations to protect their indigenous manufacturers and small-scale traders. While the Kenyan government has been able to generate significant revenue by taxing ICTs and maintaining an ownership share in some telecommunication companies, this partial and highly politicized liberalization process has destabilized the economic environment in which Kenyan enterprises are forced to function and compete.

The cities of East Africa offer a glimpse at the local settings in which the social and economic impacts of new telecommunication technologies are being felt. Much early interest in the “digital divide” – or the disparities between those with and those without access to new technologies – emphasized North American and European telecommunication reforms and efforts to bring disadvantaged people online rather than the social and economic effects of new ICTs within countries of the global South.² In March 2005, *The Economist* featured “The Real Digital Divide” as its cover story,³ arguing that the *real* digital divide existed *within* the nations of the global South and should be bridged through market liberalization. As the concluding words from *The Economist* read:

Rather than trying to close the digital divide through top-down IT infrastructure projects, governments in the developing world should open their telecom markets. Then firms and customers, on their own and even in the poorest countries, will close the divide themselves (2005:11).

Such arguments assume that privatization and deregulation will drive down consumer prices and overcome inequalities in access to new technologies. But as I will demonstrate of Kenya, liberalization and privatization of the telecom sector has been slow and has placed most of the early profits and advantages in the hands of a very few political elites and foreign-owned companies. While some privileged parties have made huge profits, for the first several years of operation, services and connections tended to be almost impossibly slow and of variable quality considering the high prices. It was during this critical period that the advantaged few made their move to solidify their roles as intermediary traders of Kenyan handicrafts. The rest were left seemingly unable to

² For example, the topic itself largely came to prominence when U.S. President Bill Clinton spent a significant part of his second term in office urging citizens of his country to overcome the digital divide (Sonaike 2004:41, 45).

³ *The Economist*, March 12-18, 2005.

compete and catch up. Even many of those who had early experiences of success, such as Davis, would soon find themselves out-competed by traders and business administrators who could better accumulate the economic and symbolic capital necessary to win over the small yet potentially lucrative international market for Kenyan handicrafts.

When North American and European companies' profit motives drive African telecom development, the rollout is inevitably uneven. This unevenness is then reproduced and mapped onto other indigenous industries that depend heavily on communication technologies. The "opening" of telecom sectors also tends to create large-scale techno-dependence, as African countries become dependent upon foreign companies to provide them with the telecommunications that connect some of the population to the rest of the world (Sonaike 2004:41). Backed into a corner, African countries cannot attract multinational companies and international investors without a competitive ICT infrastructure (Tyler et al. 1999:80). The result has been corporate-driven, uneven rollout of telecommunications, which actively and consciously creates islands of poverty and poverty traps as investment focuses on high-return areas. The consequent lack of ICTs experienced in many areas and among the poor further hinders the capacity of the disadvantaged to attract aid workers, NGOs, and the international attention needed for development in the absence of a strong welfare state (Kane 2002).

Studies of ICTs and enterprise development in Kenya have come to the same conclusion: that new technologies cannot overcome but tend to reproduce existing inequalities (Chowdhury 2006; Migiro 2006; Moyi 2003).⁴ Providing ICTs in Africa to

⁴ In some studies of small-scale Kenyan enterprises, up to 40 percent of participants stated that ICTs were not useful, due simply to poor access to electricity, telephones and the internet (Moyi 2003).

only those who can afford them has created “a new digital divide, not along international frontiers, but between different parts of society” (Henten et al. 2004:2). Even if there are some segments within Kenyan society who can afford new communication services, this further obscures the fact that the majority of people are far from having a means to pay for a connection (see Henten et al. 2004:5). I found, for example, that small enterprises like the curio businesses I studied often lacked the capital needed to invest in new technologies like email and cell phones. Even when capital was not lacking, by integrating markets and exposing micro-enterprises to competition (as in Davis’s case), ICTs have at times eroded enterprises’ long-term profitability (also see Chowdhury and Wolf 2003:3). In sum, the Kenyan socio-economic environment into which cell phones and internet cafés were suddenly injected in the early years of the 21st century was one of flux, insecurity, and inequality.

While new technologies gave many traders hope, the initial bubble in ICT-based curio enterprises would slowly deflate as even many of those who had access to new technologies were out-competed and eventually driven into deeper poverty. Understanding the effects of new technologies on economic development requires keen awareness of this pattern. I will now turn to the specifics of Kenya’s telecommunications development before discussing the curio industry to more precisely demonstrate the social and economic effects of privatized, market-based communication.

Telecommunications and ICT Liberalization in Kenya

Kenya’s earliest telecommunications came in 1888 with the laying of an underground telegraph cable connecting Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam (Tyler et al. 1999:81). More recently, Kenya was one of the few cases where an African

government invested heavily in public pay phones before the onset of the mobile phone age (Tyler et al. 1999:89).⁵ But beginning in the mid-1990s, the Kenyan government came under intense pressure from the IMF, World Bank, and international investors to sell off its stake in its telecommunications sector, which was dominated by the state-owned corporation Telkom Kenya and the highly politicized regulatory body, the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK). Even the government accepted that Kenya's mobile telephony market badly needed an economic jolt, when the waiting time for the connection of a land line had increased from 5.6 years in 1997 to 9.6 years in 1999 (Chowdhury and Wolf 2003:5), prompting various jokes in urban Kenya about the "line for a line."

But the initial investment in and the expansion of the market for new technologies came slowly. In the late 1990s, while Kenya was the most substantial market for mobile phones in East Africa, the only service provider, Safaricom, had the highest charges in the region.⁶ At the time, Safaricom was jointly owned by Telkom Kenya (70%) and the president's son, Gideon Moi (30%). But this would soon change when a large stake in the company was sold to Britain's Vodafone in late 1999 to help generate capital for upgrading and investment. But once the second company, named Kencel (later to become Celtel, then Zain), was officially licensed (although scandalously),⁷ prices became more affordable and the market grew. The number of subscribers increased dramatically from only 20,000 in September 2000 to over 400,000 by July 2001 (Kenya

⁵ Tyler et al. (1999:90) noted, however, that this was not true until after 1982, before which time the phones were not automatic but operator-controlled.

⁶ See "Phone Sects," in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 40, no. 19, p. 3, Sept. 24, 1999.

⁷ The licensing of a second private cellular provider was highly politicized and delayed, leaving Safaricom with a monopoly over the Kenyan market for a prolonged period. See "Sorry, wrong number," in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 40, no. 25, p. 2, Dec. 17, 1999.

2002:109). In 2002, demand for mobile phones increased by 69.6 percent (Kenya 2002:28). By 2004 the number of mobile phone connections had grown to roughly 1.5 million (Kenya 2005a:214). When I first set foot in Kenya in January 2001, cell phones were rare and highly prized possessions. By the time I returned in June 2003, it seemed like everyone in urban Kenya owned or at least had access to one.

As the competition over control of the mobile telephony market heated up and brought Kenya international praise for its efforts, the government also claimed it had the largest number of internet users in sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya 2002:107).⁸ Most accessed the internet through the countrywide backbone known as Jambonet, which connected the cities of Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Nyeri to the Nairobi hub (Kenya 2002:107; see map 2.2, page 70). As soon as connections were functional, internet cafés began opening throughout the country's urban centers. By 2002, prices that were initially high stabilized at between one and three shillings per minute (\$0.02-0.03). However, in internet cafés bandwidth was usually split among as many as 15 to 20 computers, making connections prone to disruption and slow (typically slower than a dial-up connection in the United States).

Throughout East Africa, internet cafés became famous for their slow connection speed (Mwesige 2004:98). Mwesige (2004) found in his study of Ugandan internet cafés that average citizens did not typically use such facilities, which were the realm of young, well-educated urban elites, or at least those with significant advantages over less-educated individuals from rural areas. He argued that while the internet could provide some economic advantages, open market access brought the risk of excluding large

⁸ See chapter 9, Information and Communication Technologies from the 2002-08 National Development Plan (Kenya 2002) for more information on the government's envisioned role in developing Kenya's ICT sector.

sections of the population (Mwesige 2004:89). He found that in an average Ugandan internet café, 60 percent of internet users were male and 80 percent were under the age of 30 (Mwesige 2004:93). Such a user demographic, Mwesige (2004:93-4) suggested, was typical of internet use in Africa as ICTs became permanent tools for maintaining advantages, but with a generational bias.

The slow internet speed, which limited participation, was a result of the fact that eastern and southern Africa remained the only regions in the world not connected to global broadband internet by cable, leaving expensive and slow satellite connections the only option.⁹ The answer from the World Bank was the East African Submarine System (EASSy) project, started in 2003 and involving 23 African countries.¹⁰ But by September 2006, only seven governments had signed the protocol to participate in the construction of the 9,900 km cable. Despite having already invested \$7.5 million toward the project, Kenya refused to sign, claiming that the South African company awarded the contract was making unfair demands regarding financing, ownership, and management. As an alternative, in November 2006 the Kenyan government completed its own 5.7 billion shilling (\$85 million) deal with Etisalat of Dubai, which would run an undersea cable from Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates to Mombasa.¹¹ The project, called The East African Marine System (TEAMS), would be the Kenyan government's player in a politico-corporate race for East African fiber-optic connection. This new deal, aimed to the East in the direction of pre-colonial trade routes, was to be completed by November 2007 at a fraction of the price of the World Bank-funded EASSy project. The timetable,

⁹ Wahome, Mwaniki. "Kenya to benefit from WB funding," in *Daily Nation*, April 5, 2007.

¹⁰ Otieno, Jeff. "Kenya still keen on EASSy cable project," in *Daily Nation*, Sept. 28, 2006.

¹¹ Omondi, Michael. "Telkom signs Sh5.7bn cable deal," in *Daily Nation*, Nov. 18, 2006.

however, was consistently pushed back, and none of the undersea cable projects had been completed at the time of this writing (spring 2009).

Meanwhile, compared to the internet, where thirty minutes cost only around 30 shillings (\$0.40 in 2005), cell phones were expensive, with one minute costing as much as 50 shillings (\$0.73 in 2005) during prime times (depending on the calling plan, or tariff).¹² One shopkeeper I interviewed in 2005 told me seriously:

You know, maintaining a mobile phone is more expensive than maintaining a car. Sometimes you can use two to three thousand shillings per day [\$30-45]. Other people use only one hundred shillings per day [\$1.20]. That is still three thousand per month [\$45] when your salary is just five thousand per month [\$75]. It is ridiculous.¹³

It was this price of phone calls that made SMS text messages a very important form of communication. In 2005 and 2006, text messages cost around five shillings (\$0.07 in 2005) each depending on the time of day and the particular tariff, making a short SMS much more economical than a phone call. The cheapest way to communicate was to use a phone simply to receive calls and not to make them, since receiving both local and international calls was free. If you wished to speak with someone but did not have phone credit or did not wish to use your own money, it became standard to “flash” the receiver by calling and hanging up after letting the phone ring briefly. The receiver would find a missed call and know to call you back. Safaricom added an additional service in 2005 that allowed users to send an automatic text message to a receiver that simply read: “Please call me. Thank you.” It did not remove the “*flash*” from common

¹² Each company, such as Safaricom, Celtel, and later Telkom Wireless, provided a variety of tariffs, each with different rates depending on the time of day

¹³ This interview, conducted on Oct. 7, 2005, was with a male curio vendor who worked in a shop located in a Nyali Beach hotel. He did not own the shop, but had been employed by the Indian owner for over ten years. When tourism declined in the late 1990s, the owner had left Kenya for England to pursue another business. While my research participant did not own the shop, he ran the business, having to use his mobile phone and a fax machine as the primary means of communication with his employer, who remained living in England.

use, but did begin to take its place. Soon afterward the company added its *sambaza* service, which allowed a user to “*sambaza*,” or send credit from one phone to another free of charge.¹⁴ The *sambaza* and related *Mpesa* services allowed Kenyans to send money to one another through their cell phones and phone lines and made Safaricom a type of bank in addition to a cellular provider. Such services, adapted to Kenyans’ need for communicative and financial flexibility, not only made the technologies more useful, but also helped make Safaricom consistently the most profitable company in East Africa beginning in 2006.

Regarding the profits being made by cell phone companies in East Africa, Kerretts (2004:57) found that in general, Kenya’s competitive licensing process tended to bring high licensing bids, which was good for government revenue collection. But average Kenyan citizens were usually the ones to make up the cost in the end through high tariff rates. He pointed out that both Celtel and Safaricom defended their high service charges on the basis of recouping the initial license fee paid to the government. While it was no secret that the price of using a mobile phone in Kenya was exorbitant, Celtel and Safaricom both deflected the criticism by blaming government taxes, which in February 2007 stood at 26 percent of airtime.¹⁵ The mobile phone companies had a case for complaint since mobile phone taxes in East Africa, averaging between 25 and 30 percent of call time, were well above the continental average of 17 percent and the object of much criticism both from mobile phone operators and external consultants.¹⁶ For example, Safaricom CEO Michael Joseph argued during a 2007 ICT exposition in Nairobi that lowering taxes would actually give the government more revenue since a

¹⁴ *Sambaza* is a Swahili verb meaning to spread or distribute.

¹⁵ Wahome, Mwaniki. “Bank to fund ICT bureaux,” in *Daily Nation* Feb. 8, 2007.

¹⁶ Wahome, Mwaniki. “Bank to fund ICT bureaux,” in *Daily Nation* Feb. 8, 2007.

decrease in airtime costs could theoretically stimulate usage.¹⁷ While the mobile phone industry was estimated to account for five percent of Kenya's GDP in 2006, many invested parties estimated that cutting taxes on mobile phones could lead to even greater growth in the long term.¹⁸

In 2007, with taxes still high, Safaricom finally made large cuts to their rates in an attempt to maintain their 6.5 million-subscriber client base and their significant edge over competitor Celtel. Safaricom's price reductions came soon after Celtel, with its 2.5 million customers, introduced its "Mambo 6" tariff, which targeted young Kenyans and gave callers off-peak calls for only six shillings per minute (\$0.09).¹⁹ This followed the December 2006 launch of the company's Uhuru tariff (*uhuru* means "freedom" in Swahili), which allowed customers to call at a flat rate across all networks in Kenya.²⁰

Discourses of *freedom* and liberalism were central to the marketing competition between the two companies, even as the rate structures reaffirmed national boundaries.²¹ As Celtel's chief executive officer, Mr. David Murray, explained at the launch of the Mambo 6 tariff: "Communication is about freedom. We do not want to limit our customers to just calling within our network. We want to continually offer them freedom to call any of their friends, relatives and business partners in any other network in Kenya."²²

¹⁷ Correspondent. "Short message to East African governments: Cut mobile taxes to grow revenue," in *The East African Standard*, March 21, 2007.

¹⁸ In May 2008, Dr. Bitange Ndemo, the Information and Communications Permanent Secretary, said the government had approached the Treasury with a proposal to limit taxes to ten percent of airtime in an effort to bring the average cost of a mobile call to two shillings per minute. See "Mobile phone calls to cost Sh2, predicts PS," by James Anyanzwa, *Standard*, online edition, May 15, 2008.

¹⁹ See Nation Reporter. "Celtel raises the stakes in tariff war," in *Daily Nation*, May 15, 2007.

²⁰ See Nation Reporter. "Celtel raises the stakes in tariff war," in *Daily Nation*, May 15, 2007.

²¹ Special thanks to David Hughes for pointing out this irony.

²² As pointed out by the Nation reporter in the article, "Celtel raises the stakes in tariff war," in *Daily Nation*, May 15, 2007, Celtel created this flat rate tariff in response to the February 2007 ruling by the

How could consumers be skeptical of companies that were going to set them free? Global telecommunications policy frequently underscores the importance of new technologies by stressing the individual's right to access to new technologies (Stewart et al. 2006:732). Stewart et al. (2006) found that over time there was a strong tendency in both E.U. and U.S. policy to frame access to ICTs in economic and market-based terms. They felt this was a powerful force in directing global telecommunications policy toward the neoliberal model, even if this was more a result of the political context of the E.U. and U.S. rather than because of what was needed in countries like Kenya, which still lacked a dependable national ICT infrastructure (Stewart et al. 2006:746).

This is not to suggest that the Kenyan government has been powerless to resist the "liberalization" of its ICT sector. Quite to the contrary, the government has engaged in a pragmatic privatization that has earned it significant revenue and left it with substantial authority even after making the market "competitive." The Kenyan government was very much aware of the importance ICTs would have entering the new century, with an entire chapter of the 2002-08 National Development Plan dedicated to ICTs (see Kenya 2002:107-116). "ICT are the foundation of modern economic development," the government argued (Kenya 2002:107). The government, indeed, owned Telkom Kenya, which in turn owned 60 percent of Safaricom and could generate significant revenue through both taxation and direct control. But even though the company generated substantial revenue for the government, development specialists and politicians alike were for years determined to sell off the government's shares.

Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) that all fixed line and mobile phone operators must charge no more than 30 shillings per call placed to competing companies' networks.

Since the late 1990s, an Initial Public Offering (IPO) on the Nairobi Stock Exchange (NSE) was repeatedly suggested as the best option for privatizing both Telkom Kenya and the government shares in Safaricom, since it would ostensibly allow average Kenyan citizens to purchase shares in the company and potentially benefit from the company's growth and profits. However, despite rumors as early as 2006 that the government was set to relinquish its majority share holding in Safaricom, little happened as the privatization was delayed preceding the 2007 election.²³

As the election approached, further questions were raised about the legality of past sales of Safaricom stock. The criticism revolved around the company's complicated ownership history. From 1999 to 2002, Telkom Kenya's sole partner, the British company Vodafone, had at some time increased its shares in Safaricom from 30 percent to 40 percent before settling in at 35 percent by 2007.²⁴ This had all been done without government approval, record, or public announcement. The situation became more confused when the Ministry of Information and Technology, as well as Safaricom CEO Michael Joseph, made repeated statements in early 2007 that Vodafone owned a full 40 percent of the company. Eventually in March 2007, the British Serious Fraud Office launched an investigation into the mysterious transfer of shares between an African government and a British multi-national, meeting with the Kenya parliamentary watchdog committee and calling several individuals, including Mr. Joseph, to give statements.

²³ See Ondari, Justus. "Why Safaricom sale must go on," in *Daily Nation*, Oct. 9, 2007; Namunane, Bernard. "Telkom sale 'to fund campaigns'," in *Daily Nation*, Nov. 15, 2007; Nation Team. "Safaricom sale to go on," in *Daily Nation*, Dec. 21, 2007.

²⁴ The rest of this paragraph draws on Namunane, Bernard. "Safaricom deal under probe," in *Daily Nation* March 9, 2007.

It was later revealed that a firm named Mobitelea Ventures had held a 10 percent share in Safaricom until early 2003, when it sold half of these shares back to Vodafone.²⁵ The government itself declared that it had no knowledge of the deal, insisting that it only knew of the 2000 deal when Vodafone had purchased its 40 percent. The scandal deepened when it was found that Mobitelea's owners were simply named as Anson and Cabot Ltd., who were based in Anguilla and Antigua in the West Indies.²⁶ While Vodafone later stated that Mobitelea was their chosen partner in Kenya, theories about the mysterious shares and the legality of the transactions further delayed the release of Safaricom shares on the NSE and made many Kenyans skeptical of the transparency of the government's role in the privatization process.

Finally in March 2008, with the coalition government having begun to form following the previous December's election, the Kenyan government announced that it would go ahead with the Safaricom IPO, selling shares on the NSE for only five shillings (\$0.07) each with a 10,000 shilling (\$150) minimum.²⁷ But the media hype and dreams of potential profits by average Kenyans meant that after kicking off on March 28 and closing on April 23, 2008, the IPO was oversubscribed by a massive 532 percent.²⁸ How would the extra money be returned to investors? After Safaricom released the extra money, brokers and their agents were left with the responsibility of returning the 79

²⁵ Nation Correspondents. "Mystery over Safaricom owners," in *Daily Nation*, Nov. 21, 2006.

²⁶ Redfern, Paul. "Vodafone stake in Safaricom indirect," in *Sunday Nation*, Feb. 18, 2007.

²⁷ See Njoka, Kimathi. "Safaricom shares to cost Sh5," in *Standard*, March 15, 2008.; Ohito, David. "Safaricom IPO launched amid fear," in *Standard*, March 28, 2008.

²⁸ See "Safaricom IPO results out today," by John Njiraini, *Standard*, online edition, May 30, 2008. The questions surrounding the over-subscription of the IPO and the resulting dilemma of returning investors' money was a regular issue in the *Daily Nation* and *Standard* newspapers through June, July, and August of 2008.

percent to each of their clients.²⁹ While some firms quickly returned investors' money, others were slower, as Safaricom shares jumped 50 percent to a trading price of 7.5 shillings during the first day of trading on June 9, 2008.³⁰ As late as August and September of 2008, I knew Kenyans whose money was still locked up in banks or with agents, while the loans they had taken were accruing interest and the price of Safaricom shares rapidly declined from the initial peak. In August 2008, as investors scrambled to sell their shares to pay back loans, the price of Safaricom stock on the NSE fell below the initial offering price of five shillings per share, and some Kenyan investors I knew were left in disbelief. While profits could potentially still be seen over the long term, the promise of making a quick fortune had disappeared.

Through 2008, Safaricom and Celtel would go head-to-head with a variety of promotions, including Safaricom's Ongea tariff, which gave callers a flat rate of ten shillings (\$0.13) per minute. Safaricom and Celtel posters and billboards became symbolic pillars of the urban landscape, lining roads and painted on buildings throughout Kenya with marketing lines like, "Ongea tariff 10/- all day, all night, every day." Celtel responded with its Pamoja tariff (*pamoja* means "together" in Swahili), which allowed users to talk for free during the day after adding 100 shillings (\$1.20) of credit to a phone. The primary message of the advertisements was not only of freedom, but the freedom to be together and connected to networks external to one's own, often seemingly inescapable locality.

²⁹ See "Safaricom to refund Sh236b in IPO," by James Anyanzwa, *Standard*, online edition, May 31, 2008. The retail investor was allowed to keep 21 percent of the purchase while investors and Safaricom dealers got to keep 31 percent. Foreign investors kept 15 percent, and Safaricom employees emerged the biggest winners, keeping 84 percent.

³⁰ See "Safaricom's big day at the NSE," in *Standard*, online edition, June 9, 2008, and "Safaricom shares jump 50 percent on debut," in online *Standard*, June 9, 2008.

As competition heated up, the ownership of the major companies became even more complicated. In July and August 2008, Celtel and its small percentage of the Kenyan market (2.4 million subscribers to Safaricom's 11 million) was bought by the Zain Group, based in the Middle East, which resulted in an abrupt and massive re-branding campaign.³¹ The corporate battle had already been complicated in 2007, when France Telecom had paid \$390 million for 51 percent of Telkom Kenya and brought its Orange brand to Kenya. Then in May 2008, as the Safaricom IPO still captured the imaginations of Kenyan investors, Telkom Kenya signed a nine billion shilling (\$130 million) deal with Ericsson to supply the equipment for Telkom Wireless.³² Through 2008, Telkom Wireless offices were increasingly visible in urban Kenya, in many cases doubling as public internet cafés as the company prepared to join in the competition. By late 2008, the company, now controlled by France Telecom, released its "Orange" brand calling plans onto the Kenyan market.

During 2008, wireless "hot spots" became the norm in the wealthier parts of Nairobi and in downtown coffee shops, where urban professionals and expatriates could bring their laptops to surf the net and sip on a cup of the country's finest coffee. As a result, many downtown internet cafés closed as their primary consumer base moved into private coffee shops with their laptops. Places where in 2005 the boss and the janitor could have sat next to one another while checking their respective email accounts after work had closed by 2008. The cafés that remained open declined in quality, unable to compete with private hotspots and the increasing availability of internet in urban offices.

³¹ See Ondari, Justus. "The chips are down in mobile market, but Zain is betting big," in *Daily Nation Smart Company*, page 6.

³² See "Telkom to retain corporate identity," by James Anyanzwa, *Standard*, online edition, June 6, 2008.

Why use a slow, unreliable, and often crowded internet café if you could use a personal laptop or a cell phone to connect to the internet?

When it was reported in the *Daily Nation* that a quarter of Kenyans with mobile phones owned multiple lines from more than one provider so as to maximize the benefits of a variety of promotions and calling tariffs, ICT industry observers claimed the “war” would clearly “be fought with SIM cards and handsets.”³³ But the politics of ICTs and the “wars” engendered by open access do not only take place within the realms of corporations and governments. There is a “trickle down,” not of profits and funds, but also of the culture of competition produced by large-scale political and economic structuring. This has been the case with Kenya’s curio industry.

ICTs and the Curio Industry

In 2007, Kenya hosted its second annual E-Tourism conference, where the message was simple: “invest in ICTs or lose.”³⁴ The conference was primarily focused on large, corporate investors in the tourism industry, such as the Sarova Group of hotels and lodges, as well as the government’s major marketing bodies – the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. But even if resort hotels and international marketing bodies were the focus of the conferences held to discuss the theme, the impact of ICTs was being felt throughout the entire tourism industry.

³³ Kang’aru, Wachira. “Econet and Telkom to stir up new mobile wars,” in *Daily Nation Smart Company* page 1. Regarding tariffs, I, for example, used both a Saficom Ongea tariff and a Celtel/Zain Pamoja tariff in June and July of 2008, since the former allowed a flat rate of ten shillings per minute and the latter allowed me to speak for free during the workday after topping up for 100 shillings in the morning.

³⁴ Ndurya, Mazera. 2007. “Drive to sell tourism online picks up pace,” in *Daily Nation*, Smart Company insert, July 17, 2007, p. 16.

My own data collected from research participants demonstrate the extent to which a divide had developed within the curio industry between those individuals with access to new technologies and those without.³⁵ While 58 percent of my sample was actively using either a cell phone or email for business in 2005 and 2006, 42 percent was not.

I found that 28 percent (24 of 84) of my research participants from the curio industry used both a cell phone and email regularly for business purposes; thirty percent (25 of 84) used a cell phone for work, but did not use email; and 42 percent (35 of 84) used neither a cell phone nor email in their day-to-day job working in the production or trade of curios.

As noted in chapter 4, 36 percent (30 of 84) of my research participants who worked in the curio business regularly exported or traded curios internationally. *Of these 30 exporters, all of them used either a cell phone or an email account regularly for their businesses.* ICTs were directly associated with an individual's success, failure, and mobility within the industry. The gap in access to technologies – with all curio exporters actively using ICTs – almost perfectly overlapped the gap in access to outside markets and international clients.

As important as new technologies were, knowledge about their use was one of the most important factors for success in the curio business. But most traders were not being educated actively on how to use ICTs, which pleased those few who were “in the know” since it kept them on the connected side of the divide and gave them a considerable advantage. Very few research participants had ever learned formally about computers, cell phones, or even business management. Rather, the majority learned from their

³⁵ For a complete breakdown of information about ICT-use by my research participants, please see Appendix 1, particularly tables 13-19.

friends and relatives, and in a few special instances, from tourists, visiting students, Peace Corps volunteers, or missionaries. Davis, for example, was taught to use a computer and email by local Peace Corps volunteers, mainly because they assumed it would give him an advantage in developing his business. For several years his knowledge of ICTs gave him a significant advantage that enabled him to work as a prominent exporter. But many of those like Davis who received such tips and informal lessons tended to keep this knowledge to themselves since monopolizing such information allowed them to operate as small-scale tycoons. The result was that some enterprises quickly out-competed the rest because of their ability to connect international customers with Kenyan producers.

As Davis told me in 2005 when concluding our discussion of the community of curio dealers in Mombasa: “I guess most of the people who are here, you will find out they are not really very well connected with the internet. Mostly they are isolated. But you work it alone. That’s very nice. You go and work it alone.” A multi-ethnic urban Kenyan who had lived in three of the country’s major cities, Davis enjoyed being an “individual,” or as he put it, “working it alone.” Living on his own and with few relatives, he had no dependents to hold him back. But like it or not, personal connections had their benefits, even if he preferred his independence. His exporting job was, after all, only possible as long as he maintained and monopolized control over the connection between the production groups and his American buyers. In the end, simultaneously maintaining his anonymity and importance within the commodity chain from production to consumption was what he failed to do. Because he had “gone it alone,” he had no support networks left to help him when his employer stopped sending him orders.

Davis and Juma are good examples of individual traders who invested relatively large amounts of money (around five shillings or seven cents per minute) to learn how to use a mouse and type on a computer. While Davis was slowly buying his roadside kiosk from the local Old Town woman from whom he had been renting, Juma was employed to sell soapstone from several different kiosks for a salary of a little more than 1,000 shillings (\$20) per month. When email first became available, Juma was employed by a man named Nyambuto, who was originally from Tabaka at the site of the quarries in Kisii District and who sold exclusively soapstone carvings from his five kiosks (four outside of Fort Jesus and one on Moi Avenue outside of the Royal Castle Hotel). Juma appreciated the salary Nyambuto offered him, which provided more security than working on commission. Juma also pocketed additional money when he could sell carvings for more than the usual asking price. While he did not always tell Nyambuto, it was a common practice among employees whose bosses were often not present to see their businesses in operation. As long as Nyambuto was receiving a specified amount for each carving that Juma sold, he accepted that Juma would keep some of the extra profit he was able to make. Much of this extra profit would go toward funding his self-education within some of Mombasa's first internet cafés.

It was while working for Nyambuto in December 2000 that Juma met a pair of British missionaries visiting Fort Jesus for the day, who asked him about his economic situation. Sensing that they might be looking for a way to help him, Juma asked them about computers and the internet. He said he had first heard about computers in primary school and had always wanted to use one. The missionaries took Juma to an internet café, opened an email account for him, and taught him the basics of how to use a

computer and check his email account. Juma told me that after about a month of checking his account regularly he had acquired enough computer literacy to communicate comfortably with email. Juma had the good fortune to meet with the missionaries and then American students and other travelers with whom he exchanged email addresses and contact information. This was essential for him to expand his social networks and practice using these new communication technologies.

After I returned to the United States in 2001, as Davis and Juma continued selling curios outside of Fort Jesus, they both sent me numerous emails and regularly asked me questions about how to use the internet more efficiently and how they might find an overseas market for their products. Neither of their roadside businesses were doing well, particularly with the dismal tourist arrivals and an overall stagnant Kenyan economy. Then, to make things even worse, their kiosks were abruptly removed in January 2002 (see ch. 3).

The demolitions were devastating for Juma. Even though he had not lost his own kiosk, he was left with few employment options and few connections. Juma was Duruma (Mijikenda) and from an area of Coast Province near Mombasa, and he only needed 200 shillings (\$3) for a bus home. There he would have food and a place to sleep on his father's farm or with relatives. But for him, Mombasa was a place of potential and connection that he could only abandon as a final option. Fort Jesus provided him with the possibility of meeting new customers, business partners, or friendly travelers like the missionaries who had originally shown him how to use a computer and email.

During research conducted through August 2006, Juma never hesitated to emphasize the importance of his location outside of Fort Jesus. This was despite the

promise of ICTs. If anyone needed to find him, if someone had a job for him, or if a family member was visiting Mombasa, Fort Jesus served as his office and his location on the map. While having a family home only a few hours from Mombasa gave him flexibility typical of many coastal Mijikenda, he lacked capital, a primary school certificate, and any hope of formal employment beyond daily labor.

While Juma invested most of his time after the demolitions in finding access to Euclidian commercial space outside of Fort Jesus, Davis was tired of the social politics of Old Town and Mombasa's roadsides. It was his preference to leave the roadsides behind and use ICTs to access customers. Davis had originally started working at the kiosks while employed as a houseboy for an Indian businessman living in Old Town. Every day he would pass the vendors outside of the Mazrui Cemetery and Fort Jesus, some of whom spoke Kisii. He had never actually lived in or even near Kisii District, but his mother had been ethnically Kisii, and Davis had learned the Kisii language as a child. After much hesitation, he asked a Kisii vendor who had empty shelf space if he could "try his luck" selling a few chess sets. Since the soapstone itself came primarily from Kisii, Davis could use his language skills to buy chess sets cheaply from the Kisii wholesalers working from the Kisii soapstone cooperative. In the early 1990s, tourism and the curio business were still doing well, and after several years of learning the trade, Davis accumulated the capital to move entirely into his own kiosk as a renter and later the owner.

It was while selling curios in the late 1990s that Davis would meet the Peace Corps volunteers based in Old Town. As tourist arrivals declined, Davis worked to maintain a valuable socio-economic relationship with the American volunteers. He

became the primary curio vendor for Peace Corps members visiting Mombasa and the coast from elsewhere in the country, and he benefited substantially from their business and advice. A Peace Corps member would introduce Davis to email in late 2000 and help him set up his website, which he could only afford to maintain for one year. Another Peace Corps member would later open a business in the United States selling “arts and crafts.” Davis became the “authorized” Kenyan buyer.

Juma did not have friends in the Peace Corps, nor the knowledge of websites and mobile phones to fall back on as Davis did. Immediately following the demolitions, he tried to get a mobile phone, but it was a very cheap model, broke, and he never replaced it. He said he still had the phone line but that he did not think it was worth investing in a phone considering his limited cash flow.³⁶ Following the demolition of the kiosks, Juma sent emails to all those people whose addresses he had compiled over the previous year. He emailed very humble and polite emails (I received several) informing us of what had happened to the kiosks and why he needed any financial help we could offer. I resisted for several months but was touched by his manners, excellent English, and aspirations for moving his enterprise forward. I felt better knowing that I was neither the only person asked nor the only to offer financial assistance and advice. I rationalized such help by telling myself that it would be a sort of experiment: I will give Juma a small amount of capital. Let’s see what he can do with it.

I learned from later interviews that Juma had money in the bank when the kiosks were destroyed. But that money ran out quickly during the three months he spent

³⁶ A very simple and cheap phone could be bought for 2–3,000 shillings (\$30–40), but that was more than what Juma made per month and three times his monthly rent. He would have loved to have a phone, but he argued it was better for him to use email at a few shillings per minute and rely on the public phones, or *simu za jamii* in Swahili, if he needed to call anyone.

unemployed living with two of his other brothers in Likoni to the south of Mombasa Island. A few months after the demolitions, I donated 25 dollars to his cause along with another former student. It was not a large amount of money. But combined with his savings, it helped him buy stock and pay the 3,000 shilling (\$45) fee to gain a spot in one of several “free mark” shops opening in Old Town and trying to re-access Mombasa Island’s market for curio art. When he first entered the shop he sent me an email thanking me, calling me “brother Dillon.” He also attached a scanned digital picture of him posing proudly in his new free mark in front of shelves of wooden animals and bowls.

The free mark, however, did not prove as promising as Juma or I had originally hoped. The free mark shop was cramped with a large number of vendors. After only several months in the shop, he left to set up a small table daily outside of Fort Jesus at the entrance to Ndia Kuu Road and Mombasa’s Old Town. From this spot he could target tourists before they had passed most of the other curio shops and free marks in Old Town. Most importantly, he succeeded in maintaining a presence outside of Fort Jesus, despite its illegality and informality.

Juma’s move to the roadside led to immediate, albeit limited profit. He did not spend this money on a cell phone, although he did continue to send emails regularly. While these emails were mainly social, they often had economic potential. Rather than use the small profit he generated to expand his business, increase the number of items he sold, or turn his table into a more formal stand or kiosk, he used his money to buy a small plot of land in an area of Chagamwe called Kwa Punda.

Kwa Punda was an informal settlement in Changamwe that was located on government land, partially beneath electric lines and separated from nearby neighborhoods by the railroad tracks connecting Mombasa to Nairobi. A year earlier, Juma's older brother had paid the local chief for a plot in Kwa Punda. Hearing of the opportunity to acquire a plot (albeit illegally), Juma decided to do the same, especially since the chief had built a reputation of helping Mijikenda living in Mombasa acquire plots. That the land belonged to the government and could not legally be sold seemed an afterthought. Juma carefully typed and printed his own title deed in an internet café and brought it to the chief, who he later called his "good friend." For 15,000 shillings, or a little over 200 dollars, she signed the title deed and the land, at least in his mind, became Juma's.

Juma was slowly able to make a place for himself in the community. The several hundred people living in Kwa Punda were primarily of various Mijikenda sub-groups. Besides the chief, the only informal local leaders were the pastor of the small mud church built in the center of Kwa Punda and the "*mzee wa mtaa*," a local elder. Juma soon became an assistant to the pastor, teaching younger men about Christianity on Sundays. He also quickly befriended the *mzee wa mtaa*. These were both important people for me to meet when I visited Kwa Punda with Juma. I became an important prop in his performance of economic potential and advancement, despite his illegal and informal existence.

Both his house and small table outside of Fort Jesus were occupying land from which certain authorities could remove him legally and without notice. But he retained an impression of formality and legality by bribing municipal *askaris* outside of Fort Jesus

and printing his own title deed. While staying with his brothers in Likoni, Juma saved the profits from his small curio business to build an eight-room, mud and thatched-roof structure in Kwa Punda.

Despite Kwa Punda's precarious location, its proximity to some of Mombasa's biggest factories made it attractive in Juma's eyes. From Kwa Punda it was impossible to miss the smoke stacks and noise of Changamwe's nearby industrial center, oil refinery, and export processing zones (EPZs). Every morning and evening, hundreds if not thousands of primarily young women could be found sitting or walking outside the factory gates. They were walking to and from work or waiting daily for the opportunity for employment within the factories. Juma decided to rent the rooms in his house to women working in the EPZs. While employees in the factories only made about a 100 shillings (\$1.25) per day, he was willing to rent single rooms in his house for as little as 500 shillings (\$7.00) per month. He had done his research and was confident of success. There was a severe shortage of cheap housing in Changamwe. Rather than invest in expanding his curio business through the use of ICTs or the building of a kiosk, Juma's plan was to invest in housing for the underpaid factory workers.

By 2007 Juma's house was complete, although he complained that family members, including two of his brothers and their families, had moved into four of the eight rooms (see photo 5.1). But this arrangement only made him more of a "big man" within Kwa Punda and among family members. Juma was exceedingly proud of his house, which had its own hand-dug toilet and metal door for security at night. Although the walls were mud and the roof was thatched with palm fronds, he had built a cement

foundation and the corners were supported with concrete. He told me the most important early step was to ensure the structure's permanence.

In early 2007 he again expanded his moneymaking and formality by purchasing a pipe to run water to his house from the church on top of the hill and at the center of Kwa Punda. Prior to this investment, the only water available in Kwa Punda was from the church, which had an account with the municipal water supply. Because there were often over 50 people in line waiting to fill jugs with water from the tap at the church, Juma's tap and meter became a way to make money by selling water cheaply while also providing a service to the community. If he continued to make a small profit from his curio business, he told me, he would add solar panels to the thatched roof of his house so that he could power at least a light bulb. Ideally he said he wanted to power a refrigerator to make ice for selling to fishermen and for chilling beverages.

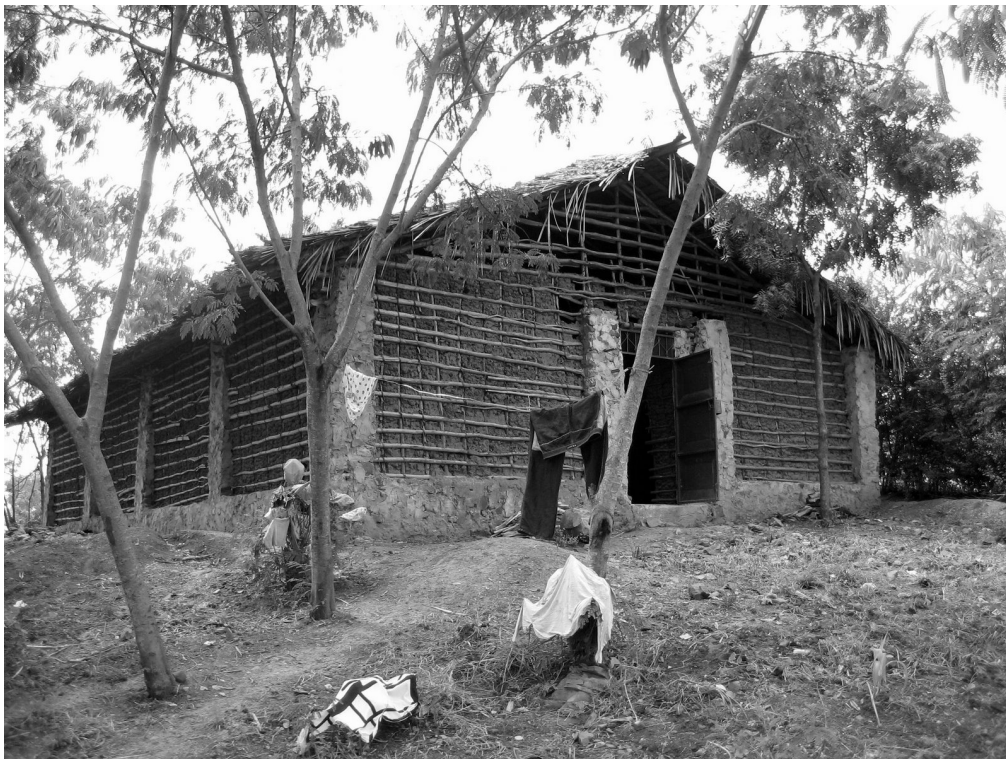


Photo 5.1: A house in Kwa Punda similar to that built by Juma. Several such houses were built in the area.

Prior to the kiosk demolitions of January 2002, Davis appeared to be in a better economic state than Juma. Davis was completing the purchase of his own kiosk from which he sold curios, making several hundred shillings in profit per day. Juma conversely was employed to sell soapstone carvings for a small monthly salary. By 2007 their fortunes had reversed. They had both attempted to use email and cell phones economically. But the eventual difference in outcomes was shaped by a mixture of personal connections, pragmatic business strategies, and luck. After leaving the Old Town free market, Juma decided to risk working from a roadside table selling curios, putting himself into an illegal and insecure economic environment, but one that gave him a regular daily income (a few dollars per day). With patience, persistence, and personal connections, he then invested his profits locally in housing.

Davis had not wanted to risk a return to Old Town after losing his kiosk. His bitterness was mixed with an increased sensitivity at being labelled from “upcountry” and a perception of being discriminated against by “coastal” people, “Swahilis,” or “Indians.” With few local personal connections, Davis looked internationally and made his cell phone and email account the foundations of his export business.

Compared to Davis, Juma felt more comfortable in Mombasa, identifying as a “coastal” person and benefiting from being Mijikenda in acquiring his plot in Kwa Punda. While Juma had an email account and used it regularly for social communication, his livelihood depended primarily on family support, his plot in Changamwe, and his small table outside of Fort Jesus. He did not even own a cell phone. Meanwhile, ICTs had failed Davis. He lost most of his local connections to the tourism industry and was

stranded in Changamwe, barely able to pay the rent to live in a structure similar to that Juma had built with his savings.

Juma and Davis demonstrate only two of the strategies attempted by traders during economic upheaval and change in Mombasa. Another common option, especially for Kamba traders who had lost their kiosks, was to carry Kamba carvings to sell to Tanzanian shop owners in exchange for Tanzanian products, such as Makonde carvings, which could be returned and sold in Kenya. Another option for migrants from Kisii or Machakos Districts was to just move “home” to their farms or to family in rural Kenya. I found during a 2006 visit to the soapstone quarries and production networks in Kisii District that several traders from Mombasa had returned to Tabaka and Kisii Town to try other options. Many of these people had “tried their luck” in Tanzania and Mombasa, but had “gone home” as the market for curios was glutted with traders and hindered by over-production that drove down the price of the products. As one such trader told me from his shop in Tabaka: “We used to have local markets like Nairobi and Mombasa. But we get exploited there, wanting for money. And we need to live. We started to work at a loss. Now we have just come back here.”³⁷

During my first day in Kisii Town in 2006, I happened to walk out of the hotel into which I had just checked only to find standing in front of me Nyambuto, a Kisii entrepreneur who had owned several kiosks along the roadside outside of Fort Jesus and for whom Juma had worked for several years.³⁸ His role in the curio business after the demolitions completely changed since the loss of his kiosks. Surprised to see me so far

³⁷ This interview was conducted on May 19, 2006, with a male Kisii trader in his 40s who had worked in the curio industry since the 1970s selling soapstone outside of Kisii District but had decided to return in 2004.

³⁸ The interaction with Nyambuto described in this paragraph took place on May 18, 2006.

from Mombasa, he was all smiles as he excitedly showed me the Toyota station wagon he had recently purchased. He had become a well-known taxi driver in Kisii Town, and he regularly ferried goods back and forth from Tabaka. He still played an important role in the soapstone business, transporting boxes and crates of carvings in his station wagon from the quarries and small shops to the bus stations in Kisii Town. He told me he was heartbroken after the kiosk demolitions in Mombasa and had lost all hope in Mombasa's curio business. He said the demolitions were the type of "*ujinga*" (stupidity) that should show a researcher like me the direction in which the curio business was headed.

Rural family or a "home" outside of the city was an important support mechanism for urban curio traders. There were few backup options for individuals like Davis or for coastal people who lacked rural or upcountry connections. The former chairman of the Fort Jesus Curio Group found himself in a particularly undesirable position, pulling an *mkokoteni*, or cart, through the hectic streets of Mombasa, cutting firewood, collecting plastic bottles, and transporting goods.³⁹ When I sat down to talk to him in October 2005, he appeared very embarrassed if not disgraced. He rented the *mkokoteni* for 50 shillings (\$0.70) per day, lacking the capital even to buy his own for 7,000 shillings (\$100). Out of sympathy I offered to buy him an *mkokoteni*, but he refused my offer, telling me that for even half the capital it would take to purchase his own pull cart he could move into a different business that was not as back-breaking and unreliable. As tourism was on the rise, he ideally wanted to get back into selling curios. But he lacked even the few thousand shillings he needed to purchase a small number of carvings and beads to set up on a table outside of Fort Jesus or at the public beach. He would eventually come to me and very formally ask for a business grant of 2,000 shillings

³⁹ Interview with the former chairman of the Fort Jesus Curio Group, Oct 28, 2005.

(\$30), which I gave him. As I witnessed, he would indeed use this money to purchase a small number of soapstone items and beads to sell at the public beach in late 2005 and 2006.

But despite the minor financial help I could provide to some curio vendors, their economic footing was too precarious to be fixed by an injection of capital. Traders who had lost their kiosks in the 2002 demolitions felt a sense of “abjection” (Ferguson 2002:140), humiliation, or expulsion that could not be overcome by small development grants. Traders like Davis, who had thought that ICTs would provide him a new lease on life and his business, were bewildered. For traders with dreams of “jumping scales” into wider, international markets, losing one’s commercial base was economically as well as psychologically devastating. At times, the competition, stress, and insecurity of his business and his work and living environment would wear on Davis. He would emerge with stories illustrating his insecurity.

One morning in 2006, while still working regularly with his U.S. employers, Davis woke me up, frantically complaining to me that he had no friends and that he had almost been killed for 350 shillings (\$5). He said he had been drinking beer the night before in a local bar near his home. He told me he owed 650 shillings (\$9), so he paid with a 1,000-shilling (\$15) note, which was the only money he had. When the barkeeper denied him change, he demanded his 350 shillings because that was all he had. Instead, everyone in the bar turned on him. He told me that he was convinced the others in the bar thought they would be able to get some of the change the barkeeper was denying him. “They were going to kill me,” he insisted. He was only saved by a group of Kamba carvers who suddenly entered the bar, at which time the bar again became calm.

“Why was there not a fight?” I asked him.

He answered simply,

Kabila [ethnicity]. They are all Kambas, and I am a Kisii. Nobody could stop them but other Kambas because they were Kambas that were going to kill me. And those *vibuyu* carvers [the type of carving], they depend on me for business, so they had to save me.

He stressed that while he was a Kisii, he had no connection to the other Kisii families who came from Kisii District. Many people, in fact, thought he was Kikuyu. He was glad that in the end, the barkeeper, while not giving him his change, gave him three beers and told him to never come back. He told me that he gave the beers to the Kamba carvers who had pulled him out of the bar. But the stress was engrained, and he quickly switched bars to a place run by a friend who was a Meru – the same ethnic group as Davis’s wife – and who he thought would therefore protect him. This was the situation in which Davis, a Kenyan “individual,” found himself. Individualism, while idealized by some traders and enabled by ICTs, was also the source of significant insecurity and stress.

Individuals versus Cooperatives

The fact that email and cell phones were individualized made it easier for well-connected entrepreneurs to succeed while others lacked the knowledge and ability to do the same. It was rare to meet an exporter or agent who did not have his or her own business card, with an individual name, a specific workshop or company label, and an individual’s cell phone number, email address, and P.O. Box. Likewise, among the new generation of business card-bearing exporters whom I interviewed, there was little evidence of traditional or ethnic labels used in marketing their crafts or in naming their individual enterprises. Rather, business cards were adorned with titles such as “modern handicrafts,” “Stone Arts: Local and International,” or simply “Global Crafts,” as these

traders found more value in representing themselves as modern, internationally connected, and economically developing. While labels such as Global Crafts may seem contradictory at first, traders were able to overcome these representational obstacles. The major hazards facing many art traders were not symbolic but political and economic.

Individual email addresses quickly became important to the successful curio trader, even if he or she had conflicting responsibilities – as chairman of a cooperative society, for example. But much of this conflict was often brushed aside by those in power, who saw the changes the industry was experiencing as the inevitable results of “progress” and the newfound market “freedom” introduced with ICTs. This was always an easy assessment when an individual was doing well economically. As the chairman of Mombasa’s Kisii Soapstone Cooperative told me in 2005, openly and while surrounded by other cooperative members:

I go and I check [my personal email], and I have an order, bup. I go to a clearing agent, I get like four million shillings [\$50,000], I clear a few crates, bup. I go and I pay the carvers and everyone, and I make maybe two hundred, two hundred fifty thousand myself [\$3,250]. It can be a good business.⁴⁰

In this particular quote, the chairman was referring to business that he would do individually rather than as the head of the cooperative society. To avoid the mid-day sun, we were crouching down in one of the few shaded sections of Mombasa’s Kisii soapstone cooperative, located in a part of Mombasa’s Chagamwe constituency called Chaani. The chairman was apparently not worried about telling me or having other cooperative members hear how he operated his private business while also serving as the business

⁴⁰ Interview, Sept. 23, 2005, with the chairman of Mombasa’s Kisii Soapstone Cooperative from the cooperative in Chaani, a section of Chagamwe. He was born in 1963 in Tabaka, Kisii District, and had finished secondary school before coming to Mombasa to sell soapstone from Uhuru Gardens along Moi Avenue in the early 1980s. Although he lived permanently in Mombasa, his family still maintained a farm in Tabaka, and he regularly traveled back and forth for the purpose of buying and transporting carvings to the coast. In addition to handling the export orders for the cooperative, he also had his own personal clients.

manager for the group. Yet clearly as the advantages passed to such individual traders who bypassed the group, organizations like the Kisii soapstone cooperative ceased to operate as cooperatives at all. The “cooperative” label remained and continued to attract some international clientele and fit the Kenyan government’s understanding of an acceptable production organization. But members were forced to depend on themselves as the cooperative’s administration was compromised by conflicts of interest. While the Kisii soapstone cooperative remained an important location for the trade in soapstone, it functioned primarily as a private wholesale market frequented by Mombasa’s shop owners, exporters, and beach vendors, but unable to attract tour groups or develop a social safety net.



Photo 5.2: Inside a Chagamwe soapstone shop, July 2006. Such a shop specialized in selling large quantities of raw, undecorated soapstone products to local shop owners and overseas customers. The owner was a former member of the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative but had chosen to “go it alone.”

The problems and solutions were inevitably political, and research participants whom I interviewed frequently drew parallels between Kenyan national politics and the problems of cooperative administration. One of the more individually successful members of Mombasa's Kisii cooperative told me in 2005 that the biggest problem with the society was simply "corruption."⁴¹ "The administration" he continued, "had problems with corruption," carefully choosing his words in English and appearing somewhat uncomfortable with the topic. But as he continued to explain for me:

You see, we each do our business. And the cooperative is supposed to be attracting buyers here to this cooperative. Then they get an order, and then they are supposed to distribute it out, like ten here, ten here, ten here. But instead almost all the business is done individually.

But this individualism, he said, was also the key to success and out-competing the rest. To demonstrate, he pulled a life-size carved apple from the shelf next to which he was standing in his small market stall in the Kisii cooperative. He said he had carved and polished it the night before out of boredom. Like many of the traders and exporters, he had learned to carve as a young boy, but had left the trade behind because he could make much more money selling the products in wholesale quantity rather than making them individually. The apple he was holding was something he made just to pass time, and it was polished bright and glassy smooth, showing pink speckles and lines running through the stone. After having allowed me to examine the apple for a moment, he pulled down a much larger, intricately carved and complicated sculpture of the same soapstone but

⁴¹ This exchange came from an interview in this trader's stall in the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative, Chaani, on Sept 26, 2005. See photo 5.2 for an example of what the inside of some of these wholesale shops looked like. This trader, like the chairman and most other members, was born and raised not far from the soapstone quarries in the small town of Tabaka in Kisii District. He had grown up around the soapstone business, although he completed his high school education before realizing that he could make more money from soapstone than from formal employment. His comparatively high level of education and access to cheap raw material at the site of extraction and carving allowed him to thrive as a major exporter of soapstone carvings and other Kenyan handicrafts.

which had not been polished like the first. As complex as it was, the stone had a dull color and was not as attractive as the apple. “There is no comparison,” he said, stating the obvious.

This one [the apple] is just finished. Beautiful, polished. But I cannot just go and use one entire piece of sandpaper on just one of these sculptures. That one piece of sandpaper, that will cost me 50 shillings. And the cost of transport to town to get that sandpaper, that is another 50 shillings. It is just not worth it. If the cooperative wants ten pieces of a certain type, I won’t polish them nicely. But with my own customers it’s entirely different. You have to work to stay on top. You have to spend the extra money to finish the product perfectly.

He laughed, “Many exporters think the American or European dealers will do the *msasa* [finishing, polishing]. But they do not. They take them straight out of the box and put them on the shelves. *Hii ndiyo siri kubwa ya hii biashara*,” [translation] *this is a big secret of this business*, he said in a hushed voice, switching from English to Swahili.

The struggles within Kenya’s handicraft cooperatives among individual members, the management, and the cooperative ideals, were as old as the cooperative organizations themselves. A careful examination of the history of Mombasa’s handicraft cooperatives reveals that since their inception in the 1960s, their members have consistently been less interested in egalitarian redistribution of profits than in access to affordable raw materials for carving and secure economic space for conducting business away from the urban roadsides. It took just a few years in existence before the Akamba Handicrafts Co-operative Society in Changamwe to the West of Mombasa was making the Coast Province Co-operative Officer raise questions (in May 1967) to his superiors in Nairobi about the “co-operative element” of the society.⁴² The Ministry of Co-operative

⁴² See letter from the Cooperative Officer, Coast Province to the Town Clerk, Mombasa, dated 4th May, 1967, document 17 in the file “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978,” from the files of the Ministry of Co-operative Development, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2.

Development's 1978 document, *Handicraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development*, found: "Only a fraction of the carvings produced by the members appears to be marketed through the societies."⁴³ The authors of the same study noted that 90 percent of the woodcarvings produced in Kenya's three woodcarving cooperatives were bought directly by private dealers who bypassed the societies. Even at the peak of international and government support for the handicraft sector in Kenya in the early 1980s, Ole Lindberg, the Nordic Team Leader to the Handicraft Unit, remarked in his report: "It is puzzling that the loyalty of the primary societies and their members is more to private middlemen than to their own organization and that they obviously are prepared to put its continued existence into jeopardy."⁴⁴

Clearly the tension between individual traders and the cooperative model is not new and has not been brought on by ICTs alone. However, my data have suggested that individualized cell phones and email addresses available through an open market have played an important role in this crucial tension, as I will now discuss using the example of the relationship between Magongo Market and the Kamba woodcarving cooperative.

Magongo Market and Akamba Industry

During an interview in October 2005, Peter, a successful curio exporter located in Changamwe's Magongo Market, referred to his cell phone simply as his "best friend" while describing his business practices to me.⁴⁵ He did not know how to use a computer

⁴³ This comes from page 7 of the document "Handicraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development," produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January 1978. This document can be found in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

⁴⁴ See report from Ole Lindberg, Nordic Team Leader to the Handicraft Unit, Dec. 2, 1982, document 91 in file "Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984," Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

⁴⁵ Interview with Peter, Oct. 26, 2005. Peter was a male Kamba trader who had been born in Machakos in 1960 and joined the Kamba woodcarving cooperative in the 1970s after having completed secondary

or email, but that mattered less as long as his “best friend” was on a lanyard around his neck. I liked to ask such traders what they would do if they ever lost their phone. “I would immediately buy another,” Peter told me. “I would close this entire shop to keep my mobile.”

Both the cooperative and market were spatial as well as economic structures (see ch. 3). As ICTs overcame spatial obstacles, the cooperative lost relevance and the market itself became less important than the cell phone. By enabling intermediaries to increase advertising and re-consolidate trade networks, ICTs compromised the formerly dominant position of the cooperative societies, which had long been the foundation of Kenya’s curio industry. As mentioned in chapter 3, Kenyan government support of cooperatives through direct assistance and subsidized services ended with the Co-operative Societies Act and Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1997 on *Co-operatives in a liberalized economy*. This act officially ended the government’s obligation to assist and subsidize cooperative organizations, making them “free enterprises” forced to compete directly with other privately owned businesses (Kenya 2002:37).

Lacking significant organized support, the once-dominant Kenyan cooperatives tended to be very slow to adopt ICTs and were vulnerable to competition from individual entrepreneurs with access to large amounts of capital.⁴⁶ For example, the coordinator of the Kenya Gatsby Trust, an NGO dedicated to helping small-scale Kenyan traders in business expansion and wealth creation, urged the government to enhance business training for small-scale traders and artisans such as carpenters and woodcarvers, whom

school. Originally a carver, he only did this job for a short period of time before becoming a full-time trader, working mainly from his Moi Avenue kiosk before it was demolished in December 2001. In 2003, as the cooperative became less friendly toward traders based within the cooperative premises, he moved to Magongo Market.

⁴⁶ Sambu, Zeddy. “Co-operatives slow to adopt ICT,” in *Daily Nation*, May 26, 2006 p. 29.

he argued did not lack in skill but rather business sense and the ability to access and use the internet.⁴⁷ The Gatsby Trust coordinator told *Coast Express* newspaper in 2006 that the Ministry of Trade and Industry could easily set up a website for displaying products to overseas buyers, a point of market access which many traders lacked. He was quoted in the article as saying: “Majority of these traders are missing excellent opportunities for their products because they do not have any access to a website that can highlight their merchandise.” Consistent with my own findings, he claimed that because traders mainly worked independently and without clear coordination with government departments, they were left at a disadvantage in terms of their products’ overall sales and promotions. Lacking aid from the government, traders who ran large workshops and enterprises often abandoned the hassles and expenses of the cities, such as local economic insecurity and high rents, in exchange for spatial flexibility and greater reliance and dependence on ICTs. This allowed connected intermediaries to avoid the most competitive markets, as the business moved almost completely out of the tumultuous public spaces in which it had developed over decades and to the suburbs of the major cities, such as Changamwe.

One such middle-aged, Kikuyu, Nairobi-based trader ran a family business with his wife.⁴⁸ They gathered banana fibers from their one-acre farm and other such neighboring farms, located 15 kilometers outside of Nairobi just past Runda. They then cheaply employed local children to help them make banana fiber products for export. Using internet cafés and cell phones, the husband-and-wife team managed their local supply-and-export business without having to deal with the competition and rising license

⁴⁷ Buluku, Allan. “Help Artisans Improve Skills, Govt Urged,” in *Coast Express*, March 18, 2005.

⁴⁸ This case comes from an interview, May 18, 2006, with this male Kikuyu trader who was born in the 1950s. In addition to their export business, his wife also sold regularly from the Maasai Market located at Globe Cinema near downtown Nairobi on Tuesdays.

fees and overhead of the city's crowded curio markets. He explained this to me one sunny day in May 2006 as we stood in Nairobi next to his vintage Peugeot, which was packed, even on the roof, with banana fiber Christmas trees destined for France. "There are too many markets," he told me, referring to Nairobi's four weekly curio markets. He explained that as a result:

Too many people in this business are trying to make just a few shillings per day. There used to be so many vendors down in town. But most are gone and the shops don't do well. The customers go to the markets like the ones here in the Westlands, which these days sell mostly at wholesale price. The business is really now in exporting.

I questioned him more on this spatial shift from the downtown. He responded: "Most of the older folks who used to be doing this business have moved out to the estates. That's where the real business is going on now. Out in the estates. But not here in town."⁴⁹ When I asked if that was because of cell phones and the internet, he responded "absolutely. The business has completely changed."

One of the largest single organizations for producing curios in the world, with a workforce of nearly ten thousand, Mombasa's Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, located in Changanwe and often just called "Akamba Industry," provided an excellent example of the challenges facing cooperatives if they fall behind in the race to become connected through ICTs. In late 2005, as I was in the middle of an intensive survey of the effects of ICTs on Changanwe's curio traders, the cooperative society did not have internet access on site or even a website of its own. The Head of Records and

⁴⁹ In Kenya, formal housing "estates" are a rough equivalent to suburban housing developments in the United States or Europe. The key point from this quote is that they were moving out of the city, away from the urban commercial space and into peoples' private homes. For traders like this individual, there was little advantage to paying the overhead to have an office or shop in the downtown, especially if production and packaging could take place at one's home. Coordination was made much easier with cell phones and email, usually accessible from local internet cafés located throughout the city, not just in the downtown or commercial centers.

Books told me that a computer would have helped him tremendously since the industry's records were still all on paper.⁵⁰ But he rolled his eyes from behind his desk and admitted that it was just wishful thinking.

While the cooperative's Head of Exports told me they had previously had a web site, it no longer functioned.⁵¹ He added that the cooperative had been promised a computer by a charitable organization, the name of which he could not recall, but nothing had ever materialized. With older carvers controlling much of the decision-making, little push had come from the cooperative itself to invest in technologies. As the head of exports, my research participant was responsible for all outside communication with major customers. But he did so through a local internet café or by phone, giving him no advantage over the many other traders in Mombasa who had access to the same technologies and facilities. He resented the fact that as he sat in one of Mombasa's crowded and slow internet cafés, many of the other men around him were receiving orders and sending off emails to his and the cooperative's former customers.

At the time of the interview, the cooperative had only one order to fill. The order itself, sent via email, provided little colored pictures next to each item to ensure accuracy. "But this order is only for three hundred pieces," the head of exports told me. "We have almost three thousand carvers here. These days people are carving more for fun or to pass time than to meet a customer's order." For many traders, carvers, and finishers in Akamba Industry, many of whom came to the coast from the region around Machakos, Kitui, and Nairobi in the late 1990s, Changamwe's woodcarving cooperative was not a

⁵⁰ Interview, Sept. 26, 2005, with the Head of Records and Books at Changamwe's Akamba Handicrafts Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd.

⁵¹ Interview, Sept. 26, 2005, with the Head of Exports at Changamwe's Akamba Handicrafts Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd.

viable economic option as its numbers soared to ten thousand, with each of the more than seven thousand non-members paying 50 shillings per week to enter. Unemployment and competition within the cooperative peaked as orders were few and overproduction drastically reduced the value and quality of the carvings being made.

When Magongo Market,⁵² just up the road from the cooperative, was opened to curio vendors beginning in the late 1980s, many of those with the capital to do so had moved to the new market from Akamba Industry. Magongo Market was set in a dusty but shaded section of Changamwe, wedged between a large string of export processing zones, Mombasa's oil refinery, and several sprawling informal settlements. The market itself was located along a small dirt road only a few hundred yards from the turnoff to Mombasa's Moi International Airport between a few small local restaurants, a truck stop, and the Changamwe police station. At first the numbers of traders in the market were small, but the shift out of the cooperative to the municipal market became more rapid around 2000. By 2006 there were at least 250 traders running their individual enterprises from or employed to work in Magongo Market. Of these, best estimates from my most recent 2008 survey showed that eighty percent had previously worked in the cooperative. Nearly all of them worked from a wooden structure with an email address or cell phone number written above the entrance.

Some of those in Magongo Market, such as Peter, had been, as he put it, "chased away" from the cooperative. More precisely, he had been given a letter of suspension for one year, after which time the cooperative management would re-assess his candidacy for

⁵² The Magongo curio market, or just "Magongo Market," was set in a dusty but shaded section of Changamwe, wedged between a large string of export processing zones, Mombasa's oil refinery, and several sprawling informal settlements. The market itself was down a small dirt road only a few hundred yards from the turnoff to Mombasa's Moi International Airport between a few small local restaurants, a truck stop, and the Changamwe police station.

membership.⁵³ His crime? As he told me, it was “doing business individually,” around and in competition with the cooperative. While this was against the cooperative’s bylaws, such behavior was normal within the much smaller Kisii cooperative and practiced by the chairman himself. Peter blamed the situation on the cooperative members, who he claimed did “not want to see others develop.” He had once been a carver himself and a member of the cooperative, but as he told me, he wanted “to be rich.” As he continued: “The people in the cooperative want to see everyone stay the same. But no one will ever grow rich with that mentality,” he told me in July 2008 from behind his large desk, surrounded by wooden giraffes in his shop, one of the largest in Magongo Market.

I interviewed several such traders, many of whom were former carvers and cooperative members and had been in the business for decades. All of these individuals cited heightened competition within the cooperative as the reason for their move to the market and cell phones as the primary tool that enabled them to leave the cooperative behind. ICTs broke the spatial dependence on the cooperative as well as its near monopoly on the woodcarving market. By not selling through the cooperative, the Magongo Market traders did not contribute any of their profits to a group and denied the cooperative significant revenue, further weakening its importance. For example, in 2005 items sold in the cooperative’s main showroom for tourists had 22 percent commission removed to pay the salaries of the cooperative’s staff members and for water and

⁵³ Interview with Peter, July 17, 2008. Peter was a Kamba trader in his early 50s who had moved to Mombasa from Wamunyu in the late 1970s to join Akamba Industry. He told me he had been chased from the cooperative on various occasions but remained a member with his own products in the showroom. He also regularly purchased wood and carvings from the cooperative, and even used the cooperative’s kiln to fire wood and reduce cracking of his carvings. He had, however, been located in Magongo Market since 2003 after being accused of “witchcraft” and chased from the cooperative.

electricity.⁵⁴ The wholesale shop, designed for local traders and exporters, had six percent removed in commission and was a good way for members to sell large quantities of items to local shop-owners.⁵⁵ But selling from Magongo Market, just up the street, meant not having to deal with the cooperative's rules, commissions, bureaucracy, and competition.

Because the Kamba cooperative had difficulty coming online and streamlining market access for its traders through the use of ICTs or even its own website, through 2005 and 2006, individuals who could use their own email accounts and cell phones were suddenly operating at the same economic scale as the cooperative society. From a buyer's perspective, the individual traders could offer goods for lower prices, and there were enough intermediaries to try several before settling on someone dependable. The structural relationship between Akamba Industry and Magongo Market was the result of the re-organization of the curio industry, as cooperative societies ceased to be the primary means for market access and were replaced by business cards, internet websites, email addresses, and cell phones.

But even as the cooperative societies were compromised by the activities of lone intermediaries, Davis's case shows that individual traders were not necessarily any better off. While the Kisii Soapstone Cooperative ceased to function as a cooperative, the number of individual traders who were able to make enough profit to survive in the

⁵⁴ The showroom was inside of a large building with two main rooms, each of which was full of carvings that had been made on site and were being sold by individual cooperative members. Each member's number was written on the item along with the price, and when the item was sold the member's number was recorded so that he or she could receive his payment from the cooperative, minus the commission kept by the group. Having one of the nicer curio shop interiors in Mombasa, it was a frequent first stop for tourists on their way from Moi International Airport to their hotels. It was common to find large groups of 50 to 100 tourists packed into the showroom on an average day during the high tourism season.

⁵⁵ This information comes from the cooperative society's information sheet as well as an interview with the cooperative's Head of Books and Records, Sept. 26, 2005.

business dwindled. Similarly, while Magongo Market filled with traders between 2005 and 2008, only a minority of traders was doing thriving business. In fact, the growing number of traders increased the competition. A return to the cooperative was one option for the destitute trader, but with its economic and spatial importance compromised, there was no sure path to economic advancement.

Through 2008 Davis was left with almost no business. Despite his own ideal of “going it alone,” he found himself dependent upon a nephew who had moved to Mombasa from Kisii District and had found employment in one of Changamwe’s export processing zones making clothing. Davis was slow to accept that the “free” and competitive market economy that had developed in Changamwe since the early 1990s functioned not as a meritocracy but as a system in which personal connections were essential.

Conclusion

The impact of new technologies is impossible to assess as simply good or bad. While ICTs play a major role in supporting the trading activities of enterprises and firms in countries of the global South, a wholesale shift to new forms of electronic commerce has not occurred and is unlikely to occur even with greatly increased investment in ICTs (see Mansell 2004). The problems of ICT implementation and liberalization in Kenya, for all the resulting insecurities experienced by traders like Davis or the cooperative societies, are not purely technological at root. Rather, institutional and policy arrangements combined with the ideological, political, social and economic context unique to Kenya, have shaped the environment in which ICTs are having an impact.

The continuing lack of market information suffered by most Kenyan small-scale traders is the product of a more complicated political economic situation than can be solved simply by increased access to ICTs or better infrastructure (also see Moyi 2003). As Davis's case demonstrates, even some of the most hopeful success stories can be deceptive in representing the long-term benefits of telecommunication technologies. There is a genuine danger of confusing macro-level expansion with the actual effects on small-scale businesses (see Matthews 2007:818). Just because certain traders are doing business internationally does not mean that the majority of traders or the overall industry is profiting. This is why an ethnographic approach is so important for assessing the localized effects of national or international policy.

As I have demonstrated, an increase in access to ICTs can also lead to an increase in precariousness and economic insecurity. ICTs can enable or expand personal connections, access to capital, and support from family and a rural "home," but they do not necessarily overcome disparities in access to such resources. The individuals that worked laboriously and lost life savings investing in orders and shipments of handicrafts were responsible for making the industry function and yet received minimal recognition from either large European or North American companies or the consumers who continue to purchase curios. But as I will discuss in the next chapter, over time the products being sold in Kenyan curio shops have been adapted to new market demands and altered to conform to environmental pressures and a changing social context of Kenyan tourism.

Chapter 6
From Ethnic Brands to Fair Trade Labels:
The Illusion of Transparency and the Meanings of Kenyan Curio Art

You know, these ‘tribal’ carvings that Kambas make. Those are not the hot commodity right now. What all my customers want right now is Fair Trade, hand made things, made of garbage or recycled goods. But not the ‘tribal’ carvings.

- Davis, Curio exporter, 2007.¹

Gesturing to an array of baskets, painted carvings, antique coins, wire jewelry, and fabric wall hangings, a Kamba woman in her early 30s remarked to me in 2006: “It never used to be this diverse.”² Standing in the doorway of her shop, located on Ndia Kuu Road in Mombasa’s Old Town, she was referring to the overall variety of goods being sold in Mombasa but originating from remote production locations throughout East Africa. Using examples from her own shop, she pointed out the decoration, beadwork, and painting that was applied to products such as Kamba woodcarvings, which had for decades been sold as undecorated plain wood. Although she did not market products as coming from specific countries, she sold woodcarvings from Tanzania, “ebony” bowls and candlesticks from Malawi, malachite bowls and jewelry from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), baskets from Uganda, and batiks from Zimbabwe. She argued to me that this increased diversity of product types and origins, as well as the increased decoration on items, was a result of both industry competition and cell phones. While the former had undeniably become important for driving innovation, I was

¹ This quote came from Davis, a Mombasa-based curio exporter with whom I was discussing my dissertation in September 2007. His point, which is similar to mine, is that the curio industry has changed in response to consumer desires for new items being sold with new types of symbolic meanings built into their eventual marketing.

² Interview, March 28, 2006, with a female Kamba trader who had been born in Machakos in 1974. After completing her secondary school education in 1995, she moved to Mombasa to sell curios, which she did from her Moi Avenue kiosk until it was removed in December 2001. Following the kiosk demolitions, like many other such individuals, she began renting a shop along Ndia Kuu Road in Mombasa’s Old Town.

primarily interested in the latter. It was a cell phone that allowed her to remain seated in the shaded doorway of her shop while casually calling up her Congolese malachite dealer, her Malawian bowl suppliers, or the traders in fabrics and pillowcases from Zimbabwe. Most importantly, she did not have to go to these places in person.³ As I looked at the array of items sitting in her shop, only some of which were made in Kenya, I began to understand her point. New technologies for facilitating communication between producers and consumers, when in the hands of clever and connected intermediaries like her, left a visible mark not just on the economic organization of the curio industry, but also on the products being sold. Her job was to make the connection between the customer and the producer appear to be intimate and personal, even if the actual links in the multiple commodity chains were extremely complex.

Changes in the types of products being sold locally and exported through Kenya's curio industry were not only the result of new technologies for connecting intermediaries and shop owners with production networks. The new symbols of authenticity and value that were rapidly developing were also a product of the political instability and economic restructuring I have discussed in the previous chapters. Indeed, new technologies do not suddenly become useful with their introduction into new economic environments.

³ Although the Kenyan Postal Service could be unreliable, with products sometimes lost or stolen, most traders found that transporting products and even money payments through long-distance bus lines, such as Akamba Bus, Coast Bus, or Mash, was quite reliable for large shipments. The bus companies operating between Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda tended to have under-carriage compartments for passengers' luggage. When there was extra room, individuals could pay to ship other items, which at times included large shipments of soapstone or other handicrafts. This was the case for many coast-based soapstone exporters and wholesalers, who tended to buy products from the site of the quarries in Tabaka, then ship them using Akamba Bus from Kisii Town to Mombasa. It was also common for Mombasa-based traders buying products wholesale from distant locations such as Nairobi or Kisii to enclose cash money payments in large boxes, which were then shipped through the bus line as if it were a large package. Because the competing bus companies depended upon their reputation to attract such clients, the shipping services they provided tended to be very reliable and I recorded no complaints from traders of packages being stolen or missing. The job of the trader was to be present when the goods were loaded onto the bus and to ensure someone would be present on the other end to receive them.

Rather, how ICTs like email and cell phones are understood and utilized is shaped by the changing lives and situations of the people using them.

In this chapter, I discuss how the forms, materials, and symbols of Kenyan curio art have been heavily influenced by the environmental restraints and regulations that affect the supply of raw materials, the personal politics and aspirations of intermediary traders, and a changing and diversifying consumer base. With the help of ICTs, traders have remade a convenient correlation between industry organization and consumer desire, similar to that which existed when “tribal” Kamba carvings first became popular because of a production system organized around ethnic cooperatives and tourist anticipation of a “tribal Africa.” As I will demonstrate, the successful individual traders are increasingly producing an “Africa” that is based on what they find in common between their own notions of modernity and progress and what they calculate to be the desires and expectations of their customers.

Here I am particularly interested in the conjunction of performances of modernity by African art traders and the use of new communication technologies. As Louisa Schein argued from her study of the Miao minority in post-Mao China, “the modern is usefully thought of not only as a context in which people make their lives, nor only as a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity, but also as powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance” (1999:361). I wish to discuss modernity in a similar light – as produced and (re)-interpreted through artistic forms and business practices that illustrate aspects of what individual Kenyans felt to be “modern.” As I will discuss, the emergence of new artistic motifs and forms of symbolic capital is intimately related to important new communication technologies.

As I discussed in chapter 5, the corporate provision of ICTs in Kenya has resulted primarily in uneven development and at times in an increase in precariousness among small-scale traders and within cooperative societies. But technologies and the hopes they inspire are still powerfully felt, even if ICTs' actual usefulness for relieving poverty or increasing transparency in governance or economic exchange is highly questionable and dependent upon an array of non-technological variables. Despite the complicated roadblocks to a free information society, there *is* great ideological potential for governments, individual traders, and civil society organizations alike to use the symbols of ICTs, combined with assumptions about the virtues of technology and free market capitalism, to *perform* an ostensibly "transparent," genuine, and trusting connection. In this sense, as the concept of *transparency* attains symbolic capital and becomes a global good of its own, the *art of connection* becomes the ability to create and maintain an *illusion of transparency* within the commodity chain of Kenyan curio art. For example, as I will discuss in this chapter, intermediary art dealers can maintain their link in the commodity chain by applying Fair Trade stickers to exported crafts. Due to their symbolic value, the stickers create an illusory notion of transparency within the commodity chain even if the intermediary trader is quite alienated from both producers and buyers.

It is not necessarily new to argue that producing an illusion of transparency and proximate connection within a commodity chain can add value to African art. Such an argument speaks directly *to* rather than *against* MacCannell's (1976) discussion of mystification and tourism. Drawing on Erving Goffman's (1959:144-45) theory of the *front* and *back* regions of social establishments, MacCannell described the importance of

mystification in the tourist space when he argued that “a back region, closed to audiences and outsiders, allows concealment of props and activities that might discredit the performance out front. In other words, sustaining a firm sense of social reality requires some *mystification*” (1976:93).⁴ In this chapter, I focus on the mystification and illusion inherent in Kenya’s and East Africa’s tourism and curio industries. I argue that new ICTs have played an important role in shaping new symbolic forms and motifs found in Kenya’s curio art. I emphasize the role of telecommunications in more efficiently producing the related illusions of proximity and transparency.

Authenticity and Ethnic Brands

The Western concept of art is centuries old. In the classical European study of art history, *high* or *fine* art is that which results from spontaneous creativity and is produced free of economic motive (see Kasfir 1999a:102).⁵ As a result, dominant theories of “art” have been influenced by a subjective distinction between non-commercial *art* and the utilitarian and commodified *craft* (Kasfir 1999a:102). This separation of *fine art* from *commodity* erases the economic and symbolic history of art industries, assigns European fine art a separate, higher status, and exoticizes and subordinates art produced by non-Westerners for functional purposes (see Graburn 1976; Steiner 1994; Phillips and Steiner 1999a).

Within such a categorical system, Kenyan curio art is usually given the status of *commodity* rather than true *art* (Kasfir 1999a; Steiner 1994; Phillips and Steiner 1999b).

⁴ MacCannell’s argument began with a summary of Goffman’s theory of a structural division of social establishments between “front” and “back” regions: “The front is the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances” (1976:92).

⁵ As Phillips and Steiner discussed at length in the introduction to their edited volume, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, “The standard Western system of art classification has its origins in the sixteenth century in the emergence of the concept of the artist as an autonomous creator” (1999b:6).

Maintaining its value as “art,” however, is precisely what maintains its value as a commodity. It has therefore become important for traders to perform to customers and business associates their connections to production networks as well as their awareness of consumer taste. Within such a system, each trader must develop his or her niche as a modern African culture broker, marketing and selling art that gains value through its ostensibly authentic portrayal of a Kenyan landscape that fits Western assumptions about “Africa.”

Even before the onset of mass international tourism in the late 1960s, handicrafts labeled with particular ethnic identifiers dominated the Kenyan curio industry. Ethnic labels and brands such as “Kamba woodcarving” and “Kisii soapstone” have long been important for competing within the wider global market for tourist arts and crafts. Ethnic and tribal brands and symbols have helped traders present art in a way that makes it appear to be in its “natural” setting, as “it is presumed to be closer to the context of its creation or use and therefore less likely to be inauthentic or fake” (Steiner 1995:152). As Steiner (1995:154) has described of the Côte d’Ivoire art market, traders often present the art in a way that creates the illusion of discovery, playing on travelers’ imaginations and fantasies of travel and exploration of the African “frontier.”

But during research conducted between 2001 and 2008, I could not help but feel that the symbolic economy of African art had somewhat changed. Kristina Dziedzic Wright (2008) has discussed the emergence of new craft forms made in the town of Lamu on the northern Kenyan coast. At times, traders themselves would discuss innovation and the new motifs. While it was safe to sell the time-honored carvings of animals and Maasai figurines, new products were competing for symbolic capital.

This was not to say that the symbolic value of the “tribal” Maasai had vanished. Masculine images of the Maasai warrior or patriarch are still prominent in the Western imagination, and epitomize the most picturesque, unchanging, and potentially “authentic” representation of “tribal Africa” (Hodgson 2001; Kasfir 2007). Such Western stereotypes, while social constructions, were not lost on Kenya’s art traders. For example, Davis commented in 2005 of the symbol of the Maasai warrior as “authentically African”:

Usually women from outside [of Kenya], they come and marry Maasais because they have this whole symbolical, [pause] ‘this is like a *real* Kenyan. A real African.’ But the Maasai, it’s not like they like being that way. They want to be modern, but in order to be modern, by being these Maasai they can get the money to be modern.⁶

The image of the Maasai warrior, possibly the most iconic and lasting within Kenya’s tourism industry, is rooted in the colonial romance with the noble pastoralist warrior of the East African savannah.⁷ The image of the tall and lean Maasai warrior has remained for nearly a century and is still used prominently in marketing and representing Kenya and East Africa internationally. As Edward Bruner has described, “The colonial image of the Maasai has been transformed in a postmodern era so that the Maasai become

⁶ Interview with Davis, Sept. 10, 2005, with a male Kisii curio trader and exporter who moved to Mombasa from Nairobi in 1989. With no formal education, he began decorating and selling soapstone outside of Fort Jesus, where he worked in the kiosks’ removal in 2001-02.

⁷ “Maasai worship” was a well-developed cultural phenomenon of the British colonial era (Hammond and Jablow 1992:165 cited in Kasfir 1999b:70; Tidrick 1990:ch. 5). Norton found from research on tourist brochures that East African tourism drew heavily on romantic images of colonial contact with Africa and represented “East African nature as primordial and its culture as primitive, characterized by the noble savage” (1996:368). East African tourism and its self-representation as a place of primordial and untouched nature has produced a starkly contrasted ‘Other’ to a Western self-image as a degraded culture due to industrialization and modernization (Bruner 1991). In her discussion of the importance of two images of the Samburu (Maasai), the spear and the postcard, Kasfir (1999b:70) noted, “the postcolonial Kenya Ministry of Tourism certainly has no desire to let go of that image.” She described a “seemingly endless production of postcards, travel posters, and game park brochures with Maasai and Samburu as generic cultural symbols and of ‘authentic’ Africa, and even carved representations of them by Kamba artists...” (Kasfir 1999b:70). Also see the book *The White Masai: An Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure* by Corinne Hofmann (2005), which is the story of a white German woman’s marriage to a Kenyan who she met while on vacation in Mombasa.

the pleasant primitives, the human equivalent of the Lion King, the benign animal king who behaves in human ways” (2001:894). As such, “Black Africa in the American imagination has been re-presented to Americans in tourism” (Bruner 2001:894).

But Kenyan art traders who had dreams of becoming wealthy entrepreneurs and living the lifestyles they saw portrayed in international media were actively opening up new spaces for representation that fit better into their own imaginations of self than those represented by the Maasai. A late 20th-century American and European romance with the “tribal,” “ethnic,” or “primitive” was still welcomed and nurtured by Kenya’s tourism marketers, who had learned of Western sensibilities from the original colonizers nearly a century earlier. Undeniably, “ethnic” and “tribal” labels still appeal to transnational elites’ understandings of what is culturally “authentic,” “traditional,” or simply *real* about an “Africa” politically constructed as a binary opposite to the rationality and modernity of the West (Graburn 1976; Steiner 1994; Phillips and Steiner 1999b). But “tribal” images do not always effectively persuade tourists that their experience or the art they are buying is authentic, since many romantic images of a “tribal” Africa do not sufficiently “push back” and produce “the ultimate tourist commodity – experience” (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994:435, 449). Indeed, I have found that the traditional “tribal” images that popularized Kenyan curio art through much of the 20th century no longer carry the same symbolic value they once did. As Davis told me in September 2007, “You know, these tribal carvings that Kambas make. Those are not the hot commodity right now. What all my customers want right now is Fair Trade, hand made things, made of garbage or recycled goods. But not the tribal carvings.”⁸ This represents a shift in at

⁸ This quote, which struck me at the time, came from a conversation with Davis, September 18, 2007, Changamwe, Mombasa. A long-term participant in my research, he was helping me find some gifts for

least some segments of the Western conception of Africa: that while the continent may no longer be “tribal” in the sense created by the image of the Maasai warrior, its people are still in need of Western help and patronage, which is facilitated by Fair Trade and other ethical buying movements.⁹

Because the value of ethnic or tourist art rests in the consumers’ understandings and definitions of authenticity, as the consumers change so too do their understandings of what an authentic Africa, Kenya, or Mombasa looks like. While there has been significant discussion of what consumers of African art find appealing, there has been little discussion of how these consumers have changed over the last century. Consumer culture and demand substantially shape production and distribution processes of global commodities (Collins 2000:97). This is particularly true for the students, environmentally conscious travelers, and adventure tourists of the late 20th and early 21st century. Mathers and Hubbard (2006:197) argued that it is the submission to the realities of modern Africa that makes the conquest angle of adventure travel to Africa palatable for American tourists and students. They noted that while “representations of Africa as a colonized space of darkness” may have shifted to “contemporary images portraying a continent where modernity fails and epidemics run rampant,” all of these spaces are located “fully outside of the United States” and therefore open to discovery and penetration (Mathers and Hubbard 2006:197).

I am primarily concerned with changes in the meanings of Kenyan curio art.

There is evidence from as early as the 1950s that the authenticity of Kenya’s curio art

friends in the US at the Kisii soapstone cooperative. His statement was in response to my own remark that there were very few soapstone items that displayed any “ethnic” or “tribal” imagery.

⁹ For more on the Fair Trade movement in the developing world, see Raynolds et. al (2007), Raynolds and Long (2007), Raynolds and Murray (2007), and Wilkinson and Mascarenhas (2007).

was being questioned. Walter Elkan, for example, wrote of Kamba woodcarvers in the 1950s, “their carvings have an exotic but suspiciously uniform look about them and at the back of everyone’s mind there lurks the suspicion that really they are all mass-produced by machines” (1958:314). Likewise, Dean MacCannell (1976) stressed during the 1970s that tourists were doomed to failure in their quest for authenticity since tourism industries were repeatedly created for them and thus by definition lacked the natural or pristine elements that tourists desired. But could there be room for maneuver within the binary of the “real” or “authentic” and the “mass-produced” or “inauthentic”? What role does “Fair Trade” and “ethical buying” play in such a negotiation?

Edward Bruner took up the issue regarding tourism industries more generally, having found from research conducted with tourists that “most tourists are quite satisfied with their own society, most are not alienated, and they are not necessarily seeking an authentic experience elsewhere” (1991:240). As Bruner (1991:240) continued: “tourists are not dupes, and they realize that the native performances on their tour itinerary are constructions for a foreign audience. Tourists are willing to accept a reproduction, as long as it is a good one...” (1991:240). This is to suggest that, while tourists may not view ethnic labels, images, and commodities as authentic pre-colonial cultural artifacts, they are satisfied when items are produced well and in a way that feels comfortable to the Western consumer. This is not to suggest that tourists have abandoned any quest for authentic experiences of Africa. Rather, it accepts the fact that the types of experiences and aesthetics that Africa and Africans can offer to tourists and art consumers are diverse, complex, and influenced by Africans as well as tourists.¹⁰ As I demonstrate in this

¹⁰ As Kasfir put it, “for every package holiday tourist looking only for a mild sexual adventure and a tan, there is another looking for the real (or ‘disappearing’) Africa” (2004:338-39). She was particularly

chapter, the changes in forms, materials, and strategies used in marketing Kenyan curio art are related to the changing structure of Kenya's curio industry and its ability to adapt to environmental and market pressure.

Evidence of the adaptability of Kenyan art has, in fact, existed since the early days of the curio industry. As discussed in chapter 3, the earliest Kenyan artisans produced crafts that did not conform to ethnic or community traditions but rather to the colonial imagination. During the 1980s, Changamwe's Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society made an official marketing distinction between "ethnic" lines, which were intended for the local market, and the quite different export lines, which included non-ethnic decorative animal carvings and functional items (Jules-Rosette 1984:210). This distinction rested on the assumption that tourists wanted items with more "local color," such as Maasai figurines, while export products did not need to explicitly market the carvings' exact origins. The Kenyan export trade, therefore, was open to a range of images, including depictions of the animal kingdom as well as crafts emblazoned with abstract geometric designs (see Jules-Rosette 1984:210).

According to several exporters I interviewed, some of whom shipped several tons of handicrafts each year, the most popular products among overseas buyers were the new and unique items such as non-generic carvings of animals or people, or abstract carvings showing human interconnection, many of which had only been on the market for a few years. As a result, many exporters and intermediaries, especially those with close connections to producers (through family, for example), blended the desires of international buyers with their own notions of modernity to develop new forms of art that

interested in "this second group," the members of which "keep detailed diaries and compete to see who can get to the most out-of-the-way places and find the most authentic artifacts for the lowest prices" (2004:339).

to them was an expression of modern Kenya and the transnational, creative, and innovative nature of their businesses. For example, as Davis told me quite directly, “I would take authentic and modern just in one category.”¹¹ For him, what was most *authentic* on the curio market was what was *new* and had been least copied. As he explained:

I would just take authentic and modern together with artwork... Most people from my experience, they are really looking for something that is very unique. It's really Kenyan. It's not something fake. You talk to some of those people from U.S. and they tell me that point. 'We don't want stuff that has been in the market for more than ten years.'

Traders, particularly migrants who had experienced discrimination and political targeting because of their ethnic backgrounds, often welcomed such changes. Many art dealers who identified as modern, urban Kenyans were wary of presenting themselves as “tribal” or “ethnic.” This was particularly the case for individuals who were striving daily to downplay their ethnic identities, finding more security in representing themselves as modern Kenyans rather than ethnic migrants. While politicians drew on ethnic differences and images to divide and rule Kenyans or foment inter-ethnic violence (see ch. 2), “tribalism” was the opposite of what many Kenyans hoped for the future of their country. As ethnic identities were politicized by the nation’s elites in feuds over election votes, traders who depended upon tourism and economic stability became perturbed by such categories and performances (see ch. 2). Kenyan art that showed the nation to be modern, changing, and new, represented Kenya as welcoming to tourists without playing on labels, brands, and symbols that were increasingly becoming politically sensitive. They found a way of appealing to tourists on their own terms, as modern or worldly, but not necessarily “tribal” and “traditional.”

¹¹ Interview with Davis, Sept. 10, 2005.

At the same time, traders were aware that they could lose their symbolic capital and attraction by appearing *too* modern, entrepreneurial, or capitalistic. As Davis related to me:

When [tourists] find that there is internet everywhere, and people are getting cell phones, they get disappointed, and they say, 'I never thought it would be this way.' So I think we bring a very different reality. That's even why they don't want to buy anything from a part of Kenya that seems modern.

As a result, his job was to find overlap and points of collusion between tourists' expectations and his own pursuits within the political and economic realities that structured his business within modern Kenya. A major question implied by his comments and those of other traders was, could decades of inter-cultural communication lead to the development of new sensibilities among both traders and tourists alike? In other words, as tourists became more skeptical of both the safety of Kenya as a destination and of the authenticity of "tribal" representations, could artists and art traders find ways of representing Kenya through art that would portray the country as safe and welcoming while not losing the valuable symbolic capital of the art itself? How could ICTs facilitate such changes?

Innovation and the Art of Connection

Since Mutisya Munge carved his first wooden animals and figurines (see ch. 3), Kenya's curio industry has continued because of carvers' innovation and cross-cultural sharing. As Sally Price (2007) has also noted, when artists once dubbed "primitive" find themselves operating in an expanded, international economic environment, the result can be innovation in artistic forms, alternative materials, and new interpretations of the art itself. Much of the early innovations that emerged in soapstone and wood carvings came from Kamba and Kisii carvers who were hired during the 1960s and early 1970s to copy

West or Central African art for export or sale locally in Kenya (Miller 1975:29). While curio art is often sold or marketed using very specific ethnic brands to increase value, these mono-ethnic labels are deceptive since artisans themselves were always learning from one another across ethnic boundaries. By the mid-1970s, Kisii artists were regularly carving small soapstone animal figurines, inspired by similar Kamba woodcarvings yet having their own unique innovations. For example, unlike the detailed and precise realism of Kamba animal carvings, Miller described the emerging Kisii animals as “simple” and “nearly abstract” (1975:30), with “geometric balance, and smooth, usually undetailed, surfaces” (1975:31). Indeed, any experienced soapstone trader can easily differentiate between a Kamba-carved and a Kisii-carved soapstone elephant. The styles were entirely different, which was a major reason why so many Kamba carvers found employment in Tabaka producing soapstone animals for Kisii exporters and wholesalers.

Due to its cheap price compared to wood, soapstone has long been a practical medium for stylistic experimentation. Carvings of human pipe smokers or water bearers made from soapstone began appearing on the Kenyan market by the early 1970s (Miller 1975:31). Other forms emerged with time, such as “thinking men or women with bare breasts. Even ten years ago you could not find those,” I was told during an interview with Dennis, a male Kisii vendor from outside his roadside kiosk in 2001.¹² Dennis, born and raised in Tabaka near the soapstone quarries, finished his secondary school education before going to work for his uncle Nyambuto in Mombasa. While he had grown up carving, he told me most young men ideally wanted to work in the formal sector rather

¹² Interview with Dennis, April 20, 2001. Dennis was a male Kisii vendor born in Tabaka in 1977. He finished secondary school before moving to Mombasa in 1999 to work for his uncle outside of Fort Jesus.

than in the soapstone business. But after finishing school, the offer from his uncle to manage several of his kiosks outside of Fort Jesus was too promising to pass up. Having literally grown up next to the soapstone business, he and many other such young men brought fresh energy to the industry and new ideas for how to develop the newest and most innovative carvings.

One form of soapstone sculpture that emerged from the early 1990s represented social connectivity through the carving of simplified, inter-connected people (see photos 6.1 and 6.2). Such carvings were also a practical way to lighten the heavy soapstone by hollowing out the majority of the material.¹³ It was common, for example, to find simplified carvings of a “mother and child,” depicting a tall, abstract individual stretching down to embrace a shorter figure who was looking and reaching up (see photo 6.3). This was also adapted into the “family” motif, which depicted all combinations of parents and children, abstractly organized around a singular soapstone base. During my time in Kenya, I frequently found myself helping visiting friends or relatives seek out such sculptures that matched the number of children in their own families. I have heard tourists refer to these sculptures as a type of “modern art” because the features of the people were smoothed away, leaving simplified representations of interlocking human bodies that lacked detail. In another similar style, the figures were interlocked within a larger dome or column of human torsos, heads, and appendages, with some upright, some upside-down, and others elongated until one figure’s legs became another’s arms. I saw these as truly the *art of connection*, a literal representation of human inter-connectedness (see photo 6.1).

¹³ These sculptures became the specialty of Kisii carvers, while Kamba carvers who moved to Tabaka because of the wood shortage made highly detailed soapstone animals their specialty.



Photo 6.1: The *art of connection*, or a “Makonde” style soapstone carving, demonstrating inter-personal connectivity.



Photo 6.2: Motif depicting social connection. This example is of rosewood.



Photo 6.3: Family motif carving, showing mother and child – of soapstone.

Meanwhile most Kenyan dealers referred to these styles as “Makonde,” referring to the original inspiration from complex Makonde woodcarvings. Woodcarvings made by Makonde carvers of present-day Mozambique were common before the onset of European influence (Kasfir 1999a:109-110; Kingdon 2005). But it was several decades after the conquest of the Makonde by the Portuguese in 1917 that European patronage of the woodcarving industry and the developments of the *shetani*, or spirit figures invented by Samaki Likankoa in the 1950s, would make Makonde carvings famous internationally (Kingdon 2005:53). While the Makonde produced carvings in small family groups prior to the 20th century, the carvings sold today as Makonde are very different from those made in pre-colonial times (Kasfir 1999a:109-10). The type of woodcarving most similar to what is now called Makonde-style soapstone carvings did not appear in Tanzania until

the 1950s (Kasfir 1999a:110). This genre, better known as *shetani* (Swahili for “Satan” or “devil”), was described by Kasfir as “sinuous, anti-naturalistic and frequently employed in erotic and social caricature” (1999a:110). Kingdon (2005:52-3) further differentiated the various types as *shetani*, *ujamaa*, and *mawingu* forms, the first representing demons or spirits, the second interconnected people, and the third more abstract forms, said to be originally inspired by cloud formations.

It was only a matter of time before Kamba and Kisii carvers began copying and adapting the Makonde styles. Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984:126) found in the early 1980s that the Kamba carvers of the Makindu cooperative in Kenya specialized in copying Makonde carvings (which they called “*kisanza*”). The Kenyan government’s Handicraft Unit made the same observation of innovation and adaptation, reporting of the Makindu carvers: “Unlike other wood-carving Societies in Kenya, the group not only specializes in sculpture carving (Makonde Carvings) but also use variety (*sic*) of wood species such as Olive Wood, Ebony, Mahogany ‘Itula’ and White Ebony.”¹⁴

In Tabaka, at the site of the quarries and most carving, I was told motifs of interconnected people had been regularly produced since the early 1990s and developed out of the sharing of knowledge between the Kisii, the Makonde of Mozambique and Tanzania, and the Shona of Zimbabwe.¹⁵ But unlike the intricate Makonde carvings, the soapstone

¹⁴ See letter from F.O. Okwiri of the Handicraft Unit dated Nov. 28, 1980, document 15 in file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

¹⁵ Zimbabwe has a quite different history of ethnic and tourist art from Kenya, since until the 1960s pottery was the primary craft sold along roadsides (Standa-Gunda and Braedt 2005:73). Soapstone carving was introduced to Zimbabwe’s artisans in the 1970s and woodcarving soon followed through the 1980s, but well after the development of these industries in Kenya (2005:73). Since I have interviewed Kamba traders who were traveling to what is now Zimbabwe and as far as South Africa during the 1960s selling wooden carvings, it is very likely that soapstone and wood carving techniques not only became popular in Zimbabwe because of “buyers acquiring new tastes from other markets,” as Standa-Gunda and Braedt

versions were highly simplified, smoothed, and polished so as to reveal no gender or race. Representing a blank slate for interpretation, these sculptures elicited a creative interpretation from both the buyer and the vendor, who could have numerous understandings of the object's meaning. The intriguing sculptures had the potential to represent the new modern connections developing in Africa and Kenya, which traders and travelers together celebrated as part of their greater transnational mobility made possible through international tourism and the use of new technologies. I could not help but think of how, by hiding inequality and stressing connection over disconnection, such sculptures represent the ideology of free mobility dreamt of by traders and romanticized by the transnational elite.

The Wood Crisis and the Environment Impact

The environmental impact on innovation was significant. While woodcarvings are light, inexpensive, and attractive to souvenir-seeking travelers, the trees most prized by buyers and carvers alike have been in a state of rapid depletion for decades (Belcher et al. 2005:1).¹⁶ Kenya's difficulties in this respect are compounded by the fact that most of the preferred wood for carving comes from specific slow growing and endangered species. For example, African blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*, *mpingo* in Swahili, commonly called "ebony" in English) and rosewood are valued for their fine grain and the fact that they rarely crack, even in the cold climates of the northern hemisphere (Cunningham 2005:13).¹⁷ But as early as the 1950s, Walter Elkan found that "the supply

(2005:73) postulated, but also because of an exchange of information and styles between African traders operating throughout eastern and southern Africa.

¹⁶ Simon Choge of the Kenya Forestry Research Institute showed in a survey cited by Schmitt and Cunningham (2002:260) that over 40,000 trees are felled each year for Kenya's carving industry.

¹⁷ According to Cunningham et al. (2005:204, 207), not only are African blackwood, rosewood, and other similar species important for the international trade in furniture and instruments, but the environmental sustainability of these species is not just a matter of regulating cutting for woodcarving but also commercial

of dark wood in Wamunyu was soon used up and even within a radius of a hundred miles there is apparently little ebony” (1958:321). It appears that for nearly as long as there has been woodcarving in Kenya, there has been concern about the rapid depletion of the valuable wood upon which the industry relies.

Since the earliest days of Kamba woodcarving, traders traveled long distances to obtain the best wood for carving. During the 1960s and 1970s, Mombasa’s Akamba Industry was repeatedly involved in negotiations with the forestry department over access to cheaper wood.¹⁸ In the March 1972 Monthly Report, the Mombasa District Co-operative Officer remarked of the woodcarving cooperative:

The Society is faced with shortage (*sic*) of logs which form the main material required for production. They are transported from forests in Lamu District at very high transport costs. The Society has combed forests in Kwale and Kilifi District for the special variety used for wood carving.¹⁹

A United Nations study found in 1974 that it would only take five years for the type of wood most commonly carved by the Kamba, “*muhugu*” (commonly referred to as “mahogany”), to become exhausted in the readily accessible areas of the country.²⁰ In February 1976, the Mombasa District Co-operative Officer was still complaining to his superiors in Nairobi that Akamba Industry was having difficulty because the closest forests on the coast were in Kwale and Malindi Districts, 20 to 75 miles from the

logging. In Kenya’s case, only one percent of timber cut in Kenya is for woodcarving (Choge 2002 cited in Cunningham et al. 2005:209).

¹⁸ See “Monthly Report for April 1964,” by W.D. Mwasi, Co-operative Officer, Mombasa, to Ag. Commissioner for Co-operative Development, May 5, 1964, document 136 in the file “Monthly Reports Mombasa – Department of Co-operative Development 1957-1967,” Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/292, box 489, shelf 6743.

¹⁹ See “Monthly Report – March, 1972, Mombasa District,” B.M. Nduati, Co-operative Officer, Mombasa District, to Coast Provincial Co-operative Officer, dated May 3, 1972, document 68 in the file “Mombasa District Monthly Reports – Ministry of Co-operatives 1968-1972,” Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/19/293, box 489, shelf 6743.

²⁰ See page 12 of the document “Handcraft Co-operatives: A Survey on Potentials for Expansion and Development,” produced by the Development Planning Division, Ministry of Co-operative Development, January 1978. This document can be found in the Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/20/29, box 509, shelf 6749.

cooperative. He estimated that the Mombasa cooperative needed at least ten large truckloads of wood per week to stay adequately supplied, which they rarely were.²¹

In November 1980 an official from the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services wrote to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources regarding “Muhugu Tree Allocation,” asking that each cooperative (there were three at the time, in Mombasa, Nairobi, and Wamunyu; see ch. 3) have its weekly tree allocation increased to 12.²² The letter concluded: “Nordic Governments have set aside K.sh. 1,650,000 to assist Handicraft Co-operative Societies. In order that the funds are utilized properly, Handicraft Societies must increase their out-put.” The Chief Conservator of Forests responded quite bluntly that the limit on trees allocated to the cooperatives was, indeed, to ensure the longevity of the carving industry since it would collapse if the carvers exhausted the wood supply too quickly.²³

Despite the environmental constraints, woodcarvers I interviewed at the Kamba cooperative in Changamwe still preferred carving the rare mahogany (the aforementioned *muhugu*), teak, rosewood, and African blackwood (“ebony”), all of which could be found in the Central Province forests around Nyeri and Mount Kenya. Nairobi, in fact, had seen an earlier boom in urban woodcarving than in Mombasa, particularly during the Second World War and largely because of the proximity of wood. But by the early 1980s,

²¹ See letter from T.M. Mutugu, District Co-operative Officer, Mombasa District, to the Commissioner for Co-operative Development, Nairobi, dated Feb. 26, 1976. Document 135 in the file “Akamba Handicraft Industry Co-operative Society, Ltd. 1963-1978,” from the Ministry of Co-operative Development files, Kenya National Archive, Nairobi, serial number TR/8/816, box 236, shelf 6658, room 2.

²² See letter from A.H. Ogada for Commissioner for Co-operative Development to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources dated Nov. 4, 1980, document 10 in the file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

²³ See letter from O.M. Mburu, Chief Conservator of Forests, to the Commissioner for Co-operative Development, dated Nov. 13, 1980, in file “Handicrafts Development Plan – Ministry of Co-operatives 1972-1984,” Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, serial number TR/10/24, box 413, shelf 6717.

government regulations limited Wamunyu-based carvers to purchasing only three logs per month from the Karura and Ngong forests just outside of Nairobi (Jules-Rosette 1984:120). The result was that it became common for Kamba traders to import African blackwood from Tanzania since it was not always as readily available in Kenya, especially in *Ukambani* (Mount 1973:52). For a period beginning in the 1980s, mahogany and African blackwood could still be cut in Kenya, although the amount was strictly limited by the government. In the mid-1990s, the government applied strong restrictions and regulations to the cutting and use of the most important wood, *muhugu*, from the central Kenyan forests (Schmitt and Cunningham 2002). The resulting spike in the price of raw material for carving increased competition just as the tourism industry began its decline during the late 1990s.

One Kamba trader from Wamunyu, who had worked in Nairobi before coming to Mombasa in 1998, told me in 2005 that almost all the wood cut from around Nairobi after the year 2000 was being cut illegally.²⁴ Because neem, the major legal alternative to mahogany, was not available around Nairobi, he came to the coast along with many other Kamba curio dealers to access cheaper wood. Such moves only increased pressure on coastal forests, workshops, and markets. It is no coincidence that it has largely been since 1998 that neem surpassed mahogany (*muhugu*) as the most commonly carved species among Kenyan woodcarvers.²⁵

²⁴ Interview, Nov. 25, 2005, with a male Kamba vendor who was born in Wamunyu in 1968. He almost finished secondary school before moving to Nairobi in the 1980s to work in the curio business. At that time, he said, the woodcarving business in Nairobi was better than at the time of interview because wood was still cheap. When he came to Mombasa in 1998, it was primarily because of the restrictions that made wood in Nairobi unaffordable. Upon arriving on the coast he moved straight to Magongo Market, from where he still operated his curio business the last time I saw him in July 2008.

²⁵ For this paragraph, see Box 14.5 in Cunningham et al. (2005:221), titled, "Neem (*Azadirachta indica*, A. Juss., *Meliaceae*) and its potential for sustainable woodcarving in Kenya: a case study from Malindi," by Alex O. Obara, Martina G. Höft and Robert Höft. It is not clearly known when neem, an invasive exotic

As wooden products became more expensive, traders adapted styles that portrayed the authenticity of the wood to ensure the value of the carvings. As neem became the most common type of wood found on the Kenyan market, making up 80 percent of what was carved in Akamba Industry in 2005,²⁶ much of this very soft and light colored material was painted black and marketed as “ebony.” While increasing the value of genuine “ebony” (African blackwood), the practice of painting neem black brought an additional challenge to the vendor – to visually demonstrate that the wood was authentic. By leaving the outer bark on the wood and revealing the separation between the darker core and the lighter periphery, artisans and vendors made it obvious that a carving was indeed of rosewood, “mahogany,” or “ebony” (see photos 6.4 and 6.5). As a result, this dominant motif was soon found throughout East African curio shops and markets, appealing to an environmental rather than “tribal” or “traditional” notion of authenticity.

species, was brought to coastal Kenya. Choge et al. (2005:42 f.n. 3) suggested it was probably introduced by migrant Indian workers who settled in coastal Kenya while employed during the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway in the late 19th century. The introduction of neem to woodcarvers as an alternative to “mahogany” was primarily due to a collaboration beginning in 1994 between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Kew Peoples and Plants Initiative, and a range of other such organizations. Since then, several carving cooperative groups have started their own nurseries, the oldest owned by the Makindu Carvers Cooperative, which started its nursery in the early 1990s (Schmitt and Cunningham 2002:262).

²⁶ The Head of Records and Books at Akamba Woodcarving cited this statistic during author’s interview, Sept. 26, 2005, Changamwe, Mombasa.



Photo 6.4: A curio vendor polishes a large sculpture of African blackwood, in which the lighter outer wood has been left in a spiral to demonstrate the authenticity of the wood, April 2001.



Photo 6.5: Carved African blackwood revealing the separation between dark heartwood, light outer wood, and bark.

Since the mid-1990s, NGOs have emerged on the Kenyan coast to solely deal with the coastal woodcarving cooperatives and to help convince carvers to shift to neem, mango, or jacaranda rather than the rare *muhugu*, African blackwood, rosewood, and teak (Choge et al. 2005; Schmitt and Cunningham 2002; Schmitt and Maingi 2005).²⁷ Many of these organizations have advocated certification as the solution, despite continually running into problems applying international standards to the specifics of the Kenyan case (Cunningham et al. 2005).²⁸ Because Kenya's woodcarving cooperatives consume roughly half of the total volume of wood utilized for carvings within the country (Choge et al. 2005:34), they are an ideal platform for reform. The cooperatives provide a well-organized bureaucratic structure for implementing conservation policy. But despite the attempts that have been made to confront environmental problems and promote sustainability among Kenya's woodcarvers, when compared to India or Indonesia, in Kenya, "little forestry policy or management practice have been focused on the carving

²⁷ Also see author's interview, Jan. 9, 2006. The major efforts came from WWF and the Kenya-based Good Woods Project, which pushed certification as a means to limit the destruction of East Africa's remaining coastal forests (Schmitt and Cunningham 2002:260-61). The Good Woods movement was helped by "ethical sourcing" by groups like the Mennonite Central Committee, for example, which was buying an estimated \$250,000 worth of carvings from Kenya each year, largely from Kamba cooperatives (Schmitt and Cunningham 2002:261). The major stakeholders and organizations involved were the People and Plants initiative, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-approved certifiers SmartWood, and the Soil Association Woodmark Programme (Schmitt and Cunningham 2002:261). The FSC was set up in 1993 in response to the popularity and application of certification and "eco-labelling" of wood product during the 1990s (Schmitt and Maingi 2005:229-30). The FSC has seen great progress throughout its history and has created a comprehensive system of assessment based on environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Schmitt and Maingi 2005:230). See www.fscoax.org/principal.htm for more information on the ten principles used by FSC in certification.

²⁸ For example, FSC certification does not allow for species-based certification, making the certification of neem as a "good wood" as opposed to other indigenous types very difficult (Cunningham et al. 2005:239). Cunningham et al. admitted, "it is somewhat doubtful that the certification scheme is sustainable over time without external support" (2005:246). In particular, they found that the estimates of how certification would increase the price of the final product when sold were over-estimated. In the case of Global Village, rather than adding value to carvings of certified woods coming out of Kenya, certification led to a rapid decline in the number of products being purchased from Kenya. This was at least partially because the products being purchased, of neem for example, were of a significantly lower quality due to the shift from the traditional hardwoods like mahogany or rosewood to softer and lighter woods such as neem, which often split in cold and dry climates.

industry” (Choge et al. 2005:35). Further, as cooperatives lose their former authority and importance within Kenya’s curio industry (see ch. 5), their potential to function as the primary nodes for implementing environmental policy is also compromised.

Traders and exporters I interviewed accepted ethical cutting standards to an extent, although for many it was seen as just another barrier to the economic development of the industry. Traders could easily circumvent regulations by buying from individual traders who had their own, private carving workshops. This was the case with one Nairobi-based exporter I interviewed, who no longer bought or worked through cooperatives at all, instead engaging in more flexible sub-contracting with regional traders who supplied him with woodcarvings made in remote locations like the rural homes near Wamunyu or the forests of Tanzania near the Kenyan border.²⁹ As a result of such decentralized sub-contracting, the oversight and responsibility was repeatedly avoided. As he explained to me in early 2006: “When you go and talk to the carvers about *mambo ya nature, anataka kula kwanza*. Before he will listen to you. *Huwezi kufa na kuna mti hapa.*” [translation] “When you go and talk to the carvers about matters of nature, he wants to eat first. Before he will listen to you. You can’t die and there’s a tree here.” But he also defended the carving industry and downplayed the wood crisis, saying the easy solution was to promote the replanting of trees. As he continued: “*Ukikata mti, panda mwengine, ni rahisi. Tunajaribu kuwaeducate.*” [translation] “If you cut a tree, plant another, it’s easy. We try to educate them.” Interestingly, by saying that he was

²⁹ Interview, Jan. 9, 2006, with a male Kamba trader who was born in the small town of Kangundo in 1972. He completed his primary school education before moving to Nairobi in search of work. Lacking a formal job, he was employed by several large curio shops and exporters in Nairobi’s downtown before setting off on his own during the 1990s. At the time of interview, he had a main office in downtown Nairobi and rented two stalls in the Triangle Market in Nairobi’s Westlands.

trying to educate “them,” the blame and responsibility was passed to the carvers themselves rather than the exporters and intermediaries.

Despite the potential of new technologies to facilitate communication and help rural producers find markets, transparency and accountability within such non-personal interactions simultaneously decreased. This was despite the fact that shipments of woodcarvings were increasingly being exported and sold as “environmentally certified.” Not only did ICTs and the subcontracting limit individual exporters’ capacity to monitor the production conditions of workers and the sourcing of raw materials, but it also made the potential for new movements, such as Fair Trade, less realistic. While ICTs have the potential to connect producers and consumers, new communication technologies also have the potential to increase the illusion of transparency within the commodity chain and allow individual entrepreneurs to easily circumvent regulatory systems and organizations that were put in place to monitor the ethical sourcing of raw materials and goods. As North American or European buyers increasingly communicate with their East African exporters via email or cell phone rather than in person, assurances of environmental and other forms of certification are often based more on assumption than certainty.

Fair Trade and the Dominance of Intermediaries

Innovation in marketing Kenyan carvings and handicrafts did not only come in the form of materials used and forms produced, but also in the labels and very explicit markers applied to the products at the point of sale. The international Fair Trade marketing phenomenon was timely for Kenyan intermediaries and exporters, who have been able to use the Fair Trade label to affirm authenticity and the symbolic value of their

products.³⁰ While not an initial topic of study, I quickly found that the success of Fair Trade crafts was the result of the cell phone entrepreneur, who could only succeed by appearing to represent the local or “grass-roots” level of production while still functioning in a thoroughly modern fashion.

For example, a Mombasa-based exporter with very little connection to a production group could easily apply a Fair Trade sticker to an item and thereby produce the illusion that he, in fact, represented the producers. In many cases, he had never met the producers or even visited the site of production. It was often simply too easy to call them up and have them ship him items when he needed them. As a result, the bureaucratic nature of Fair Trade marketing and labelling slowly departed from the values of the movement itself, which emphasized putting consumers in direct contact with producers. This was particularly the case when the companies claiming to be Fair Trade were based in North America or Europe and left intermediaries responsible for oversight.

As the chairman of the Kisii soapstone cooperative said of his role as intermediary: “*mimi ni kama daraja*,” [translation] *I’m like a bridge*. Ironically, this is what led him to answer my inquiry about Fair Trade by simply saying, “*I am Fair Trade*,” pointing to his chest for extra emphasis.³¹ I found it fascinating that in the eyes of those

³⁰ The product certification aspect of Fair Trade came out of a late 1980s strand of the larger movement (Raynolds and Long 2007:17). European Fair Trade labeling groups, for example, began organizing under the umbrella group the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) in 1997 (Raynolds and Long 2007:17). As Raynolds and Long (2007:19) pointed out, partially because of such organizations, the Fair Trade certification system has recently become much more industrial and bureaucratic. IFAT and its members, for example, are also largely concerned with certification and have the longest presence in the Global South compared to the FLO in the North (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007:126).

³¹ Interview, Sept. 23, 2005, with a male Kisii exporter based in Mombasa. He was born in 1963 in Tabaka in Kisii District and had finished secondary school before coming to Mombasa to sell soapstone from Uhuru Gardens along Moi Avenue in the early 1980s. Although he lived permanently in Mombasa, his

labeling and exporting the Fair Trade crafts, the label itself had ironically become what it had set out to eliminate – another intermediary.

As Raynolds and Long put it so eloquently: “Fair Trade seeks to challenge historically unequal international market relations and transform North/South trade from a vehicle of exploitation to a means of empowerment” (2007:15). Also embedded in the term is an idea of “trade, not aid,” which according to Raynolds and Long, improves “farmer and worker livelihoods through direct sales, better prices, and stable market links, as well as support for producer organizations and communities” (2007:15). But while Fair Trade ideally represents the connection of consumer with producer through the removal of an intermediary or of excessive intermediary profiteering, exporters and intermediaries who had limited connection to carvers and production networks were usually the ones to do the actual labelling. This was particularly true when production took place in rural areas, since exporters were generally based closer to urban shipping infrastructure. This was compounded by the very blurry line between official Fair Trade certification by the Fair Trade Federation (FTF)³² or the International Fair Trade Organization (IFAT)³³ and the application of labels saying products were “Fair Trade,” “handmade in Kenya,” or “environmentally certified.”

For example, the Head of Exports at Changamwe’s Akamba Handicrafts Industry Co-operative Society told me in 2005 that neither they nor their products were officially

family still lived on his farm in Tabaka, and he regularly traveled back and forth for the purpose of buying and transporting additional carvings to the coast.

³² See <http://www.fairtradefederation.org/mshop.html>. FTF is one of several large, transnational Fair Trade umbrella organizations. FTF works largely with crafts producers and North American companies. Grimes (2000:12-13) discussed the FTF and broke down the seven principles that underlie FTF’s mission: “the payment of fair wages to artisans and farmers; the guarantee of employment advancement; environmentally sustainable production practices; public accountability; the creation of long-term trade relationships; the assurance of safe and healthy working conditions; and the advancement of technical and financial assistance from the North American marketers to the producer groups whenever possible.”

³³ <http://IFAT.org>.

registered or certified as Fair Trade, even though they regularly shipped to large chain stores such as Global Village³⁴ in the United States, which claimed to deal in Fair Trade products and regularly labeled Kamba carvings as such.³⁵ It was common at Akamba Industry and other workshops and cooperatives for international buyers to send their own stickers, often printed with “Fair Trade,” to be applied to all products before they shipped. Global Village even had Akamba Industry place price tags with bar codes and “Fair Trade” on items before shipping rather than pay their own employees in the United States to do the job. “Apparently the Fair Trade stickers keep them from paying someone on their end,” the Head of Exports at the Kamba cooperative told me, admitting he did not actually understand the labels’ significance.

But many intermediaries did understand. One Kisii trader, a male in his late 20s, worked for a major U.S.-based Fair Trade crafts store. As a full-time exporter, his job involved daily visits to one of Mombasa’s chronically packed and slow internet cafés to check his email for new orders, updates, and inquiries. The danger, he told me, was that if he did not satisfy his buyers (mainly in the United States and Great Britain) with *new* products that would sell on the European and American crafts markets, he would lose his intermediary role to competitors. His job entailed communicating with production cooperatives and workshops located from Nairobi to Kisumu in Western Kenya to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It was, however, essential that none of these producers became directly connected to his buyers, lest his own intermediary position become needless. As a final step before shipping his orders, all of the products, regardless of their origin, were labeled with the ordering company’s website and “Fair Trade product of Kenya” stickers,

³⁴ This is a pseudonym for a large company that specializes in selling crafts in North America and that has several hundred outlets in the United States and Canada.

³⁵ Interview, Sept. 26, 2005, with the Head of Exports, Changamwe, Mombasa.

which he was sent ahead of time by his employers. As of 2006, this trader's company-issued business card made him an "Authorized Buyer" of "Ethically Imported African Arts and Crafts." With his business card, adorned with his hotmail account and cell phone number, he was more than just a curio vendor – he was a buying, shipping, and exporting enterprise. While his income was still as low as one or two hundred dollars per month, he was well above the absolute poverty line. While he was aware of the illusion required to maintain his intermediary position, this was the technique that allowed him to survive in the curio business.

Much literature on Fair Trade has raised serious questions about the movement and its ability to live up to its ideals (see Raynolds et al. 2007; Raynolds and Long 2007; Raynolds and Murray 2007; and Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007). I have found, there is a significant lack of oversight and certification of crafts producers taking place. As Western-based Fair Trade organizations increasingly rely on ICTs for communicating with their ostensibly fair-practicing buying agents, there is a considerable knowledge gap maintained for the purpose of making the links within the commodity chain appear transparent and direct when that was not, in fact, the case.

It was obvious to many exporters that Fair Trade and other labels such as "handmade in Kenya" functioned primarily to attract customers. "Besides," as Davis told me one day, pointing out some handmade items he was packing, "I know these were made by *chokoras*," *street kids*, which from his attitude meant that their production was anything but fair. He knew from experience about the potential for young Kenyans to be exploited by businesses that paid small amounts of money or food for days of work. But that was also the economic foundation of his business. Walking through the musty and

humid rooms of his two-bedroom apartment, which were literally overflowing with boxes of handicrafts sent to him from all over East Africa, Davis pointed out labels with phrases like “teenage mothers and girls,” “Empowering Women, Children, and Orphans,” and “Women and Children.” He just laughed:

They [producers/production workshops] are all doing that because that’s how they do business. They put that all over the boxes, which are then re-used, and they become well known. People call them up, they appear as a large cooperative, something like Bombolulu, Shanzu, or Akamba.³⁶

Davis insisted that many of the people whose products he exported had no idea where the products would end up. They would sometimes ask, but he would almost never give away such important information. “They just ship them,” he said. For Davis, producers’ labels were a direct challenge to his own economic niche, since it was only a matter of time before his overseas buyers would try one of the email addresses or phone numbers always highlighted on labels. For Davis, it was even worth repackaging items into new boxes that did not have labels advertising the production organizations, lest his intermediary position become completely obsolete. In other words, the crucial skill became creating an illusion of transparency and proximity by replacing the labels of production organizations with generic “Fair Trade” stickers.

Some organizations and cooperatives I visited told me they were registered as Fair Trade, even though they had never spoken with or been visited by anyone from a Fair Trade organization. In one case, IFAT registered a workshop³⁷ even though their

³⁶ See author’s interview with Davis, March 23, 2006. Bombolulu and Shanzu were two large and well-established workshop societies for disabled children, many of whom were victims of polio. Both of them survived because of the export market and were in this trader’s opinion *legitimate* “Fair Trade” producers. He was comparing these established groups to others that emerged more recently on the wave of ICTs, Fair Trade, and other such labels.

³⁷ See www.IFAT.org. Through the 1980s and 1990s, four major organizations emerged to represent the larger Fair Trade movement: The Network of European World Shops (NEWS!) and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), which both work primarily with European companies, the Fair Trade

directors told me they had never met with anyone from the organization and did not know what IFAT actually did.³⁸ Beyond what the directors told me, I saw no evidence in the form of a certificate or label that verified their registration. The ambiguity accompanying this registration and certification process only furthered the skeptical view among the directors of such workshops that the label was nothing more than a marketing tool. But Fair Trade, while another powerful intermediary, was one that was now essential for them to use. In a similar case, the staff of another production organization told me in 2005 that an American buyer suddenly contacted and informed them that they would not accept any additional products until they were registered with FTF. But as with IFAT, this registration involved sending an email and making a phone call but no personal visit from a representative of FTF. Fair Trade certification became just another step to take before the U.S.-based company would resume buying their products.

The online Fair Trade websites, such as IFAT.org, indicate that their attention is geared almost solely to Western consumers. Little information on the web sites concerns artisans, producers, or even crafts, with the emphasis falling on agricultural products such as food, coffee, and tea. Online information about Fair Trade appears to function precisely as the intermediaries and exporters in Kenya told me – to make consumers feel good about their consumption practices while maintaining a distance from the realities on the ground. For example, most FTF members, as openly stated on the website, are either

Federation (FTF), which works primarily with North American companies, and the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT), which is the largest international umbrella group (Raynolds and Long 2007:16). IFAT has worked hard since the turn of the 21st century to establish a set of regional and national forums for helping coordinate Fair Trade certification in Africa, including the African Fair Trade Forum and the Kenya Federation for Alternative Trade (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007:126). IFAT and its members have the longest presence in the Global South compared to the FLO in the North (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007:126).

³⁸ Interview with the board of directors of a Tabaka-based self-help group, May 19, 2006.

retailers in the West or wholesalers. The result is that FTF appears like a coalition of intermediaries. As their website states:

Producer groups and associations make up a small number of FTF members. The producer groups and associations who are listed in the directory are committed to paying living wages, providing safe and healthy working conditions, involving workers in decision making and creating high quality products. While benefiting producer groups is the ultimate goal of the Fair Trade Federation, it is linked to these groups primarily through the work of its retail and wholesale members.

I do not mean to imply that all or even a majority of export organizations, cooperatives, and self-help groups are exploiting their workers. The danger is that the burden of oversight is placed on international intermediaries and buying agents who have limited means for regulating and making their business practices “fair” by any objective standard. In the case of Kenyan handicrafts and carvings, the role of new technologies, the restructuring of the industry, and the dominance of intermediaries has meant that the oversight needed to make “Fair Trade” *fair* simply does not exist (see photo 6.6).



Photo 6.6: Men applying Fair Trade stickers to products before re-packing them in their boxes and shipping them to the United States, March 2006.

Since Fair Trade has a specific mandate to help “disadvantaged producers” (Raynolds and Long 2007:28), it has dramatically increased the opportunities and potentials of performing marginality. While transparency markers like Fair Trade stickers add value when placed on hand-made Kenyan carvings, art, and souvenirs, the same is true of an array of products and labels that symbolize an interaction between a deserving producer and a charitable consumer. For example, Global Village, a major dealer in Kenyan Fair Trade handicrafts, markets Kamba carvings in their U.S. shops with small cards that read “Muhugu Wood from Kenya.” These cards, of course, do not note the environmental effects of the over-cutting of *muhugu* (“mahogany”). On the back of these cards is printed in bold: “Your purchase makes a difference.”

Fair Trade and “Trade Not Aid” movements are ideologically about a Western longing for a global community without boundaries – an idea that is manifested and engaged with in numerous ways in the West through popular culture and the advertisements of companies like The Body Shop and American Express (Kaplan 1995:46). Fair Trade marketing has become similar to volunteer tourism programs, which combine, as Kate Simpson put it so aptly, “the hedonism of tourism with the altruism of development work” (2004:681). Such programs, as well as unscripted gap-year traveling to Africa by Western students,³⁹ make development do-able, knowable and understandable, particularly for young travelers who encounter their African “Other” for the first time (Simpson 2004). The problem with such programs and travel trends, Simpson (2004:683) argued, is that they offer (like Fair Trade marketing), a highly simplistic understanding of development where enthusiasm and good intentions become

³⁹ See Simpson (2004:681-82) for an in depth look at gap-year traveling as well as volunteer tourism programs. “Gap-year traveling” refers to the increasingly common phenomenon in the US and Western Europe for students to take a year off after high school or college to travel and “see the world.”

more important than understanding the historical and political roots of poverty, underdevelopment, and social inequality. The changes in the marketing of both tourism and tourist art represented by the Fair Trade label point to a larger change in the way that Africa and the countries of the Global South are being viewed, marketed and consumed in the 21st century. The message from Fair Trade and volunteer tourism alike is that while Africa may not be “tribal” or “primitive,” it is definitely poor and greatly in need of consumers’ help.

I do not want to give the impression in this chapter that the majority of self-help or Fair Trade organizations producing and exporting handicrafts from Kenya were being actively deceptive and consciously cheating the system. I encountered several inspiring organizations with dynamic directors. In Kisumu, in western Kenya, I visited one of the more impressive NGOs one could hope to find, but which had only been able to succeed through significant personal connections, help from the U.S. Peace Corps, and donations from America Online.⁴⁰ Dealing mainly with female primary school drop-outs, it had a chicken coop, medical clinic with a regular volunteer nurse, a loom, nursery school, hair salon, and a room full of computers donated by America Online that are used to teach girls computer literacy. The production and sale of arts and crafts was their primary funding source. Like most crafts producers, marketing had been their biggest problem before being assisted by the Peace Corps, whose volunteers helped start their website, AfricaPamoja.com, which is now designed and maintained by graduates from their own program in computer education.

There was no question that while the Kamba cooperative in Changamwe was having trouble adapting ICTs to its economic model, other workshops and production

⁴⁰ Information on this NGO comes from an interview with the managing director, May 20, 2006.

groups filled the gap by utilizing new technologies and marketing their products creatively to a new set of Western aesthetics. This was particularly the case for aid-based organizations, which could use their producers' disadvantaged economic situations to increase the price of a commodity. This marketing strategy hinged on making explicit the marginality of producers. Particularly with the help of ICTs, organizations' and workshops' heads of exports could increase the value of their products by marketing them as Fair Trade and made by disabled or disadvantaged artisans (also see ch. 6).

Jacaranda Workshop in Nairobi was started in 1982 with ten mentally handicapped young adults from a Nairobi special needs school.⁴¹ While they had few options in Nairobi, they were able to accomplish simple repetitive tasks like making jewelry or beadwork. A new director took over in 2000, making use of his college certificate in accounting and his experience working at the workshop since 1994. As he put it, "I pulled the workshop up from nothing through honesty and transparency." When he took over in 2000, he said none of the staff had been paid in 17 months, and his primary job was simply to find customers to generate income. At the time of the interview in November 2005, their primary clientele were "Alternative Trade" and "Fair Trade" customers from Germany and the United States who were willing to pay more "to support artisans." While several larger companies such as Germany's GEPA⁴² had recently dropped them, they still did regular business with Global Village in the United States, Global Villages Canada, and Global Crafts, a company based in Florida. In 2005 alone, Global Village (U.S.) gave them \$25,000 worth of business, for which the director

⁴¹ This section based on interview with director of Jacaranda Workshop, Nov. 13, 2005.

⁴² GEPA is a major German fair trade company and one of Europe's largest alternative trade organizations. GEPA stands for "Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt mbH", or literally "Society for the Promotion of Partnership with the Third World". For more information, see <http://www.gepa.de/pl>.

was deeply grateful. Such deals allowed him to plan ahead, stop applying for funds from donor groups, and bring ten more handicapped producers into the workshop.

In 2005 Jacaranda already had 26 handicapped adults working with them, of whom eight were female and 18 were male.⁴³ One was 20 years of age while the rest were between 25 and 42. Most had worked for Jacaranda for at least eight years. They worked mainly for food, which was provided for them daily, as well as for a salary of between 3,500 to 5,000 shillings (\$50-\$75) per month, depending on skill and production level. Because they all lived with parents or relatives, even this little money, which was more than the standard wage for domestic house help, was significant.

Jacaranda, however, would probably no longer exist had it not been for computers and the initiative of the director to move all communications and marketing online. Since 2004, the director had even had a computer with email installed in his office. This was an essential step for communicating directly with the customers, he told me. As he explained:

I have never been there to England or America. I don't know what it is like there, or what people want there. I rely on these people to tell me what colors. They will send me a template, a color sample, even through email, and I will develop that color, or several colors, and send them back.

Although Jacaranda did not have its own website at the time of interview, their contact information was available from three different web sites that also sold Kenyan crafts. The director said this was very helpful for attracting customers, and he did not need to have much computer knowledge beyond the use of email. He used internet cafés at first but had problems with buyers who wanted very fast replies. "Especially the

⁴³ Few of these adults have ever had any schooling because their mental capacity tends to be that of a child. While they can not learn in a standard classroom, they are very able to perform tasks with their hands, such as making jewellery. In a sense, this is the only education they have ever received. I was able to obtain no data on their ethnic identities because interviews with the individuals were not possible.

British,” he said, would start worrying and calling on the phone if they had not received a reply to an email within a few hours. “Before email,” he said, “it could take two weeks for us to send an invoice and then you never knew if you sent the right thing. Sometimes it would take five months to fill an order. That has all improved by having email in my office.” At the time of interview in 2005, most of his clients trusted him enough to pay fifty percent of the cost up front with a 90-day window to ship.⁴⁴ But he admitted that with the capital he had been able to accumulate, he could almost always ship within a few weeks. With some orders, he could ship immediately if he had the items already in stock.

While many of the cooperative societies in Mombasa and elsewhere in Kenya were losing business and customers because of not shifting their marketing and communications to the internet, business was clearly finding its way into the hands of those who had. While an increase in access to ICTs can lead to an increase in precariousness for small-scale traders and production cooperatives alike (see ch. 5), several traders and production workshops benefited greatly from their new ability to communicate and market their goods via the internet. While individuals with superior access to capital, formal education, and personal connections have an advantage within the industry, aid-based workshops such as Jacaranda have a unique upper hand in marketing their products to consumers. As the Jacaranda case illustrates, marketing products using Fair Trade or “ethical buying” directs profits to disadvantaged and disabled producers rather than the able-bodied Kamba or Kisii carvers that had profited from the 1960s through the early 1990s. While consumers do not want to purchase

⁴⁴ It was still usual for exporters to not be paid until the foreign buyer had received the order, a clearly difficult mandate for Kenyan exporters that ensured that traders lacking substantial capital had little chance of competing.

ostensibly inauthentic, “tribal,” or “mass-produced” carvings, they are willing to pay extra for products made by disadvantaged producers.

The Aesthetics of Domestic Tourism

The curio industry’s symbolic economy of authenticity is undergoing changes not only due to factors external to Kenya such as Fair Trade, but also because of the growth in Kenya’s domestic tourism industry. The impact of the domestic market in Africa is underrepresented in the tourist art literature.⁴⁵ The domestic tourism boom experienced in Kenya since the late 1990s has largely been a product of active promotions from the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), the goal being “to develop a culture of holiday travel for Kenyans” and to “create curiosity and begin to change attitudes.”⁴⁶ The KTB initially undertook research in 2002 to understand the market conditions and potential of domestic tourism, and later in 2004 began their “discover, explore, experience” campaign, “launched to create awareness and desire” among Kenyans.⁴⁷ As a result, much of the rebound in tourism between 2003 and 2007 was not because of international tourists but because of Kenyans learning to be tourists in their own country. In 2006, as tourism became Kenya’s leading foreign exchange earner, domestic tourism continued to play its own major role in revitalizing the industry, growing by an unprecedented 55 percent from 2005.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Personal communication with Christopher Steiner, February 1, 2009.

⁴⁶ KTB Marketing Plan 2005/2006: first presented January 2005.

⁴⁷ Of interest, this effort by the KTB was not the first government attempt to generate local interest in tourism, which first materialized in the 1984 formation of the Domestic Tourism Council (Sindiga 1996:20). Miller and Yeager (1994:152) suggested that domestic tourism failed to produce measurable benefits largely because of economic decline and many Kenyans’ negative opinions of tourists’ behavior. Sindiga (1996:24) noted that by the mid-1990s, the most significant domestic tourism was from young people, mainly students.

⁴⁸ Mugambi, Kaburu. “Tourism again tops in foreign earnings,” in *Daily Nation*, Feb. 1, 2007.

Kenyans' understandings of what it means to be "modern" involves a notion of "authenticity" that is apparent in the Kenyan popular cultural industry targeted to residents of Mombasa and Nairobi. Tourism is a major part of this, as Kenyans increasingly see the consumption of leisure as a way of being modern. But domestic struggles over cultural authenticity tend to not be reflected in tourist art. Kenyan understandings of cultural authenticity are more frequently expressed through the Kenyan and East African music and entertainment industry, which is increasingly dominating tourist spaces such as nightclubs and the renowned Mombasa beach parties.

Beginning with the late-1990s drop in international tourism, Kenya's night clubs and discos increasingly opened their doors and geared their entertainment to Kenyans with money. This included the Mombasa beach parties, hosted during holidays when upcountry tourists would visit the coast and provide the market legitimizing the high prices at such events. The Mombasa musician Pharaoh reflected on the dynamics between upcountry and coast at such events in his well-known song "Mombasani," and I attended many such events myself, where I found a crowd of mostly young Nairobians paying relatively high cover charges to drink beer, listen to live music (mainly from Nairobi), and be on the beach to celebrate Christmas, Easter, or the New Year. One such party I attended for Christmas 2005 was rumored at the party itself to have been attended by as many as ten thousand people, almost all of whom were Kenyan.

Yet "Kenyan culture" is not monolithic, and the "domestic tourist" is not an individual easily categorized. Because the growth in Kenyan domestic tourism was made possible by the country's growing economic inequalities, the culture of domestic tourism has likewise reflected the uneven growth in specific sectors of the economy, areas of the

country, and ethno-linguistic communities. Such new traditions of Kenyans being tourists within Kenya have attracted mainly middle and upper class, non-coastal Kenyans, lured into a visit to the coast for concerts by popular musicians and performers, particularly hip-hop artists and bands playing Kikuyu “*mugithi*” or Luo “*benga*.”⁴⁹ Desires for leisure and modernity among such Kenyans are embedded in a quest for a *new authentic*, framing a new and interesting symbolic battle within the tourism industry between the aesthetics surrounding Simba from Disney’s *The Lion King* and those of rapper 50 Cent – the former representing a quintessential consumption desire of the Western tourists to Kenya and the latter representing the quintessential consumption desire of many young, urban Kenyans within the nightclubs and tourist entertainment venues, re-colonized by Reggae, Hip-Hop, R&B, in English and in Kenyan Swahili and *sheng*.⁵⁰

Despite assumptions by many curio vendors to the contrary, during the 2005-06 holiday season, upcountry Kenyan tourists visiting Mombasa *did* buy curios. One Giriama trader I had known since 2001 set up a table at the public beach on the North Coast to sell curios just before Christmas in early December 2005.⁵¹ Each day, his location at the public beach was packed with thousands of Kenyans to whom he actively

⁴⁹ For more on music in East Africa, see Barz (2004)

⁵⁰ See my discussion of *sheng* in the introduction for more on this colloquial mixture of English and Swahili, spoken in different forms in urban parts of East Africa. While the coast and Mombasa had its own artists and recording studios such as Tabasamu and Jikoni Records, influence from Nairobi-produced popular music was profoundly felt. For more on pop-cultural sensibilities emerging out of Nairobi, see Frederiksen (2000), who conducted a study on the consumption of local and international media by young Nairobians. She found that young men and women living in Nairobi are particularly fond of African-American visual culture.

⁵¹ Interview, Jan. 8, 2006, with a male Giriama trader who had been born in 1966 in Takaungu, Kilifi District. He studied through form 2 before moving to Mombasa in search of work to support his ailing father. He came to Mombasa in 1988, when he began selling soapstone outside of Fort Jesus from a rented kiosk at the age of 22. After the loss of his kiosk he returned to his family’s farm in Takaungu where he made money selling palm wine. In early 2005 he moved back to Mombasa’s North Coast and worked selling firewood until he found the opportunity in December of that year to sell curios at the public beach.

marketed his small, functional soapstone items. Within a few weeks he had sold all of his stock, consisting mainly of drink coasters and small dishes. When I asked him on January 8, 2006, what happened to them, he proudly said that he had made very good money. “But it was upcountry tourists,” he said. “They were the ones doing business,” he told me. “But none of *them*,” he said, pointing out some of the white tourists walking past, “not even *one* of them bought from me. Even all of my beadwork,” he said, pointing to a yellow plastic Nakumatt bag under the table from which he was selling some cassava chips.⁵² “That’s full of beads and materials for making necklaces. But I’m taking a break right now. Business is good.”

During the years I spent conducting research with curio traders in Mombasa, it remained a common myth that Kenyan tourists did not buy curios. But as one trader told me from his hotel shop: “You know, those Kenyans who just come for a short time, like Christmas, those are spenders. They spend a lot.”⁵³ Success for such a businessperson came from adapting to the Kenyan tourists, since Kenyans’ aesthetics, in this trader’s opinion, overlapped with those of foreign tourists. As he explained, from what he had seen in his hotel shop, international tourists tended to buy all the same products that Kenyan tourists bought, such as beaded sandals, simple jewelry, and lightweight shirts. For him, marketing mainly to Kenyan tourists attracted foreigners looking for items that were new, different, but also *authentic* in that they were used and consumed by Kenyans themselves. He gave the example of beaded “Maasai” sandals and embroidered African

⁵² Nakumatt, along with Uchumi, were the two large supermarket chains found throughout Kenya. Plastic Nakumatt and Uchumi bags were found all over Kenya because of their use and re-use for multiple purposes. This would eventually change with Uchumi’s bankruptcy in early 2006 and the beginning of municipal ordinances in Nairobi and other urban centers in 2007 forbidding the use of plastic bags for environmental reasons.

⁵³ Interview, Oct. 7, 2005, with a male Taita trader born in the town of Wundanyi in 1969. He completed secondary school and also had a three-year degree in business administration. He came to Mombasa in the late 1980s and originally worked as a clearing and forwarding agent before moving into the curio business.

shirts. He said if an international tourist saw a Kenyan tourist wearing such clothing, she or he would want to wear it in order to be like a Kenyan.

In his opinion, there was no question that domestic tourism had been very good for his business. As he put it:

Unajua kuna mabadiliko mengi. Unajua mentality ya watu wa zamani, walikuwa wanafikiria 'okay. Hoteli kama Nyali ni hoteli ya wazungu.' Unaona? Walikuwa na mentality, 'if I go to, um, Mombasa Beach, ni watu wa juu.' Lakini vile tumeendlea, kidogo nafikiri ni kwa sababu tumesoma. Watoto ambao wameenda shuleni washajua, 'okay mimi sina tofauti na mzungu.' So it was not economical, it was just a mentality, yes. Because those people who afford to come to Nyali now. It is not that they did not have money. But they thought this was just for wazungu. *Lakini sasa mambo yale yameisha. Kila aina ya watu tunapata.*

[Translation] You know, there are many changes. You know, the mentality of people in the past, they were thinking 'okay. A hotel like Nyali is a hotel for Whites.' You see? They had the mentality, 'if I go to, um, Mombasa Beach, it is high class people.' But because of how we have developed, a little bit I think it is because we have been to school. Children who have been to school they already know, 'okay I have no difference from a white person.' So it was not economical, it was just a mentality, yes. Because those people who afford to come to Nyali now. It is not that they did not have money. But they thought this was just for whites. But now those matters have stopped. We get every kind of person [coming to the shop].

The Kenyan curio industry, however, was only slowly opening itself to the domestic market and did not produce many products aimed specifically at Kenyan tourists. This was despite the ready and growing market that domestic tourists provided. Although some shop owners had begun, there was great hesitation by many traders. During the period when Kenyan handicraft artisans had attracted popular support from the government – namely through the Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Kenya External Trade Association (KETA) – there was little pressure put on finding a market among Kenyans or domestic tourists. Instead, all the emphasis was placed on protecting producers who continued to make the same products upon which the industry had been founded. Over 20 years later, the

importance of the cooperatives has been compromised, and the majority of the industry is missing a Kenyan consumer base that could lead to the revival of the curio industry.

Conclusion

Kenyan curio art is heavily influenced by the structural organization of the curio industry itself: the political and economic environment in which producers and traders operate; the environmental restraints and regulations that affect supplies of raw materials; and the symbolic strategies and aspirations of the intermediary traders. These intermediaries have the crucial role of performing their worldly sensibilities to tourists while simultaneously relaying orders to production networks. By using several examples including that of Fair Trade labeling, I have argued that ICTs have been used to create an *illusion of transparency* to increase the value and price of a commodity. The art itself, while continually questioned for its authenticity and the realities of its production, tells a practical story of an environmental reality having to do with the materials used and a socio-political reality influencing economic organization and the identities of artists and vendors.

But while cell phones, email addresses, and other ICTs have emerged as some of the few fixed aspects of transnationals' identities, ICTs have serious limitations for providing actual social mobility and industry expansion. Despite the examples of changing motifs I discussed in this chapter, the overall lack of change in types and forms of art produced, particularly by Kamba woodcarvers, is quite remarkable considering the number of woodcarvers employed by the industry. As I have described, this is largely due to an economic system and business model that gives little credit or profit to innovative producers. Largely because of ICTs' importance and the divide between those

with and those without access to them, the circulation of information about market trends has been monopolized and hoarded by technologically connected intermediaries.

While many Kenyans are coming online every day, many more are not. In this sense, the *art of connection*, in all of its conceptions, is essentially ideological in that it creates the illusion, first and foremost, that *connection* rather than *disconnection* is taking place. As Michael Burawoy described it so well: “globalization is not just the production of (dis)connections, but simultaneously it is the production of a *convincing ideology* that obscures the source of those (dis)connections and presents them as something natural and eternal” (2001:150). As the case of Kenya’s curio industry demonstrates, the globalization of markets, ICTs, and tourism, has led as much to experiences of *disconnection* as connection (see ch. 5).

While an *art of connection* exists within the Kenyan art market, there is a notable absence of motifs that represent marginality, disconnection, or inequality. Artistically representing Kenya as a place of *connection* is a way to counter perceptions of Kenya as insecure, especially for tourists. For example, following the political crisis of Kenya’s 2007 general election (see ch. 1), Kenyan “culture brokers” continued to produce counter-narratives to the realities of political turmoil and economic precariousness in order to make Kenya and Mombasa appeal to tourists.

Conclusion

For a brief moment just before the turn of the 21st century, companies and supporting government bodies defended themselves from critics, claiming that customers and the general public should not question corporate control over access to media and new technologies. Major corporations claimed the technologies they provided and the new digital communication networks they made possible were going to eventually “set us free” (McChesney 2000:5). But as Robert McChesney pointed out, this “Web utopianism” was “based not just on a belief in the magic of technology, but, more importantly, on a belief in capitalism as a fair, rational, and democratic mechanism” (2000:7). Rather than a global village, the deregulated expansion of multi-national corporations since the 1990s has in some cases increased poverty and social unevenness in access to services. As I have argued in this dissertation, an increase in access to ICTs can lead to an increase in precariousness and economic insecurity in the lives of individual citizens in East Africa. ICTs can enable or expand personal connections, access to capital, or support from family, but they do not necessarily overcome disparities in access to such resources.

In this dissertation, I have assessed the impact of ICTs on Kenya’s curio industry of arts and handicrafts. Some traders are using cell phones and internet cafés to circumvent government regulations and patron-client networks that have for decades dominated the market for handicrafts in Kenya and overseas. However, the deregulation of Kenya’s telecom sector and the lack of state support for small-scale businesses and cooperatives have in many cases increased precariousness and insecurity among these

important economic actors. For example, cooperatives lacking state subsidies and direct support have been challenged to compete with individual entrepreneurs who have equal or better access to technologies and information about artistic innovation. While an individual like Davis was briefly connected to international customers with the help of email and a cell phone, a collapsing U.S. economy, competition among traders, and a lack of a social welfare system led him to lose his job and fall into deep poverty.

Despite hopes that new communication technologies will expand businesses, increase transparency in governance, and create a new public space for civil society, there are serious doubts about the positive impact of communication technologies within the context of an authoritarian state or in cases where the internet and cell phones can be used for fraud or to hinder democratization (also see Barber 1998; Downey and Fisher 2006; McChesney 2000). The socio-economic environment into which cell phones and internet cafés were suddenly injected in the early years of the 21st century was one of flux and insecurity even before the introduction of new technologies. The use and importance of ICTs has left a mark on the individual men and women who drive Mombasa's curio industry, as well as the art itself.

In Kenya, ICTs have cultural and economic impacts shaped by local histories of social and political upheaval and change. In chapter 2, I explored the history of social inequality in Mombasa and the conflicting discourses of marginality predominant in the city. I drew on examples from research with the Fort Jesus Curio Group in 2001 to paint a clearer picture of the lives of my research participants. Mombasa's roadside kiosk economy, while insecure and less than ideal for many traders, allowed the development of important cross-ethnic cooperation and the formation of economic- rather than ethnic-

based organizations like the Fort Jesus Curio Group. But because the responsibility to manage migrants' social and economic risk has been abandoned by the state, ethnic and other informal social networks were often last resorts for disadvantaged urban traders. Further, the social tension and insecurity in Mombasa caused an increasing number of traders to look to ICTs as a means to jump scales into international markets for their products.

The third chapter traced the development of Kenya's tourism and curio industries from the early 20th century through the present. The formation of ethnic cooperative groups for selling curio art was successful from the 1960s through the 1980s partly because of government support and partly because they conformed to the expectations of Western consumers and the regulation and surveillance apparatus of the Kenyan government. However, the 1997 declaration that all Kenyan cooperatives must compete as independent entities within a "free market" reversed decades of support for cooperatives and left some large organizations and cooperative societies, such as Mombasa's Akamba Industry, in a precarious state. To compound this problem, economic restructuring since the 1990s has led to the fragmenting, privatization, and segregation of urban space in Mombasa. This has aided in pushing Mombasa's tourism industry out of the urban center and into walled-off beach resorts. Such policies of spatial segregation made ICTs even more important and tempting to Mombasa's small-scale entrepreneurs and curio traders.

ICTs provided the potential for traders to circumvent state regulations that were haphazard and lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many of my research participants. Chapter 4 investigated the relationship between curio vendors and the Kenyan state,

particularly following the kiosk demolitions of January 2002. Many curio vendors saw the government as increasingly parasitic and opposed to Kenya's small-scale traders and roadside hawkers during Mwai Kibaki's presidency. While the NARC government had stressed its role in bringing greater security to Kenya, its policies of licensing and regulating small-scale traders were mainly creating opportunities for advantaged traders with personal connections. This was particularly problematic since the government planners expected the MSE sector to be at the forefront of job creation (Kenya 2005b). But little was being done to formalize traders or to give them a legal and secure economic environment in which to operate. A system based on bribery was one option. But while curio traders saw rising taxes and license fees as hostile given their struggles following the loss of their kiosks, many *were* in favor of official recognition and formalization when it meant being granted secure access to commercial space. I examined three cases (the Fort Jesus tour guides, the North Coast beach vendors, and the licensing of exporters) to illustrate this point.

In chapter 5, I focused on the impact of new communication technologies on the curio industry after exploring the history of ICT liberalization in Kenya. Through several ethnographic examples, such as the comparison between Davis and Juma, I demonstrated both the positive and negative impacts of ICTs on the curio business and the sustainability of the handicraft cooperatives. Cooperatives like Akamba Industry and Kisii Soapstone have been hard pressed to compete with individual entrepreneurs with equal or better access to technologies and artistic innovation. As Mombasa's curio cooperatives lose much of their economic as well as spatial significance to the curio industry, their case shows how an increase in access to ICTs can increase precariousness

when the state allows the economy to operate informally and when private actors with access to capital, personal connections, and information have an upper hand.

The changes traced in chapters 2 through 5 have left a mark on the art itself. In chapter 6 I addressed how Kenyan curio art has been influenced by the rising dominance of intermediaries, the environmental restraints and regulations placed on carvers and exporters, and a changing consumer base, including domestic tourists. Using several examples such as Fair Trade labeling, I argued that ICTs have been used to create an *illusion of transparency* in order to increase the value and price of commodities. But as I demonstrated, as cell phones and email make communication along the commodity chain easier, the means of production of Kenya's curio art has been increasingly mystified. This reality has undermined attempts at environmental certification and the goals of the Fair Trade movement.

It is nearly impossible to assess the impact of new technologies as simply good or bad. The impact of ICTs is shaped by state's role in regulating access to new technologies and formal commercial space, helping traders minimize economic risk, and providing the important technical and educational information necessary to realize the positive potentials of new communication technologies. As I have demonstrated, ICTs provide a potential means of circumventing the hazards and social tensions of Mombasa's roadsides, curio cooperatives, and economic regulations. But while the state has an essential role to play, government policy has often been contradictory and has, at times, alienated Kenyan traders operating in the shadow of the nation's coastal tourism industry. My findings suggest that the government could substantially assist its small-scale trader class by helping reduce the precariousness of everyday life.

I have illustrated that talking strictly of a *digital* divide in Kenya distracts attention from the historical formation of social inequality. The digital divide emerges from the social context in which new technologies are being used, as shaped by concrete, deliberate policy decisions that have complex, reverberating social, cultural, and economic effects. Blending a life of work and leisure through the use of ICTs does not “set the individual free,” but places the individual in the hands of the “fickle and unpredictable” global economy (Deuze 2007:12). Because the responsibility to manage risk has been abandoned by the Kenyan state and left to individual citizens and informal social and ethnic networks, the story of the digital divide among my research participants became one of ups and downs, precariousness, and intense competition. These findings are important for future studies of Africa’s urban informal economy and create a multitude of new questions and opportunities for further research.

The current context of ICT development in Kenya raises questions about the effects of new technologies on democracy as well as the democratic nature of technologies. As research on the effects of ICTs in countries of the Global South has increased, so too have arguments for bringing the poor online and getting citizens involved in the politics of new technologies (see Mansell 2006).¹ In this sense, the digital divide has become a question of “technological democracy” (Barber 1998). As Benjamin Barber stressed ten years ago in a discussion of the future of technology and democracy:

If democracy is to benefit from technology then, we must start not with technology but with politics. Having a voice, demanding a voice, in the making of science and technology policy is the first step citizens can take in assuring a democratic

¹ For more on the obstacles to ICT development, see the special issue of *Information Technology for Development*, 2007, vol. 13, no. 4, edited and with an introduction by Sajda Qureshi (2007).

technology. The new technology is still only an instrument of communication, and it cannot determine what we will say or to whom we will say it (1998:588).²

The present danger is that privatization and corporate, profit-driven development of African telecom sectors have largely increased the divide between those with and those without access to new technologies (Chowdhury and Wolf 2003; Chowdhury 2006; Henten et al. 2004:2; Matthews 2007; Migiro 2006; Moyi 2003). By making technologies accessible through market liberalization (privatization and deregulation), telecom development in Kenya has conformed to an understanding of “democracy” that calls for “free markets” and neoliberal policy as a means to promote ostensibly “democratic” experiences of “freedom” (Williams 1976:96). But an alternative definition of democracy stresses “popular power” and a state that meets the needs of the majority (Williams 1976:96). If the state is concerned with the welfare of all its citizens, it must take responsibility for the outcomes of its economic policies. With a secure and stable economic environment, the struggles of Mombasa’s artisans, intermediaries, and curio vendors might not be in vain. A solid foundation of state support and guidance has much more potential for enabling small-scale traders than a belief in the magic of technology and the free market.

² As Barber suggested of the future, “We can aspire to hope and we can cultivate caution, but it is, of course, complacency that is most likely to attend and determine our actual future” (1998:576).

Appendix 1:
Profile of Study Participants

Total participants in study: 121

Participants not involved in the curio industry: 37

Participants working in the curio industry: 84

These 84 research participants who were engaged in the curio business can be further analyzed by gender, generation, education, regional origin, ethnic heritage, and ICT use.

Table 1: Gender

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
Male	72 (86%)
Female	12 (14%)
Total	84 (100%)

86% (72 of 84) were male.

14% (12 of 84) were female.

Table 2: Generation

<u>Decade Born</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
1940s	3 (4%)
1950s	12 (14%)
1960s	19 (23%)
1970s	36 (43%)
1980s	14 (17%)
Total	84 (100%)

Table 3: Education¹

<u>Level of Education</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
Some Secondary +	39 (51%)
Finished Primary	13 (17%)
< Standard 7	24 (32%)
Total	76 (100%)

51% (39 of 76) of individuals had some secondary school or further education.

17% (13 of 76) of individuals left school after finishing primary school.

32% (24 of 76) of individuals had no schooling or left school before finishing primary school.

¹ I had no data on education for eight of the 84 total participants, making 76 the total number of those whose education was known.

Table 4: Regional Origin²

<u>Regional Origin</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
Mombasa District	8 (10%)
Coast Province – Other	15 (19%)
Eastern Province	27 (34%)
Kisii District (Nyanza Province)	12 (15%)
Nairobi	8 (10%)
Central Province	6 (8%)
Rift Valley Province	2 (3%)
Western Province	1 (1%)
<u>Tanzania</u>	<u>1 (1%)</u>
Total	80 (100%)

29% (23 of 80) were born and raised in Kenya's Coast Province.
 71% (57 of 80) were born and raised outside of Coast Province.

Table 5: Ethnic Heritage³

<u>Ethnic group</u>	<u>Number (%)</u>
Kamba	31 (37%)
Kisii	13 (15%)
Kikuyu	14 (17%)
“Swahili”	8 (10%)
Giriama (Mijikenda)	4 (5%)
Duruma (Mijikenda)	5 (6%)
Digo (Mijikenda)	1 (1%)
Chonyi (Mijikenda)	1 (1%)
Mijikenda Total	11 (13%)
Taita	1 (1%)
Luo	3 (4%)
Luhya	2 (2%)
<u>Tanzanian</u>	<u>1 (1%)</u>
Total	84 (100%)

² I had no data on regional origin for four of the 84 total participants, making 80 the total number of those whose region of origin was known.

³ Ethnic background was determined through direct questioning, although it could often also be deduced from an individual's name, knowledge of other Kenyan languages, or birthplace.

Table 6: Work Status, Ethnicity, and Gender of Fort Jesus Curio Traders, April 2001⁴

Work Status	Kamba		Kisii		Kikuyu		Luo		“Swahili”		Mijikenda		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Kiosk Owner (Absentee)	1		3						2	2			6	2
Kiosk Owner (Worker)					2	5			2				4	5
Kiosk Renter			1				1				1		3	
Kiosk Employee	1		2						1		6		10	
Hawker											1		1	
Total	2		6		2	5	1		5	2	8		24	7

Categories of Curio Industry Participants

I assign research participants who worked in the curio industry to the following three categories:

Non-artisan traders are businesspeople who bought and sold curio art but who did not carve, decorate, or produce art with their own hands (N = 53).

Artisan-traders are businesspeople who bought and sold curio art that they themselves often carved, decorated, or produced in some way as a skilled artisan (N = 17).

Non-trader artisans are carvers, painters, weavers, sanders, and decorators who either sell their product to an intermediary or are regularly employed to fill orders or complete jobs but do not sell individual pieces (N = 14).

Table 7: Curio Industry Category and Gender

	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Male	41 (81%)	15 (88%)	14 (100%)	72 (86%)
Female	10 (19%)	2 (12%)	---	12 (14%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

⁴ This chart was created from a survey I conducted in April 2001 and later verified through follow-up interviews in June-July of 2003. “Owner (absentee)” refers to owners of kiosks who were not regularly present and tended to have formal employment and rent their kiosks to other vendors. “Owner (workers)” were individuals who both owned and worked in their kiosks. “Renters” were individuals who rented a kiosk directly from the owner. An “employee” at a kiosk generally worked on commission or salary for products sold from an absentee owner’s kiosk. The lone “hawker” was an individual vending curios outside of Fort Jesus but from a table rather than a kiosk. This survey included all of those invested in vending curios in the square outside of Fort Jesus, but was not inclusive of the formal shops located along the streets of Old Town itself, further away from the fort.

Table 8: Curio Industry Category and Generation

	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
1940s	1 (2%)	---	2 (14%)	3 (4%)
1950s	9 (17%)	2 (12%)	1 (7%)	12 (14%)
1960s	10 (19%)	8 (47%)	1 (7%)	19 (23%)
1970s	25 (47%)	5 (29%)	6 (43%)	36 (43%)
1980s	8 (15%)	2 (12%)	4 (29%)	14 (17%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 9: Curio Industry Category and Education⁵

Education	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Some Secondary +	26 (54%)	10 (67%)	3 (23%)	39 (51%)
Finished Primary 8	(17%)	2 (13%)	4 (31%)	14 (18%)
< Standard 7	14 (29%)	3 (20%)	6 (46%)	23 (30%)
Total	48 (100%)	15 (100%)	13 (100%)	76 (100%)

Table 10a: Curio Industry Category and Regional Origin (Kenyan Coast vs. Non-coast)⁶

Regional Origin	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Kenyan Coast	18 (36%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	23 (29%)
Non-coast	32 (64%)	13 (81%)	12 (86%)	57 (71%)
Total	50 (100%)	16 (100%)	14 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 10b:

Regional Origin	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Mombasa District (of Coast Province)	8 (16%)	---	---	8 (10%)
Coast Province, Other	10 (20%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	15 (19%)
Coast Province – Total	18 (36%)	3 (19%)	2 (14%)	23 (29%)
Eastern Province	13 (26%)	3 (19%)	11 (79%)	27 (34%)
Kisii District (of Nyanza Province)	4 (8%)	7 (44%)	1 (7%)	12 (15%)
Nairobi Province	5 (10%)	3 (19%)	---	8 (10%)
Central Province	6 (12%)	---	---	6 (8%)
Rift Valley Province	2 (4%)	---	---	2 (3%)
Western Province	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Tanzania	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	50 (100%)	16 (100%)	14 (100%)	80 (100%)

⁵ I had no data on education for five non-artisan traders of the 53 in my study, making 48 the total number of those whose education was known to me. I had no data on education for two artisan-traders of the 17 in my study, making 15 the total number of those whose education was known to me. I had no data on education for one non-trader artisan of the 14 in my study, making 13 the total number of those whose education was known to me.

⁶ Four of the total 84 had no data on regional origin. Therefore, total individuals for this table is 80 instead of 84. Because 3 “non-artisan traders” and 1 “artisan-trader” had no data on regional origin, the totals for these groups are 50 and 16 respectively.

Table 11: Curio Industry Category and Ethnic Heritage

Ethnic group	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Kamba	16 (30%)	4 (24%)	11 (79%)	31 (37%)
Kisii	5 (9%)	7 (41%)	1 (7%)	13 (15%)
Kikuyu	11 (21%)	3 (18%)	---	14 (17%)
“Swahili”	8 (15%)	---	---	8 (10%)
Giriama	1 (2%)	1 (6%)	2 (14%)	4 (5%)
Duruma	4 (8%)	1 (6%)	---	5 (6%)
Digo	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Chonyi	---	1 (6%)	---	1 (1%)
Taita	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Luo	3 (6%)	---	---	3 (4%)
Luhya	2 (4%)	---	---	2 (2%)
Tanzanian	1 (2%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 12: Curio Industry Category and Involvement in International Trade

International Trade	Non-artisan Trader	Artisan-trader	Non-trader Artisan	Total
Yes	20 (38%)	11 (65%)	---	31 (37%)
No	33 (62%)	6 (35%)	14 (100%)	53 (63%)
Total	53 (100%)	17 (100%)	14 (100%)	84 (100%)

ICT Use

The 84 research participants involved in the curio industry can be sub-divided into categories of ICT use. I have created three categories for this purpose, which can then be analyzed in relation to the other demographic categories listed above.

Category 1 is for individuals who use cell phone and email for business.

Category 2 is for individuals who use a cell phone for business but not email.

Category 3 is for individuals who used neither cell phone nor email for business.⁷

Table 13: Categories of ICT Use

	Number (% of 84)
Category 1 (Phone and Email)	24 (29%)
Category 2 (Phone no Email)	25 (30%)
Category 3 (No ICT Use)	35 (42%)
Total	84 (100%)

⁷ It is worth noting that all those traders who used email for their businesses also used a cell phone. In other words, I had not a single participant who used email but not a cell phone for business. This mainly reflects the usefulness of a cell phone to business in Kenya. Cell phones were also much more common in non-business use and were generally easier to learn than email, particularly for the older generation who needed to learn not only how to surf the internet but use a computer. Cell phones were more expensive than email, but using email for business meant having a definite long-distance connection with whom you were doing business. Several traders had knowledge of email or used it for their personal communications but simply lacked the business connections.

Table 14: ICT Use and Involvement in International Trade:

International Trade	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Yes	23 (96%)	7 (28%)	---	30 (36%)
No	1 (4%)	18 (72%)	35 (100%)	54 (64%)
Total	24 (100%)	25 (100%)	35 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 15: ICT Use and Gender

Gender	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Male	20 (83%)	20 (80%)	32 (91%)	72 (86%)
Female	4 (17%)	5 (20%)	3 (9%)	12 (14%)
Total	24 (100%)	25 (100%)	35 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 16: ICT Use and Generation

Decade born	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
1940s	---	1 (4%)	2 (6%)	3 (4%)
1950s	4 (17%)	3 (12 %)	5 (14%)	12 (14%)
1960s	8 (33%)	8 (32%)	3 (9%)	19 (23%)
1970s	10 (42%)	11 (44%)	15 (43%)	36 (43%)
1980s	2 (8%)	10 (40%)	10 (29%)	14 (17%)
Total	24 (100%)	25 (100%)	35 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 17: ICT Use and Education⁸

Level of Education	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Some Secondary +	15 (71%)	15 (60%)	9 (30%)	39 (51%)
Finished Primary	3 (14%)	1 (4%)	9 (30%)	13 (17%)
< Finished Standard 7	3 (14%)	9 (36%)	12 (40%)	24 (32%)
Total	21 (100%)	25 (100%)	30 (100%)	76 (100%)

Table 18a: ICT Use and Regional Origin (Kenyan Coast vs. Non-Coast)⁹

Regional Origin	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Kenyan Coast	5 (24%)	5 (21%)	13 (37%)	23 (29%)
Non-Coast	16 (76%)	19 (79%)	22 (63%)	57 (71%)
Total	80 (100%)	21 (100%)	24 (100%)	35 (100%)

⁸ Three individuals from Category 1 and 5 individuals from category 3 had no data on education. Therefore in this table the number totals for Categories 1 and 3 are 21 and 30 respectively.

⁹ Four of the total 84 had no data on regional origin. Therefore, total individuals for this table is 80 instead of 84. Further, because 3 individuals from Category 1 and 1 individual from Category 2 had no data on regional origin, the totals for Categories 1 and 2 in this comparison are 21 and 24 respectively.

Table 18b: ICT Use (Categories 1 and 2 Combined) and Regional Origin (Kenyan Coast vs. Non-Coast)

Regional Origin	Categories 1 and 2	Category 3	Total
Kenyan Coast	10 (22%)	13 (37%)	23 (29%)
Non-Coast	35 (78%)	22 (63%)	57 (71%)
Total	45 (100%)	35 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 18c: ICT Use and Regional Origin (by Specific Region)

Regional Origin	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Mombasa District (of Coast Province)	3 (14%)	2 (8%)	3 (9%)	8 (10%)
Coast Province, Other 2 Districts	(10%)	3 (13%)	10 (29%)	15 (19%)
Eastern Province	6 (29%)	8 (33%)	13 (37%)	27 (34%)
Kisii District (of Nyanza Province)	4 (19%)	6 (25%)	2 (6%)	12 (15%)
Nairobi Province	2 (10%)	3 (13%)	3 (9%)	8 (10%)
Central Province	1 (5%)	2 (8%)	3 (9%)	6 (8%)
Rift Valley Province	1 (5%)	---	1 (3%)	2 (3%)
Western Province	1 (5%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Tanzania	1 (5%)	---	---	1% (1)
Total	21 (100%)	24 (100%)	35 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 19: ICT Use and Ethnic Heritage

Ethnic group	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total
Kamba	8 (33%)	10 (40%)	13 (37%)	31 (37%)
Kisii	5 (21%)	6 (24%)	2 (6%)	13 (15%)
Kikuyu	5 (21%)	4 (16%)	5 (14%)	14 (17%)
“Swahili”	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	4 (11%)	8 (10%)
Giriama	---	1 (4%)	3 (9%)	4 (5%)
Duruma	---	1 (4%)	4 (11%)	5 (6%)
Digo	---	---	1 (3%)	1 (1%)
Chonyi	1 (4%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Mijikenda Sub-total	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	8 (23%)	11 (13%)
Taita	1 (4%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Luo	---	1 (4%)	2 (6%)	3 (4%)
Luhya	1 (4%)	---	1 (3%)	2 (2%)
Tanzanian	1 (4%)	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	24 (100%)	25 (100%)	35 (100%)	84 (100%)

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